

# Gordon McCallum (sound engineer)

## 26/5/1919 - 10/9/1989

by [admin](#) — last modified Jul 27, 2008 02:38 PM

**BIOGRAPHY:** Gordon McCallum entered the British film industry in 1935 as a loading boy for Herbert Wilcox at British and Dominions. He soon moved into the sound department and worked as a boom swinger on many films of the late 1930s at Denham, Pinewood and Elstree. During the Second World War he worked with both Michael Powell and David Lean on some of their most celebrated films. Between 1945 and 1984 as a resident sound mixer at Pinewood Studios, he made a contribution to over 300 films, including the majority of the output of the Rank Organisation, as well as later major international productions such as *The Day of the Jackal* (1973), *Superman* (1978), *Blade Runner* (1982) and the James Bond series. In 1972 he won an Oscar for his work on *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971). **SUMMARY:** In this interview McCallum discusses many of the personalities and productions he has encountered during his long career, as well as reflecting on developments in sound technology, and the qualities needed to make a good dubbing mixer.

## BECTU History Project - Interview No. 58

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Transcription Date: 2002-09-20

Interview Date: 1988-10-11

Interviewer: Alan Lawson

Interviewee: Gordon McCallum

Tape 1, Side 1

**Alan Lawson :** Now, Mac...when were you born?

**Gordon McCallum :** May 26th 1919.

**Alan Lawson :** And where was that?

**Gordon McCallum :** In Chicago.

**Alan Lawson :** In Chicago?

**Gordon McCallum :** [Chuckles.] Yes...that has been a surprise to many people!

**Alan Lawson :** Yes!

**Gordon McCallum :** I came back to England with my parents, who are English, when I was about four, and my schooling, therefore, was in England - that's why they came back, largely. And so my memory of America is pretty slight.

**Alan Lawson :** What schooling did you have?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well we went to live in Hove and I was at a small private school there for some time. Then my father came back to London to work and I had a couple of years at Clarke's College which was destined to make me a suitable candidate for some kind of business work, and which I hated, I didn't really learn anything. And at only fourteen, I had an operation followed by scarlet fever, which was dreadful at that time, and so I had a period of isolation followed by convalescence. And by that time, being an impatient character, I was ready to go to work, and at fourteen, of course, you could go to work. So it really was all quite fortuitous the way that everything worked out because I had not the slightest idea what I wanted to do. My father had been a clothing designer, working successfully in America and also with a couple of important people in this country, and he naturally thought that his three sons would all become clothing designers...needless to say, none of us did! So I was not really prepared for anything, I would say, and hadn't any clear idea what I wanted to do...I just wanted to get to work. I was interested in radio, so I was making radio sets and reading and that sort of thing...and electricity. And I became acquainted with a chap on the Hampstead Garden Suburb where we lived...one Ron Hague, I don't know whether you know Ron Hague? You would do, probably, if you'd been around the laboratories in the past...Technicolor for many years. Anyway, that's his history, but he's been a longstanding, very valuable member of the industry. And I went to work with him when he was running a little radio and electrical shop, as a very young man...which he didn't do for long, he decided to give that up and move on. And he came into the film industry, and it was his suggestion, when I was just sixteen that he wanted to go into the film industry, and did, and I thought, "What a damn good idea!" Because if I went into sound, I would be following my inclinations and, of course, I had been quite an enthusiastic schoolboy actor and things like that. I was interested in the artistic side of things, perhaps, and I thought, "Well films sound like a marvellous idea." So that is my background...very little background! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson :** What was your parent's reaction to the film business?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh I think they were - my mother in particular, was quite enthusiastic you see, because she, I think, always had an artistic bent. And my father of course - I think he knocked hell out of my mother quietly, you know - but he didn't complain too much to me! I'm sure he disapproved most emphatically about it, but anyway they tolerated it. And so I was just sixteen when I started at British & Dominions at Elstree.

**Alan Lawson :** How did you get the job?

**Gordon McCallum :** By writing...that's all. My father did know somebody in the industry, whom he'd played golf with, and that led to an interview at Shepperton with John Cox, who did his best to frighten me and suggested I shouldn't go into the business. And he said, "Well when we get to Denham there'll be some jobs going, but at the moment we've got nothing for you." So my little bit of string-pulling there - or my father's - did no good at all. But I had written letters to

all sorts of people and one of them was to British & Dominions and they must have been frantic for somebody or liked my letter, or whatever! [Chuckling.] But I went down to see Overton [L. E. Overton] - who was then the chief of sound, and a lovely chap - one evening, and he took me round the sound department and it was all very great as far as I was concerned, and I got the job. Starting in the lowest possible step...

**Alan Lawson :** Which was?

**Gordon McCallum :** I became the loading boy. I kept film loaded for the cameras, the sound cameras, and I did any other menial task that was necessary. Keeping the sheets, the records and that sort of thing, going to get things from the stores that were needed and all this very essential but menial work. Then more, of course, loading the film, in itself, and doing hand tests, developing hand tests to see that the light valves were clean and no obstruction and all that sort of thing - that was quite important.

**Alan Lawson :** What were you paid, can you remember?

**Gordon McCallum :** One pound a week I started at, which was enough to pay for the fares but not much else.

**Alan Lawson :** How did you get there?

**Gordon McCallum :** From the Hampstead Garden Suburb?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Bus to Golders Green. I rather think it may have still been tram, but it became trolley-bus down to Cricklewood Broadway and from there to Borehamwood on the train. And anyway, one of the more interesting things that we did I had to do at that time was to cut out 'NG' ['No Good'] takes. Now of course in the days of great austerity with the quota films - I don't know what they were made for then, they were made later, in Pinewood, for five thousand pounds a time...

**Alan Lawson :** That was a pound a foot.

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes. So every saving that could be made was important and I used to literally break-off the good takes from the bad, in the dark...

**Alan Lawson :** God!

**Gordon McCallum :** ...to save the cost of developing.

**Alan Lawson :** Do you know you're the very first person who's ever said that! I never knew that.

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes. I had large platters you see, and I'd put the things on, ran through until my fingers on the edge of the film just felt a notch and then I would break things off. And that was something we had to be careful about...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Anyway, it all went well for just six months, because I joined in August of '35 and B&D was largely destroyed and quite a large part of British International Pictures next door, by the fire, the Ostrer[?] fire of February I think it was... '36. So that everything came to a rapid halt. I went home one night, and - it was a Sunday morning I believe, I had to go back for a music session and planes were diving over the studios. I didn't know what the planes were doing flying around, and of course, they were taking photographs of the most mangled, awful mess. You may have seen it, Alan, I don't know whether you did, but it really was devastation, girders twisted like hairpins, you know, and so on. Anyway, that was the end of production briefly, but very briefly. All the pictures went, rapidly, into other studios and we kept going in some - one or two lines in British International Pictures. Some at Rock, some at Whitehall I think it was called, wasn't it?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes...

**Gordon McCallum :** J H down beside the...

**Alan Lawson :** The railway...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...the railway. I think another line went out to Shepperton, and so the work went ahead. And it was announced that British & Dominions which owned the studio that was burnt down, they were going to become a partner at the new studio being built at Pinewood. And that was started at the end of '35 and completed and started shooting in September '36, which was really a remarkable achievement. And the B&D sound department moved over lock, stock and barrel, as Pinewood opened up, and I was there on the first day of shooting. 'London Melody' I remember quite well, Herbert Wilcox. So that was quite a big thing in my life. I had to find digs on the Iver Heath Estate and I stayed there, in digs, for about eighteen months I think, in two different places. The first place slung me out very quickly, after I worked all night one night, and they would not believe that I, a young man, could possibly have been behaving myself by staying out all night, and I was kicked out! And the next place, also, really didn't like the fluidity of hours of work of the film industry, so I went back home to Hampstead Garden Suburb and proceeded to do the longer journey, which I went on doing for many years.

**Alan Lawson :** How did you do that - by this time having your own car?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no. I did not get myself a car until I was thirty-five years of age. There was excellent public transport. I suppose I probably slept on the train or whatever, but I went out to Finchley Road and from Finchley Road to Uxbridge and Uxbridge to Iver Heath...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. What were you doing by this time?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I was a film-loader, as I said, at B & D and if you want me to talk about B & D at all, I could, but of course in those days we had main channels with great, huge machines, built you would think in a shipyard, you know, heavy castings and all the rest of it, and er...

**Alan Lawson :** This was Western wasn't it?

**Gordon McCallum :** Western Electrical Equipment, yes. And monitory rooms for the mixer to work in, which were large monitory rooms, trying to simulate, I imagine, some of the effect of a hall, and with large loudspeakers which were similar to smaller cinema speakers. And, of course, the mixer talked to the people on the floor by a PA system, and of course, he sounded like the voice of God, and of course he was a little bit like the voice of God in those days! Because it was so important to get it on film...almost the first cry was, "All right for you? [So-and-so]?" And then they thought about everything else. But of course, times have changed. Yes, as I say, heavy, cumbersome equipment, heavy cables and so on. And that was the time - we were making films for Wilcox and Jack Buchanan was regularly there. One film I remember on the floor at the time of the fire was 'Two's Company' with Gordon Harker and Ned Sparks. And I think they completed their last day of shooting and somebody said that it was because they were firing blanks that something started a fire in the walls. I think it was more likely an electrical fault, but that was the story. Anyway I went to Pinewood, still as the loader, to get them off the ground, and they took on a couple of extra lads and I showed them the ropes and then I moved onto the floor as a 'cable monkey' or boom assistant, as you will remember. And I spent most of the rest of the time at Pinewood as a boom assistant.

**Alan Lawson :** Can you remember who you were working with on the floor?

**Gordon McCallum :** Mainly with...I did three Jack Buchanan pictures, 'Smash and Grab' - oh dear, titles! I could find them if I looked in the Pinewood book, I've forgotten now.

**Alan Lawson :** Who were in the crew?

**Gordon McCallum :** The Rene Clair film 'Break the News', that I remember as a Jack Buchanan film.

**Alan Lawson :** But who were the sound crew?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I worked with a number of different mixers. Sash Fisher was one of them. John Dennis, he did the Jack Buchanan pictures. Overton worked, I think, with Wilcox and did the Wilcox work. There were one or two others - I'm beginning to forget now. I remember the boom swingers, Jack Locke. Oh there was - no, it's going now. I can't recall names quickly.

**Alan Lawson :** Was Percy there?

**Gordon McCallum :** Percy Dayton, yes! Percy Dayton - so right! A very colourful character and I was his assistant on some of the pictures we did there. And he, of course, went eventually to Denham. But we all - I started to swing a second boom and that sort of thing. Artist test and

things like that, just before the demise of Pinewood as a feature studio, pre-war, which occurred at the end of '38, the Munich crisis time. The film industry was in some difficulties and work was concentrated at Denham, so we were all laid off at Pinewood and it was a scramble to find a job somewhere else. And I then went as a boom swinger to - at Highbury. I worked on one film at Shepperton, as a boom assistant, and I did two or three pictures at Highbury. And I then was called down to Denham to start being an extra boom swinger for the many units that they used to run. 'Thief of Bagdad' for instance, I was on one of their units, and that was my first introduction to Korda and Michael Powell. Er...Oh dear, I'm running out of steam!

**Alan Lawson :** Going back a bit to...

**Gordon McCallum :** Will you edit this or what do you do?

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

**Gordon McCallum :** You'll just let me ramble on?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** [Chuckling.] Oh dear! [Laughs.]

**Alan Lawson :** This is archivable! Going back for the moment to Pinewood a bit... Well no, let's go back to the B & D thing - the techniques on the floor?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I don't know, I can hardly describe those to you. As a lad in the darkroom and loading film, I wouldn't like to talk about technique so much, except that of course, as you well know, everything was mainly shot indoors, very little location work. We had a lot, and we had one sound truck, which tried to carry everything including the kitchen sink, out onto the lot. But mainly work was done indoors and as I say, sound was then, as far as sound was concerned, it was very much a matter of 'the man up above' being 'the voice of God' and laying down the law a little bit which, of course, died out very quickly.

**Alan Lawson :** What about microphones?

**Gordon McCallum :** We used moving coil microphones at that time. They were Western Electric 618's I think.

**Alan Lawson :** They were rather big, weren't they?

**Gordon McCallum :** They were a rather big microphone, about three inches or so - or rather more - three to four inches in diameter. I think we used mic. amplifiers at that time, which were large things, about - oh, more than a foot long.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, like a bomb!

**Gordon McCallum :** And the whole thing created shadow problems galore of course. And so we were all very happy when, really I suppose very quickly after my time, we went over to the Western Electric 630 microphone - the 'ball and biscuit' as it was called, and which went on being used for donkey's years, and was a really excellent microphone. It needed no amplifier on the spot and that partly was due to the fact that mixers started to work on the floor. There was a short cable run to the mixer, sound mixer, sitting as near as possible to the set, able to be talked to directly by the director and instead of being 'the voice of God', became one of the crew!

**Alan Lawson :** [laughs.]

**Gordon McCallum :** And things gradually became lighter, but we were still involved in heavy cables running back to the wall, which I used to get filthy, rolling up morning and night and so on. And then we had the sound truck outside the stage, or a permanent channel, depending on where you worked. At Pinewood we had permanent main-channel recording booms. We had monitor rooms, which were used very occasionally and briefly in Pinewood and then the mixer was on the floor. At Denham they always worked with sound trucks outside the stage - they didn't make use of main recording rooms. That was the difference between the two studios.

**Alan Lawson :** By the time you got to Pinewood what salary were you getting then?

**Gordon McCallum :** At Pinewood I was paid three pounds a week, which enabled me to pay my digs and just about to pay my way, I was not now so dependent on my parents to keep me.

**Alan Lawson :** And when you started, as it were, freelancing, what was the kind of going rate then, or was it [??]?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I didn't freelance - Oh, when I went to Highbury and so on?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh I went up to about - I earned as much as about a fiver a week or something like that, just before the war.

**Alan Lawson :** How come you weren't freelancing then? You were loaned out were you, or something?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no. Oh yes I left Pinewood, they laid us all off and so I did freelance then to that extent. The only time I had to seek my own jobs from picture to picture, was at that period for a very brief period. And in this I was terribly lucky, the brief period between the end of '38 and being taken on, on permanent staff, sometime in '39. When I went to Denham, to begin with I was in a marvellous position of being paid daily rate really, basically. I worked all the summer of '39 on daily rate at Denham, earning what was to me a fortune, in that way. Because, what were we paid - time and a half or time and a quarter or something, wasn't it, daily?

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

**Gordon McCallum :** I don't remember, but it seemed lovely money to me. And then they took me onto the permanent staff as we got near the war and then, of course, the war created a great hiccup.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. Before we come to the war, you say you worked at Highbury. Can you remember the productions at all or the directors?

**Gordon McCallum :** 'The Mind of Mr Reeder' was one picture I remember.

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yes!

**Gordon McCallum :** ...with Will Fyffe, was it not?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And Gordon Daines wasn't it? Gordon Daines was the chief sound-man there. I think it was Daines - Norman Daines!

**Alan Lawson :** Norman, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Norman Daines - nice chap. I met um...

**Alan Lawson :** Do you remember who directed that?

**Gordon McCallum :** No I don't, I'm sorry, can't remember that. No, my memory's going - dreadful isn't it? But as to directors, I mean I can remember the first director at B & D that I saw in operation and I think was Marcel Varnel.

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** I saw George Pearson the er...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yeah, the legendary George Pearson, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** The legendary George Pearson there, and I only recalled the other day that of course, Winnie Pearson was his daughter.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** What a lovely lady she was!

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

**Gordon McCallum :** She died, didn't she?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes, TB I think.

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes, lovely, lovely person. I was very fond of her.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes, George Pearson. Who else do I remember? Well of course Herbert directed most of the films at B & D and - now who else directed? Lee Garmes directed a Jack Buchanan picture I remember at...

**Alan Lawson :** Lee Garmes - really? What, the cameraman?

**Gordon McCallum :** Would you believe it? Now that was - what picture? Mara Loseff and Jack Buchanan in - and I've forgotten. Lee Garmes, yes [chuckles]. [NB. The film was 'The Sky's the Limit'] Who else? Well of course, Carol Reed did 'Talk of the Devil'. I didn't work on that, oh no. 'Talk of the Devil' or 'A Man With Your Voice' I think it became, it was re-titled. That was the first picture actually made completely at Pinewood, and that was Carol Reed. But I didn't work on that picture. I was busy teaching other people to load films so I didn't really get to know him at all then. I worked with him a long time later. Of course, Gabby Pascal made 'Pygmalion'...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...as you well remember, and he was a larger-than-life character. Again, I didn't work on that picture, but you couldn't fail to notice him around the studio! Hitchcock came down, I remember him sitting up on his - tubby character - sitting up on his stool.

**Alan Lawson :** Do you remember the picture?

**Gordon McCallum :** Um 'Sailing Along' was it called? Jessie Matthews's picture was 'Sailing Along'. Didn't he do Nova Pilbeam and Derrick De Marney in another film?

**Alan Lawson :** That sounds certainly possible, but Jessie Matthews? I wouldn't have thought that...

**Gordon McCallum :** Did he not? No, I'm wrong, he didn't do the Jessie, of course not! Let me look something up, if I can find it - I haven't time to look it up really.

[AL chuckles.]

**Gordon McCallum :** But er, no, you're quite right, the picture he did was Derrick De Marney and Nova Pilbeam [NB, 'Young and Innocent']. Now who directed the Jessie? Her husband I suppose, Sonny!

**Alan Lawson :** It could have been Sonny Hale.

**Gordon McCallum :** Sonny Hale! And I think she did two pictures there. Again, I didn't work on those, this is why I'm very sketchy on it.

[Slight pause as GM looks through book].

**Gordon McCallum** : No I can't remember.

**Alan Lawson** : [Chuckles.] Well not to worry!

**Gordon McCallum** : It's all a long time ago, isn't it?

**Alan Lawson** : Yes it is a long time ago. Now, in up to the war years, who gave you the most help, if you like, on the climb-up that one inevitably has to do?

**Gordon McCallum** : As to help, I mean I learnt from, obviously, from all the people in the sound department that I worked with. I was fond of Ove [Overton], he was a very good chap, very knowledgeable. I mean he was a chemist, went to Technicolor for quite a long period in their colour control and all that sort of thing, you know. So that, I mean, he had a very wide knowledge, so that he must have taught me an awful lot. And John Dennis was one of the main mixers and I worked with him quite a lot. B. C. Sewell was the dubbing mixer...

**Alan Lawson** : Oh yes!

**Gordon McCallum** : Do you remember Mr Sewell?

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

**Gordon McCallum** : Now he went to The Bush, didn't he?

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

**Gordon McCallum** : As head of sound.

**Alan Lawson** : Yes.

**Gordon McCallum** : ...and so he was the dubbing mixer and, again, a 'gen.' boy. Apart from that it was learn as you go, very much. I mean you were thrown it at the deep end weren't you?

**Alan Lawson** : That's right, it's the only way isn't it? Really and truthfully, you have to do it.

**Gordon McCallum** : Yes, and of course I was tremendously enthusiastic really. I mean everything about the job was great as far as I was concerned. And that, I think, is really my big recollection of youth in the business was that, I mean when I went into the business, I remember going home to my parents and saying, "It is marvellous there! There are one or two older people, who are maybe directors, everybody else is under thirty!" Everybody was young and enthusiastic and that was a wonderful thing really. In fact I mean that - I mean people got older but it remained all throughout my career, that I was so impressed by the enthusiasm of people. I mean, we had a job that really we loved doing I think, there's no doubt about that. There weren't very many people who disliked their work, there couldn't have been.

**Alan Lawson :** No, no, no... Up to the war years did you see much change in the design of equipment and type of equipment coming in?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I mean, obviously, the er...the um...

**Alan Lawson :** The mics, we know...

**Gordon McCallum :** The mics we know, they improved. Light valves improved. Wwe had light valves which used to clash in the early days - they were in the same plane, the strings of the valve and a clash was a dreadful thing. Well gradually Western Electric introduced bi-planer valves which avoided the visible clash. You still got distortion but it avoided the worst elements of it. And so that was a marked improvement. Other than that, I don't think there were any vast improvements pre-war.

**Alan Lawson :** Ah hmm.

**Gordon McCallum :** In fact with the onset of war, things didn't improve greatly during the war. I mean we were lumbered up with heavy cables and stuff right the way through the war and into - after the war. And everything became more lightweight on the floor, later on.

**Alan Lawson :** Your Canon plugs didn't come in yet? [Chuckling.]

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no, we had Canon plugs, oh yes - we had Canon plugs from Pinewood on and they were fairly light. I mean there used to be huge great things in the early days didn't there?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** But no, Canon plugs came in I should think in the - about '36 time, something like that we started using those.

**Alan Lawson :** Tell us about the war years, because you were at Denham, weren't you?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes I can tell you about that better. I suppose I was more specifically assigned to pictures. I was boom swinging. What happened was, that with the start of the war, of course like every other young fool I sort of volunteered and wanted to go and I tried all the services. But I was graded 3 medically because I'd had my earlier operations and double hernia which I later had put right, but it didn't really make any difference to my medical classification. And the only time that they would - later in the war of course they would have taken me in the Pioneer Core or something. But by that time films were regarded as being just one of the more rather important civilian occupations and so there was no question about being taken away, so that I was fortunate to not have to endure some of the suffering that the lads did. I had my own kinds of suffering but nothing to compare with theirs! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson :** Where were you staying?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I lived in the Garden Suburb and - as you know, and...

**Alan Lawson :** You were still there? Even during the war?

**Gordon McCallum :** During the war and so one of my sufferings was the problem involved in getting to the studio, without my own means of transport. I don't suppose I would have got petrol for it anyway in those days, but it was very difficult during the blitz of course. I mean Denham kept going pretty well during the war but of course there was the hiatus immediately war started. People took off, unfortunately, and films came to a temporary halt. Then they got going again and with the blitz of course they shut down again, because there came a time at the height of the blitz when it was quite impossible for people to get out to Denham, so they shut down and I went into full-time ARP. I became a warden in 1940, some time before the blitz, and one could see the need for it and it was a job I could do in my spare time, so I became an ARP warden. And I remained very busy in ARP all through the war as a spare-timer. But I took on full-time work when the studio shut down at the height of the blitz and although that was - that was a bit of a doddle because we didn't have much activity during the day at all. I was there for about three months I think, doing that, just holding the fort. And then of course there was a shout from Denham that they wanted to get going on '49th Parallel' for Mickey Powell and they hoiked me out, they had enough clout to hoik me out of the Civil Defence, which I carried on doing spare-time. In fact I did a full-time job at one time in my spare time, if you like, I did a lot of admin work and training and that sort of thing. But it was lovely to come out and get back with Michael Powell. I met him, as I say, before the war, briefly, and in '39, I suppose. We made 'Contraband' I think it was, with Mickey. And so...

**Alan Lawson :** Did you know him as a sound engineer, or a still man?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, I knew he'd been a still man. I didn't know he'd been a sound engineer.

**Alan Lawson :** Well I was told he'd been a sound engineer, whether it's true or not, I don't know...

**Gordon McCallum :** [laughs.]

**Alan Lawson :** ...but he's certainly been a still man!

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes! Well he never showed any sympathy for the sound department much on the floor anyway! [Laughs.] So I don't know whether he knew more, or less! [Laughs.] No, I loved working with Mickey, because he was an impossible man in many ways, but he was tremendously imaginative. I mean every picture he made was different. He didn't stick to the rules at all, he was trying all sorts of things, ventures - all sorts of ideas and as he went through his career I suppose, he got better and better. But '49th Parallel' was marvellous...

**Alan Lawson :** You went on the location.

**Gordon McCallum :** No I didn't go on the locations. They were shooting on location I suppose in 1940 in Canada and it was early - was it early '41 that they started shooting on the floor, and

that's when I was brought out of the Civil Defence. But I worked with Mickey on a number of his pictures. I think we almost immediately went on to 'One of our Aircraft is Missing' with him.

**Alan Lawson :** Again on the boom?

**Gordon McCallum :** I was on the boom and C. C. Stevens was the mixer on all those Mickey pictures that I did on the boom. In fact I became Steve's[?] mixer. I did work with one or two others, but I became Steve's[?] boom swinger throughout the war basically, through most of the war. And we did Mickey's pictures - 'Blimp' ['The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp'] and 'Stairway to Heaven' - as it was finally called, 'A Matter of Life and Death'. I started that and I was hoiked off to go into the theatre as an assistant to Desmond Dew in the middle of that picture and subsequently we dubbed that picture together for Mickey, so that I was with Mickey as boom swinger and again as a mixer later on.

[Pause in tape.]

**Alan Lawson :** You were saying, 'Stairway to Heaven', you'd been on the floor but then you were taken off and then you started in mixing.

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes well I've referred to my working with Mickey because of course that was a tremendous pleasure. It wasn't of course the only pleasure I had. I worked also of course with David Lean on 'In Which We Serve', which was his first directorial effort. He shared that with Noel Coward, a most unusual and strange arrangement, in which I imagine David was entirely responsible for the technical side of directing and, in theory at any rate, Noel just took over with the actors after David had set everything up. Anyway it was a very successful film of course, as you know.

**Alan Lawson :** Yeah, yeah, you were on the floor with that?

**Gordon McCallum :** I was the boom swinger on the floor with that and I must tell you about that. That was an occasion that I remember well, not a very happy occasion for me. They had this wonderful set that they built of the destroyer, 'Torrin' it was called in the film but the story was based really on Mountbatten and 'The Kelly'. And it was a full-sized replica of the destroyer, which was complete, except the sharp and the blunt end were just missing. And the whole thing was on hydraulic rockers and it was the first time this had been used and the whole thing moved like a ship at sea. And it really was most impressive, to the extent that because Noel was connected - no doubt, in the way that he was - the royal family were brought down to see the shooting on the set. So we had one morning when we were told, "The royal family will be here shortly, get everything set and 'tarted up' and ready for them to come." And two minutes before the arrival somebody said to Steve[?], "Oh you must meet them, come up on the deck!" The mixer at this time was down on the floor somewhere, well away from where the actual shooting was going on. "You'll have to meet them..." So we're going to shoot, record everything and film it of course, naturally. So headphones were thrust in my hand, "Record it!" you see. So Steve[?] dashes up there and my assistant dashes up onto the boom, where I had been and the royal family arrived. And I put the headphones on and not a sound was audible - not a sound! Everybody was going to be interviewed, the royal family were going to talk to all the important personages of the

unit and I was going to record it - and not a sound! I put the headphones down, "What's wrong?" Checked all the plugs, oh dear! A cable's come adrift, you see. And I went charging around the back of the stage and, of course, I don't know whether somebody tidying up flats or something or other. Eventually I found that a Canon had been pulled out. And I found it, plugged it up, dashed back and put the headphones on. I had, of course, I mean the moment they walked on I had turned over. I omitted to say that - the camera was running of course, the picture and sound were running, but no sound until that Canon was plugged up! [Chuckles.]

[AL chuckles.]

**Gordon McCallum :** And so when I did get there all I could hear was echoing footsteps as they went away, virtually! [Chuckles.]

[AL laughs.]

**Gordon McCallum :** So that the rushes the next day were a great success for Mac - "Oh Mac recorded the sound on this!" [Laughs.] But outside of that, 'In Which We Serve' was a very good experience and I enjoyed working with David and Ronnie Neame on the camera of course. And we went on to do 'This Happy Breed' - also David and er...

[Break in Recording]

**Alan Lawson :** Side Two.

**Gordon McCallum :** Side two, right! [Chuckling.] Yes, 'This Happy Breed', that was a very fine film - very moving, with a wonderful cast. Bob Newton, Stanley Holloway, Celia Johnson, you will remember. Kay Walsh, Johnny Mills - oh what a cast! I am right in saying Johnny Mills was in that, wasn't he? I get mixed up between the two pictures sometimes.

**Alan Lawson :** I'm not sure.

**Gordon McCallum :** Anyway...

**Alan Lawson :** No, John Mills I know was in the other one...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...was in 'In Which We Serve'. And yes, well it was 'This Happy Breed' wasn't it? It was one or the other my memory is terrible these days. [N. B. Mills was in both films.] But one or the other, where we had a scene - David liked to rehearse a scene through first thing in the morning, as you know.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yeah...

**Gordon McCallum :** Full run-through of the entire scene, and to make the actors happy and uninhibited, most of the people were removed from the set, to keep it quiet and just a few of us who could benefit from watching what they did remained. And they played this scene, and it was the scene of - It was the, I think - who was it? Johnny Mills, was it? - had been killed I think -

would it be that? I have forgotten. Anyway, it was the most moving scene. Mainly Celia Johnson, but with the others. I think this must have been in 'In Which We Serve', and the whole unit were in tears at the end of this. When I say the whole unit - all of us there were in tears, at the end of that playing, of that rough run-through of the scene. And, you know...

**Alan Lawson :** If it was David...

**Gordon McCallum :** It was David.

**Alan Lawson :** Well would it have been? Because you were saying that Noel Coward really did the actors.

**Gordon McCallum :** So it would have been 'This Happy Breed'. It was 'This Happy Breed' clearly. I always remembered it as 'This Happy Breed'. I was interested in all the technical things of course and enjoying being with actors, but I mean this really impressed me of the power of the cinema and of dramatic acting, I think more than, perhaps, anything.

**Alan Lawson :** Was that kind of overall control of the actors by David?

**Gordon McCallum :** Brilliant acting. A good scene but brilliant acting. David I think - he was responsible for getting together a brilliant, a marvellous team, obviously. And - no, I mean this wasn't direction at that time, it was just pure, brilliant acting. And in my later career I was in the dubbing theatre, dealing with the images of all these people and they became great friends, even though many of them I hadn't even met - do you know?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Many artists that I had not met. And today I can't tell you with some actors whether I ever met them or not, but I knew them so well. In fact I used to know voices so well. In fact even now I can be not looking at the television and I can know who it is talking, and it may be a small-part actor of many years ago, and I still recognise the character. Anyway, that's digressing, but certainly working with David was a great experience. I did a number of other films too, I did 'Hatter's Castle', that was Bob Newton again, he was a very fine actor. Lance Comfort directed that I think.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes. And [Isadore] Goldsmith was the producer. One or two things I remember about that film. That was the time when poor old Bob was hitting the bottle a bit and the insurance doctors had to come down to see him. And we used to shoot, generally speaking, only in the mornings, because the afternoon was no good. That was a sad thing about it, because Bob was a great actor and a very likeable chap but, of course, the insecurity, I suppose, of actors took him to drink and I suppose, to some extent spoilt his career - although he was very successful, and everybody loves him. I mean the public loved him, I mean all my friends keep talking going back to films that he was in, so he couldn't have been more successful in that

respect. But one other event happened and it showed you the - I had some minor moments of danger, one aspect of the film industry is danger, isn't it?

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

**Gordon McCallum :** Always has been. And I am very conscious of chaps who died doing their job, it never happened to me, fortunately and I never came seriously near any danger, but one amusing incident was on 'Hatter's Castle'. As boom swinger I had to get my microphone in a suitable place to record a line where Bob was 'doing his nut' in his usual manner! And he had a line to - he'd built this place called Hatter's Castle and he'd been let down, I've forgotten the story now, by his wife, was it? Anyway he was very unhappy and he had to cry out, "I built ye up, I'll pull ye down!" And he threw a lighted paraffin oil lamp onto a bed, which burst into flames rapidly, particularly as it had been doused in petrol to make sure it went!

**Alan Lawson :** [laughs.]

**Gordon McCallum :** And the only place I could record that - we could get that line from satisfactorily was from the spot rail right over the top of the bed!

**Alan Lawson :** [laughing in background.]

**Gordon McCallum :** So while the fire brigade stood by with their means of extinguishing the fire, Mac sat in the hot seat! And it was hot, because the moment he said the line, he did it all in one gesture, the end of the line was the throwing of the lamp, and it went like a flash, you know! [Chuckling] And I felt the heat coming up at me - I can't tell you how fast I moved! I was in a sitting position with my arms outstretched, and a long pole, just getting the mic in the right place. And I hoisted that pole up rapidly, threw it - I'm sure the sound department wouldn't have been pleased to see the way I handled the mic! But I threw it away out of what I knew was going to be the area of the fire, and somehow scrambled onto the thing and got away and looked back, and by the time I looked back, the flames were over the handrail of the spot rail, going up like fun! So it might have been dangerous, but it wasn't, as it happened, it was fine. But the funny thing was that it took me - I had to walk right round to the back of the set on the spot rail to find the ladder down! And I came down and walked round to the front of the set, you see, and by this time... [laughs] Goldsmith was in a terrible state, "Ver is Mac? Ver is Mac?" he was saying! [Laughs] He thought he'd lost me! [Laughs] And anyway, all was well.

**Alan Lawson :** [laughs.]

**Gordon McCallum :** So that was a minor discomfort! And also discomforting were the waves I was regularly doused with on 'The Torrin' on 'In Which We Serve'. [Chuckles] The only way to get the microphone in the right place was in the direct line of the water splashing down off the...

**Alan Lawson :** The decks...

**Gordon McCallum :** No, off the special wave machines. They had huge great wave things that they could release these great - surges of water came down over the ship, and over Mac! I used to

go and change in the wardrobe regularly! [Laughter] One or two films took me up doing a bit of flying, and we had to record Wellington bombers and things like that. And so, having seen that thing about bombers last night on the telly - I was saying to Jilly - we recorded a Wellington taking off on a raid and I watched the young lads go on a plane and cheerfully waving as they went past us. We were recording them and they thought, "Well let's hope we get back," you know. It was one of the things to remember. Well that's about it I think, war time. What else can I say? Oh the blitz of course was dreadful because we tried to cope with the transport situation and, in fact, Mickey Powell was in a similar difficulty and he and I used to try and find the station which had a train which would go somewhere near Denham. And it was Finchley Road to Uxbridge or Marylebone or Paddington to Denham, and of course you never knew what was going to be operating so it was very difficult, but we managed somehow. And eventually when it was very bad we had transport laid on by the studio. They were obviously granted extra petrol because our work was considered important, so we kept going with cars taking us to central points and so on. Then we come to...

**Alan Lawson :** Well what I'd like to talk to you about - when did you first get involved with ACT, can you remember?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well ACT yes, yes I can tell you. That goes back to the beginning again a little bit. Because I was only a boy, as I told you, when I went to the studio and of course ACT was at that time not the universal thing it became, and I only sort of discovered that there was such a thing as ACT after talking to Sash Fisher.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** And I said, "Oh, well I think I ought to join that," you see. And he nearly fell down when somebody actually volunteered that he wanted to join the union. And so that was it, I joined on the spot and I didn't pay any really very active role until...

**Alan Lawson :** When was that?

**Gordon McCallum :** That was in - at Denham.

**Alan Lawson :** Was that at...

**Gordon McCallum :** At B & D in 1935-6. I don't know, sometime around that. I was number 793, so I was one of the first thousand shall we say! [Chuckles.]

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And from then on, I mean, I collected subs and became a unit steward and that sort of thing, and gradually got more involved. But it wasn't really until - I suppose I knew a great many people in features during the war. I think as a boom swinger working at Denham I probably worked with quite a wide number of people and I became known and got more eased into it shall we say...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, more involved...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...more involved. And so I was put up for General Council eventually you see. And I was on General Council for a few years and Executive Council and sub committees and things. And I was involved in negotiations for the 1947 agreement, which was the first post-war - the main agreement that started it all for so long. It was almost a standard that just needed a little updating, you know. So I was very pleased to have taken part in that. And I became shop steward at Pinewood when I went back there, when they re-opened after the war. But really I couldn't keep it going, I couldn't keep shop steward going, because it meant pulling me off the desk when I was in the midst of something to go and settle a problem on the floor, so that didn't last very long. I remained a member of the committee and of course, I remained going up to head office for quite a long time, until I found that really I couldn't carry on a very active role in ACT and put the amount into dubbing that I was doing. I was, as I'll tell you, I mean I was dubbing all the films that Pinewood made, in those years, and it really was taxing. And, like everybody else of course, I also had to think about home - that, when I wasn't working I was up at ACT, and I had a young family and so on. So that eventually I played a less active role we'll say and I was just a member of the committee and so forth at the studio, and that was about it.

**Alan Lawson :** What do you think ACT's standing was coming up to the war, when it was just ACT?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I think probably people sort of - didn't take it too seriously shall we say. I think that ACT benefited from really a change of attitude of people in general during the war, and that helped. It was right, we were all on the same side basically, you know, and I think that particularly in the post-war period, immediately post-war period, everybody was active in ACT really - directors, everybody you can think of, with a few exceptions obviously. And I would say that the employer's side at that time were anxious to have a sensible agreement and I was very happy to be involved at that time, when I felt there was less antagonism. Perhaps I haven't the stomach for fighting and I think as years went by, that ACT and the employers became further apart and there was more acrimony and so on and I don't know that I had the stomach for that kind of fight. I hated to see people deliberately changing the understanding that I knew had been reached, and words can always be twisted, and I think that that happened on both sides. I think that some of our members were trying hard to find something that they could gain, something out of a wording when it really wasn't what was intended, and it certainly happened on the other side. And there was one personnel officer at Pinewood who openly said to me that he recognised his job as being that of trying to find holes in the agreement. And I am afraid that that sickened me, and so I think that played a part in my decision not to be too active. I think that I just couldn't take it as well as - I mean I was one hundred per cent into my work, I wanted to put everything into it and I felt I just couldn't do that and carry on a battle at the same time, which other people fortunately were able to, or had the stomach for, that I didn't have, I think that's the truth of the matter.

**Alan Lawson :** Do you think ACTT has played a useful role in shaping the industry?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I think undoubtedly, I mean there's no question. You have to have unions in any business and particularly in a business that is as unusual as the film industry has

been. I don't know, I can't speak for television. I really have never known television to any extent at all. But even in film, what people did was so out of line with what other people do that you had to have agreements that protected the people having to do the job, and I think that most sensible employers really accepted that. And so I think that ACT, although ACT certainly had its enemies, without a doubt, among some directors - well known, and so forth - but I think most people realised that ACT did some valuable work. I wasn't politically in the same area as some of our members in ACT, so maybe that accounts for my attitudes being different. But it's the same today, I mean I will vote conservative because I haven't seen socialism working in this country, but on the other hand, I dearly wish for somebody to create unity in some way, to work towards unity, and I think, ultimately, it will come. We are all involved with one another in life in general and it was particularly so in the film business. We depended upon one another tremendously. I mean you pursued your own job but you depended on so many other people, and this is so in life. That's my political belief and I wish I could say that I could see things moving today in the direction of getting more harmony.

**Alan Lawson :** Do you think that there is a future for ACT in the film business and television media?

**Gordon McCallum :** Of course! I don't think the film business can exist without a trade union. Which trade union is it to be? I mean ACT is the one with the experience, of course it should be ACT - very much a future. Well I mean one of the features of today is that changes are even more dramatic than they were years ago and change must involve, changes of working practices and so forth. And therefore there is a big future for ACT to look after its members and to get a little sanity in the business.

**Alan Lawson :** Now let's get back to the business. When you went into the dubbing theatre as an - assistant, I suppose?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes.

**Alan Lawson :** Did that establish you or did you ever have to revert back?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no, that established me. I mean once I went there, I never moved back. That, I think, was my very great fortune, and I think I've been tremendously fortunate, because it pitched me into a job that somehow was just right for me. Perhaps I am susceptible to atmosphere or something, I don't know what it is - and mood. But I think that was - if I had any strong point, that was it. I would never describe myself as a great technician, I mean there were people far more able than me to talk about what went on in the back rooms. But my original interest in going into the films was somehow allied to the artistic side of it and I think that dubbing just gave me that opportunity, the opportunity I needed, and I felt that I was right in that job. And although I had grandiose ideas that maybe I would like to direct one day, and perhaps I had some of the qualities necessary, I felt that perhaps I didn't have all of them, I'm sure I didn't. But I stayed with dubbing throughout because it did satisfy me in that it gave me tremendous pleasure doing good work in that connection.

**Alan Lawson :** How long was it before you kind of became a dubbing mixer purely on your own [???]?

**Gordon McCallum :** It was very quick, it was very quick.

**Alan Lawson :** Really?

**Gordon McCallum :** [Chuckles.] Some might have said too quick! But I'm trying to remember when it was. It was about - summer of '45 some time...

**Alan Lawson :** You'd worked on the Mickey Powell?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes I worked on the beginning of the 'Stairway to Heaven' as it was subsequently called - we called it 'A Matter of Life and Death'. I worked on the beginning of it and then moved into the dubbing theatre where they were just doing the foreign versions of 'Brief Encounter'. So that was my first touch of the pots[?] and I was in a dreadful state because I couldn't see! My eyes were giving me a bit of trouble. I think this arose out of blackout and trying to read in dark trains and so on, and then I went into the theatre and I found I couldn't read the cue sheets. I used to take them home and memorise them at night [chuckles] which was [???] until I got the right glasses. And that was a drama too, because it's very important that you can see well, and I went to a chap that I was recommended to go to in Harley Street and he prescribed some glasses which were hell! I could not get on with them, and it was some time later that I went again to somebody else and he said, "Well these glasses are absolutely wrong for you." So where the mistake occurred I never bothered to find out, but the next pair of glasses was fine and I was able to see, which was important because eyesight is almost as important as hearing in the dubbing theatre, there's so much to look at.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** You're looking at the screen, you're looking - as later on we were looking below the screen at volume indicators - you're looking at cue sheets right up close and notes that you write down. You're looking at equipment - dials and so on - near to you, and so it's quite a taxing thing. And then you have the blackness and the light on the screen and you have enough light to read what you're doing near to hand. And that was a constant problem, we always were trying to improve lighting so that it wasn't too much eyestrain. Anyway, that's by the way, it's a problem for dubbing mixers and one that really is very important for them to consider while they're young and able to see well, they've got to look after their eyesight. And the other thing they've got to look after, I would say it's a fairly unhealthy place to be, but I've come out of it very well. The only problem I've had was with back trouble, which undoubtedly resulted from the bending over the desk which went on for year after year after year. And so good sitting, good posture conditions - very important for dubbing mixers and they should learn from my experience. And I had to go to the osteopath on a number of occasions and I have been left with a weak back. And that also partly may well be due to the fact that we used to work a ridiculous amount of time, you know. So of course the garden used to get neglected, and other jobs that you wanted to do. So when you did get home you worked like a maniac doing physical work for

which you weren't properly prepared and weren't in the practice of. And I think between that and the posture, that folded my back up. So dubbing mixers have to beware.

**Alan Lawson :** You touched on hours, because yes, I know the dubbing theatre is an expensive item in film budgets. What kind of hours were going through then, each week?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh well it varied tremendously. I mean, I worked on all kinds of pictures and we worked on many that were very tight budgets when, if we went five minutes over, I was hammered like mad because it cost overtime, and so we had to avoid that, which was a problem because people still wanted a first-class job! [Chuckles] But time is important. And then of course we went to the other extreme of working weekend after weekend after weekend. I think the worst spell that I was involved in was a very important picture to me - to Pinewood sound department in many ways - 'El Cid'. It was actually our first stereo dub and a real big epic, which was very successful in the end. And we worked for three months on that dub, working late every night except Friday night, when we had a holiday. We went home at normal time on Friday night. And we worked every weekend and we worked every night until about ten-thirty, eleven o'clock - every night, seven days a week, throughout the three months, which was very taxing, very tiring. And so much so that, of course in those days, I was one of those people - by that time I was a highly paid gent who, according to agreement, didn't receive overtime because I was earning too much money. Actually I earned around about the minimum that that applied to, so that I worked throughout that picture without a penny of overtime, and I was entitled to a number of days off in lieu. And I thought, "Well those will be valuable," because just before the picture that well known firm of Blacknell[?] delivered me an extension which I was going to put on the back of my house and (of course - late!) I was hoping to have it all done and finished. I'd built dwarf walls up to sill height and all the necessary foundation work and so on, it was all there waiting for the arrival of the Blacknell[?], which arrived, I think, the day before we started dubbing 'El Cid'!

[AL laughs.]

**Gordon McCallum :** And of course, because that unit and the people involved knew nothing at all, except to work all the time - they didn't know any other way to work, you see - that was the end of my ability to build my Blacknell[?] extension. And it went into the garage, for protection, and my car went out - oh I was driving by that time. And we worked for the three months, as I say, like mad things, and I thought, "Marvellous, I shall have some days of in lieu straightaway. I'll insist on having my days off then." And I don't think there was a picture coming in, anyway we went and I took the days off in lieu, and for a fortnight I didn't do a thing! I could not put one piece of timber next to another piece and bolt up a bolt - I just couldn't, I couldn't do a thing, I was so far gone that I did nothing for a fortnight, and only then began to assemble my Blacknell[?!] But that was the sort of commitment which we had and, although I don't know that everybody was as grateful as they should have been, I think it established Pinewood as being capable of doing a particular type of work. And we then attracted outside work of that type, which helped the studio a great deal, in that when there were lean times on the floor, the dubbing theatre was almost invariably busy, and it did help to keep the purse partially filled.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. Now lets um...

**Gordon McCallum :** But you asked me the question, how soon did I move up...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And I didn't properly reply...

**Alan Lawson :** No.

**Gordon McCallum :** It was very quick. As I said, I went in and touched the pots, first on 'Brief Encounter' foreign versions, but that was just two or three days. And then, in came Gabby Pascal with 'Caesar and Cleopatra' which of course, is well known, was a picture costing one million, two hundred and seventy-eight thousand pounds, I think was the figure ultimately - which at that time was a ridiculous amount of money, particularly as the film didn't succeed. But Gabby was a very extravagant man and there were good things in it, I mean Flora Robson, Cecil Parker, Vivien Leigh, Claude Rains - these people all doing very good performances, but somehow not a good film. Anyway, there were just the two of us on the desk, a small desk, I think we had four pots each and er...

**Alan Lawson :** Who was the governor?

**Gordon McCallum :** Desmond Dew.

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** He was the dubbing mixer at that time and remained, I think, there until very nearly before they shut down at Denham, when he went to the National Film Board of Canada and I think did very well in Canada. But he was a very good chap and did extremely good work, one of these chaps who said, "Well get on with it," and didn't instruct me too much, but encouraged me, gave me confidence. And it was necessary because, of course, Gabby was not that kind of a man, and the sound department was very worried at that time that if Gabby had known that this was my first picture, I'd have been off like a shot, you know!

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** But I managed to get on quite well with Gabby. A very extravagant character, he used to sit in a chair right behind Desmond and me, with his black Homburg on and his - because he said we kept the place much too cold - his overcoat down to his ankles, and with a big stick which he used to poke us with for a cue! [Chuckles] He used to give us a great big jab! [AL laughs] Anyway, I like to think of him as a bit of a Hungarian gypsy. I mean, he had these gleaming teeth and the big broad smile, and he really was a larger than life character. Anyway I must have made it with him when, on one occasion, I had the temerity to disagree with him. [Chuckles] The new boy on the desk! And he was trying to tell me how to play some tracks of cheering crowds as Caesar walked triumphantly down the harbour in Alexandria I think it was - to board his craft, and there were people cheering, and Claudie [Claude Rains] had this broad grin of Caesar's satisfaction, elation. And Gabby was saying, "Oh this track up a bit - that track, take that one down. This one, not too loud..." And I said, "No, Gabby, there's so much of it

played in big close-up on Claudie with that great big smile that the sound has got to become louder and louder and louder, and he's got to become more and more buoyed up and more and more - Caesar enjoying himself."

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

**Gordon McCallum :** And so we did it that way. Gabby said, "Go ahead, do it!" And at the end, he looked round and he said, "This Mac is a great guy." So I was in! [Laughs] So that, of course, little things like that. I suppose it's vanity. You feel very pleased that you've done something that's right, and it encouraged me to gradually become more venturesome. Anyway we did that picture, which went on and on. Gabby being Gabby, we took a fortnight to dub the first reel - would you believe that? One fortnight to dub one reel! This was Gabby of course, feeling his way, and of course I wasn't going to argue at that stage.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** And when that was done, we worked with Thorold on 'Men of Two Worlds', we dubbed that. And I think the next one must have been - was probably Mickey. I don't know, I can't remember now exactly, but Mickey came in to do 'A Matter of Life and Death' and we enjoyed that, that was...

**Alan Lawson :** And you're still working with Desmond?

**Gordon McCallum :** Still working with Desmond. Mickey, on that one, did something out of the ordinary with this stairway that went all the way up to heaven. From a sound point of view and a cutting point of view and so on, it was different in that the stairway at various points of the plot, the stairway - I don't know whether you remember it, you may do - the stairway had to stop and reverse and then go back down to earth instead of going up to heaven. But it was all how a trial was going - anyway it's too complicated to explain, I don't know whether I remember it well enough. But we couldn't figure out what to do to sufficiently make it obvious what was happening at one point where the stairway went backwards. So I said, "Let's play the music backwards!" The music had been going in the one direction, I said, "Let's play it backwards." And we did, and it stayed in the picture that way. He wouldn't believe it. I don't suppose it was played backwards for long, but it did what was needed. And Alan Gray wrote the music and he didn't know anything about this and [chuckles] when he saw the picture through, he couldn't believe it! I mean it all worked a treat and the look of consternation on his face, "What had happened?" I said, "It's backwards Alan!" "Ohhh!" [Chuckles] And that was fine, everybody loved it! So that was an amusing episode and, of course the whole thing was - Mickey was - did this wonderful dissolving from black and white to colour...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...in that picture. Which was Technicolor black and white of course, instead of black and white, as you and I had previously known it. And it was tricky to get it right but they got it right and it worked remarkably well in the film. So that was that. That took us, I suppose, to early '46 and by this time the Rank Organisation was splitting its production

activities between Two Cities Films and Independent Producers. And Two Cities remained at Denham and the Independent Producers, which were the Archers - Mickey Powell and so on; Cineguild - David Lean and Company; Wessex - Dalrymple and so on; and the Launder and Gilliat, a marvellous bunch of producers. They were going to Pinewood, and so it was necessary to open up Pinewood sound department and I think the Independent Producers' chief of production - well it was Ernie Holding then wasn't it?

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

**Gordon McCallum :** Ernie Holding. And he summoned me over and said, "We're going to make you our dubbing mixer." So I - straight in, you know - and I went there and I did a couple of pictures that were Pinewood - er, Denham started. I did 'Carnival' - I part did it because it had some re-cutting, and Desmond did the rest. Maybe that was because I wasn't very good or because [chuckles] it fitted in, I don't know! And I did Jill Craigie's 'The Way We Live', I think it was called - documentary feature about Plymouth. Those were my first two and then the first big picture we got a new desk in for was 'Great Expectations' which had been shot at Denham by David Lean of course, and was the first picture on the new desk and the new equipment.

[Break in recording]

**Gordon McCallum :** Well to begin with, a picture of what we had to use. When I went to Pinewood - immediately - we had the pre-war equipment and stuff that had been used by the Crown Film Unit, I suppose, during the war a little bit, and Army Film Unit, making training stuff and so on. And the equipment basically was a six - I think it was six pot desk, right up against the wall with a patch panel beside it, with I think two equalisers we could patch if we felt we desperately needed them. And that was about all we had. I've forgotten how many machines, but not very many. And so it was on that that the first couple of pictures were done when I came over there.

**Alan Lawson :** And they were?

**Gordon McCallum :** It was Western Electrical equipment...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh the pictures?

**Alan Lawson :** Yeah.

**Gordon McCallum :** As I say, 'Carnival' which was...

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yeah, partly done by...

**Gordon McCallum :** Bernard Miles - partly done by Desmond, and 'The Way We Live' Jill Craigie's picture. But for Independent Producers, they were installing new equipment of course. So after I'd done that we had, I think it was a - yes it was a bigger desk with twelve pots and

master gain[?] controls as well. But equalisers to hand for each set of - there were four pots and a master control for each of three positions. So three of us went on the desk and we had equalisers in front of each of us and it was a much better desk, there were more facilities there for... And we could switch things around between us a little bit. And we had a dozen machines, new machines put into the box upstairs, so that we were - it was a whole new ball game, we were able to improve our dubbing. Of course it was all optical, as it had been pre-war.

**Alan Lawson :** That [???]...

**Gordon McCallum :** We had... We were on variable density, Western Electric still, and that remained until early fifties I think, somewhere in the early fifties we went over to variable area, but still Western Electric. But I think we were able to record good quality within the limited medium that we had. A 100mm track, you know, didn't give you a very wide dynamic range because of noise problems and so on. But otherwise the quality was good and the density track suffered from the fact that it had a poorer play-off level and you virtually had to pull the fader up three steps after you'd played an area track. So RCA had an advantage in that respect, because projectionists didn't always pull the track up, so that the film was played less favourably. But as long as it was properly played it was quite a reasonable track. In fact it amazes me how good the sound of some of the early films is when you listen to them, it's really quite amazing. But of course you had less material to play with, you were not so venturesome, you had fewer tracks and you went for clarity as far as you possibly could off those tracks. But as time went on of course, people became more and more ambitious and wanted to improve the dramatic appeal of soundtracks and put more and more material together and increasingly it became a job to squeeze a quart into a pint pot, virtually. So that we were very glad really as things turned out later on and we went to magnetic and then to Dolby and all the subsequent things. But that's too far ahead to talk about that.

**Alan Lawson :** You were saying that there were three positions, you know, so in other words there were three mixers...?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes, three mixers. I was the man in the middle and I used to handle dialogue and music and the others were handling the effects tracks.

**Alan Lawson :** I see. So, I mean - so you were more control really?

**Gordon McCallum :** That's right, yes. And it became the long story of my incarceration in Theatre Two at Pinewood, in which I remained until I retired, until 1984, which was thirty-eight years, dubbing films, which is really a fantastic amount of time. But it went very quickly and the funny thing is that I didn't think I was getting old. I mean when I started in the business I was virtually a child and everybody was youthful and my thoughts were youthful about the whole job. I was enthusiastic and I didn't see the passing years really, at all. I was looking forward to the next picture and the next picture. In fact I got greedy, I really wanted to dub every picture that was made, I was so keen. It hurt if there was a marvellous subject somebody else was going to make somewhere else, you know! [AL chuckles] So that the passage of time, you know, amazed me really that I still felt I was young right to the end.

**Alan Lawson :** Let's talk about some of those films that did go through. 'Great Expectations' you dubbed with David...

**Gordon McCallum :** Wyn Ryder was the dubbing editor.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And I worked with him many, many times.

**Alan Lawson :** Right, yes. How was David in the theatre with you?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I'm glad you asked me that question, because if you asked it in another way, "Who did I most like working with?" I would say it was David, because he was an absolute example, I think, to all of us of total commitment to the job - tremendous encouragement to everybody around him, as long as they put their back into it.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And he was pretty tough on people who didn't. He was tough - David was tough. I think he was tough with actors and they didn't like it and he was tough with technicians if they were not pulling their weight. But he gave young cutting room lads and people like that, and me, so much encouragement, and scope! The way I worked with David, it was entirely the way he wanted to work, was to see a rough run-through of all tracks on a reel, as we came to do it, followed by a discussion. He would know what material was there. Obviously if there was anything not there that he felt could contribute, he'd mention it. But he'd then go on to say - not how to play anything, but the effect he wanted created in each and every scene, what he had planned and hoped for and expected us to produce. And he went away and left it to us, to work on it until we had got what we thought was right, summon him down and have a take. And if we'd done something wrong, we'd do it again if you like, or make some small changes. But he was so good at conveying his desires in that field that it was easy for me, I found it easy. And I think perhaps I'm lucky that - it's the quality I think I had - was to understand, even before they said it, from film, what the director had been trying to do, what was demanded of the track to support the film. I mean, I always regarded the soundtrack as being just one ingredient in the overall thing of trying to create the right dramatic or comic or whatever effect you wanted to achieve. And I felt that I could pick that up quite quickly and so I knew where I was trying to get to when I was working. But particularly, I think David encouraged that view by the way he worked and so I always worked very happily with David.

**Alan Lawson :** Were there any directors or producers that, if you like, it wasn't a particularly happy association?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes, yes. I wouldn't like to be critical of anybody else really and I hate to name names, but there were some directors who were - a few who were less easy to work with. It's not just a matter of an affinity between people, I think, but - or perhaps it was. But I mean I can give you a few examples. I won't quote in this particular example - one very famous Hollywood man, very famous and very talented, did something that I didn't approve of that, in

my view, played a part in destroying the film. And he insisted on playing some music over, low - too low. I mean it's the only time it ever happened - so low as to be nothing more than an irritant on the track, for no other reason that he didn't like the score.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** He didn't like the score, and he said, "Take it down! Take it down! I can still hear it!" Literally! Now you'd not believe that of a man of his stature. And that's the sort of thing I had to deal with occasionally. The film was not successful, for a number of reasons, I think mainly - well, not to do with the soundtrack, though I can't help but think that that played a part - in wrongly playing the music. The composer went home in tears, sort of thing, and it was most unsuccessful, so unsuccessful that it could have had a very bad effect upon me personally later on, because other people had picked that up and didn't know, of course, that it was not my fault. So that, you know, that was the sort of problem that you could have and it was utterly unreasonable in my view. There was another occasion with music and - poor old Tony Mann is dead and gone, and he didn't like the score Rozsa did for 'El Cid', because he said he'd heard it before. Rozsa did, and I think he got an Oscar for 'Ben-Hur' didn't he? He'd done 'Ben-Hur' which was a tremendous, outstanding success. I didn't think it would be as a remake, but it was so successful, I didn't do it, I would have liked to have done but er.. [AL chuckles] It was tremendously successful. Rozsa had done it and had done a score that, obviously, had been successful. And Tony Mann thought he recognised too much and that it was a rewrite. And the funny way we worked on that picture was to do the foreign versions first - Samuel Bronston had done deals all over the place to get money, no doubt, with foreign territories and he had to supply them before the English speaking market. So we did the foreign version first and on the foreign version Tony came to reel after reel after reel and said, "I don't like the music, take it out!" And Rozsa was in the theatre, and Rozsa was a very quite man, not able to argue very well. He wasn't able to argue - I liked Rozsa very much, but I felt he should have stood up for himself but was not able to, some people are like that.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yeah.

**Gordon McCallum :** So the music was dropped in a great many places and I look back with pride on the fact that - Rozsa had packed up, he went home in disgust. His music cutter was in tears, lovely girl - what was her name? Edna Bullock - she stayed on. And we came to dub the English speaking version and I talked Tony into putting it all back, the whole lot - I convinced him, I worked on him hard, and it all went back in and the film was a great success. I never heard from Rozsa, I don't know whether he was sick of the whole thing, but I think he should have been pleased because the music worked extremely well. It's true, every composer must repeat themselves to some extent, particularly if the theme is similar. I mean, I don't - maybe there are musicians who are talented enough to come up with something entirely different in similar circumstances, but I can - or I could - recognise a composer's music by little things that I heard even if I, you know...

**Alan Lawson :** Hmm...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...because it was a repeat of other things. They are bound to have ideas in their head that they repeat. I imagine every great composer of bygone days had the same problem of trying to be original. Anyway that was one difficult experience but, having said that, that Tony did something which I thought was wrong. It wasn't that we didn't get on, we got on marvellously. I liked Tony Mann, he was a very nice man, and I did another film for him later on before he died. But there were other directors that I didn't get on quite as well with. I think, being totally committed myself to my own particular job and wanting my job to contribute to the overall, I felt that some directors didn't. Possibly because they didn't understand the post-production as well - that they were a bit flippant about things, a bit careless, and so I didn't get on with one or two of those as well. I had to, it was my job to get on with them but, you know [chuckles] there are degrees! One man, another very fine director I didn't enjoy working with quite as much as I had hoped I would, and that was Fred Zinnemann. Because, I mean, he is without question a fine director and I did 'The Day of the Jackal' with him, which was a fine film, no argument about that. But what I found difficult was that he didn't trust other people. He felt that people were trying to do something he didn't want, trying to alter something, you know. It didn't apply to me only, in fact, I mean I discussed the way he wanted to do the job and I tried to keep very closely to it. But there were occasions when, I mean, even I - I suppose he felt he didn't trust me because I was doing something. Well now, I mean that is crazy really, because we all have something to offer and it's for him to say, "No, I don't like that..." All right, fine, forget it! But I mean we all have something to offer. I mean, one of the worst examples was in the film - there was a scene at Heathrow and he had laid down that it had to be a piston engined aircraft, because at that time that was what was used - actually he was wrong! [AL chuckles] We all said, "I don't think he's right about that, they weren't pistoned engined at that time." There were turbo props, I don't think we'd gone into pure piston engines.

**Alan Lawson :** Pure jets, yeah.

**Gordon McCallum :** Pure jets. [Coughs] So he was expecting to hear pistoned engines. And the dubbing editor laid up some turbo props, having checked with Heathrow what planes were in use at that particular time. And he did his nut - well, I won't say he did his nut, he had his own way of doing it. "What is this?" you see. And it was Nick Stevenson, and he said very politely and nicely, "Well I got on to Heathrow and I found out what the situation was, of exactly what was used at the time, and in fact, to be authentic, it should be a turbo prop. So I've laid that up," you see. And the look of anger and hatred that came over his face!

**Alan Lawson :** Dear me!

**Gordon McCallum :** Maybe I shouldn't be saying these things, but it's true.

**Alan Lawson :** [Chuckles] Yes, tell me...

**Gordon McCallum :** I wouldn't mind him saying "I know it's wrong, you're probably right, thank you for trying, but I would prefer it that way because I think most people will think it was piston engine at that time." Or, "I prefer the sound of piston engines," or any of those things! But he just looked - you know, venomously I think, at that moment. And oh! I, I didn't like that. And another occasion, you'd hardly believe it, but we'd spent a lot of time doing dub and pre-dubbing

and I kept everything as authentic as I could. And Nick had - oh I don't know whether Nick did the dialogues, I don't think he did, I've forgotten who now, for the moment. But they stripped out a piece from the original floor recording of a movement noise - it was a camera move, and there was a great big dolly creak, in a situation where it was crazy! You know, it was absolutely wrong for what was happening in the scene. So he slipped it out and carefully built up some other good footsteps and produced for me a track that replaced, and I carefully balanced it in so that it sounded like a perfect track. It was perfect enough that Fred didn't know the difference, we just went through rehearsing. And he suddenly after several rehearsals, "Oh, there's something wrong there! There's not a sound there I want!" So I said, "Oh yes, Fred, you're right. A dolly creak was slipped out - this is - it was built up." And he insisted on it going back in! Now I wouldn't mind if he had said, "I liked it because it gave a sort of spikiness to the scene," or a little, you know, atmosphere. But he didn't, and he wanted it back in because that is what he had shot and good, bad or indifferent, that was what he wanted. And it was bad, but he wanted it! Now - I don't know - I kind of felt that a lot of us had, in some respects, more integrity than some of the people we worked for.

**Alan Lawson :** [chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum :** We were more committed to the job we did, to the public who we were making the film for, than some of the people.

**Alan Lawson :** Did you ever work with Kubrick at all?

**Gordon McCallum :** No I didn't, no. I wish I had. He's gone to Pinewood since I left, would you believe? [Chuckles] We're still recording, are we?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh God! Well that was that. I don't like to think about unhappy times doing pictures, because by and large they were happy times. There were very, very few people I didn't get on with. Um... Oh I won't go into the boring details of another man who I couldn't get on with, and I did my best and worked all night, and goodness knows what, but I didn't like him. I didn't like him before he arrived - he came from Hollywood. He wanted me to save something which was un-saveable, because it was a badly constructed thing, and having wanted me to do it, he didn't want me to do anything to what he'd done!

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** So I explained that there was nothing I could do, unless I could offer him my advice and try to do it the way I knew was right, but he wouldn't take it and he went away. He didn't pay Pinewood and I found that he had not paid any of the studios in Hollywood he'd been working at before, so that we did have some pretty bad types. There were some bad types and of course it was very difficult to get on with them. But others were marvellous to work with. I mean I loved working with the real enthusiasts. And of course one of my happiest times must have been, of course, obviously, with Norman Jewison and that was the only occasion I got an Oscar, for 'Fiddler on the Roof.'

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

**Gordon McCallum :** I liked working with Norman, we got on very well. And I did that and two other films while he was domiciled in this country and he was kind enough to bring back one of his Hollywood pictures that he had made, for me to dub as well. So I got on very well with him.

**Alan Lawson :** Now obviously one of the things which must have given you a lot of assistance was the coming of magnetic?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh yes! Well I think the progress after the war in terms of equipment. We on Western Electric went over to floor recording with a 200mm push bore track[?]. That was the first attempt at getting a better signal to noise ratio. It meant that I got a better dialogue track in later on and noise was less of a problem. Of course I should mention at this stage the enormous amount of work that had to go on to give us clean tracks. Particularly, the problem was dirt on the track, making pops and bangs and so on, or scratches, or anything like that - particularly with the 100mm standard density track, it was ghastly, even when you went to variable area, it was still a worry. But the push-pull track gave you a wider track - not push-pull track, the 200mm track - was wider and helped you, because of the width and a better play-off. And so you didn't have quite so much work to do to keep a clean track. But of course keeping the track clean was vital in the labs. There would always be some dirt and you had to have that painted out with a paintbrush - spotting - which we did as well as the laboratory people. We also used to - we got very good with our paintbrushes! I mean we would take down unwanted noises with a paintbrush, very loud lip clicks and things like that. Even sibilance, you could virtually remove the entire track and still get enough sibilant, if you had a bad sibilant - we did all that sort of thing. And so the 200mm push-pull track was the first step to improve that situation. And then of course magnetic came in and we started using magnetic at Pinewood for dubbing, as a dubbing facility. And we started with two machines, two magnetic machines, and everything else optical, and that went on for quite some time. And then, gradually, we got more magnetic machines.

**Alan Lawson :** Had Rock and Roll come in yet? No...

**Gordon McCallum :** No, Rock and Roll was a lot later. And magnetic enabled you to do a recording and have an immediate playback, which was very useful for - immediately - everybody saw the advantage of that. Not only did you not have to wait but we could cram more material in you see and put it up for the dub. So of course, from two machines we had to have all the machines converted to magnetic and gradually optical became out of use - though we went back onto optical for the final...

**Alan Lawson :** final mix...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...track.

**Alan Lawson :** Final track, not the mix.

**Gordon McCallum :** Now as far as the final mix is concerned of course, you see originally we went straight onto film and that was - I should mention that. That was, in those days, a trying

business because you would rehearse right up to the point of being able to do a good ten minute take - and ten minutes is quite a long time. And you'd have a whole lot of tracks to play, a mass of cues, of alterations you wanted to make in the level or quality and so forth. And you would mark your cue sheets with the levels and you'd write cues down on paper...

**Alan Lawson :** Ah hmm.

**Gordon McCallum :** And that led to the total destruction of my ability to write legibly, because it was always the quickest possible scribble, and back to the pots. So that, anyway, as I say, we rehearsed up to the point of being able to do it and you buzzed the turnover with film on the line and your mind went a total blank of course! Immediately you did that, you couldn't remember a thing! But the moment the first mods[?] came through, you clicked back in, you were programmed, and usually it worked and you did one or two takes. It seldom went above that, because if you did, that was costly, you know - a film and all the rest. And that was, of course, the time when we were making...

**Alan Lawson :** The 'quickies'?

**Gordon McCallum :** ...trying... Er no, not the 'quickies', the 'quickies' had really died out.

**Alan Lawson :** That's right, yes, they'd gone.

**Gordon McCallum :** They'd gone. But we were making - having spent a fortune, poor old Rank had lost millions and the insurance companies and, you know, you name it, the backers. The only way you could get backing was on a fairly low, tight budget picture. And John Davis laid down a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, that was the top whack for any picture. And, indeed, we made quite a number of quite good pictures at that sort of budget, but we were being very careful about anything that was costly. So when we went to magnetic, I think the first thought was, "Oh, this will be cheaper, we shall save money on this," you see. But of course it was a facility that assisted the dubbing process in so many ways. And of course, then it went onto the floor and we got rid of optical off the floor and we got a better quality of soundtrack to put up. Still to the optical track for release, but it was so much better, at that stage that the final optical track was greatly improved as well, and that lasted for quite a long time.

**Alan Lawson :** When you were doing optical tracks, did you ever reach the stage when, in desperation, you'd take bits of each take to make up the final...?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh we did, yes we did! They used to neg. cut two or three takes together maybe, at the most. But we used to like to try - I think we used to like to get one take, because joins are always a bad thing in the lab. But as we got fussier and fussier - I say 'we' and by that I mean everybody involved, directors and cutters and everybody, the whole crew. We got to aim higher and so, you know, you selected the very best you could of two or three takes. And, of course, I suppose stop[?] became less important in the overall production cost point of view. And of course when we went to magnetic, we were then able to create a perfect take on magnetic, going back over various bits and so on, until we got it right, and you just transferred a perfect

take onto optical, so that saved that problem. That was a bit saving, but it did mean we got a top-notch take.

**Alan Lawson :** When did the ticker come in?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh we had the ticker from the beginning of the time at Pinewood. We used to have - at Denham and er...

**Alan Lawson :** I know they used to run a film with the numbers on.

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes well we went, quite early on, to a driven mechanical Vidor[?] type of thing.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, that's right, Vidor[?] yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** ...on the desk, that's what we had, originally.

**Alan Lawson :** On the desk?

**Gordon McCallum :** On the desk we had it - long poudon[?] wire or something that worked it! [Chuckles] So that was the first beginning. But when Pinewood opened, we'd got a ticker already, an illuminated ticker, and that took different forms over the years.

**Alan Lawson :** Somebody told me that it was Muir Mathieson who pioneered that - is that true do you know?

**Gordon McCallum :** It may well have been, it may well have been, yes. Muir was very bright, a very good technician, apart from musician, and the sound department worked very closely with Muir and the music department at Denham, and of course he came over a little bit to Pinewood later on. But it was sad that he dropped out didn't he?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** ...Eventually. I don't know what was the reason for that, and then he died didn't he?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** But Muir was really top-class, he really was very good. And yes, he may well have done. Muir and Desmond, were very close together, because Desmond used to do music recording as well as dubbing - Desmond Dew.

**Alan Lawson :** Ah ha, ah ha.

**Gordon McCallum :** And I would think that they worked it up together.

**Alan Lawson :** Probably, yeah. So, I mean, that again must have made a great difference, rather than having that wretched little frame[?] counter?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh yes, oh absolutely, absolutely, yes! I mean, your eye was on it without moving your eye from the screen. I mean, obviously the whole aim and object of dubbing was to, really, watch the screen and to time everything immaculately to the screen, and the less you had to do down here at your hands, the better. That didn't mean your hands weren't busy...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...you had to play it like a piano, without looking at it, you know - which of course with practice, you could do.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. Then the next innovation was Rock and Roll was it?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yes...

**Alan Lawson :** Or was there something before that?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, I think the next was Rock and Roll. We were rather late in the day for the Rock and Roll, I wouldn't like to say when exactly... In fact, it was after we'd gone to stereo, and of course we had stereo magnetic.

**Alan Lawson :** Well that...yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** That of course was a great improvement and it meant a magnetic release. Now that was marvellous from our point of view, because you had wider dynamic range, wider - a better frequency response. Theatres were lined up to produce a much better soundtrack. But of course exhibitors didn't much like it for reasons you probably know. The cost - the exhibitors had to have their equipment maintained, expensively, and the distributors didn't like it because they had to have both magnetic and optical prints, which used to get mixed up together. They tried to produce a combined optical and magnetic track, which gave you half a width optical track which was absolutely diabolical! [AL laughs] But of course, the main thing which was the death knell of that magnetic track at that time, and we were going four-track, that was the Fox Cinemascope format - was the cost of striping and recording on the track. That was another operation that had to be done and it had to be paid for. And so every print was that much more expensive and with the business the way it was nobody much liked that, despite the fact that it must have given a boost to business to some extent, to go to stereo. And certainly from a sound point of view, we loved it. And of course, no sooner were we four track, then we went to six track with the Todd-AO format.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And that was even better because you had wider tracks and it was altogether better, you could produce a magnificent track. The Bronston films I was quite proud

of - I did twelve for Bronston, 'El Cid', '55 Days at Peking', 'Fall of the Roman Empire' and 'Circus World' - by which time he'd gone broke!

**Alan Lawson :** [laughs]

**Gordon McCallum :** Not entirely due to us, I hope! But we produced some good soundtracks. It was thrilling really to be able to play silences that were silent and then go into noise...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** You know, you could do that - tiny little fluttering flag effects and things like that, they meant something. Where that we'd tried before, but with an optical soundtrack they were never really very satisfactory, but the small things were good. And of course, when something needed to be loud, it could be...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...so that was great. But of course 70mm prints were even more expensive, so there weren't too many of those. But I mean, you got into the state where you would dub a picture like 'Fiddler on the Roof' and others where you would have some 70mm prints, and some four track - four track cinemascope and the standard optical. And of course eventually it became more complicated still because we had Dolby come along.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** And we used to dub for 70 - I don't think we did four track, although I think some people wanted four track magnetic. And we produced the two track Dolby optical which was brilliant really, brilliant. I think, from the many points of view, the most significant improvement of all was the Dolby stereo two-track optical, which produced four-tracks in the cinema. Simply because it gave you everything you could achieve off magnetic without the cost of magnetic - up until the prints. So therefore, it did mean that cinemas had to equip and they have done, somewhat reluctantly in some cases, but they have. I think most of them have been brought up to a far higher standard and you can hear a good quality soundtrack off optical today, where - I mean, immeasurably improved over the old optical, simply because of Dolby noise reduction. I was involved a little bit in early testing with Dolby and I almost fell out with them. Ewan Allen[?] was the one who was really responsible for pushing Dolby into film and, to his credit, he did that. And after many tests I came to the conclusion that the Dolby with the standard optical track was not going to make a significant enough improvement for it to be worthwhile, and that it would not be taken up. And the way we were situated, we didn't really want to become involved in it too much and Bill Rowe in fact did a lot more work with Ewan Allen[?]. In fact, they dubbed a number of films as a mono Dolby track, which was an improvement but I think I was right that it did not show any great significant advantage to the people who had to put equipment in, to be able to sell it to the public. And so that didn't really - that didn't take off at all. But the moment they came up with a stereo track, where you could get the full benefits that you used to get from the magnetic four-track - you could get off an optical track, a stereo Dolby optical track, it was obvious it was really going to take over and we went into it and, I imagine

today, it is the thing which is mostly used now. Though of course, I mean we used Dolby with six-track - we used Dolby with six-track 70mm prints. Dolby came up with an alternative to the - what was the - the boom system called? I've forgotten for the moment now, the original one came into a control track, to put very low frequency - to augment the low frequencies for the big spectacle. I've forgotten what it's called now, it's terrible! But Dolby came up with a system to use on 70mm, to use two tracks of the 70mm for boom channels, you see. And they did some films in America, but Dolby had sort of - Ewan Allen[?] had transferred his operations to America at that time, and they did some in Hollywood, with boom, very successfully. And the moment I heard about that, I said, "What a waste of channels, we can do something better than that! We can use the track for both boom and divided surrounds in the theatre, so that we can have discrete sound out of theatre auditorium speakers as well." And so we did 'Superman I' in that way, with divided surround, Dolby encoded stuff, which was a marvellous track, we were nominated for that. But nobody ever heard it that way, simply because, as ever, by the time all the special effects had been shot and so on, and the labs were working, like it has to be ready last week, you know.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And they were not able to produce the 70mm track prints for all the main openings, which of course is - that's where the 70mm prints were needed. So it went out for Dolby stereo two-track and I think there were four-track in some places. And my beautiful divided surround - and I was the first one ever to use that, and we worked it out between Dolby's Max Bell[?] and ourselves at Pinewood, to give me that facility - my track was never heard in that form.

[Break in recording]

**Alan Lawson :** What changes in post-sync practices and techniques?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I suppose post-sync almost didn't occur, did it, in the very early days? And it came in somewhat reluctantly. I can't speak with any certainty of how it was done in the very earliest days, but very little was done, and you tried to record everything correctly on the spot. Then, subsequently, we used to have film loops made up and artists would speak their lines to the loop with cue lines on the screen, giving them the word when to start. Am I explaining enough?

**Alan Lawson :** Er, just - how do you mean, cue lines?

**Gordon McCallum :** A streamer, or wipe across the screen would indicate when the artist had to start and so on, to give a very close fit, and the editor would then have to fit even more if they were totally unsuccessful. But that was the next thing, the looping system, with, at first, full rolls of optical sound running along, covering all the bad takes and so forth. Magnetic of course improved that tremendously because when you went to magnetic you also had magnetic loops and you recorded and recorded until you got your good enough sync and a good enough take, and that was it, you used that piece of magnetic. It was joined up in rolls later on with other loops

and they were transferred and that was it, so there was no waste there. And I think that lasted for a long time and ADR appeared on the scene I suppose.

**Alan Lawson :** What does that mean?

**Gordon McCallum :** Automatic Dialogue Replacement - about ten years ago. I never worked with that system, but the results I received. It was a system by which the whole reel was run down and there was automatic control of the start and stop and the machines ran backwards to the same point and replayed it and so on. It gave the artist the ability to hear the play in and the play out and to get closer to the original, this was the theory of the thing. And it was quicker and cheaper, in terms of stock again and that I think, probably, is what is being used now, although I am now four years out of date and things do change. They brought in an automatic fitter - I've forgotten what it was called now - just before I left, which was supposed to create perfect sync with a guide-track. A guide-track controlled this track and enabled the sound, even if you got it somewhat out, to fit to the modulations of the guide-track, so that you had perfect sync. That was the theory, which I always doubted would work entirely satisfactorily. I am sure it would work up to a point, but I believe that it is now somewhat out of favour. So I can't speak more up to date than that.

**Alan Lawson :** Now, what about music sessions?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well yes, music sessions - I don't know to what extent they've changed. We used to have our own music stage at Denham, even after Denham closed down, all our music was recorded at Denham. But nowadays I think music is recorded more in specialist music recording studios rather than film studio music stages. I think that's the practice. Of course, as in music in general, the strides there are enormous. I mean, again, Dolby has played such a big part in that everything is multi-track recorded, all the sections of the orchestra are laid on different tracks and so on, and there is a final mix down to produce the best balance before it is transferred. This is largely done at [for/Four Film Mat[?]] and I would say at CTS[?]] more than anywhere else - that's the type of studio, there are other studios that people go to...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...places that musicians are used to working at and so on.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. What is your reaction to the, you know, the quarter inch tape recorders as opposed to the professional 35mm ones? [Chuckles.]

**Gordon McCallum :** For what - for what purpose? Floor and...

**Alan Lawson :** Floor, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** ...effects recording? Well without a doubt it's simplified the whole procedure for sound people and for the rest of the crew I suppose, to have a man there with a little machine rather than bulky equipment. And the Naga[?] has of course, in the main, made a

tremendous difference. I mean, a very high quality track was recorded and the equipment, the 35mm equipment was very, very bulky and it was - it had had its day.

**Alan Lawson :** Do you think it's - has it made any difference to quality at all, has it degraded quality in any way, do you think?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no. By no means. I think quality, as such, is certainly as good on a quarter inch tape as it is on 35mm film, simply because 35mm film is film and, to some extent, that is less easy to record on than tape. The sprocketed film has its problems. The reason for the sprocketed film of course is...

**Alan Lawson :** Sync, yes

**Gordon McCallum :** Sync and the usefulness for film.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. What do you think are the pre-requisites for a dubbing mixer?

**Gordon McCallum :** [chuckles]

**Alan Lawson :** I won't say successful dubbing mixer, because you are a successful dubbing mixer, [laughs] so it follows!

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I imagine everybody varies a little bit and probably they all have their good points and their bad. I mean, maybe I could have been a better technician in some ways, but I feel that the main requirement is an ability to understand the dramatic content of the picture that you're working on and to play your tracks accordingly. In many ways it's very much like an actor working. There is expression in the way you play your tracks, or there should be. You don't just open a pot to a given level - you're playing all the time. I particularly found that I played music, not as music, but as a dramatic element, which of course it was a very important dramatic element in the film. But I felt that in the feel of the way you handled it, it contributed more-or-less to a scene. And I felt that I grew to know how it should be played for a picture and I think that feel is the main requirement above all. I suppose I went through various phases of having great dexterity - we had to fiddle so many switches and so on - some people would be clumsy and not able to do that, but as long as you'd got that requirement and as long as you understood film and so on. You had to be a bit of a politician - that was a very important element. I was determined to do the very best job I possibly could with everything that I had to do. But on the other hand, I had to please other people, obviously notably the producer and the director and, to begin with, that was not possible always because they used to argue. And the musician, who wanted to hear every note of music and really basically, in many cases, many of them, they only wanted to hear the music, they didn't want to hear anything else! The audience, I'm quite convinced want to hear every word of dialogue...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...and that really is their main concern with a film. Particularly in recent years, as films became more and more ambitious, you had more and more people in the cutting

room all doing very valuable and essential work, but all in little watertight compartments, and some of the big pictures resulted in enormous numbers of tracks coming in - enormous! I mean, I lost count in the end of just how many tracks we would get in to mix together for a reel. And even with the stereo sound and so on, you cannot listen to too many things at one time, or if you can hear them all, you can't sort out what is important, you can't get the feel created by certain things that would be important to the film. And so you have to, as a dubbing mixer, you've got to decide for yourself. I mean, many people would like to step up to the desk and do it, and they know what they would like to do, but they wouldn't know how to do it. You know how to do it and all the people who are telling you what they want are all telling you something a bit different.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** So basically, the dubbing mixer has to...

**Alan Lawson :** He's a balancer...[chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum :** ...decide - he's a balancer, not merely of the sound but of all the other conflicting interests. And it was very difficult. At times I would disappoint some people who'd sweated their guts out - if I may use the expression - on laying some footsteps, or a brilliant job they may have done which, on their own, would have contributed a tremendous amount; but in conflict with all the other interests did not contribute anything, rather detracted instead. So that it was necessary for me to take decisions like that, which were not always agreeable to everybody [chuckles] but on balance turned out to be right, you know. And you had to have a certain amount of conviction and a certain amount of confidence. But you also had to listen to everybody else's point of view and try to meet it, if you could.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** But there comes a point where it was impossible to meet all the points, certainly with the question of music. I got on extremely well with some composers and they recognised that the music had to be played dramatically and I think others who purely wanted to hear it as a piece of music many not have been quite as satisfied, I don't know. That could well be the case. And, inevitably I think - I think my number one aim was to make sure dialogue was fully audible. After that, I liked to play the music and the effects for the best possible balance, the best possible compromises, whatever was working best then they had their day, I think that's basically it. So that you had to be able to make up your own mind and have a go, you also had to be responsive to other peoples' points of view and try and balance it. So you had to be a bit of a politician and very patient. And I don't know that I'm - I'm a mixture of great patience and great impatience, if you know what I mean? There comes a point where my patience can't go on, but I was generally very patient to try and get the best result.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes. Now of all those credits you've got, all the picture credits you've done... I'll start in the negative way, I think, and ask you, which of them - or was there one, if you like, gave you the least satisfaction?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh dear! I've forgotten those, I don't like pictures that... [laughs]. The least satisfaction generally - I don't know. Every picture I worked on, I treated it as being just as important as any other. The most difficult films to work on, obviously were the films that appeared straightaway, to me and probably to everybody else working on the unit, they were going wrong and they weren't going to work.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** I mean, you used to work like blazes to try and make what basically was a bad film into a good film. I mean it was far harder to work on a bad film than on a good film.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And, so that I was obviously disappointed when films failed, particularly if it was a film that I had thought ought to do well, and that of course was a great disappointment. And many, many films have been made that were good films and they didn't succeed for a variety of quite wrong reasons, you know.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Like, particularly in recent times. It's a question of how much money is the distributor going to pay for publicity, on which picture.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And he has so much money in the kitty he knows he can spend and he decides for himself which one he thinks he can sell best and, therefore, which one he should spend the maximum amount of publicity money on, and anything else they just ignore completely.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** So no publicity gets nobody into the cinema virtually and it's a hard task for any film to succeed like that. So that there were disappointments there. Oh I don't know, I suppose - I suppose there must have been films I thought, "Well I could have done a bit better there." But I can only say that I've always tried my hardest on every film, however good or bad and, generally speaking, I got ninety per cent of the way there, you know, and so I was reasonably satisfied.

**Alan Lawson :** Which is the one then that has given you the most satisfaction?

[Slight pause]

**Alan Lawson :** There must be one single one which surely you have...?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well I mean if you can say that it achieved success and the respect of the industry and so on, a film that won me the Oscar, 'Fiddler on the Roof' obviously must qualify as being my favourite. I don't think it necessarily is my favourite, it was one I loved dearly, because from the moment that I started to see some of the cut material, it was obvious that it was a great movie. Brilliant performances and Norman Jewison - excellent to work for. And all the way through, right up to getting an Oscar, it was just great, I enjoyed every minute. But there were other films you know, I mean you take 'Great Expectations' as being my first big movie. That was a great success.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And so I got, I suppose, relatively just as much kick out of the success of that film, although I didn't get any awards, but it won awards - best picture and writing and oh, I think one or two other awards, you know. And great success for David and so on. So I was absolutely thrilled to death with that one. I worked on other notable films, I mean 'Red Shoes' for Mickey Powell...

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** ...which had great acclaim and it was best picture, I think again wasn't it? I believe it was.

**Alan Lawson :** I think so, hmm.

**Gordon McCallum :** And er...oh, so many films I've done that have been either successful financially or at least have achieved the respect of the industry. They were all very pleasing - it's hard to remember them all. I've got three hundred and twenty credits of films I actually dubbed myself!

**Alan Lawson :** That's quite something isn't it?

**Gordon McCallum :** [Chuckles] It is a lot! [Chuckling] You might say it accounts for the corns on my rear, you know, having sat at the desk all that time! But no, it's hard to pick out, pick and choose, but most of David's pictures I have enjoyed doing. I got a nomination on 'Ryan's Daughter' I enjoyed doing that tremendously. That wasn't as successful as all that.

**Alan Lawson :** Did you work on any of the 'Bonds' at all?

**Gordon McCallum :** I did all the - I did the early 'Bonds' and many of the more recent ones. I think I did about a dozen of them.

**Alan Lawson :** Ah ha.

**Gordon McCallum :** And I used to - I loved dubbing a 'Bond' because it was genuine entertainment and I mean that's what I was in the business for, I think basically. I wanted to participate in the making of sheer entertainment, and it was. I think I got to the point where I was

a pretty good judge of films too, as to whether or not they would be successful. And I can remember that on 'Dr No' the first of the 'Bonds' there was some concern that the audience would take it. And you have to say for Terence Young as the director, that he must have got the right mix, the right feel in the characterisation, because it certainly took off in a wonderful way. But he was unsure of himself, as of course we all are. He was unsure of himself right into the dubbing theatre and he said to me, as Bond pumped some bullets into a man on the floor, "Oh, do you think they'll take that?" Well of course they cut it down a bit for the Censor anyway, so it wasn't quite as much. But I said, "Oh they will take it, it's precisely because he is a character who can do that, that Bond is going to succeed." I mean it's a wonderful character really, the James Bond character, and particularly the way that Sean Connery played it to begin with. Because, I've read since that, maybe Roger Moore was a little closer to the written one, but for film Sean Connery started it in exactly the right mix of good humour, playing around with the ladies and that latent violence that was possible and came out from time to time. And it was a great thing and - Oh! I loved every minute of the 'Bonds' and I liked working with Cubby Broccoli, he was a marvellous chap. And - oh I miss it all, I'm sorry to say, it's...

**Alan Lawson :** [chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum :** I could go back tomorrow and start mixing again! [Chuckles]

**Alan Lawson :** [Laughs] You were saying that you might like to have perhaps had a shot at directing?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh well that was a boyhood thought I suppose really. Because I used to make films on 9.5mm and then 16mm sort of thing, you know.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** Little things and, nothing very good I suppose. But it was just my interest in both the technicalities of making pictures and also the actors. I loved being with actors. There were some marvellous chaps, and in fact I knew so many of the - we had so many good actors who were only, shall we say 'bit part' players, and so many of them have come to the fore with television, with the greater opportunity that television provided, and it has thrilled me to see people achieving in that way. I found that the real professionals, you had no trouble with on the floor at all.

**Alan Lawson :** No, no.

**Gordon McCallum :** I'm afraid some of the little starlets were difficult to get on with because they were so career ambitious and so on. But the real professionals were absolutely marvellous. As a boom swinger, anything I said, "Oh can you try turning the other way at the end of that walk, I'll never get the mic over so-and-so," you know. And they'd do it on the next rehearsal, without the slightest demur, and do it right. Because, you know, because they were professional. That was a great joy. But as to directing itself, you know I - Mickey Powell asked me, "What are your aims?" Quite early on, and I said, "Well I like the shape of your shoes, Mickey!" But I'm afraid it never came to that. [Chuckling] The main reason, I think, was that it would mean a big

switch from the sound department into some other department. Obviously not into the top, and to work my way through. And, of course by this time I was getting myself married and a young family and so on. And I thought, "Well I'm getting a tremendous amount out of this job, I'm thoroughly enjoying it and the money is good enough," and so I never got tempted further which is - there you are, as simple as that. I wouldn't change it, having done it really.

**Alan Lawson :** That was what I was going to ask you. I mean, you know, if you could start again would you want to change lines at all?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well you know, quite frankly, anything practically in the film business would have been nice. I mean I wouldn't have minded going into camera, I worked very closely and became very good friends with a lot of camera boys. I mean I call them 'boys'! We used to all call them all camera 'boys', because they all were boys at that time.

**Alan Lawson :** That's right yeah.

**Gordon McCallum :** And we used to share our spare time and so on, and make little movies and one thing and another, you know, and that was nice. And I would have liked to have been in the cutting room I think, for the same reason, I mean it's a tremendously creative job, cutting can be so creative. Anybody outside the business just doesn't realise just how much a cutter can do, and so that would be interesting. I would like to work in the floor if I could have an active enough role.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** I was boom swinger for a number of years, having been assistant before that and so on, and I was getting bored. And I was looking at mixers on the floor and I never really felt that that was a very good job. A lot of other people preferred it and did that - they liked to be working on the floor I suppose. I got a bit bored, it wasn't a full enough activity. You're waiting so much for other people, dependent to such an extent on what other people decide to do and so on. And a mixer - and it's important that he should be a good mixer for the film - he had to do a good job in whatever circumstances, and they were usually not the circumstances of his choosing, it was what somebody else allowed him to do. And it wasn't an active enough life, and I was very, very relieved when I was moved into dubbing and I realised that there you were doing it the whole time, I mean it never stopped.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** I mean it did stop, but I mean while you were actually dubbing, physically, you were thinking and manipulating and doing things the whole time, and that appealed to me much more. That's, I suppose, why I stayed put in the job that came my way. [Slight pause] No, well I think that's er - it was just a pipe dream to be a director, I suppose.

**Alan Lawson :** [Chuckles] Well thank you very much Mac, thank you.

**Gordon McCallum :** You think that's enough do you?

**Alan Lawson :** I think you've done very well.

[Break in recording]

**Alan Lawson :** We were talking just then about David's film after 'Great Expectations', 'Oliver Twist'...

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh yes, 'Oliver Twist'! Well, what I would like to say about 'Oliver' is that it was quite a dear film to me because I got married the day after we finished dubbing! And, of course, that was touch and go, and I got a telegram to tell me the rushes were all right [chuckles] at the reception!

**Alan Lawson :** [chuckles.]

**Gordon McCallum :** But apart from that, I think 'Oliver' was a superb film and it didn't receive the acclaim that I think it perhaps should have done, simply because the Americans didn't take it. They didn't take it because of the character of Fagin, which was so brilliantly played by Guinness and directed by David, it was an absolute joy to watch. But they felt it was over the top and anti-Semitic, which certainly I think there was no intention of doing that. But that spoiled the financial success of what was otherwise a brilliant film. Other films I did for David were not quite as successful, some of them. 'The Passionate Friends' and 'The Trial of Madeline Smith'[NB 'Madeline'], again I thoroughly enjoyed working with David on them, but I felt they were not his best - I'm sure he would say the same. And then, unfortunately, David, together with the other Independent Producers, left the Rank set-up. Because by this time the Rank Organisation had got into such financial straits that John Davis's control included a very strict rationing of budget and a restriction of what was possible for some of our creative directors and producers, and they wandered away. We lost David then, much to my dismay and he didn't come back, as far as I was concerned, until 'Ryan's Daughter' which was occasioned by MGM-British Studio shutting and his wanting somewhere to dub and he said, "I'll go back to Pinewood." And that was a great pleasure for me and, I think I said, I got a nomination on that one so, between Win Ryder [Winston Ryder] and and company and David's usual encouragement and so on, we produced a good track on that and that was marvellous. I became ill just after that - I'd done a couple of long stints, I did 'Waterloo' which was shot in Yugoslavia - Rod Steiger, Napoleon...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** ...and Chris Plummer, Wellington. Good in parts - curate's egg. Very good - a big spectacle. I mean the entire Red Army I think appeared in the film! [Chuckles] Anyway, that was very hard work...

**Alan Lawson :** Who directed it?

**Gordon McCallum :** Sergei Bondarchuk...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum** : ...the Russian, with whom I got on quite well. He didn't speak much English but he knew when he was being taken for a ride! And there was - somebody said something in English which he picked up in no uncertain manner and he put him in his place! But no, we got on very well. And he wanted me to go over to Russia to do the Russian version. It never transpired in the end, for one reason or another - it would have been fun. But that was a hard stint, that was because it was - Dino DeLaurentiis was involved in it. And after we'd been working for quite a long time and done all the pre-dubs, which we had to do at that time, a great many pre-dubs - we'd been working for, oh I should think about six weeks on it - and he re-cut the entire thing!

**Alan Lawson** : [chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum** : And the date was not moved, as you can imagine, so we had to start all over again, terrific hours. And we just finished about the day before David arrived with 'Ryan's Daughter', another long, big stereo epic. And so it was - I had, in all, between those two pictures, about six months I would think of really very hard work. And I thought, "I'm getting a bit more tired than I expect to be," you know, and I used to go for a walk if I occasionally got home early enough to do so, and I found I could hardly walk a few yards. I went to the doctor, when we'd finished the job, I didn't hold the picture up, naturally! [Laughs] And it was an overactive thyroid. I was off work for quite some time then, the only time I was really unwell. And when all that was dealt with, I've been fine ever since, health wise. Er... [pause. GM appears to be looking though a list of his credits] Of course, in the lean periods, I don't mean David Lean periods, but in the period of some austerity, we made a number of good films on low budget, I thought. And I've missed out many of the films I could have talked about. 'Black Narcissus' was one I did for Mickey Powell, that wasn't a low budget picture, it was a very successful picture, earning awards in various categories. But then after the time of the Independent Producers leaving Pinewood, we had a number of people, we had Puffin Asquith make a picture or two. I'm trying to find the names - I do tend forget. I can't find it now. I did two or three for him and he was a pleasure to work for.

**Alan Lawson** : Yes...

**Gordon McCallum** : I'd worked with him at various times on the set, little things. I was a sort of boom assistant on 'French Without Tears' with Puffin. And I remember saying to him one day, "I don't understand it Tony. How is it that - I mean I've worked on other pictures, but your pictures all seem to have a stamp that is definitely you, and yet you never do anything on the set - how does it come about?" I mean, I knew the answer. I mean, he persuaded people in the gentlest of ways. And he said, "Oh as long as you've got good technicians and good artists and a reasonable script, you haven't got anything to worry about." [Laughs] Or words to that effect! And of course, that is typical of him!

**Alan Lawson** : That's a very nice recollection of him.

**Gordon McCallum** : Yes, yes. Oh yes, there are so many things that happened that were entirely enjoyable, both working on the floor and off. But I've been - most of my pleasure has come from dubbing really. 'So Long at the Fair', there's a film that people don't think about these

days, but 'Carriage and Pair' still comes up, the piece of music, do you remember 'Carriage and Pair'? Bernie Frankle's 'Carriage and Pear'? That played for years and years, you still hear it occasionally. 'Waterfront' now, that was not 'On the Waterfront', it was Mickey Anderson's first direction and I'd met Mickey Anderson as, I think he was second assistant director on 'French Without Tears' - second or third. And we both registered for military service as militiamen in - when was it? It was just the beginning of 1939, before the war. We went along at the same time, the first bunch of militiamen. Of course I didn't go into the service, I don't remember what he did. But 'Waterfront' was his first directorial job and it also was the first time that I saw Burton...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...Richard Burton, performing. And he was marvellous in it. It really was not a great film but he was really first class. And I said, "Oh well, that chap's going to really be tops." Of course he did become very big and perhaps, however, he didn't achieve all he might have done, for one reason or another, but he was a great actor. Then I worked on the Somerset Maugham 'Trio'.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And looking back, we did get - the studio sound department got a nomination for that picture and a little nomination certificate went up somewhere in the office and I think somebody mentioned, "Oh we got - there was a nomination for that, of course it doesn't mean anything," and they poo-pooed it, but it was at a time when there was a tremendous amount of opposition and that soundtrack was the only nomination, the only category in which we got a nomination for that film. So looking back at it, I'm rather proud that we were able to get recognition just for the track. Oh here's the Puffin Asquith picture I dubbed, 'Woman in Question', yes. And then of course I went on to so many of the comedies that Rank produced, I did most of the 'Doctors'. I did the early 'Doctors', most of them I dubbed. And the Norman Wisdom comedies, I did most of those. In a way, it started off with me starting all these things and, in fact, I dubbed all the pictures at Pinewood for the first eleven years I think, after the war. And then after that we split into two, we developed another team in the next theatre, out of my assistants, and we started up a second dubbing set-up. So I didn't dub all of them, I dubbed some of the early ones and then the others went into the next theatre. Another one, another picture on which the sound department got an Academy nomination was we called it 'The Card' - Ronnie Neame directed Alec Guinness. And the Americans called it 'The Promoter'. And there again, the only nomination given, was for the soundtrack, so you know I feel a bit proud of that. It was a very good film, why it didn't get other nominations I don't know. It just is that there was so much competition at that time that it was hard going. I did 'The Importance of Being Earnest' of course, for Puffin and everybody remembers Lady Bracknell in that... [both laugh] Oh, endless titles here. Another one which - of the earlier films which I'm very pleased I was part of was 'Genevieve'.

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yes!

**Gordon McCallum :** Which is a classic. And unfortunately three out of the four main characters are now all dead.

**Alan Lawson :** You dubbed that one?

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh yes, I dubbed that one. And that was fun! Then we did lots of war-time stories. I read the other day the little glib comment describing a film being shown on television 'Malta Story' it was, and it was described as a propaganda film, a war-time propaganda film - we dubbed it in 1953, so I don't know how it was a war-time propaganda film! But that's the sort of lack of knowledge. It worries me, about history, it seems to me that things that we know about - all right, maybe our view changes slightly, but many of the things that you see today on television are wrongly reported, wrongly re-staged, simply because the people didn't experience what went on. I am watching this Battle of Britain thing - I've forgotten what it's called now - avidly to see whether they do justice to what happened at the time, and I fancy they maybe won't. I mean, in the very first episode I felt that the people were the kind of characters that they play in modern material today, and that their attitude to the job they had to do is not typical of the kind of people who were involved in flying aeroplanes in the war. I know that they - obviously they got the gung-ho types and, you know, the different types of character, but there was less respect between people, less discipline. All right, there wasn't a lot of discipline, perhaps, among the RAF people. They were given a lot of freedom I suppose in their situation, but they all went there to do a job, a frightening enough job, but they went there to do it and I don't think that they behaved in the way that that series is now showing.

[Break in recording]

**Gordon McCallum :** Oh dear, we're getting on, aren't we?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes we're doing fine.

**Gordon McCallum :** [chuckles]

**Alan Lawson :** In one of our little chats you were talking about - there used to be meetings between the sound department of Pinewood and of Denham - this was when the Ranks[?] re-opened. Tell me, what was the reason for these meetings?

**Alan Lawson :** Well I think that the sound department to some extent felt that by this time they were becoming Cinderellas. I suppose that it was the effect of, probably, the result of having had an unusual position when sound first came in - in that people treated them with some awe. That rapidly dispersed, really, and I think that sound, to a certain extent became a bit of a damn nuisance, really. That on the floor people were trying to shoot pictures and really sound created problems for other people. And I don't know whether it was that feeling or what, but certainly there was a money element in it. The sound department were never very well paid. I think somewhat better paid at Denham than they were at Pinewood before the war, and I think Korda probably lashed out a little bit more. But we were, I think, under-recognised for quite some time - at least that was the general view of people in the sound department. And so we used to discuss our views on this subject and what could be done about it and of course ACT came into it and played a role in getting an improved situation for the sound department. It really was mainly done through the sound department but we did urge our managements that something had to be done and that they were being prepared for it. And when the 1947 Agreement came there was a

distinct improvement for the sound department achieved and I played some part in that. I even managed, at one time - because Rank heard that the sound department were unhappy - I was even summoned to talk to dear old J. Arthur, who sat me on his knee practically! [Laughs]

**Alan Lawson :** [laughs]

**Gordon McCallum :** A very nice man, Arthur Rank, a very well intentioned man. And I just told him how we felt about it and we soon learnt that we were going to get something more and get something more, we did in the '47 Agreement.

**Alan Lawson :** Was there rivalry between Pinewood and Denham sound departments?

**Gordon McCallum :** I think there has always been rivalry between...

**Alan Lawson :** Or armed truce? [Chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum :** You see - yes, between Denham and Pinewood there was a little. When I think back to the industry, I think that, particularly in recent years there has been tremendous competition to get work, between the studios, so I think there's always been rivalry to some extent - friendly rivalry. Between Denham and Pinewood there was a little difference and I don't know why. It was about - they both opened at about the same time and - what the difference was I don't know. But Korda made such a difference to Denham that - and I suppose he was talked about so much and his films were talked about so much and he had been so successful with the various things that he'd done - that I'm afraid we got the feeling at Pinewood that the lads at Denham were a little bit snooty. And I think that most of them would agree that they did think that they were a little bit better than anybody else in the industry. Maybe they were, who knows? But there was a difference!

**Alan Lawson :** Now you would have, obviously you would know Watty [A. W. Watkins] wouldn't you?

**Gordon McCallum :** Yeah I knew Watty very well.

**Alan Lawson :** Now at that time there were no credits for sound people...

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no, no!

**Alan Lawson :** ...other than Watty.

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no. I don't know whether Watty had anything to do with that with regard to screen credits. With regard to Academy nominations and so on, the nomination and award was always given to a studio sound department...

**Alan Lawson :** Yeah, yeah.

**Gordon McCallum** : ...based on the practical thing, basically that sound-departments were organised around big studios.

**Alan Lawson** : Yes.

**Gordon McCallum** : I mean nobody had any sound equipment other than the big studios, you know, in the early days. I mean it was a big investment and all the rest of it and it was tied to various places and so on. So it was - so many people were involved that I suppose the original theory was, give it to the department, give any award to the department. And gradually when the actual working of equipment and so on became more normal and more understandable by everybody, I suppose it began to appear that it was more fair to give credits to the individual who was involved on a particular picture. And in the case of a screen credit for the floor, it used to be originally the floor mixer, then they brought in giving the dubbing mixer the credit and not the head of department. But it remained, for Academy Awards that it was the studio sound department until really the studios started to break up and then of course everybody was freelance as far as floor recording was concerned, so no way could you tie it to a studio. So then it became the practice to give awards to the floor mixer and the dubbing mixer and I got my 'Fiddler' Oscar with David Hildyard, with whom I'd worked years before and several times, so it was very nice to get an award together with him, and that's how that was done. But up until then, any nominations that came to pictures I'd done were given to the sound department, which was fair enough in a way. And nowadays of course, the Academy for instance, the American Academy do include up to three men on the desk and they all get an award.

**Alan Lawson** : Yes.

**Gordon McCallum** : It's very difficult to say - where do you stop?

**Alan Lawson** : Right, yeah.

**Gordon McCallum** : I mean quite frankly, the lads in the backrooms who keep the machines going need an award at times for their work and so on. But I think that probably the best thing of all was when they gave it to the floor mixer and the dubbing mixer, because they were responsible for their own sphere. I think that was probably the best thing, but of course in particular films the music mixer needs a credit, because the music mixer is usually somebody different.

**Alan Lawson** : Yes.

**Gordon McCallum** : And so some films do, in fact, get a credit for music mixer and if not, it usually, nowadays you see a screen credit for a music recording studio, which they consider important because it's publicity for them.

**Alan Lawson** : Oh yes, yes. Any more films there that you'd like to talk about?

**Gordon McCallum** : Oh, talk about them - talk about them, so many! 'A Town Like Alice', Jack Lee, now that was a nice film, a good film. I enjoyed that, or at least I enjoyed it up until half

way through. I did all the pre-dubbing, all the dialogue mixing and most of the effects mixing. And then we started the main dub and I'd got to reel six and then - the only other time I was sick I think in the entire time - I got flu so badly that I tried to get out of bed one day and I just fell backwards. So poor old Bill Daniels [Geoffrey Daniels?], my assistant, had to sit in with Jack Lee sitting on his neck, and he did a good job, so that was an interesting one there. I did 'Battle of the River Plate' for Mickey Powell. Oh, it goes on and on and on, 'Ill Met by Moonlight', Mickey Powell. As I say, all the 'Doctors'. 'Sleeping Prince' or 'Prince and the Showgirl'...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...that was the one film done in this country by Monroe, with Laurence Olivier directing. That was quite interesting to do. She created the usual stir [chuckles] wherever she went! Everybody dying to get to see her.

**Alan Lawson :** Did you work on any of the Chaplin films?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, and sadly - I met him, I'll say. He came into my theatre, Chaplin, when he did the film at Pinewood - I'm trying to remember, what was it called? 'Countess of Hong Kong' wasn't it, or something? [NB 'A Countess from Hong Kong']

**Alan Lawson :** Something like that, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Something like that - no, it's not on my list, obviously...

**Alan Lawson :** No.

**Gordon McCallum :** I didn't dub it. It was dubbed in the next theatre. But I was free at the time and he wanted to do some choosing of post-sync...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes...

**Gordon McCallum :** ...come back to post-sync. And there were endless takes of things and I ran it all for him you see and he sat down there trying to choose. And I was sad to see that he really was just not able - he was, you know - he shouldn't have made the film. What is it that? I mean his pride I suppose and all sorts of things that will keep people going. With his record, I mean he deserved every award that he got and he should have retired and been happy. But of course, I mean, people with it in their blood, it's so difficult to retire, and he should have done earlier because he was just not capable of choosing post-sync - he couldn't do it. And he packed it up and said, "There, I'm only human after all." You know - well, it's sad really.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** So I would have liked, you know, that's one thing I do regret. I say to myself, "Oh I would have loved to have been in the early Hollywood days," it must have been so exciting!

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** It must have been absolutely incredible, really, when it was all growing. [Slight pause - looking at list] No, I made a lot of pictures, some of them not very good ones but I won't mention the not very good ones!

**Alan Lawson :** [chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum :** But as I say, I had to work very hard. I worked on a number of Disney films, which were jolly good entertainment, all of them. 'Swiss Family Robinson' for instance, that was a very busy, busy picture, but jolly good, great entertainment. But you see it was not until 1961 that we did 'El Cid' and that was our first stereo and really for me the horizons opened up as we came to stereo - so much more opportunity.

**Alan Lawson :** In what way?

**Gordon McCallum :** Well, as I say, the - I think that with a monoral[?] track you can enjoy a film very well but you're not as involved in it as much as you are with a stereo track. If you've got a good stereo track, and particularly when you think of a big screen, you need to be involved in it, and that opportunity was presented by four-track stereo which we started doing then, and later six-track and so on. All those Bronson pictures were a big test and very good, very enjoyable. Then we started the Bonds and they were monoral[?] for a long, long time and they earned so much money, everybody said why ever go to stereo?

**Alan Lawson :** [laughs]

**Gordon McCallum :** But of course there came a time when the big epics were really selling themselves on tremendous special effects and sound effects and so on, when it was obvious that Bond too had to go stereo, so of course it did. But that was several years, many years later. So I did 'Dr No', part did 'Russia with Love'. When I say 'part' did it - because if I was doing stereo in my theatre, somebody else had to do monoral[?] work in the other you see, so that's how it worked out. I did 'Goldfinger', and I part did - again, part did - 'Thunderball'. And I did 'You Only Live Twice' was the next one, I think. And the one done by Big Fry[?] - what was his name? George Lazenby! 'On Her Secret Service' that one I did and, oh many more. I worked with Ken Russell...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** I did 'Billion Dollar Brain' and I think it was his first film, and that was done for, I think Saltzman was the producer for that, but he didn't show up, it was all down to Ken. And I thought it was extremely well shot and, of course, Ken was learning, really, basically, the medium of film. Because he'd done television and all the rest of it but I think this was his first - but he'd shot it extremely well and we got on very well, it was quite a good dub in the end. And I did others for him, but um - Ken is a one-off isn't he? [Laughs]

**Alan Lawson :** [Chuckling] Yes, slightly larger than life!

**Gordon McCallum :** Very much larger than life, yes. And so really, I did - what was the thing called? 'The Devils', and I think I blotted my copy book by saying that I didn't want to do it because I disapproved of the kind of subject and the way it was dealt with. I mean, the subject was fine to read about, I suppose, historically, but to make a dramatic piece of entertainment - I was very conscious of the effect that film has on the viewer. I was receptive to it myself and I'm sure ordinary people in the audience are certainly receptive to what the screen is saying, and what you can do by cutting and going into peoples' eyes and everything else that you show in detail. That, you know, it has a profound effect. And I thought that 'The Devils' was wrong, and I told Ken and - we got on all right, even though - I mean I had to do the film because of course the studio held up their hands in horror if I said I wouldn't do it. I mean, I had said I didn't want to, but I did it. So maybe Ken was disappointed in me in taking that line but that was how I felt and I feel even more today. I suppose I'm a Victorian or something - but I feel even more about television. How can people argue the worth and the merit of television, the latest form really of the visual image, without admitting their responsibility? And what is shown and the way it's shown today, I disapprove on many occasions. And I would really wish to see people in television stand back a little bit and look at it and think about it a bit because I think it's having a profound effect upon people's attitudes and morals and so on. I was conscious of it in the film and I'm even more conscious of it today in television and I think we have a responsibility to society generally, to try to promote the right moral atmosphere. Then - what did I do? I worked with Bryan Forbes quite a bit.

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

**Gordon McCallum :** I enjoyed many of his pictures. 'Madwoman of Chailot', Katharine Hepburn - my one opportunity to do one of hers. Oh previously I'd done 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie', I was rather proud of that, because Maggie got an Oscar for that, and richly deserved it for a very fine performance.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes, it was lovely.

**Gordon McCallum :** Nevertheless I had to work like mad on the dialogue track!

**Alan Lawson :** Really?

**Gordon McCallum :** And nobody really knows, and that's what became a difficulty for me I found, because to some extent I had to decide what I did.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** I couldn't ask people, "Should I do this or should I do that?" The result of that would be that they would think I didn't know what the hell I was talking about and they would have no confidence in me. But I used to dialogue pre-dub and very often in pictures it would take considerable time and I would know all the things I could do and, of course, time comes into it, and how much should I do? Well I know I did a lot on that film and if it contributed in a small way to her receiving an Oscar, I'm delighted because she deserved it and it

was another bit of pleasure for me. I worked on many films that won awards for one category or another and I thought, "Well I've got just a little bit of that," you know?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And we all did, I mean you know, it's a collective effort. 'The Battle of Britain', that was not as successful as I had hoped it would be. I didn't think it did justice to the event. I did another Bond, I did 'Diamonds Are Forever' the last one that Sean Connery did...

**Alan Lawson :** Oh yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** ...just after I'd done 'Fiddler on the Roof' and I got nominated for that one as well, so I had two nominations that year, I was very pleased, very cock-a-hoop!

**Alan Lawson :** [chuckles]

**Gordon McCallum :** And the year before, for 'Ryan's Daughter' so I thought, "Oh well it's going great," but of course we didn't get any more nominations for I don't know how long! [Laughs]

**Alan Lawson :** It wasn't your turn.

**Gordon McCallum :** No that's right. Well there is that you see, I think the very fact that you get a nomination one year, you stand a better chance next year, because more people know you. But I do think that the Hollywood system of voting, and I'm not sure what the British Academy system is today, but as it used to be in Hollywood, I think is as fair as you can get with these things. You know, in that cameramen decide the nominations for camera, sound men decide the nominations for sound and all the way through, and then the whole membership votes for the winner. And I think in a way that's right - I mean if the sound boys say, "Well these five films are, as far as we're concerned, probably the tops, they're very good," you know, and then everybody says, "Well yes, that was great, didn't that work well?" And you have to appeal to an audience, the broader audience, so I think that's a good way of - as fair a way as it can be done. [Slight pause] Running through these titles, 'The Odessa File', 'Wilby Conspiracy', 'Brief Encounter' re-make for television by Burton - and it was terrible, it really was terrible! However... 'Rollerball' for Norman Jewison, that was a good soundtrack. It was quite a good film but unfortunately it was - it needed padding out, it was a short story and a short story which asked all sorts of questions and the answers weren't forthcoming really. And I took my younger son, I was very proud of what I'd done on 'Rollerball' - I say "I" - "we" is much more accurate, because Les Wiggins made the soundtracks. I think Les - not he alone, obviously, but Les was the main dubbing editor and he'd done a marvellous job. I'd worked with him a good deal and it was a great pleasure. I started him, his first picture. I used to like to try to help the chaps when they were starting first because I'd had so much help. Anyway, 'Rollerball', I went with my younger son to see 'Rollerball' and we came out after I think the - it wasn't maybe the premier, the first A run, and he said, "Oh, rotten!" [AL chuckles] And I thought, "Oh great! Isn't that great? My own son - cut down to size!" And he is quite an intelligent chap, I don't know how I got such an intelligent son, but he hit straight on it, he said, "I'm not satisfied, it wasn't satisfying because it does ask so many questions and it doesn't give the answers," you see, so...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes!

**Gordon McCallum :** 'The Man Who Would Be King', my only occasion with Huston, a very good film. 'Slipper and The Rose' the musical for Bryan Forbes. 'F.I.S.T.', that was the film that Norman Jewison brought back from The States for me to do, that was a very good film of its type, based loosely on The Teamsters.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** That was very good. I did one film on the Imax system. The Imax people brought 'The Living Planet' over, and for that we had to replace our speakers from their normal set-up. We had to have - The Imax soundtrack is six discrete tracks. So that you have three behind the screen as normal and you have discrete channels for rear left and right, surround speakers, and you have a sixth speaker up at the top of the screen, because it is a great huge screen, as you know. And you sit opposite, and - have you seen it?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** It's really very electrifying isn't it? Anyway that was an interesting thing and I went over to The States to the opening. And that was chaos! [AL chuckles] I was flying backwards and forwards to the theatre. They couldn't shut the place, it was opened at the um - the theatre in the museum of...

**Alan Lawson :** Rank?[?]

**Gordon McCallum :** What is it? The technical one, the one where all the moon stuff is and so on? Oh dear, I can't remember for the moment. Anyway they've got a theatre there that people are going into all day long and I had just a few hours. And I went back to hear it just before the actual premier and they'd done something wrong and the tracks were all coming out of the wrong speakers! And I went flying around the theatre, listening in various places and so on, and eventually I coaxed it all back to the right place! [AL chuckles] And I was about five minutes before the crowd started coming in, I had to dash back and change! [AL laughs] Oh dear! We made it! [pause] 'Clash of the Titans' that's the sort of things you get occasionally and er...

**Alan Lawson :** It sounds like television doesn't it?

**Gordon McCallum :** 'Clash of the Titans' was Charlie Schmeer with his - oh, what's the one with the chap who does all the puppets? The American who does all the names? He's worked with Charlie quite a bit...

**Alan Lawson :** Not Williams?

**Gordon McCallum :** No, no.

**Alan Lawson :** No, that's the Canadian.

**Gordon McCallum :** Um, I'll tell you later - Anyway that was a very interesting stereo job of course. And then of course we get very much more up-to-date, getting near the end of my time. We did 'Blade Runner'. I only did part of that because I had to go in for an op. I did 'The Pirates of Penzance', now there's a thing that...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...that was stereo dub of course, and I went over to The States with it. And that was a complete failure because Universal made it and they had no idea how to sell that to their audiences, no idea at all! Why they made it at all I just don't know. Wilford Leach, I think was the director and he'd done it on Broadway I think and he did it on the stage in London, and it was very successful on the stage in London, and lovers of Gilbert and Sullivan would say it was jolly good as a film. But they'd no idea what to do with it in America and they opened it, they ran it in Atlanta when we went over there and they advertised it in a way that everybody was going there expecting a pirate thing, you know, they'd no idea they were going to see Gilbert and Sullivan! [AL laughs] And it was, of course, a bit of a disaster I'm afraid! Then I did another film that was quite a nice film, it was a stereo job again and a lot of fun to do and we had a running of it for families and so on, it really was a family film, it was called 'Savage Islands' - well we called it 'Savage Islands'. [NB. Also known as 'Nate and Hayes'] And it was based on the Maori bit and all that stuff, you know?

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And it was great! It was absolute hokum and it was really a fun film and the families absolutely loved it, you know, and the noise of everybody enjoying it. And the Americans, I think, bought it out and didn't show it, because they had - they got it, I've forgotten which company it was. But it interfered with their programme and they felt that it might be so successful it might well split the audience and they never showed it. That's the sort of thing that happens. So that wasn't a success! I did 'Greystoke', that was interesting. That was the legend of Tarzan...

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

**Gordon McCallum :** ...of Tarzan coming back to England.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** And a lot of time spent in the jungle, with apes, with nothing but ape dialogue going on. And that was great fun, but by that time we'd got some assistance from technology, because we were able to alter the pitch of voices. I mean there's nothing more boring, I think, than the noise that apes make. And you had Mama Ape, and you had Papa Ape, and you had Uncle Ape, who liked to get in on the act! And you had all the baby apes, and all this. And to make them assume characters, which was essential, we upped and downed everything in pitch and varied, you know, in every way we could to make them fit. And, yeah, it was quite a good dub in the end but not a great success I think. And my last film was 'Supergirl'.

**Alan Lawson :** [Chuckling] Oh yes!

**Gordon McCallum :** ...Of the 'Supermen' persuasion! It was a quite funny, reasonable film, but I don't know how successful it was. And so that was it, those are just a few of the three hundred and twenty.

**Alan Lawson :** That's a taste, yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** Just a taste. I mentioned audience reaction - of course I used to thoroughly enjoy going to a cinema and hearing something work if we'd done something you know. And that was particularly possible with comedy, and we did quite a lot of comedies. To get the laugh in the right place and so on, to trigger it at the right time. We used to play around with the effects quite a bit to get the precise moment of...

**Alan Lawson :** Telegraphing.

**Gordon McCallum :** Telegraphing - that's right, getting it right, and that was very satisfying. And not on the comedy side but audience reaction, 'Great Expectations' of course was the famous churchyard thing, Pip and Abel Magwitch.

**Alan Lawson :** Wonderful!

**Gordon McCallum :** That was the biggest reaction you could possibly imagine, done so simply by just a camera pan - and it did stop right at the correct moment. That must have been a tricky shot to get right.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** But I mean the effect on the audience was terrific, absolutely marvellous! And of course Pip's gasp had to give - to gasp with the audience, you know, and by golly the whole place went! [Laughs.] Yes, great! What I haven't said of course, perhaps enough of, is my great pleasure in working with so many technicians, not necessarily the names that are known, you know...

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** There are so many people who used to work so hard, I mean dubbing editors who would sit over their movieola all night long to get something right for the next morning and so on, you know. And I know it's something that probably the trade union would frown upon but it is - I mean this is where the trade union was in difficulties. I mean they were dealing with a bunch of enthusiastic kids to a large extent, you know, and - so difficult. But nevertheless very necessary for them to protect people, and I think that a very important role is to observe conditions in which people work and see that those are right. The sort of thing I was saying about the desk position and lighting and, apart from the hours, the obvious hours thing. But that is what I miss most of all, I think, is the - I suppose most people when they retire do miss it, but I miss the chaps I use to work with.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes, yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** You know, there were very few I didn't get on with and maybe a lot of them thought I was a bit of a terror because I was so committed and maybe impatient at times. I tried my hardest to be - to follow David in being helpful to other people. Well they helped me.

**Alan Lawson :** Yes.

**Gordon McCallum :** It was a marvellous two-way thing. I mean, Les Wiggins I worked with so much and it was very pleasant to work with him. Don Sharpe, Harry Miller was a joy to work with. Win Ryder was, Win and I used to - David used to enjoy it because - David Lean - because he knew we'd have a go at each other over things! [Chuckles] But I used to thoroughly enjoy working with Win because he was a great craftsman. His forte was really choosing the sound effects that did the job remarkably well without embroidery. He didn't make life hard, he would choose an effect that nine - I'd say nine times out of ten, maybe better - it did the job without anything else having to be done. Very often I'm afraid I used to put my big foot in it and if people did not give me what I felt was necessary, I would demand or seek or cajole in the nicest way, more. But Win was no trouble in this respect; he was usually so perfect. I'd like to say Harry Miller was beyond anybody else's ability I would say at dialogue sync, in the days when it was difficult when it was difficult and it was all post-cut dialogue. And he would show me a piece of sound I was going to play shortly afterwards and a piece of film two feet long would have twenty cuts in it, and you wouldn't hear one, you know. Now that takes some doing and he was a master at that, absolutely great! But in all departments too of the film business I enjoyed the association with other people. I mean the art people that I knew well, the special effects people and so on, and they were all, in their way, in their separate sphere, working just as hard as I was for the same end, and that was tremendously satisfying, you know. So I miss them all I'm afraid. I've tried to bury myself in other things since I retired, but I do miss it and I'll never be any different. And it's been jolly nice to see you, Alan, [laughs] after all these years.

**Alan Lawson :** Well thank you Mac. I think that's it!

[End of Tape]