

# Leonard Harris (camera operator) 19/5/1916 - 1995

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**BIOGRAPHY:** Len Harris trained as a Cameraman in the British Kinematograph Society's course at the London Polytechnic, Regent Street, and then began at the Gaumont British Shepherd's Bush studios as a clapper-loader. He worked at Gaumont British on comedies starring Jack Hulbert and Will Hay, as well as serious dramas such as *King of the Damned* (1935). During the War, Harris served with the Army Kinematograph Service (AKS). He filmed material of the Normandy invasion later used in *The True Glory* (1945), and made some AKS documentary shorts. During the post-war period, he worked consistently as a camera operator, and occasionally as a cinematographer, primarily for Hammer Film Productions at Bray.

**SUMMARY:** In this interview, Harris talks to Alan Lawson about his career, discussing working practises at Gaumont and Hammer (particularly with regard to budgeting), and technical issues - comparing cameras and back-projection techniques. He recalls the production of many films, including *King of the Damned*, *The Astonished Heart* (1949) and *X the Unknown* (1956). Among the many colleagues he recalls are cinematographers such as Jack Cox, Arthur Crabtree, Jack Asher, Bernard Knowles, Charles Van Enger, Philip Tannura, and directors such as William Beaudine, Tom Walls and Leslie Norman.

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Interviewers: Alan Lawson and Manny Yospa

Interviewee: Leonard Harris

Tape 1, Side 1

**Alan Lawson:** When and where were you born?

**Leonard Harris:** Well I was born here - just up the road here, in Cheaming Road[?], Brondesbury Park there, and I lived there until I was about sixteen I think. Anyway we came over here, we moved - this has always been a very central and handy area to live in, you know?

**Alan Lawson:** Hmm...

**Leonard Harris:** And we came down here - much smaller house, because the other one was a bit unwieldy really you know, they're big houses up there. So we came down here and I've lived here virtually ever since. I was away in the army for a time then when I was married I lived at

Ruislip, but when all that fell through I came back here with my parents and stayed here ever since. Always been very handy here you know.

**Alan Lawson:** And what about schooling?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh schooling. Well I went first of all to a little private school here called Kingswood School, just around the corner. It was in the basement of Wesleyan Church I think, it was nothing to do with the church, they rented the ground - the rooms you know?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes...

**Leonard Harris:** And um, they stressed French speaking all the time, we used to have to speak to the teachers in French. You know, if you came in, in the morning you'd say, "Bonjour Madam" or "Mademoiselle" or whatever it was, and if you wanted to go to the toilet, "Exuser moi s'il vous plait?" and you popped out...everything was French, which was quite good really. Then I went from there to the local grammar school, Kilburn Grammar School, which was a good school really, I look back on it and I think it was a very good school, but I hated it! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** Why was that?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh I don't know, I didn't like the discipline you see, I've never liked discipline really. And I think their methods of teaching were all wrong, it was all covered by threats you know, "Get nine out of ten or you have to do it again or stay in," or something and I hated that sort of thing. Although I will say - although I hated it and I didn't like the masters much either! [Chuckles.] And a lot of them lived around here, which made it awkward going out at nights, if you didn't have your school cap on you were in trouble and that sort of thing. But I do think it was a good school and I realise if I'd liked it better and I'd studied more I would have probably done better there you know. But what I did learn there seemed to stay with me, and has stood me in good stead I think. I learnt German speaking there and, again, carried on with French and that, a smattering of Latin, which I wasn't very keen on, but we got onto more modern language after that. And I - German stayed with me - it's got a bit rusty now but it's always been useful. And I worked in Germany since the war and of course in Germany during the war, and I found it quite useful. And what surprised me: that people who had really better educations couldn't speak much French or German or anything you know, it did surprise me really. It would be people come down from universities and things like that and I would be called in to translate. I mean I will say I went on one location for Gainsborough pictures and as soon as the producer - it was in France and he realised that I could speak a bit of French, he roped me in as an interpreter, and he paid me, he paid me for it. We had an interpreter but of course he could speak English as well as French but he was always down in the village and arranging things when we were up in the mountains and that. And they'd want to speak to an old farmer or something, they'd get me in on it, and he paid me, that was very good! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** The one thing you didn't say is when were you born?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh when? Oh 1916. 19th May 1916.

**Alan Lawson:** Now at the grammar school did you matric, get matric?

**Leonard Harris:** No I didn't stay that long.

**Alan Lawson:** You didn't?

**Leonard Harris:** I don't think I would have got it mind you, because I hated school and I didn't learn much. But that's really it. I wanted to be in the film business you see, I was passionately fond of films all the time, possibly it was a bit of an escapist thing at first, I expect, because of getting away from school you know. And there was a little cinema down the road, you might have noticed it as you came up, down in Salisbury Road there, a small cinema. It's closed now of course, it's been closed a long time - it closed when the war started.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes...

**Leonard Harris:** And I used to go down there - it was quite cheap, and saw all the old films. Now I must have seen - because sound had just about come in you see, they used to show mostly silent films, they could only afford that and then when eventually they got sound equipment they were only showing silent films as second features. Because the silent films were getting older and older and they were classics some of these, it was a wonderful opportunity to see these old films. Incidentally, see that poster over there?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Somebody gave me that only the other day...you see what it says on it, it surprised me. It's called 'The Third Eye' Maclean Rogers produced it - directed it, not produced it, directed it - wrote it too. But it says there, "The first television film." Now that's why they gave it to me, yes, I know what you're thinking and I thought to myself, "Well, television? I know there was television about at that time," you see. It's the trade show is 1929, January, which means it must have been made in 1928. And I thought, "Well that's one of the first sound films and television was about so they must have thought that it was going to be shown on television perhaps." Then I thought, "Well now look, if that were an early sound picture, 1928, they would plaster all over the posters, 'All talking, All singing, All dancing' or something! And it doesn't say that so it must have been one of the last of the silent pictures I think.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Because old Maclean Rogers is not around now so you can't ask him [AL chuckles] but I don't know who else might have been on it. But it was interesting and somebody who knows I am interested in those sorts of things gave it to me only last week as a matter of fact. A fellow who I know, he belongs to the Hammer Film Society of which I am an honorary member, having worked for so long with Hammer films, and he lives at Stanmore. And I went up to see him, he came and collected me. Do you know he's got, in a way he's got thousands of pounds worth of equipment round there. It's all old and useless, but he gets hold of old cameras and puts them right again, or he's trying to do that. He's got an old Super Parvo Debie, you know a thousand foot one. He has a Vinten Everest, and that's how he got me to go up there first

of all. And he's got the outer casing of a Mitchell B&C but the guts have been taken out for some reason or other. And he's got a lot of old Arriflexs and Newman Sinclairs - all in bits and pieces, and he spends his time putting them together again, he's enthusiastic about it. But in a way it's probably thousands of pounds worth of equipment, but on the other hand none of it's worth anything at the moment. Because if you said to him, "Can you go out and shoot something for me tomorrow?" he couldn't do it because none of it works, you see and it's not likely to work for some time. But eventually it'll - if anyone wants that type of equipment by then, which is doubtful, it will be worth something! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** Now coming back to you...what did you do when you left school then?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yes that's right, well I always wanted to get into the film business and just before I was due to leave school the British Kinemograph Society arranged a course at the London Polytechnic, Regent Street, you know, for cinematography. A two-year course it was, every day. Well I knew no-one in the film business and I'd written letters up to various people and got the usual sort of replies you know...

**Alan Lawson:** If and when, yeah...

**Leonard Harris:** "We'll keep your details on the files," and all this sort of nonsense. And um, oh yes, so there was a scholarship and I won one of the scholarships that were being issued. Now my father still had to pay quite a lot of money but Sidney Bernstein was the sort of backer and so I won this two-year scholarship. You had to go up for a three-day test I think it was. Now I'll tell you this about it, it was a two-year course going on every day but it wasn't well organised at all. Looking back I think, although the British Kinematograph Society was behind it, it was all theory stuff like, a lot of useful stuff mind you. Photographic chemistry, design, electrical engineering and all sorts of things, and we did tinker a bit with 9.5mm and I think we had an old Newman Sinclair. But that was all right for the first year but the second year should have been, in my opinion, lectures and talks by people in the industry you know...who were qualified people in the industry. But I don't think...I think we had a man came from Western Electrical once and talked to us for about an hour or so, that's about all, and I felt that the second year was almost a waste of time. The only thing is that Bernstein at the end of it said, "If you go to Gaumont British you'll get a job, I'll give you a job there." Lime Grove you see. So [chuckles] I went to Gaumont British, Lime Grove, and I was the first one to get a job from that course. Not that I was the best one on the course, I don't mean that, but it was the first offer, you know. So I went there and saw - was it P C Samuels? I don't know if you...

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Do you remember him?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah,[chuckles] he'll be...

**Manny Yospa:** Not Doc Samuels was it?

**Alan Lawson:** No, no, no. P. C.

**Leonard Harris:** And he became a producer later on, yes...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes that's right.

**Leonard Harris:** Well he was studio manager then and of course that was a pretty big job. He was sat there in a big office with a big desk you know, [chuckles] and he said, "Well we don't want you, we don't need you, but if Sidney Bernstein says you're to have a job, you have one, that's all!"

**Alan Lawson:** What did you start at?

**Leonard Harris:** In the central loading room. Oh yes, he said...

**Alan Lawson:** And pay?

**Leonard Harris:** Pay yes.

**Alan Lawson:** What did they pay you?

**Leonard Harris:** A pound a week, yes, a pound a week for working if necessary. You see I was eighteen by then and they wouldn't take anyone under eighteen, at least not to work on the floor or in sort of any way connected with production, because of the hours - they had to finish at six o'clock, I think.

**Alan Lawson:** That's right, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** But anyway I worked there, I went there. Central loading room, and he said something about, "We don't really need you." I mean he made [laughing] it pretty clear that they didn't want me, that he was only obliging Bernstein! Well I didn't worry too much but the job, it was a bit monotonous because you worked there - Dudley Lovell was there when I went there, Dudley and some other chaps who, one I think has died since, I can't think of his name, oh Terry...um...

**Alan Lawson:** Terry Hunt?

**Leonard Harris:** Terry Hunt! Yeah, Terry Hunt was there.

**Alan Lawson:** What in the loading room?

**Leonard Harris:** In the loading room, yeah. And we used to work, well there were four of us I remember, we'd take it in turns as to who was to work late. And we didn't mind working late because you got half-a-crown if you worked after eight o'clock, for supper money. So if the unit worked until about half-past-seven on the floor, by loading and unloading and preparing the stock for the next day, we needed to make it eight o'clock you know. So half-a-crown then, when

you're only getting a pound a week, half-a-crown is something, you know. And it was quite - oh then you'd have extra if you get sent on the floor as a sort of clapper loader you know, or to make yourself useful in some way of another, which I looked forward to. In fact I liked working late for that reason, because very often you would get sent on the floor because they wanted extra people to hurry things up or something or other, you know. And I remember working on 'The 39 Steps' you know, in that way, odd evenings I'd work a bit later and I loved that. And then Hitchcock's 'The Man Who Knew Too Much' which is what they were doing when I first went there and oh yes...[pause] Well I got a bit fed-up, it wasn't a very exciting job really as I say, and of course you worked Saturday and Sunday and everything you know - not always but very often Saturday and Sunday.

**Alan Lawson:** Was that all in the pound?

**Leonard Harris:** All in the pound yes, you didn't get any pay for any extra, any overtime then. No pay for overtime or Sunday work or anything, not even a "Thank you". I mean in fact, they could tell you on Saturday night, "Oh we want you in tomorrow," you know and you'd have to come in - all in the pound. I got, let's see - there was a fellow named - I think he's been an assistant director, but he was assistant studio manager, Frank Covern or Frank Cohen as he was then. He's a very nice bloke and I think he's still around in the business somewhere, something to do with the Daily Mail I believe and television films I think. I believe he is - Australian television films. Because a friend of mine, Jack Midwinter still keeps in touch with him...do you remember Jack Midwinter?

**Manny Yospa:** I know him very well and his brother, Clive.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, Clive, that's right - poor old Clive, he's a nice bloke, well they're both nice blokes. Well see I keep in touch with Jack. [coughs] Excuse me. So I'm very fond of them. [Chuckles] Let me think now, what am I saying?

**Alan Lawson:** Now just go back a moment to the Poly course,

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yes?

**Alan Lawson:** Can you remember any of the other people on it?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes a few people. There's a fellow who I got very friendly with, named D'Arcy Cartwright he was one. He'd been an Oxford University chap and he was quite old really compared with us, we were still in our teens and he was about twenty-something. In fact I've seen him once or twice since and when I was in the Army Film Unit, it was a bit embarrassing really, he tried to get me into AKS. Because I met him, I was going down - what's the name of that road? The road where - oh near the War Office - and I saw him.

**Alan Lawson:** Whitehall - in Whitehall?

**Leonard Harris:** No not in Whitehall. Curzon Street.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh Curzon Street yes, yes.

**Manny Yospa:** Oh yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And I met him and he was I think a Major, Staff Major you see. "Oh," he said, "you ought to come with us!" So I said, "Well," you know, I liked the chap and [chuckles] and so I said, "Yes." He said, "You being in the studio, you're the sort we want." Anyhow he made an appointment for me to go and see somebody in AKS you see, one early evening. So I thought, "Well I'd better keep it." So I went up to this place, I'm not sure it wasn't in the same block?

**Alan Lawson:** It was, it was in Curzon Street barracks? Different wing! [Chuckles]

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, yes, and saw this chap who said, "Oh no, we've got plenty of people, no we don't need them. You're better off in the Army Film Unit." And I was relieved at that because I really wanted to stay with the Army Film Unit you see. "No," he said, "we've more people than we need." So I came back from there and I reported back. I phoned D'Arcy Cartwright up and told him and he was very cross about it. He said, "He had no right to say that, I'm a Staff Major, he shouldn't countermand what I say!" [Laughter] Anyway I had to leave it at that but I think...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, who else was on the course?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh er, Jimmy Carr.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, World Wide?

**Leonard Harris:** World Wide, yes. Of course World Wide came afterwards.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes, very much so! [Chuckles.]

**Leonard Harris:** Yes. Let me think, now a lot of other people...

**Alan Lawson:** Peter Sargent?

**Leonard Harris:** No he was in the photographic school...

**Alan Lawson:** Ah ha, I see...

**Leonard Harris:** ...which we were attached to of course, so I knew Peter Sargent quite well then. By the way, I know what I was going to ask you, Bill Allan, have you heard anything about Bill Allan?

**Alan Lawson:** No, no.

**Leonard Harris:** No, I wonder what happened to him. Hmm. I liked him. Yeah, Peter Sargent.

**Alan Lawson:** But you say he was on the photographic course, not on your course?

**Leonard Harris:** Not on our course, no, but we had contact with him, you know. Ah let me think known - Julian Wintle.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes!

**Leonard Harris:** Julian Wintle, who I met once or twice at Shepperton later on and he had his own company. I think he had a bit of money, you know. He had his own little company, which gradually expanded and then he became quite a prominent independent producer after a time. I don't think any of the others - oh Peter Baylis of course, yes!

**Alan Lawson:** Really?

**Leonard Harris:** Peter Baylis yes. Now Peter Baylis, incidentally Peter Baylis lived near where you used to live in er Churchill Street Gardens yeah, hmm. Peter Baylis, I liked Peter, I got on well with him and he and D'Arcy Cartwright who went into Shell Film Unit - D'Arcy.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** The others I don't think they ever came into the industry at all, I can't remember. And then they had another, as we finished our first year they started another two year course you see. That's what Jimmy Carr was in, by the way, the second one, not the first one.

**Alan Lawson:** I see.

**Leonard Harris:** But then after that they discontinued it because quite frankly I don't think it was a successful course really. If it had been like the first year, all the serious stuff, which was fine, it was great you know, beneficial to you really. I mean photographic chemistry and all sorts of things like that, when the lab was trying to tell you something you knew what they were talking about! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And we did developing - all that sort of thing was good. Oh I know, Craig! He was not exactly on the course, he became the big shot at Kodak's later on.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes...he was a lab technician there?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes that's right, he was, that's right. But he was - I got very friendly with him and um...I've seen him once or twice at BSC meetings you know - or not meetings, I mean when they have these...

**Alan Lawson:** Gatherings...

**Leonard Harris:** ...annual gatherings, yes - and as a technician he's been invited. And I've only been invited really, I don't belong to BSC you know. But I've seen him once or twice since then. And that's it, I can't think of anybody else - nobody else I think. There were twelve in each year

you see, each course, or was it twenty? No twelve I think, that's right, twelve. Quite a small thing really. And if only they'd, in the second year - oh we did visit studios a bit in the second year but you know, only for a few hours, nothing much.

**Alan Lawson:** Can you - who was the tutor, do you remember?

**Leonard Harris:** Well the man in charge was a man named Hibbert, but Linden I think was the chief of the photographic department. He was a Royal - he was an artist, he had his pictures in the Royal Academy and he gave us lectures and demonstrations on portraiture and all that sort of thing.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Now he was pretty good and Hibbert I think was a very clever man but he'd been an old time cameraman and I think really in the old time when they hand cranked and just called him in on an odd occasion. I don't think he'd ever been a cameraman on a production, he'd probably go out and shoot some nature subject, a few feet or something of it. Because he wasn't - he didn't talk like a - you know, and when he related things about what he'd done or where he'd been, it was never any production stuff in that sort of way. But I think he was very, very clever in all photographic theory and stuff.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And a man named Coleman was - he always said, "Now I want you to get a bread and butter negative," that we took. He said, "I don't want any arty-crafty stuff, I want a bread and butter negative"!

[Laughter]

**Leonard Harris:** And of course we used glass plates you know, and you'd have to take the negative to him and he'd examine them and then you'd have to - that was quite good you see. You'd have to do a correct exposure on a plaster-cast, over-expose them, under-expose them, over-develop them, under-develop them - a whole range of things you'd have to do to see what the results were like. And do you know I've always followed that up for years. I bought some plaster figures for years which I kept upstairs. I wish now, I only recently sold them - testing out various new colour systems when colour systems were coming out. And I used to get hold of a bit of stuff and at home I used to photograph them to see. Because I felt that they were pure white, matt white and if they didn't look white on the colour system, then either the colour system was not very good or I'd done something wrong, you know, I'd try to find... And I kept that for a long, long time, until they stopped bringing out new colour systems and by that time the things were just rolling around. And I remember how I got rid of them! You know these fellows who come round, "What have you got to sell?" And they see the grandfather clock, "Oh I'll give you so much for that." I said, "I've got nothing at all," I was getting a bit fed-up with him, and I suddenly thought of these figures, I think I'd just been dusting them. "Oh" I said, "I've got these things." "Oh yes, they're wonderful" he said - I had about half-a-dozen of them I think - "Oh yes," he said, "I'll take those." So I said, "Well what are you going to give me?" Because I

know what I'd paid for them - very little. "Oh" he said, "I'll give you twenty-five bob each for them." So I said, "All right, all right." Well now he was a mug, unless he was trying to get my confidence, because down in one of those antique shops or second-hand shops in Salisbury Road, you could see them for ten bob - or you could then. But I sold them the same day and I walked down afterwards and looked, they were ten bob, those old second-hand. He'd given me twenty-five! Well I don't know if he thought I'd think well of him because of that and I'd tell him about other things or not, but I [chuckles]...

**Alan Lawson:** Lost leader!

**Leonard Harris:** Yes...[chuckling.]

**Alan Lawson:** Now let's come back now to...

**Leonard Harris:** I'm wandering a bit aren't I?

**Alan Lawson:** Well let's come back now to The Bush...

**Leonard Harris:** Yes.

**Alan Lawson:** How long did you stay in the central loading?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh well, I was talking about this fellow Frank Cohen wasn't I, Frank Covern?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** That's right. Well I knew him slightly, he was assistant studio manager there. Now I suddenly got wind, heard of a job over at The Bush for loader clapper you see. So I phoned him up and I got the job, and I did it. I went above the heads of the people running the loading room, which old Brocklebank[?] - he was a nice enough bloke but I knew what he'd do, he'd push somebody else in you see. I thought - somebody who he wasn't so keen on, and it certainly wasn't Dudley or Terry, I can't think - but to get rid of them, he'd rather have them out of the way over at Islington. So I could see that was going to happen so I phoned and I settled the job, got the job directly through Frank Covern you see. And I told Brocklebank[?], and Covern wrote or phoned or whatever he did and it was all done. So I went the next day and I went over to Islington and I'd only been there a short time and they said, "Oh yes, well you have to load here and do the number board and all sort of things, we'll give you thirty-bob." So I got a ten bob! [chuckles]

**Alan Lawson:** A ten bob rise!

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah, although working day and night, and we really did work day and night, on Sundays and everything you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Who was the cameraman over there?

**Leonard Harris:** Well the lighting cameraman on the first picture I went on - I'm trying to think.

**Alan Lawson:** Was it Basil?

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm?

**Alan Lawson:** Basil Emmott was it?

**Leonard Harris:** No, nom they talked - he had been there I think. I'm just trying to think - oh, Charlie Van Enger!

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes.

**Leonard Harris:** That's right, was on the first picture. 'Boys Will be Boys' the Will Hay thing, and William Beaudine was directing, Bill Beaudine directing, an American 'quickie' type director really. He sounded quick but he covered himself so much that he wasn't really quick, I don't think. We used to work the clappers on the beginning and end in those days and before the clappers went on at the end he'd say, "Right, cut it, print! Over here Charlie, over here with the Kodak!" And he'd get that in before the clappers went down on the ends. So when you're seeing the rushes you think, my gosh that bloke's quick, he knows what he wants to do! Well he did, but he wanted to do so much. For you two sitting there, he'd have about six different camera angles on that you know. Derick Williams was the operator, the chief operator. That's where I first met - I first met Bill Allan at The Bush, but he came over to Islington quite often, and I met him there. And we had Errol Hinds, no not Errol Hinds. Oh! Errol - Errol Hinds is the Hammer bloke isn't he? [NB is he confusing him with Anthony Hinds?]

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah. Errol something or other...South African he was, he was the other operator and Walker, Bob Walker.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Bob Walker, and then Bob went to - he went to Denham I think, he went somewhere I know. And Gordon Lang who'd been focussing with the other chap I just mentioned, he took over, became the third operator you know. But they were nearly always, in those pictures, they were all going at the same time, you know, and I had to put the board in for the three cameras and load for three cameras and rush around and make myself generally useful! [Chuckles] Anyway I was on the picture called 'Boys Will Be Boys', Will Hay and Gordon Harker. And the next picture was Jack Hulbert in um...Oh dear!

**Alan Lawson:** Not 'Jack's The Boy'?

**Leonard Harris:** No that had been done earlier, yes, Jack...

**Alan Lawson:** 'All the King's Horses'?

**Leonard Harris:** No that was another...

**Alan Lawson:** That was at The Bush was it?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh gosh, what was it called? 'Jack of All Trades'! [AKA 'The Two of US'] Co-directed, he and Robert Stevenson did it.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And then for some reason or other they had a break in that picture, we were on it for a few weeks, had a break - that again was Charlie Van Enger was the lighting cameraman, and the usual camera crew. We had a break and they sent me back to The Bush for a few weeks where they were doing quite a big picture. Oh, it was a prisoner of war thing, they were on - Oh dear! I'm always thinking of this picture. [NB probably 'King of the Damned'] I know we had two thousand extras on it and we shot a lot of it at Northolt where Gaumont's and Gainsborough had a bit open air lot.

**Alan Lawson:** By the - what became the racecourse didn't it?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah it was I think a racecourse and a cemetery I believe it to be now...

**Alan Lawson:** Really?

**Leonard Harris:** I believe so, I haven't been up there for ages. But Northolt was a pretty little village then...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes...

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah. And they had a dressing room and all sorts of things, it was well equipped, and then they closed it down when The Bush closed, of course. What was it Conrad Veidt was the star, Noah Beery, Helen Vinson, Cecil Ramage. And I tell you who I got to know quite well and I've known ever since, Billy Wells the boxer He had a small part in it, he didn't have much to - yes that's right! [In answer to indecipherable interruption - possibly identifying Wells as Rank's 'Gong Man'] Well of course he had played the lead in a lot of silent films you know, Billy Wells. I've got an old book there - and there's quite a few two and three reelers, they were, well a lot of pictures were then. And um, I suppose they - I think, 'Dick Turpin' - action pictures mostly. But I got to know Billy quite well and I liked him a lot and I saw him lots of times afterwards, or hundreds of times really. Because he used to stand in for an artist we had at Hammer for quite a time, Forrest Tucker. And you know, Forrest Tucker was a very nice bloke. He knew that poor old Billy couldn't stand much, you know, his legs got weak and he [chuckles], Billy would sit there when they were rehearsing a scene and he'd go to get up and Forrest Tucker would say, "All right Billy I'll do this one!" And he'd stand in for him all the time - Billy only had to stand in perhaps when he had to sit in! And Forrest Tucker insisted - we went on location to Cornwall and Forrest Tucker insisted that he went down there. Because [old Tuck] couldn't do anything but sit around really, but he was always willing! But Forrest Tucker used to do it all, always for him [chuckles]. They had a nice relationship really. What was it - oh yes, 'King of the

Damned' that was the picture, Conrad Veidt, Noah Beery - 'King of the Damned', yes. And they had two thousand extras some days, which was a lot in those days. And I mean if you called for - they all had to be male extras too because it was a sort of prison camp thing. And so what they had to do was to go around, and it was a messy job, they didn't have to act much, they had to charge around really, as in a revolt, and all that sort of thing. They had to go to - what's the name - Shepherd's Bush labour exchange to get more people you see. Well Shepherd's Bush being as it was then was a pretty tough area in some respects so they got a lot of quite honest out of work people, but they got a lot of villains as well!

**Alan Lawson:** Oh not half, yes!

**Leonard Harris:** [Chuckles] And they had to issue them with rifles and pistols and things! I mean they probably only fired blanks but they were always disappearing, they'd make them sign for them, but there was some story, "Somebody took it away," or "I didn't see who's got it!" But these pistols disappeared! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** Who was the cameraman on that?

**Leonard Harris:** Ah that was Bernard Knowles.

**Alan Lawson:** Ah ha...

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah, Bernard Knowles. And um...

**Alan Lawson:** And the director?

**Leonard Harris:** The director was Walter Forde, that's right. And it was quite a good picture and strangely enough when Brussels was liberated and they started showing - digging out of the vaults - a lot of old British pictures, I saw that there. Yeah, one night, down in the cut - I don't know what the name of the road is but they showed it there, yeah. And then I came back off that one - of course they needed extra cameras with all these mob scenes, they had eight cameras going some days. Harold Heyson[?], do you remember Harold Heyson[?]?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Now he was one of the loaders by then at The Bush. That's after I'd really left The Bush, he must have probably taken my place or something like that. What's happened to him, he had his own company didn't he?

**Additional speaker (unidentified):** I don't know. I had a feeling he was an operator.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes he was I know, then I think he had his own company. I haven't heard from him for a long time. Then I came back to 'Jack of All Trades', they resumed shooting that, I don't know what the hold-up was all about now, I can't remember. I know we went back to Northolt sometimes on that and we'd do some outside stuff with Jack Hulbert dancing around and jumping

around the streets and dancing away. Now it's strange how your memory tricks you. I remember - oh I was focussing by then, did I?

**Alan Lawson:** No, you haven't told us that.

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah I was focussing by then. We had previously done a Tom Walls thing, one with Ralph Lynn I remember, called 'Stormy Weather' - not to be confused with the Fred Astaire picture we made later, we did that. Robertson Hare, directed by Tom Walsh of course. Phil Tannura was the cameraman, lighting cameraman, and again Derek Williams...

**Alan Lawson:** The operator.

**Leonard Harris:** ...operator, yes. Now, what's his name, Tom Walls used mostly one-camera set-ups, he didn't have multiple camera set-ups. Then Phil Tannura left Gainsborough and Gaumont-British and went back to America and Charlie Van Enger had also gone back and they were getting more British cameramen in. They had...we did a picture for Gainsborough called 'Tudor Rose' which was a very classy picture and Mutz Greenbaum - or Max Green as he became - photographed that. Sid Bonnett [S. R. Bonnett?] operated for a time...of course that was a bit spasmodic in production and I think Errol Hinds - Errol Hinds it was, the South African I assisted him, and I assisted Sid Bonnett too. I remember doing a kooky old crane shot with the home-made crane, because they couldn't get very good cranes in those days, you know they had to make them themselves, the studios.

**Alan Lawson:** That was the tubular wasn't it?

**Leonard Harris:** Tubular, yeah.

**Alan Lawson:** That's right, hmm...

**Leonard Harris:** ...and they didn't half creak you know. And I remember we did a scene, a crane shot with the 'Dad's Army' chap, the Scots bloke, what was his name?

**Additional speaker (unidentified):** Oh was it John?

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** We were on this crane and he was playing John...

**Alan Lawson:** John Laurie!

**Leonard Harris:** John Laurie yeah, and he was playing John Knox, and we had to do this scene. I spoke to him years afterwards about this, I said, "Do you remember doing that?" He said, "Yes, that was about the first picture I did when I came down South." Because he'd done this thing before with 'The Edge of the World' you know, which was a big success and er, yeah. But

strangely enough, jumping ahead, when I went to Berlin on a picture, some years - after the war - they still had these ropy old cranes, more-or-less hand-made. Although they had a bigger studio, the Tempelhof Studio.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** It was quite big, they had eleven stages, but they were pretty ropy some of them but some were quite good, and they had a terrible crane! Now the director, he writes about it in his book, he was a Hollywood chap, he was a very good director, oh - tough pictures he made, you know, tough stories. He was a tough man, but a nice man really and he writes about this terrible crane. Because they couldn't put you on a point, [chuckles] and he was devising all sorts of shots where you go round the set and you finish up on something - oh I know, you had to look through a grating at someone. Well when the crane got round and a little chap from rigging, [chuckling] you wouldn't be any nearer the grating, you just saw the blank wall you know!

**Alan Lawson:** What no control at all really?

**Leonard Harris:** Not real control of the thing, and it was creaking away all the time. Oh that's another thing! They were hanging out blankets and things around the set for sound-proofing you know, and they hadn't got - they still had the old sound cameras in a booth, you know which were wheeled around the studio, like we used to have when I first went to Shepherd's Bush. They had a sound camera in the back of it and the mixer would sit in the front with a panel in front, then he would be pushed around to wherever was required. They still had that at Ufa! - at Tempelhof anyway, when we went. Well our people - it was a Hammer Seven Arts Production, they didn't want that, so we took the first tape recording equipment over there and they had to be shown how to use it, you know?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And strangely enough, the sound mixer, I can't think of his name now, he'd been a Prisoner of War in England and he was married to an English girl and he was a very nice chap you know. He wasn't an army chap at all or a political chap, he was just a film technician, you know what I mean [chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And another thing about that studio - Gainsborough at Islington, as you probably remember, there was one stage upstairs and one downstairs, they weren't one above the other but there was one downstairs.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, hmm.

**Leonard Harris:** And you walked down this road and got to it. Now when I went to Tempelhof's studio - first of all, at the tail end of the war when the British troops went into Berlin, I'd been filming in there and I was making this film and I had to go into Tempelhof to do some sound recording, you see. And what struck me, I was going down in the Jeep and it was a

sort of soft bank side of the road and you know all the way down were mounds of earth where German soldiers were buried with their rifles stuck in, and a tin hat on top and identification. And it reminded me so much, the set-up at Tempelhof then in those days, it reminded me so much of Gainsborough at Islington. I thought, "My God, this could have happened at Islington," you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** But it didn't [laughs] fortunately! And - oh yes, when I went back there, it was years later, it had eleven stages and it was much better, but still in some ways primitive, you know. [Talks about dog in room - if she needs to go out.] What was I going...? Oh yes, still at The Bush aren't I, yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Then I came back to Gainsborough and we did - oh another one we did was the um, Boris Karloff came back to England and did 'The Man Who Changed His Mind'. I think he'd previously made 'The Ghoul' at The Bush, and 'The Man Who Changed His Mind' - Boris Karloff, John Loder, Anna Lee, Frank Cellier and Donald Calthrop and all the sort of regular Bush repertory company. Stevenson directed that actually. The first time I went to Islington I went to - the studio had closed um - they closed for the summer holidays, they did then, all the - there wasn't Rank then - but all the studios in that group had closed.

**Alan Lawson:** That was the Ostrers?

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm?

**Alan Lawson:** That would be the Ostrers then?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes that's right, yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, the Ostrer brothers, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And they closed, but they'd left a small crew behind and we went across to Islington to - it was an artist test for Sophie Tucker, I always remember that.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah, and I'd previously just seen her at the Palladium you know. Stevenson directed those tests incidentally. Oh yes the Ostrers, and they were very good people - did you work with them ever? They were very good people I think.

**Alan Lawson:** They just came in just before I left.

**Leonard Harris:** Did they? Ah, because you know, Gainsborough, although we were nearly always in production, there were gaps at times and although you had to work day and night

more-or-less, they kept you on in between production, whereas a lot of the other studios didn't you know - Elstree didn't. Nearly everybody went, some people were kept on but not many. And Gainsborough kept on their - all their, you might say their production crew, technical crew. The people they put off were the construction people, but I noticed you nearly always got the same people back again and you got to know them quite well through the years of course, and they did tell me that they were paid better than outside. They told me, so I don't know what the pay was in those days, so they were quite willing to come back again. And I think by the standards of those days, Gainsborough and Gaumont-British (as it was) were good people to work for. The rates of pay as I gathered were generally above the average in the business but not perhaps as well as they were at Denham or somewhere like that. And of course you always got exceptional people getting big salaries and in the same way sometimes you got sections of people getting low salaries. I remember Phil Grindrod telling me once, he said, "Do you know I was on a picture at Elstree and I was the highest paid member of the unit. It's possible that the director got a bonus or something, but I got more money than he got every week, and the same with the lighting cameramen." He was operating, Phil was, at that time. But he said, "That's the way it goes, I'm earning more than anybody else." I suppose the director might have got a bonus if he got the thing in on schedule you know [chuckles], but they weren't so much worried about schedules in those days because they could work late to make up time and they didn't have to pay anybody any extra. The extras got paid more but there weren't so many of them you see. But nobody else got any money, they just had egg and bacon suppers to...[laughs]. I will say that for them, they were very good, they cooked very good eggs and bacon! [Laughs]

**Alan Lawson:** That was at The Bush, The Bush canteen?

**Leonard Harris:** The Bush and Islington, yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh I wouldn't know about Islington... I'm going to turn over.

[Tape Ends] [Tape 1, Side 2]

**Alan Lawson:** Now can we talk about some of the equipment that you first started working with?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes. Well at Gaumont British and at Gainsborough they were mostly Mitchells. On the other hand we used also Debries

**Alan Lawson:** That was the Superparvo?

**Leonard Harris:** Superparvo yeah, and I had ordinary Parvo models, that were mostly used for location work, exteriors. Stanley Rodwell had a Superparvo, I remember - do you remember Stanley Rodwell?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** And Newman Sinclairs. Cinephones.

**Alan Lawson:** Ah yes, now talk a little bit about the Cinephone.

**Leonard Harris:** Well I always thought it was a very well designed camera. It was designed by a man named Hirsh and Otto Canterick, you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And I thought it was a well designed camera but it wasn't made of good materials, that's the trouble, and bits used to fall off a bit! You know [chuckles], the magazines used to get chips in them, though I don't remember any scratching particularly - but they did, and you'd have to check the gate frequently. Now I know nowadays they do check the gates on Mitchells and everything frequently, but we didn't check the gates on a Mitchell perhaps about once a magazine in those days...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes that's right, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** But Cinephones you'd check - well at least if you had taken more than 300 feet, you'd certainly check the gate. And it wasn't so much a - it was a little pile-up in the corner sometimes - it wasn't so much of scratching or anything like that. But of course the sound, they were probably very good in the early days of sound when the sound wasn't so efficient, but they were a bit noisy, and of course they had this flexible drive which you had to stick in the side you see. So what it meant was that if a Cinephone was used, probably as second cameras I think, they put blankets - no, eiderdowns - over you. I mean the operator had an eiderdown over him and over the camera. The motor which was on the floor had to be covered up with an eiderdown and the focus bloke, he would be under there, he would be sweating like anything, trying to follow focus and trying to read with a torch on the scale on the side. And later on it got used for back projection, very successfully, at Gainsborough and The Bush too, for back projection. Because...

**Alan Lawson:** What as shooting the plates?

**Leonard Harris:** No not shooting them but for doing the back projection in the studio, yes.

**Alan Lawson:** As projection?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah, yeah. And you'd have to pull it round, pull the thing round on the side 'till you saw it was in synch you know and all this sort of thing. Oh I know, lights were [indiscipherable] I'm forgetting now. And when you were looking through - let me think now - you didn't see the, when you were doing the back projection, because the plate - if it was in synch the plate would only be on...that shutter would be open on the projector, when yours was closed, you know. But they went by a little light on the side, you had to pull it. And a fellow named Syd Wiles who became a sound recordist. You know Sid? Well you know Sid...

**Manny Yospa:** Les Wiles' father?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah that's right, yeah, he was a sort of - and Frank Sloggett [?], they were the people who were really in charge of the - what shall I say - the mechanical side of that. Alf

Davis[?] was a projectionist at Gainsborough, and I think that we'd got, for those days, quite a high standard of back projection. And I always remember a funny thing happened to me really at Islington. We had a few day's break between productions you know and they arranged, they were very good at Gainsborough - we had the time off you see. Well with me being a very junior person they said, "Well look, we'll go off and you stay here and then you have a day off tomorrow," or whatever it was. So it came out, they said, "There's only some mechanical back projection test to do." And I remember it to this day, at the end of stage two I was. So they said, "You'll manage those all right won't you?" Well when I got there, I was on my own then, I had to do the whole bloomin' lot [chuckles] and everyone else had gone on holiday! So I realised then that it was a bigger thing than I thought. Well I had a bit of set which had already been built, a railway carriage and the back projection was through the window. So I tried various lenses and it was a matter of - on the camera that is, you know - and the plates were there, they were just railway scenes or something, and going into a station or something like that. And I got our 'Grip' Honeybeard[?] to sit in as a passenger in the train and I arranged some lights and shot the thing. And because of the physical circumstances, and I can't remember exactly what they were, but I had to use long focus lenses on the camera. Now, and I didn't really want to because of the focus trouble, you know, focussing the screen, and I had to stop-down a bit and all that sort of thing. But I can't remember why, but I had to do this. Anyway I shot it and I did some hand tests, which I've still got some prints of them, I went up to the dark room - you did the whole lot yourself. And I came home here you see. And the next day the 'phone's going - Arthur Crabtree is on the 'phone. "Len" he said, "What lens did you use on that so-and-so, or on such-and-such scene?" So I said, "Well I've got all the notes here I kept in order..." "Yes" he said, "but tell me, because this is excellent, this is some of the best back projection we've done!" [Chuckles.] So I said, "Well I had to use a three-inch on..." "A three-inch? Oh yeah, that's good," he said. And I told him the stuff, I was reading it all from the notes which I was going to take back the next day, and he was most enthusiastic. So really I, so then after that we used three-inch on the camera lens for back projection almost always. And they'd stop-down accordingly and bung on more light and all that sort of thing. So I discovered something quite accidentally and [chuckles] - well I didn't get any credit for it or any pay I can tell you! [laughter] But it was fun!

**Manny Yospa:** I suppose you had to use the same lens as you shot the plate then, otherwise you might get...

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, you'd always use... I mean then you'd do perhaps a close-up to the people, that'd be a three-inch, but even if it was a long-shot, you still used a three-inch lens you see - on the old Cinephone[?]. Now I often wonder what happened to those Cinephones when all the stuff was sold up, because you never came across them afterwards, they were never heard of. And it was a noisy camera and of course, as I say, underneath it all the heat of the, and the amount of light they used in those days on a set you know, they'd bung 5 K's right down on top of you all the time.

**Alan Lawson:** Up to the war years did you do any overseas locations?

**Leonard Harris:** Well I... No...

**Alan Lawson:** Up to the war years I mean.

**Leonard Harris:** I didn't up to the war years, I did a fair number after the war but not before the war. I went up to Scotland and - I went up to Scotland on 'Night Train to Munich' where we wanted something looking like the Alps, and they had this snow everywhere, and we took three days to get up to Scotland by car. Because you see, all the signs were down, there was snow everywhere, so you couldn't even see where there was a road, unless something else had been up there. And when you get way up into the north of England and up into Scotland, there wasn't much traffic, especially as the war was on, and people didn't have much petrol. So it took us three days to get up there, you know. But that was Scotland, that was for 'Night Train to Munich'. I don't know if I - I might have done - yes, I went down for daily locations of course, down to I think the Isle of Wight and places like that. Oh that was 'King of the Damned' we went to the Isle of Wight once, the sea-plane landing. Roy Kellino came on that little expedition I remember. He was a nice bloke, Roy Kellino.

**Alan Lawson:** Now what about - when they changed screen - the format - did that make much difference in your work at all?

**Leonard Harris:** Well it did, yes. We had to... When - I was at Hammer by then...

**Alan Lawson:** Oh this is after the war, no I mean before the war.

**Leonard Harris:** Oh well I don't think they changed...

**Alan Lawson:** Oh they, yes, they did.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, well they must have changed before I went into the business, I think.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** A lot of the gates were old - were silent aperture gates.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes...

**Leonard Harris:** ...but the viewfinders and things were put so that the ground-glass, so that you'd only see what would be projected eventually. I think I've still got an old Devry upstairs, not one from the army but one from Gaumont-British News. I think that's got the old...

**Alan Lawson:** A Devry?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah! [chuckles]

**Alan Lawson:** How dreadful! A dreadful machine!

**Leonard Harris:** [Laughing.] Well I'll tell you how I got that, I suppose I shouldn't be saying all this now, because it's not... [laughter] But when they sold up the stuff at Shepherd's Bush, I was working somewhere else, you see. I was probably at Pinewood then, because I went with them from Gainsborough, I went to Pinewood. And I said to Sam Martin[?], "Look, they've got a sale

of equipment at Shepherd's Bush and there's one camera head, pan and tilted, that I want, because it's the best one of the lot." I said, "Well if you're going to the sale," (and he was he said), "will you bid for it for me, see what you can, you know?" I said, "I can go up to about fifty pounds for it, I don't mind, it's worth having, because you can't get - not all heads are like that." But when he went you see, you can't, they didn't...

**Alan Lawson:** It was an auction, it was all in a lump?

**Leonard Harris:** A lump, exactly. He said, "The heads were all lined up on the floor and it was a bid for the whole lot, not single ones." So anyway, he thought of something, I suppose he thought the Devry had been with Gaumont-British News. It was broken but it would just about - he thought I might find a use for it, for about a fiver. So he got that for me and a few other odd bits and pieces. But it's upstairs, I've never really put it to use. I think there's no winding handle, there's only a... and you have to wind it up. I remember Bill Allen[?] saying, "If the winding handle gets lost, you can use a ha'penny!" [Laughs]. So I... and the viewfinder's damaged too.

**Alan Lawson:** How many lenses had it got, just the one?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh one, and that I think is chipped! Yes just the one lens, [it's not a turret model.

**Alan Lawson:** [chuckles]

**Leonard Harris:** I've also got an old - now what do they call these? Normandie.

**Alan Lawson:** Vinten Normandie?

**Leonard Harris:** Vinten Normandie, yeah. Also not working - well it runs all right, now what's wrong with that?

**Alan Lawson:** The gate doesn't work?

**Leonard Harris:** No I think that's all right too, but I think, I haven't got a viewfinder for it I think. They were bought more-or-less as junk you know, that I could - at some auction or sale or something. I didn't buy it but people got it on my behalf who knew something about it, "You might like it." Because I've always been a great Vinten fan for the Vinten Everest you know. I think it's a marvellous camera!

**Alan Lawson:** I was going to come to that [chuckles]. Come to that later. Now did you - again, we're still before the war. Did you work on any real Quota Quickies?

**Leonard Harris:** No I didn't, because I was a Gainsborough you see...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, so you didn't do that...

**Leonard Harris:** ...and they weren't the Quota Quickies as such. I don't think I... No, some were fairly cheaply made, but all to a certain standard I must say. I mean the Will Hay things weren't very expensive you know, they were quite cheap, but they were a fairly polished thing, they weren't bad.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** At Shepherd's Bush, a famous director who died recently, he was doing some low budget things, Michael Powell.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And I remember him, I never spoke to him even, but I remember, as he was there and I used to see him, he used to walk past our loading room. I didn't like his voice very much and strangely enough, it seemed to me that people either liked him a lot or disliked him. But I had never had any contact with him at all, but I mean he was a jolly good director. And really, although he rather, in his book, he praised down some of these cheap pictures he made in the early days, I think that some of them were his best work, because he made some excellent pictures which must have been on a shoestring. You know it was not so difficult, I would say, to make a good picture if you've got a big budget and can go back and retake things. But if you've got to go out there and do it one day sort of thing, it requires a bit of skill you know, I think anyway.

**Alan Lawson:** Again, did you ever work on the Schufftan Process at all?

**Leonard Harris:** Well I did and I didn't. I mean I have been on shots where they used the Schufftan, but of course the Schufftan fellas did it themselves, you know, they cut away at the glass, scraped the mirror thing...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And they went back to Germany just before the war, they were called back. But they were quite nice, but they were quite pro-German anyway, they were a bit pro-Hitler you know, perhaps in an idealistic sort of way they thought he was a good bloke, I don't know. We didn't talk much politics I must say, but I remember that they used to scrape away at this glass, and it nearly always meant working late on something or other because of their shooting you know and their doing it.

**Alan Lawson:** Now let's talk about the cameramen you worked with before the war.

**Leonard Harris:** Ah yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Who was the first one you really worked with on the floor?

**Leonard Harris:** Well I suppose with Bernie Knowles on that 'King of the Damned' a little bit. Then Gainsborough, Phil Tannura, Charlie Van Eger. But coming back to the English ones

again, we come to Arthur Crabtree, he started lighting then and I remember he started out then and they loaned him out to Fox at Wembley and he went down there and lit a couple of pictures and I had to go down, not to assist him, but to take something down for him I remember. And they were doing, I saw them, I read about this picture the other day - Michael Powell was the director, incidentally, and I didn't realise at the time. And Louis Hayward was the star and from that Louis Hayward went to Hollywood. He's now forgotten of course! [Chuckles] And then of course Jack Cox came along, and I think he was fantastic you know. He was a marvellous chap.

**Alan Lawson:** In what way?

**Leonard Harris:** Well all ways really. I mean he was an excellent cameraman, I think, and he could sum up a thing - er - as to what it was really worth and how much - effort shall I say - to put into it. You know, always doing quite a good job but if he wanted something really artistic, he could do it, you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** I remember Robert Stevenson saying one day on 'The Man Who Knew Too Much', he said, "Oh my goodness," he said - of course I know he's been to America since. He said, "We've had all cameramen, American, German and all sorts, but there's nothing like Jack Cox." You know, and he was so quick too you know, and so friendly with everybody. And he could talk to anybody sort of on a level, do you know what I mean?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** He wasn't [chuckles] - however high and mighty some of the stars thought they were, and they did in those days more than they do now, he could take them down a peg or two, [chuckling] without causing offence you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** And he was a good businessman too, because I know odd times between pictures, he'd get me out buying 3-D cameras and coming back and shooting something in the studio on 3-D processing. And he'd go back - he'd give me so much money to buy this camera, he'd see it advertised and he'd give you, say thirty pounds, which was a lot of money in those days. He'd say, "Get that camera!" And then he'd take you a day or two and test it. "Well" he said, "take it back to them and say we don't really want it" and he'd get the money back. Or he'd do that sometimes, he'd buy it and take it somewhere else, "Ask them for forty pounds." You know and he'd get it! And he bought a yacht once you know and sold that at a profit. And houses, he'd buy a lot of property, old Jack.

**Manny Yospa:** He used to own a chain of butcher's shops didn't he?

**Leonard Harris:** His brother did, I think he had an interest in them, yes. His brother had, I don't know about a chain, he had butchers shops. And Jack would never let anybody like an assistant director [tick off] any of the camera crew you know. I mean I remember once a case, I was doing

a bit of operating on 'Okay For Sound' and I had the Cinephone. There were about four cameras on it, that's why I was roped into operate you know, at Islington, that's right, of course. And everyone said, "Camera ready? Number One ready? You ready? Yes you're ready." And in order...I thought - especially not being used to doing the job - have a quick look and I swung over quickly, have have another look through the ground-glass. And of course they'd turned over, they'd turned over the panel and things started up. Of course it jammed - oh crikey! You know.[chuckles] Jack was standing just behind me, behind all the cameras [chuckles] and I said, "Oh no, cut it!" I was calling out, and Jack rushed out forward, he said, "Cut it" he said, "Look at those lamps" he said, "Oh boy's keeper" And he addressed no particular boys on the rail, you know, so no-one - he told the boys to watch those arcs - you know and all sort of nonsense... "I'll have to cut it". And then afterwards he said to me, "Look if you're ever asked and you're not ready, say you're not ready. If you are ready, say you're ready." He said, "You're perfectly entitled to say you're not ready, unless you're [chuckles, you know] you're being very slow." And I've always remembered that, ever since that day. [Chuckles.] But Marcel Varnel, who was directing, he thought a lot of Jack and I'm pretty sure he knew what had happened! [Laughs] But he was a nice guy too you know.

**Alan Lawson:** What about Phil Tennura?

**Leonard Harris:** I didn't have so much to do with him of course. I don't um - he was all right, I found he was a quick cameraman, very good, and Tom always liked him a lot, he had him on several pictures. And I don't say I got to know him. He was a little bit of a womaniser. [Chuckles] Not really - not seriously I don't think, but you know, a little bit! But he was all right, and Charlie Van Enger was. One other nice bloke, but I didn't have much to do with him is um - Oh God, what's his name now? American. When he went back to Hollywood afterwards he set his own film company up, I think they used to do documentaries. I remember George Hills[?] telling me, when he went to Hollywood, he saw him over there and had a chat with him and spent a lot of time with him. And this fellow was - oh God what's his name? I never really worked with him, just for a few odd days you know, he seemed quite pleasant. And incidentally, I don't know how true this is, but he was credited with introducing Coca Cola into this country. Now whether that's really so, or whether it was just at Islington I don't know, but I do know this - I hadn't heard of Coca Cola before I went to Islington and you could always have Coca Cola at Islington. Anytime, you could go and ask for a Coke in the restaurant and they'd give you one, and they'd give you two or three if you wanted to take some away. So we had a supply of Coca Cola, you know, just at anytime. So I don't know if it's true that he introduced it to this country, I heard it was, it might have been, but he certainly introduced to Islington. [pause LH comforts his dog who is impatient to go out] Oh what the hell was his name now? He worked at The Bush for a long time and Islington. I'll probably think of it later on, oh dear! It's funny, you know I find that this happens a lot nowadays since I've had this stroke, there's things I'm leading up to, I forget what I'm leading up to! You know [chuckles] it's silly really.

**Alan Lawson:** [Chuckles] Now let's come to the war years now then.

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yes.

**Alan Lawson:** You were working at The Bush when the war broke out were you?

**Leonard Harris:** Well Gainsborough - when the war broke out we were at Islington on that Sunday morning I remember. Arthur Askey in 'Band Waggon' we were doing. And our blimp cable broke. I sent for George Hill because they were the only people who could repair it because they had the special instruments to hold the cables back you see, we didn't have them.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, that was on the Superparvo?

**Leonard Harris:** No on the Mitchell.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes.

**Leonard Harris:** The Mitchell with the big blimp, you know?

**Alan Lawson:** Oh the big blimp, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes. And it was a complicated - overs and pulleys and all sorts of things. And there was a steel cable and if it snapped, it was a job, you had to hold it or put another cable on, and it was very difficult to hold it because it was very tight you see. And the wire snapped on this Sunday morning it was, and we knew that things were happening with the war. Anyway we went down to that lower camera room, where the rats play around! [Chuckles] And we got it mended you see, I was holding the cable and George was using the special tool they had to do it. Anyway, having done that we come upstairs and the studio was empty, all the lights off, not a soul. So I went round to the studio manager, I think it was old Kellino at the time. He said, "Oh what are you doing here? You should have gone home!" Anyway they sent us home and the cameras and equipment were still standing on the floor you see, they just sent everybody back, switched all the lights off and sent everyone home. But they hadn't come to notify us down in the downstairs! All the other - probably three other crews had gone [chuckles] thought they'd get home before the bombs started dropping! [Laughs] So we went home, Kellino said, "Oh go home" he said, "We'll send for you, or I'll let you know what's going to happen."

**Alan Lawson:** This is Bill Kellino, isn't it?

**Leonard Harris:** Bill Kellino yeah. So we came home and I stayed, I was at home about three days. And Jack Parry who was then the chief operator, he 'phoned me up and said, "What are you doing at home? Aren't you coming back? We're at The Bush." So I said, "No I haven't got any message to come back." They'd completely forgotten - I bet they thought, we were still downstairs! [Laughs] Anyway I come back to Shepherd's Bush and they'd moved all the camera equipment over, apart from their camera equipment, and they had about forty cameras at Lime Grove, you know, ranging from Mitchells to Superparvos, Eymos to Newman Sinclair's and all those things, Cinephones. So we came back to Shepherd's Bush and we used the upstairs stages at Lime Grove, and we had to finish by five o'clock I think it was. And we had a lot of the - oh the Sherman Fisher Girls - the chorus, we had them in this picture and they had to go at a certain time, and I think the other artists - the theatres started opening again very soon afterwards but they opened, they started late...

**Alan Lawson:** Early?

**Leonard Harris:** ...early, that's what I'm looking for [chuckles] and finished late, so we had to finish early for a time, and then things got back more-or-less to normal, and um, strangely enough it couldn't have happened to many people. When we had to check all those Devrys for the Army Film Unit, I got sent back with Harold Payne[?] to Lime Grove and working in George Hill's workshop, shooting tests and mucking around with viewfinders and all that sort of thing. [Chuckles] So it didn't happen to many people I bet, to get sent back to their own firm! [Chuckles] Yeah so, the army days and then...

**Alan Lawson:** When were you called up?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yeah, I was called up rather - the actual registration and all that sort of thing went on for a long time. I, with some other chaps I knew, some other chaps from the studio, I knew we were going to be called up because we were the right age-group. So we went to some RAF place and volunteered for that you see. I sort of thought of aerial photography or something, but they said, "No, you go away and we'll send for you if and when we want you." So it went on for ages and ages and ages, and it was right until... Oh it was the June, June 1940 when I actually went to Kingston-on-Thames barracks. And by that time I'd been up to Scotland, they said, "We'll get you back," the studio said, "we'll get you back if you...don't worry about that." But considering it took three days to get up there, I don't think they realised that! [Chuckles] But anyway I went to the East Surrey Regiment then and foot slogging and square bashing and all that sort of thing - boring as anything, I couldn't get enthusiastic about the Bren gun, which they thought was marvellous, because I thought it was most inefficient. You know, I must say, I don't know what they used before, but any sort of gun, to me, which you have to change the barrel after twenty-eight rounds I think it is, and if it gets hot you have to pee on the barrel! I mean, what's the enemy doing?

**Alan Lawson:** [chuckles]

**Leonard Harris:** You know, are they waiting? "Oh, somebody's having - something private's going on over there!" [Laughs] I thought it was terrible, so I never had - I think it probably was more accurate than other guns they had, but considering it was um, I didn't think it was very good at all, it was very heavy you know. So I wasn't very enthusiastic about that, not really, although they frowned at you if you criticised it, you know, they frowned on you - especially the old soldiers, so I suppose it was better than they had before. But to me it was most inefficient you know. Oh yes, and what else? Oh yes, and I was in the East Surreys... Oh yeah I know what, I got quite an interesting break then. One day we were doing PT on the square, it was horrible, it was summer, very hot you know. And um - oh before that, that was another thing that surprised me about the infantry. We were breaking into a slow march, you have to get that right and the chaps were coming back through the gates from Dunkirk you know. They were all rough, all uniforms and bits and pieces they'd brought with them. French mixed up with them as well as - and here we were on the... They'd been in a retreat and had hell knocked out of 'em and here we were, learning how to march in slow time! I thought, that shows what the Army was like, how the men...you...[chuckles]...they didn't... [laughs] And polishing your brasses, so the paratrooper could see where you were hiding in the undergrowth, you know and take a pot shot at you as they came down!

**Alan Lawson:** [laughs]

**Leonard Harris:** Oh and they sent us out sometimes to Richmond. The paratroops - air raid siren goes, so we'd shoot down to Richmond and go on the bridge there. Well I go on the bridge and on the centre of the bridge was a Bren gun, that's supposed to be the key position and a rifleman on each end, you see. Well now I do appreciate that this was the sort of exercise to get us into the feeling that the war was really on and also probably the civilians round and about, they got some sort of encouragement by seeing us there [chuckles] in case paratroopers dropped. But I learnt afterwards that - me behind the Bren gun - a parachute or a dive-bomber or what have you, Messerschmitt 109, he would have fired long before he came into the range of my Bren gun! [Laughs]

**Alan Lawson:** [laughs]

**Leonard Harris:** And I found this out really because - it's a long story. I was doing this PT, I didn't tell you about that... PT and I went into the orderly room, "Can you operate a cinematograph film projector?" So I'd only seen one...I said, "Oh yes, yes, yes!" [Chuckles] So they said, "Right, go down to Curzon Street," and they gave me the address, and you know your usual, you get your ham roll and what you get. And I came round to Curzon Street and I went into an office there and a chap, civilian - there were lots of Army people all around, but a civilian. He said, "Can you operate a cinematograph projector?" So I said, "Yes." He said, "It's all in those boxes over there." And I saw these big black boxes. "Oh crikey!" I thought, "I like to see what I'm talking about!" Anyway he said, "Look, I'm going to lunch now, you go to lunch too and we'll come back at two o'clock and we'll have a look at it." So I thought, "Oh well that's good." So I hopped up to Great Castle Street, which I knew was the sixty - oh well no, I'd found it was a 16 mm one and it was a relief to me because I hadn't actually properly operated a 35 one, I'd played around with one but um, anyway. So I went to Great Castle Street and I told the chap there, a youngish chap who I was and I would like to see this particular model, I forget what it was called now.

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**Manny Yospa:** The Bell and Howell was it?]

**Leonard Harris:** The Bell and Howell yeah! And it was a very nice model. So [chuckles] when he came back and when I went back there after lunch I was able to say to this fellow - we went in this room where this thing was, "Oh," I said, "That'll be the projector in there and the [laughs] speaker in there!" As if I knew it all! [Chuckles.] But I did know, he was quite helpful, he showed me little things about this projector and about the sound system, so I was quite with it. So I had to go to the War Office then, in Whitehall for about a week. They said, "Would you mind staying up in London for about [chuckles] a week, to show these secret films?" So I went to the War Office and showed some secret films - supposedly, I suppose they were. I thought the only reason that they're secret is they're so antiquated, if a Jerry ever saw those or a spy ever saw those films they'd invade tomorrow! Because they were all cavalry things and manoeuvres with cavalry and all sorts of things.

**Alan Lawson:** [laughs]

**Leonard Harris:** And they have a series of - they used to have silent films for the Army - there was 'Private Can' and 'Private Can't' or something. Private Can was a smart boy, he could do everything he was told. Private Can't made a mess of everything, you know, and they were in all these different films! [Chuckles] They were put out by the old Orders Corps, I don't know who made them but they were terribly, sort of, ancient. I mean they were even - the blokes were in putties and all that sort of thing, nothing was up-to-date at all! Anyway then they did get hold of a secret Naval film, that probably was it because it was a - we got it from the Navy, and in Technicolor, that was on 35mm. And that was afterwards...yeah that was the second time. So then they sent me - I finished this thing at the War Office and they said, "Look, you'll go back to your camp but they'll not send you anywhere, we may want you again." So I readily told the Sergeant Major that. That I wasn't to be sent [chuckles] and he sort of snarled at me, you know the way they do! Anyway they sent me to a Prison of War camp on Ham Common which was very, very interesting. On the guard duty. Now I would have hated guard duties but when you get into it it's a piece of cake. And I suppose the Sergeant Major, he hated everybody, but he sort of thought I wasn't so hateful as others I suppose. They put me on the main entrance with a revolver, which meant to say I didn't have to Blanco all my equipment, I just had the belt and revolver you know. And on this main entrance there was a little cubby hole, so anyone who passed you, they had to pass you close you see and you had to ask to see their identity. Even if they went in and they came out two minutes later, you still had to check them. And the CO was always in civilians, he was a judge actually, I forget his name now - a prominent judge. And there were other senior officers there like Brigadiers and all that sort of thing. And you had a - there was a seat there and where your foot was there was a bell, now if anything went wrong you were supposed to press that and they'd turn out the guard. Well I never had to press it really but they tell me - and some interesting characters came through, but I don't know who they were. But I was told afterwards, in fact I saw it in the local paper that Hess had been there. That was after I had left there, you know. So I would have like to have seen him, it would have been a matter of interest. And they all - a lot of them were in their national costume, you know, Dutchmen in the clogs and the big old peak cap and all that sort of thing. See, what happened apparently, and I heard about this from other sources afterwards, that they would say - the resistance people would be over here and say, "We want to capture someone collaborating over in Holland or Belgium." And they would send somebody out in the Army - or Navy I suppose it was, yeah - to go over there at night or in an aeroplane, light aircraft. And the local resistance people would capture this fellow, get him out into a field at night and the British Army would take him back. And this was going on all the time, and they'd bring these people back very often to this place for interrogation you see, and some of them were in their national costume, and it was sort of quite interesting really. They were quite well treated, I saw some of the cells, they were very, very comfortable little cells you know, heating, I don't know what the food was like but our food wasn't bad there, so I expect theirs was quite good. And then I got - oh yes, being on this guard duty was all right because when we came off I found they used to put - you got twenty-four hours on I think it was, then a break and twenty-four hours on again. But I liked it, you got into a routine, and especially when I got this job on the front entrance, I was all right you know. And the only thing I knew that, on the twenty-four hours off you could get put on coal fatigue you see. Now I thought, "Oh crikey I don't want to get coal fatigues!" So anyway my turn comes eventually and I'm on the coal fatigues. They give you a Private Major who gets you all lined up you know, give you a

shovel and you, "To the left turn, get on the truck," and you sit on it and you go down to somewhere, not far out - somewhere near Slough I think it was. And we get in a kind of canteen place and all the lorry drivers are playing darts and having a good old time, and the Army fellows were too you know. And I was getting a bit worried, I thought, "Well I want to get off home when I get back and I want this coal business done!" So I said to the Lance Corporal, "Isn't it about time we did something about this coal?" "Oh" he said, "don't worry about that!" He said, "Look, look through that window, watch through that window," and I did and very soon afterwards our lorry drove up, he came under a chute and all the coal came down the chute - bonk! And the Corporal said, "That's all right, we'll go now then." So we went back, we got on - well we had to sit on the coal you know, the way you do. So we went back - coke it was, not coal, that's right. So just before we got into the camp he said, "Get your shovels dirty!" So we pushed 'em into the coal [Laughter] and the Sergeant Major again paraded us up and he said, "Get those shovels cleaned up!" [Chuckles] So we highly polished them and the rest of the - oh you had to clean your kit afterwards but I didn't have much to clean, and the rest of the time you were off you know. I used to go into Richmond or come home here. I could come home here very easily from Richmond. But what I - oh then from there, suddenly one day again they said, "Oh the Officers want you again," the Sergeant Major is scowling. So I came down there to the War Office and they had this 35mm film then and it was a secret film about gun sights and things. So - it was the guard's officers had a little unit there and they said, "Look we've got this secret film, you mustn't let it go out of your sight, you must be with it at all times. We're going to selected cinemas to show it where the projectionists have been vetted and everything, but you've got to be in there with the box with it and you can show it if you like yourself but the cinema want their own projectionists, naturally." So I went down, we did a tour of London district HQ, went all around the airfields all around London and Northolt and all around Purley, Pirbright showing this secret film. And I got to learn quite a lot about projection then because I got very friendly with a lot of projectionists, you see, and they'd show me, teach me the various things about projection and I knew a bit about it anyway. But it was quite fun, I think I - oh then we finished showing that film, we got a 16mm film, we used to take our 16mm Bell and Howell - No! B T-H [British Thompson-Houston] model lot around to the cinemas. I used to find that if I put in a circle, as a rule I'd have enough throw and enough light behind it to get a fair sized picture. And the sound was - there was quite enough sound and our audience were the Army and people who marched in and they wouldn't be in the circle, they'd be down in the um...

**Alan Lawson:** In the pits! [Chuckles.]

**Leonard Harris:** ...pit yes. And um we showed all these aircraft, aircraft recognition films. And I found out then about the sighting of guns because where they used to put me on the bridge was the wrong place, [chuckling] as I say I'd be blown to pieces before I could press the trigger! But it was interesting because it was a Guard's Brigade or whatever they call it and I stayed with them for about nine months - went down to Sleaford with them, and that's how it was. When I came to the Army Film Unit, the CO, he was a nice old boy, he was a Welsh Guards Captain actually, and the others were - a lot of 'em were Welsh Guards, but all sorts of guards. It was a small unit - Irish Guards I remember. He called me into the office one day and he said, "Look" he said... Oh by that time I was a Sergeant - well I was a Lance Sergeant which is an unpaid - you get paid as a Corporal and do the work of a Sergeant, you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** I'd been a Lance Corporal and a Corporal and everything [laughs] well, I have! But I never really wanted to be a Sergeant, I didn't want to be a Sergeant particularly, but I took the job on because it always meant better circumstances.

**Alan Lawson:** Well that's right! [Chuckles.]

**Leonard Harris:** [chuckles] staying at - when other people got posted to somewhere up in the Midlands of something, I stayed in London you see and all this sort of thing. We even got a - I went on a Lance Corporal's course. They took three hundred people and they posted them, they kept twelve of us back to go on this course that was at Kingston Barracks. Well that suited me, I didn't really wanted to be a Lance Corporal...I never thought about any promotion in the Army, never thought of it you know. But when it meant staying at the barracks which was better than going somewhere up in - Bedford I think they went to - an unknown place, I'd heard all sorts of reports about, I thought, "Well this is better, stay here!" Oh and then I got, when we had finished that course, they didn't make any of us up, but then they put us on a two-inch - four-inch mortar course, that's right. And that was a funny thing really because it was a course for officers and they came down there. Now we had a four-inch mortar but we had no ammunition for it, or dummy ammunition or anything at all. So there are four in the four-inch mortar crew, [laughter] there's the firer, the first assistant or something, second and the bloke who carries the ammunition. [Laughs.] Well they didn't even have any boxes of ammunition, so you'd got lines to say! [laughter] So the officer who's going to fire it would say something about, "Number one ready" or something like that. And the other chap would say, "Sighted," or something, and in the end you'd run up and the last one would say, "Ammunition ready Sir!" [Chuckles] There was no ammunition, no box or anything!

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**Manny Yospa:** [laugh]

**Leonard Harris:** Eventually they did get us some old ammunition cases which were empty and weren't for four-inch mortars at all. But the only thing about - oh they gave us one, as a sort of gesture, one turn of the four-inch mortar on each thing, otherwise we were just stooges carrying the imaginary ammunition gauges. But you see, while you were doing this, you were officially on a course, so it meant that they couldn't put you on guard duties or parade duties or anything like that, so that again, it suited me. And we went also to see them fired to Pirbright I think it was - obviously Pirbright, yeah - to fire this four-inch mortar eventually. We saw that and when they gave you a demonstration - now this is interesting to me I think, because the whole thing - they argue on this course that you could shoot down an enemy aircraft with a rifle. They said this had been done and if you know the right part... [End of Tape 1, Side 2][Tape 2, Side 3]

**Alan Lawson:** You were talking about the four-inch mortars.

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yes, [laughs].

**Alan Lawson:** [Laughs] Then after that, when did you come into the Army Film Unit?

**Leonard Harris:** Well, um there was...

**Alan Lawson:** How did that happen?

**Leonard Harris:** Well - that's right - now let me think, that was the East Surrey's, that was. Then I came again on one of these LMG defence corps as a projectionist mainly, showing films, secret films to them. And they were a pretty nice crowd actually, they had some very decent officers there. A lot of them were titled men, very wealthy all of them, as Guard's Officers often are you know. But they were quite generous and, you know, the CO was always paying for us to have a night out, I mean he'd pay for it you know, he was very good actually. A very strictly very military type you know but nice with it. And - oh yes that's right, he called me into the office once, he said, "Look I keep getting these signals from the War Office to say you're to go for an interview for this Army Film Unit," you know, he didn't know much about it. [Slight pause - someone at door] Yes, so he said, "I keep getting these signals. We're a War Office unit and I've told them that I can't let you go." But he said, "This time they've been emphatic and I'll have to let you go up for the interview, but nothing will happen." So next day, I suppose it was, I came up to Hotel Great Central [chuckles] which I knew so well anyway - which was a transit camp, then. I came up for this interview for this Army Film Unit. And then I came out and that big old Sergeant Major there - he was a nice bloke actually, he was a big fella you know, from some Sussex regiment or something he was, I don't know. As I came out I said, "Well I must go back now, I've got to go back to my unit." He said, "You're not going back to your unit!" I said, "Well I've got things to do there, there's lectures to prepare for tomorrow." Because I was kind of stage manager for their lectures as well you see, in the cinema. They'd have all these things set out on a stage in a cinema and I'd have to arrange all this, have it there when they wanted it. He said, "You're in the Army, you do what we tell you not what you think you ought to do!" [Chuckles] So he said, "You will go back to this..." - I don't know whether he said go back to the Hotel Great Central or go back to transit camp, or what he did, or stay there, I forget now. And Joe West was the other - he was a sergeant.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yeah that's right, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** And so we did. And, you know, he said, "We'll send for the rest of your equipment, there's a kit bag and all your other bits and pieces." He didn't say that - bits and pieces - he said, "We'll send for your equipment." And so he said, "You can't do anything about it."

**Alan Lawson:** Was that Flood?

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm?

**Alan Lawson:** Was his name Flood, the Sergeant Major?

**Leonard Harris:** I can't remember his name, he was a big fella in the Wessex Regiment, with a peak cap, rather...

**Alan Lawson:** Anyway, the interview - who did you see, do you remember?

**Leonard Harris:** I believe I saw you, I'm not sure!

**Alan Lawson:** It was me was it?

**Leonard Harris:** I think so yeah, and I saw - who was it? Major um...

**Alan Lawson:** McDonald?

**Leonard Harris:** Stewart. No, Major Stewart.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh, Hugh Stewart?

**Leonard Harris:** Hugh Stewart, yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Ah ha.

**Leonard Harris:** Hugh Stewart and I believe some civilian - I'm not sure I didn't see George Hill as well - some civilians there as well, I think.

**Alan Lawson:** Really?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah. And of course then I came back - I stayed up... But I felt very bad about leaving this unit because they'd treated us very well you know, and you don't get treated very well in the Army as a rule, I hadn't been. The only people who treated me well were a Canadian unit and they treated me very well. But you got kicked around and pushed around a bit, generally speaking, you know. And they'd treated me so well this, this Guard's lot. So I wrote - which you shouldn't do - I wrote to the CO, explaining what had happened you know, and of course he didn't write back directly to me but I got a letter from the Orderly Room Sergeant eventually saying something about, "Captain So-and-so noted what you said" [chuckles]. But yes, they were good, and a Captain Vaughan was another one, he was Welsh Guards too. And McClain, I wouldn't mind meeting any of them afterwards but I don't know. Vaughan - no, the first one I mentioned - I believe he had big estates in Scotland and down south and I read, years afterwards, that somebody in a shooting party with him up on his estate in Scotland got shot you know, by accident, as people do quite often in these shooting parties. I haven't much sympathy for them because they shouldn't go shooting! [chuckles] I'm all against it!

**Alan Lawson:** Now tell us about your time in the Army Film Unit. What was the first thing that happened, can you remember?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, well we came up to the Curzon House, wasn't it called?

**Alan Lawson:** Curzon Street House.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, Curzon Street House yes and I saw Bill Allen and yourself, and Bill Allen said to me, "Come over here," he said, "now you take half the class and I'll take the other," of this section, you know. And he said, "We'll explain to them about the Devrys camera." Well I'd never seen a Devry camera and I didn't know how intricate it was, so I said to Bill, "I haven't seen this before, what...?" "Oh," he said, "look, it's very simple" and he showed me just what there was, and it was simple, let's face it - probably the simplest camera ever I should think. So I had to take half the blokes on that, instructing them how to use it. We used to go up on the roof, because it was summertime, we used to go up on the roof and practice panning and tilting and all that sort of thing and um, yes. And when we'd sort of finished the course, it was quite a long course then, it was about twelve weeks I seem to remember, we were told that we were going to be posted in due course. And it gradually went on and on, and I wasn't posted. Gradually the chaps started going away, and there was myself, Corporal Paton[?] as he was then and one or two others kept back, and they said, "Oh you're going to Pinewood now, you're going to instruct on a course at Pinewood." So again, that suited me very much! [Chuckles] So I went to Pinewood and a Captain Black was there in charge of training.

**Alan Lawson:** Alf Black, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** Alf Black, yeah. Of course his uncle had been in charge at Gainsborough, because I never... I didn't seem the thing... [indecipherable]. But then he eventually went to the Far East. I shot a lot of stuff, material then for those two films 'Africa Freed' and what was the other one?

**Alan Lawson:** 'Desert Victory'?

**Leonard Harris:** No, well 'Desert Victory' had been done before, they'd shot some of that at Pinewood on the lot, you remember? That night stuff, which they couldn't, obviously, do over there. But 'Africa Freed' and one other, I shot a lot of material which got into those pictures. And then when 'The True Glory' came, I had a lot of stuff in that later on, quite a lot of stuff. But then strangely enough a funny thing happened - I got, um - Army Film Unit, we were in Normandy. Oh eventually when we went to Normandy, we were on the invasion, I think I went over in about 'D' plus one or something. Oh! What I was quite proud of, I did very good, I thought, very good coverage of the paratroops getting ready to go, the paratroops and airborne troops. I thought I did good cover in that, and it was because all the newsreels used it, and we were able to see - we were stationed then down at - that was at a place near Cambridge where they went, and I filmed that. And we were stationed around um... well we gradually went down to Portsmouth, towards Portsmouth, so we were able to see the newsreels at the cinemas, we were allowed out then, everyone knew the invasion was on. So we were allowed out and we went to see the newsreels. And I got this stuff in nearly all the newsreels - well all the newsreels except Pathe - Pathe hadn't used it. And I noticed that Pathe were the ones who didn't use much Army or any - they used their own material. Well they had a very good cameraman I must admit, Ken um, Ken um...

**Alan Lawson:** Ken Gordon?

**Leonard Harris:** Ken Gordon, yes! [Chuckles] Fantastic man he was and really - and he was their main bloke, they had other fellas as well, but they didn't use so much of the service material

as others. Gaumont-British used a lot, and of course I knew Sid Bonnett and he was with Gaumont-British News then and I saw him. And when I came out of the services, I did quite a bit - well not a lot of newsreel, but big events, news events. I got borrowed from Shepherd's Bush you know, to go out with the newsreel and you got to know the producer of the newsreels, what's his name, quite well. A famous name...

**Alan Lawson:** Castleton-Knight?

**Leonard Harris:** Castleton-Knight, yeah. And I went on the Olympic Games with him. I didn't get a credit because they didn't know I was on it. They didn't know I was going to be on it you see, and they did all the credits quickly so the thing was out in the next week. So although I had a lot of material in it I didn't get a credit, which is a pity because it meant I lost a little job years later because of that. Well some big - I was freelancing and some big news event, I can't think what it was, was coming up and Movietone News were going to cover it in a big way. So I went to Movietone News and I said "If you want any extra cameras...?" And they said, "Oh yes, what have you done?" And I told them, they didn't know me. I said, "Well a lot of my stuff is used in your newsreel at times, army stuff, and I covered the Olympic Games for Castleton-Knight." And I saw them look at one another, as much as to say, "He wasn't on it," you know - I could see that in their faces, and I didn't get the job! But it didn't matter much, something else cropped up. You know, when you're freelancing, one job you don't get, you get another one. But it was obvious, you see they didn't think I was on that thing, they thought I was trying to pull a fast one! [Chuckles] But anyhow I was on it for - well for the weekend, with the old bi-pack because they did some of the big racing things, the Technicolor bi-pack thing. And outside Brent Town Hall, we were covering that. No, it was quite good, I quite enjoyed it in a way.

**Alan Lawson:** Anyway, coming back to the war years.

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yes! [Chuckles] Now - oh yes that's right!

**Alan Lawson:** In Normandy.

**Leonard Harris:** Normandy, yeah. That's right. Now I had a bit of a shake-up I remember and a fellow I was very friendly with got killed - Robinson. Do you know Robinson? You'd remember him probably, not now, because it's a long time ago. But he was a young chap and he'd just recently left college I think, I don't think he'd ever worked - but he was mad keen on films and he was very good, and he had the right temperament, and I thought, "This bloke is going somewhere," you know. And he got killed by a mine, you know, he stood on - or he'd dropped it, I don't know - and it blew him to pieces. And it upset me a lot, I was a bit shaken up by this. I wasn't there, mind you, with him. It was the fact that, I suppose, I was fairly close to him and it affected me more than some other people. So AKS was wanting some filming done over there and they hadn't got a unit, they had a projection unit, cinemas and things, mobile and all that sort of thing and Stewart loaned me to them to make these little films. Well it was fine for me, I loved it. You know I had an old Eyemo and they'd sort of call me in the office and say, "We want a film about so-and-so made." Well one film I did 'Jerry Cans' I was always rather proud of that. The Jerry cans were in great demand and that's what gave the film its title, 'Jerry Can in Great Demand' and I used 'Jerry Can' as if it was a person you see? [Chuckles] But they'd say, "We

want a film made of that." Well I'd have to go out to devise something - that meant writing it - they were only short things, you know, quite short - go out and shoot it, direct it, photograph it, edit it, cut the negative, and sometimes I'd even have to help process it! Because they were taken back to a laboratory in Brussels, who were very short of staff because some had been taken away by the Germans or something as far as I could - and they weren't always - they hadn't got enough people to do it, so I'd have to sometimes help to develop it, which was all interesting you now. And, oh I had to shoot the titles on an [Imo] with one lens and I'd have to allow for parallax and all this sort of thing, but they worked out quite well. Oh I got a Royal Engineer Sergeant, quite officially, to write the titles out for me, he was very good at lettering, and the boss of the AKS unit, I forget his name now - Park-Webb! Have you ever heard of Park-Webb?

**Alan Lawson:** No, no...

**Leonard Harris:** No. He was something in films but I didn't hear of him after that except, I think he was an advisor on a war film 'They Were Not Divided'. Someone told me he went as an advisor, he'd been a tank officer or something, during the war. He was a nice bloke and he'd tell me what the people wanted to say, you know, on the titles like, "So many thousand Jerry cans have been lost," and all that sort of thing. So I get this Royal Engineer fellow to write it out and I'd film it. And I'd develop the titles in a sink! [Chuckling] I remember once I was developing these titles in a sink, on the borders of Holland and Germany and I'd been lighting some stuff inside. I had a few studio lamps, which weren't proper lights really and the shutters were down, as they have them in these old Dutch farmhouses, and suddenly I heard a voice say, "Put those lights out!" Well, I put them out, I thought the shutters were up and they were all right. Well anyway, a moment afterwards - Ba ba ba ba! - you know, an air-plane swooped down, and it was one of the last German air-raids in the war I think, when they were on the dying stage. And I did hear they'd brought it down some way away. Anyway when I went out, I put the lights out but I don't think many lights could have been showing, it's quite possible that they were talking to somebody else - although it was a farmhouse, there wasn't much around, and I had just put my lights out, you see. And I'd develop the titles as much as I could for two reasons: one, for checking on parallax and that, you know, seeing if they were sharp and well positioned in the frame and all that sort of thing. And also I planned - as the thing was wanted as soon as possible, the film - it was only a seven or eight minute film I think, and I had to get it out as soon as possible. So I thought if I take these titles, already developed - some of them were a bit scratched but [chuckling] they were all developed - it would all help to make it all quicker. So we get back to Brussels afterwards and I got the film back and you know, within a week of getting told to make the film, it was about in AKS cinemas, and I thought that was pretty good going. I mean it wouldn't be anything nowadays, you could get it done overnight! But in those days you see, you had to go by road to Brussels and so you helped develop it. Although silent copies were out that following week and a bit later on we just put - from some soundtrack that we got from gramophone records, things of musical - a regimental march and all that sort of stuff, and put a soundtrack on it. It was just bunged on because it didn't require any - the titles explained everything, you see. What had happened, these fellas were filling up the Jerry cans and just throwing them down. Now there's a pipeline coming right across the channel and round to Normandy and right up, you know, and the Jerry cans were - well there weren't enough Jerry cans by that time. It did tell you in the film, I think, how many had been lost. So I had to explain, I showed chaps making - people made a bed, they put them on the ground as supports to their

bed for one thing [Chuckles] in a billet or something. Or they leave them out and the kids go and pinch them or they chuck 'em in a ditch - all sorts of things like that, you see, and it was getting a bit dangerous then. But fortunately quite soon after that, the film, as I say, got shown and I suppose it was some use, but quite soon after that peace was declared! [Chuckles] So I always say, "Well, that film helped to win the war!" [Chuckles] But I had to do other - mostly Royal Engineers, bridges being built and things. I did one, 'A Russian Village in Germany' - that was interesting. There was all the slave labour there in this village and - I tell you the thing I found interesting, you know in these early Russian films you see the sort of - they're playing the balalaika thing and they're kind of posing against the skyline?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes...

**Leonard Harris:** I found these people were doing the same sort of thing! And I couldn't help getting the same sort of set up you know. And there were pregnant women, very much pregnant, standing against the skyline, leaning against a tree or something, and it was so typical of the sort of films I'd seen at the Academy in Oxford Street, you know! [Chuckles] But it was great! Oh then I know another trouble we had there, while I was in this camp doing this film, there was an English Medical Officer, a Russian Sergeant Major who had been captured and an English radio operator - we had radio contact with some battalion somewhere. But you see, all of these nationalities, all around - they'd get their own back on the Germans, they thought. And they used to drink this 'flying bomb' stuff and they'd get real drunk, in a terrible state, and you used to have all these people coming up and they'd want to smash the village up you see. Because it obviously belonged to Germans and we'd have to try and keep them from doing this! And the bloke used to get onto the radio and signal back, but they said, "Well we can't send anybody, you'll have to do it yourself." And fortunately the Russian Sergeant Major was very good, he had good control over - and he used to talk to his people and be in control and send them back you know. And our Medical Officer, he was good too, but of course he wasn't a disciplinarian really, I mean he was just a medical. And he was looking after the people - we had some abortions and all sorts of things to deal with - well, he did! And I've seen kids about - babies, about - in a wineglass, about as big as a thumb and all sorts of things. I didn't see the operations you know, I didn't want to either, but he showed me, as a matter of interest you know. And those films, they were handed back to - when they were finished - the AKS Second Army HQ, and then what happened to them I don't know. I don't know if they got into a British Prisoner of War place or not. I know that um... And I made a lot of films for the Royal Engineers. I got into the Royal Engineers afterwards you see. I was filming for the Royal Engineers when they started disbanding the Army Film Unit and I suppose the Royal Engineers said - this is just as the war is finishing - in Europe anyway. Then the Royal Engineers said, "Well if he's filming for us we've got a lot of work for him to do." So they said, "Well you'd better have him." I mean they're saying it in an Army language of course - so I was put into the Royal Engineers and came out as a Royal Engineer actually, which I've still got the trade pay and all that sort of thing.

**Alan Lawson:** You were lucky!

**Leonard Harris:** Yes.

**Alan Lawson:** You were lucky! [Chuckling]

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, yes! And, oh I know - a couple of the films I brought back, I suppose I shouldn't have had 'em but the Jerry can film, I had a worn 35mm copy. I got that back - a silent one, mute one, so it didn't make much difference - and I thought, "Well, I'll bring that back." And I eventually gave it to the Imperial War Museum who were very pleased and they gave me a 16mm copy of it, and they were pleased with it. And another one about the remote control weasel, which is a thing where they control a weasel and they can be yards and yards behind it with cables and they pull the cable - primitive then - well not primitive then but it would be primitive now. And they can control it and it goes over landmines and things you see, with a flail in front of it beating these landmines and when it's cleared the path, the Infantry can go through. As I say, it was devised by a Brigadier David Jones with the Second Army. And I always thought, someone said he had an engineering business in Shepherd's Bush and I often wondered, at the end of White City there was Jones and something, Engineers - it was a big firm or it used to be, I don't know if it's still there.

**Alan Lawson:** Heavy engineering that was?

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm?

**Alan Lawson:** That was heavy engineering.

**Leonard Harris:** Heavy engineering, which is the sort of thing this bloke might have been, he might have been, I don't know though, it's just a guess on my part really. He was a very nice bloke. [chuckles] A very nice bloke. I had a lot of problems with him - you know he'd, "Now Sergeant, what..." (because I was just a sergeant then) "this is a scene where you want to see the Infantry going forward." So I'd say "Yeah, well I've radioed Sir, you know, so they'd go in, they get in and duck down." "Oh no, I don't want them to see all that." And eventually he'd have it his way, you know. "Now you do it the way you want, Sergeant," you know - but he'd still put his spoke in, so I'd have to come round! But it's just as well because that's what he wanted to show. He didn't really want to see them ducking enemy snipers or something like that which I built up! [chuckles] But he was very pleased with the film eventually and he had a copy I remember, and that's in the Imperial War Museum.

**Alan Lawson:** Did you edit those yourself too?

**Leonard Harris:** Pardon?

**Alan Lawson:** Did you edit those yourself?

**Leonard Harris:** Edited them myself, yeah.

**Alan Lawson:** Did you really?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes I did it myself, and edited the negative. I did the whole thing really - it was a one man... They were 35mm. That was fortunate really and I went to the cutting rooms in Brussels and they had - the movieola they gave me, it was rather funny. The harder you pressed the pedal down the faster it went! [Laughs] Well it's all right if you're cutting action, when it

looks right you just you know, cut it. But when you're doing titles you see you've got to work out how long the titles will be on the screen so it sinks in, not too long so that it gets boring. Well you can always work out, "Oh, four and a half a second," and all that sort of thing, but it doesn't - it's best if you see it. So you've got to get the position on the treadle that you think is twenty-four frames a second and then after the final check I would measure up the footage, and they seemed to work pretty well! [Chuckles]

**Alan Lawson:** This was all done in Belgium was it, this work?

**Leonard Harris:** This work was done in Belgium and later on in Germany, in Berlin, but mostly that was in Belgium. Berlin there was a bit more - oh we had a Royal Engineer band in there and we had to pinch some time, that was in Ufa's place. The British Council were doing some recording with a proper orchestra - a German orchestra, but we had to get in and do our military band. I had to get them doing that for the timing and where I wanted a roll on drums and all that sort of thing. That was, as I say, Berlin, but mostly it was done in Belgium you know. The laboratory was named, um, I see their name up on television occasionally...

**Manny Yospa:** Gevaert's

**Alan Lawson:** No, not the laboratory, it was Gevaert film we were using, mostly. Um, oh I'd like to go back there someday. They were doing a lot of printing for AKS too, er, you know, film printing I mean, at the time. I can't think - I'll think of it again later on. But um, yeah, as I say, I always wanted to make my own films, which I did do a bit after I came out of the Army, I made little films you know, some puppet films and short films.

**Alan Lawson:** And this was after the war?

**Leonard Harris:** After the war, yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, how did you get finance?

**Leonard Harris:** I didn't, I had to finance myself you see, that was the trouble! [Chuckles] So they had to be really done on a shoestring and the shoestring I can tell you was a cheap shoestring! But you see I used to get bits of 35mm, I had a camera, yeah, and people would leave film in the camera for me.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh I see, but you were... This was a - what shall we say? - a part-time occupation?

**Leonard Harris:** Oh part-time, yeah.

**Alan Lawson:** Now, when were you de-mobbed?

**Leonard Harris:** I got de-mobbed in 1946, in the May I think it was, yes. I always remember that day. I was de-mobbed at Aldershot and the taxi driver - I came to Victoria - the taxi driver,

well it was obvious I was de-mobbed. And you remember they used to have taxis then with the open back?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** I got in this taxi and he drove me through Hyde Park and it was lovely! It was freedom, the spring and everything. And he must have known, that taxi driver, that's why he drove through the park I think, you know, so I always remember that day! [Chuckles]

**Alan Lawson:** Did you have reinstatement rights with Gaumont?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes.

**Alan Lawson:** You did?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes. In fact they were quite willing to get me out of the Army a bit earlier - Gainsborough this was really.

**Alan Lawson:** Yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** But I would have lost - I worked it out that by the time they notified me about this I would have lost the - what do you get, a handout don't you?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** I forget now what it was, but you get so much. Well I would have lost some of that and also I would have lost a bit of a holiday. So although I would have loved to have gone back, I explained to them, wrote and explained to them what I would lose, so I might as well stay the course, I get the money and have a bit of a holiday. I only had about a couple of weeks when I came out. And I came back and I went to Lime Grove then of course because Islington - well it had opened up again, yes that's right, it opened up as Columbia Pictures opened it up again I think. Because they were afraid - apart from Lime Grove - a lot of it was political I think. Lime Grove was empty you see, when the war started, apart from GB Newsreel had a place there, GB Instructional were there, but it was virtually empty. It wasn't boarded up or anything, but... there was a newer building. But they thought - so they didn't want the government to move it into stores or anything like that, which they might well have done. They did use an air-raid shelter below. But also they thought with Gainsborough being an older building, there was danger of that chimney coming down. Incidentally, they've taken that chimney down now you know - I'd have loved to have seen them doing it, how they did it I don't know, it was the third highest in London, you know?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And it was quite a building. So that's one reason I moved over from there to Shepherd's Bush you see. So I went back to Shepherd's Bush, stogged around a bit, then of

course they said, "We'll make you a second operator" - they used to have second operators then, you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes that's right.

**Leonard Harris:** And I don't see it so much now, I mean you had second cameras like an official...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, oh yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** So I did odd bits and pieces of pictures. And the first picture I did was a thing called 'The Calendar' an Edgar Wallace film, which Gainsborough had filmed before. Reg Wyer was the cameraman, lighting cameraman.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes?

**Leonard Harris:** Arthur Crabtree directing it. Old Arthur! [chuckles] He was a good bloke, Arthur, really. He gave me a hell of a time mind you, because he was such a perfectionist you know, but I learnt a lot from him. And I remember Dudley telling me the same, Dudley Lovell, he gave him a rough time on one of his early pictures. Not unpleasantly, I don't mean that, but he was a perfectionist you know. But if you listen to a man like that, you learn you know, you do learn a lot. And if ever I've been any good as an operator, you know, through the years, a lot of it is due to Arthur's coaching you know, and instruction. [Chuckling] You could almost imagine him standing behind you! And Reg Wyer was doing that, he was a grand bloke, too. I think cameramen generally are, there's something in the breed - they become rather pleasant! Then I got with Jack Cox and I - oh you see Jack Cox was very good, I used to do a lot of lighting on his films. Now I did some operating on a couple of pictures and then the way, when Sidney Box took over Gainsborough you'd very often - a film would finish but then they'd do some more scenes and things like that, a thing we didn't do in the old Ostrer days. But anyway I very often got the job of lighting these extra scenes you know, and some of them were quite important. And sometimes Jack Cox would be working on a picture on the next stage and they'd say, officially, "Could you just go and have a look at it?" Well old Jack, he would come in, look around and say, "Yes that's fine, yes, yes, yes, yes they're fine. Shoot it, shoot it! Turn over!" And he'd walk away and as he was going he'd say to me, "I should flood that a bit more if I were you," you know, so nobody else heard! But um, then - I got lots of lighting, more lighting experience on other pictures, bits and pieces, second unit stuff you know. 'Holiday Camp' was one I did a lot of stuff on. But I was still an operator really, which suited me very much and I stayed with them until they closed. We were doing two pictures - I forget the - I was doing 'Traveller's Joy'. Dave Harcourt on another stage was doing 'So Long at the Fair', that's right - operating, 'So Long at the Fair'. I think Reg Wyer was doing it and Terry Fisher was directing. But one that I was on, 'Astonished Heart' we were shooting this film you see, this Noel Coward story. We'd been three weeks shooting it and Coward comes back from America and he has to see all the sets and everything and he had all his entourage with him, his own set decorator or dresser. Well they'd just walk round, they'd do odd things like move an ornament and things like that, as much to say... Anyway we'd got Michael Redgrave playing the lead, and doing very well. Anyway, three weeks into it, Coward comes back, and in the afternoon he comes back - we came back after

lunch. We'd just done a very tricky scene I remember, tricky for camera anyway - awkward moves - in the morning, we'd finished and gone to lunch. And we came back in and Michael Redgrave was there and he'd got a moustache on! So we had to do this scene again with Michael Redgrave with a moustache on you see. Well he hadn't been - although he was playing the lead in the picture, the stuff we'd shot before in that three weeks, he hadn't been in a lot of that stuff you know, it was other people - on other artists, Margaret Leighton and people like that. Anyway, so we did this scene again with Noel Coward and some other bits and pieces, and the next day - no I beg your pardon, with Michael Redgrave with his moustache. The next day we come in and there's Noel Coward on the set and Michael Redgrave is no longer to be seen, so Noel Coward played the part! So we had to do it all again! And then go - fortunately Michael Redgrave hadn't been in a lot of the earlier stuff, so we didn't have quite three weeks. But what I was driving at really, it made us late on this other picture. So Terry Fisher went onto the other picture when he wasn't quite finished on our picture and he carried on with 'So Long at the Fair' and the producer fellow directed our picture and Coward had a hand in there of course. I mean, I don't think you could direct Coward much, you know. [Chuckles] He's a nice enough bloke but he's a bit um - you know. And he'd written the play, he'd written it and he'd been in it on the stage, you know, he should know the part! [pause] Now what was I going to say? Oh I believe that 'The Astonished Heart' the BBC are doing a television play of it I think. They're doing a series of plays by Noel Coward as a season I think and that's one of them. I'd like to see the - well it was quite a dramatic thing. Coward I thought, personally, was - although he was probably excellent on the stage and he had written it - by then he was slightly too old and brittle a man to play the part. I thought that Michael Redgrave was a smoother, softer - not smoother - softer character, more likely to be... You know I wouldn't have felt like going to confide with Coward if I - because he was supposed to be a psychiatrist you know - whereas Michael Redgrave, you could. Coward was more of the business type you know! [Chuckles] He was good in it and I thought he was very good in the final scene, excellent in it, excellent. But he didn't, generally speaking I think - he might have as a younger man, but not by then you know. Oh yes so then I finished on that and by that time I'd just about finished at - I had a contract with them you see that finished then. Finished then and I was, I think I'd finished. I was making a - I'd got a picture going at Elstree, at the Gate Studio, not the BBC. And I - that's right - yeah - that's it. Just before I was finished on 'Astonished Heart', Bert Easy came up to me and he said, "Look Len, they've got a few weeks going on a picture at Denham, 'Morning Departure' with John Mills, would you like to go on to that? It's on submarines and things like that." So I said, "Yes that's fine." He said, "It's only a couple of week's work." So I thought, "Well that's fine because this other thing I've settled for starts in two week's time". So I went on this 'Morning Departure', out to sea in submarines everyday, which was interesting. Then I left it but they kept on piling on other scenes and it kept on building up you see, I left it. And I think it went on for two or three weeks, I mean some days the sea was so rough you couldn't shoot and all that sort of nonsense. But I was back by then on my other picture at Elstree you know so... [chuckles] Who was in the Elstree picture? I think Lewis Gilbert directed it. I'm trying to think - oh yeah... girl, great song and dance artist she was at the time. Jack Watling was the leading man but the star, I can't remember... [NB Possibly Pat Kirkwood in 'Once a Sinner'] Anyway and then I was - oh I think I went on different pictures to different studios, all that sort of thing. Then I got a letter one day from Hammer, would I do - and I'd just seen a few pictures from Hammer and they looked quite polished and I thought, "That's a very good film." I had this letter from Hammer saying, "Would I be interested in doing a picture with them and possibly another one to follow-up?" So I went to see them and

said, "Yes I'll do that." And of course the other one did follow-up and I think I was lucky that Dudley was going to do one, the next one I think and he went somewhere else, and so I stepped into there, I got the other one. And it seemed very good.

**Alan Lawson:** And this is at Bray, isn't it?

**Leonard Harris:** Bray yes, 1952 that was. Hmm. And then of course Bray expanded a bit. But they had a very good art director then. Reg Wyer was lighting, Terence Fisher directing, a good art director, Jim Wills. And another thing I was going to mention about Jim Wills that I found out later about him...he'd been a director, as you probably know, and a producer. But a thing about war-time experiences, he told me once that he was taken over and put on a beach in France and the next day a naval vessel came along and picked him up and he got samples of soil and things like that. [Chuckles] You didn't know anything, I mean, you don't think about these ordinary sort of people doing things like that! But he was a good art director, but he really retired from Bray through ill health I think you know, he was getting on a bit. They were clever that way, they got some very good art directors all together, and good cameramen too. Reg Wyer, I think he went back to Pinewood and they got Jack Asher of course. And I'll tell you another fellow they had when I first went there, um, Harvey - Jimmy Harvey [Walter J Harvey].

**Manny Yospa:** Jimmy Harvey!

**Alan Lawson:** Jimmy Harvey, yes, yes, yes...

**Leonard Harris:** Now Jimmy Harvey, I liked him, I got to know him quite well you know. And I know when we went back to Germany on location he was afraid to speak German you know! And yet he was born there but he was too shy. When he got into it he was all right, he was quite happy about it.

**Manny Yospa:** I thought he worked with us at Ufa.

**Leonard Harris:** Pardon?

**Manny Yospa:** I thought he did do a lot of work at Ufa before...

**Leonard Harris:** Where, sorry?

**Alan Lawson:** At Ufa - he worked at Ufa before the war. Well - could it be, his sister...

**Leonard Harris:** Jimmy Harvey, mind you his sister was there, she was a star there, yes, so he did work there - he was on some of these 'Siegfrieds' and all these big films at Ufa. But he didn't like - because I went out when we went, we went to a restaurant and Jimmy was very reluctant to speak German. And only when the waiter spoke a lot of German and Jimmy sort of got into it more, he would talk. And yet he spoke it very well, obviously. But he would never speak of his sister much you know. And I wish I'd talked to him more about these old Ufa days but um, you'd have to drag it out of him, he wasn't a - you know - if you asked him a question about it he'd answer it but then he'd go on to something else you know. And now I've seen, I will say this

about Jimmy, you know, he's very quick, as a cameraman he's very - but I've seen some of the best day for night material I've every seen with Jimmy Harvey, he really hit it right bang on the er - the nail, the head!

**Alan Lawson:** Right on the nose!

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, absolutely on the nose, yes! [Chuckles][End of Tape][Tape 2, Side 4]

**Alan Lawson:** Now you've been talking about Jimmy Harvey.

**Leonard Harris:** Oh yes, Jimmy Harvey. And I - well it's some years ago now, but I didn't know until a long time afterwards that he'd died, I didn't read about it anywhere and I heard about it quite a long time afterwards, so, that was very sad. But um - Jack... Actually, Hammer had one or two people at various times. They had um...the fellow became a director - oh heck - a young, well not all that young now, obviously - I'll think of it later. As a matter of fact he just got the award for the best colour photography and black and white photography this last year, I think it was a BAFTA award.

**Manny Yospa:** Do you mean Bob Krasker?

**Leonard Harris:** No not Bob Krasker.

**Alan Lawson:** No, no, no, Bob Krasker is dead!

**Leonard Harris:** Oh, and he directed a few films and he'd be back on lighting again now... Oh! Well they had him anyway! [Chuckles] And who else? Oh and in my humble way, me, for some small films and bits and pieces! But of course - Oh, Arthur Grant! Of course Arthur Grant, they had a lot, you know Arthur Grant.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** He died while he was working with them, old Arthur. And who else? Oh Lionel Baines did a picture there. Gerry Fisher, no not Gerry Fisher, Gerry Gibbs did two or three pictures there and he did some for other companies at Bray. Because although we were pretty busy at Hammer Pictures we had renters came in at time to time you know, which was a good thing because you got to know other people more. And I was loaned out quite a lot so fortunately when Hammer did pack up I had been to other studios and I'd been on loan so I wasn't completely unknown in other studios.

**Alan Lawson:** Were you under contract with Hammer?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah I had a series of yearly contracts. They er - what did they do? They had...

**Alan Lawson:** Options?

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm?

**Alan Lawson:** A contract with options?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, well first of all it was picture to picture, and then after about a year, I think, they put us under yearly contract. Then - oh I know, yes that was interesting, they stopped the contract business, they said, "We know we're going to keep people on, you don't need to give them a contract." Well I'd been doing some motor racing films in the weekends mostly for Random Film Productions, I don't know if you've heard of them?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** And I'd been doing motor racing and motor cycle racing films, and I done quite a lot of those. So they 'phoned me up one time - oh I think it was, they 'phoned me up, they said, "We want to talk to you when you come over next weekend." So I got over there a bit early and they wanted to see me, they said, "Would you like a job here with Random Films? We're going to do a series of advertising for Shell," I think it was, all concerned with motor racing, and they were only going to be very short, "We'd like you to photograph them and direct them for us, and we'll give you more money." So I thought, "Well this sounds good, and they were nice people to work for," so I said, "Yes I would like to" it sounded good. So I thought, "Well I'll have to go back to Hammer and [chuckles] tell them." So I went to Hammer, I went to Michael Carreras and I said to Michael, "I'll be leaving because I've got a better job." "What?" he said, "You're not leaving us now?" And so you know, he laid it on thick, he said, "We've got a big programme ahead, what are they giving you - want more money? I'll give you more!" So [chuckles] he gave me more money and he said - his secretary, he called her in, he said, "I'll give you a contract!" Of course they'd stopped the contracts. He said, "I'll give you a contract - whatever - a yearly contract. As long as we're making films you've got a job," he said, "you'll always be with us, you've got a job!" So [chuckles] I thought, "What am I going to do now?" Because I was very happy there really you know, and I thought, "Well I don't know, the other thing is for advertising." So eventually I thought - and we had some rather nice locations for Hammer, [chuckles] so I thought. Oh I phoned up Gordon, that's right, Gordon Lang, because he was with Random Films...

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes, yes...

**Leonard Harris:** I phoned Gordon and I explained it to him, "Oh don't worry," he said, "I'll explain to Random," because he was with them by then. He said, "I'll explain what happened, that they're offering you more money and a contract and they'll give you a job for life really." So I didn't go back, but do you know Random never employed me again, not that that surprised me, you know, I understand that. They didn't call me again, and yet I used to do a lot of work for them, I suppose they were a bit fed up with me double-crossing! [Chuckles] But Hammer were good, they paid me and, of course when they stopped production I thought, "Well it is time to make a change anyway," and I wasn't going to go up to them and say, "Look here, I've been promised a job forever!" Because they stopped production. Although they made some more pictures after, and I will say that when they were going to do another picture, only occasionally you see, they contacted me and said, "Would you like to do it?" Well by that time I was doing quite well with a film - one film - two or three films, but one in particular at Shepperton, so it was worthwhile staying at Shepperton you see, instead of doing an occasional film with

Hammer. But they got me back on bits of second unit stuff, so I kept the contact going. They were always very nice and they treated me all right. I don't know that they were always the same with other people but [chuckles] I think they were all right as far as I was concerned. But um, I'll tell you another thing they did, they used to do. They had a system of bonuses you know, and it applied very much. When they got us in there it was very - it was a bit above minimum rates - it wasn't by many, it wasn't much above them - but it was more than you'd get at Elstree, ABPC or anywhere like that. But if you finished a picture on schedule, certain people - there was the lighting cameraman, camera operator, assistant director and I think production manager, oh and the director - if you finished the picture on schedule you'd get a bonus, quite a substantial one, you see. And they said, "Oh we've been advised that you needn't mention this," so how they got around that I don't know, I didn't ask questions. But um, and that reminds me about the Ostrers by the way, I'll tell you that in a minute. They - and we got this for quite a long time and they said "If the picture comes through on schedule you get the bonus but if it doesn't you won't be on the next picture!" You see, it was just like that! [Chuckles] So one picture we had with Dane Clarke, you remember old Dane? [indecipherable response from MY] Yeah! It went over schedule you see, so we thought, "Well, that's it for this time." He called us all up into the office, there was Terry Fisher, he was the director mind you, we all go up there in front of Michael Carreras, like we were at school really! [Chuckles] He said, "Now look, this picture has gone over schedule - you know the arrangement - and over budget." So we said, "Oh yes, we know." "But," he said, "I will say this, I know the reason why it went over schedule, we all know the reason and as a matter of fact there's still some more money left in the kitty, so I'm going to give you half your bonus now." [Chuckles] So we went out of there with half our bonus and we didn't get the sack! But I'll tell you, although the bonus was popular with us of course, there were a lot of people working there that were a bit against it - they knew we got it - because they weren't getting it and thought, "Well we work just as hard," you know, which was true. But they got the extra money working at Bray, they paid the 'Bray Pound' didn't they, I remember. And all sorts of other things. I seem to remember at one time the meals were free and the mid-morning thing, all that was free you know. But it was a bit of a - it created a bit of bad feeling I think, because everyone there worked very hard, there's no doubt about it and um, but a nice atmosphere. But anyway we um - what was I going to say? Yeah, so then when they stopped the bonus they incorporated what it would have been in your salary, so you got it as a salary, no question about the film not finishing on time. But I must say that every film did finish on time except one film that Leslie Norman directed called 'X the Unknown'. Did you know Leslie Norman at all?

**Alan Lawson:** No.

**Leonard Harris:** He's a good director, very much of a Cockney chap...

**Alan Lawson:** Yeah, yeah...

**Leonard Harris:** He's Norman Film Service there, you know the family has been in the business for a long time, and of course the bloke on the television is his son, one of his sons. But the foul mouth! Oh all the new words you learnt! And we were on the lot - not on the lot at Beaconsfield - but on the gravel pits of Beaconsfield and it was wintertime, January, ice and freezing cold. And he'd have this loudhailer and he'd be shouting at artists and all the swear words would be coming out, going all over the area. And you know what a nice area Beaconsfield is! [Chuckles]

This is in the middle of the night! But anyway, but I will say for Leslie Norman - I didn't like working with him - but he's a good director, he knows what he wants and he gets it. Now this is one of the troubles you see, you wouldn't give - now we were out there in appalling conditions. I mean when I say we were up to here in mud at that time - we had special clothing - we were! And you'd get stuck in it and you couldn't move. They'd put a rostrum down and of course you'd want to track where it was mud, thick mud. They put rostrums down and they'd test out the ground first of all, said, "Yes that'll be all right," put the rostrum down, put the tracks down onto it and the rostrum and tracks would disappear even so! Well all this thing was going on! We had this heavy velocitator and he wouldn't give an inch, you see, he insisted on everything as if he were working on the studio floor. Well of course this held us up. Jo[seph] Losey was going to direct the picture but he got pneumonia and didn't do it, so Leslie Norman came in at the last minute and he made a very good job of it, constructionary-wise and dramatically. I've got an 8mm copy of it and I still, there's a scene where it's getting a bit tense, even now. And I worked on it and how I hated it at the time, it still gets me, you know!

**Alan Lawson:** What was the film?

**Leonard Harris:** 'X the Unknown'.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Hmm, black and white. Gerry Gibbs lit it - that's right! And everybody wanted to get off it as soon as they could. Because Gerry got off it, he had a contract for whatever it was, five weeks, and he finished and he said, "I'm going! As soon as my contract finishes I'm getting away from this thing" and he did. And Jimmy Sangster, who had written the script, was also doing production manager work then, got onto the other picture because he said, "I've got to prepare for the next picture, I can't come out on this!" So he got away, and a lot of other people. Because I mean everybody had a row with Leslie Norman, he used to shout and swear at everybody. Only old June - she used to shout and swear back at him! [laughter]

**Manny Yospa:** June Randall?

**Leonard Harris:** Yeah! Another funny thing I remember with her, a little incident. He got stuck in the mud and we had these duffel coat things and a cape you know. And he was stuck in, like this there, and his boots, and he went down on the ground in thick mud and this duffel coat came over his face! [laughs] He was stuck there in the mud! Everybody was laughing and carrying on. Of course June pulled him out and I said, "You ought to have left him there!" [laughter] But he was a real, right so-and-so. As a matter of fact I told Tony Hinds, the producer - Oh that's it, he got off the picture too! Michael Carreras came and took over. Everyone got off as soon as they could 'cause it was such a - well it wasn't all his fault, the conditions were bad, but he made them worse. But mind you, I will say, he had a tough job to do, I mean, to work under those conditions. And when you've got to think that he's the bloke who's got to get it done, you know, it's a big responsibility really. And I see a man has just died who was in it - who played the lead in it. Not Chapman, an American - oh it was in the paper only about a fortnight ago that he's died. I can't think of his name now. [NB: Dean Jagger] but he wouldn't let Leslie direct him you see. Leslie would say, "Um now, so and so." He'd say, "I'll do it my way, I'll do it," and he'd push

Leslie away, "tell me just what you want me to do" - come in the door, or something or other - and he'd say, "Well that's it." He wouldn't let him do it. Because I think he could see what Leslie was like. But I have a certain admiration for Leslie because as I say, he had a tough job and a rather mutinous crew! [Laughs] And he saw it through, you know, and on the last night he just walked away, he didn't say goodnight to anybody or goodbye or thank you, he just walked. "Where's my car?" And he got in it and drove away. Anyway, there were lots of bits and pieces to do and I finished them up, so I was the last one on that picture, on the lot at Bray. And in the other location, I came clearing up after that - all bits and odds and ends, you know, people running down a road or pointing to things, odds and ends. But that went over schedule because of that reason, you see, he wouldn't give. He wouldn't say, "Oh well we can't track over that muddy spot." He would insist that rostrums being put there made it possible. It ruined our velocitator, no doubt about that, it was never the same. I mean we had it all overhauled afterwards but it was never the same after that. That was a very good Vinten velocitator that you could do anything with, you could use it as a small crane. But you couldn't after that, and it made all sorts of noises when you moved it, if you used to pan around in a shot you would make a screeching noise you know, it was never the same. But that reminded me when I was talking about the bonus thing, you were talking about the Ostrers. Well now after I'd left Gainsborough I met the sound-mixer one day at Richmond and he said, "Have you heard from the Ostrers?" I said, "No." "Oh," he said, "I think you'll hear something good from them." This was some time after, you know, about six months after I think. So when I got home that night there was a letter for me, signed by Maurice Ostrer and it said, I can't remember the actual wording now, I think I've still got the letter - I think. "Sorry that we had to dispense with your services, but we cut down on production, we stopped production," all that sort of thing. "But as some compensation, here's a lump sum." And it was quite a generous lump sum, I honestly can't remember what it was now but it was several hundred pounds, you know. I mean this is going back a few years you know, not long after the war really. And a note at the end of it that said, "We have been advised," so their solicitor had obviously, "that you needn't declare that." So obviously I didn't declare it!

**Alan Lawson:** So you got this after the war?

**Leonard Harris:** After the war, after Gainsborough had closed, you see, and that was from Maurice Ostrer.

**Alan Lawson:** Oh!

**Leonard Harris:** And "We thank you for your services with the company," and all that sort of thing. "You have been with us for so many years, we wouldn't have disposed" - not "disposed"! - "dispensed!" [Laughs] You know, a nice letter really. And I mean, after all, some cynical people would say, "Oh he wanted to save on income tax," but he needn't have done it. I mean maybe it did cut down, we don't know, but he needn't have done it. I mean he could have put it in some - some other reason you know, we don't know. I think it was a generous, and most other people thought it was a gesture. And I mean he did it to a lot of people who'd been with the firm a long time and some who were pretty old then, there were a couple of stagehands who'd been with the company from way back and he put them on a small pension. Now there was no pension in the film business then, you see, but they had this pension business. How that would have worked out in the long run, I don't suppose they lived all that much longer probably. But I'm just thinking

now with all these rate things, if you've got a pension you have to watch out that you don't get it - you don't lose on something else, you know what I mean. But it was quite a - you know like Tilly [Day]. I think, she told me once you see, she doesn't get all the things that she might have got because she had invested some money or something and it pays her a small...

**Alan Lawson:** In dividends, yeah.

**Leonard Harris:** ...annuity, yeah. You see, so she can't claim for other things, which would have been more you see.

**Manny Yospa:** Yes because I'm been in the same position myself.

**Leonard Harris:** Pardon?

**Manny Yospa:** I'm in the same position myself.

**Leonard Harris:** You are, yeah. Well you see if you get an annuity of say, oh say twenty pounds a week, you can't claim for something else, and if you claimed the other thing you'd get thirty pounds a week, something like that, you know.

**Manny Yospa:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** What was I going to say about - oh yeah, anyway, I thought it was very good of him I must say. I invested the money in some shares, so it's paid off in the long run you know. No I think they were very good, you see they kept us on at Gainsborough, and I'm going back before the war. Did I say this before?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, you have, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** In between pictures you see, which was something.

**Alan Lawson:** No those days went didn't they?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, yes, hmm. So, oh I'm at Hammer now and then they stopped production, then I went freelancing again to different people. I think I worked in pretty well every studio that existed when I was - and some have gone a long time ago and some - I went to other studios and a lot of other companies too. Launder and Gilliat.

**Alan Lawson:** You worked for them did you, Launder and Gilliat?

**Leonard Harris:** Yes I did a picture with them - a picture for them, and a second unit on another picture of theirs. A long time ago this was now. Um, who else did I? Well I worked - I didn't work so much at Elstree, I worked there quite a bit but with the renters, I didn't work much for Associated British, although I bought some shares in Associated British with some of my Ostrer money! [chuckles] And now of course there's not a - I feel a bit cheated there, because when it was taken over by Canon, then Thorn-EMI, yes. And of course every time it's taken over, as you

know, what happens, you get less number of shares every time, but they're worth more at the time of the take-over. Then they drop down and are worthless, so now I've got very few shares in Thorn-EMI. But they've sold the Associated British - Canon bought it, they've got no film production, so I've got my money in - you know, I just wanted to put my money in the industry that I was interested in.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes, yes.

**Leonard Harris:** I'm not really interested in vacuum cleaners! [Laughs] But still the money. I see that the twenty-five pence shares, and I think I paid a pound for them, and they're worth seven pounds odd now a share, so at the moment they're not doing too badly. I haven't got many of them but...[chuckles]

**Alan Lawson:** Tell me then, which of all the cameramen you worked with, kind of, gave you the most encouragement?

**Leonard Harris:** Encouragement?

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** Well I should think - it's difficult to say that really 'cause I got a lot of encouragement from Jack Cox and a lot of encouragement from Jack Asher. Sometimes if Jack Asher had to go - occasionally you got pictures overlapping for Bray later on, on Hammer, Jack Asher would say - would ask me - to get me to light it and tell the management he wanted me to do it, you know. So I think that was encouragement in a way. 'Yesterday's Enemy', no not 'Yesterday's Enemy' yes I did a bit on - oh I can't think of the name now, one or two, you know, as I say. I found him always very, very encouraging. And Jack Cox too, you see.

**Alan Lawson:** Yeah...

**Leonard Harris:** They were very helpful. As I say, I've worked with a lot over the time, but those two were very good. I don't know what's happened to Jack Asher?

**Alan Lawson:** I don't know either, no.

**Leonard Harris:** No. I ought to, he only lives at Edgware I think it is, or he did.

**Manny Yospa:** His brother Bob Asher was...

**Leonard Harris:** Pardon?

**Manny Yospa:** His brother Bob was a er...

**Leonard Harris:** Yes the director, he died though didn't he, a long time ago you see. And he was nice, a nice bloke and um...

**Manny Yospa:** They were both very nice.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes, and he was a good director. I didn't work with the brother as a director but when he was an assistant director I did, and I mean, he made it so easy. He would be lining up on a shot - not that I, I didn't do a lot with him but some... And he would sort of say, "Now what do you want, Len?" You know, and instead of having to say, "Well I want, um," you know and shouting out yourself to people, I'd say, "Well I wanted some extras over there and some there, and that there and that wall taken..." or whatever. And he'd do it, he'd set it in motion right away, and you know, you wouldn't have to find him and ask him to do it, he'd come up and ask you what you wanted right away and get it done. And I should think he was a good director, I would think. Well he became a producer didn't he, the two brothers, Asher Brothers produced a couple of films, yes, they did for a time. And then they retired. Well one died and Jack, I think, retired. And I phoned only once - er, Jack, he phoned me up a long time ago. But I don't find - see I can't get - I could get about before I had this stroke but I can't get about so much now. But I'm not too keen on contacting people where I've got to travel around a lot you know, well I can't do it. I get very tired, too, doing it, and I'm so slow doing it. But thank heavens I don't have to be in a wheelchair you know. They've given me one, I've got one in the other room, they insisted I had it. But I said, "I live on a hill, who can push me up and down in that?" "Oh no, you'd better have it in case you have to go anywhere." They were emphatic about it, but when I go up for my next check-up I'll tell 'em. But unless they think maybe you might have another stroke and you might need it, I don't know what their way of thinking is. But fortunately I can put my arm up and my hands move, I drag my leg a bit but - anyway you don't want to hear about that!  
[Chuckles]

**Alan Lawson:** Again, looking back over it all Len, which has given you the most satisfaction?

**Leonard Harris:** Well, which place?

**Alan Lawson:** Well you know, job, anything - job really.

**Leonard Harris:** Well um, I tell you I was very happy operating at Hammer, and elsewhere in fact, but particularly Hammer. I suppose after I'd been there a little while they gave me a very good - left a lot to me, you know, maybe that's something to do with it. And they had good directors who - I mean, Terry Fisher, Val Guest you know.

**Alan Lawson:** Yes.

**Leonard Harris:** I'm not saying Val Guest left a lot to me because he very much knows what he wants to the detail, but a lot of other directors left a lot to me and would - can I say - consult me about things. And um, I got on well with them and Tony Hinds and Michael Carreras, so I got a lot of satisfaction. And I'll tell you another thing which might sound rather strange, but I like operating, I prefer operating to doing lighting. Now I haven't done that much lighting but I've lit a few not very important films and on a lot of second unit stuff. But when you're operating, if you're working with a good director, you think you're translating, getting his ideas in the making of the film, you know what I mean? It's a sort of a thing - and if they get to know you, they leave a lot to you because they sort of, light the match, so to speak, that sets the flame - you know, it's

a kind of inspiration thing really I've found. So I really enjoyed operating and I really only - in fact I'm down on the ACT on my card I think it says 'Lighting Operator', it doesn't say - [chuckles]. Because I got more, I think I got more pleasure out of it and getting interesting shots you know, devising interesting shots and I liked doing that a lot.

**Manny Yospa:** And also there's a technical thing about cheating looks.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes and all that sort of thing and they...

**Manny Yospa:** And when you worked with the continuity girl.

**Leonard Harris:** Yes and um, you know you work a lot with them and as I say Hammer gave me a lot of scope really, and um you know, I sometimes had to pull half the set down to get the camera in somewhere. I suppose anybody but - I remember Tony Hinds saying, one of Tony Hinds's favourite sayings, "How many one and nine's is it going to sell?" [laughter] So I said, "Look Tony, we've come in here, the director wanted to get that shot from that angle." See, I'm on the director's side! I said, "He wanted that shot and he wants to track down there." And I said, "We've got good stagehands," we had a very good crew down there, they had a very good standby crew who were excellent and they would put the set back in no time, you know, plastering and everything. And I said, "You know it's cut out shooting certain close-ups there?" That pleased him, you know! [Chuckling] So they saved on that way - it was a fact though, it did, you see. I can remember several instances of that sort of thing, because in a way you'd be getting the close-ups as you were tracking or something like that. Mind you I know with certain close-ups you get a certain dramatic punch with them but it didn't always apply you know, I mean it doesn't always apply. But um, so really I suppose, I don't know, I liked - and I was very happy, I didn't want to retire. But I had this high blood pressure trouble you see, I had it for years. I finished on an Anglo... Well I knew I had it for years and I was having special food, Mrs T, you know at Bray used to do me special meals and I was on pills and I tried not to eat the things that I shouldn't and tried to eat the things I did. I did smoke a bit, quite a bit, especially at one time. I smoked these small cigars, mannequin type. But I cut it down a lot. And I was on this Anglo-Indian picture I remember at the end, and I went to my doctor and said, "I think perhaps you should change the pills," because he had done that once or twice when I felt rotten. I said, "I feel a bit bad." So he said, "Well sit down and," - you know, I was sitting down them but - [chuckles]. But he said, "Open your coat and I'll go over you with a stethoscope." And I knew him very well, my doctor, he was a nice chap, he's dead now. And he said, "Now sit still, I'm going to send for an ambulance and send you to hospital." So this was in the evening, so he sent for the ambulance and they took me out and they didn't want me to walk or anything. But I did, I walked to the ambulance and when I got to the hospital, in Mortimer Street, the Middlesex Hospital, a wonderful hospital, they said, "You're not going to walk now." They put me in a wheelchair, took me up and they did all sorts of tests on me. "Now" they said, "we'll put you in bed now." I said, "I can't stay in bed, I've got to go home, I've left lights on at home!" "No, you're staying here!" So they phoned my neighbours next door who were very good and explained to them what had happened. That I was in hospital. I was there for two and a half weeks, and they got the blood pressure down, it must have been very high then, they thought I was either going to have a stroke or a heart attack or something. And another - I came out - oh I came out and some days I felt really rough and other days I felt fine. Now I'm coming up to about sixty-five you see,

and I thought, "Thank heavens I'm not working today, I feel that I can hardly get out of bed," sort of thing. So I thought - I'd got this Anglo-Indian picture - not, that didn't cause it, but they wanted to do another picture you see. So the secretary rang me up and they said, "We're going to start soon, come over to some conferences." Well I thought, "I don't think I can," because, you know, they were nice people but you get about a dozen or more Indians all around you, amongst themselves, they're not speaking English and they're jabbering away and it gets a bit much! So anyway I think I said, "I'd better retire." Oh then I get a message to say that, "We can't get the money," he said, "I have to postpone the picture or go to make it in America, the next one." So I thought, "Well I don't know, these pictures are being postponed and I feel bad, so I'll retire." So I went up to the ACT and said, "I think I'd better retire." They said, "Well all right, if you want to work again let us know." The only thing I've done since then was a cushy thing. Oh at about that time I did a few bits of documentary. You know, where they were making a documentary but then it would probably take two years to make and they want someone in just to do a couple of days on something happening, and then not to shoot for another six months perhaps. So I - oh I've done a video thing for - educational thing, 'Romeo and Juliet' I did. That was a bit of cake. I told 'em, I said, "I can't go down, I've got a dog." I had a dog by then, a whippet. "Oh bring the dog, bring the dog, that's all right!" And all expenses were paid, I had a little hotel, comfortable hotel, the dog was in the film, in 'Romeo and Juliet' [chuckles]. And um, they wouldn't let me buy a paper, I mean I did, but if I wanted a newspaper they would rush out and get it, they did everything for me. And um, so I had a nice time and the invitation was to always go back and stay down there, but I didn't go. Oh I went once, yes, for a few days. Oh I had an offer from a French company only last year to go over to France and do a film. Or it was the year before now isn't it because we're into the New Year! And they kept on about it, they phoned me up several times from France and they said, "We're coming over, we'd like to see you." So I said, "Now look, I really have got to give it up now. I feel so bad some days I couldn't possibly work," you now. And I did then, but I haven't felt bad like it lately. But I'm just so, you know I can't get around much, obviously. But until I had the stroke I used to feel fine some days and rough the other days. Anyway you don't really want to hear about that sort of thing on there do you? [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson:** [chuckles]

**Leonard Harris:** So I had to really retire then. But I loved it, I didn't want to retire. I loved the whole industry and I'd like to have kept in touch, because I was a keen amateur before I was a professional you know. I belonged to Brondesbury Kine Society, and I used to make little films of myself on 9.5mm in the garden there with my school friends, you know, little things, so I loved the whole thing.

**Alan Lawson:** The family encouraged you did they?

**Leonard Harris:** Well they weren't awfully, they did to a point, but put it this way, my father didn't think it was a good industry to go in, you see. My father was a civil servant at Scotland Yard and he had a pretty good job. And of course it was pretty irregular then, I mean well it was irregular. And the film business, well you read studios were closing, you read it in the paper and you obviously thought actors are funny people. So they didn't really discourage me, in fact they helped me, I mean they bought me projectors, a toy projector originally and later on a 9.5mm

projector. So they took an active interest in it but they didn't think it was a very good profession to be in, and I must say, really, it isn't a good profession to be in is it? I mean I loved it and I wouldn't have been in anything else...

**Alan Lawson:** If you could start again what would you rather do?

**Leonard Harris:** Well I've thought about this quite a bit. You see, from what I see of films now I don't think I'd want to know anything about 'em. I don't - I suppose because one gets old, but I don't see, I watched a film on Saturday night, a late night film on TV. Now I don't watch much TV because of - if I do watch it, it's an old film as a rule. But Saturday night they had an old Hammer film which I worked on, 'The Two Faces of Dr Jekyll' and I thought, "I'll see that," and I phoned Tilly up because she was on it too. And I thought, "I'll see that," and I thought, "Well I'll have an evening of TV," and there was an American kind of gangster film on first and I put that on. I don't think that I could understand more than twenty five per cent of the dialogue, the sound was so bad. So I thought, "Well maybe it's my set..."

**Alan Lawson:** [Chuckles] No, no, no...

**Leonard Harris:** Then 'The Two Faces of Dr Jekyll' came on - Hammer - I could understand every word! It's not because I remembered the dialogue, because I didn't it was so long ago, I mean it was over thirty years ago that we made that film. And it was a twist on the old Stevenson story you know, so I didn't remember that. And some of them were speaking with accents, David Kossoff you know, and he laid on the accent more - he has an accent but he laid it on more for this part he was playing. It was like an Austrian doctor, you know what I mean. And some of the women, one of the women had a strong accent, but I could understand every word. Now I thought, "Well I don't know, there's something wrong with the sound somewhere," and I thought, "well it's not my set." So a friend of mine who's a fan of Christopher Lee and has also seen 'The Two Faces of Dr Jekyll' which he was in, phoned me up saying, "Do you know there's an American film with Christopher Lee on tomorrow night called 'Serial' and made for American television? You want to watch that!" So I saw this confounded thing, I could only follow less than twenty-five per cent of the dialogue, I don't know what they were talking about. And Christopher Lee was in it, he had co-star billing in it but he'd only got a small but important part, very important part, and I could understand every word he said. But the other artists, I don't know what they were saying, and I'm sure it was one of these things - there was a lot of nudity in it and bad language as well, an American style of bad language. I don't - if they want to have it they can have it, I don't object to it on the whole, but I couldn't understand it. I sat here and I thought, "What on earth?" Mind you it's an old set as you can see, but what are they saying? Then as I say, the Hammer thing, I could understand every word you know. So I don't know, but, and the subject...

**Manny Yospa:** You're not the only one, I find the same problem.

**Leonard Harris:** Do you? Yes.

**Alan Lawson:** Me too!

**Leonard Harris:** You too, yes. And the subject matter of the films, I look through every week, through the papers to see what's on at the cinemas. We haven't got a cinema near here now of course but - and I think, "Well I wouldn't want to see that, I don't want to see it." I probably do miss something that's good, I mean I daresay I miss some films that are good and I don't see them, and on television there's some good films which I don't see, I will admit that. But I've got no inclination to see them, so as regarding - if it were a matter of going back in the industry as I knew it I would probably want to do it, but to go into it now, I don't know, it's not an industry, it doesn't... I don't mind there being a lot of electronic stuff, which I'm not particularly well up in, but I daresay I could learn, get around that. But it's just this, sort of the subject matter, I don't know, there doesn't seem to be - the only word I can think of, and it doesn't really apply in my case, but the only thing is 'glamour'. But it's not really glamour, but I can't find any other word you see, there's something... Now, I told you when I worked in Germany and Brussels, the same exciting feeling working in a cutting room and the smell of the film cement, which you used to get with the old acetate film, is exciting, I found it so. And I can always remember opening that - when I was given a toy projector that Christmas morning, with some film, and I opened the tin and you got the smell, it excited me. You don't get it so much now of course. That always had been exciting, and as they like to say, "The smell of the greasepaint." I've always found that interesting. That's why I think it is that I liked films about people and not about things so much. I don't get very excited about a film about a bit of metal flying through the air. I like to see more of a person and I've always felt more interested and I like to sort of get into the character a bit. I always live a - if I'm working on a film I used to always live one of the characters! [Laughs] Probably the villains! [everyone laughs] But um, I don't know, so I don't know what I - but mind you, you see if I were younger I'd probably have a different feeling about those films you see. I'd think, "Oh that's exciting, somebody going to the moon, that's jolly good," you know. I sat here and filmed that going to the moon, that landing on the moon. I put an 8mm camera up, twenty-four frames, when they landed on the moon that first time. I sat here all night, sat in that chair over there and switched the camera on just as they're going to, I've actually filmed them landing on the moon. Mind you, you've got all the strobing on and all over it, but still, I didn't mind that! [Everyone laughs] I filmed a bit of history!

**Alan Lawson:** [Chuckling] Oh thanks for that, oh I think that's good, great. Thank you very much!

**Leonard Harris:** Oh well I hope it's been of some interest to somebody.

[End of Interview]