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Name: Doug Shelley

**Regiment: The Royal Navy** 

Date transcript: September 2014 <a href="Transcribe by: Laura Haines">Transcribe by: Laura Haines</a>

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	Yeah well, my name is Doug Shelley, right, and my rating was Able Seaman, right.
01:00:07	Were you - which Port Division were you?
01:00:09	I was Chatham. Chatham Port Division.
01:00:16	All right. Doug, why - why did you go in the Navy? What was your thinking?
01:00:21	Well, I'll tell you why I went in. My uncle was a chief on the Jervis Bay, my brother was a chief, and that's why when I volunteered I went to Romford Drill Hall and in there I said to him, "Right I want to join the navy." The bloke said, "Well you lucky there - ," And that's what I done.
01:00:40	What year was that?
01:00:41	Oh, not till '42.
01:00:44	Where were you living and what was life like in the war for you?
01:00:48	Er, what civilian side or?
01:00:53	Yes, civilian side.
01:00:54	Well, I was only er - well, I was only about what seventeen and a half - you know. When I volunteered I wasn't eighteen, and they didn't ask for a birth certificate because I couldn't - I couldn't produce one. Majority of blokes done that at, er, Romford Drill Hall. So that's it, I went in when I was about seventeen and a half.
01:01:21	And what was it like for you then, going from being a - a boy civilian to becoming a sailor - that transition, training etc.?
01:01:30	Well that - that was entirely different weren't it? I mean, we were only lads you know, but, you know before - before you, well by the time you was in the Navy within a year and a half, two years you - they made a man out of you - believe you me. You wasn't a boy any more.
01:01:50	Where - where did you go first?
01:01:52	I first went - I, my first erm, I went to - I done my training at HMS Glendower which is in Wales. And that's where I done my training.

Time code	What is said
01:02:06	And are there any stories from there that you remember?
01:02:09	Well no, only, strangely enough - it was in the winter time, and we were all in bloody huts like that and of course in the morning 'bang, bang, bang' on your bloody door and of course the old chief was out there shouting out, "Wakey wakey, rise and shine, the morning's fine - it would scorch your eyes out!" - there was about four foot of snow out there. And that was it.
01:02:35	What were you - what was your sort of training there? Was it square bashing and stuff?
01:02:38	Yeah, well we went through all that - square bashing and physical training. We used to go for about a six mile run every morning, yeah - on the old PTI.
01:02:49	Did you enjoy it all then?
01:02:51	Oh I did, yeah I loved it, yeah. Couldn't - couldn't have been better, really.
01:02:56	And when you'd done your training up in Wales then, is that when you were assigned to a Port Division?
01:03:03	Yeah, then you're assigned - I went to Chatham, you know where the Cavalier is, er, and then I went through a gun recourse there 'cause I was a gunnery rating. And then I was drafted, you know, on the Russian Convoys, you see. That was my first destroyer
	Start of Film 2
01:03:25	What do you remember of the Chatham Barracks? Are there any stories that you've got of your - that you remember being in Chatham?
01:03:34	Well, er, I do know that there was, er - a guy, now this is - whether it's true or not - who was in - a Chatham rating and he only came in for his - for his pay a fortnight. Nobody could find him afterwards. Amazing, isn't it?
01:03:54	What was - what was discipline like down there?

Time code	What is said
01:03:57	Well, oh, what was it like? It was - I'll tell you what - that was, well, that was just as much as anything in the Navy, in Chatham Dockyard. If you went on the weekend leave and you never got in there by half past seven, you were booked. That's it. And when you went across the playground - the square - where you done your training you know - you had to run, double, all the time. Not walk, double. You'd hear the GI, "Double, Double, Double!" and off you went. Now, in the morning when you fall in for the Divisions, right, the working party - this is, you got the old PO out there and he said who can ride a bike, and you say "Ere, yes." And I thought to myself, "Cor, I'm alright here." But - you know what they done? When, when the guys in the white duck suits, the GQs, they shackled them one to you, and took them down to the commander's reports, and I thought "Well this is no good is it? It's not riding a bike." So I never volunteered any more. And that was it.
01:05:10	And - and how long were you there before you saw a draft with your name on it then?
01:05:15	Er, not long - after I'd done me gun recourse I got drafted onto the Milne you know for the Russian Convoys.
01:05:24	And where did you pick up the Milne?
01:05:28	I picked - well, I had to go to Scapa Flow. And I picked her up about half past two in the morning. And I tell you I was bloody knackered because in those days there was - well, troops were going everywhere and I had to sleep and got up on the roof racks and slept in there until I got there. But the strange thing about it was when we got on board right, it was half past two in the morning - it was me and a petty officer. Anyway, slung me hammock and got in it and all of a sudden, well, I was so tired I didn't know what - I see this bloody great rat, about that size (indicates with hands), leapt across and I thought "I'm too tired!" Anyway in the morning they tried to book me for a slack hammock because you had to have your hammock stowed by half past six in the morning. They'd call out, measure up and stow - and this PO booked me - me and the other one and I said, "Look, now do me a favour," I said. "You're not very human are you?" He said "No, I'm - you know" I said "No." I said, "We didn't join until half past two in the morning." I said, "Give us a chance." So he said, "Alright, alright, fair enough." So, we were lucky there.
01:06:45	You were lucky.
01:06:48	Yep, we was lucky - yeah. Yeah, but half past two in the morning, I had about three hours, four hours, you know, sleep - and that was it.
01:06:55	So what was it like then, sort of after you've had this incident with the PO, what - what was your sort of take of the Milne - what did you think?
01:07:04	Well then you got back - you got back to normal seaman's duties - you know, up on the upper deck and all the rest of it. As an AB, you're always up on top - on the deck - you know.

Time code	What is said
01:07:15	What was your first impressions of the - of the Milne, then? Once you'd seen it.
01:07:21	Well I, you know, I thought to myself, "Cor it's er quite a nice boat." You know what I mean, yes, I thought, "Yeah - lovely." And of course when I first joined her as, er, a gun layer, er, an LRT er, you know, a cross gunner they couldn't put me in the turret so they put me on what they call ack-ack which is a pom pom. And I thought "Christ I don't know anything." Well, anyway, I was a loader - I had belts of bloody ammo right over my shoulder loading them in to the, you know, the pom pom. And of course, when they go like that, you know what they call a pom pom don't you?
01:08:02	Well because it pom-pom-pom-pom you know
01:08:05	No - they call it the, er, Chicago Piano. She goes like that you know – ferocious (indicates with hands). Yeah.
	Start of Film 3
01:08:12	How long were you in Scapa and the Milne before you sailed?
01:08:17	Not all that long actually. Er, we got our orders to pick up the Convoy at Loch Ewe - 'cause that's where they all waited for us. And then off we went.
01:08:28	Was Milne a new ship, or had it been?
01:08:33	Yep, yeah she was - they built seven of them. They were specifically built for Arctic Convoys because they had heated inside, and heated torpedo tubes - you know. But when you looked at it, you know any naval bloke would think - it's a bloody cruiser. But it wasn't - it was a destroyer. 'Specially built. And out of seven, three got sunk.
01:09:01	Yours was the only one that didn't?
01:09:04	Well, I'm a lucky man, to be honest sometimes I wake up in the morning and think when they fired the torpedo at us it missed us by that (indicates with arms). But the rest got sunk.
01:09:18	Did you know anything about the Arctic Convoys when you went up - went up to Milne?
01:09:23	No - knew absolutely nothing about it at all.
01:09:27	So what was it like sailing out of Scapa and heading up to Iceland, what do you remember of that?
01:09:35	Well yeah, it weren't too bad - we went to Reykjavik er - to refuel, and then we got attacked from above. So that's when we had to open up you know, but we were lucky enough to, er, beat it off and then head off.

Time code	What is said
01:09:54	Did they come - did you shoot the plane down?
01:09:56	Sorry?
01:09:57	Did you get the plane?
01:09:59	No, no we didn't - no, no we, er, then we got further round and then we were attacked by the U-boats, and, er, and we got - we got one. We blew it out of the water
01:10:11	What was that like for the crew?
01:10:16	Well they were over the moon, weren't they? They would be, wouldn't they? If you sink a bloody U-boat, you, you're lucky, ain't you? But 'course you know, as you further went down and took the merchant ships into, er, Kola inlet but that aside time in that little area was about twenty, twenty-seven U-boats waiting for you. And that's where they were taking them out. They got - they got all that sussed up. 'Cause their island on the way round down to Russia, that was a - a U-boat pen. They used to operate out of there, then they followed the Convoy down into Kola and then all the boats - we were escorting the big er American Liberty ships which were welded in three sections. Sometimes with the weight of the snow on, it would split one of them and she would roll over but if that didn't get it then the U-boats got 'em.
01:11:24	Is this all on your first convoy, this?
01:11:29	Yeah on my first one - yeah, the very first one that was.
01:11:33	What name was that one?
01:11:34	Oh God, now you've got me. Oh Christ I can't - I can't - there were so many you see. When you went out you was PQ, when you come back you were QP - they reversed the situation of the convoy numbers. Then there was of course RA and - weren't there - there were so many different convoy numbers, yeah I can't
01:11:58	Did you go on some of the PQ convoys?
01:12:01	Yes I was on - yeah I was on like — PQ18 which followed the 17 which lost, well out of thirty-five ships there was only seven - about seventeen arrived.
01:12:12	And you were on the PQ18?
01:12:14	Yeah, the following one - yeah the following one, yeah.
01:12:19	What was conditions like? Although you were a heated ship, what were they like?

Time code	What is said
01:12:23	Well normally er a destroyer's compliment during peace time was roughly about 230. We had about 2-250, 260. It was over-complimented yeah? There was hardly any room at all. There was a grotty little bloody bathroom, as such - you know, you had to do everything in there. Scrub your hammocks, do your doby, and do everything - wash and shave and all sorts of things - yeah.
01:12:53	Just going back to the - the U-boat then - were you on deck when you saw that, did you see that go?
01:13:05	I was in me turret, 'cos I was er er a gun-layer in the turret. But when they sent the deck charges out you see that's what blew it out of the water.
01:13:17	So you didn't - you weren't able to see it because you're - you were inside a turret?
01:13:20	Well, I couldn't see anything because I'm - I'm in a bloody turret - I can't get out. 'Cause they used to have to do four on four off, four on four off, right up the way through - right the way down to, er, Murmansk.
01:13:34	And what was it like? You mentioned it was a 'Chicago Piano' but what was the - just describe you're - what you're doing in the turret and what you
01:13:43	Well I - I was a feeder - a loader, giving them, you know, the belts of ammo. But that wasn't where I should have been but 'cause the turrets were full up that was it but eventually I - I wound up in the turret - in B Turret.
	Start of Film 4
01:14:00	Did you actually go ashore at Murmansk?
01:14:02	Wasn't allowed ashore. Nope. Wasn't allowed. Merchant seamen, which is the strange thing about it, when they got in to offload all their raw materials they had a rough time believe you me - the Russians didn't want to know them. They just - it was Stalin that more or less paused them really. There was a guy - I mean, as Russian women went I mean, well, you were very lucky - anyway this guy fell in love with her and she fell in love with him and - anyway, what happened was, erm she stowed away on the ship. And they found her, then they sent her, oh God, poor woman, they never did - that was it. She suffered.
01:14:50	What, they sent her back?
01:14:52	They sent her back, but they sent her out into Siberia somewhere.
01:14:57	Nasty.
01:14:58	And the poor bloke, well that was it, weren't it?
01:15:00	Just tell me a bit about what you remember of going into Kola, then?

Time code	What is said
01:15:08	Well, well there's not a lot really - you just steaming in there with the convoy, you know, well you weren't doing a lot of knots because with a big convoy you - it, it averages from seven, fourteen knots a time, slowly in there. And once we - we got 'em in there, then we had to go and, er, wait for another one to fetch back - go alongside the, you know, the dockyard and wait there 'til we got another one to escort back.
01:15:43	So there was an instance where you actually helped to rescue people? Were you on deck when that was going on?
01:15:49	Yeah, I was yeah. I was on deck.
01:15:52	Tell me about that.
01:15:54	Well, we just brought them in, well, half of them were, well, near enough bloody dead. When you - when you drop in the Barents Sea, you only last about three to four minutes. It's the coldest sea there is. Did you know that? Yeah, that, never mind about the Atlantic - you go through the Atlantic and then into the Barents Sea. And we had - we were dressed up in: we had Seaman's jerseys, we had overalls then we had a duffel coat, then you had a harness with two red lights on port and starboard and if you dropped in there - if you were lucky they'd, you know - harness on, they'd fish you out. If not, you were frozen stiff and dead, gone. All merchant seamen who got torpedoed during the war, their pay was stopped. And they - they were lucky if they were alive, half of them. They were frozen stiff - gone.
01:16:56	And did - was there ever any instance where your skipper actually stopped to help?
01:17:01	Well only on, er, only on that occasion, yeah.
01:17:05	So what do you remember of that occasion - what was going on?
01:17:08	Well I only roughly, er, you know when, when that was, er, the merchant ships was walloped and we went to assist them and pull them in - that was about it.
01:17:19	So what were you doing to help?
01:17:21	Well I was a seaman - I was just pulling them in there. Half of them were bloody dead anyway. They weren't alive - they were frozen stiff - soaked in oil and God knows what.
01:17:33	What was that like for you as a young man? Do you remember it?
01:17:36	Well it was terrible. Terrible - and absolutely ghastly - absolutely ghastly. Have you ever? Well, I don't like saying this - have you ever seen a dead person frozen?

Time code	What is said
01:17:50	Not frozen.
01:17:52	We've - we've had blokes frozen stiff on look-out you know, dead as a dodo. Even with, you know, like that (indicates holding binoculars). Gone. That's how cold it was.
01:18:04	What happens when somebody dies on the ship? What's the process?
01:18:09	Well, normally they're - they're buried at sea. They're sown up into the hammock and, er, passed over the side.
01:18:20	What do you remember of the, the seas? Just talk about - were there any, were you caught in any storms?
01:18:26	Sorry?
01:18:27	Were you ever caught in any big storms?
01:18:30	I should think so. PQ17 was one of the worst storms, I will verify that, that they've ever had on those runs. You know, you've got waves thirty foot high; winds that well - he had a lot of damage on his ship.
01:18:49	What was it - what was - did you have good sea legs? What do you remember of being caught in a big sea? Did you ever feel like it was going to tip over or anything?
01:18:54	Well yeah, there was always that point - you didn't know whether you were going to be whoop (indicates with hands).
01:19:00	Can you remember how you felt when you - you'd done PQ8T, you'd seen all this carnage around you, you're in Murmansk and then you know you've got to return, I mean how do you feel at this point, can you remember?
01:19:13	Well, it's a question of, well you don't feel all that good obviously but, erm, you're there to do a job and you get on with it. And that's it, 'cause we were young and strong and fit and you know nothing really seemed to bother you all that much, you just got on what you had to do.
01:19:36	Well, you, you obviously did, but were there people on board who didn't? Did you ever see anyone crack up?
01:19:42	Well yeah, there was one or two that, erm, you know, er, got a bit, erm, well it frightened the bloody life out of them. To be honest, well it would do anybody as a, as a young, young boy you know 'cause they, er, they weren't all old, they were all youngsters coming in - some before the war and some HO's (Hostilities Only).
01:20:12	What happens next? Just talk to me a bit about what else you remember?

Time code	What is said
01:20:16	Well we picked up another convoy and brought them back to Loch Ewe and then we had to wait for another one to take back down again.
	Start of Film 5
01:20:23	Were there any stand-out memories? How many convoys did you do?
01:20:26	Well, it's difficult to say really, there was roughly on - you got onto at least, I done nine months on that. You've got to do six months to qualify for the Atlantic Star.
01:20:39	So were there any other experiences that you can talk about?
01:20:43	What, on the Convoy duties? Well, not particularly - no. I've more or less covered most of it. Erm, I really felt sorry for the Merchant Navy guys because erm the majority of their Liberty boats were getting blown out of the water. Half of them never arrived anyway. And then when they got there they were treated like huh you know - nobody, you know - 'who are you?' sort of thing. And yet they've just done eighteen hundred miles from, you know, Loch Ewe right the way round down to Murmansk or any other, you know, Archangel or Polyarny or somewhere like that.
01:21:27	Did you ever get ashore in Russia? Did you ever go to any of the other bases?
01:21:33	Yeah I did, yeah, but never got ashore. Weren't allowed. All we done was sentry duty, alongside with the Russians. They were marching up and down - we were marching up and down, and that was it. But you couldn't get ashore - if you did, you you were in trouble. They called that 'breaking out of ship' and 'breaking back in again'. And then they really lashed you up then. Especially in those conditions. It's bad enough in peace time but wartime is the worst part of it. 'Cause if you, er, whatever happened during the war, like, if you fell asleep or anything on watch, you - you could be shot for that, really. That's how bad it was
01:22:25	And you mentioned about people who froze to death on watch, that was on the Milne?
01:22:30	Yeah, yeah that's right.
01:22:32	Was that anyone you knew?
01:22:34	Sorry?
01:22:35	Did you know that person?

Time code	What is said
01:22:37	Well they, they were the crew on board our ship, yeah. See, on board the ship, all your - you know, you're all able seamen. You've got all different branches, and they're all living in different, you know, messes. So, you don't know everybody on the ship - you - you know you might have more or less seen them once sort of thing and that's it. But like us seaman have to go up on the upper deck, you know, and on look out like that (indicates holding binoculars), you know, and do our stint up there. You, well in that, it's said, like these guys, that they had their sea-boot stockings and their sea-boots on and their sea-boot stockings were frozen to their bloody legs. They had to have ???? to take them off. And then their boots as well. But, that's how cold it was. Well, you can see by that can't you?
01:23:37	Did you ever have any downtime? I mean was there ever any entertainment on board or anything like that?
01:23:42	Well, you - you made your own entertainment didn't you? You had - you had sod's opera and all things, and the lads got dressed up. Yeah you made your own entertainment.
01:23:52	And what did the Milne do after the Arctic - where did she go afterwards?
01:24:03	When I left the Milne, she actually er went as a training ship, and then after that she was sold to the Polish navy. And they bought all our - because they were bloody good ships, without a doubt.
	Start of Film 6
01:24:23	And where did you go when you left the Milne?
01:24:26	When I left the Milne, I, I'll tell you when it was - erm it was just before D-Day and I come home, have me leave, then I was drafted out to Australia to Golden Hind, which was a dispersal camp. Then from the Golden Hind, I was in there what roughly about two weeks, then I was drafted back to a later destroyer - a battle class, they were later ones. And that was it then, we went all round Australia, and all over the place.
01:25:00	Are there any stories over there that you want to share?

Time code	What is said
01:25:04	Er, well yeah we – went, er, I don't know if you, er, you know Queensland, Northern Australia? Well, there's two places called Port MacKay and Townsville. We went into Townsville – they're like one-offs – towns, galloped down the bloody street on horse they were, and we were the first British destroyer ever to enter there, and my God everybody on that ship got entertained by the people that lived there – there wasn't one bloke left on that ship who was allowed to go ashore. So we all dressed in our ??? suits; our whites. I went with the, er, chief fire officer, and he said to me "Right ho mate," he said. "Get your bloody clobber off," he said." 'Cause you know well it was about well, oh well, the temperature was, well you can imagine in Queensland. It was about ninety, one hundred by the time we got, you know we had bloody whatssaname was soaked in sweat and that He said, "Get 'em off mate", and then he – he gave me a dressing gown, and I put it on and then after the evening when you know they had entertainment, yeah I had a marvelous time really, I think everybody did really. He, he - he even had all my whites, you know me – me shorts and me tops and all that, all pressed and ironed and ready to go back on the ship. And it got to a stage where the blokes were having such a lovely time that they – they tried to bloody sabotage the ship. But it didn't happen. And of course we had to leave then. Then we left Queensland and, er, where do you go then? Er, oh yeah we went to Fiji
01:27:00	Lovely.
01:27:01	Oh lovely yeah, yeah, and that was bloody hot there. Well we done a march in Fiji, and I'm not kidding you, with the rifle on and your marching along like that, when they said shoulder arms, it bloody nearly fell off mine – I was so, so tired it went whoompf like that (indicates with arms), but er very nice, yeah I liked Fiji.
01:27:24	So you never saw any, you never came under attack from any of the Japanese or anything in the area?
01:27:30	Well no, we – well we were in the Pacific but we were what you call a destroyer escort to a carrier. You, you can imagine the carrier stern's way up there and the destroyer's down here (indicates). Well, when they went out on their raids, they came in you know to land, some of them hit the deck and pitched over and went in. Or they went, if you see a carrier like you see the stern back where they put men always – oh it's gone straight through. Yeah, well that was our job.
01:28:04	Rescuing people?
01:28:06	Pick 'em out, yeah. Take the long boat out and go and get them in. And in those days they had dinghies with, er, liquid in there that kept the shark – shark repellent. Yeah, there were some nasty accidents when they come in and hit the deck and pitched over the bloody side, and that was it – we had to go out and pull them in. What was left of them.

Time code	What is said
01:28:31	Did you, I was going to say, did you get many survivors?
01:28:33	Yeah we did, yeah, yeah we did, yeah.
	Start of Film 7
01:28:37	And where were you for VE Day?
01:28:40	VE Day, er, we were in Hong Kong – I was waiting to come home on VE Day. But of course you don't come home straight away. I came home on the Battle Wagon – HMS Anson It was quite a bit of time before it got out there, you know before we were brought back. And then you have to wait before you come out and, er, while I was in Chatham I was a rum boson.
01:29:14	Well tell me about that – what do you do for that?
01:29:20	Cor, God, what did I do for it? Well I tell you what, I never got out of those barracks without, I was, three sheets to the wind. How, I sometimes, you know, I think to myself how the hell did you ever get out of that bloody Chatham Barracks, in the state you was in? Well, the lads were, we used to queue up on the terrace right, Liberty men and you form up like that (indicates with hands) and Liberty men right turn, you know, left march, and they used to squeeze me up tight, so I didn't fall over – and I'd march along and they'd keep me, you know, I was alright, I kept on me feet I kept going, and when you got out the main gate, you got the ???? there, chiefs there and all that, waiting, you know, to see what you got in your bags and all that. Well every Liberty man came out with a little brown case, you know, probably with his stove in and a few cigarettes. And, er, you know, never - I never got picked on, just went out there. All I had in there was enough money to get on the ferry and get over the other side, and then wait to get home. Well, in those days most men that were in uniform – anybody would stop and pick you up and take you, yeah – take you out there – take you home. I found that in Australia as well. When, when I went ashore on there, on Anzac Day or anything like that, "Right ho mate, jump in here – off you go!" Wonderful.
01:30:57	The rum tot was usually very tightly controlled wasn't it?
01:31:01	Yeah.
01:31:02	So how did you get away with getting

Time code	What is said
01:32:04	Well, when, when – when the PO and the officer marched off you know you're supposed to tip it away but – you don't. (Indicates drinking). When I went to Australia, I picked up the –the merchant ship, the Aquitania, and on board the Aquitania, was all er Ameri-, Australian RAF guys that had been discharged because they all been shot up during the war. Terrible, terrible – I've never seen human bodies burned so much in all my life. And these, all these guys were great guys, all been discharged, you know through their injuries, you know. And all going back to Australia. Then when I got to Sydney and got off there that's when I went in to the, erm, er, camp - Golden Hind, HMS Golden Hind. It was a dispersal camp where they drafted all over the place.
01:32:14	And what was the ship you were drafted to then, that you were doing the rescuing in?
01:32:18	Well that, that was it. No – HMS Armada. She was a later Battle Class destroyer.
01:32:27	Which was your favorite ship?
01:32:29	Well, out of the two I would say, that er the Armada was a - a better boat really. Erm, er, for our side of it, er, I mean the Milne was only equipped for that Arctic situation. But the Armada was, er, a better built, a later destroyer.
01:32:59	How do you reflect on your naval time then?
01:33:03	I – I only went, well, you see the trouble was like, most blokes during the war time, like, they really had enough to an extent. Then if you went back within a year, you could, er, and you signed on then they would take that all your service in, but once you left and passed the ??? it was too late then and you'd got to start again. But what I did, I, two years later I went in the Merchant Service. And I done more years in that than I did in this, because I got more money, better pay.
01:33:44	End of Films