

Philip Leacock (director, producer)

8/10/1917-14/7/90

by [admin](#) — last modified Jul 27, 2008 02:22 PM

BIOGRAPHY: Philip Leacock was born in London in 1917. He spent the early years of his life on the Canary Islands, before being sent to various boarding schools in England, including Bedales. At school he developed an interest in film, and soon after began to work for Harold Lowenstein on short documentaries such as *Out To Play* (1936) and *Kew Gardens* (1937). In 1938 he went to Spain working with Thorold Dickinson on two documentaries about the Spanish Civil War. During the war, Leacock joined the Army Kinematograph Service, making a range of documentaries, drama-documentaries and training films, including *The New Lot* - the inspiration for *The Way Ahead* (1944). After the war, Leacock worked at the Crown Film Unit, increasingly on drama documentaries such as *Out of True* (1951). He moved into feature film production, making *The Brave Don't Cry* (1952) for Group 3, and *Appointment in London* for Rank. *Riders of the New Forest* (1946) - a series of shorts for Gaumont-British Instructional initiated a habit of working with children, and many of Leacock's Rank films of the 50s feature children in central roles including *The Kidnappers* (1953), *Escapade* (1955), *The Spanish Gardner* (1956) and *Innocent Sinners* (1958). From the late 1950s he worked increasingly in Hollywood, working for Hecht and Lancaster and later for Columbia on films such as *Take a Giant Step* (1959) and *Reach For Glory* (1962). Leacock also turned to television at this time, and his television output as director and producer remained steady through the 60s and 70s on shows such as *Gunsmoke*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *The Waltons* and *Dynasty*. **SUMMARY:** In this interview, conducted in 1987, Philip Leacock talks to Stephen Peet about his career in film. His discussion focuses mainly on his film work, with detailed material on his period in the Army Kinematograph Service and the Crown Film Unit, and his work for Rank. He talks very interestingly about the influence of his documentary experience on his feature work, particularly his conviction that films must contain a moral point as well as a story. He particularly recalls details of the production debates around *The Kidnappers* and *The Brave Don't Cry*, and gives a fascinating account of the fate of *Take a Giant Step* - a film about race relations which he suggests was not fully supported by United Artists. Not given to personal gossip, Leacock's account of his career is nevertheless full of fascinating material.

BECTU History Project - Interview No. 25

[Copyright [BECTU](#)]

Transcription Date: 2003-01-24

Interview Date: 1987-10-28

Interviewers: Stephen Peet

Interviewee: Philip Leacock

Tape 1, Side 1

Stephen Peet: Ah, here we are, 28th October 1987. Name of interviewee, Philip Leacock, interviewed by Stephen Peet. The copyright of this recording is vested in the ACTT History Project. Tape 1, Side A. How I'll start really is right at the beginning and the business of when and where you were born, just to get going.

Philip Leacock: I was actually born in London, in Ealing I think. But this was not my home for a while because my parents lived in the Canary Islands and so we were brought up like many people, we went to boarding school over here but our home was in the Canary Islands.

Stephen Peet: But how did they come to be in the Canary Islands? Expatriates?

Philip Leacock: [Laughs] No, just chance I think. My father, again like us, he was brought up in Madeira, which is a nearby island. And he inherited part of a business which he then developed out there and so we were at some very nice places. Very like California in fact - one of the reasons I think I like it out there. [laughs]

Stephen Peet: So your schooling was...

Philip Leacock: At boarding school, yes. They had a house here for quite a long time.

Stephen Peet: So which school was that?

Philip Leacock: Bedales.

Stephen Peet: So, did you do, then, at school, any specialised training, or - put it this way, why did you decide to go into films? Was it at somebody's suggestion, or somebody you met?

Philip Leacock: Um, It really started possibly because they had a very nice darkroom at the school and I became interested in photography. And that led to an interest in film and shooting little 16mm films. And then my elder sister married a man called Harold Lowenstein, who's still working in documentary I think. And although the marriage didn't work, my relationship with Harold has always been a very happy one. And he was a wonderful person. I started working with Harold, in fact we did a film, a couple of films while I was still at school, which I would just help with - little shorts.

Stephen Peet: Was that one called Out to Play?

Philip Leacock: Out to Play was the first one, yes, which I really didn't do anything except for carry cameras and stuff like that. And we did - [distracted as the door swings open] just slam it, I think you had to slam it a bit. That's it. And it's - he was very nice and he's lovely. Slightly strange man, but very talented I think. I learnt a great deal from him. And then we did a thing called Kew Gardens, which I'm credited with having directed. In actual fact Harold decided he wanted to be a producer, so he put himself down as producer, and I got this large directing credit [laughs] which was totally undeserved.

Stephen Peet: Was this a commercial company, a little documentary company? I believe we'll have a little pause here.

Philip Leacock: Okay, yes. [Break in recording]

Stephen Peet: Now, just to go back to one bit - I'm not sure whether you gave the date when you were born - do you mean this or the other dates of things?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Any dates. We don't know what period this is in effect.

Philip Leacock: Oh I see, in 1917 - I was born in 1917, October. And as I say, I spent most of my early years in the Canary Islands, and attended a number of schools actually, I think I only mentioned Bedales, but that was after all the cranky schools I think I attended, starting with King Alfred's, to St Christopher's...

Additional speaker (unidentified): King Alfred's in Hampstead?

Philip Leacock: Yes. To St Christopher's...

Additional speaker (unidentified): Did you like that?

Philip Leacock: Hmm?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Did you like the school?

Philip Leacock: I don't think they liked me. I was very small [laughs]. I rather gathered that I was not welcome back, so... When do you start school? Five or something, six. Bedales I quite liked, I never finished school so - I was never very interested in the academic side.

Stephen Peet: So in effect you got out of school when you were about 17 or so?

Philip Leacock: About then, yes. I started work with...

Stephen Peet: Lowenstein. What I was about to ask just now, before we stopped - did he have a commercial company?

Philip Leacock: Yes, he set up a company himself and I think somewhere I have a hundred or - he'd pay us all in shares [laughs] in the company, so it looked like quite a lot of money, but I think I have a whole bunch of rather ornate shares, which I got for something [laughs].

Stephen Peet: This isn't the man that called himself Prince Lowenstein is it?

Philip Leacock: No, no, no. Harold made some very interesting films and I don't think he ever worked with - he has always been an independent and hasn't made many films but...

Stephen Peet: So you were in business in effect at about 17 or 18 years old. And you were talking about being credited with directing something called Kew Gardens. Was this...

Philip Leacock: But that was an official film about Kew Gardens, and it was quite successful in that a lot of copies were sold to universities and things all over the world. So Harold did quite well out of that I think.

Stephen Peet: That was 35mm?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Because you weren't working at all except when you were just learning how to use a camera with anything smaller were you?

Philip Leacock: No. I just had a - you know - a little hand crank and then a clockwork 16mm camera. But all the stuff I did with Harold, like *Out to Play*, were done on 35mm, yes,

Stephen Peet: Now at some point along here you must have joined ACT. Was that while you were with him or a bit later - do you know?

Philip Leacock: That was later.

Stephen Peet: Because, I say this because you went abroad with other ACT members on a job with paid expenses only, in '38. Could you tell me about that? Because you must have been a member by then. This is to Spain...

Philip Leacock: Yes, I'd been a member for quite a while then I think. I was trying to think...

Stephen Peet: How did it come about that you joined?

Philip Leacock: Well after working with Hal, to fill in a gap there, I then really needed to start earning my living and be slightly more serious about it as a job. And I had some difficulty getting in, and in fact somewhere I have letters recommending me to do something else from both Robert Flaherty and Dilys Powell, who thought I was not really suitable for the industry. And then I saw Basil Wright and got a job through Basil, not with *Realist* to start with - I worked with Donald Taylor actually, but it was in connection with something of Basil's. And I can't quite remember the order of events, but I certainly at some point along the line there, I did some work for, I think it was called GB-I. What was that...

Stephen Peet: Gaumont British Instructional.

Philip Leacock: Yes. And they were very anti-union. Now that's the first thing I really remember, it was recruiting ACT members [laughs] and that point we weren't announcing that we were doing that, because I think we felt we would all be fired immediately. [laughs]

Additional speaker (unidentified): You were actually trade unionists.

Philip Leacock: Yes, somewhere I've got my date - do you know when I joined ACT? It's on my card.

Additional speaker (unidentified): Interesting to see all these things - you had photographs and things - sometime.

Philip Leacock: Yes, yes, fine. I could do you a Xerox of it. As a matter of fact I wanted, because I haven't paid any dues for years, they're not very good at asking you to pat your dues if you live in Los Angeles. [laughs]

Stephen Peet: They say they have all the records there of... I should have looked it up the other day. But, I'll tell you what, I'm going to stop, just a minute.

Philip Leacock: Yes. [Break in recording]

Stephen Peet: Now how was it that you were chosen to go to Spain? Did a call go out for volunteers who would go and just work for expenses or something like that so that people who - political inclinations and sympathies - were they the people who were chosen, or how was it? Do you remember?

Philip Leacock: I really don't remember. Someone just got in touch, and I think it was probably Ivor.

Stephen Peet: When you say Ivor - Ivor Montagu?

Philip Leacock: Yes. But I didn't actually know him at that time. He'd been working at Ealing and that was outside anything I was doing. [CB query: was IM actually at Ealing then? Maybe..] But it was probably through friends who knew me, because I don't think any sort of call was put out.

Stephen Peet: So how did you manage to get there - was it easy? Or did you have to get special permissions and visas? Do you remember this at all, or was it...

Philip Leacock: We were technically brought in by the Spanish Ministry of Information, and we were looked after by them. They met us by arrangement at the Spanish border near Perpignan and we were driven to Barcelona. And the rest of them went to Madrid where most of the fighting was going on. Barcelona was being bombed quite steadily at that point by the Italians, and later by the Germans. And Ray Pitt came back so - Thorold being a, well both he and Sid were editors really...

Stephen Peet: Shall I just put on record the list of the people that...

Philip Leacock: Yes surely.

Stephen Peet: Because there were two...I understand that two films were made, Spanish ABC and Behind the Spanish Lines. There's a kind of crediting in the history books that they were

supervised by Ivor Montagu for the Progressive Film Institute. And Thorold Dickinson directed Spanish ABC, and Sid Cole Behind the Spanish Lines, and the two cameramen were Alan Lawson and Arthur Graham. And you were credited as Philip Leacock and Ray Pitt, as assistants. It seems strange to me that editors...

Philip Leacock: Ray Pitt was actually a Supervising Editor at Ealing, so - but he left quite early on, so I was very inexperienced.

Stephen Peet: So really as assistants you did all the dogsbody work because as editors you were just there to...?

Philip Leacock: Well there was a lot of editing to do actually because what we did, while the others went off and before there was any of our own film to edit, we were given - well it really became - Ray to be quite honest didn't like the bombing at all, and it was rather sad because - well he didn't anyway. So I was editing - we would run, with Ivor usually, and one of the others, a Spanish short already made. These were on subjects like non-intervention, and another one about education under the new regime - what was it called - Sol en le Noche, which is Sun in the Night, I don't know what we called it then.

Stephen Peet: Because you had the advantage, having been born in the Canaries, of being bilingual. This presumably was a help.

Philip Leacock: Well, I'm not very good at Spanish. But yes, I could speak some, yes. And it was. So really what I was doing was re-editing and putting on English commentary, which I think Ivor usually did the - wrote. And we did several of those films, and it was a very exciting period because it was - the beginning part of it, I think everyone still thought we had a sporting chance. But then of course we were up against - when we came back - but things became very tough and after a while none of the - we didn't have any electricity so we couldn't, the editing really packed up.

Stephen Peet: But while you were there you said there were lots of air raids on Barcelona. Was this the - did you see yourself or experience yourself any other part of the war?

Philip Leacock: I didn't, no. I didn't really go outside the immediate area of Barcelona.

Stephen Peet: So in the end you all had to come back?

Philip Leacock: We were sent...

Stephen Peet: Did you come back with film and edit it in England?

Philip Leacock: Yes. And I was - I don't think I was involved when we came back. I had got leave of absence from Strand Films and when I got back Basil Wright and John Taylor asked me to join Realist, so I went to Strand to apologise - and was only to learn that they weren't going to take me back anyway [laughs]. I was very, very cross because the man managed to fire me

before I could explain that I'd got another job [laughs]. But anyway, and then I worked at Realist for quite some time.

Stephen Peet: Now one of the things that you're credited with is being Assistant Director with John Taylor on The Londoners.

Philip Leacock: Oh it was a very exciting project.

Stephen Peet: What film was that?

Philip Leacock: It was made to - it was made for the London County Council, celebrating I think 50 years and it was really very exciting and John was a wonderful person to work for. I'd worked with John quite a bit before then on other projects and he's really quite a person. Well you probably know him.

Stephen Peet: So that you worked with, one way and another, a lot of the people who were the early pioneers of documentary in the country I suppose, because it was a very small group then wasn't it?

Philip Leacock: Yes. I worked with, on loan out to Elton. I edited a film which John shot in what is now called Iran, which was still Persia. And that was for Elton, and that must have been fairly early on because I know I was being paid 25 shillings a week. And they were rather pleased with the cut and Elton turned and said well how much am I earning and I said, "25 shillings," and he was absolutely furious [laughs] because they were paying 5 pounds or something like that for those loan-outs!

Stephen Peet: The equipment you had to work with in those days, you were on camera ever were you? Or not?

Philip Leacock: Well, you know, the basic unit usually there was a director, a cameraman and an assistant. And the assistant would usually work on the research and script and right the way through. And he'd - camera, he'd really be assistant to someone like Jeakins, Adrian Jeakins was our regular cameraman at Realist and was absolutely terrific. But you would carry film cases and load, I mean you didn't learn to photograph really, but you did learn the basics of an assistant cameraman I suppose.

Stephen Peet: Well what cameras were they?

Philip Leacock: Newman-Sinclair I suppose was the...

Stephen Peet: ...the big things.

Philip Leacock: Well it wasn't that big was it - Newman? It was a spun aluminium...

Additional speaker (unidentified): Ron Craven used to use one. Did you know Ron Craven?

Philip Leacock: Yes. John's still got one I think.

Additional speaker (unidentified): Ron Craven used to use one when I was at Transport.

Philip Leacock: Did he? Yes, it had one awkward thing that took you a little time to get used to if you remember, the eyepiece. You had a non-optical viewfinder on that ran through the top of the camera and then if you wanted to you could stick the prism eyepiece into the side. But the image you got was upside down and it was funny because after a while you must have some mechanism - it always interested me that you forgot that it was upside down, you adjusted for it or something.

Stephen Peet: Did all these films have to be carefully scripted and then the scripts vetted by people before you could start shooting? Or were you able to in effect, apart from in Spain when it was a rather special case, shoot off the cuff and make things up as you went along?

Philip Leacock: I think you had a script and it was - all these were sponsored films, someone put up the money for them, which was I think in the end the undoing of documentary because it was not a viable way of filmmaking. And you would have a script, but it was more like what we would call an outline and the commentary was not, as a rule, written at that stage. And - but I think you had - I mean I remember working on a thing with Basil, where I was just Assistant, on education. I don't remember the name of it [NB Possibly Children at School]. And Basil, you would just have sequences at a certain school, on a certain aspect, you know. But you didn't really know what he was going to do in detail until you got down there. And I suppose, considering most of the films were 20 minutes to 30 minutes, I guess, were they? That you took quite a long time really in getting that footage by modern day standards when you think you shoot a television hour show in seven days or six and a half days or whatever miserable thing they think up!

Stephen Peet: Yes I remember The Londoners was unusually long, it was four reels, because I remember inspecting a print before it went to the World Fair I think. I remember it was a four-reeler.

Philip Leacock: Oh, that was a nice film.

Stephen Peet: Others were usually a bit shorter. Your Island People is one, and The Story of Wool I think. This is at the beginning of the war, where you're down as Director on the credits. Was The Story of Wool the first one you actually directed yourself do you think? Apart from Kew Gardens.

Philip Leacock: Probably was, yes. Island People Ruby directed, Ruby Grierson, and we were stuck on the Isle of Islay for a long time. But she was a wonderful person to...

Stephen Peet: That must have been the last thing that she did.

Philip Leacock: It was.

Stephen Peet: What was it about then - Island People?

Philip Leacock: It was really about the economy of the islands and it covered a wide range of subjects. I don't know quite what. I don't remember seeing the final film, but we covered all the industries and the way of life and the seafaring side of it. We must have been up there quite a long time.

Stephen Peet: Now during part of the war you had a position in the Army - what was it called? The Kinematograph Unit or Kinematograph Services? A great mouthful of a name anyway. [NB The Army Kinematograph Service]

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: What position were you there? Were you a director?

Philip Leacock: I was directing yes.

Stephen Peet: Did the fact you had been to Spain in any way inhibit that or - not inhibit it, what's the word? Were any queries about you going to Spain that gave you trouble in that period?

Philip Leacock: Not really. I did notice, I'm sure it was coincidental, that I didn't get my commission until Russia came into the war [laughs]. Who knows what goes on in the bureaucratic mind!

Stephen Peet: What kind of films did you make then in the Army?

Philip Leacock: Training films, some for exhibition, for showing to recruits and things. And some very practical ones like how to pack equipment, which were very dull. And then for a while I was up at the battle school at Barnard Castle. And we did a lot of shooting up there. I can't remember what the film was used for, because most people weren't there to be trained. We just did a lot of coverage of people going through training with live ammunition and that sort of stuff.

Stephen Peet: Was it difficult for you in any way in this Unit? Did you have to compromise with your own convictions about things? Because a great many of the documentary group remained in reserved occupations. Did you have this choice or did you volunteer to go into the Army?

Philip Leacock: I think I would have volunteered - no I didn't, I was called up. And I got, I think when I was called up I did get some sort of - I was working at the time on something with John, I can't remember what, I know it was connected with the Army because we went down and did some filming of the first Canadian Division to come over here. And again I have no recollection of that.

Stephen Peet: You probably got a deferment of some sort.

Philip Leacock: Yes, that's right, and then I went in April 1940 I think.

Stephen Peet: So you were in this Unit, making...

Philip Leacock: I wasn't to start with, I was in the RAOC for a while.

Stephen Peet: Were you? Oh I see and then you went from the RAMC...

Philip Leacock: RAOC - the Royal Army Ordnance Corps...

Stephen Peet: I beg your pardon, RAOC.

Philip Leacock: And I was there for about a year or so.

Stephen Peet: So you actually had some personal experience of life in the Army before you started...

Philip Leacock: Yes, I was Sergeant I think by the time...

Stephen Peet: And there were films that got listed somewhere, no doubt there were dozens more. One called A Day in the Line and Back to Service, and Rehabilitation, I found in a book somewhere.

Philip Leacock: Oh really? Rehabilitation was at the end of the war.

Stephen Peet: Yes obviously.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Were there others from the documentary movement, as it's now called, in that work as well? Did you...?

Philip Leacock: Oh yes, a lot of us. Freddie Francis, er, oh, and the great cameraman, Freddie Young.

Stephen Peet: Oh right.

Philip Leacock: And oh there were quite a lot of people. And it was - and then of course they brought in, at one point they brought in Carol Reed along with Eric Ambler. Eric was already a Colonel and Carol Reed was made an instant Captain, and Peter Ustinov was a Private, so I was brought in on that picture. They had Michael Aniston[?], really he was the Assistant Director, he'd worked with Carol Reed before. And I was brought in as a sort of extra Assistant Director to try and make them behave in a relatively military way [laughs]. And it was very funny, you had to practically dress them [laughs], they didn't know how to put their gaiters on because none of them had done basic training. Ustinov was very, very unhappy, he just couldn't - I think he got out on psychological grounds.

Stephen Peet: But was this some kind of feature film? Or what was the...?

Philip Leacock: Yes, it was. I think it was called The Way - no, The Way Ahead was the movie wasn't it?

Stephen Peet: Ah-huh.

Philip Leacock: And we made - the original version with Donat was made as an Army film, and - to give people coming into the Army and idea of Army life. But it was a story film. [NB it was called The New Lot]

Stephen Peet: Is that why Ustinov was on it?

Philip Leacock: Yes. He and Ambler were both writing. And I don't know what happened to him. I don't know why he was brought in as a Private, whereas Carol had been brought in and immediately made a Captain, which is not a very easy thing to do because he didn't know any military - had no military knowledge at all [laughs]. Anyway, he didn't stay long.

Additional speaker (unidentified): And a Russian background...

Stephen Peet: Yes. That's extraordinary. But then you were doing this for five years or so, until the end of the war, or after the end of the war?

Philip Leacock: Well just the last six months I was in, waiting to be demobilised, I was a Captain then I think, and I was put onto work with prisoners coming back from the Far East from prison camps, which was very interesting indeed.

Stephen Peet: Was this work nothing to do with film?

Philip Leacock: Nothing to do with film.

Stephen Peet: I see. And then you were demobilised?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Now, I assume after the war, like many other people, you had difficulty getting back into the business again, or did you have an assured job to go back to?

Philip Leacock: I really don't know how it worked out because John by that time...

Stephen Peet: This is John Grierson.

Philip Leacock: I was a sort of junior member of the sort of inner circle around Grierson I suppose really. But as I say I was only allowed to buy a drink in the Highlander very, very occasionally, that sort of thing, and stood at the back. But I was very close to them all really.

Anstey I think I knew least, but I'd also worked for Rotha on the thing he made about The Times, The Thunderer. The Thunderer?

Stephen Peet: In what capacity did you work on that?

Philip Leacock: The Fifth Estate or something...

Stephen Peet: ...Fourth Estate...

Philip Leacock: ...Fourth Estate, yes. I was his Assistant on it, yes. So that was before the war, but I'd worked with Rotha. Anstey I did - I don't think I ever made a film for Anstey but I did some preparatory work on a couple of things that didn't, that didn't go ahead. So I really knew most of them. No, John had by that time had started Crown Film Unit and I went in there straight away. Yes, immediately. Down at Beaconsfield.

Stephen Peet: That was what, about '46 or something of that sort?

Philip Leacock: 1946, yes. And about a year later they sent me a huge sum of money, the government, because I was supposed to have been working for Crown. I had done some work - I don't know really to this day - I didn't argue about it, they sent me a cheque for five thousand pounds [laughs] which was a lot of money. It was so much for each year that I'd been in the Army, that's right. And I never argued about it.

Additional speaker (unidentified): That was from being with the Crown Film Unit?

Philip Leacock: Well, it was as if I had been with Crown before the war, but I don't think I was. But...

Stephen Peet: So you were already in Crown straight after the war. What was this film where you Second Unit Director, called Mr Perrin and Mr Traill? Does this ring a bell?

Philip Leacock: Yes, that was, I think Donald Taylor got me the job but he was in some way connected and they wanted, they asked me if I'd do a second unit in...[pause]...King Arthur's Castle, wherever that is. It was on the coast in, presumably Devon and we were to go down for two weeks and we ended up staying I think for at least two months.

Stephen Peet: What was the - what did you have to shoot?

Philip Leacock: Mainly back projection plates and scenes with doubles, to be cut into the - it was quite a major feature.

Stephen Peet: Lawrence Huntington director was he?

Philip Leacock: That's right, yes.

Stephen Peet: Was this your first chance of directing actors even though they were doubles?

Philip Leacock: No, I'd already, with Crown I'd already - do you have a record of when we did Out of True? Is there anything called Out of True there?

Stephen Peet: I don't think so. I think it was much later.

Philip Leacock: Was it?

Stephen Peet: In 1951.

Philip Leacock: Oh really?

Stephen Peet: According to the records.

Philip Leacock: Oh yes.

Stephen Peet: Out of True and Life in Her Hands and things like that.

Philip Leacock: Oh later were they? Well maybe I got - That was the first time I think. I did a thing for the Post Office somewhere along the line, where we used actors, because I know we had Alfie Bass, who was as inexperienced as I was.

Stephen Peet: Would that be Pillar to Post? Or something like that?

Philip Leacock: Oh it sounds like it, yes [laughs]. Terrible pun!

Stephen Peet: That's in '48. Two extraordinary things when you joined the Crown Unit, called Pillar to Post and Deadly Lampshade.

Philip Leacock: Well Deadly Lampshade was a ludicrous thing by the Design Council or some such organisation, about - we tried to design something which was truly appalling, broke all the rules of good design. And before we'd even finished someone was trying to buy the prototype we'd made [laughs]. It was a - the deadly lampshade was a table lamp made of - it was like a Viking ship with lots of little things that would collect dirt. Everything was worked out by the Design Council, this was the worst thing and had people... I'm not sure if it ever went into production but they were certainly very interested in it! [laughs]

Stephen Peet: There seems to be a bit of confusion in the lists of credits because you're down as doing a great many things around about '48, including Riders of the New Forest which was presumably, was it the Children' Film Foundation or somebody like that?

Philip Leacock: Yes, that's odd.

Stephen Peet: Mary Field. Maybe there's just mistakes in the listing. But it was round about there wasn't it? Was it before you joined Crown?

Philip Leacock: Funny, I'm not sure. Maybe I didn't go straight to Crown, but...

Stephen Peet: Whether that is right or not, Riders of the New Forest was something very new for you wasn't it?

Philip Leacock: Yes, that was a children's - for Mary Field - a children's film, and that took a whole summer so I must have been. That's interesting, yes. Maybe I've got a gap in there somewhere.

Stephen Peet: It appears to have been both a full-length feature and a serial, so I suppose it was made in such a way that it could be...

Philip Leacock: I didn't know they made - we did it as so many - they were 20 minute two reel episodes.

Stephen Peet: Yes. What was the story of that? Because that would have been your first full acting direction.

Philip Leacock: It was a family, a group of children, who were all interested in riding and lived in the New Forest, and it was just little adventure stories. There was no - it was fun to do.

Stephen Peet: Who worked with you on that, do you remember or is it difficult to recall?

Philip Leacock: A director who was - the art director on it, who became a good friend, I can't remember his name. He's in Hollywood now. And a director - it'll come to me in a minute. Most of the crew were new to me. I didn't know the cameraman or anything.

Stephen Peet: But it was new experience presumably, working in that way.

Philip Leacock: Yes it was, yes.

Stephen Peet: It was all shot on location was it? Or was there some studio shooting?

Philip Leacock: No, it was all shot down there on location, yes. We'd sometimes - we had interiors, but we'd use - we'd sometimes build a small room in an old barn or something like that.

Stephen Peet: So in effect you were using documentary techniques, because that wasn't a usual way of shooting a feature was it?

Philip Leacock: I suppose not, no.

Stephen Peet: Anyhow, that gave you a feeling or a taste for directing children I believe?

Philip Leacock: Well it was certainly fun, yes.

Stephen Peet: Because you went on in the Crown Film Unit for several years according to my information. You did one called 'Health', directed, or co-directed with Richard Warren and

another one called 'Television'. It doesn't sound to me like titles, I think this must have been somebody's notes. Does that ring a bell at all at Crown?

Philip Leacock: Um... We did a thing, a sort of magazine called This is Britain, and we'd all take turns in shooting stuff for it when we weren't involved in another project. It was very interesting.

Stephen Peet: Was that a ten-minute or twenty-minute film that regularly...?

Philip Leacock: It was rather like - I think it may have been longer. Each edition had three stories typically, and you know, we'd do the glass industry, we did the development of the British racing motor car. We did the development of the Comet aeroplane. And those would be things where you'd do coverage over a year or so, and you'd go back whenever they told us there was a new development, you know, they were going to test fly the Comet or whatever it was. And we shot a lot of footage. And it was very interesting actually, I enjoy that sort of shooting, just off the cuff stuff.

Stephen Peet: Anyway, at Crown various things are listed for you: Out of True, Life in Her Hands and Festival in London - presumably about the...

Philip Leacock: ...'51...

Stephen Peet: ...1951 festival. Were you still using Newman Sinclair cameras and rather clunky equipment?

Philip Leacock: No, no, we were using more conventional feature stuff then because Out of True was a story film, which Carol's father wrote. It was made by the government.

Stephen Peet: Can I just interrupt you because you said Carol's father. If you could...

Philip Leacock: Oh - my wife's father, Montague Slater was a writer and had done a lot of work in documentary. And he wrote the script for - he was a novelist and poet also. He did the script for Out of True, which we spent quite a lot of time doing. The idea was to try and counteract - a movie called Snake Pit had been released shortly before, which made mental hospitals like, really very horrifying. And it was felt that this not true in British mental hospitals, so we did a quite serious story, with a slight story but really trying to say that you go into a hospital and they try and cure you and help you and so on, and it's not a 'snake pit' situation. And Jane Hylton, who was a nice actress, I think played the lead in it and Montague then went on - Montague Slater went on and wrote a book about the hospital which we worked in.

Additional speaker (unidentified): Who edited that film? Was it Terry Trench?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Additional speaker (unidentified): That's why it rang a bell, yes.

Philip Leacock: Yes, it was very interesting because we shot the whole thing in the hospital. We played cricket matches with some of the inmates! [laughs]

Additional speaker (unidentified): I worked with Terry when I worked at British Transport.

Philip Leacock: Oh did you? He's awfully nice, yes. Lovely.

Additional speaker (unidentified): That's where I first heard your name.

Philip Leacock: Was it? Yes. We were good friends.

Stephen Peet: What was the set-up at Crown? Did you have, in effect, heavy-handed producers breathing down your neck? And did the directors work on a film right from the beginning, right to the end? You didn't hand over to an editor?

Philip Leacock: No. Well John as you know, he was head of Crown.

Stephen Peet: This is John Taylor.

Philip Leacock: Yes, John Taylor, with Grierson in the background. And I mean he's always the sort of person who gives you - who will defend you against the upper echelon of the bureaucracy as much as he could and would give you a free hand. And at some point John left. Do you remember how that happened? I don't know. John left and I can't remember the name of the man who took over. But it was not the same thing. Because when Grierson asked me if I'd be interested in a - he'd got an idea for a Scottish coal mining story based on an actual disaster, a mining disaster took place in Argyllshire I think it was.

Stephen Peet: This is Grierson.

Philip Leacock: Yes. And he asked me if I'd like to do this and I wrote a - based on newspaper cuttings I wrote a six-page outline and then I asked if they then - Group 3 had just been formed and I asked to be released - if they would release me to do it and they were very snooty. I can't remember the name of the guy at all [laughs]. I was very cross with him. Anyway he said, "We're not going to guarantee the place is - we can't hold places open for you." So I said, "Well I'm going to do it anyway." And they were promptly cancelled by the Tory government when they came in! [laughs] I was sorry for the other people, but it served him right I thought.

Stephen Peet: Before we get onto that, because that was The Brave Don't Cry wasn't it? This film you're talking about?

Philip Leacock: Hmmm.

Stephen Peet: What was your relationship with Grierson and...? Did you get on well with him or...?

Philip Leacock: Oh yes, very well. I mean as far as - you never knew with Grierson [laughs]. I loved working with him. I think he was a terrific person. I think - and I'm sure you've heard this from other people, he had a sort of technique of stimulating you by sometimes quite unpleasant methods. It always annoyed me that when they - the films they've made about him and books they've written, they always make - it's always so serious. And yet, for me anyway, he was a man of enormous humour and great fun to be with. And he'd throw insulting remarks at you to see how you'd react, and watch! [laughs]

Additional speaker (unidentified): Did you know Stewart McAllister?

Philip Leacock: Not very well, no. No, I didn't work with him, no. I mean I know his work and - yes.

Stephen Peet: A bit about The Brave Don't Cry, because this was very specifically a feature film.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: But was it semi-documentary? Did you use actors or was it a mixture?

Philip Leacock: No, we used actors pretty well throughout, and we shot it all up here.

Stephen Peet: When you say up here?

Philip Leacock: In London.

Stephen Peet: Beaconsfield was it?

Philip Leacock: Beaconsfield. No, no, we didn't shoot at Beaconsfield, we were at somewhere near Uxbridge, no. One of the small - Southall?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Southall.

Philip Leacock: Yes, shot it at Southall.

Stephen Peet: But it's about a mining disaster, it can't all have been done in the studio was it?

Philip Leacock: Um, oh we did some exteriors, but very little.

AP: It wasn't shot...?

Philip Leacock: The actual - we did a little shooting of the exterior of the mine but nearly all of it was done, even the mine head was shot on the back lot at Southall. We had very little money and Michael Stringer was a wonderful Art Director and...

Stephen Peet: This was one of the early Group 3 Productions was it?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: After it had been going a year or two. What was the reaction to it? Was it a successful feature film?

Philip Leacock: It was, it got very nice reviews and they didn't have a prize at that time in Edinburgh but it was the featured production, being Scottish of course. And we had a screening up there for all the miners who'd worked at the mine where the disaster - it was very much a documentary, to go back. I mean Montague, again Carol's - my wife's father - wrote the script. And we spent a lot of time up there and we went into the actual mine where the disaster had taken place. It was quite complicated. And it was very interesting that - I think Montague first got this feeling that we were being shown around by mine officials and miners and we talked to people, that something was going on, and had gone on which was not on the public record. And we gave a party just before we left, at which everybody had quite a lot to drink, at a hotel. And two or three people started breaking through, and there had been a revolt underground, and really, without that we really wouldn't have had a story. And so we got this really exciting story about the guys feeling that - there were 117 men trapped and what they did was, they tried to get to them through an abandoned nearby mine. And as soon as they opened - they actually opened a hole through to them - but immediately, an air pressure differential fire dam started to go through into the mine where the guys, and they hadn't got gas masks. So they had to close it off, and you can imagine, there was just - the guy who was in charge was a rather dour disciplinarian sort of guy and he was deposed by the guys in there. They wouldn't take his instruction any more, the trapped men. And eventually they got gas masks, they borrowed them from all over Europe and they got them all out.

Stephen Peet: This is the real story.

Philip Leacock: The real story. We stuck to it pretty closely. We put fictitious characters in, but as you say it was a documentary basically.

Stephen Peet: Was there any objection that you had uncovered the real story?

Philip Leacock: No.

Stephen Peet: Had there been a cover up and an inquiry...[Break in recording] I'll say it again because it was too near the beginning. Philip Leacock, Tape 1, Side B. You were talking about the actual facts behind The Brave Don't Cry. Were the actors all Scottish or did they have to...?

Philip Leacock: Yes, really pretty well all of them and Andrew Keir for instance was one of the sort of leaders of the younger miners and they were, some of them were people I'd worked with before.

Stephen Peet: What, on other films?

Philip Leacock: Yes. Andrew I hadn't, but I have since.

Stephen Peet: As you said, it was a successful film, it went, presumably on release?

Philip Leacock: Yes, I don't know. In those days one just got a fee for a movie and that was it. So you never had any way of telling how well it did. I have no idea at all. I've got a bunch of press cuttings and...

Stephen Peet: But I understand it led to a contract for you with Rank.

Philip Leacock: That's right, yes. It had very nice reviews, yes. Whether it did any...

Stephen Peet: So you went on to making quite a number of other features in this country from then on, of which something called Appointment in London, I don't remember, was soon after that.

Philip Leacock: That was a Bomber Command picture with Dirk Bogarde. It was the first picture Dirk did where he didn't play a psychotic killer or something like that. He played the gallant officer who's doing his last mission. It was quite a nice experience, it was produced by Aubrey Baring. I don't know if he's still in the industry you see, that's the Baring banking family. He was absolutely delightful. Terribly, terribly polite because I remember one of the first scenes I did in the studio, he would always come on the set when he'd seen the rushes and he said they were very good, very nice and he said, "I think we'll save the set Philip. You might want to do a few little extra clasps later on." [Laughs] That was the nearest to criticism you'd ever get from him! [laughs] It was a fun picture I must say.

Stephen Peet: So really, by then you had moved away from any kind of documentary into features from then on?

Philip Leacock: Well I think you always, if you've come out of documentary, I think that side is always important to you and limits you in a certain way as well. I mean I was certainly - to me it was important that despite the story, to make the actual basis of what was going on as real as possible. And...

Stephen Peet: Did you try and work on location or is it still the tradition then to do everything in the studio?

Philip Leacock: No, we did quite a lot of that in location. And...

Stephen Peet: Was that shooting sync sound on location?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: You didn't post-sync or anything?

Philip Leacock: No.

Stephen Peet: Didn't have difficulty with background noise?

Philip Leacock: No.

Stephen Peet: So things were getting more sophisticated. But your next one, called *The Kidnappers*, that presumably was largely on location wasn't it?

Philip Leacock: No, funnily enough it wasn't. The writer of that, Neil Paterson, he'd written the short story, and he and I worked on the script together. It was near enough to the war to be very tight dollar currency control. And they gave us enough money for us to go over to Canada, it was based - it was supposed to be Nova Scotia. And we spent about three or four weeks looking at possible backgrounds there to reproduce. As a fact I don't think we lost anything because it was a period picture and there were very few buildings which we could have made use of over there. But we got a lot of, we took a lot of pictures and then we shot - we did, I think, two weeks location in Glen Affric, which is up north of Loch Ness, you go out of Inverness up there. In fact my wife and I just went and looked at the locations but they've all been - the 'hydro' as they call it up there [laughs] has really ruined the - well, I mean it's still very beautiful but it's not the place we filmed in.

Stephen Peet: What was the story of *The Kidnappers*?

Philip Leacock: It's a very delicate sort of short story which we had to expand a little bit, about two small boys whose parents have died and have been sent out from Scotland to live with their grandfather, who is a very narrow, hard-nosed Scotsman, a farmer with his wife and daughter, who's at loggerheads with the community. And it's really this man's humanity coming out as a result of the boys. The boys want a dog and he won't let them have it and they need something and they find this baby unattended and so they look after the baby for a few days, a couple of days, in a sort of nest they make for it, and even call it Rover, which was the name they were going to give the dog. And then they're put on trial in the village and exonerated and the father - it ends up very happily. But it was a really fun thing to work on.

Stephen Peet: It was a period piece you say?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: What period?

Philip Leacock: It was just after the Boer War. And the added element that when we found we were short that Neil Paterson wrote into it was a sort of love story between Duncan Macrae, who played the grandfather, between his daughter and Theo Bikel who was a Dutchman and a doctor working in the area.

Stephen Peet: What, somebody who'd been in the Boer War?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: I see.

Philip Leacock: Well not really no, the fact that he was Dutch was enough to put the [laughs] - you know he hadn't been in the war, it was just that the grandfather labelled everybody. [laughs]

Stephen Peet: But that's a film that you're particularly fond of I believe?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Is it that working with children was something you did that you enjoyed? Or is it just chance?

Philip Leacock: Not really. Margaret Thomson worked for the children as much as I did. You know Margaret?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Yes.

Stephen Peet: I was just going to ask you that, yes. I remember her telling me about that. What was her job on that? Was she grooming them, coaching them I mean?

Philip Leacock: Yes. Yes, she worked with them and she also worked on the casting. And the little one, who was only five, couldn't read and so she would teach him lines overnight. He had a terrific memory because he would memorise not only his lines but the adults', which drove them up the wall [laughs] because he would correct them [laughs]. No, she was a great, great help.

Stephen Peet: Was the next one, Escapade, it sounds a similar kind of title, or was it something quite different?

Philip Leacock: Well it did involve children in fact. It was - I think it was based on a play, Roger MacDougall's play of the same title. And it's about a group of schoolboys whose father is a pacifist, John Mills, and it's really a clash between the father and Alastair Sim who's their headmaster at their boarding school. And the boys have set up to try and demonstrate their opposition to war. John Mills' eldest son flies a plane to Vienna, he's learnt to fly. It's a nice story. It didn't do very well, I don't know why, but maybe people don't believe in anti-war things. It was anti-war and... [laughs]

Stephen Peet: Well it's the period perhaps, in 1955 it was too close to the war.

Philip Leacock: Maybe, I don't know.

Stephen Peet: Because there were anti-war films - oh about that same length of time aren't there, after the First World War, which were - what was it? 'I Killed a Man' and... But it was co-scripted with Donald Ogden Stewart, I see.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: So he would have been sympathetic to the story I imagine?

Philip Leacock: He wasn't allowed to use his name on the picture at that point.

Stephen Peet: At all? Because he was still blacklisted was he?

Philip Leacock: Well they didn't have the guts to put his name on. He used a pseudonym or whatever you call it - no, what do writers use?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Pseudonym.

Philip Leacock: Is it? Anyway...

Stephen Peet: Oh, well he's down in the history books now as co-scripting it, so he's on again.

Philip Leacock: Oh good! [laughs]

Stephen Peet: These stories - that one - they're expressing your own personal feelings obviously because you wouldn't have made a film like that just for the money. You did it because you believed in the story I imagine?

Philip Leacock: Oh yes, very much so. Yes, yes.

Stephen Peet: Are there other films that followed that expressed your humanist or political feelings, whatever one's going to call it? Like Spanish Garden[er], or High Tide at Noon, or Innocent Sinners? These are not names I remember...except Spanish Garden[er]. What kind of stories were they?

Philip Leacock: High Tide at Noon was a - I don't know that I was ever looking for political statement, but I think I was trying to find things that reflected my own philosophy of life, whatever you call it, which is fairly loose but you know, would encourage a sense of decency really. And I think those all did that.

Stephen Peet: What were the stories? Spanish Garden[er]?

Philip Leacock: Well Spanish Gardener was Dirk Bogarde.

Stephen Peet: Sorry I made a slip there, it was Spanish Gardener.

Philip Leacock: Gardener, yes.

Stephen Peet: I just wrote it down wrong here.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Oh I remember that, yes.

Philip Leacock: That was a story of a very intolerant, Michael Hordern played the father of a small boy - the wife - I think the wife had died and Dirk plays the gardener who befriends the little boy and gives him the warmth that the father is incapable of. And the father learns from, he eventually turns on the gardener and has him arrested. And it was - I liked the story very much. That was a Cronin story. What was the other one?

Stephen Peet: High Tide at Noon and The Innocent Sinners.

Philip Leacock: Oh The Innocent Sinners was the story of Rumer Godden's which was was 'An Episode of Sparrows'. And I don't know why they changed the title because it was - it hurt it because it was a well known novel, you know. And the Rank Organisation didn't think 'Episode of Sparrows' would mean anything and in those days - well they still are - they're so ridiculous about titles. But I think it hurt the picture. That was again a story about young people and children, yes.

Stephen Peet: Did you yourself choose these particular stories to do? Or were any of them handed to you on a plate?

Philip Leacock: I think a lot of these were producers at Pinewood coming to - I was under contract but they never forced you to take a subject, and I think that's traditional throughout the industry. You eventually take something if you're under contract [laughs], because you begin to get a sense of guilt that you're getting this cheque every month and you're sitting around in the garden not doing anything.

Stephen Peet: Did you have any battles when you were there with the things you wanted to do and there was some doubt that it wouldn't be a money-making film or...?

Philip Leacock: Well, not so much battles, but like The Kidnappers, when we'd finished the script. At that time there was a strange relationship between Balcon and Rank. Balcon was still at Ealing, he was head of a committee which vetted all Rank projects. And we were all set to start real work on it, to start casting it and so on, and his board turned it down because they didn't think it was financially viable. And the strangest thing happened, I was at home on a Saturday, I got this call - if I had a few minutes, would I go up to Mayfair and see Lord Rank in his office? [Laughs] And I thought, "Oh God, what are we doing now?" you know. Anyway, he was absolutely sweet, he said that he'd read the script and he'd never disagreed with his board to that extent, but he wanted to make it anyway. And he talked about - it had a very strong moral feeling to it, you know. And he said, "I have one request to make..." and my heart sank [laughs] - you know, his daughter to play the lead or something - and he said, "If you can, and don't force it, just if it fits in, if you could just mention..." I can't do the Yorkshire version of the 'Good Book' but [laughs]... So I said, "Fine." And we put a mention of the 'Good Book' in there! And so it was made over Balcon's head and Balcon was very nice about it, I mean, he called up and said he was delighted that they had made an honest decision based on financial considerations and both he and Rank said, "Please do it as cheaply as possible," which we did. And it's made its money back in Canada alone, which was interesting.

Stephen Peet: Anyway, your contracts came to an end with Rank after *Innocent Sinners* I believe.

Philip Leacock: Yes, yes.

Stephen Peet: And you went off in various directions from then on, working more and more in the States I think didn't you? Or did you move to the States at any one point? Did you travel backwards and forwards to wherever you were working?

Philip Leacock: We commuted, yes. I was actually...Sandy Mackendrick [Alexander Mackendrick] had gone out there to work with Hecht and Lancaster. I think it must have been at his recommendation. They asked me to come out and talk to them, and Hal Hecht put me under personal contract for five years. And they went broke. I did two films for them, and they went broke. Not my fault [laughs]. And that was very interesting that because they were two tiny little low-budget films, but they were - one of them was one of the first efforts to make a film with and entirely black cast, called *Take a Giant Step*, which nobody wanted to make except Hal Hecht and us. And...

Stephen Peet: What kind of story was it then?

Philip Leacock: It was the problems of a black boy, black family who moved into a middle-class white district and the father is an employee of a bank, in a quite senior position. And they have a nice house and a maid. And everything's fine for the boy - very well played by Johnny Nash, who became a top singer. He was only seventeen at the time. And the story starts at the point where the boy has - he's got a nice group of white friends, and everything's worked fine and they're all very interested in games and stuff, sports. And then when the boys start dating, he finds he's no longer included in the gang and gets very, very upset. And - it's got quite a lot of nice comedy in it - and goes off and is made fun of by three hookers and has a little affair with Ruby Dee who, I don't know if you know, the black actors in America, she's a wonderful person.

Stephen Peet: But this is 30 years ago, so really you're sticking your neck out at a time when...

Philip Leacock: Do you know, when we - we shot it at - it wasn't a Universal picture, but we took space at Universal, which was totally empty at the time, it had gone broke. And we tried to, we brought Johnny Nash in from - I forget where he was from then, it wasn't Nashville, but it may have been. We couldn't find a hotel that would take him in Hollywood. We ended up at one of these places like the Tropicana I think, in Hollywood, which was a very sleazy hotel.

Stephen Peet: I imagine, because of the subject matter, that was entirely a studio production. Could you have done any of that on location in the kind of town where...?

Philip Leacock: Not with the sort of money we were working on. We shot it in three weeks. I think we had an eighteen-day schedule actually, which is just over three weeks, yes. And I don't think we went off the back lot. But Universal has a huge back lot and you can do a lot with it with a good Art Director, which we had. And...no, you notice it a bit. There's a rumour that United Artists, who never wanted to make it anyway, that they had destroyed the negative. But

I've got a 16mm copy which I bought from them. They wouldn't give me one even. And it's getting worn out with screenings, so we've had some tapes made and I've given it to a university to look after because any time there's a black film festival they like to run it. It's a nice little film, it is a little film though.

Stephen Peet: But it was in advance of its time?

Philip Leacock: I suppose so, yes.

Stephen Peet: Where was it screened? Around the States? It wasn't shown here was it?

Philip Leacock: It didn't - it had an odd history. It didn't do very well, it didn't even get particularly good reviews in the States. And everyone I think was afraid of Uncle Tom-ism, I don't know, all sorts of complications. And it was just pushed out. It got no advance publicity from - United obviously didn't want to show it. It was funny because it got a very good rating when we did a sneak preview but they didn't like it anyway. And then they put it on here, Marble Arch, as second feature to a thing called 'Captain Blood's Coffin' [NB Probably Dr Blood's Coffin] I think it was [laughs]. And Dilys Powell somehow must have heard of it, because she let off a blast the next Sunday. And then the other critics went to see it and it got a very good press here. And then it got some distribution after that. I don't think it made any money but it didn't cost any either.

Stephen Peet: Did we ever get on record the title of it?

Philip Leacock: Take a Giant Step.

Stephen Peet: It was Take a Giant Step. It was called that in this country too?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Because some of the films get re-titled.

Philip Leacock: No, this was the same.

Stephen Peet: Like The Kidnappers I believe was...

Philip Leacock: It was Little Kidnappers, yes.

Stephen Peet: It's very strange.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Now, what was it like moving into American studios for the first time? Was the contrast considerable or was it very similar kind of methods of working?

Philip Leacock: Very similar. And they're very used to working - they say it helps if you speak some English [laughs], that's the attitude. I mean they're very sort of relaxed and fun people. Very much the same, yes. They work at a much higher tempo and it's a slightly different attitude. If you want to work late, you work late and the company pays for it and they don't give a damn. But the tradition is if you suddenly announce in the middle of the afternoon that you're going to add to the schedule and shoot until midnight, people may curse to get to the phone to put off dates and things but there won't be any...

Stephen Peet: So it's a personal decision to agree to work late. What about the unions? There's not one single union, is there a whole lot of unions?

Philip Leacock: Yes and they're not - I don't think they're unions in the sense that the ACT is. Or the craft unions probably are closer to it, but as far as directors and writers and actors - those are guilds really and don't have a tradition. I mean they're very good in what they do, they negotiate very well for their members and - but they're not a member of anything equivalent to the Trade Union Congress or anything like that. And basically they don't sort of get involved in politics outside the industry, although occasionally they do. The actors, when Ed Asner was president became quite sort of politically conscious and took an attitude on South Africa and things like that. But it's against the tradition of the guilds really to get involved. And this didn't last. In fact Charlton Heston, who I was delighted to see got a terrible review in the paper today [laughs], started a splinter group in S.A.G., opposing their taking any sort of political attitudes, which is interesting.

Stephen Peet: Now, we've left out the huge chunk of your life, really of about 30 years from starting to work in the States until now, where presumably you began to alternate between television work and cinema work? Or did you make a break and go entirely into television? And also you alternated between directing and producing I think?

Philip Leacock: Yes, but the producing was really only in television. Yes, what happened was I was making a - in fact I was just talking to someone here who is doing a film about Jean Seberg. When Hecht and Lancaster wound up their business - they were quarrelling among themselves and I think they were losing money - and so with my agreement they sold the second, four remaining years of my contract to Columbia and I did quite a few films during those four years for Columbia, part of it over here. The War Lover, Steve McQueen, we made over here.

Stephen Peet: This is what - early '60s by now?

Philip Leacock: Suppose so. And a film I'm very proud of but it never got anywhere - about a group of boys evacuated from London into the country and the effect of some jingoistic adults on young people. Reach for Glory. Again a title - it was called 'The Custard Boys', the original novel on which it was based. But Reach for Glory was a very inappropriate title. Unfortunately it came out almost the same time as Lord of the Flies, which was probably a much more dramatic picture and a very good picture. But it hurt us and we got a very good review in 'The New York Times' indeed, comparing us, saying that this was a good picture but it was being eclipsed by... So it didn't do very much but it's a film which I particularly like.

Stephen Peet: Again, with children.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Additional speaker (unidentified): It's a subject dear to my heart.

Philip Leacock: Is it?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Yes.

Philip Leacock: Oh yes, hmmm.

Additional speaker (unidentified): Talk to you more about that afterwards.

Philip Leacock: But it was after that I suppose, I don't know, at some point someone came and said would I like to do - a very persuasive television producer, would I like to do a pilot for a new series. I had no idea about television at all. And that was when I was doing this Jean Seberg film...Let No Man Write My Epitaph was the title of it.

Stephen Peet: When you say you had no idea about television, you mean about working for television?

Philip Leacock: Yes, I mean for instance when you were under contract, Columbia, you ate in the directors' dining room and it was all very formal and people - the television department at that time, Columbia wasn't doing very well, it was being supported by its television wing. But they weren't allowed in this dining room which amused to me [laughs]. Very ironic with what was going to happen. Anyway, this guy came and he and I got on immediately and so I did this pilot for him which was the pilot for a series called Route 66, which I really enjoyed very much working on. It was so exciting.

Additional speaker (unidentified): They're doing it on television at the moment.

Philip Leacock: Do they?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Route 66 - late night.

Philip Leacock: Oh. Again it was a series that - in a way, they all had themes to them, that hasn't happened since the advent of the soap opera.

Stephen Peet: Did you take kindly to the pressures and the speed at which these things were...?

Philip Leacock: I really enjoyed it actually. It didn't worry me at all.

Stephen Peet: But did you still retain control from beginning to end or were you shooting one thing while the previous one was being edited? Or were you able to control and supervise right through?

Philip Leacock: Um...yes, it's difficult because you have certain rights to edit your material and unfortunately it's one of the big problems with that because a lot of directors are not honouring their obligation really to edit. And they're trying to... I've only very rarely had a problem editing in television. And in a funny way it's becoming easier now that you have editing on tape. Shooting on 35mm, which most of the dramatic shows are...

Stephen Peet: Still?

Philip Leacock: Ah huh. Most of the prime-time dramatic shows. It's very difficult working with high powered television stars who are not going to - I don't know why it is that it doesn't look as good on tape, or they don't. And they don't like working on it. But anyway I made an arrangement with this, on Route 66, that whenever I wasn't doing a feature I would do some of these things. And they were very generous, if we were back in London they'd transport the entire family to Portland, Maine, or wherever it was [laughs]. We had a wonderful time, yes. We did some very exciting shows.

Stephen Peet: But over the years you've done a mass of directing and production...

Philip Leacock: In television, yes.

Stephen Peet: For television, yes.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Are you still working?

Philip Leacock: No. I decided. I was shooting in the Napa Valley this time last year, no it was earlier, it was a summer, on a terrible thing called Falcon Crest - it's not terrible but it is soap you know. And they say nothing, they really don't. And I just wondered why I was doing it. So I just quit.

Stephen Peet: It's interesting that it's still shooting in 35mm for television.

Philip Leacock: They've tried making the switch, but they edit...

Stephen Peet: The switch to 16mm or the switch to tape?

Philip Leacock: A switch to tape. But it doesn't seem to work as well. And it's funny because all the musicals and the comedies are done on tape. What they are doing now is that - and they may be advancing from that now - but for the last couple of years they've been, on most of the shows they've been transferring to tape immediately, straight from the negative. And as a director you get your rushes, they'll either be - if you're shooting on location your rushes will be put on whatever cassette you happen to match your - half-inch VHS is what I have - and the tape will be at home when you get back from work for the previous day's work. And then you talk to the editor on the phone the next day if you're out of the studio. If you're in the studio go and talk to him. And then you do all the editing on it. And it has some great advantages. First of all I was

very dubious about it, but it has some tremendous advantages, you've got all your dailies, your rushes, sitting there in your television room or whatever, and then anything, any stage of the editing you want to, he just runs a complete tape for you and now you've got his first assembly and then your first cut and second cut, third cut, which you can run back and forth and work on your own, and then phone notes through. So it works very well I think and the mechanics of that system is fairly cumbersome and I think they will come up with a completely - I mean it is computerised in that you can work with the editor and you can run what he's done and then you say, "Well wouldn't it be better to do it this way." He can immediately do it that way without any physical cutting and without touching his previous effort, so that you can look at it then and say, "That works" - in which case we'll include it in our next version. Or, "It doesn't work" in which case you just wipe it and continue. But it really does, it's been hard in the editors. Did you know Matthew Knox?

Stephen Peet: Yes, yes.

Philip Leacock: Well he's been a leading light at Lorimar in getting that system going. And...

Stephen Peet: He started getting into the business. Was it you who gave him his first video while he was still at school? You or your brother I know, because, he's a friend of one of my sons and suddenly blossomed with this video camera because he was having difficulty, being dyslexic, with reading and writing. He suddenly began being able to communicate with a video camera. It was marvellous, changed him in a few months, changed him as a person.

Philip Leacock: Well he really wanted to be on that creative side, but he's ended up...

Stephen Peet: This is your nephew.

Philip Leacock: Yes. He's now Head of Post-Production for Lorimar, which is a vast - I mean Aaron Spelling Productions - and they are the two biggest independents with I don't know how many hours of nightly television. And he's Head of Post-Production actually for their features as well, and was made a Vice-President last year I think. Not that it means that much but it means something. No, I think he's done very well.

Stephen Peet: Questions - picking up any points?

Additional speaker (unidentified): I've got one point. Were you very involved with the writing of scripts? You had script writers but were you yourself involved at all?

Stephen Peet: Are you talking about the States?

Additional speaker (unidentified): Anywhere, at any time.

Philip Leacock: I've always tended to have great respect for the writer, the original writer of a project and in fact many of the people I've worked with became close personal friends. In fact Neil Paterson who did *The Kidnappers* - we spend a couple of days up at his house in Scotland every year when we come over. And when I go on a project which has already had some writing

done, I always ask to see the first draft, which I always feel contains something more interesting than the final thing [laughs]. But you were asking earlier, that's a question I suppose one tends to avoid. I really I think, after my contract ended with Columbia, was really when I started - I made a thing called Tamahine here, which Mike Frankovitch was head of Columbia then and I still had a few months to go on my contract. I didn't want to renew it but I took this to him and he advised me not to do it. It was for Ray Stark and I didn't have much control. But I thought we could make it have some sort of social content as a comedy. And it didn't really work, it was financially not a success and in the States MGM re-edited it without permission from myself or John Bryan who produced it. And I think after that we had really quite a bad patch, we were over here, but with strong roots over there. And we were really quite sort of - I mean we were never broke in the sense that we weren't living at the same standard, but the bills were mounting up [laughs]. And I remember that this producer of Route 66 had always said, "Phil, just let me know if you have time." So I sent him a letter saying that I really would like some work and I got the most wonderful telegram - wish I'd kept a copy of it back - immediately laying out a schedule [laughs] for about 6 months ahead. So then I think I really just drifted into it. I did a couple of features after that. But I've never had any sort of feeling that television was terrible, except just recently when... You know, because I worked on things like Gunsmoke, which had really high story content, very interesting. We always used it as a vehicle because I both directed and produced on it, used it - even Hawaii Five-O, which I also produced and directed - we always tried to say something of interest you know, and have some sort of a moral standard involved. But that's gone by the wind, it really has. I mean Dynasty, funnily enough started off as a very witty, satirical show for six months. And the guy who started it was writing the scripts. And then they brought Joan Collins in and got some other writers in and it entirely changed. I'd worked on that quite a bit. And I don't know if we'll ever get back to shows that are intelligent. Every now and then, I mean I've done several shows that have only run - several series, like one we did on the early period of Swedish immigration into Minnesota and we got great reviews but no ratings [laughs].

Stephen Peet: It's an interesting phenomenon that occasionally, or quite frequently, soaps or whatever you're going to call them, are used as platforms for getting across all sorts of interesting and controversial ideas. I think it's marvellous because if you've got fixed huge audience - why not?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: Until somebody starts complaining that you're using it for your own personal platform.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: But it's happened in this country with some of the shows.

Philip Leacock: Has it?

Stephen Peet: Yes.

Philip Leacock: Well you see there's much less of that there. Like The Waltons for instance, was a very - Earl Hamner, who created it and worked on it all the way through, because it went on for many years - was always a pleasure to do because every story had a very real purpose to it. And it was right up the top of the ratings. And then it's funny that you do get a lot of shows that really are fairly evil I think. I mean Miami Vice and things like that, which didn't last very long. But a lot of the shows are really bad I think and - but anyway.

Stephen Peet: It almost goes round full circle to the phrase that was used in the '30s in the documentaries. Some of them were called 'films with a purpose' which I think is a rather nice description of what a good documentary can be.

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Stephen Peet: And as you say, some of these things was instilling the purpose into the picture.

Philip Leacock: Yes, yes.

Stephen Peet: Soaps.

Additional speaker (unidentified): With a better subject obviously - you would do some work again would you?

Philip Leacock: I'm not sure of my position because the DGA has a very good pension plan.

Stephen Peet: DGA?

Philip Leacock: Directors' Guild of America. They have actually two schemes, two pension schemes which you pay a fare but the employers also pay. And the pension fund was - I don't know what's happened to it with the market crash, probably been hurt, but on July 1st I'm due out. You can either take a monthly payment or you can take the cash. And I decided to take the cash. But when you do that you have to say that you're not going to work and that you're not planning to work in the industry. And I think you're really sort of - it's quite a serious document you sign saying you're not going to work any more in the industry.

Additional speaker (unidentified): The industry in America or in England?

Philip Leacock: Yes.

Additional speaker (unidentified): So that doesn't stop you filming here does it?

Philip Leacock: No, a bit different, yes. But I do know people have gone around it occasionally but I was planning to work on some projects which I wouldn't necessarily direct. I don't know if I want to direct any more. But anyway...

Stephen Peet: Well, we're about ten seconds from the end of this tape. It's exactly 12 o'clock.

Philip Leacock: Oh fantastic! [Laughs.]

Stephen Peet: So I think it's time to...[End of interview]