This oral history was transcribed verbatim, off the tapes by Peter Smith and Murray Davidson in May, June, July 2017. Any information not recorded on the tape but are part of the oral history found between brackets on this transcription is extra information added by the transcribers. One tape was badly effected both sides by static, where words or sentences could not be transcribed, the word (static) was inserted in its place.

**Interview with Robert Julian Clutterbuck conducted by Captain Barry Nobes on 9 July 1998.**

BN. I will start with Robert by asking him first where he was born and when?

RC. I was born in Eltham which was Kent then, which is now part of London. My father was an officer in the Royal Artillery based on Woolwich, so all my childhood was spent round about that district because he was getting, every time he came back to the UK he was sent to the barracks at Woolwich. So we always had rented houses in that area.

BN. So you were born on what date?

RC. 22nd March 1916. My mother was, her name was Isabella but she would never allow that, she used to be called Daisy her (sur) name had been Jocelyn and her father was also an officer in the Royal Artillery. Both my grandfathers were Army Officers at least three of my great grand fathers were, it was almost certain that I would go into one of the forces in some form or another. Which I did as soon as I could.

BN. And so you were born into a family of how many children?

RC. Well I had two brothers and a sister, both brothers served in the forces too and my sister’s husband did, so it was a very service family.

BN. And were these siblings older or younger than you.

RC. Well, I’m the third my sister was considerably older, eight years, my elder brother was four years older. My younger brother was a year and a half younger, he just died lately he was the most distinguished member in the family. First of all, becoming a Major General in, after service in the Royal Engineers and then becoming a university professor so he had a very distinguished career and he’d only just finished it.

BN. Now tell me, where did you, your father was still serving in the Army at this stage so this was of course in the middle of the war, so where did you spend your early youth.

RC. Well it all was round about that district the eastern suburbs of London because every time he was not abroad he was appointed to Woolwich.

BN. Right, you didn’t actually own a house then?

RC. No we never owned a house in those days, we rented houses and they were very nice some of them too. And um, So Eltham in those days were fields with cows in you know. Not like it is now, it’s all built up, motorways and things now.

BN. And where did you go to school?

RC. I first went to school at a little school in Blackheath, well no before that, when I was five I went to a school in Cromwell Road which was nearer my mother’s father lived and part of the time when my father was abroad we used to stay there and I went to this little day school.

BN. Now Cromwell Road was where?

RC. Cromwell Road in London it was you know near Kensington Gardens and all that lot and um, we went to this day school it was in walking distance I seem to remember and err, I enjoyed it there and I was taught, I remember the principals of perspective in drawing which have stuck with me all my life. I love drawing and that was one of the things I learnt there. Then I went to Saint Leonards which was a prep school in Worthing, Sussex and stayed there for a time and went into the Navy.

BN. At what age?

RC. Thirteen. We joined up at thirteen. It was an interesting thing the way they recruited people for(HMS) *Dartmouth* in those days. The first thing you had to do was to go for an interview and I think they had an enormous number of candidates for only about forty places, and in the interview you sat down in front of some very distinguished gentlemen of who some of them were naval officers, though you couldn’t tell because they weren’t in uniform and um, the first thing they wanted to decide I think was whether you’d fit into the wardroom mess, whether you’d hold your knife and fork right. And whether you wouldn’t drop your aitches and that kind of thing, and that was the primary purpose of the interview unless they thought you would come up to that standard, you weren’t allowed to sit for the exam. Then you sat for the exam and they chose forty or so lucky ones to get into *Dartmouth.*

BN. Of course the interview these days is done in the reverse technique you have to pass the scholastic first. Now tell me why did you go, to decide to join the Navy. You were obviously an Army man?

RC. Well my father was very keen on sailing and I spent a lot of time messing about in boats when I was a child and I just longed to go to sea, I never wanted to do anything else. From the day I was five I used to say I was going to join the Navy and I did.

BN. Where did you do your sailing then in the London area?

RC. Well, at the Aries (1) there was a yacht club and probably still is and my father got involved in that, he used to sail little boats at the Aries and then in our summer holidays we used to go to Isle of Wright where he owned one of the Isle of One designs in the Solent Yacht Club and we had a lot of fun with that and then when I, we got big enough we got hold of a little 18 foot boat which had been a trawler’s lifeboat, it would have been what they called risard (2) they put an extra top string on, they put a false keel up, ballast in it, it’s a sort of sailing boat without a centre board, you know a proper sailing boat and we used to, my brothers and I used to sail all over the Solent in this thing and camp out in it and that kind of thing we had a lovely time.

BN. So 1929 you joined *Dartmouth*, four years there, how did you enjoy them?

RC. Yeah, Well *Dartmouth* was, I enjoyed some parts of *Dartmouth* very much, I, I loved the sailing and I, I think I loved the engineering I think, they taught you, you went through all the workshops you know the fitting shops and machine shops, blacksmiths, pattern making which was really like carpentry and you learnt to use tools in a way which I’ve always valued I think it was a wonderful experience that. I wasn’t much for one for Pussers discipline, and I was always a bit rebellious with that I think. One of the things I will say about *Dartmouth* is that, you know all this hazing or bastardization that’s supposed to go on in these kind of establishments. Well there was none of that at *Dartmouth,* but there would have been I’m sure, but they put a stop to it by having the term system, so three times a year another term of forty or fifty boys would join, and they had their own gunrooms and their own dormitories and they stayed, and their own classes they didn’t mix with the other people at all, except to play games against them, and that meant although there were certain rules to keep them in place with regard those who were older than you. There wasn’t any, any of that maltreatment which you hear so much about.

BN. No, I too at *Dartmouth* never experienced it, I don’t know if it ever did happen there.

RC. Well it certainly did before and I’m sure and well if you’ve read Shrimp Simpson’s book, I’ve no doubt Periscope View he described what it was like in the Gunrooms in those days. Well there wasn’t much of that when I went to sea as a midshipman either.

BN. So *Dartmouth*, you passed out in 1933, had you gotten any thoughts of what you were going to specialise in or at that stage?

RC. Not at that time, at that time I was madly enthusiastic about everything to do with sailing ships, I almost thought of getting out of the Navy and going to sea in some other sort of ship, but anyway I didn’t, I stayed in and was allowed to stay in and um…………...

BN. And at that stage the country was going through a very poor…….

RC. Well yes, at that stage there were people being axed left and right, and I remember Naval officers in their thirties were being, perhaps even younger were being put off and I don’t think they got much in the way of severance pay or anything else they just put them off. They had a dog’s life some of them.

BN. And one of them were they would find was it would be very difficult to find work outside I assume.

RC. Yeah, I know one lot came into Brixton they had got hold of a little old topsail schooner and they were trying to run this, trading around this coast. They weren’t very confident in sailing topsail schooners. Anyway they got into trouble in Brixton and um, and um had to be towed in and somebody claimed salvage from them and they just couldn’t raise the money. And they all just disappeared I don’t what happened to ship…... I, I, always going down to Brixton to have a look at ships all the time and um, I remember the schooner in there, she was just lying there as a poor old wreck. I was on board when they first came in, they were sort of bluff naval officers you know like naval officers would running the ship.

BN. Did you go to sea at all in a square rigger?

RC. Well I wouldn’t call it a square rigger, I see it as a topsail schooner and towards the end of my time at *Dartmouth* another bloke Dick Gatehouse who you might know, another submariner in my time we used to go off, or we did twice, or I did twice, he did it once in our summer holidays down to Falmouth where there were *Casey* sailing boats, sailing all around the British Isles and we joined those a couple of times one was a topless schooner I like to find one a second time, but I couldn’t, wasn’t one in there going anywhere at the time I was there but there was a ketch and I went in that.

BN. That must have been very good fun? Did you, when you were at *Dartmouth* did they have yachts, and um dinghy’s?

RC. They did they had the *Amaryllis* which was a beautiful old yawl, the old fashioned narrow deep type, we had made a world voyage, around the world voyage before she’d been presented to the College by I think the inheritance of his family, he had been a naval officer in the war, can’t remember his name now it was German name something like (Lieutenant GHP) Muhlhauser, I can’t remember for sure, anyway she was a beautiful ship and um, we used to sail in her, used to go out with a gang of cadets at the weekends and that kind of thing.

BN. What sort of size was she?

RC. She would be about 37-tons I think she would be about 40-foot overall, 50-feet overall I don’t remember. A big old heavily rigged old ketch with a long, both ridden topless and all that kind of stuff. I remember one cruise over to Britany in the summer holidays it was very good value.

BN. Otherwise you also sailed Naval boats.

RC. We sailed Naval boats, I think they sailed beautifully you were rather contemptuous oh I think they are lovely anyway. We also had some things call the Dartmouth Thunder sides, DODs they were funny little……...

BN. Twelve footers I think weren’t they.

RC. Twelve foot yeah with a single Gunter type sail, they were very flimsy little boats, but, there was a man called Macarthur I think who was a tycoon retired who lived in Dartmouth. He presented the College with four of these, he had a lot himself, but he and his guests used to sail in them. We had a lot of fun racing those.

BN. What about dipping lug gigs did you have those?

RC. We had dipping lug gigs, but no not at *Dartmouth* the way it was, we were doing light cutters, remember those? Did you ever sail anything like a cutter?

BN. Oh yes!

RC. Well, well the dipping light cutter was the first thing we had to learn to sail in, and I must say my first introduction to that in the Navy, oh coloured my attitude from there on, to a certain extent because the instructors who came out of Peakhurst didn’t really know a great deal about sailing boats and it was all done in terribly parrot fashion, you know it was a drill motion you had to handle the boats and I’m I don’t know, I’m acting anti Pusser drills.

BN. So at the end of your time at *Dartmouth* then you would have done, you go on a cruise as a cadet or something.

RC. But we had the (HMS) *Forres,* the *Forres* was an old twin screw minesweeper was attached to the College and during your last year at the College you did a cruise in the *Forres* for a week, you joined her on a Saturday and went off to sea up and down the English Channel hoisting and lowering boats and steering and scrubbing the decks and all those sorts of things, and then she came, just one week and then you came back in, we all did that, that was good fun. I enjoyed that.

BN. And so at the end of your time at *Dartmouth* what happened then?

RC. Well I was sent to a training cruiser which in those days was the (HMS) *Frobisher* and we did to terms in the *Frobisher* and the public school entry came in and joined us at that stage, they did three so they caught up with us then. So we had these new comers joining us we were a little bit, we thought we were old sailors by that time.

BN. They had already done a cruise had they when they joined?

RC. Well, they, they joined three times a year the same as we did.

BN. You said they did three cruises?

RC. They did three cruises before they were considered sufficiently trained to go to sea as midshipmen. We only did two.

BN. But did they join up with you in their second cruise.

RC. Oh yes they were mixed with us when we were out.

BN. So, did they then stay on at the end or, or they joined up with you.

RC. No, no they stayed on at the end, I mean every time a new lot would join either one lot from public school and one lot from Dartmouth. The Dartmouth blokes would stay two terms the other ones would stay three. Because before that they wouldn’t have the *Amaryllis* for the public school people she be in a moored training ship and she never went to sea. They, they did their first term learning to be sailors but they scrapped that and put them into the training cruiser.

BN. At the end of your training at this stage did you feel a great deal of difference between Darts and public school, did they catch up in other words?

RC. Oh, I’m sure they did, we wouldn’t have admitted it. By the time we were midshipmen and done our three cruisers in the *Frobisher,* there were some ways perhaps they never caught up. Funny you should say that, caught up you know course there was some things you learnt at *Dartmouth* that sort of ingrained because you’d been there since you were.

BN. Some people say brain washed.

RC. Raymond Steel an old term mate of mine who retired as a Captain many years ago living around Portsmouth where everybody was retired Navy. You say it’s………. that counts (3)

BN. So at the end of your training cruise and you are made a midshipman and off you went to a gunroom somewhere?

RC. Yes, well I went to the (HMS) *Barham* a battleship in the Home Fleet and did about half my time in her and then I was sent to the (HMS) *Dorsetshire* which was going out to China Sea joined her in Portsmouth and took her out to China Station, and did, when we were there we did a four month’s in a destroyer, a destroyer on the China Station. And during that time as a Cadet Midshipman I had a wonderful world tour really, we went up the Baltic, out to the West Indies through them and out to the Far East and of course around the British Isles, so it was a wonderful sort of view of the world that I got those first few years.

BN. What sort of liberty, leave on shore were you allowed?

RC. Midshipmen were generally meant to come on board in the last Liberty Boat which was eleven o’clock.

BN. But as a Cadet you weren’t allowed ashore very much?

RC. As a cadet I think they expected us back at eleven o’clock, but you could ask for late leave, but you had to request for it you didn’t have to come back till eleven. But I think we were supposed to be on board on seven-thirty boat or something of that sort.

BN. And you given leave for what three out of four days or?

RC. Oh well you would have leave unless you were in the Duty Watch. You could always go if you weren’t in the Duty Watch, which I suppose cropped up once every four days.

BN. I presume that your watches were divided into Port and Starboard, first part, second part.

RC. Of course, of course!

BN. So one in four was duty roughly?

RC. I suppose so, yes.

BN. And as a midshipman though there would be a couple of additions of ………………

RC. As a Midshipman, yes.

BN. Otherwise the rest was allowed

RC. We might be in one of the boats, you might be running a boat. Running the boats was one of the best things in the English navy it was a lovely thing, the old steam picket boats were fifty feet long and they had water tube boilers, reciprocating engines, a big screw and they go quite fast, it was really great fun driving them.

BN. So as a midshipman what was life like in the gunroom?

RC. Well it was pretty good really, there was not much of this bastardisation as they call it. You were a bit of a dogsbody, you were expected to make cocoa for the Officer of Watch on the bridge and come down and wake them up, that was one of the rather tiresome things. You’d be told to wake somebody for the middle watch. You’d go down and you’d shake him and you say “quarter to twelve Sir your middle watch” and he’d say “mmmm” you wouldn’t dare put the light on, some of them would say put the light on and you’d hang around for a bit and if he didn’t get up you’d get……...(laughter)

BN. Yes, I know what you mean. Were you allowed to drink?

RC. Oh yes in the gunroom I forget what if your mess rules were too much you’d be compared, I forget what the mess rules were limited to but, you were allowed to have a glass of beer whenever you wanted to, but you weren’t allowed to drink spirits as an interim, but you’d occasionally get stood one by somebody of course.

BN. Do you remember any of your particular mates as midshipmen your compatriots?

RC Well of course I remember them.

BN. And how well they did in the Navy, I mean did you keep in touch with any of them, did you make friends for life.

RC. Well one I made friends with from *Dartmouth* who stayed my friend all my life, he’s dead now unfortunately. He’s the only one who, oh there was Steve of course. There were two or three of them who, who have been close friends all my life, but um, as far as how they got on in the fleet that’s rather interesting, because there were about forty of us at *Dartmouth* in our time, forty-two I think. The top quarter were put into what they call the After class and those were the brighter boys and they were in the After class and did special kind of instruction and they, there were I think twelve in our After class in our term and of those I think only one got a brass hat. The rest of us were either lost or passed over. The only Admiral we got, we only had one Admiral out of our term, Rear Admiral he was quite well known in the scholastical order.

BN. Well it was the same in my term. Not even as good as that I don’t think.

RC. The Cadet Captains didn’t do a trick, well one of them did, we had one of our Chief Cadet Captains was kind of very up standing successful officer, the other one was an absolute ratbag.

BN. Well, getting on with this midshipman you were expected to be a midshipman for what a certain length of time?

RC. I can’t remember about two and a half, three years.

BN. As long as that?

RC. I could check it for you.

BN. Anyway you went out to the China Station and what ship again was it?

RC. The *Dorsetshire.*

BN. And how long did you spend in that ship then?

RC. Well I was in the *Dorsetshire* I’ve got the times here.

BN. You joined her in late ’33.

RC. I could look it up for you anyway that, I suppose it was ’34, ‘34 to ’35.

BN. Right, and that was all spent in the China Station.

RC. In the *Dorsetshire* yes, after the first year in the *Barham* in the Home Fleet and out to the West Indies and around Spain.

BN. But, going on I want to go on the *Dorsetshire* and the China Station because at that stage Japan was looking at China with envy, with greedy eyes, did you see any of this happening.

RC. Well not as far as Japan was concerned there were weirder things going on in China, because China was not at peace, there was some kind of war going on in China, and when we got to Singapore in the *Dorsetshire* we were told to proceed to Hong Kong with all dispatch, which was quite a dramatic thing to get. Peace time Navy, so we thundered along to, to Hong Kong and when we got there we found that there were two Chinese cruisers which were on opposite sides and they’d been having a battle somewhere off Hong Kong and one of them came into Hong Kong into their Territorial waters and anchored there and the other came in and anchored near her, so we were sent there to keep the peace. I don’t know what happened, I think they both eventually went away.

BN. Well yes I wonder what the……………………...(4) all about that would be quite interesting.

RC Yes.

BN. Now, you must have enjoyed Hong Kong it was a very different place then.

RC. Oh yes I’ve been to Hong Kong before and after the war and it was very nice all the time really, we used to have a lovely time there sailing, racing when I got into the crew of some Royal Engineer’s Colonel I think, we used to race every weekend we had great fun racing.

BN. That yacht club on the Island what was it called?

RC. I can’t remember the Island now. There was an Island there, you had to get a sampan to take you across.

BN. Yes, but anyway it was good sailing in the harbour, and it didn’t matter if you fell overboard in those days because the water wasn’t very polluted.

RC. And there wasn’t any sharks either, no it was very good value and I went around the Island race one time with somebody, somebodies yacht.

BN. And a good social life?

RC. Well I’m not much of a social man actually, not being my life, I was content to just go ashore and not say anything.

BN. But, people like this engineer would have taken you under their wing.

RC. Oh, yes, yes, yeah.

BN. Was there any other sport or just sailing?

RC. Well I was never a very athletic sort of bloke and I never liked to play cricket. I never wanted to play cricket, so all the time I was at Dart mostly I used to go sailing, and you were expected to take some sort of exercise or activity over the day. In the winter I used to like going around on my own, I never wanted to play soccer, I never wanted to play cricket so I used to play hockey. And I wasn’t very enthusiastic, I used to volunteer at playing goal because I used to spend most of the time you’d see me leaning against the goal post. As there weren’t many volunteers playing the goal. I was actually put in the second/eleven I was quite enjoying it though after a while and I continued to play goal for the ship’s hockey team when they were at the CO’s, but I knew it wasn’t very athletic as I say.

BN. How much interest did you take in what was happening around you at that stage? I mean Europe was in turmoil really?

RC. Politically, not a great deal when I was a midshipman I must admit, I wasn’t interested in politics much.

BN. But you had to write your journal log.

RC. Oh gosh yes, I’ve got my journal here, yeah. I had to write that up.

BN. Plagiarise the newspapers, well that’s what I used to do.

RC. The trouble with journals we had to keep a journal and it was an awful bind because it had to be put in for inspection once a month or whatever it was and you were continually being criticised because you put something in wrong you know and if I hadn’t been introduced to journal keeping that way. I may have kept some sort of a journal all my life and I’m very sorry I didn’t, because the moment you didn’t have to there was no way you were going to do it.

BN. I absolutely understand, yeah, it’s a shame though isn’t it?

RC. Because, I love reading my journal now. Like I read it again and again.

BN. Yeah. So at the end of your period on the China Station was presumably came with your being sent back to England for courses of some sort.

RC. Yes, yes.

BN. Did you go to (HMS) *Greenwich?*

RC. Yes, *Greenwich*. We spent two terms in *Greenwich* and that was a real, that was a lovely time because we met all our old term mates again, they all came back at the same time we were no longer under sort of the restrictions, we enjoyed ourselves there and I used to like playing rugger there too, but I never got into bed with the A-team and I used to enjoy that. It was really good fun playing rugby in those days you’d play against all the local clubs, banks, and colleges and things and um, after this you’d have a terrific sort of booze up with beer you know.

BN. And rugby songs.

RC. I enjoyed that, but the other thing I was doing all that time, was as soon as I got home I bought a little sailing boat, a little five-time yawl in Falmouth and I was refitting that, my father at that time was Woolwich Arsenal a sort of technical job there he arranged that I could berth in the Arsenal and I could go down there.

BN. You could walk there.

RC. Maintain it, as well as repair it, so every weekend while I was staying at home I was working on this boat, so the time at the village was really very, very nice.

BN. So, you enjoyed your eight months, I suppose it was, in *Greenwich*?

Did you take advantage of the City of London being close by?

RC. Yes, we used to go up to the ballet, and opera and that kind of thing, also used to watch all in wrestling sometimes, it was quite cultural group. It was an absolute farce, yes we used to do that. It was very close it only took us twenty minutes to get to London by train I think. They were very frequent, very good.

BN. You didn’t take any special subjects then?

RC. Not at *Greenwich* you weren’t offered special subjects at *Greenwich*

BN. Well some people were able to do languages I think weren’t they?

RC. Oh you could, I’ve been one special solid language, but I can’t remember doing that, we were taught French though, and taught quite well and apart from that it was academic, mathematics, when I think of the mathematics we learned there, and I’ve never used it again, differential calculus and things like that doesn’t mean anything to me now.

BN. But at least you trained your mind, that’s what they say anyway. This is the start of side two. You were talking about *Greenwich*, and um presumable your time is coming up to the end of *Greenwich* what were you going to do then?

RC. Well, we had to go down to Portsmouth to do our various, what you might call professional courses in gunnery, navigation, torpedoes and all those things and the idea of specialising was beginning to come into my mind then.

BN. You were then a sub-lieutenant.

RC. Sub-lieutenant yes, acting sub-lieutenant, I think you weren’t confirmed to sub-lieutenant at that stage. I hadn’t decided to join submarines, but I knew I wanted to be in small ships. I never, I liked my destroyer time and my time in the *Forres* and that kind of thing that’s the minesweeper we had at *Dartmouth* I enjoyed those times much more than the big ships, because as I say Pusser’s discipline has never been quite my line. I like the atmosphere of the small ships better and um, the trouble was if you didn’t specialise you became what they called a salthorse you might have a lovely time in a destroyer or something but you might be pointed to a big ship as the sub of the gunroom, or you might be drafting, then a time would come when they’d want specialist and if they didn’t have enough volunteers they’d draft you in for whatever they wanted people for. So it was better to decide for yourself if you could and choose something, you might stay on as a salthorse for all your time some people did but it wasn’t safe and they might suddenly decide they wanted to draft you into the Fleet Air Arm or something. Oh I didn’t want that I didn’t particularly want to be an aviator or an observer which was what they were rather short of, volunteers for Observer most who went in the Air Arm wanted to be pilots you know and I didn’t want to do that and so I, and I certainly didn’t want to be gunnery or torpedo the last thing I would want.

BN. Well that implied big ships basically?

RC. Yeah, yes exactly, I would’ve liked to have been able to be sure that I would’ve been in destroyers. But there was no way you could do that so the idea of submarines kept coming into my mind. And I always remembered when we were at *Dartmouth* they used to send submarines round to take people out for a bit of experience and you could spend a day out in a submarine from *Dartmouth*. I was really impressed with a submarine, because nobody shouted, everything was done quietly and people doing the most complicated technical things with terrific confidence, you know. I remember in the old boat there, the reality is pulling out the starting switches and reversing the motors and that kind of thing and it was wonderful to see a simple sailor doing all these very complicated clever things without anybody shouting at him.

BN. (Laughter), Yes I think a lot of people would enjoy that side of it.

RC. And so I had that sort of feeling for submarines, but then we did our courses and um.

BN. Did you think at that stage of your future career, I mean you’re thinking obviously your immediate career as a lieutenant in small ships, but what about the future did you think about that?

RC. I didn’t think about that at all, it just seemed so far away, anybody over twenty-five was one foot in the grave in those days.

BN. Yes, yes.

RC. It was so far ahead I just didn’t think about it.

BN. So you were asked at some stage were you when you were doing your sub’s courses what you wanted to specialise in?

RC. You were given the opportunity, I can’t remember how it came about, but you could, you were invited to volunteer for whatever specialist subject you liked and I can’t remember when it was I decided to go to submarines, the other thing is, when we went down to Portsmouth and we were doing courses there, living in barracks, places like that, we had every weekend free Friday-whiles, they used to call it, we didn’t have to work on Saturday except when you were on duty and I had this little sailing boat and I used to spend every weekend sailing about and if I went to, if I volunteered for submarines I’d get another three months in Portsmouth.

BN. Now this boat you had actually had brought down to Portsmouth did you?

RC. I sailed it all the way down.

BN. You sailed it down the Channel?

RC. Yeah. And um, and so in order to be able to do that I thought well if I volunteer for sub’s course not only do I get long summer leave before I had to go to, which I had a lovely cruise before I go to Blockhouse but when I get there I’ll be able to go on sailing every weekend too.

BN. Can we go back to your Subs courses how did you find those?

RC. It was lovely really I mean all our friends around us and I was interested in all the technical things you know it was a good life, with weekends and? (5) Barracks and everything.

BN. And of course you were comfortably housed and looked after.

RC. Oh yes, yes, it was a very nice time really and of course most of the chaps were out looking for girls in those days. I just wasn’t interested in girls in those days

BN. You were still sailing? Now your acceptance into submarines was communicated to you before you finished your sub’s course and then you went straight into a submarine course did you?

RC. Well it was long summer leave which we hoped for and I hoped I’d spend that sailing, well I didn’t, because they suddenly decided war clouds were going to roll up a bit, and they wanted to shift four twin screw minesweepers from Sheerness to Malta and put them in Reserve there and they got four sub-lieutenants who were going to go to Blockhouse, so what might have been our summer leave doing this.

BN. Was this 1937 by then?

RC. Mmmm, I suppose so ’36, yeah it was ’37, the summer of 1937.

BN. So the Spanish war was on?

RC. It was and I can remember going past Gibraltar in this little thing and um, seeing a Spanish warship of some sort on the curl off the coast and err we hadn’t any magnetic compass in this thing and coal fire, in fact we were so out of coal, we had to coal ship in Gibraltar.

BN. Was that the only time you ever coaled ship?

RC. Yeah, the only time I ever coaled ship.

BN. Did everybody join in?

RC. Oh, gosh yes.

BN. Even the captain?

RC. Ah yes, even the captain, he was, the only person that kept clean was the Chief Engineer.

BN. He coveted his white overalls didn’t he.

RC. He was walking about keeping a tally of what was going in.

BN. So that was your long summer leave was it?

RC. Basically yes, mind you I had my full quota of leave with all the other leaves we got, there was no complaint but it wasn’t the way I hoped things were going to turn out.

BN. Right so any way in 19……… after that you were then drafted to Blockhouse were you?

RC. Yes, yes.

BN. Posted I should say is the word, appointed, anyway that was the beginning of your submarine course.

RC. Yes.

BN. Do you remember the number of your submarine officers training course?

RC. No I don’t remember the number now.

BN. No I’m sorry.

RC. Archie Train (6) was the training Jimmy did you know him.

BN. No, I don’t think so.

RC. Lovely man, can’t remember the Coxswain’s name.

BN. And this was what four months or something like that.

RC. I think it was certainly three months, I’m not sure. Finished. It must have been only one term I think. Because it finished about New Year. Because I know on New Year well at the end of my sub’s-course I was appointed to the submarine (HMS) *Swordfish* which was in refit in Plymouth.

BN. She must have been quite new?

RC. *Swordfish*? Reasonably new she was the first of the “S” boats, by that time there were about oh I think about half a dozen of them or more and um.

BN. How did you find your training course may I?

RC. Submarine Course?

BN. Yes.

RC. Oh very good, I loved it.

BN. So you really enjoyed that? Who were your compatriots?

RC. Dick Gatehouse, and Stevens in my term and a chap called Simpson was also my term he was lost right at the beginning of the war. I can’t remember who else was in my particular training class. I think Boddington, do you remember Boddington he was lost during the war too.

BN. Were you all seamen or did you have engineers as well?

RC. We had engineers as well, yes. One fellow of my term joined engineers a chap called Adrian Albert who later became my own Chief in the boat I was in.

BN. So in the beginning of the New Year 1938, you then Joined.

RC. Yes, I sailed my little boat down to Plymouth over the New Year, it was good fun. I kept her in, kept her on the beach on the hard in, in Devonport while I was, while *Swordfish* was finishing her refit. Because she spent some time in refitting while I was in her. Captain was Rupert Lonsdale who later had the (HMS/m) *Seal* if you remember?

BN. Yes.

RC. He was a lovely man; he was the best captain I ever had I think.

BN. And so you found yourself, what was your job on board *Swordfish*?

RC. I was navigator I think, navigator and correspondence, I don’t think I had gunnery or torpedo. The First Lieutenant was a chap called Griffiths.

BN. Were you known as the fourth hand or, or?

RC. Yes, yes.

BN. And the captain was?

RC. Rupert Lonsdale

BN. Lonsdale, and you stayed on board for how long?

RC. Well I stayed in *Swordfish*, she eventually went and joined the Home Fleet and I stayed in her until 1939.

BN. So what do you mean by joining the Home Fleet, where were you based?

RC. Well the Home Fleet was a group of submarines attached to the Depot ship (HMS) *Lucia* and they went round with the Home Fleet as part of the Home Fleet and when there were exercises we would play our part attacking the ships as they came past and that kind of thing and we’d also have to do a lot of asdic training them, ping running, and we went on cruises with them and that sort of thing and um, and after that we went into Scapa Flow, there was a firm called I think Metal Industries which was salvaging the German warships which had been sunk there and when the Germans sunk them in 1919 they made sure that they would roll over so that they wouldn’t be easy to salve. So they were all on the bottom, bottom up. Except I think the *Hindenburg* was the right way up so it made it economical to salve them. Because all they had to do was put air-locks in the bottom and get inside and then they had to shuttle, blow compressed air in, they would have shut off the holes where the water had come in of course, which were only things like circulating air vents, torpedo tubes they had to shut those off and then they could blow the thing to surface. And we went alongside these, one of these it was the *Grosser Kurfurst* she was floating upside down and we took the *Marlborough* alongside, her sounding officer invited, allowed to go on board you could walk round in this ship went round through the hatches, it’s incredible walking around on the deck head picking your way through the electric lights and things, they let us take souvenirs that we could find, you know they wanted to see what we got when we got off and I got hold of a spanner which I’ve still got and I had a pocket knife with a bloke’s initials on it, I lost that over board finally which was sad and a hammer which I’ve still got.

BN. How extraordinary. You were obviously training with the Home Fleet, was your training realistic.

RC. No, no if we did err, well the day time exercises were all right, but the night exercises were farcical they were so safety conscious in the Royal Navy in those days that if there was a night exercise either the submarine or the target had to carry navigation lights and they weren’t allowed to zigzag.

BN. Why was it so safety conscious?

RC. Well because, you know what it’s like, a terrible witch hunt in peace time if anybody gets hurt.

BN. Yes, I know, but you were preparing for war, you would have thought that these. Was there a wash-over from things like the Invergordon mutiny or things like…….

RC. I don’t know why it was, but the Navy was…... well I tell you what sort of safety conscious they had when we were in, when I was a Midshipman in the *Barham* and we were lying in Torbay and we wanted to go round to Portsmouth for a brief period, the midshipmen in the (HMS) *Rodney* and in the *Barham* said can we race cutters round, can we take two cutters and sail they around while the ships are going around and they were very reluctant they said, “oh well, well alright but you’ve got to have a full crew of twelve men in each boat, twelve cadets suitable midshipmen in each boat and there’s got to be a commissioned officer there and you’ve got to be escorted by the ship’s drifter”. Just to sail cutters from, oh it was farcical and then of course in each cutter there would have been half a dozen or so blokes who were keen on sailing who would have liked to do it we had to rope in six more who didn’t want to come and some officer out of the wardroom who didn’t really want to come either, anyway he wasn’t supposed to be in command he was only there as a sort of monitor.

BN. Was it so when you were a midshipman as well, I mean didn’t you participate in sailing your ships boats?

RC. I was sailing races and sailing boats and that sort of thing, but this was sailing in the open sea without………

BN. But, you weren’t allowed, when you were in the Mediterranean for instance to sail from one island to another island?

RC. No that came in later. In those days that was, I don’t know it may have been our own particular Admiral who may have put it out, if it was he was Max Horton, no it wasn’t Max Horton he was in command of our battle squadron he wasn’t in command of the fleet. But anyway, however it was that was the rule they made and to make it even worse when we got to Peveril Point the tide turned foul, the wind was naturally westerly we were beating backwards and forwards off of Peveril Point, not making any ground and it was coming on about six o’clock-seven in the evening, it was summer time, it wasn’t going to get dark for two hours and as the fleet came past, they hoisted our recall and we had to go on board and get hoisted, they wouldn’t let us finish the race. Well that was the kind of attitude.

BN. And that same attitude was while you were training for war the submariner didn’t seem fit.

RC. Well it does seem strange but that was, I mean you’ve got to think what it was like in the peace time Navy with promotionitis and all that kind of thing.

BN. How competent where you in the submarine, I mean how did you feel about your captain.

RC. Oh terrific, I loved my captain I think his skill in packing and all that was second to none and I, and I think that the submarine was, I mean I always thought from the time I joined the submarines was the only place to be in the Navy you know, they were, and I’ve always retained from that moment with real pride in the way things were done in submarines.

BN. So you were quite competent, confident that you could go to war?

RC. Oh gosh yes! yes.

BN. But you were probably a little bit sniffy about the training that you were doing actually. Would that be fair?

RC. Err, well day time attacks were fine, even though there was very, very much of a screen. Nobody was allowed to zigzag much. Zigzagging was very limited. It wasn’t really terribly realistic, the training.

BN. This is in hindsight isn’t it, what did you feel at the time?

RC. Well I didn’t really feel any worries at the time I just thought we were so good that we could do anything.

BN. Right, you must have visited some interesting European places in those days. How were you treated as a submarine when you went in with other warships?

RC. Err, I’ve no complaints, I never went into a foreign port in the *Swordfish* the only cruise we did in peace time, peace time before the war was the Scilly Islands. That was very nice but it wasn’t a foreign place of course, otherwise I didn’t go to a foreign port in the *Swordfish.* But I always felt we were, I think the sort of reasonable naval officers to have certain amount of dislike for submarines because, because we didn’t, weren’t Pusser enough.

BN. Did they offer you showers or baths or send fresh food across?

RC. They certainly would have done that, was depot ship, we had our depot ship with us. She was, when we went on a cruise we didn’t because then there weren’t any other ships there we went to the Scilly Islands. Two submarines I think there were went in there together we went into various ports on the west coast of Scotland cruising and then later we re-joined our depot ship fairly soon.

BN. Well at that time 1938 some momentous things were happening.

RC. Oh they were indeed. In fact, after we went round to Scapa and as I mentioned alongside the *Grosser Kurfurst* we, the Munich crisis was building up and so the usual sort of fog of war crept in. They suddenly decided we got to go to war stations so they said *Lucia* had “S” boats and minelayers. Well they said all the “S” boats from *Lucia* have got to get their brows and hammocks on board and get out of *Lucia* and join another flotilla with the (HMS) *Titania* who come up from Portland going into Aberdeen, going around collecting “S” boats from Aberdeen and the other ships had to go and join the *Lucia* somewhere else. We had suddenly changed depot ships at the last minute, we remember at the same time we were putting war heads on the torpedoes and getting ammunition on board and everything else. It was a really incredible time, and we went into Aberdeen and stayed there for a week or two.

BN. And *Titania* had come up by then?

RC. *Titania* came up yeah. She came into Aberdeen and we had to move into *Titania* and um, the funny thing about Aberdeen was apparently, I never realised at the time, but apparently at low water there wasn’t enough water to get in and out.

BN. Sounds like a good place to have war base?

RC. Yes, well the other thing I like about Aberdeen is the, a lot of trawlers sailing out of Aberdeen, you know the trawlers rather flat sided things full of, angle bow coming into the sand and when they berthed these things against the wharf, the first one used to come in and she would berth at an angle of 45 degrees from the wharf held in by a tight head-rope you know so the angle of the bow was resting against the jetty the next one used to come in would scrape along and ram the wall and force herself up and so that they’d pack like sardines.

BN. So she’d just ease out on a hand rope?

RC. No, no she’d stay put, they all came up, each one on …… you know they are all on the port side of the first one till the wall was full, there wasn’t any room to move no access with backs together, it was quite rough the sea was.

BN. And it’s all circular.

RC. No, no I’ll have to draw it there, let me make it clear to you how it was, there’s the trawler, there’s the wall and the next one came in like that you see.

BN. Oh, I see angle parking!

RC. Angle parking describes it exactly, each one was rammed near the stern otherwise there wasn’t room for another, I suppose the harbour master would say to the first one you know if you try to berth this with breathing space you won’t leave enough room for the next one.

BN. That’s right. So you’re getting much more in there, good idea. Right so what else was happening in the world. I mean you, Munich obviously caused you to get around.

RC. Well yes the other thing which struck me then was the Auxiliary Air Force appeared on the scene and we’d see them patrolling round in flight and the Auxiliary Air Force was much more prepared than our RNVR for example because they were fully operational, they had their aircraft and everything and they were just blokes doing their weekend spare time work in the service but they were ready to go at Munich. And I was quite impressed with that.

BN I hadn’t heard of that actually.

RC. That was the Auxiliary Air Force. There was the Aussie, RAAFVR as well I think.

BN. What did the Auxiliary Air Force fly?

RC. I forgot what sort of aeroplanes they were.

BN. Where they fighters or?

RC. I can’t remember, I think they probably were, but I can’t remember, but I remember seeing them flying around and people saying that’s the Auxiliary Air Force and telling me about it.

BN. Mmmm, interesting! Um now I see your notes here, you have (HMS/m) *Tribune* M.A.N?

RC. Well, after I left the *Swordfish,* round about that time I left the *Swordfish* and was appointed to the *Tribune.*

BN. Which would have been in mid ’38?

RC. The end of ’38 maybe even the beginning of ’39, I think Munich was round about August wasn’t it? Yeah well, soon after that about November I think, I was sent to the *Tribune* and she was building at Scots Engineering Works on the Clyde and she had M.A.N. diesels which was the diesels the U-Boats used and there was a German Engineer was sort of appointed to help supervise the building, they were building, these engineers at Scots yard and they were having continuous trouble, they were continually cracking their frames and people were suspicious that the Germans were doing it on purpose.

BN. Sabotage!

RC. I don’t just believe they were. I don’t think that our foundry people had quite the right skills, they couldn’t quite cast frames as well as the Germans could.

BN. Right. That’s probably more likely.

RC. I’m quite sure that this M.A.N. wouldn’t have fouled up one of their early engines.

BN. Was this M.A.N. do you think, taking advantage of the fact that he was with British submarines and find out all about them?

RC. Well, I don’t know we never saw.

BN. You would never know I suppose he probably would have done wouldn’t he?

RC. Well, I suppose he would have. There wouldn’t be much that he didn’t know about the “T” class, after all he had to put the engines in the thing.

BN. How extraordinary, I hadn’t realised of course that they were still working on those engines.

RC. Well the “T” boats some had M.A.N. some had Sulzer’s which was two-stroke, two stroke diesel imagine that.

BN. That was a Swiss engine wasn’t it?

RC. Yes, and the others had Admiralty engines and some had a Vickers engine.

BN. They all finished up with Vickers or Admiralty didn’t they?

RC. I think so. But anyway this M.A.N. diesel was put into the *Tribune* and I stayed in *Tribune* the whole of that summer of 1939 we had a lovely time, we stayed in digs ashore had practically no work to do, ship building, refitting, just had to get all the books and papers in order and learn about the ship, but we didn’t have much to do and again I spent every weekend sailing. I bought a little boat.

BN. Did you sail in the sea or did you sail it in the lakes?

RC. In the Clyde, I bought a little boat called Ian Ellen class it was about a seventeen foot six boat decked all over I could fix up a kind of bunk under it, underneath, and I sailed it all round the Clyde every weekend.

BN. Was it built in Ellen?

RC. In Ellen, I don’t know if they built them in Ellen, but it was that class. It was an old time low beam draft narrow sort of, not very narrow, low beam draft for racing keel kind of boat, typical of Scotland and I sailed it in my summer leave I sailed it through the, got it towed through the Crinan Canal sailed it up the West Coast of Scotland as far as Tobermory.

BN. Isn’t that a wonderful spot for sailing?

RC. Oh yes, beautiful. Going through the Crinan Canal was fun because I didn’t have a motor in this thing, so when I got into the canal I found that there was a system dating back to the old days of yachts where you could hire a man to tow you through.

BN. You mean he walked through the dregs?

RC. So I hired a man to take me through. So this chap and put bow on the end of a rope and shoved it over his shoulder as he walked along the towpath. Towing a little boat, after a while I thought this won’t do I’d better give him a spell. So he sat in the boat and I towed it.

BN. Did you like a scotch now and then to revive?

RC. I don’t think I had any on board.

BN. Now this was at Tobermory and this was sort of middle ’39?

RC. Yes, summer of ’39, the war was getting very near.

BN. And you knew this?

RC. Well we thought there was bound to be a war here.

BN. And when did you expecting to have finished building?

RC. Well, it would have been towards the end of the year. I can’t remember when we actually did finish. But, we hadn’t finished when the war started we were still building. It was, I felt very sad when the war started. I mean none of us are supposed to look forward to wars and I didn’t look forward to it.

BN. I’m sure you didn’t.

RC. We are going to spoil everything now; I was having a lovely time then. And though the war started.

BN. Personal wonder in all of this was, I mean…………….

RC. The day the war started was a Sunday I seem to remember. So we all knew the war was coming and we said to the captain what will we do, you know, because we didn’t come into the ship yard during the weekend did nothing just stayed at home. Stayed at home fiddling around with my boat, the day the war started.

BN. Wondering where you should be?

RC. I was expecting bombers to come over you know.

BN. Did you, you’d been issued with gas-masks?

RC. Yes, yes gas-masks yes.

BN. What other war preparations had you…………?

RC. Well they had things to go on the headlights of your cars, sort of mask things to go on the headlights, I had a car then it was an old 1926 Morris, Morris Cowley Saloon. Useful little thing I paid 26 quid for it.

BN. Tape two side three. War had just come?

RC. Yes.

BN. So you are still building, um did you have any sort of news of anything that was going to change in the submarine arm. Did you, did you have a feel for where you might be sent with your submarine when it was built. Were there work ups were they going to change.

RC. Well, we knew we’d do our working up around the British Isles, Clyde and Portland and places like that. We were expected we’d go to the Home Fleet to learn which at that time was based on (HM Dockyard) Rosyth. When I say the Home Fleet there were two, one at Home Fleet, one Blythe one at Rosyth and one in Portsmouth there were three still operating from the UK, we’d go probably to the Rosyth one, we did eventually.

BN. So you actually finished the submarine building?

RC. I supposed it must have been, I think it was round about December, I can’t remember for sure. But, anyway we finished building and went and we arrived at our working up and um I know ……………. (7) we must have finished building before that and I think we finished our working up and got to Rosyth about that time.

BN. Was commissioning a big deal, did you have it all set up?

RC. Oh no, ship’s company just arrived and we put them in digs and then we had very confident Coxswains and people who looked after them and all that kind of thing, you know. There was a good First Lieutenant there was Archie Chain who would be my training officer. My training officer in the………

BN. And you are what on board?

RC. I was gunnery and torpedo

BN. And correspondence?

RC. Correspondence I think, I think I was correspondence. And we did our working up, I can’t remember much about the working up actually. We went round to Portland, when we went round to Portland they made us do some trials with the duplex torpedoes as they called them, they were supposed to explode underneath by magnetic, they fired these torpedoes from the range in Portland Harbour, you remember there was a Torpedo Range there and when the torpedo, the person who operated this released tennis balls. We were after the target and we were supposed to see these tennis balls bouncing out of the water while we went up alongside it. Anyway we did that for a bit and then we eventually got up to Rosyth and joined the operational Flotilla.

BN. Well, these are Mark 8 torpedoes.

RC. Yes.

BN. Fitted with these new um, new fuse or new double duplex ……….?

RC. No, well we didn’t have that in those days, we just had what they called was it, the three F pistol, anyway it was an ordinary pistol with spikes sticking out of it which just went off on percussion.

BN. And this was on contact. How reliable were the torpedoes?

R.C. Well I thought the torpedoes were reasonably reliable I never had any doubt about that.

BN. You were the torpedo officer; you were quite familiar with those. Did you like the idea of this new pistol?

RC. I like the idea but, I hadn’t formed very strong views about it. I had more say about later, at that stage it hadn’t come you know, we were still experimenting with it. The Germans were using magnetic mines in those days it was a fairly new idea.

BN. Now, in those days of course you fired your torpedoes using a hose pipe salvo and there was no angling of any sort?

RC. Yes, but you could have a 90 angle you could angle the torpedoes 90 degrees and you had 90 angle tables. I can’t remember how it was set up. But, I’m thinking in terms of is/was now when went to fire a 90 angle shot you swivelled the is/was disc round through 90 degrees and that gave you a track angle, but you had to apply a correction to your direct angle to allow for the turning circle of the torpedo so you thumbed through this 90 angle table for the track angle and um, I don’t think there was anything else but track angle you had to worry about. But anyway something else you had to feed into this table you had to apply a correction to direct your angle. It was a lovely idea.

BN. To track it away.

RC. Maybe, I can’t remember what the arguments were, you hardly ever used it operationally, it wasn’t considered very satisfactory because you couldn’t be quite sure what the turning circle of the torpedo was going to be, depending on the angle of the submarine when on firing on the atmospheric pressure and all sorts of things were liable to affect the angle of the torpedo.

BN. So nobody liked this angle?

RC. No, but it was a lovely idea because you could set a parallel course to the enemy which was a very nice way of doing an attack.

BN. Or any attack.

RC. Nobody liked it, and I never actually heard of anyone firing one in anger. And um, I don’t think the is/was, was set up for you to do it. It wasn’t.

BN. So what happened after these trials? You did these torpedo trials down on the Solent?

RC. Portland.

BN. Portland, sorry, and then what happened?

RC. And then we went and joined the Flotilla at Rosyth.

BN. Right, you were an operational submarine, fully operational. Um, did you start on war patrol straight away?

RC. Oh, yes we’d finished working up, we were ready to go. Most of you were sent off, but they had left coordinates all over the North Sea, we were sent off to patrol near one of these, we had a square round one of these areas. No doubt in my mind MDRE was one of the coordinates and everybody else spent a lot of time on MBRU and it was somewhere near Little Fisher Bank I seem to remember and we used to, every time rules for Uckers we had what we called the Little Fisher Bank rules.

BN. You better explain what Uckers is?

RC. Uckers is a ludo game with different rules in the Navy, I mean you were allowed to what they called tit up that’s when you refresh on the thing. Best thing to do is tit up on his hotplate, that is to say if you could land two of your men on the, on the one where the first one had to come out of. The other fellow might throw a six, but he couldn’t come out because he was titted up.

BN. Did you allow I think?

RC. No, yes, you couldn’t jump over a tit you had to come back.

BN. Enormous fun. So this was the way you passed your war patrol, is it?

RC. Never saw anything at MBI you know it was completely what, desolate, nothing was there and um, one patrol, round about early February, early New Year I suppose we went up to Skagerrak and that was horrible, it’s the coldest I’ve ever been you know, the ice was freezing in people’s beards on the bridge you know.

BN. February was it, did you say?

RC. I think it was February and it was cold and windy and horrible and spray was sort of practically ice when it hit you, you know. We were spending a night up the Skagerrak and it was ’39 still, ’40 I suppose early ’40 and nobody else was in the war you know and um, and all the ships were going past with navigation lights and I was officer of the watch and it was so horrible on the bridge, it was blizzardy snowing. I sent down to the Captain, permission to switch on navigation lights. Because I thought the danger of the sea was much more violent than the enemy. And he agreed we put on the navigation lights.

BN. That was the phony war.

RC. Yes, very phony.

BN. How long was a war patrol?

RC. About, about nearly three weeks I think sometimes a little bit more, less than three weeks, not often more. And in those days’ submariners would behave in a way of which I’m not proud of, we were so full of our…...

BN. Self-importance!

RC. Oh yes and our absence of Pussers, they used to come in without any sort of attempt of pomp, people used to come in dressed in their piratical rigs and unshaven, both horrible you know, but gradually this got smartened up, we changed our minds and we got rid of that. I remember Baldy Hezlet was the first lieutenant of the (HMS/m) *Trident* and he wasn’t going to have any of this in his submarine and so to set an example to the rest of us, he had his trot sentry dressed in number threes with belt and gaiters with a rifle, marching up and down the casing

BN. Well, so it should be! So, really that was a very phony.

RC. Oh it was very phony, we did one attack on a, on a sub, alleged U-Boat (*U-21*) on our way home from patrol and um, it was night time, we fired ten torpedoes at it, you could fire ten ahead in the *Tribune.* And we came into harbour and the first lieutenant went on, captain went sick the first lieutenant went on leave and I had to prepare a patrol report, and I prepared the patrol report and wrote it as well as I could and, and Captain (S) said I want a sketch of this U-boat you saw. Well I had seen it, I had a view from the bridge and I said well it’s difficult to sketch you know. He said well I want a sketch! You see. So I gave him a sketch I got the type writer I typed in the place where the U-Boat was, I typed in hyphens close together to make a long thick rat ride and a row of hyphens on the top of each other to make the conning tower so that was the sketch I put in the patrol report. I never got sent for, I don’t know why not.

BN. It would have been useless. Oh dear. So this was *Tribune*, Skagerrak, um MBRU and all that, when did things hot up become a bit more serious.

RC. Well I don’t think they did in home waters not till Dunkirk. I forget where I was when Dunkirk happened. Oh yes things did hot up and I got, *Tribune* was continually breaking down with their M.A.N. diesels. One time when she was broken down she was sent round to, back to Scots I think to have the engines refitted by Scots and they sent four French submarines over to help us out, Norway was being invaded by that time and they sent four French submarines they, they grabbed four young submarine officers who could be spared and I was one of them, because *Tribune* was out of action to be liaison officer in the French submarine. I did one patrol in the French submarine *Sfax.* We had joined her at………

BN. What was her name?

RC. *Sfax*, S.F.A.X. it’s a port in North Africa I think. And she sailed from, there were four of them, *Casabianca* and the *Sfax* were the two I remember, and then they sailed, they sailed from Harwich to patrol off the coast of Norway it was mid-summer by that time, and almost permanent daylight and it was quite nice sailing with the French Navy they always had a rather strange smell about them I think it was,

BN. Bergius! (8)

RN. I think it was the stuff they used in their disinfectant in scrubbing out.

BN. Not French cigarettes?

RC. It may have been that. They used to smoke when dived too, which always rather surprised me. We never used to do that. No, no they didn’t smoke when dived they smoked on the bridge, they didn’t smoke when dived the Americans did that, but um, there were some strange incidents that happened in this submarine, one time when we were off the coast of Norway the fore planes went bow a fort were (French used for) hard arise.

BN. (French used) hard arise!

RC. Yes.

BN. And you couldn’t (French used) lower the planes

RC No, something was threatening to break surface and so we went to the old fashioned submarine control technique of (French for) all hands forward.

Bn. Everybody went forward.

RC. Tout le monde and the submarine was sort of lurching about, you know. The captain said arrêtez (French for) stop, naturally, go slow ahead as necessary depending on whether we were pointing up or down. And he held it like that without breaking surface I think for quite a long time.

BN. That was quite skilful!

RC. Eventually they got the planes going again and it was all right. But the other trouble we had with this submarine was we had a head tank you didn’t blow the heads, really they used to blow the tank and one of the heads went out of action and everyone was operating and this tank was full, it really was dreadful, dreadful time for about half a day till we could get up and put things right.

BN. Could only be blown when he was on the surface?

RC. Yes, you wouldn’t blow it while we were dived, but no doubt it could have been.

BN. So did you, what was your impression of French submarines, reasonably efficient?

RC. Oh yes, I thought they were good, the captain and the first lieutenant who had both done Perishers I think, used to keep watch and watch but they always had a second officer of the watch. Second officer of the watch were the two junior officers and the barreur who was the coxswain, he kept a watch now he, or the captain or the first lieutenant were always on watch probably sitting down in the kiosk.

BN. This is a system that is now used today, of course. There’s always somebody overall in charge. I think it’s a good idea.

RC. Yes, so do I, we never did it in our days and um, we had lovely meals of course French cooking.

BN. Did you have wine with your meals?

RC. Everybody had wine, the um, the um, that was part of the troubles because when the French were alongside the depot ship there was always plenty of wine because everybody, one of our repair parties was sent down they always got served up with plenty of wine and they used to drink it as if it was water or beer, you know and get into trouble.

BN. Well, they never worried about it and I still don’t think they do, French I mean. So that was an enjoyable experience, and quite educational I think.

RC. Yes, she went into, she went into Aberdeen and I left her there. After that she was called back to France and the French gave in and I heard later on that she was torpedoed (9) I never know quite by who somewhere off the coast of North Africa.

BN. What did she………..

RC. She was sunk with all hands, so all my French mates bit the dust.

BN. Did she become Free French or was she…….?

RC. No, no she didn’t.

BN. She was Vichy?

RC. Yeah.

BN. Oh right, so after that you went back to your submarine *Tribune* which by then had got its engines repaired again had it or?

RC. Yes, it wasn’t long after that, that they appointed me as a Jimmy. I can’t remember when it was, wasn’t very long after that I can’t remember the exact date, but anyway I was sent, sent as First Lieutenant of the (HMS/m) *Otway.*

BN. Now, by that time you were a Lieutenant with a couple of years in, so First Lieutenant of *Otway* was you’re first posting as a Jimmy and where was she?

RC. She was based on the HMS *Cyclops* at Rothesay and was used as a target for training in the, mostly going down to Campbelltown. We used to go down to Campbelltown where they had an AS (Anti-submarine) School, if you remember?

BN. Yes.

RC. And we went down, she went down to Campbelltown spent every day at sea doing AS ping running and my first, my captain………

BN. For surface ships?

RC. Surface ships, ping running yeah. And the captain was Dudley Norman my first captain, he was very good too, and later on he was relieved by Hugo Newton, I only stayed a few months in one’s training.

BN. *Otway* was considered to be a sort of a second line submarine really she wasn’t……?

RC. Oh yes, she wasn’t really operational, she was quite old, she was the oldest of the O, P’s and R’s.

BN. Did she carry live torpedoes, that kind of thing or not?

RC. I think we had some on board but they certainly weren’t in the tubes. I can’t remember for sure, I’m sure we had some live torpedoes on board and it was good fun sailing and ping running out and being first lieutenant, I enjoyed that.

BN. And you lived on board *Cyclops*?

RC. Lived on board *Cyclops* except when we went down to Campbelltown we lived in the boat there.

BN. And this was in 1940 of course?

RC. Yeah. I remember one time when we were lying alongside *Cyclops* it came on to blow, it was a dark and stormy night and um, the submarine started bumping and they told us to shove off and anchor, and Phillimore was the first lieutenant of the (HMS/m) *Oberon* which was our opposite number and I was first lieutenant of *Otway* and our captains was ashore and we had to take the submarines and anchor the wind was easterly and we had to anchor in the bay over the other side. Was it easterly, no it wasn’t it was westerly, we had to anchor in the bay over the other side.

BN. On the lee shore?

RC. Yeah on the lee shore but, but in order to make room in the channel and everything, we anchored over there but we trimmed down quite a lot both of us did that as soon as we got our anchor out, and lay as quiet as a lamb you know submarines do and I remember that Polish destroyer *Blyskawica* came in and anchored in between us and you know what destroyers at anchor are like in harbour it was tacking backwards and forwards.

BN. All over the place.

RC. Threatening us on each tack, we were quite worried that the *Blyskawica* was going to run into us.

BN. Yes, submarines are very good sea boats aren’t they?

RC. Oh lovely, I mean from that point of view, they’re not very comfortable.

BN. No, no but they are certainly seaworthy.

RC. Yeah, yeah and very anchor way, I mean by the time your got a submarine trimmed down forward anchored she’ll never drag, she doesn’t yawl, she lays as quiet as a lamb.

BN. Yeah, she just stays there nice and quiet then. That was an interesting night. How long did this go on with *Otway* then?

RC. Oh not very long, after being Jimmy of *Otway* for a bit I was sent to an operational submarine which was (HMS/m) *Sturgeon* and the *Sturgeon* was based at that time on Blythe so I joined the *Sturgeon* as First Lieutenant and my captain was St. Clair-Ford who was subsequently lost unfortunately, and the other officer I had in there was Donald Cameron who became the X-craft captain he was our Sub at that time I think.

BN. Was he a third hand or something?

RC. Yeah, he was third hand.

BN. Did you see many VRs (Volunteer Reserve)?

RC. Oh gosh yes. While I was in Rothesay, in Campbelltown as Jimmy of *Otway* I saw my first RNVR it was Teddy Young and an expert came in and there was an RNVR officer standing on the casing wearing the wavy stripes and I thought well this is the beginning of the end. How are we going to survive if we are down to having RNVRs in submarines, we always had RNR’s we had them even in peace time, because they were considered to be seamen.

BN. They came to do their training.

RC. And they were allowed to do their eight months or whatever it was training and they did really well, actual appointed to submarines as navigation officers. Nobody ever thought they’d become a first lieutenant. About that time….

BN. Let alone a captain!

RC. About that time RNRs where becoming first lieutenants and I thought well, I suppose that’s alright and then RNVR appeared and I thought that is the end. I’ve never been more wrong.

BN. How’d you find Cameron then?

RC. Cameron, he was very good.

BN. Yes of course he was.

RC. A very good officer.

BN. You seemed to have been blessed with efficient officers in your day. You didn’t come across any sort of idiots.

RC. Well I wasn’t mad about some of my captains, I don’t want to mention names.

BN. Why not?

RC. The poor fellows might get to hear about it, who am I to criticise anyway. Reuben Marquette was very good and so was Dudley Norman.

BN. So you now in *Sturgeon* based on Blythe and starting war patrols and all that sort of stuff.

RC. Yeah, we did a patrol off the Norwegian coast, we came out of an attack on some sort of a ship err, and err, the captain claimed he got a hit and he got me to have a look. It was a long range shot about three thousand yards I think. I, I… he said the ship’s sinking I, I just couldn’t see it, but I must have been blind because we were in fact credited with it later on. We did sink something in some sort of a convoy off the Norwegian coast. There was no counter attack or anything.

BN. Was it poor visibility?

RC. No I don’t think so. My recollection is a little bit vague of this, but I remember the captain saying have a look at that Jimmy you know. Err Number One and I had look and I couldn’t see it, I, I didn’t sort of argue the point with him. It must have been there, because he, we were aware….

BN. That it actually happened.

RC. Yeah.

BN. Were there noises on sonar, on Asdics?

RC. I can’t remember. It was long range.

BN. Probably poor sea conditions.

RC. Yeah. But then eventually the *Sturgeon* was sent round to Blockhouse to operate from there and we did patrols in the Bay of Biscay and it was horrible and rough, miserable and wet, but I remember we’d write down what they used to call an iron ring, with these iron rings and every time they thought the German war ships were going to come in and out of Brest they’d establish one these iron rings, and we were on the iron ring when the *Bismarck* came round, she never got as far as us.

BN. This was 1941?

RC. I suppose so, whenever the *Bismarck* was sunk, ’41 yes.

BN. And she got out through the iron ring did she?

RC. No, she got out, she came out rather from the north, she came out from Kiel I suppose and went round the north and it was somewhere off the west coast of Scotland that she was first, off the North Cape, the north of Scotland where she was first encountered and sunk the (HMS) *Hood.*

BN. That was up near Greenland wasn’t it? It was quite near Greenland when she got………….

RC. Yeah, wherever it was. Anyway she was, she’d let the *Prince Eugen* go and was coming back to go into Brest because she’d scored, finally scored, *Hood* had scored a hit on her and of course she got the daylights beaten out of her, tragic thing really, when you think of all the men in that ship.

BN. Yeah, right. So this was *Sturgeon* in 19………

RC. ‘41

BN. ’41, so you had at least a couple of exciting patrols. Um, what were conditions like on board during these patrols?

RC. Well “S” boats were, were you roughed it a bit in “S” boats, the *Sturgeon* and the *Swordfish* which were the two I was in, both had the wardroom forward, because in those days in peacetime it was nearest to the fore hatch which was the most convenient place for peacetime, the control (room) was a separate consideration. I remember that the officer heads were actually in the wardroom which was in one corner, it wasn’t very nice and we had a hot bunk system because, I don’t know if we had an extra officer, we must have had an extra officer it was quite usual for submarines to have four junior officers on board.

BN. I suppose they were training people.

RC. They were, that’s right you see, you always had an extra one who was ……...

BN. And what about extra ratings?

RC. No we didn’t seem to have any extra ratings, certainly wasn’t room for the poor fellows, I mean there really………...

BN. Did everybody hot bunk then?

RC. I don’t think the ships company necessary hot bunked, we had a hot bunk because we had four officers.

BN. You know you can always hot bunk and get more people in I guess.

RC. Well you could.

BN. But there were plenty of submarines I suppose by then to do the training and that kind of thing. Submarines like *Otway* presumably?

RC. Yes, they wanted us to go on patrol before they sent them off to the operational bases in the Far East, in the Med, and that kind of thing if they could, anyway it was pretty uncomfortable there in the Bay of Biscay in the winter time it’s not a very nice place.

BN. But you surfaced every night and spent the whole………..

RC. Oh yes, yes we surfaced every night and spent the whole night climbing over mountainous seas, the extraordinary thing is……

BN. It must have been a relief to dive the next day.

RC. Oh it was. We never used to carry, never used to put safety belts on or anything, I don’t know why we didn’t. The German submarines are a lot wetter than ours and they always had to.

BN. Side four. We will begin with your time in *Sturgeon.* Due to extreme static on side four, tape could not be transcribed.

BN. Side five, which is also suffering with extreme static, however conversation can be recorded. Bob, you were sailing down the Clyde in (HMS/m) *Torbay*.

RC. Yes, when we got to somewhere round Ailsa Craig the (static) broke down and we were told to go back into Rothesay alongside the (unfortunately static overtook the conversation.)

BN. So they had deliberately missed twice sure they had?

RC Anyway so we got out to Gibraltar and we had to go independently once we got passed the long ships we had to go independently (static). We went down to Gibraltar and went alongside Depot ship there and the first thing they told us to do was to do a patrol off the coast of Spain. And the idea of that was that you patrol off the coast of Spain because there is lots of Spanish neutral shipping sailing up and down the coast of Spain, Merchant ships and you had a chance to do practice attacks on these things because all the attacks were done inside water (static) or the, or the (Steam Yacht) HMS *White Bear* (10) or the old Duke of Westminster’s yacht SY *Cutty Sark* that was another one you never saw, an ordinary merchant ship that was going to be your target so you had to practice on these, but you were in fact two or three trips that they used to call blockade runners, I mean trips for the Germans out of Spanish ports and if you could identify any of those we were allowed to sink them, in fact we did sink them. On the way down there we were diving by day. The third hand fellow was the same chap who rescued (static) he was the officer of the watch during the forenoon or the afternoon rather and he was busy fixing the ship on the high peaks of Sierra Navarra which we could just see in the distance and lost view all around the back, suddenly the cry “Captain to the Control Room” and I went in and had a look and there was a grey painted ship about the size of the (static) bearing down on us (static) came back up to periscope depth what should I see, but a submarine on the surface (description of the chase loaded badly with static.) he turned ninety degrees to port to bring himself right in the way of the gun, he had a gun, two guns one forward and one aft, that would bring both guns together and I thought this is a hostile attack he’s going to open fire, so I said open fire as our gun crew was closed up and we fired the first round off and crash, we fit him on the fore planes which were turned in, something that never happened before, up eight hundred down six hundred.

BN. First time!

RC. First hit, then the gun didn’t run out, we were too afraid it wouldn’t work and the gun didn’t run out, so everybody (static) was saying get that bloody thing in action after a while we got the gun out and we go another round in and we fired that and of course it went miles over the top. By this time, we were getting to see the enemy a bit more clearly and you could see the deck it was covered with men the whole casing was full of men. Anyway we got a little bit closer still and um, and um it was an Italian submarine too, we identified the shape of a Italian submarine, but we could see also it had a lifebuoy hanging over the bridge, brass polished rails and a bell, Spanish colours all over it, we thought oh, it must be Spanish and there we were sending for block sketch cards and things and suddenly brought up a block sketch which showed the Spanish had in fact acquired an *Archimede* class submarine from the Italians and this was it (*General Sanjuro*). So we went up alongside it and I sent Adrian Abbot who was my first lieutenant, a chap who had been in my term at Dartmouth who was a good French speaker, I said go down onto the fo’c’sle on the brow and parle with this fellow in French because we don’t want him to know who we are. Abbot was yelling at this fellow in French saying who the hell are you, what are you doing without your escort, because we were supposed to know where every Spanish submarine was if it was at sea, they were supposed to tell us and they were not supposed to go anywhere without an escort so when I first saw him I thought the grey ship was his escort, but it wasn’t it had gone away, and he said the escort was a (static) or something and he was following up behind anyway eventually I said well, he was obviously Spanish so we backed off and we said alright we’ll go ahead and we went off on a false course and came up on the horizon. And when we got home they, I thought I’d probably be taken to task for this operation, but I wasn’t, in fact the Spanish of course wanted to protest but they were told they were bloody lucky that they hadn’t been sunk and in deed if I’d been in a position of power when I first seen her I’d would have fired without a thought.

BN. Or if you are going to fire a second time!

RC. Yeah, anyway we found afterwards, we was, or we heard that we were on one of the RC rescue expeditions for Germany one of their airplanes had come down in the Western Med and he was going to rescue these fellows, what actually happened we don’t know, but that is what we heard. So anyway all was for the best.

BN. So you didn’t deceive him in thinking you’re French then?

RC. I don’t suppose so. Anyway when I docked at (static) we were attacking them, these merchant ships for practice. When getting back to Harbour we could see a ship which we knew was on our list of blockade runners it was a Danish ship called the *Grete* or the *Greta* she was, you could see her out here course you can, and I thought well you don’t know which way she is going when she’s sailing so we stayed in all day off Valencia watching this thing (heavy static). One morning we went back anyway (static) and what did we see she’d sailed and was going round the coast, well by that time we were not in a very good position we were (static) so I ordered full ahead group up, full ahead group up (static) give me three minutes to group up. I did twenty minutes at full speed.

BN. Flogged your battery did you?

RC. Yes, when we looked again we were a hundred and thirty (static). We fired two torpedoes and one of them hit, so she sank. They say she was inside territorial waters and I said she wasn’t. (static). Anyway when we got back, it was a terrible thing to arrive in your operational field for the first time flying the Jolly Roger. (Static).

BN. So now, where did you go back to?

RC. Algiers!

BN. Algiers?

RC. Algiers, funny thing about Algiers is, was that in those days Algiers was like great city, you were hardly aware that there was any kind of problem with the Moorish population you know.

BN. Was it a problem?

RC. Yes, it was, that came later. We went round to a rest camp at a place called Bouzareah and that was where the French had had their nice little seaside villas along the harbour, I mean not many had it hard. It was some kind special operations group and they would accommodate us down on this beach., during our rest days, and they sent me, I only spent a couple of days down there I lived in this flash little, very extraordinary bunch of fellows who were all involved in some kind of special service and they said to me go anywhere you like, do what you like, don’t ask any questions, so I was walking about along the beach line one day and some aircraft came over and people stated coming out on parachutes and landing on the beach and there was live ammunition flying about you know. And there was a galloping major on a white Arab charger prancing about shouting instructions to these fellows on the parachutes. Down they came and when they landed, I was listening to a couple of fellows talking on the beach after they got out of their parachutes they were talking in the best Eton English you know and then they burst into a very colloquial French, what is this that I’ve got involved in. Anyway when I went back into the mess, they repeated you know, don’t ask any questions. These people obviously came with some kind of family of snobbery, I don’t know what they were doing. But one of fellows living in the mess at that time was a surly sort of bloke with a Lieutenant Commander RNVR and he said he’d been captain of a destroyer on the Government side during the Spanish Civil War. Extraordinary mob of people, anyway then we were ready for potential operation patrols.

BN. And so off you set?

RC. Yes.

BN. This is into 1943 of course?

RC. We did a number of patrols in Alexandria as we scored a certain number of hits on this and that I don’t want to describe all the attacks that would be just tedious.

BN. But you had a number of successful patrols.

RC. Yes, we did, and um, I will tell you one, the first one we went into Ajaccio Bay, it was on the Island of Corsica and we patrolled there during most of the day, and we saw, mot, mot, motor fishing boat type of thing going up towing a target there (static) but after a while it came back and we were about ready to go (static) it was a funny thing because we were almost into the bay and you could hear our own shots reverberating around the bay (static) anyway, there were these cracks and bangs coming from all sides and suddenly the guns crew disappeared somebody had told them to clear the gun. I was leaning over shouting out to them get back onto that gun, you know. The first pair of them and the third hand, you know. So we went round, manned the gun and got off another round or two before the gun’s crew came up again. The gun crew did come up again and we fired a few more rounds we went to shore backwards being a strategist we got out of it. Well then, then we went round, went off towards the coast of the South of France, south of Spain, south of Italy and France and on the way in the night, same night. We were …. I don’t know if it was the same night, anyway we came on a darkened ship sailing, sailing westwards so we tried to torpedo on the surface at night, I stayed on the surface at night and fired three torpedoes at this thing and we didn’t hit it. So I stated shooting the gunnery and it was then we got the signal on shortwave (foreign languages in a lot of static) stop it, stop it. And then he started making distress signals in German. Anyway we finish shooting up and actually setting him on fire and he was a blazing wreck fore and aft (static) we’re was not going to stay here after these distress signals had been made with a blazing beacon alongside.

BN. Flaming patron as they call them.

RC. Anyway, we approached the coast of Spain and um, In the official history of the war, I can actually go to the page if you want me to, they got no less than five mistakes of purely factual nature about this patrol, one of them says that perhaps fortunately *Torbay,* perhaps fortunately unsuccessful attack on the French Ship *Oasis* and I enquired about it and said I’m sure I sunk the ship and I found out from other sources that we certainly had sunk it and it also said that we fired two attacks, first one was one torpedo which missed and the second one was three torpedoes which missed, all this was quite factually wrong in fact we had fired three torpedoes the first time and one torpedo the second and all this was in my patrol report of course, as well as my gun-fire what really got my goat was the words “perhaps fortunately” which suggest that maybe I was wrong to have attacked the ship. There would have been a grave dereliction of duty if I hadn’t. We were in a free for all area, she was sailing from an enemy occupied port obviously on an enemy errand she made a distress call in German. To say that I shouldn’t have, really got my goat. So I wrote to the Historical Department and said look can you explain this and all the other mistakes that are here about the number of torpedoes that were fired. I didn’t get a reply.

BN. Do they still read that way? They never corrected the …..

RC. Oh lord no, I wouldn’t think so. Anyway, there was another incident happened on that patrol we were doing an attack on an enemy ship, un-escorted this one off the coast of Italy and um we fired one of our torpedoes by then and were going to use some of the external tubes we were going to use nine and ten tubes and the two ones in the middle. They had a firing lever in the control just near where the periscope is, so we were coming in towards the closing stage of the attack and I said coming up any time and I said “put me on nine” you see to the periscope attender and um the young fellow who was operating the torpedo lever, so when I said “put me on nine” poor chap his knees were shaking you know, anyway nine torpedo went off ahead of the tube, somewhere ahead of the tube, but luckily we still had the other two bow tubes, get one of those ready to fire and we fired and two proper (static) well they said in the same report that we carried out two attacks on this ship.

BN. I wonder where do they get their facts from?

RC. I can’t imagine. They had the patrol reports, which you would think. Anyway we did some more patrols, but one day we were in Algiers we were in the Captain’s Cabin having dinner. Someone decided to be captain, we had Avery came down and they started shooting up and everyone went on deck to listen to the four-inch guns going off, he said that’s shell shock chaps, we sailors a fitting place for those who could, anyway this went on for a bit. Then a message came up that *Torbay* had been hit. Well *Torbay* was lying at The Mole stern to, the bow to jetty, stern to the buoy, it rose stern to ……. So I thought alright well I’d better go down, this was, we’d gone back to dinner by that time so I said, can I be excused, so I went round to my submarine and there she was lying alongside full of smoke and lights out and a bit of a stink. First Lieutenant he’d been on duty on the submarine and he was on the bridge and he said a bomb came down and the submarine lurched to one side and then he found himself swimming in the water, so he said, I swam out for the shore man you know, he slipped off the side of the bridge, because the bomb had thrown up so much water it had completely filled the bridge with water anyway, somethings were wrecked the engines had been sort of shifted in their beds and they were out of line and one thing or another so he said alright after we had a chance to examine her, she’s got to go back to Gibraltar. So we got towed back to Gibraltar by an Admiralty tug (static) we told the officers we were towed in by our float post captain I don’t know quite why (static).

BN. Probably retired.

RC. Anyway he towed us back to Gibraltar and we had a lovely seven weeks in Gibraltar living off the fat of the land before we came back to patrols.

BN. How many, how many weeks?

RC. I don’t know, about six or so, I could look it up.

BN. Pretty smart going, if you prefer that sort of thing.

RC. I don’t know how long we were away I could look it up as I say. Anyway we went out back on patrol.

BN. And what time of the year are we now? We are still in ’43 I presume?

RC. ’42 now.

BN. ’43.

RC. ’43 now yeah, ’43 yeah. Ah, oh yes then we went back on patrol off the coast of Italy again and one of the favourite recreations we got one of the previous patrols which was sinking what we called AS schooners, the Italian’s used to have a lot of these old coastal schooners which they’d got motors in, they fitted them with a couple of machine guns and two depth charges and an air listening thing, they had these air trumpet things arranged with batteries so they could protect approaching aircraft. Radar hadn’t come in much in those days, it was only on its way in and they had these things patrolling off the Italian coast giving early warning, and submarines used to sink them left and right. One time we got two on the same day. It was really rather pitiful because they were only commanded by or manned by ordinary Italian seamen no doubt who probably got some kind of petty officer from the navy on board or something, anyway they always used to abandon ship as soon as we opened fire, as I say we got three in one day, three altogether in our various patrols. Then one time we attacked a convoy off Civitavecchia, was it? Anyway we attacked the convoy and the gyro went off the board during the middle of the attack it was quite an interesting event. Because we had to steer by diving compass and keep the fruit-machine lined up manually which was hardly comfortable and that was fun. We had a sure hit on the ship, it was a, I thought it was a big ship, it was one these ships with three or four masts with a tall thin funnel I thought it was about five thousand tons, but it wasn’t, it was only about fifteen hundred I think (11).

BN. But she didn’t sink?

RC. Oh yes, she sank. Well soon after that we were told to go to Beirut we went to Beirut as our base after a patrol in the Mediterranean, in the Aegean and then on we did our patrols in the Aegean.

BN. Now, what happens to your gear when you changed bases like this?

RC. We took it with us.

BN. And you knew you were ………..

RC. Bags and stowage all stacked and tied.

BN. How long was an average patrol at this time?

RC. About three weeks.

BN. And what, and when you came in how long did you have in harbour.

RC. It can be about ten days.

BN. And out again?

RC. Yeah.

BN. And you store completely for about three or four-week period.

RC. Oh yes.

BN. And what would you do in harbour?

RC. Well, sometime there was going down to this rest-camp that I mentioned sometimes you just spend the time, eating and drinking and making merry.

BN. Did you do any training or?

RC. Not as a rule, often you’d go out on some kind of trails or tests you know.

BN. What um, it would be the same thing, with the ratings, I mean they had nothing more to do either. What about sport and all that sort of thing.

RC Oh well obviously football games were arranged and that sort of thing, nothing was very serious.

BN. No, what about changes in ships’ company did you have many?

RC. Not very many, gradually most of the fellows who had done the first commissioning of*Torbay* moved out, most of them. A few stayed with me (static) most of them were replaced.

BN. Would they go up in seniority?

RC. For some reason or another they would have got drafted out.

BN. What was the routine, I mean you were expected to do how many patrols or was it just for ever?

RC. Well, the submarine was totally due for a refitting.

BN. And did you know when that was likely to be

RC. No, I’m not really quite sure how long it was. I think generally speaking you’d stay of the station for about eighteen months or something like that, but I’m not quite sure.

BN. What about mail from home and all that kind of thing?

RC. Daddy was still alive and mail arrived from him from time to time, which brings me to another story. We had a signalman in *Torbay* who was a very good signalman.

BN. New tape. Bob you were just probably finishing your time as Spare Crew in 1944 after returning to UK.

RC. Yes, well then I was drafted to the (HMS/m) *Truncheon* which was a new “T” boat building in Chatham Dockyard and during the time we were there the war with Germany ended, so we came up to Dunoon to do our working up and we were going to go out to the Far East and I think the um, the only thing I’ve got to say about that is that British submarines in the Far East were mostly employed round the Indonesian islands, the longer distances up to the Japanese islands were mostly done by American submarines and err, so we were hardly ever had any …..

BN. I’m just a little bit confused you were, this was 1944. So which part of ’44 were you?

RC. No its ’45 now.

BN. Ah, right I hadn’t realised.

RC. I must have been longer in the Spare Crew than I’ve suggested.

BN. Well not a year longer though was it? When did you say when, no I thought it was the end of ’43. You joined *Truncheon* in May ’45 just as the war ended, Right.

RC. When did the war actually end.

BN. May ’45 in Europe, August ’45 in the Pacific.

RC. It must have been just before the war ended I joined her. I must have joined her just before the war ended. The war in the Pacific and at that time British submarines were mostly employed round the Indonesian islands while the American submarines did the more-long distance work round Japanese waters and there were hardly any targets to be torpedoed, so gunnery was the in thing and um, we were practicing to be able to shoot enemy junks and kites and things. And they had the idea of using two submarines operating in company and part of this practice was that one submarine was going to illuminate the target while the other shot at it. So we had a gunnery officer called Rannic (12.) I don’t know if you’ve heard of him, but he was a dashing young artist from Aberdeen who had joined the RNGR and become a most enthusiastic Gunnery Officer and he came out with us and he had got hold of some rockets which we were going to fire to illuminate the target and we had these rockets on the side of the bridge, and we were going to fire them to illuminate the target, which I think was (HMS/m) *Tireless*, was that Tubby Crawford’s boat? Anyway it was Crawford and he was going to shoot at him, so we were blasting these rockets off and you fired them by short circuiting a battery across a couple of points and that started the rockets off and they shot off into the air and was supposed to let a sort of star shell over the target, well they were whizzing off into the air not making any stars, so after this had been going on for a bit I said, to hell with this, lets illuminate the target properly, fire star shell you see. So we loaded star-shell, fired them off and of course we got a beautiful illumination of the target and Crawford got a nice shoot in and then we went on to the next exercise and when this had been going on for a while we got a signal from Captain “S” saying the village of Corrie reports that it is being bombarded, cease fire immediately. Well of course what I had forgotten as everyone knows that when a star-shell fires the star, the firework comes out of the back but the shell moves on. In this type of waters not much room for this kind of thing, they were landing on somebody’s wood-shed in the Island of, (Isle of Arran) in the village of Corrie. But of course it was a very lucky thing that nobody was hurt, well of course when I went back to the (HMS) *Devonshire* I was suitably contrite, but such are things in time of war, you know submarine captains were needed I didn’t even get a rocket I don’t think. Anyway it was a dreadful thing to have done but it was just accepted. So off we went to Ellyn (13), we were just about ready to sail when VJ Day come round and I thought with a bit of luck we won’t have to go, but we did, they sent us out and um, off we went and joined the Flotilla in Hong Kong, which was a big changed from the days I’d known it before the war, but was still a pretty gay sort of place and a lot of fun was had there.

BN. Even though the Japanese had only just left really?

RC. Yeah, but all the British clubs and things had started up again, it was some months after the Japanese had gone by the time we got there, I suppose the passage out and all at a leisurely speed in those days.

BN. Do you switch to peace time immediately I mean?

RC. Well yes, it was really quite extraordinary, to find ourselves steaming along with main vents cottered and anybody you like coming onto the bridge. But I must say there was a kind of, sort of a slight feeling of emptiness.

BN. Yes, were people expecting to be relieved I mean how many volunteer reserves and people?

RC. Oh everybody was waiting for their age and service group to come round and it took years for that to finish.

BN. So people were anxious to get home to the ………

RC. Well they were but, but as far as the moral of the people I was never aware of much impatience from them, I think they quite liked being in the service you know and if there wasn’t any more danger involved it wasn’t a bad life.

BN. You didn’t have any trouble leaving UK even though the war had finished?

RC. No, not at all.

BN. No, why should you, but you didn’t, no.

RC. And I suppose most of my ships company would have been hostilities only people, I just, I can’t remember it being any problem.

BN. So, you went to Hong Kong, you enjoyed that. Um, what happened then, the war was over?

RC. Well then we were sent down to, to um, to Sydney. Well I should mention before that we did anti-piracy patrols off Hong Kong.

BN. Oh yes.

RC. I don’t know quite again, what we were supposed to do about them, but the technique for the Chinese pirates in those days, was ships plying up and down the China coast were always carrying a number of deck passengers, and the hold of the well deck which might have an awning spread over it was completely covered with Chinese with no accommodation provided for them just a bit of water and maybe some sort of sanitation, but nothing else. They brought their own food and they just lived in the well deck. And the pirates used to be among this lot and when they found the ship was in a suitable position, armed men would appear on the bridge and in the engine room and take the ship into one of the bays, where they would unload the cargo and then let it go again and that was the technique which was going on before the war and they used to keep warships on patrol to try upset the seamen and discourage them, and we used to do some of that. Well actually it was more like sort of a yachting cruise for the ship’s company, cause we, cause we go out and sort of fiddle around in these little islands find an attractive sort of place and we’d anchor there, and all the people would come off in their sampans and hands to bathe and all that kind of thing. We’d spend a week or two on these patrols. Let alone we never did any good in handling piracy I don’t know. Anyway we went to Sydney, towards Sydney and on the way we stopped at a place called Port Dreger which was a base on the coast of New Guinea which was largely occupied by the Americans. And we went in there and I always remember they were sort of working down after the war and they had landing craft in there and they were loading these landing craft with crates of materials and stores, the crates containing rifles which had never been unpacked with this greasy paper still around them and, and, bulldozers and things, they were all being pushed into these trucks they’d take them out into deep water and just shove them out over the front of the landing craft they were just disposing of them. And I suppose they had to do this because after a war you’ve got all this materiel, war materiel and if you sort of flood the market with that, the sort of business is going to go broke, nobody is going to buy a new car if they can get a jeep for nothing.

BN. It seems an awful waste though.

RC. It was dreadful, there were there were aeroplanes and things that were in these things with their wings folded with tape all over them, they were ditching the lot. And when we went down to Sydney we took some Australians who were due for discharge down with us, I think we had a couple of stowaways I not sure or not but anyway we arrived in Sydney and we berthed alongside the (HMAS) *Adelaide* which was lying near Kirribilli against some dolphins that used to be there, I don’t know if they are still there.

BN. Well no they’d gone, but they used to be.

RC. We lay alongside these dolphins in the *Adelaide* and we used to go out ping running for the Australian Navy off Sydney Heads. I hadn’t been there for long, before I got relieved and sent out to China. And Chiang Kai-shek was still operating the Chinese National Government then and Chairman Mao was fighting against him.

BN. You were sent to China as what?

RC. Well, I was sent to China because we had, we had U-class submarines ten a penny, then and we’d sold some to General Chiang Kai-shek and he had sent a small group of officers over to the UK to do a submarine training class and they were going to run these submarines and I was sent over to join this lot and to see what was going on, and see if I could help them and report on it, and when I got there I found that they had, I think there were five officers who’d done the training class or maybe six and um, they’d recruited about one hundred and fifty young men of suitable political background who had no knowledge of the sea or anything to do with it and they were going to make these people into submarine crews, electrical artificers, telegraphists, POLTOs, they were going to get, make this lot to do all these things you see. They had this lot in this place and I said, Sod it, I had lived in the British Cantonment where they had a sort of base and a consulate and, and um I said well I want to go down and live in the Chinese mess with these people and I got moved in there and I lived in the Chinese mess and that was great fun. Eating with chop-sticks and everything, you know.

BN. Now, how did you communicate?

RC. They spoke English very well, they all spoke English and I said what can I do to help and I found these people didn’t know anything. So I start taking class in bends and hitches, I had to start teaching these people bends and hitches and I said we must get hold of a boat of some sort, so I got hold of an old Chinese cutter, old ships cutter from the dry dock down there, and we used to row this about the river you know.

BN. This is basic training!

RC. I thought I’ve got to do this, so I had to something to help, meanwhile I was writing reports back saying look this is what going on here, it doesn’t look to good to me, and there were some funny things went on there. They had a Ford V8 motor car, an old Ford V8 tourer, they used to let me drive this about and it was a bit of an old wreck the way you started it, was you, reached under the bonnet and you twisted two wires together and that the ignition was made then, you then found another wire dangling and you earthed that on the steering column, and the starter worked and the engine would go with a little luck and if you wanted to blow the horn you had to find another wire. There was a kind of workshop there.

BN. You could get around though?

RC. So I thought I’ll fix this lot, so I tried putting in a few switches here and there you know. Got it all working and I used to drive this car around and one time it wouldn’t go I, I, it was something, I couldn’t make it go and so they sent it back to the garage, and they found a burnt out coil, so they put a new coil in, but, but before this happened I found that, all the things, all the switches I had put in had been taken out and the wires had been disconnected again and I spoke to the chief people of this mess, they said well that English arse has been messing about, we had better put the things he’s done back and if it doesn’t go there we’ll send it down. Because all I did was put the new coil in and it came back with the dangling wires again.

BN. Tell me going back one step, in Sydney were there, there was submarine squadron running in Sydney at that stage.

RC. Well,

BN. With you, I mean you were part of it, were you?

RC. Yes, I think, I can’t remember if there were any other boats there or not.

BN. Did you meet Don Wilson at that time?

RC. I’d met him before, when he was in the Med and that sort of thing, I didn’t meet him then I don’t think particularly, I don’t remember. When you say that, we were based on, we were a kind of detachment from, from the, I think it was the (HMS) *Maidstone* was the name of the ship there, we were detached from her, we weren’t, she wasn’t there we were kind of, we had a house on Point Piper which was Chris Leastways and we used that as an Officer’s Mess I forget where the ship’s company lived. And we used to go down to Kirribilli every day and take the boat out as required.

BN. Sorry also going back a little. So how long did this China adventure last?

RC. Well I was there for about I suppose two months.

BN. Were you a Lieutenant Commander at that stage?

RC. Yes, and whilst I was a quasi-permanent acting lieutenant commander I think that’s what they called them. He wouldn’t have rated up. What was happening is that the regular officers had to serve eight years as a lieutenant at sea, but all the I and the R’s that were coming were getting promoted and this wasn’t considered quite fair on the regular RN people, they had to promote them because they were bank managers and business executives they were high rank people, they weren’t of the sailor’s intelligence, so they had to promote us but they wouldn’t promote permanently, so we got this quasi-permanent acting lieutenant commander so we just we had to accept it. But as soon as the war was over we expected to go back, but by that time I had got there anyway, I think. And um, so I was writing these letters back saying you know this doesn’t look too good to me and after a while they told me to come back home, but soon after that Chairman Mao managed to beat them and that was the end of the whole project anyway. But one of the interesting things was that when I was in Shanghai I lived, before I got to Nanking I spent a few days in the British Embassy at Shanghai and the Naval Attaché there was an extraordinary expensive sort of retired commander with the name of Billyard-Leake and he had been captain of one of the block-ships of the Zeebrugge attack, but everything was absolutely back to normal. I went to some old British club in Shanghai and they were playing bowls and all Chinese servants had come back and everything, everything assumed it would go on as before.

BN. Unfortunately, it didn’t though did it?

RC. No.

BN. So, you were after the Nanking?

RC. Well then I was told to go home and I had to do a little bit of general service. I spent a bit of time as First Lieutenant of the (HMS) *Solebay* a home fleet destroyer and um, I didn’t stay there very long and then I had a spell in the Reserve Fleet. And that was interesting time, because I was in the Reserve Fleet in Harwich and the only commander of the group, the Reserve Group as they used to call it of frigates and they all tied up between buoys and we had one ship which we kept almost in commission, that’s to say the engines were in commission but, we kept the boilers going, kept all the auxiliary machinery running, we lived in this ship and we had a ships company, we were supposed to look after her, like half a dozen other ships, and we had jungle bridges between them and we looked after all these ships and they were gradually being sold off to the Portuguese or other navies and disappearing and um, and the business of putting ships in reserve was quite interesting. The ships would come in with their operational crews and they would be told to put in a program for induction to reserve, which meant cleaning everything right out. Clean out the bilges so that you could eat off them you know. Everything spick and span, and all the machinery wrapped up in plastic.

BN. Cocooned.

RC. Yes, they were supposed to go through a huge program, cause by the time they had been in a week the captain would have been relieved, because his age and service group would have come round, some other captain would be moved in and gradually all the ship’s company would disappear, but they were replaced because they were entitled to a ship’s company to do a program for an induction to reserve. By the end of that time they were nothing like the original ship’s company at all. But then we had to inspect the ships and accept them into reserve or not, it was rather painful to think of all the work we put in for no purpose. We had trots and trots of these ships you know “Heroes of the West Nation” and everywhere sort of all being carefully looked after just to be turned into scrap iron.

BN. Yes, I remember the reserve fleet as it was, yeah. What was your position, your posting?

RC. I was a, I don’t know, I was just appointed to Reserve Fleet, Harwich I think. As a Lieutenant Commander.

BN. As a sort of staff officer?

RC. I don’t remember that whether I was appointed commander of the Reserve Group I can’t remember. But I was actually acting captain of a small ship. Well it was quite a nice life actually.

BN. This was your general service time? And you were able to return to all your sailing were you?

RC. Yes, well my brother and I bought a little boat which had been laid out in Rye, we bought this and decided to sail it back to Hamble which is nearest to where my family lived at that time saved going on to Hampshire, and um, I wasn’t married at that time and um, we um, the engine, it had an engine in it, but the engine had completely gone to powder it was some kind of aluminium and it had all just corroded away. So it hadn’t got an engine and we sailed it down, and my father who was always a frightfully keen yachtsman, he came to sail it around with me. We picked it up at Havant, he would always have a go at racing yachts and never been cruising because he was so seasick, that was a dreadful thing as we sailed out of Rye and started beating down Channel against the usual westerly wind and he got so seasick that he had to retire below and he didn’t appear on deck again at all until we got into Hamble River and tied up.

BN. He must have got very ill?

RC. He was, he stayed in bed for about two days upwards, He was so mucked up, it was a sad thing because he loved sailing. He just couldn’t stand going to sea, I used to get seasick all the time too, but I’d get over it after a few days.

BN. Um, yes, so that was your general service time. Was it two years?

RC. I suppose so, and then I went back to submarines in 1949, to (HMS/m) *Thermopylae* and *Thermopylae* was based on Rothesay I think, yeah Rothesay, was it the (HMS) *Forth* or the *Maidstone* anyway they were the dead ships in Rothesay, and we used to go over to Londonderry and do ping-running from Londonderry. And a lot of the time just like Algiers and Beirut there was no sign of any kind of political trouble in Londonderry at all, you wouldn’t have realised that there were Protestants and Catholic’s, we just lived peacefully with everybody. We’d go across the border into Ireland, no problems at all, and um, and around about that time I got engaged to be married. And we were going to live in Caves Castle actually in Cave Town it was all arranged and then I got a draft chit to be training officer at (HMS) *Dolphin* and so we went down there.

BN. Now, you haven’t said where you met your future wife.

RC. Well I met her in England, because I’d met the family when we were in Sydney, and she came over with her sister who was going to get married actually to a chap who relieved me in *Truncheon.* And that was Audrey, she got married to James Kelly and Suzanne came over to sort of be bridesmaid etcetera, as I’d known the family in Sydney that was when I met her and she never went home for another ten years.

BN. That was some time! So you got engaged and then you moved off to *Dolphin* unexpectedly was it?

RC. Well I was drafted to *Dolphin* and I got married just before I left *Thermopylae* and we moved straight into Blockhouse and I got a nice little place in Wickham to live in and we had a lovely time with a couple of years as training officer.

BN. Barry stopped the tape and resumed. You were about to get married I think?

RC. Well I think I’ve said, I got married and got the job as training officer in *Dolphin* and spent a lovely two years, newly married and having a shore job, it couldn’t have been better. The only sad thing was, we had the loss of HMS/m *Affray* while I was training officer.

BN. Yes.

RC. Which was a dreadful disaster, but there’s no point in talking about that here I think.

BN. Well, it’s um something which I think, I have never had mentioned on a tape and your experience of it would be quite interesting.

RC. Alright.

BN. As you were really right in it weren’t you?

RC. Well, I was my Training Jimmy was out with a training class in her.

BN. Yes.

RC. (Gordon) Selby would have been another, one of his narrow escapes, he’d gone sick or something and didn’t go out for some reason. Anyway all I really know and can say about it is the, we had got the diving signals and they didn’t, if the surfacing signal didn’t come through an operation known as Submiss and Subsunk was brought into force and everybody, pulled all stops out to look for it and um, all I can remember really is standing in the staff office just sort of worrying, Otto Stanley was Commander “S” I remember and um, we um, nothing came through we just, we just waited till eventually we had to accept she was lost.

BN. What was sent up to search for her?

RC. I didn’t have anything to do with organising that, but obviously every operating ship we could think of was out there looking.

BN. And your sad duty was to just sort of wait and see.

RC. Well, the thing that I remember worst of all was the press. There seemed to be a lot of perhaps freelance pressmen and when I drove in they were all hanging around the gate of Blockhouse, they weren’t allowed in and, and anytime anyone went in or out they tried to get him to tell them something you know. And um, the captain of the submarine, his wife had gone to her mother who lived somewhere else or her mother in law, any way she’d gone to another house obviously and the press tracked, tracked her down there. Knocked on the door and she wouldn’t receive them, and they went around the back and started talking to her children over the garden fence you know. That revolted me, so, that was the only personal, well there was one other thing which, there was a young officer came in and said were you interested in Spiritualism, because he knew a medium and that might be able to help. And so I was standing, and I was standing we didn’t have no one else to do anything so I said “I’ll give it a go.” I had a powerful car so I said to this young fellow all right I’ll drive you down, we’ll give it a go. We went to a house in Dover it was, we knocked these people up and they said yes we’ll see what we can do, so it was all sort of very, what shall we say err, err non-committal order you know, cups of tea and everything we went up to a special room and um, and they said we’ll start seeing what we can do and they put the light off, then they said some kind of prayer, just to show it wasn’t devil-worship or anything like that you know, and after a while this sort of they switched the light on and there was this little sort of wheel like a compass on top of the table with a little illuminated spot on it and they said if anything’s there this will start moving, well after a while it did start moving, it was obvious to me it was magnetised and somebody was putting a magnet near it. Anyway eventually a voice spoke up, and it was obviously the medium’s voice, but disguised and there was apparently a contact in Heaven was a little nigger girl, this little black girl sort of nattering away as a child, you know she said because they stay the same age as when they die you know, when they pass over. This little girl and she was saying oh can you find anybody who might know anything about this submarine, and she said, the little girl said she’d see what she could do. And eventually a gruff voice came on you know in the same room it was a lieutenant an ex-lieutenant well all I heard was a big bang, I swore we all laughed out loud. We, anyway that was all we got out of it. Eventually we all came out we had more cups of tea and we drove home.

BN. Very interesting I think we better stop here.

The Interview with Bob ended here. After Bob’s service as Training Officer his last appointment in 1954 was to take charge of the HMS *Kingfisher* project which was a submarine rescue and salvage ship, during this time he represented the Royal Navy on a fact finding trip to the United States to look at American Deepwater Submarine Recovery bell and vessel. Robert retired from the Navy as a Lieutenant Commander in 1958 and he and his family settled in Sydney, Australia.

Also, not mentioned in the interview was that Robert was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, the London Gazette reported on 29 February 1944 for Eastern Mediterranean Patrols from February to October 1943 where HMS/m *Torbay* had sunk supply ships and bombarded Amorgos Island in the Cyclades. The Order was presented to Robert by HRH the King at the Investiture at Buckingham Palace on 1 May 1945.

In October 1985, Robert joined Submarines Association Australia. During his time as a member Robert was well known for his organisation and skill in putting meetings and reunions together for this he was recognised for Life Membership.

Robert passed away in Sydney on 25 March 2000, he was survived by his wife Suzanne and his four daughters. Robert’s funeral service was conducted in the Chapel of St. George the Martyr at HMAS *Watson*. This cliff top chapel on Sydney’s South Head with its views up the harbour and the altar looking east over the Pacific Ocean was chosen to farewell Robert and his love of the sea.

1. Aries, no club could be found by this name, or variation of spelling, may have been acronym for an Army Sailing Club.
2. Risard. The transcribers have no idea what this word is, or the exact spelling or if it’s the correct word used.
3. Undecipherable words.
4. Undecipherable words.
5. Undecipherable word, sounds like Topfull or tot full.
6. No listing as an officer was found for Archie Train, his position at Fort Blockhouse as Training Jimmy may have been filled as a Chief Petty Officer.
7. Undecipherable words.
8. Bergius. Barry may have been having a joke as Friedrich Bergius 1918-1949, was a German chemist who invented a process for producing oil by high pressure hydrogenation of coal.
9. *Sfax* was torpedoed off Cape Juby, Morocco by *U-37* on 19 December 1940, 64 men killed in the sinking and 4 survivors.
10. HMS *White Bear* was originally SY *Iolanda* and was hired as a submarine tender for the duration of the war. The Steam Yacht *Cutty Salk* was acquired by the Ministry of War Transport in 1942 and became a tender to the Third Submarine Flotilla, at the end of the war was handed over to the Jewish Marine League and used until late 1947 and sold to Thom. Ward and broken up by April 1948.
11. SS Ardeola of 2609 gross tons.
12. Rannic. The transcribers checked all Royal Navy sites through Google and could not find this name or variation to the spelling as being a Gunnery Officer appointed to HMS/m *Truncheon.*
13. Allyn. Robert Clutterbuck did not give enough information on where this place was and could not be found on any coastal map of the United Kingdom to check the spelling.