

Interviewee: Norman Fisher
Interviewer: Roy Fowler

Draft analytical transcription by Sarah Easen, BUFVC

Section 1 Early years, the GPO Film Unit and making *Night Mail* [24:50 mins]

Birth and childhood; schooling; first job at Kay's Film Laboratories; the GPO Film Unit: Memories of John Grierson and Alberto Cavalcanti, sound recording, making *Night Mail*, memories of W H Auden, Benjamin Britten, Len Lye, Harry Watt and Ralph Bond.

Section 2 Making *Night Mail* and starting in the newsreels [20:16 mins]

The GPO Film Unit: Making *Night Mail*; starting at British Movietone News in Soho Square; sound recording systems; newsreels in the 1930s; newsreel assignment procedures and staple stories.

Section 3 Newsreels in the 1930s and the build up to World War Two [23:18 mins]

Inter-newsreel competition: The newsreel wars; British Movietone News and Conservative politicians; newsreel cameramen's pay and working conditions; the build up to World War II and Fisher's first assignment as a war correspondent in Rheims; World War II: Evacuation of Dunkirk.

Section 4 World War Two – part 1 [22:12 mins]

World War II: Norman Fisher's war diaries, newsreel pooling arrangements, navy war correspondent with East Mediterranean Fleet, loss of censored military newsreel footage, newsreel camera equipment used on board ship, theatres of war covered: Far East, Egypt, Greece and the Battle of Crete.

Section 5 World War Two – part 2 [22:38 mins]

World War II: Military censorship of newsreel, film processing procedure, loss of censored military newsreel footage; end of World War II; travel in Greece with Spyros Skouras; assignment in Palestine; King David Hotel explosion; post-World War II newsreels; post-war camera equipment; making cinema shorts and documentaries for Twentieth Century Fox and the Conservative Party.

Section 6 Decline of the newsreels from the 1950s to the 1970s [22:24 mins]

Making cinema shorts and documentaries for Twentieth Century Fox and the Conservative Party; decline of the newsreels from the late 1950s to the late 1970s; being made redundant from British Movietone News; closure of other newsreel companies; television and freelancing work; family life; social life; newsreel cameraman's life on the road; the ACT (forerunner of the ACTT and BECTU) and newsreel staff; negotiating newsreel working and pay conditions; shooting a film about the rights of Iranian women for the Shah of Iran's sister, Princess Ashraf.

Section 7 Decline of the newsreels and making *A Queen is Crowned* [13:18 mins]

Shooting a film about the rights of Iranian women for the Shah of Iran's sister, Princess Ashraf; newsreels versus televisual factual recording; the making of the Technicolor film *A Queen is Crowned* about the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953; the change to one colour newsreel per week.

Total running time: 148:56 mins [2 hours 29 mins]

chapter	time	year	text	terms
[1]	0:00:00		RF: Copyright of the following recording is vested in the ACTT History Project, copyright 1989. The date is the 25 th September 1989 and the interview is with Norman Fisher by Roy Fowler. We're at ACTT head office. Norman, good morning. The first question is usually when and where you were born?	
		1917	NF: I was born in 1917, July 18th, at Eccleston in Lancashire	Birth
			RF: And some idea of your family background, any connection with show business, as it's called?	
			NF: No, my father was a doctor, my mother was a nurse. She was Scottish and he was English.	Parents
	0:00:56		RF: Yes. And your early aptitudes and interests. What kind of schooling did you have?	
		1934	NF: Well I went first to the Edinburgh Academy and at the age of 12 I went to Arundel School and I left Arundel School in 1933, 1934, just at the end of the year. And I'd always been keen on photography and wanted to get into films and had one or two useful contacts, because the necessary way to get into the film business was whom you knew.	Schooling
	0:01:47		Anyway I started off in Kay Film Labs at Finsbury Park.	Kay's Film Labs
			RF: How had you made your contacts, your film contacts which you used to get a job?	
	0:02:02		NF: Well I had a rich aunt who knew Sir Gordon Craig, as a matter of fact, and through his influence, he then was managing director of Movietone, through his influence I had my first job. It was always considered that one started off in the labs. So I did a spell in the labs.	First job at Kay's
			RF: What did they say to you/ Did they say, you have a certain amount of time in which to make a success?	
			NF: No., no, no, no.	
			RF: And you were obviously very happy to get into the business to break in?	
	0:03:04	1936	NF: Indeed. Kay Laboratories at that time were setting up a sensitometry department and sensitometry was rather a new thing then. I was in that most of the time, in Kays in fact all of the time. And I did about a year in Kays. And then got a job at the new GPO Film Unit at Blackheath.	Kay's labs; sensitometry dept; GPO at Blackheath
			RF: Before we leave Kays, may I ask what your starting pay was?	Pay at Kay's
	0:03:37		NF: That's rather difficult to remember; it can't have been awfully much more than three pounds a week.	
			RF: Oh as much as that, it was a lot for the time and for a young trainee, someone just starting out?	
			NF: It was something about that, it was between two and three pounds a week.	
	0:04:01		RF: Could you survive on that in London or did you have help from your parents?	
			NF: No, my mother who was a widow then, she came down and set up in house here, so I was still living at home then. And at Muswell Hill. So that was handy for Kays in Finsbury Park.	

	0:04:29		RF: Indeed yes. How did the job with the GPO Film Unit come about?	GPO Film Unit
	0:04:34	1936	NF: Once again I had an introduction to John Grierson through Sir Gordon Craig, again, and I was taken on as assistant sound, incidentally, the studio manager then at Blackheath was Ralph Bond, and there were a lot of well-known people there, oh, Cavalcanti, Harry Watt, Arthur Coldstream, many others who became well-known in the documentary field.	Meets John Grierson
	0:05:30		So I was assistant on sound. The GPO had just started using sound and we had a primitive Visatone outfit which was all fitted into a nice red post office van. It was rather crude, it was before the Noiseless Visatone was brought in but it worked anyway. So one of the first films I worked on was <i>Night Mail</i> and so anyway I did about a year with the GPO Film Unit.	Sound recording at GPO; <i>Night Mail</i>
	0:06:20		RF: Can we not just leave it that quickly? Can we go into details a little more?	
			NF: Yes surely.	
			RF: I suppose we ought to talk about the individuals themselves as you remember them. Shall we go through them one by one, starting with Grierson, you were then what, eighteen. nineteen. How did Grierson strike a nineteen year old?	Impressions of John Grierson
	0:06:50		NF: In fact I saw very little of him because his office was up here in this area and he wasn't often down at Blackheath. I used to see him occasionally. I was a boy around the place, I used to do ... not on the higher level stuff.	
			RF: He had no time for a junior?	
			NF: Difficult to say. No, I wouldn't say he hadn't any time for juniors at all.	
			RF: Was he an abrupt, brusque man?	
			NF: Oh very, yes, yes.	
			RF: A dour Scots?	
			NF: Yes I could say that.	
			RF: So no very specific memories of Grierson at that time?	
			NF: Not as a personality, no. It's quite a long way back.	
			RF: But he was very much the boss of the unit?	
			NF: Oh very much so yes.	
	0:07:55		RF: Who was below him in the operating arrangements?	GPO hierarchy
			NF: Now that I really can't remember. Sorry but I can't.	
			RF: Cavalcanti was what, a producer? Director?	
			NF: Director. It was all a very loose sort of organisation really and everybody was doing everything and apart from the technical staff everybody was doing their own thing more or less.	
	0:08:40		RF: Well the people who stand out in your memory most clearly, had Humphrey Jennings arrived yet?	Humphrey Jennings
			NF: Humphrey Jennings had been and gone, I never encountered him at	

		all.	
		RF: Stewart McAllister?	
		NF: No, he may well have been there later.	
0:08:58		RF: Did you find yourself very much compartmentalised on sound, you said everybody was doing everything else, but nevertheless I imagine sound must have taken most of your time?	Sound department at GPO
		NF: Yes, well we had a sound unit of two, there was a recordist plus me.	
		RF: Who was the recordist?	
		NF: Ted Pauly. And we had two cameramen on the staff called Jonah Jones and Chick Fowle and we had a studio carpenter-come-handyman and everything else, so you could say we had, oh we had one permanent editor, so we had a total staff of about six or seven.	Staff at GPO
		RF: The studio itself was it an old church or what was it?	
0:10:05		NF: No, it was an old art school as a matter of fact. I think Augustus John used to inhabit it at one time. And it was converted as a ... into a studio. It was small but adequate for what we needed, you know.	GPO premises
		RF: Minimally equipped. Or did you have enough equipment for purposes?	
		NF: We had a certain amount of permanent lighting, of course, and we had an electrician as well. So anyway, anything else that was required it was brought in from outside. Of course the budgets were terribly tight so you could not afford awfully much in the way of set building. I mean for instance the biggest set which was ever built there in my time was the sorting office of the mail train. We built a set of that. It wasn't feasible to film actually on the mail train itself for a number of reasons but, so we built a set in the studio. That was about the biggest one I ever remember we had ... and I ...	GPO equipment; set building
0:11:34		RF: Was there any location sound on <i>Night Mail</i> ?	
		NF: Oh yes, we did a fair amount. You know the night mail on its way, we had the sound truck on a flat bed truck tacked onto the end of the train, it wasn't a comfortable ride at all ... but anyway.	sound recording on <i>Night Mail</i>
		RF: Sounds rather dangerous to me!	
0:12:05		NF: There were odd bits of sync shooting. Sync shooting was always a bit of a problem because we couldn't run to a proper studio camera, we had a Debie inside a home made blimp, it wasn't very quiet either but it worked. And the Visatone sound wasn't the greatest, as I said it wasn't the noiseless Visatone so it was a bit scratchy but anyways it did it's stuff. And for the music and background sound effects we had Benjamin Britten as a matter of fact, who with W. H. Auden were having a look around films at the time and he did the background music for <i>Night Mail</i> , "this is the night mail crossing the border, bringing the cheque and the postal order", that sort of thing and we had a small music set up and an iron bedstead for making the noise on the rails and this sort of thing.	Synchronised sound shooting on <i>Night Mail</i> ; Debie camera; Visatone sound system; music for <i>Night Mail</i> ; sound effects
0:13:30		RF: This was done at Blackheath on the soundstage. And music recording too? Did they do that there?	GPO soundstage
		NF: Yes we did that there, yeah.	

		RF: How many in the orchestra, do you recall roughly?	
		NF: Oh about four.	
		RF: Is that all?	
		NF: Yes.	
0:13:48		RF: It would be interesting to have your memories of Britten and Auden at that time.	Britten and Auden
		NF: I had very little to do with them at that time, they weren't permanently there, they just sort of swanned about on occasions.	
0:14:03		RF: The commentary, if I can call it that which Auden wrote, did he bring it in complete or was it to some extent put together during the recording session?	Auden's <i>Night Mail</i> commentary
		NF: Difficult to say. I suppose he must have written it in advance and altered it as it went along.	
		RF: Were you recording to picture?	
		NF: No, some of this was done elsewhere. The final recording it was done some place else. We couldn't do the mixing ourselves.	
0:14:45		RF: I was wondering basically whether to some extent the picture was adjusted to the words or whether somehow the words fit that well with the cut?	<i>Night Mail</i> editing
		NF: The words were put to the picture. Eventually it all got together like that. But the picture was the starting point and Auden, he matched the words to the screen. And as I said the final re-recording was done elsewhere, we simply didn't have the facilities at Blackheath before that.	Images versus words in <i>Night Mail</i>
0:15:30		RF: Do you remember how long the shoot was? How long you were attached to the picture? Or was it fairly relaxed?	
		NF: It was spread out over quite a period, I think from beginning to end it was spread out for about a year because other things were going on as well. You see we had Len Lye then and he was doing his little jingles with hand drawn image for the Post Office, sixpenny telegram, these were things which lasted about a minute, but Len Lye had evolved this technique of hand painting on blank stock and when run intermittently you got little abstract figures dancing around and these were usually matched to a standard piece of music, a jingle sort of thing.	shoot for <i>Night Mail</i> ; Len Lye; hand painting on film
0:16:35		RF: Library music? Or specially composed?	
		NF: Yes.	
		RF: Library. Did you have anything to do with working on those Len Lye films?	music for Lye films
		NF: Not really, he did them all on his own anyway, it was all handwork. No. But what else can I tell you ...	
0:17:11		RF: Let me ask you one question about <i>Night Mail</i> again, was there a sense that it was an important film, a break through film, a film out of	<i>Night Mail</i> as a milestone in

		the ordinary?	documentary
		NF: Yes, it was the first time a documentary had been made with synchronised sound. It was a sort of a milestone, instead of simply just a commentary, and for its time it was considered advanced.	
0:17:38		RF: Harry Watt, how do you remember him?	Harry Watt
		NF: Tough, irascible.	
		RF: Talented? Or not? Talented or a promoter?	
		NF: Yes, indeed, certainly. Because no one person directed <i>Night Mail</i> really, different people were doing bits of it. I mean you'd get Cavalcanti on one bit and Harry Watt on another and Arthur Coldstream would have a finger in it somewhere.	Group effort of making <i>Night Mail</i>
0:18:16		RF: Was there one major influence, do you think, on shaping the film?	
		NF: I would say it was very much Harry Watt's film, and we also had... sorry name's gone ... we also had Stuart Legg, now he had a share in that, in fact every body had a share in <i>Night Mail</i> .	Harry Watt
		RF: Right. What were Harry Watt's strengths would you say? Did he shoot off the cuff, was he able to plan the shoot? It was scripted?	Harry Watt's directing
		NF: Oh yes, he worked to script. It is very difficult to be specific about these individuals because I only met them on the odd occasion.	
0:19:24		RF: I understand. The way they struck a young person at that time would be interesting. Cavalcanti, we haven't really talked about him.	Alberto Cavalcanti
0:19:35		NF: Excitable. Liable to, if we were recording in the studio, he was liable to suddenly blow his top for some reason or other under the microphone. Which is, we didn't have the gain turned down in the sound truck, it blew the galvanometer on the recorder, so we always had to be careful when Cavalcanti was around that if there was no actual sound on at the time to keep the gain down, because any stress on the galvanometer, it blew the mirror off, and the mirror was about a sixteenth of an inch square and it took a lot of finding and sticking on again. It was a very crude system. really.	Alberto Cavalcanti's personality
		RF: That was a problem with most of the early sound systems, wasn't it? A number of people have talked about that happening at Elstree, BIP, there was always a problem with blowing the galvanometer. Cavalcanti, also had a short fuse, was he over it very quickly? Was he a pleasant man to work with?	Cavalcanti's temper
		NF: Yes, yes.	
0:20:59		RF: Again I would like to ask what you perceived to be his strengths, because I know you were watching people to learn from them?	Cavalcanti's strengths
		NF: It's very difficult to say ... I'm sorry I'm just trying to think of the word...	
		RF: Right so your memories are really rather hazy after this length of time?	
		NF: Yes, acquaintances were brief, and people came and went. I was very much involved in the sound bit and really I didn't have a lot of association with people such as Cavalcanti, I mean just the odd bit here and there, but you never worked continuously long enough to form any	Brief acquaintances with other filmmakers

			real opinion about them. It was just, you know, a matter of doing the job.	
	0:22:12		RF: Let me ask another question about <i>Night Mail</i> itself, or the shoot, the recording van tied onto the train on the flat bed, did you take it all the way to Scotland and back?	Recording van on train for <i>Night Mail</i>
			NF : Yes, yes, yes.	
			RF: How many trips did they have to make?	
			NF: We made only one really and this was to get the sound inside the sorting vans. From the camera side it wasn't practical to light the interiors of the sorting vans, that was the reason, and as I said, we built the set in the studio at Blackheath.	sound from the mail train sorting vans
	0:23:03		RF: Where were you on that train trip, were you in the little sound truck or in the train?	
			NF: Yes.	
			RF: You were in the sound truck?	
			NF: Yes, switching on and off, we had an intercom through, yes it was rather a bumpy ride.	
			RF: It sounds quite adventurous for its time in terms of recording.	
	0:23:24		NF: I suppose it would be. The whole thing was, of course our Visatone equipment in the truck couldn't be removed, it wasn't a portable outfit at all, so it had to come in its van. A sort of huge rack amplifier and everything was fixed.	Visatone sound equipment
			RF: That must have been a terrible problem for your galvanometer in the truck, how was it cushioned?	galvanometer
			NF: It stood up to it all right. I sort of, I seem to recollect we must have put sponge rubber underneath the recording camera just to soften the vibration a bit. Anyway with the van on its tyres, this absorbed quite a lot of the vibration so we didn't have that problem.	protection of the sound system
	0:24:32		RF: Did you ever record with the truck moving? I don't mean on the train, I mean other times, could you take mobile recordings?	
	0:24:50		NF: I don't think we ever did, not in my time anyway.	

[2]	0:00:00		RF: Now then. were there any other films you worked on at the GPO?	
	0:00:13		NF: Not really, all sorts of odd bits and pieces of things, other films that had been half completed and needed a bit of commentary on. I can't be terribly specific about any of them. <i>Night Mail</i> occupied most of the time I was there. I was only there nine months or so.	other work at the GPO Film Unit
			RF: Clearly an interesting time and place to be, indeed.	
			NF: Yes indeed it was.	
	0:00:55		RF: Was Ralph busily organising people into a union?	Ralph Bond
			NF: No, I was never asked to join anyway, not then.	

		RF: We'll come onto the union later, I wondered if since Ralph was there whether he was already militantly organising people?	
		NF: Not to my recollection.	
		RF: How did your career progress? You again, through Sir Gordon Craig, went to where?	
	0:01:38	NF: I'd always wanted to get onto camera and Movietone, Sir Gordon was managing director of Movietone, and Movietone was expanding a lot. He said well come, and I left GPO and joined Movietone up at Soho Square here. And I was a sort of, general at the start, I was a sort of general "hey you" and tea-maker and camera cleaner. I was getting my hands on the camera at last. I'd only been there six weeks when I got my first assignment simply because nobody else was in the office and there had been an accident at Sheppey Bridge.	Desire to be a cameraman; move to <i>British Movietone News</i> with help of Sir Gordon Craig; first assignment
	0:02:42	Something had run into it or something like that, and the news editor came rushing down and said any cameramen about and I said no, only me. He said well can you use a camera, I said I think I can. I grabbed a Newman Sinclair and went down to Sheppey and it was the very first story I did. And it was quite successful, so from there on I was on camera.	First assignment
		RF: How much experience had you had with the Newman Sinclair, operating it?	
	0:03:35	NF: Just fiddling around with it, there were plenty around and I used to clean and polish them and run them through and this sort of stuff. So I hadn't any trouble in using a camera at all. Ultimately, of course I went over to sound camera. We had then in Movietone, we had five sound units. Camera ... of course using the Movietone AEO-light system which was incorporated in the camera so you had a crew of a cameraman and a soundman and your own car adapted to carry all this with a strengthened roof with camera clamps on it. You've probably seen pictures of it.	Experience with cameras; camera cars
	0:04:27	RF: This is the one ... such as there is at the Museum of the Moving Image?	
		NF: Yes, are you talking about the REO?	
		RF: Yes.	
		NF: Well now Movietone when it started had five of these REOs which were shipped over from America, complete with all the equipment. And they also had American crews as well who were ultimately replaced with British crews. Anyway we used the REOs for quite a time, they were clumsy, awkward things.	REO camera cars
		RF: The vehicles you mean?	
	0:05:23	NF: Yes. So eventually we replaced them with adapted saloon cars, Talbots mostly, and there was still one REO left when I went to Movietone and it was never really used except in emergency. It wasn't a pleasant vehicle to drive at all, really on British roads. They were left-hand drives.	Talbot cars adapted for camera cars
		RF: So really they had less of an influence than legend has it. They were used less. How long a period of time were they used?	
	0:06:05	NF: Let me see, Movietone started here in 1929 and I joined it 1936 and there was only one of the REOs that was left.	

		RF: Had they come over in 1929? they dated back to then?	
		NF: Actually Movietone started in America in 1928 and in 1929 they extended into Europe, into London and Paris and Rome.	Movietone in Europe
0:06:42		RF: We've made again a sizeable jump from your being on camera to your going back to sound, shall we fill in the time when you were on camera? On picture camera?	
		NF: Oh no, I was on picture camera, the whole time from day one.	Cameraman
		RF: Oh I see I misunderstood.	
		NF: I said it was a combined system and the cameraman didn't have to worry about sound.	
		RF: A single system?	
0:07:12		NF: A single system, yes, you had your soundtrack alongside the picture on the negative and you had a soundman who was controlling the thing at the microphone end of it. But as far as the cameraman was concerned it was there and you just, it was quite an effective system because it was extremely compact as far as the camera end was concerned. It was just a matter of inserting a glow tube in the back of the camera and this of course was the De Forest patent, the AEO-light, which Movietone had acquired and it made sound newsreels possible. And when other newsreels started up such as Gaumont, Paramount, Pathe, they had much more clumsy equipment.	Single system sound recording; other newsreels' recording equipment
0:08:24		Pathe had Visatone recording on a separate recorder instead of in the camera. The recorder of course was running in sync but it was a rather cumbersome system. The beauty of the Movietone system was that you didn't have to bother about sync at all, you simply switched your camera on and you got your picture and sound simultaneously on the film.	Visatone recording system
		RF: So it made it much quicker to work I suppose?	
		NF: Very much so.	
		RF: Did it make more complications in the editing stage, it required very simple basic editing I guess did it not?	
0:09:16		NF: Yes the soundtrack was in the camera was about 12 frames behind the picture so in the editing system you had to take the original soundtrack off the negative and match it up to sync, you could make a combined print from that. As I said it was a very efficient system and the sound quality was good.	Editing sound and picture
		RF: Well let's talk about the newsreels as you remember them from then on. How long a time were you with Fox Movietone?	
		NF: All in all from 1936 to 1978. The war was in the middle but I was a newsreel war correspondent so I was still with Movietone.	
		RF: Norman I wonder what the best way is of covering this period? Just coming forward in time as you remember things?	
0:10:36		NF: OK.	
		RF: I suppose then the first question would be could you give us an idea how newsreels were made in the mid-thirties, the requirements placed upon the various crew members and what happened to their material when they got back to London.	Newsreels in the mid thirties

	0:10:58		NF: The set up was you had a chief editor and then you had a news editor whose job it was to decide what would be covered and a production manager who organised the necessary crews and handed out assignments.	Movietone newsreel staff hierarchy
			RF: How many crews were there when you joined?	
	0:11:30		NF: We had in cameramen, we had about ten at that point, some of them were freelancers who used to wait around in case there was a job. Permanent staff, we had four on sound camera and we had three who only shot silent material, often in support of the sound unit. Because you needed on a lot of jobs, you had to have a silent camera as well for the cutaway shots. On the big jobs such as the Cup Final of course every one was on that, or the Grand National, you'd have everybody out on that.	Camera crews; freelancers; composition of camera crews; sharing film footage of important events
	0:12:24		The Grand National was something different because being spread out over such a large area with a lot of jumps, it was the one occasion all the newsreels got together, each taking a section of the circuit and sharing the material. But otherwise, everybody, there was a certain amount of competition of course.	
			RF: We'll come onto that in time, just to get the structure. [background noise] That threw me ... It's all based in Soho Square. You reported to Soho Square and waited for an assignment, is that the idea,	Assignment allocation
	0:13:38		NF: Or if you'd had an assignment handed out the previous day you simply went straight there by whatever means. Movietone actually was rather fragmented. Actually, it started in Newman Street, it was the head office, we had a garage and workshop up at Fitzroy Square and we had a library some place else, we had a bit of it in D'Arblay Street, bits and pieces all over the place. And then eventually we moved from Newman Street to head office in Soho Square with theatre and editing and offices, and we also had a bit in Great Russell Street as well which was the accounts. So really we were split up all over the place.	British Movietone News premises from 1929 to 1979
	0:14:32		And it really wasn't until eventually in 1961 when we moved to Denham that we got everything under one roof, including the library. The library at that point was fragmented over about six different places, Perivale and D'Arblay Street and the rest of it, but we got a specially built building which Rank built for us and the library was at last altogether in one piece.	
	0:15:22		RF: Where would you report to yourself, where did the cameramen hang out?	Cameramen at Movietone
			NF: Well in the office, first of all in Newman Street and then in Soho Square.	
			RF: Where you kept more or less busy all the time or was there a certain amount of waiting around for assignments?	
			NF: There was a large amount of waiting around. I would say one would average in the course of a week about three or four assignments.	Waiting for assignments
			RF: Were cameramen known for what, either their specialisation or versatility, were you expected to cover anything and everything?	
			NF: Oh yes indeed, you were a jack-of-all-trades then.	
	0:16:15		RF: OK, lets take a typical assignment then. You would be at Soho Square and you would be told to proceed on a job, did you have paper work? Did they actually hand you a thing to say this is your assignment or was it all verbal briefing?	Typical assignment
	0:16:29		NF: It was all written out, giving you all the necessary information and	Assignment

			contacts and times and so on. And you were briefed as much as possible but it was very much over to you. The attitude was well you're the guy out the front, go out and do it your way. Some cameramen were better on certain jobs than others were. When it came to say football, cameraman A would be possibly better than cameraman B because he was more enthusiastic about it.	sheets
			RF: What were the bread and butter stories, if any. Was football one? That was a weekly assignment presumably?	
	0:17:09		NF: We used to talk about the four Fs, fashion, football and furry friends, you were always doing something in the zoo. So, these were the four Fs. We did a lot of fashion stuff, a tremendous amount of football. This was important for distribution purposes because exhibitors reckoned football was the stuff that brought the public in and in certain areas it was, so you were often going off to do the local football matches which was simply to please the one particular exhibitor, which was rather expensive. In the end we had to stop doing that sort of thing, it was getting too costly to send a crew out simply to do one match for one, for a one-off show.	The four Fs: newsreel story staples
	0:18:14		RF: You mean only that cinema would play that particular story? Just in that reel or would it go into all the reels?	Local stories
	0:18:44 [ends]		NF: Yes. It was a flyer in a single copy. Anyway, if it kept them happy you did it for goodwill's sake. But football and sport in general was very much the staple thing. And ... can you hang on a minute [ends abruptly]	

[3]	0:00:00	1930s	RF: ... Recording ... we're on side two now. So we broke off and we're in the thirties; you've said you don't remember that much about them but let's dig and see what we can find out. They talk about the newsreel wars, now was that something you remember from the thirties or not?	The newsreel wars of the 1930s
			NF: Oh yes, the competition bit. The real, if you can call it a war, the competition on the ground and skulduggery and the rest of it had largely ceased at the time I joined it, Movietone, that was earlier on ...	
			RF: ... from when? The early thirties or the twenties?	
	0:00:58	1930s	NF: The early thirties. One sort of thing that would happen is one company would get the exclusive rights to some sporting event such as the Cup Final, and the others would try to get in on it and that was when some of the mayhem went on. You know, sort of, the pirate cameramen might find a rather large individual alongside them who'd ease them out of the way or make it generally unpleasant.	Pinching stories; threat of violence
			RF: Was there actual violence or just the threat of it?	
			NF: No real violence at all.	
			RF: People got leaned on?	
			NF: But all sorts of other things went on. If somebody had the exclusive on say a test match, the others were capable of turning up with mirrors to shine in their lenses or put up balloons in front of cameras, you know, that sort of thing.	Pinching
	0:02:08		RF: Did they set out to sabotage equipment, nasty tricks?	
			NF: You may find a cable cut or something. But no a lot of that has been exaggerated. It had certainly stopped when I joined. Except of course on the ground you always tried to get the better stuff than the other guy, the idea of sabotaging equipment and stuff, that had stopped.	Sabotaging other newsreels

	0:02:45		RF: Were people, was a cameraman from Movietone, could he be friendly with somebody from Paramount or Gaumont British?	Inter-newsreel competition
			NF: Oh indeed.	Friendly rivalry
			RF: Yes, you were all buddies together?	
			NF: Yes, we did meet in the pub afterwards and have a pint or two. But on the job one tended to be competitive because if somebody had got something which you didn't there was apt to be questions asked in the viewing theatre.	
			RF: Of course. But it was friendly rivalry although it was quiet rivalry?	
			NF: It was friendly rivalry, you could say that, yes.	
	0:03:24		RF: Right okay. In these early days of yours is there any one particular story or group of stories that stands out in your memory from before the war? One that gave you great pride for example? Or that put you in danger?	Scoops
			NF: Mostly routine stuff. I don't think before the war I ever got anything which could be called a scoop by any means. On the other hand I don't think anybody else did. A scoop was simply a matter of luck and being in the right place at the right time when nobody else was. But these were relatively rare.	
	0:04:10		RF: Gordon Craig, he was a personal friend or a family friend or was he very much your boss?	Newsreels and politics
			NF: Oh he was very much the boss, he just happened to have a connection with my family that's all.	Sir Gordon Craig
			RF: There's a story that he was the wrong Gordon Craig in terms of the knighthood, that it was intended for the theatrical designer, but because of his Tory party affiliations there was confusion and he was knighted. Is that something you can bear out?	
	0:04:45		NF: No I couldn't frankly. Yes, he certainly had associations with the Tory Party, in fact we used to do a fair amount of filming for the Conservatives, they had a films division and we used to do a lot of work for that, through Sir Gordon of course.	Filming for the Conservative Party
			RF: And also it was Joseph Ball, was it not, at Tory Central Office? Did you have any dealings with him?	
			NF: I remember the name.	
	0:05:23		RF: Did you work on any of those political stories?	Politicians
			NF: Oh yes.	
			RF: People like what, Chamberlain ... and Baldwin had gone by then hadn't he?	
	0:05:42		NF: Yes. One of the things I did get was Chamberlain's return from Hitler in 1939.	Munich Agreement
			RF: You were ... was it Northolt or Croydon?	
			NF: Hendon.	

			RF: Hendon, that's right, yes.	
			NF: It was Hendon then. And he waved his little bit of paper ...	
			RF: You filmed that did you? Did you?	
			NF: As a matter of fact it's running at the moment in the MOMI [editor's note: Museum of the Moving Image], the newsreel exhibit there, with the REO van and there's a screen with the thing. Well that's running all the time that stuff, typical sort of newsreel stories of that sort of period.	Newsreels at MOMI
			RF: That shot must be the most used in the history of motion pictures, certainly in this country, so tell us the story of how you got it.	
	0:06:32		NF: Well we had two Movietone cameras there. And I was up at the top on the control tower for the arrival and we had our other camera on the ground, in the usual jam, because all the newsreels were there. And our camera jammed so it was over to me on long focus lens to get this piece of paper bit. All the other newsreels had it of course, this was not really a scoop because everybody was there.	Chamberlain returning from Munich
			RF: But there is one specific piece of film that seems to be the one that's always used and was that Movietone or was that one of the others?	
			NF: Yes that was mine actually, that's the one which always seems to come up.	
			RF: Right. It's almost symbolic and emblematic. That's very interesting indeed.	
	0:07:45		NF: No we ... After the war we did quite a lot of Conservative Party films, mostly shot at Brighton Studios in fact, with actors and the rest of it.	Brighton Studios
			RF: Well we'll come to that. It's interesting the political connection between Movietone and the Conservative Party. Do you think there was any political bias to the reel, the newsreel as it was put out?	
			NF: No, I would say certainly not. You have to be careful over that one. But remember you see, part of the ownership of Movietone was the Daily Mail, they had the forty nine percent, and 20th Century Fox had the fifty-one. They had the controlling interest. But the Daily Mail had the other bit, so through Daily Mail, of course, that was where the Conservative influence was.	Ownership of British Movietone News
	0:08:59		RF: Craig had come from where? Had he been a newspaperman?	
			NF: No. He'd had various film companies of his own; most of which seemed to pack up one way or another. But I'm very vague on his background in fact. But we also had Sir Gerald Sanger who was a close friend of Lord Rothermere, and ... so you can see there was quite a, sort of, Conservative flavour to the whole thing, but this I will say - it never showed in the reel, we had to be scrupulously accurate on this.	Gordon Craig's background; covering political events
	0:09:58		Obviously we'd do say, a Conservative Party conference – the annual conference, but we'd also do a Labour Party conference and a Liberal conference, each one was given the exactly the same amount of footage. It was measured to the frame, so that ... it was a straightforward reporting. Alright you'd have Churchill doing the key speech at the Tory Conference and so on and so forth, or Atlee, they all got the same footage.	Political bias

	0:10:46		RF: I was going to ask you - do you have any recollections of politicians of the time off-camera, because on camera they're treated extremely well, are they not? There's no aggressive interviewing at all. Do you have any memories of Chamberlain ad-libbing anything or dropping his guard in any respect?	Politicians
			NF: Not really, as you say the interviews with politicians then were not done on a question and answer basis at all, it was just "Would you care to say a few words sir?" And sir did his few words. But there was no challenging or questioning. This was understood.	
			RF: And this continued quite a long while.	
			NF: You did the doorstep stuff at No 10 and somebody would have a mike and would say "Would you care to say a few words sir?" and if he said no you knew then that was that.	
	0:11:56		RF: One last area to talk about before we come onto the war years, was it a good living?	Pay and expenses claims
			NF: It wasn't the ... at that time newsreel people tended to be slightly better off than their equivalents in feature studios, leaving out of course, key people, such as lighting cameramen who'd be on a contract or something like that, but it was a steady job. And it didn't pay the greatest but you were better off very often than people in other areas in the film business.	Newsreel versus feature studio working conditions
			RF: Who were laid off continually?	
			NF: Yes, exactly, were laid off. That was one thing about it, that it was a permanent job.	
	0:12:51		RF: Did you have a desire to switch over in to features or were you dedicated to newsreel?	
			NF: Not really but subsequently I got all the shortened documentary film work, so I was less concerned with newsreel. But this was later on.	
			RF: After the war? Let me ask you, do you remember the sort of money you made before the war?	
			NF: I think my salary as a cameraman in 1939 would be about £15 a week.	Cameraman's pre-war pay
	0:13:35		RF: Oh that wasn't at all bad for the time? Were there modest fiddles to expenses? I stress modest.	Expenses
			NF: Well one sometimes stretched them a little.	
			RF: Well, so that was an augmentation of income to some extent.	
			NF: To a very very small extent. There's no, sort of, real dishonesty about it. One just might have an extra taxi or something to make up for something else.	Fiddling of expenses
			RF: Regarded as perks presumably?	
			NF: Yes, yes it was really.	
	0:14:15	1937 to 1938	RF: It might be interesting to ask you the pressures on the newsreel leading up to the war, because what '38 or '39 were rather intense years in many ways weren't they? The comings and goings and preparations for war, do you have a memory of these months?	Newsreels in the pre-WWII years

	0:14:36		NF: Yes. One really wasn't thinking in terms of war in 1937 or '38, one was becoming aware of the possibility of it about 1939, but as a prosperous period for the newsreels, I mean, the cinemas were going full blast and the newsreels were selling and it was a popular feature in cinema programmes. The ... of course, during the war the newsreels had quite an important part, lots of us were overseas, but all the material in the war was pooled anyway but of course, it was still, newsreel was still an important part of any cinema show, particularly in the war.	Pre-war prosperous period for newsreels
	0:15:53	1939	RF: Well let's come to the outbreak of war. What was the immediate effect on you and the newsreels? Or upon Movietone?	Outbreak of WWII
			NF: Well we then came under the Ministry of Information.	
			RF: The cinemas closed immediately so what effect did that have?	
			NF: The cinemas reopened again, yes, there was no instant devastation, you had this period of the 'phoney' war and you know the cinemas were doing quite well then.	
			RF: So people even then weren't laid off?	
			NF: Oh no no. Quite a number of newsreel personnel such as myself, of course, were made war correspondents and shipped overseas.	
	0:16:49		RF: Had there been planning for war by the newsreels do you know? Or by the Ministry of Information, were there plans already prepared?	
			NF: Not as far as I know.	
			RF: How did it affect you? What happened when war broke out?	
			NF: Well, I was almost immediately signed up as a war correspondent and went over to the BEF [British Expeditionary Force] in France.	Joining the BEF
	0:17:16		RF: Were you then in the service or not?	
			NF: No, the war correspondent had a sort of ambiguous situation. He wasn't actually in the armed forces. He was still a civilian but in uniform and given an honorary rank without any executive power. I mean you'd have an honorary rank of captain but you had no executive authority. And you were in fact a civilian in uniform.	Military power of the war correspondents
	0:18:00		RF: Did you get any training at all as a war correspondent or was it just a straightforward continuation?	
			NF: Yes you simply did what you'd always been doing and it was very... you worked in conjunction with the service PR Units. The RAF had it's public relations unit and so had the army. The navy somehow never had it to the same extent and it was a bit haphazard with the navy. You worked in conjunction with the service PR set ups and it was over to you really to say what you wanted to do and for them to say whether it was possible or not and if it was a supply of transport and if necessary a conducting officer, but it was largely left over to the cameraman to say what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go.	Working with the military
	0:19:12		RF: Did your pooling start immediately?	
			NF: Yes.	

			RF: Right. And you were assigned to the BEF?	
	0:19:20		NF: My first assignment in fact was with, what was then known as the Advanced Air Striking Force which was based at Rheims, and I did a few months then, and we had another cameraman with the BEF HQ at Arras. He went sick and I took over his job, I left the airforce and went over to the army instead. And it was all a period of scratching to find something to shoot. I mean it was the phoney war in other words and there wasn't much, there was no action to film, so you went around finding various units and trying to rake something up. Doing exercises and this sort of thing. It was quite hard graft finding enough material as a matter of fact. And then of course, well, May 10th 1940, up went the balloon and of course our feet hardly touched the ground after that.	First WWII assignment in Rheims
	0:20:48		RF: Were you still in France on May 10 th ?	Dunkirk
		1940	NF: Yes, I was in Paris as a matter of fact and had to make a dash back to Arras. From there on well we sort of advanced until we had to come back in a very great hurry. We got quite a lot of material but it was all chaos and it was difficult really to get at what was going on because nobody really knew. But, so anyway as far as the Movietone crew, which was myself and Martin Gray were concerned we eventually had to evacuate from, not Dunkirk, Boulogne, taking with us what equipment we could carry which wasn't very much and we had to leave the vehicle. So back to here.	Dunkirk evacuation with Martin Gray
	0:22:03 0:23:19 [ends]		And shortly after that I was back here for really only a few weeks and then was shipped out to the Middle East to join the navy as a correspondent, the Eastern Med fleet at Alexandria, and so I was a naval war correspondent from there on. One of the things you could do as a war correspondent, you could interchange your services, you could do a bit of navy and a bit of army and any RAF stuff as well. But most of the RAF stuff was, well when it came to operational, the flying was done by the service film units. The RAF Film Unit was based at Pinewood and they did most of the operational stuff from there.	Moving between armed services; joining the Eastern Mediterranean fleet in Egypt

[4]	0:00:00		RF: Well again, let's talk about your war, the kind of stuff that you were doing. Incidentally have you been interviewed by the Imperial War Museum?	World War II
			NF: Yes, I got quite a lengthy one.	
			RF: I should imagine yes a lot of the detail then is recorded there. What were the salient aspects of your war activity?	
	0:00:26		NF: I'll just refer to this for a moment.	War diaries
			RF: Now these are diaries from the time, are they, that you carried with you?	
		1940	NF: Oh no, I've made these up later on, since. I did keep diaries at the time but not in this form. This is a sort of assembly of everything. [searches though diaries] Yes, war: October; travelled to France; accredited war correspondent at RAF Advanced Air Striking Force at RAF HQ at Rheims.	War diaries
	0:01:39		No further record after that. 1940 with Advanced Air Striking Force, France; snow scenes; aeroplanes in the snow standing still; Captain Balfour inspects RAF; visit Rheims airfield; Winston Churchill visits RAF; arrival AOC&C Air Marshall Barrett; left for Metz; visited Maginot line near Metz; returned Rheims; return of leaflet raid over Vienna and Prague which was one of the first RAF operations dropping leaflets over Vienna and Prague. And they landed back at Rheims. I think they were ... what was the long aeroplane? Anyway it doesn't matter ...	

	0:02:23		RF: Now what sort of period are we talking about this coverage?	
		1940	NF: January 15th 1940. Left for BEF HQ at Arras, that's when I changed over to the army. And Paris oh yes Paris. January 24 th patrol demonstration; 28th presentation of colours to Royal Ulster Rifles, and so on, and so forth; 30 th First militia fighting unit in France, I don't know what that was actually; contacted Indian unit - oh yes, you could scrape up something with Indians doing Indian dancing or something like that. You see all of this is very dull stuff.	War diaries
	0:03:20		RF: So things like this were staged for the camera were they?	
			NF: Yes oh yes, all these units were very happy to have you, it relieved the boredom a bit.	Arranging events to film
			RF: As you say, it was the phoney war.	
			NF: Arranged church parade with Royal Irish Fusiliers ...	
			RF: Now how much of this would have been used eventually do you think back home?	
			NF: Oh quite a lot because it was considered as good for morale, if mum could see her boy in ... you know, with the army all fit and well, that sort of thing.	Morale boosting footage
	0:04:04		RF: How did the pool work? You sent stuff back, did everyone have access to that? Because the individual reels were still making their own reels up? There wasn't one newsreel during the war.	Pooling arrangements during WWII
			NF: No, except I think there was a Ministry of Information reel, but the thing was whoever shot the material, whether it was for newsreel, Army Film Unit, RAF, Navy, it all went in the pool and subject to censorship everybody shared it. And of course, the film was coming from many sources. We were getting film from France. And of course one did get hold of a certain amount of enemy material as well, that used to arrive somehow or another. But everything went in a pool and was subjected to censorship. And if passed everybody had it. There was no such thing as one newsreel company simply having exclusive material.	Pooling arrangements during WWII; use of captured enemy footage
	0:05:30		RF: Now, that would be on the war footage, but they obviously at home were covering their individual stories. I imagine here that wasn't all pooled was it?	
			NF: Now I wouldn't be sure on this, I would think not if it didn't involve any armed forces.	
			RF: Dear god excuse me ... I'm sorry [tape recording interrupted] ... So, again, I've lost track because of all those interruptions. Yeah we were talking about the home front.	
			NF: Yes now, I must say, for practically the next three years I had no contact with the home front at all. I was abroad continually.	Leave during war time
			RF: Were you?	
			NF: Yes.	
			RF: No leave or very brief spells back here?	
	0:06:30		NF: I think in three years I had one brief spell back here. But I ... one thing was that that if you came back and stayed back too long of course you got a call-up card. You were still a civilian, you see.	

			RF: Yes of course you were very liable for that weren't you?	
			NF: So really to keep going on the job I simply had to stay away and that applied with most of us, we ...	
			RF: Were you in to fairly hairy situations? Was it a dangerous life? Were you shooting combat footage?	
			NF: Oh there were some nasty moments but ... see I'm still here in 1940.	
			RF: Well I won't burden you with going through all the stuff you've done for the Imperial War Museum because if they've covered it then obviously it's a matter of record. So we don't need to go into in great detail. What I'd love to get is your overview, your impressions of the period operating in that capacity.	
	0:07:50		NF: Yes well yes, it was a matter of deciding what you wanted to do and get the facilities for doing it through the various service PR set-ups. And the navy, my next assignment was naval war correspondent and this was rather a sticky one. All you could do really in the case of the East Med Fleet was to go out with the Fleet every time it put to sea, and see what you could get. There was a certain amount of, I wouldn't say resistance ashore, but a lack of enthusiasm to give you the facilities.	Navy war correspondent for the East Med fleet at Alexandria
	0:08:56		But once aboard a ship, they couldn't have been better, they'd give everything they could possibly do for you. And so one went out and hoped to get something. Alright you got a certain amount of air attack, but when it came to naval engagements they ... one of the problems the navy had was making contact with the Italians who weren't exactly enthusiastic about coming out at all, and generally speaking had faster ships so they could move back a bit.	Navy war correspondent for the East Med fleet at Alexandria
			RF: I think that was very sensible of them.	
	0:09:38		NF: Another difficult thing with the navy that operated at this end was they had a curious censorship policy on film and photography that so many things that they considered could not be shown because of security. And if you photographed a warship at sea it gave away outline, camouflage, armament, radar and so on and so forth, so it was censurable. So it was rather daft going to sea with the navy and not showing a ship, you see. Well actually it wasn't that bad, but this is rather the way it started off, but you could not show the damage to HM ships, so if you'd got a jolly good shot of a bomb exploding on a ship it was automatically censurable because it showed the damage.	Navy censorship of film and photography; lost newsreel footage due to censorship
	0:10:42		And the navy in its wisdom destroyed everything that was censurable instead of putting it into cold storage for the record. In all the time I spent with the navy, because I had two spells of that in 1940-41 and then in '43 I shot a fair amount of film, some of it quite spectacular and there's hardly a foot of that remains now.	
			RF: That's sad, very sad.	
			NF: What they ... yes, I mean when it came to action stuff, there's very little remains I know in the Movietone Library, because I've checked there, of anything I shot.	
			RF: You mean it was destroyed at the time or has been lost since?	
	0:11:54		NF: A bit of each actually. The navy destroyed a lot of stuff. And subsequently when Movietone Library was in a bit of a chaos being split up over about six different places, I think a certain amount of material vanished then. If you remember after the war CBS was making the series <i>Victory at Sea</i> .	Lost newsreel footage due to censorship and Movietone Library move

			RF: It was NBC actually, I remember it.	
	0:12:36		NF: Oh it was NBC, I'm sorry. Yes NBC. And they were scrapping every source to get naval material. And of course here as well, and at that point we could hardly supply anything from Movietone and it seemed, this seemed to apply everywhere. They could just not get hold of enough naval material, barring a few Malta convoy things. Now I knew pretty much everything I had shot with the navy and listed all this stuff but we could not lay hands on it at all. What had happened I know not.	Lost newsreel footage
			RF: Well that's a tragedy.	
			NF: With a split up library such as we had then, there's a tendency for things to disappear out of the back door, you know.	
	0:13:46		RF: Collectors? Or other libraries? Or people just taking what they'd taken? It's a bit difficult to know why people would want to disappear with it?	
			NF: Oh somebody would want a bit of something for some purpose or other...	Lost newsreel footage
			RF: A bit depressing	
			NF: Have you got it, it would be handed out and not checked and not listed. I'm not saying a lot of that went on at all, but I know a lot of stuff that they thought they had from the records simply wasn't there.	
	0:14:31		RF: What was the equipment that you were using especially on board ship? What did you take with you?	Cameras on board ship
			NF: I used to have a Newman Sinclair and an Eymo, sort of standard equipment. I mean you had to have stuff which you could handle yourself. And I think I had the heaviest Newman Sinclair ever built. It was built like a battleship, of course, as all the Newman Sinclairs were but I had one of the only three four-lens turret Sinclairs which Sinclair built. And there were only three. I had one of them and it was heavier than any other one. And Harry Rignold in the Army Film Unit had the other one and I don't know who had the third one. But anyway, I lived with this thing for about three years. It was very efficient, very reliable.	
	0:15:34		RF: If it had to be serviced what, were you capable of servicing it yourself? Or where would it be taken?	
			NF: Well if it needed any servicing, as a matter of fact it never did in three years, apart from a bit of oiling and so on and so forth it never gave any trouble. But being with the navy of course, had there had been any serious trouble, I think the navy could have handled that in one of the service depot ships. But the Eymo was handy. It was a 100ft Eymo, was handy in tight spots where the Newman might have been a bit hefty to deal with in the ...	
	0:16:31		RF: What were some of the principal stories you covered, theatres of war or specific actions?	
			NF: Well of course starting with the BEF, it was just a matter of grabbing what you could, air attack and that sort of thing. And then subsequently with the navy, well in the early stages it was just a matter of getting your bombardment and the odd air attack, nothing specific, it was just a matter of grab ... it wasn't a complete story in other words.	War stories covered; the BEF; the Navy
	0:17:20		RF: What were the theatres of war that you served in?	

			NF: France, the Middle East, Singapore. Ceylon for a bit but that could hardly then be called a theatre of war, I mean it was on a war basis but the only thing that happened in my time in Ceylon, and it was before I'd even arrived there from Australia, the Japanese bombed Trincomalee and Colombo. They had a fleet in the Bay of Bengal. There were carriers and they carried out a bomb attack on Trincomalee and Colombo and that was the extent of the action.	Service in theatres of war including Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia; Singapore;
	0:18:10		Of course, in Singapore, as the soon as the balloon went ... I was there before Pearl Harbour of course, when the Japanese came in and attacked Malaya at the same time. So we got what we could starting, you know, up in Malaysia and retreating once again to Singapore picking up what we could. The Army Film Unit was there as well. Bryan Langley was in charge of that then, so we were together quite a bit on that, but eventually, of course, we had to quit and ...	
	0:19:08		The Japanese at that point had reached [the] Johor [Strait] and were lining up to attack Singapore. And so we really had to get out at that point and go over to Java as it then was. And I didn't do terribly much there, a lot of nice scenery, and one was dealing with the Dutch, of course, then. And then finally, of course we then had to get out and Australia was the only place we could go then.	Escape to Java and on to Australia as Japanese invade Singapore
	0:19:51		It all sounds awfully unspectacular but it was just a matter of picking up bits and pieces all the time. You couldn't say you'd done any specific action, you'd been present probably at an action, but it wasn't that sort of war, really. So I got a certain amount of stuff in Singapore but that again was mostly air attack and troops in retreat. But Australia, of course, well nothing was happening there except the Americans were beginning to arrive in. And Movietone had a set up in Sydney, we had our own office there.	Arrival of Americans in Australia;
	0:21:00 0:22:11 [ends]		And then back over to Ceylon because it looked as if Ceylon might be eventually invaded so I went over there and it wasn't invaded so I had a jolly nice six months there. Once again scratching round for all sorts of material to make up something, something at least to send back. Then I subsequently went back again to the Middle East, to Alexandria and joined the navy once again. At this point, of course, the Germans had invaded Greece and were landing on Crete and the navy was sent up from Alexandria to give what air support it could for our troops' evacuation from Crete. And ... [ends abruptly]	Return to Egypt and on to Greece

[5]	0:00:00		RF: Side three. Can we just overlap that Norman, you were saying about the invasion of Crete and the material you were able to get.	Invasion of Crete
		1941	NF: Yes, the navy was sent out and got what air support it could for the evacuation of our troops from Crete and we had a fairly large force. There was one carrier, <i>Formidable</i> , on which I was aboard, and we had several cruisers and the usual destroyers. But the Germans at that point had concentrated a large part of their airforce in Southern Greece, including as we found out later on, one of their crack dive bomber squadrons, the Goering Squadron. And of course they came at us like all hell and this made some really good stuff. Ships were hit, and actually in one day we lost a cruiser and two destroyers, in one day. One of the destroyers was the <i>Kelly</i> with Mountbatten on board, the famous <i>In Which We Serve</i> one, and so anyway all this was good spectacular stuff. We on the <i>Formidable</i> were hit about four times and had casualties and lost all our aircraft which had flown off and couldn't land on again because the flight deck had been damaged too badly. So we lost our aircraft, they had to ditch.	Invasion of Crete; sinking of the <i>Kelly</i> ; Battle of Crete
			RF: Were you the only cameraman covering this?	
			NF: Yes.	
	0:02:00		RF: Does that material survive or was it also heavily censored and destroyed?	Military censorship

			NF: It must have been heavily censored because it doesn't exist any more. I should think in the three days I must have shot a couple of thousand feet and all of it good stuff. But apparently it no longer exists and it's certainly not in the Movietone Library, I don't know if it's in the Imperial War Museum Archive but I don't think it is.	
			RF: What would have happened to that raw stock that you'd exposed, who then took it over, did the navy take it over?	Film processing procedure
			NF: Yes, you handed it over to navy PR in Alexandria and they arranged for it to be flown back.	
			RF: Still unprocessed?	
	0:03:00		NF: Unprocessed. Yes it was processed here. And you could in fact fly stuff back via Gibraltar. Of course, I never heard anything more after I'd shipped it off. But there's every reason to believe that that sort of material and a lot of other stuff that I shot for the navy, and other cameramen, doesn't survive any more.	
			RF: An interesting point then for researchers listening to this tape to try and find out what happened to that stuff. Where and when and under whose authority it disappeared. There's not a lot of point in going into the war time detail if you've covered it with the Imperial War Museum because they've got a marvellous archive there, so we know that will be preserved.	Loss of censored military newsreel footage
	0:04:04		NF: I know I did four cassettes for them. I'm just trying to think who it was, I'm sorry his name's gone for the moment. Doesn't matter. Anyway they've got it and I've got a copy of it.	
			RF: An estimable oral history resource that. So bring us forward in time to what the next major watershed when - was it peace? Or was there still anything to cover in the war which you haven't covered for the war museum?	
	0:04:46		NF: Well my next major assignment was off to Palestine as it then was.	
			RF: During the war still?	
			NF: No, the war was over.	
	0:04:58		RF: This is post-war. Right. How did the war end for you, you were still with the navy?	End of World War Two
			NF: Now what was doing? Well, just a minute, I have to think back here	
			RF: You'd remained a civilian throughout? yes?	
			NF: Yes. Now when did I get back here ... I can turn it up I think ...	
			RF: OK I'll stop. [tape stops]	
			NF: [tape resumes] I finally returned to the UK on the 17th April 1945.	
			RF: From where? From the Med?	
	0:05:47		NF: Yes, from the Mediterranean, I returned on the HMS Renown to the UK via Gibraltar and after that I was no longer a war correspondent. Peace had broken out. The next assignment was ... at	Return to the United Kingdom; travel to Greece

			this time, Spyros Skouras was president of Twentieth Century Fox and was heavily involved in Greek war relief, following of course the occupation of Greece and the civil war and the rest of it. So I was assigned to Spyros Skouras for a trip to Greece to see how the relief work was going. That took up, about, the better part of three weeks, no about a month, yes, about a month travelling around in Greece with Spyros Skouras.	with Spyros Skouras during the occupation and civil war
	0:07:11		RF: What was Spyros Skouras like?	
			NF: He was great fun, apart from his English which was ... fractured. Spyros was great. It was rather interesting that in the course of this trip we visited a village called Skourorion which was inhabited entirely by Skourases, almost all his family were there. They were in a pretty sorry state after the occupation. VE Day, German surrender in Europe. Now I was away when that happened, in Greece, I wasn't in on VE Day here. I'm sorry I'm waffling here ... I don't quite know where to go from here.	Travel in Greece with Spyros Skouras
	0:08:38		RF: Right. rather than get involved in that kind of detail ... when did the newsreel revert to any kind of peace time structure, how long did the pool material continue for example?	Newsreels in peacetime
			NF: I wouldn't be sure about that, it seemed to revert almost immediately to the normal newsreel.	
	0:09:02		RF: I have a feeling. I don't know if this is so, but the chances are that the newsreels did to a very large extent retain their identity during the war, it was only the censurable material and the war footage that was pooled. I think probably they were covering the domestic front individually, wouldn't you say?	
			NF: Yes, I should say so, and they always appeared on the screen with their own label.	
			RF: Very much so. Did you notice any differences coming back after an absence of five years?	
	0:09:40		NF: Well yes, all in all it would be about four years, getting on for about five years with two breaks in between, I had two brief breaks back in the UK. After have done this Spyros Skouras bit, of course, I was then shipped to Palestine and things were obviously brewing up there. Each company had its own cameraman there. As a matter of fact I arrived in Jerusalem the day after they blew up the King David Hotel.	Assignment in Palestine
			RF: Would you have been in the King David, staying there?	
	0:10:42	1946	NF: I wouldn't have been staying in it, but all the press always used to gather in the bar in the basement every day to swap beers and stories and everything else and it was into that bar, it was the Stern gang which did this. Captain Begin was in charge then. And they suddenly arrived dressed as Arabs, offloaded milk churns from a truck, dragged them into the bar and said get out of here which every body did, but it was too late to give any sort of alarm.	King David Hotel explosion; newsreel cameramen who covered the story
	0:11:31		Now as a matter of fact, it turned out afterwards, no it was the Ergon, not the Stern gang, They had in fact, you see one wing of the King David was Army Headquarters. And they did phone up and say we advise that you evacuate the building and nobody took it seriously and they stayed in the building and of course the casualties were quite heavy and the whole of the wing came down. And ... so at least other cameramen, there were three, one from Pathe, old Ken Gordon as a matter of fact, and a guy from the then short-lived Metro News, and Jimmy Gemmell from Paramount, so there were four of us all in all there.	
	0:12:51		Oh and Ronnie Noble from Universal, five. And everybody it so happened that day had dispersed and gone off to do other things and	

		nobody was on the spot when the King David had gone up. And I'd been hung up in Cairo and only arrived the day after and had a lot to shoot then, all the aftermath and the dragging out the bodies and the rest of it. That was my starting point in Palestine.	
		RF: How long were you stationed there?	
	0:13:35	NF: About five months if I remember rightly and most of the stuff we were doing, we were getting a number of these illegal immigrant ships which were coming in and this always made good material and you could scratch up odd stories here and there. But the main thing was dealing with the immigrant ships. Yes, I was there about five months and then somebody else took over and I came back home then.	Assignment in Palestine
		RF: Do you count it as a dangerous assignment?	
		NF: Compared to war time, no not really.	
	0:14:38	RF: Has the shape of the newsreels changed or is it very much the way it used to be?	Post-war newsreels
		NF: You're talking about this period?	
		RF: Yes in now what, the late forties, just after the war.	
		NF: No pretty much the same formula.	
		RF: We have a new government now, a Labour Government. Did you have any coverage to make of them? I suppose inevitably.	
		NF: We did all the usual stuff which goes with an election, speeches and so on and so forth.	
	0:15:20	RF: What about equipment, has that changed at all or is it still the old pre-war stuff?	Camera equipment
		NF: It's pretty much the same old stuff, except that at Movietone we got two new all combined system sound cameras from America and went over to Western Electric sound instead of the old AEO-light. The Wall camera was equipped with Westrex sound. Better quality and more portable as far as the amplifier was concerned. I've got a picture of it somewhere there.	American sound cameras; Western Electric sound
		RF: It was still very cumbersome?	
		NF: It was heavy but no heavier than a standard Mitchell camera, not blimped of course. Although we subsequently did, when we were involved in a lot of studio shooting, we got hold of a Mitchell blimp and we found we could fit the Wall camera quite happily into that. It was the same shape and format. So we used to use it with a blimp in the studio, still with the advantage of combined system sound.	Wall camera
	0:16:50	RF: Did Movietone have its own studio?	
		NF: Not then no. We used to have a small studio way, way back in Newman Street which was used for interviews. It was sound proofed and it had a glass window and you put your camera behind the glass window. The cameras were, of course, rather noisy then, you could shoot an interview in the studio from behind the glass alright without having any camera noise.	Movietone Studios
		RF: So it's still very much the old peacetime routine for you, did you stay that way or did you branch out into new areas?	

	0:17:47		NF: Yes, we went to quite an extent into doing shorts for cinema distribution. Certain number for the Conservative Party for propaganda purposes and Twentieth Century Fox wanted shorts as well so we were doing quite a large amount of shorts and documentaries. As a matter of fact I was doing the bulk of this, I really wasn't doing much newsreel stuff at all.	Shorts for cinema distribution
			RF: Now were these studio based or again ocation orientated?	
			NF: Both. For a studio we used Brighton Studios, they were quite well equipped.	Brighton Studios
			RF: You'd become a lighting cameraman by now?	
			NF: Yes, and Brighton had other advantages. If you wanted exteriors you had everything all round there.	
	0:19:03		RF: I'm trying to think of the man who owned Brighton Studios, I can't think of his name?	
			NF: Ah yes, I'm sorry I've forgotten it as well.	
			RF: I imagine that was the connection because he was a very active Tory was he not?	
	0:19:21		NF: Not to my recollection, our only reason for using Brighton was that it was very cheap and convenient for London. We could get actors down any time. I don't remember that whoever owned the studio had any sort of Conservative leanings. Yes, now a guy called Tommy Tomlinson, I think it was, had bought the studio from its original owner and he was going to make his own films there.	Use of Brighton Studios
	0:20:20		Well he started off, I think it was Tommy Tomlinson, he was going to make his own films there, and he started off on one and ran out of money half way through and I don't think he ever finished it. He was only too happy to lease the studios. So we got a very good deal there. I think we got that studio with the facilities including a resident carpenter and electrician, etc for something under £40 a day.	
			RF: That isn't the name, it's obviously a subsequent owner that I was thinking of whom I worked with. I used the studio myself a few times, but that was later, much later. What then developed for you, this went on for how long, the short subjects and Conservative Party films?	
	0:21:24		NF: I was mainly doing that sort of stuff for the rest of my time with Movietone. It was obviously interspersed with a certain amount of newsreel stuff. If we were going to cover the Grand National we needed everybody, in between shorts we were back on the newsreel again.	Short films; Conservative Party films
			RF: What were the short subjects, were they operating under some kind of general title or where they purely random subjects?	
	0:22:38 [ends]		NF: They were random subjects. For instance we made a short for BOAC as it then was which went out under the title of <i>Sudden Summer</i> . It involved ... it was a sort of travelogue of four countries served by BOAC, this is what it amounted, and there was sequence in each country, that sort of thing.	Short films

[6]	0:00:00		RF: And it got a theatrical release?	
		1950s	NF: Yes. Yes. For Fox we did a, we had Peter Hampton then as a director/scriptwriter and we did a series of shorts, some with a sporting angle to them, and they ... a sort of general interest two-reelers and	Subjects of short films; reasons for making short

		comedy shorts. These went out all over the place. We did one or two ... we did a series of comedy shorts at Brighton called <i>Life with Hardwicks</i> who, which is quite ...	films; impact of television
	0:01:08	These caught on and they went all round the world. They were pretty crude but we had a good director on there. A guy called Peter Whale, who you may know. He handled most of these. The Fox ones often had a sporting angle to them. Come Farnborough Air Show, for instance, we made a complete short on that, and many others beside. I can turn them all up, they're all here, but anyway. So, shorts were taking up a lot of the effort and of course the newsreel revenue was falling off and tv was making itself felt.	
	0:02:05	RF: We're talking now of the fifties still, or are we into the sixties?	
		NF: Fifties going into the sixties and ultimately into the seventies. As you appreciate the cinema audiences were falling off. Exhibitors were no longer very keen to have a newsreel at all, with tv running its own daily news, and so the revenue from the newsreel was falling. In fact it was running at a loss and being largely supported by the shorts and other things. Commercial films and things like that were paying for what was left of the newsreels.	Decline of newsreels from the 1950s to the 1970s
	0:02:56	RF: Had there been cut backs? Had people been laid off??	
		NF: No that came a bit later. Well I was made redundant in 1978, but really I'd run my course then. I mean I would have retired at 65 anyway. I was given a handshake and retired at 61. So ... but after that I was still working for Movietone on a freelance basis so it was an easy sort of let down. And then the final shutdown of Movietone was 1979 when the whole operation was dropped and they simply retained the library which is still there and doing well at Denham. So Movietone now really only exists as a library.	Fisher's redundancy and closure of Movietone News
	0:04:22	RF: Were you a cameraman throughout that period or were you directing to some extent towards the end on those short subjects you were working on? Or was there a director assigned as well?	
		NF: yes, yes, usually a director on the shorts, but of course, I mean in the newsreel and on certain other projects you had to act as director cameraman really, you had to do the two.	Directing the shorts
		RF: Did you ever have a wish to be a director as such?	
		NF: No not really, I liked camera work.	
		RF: Yes, about Movietone, were they in your estimation good employers? You were with them for a long long time. What, over thirty years, thirty-two years.	
		NF: Oh yes, yes, yeah.	
		RF: So you enjoyed working for them? It wasn't just a job?	
		NF: No, no.	
	0:05:26	RF: Did you regard their reel as the ranking one, is that the one you admired most, did you have much of a chance to see the opposition?	
	0:05:35	NF: Oh yes, well I mean we used to run each other's reels. The whole thing, the whole of the newsreel business started to fall apart in the fifties and the first to go was Paramount. They were under direct American control and they were simply shut down at a week's notice, regardless of any ACTT agreements or anything like that. They just said	Closure of other newsreels

		chop. Then Universal joined up with Gaumont British and eventually they went. And next to go was Pathe, leaving Movietone on its own. It was generally predicted that Movietone would be one of the first to go. In fact we weren't, we were the last. Pathe were rather sore about that.	
	0:06:59	RF: What, in general terms, happened to all the newsreel persons who were let go when the newsreels closed down? Did they get other jobs or leave the business?	Future of newsreel cameramen
		NF: Some of them got jobs in television or simply went over to freelancing.	
		RF: Was it a difficult time for them do you think?	
		NF: No, I don't think so, there was so much television stuff and some of them, all right, own equipment and set up on a freelance basis. And some of them did pretty well.	Freelancing and television work
		RF: Was I, I made a mistake a moment ago, I said thirty years, it was forty years of course.	
		NF: Forty one actually.	
		RF: Forty one. This then is a silly question, I presume if you'd wanted to do anything else you would have within those forty years have made some effort to do it. You were happy with your work?	
	0:08:13	NF: Yes indeed. At one stage I was wondering if it would be any better in the BBC but, anyway, so much short filming work was coming along I dropped that one. Just as well I did because the BBC ultimately has shut down its film unit at Ealing there. It's was depending rather more on contracting in.	Why Fisher stayed with Movietone
	0:08:54	RF: Did you marry and have a family?	Family life
		NF: I married but we had no family.	
		RF: I wondered the extent that peripatetic life would have affected family life, even married life. Was it a burden on the marriage, the absences?	Family life
		NF: No, no no I don't think it ever was. My wife was very understanding. Also she was teaching then and so she was well occupied if I was away. I mean you know ...	Family life
		RF: Was that a fairly general thing or would other of your colleagues have had a different story to tell, other newsreel cameramen?	
		NF: Oh I think so. I know of one or two instances where family life was rather difficult, Daddy was away for too long. Some wives were more understanding than others. I was lucky.	Family life
	0:10:01	RF: Was it a good life on the road, was it uproarious, lots of activity of one kind or another besides work?	Social life
		NF: Not really. Apart from the odd pub session, a lot of us met up, the same job, that sort of thing.	
		RF: Did you live well, was it a matter of good hotels and good restaurants? Or was it a very basic life?	
		NF: Well one didn't go for the tops, that wasn't on. But you had reasonable hotel allowances, meal allowances and the ... yes it was quite	Life on the 'road'

			a good life. There was a lot of ... monotony of doing the same sort of things all the time, it was often a question of not another football match, that sort of thing.	
	0:11:12		RF: Also checking in and out of hotels I would have thought became boring.	
			NF: You see you didn't on newsreels spend a lot of time away so it was rather a matter of one or two night stands or something like that depending on the job.	
			RF: I had your stay in Palestine away and also long absence during the war.	
			NF: Oh yes, well I moved round all sorts of hotels then. In the case of Palestine I wasn't staying in the King David which was the only decent hotel anyway. There were certain other ones but nothing very spectacular.	
	0:12:12		RF: What about ACT, your connection with that. When did you join the union and under what conditions, under what circumstances?	ACTT
		1937	NF: I joined ACT in 1937 I think, the newsreel section was being formed then, much to the disapproval of certain employers in the business.	
			RF: Were they out to sabotage the organisation?	
			NF: Well, there was a lot of tooth sucking over it and one boss actually did, who shall be nameless, actually posted a notice to the effect that the management would view with displeasure any employees joining a union and a sort of slight hint that your job might be on the line. This caused fury as you can imagine and so everybody joined ACT. I mean even the waverers.	Newsreel employees participation in ACT
	0:13:35		RF: Really? That's a good result, reaction.	
			NF: There were one or two good boys in Movietone who sort of thought their interest might not be well served by joining ACT but by and large, I think, we had pretty well a one hundred percent shop there.	ACT membership at Movietone
			RF: Did ACT come onto the scene because people had been exploited before or had they been fairly treated and fairly paid?	
	0:14:06		NF: Well, there was a lot of disparity in pay. It was obvious that some sort of working agreement had to be worked out, that there had to be minimum rates. Some paid better than others, Movietone was amongst the better paying and Universal were probably at the bottom of the list. So anyway, all the urge was there to form a newsreel section. There were sort of candlelit sessions in cellars in Greek Street to discuss all this. So anyway of course the result was that the Newsreel Association was formed to sort of deal with this. The companies all got together to form the Newsreel Association, and the resulting agreement with ACT was discussed with them as a body.	ACT equality of pay among newsreels
	0:15:03		RF: Yes, who was organising from the ACT end? Was it George Elvin?	
			NF: Yes it was George Elvin. He was the front man on the discussions which went on. So eventually we got an agreement with minimum rates and other conditions. As well I joined about the end of 1937 or something like that.	Agreement of working conditions and pay
			RF: You must have a low number, a low union number?	

	0:16:07		NF: Yes 7031. Of course, it lapsed a bit in the war so of course the thing was started again after the war and fresh cards were issued but I still have my old number 7031. I retired in '78, at least you see I was still working as a freelancer for Movietone after '78. But when I finally turned in the camera, I said alright I'm fully paid up now. After Movietone shut down I really didn't do any more freelancing which was in '79.	
	0:17:17		RF: I wonder what areas we've not touched upon at all or not developed fully. Is there anything that occurs to you that we might go into in a little more detail.	
			NF: Yes apart from individual jobs, I can't really think of anything that's more or less the story.	
			RF: Well are there any individual jobs you would like to talk about?	
			NF: Well ...	
			RF: Ones that were very important to you, in one way or another?	
	0:17:53		NF: Well we had, just taken at random we had quite an interesting one which was commissioned. This was not commissioned to Movietone, it was to another company. We supplied the personnel. It was a special film for Princess Ashraf, who was the sister of the Shah of Iran and she wanted her own personal film made on lines of the work she was doing on behalf of women's status. And she was actually doing a fair amount in Iran, running all sorts of things. So anyway we spent a bit of time on that, in fact we did it in two sections and had two goes. We did manage to get it finished before the Shah got chucked out but it was very interesting to do, in fact.	Shooting film about the rights of women in Iran for Iranian Princess Ashraf
	0:19:14		RF: You shot a lot of it in Tehran, in Iran itself, did you?	
			NF: All of it was shot in Iran.	
			RF: All of it, yes, right. Were you privy, part of the imperial life there? Did you see the scale on which they lived?	
	0:19:30		NF: Well we didn't do anything with the Shah himself, but we did a lot of Ashraf in her place. She had quite a modest, I mean I wouldn't call it a palace, it was just a very nice large house in the north of Tehran, surrounded by about a battalion of troops. But she was quite easy to get along ... We did a lot of talk to camera stuff with her. She was interviewed by Lord Chalfont as a matter of fact on these occasions who was an old friend of the Shah's and he acted as interviewer on these.	Filming in Tehran, Iran
	0:20:36		And we shot them all in her place. But you could sense what was coming. There was a lot of ... We were dependent for camera equipment and lighting on the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts which ran their own film set up. Had a very good studio actually and first class equipment, but we used to get a certain amount of tooth sucking from the crews they sent along. You could feel they weren't happy at all about this effort.	
			RF: What was it that they weren't happy about, the system in Iran?	
			NF: The working of, yes, the working for the regime.	
			RF: Yes, right. It wasn't the fact that the film was about women's liberation in Iranian terms?	
	0:21:39		NF: Oh no no no no. It was the fact that they were doing it for a	Iranian camera

			member of the regime which is not, which was becoming increasingly unpopular. In the end we didn't get much co-operation from them at all, because when we went out a second time we had to take our camera equipment and lighting from here. It cost the earth to fly it all out but on the other hand, I mean, Ashraf didn't mind what it cost at all, as you might expect.	crew
	0:22:25	[ends]	RF: Let's break.	

[7]	0:00:00		RF: Right we're on side four. So that was the grand life obviously, Iran in the last days of the Shah.	
			NF: It was a very interesting film to do because it wasn't a country one would normally have travelled in anyhow and it was quite spectacular in places and ...	
			RF: Was it a film intended for internal consumption in Iran?	
			NF: No no.	
			RF: No? For other countries?	
			NF: It was purely for her own amusement. And in her place she had a magnificent viewing theatre with the latest equipment in it, you know. They could run Panavision and all the rest of it, all the latest stuff. No, it was just for her own, I don't know if she had any ideas of letting it out or simply just to show her friends. We shall never know what happened to it.	Princess Ashraf's palace including viewing theatre
			RF: You don't know if any copies survived?	
			NF: No, no no. I think the original negative went back to Tehran before the balloon went up, as I said an interesting film to do.	
	0:01:28		RF: Anything else which especially sticks in your memory from this period?	
			NF: What else have we done? I'm sorry I would have to refer to this, just to, just for a second ...	
			RF: Right. I'll push the pause button ...	
			RF: You were saying, I asked you if you intended writing about your career?	
	0:01:56		NF: No, I think not, because it's already been done as far as cinema newsreels were concerned and of course compared with what's being done on the television now, in factual recording, it really was very tame stuff, by and large.	Newsreels versus televisual factual recording
			RF: Cumbersome, laborious, but then of course technology has changed and satellites have transformed the world in so many ways, especially this area.	
	0:02:32		NF: Yes. You see the same old jobs keep coming up, [referring to journal] the state opening of Parliament, hardy old annual that was. Preparations for royal wedding, that was quite spectacular because that doesn't happen all that often. oh no, the Coronation was way way back in 1953, that was a big job and a sort of once only really, that was back in 1950, no was '63 or '53?	
			RF: The Coronation? 1953.	

	0:03:26		NF: It was '53, that's right. I'm sorry ... I wish I had instant recall. Here we are, June 2nd 1953, Coronation of Elizabeth II.	
	0:04:10		RF: Was that a pooled effort?	
		1953	NF: No, it wasn't. Pathe, well, Gaumont, Castleton Knight was clever and as soon as King George VI had died, he phoned up Technicolor and said I want every camera unit you've got. And they said oh is this for the funeral of the king? And he said no, it's not, it's for the Coronation of the Queen. I mean he thought that far ahead and he got every Technicolor unit which was available in Europe at the time.	Queen Elizabeth II Coronation
	0:05:10		There were never very many available in Europe at the time. And he managed to raise, I think about ten, some of which were taken off feature production for the occasion. And so anyway, Eastmancolor was just beginning to come in then and Eastmancolor negative was in very short supply. Pathe managed to corner most of it. We decided to settle for Gevacolor which turned out to be not a very good ideas, because Kay Laboratories was setting up to process Gevacolor and they really hadn't got it working well at the time of the Coronation.	Castleton Knight's monopoly of Technicolor equipment
	0:06:16		And we had a few disasters in the lab and, of course, the quality of it then wasn't as good as Eastmancolor. After all Kodak's had had cross patent agreements with Technicolor to hold back Eastmancolor until Technicolor were ready to get out of the market with their three-strip system, and from there on, as you know of course, all Technicolor was shot on Eastman negative and processed by Technicolor.	Colour processes
	0:06:59		They were using Eastman negative having abandoned the three-strip system, which was terribly cumbersome, very good, to make the three colour separations in Technicolor labs. So of course the old three-strip camera was redundant. Some of them were converted over to 70mm for single strip for Todd A-O and wide screen systems. There's one sitting in the South Ken Science Museum and I think there's one in MOMI, one or two are dotted around.	Colour processes
			RF: Technicolor have one without the blimp, they don't even have a blimp. At least I believe that's true and Sammy's have one which may be the MOMI one and Bradford has one.	
	0:08:16		NF: Yes, well that's where most of them ended up. So anyway that was the Coronation. It certainly made, well I have to say that Gaumont and C-K, scored hands down on that one. It came out as a complete film. It was called <i>A Queen is Crowned</i> I think. And of course you know that old 3-strip Technicolor, the quality was really superb in spite of the fact that the equipment was so cumbersome. If you're using it on features then that was no problem. So, I seem to be doing a short here called <i>The Road to the Isles</i> . That was a series of travelogues which Movietone did in different areas of the country. <i>The Road to the Isles</i> were about Skye and the Islands.	Coronation film <i>A Queen is Crowned</i> ; filming travelogues for Movietone
			RE: These ended up as two-reel films, going out as part of a programme with a Fox feature?	
	0:09:39		NF: Yes, all these were done in black and white as a matter of fact, this would be 1952. We hadn't really gone into colour in a big way then. Subsequently, of course, at the very end we were putting out one newsreel a week in colour but it was a short one and it really wasn't so much a newsreel as a short. What was defeating things to the very end was the cost of the lab work was getting more and more expensive. And really the whole operation was uneconomic newsreel wise. But we'd gone over completely to colour then. Well, apart from scraping up a few more jobs.	Changeover to one newsreel per week in colour
	0:11:10		RF: Well, no there's no point in doing that. I wondered if anything had especially stuck in your mind?	

		NF: I can't think of anything else.	
		RF: Right then, are we at the conclusion?	
		NF: Well unless there is anything else I can answer.	
		RF: I think we've touched on everything that comes to my mind. I could ask you to look back over the newsreel years and say what you think about them?	
		NF: Well as far as I personally was concerned they were happy years. One had one's ups and downs and an incredible amount of boredom as well. If there wasn't awfully much around, of course, you were sitting around, no really I can't say more than that.	
	0:12:23	RF: OK right, well, I have to thank you then for your time, your effort and for your memories.	
		NF: It's a pleasure ... well I hope you got something out of it.	
		RF: Oh yes, without a doubt.	
		NF: I hate the sound of my own voice on tape, I really can't bring myself to run it.	
		RF: I think most ... it's like the difference between one's image in a mirror and one's image on a photograph, they are two quite separate things I think, and the voice one hears is quite different from that one hears playing back. Yes, I think most of us do that.	
		NF: yes, yes, I actually dragged out one of the War Museum tapes yesterday just to refresh my memory as to what I sounded like and shut it off half way through.	
		RF: Well I hope you won't do that with these. Good, thank you very much Norman.	
		NF: OK, well I hope it's been useful	
	0:13:18	RF: It has, good, thank you.	

[Return to top](#)