

# Pat Jackson (director, documentary filmmaker) b. 25/3/1916

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**BIOGRAPHY:** Pat Jackson entered the film industry in 1933 as an assistant at the GPO Film Unit (later the Crown Film Unit). After working on *Night Mail* (1936) among other productions, he made his directorial debut in 1938 with *The Horsey Mail*. He came to prominence as a documentary filmmaker during WWII and is credited with developing the 'story documentary'. His most celebrated production in this period was *Western Approaches* (1944), shot at sea in Technicolor, and its success led him to be placed under contract at MGM in America. It was not a happy period and he directed only one film, *Shadow on the Wall* (1949), before returning to work in Britain. His British feature films display a strong documentary influence and include the hospital drama *White Corridors* (1951) and *The Birthday Present*. Working in a different vein, he also directed the comedy *What A Carve Up!* (1961). **SUMMARY:** In this lengthy interview, Jackson talks to John Legard about his memories of the British documentary movement, the atmosphere and personalities of the GPO Film Unit and particularly the influence of Harry Watt and the idea of the story documentary on Jackson's own work. He recalls working on specific productions such as *Night Mail* (1936), *The Saving of Bill Blewitt* (1936), *London Can Take It* (1940) and *Patent Ductus Arteriosus* (1947). He gives a detailed account of the production difficulties on *Western Approaches*, and of his unhappy sojourn in California. There is a brief outline of his later career. This interview contains many fascinating and beautifully told anecdotes. Jackson recalls the many figures he has worked with, and discusses his ideas about documentary and the use of non-professional actors with great clarity and élan.

## **BECTU History Project - Interview No. 185**

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Interviewer: John Legard

Interviewee: Pat Jackson

Tape 1, Side 1

**John Legard:** Well Pat, it's very good of you to come along today and talk to us. Perhaps you'd like to tell us a little bit about your early life, your childhood, who your parents were, where you were born and so on, school...

**Pat Jackson:** [Chuckles] Well, if it's of any interest, my only claim, really, to fame is that I was born in the town of Bob Hope, at Eltham and we had a vast funny old Victorian building, sort of eight rooms, you know, the sort of thing that - Eltham was surrounded by these old Victorian houses. And then through various family tragedies, father dying and one thing and another, mother was left pretty near penniless, so we turned it into a boarding house, and that was fun because we got a lot of students from all over Europe, and I really grew up with a sort of League of Nations, which was fun! I went to Bryanston for one term. The only reason I went to Bryanston was because it was the only school at the time that didn't want people to have taken the 'Common Entrance,' because I should have never have passed the 'Common Entrance' by any chance, because my schooling was totally interrupted through father's illness and we were always popping over to Switzerland to help him.

**John Legard:** Oh really? What did your father do exactly?

**Pat Jackson:** He had TB. He was a rice merchant in the City and the family were hop factors, I think. They were an old Kentish family and they'd made their living out of being hop factors you see, all around Kent and Herefordshire, where it was a very booming industry - that doesn't exist any more. And so, sort of, prep schools - but then one was promptly shoved out to Switzerland with my parents. Because my mother was a wonderful but totally dotty woman, who...

**John Legard:** I remember your Mum, she used to come along to Pinewood didn't she?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, she was a wonderful really, she said, "Well, I've got children, I'm not going to leave them in prep school! They'll come to Switzerland with us and that's it!" Which always meant, you see, that when we came back to school we were always three terms behind, so we never caught up! Consequently, I was a backward boy and always have remained a backward boy ever since. So then I went to Bryanston and the only thing that was fun - I enjoyed Bryanston enormously for this one term, and I think Lucian Freud was there about the same time as I was...

**John Legard:** That was a very new school then?

**Pat Jackson:** A very new school! And they wanted pupils desperately you see, and so I got in of course, as I said. Well that was fine, because I got into the 'colts' at once and the only thing, I was quite a good bowler, I was a good bowler, and I might have, you know, if I'd gone on. Well then...

**John Legard:** So presumably you started there at, sort of, normal age for?

**Pat Jackson:** It was in 1929...1929...

**John Legard:** So you were thirteen years old. [Over interviewee]

**Pat Jackson:** I was thirteen, fourteen - usual time, usual sort of age. Well, the only sad thing was that there was a virus going around at that time and I caught this virus just at the end of the summer holidays and it laid me flat and I was in the sanatorium for the whole - most of the summer holidays, and that knocked me flat for two years - and so, I won't bore you with the details. So that was the end of my school for...

**John Legard:** That's a long time.

**Pat Jackson:** It's a long time, because I had a poison and then it poisoned the ventricle of my heart and so I had heart business...

**John Legard:** Goodness me! Yes!

**Pat Jackson:** So that didn't help. So I was now sixteen, and I got, through a dear old friend of mine, Henry Blyth - who was one of the film critics on the Times, later on - brilliant chap! [NB: could be Henry Blyth, screenwriter, b 1911, who was co-writer of Jackson's Seven Keys in 1961 - is this correct?]

**John Legard:** Henry Blyth

**Pat Jackson:** Henry Blyth. He got a job at Welwyn Garden City as a camera operator. He was a very bright lad. And there was suddenly a vacancy for another camera assistant, so he rang me up and said, "Come on down, Pat, to Welwyn Garden City and see if you can get a job. So I was interviewed by the Woolf brothers...and...I think I was just about sixteen and a half. And I started off as a loading boy at the princely salary of two pound a week, which was fantastic you see! Well, [chuckles] my career was rather short-lived there! Jack Parker was charming, he was a lighting cameraman, and we were doing terrible Wally and Barry Lupino 'quota quickies' - absolutely disastrous films, they were! And I suppose I must have been the worst assistant cameraman that poor old Jack Parker had ever had in his life! And the first magazine I ever loaded...I'd been taught how to do it by Harry Rignold, and we were on a...[chuckles] Bell and Howell camera! And there was a horrible magazine, usual sort of magazine, but we had to...you know...there was a little spring that you had to attach to open the velvet lock, so that you could feed the film into the magazine. And of course, I got flustered and lost my head completely! I was in there an hour and a half and I thought I'd got it in, all was fine, but of course, the bloody cap of the magazine hadn't been properly wound on, and I'd exposed the film. Almost in tears, I went out...[chuckles]...put this magazine onto the floor and said, "Mr Parker, I've exposed this film, I'm terribly sorry! Shall I collect my cards?" [Laughs] And he said, "Oh good God! That happens all the time! Put it away and forget about it and try again!" So this time, it was successful, you see! Well, I think that job lasted three weeks, er, and the rest of the series of these 'quota quickies' came to an end and then...I think for about four months I was out of work.

**John Legard:** So this year was, what...1934?

**Pat Jackson:** Well, it would be about 1932.

**John Legard:** Oh it's earlier than that? Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes...'32...'31/'32. Welwyn Garden City. The set was still up for 'I was a Spy' which...

**John Legard:** [over interviewee] Madeleine Carroll

**Pat Jackson:** [indecipherable]... Saville, you see...had done. And then, thanks to my very clever Mama...

**John Legard:** Can I interrupt for a second? Were you interested in films before you...? er...

**Pat Jackson:** Well I sort of vaguely...well you see...so often...I'm rather like Anthony Pelissier, bless his heart...you see...Anthony Pelissier always told me, he said, "well I had to go into show business of some kind, because I was fit for nothing else!" you see. His schooling was totally interrupted too [laughing]. So, I thought vaguely I wanted to go into the technical side of films...I hadn't the faintest idea what that meant. So, Mother...using her loaf...suddenly thought, "Now what connections have we got?" We had precious few, but we had one golden one, which was Kingsley Wood, who at that time was our MP at Eltham and Woolwich and he was then appointed Postmaster General. At the time he was posted Postmaster General, I think Mother saw that a film unit for the post office was being created, so she put two and two together and thought, "Well, old Kingsley Wood is a family friend, because he'd been madly in love with my Grandmother" (who, mercifully turned him down, married the silly old Grandfather, who was a silly old fool, anyway...yes, she made a bad choice there, but that's another story!)

**John Legard:** [Laughs]

**Pat Jackson:** So, she then wrote to Kingsley Wood and said, "Do you think you could help my brilliant young son of sixteen to get a job with the GPO Film Unit?" So, he wrote to Grierson, and Grierson wrote back and said, "I'm quite prepared to come along if you come along, I'll give you an interview." So I trotted along to 139 Oxford Street, I think I was just coming up to my seventeenth birthday, and was confronted by this dynamic little man with these piercing blue eyes. And I think he must have had the most appalling interview, wasted thirty minutes of his time. He asked me questions which I was totally incapable of answering. He said, "What have you been reading lately, Jackson?" And it so happened that I'd been reading a book on [laughs] 'Anti Aircraft Fire' by General Graver [details correct?!] I'd been reading a most interesting book! "No!" he said, "I'm not interested in that!"

**John Legard:** [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** He said, "what about your literature background?" "Oh" I said, 'well...not very much, I'm afraid.' [Chuckles] Anyway, poor Grierson was blackmailed almost, you see, into taking me on, because he couldn't very well turn down this introduction from the Postmaster General. So he said, "Well I tell you what I'll do with you, Jackson," in his slightly Scots accent,

"You can start off as our Messenger Boy. I'll give you seventeen and six a week." So I thought, "Well, all right, fine."

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** So!

**John Legard:** And that's how you started there.

**Pat Jackson:** ...how I started. And then when I look back on it, you see, for a time I was totally lost, because Grierson had got into the contacts with the Civil Service and he was brilliant enough to get - the old, old story - Stephen Tallents gave him the money to start a unit - fine! That's old ground and we won't mill over it too long. But just to say one thing, I was absolutely lost, because I was surrounded by brilliant academic minds, they were all 'double firsts' from Oxbridge you see. And frankly, I could have been in Tibet, I didn't know what the heck they were talking about.

**John Legard:** Who are the names that you're talking about now? These...um... first class honours degrees?

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah, well there was...let's see...there was Stuart Legg, I think he was a 'double first'. Humphrey Jennings who came six months after I did...a 'double first.' Arthur Elton, 'first class' in engineering, Basil Wright, 'double first in classics', Anstey - I'm not too sure whether he got a 'double' but he had a jolly good degree. And, honestly, I didn't know what the hell these people were talking about, because in their moments of relaxation and conversation at the pub...I mean, I could have been in Tibet, I really could...I didn't know what they were talking about. I felt appalling...I might have been a lump of frog-spawn...you know...useless!

**John Legard:** God, yes. Rather you than me. It sounds a terrifying time!

**Pat Jackson:** And so...I got, um...I got very, sort of, er... lost in this world. And when I look back on it...and I thought to myself at the time, I thought, "they really are an awful lot of intellectual snobs." Because they did rather intellectualise about everything, and they liked to make those who hadn't been to university, (and I was certainly a bit of a snift [?] at the university) very inferior. And they did this, not consciously, but it was...it was...we were rather treated like the lowest form of animal life in any sort of service...quite rightly too, we were put through the mill. I wouldn't have minded that, but one just felt one would never cope...one can never cope in life...one hasn't any knowledge of anything, you see. Well then, why did Grierson, when I look back on it now...why did he surround himself with these academically brilliant people? And I suddenly get it into perspective now, I didn't then. He wasn't...starting a film unit to enter the entertainment business at all...he was starting a social service, wasn't he really? He was starting a social service and information through the local cinema if he could get the films in. And therefore, he said to himself, "Well, I must have trained minds, in order that they can research a subject, get hold of the essential facts, organise these facts into some sort of form and present them in a new form on film. I need a trained mind for that." Therefore, the proof of a

trained mind to Grierson was a degree, and without that you really weren't going to get anywhere.

**John Legard:** Hmm. It was a very, (in some ways) a very political approach really, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Well it was a...no...it was a common sense approach. He hadn't got the time or the money to waste on people who were going to flounder it...who couldn't really come to grips with the subject, and he felt that somebody who had sat down for four years and taken a degree, at least had a disciplined mind, which is what he wanted. Which was fair, a very fair point. Well then...splendid. And, of course, at the time, one has to remember that there were very few means of disseminating the nitty gritty of our society...very few means. What was there? A few left wing papers and magazines, Gollancz's Left Book Club, but the dissemination was limited. And that is why Grierson wanted to try and get this information over. Now, when we look at the reverse of the coin, there is practically no misery in the world, with which we are not bombarded every minute of the day, to such an extent, that unless we become immune from it, we become almost intolerably unhappy and insane, and take to drink and put your head in the gas oven! And it's only recently, somebody said to me... when I was very upset by a programme that I'd had seen... she said, "well, Pat, you silly old fool! You haven't learnt to use your television skin!" But what does that mean? It's all got to wash off you quickly! So what you see, you must forget, otherwise you become upset! So that's the reverse of the coin. Now we have so much dissemination of misery, unhappiness that...you know, we can't take it on...but that's the reverse of the coin.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** But now...coming back to the old GPO Film Unit... we get the sort of middle man who suddenly comes in. And that was the man who failed in academia... who scraped a pass degree of sorts in Edinburgh (or I think it was Glasgow) University, and had realised that he was never going to be an academic, far less an intellectual, and therefore went out into the world and faced the world and took on it's challenges. And he sailed across the Atlantic, with Jack Doyle I think, and then he sold balloons in the Bowery and even went into the ring in the Bowery and, you know, had a few fisticuffs and saw the world, came back and got some money from...Harry Lauder I think it was, to start a ball factory in Slough, which failed, because he couldn't keep the air in the balls, so they collapsed! This was none other than Harry Watt.

**John Legard:** I was going to say, it could only be Harry Watt!

**Pat Jackson:** [Chuckling] Now, how did Harry get the job? Because, certainly, he had no qualifications. I mean, Grierson would have said, "I'm sorry dear boy...you've failed, this is no good..." But, you see, Grierson loved the sea, as 'Drifters' proved...and Harry...

**John Legard:** Well Grierson of course, was in the Navy wasn't he, at one time?

**Pat Jackson:** I think he was! He was in the....

**John Legard:** The First World War.

**Pat Jackson:** ...Dover Patrol wasn't he? I think...

**John Legard:** Yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** But of course, he loved the sea and he sprayed his camera over the fishing fleets, that's how 'Drifters' came along.

**John Legard:** 'Drifters!'

**Pat Jackson:** And so, of course, Harry squeezed into the GPO Film Unit. He had, of course, worked for Robert Flaherty ('Man of Aran')... and it was from the arrival of Harry Watt that the 'preciosity' of the documentary movement was turned into something a little bit more human. Because Harry was one of these lucky people who always remained the same, ebullient, delightful self, with this wonderful, enchanting smile, no matter what company he found himself in, whether it were the highest or the lowest, he always was Harry Watt, always companionable, always an extrovert, always enormously good company. Consequently, he was able to relax people when they were in front of a camera. And, to my everlasting good luck, I became Harry's assistant, and this was in 1934, I then was about eighteen and a half. And he was given 'Night Mail' that was his first really important directorial assignment. Now, 'Night Mail' is supposed to... well we all know a lot about 'Night Mail', but it's supposed to have been written by Basil Wright, and, I was playing golf with Basil Wright, down at Seaford, Blatchington golf course, and he came in, I remember, he had one of these enormous GPO note books, Civil Service note books, in which he was beginning his notes on the script of 'Night Mail.' And I read some of it, you see, very interesting, but none of it ever was in the film. So nobody really wrote the script of 'Night Mail.' It, sort of... it really, sort of happened. There was a vague shape, and I can remember...

**John Legard:** So often the case though, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Always! Always!

**John Legard:** You'd got the subject headings and you started shooting...

**Pat Jackson:** ...you started shooting.

**John Legard:** yup, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** But I can remember... which gives a very clear definition of what Grierson's aim was for documentary... because there was a pub at the end of Bennett Park Road where the little studio was, you see, called the 'Railway Arms.' And in the evenings, the great man would come down and be surrounded by his disciples and the junior, junior apprentices would be at the bar and could occasionally pick up fragments of dialogue from Grierson. And when 'Night Mail' was being planned and people were throwing ideas around for the script and so on... I can remember Grierson saying - I'm para-phrasing rather badly perhaps - but the gist of what he said was quite simply this: He said, "Who can imagine a society without letters? Inconceivable! Society would collapse! Who can imagine a society without the milkman or the railway driver, who takes us to

work and brings us home? But do we appreciate them? Do we appreciate any of these people, upon whom we depend for our livelihood to getting us to and from work and so on? No! Of course we don't! We take them all for granted! And yet, you see, we are all interdependent, one on another. We are all in each other's debt and it's a debt we have to pay, with respect and liking, if possible." He said, "This is the message that we've got to get over and this is what documentary is all about, the realisation of our interdependence, one on another, which is the basis of a sound, healthy society!" And I've never forgotten that, because it sums up the purpose and ideal of what he was after. But if we look back at the history of documentary, until the emergence of 'Night Mail'...one is left with the fact that, though they were very praiseworthy and splendid, they were really nothing more than illustrated lectures, with a commentary. They were expository, visual treatments of any subject, and they were rather cerebral, they had a great deal of visual poetry; but I defy you to find any film at that particular time that, for one moment, touched the heart or made it beat faster.

**John Legard:** Possibly 'Night Mail' is an exception? It seemed to...

**Pat Jackson:** Well this is the point I was coming to. It was 'Night Mail' you see, that for the first time, put ordinary people talking on the screen. And, um...I can remember we'd go out, old Jonah Jones and Harry and I, we'd go out down the up-fast...no...the down-fast, somewhere beyond Watford, and we'd walk along there. Because our representative at Euston, the Public Relations man said, "Well there's a good ganger there, you'll find a good gang, plate laying, and we'd go along there and find them and Harry would shoot a sequence off the cuff you see...and so on. Invent a bit of dialogue, which they, sort of use, and we'd wait for the rushes the next day. And then I'd try and cut them for him, you see. And then, to his surprise and my surprise and horror, it wouldn't cut. Then we'd go to the Moviola and say, "Why is it?...why?...it doesn't look right, Harry, does it?" He said, "No! Bloody Hell! It doesn't!" You know, typical old Harry, blaspheming! And then I said, "Harry, I think what the trouble is... you see, they were all looking the same way, aren't they? They're all looking right. I suppose this chap ought to look left, if it's going to look right." He said, "Oh F..." you can imagine the...well... he said, "Oh bugger it! We'll have to go back and do it again!" So we go back the next day, you see [chuckling] and then we get it right! And the gang had gone by this time!

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** So you can see, it was really the first film school! But as there was nobody to teach us, we had to go out and teach ourselves...by errors! But it was marvellous, what a wonderful way of learning a job, you see! Because once you'd made that mistake, you don't go on making it again, you see. And in this extraordinarily fumbling way...

**John Legard:** And of course, your cameramen too were all from, er... GPO weren't they?

**Pat Jackson:** [Over interviewer] Oh absolutely! I mean [Izzy 56] with an [aero filter] and hope for the best! [not clear - ?] [Chuckles]

**John Legard:** They hadn't had any experience...



**Pat Jackson:** Oh, of course not! Of course not!

**John Legard:** ...in studios or anywhere else?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh no... Chick Fowle and Jonah Jones, they learnt it as they went along, you see. It was the first haphazard film school! And then...there was a bit of interior shooting in the studio...we mopped up the...you know, the sorting...the railway carriage, but the rest was all shot on location. And then it was put together. I cut the first reel and McNaughton cut the second reel. And I...

**John Legard:** R. Q. McNaughton I seem to remember?

**Pat Jackson:** That's right! Marvellous cutter! Marvellous editor! And then, um... I'd previously been joining for Cavalcanti, I think 'Coalface' came out, just before... the little short, 'Coalface'. And I remember standing at the sync re-winder, it was one of those very old ones, and Cavalcanti, old Cav, would be handing me little six inch pieces of film, you see, tiny little pieces to join up. I thought, "Well this is strange." And of course, when I put it all together and looked on the Moviola, here was the perfect example of montage, you see. There was the pit - as the cage went down the pit, you see - and the little tiny bits of cutting, marvellous! I thought, "That looks bloody interesting, that's marvellous." And so of course, when it came to my cutting the apparatus sequence, as it was called in 'Night Mail', in the first ten minutes, I thought, "That's what Cav did...my God, here's a little tiny frame of that, and that arm going up and this and that..." you know. So there was a bit of a montage there...entirely thanks to seeing Cav's.

**John Legard:** Yes. At what point did Cavalcanti come in? Was he...?

**Pat Jackson:** He was there about 1934.

**John Legard:** Hmm. So, he came much the same time as Harry, possibly?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, just a little tiny bit after.

**John Legard:** Hmm. But he was the experienced filmmaker, Cav, wasn't he? Because he'd had all that...

**Pat Jackson:** [Over interviewer] He was...um...

**John Legard:** ...with Clair and so on.

**Pat Jackson:** He'd done...well, he'd done 'En Rade' and, er...

**John Legard:** ...and his own films, anyway. Yup.

**Pat Jackson:** And, er...yeah, he was great. He didn't teach, you know... as that... but one, he taught by just doing it himself and we were able to see him at it, you see. He didn't sort of lecture us or anything, there was no sort of formalised teaching, you just watched. And then...

**John Legard:** Did Grierson (sorry to interrupt)... Isn't it a very enlightened move of Grierson's to get hold of Cav and it was clever of him to be able to afford him.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh well, I don't think Cav was getting very much for...

**John Legard:** Well perhaps he had other work as well, perhaps he was doing this on the side?

**Pat Jackson:** Not a great deal. I think he...you see, I think Grierson had this, he had great charisma... there was no question... he was a wonderful public relations man. He was a hell of a good critic and a wonderful writer too, as a critic... I mean an analysis of films and so on, and really influenced by all the Russians. I mean, when you looked at the original cut, (we're digressing a moment) - the original cut of 'Drifters' - you know, it's all Pudovkin.

**John Legard:** Yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** The old pistons in the engine room and the smoking smokestack and the... you know, all that sort of stuff. But 'Night Mail' was difficult because, of course, we only had this Visatone sound track and we did once put in on a...

**John Legard:** Visatone! Goodness me, yes!

**Pat Jackson:** Yes. Very, very old, you see. Old Pawley did that. So there was, if you remember the - you won't perhaps remember it - but there was the trainee operator who was being taught how to put the mail bags out and so on, and his instructor said, "you put it out two in bridges and forty five beats." Do you remember? And he starts counting... the railway... the rhythm of the beats. But we hadn't got the track of that, because we weren't shooting sync - we were only shooting wild in the actual train as it was going up. So those beats had to be, somehow, synchronised, but we hadn't got a track of that at all. But this shows what a sort of home-made affair 'Night Mail' was... it so happened that my brother was a great model locomotive fan and had a Bassett-Lowke Gauge One steam engine and Gauge One railway line, you see. And he also had a tiny model bogie, and when I got home that night, I put the bogie over one of the joins of his Gauge One railway and it made a nice "de-de, de-de." [making train rhythm] I ran the bogie up and down, you see. So, I told Harry, I said, "Look, I'm going to bring a bit of this tomorrow and we'll get old Pawley to record this." "Jolly good idea, Pat" he said. "Splendid! Let's try it." So, we did this and I got the "de-de, de-de, de-de" you see, and then I was able, then, to put the scissors in between the gaps to the finger movement, and that way we got a perfect sync. But it's bits and pieces, home-made railway [chuckles] and eventually...eventually it was made, and of course the brilliance of Basil Wright was to get dear old Benjamin Britten, who was a brilliant, brilliant tennis player, as well as being a brilliant composer. And then, the great moment came of the first show copy and, um...Grierson said, "Well, we want a sneak preview, but where can we sneak preview it?" And through, I think it was Basil's connections, the Arts Theatre had just opened at Cambridge and 'Night Mail' was to be the first film ever shown at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge. And we all went down... Harry Watt, Basil and I, and I was sitting between Basil and Harry and the film came on and within, I think it was five minutes, or two or three minutes, the first belly-laugh of a documentary film! The audience roared with laughter! And I remember, with astonishment, turning to Basil, and I said, "Basil, they're actually enjoying it!" Now this was

the first breakthrough of documentary in terms of an audience reaction to their films. Instead of it being a sort of 'pie-eyed' lecture, this was the beginnings, almost, of entertainment.

**John Legard:** Right.

**Pat Jackson:** And this was Harry's contribution. Because it was Harry that got the people and relaxed them and made them behave, and was able to put these lines over.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And there's lovely touches, you know. And this was all Harry's humanity that got it on the screen.

**John Legard:** Ah hmm, ah hmm. And, of course, W. H. Auden...you had a remarkable cast in that film, didn't you...of talent, artistic talent?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes. Auden...I spoke the commentary and Legg spoke the verse of Auden.

**John Legard:** And I seem to remember Grierson's voice came into it at some point.

**Pat Jackson:** Grierson came in: "And who shall hear the postman's knock?/ Without a quickening of the heart?/ For who can bear to feel themselves forgotten!" That was his line...[laughing]...that was his last line of the film. Yes, oh yes.

**John Legard:** Well that was...that's very interesting.

**Pat Jackson:** And then, er...

**John Legard:** And what happened next?

**Pat Jackson:** Then, as a result of that... and of course, what is interesting when you look at the credits, there are only five names on that film. And now you look at the credits of any sort of film that goes on TV, you've got the lavatory cleaner and the bookkeeper and everybody else! [Laughing] The credits are almost as long as the film!

**John Legard:** And not only were there just a few names, but they were mostly surnames, rather than, you know...it just said Watt or Jackson or Pawley... and this... Of course, Grierson...

**Pat Jackson:** [Over interviewer] Yes, I think so... But anyway, there were only five names, I think the cameraman got, the sound...about five names on the credits anyway.

**John Legard:** That's right, yes. Of course, Grierson was particularly austere, puritanical about credits, wasn't he? I always had a theory that he was. He never really sort of designated the different crafts to any particular name, he just gave a list and, er... I remember Charlotte Jennings was once...she appeared in a quiz show and she was asked, "Who directed 'Night Mail'?" And it

doesn't actually say who directed 'Night Mail' in the credits, and she'd seen it quite recently. And she said, "um... Harry Watt."

**Pat Jackson:** Hmm.

**John Legard:** But she didn't get the prize, because it was, um...it was Basil Wright and Harry Watt and they got the, sort of, combined credit of whatever, you know.

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah. It was unfair because um...

**John Legard:** Production! Credits for that?

**Pat Jackson:** ... I was on every shot of it, and I know that Harry directed it, you know. So I mean, there's no question of...

**John Legard:** And you probably didn't get a credit at all?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh no, no! Certainly not! And I, you know...no reason to, I mean, I was a trainee!

**John Legard:** But anyway, it didn't matter in those days...?

**Pat Jackson:** It didn't matter a hoot. I mean, it's a memorable film and it's a mile stone. But then, I think the next important step for Harry, which was, um... also for the story documentary, was...'The Saving of Bill Blewitt'... 1936, '37. Er...and that really was a milestone, because this was the first, sort of fictional story, and the beginnings of the use of a dramatic shape and form. There were snatches in 'Night Mail'...little vignettes of humanity, but this, 'The Saving of Bill Blewitt' was conceived as a story, you know, as a drama. And, I think the triumph there was that, Harry just went down to Mousehole, by the greatest good fortune, went into the 'Smugglers Inn' and there got drunk... beautifully drunk... with an enchanting character called Bill Blewitt, who was the local postmaster. And, so enchanting was he, that Harry thought, "I think I've found my man." And he tested him the next morning, just with a Sinclair and no sound...but, I mean, there was no stopping old Bill, he just fantasised about how he'd met Kingsley Wood [the Postmaster General] and Maroch [? couldn't decipher this name], you know... made up a fantastic story. So that, Harry was convinced that here was the extrovert quality that he needed and the whole village was played, they played their normal parts in the film, you know. So he put a slice of England on the screen, and what was very important, I think, was that it was the beginnings of the story documentary, the drama documentary... followed up by 'North Sea' which, in my mind, is probably Harry's best film. But I think there are two important things about the story documentary. It was that people had the stamp of the environment and their life and background... not only on their faces but in their physique, which no actor can really give you. It also had the vernacular... their way of speech, their way of phrasing, because they never... even in 'Western Approaches' I never asked them to learn lines, so that you get the gist, so that they interpreted the scene and used their own words to describe the content of the scene.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** Now, a scriptwriter thinks he knows how people speak and he's a good dialogue writer, and imposes it. We didn't impose it. So that the natural ability of expression came from the people we had chosen, and so you were getting something of true vintage on the screen. And Harry's 'North Sea', I still think is a milestone and that was the foundation of the story documentary - started with 'Bill Blewitt' and confirmed by 'North Sea', which got international acclaim wherever it went, because it was a really true slice of life...and edited beautifully by McNaughton

**John Legard:** Right! Yes! Marvellous film...'North Sea', yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** Edited by dear old 'Mac'.

**John Legard:** McNaughton again, yes. Hmm. But, obviously as well as these films, the famous ones, there were a lot of other films being made by the GPO Film Unit at that time, which were much more, sort of, workaday, and I imagine that that output was a very important aspect of ...justification.

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah, they were inclined to be workaday, you see, because... there were very few who had this gift that Harry had, of unlocking people's personality, so that they were not enslaved and encased in their inhibitions of shyness.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And this was the, sort of, magnetic quality of Harry, behind the camera, you see. Which is, I suppose, really what a great conductor is in an orchestra, you know... people play for a great conductor and people relax for a good director. And, er... I don't think anybody had it in the GPO Film Unit to that extent, because they were - charming, sweet people, don't get me wrong, they were lovely people - but they were inclined to be a little inhibited themselves. An academic background, you know... you're in the ivory tower of academia and you haven't mixed and haven't rubbed around the shoulders of...

**John Legard:** But presumably some of the academics were making films on their own, apart from, you know, being supported by Harry Watt and so on. They were making, possibly... I seem to remember there were a lot of titles GPO... there was, 'The Fairy of the Phone' and this, that and the other. 'Line to the Tschierva Hut' and...

**Pat Jackson:** Yes but, 'Fairy of the Phone', you see, was not made by documentary...it was made by Bill Coldstream who was an artist, you see, who was taking a sabbatical from painting and came in and, jolly good, jolly amusing, very funny! But it was a fantasy, wasn't it? It was...

**John Legard:** Yeah! I only just remember it, I remember the title better than the film.

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, it was a fantasy. But you say, if you looked through all the outputs of the GPO film unit at that time, there were straightforward, commentary expositional films.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** ...You know...Stuart Legg at that time was doing 'Voice of Britain'...but 'Voice of Britain' on the BBC is merely... there's no story... it's merely the camera, sort of, dipping in the various departments at the BBC, getting a vague impression, sort of vague brushstrokes. There was no shape or plan to it...er...very...um, have we got time for a moment of digression?

**John Legard:** Yes, certainly!

**Pat Jackson:** There was a wonderful moment when the triumph of Grierson's public relations. He got Bernard Shaw to come down to Bennett Park Road. To get Bernard Shaw at time to appear in a film...I mean, crikey! It was a great triumph! And so Bernard Shaw arrived at the GPO Film Unit at Bennett Park Road in his Rolls Royce and... um... I was listening in the sound lab, where they were poorly... hearing Grierson's polite conversation. You know, party manners to the great Shaw, and talking about the first time they'd ever used a land-line to record something for film and, "We consider this, Mr Shaw, a great advance!" And Shaw said, "Oh yes, oh...very interesting..." whatever it was...in this lovely Irish accent. He said, "Well now, Mr Grierson, what is it you want me to talk about?" And so Grierson said, "Well, I think, Mr Shaw, if you could give us your impressions of what you think broadcasting is all about and the effect it's having..." He said, "I understand, yes." And he got up on this rostrum, there was a little set with the cameras behind. And he said, "You'll tell me when you're ready then and I'll start, in my good time." So the camera went over and the clapper went in, and he said, [PJ does an impression of Bernard Shaw]"Now I've been asked to talk a few words about broadcasting. My impression of broadcasting is that it is a very, very dangerous medium indeed. Particularly if you happen to be sitting behind the microphone, as I am now. I can almost tell what the announcer has had for breakfast, and certainly what he has had the night before, and if he's hanging over badly! You have to be very, very careful of this instrument, for it's very much more sensitive, in fact, you could almost say it's a kind of x ray machine that can peer deeply into your whole being..." And so he went on in this incredible way for about ten minutes, and so we said, "Sorry, Mr Shaw, we have to reload some film." He said, "Well, tell me when you're ready and I'll go on until you tell me to stop." And this went on for three magazines worth! We had half an hour of this! And then a most terrible thing happened. There was a fellow called Martin, a charming chap, about my age...who did precisely the same thing to those rushes as I had done trying to load my first magazine...he exposed one of these rolls...the Bernard Shaw rushes! He put the lid on quickly, but the light had gone up, and so it was exactly the same thing. He went to dear old Ed Pawley the sound recordist, who was Frank Bryce's brother-in-law...and so Ed Pawley said, "Oh...that's not a help is it? That's not a very good thing to have done. Had it to have been any other reel but the Shaw's, that would have been not so bad." He said, "Well I suppose," (Martin said) "I'd better go and own up to Grierson and... I shall get my cards, obviously... jolly nice working with you, Ed, and thank you very much for what you've taught me." So, just as he was leaving to resign, you see... and confess, Pawley said, "No, wait a minute, wait a minute Martin, wait! There's just a chance the sprocket holes will have probably exposed a track, certainly they'll have gone through the track...that would give us probably a frequency of six hundred" (I don't know, might have been six or seven hundred, I don't know, I can't remember the sum he said.) He said, "I think I can filter that out...I'll filter that out without destroying the quality of the voice. Don't say a thing, Don't say a thing! Wait until the rushes come tomorrow." So we waited for the rushes and, sure enough, this reel went 'bm-bm-bm-bm-bm-bm...' as the sprocket holes had exposed the track, you see. And then Eddy took it straight into the sound van, this old

Visatone sound van, put it through, put a filter in, and sent it off to the rushes again. Next morning, the track was clear...absolutely clear! And Martin, dear old Martin was saved

**John Legard:** Amazing! Lovely story.

**Pat Jackson:** So, you see...that was the GPO...that sums up the GPO Film Unit... a bunch of amateurs, fumbling their way forward, being able to overcome their mistakes and produce some sort of result at the end of it.

**John Legard:** Marvellous!

**Pat Jackson:** And er...I mean, it was a fascinating period to have gone through.

**John Legard:** As a matter of interest, how were they financed? Did you have your own annual budget?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh I think so! I mean...I don't know, John...but I think it was an...annual budget, with which we had to...

**John Legard:** ...so much to spend each year?

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah. Well it came off...I forget what it was ... cream off the establishment or something, you know. Oh yes, that would have been allowed for budget to the GPO Film Unit... 'X' thousand. You see, you mustn't forget old Harry...when he was making 'Night Mail' and when he started 'North Sea' he was making three pounds a week, I think he got a ten shilling rise, three pounds, ten. I mean it's very difficult to relate to that now, I know, but it sounds ridiculous doesn't it?

**John Legard:** Absolutely.

**Pat Jackson:** But, er...I mean they were magical days...magic. I mean, imagine at the age of eighteen, nineteen...going on the Royal Scot on the footplate and stoking it as we climbed over Beattock. Which I was allowed to do. I mean, fabulous experiences for a seventeen-year-old! And then going out with the fishing fleets off Longships lighthouse, and mooring there, as we drifted with the nets. You know, wonderful, wonderful experiences, never to be matched again! Never to be had again! They were magical days, John! Wonderful days!

**John Legard:** Were you, as well as doing the, sort of, public relations films...(I'm sorry, I'm being a bit, sort of, practical now) but did they do training films for people within the organisation, you know? Rather like we did with the railways? I mean, where you used to do a lot of training stuff, or...?

**Pat Jackson:** No, I don't think they did, I don't think they did.

**John Legard:** ...or mostly promotional?

**Pat Jackson:** I think so. It was a purely public relations exercise...of a government department and it's contribution to society. 'Weather Forecast', how in effect were the forecasts brought in. The sorting offices, you know... then Legg did one on the telephone operator, and this sort of thing. What the job meant, so that we could begin to appreciate what the telephone operator did for us. Then he did one on the cable ships, you see. How the cables (when they went wrong) were found. Very interesting, you sat very interested, you know...it was an illustrated lecture. And then you suddenly realised, "Yes, my God! What would we do without the cable ships, Golly! All our telephone communications to the continent would go!" So that one did begin to inter-relate with society very much more than if one hadn't seen these films.

**John Legard:** Yeah, right. And because, presumably the outlets were not only in the cinemas but, I mean, obviously some of the more specialised ones, they were probably... did you have your own distribution, sort of internal screenings, private screenings and so on?

**Pat Jackson:** Well I think there was a non-theatrical circuit.

**John Legard:** Non-theatrical, that's right! [Indecipherable - interviewee talking over]

**Pat Jackson:** ...I think, which Grierson built up. I didn't know much about that...oh yes! I do know a bit about that...because Roy Stocks was also a very good cutter, and he went out, (of course he did) to village halls, with portable projectors. Oh yes! That was a very strong part of it.

**John Legard:** I'd got an idea you actually had 35mm portable projectors didn't you?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes we did, yes we did.

**John Legard:** ...in those days. And you had a very early non-flam 35-mm, which was rather brittle stuff. Because I remember seeing some of that in the library when I joined Crown in 1943...this strange material which had been used for non-theatrical screenings, in the late 1930's.

**Pat Jackson:** Yes.

**John Legard:** So the output was colossal...I've got a list actually of all the GPO films ever made... I've got a list... I'll show it to you when we get onto the next tape. But... hundreds of films you made didn't you? Well...a hundred...anyway...you made a hundred and...something like that.

**Pat Jackson:** Do you mean...what...before we became The Crown Film Unit ?

**John Legard:** Before you became Crown, yes.

**Pat Jackson:** Yes...It started the Empire Marketing Board, then I think became the GPO Film Unit in about 1933. And then 1933 to 1939, of course.

**John Legard:** Hmm. And so you went to Blackheath.... er....



**Pat Jackson:** We were at Blackheath until the War.

**John Legard:** From about 1934 to the War, yes. Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And, you see... 'North Sea' was made... the interiors were made there.

**John Legard:** Yes, there was that nice sequence that we saw on that 'Arena' programme, yup.

**Pat Jackson:** And that was a brilliant idea, you see...of old...can't remember the man's name now... Bryson I think his name was. A Scot, who'd got a very good degree in art. And, um...Harry was worried about rocker sets and so on. He said, "The trouble with these damn rocker sets, they're all going to squeak and it's going to be awful." And Bryson said, "why don't you build it on a mushroom?" Harry said, "Come again? What do you mean, a mushroom?" He said, "well..."

**John Legard:** Upside down mushroom.

**Pat Jackson:** "...we build half timbers...half a mushroom, as it were, and build the set on it and then it will rock naturally, if we control it." Harry thought that was a brilliant idea. And we had two wonderful, wonderful craftsmen carpenters, the Jacobs brothers. And these two men built this... half ball... as it were, and built the set on it. Absolutely wonderful! And Bunny Onions was the cameraman who did the interiors and, you know, it was very, very ingenious...brilliant, brilliant idea!

**John Legard:** What was your role on that film actually?

**Pat Jackson:** I wasn't on it!

**John Legard:** You weren't on it at all? No...you were onto...what were you doing at that time?

**Pat Jackson:** I was doing, um...I took over 'Big Money' from Harry, and then I also took over 'Men in Danger', which was the first, sort of, hour long documentary I made.

**John Legard:** Was that... also... did you shoot dialogue in that, 'Men in Danger'?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, ah hmm. Yes, that was, um...

**John Legard:** In other words...again, it was using the, sort of, idea of a story documentary? You followed ...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes! Yes! But, mind you, 'Men in Danger' didn't have a story, it had little vignettes. I remember we went down the Manvers Main colliery, which was the deepest pit in England. And Manvers Main colliery was the first pit in England to start a school, at the coalface, for apprentice miners, to teach them the hazards and the dangers. And we went down there with dear old Chick Fowle, bless his heart, and they had a little schoolroom in there, which we mocked up in the studio. And I brought these pit boys down and the teacher came down and

just reeled off his dialogue, which was perfectly wonderful. And so that was the beginnings again, just of a re-enacted scene, you see. But again, you got this wonderful vernacular and you got these marvellous faces of these boys, you see...these kids who were third generation, fourth generation miners' families, you see, and it's quite matchless. And I remember... a typical example of what I'm trying to say is... I did a tiny film in the War called 'Builders' which was a series of five minuters... just informing people of what was going on in the country. And I was asked to make this film on building an ordnance factory and we went down to Bedford and just covered ourselves in mud and filth and slime! And I thought, "This is impossible - how on earth are you going to make a subject of building an ordnance factory?" And so, I was in despair about that and I thought, "Well the only way to do it, is to really use the subjective camera, and the camera will be somebody who is going to visit them and talk to various people. It was the first use of the subjective camera, actually...and then used by...

**John Legard:** Cinema V♦rit♦!

**Pat Jackson:** No...no, the people actually talking into the camera.

**John Legard:** Talking into the camera.

**Pat Jackson:** And it was used by Bob Montgomery in 'Lady in the Lake' afterwards.

**John Legard:** Yes, that's right, I was...yeah, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And, anyway... as we got down, the second day. I heard this wonderful Cockney voice, ringing across, oh a hundred yards. A wonderful clarity of voice. And interspersed with the ringing of his...his trowel, breaking the bricks to fashion the bricks before he laid them... continuing this dialogue and 'clink, clink, clink' as he broke the brick, you see. And I walked over and had a listen to him. And he was like a little chirpy sparrow, wonderful! Dialogue unending! I tested him and... next day; he was absolutely remarkable... just talked straight into the camera, totally unfazed. Wonderful dialogue, wonderful! Now, I asked myself, "Supposing we'd asked Sir Laurence Olivier to do that?" He'd have got the dialogue over beautifully, but the point is, he wouldn't have been able to fashion these bricks and lay them, still carrying on looking at the camera, laying the bricks, putting the right amount of cement on...wouldn't have done it! So, this is a typical example of the use of the non-actor... so long as you treat him as though he were... he had to be specially cast, and so long as you were prepared to go to the trouble of testing them, you'd come up sometimes with the raw, wonderful, matchless talent for the screen!

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And it isn't a question, is it, of their acting? Nothing to do with acting!

**John Legard:** They're not actors, no.

**Pat Jackson:** They're just 'being'...just there 'being' themselves. And that's a totally different thing. And if one were to say, "Well of course, they had a marvellous, natural talent, natural

actors." Of course they're not! You could no more put them on the stage than fly! But the cinema medium is such an accommodating, such a sympathetic medium, that if they do 'fluff' I mean, it's not very important, you have a cut-away and...you know... If you get the vintage stuff on the screen, it is matchless!

**John Legard:** Hmm. But do you think that if you'd had the equipment in those days, which would have made it easier for you to get that sort of stuff... in other words, not the cumbersome recording equipment and... as they have nowadays, you know, it's easy to go in with your little cassette and your 16 mm, or whatever ...?

**Pat Jackson:** Well they're doing it all the time, aren't they?

**John Legard:** Yeah. So, in other words, I mean...this was one of the great problems, wasn't it, in those days...that you couldn't simply shoot the sort of thing that you are describing... people being themselves? And you could only...well, this is what Harry Watt pioneered, as you were saying, and it was a tremendous step forward. But for many years I used to say to Edgar [Anstey] in the old days of British Transport, I'd say, "What a pity we can't do a little more dialogue shooting, I'm sure it'll be a good idea, you know. In certain films we could just get that extra touch." And Edgar used to say, "Oh John, do you really feel that? Do you think that's necessary? Don't you think that...."

[End of Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

**John Legard:** Anyhow, we've got to the, sort of, end of the GPO period... the transition, when GPO became the Crown Film Unit at the beginning of the War. How long did you stay at Blackheath, after the War started? When was the actual, physical...?

**Pat Jackson:** Er...I'd have to look in my diary, but roughly I think it would be about... oh... throughout the first year I should think; during which time, we made 'The First Days' and 'London Can Take It' and that sort of thing, you know. It was a very, very trying period, because nobody - as Harry Watt has explained so well - nobody knew what the hell to do with us, you see. Until the Ministry of Information came along...

**John Legard:** So you had to invent your own functions then?

**Pat Jackson:** Well really, yes...and I think it was old Cav and Harry, thanks really to their initiative and... guts, that the Unit really kept going and we... the order simply was: "Go out and shoot what you can, observe what you can and record it." And we did. I mean, Jack [? Lee] went out, I went out, we were about five units - we split up into about five units and just went round London. And, um, that was the basis of 'The First Days', you see.

**John Legard:** 'First Days', yes, which I remember seeing, not so long ago.

**Pat Jackson:** Er...so that...which is really becoming Newsreel. And then the important one, which is what Harry did, 'London Can Take It'. Well, we know all about that, I won't repeat it.

**John Legard:** That was...'London Can Take It' was during the Battle of Britain, The Blitz. Not the Battle of Britain, The Blitz.

**Pat Jackson:** The Blitz, the beginning of The Blitz. In fact...

**John Legard:** After the Battle of Britain.

**Pat Jackson:** ...I remember, the first real attack, we were at Bennett Park Road and it was the daylight attack at 4.30 I think, or 4 o'clock, and we saw them come over, and... it was a brilliant summer's day, I remember it well. And the sun was catching the silver of both the Bombers and the Spitfires... it got in amongst them like a little shoal of minnows going amongst the herring, you might say. You could see these little darts of silver going in... and, er... then tragically one or two would fall and spiral down.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And um...I think I went with Mac, that's right, and I took the old Bell and Howell...

**John Legard:** Stewart McAllister?

**Pat Jackson:** Stewart McAllister. And we went up to Greenwich Park, just near the Observatory, and we looked out over the City and over Dockland, and we recorded that and we photographed it. It was only a hand turned one, you see, and I could remember old Jack Parker's speed, you know... and I could remember, how they'd keep to... had to be got. I said, "Mac, that's about it, isn't it?" "I think that's about it - more like winding up a gramophone, isn't it?" I said, "It's the eyes and ears of the world, isn't it, that's about the speed, isn't it, that we turned on." [Laughing] And then it was quite extraordinary, because, it was as though the Grampians or some granite block of mountains had suddenly transformed themselves, in Dockland. Dense, black smoke...I suppose rather like what is happening in Kuwait at the moment... going up five, ten thousand feet high. Solid granite, it looked! Only illuminated by these jets of red flame coming up from Dockland. So, we ran out of that magazine and then went back, waited a bit and, at night, we went down to Charlton, because I had started a film on the cable ships, er...which was finished by the War, we didn't finish it. And I remembered there was a jetty there, where the Monarch moored. Well, I said to Mac, "That's where we can get right out into the river and on low tide, we should get a good a shot there." So we set up the old camera... and I was pointing downstream, and we opened right up, and there we were, we turned... and it was a curious coincidence... at that moment Tate and Lyle sugar vats caught fire, and it was exactly like the mushroom flare of the atomic bomb to come later on! And the whole of Silvertown just lit up, and the film just over-exposed and became a, sort of, blank. And about thirty seconds later, the

intensity of the flame died down a bit and the film then started to expose properly, you see. I suppose that shot's been used thousands and thousands of times!

**John Legard:** I've seen that film once or twice! Yes!

**Pat Jackson:** And old Harry used it, for some extraordinary reason, for the start of his film on Dover, you know, 'Dover Front Line'. Well, it had nothing to do with Dover, but he thought it was an arresting shot! [Laughs]

**John Legard:** Good start, yes!

**Pat Jackson:** So, you know, everything was pooled and shared. And so...that was used, I think, in 'The First Days' too. But that was just pure coincidence.

**John Legard:** Just to go back slightly; you mentioned Stewart McAllister, when did he join the Unit, was he... did he work, or something? Had he been there for some years?

**Pat Jackson:** Er, he joined about... I think... he would have been there after 'Night Mail', he came about...'37 I should think. I'm only speaking from memory, I mean...

**John Legard:** And Ken Cameron presumably, too?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh Ken Cameron was there very early on. Well if Ken Cameron was apprenticed when he was taking his degree at Glasgow... He came down and helped on 'The Saving of Bill Blewitt'. I remember very well, old Ken and I...yes, he was helping there, and then went back to his degree and, um... It was Cav who got him into the Unit again. For some reason, Grierson didn't - so Ken said - didn't want him to join, but Cavalcanti persuaded Grierson to take him on. A jolly good thing he did, too, because, I mean, Ken was the backbone of the recording at the GPO and Crown, of course.

**John Legard:** So by the time the War came, the GPO Film Unit must have been quite a sizeable Unit, in fact? I mean you probably had what, three or four directors? Three or four editors and...? About the size of Crown? No, presumably they were smaller than Crown?

**Pat Jackson:** They were a bit smaller, yes. Yes, I suppose... there wouldn't have been many, you see. I can tell you exactly... I think there would have been probably four directors, sound was only two and there were three cameramen: Chick Fowle, Jonah Jones and dear old Freddie Gamage.

**John Legard:** And Fred Gamage, yes, hmm..

**Pat Jackson:** And that's it! And Cavalcanti, and there were a few secretaries, but very few. And then, of course we moved down to... then slowly, of course, the Civil Service crept in. I mean, when we were at Soho Square, there was only old Fletcher and a dear old whatsit - another little man... that's all there was... and Phil Long. Hardly any Civil Service at all. By the end of it, there were more Civil Servants than there were filmmakers.

**John Legard:** Oh, you mean right at the very end?

**Pat Jackson:** Right at the very end, yes.

**John Legard:** Yes, of course, yes, hmm.

**Dave ?:** Pat, can I ask you, a quick word about researching? Did you actually have to do your own researching?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes.

[Dave?]: So you didn't have a team?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh no, no. No, you were given an assignment, Dave, and um... it was up to you to do your own and you went out and interviewed people and made your notes and so on... No, it was up to you, it was a one-man-band, and - if we come on to that - that could be very difficult, sometimes.

**John Legard:** What about crews and so on... was ACT involved in those days, incidentally?  
[Chuckling] As a matter of interest...?

**Pat Jackson:** Hardly at all! We all joined ACT, I think I'm number 827...

**John Legard:** Are you? Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** Hmm. And... well, it was considered quite a good thing to do, to join it, you know. I think we joined in about '36, '37...I don't know when ACT started?

**John Legard:** Shortly after...when did ACT start? Can you remember? About '35 was it?

[Dave]: I don't know when it actually started...but it would be round about then.

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah...I think we joined about '36, '37, I think.

**John Legard:** You see, it would be interesting to know who was the Shop Steward in those days!

**Pat Jackson:** I don't think we had that sort of thing...

**John Legard:** Because I remember, when I joined Crown, which was not until 1943, I mean... it was comparatively late on in things, and Ken Cameron, of all people was the Shop Steward.

**Pat Jackson:** Was he?

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** But I think we were much more interested in getting on with the job! [Laughs]

**John Legard:** Yeah, that's right... well, we were... But I didn't know anything when I joined Crown. I didn't know anything about ACT.

**Pat Jackson:** I mean, I think our attitude, frankly, was, so long as we had just enough to live on, it was such fun - the job - you weren't terribly worried.

**John Legard:** No, quite.

**Pat Jackson:** You know, one looked on it as a privilege to be able to do it!

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** A more fascinating, wonderful job...

[Fourth Voice]: It's a nice attitude, that.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh, it was marvellous you see, we didn't worry about it. And you see, I think what was also matchless... was the fact that one was meeting the real people of your country, and really having an eye opener as to their problems. As I said earlier, you know, you didn't get then, 'The Times'- and the newspapers and the dailies didn't increase their readership by being too sad and depressing about their news. So that the seamy-side of life in Britain wasn't very much exposed, really. You had to dig for it really, you know, you had to be a very dedicated left winger to find out what the real problems were and all this... a member of the 'Left Book Club' and Gollancz and you delved into all that! And that was all pretty damn depressing. But to go out and see it first hand was an eye opener, and if one felt that one had got somewhere near putting that on the screen, without pamphleteering... and, that, I think, is perhaps quite a good word, actually, because I think a lot of the earlier documentaries were bordering on being pamphleteerists, and that's where the use of the story, the presentation of your story in dramatic terms (which is something that the Grierson school never got onto)...

**John Legard:** They eschewed rather, didn't they?

**Pat Jackson:** That's quite right. To be quite honest, it terrified the life out of them. It was only old Harry, ploughing...

**John Legard:** I'm sure they'd challenge you on that! They would say that...

**Pat Jackson:** No, I'm quite [indecipherable] story, quite.

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** It's a totally different discipline, John. It's a totally different discipline to know how to handle artistes on the floor, to move them around, to build up the conflicts of the scene and to conduct it as an orchestra. And it's a different discipline, and it takes... it's a different training. It is the difference between the academic mind and the dramatists mind. And the academic mind is not necessarily the storyteller dramatist's mind - they're two totally different schools. And I defy you, John, you say "they would challenge me"... I defy you to produce one dramatic film from the so-called leaders of the documentary movement... where they had used drama and they had used dialogue, written dialogue and presented it as though it were part of a feature film, you mention one and I will bow to you.

**John Legard:** No, I give it to you, I'll have to think about that!

**Pat Jackson:** [Laughs] Yes! You'll need notice of that question! It's an interesting....

[Dave]: We were talking about that subject before you arrived, actually.

**Pat Jackson:** Were you? Yes.

[Slight pause]

**John Legard:** So, anyway... where are we? Moving... we're at the Battle of Britain, or after that... and you're moving from Blackheath and you're coming along to the next studio. Was that Denham? Or did you go...?

**Pat Jackson:** No, then we went to Denham, yes.

**John Legard:** Then you went to Denham, yes.

**Pat Jackson:** ...Went to Denham and then um...let's see, what happened? Oh, then I did 'Health in War', I mean...

**John Legard:** Oh yes, that's another film I remember of yours, yes, 'Health in War', yes.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh, that was a chore...



**John Legard:** And, I remember... all I can remember... I can remember certain pictures, where I remember you used the music of 'Enigma Variations', I think you had in it, didn't you?

**Pat Jackson:** I used a bit of 'Brigg Fair' and I think I used... yes I did... I used a bit of 'Enigma Variations'... I can't remember what now.

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** It was just an...expositional commentary film...really. With a tiny little dramatic story, very vague, following one patient through, I seem to remember. Then the next one, which was interesting, so far as carrying Harry's tradition a little bit further... not further, but the same pace as he... was 'Ferry Pilot'. That was interesting because it had a story and, answering your question, Dave, one did one's own research. I went down to White Waltham where were the headquarters of the ATA, which was the 'Ancient and Tattered Airmen', as it was known. And one was just flown around by these ferry pilots all over Britain, just to, sort of, see what they did and how they worked, you see. And, so... then one wrote a script... then how did one cast it? I cast it by just sitting at White Waltham aerodrome, seeing these pilots as they came in and talking to them, and there were two things I always looked out for very carefully... it was voice. Voice... what was the timbre of the voice, and what was the key in which the voice spoke? That's a very strange thing... you relate it to the commentators of the BBC now... some of them are on the minor note, not only are they on the minor note, but they finish their sentences on the minor note... and send you to sleep within about two or three minutes! And... I was very lucky; I got some marvellous people to play that. And the little girl, Joan Hughes was twenty-one, twenty-two, and she played opposite Audrey Sale-Barker who was our amateur skiing champion at that time. And Joan Hughes was five...just five foot, I think she was four foot, eleven and three quarter inches. And she was flying Spitfires and Hurricanes, and by the end of the War, this little girl was then twenty four, was flying four engine bombers, Stirlings, Lancasters, Halifaxes, the lot. And, there was a time when the Bow Fighter - light Bow Fighter had a very nasty reputation... as being a bit head-heavy and liable to spin in. And there was an aerodrome, near Hornchurch, I think, where the morale was a bit poorly because they'd lost two in such a way, in a fortnight, they'd sort of spun in and... One evening, they saw a plane coming and then, blow me down, it was a Bow Fighter coming in to replace... So they sort of wandered out for a moment, from the Mess, to see who'd come in and... the cockpit cover was pushed back and the helmet of the pilot was taken off and this flowing black, auburn hair of Joan, little Joan Hughes, as she stepped out, you see! [Laughs] She was a very welcome guest, and the morale of the squadron went up! "If this little child can fly it, what the hell are we worried about?" But Brad Brooke played the lead in that, and Brad Brooke was a wonderful, natural extrovert... wonderful character, and he helped me enormously in the dialogue, which he made up as he went along. He said, "I'm going to say roughly this, Pat..." "Oh, that's marvellous, that was splendid..." And we shared the same digs in Maidenhead, and he was a tremendous, tower of strength to me, you know. A very good partner and poor chap... poor chap killed himself later on, poor man. But that was a story documentary again, you see.

**John Legard:** That was 'Ferry Pilot'? Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** That was 'Ferry Pilot'.

**John Legard:** I don't think I ever saw that... it's presumably... how long did it run? Was it a half an hour...?

**Pat Jackson:** No, I think it was forty minutes, I think...forty minutes. And that lead to um...then I did 'Builders' and then, um....

**John Legard:** 'Builders', yes that's the one you were talking about earlier...

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, it was the five minutes and er...they seemed to rather like that, for some reason. And because of 'Builders' and 'Ferry Pilot' I had the good luck to be given 'Western Approaches'.

**John Legard:** I read your book and I was absolutely riveted by it, as I was saying earlier. It would be interesting, obviously it would be nice to hear you encapsulate what happens in the book, on tape now... [chuckles]... and the making of the film. Because it just follows on naturally from what you've been talking about for the last half an hour, about the business of people being.

**Pat Jackson:** Well it was merely, um... following Harry Watt's example, you see. Harry Watt had an enormous influence on me, not only as a filmmaker but, I mean, he was absolutely enchantingly kind to me. Because, I mean, I was really a raw egg. I mean I hardly knew my alphabet when I joined the GPO Film Unit. And Harry really looked after me, and I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude which, of course, I was never able to repay, except out of loyalty and friendship. But he was... I had great regard for Harry. He taught me - not how to make films, obviously - but the attitude of mind in approaching an assignment. And he was a journalist first and foremost, he had a nose for a story and he taught my nose how to smell out a story and to go for the ingredients. But to answer your question, John, about 'Western Approaches', I mean, I could talk for three hours on that without difficulty, but I don't think you want three hours of it! [Chuckles]

**John Legard:** Well no...no...I think...

**Pat Jackson:** I can just give you roughly what...

**John Legard:** In proportion to what we've been talking about here, the length and...

**Pat Jackson:** Well, you see...in the first place, I went in and Dal [Ian Dalrymple] called me and sort of looked at me and said, "I've just had Owen Rutter who is a very famous Naval historian... he's just come in here and wants us to make a film on the Battle of The Atlantic. And this has come from the Admiral in command of the Battle of the Atlantic, Admiral Sir Percy Noble, who, so Owen Rutter says is a little bit piqued that the RAF, after 'Target for Tonight' is getting all the glamour, all the acclaim!

**John Legard:** Interesting, yes.

**Pat Jackson:** And he thinks, now it's time for the Silent Service to speak up for itself a bit. So he said, "would you like to tackle it?" I said, "Well yes, it sounds marvellous. Have we got any

story-line?" He said, "No, we haven't, Owen Rutter's left a sort of treatment here, twelve pages, so take it away and read it." So I read it, and it was just an outline, it had no, sort of, story-line. So anyway, I phoned up Owen, who was a charming man, and he said, "Well, we must go and see the Admiral, how quickly can we go?" So we went up the next day, went up there. And Admirable Sir Percy Noble was really a delightful, charming man. And I had my one and only Burton pin-striped suit, which was very worn, it shone at the backside and elbows, practically and I hadn't got the coupons to buy another. Anyway, he was absolutely charming, and...what was I now? Twenty-five, I suppose. So he said, "Well now Jackson, I understand you're going to make this film for us?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to have a jolly good try, Sir, yes I certainly am." So he said, "Well, what can we do for you? What do you want to do?" So I said, "Well Sir, I must obviously go to sea as soon as possible." So he looked at me with a wry smile and said, "Well you've come to the right place for that haven't you? Where do you want to go? Malta or Cape Town, or where?" So, Owen then spoke up and said, "Well Sir, I think, if I might suggest... I think it's quite simple for Jackson, isn't it, to go up on the East Coast Convoy and come down, perhaps on a destroyer? Because then he'll see how a Convoy works. If he goes to Malta, it'll take him a month to get there and back, and, oh...what a waste of time." "It's a very good idea, Owen, very good, yes. We'll arrange that for you." So I went up with the East Coast Convoy...I joined it at Southend, I think, and went through what was called 'The Graveyard' down the Thames estuary. This is just after the magnetic mine had been discovered and made innocuous by degaussing, but the acoustic mine had just then appeared too. So, the trawler ahead of us was flying the red sign that it was sweeping the channel. And anyway, we went, without any event at all, we got up to Methil. And...the depressing thing about it was that it was so desperately monotonous... desperately monotonous! Nothing happened! And if it did happen, you wouldn't be able to film it. So, one was left with a subject that seemed hardly to move, because four hundred or forty ships lolling around the ocean, when you set the camera up, they're moving at six knots, they hardly seem to be moving. And the same thing happened...I came down on a Destroyer and the routine... the routine of running a ship is deadly dull. I mean, it produces wonderful characters and men of staunch iron and character, but it is the least filmic thing, you know. And by the time you've run through all the clichés there are on board ship, and we know what they are, don't we? The wash, the seagulls, the steward emptying the titbits and er...the bow-wave with a light bit of spray coming over, the wheel and all the rest of it! But what is there else, you see? And very early on I realised this was going to be a brute of a subject to dramatise, to make it cinematic. And there was absolutely no point in my pretending that I was going to get a capital ship to come and perform for me, or an enormous gun battle like the River Plate which was done later by Mickey Powell, you know... and that was all going to be artificial with spray being thrown by stunt men and effects men... that was not going to be any damn good at all! How the hell to dramatise it? So I came back down to Southend again, with a destroyer, and went back home. Saw Dal for a moment, and he said, "Any good, old boy?" I said, "Well, for a moment, Dal, no. My mind is a total disastrous blank, I haven't got an idea in my head how to tackle this." So he said, "well you better just go and sit on the nest, old boy."

**John Legard:** Sorry, just to interrupt, just for the tape... this is Ian Dalrymple you're talking to?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh, Ian Dalrymple, yes, who joined us, I think...'41. So, all right, I went home, I was living behind Pinewood at the time, and 'sat on the nest' as it were, and faced that terrible blank page. This went on for three weeks, with all sorts of false starts and absolutely nothing... I

wasn't getting anywhere at all! I really wasn't getting anywhere, I was in a state of total despair, and I regretted waking up every morning, knowing that I'd have to face that blank page, and not an idea was going to come. And I'd juxtaposed every possible combination of what a Convoy was and what the Destroyers were doing and... this, that and the other... and I could not make a story hang together...that was filmable! It's all right having... you know... saying the Prince of Wales comes up, and HMS...useless! We'd never get them! So, there were no facilities that one could rely on.

**John Legard:** Hmm...nightmare.

**Pat Jackson:** Absolute nightmare! So I thought, "Well, it's no good. I'm wasting time, this is now a month, I haven't produced a thing, I must resign." Because, he must get somebody...

**John Legard:** You really got to that...?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes, I went through... I left Mandeville Cottage where I was and I walked through the woods towards Pinewood, and the birds had the impertinence to be singing! It was February still! No...just about March, a very cold, bitter, blasted day, and the mud was thick, and I thought "Oh God! This is absolute hell!" So, I got halfway there and then, for some extraordinary reason, this idea popped into my head... somebody put it there, I don't know who the hell it was, but I'm most grateful to him or her, whoever it was! And this simple question, and it was this: it said, "What would happen if a lifeboat sent out an SOS from its portable radio, giving its position and a U-boat, peering at it through its periscope, picked the message up through the aerial in the periscope and the U-boat commander decided to keep station on that lifeboat, use it as a decoy, knowing that sooner or later a Merchantman would pick up that message and probably come to the help of the lifeboat?"

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** He would have a sitting duck. And, once that equation was formed, we would have an inevitable suspense situation, which would build and build as those three elements started to interact, and we couldn't miss it! And, what were our facilities? I only had to have shots of the Convoy, I had to have a lifeboat and its members in the lifeboat, (a story of survivors in a lifeboat) and a mock-up U-boat in the studio, so that I could get shots of the lifeboat through the periscope. That's all I wanted! God! I'd got it! Marvellous!!

**John Legard:** Who was it, do you think... where did this idea come from?

**Pat Jackson:** No idea!

**John Legard:** Did somebody suggest it to you, or did...?

**Pat Jackson:** No, no, no!

**John Legard:** Oh, it was something you came to...

**Pat Jackson:** No, it was the result of worrying you see. The egg, eventually, was hatched. Because after three weeks, although one is in this total state of despair, there is, I suppose, subconsciously, a gestation period... I mean that's what I suppose creative effort is, isn't it?

**John Legard:** Yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** You know, it's the old famous Stravinsky story, his wife was a famous artist and came into him one morning, she'd been struggling in the morning and had produced nothing, and she came in and said, "I am no good, I haven't got an idea, I'm finished for today." So Stravinsky sent her straight back and said, "You haven't worked! Go back and work and get an idea!" And so I suppose it is the result of application, and this applies to anybody or anything, you know. If you can pinpoint your concentration, however despairing the effort, something comes.

**John Legard:** Something eventually...

**Pat Jackson:** I don't know, nobody, not even Bernard Shaw could define the source of inspiration and ideas, we don't know where they come from. But it is the result, obviously, of sweat, tears and agony.

**John Legard:** Yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** ...I suppose. Anyway, thank God it came! Because, I was in a desperate state.

**John Legard:** Didn't you say in your book, "that you were walking back from the 'Crooked Billet' [pub] to Pinewood and the..."

**Pat Jackson:** Oh no, no, that was when I had written the script.

**John Legard:** Oh, that was later, wasn't it? Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** And then I had the treatment out... I think it took a fortnight, the treatment, then was done. A pretty detailed dialogue treatment, it wasn't in... And then I had put it up to Dal, but then, he was busy seeing rushes - I left it on his desk. And I then went up to the 'Crooked Billet' and had two or three pints and, um... And then Dal and old John Monck was there. He said, "We read it and we like it..."

**John Legard:** John Monck, yeah. Who edited...?

**Pat Jackson:** John Monck. He said, "We like it" and he said, "If we were a commercial firm, we'd still like it and we'd do it." So then... we wrote the shooting script, and it was fine. Well then... this is a great triumph for Dal, because, again, a very good public relations act on his part, because my story had very little to do with the Navy, as such. I mean, I was dealing with a U-boat, the survivors in a lifeboat and one Merchantman that comes to pick them up. Where the hell does the Navy come into it? Hardly at all. And this was supposed to be a film about Her Majesty's Navy and the ships and all that, and it hardly appeared. And, er... Sir Percy Noble, I think, saw the value of the story and was quite prepared for the Navy to play second fiddle,

realised that the facilities that were asked of the Senior Service were very few and far between, and let it go. Because he liked the story, he thought it was a good story and thought, "Yes, that's all right." The next thing, once having got the finance, which was quite considerable, I think they put up fifty thousand...

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** ...which was a lot of money in those days. And it was to be, you see, the first feature documentary in Technicolor. Well, that was fine! Now then, we had to cast it. How were we going to cast it? I needed about eighteen chaps in the lifeboat, of whom there were at least fourteen talking parts. So I went up to Liverpool and I hung around the pubs, and I had a great chum in the Shipping Federation, which was the place where the seaman came on a register, and so on, for their next job...or claimed damages for having lost their possessions, if they'd been torpedoed and so on. A nice man, Hobbs. And so he said, "Well you'd better sit in here, old boy, and just see faces, and if you like faces and want to talk to them, go up to the grill and tell the clerk behind that you'd like to..." So in this way we found one or two, but nobody really came from the Shipping Federation. The Shipping Federation then sent me to the 'Angel' Pub, further down the road, and the 'Angel' Pub was run by a marvellous old publican called Anderson. And Anderson was a great football fan of Liverpool and I think he was one of the directors of it. And he said, "Yes Pat. Use my pub as much as you want. There's a little private bar there, give me a wink if you like anybody and I'll tell them to come around to you." So, I was up there with... awfully nice...my assistant, who was called Peter Bolton, charming boy.

**John Legard:** Oh, Peter Bolton! Yes, I knew him very well...

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, awfully nice, lovely sense of humour. We had a great giggle, he'd been invalided out of the RAF. And we sat for three or four days. And, you know John, again a moment of despair, because three or four days had gone by and one hadn't seen a face or even anybody that looked likely. And here was the War in its worse phase, and here were we, bumming around in pubs, trying to make a dramatic story, you know. You might say, "What on earth are we doing here?" you know. It was very difficult to relate this to being any sort of contribution in any way, shape or form. However, that was the job we had to do and we carried on, discouraged and sometimes the morale was absolutely on the canvas. And then, one morning this character appeared, I see him now, with his funny little cap on the side of his head and a clap pipe...buccaneer, Wallace Beery kind of type. And he got to the bar and ordered his pint and chaser, and I heard that voice ring out... marvellous voice! And the barman said something, and he had a wonderful laugh... that intrigued me. And he had piercing, funny little brown eyes that shone and a face that lit up every time he talked... fascinating little man! So I gave old Anderson a wink... so I heard him say, "There are a couple of blokes round there want to have a chat with you... just go and see 'em round the corner there." He said "What...?" He said, "Go on, it won't do you any harm, go and have a talk with them." So this figure went out and we waited for him to come in our little door, and he sauntered in and looked at us, "You chaps wanted to have a talk to me...are you the chaps?" I said, "Yes, that's right, yes. My name's Pat and this is Peter here. What's your name?" And he said, "my name's Bob, Bob Banner" And he had a lovely Liverpool accent. He said, "What's all this about then?" So I endeavoured to explain, you see. I said, "Well, we're making a film and we think you might be very good in it." "What do you mean, very good

in it?" "Well, you might play a part in it, act in it." "Oh don't be fucking daft! What are you talking about? Act? I've never acted in me life!" I said, "Well I don't want you to act in your life, I just want you to be yourself" you see. So, [chuckles] after a long argument I told him roughly what the story was and he was going to play a very big part in it. I said, "Look Bob, you've got absolutely nothing to use. We shall test you shortly at Pinewood, meantime you'll be on full pay, you won't have to go back to sea for a moment, until we decide whether you can do this or not. Will you do it? Will you have a try?" He said, "Well, I've got nothing to lose, as you say. Oh, all right, yes I'll try. Here's me address." And so we gave him a drink. He said, "I'm living at this place" and he gave us his address. And in that way, we slowly built up eighteen or so people we found who we thought would be good for the lifeboat, you see. So then a fortnight later we brought these people down to Pinewood. Old Teddy Carrick was the art director, marvellous man!

**John Legard:** Hmm. We recorded him just recently, Teddy Carrick.

**Pat Jackson:** Have you?

**John Legard:** Yes. I wasn't involved, Sid Cole I think interviewed him.

**Pat Jackson:** Did he? Oh great. I saw him only recently, marvellous chap. So, he put a half lifeboat section of the lifeboat and this... in the lot at Pinewood, and we waited for the bus to arrive with these seamen. Pennington Richards was lighting for us. And slowly they appeared, the captain came first, who was very shy... and I was forced to take the captain because he was the only one available from the Blue Funnel Line...

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** ...and he was on long-leave, because his ship Deucalion had been very badly damaged in the Malta Convoy. He was... he was just all right, just all right. But I knew he was the only one I was gonna get, so I had to make do with him. And then Bob Banner came next, and he was absolutely electrifying, straightaway.

**John Legard:** Yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** ...took command and was marvellous. And so that's how we found the cast, you see... slowly found them.

**John Legard:** Yes... it was slightly... it was a bit of luck, wasn't it... he was actually the first person you cast virtually, wasn't he... Bob Banner? Or the first person you found.

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah, Bob Banner I think he was. Yup, almost found, yeah.

**John Legard:** That was a good omen, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh marvellous! He carried the film, you know, Bob Banner. He carried the film, in the lifeboat. I mean, he was a natural actor, you see! Absolute natural actor! And he was Wallace Beery to the 'T'. Marvellous performance, that man gave!

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** Absolutely... when he... I don't know if you remember it well, but there was a scene where he sings this extraordinary mock ballad... you know!

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** I mean, just unbelievably good!

**John Legard:** Yes, in fact, they were all... I mean a lot of them were good, weren't they? I mean, he was brilliant, I quite agree, but a lot of your cast were outstandingly good, weren't they?

**Pat Jackson:** Just themselves.

**John Legard:** They were just themselves. I mean you had devoted so much time to this casting, which was well worth it. It was the only way you could do it really, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** The only way. Oh yes...

**John Legard:** I can't think of a... of a character in that film who didn't come off, I mean, they were all good.

**Pat Jackson:** Well, one would have liked... the captain of the lifeboat was... I mean he looked the part...

**John Legard:** Oh, he was all right, actually.

**Pat Jackson:** He looked all right. It was hard work, it was rather like pumping up a punctured tyre, but we got it out of him in the end.

**John Legard:** He was... sort of... I mean, you remember the circumstances, but for me as a member of the audience, I thought he was outstandingly good.

**Pat Jackson:** He looked marvellously patriarchal, didn't he?

**John Legard:** That's it, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, he was fine...yes, he did very well.

**John Legard:** I think he was carrying that responsibility...



**Pat Jackson:** But, you see...that went on, I won't bore people any more with it but...it was a very difficult film.

**John Legard:** It's terribly interesting...

**Pat Jackson:** But you see, I think the real hero...

**John Legard:** ...Because it's unique, that film.

**Pat Jackson:** ...was Jack Cardiff. And it was his first feature film and my first feature film...

**John Legard:** Right.

**Pat Jackson:** ...and the one thing I did learn...

**John Legard:** Oh, I didn't realise it was Jack Cardiff's first film.

**Pat Jackson:** ...first film, yeah. One thing I did learn from the East Coast Convoy was that I had the stomach of a horse. That it didn't matter what the sea was or what it did to the ship...

**John Legard:** Not everybody did! [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** ...it didn't make me seasick. Because the combination of trying to make a film and direct people in the lifeboat, and being seasick, would have been impossible. You just couldn't have done it.

**John Legard:** And I seem to remember Jack Cardiff wasn't a very good sailor.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh poor, poor chap suffered real agonies. And when you think of the problems in exposure that poor man had with a three-strip camera, with the light varying every single moment of the day... a reflection... you see it was awfully difficult for him, because if we were looking with the sun the sea became blue and green, if you look into the sun it became green (or the other way round, I can't remember which) but there were two. So starboard was one colour and port was another colour. Well, there was nothing you could do about that, because it was just impossible. But the problems of balancing exposure against the sky, with the light in the lifeboat was almost impossible for him. I mean, we had to give up for a while and get a generator and put arc lights in the lifeboat, if you please!

**John Legard:** Yes. I remember that comes across rather well in your book, because, obviously, if you'd had time, you'd have experimented with all this before you got your cast on location as it were. I mean, you needed... there were so many unknown factors which you didn't realise...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh...we needed six week's preparation at sea before the cast was down. But I had to find the cast! I mean, as soon as I found the cast I was almost...

**John Legard:** Because you had to... you'd committed yourself to shoot...

**Pat Jackson:** But also you see, the other thing that held us up was the fact that, there were only three cameras in the country, and one was being used on 'Henry V', the other was '[This] Happy Breed', all three were involved, and so we couldn't get the equipment. It was Technicolor that held us up those vital months. I mean, my script was ready in July, we didn't start until September, which was beginning winter.

**John Legard:** I expect there were certain times where you thought, "Oh, pity we aren't shooting this in black and white." But what a disaster that would have been! [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** Well there were times when we thought we would never get through it.

**John Legard:** Oh really? Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes. There were times when we thought, "Well honestly, the conditions are really beyond the capacity of film to record." Because it wasn't only Jack's problem, but you see, if you imagine you have a microphone cable going through the water, you have the power cable going through the water, the towing cable going through the water, the induction problems that poor old Kay Ash who was the sound recordist, was getting. So the electrical problems alone! Quite apart from the photographic problems! You know, posed an appalling amount of problems for the poor technicians. I mean, my job was just jolly simple, I mean, you just had to wait until the weather conditions...and hope to God the cast wasn't seasick...and of course they very often were, just when we were about to turn, over the gunwale they'd go!

**John Legard:** Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** And here were hardened seamen you see, who'd been at sea all their working lives, but who weren't used to the rhythm of the lifeboat, bouncing about.

**John Legard:** How long in fact did you spend filming the lifeboat scenes?

**Pat Jackson:** The lifeboat was... six months.

**John Legard:** Six months?

**Pat Jackson:** Six months. And then we were held up, you see, so often by the Navy, and the original craft they gave me just wasn't seaworthy. I wasted six weeks before I had to go and see Sir Percy Noble and say, "Unless I get a trawler from you, Sir, I can't continue." And of course I'd known the importance of trawlers, because they were all minesweeping and most of the available ones, you see, were following the Convoys to pick up survivors. And so a trawler was really... like asking for gold dust. Certainly they were all on the East Coast Convoys and they were mostly now being used more and more in the Atlantic, because the Battle of the Atlantic had reached a very, very crucial stage. Casualties were enormous, and therefore the survivor was enormous, so every available trawler was used. And I hesitated for weeks to ask him this because I knew that however important I thought the film was, it wasn't as important as saving life at sea! So this inhibited my approaching him earlier. However, I knew the film was going down the spout unless I got this trawler, so I went to see him, and he was absolutely charming, he said

"Well you must have it, of course you must have it." And he sent me one and I had it within two or three days. And then we started... but that vital two months was wasted.

**John Legard:** Hmm. But fortunately you didn't have a deadline for completion, as they do nowadays... no way could you have...

**Pat Jackson:** No, we could never have. No, we were in the hands of the Navy you see. We could only go... And then when the lifeboat was over... sequences... we had to then join the Atlantic Convoy, get on the Merchant Ship, you see, which was also playing the hero. It was the Merchant Ship that eventually picks up the lifeboat, it was the hero of the film. Could we get an English Merchantman to take us? They wouldn't take us! Not one English Merchant Ship would take us aboard, because we were a crew of six, seven... and they wouldn't take us. Said, "We haven't got the accommodation and we don't want to!" And the other problem... fortunately I found a Norwegian ship and the captain was a charming man, and when I told him that his ship was really going go - it was a lovely, a white ship - that was going to be the sort of star of the film, his face beamed and he agreed to take us. Marvellous! But there, you see, we came up against other appalling problems, because Technicolor would not allow us to use one of their three-strip cameras, there were only three in the country and they weren't going to risk it - It didn't matter about us but the camera was important! [Chuckles] So, we then had to use a Vinten with a very, very new untried stock. Thorold Dickinson has always thought that he was the first to use Monopack but in point of fact...

**John Legard:** Monopack.

**Pat Jackson:** Monopack. Which wasn't very satisfactory, but it was the only thing we could use, we had to use it.

**John Legard:** That, I suppose, was an early version of Kodachrome... of um Eastmancolor really, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah, yes it was, and it was very untried. So, anyway, that's all we could use, so there we went. And then...

**John Legard:** I seem to remember you had certain matching problems with the Monopack and the real thing...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh we did.

**John Legard:** I mean...it was OK actually, wasn't it? It worked, but if you knew about it you could recognise which was the Monopack and which was...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes. That was...honestly John! When one thinks back it was a bloody miracle the thing ever got onto the screen, because... Monopack was a very critical stock in terms of temperature. It had to get to the Labs at a certain temperature. Well, we could only send what we'd exposed from New York. Well, so that meant that the aircraft taking it to Los Angeles was going to at least stop at two aerodromes, in the temperature which would probably rise to a

hundred in the sun, and they weren't going to look after this very carefully, however refrigerated it was. In point of fact, we lost about 30 % of the Monopack.

**John Legard:** Did you? Because of the temperature?

**Pat Jackson:** Because of the temperature problems...

**John Legard:** Oh! Dear! Dear!

**Pat Jackson:** ...and a lot of the most wonderful Convoy stuff that we were shooting never came back...

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** ...lost, completely lost.

[Dave?]: What sort of affect did it have on the stock?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh... it went... magenta streaks.

[Dave?]: Oh did it? Nasty.

**Pat Jackson:** Hmm...apparently. And then, that was only one problem, which was tragic... where we weren't to know we were going to loose the stock until we got back. But when we came back from New York and the Convoy started out, we had the very difficult scenes to do, which was the battle between guns, the rear gun on the Merchantmen and the U-boat, you see. And this was the climax of the film, we had to shoot this coming back. And going out, we had eleven days of continuous thick fog, in which we couldn't shoot a foot!

**John Legard:** Oh bloody thing!

**Pat Jackson:** You couldn't see the ship's bows. So there we were, the Unit, eating like fighting cocks, because the rations on this Norwegian ship were absolutely...smorgasbord every damn meal we had, I mean we were getting liver attacks and we were becoming very petulant, no exercise... and the frustration of eleven days at sea, crawling at about eight knots in thick fog was absolutely diabolical. So, coming back we now had to do what we were... half of what we were supposed to do, shooting out. So we were under enormous pressure. And we started the first day - it was beautiful for three or four days - onto the gun platform and the Convoy made special movements so that we could fire it and gave us space and so on, and we got the Commodore's permission. And then what did we discover? That the Monopack had shrunk! An infinitesimal fraction, so that the sprockets... I suppose there was a hundredth of a millimetre out every ten feet... it was enough to jam the camera every hundred feet!

**John Legard:** Oh God!

**Pat Jackson:** So, imagine... here we came to the climax scenes with a lot of dialogue and all that we could hope for...was a hundred feet. And poor Denny Densham who was the operator for Jack had to go down, load, reload, preserve the nine hundred feet left, because it had to be used again, can it up, tape it up. Up they go onto the gun platform again, get another hundred feet in, jam, unload, reload with a new magazine, hoping... sometimes the magazine would run perhaps two minutes... And in that way we limped through... I mean it was an unending nightmare from the moment we started to shoot. I was getting bald at the time I started, I was bloody near bald at the end of it! [Laughs]

**John Legard:** [Laughs] Yeah...

**Pat Jackson:** But there it was and... in the end we limped through it and er...

**John Legard:** So, yes... so you spent six months with the lifeboat, but how long did it take altogether?

**Pat Jackson:** From the time I did the research on the East Coast Convoy to the time it was shown at Warner's, it was a two year job.

**John Legard:** Two years? Yes...

**Pat Jackson:** Including the writing, the script, the casting, editing... because I edited it as well.

**John Legard:** If they'd known that it was going to take two years when they first suggested it, Sir Percy Noble... would they have... do you think...?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh dear, Old Boy...that's....

**John Legard:** I mean, it's a hypothetical question, but it would have been tragic if you'd said something like "It's going to take a long time..."

**Pat Jackson:** I suppose, yes, I suppose in hindsight, you see... it is the, sort of, official record isn't it - of the Battle of the Atlantic? And I see it's now on tape and, you know people buy it and so on. I think, what is fascinating about it, and I come back to my old plea of the use and the method of the non-actor... it won't date any more than 'Nanook of the North' will date. It dates if you've got Larry Olivier in it or Cary Grant, because you can tell... "Oh yes, he must have made that...oh yes, he's quite a young man there..." As you've never seen these people before or will never see them again, it doesn't matter whether you see them in 2001, it is dateless for that reason, and it is a record for all time.

**John Legard:** Hmm. But obviously when you started, you assumed probably that it would be out in the cinemas a year later or something...?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes. I mean we were innocents going to the slaughter. We hadn't the faintest idea what we were embarking upon. We would never be attempting...well, now of course you can do it with tapes so much more easily. But you see, to put a three-strip camera, don't forget it was damn nearly as big as the average refrigerator, and it wasn't until we'd worked out methods of moving it around the lifeboat that we could hope to do more than about one shot every time we were towed out of the harbour, you couldn't move the damn thing! You fixed it for one set-up and that was it! You had no means of fixing it, it was too heavy! And there weren't clamps, and this was a lifeboat, bouncing around, the damn thing would fall over! And then we developed, fortunately we developed, an idea of having portable rails built in the lifeboat, which screwed onto the thwarts. So that we could then, you see, put this on a tray along these rails that we'd bolted onto the thwarts so that it then became a portable camera, and you could move it port and starboard, fore and aft.

**John Legard:** That's where you really needed the pre-shooting time, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh! Of course it was! But the Unit wasn't big enough, you see, we were tiny. All the available people were out making their own films, there wasn't...it needed a scratch unit with Jack Cardiff down there. Jack was on some other film, I mean we just had to cope with it as it came along. I mean the inventiveness of my chippy, Harry Tupper - wonderful, wonderful man. One owes the making of a film as much to the head carpenter, Harry Tupper, the master carpenter...

**John Legard:** It comes over very well in your book.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh, wonderful, wonderful man. All of them... and the prop man... they were a wonderful...

**John Legard:** Harry Tupper, yes he was outstanding.

**Pat Jackson:** Harry Tupper was the Master Carpenter and, dear old Charlie Squires the greatest prop man ever. Wonderful crew! God! One was lucky to have those men. And when one looks, you see, people think about the glamour of show business... there isn't much glamour about show business, but the glamour, if there be any, is the...

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Tape 2, Side3]

**Pat Jackson:** Well, I was just, sort of, mentioning what I thought was the glamour of show business. I find very little glamour in show business, but if there be glamour, I think it comes from the fact that, as I was saying, you know, there are forty or fifty different people, different crafts, different walks of life... all concentrating on the one goal which is to get the film made

somehow or other. And the unity, not only amongst the film unit, the unity of purpose and the deep relationships that last throughout that, which carries through all, or surmounts all the problems that beset this united fraternity, is magnificent. I mean it's a wonderful thing to experience that, because if ever there were difficulties and a unit coping with them, by God that unit had them on 'Western Approaches', and the way they coped with it and just would not allow themselves to get discouraged was wonderful. And that was quite an unforgettable experience of course, and no other film has measured up to it, and though working in Hollywood and going on the floor in Hollywood at Culver City was a totally different experience of a different kind, it was nothing like the magic of a unit coping with this sort of problem...and in the end, triumphing. And when I look back you see, John, and I realise the contributions of the Master Carpenter and the contribution of Gerry Bryant and Charlie Squires the prop men, getting us something that would just shelter, so that we weren't just standing around the dock wall... these sort of contributions that make the whole thing, in the end work. That was extraordinary.

**John Legard:** Can you just stop just for a second, just for a moment... I've got to turn off...

**Pat Jackson:** I can't remember what we...

**John Legard:** Well, you'd finished on that last bit, hadn't you... about the aspect of the performances and the whole thing... and you were going to get onto the post production now, on 'Western Approaches'...?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh the cutting, yes. Well...my dear old sister Joss [Jocelyn Jackson] ...

**John Legard:** Yes, I was going to say, of course, Joss was deeply involved in that wasn't she? Right from the beginning...

**Pat Jackson:** Yes she was, she was assistant to the appointed editor... no point in mentioning... it doesn't matter... And er, when I came back...

**John Legard:** Oh I remember who that editor was...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh, well it doesn't matter anyway....

**John Legard:** [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** ...and I came back from New York and I had a look at this assembly, I practically burst into tears!

**John Legard:** Oh really?

**Pat Jackson:** It was absolutely appalling, and I can remember coming out of Theatre One...

**John Legard:** At Pinewood.

**Pat Jackson:** ... and saying to Joss, "My God! There isn't a film here! It doesn't make any sense, it's awful! I thought we had some quite good stuff, but this is terrible!" And old Joss, you know, she was a real old pistol shoot and we used to call her Margery Mayer [correct?], not for nothing! I mean she...

**John Legard:** Yes, she was splendid...

**Pat Jackson:** She shot from the hip didn't she?

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** She said: "Don't talk such a lot of balls!" [Laughs] "It's all there, it's all in the can somewhere, the silly bugger didn't know what he was doing. We'll have to start again, we'll have to start again." And so I said, "Right," and so on. She said, "Yeah, we'll have to print it up." So, in short, we got the whole rushes printed up again.

**John Legard:** Did you print up the whole lot again?

**Pat Jackson:** The whole lot, in black and white.

**John Legard:** In black and white, of course, yes, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And there were eight reels of it, and we tore the whole lot up and started all over again.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And old Joss and I re-edited that film from top to bottom. And then... and then all right and then... Muir Mathieson saw the final cut... Who was going to compose the music? "Very important..." and he thought for a moment and he said, "You know, I think the chap we want has just had a nervous breakdown, but he's over it now. I think he's got this quality that I think this film needs, it's a sort of curious ethereal quality he can get, and his name's Clifton Parker. I'll get in touch, get him to come down and have a look." So Clifton Parker came down and I met him, charming, delightful, sensitive face and a charming man. He had a look at the film, didn't say much. And we went out on the lot and we walked around, and he didn't say anything very much. Then he stopped and he looked at me and he said, "Pat, I think I've got it, I think I've got it. If only I had a piano, I could tell you what I want to do."

**John Legard:** Looking for a piano...

**Pat Jackson:** So I said, "I've got a piano, it so happens by the grace of God I've got a piano, I've got a little Broadwood in my office - come along." Well you won't believe this, he sat down and he played the theme of 'Western Approaches' straight off, that was ten minutes after he'd seen the film.

**John Legard:** That's amazing.



**Pat Jackson:** That's quite astonishing, isn't it? And, I gather that...

**John Legard:** Was he able to explain that...

**Pat Jackson:** No. Just like, my getting the idea! You see? It's exactly the same, except that he didn't quite sweat...he sweated on it for ten minutes and he got it! [Chuckles] And Dennis, I saw Dennis Swann the other day... he told me that EMI have just put the tape of his score out, and which I must get... EMI have recorded it...

**John Legard:** Oh really?

**Pat Jackson:** Yep, the original score. So this must be got!

**John Legard:** Good news.

**Pat Jackson:** And then when he came to the recording, I mean that... barely a tune, that wonderful... I think almost as great, the title music of 'Western Approaches' as Vaughan Williams' for Mickey [Powell]'s '49th Parallel'

**John Legard:** Indeed, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** They're both marvellous melodies, and that... when that melody comes back at the end, when the survivors of the lifeboat are climbing aboard...

**John Legard:** It's a very simple tune, isn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** ...it was his music that...

**John Legard:** A very simple tune, its sort of modal, isn't it? Minor key...

**Pat Jackson:** And it was that tune over the final shots that produced the tears in the audience, not the story, it was the music of Cliff, and Cliff's contribution was enormous to that film.

**John Legard:** Well it was inspired by having seen it with you.

**Pat Jackson:** Well then, of course, a very strange thing happened, because then we dubbed it and showed double-headed to the Ministry of Information Films Distribution, and they didn't quite know what to make of it. They weren't at all sure whether they'd got, by this time seventy thousand pounds worth of value on the screen...and, um, they said, "Well I think we must get some advice on this." And it so happened that the Honorary Film Advisor to the Ministry of Information of Films Division at that time was Sir Alexander Korda.

**John Legard:** Oh was he? Yes... I didn't... hmm... interesting.

**Pat Jackson:** Ah hmm. So, er... he was duly appointed to come down the following Wednesday to have a look at this film. So dear old Joss and I went through the cutting copy... it was still a cutting copy, you hadn't got a married print, you see.

**John Legard:** Those old fashioned cement joins, and build-up and all the rest?

**Pat Jackson:** That's right! And awful every, every joint you went through, we had to...twenty four hours...

**John Legard:** Absolute nightmare! You didn't even have Sellotape to stick them down in those days!

**Pat Jackson:** No! Just old...you know...the old cement stuff, the acetone. So I suppose there must have been, God knows, three or four thousand joins, I suppose, in these reels.

**John Legard:** I'm sure!

**Pat Jackson:** And then, we really reached. We sweated that night, whether...God, the bloody cutting copy would stand up? There we were, at Theatre Two, Pinewood...

**John Legard:** Oh, you showed it at Pinewood? Yes...

**Pat Jackson:** Pinewood, yes... Theatre Two

**John Legard:** At least you'd got Dougie Smith to keep an eye on it for you.

**Pat Jackson:** Well exactly, dear old Dougie Smith. And... there we were, and this funny character appeared, wearing a rather battered trilby hat and a rather dirty mackintosh! And I was on the front row looking up at old Dougie and old Dougie, you know, that lovely smile and he was putting his thumb up.

**John Legard:** Yes...

**Pat Jackson:** And then I heard, [PJ imitates Korda's accent] "My name is Korda, I have come to see a film called 'Western Approaches'. I am ready when you are please. I will sit here, just leave me alone." So... Joss and I sat in the back row and old...

**John Legard:** So he came on his own did he?

**Pat Jackson:** He came on his own. And old Stewart McAllister joined us at the back, for some reason, I don't think he'd heard he was coming, and old Stewie was in there. And the lights dimmed the curtains parted, and the first reel came up. And Joss and I sat at the back there, hearing these joins going through the projector like a train going over rather maladjusted points, thinking, "My God, there's going to be a crash in a minute!"

**John Legard:** [Chuckling] Yes...

**Pat Jackson:** But by the grace of God, the cutting copy stood up to it and, er...the lights came up and the curtains closed, and this figure grew out of the front row, looked round for somebody there, so then I stood up. He very accusingly said, "Who made this?" So I thought, "My God, I'm for it now!" So I said, "I did, Sir Alex." And then er...

**John Legard:** What did he say? Go on, tell us!

**Pat Jackson:** Well no... he was very flattering. He said, "You are coming with me, I am putting you under contract."

**John Legard:** Just like that?

**Pat Jackson:** Just like that. And er, that was the beginning of something rather unfortunate... however that's another story.

**John Legard:** So how long after that screening was the film shown? I mean that was presumably, then it was...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh I can't remember, I've got the date of it somewhere. I think it was '44, the Warner's somewhere...

**John Legard:** Yes, it did come out at the end of '44, hmm... I seem to remember it started about, just before... just about the same time as Henry V, because I remember the film critics were showing... describing, or doing their reviews of both films in the same week...I think I've got Dilys Powell's review somewhere of 'Western Approaches'.

**Pat Jackson:** But the thing John, that is interesting, you see, which supports my permanent plea for that type of film making, because - and I say this, not simply because I had something to do with the film - it was nominated for an Oscar, as the 'best film from any source', which speaks highly for the non-actor. Now, if non-actors can suddenly appear and be nominated for an Academy Award, there is something in that system of film making, and we can't do it now... because of the union trouble. So that it means that a vital form, a powerful form of expression on the screen, is denied it, which is tragic. And not only that, the way in which a nation expresses itself, by its people, directly to the screen is lost. Because these people spoke, don't forget, not as I thought they would speak, but as they spoke themselves. Our scriptwriters do not always know how our people speak. And so that, that vital, direct link of expression has gone, and it's tragic.

**John Legard:** I suppose the nearest you get to that nowadays is... I mean, Cin♦ma V♦rit♦ did sort of attempt that, didn't it? You know, Ricky Leacock and his company, Pennebaker, and they did all this hand-held stuff and they went in on people being themselves. But the trouble with that system was that they ended up with an enormous amount of material and the problem was in the editing and they eventually got more or less drowned by it.

**Pat Jackson:** You see...if...[coughs]

**John Legard:** But I mean, some of that, the best of that stuff was brilliant.

**Pat Jackson:** You see, it's being done all the time, of course it's being done! The direct interview, you see it all the time on the 'box', of course you do. But... this is the constant inter-cutting of one piece of an interview, then you get the end of the interview stuck in after about four different inter-cuts... this is nothing whatever to do with drama, this is journalism! This is screen journalism!

**John Legard:** Journalism, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** ...With the interviewer and the interviewee - all splendid, I mean it gives you an impression of the subject under examination, but it isn't a dramatic representation of that subject, which is what I'm on about...

**John Legard:** Yup...understood, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** ...and that is the point. And I'm sick of this endless succotash of interviews and...

**John Legard:** The Talking Head thing is appalling.

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah...it's a crashing bore.

**John Legard:** Yes, it's a denial of cinema anyway, isn't it. It's a sort of contradiction, because it's anti-cinema, it's endlessly static whereas cinema is about pictures and characterisation and...what you did. But I suppose there are other examples of yours... of 'Western Approaches'- type shooting, I'm sure there must be. I can't think of any...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes...er...'Kes' was one...I mean it was much more of a cast of course, but it was the same method, of course it was.

**John Legard:** That was partly professional wasn't it? Partly professional actors and partly amateurs.

**Pat Jackson:** Yes well you see, that's splendid because...if I may mention one of my other films, which was a mixture of the professional and the amateur actor - in 'White Corridors' where we had Godfrey Tearle, Googie Withers playing against the 'gunner' of 'Western Approaches', who was the porter of the hospital. He was a non-actor, and old seaman, playing against Googie Withers and I say it, took the scene from her. So there was the perfect melange.

**John Legard:** I must have another look at 'White Corridors' obviously.

**Pat Jackson:** But there you are...and with the marvellous (dear me, who's the partner who always played with Naunton Wayne? - Basil Radford!). Basil Radford has the running gag with dear old Hills, who was the 'gunner' in 'Western Approaches'. The light touches in 'White Corridors' which was the running gag I wrote in, was held and played beautifully by Basil Radford against the non-actor, dear old Griff, of 'Western Approaches'.

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** Which is a fascinating mixture...blend.

**John Legard:** So what happened? 'Western Approaches'- you finished that at the end of 1944 and, I seem to remember that you didn't stay on at Crown all that... oh no, you did work on... I remember you made a film about a heart operation, from what I remember...

**Pat Jackson:** 'Patent Ductus' no that came quite by chance, and Joss gets all the credit for that. Because, we were living in a flat in Uxbridge and...there was a very famous surgeon called Libero Fatti, a South African, living in the flat below, and we got to know him quite well. And he came up to me one day and said, "Pat, I don't know whether this is the slightest interest to you, but we are going to do an operation in England for the very first time called patent ductus arteriosis." I said, "oh yes, what the hell's that?" And he said, "well, it's an operation, which happens very rarely, the incidence is about one in three thousand. What, in point of fact happens, to try and put it in lay terms for you, is that at the moment of birth, the child at the moment of birth, cuts off from the circulation of its mother and creates its own circulation by stopping automatically at the top of the heart, a duct, and it remains patent when there is a slight mal-birth. In other words, the duct does not automatically close and remains patent... that means to say it remains operative. Therefore, the two bloods, the red and the blue, get mixed in the left ventricle of the heart, creating what is called 'factory murmur', and that, in the end, produces deterioration of the arteries and means usually death at about the age of nineteen." And he said, "My job is to dissect the heart, get a suture under the duct and tie it off and close it, then the blood circulation becomes normal." He said, "would this be of interest?" I said, "Well, Dear Old Boy, I've no idea...we can try." So I went rushing back to dear old Basil Wright, who then was, I think, leading drama.

**John Legard:** Yes, Basil was then in charge of drama.

**Pat Jackson:** I think so. He said, "Well, crikey! Yes! Well, we'll get it through somehow, Pat. Yes, we'll get a library allowance or something." So Harry Waxman was going to photograph it for me. So we rigged up all this tubular over the operating theatre and we did it at Hillingdon - the famous centre there. So, the great day came, and the strange thing was that because we had a job to do - this was not a pretty operation to watch, because the child's chest was ripped right open, straight down, the thoracic cage was just opened as though it was a leg of mutton and then the heart laid bare - But I was looking behind the camera with Harry, just looking at it quite clinically. And then the commentary was so strange because Libero commentated as though it was a football match...

**John Legard:** You were recording the commentary as you went along?

**Pat Jackson:** As we went along, it was quite extraordinary. I mean he'd say, "Ah I'm up against a bit of gummage here...oh this is very, very annoying. Send for Sister please... yes... I've got to go rather carefully here because I hadn't expected this - this is much tougher than I thought Blast it! I don't seem to be able to come through here! I'll try the other angle, just a second...just to see whether... No, no (it's very, very annoying, this is). How's the patient doing? Is she all right? Oh good, that's fine, yes..."

**John Legard:** [Chuckling] Is the patient still alive by any chance?

**Pat Jackson:** "Well now...let's try that other thing...yes, that bit there Sister, let's try that. Yes...ah, that's better! Ah, ah! Good! I'm through, that's fine! Right! Well! Give me a suture Sister please... tie it at the end there, that's right...now, round...that's it good... Now, Pat, are you recording this? Good! Now look, I'm going to tie it off, just temporarily...you can hear this murmur can't you? You listen...." "Boom boom boom... boom boom boom boom... boom boom boom...." "You've got that, haven't you, you've recorded that?" "Yes we have Libero." "Good! Fine! Now listen to this... I'm slowly tightening, you see? I'm slowly tightening, can you hear? It's going... now listen to this..." "Boom boom boom boom...boom boom.... Boom...boom...boom...boom..." "Got that? Right! Now I'm going to untie..." "Boom... boom... boom... boom boom boom...boom boom boom... boom, boom boom... boom boom boom... boom boom boom..." "Now that is the factory murmur, that's what we're stopping for good and all." He tied it off forever and the heartbeat came back, you see. Now, what was the interesting thing about that is that, I was fascinated to see that at 'Guy's' the other day, 'Patent Ductus Arteriosus' is being shown. It is part of the surgical training of students. Now, you see... I said the incidence is one in three thousand (about), or maybe four thousand, which meant that the average GP, when he heard the factory murmur for the first time, hadn't the faintest idea what it was and wouldn't have known how to diagnose it. Now, you've only got to hear that once and you know exactly what the problem is. And so to that extent, Libero's film...

**John Legard:** It had done a very important job.

**Pat Jackson:** ...was an important job diagnostically for students. And the credit of that film goes entirely to my sister, because it was she who... I then went to America and wasn't able to finish it, the control of the diagrams, which are those helped by the physician, was organised by Joss entirely, the science film. So the real credit should go to Joss, but the credits were arranged and I didn't know about it, otherwise she would have got it, and by the time I came back, I'd got it. But it was really Joss' film, my sister's, not mine. I'm merely responsible for getting the camera there, but the actual organisation and the editing of it was Joss.

**John Legard:** Hmm. Because I remember, that was actually... it was shot on 35mm wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah.

**John Legard:** Because most people shot everything on 35mm in those days, there was none of this 16mm.

**Pat Jackson:** But it was very strange, because...

**John Legard:** ...and it was 35mm black and white, of course, wasn't it?

**Pat Jackson:** Black and white, yeah. And then the next time I saw - and this is the strange thing - when I was a witness of a operation, because Googie, before we did 'White Corridors' wanted to see an operation done, as she was going to play a nursing sister...

**John Legard:** Oh right, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** ...and we then saw a caesarian - which is for the layman a very nasty thing to see. And Googie stood there, you know, totally unperturbed, and I was feeling very sick, and I had to leave the theatre, put my head down between my knees or I would have passed out, just like a first year medical student, you know. Horrible thing to see. Because I hadn't a job to do, I was just watching, you see. But, Googie - it was water off a duck's back to her. But... then what happened....?

**John Legard:** So that really it was his idea, the doctor, who said to you, "I've got this"... sort of thing...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes! And I said, "Well, we'll see what we can do" you see.

**John Legard:** I mean, it must have been comparatively early, there can't have been all that many operation films that had been shot up until that time?

**Pat Jackson:** No, I think it was the first of them.

**John Legard:** I know that the plastic surgery, that chap Stamford...

**Pat Jackson:** Well I did one with Harold Gillies earlier than that, down at Park Prewitt in Basingstoke...

**John Legard:** Oh did you?

**Pat Jackson:** Hmm... with a child being given a new chin, when I saw Sir Harold Gillies at work...and then somebody else...Sainsbury I think, did one with Harold Gillies afterwards. Because Gillies got bitten with the idea of films - that he could pass on a lot of his skills, you see.

**John Legard:** Sorry, you say that was done before 'Patent Ductus'?

**Pat Jackson:** I did Gillies before 'Patent Ductus'. I've forgotten what that was called now. And then, you see, coming back to the Korda.

**John Legard:** Then of course, and I'll get back to this, so Korda said he'd offer you a contract?

**Pat Jackson:** He wanted me to, immediately, to make a film called...(which I'd longed to make)...called 'Bricks Upon Dust' - Paul Tabori. Marvellous story about children living in the ruins of a blitzed town, which would have been a wonderful film to make, but...

**John Legard:** Well, there was a film made, wasn't there? About children living in a blitzed town?

**Pat Jackson:** I don't know whether it was 'Bricks Upon Dust'. I don't think it was a Paul Tabori's film?

**John Legard:** Oh no...I'm thinking of the one that Phil Leacock made, called...

**Pat Jackson:** 'Magic Garden'?

**John Legard:** Called...er, 'The Innocent Sinners'. That was probably a different story.

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah...and at the same time, if you please [chuckles], Basil asked me to make a film on the Beveridge Report!

**John Legard:** Sounds a bit dodgy!

**Pat Jackson:** So, I didn't feel...

**John Legard:** (oh! there was a film made, wasn't there? Yeah.)

**Pat Jackson:** ...that I could walk, I could just suddenly resign from the Crown Film Unit when a nice, better offer came along, having been given this final assignment, because I felt at least I should do that; it was the only war work I'd done, after all was said and done. And the war wasn't quite over, so I thought, "Well, I must try this." So that was another bastard thing to try and do. But I wrote, I did... a dramatic version script of it called 'Now or Never' which was highly controversial and very, very left wing indeed. And the extraordinary thing was that the M of I under the National Government, approved the film and approved the money to do it - 1945. Which I thought, "Well, that's really - all honour and glory to the National Government, because it was the combined National Government still - this was before the election you see. It was Churchill still...

**John Legard:** Churchill was still in charge.

**Pat Jackson:** Churchill was still in power. And I thought, "Well, this is hardly a Tory piece of pamphleteering that I'm doing here." It was very, very radical indeed, and it was a story film, and I thought, "Right, fine, go ahead." Then the election came and, we know, Labour got in... and would not approve the money for...

**John Legard:** Ironically.

**Pat Jackson:** ...'Now or Never'. And the reason was that Herbert Morrison, who was Home Secretary, I think at the time... was frightened that the Labour party would be accused of using film as Goebbels used it for political propaganda purposes, and he was not going to lay himself open to being attacked on that score. So the film was never made, I had wasted six years of my time... [sic - should it be six months?]

**John Legard:** How far had you got, er...?

**Pat Jackson:** Shooting script.



**John Legard:** Oh, you'd got to the shooting script? Yes, I see... yes, and the money was there, and so on...

**Pat Jackson:** ...and, by which time Korda had been sacked from Metro, I was under contract to them, and they wouldn't release me. And no films were being made in England, so there I sat on my backside and no British company would use me because I was under contract to Metro. They'd think, "I'm merely building up the reputation of the Metro"...that's no good. So I then took myself to Germany...

**John Legard:** Oh, we're now talking 1945, end of 1945?

**Pat Jackson:** 1945, we're coming into 1946. And I felt quite sure that the really dramatic story, contemporary dramatic story to be told was in the British zone of Germany. So I got Bernard [?surname?] to go as a British correspondent. I got Metro to release me (they were still paying me, of course) to send me out, and I took old Pennington Richards' 'Hillman Minx', which I bought from him, and went across to Europe. And got to the Dutch frontier and Aachen was about two miles away, and those two miles took me three hours to do because the road was so blitzed. And, I then got into Aachen and the Town Hall was one of the few buildings that hadn't been blitzed, a magnificent building. I got in, (I'd already parked my car) and the German sentry came to attention... brought his arms down with a crash, I thought "God Almighty! What on earth is he doing? Oh it's me! Oh yes, I'm wearing a khaki uniform!" I haven't even got a defence medal! I've an absolutely barren breast of non-medals, non-decoration! [Chuckling] And I got into the foyer of the Town Hall and looked up at this vast board of offices. Because I had to report to the Town Major, you see, with the new correspondent that had come into his zone - into his area - he was the Christ Major[?] of this particular town...

**John Legard:** Christ Major[?]? [transcriber couldn't get any closer than this!]

**Pat Jackson:** Christ Major[?]. So, I heard a voice behind saying, "Can I help you?" So I looked round, it was a Major in the Tank Corps. I said, "Oh that's very kind of you. Yes, I'm looking to report to the Town Major, I'm looking to see where his office is." So he said, "Oh, he's a member of my Mess, come and have lunch with me and I'll take you to him." I said, "Oh, that's very kind of you." He said, "Have you got a car?" I said, "Yes I've got a 'Hillman'." He said, "A 'Hillman'? You must be mad! Leave it there, at once! You won't last ten kilometres on these roads. Come in my little 'Volkswagen.'" So we got into this little 'Volkswagen' and got into gear and off we went. We didn't say anything for a moment, then he said, "Do you know, I had the most extraordinary experience this morning?" I said, "Oh have you Sir, what's that?" He said, "Well I've just seen a German, and the last time I saw him was on the eve of the Battle of Alamein." I said, "Well that's very interesting, how did that come about?" He said, "It came about like this...my tank crew had been killed and the tank was still going and I was absolutely parched for water, I wouldn't have lasted another two or three hours. And I came up onto a corral where a lot of old British tanks had been knocked out and I was just looking for water, and what I didn't know was, there was a German Panzer which I saw below. I didn't know that the German Panzer commander had been looking for petrol. When he saw me appear, he pops into one of the British tanks, and I didn't know if he had me covered, of course, but he could have shot me at any time. Then I saw the Panzer and I went in, thinking there might be some water there. I got into his tank

and I heard a voice shout, "Hi there!" and I looked up, couldn't see anybody - a nice English voice! And suddenly his head appeared out of my tank. And I said, "What the bloody hell are you doing in my tank?" He said, "What the hell are you doing in mine?" [Laughs] "So, we sort of thought, well Christ, the war must go on! So we had to take two or three pot shots at each other, fortunately missed and then he said, "Look, this is rather silly isn't it?" I said, "Why don't we have a little truce?" So we arranged a little truce. I said, "Well how do I know if I put my revolver down that you're not going to put yours down?" He said, "Well same here! How do I know you won't?" "So, on one, two three, we'll drop"... so one, two, three...I dropped and he did. As the clatter of the revolvers dropped, we then met in the middle of the sand there, and he saluted, and I saluted and he said his name and I gave him my name. He sat down and we had a little chat, and he was a charming man. He was a graduate of Oxford, spoke perfect English. And of course he was part of the elite corps that was coming to invade England of course and would have then taken over the administration of England, been almost bilingual." "So we had a long chat. Then he said, "Look, your chap Montgomery, he's no match for our fellow Rommel, this will all be over, you know... he'll have him in the blasted, bloody battle... he'll have him over in about three or four days. But... look, give me your address and when we come to England, occupy your country, I'll see if I can do the best I can for you and your family." So I said, "Well, that's very nice of you, I appreciate the gesture, but I don't think it's going to be quite like that. It's going to take us a bit longer than you think it's going to take you, but I think it'll be three of four years probably. But, nevertheless, give me your address and I'll do the best I can for you." Blow me down, I saw him today!" Then he didn't say anything, I said, "Are you going to honour that agreement?" He said, "Oh yes, of course." I never saw him again. But that was the basis of the drama, which I wrote about the British zone and it was a fascinating, fascinating story of what was going on, because you had this extraordinary situation, do you see, of two armies who shortly before their duty was to kill each other and now the British Army's duty was to save every German that they could. And had it not been for the British Army, there would have been cholera, there would have been the plague, there would have been famine, there would have been every conceivable disaster.

**John Legard:** Like what's not happening in Baghdad at the moment?

**Pat Jackson:** Exactly! And, you see, the British Army had the worst zone in Germany, because it had the most highly industrial zone of Europe, the Ruhr, Krupps, all these enormous factories absolutely smashed to smithereens - drainage, light, the power, all gone! So there was a tremendous drama going on and this story...told it. But, I showed it to MGM, it was practically useless, it was of no interest to them! Not the slightest interest. There was one producer in England who read it: Wintle. Julian Wintle.

**John Legard:** Julian Wintle.

**Pat Jackson:** He said, "This is a tremendous story!" He said, "We must try and get this made. Will they release you to do it?" I said, "Yes, I think so." He thought it was a tremendous story. Of course it was! I mean it was one of the great historical stories. The compassion from 'kill or be killed' to 'save humanity' - I mean, it was a tremendous...

**John Legard:** Yes, lovely story, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** ...marvellous story! But...no! No, the British film industry couldn't see it. If they could see it, they didn't want to. So, it's a tragic medium in many ways in which to try and work. To try and work... it's a tragic, tragic medium. I mean, God! I'm only one of many, many, many people who have found the frustration of this game... really very trying.

**John Legard:** It was a particularly bad moment I think when...yeah, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** It wouldn't have cost a lot of money, you see!

**John Legard:** No, quite, no...because it sounded like a sort of fairly small cast and...

**Pat Jackson:** No, no, it wouldn't have cost any money at all. I mean, when you think that the old Crown Film Unit was doing 'Diary for Timothy' in which Humphrey Jennings was in exactly the same part of Germany that I was... admittedly it wasn't a drama but it was... it was there, all to be seen and picked up. Oh, what we would have recorded for history, I mean...oh!

**John Legard:** Yes. There were one or two films made, I think the Italians...er, there were one or two films made in Europe by European companies at that time...

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, there was a jolly good one, um, that very nearly got it, with refugees going over the mountains... oh, I can't remember what it was called now...

**John Legard:** Yes, Rossellini and people like that.

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes, but there was an English one... an English cast in it... oh it doesn't matter anyway.

**John Legard:** Missed opportunity, goodness.

**Pat Jackson:** Well it's...you see I think the real problem is - the obvious problem is - the cinema is an industry, it's not an art. It has to make money, otherwise it doesn't tick over...

**John Legard:** It's commerce, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** It's commerce, and the artistic integrity and the content of a story is so often at loggerheads with the commercial interests, which have to apply if the industry is going to tick over.

**John Legard:** Right.

**Pat Jackson:** But it's very difficult to get the synthesis between the artistic endeavour and integrity, which can be in harmony and in synchronisation with the commercial values, and the two are generally in conflict and there's only one that goes to the wall and that is the artistic integrity. And so all too often you are left with the ingredients, which you find distasteful and don't want to make.

**John Legard:** Of course, it was particularly a shame that that film didn't work, because at that time film-going was at its peak wasn't it? I mean this was... with the Rank Organisation getting underway and making enormous numbers of films, and a lot of those films now that you see, they're dead ducks aren't they? I mean, they simply haven't lasted, they've dated so much. They weren't particularly good in the first place, quite a number of them...were...

**Pat Jackson:** You see, it happened even later. I come back now... I've finished with Hollywood and I've come back.

**John Legard:** Oh yes, can you tell us a little about....?

**Pat Jackson:** I'll come back to that...

**John Legard:** Yeah, sorry, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** But er...when I joined Balcon, it was absolutely charming and I was going to bring him the Tirpitz story, but he thought it was a bit too expensive for him to undertake...

**John Legard:** Sorry, you? ...yeah....

**Pat Jackson:** We were going to story and I had done a treatment on the Tirpitz story, but by the time he's analysed it and realised it was a bit bigger than he thought he wanted to undertake he didn't do it and they did it at Pinewood. Then he said, "Well what do you want to do Pat?" And I said, "Well I'd like to go to Canada, Mick." He said, "Why do you want to go to Canada?" And I said, "Well I have a feeling in my water that it is the last great frontier country left for the white man, apart from the outback in Australia... where we will get the ingredients of the contemporary western without the heavy... the enemy will be the elements and the distances." And I said, "You see, there's a fascinating statistic, Mick, I've just discovered. And that is that between the years of 1935 until 1938, 90 % of the world's airfreight has been carried over Canada... now why? It's been carried over Canada by the bush pilots who are delivering capital goods into the north west territories up into the Yukon, opening up... the Gunner Mine opening up these new mines. And there's some fascinating stories, there must be... the trappers and these adventurers still out there." And he thought that sounded interesting. I said, "We will do the contemporary western, Mick, and we will find a new subject matter for the British screen. We're getting short of subject matter, we could do with some real adventure stories of adventurous people, it will be a living ingredient which we could well do with." He thought it was a good idea. So, I went over and I tracked through Canada, I came back four months later.

**John Legard:** Did you? Four months stuck there?

**Pat Jackson:** I was out there.

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** And I had two stories. One that I scripted for him right away, which he liked very much. And this you will hardly believe... he had to get some dollars, obviously. By this, I'm

talking about '57. We go up to see the Treasury, who have turned down his request to release dollars that his films are earning. Can you imagine? The British Treasury will not release the dollars! So he said, "Well there we are Pat, we can't go ahead." I said, "Mick, you are Sir Michael Balcon, you're not going to take this sitting down, surely? You're going to fight this aren't you?" And he said, "Oh yes Pat, I suppose I am, yes, yes... I suppose so. Well, I'd better go and see them, come with me." So we went up, we went up to see somebody at the Treasury. Not what it should have been, the Chief Secretary of the Treasury but somebody obviously less important.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And they were absolutely adamant. They said, "No, no... we've got a terrible sterling crisis on... we can't possibly afford to convert any sterling at the moment into dollars... even though your film... I'm very sorry Sir Michael, it's quite out of the question."

**John Legard:** So...didn't go high enough, obviously.

**Pat Jackson:** Didn't go high enough.

**John Legard:** I'm surprised at him.

**Pat Jackson:** Well, there it was and, it was never made. The script is still there, which I bought from him. I've got two magnificent adventure stories from Canada, waiting to be made, fully scripted. So, you're not buying a novel that you've got to pay the rights on and then employ a scriptwriter to - we all know what would happen to that. You know, you can employ a scriptwriter for four months on God knows what salary and he comes out with absolutely nothing! Nothing viable at all! Here, it's a take it or leave it, you either like or you don't, you haven't spent a penny!

**John Legard:** No.

**Pat Jackson:** There is a curious... I can't understand it....

**John Legard:** What year... this was Michael Balcon...er...

**Pat Jackson:** That would have been about 1956, '57.

**John Legard:** '56, '57... but this was after... this was when he was... after Ealing was it? Or is Ealing still going then?

**Pat Jackson:** It's still going... just before the break up of Ealing.

**John Legard:** Oh right.

**Pat Jackson:** And then when it broke up, I bought the story material from him.

**John Legard:** Ah yes.

**Pat Jackson:** So I've got the rights.

**John Legard:** Hmm, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** But um, very, very disheartening, in a way.

**John Legard:** Well I should think so! I mean, heavens above, you'd spent several months there anyway and you got two very interesting....

**Pat Jackson:** Well yes, one felt one had really struck gold, because it's teeming, this story material... absolutely teeming with... the Yukon is one of the gold mines for film makers, it's full of the most extraordinary material. Oh, they're a different breed of people, you see... Well I haven't been there for twenty five, thirty years now... the population influx has changed. I mean I was in Saskatchewan which was totally Anglo-Saxon, it's now... I think the majority are now German.

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** Hmm. The majority of the population of Saskatchewan is German.

**John Legard:** Yes. So anyway well, you went a bit forward there didn't you? We haven't heard about you actually setting off for Los Angeles. That was under the MGM aegis, yup.

**Pat Jackson:** Under MGM, yes. Yes well, that was full of problems. Because when I got to Hollywood...

**John Legard:** Had you already got a film lined up?

**Pat Jackson:** No, oh no. I married... and went out to America, was married, and they sent me to old Ben Goetz.

**John Legard:** Ben Goetz?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, who was, you know, a nice old bubbling old chap really, a sort of garage attendant, really at Elstree you see, and they were doing nothing. So he said, "Well it would be a good thing for you to go to Hollywood, go to Culver City and see how you get on, you see.

**John Legard:** Because you were under contract anyway? So you...

**Pat Jackson:** Under contract. So, I go there and I arrive at Culver City... unfortunately I'd broken my leg very, very badly and my hip was in plaster, so I limped up the Irving Thalberg steps, which is like a Greek temple, you know, about forty five of these bloody marble steps. And, get up there and there's old Ben Goetz to greet me. He said, "Hello Pat." [P J imitates American accent] He said, "Nice to see ya, boy. We've got an idea that it would be a good thing

for you to watch Sam Wood directing 'Command Decision' going on the floor very soon, in fact tomorrow. Do you think you can hop in there on your crutches?" I said, "I'd love to, Ben, yes I would love to." So I watched old Sam Wood making 'Command Decision' with Clark Gable...

**John Legard:** I remember that, it was Clark Gable, yes.

**Pat Jackson:** ...who was a charming man. Because what was amusing was that it didn't matter how great the star or how enormous his salary, he was exactly, and treated himself exactly as though he were a Civil Servant. He had a job to do, he was never late, always 8.30 on the morning. And Clark Gable had what they called a 5 o'clock shadow; not that he was growing a beard at 5 o'clock. He had in his contract... there were only three stars in Hollywood that had the 5 o'clock shadow, one was Claudette Colbert the other was Greta Garbo and the other was Clark Gable... and they were allowed to leave at 5 o'clock. Which meant that at 5 o'clock if you hadn't got the scene that you'd been shooting on, it might have been a very difficult scene, he'd give you one take and if it was 'two past five' he'd say, "Sorry fellas, you've had it, I'll see you in the morning" and off he'd walk, you see, from the floor. Which meant that the poor old director and crew then had to try and fiddle around with inserts, you know... "You can't leave until the time is up!" So then... but always he was word perfect, Gable. Well then after I'd watched this for a while I met John McIntire... it was his first little bit... I'll tell you about John McIntire in a minute...

**John Legard:** John McIntire?

**Pat Jackson:** He was a lovely, marvellous character actor, he died just last...two months ago.

**John Legard:** Yes...I know the name.

**Pat Jackson:** A lovely man. Anyway, then I realised from the grapevine that I would never get an assignment at Culver City...ever. So I then wrote a letter of resignation to L. B. Mayer and I said, "Dear Mr Mayer, It has become quite become apparent to me that you consider me too young, too inexperienced and that you will never give me an assignment. I am therefore wasting your money and you are wasting my time, and I shall, unless I hear from you, assume that the contract is now null and void and I shall be catching the earliest plane back possible on Monday." It was then Wednesday. Well, blow me down, if the very next day, L. B. Mayer's secretary didn't ring me up to say, "Mr Jackson... Mr Mayer has had your letter and would very much like to see you, could you come this afternoon at 2 o'clock?"

**Pat Jackson:** I said, "Certainly."

**John Legard:** You presumably had met him before?

**Pat Jackson:** No! Never seen him, no.

**John Legard:** No?

**Pat Jackson:** No. So I go... again, repeat my limping act up the Irving Thalberg building and go through, and then I find myself in the Georgian suite and I enter a corridor, carpet up to my ankles in pile and Gibbons carving on the doors, and all the rest of it...oh, very plush and lovely. And I come into the Mayer suite and I enter the little entrance lobby, and there are the typists all still having their lunch, all just reading books. And there's a buzz and suddenly four typewriter covers come off and the keyboards are tapped as though they're hard at work...

**John Legard:** [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** And I'm sitting in a mock Chippendale chair facing the Adams door which opens by apparently no human means at all, but a photo electric cell, and this funny little man in a blue serge, beautifully cut, double breasted suit, standing five foot three... looked with piercing cobra eyes straight ahead of him and walked into his office, and the door closed. And a moment later a strange homosexual secretary said, "Have you met Mr Mayer?" I said, "No, I'm looking forward very much to meeting him." So he said, "Will you come in please?" So, I went in and [chuckling] there I was confronted by this funny little figure, sitting behind a kidney desk, and on the right hand wall... the drapes were yellow golden satin drapes, half pulled to take the sun off him, and on the right were all his horses running at Santa Anita and on the left were his film stars. So I 'crutched' my way, laying my crutches down in front of him, and he was absolutely charming, you know, he greeted me like a long lost friend, and said, "Mr Jackson, I've received your letter"...and very good English, because he was Boston, you see...very New England accent... "And I do want to assure you that we're just as interested in you today as we were when we signed you." I said, "Well I'm delighted to hear that Mr Mayer. I am most encouraged. I only hope that very soon you will give me an assignment because I really... I cannot hang around here wasting my time, however pleasant California may be." He said, "Well I'm now a very old man... the burden of responsibility is weighing heavily on me. I've just taken on what I think is going to be a new Irving Thalberg and that is Dore Schary, and he's just joined us from RKO and I know he's going to put the studio on the map. I'll arrange for you to see him straightaway." So he picks up the 'phone - "Oh Dore, I want you to meet.... Oh, oh...yes...I understand...yes, yes...three weeks? Three weeks.... Right-oh" "Oh, Mr Jackson, you heard...Mr Dore is so busy, he's got so many properties to read, he can't see you for three weeks. Will you just wait for three weeks?" I said, "Yes Mr Mayer I will certainly... three weeks would be very nice." So I go away fishing for three weeks, we go up into the mountains and, er...

**John Legard:** Marvellous.

**Pat Jackson:** ...I fished the Colorado River. Three weeks to the day I come back, I don't hear a word, I write exactly the same letter, except I said, "Dear Mr Schary" instead of "Dear Mr Mayer"... "I shall be catching the next plane back unless I hear from you on the following Monday" and exactly the same reaction - exactly the same reaction! This time I go into Dore Schary's office, which is slightly different, it's all the rancho style with wheels, and ferns growing out the spokes and all the rest of it. I get into the office and the first thing he says to me, through his great, thick, horn rim glasses, he says, "Well, what's your beef?"

**John Legard:** [Laughs]



**Pat Jackson:** So he points for me to sit down. I said, "I have no beef, Mr Schary, I have a very, very simple request - either use me or let me go." So he said, "Well that seems very fair... Well in the first place, let me ask you, what makes you think you can come over to America here and make films about America in our lingo? You don't know about it." I said, "I think, Mr Schary, you should have thought of that when you put me under contract," I said, "But to answer your question, we are talking in an international language, which is the language of drama, whether it be Greek or whether it be English or American...if the story holds up..."

[Tape Ends.]

[Tape 2, Side 4]

**John Legard:** Now you were telling us about Dore Schary and your discussion...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes, yes. I said, "Yes, we were talking an international language" and he thought that was a fair point. And then er, he said, "Well now look Pat," he said, "I've just taken over, as you know, and... you can see that there? See that?" And I looked to where he was pointing and there was a pile on his desk, of scripts. Oh! a good four feet high. He said, "Those are the properties... I gotta get through 'em - gotta get through 'em - see whether we are gonna make 'em. But I'll find one for you that you'll like and I'll like, I'll find one. But it may take me three weeks." I thought, "Another three weeks? I can't go fishing again for three weeks! However, California is a nice place to spend three weeks in and er, we were living at that time in Shirley Temple's honeymoon cottage in San Vicente Boulevard.

**John Legard:** Oh really? Sunset Boulevard!

**Pat Jackson:** No, San Vicente, not Sunset...

**John Legard:** Oh San Vicente.

**Pat Jackson:** And er, every morning for breakfast Charles Bickford had a little avocado pear tree orchard, and when we heard one plummet, we'd get up and have that for breakfast, because it fell into our little garden. Well...this for three weeks, as you can imagine, the beach was lovely and I tried to learn how to surf, ride the waves, which I never learnt to do. And I saw these people who were really experienced, without a surf board you see, they'd suddenly go out about a hundred yards and at the moment of exact timing, like hitting a beautiful cover drive they'd just put themselves on top of this wave like a flat board and I used to see them, like an ironing board, come up and be washed out onto the beach, with only about four inches of water, and there they'd lie, they'd have a nice hundred yards. So I watched this, I thought well, this is marvellous, this must be better than playing golf, you know, this will be great. And I went out into those waves, I never mastered it but I got spun over many, many a time. Well, as you can imagine, three weeks went past very quickly, it went like three days! So, three weeks to the day, er, almost

the same letter saying, "I know you were trying to find a subject and three weeks is up, in fact a little bit more. Have you found it or not, because if not I shall be going home." He 'phoned me... back I went, getting to know the Thalberg building quite well by now. So he said, "Pat, I've got it for you! I've got it! You're gonna love it, you're just gonna love it!" he said, "There it is!" Well the first word on the Title page: 'Lassie...' (something or other).

**John Legard:** [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** Well I didn't know much about 'Lassie' but I did know that there were three dogs making up 'Lassie' and I thought, "Well, if all my years in realist cinema ends up by my making a 'Lassie' film, this is really..."

**John Legard:** [Chuckles]

**Pat Jackson:** However!! I thought, "well now, humble pie, Jackson. Don't be proud, don't be arrogant, don't be a fool!" I said, "Well Mr Schary, thank you very much. I shall take this home and read it with great interest." So I went home, heart in my boots...a 'Lassie' picture, really! God Almighty! This is very trying? However! It may be a very good story. I got to page ten and I said "No, I'm bugged if I'm going to make this crap. I really am...I will not...I WILL NOT do it! I refuse to do it! It's an insult to the whole damn..." Anyway, I got very hot under the collar, inside and internally. So... Oh dear me, this is very difficult. This is a difficult medium to work in; it really is very difficult. So I went back. I said, "Mr Schary, I am very sorry, I will not make this film for you." "Why not?" "Very simply, I just don't believe it, I think it's terrible! I'll make a terrible job and I just don't want to do it, I refuse to do it!" "Gee! Well have you got a story you'd like to make?" And by the grace of God, I had been working on a story with a writer. "Yes," I said, "I have got a story that I'd like to make. I don't know whether you've read the script, but it's... Bill Ludwig has been working on it, it's called 'Death in the Doll's House.' It's a very good psychological thriller and I think I can do a very good film by it."

[break in recording]

**John Legard:** Yah, so you were talking about this...story....

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes...Bill Ludwig, yes...'Death in the Doll's House' it was called, it was an interesting story. And er, he says, "Yes alright, I'll read it. I'll read it and see whether I like it. You're prepared to make that then, are you?" He was getting fed up! Of course he was! I mean, here I am under contract, daring to turn down my first assignment! Unheard of!! So anyway, in short, he read it and um...he said, "Yes, OK, go ahead, we'll make that." So, it was Ann Southern and Zachary Scott, whom I've always admired ever since I saw 'The Southerner'. He was a wonderful actor, he was on loan from Warner Brothers. And a new girl called Nancy Davis.

**John Legard:** That's a familiar name.

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, she became Mrs Ronald Reagan...later on. Nice, charming girl. And John McIntire. Now John McIntire I'd got to know when we were making 'Command Decision'... when I saw him making 'Command Decision'. And he'd appeared in a tiny little piece with James Stewart called 'Call [Northside] 992' or something, I think he played a tiny little bit. But he was a fascinating character, had a wonderful voice and ...I cast him in his first big Hollywood role. And er, this was fascinating to see, when we started shooting, we arrived you see, and it was a hard week, because we worked on Saturdays, a full day, so it was six hard days slog and we were there 8.30/5.30 and it was um... and it was delightful. The crew were wonderful to work with, and I must say, when you really knew what you wanted and the sets were... You know, Cedric Gibbons was a very nice art director to work with, and I'd seen the set designs before we went on the floor and there was one set that didn't suit me - didn't hit the action that I'd planned. Because he'd seen my shooting script, which was something they hadn't seen, funnily enough... which was strange. They shot from just the master scene script, they weren't used to seeing the fully orchestrated script, which we were taught to do in the old Crown Film Unit, where you really tried to get every single angle of the camera and what the camera would do. So er... he looked at his designs of this particular set... I won't bore you with the details. He said, "What is it you want, Pat and why?" So I showed him the camera angles that I wanted. I said, "You haven't given me enough overlap. You see, I cannot get my camera back there to take the foreground action. You have got to build me on that wing to do that." He said, "That's a very fair point, yes...you'll have it." No trouble at all, facilities were granted at once if you gave them a good reason. It was, you know... it was like having a perfectly laid out course, with the best clubs, the best caddies, the best everything, and er, it was then up to you to play it. But it was all there and that was absolutely marvellous. And when the crew were on your side, then it was - before you could say 'knife' the film was over, you know, it was finished, done, marvellous.

**John Legard:** How long a shoot was it, in fact?

**Pat Jackson:** Five weeks, five weeks. And then the cutting came, I was given the first cut, with an awfully nice man, and then they saw it and um... Then my option came up, and this was Korda's contract - and this came up before I went on the floor actually. The option was coming up and I was going to get a fantastic, fantastic salary, which Korda had written in originally, you see. And they wanted to undercut this, and I thought, "Ah! this could be my release." And I said, "No, I won't accept any cut. This is the contract I signed and this is the contract you made out for me, I'm not accepting any cuts." And the option period came out before the sneak preview of this film, and they did not renew the option, and I knew they wouldn't because I was what they considered a 'difficult bastard!'

**John Legard:** [Laughing] You'd turned down Lassie!

**Pat Jackson:** [Laughing] Difficult bastard! And the film that I turned down was done by Edmund Gwenn, a sweet man to work with, marvellous chap, I only got to know him socially. And the film was made by a very famous director, whose name I won't bore you with, because I've forgotten it, and even if I knew it I wouldn't tell you! Because, they're under contract, it is a civil service job, they've got their pensions to think of. They mustn't say "no" because if they say "no" they will be suspended and so... They were in the civil service! But a civil service that paid millions of dollars a year, it was exactly the same routine. So, then by the grace of God, at that

time, while they did not renew the option. I was on leave in England when I heard that and I came back to Hollywood to pick my stuff up. I had been given the script to do for 'White Corridors' which was then called 'Yeoman's Hospital'. And I'd seen the first script and I thought that I could do a good job on it and that I could see, possibly, how to rearrange the script...

**John Legard:** Was that an original screenplay?

**Pat Jackson:** No, it was an adaptation from Monica Dickens. One of Monica Dickens' novels called 'Pair of Feet' or something. I can't remember quite the title...

**John Legard:** Pair of something...oh, yeah...

**Pat Jackson:** ...but 'Yeoman's Hospital' or something or other. Anyway, it was based on her experience, jolly good story! So I came back to do 'White Corridors'.

[NB. 'White Corridors' is actually - as stated on the credits - adapted from a novel called 'Yeoman's Hospital' by Helen Ashton (1944). 'One Pair of Feet' by Monica Dickens, published 1942, was adapted as 'The Lamp Still Burns' (Maurice Elvey, 1944). But maybe bits of Monica Dickens were also used, without crediting her? Should text be amended?]

**John Legard:** Which was being made by?

**Pat Jackson:** That was Jo Janni's first...second feature film for big films...Jo Janni.

**John Legard:** Oh Janni, yes of course, yes, that's right, yeah, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** Um...I was just trying to think...oh, I know what it was, yes...I knew that I'd forgotten something. Louis De Rochemont approached me to make 'Whistle at Eaton Falls', and I read the script and met Louis De Rochemont and I liked him. I said, "Yes, I think it's very good, I'd like to do it very much." Then I went to England, on leave, realised the option from MGM hadn't been picked up, so I was free of MGM. Went back to do 'Whistle at Eaton Falls' and the script had been completely changed.

**John Legard:** Ohh!

**Pat Jackson:** ...since my having accepted it. I hadn't signed the contract, thank God! And the script that I then read had been so watered down that it was not like the script that I'd accepted, and I 'phoned him. I said, "Louis, this is not the script that you gave me originally. It's been altered and very much watered down." Because it was quite an interesting, quite a radical idea, about a factory ownership which was... so forth and so on]...

**John Legard:** Oh yeah, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** ..."And this is not the script, it's quite different, it's not as strong at all." And he said, "Well that's the one we're going to make." I said, "Well I'm not gonna make it." And I didn't make it, I wouldn't make it, because it was not the script that I'd agreed to make. So then, instead of doing 'Whistle at Eaton Falls', I came back to do 'White Corridors'.

**John Legard:** How long were you in Los Angeles for, in fact? I mean from the time you...?

**Pat Jackson:** About two years.

**John Legard:** Hmm. During which time you were...you made the one film?

**Pat Jackson:** We made the one film. And that was a struggle because it was about nine months struggling to get that on the floor.

**John Legard:** Really?

**Pat Jackson:** Because I was working on the script as well, you see.

**John Legard:** Oh right, yes of course you were, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** With Bill Ludwig and er....

**John Legard:** Who was your collaborator on story, whose story was it?

**Pat Jackson:** I don't know who the original novel was. It was scripted by Bill Ludwig.

**John Legard:** Oh yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** And the producer had been the secretary of Eugene O'Neill, and I can't remember his name. Nice man, you know. But, it was the period of McCarthy, and the place smelt of fear - you know, that awful smell of fear.

[Other voice in background - Dave: Oh, I've heard that...]

**Pat Jackson:** Yeah, it was terrible. And there was an English recordist there, awfully nice man, been there all his working life, thirty years. And um, everybody was very interested in the Labour government you see, and particularly in Nye Bevan's health scheme, and er, I was shooting off saying, "Oh that's magnificent. I think we've got a very important government doing some very important things, and I think Bevan's National Health Scheme is probably the most important piece of legislation in Europe for years, it's going to revolutionise the whole structure of our medical service and it means to say that the..." and so on. And I was going on, and this fellow came up - nice little man - he said, "Pat, you've got to watch it!" I said, "What do you mean, I've got to watch it?" He said, "Well everything you're saying is considered communistic here, it's all going to Mayer you know!" I said, "Well I don't mind, old boy. I mean, I'm only

telling the truth." He said, "Well it's not going down very well...just don't say these things..." (because his English had become a bit Americanised, you see). So, it was a strange concentration camp. And you see, everybody - the whole culture - was as though people were living on meringues, you see. The wrong step, the wrong place and you're through the crust and you're into the soggy part and out, finished. There were people living at an enormous standard of living there, in mansions, and you've only got to be suspended and you're out, finished, you know. The whole thing collapses like a house of cards. So I realised that you can pay a too big a price for...

**John Legard:** Yes. I think if you'd er, if you'd made that 'Lassie' film, [chuckles] you would have probably stayed!

[Laughing in background]

**Pat Jackson:** Well you see, I mean it's a question of how you play your cards, isn't it?

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** I mean, if one had wanted to play...

**John Legard:** You could have given 'Lassie' the new look that it needed!

**Pat Jackson:** ...er, one would be there now, but I mean, I don't...[laughs] I think there are more important things!

**John Legard:** Yeah. A far cry from 'Western Approaches'.

**Pat Jackson:** I think one of the nicest things that happened to me was meeting Dean Jagger after he'd won his Oscar for his film in 'Treasure of the Sierra Madre' [NB actually 'Twelve O' Clock High'] as best supporting player, I think it was.

**John Legard:** Oh right, hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** We went fishing off Catalina Island, a more enchanting man I've never met...absolutely. There were so many wonderful people there - but all menaced, and knowing that they're menaced by the transience of their stability. And this creates a kind of frenzy in their whole way of life. And, I mean, I'm talking now of - what am I talking of? - forty years ago, it's fifty...

**John Legard:** Yes.. bit different now...

**Pat Jackson:** Well you know more about that than I do. But then I came back. Fascinating period, wouldn't have missed it for anything... in so far that...

**John Legard:** Where you thankful to get back? I mean...

**Pat Jackson:** Yes I was, I was. And I knew that with my temperament I could never fit into that Hollywood scene. Because I am, unfortunately I am blessed with the wrong temperament....

**John Legard:** No, you'd be too...you'd be too impatient...

**Pat Jackson:** No, I can't do things - It's just me, I can't help it - I can't do things, particularly with films, and I think film is such a bloody bore anyway to get on the screen, that to get up at ridiculous hours in the morning...

**John Legard:** That's right, yes...

**Pat Jackson:** ...unless I believe in what I am doing, it's just not worth it, to me! [Chuckling] I haven't got that terrible ambitious drive for fame. Fame doesn't mean anything to me at all, I couldn't care less! If I believe in anything that I'm trying to do on the screen, then I'll go to the ends of the world and go through endless pain and suffering. But when I know the whole thing from start to finish is just another bloody chore, I won't do it, for a start! I haven't got the desire! It doesn't appeal to me to that extent.

**John Legard:** No, fair enough.

**Pat Jackson:** But anything that does, then it's a very different kettle of fish. And so, to put it shortly, I wasn't prepared to do my chores and I'm not prepared to do my chores and I won't do them, there's no question that I ever should be asked to do them, so it doesn't affect the problem. But it does create - that way of life, and I've seen it - It creates great unhappiness, great misery, and there are other things in life, you know, that are more important than churning that stuff out!

**John Legard:** Right, yes. I mean if you'd happened to have been mad keen on making musicals or something like that, it would have been quite a different story. But after all, you are from a different tradition anyway, of film making. You want...after all, I mean Hollywood is diametrically opposite, with sort of 'Western Approaches'.

**Pat Jackson:** Well I think, you see...I think Grierson's effect, even though I may have been uncomplimentary about certain phases of Grierson, his message was important in his use of cinema, and it never leaves one. I mean I was certainly a disciple of his faith in the power of cinema... I was not a disciple in his use of cinema. And I think it was a tragedy that Grierson perhaps did not have a little bit more experience in the actual making of films himself, because I think he would have then become a very great director probably and producer...

**John Legard:** A very good point, that, actually...

**Pat Jackson:** ...one has to remember, he only made the one film, 'Drifters' which, without detracting from 'Drifters' at that time, which was after all in the twenties and thirties, consisted really in having the guts to go out at sea in all weathers and spraying the camera - spraying the camera, you know - everything! I mean, there was plenty going on, so if you shoot enough you're going to have enough to edit. And the next assignment, you see, that he got was on the Port of London Authority, which was a very different kettle of fish, which consisted simply of ships

moored in the Port of London Authority. In the early days of the GPO when I was looking after the vaults with all the other apprentices, I mean there were cans and cans and cans of Port of London Authority film, which had never come to anything, because you couldn't cut it, it was...

**John Legard:** Really? Just a mass of material?

**Pat Jackson:** Mass of material on the Port of London Authority, you know... endless sheep coming off cargoes and this, that and the other, you know. So this was a challenge which he wasn't able to meet, because he didn't script it properly. He didn't have a conception, and it isn't good enough just to go and shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot, unless you've got an idea behind your head. And so, as a film maker he didn't, perhaps, go through the mill sufficiently to become a great technician, like Flaherty did, you see. But that didn't prevent his becoming a very powerful and important and beneficial influence on cinema.

**John Legard:** Indeed, yes.

**Pat Jackson:** And that message did not leave me, that's why one wasn't able, easily, to - this sounds bloody pompous and precious - but it's Grierson's fault that I wasn't able to abuse the medium in the way that he would not have permitted, so his message remained clear about the essential function of cinema. And it was difficult to bastardise it, in a nutshell. And I owe that [chuckles] to Grierson and Harry Watt and that school of film making.

**John Legard:** Right. Hmm, hmm. So then...you um, came back and made 'White Corridors'.

**Pat Jackson:** That was a joy, one of those lucky things that went through like a dose of salts and it was lovely. Everybody was delightful, marvellous unit. Pennington Richards, fastest cameraman I've ever worked with, I think. A wonderful cameraman, a fascinating man. Done in five weeks.

**John Legard:** Really? Was it?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes.

**John Legard:** Goodness.

**Pat Jackson:** Average time at Pinewood then was ten, and that was quite extraordinary. Then Earl St John wanted to put me under contract, and I said, "Earl, thank you, very kind of you, appreciate the offer but I've had contracts, because I had one with MGM, as you know. If I sign your contract, I lose my right to say no, don't I? If I take your salary, which will be quite high, every week, I shall be duty-bound to accept your assignments, which I may really dislike, and though I shall fight to get the subject altered, you may not like my alterations, and I will have to make them. I am not putting myself in that position, Earl, thank you all the same. I will willingly freelance for you..." And on that basis, we left it. I then did one of the Maugham... 'Ant and the Grasshopper', I think it was - yes it was - with Nigel Patrick and Roly Culver, it was scripted by Tibby Clarke, which was lovely fun.



**John Legard:** Of course the trouble with these contracts is, it's easier for actors isn't it, because they can tend to fit in to films that come up, if there's a part for them.

**Pat Jackson:** They're marked, yes, absolutely. It's a very good point, John, you make there. Because the actor does his little bit, he's not as morally involved as the director who's behind every shot and has to get the thinking of the thing right. That doesn't mean to say... I'm not trying to suggest that you, you know, you're behind the... of course I'm not. But you are responsible for the complete content of the thing and therefore you are obviously, morally, much more involved than the actor who comes in brilliantly and does his contribution, and is out.

**John Legard:** Presumably, I mean there are contracts which allow for the freedom of expression, or whatever you call it? Opportunity to...

**Pat Jackson:** There maybe, I don't know. Because it is a difficult situation.

**John Legard:** It's terribly inhibited, terribly inhibited.

**Pat Jackson:** It's very difficult, you know, when you are receiving a fat salary every week, and then perhaps you've been lying in limbo for four or five months and they ask you to do something which you don't particularly like, and then you're in trouble, you know, and you feel you've got to do it. And that's something I have never done. And then I did a bad film, which was entirely my fault. After 'White Corridors' and 'Ant and the Grasshopper', I combined with dear old James Hodson who was a wonderful, great man. We wrote a story together called, 'Something Money Can't Buy' ...

**John Legard:** Oh right, yes!

**Pat Jackson:** Which was, I think I made a 'balls up' of it, I think I directed it badly.

**John Legard:** Was that the film about the catering?

**Pat Jackson:** Pat Roc was in it... Yes, that's right, the roving restaurant. It ought to have been a good film, it had a certain charm, the story had a certain charm. I think I just did it badly, I directed badly, I don't know what it was, it just didn't work. It was my fault and that was it; it was a simple as that.

**John Legard:** They were showing that on cable television recently.

**Pat Jackson:** Were they?

**John Legard:** Yah. I just caught a bit of it, which I thought was rather entertaining, but I would have liked to have seen it all the way through. You're not happy with it, obviously.

**Pat Jackson:** No, no. It needed great lightness of touch, which I didn't get. I bungled it. It's as simple as that. It was all in the script, the script was charming. I think James and I wrote a nice script and he was a great help and a wonderful man, James. But no. I botched it.

**John Legard:** How did it do commercially? Perhaps it did...

**Pat Jackson:** Not well, not well. No, it was a bad job, I did a bad job, and that was the end of it. Then...I was going to do 'High Tide at Noon'

**John Legard:** Oh right, yes...I remember that one.

**Pat Jackson:** And that was a total disaster, for me. I mean, that really ended my film career, because, details that I won't go into too carefully, but it meant that I had a bit of a 'facer' with John Davis. And don't forget I was assigned to this as a freelance. I think there were contractual problems

**John Legard:** Ah right, this is not a contract? This was freelance?

**Pat Jackson:** Oh no no, it was freelance, and I was offered this assignment, and I said, "Yes, I'll do this very happily, very nice story." Very simple story, about lobster fishing off an island in Nova Scotia where the lobsters start to run and the effect on the community - very interesting, quite good. The only trouble was, we couldn't find an island off Nova Scotia or anywhere around the British Isles, and in the end we found it off the coast of Sweden somewhere. And Teddy Carrick built the set, was building the set from carpenters who had escaped from the Ufa in Germany into Sweden throughout the war. He found these people and they built the village absolutely as described in this...Nova Scotia. And I come back to Pinewood and I'm met by James Archibald, and I'm told by James (and I can't vouch for this) that Virginia McKenna was contracted to play the lead in this, and this was - I mean she was a contract artist. And he said that she didn't approve of the script and she didn't approve of this, that and the other. Now, whether James was lying to me, I can only report how it affected me and my life. Whether Virginia McKenna was behind this, I've no idea at all. She was probably perfectly innocent, maybe James was making this all up, I don't know. Anyway, he said this. I said, "Well look, I'm sorry James Archibald, I'm not standing for this. I'm not asking to see John Davis, I'm demanding to see John Davis! So this was arranged and I went into see John Davis the next day and he said, "I gather you've got a complaint, Mr Jackson." I said, "I haven't got a complaint really very serious, but I understand that a young, fairly untried starlet has objected to the script, has objected to the cast that I have tested and approved. And I can only say, if a young starlet is given this amount of power, which Greta Garbo would never have demanded, the film industry won't last very long!" And he looked at me full in the face and said, "You've got it all wrong, Mr Jackson. I'm sorry to tell you it is my decision, I have cancelled the film, I don't want it made, I don't believe in it any more." I said, "Oh well, that is a very different situation, I hadn't realised that Mr Davis. You are the executive producer, I'm merely a hired director on a freelance basis. You've cancelled the assignment that I'm supposed to do, I'm sorry to hear it because I think I could have made a very nice film of this for you." He said, "No, I'm sorry...I have no faith in it any more and I have cancelled it." I said, "Well I have nothing more to say." I left the office, he said, "I hope we shall be able to find an assignment for you very soon, because I think we should get along very well." I said, "I hope so, very much Mr Davis." And I left the office, on a very friendly basis. I received a charming letter from him the next day and he said, "I look forward to our working together happily, I have it on my files." And the next thing I heard, from James, or somebody at Pinewood, was that Phil Leacock had been 'phoned and ordered that he was to go

on to Stage 2 and make 'High Tide at Noon' on the big stage at Pinewood. Now this is a sea picture about lobster fishing off an island in Nova Scotia! Well, poor old Phil, he accepted the assignment, so I gather. 'High Tide at Noon' at that time, so I'm told, cost a lot of money and did not do very well, how could it? A sea picture shot inside! In fact it did disastrously.

**John Legard:** Pity he didn't come straight with you, because I imagine it was something to do with the fact they wanted to make use of the studio...

**Pat Jackson:** I don't know. But the fact then was, I, you see was under contract for this film. Therefore, contractually they had to pay me my fee, which was, you know, by their standards not very high. But, in order to justify this fee, they then sent me, hopefully, two assignments. One was 'For the Love of Doc' [correct title?], which I read and thought was appalling. The other was something on the Dauphin [NB 'Dangerous Exile'] with Belinda Lee, which I thought was absolutely terrible! Which was made by Brian Desmond Hurst and was another ghastly flop! Both were ghastly flops!

**John Legard:** I don't remember those.

**Pat Jackson:** ...commercially too. But, because I had not accepted them, in order to justify the fee, which contractually they had to pay...er, finish. And you could argue, perfectly justifiably! I should have damn well gone and made a film that I knew was going to be awful! Commercially, I couldn't see how it could help the film industry; it was bound to lose money, which they both did.

**John Legard:** Which they both, presumably, did? Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** They both did! So you can't win, you see, in that situation.

**John Legard:** Yes, this is an interesting aspect of film...

**Pat Jackson:** As I said earlier, it's a difficult medium! [Chuckles]

**John Legard:** [Chuckling] A difficult medium! Yes!

**Pat Jackson:** [Laughing]...in which to work!

**John Legard:** Yes that's very strange. You see, I remember 'High Tide at Noon' and it's studio, of course a lot of back projection .

**Pat Jackson:** Well there, you know...and that's all... really...

**John Legard:** Yeah. Anyway, that's all past history now, so...but er...

**Pat Jackson:** Anyway, then I did a lot of TV, I did 'The Prisoner' with Pat McGoohan.

**John Legard:** But then, yes, you did...

**Pat Jackson:** But I brought Pat, you see, to the screen, Because it was I who found Pat McGoohan.

**John Legard:** Pat McGoohan, yes...

**Pat Jackson:** I found him playing in 'Moby Dick' and thought, "This is one of the great actors," and immediately brought him down to Pinewood to test, to play the lead in 'High Tide at Noon', and he was in it, but he played the 'heavy'... he was going to be the hero! And he would have been wonderful.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And I remember, this is the strangeness about the acting profession, and not for nothing was 'play therapy' introduced at John Hopkins for disturbed people!

**John Legard:** You did some er...you worked with Patrick McGoohan later in television, didn't you?

**Pat Jackson:** In 'The Prisoner' yes. We did four of 'The Prisoner', yes.

**John Legard:** You did four of them, did you? Yes. Because that was a very interesting series, and I gather there's a cult... there's a sort of 'Prisoner' society, isn't there? And they have screenings of these films...to themselves...and they have a... correspondence...

**Pat Jackson:** I remember, yes...it would be curious to... (How long have we got, incidentally? Can we go on for some more?)

[Background voice]: Bags of time, bags of time.

**Pat Jackson:** I remember Pat telling me how 'The Prisoner' started, because he 'phoned me up and said, "Look, we've got this idea, we've got to go quickly" and so on. "Do you know Portmeirion?" and I said, "No, I don't think I do." And then he told me vaguely about it and how it had come about, 'The 'Prisoner'. Which is quite an interesting story and I don't think I'm talking out of turn, because I think he's said so himself. He loathed cocktail parties - In fact he loathed parties of any kind. He went home one day and his wife said, "Look darling, I've done the unforgivable thing, I'm involved in a party and I couldn't get you out of it, you must come along and support me." He said, "Of course I will." So he goes along and suddenly finds himself cornered by a rather drunken, but great fan of his. He comes up and makes a great fuss of him, so Pat takes all the 'smarm' very kindly. And then this fellow suddenly said, "God, Mr McGoohan, I've got a partner whose in terrible, terrible trouble and we're in a desperate state." So Pat, very politely said, "I'm sorry to hear that, what's the trouble?" And to cut a long story short, it appeared that two of our atomic physicists, very famous and very much in the know of our latest secrets had 'gone round the bend' - having nervous breakdowns, and were 'spilling the beans', and so, were a national hazard. So Pat thought, "Oh that's interesting." He said so, "That's interesting,

what a difficult problem, I can understand. What are you doing? How do you cope with it?" So this fellow said, "Well, we have places Mr McGoochan, you know. We have places to cope with this." "How do you mean, you have places?" "Well, we have had to take them out of the public domain, otherwise our national secrets would be hazarded." "I see, a sort of rest home, you mean?" "Well, yes, I mean they've got everything. They've got squash courts, tennis courts, every conceivable comfort you can think of..." "Except their freedom?" "Well of course Mr McGoochan, of course." That was the basis of 'The Prisoner'. But you see he couldn't resolve it because there's no...

**John Legard:** There's no de..., no possible denouement, is there!

[Both laugh]

**Pat Jackson:** No. But that was how that started. So er...there we are. All the rest is not worth recording.

**John Legard:** So what...no...but the thing is, you did quite a few films as well as television after the John Davis...

**Pat Jackson:** I did a lot with an awfully nice man, which was Eddie Knopf. Eddie Knopf was the brother of the Alfred Knopf the publisher, and I'd met him, he had been a story editor at Culver City.

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** And he came over to do an anthology of short stories called 'Rendezvous' - the 'Rendezvous' series. Now the trouble with them...they were all fascinating, they were all short stories and all very interesting in their own right, but of course, I don't think the public was ready for short stories, they liked the serial. And also he made, I think, a fatal blunder in what he called "the opening and closing" which was Charles somebody or other [NB Drake] who played the lead, talking to a bloody collie dog about what the story would be...

**John Legard:** Oh right, one of those.

**Pat Jackson:** ...and that killed it stone dead. But there was a lovely episode which I had, well I think I did - there were episodes... twenty-six - I did half of them and I remember two with vivid delight. One was working with Gladys Cooper, 'Peter, Paul and the Tame Leopard' And I can remember this because the first day, I think Gladys Cooper was in her eighties very nearly and I was told that her memory wasn't all that sound. It was quite true, the first day she didn't get a word, not a word, I mean we just chatted and it was lovely. And I always remember her saying, "I've wasted so much of your time Mr Jackson, I'm very sorry about it." "Miss Cooper," I said, "You, wasting my time? We've had the most wonderful day! We'll get it tomorrow, don't worry. No, we've had a wonderful day, it's lovely." Well in fact, we got it all the next day; I think we were allowed three and a half days to shoot. And she had a scene where this tame leopard - and I

don't believe that a leopard is ever tame however tame the tamer thinks he is - where she had, with burning brands, to drive this leopard back up a flight of stairs into her son's bedroom, because she wanted to bump her son off. And I said, "Miss Cooper, it has occurred to me and I'm sure it has occurred to you that a cat of this size, however tame, might be nasty. I don't suppose he likes having burning brands under his nose, I know damn well I wouldn't!" She said, "No, I don't suppose I would either!" She said, "I know what you're going to suggest, Pat... I know what you're going to suggest and I won't hear of it! You're suggesting that I have a double and you shoot on my back! I wouldn't dream of that, I've never had a double in my life! I shall have my way with that leopard, don't you worry!"

**John Legard:** [Laughs]

**Pat Jackson:** ...and she did! Without a doubt, she shot those burning brands under that leopard's nostrils, turned the leopard back and it went snarling up the stairs and she got it in that room and slammed the door! [Chuckles] We stood and cheered, and it was a marvellous, marvellous...oh what a woman! What a wonderful woman! What a privilege to work with her...great woman!

**John Legard:** She must have been getting on a bit, by that time...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh she was in her eighties I think, she was in her eighties! And then the other wonderful story, which was Pat McGoochan, I think he did three for me in that, was 'The Hanging of Alfred Wadham', which was an E. F. Benson story - short story. Benson was then...had been...headmaster, I think at Wellington, and was the brother of the Archbishop and was a great short story writer [NB. Actually, E.F. was son of the Headmaster, E.W.Benson, and it was E.W. himself who went on to become Archbishop]. And 'The Hanging of Alfred Wadham', which was with Pat McGoochan playing the priest, with Paul Massie. And, oh, he did it superbly well. The premise simply was, a man comes in and confesses to the murder of the suspected murderer, whose confession he has just taken that morning in the condemned cell. He said, "Thank God you've come. Now this poor chap can be released; we'll go to the police station at once." And Massie looks at him and says, "Oh no, Father...oh no. You've received my confession, you've given me benediction, I'm not confessing to the police"...hell of a situation! Marvellous situation.

**John Legard:** Yes, yeah.

**Pat Jackson:** And the way McGoochan played that was absolutely... and you know, when he goes to see the Bishop of Westminster and the Bishop can do nothing...oh God, hell of a thing! Anyway...they were fun, you see. They were half-hours...

**John Legard:** Yes, half hour...?

**Pat Jackson:** Half hours every week we did them, every other week. Should have done better, but being an anthology, you see, the audience wanted serials.

**John Legard:** Hmm...yeah...The art of the short story. But you also did a film with...er, now who was it? Was it... 'The Birthday Party' was it? The one about the stolen...

**Pat Jackson:** Oh yes! That was fun, that was a lovely film - to make. I didn't mean it was a lovely film, it certainly wasn't a great film. It was a Jack Whittingham story; an original story of his called 'The Birthday Present.' It was Tony Britton's first...

**John Legard:** 'The Birthday Present' of course! Yes.

**Pat Jackson:** ...with Sylvia Syms. Yes, that was fun to do. A very good story and I could believe in it from start to finish. It should have done...it got wonderful, wonderful notices...didn't do commercially well because Asian 'flu if you remember, hit London very badly, it was all sort of at that time...

**John Legard:** Oh, just when it was released?

**Pat Jackson:** Yes, just when it was released. I don't suppose....

**John Legard:** Who was that well-known actor who er...very good man...the leading part...?

**Pat Jackson:** Tony Britton played the lead.

**John Legard:** Tony Britton, yes.

**Pat Jackson:** I would say it was the first really, and only starring part in a film, and then he became more of a stage actor, I think.

**John Legard:** Hmm. And then he got into television latterly, yes...

**Pat Jackson:** Well I think, you see, he hit it unluckily, in so far that, the British film industry was beginning to get into decline...

**John Legard:** Hmm.

**Pat Jackson:** Ealing had gone, you know, and Ealing was then at... Metro, that had gone, and the films made in England became fewer and fewer...and that was it.

**John Legard:** Yes, and they weren't any longer part of a continuous output, because, as you say, Balcon had finished and er...

**Pat Jackson:** Well, that's about it chums, I've got nothing more to tell you! That's the end of P.Jackson... unless you've got something you want to ask?

**John Legard:** Thank you very much...um...I think your contribution is very considerable, very interesting...thank you. I can't think of anything else at the moment unless, Dave, you've got any questions to ask Pat before we finish?

**Dave ?:** Just one, Pat. Did you actually direct any TV programmes from the gallery, as a TV director? Or were you...? You didn't, ah.

**Pat Jackson:** No...all film, all film. No I've never done any television!

**John Legard:** You haven't done any of the video stuff?

**Pat Jackson:** No, no, no. Strictly limited... [chuckles]...very limited to film. Well, thank you very much, it's been very nice talking to you both.

**Dave ?:** Thank you very much indeed.

[End of Interview]

Pat Jackson

Film Director<

1930s-1940s - Documentary Film Movement ('Night Mail', 'Western Approaches')

1950s-1960s - Feature Film and Television ('White Corridors', 'The Prisoner')