

Interview of Sydney Montague

Interviewer: All right, what's your full name?

Sydney Montague: Sydney, S-Y-D-N-E-Y, George Montague.

Interviewer: And you were born where.

Sydney Montague: I was born in Orford in The Crown and Castle Hotel with my (inaudible).

Interviewer: And what town was that in?

Sydney Montague: Orford.

Interviewer: For Americans, tell us where that is.

Sydney Montague: Oh, it is right near Ipswich. It's on the east coast of England above London, of course. It's in Suffolk, Suffolk is the county.

Interviewer: And you grew up there and--

Sydney Montague: I wasn't there very long. We moved to London and settled in Chelsea in London. I was brought up there most of the time.

Interviewer: When did you go into the Royal Navy?

Sydney Montague: The Germans, when they started the war, they dropped about two bombs on the houses right opposite us -- blew all the glass out and everything else. I thought, "These buggers have gone too far." I thought, "I'm going to join up and help out." A good friend of mine, John Yearman, he said, "I'll go with you and join up." So we both went up to the recruiting place. I was about 17 at the time, and we volunteered for the Navy because I said, "I

don't want to go in an aircraft, because if it gets shot down, it's a long way down. I don't want to go in the Army, but I don't know where the next meal's coming from." I thought, "Well, if I join the Navy, I've always got a meal coming." So I joined the Navy.

Interviewer: So you enlisted and what did they make you in the Navy?

Sydney Montague: They tried to make me a signalman, you know, because in those days, there wasn't any stuff like we got today. We got flags. I couldn't read the Morse Code -- I didn't know how many dots and dashes there were. So I said, "Put me in something else, like handle." So they said, "What about electro branch? It's a torpedoman." They didn't have electro branch, torpedomen were electricians as well. I said, "That sounds all right." I was very interested in these torpedoes. I became a torpedoman and electrician, so I did the electrical work and went to courses and that -- there weren't very many -- and became an electrician on the flotilla, or a ship I was on. I was helping, because there's more than myself, there was quite a few of us in case anything happened, you know, repair the electricals and get the lights on again and all that business.

Interviewer: What was the ship you were assigned to?

Sydney Montague: I was assigned to HMS Liverpool. It was a cruiser. I think there were 800 men on board, and there was quite a large one, but it was an older ship. Of course, it had a lot of refits, you know, six inch guns on there, and Oerlikons, and "pom-poms" for anti-aircraft use. We had depth chargers, and I know all about depth charges -- how far they went down before they went off, how to set them, and that sort of business. That came under the torpedo as well, you know the branch.

Interviewer: Tell us about your first, your first duties with the Liverpool and where it went.

Sydney Montague: Oh, well, we had to sort of get in with other people on board in order to make this all work. You know, we didn't just stand by the torpedoes until they were needed, so we had to do watches on board with binoculars looking out and see if we could see any subs or aircraft and all that, that was part of the watch. You did four hours on, and two hours off. You came on again and did that. It was dang cold up there, but we made it to Iceland. Then you refueled at Iceland and then up to Russia. It was a stepping-off point.

Interviewer: So, you were heading where?

Sydney Montague: To Iceland.

Interviewer: I mean, what was your mission?

Sydney Montague: To go to Murmansk to cover a convoy going to Russia with arms and munitions and all that sort of business.

Interviewer: How many ships would be in a convoy?

Sydney Montague: Maybe 30. I didn't count them all, but it was quite a lot -- going up to Russia, Murmansk.

Interviewer: What was the big danger in the convoy? What were you worried about?

Sydney Montague: Two things, submarines -- the German U-boats -- and aircraft flying from Norway and places like that were trying to strafe us and stop us going, and mainly to sink some of the convoy.

Interviewer: Did you see any U-boats or enemy aircraft?

Sydney Montague: We saw aircraft, and of course, we manned the guns, you know, the Oerlikon, which was a Swedish gun, and the “pom-poms”, which I think were originated in America. The Pom-poms -- they were dang good, though. We managed to shoot down a couple planes on the trip up there. We were going to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk.

Interviewer: And the convoy would do what when they got there?

Sydney Montague: Well, they'd come into Murmansk and unload -- unload all their things and try to get back.

Interviewer: Then what happened? Where did you go after that?

Sydney Montague: Well, we took two trips up there, and the second trip up there was less like the first. We lost some convoy, and you couldn't pick them up.

Interviewer: I'm sorry, what did you lose them to?

Sydney Montague: Airplanes. You know, they bombed them. On the second trip, it was really funny because on the second trip, we got there into Murmansk and a lighter came alongside us and we unloaded boxes and boxes of gold bars -- real gold that the Russians had given us for the stuff that we took up there and for the convoy work. Bars and bars of gold in boxes. All I wanted was one box, but they were guarded pretty well. We took this gold down to a British port, which was, if I can remember, Scapa Flow. Then another boat in Scapa Flow, because that was one of our bases, you see, and another boat came alongside and we loaded it up to the second boat and they said we're taking it to America for safe keeping in case anything happened. It was just like some of the art work that was taken to America.

Interviewer: You also had almost a run in with a German raider?

Sydney Montague: Almost, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Sydney Montague: Well, I think it was the Gneisenau -- a German boat was floating around on the way back. And when we got to Scapa Flow with this gold, before the lighter came alongside, we turned around to go up there again. The commander -- never the captain, always the commander -- he says, "This is the commander speaking. You know we've gone about, turned about, the German pocket battleship, the Gneisenau" -- I think it was -- "is on the loose up there and we've been told to shadow it until the KG-5 comes up to help us out." Of course, all the guys on board said, "I hope we never see it." Fifteen inch guns, we had six. If you know anything about naval warfare, they could have shot us and sunk us before we could even get in range of them. So we didn't find it. It went into a Norwegian fjord or something. We came back to Scapa Flow and we unloaded this gold and that's all we saw of the gold.

Interviewer: What happened next?

Sydney Montague: We got a weekend's leave, I think, out of it. You know, they gave us a weekend off and we made it down to London or wherever we were going and saw our folks. Then when we got back to the ship, we sailed again out of Rosyth -- we sailed out of a Scottish port, I think -- and we sailed down to escort another convoy to Malta. I forget the name of the Malta convoy, because it went by numbers and names.

Interviewer: Tell us where Malta is and why it's so important.

Sydney Montague: Well, Malta, if you look at Italy and the boot of Italy and Sicily, it's below Sicily. It's very important because it was a route for the Germans to reinforce their troops and

everything else at North Africa. We had spitfires and everything else on Malta, the Germans could not reinforce their troops because when we were in North Africa, we found tanks, perfectly good, no gasoline for them. Anyhow, Malta is a place we had to have. It was bombed more by the Germans and Italians during the war, more bombs dropped on Malta than on any other theatre, including the Battle of Britain. More bombs dropped on Malta than anywhere else in the whole war.

Interviewer: And you were heading straight for it?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, well, this big cave, you see, and the population went in the caves so they wouldn't get killed, but they were practically starving -- actually starving.

Interviewer: So, tell us about the convoy to Malta.

Sydney Montague: Well I think we had 47 ships in the convoy in all. I think there was 40-some-odd, 46 or 47. We were on the, as you might say, the right-hand side towards going in. These Italian planes would come over and sink some of the ships on the convoy. We tried to defend by shooting off our Oerlikons and everything else. Then an Italian plane came over and dropped a torpedo and it headed right for the boiler room -- right in there. They mess they made, but it didn't actually go off. This torpedo, if it had, it would have blown half the stern off the thing and as it was, it went in the boiler room, and we were only traveling four knots after that, which was no speed at all. The ship was listing over to the port side, and I guess the captain -- or whoever it was -- decided to flood the other side. So we flooded the other side to right the thing up. We were told to dump everything we could overboard. We had a Catalina flying boat that used to be on the quarter deck. We all got together and dumped that over the side. It was perfectly good, but we were trying to get all the weight we could off of the stern. Anyhow, eventually, a

destroyer came along side and we had a tow line out. We all got together and got this wire, well, you don't do it that way. The way you do it, you shoot over from a gun the first line, and it's just like a piece of rope -- very thin. Then that gets tied on to something else and something else and eventually, you get this wire and you pull it over. You pull it over (inaudible) and we were being towed back to Gibraltar because that's the only place we could be towed. We couldn't be towed to North Africa, because there was fighting going on there like crazy.

Interviewer: Were you worried about more Italian aircraft?

Sydney Montague: We were, but luckily, they were more concerned with sinking the convoy because that was the main objective than to sink us. So they didn't -- we shot off a lot of cartridges to these planes and they sort of turned around, but they were more concerned with the convoy than they were with us.

Interviewer: Let me get some more detail about this. When the Liverpool was struck--

Sydney Montague: Yeah.

Interviewer: --where were you?

Sydney Montague: I was in secondary control headquarters. That's on the, well, it was one deck below the top deck.

Interviewer: And what were you doing?

Sydney Montague: I was standing by in case anything happened, and of course, it did happen. Then I had to report up to the quarterdeck -- was there any damage I could see around where I was. There wasn't much damage where I was, but the deck was blown right up and you couldn't even get through, you know, underneath.

Interviewer: When the torpedo went off, what did you hear?

Sydney Montague: I heard a hell of a noise, and I thought we've had it. I thought, "This is it." But it actually didn't go off. It just went in there, and I guess half of it blew, but it didn't do much damage -- only in the boiler room, it devastated it.

Interviewer: You must have been moving pretty fast to do your duties.

Sydney Montague: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about what you were doing, all the things you were concerned with, personally.

Sydney Montague: I was concerned with any damage that had been done forward of the boiler room. I kept calling down and asked if there was anybody dead in there. Of course there was, practically all of them were dead in the boiler room. You know, they got flooded. Anyhow, they called for any volunteers to come up on deck. They're going to put up what they call a "crash net". It's a big rope, sort of network, and you put that over the side, and as the water is trying to get in the compartment, of course, this crash net is over it. It stops a lot of water getting in.

Interviewer: So, you went up and helped with that?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, everybody did. I called for them to get up on deck and try to get this crash net over the side.

Interviewer: Was this night or day?

Sydney Montague: This was during the day.

Interviewer: So you went back to Malta under tow?

Sydney Montague: No, we went to Gibraltar. We towed back and left the rest of the -- it wasn't that only our ship was protecting the convoy. There were other ships as well. I guess they lost quite a number, but they made some to Malta.

Interviewer: So, you get to Gibraltar what happens then?

Sydney Montague: Well, after I got to Gibraltar, I hitched a ride on a destroyer to England. I was at Westcliff, which was a Naval Base.

Interviewer: This is about 1940, isn't it -- right around there?

Sydney Montague: Yeah.

Interviewer: Before America is in the war.

Sydney Montague: Yeah, '40 or '41. Then I was told to attach myself to the 9th Flotilla of LCT's, which was, at the time, doing test runs and all that sort of thing, making certain that the boilers are working, you know, the test run and the engines were running right. They were in Appledore, England. I arrived and told them I was an electrician of the flotilla, and they said, "Well, you better go aboard and see if everything is all right." So, we did.

Interviewer: What is an LCT and tell us what its mission is.

Sydney Montague: An LCT is "Landing Craft Tanks," that's the official name for it. They've got a big hold and a little part where the engine is and a compartment for the men. I think there are only about eight men on the ship. Our main objective is to get tanks and stores and ammunition and all that to where it's needed.

Interviewer: So, you were assigned to this, and you are now the electrician and you were going to tell me what--

Sydney Montague: Yeah, well, we set sail for -- can I take a break for a minute?

Interviewer: Sure, take a minute, yes.

(Break)

Sydney Montague: I left out when we got ready for the invasion of Sicily.

Interviewer: You were on an LCT at that time?

Sydney Montague: I was on an LCT, the 9th Flotilla of LCT's.

Interviewer: So you were on the invasion of Sicily, then?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, that's when I got hurt.

Interviewer: Well, tell us about that. Tell us about the invasion and how you got ashore.

Sydney Montague: Well, the Army was already there, you know, our 8th Army. They invaded Sicily, the Americans went up one side and we went up the other. Patton I think went up one side, and we went up the other. We had to clean out all the little pockets of resistance. I was searching and made sure they didn't have any guns or anything, and one of these guys had a knife and stabbed me in the stomach.

Interviewer: Good grief. So let's back up here. You weren't on a landing craft, but you were assigned to clean out pillboxes?

Sydney Montague: Well, we went -- we sailed over from Malta, because Malta was pretty secure then. This was '43, and we sailed over to Sicily, which we landed at Augusta, and the Germans had poisoned the damn water there, and they booby trapped the cranes and all that sort of business. We knew they were going to do this. We know from previous experience that's what they do when they retreat. So, we tried to get as much water as we could -- fresh water -- to the Italians because they'd already given in. They were sort of switching to our side now. So, we stayed there for a little bit.

Interviewer: Tell us, again. These are Italian prisoners you were cleaning up? Tell us what the duties were and why you, as a sailor, were assigned to do this thing.

Sydney Montague: Well, it was part of our job, know, they tell you, "Clean out the pockets of resistance," and that's what we did.

Interviewer: So you had a rifle?

Sydney Montague: Oh, yeah, we had a rifle, bayonet and everything. Most of them came out, you know, no problems, but in this one case, these guys came out and, there were three of them, I think, in this one place. They thought they'd be heroes, I suppose. It didn't do them any good because the guy shot, all three of them. I certainly got one of them.

Interviewer: So how badly were you wounded?

Sydney Montague: Well, it didn't seem as if it was very much at first, you know. You have a knife in your stomach and it doesn't faze you too much at first. But then after, to see the blood coming out, you think, "Maybe there's something wrong there." Anyhow, they put me on a ship going to Gibraltar and they put me in the hospital for three or four days, I suppose.

Interviewer: This was serious then.

Sydney Montague: Hmm?

Interviewer: It was a serious wound then.

Sydney Montague: Well, they had to sew up the intestines, you see, because they were gone. So they had to knife me out.

Interviewer: All right, so after you recovered there, then where'd you go?

Sydney Montague: Then I went back to England, and this was '43 -- yes, '43. They told me I was going to be six months shore job. So I thought, "This is great to recuperate and everything else." So I was a Westcliff, which is (inaudible) the Thames, Westcliff is. Suddenly, a guy comes up to me, one of the officers and says, "You've got to report to area 5." I said, "Oh, great." It's like a holiday camp. So I said, "Whereabouts is it?" He said, "I don't know. They didn't say." But he says, "You've got to go find the area 5." He says, "Go to Shanklin on the Isle of Wight and then you can find, they'll tell you where area 5 is." I said, "Great." So I go to Shanklin and they said, "Never heard of it." So it was some other place. I went all around the Isle of Wight to a train that goes all the way around I had a pass on the train and everything and they said, the last place I was at, they said, "If I can't find area 5, I'm going to send you back to Westcliff." So I said "Great, hope you never find it." The next morning he comes up and he says, "I found area 5. It's at so and so place." I forget where it was now -- it's some little town on the Isle of White. He says, "There's a ship there, the Llangibby Castle." He says, "You've got a report on there." So I go there and I say, "I've got medical papers. I'm supposed to be six months shore job." He says, "I don't know anything about that, but you are an electrician, you've got to come on here. We've got your name and everything." So, I was on there.

Interviewer: Tell us what the Llangibby Castle is.

Sydney Montague: Well, it's an old steamer, I suppose, an old one, built a long time ago in about 1920's or something. But they had all these davits on there, the place they hang the landing craft. We were confined to our quarters, and didn't know what else was going on. Suddenly, the thing starts moving. So, I said, "Where the hell are we going?" He says, "We'll let you know later." They apparently got orders to set sail and then they opened the envelope and find where we're going. It's on the D-Day thing. Anyhow, that's how I got on D-Day.

Interviewer: Walk us through that. Again, the Llangibby Castle, what's its mission?

Sydney Montague: Well, its mission was to go and have all these LCA's on davits and we had troops on board and the idea was to put the troops on the scrambling nets going down and into these LCA's -- which is Landing Craft Assault -- and drive them in on the shores of France. That's what we did.

Interviewer: Your job was, on D Day?

Sydney Montague: Oh, well, first of all, I was supervising the lowering of the boats and they had still some boats there with men in, I don't know why, but they said, "Would you go over and drive them in?" I said, "Okay." I knew how to maneuver one of those because there's nothing to them, really -- forward, reverse, steering wheel and stop, and go faster, and whatever. So I drove these things in on D-Day with the troops.

Sydney Montague: Now, take your time and tell us about going in on D-Day and what you saw and where you were. You were, tell us about -- you were one of the first craft ashore.

Sydney Montague: See. we had one officer and all these men, 30 or 35, I never counted them. They all stand there with their rifles up. This officer turned around to me and said, "Are you sure we're on the right beach?" I said, "I don't really know. I know it's a beach." He said, "There's nobody here." I said, "Somebody's got to be first." So we lowered the door, you know, in the front and they got out. They were only up to their waist in water because I couldn't go any further because there were too many obstructions. Then the bullets started flying from the shore. They must have seen these things and got orders to shoot because they have to have orders.

Interviewer: So you were taking hits?

Sydney Montague: We were taking hits, but only the men on the shore. They weren't bothering us. Some of the bullets went quite close to us. So we backed out, and I had a good bowman. He stood up on the bows there and said, "Starboard, port, a little slower or faster." We drove it back on there and then they piled more troops on. I made about five trips in the war. When I got on there, I said, "Where's the rest of them?" He said, "We lost about half of them." I said, "Well, we were lucky then."

Interviewer: You mean half the boats?

Sydney Montague: Half the LCA's, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us how that happened.

Sydney Montague: Well, it happened when they strike these obstructions in the water. The water was rough. I mean, the waves were coming in. I guess some of them turned over, you know, when they hit these obstructions. That was the idea of the Germans.

Interviewer: So, you lost half of your flotilla of the landing craft?

Sydney Montague: Yeah. I was told about half of them got lost. You know, sunk or didn't come back. You know, the guys went out and couldn't get in, couldn't get them back again. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you got through?

Sydney Montague: I was lucky. I think I was just lucky.

Interviewer: Were there many sailors lost from your ship?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, there was about 20 or so, you know, that were driving these things in.

Interviewer: Did you know any of them well enough to--

Sydney Montague: Not really, didn't get to know them very much because they Shanghaied me in on the damn thing on the first place. I was only on there for a little while.

Interviewer: So what happened after D-Day?

Sydney Montague: Well, after D-Day, we got back to England because we didn't have any more troops to land. When I looked at the back of me, when we actually got to France, you know, we didn't drop hook or anything. We just laid there. All you could see was a mass of ships, and the Germans must have been scared out of their wits because they told some of the prisoners that we took back -- you know, the German prisoners -- they said, "Where'd you get all the ships from?" You know, a lot of them spoke very good English, or broken English, anyhow. So they said, "We were told the Luftwaffe sunk them." I told them the Luftwaffe didn't sink them. It was just a black mass of ships there. The destroyers and the bigger ships were shelling, you know, six inch guns and eight inch guns were going. It was a Mayday, I'll tell you.

Interviewer: So, what were your feelings on D-Day?

Sydney Montague: I thought, well, there can't be many Germans left after all this shelling because the guns were going like crazy. It's a wonder they didn't hit any of the people on the shores, but there were well inland. They tried to break up the supply lines, I guess.

Interviewer: So, were you frightened on D-Day?

Sydney Montague: Not really, because when you're that young, you don't realize what danger you're in. You really don't. You figure you are a cog in the wheel. You are only one person. You don't really realize what you're going through.

Interviewer: So, what happened after D-Day? Where did you go then?

Sydney Montague: Well, I went back to England, and let me think now. I think I went to Westcliff still, because that was the nearest base for the combined -- we were in combined operations, you see. This is combined operations.

Interviewer: And what does that mean?

Sydney Montague: You cooperate with the Army, Navy and Air Force. You are part of all three. You know, the Army can get you for doing so and so, and those are the Army, Navy, and Air Force -- your combined operations. Anyhow, we went on leave, a weekend, I think it was, and we came back and were in Westcliff for about, I don't know, three or four days. They told me I'd been assigned to another ship. I said, "Christ, you're going to kill me. You're going to kill me one way or another, keep sending me to these places." So, this was the Sussex. It was an older ship. Three funnels.

Interviewer: Was it a warship?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, it was a cruiser. It had, A and B turret in the forward section, and X and Y in the rear. Each turret had three, three guns -- six inch, I think they were. I'm not sure, I didn't get in the turrets. So, I think by this time, with all this going on, we had to go out to the Far East, to Singapore, so we went to Singapore. The Japanese had given in, so the Germans had given in. This was about 1945 -- I was in till '46. The war was all over in '45, I think. Anyhow, we went out to Singapore to relieve the Japanese prison camps there.

Interviewer: I'm sorry, these were British and Australian?

Sydney Montague: Australian and British troops that had surrendered in Singapore because they couldn't do much else, I guess. When I saw these poor buggers coming out of the camps, it was reminding me of the German camps, Auschwitz and all those places. They were skin and bones.

Interviewer: Were they glad to see you?

Sydney Montague: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Sydney Montague: Well, they were crying, most of them. It was a terrible sight. A lot of them died, they tell me, in the camps. Mountbatten, you know, he was on our ship. He was a commander. Mountbatten was on the Sussex when we out there and he took the surrender from the Japanese. I was on deck as one of the guards at the time and these Japanese came on board, not military, wearing top hats and fur coats. They were the ones who were going to surrender. They came and surrendered to Lord Louis Mountbatten. The papers were all written out, you know. They made their mark and Mountbatten made his. Anyhow, he said he's going to have -- there was a big jail there, a huge one where they kept British and Australian prisoners. That was

called Changi Jail and if you look up the records, you'll find the most notorious place. Anyhow, he said he's going to have them paraded right down Main Street, which was North Bridge Road and South Bridge Road -- one road, but they divided it and he had all these guards paraded down there and the Red Cross nurses who were there threw everything at them -- any garbage and all that, and shouting at them and everything, at these Japanese prisoners.

Interviewer: Had these nurses been held captive?

Sydney Montague: No, they were Red Cross, but they were not allowed to do this and not allowed to do that and all that business.

Interviewer: So, how long were you in Singapore?

Sydney Montague: I don't know exactly, but I guess I was in there about two or three weeks because I know I had a film -- a funny thing, I had a film. I had a camera and I had a little film in it that I had taken and I thought I would take it into a place that develops film. I took it to place and said, "I'll remember the place." I had a few drinks and it was Chinese writing outside all over the place, or Japanese writing. I never did find that film when I came back, couldn't remember where the hell it was. We left Singapore, and we were told we were going to Batavia, which was the capital of Sumatra at the time. It's named something else now, I think. We got to take over -- it was only 60 or 80 people on board -- we had to take over important buildings and banks and internment camps, you know, so they split up the crew amongst all these. Really strange things happened in Batavia. I went into a bank, because I thought, "Well, we'll see what's going on there." There was an officer shooting at the lock of the bank to get the money out. I said, "Well, you might as well give me some of that." It was what we called banana money, because there was always bananas on the money, pictures of bananas. Well, I took

about, I don't know, two or three million -- weren't worth a damn, nothing to back it up. It was just paper. Anyhow, they assigned me to a camp out there, about 10 miles outside of Batavia, and it's called Camp Adak -- A-D-A-K. I had 13 men with me, I was the leading seaman by this time, you know. We had to take over this camp from the Japanese. Of course, they gave us their swords and all that business. They figured it would be all right. Well, there was, I know there was 13 of us because there was 1,300 women and kids in the camp, according to the records. So we had to repatriate them to Batavia, which was 10 miles away on the trucks -- just stand them upright and a couple of them drive the trucks back to Batavia. Then they came on board our ship and other ships that were in there to take them to Singapore for safekeeping out of this war zone. Of course, if you read your history, at the time there was an uprising against the Dutch -- these are all Dutch, and I think the fellow's name was--

Interviewer: Sukarno?

Sydney Montague: Sukarno, Sukarno. So of course the natives there, they didn't want anything to do with us because they wanted to get and kill all the Dutch they could, and we were trying to get them out. They were all -- a lot of things happened in that camp. We let washer women come in to wash clothes because they said we're here to help the Dutch, washing their clothes and that. We didn't know at the time that they used to put a knife down their blouse. You couldn't see it or anything. Then, what they would do, they would kill all the women and kids they could and, even at nighttime.

Interviewer: These are Dutch women and children?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, they were Dutch women and children. They were the natives there. When we used to come in the morning and find so many dead, we figured that we better search

these women. So we started searching them, and the guys in the surrounding villages who wanted us out and wanted the Dutch out, they used to cover themselves with coconut oil because they'd kill as many as they could, but then when you chase them and try to get them, you couldn't hold on to them. They'd go over the wall because it was a walled camp. So, things were getting pretty bad. There were only 13 of us, you know? One day, while I was in there, this truck drove up outside the wall with a couple women in there -- Australians, they were. They said some atrocities have been caused by the officers. We had to keep so many officers in the camp because we didn't know where anything was -- the flower and the bread or anything.

Interviewer: Japanese officers?

Sydney Montague: Yeah, we had to keep some of them in there, probably about a dozen or more. They picked out two of them that had done atrocities to women in there. I won't tell you what they did. So they picked them out, and I said, "If you take them, I want a signature from them. I don't want to -- you know." They said, "Oh, we'll sign it." They had them dig the trenches and then they bayoneted them, put them in there, and covered them up. They said, "We've done our job, mates." Yeah, we just went. "Justice has been done," they said.

Interviewer: So, when did you finally get home to England?

Sydney Montague: Well, as I said, I was in until early 1946. I kept in touch with the ship and said, "When the hell are you going to relieve me?" They said, "Very shortly." They did, they spent an army of fellows down to take over the camp, and I said, "Good." I got in one of these trucks and drove back to the ship. I had somebody drive me back, and I was told to go to Chatham for demobilization, so I did. That was 1946 I got out.

Interviewer: I want to go back and cover a couple things--

Sydney Montague: Yeah.

Interviewer: --get more details from what you say. Tell us what it's like to be under air attack by the Luftwaffe when you're on a ship. Tell us what happens on a ship and what you were doing and what's going through your guts and your mind.

Sydney Montague: Well, you got to get to a gun to shoot these planes down. In one attack, they'd machine gun, and they practically cut one of our guys in half, you know, with machine guns. He was slumped over in an (inaudible). One of the guys says, "Go up there and work the Oerlikon." So, one of the men took the straps -- he was strapped in there with a strap -- took the straps off, let the guy fall on the ground -- he was dead anyhow -- and he worked the Oerlikon. He said, "I've worked one of these before," and I never had. So, I was pretty scared, you know. I realized that at any time, I may be gunned down. I was passing belts of ammunition up to them and stuff like that because that's all I could do.

Interviewer: Do alarms go off? Describe.

Sydney Montague: Well, alarms go off. There's an alarm that says, "There's a bomber overhead, there's a bomber overhead," you know, if there is. You can see them coming -- you are pretty scared.

Interviewer: Let's go back just a little further. Tell us about the blitz, what it was like.

Sydney Montague: In the London blitz?

Interviewer: Yes, tell us all about -- you've got to understand, there are some people that have never even heard of it, isn't that a shame.

Sydney Montague: I stood on Chelsea Bridge one day when they were bombing it. All you could see was fire, and I thought, "The whole damn country's ablaze!" I was really thinking that the whole country's ablaze because any way I looked, you could see fire. You know, from where they had bombed, incendiary bombs and all that. It was pretty scary. I was glad to get out of England. I was safer on the sea than I was in England.

Interviewer: And you lost your house?

Sydney Montague: Well, we just, all the front was down. My father was in World War I, and I guess he was pretty deaf. He was pretty deaf with the bombs. He was a captain in the First World War. I didn't know this till I researched him through the war office, and I got all the information I wanted. He came in one morning and said, "You boys had better be quiet. You're making too much noise." I said, "Look, Dad. The whole front of the bloody house is down." The windows, wall, frames were all out because they dropped these bombs. So he says, "Oh my God!"

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sydney Montague: I didn't want to go to some places in England because they were bombing them like crazy.

Interviewer: Yeah. Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: What was the English view of Americans?

Sydney Montague: Can I go to the--

Interviewer: Yes, let's just take a break. He needs to use the restroom.

Interviewer: Just a moment.

Unknown Person: We're rolling.

Interviewer: We missed a whole area here.

Sydney Montague: Yeah, we missed it. When we came back from -- can I see that?

Interviewer: Sure, of course, take a look at your notes if you want.

Sydney Montague: Well, I think it was, I think we left Gibraltar, before we picked up the convoy, we went to North Africa.

Interviewer: This is on the Liverpool?

Sydney Montague: No, on the 9th Flotilla, the LCTs. We went to North Africa to, I guess, the Americans were in the war then, and they came and captured -- there're two big ports there.

Interviewer: Oran?

Sydney Montague: No, in North Africa.

Interviewer: Algiers?

Elizabeth: Fuji?

Interviewer: Fuji?

Sydney Montague: We landed at (inaudible), it's a port there in Libya. We loaded up to supply parts, ammunition and that to the 8th Army, which was in Africa. Montgomery's boys were out there fighting the Germans -- Algiers. Oran -- the Americans took Oran, and they had a hard job like that because the cliffs go up like this and the Germans had guns on top of the cliffs. So

you'd sail in, you know, they had a real tough time. Algiers, we didn't have much of a job there in Algiers. Anyhow, we went on to Djeli to pick up and take ammunition and stores to the 8th Army, which the nearest port was Benghazi and Djeli, and that was in Libya. On our way in, I started telling them about the American destroyer. There was an American destroyer. We looked flat like this and there was a hump, and they thought we were a submarine. They came to ram us. When they got close enough, they found out it wasn't, and they turned off, but they knocked the door down in the front and of course the water came in. We didn't sink because we have double bottoms -- you know, two bottoms. They did apologize. They thought we were a submarine and they were going to ram us. Djeli was more or less our base for picking up stores and that and getting stuff.

We were billeted, or we put our hammocks down in a cork factory there. There was a cork factory where they made corks. I was with this friend of mine, Ted, and had a bucket and was doing my dobyin', which was washing, you know. They told us beforehand that the RAF was going to have a practice run over us, this cork factory, at 5:00. So, I'm doing my washing there out in the open, and there's a fire going underneath it. All of a sudden, planes come over, a couple of them. Well, they said 5:00, what are they coming over at 4:00 for? As they passed over, I looked up, there was a swastika on them. They were German planes. So we got in the cork factory and hit the deck real hard. It was all concrete floor, pulled my kit bag over me. They started machine gun a little bit, but there was nobody there to machine gun of course, and they didn't know anything else, so they took off. That was just a funny accident that happened

there, but nothing much happened there. We lost one of the LCT's. Apparently a storm came up when they were in Buji and broke loose the ties that were tying the thing up. It was number 404, LCT 404. It was in our flotilla, and I didn't know what happened to it until long time afterwards. Apparently it ran aground somewhere and they just abandoned it.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you a question about this destroyer. What did you think about the Americans?

Sydney Montague: Well, I thought they were gun happy. In North Africa, when they first came in the war, you know? There's a line called the Mareth line the British were holding from the Germans. It's called the Mareth line, and they came in war and started machine gunning it. Well, they killed about 20 of our troops there. I wasn't there at the time, but, I mean, they killed about 20 of the troops. They were waving British flag and everything else, and they were gun happy. We're in a war sort of thing. They got the wrong enemy and were killing us.

Interviewer: Did you have any more experiences with the Americans -- you *personally*?

Sydney Montague: No, not really. Didn't come across too many.

Interviewer: What was the difference between -- we talk about the difference between the American Navy and the British Navy for the average seaman.

Sydney Montague: Oh, well, of course, when I was in Singapore, the Missouri was there. We were a cruiser, and the Missouri was one of the big American battleships. So we invited them over to us, being a British port, you know, Singapore. We sort of entertained them as much as we could. Then they invited us over to the Missouri, and it was like Hollywood (laughter).

Interviewer: Why was it like Hollywood?

Sydney Montague: Well, they had a full band there, you know, like Hollywood. They all stood up and waved their trumpets. It was like a Hollywood set. Of course, they had so many men, they could do that. Well they showed us around the ship, and I was very impressed, you know? We didn't have a laundry room, we just had a bucket and did our laundry in a bucket. Then they gave us ice cream from an ice cream bar there. I thought, "That's a good idea." So I was on the canteen committee for our ship, and I said, "We'll have to" -- we have done most of the talking -- and I said, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to have ice cream on here?" The commander had red hair and a big red beard, and I think it went redder. He says, "We're fighting a war. It's not a bloody Hollywood set." He didn't like that idea at all. He said, "If you mention that again, you can put yourself in my report." I didn't mention it anymore. So they had ice cream on there and everything.

Interviewer: What were the difference in quarters and showers and those kinds of things? Tell us more, the difference.

Sydney Montague: All right, well, Americans were well looked after. We had hammocks, which I liked better than what they had. They had bunks that come down like this, you know, and held up by ropes and chains, like a bed. I like a hammock better, get better sleep in a hammock. As the ship rolls, the hammock stays straight up right, whereas, on those bunks, you could fall out of it if the ship went over like this, you'd all fall out. The food was fantastic on the American ships. I mean, just like a hotel. Had people serving you and everything. It was a world of difference, you know.

Interviewer: Whereas on a British ship, you had what?

Sydney Montague: They had two types -- we were on a cruiser, they only had one. They had a galley and people cooking stuff and everything else. You had an assignment for your food with your mess on the top of it, you know, like mess 12, there was 12 people in our mess, six each on the side of a bench and you sit down there. When you finish, you put the things on hinges and you put it up and lock it in place.

Interviewer: So we were like Hollywood, like you said.

Sydney Montague: Yeah. They had, you know, we were rationed on the ship to a certain degree. Not like they were in England, but we were rationed. Butter and all that business, you know. But we didn't eat too bad. When you didn't see anybody else having the best of everything, you figure, well, this must be it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Elizabeth: Is it true of all American ships, or just the Missouri? The Missouri was--

Sydney Montague: Oh, no. I think most American ships, they were fed pretty well. I don't know if they had ice cream on everything ship, but the Missouri, of course, is a big battleship. I would imagine, from what I saw of it, cruisers and light cruisers were all very well fed -- destroyers, not so much.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Elizabeth: The end of the war.

Interviewer: The rum ration? Tell us the tradition of a British rum ration.

Sydney Montague: Oh, 11:00, just before dinner, you know, 12, a pipe comes over the loud speaker. You call it a type, you know. A hand for the mess -- no, he didn't say rum. "Hand for the mess of grog." You got a little less than that of rum every day, so you didn't worry about your food after you drank that. I think it was 100-proof rum from Jamaica.

Interviewer: You were telling me also that they gave you coco with fat in it?

Sydney Montague: Oh, yeah, for when you were in Russia. Well, you know, it's dang cold going up there, and you're on watch and you got a duffel coat on and maybe a scarf or something like that, and you're still cold. So, you can get, they come around with a big pot and you put your cup in and get it. It's chocolate with pieces of fat in it, and it's supposed to keep you warm. It's made like that, the chocolate is made especially for the Navy and it's made with these little globles of fat in there so that you keep warm. It's damn cold up there, I tell you.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sydney Montague: This rum ration, you took it for everybody in the mess, but if somebody didn't want it, they'd share it out a little more. It was damn good to get. I once was on the loud speaker. I had to take a guy's place because he was sick or something or other. I had to say, let's see, now. It was really funny. Oh, they pipe up spirits -- "up spirits." That means you can go get your rum, you know? And that's on the quarter deck, and they measure it out, it's all measured. And if there's any left over, they dump it over the side. Yeah, if the mess didn't take any, they're not allowed to put it back in the barrel. They had to dump it over the side. Anyhow, I piped, I just mentioned.

Interviewer: "Up spirit?"

Sydney Montague: I piped, "Up spirit," and I forgot to switch the switch off. "Stand fast, the Holy Ghost!" I had to go see the command for that. (Laughter).

Elizabeth: What about the end of the war and the atomic bomb?

Interviewer: Yeah, the end of the war, the atomic bomb. Where were you and what do remember about that, what were your feelings about that?

Sydney Montague: Well, I always thought that to invade Japan would take a million men and you'd lose half of them or more. I thought it was the best thing they ever did. I always admire him for dropping those two bombs because that got their attention, didn't it? I mean, so you kill a million or two of the enemy. They are going to kill a million or two of you. They had everything worked out, women and kids and bamboo poles and everything else. They would have done a lot of damage, believe me.

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard about the bomb? Were you on board? Were you on ship?

Sydney Montague: I think I was on the Sussex at the time, I can't really remember because the surrender of Singapore, it was on our ship. I have a photograph somewhere and I can't find them right now.

Interviewer: How did the crew react, how did you mates react?

Sydney Montague: Oh, well, I'll tell you where I was when the war ended with Germany. I think I was in Siloan, which was an island that makes tea and all that. They got so rambunctious, the guys did. It was ashore, that they set fire to a lot of the Navy huts there. We were put on a little island for punishment called Coral Island. It was an uninhabited island, nobody was on there but

lizards and snakes and everything else, and we were put on there because we did a lot of damage. We were setting fire and boisterous and everything, joyful sort of thing when the war was over with Germany. We were put on there as punishment.

Interviewer: So, again, try to explain to Americans what it would be like for a Brit about the surrender of Germany.

Sydney Montague: I don't know.

Interviewer: Because you had been through so much.

Sydney Montague: Yeah, it was great to hear it, you know. At first, I didn't believe it, but you know, I did after awhile because, I don't know. It was a joyful thing. Everybody was climbing up and kissing each other and everything else in London.

Elizabeth: I think I'm good.

Interviewer: I think that was a wonderful interview.

Sydney Montague: Was it?

Interviewer: I think we're done.

End of recording.