DAVID DALGLIESH

Edited transcript of a recording of David Dalgliesh interviewed by Jaap Verdenius on 11th February 1993. BAS Archives AD6/24/3/29. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 12th August 2013.

[0:00:00] Verdenius: Well, 40 years ago now, but our reputation differs somewhat throughout the country.

Dalgliesh: Yes, it's funny. A lot of Malays … A lot of English are in Malaya. I still call it Malaya. It was Malaya when I was there. They never really were colonised. They became the Confederated Malay States but there are still a lot of English people there, the same way as in India, actually. There are more English people in India now than there were at the time of Partition.

[0:00:40] Verdenius: I think they sort of settled there very well, I think.

Dalgliesh: We went to Pakistan three years ago, staying with the Australian ambassador, who had stayed with me 25 years before in Hong Kong. I happened to meet him again; he was a friend of my brother's. He said 'Very kind when you had us to stay.' Because I did it …; it was an emergency. He couldn't get to the flat that he had been lent on the Peak in Hong Kong, which is a very desirable place with a wonderful view. He couldn't get up there because there had been landslides due to very heavy rainfall. So I had him to stay, with his wife and two children. They said 'It's time you came to stay with us.' So I said 'Where are you?' and he said 'Islamabad.' I said 'OK. I'm going.'

[0:01:32] Dalgliesh: People said 'Why on earth are you going to Pakistan?' I said 'Two reasons: (1) I have never been there before and (secondly) I have been invited.' If you go and stay with an ambassador, you find all sorts of doors are open. They told us where to go, he and his wife. We down to Lahore. We then came back and then we went up the Swat Valley, the foothills of the Hindu Kush with a car and driver and it was … We got up into the snow. It was March and so there were all the blossoms coming out. It was very beautiful. You could stop in a village and take pictures of the people and they didn't mind. They just looked at you and you looked at them, and during our two weeks there, not once were we bothered by a beggar. That wouldn't happen in India. Then we went back over the Malakand Pass, where young Mr Churchill had been fighting in 1898. It was all very historical.

[0:02:31] Dalgliesh: We got to Peshawar and they had come direct from Islamabad and the next day in a Range-rover with a driver, the four of us went up the Khyber Pass. We had six armed guards in a truck in front of us and six in a truck behind, and when we stopped because we wanted to take photographs, he and I would jump out but always one of the armed guards would be beside each one of us with his loaded rifle. They are still quite wild and always have been. We never beat the Afghans, which is what they really are, and the Russians didn't. The British people who had long enough memories or read their history all said 'They won't succeed.' and they didn't … Glued them, cramped them, and the tread surface is actually on the underside. It's good English oak. Then we found … Auntie found an altar table in a castle near where she lived, which is the bottom part. I had to cut it down. I paid them

a pound for it so … It has made a rather nice table I think. 1752. It's quite a long time ago. Good English oak.

[0:03:53] Verdenius: Oak?

Dalgliesh: Oak. That's oak, yes.

[0:04:00] Verdenius: When you went to Antarctica, but before you went there, I wrote how you were invited in a way to go there. What did you imagine at that time? What kind of picture did you have?

Dalgliesh: I didn't really. My brother and I (he was younger than me), we had always said that we wanted to travel extensively and we thought it would be most attractive to be able travel to somewhere where no-one else had been before. But we both agreed that we would never go to the polar regions because it would be too cold. But when I was suddenly asked if I would like to go to the Antarctic, having asked if they had got any expeditions going anywhere, I thought this was too good a chance to miss. So I thought 'I don't know if I will like it or not. The only way to find out is to go.' So I said 'All right. I will go.' And I suppose I was prepared for anything.

[0:05:00] Dalgliesh: I was prepared for discomfort and we had it. One learned an awful lot like: if you wanted to be comfortable, it was up to you to be comfortable. And we all used to have a saying, that: 'Any fool can be uncomfortable.' I know when I have talked to people since about how there were 11 of us so very 11 days you had the bathroom to yourself, and you washed your clothing the next day, including the sheets off your bunk, and people said 'Sheets? Good heavens, you have sheets?' I said 'Why not, if want to be comfortable?' Any fool could sleep in blankets but it made a little more sense if you were prepared to do your own washing, to have sheets. Same way as the cooking, we took a week at a time and it was hard work, to begin with especially, because none of us had cooked before and we all learned, quite simply, that if you could read, you could cook as long as you did what the recipe told you to do. And there were some people who tried more than others and there were some who, like myself, who found that they rather enjoyed it and I have enjoyed it ever since. The reason I don't cook now is I am lazy and I've got a wife who does it for me.

[0:06:18] Verdenius: These are the things that you found out when you were there, but when you were going there, apart from knowing that it was cold like the North Pole, did you have any more information on it?

Dalgliesh: No, I didn't even have time. I know the chap who interviewed me said 'I expect you have read *South with Scott* which was a boys' book about Captain Scott's expedition?' I lied and said 'Yes, I have.' as I thought that I ought to have done. In fact I hadn't read it. I knew it was going to be cold but when you are young, you can stand the cold and we certainly could. In the event I slept two nights running (all of us did in this particular party, including Ray Adie who you met the other day) in –42 Fahrenheit which was 74 degrees of frost. It was jolly cold and we used to laugh and say that we woke up and got up for a rest, it was so uncomfortable, but you can do it when you are young. The second time I went, the temperatures got down to –59. I was always sorry it wasn't a round –60 but when you get into the minus fifties, you

know that it is happening. As a doctor I certainly knew. That is you found you were coughing, little coughs, and this was because in the minus fifties the ice crystals of hoar frost actually form inside your bronchial tree and you must stop work because if you breathe too heavily the ice crystals could tear the lining and you could haemorrhage.

[0:07:53] Verdenius: And you learned this by experience?

Dalgliesh: By experience. In fact, yes indeed. I can remember the first long journey I went on, the only big journey, and I had half a ton on the sledge and a jolly good team. When we finished …. It was a very heavy day's work, heaving on the nine dogs when necessary, pushing the sledge when necessary, and directing the sledge. When we finally stopped, the lead team that had got there had found a seal (we were travelling over the frozen sea) and he had killed the seal. This was a source of fresh food for the dogs, and that always made them very wild and they started fighting. I was asked: would I go and sew up Darkie. So I said 'Bother Darkie!' (or words stronger than that) and then I was meant to be doing the work outside the tent because we always travelled in pairs and the 'inside man' was inside and he was preparing the sleeping bags and getting tea ready.

[0:09:04] Dalgliesh: I suddenly shouted 'I am coming in!' I wanted to have a mug of tea. He said 'You can't have finished yet.' I said 'I am coming in.' Because I found myself saying 'I am getting so tired I think I will just lie down and have a little sleep for a moment.' Luckily alarm bells rang and I realised that this was the beginning of hypothermia, and if I had laid down in the snow, I would have never woken up again. Of course what had happened was that I was wearing too much and I had sweated as I heaved on the sledge and the dogs, and when we stopped at the end of the day my sweat froze all over my body. And so I got hypothermia, or the beginnings of hypothermia, very rapidly and so one learned the hard way and we learned it all the hard way. I had never driven a team of dogs or even seen a team of dogs before. That as you went along you would peel off a hat or you might peel off one glove or even two gloves, and you could balance it very nicely, accurately, that you kept your body temperature at the right temperature. You weren't getting frozen and you weren't sweating.

[0:10:09] Verdenius: When does hypothermia start?

Dalgliesh: Hypothermia is when the core of the body gets to below an acceptable temperature. You can get frost-bitten hands or frost-bitten anything you like. It's when the chill gets deeper and deeper and deeper to the whole core of the body, the centre of the body gets so cold. That is the time when, if it's not treated, if steps are not taken, then you will die. It's the opposite, actually, of what the Scandinavians do of taking saunas, because they will heat the body until it is really heated to the centre and then plunge into a cold bath or roll in the snow because physiologically … I was trained to do this by a Finnish doctor who, he and I worked together years later. He explained all the physiological processes that were going on, and when you do go from excessive heat which you get in the sauna and then very cold, you get a flood of white blood cells into your bloodstream, and therefore you will resist infections. I know when I first started doing it, at a local gymnasium near here, that particular winter my wife must have had three or four colds and I didn't have one at all. I

reckoned it was due to the fact that I was getting frightfully hot and cooling myself down, and I was getting a raised level of white blood cells and they were protecting me.

[0:11:46] Verdenius: And this was told to you by the Finnish doctor? This is what you learned from the Finnish doctor?

Dalgliesh: Yes, but I learned the physiological processes afterwards.

[0:12:00] Verdenius: Were you the first doctor who was on the Antarctica?

Dalgliesh: No[1]. There were two before me. On the big bases they always try and have one doctor but it's largely to make people at home less worried because I was no use to the people back at base, our base camp, when I was out on a 700-mile trip. I did indeed have to look after four or five other bases which were hundreds of miles away, and I had to … They had to consult me, and I had to examine them, diagnose them and treat them by radio, often with Morse key, but it worked.

[0:12:49] Verdenius: What were the things that you had to treat?

Dalgliesh: One chap I know I had to treat, he had … He was travelling on glare ice. Do you know what I mean? All the snow has gone and it's just shiny hard ice, on a sledge with dogs. He foolishly had both hands in his pockets. The dogs suddenly swerved one way and he was thrown off, landed on his side and hit one of his kidneys. So his symptoms were that he had complete suppression of urine. Both kidneys (the other one 'came out on strike' if you like); both ceased to work. It was made more difficult by the fact that he was actually the radio operator. So I said to him 'Look, you must stop sending the radio signals. Tune your radio into our radio, the right wavelength, and we will talk.' and we agreed the times. I told him to take morphia and various other things. Then at the agreed time we listened and listened and could hear nothing recognisable. We heard dots and dashes but they made no sense and we wondered whether it was a Russian ship which we knew was within a few hundred miles of us.

[0:14:08] Dalgliesh: Anyhow, I was going round with my fingers crossed, hoping that due to my hundreds of miles away treatment he hadn't died, and at the next scheduled time he came on the radio and he talked. I said 'What on earth happened?' He said 'Well I got someone else to fix up the wires and they crossed them, so when I read a dot, a dash came out and vice versa.' And he did survive. Another chap who … I can't prove that he ever had a bruised kidney. I can only assume, circumstantially and from his symptoms. But another chap, who was even further away, hundreds of miles away, broke his ankle and I remember that particular occasion I was examining him by radio and I said 'Where is the maximum point of tenderness?' and he said 'On the ankle bone.' I said 'Which is the ankle bone?' He said 'Surely you know, as a doctor.' I said 'Well yes, but is it the inside one or the outside one?' So we found out which one it was. So I said 'He's obviously fractured the end of his bone. Put him in plaster.' A few days later he went into the whaling station at South Georgia and said could he

---

[1] The question is not clear but Dalgliesh has interpreted it as 'Were you the first doctor at Base E?' R.S. Slessor (1946) and A.R.C. Butson (1947) preceded him.

have his ankle X-rayed (because they had got a machine) and they did and they found that it was broken. So I was rather pleased my diagnosis from 500 miles away had been correct.

[0:15:43] Verdenius: It was also being done through Morse?

Dalgliesh: Well sometimes it was Morse, sometimes it was speech. But if the conditions weren't good enough for speech (RT[2] they called it I think), then they did it on the Morse key which made it that much more difficult, because I had to write down what I wanted said. Then he would write down what their reply was.

[0:16:10] Verdenius: Do you remember arriving at Stonington Island, Marguerite Bay, the first base to which you were sent? Do you remember this day?

Dalgliesh: Yes, my first night, because we had to wait for an American icebreaker. The sea had frozen up. The icebreaker had been in the day before for the Americans, come out, and then his track had all frozen up again, and our ship wasn't strong enough to get in. So we waited for them to come. They came in, and being summer, the sun was still above the horizon. They took us in at night and the sledge teams came down from the people who we were relieving and a chap said to me 'Here you are. That's your team. Take it back up to the base.' I had never seen a team of dogs before, let alone drive one.

[0:17:04] Dalgliesh: Anyhow we unloaded two hundred tons or more of stores in the middle of the night, although the sun was shining. I eventually got to bed and was just about to go to sleep, thoroughly exhausted, when there was a most frightful noise I shall never forget. This was 1948 and the noise sounded something like a wartime air raid siren and I couldn't think what it was. It was rather frightening. Those who were staying, who knew what it was, said 'Don't worry. It's the huskies. They are howling to the moon, and they only do that when they are happy.' It is a most haunting sound which, if I heard it now, my hair would go up on the back of my head in surprise and delight, because they all howled together and there were slightly different notes: up and down, up and down, rather like an air raid siren. Yes I do remember my first hours there, very clearly indeed.

[0:18:07] Verdenius: You were part of the group that were to stay there for at least a year?

Dalgliesh: That's right.

[0:18:17] Verdenius: And probably the ship would take back half of the crew that had stayed … ?

Dalgliesh: Yes, absolutely.

[0:18:26] Verdenius: Those people were there for a year?

---

[2] Radio Telephony.

Dalgliesh: And we were a thoroughly mixed bunch in that some were officers, some were non-commissioned, some were private soldiers, some were ordinary seamen, some were majors. A complete mixture, but rank was dropped. There was no question of rank at all. We were all members of a team. One of the things I remember (I remembered it then) was how remarkable it was that one got on with such diverse people with diverse backgrounds and experience, and if you didn't like the way someone was behaving, you found yourself saying automatically 'Well, it's very good. I have got to get on with him because we are going to go on living in the same base together.'

[0:19:24] Verdenius: Did this emerge gradually sometimes?

Dalgliesh: Yes. We always said (I don't know if you read it in those notes just now) that we never knew what day of the week it was. The only person who knew was the cook because cooking was hard work. We had a jolly good Esse stove fired by anthracite but it was hard work and they expected 3-course meals, and fresh cakes, buns and pastry for tea every day and fresh bread to be baked, and the one chap who always knew the day of the week was the cook because he was knocking off the time until he ceased to be cook and somebody else took over.

[0:20:07] Verdenius: What impression did these people make on you? These people had been there for a year and you were coming there anyway, new to the continent?

Dalgliesh: I will tell you the first impression and that was an extraordinary distant look in their eyes, and I noticed it amongst all of them who had been there one year – some of them had been there two years. They had a look in their eyes as though they were looking into the farthest distance. I don't know how else to describe it but it was a … As a doctor, it was my job to observe people and I did observe this, and talking of eyes, the other funny thing was that my family told me when I came back that my eyes were bluer than when I left and I can't explain that and nor has any eye surgeon explained it. Funnily enough, it happened to a chap on Scott's party – Cherry Garrard – his mother claimed his eyes were much bluer when he returned home. Talking about the effects, after-effects, it was all due to, in this case, two years non-stop.

[0:21:27] Dalgliesh: One became very difficult to fit in to ordinary life because you knew everyone so well. You got to know them very well because you eventually were stripping off all the superficialities until you finally knew the real man right inside any airs and graces or accents or behaviour he may have put on. And I was also amazed with myself and I have talked to others who were there to find how you put up with things that you would not have put up with at home. Some things they couldn't help it; other things … I remember one chap, the second time I was down there, who always at breakfast used to pull the rind off his bacon with his fingers. He didn't use his knife and fork and I am sure it was done to irritate which it did but the last thing one could do was to show it. You just knew you had got to put up with it, and you did. And I will tell you another thing. After our two years non-stop, when we got home one rather thought 'That's that. We have seen enough of each other for two years.' But we couldn't find enough excuses to see one another. We wanted to go on seeing one another, and a lot of us still do.

[0:23:02] Verdenius: I will have to shift back a little because my wire gets to the table.

Dalgliesh: Sorry, I am using my hands. I must have French blood. You know it's hard to gag a Frenchman, is to tie his hands behind his back because he can't do this …

[0:23:25] Verdenius: Not only French. No it's one of the problems with ??? [inaudible] society. Did you notice anything else on this first time that you were there? Something apart the eyes of the people who had been there for a year?

Dalgliesh: I don't think I noticed it but I asked my family when I came home if they thought I had got this funny distant look in my eyes and they said 'Yes.' And I suppose it is not surprising. You are using your eyes acutely. It's very necessary and you do see miles at times. Alexander Land, which was a hundred miles south of us, we would frequently see when it was miraged. You don't often look a hundred miles and see mountains but we would see them quite clearly.

[0:24:28] Verdenius: You also see a lot of light?

Dalgliesh: One of the things I did expect to see in the Antarctic, now you say that, was something white but if you looked at the scenery it was never … ; the snow or the ice was never actually white. It wasn't white and black; it was always shades as far as the snow and ice was concerned of blues and greens – blues and greens you have never dreamt of. And the snow would all be yellow, orange, pink. It was never white. I always imagined that it was going to look like a lump of ice in my gin and tonic, but no it wasn't. It was the most beautiful colours. Now I have been back to the Antarctic again and I took colour photographs at that time and I have tried to capture (and I think I have in many instances) the amazing colours that you get, and I have got several paintings which I have collected, which I only bought or had given to me because they had captured the colours that you get there. People have often said 'Why do you want to go back, because …?' I remember the first chap who interviewed me before I left London, he said 'Take it from me.' Because he had been in Greenland and twice in the Antarctic. He said 'You will often wonder "What the hell am I doing here?" but don't worry, you will want to go back again.' And he was absolutely right. It grips you. It's like a drug. All right, when the wind is blowing and you have got a blizzard – and I have known a blizzard last for two weeks without letting up – life is very uncomfortable.

[0:26:24] Dalgliesh: When the first time we were there, we had to feed the dogs, and we had over 80 of them. You went outside to feed them lumps of frozen seal meat. There was no point in standing up because you were blown over, so you went around on all-fours, and pulled the sledge behind you and chucked a 7-pound lump of seal meat to each dog. But obviously the times you remember with pleasure are the times when the colours were just… Well they defy my description, they were so beautiful. I don't know whether you have read that bit of mine describing how, in the winter, at the end of winter, we were on a journey and I was outside. Everything was so quiet; there wasn't even a breath of wind and I saw the hoar frost on the cord, the string on the end of an ice chisel. The dogs were actually quiet, were making absolutely no noise and the sun was just coming back and was just blessing (as I call it), a sort of religious blessing, the tops of the peaks with peach salmon colours and I suddenly

realised that I had stopped breathing because even the noise of my breathing was intruding on this unforgettable landscape.

[0:27:52] Verdenius: Silence?

Dalgliesh: Silence. Silence that you have never heard in this country. I have heard it in Greenland. I once went to Greenland to buy some dogs and I found there: I went for a walk in the afternoon in one of the ports we stopped at and I went round the fjord and sat down and I suddenly realised that I was again experiencing this tangible all-embracing silence, which is one of the reasons, I suppose, I live in the country. I don't like too much noise, if any.

[0:28:25] Verdenius: You shouldn't live in London then, probably. Did you feel at home, with this silence?

Dalgliesh: Oh, very much. People often said to me 'Weren't you lonely?' and I have always said 'No.' We were alone but I have felt far more lonely in London than I ever felt in the Antarctic.

[0:28:57] Verdenius: Did you ever consider going back there, or making a living there at a permanent base?

Dalgliesh: No, but I married late in life. In fact I really thought … I wanted to be married but I didn't find the right person, hadn't. And there was a time when I actively thought of leaving the Navy and going to northern Canada to practise medicine with my own sledge and dog team. But other events overtook it and I didn't go.

[0:29:44] Verdenius: What kind of equipment did you have when you were there?

Dalgliesh: Well it was just after the War and so a lot of it was Army surplus, but the ordinary clothing, every day, would be a string vest (very good, creating a layer of warm air that you have warmed) then a chill-proof woollen vest, then a khaki shirt, then a seaman's jersey which they don't make now, sadly. They were very closely knitted navy blue jerseys which came right down over your bottom so they really kept all your heat in. Because the great thing about the clothing is to keep your own heat in, and so you will always have close-fitting jerseys, garments at your wrists, at your ankles and round your neck, and always wore a scarf until you got too warm, just to stop your own heat escaping, the same way as you wore a hat. The head can lose an awful lot of heat but as I did say earlier on, you then learned when to take your scarf off, when to take a glove off and your hat. At times, on frozen sea, going through icebergs and in temperatures way below zero, because one was working, skiing and manoeuvring nine dogs and a half-ton sledge, I have done it in my shirt sleeves. It seems almost unbelievable but it was a fact and it would have been very foolish not to have done because we would have got too hot.

[0:31:26] Verdenius: And what kind of medical equipment did you have?

Dalgliesh: Pretty basic. I could have given an anaesthetic and dealt with an appendicitis if necessary. Thank God I didn't have to. The most medical work I had to

do of all, was in fact dentistry. Before I left the last ship I was serving in, knowing I was going, I asked the dentist on board if he would show me how to pull a tooth and he did very effectively, and also how to fill teeth with temporary fillings. I filled every single person there with a least two fillings. I couldn't do my own, because although I could work backwards in a mirror, when I was doing my patients, to work backwards in a mirror, in a looking glass, meant doing it twice, and I was unable to do my own. So I had to wait until I got home.

[0:32:28] Dalgliesh: I had to learn to pull the teeth out of huskies if necessary. Their favourite pastime was to fight and a team would fight within itself. But if it met another team, you would have eighteen dogs fighting. They would forget their old animosities; they would then fight as a team, and I remember on one occasion there were three teams (27 dogs) all fighting, and with teeth that could cut through a rope the size of my thumb just as though they were scissors. In those two years there when I was treating them, sticking needles into them, never once was I or anyone else bitten. There was one occasion when a dog had got a very nasty wound on his face, on his cheek, and he had to be sown up, so I took him into the workshop because I didn't see why I should kneel down in the snow and do it, and he didn't like coming into the workshop. I put the needle in and he turned on me and his jaws were closing on my bare arm and he stopped just before his teeth entered my flesh, looked at me and put his head down in shame and I finished it without any more trouble. He knew I was doing him good.

[0:33:44] Verdenius: How about pulling teeth?

Dalgliesh: Teeth? Well that was remarkably simple. I have even pulled a poor husky's tooth with a pair of pliers. What you did was to get the dog, with a chum, standing against something like a loaded sledge or a rock, so he couldn't go back any further, have the dog between his legs. Then he would put an ice-axe handle in the dog's mouth and pull it back so he held the dog's head and his own mouth against his thighs and then I pulled the tooth out. This was when they had an abscess or something. It was in the dog's interest to have it taken out, and not only the dog's interest; ours too. Because (a) the dog didn't want a septic tooth which we couldn't treat (it was usually broken from fighting) but (b) he wouldn't run so well and that was the basic living, that the health of the dogs: our lived depended on them and theirs depended on us.

[0:34:53] Verdenius: They didn't blame you for it?

Dalgliesh: No. They were marvellous animals, tough as they come. You could never hurt them. They were so tough. To teach them you would probably beat them across the backside with a ski stick, but they are so tough it didn't hurt them. But eventually I drove my own team; without having to do that I could metaphorically lash them with my tongue. I could just shout at them and use … They didn't like swear-words and you can't drive a team of dogs without swear-words. I could really chastise them with my tongue.

[0:35:40] Verdenius: You can't drive dogs without cursing them?

Dalgliesh: No. It's impossible. I don't know why.

[0:35:47] Verdenius: Try 'You stupid dog!' ??? [inaudible] Also I imagine it sounded like …

Dalgliesh: Well you have got to the place, I'm sure, where I had to despatch Snipe. I had to kill him.

[0:36:12] Verdenius: Yes, I got to that.

Dalgliesh: We were all weeping. It was the final betrayal. They had worked for us and we had worked for them and they weren't wanted and so they had to be shot. It was one of the nastiest thing I have ever had to do and I shall never forget it. Thank God it was instantaneous.

[0:36:42] Verdenius: Did you try dog teams at Halley Bay?

Dalgliesh: No, we didn't need them. We were a static base. We were England's main scientific observatory for the International Geophysical Year. An International Geophysical Year doesn't happen very often but it happened this particular time. Being an International Geophysical Year, it lasts (for some reason) 18 months. They had observatories all over the world except in the South Polar regions. So 12 different nations set up observatories there, and the one I set up at Halley Bay was the main British observatory. The idea being that throughout the world they would take observations on the outer space[3] at the same time so that they would be correlated and all have simultaneous observations. As I told you earlier on, we set up the first Dobson spectrophotometer which measured the ozone layer, correctly called the ozonosphere.

[0:37:52] Verdenius: How had things changed in these eight years?

Dalgliesh: [misunderstanding the question] Well I went back, nearly seven years ago now, just on a visit of nostalgia because I wanted to see it again before I died (well I have no intention of doing that at the moment). I was amazed how it had changed. When we were there, you had to do everything. I was a doctor; I was a dentist; I was a veterinary surgeon; I was a photographer; I was a dog-driver; I was a gardener (because we had a little 6-foot by 4-foot greenhouse); I was a cook; and so on. If you wanted something, it was really very simple: you either made it or you went without. But when I went back in 1986, I was amazed to find how there had been demarcations and you had permanent cooks. Instead of cutting squares of snow like this to be your water supply, they had de-salination plants. Their comfort – I didn't resent it at all but it was nothing like what we had to put up with. I mean our base was so cold in the winter that you could not scrub the floor because the water froze.

[0:39:15] Verdenius: But in these eight years between Marguerite Bay and Halley Bay? Had things changed in this time? In your paper you said that it when you went the first time there it was a time of genuine exploration.

[3] Most of the effort of the IGY was directed at near space (sometimes known as geospace) rather than outer space.

Dalgliesh: Well yes, it was. We were doing a whole survey the first time, of the coast, that particular part of the coast in Marguerite Bay: of geological, geographical, meteorological, zoological, botanical, because it hadn't been done before. When I went to Halley Bay, it was purely scientific, and in fact we were merely putting (merely!), we were putting up the largest single building at that time in the Antarctic to house twenty scientists the following year. In the event they sent down 21. But they were coming to do purely scientific observations. Only later on, after the International Geophysical Year finished and the British Antarctic Survey[4] took it over, did they use it as a travelling base as well as a scientific base, and they did journeys inland.

[0:40:41] Verdenius: So it was… Was it still genuine exploration in that time, at Halley Bay?

Dalgliesh: Well it was, in that we were landed on this coast, 400 miles of coast, which had never been landed on before. So I suppose that is exploration. Observations were made of outer space from that position which had never been made before. I think yes, you could call it still exploration. Just travelling from one point to another is not such an acceptable form of exploration as adding to the scientific knowledge, finding out things which were hitherto unknown. I will tell you what one enormous difference I noticed which was due to Man's intervention.

[0:41:43] Dalgliesh: When we first went there in 1948, as we sailed through the waters, you would see whales all the time, and even by 1950, only two years later, they were not such an everyday occurrence but you still saw them. When we went back in 1956, they were very rare. In fact I saw more in '86 but they were all the smaller whales. We didn't see any blue whales which are the biggest (biggest mammal that has ever existed on the Earth). We didn't see any fin whales but we saw a lot of minke whales and some humpback whales which the Japanese were taking for (they say) scientific purposes, but we know all the meat finishes up in the butchers' shops or in the restaurants.

[0:42:39] Verdenius: You claimed the land around Halley Bay in the name of the Queen?

Dalgliesh: Yes, I did.

[0:42:45] Verdenius: How did this procedure take place?

Dalgliesh: Well originally, as I think I told you, Fuchs was going to go in a week ahead of me and it was arranged that we would establish an advance party, of which I was the leader, and his advance party (but he was going home for a year before he came back to do his Crossing). I was to be the leader of both bases. But in the event, he tried to take a short cut and got caught in the ice for five weeks. There was no point in us going to him, otherwise we would have been caught in the ice too, the pack ice. So we followed the instructions we had both been given (they were identical copies) and we bore away to the east, we found open water and sailed down to 77 South, where we found unbroken ice except for a lead (that's a break in the ice) which was wide enough for the ship and in the distance, only 50 or 60 miles away, we could see

[4] Which was then known as Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS).

a water sky, which is when you have got open water and then the reflection is dark on the clouds. The opposite to that is an ice blink when on an open sea, if you see bright light on the clouds, you know there is pack ice underneath.

[0:44:06] Dalgliesh: The captain said he knew he could get down this lead, but if it didn't go all the way and he had to come out again, he would have to come out backwards; he didn't know a better way of losing his propeller. Anyhow we then looked further up the coast. We found what subsequently was called Halley Bay. I landed with two companions. I had been sworn in for political reasons as a magistrate, in South Georgia when we called in there as our last port of call, and having landed, I thought 'Well …' I didn't know this was going to happen because I knew Fuchs was going to get there before me but he didn't. So I thought 'Perhaps I am the first person to land here.' So I stood there and said something to the effect that I was Her Britannic Majesty's magistrate and I was taking formal possession of this land. I have never told her but I took possession of a few hundred thousand square miles of land, or ice, or both.

[0:45:12] Verdenius: You have never told her?

Dalgliesh: No. Somebody asked me why I didn't, in fact a bishop[5], who she knew very well indeed. He's dead now. I have known him since 1947. He said 'Well she ought to be told. Why didn't you tell her?' I said I assumed that the Royal Society, who were sending me there, would have told her if they thought it was appropriate, because I sent despatches back to them, which included the fact that I had taken possession of it in her name. But to this day I don't know whether anyone has told her. A very old-fashioned thing to do but I am a bit of a traditionalist.

[0:45:58] Verdenius: Is there a standard procedure for doing it?

Dalgliesh: I don't know. I hadn't been taught. I didn't know it was going to happen. I suddenly found instead of following on, and having the air support showing me where to go in the pack ice, we were on our own. We had no aeroplane to show us where to go. In the event, when Fuchs did get out and he came to Halley Bay, he said that he could not have got inland from there (which in fact wasn't true because they have done it since) and he wanted to get to 78 South which was a shorter journey, and he did that thing. He landed at 78 South. We in fact – the advance party – went with him and helped them unload and helped them put up their base, which they hadn't done. He had told them when he left, not to start building the hut, the wooden base, until they had got all their stores off the frozen sea. They didn't obey him and they started building the base.

[0:47:17] Dalgliesh: A blizzard came up so they were stuck in their tents for ten days or whatever it was. When the blizzard stopped, they went outside and went to the edge of the ice cliff and looked down, and half their stores had floated away. So they spent their winter living in a tent and a tractor crate. I always regret that the work my chaps did, there were ten of us, was never acknowledged. We helped build the base. I took two carpenters down. The commissioned bosun, who was a most wonderful chap, who was with me, looked around when he got there and he said 'Well there is

[5] Launcelot Fleming.

no excuse for dirt.' and he found himself a bucket, hot water, scrubbing brush and soap, and got down on his hands and knees and scrubbed the floor. I and another party went off in the expedition ship and caught a whole lot of seals to feed his dogs, which I had bought in Greenland for him.

[0:48:30] Verdenius: The geography of the surroundings of Halley Bay was quite different from Marguerite Bay?

Dalgliesh: Totally different. In Graham Land you got piedmont ice and occasionally shelf ice (or ice shelf), which in Scott's day was known as the Great Ice Barrier, but it is the land ice. It has reached the sea and it comes over the sea. But that is freshwater ice, in distinction to your frozen sea[6], which breaks up in little bits as a pack and is known as pack ice, and that is saltwater ice. In Marguerite Bay you had your piedmont ice and/or shelf ice and then you had mountains rising up to 6000 feet – very very dramatic scenery. At Halley Bay we were on shelf ice and it was just almost flat whiteness except that (I have already said this) it is not white, but a great flat sheet of ice disappearing for 40 or 50 miles until it comes to the land proper where the rock occurs. You are then rising up onto the true Antarctic continent.

[0:49:56] Verdenius: So it seems that there is not too much to venture out, to leave your base for?

Dalgliesh: No. We did occasionally go to … We spent the whole year building – there were only ten of us – building this multi-layered laboratory (if you like), observatory, which had five layers to trap the warmth, to house 20 scientists: two bunkrooms and their various workshops where they would do their work. Only occasionally did we take a little time off, which might mean going down to Halley Bay itself, or to Emperor Bay where there was a colony of probably 40,000 emperor penguins (very difficult to count). We saw some when we first arrived because they were in Halley Bay too, some of them. In fact they came out to greet us. They didn't know what we were. If they thought we were anything, we were rather large and over-dressed penguins. The first time we ever saw them was when I was in Marguerite Bay. We didn't know what they were. They stood up. As you walked towards them, they bowed to us. We took our hats off and we bowed back to them.

[0:51:29] Dalgliesh: They are wonderful creatures, very dignified and very well-named as emperors. That time in Marguerite Bay, having been marooned and we couldn't get out, Fuchs had thought up work for us to do for the following year, so we wouldn't just sit and do nothing. Having found a very small rookery, they call it, of emperor penguins, only about two or three hundred, it was then only the third known rookery of emperor penguins in the world. Scott's party found one at Cape Crozier, Ross Island, and the French had found one, oh no it was Mawson, in Adelie Land at Cape Denison and we found this small one. Scott's party: Cherry Garrard with Wilson and Bowers had gone to Cape Crozier in the winter, because they lay their eggs in the winter, to get a collection of eggs to take back to the British Museum in London, to the Natural History. And they did not succeed because they had the most terrible journey. Cherry Garrard wrote a book called *The Worst Journey in the World*.

---

[6] Usually called sea ice.

[0:52:46] Dalgliesh: But we had found these, and so Fuchs said 'Well why don't …?' Bernard Stonehouse was our meteorologist but an embryo zoologist (he finally had the Chair of Zoology at Bradford University). 'Why don't you spend the winter taking a series of embryos?' So Bernard Stonehouse, the meteorologist and zoologist, Dave Jones who was the air mechanic (we hadn't got an aeroplane) and me were to go out and spend the winter there. So we left with three teams of dogs (one was a supporting team), sledged over 50 miles out to sea on the frozen sea to these islands, established our base with two tents (one measured 7 by 7 by 7 feet) in which the three of us lived, and the other two went back. Then we took one egg each day, took the embryo out, fixed it in alcohol and various things and kept them warm in our sleeping bags until they were properly fixed. They are, to this day, in the Natural History Museum in London. Having taken it out, we had a large egg. 'What shall we do with it?' So we had it scrambled and it was enough for three of us to eat and highly treasured because fresh food was non-existent.

[0:54:22] Verdenius: The embryos are still there in the museum?

Dalgliesh: The embryos? They have been moved but they were originally in the Natural History Museum in Kensington. I have got one. When we were leaving the Dion Islands (they are called) where this rookery is, we were leaving there. We went over rotten ice without knowing it, because when you get shallow water, the tides will go more rapidly, and so it looked like ordinary frozen sea and it wasn't. And the sledge sank through. The dogs were cut loose and we got most of our equipment off. One of the chaps who was there sat on it, floating, and passed off. We chucked him a line and he was hauled back, and we only lost a ski and one other thing.

[0:55:18] Dalgliesh: It wasn't very much considering what we might have lost, but while we were doing this, this team of dogs had got off. One killed an emperor penguin and it was just lying there dead. So I thought 'Well, it seems a pity.' So I cut its head off, kept it frozen until I had a spare moment, and scraped it. I have had it mounted and I have got it upstairs now. They are the biggest and rarest of all existing penguins. There are fossils of penguins which are 7 feet tall or more. These weigh 70 lbs. or more; they are heavy. They are very very striking. They have got a red lower bill; they have got an orange auricular patch; they have got a slate-grey back and a lemon-yellow front. It is amazing to have such colours down in the Antarctic.

[0:56:19] Verdenius: You said it was a country full of colour.

Dalgliesh: Then I went on to add other things: that like doctoring, travelling, stalking, studying wildlife, having a few sheep, and I think the people who have got nothing to offer except polar exploration can become just as boring as doctors who have nothing to talk about except doctoring.

[0:56:50] Verdenius: Is this what you meant when you wrote in a letter, that you said that in your later years you had begun to see human endeavour in a more true light?

Dalgliesh: Yes, exactly that. It is all rather sad, that people who you had admired, with good reason, nevertheless accepted all the admiration, accepted the loyalty, accepted what you did but never gave anything in return. You didn't do it for anything in return, but it would have been rather nice it there had been a little returned,

wouldn't it? And what I told you just now, about not turning up for the funeral, I think that sums it up completely.

[0:57:42] Verdenius: Do you think that a lot of the people who went to the Antarctic suffered …? That it was a monomania activity to them?

Dalgliesh: I'm sorry, I don't understand you.

[0:58:16] Verdenius: Do you think that you had to be a monomaniac? You know the concept in psychiatry? It's not really a psychiatric concept but it's an idea that you have. Can't keep you mind off one thing and in some way this is bothering people.

Dalgliesh: Oh you mean almost like a megalomaniac?

[0:58:47] Verdenius: Maybe.

Dalgliesh: But they just have one interest only.

[0:58:51] Verdenius: One interest only.

Dalgliesh: Yes, well I do, I think it is exactly that and I think this is where I have been very fortunate in that I have had my interest in travelling and seeing different cultures and different people and different places, different diseases. As I have said to people before now, I had 30 years in the Navy and I really 'squeezed the lemon' (as I put it). But I went to so many different places, and saw so many different people and occasions, the extremes being (I always quote) treating anything from frostbite to leprosy and from eskimos to the Royal Family, and you can't have much greater extremes than that.

[0:59:36] Verdenius: Have you ever considered going to the South Pole?

Dalgliesh: No. There is no purpose. If somebody offered me a flight there I would take it, but it doesn't matter. In fact that is where Ed Hillary behaved very badly. He wasted fuel and tractors. He didn't need to go to South Pole.

[1:00:06] Verdenius: You know these days that are sort of scared of the coast, the continent. The mainland so to speak, rather empty. It's just like it doesn't attract much attention.

Dalgliesh: The only reason to go there would be purely scientific. Somebody should have established (and the Americans did) a scientific observatory at the South Pole, because it is at the South Pole. Someone should (and the Russians did) establish a base at the Pole of Inaccessibility. That was the point farthest away from the sea in any direction, and that recently was Dick Laws who did those paintings. He was telling me that they are doing ice core samples. And they were put down 160,000 years ago – an extraordinary figure. They pull up the ice; they can analyse it and they can tell how much carbon dioxide there was in the atmosphere then. Quite recently, in those terms, you can still see the layer of ash when Krakatoa exploded at the end of the last century, whenever it was. The dust went all over the world, including in Antarctica. It is possible …. I haven't seen it but I have talked to people who have. It

is possible to see the layer of dust which landed. And you can find pollen from plants which has blown thousands of miles and is deposited on the ice. It is a real history to go all through all these layers.

[1:02:05] Verdenius: You made some notes: it is hopping from one thing to another, so there will be some discontinuities. You say that some people got snow in their eyes.

Dalgliesh: Snow blindness?

[1:02:32] Verdenius: Some people suffered or experienced snow in their eyes, meaning that they wanted to go back …

Dalgliesh: Oh that was just my way of expressing it. I have said to my wife that the ice and the snow got into my heart before she did, because I hadn't met her. But I have yet to meet anybody who had been there (another way of expressing it) who didn't want to go back again. I would like to go back again now. My chances are nil, because I am getting too old. They don't want old fogeys on there. No, it's a love. For all that it can be very uncomfortable, very cold, very hard work, and driving blizzards which would literally take the soft grain out of wood, which would strip the paint off oil drums. When it is beautiful, it is so beautiful that it more than makes up for all the discomfort. That's the only way I can explain why you long to go back.

[1:03:47] Verdenius: Because the beauty rules over …?

Dalgliesh: Over-rules, yes. It is more beautiful than the discomfort is uncomfortable.

[1:03:59] Verdenius: You said also you noted down that you had some difficulty sleeping there. Was it only ??? [inaudible]

Dalgliesh: No. Most of us did. Most of us found we had insomnia; we found it difficult to sleep and I don't know why. One of the reasons, but only one (this was in the summer), when the sun didn't set, we would be talking to one another, just chatting, quite often in the kitchen, because you can sit on the stove and keep your behind warm. And you would just be chatting and chatting and chatting, and without realising it, gauging the time of day by the light outside the window. But of course it wasn't setting, and so you would suddenly find it was two o'clock in the morning, and quite interesting staying up quite as late as that.

[1:05:06] Verdenius: What did you talk about?

Dalgliesh: Very interesting. I will give you an instance. A chap I travelled with, who was a most interesting man (he lives in Australia now), he had been a para-trooper and landed at Arnhem. We had only about one book each because of the weight. You couldn't take too much, and we would read by a candle. But we would talk and talk and talk until we had stripped each other of superficialities. And sometimes you would get to the point where there was nothing more to say, and you would both lapse into silence, and you would remain in silence. Nobody minded. Then suddenly you would think of something and you would start another conversation, but you could exhaust one's immediate brain with reminiscences.

[1:06:05] Dalgliesh: His, as you can imagine, having jumped on his parachute in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Arnhem, Norway, and he had endless stories to tell, but eventually he would run out as much as I would run out of stories; not stories but episodes which had happened in one's life. The other thing is that when you have lived as closely as that with people, I find … Again, Dick Laws who did these two paintings I have got of his, we can not see one another for a year, two years, five years and yet when we meet, we carry on as though it was yesterday. Friendship has been formed and it is there. No distance, geographically or in time, has diluted it or broken it.

[1:07:12] Verdenius: Stripping off each other's superficialities is also one of the things that has come back?

Dalgliesh: Well that's why I say I think you knew the true man inside, and why we found it very difficult, as I still do, to carry on small talk. I don't really like dinner parties and things very much. I think it's a pity; it makes me rather awkward. And I find someone who does share my interests: nothing will stop us talking, more or less. Share politeness to the other people present. I said it earlier on, that … Well I didn't say it but I will say it now. I don't think anyone could go to the Antarctic and come back the same person. It changes your character. You have put up with all sorts of things which you would not have put up with before, but on the other hand you find you are intolerant of things like small-talk, when people have to talk without saying anything. You know what I mean? They certainly make a noise but if you boil it down, what they have said amounts to nothing.

[1:08:47] Verdenius: Now to another subject. You wrote that when building Halley Bay, you decided to make the sitting room as little like Antarctica as you could. Just that. How did you decide it?

Dalgliesh: Well we wanted it to remind us of home. I have got a picture somewhere I could show you of the fireplace, which was quite bogus. It appears to be made of bricks and stone but it was all made of plywood which we had painted to look like bricks and stone. There was a bunch of flowers in a vase which someone had made out of paper. Someone even made a cobweb out of thin cotton up in the top. And we made beams, old beams like the ones we have got in our dining room here, but they were made of perfectly new wood which we chipped around and stained. We wanted it to look like anything other than the Antarctic. I don't know why. We all agreed that it would be rather nice to have. Very interesting that we took all this trouble, but I have been to two American bases and they are cold, soulless. They make no effort whatsoever. They wouldn't dream of having curtains; they wouldn't dream of having pictures; they wouldn't dream of having a bogus pretend fireplace.

[1:10:22] Verdenius: What are they like, the American bases?

Dalgliesh: Cold. Not physically cold but they are featureless, characterless. Just plain walls, plain floor, plain chairs, but then I think the Americans are a very funny race (funny peculiar).

[1:10:50] Verdenius: Because I haven't seen these bases, could you describe them to me now? What you seemed to make was essentially, as you describe it, was like a pub.

Dalgliesh: A pub? Yes, you are quite right.

[1:11:10] Verdenius: What the Americans are doing, is that essentially Antarctica decoration?

Dalgliesh: No, they just don't bother. I will give you another instance. The year before I got to Marguerite Bay, the Americans had had a base on the same island and they were always looting (as they called it) which was a euphemism for dishonesty really, for stealing. And they openly admitted to our chaps (because there was an overlap), and some of the chaps who had been with the Americans stayed on with us. We went through our living room and the bunks around the edges, we went through a workshop, we went through the dog-house which was where we kept the harnesses, the whips and various other things that were needed.

[1:12:02] Dalgliesh: Then we came down some steps and we came to the end of a Nissen hut where we had a bathroom. Then we had the stores, be they: clothing, food, cigarettes, tobacco, booze, you name it, and right at the end of that was the two-seater lavatory. So every day we would all walk down there two or three times, and not once did any one of us think of taking anything. The Americans admitted they couldn't have done it because all the stores would have been taken. And this is the different approach. The English approach, which is of sheer basic honesty. You are stealing from yourself really, aren't you? Because those are our stores, our food, our tobacco, our booze. The Americans would loot each other and then they would loot the looter.

[1:13:03] Verdenius: Loot the looter?

Dalgliesh: I am surprised Ray Adie didn't tell you that.

[1:13:17] Verdenius: He told me that there was a difference between the Americans and the English.

Dalgliesh: Oh yes. They were all gung-ho. They had to have a steak every day, which they brought down and buried in the snow. It kept it all right but we just made do with tinned and dried stuff, or … A thing we did like was roast stuffed seal heart or seal liver because neither was fishy. Seal meat is fishy, very dark and fishy. But nevertheless Amundsen succeeded when he did because he made all his men eat seal meat every day, because he knew (and we were aware of the knowledge too) that it is very full of Vitamin C. So I am afraid all Scott's party were suffering from scurvy and they needn't have done. Amundsen's party weren't at all; they were completely built up. That's right. He sat on his sledge at times. I'm not saying Scott wasn't a very brave man but I think he was very misguided.

[1:14:33] Verdenius: Most people are sort of Anglophiles about Scott. What do you think when Scott comes to Antarctica and he says 'My God, this is an awful place.'

Dalgliesh: That was after he had found Amundsen's tent, wasn't it?

[1:14:56] Verdenius: It probably was.

Dalgliesh: I think so. I mean the depth of despair and depression, having worked incredibly hard, to find that he had been beaten to it. I think that's why … coupled with the fact that we know, from what they ate, that they must have had scurvy, because they did not have a sufficient intake of Vitamin C. So that would probably affect your brain. There is no reason why your brain should be excluded from the rest of your body. The obvious signs of blatant scurvy were: your teeth fall out and you bruise and have terrible haemorrhages under your skin. There are no two ways about it, they all suffered scurvy, some more than others. That's typical of human beings down there. *Homo sapiens* is infinitely variable.

[1:15:53] Verdenius: Does it make sense to you. Can you understand it, him saying that 'My God, this is an awful place.'?

Dalgliesh: Yes, I can, I think. It's the real trough, the bottom of a depression wasn't it? You have struggled like mad and then you found that it was all in vain, that you had been beaten. He did one of the things I can't explain, like he took five men instead of four, and all the stores were geared up for four. We've all got our warts and our bad points, but I think one of the most exhilarating, inspiring accounts to read is Shackleton crossing South Georgia with two companions. Have you ever read that? He went down, funnily enough …. Our ship did get nipped in the ice, in a sea 400 miles across in any direction, within 3 miles of where he was beset ('beset' meaning nipped in the ice). We got over the side with picks and dug ourselves out.

[1:17:36] Dalgliesh: He couldn't get out. It wasn't that he didn't try, but he couldn't, and his ship was eventually crushed and sunk. And they all took to the ice floes, great floes, and they drifted north. Then the ice floes got smaller and smaller and so they took to the boats and they sailed to Elephant Island. They landed and they turned one of the boats upside down to shelter themselves. Then McNish (was the name of the shipwright), who because he lost his temper one day he never got a Polar Medal. That's Shackleton's 'wart', if you like. But he made that *James Caird* boat, which you can see at Dulwich School, South London. It is there to this day, this tiny boat you can see. He cased the top in with wood and canvas, so there was the smallest possible hole for them to work in, and it sailed, five of them, 750 miles across the worst seas in the world.

[1:18:51] Dalgliesh: Worsley navigated, found South Georgia, because he was such a good navigator. He might have gone either side. They landed on the south side which is the wrong side, in that all the whaling stations are on the north side. So Shackleton and two companions (it makes the most moving reading) climbed South Georgia which no-one had ever done. People said it was impossible. They climbed over. They eventually came down to a whaling station and they were black from the blubber stoves. He saw a Norwegian, the Norwegian manager. He spoke to him. The chap said 'I don't recognise you but I think your voice is familiar.' He said 'I am Shackleton.' He said 'Good.' Anyhow to cut a long story short, he eventually saved the other men. He never lost a single man.

[1:19:52] Dalgliesh: But to me the most moving thing is that when they were crossing, there were the three of them: the two and Shackleton. And one of the two said to the other 'Do you know it's a funny thing. When we were crossing and it was my turn' (because all three took it in turns to prepare the meal) 'I always divided the food into four. Then I would say to myself "Don't be silly. There are only three of us."' But without fail they were divided into four because they knew there was a fourth presence with them. So the other one said 'Yes, I did exactly the same.' So they said 'Well let's ask the Boss.' and they asked Shackleton and he said 'Yes.' I don't know whether you are religious or not but as far as I am concerned, that was a presence which took them over this apparently impossible mountain range down to safety. I think it was a most incredible thing.

[1:20:53] Verdenius: Do you believe in God?

Dalgliesh: Mmm. I don't think I could go to the Antarctic and then come back … I have always said I don't think anyone …, I couldn't have gone to the Antarctic and come back an atheist. I felt I was in the presence of a much greater Being, almost an intruder, especially in that silence when you knew, in fact, that the vast glaciers were shaping mountains and valleys. Yes, I felt an intruder. God, Almighty Being, whatever you like to call Him. Yes, most certainly.

[1:21:38] Verdenius: Did you believe in God when you went there?

Dalgliesh: Not so firmly as I did after I had been there, undoubtedly.

[1:21:55] Verdenius: Did you use to have Sundays, I mean …?

Dalgliesh: No, we never did. I rather regret we didn't actually. I would have a Sunday and just not work. Not at Halley Bay to begin with. They said I was a slave driver, but the point about Halley Bay was: as I say we were the first people to land there. No-one could tell us what the weather was going to be like because no-one had been there; they didn't know. So I said 'We are not going to take a chance.' (which they did down at Shackleton, as they called their base) and I said 'We are going to work seven days a week, 14 hours a day.' and I was known as the Slavedriver. It was 120 feet long, this building. The alternative, if I hadn't done that … I was right and there is no better way of being unpopular than being right I can tell you.

[1:22:50] Dalgliesh: But the alternative was that the inside (because we were building the outer shell), the inside would be filled with packed snow. By packed snow, I mean snow so packed that your shovel would ring when you hit it, not slip into it like the soft gentle flakes which we know back here. Alternatively, even worse, it might have gone underneath part of the roof and torn it off. And within less than a week of completing the outer shell, the blizzards really started and we could then work inside and complete everything inside. Nothing clever except that I had learned something very definitely in my two years originally. That is if you start taking anything for granted, you will 'measure your length' as we say in English.

[1:23:39] Dalgliesh: I don't know whether you know what I mean. You will trip up, fall flat on your face. So I wasn't going to take that chance. It wasn't just me. I was responsible for nine other men – one of them was my brother – and I wasn't going to

take that chance. And it turned out that I was quite right. The real blizzards came. I have got it in my diary somewhere. My diary, as I tell you, is excessively boring but I have got it in my diary of when it came. It was within a week of completion, the blizzards really came. And I told you earlier on, those blizzards are such that if you had to go outside, there would be no point in standing up because you would be blown over. So you crawl along on your hands and knees. I don't regret it. I was young; I wouldn't do it now.

[1:24:36] Verdenius: Why do you say your diaries were excessively boring?

Dalgliesh: Oh, excessively boring, because I just put down facts which … well those things I find interesting. I hope you did, but my wife persuaded me. It took some badgering over a matter of many years. because I have had a very interesting life, travelling all over the place with a variety of people. As I said to you earlier on, from the eskimos to the Royal Family and so on. She said 'You must write it down for the children.' and I kept saying 'Yes.' and not doing it. Then she got more and more … so I eventually started writing down headings, which is the way I like to write things. Then one day – I can tell you exactly how it started – an old friend of ours came who talks incessantly and has a laser-beam voice which will go through 3 foot of stone wall. I thought 'Oh God …' My wife said to me 'Go and shut yourself in the study.' (where I showed you the egg and things). So I did and I got there and I said 'What on earth am I going to do? I know what. I will start writing.' So I started writing and I have written down, for them, bits about the Antarctic, which I think would be far more interesting than my diaries. I used my diaries when I wanted to find out a date, but otherwise no, they are frightfully boring.

[1:29:26] Verdenius: You use it as historic material?

Dalgliesh: Historic?

[1:26:35] Verdenius: To find out facts?

Dalgliesh: Yes. But the funny thing was: the chap who bound them for me (because I did one for each of the two children, one for my wife, one each for my two sisters and sister-in-law, so I had to have …). It cost quite a bit of money. But I said 'Did you read any of it?' He said 'Well I did of course, as I was binding them.' They have got one of these spiral binders. He said 'You must have kept the most detailed diaries.' I said 'I didn't you know. It's all up here.' And it is up there. But I found once I have written something down, it is far more difficult to recall it. I read something and I think 'Good Heavens! Did I really do that? Did I really say that?' I think that's one of the things that stopped me doing this originally. I am glad I have done it, for their sake. Maybe they will read it, or have read it.

[1:27:38] Verdenius: OK.

Dalgliesh: [apparently reading from diary] '6 January 1956. Cabo Rol,' (That was what it was called then.) 'By 5am we were off the bay south of Cabo Dedo. We started our search once more. At 6am we passed a bay with at least 5000 emperor penguins, most of them being young ones. This would indicate that the total population in winter may be doubled and this may be the largest emperor penguin

rookery yet discovered. In the furthest corner of the bay was a slope, with the penguins, and offering a possible if messy way up onto the icesheet[7]. Around the northern cape of this bay we found another bay with only about a thousand penguins, but in the furthest corner of this bay was a gentle slope up to the ice.'

[1:28:33] Dalgliesh: 'We tied up and at 7.15am, Ken[8], George Hemmen and I set off on skis with a small sledge, to the slope. We found the sea ice firm and crossed four cracks before reaching the slope. This we skied up easily and soon found ourselves on the top of the ice sheet which lay before us as an almost limitless white plain rising slowly and gently to the east. We continued for a mile or so inland, testing all the way for crevasses but found none. Nor did this surprise us, for the easy contours of the country. We tested a large area for the base site and erected more trail flags which we had done all the way from the slope. Far to the east we could see the main continental plateau which presented crevassed areas only in places.'

[1:29:25] Dalgliesh: 'I took formal possession of the land in the name of the Queen, which the other two thought rather a joke, which I thought was the proper thing to do, as we were the first men ever to land on the Caird Coast. It was a brilliantly clear sunny day. We were in our shirt sleeves, and there was that all-pervading silence and peace which you can only find in these regions. Life was very good. We sat on our sledge and ate some chocolate, took photographs of ourselves and felt thirsty. Then I produced my surprise, an orange which I had saved from Rio de Janeiro. Life was even better. We returned to the ship and gave them the good news, then started the unloading. The tractors were already off and running.'

[1:30:10] Dalgliesh: 'After lunch, Robin and I set off to lay some boards over the tide cracks we had found, but after a little way the tractor bogged down in the slush and meltwater lying on the sea ice, which itself was about 6 feet thick, however. This was only the first of many such occasions. We had to learn the hard way that the only way to travel over the dreadful surfaces formed at the high temperatures we were experiencing, was to travel very slowly indeed, always on the same track. I decided in these circumstances it would be best to work at night when the cooler temperatures would give better surfaces.' Well that's one day; it's one of the few more interesting bits. [noise of a pump] That's the central heating.

[1:30:57] Verdenius: Do you have ??? [inaudible] for your Christmas Day?

Dalgliesh: I doubt it. This was only the … No, because …

[1:31:09] [End]

ENDS

---

[7] He means iceshelf.
[8] Ken Powell.

Possible extracts:

‘Any fool can be uncomfortable.’ [0:05:00]
Hypothermia. [0:09:04]
Long distance medical diagnosis. [0:12:49]
First night at Stonington. [0:16:10]
A distant look in the eyes. [0:20:07]
Snow and ice ‘not white’. [0:24:28]
Feeding the dogs. [0:26:24]
Clothing. [0:29:44]
Canine dentistry. [0:32:28]
Claiming the land in the Queen's name. [0:44:06]
The penguin rookeries. [0:49:56]
British and American bases compared. [1:21:55]
7-day working to finish the outer shell at Halley Bay. [0:05:00]
Choosing the site for the IGY base. [1:28:33]