

Mickey Hickey (projectionist and sound recordist) 29/6/1914 - ?

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1920-30s - West End Projectionist (discussion of early sound systems) Late 1930s-40s - Paramount News 1940s - Army Kinematograph Service (AKS), Pinewood. 1940s-60s - Feature sound recordist, particularly at MGM British (Elstree). Also with David Lean, Kubrick and Hammer.

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Interviewer: Bob Allen

Interviewee: Mickey Hickey

Tape 1, Side 1.

Bob Allen: This is an interview with Michael Hickey, better known as Mickey Hickey, who had a long career in the movie business. We're in his home in Borehamwood and today is the 8th November 1995. And so from here on, we'll let Mickey take over. I'll just say, Mickey, if you can give us an outline of where you were born and when you went to school, your early life and how you got interested in movies.

Mickey Hickey: Well, it all started on 29th July 1914, I think I helped to start the First World War off! I was born and my mother, at the time, in the country, where there was no money. And she decided after a while that the best thing she could do was to come to England and get a job and sort me out afterwards, and my grandmother bring me up, anyway which she did. And so we'll carry on from then, because up until about 1922 there was nothing of any great interest, outside of the troubles in Ireland, which I'm sure you're not interested in anyway - we're talking about the cinema now. And anyway, about 1922 I suddenly got taken down this - it was like a shed or an old shop - I saw these things moving on a screen, you know, and I was really taken with it. Well from that day onwards I was hooked. Because we had no money, but I'd go down and hang around, and I'd stay outside until I'd be let in. Sometimes it might have been the last quarter of an hour, last twenty minutes, but I was still pleased to go in. And then we had a man move in then from Dublin, Mr Murphy, he moved in. He was a motor mechanic. He bought himself a filling station, and decided that he would build a proper cinema - in other words, four walls! But much larger and not like the one that we had. So that of course became part of it in [indecipherable], but again he couldn't keep me away, because I'd go down and hang around. Sometimes people would know me to say, "We'll let you in," or sometimes I may have got a

couple of pennies for doing an odd job, so I'd have enough money to go down and say to Mr Murphy, "That's what I've got." And being a Dublin man, he would never say, "I'll let you in," it was always, [in Dublin accent] "I'll let yous in" [chuckles]. But I suddenly became, as I say, very hooked on this. Then in 1924 my mother decided that she wanted me in England, and grandmother and myself decided that we'd go, so we went over to England. Of course there I got involved again with the cinema, because being young and doing odd jobs for my step-father, who was a milkman, and I was able to go to what was known as the Saturday Matinees, I don't know if you ever came across those. Where you used to get all these shows - Talmadge, and all their horses, the cowboys and everything. It used to go on for, oh, probably, maybe two or three months you see. [Chuckles.] But you were always interested because it was always something exciting, or something terrible was going to happen, and then you cut, and it would be "Resumed next week!"

Bob Allen: This was the serials, the Saturday morning serials?

Mickey Hickey: The serials, yeah. And this was, it was mostly for - It wasn't features, just most of the Saturday Morning Matinee as they used to call it. Anyway, at the end of two years my grandmother decided that she wanted to go back, so I said to my mother, "Well if Gran's going back, I'm going to go back with her." That was 1926, so we went back to Ireland. I finished my schooling in 1928. Then decided - my mother had got in touch and said, "Right, he's got to come back to England now and grandmother come back with him and we'll find a job for him." And I think, what we'll do, we'll cut there, Bob, because now we're getting in onto er...

Bob Allen: Just before we do that, do you remember any of the actual titles of the movies that you saw at that particular time or the actors, actresses and so on?

Mickey Hickey: Oh yes, I saw old Valentino in 'The Sheik'

Bob Allen: Ah hmm.

Mickey Hickey: And there is another very great - Cecil B De Mille, I think it was called 'The Good Earth' or something [chuckles]. Don't forget I was very young, and it's a job.

Bob Allen: Hmm, yes...

Mickey Hickey: And a lot of the Keystone Cop type of stuff, and er, I think it was Richard Talmadge and there was Buster Keaton and, of course, naturally Charlie Chaplin. He always used to crop up now and again. Features - I think I saw the original 'Ben-Hur', the silent one. And, what else can I think about? It's a long time to go back, I'm afraid I can't recall them all, you know, because we're talking about - I wasn't even fourteen at the time, you know, I was very young.

Bob Allen: Well no, that's good though. Did you get into the projection room and in with the equipment at this time?

Mickey Hickey: No I never did that, you see, [chuckles] because the funny part would always be, as soon as I used to get into the cinema, the first thing I used to do was straightway my eyes used to go back to the porthole. And I'd stay watching just to see what he was doing or what I could see he might be doing. And I always knew then when the lights were going to go down, because there was a certain movement he'd make and I used to say to the boys, "The lights are going out now!" I'd got that all taped! No, I never managed to get into the projection room until I eventually came back to England in 1928, and that's when I first got in.

[break in recording]

Bob Allen: Right, we're running again.

Mickey Hickey: Well in 1928 when I finished school, my mother naturally got in touch with me, she said, "Well it's about time you came back and we'll have to find a job for you." Well my stepfather, who is a very nice man, he had a brother called Lou Hollingham, that was the name. And when I came back he rigged me out in my first pair of long trousers. I felt such an idiot because I was only very small anyway! [Chuckles] They had me earmarked for a job at Sainsbury's at Blackfriars, which was the head office I think of Sainsbury's in those days, well it definitely was in those days - whether it is today or not, I'm not sure, I think it is. So anyway I wasn't all that happy about it, but in the meantime my stepfather's brother came down to see us. Now what he did, he wanted a job as a projectionist. So he went to a little cinema in Tottenham Court Road where you had to pay about, say five pounds a week. And for about two or three weeks, or a month, they would take this money off you and they'd teach you what they could as regards making a film up and joining the two reels together, and making joins. Because you didn't have the automatic joins in those days, everything had to be done with just the scissors and sort of guesswork. And he eventually then passed out, that he was good enough to take a job and eventually got a job as a projectionist. And he came down and they were talking about me and he said, "Well I don't know," he said, "when I learnt to be a projectionist, things are beginning to move now and they want a rewind boy. A young boy that'll look after the thing, make the film up, do the joins, make the programme up, keep the place clean and what have you." So I said straightaway, "Yes, that's what I want to do!" So on Guy Fawkes night, 1928, I will never forget it, I turned up at this little old cinema in Tottenham Court Road. And I'll tell you exactly where it was. It was between Tottenham Court Road station and Goodge Street station, just somewhere in the middle there, that's where it was. And there was another one a little bit further along from that. So anyway, we started there and oh, after about a month or so, I was getting on very well with it, and we had a Ross projector, an open projector, an open Ross. The arc lamp was no bigger than a biscuit tin. And [chuckles] I'll never forget one night, we only had about one hour to go and the supply to the motors went - they'd lost the supply to the motors, but we had the DC for the arcs. So, I'm not telling you a lie, it was hard work cranking that machine for the last hour of the show! [Laughs]. We had to hand-crank it! And another thing, you see which used to happen at the end - it also happened to me as well, which we'll come to later on - you had one day a week off and you've heard of the busman's holiday. All projectionists in those days as it was a new industry, whenever they had a day off they used to always go around spend that following day, on their day off, with friends that they knew who were working at different cinemas you see! [Chuckling] Anyway this happened, in this particular case, in the January of '29. Chappie came up who was working at The Astoria, Charing Cross Road, which at the time

was one of the first of our supa-dupa cinemas that eventually started to spring up, like The Regal, Marble Arch, and places like that. But at that time 'The Singing Fool' was being shown at the Piccadilly Theatre. Now - Alf Schevering was his name - Alf came round and he said to Bert Doodley[?], "Bert," he said, "We're getting busy down here," he said, "we've been trying out talkies, the 'G-B Acoustic' - the double-header stuff - and we don't seem to be able to make it work." So he said, "We need a rewind boy, because things are getting busy and with trade shows and all sorts of other things." So he said, "What about letting us have the lad?" I was getting fifteen shillings a week by the way, it's my first job. So I went down to the Astoria and Harry Rayner[?], funny enough, happened to be an Irishman, so of course I was in. And I stayed there, and they doubled my money. I'm now only fourteen and a half years of age, I'm getting one pound ten shillings a week, which married men were bringing a family up on. Well we had this 'G-B Acoustic' thing, but at the same time we had, in there, we had Western Electric engineers installing the Vitaphone system, you know, with Warner Brothers. And we also had this double header stuff which was - at the side of the projector we had the sound unit. But whether it was us and not knowing what we were doing and not having proper tuition, [chuckles] to this day I don't know, but it never seemed to work! We might get it to work one show, [chuckles] we'd never get it to work the next show! So eventually the people that were running the Astoria decided, "Let's get rid of this, let's go in big, go for Western." So the Western Electric...

Bob Allen: Can I just interrupt there, just to clear up a little point for people listening - this was the Gaumont-British, or British Acoustics, rather...

Mickey Hickey: The British Acoustics, yeah.

Bob Allen: The British Acoustics system, which actually was a Danish invention that Poulsen - Poulsen Petersen.

Mickey Hickey: Was it? Oh you probably know more about that than I do. [chuckles]

Bob Allen: It was a double - the sound on film but on a separate film.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, that's right, separate film.

Bob Allen: Sound on a separate film. The original - now this is the stuff - this is on a question, because the original that I've read about, Petersen and Poulsen, the picture ran at 16 frames but the sound ran at 32 frames, so...

Mickey Hickey: No, I...

Bob Allen: So that by this time that it had come to you, this must have been, or British Acoustic - they were both running at, I assume, 24 frames...

Mickey Hickey: I would think so, yeah.

Bob Allen: ...which had become the standard speed.

Mickey Hickey: I would think so, yeah.

Bob Allen: And so, was the projector and the - was the sound on a separate machine?

Mickey Hickey: The sound was, yes.

Bob Allen: I mean it wasn't in tandem with a...?

Mickey Hickey: There were, like, two projectors, the projector with the lens and the projector with the sound.

Bob Allen: So they were built all in the one machine?

Mickey Hickey: Er, well...

Bob Allen: Side by side...

Mickey Hickey: Side by side, side by side.

Bob Allen: Hmm, but it wasn't like we get later on with the...

Mickey Hickey: All driven from the same unit, the same motor.

Bob Allen: Yes. It wasn't like we got later on within dubbing theatres with the separate dummy heads for the sound?

Mickey Hickey: Oh no...no, no, no...

Bob Allen: Just projectors. So you had two projectors did you, or just the one projector?

Mickey Hickey: No we had one projector with the sound unit built on the other side of it, which again of course, was the same as a projector because it had a top spool, a bottom spool and it had the sprockets and all the things that are necessary for...

Bob Allen: Yeah, but did you have two of those machines in the box or just...

Mickey Hickey: Oh we had three...

Bob Allen: Three? Yes.

Mickey Hickey: Don't forget, this was the start of the big days and the new super cinemas. And two spotlights as well. It was rather large. I mean the projection room was from that window there right down to the end window down there.

Bob Allen: That's about thirty feet.

Mickey Hickey: So you see what I came from - I came from a little box this size to this supa-dupa - I mean at fourteen and a half years of age, you know, it was really something, it really was.

Bob Allen: Do you remember any of the titles of the movies that ran that system?

Mickey Hickey: No! [Chuckling.] Because we never really worked it!. We'd no sooner started than something would go wrong - we'd be out of sync or something would be wrong, and so we'd say, "Oh, shutdown!" So we'd go back over to the silent film, because in those days you ran one silent and one sound. Well by that time we were all silent, we were just playing around with shorts, they were only shorts.

Bob Allen: I see, yes.

Mickey Hickey: Only one-reelers.

Bob Allen: I see, they weren't features that were on the system?

Mickey Hickey: Oh no, no, no. They were only one-reelers. And it was a sort of novelty sort of thing more than anything else. It was a novelty thing, talking pictures, you see. This was more of a novelty than anything else. But it wasn't the - the real thing, of course, was when Western came on the scene with the er...

Bob Allen: With the Vitaphone.

Mickey Hickey: With the Vitaphone system. Not only the Vitaphone system but the sound-head they'd built on the universal base, with the projector sitting on top of the universal base, and of course the sound-head with the exciter and the peck were just a sound unit...

Bob Allen: Hmm, hmm...

Mickey Hickey: A nasty little sprocket in there too, it was a vicious little one, that one. If you were going to get it cut up that's where you'd get it! But once you'd got past the intermittent then invariably you were all right. But the danger part always the thing that bothers you, as you probably realise, same as I do, with acetate was, if you broke at the intermittent then she'd stick, she wouldn't go through the gate. And of course, if you were watching and you see suddenly - pure in the middle - shut down quick, grab it, rip it off, otherwise if it gets into the top, it's a case of, "Run!"

Bob Allen: So this was nitrate?

Mickey Hickey: It was nitrate, yeah, it was nitrate, you see, and it was very inflammable. And really, the thing to do was you had to be very quick, you had to be very quick. You had to catch the loop above the picture gate. You had your loop there by the picture gate, and you had your feed sprocket which was feeding the film out of the top magazine, or the top spool box, not magazine - they called 'em spool boxes. And through a fire trap - which of course helped - but if

she did get back as far as that you might just as well run, because once she gets in there it's going to explode. And it never happened to us, but I have experienced having to stop a fire, where it's gone, it's stuck by the intermittent and it's got caught in the gate. And the heat and, straightaway it's just, be quick, keep your senses, grab it at the loop and pull her away, and you're all right. But I have seen projection rooms where it has gone wrong. We even had one a Pinewood, that way - go rotten that same way. The fellow on there wasn't quick enough. I forget, I think it was number three or number four, during the Army Film Unit days.

Bob Allen: And so how long did this experimenting go on with the British Acoustic?

Mickey Hickey: We threw it out, we got fed up with it...

Bob Allen: Hmm, you must have done...

Mickey Hickey: ...because it never worked, the manager got fed up. The company was called PCT, I don't know if you've ever come across that company. Provincial Cinematograph Theatres which was a subsidiary of Gaumont-British, see? It was a subsidiary of G-B and they also had The Tivoli, that came under PCT.

Bob Allen: Tivoli in The Strand?

Mickey Hickey: Tivoli in The Strand, that was a PCT theatre. Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, you see, but a subsidiary of Gaumont British. Well then after that the management said - by the way the house manager was Mickey Hyams, you've heard of the Hyams brothers?

Bob Allen: Hmm...

Mickey Hickey: He was the house manager at the time. And so they said, "Oh well let's get rid of this, it doesn't seem to work!" [Chuckles] It probably was us, you know, we were dealing with something new, something that's - you know - and it could have been us. It was probably down to the fact that we were not threading it up properly or were perhaps making too larger loops and throwing it out of sync, or - anything could have gone wrong - I don't know. But we decided to get rid of it and wait 'till Western Electric had finished. And the first thing, of course, when they had finished, of course was 'The Singing Fool', and everywhere else - they all opened up. I know everybody keeps talking about 'The Jazz Singer'. I never even saw 'The Jazz Singer'...

Bob Allen: Didn't you?

Mickey Hickey: No, I never saw 'The Jazz Singer'. Because, as I say, every cinema, they were all opening up with 'The Singing Fool' at that time. Well after that, you know, things began to move and we're getting into '29 now, getting February, March. And what's happened is now, the old Music Halls are beginning to go broke, they're feeling the pinch. So the Stoll circuit and the Moss Empires, they had their own circuit of - so this is where you first come along to the circuits. They had their own theatres and of course they thought, "Well it's no good," whereas the other people were having to build them from scratch, they had it already there - "Let's change over," so they were all changing over to sound. Well Harry Rayner[?] was approached by Mr

Falkner, chief engineer for Stoll circuits, at The Coliseum. So he decided he wanted - we were in a premium now, because we knew something about it, and the thing was that we knew what to do, we knew how to make a programme up and we knew what to do if we lost the frames if it was on Vitaphone, well we knew we had to put that blank stuff back in and things like that. So of course we were all - Harry Rayner accepted the job for three of us. He went to Wood Green Empire, Alf Schevering went to Chiswick Empire - funny enough, I eventually ended up there as chief projectionist years afterwards - and I ended up at the Shepherd's Bush Empire. Now my job was to go down and meet two dear old gentlemen, old enough to be my father, and just look after them as regards making a programme up, and still be the rewind boy, but I was getting now, two pound ten shillings a week.

Bob Allen: Sorry, these elderly gentlemen you refer to, they were the projectionists?

Mickey Hickey: They were the projectionists, the two of them, first and second you see. So I went down there and anyway, what happened, we were...

Bob Allen: Can you repeat the - two pound, what was it you said?

Mickey Hickey: Two pound ten shillings.

Bob Allen: That's quite a good...

Mickey Hickey: [Chuckles] It's gone up a lot now and I'm still not fifteen! So anyway it all went on, so if we did have a rip-up, myself, it makes things easier, I just said, "Oh we've lost five feet." So we lost five feet so this...

Bob Allen: This was a movie with sound on disc?

Mickey Hickey: With sound on disc, Vitaphone yeah. And, (you'll have to stop me 'cause now and again I'm running away and...) But it's sound on disc, so... We had this particular rip-up, so he'd got all the [indecipherable] joined, I said, "No, you can't do that." So he said, "Why can't I do that?" I said, "You can't, you've got to put that spacing back." So he said "That's a second," he said, "I told you, I don't know why Falkner sent us this kid out here, he don't know what he's talking about!" I said, "Well what do you mean?" He said, "Well don't you understand Sonny, that if we put spacing in there's going to be nothing on the screen?" I said, "Well don't you understand Sir, that if you don't put it in, it's going to be out of sync? So it has to go back in, it doesn't matter what you feel like, it's got to go back! We've lost that amount of film, we've got to put that back!" [Chuckles] It was a bit of a job to get - eventually they got it, but... So that went on so, the next thing we knew then, I was down there and - a lot of the big cinemas now, they were beginning to get plenty of films being made - because don't forget at the beginning the supply wasn't there, that's why we always used to have one sound film and one silent film. And also the other thing we had on the sound film - when we were running the sound and silent - as you walked into the auditorium there'd be a red light flashing, and underneath it would say, "When the red light is flashing, please do not make any noise - sound picture in operation." [Laughs] So we used to get that, you see. Anyway, now you see, I've gone back again you see, so now I've...

Bob Allen: That's fine. So was I - it's like going into the actual recording studio, with the red light up.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah [chuckles.]

Bob Allen: Can I just... On the Vitaphone piece and so on - did you often have breaks then? I mean, apart from this large rip up?

Mickey Hickey: We were getting - I'll come to a funny one in a minute, much later on in my life when I was about - no I was about eighteen, nineteen, I suppose at the time. I kept moving from one place to the other and new cinemas were being built, I wanted to go there, all the time I wanted to move up. I came up against things where engineers would say, "No, you're too young." And I'd say, "Well my age has got nothing to do with it, it's what I know and what I'm capable of doing." But one of those was Bob Richardson, - well he ended up, funny enough, as chief projectionists at MGM studios, so I reminded him of it. He said, "Yes," he said, "I got fired because of you!" So that was another story. Anyway as I say, we all went off to the different places, so - all the - Universal and that. And ABC Cinemas at the time were just beginning, a fellow by the name of John Maxwell, I think you may have heard of him, from Scotland. He'd got The Regal, Marble Arch, and he was just beginning to build stuff up in the south, taking over cinemas and what have you. At the same time they decided that they would operate together with what was known then as the BIP Studios in Elstree, which is the old BIP Studios that you know down the road, because it eventually became the ABC and all that sort of thing. So he decided to end up with that. And the very first real film in my age was a picture called 'Atlantic'. And they got that. Now he needed a shop window. But Universals had taken over the Alhambra for a shop window for their stuff, because MGM had theirs, and all the others, they all had their own one. But Universals had this 'All Quiet on the Western Front' and 'The King of Jazz' coming along to be shown, they'd been shown in America but hadn't quite reached us over here. So they took over the Alhambra at one thousand pound per week, from Stoll's - meaning that Stoll's got a thousand-pound a week, but everything else was down to Universal. So we ran 'All Quiet on the Western Front', I think for about three or four months, and then we took it off and put 'The King of Jazz' on with Paul Whiteman. Well after that, things weren't going very well. [pause] Er... sorry, I've got this the wrong way round, can I go back?

Bob Allen: Hmm, yes.

Mickey Hickey: Now we'll go back to the BIP - they wanted a shop window, so we decided to put 'Atlantic' on and so they'd taken the place of over a thousand pound a week from Stoll's. So we did very well on 'Atlantic', I think it ran for about five weeks, maybe six weeks, very long. So then they put another picture on called 'Blackmail' which was made by Hitch. Well, that didn't do very well, we weren't getting the audiences, where people were. I mean you were getting the big films from America, they were running for anything up to six months, and of course this was no good. So they took that off and put a thing on called 'Juno and the Paycock', which was a disaster. So now in the meantime (this is where we're now getting right) Universal were looking for a place, so they stepped in and said, "Right, we'll take the Alhambra off you and we'll pay Stoll's for the Alhambra at one thousand pound per week. So we showed 'All Quiet on the Western Front' - I think it was also at The Rialto, Leicester Square, we were showing it as well.

There were two cinemas showing that. And we eventually then went to 'The King of Jazz' and one or two others, and the year finished, and when the year finished up, "Ahh, now," the chief engineer at Stoll's said, "I'm sorry, Mickey, I haven't got anything for you at the present. Anything crops up, I'll be in touch." But anyway, ABC thought, "Well we've taken over," they'd got to know me then, "we've taken over the Hippodrome, Lewisham Hippodrome. There's a job over there if you want it." So I went over to Lewisham Hippodrome. And before Jack Robinson [NB presumably meaning, "before you could say Jack Robinson"], Stoll's were back again, and this time now, they were producing a play called 'Waltzes from Vienna', producing the whole play, it's come in from scratch - just a script, and you were working the same as you would in a studio, from scratch. So we were rehearsing and producing that for about three months, and I was on the spots. So I've changed over now, I've come out of the projection room, I was on the spotlights, and I did very well. Anyway, we had the grand opening night, which was beautiful, it was a great success, and the stuff that we did was very good. Moving orchestra, bringing an orchestra up, taking it back to stage as she's going backstage, dancers coming in from the wings, you know - dancing to 'The Blue Danube', because this was Johann Strauss junior, not senior. So within a week of that, Mr Falkner - again quite right to what he said - got in touch with me. He said - their number one house was the Stoll, Kingsway, where they used to show two features - he said, "We're operating two shifts at the Stoll, Kingsway, and there's no rewind boy. There's going to be a senior chief, a senior second and a senior third." He said, "You're going to be a senior third on one shift and your old friend Harry Rayner" - who had been at the Astoria with me again - he was the senior chief on the other shift. So I went there in 1931, finished there in 1935. Well how I managed to finish there - we were working and, I don't know if you've come across one of these, Bob, we had [indecipherable] known as Rantograph[?] machine, it was a very good effects machine. You could get all sorts of things, you could put in raining cats and dogs on the screen - for anything you did - you know, you had all the bits and pieces, you know, that you put in, it was on a wheel. So I was in there one day, there was only two of them in England, there was one at The Regal, Marble Arch, and we had one at Stoll, Kingsway. I was in there this day and this gentleman came round, I heard him talk and I thought, "He's Irish!" So he heard me talking and he came over to me, he said, "Excuse me, you're Irish aren't you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How would you like to come and work in Dublin?" And I said, "Yes, if it's possible, if you prepare now." [?] He said, "Well yes, this machine that you've got here, we're installing one of those and we haven't got one in Ireland." And he said, "I'll show the lads - you'll be all right when you go over there, you come under the Transport and General Worker's Union." And he said, "We're opening up in September 1935." So anyway I had to go out to Dublin to see him, went out and saw him and sure enough I was engaged out there. Well now, when I went out there, the lads in the projection room - there's five of them - all taking a liking to me. We also had stage amplification because we were fifty-fifty, half variety, half cinema. And they took a liking to me, and anyway, the Transport and General Worker's Union, they wouldn't do anything about it, they tried to have me moved out. They said, "No, no, he's Irish, he was born in Ireland." They said, "Yes, but he learned his trade in England, he's nothing to do with us as far as we're concerned." So then Mr Pearce[?] came to me, he was the head and, by the way, he was at one time the partner of John Maxwell of ABC Cinemas. And a law was passed in Ireland that all companies in Ireland had to be, I think, seventy five per cent of Irish capital. So Associated British Cinemas had two cinemas in Dublin, one of them being - no, one in Dublin, the Savoy, Dublin and the Savoy, Cork. So Mr Pearce pulled a fast one, he steps in, forms Associated Irish Cinemas, you see! [Chuckles] Of course, that made him and Maxwell fall out anyway. Anyway

he came and saw me and he said, "We're opening up the Savoy, Limerick. I'm going to give you the job as chief projectionist." I was what, then? I was about twenty-three I suppose at the time. So I said, "All right." The next thing I know he sends for me and he says, "I'm very sorry, they've stopped work on the building." He said, "Before, we've been able to get round it, but the place hasn't finished being built yet and the Irish Transport Workers Union are saying, 'no' you can't have the job, because you learnt the trade in England." So, fair enough. So anyway, I stayed on at The Theatre Royal. Then I heard about a cinema in Belfast - Union Cinemas, Border Street, were opening up The Ritz, Belfast. So I wrote to the chief engineer - it's not like now where you can pick up a 'phone - I wrote to the chief engineer in Wardour Street. I said, "I'd like to do the job, what are the chances?" So eventually he said, "I'll be out in Dublin in two week's time, we're opening up in about three weeks, so I'll be out there in two week's time, I'll have a chat with you and discuss salary." So I said, "All right." So anyway the time came and The Ritz, Belfast opened up, and no sign of the chief engineer [chuckles], so I got in touch with him, wrote to him. He wrote back, he said, "I'm very sorry but the lads up there said 'no' when they heard you were coming up and that you were from England, you'd learnt your trade in England." They said, "No, we're not going to have that, he learnt his trade in England!" [Chuckles]. So you had the six counties who were British saying "No" and the others. So in the end I said, "Oh well, enough's enough." So I came home on holiday and saw my mother, my mother was living in Harrow. I went up and saw my old chief engineer at Stoll's at the Coliseum, told him what was happening. "Right" he said, "I've got a job for you." I said, "When does it start?" He said, "Three week's time." I said, "I've got to go back and work a week's notice." I went all the way back to Ireland and worked a week's notice. And he said, "What we're going to do, we're just going to have Sunday pictures and the newsreel during the week, with the variety. The job is yours as chief projectionist." So I came back, and that was the year before the war broke out. So the next thing, war breaks out, so we're completely closed. Nothing to do. I got a job for about a couple of months at a munitions factory in Barnes, making shells, and they were really white hot, and because with my complexion I was getting very burnt, I mean even through my clothes I was getting burnt. So I had to pack it in and it was lucky I did. The government decided then, with the blackout and everything else, that we could open the cinemas, as long as the blackout was going to be OK then the cinemas could open up again. So I went back to the Chiswick Empire and I was on five pound a week then as chief projectionist, but I got in with Gary De Wanne[?] who was the chief projectionist of the Warner and Stan Perry[?] who was chief projectionist at the Empire. Now they ran what was known as The Guild of Kinematograph Projectionists and Technicians. We were not a union, our idea was to improve our knowledge by going round and having lectures and all sorts of things, in other words we were prepared. Well now once you'd got into The Guild, you were in The Guild and any 'plum' jobs that were going, a Guild man got it. So I saw Gary, he was an Irishman too! [Chuckles] So I joined The Guild and found myself working at the Warner, Leicester Square, as an assistant. Getting the same money but no responsibility. Then he moved me on to - down to The Ritz on 'Gone with the Wind'. He said, "There's a job going down there, more money, Mick," he said. "you're senior second." So I went down there and then about a couple of months after, I'd been showing 'Gone with the Wind' for about four or five months and he sent for me. I went up and saw him in the box. He said, "I've got a nice job for you." I said, "Oh, what's that?" He said, "Paramount News, over at East Acton - the jobs yours, I've been in touch with them." So I went over there and we get round to now an entirely different thing all together. I'm now becoming a projectionist in a studio.

Bob Allen: Can we break there just for a minute - not exactly break, I'd like to go back to ask you some questions on the technicalities and so on. Again, harking back to the sound on disc, the Vitaphone system...

Mickey Hickey: The Vitaphone.

Bob Allen: If you had a break during a show, what was your procedure then?

Mickey Hickey: You had no choice, you just put the non-sync on - music - until you had repaired it, and you couldn't go back, you see. You couldn't start on the next reel. Go back, you had to just - you had no choice.

Bob Allen: How did you find your sync again?

Mickey Hickey: We had to go back [chuckles] to the beginning and start again!

Bob Allen: Oh back to the beginning of the reel?

Mickey Hickey: Oh yes, we had to go back to the beginning and start again.

Bob Allen: I see!

Mickey Hickey: We had no choice. But it didn't happen an awful lot. You see one of the things we used to do, we were very careful with it, once we got the start mark in the picture gate - which again, I never mentioned that, but I should have done. Once we'd got the start marker in the picture gate - now there were always two of you, one would put the film on, the other one would do the disc, because in some cases some of the reels were only about five hundred feet. Now you're talking, you've got to change your arc, you've got to change your carbons, you've got to get that film on, you've got to get down, you've got to track the disc - which you can't. You can't be out front and out back, because you used to winch it, so you have to have the...

Bob Allen: Winch it on?

Mickey Hickey: On the flywheel.

Bob Allen: For the disc or for the...?

Mickey Hickey: For the disc.

Bob Allen: Yeah, that's from the - there was a start mark marked at the place for the pick up, for the stylus to come into the groove, right?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, to come down there. But we had a start mark on the film. Now say I'm going to run that projector, there's a fellow on the other projector, what I would do, I'd put my reel on at the start. Now he'd get my disc and we'd double-check each other then, making sure I'd got the right reel and making sure he's got the right disc. And once we'd done that, as I say, with

only five hundred feet, you've got to work, go quick. Sometimes you're lucky you'll probably get eight or nine hundred, so you've got a better chance. So anyway he'd go down and what I'd do is, I'd put my start mark in the gate, so he'd put his start mark on the disc, then we'd switch on, and you'd find she'd probably kick a little bit, you know, like you would on an interlock. So once you'd done that and it hadn't moved - because you had a swan neck which you could bend right down close so that you could make sure that you were tracking. And once you'd got it down onto that groove and you switched her on, as I say, she'd give a little bit of a kick but you could see if she's moved off or she hasn't. And if she hadn't then you'd get the flywheel and you'd gently crank her. So you're cranking the film down and you're moving the discs, the discs are going round as well, so you're still keeping sync. Now you know you're all right, you can now pull the swan neck away, because if you don't...

Bob Allen: The swan neck was a light?

Mickey Hickey: A light, the swan neck. Because if you don't...

Bob Allen: A lamp on a swan neck, yeah

Mickey Hickey: And it has happened, where a fellow's left it down and you come and you suddenly find that she's caught on it, you know, it's happened over at Lewisham Hippodrome! But that was how we did it, we used to inch it and then you'd know you're all right.

Bob Allen: It's a bit like you were checking for the lock of the...

MA: Checking for the lock, in the old days, before your rock 'n' roll and all this business came in. But it was... It worked, but as I say, it wouldn't often happen because don't forget, this is the way you've got to look at it, Bob, we didn't have it for long, because sound on film was coming in. Oh I never mentioned that did I? Our first sound on film was from the old Fox company - not 20th Century Fox, the old original Fox Company.

Bob Allen: Yes, William Fox.

MA: There was a film called 'Speakeasy', and we, as projectionists, were so pleased, we thought, "Yeah! We haven't got this disc to mess about with, we can join two reels together, we can now have twenty minutes." We can relax for twenty minutes, you know, no longer have we got this rush, "get this one on quick!", "change the carbons!" We had none of that, because we joined the two together - one and two, three and four, five and six, and so on.

Bob Allen: Before the Vitaphone came in, then, and you were running silent movies, you used to run those in 2,000 foot blocks, too?

Mickey Hickey: Oh yes, we'd double them up.

Bob Allen: Yes, yeah.

Mickey Hickey: Oh yeah, we'd double them up.

Bob Allen: So this was a backward step, having to have the... Because I suppose the reason was that they were made up in sequences, more-or-less, as to how they could manage the dub and so on, as to editing the disc and so on?

Mickey Hickey: Well more so this happened on the disc side, because I mean, they'd get into sequence, of maybe a dance sequence and the dance sequence might finish maybe at the end of 450 feet or something like that so they're not going to... So what happens is, well this is what was creating these short reels, you know, and you really had to work hard. But there is another way of looking at it. I think us projectionists in those days - I'm not going to say they're not the same nowadays - but in those days we prided ourselves on the job, we prided ourselves on having a very good light and we just loved the job, it was as simple as that. Oh we got paid for it, naturally, but we really loved the job. We weren't doing it for the money, we - well we were doing it for the money, but you know...

Bob Allen: Hmm, I understand.

Mickey Hickey: We loved the job, and I don't suppose I ever came across any projectionist, of the ones I knew, that were not dedicated to that particular job that was the cinema. We were taking people on - on a fairy-go-round ride, getting rid of their worries. They're sitting back there and you've got them on a magic carpet, if you like, and they can forget everything for about two-and-a-half to three hours, forget all their problems. And I think we felt that way about it. And also we'd started to become, we wanted to be showmen. We didn't want to just open the shutter and spec the film on the curtains and pull the tabs back and let them see. We used to try to do it - we'd open the house tabs first, with incidental music, it was called the non-sync. We had two tables that we always could - always had music on there if we wanted. And then, we then throw out the sensor on and once we went to throw the sensor on, we'd draw the curtains and the curtains would be drawn so that the sensor would eventually end up on the screen now and that would be that. Plus the fact that we'd have - if we had them - which we did have, like the Astoria, Charing Cross, we had the footlights. We had all those sort of things then, we had everything that we wanted there in that sort of - like you know we were learning, we were becoming showmen. We were no longer just a projectionist just minding a projector, we were trying to do other things as well, and I think we got a kick out of it. And of course then when we got to the cine-variety, of course then we did come into our own because we were handling the spotlights as well. I don't know if you've ever come across one, called a Stelmar[?] - very big long fellow there, he was a beauty - but you could have a black-out stage, once you'd got the hang of them you'd stand right behind them - you'd go from here to the entrance there, very long - and you'd have these magnifiers in the front and if they say, "Right, we're gonna - there's somebody coming." On a cue - somebody - you'd got to pick them up. Black stage! So you get a cue, and [claps hands once], come like that, and I guarantee you we'd pick 'em up straight away. Because you can't see them, but if they're in the right spot we'll pick 'em up, or we used to pick 'em up. And these were little things that sort of made it. Well we're getting onto that now, we've now got to the er...

Bob Allen: I'm now going to interrupt you again just to ask another question. You mentioned what I took to be a sound effects machine...

Mickey Hickey: What the Brencode Branograph[?] machine?

Bob Allen: What was it exactly?

Mickey Hickey: It was called the Brencode Branograph[?] machine.

Bob Allen: And this, you could produce rain or...

Mickey Hickey: Rain or snow, I mean I made a beautiful - we wanted some snow, so I got hold of a large cardboard disc at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, from the chief. He was very good at making things like that. And this large - and the right circumference, it had to have a hole in the middle because we had to fit it on the - and lock it off with a couple of nuts, nuts and bolts under the front. Because it was on a - we could wind it round you see. And I then got hold of a, like a bradawl, and I went round all this cardboard banging holes all, anywhere - you know, scattering them. And when we put it onto the curtains and we started to...it really looked good, it looked as if there were flakes of snow...

Bob Allen: Oh I see, it was a visual effect!

Mickey Hickey: Oh yes...

Bob Allen: I was thinking it was a sound effects thing?

Mickey Hickey: No, no, no, no.

Bob Allen: Oh, visual effects, hmm.

Mickey Hickey: No this was visual effects.

Bob Allen: For your stage presentation?

Mickey Hickey: Yes, for that.

Bob Allen: I see, yes.

Mickey Hickey: And also, that's when I said, when I said to you about 'cats and dogs'. If you had a disc that had cats and dogs on it, 'raining cats and dogs' - I think we did even do that, you'd put it on there and you just turned it by hand and it was...

Bob Allen: I still thought you meant, 'raining cats' and making the noise of 'raining cats and dogs'! I see.

Mickey Hickey: [Chuckling.] They were all little things we used to try and think up. The chief projectionist at the - funny, I saw him when I was out in Ireland on 'Barry Lyndon', I've got someone that said they knew him and I got him to meet me in the pub, and he walked past me, didn't recognise me, because we were talking about over thirty years, you see. But he was very good, very clever projectionist and he used to come up with some beautiful ideas, very clever

man. He'd have done well in the West End of London if he'd have come over, but he was quite happy over there. So we've got now as far as where I'm coming into the studio now...

Bob Allen: Well just hold on there, because we're just about at the end of that side, so I think if I turn it over and...

[End of Tape 1, Side 1] [Tape 1, Side 2]

Bob Allen: We're running again, this is Side Two of Cassette One and you've now started work at Paramount News, promoted to Paramount News.

Mickey Hickey: Paramount News. We're now leaving the cinema and we're starting...

Bob Allen: Cinema projection, yeah.

Mickey Hickey: Cinema projection. And we had - there was only one projectionist there - Oh you probably know the chief of sound at the time, Red Law? He was chief of sound of Paramount News in those days...

Bob Allen: I didn't know that, I knew Red Law later.

Mickey Hickey: But Red worked at Shepperton, didn't he?

Bob Allen: Hmm, hmm.

Mickey Hickey: Well he was chief of sound at the time when I was at Paramount News, just before, well - the early years of the war. Because, having gone to Paramount News, The Ministry of Information, of course I was reserved occupation for a start. Well Albert Till[?] ran the whole thing on his own, and myself, and when we used to do what was known as 'The Issue' - that's the newsreel - we'd be going on, and Charlie Green was there with Red Law at the time. Charlie told me dear old Red rang up and he said, "Well I've made a mess of that." "All right, well the front section's OK, put new start marks on." So I used to say to Albert, "Albert I don't understand this." He said, "What?" He said, "You'll get it, I was the same, when I first came from the cinemas into... I thought to myself, 'I'm never going to get this.'" He said, "You'll get it, it'll all fall into place." I said, "What's the point of putting these start marks on?" He said, "Well what we're going to do, we've got a good front, so we're keeping that. Now we're going to do an end section or a centre section, just in case we mess the end up." Anyway in the end I eventually cottoned on! But anyway! Then they were getting very busy and what we were doing - there was a lot of stuff coming in for the Forces, the AKS at Wembley and things like that. So a lot of features were coming in and they were being sent over to Pinewood and places like that for a new negative, for reduction, because they found that density was better for reduction rather than area, sound-wise. So anyway I was then...

Bob Allen: This is a reduction to 16mm?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, reduction to 16mm. I was then put in charge and most of my time was spent now back [chuckles] as if I was back in the cinema again showing features! Tommy Cummins who was the chief editor.

Bob Allen: He was at Paramount then, Tommy Cummins?

Mickey Hickey: Tommy Cummins was our chief.

Bob Allen: Yes, because I knew him when I worked for Pathe.

Mickey Hickey: That's right, and Jim Mellor then?

Bob Allen: Jim...?

Mickey Hickey: Jim Mellor.

Bob Allen: No I don't remember that name.

Mickey Hickey: Oh well he was at Pathe. Anyway, everything was going along all right and I enjoyed it there. I was living at [indecipherable], I was married to my first wife then - not the one upstairs - I was married to the first wife then. Anyway we used to come, and they were very good to us, Paramount were a very good company to work for. So suddenly after about two years working there, the war had been on two years, I suddenly get call-up papers! [Chuckling] So I thought, "What's this?" So I went in and saw the girl, Tommy Cummins's secretary. She said, "Oh I'm terribly sorry." "Why?" "Well," she said, "you're not the only one, there's two others!" She said, "I'll have to have a chat with them to see what's happened." So what happened, there was two others, and she'd forgotten to put in for - they had to put in every three months for reserve occupation. So of course - forgot mine and forgot the other two - one of them ended up in the RAF! So anyway MOI said, "If these people were important to you, you wouldn't forget to apply for them," so of course that was it. Now they'd got their hands on you, this was what the war office wanted. So I get called up and the next thing I know I'm sent down to Leicester, a place called Oadby where Leicester racecourse is - Royal Army Ordinance Core. So, right I've finished there. We finish there and I get sent off to London. Having done my full training in the war, I was sent to the AKS at Wembley. And the AKS at Wembley, they were having a chat what to do one day and they came to me and said (because funny enough, I had a flat in Wembley, I lived in Wembley!) [Chuckles.] So they let me sleep out but during the daytime they said, "What did I like doing?" I said, "Oh I love gardening." They said, "All right, you can go and look after the officer's gardens." Only one particular garden, you know, so I was doing all right. So then er...

Bob Allen: What were you supposed to be doing as far as war-wise then at this - that they could send you off to do the garden?

Mickey Hickey: Oh because you see, what happened, we'd only just arrived, we hadn't been sorted out, we'd got to go through - we'd just finished our training, the basic training, that's all - how to fire a rifle, how... see? And we ended up, so I got sent to Wembley. And the reason I got

sent to Wembley is because they'd looked at my records and found that I'd been a projectionist and, of course, at the time they were getting stuff ready for mobile projectors to go around showing pictures to the troops abroad as well as in England. So, of course, I was sent down for this particular reason. So they thought, well right, Hector Cowell[?] was the studio manager. So I got sent out to this to keep me out of the way. The next thing I know, John Cox sends for me. Now in the meantime I'd known that D. P. Fields who'd worked at Paramount News had been in touch with Paramount and said, "Anybody who gets called up, let me know who they are, what regiment they're in and I'll claim them." So that was another question, I didn't know much about that. So the next thing I know is John Cox sends for me, Captain Cox. "You're just the fellow I want," he said, "got a dubbing suite ready, we want somebody who knows a bit about dubbing." Now I didn't know enough about dubbing. You know who I'm talking about, John Cox?

Bob Allen: Yes, yes.

Mickey Hickey: So he said, "Right!" So that's all right. The next thing, I'm on guard duty. They took me off the gardening, see? John Cox said, "I'll have you taken off that job, get you an easier one. Stand on the door, just make sure you don't let anybody in that shouldn't come in, until we get this thing sorted out. Because it all has to be done legally and I'm going to apply for you now." So I suppose I should have said something, but I thought, "Well, he's an officer, I'm not going to say, 'as far as I know, Captain Field at Pinewood was going to apply for me as well!'" You see - I didn't know all this. The next thing I know is, he sends for me and he said, "What an awful lot of trouble you've caused." I said, "What trouble, Sir?" He said, "Why didn't you tell me about Pinewood studios?" I said, "Well because I didn't know, it was only hearsay, I knew nothing about Pinewood!" "Well" he said, "you've got to go off to the Great Central in London, you and about ninety-nine others, on a cameraman's course." This is how Pinewood got me. A cameraman's course was a War Office posting. Your regiment could have no say in the matter. So anyway I go up there and of the hundred there's only thirty accepted and, naturally, I'm one of them. So we end up at Pinewood studios, I go down on the first day for my course and Len Harris - you probably remember Len Harris the cameraman?

Bob Allen: I know the name. Can I interrupt a moment? Why do you think that you were selected then out of those - one of the thirty?

Mickey Hickey: Because Dick Field had already applied for me!

Bob Allen: Oh I see! [Chuckles.] It was who you know rather than...

Mickey Hickey: Yeah - well I didn't even know him, I'd never met him!

Bob Allen: No, no, but he knew of your previous experience then?

Mickey Hickey: Well he only knew me because I was ex-Paramount News, that was all. I didn't know him from Adam. But as I say, he eventually became my best friend, we were really pals as it worked out! So anyway they kept me on the course - this cameraman's course. So I'd only been down there for about half-an-hour, Len Harris said, "Private Hickey?" I said, "Yes, Sir!" He said, "Will you go over to the recording studio [corrects himself] - theatres over in the main block,

Theatres One and Two, the big ones." He says, "Captain Field over there wants to see you." I went over there. So I went in, there he was - scruffy - with his old battle-dress on. [Laughs] You know - two pips on here and one in his pocket! [Laughs.] Typical! So he said, "Right mess you've gotten everything into now, haven't you?" I said, "I don't know what you're on about, Sir." He said, "Why didn't you tell them over at the AKS at Wembley when Captain Cox sent for you and he said they'd got to apply for you, that I'd applied for you?" I said, "I didn't know that you'd applied for me, Sir. All I know is I was told that this could happen. Nobody told me." He said, "Well I have," he said, "you're with me now - get upstairs and start work!" Up to the projection room! [chuckles] Well that's how they got me. If he'd have asked for me as a projectionist, RAOC would have never let me go because RAOC - all projectionists came under RAOC at the AKS at Wembley. So the way to get me was to get me on a cameraman's course. Because after about six months he saw me and had a chat, he said, "Ordinance have been on and want to know if you've failed your test and why haven't you been 'RTU'd'?" Well of course I hadn't failed the test, because I was never on it and it was never intended that I'd go on it! So anyway, John Aldred then... The second front is beginning to loom on the horizon. John Aldred and Peter Hanford are earmarked for that, so D. P. Field now needed a new sound camera operator. So anyway John Aldred was given the job of taking care of me. So this particular day we'd already had a few goes, had a couple of reels in the bag and all of a sudden the Captain says, "All right, Mick - roll over." So I turned over, I'd got interlocked. Bert Carter who was the chief projectionist said, "Right, turn over!" So I turned over and right - turned it - ten minutes, see. So we're finished, the Captain gets on, he says, "OK Mickey, we'll print that." [correcting himself] No, no, he says, "OK Mick, we'll go again." [corrects himself] No, sorry, now let's get this right, he says, "Now Mickey, load up now, we'll have a take!" "Captain," I said, "I've just shot it!" He said, "You've what?" I said, "I've just shot it." He said, "I'll be upstairs in a minute." He came up, he said, "John Aldred," he said, "what's the matter with you? You're supposed to be looking after him!" He said, "I'm a Sergeant, he's only a Private!" He said, "I don't care, you're supposed to be looking after him! He's been and shot a reel, we don't want it! I wasn't ready, I was only rehearsing!" [Chuckling.] Well anyway, John Aldred, as you know, he went out with Peter.

Bob Allen: What was John Aldred doing then?

Mickey Hickey: He was sound camera operator.

Bob Allen: Oh he was sound camera operator.

Mickey Hickey: You see, but that was...with John going on the second front, well earmarked for the second front for when it did happen...

Bob Allen: And who (sorry), who was mixing?

Mickey Hickey: Oh D. P...

Bob Allen: He was mixing, yes.

Mickey Hickey: Oh he was the dubbing mixer. Peter wasn't, in those days, he used to do a little bit, but Peter changed over to camera. Because Peter changed over to camera and Peter and John

Aldred then came back onto sound when the second front started. But Peter... Peter was dropped very early, I think one plus one hour or something, we didn't ask, I know he's got an MBE...

Bob Allen: As a sound recordist?

Mickey Hickey: No, as a cameraman.

Bob Allen: As a cameraman?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, and then when they decided that they wanted sound out there, Peter reverted back to sound...

Bob Allen: I see.

Mickey Hickey: ...with John Aldred and I took John Aldred's place. And the other member of the sound crew was - oh he ended up with the National Film Board in Ottawa - George Crowle[?]. And he went out there and he contacted me when I was at MGM, said, "We've got a job for you out here, we'd like you to come out right away." He said, "Funny enough they had a was name of Hickey, so you should get on all right!" At the time I was skint. I was divorced from my first wife, I was courting the second one, I didn't have any money and I was also under a three month contract to MGM at the time as well. So I wrote back and said I would have to say, well, "Sorry." So it was a great shame but you never know what way things would have gone and I did very well, as it happened, in the end. I then started, when the Army Film Unit finished...

Bob Allen: You were at Pinewood all that time?

Mickey Hickey: I was at Pinewood all that time.

Bob Allen: You didn't get overseas at all with the Unit?

Mickey Hickey: No. I went overseas when the film unit packed up. When the film unit finished I still had a year to do so I was RTU'd to Ordinance at Leicester, and they sent me off to a camp up in Ollerton as a Sergeant in charge of entertainments [chuckles]. I'm back in the cinema again! I had two cinemas up there to look after, and a couple of helpers, some German helpers, like German Prisoners of War, and they also used to look after a theatre, if they had dances on I used to do that. Or if the Colonel - Lieutenant Colonel - if he wanted a 'do' in the Officer's Mess - his idea was to break down the snobbery that we had in the British army, that officers and other ranks must not mix. So he used to throw a party open now and again and invite all the senior ranks. And when he ever did that he used to say to me, "Sergeant, can you fix up a film show for us?" I said, "Yes," because I had a couple of Ben & Howell 16 mms. So I'd go over and fix that up you see, and be on free drinks and all that. I used to do well out of it. And eventually then I ended up in - my marriage had broken up and I decided to leave. 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' - hoping that would sort things out, but it didn't work out that way. War had finished and I ended up in Germany and down the South of France, and they put me in charge of a static laundry! [Chuckles.] Because they said - "Why did you put me in charge of that?" I asked once. He said, "Well we could see by your records you knew a little bit about electricity and as the

laundry is run mostly on it, we thought well..." [Chuckling.] No, he said, "We're short of lads, all we're getting in is these young people." The young ones were coming in, you see. Because don't forget I was late going in to the army, which meant of course that I came out late. So anyway I go back to England and D. P. Field had been trying to get hold of me and eventually I got hold of him and he said, "I've got a job for you." I said, "No, I want to work at Pinewood." He said, "All right then, if I tell you that John Aldred, Peter Hanford and myself were going to Amalgamated Studios in Borehamwood," (that's MGM) he said, "what are you going to say now?" I said, "Well now I'll say, I'm going to Amalgamated Studios in Borehamwood!" So he said, "Right! Go up and see Mr Watkins up in London and start at MGM." So of course I started off there as their number one sound recordist - well sound camera operator, as we were later called, or sound recordist-cum-camera operator.

Bob Allen: Can I interrupt a moment, you mentioned Amalgamated Studios...

Mickey Hickey: It was Amalgamated Studios, it was built before the war. Well what happened was, McAlpine who was building it - Soskin - was it Solskin - someone like that, who was building it, he went broke and McAlpine foreclosed and the war broke out, so the army then took it over. But of course when the war finished McAlpine had it [N.B. Actually Rank had it by then], MGM had so much money tied up in the country, they were not allowed to take the money out of the country, they had so much money - bursting at the seams, you know. They just wanted a studio in England, so they bought what was Amalgamated Studios, which became, as you know, MGM.

Bob Allen: I see, this is after the war, that it became MGM Studios?

Mickey Hickey: This was after the war it became MGM, not before the war.

Bob Allen: Now what about pictures like 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips' and 'A Yank at Oxford'? They were made before the war but they were MGM.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, they were made at Denham.

Bob Allen: They were made at Denham! I see!

Mickey Hickey: They were made at Denham. That's where Freddie Young got in with them.

Bob Allen: I see. And also because 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips', I think - didn't that get - it was nominated if it didn't get - an Academy Award for sound...

Mickey Hickey: That was Donat, wasn't it?

Bob Allen: Yes.

Mickey Hickey: Well I did the other 'Chips', the one with Peter O'Toole.

Bob Allen: That was the much later on one.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah with...

Bob Allen: That was at MGM Studios...

Mickey Hickey: Yeah I did that one, with O'Toole. And another interesting story, now, are you still running Bob?

Bob Allen: We're still running, yes.

Mickey Hickey: Well what I'd like to know is, very often - and you must have come across it the same as everybody else in the business, where you get the funny moments. My favourite one, I think this one's a classic! We were out in San Falou[?] doing this film with Hayley Mills called 'The Truth About Spring', Sash Fisher was the mixer. Neil Stevenson, who's now dead, was the sound maintenance. Fred Emery 'Junior', that's old Fred's son, was the boom operator and I was the sound camera operator. We were in this little fishing village called San Falou and the idea was, it was supposed to be a Caribbean Island. So we were moored about a mile or so off the beach - well I won't say a mile - but we were moored a long way out off the beach. And everything was taking place on this barge, which meant - there was nothing there, only a flat-bottomed barge, nothing else there - because if you wanted a wee (excuse me for saying that) [chuckling] well we could go, but you had to think about the ladies, what did we do for them? So we used to have to find some way of getting them ashore, you see! But anyway, one of the prop men, he was always jumping about this, that and the other, and everybody saw him jumping from one boat to the other. And when he fell in the water this day, nobody took any notice, they thought, no, he's always jumping around from one boat to the other. It was only that eventually we thought, "This fellow's in trouble." Anyway they fished him out and found he couldn't swim! They had a check-up, I think sixty per cent of us on that boat could not swim! I could. But the funny one I'll tell you about, every Sunday was our day off and we used to go down to Louie's Bar down in San Falou to have our lunch. Sash wouldn't come with us, because Sash was one of the old type mixers, you know, mustn't mix with the boys you know? You've come across it I imagine?

Bob Allen: Hmm.

Mickey Hickey: So we went down and Fred Emery had an insatiable appetite. So we'd had this lovely meal and we'd had a large jug of Sangria, which in those days was not very well known, you know I'm talking about - well over thirty, nearly forty years ago - Sangria wasn't very well known in those days. So anyway, we'd finished that and we're enjoying ourselves, and a car pulled up and we could see it was Lionel Jeffries, and there's a whole load of kids and an elderly woman and another woman. "Is this the way to Mill Hill?" he said. And we said, "Yes, just keep going," you know. So Fred said, "Never mind about him, I'm hungry!" I said, "Fred, you're always hungry, we've had a good meal," I said, "I've got an idea." He said, "What's that?" Well you know, in England, you know, the Welsh Rarebit, what we always call a Welsh Rabbit, don't we?

Bob Allen: Hmm.

Mickey Hickey: I said, "I tell you what, Fred, we'll have three Welsh Rabbits."

Bob Allen: He said, "That's a good idea."

Mickey Hickey: So I said, "Louis!" He came over, "Si, Signor?" I said, "Louis, three Welsh Rabbits." [Pause] I said, "Louis, three Welsh Rabbits!" "Si Signor." So he goes away, then he comes back, he says, "Signor?" I says, "Yes what is it Louis?" He said, "We have no rabbit in Sans Falou today, but the chicken is very good!" [Chuckles.] I said, "Get me a bottle of wine that the chef likes, take me into the kitchen." So I went into the kitchen with a bottle of wine, I said, "Chef - Welsh Rabbit! Bread! Toast! Cheese!" [Pause] "Welsh Rabbit!" So that was melted cheese on toast, but that was our Welsh Rabbit, I think it's a lovely one! [Chuckles.] "We have no rabbit in Sans Falou today, but the chicken is very good!" You must have come across some more things like that and I feel little things like that, little snippets like that, you know. Another one, we were doing 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips' and we were staying in Vetri Sul Mare down near Sorrento. We'd finished all the stuff around Pompeii. And we had a one day shoot only at a temple that Mussolini had been responsible for uncovering, a Greek temple at Peirstom [?]....

Bob Allen: Oh at Peirstom, yes, ah hmm...

Mickey Hickey: It's just the other side from where the British emissary is. So we're down there, we're only there for the one day because after that we're doing night shooting down in Posetallo[?]. So this woman comes, she says to me, "You're all English aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "You're making a film?" I said, "That's right." She said, "Well tell me, what's the name of the film?" I said, "'Goodbye, Mr. Chips.'" She said, "Well that's very odd." I said, "Why, what's odd about it?" "Well," she said, "my husband and myself, we came through Cherbourg two weeks ago and they're making a film called 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips!'" I said, "Well we're out here now, but that was us, it was us!" [Laughs.] But you know funny little things that happen. Gerry Turner, who's now dead, poor old Gerry, he was great. So we were doing this film called 'Nine Hours to Rama' which was the nine hours leading up to the assassination of....

Bob Allen: Gerry Turner of course was a mixer at this time?

Mickey Hickey: Gerry was, yes. He was the number one mixer actually, he took it over from Sash. Because Sash upset the - we were doing 'Anastasia' and Sash couldn't get on with Lidvak, they're both Russians. Sash was Russian and Lidvak was Russian, and they just couldn't get on. So somebody had to go, so Sash went and Gerry Turner took over as the number one floor mixer, from then onwards. Well we're out there with Mark Robson, we're doing this 'Nine Hours to Rama', this is the nine hours leading up to the assassination of Gandhi. Well the previous day we'd been down to have a look at the spot and we came to a road - one road went that way and one road went that way you see. And we'd been down there having a look, trying to do some effects or something. Anyway, we were off shooting and Mark Robson said - we had a convoy, it must have been about a hundred vehicles if not more, you know what it's like Bob, I don't have to tell you, you've come across it as well. Mark Robson said, "We've got to go and do this shots. It's only one shot, won't take long." So Mike Bassett said to me, "do you know what that is?"

Bob Allen: He was maintenance?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah.

Bob Allen: Hmm.

Mickey Hickey: He always called me 'Hick'. He said, "You know where that is, Hick?" I said, "Yeah I know where it is." He said, "All right." So we went along. So Gerry said, "Find the way" So Mark Robson said, "Gerry Turner, Gerry knows." Because this was the second picture on the trot that we'd done for Mark. We'd done a back-to-back. We did one in Wales, finished that and then went out to this one. So he said, "Gerry knows the way, everybody follow Gerry Turner!" So we get in the sand, track that way, and we'd got the Indian driver driving us. So we come down, Gerry goes. Bassett, as always, says, "Has he gone the right way, Hick?" I said, "No he hasn't, he should have taken the right fork." So Gerry up front said, "I don't know why I keep having him on pictures with me. I'm getting fed-up with him! He always thinks he's right, he thinks he knows everything!" I said, "Gerry, you're going the wrong way! You should have taken the right fork." He said, "No, no!" We went on, we must have been travelling for over an hour and we're on a road now where you can't even turn round! And we came to this barrier across the road that says, "You Are Now Entering The Punjab" [laughs.] Now we've got to turn round, but we can't turn round! So Mark Robson said, "Right that's it for today boys, everybody go home!" [Laughs.] He was so funny that way. The other one, we were in Kowloon in the hotel, Mark Robson says to Gerry, he says, "Gerry, I want you and the boys to go - there's restaurant not far from here where they sing the menu, it's beautiful. The girls go around singing the menu, I want a recording of it done." So we get up in the morning, get the Chinese driver and go off. So we're going up Neyton[?] Road, so Bassett says, "All right Hick?" I said, "No, they're going the wrong way."

[Knock at door]

Mickey Hickey: Excuse me, Bob.

[break in recording]

Mickey Hickey: We all get out of the car after breakfast on the Sunday morning and we go up Neyton[?] Road, I don't know if you know Neyton [?] Road, have you been to Hong Kong? This was a picture called 'The World of Suzie Wong' by the way, with Nancy Kwan. Anyway we go up Neyton Road and Mike Bassett in front again says, "We going the right way Hick?" I said, "No!" He said, "What are you talking about?" Gerry says, "I wish he'd shut up! He always thinks he's right!" And Bassett says, "Well of course he's always right, he is always right, you're going the wrong way!" So we're going on and on, I said, "Gerry you can do something about this," you know, because I saw a signpost not far away it said, 'The New Territory'. So I said, "Look, we'll stop and you go in and ask. When you go into the caf" - that we'd pulled up at - "don't go in and say 'do - er - the way to - er - directions...' [in mock accent] Because Gerry always used to - because they spoke in broken English he thought if he spoke in broken English they would understand him, see? So he comes back, he looks at me, he said to the driver, "Turn around." So we drove back to Kowloon and the restaurant was about five minutes walk from where our hotel was! [Laughs]. We'd been out all the morning! These are funny little things that happened, you know. Surely you've got one haven't you? Haven't you got one?

Bob Allen: Well I suppose so, but we're talking about yours.

[MH laughs.]

Mickey Hickey: But it was good. Anyway, what happened then? MGM closed, as you know.

Bob Allen: So just before that, this was - you were established at MGM pretty soon after the finish of the war then?

Mickey Hickey: Oh there is a gap I didn't tell you about, are you still running?

Bob Allen: Yeah.

Mickey Hickey: After nine years at MGM I got fed-up with Watkins. He was bringing people in, sending them on lovely locations all around the world and keeping me in the dubbing theatre. So in the end he came to me he said, "I understand you're getting married in September?" I said, "That's right." He said, "Well I'm going to send you on 'Bhowani Junction', give you some money for your wedding." So I said, "All right." About a month afterwards I was downstairs and his secretary said to J.B. Smith, who was the dubbing mixer, she said, "Are you going to tell him or shall I?" So J. B. said, "No, I can't tell him." So Kay said to me - I can't tell you the words she used but, "That old so-and-so, you know what he's done?" I said, "What's he done?" She said, "He asked me this morning to get in touch with Peter Day, at National Studios, and offer him 'Bhowani Junction'." So I went in and I nearly took the door off the hinges! I said, "What's this all about?" He said, "I can't let you go, we've got a large dubbing session coming up, we've got a music session coming up, and Frank Clarke - he was the chief editor - he'll be down on me. I daren't let you go." Because we had six sound cameras up in the dubbing room. He said, "I can't let you go." There was two area and four densities. So he said, "I can't let you go." I said, "Right, I'll tell you what I'll do," I said, "Kay?" She said, "What is it Mickey?" I says, "I've got a week owing," I said, "Right, make out a chit, give it to the Governor here, I'm having a week off, find myself another job." Anyway I went out, and at the time there was a job going at ABC. And of course they had an agreement in those days, they wouldn't poach each other's staff. So in the end I went down and saw them and they said, "Well we want you to take this job and the reason we want you to take it is because there is a particular projectionist who's going to get it if an ACT man doesn't apply." So they said, "We want you to apply for it even if you don't want it." So I applied for it and having gone so far I thought, "Oh I might as well go the full hog now." Harold King was chief of sound at the time, so I thought, "Right!" So anyway I ended up down the road. Well I didn't like it, because the freedom at MGM, we used to go in and just sign in, we didn't have to clock in, and if you had no picture to work on, Watty didn't mind you sitting in the staff room. But at EMI if you had no work to do you had to go and clean up cables and all sorts of things. So I stuck it for three months and Danziger's opened up and they offered me a job and if I would join them, when they formed the second unit they would make me mixer of the second unit. So I went down there and Charlie - I forget his name now, he was in the RAF, a mixer...

Bob Allen: Tasto?

Mickey Hickey: No not Charles Tasto, no. No I can't think of it...

Bob Allen: Poulton?

Mickey Hickey: He was there but he didn't get on with the chief engineer, the chief engineer was ex-MGM. And I used to say to him, I said, "I'd watch it, because he's going to have you," and he eventually did have him. And the result was, who came in there was um...

Bob Allen: Bill Howells...?

Mickey Hickey: No it was before him, it was - Barry Copeland.

Bob Allen: Barry, oh yes.

Mickey Hickey: Barry came in and I worked with Barry, and they were still building the stages while we were shooting! And we had to get this boom across on planks of wood and if it rained we had to stop. So I said to Barry one day, I said, "You're going to have to do something about it, Barry." He said, "Why?" I said - and the chief engineer, Alan Brown, who was ex-MGM, I said, "He's after you, you know. Put your foot down, just tell him." "What's the good?" he said. "Danziger said 'we're not interested.'" All that Danzigers wanted was quantity not quality, that's all they wanted. Two and a half days we're doing at [indecipherable]. So I said, "If you don't, he's going to have you", and sure enough, he did have him. Anyway he got rid of him. And then they closed down and I put myself on the ACT list and the next day I get a call from Kay at MGM Studios. She said, "We've got an artist test coming up, 'Anastasia', would you like to do it?" I said, "Yeah, I'll come and do it." I went up, did the artist test. She said, "You go and see Watty, the job's yours if you want it" - sound camera operator with Sash Fisher. I said, "Oh yeah?" She said, "Yes." I said, "I'm not going to see him, he knows why I left. I'm not going to go in crawling to him. If he wants me, he can come out and offer it to me." So she said, "If you won't bleedin' well do it, I'll go!" So she went in and told him, "Mickey wants the job." So he said, "Well tell him to come in." She said, "No, he refuses to come and see you!" [Chuckles] So I'm in the toilet, and Harry Watkin comes in, "Oh, dear boy, we'd like you to do 'Anastasia.' Now when you've done 'Anastasia' I understand that 'Island in the Sun' is coming up. Now we'll talk to you more about that later on, but would you care to do it?" I said, "Yes all right, I'll do it." And I was with Sash. Now of course Sash then got the push, he didn't get on with Litvak. Gerry Turner took over and that meant that Gerry and myself - well, Gerry had always wanted me with him, when he first went up there. He now thought, "Well we're together now, us two mates," because I was with him for over ten years. Anyway Gerry took over and then Watty said to me, "Now we've got 'Island in the Sun' coming up." Johnny Palmer, who was in the army film unit with me, he was an officer...

[break in recording]

Bob Allen: We're running again.

Mickey Hickey: So anyway, getting back to John Palmer and that, and 'Island in the Sun'. I ended up doing 'Island in the Sun' with Gerry Turner. It took us three and-a-half days to get there and when I went back to...

Bob Allen: This was to...?

Mickey Hickey: To Grenada.

Bob Allen: Hmm.

Mickey Hickey: As I said, went about a few years after that, well it was many years after that, when we went out to do 'The Tamarind Seed' with Omar Sharif and Julie Andrews, the journey took us seven and-a-half hours! [Chuckles.] So there was quite a big difference!

Bob Allen: Going to Grenada - was that by sea?

Mickey Hickey: Going to Barbados.

Bob Allen: But it was all by sea, was that?

Mickey Hickey: No, Barbados, three days, no the three days was when the old Strutter cruisers...

Bob Allen: Oh yeah!

Mickey Hickey: The ruddy piston jobs, you see? The only plane that they had in those days, which had a terrible prop[ellor] was - 'The Viscount' - and 'The Viscount' was a short-range plane. So we went to New York on the Strutter cruiser, stayed overnight in New York, then hedge-hopped all the way down the islands on 'The Viscount' to Trinidad, arriving too late to get a flight to Grenada, and then going over the following day - so you're talking about three days.

Bob Allen: Was all the equipment with you then?

Mickey Hickey: Equipment, yeah. We used to charter the plane, see? Fox always chartered the aeroplane and all the equipment and everything was on it. We were really well and truly laden, you know. On the way back, Mike Bassett again was with me and we left Barbados and Mike said - we'd been up about five or ten minutes - he said, "What do you see?" I said, "Well Mike, looking out of the window, the tip of the wing is practically touching the water!" He said, "Oh bloody hell!" So anyway [indecipherable] been having trouble, we'd had to wait three days to get the flight. So anyway we got talking to the Skipper, it was our own plane, there was plenty of liquor flowing and that - he came round and I said, "I understand you're going to make the long hop?" He said, "No, we'd never make the long hop in this!" That was from Bermuda to England. He said, "No, no, we wouldn't make it, we'd never make it, we'd end up in the drink," he said, "No!" Anyway on the way he said, "We're going to have to stop at Bermuda tonight because one of the port engines has gone." So anyway, what happens, we get off there - now of course all our stuff, being a very hot climate, this was December, having left a very hot climate, we're all just like this, you see? And we didn't have a lot of money either, not the money that was needed. So we went into The Castle Harbour Hotel in Bermuda that we stayed in, and we went down there and they said, "You can't go into the restaurant unless you've got a tie on." So we said, "Well, we haven't got any ties, they're all on the aeroplane, we're stuck!" So anyway after a while everything sorted itself out and then the camera boys, one of 'em being Nick Roeg who you

probably know very well, he was an assistant then, and Alex - Alex Thompson, and myself, we were up there, and we were playing poker. So I'd go off to see the lads, because I went down to see John Wilcox, the cameraman, to have a drink with him, because he said, "I've got plenty of dollars, Mick, come down and have a drink with me." So I went down and left the lads, and they ordered a fantastic meal and everything else you see. Anyway when the fellow came up to pay - wanted the bill, of course they couldn't pay for it because they didn't have any money [laughs] nobody thought we were going to stay in Bermuda for the night. So anyway the manager comes up and he's laying the law down and of course they told him what happened and he got most apologetic. He said, "I didn't realise this, I was never put in the picture. So in other words, you're all stuck here?" We said, "Yeah we're stuck here and everything we've got is on the aeroplane. Some of us have got a bit of money." He said, "Let me have the bill." So he got the bill, tore it up - "Have it on the house!" And when we were leaving in the morning, Nick Roeg came to me afterwards when we got on the plane, he said, "Here, look at that." I said, "What's that?" He said, "As we were leaving the doorman gave me a tip!" [Laughs.] He said, "He gave me a dollar - thought, 'these poor hard-up English!'" It wasn't that, we just couldn't get at the stuff, it was stuck on the aeroplane. So then, the wife's doing her nut, I'd only been married about three months! Derek Cavanagh [?] was on the plane with us as well...

Bob Allen: Was he boom, was he?

Mickey Hickey: Derek was second boom yeah, sorry, we had two, two booms, because we had to do our own cutting. We had to cut 'Island in the Sun' - the disc, because we didn't have Nagras in those days, we were using Leever's-Rich, and we didn't have a tape, so we decided to cut one out there, because Belafonte was out there and we had to cut the disc out there. We worked late at night in an old shed infested with rats, running all over the place!

Bob Allen: What, this was using a disc recorder?

Mickey Hickey: A disc recorder...they'd cut 'Island in the Sun' - that's for the playback sequence.

Bob Allen: Oh it was just for the playback was it?

Mickey Hickey: Playback, by the time...

Bob Allen: Oh it must have been even master for the - used in the picture, because ...

Mickey Hickey: Anyway, by the time we came to the next one, 'Old Man Holler'[song], where he's fishing - I don't know if you've seen the film - where he's fishing at the sea at the side there, with the nets. By the time we'd got to black of course we'd got it on tape, so we were all right. But Derek...

Bob Allen: What were you playing it back on...

Mickey Hickey: No, off Leever's...

Bob Allen: At variable speed?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah. What happened was - oh wait a minute, did we? No, we must have done Old Man Holler - of course it would be variable speed wouldn't it? It was the only way you could keep the speed on that. Yes, there wasn't a control speed. The only way you could keep it there was to keep an eye on the strobe, that's all...

Bob Allen: The strobe.

Mickey Hickey: Oh no, you're right, it must have been, it must have been. Because I think that's why Derek came out, he came out as the second, sort of second boom operator. Because Derek, you see, before all this had been my loading boy at MGM [chuckles] so I practically trained him! He was a loading boy with me up in the dubbing room. Anyway, we came back from that, the wife's doing her nut because she'd rung up Heathrow and they didn't say, "Well no, with the bad weather there, they're grounded," they just said, "Well no, they're having a lot of engine trouble!" [Laughs.] So of course - the worst thing they could say! Anyway we got back in one piece anyway.

Bob Allen: Was it 'Island in the Sun' that [Mike Bassett] had his accident?

Mickey Hickey: No, no, that was the one, remember I told you, if we go back and I said to you about 'Nine Hours to Rama'. We did two pictures for Mark Robson back to back?

Bob Allen: Hmm...

Mickey Hickey: We were doing a picture for Mark Robson in Wales, called 'The Inspector'[aka 'Lisa']. Now the film was all about - you remember the time when they were trying to set up the new state of Israel and they were smuggling people in? I think it was called 'The Inspector'. Anyway we were up there and what was happening was, we were down in Swansea, we were in the Volkswagen, we always had our own driver for that. And Mike couldn't get in, it was raining, drizzling. Gerry was sitting beside me. I'm sitting here with the Narga, because I also controlled the speed for the camera as well. And the driver's there, and Mike wouldn't get in, there's a girl sitting in there, one of the extras sitting in the front. The window was open about that much, that's all. And in the end this girl got out and Mike got in, I said, "I'm glad of that Mike, you're getting wet." He said, "Well I didn't like to be rude, I didn't like to turf her out." So anyway a couple at a time, I gave him speed - turning cameras - explosion - bang! Mike falls forward, I said, "Oh don't mess about Mike, get up you silly so-and-so!" And he got up and it was just like a tap, it was just pouring out of him. So we stuck an old plastic mac, you know those old plastic macs that we had in those days, for rainproof stuffed that - anyway he lost his eye, so because...

Bob Allen: What had caused the - what? Had he fallen on...

Mickey Hickey: Well it was the wood not the metal. You see the metal they could have got out with a magnet but...

Bob Allen: But what did he fall on, or...?

Mickey Hickey: No he didn't. We used an explosion, see the idea was...

Bob Allen: Oh was it a fragment from the...

Mickey Hickey: A fragment from the barrel. The idea was that they were blowing holes in the barrel, they give the effect of bullets entering the barrel - it was a cast - the barrel - the wooden barrels, to hold water in.

Bob Allen: Water barrels, yeah.

Mickey Hickey: Well the idea was they were blowing and he put too big a charge in, see, he was our own effects man from MGM. And the result was, with such a large explosion it came right through. The metal they managed - they were able to get the metal out.

Bob Allen: Well how far away was the explosion then? From where he was sitting in the truck?

Mickey Hickey: One cable length, one cable length from us. We had one cable length out. A hundred feet.

Bob Allen: And he's sitting in the truck?

Mickey Hickey: Sitting in the truck...

Bob Allen: It came through the window?

Mickey Hickey: Oh it was opened about half an inch, yeah.

Bob Allen: It didn't break the window? It was just through that half inch?

Mickey Hickey: It just went through the half inch. It wouldn't have broken a window anyway because...

Bob Allen: A real freak!

Mickey Hickey: Yeah because he was sitting there and it caught this eye, and it was wood. They were able to get the metal out, because they got that out with a magnet. But it was the wood that had gone in, these fragments from the barrel that had gone in and that of course... Well it meant that he couldn't come out to India with us to do the other picture so while we were out there I had to keep an account of everything, because it all had to go down as money that he was losing through the eye. And while we were out there we heard then that they wanted to save the eye, because they thought it would be better if they saved the eye, even though he would be blind in it, rather than put a false one in. So while we were out there we got the message out that he'd - I think he wrote to either me or Gerry - that he had to lose the eye, otherwise it was going to affect the good eye. So they had to take the eye out and put an artificial one in. And then they were arguing as to who was going to pay, because he was MGM staff on a 20th Century Fox picture, so you know - the argument was who was going to pay, who was going to meet the bill! Well, I don't think he got an awful lot out of it. But he still drove every day from Camberley in Surrey to MGM. Now is Mike still alive? I never get a card.

Bob Allen: As far as I know...

Mickey Hickey: I never get a card from him, I used to get a card every Christmas and it stopped about five years ago.

Bob Allen: Yes as far as I know, I thought I heard of him fairly...

[End of Tape , Side 2] [Tape 2, Side 3]

Mickey Hickey: 'Ryan's Daughter' I think it was 1968. 1968, yeah. You're recording now, yeah? 1968, with John Bramall, Neville Stevenson[?], known as Oscar, Bill Cook and myself - we got 'Ryan's Daughter', with David Lean, out in Ireland. And we had all our own equipment on that, as MGM weren't interested because it was um - David Lean had a sort of company called 'Faraway Productions' which was based, I think, in Switzerland - but MGM sort of washed their hands of it. And we were on the payroll of 'Faraway Productions' even though we were permanent staff at MGM. Anyway, we were out there and of course everything went all right, but what happened was we had a lot of trouble with the weather. When David Lean first went out and saw it, it happened to be that very fantastic summer and he thought, "Oh this would be great!" But of course it doesn't work that way in Ireland and the result was that we couldn't finish the beach sequences, so we had to go out Cape Town. David Lean sent the photographer to New Zealand and to South Africa to find a terrain that would be something similar to the Macgillicuddy's Reeks which is Killarney - the mountains in Killarney. And the nearest he got to it - oh yes, we had to do the sequence where she's in the wood, in the thicket, and that wasn't finished, and of course the leaves were beginning to change colour from green to brown. So anyway he sent somebody out to New Zealand and it was decided then that New Zealand would give us what we were looking for, in vegetation and everything else. But during the meantime we suddenly got a break in the weather and we were able to finish the seduction sequence before the leaves went brown. So that meant now that we only had to complete the beach sequences. For Trevor Howard is looking for Mitchum and Mitchum has gone missing, in his nice shirt, and he's looking for him - and Sarah Miles. And he gives her a smack for what she's done to her husband and what have you - so that was the beach sequence, but we were not able to finish, so... But what they did, it was funny, it was... Freddie Young is a pretty clever cameraman because the sand out there, of course, is white, whereas the sand in Ireland is golden. And also the Macgillicuddy's Reeks in the distance. We didn't have - what happened was, there was a haze in South Africa, I think it was on the Indian Ocean side. And you'd got these hills in the background and you couldn't quite make out what they were, so of course you were probably able to cheat! So that was part of the one in Ireland, but it didn't do bad, it fitted in pretty well actually. Then of course we ended up with John Mills messing about with the ammunition down on the old wreck and - I must tell you a funny story there in a minute, before the wreck. Anyway, John Mills had blow that thing up. But what happened, this old wreck we had down there, we were shooting on it and the following day we came out and David said, "What are we going to do?" There had obviously been a sandstorm and the whole thing was covered over with sand! So Eddie Fowle, being a very good prop man and always David Lean's right hand man and pal, said, "No problem, governor...just get a helicopter in, get 'em down!" Well we all laughed, we thought, what an idiot! But no, we were the idiots, he wasn't, because it actually worked! [Chuckles.] They got a helicopter and it blew all the sand away! But anyway we finished that,

then we came back to Ireland, we had about five weeks in Clare, doing the storm sequence. And while we were there we got this famous Chinese handbill [chuckles] that MGM had now closed and we were all out of work! Not that we were all that worried about it, because we'd got a taste of freelancing with our own equipment and we thought, "Well this is much better than working there," so it didn't affect us all that much. Then after that then, I suppose it a matter of...

Bob Allen: Just to flit back, you mentioned when we were talking that you were doing looping in Ireland...

Mickey Hickey: Oh yes, post synching...

Bob Allen: Yeah, post synching.

Mickey Hickey: I was trying to think of the name of the editor now - he always had him as his editor, a very nice chap, and he died not long after 'Ryan's Daughter'. [N.B. Norman Savage?] I think he had leukaemia, I'm not sure what he had. But the sound editor was our old friend, who's in the journal - what's his name?

Bob Allen: Win, Win Ryder.

Mickey Hickey: Win Ryder, yeah, he was the sound editor. Can't think of the name of the editor now, but yeah, we did all our own post synching, and also when we went to Cape Town we did all our own post synching out there. David was quite happy to do it and...

Bob Allen: What, you had a projector?

Mickey Hickey: We had a projector, yes. But David wouldn't have anybody from England, he had a projectionist sent out from Culver City. [Laughs] A very great story there went round. At MGM the projectionists always had a sort of rota system, whenever a projectionist was needed one of the projectionists would go, you see. Well Mike Bassett wasn't the maintenance man, but Mike Bassett had to come out, we needed some extra help up around Killarney. I don't know what it was now, but Mike had to come out for a week or two. So when he goes back, this projectionist, who had been laying the law down because he hadn't got the job, because we'd only been out there about four weeks I think at the time. And Mike was in there and this projectionist came in. So he's talking to Don Deere[?] and he said to Don Deere[?] - he saw this fellow come in - he said, "Oh Hickey is having a great time out there! He's bought himself a brand new car, a new Rover; he's making a bomb! They're working Sunday mornings doing the post synching and of an evening Mick is using the projectors as well, showing the films as projectionists." Of course the next thing, about a week afterwards, I get a letter from George Elvin, don't I? "What's this, Mickey? If you are doing something like this, they're going to be very cross." So of course I hit the ceiling! I went into Roy Stevens, I said, "What's this?" He looked at it, he said, "I don't think it's bloody funny, do you?" I said, "No, I don't think it is bloody funny!" He said, "What can we do about it? I tell you what to do about it. You get on the 'phone to MGM Studios and get hold of Watkins, and get Watkins to get the chief projectionist Johnny Finn[?] down here to the office, find out who's done all this." So of course it all came out

didn't it? I even got a letter from the chief steward as well about that NATKE were going to go to town, I mean it even got as far as O'Brien!

Bob Allen: Because you were running the projector for the film shows?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah - but I wasn't!

[BA chuckles.]

Mickey Hickey: This was all done as a wind-up! So of course, the chief projectionist came down and Watkins said, "What's all this all about? Mickey's been on the 'phone, he's playing hell! And Roy Stevens - now who was it?" So Johnny said, "Well it can only be one person." He said, "Get him down here in the office, I want to..." He came down into the office...he said, "What's this business about, you talking about Mickey?" He said, "Well Mike Bassett and Don Deere[?] in the workshop they were talking about it and I heard them say that Mickey's bought a brand new Rover and he's making a mint, making a fortune out of it." "Get them in here!" So they came in the office, he said, "Bassett, Mike, what are you having a game at? You haven't half stirred something up George O'Brien and Elvin [sic - Tom O'Brien and George Elvin] are all involved in this! You accused Mickey of acting as a projectionist as well as a sound camera operator!" "Well" he said, "I'm fed up with that projectionist going around moaning and groaning all the time, so I thought I'd wind him up." He said, "Yeah you've wound him up all right, but you opened up a hornet's nest!" [Chuckles.] So that was that one! It just shows you, doesn't it?

Bob Allen: I'm flabbergasted actually! [Chuckles.] Because it had all been taken up by George Elvin at ACT and...

Mickey Hickey: And O'Brien!

Bob Allen: And O'Brien - because rumour had it that you were...

Mickey Hickey: They had to take notice didn't they? They had no choice. I mean if someone makes an allegation, they've got to trace that. But you see the big trouble was, Bob, it should never have got that far.

Bob Allen: No.

Mickey Hickey: When they got to the chief steward at MGM he should have had the ACT steward down and said, "Now look, what's this?" The ACT steward should have got in touch with Watkins, got in touch with the production office in Dingle. There was no need for it to go to top level - it went right to the top.

Bob Allen: Surely the steward should have known that there was an American projectionist there that was...

Mickey Hickey: Well they didn't believe it you see, this was the trouble.

Bob Allen: Why then did Lean get the projectionist from Culver City?

Mickey Hickey: He'd met this fellow, I think, in Culver City - or I think he was out on 'Zhivago' I'm not sure. I think he may have been out on 'Zhivago'. Because you see, another point, getting back to this now, all this business here, you see, I was - well I was doing nothing at the time because Kubrick was taking over every stage for '2001', so nobody could come in, so I was sort of out of work. And I went over to Pinewood for a couple of days loan on 'Thunderball' with Bert Ross and Derek Cavern[?] and that. And Bert said to me, "Mickey what are you doing?" Because I'd done one picture with Bert at MGM. I said, "I'm not doing anything, I shan't be working until January," I said, "Kubrick's taken every stage and we won't start shooting until January." I said, "Then we're going to start at Shepperton," which we did, on the silent stage. So he said, "How would you like to come with me out to Egypt? I'm taking two units out there on 'Gordon of Khartoum'." I said, "Yeah I'd love to!" So I go back and Watkins sent for me, he said, "Oh by the way, sit in that chair." He said, "Paddy Cunningham the sound camera operator had gone sick on 'Zhivago'." He said, "Johnny Palmer" - again, back to the army for you - "Johnny Palmer says get Mickey to stand by, we'll let him know and we'll get him out here." So anyway, after about four or five days nothing happened. So I said to Watkins, I said, "What's the matter?" So my mate then, Oscar, he said, "You don't want to go on that!" I said, "Why?" He said, "Paddy Cunningham hates Watkins" I said, "But Paddy Cunningham likes me." He said, "Oh yeah, Paddy loves you, but because you're working for MGM, and he won't have anybody from MGM." So I said, "Oh!" So he said, "No, he won't." So in the end Watkins came down. So he said, "Bert Ross has been on the 'phone, wants to borrow you." So I said, "Well why couldn't you do something about it? It's obvious I'm not going to out on 'Zhivago'". So anyway he came back, he said, "I've seen George Catt[?]" who was a studio manager, "We're going to release you without loss of service, so you can do your own deal, you can go and do this picture with Bert Ross out in Egypt." Now getting back to the Paddy Cunningham thing - after MGM closed there was a period when I hadn't worked for about two or three months - the longest I'd ever had, you know. And my mother-in-law was alive at that time. I was down at the bottom of the garden and she came down, she said, "ITN's on the 'phone, they want to talk to you." So I went in, they said, "Hello, this is Roy Colwell[?] at ITN. Can you do a day's work for us tomorrow, Mickey?" I said, "Yeah, all right." So when I went in I said, "By the way, Roy, where did you get my number?" He said, "Well I asked for a list from ACT and about a dozen names were submitted and I saw your name and I thought, well I know the name even though I'd never met the fellow." Because he said that he used to work at the old National Studios. And he said, "Something else - my best pal was Paddy Cunningham, and he always said to me, if ever you want anybody [indecipherable] get Mickey." So you see what I mean? Paddy would have had me but he wouldn't have me because he didn't - he wouldn't have Watkins because I was MGM staff. But Paddy did me a great favour with that because when I started working for ITN, they allowed me to do features as well and come back, and as soon as I came back I was in there - that's when I made the money that I'm now living on today.

Bob Allen: With ITN you were in the er...

Mickey Hickey: In the transcription and the OB, with ITN mostly transcription, and I used to go out on the OB as well. I used to do well on the OB and that. But er - and also, as I say, while I was at ITN I did five pictures for Norfolk International, Smedley Aston being one of the

directors, Smedley Aston Junior, being one of the directors of the company. I did five pictures for them in the period of five years, one a year, as their sound mixer. So I can honestly say I started right at the bottom as rewind boy and at the end of sixty-one years I ended up at the top! [Chuckles.] I don't think I could have spanned much further than that, do you Bob?

Bob Allen: No, very good, very good.

Mickey Hickey: But I don't think there's much more I can say.

Bob Allen: No, right. What...

Mickey Hickey: Only little questions.

Bob Allen: Yeah, one question that comes to mind, working with Lean - it was just 'Ryan's Daughter' that you worked on a Lean picture?

Mickey Hickey: It was the only one I did, I wanted to do one with him, naturally.

Bob Allen: How did you find him as a director then as...?

Mickey Hickey: Oh he's great. He's a man that - you see when David did a picture, if you said six months - when we went on it, it was a year. Now I mean the two boys said to me, Bill Cook and Bram [N. B. John Bramall] said to me - we were in the 'Lion's Den' at MGM, having a drink, and they said, "Why don't you go and ask your mate Doug Twiddy about, can we do 'Ryan's Daughter'?" I said, "Oh don't be stupid, Paddy Cunningham does all of David Lean's pictures." Because he'd done the two previous ones. So they said, "Well we've heard a little tip that he's not going to do this one." "Well if you've heard a tip that he's not going to do it, then somebody else is. All right." So I saw Doug, I said, "Doug - Bram, Bill and myself, with our equipment, do you feel like putting us forward?" He said, "Well yes, if you like I'll put your name forward to David." And of course we got it! But that's how we got it, we got it through Doug Twiddy. I knew Doug as a third at MGM years ago before he became - one of the nicest production... Did you ever work for him?

Bob Allen: No.

Mickey Hickey: One of the nicest and fairest production managers in the whole of the industry, he really was. We were out in Ireland on 'Barry Lyndon' - we were having a spot of bother out there - not an awful lot of bother - mostly John Salter. I ended up - having worked with Kubrick before, I knew what Stanley was like and I wouldn't take a ...

Bob Allen: You were on '2001'?

Mickey Hickey: No this was on 'Barry Lyndon'...

Bob Allen: No, no, you'd worked on '2001'?

Mickey Hickey: Oh, I'd worked on '2001' and I also did some work on 'Lolita'.

Bob Allen: Oh, 'Lolita', of course, yes.

Mickey Hickey: Only on loan from MGM.

Bob Allen: That was at ABPC wasn't it?

Mickey Hickey: Yes, yeah, that was Dickie Bird. So anyway,...what was I saying?

Bob Allen: 'Barry Lyndon' and Doug Twiddy.

Mickey Hickey: 'Barry Lyndon' that's right! So I'd been on a few things with Doug, so they came out and John - I wouldn't accept a deal, I said, "No, I'm going on an overtime sheet." And Bernie Williams was the associate producer on it, so I said, "Oh aye?" So John Salter[?] said that he'd accept the deal. Now the maintenance man, Richard Daniels[?] and myself, we were on a timesheet and we were making - oh, anything - fifty to a hundred pound a week more than John. And then John in the end got annoyed and he went to Robin, he said, "If those two don't stop talking about the amount of money they're making, I'm going to put one on both of them!" So Robin told me, he said, "Now you've got to watch it, Mick, because he's getting very..." I said, "Well it's his fault, I told him not to accept the deal!" So anyway it got to the stage that they decided that - what do you call it - has got to come out. Oh I forget his name now - he's dead, used to be a mixer. [trying to remember] Oh dear oh dear, wish the wife was down, she'd tell you. Anyway, he came out and I was... That's right, I was unit steward, I'll tell you how I became unit steward. They wanted a unit [shop] steward, so they had a meeting and nobody would do it. They said to me, "Will you do it, Mickey?" And Doug Twiddy said, "Will you do it Mickey?" I said, "No." Because I'd worked with Doug before and we got on well together, so I said, "No." So he said, "Will you go in a hat?" I said, "No." So June Randall said, "All right Mick," she said, "Look I'll go in a hat with you and Tony Musgrove" (or something - a focus puller [N. B. Possibly Douglas Milsome.]) "So will you agree to that?" I said, "Well all right, but not three of us, the whole unit." He said, "All right." So Bill Cook's son Brian was out there, so he drew the name out of the hat - done that - who was going to be unit steward. Well who was it? There was fifty- three 'Mickey Hickey's' in the hat, wasn't there!

Bob Allen: Oh really?

Mickey Hickey: Well we don't know that, but I came out! So I said, "All right I'll do it." So we had this - we went out to do this shoot on this day and it was teeming down with rain, down at Tremour and even Stanley's trying to get in - he loved to play with things, he got in the van, he got bogged down. So he said, "We've got to work tomorrow." So Les Wilds[?], Les had already said, "No, you can't work six days, you can work Saturday or you can work Saturday and not Sunday, but you can't have both - unless circumstances allow it." So anyway, Stanley gets hold of June, he said, "Get down and talk to Les Wilds[?] and tell him I want to work tomorrow, tell him what happened." She comes back and says, "He won't listen to me, he'll only listen to Mickey." So I said, "All right." [imitating Kubrick] "Mickey, get that [???] down here!" [Chuckles.] You know, so I got Les and he said, "Well what's the position?" I said, "It's genuine,

it really is genuine," I said, "we lost a day's shoot, we got bogged down and we couldn't get the stuff out. The tractors came in to pull us out and they got bogged down!" So he said, "It's genuine?" I said, "Oh yeah, it's genuine!" He said, "All right, you can work." So we were given the OK to work, so that pleased Stanley, you know...

Bob Allen: Stanley? Who was that?

Mickey Hickey: Stanley Kubrick.

Bob Allen: Oh Stanley Kubrick, yes of course! I was thinking of Stanley as a production manager or something. Stanley, the man himself, yes!

Mickey Hickey: [Chuckling.] Hopefully it made his day anyway! But it was one of those things. You see when first of all Doug and myself - well we always hit it off well. We were going out, I was the unit steward on 'Ryan's Daughter' and David Lean sent us home for a week, we had a week off for Christmas, and we had to fly out on Boxing Day to Cape Town. So we got there and Doug sent for me after about - we'd had a week on full pay don't forget. So we went down, we travelled overnight - well probably not all of it. So I went down and saw Doug, I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "The camera crew." I said, "What have the camera crew done?" He said, "They want so many hours for travelling overnight." I said, "Well is it in the agreement?" He said, "No." I said, "Well let me have a read of the agreement." So I read the agreement, I said, "No, nothing there," I said, "We've had time off, it's not as if we're doing thirty hours, and they've had a whole week off at full pay, home for Christmas," I said, "No, this is taking the 'Mickey'." So he said, "What should I tell them?" I said, "Just tell them they're not entitled to it, it's not in the agreement." He said, "Well I'll give them a half-fee." I said, "No, Doug. You either pay 'em the whole lot or you pay 'em nothing. If it's in the agreement you pay it!" I said, "If it's not in the agreement, you know...but..." All right, so he sent for me a few days afterwards, I went down, he says, "There you are." He gave me the petty cash sheets, so I just tore them up like that, I threw 'em in the bin. I said, "Now if they come down to see you, send 'em to me." He said, "What's that gonna cost me?" I said, "I'll tell you what it's gonna cost you. Freddie wants to do a dawn shot," I said, "and I understand we've got to get up at four o'clock in the morning to go out and do this dawn shot." He said, "That's right." I said, "[indecipherable - possibly 'job will'] finish." He said, "Granted!" [Chuckles.] So that was the way to work wasn't it? So we went out, we did the job, although we didn't do it the first day, things went rotten, and we had to go and do it again. But we were, I think we must have finished somewhere about eight in the - well it must have been seven in the morning when we finished. Once that dawn came up, he wanted to photograph the dawn coming up, once that had come up, that was the job finished, the day was ours. But that's the way I found that you could. It's no good being - if it's in the agreement then you pay it, if it's not in the agreement, you could always negotiate beforehand, but then you have to negotiate as a unit, not as four members of the group - which you're talking about four people.

Bob Allen: Too much making up an agreement on the spot, or making a new agreement on the spot.

Mickey Hickey: That's right, you could do a local agreement, but you don't just do that, present them with a bill like that and then - then it has to be done as a unit. It has to be done, the whole

of ACT and not just four members of the camera department, because we were all under the same conditions, we all travelled exactly the same. But I used to pull my... And you see you get people like Doug, Doug was very fair - you get people like that and they will, they'll try it on - they'll say, "Oh we'll get away with it." Because I mean, as I said to you, he was prepared to pay them half. I said well, "No, you pay them nothing." But anyway that was the business, as I say I've - I'd do it all over again if I had the chance.

Bob Allen: When you got up to the top of mixing, how did you react to that then?

Mickey Hickey: A bit nervous for the first one. The only reason I did it, I'll tell you how it all came about...

Bob Allen: What pictures were they then - any titles?

Mickey Hickey: Oh they were five-weekers, six weekers. They weren't big pictures, the longest was seven weeks. The best one I turned down, because I was at ITN. I'd agreed to do a three month stint at ITN and I was asked to do 'The Wildcats of St Trinian's', that was with Smedley Aston's dad, and Gilliat, who's now just died I think. And when he came to me - Smedley Aston came to me - he said, "We want you to do this, it's not Norfolk International, but there's three old devils together! You're all about the same age!" And I gave it to Bram, Bram did it. I didn't do it, I stayed. Oh well! I lost out by it, I said I'd stay at ITN - stayed at ITN, gave the job to Bram, Bram agreed to do the job, two days afterwards ITN went on strike! You remember that strike that they had?

Bob Allen: Oh the big one, yes.

Mickey Hickey: I was out of work! [Laughs.] Oh dear! So Doris said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Oh so-and-so, let's go to Jersey and have a holiday!" So we went off to Jersey!

Bob Allen: You were using your own equipment on those pictures then?

Mickey Hickey: Oh yes, yes...

Bob Allen: Who did you have with you for crew then?

Mickey Hickey: Well how it all happened was, Bram and myself had done a picture, a small picture, a three-weeker, out in Austria, called 'Avalanche' for The Children's Film Foundation...

Bob Allen: Oh yeah, hmm.

Mickey Hickey: Colin Wood was the boom operator. And anyway this chappie, the production manager, he was a young fellow, that Colin got very friendly with, they were on a job and he said, "Oh I've got a job coming up and I want Bram and Mickey and you to do it." So he said, "Well Bram won't be able to do it." He said, "Why?" He said, "Because Bram is away in South Africa." He was away in South Africa with Bill Cook on a big picture - I forget what it was called now - something 'Rose' or something. There was only the two of them on this picture - no

they didn't take four, just the two of them - there was a bit of a row about that actually. Anyway, so he said, "Well what a shame. Well look," he said, "why don't you get Mickey to mix this?" Because Colin wanted the job as well. He said, "Do you think he'd do it?" He said, "Well why don't you ask him?" So he came and saw me, he said, "Would you do it?" Colin was with him, he said, "Come on, you can do it, for Christ's sake!" I said, "Yeah all right, I'll have a go." So anyway I did the picture, Colin was boom operator, then I had Tony Collette[?] as a boom operator another time. But I did five pictures for Norfolk International and, as I say, the editor, is it Connock, Tom Connock?

Bob Allen: Ah, Jim Connack.

Mickey Hickey: Jim Connack. He was the editor on them and he met me in Wardour Street one day, I was at ITN. And he said to me, "Mick," he said, "I like the way that you keep shooting soundtracks and if you're not happy with the - well a couple of lines - you'll ask James to let me have a couple of wild lines," he said, "because you did so much, you got us out of a hole so many times." And he recommended me to a friend of his who was going to do a picture in Ireland, on that - on that - you know, that I'd done. And er, they weren't big pictures, nothing to shout home about, they were pleased with them, well to do five for the same company...

Bob Allen: And they're harder pictures to do because they're more conscious of wanting the sound useable, not like on a big one where they say, "Oh," you know, "bloop it," and so on.

Mickey Hickey: You didn't have a lot of time either it was a case of - you weren't quite television but you nearly were television, for quantity, not quality. But - and also, I enjoyed working with them, the three of them. I mean the director used to send to me, the last time he sent me a card and it was, "You're a horrible director. When can we do another one?" [Chuckles.] That's what I used to get! Bram said to me, "How come you do five for one company? I never did more than two!" And I wanted to tell him! I wanted to say, "Well Bram" [chuckles] - Oh no, I mustn't, it's recording. I wanted to say, "Bram..." He should know why! But that's off the record - that's not on there! But no, Bram did two, he did two for Julie Andrews's husband. But I did five, as I say. But there we are, anyway, would you like a beer?

Bob Allen: No I won't. Oh it's five to five, yes, we better be wrapping up. Just before we do that, looking back over it all, which particular part of your career did you like the best? When was the time when you...

Mickey Hickey: Well I've done it all, you see I've done playback...

Bob Allen: Hmm, that's what I mean, you've...

Mickey Hickey: I've done the playback as well. I've done a little bit of maintenance. I often used to say to my wife, in those early days at MGM, I'd say, "I only wished I had that much of Steve's brain, Oscar's brain," you know, he was brilliant. I only wished I had that much of his brain, because I can't knock my childhood, because - I can't really knock it - but I didn't have the education, the money wasn't there, and if I'd had a little bit of brain I would have loved it. But I eventually did get to the stage where on the Hammer series I was doing maintenance, I was

doing playback, I was doing second boom, I was mixing when Bram was missing, you know and I was...

Bob Allen: Which series was that?

Mickey Hickey: Hammer House of Mystery was one, and the Hammer House of Horror was the other one, we did both of them.

Bob Allen: Was that out at Bray?

Mickey Hickey: The Hammer House of Horror was one out at um...what do you call it? The other side of Wickham...

Bob Allen: Yes. Bray.

Mickey Hickey: We built our own little recording room, we used to do all our own transfers and our own post synching and everything out there. I organised all that. I didn't install it but I knew what I wanted, I knew what we wanted and I was the one responsible for getting it in there. But er, no, I was doing a certain amount of maintenance. I had cables going down and getting the old soldering iron out, and of course I used to do playback, I used to do second boom. And if Bram was missing there was no hold-up, "Go and get Bram, he's gone to..." I'd just step in and take over until he came back.

Bob Allen: So you've no regrets of having left the cinema or the theatre?

Mickey Hickey: Oh no, I think if I had my life over again, I think I would want to start the same way. I've gone right through the theatre as well you see, I started off with the cinema, then we've gone to the theatre, which was [indecipherable], then I've gone back to the cinema again from the theatre, which was the period, the three months at the Alhambra and the production of [indecipherable] for me and that. And then I've gone to newsreel, and then I've gone into the Army Film Unit which has put me on features, and then I've gone to MGM as features, and I've ended up back on newsreel again with ITN you see [chuckles] I've sort of, you know. Er, what can I say - I don't know - I enjoyed every moment of it, that's all I can say about it.

Bob Allen: Hmm. And looking back, there's nothing, no other sort of line of work that you would have - you'd think now, "Well I wish I'd been in"? You were saying about the lack of education and so on, there's not a hobby or something like that.

Mickey Hickey: No, that was the only work. But as I say, it is a fairy story because it all came about by my step father's brother wanting a job and getting a job in the projection room...

Bob Allen: And he paid his five-pound a week...

Mickey Hickey: He paid his five pound a week, he got me in there as the rewind boy, and within say a couple of months - I'm only fourteen and a half years of age - I'm now in one of the premier cinemas, as I told you - projectionist - which was The Astoria, Charing Cross Road. Well we had

a band and... The Theatre Royal, Dublin, by the way, we had our own orchestra as well, Jimmy Cambourne[?], we had Albert Chambers[?] on the organ. So of course there was... At the time, in '35 when that opened, it was the largest thing in variety in the whole of Europe, it was supposed to be. Now I don't know, I would hate to argue on that, but it was said that, at the time, it was the largest. We had our own resident orchestra.

Bob Allen: Did you have any other hobbies besides work?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, I love playing darts! [Chuckles.] That's the only thing I was ever good at!

Bob Allen: That was the recreation.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, the only thing I was ever any good at. I'm no good at cutting a piece of wood. I'll never forget when we first moved in here, I got a piece of wood to cut round here, one of those. I had a bit that length, and by the time I'd finished it was that length!

Bob Allen: [laughs]

Mickey Hickey: I was telling the 'chippies' at MGM what happened, so they said, "Oh what we'll do, we'll make a mitre block for you and in future when you want to cut a bit of wood there it is." It's still in the garage! [Laughs.] And Dorothy said, when her mother moved in - Dorothy's dad had died - and she said, "We were watching you out there with this bit of wood and in the end you got so annoyed you slung it down the garden, and the saw!" [Chuckles.] I just - I just couldn't cut a piece of wood straight!

Bob Allen: Was your wife in the business?

Mickey Hickey: No. No, her father used to work in the stores at MGM. Her father was a professional musician. You see talkies finished him, because he was in the Music Halls - whereas it made me, but it finished him. Her brother worked at MGM as a rigger. I didn't meet her through that, I met her through - I was courting a girl at MGM and I fell out with her because she insisted that I had nothing to do with my daughter from my previous marriage, who needed my help anyway. So I gave her up and then went out - I was in digs with Dorothy's mother when Dorothy's marriage busted up, and that's how we met, I was in digs with her down here in Borehamwood, down in the main street. That's how we ended up, but no they weren't in the business. No, I don't think I was cut out - I think if I hadn't had such a lucky break in my life, what with D. P. Field[?] and Johnny Palmer[?] and Roy Colwell[?] at ITN, and Gerry Turner at MGM, and all these sort of things, I doubt whether I would ever - well I'd probably have been a projectionist from the day I started to the day I finished I should imagine. I would never have had the lucky breaks that I got. And it is a fairytale when you stop and think about it, because it wasn't as if I was a clever person, I wasn't. I was a good operator, put it that way.

Bob Allen: Well obviously, yes. You were keen and eager and a hard worker and a diligent person.

Mickey Hickey: Oh yeah, I idolised my work. I never thought I'd pack up. I was at ITN, I'd completed sixty years and I thought, "Oh go on, carry on!" All the lads used to say, "That old devil will keep going, when we're gone he'll be still going." And they rang me up, I'd finished the sixty-one years and they rang me up to do the budget in the House of Lords. I'm accredited for the House of Lords and for the House of Commons. And they had to have someone that was accredited, otherwise they'd have to go through, all the palaver of getting them accredited again. Because I've also been into 10 Downing Street and done work with Mrs 'T'. I've also done - I interviewed Winston Churchill before he died, a thing that was done for MGM, Culver City. Gerry Turner and myself did it, we were down there. But as I say, I don't think I would have done anything else, I just loved every moment of it. I met a lot of famous people. Since you spoke to me, for two days I've been thinking and as I said, this is a fairytale, you know, how can anybody be so lucky? Oh you can be lucky, you can win the National Lottery I suppose, but you know! [Chuckles.]

Bob Allen: Well I suppose some of us - I mean I consider myself lucky too, of having lucky breaks, like you, in my career too, and I suppose perhaps that's why we don't win the lotteries, because we've both been lucky in other ways - you can't be lucky in everything!

Mickey Hickey: You can't have it all ways! But anyway, as I say - no I suppose... Lets be honest about it, if the Transport and General Workers Union hadn't put their foot down and stopped me getting promotion in Ireland, I don't think you would ever have met Mickey Hickey. I think Mickey Hickey would have stayed in Ireland, as a chief projectionist, to the end of my days. Because the money was pretty good, chief projectionist, the money in those days was very good, and I was courting an usherette as well at the time. Of course when I came over, she came over, because I got her a job in the cinema, and her sister, they both followed me over when I came back, that's how I got them jobs down in Hammersmith. So as I say - I could probably say I can thank the Transport and General Workers Union in Ireland for the whole thing, put it that way! [Chuckles.]

Bob Allen: The turning point, yes. Well, all right, we better be ending off there and getting back to normal operations.

[Break in recording]

Mickey Hickey: ...artists and then I came back to finish with her.

Bob Allen: You must have worked with quite a number of big-time artists in your career?

Mickey Hickey: Oh yeah, I've got a load of stills upstairs, it's a bit too short a day now to let you see. I've got some photographs of Elizabeth Taylor when she was sixteen. I did a film with her and Rob Taylor called 'The Conspirator' at MGM Studios, I think it was about the second or third picture we did up there. I worked with Clark Gable, I did about four with Robert Taylor, 'Ivanhoe' and 'Knights of the Round Table'; Gene Kelly, 'Invitation to the Dance'; Grace Kelly, I've got lovely photographs of Grace upstairs; Ava Gardner, to name a few. Coming back to the whole lot, my favourite actress has got to be, as I used to call her, I'd say to my wife, "My lady of the screen." I did 'Anastasia' with her, 'Inn of the Sixth Happiness' and I did two weeks on the

Golda Meir story [N. B. 'A Woman Called Golda'] - and that is Ingrid Bergman. When we did the two weeks on the Golda Meir story, it was about six months before she died. I said to her, "Ingrid, you know this is the third time I've worked with you?" She said, "Is it, love? Tell me..." I said, "'Anastasia'..." She said, "Oh yeah." Because that's the one that she came back in - she'd been in the wilderness, they ostracised her because of Rossellini. And I said, "'Inn of the Sixth'..." "Oh" she said, "It was lovely, I loved doing 'Inn of the Sixth'."

Bob Allen: Donat was in that too, wasn't he?

Mickey Hickey: Who?

Bob Allen: Robert Donat.

Mickey Hickey: Oh Robert, we killed him actually. Well when I say we killed him, we brought it on because he was suffering from asthma and Mark Robson said, "We've got to shoot all of Robert's stuff first because he hasn't got long left," and he needed the money, it seems. So everything in the script was all - anything appertaining to Robert Donat. He'd be going along, making a mistake, and we had about ten, fifteen, maybe more takes, "Cut!" "Cut!" And in the end they decided to put it on a board for him, and he was still, you know, reading. It was alongside the camera so he could see his lines - we didn't have teleprompters in those days, not like they have now. And anyway he kept fluffing and he kept apologising, and in the end they went again and then Ingrid fluffed. She said, "Oh I'm terribly sorry, Robert, I've gone and done it now." I said, "She hadn't done it - she deliberately did it to put him at his ease." And we went up to Wales, we'd finished all the stuff with Robert and we'd only been in Wales maybe two or three days and Mark Robson came one lunchtime and said, "I want to speak to you all. We've had the sad news that Robert Donat passed away."

Bob Allen: He actually had finished his part?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah he'd finished the part. We didn't go over to Wales until he'd finished all his stuff. But you see, what happened, if you remember the bombing of the City - well all that smoke, I mean he could hardly breathe, I mean we must have knocked a couple of weeks off his life you know, at that time. But he was a good trouser, but Ingrid - I've you know - all right, all the others have been marvellous, I can't find one that I could say I didn't like.

Bob Allen: What particularly then made Ingrid Bergman this...

Mickey Hickey: My favourite?

Bob Allen: Yes.

Mickey Hickey: I think it was - I think it was 'Anastasia', playing the part of this Russian princess. It was 'Anastasia', because you see what happened was that, I knew that Ingrid had been ostracised by the Yanks because of her marrying - living with or marrying - Rossellini, and of course I felt sorry for her. And 'Anastasia' was her come back. Now I said then that she'd probably get The Academy [Award] and one or two people said, "No, the Americans would

never allow that." But they did, she got the Academy Award, and I think it was because of all that. Coming back the way she did. And to fight her way back to the top again and get that Academy Award, I think that's what, from then onwards - I mean if my wife was to come in now and I said, "Dorothy, who was my Lady of the Screen?" And she would say, "It was Ingrid." I thought a lot of her, I think it was because of that, the way that she fought back.

Bob Allen: How lucky you were to have worked on the Golda Meir picture then, to have er, that was to have been her last.

Mickey Hickey: Well the Golda Meir thing was shot in Israel, it wasn't shot by us at all, we didn't do it, but there was two weeks work in London, and Bram got it, and myself, and I forget who else - I think there were three of us on it. But we got it and of course I went and had a chat with her then, it was not long after that that she died I think.

Bob Allen: No, very soon after.

Mickey Hickey: Very, very soon after that.

Bob Allen: It was probably one of her most - one of her best performances actually. I don't think she made a bad performance anywhere, but I think that the Golda Meir picture was probably...

Mickey Hickey: No, no, she never made a bad performance. I mean I saw her in - with, what do you call it, oh what's his name now...? 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', wasn't it?

Bob Allen: Oh yeah!

Mickey Hickey: Not Clark Gable, um...

Bob Allen: Gary Cooper.

Mickey Hickey: Gary Cooper, yes, she was terrific in that. I think it's because of all that, is the fact that she'd - coming back the way that she did and being able to - I'm not going to say "stick her fingers up to them all that had ostracised her"...but coming back and saying, "Well," you know. And the Americans to have accepted her, to have given her the Academy Award, because otherwise she wouldn't have got it.

Bob Allen: Of course in today's atmosphere, no one would think anything about it at all! [Chuckles.]

Mickey Hickey: It would be wrong to do it the other way now! [Laughs.] It's wrong to do it the other way now, it would be wrong not to do what they did! I mean, no, it's funny the way things change, but there we are.

Bob Allen: Were there any male actors that you had a similar sort of - feeling for, or a dislike of?

Mickey Hickey: Oh, I had one actor I didn't like, I didn't like him at all. I mean, let's be honest about it, a marvellous actor, no getting away from it, you couldn't take that away from him. We were doing 'Where Eagles Dare' and I think you probably know who I'm talking about - one of Liz's husbands.

Bob Allen: Burton?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah! [Chuckles.]

Bob Allen: Really? Why was that? What was he...?

Mickey Hickey: Well he was always - when we were out on 'Eagles Dare' - because of the short days, it was in the winter, because it was snowy and everything else, they asked us to work through the lunch hour, and when we came down from the castle and came down from the mountains, then we'd have our break and that would be it for the day. So we'd all come down and be at the bar and he'd be saying, "Aren't you going to buy me a drink?" And in the end we used to say, "Well don't you think it's about time you bought us a drink?" You know, he'd never buy a drink! So anyway, we were working at MGM and he had to - I think he had to get up to there, to get on there - the cable car stuff, and [arry?] was down low, for him to jump into camera - you know, as he's now on the cable car, and the jump down. So - but prior to that, I'm sorry - prior to that, they wanted to work late, so we said, to the director, "No." We'd had enough, and he called a meeting. He said, "I can't understand it, you've always given..." So in the end we said, "Well why do you want this ten o'clock thing?" You know - work 'till ten, or quarter past nine in other words and not have a supper. So he said, "Well you know, we're behind." So we said, "The only reason you're behind is because this fella, Mr Burton, he never comes in, he stays up at the King's Arms," - which is a pub up the road there - "and he comes back and you know, he's the one that's causing it, he comes back late..."

[End of Tape 2, Side 3] [Tape 2, Side 4]

Mickey Hickey: "...All right, we'll make sure he's back then, if he goes up, if he's back and then we'll work whatever it is, if you want the hour, work the hour." Anyway, so we're all there and he comes back - he's back late again. So we thought, "Well we're here now," so we thought, "well we've got to work it anyway." So in the end, Cracker - we always used to call him Cracker, Derek [???] - said, "Climb up there, Richard and jump off into camera." He said, "What?" He said, "Climb up there and jump off into camera." "I'm not doing that, I'm not going up there!" He said, "Well it's no distance." He said, "Yes it is, if you've been up knocking back the brandy I've been," he said, "you wouldn't jump off there!" And with that, Liz happened to come on the floor, you see. She said, "I want you!" Calls him over one side, and he came back and he did it! But that was why we didn't want to work, I took a dislike to him. I thought to myself, well you know - all the money he gets and all the riches he had - a brilliant actor, no getting away from that. But I disliked him for that and to me he wasn't a trouper, he wasn't a - to me I suppose he was letting the side down. But she made him do it - she could, she said, "Get over and do that!" Yeah, he said to Cracker, "No," he said, "if you'd drank the brandy I've drunk during the break, you wouldn't go up there and do it!" [Chuckles.]

Bob Allen: It was, what? A distance of about a couple of feet?

Mickey Hickey: Couple of feet, well you know what there is, the area's there and you just jump into fast camera that's all. You get down low in the area, it's not as if you had [indecipherable] or anything like that down there. Bob Taylor was a great favourite of mine, because I did four with him, I did four with Robert, and I - yeah I did four with Robert Taylor. I was trying to think who else it was that I really, really took a liking to. I like Elizabeth, I mean Elizabeth was a - she was a great trouser, she'd go up to The King's Arms and drink a pint of beer with you, handle it. She was a great trouser, Elizabeth.

Bob Allen: Were there any other technicians that you didn't get on with at any particular time, either in your own crew or in the...? You know, there are often sort of little things happen that - I mean you are a person of such pleasant demeanour I am sure that you probably always got on well with everybody.

Mickey Hickey: I've been thinking about this for the last few days, you know, it's been on my mind a lot. And going back, and I honestly can't think of anybody that I didn't get on with. June Randall, I got on well with her. Martelli - Angela [Angela Martelli]. Freddie Young, old Freddie Young he'd er - I'd have to go and do a second boom shot, and I'd go out there and the fellow who had been out there, he said, "Get out!" I'd been up there and I'm fishing around and all of a sudden Freddie, "Oh hello!" If it was someone that he was not used to, "Get out!" You know, you're sort of fiddling around, trying to find where your shadows are! [Chuckles] But Freddie, I got on very well with Freddie, and not only that but what a marvellous cameraman he is too, I mean there's no getting away from it, he's brilliant, brilliant. And I did work with Freddie - the last time I saw Freddie was at Doug Twiddy's funeral. They were all down there that day. God Almighty I've never seen anything like it! It was a reunion of the film industry really, and one man brought us sort of all together. One very good - and he... Johnny Palmer came and spoke to me. And I said, "Johnny..." and we were talking about Doug. I said, "Doug - you trained him, that's why he was like that, he was your double." I said, "Yeah, you trained him and he followed in your footsteps." He did, he was very good. He was a man you could go and talk to. Some of those, you could go in and they, you know - they'll do you out of a penny if they could, you know! [Chuckles.] But no, Johnny Palmer, not, no. Ted Lloyd, I liked [Ted Lloyd, too. Very good, very good.

Bob Allen: Is John Palmer still alive?

Mickey Hickey: Oh, let's face it, I haven't seen anything in the obituaries about him, I should imagine if he wasn't, I should have imagined he would have appeared in the - because they send me the journal every month.

Bob Allen: Yes, the BECTU Journal, hmm.

Mickey Hickey: Oh they send me that every month. I don't pay for it, it's just sent to me.

Bob Allen: No, no, I don't suppose.

Mickey Hickey: You see Linda once said, when I went up, I said to Linda I said, "I've done sixty-one years, Linda, I think I ought to pack..." She said, "Well no, Mickey, I tell you what to do. Don't pack up. If you want to pack up then you've got to apply for Honorary Membership, but if you don't want to apply for Honorary Membership, don't pack up, be a paid up member." And she said, "What you do is, we keep in touch with you and we give you all the information, if you want to register you can, but if you work then we shall expect some money." So that's the conditions that Linda offered me and I accepted them, I said, "Well that's fair enough." So I get the journal every month and any other information there is and that's it. I've got my Badge of Honour over there, framed, that my son took down and got framed for me.

Bob Allen: Where?

Mickey Hickey: Not the, I'm talking about the AMPS[?] one...

Bob Allen: Oh the AMPS[?] Honorary Membership, yeah. John Bramall, he's still alive is he?

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, I nominated him for a membership, he was accepted.

Bob Allen: Oh he's on the, yeah, yeah.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah, they did say on one of the newsletters now and again, they say, "If you know of anybody that you feel..." Well John had been with the BBC during the war years and had done a lot of work with us at MGM before he came up to us as a freelance. So I put his name forward and anyway, they accepted - he is an Honorary Member now.

Bob Allen: He is, he is, I'd forgotten that.

Mickey Hickey: No, I did that.

Bob Allen: Well, we'd better pack it in, I think.

Mickey Hickey: Yeah.

[Tape Ends.]

Mickey Hickey
Projectionist and Sound recordist

1920s-30s - West End Projectionist (discussion of early sound systems)

late 30s-40s - Paramount News

1940s - Army Kinematograph Service/Army Film Unit at Pinewood

1940s-60s Feature sound recordist. Particularly at MGM British (Elstree). Also with David Lean, Kubrick, and Hammer.

Document Actions