

LEONARD TYSON

Edited transcript of a recording of Leonard 'Lofty' Tyson interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 8th December 2009. Transcribed by Murray Roberts August 2014.

[Part 1 0:00:01] Lee: This is Leonard 'Lofty' Tyson recorded at his home at Edenthorpe near Doncaster by Chris Eldon Lee on 8th December 2009. Lofty Tyson Part 1.

Tyson: Leonard Charles Tyson. Born in Kirk Sandall, near Doncaster – next village to here – on 20th August 1923

[Part 1 0:00:28] Lee: So you are now 80.....

Tyson: 86 years old.

[Part 1 0:00:32] Lee: And where did the name Lofty come from?

Tyson: This goes back to when I first thought of joining FIDS. At the time I saw the advert for FIDS needing wireless operator/ mechanics for service in the Antarctic. I was doing a course at Hull Tech. to get a certificate to go to sea as a ships radio officer. Now, I applied for this FIDS job as the result of seeing an advert in a magazine and I got an appointment for a Monday and this coincided with my passing out exam at Hull Tech. The exams had started on Friday and were due to continue on Monday. The Chief instructor – when I told him that I had got this interview – he arranged for the examiner to come and examine me, and a mate of mine, on the Saturday. So we did and I went down to do the interview.

[Part 1 0:01:51] Lee: How old would you have been Lofty?

Tyson: Well....I got demobbed on my 30th birthday, or a month afterwards, and that was in '53, so this was.... So I would have been 31 – just before my 32nd birthday. Having got this job with FIDS I was then working as an electrician's mate at the Rockware Glass Company on a temporary basis until the ship sailed and I got this invite down to Cambridge to go and see and meet some of the people who were going round being interviewed on what was in for me.

[Part 1 0:02:45] So I went down on my motorbike and, as usual, I got lost in Cambridge and I couldn't find the Scott Polar Institute. So I was late, and when I got in there I just joined the mob who were being shown sledges and husky dogs and so on. Then we were all being called in for an interview in one of the rooms of the building and there was this man sitting on one side of the desk with a tape recorder and I sat down on the other side and he interviewed me.

It never struck me at the time but I just assumed that he was from FIDS doing the interview, but it turned out that he was from the BBC. Well during the course of his conversation he asked me did I have any nicknames? So I said 'No, as far as I can remember it's always been Len or Tyson. It might have been 'Lofty' if I got out of step on the parade ground when I was in the RAF or something like that, but otherwise no it's never been 'Lofty'. It was just Len.' So that was it. He also asked me a few more questions. One of them was 'What do you expect to find when you get down there?' So I said 'find a bit of peace and quiet' And then I went.....when I got down there I was forwarded a copy from the Rockware magazine in which it said that the author knew it was noisy in the works, but didn't think it was noisy enough to drive anyone to the Antarctic for a bit of peace and quiet.

[Part 1 0:05:52] But anyway – as I say – I didn't know this recording was for the BBC, but on the *John Biscoe* going out Bill Anderson was doing recordings and I discovered there that this was for a programme the BBC was going to broadcast called 'Expedition South', and they were following our year's people down there to see how they got on. Well of course he did a few recordings on the boat on the way down there, but I didn't know when these things were being broadcast.

When we got to Stanley I wasn't going down on the *Biscoe*'s first trip south, so I was offloaded in Stanley. I was working in the Met Office as a relief operator, and when I got up to the Met Office I found that they had three transmitters and two receivers, but they had two transmitters and one receiver out of action so my first job was to get them working.

[Part 1 0:06:10] But anyhow I settled in Stanley for a month and one evening we were invited to a party at Arthur Martin's and this 'Expedition South' programme was broadcast over the local radio. So that was the first time I had heard it and on it the man said 'Bill Anderson tells me Lofty Tyson is the Casanova of the *Biscoe* with a phone ringing every few minutes with one of the local damsels. He wanted a few words with her. That was the first time that I knew I was being called Lofty Tyson, and you can imagine the reception I got when I got to the party!

[Part 1 0:07:11] Lee: Were you the Casanova of the *Biscoe*?

Tyson: No. What happened was when we docked in the early hours of the morning, as soon as the post office was open, I went ashore with the donkeyman to collect the ship's mail and when we got – I'm going to prove myself a liar – when we got to the post office the man behind the counter said to me: 'Are you Lofty Tyson?' I hadn't been ashore for more than ten minutes so I admitted it. Anyway on the way back to the ship we met a woman who the donkeyman knew because he had worked in Stanley before he joined the *Biscoe*. So he stopped to talk to her and I went back to the ship. I didn't take any notice – I didn't know what she looked like.

[Part 1 0:08:16] Anyhow when he was taking his stint as – I suppose it would have been as the gangway Observer or whatever the equivalent was – whenever he was on duty he phoned her because she worked in the telephone exchange. And, on this first occasion, he yelled down the Fiddery steps: 'Lofty, Valerie wants a few words with you.' So anyway I went up and by the time I got there she had rung off. So this became the thing. Whenever he was on duty he would speak to her and he would yell down the stairs, but she was never there when I got up. So, of course, all the fids cottoned on to this and every time the phone rang they yelled: 'Lofty, Valerie wants you.'

[Part 1 0:09:19] So anyhow on the Sunday – can't remember now if it was the first or second Sunday – this cinema show was in the town hall and he yelled out: 'Valerie wants you to take her to the cinema'. So - I was going to the cinema anyhow – I let them all get off to the cinema and thought to myself: 'Damn it. There is only one way to put a stop to this lark. I'll go and meet her.' But I hadn't a clue what she looked like. So I went to the teashop and looked around at all the women in there and she blushed. So I said: 'I believe I'm supposed to take you to the cinema. Are you ready?'

So we went and I don't know whether you have ever been to the cinema in the town, but the entrance to the town hall is at one end opposite to the stage. The projector was on the stage and the screen was above the entrance and the chairs were set out in two lots with an aisle down the middle. Well, of course, not knowing my way around I was letting her lead me in. She walked right up the middle and, of course, as soon as we got level with the first row of stalls all the Fids were sat up on the stage in the expensive seats and they all burst into applause, and, of course as soon as that happened the idea spread and the whole audience burst into applause. So she sat down on the first available seat and I sort of acknowledged the applause and went and sat down next to her. So that was that ... that was how I came to be called Casanova Lofty!

[Part 1 0:11:25] Lee: Who was Valerie?

Tyson: Valerie. She later married one of the forecasters out there. What was his name? He'd been out there before but he came out again while I was out there, but that was later on after I came up from the South.

[Part 1 0:11:54] She was a Falklander was she?

Tyson: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:11:57] Lee: Attractive?

Tyson: Yes. I wasn't particularly attracted to be quite honest.

[Part 1 0:12:07] Lee: She wasn't the one that got away then?

Tyson: Oh no no.

[Part 1 0:12:14] Lee: And this was all happening in 50....?

Tyson: December 54

[Part 1 0:12:21] Lee: So that radio programme would have gone out about the same time.

Tyson: Yes. It was it became infamous as 'Exhibition Mouth' because Bill Anderson didn't take it seriously.

[Part 10:12:40] Lee: You don't remember any names of the presenters?

Tyson: He was quite well known but I can't remember his name now. I did write to him but I didn't get a reply – probably because I was being rude to him.

[Part 1 0:12:54] Lee: Oh. I see.

Tyson: The result of labelling me the Casanova of the Biscoe.

[Part 1 0:13:00] Lee: Let's go back a bit – can we? Tell me a bit about your education. Which school did you go to? What was your education like?

Tyson: Well I was born in Kirk Sandall and I went to the infant school and the junior school there, which is the next village to here, and then I went to Arnthorpe senior school, and then I went to the junior tech at Doncaster until I was 16. I think I surprised the form master in each case because when it became known at Arnthorpe that I was taking the entrance exam for the RAF the form master gave me a telling off – to put it mildly – for not telling him so that he could have given me some homework.

He said ‘You’ve not got a cat in hell’s chance of passing’. So I think there were 3 people from the school sat this exam and I passed highest. Then at the tech I’d taken the entrance exam before the end of term and the form master came into a machine drawing lesson looking for me because I’d had a phone call from the gas works to say they had got a vacancy for an apprentice and he thought I’d be suitable. So of course, as it happened, I was out relieving myself when he came in and somebody said: ‘He’s going to join the RAF’. So his reply to that was apparently: ‘If – I say again - if he passes’. So he didn’t bear much chance, and I did pass. So I did join the RAF as an aircraft apprentice.

[Part 1 0:15:04] Lee: What year was that?

Tyson: 1939

[Part 1 0:15:10] Lee: An auspicious year.

Tyson: We joined at Halton on 22nd August and were moved to Cranwell on 29th and war was declared on the 3rd (of September) on the Sunday.

[Part 1 0:15:27] Lee: Do you remember when you joined the RAF, were you expecting there to be a war?

Tyson: It looked highly likely, yes.

[Part 1 0:15:36] Lee: but you still went ahead?

Tyson: Yes. I was only 16 – in fact I was 16 years and 2 days when we joined up. Yes, I joined as an apprentice Wireless Electrical Mechanic (WEM) and when war broke out there was some debate whether they were going to keep apprentices on because it was a 3 year course. They decided to keep us on – in fact they brought extra in and it was the biggest entry ever and this 3 year course was reduced to 2 years. And then after a month or two training as a WEM it was changed to WOM – Wireless Operator Mechanic. So then in January ’41 - we were due to pass out in September – but in January we were supposed to be passed out straight away because there was a shortage of WOM’s. Anyhow the powers that be at the school pointed out that that the last 6 months of the course was going to be the most crucial, so they extended it by 6 months. So instead of passing out in September I passed out – got posted on 3rd June. So a 3 year course was reduced to basically 18 months.

[Part 1 0:17:12] Lee: Why wireless Lofty? Were you attracted to radio?

Tyson: Well I thought it sounded like the easiest of the options. There were engine fitters, airframe fitters, armourers, instrument makers, and wireless electrical mechanics. So that seemed the most interesting one of the lot.

[Part 1 0:17:38] Lee: But you had done some toying around as a boy?

Tyson: No

[Part1 0:17:44] Lee: No crystal set?

Tyson: No I hadn't a clue on radio or electrics.

[Part 1 0:17:50] Lee: Did you stay in the RAF throughout the duration of the war?

Tyson: Oh Yes. I was on a 12 year engagement from 18. So I passed out 2 months before I was 18. So I did my 12 years and then, because of the Korean conflict, demob was delayed for a month. So I did 12 years and 1 month from 18 and by that time I was doing a resettlement course at Hull Tech to get my P&G certificate to go to sea as a ship's Radio Officer. I never did, but it stood me in good stead to get this job with FIDS.

[Part 1 0:18:35] Lee: It's a big question but do you think that those 12 years with the RAF helped you to prepare yourself for life with FIDS?

Tyson: Oh Yes.

[Part 1 0:18:47] Lee: In what way?

Tyson: Well basically you got used to living with other people and I also got used to working with radio gear and odd hours, being on call whenever. Oh yes. No regrets about my RAF career except that I went aircrew and having been rejected as a WOM/AG (Wireless Operator mechanic/ Air Gunner) which would have been in Coastal Command. I was rejected at the interview without any questions being asked beyond: 'What are you in for?' I said WOM/AG and he said: 'Too tall'.

So he said: 'Have you ever considered going for PNB (Pilot/Navigator/Bomb Aimer)?' So I said I didn't think my education would be good enough. So he said: 'Would you like to try?' So I did and I was accepted and then we got accelerated entry to train as a NBW (Navigator/Bomb Aimer/Wireless). Well neither me nor anybody in the Orderly Room had ever heard of this trade, so we worked it out there was only one aircraft that used the NBW was the mosquito. Of course that was the most attractive aircraft for any non-pilot. You either flew so high that if anything happened you had a chance to get out, or so low it was all over so quickly you didn't know anything about it.

[Part 1 0:20:51] So I trained as a Nav/W and became redundant at the end of the war and got posted back at my ground trade as an instructor to Compton Bassett in the Radio School. I didn't know I was supposed to be there as permanent staff, so I did a couple of weeks on the course with the rest of the 'Herberts' that had gone down with me. I was sent for by the Chief Instructor. 'Where have you been for the last fortnight?' 'I was on course so and so.' 'You weren't sent here to do the course. You were sent here to be permanent staff.' So the following week I was taking my old class as an instructor.

[Part 1 0:21:40] Lee: So you saw some active service during the war?

Tyson: No, I had a very quiet war.

[Part 1 0:21:47] Lee Oh. OK.

Tyson: There was training. Then I had 2 years sat on my behind at a transmitting station watching 2 transmitters, one in use and one standby. Then I went aircrew and then I went all over the place doing various courses. Babacombe; Cranwell for a refresher; Key bashing course. And then I went to Canada to do a navigation course. I came back and discovered they weren't using Nav/W's in any quantity, so they didn't know what to do with us, so they sent us out to ITW's flying around in Tiger Moths doing map reading familiarisation, and then I did a Senior NCO's course. Then they decided they'd send us to Coastal Command.

[Part 1 0:22:50] We were to become radar operators. The fact was that there was a shortage of straight navigators on Bomber Command, but they were training them as Navigator/Radio, and we had done Wireless, but they didn't consider us for that for that, so we were to go to Coastal Command. So I did a Coastal Command pre OTU signals course and then the war finished. I became redundant and then I discovered – well I decided – I didn't want to be an instructor. So I failed the Instructors Techniques Course. I applied for a posting overseas – anywhere but the Middle East – so then when I finished up in the Canal Zone. I was living in a tent for a year. Then they had a restructuring and I was told that my permanent rank would be Corporal, but in the meantime I still kept my aircrew rank and then I got stuck back on flying again.

So I was on MED/ME Com. squadron, Ansons and Dakotas, and then on a trip to Nairobi I met a man who had been an apprentice with me and had also done his aircrew training with me. He was on 13 squadron flying Mosquito photo reconnaissance aircraft. So he asked me if I would like to get transferred to the squadron and we discovered that we were both based at Fayid. But he was on detachment to Nairobi and I was just delivering an Anson to Nairobi. So anyhow when I got back to Nairobi I did one more trip and I came back and found myself posted to 13 Squadron. So he told me all about the PR job in half an hour, and 10 minutes in the cockpit of a mosquito sat in the sun and so I became a PR/Navigator.

[Part 1 0:25:30] Lee: PR?

Tyson: Photographic Reconnaissance

[Part 1 0:25:34] Lee: So you never flew a plane as such?

Tyson: No. I was just a navigator

[Part 1 0:25:40] Lee: let's just fast forward then to seeing this advert in the magazine. You don't remember the name of the magazine?

Tyson: It was probably Wireless World

[Part 1 0:25:53] Lee: Alright. OK. What made you want to go to the Antarctic? Had you read about it as a boy?

Tyson: Well let's go back to my aircrew career. While I was on 13 Squadron we went down to Nairobi to do a job from there and that was the beginning of June. We had two attempts but couldn't take the photographs because of cloud, and then the plane ran out of flying hours, so it had to be overhauled. Then when it got – when it was ready – we took off to go and take these photographs again but we only got a few hundred yards off the end of the runway and crashed. The pilot was killed. I don't know how I got out but I spent 3 months in an army hospital there and then I got invalided home and spent a year in the hospital at Halton. So then when I came out of hospital I'd gone in as a Warrant Officer Navigator and went to Innsworth which was a holding unit. Well they got me sorted out and then I was posted to Finningley.

[Part 1 0:27:19] Lee: Where?

Tyson: Finningley. Just across the road here – 8 miles away – as an acting Corporal WOM. So I arrived there with 2 requests for grievances on the grounds that I should have kept my rank and pay for six months after being grounded. Alternatively, under the terms I'd gone aircrew, I should have been returned in the rank and pay it is calculated I would have maintained in my ground job. I was promoted from Acting Corporal to substantive Corporal and got a posting to Southern Rhodesia. So I had 15 months out with injuries. Burns.

[Part 1 0:28:40] Lee: What was your first inkling of the Antarctic and why did you decide you wanted to go?

Tyson: While I was in hospital I was an avid reader and I think I read every book on the Antarctic they had in the library. Well I read lots of other books of course – but I got quite interested, so when I saw the advert I thought 'that's a part of the World I wouldn't normally see and it should be interesting so we'll have a bash.' So I did.

[Part 1 0:29:15] Lee: So you had heard about Scott and the heroes – before your time of course.

Tyson: Yes. Much before my time.

[Part 1 0:29:27] Lee: And what was the interview like when you went to FIDS to be interviewed?

Tyson: To be quite honest I don't remember anything at all about it. I've a vague idea where it was and from there I'd to go to Harley Street for a medical, but I couldn't tell you who was there or anything about it.

[Part 1 0:29:46] Lee: Do you think the fact that you'd done that period of time in the RAF had stood you in good stead?

Tyson: Oh yes. Yes.

[Part 1 0:29:54] Lee: Were they actually looking for ex servicemen?

Tyson: Well let's face it at that time practically everybody was ex service. On the Base we had Ron Napier ex marines, Harry Dolman ex navy, Lance Tickell army, Jim Shirtcliffe ex airforce, and – what's his name – anyway another ex army bloke. The only one who hadn't seen any service was John Bull the diesel mech. So there was never any conflict because we were all used to living with other people, which was fortunate. But of course in those days practically everybody in their early 20's had done either service during the war or national service.

[Part 1 0:31:09] Lee: so you ended up going South on the old *Biscoe*?

Tyson: Yes

[Part 1 0:31:13] Lee: What was she like?

Tyson: Bloody terrible!

[Part 1 0:31:16] Lee: In what respect?

Tyson: Well, we'll put it this way. We boarded her in the afternoon and we sailed and had tea or the evening meal – I can't remember what they called it. Having done that we went up on deck just as we were passing the Needles and I got rid of it over the side, and I was seasick every day from there to Montevideo. Does that answer your question? [laughs] No I wasn't violently sea sick but I was seasick every day but we had chores to do on board and I did my share, but I was not happy.

[Part 1 0:32:04] Lee: Did she roll a lot? Was that the problem?

Tyson: Do you know anything about the old *Biscoe*?

[Part 1 0:32:09] Lee: Well no one liked her very much. Most people I ask that question of give me the same answer.

Tyson: Yes, it was a US built harbour defence thing. I think it was about 800 tons, wooden built, round bottomed so it rolled a lot and it wasn't very big. It wasn't very comfortable and the Fiddery was the old hold and there was no ventilation. There was the usual spout up but it didn't get much [air], and at the top of the stairs – they don't call them stairs on ships do they – at the top of the gangway from the Fiddery, across the passage was the kitchen. So it was not very comfortable or well ventilated at all.

[Part 1 0:33:14] Lee: Had they described to you the work that you would be doing when you got South?

Tyson: Not that I recall. I just assumed that I'd be a Wireless Operator Mechanic. The name specifies it, doesn't it?

[Part 1 0:33:29] Lee: So you didn't know that you were going to Signy initially?

Tyson: No. I'd no idea where I was going. That was sorted out when we got to Stanley. In Stanley we got kitted out, interviewed, and I think we met the Governor as well. I've a vague idea going to a cocktail party there. Oh...and we were doing chores; filling sandbags with gravel and sand to take down for building. And, as I say, I was stuck there for a month while she went down to the other bases.

[Part 1 0:34:12] Lee: So what did you make of your new home when you finally arrived at Signy early in '55?

Tyson: I thought it rather depressing. The old hut wasprimitive and it was built in bits. Originally built by the handyman from the Met Office, as I discovered later. There were two handymen working at the Met Office when I went back to Stanley – each had done a stint at Signy in the early days, building the place.

[Part 1 0:35:00] Lee: Was that the general impression? Were other people a bit despondent?

Tyson: I don't know about being despondent. I think by this time we knew we were there to build a new base. So I think we all agreed that we needed a new base.

[Part 1 0:35:18] Lee: It couldn't be any worse?

Tyson: No. Well I suppose it could have been. It must have been in the first year. It was just the basic hut before they had got the additions on and they added a kitchen and a diesel room and a bit more. And, of course the toilet was outside which was always a problem if you needed to go out there. You did have a good view from there, though, out across to Coronation Island.

[Part 1 0:35:52] Lee: How did you go about building this new hut then? What do you remember about the process? I appreciate it was a long time ago.

Tyson: Well basically the Biscoe's holds were full of this new hut, because it had come down to Stanley on a different ship.

[Part 1 0:36:13] Lee: This is going to be Tonsberg House isn't it? Was it in kit form?

Tyson: I suppose it was. It had all been pre-assembled and all the joints were cut and the timbers were labelled. So it was in bundles of timber and you'd get a bundle of 4 by 2's and a bundle of tongued and grooved and these were all labelled. As you can imagine on a hut that is 70 feet long and 36 feet wide – or something like that - there's a lot of timber. The framework had all been cut, tongued and grooved and pre-assembled and then dismantled and packed up. So we had the overall plans showing what went where. The individual bundles – we didn't know what was in them until we unpacked them.

But first of all they had to decide where to build the hut and it was built on the site of an old whaling factory, so the ground was uneven. At one end of the hut we were about 6 or 8 feet above ground level. The other end of the hut was probably 18 inches or so. So we had to build pylons at the living end of the hut to build it up to the other end where the diesel shed and the cold store were. That was solid concrete. We filled that end up with rocks and old iron from the remnants of the whaling station. So the Biscoe stayed behind while we were doing this. The crew and the other transient Fids were all labour gangs working on this lot and they went off and left two of the previous year's men – two Smiths actually - and they'd volunteered to stay and help with the building. Then we got on with the building between us and eventually got it all built up. Eventually the *Biscoe* came back and gave us more help.

[Part 1 0:39:22] Lee: Was it an easy job to build it?

Tyson: Hardly. As I say it was about 70 feet long so we had to get the framework up first- the framework for the floor first. Then put the flooring boards down. And that was double thickness tongued and grooved, with a layer of roofing felt between them – If I remember correctly. So there were a lot of nails to be knocked in, and knocking nails in when it's cold and usually damp, can be a bit damaging on the fingers! It took a while and once we'd got the floor down we had to assemble the frame. So that involved unpacking bundles of timber to find the right labelled bits to go where you wanted them. So that was time consuming.

[Part 1 0:40:35] That's when I came to kill my first penguin. I was undoing bundles of timber on the beach and everybody else was up at the building and – as one does - I got into conversation with this penguin who was watching my antics with some curiosity. Suddenly I noticed how all the work had stopped, so I turned round to see what was going on and somebody yelled:

'Don't stand there talking to the bloody thing, kill it'

'What me?'

'Yes.'

'What with?'

'You've got a hammer in your hand.'

So I walked over to this gentoo penguin –'Sorry about this mate' - and I bashed it over the head. It was the first penguin I killed.

[Part 1 0:41:18] Lee: Was it for food?

Tyson: Yes

[Part 1 0:41:21] Lee: They weren't plentiful, were they?

Tyson: Oh Yes. Not particularly around the base, but we just used to get the odd one a bit curious about these peculiar creatures ashore.

[Part 1 0:41:35] Lee: Did anything go wrong with building the hut? Normally when you get a kit there is a bit missing.

Tyson: No. All that was missing was the list of what was in each timber bundle. So I can't remember now.....I think it was about April when we finally got enough of the hut built to move into it. We got the kitchen; the bunk room; the radio room; the met office; and I think we'd got the sitting room, but I'm not sure about that. We moved in and as originally planned the lavatory was at the end of the hut and next to that was the wireless cabin so it wasn't very long before I objected because of the smell. It was terrible. So then they built an extension on the hut and move the lavatory out, and the old lavatory became the egg store – because we used to go out and collect penguin eggs.

[Part 1 0:43:10] Lee: What was the hut like to live in?

Tyson: Oh. It was nice and comfortable once it was finished.

[Part 1 0:43:16] Lee: Warm?

Tyson: Most of it. Well – the part that we lived in, yes, because the kitchen range was always on and there were stoves in the bedroom and the living room and in the workshop. The one in the workshop heated the water for the bathroom, but where there was no stove, of course, it did get rather chilly.

[Part 1 0:43:55] Lee: Were you proud of it?

Tyson: Oh yes. Yes. In fact there is a bit of it in the chair behind your chair. The chunk of wood there.

[Part 1 0:44:04] Lee: How did that get to Edenthorpe?

Tyson: Well they demolished the building and took it back and Lance Tickell was there when they were demolishing it, so he got a piece of wood for all of us with the stamp on it. So he presented us all with a souvenir of the house.

[Part 1 0:44:41] Lee: There was some sort of crest on this hut, wasn't there?

Tyson: Yes. I think.....I've got a sneaking suspicion I might have been responsible. Not for that, but for the idea.

[Part 1 0:44:54] Lee: Can you elaborate for me?

Tyson: Yes. Well, of course, midwinter is always a big celebration down there and Jim Shirtcliffe and Harry Dolman made a midwinter cake in half a flour tin. Which is a very large cake and I was duty cook for midwinter because, of course, in those days we didn't have a base cook. We did it in turn – a week about. So I had to decorate this cake. Well, I'd never decorated a cake in my life. I got the marzipan alright, because we had some ground almonds. Then it came to the icing and I made the mistake of mixing the icing sugar with water and put it on, and you shouldn't do that because it just doesn't set. It doesn't dry. So after 2 days I stuck it in the oven to dry it and then, of course, I had to decorate it.

So there was some almond paste left over, so I came up with the idea of making a Signy island presentation of two elephant seals rampant in a sea of shit. So I did that and put the 'Semper in Excreta' on the side. So this seemed to go down well, so John Bull took up the idea and he got a piece of plywood and he painted the crest on it and elaborated it a bit and made a proper crest out of it and stuck it up on the side of the hut. So it stayed there until...I don't know why it was taken down. I think someone had a bout of conscience and thought we had better have it down when the Biscoe comes back. I can't remember whether the Governor was on board or not. Anyhow we took it down – but it went back up as soon as the ship had gone, and I think it remained there for some years. In fact it became a feature of the place.

[Part 1 0:47:31] Lee: Do you know what happened to it in the end?

Tyson: No. It probably – like all plywood – deteriorated.

[Part 1 0:47:41] Lee: So you spent almost a year there – or 9 months?

Tyson: Yes. I think that we moved in in March or April.... I can't remember. And I went out in January.

[Part 1 0:47:55] Lee: The following January?

Tyson: Yes

[Part 1 0:48:00] Lee: Now what about the radio? You had to establish a radio link I presume?

Tyson: Well that was already in operation. I mean the previous year there'd been.....They'd always had radio on the base, so it was just a case of moving it from one hut to the other.

[Part 1 0:48:17] Lee: That sounds very simple. I bet it wasn't.

Tyson: No. No they were big transmitters and they came down on a sledge. And there wasn't much snow either. No the big problem then was getting the mast up because we had two 30ft steel masts to put up. No problem if you've got the manpower on flat ground. But we didn't have any flat ground. So each guy was a different length and so that was a bit of a problem.

PAUSE

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Leonard 'Lofty' Tyson recorded at his home at Edenthorpe near Doncaster by Chris Eldon Lee on 8 December 2009. Lofty Tyson Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:14] Lee: What were the radio conditions like when you arrived at Signy?

Tyson: Well they were the same as they were when I left basically except that they were in a different hut. We had one main transmitter; two receivers, and basically that was it. We did have a standby suitcase transmitter/receiver which came in handy later on, but basically we just had the transmitter which was a RCA Canadian built ex-navy transmitter and I think that when I arrived we had 2 Marconi CR100 receivers (ex-navy) and then we got 2 new Edison receivers, so we were all right. You know at the time it was just about state of the art, but not most up to date, but it was adequate equipment.

[Part 2 0:01:43] Lee: And you had to move all this so I presume for a while you were off the air – were you?

Tyson: No I don't think we were off the air because we moved between scheds. We had 3 scheds a day with Stanley Met to pass the met obs. That was in the morning – I can't remember now – I think it might have been 8 o'clock; 1 o'clock; and 6 o'clock – or something. Anyhow that's basic we had 3 a day with Met and after that we had a sched with the control station which in those days was Lockroy, which we passed any non-met traffic through. And we listened to the broadcast from VPC, the government station in Stanley, to pick up any traffic for us. The idea was that we'd take what traffic was destined for us and anything we missed we got from the control station. It worked pretty well.

Then of course there was the scheme where everybody could send one letter a month and how that worked was we sent it by Morse to Stanley. It was copied there and sent to the office. They typed it on an Air Letter form and sent it off in the normal mail. Because in those days communications with the Falklands relied on the Fitzroy going up to Montevideo once a month taking mail, passengers and freight. Then every year there used to be charter boats coming out from the UK to collect the wool. They used to bring stuff as well.

[Part2 0:04:00] Lee: The wool?

Tyson: Because in those days wool was the only export from the Falklands. In fact wool kept the place running. They were the basic scheds. So when there was a ship into Stanley with mail we had the reverse procedure. The mail was taken to the FIDS office and then sent up to the wireless station, and then that was sent from the FIDS office down to the bases, so they were all written out by the operator and passed to the addressee.

[Part 2 0:04:43] Lee: So the mail would arrive on paper? It wouldn't be in Morse code?

Tyson: Between Stanley and the bases it was all Morse.

[Part 2 0:04:52] lee: Alright, so the replies from the loved ones were by Morse?

Tyson: Oh Yes. So it was a combination. It would be Morse between the bases and Stanley, and then on paper from there to the UK and vice versa.

[Part 2 0:05:07] Lee: So you were receiving personal messages for other people?

Tyson: Oh yes. Yes. We knew everything that was going on basically. Of course professional etiquette required that we kept quiet about some of it.

[Part 2 0:05:24] Lee: Was it just a gentleman's agreement or did you have to sign something?

Tyson: Oh no. It was all part of the job. No ... it was 100 words a month, which doesn't sound much but when you think that we were working at about 20 words a minute, and you've got 7 men on our base.... Divide 700 by 20 – that's 35 – it's a lot more than 35 minutes. It takes quite a long time and then, of course, the operators in Stanley were doing this for all the bases – and that's between their normal job as well – because they were working the bases to collect the met obs from South America, and the apprentices and the operators were also Met Men in Stanley. So it amazed me when I was working there because these operators could turn the volume up when they were reading the obs from South America and plot them straight onto the charts. It was amazing. Even the two apprentices were able to do that. No, it was quite an eye opener.

[Part 2 0:07:04] lee: Yes. You'd expect them to write it down first wouldn't you and then go to the charts?

Tyson: Yes. Of course that's what I did. I mean that was the normal procedure – to take it down on paper, but they could plot it straight away. I didn't normally do that as there was a Met man there to do that.

[Part 2 0:07:23] Lee: So when you were moving the station from the old hut to the new one you had to move the aerial masts as well?

Tyson: No. No. No. The old masts were well past it. We put the new mast up before we moved down. Everything was ready apart from the actual transmitters and receivers.

[Part 2 0:07:45]Lee: So the new masts arrived on the ship and you had to install them? And this was more than a one man job?

Tyson: Oh yes. It was a full base job. No, in Stanley, when I was putting the masts up there, it was alright. There I had a Land Rover and we had some flat ground, and two of us could put a mast up with no problem at all. But at Signy, where there'd been uneven ground and no mechanical aids, it was a problem.

[Part 2 0:08:20] Lee: It was all done by hand? No winches?

Tyson: No. I didn't have any mechanical contrivances at all.

Part 2 0:8:29] Lee: How did you choose where to put the mast? Was it critical, or would anywhere do?

Tyson: No. We just put them up where it was convenient basically. With HF theoretically the best propagation is at right angles to the aerial, but to do that you need to have the aerials cut to the wavelength. But we were using such a variety of frequencies that that was not a practical proposition – so we just used a long wire. I should have some photographs to show you.

[Part 2 0:09:20] Lee: What was the coverage like? Were you able to pick up signals from across the world – or just locally?

Tyson: Well it varied throughout the year. We used low frequencies at night during the winter and higher frequencies during the summer and during the day. But basically we were only operating between Signy and Stanley, and Graham Land, and the other bases. Ham radio was popular around the bases. Most of the other operators also did some ham operating and they could work all over the world, but this is just picking the right frequency for the conditions.

[Part 2 0:10:18] Lee: Were you doing some of that as well?

Tyson: I got a licence on my way South and I did operate for one night. Some other bases were in regular contact with the UK and various places around the world, and there was one particular operator in Chile who'd worked all the bases except Signy and a couple of other operators got on to me to contact him. So one night I arranged I would come up and have a word. I did make contact with him and then the diesel mech switched the power off – so that was that – because the power used to go off at 10 o'clock at night.

[Part 2 0:11:16] Lee: So you didn't bother otherwise?

Tyson: No. I never had any desire to talk to anybody. I've never been a very talkative character. You've caught me. I'm a different man – talkative wise – to what I was in those days. I never had much to say to anybody. I wasn't exactly shy but I wasn't very sociable, so if I didn't speak to anybody for weeks on end it didn't worry me. It still doesn't – but once I start talking I can't stop.

[Part 2 0:12:04] Lee: Did you have any emergency calls to make?

Tyson: Not exactly emergency calls, but we did have a generator failure so we had no power. So I had to get out the emergency set which was operated by pedals – a pedal power generator. So I had to drag this out and install it in the wireless cabin and I did manage to contact Stanley and Lockroy – the control station. We informed Stanley of the power situation and I think we operated for 2 or 3 days like this.

I decided that since the diesel mech. didn't have any diesel engines to maintain it would be a good idea to let him do the pedalling. I screwed the pedal generator to the floor behind the operator's chair and gave him a chair and he did the pedalling while I did the key bashing, because bashing a key and pedalling at the same time is a bit tricky. But no – *HMS Veryan Bay* was the ship in Stanley at the time. It was a frigate and that came down to bring spares, and the ship's electricians came and had the generator working in about an hour or so. Then we were back to normal.

[Part 2 0:13:51] Lee: But you didn't have 24 hour power did you?

Tyson: No. It would go on for the radio scheds basically – morning, afternoon and evening.

[Part 2 0:14:03] Lee: There's a very strange message in the files here from Sec Fids which you may have received in October 1955 about 'Calling the Falklands'. Do you remember this incident? There was a concern that there was a recurrence of insulting innuendos of such a serious nature as to render the originator – if discovered – to be liable to court action, and therefore they changed the rules which meant if you wanted to make a record request to the BBC you had to send it through Stanley first. Do you remember that incident?

Tyson: Not specifically, no.

[Part 2 0:14:50] Lee: There were several malicious or even wounding references made which have caused considerable distress to private individuals, and the people sending these have used fake addresses. They were trying to avert the possibility of the programme having to end 'Calling the Falklands' because of irresponsible abuse.

Tyson: Well that wasn't our base. We didn't send any to London.

[Part 2 0:15:20] Lee: Well it was 'Calling the Falklands' so presumably it was a record request programme?

Tyson: Oh yes, 'Calling the Falklands' – that was a BBC programme for the Falklands from London. I remember there was a fortnightly or monthly one that was a request programme.

[Part 2 0:15:39] Lee: But somebody, it seems, had been sending in record requests of a rather naughty nature. That doesn't ring a bell with you?

Tyson: No. Because I didn't read all the traffic going out from the bases, only the traffic coming to the bases. The only problem I heard anything about - there used to be an evening chat between bases.

[Part 2 0:16:13] Lee: The Goon Show?

Tyson: Yes. But the Governor used to listen in on this and on one memorable occasion he took umbrage at something that had been said from one of the Southern bases. There was a naval officer involved and the Governor replied to the....well he didn't reply. He sent a signal in reply to something he'd overheard on one of these Goon Show things, warning the man that if he heard much more of this kind of thing he'd be chicken farming a lot earlier than he'd anticipated.

[Part 2 0:17:06] Lee: Describe to me what the Goon Show was like? What came up in the Goon Show? What did people talk about?

Tyson: Well it was just anybody on the base would chat to anybody on any of the other bases if they wanted to. All sorts of things. It might be to do with the job or it might be just normal social interchat, but we didn't go for it very much on our base, it was mainly the sledging bases and the smaller bases. No... of course if somebody had a birthday – or something – there was a lot more than usual consumed, then of course it did get a bit crude at times. Telling all the crude jokes you do.

[Part 2 0:18:07] Lee: This was voice work – not Morse work?

Tyson: Oh yes, yes. No – if there was like midwinter that was general get together. Everybody was on the air. Each base took it in turns to have a chat and singing ribald songs and so on. I never could sing so I just left them to it.

[Part 2 0:18:32] Lee: Would they pass on advice as well, sometimes? If somebody had a problem?

Tyson: Oh Yes.

[Part 2 0:18:37] Lee: So it wasn't just fun and games?

Tyson: Oh no, no. If there was anything serious, of course, you made a specific appointment. Like we had John Bull reckoned he'd got appendicitis. So I got a sched with Hope Bay. They had a doctor and our base leader Harry Dolman had a chat with him about this and he prescribed hot kaolin poultices. So they dug out the hot kaolin poultices from the medical kit; applied it very hot and that cured his appendicitis. Probably the quickest cure of appendicitis you'd ever heard of.

But it was always possible to get a sched like that. Then, of course, if anything serious happened, like when the *Biscoe* called the first time, it picked up Harry Dolman and Ron Napier – that was the two builders. They took them to Admiralty Bay where there was a new hut being built, and then while they were there – I think it must have been a later visit of the *Biscoe* – the Fids going ashore in the base boat overturned alongside the ship and Ron Napier vanished. So of course they had to have scheds with Stanley to report it. All that sort of thing. Later on while I was in Stanley there was a sledge party camping on the ice, when the ice broke up overnight. They vanished and there were more special scheds about that. Between scheds there was normally no traffic, but if anything cropped up, then on the next sched you got in touch with Stanley or the appropriate base and made arrangements to work them later.

[Part 2 0:21:22] Lee: So how did you spend the rest of your time then? Were you doing any skiing or sledging?

Tyson: I didn't do any serious skiing myself because my ski boots wouldn't fit in the skis. It was alright on the flat. I could walk around. But downhill the first time we hit a bump I'd lose a ski and I'd go down on the other one until we hit another bump, and then I'd walk down to the bottom to collect my skis. So I didn't do that very often. People used to go and ski and I wasn't very energetic. I did used to go down to Gourlay occasionally to see the penguins and take photographs and that sort of thing. And we all used to go out to collect seals occasionally for dog food.

But I never did any sledging. They did do a bit of.....once we'd got the base hut finished, during the winter they'd do a bit of sledging with the dogs – just for training – and then I think a couple of them went over to Gourlay and camped over there for a few days with dogs and ran them out there. But no, that year we were not a sledging base. We were basically

building the new hut for the following year to take a larger party when they were going to be surveying Coronation Island.

[Part 2 0:23:24] Lee: So you did spend the winter there?

Tyson: Oh yes.

[Part 2 0:23:28] Lee: Were you happy to be on Signy?

Tyson: Oh yes. I think it was probably one of the happier bases. Some of the others were busier – like Hope Bay was a big sledging base. But we had plenty to do with building the base hut and getting it decorated once we had moved in, and I did all the wiring as well which kept me occupied because it was lead covered cabling which is a hell of a thing to work with. We had two electrical systems. We had the 230 volt system and then we had a 12 volt standby system. So we had a duplicate wiring system and, of course, we didn't have any wiring diagrams to work to, so I devised the wiring system at Signy, so I take full responsibility for that.

[Part 2 0:24:39] Lee: Was this lead cable difficult to work with?

Tyson: Yes it is because you've got to keep it straight and not get any kinks in it. I'd never worked with it before so I discovered that you also had to bond two adjoining lead cables together, because otherwise the slightest movement and you got crackling on the radio.

[Part 2 0:25:14] Lee: Was communication with Stanley reliable?

Tyson: Usually yes. Conditions were very variable. Some days it would be loud and clear, otherwise it was a struggle to hear them. But we had a variety of frequencies to try and you could usually establish reasonable communications. Of course you can get through on Morse when you can't on RT.

[Part 2 0:25:43] Lee: So your year at Signy was coming to a close and did you know what your next stop was going to be? Did you know you were going back to Stanley?

Tyson: Yes. When I was working in Stanley on the way South I got the equipment working there and talking to the controller – the Chief Forecaster - there one day, I said: 'What you need here is a wireless operator/mechanic who can do his stint on the keys and look after the gear' I said 'You've got some good operators but they don't have much of a clue on maintenance' So I never thought any more about it and then – I think it was in August – a coded signal came in and I was offered a job to take charge of the FIDS wireless station in Stanley. So I thought this was the job I'd suggested – so I accepted. So it wasn't until I got to Stanley that I discovered that it was a lot more than that.

So after I came out of Signy my Dad died so I went home and then I went back out to Stanley in September.

[Part 2 0:27:16] Lee; 1956?

Tyson: Yes

[Part 2 0:27:19] Lee: To Stanley?

Tyson: Yes. I came home and then went back to Stanley on a 3 year contract.

[Part 2 0:27:25] Lee: Did you have to start start from scratch in Stanley, or rebuild, or what was the job?

Tyson: Well the job involved getting two old ex-Navy transmitters from the naval wireless station at the end of the bay and installing them in an extension on the end of the VPC government transmitting station and then putting in an array or an assortment of aerials for them, and then moving the stuff from the Met Office to there. But all the stuff to do the installations didn't arrive until after Christmas and it was due to start on the 1st May or 1st June. Then when the new *Biscoe* came out she had water in the bottom holds and the radio gear for some new bases was in there – so that was a write off.

So I got sent off on the new *Biscoe* around the bases to see if I could scrounge enough radio equipment from the established bases to equip the new ones, to get them on the air. All the bases had sledge equipment – battery operated radios – and various standby radios at different stations. So it was the end of February when I got back and I was transferred to *HMS Protector* off Adelaide Island and came back with that. So when I came back the building extension at VPC was almost finished. We didn't have any of the equipment and so basically I had to start from scratch by bringing the transmitters up. This was an 11 Kw transmitter and a 1 ½ Kw transmitter which were Canadian Marconi SWB8/11 and SWB8 if I remember correctly. These were 1930's designs so everything was big and high voltage.

[Part 2 0:30:44] Lee: They worked did they?

Tyson: Oh yes. Of course we had to dismantle them because they had been unused since, I think, 1946. So it was a long time and then get them back and rewire them, tune them up – well clean them up, and then try them. And get them working. I spent hours polishing brass. And then we ran out miles of feeder cables. To feed the transmitters we put up... I think we put up about 12 masts from 60ft to 30ft – a vast array of equipment.

[Part 2 0:31:48] Lee: Where could you reach from there – from Stanley? You could work the World from Stanley Could you?

Tyson: Yes. But of course unless you are in the business you don't realise. You can work anywhere in the World when the conditions are right and you get the right frequency. It's basically a case of getting the right frequency to work between any two points. I got a good example of this. Let's see... this would be when the planes were coming out for the aerial survey.

[Part 2 0:32:36] Lee: The Camsos

Tyson: The Camsos, yes. They were in Montevideo and we had to pass them the weather forecast and they told us what frequency to use. So this was about 6 o'clock in the morning. I was doing the operating because it was out of the hours of the operators. I went up there and listened on this frequency and I thought right from the start 'this is far too high a frequency for this time of day'. So listening first of all I could hear Newfoundland working. Then as time passed on I could hear stations further South in the States, Brazil, and finally I could hear Montevideo, but by that time they'd packed up. It was about 9 o'clock – they'd given up. So we had to send a signal to them and get them to set lower frequencies and we got through.

But that was another thing. We worked them on the way down with weather forecasts, and the trouble you know in Stanley the weather changes very abruptly and when they got half way down – beyond the point of no return- the weather had deteriorated, but we didn't pass that on to them, so they found out for themselves when they arrived. This was the second year they had been out. One of them landed up by the hangers where it was reasonably sheltered, but the other one landed down the other end of the bay – off the cemetery. So they had to taxi the length of the harbour with the water breaking over the cockpit and the engines and everything. But what amazed us was the fact that the pilot who'd landed up that end had been down the previous year and we thought he would have landed up the other end.

[Part 2 0:35:11] Lee: You were there for 4 years at Stanley?

Tyson: Three and a half. I was on a 3 year contract and then I extended it by 6 months. So I got two summers on the trot instead of two winters.

[Part 2 0:35:23] Lee: Were there any improvements in radio technology during that period? Was it a lot different when you left to when you started there?

Tyson: Out there – no. Because basically when you're key bashing all you need is a transmitter and a key.

[Part 2 0:35:48] Lee: Was it a prestigious type of job? Wireless Operator – were you in the hierarchy of the Islands?

Tyson: No. I was just another peasant. In all the time I was there I set foot in the Colony Club on one occasion. That was when I came up from South and I went along to the inaugural meeting of the Cricket Club.

[Part 1 0:36:16] Lee: Yes, I gather you were a founder member?

Tyson: Yes I was. I've always been keen on cricket but I've never been a good player and when I was in the RAF I never managed to get into a section team. I think the only time I played in the RAF was out in Rhodesia when the station workshops were a man short and I used to play for them. In Stanley we – if I remember correctly – we had a total membership of about 36. So we split it into 3 teams of 12 and we used to play seven-a side between each other and then there'd be odd occasions like when there was a FID ship in... Then they'd raise a FID team to play the FIC, or when the Navy had a ship in, then we'd play them.

[Part 2 0:37:25] Lee: What was the standard like?

Tyson: Low!

[Part 2 0:37:29] Lee: The pitch. Was it a decent pitch?

Tyson: We had a concrete pitch. It was on the football field which is alongside Government House. I think it's been built up now. The football pitch was there anyway- it was at an angle. The football pitch was at the top and then the cricket pitch was below and the grass was cut by cows. So there was a hazard in fielding and we had this concrete pitch laid. There were one or two good players. We had a good fast bowler working in the Met Office and one of the FIC men was a good batsman. We had quite a few who were reasonable but nothing even up to good club standard.

[Part 2 0:38:42] Lee: It was doing it that mattered wasn't it?

Tyson: Yes. The reason we played seven-a-side is because it wasn't always possible to get 11 because lots of players worked out in the camp. So if there weren't eleven people in camp you couldn't raise a team. Then, of course, there weren't many locals who played because it had never been played before. One or two of them became quite good. We had one who was a good wicket keeper. He used to play in one of the local football teams as well, as goalkeeper, and he was a good wicket keeper as well.

[Part 2 0:39:23] Lee: Did you have a club house?

Tyson: No.

[Part 2 0:39:31] Lee: A couple of incidents just to finish off with, if I may. One was – I think you mentioned briefly *HMS Protector* coming in – but I understand they didn't all appreciate the penguin eggs you cooked for them?

Tyson: Oh yes. When the Naval ships came in they usually used to invite the base members aboard for lunch and I always volunteered to stay behind and look after the base. *Protector* came in one day and invited us aboard. I was duty cook so I stayed behind and the ship's boat came and collected the base staff and took them aboard and while they were having lunch a gale blew up and so when it came to embarking the base staff onto the boat Jim Shirtcliffe managed to get on but then the captain decided it was too rough and so he abandoned it. The ship's boat came to shelter in the bay in front of the base while *Protector* put out to sea to ride out the storm. And there was a junior naval officer in charge of this lot and to start with they anchored out and came ashore in the base dinghy, but they were getting soaked so we decided the best way was to anchor it there and just keep a visual watch from the base hut and so we hung all sorts of bits of old scrap iron that was lying around and anchored the thing out and then they all came ashore.

We were under the impression that the *Protector* didn't have enough fuel to stay for very long and they were liable to be left with us, so they all volunteered for various jobs and we managed to give them some dry clothing to wear and they settled in and I dished up some hard boiled penguin eggs. One bloke in particular wasn't going to eat this thing with a transparent white. Anyhow for breakfast next morning I scrambled the eggs and he still ate it and enjoyed it.

[Part 2 0:42:45] That led to another thing. The next day we did the base chores between us and then they wanted to go out and shoot something. There's nothing much to shoot. So what are you going to shoot – so we'd shoot some penguins and eat them or feed them to the dogs. So we laughed at them because if you want a penguin you just walk up to it and clobber it. So they went off and after a while I heard some shooting just outside the hut, so I came out to see what was happening because we had some dogs and I didn't want them shooting the dogs.

So there was a dead penguin near the jetty and we got it covered with an open-work crate. There were two skuas on the near side and one on the far side of this crate sticking their heads through and having a bite of penguin and then they'd come up to swallow it and this is what they were shooting at. I stood and watched and made rude remarks about naval marksmanship with the inevitable consequence one of them says 'show us how'. While this conversation was going on the two skuas at the near side had flown away so all that was left was the one at the far side. So when it stuck its head out the next time – bang – and I hit it, much to everyone's amazement. The consequence as far as I was concerned was when I got up to Stanley playing cricket – we were playing *HMS Protector* – and the *Protector* man was making out the team sheets and we were giving him our names. I said 'Tyson' and he looked at me and said 'Were you at Signy?' I said 'Yes'. 'We've been hearing about you. You're a dead shot.'

[Part 2 0:45:20] Lee: What were the circumstances by which you left Stanley and left FIDS? Was it just that the contract was up?

Tyson: The contract was up, yes.

[Part 2 0:45:27] Lee: You didn't want to extend it?

Tyson: Well no. By the time my contract was up I was getting on for 40 and I thought 'well, if I'm going to make a career at all after FIDS you know basically it's the end of the road – radio. I was so far out of date I'd have trouble getting on with it so I thought I'd better leave while I can. So I left.

[Part 2 0:46:10] Lee: And travelled the world?

Tyson: Yes basically. But before I left - in the beginning of December – up to then I'd lived in Brecon's which was a boarding house and it had always been a transit place for transient Fids. Only the Brecons had left and Mrs Harris (Mrs Brecon's sister) had been running it, only she was taking over a new place because the Brecons were coming out – so I got my marching orders at the beginning of December and I was due to leave in March. Trying to find accommodation in Stanley at that time of year is very difficult because at Christmas all the people come in from the Camp for the celebrations. FIDS were taking over an old army camp to house transient Fids that year for some reason, so I went to see Johnny Green to see if I could stay there.

He gave it some thought and said: 'Well, I'll tell what I'll do. I'll put you in charge. We've got a cook who'll do all the cooking and catering. I'll give you 7/6 a day per head for all the Fids up there and you pay all the bills, and at the end of the month any deficit you make up and that's your rent.'

So I said 'Right. Fine.' So I moved up to the camp and then when the new lot came out – the ones who weren't going South on the first voyage – were billeted up there and they settled in very well and made friends with the locals. They decided they'd put on a pantomime. So they put on this pantomime. I was in charge but it didn't make any difference. I was just one of the Herberts and when they were rehearsing I was banned from the camp, so it was a complete surprise to me. So anyhow they invited locals – I think each of them was allowed to invite two people, and of course the FIDS office staff were invited. So anyhow this pantomime was a howling success. Literally howling. Half the time you couldn't hear the script for the laughter, and the actors themselves, half the time had to stop laughing before they could carry on.

[Part 2 0:49:32] This was a great success. So the following week the locals who'd been guests decided they wanted to throw a return party. So we were all banned from the camp while they took over and decorated it and got it organised. We were all invited out to various locals for tea while it was going on. It was all very friendly. So we had another good party. Then of course they left. In due course they were replaced by another batch of Fids on the way home. Well, of course, they had heard about the parties, so they wanted parties.

So it became an established thing and I think we had parties every fortnight on various topics and for some reason or another after this first one – I think this was when we had the pantomime – the police chief had heard about this party and apparently was spouting in the Colony Club about this wild party and how we'd had half naked women wandering around the place. Fortunately the Col.Sec. was in there and he'd been to the party, so he told him it was a load of bullshit. Anyhow after the next party he had another go and said 'You have to get these parties stopped' on the grounds that we didn't have enough toilet facilities until somebody pointed out that we'd more toilet facilities than they had in the Town Hall. Then his next do was we didn't have fire facilities. Once again we had more fire appliances than they did at the Town Hall.

[Part 2 0:51:55] Lee: He was determined to stop you?

Tyson: He was, yes. After the last party there, some of the Fids took a couple of the office girls down the hill to the Biscoe in the peat barrow, which was alright going downhill but when they'd deposited their passengers - and faced with an uphill push to the camp – they decided this was too much. So they had a discussion what to do with this. So they hung it up from the whalebone arch alongside the cathedral. So they went back to camp and at breakfast next morning we were all sat around the table, mostly feeling much the worse for wear and somebody mentioned this. So I said 'Bloody Hell the Governor will be going to the Cathedral service at 11 o'clock. We'd better see about getting it shifted.' So I rang the police station and said: 'We've lost a peat barrow. Has any been reported lying around anywhere?'

So the man said: 'Ah that'll be it. There's one hanging from the whalebone arch.'

'Where?'

'It's hanging from the whalebone arch.'

'Bloody hell we'd better get that back.'

[Part 2 0:53:50] So the people that had hung it up went down to get it back, but we heard later that what had happened was the Governor had arrived, seen this barrow hanging from the whalebone arch; turned to the Chief of Police; 'What's that doing hanging on the whalebone arch?'

'I don't know sir.'

'You'd better get it down hadn't you?'

So he turns to the Sergeant: 'You'd better get it down.'

So he turns to the constable: 'Go and shift it.'

So by the time our Herberts got down there it was down, but it broke one of the handles because all he'd done was cut the rope. When they'd gone to put it up they'd found a convenient ladder leaning against the cathedral and some rope, so they'd done it the easy way. Anyhow they got it back up there and over the next day or so they replaced the handle and painted the barrow and so the caretaker who owned the barrow was quite happy with this.

So when the police chief started making enquiries, he was convinced it was somebody off the *Biscoe*. I think he interviewed all the ship's officers. I don't know about the FIDS, but I know he made enquiries, but he never came anywhere near the camp, or even rang, and I think everyone in Stanley except him knew what had happened.

[Part 2 0:55:28] Lee: Was it a happy time down there?

Tyson: Oh, very happy.

[Part 2 0:55:33] Lee: Some people say that their time in the Antarctic is the best time of their life. Is that true? You did travel the World a great deal afterwards and you never found anywhere to match it?

Tyson: Well, it's different. It's unique. No, most people who were down there would regard it as the most the most interesting year of their lives. And I enjoyed Stanley as well. As I said setting up the wireless station I was overworked and I was fed up because none of the operators had been anywhere near to see what was being done for them. Complete disinterest. So when we handed over I'd got everything ready, correct, but I had to move the receivers over before we could start and the last sched at the Met Office was 11 o'clock at night and we were due to start operating from the other one at midnight. So I shifted it over. Then I had to stay to show the operator how things worked; how to tune the transmitters; and then we had a frequency change, so I think I stayed over there all night just briefing them what went on.

I resigned but was talked out of it when I discovered I had to find my own way out. I'd been flown in 1st class Air France to Montevideo, and then went down from Montevideo to Stanley in the stoker PO's mess on a frigate, and I didn't have enough money to pay my fare back.

[Part 2 0:57:42] Lee: End to your 3 ½ years at Stanley. We must stop there.

Tyson: I'm sorry; I've rambled on for far longer than anticipated.

[Part 2 0:57:57] Lee: Thank you very much Lofty.

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Killing a penguin. [Part 1 0:40:35]
- The Signy crest. [Part 1 0:44:41]
- Pedalling to power the emergency transmitter. [Part 2 0:12:04]
- Shooting a skua. [Part 2 0:42:45]
- The peat barrow and the whalebone arch. [Part 2 0:51:55]