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Name: Mervyn Salter
Regiment: The Royal Navy

Date transcript:
Transcribe by: Sam Cook

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
	I'm Mervyn John Salter. I was an able seaman, anti-aircraft gunner... I joined the royal navy in 1942, at the age of 18 And trained at HMS Raleigh and HMS Drake.
01:00:25	<i>Mervyn, why did you-why did you want to join the navy over any other service?</i>
	It was just a preference, of the sea and... the sea and what it offered... Or at least what I thought it offered.
01:00:44	<i>Where are you from? Where were you living sort of early part of the war?</i>
	I was in Bath yes yes.. I was living in Bath at the time.
01:00:59	<i>Tell me a bit about that-that process that you go through, and where you you-know the early stages of your training?</i>
	Well as I say I joined at HMS Raleigh... and we did the usual things that... drilling, ect. Boat. Working with whalers and that type of thing. Until then I switched to HMS Drake and I took up the anti-aircraft gunnery as I say.
01:01:49	<i>Are there any-are there any memories any stories that you can remember from Drake or Raleigh?</i>
	Well there were. We were at St. ??????... And it was just a normal... A normal training session you know, there was nothing outstanding, at that time. We spent one weekend on the great water fort, and most of that time we were peeling potatoes. But you know that's, that's about it, as far as I know.
01:02:31	<i>That's alright. When did you get your draft? And... what-tell me about how you felt about where you went and when you saw the ship?</i>
	Ye-. As I said after training, I was drafted to... HMS Saumarez, an S-Class destroyer. Which was commissioning, at.. Ebon in Tyne. And as I say, I joined her there.
01:03:05	<i>What do-what do you remember of seeing her for the first time can you remember that day?</i>
	Well- you know she was a sleek... Low lying destroyer.

Time code	What is said
01:03:19	<i>Tell me a bit about Saumarez, what your mess was like... You know-what life was like on board for you know-a young sailor?</i>
	Well as I say it was an optimistic. You went down stairs, there were... Lockers. Which we sat on mostly when we were on the arctic conveyers, because we er-couldn't sling hammocks. We had hammock storage down below. There were... Two messes, two or three messes. About 10-15 in a mess. We used to have to prepare our ... meals. And this was taken up to the galley where they were cooked... And they had a... Cook of the mess. And you know your turn came around probably every four or five days. And... as I say we just off watch you sat and chatted and looked at anything that was available you know that type of thing.
01:04:44	<i>Why didn't you-why didn't you sling your hook... Your hammock, hammock sorry. Why didn't you sling your hammock in the arctic?</i>
	Er-because the sea and that was... Not convenient, you know too much... swinging. And, because we ... Too often, having to prepare to go on watch, on... at action stations. So as I say a lot of the time we didn't undress properly. We just waiting there all the time... too... to go on watch or go on-go to actions stations.
	Start of Film 2
01:05:34	<i>What was some of the Can you remember the sort of the first few journeys of what you did I mean... Did you go to Norway quite early on?</i>
	The first trip... I took... Saumarez was detailed to carry out an [Aztec] sweep... Whilst accompanying RMS Queen Mary with Churchill aboard... on route to a meeting with Roosevelt... In Quebec or at Quebec. But... Due to a typical Atlantic storm... Gale force winds and mountainous seas, we had to call it off after 17 hours. Because it was because the conditions were so bad... And resulted that we limped into St. Johns Newfoundland four days after Queen Mary birthed at Quebec. So-... Some baptism at my first trip to sea.
01:06:49	<i>How were your sea legs?</i>
	I was never sea sick. That was one thing I always boasted about I was never sea sick.
01:06:59	<i>Can you describe conditions in those seas?</i>
	Well as I say it was... very mountainous seas and the ship would be either... Up and down mainly... Going into the water and the water would... Cascade over the top of the bridge... And all the down over the guns and all the rest of it.
01:07:36	<i>What was your action station then... You know at the time were you on or off that watch?</i>

Time code	What is said
	I was as I say on an Oerlikon gun... Which was on a platform posted just after the after the funnel.
01:08:03	<i>Where you on an Oerlikon in these storm?</i>
	Oh yes, yes.
01:08:12	<i>Really? Where you thinking I wish I'd gone to the air force at this point?</i>
	Never. Never.
01:08:19	<i>What was next?</i>
	Well as I say led me kip out from Canada We were attached with units in the fleet to carry out bombardments of installations on the Norwegian coast. Which was our first-my first taste of the war as it were. And on retiring from the action we were pursued by enemy aircraft but fortunately they didn't press on too much so we escaped unscathed as it were.
01:09:07	<i>Is that the first time you got to fire the Oerlikon?</i>
	I didn't actually fire because the 4-7s the bigger guns kept the aircraft at bay, you know. But we were close up ready to fire, but my range was only a thousand yards you see. So that as I say, though I was close up I didn't actually have to fire at that time.
01:09:32	<i>What was it like to be-you know although you'd done gunnery training, can you remember what felt like to be on board when the ship really opened up in terms of the full bombardment. What's the effect on the ship like?</i>
	It's-obviously a lot of noise from the 4-7s. Really it was a great deal because it was steaming, and we were probably doing 20, 20+ knots. So that you got the judder from the ships, firing the big guns firing. But as we were closed up we concentrated on our own efforts, we didn't take too much notice of this. Yes so we came, after the Norwegian trip then it was arctic convoys.
	Start of Film 3

Time code	What is said
	This was different. As Churchill described; the worst journey in the world. And it was... Horrific on occasions. The ship could get bitterly cold conditions, covered with ice over the guns and deck all of the rest of it which... Meant you had to chip it all of otherwise you were vulnerable, and if it was not the icy conditions it was still bitterly cold. But you run into gale force winds and mountainous seas... The sort that would take you to the crest of the wave twenty-thirty feet in the air, and then drop you down into the trough, and as you were going down the judder and shuddering and the whole ship would be shaking... And then you'd become complete awash with the wave, and you wouldn't whether or not you would stay afloat.
01:12:10	<i>Did you ever...</i>
	And sometimes the conditions were so bad that we could go off watch, and go back to our [after best] deck and find it... Awash with three or four inches of water... Plates having sprung from some of its rivets... And there was only one way to get rid of it and that was to put the water in the buckets, and then hand it in a chain, and pass it up through the ladder through the hatchway and throw it over the side. Very, very... And very helpful when you've just come off watch and all you want to do is sleep... If you could you know.
01:13:12	<i>I mean, the conditions-the weather conditions are one thing, obviously another big problem with arctic was you either had U-boats on you or you were obviously under air attack? Do you remember any of that?</i>
	Very much yes indeed, we-certainly the U-boats... Oft times we'd get what you call a ping on the ASDIC and then you start pursuing them, oft times dropping depth charges. But... In our experience, we never actually encountered one on the surface... We seemed to do this when they were underwater... Whether or not we scored any successes it was hard to know, because sometimes there was oil. But... Whether they were just releasing it.
01:14:20	<i>What was the role of the Saumarez? You know what its duty on the international convoy was, just talk about its strategy and its positioning etc?</i>
	Well we because of the-we could get up to 32 knots and therefore we were oft times covering the perimeter... Guarding the other cruisers, aircraft carriers or battleships if they were... So we were more or less scouting, as it were, and viewing the horizon to make sure... A lot of my job was on lookouts, you know making sure there was no enemy aircraft or enemy shipping or U-boats... Or for that matter any aircraft, so this was our role really.
01:15:36	<i>Did you-did you get ashore in Polanyi or Murmansk?</i>
	Certainly in Polyarny, Yeah...

Time code	What is said
01:15:44	<i>Can you remember what it was like?</i>
	Yeah... A bit desolate. We did manage to play football on some icy pitch there. But There wasn't really much to recall. The only people that would be likely to speak to you would be young children, and some of them could speak English, some English... But they seemed to train to ask about the radar... To find out what they could about the radar, but of course we were warned about this.
01:16:34	<i>Really wow, I've never heard that?</i>
	Mhm-yes... Because they didn't have it, apparently.
	Start of Film 4
01:16:42	<i>So tell me-we just touched on that but we didn't discuss actually, just tell me a bit about your job on the Oerlikon and the setup, and what you were trying to do and how it operated?</i>
	Well as I say we had this Oerlikon we were responsible for the maintenance of it, so it's a case of having to strip it down and make sure it worked properly. Then if called upon, remembering the range was about a thousand yards but it was only times that you came into close contact with anything that you were required. Obviously you were expected to fight off any aircraft... That came within that range, when they came sweeping in. But also... If you closed on any shipping or land installations, where you were required to open fire that would be part of the job.
01:18:21	<i>Was it an enjoyable job?</i>
	I enjoyed it... Yes I did. I did yes indeed.
01:18:29	<i>Did you ever shoot any aircraft?</i>
	Not actually, no. Mainly funnily enough as far as the aircrafts concerned because of the way we were operating, the bigger guns were more or less keeping them out of range so that I did get charged on one occasion... Why didn't I open fire? My answer was that I couldn't afford to waste ammunition, and this was accepted. You see if the things 5000 yards away or something of that sort... Your shells would be falling...
01:19:23	<i>Short...</i>
	Way before effective range, you know.
01:19:29	<i>One of the convoys that you did.. Was quite well known?</i>

Time code	What is said
	JW54B. And er-this one in company with the... Duke of York, Jamaica... The destroyers Savage, Scorpion and the Norwegian Stord. We left Iceland late on Christmas Eve, and sailed all day Christmas Day and Boxing Day... And again... Pretty erratic seas, and then caught up with the... German battlecruiser Scharnhorst about 4:30 in the afternoon Boxing Day, and then all the big ships... Duke of York and Jamaica opened fire, but the Scharnhorst although hit several times still managed to get away and was... Her speed was too fast for these other ships. So four destroyers were detailed to give chase. Together with Savage on the north side, and the Scorpion and Stord on the south side we approached to torpedo range... And we fired our torpedo and in heeling over to fire our torpedo... We were hit, we were struck. By an 11 inch shell in the director and range finder... And though it didn't explode, it still killed one officer and ten -ratings- and seriously wounded ten -ratings-, another shell put the starboard engine out of action... So we had to retire from the fight as it were, and then in company with Scorpion we sailed into a Kola inlet, Where we stayed for a week and carried out temporary repairs.
	Start of Film 5
01:22:33	<i>Can you remember these days? Can you remember what was happening and how you felt, and what you knew?</i>
	As I say... because we were close up all the time... On and off we had Before we went fully in action stations... It was a case of coping with the weather and the sea conditions, because we knew we were after a big ship... Not knowing initially which one, but then it came through that it was the Scharnhorst. And as I say she was massive.
01:23:38	<i>Did you see it?</i>
	Saw it illuminated by star shell, yes. For you know, fleeting glimpses, before we actually went in to fire out shells... Our torpedoes I should say.
01:23:59	<i>And do you recall being hit?</i>
	Yes. You could hear that there was a... A bang, obviously a bang... And the bit of a shudder. Butchered on our starboard side, I was on the port side so... Not.. Didn't get the full effect of it. But, enough to know that we had been struck yes.
01:24:40	<i>And after you'd been hit, are you still in your action station? Does it change then? You don't move of to help the bridge or anything?</i>
	No-no-no we still had to close up. As I say, because of the... A situation could arises where the close range weapon was required... It wasn't on that occasion but it could have been so yeah we still stayed closed up... Until the next day when we fell out and then we had to bury our dead... At sea.

Time code	What is said
01:25:24	<i>I was going to ask you about that... Can you tell me about that and what happens and what the morale on the ship is like? What's the- where were you, what's the effect?</i>
	Well, as I say they... Trying to think of their names... Anyway they were sewn up in bags and weighted of course, and put over the side and we had a short service... Prayer service, and then it was a question of getting back to your duties again you know.
01:26:07	<i>How did that effect the morale of the ship?</i>
	It's a case of you just have to get on with these things, you know? It wasn't until we pulled into the Kola inlet that we found out who had been killed. One that was close to me was a Ken was a leading seaman and part of my ship... And a first class sailor you know. We had twins aboard, and one of those had been killed so they had to transfer the other one pretty quickly and get him back to England, and as I say we stayed there for a week so we... Transferred him to another ship. But it was a case of-as I say, you just have to get on with your job, and that was it so... Didn't really upset the moral at all... Just that... A couple that you knew.. Would no longer be with you, you know. Then we came back and we went to Newcastle for full-repair. Going up the Tyne... There were hundreds of people on the bank, waving flags and cheering.. And all the ships and boats, all the way up to be sounding of their sirens... In recognition of our effort to.. Against the Scharnhorst... It was something that -.. Really lives with you forever. Struck my heart you know. It really was something.
	Start of Film 6
01:28:39	<i>44 presented some differently challenges, where you at Normandy?</i>
	Yes-yes indeed. After being repaired at Newcastle we did another Russian convoy, and then we were detailed to Normandy for D-Day. We joined in the bombardment, the dawn bombardment which... Again something that is hard describe.. The noise and the effect, all the ships firing their guns... It really was something, you know. We remained there for about two months, patrolling Juno.. Sword beaches in the channel. Again protecting the landing craft, and the building mulberry harbour. One or two minor incidents.. And this took us up until September I think it was.
01:30:12	<i>What were the minor incidents? Can you remember?</i>
	Couple of German vessels were entering the channel going to Jersey, and we exchanged shots with them. But they got away... We might well of hit one or two but as I say nothing really serious.
01:30:56	<i>Did you go out to Ouistreham as well?</i>
	Yes-yes indeed.

Time code	What is said
01:31:00	<i>Did you think there was-did you see-feel that there was a different experience to Normandy? Does it scale or?</i>
	Well, Arromanchewas a... the beach... A fantastic beach, it really was. It was different. A holiday type of effect, you know.
01:31:21	<i>Ok, so in September then.. Is that when you were then moved to the Pacific?</i>
	No we then went back and did another two Russian convoys. And this then took us up to the end of 1944.
01:31:37	<i>Anything exciting on those convoys?</i>
	One of them there was a lot of air activity.. I forget which one. One of them was a very fast patrol, we escorted a ship it was taking.. Whether it was prisoners of war I'm too sure about that, but anyway it was a fast run for us.
01:32:03	<i>Did you have any feeling about the fact that you'd seen Normandy and then you had to do more Russian convoys.. Does it-.. Did you sap your moral or did you just accept it?</i>
	Again it was all part of your duties.. You just had to get on with it. Cause' as I say the end of 1944 the next thing.. Was that... We were.. Appointed captain D of the-this was in January 1945-appointed Captain D of the 26th destroyer flotilla.
01:32:43	<i>And what did that mean to you and what did that mean to the ship in general?</i>
	Well we had a captain on board who was intent on becoming an admiral, and did. And did become an admiral later on.. And as captain D of these ships.. The Venus, Virago, Vigilant, -Volage-.. So that we.. We were sort of in charge we set an example, I suppose. And with the captain aboard.. He was making sure that this was so, doing exercises all of the time to make sure that we were efficient. As I say...
01:33:56	<i>Did you enjoy it? Was it enjoyable having somebody that sort of-getting you active and.. Up and about?</i>
	I wouldn't say enjoy but we.. It's certainly.. You know put on your metal, and you know this was not a bad thing.. That we sailed through the Mediterranean, we oiled at Malta, Alexandria, through the Suez canal stopping at Port ????? Aden and then finally birthed at Trincomalee which had become our main base for attacking the Japanese.
	Start of Film 7
01:34:48	<i>That must have been a welcome respite after the Arctic?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Certainly warm! Yes indeed, yes indeed. It was different. But then it was a completely different setup as you say all together. We got Involved in a few skirmishes in the Andaman sea's.. Couple of those, one of them, a Japanese ship was sunk and we picked up.. 5 women survivors, 5 Japanese, and about 50 to 50+ chose to swim away.. Trust their lives with the sharks rather than be picked up... And they were so fanatic that on another occasion we sank a submarine chaser and that ship was going down.. Stern first.. The master was climbing the mast with an automatic gun firing aimlessly into the sky.. And of course he just went down with the ship, these were the sorts of things you had with the Japanese.. You just couldn't tell what was going to happen next.
01:36:33	<i>Can you just describe the rescue process.. For somebody who doesn't know how it operates because it's unusual in the Arctic you wouldn't really do it would you?</i>
	No, no, no
01:36:46	<i>So what was the process?</i>
	Well you just had a scrambling net over the side and they had to climb a scrambling net.. And when they got up you'd lift them over the top.
01:37:01	<i>What was it like to suddenly see Japanese women climbing over these nets?</i>
	Well-they were not Japanese actually.. Indonesian-one was an Indian.. But they were more of the islands rather than Japanese, they were obviously for the comfort of the Japanese.
01:37:28	<i>So they were basically slaves.. Sex slaves?</i>
	Absolutely, yes.
01:37:34	<i>And what do you do with prisoners of war, I mean what happens next?</i>
	The ladies of course we put them to good use because we had several days before we got back into port, and er-they did all our dobeying (naval term for wash/clean, typically clothes) for us, which was very helpful.
01:37:52	<i>I wondered what you were going to say then!</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>yes.. The Japanese, of course we had a constant guard over them.. All the time. But the five that we had just accepted that they were prisoners and that was it. On one of the other boats, one of the Japanese actually committed suicide, we learned.. Again as I say you just couldn't say what was going to happen next. The next thing that we er-.. How do I describe this for you... We didn't come off best.. Explaining again our captain.. Was.. Intent on becoming an admiral and therefore he was looking all the time, seeking things. So we pulled into Stewart Sound in the Nicobar Islands, and we were accompanied by Rapid, HMS Rapid, and HMS Volage. We left Rapid at the mouth of the Sound, Volage came halfway and Saumarez went all the way up a winding stream as it were until we came to this island.. We were looking for shipping, there was none there.. Instead there was a 6-inch gun on this island... When we came to it, we were passing it, we could see the Japanese being awaked from their siesta, running to man their gun.. But they couldn't get a range on us... So we, we were lucky in that way otherwise we would have been blown out of it all together.</p>
01:40:29	<i>How far away were you?</i>
	<p>50 hundred yards, it was that close. As you say it was like a winding river I suppose, type of thing you know, obviously.. Anyway we received a message that the Rapid had been hit, so we turned back and retreated back down the.. The Sound and... Took the Rapid in tow. A sight that was rather frightening... She'd been hit... The er... Her lookin' crew were.. Like wax-dolls at their gun.. Obviously killed by the blast. There was only one survivor on the [POM POM?] deck... Ex-gun had a direct hit.. And there were limbs, legs and arms on the deck.. As I say it was all... All.. Scary to look at, you know. I think they lost 36 in all.. And we took her in tow. Volage meantime was also pulled back from halfway and was making smoke to protect us, and we pulled out into the main Andaman sea and Rapid was unable to make her own way under her own steam, and we accompanied her to ????? in Burma... Where obviously you transfer all the wounded and the dead to hospitals and what have you there... Again we didn't have time to think about these things... Next thing we were sailing again and.. This was now to.. Rangoon. Capital of Burma, which we were retaking. We were only there for 4 or 5 days because the troops ashore had made so much progress there was not much for the navy to do. So we pulled back and returned to Trincomalee.</p>
	Start of Film 8

Time code	What is said
	<p>Back in Trincomalee and then we joined the main fleet, Queen Elizabeth, Rodney, one or two others. Big ships. We learned that the Japanese were probably evacuating from the Nicobar Islands and in fact it turned out to be a Japanese cruiser Haguro... And an accompanying destroyer. Again we sailed all day and just before midnight we made contact, and then went into action.. We again fired our torpedoes and quite successfully scored a couple of hits, but in turn got hit ourselves and had to withdraw from the battle as it were... Leaving the other ships Venus, Fargo, Vigilant perhaps to actually finish off the Haguro and she was sunk. We returned to Trincomalee and from there we went to South Africa for repair, in Durban. We had a couple months down there which was fantastic, away from the war as it were... And one experience I had.. Was that I stayed for two three weeks with a superintendent and his staff on a ????? colony in ????? Which was as I say a complete change from what had been going on.. Really enjoyable. We returned... And on our way back to Trincomalee, again to join the fleet we passed Madagascar and the news was broken of the bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.. Which was first.. Nagasaki.. I can't remember, but anyway... I think Nagasaki was first.. We arrived back in Trincomalee spent a week or so there before again joining the fleet in the Indian ocean. Then asked captain D, senior captain D, to lead the fleet into Singapore... To retake Singapore.. Which again was a sight to behold. Leading the whole.. Leading the fleet into the harbour was really..-</p>
01:48:56	<i>How many ships can you remember?</i>
	Na.. I can't. Quite a few but..
	Start of Film 9
01:49:06	<i>Did you like this chap? This skipper?</i>
	<p>We didn't get to know him too well because he was very detached. The only thing to say in all honesty was that he was a good skipper. He got us through these things.. That other men may not have done.. And as I say he maintained a very efficient ship. So much so that on our return to the UK, the war over, and he's still carrying out night exercises.. Torpedo attacks, that sort of thing.. You know dummy ones, to keep us on our toes.</p>
01:50:11	<i>What was his name?</i>
	<p>Manley Power. Admiral Manley Power, he finished his admiral of the dockyard at Portsmouth, and he lived on the Isle of White I think. Just conclude by saying that sadly.. My ship.. Was recommissioned in 1946 and was mined in the Corfu channel.. In October well after the end of the last war.. And subsequently had to be broken up, being of no further use for service. That was mines laid by the Albanians, whether you remember that incident... But that was the end of the Saumarez.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:51:38	<i>You weren't on board though were you?</i>
	No. I'd left. That was in October, I left her in February before that.
01:51:47	<i>Did you feel for her when she went?</i>
	Yes.
01:51:52	<i>It was a happy ship?</i>
	Absolutely, yes indeed. We maintained contact.. Several reunions over the years.. But again, as one would expect.. There are fewer and fewer of us left... So no more reunions.
01:52:20	<i>And how do you reflect on the war now?</i>
	Something that... Must not be forgotten. Particularly from the angle of the Japanese who were.. Carried out some, as you probably some horrific actions.. The Germans were... More disciplined and good seamen. But er... I think that they-.. These things must never be forgotten. I'd just hate to think what might happen if anything major turned up in the future.
01:53:27	End of Films