

LES OSTINELLI

Cameraman/laboratory technician/lab contact man

Interviewed by Alan Lawson and Sid Wilson, on 5 November
1992

Copyright BECTU History Project

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

Alan Lawson: When and where were you born

Les Ostinelli: I was born in London, Euston, 1918, which makes me 74 now. My father was a waiter, came from Italy when he was 16, so I was born almost and lived for quite a long time the West End.

Alan Lawson: School

Les Ostinelli: I went to St Martin in the Fields School in Trafalgar Square. I left there just under 15

Alan Lawson: Just under.

Les Ostinelli: Well you used to leave school at 14 in those days. That was the school leaving age. I was mid-14 because of the calendar. And I went to work more or less as an office junior. A couple of jobs and then I ended up in an office of a big transport company down by Lambeth Bridge there, the old Union part of the Vesty Empire, in the transport office there. I got interested in photography as a hobby originally. And then I don't know, I used to go to the movies, I got the movie bug obviously, I used to go two or three times a week at least in those days. I got the bug and I suppose my interest transferred to cinematography in that sense, I got very interested about it. And I thought I'd like to learn a bit more about it. I used to buy the *Amateur Cine World* and the other one at that time. And I got very interested and I thought well the best thing to do was probably try to join one of these cine societies of which there were a lot in those days. And aiming at the top I thought which was the best one, and the one which seemed to be winning a lot of awards and had a lot of money which meant they had a little studio and all the equipment and even a theatre with seats was the Bronsbury Cine

Society. And we had a little studio up by Kensal Rise, Brompton. And I used to go there 2 or 3 times a week and we used to make 16 mm, everything was 16mm black and white of course in those days, and that was very instructional really, learned quite a lot at that. And funny enough there was a fellow there, a young boy about the same age as me, who did, I think he had a relation there, anyway he got a job at Lime Grove, Gaumont British, clappers, very junior, but in the camera department. That sort of spurred me on, I thought well I must get a job like that. And then of course it all starts doesn't it. I sort of wrote to everybody in the business that I thought of, reams of letters coming out and coming in, the usual thing, sorry but we will bear you in mind, all the usual stuff. And I eventually got even one which I told Freddie about, I joked about it, I said even got one from you at British and Dominions. The usual thing, the usual working saying. And I used to buy the *Kine Weekly* regularly and even the *Hollywood Reporter* which used to be sold in London at that time, they had London edition that's right. And eventually I went up to the ACT and saw old George for the first time and they were in that office in Shaftesbury Avenue, just off the Circus, you went upstairs

Alan Lawson: Piccadilly Mansions

Les Ostinelli: That's right. He was up there. Well he was very kind, old George, because I was still, what, only 17 I think by then, not that he could do much, it all came down to who you knew, like relationships and things like this. And anyway I got the idea suddenly of taking an advert, I don't know why, I thought I'll put an advert in the back of the *Kine Weekly* and I could kick myself because I never kept half that stuff but I keep meaning to go up to the library at the British Museum and find this and get a reprint of it. I put an advert in and that's what I did. I put young keen, enthusiast, 17, wants to start in the technical side of the film, all that jazz, never expected to get anything back. Anyway I got one letter. One letter back and it was on plain paper and the only address on it, it had no company or heading or anything but it said 22 Grosvenor St, London. Well by that time I was enough of a film buff to know that was London Films, Alexander Korda's office. Anyway this letter asked me to phone and make an appointment. So I got very excited about this, made an appointment and went up there. Well I met there, at this

interview Gary Schwartz. Well Gary Schwartz was building the laboratory at Denham for Korda, it all belonged to Korda anyway, the Prudential were putting up the money, he was in charge of building the lab at Denham.

There is an interesting point, again which I want to follow up, *Kine Weekly* published in 1935, while they were building Denham Studios, they published a whole lay out of the plan of the Denham studios, stages, workshops, everything. And at the end was a laboratory. And in the laboratory space it had got on it Technicolor Laboratory. And apparently what happened is that Korda went for colour, he took a big interest in Technicolor and he was actually concerned, instrumental in forming the British company through Prudential and somebody else, anyway the story was that they were going to build, because he committed to do so many films in Technicolor he wanted the lab, the Technicolor plant to be on site at Denham. And the only thing that stopped it was that the Bucks County Council wouldn't allow the dye waste to go into the sewage system. So they had to go across to Middlesex, Middlesex allowed it and that is the only reason Technicolor Lab is where it is and Denham Labs got built. If it had all gone through, Technicolor would have been where Denham Labs is.

Syd Wilson: Also, the purity of the water, they couldn't go too far, because in those days you had a million gallon reservoir at Technicolor, an underground reservoir.

Les Ostinelli: They had underground wells

Syd Wilson: Artesian wells. They built on that well, there was a million gallon reservoir.

Les Ostinelli: But it was only that that made, those water and the sewage and that made it why the thing happened.

Syd Wilson: They did have another site, at Rickmonsworth, which they hung on to way, way past the war. They purchased that at the same time as they purchased xxx.

Les Ostinelli: That's what happened, and that's why Denham Labs came to come into existence. Taking up that, I was given assurance that when the thing got nearer, because it was still in steel girder stages, and Denham Studios itself wasn't completely finished. And it was very funny by coincidence, in this transport company where I say I worked

in the office there, all the lorries that used to go out taking Dewhurst meat, they used to carry meat to all the butchers, like South Wales, everywhere, when they came back they used to bring bricks and I always noticed they were going to Denham Studios. So I knew the progress of the building, because it gradually went down, the demand for the bricks, there weren't so many trucks going back there. So that gave me some sort of idea what was going on down there. Anyway this went on and I used to ring up occasionally, and eventually I got the nod to start which would have been in 1935.

And when I started, all we had, there was a little gatehouse, where the lab is now, there was a little gatehouse, which was 2 up and 2 down and a staircase up the middle, and that was the headquarters of the lab. Gary Schwartz was upstairs with his secretary and a general office and downstairs we all hung about. When I say we, there was only 7 of us. There was Gary Schwartz himself, his secretary, there was old Doug Myers the engineer, the father of the editor, but Doug Myers was a wizard engineer actually. Him, there was a guy called Westfield who was the electrical chief, there was a German, no a Hungarian chemist, there was myself and George Barker, you all know George Barker. Well George Barker was at Humphreys and he got this job, he was coming to Denham, being in charge of the control room on sensitronomy. And I started the same day as George, we both started together the same day. There was nothing to do because as I say, the building was a shell still. And I moved, because of the travelling, I moved into the digs down at Denham, and for want of more to do in the evenings, old Gary Schwartz who lived there night and day, and he had the house opposite which is no longer there, opposite the gates of the studio, and that was Gracie Fields house originally. She moved out and Gary Schwartz had it. And he lived there and we used to all end up there in the evenings. But he used to go for his parade round the labs to see how the builders were doing at night, about 6 o'clock or whatever, he would have a walk round. And I always remember he fell off one off the girders, he fell and broke his arm, it taught him a lesson really. Anyway eventually, it came on and it came on.

And then the official day came up for opening Denham Studios and it was going to be officially opened by the then chief of the Prudential Insurance Company. And on this very day they decided to make a film which was shot by old

Bernard Brown, Bernard Brown and Cave Chin, two Newman Sinclairs and they were wandering round following this group, VIP group round with Korda and a few stars and the Prudential guy. And they had a motorbike guy who used to go down, follow them round, collect the film and rush it back. Well there was no where to process this so the idea was to knock up a temporary lab in the studio which was over the sound department in the long corridor. Down the bottom of the long corridor the sound department, and above that there were about 3 rooms. So we had these tanks made by Curbys, you remember Curbys in Uxbridge, they made these teak tanks and lined them. We had some wooden frames made, it was going back to the old days really, we were developing the film on frames and a big drying drum made. The only modern thing we had was a printing machine which came out of its packing case. That was a Debie machine. That was the only thing we had up to date. That was the only way we could get over this.

Syd Wilson: What was this the old **Matipo**

Les Ostinelli: Yes, I think it's still at Denham. I always remember trying to get this up this very narrow staircase, and we had two navvies from the building site helping us and we were all struggling to get this in because it was a very narrow staircase and there was a bend in it. And this, it was not like a Bell and Howell, it was a bloody great heavy thing, trying to get this up the staircase, and I always remember, we were having a rest half way and after what seemed two minutes this guy said do you mind this is resting on my foot.

Syd Wilson: They really were heavy those things

Les Ostinelli: Yes. Anyway we got the film and processed it, the negative, dried it, made it up, printed it. We developed the print, rushed it round to the theatre where they're all sitting waiting to see the results of this, and when it came up it was so dark, it looked like night shots. And I always remember, they all walked across the green, to the stages, from the Old House to the stages and Paul Robeson, he disappeared, you couldn't see him because he was so dark. And on top of that, having no proper cleaning facilities, only a velvet or something, it looked as if it was snowing. And that was my first experience, not that I did anything really other than pass the buckets or something like this. But my first experience of developing

and printing cine film. I forgot the main thing about that too, when the guy from the Prudential arrived at the main gate they wouldn't let him in. They didn't know who he was, he didn't have any identification or anybody, they had to phone through to the office, Korda's office and say are you expecting anybody.

Syd Wilson: Who was it, Monty **Meger March**

Les Ostinelli: No, Monty Meger March was on the board wasn't he. No he was a Prudential, Sir Somebody

Alan Lawson: Not **Mountain**, Sir Edward Mountain

Les Ostinelli: It could be, I wouldn't even remember the name. Honestly. He seemed to be a bit insignificant. You would have thought for such a big thing they would have a royal or somebody to do it. Not the guy who put just up the money.

Alan Lawson: When did the labs really start

Les Ostinelli: 1936. I was there about 9 months before it started, we were operational. As we had nothing to do, old George Barker, I did know quite a bit already obviously. He was a technician already, he spent a long time teaching me sensitronomy and stuff like that. Then I went over, they took me over and I was put with Bert Easy in the camera department for about 3 months as a spare clapper boy really and mainly I got all the, because there was a big build up of production at Denham then once the studios were finished, I can remember probably 9 or 10 productions going on and all quite big ones. And *Elephant Boy* was on at night, shooting on the lot. And I was usually thrashed out on the artists tests and all this stuff, a test unit. But I always made a laugh because I said I had worked with so many, because they were all American cameramen, the only non American cameraman was Georges Perinal who was French. There were no English cameramen about. I mean so I made a film before about who I worked with: Jimmy Wong Howe, Harry Stradling, Al Giltz, Phil Tannura, Charlie Rosher. Charlie Rosher promised to take me to Hollywood and all this, he probably promised this to everybody. He was a lovely man but he made rash promises.

Alan Lawson: Was Glen MacWilliams ever there

Les Ostinelli: No, I think he might, no he was mainly at the Bush. He may have been at the odd time but he wasn't in the lot that I remember. I remember all these because they were quite the tops. Jimmy Wong Howe, Harry Stradling, Phil Tannura, Al Giltzs who was at Paramount at the time.

Syd Wilson: Ossie Morris was there, what did he do

Les Ostinelli: I don't remember Ossie there at that time. He was at Wembley at Fox.

Alan Lawson: He was a clapper boy

Syd Wilson: he was down at Denham, because Carmen used to baby sit for him. It was in the 30s

Les Ostinelli: I think Ossie he started either at BIP or Fox at Wembley, because I remember talking to Ossie going back to when I was trying to get a start. I eventually got this letter in my other letters from Fox British who owned Wembley Studios then doing quota quickies. But I had a letter from AT, Tommy, Jones who was the studio manager. He said come and see me and I went to see him and of course nothing ever happened and I plagued him. I used to ring him up every week to see if there were any jobs going. But later on when I talked about this to Ossie, because I knew Ossie was there, he said he got a start there because his father owned a newspaper shop in Ruislip, he said he went there and he worked for nothing, it was the only way he could, they could give him a job for nothing, clapper boy or whatever, and no salary. I think if they worked late he got fish and chips or something. Well I couldn't afford to work for nothing, I didn't get the chance anyway.

Well I was, because I was interested in trick photography which I used to do in stills quite a bit myself, my leaning towards that, in my interview with Gary Schwartz he pencilled me down to go into their optical department whenever it happened. So eventually I finished my period in the camera department and went back to the lab because they started taking on more bods as the place was getting into shape. We were installing and testing the developing, which was all Debie stuff, all developers were Debie, the first time I think they'd used the daylight developing machine. And old Andre Debie, I can still see him, we had so many traumas with that developing machine, I can remember seeing him in the middle of the night sitting on the waste bin in

the corner, waiting for things to happen, or not happen. Kip Herron was one of those that came, he came as I did as a trainee, we all came as trainees. He was a bit older than me, Kip, he was in the developing room. And eventually after having all the labour jobs of scrubbing the floors and getting it all spotless clean, endlessly round this big concrete building, eventually we got the machinery in and we started to test and process.

I think one of the first films processed at Denham, yes they were release prints of *Elephant Boy*. All the testing was done on a film about a dog which old Bernard Brown shot called Scruffy. And if you mentioned Scruffy to the old boys at Denham, because every bit of film which went through they saw and handled was Scruffy. I think we started doing a picture at Pinewood, Pinewood had opened then and we did one of the first Pinewood pictures, I can't remember which one it was now. All I remember is we only had it for 4 days because after a disaster nearly every night they decided not to trust us any more.

Alan Lawson: What was the problem

Les Ostinelli: It was like all machinery, all processing machinery, you have a break

Alan Lawson: Not run in properly

Les Ostinelli: Not run in, you can buy, even today, you go and buy a new machine from somebody or even build it yourself and it takes you 6 months to get it right.

Syd Wilson: I was going to say 6 months too.

Les Ostinelli: The ones that Tec done don't even run properly now. Then our optical printer arrived, the machine I mean, that was a Debie Tricker, which was quite well known in those days as an optical printer. The only problem was that it was so long, you had to work in the dark because it didn't have magazines, no camera magazines, you could shut it all up but it means putting great big cowls on and all this stuff. And you're using ortho chromatic dup stock, you were in a red light so it was quite good anyway. But the machine was about 15 ft long.

And then the optical printer was a Hungarian who was obviously part of the Korda family, Ferdy **Eisinglie**. He

couldn't speak much English, he used to mumble away. And he used to sit up at the works end where you lined everything up for a camera, and big handles everywhere and did all this. And I was down at the other end, 15 ft away, seeing that the film didn't fall off the what's its name. And then we did titling as well, that came under us, because we had a Debrie vertical titler with an L Debrie Parlo camera on it. And I did the same old trick that a lot of people have done with L Parvo cameras, you load the bloody thing up and shut the door, and then you look round and you see the lid for the magazine, so many people have done this. You say god, what do I do now, because you've shot a main title or something, and you say now I've got to get the film out or the lid on somehow which means going completely black of course.

I got a bit tired of, because in those days the lab only did routine, mainly fades and dissolves, I got a bit fed up with that. And titles, shooting centre titles and stuff like this. And my first optical I ever did on my own, because it was for *Elephant Boy* and it was only because Ferdy had gone back to Paris for the weekend and they wanted desperately this shot. We'd done it but it wasn't quite right so it had to be done again. So on the Saturday morning I had to go in and do this shot. It was this big idol which had all its genitals showing and they were a bit embraced by this and they said can you filter this out. It was a simple job really. But I always remember that as my first optical shot.

Alan Lawson: But it was successful.

Les Ostinelli: Yes, but eventually I got a bit frustrated with this. I didn't feel I was getting very far and also I was only getting 30 bob a week. I started at 30 bob a week and I never got a rise, I don't think anybody did. So that was the sort of going rate at that time so I started to look around to try and get into the camera side again. And I knew quite a few of the fellows in the camera crew in Technicolor, the Coops and Chris Challis and people like this. So I thought I must try to get in, because that was the coming thing, Technicolor 3 strip. They were bringing more cameras in and more films came up. I thought this might be a good thing to get into. So I tried to get a job at Technicolor and the only job I could get was in the lab. I thought well that's a start. You're in, you might be able to get into the camera department later, I didn't know at

the time the brick wall which existed between the lab and the camera department. Anyway I eventually went there and I was in neg assembly. The only thing I can say about Tec is that they really trained people properly. I went into the neg room with Sid **Corabis**, 1937 I'm talking about now. Now every department head was an American, and I went in the neg room and I hadn't used a Bell and Howell joiner, but he made me sit three for 3 days solid making joins, neg joins. And of course we used to have a micrometer and I sat there for 3 days and he'd come over now and again and pick up what you were doing measure it, see how clean it was. And I always look back at that and think what great training that was really. Certainly I made good joins after that. They taught you to handle film properly.

And then I went with little Tommy Jones and 3 strip neg inspection which was a bit eye pulling because you had 3 records up on the synchroniser and you went through frame by frame and everything had to be reported whatever was, I did that for about 3 months. And then I think my eyes were being a bit pulled out and I got a move into printing. But all this time my aim was to get into the camera department and every month I had an interview lined up with Leslie Oliver. I used to see him every month, he had no say about the camera department, but I was a bit naïve, I used to say that's what I'd like to do. After about 4 goes at this, I thought this is, there is no way you're going to get across the wall are you.

But anyway by that time the war was coming up, 1939. I was in the age group for the first lot of conscripts where you were supposed to do 6 months military training. So you tough you were going to do 6 months. By the time you got in there, the war had started and that was it. But in the mean time I did a few jobs at British Lion, Beaconsfield. I went out there as a clapper loader with Glendinning and Harry Rose, Bob Thomson, that was the crew, and me clapper loading. And I only got the job because Ray Sturgess who was usually out there, he couldn't make it and he had to do something else, or he was on another film

Alan Lawson: This was for the Smiths

Les Ostinelli: Sam Smith ran it and Herbie Smith was the studio manager. They had their own lab there, Billie Crisp, he ran a little black and white lab there. Anyway I was out there and the funny part about this story was, I'd

always been used to Debie stuff in the main, all their camera equipment, and I went out there, I had to borrow a bike, there was no way of getting out to Beaconsfield at 8 o'clock in the morning, so I borrowed a bike from a guy who used to be at Denham and rode out to Beaconsfield the first morning, and I thought, hello, it's a Mitchell camera, I'd never loaded Mitchell magazine in my life. But fortunately being keen I'd collected all these, I had the Mitchell catalogue and all of them and I studied this the night before, which was pretty simple when you know. They had the diagram with the loading and the film and I thought crikes, I tore this page out and put it in my pocket. If they'd have known, they'd have had horrors, if they'd known I'd never loaded, here I am loading up the days' magazines in the dark room never done it before. Anyway nothing happened, I was quite alright, I got round that.

Alan Lawson: They were easier to load than Bell and Howell mags because you didn't have a trap to open

Les Ostinelli: That's right. The only thing with the Mitchell one was getting it right way round the roller.

Alan Lawson: That's right.

Les Ostinelli: But also, because they were a big job to get in, there wasn't much room to get a 1,000 ft in a Mitchell magazine was there.

Alan Lawson: No, about a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, you dropped it in there.

Les Ostinelli: And also those bloody awful lids. They were always a bit sticky the Mitchell magazine lids. That is why I preferred later the Newell ones, they were heavy but a nice clicking on it. Anyway I was there until messing about odd days at a time until I had to join the army. I got called up. I had one call up for August, and then got a telegram cancel instructions, I was supposed to report to the Royal Artillery somewhere down in Devizes, they said cancel instructions, await further. And then I got another one about 3 weeks later saying report to Aldershot, 1 November 1939.

Alan Lawson: Was that also artillery

Les Ostinelli: No, funny enough that was the medical corps. What they'd done apparently, in the medical corps if you

were serving up front you had to be A1, supposedly everybody up the line had to be A1. What happened is when they called everybody up, they called 600 people up for the Royal Artillery and suddenly found they hadn't any A1 people for the medical corps and we were transferred on block. So that call up, every one went to the RMC. And I went in that. I don't know if they took any notice of what you'd done. I was putdown to run the x ray supplies and things in a medical store.

We did our training, I did my basic training, Christmas came, I finished our training and then I was assigned to a unit which was going to France, medical store unit which was going to France, in Boulogne, in the old Casino, and I was there until all the problems started. It was all very quiet up until the Germans pushed through. We were in Boulogne and all I remember is our OC, he said I can't get any communications from headquarters which was in Boulogne, about 3 or 4 miles away. He said I'm going up there to see what is going on, because we knew there were things going on. So he goes up there and he, about an hour and half later he came tearing back in a RAF truck driving it. And he said come on, leave all your stuff, get into this truck, we've got to get the hell out of here. We've got to go to Calais because Boulogne was being sealed off by the Germans you see. So we made this hair-raising run in this RAF lorry, in just what we were standing up in, and we got to Calais on the last boat out of Calais, we got on that, and we arrived back in Southampton looking like a lot of refugees.

And I remember parading through Aldershot to the camp. You just had what you stood up in, no coats, no overcoats, But we got out of Calais and I was posted up to Leeds, out unit we were put out in billets in Leeds and we were stationed, I did army guard duty on Headingley Cricket ground and we were given pick handles to resist German paratroopers that might descend on Headingley Cricket Ground. We used to do guard duty round the casino in Wimbledon too with pick axes. We used to walk round this building at night, the usual 2 and 4 with a pick axe. British army that was. Then I went up to Scotland after that where I spent, where Monty started his toughening training, we went up to Scotland, we used to do these 30 miles a day route marches with all your kit, every quarter of an hour you had to put your gas mask on. Really you used to come back, your poor old feet.

But in the meantime, I was very canny, I thought I'll put in for an x ray course. See if I can become a radiographer, that's near enough to doing something photographic. So I didn't hear any more, and eventually, about 2 months I suppose, I got posted down to Millbank, the military hospital where the college was, the ministry medical college at Millbank there, for this course. And while I was waiting for my course to start I was put on general medical duty at the MR room down at the Tower of London. I was at the Tower, in the MR room, the Scots guards. And Rudolf Hess, I didn't see him, he had just been there and they whipped him off again. Hess was in the Tower. Anyway I was down there. But on my days off I occasionally went to see old George Elvin. He was by then he was in his house at Stanmore and he was more or less headquartered working from there. I used to go over there and see him and he was always very nice. And that is when I heard about the Army Film Unit. And I thought I must put in for the Army Film Unit. I think it was called then the War Office Film Unit. Walter Tennyson, Harry Rignall, and that was rather an elite nob at that time

Alan Lawson I was in it

Les Ostinelli: Wasn't Arthur Graham.

Alan Lawson: He was later. There was Alf Black

Les Ostinelli: That's right. Anyway I didn't hear much about that for a while and suddenly I was down at the Tower of London still waiting for my x ray course. And I got this message to pack up all my kit and report to the Great Central Hotel Marylebone. And there were 300 turned up for this interview, because what had happened, anybody who was serving in the services or the army in this case, they got the names from the ACT, and they called all these people out. And there were such a hotch potch of people, there were lab people, there were projectionists, anybody who was remotely connected with the film industry was summoned to this interview. And as it was a War Office thing there was no argument, the units had to let you go. It was a directive from the War Office. So we all turned up there and I went before this board. And I remember this board, it was Hugh Stewart, Alex.

Alan Lawson: Wasn't Dave McNaughton

Les Ostinelli: No, I think he had already gone. He had gone to Cairo. Alex Bryce, George was on it, George Elvin.

Alan Lawson: Wasn't Alfie Black

Les Ostinelli: There might have been. There were four people. I always remember Alex Bryce because I knew him by name as a cameraman, Hugh Stewart I also knew, only because he was an editor at Denham, in London Films. Anyway I was one of the 30 selected. But they said to Arthur Day who was Pop Day's son, well he and I were asked, we were going overseas, they wouldn't tell us where, they said you're going over seas, with this unit they want two camera mechanics, and as they hadn't called them up yet, two proper camera mechanics, they were in the process of calling them up, they had to do their military training and all that sort of thing before they could come out to us, wherever we were going, and they said in the meantime could you do this job, fill in this job. Which we jumped at, anything to get into film. So we were sent down to Lime Grove, to George Hill for two weeks training. And old George and Sam Martin

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

George Hill was going to train us to be camera mechanics in two weeks. You know old George, we used to get there at 9, and George was down the road at half past 11, in the nearest pub on the corner, so we didn't see much of George really. He used to give us the Newman Sinclair, and De Vry's, which we were going to, and Eyemos, and mainly adjusting the springs, rewinding the springs or putting new springs in. And he was a cheeky rogue because he used to take the spring out of a Newman, which was like a gramophone spring, let it go and it would cut your head off, it would go down the shop, pang. And he would say right now I'm going, you get that spring back into the casing. That was our training as camera mechanics really.

After two weeks of that we had to report back to Great Central, and we went to Egypt. It was No 1 Unit, David Macdonald. So we all went out on this Highland Princess, we had some sort of training on board just to keep us amused. Who was in with us, Reg Morris was in with us. Ossie's young brother. Fox, Dennis Fox who was in the camera world, later became known as Fearless Fox because he was always telling his stories of bravado and the rest of it. Basil Keyes, Ferdie Main. It was quite a good bunch of people actually. I know the Highland Princess was in this great convoy going out. And I always remember spending, December 1941, the Americans came into the war, we heard it on the ship, we spent the convoy halted on Christmas Day in Freetown which was a very happy Christmas. Eventually we went down to Durban, changed ships to go up the Red Sea, changed ships, the Highland Princess and the rest of them went to South America picking up meat and stuff, bringing it back, convoys.

And then we had two weeks rest in Durban and then we went up to Cairo and our headquarters, No 1 unit was in the grounds of the British Embassy in Cairo. And that's where I came into contact first of all with Gerry Massey Collier, he had a rough time. He had been in Crete and he got the shakes a bit. He was a lovely man old Gerry. Anyway we worked with him because he was stationed as the officer in Cairo. He said right you're the mechanics. I said what do we do about tools and stuff. We had nothing. So he takes us down to the big ordinance place near Suez, you go in there and they haven't got anything, and you end up with a hammer

and screw driver and stuff for repairing tanks. Nothing for like , no fine screwdrivers or anything like this for dealing with instruments. So we had to come back and buy that stuff in Cairo.

The first lot of De Vrys had gone down, they'd been sunk. There were 50 De Vrys cameras in a shipment on a convoy from the States, that got sunk. So we were delayed in getting the gear so we had to have another lot which was on another consignment or whatever. All the still cameras were those super Icontras, do you remember those. They were captured weren't they, from the Germans. So we had some good gear. I think we had one Newman Sinclair and one Eyemo, that was all.

Anyway the cameras turned up and we were all dispersed in various directions. I first went to Syria. And then I was asked to make a film with Basil Keyes and I've forgotten his name, the Marquis of Ely, he was in PR.

Alan Lawson: He was a conducting officer.

Les Ostinelli: That's right. Well he got this idea to make a film about the Arab legion and we went up to Oman and down on the airfield there, the RAF airfield in Oman, made this film about the Arab legion, a propaganda thing. That was I suppose a month we were there.

And then we came back to Cairo and made another film in the studio, about minefield gapping. And it was a fellow, I never knew he was a cameraman, I think he must have been a documentary cameraman, he lit this film because it was all night shooting. It was all in the stage, we had this complete backing round, it was all lit for night. And I was operating, I had this Debie Model L inside the Debie blimp that was bigger than a Technicolor blimp. I thought bloody hell, if you'd unlocked it it would have shot you to the other end of the stage. Because nothing like geared heads in those days, it was all freeheads. Anyway we did that mine gapping film.

And then I went down to Suez to film the arrival of the 6th South African Division. They'd come back and were reforming with Sherman tanks which had started to come through and they were all coming up and preparing for the big push. And funnily enough, an aunt, my wife was born in South Africa, her aunt wrote to her and said she had just seen the

newsreel of the South African division arriving in Suez and all the training of the tanks and all of that, your husband's got his name, so I must have got a credit on that. I wouldn't have known anything about it otherwise.

Alan Lawson: That was very unusual

Les Ostinelli: It said photographed by.

Syd Wilson: A copy of that will be in IWM, won't it.

Les Ostinelli: Not here, it was in the South African newsreel. They'd seen it in South Africa. They say what credits did you get, and I say I got one on a newsreel in South Africa in 1942.

Alan Lawson: It wasn't George Groom who lit

Les Ostinelli: No it was a guy from the Midlands, he wasn't known as a name to me. I knew most of the names by name. But he did a good job on it nevertheless, it worked out quite well. Then, well the British air attaché then in the Middle East was Wing Commander Lord Forbes. And he got this idea of making a briefing film on the. The Americans, you know when they bombed this xxx oilfields., they made rather amateur 16mm film, animation and models of briefing the planes, where they had to aim for and all this. And he'd seen this and said what a good idea to make one for the invasion of Sicily. So I was summoned and Johnny Guthrie from the RAF Film Unit down to edit this film. We were given a studio, Misa Studios near the Pyramids, we were given this big room. Fortunately they had these two Mitchell cameras there which they never used, because they preferred the Debries, they didn't like the finder business. So we were able to use this Mitchell camera and we had all these relief maps coming in of Sicily, model planes. I must say it was only hand turned animation because it was really turning arrows. But we had, what made me laugh, the security of thing. Because Sicily hadn't taken place, Cairo was a terrible place anyway and here were we stuck out at Misa studio, we got all the maps, all the divvies, where they were going to land, on which day, what their target was going to be. We had the whole thing for Sicily. I don't know whether it was a ruse or not because we finished the film the Sicily invasion took place. It was a bit like Monty's double, they might have fed some false information through. The 51st Highland

Division didn't land there, they landed somewhere else or something. Anyway it was quite interesting to do that.

And also at that time I was asked to, because of security, this was just before Alamein, because of security reasons we used to process the film in Cairo, for the Army Film Unit, the Navy Film Unit and the local newsreel which was run by old Charles Martin. Well Kodaks had a Debrie developing machine and printer. They weren't in the lab business but they'd inherited these two machines in a bad debt. So we were using this for processing. Most of the Desert Victory stuff, the original stuff was processed at the Kodak Lab in Cairo. And then we had the labs which was an ordinary commercial lab in the Misa Studio which we did the local newsreel, Charles Martin's MRI Newsreel every week.

And the one big night, I remember on that, when Churchill was coming back from one of his meetings, it wasn't Yalta, it was much earlier than that, it must have been in 1943. Because he was flying back via Cairo and they shot, the RAF had shot some film of the visit, of the meeting and all the rest of it, and they wanted it processed in Cairo. And do you remember old Brown the producer, George Brown, he was in the RAF Film Unit. And he came to me and said I don't know what you can do but we've got to get this film processed because the old man wants to see it and this was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So we had to go round, because the lab finished at 5 out there then, and the Labs certainly did, and we had to go round rounding up all the bloody lab people. And they were all over the place. One was at the cinema. We eventually got a crew together, a skeleton crew together, about 9 o'clock at night so we processed this stuff during the night in the Misa Studio Lab, made a print and we showed it to Churchill in the afternoon the next day when he was at the British Embassy.

And I was invited round there. I went round to see this in the theatre with Churchill. And I always remember the gaff that his son, Randolph, he used to be always in the group, but he was always making gaffs. It was all supposed to be very secret where Churchill was going next and everything else like that, and he was in there, I know it was all the top brass in there but he's saying he's going off, and everybody's looking at each other, he says everyone's going off to so and so tomorrow.

And all this is going on. And the other thing that strikes me about my time in Cairo, the American Airforce started to arrive. And the American airforce film unit. And we had the old De Vrys. I went out, Monty Berman and Bob Baker they were assigned to do some job, a lot of it was studio, at Misa, in the studio. But in the meantime the only film we had was all 100 ft Eyemo spools, that's all other than some odd Newman stuff. Well we only had one Newman so we didn't have much of that. And Monty was going to use this Super Parvo, and the Americans had Dupont Superior 2, lovely stock, in lovely colour tin. And they were very angry because they had a lot of Eyemo cameras and they were having to break down all their stock. The other way round and I used to go round and swop. And I'd say here's 10 Eyemo reels for 1000 ft of Dupont superior 2. And I was doing this while Monty was on this job, he shot this whole little film on Dupont Superior 2.

Alan Lawson: Those De Vry Cameras, did you have trouble with the mount

Les Ostinelli: Never.

Alan Lawson: Extraordinary.

Les Ostinelli: I think in some ways, I know they were always a bit of a joke but you could virtually do anything with them, and when you consider they were knocked and crashed about, they were never in the box were they. They were slung about in a jeep full of sand and whatever. I think a lot of credit to the old. I don't think the Eyemos would ever have stood up to it.

Alan Lawson: The casing, they cracked very easily.

Les Ostinelli: And if you think like *Desert Victory* or any of that stuff out there, or any of that stuff out there, I would have thought 80% of it was shot on De Vrys. I know they weren't the steadiest of cameras but for a newsreel job. The whole thing was, the newsreels we used to process their stuff too, Paramount and Gaumont British, all of them were out there. But they weren't allowed to go where we were allowed to go. They never went up with infantry, they were always back, not in base

Alan Lawson: Behind the lines

Les Ostinelli: They didn't get beyond brigades. That's, we had one in the desert. When Macdonald came back, the War Office said it would be a good idea to have an infantry officer, where the action is going to be. So I think, he came from an Irish-Scottish regiment, he was the brother of the Bishop of London, well he had this idea and he put about 6 crews, you know we used to work in pairs on the cinemag up with the front line industry. In about the first week 2 of them were captured, one went up on a mine, and in any case the whole idea of standing up there filming is bloody ridiculous. And when we were got in Cairo we got these xxx things, we got 14 tanks in a frame that size. And the War Office said where are all the pictures of this. And you stand, a tank battle is like a sea battle, you can't see the other bloody tank, it's bloody miles away.

Alan Lawson: People didn't realise

Les Ostinelli: That's why a lot of it had to be faked. You couldn't get a bloody tank battle on the screen could you.

Alan Lawson: Unless you got a 180 degree lens and a telephoto as well.

Les Ostinelli: And keeping your head down as well. You were a good target standing up with a camera. That was the end of Egypt. That folded out.

I was then sent to Anzio in Italy, Anzio beachhead, into Alan Whicker's unit. I won't say too much about Alan Whicker because you might have to censor it. But there were about 3 crews on Anzio and we all lived in dug outs, it was like *Journey's End*. We all lived under ground. We had sleepers from the railway to shore up the roof. You crawled into your dug outs, and every time you went out to get something to eat, to the cook out, you'd get shelled or mortared. Terrible place. It was just a perimeter. Every foot of it was under mortar fire.

So he took us up there, we changed over with another crew, and they came back for a rest and we got into these dug outs and Whicker was living in the villa in Otuno, which was the port in Anzio, in this beautiful villa. Admittedly he couldn't live, they lived in the basement because the whole of that place was shelled so often or just mortared all the time. But he always picked a good place. When we went up Italy, you could be in the mountains in winter

looking for somewhere to put yourself up in an old farmshed or something, and Whicker would be in, the nearest villa that was about, he'd be there. I always remember, we got to Florence, we had a week's leave in Florence, Whicker was in this lovely villa, beautiful Florence villa, all marble staircases and everything and he wouldn't let you go in the front door, he made us go round the back, sort of the servant's entrance. And if you went in the house to see him, you had to take your shoes off. I can understand that of course.

And he was always, how he survived the war I don't know, from his own men, I don't know, him and Dicky **Gade**, he was another, the 8th Army was Dicky Gade on that side, this side was Whicker with the 1st Army, and the American 6th Army. And he used, both of them used to send them out on reckless errands. Old Bill Jordan when he got blown up on a mine, he was on a mission he shouldn't have been undertaking. And I remember when we were breaking out of Rome, breaking out of Anzio, eventually to get to Rome, he said to Freddy Marshall I think it was, Sisterna, which was one of the main towns on the route just outside the perimeter. He said if you go up there, I've just come from intelligence, he said, if you go up there, you will get some great stuff in Sisterna. The Germans are evacuating and all the rest of it.

So we make our way towards Sisterna, and can't see a ruddy soul anywhere, it's very quiet. Nobody about anywhere, and suddenly out of ditch at the side of the road there is these two American soldiers, there is a whole platoon there actually, they're all arguing, there is no bloody discipline, they're all arguing with their lieutenant, who was their leader about moving on, we're not going, all this was going on. And when we came up with a jeep and a crowd of dust, they said where are you going. You can't go, look at all the dust, we'll have a stonk down in a minute. I've never seen a jeep turn round so fast in my life. Typical thing you get from Whicker and Dicky Gade. These sort of instructions from the villas.

We're in Italy, we've nearly finished Italy. I ended up in Venice at the end of the war, we were in Venice. My last job in Italy was, we were stationed just outside at Mistra in Venice. General Mark Clark who was the US commander used to have a parade at 10 o'clock every morning at St Mark's Square, when American troops, British Troops and the pipe

band, they used to do this every morning at 10 o'clock. And I was told to film this, every morning. I couldn't realise why I was doing it every day. I never did find out. I used to have, you could only take the jeep to the end of the causeway, and I had the motorised Eyemo, the Eyemo with the 400 ft magazines, the motor, the battery, all this on my own, and I used to have to carry this lot right down to St Mark's Square every morning at 10 o'clock. And General Mark Clark, he had this PR chap, you could only photograph him from one side. If this bloke saw you going the wrong side, he'd come and slap your hand. That was the last job.

Then I'd done nearly 4 years abroad by then. I went back to Rome, waiting for repatriation, and came home. And then the war was over. And the unit was more or less not needed, the 2nd Front had happened. The war in France was done, it was only the Far Eastern one going on. So I came home and I went to see Macdonald at Pinewood, they were at Pinewood. I reported up to see him, I was on a month's leave after coming back, I went to see him at Pinewood and he said, I thought it was great, he said if you would like know you could go out to the Far East with a commission. I thought that's great, I've been away for four years and now I'm going out to the Japanese war, it's not really worth it.

So I didn't hear any more about that. I didn't volunteer for that. So I ended up in Bista, waiting for my demob, in Bista camp, with Jordan, old Bill Jordan.

Alan Lawson: Had you been transferred by this time, your actual unit.

Les Ostinelli: I went through lots of units. You see, originally we were a motley crowd, everyone was in their own regiment.

Alan Lawson: You were transferred to Ordinance

Les Ostinelli: Yes, but in-between, we all became engineers, Royal Engineers for about a year. And then they decided to put them all over to Ordinance, and that's why we went to Bista, because that was the ROC depot. And I went down to Taunton with Bill to get demobbed at Taunton.

Alan Lawson: What happened at demob. Did you have reinstatement rights.

Les Ostinelli: No, because I was a freelance, I was freelancing. But I'd been talking, because I knew Tom **Howe** quite well, at Denham, because I was always popping over to the special effects department, hoping I would get fixed up in there sometime or other, with all the Americans, Ned Mann, Larry Butler. Larry was very good to me, because he always gave me the chance to go over any time I wanted to go. He said come down and see us, but he couldn't offer me a job though. Anyway, what were they doing, testing for *The Thief Of Baghdad*, trying to get a matting process going. They tried Dufay colour, they showed me all the stuff down there, Dufay, all sorts of ways of trying to do it. But anyway Tom was by that time, Korda was going to become the head of MGM London Films, the combined company and they were going to take Amalgamated Studios at Elstree which had never been opened. And Tom offered me a job coming over there as a camera in the special effects, matte, with Peter Ellinshaw. On the other hand I had an offer from Percy Day who had Wally Veevers as his cameraman, he offered me a job as well. Because I knew as I said Arthur Day in the Army, I knew the other Day. So eventually I went up for an interview up at Belgrave Square, MGM, Britain, and saw, I think I saw David Cunningham first, he was still London Films and later on I saw Matthew Raymond and he offered, I took it, a contract to start on 7 January 1947, because the studio, they'd moved into the studio but they decided for some reason to top the roofs another 12 ft. All the stages had to go up 12 ft higher.

Anyway I had a few months, although I had this thing I had a few months spare what to do. So one day I rang Reg Morris, we met up, had a drink and that, because he only lived in Ruislip, and we said let's go up and see old George Hill and see what's going on at Shepherd's Bush, so we're up in his old rooms chatting away there and the phone rings and it's what's his name from ABPC, ABPC were still at Welwyn then, Welwyn Studios. They hadn't moved back into the other one then. They said they want an operator and a focus pulling for 4 days testing at Welwyn. So old George said I've got two fellow here, we just happened to be sitting there. Anyway we got the job. Fortunately getting to Welwyn you can imagine, fortunately old Reg borrowed his father's car and we set off for Welwyn for four days with Otto Heller, shooting artist tests. And the only camera they had spare was a Model H Vinten, with that terrible blimp, sharp as a razor, you put your eye there and you've got those sharp corners there. Terrible thing. That was the

only one there and Otto kept apologising, because I was operating and Reg was the focus puller. Anyway we did that.

Then I got a call to go as second unit on a picture which Francis Carver was going to direct which was called *Silver Darlings* which Karl Grune was going to direct, no Clarence Elder was directing, Karl Grune was the producer. It was tied up with ABPC really, Clifford Evans and all of them. That was in Scotland. I was doing 2nd unit and there was a hell of a lot of BP plates for the sea plates and stuff. And it was very embarrassing really because with a good G filter you couldn't go wrong really with the sea. They were coming up really beautiful, for looks you couldn't go far wrong. And we used to sit in the theatre every night, local, and go through all the routine stuff, the action stuff, which was good but commonplace, and then you'd get all the umms and ahs because you'd got all these glorious seascapes. I was embarrassed by this. Paddy Vinten was on this too. Paddy Vinten he was the operator, Frank Ellis was focus puller. Peter Brock was the loader. We were up there about 3 months I suppose.

My wife came up because I used to go out in this 10 ft lobster fishing thing in the **Pentemam** Firth, and you disappeared between the waves. We had this Mitchell camera mounted in this 10 ft boat. Just 3 of us with the old matte box over the side and it was amazing, we never got a splash on it. You could virtually look round you and all you could see was water, above you, the waves. My wife used to think we'd gone because she couldn't see us from John O Groats. She used to sit there and say where are they now then.

Then I did a job, this was all good for me, because every job I got was either stuck up in Scotland or the Shetlands for 4 months. Or I did another job as an operator on a small budget film called *Swiss Honeymoon*, all shot in Switzerland. I was out in Switzerland for 2 ½ months I suppose. And then the cameraman was old Jan **Sikorski**, did you ever come across him, Polish, well he photographed this film out there, we did all exteriors and interiors were done in one of the big hotels in Zermatt and he went sick for about a week and I had to carry on for about a week. But after that I just did a few odd jobs and my time came up to go to MGM. 1947, January 1947, MGM Studios.

Alan Lawson: What was your first film there

Les Ostinelli: Well in special effects you did them all. The first film I remember doing matte shots on in black and white was *The Guinea Pig*, xxx did the matte shots on that. Quite a few, *Edward My Son*, Then the big epics came along. They were a bit slow in starting, MGM, but then they did *Ivanhoe* which was still 3 strip, several 3 strip ones. And then come the 50s that died, they went to Eastman. We did a hell of a lot of matte shots on *Ivanhoe* and the other Elizabeth Taylor one, *Knights Of The Round Table*. I did mostly travelling mattes on *Knights Of The Round Table*, because Tom, being the he was, he never refused anything. If somebody said can you do this, he'd say yes. So we'd done successfully matte shots on *Ivanhoe*, 3 strip films, when it came to *Knights Of The Round Table* that was Eastman color and in fact one of the first Eastman Color film pictures. And doubling up on that it was the first, over here it was the first **Bush and Loam** CinemaScope picture, with the double lenses, double anamorphics.

Syd Wilson: Did you go via separations

Les Ostinelli: No, we made our own separations. Yes. But with 3 strip it was easy, not easy but much easier, because you've got a natural source for the matte. When you come to Eastman Color you've got to get them separated which is difficult. Also the fact was they scheduled to shoot the first two weeks of the picture all travelling matte, blue screen at the stage at Elstree. And Tom said yes we can do it. Of course we'd never done any travelling matte test with Eastmancolor. We couldn't even make separations because a) the stock had only just come on the market, the separation stock for Eastman, so it was all a very hard trying period, because not only had you got to try out and get good dups from Eastmancolor, you had also got to make mattes with it, re-composite them. So we had, the pressure was on, because like all pictures they have delivery schedule. They sent some to Hollywood, but I noticed that when the pressure was on we got them back again.

Syd Wilson: As well as separations, you used to have to use dyachromes as well to stop the overlap.

Les Ostinelli: The other big one, the 3 strip one, was *Quo Vadis* which was shot in Rome 3 strip, but all the effects, not the stage effects, but the photographic effects were done in Elstree. And I think I was with Peter Ellinshaw

then up in the matte department, we did about 140 matte shots, matte painting shots combined with miniatures for *Quo Vadis*. And we also did *Captain Hornblower* for Warners, at Denham. Of course they built that replica of the ship on the stage at Denham with Gregory Peck, but of course, you could never see that in the water as it was on the stage. So somebody said one day we've got to see it in the water. So Peter and I went down and shot a lot of water plates down at Herne Bay or somewhere. Anyway we doubled it all up at the end. So that was my life at MGM. It was very good really

Alan Lawson: How long did that go on

Les Ostinelli: Till 1954 because they decided then they weren't going to make any more pictures. Change of policy as usual with Americans and almost close the studio. So we all got our notices including Freddie Young at one time, all the camera department. So that was a bit of a shame. You see having so much regular employment in a studio is unusual, and you suddenly come back to facing the hard world again, sitting by the phone, who wants me.

So it became a bit of a thing. I did some odd documentary stuff for Greenpark, the old Guild outfit. I did some for him and some for the other outfit, Verity was it.

Alan Lawson: Yes, it was Verity

Les Ostinelli: I went up to Scotland to do a film, a Babcock and Wilcox film about boilers. Anyway I did that for a bit as the winter was coming on the work was getting thinner and I missed the regular weekly pay cheque and I thought I can't live with this, I'll have to go back in the labs or something. At least you get paid every week, even though it's not so much money but at least it's regular. So I rang George up at Denham, my old mate. And he said come back, join the optical department again. So I went back in there and fortunately they had the Acme Dunn printer which was a super optical printer for those days because it was designed by a man who actually did optical printing himself so he knew all the handles and knobs.

The two we had at MGM were lovely machines but they were bastard things to work with. You only had to knock a screw and the whole thing dropped out of line. So the Acme Dunn was a piece of cake after that

Syd Wilson: You would have loved a machine, a printer that he made himself over in his laboratory, which had 3 clapper gates in it and you could put 3 strip in it and the whole damn thing, you could print straight onto Eastman Color

Les Ostinelli: Combined

Syd Wilson: Yes, in one pass. The register was flawless

Les Ostinelli: They had the old shutter gates didn't they

Syd Wilson: That's right. No it was a good machine that. I did a lot of travelling matte stuff on that. In fact at one time we were so busy on the Acme Dunn that would only cope with this sort of work and colour work, they still had the old Tricker over there, the old Debie, it was still there. It had a standard Mitchell on it, on the long bed that came out of the studio, it had the special effects printers from Denham and the long bed one which I used to use for film strip shooting and title shooting had a standard Mitchell on it, that's right.

Les Ostinelli: I was there back at Denham, then I got a call, I think that's when I first came into contact with Alan really, 1956, I had Howard Baillie, he rang me up and said, I'd seen him once before when I'd left MGM, you know what was going on over there, they had an optical department. Anyway there was nothing doing but he said I'll bear you in mind if anything comes up.

LES OSTINELLI

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

Alan Lawson: You were saying Howard **Baillie** of Olympics.

Les Ostinelli: He wrote to me and offered me a job. He wanted a contact person or whatever which sounded interesting, to liaise with production companies and such like. So I went there, the money, he made quite a good offer, expenses and all the rest of it.

Alan Lawson: When was that

Les Ostinelli: That was in 1956, and my first job as you will probably remember Alan, was mainly concentrated on BBC, because I used to appear every morning 9 o'clock rushes in Lime Grove.

Alan Lawson: You're the first contact man we've ever done. Explain about the job of contact man really. Because people wonder what on earth it is

Les Ostinelli: I suppose it means you acted as a liaison between the companies, the production companies and the laboratories.

Alan Lawson: But your day started early, why

Les Ostinelli: Early in the morning, to see the rushes, you went in to see the rushes. You then wrote up your reports on the rushes, bearing in mind you probably 8.30 onwards you got calls from units, studio units, foreign locations, everywhere wanting reports on the rushes, which you gave them. You visited units, obviously your main contact was with the cameraman and discussed whatever. Going on after the rushes period, later on, when the film is completed and the cutting, editing has been done you get involved then because

Alan Lawson: Show prints

Les Ostinelli: Show prints, or grading. You don't grade the thing, but you sit in with the grading, and whoever is available. The cameraman is sometimes available, but not always available, but at least you have some continuity because you knew what he wanted. And they all had their

whims and things, even in black and white, more so than colour. They all wanted it certain ways and you really were the only one that knew what they did want. Then you carried that through into answer printing, grading answer printing, showing it to whoever is available, director, cameraman or whoever. Often it is only the editor but hopefully you've got the director and cameraman together otherwise they clash afterwards because you've done one for the cameraman and you've got to order it all for the director. So if you can get them together you're on a good wicket. And you can say I'll stand back, you fight it out, do you want it lighter or darker, greener or browner, what do you want. That is really what the gist of the job is.

The labs generally and I'm speaking now, at Denham the system always was to get into contact office as they called it, you always had to be an experienced grader which is real, because you know what the film can do, you know what the lab can do with the film. You can produce what they want or you can't, so it's not a bad idea. The colour with Technicolor I found when I went there was a horrendous thing because there were no such contact men as I know them, they were all ex camera, from the camera department which is not quite the same thing, because although they could be experts on the 3 strip camera and everything else, that didn't help much they you talk about processing, not many of them knew much about processing I'm afraid. And I used to get people, when I first went to Tec people used to ring up and they're going to do a picture and they'd say now who's going to be my contact man, and you'd start with, Stan Sayer, don't want him. Tony Lewis, no fear, thank you. And it always used to end up with poor old, the only lab trained man was old Sid **Payne** who came from Humphreys. And he was a real, he had been a grader, he'd viewed all the black and white, he was very good. You see what happened, what it ended up with was Sid got all the pictures and the other two nobody would have them. That was the problem, their idea, their system wasn't very good. That was one of the reasons they wanted me to go there.

Alan Lawson: Did you have problems with cameramen.

Les Ostinelli: No, not really because, I was fortunate in having a camera background so that I knew, I knew their problems, if they talk about exposure or lens or camera problems or lighting problems, I understood it. But I also knew the lab business pretty well and I could tell them or

advise them which way to do certain things which we could help them with. You know if somebody wanted to do something special, like get hold of a guy like **Storraro** or David Watkin who wants to put the film through the bath backwards, or something. You see you have to listen to all this. And I always had a listening ear. I knew certain things couldn't be done, but you had to be very careful how you said these sort of things. Whereas certain labs, would say it's bloody impossible. Well in the end of the day that's why most of the cameramen came to me, because I'd always listen and try to help them.

Alan Lawson: By this time hardly any black and white was going through of course. Was there any black and white.

Les Ostinelli: There was a stage when there was both when I was at Humphreys, yes we were doing some half and half at one time. 50-50. Then black and white gradually died.

Alan Lawson: Did you have any cameramen who would go for under exposure and forced development.

Les Ostinelli: No, one of your problems was always trying to keep the under exposed lads up. Because there is nothing worse than under exposed film, whether it be black and white or whether it be colour. It is awfully difficult, you spend days saying can you come up a bit. Can you, I can't understand that, I gave it another $\frac{1}{4}$ of a stop. You say well it doesn't show on the screen, because you never unshod whether they did or they did not. And I had this experience with Freddie Young one, because when the second batch of Eastman color came in which was reputed to be faster emulsion, he was doing a job at the old Danziger Studio at Elstree, and he was telling everybody how wonderful the stock was, because, I can't remember the foot candles they were using then, but he was saying I could do this at whatever it was, 50 foot candles at 2, wonderful, fast. I nearly said to him, but it bloody looks like it on the screen because it was underexposed. But he was telling people this and they were all saying I'll try that .

Alan Lawson: There was a time, especially during the continental cameramen of over exposing and underdeveloping to get a softer neg

Les Ostinelli: In black and white. Yes. We did have some cameramen too, on occasions, a lot of time it was horses

for courses, like colour, they were asked to produce a certain effect. We were developing black and white neg on one picture I can remember at Shepperton, I have an idea it was one of Jack Hildyard's pictures, it was going through a very high gamma, but that's what he wanted and there you are. You got past the stage where they all wanted it done by test, that is really going back to the old days where they developed a test on the end of the roll, that is why the neg always looked all over the place when you joined it together, because it was all different contrasts. And I remember a picture, and I hate to say this, it was at Studio Film Labs, years ago,

Syd Wilson: That was before my time.

Les Ostinelli: When I was a Humphreys there was a picture that Larry Pizer or Gerry Turpin photographed, no Gerry Turpin photograph. And they couldn't get a decent print off it, in the end it was so uneven it was unbelievable. And what he'd been doing is have it all done to test, which they were doing, so every bloody roll was a different contrast. You've got to keep it all level, if you want contrast, do it in lighting, which you can in black and white.

Syd Wilson: You can't alter it once

Les Ostinelli: That was the problem, this neg ended up and you couldn't get a decent print off it.

Alan Lawson: Carry on about Olympics

Les Ostinelli: I was on this contact job for a long time with, mainly as you know with the BBC and other people when commercial scene came in, we tended to do commercials and all sort of stuff. And then eventually Howard Baillie put in a colour plant or two colour machines and printing machines and we were supposed to go into colour in a big way because the company being owned by Paramount, and Paramount's work was all done by Tec, by contract at that time, and I can remember to this day, I was made, because we had people at Olympic who had always lived with black and white, none of them had colour knowledge at all, a lot of them were quite elderly to take up the colour thing any way. We got into such a state old Howard Bailey said would you help us out. Because I would be going out all day on my rounds and seeing stuff out at Highbury and *Take Your*

Picks and Double Your Moneys and going down the Beeb, and I'd have to go back and they'd say we've got to make some separations for this picture, and nobody had a clue. I used to be there till 9 o'clock at night, trying to set them up with the filters and everything, and it got too much. And in the end they said would you like to take it over completely, the colour operation. So I said yes. Again money entered the thing, he made a good offer and I was interested anyway. So I ran the colour operation right up to Rank bought the place.

Alan Lawson: That was bought for Visnews

Les Ostinelli: Paramount decided to sell off all their operations which included all the cinemas, the Paramount Astorias, the Plaza, all these cinemas. They sold off other little things, they also included in the package the lab. So the lab was sold. Rank bought the lab and the theatres. We were all interviewed to carry on with our work. The only thing was they told me they were going to close down the colour plant and move it all to Denham where the main operation was. It made sense I suppose really. And they said it looks like you and a couple of your bods will have to move to Denham. In the meantime Howard Baillie who was offered a contract to carry on running the operation wasn't very keen on, I don't know what it was, the terms, we were great friends by then anyway. Anyway he had an offer, Gaevart were mixed up with it with Cinecolor, there was a Cinecolor plant at Slough. I don't know if you've ever been there, it would frighten you to death

I went, he said to me, I liked Howard we got on very well together. He said to me I've got this offer to take over Cinecolor because they were in dire straights financially and other wise. And what had happened that Gaevart that made all the material, the special material, the colour double backed colour material had a mountain of it, they didn't know what to do with it. The only way was for somebody to use it. The Cinecolor plant in Hollywood had folded and gone. And I think there was some thing between Gaevart and Howard and the bloke who ran Cinecolor here to do a deal and use up this film and all the rest of it. So he said would I like to go with him. So I said fine, I didn't particularly want to go back to Denham again, in a job I didn't know what I was going to get. So I went there. I was only there 10 days, because the whole thing fell in around us. The brokers came in. Old Bill Hillson used to

run it. They had two vaults full of junk film. I don't know how the process ever worked

Syd Wilson: You floated it along

Les Ostinelli: I know. You had these long troughs of developer and the film floated on top of it. And then you turned it over in another bath and went the other way.

Syd Wilson: It was emulsion on both sides

Les Ostinelli: But it was only 2 colour at that time. They were doing quite a bit for Fox like Westerns because it was 2 color, they were doing quite a bit for the Army Kinema Corporation thing, but it was really a joke. Anyway out of that came good, because Humphreys who were a very busy, very prosperous lab really, but had a management problem, old Roland Wright was the general manager and he was famous for upsetting customers, because they would come on to him and he would say well the bloody hell do you think you are, and when are you going to pay me. And all this went on which wasn't good for public relations really. And Arthur Jarrott got to hear of this because he was at that time the chairman of British Lion, British Lion Studios, Humphreys Labs, the National Film Finance thing, so all the producers had to go to Arthur Jarrott when they wanted money, or backing, or for distribution, and out of all that they had to go to Humphreys because he said you've got to use Humphreys, because this is why I'm giving you money. And also Mole Richardson was in the group, the lighting company. Anyway Roland Wright knew Howard and he could see that he was getting in a bit of a state, so he asked Howard if he would go there, not as his assistant but to come on the management administration side. Well I know Howard went to see Sir Arthur Jarrott and they were quiet keen about it because I don't think Jarrott was keen on the way that Wright was running the place

Syd Wilson: Roland Wright was a solicitor, he wasn't really a management man

Les Ostinelli: No, he had this fiery Scottish temper. He wasn't any good for public relations either. Anyhow Howard went and Howard was good in the sense that I'll come but I've got to bring Les Ostinelli with me. That was the agreement, he wouldn't sign it unless they took me as well, which was rather good in a way because I was a bit out on a

limb having given up the Olympic job and Cinecolor collapsing. Any way I went there and eventually we did a lot of sorting out internally in the plant first of all. And got them a bit straight administrative wise inside. And then we had a bit of reorganisation. Roland Wright called his bluff because he said to Arthur Jarrott, his contract or something was up for renewal and he said to Arthur Jarrott I will only sign up if you put me on the board, to Arthur Jarrott. And I think they called his bluff because Arthur Jarrott said no. So it was really goodbye Roland Wright, he had no comeback. So Howard Baillie became the general manager.

Syd Wilson: That would be

Les Ostinelli: 1958. And then we had, we had a lot of political problems at the top. There were 3 different camps at Humphreys, there was Roland Wright and his gang, there was old Harry Woolf who was the sales manager, and they were all hankering for the top job and Harry Woolf's claim to fame was in the old days MGMs printing all went to Humphreys because he was a mate of Sam Eckman who was head of MGM and he always claimed to keep the MGM business into Humphreys. And he aspired to become the number one. And then you had Ted **Jewitt**, who was good, he wasn't interested in all the politics of the thing,, he was just a good technician. And then you had Doug Haye who you know, and who also aspired to the number one job. So when you went on the top floor you didn't quite know which office to go in.

Syd Wilson: What was Doug

Les Ostinelli: He went there as a colour consultant, because they started Eastmancolor and like everybody did at the beginning had problems, not that he could help but he was put in to liaise as a contact man, colour contact man really. Because they wanted George Gunn really, originally and George obviously wasn't interested in going to Humphreys and he recommended Doug Haye who was some vague relation to George Gunn. Anyhow that was why he got the job. In all this infighting Doug didn't come out very well and he wasn't all that popular with cameramen either. You see Doug's one fault was that he would never tell you a or b. If you looked out the window and said Doug, tell me if it's raining or not. He would say I'm not quite sure. So when cameramen rang up and said where is my printing and is my stuff alright you got all this funny stuff. And I'd

experienced this myself personally, when I was at MGM I shop 3 strip stuff in the matte department. And you'd ring up old Doug and say has it all come out alright and how is it printing and you'd get this thing. He would never tell you what's wrong. You'd more or less have to wait until you saw it yourself.

Syd Wilson: Couple that with a total lack of personality

Les Ostinelli: Yes. No doubt he was a good technician, but not in that job. So they didn't renew his contract and they made me take over his colour constancy. Doug went and I took over the colour constancy. And old Fred Harris did the black and white. And that is where I really started to build up a big relationship with cameramen at Humphreys, especially on colour, because there is no doubt that after the initial problems they became very good on colour. It is like everywhere, whatever you say, it is the people that deliver the goods. There is no better lab than another, they're all the same. There is no secrets to film processing, they all do it the same way, especially in colour. You're governed by what you can do and what you can't do but you've got to have people that cared, and I always cared about the cameramen.

Les Ostinelli: Because the people cared. Old Fred Harris was a terrible man to be with, but he gave his life to, he used to go in at 6, same as I did. And he was very good. Ossie and Erwin Hillier, Jack Hildyard even, black and white at that time would go nowhere else but Humphreys. And eventually we did quite a lot with the colour side too. Because Technicolor, Syd will remember this, they were interested in the mass bulk printing. They knew they would get it no matter what happened, it was locked in.

Syd Wilson: What used to happen in fact, Les would have the stuff at Humphreys and some at Denham, but when it came to the bulk printing, after answer printing, we used inherit the neg and do the bulk printing.

Les Ostinelli: But they didn't worry. And their people, the contacts for Tec were these ex camera department assistants, they didn't really know the lab business.

Syd Wilson: Before you got there, they had Stu Brown as one of the contacts

Les Ostinelli: But it wasn't really his forte

Syd Wilson: But he certainly got on with the people, he got a certain amount of personality.

Les Ostinelli: Yes, but they were more kind to Stu, quite honestly. I knew Stu when he first came to England, and I can tell you where Stu worked first, he worked for Technicolor, he worked at Denham, because when Denham Labs was first opened, all that ground floor was cutting rooms and on *Wings Of The Morning*, the neg was processed at Acton, they weren't processed by Technicolor, they weren't even built. And Stu had a cutting room at Denham because I remember helping to move the great inspection table into Denham, with all his stuff. And that is where he did his inspection and his makeup there.

Syd Wilson: He was on *Lawrence* and things like that, he seemed to get on alright

Les Ostinelli: I don't think you could ever be cross with Stu,

Syd Wilson: No, you couldn't. It was an asset really.

Les Ostinelli: But I think during the 60s Humphreys had the key to the whole operation

Syd Wilson: I couldn't agree more

Les Ostinelli: Because they built up a good relationship and they had some good people there. But that all ended with bad management again. You see Howard Baillie aspired, he done well for the Lab and he aspired to do better in the group and he fell out with Paul **Adorian** which was not very good. And eventually he decided to pack it all in which he did. We'd had our famous Mr Ray Dicks, who you know Alan, from the Bush, by 11 o'clock he was past it.

Alan Lawson: I didn't know that.

Les Ostinelli: By 11 o'clock in the morning he was well away. You couldn't even talk to him. And I blame Ray Dicks, I have no hesitation in saying this, I blame Ray Dicks for the downfall of Humphreys. Because the business fell away. I used to have arguments with producers or something, because something had gone wrong, it does in all labs. And

you go out and especially the American type, they'd say I've got to speak to the head man. Well you'd say ring Ray Dicks if you won't listen to me. And they could never get him and they would never call him back and that went.

So in 1970 I'd seen, the end of 1968, 1970, I'd seen Bob Dibley who was the managing director of Denham then, yes, they'd become Rank by then, Bob Dibley, I saw him at a do somewhere and he said if you ever want to come back to Denham just give me a call. Well by that time I was quite a valuable asset, because it's all a sales thing whatever you do, at the end of the day it's selling and that. So I got so fed up one day I rank Bob Dibley and he said come over on Saturday morning. So I went over Saturday morning and we did a deal. He offered me a good position as a production consultant I think we called it. I had a good deal, a secretary, an office, car, you name it all. And it was nearer home and I told them this at Humphreys and I had Ray Dicks and old Ron Jones who was the company secretary, it is funny how people discover your worth when they know that you're going. They said we were going to put you on the board. I said this is a bit bloody late now. I've made up my mind. You don't go in for this jockeying thing. You have to make up your mind you're going or your not. I'd done all that and I ended up at Denham again until 1975. I was very happy at Denham because again we did quite a lot of front end stuff and good pictures in those days.

And then my brother in law, my brother in law is a producer with his partner, George Roy Hill, the director, he rang me up one night and he said I don't want to get involved in this at all Les but Jay Sykes who was the marketing chief of Technicolor in Hollywood he said he wants to know if you're interested in joining Technicolor. I said pretty well, I wouldn't think so, not with their reputation. Anyway Les, nothing to do with me, I'm just putting the two together and that's it. I said well I'll listen. You always listen to what they're going to say. So I got a call from Bill Ingrams who was then the managing director of Technicolor. He said Les, I'm supposed to call you and see if we can get up and meet. I said that's fine, so we had the usual secret rendezvous somewhere. He said what would you want to come to Tec. So I said well, I'm not really keen on coming to Tec what with the hiring and firing and all the rest of it reputation and I'm quite happy at Denham. What are you going to offer. He said write out. So I went home and I wrote out, I wrote out the most

outrageous things, and what I wanted, salary and everything else. I thought that will kill that, they will never agree to all that. And this went on about 6 months because it went quiet and then it came back and Jay Sykes came on the phone again. And to cut a long story short they agreed everything. And I thought blow me, I can't refuse this, because I'd done a deal for a salary which was higher than the managing director at Denham at the time, which was Ray Duckfield by then. And when he heard what I was getting.

That is how I ended up at Technicolor with a very good, it was the first time they'd ever given anybody a 5 year contract, because they didn't give, everybody was on a year or 3 exceptional, but I had 5 years with an optional 5 years which carried me up to retirement. I was clever like that. I thought if they ever want to fire me any time they've got to pay me up any way so I can't lose on this. I knew I was going to be in for a lot of problems because of their reputation, not only of hiring and firing but also, which I was protect with by my contract, but their reputation generally in the industry wasn't very good. So I knew I was going to be in for a lot of hard work. Anyway I started there.

Syd Wilson: That would be 1974

Les Ostinelli: Yes, March 1974.

Alan Lawson: Your official title

Les Ostinelli: There I was called director of production services which meant all front end, anything other than release printing. And I inherited George Gunn's office, I took his office. It was a lovely office, and I was allowed to take my secretary from Denham which was Frances. They did her a deal as well. So it all worked out very well. I was made a director of the company in 1976, I was put on the board. In 1978, they made me take over running the plant.

Syd Wilson: You became plant manager

Les Ostinelli: They called it director of operations I think the famous name was. I took that over, in the meantime I was supposed to find, they wanted somebody but I wasn't really interested in doing that job but it was a fait accompli because they said, poor old Mike Smith, he

got the chop. They were very cruel, because Mike, I don't know how long he'd been there.

Syd Wilson: When I left, I walked out, because I'd been told to get rid of everyone who had been there longer than 10 years, I had to get the lot straight out, I refused to do it, so I walked out of the place. They were back on the doorstep here the following morning, but I wouldn't go back. They said what are we going to do, we've got to do something. I said put Mike Smith and Stu, split my job up, which was plant manager then, split it up between the two of them Mike Smith is due, so Mike took over really from me.

Les Ostinelli: Well the Americans, the new lot, another new lot. I saw 4 chairmen of Technicolor incorporated between being approached to join them until the day I signed, I'd seen 4 different chairmen in America.

Alan Lawson: In 6 months

Les Ostinelli: Yes because they had this thing, get rid of this new regime, the old regime over there, the Mafia business

Alan Lawson: Asset stripping

Syd Wilson: All it was really was a great big asset stripping job.

Les Ostinelli: Yes, but those guys that got those jobs over there. I mean they made a horrendous pile because they had to pay them off, one of the things in American, even in the studios, all these guys, they change studios and they always get these horrendous pay offs. They start off again. In fact there was one guy at Tec in Hollywood, I can remember, who had been paid off from tec and he was still getting a pay off and he was actually working for Movie Labs at the same time.

I became a director and took over the plant operations in 1978, ostensibly because we were told to close the dye transfer plant by September 1st, because they were so keen to get rid of 200 people. After all the dye transport was heavily loaded with labour and the idea was to get rid of them. But we went all through this horrendous period with the union, Bill Ingram, we'd sit at this table with old

Alan Sapper and Brian Shemmings, you'd always sit round the big boardroom table at these meetings, not a word being said. Bill would be sitting sideways looking out the window at the airport, you would go through this list. I had my list of how many people I wanted for the plant and Eastman plant, how many people we would require. And that had been cut to a bone because the American would come over and he would go through a list of how many people you'd want, and he'd say I've worked it all out for the machinery, for the shift work, holidays, I want 36 or whatever, printers. He'd say what do you mean you want 36 printers, you've only got so many machines. I said yes, but what about the holidays, don't you count holidays. I said what happens when you come in one morning or sickness, don't they count, you see. I said well they've cut the developing crews to a minimum, I said what happens one morning when you come in and one guy doesn't turn up, that means you can't run a developing machine. He said, oh well you get someone from somewhere else. I said where. He said you get a printer. I said you can't do that here. At that time in the labs you couldn't move people because if you're a printer you're a printer and you couldn't move into the developer because the union would jump on you. We went all through that bit. Over there, it didn't they could do anything they liked over there.

Syd Wilson: Had you got rid of my crash crews, because I had 2 or 3 crews trained up capable of doing every job in the place

Les Ostinelli: That would be dye transfer

Syd Wilson: No, that would be including printing and everything

Les Ostinelli: That had already gone when I got there

Syd Wilson: I'd got crews, wherever you got a sudden shortage, there were people who you could put in straightaway

Les Ostinelli: No, they'd already cut that down obviously, But I was struggling to get enough crews to run the machinery, particularly developers which is the key. You can easily print more than you can develop, to keep the machines running. And they won't listen to you, as I said we had these 3 new machines, high speed, and the first one

was supposed to start running on, this is how close it is, the same day you closed the dye transfer, your first high speed print machine is supposed to be running at 500 ft a minute. And that would help to take up the slack with the two old ones. And it was built, it wouldn't run, we had all the teething problems with it, we'd spent nights, hours there with Keith Burnham and everybody would be around this machine trying to get it going. So I sent, I had a copy of a telex I sent to the gov'nor of Technicolor in Hollywood explaining all this out. I said our customers are already pressuring us because they're not getting deliveries, on September 1st we're going to be reduced to an output of so much with the loss of the dye transfer. We are only capable of producing so much. It said we've got 20 million ft of blank film in the vaults, and another 20 million on hold at Kodak. Wouldn't it make sense to keep the dye transfer plant running for another 3 months, keep our customers happy and it gives us 3 months cover to get this, probably 2 high speed pos machines running fully. Wouldn't listen to that. September 1st that's it. And what happened, it did happen the same as in Hollywood, didn't it. The fast machine wouldn't run, 2 old machines flat out at 64 a minute, disaster.

Alan Lawson: The management both in England and Hollywood, what were they, accountants, had they any experience.

Les Ostinelli: No, mostly they were finance people. If you called the real technical people, they went a long time ago. Then you had all these entrepreneurs like the people from Gillette and the what's it name razor company, and the Ever Sharp Pens. All this lot, it was only a business to them. And I suppose you're right, when you come down to it accountants.

Then we went through a session where they had plant people over there from Eastmancolor came from DeLuxe and Ray Gould, about 4 of them came from DeLuxe Labs, and Ray Gould was a real lab man, he wasn't a businessman, he wasn't interested, all he was interested in was labs and processing. He was a hard nut, a tough nut, but he was a lab man at least. That's why, if you were a lab man like I was, you got on with him, because he had no time for salesmen. He thought they were unnecessary and all the rest of it, thought they were a waste and everything else. Although he was tough he was quite good, but he had a henchman, a young henchman over there who was his protégé

at Deluxe and he came with him and he was put in charge of Plant 20A, which was the original Eastman plant in Hollywood, and he made such a hash of that they had to rescue him and put what's his name in there, I can't think of his, name, they put another guy in there, and old Ron, he got this fictitious title of being in charge of overseas plants, he was in charge of New York, they called New York overseas, New York, Rome and London. This young Jarvis, and he was like a cowboy, he was only 36 at the time.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

Jarvis became the overseer of all the foreign plants including New York, and the funny thing about New York is the guy who ran New York was old Norman **Stein**, and he had been instrumental in getting Ray Gould to come from DeLuxe into Tec in Hollywood. But Norman would not have Jarvis come anywhere near his New York plant and he have strict instructions to Gould saying he is not going to come anywhere near us, and he never did. So he spent his time either in London or Italy. And I used to have rows with this bloke, because they're famous, it's all controlled from Hollywood, it still is, despite being owned by Carlton Communications, it's still run from Hollywood. I used to get the call every night at 6 o'clock at night from Ray Gould, saying what is it today, what speeds are you running the high speed. Is the high speed printer running at 15,00 a minute. I'd say no, it's running at 1,200 ft a minute. He'd say why's that. I'd say because it keeps busting at 1,500. And every night you got this, at 6 o'clock at night. And I used to have all the figures ready, so much footage process, so much on hold, printed and stacked developing. Every night. This is to the top man of Technicolor in Hollywood. One night he rang up and he said I couldn't get you last night at 6 o'clock. I said no, I don't suppose you could, I was in at 5 o'clock in the morning. It was one of those nights I'd had to go in, bloody developing problems.

Out of all that I enjoyed my stay at Technicolor in the sense that being in the position I was, I had much freedom. And having an almost watertight contract I didn't care if they fired me tomorrow, because they got to pay me.

Alan Lawson: Did you get out of the plant a lot

Les Ostinelli: I got out until the time I took over the operations of the plant. But that was only a temporary basis because I was then 58. But typical American, it used to make me laugh, they'd come over for a board meeting twice a year or whatever. You'd sit round the table, and if you're 40 you're too bloody old aren't you in America. And they used to talk about people, even Hollywood and they'd say old Fred so and so, but we can't really give him

that job, he's 38 or 40 or whatever, and I used to say, wait a minute gentlemen, I'm 58.

The other thing Ray Gould always remembered, I got so fed up one night. He phoned me up, because Jarvis always used to be coming on and telling us how, and I couldn't bear it any longer and I said to Ray Gould I can do without this call every bloody night telling us how to rewind film. And he never forgot that. Every time he used to come over he said Les, I can remember the time you told me about rewinding film. They always know it all, this is what gets you. I spent 4 nights in a row with Jarvis, and Keith, I said come into my office, they sent over a printing machine which was supposed to double rank, make 16 mm double CRIs in one pass. And I got this machine. They said it's the same as we've got. And the idea was good, there is no doubt about it. We all went up there, the printers, the foreman printer, Keith Burnham, myself, we all had ago, we said there's no way we can thread this to do what they say. It was supposed to doing several different things sliding it over and that. We said there's no way. For two nights running I told them this, this machine will not do what you say. Oh, I don't understand this. Well the next night, he came on, I said I know what I'm going to get to night. I said Keith Burnham, the foreman printer, Ashley, sit round the printer and wait for this call. He came on and he said have you sorted that printing machine out yet. I said no, it won't do it. You can talk to Keith Burnham who's tried it, he's the chief engineer, there is the foreman printer here. We have all tried it and it will not do what you say. So there is a horrible silence for a couple of minutes. He said you know what happened, when they modified this machine, they put it out, they didn't do it themselves. He said what they forgot to do to your machine is put this thing on. We'd had 3 nights of this. And old Keith said I can do this locally, you don't have to get the part, I can do that. But this is the thin you got all the time.

Syd Wilson: I had 26 years of this

Les Ostinelli: I only had 18 months of it in that job. You see I was supposed to find, I was supposed to go out headhunting, I was supposed to go out, they had nobody else, they didn't believe in Mike Smith, because he was a good technician but he had no umph really, did he. Any disaster he went to pieces and he couldn't do staff either. However, I had a phone call, they said you have got to get

rid of Mike Smith. I said what. We're not happy, you've got to fire him. I said well he's been here, I don't know how many years he'd been there by then, I said I can't do that. The man's been here, he is the plant manager, how can I just fire him like that. That's up to you, that's your job. So I hid him for a while. I hid him in another job but I knew it was going to come out again. And fortunately for Mike, and I'm glad he did, he obviously made contact with Denham and he got fixed up at Denham. But I was very pleased really. But that was the sort of way they did things.

Syd Wilson: What go me was all those people who had helped build that place up to what it was and then they came along to me, Paul **Fassenack** and said you will get rid of everyone that has been here more than 10 years. What would you do, you'd do what I did. I broke the contract and walked out and that was it.

Les Ostinelli: I was told to go head hunting and they said will you see so and so and so and so and see if he's interested. I said yes. I didn't think he was for a minute but I'll do so if you ask. So I tried 2 or 3 people I knew. They weren't really interested. They said you've got to find somebody to take over from you. I thought, I spoke to the what's his name at Denham, and I knew he would be interested because he'd been at Denham from day one almost. I phoned him up, I said John, you don't have to say much about this but I've been told I have to ask you. I knew what the answer you be. Then I thought the next person must be somebody like Ashley, I knew Ashley, not very well but fairly well. He was the right age, he is keen, he has been in business management, he is pretty well up in the lab business. And he would seem to be quite a good prospect. I said well he's the second to John Judd at the moment. Sometimes it's better to go for the second than the first when you can't get them. So I went to see Ashley once at his house, secret meetings again and I reported back he was interested, he was very tough, and I even told him to ask for more money than he wanted. I was very disloyal as a director of the company. He said I will ask for so and so. I said no you won't, you will ask for 2,000 more than that. I gave him a lot of conditions very similar to my own original contract. I said you put all them in. They can only throw them out. Jarvis comes over, so they arranged to have lunch out somewhere so they could discuss. I was supposed to go as well which I did, because Ashley was a

bit nervous. And Bill Ingram heard about this and without any invitation at all he said I'll come with you. You can't say to Bill you can't come. Can you. So he came and the four of us are there. And both Bill and Jarvis afterwards, because Ashley was very thorough, he always had a clip board, and he had all his questions ready and it was all down there right to the T, because he is like that anyway. After Ashley went back they didn't like him at all because he was asking too many questions and wanted to know how they did this and that in Hollywood and all this. So they went right off him. So it all went very quiet for about 3 months. And we were still struggling on.

Then I got a call again, from Bill Ingrams, he'd had a call from Hollywood saying Jarvis was coming over and wanted to see Ashley. They did it again, the same thing happened again. They didn't really, Ashley didn't hit it off with Jarvis and he was frightened of Bill Ingram, I suppose it was his size or what I don't know. However, the thing was more or less in abeyance, and I said look we've got to do something, I can't carry on running this bloody place on my own. Because Mike Smith had gone. Jack Household had gone. Bernard was nothing to do with the plant anyway. I said it's getting a bit much, what with trying to run in a new Eastman plant with all these problems with the high speed machinery. They said if you want Ashley it's on your head. So I had to have a new contract which stipulated that I could have the assistant of my choice, of my own choice. And Ashley had to write into his contract, because he was frightened of Bill Ingram, I don't know why he should be, he had written in his contract that he would report only to me. Anyway out of that we did the deal and it all worked out very well. And in 1979 I gave up, handed it all over to Ashley, and went back to my old job, liaison with the studios, which I was much happier about, until I retired in 1984.

I should have retired in 1983, they asked me to stay on an extra year, by then I was 65, but I still had an ongoing contract, they said would you stay on another year full time. I said ok but I had an ulterior motive for that, because I made my pension much better, because the trouble with pensions is they depend on service, because I'd only done by then 10, 10 ½ years with Technicolor, so although it was still a good pension, I thought if they want me that much here's a chance to up the pension. So they upped it to the limit they could, because they're only allowed under

legislation to do so much. So the one thing I did out of that extra year, I got a much improved pension, and I also benefitted because of the last two years of my time there they introduced a bonus scheme for executives. And the first year we ever had it we got £7,500 bonus. And the next year I got £4,000 but the importance of that was that it was added to your salary, so it made your retirement salary much higher really what it was, and my pension was based on my retirement salary. And I did very well out of that really.

Syd Wilson: Did you retire as long ago as that.

Les Ostinelli: September 1984

Alan Lawson: Did you retire completely.

Les Ostinelli: No, what happened is that I had this consultancy deal with Tec for 5 years which meant that I could work as many days as I like, up to 5 days if necessary at a pro rata daily rate. The only trouble was I didn't want to stay with Technicolor any more, I'd had enough by then. So my old mate at Denham, he heard that I was actually retiring and he said why don't you come and do the same thing for us, Jim, in fact he offered me more money than I would have got with Tec so I did well really. I was doing 2 or 3 days a week originally at Denham, but I only do one now. When I say do 1, it's I get paid for a day, I can spend an hour here, spend an hour in Pinewood.

Syd Wilson: Do you still have your office at Pinewood.

Les Ostinelli: No, it wasn't worth it. It was too expensive. The only reason for that was that as I was acting as a consultant with Denham, if people wanted to meet me it made sense to meet them at Pinewood for example, rather than in a hotel lobby or somewhere. So we had the office for about 2 or 3 years but it really didn't work out and it was too much money anyway.

Alan Lawson: Looking back over it all would you rather have gone into the studios

Les Ostinelli: I don't think I would now Alan quite honestly. As it happened I had a lot of ups and downs like we all did. You had your very low troughs and high peaks, but generally speaking I've done very well the way it went.

Because people say oh well you were always changing jobs, but I don't think that is too bad. I would never have got where I am without changing jobs. Because there are colleagues of mine at Denham or even at Tec, when I was there very briefly in 1937, they were still there when I went back still doing the same job. Still in the neg assembly, old Whitey and a couple of others. So I think you have to move on to progress.

Alan Lawson: Which was the most enjoyable part

Les Ostinelli: I would think probably MGM, the special effects, because it was interesting worked, we were busy, and it was regular work too. And after that I suppose it was, in fairness, despite all the traumas at Technicolor, that was probably the second. Because I had a job, they wanted me which was a lovely position to be in, I didn't have to go there, in fact I didn't want to go there but they wanted you so badly they offered you, and then when I was there you were treated like royalty in a way. Anything I said or wanted I got, any trips I made, I went to Hollywood to the Oscars every year. That part was very good. The worse part was getting too involved with the plant I think, because I've been all through lab problems before, new labs, trying to get machinery, not me personally but being involved, its very wearying, you burn the midnight oil and see wet film coming out the other end. I remember when old Howard Baillie put this machinery in at Acton, the colour stuff, I mean we had no spare staff there either but him and Fred Harris and myself used to go in on the Saturday morning to try and get the colour machines turning over. And I always remember on the Saturday morning when Howard was down feeding the stuff in, only using the leader, he was down the dark end the other side of the wall, and old Fred was in the middle and I'm at the take up end. And suddenly there is no more film coming out. And I shouted out what's happening, And he said I keep feeding it in. And it was all going down in the middle somewhere. But those are the things you go through

Syd Wilson: Was xxx still there

Les Ostinelli: Alf, yes he was the optical printer. His assistant is still at Denham. He is on commercials, contact commercials.

Alan Lawson: Was Alf the son of Joe

Les Ostinelli: No, his brother.

Alan Lawson: Much older brother Joe, he must have been

Les Ostinelli: I didn't know Joe, I only knew the name.

Alf had this huge old ex Paramount machine, I've still got the photos and the copy of it that he wrote up in the ACT journal years ago before the war. Because at one time I was on the old Act camera Committee with old Desmond Dickinson. We used to have a meeting, there used to be a lot of meetings in those days. I remember going to meetings nearly every night for something or other. There was a technical committee. There was the camera committee.

Alan Lawson: I know there was a journal committee too. Any regrets

Les Ostinelli: No, it's given me a good life. I've done very well out of it. It's very nice to look back anything you did it on your own. I mean I didn't have any uncles who were film producers or whatever

Syd Wilson: You haven't said anything about the BSC

Les Ostinelli: That comes under different thing.

Alan Lawson: It is part of your life.

Les Ostinelli: I was originally made a member of the BSC in, in 1968 I was made a full member of the BSC and I think that was mainly through Ossie Morris who proposed me. In 1973 I was elected to the board of the BSC and I must be the longest, I'm still on the board, I'm retiring next year, I think it's long enough. I talked Frances into being the secretary, because she was my secretary. You see when Joe Minton packed up, because she moved down to Wiltshire, she said she couldn't do it any more, So we were a bit stuck for a secretary. And you really need somebody with office work experience. So I talked Frances into it. She was my secretary. I said would you like. It wasn't very well received at the time and I used veiled threats, well you can do it all in my office time. And she took it on and she's been running it ever since. And she's been marvellous. She is a good secretary. I took her on almost straight from school. I interviewed about 6 girls for a

secretary at Denham and we chose her. That was her second job, she was working at a hospital before that. But she was so keen. She picked up things very good. And I put her on every course that was going. She went on all the Kodak courses. She went on some of the BKS courses, without being a technician or handling, she knows a lot about what goes on. She was a wonderful asset for the customers, because if I was ever out, and I was out a lot, you always knew she'd give the right answers. That's another thing. She'd know what you'd say, if you'd say bugger off, or we'll do that one tomorrow, he would know that. She retired just before me because she was going to have a family. And as I postponed my family for a year, it put it all out. She thought I was going to retire in 1983 and she said that's when she was going to go, and start a family. I said I'm staying on. Then I had a terrible run of people. They got in temps and you'd say, Christ, give us the telephone.

I've now got my list of awards. In 1971 I got the GBCT Award for Excellence. I was made an honorary member of the GBCT and still am. BFI Career In The Industry Award I got in 1986, British Film Institute. The BSC Arri Award I got in, the John Alcott Award, I got in 1987,

Alan Lawson: What is that

Les Ostinelli: We aim to give the Arri award which is sponsored by Arri to persons who have done a lot of good for the society, which was always very embarrassing to me because I was the first one to win it. When we debated what we were going to do, without being big headed I thought well there's only one who's going to get this award. I'd been running it with Frances for I don't know how long. That was all very hush hush that was, I thought how can they give it to anyone else. BSC Technical Award I got 1990, that was the Bert Easy Technical Award, I became a fellow of the BKSTS in 1976. I actually joined the BKS, as it was then, in 1941 when I was in the army. Howard Quicks ran it. I also joined the SMPE in 1941. And as I kept reminding old Alan Sapper, I said look I've been a member, I was paying my subs while I was a soldier to the ACT.

Alan Lawson: You also got an Italian award

Les Ostinelli: This is the one I've just got, the Association of Italian Cinematographers have appointed me

as an honorary member. I think Storaro put my name up
because he's the gov'nor.

Alan Lawson: Thank you.