



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

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

Hatfield, John Prosper (Ser225 / IWM 010180R01-13)

British able seaman served aboard HMS Carnation during operations in Atlantic, 1941 - 1942; served as officer aboard MTB 621 with 31st MTB FLOTILLA, 1943; served as staff officer running 'Y' intelligence radio station attached to Naval Operations Staff, Gibraltar, 1944-1945, served as British liaison officer attached to 23rd (Free French) Flotilla during operations in English Channel, 1945; seconded as Temporary Assistant Principal, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1946-1947; seconded to civil service in Palestine, 1947-1948

Content description

REEL 1 Recollections of background as son of British banker in Madrid, Spain, 1922-1936: accommodation; relationship with Spanish and British civilians; languages spoken; nature of education at French school, 1928-1936; awareness of political events in Spain; influence of British fiction on attitudes; possible career; nature of family's political views and response to political events in Spain; decision to continue education in GB; review of political situation in Spain. REEL 2 Continues: review of political situation in Spain and origins of Spanish Civil War, 1930-1936; rumours, suppression of mutiny in Madrid Barracks, 1936; reactions to burning of churches. Recollections of evacuation to GB, ca 9/1936; train journey with refugees to Valencia; evacuation aboard HMS Devonshire to Marseilles; reception. Period at Beckenham and Brighton, 1936-1941: education at Xaverian College, Brighton; background to development of economic and political views including influence of Spanish Civil War. REEL 3 Continues: taking French degree as external student of London University studying at Brighton Technical College, 1939-1941; father's situation on return from Spain; reactions to outbreak of war, 3/9/1939. Recruitment into Royal Navy at Recruitment Office, Brighton, 8/1941: procedure; parents' reaction. Recollections of conditions of service, lifestyle and daily routine at HMS Collingwood Shore Station, Fareham, , ca 8/1941-9/1941: accommodation; food rations; reaction to naval discipline and lifestyle; relationship with recruits, and petty officers; interview and selection and potential officer candidate; recreations; PT; drill seamanship. Period at Portsmouth Barracks, ca 9/1941-11/1941; conditions of service. REEL 4 Continues: anti-invasion

exercise; infantry training; gas masks; passing examination to qualify as able seaman. Period aboard HMS Carnation operating in Atlantic and based at Liverpool and Gibraltar, ca 11/1941-5/1942: preference for small ships; kitbag and uniform carried on joining ship; reception; nature of forward mess; effects of rough weather; canteen messing system and meals cooked; watch system; scrubbing decks; lookout and steering duties; action stations as range setter on forward 4" gun; familiarity with depth charges. REEL 5 Continues: waking officers for watch duty; extra training as potential officer candidate; relationship with lower deck; opinion of officers and bosun; recreations; washing; tobacco ration and making 'plug'; rum ration; reception on arrival; seasickness; role of corvettes; personal morale; question of torpedo alarms; visits ashore and buying gifts at Gibraltar. REEL 6 Continues: visits ashore and buying gifts at Gibraltar; relationship with Gibraltar civilians; patrolling Moroccan coast; attitude to war; effects of rough weather; impressions of Liverpool; appearance as potential officer candidate in front of Admiralty Board at Morden House, Hove. Recollections of training as officer cadet at HMS King Alfred Shore Station at Hove and Lancing, ca 5/1942-6/1942: preparatory training; lectures; patrols and sentry duty; commission as temporary acting sub-lieutenant; training uniform; background to selection of motor torpedo boats. Recollections of initial period and training with MTB 621 attached to HMS Bee at Weymouth, 9/1943-4/1943: joining newly built MTB at St Helens on Clyde; armaments; crew complement; relationship with captain. REEL 7 Continues: relationship with lower deck; role of coxswain; roles as divisional officer; duties as navigational officer and difficulties encountered; disagreements over procedure with captain over duties logging correspondence and signals; memories of officers; role of cook and officers' servant; Christmas celebrations, 25/12/1943; seagoing qualities of MTB during voyage to Weymouth; question of navigational ability; MTB tactics in attacking convoys; method of aiming and firing torpedoes; techniques of depth charging surface ships; weapons for use in boarding ships; night training. REEL 8 Continues: move to join 31st MTB Flotilla based at Great Yarmouth, ca 2/1943; navigation dispute with captain and posting for further training at HMS Bee, Weymouth; requesting posting to Naval Intelligence. Recollections of period as assistant staff officer role running 'Y' intelligence radio station attached to Naval Operations Staff, Gibraltar, 4/1944-6/1944: role picking up German U Boat wireless signals; use of direction finding stations to fix U Boat locations and passing fixes to naval operations room; logging and passing on signals to Blechley Park for deciphering; unofficial knowledge of Ultra; role acting as divisional officer to female and male wireless operators; role as officer in charge of situation plot including criteria in assessing signals and accuracy fixes of U Boat; passing intelligence of U boat locations to units and their success in sinking U Boat in Straits of Gibraltar; role of differing ranks in running and interpreting situation plot; collaboration with RAF and the use of probability statisticians to locate U Boats; passing intelligence to convoys; question of German awareness of signals interception; U Boats signals prefix; background to posting; relationship with staff and WRENS. REEL 9 Continues: recreations; desire for sea posting; visit to Spain and reactions to situation; interrogation of captured Italian midget submarine

crewman; naval language and slang; naval drill and discipline; review of development in submarine war and winding down of 'Y' Intelligence, 1944. Recollections of period as British liaison officer attached to 23rd (Free French) Flotilla based at Kingsmere, Newhaven, La Belle Rocque and Brest, 6/1944-9/1945: reception; liaison duties; developing sympathy for French perspective and accompanying their patrols; recollections of Captain Lehle; nature of patrols and operations; French reaction to bombardment of Brest; reception from French civilians at La Belle Epoque; role on patrol; role of British telegraphists; question of use of Benzedrine and lifebelts; effects of leave in France on morale of French personnel; clearing war debris from Brest; role in securing supplies for Free French from Admiralty; reports on Free French; opinion of Free French officers; question of their efficiency; changing role of flotilla following capture of Brest. REEL 11 Continues: question of relationship between elements of Free French and Vichy French Navy at Brest; conditions of service at Brest; visits to Paris; coastal operations and liaison with French Resistance; liberation of Croix and treatment of German POWs; Free French attitude to Germans; nominal role as British liaison officer to French Commander in Chief, Brest; relationship with French civilians; blackmarket activities; resistance reprisals on collaborators; Breton customs; sailing up Seine to attend French armed forces joint parade in Paris; post-war situation of Free French officers. REEL 12 Continues: attending post-war reunions of Free French; return to GB, 9/1945. Period aboard HMS Maidstone at Portsmouth, 1945-1946. Period seconded as Temporary Assistant Principal, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1946-1947: role releasing wartime requisitioned land to civilian owners; interest in encouraging small holdings; role in redefining power of landlords and tenants in drafting Agricultural Act, 1947; development of socialist beliefs and support for election of Labour Government. Recollections of secondment to civil service in Jerusalem, Palestine, ca 4/1947-4/1948: journey out; political situation and question of relationship with Jewish and Arab civilians; question of illegal Jewish emigration; background to failure of United Nations efforts to intercede between Jewish and Arab factions; visits to religious sites; relationship with Jewish and Arab civilians; opinion of Palestine Police; convoy from Jerusalem to Haifa, 4/1948. Reactions to wartime service. REEL 13 Reactions to wartime service.

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