



Copyright - Legasee under licence [2011]. Except as provided by the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted or published in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For details please contact: info@legasee.org.uk

Thank you for downloading this transcript featuring **Alec Pulfer**

Before you read it we'd like to make you aware of our copyright terms and conditions.

Copyright license

Legasee grants to you a worldwide non-exclusive royalty-free revocable license to:

- view this document and the material associated with this Veteran on a computer or mobile device;
- copy and store this document and the material associated with this Veteran on your computer and in your web browser cache memory; and
- print pages from this transcript for your own [personal and non-commercial] use.

Legasee does not grant you any other rights in relation to this website or the material on this website. In other words, all other rights are reserved.

For the avoidance of doubt, you must not adapt, edit, change, transform, publish, republish, distribute, redistribute, broadcast, rebroadcast or show or play in public this document or the material associated with this Veteran (in any form or media) without Legasee's prior written permission.

Enforcement of our copyright

Legasee takes the protection of its copyright very seriously.

If we discover that you have used our copyright materials in contravention of the Copyright Act 1968, we will bring legal proceedings against you seeking monetary damages and an injunction to stop you using those materials. You could also be ordered to pay legal costs.

If you become aware of any use of Legasee's copyright materials that contravenes or may contravene the Copyright Act 1968, please report this by email to info@legasee.org.uk or by post to Legasee Ltd, 27 Government Row, Enfield Lock, Middlesex, EN3 6JN.

For more details visit our Terms & Conditions at: <http://www.legasee.org.uk/terms-and-conditions/>

Name: Alec Pulfer
Regiment: The Royal Navy

Date transcript: 25/03/2011
Transcribe by: David Davies

Timecode	What Is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	<i>Alec can you begin by introducing yourself, telling us your name and a little bit about yourself please?</i>
01:00:05	I'm Alec Victor Ashcroft Pulfer, 92 years of age and were apprentice on the river Thames at 14 years of age as a Tug Boy and served 7 years on the river to learn the trade of a Waterman and Lighterman and I had some very very stirring times and after 7 years I got the freedom of the River Thames, but unfortunately I got conscripted into The Royal Navy. I joined at Devonport in August 1939 and unfortunately the war broke out
01:01:06	I trained as a Signaller and eventually after 4 months training, the war broke out and I was sent to Southend-on-Sea, which was the commodore of the convoys and I sailed on merchant ships from Southend to Gibraltar and fortunately apart from a few floating mines we had a good trip out and a good trip back and then The Navy made the mistake that I shouldn't of been on them convoys because I was fleet trained at signals. So I was taken of at that trip and sent to Scapa Flow and joined The Royal Navy proper, and it was so boring in Scapa Flow that I volunteered for active service.
01:02:14	I ended up on H.M.S Javelin and sailed for Norway with the Green Howard's, two troop ships and a transport. Unfortunately 05:00 in the morning off the Norwegian Coast the transport was torpedoed and some of the worst incidents of my life, we had to leave men to drown in the water because we had to hunt a submarine.
01:02:48	Anyway the Norwegian campaign was a bit of a fiasco because we couldn't win anyway and left there and fortunately got away... all we did was we lost the ships mast with dive-bombing and several men wounded on the deck. Then I left H.M.S Javelin and then got a week's leave then I joined the H.M.S Woolwich at Scapa Flow again and we sailed out to the Mediterranean fleet.
01:03:42	<i>I understand you were involved in the first battle of Norway can you tell me when that was and describe how your ship and you were involved?</i>
01:03:50	Oh yes I volunteered and joined the H.M.S Javelin and as I said before we sailed for Norway and we went to Andalsnes central Norway where we landed the Green Howard's and as I said on the way there the transport was sunk and we had to leave the men to drown because we had to hunt the submarine, which we never caught anyway and then we left Andalsnes because we had to go to another port Alesund, Veblungsnes because we never had enough fuel to get us back to England

Timecode	What Is said
01:04:40	and at Alesund the marines came aboard and said were well in trouble here the Germans are dropping out the sky well we couldn't understand it you know... you think well dropping out the sky, because they were the paratroops anyway we soon found out because at midday we got heavily dive-bombed, we lost our mast and one or two casualties, but fortunately we managed to get away from Norway and when we left Alesund to get back to England we heard the reports that the H.M.S Glorious was sunk and a couple of destroyers, but fortunately we got back safely to fight another day.
01:05:33	<i>You said you'd seen a transport ship sunk, what could you sea?</i>
01:05:43	Well it was 5 o'clock in the morning and of course in April it was quite light and there was this big bang at 5 o'clock in the morning and the transport within 10 minutes it was sunk, but the ship had all the supplies for the army onboard so that was a big detriment to the armed forces and like everything we carried on because we got the Green Howard's was on the troop ships and we got them safely to Andalsnes, but the whole campaign was not really worth it because we came out of there so quick within a few week it was all over Norway and quite a few casualties and anyway we got back to England alright then I got drafted away from the H.M.S Javelin and joined H.M.S Woolwich where I eventually went out to the Middle East.
01:07:00	<i>You said you thought that the war was over during the battle of Norway, what were your feelings what lead you to believe that?</i>
01:07:07	Well it was over with regards Norway, but then we knew it was far from over because our people didn't realise what we was up against because the Germans were so far advanced above us with their tactics and everything it took 5 or 6 years for it to... for the war to finish.
	Start of Film 2
01:07:40	<i>Can I just unpick the beginning of your carrier a little bit, so you finished training and where did you go, where did you set sail for first of all?</i>
01:07:49	When I eventually left England we sailed for Alexandria in Egypt via The Cape of Good Hope, which entailed... we left Liverpool and we sailed into the Mid Atlantic and then made a course through Freetown Sierra Leone and they were the worst times because the boredom at sea and no expectation of going ashore on leave because you wasn't aloud any leave in the west coasts ports and then we sailed from Freetown and 3 weeks after we ended up in Cape Town, which was very enjoyable because we was aloud ashore and a week in Cape Town and we left there again sailed to Mombasa and refuelled and done all the necessaries. Then we left Mombasa got to Aden sailed up the Red Sea and eventually arrived Christmas Day Alexandria. Just in time to get into the real war.

Timecode	What Is said
01:09:23	<i>What was it like being a young man stopping off in all those exotic locations?</i>
01:09:28	A bit grim because we got ashore in Cape Town and we had a few days leave in Mombasa, but apart from that we never got ashore at all because we were under war time conditions, but I will say one thing, I liked Alexandria because it was a modern city and once you got ashore there it was like living a normal life because the funny thing about the war the Germans never bombed Egypt, they bombed all the harbours, but once you got ashore into the town everything was normal because the Germans wanted to capture the Middle East without too much damage therefore they never really bombed Egypt at all, only in the deserts and all the harbours.
01:10:34	<i>What was it like then for you and the ships company did you feel you were away from the action?</i>
01:10:41	Oh no there was plenty of action because every other night they were bombing the harbours so you know it was lucky dip if you got hit or anything, but then over that 2 years in the Mediterranean most of the fleet got sunk or damaged and I was very very fortunate because being on H.M.S Woolwich we was a destroyer attendant ship and apart from a few men getting killed aboard that ship got through that without much problems, but there was quite a lot of casualties you know army and navy and it was a long period over 2 years and then eventually my time was up of service in the Middle East and I was able to come home. So I arrived home in 1942 and done another course in signals, a higher grading course and then got sent back out to the Middle East.
01:12:10	<i>So having served in the Middle East and seeing a number of casualties what was it like for you coming home back to shore?</i>
01:12:20	Well it's hard to say really because things were fairly normal in England apart from the bombing and everybody looked ill because we were all sunburnt and brown and I was just glad to get home but there again it didn't last too long because I done a course and then got sent back out to the Mediterranean again and this time things wasn't quite so good because I got put into special service, put aboard a Greek small ship, which smelt like nothing on gods earth and ended up in Greece right smack into a civil war. You know you're in the forces to fight the enemy, but we ended up fighting Greeks and that was the worst experience of the lot you know to go there, the people you're supposed to be helping and to get caught up in a civil war and so things were very rough in Greece.
01:13:43	<i>Tell me a little bit more about that, what were you doing there onboard ship and whereabouts were you?</i>

Timecode	What Is said
01:13:50	I was in Piraeas we was... the army and Royal Marines we had a barracks in Piraeas and I was in the signals station, routing the ships into Greece and leaving Greece so I ran the signals station in Piraeas, but to go there every day on watch, we had to get through all the bombing and because the war was on with the Greeks and we had several men killed and injured you know just going on watch. Then we all got food poisoning and running alive with mosquito bites because it was malaria country at the time in Athens and that and then we all caught scabies, which is a skin complaint and anyway it was very rough times in Greece and then eventually the best thing that ever happened... the war ended! and it was strange being in Athens watching all the celebrations going on in London and they was all the people that wasn't even in the war. Eventually came home and got demobbed and there's the 6 ½ years best years of my life just gone.
01:15:43	Can you tell me about what led you to become in possession of the ensign?
01:15:49	I was on H.M.S Canopus, that was the barracks in Alexandria and we went aboard the destroyer to intercept a ship that was taking soldiers from Crete to Italy to fight on during the war and we heard reports that the ship was trooping instead of being a hospital ship, which it should have been, so we boarded the ship and it was an uncanny feeling when you got hundreds of Germans all around. Brought the ship into Alexandria and all the troops was taken off and all that was left aboard was the medical staff and us signalman, I was on the bridge to communicate with the shore and the ship was held for a few days and then was allowed to sail, and the end of the story was she got back to Italy and was sunk in Italy during the Italian war, so that put pay to the hospital ship and as I said before I left her I helped myself to the ensign.
	Start of Film 3
01:17:17	<i>Can you tell me about your training when you joined the Royal Navy what that was like?</i>
01:17:21	Everything in the navy has to be perfect and on time, which wasn't a bad thing really, but the hardest thing was communications learning the Morse code flashing and sound and all the flags and coding and everything was very hard to learn and over the course of time I managed to master most of it and as the time goes by you improve quite a lot and anyway ended up in the Mediterranean fleet, which was where the war was really something.
01:18:15	Learning communications was very hard, but like everything in the navy it has to be very thorough and certain and eventually I did quite well at the Morse code and semaphore, which being drafted into different ships it was a good job to do really because you was always on the bridge of a ship in the open and in some ways the most important person on the ship.

Timecode	What Is said
01:19:06	<i>So can you tell me what it was like then to have been conscripted in and then hear that war was breaking out, what was that like for you as a young man?</i>
01:19:15	Well it seemed exciting at the time, but the worst thing I didn't want to be in the navy you know I'd sooner of been back on the river or gone on merchant ships you know in the merchant navy, but as I was conscripted against my will I decided to stay in and see the war out you know, which I did and then... over the next 6 ½ years which it took a long time to get over the war I served in most places, mainly the operations was in the Middle East and the first commission I was out there for 2 ½ years and unfortunately most of the navy got sunk anyway?
01:20:25	<i>Can you take me back to your first ship and when you first left dock, what it was like where you were heading and what your feelings were, your emotions at that time?</i>
01:20:37	Well that was always exciting because danger always excited me and as I told you before at 14 I was on the River Thames where nothing went perfect there was always incidents and things going wrong on the river, but I used to like problems and things going wrong and same being in the navy although it was more regulated I always had a sense I loved danger and things like that you know I didn't want anything hum drum, but there was a hell of a lot of hum drum times in the navy anyway because weeks on end your stuck in harbours and waiting for something to happen, but when things did happen it made up for the hum drum times.
01:21:38	<i>And you were a young man at the time what was it like seeing casualties and experiencing death around you for the very first time?</i>
01:21:47	Very very grim, but eventually you get used to it. the one thing I never really got over in Greece, when the Germans left they mined everywhere so everyday mines were going up all over the place and the one thing I couldn't understand seeing women and children blown up and men and soldiers and sailors that's what your there for kill or be killed, but seeing that civilians and all that being blown up and you open up like pork sausages, it terrible to say it but that was one thing I could never get used to, but there again this is war or this is war... total war and fortunately let's hope it wont happen again. Its starting again now in Egypt isn't it.
01:23:00	<i>Are there any other incidents during your time in the military that you can remember?</i>

Timecode	What Is said
01:23:06	Well only that... I rather liked the Middle East because the climate was perfect and one thing I will always remember when we left Greece, we left there on a landing ship... a tank landing ship to go back to Egypt and three prisoners like... three sailors that was in handcuffs came aboard and because were going back to Egypt because the war had ended in Greece and these three men in handcuffs had to be prisoners aboard the ship. So the Greek officer said oh put them down that tank over there see, and I was watching and these three men were put down in this hold, it was an ammunition locker, put the lid on and I thought when we sailed and the temperature in June, it was very very hot and were going from Piraeas back to Athens and I think to myself they won't live down there being down that long
01:24:28	and because this officers gone so after about quarter of an hour I went up to our officer that was in charge of us. I said excuse me sir I said there's three prisoners down that hold and in my opinion they'll die down there can't be any air down there so you got the Greek officer opened it up and they were on their last gasp you know because it was an ammunition locker they shouldn't of been put in there. Least they were aloud the freedom of the ship before we got back to Egypt.
01:25:06	And then the only other interesting thing we got a fortnights leave to The Holy Land and I would say that was the best trip I ever had was going up into The Holy Land and touring all you know, Jerusalem and Bethlehem and all them places that really put spark in you again you know apart from that the rest is all history...
01:25:41	<i>Considering you had a number of lucky escapes what are your thoughts and reflections on your time in the military as you look back now?</i>
01:25:48	I wish I hadn't of gone in... well all I can say is I was very very lucky because I think in some ways I think we get... we all born into a world we have so many jobs to do and some make it and some don't you know I mean I was very fortunate I went right through the war and I came out unscathed when other people what I was with was being killed and one thing and another, which makes me believe we here for chance number of years might sound a bit strange to say it, but it seems to work out.
01:26:46	End of Films