

This is the transcript of an interview with Adrian Ernest "Dickie" Sweet, a British seaman who served as a telegraphist air-gunner, with Percy Fabien in 827 Squadron.

The interview is available from The Imperial War Museum, Catalogue Number: 18624. For further details go to the catalogue page <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80017628>

The whole interview, which covers his life and career is divided into 7 reels. This transcript is limited to content in reels 4, 5 and 6 only and concentrates on the time he spent in 827 Squadron between its formation in September 1940 and its near destruction in August 1941 during the raid on Kirkenes.

Part 1: Reel 4

[Beginning at +14:00 minutes]

... in September [1940], I think it was, I got posted down to Yeovilton, 827 Squadron. And I thought, oh God! Of course when I got down to Yeovilton and I thought, well it would be a Swordfish squadron. No, it was the first Albacore squadron. I'd never seen the ruddy thing in my life before, didn't know the equipment on it. When I did manage to...when a visiting aircraft Albacore landed at Yeovilton, I was the only person there from the squadron. Eventually I found the CO who was Lieutenant Commander Stokes who is the finest officer and gentleman that I ever knew. I flew with him ... and went under training and he was the CO of the squadron. So I was quite happy. When I walked aboard this visiting aircraft it was different radio gear, different equipment, it was a different gun I had never seen before, et cetera and I was the only person there. You will find in the records somewhere that last year when I did succeed to get a flight in the historic Swordfish flight, the CO made a very courteous reference to the fact that I was the first telegraphist air-gunner to set foot on Yeovilton soil.

Anyway, people then started to join the squadron. But again I found myself the senior leading airman of the squadron. Everybody else in the air-gunner branch were all trainees down from Worthy Down, and no equipment whatsoever in our first six aeroplanes that were brought and flown down to Yeovilton by the ATC, the women... the ATA, that's right. Nothing, absolutely nothing, not even bomb racks on the wings. All our armourers had to do all that. I had to teach all these new entry air-gunners. Never been on a ship. Never been anywhere near cables or wires, and I had to teach these people to splice their own aerials onto the wings and their own trailing aerials. I had to teach them how to tune a wireless set that I had never seen before. Fortunately the visiting aircraft that I spoke about just now did have some notes and I was able to, from the notes and experimenting from my own set that I was building up for my aircraft, to tune the gear. And I must admit these youngsters, one or two of them were pretty stropky about it, but they buckled to and we did start to get aeroplanes fit to fly. Pilots started to join. We joined in with the pilots and observers to swing compasses, normal things that would never have to be done by the people who fly them. And so the squadron started to build up.

Then a great catastrophe happened in my case...[Here he recounts the bombing of Yeovil village and the death of his young brother, Peter.]

[Restarting at +27:00 minutes]

Anyway, we continued to build the squadron. Eventually we had twelve pilots, twelve observers, twelve air-gunners but no air-gunner in charge. I'd had to do it all by myself

simply purely because I happened to be the only leading airman in the squadron. They eventually sent a petty officer air-gunner to take over but he's a non flyer. He's a pensioner, so I had to do all the flying with the CO whilst he did nothing. And of course we were getting to the stage now where we then had to proceed to the next stage of building up a squadron and we eventually took off, I think it was in December, we took off as a squadron heading for Arran, the naval air station at Crail, which is where we would then do our air bombing, and air firing, torpedo training, et cetera. We took off in stinking weather from Yeovil. We dropped in at an RAF air station and refueled half way up. And then we took off for Crail and we literally flew over Crail almost at rooftop and plonked down in Crail, a sea of mud. Absolute sea of mud, and here we were a full-bodied squadron and the huts had no windows in them, no doors in them. The officers were all billeted in the Golf [name unclear] Hotel in the town of Crail. We all slept that night literally with our oil skins on. A shambles! How the hell they ever sent squadrons out like that I'll never know. Our CO went and made representations to the captain, a sea-going captain, of Crail whose typical remark was, "Oh, there's a war on". Which didn't please our CO very much, but again what can you do? And then the next day, when the rain stopped dropping, we went down to the hangar... [end of reel 4]

Part 2: Reel 5

Q: You were saying about the hangers at Crail?

Yes, when we got down there wading through all the mud et cetera, of course the aircraft had been just parked anywhere when we landed the night previously in the bad weather conditions, so we were able then to try and sort ourselves out. Things were very chaotic. No workshops available at that time. But it's amazing what people can do and eventually we found suitable accommodation for crews, mechanics, et cetera, et cetera, and gradually things started falling into place. And we then started our training using the Firth of Forth to great use: torpedo dropping, we used the RAF ranges near Dundee for the bombing and the air firing, and the squadron started to build up into a very compact unit. I was still [word unclear] flying with the CO and more or less in charge with a non-flying bloke in the next office. And then one day, oh we had the squadron party, and the non-flying petty officer a little bit under the weather at some early hour in the morning. The CO had paid for the party to keep within the Scottish laws. This petty officer had got a little bit under the weather and fell over the wall, sea-wall, so of course he went into hospital. And then a volunteer petty officer, much senior to me, arrived from Arbroath naval air station as the senior petty officer, so I then went back to always flying with the senior pilot, and the senior navigator and no responsibilities, which suited me fine. We did all our working up exercises at Crail. We spent a couple of horrid nights in the air raid shelters with German bombers coming overhead, but it was a nice station. People were very friendly and very kind. We had our special pubs of course, the Cambo Arms, and everything went quite smoothly, but come the spring we had completed all facets of torpedo dropping, bombing, air firing, et cetera, navigating, et cetera and it looked as though the aircraft carrier we were scheduled to join, which was the *Victorious*, was still stuck in Newcastle and nowhere near operations standards. So Commander Stokes volunteered the squadron to be attached to the RAF in that we could do something useful toward the war effort as opposed to sitting around doing nothing. It went through all right. I don't know if there was any bitching from either side. But we suddenly then gathered all our bits and pieces together, and tools, and equipment and we headed for Stornaway.

We were attached to an RAF Anson unit in Stornaway doing convoy escorting, submarine searching, et cetera, et cetera, and we carried depth charges, so we were at

least contributing to the war effort. The whole squadron was billeted in the castle which dominates Stornaway, spacious rooms, et cetera, et cetera, and we all started to get associated with the locals. There was one spare aircraft, a Walrus which was anchored in the harbour, but we never saw the crew at all. This went on, again rather boring. There's nothing more boring than being in an aircraft looking for something that doesn't exist. I'd been taught as a boy sailor when lookout to flick the eyes around the horizon but not to stare, so it didn't bother me at all. But this went on. There was nothing untoward happen, until one day there came a signal sent out to us, "All air craft to return to base". So we all duly completed our landing at the airfield. The airfield when we were first there, it was a case of landing and taking off between the bunkers of the golf course. But by this time, I think if my memory was right, they had completed a runway. We did have one aircraft crash land with his mine still under the wing but nothing blew up so everything was all right. And on landing we were given one hour's notice to get our stuff together and leave what we couldn't take on the aircraft for the ground staff to pick up and bring down with them.

Our destination was to be Lee-on-Solent with a fuel stop at the RAF station just outside Liverpool to refuel. On arrival at Lee-on-Solent we were immediately bombed up with a torpedo with live warhead fitted and our destination was then to proceed to RAF Thorney Island which was to be our base because there was a suspected dash up the Channel, which as history has shown didn't materialise at that moment. So we finished up very tired at RAF Thorney Island. But they were very kind. Accommodation was found for us. The air mechanics and the ground staff had a far worse journey. They were lumbered around with trucks and what have you. We remained in that condition. The first few days I think we did, not raids, we still had the torpedoes on the aircraft, but we did sorties over the French coast, I think mainly looking for invasion barges but not always. We did do some sorties and ran into night fighters and had a bit of a harrowing time. This went on for another four or five days after, but the torpedoes still remained shackled on.

And then on the Sunday, oh I remember this Sunday so vividly, suddenly came the signal for the squadron to take off and proceed to RAF St Eval which was a coastal command station on the north coast of the peninsula there. Again, obviously it was because of these ships tied up in Bordeaux harbour and we were needed. We landed at about eight o'clock in the evening again in not very good weather. But the RAF did provide sleeping accommodation and we were able to have a meal.

Then I think about 8.30 the sirens went and we spent the whole night in the shelters of RAF St Eval. About 5 o'clock in the morning a van went scurrying around all the trenches ordering everyone to evacuate the airfield. "Evacuate the airfield!" So, you can imagine, where do you go? I headed out one way and found myself hiding behind the anti-aircraft gun of the station defenses which is a bit stupid, so I did a one eighty and scuppered somewhere else. One of the air gunners volunteered to drive an ambulance. You can't think of this. In our squadron of thirty six flyers, Jeff Griffen was the only one that could drive. So he volunteered to drive the ambulance because it was a saturation bombing. They hit St Eval all night long. There was no letup whatsoever. I can remember having strayed almost into St Mirran airfield, which was a Fleet Air Arm non-operational but training airfield, in a ditch, cold, wet and not very happy. Anyway we crawled back in daylight when the bombing ceased in daylight, we got back to the airfield. The pilots and observers (the officers were billeted in a hotel near Newquay), we were put in (the air-gunners) Bedruthian Steps Hotel. The hotel was occupied by RAF personnel, but there was an outhouse and all twelve air gunners were able to kip down in the various rooms of this hotel. And then of course, eventually transport was sent for us to take us back to the airfield. It certainly was a mess. Fortunately none of our aircraft were touched, which is a miracle, because we had only parked our aircraft where there was a blank space and the Germans had concentrated their saturation bombing onto the buildings and admin parts of the airfield. Nevertheless it wasn't a pleasant experience.

Anyway we all got together and settled into the Bedruthian Steps Hotel, we found out where the nearest pubs were, and Newquay was quite a nice spot. [There] was a mid-week dance, so we were all back in fine fettle. And then of course we started the...obviously the threat of the Channel dash had been shelved for a little while and we, the squadron, spent most days mine laying in the Brest approaches. It all sounded easy going and no particular danger but what we didn't know until we got there that they were very active with night fighters and new equipment so some of us had a very hairy act in evading these creatures and getting back to St Eval. There was one funny, interesting situation. On one occasion, Cocky Reid and Prendergast the observer and myself, we were sent on an operation that necessitated flying very close to the defenses of Brest. And of course, in an Albacore we didn't quite tie up with the modern bombers that RAF St Eval had. Consequently, as we made our run of reconnaissance, we were so slow (all the people laugh when I tell them about this) all the anti-aircraft fire that was being let at us went up so far ahead we were in no danger. We just sat there and plodded on at our very slow speed and just turned and came back and that was that. So we had a bit of a giggle on that.

The [words unclear] at St Eval was very good. The RAF were very helpful to us. Accommodation was a bit cramped but then usually is. If anybody that's been in naval ships or depots, you can usually adapt yourself. Then again one day came the alarm call, "All air crew return to base immediately". And again it was a case of an hour's notice to get your flying kit and your personal equipment together, and we were heading north now.

The main function of this move north was to position to Donibristle airfield where we would be fitted with the IFF gear, that's the Identification Friend or Foe equipment which had been introduced and was now standard equipment. If you didn't have it then you would get shot at. That took, for the completion of all 12 aircraft with the IFF gear, took several days. Some of us went to Crail, some of us went to Donibristle accommodation, but eventually we all finished up at Royal Naval Station Hatston, which was in the Orkneys.

We stayed there and awaited developments with the carrier. Our carrier, *HMS Victorious* had been hijacked by another squadron who was more conveniently situated to do the attack on the *Bismark*. Otherwise it would have been 827 Squadron there. But my friend Les Sayer was with the CO that attacked the *Bismark* on his first operation. So we had to wait then for that episode of the war before we could board our aircraft, and that was done at Hatston.

I was happy because my father was there. Again one could laugh. By that time I was a petty officer, fairly senior and my father was my mess man. I offered to come and eat out in the galley with him. He says, "No way. You've got your promotion. You use it." I went ashore one night, looking for birds of course and a pint or two and I came back fairly late and I thought well I'd look in the kitchen to see if the old boy was there and I walked in there and he was sitting with four WRENS! He had a personality I think.

All that leads up to the big do. A lot of training was done, doing low flying over the islands of the sound and all things you associate with a big raid. Nobody said anything, nobody told anybody anything, but obviously something big was on. Eventually it came. The *Victorious* came round and we embarked and we actually headed north.

We ran through one of our own minefields and *HMS Ardent*, one of the flanking destroyers, got blown up and very severe loss of life. [It was *HMS Achates* that struck a mine and severely damaged with 54 killed, but was towed to Iceland.]

And we were heading for Sedgewick [Seidisfiord, Iceland] (you'll have to look on the map on how to spell it) for refueling. And it was common knowledge to all of us in the squadron saying, "What the bloody hell are we doing?" What we're doing now, and that is, in a strike force, heading north, open sea, Norway occupied, Sweden occupied, everything occupied by the Germans. So where do they think we were going? To the

North Pole? It was so ridiculous! We had lost a destroyer already and, you know, that took two days to get up to Sedgewick and refuel.

We were given permission to walk ashore. Well we couldn't. We had to stay with our aircraft. And then we started heading round for (we had then been told our target) Kirkenes. Well you are going around the whole length of Norway and did they honestly think...? Blame was put on Churchill partly, but what about the First Sea Lord? He surely had enough knowledge of the Navy and the geography? You can't take a task force around that area of land and not be seen by somebody, and the Germans were no ruddy fools. So we headed for Kirkenes.

The briefing was a shambles. No air gunners attended this shambles. Unlike the RAF with their concentrated meetings, you know, everybody gets in there, they are told everything, what's there, what they've got to do. Nothing like that on the ruddy *Victorious*.

In fact the worst thing that happened to us was, at that stage Lieutenant-Commander Stokes was promoted to Commander-Flying and appointed to *HMS Eagle* which was in the Mediterranean. So we lost our CO and that one movement of removing a pilot from heading the squadron and substituting an observer as CO of the squadron necessitated seven aircraft crew changes. Now I haven't seen anybody admit to this cockup in any publication (I've got the official report from the top brass). That one stupid movement, you destroy the integrity of a fully trained squadron with seven changes. In fact, my pal Jeff Griffen who was flying in 4M, and was shot down and taken prisoner of war, only met his pilot who was the replacement for Commander Stokes, as he walked out to his aircraft to take off. I can't understand it, the intelligence of whoever organised this! I had no time for the Vice-Admiral in charge, Wake-Walker. Two squadrons, or nearly three squadrons, were destroyed in a stupid act like that. No wonder our losses were so bad. As the aircraft were lined up to take off from the *Victorious* we were aware that the task forces had been spotted. Obviously, I mean, you can't go all around the flippin' coast without being seen. So we were committed to go. There has been rumours since, that the CO, this observer that had taken over from Commander Stokes, should have cancelled it out then, but I don't doubt for one moment he was overridden by the Rear-Admiral who was CO of the whole operation. So personally, I looked at the observer Prendergast and I said, "Right, we're in for it this time".

We were in the second [word unclear] flight, 4K [with M and Percy Fabien in L]. So A, B and C, and F, G and H would take off before us, then our turn. Got airborne and settled down for the flight in. We were at about, I suppose, 500 feet. As we approached the coast we were aware there was a hospital ship at the entrance to the Kirkenes harbour. Obviously they were telling their authorities what we were up to, and still we pressed on. I wasn't at the briefing. No air-gunners attended so we didn't know what the tactics were going to be. We were like lambs to a ruddy slaughter. We were aware that 828 Squadron was bearing to the right which would have taken them to the harbour entrance and I gather, I found out afterwards, that literally as the eight aircraft went through the approach into the harbour the German gunners were firing down at them. So, you know, it was a trap.

We, I don't know whether this is spoken about, certainly I didn't know what our approach was going to be into the affray, I assume we that...All the nine aircraft behind the leader just followed him down the fjord which was to the east of Kirkenes harbour. Low level. When we got to the end of this fjord of course we had to go up to get over the top and I can remember seeing some people from a farmhouse waving to us as we flashed over about a 100 feet and then of course we dropped down into the harbour.

Standing on the stirrups at the back of the aircraft I was able to look forward and see something of what was going on. Obviously there was a lot of puffs of smoke, et cetera, et cetera and as we dropped down I was aware of a Panzer-type vehicle on the cliff side on one side, and I gave a short, sharp burst of fire to them, but with a single gun you

can't do very much about it. And then of course, the pilot, Pity Albert we called him, was trying to find a target because there wasn't any target. We'd been told the ship [sic] was a mass of bloody shipping and all I could see was one merchant ship down...[reel 5 ends]

Part 3: Reel 6

[There was] one merchant ship with its propeller thrashing away obviously in ballast. Looking over the top main plane forward, I could see that there was obviously a fight going on at the far end of Kirkenes harbour which I think was the gun boat, the Treppsee, I forget the name of this German vessel. There was other pockets, puffs, of smoke et cetera, and of course by this time my pilot had obviously got down to torpedo-dropping height. I don't know what his target was. It is impossible in an Albacore to see what you're aiming for because you've got the fuel tank and the pilot's seat in front of you, but I was aware of the torpedo being dropped because we shot upwards pretty rapidly with the loss of the weight, and then I was aware we were being shot at and the pilot by this time had done a split-arse [flying stunt] turn and was making for the high ground again to get into the fjord. I had another go at one machine-gun post but again we were junking around so violently that there was no affect at all, really. Any way, we succeeded in evacuating the main harbour defenses and were dropping down to the fjord we had come down.

Now everything was beautiful then but as we approached the entrance to that fjord that we had come down and were now going back towards, high in the sky was one terrible, I remember to this day, a terrible circle of airplanes circling and as they were circling they were picking off our aircraft as they ventured out of the fjord. So A, B and C and F, G and H took the full brunt of exiting from that area... [sentence unclear]. Our pilot immediately hared for the far bank of the fjord that we were coming out and he headed right for it, no mucking around, and when he got near it he then banked and we stuck, he stuck, all the time to that position, not going up, or going down. He just maintained that position, which enabled Prendergast to do the monitoring. We had a very tight drill. Prendergast the observer did, for want of a better word, fire direction. He stood up with his back to the fuel tank looking for anything that was making a pass at us. Whatever angle that aircraft was approaching us I would get a tap on the shoulder if it was at that side up. If it was something down below he would tap my leg on the side that was responsible, where I would immediately swing the gun to. And using this method of ranging the aircraft we had agreed that if attacked the pilot would go straight and steady. There was nothing he could do otherwise. If he did that then Prendergast could range anybody approaching us whatever direction as long as it was behind us. If there was anything in front of us, well then that was the pilot's responsibility which he took advantage of. Prendergast did the looking around for who's coming for us and indicated as best he could where I should concentrate, and I then used the gun-sight to range the aircraft. If it was an ME-109, at 500 yards it should only occupy half of my ring-sight and I would open fire at the aircraft at the best of my ability. When I got to the aircraft's wingspan filling the whole of the diameter I stopped firing and that was the indication to Prendergast to tell the pilot to do a 180 degree turn left or right, or whatever it is. Every time we evaded our enemy, purely turning at the right time. If we had turned too early then you are a sitting duck. If you turn too late you're a sitting duck, because the fighter would already have opened fire at 200 yards. It was simple but it needed everybody to do what was required. We evaded... I forget, I've got the number. Numbers don't matter. We evaded our enemy.

The pilot was given a gift. Coming over the high cliffs was a Junkers-87. Now, I noticed that there was no gun projecting from the rear cabin of this Junkers-87, so I thought, right they've got no gunner, so he's open meat for us. But of course Albacores were not the best aircraft for crews to talk to [each other]. Anyway, this stupid so-and-so was so intent on going for an Albacore in front of us that he ignored the fact that underneath his left wing was us, and he dropped and dropped until he then started to move across our front. And all Tony had to do was to lift his gun-sights up. Twenty eight shots, and he shot him down. Beautiful! Couldn't have been better!

So, OK, we got attacked once or twice more. Then we did get into a sticky situation. We were suddenly aware that there was something coming in front of us, heading for us. We were very close to the rocks at this time having lost height in our evasion tactics and Tony was then faced with an alternative. In effect he threw the aircraft on to its port wings and we dived for the rocks. Fortunately, there was a cleavage in the rock-face, like a tooth, and we went through that. The fighter was too fast and too high. Couldn't get at us, and nothing behind us. That was the narrowest escape we had.

Prendergast immediately then worked out roughly a course to get back to the carrier. I turned the beacon on and tuned in so that I knew I could back up the course set for home. As we were heading for home we passed over a dinghy from one of the ... [Fulmar] fighters shot down. We waved to them and we reported it immediately we got out of range that there was a crew out there. We found out afterwards that the Admiral refused point-blank for his rating pilot in the Walrus on his ship the *Dorsetshire*, absolutely refused him permission to go and pick them up. So, two men went to their deaths ... just because he didn't want, I suppose, to be attacked himself. Having passed these two poor souls we were suddenly aware that there was what looked like an ME-110. It was a twin-engine job. But he was way out of range. I tried to do a sort of wish-washing with the gun but all my tracers were falling way short and obviously he had run out of ammunition because he made no passes at us.

So we got back to the ship safely. We had no injuries. We had done our drills and we had got back to the ship safely. We hung back because being undamaged we let the damaged aircraft land. There were some pretty nasty ones too. 4A which was..., Cocky Reid was the senior pilot, and the CO was the observer and Jackie Lambert was the air gunner. The air gunner was able to zog a message to the bridge as to what was wrong with them (You know what I mean by zogging? You know this business...?). Because he didn't dare fire his gun, because they received a direct hit in their fuel tank with a 110 shell, but it didn't explode. But the qualities of the anti-leak of the big fuel tank was inadequate to the size of the hole. So the CO was wearing a Sidcot suit, stuffed his elbow, the top of his elbow, into this hole and saved the fuel and they were able to get back to the ship. So Jackie Lambert couldn't do any WT [Wireless Transmission] because one spark and they would have been blown to smithereens. So he zogged the message to the ship and the ship immediately turned into wind and they were the first to land. The aircraft was immediately pushed back and over the stern. The CO suffered very serious high-octane fuel burns but he saved his aircraft.

B and C I think were shot down... F, G and H, I think, were shot down. We lost 5 aircraft out of 9, out of 11, I think. It's in the records ... We were in the third sub-flight, K, L and M. K was us; we got back to the ship in one piece and could claim one aircraft, and undamaged. L, who was following us, received a 109 burst from astern and under the aircraft which decapitated the air gunner [Percy Fabien] on its way up but ... the whole burst buried itself in the wing roots of the upper main plane. The dinghy flew out and things like that. But they managed to stagger back to the ship with the dead air gunner. When it landed on, and we were watching this, when the lift had gone, the two wings just flopped, fell off. What had been keeping them going was the uplift of the wings. So the body of the air gunner was immediately removed and the aircraft again was struck down into the hanger because to get his body out that was the only way they could do it, and

of course you can imagine what it was like in the back of the aircraft. Anyway, then that was dispersed with. M got shot down. Both the pilot and the air gunner were wounded and taken prisoner of war. And P, Q and R they were all right. They were damaged; they had several bullet holes in their wings and their fuselage, but they made it back. So as you can imagine, it was a rather traumatic evening. We all got our extra tot of rum. I was called over the Tannoy to report to the ward room where I went to. My pilot and observer were there and we were all congratulating each other about how we'd got back and I said we got back because we had a good drill, which I think the point was taken. But I had a couple of whiskeys shoved in my fist and I can remember sitting on the wheel of 4K sometime later patting the fuselage saying, You did well, old girl! And that was the raid.

Again, any comments on it never reached the crew members. Everything was always done... This is the trouble with the Fleet Air Arm. You had officers and men, not crews. I mean the RAF - didn't matter if you were a Wing Commander. You had a job to do in an aeroplane, you did it, whether he's an Air Marshall or what. But the Navy was never that. Us and them.

Anyway, the next day I cleaned up the aircraft, and then I was sent for by Prendergast, the senior air gunner who expressed the desire he didn't want to do the raid next day, so I got the briefing instead. I didn't worry. I thought well if we can get through what we went through today or yesterday we've got nothing to worry about as long as we keep to our drills. But in the end... This is again that foolish ruddy Rear-Admiral wanting to send aircraft to attack after what had happened. And in fact we lost two more Fulmars that next day. They cancelled our flight because it was stupid. What could we, one ruddy airplane, achieve. So they sent two Fulmars. One got shot down and the other one pulled out of his dive so fiercely that he bent the fuselage and landed back on the carrier with a bent fuselage.

When I think back on all the efforts of the Fleet Air Arm, of the Navy and what we did, achieved in the British Pacific fleet at a later stage... I get uptight! Anyway, the force then retired. There were no more attacks... or I think there was one attack, but the Hurricane... See, we had a Hurricane flight with us. If we had the Hurricanes with us in Kirkenes they would have had a ball, but they kept that to protect the carrier, so the Hurricanes never came anywhere near the fighting. I mean, they could have left the other fighters to guard the ship. If we had had those twelve Hurricanes, it would have been a different story.

Of course, we then headed back to Hatston, or to Scarpa. The senior air-gunner to me elected to want to fly ashore. I said, "You weren't so keen the other day, were you?" Got my dig in! And of course I was worried about my poor old Dad... He had heard about this terrible episode that had happened at Kirkenes and several of the pilots went up to him and said, "Don't worry, your lad will be all right". And sure enough when I got back he said, "I knew you would come back".

Q: But the carrier was attacked on the way back by the German air force?

No, no. One aircraft came out, I think, really a reconnaissance aircraft, because the sea Hurricane just chopped him out. But it was a very demoralised ship... Literally nearly three squadrons. Old Jackie Smith that I spoke about. A, B and C. He was in A, landed safely on the aircraft. Nobody got any decoration in the first part, but a complaint was lodged and all six officers that got back to the ship were given the DFC. Jackie, nothing! Such was the Navy!

[The remainder of reel 6 concerns his subsequent career following the Kirkenes raid]