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Name: John Roche
Regiment: The Royal Navy

Date transcript: 18 Jun 2014
Transcribe by: Carly Beadle

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
	I'm John Roche and I joined the navy at HMS St. Vincent in Gosport in 1938, and I done twelve months of boys training there before I went on to my first ship; which was HMS Iron Duke
01:00:18	<i>Why did you have a feeling for the navy over any of the other services?</i>
	Well my father had been in the navy; my uncle had been in the navy, and my brother was in the navy so it was a family affair really. In August 1939, I was drafted to commission HMS Renown in Portsmouth, shed been in there for three years from 1936 until 1939; and she was having a big refit. The ship came out all brand new, twelve hundred of us came on board and commissioned the ship just before the war started, and we had a quick rush to the ammunition ship, and the provision ship and we had to do all the necessary things; such as quick seat and wheel trials the day that the war started on the 3rd September 1939 to Scapa Flow to join the home fleet. I stayed on HMS renown for five and a quarter years spent about all the war on one ship.
01:01:38	<i>Talk about the pre-war period, and the training, what were you doing? What was it like?</i>
	It was pretty tough they talk about the young offenders training these days but I think ours was much tougher than that. We had to get up at six o clock every morning, go up and over the mast before breakfast; we may get a cup of cocoa and two biscuits to start the day and then we had our breakfast. On the Thursday we had to go to the laundry because we wore dark suits for normal days and they had to be changed twice a week, so we all ended up in the laundry Thursday morning scrubbing; doing all our washing and that was all done before seven o clock. Then we were under various instructions, we done schooling, signals, naval history, and various other things. Pre-war training was pretty good, it put us in good shape for afterwards you know, when you think about the youngsters joining up these days they have about six weeks of training, but we had about twelve months of training. So really they got extra time out of us without giving us any pension, because our time in the navy didn't start for pension purposes until we were eighteen; so we done two and half years for nothing as it were really. A lot of the boy seamen went to see the beginning of the war, in matter of fact there was about 800 boy seamen lost, there were about 100 lost on HMS Royal Oak, and around 180 lost on HMS Hood. Boy seamen done the same work as naval seamen and ordinary seamen they done lookouts; ammunition carriers, anything a seaman done we done.

Time code	What is said
01:04:04	<i>Was there anything in that training that you really liked or really disliked?</i>
	It's hard to say, I suppose you enjoy being with new company you know with all the boys and that, we all mucked in together and you all became good friends. We decided we were all in it together, once you were signed on you couldn't get out anyway; so you was stuck with it
	Start of Film 2
01:04:29	<i>Did you as boy sailors have a sense that there was real potential for a war during that training period?</i>
	We did actually because it was in 1938 when Neville Chamberlain came back from Munich with a bit of paper saying that there wouldn't be any wars. The next thing we knew we were all out in the playground with pick axes and shovels digging air raid shelters on our playground, we enjoyed that more rather than marching on it
01:05:04	<i>Before you went on the ships, did you get a well done or was going on the ships just part of the next stage?</i>
	I suppose it was a continuation, the traineeship was HMS anyway the routine was much the same, so we got on the ship and we probably found being on the ship was easier as the routine wasn't as strict as the training; we had a bit more freedom if you like. Although being boys we still had to conform to boys' routine, we had a boys' mystic, the boys were kept away from the older sailors; we weren't allowed to mix with them only for work purposes
01:06:01	<i>What was it like seeing HMS Renown for the first time?</i>
	We thought it was a mighty big thing, we saw it in the dockyard in Portsmouth, and we had been around the naval dockyard in Portsmouth before that so we had seen a lot of big ships. There were a lot of big ships coming in and out, there were a lot of battle ships around then and we had seen the Hood; and that is the sister ship to Renown really which was a bigger vessel. So we had seen bigger ships, we just haven't actually served on one or been on before until we got on there, and started finding our way around
01:06:51	<i>Tell me a bit about the boys' mess, what was it like?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>There were about twenty on each mess, there was a scrub table which you would scrub every morning after breakfast and you went up to the galley taking it in turns two of you at a time to be cook of the mess. You went up to the galley and it was on a big ship like Renown, which is what they called general messing; all the food was provided for you. You used to cook breakfast, such as beans on toast; or bacon and tomatoes that sort of thing, and then dinner time at twelve o'clock we went up to collect dinner which was usually a roast or a boiled dinner, and then you had bread and butter for tea, and then you had supper in the evening which could have been sausage and chips you know that sort of thing. Then it would be time for the boys to turn in by nine o'clock, then they called the hands at half six or seven in the morning and we all had to be up, we all slept in hammocks; you had to learn how to sling a hammock and sling it properly because the ship was moving, if you hadn't slung it properly you would fall out of it. I spent all my time in the navy sleeping in a hammock really. I was only on one ship where they had bunks, I got so used to the hammock I started to like it, I'd rather a hammock than a bed I think</p>
01:08:26	<i>Even now?</i>
	Yes, it was very comfortable especially when you get adjusted to your own needs as it were
01:08:35	<i>The boys that you went onto Renown with were they all Pompeii ratings?</i>
	<p>No, before the war there was Davenport man ships, Portsmouth man ships and Chatham man ships. Your official number was either DJX for Davenport, or PJX for Portsmouth and CJX for Chatham; so all the boys that went onto Renown they were all from different classes not necessarily all from my class; and we happened to be graded to Davenport. So when we went on board Renown the crew came up here from the barracks at Davenport, and they came up by train and joined the ship the same time as we did in Portsmouth and it remained like that until after the war; and the depots became amalgamated as it were. So Renown was a Davenport man ship all throughout the war, we didn't go Davenport very often we only came here a couple times during five or six years</p>
	Start of Film 3
01:09:50	<i>Talk a bit about what you were doing during this period?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>When I commissioned the ship, you've all got your various acting stations and your normal workstations; there were usually four parts to a ship; the front end of the ships, there was the main top on one side and a four top on the other side, and that would be the mid-ship part of the ship, and then you had the quarter deck was the after end of the ships and I was in the quarter deck; so you all had your own part of the ship as it were. You all had your acting stations there and your normal workstations; my first station was the transmission station. We were down about three decks with big hatches closed down on top of us, so if the ship disappeared we would be gone as well</p>
01:10:55	<i>What was you doing down there in the transmitting station?</i>
	<p>In the transmission station they would have a range finder fitted on the master, and the range finder would be transmitting down the distances of targets whether that would be aircraft or ships and we had a transmitter, it was like an old type of computer; we followed dials and had to line them up and we were in contact with the gun and all the feed that we put into it the guns followed our instructions. So if you was firing a 4.5 gun at an aircraft, we would transmit the height, the bearing and all of that sort of thing, or if it was on a surface target you'd transmit the range and all that sort of thing; it was a type of computer I suppose if you like. That's when you closed up and went to your action stations, you either ended up in two watches port or starboard if you were in cruising stations, or you would normally be in three watches, you had a red, white and a blue watch. So you'd be four on and eight off, or sometimes if you were on a more action routine sometimes you could be four on and four off so it was pretty strenuous; it all depended on where you were and what the danger was. You might have been there all night, maybe all day; it all depends on where the ship was and what the danger was</p>
01:13:00	<i>What was it like down there when the fifteen pounders were going off?</i>
	<p>Well you could hear them thumping away all the time, every time they fired there was a tonne projector, one would weigh a tonne they had to be loaded. We had six fifteen each guns, so twelve tonne at a time going out, and when the ammunition was shipped, one had to come on at a time because they did weigh a tonne each and they went down to the shell room and the cordite in another the magazine so you had the shells in one room and the cordite in the other so if you got hit in action you can say cheerio you were on your way.</p>
	Start of Film 4
01:14:04	<i>You talked about action stations, you talked about the red, white and blue watch system, what entertainment was there on board HMS Renown?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Later on in the war we had a sixteen-mil projector and they could show films around on various parts of the ship, and then later on we had an aircraft hanger, because we carried two aircrafts on board and when the aircrafts were taken off the ship I think in about 1941, that was converted into a cinema; and then that became thirty-five-mil I think. The only other entertainment would be the loudspeaker in the mastic and whatever that was connected to, sometimes we would hear the news, our ears were always glued to the news; waiting for Winston Churchill to speak, or there would be very serious business going on such as ships being sunk or bomber raids, we'd all listen intently to the nine o'clock news every night. We had no newspapers of course, now and again if somebody was going away for a long period of time, schoolmasters would produce a weekly newspaper with the news that had come over and put it in paper form for us to read. The entertainment we played tombola of course, that was always a naval game, tombola call the numbers out, and that would happen three times a week. After a while, when everyone got organised there were some good singers on board, so they had a ships concert party going and so we made our own entertainment, you could be playing chess, draughts, or cards and so we made our own. The ship had been completely gutted out and so all that was left was a massive hole, so they rebuilt and put new guns and armour and new engines and everything else, it was a very fast ship; Renown could do over 32/33 knots so we often left the destroyers behind in bad weather because they couldn't keep up with us. So we did a lot of time on our own, zigzagging of course trying to dodge any U-boats around</p>
01:17:09	<p><i>What do you remember about heading up to Scapa the first time, can you remember that once the war had been declared and you were off to join the fleet?</i></p>
	<p>Yes, it was all a bit of a shock on the first day then you suddenly got used to being at war and getting it drilled into you everyday, and then we got up on the Scapa flow and the next thing was German bombers came over and we suddenly realised people were dropping bombs on top of us; so we had to open fire. We shot a couple of them down, but they hit a couple ships and they missed us we didn't get hit. Then of course we moved from Scapa flow into Loch Fyne on one of those places, we were lucky really because we moved out before the U-boat came in and sank the Royal Oak. The Royal Oak was sunk in Scapa Flow in October 1939, the German U-boats would have sunk a few more ships if we would have been in there I think, nobody expected that they thought we were in a safe anchorage because you know they had barricades around and nets and things like that but, they hadn't reckoned the fella coming in at high tide and he slipped in over the barricades and got into the flow and got out again and sunk a ship on his way</p>
01:19:02	<p><i>Did you hear about the Royal Oak being sunk? How did that affect the crew?</i></p>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Well we just felt it could have been us I suppose, every ship that was sunk in the war you heard about it and I guess that put you more on your metal really; they said keep a good look out and watch what you're doing and to make sure when you're at your action stations make sure you shoot down aircrafts, sink the submarines; it sharpened you up a bit really. When we heard the Hood had been sunk, it was one of our sister ships there was the Hood, The Repulse and the Renown was the three battle cruisers, and when the Hood sunk there were only three survivors out of over fourteen hundred men on board, men and boys of course; so if a ship blew up like that there wasn't much hope for anybody. So I suppose we just accepted it, we were in it and that's it really.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 5</p>
<p>01:20:16</p>	<p><i>What do you remember of some of the early arctic convoys that you did?</i></p>
	<p>We were normally sort of distance support for the aircraft carriers, battleships and battle cruisers; and the convoy was assembled normally in the north of Scotland, then they would go up to Iceland. We were based in Iceland and when the convoy sailed, we would sail at the same time and then it all sort of depended on the danger we was expecting whilst we were behind the convoy, to the side of the convoy, in front of it or whatever really. There were German destroyers and other ships and they were always worried about the Bismarck coming out which was based in Norway, so our prime aim was to stop the battle ships interfering with the convoys. So we were normally in the middle of the convoy, but now and again we would sometimes pass the convoy or move close to it. You'd see the convoy with maybe thirty, forty ships steaming along and we would sometimes steam through the middle of it</p>
<p>01:21:38</p>	<p><i>What was that like?</i></p>
	<p>It was very enlightening really, there were a lot of older ships and they was struggling to keep up the speed of course and a lot of them were coal burning ships, I felt sorry for the poor suckers below shovelling coal to try and keep the ships doing nine or ten knots or something. We only had to press a button and we could do thirty knots, so that was the main thing the convoys were pretty slow, it was so cold and the seas were pretty rough; there was a lot of bad weather which you had to contend with. Some of the ships would even ice over, we would go up in the morning and you would see all the guns and everything else covered in black ice; it would come over during the nights time and it would freeze. We had to go round with chipping hammers and chip the ice off, there were cases of smaller ships turning over because it would be top heavy with ice, the ship rolled and never came back</p>
<p>01:23:00</p>	<p><i>What do you remember of the cold?</i></p>

Time code	What is said
	Well I remember going on watch, I mean we didn't have any of today's weather clothing; we only had our ordinary gear and maybe we would get issued with long johns and things like that. You could put a couple pairs of trousers on, and a couple of coats on, we only had duffle coats and balaclavas. We used to get some bag of goodies come on board if somebody done some knitting, we used to look like pirates if you like once we put all our gear on and maybe two pairs of gloves to go on watch. Then If you came off watch you would have to stand around in case you needed to go to your action stations, you just laid down on the deck and went to sleep with all your clothes on; you wouldn't have time to put it all on once the action station sound went off; you might stay in the same gear for a week. If a ship was torpedoed or something people wouldn't have a chance, they would end up in the water and you'll only live for about two minutes, then you'd be frozen solid I should think
01:24:43	<i>You talked about putting binoculars to your face, just describe that...</i>
	Yes, you had to breathe on them before you put them up to your face, and you had to make sure you kept them near your body to keep them slightly warm because anything cold you could nearly burn yourself with ice I suppose. The cold weather was the main thing; it was very cold and rough, rough seas
01:25:20	<i>Did you ever get to Polyarny or Murmansk?</i>
	No, we got on the outskirts and then we turned around and picked up another convoy and came back again, so that wasn't any anchorages for big ships there. The escorts could go in because they would also have to pick up another convoy, or go in and do a little bit of maintenance and things like that. The bigger ships they stood off, so we didn't actually land in Russia
01:25:56	<i>Did you see any U-boats?</i>
	We had plenty of alarms, as soon as an alarm went off we would alter course and buzz off in the other direction. As far as seeing them we didn't see any, we knew they were in the area; you'd hear a bang or a ship being torpedoed or something and we were usually screened with destroyers keeping us safe from U-boats we hoped. Any U-boat alarm and we would alter course quickly
01:26:39	<i>Did you ever see any ships go down?</i>
	We did see a couple of them go down in the distance, you could see them and then all of a sudden there would be a big bang and then there would be nothing there. If there were U-boats near us we would be shepherded away in another direction to get them away from us, the U-boats would have had interest in sinking us if they got the chance but we could go a bit faster. Renown would have been a difficult target for a U-boat in those days, they only done about eight or nine knots in the water compared to our twenty

Time code	What is said
	Start of Film 6
01:27:38	<i>What do you remember of Iceland?</i>
	It was a dreary sort of a place; we were in a place called Valfurva, and now and again the boys may get a chance to go down to Reykjavik that was the capital. Anybody went down there on a day trip or something, it was expensive down there, down by our anchorage we built our own football pitch offshore that would be our main thing, or we could fish over the side all day and all night really. We were there once and a mighty gale blew up so we had to pull in our anchors, the wind was about 120mph, a lot of the ships dragged anchors and a couple of them went to ground. Every ship had two anchors down, and we were steaming half speed ahead into the wind just to hold your position. It was a big storm that came up
01:28:51	<i>How did HMS Renown handle the big sea?</i>
	She was a good sea boat really she was a heavy ship, she weighed about thirty two thousand tonnes; she rolled like any other ship would in a big ocean like that
01:29:23	<i>Did you have good sea legs?</i>
	Yes, I was never sea sick really because growing up as a boy I used to go out in the boat fishing, so I was used to being in a boat being at sea so I wasn't really worried. A lot of people were sea sick all their life really, even Lord Mountbatten he was sea sick all his career; so some people never got over it
01:30:17	<i>Do you have any stories or any recollections of the arctic convoys that you want to share?</i>
	No not really, I guess we were just happy to get back to Scapa Flow to get away from it all really, even Scapa Flow was a dreary old place; you hoped you could maybe run ashore up to Edinburgh or something like that. It was just dreary I suppose if you like, a dreary old job that had to be done
01:30:52	<i>OK, after the arctic you probably went down to the Mediterranean didn't you?</i>
	We did yes and we done about twelve months there, escorting convoys to Malta; we did a lot of that. We were down there with the Arc Royal and Sheffield and we were know down there as Force H, we done a lot of escorting convoys to Malta
01:31:14	<i>Tell me about some of those convoys?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>There were various types of convoys, they'd try and get the bigger, faster sort of ships that could nip through there. If we were escorting convoys through the Mediterranean we would leave Gibraltar in the night time just as it was getting dark and head out to the Atlantic, because there were so many Spanish people watching where we were going and then I guess they would transmit the information over to Berlin. Every movement of every ship was logged back to Germany so we'd go out into the Atlantic and then about midnight when it got dark we would turn around and go full speed back to Gibraltar and then when dawn came up we were well away into the Mediterranean away from Gibraltar. Hopefully we'd thrown them off the scent, I don't know if we were successful or not, after a couple of days you would see an Italian aircraft being nose-y to see what was going on and where we were. I suppose you played a bit of cat and mouse if you could</p>
01:32:37	<i>Talk about the Italian bombers; was it just Italian bombers?</i>
	<p>Mostly at that end of the med it was Italian bombers, they dropped a few bombs close to us; there were German U-boats and Italian submarines. Again you tried to outwit them by zigzagging and keeping up a steady speed, and some of those convoy ships were big ships and they were fast ships. Hopefully they could get through to Malta by dodging the U-boats with their speed, we would near enough escort them to Malta and then the destroyers would continue to take them while we would turn around and escort more convoys. We were making sure the Italian fleet weren't going to come out and attack the convoy, which would be our prime job really. We were in action with the Italian fleet one time</p>
01:33:53	<i>Tell me about that...</i>
	<p>We got information that the Italian fleet were at sea and we had Admiral Somerville on board, he was the admiral; great guy everybody liked him. We had the HMS Arc Royal with us and Sheffield, and a couple of us chased after these Italian ships so we got into action with them; we open fired on them but Italian ships were faster than us really. They nipped away and we chased them within about thirty miles of the Italian coast and of course, Admiral Somerville decided then that his prime job was to look after the convoy really. He actually got into trouble with Winston Churchill because he wasn't really chasing the Italians into their harbours, which would have been a dangerous game really; we could have been opening to bombers and all sorts of things. We could have also been sunken with the convoy, we could have been vulnerable really, he was hot over the coals about it but it wasn't until recently afterwards that he agreed that Somerville had done the right thing. Everyone was very pleased about that because he was a very popular Admiral</p>
01:35:37	<i>I take it then you were in you action stations basically constantly?</i>

Time code	What is said
	By that time I had been on the ship a couple of years, I had served on various action stations, I had been in the transmitting station; I had been on one of the 4'5 guns, id been look out position. By that time I had also become a torpedo man, I was a leading seaman; therefore I became a leading torpedo operator and we was to look after the electrical side of the ship. I had different duties by then, I became a semi-electrician if you like, looking after normal light or ships fire control and all sort of things like that. That's what my career became afterwards from being a torpedo man
01:36:30	<i>When you used to fire the fifteen pounders did it break all the bulbs?</i>
	Oh very often, the fifteen-inch yes the lights would fly off the bulk header, it all depended on what bearing it was on; if it was on the beam then yes. Sometime if you were firing ahead the gun was trained and needed its own upper works; when the gun fired the blast would affect the nearest part of the ship to it. In matter of fact they used to have these over the head fans, but if we knew we would be firing a fifteen-inch we would have to quickly take them down because the blast would blow them off board
	Start of Film 7
01:37:33	<i>How was the ship with someone like an Admiral on board? What was the discipline like?</i>
	Well of course we were the senior ship there with the Admiral on board, we had a good combination; we had Admiral Somerville, and we had a Captain called McGregor and he became an Admiral afterwards. They got on really well together, we used to call him Mac and him and Somerville got on fine. Somerville used to walk around the ship and he would talk to you if he were going past, normally you'd only say good morning or good evening but he was a pretty good guy. If you were in Gibraltar he might have been out in his dingy in the morning with his sports gear on, pulling in a dingy around the harbour for a bit of exercise. He was a good egg if you like, Somerville was a very popular Admiral
01:38:41	<i>Did you speak to him?</i>
	Yes, I didn't speak to him he spoke to me (laughs), unless he was doing an inspection or something, inspecting divisions or something like that then he would single someone out and talk to them
01:39:01	<i>It sounds up to this point that Renown was quite a lucky ship?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>She was a very lucky ship yes, we got hit a couple of times up Norway in 1940 when we were off Narvik; when they were trying to land up there. We were in action with those two, and the Glow-worm she was with us too; she went away to investigate and she was sunk. So we engaged these two but again there were horrendous seas and bad visibility and they managed to escape, we done a bit of damage to both of them. Other than that the only other damage we had was that a load of aircraft came to attack us, one Malta convoy and we had these 4.5 guns; we had twenty of those and there were three twin turrets on each of those, and these low flying torpedo aircrafts came in and these guns were low and depressed and were hard to shoot at these aircrafts skimming over the water. One of our guns ended up firing into the gun next door to it, and ended up killing ten of our people, so we had to go in and pick up all the bodies that were clinging on to parts of the gun. Sew them up in mail bags, and then bury them at sea off Gibraltar, I think we lost around eight or ten men, boys I think as well; so the main damage was what we done to ourselves</p>
01:41:23	<i>How did that affect morale?</i>
	<p>Everybody was a bit sad because they would have been peoples mess mates and we knew them very well, they were all lads we knew; one minute they'll be firing a gun and the next they were dead, it was a very sad occasion really</p>
01:41:46	<i>Were you part of the party that helped clear up?</i>
	<p>I was in the fecundity because I was up in that turret area, if I was in that turret I would have been killed as well I suppose. I was in and out of these gun turrets, so we saw everything that was happening; everybody had to muck in I suppose and that gun was out of action you couldn't use it anymore</p>
01:42:18	<i>When you were under attack do you recall hitting any of the planes?</i>
	<p>Oh I think so, I mean I think everybody claimed more than they did but there were ten ships firing so it makes it difficult to know who hit what plane; so now and again you'd see a plane dive into the water and you'd give it three cheers or something. Then somebody would say I done that, and somebody else on another ship would say the same thing</p>
01:42:50	<i>Were you every aware of what you was escorting, did you know what the ships were carrying?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Some of the Malta runs we knew because we were escorting aircraft carriers, one of them was the USS Wasp; we were carrying aircrafts and spitfires to Malta. We hoped to get within striking distance to Malta, so they could then fly out to go and help the Maltese air force. So a lot of it was reinforcing the air defences in Malta, we were loading spitfires up and taking them to Malta, and also big merchant ships I mean you may see tanks on deck or something; but you wouldn't know what they were all carrying. You wouldn't really be interested, what they ship was carrying wouldn't make a lot of difference to us really, our main job was to get it there
01:44:07	<i>It must have been impressive seeing all the Spitfires being taken off deck?</i>
	Yes, there were a couple mix-ups a few times because some ships would run out of fuel and would never make it; a lot of them weren't fully prepared. They would arrive in Malta, and they would be destroyed after a few days because they wouldn't be ready for operation when they got there, it was nice to see them all going off; it was nice to know they had all landed safely
01:44:41	<i>Tell me about Operation Torch, what was Renown doing on that?</i>
	We were standing off really because there were so many ships there coming in, a big American fleet of ships landing troops and everything so we were more or less off the coast giving support to any of the Italian ships. German ships may have come to interfere with the landing that was in 1942, when we were landing in North Africa we thought well we are getting somewhere now. There were a lot of ships involved, you were part of a big team I suppose escorting all these ships, and landing crafts, and various other types of ships with stores and things like that you know.
01:46:01	<i>Were you involved in firing on to the land at all?</i>
	I don't think we did for Torch, I don't think we done any bombardments for Torch; we done bombardments for other places but not for Torch I don't think
01:46:25	<i>Was that the biggest fleet you had ever seen as a young person?</i>
	I suppose it was in the wartime really, the biggest amount of ships in one place at one time, there were two or three different lots of them; the advanced party, the mid party and then the final party as it were. All various types of ships coming in and landing, and once they secured a couple of ports or something they'd be able to go in and unload
	Start of Film 8
01:47:02	<i>After Operation Torch and some of the Maltese convoys were done, you started doing more Atlantic work, is that right?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Yes we done a few Atlantic convoys, they were always worried about the German battleships that were at loose in the Atlantic; so we done a bit of time in the Atlantic. Prior to that we escorted the Arc Royal up when they were chasing the Bismarck; we were involved in that as well
01:47:28	<i>Tell me about that...</i>
	<p>We'd heard that The Hood had been sunk, that gave us all a bit of a shock really because we thought The Hood was the most powerful ship in the navy; which it was you know it had eight fifteen-inch guns compared to our six. It just disappeared, there were three survivors, whom we didn't know back then and we were down in Gibraltar the Arc Royal, Sheffield and us. We headed up there to try and cut the Bismarck off to stop them getting oppressed in Northern France, and eventually it was sited by Catalina the aircraft; and we saw the Arc Royal's aircraft taking off and that was a mighty thing. The ship was going up and down thirty foot in the air, that was a mighty bit of flying there. Then of course, the Admiral sent The Sheffield to go and shadow The Bismarck, but he didn't tell the Arc Royal; so the Arc Royal saw Sheffield and thought that was going to attack the Bismarck so they started firing at the Sheffield; but luckily the magnetic fuses on the torpedo weren't working properly and they all passed underneath the Sheffield. She had a lucky escape, she nearly got sunk with her own aircraft, then they all came back and reloaded the torpedoes and they put contact pistols on them, so the torpedo would have to hit the ship in order for them to explode. So they took off again, and they knew The Sheffield was there this time and the Sheffield directed them onto the Bismarck, and they hit the Bismarck around the rudder area of the ship and disabled it really; it was going around in circles. The Admiral on Renown was dying to get involved to have a crack at it ourselves, but we were told to lay off till the biggest RKG and Rodney came up because I think the Admiralty were scared after the Hood had been sunk; with one shot we could have been sunk as well you know. We were looking after The Arc Royal, so if we weren't looking after her she could have been sunk, in the middle of it all during The Bismarck action there was a German U-boat returning to base and he was in the area; he had The Arc Royal and Renown in his sights but he ran out of Torpedoes; he could have sunk the two of us</p>
01:50:56	<i>Did you see The Bismarck?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>No we didn't see The Bismarck, we were close by you know; they were lucky really because they nearly ran out of fuel. They was lucky that they were able to catch up with her really, otherwise if it came to it we could have been the last ship, which would mean we would have had to go in and attack her; we might have had a better chance because she wasn't steering very well she was going round in circles; she was eventually sunk. I can recall a funny story after that, a friend of mine was on one of the destroyers and they picked up some of these German survivors from The Bismarck and of course all the ships had to head for the UK; some were sunk on the way back actually because some were running out of fuel. This chap he was put on the Milford Haven in the deaden night, they were told first thing in the morning to land these German prisoners and he said we blindfolded all these German prisoners before they went ashore you see, and he said we didn't even know where we were ourselves (laughs); none of them had a clue where they were. We had to blindfold all these German soldiers so they didn't see anything, but we didn't know where we were anyway only the captains knew where they were.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 9</p>
<p>01:52:37</p>	<p><i>When you started doing the Atlantic escorts you had quite a good guest on board...</i></p>
	<p>Oh yes Winston Churchill, we done a special trip for him we went all the way over to Canada; we went over to Halifax to pick him up. He'd been at a Quebec conference with President Roosevelt and he wanted us to bring him back, so we steamed over there and went through a big gale on the way. We eventually got over there and got into Halifax, we weren't supposed to tell anybody that we were going over there but they all knew, and then he came on board with his wife and children; and we then set sail full speed across the Atlantic zigzagged all the way. The destroyers and U-boats couldn't keep up with us in the bad weather also, and so we brought him safely back; we nearly lost his daughter on the way. Mary Churchill, one of the school master officers took her for a walk along the quarter deck, the quarter deck was out of bounds because it was a very low part of the ship, and when we were at sea zigzagging a mighty amount of water used to wash over the quarter deck. So this guy took her for a walk, and the next thing a big wave picked them up and washed them along the deck, she managed to grab hold of a wire and one of the young officers went down and managed to grab hold of her and pull her back. She thought she'd gone, if she would've gone of the side we wouldn't of stopped to pick her up, it would have been too dangerous, Winston didn't know anything about this; he didn't know until afterwards. That evening when she arrived for dinner wearing her clothes, and her hair was still wet and he said I don't remember giving you permission to wear civilian clothes for dinner, she was in army uniform; he didn't know what had happened. She celebrated her twenty-first birthday on board in 1943</p>

Time code	What is said
01:55:14	<i>Was there a special do for her twenty-first?</i>
	There was actually, they presented her with a cake and a card and one of the ships kittens. The ships cat had kittens on board, so they gave her one of the kittens as a present
01:55:46	<i>Were there any other women on board the Renown?</i>
	Well of course her mother was board, I think there was a couple of typists on board but they would have been up in the offices court. I think they were the only women we carried on board actually, Mary Churchill was the only woman to fire a gun on board the Renown, they took her all round; she had a go on all the guns. I think she was the only woman in history to fire a gun on HMS Renown, she remembers all those things about the ship you know
01:56:33	<i>Was it considered bad luck to have a woman on board?</i>
	I never heard it but I knew it had been spoken
01:56:45	<i>Did it give the crew on HMS Renown pride to know that they had been selected to have Winston Churchill on their ship?</i>
	Oh yes we were very proud to carry Winston, he was number one guy; we would have carried him anywhere. On the second trip we picked him up here in Plymouth, took him on in the night time; nobody knew he was coming on board. We picked him up and he was going to Alexander that time, and the next thing we was down the Bay of Biscay on our way down at thirty knots with Winston onboard so he liked us he came with us twice.
01:57:29	<i>Did he speak to you at all?</i>
	No, he would have said get out of my way or something like that (laughs), that's all he might have said get out of my way or something like that tahts about all he might have said
01:57:43	<i>What was it like having him on board? Did it change the atmosphere?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>It did really; I was quite close to them because I was doing the electrical work at that time and one of us had to be near their quarters in case a bulb, or a fuse blew or something like that. Now and again Winston would come out and sometime he would want to see a film, so he would watch it for five minutes and then come back out; he'd be in and out. We had this big war room with all the maps, we had to put heaps and heaps of light on so he could see the Russian front, the North African front, and the Italian front. We had all these maps and they all had to be kept up to date, he was in and out of there all the time. In matter of fact I had to go in there one time because Lady Churchill had an electric iron from America, and it wouldn't work so I had to go in and repair her iron so she could do a bit of ironing; so I had a little chat with her. She was a lovely lady, after that in November we took him out to the Mediterranean because he had another conference there, took him out to Gibraltar, then Malta then to Alexander. He flew home from there, we took him on two trips; we took his other daughter the second time Sarah, and she was in the air force</p>
	Start of Film 10
01:59:38	<i>What was your skipper like?</i>
	<p>We had four or five skippers on board, they lasted for about one or two years on board. The first skipper was called Simian and the other was called Daniels, they all became Admirals after that; then we had McGregor and then a fella called Brook. Brook took us out to the Far East in 1943, to the Far East fleet</p>
02:00:31	<i>Did different skippers bring different attitudes, different ideas to Renown?</i>
	<p>Not really, they seem to nowadays but we had a fully efficient working ships you couldn't really change any of that. The ship was pretty good and gunnery, good at getting the ship to sea and everything like that, good at maintenance. There wasn't much else that the Captain could change, and of course he was under instructions to where he went and what operations he took so no not to my knowledge that I can remember that the Captains done a lot of alterations some of the officers might have been more aware of him must of watched him to see what he liked or didn't... We still had to get the ship ready, and get it out to sea whoever the Captain was in charge, they were all highly experienced men; you couldn't become a Captain of sa battlecruiser without sufficient experience</p>
02:01:59	<i>A case of if its not broken down don't fix it...</i>
	<p>That's right, nothing really changed from one Captain to another, if it was a good ship and a lucky ship they were all very proud to Captain a ship like that. It was proved because every one of them were made Admiral afterwards, so they must have done a good job</p>
02:02:36	<i>What was it like going down south to the Indian Ocean?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>It was very different, we went in through the med and down the Suez Canal, then into Colombo then round to the other side; and we were based in Trincomalee. We went on a few trips there, done a few bombardments, we had an American carrier there and I think that was The Wasp again; that went with us so there was quite a big fleet there. The fleet was starting to build up from Australia mostly for the Pacific war, so we stayed around in Trincomalee and crossed the Indian Ocean. I think the Japanese started to get put on the run a bit by then, then the main fleet went down to Sydney and we stayed in Trincomalee and then in actual fact The Renown went down to Durban and had a re-fit. All of the fellas that had been on the ship for five years decided it were time for us to be sent home, so we were all thrown off the ship so we didn't even get a chance to see Durban. The ship then came back from Durban, and so they decided there weren't enough heavy ships in the UK; renown was called back to the UK incase the Tirpitz came out...the Renown was recalled to the UK They changed another lot of the crew, they picked up about five hundred people who spent most of their time in the war in the Far East; and brought them back home. The Renown came back and was based in Scapa Flow, and then that took us into 1945 and then she came down to Rosyth. I think the German Admirals came on board, the peace deal and the signing over to the German navy was signed on board Renown</p>
02:05:26	<i>You weren't out there?</i>
	<p>No I was left out there, I ended up in Colombo and came back on a troop ship</p>
02:05:36	<i>What was it like for a young man like you to be based in a place like Trincomalee?</i>
	<p>It was a bit of a dump really, we went ashore and we had to make our own football pitch area, there was a canteen area there and we were rationed down to two bottles of beer each; and that's all you got. So apart from swimming over the side, and a bit of sailing there wasn't much else to do really. We had a good Chaplin on board, and every week we had Chaplin hour and then get all the talent on board you know, to have a bit of a concert. We all slept on the upper deck, we pulled our hammocks onto the upper deck because it was so hot you couldn't sleep down below. We had no air conditioning you see, it was very warm down below in those ships. All the ships that go out now all have air conditioning; we didn't even have cold water, no refrigerator or anything like that; pretty basic living really. You couldn't use too much water when you were bathing because you needed all the water you got for steaming, and that was the situation for all the ships in the war; they didn't make enough water for human consumption if you like</p>
02:07:18	<i>How long could you be at sea before you had to replenish it?</i>

Time code	What is said
	I suppose you could stay at sea for a couple of months, we had big freezers and plenty of tinned food on board. It all depended on how much steaming you done, you know how much fuel and what speed you were doing, of course if you were going at a fast speed you would use your oil fuel quicker, and you would have to go into harbour and replenish. I mean if we had destroyers with us we used to use the fuel from them but wasn't like now; they have all these replenishments at sea royal fleet auxiliary ships. We never fuelled at sea or anything, we fuelled other ships so it all depends how much fuel you had which determined how long you could stay at sea
	Start of Film 11
02:08:21	<i>How long were you in Trincomalee?</i>
	I was there for about twelve months
02:08:28	<i>Were you there for V-Day then?</i>
	No I was back here, we arrived there around Christmas 1943 and I left there in Christmas 1944 and I came here. Then before I knew it I was shipped back out to Sydney
02:08:56	<i>Which ship?</i>
	I went on the cruiser Devonshire, the Devonshire steamed out and we took over the ships company and then another crowd took over and steamed her back; it was like a troop ship really. When I got to Sydney I stayed out there for two and a half years, then around to the Far East. By that time it was the end of the war, I went out there in August, September just after V-day. All the boys who had been retained in the navy at the end of the war some of them should have gone to pension from 1939/1940; they all had group numbers and we demobbed. So we kept getting shipped around onto various ships, ships were coming home with the boys ready for discharge. So us regulars had to stay and go from one ship to another, ships were coming home and you went on another and stayed there. I was away for about two and a half years and ended up on seventeen ships
02:10:14	<i>What was your favorite port of call?</i>
	Sydney was pretty good, I mean during the war except from going to Rothside and going down to Edinburgh there weren't a lot of other places we went to. We had to run ashore in Quebec, you couldn't get a drink when you were out there; you had to go to a licensed place to get a ticket in order to get a drink. We ran ashore in Alexander, but by large we didn't get a good lot of runs ashore, where the fleet anchorages were they were miles away from anywhere you know up in Iceland, Scapa Flow, or Loch Ewe, or Greenock wasn't bad I suppose we had a couple of runs into there you could go up to Glasgow. We only came into Devonport once all during the war.

Time code	What is said
02:11:26	<i>Was there a time where you were ever terrified?</i>
	No I would say there was never a time where I was scared because you always had such good people around you. We were all young around twenty years of age, you weren't afraid of anything in those days; your mates made a joke out of most things. It was a case of what will be would be I suppose, I don't remember being scared at all really
02:11:57	<i>Tell me about these kittens?</i>
	Most ships had a cat on board, or a mascot, we had a lot of rats on board Renown and there was a chap called Marlow who was an abled seaman and he was a country boy. He told the commander that he would catch the rats, so he was appointed the rat catcher so he used to go around and put fuse wire snares all around the cable runs and he reported to the commander every morning to say how many rats he caught. He'd get six pence for every rat he caught, and then one morning he'd found baby rats and the commander said to him I'm not paying you for those they haven't got any hair on (laughs), he took them away and kept them in the box for a week until they grew hair and he bought them back again. You could be walking along the ship at night, there wasn't any light anywhere and all of a sudden a rat would hit you in the face because they would be hanging off of his snares. The cats didn't catch too many, I think he caught most of them, the cat was just a ships pet; they probably went ashore one time the cat went off and come back and then had kittens. But most ships I was on had a cat, a dog, a parrot or a monkey; most ships I knew had a mascot.
02:14:14	<i>The planes that were on board, tell me a bit about what they were? Were they catapults?</i>
	Yes the planes, we had the Walrus C planes and we launched them by catapult, and then the plane could fly around for as long as it could before it ran out of fuel; and they would land along side and then you would get a crane and hoist back on board. With all the aircraft carriers carrying most of the planes, those planes sort of became redundant half way through the war; our planes were taking up quite a lot of space on board. There were two hangers, one became a mess deck, and the catapult deck could be made into the boat deck, I think it was 1942 when the planes became redundant to our needs and they were taken off
02:15:33	<i>What was it like watching them go?</i>
	Oh it was pretty good you know, we used to hear a bang and the next thing they'd be gone; they were all walrus c planes. They struggled away to gain a bit of height, pretty brave boys flew them, you could get a petty officer that was a pilot, and they weren't all officers in the fleet. It was pretty dicey to land those in rough weather conditions, trying to get the crane to hoist these planes back on board was a pretty dicey job; it wasn't very easy. They were a bit cumbersome, but I guess they served a purpose

Time code	What is said
02:16:44	<i>Would it have been much fun using them in the Arctic?</i>
	No we didn't use them up there, but by in large there were aircraft carriers up there, they wouldn't have been much use. The weather would have been so rough you wouldn't have been able to recover them
02:17:04	<i>How do you reflect on your time in the navy now?</i>
	I enjoyed, I enjoyed all the friends I met, you meet some good guys and I put up with a lot of things. It didn't do me much harm in the long run, I'm over ninety now and I'm still going along, I'm able to drink my rum still so there we are.
02:17:35	End of Films