

Ivor Holloway 22 May 2013

Interview

with

IVOR HOLLOWAY

and

Staff and students of Lady Hawkins' School, Kington

(Nic Dinsdale, Malachy Grogan, Henry Watson, Calum Haydon, Joseph Hoyle)

On

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[Interview Commenced at 3.04]

Q. Can you tell us something about your early memories of Kington and going to Lady Hawkins School?

A. I was born in Duke Street and my father was a tailor. I always wanted to go to Lady Hawkins and our neighbours, their son, they paid for him to go and at that time it was 3 guineas a term. They were most disappointed when they saw me walk out with my cap on!

Q. And why was that?

A. Well, social, they lived above us, we were their tenants. We were not of the same social level.

Q. Did you enjoy being raised in Kington, do you have fond memories of being raised in Kington?

A. Yes! Well I was very friendly with the school sports master, Tommy Pugh, who was known as an international footballer for Wales, and he taught me to play chess.

Q. Was sport your favourite subject? Did you have other favourite subjects?

A. There was soccer and Cricket and Tennis.

Q. You were at Lady Hawkins Grammar School, from 1928 through to the 1930s, you must remember the building of the school pavilion?

A. Yes that's right. I took part in a play, put on at Hergest Croft and the proceeds from that were used to build the pavilion and it cost £300 at the time.

Q. And it's still being used, it's a splendid pavilion.

A. Yes, very well built, it was designed and built by an architect from Birmingham, a man named Peter Hing.

Q. And it would have been 1932 the play, I guess, it was the schools 3rd centenary, a big celebration. Can you remember were you in the play?

A. Yes but what I remember most was there was a Lady, who took a senior part and she used to wear cotton tights and we used to walk up behind her admiring her legs, all the way up through the town. What I remember most was we used to go round the district presenting different short excerpts from Shakespeare. On one occasion I was in Eardisley, I came out of the village hall and somebody threw a bucket of water over me, I thought 'Well, that's what they think of my acting'.

Q. At school we have many photos of that play. And people dressed up, I should bring it, it may well be that you recognise yourself your friends and your teachers.

Q. You had a good time at Lady Hawkins you finished at Lady Hawkins, Can you tell us a bit about what you then went on and did after leaving school?

A. I went to Pitman's College in London, my brother decided I needed to finish my education and he said you go to Pitmans College and I'll pay. He paid my fees and I went and learned shorthand and typewriting, which I can still do. I find shorthand very useful because when I used to attend meeting I could take my own notes.

Q. Did you then find a job?

A. Yes I found a job in baker street London, It was a time when jobs were protected, Employers could not sack you on a whim. I was working for a firm of solicitors in Baker Street, and this solicitor told me off for doing something once and I told him it's no good you telling me off, you can't sack me my job's protected. And he didn't like that at all, so I got all the dirty work to do.

Q. What sort of dirty work?

A. Copy typing and that sort of thing. I could write shorthand up to 150 words a minute and I could type at 60 words a minute.

Q. So you were trained up, you worked in the solicitors and then you move towards the outbreak of the war. Can you remember the outbreak of the war, where you were?

A. Yes I was up in Hillfields. The outbreak of war was announced so I did a job trot down because I knew I would have to report to the admiralty. So I went to down to St. Margaret's and reported and got straight into the Navy. I went in as a coder and cipherer.

Q. Why the Navy?

A. Well I thought if I'm going to die, I'll die in one piece.

Q. And you had skills that would help you in coding and ciphering?

A. That's right, mathematics particularly because coding and ciphering, you used to sit and you'd get a sheet of paper like that, just covered with figures and you'd have to transfer those from books to get the message.

Q. And training?

A. I trained in Skegness, it was purely physical training.

Carol. HMS Royal Arthur, were you at?

A. That's right

Carol. I was there too!

Q. What were you doing in Skegness?

Carol. I was a Naval VAD and we were looking after the patients.

Q. We'll talk to Carol a bit later and find out about Carol in Skegness.

You then trained up in ciphers and codes, did it take a long time, many months of training? Were you on land or on ships?

A. Both, I started my training at Skegness and then was transferred to Portsmouth because that side of the forces, all codes and ciphers were centred on Portsmouth.

[12.14]

Q. The codes that you got to use were you aware that these were being broken through ULTRA and top secret..?

A. No not aware of it. No, but it was suspected. What I remember most about that was the ship I was on, a destroyer called the Echo. I would decode a message and this was the 24th May 1941, I decoded this message after I had been out on the upper deck and when I decoded it, it was just a short message 'HMS Hood sunk' and I said 'ridiculous I've just seen it out there.' I had seen the Hood a few minutes before she was sunk.

Q. So you were serving with HMS Echo in the North Sea?

A. That's right, home fleet, based in Scapa Flow and we used to make occasional trips across to Norway to attack merchant shipping on the coast there.

Q. So HMS Echo engaged enemy ships?

A. Yes and on one occasion I was on North Atlantic patrol we went into Iceland and when I was in Iceland, I went ashore and I met an RAF man and my brother was in the RAF so I said 'any chance of going out to your squadron' and he said 'yes there's a lorry over there and they'll take you out' so I went out in this lorry and met my brother, we had a celebration which meant in Iceland you couldn't get any real meat it was pony steak. So we had pony steak for lunch.

Q. Did you like it?

A. No it wasn't very pleasant

Q. That's a wonderful coincidence seeing your brother. He presumably was flying to escort the convoys going across the Atlantic?

A. Yes, he was a tailor and his main job was to prepare RAF suits for flyers and put in secret pockets and sew in maps and things like that so that if they were shot down they had something to help them on their escape.

Q. He didn't stay in Iceland for the war when the Americans arrived did he leave or did he stay in Iceland?

A. No he came back to this country

Q. Amazing story, Can we go back to the Bismarck? That was, of course, a terrible event, HMS Hood. Can you tell us a bit more about what you thought when you saw the Hood and then when you heard the terrible news, and did you go and see the Bismark?

A. We used to go Breakfasting with the Hood and we would tow the target and we could see the shells from the Hood, coming through and we thought they were going to hit us and they were a few yards short and onto the wooden target. But you could see these huge shells coming through the air about the size of a post-box.

Q. Did it ever worry you seeing these shells coming so close?

A. yes! We thought gosh we're going to run into it. Fortunately we never did.

Q. And the 24th May 1941 was when the hood was sunk, so can you tell us again, you saw the Hood. Describe what you felt?

A. Yes, I'd been out on the deck, getting some fresh air and seen the hood. Talking to a friend of mine and we could see the Hood in the distance and we were up and down, being on the old destroyer, up and down all over the place. And I said to my friend 'wouldn't it be nice to be on board her' she was sailing along like a flat hound. Shortly afterwards she was gone. That was an awful shock and with only 14 survivors.

Q. And the pride of the fleet.

A. That's right

[18.01]

Q. After that date you stayed with HMS Echo until 1942, were you concentrating in the North Sea around Norway and that area?

A. Yes and the south Atlantic running convoys from West Africa to this country and in the Mediterranean. Which I've got these various stars, there's the general service, The Atlantic star, The Africa star, The Burma star, The Italian star, The victory star, and the final empire medal and the last one I had an award from Russia because I was engaged in convoys to Murmansk, so they sent me the red star.

Q. Goodness me. There's hardly a war medal you haven't been awarded there. Incredible.

HMS Echo can you tell us something about her; the type of ship she was? What you thought of her? What you thought of life on HMS Echo?

A. She was a destroyer, quite a small one, 1400 tonnes. Life on board was very friendly but it was social and you were in a mess and you had to look after yourselves, buy your food get it cooked in the gully and bring it back from the gully down to the mess. I remember on one occasion I was carrying a roast joint and I got to the gangway and I caught my foot on the top rung and slipped and dropped the roast and it hit the quarter deck and shot like a bullet because of the grease. We scooped it up and had a good meal, you couldn't afford to waste food like that.

[20.38]

Q. That sounded wonderful, so food was good, you've got a story about a Ham Sandwich in here?

A. A ham sandwich yes, I was sent to Plymouth to join the destroyer Echo but when I got there I found that she'd left and I was told she'd gone to Glasgow. So they put me on the

train at Plymouth to go to Glasgow. And there was a young chap being seen off by his mother and she gave him a brown paper parcel, and when we'd left the station I noticed he'd left this parcel on his seat and I picked it up with the intention of returning it to him en route. But we left Plymouth and got on a train to Exeter and London and, a little bit hungry I said to my friend, 'I wonder what's in the parcel' so I opened it up and it was ham sandwiches, saved our lives! The chap that left it didn't get any.

Q. A welcome find. It seems like you served at HMS Echo just about everywhere the Royal Navy did. You served on the Atlantic- Russian convoys, supporting the Russian convoys, they were quite notorious. Could you tell us some of your memories of sailing in the conditions?

A. Yes, the conditions were very bad that was the main thing. The main enemy was the sea; it was so rough and cold. At times we were issued with small hammers to chip the ice off, because the ship was getting top heavy and difficult to steer.

Q. How did you cope if you went on deck? How were you dressed? How did you find the conditions?

A. Well, we were well wrapped up, we had good, storm proof clothing, but conditions were bad as ice all formed inside the ship, wherever you went there was ice dripping down the sides.

Q. There were heavy losses also in the convoys; did you see ships sunk? Were you engaged with U-boats?

A. Yes, many times. We damaged one U-boat and followed it, it tried to get away by going into the Mediterranean, we followed it until it beached itself on the Moroccan shore. We got close up and bombarded it while it was there beached, made sure it never sailed again.

Q. That must have been a good thing to see.

A. It was very satisfying

Q. HMS Echo, she was equipped with the technology of her time?

A. Yes, we had radar which was new, I learnt radar when I went to Battersea polytechnic. On the destroyer there was a Perspex dome on the upper deck which shielded the aerials from the weather and we were the only ship in the convoy to have that.

Q. Radar therefore was vital in detecting surface U-boats?

A. Yes it was yes, it was so accurate it could detect a submarine periscope at around a mile distance.

Q. And armaments?

A. Armaments the destroyer we had 3 14inch guns which were comparatively small.

Q. Depth charges?

A. Depth charges, plenty of those.

Q. And they were used frequently?

A. Oh yes.

Q. How about losses in the convoys themselves, you must have seen merchant ships?

A. I've seen many merchant ships go down, yes.

Q. Can you recall any of those instances, how you felt? What you saw?

A. We were on course between Iceland and Greenland in the Denmark Strait and ships used to come from Russia across the north of Iceland, down through the Denmark Strait into the Atlantic. Of course they were chased there and sometimes overtaken and sunk. The Bismarck was trapped there and that was a huge ship.

Q. You encountered and sunk U-boats. Did you ever encounter any German battleships?

A. We saw the Lützow.

Q. And you engaged

A. yes

Q. Of course they were pocket battleships, you must have been dwarfed even at a considerable distance? But their armament and guns were massive.

A. Yes we were, and their shells would explode nearby and water would cascade all over the deck.

Q. So at those times when you were engaging you were in pursuit, can you remember whereabouts you engaged?

A. Off the North Cape, which is north of Norway. We went up there because they were running ships across, up the Norwegian coast across the north of Sweden across an inland lake and pick up supplies from Sweden. So we went in there to attack them.

Q. Did you have sister ships you regularly sailed with?

A. Yes, the Eclipse and the Elmfield. All what we call the E-boats.

Q. They were a particular class the e-boats?

A. Yes they were fairly heavy destroyers

Q. We used to go on these escort convoys from Liverpool down to the Mediterranean, and through the Mediterranean to supply Malta.

Q. Now Malta.

A. Malta was very heavily sieged

Q. The most heavily bombed place in the world, during the 2nd world war. A heavy price was paid both in the air and at sea by British forces, Can you remember being attacked from the air?

A. Many times. I remember one time we were attacked from the air, and this plane came in so close, that one of the crew on deck reported enemy aircraft. But it wasn't enemy aircraft it was friendly. But in those days friendly aircraft should not have approached the ship from the bow. So the orders were to shoot it down. We shot one American corp. down and the pilot, naturally was indignant when we picked him up and the captain said 'you shut your bloody mouth or we'll put you back where we got you from'

Q. He learnt his lesson and lived. On these convoys you saw Luftwaffe, Were you ever dive bombed?

A. Often, terrible experience especially if you get a screaming bomb coming down at you.

Q. What was your natural reaction when that happened?

A. Get down between decks, but that was a silly thing to do. Because when we were in dock in Glasgow, we always left a sentry on the gangplank. This chap came in one day and brought his rifle in. And somebody picked up his rifle and pointed it all round and said hands up everybody, and he pulled the trigger and bang the rifle went off and the bullet went straight through the ships side. And there we were thinking we were safe lying down inside the ship and the rifle bullet went straight through the side.

Q. So it wouldn't have taken much to sink the ship?

A. It wouldn't no

Q. You left HMS Echo in 1942, Was that a sad occasion? Why did you leave? and Where did you go?

A. I was sent back to Portsmouth to retrain in codes and ciphers. And from there to Battersea, once I finished that course I was sent back to Portsmouth to re-join the fleet.

Q. So were you retrained because codes had changed and technology had been moved on?

A. Yes, yes, that's right

Q. So you were now being trained into breaking different German naval codes. Which you wouldn't have known but they would've been Enigma.

[34:03]

Q. So you've retrained you've got up to date skills in codes and ciphers. You then were transferred to HMS Raleigh for training drafted into the Eastern fleets. Can you tell us now where that took you, and what your experiences were?

A. It took me to the Mediterranean and East Africa and India. I finished up in the Colombo, which was quite a pleasant experience. The only thing I remember once of being in Colombo lots of the native people had the dirty habit of chewing Betel nuts and spitting. And I walked along Colombo one day a native came out of a shop and hit me right in the chest; it looked as though I'd been gored.

Q. What did you say to him?

A. I didn't, I just gave him a good kick up the arse!

Q. What ship were you serving with? Or were you based on land?

A. I was based on land but in those days I was serving with HMAS, Her Majesty's Australian Ship, Wollongong. Wollongong is a town just north of Sydney. But that was a small ship, with many good friends that they kept throughout the war and even after the war.

Q. Now being a "Pommy" on an Australian ship there must have been interesting first experiences there. Can you tell us about what happened being a Pommy?

A. First experience was I was on the mess deck sitting around and someone said, "Oh you're a Pommy, oh you're a Kipper."

[37:20]

A. I said "Why did you call me a Kipper? Have you got the funny impression that's what we eat for breakfast?" I said, "Personally I don't like them, because Kippers are yellow and they've got no guts. So is said come on we'll prove it." So I had a fight with him, often led to fights with Australians.

Q. The soon learnt to respect you, presumably?

A. Yes, when you won. I'll say that about them, they'd say "Good on you mate best man wins," they weren't one sided if you were able to give the other chap a hiding they would pat you on the back and say, "Come back next week."

Q. So you had a very happy time on HMS Wollongong, and of course you served in Ciphers and codes. Wollongong did she see active engagements at seas.

A. Yes, particularly with U-boats.

Q. And the technology had moved on, on Wollongong?

A. Yes, very much so.

Q. Can you talk about the new armoury that she was equipped with, the new technology?

A. That's right, we had 14 inch guns which was unusual, and radar of course in which I'd been trained.

Q. Was she equipped with hedgehog or any of the new....?

A. No. Depth charges only.

Q. But when you sailed were you sailing with other Australian ships?

A. That's right.

Q. Purely Australian ships?

A. Yes.

Q. And your Convoys of Australian ships took you normally on which routes?

A. Well we went to South Africa and from there to Mombassa and from Mombassa to the Prussian Gulf, and then to the Indian ocean the convoys around India.

[39:48]

Q. So the convoys were transporting vital commodities, including oil, from the Persian Gulf.

A. Yes.

Q. And again hugely dangerous for those merchant ships and oil tankers. Did you see oil tankers hit?

A. Several times, and they were an awful sight, see one hit and go up in flames.

Q. Can you talk about the fears, presumably you had tremendous respect for the merchant-men sailing with you.

A. Yes. Well they knew what the end was in their respect because if they were hit they were gone.

Q. Did you mix with merchant sailors, in ports?

A. Yes, socialise.

Q. So much comradeship between....

A. Yes, that was essential to be able to fight together.

Q. can you come up with any memories like in port of what the sailors would do drinking in bars having rum.

A. I remember we went into Iceland and they were very anti-British because the Germans had done so much technically in Iceland they provided hot water systems from the Geysers they were very welcome for that. And if any Icelandic girl was found speaking to a British force member she had her hair cut off. That was the way they punished them. There were lots to collaborate.

Q. So that was very awkward.

A. Yes and very unpleasant for the girls, they more or less branded them.

Q. Could you tell us when you were with the Australians and you went to see that film?

A. Oh yes. I was in East Africa, there was the Aircraft carrier the Victorious also at station, and she sent a signal to all ships inviting the crews on-board to watch a film. We went on this water boat and we were up on the flight deck all sitting in chairs facing the screen and suddenly the announcement came on. It was Bob Hope in "My Favourite Blonde", the Australian next to me he said, "I've already

seen this so I'm not sitting through this again", and I thought you've got to wait for the relief boat to take you back. So he walked to the end of the flight deck and dived into the Colombo harbour, and swam back to the ship, he was back on board by the time that we got back. It was very lucky for him because he could have dived into another ship or floating wreckage.

Q. He could've enjoyed the film!

[44:37]

A. I was with the Eastern fleet until January '42. I came back to this country did another period of training. The navy always insisted you were trained up to the limit. I went up to Portsmouth and retrained in codes and ciphers.

Q. And then you served then with the Australian Navy. Was it very unusual for Royal Navy personnel to serve with the Australian Navy?

A. No, it was most unusual.

Q. You could provide expertise that they didn't have.

A. That's right because they didn't have to be trained up like the Royal Navy did.

Q. Did you ever have any contact with the Royal Canadian Navy because they had a vital role as well, did you meet up with any Canadians and Canadian ships.

A. We met them in Iceland.

Q. I bet there were plenty of those. So you served them with HMAS Wollongong.

A. That's right an Australian destroyer.

Q. At the end of the war were you still serving?

A. Yes, 1946.

Q. Can you remember the end of the war with Europe and the end of the war with Japan, where were you?

[46:28]

A. I was in Colombo at the time with the end of the war with Japan. I was sent back to this country to be de-mobbed. I was sent back to Portsmouth regarded and issued with civil uniforms, pinstripes.

Q. How did you feel, there's no easy way to answer this, were you happy to leave the Navy?

A. Yes, nice to get home amongst friends. Free of the rigid discipline.

Q. When you left you immediately came home. Can you tell us what happened when you got home?

A. Yes, I used to work as a short hand typist for a firm of solicitors in Baker Street and I went back to reclaim my job and the solicitor in charge, he was very rude to me and I told him I didn't like his attitude and he said, "Well if you don't like you know what to do find another job," so I said, "Well you can sack me if you want, but I wouldn't advise it because you would have to recompense me pay me for loss of salary," but I got on with that impasse mainly because his wife used to provide cake for

the committee meetings which I used to attend and one day he said, " You owe my wife for the cakes," so I said, "if your wife can give me a receipt I'll pay her what she's paid up," he said, "You don't need a receipt from my wife," I said, "I need a receipt from whoever it is the auditors want to see proof that I've paid this money out." So we got over that.

Q. So you carried on working for the solicitors for many years?

A. Yes that's right, until 1946.

Q. So how did you end up back in Kington?

A. When the peace was announced I gave in my resignation to the solicitor's and came back to Kington back to my family.

Q. And they were all very pleased to see you; can you tell us then what happened in your life?

A. When I came back I had to find myself a job of some kind which I did with a local accountants because I was trained in accountancy I had been back nearly six-months in this country until final de-mob, and final de-mob meant I had to go to Portsmouth and go through a system of regarding and they gave you a demob suit. I always felt very smart in my navy blue de-mob pinstripe suit.

[51:01]

Q. When you were back in Kington you were introduced to your friend's sister can you tell us something about that?

A. I met my friend in Colombo and he said if ever you are in Feltham go see my parents he said give them my news. At the end of the war my brother lived in Egham and I said to him I wanted to see Telmsons the builders in Feltham so he took me round and I met the family they made me a close friend I met my wife there she worked for the West Middlesex hospital I met her and it inevitably happened I fell for her she fell for me we got married in September '46 and we lived happily ever after.

Q. Where did you set up home then?

A. In Feltham, my wife's father was a builder in charge of various houses and I had an arrangement with him I bought one. We set up home in Feltham. There's no better way of getting a house than meeting your wife's father who's a builder.

Q. Very useful, very useful. When did you come back to Kington?

A. 1946, January 1946.

[54:17]

A. Well I had a house in Pentford road in Felton which I thought was very appropriate so I bought that house and my wife and I set up home there.

Q. Can you tell us when you used to go to school in Kington, when you found the money on the road? You returned it to the police station didn't you?

A. I was going to school one morning with a couple of friends and as we walked up Church street I stepped on a brown paper packet and thought that doesn't feel flat so I bent down and put it in my

pocket. Then when I got to school I went to see the headmaster E.G Robinson. I said, "I found this in Church Street", so he opened it up and said, "Oh there's considerable sum of money in here take it back to the police station," so I went back to the police station and gave it to the police sergeant who said, "Well nobody's reported the loss yet, if no-one's reported the loss within a certain amount of time then it's yours." So when I went down a few days later I was the police sergeant and he said, "No-one's reported the loss of that money, if it's not claimed within 24 hours it's yours," the following day I saw the police sergeant again and he knew what had happened about the money and knew that I was entitled to it so he said, "That was a stroke of luck finding that on the street what made you hand it back?" I said, "I was always told that if I found something like that I should hand it back to the police," then the police sergeant said, "Well don't be such a bloody fool next time will you?"

Q. And how much was in the packet?

A. 60 odd pounds.

Q. Did the person who owned the money collect it in the end?

A. Yes

Q. Did you get a reward?

A. Yes 10%

Q. Not too bad.

A. The police said, the Person who claimed it made a big mistake because it didn't encourage me to give it back in the future."

Q. Have you ever found anything as good since?

A. No.

Q. Never mind.

A. Only my wife.

END