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Name: Rodney Newham

Regiment:

Date transcript:

Transcribe by:

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	<p>My name is Rodney Newham and I was born in 1920, and I; when I was 15 I had an apprenticeship in Chatham dockyard, and for five years, and then I served a time on most of the ships that came in; on repairing. I was in the boiler making trade more than anything else. The boiler rooms and engine rooms were the ones that, the ones I was employed in. And, I knew more about the ships than some of the sailors knew, because I used to know every part of the ship, even down into the shafts room, the room of the shaft - which goes through and drives the propeller, and one of my jobs was to put safety shields over the joints of the shaft going through the ship. I knew about most of the ships, were all different; the engine and boiler rooms more than anything, and the air supplies and things like that.</p>
01:01:21	<p>When I was about 15 we sat in exams for artisan apprentices or dockyard apprentices. And at that time I wanted to go into the navy, but at that time they wouldn't accept you in the, as an engine room artificer if you had glasses, because ships in those days, a lot of steam come from the boilers so you never, you couldn't do it, so I went in as an apprentice in Chatham dockyards and served 5 years, that was 1936.</p>
01:01:08	<p>In those days even when you came out of the dockyard gates children were begging there in bare feet for your sandwiches that you had over, and you used to give them to the children who were there waiting for the dockyard people to come out, so that they could get these sandwiches. It doesn't seem possible does it but that's true, yes.</p>
01:02:35	<p>I had a sister who was seven years older and I had a brother who was 7 years younger; and what happened to him, I never knew, I never knew. But my sister; she lived until about 83 I think, something like that; with my sister, yes. And, my father, was a chief engineer in art in the navy, he did his 22 years you know. And, my mother died when I was 8, so I never really knew a mother's love and care from the age of 8, no, so I can't say that I had a happy childhood as such; not having a mother's care.</p>
	Start of Film 2

Time code	What is said
01:03:35	<i>What do you remember of your early apprenticeship at Chatham dockyard, what were you actually, was there a sense of war? Were you, were you building up to war or was it just a job for you at the time?</i>
01:03:42	Well at 1936 I went into the dockyard as an apprentice, a 5 years apprenticeship, '36, in that time, the war broke out at '39, that's right, and so I was serving the apprenticeship actually when the war broke out, yes. When it was, when I finished, I was then a qualified boiler maker which was a hard job, hard work, so I determined at that time that I wouldn't stay as a boiler maker. So I made progress in the trade and I eventually became an inspector of trades, in the dockyard, that's what I retired as; an inspector of trades. It's a, The apprenticeship of a boiler maker was a hard job; it's a heavy, heavy material job. if you can imagine, the boilers they weren't modern, they were what we used to call the arrow boilers, cylindrical boilers; made of metal an inch thick and we used to roll it into shape. Imagine they were big, they were up to thirty ton, the cranes used to have to lift that, yes. It was heavy, hard work, boiler making was, yes I know of a number of people that were killed, when; one of them, he had a plate dropped from a crane, it slipped out of the grip, fell on him and killed him, yes, it were terrible. And I remember a man, being killed, on, the cranes used to go up and down on rails lifting the heavy, well, lifting thirty odd tons, and one man was crushed up in the night, and it was a naval officer who actually went up there, up the steps, as you can imagine the steps were locked so that no, that other people couldn't get up, but He went up there to retrieve the body or to see if he could do anything more for the body. A very brave man; a naval officer lieutenant he was, as plain as if it were yesterday, yes, yes, yes, and, it was hard.
	Start of Film 3
01:06:26	<i>Did you notice, did you notice; to talk a bit about this escalation in the amount of work in terms of providing for the war effort?</i>
01:06:29	Well there were a number of vessels that used to come in damaged because of the war, and they would be repaired in Chatham dockyard, and, and they, we used to do, make, gun shields and torpedo platforms that revolved for the torpedoes on, and we used to do those and make those platforms for torpedoes to be fired from and things like that. And gun shields we used to make, made of bulletproof metal which was very hard to work with, you know bit hard.
01:07:28	<i>Any other ... came in?</i>

Time code	What is said
01:07:29	Yeah, the Arethusa was a cruise I worked on and the... was another cruiser, and, a number of riggers and mine sweepers, and then, when we used to do the re-fits; and that would mean stripping out the boiler engine rooms and renewing a lot of the stuff - the air supply through the ventilations down to the engine and boiler rooms, through turbo generators collecting the air and distributing it around the ship, yes, that was called aluminum trunking with grills on the end of the trunking. And you could alter the different positions through the engines in the boiler rooms, yes, I used to make those grills and fit them, and things like that.
01:08:43	I remember the Germans coming over, was quite a number of them, I remember the, and the Arethusa, the cruiser opened fire on them, and I think, I think a lot of the craft were Italians on there that had come over; because it was noticeable that the Germans would have gone on but when the Arethusa opened fire on them a lot of these planes changed and turned round and went back from where they come from, you'd never believed would you, but that's what happened! Yes, the Germans would have kept on and would have attacked their target, but I think that some of the others were Italians on there. Yes because where I should have been down under the shelter I stood up against one of the workshop walls, and that was my shelter and watched the Arethusa open up, as she was in dock, and she opened up and I was stood there with my back to the wall in the workshop and I saw these men on the Arethusa; stripped to the waist, firing the ships and getting the shells, empty shells and throwing them aside and loading again and firing. That was on the Arethusa, yes, they were really good, they were, they really, really turned those planes around; an experience. Course, I ought to been down in the shelter but I didn't go down there. Yes, I was given one to go to, it was just a, well it was a dugout, and you went down steps, and, that was there, but I wouldn't go down there; I stood with my back to the wall in the workshop, yes. Not that I was brave at all, it's just that I wouldn't go down the shelters. I'd rather take a chance.
01:11:03	Start of Film 4????
	<i>In the war, when you weren't in the dockyard, or were you living in the dockyard as well?</i>
	No I lived, I lived outside of the dockyard, yes, I lived in Gillingham road for a time, near the railway crossing, you know that part of Gillingham, and I lived with my father there, yes cos', because my mother died when I was 8, but I went and lived with my dad.

Time code	What is said
	<p>I think we knew that we'd, put it like this, that we'd win in the end, that we would be the victors as a nation; because I think that the effort, everybody was behind the war effort as far as I know, yes, yes. I suppose it was, you weren't paid a lot of money, you, some people made a lot of money because of the war, but we were never like that, we never made a lot of money because of the war being on, and, it was hard work; these great big slabs, I used to do things on, with a vice, a heavy vice one end of it. And I used to roll plates and cylinders out of inch thick material, and I used to work in the furnace and pull rings out of the furnace and round 'em up, and you used to have to have an asbestos sheet to shield yourself from the heat that came off when you pulled it out with rakes onto a slab out from the furnace.</p>
	<p>And the heat was so great that you used to hold these asbestos sheets up in front of you to protect yourself from the heat as you endeavoured with hammers, large, large hammers, to shape, to, to make them into the right shape. Sometimes they weren't quite round and so you had to put dogs on them and shape them. You just had asbestos sheets to protect yourself from the heat. And the thing was that you was, you made things out of asbestos sheets, and you just saw it up, and all the dust, well you just breathed it all in; no wonder so many men died of asbestos. It's a, I had, what they call, plague, in both lungs, which I've got now, but it never, it never solidified. Men used to breathe it and it would go solid in the lungs; but I was fortunate in that mine didn't solidify, so it hasn't affected me, the breathing, even up to, well now of course it does. I was fortunate, because many, many of my colleagues died at an early age because of asbestos, yes, I remember them; they were compensated a penny for it, and. I've never asked for compensation, and I've never, I've never worried about it, because I thought, well I have been breathing all these years, and with no affect, so I'm fortunate.</p>
	<p><i>And with regard to convoys and stuff what did you know about the work that you were doing about keeping convoys going?</i></p>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Not a lot really; no we didn't know a lot. We didn't get a lot of information except what we read in the papers, you know. We just did our daily work, you know, cos' I had to, we had to join the home guard, so very often it was a matter of coming home from work and going out to the home guard, yes, which was on beety avenue where we had a place, it was beety avenue! Where we used to sleep at night, then we'd be called out, they called it the z batteries and they were rockets and you loaded the rockets and fired at night, you know, and there were, there was two projectors and you had to load them onto a projector, which had two, and you was given the elevation and that over the phone, and you did that and then they would give you the word fire and you'd pull the lever and these two rockets went up from each side, and there was about, there was about; must have been 50 of these z battery rockets on one field, on beety avenue if I remember. And you was firing at the aircraft and you'd hear them but you could never see them cos' it was at night mostly. And during the day, the batteries were made by regular soldiers, you know, and the home guard would do it in the evening, yes,</p>
	<i>Hear any?</i>
	<p>I never heard of any, no, to tell you the truth I never heard them, we'd actually made a hit, it was, yes, so there was two people on each one, and you'd get the, the rocket was in bunks, a number of them, and you would draw one out, ooh they were heavy; yes that big, yes, they were heavy too, and I think they were t and t, and they were heavy, and you'd run and pick one up and load it onto the rocket, and there'd be two, the rocket, and you would hear over the phone what elevation you had to set the rocket to, or the shell to, or rocket, whatever you like to call it, you'd do that and then you'd hear the elevation and that over the phone and then they'd say fire, and you'd press down and these two went up. There was a number of them on the field; there must have been, well it's a job to say now after all this time, but quite a number. And the town's people used to say they made a terrific noise when they went off, you know, when they were all fired at the same time, and, not a lot, not a lot, there must have been great celebrations, yes, I can't remember a lot about it, to tell the truth.</p>
	<p>Oh cos' we had home guard uniforms, and we were allowed to keep that, and I used to wear the trousers to work, for ages and ages i wore those home guard trousers. Dirty job boiler making was, yes.</p>
	<i>Can i ask you a question about Pembroke house, can I ask you about Pembroke house?</i>
	Yes...
	<i>How do you find living here?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>In Pembroke house? One of the best places you could be, really, yes, its uh, yes, I didn't really imagine that I would be here, but it's the best, the best that you can, I think, well its the, uh caring I think is the thing, yes, Pembroke house, and I remember it of course when it was a girls; it was a naval children, girls, it was a girls home, Pembroke house was when I was a boy. And I remember the girls being in their little sailors uniform, it was, yes it was true, that's what Pembroke house was, it was for children, girls, mostly girls, who's fathers had been killed or some reason or other, you know that's what they were, the girls, yeah Pembroke house was a girls, yes a girls home, ex naval people's children, yes. The people, you mean the carers? Very good very good, couldn't wish for a better place really, no, no, very good. They umm, yes, I couldn't be in a better place, I feel, at the end of my life; because they are caring and err I couldn't be in a better place now, yes. And my daughters, my daughter, my son are glad that I'm here because they know that I'm being taken care of, yes. My daughter is able to come very, very frequently because she lives not far from here, yes right opposite, it's the park isn't it?, Jennifer park. I, I have walked to my daughter's, mind you they got onto me because I, I went out of the building, and I went along, into the park, and through the park out the other gate and along Seeton road and up Cleve road to my son in law, my daughter's house; 64 Cleve road, I think it's 64, and they nearly had a fit when they come to the door and I was there, so, anyhow they got me back, no they phoned up first and told, told them here that I was there and that they were going to bring me back, yes.</p>
	<p>End of Films</p>