

**Interviewee: Arthur Gardner**

**Interviewer: Malin Lundin**

**Date: 30.09.2010**

Interviewer: It should be recording now. I'm just going to put it. I can put it on there. This is Malin Lundin interviewing Arthur Gardner on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2010. Would you be able to tell me your date of birth, Arthur, please?

Arthur: July 1926.

Interviewer: Ok. I'm going to start asking you some questions. How old were you when – when the war started?

Arthur: Thirteen.

Interviewer: Thirteen and where were you living?

Arthur: 19 Tereter Road (??), Bexleyheath.

Interviewer: And who were you living with?

Arthur: Me family, dad, mum, two brothers.

Interviewer: Ok.

Arthur: No, one brother was in the army then. Yeah, and me two sisters.

Interviewer: Ok. Can you remember what you did on that day when war broke out, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1939?

Arthur: Yeah. We all sat down, listened to the wireless. It was on a Sunday and we all got up and looked out the window. We were expecting big bombs to come over straight away but they didn't come. Had – had a – and the siren went off and we – there was a few people round up the street trying to get in the shelters. One old girl was – she was getting a bit hysterical went up the road screaming cos the [clears throat] at that time we'd seen on the pictures about the – the Germans bombing – not Poland, sorry, I forget names, Spain.

Interviewer: Yes.

Arthur: They were bombing Spain. They'd seen it on the pictures. They all thought that's what gonna happen to us straight away. But it didn't happen. But when the siren went off they all thought that was it, that it had started but it wasn't.

Interviewer: So you – you were talking about the people went to the shelters when the sirens went on that first day, did you have a shelter in your garden?

Arthur: Yeah, yeah. We had an Anderson shelter in the garden, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember when – when you got that shelter, was that before war broke out then?

Arthur: Yeah, just before the war, yeah. We – when war started we already had gasmasks. We already had shelters. Some people had Anderson shelters in the garden, other people had shelters indoors that they used to use for beds, you know.

Interviewer: So what – what was your experience of the shelters?

Arthur: We just used to sleep down there and went to bed.

Interviewer: Were they – were they comfortable or –?

Arthur: We made them comfortable. We had a paraffin lamp down there and two – two beds either side, one on top of the other and two on the end so there was room of six of us.

Interviewer: So you said that you were thirteen when war broke out were you still in school?

Arthur: Yes [laughs], I was [coughs] cos that announcement come on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September we had to go back to school next week so we went back to school next week and the headmaster geared the school, he said all those under thirteen would most likely be evacuated and all those over thirteen, if they could find a job they could leave school and a lot of teachers by then had been called up or volunteered and gone in the army. I went back to school, I was there for – till January '40 and the headmaster found me a job in London at General Sugar Traders, in an office. It didn't suit me [laughs].

Interviewer: No? How long did you stay in that job then?

Arthur: About eighteen – eighteen months.

Interviewer: Ok.

Arthur: And I – in between that time the Jerrys had come over<sup>1</sup> and bombing like mad on London and quite – very often – there always seemed to be trains in the morning to get to London but coming home from London, lines had been bombed during the day and three times I had to walk all the way from London Bridge to Bexleyheath. Three times I did it. It used to take me – leave there about half past five, I used to get home about half past nine, sort of running and jogging and whatever.

Interviewer: Ok. So – so what did you do when you finished work in the sugar factory?

Arthur: It weren't a factory, it was an office.

Interviewer: Oh, in the office.

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<sup>1</sup> 5 min

Arthur: Yeah. The, well, it was a hot day and I took me tie off and one of the old ladies there went and told the governor that I'd taken me tie off. He'd coming up and said, 'Put your tie on', I said, 'Oh, it's too bloody hot for that'. He said, 'Put your tie on and go home', so I went home. That was it and dad who was a hard policeman, he said, 'Well, you better get one quick', you know, and I didn't know what to do. Walking up Broadway I met an old friend of mine and he was working a building, he said, 'I can get you a job in the building trade'. I started working on buildings and at that time we was doing a lot of work repair work cos there was quite a few bombs dropped around. We was putting tarpaulins over the roof and plastic up the windows things like that.

Interviewer: So how long were you – were you in that position? How long were you working there?

Arthur: Well, what was I then, fourteen? I tried – or thirteen and a half. Fifteen when I was doing that so I was working there till I was sixteen and I went to – I tried to join the navy at sixteen but they wouldn't let me so I went back the next year they said if you – asked me to get a – get your birth certificate or a letter to say that you were over seventeen. Now, I knew dad wouldn't do it and I didn't have me birth certificate so I had to wait till next year. I joined the navy at seventeen.

Interviewer: Ok. So how – how come you wanted to join the navy then?

Arthur: Cos I didn't want to go in the army [laughs].

Interviewer: No?

Arthur: I was – I was a coward and I couldn't see me standing in front of the Germans sticking a bayonet in them or anything like that, you know. So I thought if I join the navy I couldn't see who I was killing. You was firing a gun miles away so I couldn't see who I was killing, it wasn't so bad. So I – that's why I joined the navy cos I'm a coward.

Interviewer: Ok. So how was your experience on the home front, you said you were working on the – on building sites and repairing bomb damage?

Arthur: Yeah. Oh, well, also when – when I first left the office, I come home, I joined the Home Guard as well. So working, building, and doing the Home Guard at night and weekends and then they, well, working – they brought in a [unclear] that our governor who had a wood yard as well had to someone there every night cos of the bombs so we'd fire-watching. So I leave the Home Guard and go fire-watching in – in the firm that I worked for. I was working there all day and then about once a week we had to do all night as well.

Interviewer: How did you cope with that, working those hours?

Arthur: Oh, I enjoyed it [laughs]. It was a bit of fun for us kids<sup>2</sup> we was only, what? Only seventeen – sixteen, you know.

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<sup>2</sup> 10 min

Interviewer: So what was your duties in the – in the Home Guard?

Arthur: Oh, well, you'd seen it on the television I suppose. I was the stupid boy, you know. I was fourteen when I joined the Home Guard and I used to be on the bicycle, used to have a number of people that was – cos we never had a telephone back then I had to go round when the invasion come I go round knock 'em up and tell them that the invasion started. So they'd go back – go where the Home Guard met on the football ground at Welling. Now, when they'd get there nobody to hold back the Germans [laughs].

Interviewer: Did you receive any training when you joined the Home Guard?

Arthur: Oh, we was trained all day, that's all we done, the training and one thing I did like in the Home Guard was over – over night, every night. It was three men and a sergeant on duty in the park, Danson Park, and we slept in the stables and do you know the stables?

Interviewer: Eh –

Arthur: Danson Park.

Interviewer: Ok.

Arthur: It's a restaurant now. Anyway, we slept in the stables and at that time we only had one rifle between us. And there were three – four beds there. The sergeant slept in the bed and the – there was always one of us with the one rifle to look after the park and if the Germans decided to come down, loads of parachutists, back and wake the sergeant up. We had five rounds of ammunition. We had to fire – we was gonna fire the rifle kill these Germans. It's stupid, really.

Interviewer: So you used to have the one rifle in between –

Arthur: At that time, yeah.

Interviewer: Were you – were you equipped with more –?

Arthur: Oh, yeah. Time went on we all had rifles and all had army uniforms and that sort of thing. Yeah.

Interviewer: Ok. So did you experience any – any near misses or any bombings in your area where you were living?

Arthur: No there wasn't any close to us. On the way up from London where I used to walk all the way home. It used to be dark when I got home and the Germans was coming over and they were firing at the Germans and all around me was coming this ticking noise that the – the broken bits of shells and that falling down. That frightened the life out of me cos they – they were quite big, you know, coming down.

Interviewer: How did you equip yourself for that?

Arthur: Run.

Interviewer: Run.

Arthur: [Laughs]. Couldn't do anything else, we never had tin hats and – only the police and wardens had tin hats.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that, walking home at that time and having all this going on around you? Were you scared?

Arthur: Oh, scared, yeah. But this is after I got to about Falcon Wood or Eltham when it started banging at the Germans and then I used to get home as quick as I could, running. It wasn't so bad other times, if we could get home on train I was home by seven so it wasn't too bad then. It – I used to come home that early so it was alright.

Interviewer: Ok. How did you cope with the challenges on the home front? The blackout and the rationing?

Arthur: Oh, that didn't worry me. Mum and dad did all of that, I didn't.

Interviewer: How – how did you experience the blackout?

Arthur: Oh, we used to have a bit of fun in the blackout [laughs]. Join the – we used to go up the Bull Way (??). We used to put a bottle in the middle of the pavement, wait for somebody to come by and kick it. Stupid things, like that, you know.

Interviewer: Ok, so you said you were working in an office when you left school. What was the best part about that work?<sup>3</sup>

Arthur: I didn't like it at all.

Interviewer: No?

Arthur: No. No, I didn't like office work, shut up inside.

Interviewer: So what was the worst part about it then?

Arthur: The worst part was all the – all women that worked there. All – all miserable they was. All seemed miserable. They – they were sort of women that weren't used to working but they had worked and they went to come back and worked in the office. They seemed a miserable lot. No – no fun or anything like that went on.

Interviewer: What age were they? Were they –?

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<sup>3</sup> 15 min

Arthur: Oh, to me they was about sixty odd. I don't suppose they were but they did seem that age. I was only – only thirteen then, you know. So seeing somebody like that you thought they were ancient, you know.

Interviewer: And then you moved on to – to start working on a building site and repair work.

Arthur: Yeah, I was a labourer. Yeah.

Interviewer: What was the best part of that work?

Arthur: Oh, I liked it all. Going up the roofs and putting the tarpaulins over and – and I used be working till ten o'clock at night putting the plastic over the windows, you know, keep the rain and wind out. I didn't mind it. I didn't mind the work at all.

Interviewer: So – we people able to move in to those houses after you did the repair?

Arthur: Oh, they were in them. They lived in there. A bomb had dropped somewhere near and blown the windows out and some of the roof off. They were still living there and alright there was – make the house waterproof all these. Though I – wasn't me – other fellows doing it.

Interviewer: What was the worst part of the work? Was there anything you didn't like about it?

Arthur: Oh, I liked it all. I liked all the work. I was, yeah, I did like the work at all.

Interviewer: Ok, and then you joined the navy?

Arthur: Yeah, at seventeen, seventeen and one months.

Interviewer: What happened then?

Arthur: Well, you joined the navy. I went to – Skegness was first the first place. I was – Lee Green was a recruiting office and we went there. They said we had to go to Skegness. I joined as a signal boy but I couldn't spell and they took us to Skegness on a train. I'm waiting for the train with a [unclear], I won't bore you with the story. It took us to Butlins Holiday Camp at Skegness that was taken over then by the navy and we went in there. First day did nothing, second day we got our uniform and all of that sort of thing and after that we were just training.

Interviewer: What – what kind of training did you – did you do?

Arthur: Oh, we had to learn the compass and you learnt how to – different sort of shells, bombs and – and how to swing the lead, you know how to swing the lead?

Interviewer: Pardon?

Arthur: Do you know how to swing the lead? Swing the lead? It's not going off doing nothing as some people say, it's a – it's a – if we're going somewhere it's shallow there's a big lead about that high and on the bottom is a wax so we had send in it on the side of the ship and swing this round and round

and they go forward and as it went over the top you bounced it up and down, it showed you what was on the bottom and also it was marks on the rope that told us how deep it was. So you could know what it was going to shallow or not that was swinging did it. Learnt the compass, how to steer a ship and marching up and down, of course, it was plenty of marching up and down and the thing is, in the – when I joined as a signal boy I think it was about third day we'd a spelling<sup>4</sup> test cos I failed it. I wasn't so clever, I couldn't spell so I couldn't be a signal man. They said as I was only seventeen I could either go home or transfer to the seaman or stokers section. So I decided just to go as a seaman and so I stayed at Skegness for a little while doing lots of marching up and down and was ordered [unclear]. Then they sent us to Pwllheli (??) in Wales. We had about the same ship training there and that was, well, it was alright. It we used to have a gun there in a hall or in a place like this and we used to have our horskins (??) on and just to make it realistic they used to send water down over the top of us and one of the POs was sending fireworks, you know, crackers and things like that. So all – as we were trying to learn to use this gun there was always crackers and water coming down to make it a bit real [laughs].

Interviewer: Did you feel that the experience or the training that you received that that prepared you for what you – what you experienced later on in the war?

Arthur: Oh, yeah, it was cos when I got me first ship was the Westcott. We went from – when we finished our training in Dover we were transferred to Chatham and we was at Chatham till January 1944 and then I was given my first ship which was the Westcott and that was in Scotland so we had to go up to Scotland and find our first ship. It was in for a refit so when we got to the ship it was cold and snowing and horrible day it was and going off the ship it was all wires and pipes and things. It was all docked up. The mate who was on there, mending doing things to it, you know. So the first trip we'd done was four days to Iceland cos during the war the Americans had taken over Iceland. We had to take it, escort this troopship, up to Iceland and four days – days like that, you know, where it's a bit naughty and for four days I didn't know where I was. I was so sick and bad they could have tucked me over the side, I wouldn't have cared. But it's not an excuse in the navy to miss your duties and the rest of the boat it was on the gun deck. I was on the gun deck at that time, they used to carry me up to the gun deck and during the time at the gun deck you had – everybody had to an hour look out on the bridge and so some mate's done my lookout. I couldn't get out of there, I didn't know where I was and didn't know what I was doing and four days it was murder. You can't think of being sick for four days, shouldn't you? I ate nothing. They did give me dry bread, they said that will take down me and they did give me dry bread or something like that and in that four days we got into Reykjavik and I was pleased that the ship stopped moving. But then we were coming home the next day. I was frightened out of me life in case I was sick again. What I'm saying is – but from that time on that ship could roll, boll, pitch or toss or do what it liked never affected me again. Yeah.

Interviewer: Ok. So it was just those first days.

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<sup>4</sup> 20 min

Arthur: The first four days, yeah. The first four days were absolute murder. I don't know what I – I did most of the time.

Interviewer: So what did you do after you left Iceland then?

Arthur: Oh, they put – we were on the Russian convoys going up and down to Russia. Have you heard of them?

Interviewer: The convoys?

Arthur: Russian convoys.

Interviewer: The Russian convoys, yeah.

Arthur: Yeah, we were on them. We'd done six up there. They'd already done one before I joined the ship<sup>5</sup> and we'd done six more after that, going up and down to Russia and we also was at the – I was still seventeen when we was at Normandy landings. I was still seventeen then.

Interviewer: So what was your main duty when you were sailing?

Arthur: Our main duty was, well, you was on the gun deck during the watch – during the watch and apart from some of the times you was cleaning or looking after the ship, no – any – scrubbing the deck and cleaning out. You had to take your time with the mess stick sweeper which meant you had to get a dinner ready to sit – nobody cooking – at that time didn't have a canteen where the chef cooked you dinner. You had to cook, get it all ready and then take it up the canteen for them to cook it. So you had to get the dinner ready for the mess and take it up the galley and come back and clean the mess right up, you know, scrub everything and make it as tidy as you could and that was the sort of work we had.

Interviewer: What did you normally have for – to eat then?

Arthur: To eat?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Arthur: Well, our ship only carried food for three days, it used to take us about eleven days to get to Russia so we were on dehydrated stuff and dehydrated peas, dehydrated carrots, dehydrated potatoes. Everything was dehydrated. You had to put it in a bucket the night before so it come back to its right size. We always – all of it tasted the same.

Interviewer: How – how did you find you experience in – in the Russian convoys? What did you find difficult and –?

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<sup>5</sup> 25 min

Arthur: Well, the most difficult part was the – was the weather. You'd never believe it but you going along you hit a wave was about thirty foot high. Never believe it was like a block of flats coming at you. You hit this wave and the boat would go in and go up, if you was walking about on the deck as – as the ship was going up you felt about ten times your weight. It was a job to get a foot of and then when it got to the top of a wave you went down the other side and then it was flying all up like a fairy. It was – it was a – things you just got used to, you know.

Interviewer: How was the cold? Cos going up to Russia it must have been –?

Arthur: Ooh, cold. Cold, you never believe it. I've seen old sailors up there crying cos of the misery of the cold. It was, I mean, you think, I mean, it must have get about fifteen below but sea we got no – no – no houses or anything like that takes – take it away – it's coming down at you. No good me showing the pictures what it was like, is it?

Interviewer: If you have some pictures we can have – have a look at those later. That would be interesting.

Arthur: Yeah. But [unclear] moulds about as thick as a finger, in the mornings about as thick as a fist. That's just with ice and you was on the gun deck. If you was on gun deck you was exposed to the weather and nothing can prepare you. As the ship went down and you got the spray coming back over, it used to be ice before it hit the deck. They would leave it but, I mean, we were going seventeen/eighteen. We should be flying about, young boys. You wore so many clothes and we had over the top of us what they call a zuitzuit (??) and that was thick kapok and it was waterproofed, you know<sup>6</sup>, on the outside and we was all flying about just trying to keep warm and thing was it's so many clothes under after a while you started to sweat, you know, you stopped – stopped flying about and there's sweat under it used to be turned into ice nearly. It was that cold, never believe it.

Interviewer: No.

Arthur: And thing was, you had gloves and things like that on and if you didn't have a glove on you touched the metal cabinet it would stick and you rip half the skin of your hand. You would, no, cold you wouldn't believe. It was – that was the worst part, very cold. And there's a – going up there there's the ice is always there, you know, so during the summertime we'd keep as near the ice as we could that's to keep away from Norway cos in Norway they had all the, German Air Force. They would always send over bombers and torpedoes and whatever they could.

Interviewer: So where did you sail? Did you sail up over Norway and Sweden and Finland?

Arthur: Yeah, right up the top and back down into, well, the merchant ships went into Archangel (??) and Murmansk but we had to sat the end of the river in a place called Polyarnyy and we had to – we used to go up in turn out the tunnel (??) at the front and clear it of submarines cos the submarines

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<sup>6</sup> 30 min

would wait for the merchant ships to come out and sink them as fast as they could. Well, we was – dunno if we were lucky or not but we were sometimes thought we heard a submarine and would chase after it and drop the charges on it and once we saw a submarine of the surface and we went after it but it saw us coming started to go down so we opened up with our gun on it. I don't think we really hit it but it went down and we looked for that for about two days, stayed there looking for this submarine. Never found it. They were clever cos as we had two lots of ways of getting a submarine. Either by dropping depth charges over the back by going as fast as we could over the submarine as we were going over we dropped this dept charges on it or we had a new weapon called a Hedgehog. It was like set of about – about thirty-two bombs and they were all set in the – in a frame and then it could go up to where the submarine was and it stop and fire these things over the front in a fan shape so that we had more chance of hitting the submarine if there was one down there. But we never got one, must have been [unclear] never got one.

Interviewer: Was it common that you – that you had – saw the submarines around you and that you chased the submarines? Did you have many meetings with them?

Arthur: Well, we, no, we didn't have a lot of submarines at that time. We thought we did. Two or three times we went after them, trying to find them. But we never – never killed one, we had to – we thought we killed it but we didn't. Never got submarines at all, though we tried.

Interviewer: How – how did you feel when you had these encounters with the – with the submarines?

Arthur: Frightened [laughs]. Well, just you did do the job anyway. But you're always a bit scared with – with these torpedo. No, it was not going down the – in the sea<sup>7</sup> up – up there and give you about thirty seconds to be unconscious and three minutes to be dead in the cold. So didn't matter what you did really.

Interviewer: So how did you stay in Russia for?

Arthur: Well, no, not long. Two or three days and then cos we use to take the convoy up there and they used to be unloading it and the convoy come in before us was when it come home so we would bring that one home. So we took one up there and brought one back so we only stayed there about two or three days very often and back we were. At one time though just after – just after Normandy landings they caught a load of Russians who'd been fighting for the Germans against communism, you know, they didn't like the communism they'd all joined up with the Germans to fight communism. We caught, I don't know, so many about three or four hundred these Russians and we brought them back to England but all the – Joe Stalin demanded that we took them to Russia. So it was two troop ships for these Russians, one was full of Russians and the other one was full of Norwegian troops that were going back to fight the way back down to Norway and two – two destroyers to escort them up to Russia. I mean, with no chance they were getting us cos that was [unclear] we was home and we got up in about four days we had fast boats, you know. These Russians all taken ashore and shot,

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<sup>7</sup> 35 min

no trials, no nothing. Just shot. We weren't allowed to go ashore or anything when they took them up there.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Arthur: A bit rotten, wish we'd never taken them back. It's a rotten thing to do really but [unclear] was as bad as Hitler. He was. He was a terrible man. So that was one of the convoys we'd done.

Interviewer: So were you on a – on a destroyer?

Arthur: Yeah. That's it, Westcott.

Interviewer: Ok. Did you – were you allowed to – to go on leave when you returned to –?

Arthur: Oh, yeah. We had – had leave, not very often but we had leave now and again. The thing was that we was up in Scotland so it used to take us about twelve hours to get home sometimes so we had about four days leave, you see, and those two days travelling up and down. If we'd get a week it wasn't too bad but we used to get leave, yeah, some.

Interviewer: So how often did you get a chance to see your family when you were –?

Arthur: Oh, about – about once sometimes twice a year. Weren't too bad.

Interviewer: So were you demobilised when – when the war finished in – in '45?

Arthur: Oh, no, cos at the end of the war – did you wonder about the end of the war? The end of the war – that Westcott was an old – what they called an old DMW destroyer and 1939 was due to scrapped but they kept it going cos of the war and so when the war ended in May it was – they said – we scrapped so a month later, I don't know, shall I tell you another tale<sup>8</sup>? At the end of the war they did it – the day war ended we was up in Greenock and we was due to go ashore that night but, you know, cos it was the end of the war and the duty boat found a way in – not in – not doing what it was told, you know, so they made us to do this boat. So that night when the lights came on for first time, everybody's having a good time, we had to go to sea. We had to go to Iceland to see if we could find any u-boats that were giving in and tell them where to go and what to do. There always was in the backing so it was all over by the time we come back. Four days there and four days back, I'd forgotten about the end of the war [laughs]. We missed out on that but anyway a month later the ship was scrapped so all the sailors went back to Chatham. That's our base, you know, and in Chatham barracks, we – we got what was called foreign draft leave. We were going somewhere else, we got what they call foreign draft leave and then me brother told me he was getting married on the day that I was due to go back off leave. So I wrote to or send a telegram to Chatham barracks and asked if I could have my extra two days as me brother was getting married and he wanted me to be best man, you see. Got the ok, you know, so at the end of that time I went back to barracks and people said to

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<sup>8</sup> 40 min

me, 'Oh, you're in trouble', he said, 'Where you'd been?'. I said, 'No, I had a permission to do what I'd done', he said, 'Oh, no. He [unclear]', on the [unclear], you know, [unclear] camp. '[Unclear] the last two days', I said, 'Oh, I don't know about it'. So I went down to the seamen's main office. That's where all the [unclear] so I went down there. I said, 'I understand you been calling for me for the last two days', you know, the officer in charge, 'Who are you?'. I told them and they said 'leave a station card here and we'll look into it'. So left the card in the barracks. I left my station card there wandered around from there and went back, 'No, we can't find nothing about you' and give me card back. So I was wandering around the barracks, I see this group of sailors in a big group and someone was off of Westcott so I wasn't supposed to but I went to him and started talking to him, you know. And the chief – chief petty officer, come and got a box and stood on the box and was calling out names and he got down to Gardner. I wasn't supposed to be there, see, so I didn't answer. 'Anyone here seen Gardner?', well, I thought, 'No, I'm not supposed to be here so I won't answer'. So I didn't, third time, 'Has anybody here seen Gardner or know anything about him?'. It was someone turned around and looked at me cos they knew who I was. I said, 'That'd be me, chief', he said, 'What's your official number?'. So I told him, 'Where the bloody hell have you been? I've been looking for the last three days, is it? You're supposed to be in this draft', he said, 'It goes this afternoon'. So I had a draft – when they're doing a draft you had to go in front of the doctor, in front of the dentist, in front of eye people. In front of everybody, you know, about six different lots of people. [Unclear] one thing and another and cos they'd taken three days to do it, I had to do it in about two hours. So he sent a killick, a leading seaman, with me to take me to the front of every queue and got me through [laughs]. Was drafted and order give up and we caught a train from Chatham barracks<sup>9</sup>. The train was locked so we couldn't get out once we got in there. We was all counted in and the train was locked. We went from Chatham barracks to Liverpool without a break, how they do that I don't know.

Interviewer: How many hours did that take?

Arthur: Well, we left on one afternoon and got there the next morning. So, anyway, we was going to board the Suffolk going out to Australia so we got aboard the Suffolk it was announcing that the war in Japan had just finished. We was all entitled to two days leave so I went straight home again. We had two days, VJ-Day and back to thing and the other watch went had two days and then we went for Australia.

Interviewer: How long did you go to Australia for then?

Arthur: Well, we got up there about in the September and I'd a – in – I had about three weeks in – does it matter how long it takes this interview?

Interviewer: Pardon?

Arthur: Does it matter how long it takes – you can understand me?

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<sup>9</sup> 45 min

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Arthur: Well, when we got to Chatman barracks – didn't I say that. Every morning we had fold into divisions, you know. There was thousands of blokes there. It was a transit camp, you know. Everybody went there and then transferred somewhere else. It was thousands of them there. When we turned up for divisions there weren't a quarter of them there so we got of going round with a sack and picking up bits of paper and any rubbish, you know, and we said, 'What happened to all the others?'. Evidently that in [unclear] the huts were all on about that high off the ground on – what do you call them? Staged on to wooden and that off the ground and so it was seat underneath the huts so I thought, 'Oh, bugger, I'm going to do that (??)'. So I had about a fortnight there, you could sleep on these slats but you had to watch the barrack guard used to come round had [unclear]. So you had to watch it, if you see the gaters (??) come round you had to move yourself so you – as they gone by where you come round this way. It was silly, stupid it was. So after about a fortnight of that I got fed up with that and there's nothing to do. It was boring. So next morning I decided to fold in and they come round, 'You lot do so and so. You lot do something else. You lot do something else' and they got to us they said, 'You lot barrack guard. Go down the barrack guard'. Oh, [unclear] I'd – last thing I wanted to do was be a barrack guard. But they took us down this – the guard up and an officer came out, he said, 'I want the – I want ten of the biggest blokes here'. So I didn't want to do it so I got down the back and he flicked out [unclear] and thing is as we marched away, you can't march away bending over so I marched away and he shouted out, 'Halt, back turn'. He come back and brought me out and sent another one out and bugger it. And that there was the best thing ever happened to me that was. Well, not best but one of the best and it was two of us there was like a<sup>10</sup> – do this on the thing but it was like the camp like that there where all the tables were. Over here somewhere it was a race course so he said, 'I want two of you on the race course'. He picked me and another one to be on the race course. We went over there and we didn't have a hut to live in, we had a tent. It was all the tents down there. It was only a leading seaman's charge and he said, 'Right, your job –' we got took down to a gate on the edge of the racecourse. He said, 'Now, you open this gate every morning to let the horses in, they come and gallop round over and turn around the racecourse. He said, 'But if any lorries or any sailors try to get in', he said, 'don't let 'em'. He said, 'Send them around to the main door. They got to come in that way'. So anyway, second day and a lorry pulled up. This lorry was, oh, what do they – what's the name – the other sailors that go to sea but not sailors they march up and down and do all the [unclear]. Marines!

Interviewer: Marines, yes.

Arthur: Yeah. They had in that place they had a big Marines transport place. Anyway, this lorry stopped at the gate. He said, 'Open up!' I said, you know, 'You got to go round the other gate'. He said, 'Are you new on here', I said, 'Yeah', he said, 'Didn't nobody tell you?', I said, 'No, what?'. He said, 'Well, you open the gate', he said, 'and we give you a fiver' [laughs]. So I opened the gate and

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<sup>10</sup> 50 min

he gave me a fiver. I did it later on I opened the gate and let them out. Evidently also in this racecourse was a big freezer store. They was going down there, they'd mentioned the freezer store, used to load up the lorry with all the stuff out off the freezer store go down to Sidney and sell it. I don't know how much they'd sell it to. Anyway, every time somebody come and I got a fiver [laughs].

Interviewer: Did you earn a bit of money then?

Arthur: Yeah. A lot of money in the – fiver. Oh, lovely. So I enjoyed it down there [laughs]. Yeah, I was there for a while. I was there for about three weeks then the leading seaman came to me and he said 'Ay', he said, 'You got a draft ticket'. I said, 'Oh, I'll [unclear]', 'I tried to get it sorted', he said but, 'no' he said. 'They want something so you'll have to go'. So I went by train from Sidney to Brisbane to pick up the [unclear]. That's up the far end there. [Unclear] it was a sloop so I got on the train, it took us about twenty-four hours from Sidney to Brisbane and I found this crane and when I went in there they said, 'What do you want?', I said, 'Well, I just drafted back to Brisbane'. 'No', he said, 'we don't want to do with you. We've just come in for a refit', he said, 'You can bugger off for three weeks'. So I met another bloke one day that I thought I knew but anyway the two of us went ashore. I said, 'Can I have some money cos [unclear] is all I got' and he said, 'No, you're papers are not through yet', he said, 'There's no one onboard to open the office so you can't have any money'. Got three weeks leave and no money, oh, I had a little bit I had left over from the other place. So the two of us went in to and ANZEC canteen and we were sitting there talking about what the bloody hell are we going to do with three weeks leave and no money<sup>11</sup> and this young matron come over and said, 'Miserable pair of buggers', she said, 'What's the matter?'. So we explained the situation to her, 'Oh', she said, 'That's no trouble', she said, 'Go where you like', she said, 'Well, would you like to go in the – out the bush or on the coast or somewhere?', 'No, we've seen enough sea, we're go in the bush'. So she went off and a little while later she came back and said, 'Go to Palm Woods, about sixty mile away somewhere in the bush', and she said she'd give us a travel warrant and all. Travel warrant and we had to meet this woman at Palm Woods so we went there. We stayed with this woman for three weeks, she was – she would take in all soldiers, sailors and airmen. Anybody like that, you know, who had nowhere to go she would take them in for a while.

Interviewer: Did you have to do any work when you stayed there?

Arthur: No, we tried as well but she had a lot of – she had a lot of forest land belong to her and we said we'd tried and help her but she said, 'No, there's a timber company does all the work'. 'No', she said, there's nothing they can do. So we had three weeks leave but she had two daughters our age and so we – these daughters looked after us. They took us to [unclear] which is on the coast and we went swimming and [pause].

Interviewer: Do you want me to get something for you?

Arthur: No, just gonna –. There they are the two daughters.

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<sup>11</sup> 55 min

Interviewer: Ok. Did you get to know them well?

Arthur: Very well. I'm still writing to one of them.

Interviewer: Pardon?

Arthur: I'm still writing to one of them.

Interviewer: Are you?

Arthur: And that one there. I'm still writing to her.

Interviewer: Did you ever go back to see them again after – after you returned?

Arthur: Well, there was – I took a long time to get out the navy. That's another story. In 1946 I was due to come out the navy and after come back to England. But I didn't want to go, after we left Australia we had a job going round all the islands.

Interviewer: Is that you?

Arthur: Yeah and her.

Interviewer: Ok.

Arthur: And my girl.

Interviewer: Aaah, lovely.

Arthur: Yeah, and we left Australia [unclear] in January 1946. We had Christmas with the girls and we got left Australia in January we went all round the islands back to Hong Kong. We escorted a dry dock was pulled by three tugs. They were taken out from Australia to Hong Kong and while we were – they did about two mile an hour so we were going round these islands on the way looking for Japs that had not given in, you know. That was a load of rubbish cos you met about thirty rough sailors of the boat going on these little islands and just shouting and messing about and the – we had a [unclear] and whatever.

Unknown: I'm making a drink does anyone want one? We got cold drinks as well.

Interviewer: I'm fine thank you.

Unknown: Are you sure?

Interviewer: yes, thank you anyway.

Arthur: Are you sure?

Interviewer: Yes, sorry, I – I just had something before I got here so that's fine, thank you.

Arthur: You can have a coffee say?

Interviewer: Oh, I can have a glass of water then, thanks.

Unknown: Are you sure?

Interviewer: Yes, thank you.

Unknown: Do you want a coffee?

Arthur: Yeah, please. Not too<sup>12</sup> – not –

Unknown: [Unclear] one sugar?

Arthur: Yeah, yeah, please. Went around these islands [unclear] each other and the thing is when there were Japs there they wouldn't have asked why was we there looking for them. They would just come out and shot the lot of us. If they didn't know the war was over they wouldn't have mucked about would they. Just killed us all. It was stupid what we were doing but we were going through these little islands to looking around see if there was any signs of Japs in the morning. In the afternoon we come back sat on the bridges. Lovely silver sand, palm trees over the top, go swimming in the water, beautiful. So that was our time going back to Hong Kong then we eventually got back to Hong Kong and there were pirates there going around. We had to escort the – escort the ferry boat from Hong Kong to Singapore. We had to escort that in case the pirates got aboard it and all sorts of things like that till we come home. We got home in – about September/August '46 and I was due for demob. But the officer in charge he said to me, '[Unclear] gunman' on the Earls Court, you know, you're not old enough to know about that but they used to have big forces day and all the Navy was on this gunman (??), said, 'We need all the biggest horrible looking blokes you got to do this gunman (??)', he said, 'Would you do it?', 'Yeah, I don't mind doing it'. So he said, 'You got to sign up for three years', I said, 'No, I ain't gonna sign on'. I wanted go home. They said, 'No, you sign on for three years', he said, 'and we'll – you can do the gunman (??)'. He said, 'But you got to be regular sailor. Not [unclear] only'. So I said, 'No, that's no good to me'.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Unknown: Here you go.

Arthur: Put it on here.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Arthur: Oh.

Interviewer: I can hold that [laughs].

Arthur: Yeah. He said, 'Want to join the gunman (??)', I said, 'No, I won't sign on'. So he kept me there till –

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<sup>12</sup> 60 min

Unknown: Oh, you already got one. Or is it dead?

Arthur: It's dead.

Unknown: Was it, I never knew.

Arthur: He kept me there till March '47.

Unknown: How did you feel when you came back to England after spending those years abroad?

Arthur: Oh, it wasn't all that long I left in '45 got back in '46 so it was only two years, not much had changed. There wasn't any more war, thank goodness. No more bombs and the thing is that by then I had to find a job. At that time, you need to think, all the ammunition places closed down. All the women workers were more or less given the sack and I was on the buildings as labourer. I didn't want to go back but I had no option. I tried – tried to get a job doing all sorts of things couldn't get one so Labour Exchange said, 'You got to go back, your old employer must take you back', I think it was six weeks or something. So I went to me old employer, he said, 'Well, if I got to', he said, 'I will but', he said, 'these – so many people I had during the war that come back', he said, 'I've taken someone with some more', he said, 'if I take you on got to get rid of another one'. So I didn't know what to do, I said, 'Well, I come back anyway' so I don't know who got sacked but I got back on and after six weeks he gave me the sack and all. You couldn't get a job for love or money. It was terrible at that time<sup>13</sup>. They had me down at the Labour Exchange as a labourer so the only they would give me was a labourer. I tried – tried to get in the police force, I tried it in the Met Police, the Kent Police, the Fire Brigade – Kent Fire Brigade. I tried everything to get a job, even went down to – to New Cross tried to get on the buses and the thing was the Fire Brigade said they got so many people out f work that the – the – the – this was full up so couldn't – couldn't go back in there. They had no idea – the Fire Brigade – the police force took my name and I after a while they sent for me. They wanted thirty policemen. They sent for three hundred people to get these thirty policemen and they broke us up in two lots of a hundred and fifty. You had to have all the doctors around you, you know, eye tests and teeth and all – . Anyway, they had to go through all the doctor's tests so they would turn them down quarter inch too short, one – not enough teeth or colour blind. Turned them down right, left and centre but I got through all the doctors and they said – the last doctor said, 'Come on downstairs for your intelligence test'. So the police wouldn't tell me where we had to go, alright, we had the first one outside the office where all the other first hundred and fifty, it was only about twenty of them there. All the others had got turned down by the doctors. Anyway, it was about twenty of them there and about thirty lot came from outside. When the first lot went out, I was towards the other side and they let us in to this room for an intelligence test and first thing he done was come in with loads of papers. The man called out my name so I went up to get me papers. He said, 'You failed the medical', I said, 'No, I didn't', he said, 'You failed the medical'. I said, 'What on?', he said, 'We're not allowed to talk about it', he said,

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<sup>13</sup> 65 min

'go to room so and so get your fare money and go home'. Wouldn't argue about it, he just said I failed the medical.

Interviewer: That's strange.

Arthur: Yeah. And another time I went to – I had put me name down for the Railway Police and I went there for an interview. Not an interview – a test and that and he give us about four – four words and thing is one of them was buoy. Buoy as in the river, you know, when you try to – how do you spell it? Do you know?

Interviewer: As a buoy that you throw out?

Arthur: No – no buoy on the river. That you tie a ship to, don't know buoy?

Interviewer: I would spell it as B-O-Y. Is that not how you spell it?

Arthur: Well, I – I didn't know. I knew it was B-O-U-Y or B-U-O-Y, whatever I've done I spelt it the wrong way round. I got failed for that. I got the other words right. So there I was still out of work, still trying to get work on the dole and – on the dole they treat you like a bit of dirt when I went in there. So I tried everything, oh, I went for – I went to New Cross try to get on the buses. I said, I wanted come on as a driver, they said, no, at that time you couldn't be a driver unless you'd been a conductor first. So I said I'd start as a conductor. 'No', they says, 'you're too tall. You got to be under six foot'. I was over six foot so another job that I didn't get. It was stupid.

Interviewer: So how did you feel that cos you were just a teenager when the war started and then a young man when it ended. How did you feel<sup>14</sup> – did the war change you?

Arthur: Yes. It certainly did. I just couldn't get on. It seems, I mean, before in the navy [unclear] sort of things, you could do your job and that was it but the worst thing was you couldn't get a bloody job. No matter what – as a labourer that's all you was according to them. He's a labourer. So anyway, I tried everything I even – even got a £10 ticket to go back to Australia and I met my wife and I said, 'If I go back to Australia and get it organised then send for you would you come?'. 'No', she said, 'I wouldn't'. So I packed up Australia and then I tried everything else, I – I thought I try the merchant navy so went to the merchant navy. They said, 'You – you have to do two weeks course on life boat drill and on your own expense and if you pass that you get in the merchant navy'. So I – I did this two weeks course and passed then I went to the office and said, 'What do I do know', he said, 'Well, it's two ships signing on, one's a local one and one's going to Africa'. I said, 'Well, can't I wait for a boat to Australia?', he said, 'Boats to Australia are full up', he said, 'You want to put your name down you can do but might be ten years before you get on there cos once a boat got this Australian run they wouldn't do anything else. So, anyway, he said another boat – another boat going to Africa so I decided to do that. I signed on for that and I was on there for nine months, I suppose. When I came

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<sup>14</sup> 70 min

back I asked if she would marry me and she said, 'Not if you're sailing in the merchant navy'. So that's something else I gave up for her. So I was still doing odd jobs, odd bit of painting, odd bit of this and that. I tried to get a job, I tried. Went on a baker's round they were still in bed, I went the milk round, employee in the paper factory and also I was doing part time work for people, local people I knew and so I was making the money.

Unknown: 'scuse me. Sorry, is Nana allowed to have milk?

[Recorder pause]

Arthur: So it was a lousy time coming home.

Interviewer: So how did – if you could summarise your war – the war how you experienced it, how would you – how would you summarise it in a few words?

Arthur: Summarise it. Frightened but enjoyable [laughs]. It's a few words innit?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Arthur: A lot of the time you was frightened watching all happening. You're at sea, you're frightened of getting a torpedo, other times you're frightened of getting a bomb. It was always a bit of fear there all the time but you – you did what you could to enjoy it.

Interviewer: Ok. I don't have any more questions, is there something that you want to add that you feel like you didn't have the chance to say?

Arthur: Well, do you ever read.

Interviewer: Shall we have a look at the photographs. I'll turn this little thing off.

**End of Interview.**