

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 2

I'm interviewing Alan Walker at Porthcawl Museum. My name is Andrew Hemmings.

00:00:10 Speaker 2

Alan, good to see you here. You're gonna tell us about the your trip from Greenock to Durban.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

Right.

00:00:21 Speaker 1

The day we left Greenock, destination unknown, during the journey, we had problems with the engine, or the whatever power they call it, on the on the the American Liberty ship.

00:00:42 Speaker 1

And on the ship were American crewmen.

00:00:47 Speaker 1

And the food that was unusual to us because we never experienced turkeys and and chicken at that time because it's 1943.

00:01:00 Speaker 1

In travelling down with the company, about 30 plus, we came to presumably

00:01:11 Speaker 2

Gibraltar, was it?

00:01:15 Speaker 1

Gibraltar, in that area. And from that moment on, there's 30 or 40, 30 or 50, ships, I'm not sure of them, there's 30 plus reduced to six. They went into North Africa and we went South.

00:01:37 Speaker 1

And during our journey, we have problems with the engine of the ship and we went into Sierra Leone. These facts I'm giving you is something I've been told me in our travels. I wouldn't have known [?].

00:01:54 Speaker 1

And then further on, going down, we went into Cape Town for the same reason.

00:02:00 Speaker 1

Had faults. [?] of the six ships, 6 convoys. Sorry. Six troop ships and we went from there **after attention [?]** around the Cape to Durban.

00:02:16 Speaker 1

And we were there for six weeks.

00:02:21 Speaker 1

And from there, we travelled to Bombay, destination unknown at the time, and we finished in in Bombay, and we were there for three weeks.

00:02:39 Speaker 1

And from Bombay, we went up the Persian Gulf to Basra.

00:02:47 Speaker 1

So at least we reached our destination was Iraq.

00:02:56 Speaker 1

I was in Iraq for about 18 months.

00:03:01 Speaker 1

We went from south to north, we had a period in Kirkuk, in defence of the oil wells in that area.

00:03:13 Speaker 1

Because they were troubled with the Kurds and there's still the same to this day.

00:03:20 Speaker 1

We were there for a period of time and then we went from there to, as a convoy, to Egypt.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

And what happened when you got to Egypt?

00:03:36 Speaker 1

And and when we got to Egypt, the first thing we did there, the site that we got to was cluttered with stones. And the first we we did before we could settle down was to get rid of all the stones. You'd be surprised. And that took us some time.

00:03:54 Speaker 1

To make it a a site for living in for a period of time. Yeah. And then time passed on and we went from Egypt and back up into Palestine, to the **base workshops [?]** in Palestine and you've got that thingamybob there, haven't you. If there were ever a time.

00:04:15 Speaker 2

Yeah, just, just hold. We'll just.

00:04:16 Speaker 2

So Alan, you went to Palestine and you were at the base workshops and then you went to various places, including you went into Lebanon to Beirut.

00:04:27 Speaker 2

Is that right?

00:04:27 Speaker 1

At the yeah, at the at the the border between Palestine and Lebanon.

00:04:35 Speaker 1

See on instructions of course.

00:04:40 Speaker 2

So how long were you in Palestine?

00:04:43 Speaker 1

Ohh gosh.

00:04:47 Speaker 1

I wasn't in the base work base workshops in Palestine at that time because we moved out into different factions and we were working from there.

00:05:01 Speaker 1

Because that's the time I told you about the the the the tanker, that we were called upon to correct the tanker **that lost a third of its contents [?]**, and as recovery units, we had to go and respond, ordered by the commanding officer.

00:05:21 Speaker 1

And we we had two vehicles, one was a petrol and one was a diesel, but of course you're dealing with petrol now. Any friction and there'll be an explosion and they lost a third of the contents when we got there.

00:05:34 Speaker 1

And we saved 2/3 of that. We saved 2/3 and the commendation we had for that.

00:05:36 Speaker 2

Oh, you did well, yeah, yeah.

00:05:40 Speaker 1

But it didn't show much in material things, mind.

00:05:47 Speaker 1

Because I, as I told my daughter, what we wanted was a piano at that time, and we were offered anything to save even 2/3.

00:05:55 Speaker 1

And what did they give us? Money or? They said [?] a football. He and I. And we were, yeah. And they will give me.

00:06:00 Speaker 2

You wanted a piano and you got a football.

00:06:00 Speaker 1

He he and I, yeah and they would have given it to us.

00:06:05 Speaker 1

But we did have backhanders, mind, you know, because of our efficiency, I suppose. Because we loved our job. We were young men, aren't we.

00:06:15 Speaker 1

There was one I can remember quite and another time with the difficulties with the terrorists and the the the the [?] in Palestine.

00:06:31 Speaker 1

The orange groves outside the airport, Lod Airport which is now Ben Gurion, they've renamed it [?], yeah. We had to destroy the orange groves. And they were in season and the orange we took back to camp was unbelievable.

00:06:48 Speaker 1

And I've loved oranges ever since.

00:06:51 Speaker 1

It was unbelievable.

00:06:55 Speaker 2

So and at the end of two years, you came back to Britain, did you?

00:07:03 Speaker 1

I don't know if you've heard this saying, soldiers were getting holidays because the war and that was over, wasn't it, 1945? And we were allowed, were released, to go into into Britain, to return again. It was a 28 day furlough, then, you might call it.

00:07:26 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah.

00:07:30 Speaker 1

And when we left Alexandria in the January 1946, it had to be January, then, because in that period of time, we had a mishap.

00:07:43 Speaker 1

And the ship was named Gradisca.

00:07:46 Speaker 2

It was named?

00:07:47 Speaker 1

Gradisca. That was the name of the ship we were on, coming to Blighty for a 28 leave furlough.

00:07:56 Speaker 1

But say about well 2 days out, I would say, we we were, we were ordered into our bunks for the night and we hit something rather obstructive. Bang. And we shook in the.

00:08:15 Speaker 1

And from that moment, it delayed our arrival in Blighty. Now we all had to be evacuated off that ship.

00:08:25 Speaker 1

And we were onto lifeboats.

00:08:28 Speaker 1

And the the the the the weather was terrible at that time. Terrible. And they were tied together, one on behind the other, two or three, with a motor [?] unit in the front, taking us from the one side to the leeward side of the island. And when we got that side, there was Corvettes for us to get on off the and then from Covettes to a converted aircraft carrier that was returning to Brighton empty. And the name of it was Trumpeter, HMS Trumpeter.

00:09:06 Speaker 1

Now the captain apparently, this is all hearsay, he wanted the the the the entire people on a on a [?], he wanted to go through the the Bay of Biscay to Britain, as ballast because of the tempestuous sea.

00:09:30 Speaker 1

But at the same time, we had to adhere to the Medlock route.

00:09:37 Speaker 1

That was known as the Route 4, Medlock route.

00:09:44 Speaker 2

I haven't heard of that.

00:09:44 Speaker 1

You haven't heard of that, have you? It was the Medlock route. And that was the, what can I say, the the the holiday, if you like to call it that [?].

00:09:57 Speaker 1

And it was a special route. Everything was designed. And that's why we had to take it, I suppose. So we landed in Toulon, and then we went through Toulon up to Calais.

00:10:14 Speaker 2

Ohh I'm I'm I understand now. Yes. Yeah, yeah.

00:10:15 Speaker 1

Yeah, you know, so I can I can understand you too, because everything was late on [?]. Yeah, but the the weather was terrible. I had about 7, 10 blankets on me, and I was still cold, you know, because of course they come from a hot country anyway, from Palestine. And then we arrived in Calais and the condition was still bad. We were there for about two or three days because we couldn't leave, because the English Channel was in a terrible state.

00:10:40 Speaker 2

The state of the Channel, yeah.

00:10:43 Speaker 1

And the and the boat that took us over eventually wasn't, it's it's strange really, the name was Daffodil and it's because it's a Welsh. It's a it's. It's odd, isn't it?

00:10:52 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, yes, yeah.

00:10:55 Speaker 1

The Daffodil. The names I can remember, it's. I mean the ship that went from Durban to to Baghdad. There were three sister ships, Stratheden, Strathmoor and the Strathaird.

00:11:15 Speaker 1

And the 4th one, I didn't know any of that, but the Strathmoor, the one that I was on, it went from Durban to India to, I think it was.

00:11:28 Speaker 2

They all they all they all belong to the same shipping company, the Straths.

00:11:31 Speaker 1

Yeah, yeah, yeah, they would be.

00:11:32 Speaker 2

I can't remember which shipping company it was, but you could look yourself.

00:11:35 Speaker 1

No, but, but the Strathmoor was the one I was on. It was about 20,000 tonnes I think.

00:11:38 Speaker 2

Yes, I'll put that in. Yeah, that's sounds yeah.

00:11:41 Speaker 1

Yeah. And we were late leaving because it was made known to us that there was a U-boat in the area. And we had to take a detour, and we did leave eventually. And that's the only time I was sick.

00:12:00 Speaker 1

And it was calm. I went to the toilet in the night and it was calm. And seeing this fellow vomiting, it came up with me. Isn't it strange?

00:12:08 Speaker 2

You can't. Yeah, it is. Yeah.

00:12:11 Speaker 1

You know these moments you can remember quite well. Anyway, we were in Bombay for 3 weeks 3 weeks.

00:12:16 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's that's brilliant, yeah.