



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Conlon, Lawrence 'Laurie' (Ser 218 / IWM 026748R04)

Object description

British seaman served aboard HMS Forester and HMS Belfast in GB coastal waters, 1939; served aboard HMS Wrestler in Mediterranean, 1940-1941; served aboard HMS Indomitable in Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Mediterranean, 1941-1943; served aboard HMS Anguilla in Atlantic and Arctic, 1943-1945

Content description

REEL 1 Background in Leeds and Featherstone, 1920-1938: family; education; conditions in Featherstone during and after General Strike, 1926; employment in colliery; handling pit ponies. Enlistment and training with Royal Navy at HMS Victory, Portsmouth, 1938: decision to enlist in Royal Navy; medical in Manchester; arrival at HMS Victory; terms and conditions; accommodation in Anson Block; technique to getting into hammocks; issue of uniform including tiddying suits; messing arrangements; seamanship training; recruit who had a problem with drill; opinion of training; swimming instruction; lectures. REEL 2 Continues: formation of class band; instruction in knots; training in whaler; excitement at draft chits. Recollections of period as able seaman aboard HMS Forester in GB coastal waters, 1939: collision with destroyer; courtesy visit to Bordeaux; messing arrangements; initial seasickness; duties including cleaning ship; washing facilities; role of cook of the mess; opinion of NAAFI personnel; character of rum ration; opinion of officers; watch system; action station; recreational activities; relations with mess mates; facilities for washing and drying clothes and hammock. REEL 3 Continues: duties looking after Greek naval observer; exercises. Recollections of operations as able seaman aboard HMS Belfast in GB coastal waters and North Sea, 1939: commissioning ship; initial impressions of ship; reaction to being drafted to ship; action stations as loader with gun crew; stopping German liner Cap Norte; sight of HMS Royal Oak exploding; hitting magnetic mine in Firth of Forth; effects of damage; story of how ship got its mascot; reasons why ship was a happy ship; role of ship as German commerce raider during exercise in Pentland Firth and Captain Scott's skill; memories of outbreak of Second World War, 3/9/1939. REEL 4 Continues: change in routine from peacetime to wartime; attitude to serving aboard HMS Belfast. Recollections of operations as leading seaman aboard HMS Wrestler in Mediterranean, 1940-1941: problems with cockroaches; joining ship and routine; patrol

line; in action against Vichy French fleet at Mers El Kebir, 7/1940; action station on depth charges, torpedo tubes and searchlight; use of depth charges; opening fire on Italian aircraft with machine gun in Gibraltar; ashore in Gibraltar; encounter with Vichy French destroyers off Gibraltar, 7/1940; opinion of French gunnery; sinking of Italian submarine after recovery of confidential books; clothing worn at sea. REEL 5 Continues: Aspects of period as leading seaman aboard HMS Atherstone in GB coastal waters, 1941: escorting floating crane to Wales; evacuation from ship with appendicitis and subsequent hospitalisation in Newton Abbott; relations with civilians during wartime; role of ship; threat from German surface vessels. Periods in barracks in Portsmouth, 1940-1945: conditions in barracks; joining ship during air raid; use of air raid shelters. Recollections of operations as leading seaman aboard HMS Indomitable in Caribbean, Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, 1941-1943: initial impressions of service on aircraft carrier; role as quartermaster and steering ship; steering points in ship; action station in intermediate steering position in engine room; steering on bridge; role as leading hand of mess; messing arrangements; washing facilities; recreational activities; crossing the line ceremony; use of locker spaces; use of hammock. REEL 6 Continues: technique used to free the carrier from grounding; duties as quartermaster at anchor and on jetty; role of carrier during Madagascar landings including narrow miss by Japanese torpedo; memories of Operation Pedestal in Mediterranean, 1942 including casualties; reaction to being below decks during action; burial of casualties; role of Royal Marines; return to GB. Recollections of operations as leading seaman aboard HMS Anguilla in Atlantic and Arctic, 1943- 1945: standing by ship in US; altering ship to British specifications; voyage from GB to US aboard Queen Mary; conditions in US and relations with Americans in Boston; role handling Hedgehog anti-submarine device. REEL 7 Continues: chain of command in firing Hedgehog; 'sweeping' in Atlantic; sight of HMS Goodhall torpedoed off Kola Inlet and subsequent attack on U-286; clothing worn; sight of surrendered German U-boats in Londonderry. Demobilisation, 10/1945. Attitude to having served in Royal Navy during Second World War.

**Courtesy IWM March 2014
Copyright Reserved IWM**