Hugh Stewart (Film Editor/Film Producer) 14/12/1910 - ?

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BIOGRAPHY: Hugh Stewart was born in Falmouth on 14th December 1910. Educated at Claysmore and then at Cambridge under F.R. Leavis, he entered the film industry in the early 1930s at Gaumont-British under the apprenticeship scheme run by Ian Dalrymple. He trained as a film editor, initially cutting together out-takes from Marry Me (1932). He was assembly cutter on Basil Dean's 1932 adaptation of The Constant Nymph, and his first film as Editor was Forbidden Territory (1934). He cut several important films for Gaumont, including Saville's Evergreen (1934) and Hitchcock's The Man Who Knew Too Much (1934) before moving to Beaconsfield to work on quota productions. He also gained experience with John Dighton writing comedy scripts for Naughton and Gold shorts. During the late 1930s he edited a series of films for Korda and Saville including Dark Journey (1937), Action for Slander (1937), and South Riding (1938), and for Eric Pommer in St Martin's Lane (1938). Having worked for Michael Powell on The Spy in Black (1939) he was engaged for 49th Parrallel (1941) but was unable get a discharge from the Army before the unit sailed. Keen to go oversees, Stewart joined the Army film Unit, filming in Algeria and Tunisia and he helped Roy Boulting edit this footage into Africa Freed. After this film was shelved due to difficulties with the Americans he worked on Tunisian Victory (1944). After the War, Stewart became a film producer, beginning with Trottie True (1949) the novel of which he'd read while ill. Generally under Rank at Pinewood, he made a series of commercially successful films, most notably taking over from Maurice Cowan as the producer of the long running Norman Wisdom series, starting with Man of the Moment (1955). Stewart also produced films starring Leslie Phillips and Morecombe & Wise. By the late 1960s, he was in semi-retirement, teaching English but also finding time to produce several films for the Children's Film Foundation, notably All At Sea (1970) and Mr Horatio Knibbles (1971).
SUMMARY: In this excellent interview with John Legard, Stewart discusses his apprenticeship at Gaumont and the influence a film editor can exert on the quality of a film, and on a particular actor's performance. He talks in detail about the difficulties of his time at the Army Film Unit, particularly the tension between British and American film-makers over Africa Freed and Tunisian Victory. He remembers colleagues, including Alfred Hitchcock, Ian Dalrymple, Roy Boulting, Frank Capra, Conrad Veidt, Victor Saville, Maurice Cowan, John Paddy Carstairs, Robert Asher, Anthony Newley, and of course, Norman Wisdom. There is a fascinating account of Wisdom's working practice and his desire to gain increasing control over his material throughout the 1960s. (Lawrence Napper, BCHRP)

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Interviewers: John Legard
Interviewee: Hugh Stewart

Tape 1, Side 1

John Legard: Hugh Stewart, film producer, recorded on the 23rd of November 1989, in his home. Interviewer John Legard. Side one. Hugh, when and where were you born?

Hugh Stewart: I was born on the 14th of December, 1910 in Falmouth, Cornwall, and my parents had just come from New Zealand, where they'd been brought up. And they were married, and I was born shortly after they arrived. And my father - there were four children, I have a brother, David, and two sisters, and they were born by 1914. My father went into the army and he was with the DCLI and with the Gloucesters. But the war disorientated him as it did with so many people and when he came out he really was at a loss as to know what to do. But it was only when one of my mother's brothers came over from New Zealand and suggested, in view of his obvious interest in church affairs, that he might become ordained. So at the age of fifty-two he became ordained, and he certainly had a very happy life doing that. And we moved from Cornwall to Bristol and then my father's first curacy was in Colchester. Then he went to a place called Langley, in a tiny village in the extreme northwest of Essex, and then went to a place called Manuden [spells it]. I went to a school, not a particularly good one, called Claysmore...

John Legard: In Dorset?

Hugh Stewart: Well it is now, but at that time it was near Winchester. And the headmaster was a remarkable character called George Devine, in fact he was the - sorry, Alexander Devine - he was the uncle of George Devine the theatrical producer, and um... He quarrelled with the board of headmasters and so the whole thing was a little bit of a pitch and toss. Some things were very good about it, others very bad. One of the best things about it was that I, at an early age, got accustomed to knowing and taking in my stride a lot of non-English people. I had a Siamese friend, Argentine friends, there were Dutch - many nationalities and I have always been, therefore, very much international in my whole approach. And I remember being shocked at an early age, reading a 'Bulldog Drummond' thing when one of the villains was described as "having the sly look of a typical foreigner" [laughs] and even at that age I realised that this wasn't a very happy remark! And I did well enough at school, fortunately, to be able to go to Cambridge and I was at St John's College, and I had three marvellous years there. A lot of people say, "Ah yes, that would be at the time of the apostles"...I had no notion of any of this! But I was very much involved with the time of F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards and the English controversy that went on. And in any case I never understand why people were so apologetic about being very left wing in the early thirties - we all were, or practically all - anyway all the people that I knew and liked were. Because the Treaty of Versailles and World War I had really discredited the state of Europe and whether we liked it or not we were obviously drawn to the hope that something was happening in the Soviet Union. And although with the monstrosities of Stalin, it gradually became - one became - disillusioned. Nevertheless I never felt the slightest need to apologise for the fact that I was left wing. And it has always totally influenced my attitude about things because I - by seeing the plight of poor people I've always been very much more concerned with, put it this way, under-privileged people and privileged people. I don't propose to go on too much

about this, but when I left - well, when I was at Cambridge, I didn't take a particularly good degree but I was one of the founders of the 'Mummers' with Alastair Cooke and it was the first drama group that had women in it and it was great fun. And there I met my wife, she was wardrobe mistress, Frances Curl, who was a Girton, in fact she played goal for Girton in the hockey team and got a Blue, which is more than I ever did! [Chuckles]. But I was also on the 'Granta' which I enjoyed very much and with my interest in literature I re-started the thing, 'The Nash Society' at St John's College, Cambridge - Nash having been about the college and - I mean, when he was there! And um...the most extraordinary thing, my father-in-law to be, as he was then, said to me - he was a very conventional, a very nice man, but a very conventional country doctor, and he said, "Have you thought of going into films?" And I was absolutely staggered at the idea, and even more staggered that he should have said so. And I said, "Well I think it would be a marvellous idea!" It suddenly hit me, I'd never even thought such a thing was possible, because I'm fairly slow to anticipate things, I'm not really a great adventurer in many ways, so this...

John Legard: Probably he'd realised that you were a film enthusiast, I mean a film fan or filmgoer.

Hugh Stewart: Well something of the kind.

John Legard: You talked about them a lot, hmm...

Hugh Stewart: Yeah. He said, "I know a man who knows a man who's the godfather of somebody in the film business!" [JL chuckles][Chuckling] Well that seemed a fairly tenuous link, you see! And I said "What's his name?" He said, "Ian Dalrymple." I said, "Well I know that's an honoured name, he was the editor of the 'Granta' two or three years before I was up." So I then went and met Ian, and he was going through rather a difficult time in his personal life and his first marriage was breaking up and this kind of thing. But he suggested I go and see Angus MacPhail. I went and saw Angus and he heard me, and he too had been on the 'Granta' which I knew, but that didn't make any difference. He then sent me on to Phil Samuel who was the studio manager, who was very nice, and he said, "Well what are you interested in?" And then I suddenly realised I really knew nothing whatever about the film business, and I daren't say, "I'd like to be in the photographic department," if indeed there wasn't such a thing! [Laughs] So the only thing I knew was the cutting department, which Ian was the head of. I said, "Well I'm very interested in the cutting department." So he looked at my non-existent credentials and said, "Well I suppose that would be a good idea," and sent me along to Ian. But previously he'd said, "We are starting an apprenticeship scheme here, which is beginning in August, will you be able to start then?" I said, "Well I'll be able to start on Monday" - this was in June - "I'll start on Monday if you like!"

John Legard: What year was this in fact?

Hugh Stewart: 1932.

John Legard: '32, right.

Hugh Stewart: 1932. And so on the Monday I duly reported to Ian and he said, "What are you doing here?" So I told him, and he said, "Hmm, well you'd better go along and talk to John." So I went off and saw a bloke called John Goldman who was a mad eccentric, marvellous bloke who - gilded, a very gilded fellow socially, but also a wild anarchist and communist and also mad about jazz! And he was a tremendous leg-puller and he said that he wanted to make a film of classical nymphs and fawns and satyrs all set to jazz music! [Laughs] All said with a dead straight face, so I liked him very much! And he said to me, "There's a film being made by a German director called Wilhelm Tiele who directed some films in Germany...this was the time when Gaumont British and UFA were getting together. And we were, at this time, of course at Gainsborough studios in Poole Street. And Wilhelm Teile had made a film called Marry Me with Renata Muller and I think Ian Hunter or somebody. And anyway it was - I remember it very well. And he'd done the unheard of thing of printing two takes on everything, which of course was absolutely forbidden in those days, but he'd done it! And so there were some out-takes, and John said, "Well would you like to go and assemble the out-takes and practice - there's nothing else you can do, we've finished the film, I can't put you in anywhere. Would you like to do that?" So I went into an octagonal tiny room with a glass roof in a heat wave, and I there got together on an old thing, not a Movieola but a Moy I remember - and it was like a hay-cutting machine! And it was frightfully hot and I think I stank because I remember John saying to me, "You do exhale a bit, Hugh, don't you?" [Laughs] I said, "I'm not surprised, it's a wonder I'm still alive!" However at the end of this, after - oh not very long, about four weeks or so, I was told then that I would be re-joining the apprentices - perhaps it was more, perhaps about six or eight weeks. And they were starting in August at the newly opened Lime Grove Studios in Shepherd's Bush. So I said goodbye - I prepared to say goodbye to them, and I said, "Well I would like Mr Dalrymple to have a look at what I've done." "Well" said, John, "there are one or two mistakes, would you like me to straighten up?" I said, "Well I don't think that would be a good idea because, good or bad, he might as well seen what I've done." Which he did. And he was very nice, he said, "Some of it's better than others," you see, and walked away, and he said, "I'll see you later I hope." And that was the best news I'd had. So I then joined in with all the other apprentices, I suppose there were about thirty of them. And I quickly found out that although we were told we could go anywhere, we were effectively barred from everywhere, particularly by Victor Saville who shut us all out and wouldn't let anybody hang around the studio at all. The only - Walter Forde was also making Rome Express. And the only people at all that we could go to, there was a man called Clayton Hutton who was a producer, and Frank Cadman, and they were making custard pie comedies with Naughton and Gold, and a man called Jack somebody who was the stand-in for - Jack Williams I think...stand-in for Sydney Howard, and Flanagan and Allen were there. And Fred Karno was in the offing. So John and I were looking - standing watching all this, hoping that we'd learn a great deal and thought...

John Legard: I'm going to have to stop you - John, who's John?

Hugh Stewart: John Dighton, I beg your pardon, John Dighton, sorry, John Dighton, the writer. And he had also been at Cambridge, although I didn't know him there. So we got on together very well, because he'd got this marvellous sense of humour. And I said to him, "Look John, I think we could write something as amusing as this, don't you?" He said, "Well I should hope so!" You see, so we sat down and we wrote about a two-page script of something, and it was called 'Sweeping Partners', I remember very well. And it was designed for Naughton and Gold and one

of them was going to be a professional Santa Claus and the other was a chimney sweep and they got lost in the chimneys of some country house and came down in bedrooms and - a rather ridiculous dialogue came out! Well we thought it was killingly funny. We sent it along and this reached Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, who were the resident writers at the time, who apparently were very sweet about it and said, "Well you'd better go and be the writers and join in," you see. So we joined in with Frank and Clayton Hutton and with the idea that we were called 'the brains' from then onwards! [Laughs] And er...these - we would be appealed to to write instant gags. And Paddy Carstairs was a writer there at that time, and so we became sidekicks to Paddy Carstairs. And when that little bit was over, I think after - oh! also we used to go and see a lot of films, we'd see a film once a week and then advise to write critiques about that and they would be sent on. So we did this zealously, and obviously with some Cambridge training I was able to write reasonably well, so I wrote quite good critiques I think of films. I don't suppose they were anything very startling, but at least they were reasonably articulate. And Ian was quite pleased with them, with what I'd done and certainly seemed to take an interest in all this and um finally what happened, I was back with the cutting rooms, which I was very pleased to do - this time of course in The Bush. And I found myself after a while made assistant to an American cutter called Freddie Smith - F. Y. Smith. And I think I got quite a good name as a cutter because I used to anticipate. I'd have the scissors ready, I'd have the film ready, if they knew he was getting anything it would be all there for him and the pencils would be sharpened and everything like that. And if they wanted anything, I used to get it. So that gave me a bit of a break and I was - I worked as assembly cutter on Basil Dean's The Constant Nymph [1933], which was very good practice, with Ian obviously as the supervisor. I was the cutter on a film called Forbidden Territory which everybody has forgotten now, but it had Gregory Ratoff in it. And I met Gregory Ratoff in the lift one day, and he said to me, "You're the cutter?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Give me a break!" And I suddenly - a great revelation came to me, you know, the cutter could be - it never occurred to me to do anything else than to do what the picture demanded, but he wanted to make sure his close-ups were there. So that was an interesting piece of information. And then Ian said, "You can assemble Evergreen, Victor Saville." Victor Saville was an extremely tough character. And as soon as he knew I was doing this, actually he did the most humiliating thing. He said, "Do you mean to say" - in front of the whole unit, I mean, looking around, "that you are actually putting scissors into my film?" I said, "Yes Mr. Saville." He said, "Come and stand up there in front of me." And he did, right in front of everyone, he said, "I shall have something to say about this," or words to that effect. I said, "Very well," you know, and went and sat down again. And then Ian, to his eternal credit, said, "[indecipherable]...of any kind." And Victor, again I will say, gave me a break. Because he came up and he said, "Look there's one bit where Hartley Power has to say something and one take was better than another, because he had to say, 'This I is what I want.' And on one take, he said, 'This is all I ask for here below'." And I said, "Well Mr Saville, I did think that was the best one, I have put it in." "Oh did you" he said, "right." And he said to Ian, "He seems to be a very intelligent young man." From then onwards I never had any trouble with him! And Ian - I didn't do a particularly good job, I was still pretty green about it, but Ian then took it over and edited the picture and obviously took the credit for it, as he should do. But he did give me the opportunity of editing The Man Who Knew Too Much for Hitchcock. And I suppose it's fair to say that - and everybody must know this - that you learn more about your job from the bad pictures you work on, because you have to do so much to salvage them. But you get your jobs on the basis of the good films you work on, so it's all pretty unjust. So I used to get jobs on the basis that I'd cut for Hitchcock, but I learnt on

films which really I've virtually forgotten, because you had to make something out of rubbish - and it's marvellous training! Well then after - I got married round about that time - this was in July '34, and Ian said, "I think a change of scenery would be a good idea for you." And so he recommended that I should become an editor at British Lion with Sam Smith [possibly Herbert Smith, producer?] at Beaconsfield. And there was a man there called Arthur Tavares who was the chief editor, and I was there for two years working on 'quickies' where, you know, it would be about eighty four slates for an entire film. And I - it was quite good training to do - not a good idea to stay in, but it was very good and they were very nice there and I liked working there. And then it became evident that Victor and Ian had teamed up to make films and be a group working for Alex [Alexander Korda], so I went and joined them and I cut their four pictures... Dark Journey, Storm in a Teacup, Action for Slander and South Riding. I still think South Riding was one of the very best scripts every written, it was a marvellous script by Ian. And um...things were a little bit difficult because Bill [William] Hornbeck was the chief editor and he was very good. At one time they wanted - thought it would be a good idea to have a really top American cutter to come in to do it, and they got Jack Dennis who was a very nice man but he spent all his time playing poker with Howard um - whatever it was, the director - Howard somebody...

John Legard: William K. Howard.

Hugh Stewart: William K. Howard, that's right. And so - I don't wish to make anything of this, but virtually I did do it, you see...

John Legard: Hmm.

Hugh Stewart: So Dora Wright, who was the production manager said to me, "Well why don't you say something?" And I said, "What's the use in saying anything about it? It'll only sound like sour grapes. I'm learning, I'm doing what I want to." Well that was all over and then Victor was making films with MGM and I went on holiday where my first daughter - first child was conceived I'm bound tell you! [Chuckles] And this was in 1938 and um, er, I worked on some MGM films in a rather helter-skelter way. And then I also worked on Q Planes for Irving Asher...

John Legard: Oh yes.

Hugh Stewart: ...and I stayed with him. And we made Spy in Black and Mickey Powell was always very nice about what I did on Spy in Black because Irving and Mickey quarrelled. Mickey was fairly high-handed and Irving was not a bloke to stand any nonsense. So on the day that he finished the last shot, he fired him from the studio and wouldn't allow him to come in! And Mickey then wrote me a twenty-three-page letter, in lined foolscap, with his own handwriting, every single thing, which I conscientiously went through. But I found that quite a lot was missing. For instance, there was a sequence at the beginning where Conrad Veidt as the Submarine Commander goes through a minefield, which was completely thrown away, there was hardly anything shot for it at all. And I managed to get some bits for that. And then at the end there was a bit sequence which never really started, where the - with a ferry from Stromness comes and is emerging. And you were straight into close-ups of model shots or something like that, it was all pretty feeble, and I spent a long time in theatres in Wardour Street, finding

particular shots for things, and Mickey was enormously pleased with this. And there was one charming moment when we went to the preview at The Granada, Slough, and um - there, Irving and Mickey, who were all best of friends by this time - Conrad Veidt was there. And I had worked very hard on this submarine sequence at the beginning, which hadn't been very much before, and I got this wonderful glimpse of what a real star is, because they came up to me at the end and said how good the sequence was. It wasn't all that good, but obviously it was something. And Veidt said, "Yes, he's wonderful with those eyes, he's looking..." and he's talking about himself, his own performance on the screen! [JL laughs] And it was absolutely wonderful, you know, there was no vanity about it at all, he was just tremendously impressed by that submarine commander and the actor who was actually playing him!

Hugh Stewart: And then there was a film called Ten Days in Paris and I was on that when the war broke out.

John Legard: Now I want to stop you just a second.

Hugh Stewart: Yes, yes please.

John Legard: I want to go back to the Dalrymple training college. Can you remember any of your other colleagues on that?

Hugh Stewart: Yes, yes indeed. There was - tell me the names of some cameramen - the bloke with the double-barrelled name...

John Legard: Um...not Gallai-Hatchard?

Hugh Stewart: No, no, no, before then.

John Legard: Double-barrelled?

Hugh Stewart: I know he wasn't on it with me but he was there in a similar capacity - Robert Hamer was one.

John Legard: Yes, yes, Bob Hamer yes.

Hugh Stewart: And Robert and I of course made a film together. There's a name that you would - it was well known in films at that time, it wasn't Gallai-Hatchard no, but it was um, I can't remember.

Alan Lawson: Where was the training college? Was it attached or separate...

Hugh Stewart: No it wasn't a training college at all.

Alan Lawson: Training course wasn't it, it was a training course.

Hugh Stewart: No it wasn't even that. We were just apprentices stuck with - and we were given...

John Legard: Shoved around!

Hugh Stewart: And we were given a princely salary of five bob a week. And then after three months we got ten bob a week and then for the last six months we were told we would get - for those who were still existing, and by this time there were about ten of us, we got a pound a week, and Ian insisted on my money being raised to three pounds a week at the end of about nine months, so I was - I mean because he said that I was doing the work, which indeed I was.

Alan Lawson: A group of trainees really wasn't it?

Hugh Stewart: Yes, yes, there was no - we were just pushed into the place and made assistants and sidekicks and that kind of thing.

John Legard: But when you were acting as the assembly editor really...

Hugh Stewart: Yeah...

John Legard: ...or assembly cutter, whichever you'd like to call it...[chuckles].

Hugh Stewart: Well at that time my apprenticeship had finished.

John Legard: Yes - what were you getting then?

Hugh Stewart: Three pounds a week.

John Legard: Really?

Hugh Stewart: And for - when I cut for Hitchcock I got six pounds a week.

John Legard: Ah ha, ah ha.

Hugh Stewart: That was quite good money, you could live on that.

John Legard: Oh yes, sure. Oh yes, I mean that was good money in those days. And when you - you know, got your first credit actually, what did you get then - money? Editing, you know, a genuine editing credit, as the editor?

Hugh Stewart: Well that was for Hitchcock.

John Legard: Oh I see!

Hugh Stewart: I got it for them, yes, and also for Forbidden Territory, I suppose at that time I might have been getting four pounds a week or something.

John Legard: And the other thing too that I meant to ask you but I didn't want to stop you in flight - what was your parent's reaction when you went into the film business?

Hugh Stewart: I think they were pretty shattered! [JL chuckles] My father, I remember him saying to me - we had an uncle who wanted to be an actor and died of tuberculosis. "It was the nearest thing you could get to it!" [JL laughs] But they were very good, when they realised that I was on it, and they took some pride in it afterwards you know, kind of thing. Yes I think they were pretty shattered by it but they thought - they went along with it.

John Legard: Yes.

Hugh Stewart: Because I'd got the job and I was doing it. One thing I didn't mention, there was a period of my life after I left Victor, and somewhere around the MGM time, when - Oh yes, after MGM, before I went to Irving Asher, I cut for Eric Pommer when he was teamed up with Charles Laughton.

John Legard: That was at Elstree was it?

Hugh Stewart: That was at Elstree, yes.

John Legard: And the MGM ones were at Denham?

Hugh Stewart: The MGM's were at Denham, yes. It wasn't a particularly satisfactory arrangement, because Eric had Robert Hamer as his cutter and I didn't want to get entangled with that. But Pommer himself was a monomaniac, you see, and he was happy having two cutters and he gave me one part of the picture to cut, and Eric another - and [corrects himself] Robert another. When it came to making a dreadful film called St. Martin's Lane it split into half - it was a broken back thing - and I did the first half and Robert did the second, you know, this kind of thing! [JL chuckles] But um - so that's a good bit of fill-in, a bit I forgot to mention.

John Legard: Yes, yes.

Alan Lawson: And of course Pommer - Hitchcock worked for Pommer didn't he, too, at that time?

Hugh Stewart: Yes he may have done, but not with me. The director of The Vessel of Wrath which was a Somerset Maugham story, was an American whose name I've forgotten, and St Martin's Lane was directed by Tim Whelan.

John Legard: Ah ha.

Hugh Stewart: And that had Rex Harrison and Vivien Leigh in it.

John Legard: How did you get on with Hitchcock by the way?

Hugh Stewart: Very well.

John Legard: Was he easy to work with?

Hugh Stewart: Oh yes, wonderful, wonderful, absolutely wonderful. He was quite dreadful at one time because he had decided, I suppose, that I ought to be loosened up, so he asked me along to his flat where he was entertaining various people, including Peter Lorre, and he asked me if I'd come out and have dinner with him. Of course I was thrilled at this great honour you see. And he said, "Look I tell you what, they're all having a strong drink, I'll just give you this soft drink, an orange" you see. What he didn't tell me was that he'd laced it with gin, to which I was totally unaccustomed [laughs]. And when it came to the dinner I could scarcely eat it and I eventually had to leave the table! And I made my way home without even seeing him again and um...[chuckles] when I came on the set the next day he said, "Stop everybody!" Standing in the middle, turned the lights on me, "He behaved disgracefully last night!" [Laughs] This is Hitch! [Laughter] But he was wonderful, he was enormous fun. I mean so expert. That great sequence in The Albert Hall. He gave me complete notes on what to do. I mean it was ultimately my discretion if you like, but I mean all I had to do was to do what he shot it for. On the first day he came on the stage and put the script down on the table and said, "Right, another picture in the bag!" You know it's [chuckles] but the shooting, it was just drawing round the edges for him.

John Legard: [Laughs] Right, yes, of course!

Hugh Stewart: That's what he said, of course. It was much more than that.

John Legard: Yes, yes, a master.

Hugh Stewart: Yes, wonderful with actors, I mean he had his joke about calling them cattle, but he was tremendous with them.

John Legard: Yes. Now when we went back, just before we went back, you were coming up to the war years.

Hugh Stewart: Well um, Hitler went into Poland and I went into Uxbridge and that didn't stop him, and then two days later Chamberlain declared war, and I was in an artillery unit in Cowley, in fact. And then Mickey Powell - I was obviously standing around, you know, nothing was happening - Mickey Powell asked me if I would be the second unit director on 49th Parallel. So I thought, "Well yes, all right, it would be fun, I would be out for a while, instead of just marking time," I'd virtually got no rank or anything like that, and I thought, "Yes it would be a good thing to do." So an application was made for me, but it takes a long time and by the time it had come through, the unit had sailed. So there I was in England, out for four months, not due to go back in the army until January 19...

John Legard: '41?

Hugh Stewart: 1940, perhaps it was.

John Legard: '40, yes.

Hugh Stewart: And um - and the Battle of Britain was on so I really couldn't - I was missing some action in this way. However, when the unit came back I was due to go back in the army and Mickey couldn't believe that I wanted to go back in the army. He said, "What do you want to go in the army for when you could be making this film?" I said, "Well look Mickey, there is a war on!" [Laughs] Anyway, I went back. But in the meantime I had heard about the formation of the army film unit, so I immediately made - I made application for this and reported to the war office, with David MacDonald who'd been brought in from civilian life to run it, and found myself quite - very much being involved in it. Unfortunately I was commissioned quite quickly and David went out to the Middle East and I took over command of the unit with this special instruction that we would have to form and command a unit which was responsible for having a school. And there were two snags about this, one is I'd never seen a battle in my life, so how it was going to be I didn't know, and also I shrewdly suspected that any self-respecting battle would be virtually unphotographable. I mean there would be none of this business of John Wayne with the US Cavalry fifty yards away on the horizon! And indeed it turned out that way, battles are extremely difficult to photograph, particularly with the kind of things that we had. And in any case, once something has happened it's happened, you can't say, "Would you mind going back and do it again?" But anyway we got the unit going and I always had great affection for those times at Pinewood because it was really creating something totally new out of a great diverse group of people who'd just come along. And we were making our own rules as we went along and... I asked if I could have an overseas command, the next one that was going on you see. And I remember dear old Wassie Turner saying, "Want to have a crack at the Boche, Stewart, do you?" I said, "Well I'd like to go overseas if I could!" So I did, I got the first overseas command after that, with a full unit really properly recruited from the Army Film Unit, distinct from odd bodies coming in from Fleet Street and so on, which was largely what the Middle East unit was. And so I got No. 2 AFPS [Army Film & Photographic Section] which went to Algiers and Tunisia, and I did that. And when that was over I came back with the idea of making that into a film. When I got back I said to Roy Boulting who had been working on the preparation of putting the thing together, together with James Hodson, and I said, "I think this ought to be an Allied film, we ought to get some American film, we don't appear to have any." He said, "I know, I've been asking for it." So I then said - I then got in touch with everybody and got no reaction at all, they simply didn't give me any reaction of any kind of film at all, nothing coming back from the war department or whatever it was. So I was very worried about this and I saw Lord Burnham who was the General in charge of PR. And I said that I'd hoped we'd be able to make an Allied film because it was an Allied campaign, and if we only make the British side of it, it'll never get shown in America. And - because as far as the Americans are concerned, Tunisia is an American campaign and the Middle East is a British campaign. And the fact that most of their best troops, best people are in the Pacific and they have really people just being trained here and really they didn't make all that much of a thing in Tunisia it's - but it's very important that the proper thing should be presented. So he said, "Yes, but if you haven't got anything..." I said, "Well I think the only thing we can do is to - we'll have to go ahead and make a film of some kind." So we made a film called Africa Freed and...very, very quickly, I mean we were actually dubbing in the theatre in June, after I'd come back at the end of April, so it was a very, very rush job. And as Roy and I were sitting there watching the dubbing a telegram came in and said, "Colonel Capra and Major Veyer[?] coming to Grosvenor House tomorrow, would like to see you." So I showed it to Roy and said, "What do you think of this?" He said, "well it's a bit late but we've got to go along." So we went along and we met them and they said, "Well how far

have you got?" I said, "Well we're dubbing, we negative cut next week. How far have you got?" "Well we've got a script and a lot of rushes." And they'd got a script and practically everything was shot in California! There was some material shot in the streets in Casablanca, which was good, but they'd got that and then gone back again. It was purely the landing, otherwise they had absolutely nothing! They'd got the most elaborate thing done with one camera slightly off-centre, one with a scratch deliberately down the middle and all this kind of thing, a mass of material shot in California which of course looked pretty like Tunisia anyway! I didn't know what to do, so I went to Lord Burnham and I said, "This stuff has now come and we have a very difficult decision to make. Do we say, 'No we can't do it,' but then of course some of ours also was recreated, because you can't shoot at night. So if you wanted to create the feeling of a night battle you've got to shoot anyway, so we can't even say that ours was only that. And in any case you need close-ups to punch things... all these have got to be shot," and so on. And I said - but the thing about the Tunisian campaign was that there were just some rather run-of-the-mill tedious and beastly infantry battles with patrols and mortar platoons for a long time. And then when the rain stopped, wham! It all went in like a gigantic tank operation - an AA operation, you know, traffic operation. The vehicles we had were Hillman PU's, they could only run on roads, so there was no question of us going over the country in anything like that, there were no jeeps or four-wheel drives. So we just had to stay, so as the traffic was rolling on we couldn't even stop and photograph it, we just had to keep running. So the material, in essence, was extremely limited - ours was. So I said, "My own feeling Sir, you are much more the person to say this than I, but I feel it's so important to make an Allied film about this." He said, "I quite agree - do that." So we then put it together and we got something ready about - I don't know - October perhaps. They'd taken their time to recreate it rehash it all. And then Frank Capra said, "I've got to take this to show General Marshall." I said to him, "Aren't we going to start cutting the...?" "No, no, I've got to show General Marshall." So it then had to be taken over, and I was told that I would have to go over with it and keep an eye on the British side of the thing. And so then it was re-cut and all this kind of thing, and Dimitri Tiomkin's music put on - thanks to Rachmaninov and everything! And the film was then showed of course a year late...but that's the way things were. And they were extremely kind to me in America, I mean I couldn't have been better looked after and all that kind of thing, but... eventually I got a telegram saying, "Come and report to America and take command of the unit for the second front." So I came back and in - whenever it was, February or some time like that and - so I was there for quite some time, I was there for about three months. And I didn't um - and um it was very interesting, it was a very interesting experience, but as you can see...

Alan Lawson: What happened to the - the film that you first made, Africa Freed...?

Hugh Stewart: Yes...

Alan Lawson: Did that ever get a limited showing?

Hugh Stewart: Africa Freed - I think if you get in touch with Kay Gladstone at the Imperial War Museum, he will know about that, he will tell you about that. Yes, he went into all this thing - he was in charge of all retrieval of material.

Alan Lawson: Hmm, I was wondering whether it ever got shown before you had this...?

Hugh Stewart: No, no, I don't think it was ever shown...

Alan Lawson: But I remember seeing at the time, when I was working at the Film Unit

Hugh Stewart: Yes, yes yes.

John Legard: Do you know if it exists still as it was?

Hugh Stewart: Well presumably it must do, I mean there's no reason why they should...it was... Oh Christ I wonder, I wonder what happened about it?

John Legard: Because you...

Hugh Stewart: We were at the stage where we were virtually doing it. I think we did go ahead and complete - I honestly can't tell you because I'm - you know, we were immediately plunged into the business of making Tunisian Victory with the Americans that everything went by the board. And of course I went to America and then back, so by this time I really don't know what happened. Then at the end of - when the German war was over we were in Germany and I got a call from the war office, a telegram from the war office, "Report at once." So I got on the telephone to Edward Johnson who was my...who was the...

John Legard: DDPR yeah...

Hugh Stewart: DDPR, and a dear friend. And I said, "Sir, should I bring all my baggage complete?" He said, "Yes." So that was all there was, the only question. So I then said goodbye to everybody, came back and was told that they weren't happy with the way that the No. 5 AFPS perhaps it was by this time, the Far East was being run, and they wanted me to take over. But I had been due to - really I was due for an early de-mob and I told Alexander Korda that I would use my best influence to get with him as soon as possible. In other words, not artificially prolong my life in the army. And so I said to Lord Burnham, "If you want me to do this, of course, but could you do two things? Would you be kind enough to write a letter to Alexander Korda, and also to my wife?" My wife never knew that I volunteered to do this thing, you see. So I then was told that I'd have to go and see Mountbatten, and this was quite a thing. So I went along to Leconsfield House where he was - he had an office, and as I was waiting in the outer office to go and see Mountbatten, the Evening Standard came in with the notice of the Hiroshima bomb. So I could feel - you know the impact of the news was such that I've never forgotten it. And I went in there, and there standing right behind him was my old boss, Irving Asher, who had known him very well, and I'd never blinked an eyelid. But there I was with Mountbatten, and I knew the only thing to do with a man like that was to stand up and look him right in the eye and give him back the answers. And he was wonderful, he said, "Right, you'll do." And then I went out again and I got in touch with a bloke at the war office, George Haldane[?], and I said, "George, fourteen days disembarkation leave, fourteen days embarkation leave, I have twenty-eight days due." "He said don't be bloody silly, you'll be lucky if you get eight hours!" [Chuckling] He said, "In the meantime go and see your wife and children and keep in touch with me, let me know where you are." So I went down to the Norfolk coast where Frances was with - by this time my two children. And while I was there the second bomb fell, so I rang up the war office and said, "Do

you still want me?" And they said, "Well stay where you are [chuckles] until you know that it is all over." So I finished up my war service into November sitting in Cromer, near Cromer, with my wife and children, which was a much agreeable way of doing it! However, I had in fact earned it because I volunteered to go out to the East and I was much more frightened of mosquitoes even than I was of Japanese! And then I joined Alex Korda and I lived in London for a while. It was all pretty unsatisfactory. Alex hadn't anything for me to do; he hadn't anything for anybody to do. But he had got hold of Les Enfants du Paradis and he said, "Would you supervise the business of translating this film?" So there I was doing foreign versions, you see. And there was a man called Dennis Freeman and he was the French expert and he got the credit for it. He said, "That's most generous of you." I said, "Nonsense, that's all right, I'm quite happy for you to have the credit." So then - when I was doing this I...I...I've forgotten exactly. I said to Alex, "You've got to put me to work." And he asked me to work on Bonnie Prince Charlie.

John Legard: Now just a second Hugh, I want to turn over, we've come to the end of one side. [break in recording]

Alan Lawson: Yes well could you sort of go through that again because I still think there's a slight sort of gap between the end of Tunisian Victory and your returning from America.

Hugh Stewart: Yes well let me give you the dates. I came back from America in about February '44...

Alan Lawson: Yeah.

Hugh Stewart: And that - the 'Tunisian' film - having been done, and I went straight into the business of taking charge of the new No. 5 AFPS, which was the second front. I had to meet new officers and I had to meet new sergeants, and some of my officers were people who had been sergeants with me before. And then they - because of the - obviously what it was for was the second front, although they wouldn't say so. It was important that cameramen should go out and get some training exercises, so they would go down to Borden with the tank thing and get accustomed to photographing the equivalent of military exercises. It was - I always felt very concerned for my sergeants, because it's all very well training 'em but I know perfectly well, when it actually comes to the actual event, they get no warning, there is no rehearsal, they've just got to go entirely on their own initiative. And so you need highly trained people with imagination and initiative. And one such for instance was Ernie Walter, who came as a trainee accountant, from Cardiff. And I liked the look of him at once, and he was one of the people, although he'd never been anything to do with films, that I chose as one of the people for the landings. And I liked him so much that when it came to one or two people leaving me and going out to the Far East, like Derek Knight and Ackland, we had to make new...

Alan Lawson: Rodney Ackland?

Hugh Stewart: Sorry?

Alan Lawson: Ackland you say?

Hugh Stewart: Ackland yes.

Alan Lawson: Rodney Ackland?

John Legard: No I don't think... No it wasn't Rodney Ackland, was it?

Hugh Stewart: No, no, no, no, no...

Alan Lawson: Sorry.

Hugh Stewart: And he - and I commissioned him and he went straight back into the unit, (which he was not merely in my unit but also in the very section that he was!) And this was the good thing about the Army Film Unit in this way, that whereas ordinarily in the army you would never have a bloke being commissioned and going back to the place where he was, they'd give him a fair chance. But I always felt that, at our best, and the only way that made us tick - we were this Henry V thing, "We few, we band of brothers," and we really were that. And not merely the officers and sergeants, because we were all soldier technicians working together, the drivers became associated with them and if ever a couple of sergeants went off together, their driver would be totally identified with them, he would be knowledgeable about films and everything. It was very good in this way wasn't it Alan?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Hugh Stewart: I mean it was the most democratic - in the best sense of the word - and it appealed to me enormously in this way, and it really worked I thought. And er, you know, there was no question about an Officer's Mess or anything like that, we were all there together. And if the officers and sergeants wanted to be in a group they could be, but there was no arbitrary separation. Then um... anyway, when I - I didn't do anything to Bonnie Prince Charlie because I got jaundice. And it was a very debilitating thing and this bloke Denis Freeman suggested I read a book called 'Trottie True' by Brahms and Simon which I read, it made me laugh, and I thought, "Well if it makes me laugh and I'm feeling like this, it must be okay!" So by this time, time had gone on and I tried to get MGM to do it, but they wouldn't do it, they weren't budging. So I had to sell myself to the Rank Organisation over this and MGM took the attitude, "We wouldn't have you as an MGM producer being paid the kind of money we pay you." [Laughs] They were quite shameless about it, they insisted on getting more. And I found myself in the impossible position of being a producer on hire, so that after a while, after they'd been going for a while they decided they could do without me, which was probably fairly true. And so I had to go back, so it was a very invidious position, the thing which I had created and nursed and got going and promoted and got - finding myself going back! But I did some interesting things, James Donald I introduced for the first time as a leading man, a very good actor. And because he was this rather dour Scott, I played him as the um...young stage-door Johnnie duke who was after Trottie. And however much you could see he was after her for one thing, you could believe also there was an interior integrity about him because of this Scotchness of his, and you could believe that he would eventually propose to her and she would become the Duchess. And James Donald's performance and personality was extremely important for that and really believable.

John Legard: Who directed Trottie True.....?

Hugh Stewart: Brian Hurst. Then I went back to MGM and I was due to be with them for five years or something...

John Legard: That was at Elstree by then?

Hugh Stewart: Yes. And one thing I did there was to create and found and design the editorial department. And I did all that, and I did things there which don't happen in any other department. For instance if you want to mark up a dissolve on a piece of film you usually had to do it on the floor because there's nowhere to do it. I had just that little separation in front, where the synchroniser was. I also had special things made so when the assistant breaking down the film - I had shelves, two uprights and then sloping things [like that] so that things could be put across and then you could - little troughs yes, double layer troughs to take around, and that was my invention! [Chuckles] And then I said to Ben Guess[?], who was wonderful, "Look you really must fire me, I've six years in the army and I've had three, four years with you. I'm very happy with MGM, but I'm not doing anything and I really want to start making a film." [HS imitates American accent] "Well you wait it'll turn up in time, maybe." I said, "Well I've been waiting such a long time!" So I then put myself out of work and applied to join the Rank Organisation. And at that time - this was 1949, when John Davis was firing everybody he could see practically at that stage. Understandably, because things were very bad and had been very extravagantly done. I certainly don't attack him on that score, but a lot of people were leaving and being fired, and I was one of the few people that were actually taken on at that time. And they had what they called a 'junior wing' of new producers, and George Brown was one. And Julian Wintle and Betty Box and I were what were called preps - the junior wing. I didn't give a damn whether they called it 'the junior wing' or not! And I made a film called Night Without Stars, directed by Anthony Pelissier...

John Legard: Oh yes, yes.

Hugh Stewart: ...which was quite stylish. But the central character was a man who was going blind, and resentful of this fact - prickly and awkward, but nevertheless one should see the charm. And I wanted David Niven to play this. And Richard Hamer who was in charge of the theatres at that time, 1946, said, "Niven? He's finished!" And that must go on record! [Chuckling] And I had David Farrar. Well David Farrar was a very capable sort of actor, but totally wrong for this particular part, the film didn't do particularly well. Then I made another one with John Mills from a book by Howard Clewes called The Long Memory - Robert Hamer directing.

John Legard: Oh yes I remember that.

Hugh Stewart: And um, I thought it was rather good but it didn't do all that well. And then I've always had a great love of the early days of films and - you see if you talk about the early days of films, nobody knows anything but Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, The Keystone Kops, Laurel and Hardy... And to me, silent comedy was an absolute dream! And I liked the idea of creating scripts out of nothing, just an idea and thinking purely in terms of visuals. Well there

wasn't much chance of my doing that, but they said - there was a man called Paul Soskin who was producing a film, in which he was on thoroughly bad terms with the director, who wouldn't let him on the set, called Paddy Carstairs, with Ronnie Shiner in it. And um...they had Shiner for another film and Paddy said, "Well I won't have Soskin, I won't do it for Soskin again." And Earl St John said, "Hugh, what about you doing it?" Well I got together with Paddy and I worked out what I thought was an amusing idea for a script, which originally came from Peter Rogers, before he became a producer. It was of a man sailor left behind on a desert island to guard some barbed wire, and everybody had forgotten about him. And then a ship comes along and finds him and, to his horror, he is going to be rescued - he's living the life of Riley! He's surrounded by beautiful women [chuckling] and there he is in charge of the barbed wire! And I got some bright new actors, there was a young midi in charge of a landing party being sent to him - it was no lesser person than Bryan Forbes! [Laughs] And when they got there, they were treated to a terrific party and they all got very pissed you see, and then the captain fired a shot and they said, "Good God, we better get back!" But how to explain the long time, so they said that this man had been living a terrible time, the place is surrounded by man-eating tigers, he's living up a tree and - all this kind of thing - he's going through misery! [Laughing] And of course the only person who doesn't believe this is the conventional character, the Chief Petty Officer. But the Captain says, "Poor fellow you must be having a terrible time." Well then they go on and they find that they'd been given a job of flushing out some bandits who'd captured a submarine. Well the one person who can do this is, of course, Carter! So we then finish up on the comic chase. And I took terrible liberties with it. I mean the submarine was driven by Brian Rix, and they said, "Who knows how to drive one of these things?" "Well my uncle was a tram driver in Rochdale." "Well you'd better have a go!" So we really were wild with it! And the submarine model shots were doing this [gesturing] as it went through the sea! [Chuckling] And then it went under the actual ship where their captain was and went underneath and went under it and 'goosed' it and there was a big "whoop!" like that you see. And the thing did very well. And because I was able to do some comedy, but also cut loose a bit in terms of daft ideas I then...

John Legard: Sorry - what was this film called, what was the title?

Hugh Stewart: It was called Up to His Neck.

John Legard: Oh yes.

Hugh Stewart: And then - it then turned out that Paddy had been working with Maurice Cowan and Norman Wisdom. They got Norman Wisdom under contract in about 1952 and they'd written this play Trouble in Store and Ronald Neame and John Bryan and those that [indecipherable???] was going to make it. And Earl was terrified they were going to strip Norman of what he's good at, which is his kind of comedy, so he managed to get it away from them and gave it to a theatrical agent called Maurice Cowan who was a friend. Well now Maurice then did this with - what they'd got was a good script, but Norman was able to do it in his own way with Paddy. Then Maurice wrote another film called I think One Good Turn which quite frankly, I mean I've got to talk openly now, was not particularly good. Paddy - who is very expert but only gets annoyed with people when they really don't know what they're talking about, wouldn't tolerate another film with Maurice, because I mean he'd write a script saying 'Exterior of the House' - 'Scene 28, Exterior of the House' and then go on inside without any attempt at

saying 'Cut to 29, which is interior'. I mean he wasn't wised up technically you see, and for somebody like Paddy, he really needs somebody knowing exactly what's happening. Because he himself would get pretty wild ideas. When he was in between takes he would be writing letters or switching on his tape machine you see, so very often he knew what he was doing at the time but the gross and scope of the film he didn't always remember, so it was essential for... Anyway, having got on so well with me on the [Ronald] Shiner picture, would I step in, would I come in - and Earl asked me if I would do that, and I said, "Yes I'd love to." So we made one called Man of the Moment. And then it was very difficult to get - I've realised always that the essential thing is to get the right writer and um, I made two more, one was called Up in the World, and another one was called - it was the one about horseracing [NB Just My Luck]. And you know they were quite good, I tried to do more of a straight story on the third one and then that didn't go at all. So I then got together with Jack Davis and I said, "Let's see if we can do one really with our ideas about what we want about Norman." So we sat down and we wrote the first real hit that I ever had, which was The Square Peg when he was in the army playing - but I said, "Let's do something different with him, if we play a double role with a German general." So he was an Erich Von Stroheim, you know with the eyeglass and everything! And he was wonderful, he was absolutely wonderful! And the film created something. It was the first film ever commercially to make a colossal hit in Russia for instance. It ran in cinemas, two cinemas, and they queued in the bloody snow to go there! And our films about the war of course had always been jolly schoolboy romps, like The Wooden Horse and Colditz Castle [?] whereas of course for the Soviet Union the War was a ghastly devastation of millions of people getting killed. But somehow or other, taking the piss out of a German general released something and they screamed with laughter. And of course once they were able to, then the satellites were able to, so that Hungary and these other people - Poland. And when some of the visiting film critics went to Budapest on some film festival, all they could talk about was Norman Wisdom! [Chuckling] So these people were bloody annoyed about that - "We do have actors like Alec Guinness and Lawrence Olivier." "Yes very fine, but Norman Wisdom!" [Laughs] So this paid off at this time. But unfortunately what happened at the very end was that over some childish thing, which I can't possibly go into, Norman and Paddy had a split. There was something which Norman queried and Paddy was flashing eyes, mad with anger you see, "He should trust me! I won't do this, will never tolerate him again," and so on. So there wasn't anything to do - I had to find another director. So I did, and I got Bob Asher. I was very sorry about the business about Paddy but there was no other way. So I got Bob Asher and we made a film called Follow a Star... Oh no, before that I think we were going to make another one - yes that's right. Because of the success of Square Peg Norman made a deal with the Americans, United Artists, with John Bryan as the producer...with Stuart Burge and all this kind of thing...it was called Once a Crooked Man [NB There Was a Crooked Man]. And um...they were going to make three on option - Once a Crooked Man was so-so. Well, Norman came back to us, but in the meantime Bob and I had made a film called Make Mine Mink, which I liked very much. And it was a little film and it was rather dismissed, it only got put in because something else fell down, and I stepped in quickly, I had the script ready, and we'd made it within budget for oh - ninety-five thousand pounds. And it was an enormous success in America, the Americans took the Baronette Theatre and opened it up for this, and they had great big notices, "This is the best Christmas present from England we could have had" and this kind of thing, and it is still shown over there. And I had Irene - no, who is it, who do I mean? The darling old lady who was...

John Legard: Irene Handell? [NB Actually Athene Seyler]

Hugh Stewart: No, no, more than that.

John Legard: Not Katie, not Katherine...

Hugh Stewart: No.

John Legard: Not the little lady who was in The Ladykillers?

Hugh Stewart: Yes she was um...

John Legard: What was her name...?

Hugh Stewart: Switch it off for the moment...

John Legard: Switch it off, yeah... [break in recording]

Hugh Stewart: I also tried a new actress, Billie Whitelaw, and that was Billie's first big break. And we'll come back to the other name afterwards. Then, when Norman's - Norman came back to us to make Follow a Star and we did that, then he went off again to make another one for United Artists, which was a disaster called The Girl on the Boat, and it was so bad they cancelled the third. But each time he came back with me and - I have to say, very arrogantly - made a hit. Because we then made The Bulldog Breed, which was a great success, and in it I had - at the beginning there was a scene in a cinema. And it started off with four, what were then called 'Teddy Boys' - roughnecks. And one of them was a bloke who hadn't had a part before, he had a one-line part, and he was called Oliver Reed! And then in came three sailors, again with a one-line part, one comes up and says, "Hello darlin'" and it was Michael Caine, and I'd seen him, so I gave these two boys their first break in The Bulldog Breed. And then we went on to do various things. I did other ones with Norman, called - oh yes, Bob went off to make his own films with his brother, and that didn't work out very well so he came back to me. I think I, in the meantime, made a film called In the Doghouse with Leslie Howard [NB. Actually Leslie Phillips] as a vet. And then he came back and we made what I thought was a very good film called On the Beat with Norman as a policeman. And he played a double role again with himself as the head of the Mafia in London, having to break it up, and then he was infiltrated by the police, and it was a good movie, it really was a good movie. Then I made another one called um - the most successful film I ever made, we did 'Bond' business with - it was called The Stitch in Time. And then Norman went off and tried to do something else - he'd never learnt. He said to me, "The next film we make will be with my script." I said, "Now look, Norman, no way. I'm the producer, I say what's on the script. You're the star and it's your - it becomes known as Norman Wisdom's film. But if you want to make a film with your script, you must be the producer." So he said, "Do you mean you refuse?" I said, "Don't be silly, of course I do! I've got to be in charge of the script. I'm very glad to have any ideas you've got, but basically that's what a producer's for, he's got to be in charge of the script and says what goes in and what doesn't go in." So he then went off to go with Tony Newley in 'The Roar of the Greasepaint, The Smell of the Crowd'. Well the two of them, they were too alike, they were two little cock sparrows, neither would listen to the other.

And the story I heard about it, I can quite believe, that on the first day of rehearsal, there was Tony sitting down, he says, "Come on Norman." So Norman would come on, he would say his first line. "No, no, no, don't say it like that, say it like this. Now go back and do it again." So Norman comes on and says it exactly the same as he did before. So Tony Newley says, "Look, I am the writer, I am the producer and this is the way you've got to say it!" And Norman said, "I am the star and this is the way I'm going to say it!" And they were like that. And a bloke who I know, who was a violinist - you know when you hire musicians it is expensive, everything is absolutely set and you've got the piano up untill that time... He said he sat there for two days and never played a note while these two blokes were arguing! Well that all went to pieces and his agent, Billy Marsh, a well-known character, rang me up and said, "You! Are you a gentleman?" you see! [Laughs] I didn't say, "What would you know?" But he said that in view of the fact that Norman had taken the attitude that he did, would I make another film? I said, "Of course I'll make another film with Norman, but on the understanding that it is my script. I'd like to meet him and see what he has to say." And I knew as soon as I saw him, John, that something had happened to him. The iron had entered into his soul. I could tell straightaway and so could Bob. Bob said, "He's not the same man." And we made our last film together, which was very good, The Early Bird where he was a milkman. And then I moved over to do - oh I think - oh I know, just during the time when Norman had gone away, Bob and I made our first film with Morecambe and Wise - that was The Intelligence Men. But now something rather personal that might - one difficulty with Bob was that he had this almost Greek tragedy link with his brother, Jack Asher who was a cameraman - but the slowest cameraman ever and quite ruthless about it being slow. All our budgets went over for one reason and one reason only, that Jack Asher took far too long to do it, and I couldn't say anything to Bob! It was like - it would be like pecking at his insides even to criticise the mere thought of Jack, you see. So eventually I had to say, "Right, I'll have to get somebody else." So it was again a sad parting. And I got Cliff Owen to direct my last two Morecambe and Wise films and that was really - the last budget went way over, everything was going mad at this stage - we were over budget before we started shooting, because costs were going up the whole time. Earl St John had gone by this time, it was in the hands of Freddie Thomas who was a Wall Street man, quite unable to cope with production matters, and would never say anything to John Davis, so I would be asked too late to start something. So you had to grab - either say, "No, I'm not going to," or grab the first idea you got and so on. Anyway, leaving all that on one side, Rank stopped making films in [19]67 anyway at Pinewood, and Betty Box and I were the last producers there. So that was that, so that was the end of a beautiful marriage. And so my wife said to me, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "In terms of career, well let's think about that. But what you and I are going to do is to do something which we have never done before, we are going for a holiday for as long as we want to, where we want to, when we want to." So we went to Greece for six weeks - absolutely wonderful, it's the best thing I ever did! Came back, and I tried to get some films going but it was quite hopeless, I had some scripts...

John Legard: What year was this now?

Hugh Stewart: About '68.

John Legard: '68, hmm.

Hugh Stewart: And you couldn't get anything going, everybody was running scared. I had a very funny story, which I know I could have got off the ground two years previously, called 'The Mini-Bank Robbery', it was a comedy based on the great train robbery. But at that time I had people like Harry Worth and um - it was a funny idea, and I could have made it quite cheaply with five good comics and a woman, and it could have been good. But nobody would buy it at all, so I thought, "Oh well, hell's bells, if it's going to be like this, I'm going to try something else." Frances said, "Well you ran a school there and you've got a feeling for people, why don't you become a teacher?" So by this time I was in my late fifties, I said, "Yes, good idea." So this is what I did, and I went to International House and I got a - obviously there were going to be a lot of immigrants coming in, I thought they will need English, you know. Very often people can be quite skilled but they'll put off - a doctor, a Pakistani doctor will put people off because they can't understand what the hell he's saying! So I thought I would learn English as a foreign language, which I did, and um, I then got in touch with Uxbridge College and I was making children's films by this time. I was part of the Children's Film Foundation, and I made All at Sea and then I made Mr Horatio Knibbles which is the biggest they've ever made, been the most successful film they've ever made, and it got a prize and all this kind of nonsense. And I applied to Uxbridge and they said, "Yes all this seems promising, come and see us next summer, line up for September 1970." And I wrote back and I said, "Well since I've seen you, I have got a diploma from International House and I've also taken a course, City and Guilds course of Teacher of Further Education." I'd thought this was a good thing to do, to show a professional thing. But this was something which they all decided everybody should have to do, so all the people at Uxbridge were then told they had to take the same course that I'd just done, and I was the newcomer! But of course at my age I could only be a part-time teacher, and I did a lot of things, and I've been there ever since. And I went on making films for the Children's Film Foundation until Henry packed up. And I made quite a lot of these, including a couple of series, and - does that bring you up to date?

John Legard: Oh yes, it's fascinating isn't it?

Alan Lawson: I'd like to go back actually to the Pinewood days...

Hugh Stewart: Yes, in wartime?

Alan Lawson: No, no, no...

Hugh Stewart: Oh Pinewood after the war?

Alan Lawson: Pinewood after the war, when you were producing. When you first started producing at Pinewood after the war, what kind of budgets were you on then, can you remember?

Hugh Stewart: Oh yes, I think that Night Without Stars - I really wouldn't like to say exactly but I mean... [pause] No honestly I can't remember, it's terribly difficult. I suppose about a hundred and twenty thousand or something like that - I suppose.

Alan Lawson: What was the loading like on studio facilities? Were they loaded?

Hugh Stewart: I can't remember honestly, that was a long time ago, a long time ago. I mean yes, I've had to pay, I had to carry the studio - oh yes, it was part of the budget.

Alan Lawson: Yeah. And kind of the last one you made at Pinewood when things were getting very expensive...can you remember at all by then?

Hugh Stewart: What the budget was?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Hugh Stewart: The budget was four hundred thousand.

Alan Lawson: That's the Morecambe and Wise?

Hugh Stewart: Yes. That of course would be nothing now, but it was far too much then. And it - I had hoped they would go in America, but they didn't. If - I mean already two of them got their cost back, one is in profit. Of the cost back, interest has got to be paid on the second one. I doubt very much whether the last one ever will. But had they gone into America there was no question they would have, they would have, all three, been absolutely sailing. But Intelligence Men is showing a profit.

Alan Lawson: Is there any particular reason why they didn't go in America?

Hugh Stewart: I don't know. You never know with America, do you?

Alan Lawson: No, no, a different kind of humour...

Hugh Stewart: Yes. But I had thought that Eric's kind of offbeat humour, you know, when he's in the Intelligence Men and the people are trying to kill him, he doesn't realise it at all. There's a great feast and his soup has been poisoned, and he shifts the seating around and Ernie is always there, Ernie is the MI5 man, is always there watching. And Ernie comes along as the waiter, and then Peter Bull who is the assassin...[AL laughing in background] eats the soup and falls down, his face into Eric's soup plate you see. And he says, "Waiter!" "Yes Sir, what can I get you?" He said, "There's a dead man in my soup." Well I thought that kind of humour would go down well, you know...[chuckling]. And there's some...a lot of things were like that in it. And um - but no, it didn't go down. And the soundman, C. C. Stevens, said he was in America and the Morecambe and Wise things were being shown, sketches were being shown on American television, and he was killing himself laughing, but the Americans with whom he was sitting, were just looking at it absolutely stony-faced. So one simply doesn't know.

John Legard: Well of course, presumably for the Americans, Morecambe and Wise would be complete strangers wouldn't they? Whereas by the time you made Intelligence Men they were already established on television weren't they, those two?

Hugh Stewart: Well they - all I can tell you, that Americans coming over here, after about a fortnight would become as aficionados as anybody here, but for the films to be shown over there

- No, they didn't get it! And I mean they - you know, real top people used to come from United Artists or Paramount or whatever and said, "Can we see this thing?" They said, "Yes it's very funny but um..." And I knew what the "but" meant.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes...

Hugh Stewart: They won't get it!

John Legard: Well I must say it's very illuminating. I'm sure there are bits we ought to ask you, other things we ought to ask you. What about your teaching, what do you actually teach now?

Hugh Stewart: I teach. I was - I've taught for a long time English literature at A Level. But the full-time teachers ganged up on me because they wanted that too and - but I teach, you know the GCSE thing? I teach that, English literature at that level and also English language at that level.

John Legard: Ah hmm, right, yeah.

Hugh Stewart: And badly necessary - I mean I find tremendous virtual illiteracy. The idea of stringing an intelligible sentence together is something which is a lost art for so many of them.

John Legard: And you do that what - I mean that's five-day week, I mean that's all in the school curriculum or schedule?

Hugh Stewart: I go there on a Tuesday morning and my elder daughter is a headmistress, and she asked me - there were a lot of little girls, could I go and run their chess club? So I do that on a Tuesday afternoon. I teach all Wednesday, I don't teach Thursday, and I teach on Friday mornings. So - it's as much as I want to do. I wouldn't mind doing a bit more, but I'm quite happy with that. And I...

Alan Lawson: Looking right back, who really helped you most when you - in your career? Was it Ian Dalrymple do you think?

Hugh Stewart: Well certainly to start with, yes, yes, I owe a great deal to him. And you see, once I'd started, then I'm a great believer in self-help.

Alan Lawson: Sure, sure.

Hugh Stewart: I never had any enemies, I really didn't. There were some people that for various reasons I got on better with than others you know, but um - no I honestly don't think, I think I can say I didn't have any enemies. There's certainly nobody I terribly disliked. I have to stand up for myself if somebody tried to push me around and say, "This is going to happen," when it's for me to say what should happen.

Alan Lawson: Well there's a fair amount of you! [Laughs]

Hugh Stewart: Yes! [Laughs]

Alan Lawson: Looking...again...

Hugh Stewart: Athene Seyler!

John Legard: Oh that's right yes, how lovely. She's still with us isn't she?

Hugh Stewart: Yes, Athene Seyler, she was the one - marvellous!

Alan Lawson: Yes, now - what would you really - what's given you the most satisfaction, really in your career?

[Pause]

Hugh Stewart: I think inevitably that when you spend a long time making a film, making it and then you hear it with the audience and the audience are enjoying it, that's the most wonderful feeling. It's like a mother going through nine months of bloody hell, and labour, and then hearing the baby cry - it's all forgotten. And it's that sort - I love it when an audience. I think - I don't like films on television, it's like being kissed on the telephone. [Laughter] But I love an audience.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Hugh Stewart: The thing that happened to me once, you know Colin Sorenson, who asked me if I would - I kept in touch with him, he asked me a lot of information about Denham, which I was able to give him. And then he said - talked to me about these films he was running, and so I looked at them and one of them was The Long Memory. So I said, "Would you like it if I came along and made myself available to talk to anybody?" He said, "That would be marvellous if you could do that." So I did. You know they start at ten past six and go on untill about quarter to eight or so on. And so I went in this theatre in the Museum of London, thinking there might be about fifteen people or so - in fact it was fairly full, there were about eighty or ninety, you see. And the most wonderful thing happened, as it - as the thing - I became aware of people all round me vibrating. I knew there was an audience there, it gave me a marvellous feeling! So much different from watching this [indicating TV presumably]. I mean to think of an example too, what I mean about that, every now and then in a movie, you have something which - a situation which takes the audience so much by surprise that they're absolutely dumbstruck. And then a great roar happens when they catch it! Well this happened. Maybe it only happens once in three years - it happened twice in this thing! Twice! One with the cards and the other one at the end, when people think they're dead. And I've never forgotten the impact of that film on an audience, with an audience, and I've seen it twice since then, it goes for nothing, absolutely goes for nothing at all!

John Legard: No it's a totally different experience.

Hugh Stewart: And contact with an audience I miss terribly. Going and seeing, going to the Odeon, Harrow, on a Saturday afternoon, packed full of mums and dads and kids, that's all gone.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Hugh Stewart: And I do miss that - I mean there was tremendous satisfaction in that.

John Legard: How many er...

Hugh Stewart: I also very much liked starting off new people. I've started off a new director, Bob Asher, started off new people as cutters - Gerry Hambling and Roger Cherrill I think were started by me. And very good, and I have had great satisfaction doing that.

Alan Lawson: Yes. If you could start again would you want to change course?

Hugh Stewart: Well I wouldn't like to be in the film business as it is now - I couldn't. I mean it's no longer, it's a different thing. I mean you've got to be an international financier. I mean I've got a great admiration for David, but um, you know, he thinks in terms of going to Adnan Khashoggi for twenty-five million and this kind of thing, I couldn't do that sort of thing any more than fly. I'm basically the vicar's son I suppose!

[All laugh]

John Legard: Well thank you, thank you very much indeed.

Hugh Stewart: Would you like a cup of tea?

[Tape Ends]