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Name: Gordon Hooton
Regiment: The Royal Navy

Date transcript: 6th October 2014
Transcribe by: David Davies

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	<i>Just tell me a bit about why did you join the Navy in the first place?</i>
	Because I wanted to I'd run away from home and joined the Navy when I got to the Navy place I was sixteen and I'd been in the Home Guard before that. One of the best shots with a rifle or a machine gun up on the place here. And I run away from home you see and I was a good swimmer and I just to do a lot of high diving in and what have you at the place we had here which is now gone and you know the water drew me somehow. So one night I just packed my kit and left home and I had a bit of a struggle to get into the navy because I wasn't quite the age they would of liked but, anyway they put me into the Ganges and the other lads had just been sent up across the water to the Isle of Man because they were being bombed you see and I was the only one that went in as I were and came out at the end I done well. I'd been in the Home Guard as a younger man and done all my machine gunning and bomb throwing in the home guard and course I got a good start on everything. Explosives didn't bother me or frighten me of nothing. So yeah I enjoyed it, I loved it.
01:42:21	<i>And what was it like then Ganges why did you enjoy it so much?</i>
	Well I wasn't there long because as soon as I got there the first thing you have to do is put a wetsuit on and you have to swim the length of the pond and back and until you can do that and you don't get away but, I was a good high diver because not far from here there used to be a high diving board and I'm red hot at diving and consequently I was straight out and I had to do a couple of little runs up to Scotland and do some work up there with other chaps and one way and another I was seen to be doing jobs on little boats back and forth up to Scotland. Several of us was doing it and the next thing I decided I would I was in Chatham you see I decided I would study a bit in there, I done all in the Home Guard I'd done all my rifle work and everything and was red hot with machine gun, in Wellingborough and I was a very fit man you know but, anyway after you pass what you want to do when you leave there... I wanted to be a Torpedoman you see so I joined the Torpedo part and that actually didn't suit me when I got in there that didn't but, anyway I got in and got out. And then another chap sat with me we both passed out and went into jobs in the dockyard basically until we got a ship.
01:03:29	<i>Is this at Chatham?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>No this is at... yeah Chatham sorry I'm getting mixed up and soon as that happened we messed about a little bit in the dockyard doing work and then the Savage she was down on the where all the trouble was down south she came flying back because she was desperately needed to go up to Murmansk run and me and the chap were in there we both went aboard her and got picked up and took her to Scapa Flow and that was it and of course we done one after the other up there.</p>
<p>01:04:31</p>	<p><i>What do you remember of the Chatham Dockyard what was it like as a place for a young boy?</i></p>
	<p>Well I mean I was a young boy and I thought everything was wonderful... actually the first thing I did because the Savage hadn't come up then she was down just finishing down where the battle was going on and they sent me in the dockyard to do a job until the ship come up you see and I was in that submarine... I had to go in that submarine that was in dry dock that had fooled the Germans and the Spaniards when they put that dead body in the Channel between them... do you remember it. Well they fooled the Germans that it was a German that had been... they actually put a body... they got a dead mans body a genuine dead mans body from up north and they put it into this submarine and they actually dressed it all up... as a man trying to take information to the Spaniards in you know on the coastline. And they sunk it they took this dead body and bound it and done it all made it all look smart in a uniform. Not service uniform but, in clothing and they put a thing on his arm with a great big attaché case with dummy information of what was happening because he was supposed to be a German Spy you see. It's a film it's fantastic. Anyway that little submarine that I had to go and work on had just come back from taking the body and floating it in the Spanish Coastline to drift ashore and they dressed it all up as one of their sort not ours you know and it all worked.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 2</p>
<p>01:06:37</p>	<p><i>What was it like going into the Savage for the first time, you know your first proper draft can you remember?</i></p>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Well I'll tell you what it were she was down on the battlefield and she was called away because she was needed for this... and we were down there torpedo course and were having to work in the dockyard during the day time and then vittles in the canteen at night and anyway we got piped for and we both got told to get our kit ready and take it in the dockyard and the Savage came in from being down at the bank where they had been fighting and she'd been pulled right up and they were loading her up with stuff and alongside and we got called and put aboard her and that's as quick as that but, I'll tell you what the bloke that was with me he died not about three weeks ago and we're both together you see and we both took the course together and we both got put on the Savage. She came in, in the afternoon and pulled alongside and god it was murder they were having to do all sorts of things because we've got to race up with this big convoy what was coming from Canada and already there was loads up in North Scotland waiting for the convoy to move or... and this well we knew it. Well anyway they piped for us two and we went on to the window where they tell you where you were going and they sent us straight to the Savage in the dockyard and what the Savage was having to do was take on ammunition and everything else and it was pouring with bloody rain at night it bucketed down and we had to go down further down the coast because we joined it and when we went on we were there forever we'd been drafted to her which was alright.</p>
01:08:54	<p>But, we went done to when it got dark... we went down to the ammunition place which was a long way down the water from us and it was bucketing down and god blimey we had an ammunition ship in the dark and it was and you went along this pipe not pipes boards and they were springing up and down carrying stuff out pitch black and this ship was shipping water it was raining so hard anyway we're all carrying stuff up along the landing you know to fill her up with ammunition and that and we sailed from there at midnight up between Ireland and that to join this here big convoy and you'd never see it rain like it god almighty I was a lookout and my mate was on the other side of the bridge in the look out and we was bloody soaked to the skin pitch black and of course we had to put all new ammunition on her before we could sail from there because that was where the ammunition bunkers were down there anyway we got up in the early hours of the morning we reached Liverpool that area and then it started to lighted up a bit but, it never left off driving rain and we went right the way up to the North where we got to pick this convoy up and they were all more or less ready to sail. It was the biggest convoy of the war.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:10:28	<p>And every type of ship was there and course we joined her and I mean I've never been to bloody sea you didn't know where you were because we hadn't been trained for it. I thought it was too quick but, anyway we managed alright me and me mate. The first thing were you were all mixed up because the ship shipping water all the way and I went down into the front of the ship and it was half full of water and it was half full of water and it was shipping over the top you see it was one of the worst storms of the war running up that coast and... but, anyway I don't mind admitting it I felt so bloody sick going up to Russia I wasn't too bad going through the channel as I said but, when we actually got going I thought cor blimey I got billeted they hadn't got room for us down in the main place and I thought I felt as sick as a dog so I cleared myself and went up and they got the aft gun turret looking forehead so it was open to the direction we were going on the back of the gun shield and it had curtains... heavy curtains that go over because they had no doors or anything behind them and I slept there all night I did... all night Christ I did feel ill and my mate he was somewhere else I don't know where he went but, I was never sick again. Well I wasn't sick I felt sick but, I was never like it again but, I'd always been a good swimmer and everything you know and diver I was good at diving so why that ship upset me like that I didn't know but, I stopped in there until we got two days away from here as you might say and I never looked back.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 3</p>
01:12:43	<p>The Savage was a well-oiled ship she wasn't got a depth under water like an up and down engine ones she had electric turbines steam turbines made all the electric but she didn't draw half as much under the water as an ordinary destroyer or and ordinary sloop which was proved on the last day of the war of the convoy and we were all waited outside to go through the mountain gap into the Russian end and a U-boat was waiting for us and we were all there and the convoy was coming in and it's on the telly sometimes. Convoy was coming in and spreading about but, the Germans were waiting underneath the cliff bottoms and you could only go into the dockyard through and entrance not much wider than that with two great pillars of coastline so you had to go in one at a time and the big liberty ships used to squeeze through it anyway this was the last convoy of the war and we were hanging about there as the ships were coming in with stuff to take in and this u-boat was laying under the rocks opposite us. It was snowing in the morning when we took up our position to cover them as they come in because they got liberty ships with them you know with railway engines on them and that from America.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:14:35	<p>And the first thing that happened one of them got torpedoed as it went to go through the opening into the harbour where you go up further to it because the ship broke in half and sunk in the gateway, well we called it a gateway cause there's chaos then because the rest of the flotilla... their flotilla and the people we brought up were coming in to this big opening where we were all waiting for the others to go in and we were all ready for everything. Me and my mate were put down below to push the depth charges up hook them on and then they were pulling them up ready to go. We never heard a torpedo coming or I didn't but, the others on deck did they could hear it coming but, they didn't know where it was and it went under the Savage and it hit a brand new ship just as far away as the other side of the road. And everyone was practically killed on it... it sunk like that brand new but, why didn't it hit the Savage?</p>
01:15:49	Shallow draft...?
	<p>Shallow draft yeah she had flat engines that were driven by shafts that way right at the bottom and they drove these two generators. I used to go down one of my jobs as you go down every morning and check all the things that could of stopped it and make sure everything was alright... that was one of my jobs you see and I used to stand there and watch because what they were there was no propellers what they were on the bigger ships that were right low down weren't they it was only drawing half as much water as one of them and that torpedo went under us and it hit the other ship on the other side and we picked some of the men up six... we buried one we went in. we were fighting until dark out there all the rest of the ships and you see this liberty ship they hit it with a torpedo and it blocked the entrance you see and then it went down in the entrance.</p>
01:16:59	<i>I mean how do you get rid of that can you remember?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Well I don't know because it was up to the Russians to do their own work on that. So we were fighting until dark at night and it was snowing at eight in the morning when we started until it got dark and we buried one chap. It was quite dusk getting dark and we buried him and we had to go right up nrth futher to come in another way from the north and down inside the water because we couldn't get in you see. It was terrible, it was the last convoy of the war and when came out they had opened that up the Russians had. It was Christmas... we had Christmas Day there and we were there for two or three days and when we come out we could come out that way and we came out at midnight two of us and we had to go north run up the coastline and the other one... no we went south and the other one went north listening for U-Boats and while we were there we were dropping the convoy was ready to come out empties all ready to come out and we were sent each way us and the other one to keep anything down you see and try and find if anything was there and whilst we were doing this the convoy came out in the pitch black and by the time it got light in the morning they were well away from where we were. So we had to catch them up you see and which we did and she came home alright never had no problems.</p>
	Start of Film 4
01:18:48	<i>After the convoys of the arctic then you didn't stay on the Savage very long didn't you?</i>
	<p>Well I stayed on the Savage until the German surrender and we came back down to Chatham, at Chatham Barracks in the dockyard and I was sent for because as you see I was a volunteer. I joined underage hence it made me a volunteer not a conscripted man we came down to the Chatham Dockyard I got sent to the place added in you in and out and I had to pack my kit and the next morning I was put on a train with hundreds more in the dockyard locked in with keys and they take them out so you can't get out and this train went straight of flying down to Southampton we got out and there was a bloody great liner there waiting for us all full of people going to the Far East and she was due to sail at half past eight and it was half past six then and you couldn't get on anywhere for people it was a bloody great American liner, can't think of the name there was two of them made but, anyway we sailed that night within two hours we were on the water going out and that took us right out to Ceylon and that's where we were took off there. Don't know where she went from there because she was loaded to the top with... we had to stop before we could go through the Canal to get out to... because by the time we got there it was pitch black and we went on from there down the next morning through the Canal which was such a big ship and the next thing we went right out to Ceylon and that's when they bumped us off...</p>
01:20:55	<i>Was there any... do you remember anything of that troop ship?</i>

Time code	What is said
	There wasn't no room for us on the top deck and the gale god it blowing a bloody gale and all our kit had been left down below where it had been dumped and there was a load of women on there in uniforms and that and we had to sleep on the open top deck and it was bloody freezing and we went through the Canal. Went right out and then straight out to Ceylon and they dumped us
01:21:32	<i>Pretty incredible really when you think you know one minute you're in Polyarny in a battle and then two days later...</i>
	That's right that's how quick it was they were waiting for troops you see and she was full that ship. They had two of them.
01:21:49	<i>Did you have any fear of going to the Far East?</i>
	No I didn't know what it was like did I. I mean I had a feeling what it might be like but, I didn't... I wanted it you see that's why I runaway and joined the navy. I wanted the navy and when that all came well I was on top of the world. She was a nice ship but, I never had done any minesweeping or nothing and she was not a Chatham ship you see but, everybody else we got on like a house on fire but, this one bloke and he was in the same mess as me he used to sit opposite me at the table and I don't know why he took to me but, anyway he found out I was a Chatham man and that's how I think started it. I shouldn't of been there really but, everybody else we were like bricks together but, he where we used to go down to sleep below if we wasn't in any danger we used to go down there and down there you've got another mess deck and your hammocks down there if you can. And he was in the same mess as me sitting opposite me and he just used to sneer at me and I never had a bloody enemy on that ship and they made me Chief Quartermaster and they didn't like that you see and that give me quite a run of the ship and then the captain had me up in his cabin and he had a chat with me and he told me what he'd like me to do and it was nice. I mean I was in charge of the steerage which means the other chaps are under me straight away but, I've never steered a bloody ship but, I had to and I mean it hasn't got a compass like where you see the hands going... you've got numbers flicking backward and forwards and you've got to read them but, we did have one of the old ones.
01:24:04	<i>What about this ship the Japanese ship that you were escorting tell me about that?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Well that was the biggest of their cruisers don't ask me the name I can't tell you but, it was the biggest one they had and she'd been bombed and she lay in the harbour and we used go by her every time we went in or out but, we thought she was on the bottom but, she wasn't but, anyway it was one of the biggest Japanese ships and it had been bombed and it had been in Singapore Harbour for quite some time since it was his but, anyway unbeknown they were making it ready to tow it and sink it you see and we got chose to do it and we were coming on our way home as it happened. We left Singapore a tug with her... two tugs with her actually and she was a massive ship and she'd been emptied and everything and it had got dark and we're coming up the Malacca Straits and we got to this point where she was supposed to of been sunk, the deepest water because she was the biggest one they had at the time and consequently it was pitch black and we're on our way to come home you see. It come to midnight and two Japanese tugs that were towing her, had been towing her right out on... as far as that big house there from us but, they were coming up the coastline and we were further out where we could keep an eye on her and everything and as I say it got pitch black and by the time we got to the point which we had a compass reading which we'd got to sink her on.</p>
01:26:08	<p>They started the ship coming up and left her they bolted and left the ship with no head way and she come half way up to where she was supposed to be sunk and I expect our captain got permission to sink her but, it was midnight pitch black and we had our search light on her and they vanish into the black and gone and of course she's drifted. Well she wouldn't drift far you know she's a massive ship but, she's only just off the coastline as we saw her pitch black and I'm still on the bloody wheel and of course looking out of the wheelhouse because we weren't going we were just hovering. And then I suppose the captain got in touch with their people and they said what to do so we had to send men over with depth charges because we carried depth charges and they've got to put the depth charges as low as possible in the ship because there is nobody on there and I mean it was massive and they'd got to wire everything up and all we could do was use our depth charges and try them... that's all we could do.</p>
01:27:31	<p>Well we did we did it... it was midnight when we started and we were drifting as far away perhaps as this first house from her and course you couldn't do much really because our motor boat went over and they put four depth charges in her in the motorboat and that's all she'd hold you see... carry. And so they took them over from off us it was our crew doing it and whatever they'd done they went aboard the ship and they took the depth charges as the captain said had got to be done and put them right down in the lower end of the ship because I mean she was a bloody massive thing and they did everything they could and fused everything that would explode and came back to us and bang she did, she went down blew the bottom out and she went down but, off course we never see her no more because we left her there but, she wasn't too far off the coast and she was too far from Penang, the ship wasn't we were going up towards Penang.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:28:49	<i>Did you see her going down then?</i>
	Oh yeah we watched without search light...
01:28:53	<i>Bet that was a special thing to see?</i>
	Well we hung on until we more or less her mast was sticking out but, she's still going, she was still going down our men put depth charges all the way along so when she got to a certain depth they'd open the bottom of the ship to let the water in as you do and they had to sit there until it filled up and fired these charges and it was bloody you'd never see anything like it... it was fabulous but, of course you wasn't allowed to have cameras.
	Start of Film 5
01:29:29	<i>Just talk a bit about how you would mine sweep the story about what you do and how you do it?</i>
	Well there is various ways you can do it. You can do it with wires out with floats on well there's different ways. You can put depth charges down, put them down to certain depths and leave them down there weighted them down it depends what's going to be there over them when you come back but, basically you only do it to clear the ocean in the area you were in and if you give ships colliding with them we get sent out there to sweep it.
01:30:04	<i>Did you have any near missed with the mines?</i>
	Well we've had them come up beside us yeah a time or two but, when you're all joined together with great strong wires you're in a formation like that and each side of it goes out to another ship and then they go out to another one and then out to the other then you've got seven but, you're the one in the front. You're the one that's got probably more equipment that you can sound than the others so they do that sort of thing. They keep improving on certain things and we may have been a little bit better I don't know but, that's how you sweep you all over latch each other.
01:30:53	<i>You've actually got wires holding you together in a position?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>No no it's all done free they had to set one each side of you at a certain distance then vice a versa for the next that's how you do it. That's when you do that type of sweep but, there are other ways you can sweep and we used to do sweeps with long wires. We had a great big thing on our quarterdeck and it was full of heavy wire and we used to let that out with things on that and captain on the bridge he'd say let go and he's stop it when he tells you, it's a massive sack of wire on a drum and it's not heavy wire but, you put anything on the end of it and you could let it out and it would explode mines if it finds them if there's any there, you'll know where you stand a little bit better. It's all done on luck really because you can't look down in the sea but, we used to snag up on... we snagged up on an airplane down there that had crashed... well we were told it were but, I never seen it but, I know when we snagged it, it got around the ship that it was a plane but, I don't know how they knew because we didn't stop but, you always got somebody that made something up didn't you.</p>
<p>01:32:29</p>	<p><i>You mentioned this about this Chatham and Pompey Rating when you say he made life difficult what do you mean, how did he do that, what was?</i></p>
	<p>Well I'll tell you what happened we come home to England and I had the ??? most of the time because I used to go up and sit with him and then I'd take over because I was responsible for him you see so they didn't have a long thing I'd just take it you see and help out. And one night when I was doing that I had to be a quartermaster which means when we were at anchor I had to do a duty at the back of the ship where they come in and out of it when they go ashore and one thing and another and all the logbooks there and everything and I was on duty there doing mine and we was almost coming home at this point and I'd got a terrible throat and cold and it was pouring with rain and I had to take the night watch and I thought well I got a cold and I took my oilskins out of my locker because they'd been there since we went abroad I mean you never had them out and I thought god I'm going to go down and get my oilskins and of course I'm standing in an opening because you can go in that side walk straight out and of the ship the other side. And at night time there is an officer and a crew come around the ships and they check if you're being looked after and that.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:34:04	<p>As I went down to get my... I nipped down because I got the duty watch to get my oil skin out and I got a terrible cold and this chap slung his hammock right across the top of the opening and walk down the step under to there and he's winging about in his hammock and of course this is one o'clock in the morning and unbeknown to me the boat come around and seen that I wasn't there but, that didn't catch nothing but, he told the captain that I had been down the locker and id been having a job to get the thing open because it was all stuck together being in the heat because we never wore them you see there and the next thing he dropped me in it and he told the officer of the day that I was going down to sleep and I'm sitting trying to get this bloody thing open and of course I've got a lousy cold and he done that and the next thing he sent for the officer of the day and he come down and put me on a charge, I had to meet the captain and everything and the captain didn't like it at all... but, anyway he told me to forget everything he says you're my man he says never mind about him he said 'we've had trouble with him before' I brought the ship home right the way up to the dockyard and the next day I come home had three days leave and had to go back down to Chatham again because they were demobbing they were all finished you see by then.</p>
01:35:58	<p>They never give me a demob suit or nothing so I went to this to see what was happening and they said 'oh you're going up to Scotland there's a ship up there you're going on' so I said 'oh yeah how am I going to get there' he said 'it's alright there's two other chaps coming up with you you'll all be going together and that was that big ship up there of course she was only on loan during the war you see to us lot because Canadian you see got to go home. I was billeted on her for... they put us on there to sleep and everything quite a few of us and we slept onboard and everything but, by the time they wanted to take her home to Canada they sent for me and I went to the office and I had a bit of a problem and I had to see the doctor and the bloody doctor said I wasn't fit to go so they paid me off the day before it sailed. And I had to come out the navy I'd got something in the chest and I had to see the doctor and he said you're not fit enough he said anymore for the navy, cheeky bugger</p>
01:37:29	End of Films