

**MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Charlie Crowe

Date of birth: 29th February 1920

Place of birth:

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Royal Navy and training
The Battle of Narvick
Dunkirk
Tours of Duty on various ships
Getting married
WW1 Destroyer *The Wakefield*
The Ivanhoe
Sinking of the German Merchant Ship *The Atlantis*
Patrols in the Indian Ocean
The Curlew
Course in Marine Engineering
Celebrating VJ Day
Career with the Merchant Navy and promotion
Serving on board *The Norfolk*
Leaving the Royal Navy

Charlie Crowe - Mr C
David Callister - DC

DC Charlie Crowe, Charles Albert Crowe. Born on the 29th February 1920 ... and we're going to record memories of the Royal Navy in the Second World War, in particular, rescuing soldiers from the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. But first of all, Charlie, you wanted to get into the Navy because you volunteered, didn't you?

Mr C That's right.

DC Yes.

Mr C Yes, I volunteered in 1938 ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and nothing happened. And I queried it and they said, 'You're on the waiting list.'

DC Oh!

Mr C The Navy was pretty full in those days, you see ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... and then it was in 1939 that they finally called me into the job.

DC Right. There was some pressing need then, wasn't there?

Mr C Yes, July 18th, actually ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... 1939

DC Right. Where did you start out then, where were you first of all?

Mr C I left the Isle of Man, of course, on the Steam Packet, and railway tickets and meal voucher on the train, and arrived in Plymouth ...

DC Oh aye.

Mr C ... got rounded up by the – I forget what they call them – RCOs or something ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... and escorted to the Royal Naval Barracks in Devonport. Into the New Entries mess ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and err ...

DC They'd have to train you for something, initially.

Mr C Oh, I was ... as a stoker yes – had to do all the training for the boiler and I had to do some square-bashing [drill] as well.

DC Oh, did you?

Mr C Oh yes. *(laughter)*

DC Oh aye.

Mr C Rifle and bayonets, you know. *(laughter)*

DC Yea?

Mr C They ... we were in the barracks, but of course, we got turfed out of there because they called up the Naval Reserve ...

DC Oh aye. Yes.

Mr C ... 'cos of course, they were all experienced sailors in there. They came and took over the barracks so we got farmed out into various places in Devonport and Plymouth ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... dance halls and whatnot. And we had to sleep on the floor, like ...

DC Yes. (*laughter*)

Mr C ... instead of slinging a hammock, you see, you had to lay it out on the floor. And that was all right, you know. But then we were shipped over to Trevague in Cornwall for the square-bashing [drill] ...

DC Hmmm, hmmm.

Mr C ... and then, we had to go and train on boilers, of course.

DC Hmmm.

Mr C The first training we had was shovelling stones in them, cylindrical boilers.

DC Really?

Mr C Yea.

DC Shovelling stones in?

Mr C Yea, well ...

DC Just to get practised with it?

Mr C Ah yes, yea. In the old type boilers, you know ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr C ... and of course we did that for a little while and I thought I don't go much on this! (*laughter*) Anyway, when we got to the oil-fired boilers, and the steel-drum boilers, you know. That was more technical.

DC So you did ...

Mr C So we had to control the steam pressure by sprayers ...

DC Yea, right.

Mr C ... and we had to keep it between 290 and 300 pounds per square inch.

DC Right, right. So were you, later then, involved with coal-fired boilers or not?

Mr C No.

DC *(laughter)* You'd be glad about that, then?!

Mr C Don't ask me! *(laughter)*

DC But nevertheless, the heat in the boiler rooms must have been colossal.

Mr C Oh yea, well, well, we were ventilated well – the air pressure – big fans to keep the sprayers, like blow-lamps, that kept us fairly cool.

DC Was it messy?

Mr C No, it was clean.

DC Was it?

Mr C Oh aye.

DC Yea.

Mr C Yea.

DC No oil over your trousers?

Mr C No, everything tight, if possible. *(laughter)*

DC Yea. This was the Royal Navy, of course, wasn't it, it had to be, yes. *(laughter)*

Mr C That's right. *(laughter)*

DC So when did you first ship out, then, and what on?

Mr C Well, I was ... I passed all my, you know, tours, but then I couldn't go to sea because I couldn't swim.

DC Oh?

Mr C *HMS Courageous* had got torpedoed in the Channel, if you remember – that was the first Naval ship sunk.

DC Hmm.

Mr C But everybody then had to learn to swim.

DC Oh yes.

Mr C And although I lived in the Isle of Man and whatnot, and had sea all around, I couldn't swim.

DC No.

Mr C And it took me quite a while to pass, too.

DC Yes.

Mr C So, I had to swim two lengths in a canvas suit.

DC Yea?

Mr C It was all right on the first length, but when the suit gets soaked up a bit, it's like lead!

DC *(laughter)* Yes!

Mr C Oh aye. Then, passed that, then I got drafted to *HMS Grafton*.

DC Now that was your first ship – the *HMS Grafton*. Tell me about that vessel first of all – it was pretty large, wasn't it?

Mr C Yes. It was a destroyer – about 2,000 tons I think. About the weight of the

Steam Packet ship, you know, the old ones.

DC Yes, hmmm, hmmm.

Mr C And err ...

DC There would be plenty of guns on her then, were there?

Mr C There were four 4.7s, eight torpedo tubes, machine guns of course, and a lot of light stuff, and three boilers and twin turbine engines.

DC Right, right. What was a torpedo like? I mean, was a torpedo handleable or how were they actually stored and so on?

Mr C Well, they were loaded with cranes at first, when they put it into the tubes.

DC Yes.

Mr C Yea.

DC So once they were in the tubes then there was nothing further to do except fire them?

Mr C Each tube had a torpedo sitting in it ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and you were hoping they wouldn't run out and you'd have to use some more because you only had eight.

DC Only eight was there?

Mr C You didn't carry any spares, no, no, not like a submarine, they have a torpedo room.

DC So who were you intending to torpedo with these? Where were you off to in *The Grafton* at this time?

- Mr C** Well, I joined it at Immingham ...
- DC** Yea.
- Mr C** ... just outside Grimsby ...
- DC** Hmmm, hmmm.
- Mr C** ... and the first ship was out in the North Sea, U-Boat hunting.
- DC** Oh yea?
- Mr C** See? ... so we had a ping, so of course you depth charge – oh, we had depth charges as well.
- DC** Right.
- Mr C** You depth charged it. What did we get? Lovely cod! (*laughter*) We didn't know whether to feed it to us or the captain! We stopped and picked a few up – we didn't get fresh fish in the Navy, you know?
- DC** (*laughter*) No.
- Mr C** So then we got transferred up to Scapa Flow and then on this Norwegian job ...
- DC** Oh yes.
- Mr C** ... going up the fiords with stores for the – our forces stranded there. Only small ones – they were in different places, some as far north as Hammerfest ...
- DC** Right.
- Mr C** ... well north of Norway.
- DC** Hmmm, hmmm.
- Mr C** We missed the battle of Narvik 'cos we passed outside it.

DC Oh yes, right.

Mr C We were doing this run for fishing trips, you know ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... because we got picked up coming down the Trondheim Fiord, I think it was, that we – this German A-Class picked us up ...

DC Yes?

Mr C ... so, action stations ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... so we dodged the bombs and he dodged our shells. (*laughter*)

DC Oh, right. Neither got hit, then?

Mr C No, a draw! (*laughter*)

DC Yea.

Mr C Yes. And then, after that, we got recalled from there, down to Dover, to do this bombarding job around the coast ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr C ... from Calais towards Dunkirk ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and err, we did that, and then we were diverted to pick up – I think it was Bray Dunes, I think it was called ... we picked up 800 soldiers from there which we had to get – ferry back and forwards in our whalers.

DC So this was picking them up from the beaches at Dunkirk?

Mr C They had to wade out 'cos we couldn't get in too close because of our draught, you know ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and we had to lower the whalers – we'd got two whalers and err, the sailors ferried them back and forward, as many as we could, each time, you know?

DC Yea. Were they under fire at that time, as well?

Mr C Oh yes, there was some of them getting bombed on the beach.

DC Yes.

Mr C Yea. We saw one squadron of RAF planes, I think they were firing – 'cos we were wondering, 'Where's the RAF!' we were shouting, you know ...

DC Yes, of course.

Mr C ... and there was a squadron of those turned up.

DC So you had this first trip into Dunkirk which was a success, was it?

Mr C Yes.

DC Yea. How many soldiers would you have got out on that?

Mr C About 800 ...

DC Did you?

Mr C ... on the first trip ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... we landed them at Dover, of course, and one of them gave me his revolver.

DC Really?

- Mr C** He says, he says, ‘I won’t need this – you’re going back!’
- DC** *(laughter)* Oh, right!
- Mr C** He’s a sergeant, I think – a guardsman.
- DC** Did you still have, when you were a stoker, did you have to carry arms? Did you have a rifle and ammunition?
- Mr C** No, no, we weren’t allowed any.
- DC** You weren’t?
- Mr C** No.
- DC** No.
- Mr C** No, so before we set off again, there was a big roundup of searching all the lockers to get our allowance off us.
- DC** Oh really?
- Mr C** Yes.
- DC** Did you lose your revolver?
- Mr C** Yes. *(laughter)*
- DC** *(laughter)* Oh!
- Mr C** Anybody with any ammunition – it was taken off them, you know.
- DC** What was the idea of that – that you shouldn’t have them?
- Mr C** Yes, well, just in case we had a mutiny, you see ...
- DC** Oh, a mutiny. *(laughter)*

Mr C ... 'cos we didn't have any marines on destroyers – marines were on big ships ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... to keep the crew from, you know, in case trouble starts ...

DC From mutiny, (*laughter*) I see.

Mr C And err ...

DC So then you went back for – to transport more.

Mr C That's right, yes. So we went back and picked another 800 up.

DC Yea?

Mr C So we set off back, and there's a destroyer called *The Wakefield* in front of us. They were loaded up – that was an old VNW – First World War destroyer, that. And steaming back and 2.00am in the morning – pitch black – BANG! We stopped first, you see, then BANG! I thought, what the devil's that? We were torpedoed, two torpedoes. Well, we stopped because *The Wakefield* in front of us had been torpedoed, broke in half and sank in fifteen seconds!

DC Really?!

Mr C And there was four fellows got off – the captain and the bridge staff. They had 500 soldiers on it and the rest of the crew down below – they all went down.

DC Yea.

Mr C There was only four. And we stopped to pick them up, which I didn't know at the time because I was down below.

DC You were down below, yes.

Mr C I was told what had happened, because I was asleep – that was our lot.

DC So the rear end of the vessel was virtually blown off, was it?

Mr C Yes, well, yes, the stern was blown off.

DC Yes. What did it feel like to you, then, can you remember how you felt?

Mr C Oh, such a ... well, a bang and a crash, and the vibration, you know, the whole ship shuddering, you know what I mean ... shattering, bones breaking and water started pouring in into the boiler room. They didn't know at the time, it was the air compressor, cooling pipes, 'cos the stoker, he shouted out, 'Everybody out!'

DC Right.

Mr C And of course, you have an airlock on the boiler room, to control the air pressure ...

DC Yes, yes.

Mr C Well, the soldiers were all screaming to get out, but they couldn't get out.

DC Oh?

Mr C I had to go up there and supervise the airlock – you know what I mean? ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... let somebody in and tell them to open that hatch when you get out and then close them before you could open the bottom again. And this went on for a while and then it got that bad, that I got tumbled in with them ...

DC Right, yes.

Mr C ... out onto the deck ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and when I tried to get back down, I couldn't get back down, 'cos they were all piling on the hatches, because there was gun-fire out there – they were shooting at each other ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... you know, because we thought it was enemy – E-boats had got in.

DC Right.

Mr C So there were shells and that flying all over the place.

DC Yea.

Mr C So ...

DC So the vessel was completely crippled then, at this stage?

Mr C It was stopped, and you couldn't move it again, because of the ...

DC No.

Mr C ... and the ...

DC How many of these soldiers would have got away then?

Mr C Well, we must have lost about 200, I think, on the ship, because they didn't get off.

DC Right.

Mr C Now we lost a lot when *The Nautilus* came alongside.

DC Hmmm?

Mr C I was only up a deck, then, because we were told to abandon ship ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and err, *The Nautilus* came alongside, called a vertin [sp ???] vessel – you know how tall they are.

- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr C** They'd slung ropes over the side, so the soldiers could clamber up as best they could.
- DC** Right.
- Mr C** Some of them getting squashed in between the ships, you know?
- DC** Oh, yes, right, colliding together, yea.
- Mr C** Yea.
- DC** Well, did you get onto *The Nautilus* yourself?
- Mr C** No, no, we couldn't get on. We tried to get an officer on, that we'd transported from – who'd survived – injured ...
- DC** Hmmm, yea.
- Mr C** ... and we had to climb over the semi-naked soldiers on the deck to get up there – to get up on the forecastle ...
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr C** ... because, when we tried to get up into the merchant ship with a stretcher, the angle of the stretcher was like that, you know.
- DC** Yea, it was vertical, almost, yea.
- Mr C** There were two merchant fellows there, on the top, trying to get up, so we said, I said to them, 'Bring him back down,' ...
- DC** Hmmm, right.
- Mr C** ... so they brought him back down again. So I thought, well, there's not much I can do now, so I went aft, again, and had a word with the NEO and said, 'Well, I'll go down and close all the hatches, as a safety thing, so to make sure,' you

know ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... hatches to the stokers mess and all that.

DC Right.

Mr C So I did that and came back and said, 'Is there any chance of saving this ship, Sir?' 'No.'

DC So she was sinking, was she?

Mr C Well, yea, she was crippled – back's broken ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... so we got mustered – find out all your names, you see, and who was still alive, you know ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and then *The Ivanhoe*, the merchant ship pushed off, of course, couldn't do any more, couldn't get on it, anyway ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... so err – well, he was in danger, himself. I think it was called *The Nautilus*, but it was blanked out at that time – it was painted out.

DC Oh yes.

Mr C I found out it was *The Nautilus*, it was called.

DC Yes, and then what – *The Ivanhoe*, you say?

Mr C We waited then, hanging about, and *The Ivanhoe* came up, another destroyer ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... which was on its way to Dunkirk, by the way ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and picked us up, and we got there and back – back to England ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and I can't, from this day, remember how I got off that destroyer in Dover and got to Plymouth, until I woke up in Truro in Cornwall ...

DC Yea?

Mr C ... with the rest of the fellows, you know ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... 'Where are we?' ... and we had a guard on the trains in those days.

DC This must have been sort of delayed shock, was it, with you?

Mr C Oh well, yes. This was when we got shipped back to barracks.

DC Yes.

Mr C We got to Truro, and I said, 'Where are we?' 'You were supposed to get off at Plymouth!' this fellow said. He said, 'You'll have to pay your fare back.' I said, 'You must be joking!' I said, 'I've got no more money.' I still only had overalls and underpants (*laughter*) ...

DC Yes, yes. (*laughter*)

Mr C ... and boots. 'Oh, alright then,' he says. So ... I remember that.

DC Yes!

Mr C I can't remember what happened, you know, things are just hazy, you know and then ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... remember we got rounded up in the barracks, and transported to these army camps, you know, with the first place we went to was Plymouth Airport, as it is now.

DC Right.

Mr C It's called Roborough ...

DC Hmmm, hmmm.

Mr C ... where they had this squadron of *Gladiators*, so we were on guard-duty on that. We lived in the chalets, you know, the camp chalets. And then we got shipped out to Heybrook Camp which was out on the coast ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and meanwhile, we were getting trained as soldiers ...

DC Oh, right.

Mr C ... you know, kaki uniforms ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and we all got rifles, and ammunition ...

DC Yea, oh yes.

Mr C ... they were 303 rifles.

DC This was because you didn't have a ship to go on, was it?

Mr C Bayonet drill.

DC Oh yes?

Mr C Oh aye. (*laughter*)

DC When you were at Dunkirk, then, on that second trip, were you there long enough to see your vessel go down, or was it still ...?

Mr C Yes, well, *The Ivanhoe* had to finish it off, you know, leave it as a dangerous hulk, then, you see.

DC Oh, right.

Mr C Well, you know, so *The Ivanhoe* shelled it. I watched it, I watched my home going down, you know.

DC Yes, of course.

Mr C It's a horrible feeling, you know.

DC Yea.

Mr C Once you get to the ship, it's your home, you know. I had possessions, as well, you know.

DC Did you have a job getting onto *The Ivanhoe*, was that a tricky job?

Mr C Oh, no, just stepped over the rails, the guardrails ...

DC Yea, right.

Mr C ... and the officer on the stretcher, we just lifted it over, like.

DC Yes, (*laughter*) yes.

Mr C I think he was glad of that – he'd have slipped out of that stretcher otherwise!
(*laughter*)

DC Does this keep coming back to you now and again, this memory?

Mr C Yes, yes, yea.

DC Does it come back in dreams or nightmares, or daytime?

Mr C Well, it's when you try and think of what you've done, you know.

DC Yea.

Mr C You try and think – even some of these things I did after Dunkirk, I mean, I can't remember properly ...

DC No.

Mr C ... so of course, I was on – well, after I'd finished this twelve months in the Naval Brigade I was drafted to the *HMS Devonshire*, the cruiser ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... it was up in Campbell Lairds, now me wife and I had arranged to get married on April 6th ...

DC Yea, what year was that?

Mr C 1941.

DC Right.

Mr C And err, the draft – oh dear, I said to the fellow in the drafting office, 'I'm getting married on the April 6th.' So he looked it up, and he says, 'Oh well, it's in Campbell Lairds, the only thing you can do is ask for the weekend off – a short weekend' ...

DC *(laughter)* Yes.

Mr C ... see, 'cos it won't be sailing until May.' he said ...

DC Oh yea, oh right.

Mr C ... getting refitted.

DC Hmm.

Mr C So off I goes, and at the weekend came down and got married ...

DC Yea – in the Isle of Man?

Mr C Yea – no, in Plymouth.

DC Oh, in Plymouth you got married?

Mr C Yea, because *The Devonshire* was up in Birkenhead, then, in Campbell Lairds ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and came back on Saturday morning, got married on Sunday, went back on board Sunday night.

DC (*laughter*) Right, yes.

Mr C Now fortunately I had an uncle in Birkenhead, I had family there, who said – I arranged with him to do a – for the wife to go for a fortnight ...

DC Oh yes, oh aye.

Mr C ... so she came up for a fortnight while we were still in Campbell Lairds ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and then she went back. Now that's the last I saw of her until October 1943.

DC Really? Yea.

Mr C (*laughter*) *The Devonshire*, *The Devonshire*, of course, went on the first convoys to Russia.

DC Oh right.

Mr C Well, it wasn't the convoys, it was a taskforce.

DC Hmm.

Mr C Two aircraft carriers with planes for the Russians, and another one with Swordfish on it, you know, torpedo bombers ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and we sailed up to Kirkenes, as it was then, Finland, the Germans had bases there ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... but the Finns were our allies, and of course, that's the first job we did on *The Devonshire*. We had a destroyer called *The Accedes* with us – she hit a mine, and of course, we went to her assistance, and of course she said, 'We're alright, we'll get back,' and they steamed back to Scapa Flow astern! ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... because the bow was open, opened up.

DC Really, yes?

Mr C They got back alright, though.

DC Hmm.

Mr C And then we err ... the planes took off from the carrier, and the carrier carried on up towards North Russia, well, we escorted her, of course. Then we left them and went to Spitsbergen – I don't know what for ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... and then we got recalled down from Spitsbergen to the Tail of the Bank in

Scotland – that’s at the mouth of the Clyde, where we picked the convoy – there was hundreds of ships in it!

DC Yes.

Mr C We went steaming round South Africa.

DC Oh, really?

Mr C It was soldiers from North Africa, relieving the Australians ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and we had *The Queen Mary*, *The Queen Elizabeth*, the old ones, and all these merchant ships ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr C ... and I think eight knots was our highest speed we could do, and eight knots in a cruiser is terrible.

DC Were they getting ...

Mr C You roll ...

DC Were they getting air attacks as well?

Mr C Well, we were fortunate, we didn’t get attacked, that convoy.

DC Really?

Mr C No.

DC No U-Boats or anything like that was there?

Mr C Oh we were ... a lot of escorts with us, you see, you know ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... cruisers, there was two or three cruisers, and destroyers and aircraft carriers and all ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... so we got down into Cape Town, and then to Durban, then up to Aden where they disembarked.

DC Hmm.

Mr C Then they disembarked and we were there, and we there and we picked – the Australian troops arrived, to be taken home by *The Queen Mary* and *The Queen Elizabeth*. And my God, they were big ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... ‘cos we were a cruiser and we were ten thousand tons, and we went alongside *The Queen Mary* – phew, massive!! (*laughter*)

DC Yes.

Mr C So we had to escort them out of Aden, because of the submarine attack areas.

DC Yes.

Mr C We were doing 32 knots ...

DC Really?! (*laughter*)

Mr C ... then they left us – said goodbye and they shot off at 36 knots – just disappeared in the distance.

DC Really? Yes.

Mr C So they went to Sydney and we went to Fremantle in Australia, Western Australia. And of course, I was there for Christmas. (*laughter*)

DC Right.

Mr C Yea, Christmas 1941, (*laughter*) and then we patrolled – did a lot of work round the Indian Ocean ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr C ... Madagascar – we had that raid on Madagascar, then after that, we came round into the South Atlantic, on hunting for the surface raiders ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... now we got our own back, ‘cos we caught *The Atlantis*. The German’s merchant, like, you know, merchant, like, converted ...

DC Yes, yes.

Mr C ... called *The Atlantis*.

DC Oh right.

Mr C We sank her ...

DC (*laughter*) Good!

Mr C ... and we didn’t pick her survivors up because she had four submarines with her ...

DC Oh, yes.

Mr C ...and one of them dived, so the captain, like, our captain, he’s already been, he’s already been torpedoed once up in Norway, he was on *The Curlew*, you know ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr C ... sunk with the fleet. So he was a wily man. He disappeared ...

DC Right, hmmm.

- Mr C** ... so that was – that part of the war – got our own back.
- DC** Yes. (*laughter*) When you were, then, looking after these boilers, they were all oil-fired, weren't they?
- Mr C** That's right, yes.
- DC** Did these vessels always carry enough supplies or did you have to refuel at various places?
- Mr C** Oh yes. They had to refuel.
- DC** You couldn't take enough to last you months, then, could you?
- Mr C** Well, on a cruiser you could, because a cruiser ...
- DC** But say on *The Grafton*, how?
- Mr C** Oh well, yea, you'd have to refuel, especially if you use high speeds, if you know what I mean, it's like a car, of course.
- DC** Hmmm, yes.
- Mr C** The more you put your foot down, the more petrol you use ...
- DC** Right.
- Mr C** ... and you had to refuel about once a week, or something like that.
- DC** Would you, right?
- Mr C** I reckon so, yes. On a cruiser, of course, you go for months.
- DC** Yea.
- Mr C** Yea.
- DC** So the old 'Join the Navy and see the world' – you were seeing the world,

actually, in the wartime, weren't you, you were getting around a bit?

Mr C Oh yes – and I got around a bit after the war, too, you know. When I came back from *The Devonshire*, I was shipped home to do the mechanics course. I'd done a stokers course in South Africa, school, and of course I'd come fairly top of the class, like, you know ...

DC Hmmm, right.

Mr C ... so the top of the class, they cream off to be mechanics, as they call them.

DC Yes, right.

Mr C So I was sent home, on a ship called *The Albatross* – troop passage. Arrived at Devonport and was introduced to this mechanics course, and there's more schooling then, central lathe turning, fitting, you name it ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... all of them – central stuff of marine engineering ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... so at that point, that lasted eighteen months.

DC Right. Passed that alright?

Mr C Oh yes. When I passed that, of course, I got drafted to the *HMS Norfolk*.

DC Yea.

Mr C I had to go down – out to Malta to pick that up. And, luckily, VJ Day – that's today ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... sixty years ago.

DC Yes.

Mr C We were up in Liverpool ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and err ... oh, right oh, because we were on our way to Japan. That's where we were going.

DC So you didn't go eventually?

Mr C No, we didn't get it to – we did go to the Indian Ocean, 'cos that's where we went on the Norfolk.

DC VJ Day didn't seem to be known particularly on – I mean, was VJ Day known on that actual day sixty years ago, or was it a bit vague?

Mr C No, they had a big shindig – in Liverpool it was – they went mad!

DC Oh, right.

Mr C Street parties and everything going, you know, everybody getting blimmin' drunk, and ...

DC So, on the 15th August 1946 – 5, rather, was a big celebration in various parts of the UK as well, presumably?

Mr C Well, it was in Liverpool.

DC Yea, yea, right.

Mr C Yea, hmmm.

DC So that was the end of the war for you then, but, I mean, you were still ...

Mr C Not for me, no.

DC But you were still in the Merchant Navy, in the Royal Navy, and you had a lot

more to do then, didn't you?

Mr C That's right, so we had *The Norfolk*, of course, being a cruiser as well, we went down through the Atlantic and up into the Indian Ocean, and we were up there at Abu Dam, when the forces took over the oil fields ...

DC Oh yes, yes.

Mr C ... up there flattening them, off the Euphrates.

DC (*laughter*) Yes.

Mr C Didn't fire anything, mind you.

DC No?

Mr C The job wasn't over, after the war, you know, there was still plenty to do.

DC Well, there was the Korean War still in your time, wasn't there?

Mr C Yes, and now, after they'd finished with *The Norfolk*, came back to Plymouth, paid off, I went on destroyers, then, and it was various destroyers – oh, must have been on eight or nine different destroyers.

DC But there was nothing to destroy, I mean, they were just ... just sailing around, weren't they?

Mr C At peace time. Actually, we were on lifeboat duties, if you know what I mean. Used be duty destroyer in various harbours in case anything happened, you know ...

DC Yes, hmmm, yea.

Mr C ... and err ... I was all over the – I didn't get home very much, even in the shore – home waters.

DC Hmmm, right, yea.

Mr C Very rarely I got in. *(laughter)*

DC Yea.

Mr C Aye.

DC Well, you moved up from stoker to a more high position, I think, didn't you?

Mr C Oh well, I actually became in charge of the engine rooms of the destroyers – destroyers' engine rooms, you know?

DC Yes, yes. And you finished up as what? As a Chief Petty Officer, didn't you?

Mr C Yea.

DC Well, that was nice.

Mr C Yea. Actually I wouldn't have come out of the Navy, only me wife made me come out. *(laughter)* She said she was fed up with looking after the – I had two children, you see ...

DC Yea

Mr C ... 'I'm looking after these children on me own,' she says, 'and you're never home!'

DC *(laughter)* Quite right too!

Mr C Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW