

Raymond McGowan

Edited transcript of a recording of Raymond McGowan conducted by Chris Eldon Lee at the Marguerite Bay reunion in Bowness-on-Windermere on 31st October 2010.

Transcribed by John and Catriona Zerfahs, 21st March 2012.

Track 1 [0:00:14] Ray McGowan: Ernest Raymond McGowan 30.5.1933 I was born in Londonderry.

Track 1 [0:00:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *So these days you are how old?*

Track 1 [0:00:28] Ray McGowan: 77

Track 1 [0:00:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *What sort of education did you have?*

Track 1 [0:00:32] Ray McGowan: Ach the normal primary school, grammar school. I was not academically inclined or very interested anyway so I didn't go on from grammar school and so I went to work basically they used to have a thing called the O level and A levels before they invented GCSE so I did my O levels and left and got myself a job.

Track 1 [0:01:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was the job?*

Track 1 [0:01:02] Ray McGowan: The job was working in a factory actually. Londonderry was a very - basically the only employment in it was the shirt industry which is unfortunately now all gone, but the BSR they called it (Birmingham Sounder) they made record changers, they actually invented the automatic record changer, and I was there and then I discovered that after a couple of years there was more to life rather than working in a factory and it was time to go and see a bit of the world. So I went off to London and went to the Norton¹ school of telegraphy took the PMGs² and communications, morse, and through weekends, had various jobs and kept meself together.

Track 1 [0:01:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *Why did you choose radio work?*

Track 1 [0:01:50] Ray McGowan: Well I wanted to see a bit of the world and you could go on the merchant navy with officer status as a radio officer, and the beauty about being there on the radio you had no deck work or anything and the radios were all shut down. I was sensible enough or got the right advice I can't remember now that actually when you were in port the radios were all shut down so you were going to see a bit of the world. That's why I took up radio work.

Track 1 [0:02:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was your first awareness of the Antarctic or that a place like that existed?*

Track 1 [0:02:26] Ray McGowan: A guy came to the Norton¹ school of telegraphy and gave a talk about that. As it turned out to be actually they were very, very short. The two things when I joined FIDS they couldn't get at all was doctors and radio operators. Doctors because they had to be a junior doctor and this would upset their

career and radio operators had a proficiency in morse and it was mostly morse code work and that they couldn't take somebody in to learn on the base, he had to be competent because nearly all communications was by morse in those days.

Track 1 [0:03:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *So had you not read Scott of the Antarctic?*

Track 1 [0:03:11] Ray McGowan: Ah yeah but not seen it, in fact just before I went what really bit me was Anderson's book, Major Anderson, I would say. I went down and then applied and went for the interviews and it all went very well and they sent you up to Harley Street for a medical and there was a - this is where the laugh came in actually - I turned up Saturday, I think it was Saturday and we were sailing on the Monday out of Southampton, and I arrived Saturday afternoon then the rest all arrived which they were all scientific blokes from Cambridge and everything and I said to myself 'Ray you're out of your depth you don't even know what the heck they're talking about. You're going away for two years with this crowd.' It was only because we went up - this is a true story - we went up that evening and had a few beers and (they shall be nameless) as we were wandering down, we'd put a few beers in us, one of the pals said 'I am going to achieve my life's ambition before I go to the south' and before we could say 'What's that?' he went up and urinated against the police station door and we were all in sight! So they were human after all you know what I mean, so I stayed and then sailed on the Monday. But I just was out of my depth at 3 or 4 o'clock on the Saturday afternoon because they were all like young glaciologists, magnetologists and I don't know what there. I haven't got the education to even know what the heck their jobs were.

Track 2 [0:04:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *It didn't put you off though.*

Track 2 [0:04:54] Ray McGowan: Oh no it didn't put me off, once they were human on the Saturday night.

Track 2 [0:05:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *Once they'd peed against the wall.*

Track 2 [0:05:01] Ray McGowan: Yeah. They were just a crowd of idiots like myself you know.

Track 2 [0:05:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *Which base did you go to first?*

Track 2 [0:05:08] Ray McGowan: I went to the Argentine Islands first, base F and I was only there for a month, six weeks and then they asked for someone to go - ach it was boring actually in the Argentine Islands to be honest, always there were two backup radio operators there - and they were looking for someone to join the sledging base at base O and I fancied - I just didn't go on and done a heck of a lot of use hauling and cycling ??? [incomprehensible] - so I replaced a guy up at base O and I went up to base O and then they came up with this idea of making, taking you probably know it, Cape Recluse and what happened there is, I think it was ??? [inaudible] you have to give me fifty years it was a ??? [incomprehensible] to the aerial survey of the Catalinas and they looked at - the idea was to try and transverse (sic) the plateau from Hope Bay down to almost Marguerite Bay. The problem is how do you get up there and lay a depot because you couldn't do it from Hope Bay all the way down. So they came up with this idea that from Cape Recluse if we put a party at

Cape Recluse and there was only the 3 of us, that we could take stores up there for the plateau, join with them and go on down with them. Well we spent the autumn putting all the stores up there and this was manhandling and manhauling and backpacking the whole flaming way up.

Track 2 [0:06:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *No dogs?*

Track 2 [0:06:44] Ray McGowan: No we hadn't got a dog, not a dog and there was no real route up. It was like, as I said, you looked across there and it was doing 3 miles to get to the top there, up and down, round corners, and went up in the spring and we couldn't find a box, the whole lot had disappeared! Anyway we waited up there and unfortunately then the weather turned against us, and out of the 50 days – it's there if you ever get the wee brochure they hand out if you go to the Falkland Islands and look Recluse up - out of the 50 days we were in the field we spent 39 lying up, the weather was so, you know, blizzard after blizzard after blizzard. And so we were down to half rations and we decided to bail out, and we bailed out, and I think we were unfortunate because we had only gone half a mile and it was flat calm. Seemingly we had picked to camp one of these what they call katabatic wind areas. Anyway the following day the Hope Bay sledge turned up but they had been caught the same and we were both nearly out of food so it was a case of racing to Recluse. So we raced down, it took us 3 days to race back down to Recluse downhill with dogs and a' thing and men on very short rations and we got there and we were emergency, this is where the *Shackleton* was rerouted straight to pick us up. They went and hit an iceberg and had to go back to South Georgia so can you imagine trying to feed, what was it, 28 dogs with no boat around you and we weren't on a beach so we had a bit of trouble catching or trying to shoot seals and things like that to feed the dogs.

Track 2 [0:08:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the Shackleton didn't get to you at Recluse?*

Track 2 [0:08:35] Ray McGowan: No it never did get to us actually. The *Biscoe* turned up ??? [incomprehensible] a month late.

Track 2 [0:08:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *The Biscoe did?*

Track 2 [0:08:40] Ray McGowan: Aye, yeah.

Track 2 [0:08:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *Let's talk a bit about that trip across the top then because you were going up to rendezvous with . . .*

Track 2 [0:08:47] Ray McGowan: We went up to rendezvous with the Hope Bay people - Wally Herbert, Leigh Rice all these are the best known probably. Unfortunately they're all dead now. Yeah we rendezvoused and the idea was we would have enough stores to back them up and then we could then journey down to get off, they knew a way down actually, was it base W?, can't remember their names, there was a way down there but it couldn't be done in the one journey it was so long you see. Anyway when we did rendezvous with Wally there they had suffered the same. It was the weather beat us.

Track 2 [0:09:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *You had one or two interesting experiences on that particular trip, didn't you? In particular I think at one point you were sleeping in a single man tent?*

Track 2 [0:09:35] Ray McGowan: Oh yes we took a pup what they call a pup tent with us. I didn't suffer the cold the way the other two did so I was sleeping in the pup tent and left more room in the other. Unfortunately after they dug me out on the third morning out of me sleeping bag, it was in the lee and therefore it got covered every flipping night over the pup tent, then they went and they said I had to move in with the other.

Track 3 [0:10:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what was happening you were sleeping in the tent and you were waking up in the morning and you couldn't get out?*

Track 3 [0:10:17] Ray McGowan: You couldn't move because of the weight of the snow on top of you it would just crush down the top of the tent.

Track 3 [0:10:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was that psychologically for you?*

Track 3 [0:10:28] Ray McGowan: I never thought about it - they'd dig me out. I'm afraid actually you face things, you just face them there's not much you can do about it so why worry about it? So they dug me out about three mornings so they said 'We're not digging you out again, get in the other tent' so we had to crowd the 3 of us then into the one tent.

Track 3 [0:10:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *It happened twice, didn't it, that you got buried?*

Track 3 [0:10:51] Ray McGowan: Aye, yes, can't remember exactly I think it was on the third morning when they dug me out they said 'We're not doing this again'.

Track 3 [0:10:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *You got buried on the 11th of November and again on the 21st of November according to Dick Foster's report.*

Track 3 [0:11:05] Ray McGowan: Aye Dick probably knew it.

Track 3 [0:11:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *He remembers hearing your plaintive shout for Get Me Out Of Here. The other problem you had with the tenting was the carbon monoxide problems.*

Track 3 [0:11:20] Ray McGowan: No I don't remember that.

Track 3 [0:11:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *You don't?*

Track 3 [0:11:23] Ray McGowan: No.

Track 3 [0:11:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *Ok fair enough. 'Heavy snow and drift made us realise that something was wrong and we narrowly avoided carbon monoxide poisoning because the ventilator on the peak of the pyramid tent had become blocked with snow.'*

Track 3 [0:11:41] Ray McGowan: No I don't remember that

Track 3 [0:11:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *Maybe you were in the other tent at the time*

Track 3 [0:11:45] Ray McGowan: Maybe I was in the other tent

Track 3 [0:11:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what was it like with the 3 of you in a 2 man tent? It must have been pretty cramped?*

Track 3 [0:11:50] Ray McGowan: It was pretty cramped and basically what saved our sanity, if you want to know, the whole time was the game of Scrabble.

Track 3 [0:12:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *I was amazed to discover that Scrabble was invented in 1957.*

Track 3 [0:12:07] Ray McGowan: Scrabble, and we became experts and we had the Chambers dictionary which gave American spellings as well, and when you're not playing you sat and read the dictionary. I think I read the xs and qs and as far as we came up with there is one word I think in the dictionary that you use a q that it hasn't to be followed by a u and I don't know if you know it, its got very popular today but not in those days. It's a burqa.

Track 3 [0:12:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *A what?*

Track 3 [0:12:40] Ray McGowan: A burqa, a ladies..

Track 3 [0:12:41] Chris Eldon Lee: Oh burqa?

Track 3 [0:12:42] Ray McGowan: You never heard of a burqa in 1957 ??? [inaudible] but there was another one that came up that was zho or dzho but it is a type of cattle they raise in the Himalayas.

Track 3 [0:12:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *You're remembering Scrabble solutions from half a century ago.*

Track 3 [0:12:59] Ray McGowan: Half a century ago because we were very strict. You couldn't put a word down without telling what it was, you couldn't chance to look it up you know what I mean? Yeah it was a bit boring because, I think the longest trip we ???[incomprehensible] it was 16 days we didn't move at all, if I remember rightly.

Track 3 [0:13:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was morale like then, Ray?*

Track 3 [0:13:23] Ray McGowan: Very good, very good there was no doubt about it. We were just so very independent sort of characters that we just got on and remained friends for life and are still friends which is highly unusual for fids we discovered. We were all idiots.

Track 3 [0:13:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *Give me a little pen pointers of Dick Foster who was?*

Track 3 [0:13:55] Ray McGowan: Dick actually had just finished his national service. He went down. He had a chip on his shoulder. He was a gash hand you see, even if he was base leader. I was the radio op so I was professionally trained. Denis was supposed to be a surveyor.

Track 3 [0:14:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *Denis Kershaw?*

Track 3 [0:14:15] Ray McGowan: Denis was a bigger idiot than I was in the sense that - this is true - the year before they had turned Denis down because he knew nothing about surveying. So he went on this course at Bolton technical college and they accepted him. What he didn't tell them is he went one night! Somebody showed him something, I can't remember was it a plane table or something I don't know what the heck it was, round Bolton Park that was his surveying but he never got the theodolite out of the case once so it didn't really matter. You know, that's the type of people we were in the 50's.

Track 4 [0:14:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were supposed to be surveying the route as you went but I got the impression that very little surveying got done.*

Track 4 [0:15:01] Ray McGowan: We never got the theodolite out of the case.

Track 4 [0:15:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *You didn't?*

Track 4 [0:15:03] Ray McGowan: No, never mind surveying the route.

Track 4 [0:15:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that because Denis didn't know or because the weather was so bad?*

Track 4 [0:15:08] Ray McGowan: Well a combination of both. Dick had been a quantity surveyor or something like that, and Dick says I'll show you, but it never came out of the case so it didn't matter what Denis knew. Unfortunately he died not so long ago.

Track 4 [0:15:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *Your destination on that particular trip was Recluse Peninsula.*

Track 4 [0:15:34] Ray McGowan: Yea we went up the Recluse Peninsula.

Track 4 [0:15:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was this Portal Point?*

Track 4 [0:15:38] Ray McGowan: Yes somebody, maybe you can answer me, why did they change the name?

Track 4 [0:15:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *I don't know.*

Track 4 [0:15:45] Ray McGowan: Nobody knows.

Track 4 [0:15:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *It's the same place is it?*

Track 4 [0:15:47] Ray McGowan: It's exactly the same place and yet that little hut is in the museum in Stanley and its called Cape Recluse. Why did they bother?

Track 4 [0:15:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *They changed Cape Canaveral, didn't they, to Cape Kennedy and back again.*

Track 4 [0:16:01] Ray McGowan: Ah well you can see why.

Track 4 [0:16:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was the hut like when you got there?*

Track 4 [0:16:04] Ray McGowan: The hut was small, basic hut as it was it was built as a refuge hut it wasn't built as a living hut, contrary to what it is like in the museum at the moment and the interior is nowhere like they had in the museum. I even phoned the girl and told her that because we had friends on Antarctic cruises brought me back photographs and it wasn't like that. A we had no pinups at all, B we had no oven at all. We had 3 primus stoves, 2 Tilley lamps and an oil-fired little heater and that was basically it and 3 bunks. Anyway we managed to survive very well on it actually. But with only 3 of us in the hut like that there you weren't going for cordon blue cooking or anything like that. Tell you what we did do was probably now health and safety would have a fit, we got 2 flour tins together, put them together, put a piece of cloth over it, 2 primus underneath and we managed to cook bread. I've got photographs.

Track 4 [0:17:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *You made an oven?*

Track 4 [0:17:20] Ray McGowan: Aye we made an oven out of that, that was the oven we had but when I seen the photographs of this oven where did they get that? Oh, we had a gramophone and 3 records and, to finish what I'm describing, we had a lot of books, somebody I don't know who it is ordered from Foyles in London, they sent what they couldn't sell anywhere else. They had all the Russian novels like ??? [incomprehensible], *Crime and Punishment*, and as far as we could see you turned the page and you couldn't remember the names from the page before, and they had all 12 copies of Proust's *Swann's Way*. Have you ever tried reading that?

Track 4 [0:18:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *I have.*

Track 4 [0:18:01] Ray McGowan: Well you know that was light reading compared to the rest, and that was basically it. We had a small radio it was an ex army field radio.

Track 4 [0:18:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was a 68 was it?*

Track 4 [0:18:13] Ray McGowan: I think it was 68 in 2 boxes with the result was that you couldn't afford to ???[incomprehensible] not that you could pick up, we could pick up one station that was somewhere in South Africa and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the half hour they had the Goons show I remember that, then they reverted to Afrikaans, but we had one set of headsets between 3 so you weren't listening to the radio. We had to save the batteries because the only communication we could make ??? [inaudible] down in base O the other thing was by morse.

Track 4 [0:18:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *Let's just go back a little bit, did you have a problem with this oven of yours, did it ever go wrong?*

Track 4 [0:18:51] Ray McGowan: No.

Track 4 [0:18:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *I understood that you used 3 primus stoves underneath it.*

Track 4 [0:18:56] Ray McGowan: That's right I thought it was 2 yeah 3.

Track 4 [0:18:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *The middle one started to melt.*

Track 4 [0:19:00] Ray McGowan: Oh that's right. Yes, but we got that fixed. Yes it was only the solder at the top. That's right it did give a bit of a, but then we just reduced it to 2 because it was too much heat or something like that.

Track 4 [0:19:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was the hut draughtproof or was it?*

Track 4 [0:19:16] Ray McGowan: Yes.

Track 4 [0:19:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it warm?*

Track 4 [0:19:18] Ray McGowan: Yes it was, you couldn't strip down to shirt or a sweater or anything like that there because we only had the one small calor gas (sic) wick thing but it was comfortable enough, comfortable enough.

Track 4 [0:19:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there any problem with the condensation?*

Track 4 [0:19:35] Ray McGowan: No, not that I remember, nothing at all. We weren't producing anything that you really ???[inaudible]. I don't know, the worst condensation, basically the outside temperature [was always kept] we weren't really using that much you know of stoves or anything because internal ??? [inaudible].

Track 5 [0:19:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *And how about washing yourselves, was that on the agenda or not?*

Track 5 [0:19:59] Ray McGowan: Hmm just about when you were stuck you had a rough wash and the greatest thing when you got back to the Biscoe you had your first bath for a year. No you didn't have strip down showers you weren't that blooming mad. Oh well we did actually when we got back to Recluse you know Wally and Denis decided to have a swim, so they stripped off and went in. I think they were in for 20 seconds.

Track 5 [0:20:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *A 20 second bath.*

Track 5 [0:20:35] Ray McGowan: That was their bath but no.

Track 5 [0:20:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *There was one particular record which had a special meaning for you.*

Track 5 [0:20:42] Ray McGowan: Yes, *The Nuns' Chorus*, Victoria de Los Angeles. We used to play it morning, noon and night. Can't even remember the name of the others because we didn't like them at all but we liked that one.

Track 5 [0:20:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *Dick suggests that it would be played as soon as you got back from a trip.*

Track 5 [0:21:01] Ray McGowan: That's right, that's right.

Track 5 [0:21:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *First man back put the needle on.*

Track 5 [0:21:03] Ray McGowan: Put the needle on - Victoria de Los Angeles I think you called it *The Nuns' Chorus*.

Track 5 [0:21:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *The other records might have been Prokofiev and Elvis Presley.*

Track 5 [0:21:15] Ray McGowan: I don't remember. We never played them.

Track 5 [0:21:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the radio communication you had at Recluse Bay was that voice or morse?*

Track 5 [0:21:24] Ray McGowan: No, morse all the time you hadn't got the strength in that wee radio, you just hadn't got the wattage to use voice. We could receive voice but we couldn't send voice.

Track 5 [0:21:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *Once of course the Hope Bay sledges turned up you had the extra problem of having to feed the dogs. How did you go about acquiring the food?*

Track 5 [0:21:49] Ray McGowan: That would give a lot of difficulty because as I said we didn't have a boat at Recluse, you know a dinghy. We weren't on a beach so you could see the seals below on this beach there and we actually built a raft and - I often wonder to this day - it was of empty oil drums - why did we had empty oil drums I never knew. It was only a long way afterwards 10 years later why did we have empty oil drums? We had no diesel generator or nothing, we had no oil. Anyway we made this and on an end of a rope - we all were roped all together so they could get round to kill the seal - and we managed to keep the dogs going and of course by the time we were rescued there wasn't much shall we say much in any food of any description. The dogs were just fed whatever was handiest, the pemmican left over and things like that from the man rations, all the rations there out of the bothy, Oh the dogs survived OK.

Track 5 [0:23:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *Dick talks about shooting a leopard seal.*

Track 5 [0:23:03] Ray McGowan: No I don't remember that. We shot quite a few seals but it could be, I can't remember.

Track 5 [0:23:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that a tough trip or a magical trip?*

Track 5 [0:23:13] Ray McGowan: It was a tough trip. It wasn't a magical trip in the sense that it was a frustrating trip, in the sense it achieved nothing. It didn't achieve anything, you know it didn't achieve anything. Yes, we made our way up onto the plateau the first people ever up there, it was just the fact and its just the disappointment in not getting down and with the Hope Bay crowd and its just the way that everything fell apart, so it wasn't what you would call a magical trip that way and it was OK but I can't say we enjoyed it because it was a heck of physical hard work. Give Dick his due actually, Dick was the strongest of the 3 of us and he was able to carry the pyramid tent on his back. There was 2 other places you couldn't even manhaul. I remember Dick carrying the pyramid tent on his back, Denis or I couldn't have done it. Yes we carried it between us but in certain sections where it was only 1 man almost, kicking steps going round the side of the col or something.

Track 5 [0:24:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was the route that you took ever adopted on a regular basis?*

Track 5 [0:24:29] Ray McGowan: Don't think it was ever used again. Because I asked afterwards and I was told, I don't know if it was true or not, it was done off a series of photographs done by the Catalinas, and what do you call that thing where they make 3Ds they used to do during the war?

Track 5 [0:24:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *Yes, I don't know what it is called, but I know what you mean.*

Track 5 [0:24:46] Ray McGowan: After the bombing, and they reckon it was a route - it had never been done before and I don't think its been done since in fact the hut's now gone its in Port Stanley so its never gonna be used – anyway satellite's now used, made that all redundant.

Track 6 [0:25:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *When you were picked up the Biscoe where did it take you?*

Track 6 [0:25:10] Ray McGowan: The *Biscoe* then she started relieving the other bases and then went back to Hope Bay, dropped the boys back at Hope Bay because the dogs and they were from Hope Bay. She went and dropped them back and just continued on and worked our way south and in those days you were asked, especially at what we called the sledging bases, 'where do you want to change?' and I said 'Yeah, I'll go to Horseshoe' you know its below the Antarctic circle, to say I've been there, so we finally went up - again with great difficulty - into Horseshoe. I didn't tell you the *Biscoe* ran himself, (they used to call him Kelly Johnson, he was from Northern Ireland like me).

Track 6 [0:25:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh Bill Johnson*

Track 6 [0:26:00] Ray McGowan: Bill Johnson, he decided to break this piece of ice one night, ran the *Biscoe* up on it we were stuck there for 10 days! Ten days didn't think we would get back off again – I've got a photograph of me holding the *Biscoe* up by the prow.

Track 6 [0:26:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did he get off again?*

Track 6 [0:26:17] Ray McGowan: Yeah, with the heat of the boat melted it enough until it slid off on its own.

Track 6 [0:26:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *The heat of the boat? How did they get him off?*

Track 6 [0:26:27] Ray McGowan: The boat ran up onto the floe, ok? The problem is it got stuck on the floe because he hadn't got the power to pull it off, so he had to wait until there was enough heat in the boat to – the heat of the boat melted the floe and well enough so the boat slid off – oh we had a great time. I think I spent five and a half months if I remember on that ruddy boat between, we never got anywhere in a hurry.

Track 6 [0:26:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was Horseshoe like when you got there?*

Track 6 [0:26:57] Ray McGowan: Horseshoe was much bigger of course, the base we had never seen the size of it though like that, there was the six of us and we settled down to life in Horseshoe and seemed to get on very well. And then we got this signal about they'd like some emperor penguin eggs from the ??? [incomprehensible] so it was decided that as I was the one with the field experience 4 of us would go and get them, and unfortunately the transmitter had broken down so we were out of communication and could receive but not transmit and, as it turned out to be very simple but it took flaming weeks to find the reason, but anyway I didn't go with them.

Track 6 [0:27:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the reason - I've heard different reasons. The real reason you didn't go was what?*

Track 6 [0:27:56] Ray McGowan: The real reason I didn't go was - there were 2 things actually Henry Wyatt and Pete Gibbs was missing from Stonington, right? They never bothered keeping a sked³ ever, right? I couldn't ??? [inaudible] the other thing was the transmitter used to transmit on one frequency so you couldn't leave it to the guys because, at Deception I think it was, was going to carry all the skeds and all the like that there, so you were doing that bit of thing, you had to phone through the met report for them to put it on, so it was decided I better stay where I am because we didn't know what happened to Pete or Henry and this is it here. Did you ever hear the story of what happened to them? The reason they didn't keep the sked is they stopped somewhere away down the peninsula. They went to visit Marguerite Bay and went over to have a look at a bit of rock or something like that there, of course he didn't put the peg in on the dogs so the dogs decided to go home. So they set off I think it was 35 miles, after the dogs. They hadn't even got a bar of chocolate between them never mind, and that's why they didn't keep the skeds.

Track 6 [0:29:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *They didn't have a radio.*

Track 6 [0:29:19] Ray McGowan: They had no dogs, radio but anyway that's the difference in the base, it settled down it was going to be a static base, but a static base which we were close enough to go down to Stonington which was reopened, you know the guys at Stonington reopened and basically unfortunately that's what happened to the 3 lads. They obviously had camped on the ice and it obviously broke up during the night.

Track 6 [0:29:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well they went off without you because you couldn't be spared from the radio work. This is David Statham, Stanley Black and Geoff Strong.*

Track 7 [0:29:56] Ray McGowan: *Yep.*

Track 7 [0:29:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *And did you have any radio communication with them at all?*

Track 7 [0:29:59] Ray McGowan: *No. Well yes they had the radios and all but the very first night they went off and it was very, very rough you know, blizzard blowing, so they didn't keep the first night's skeds OK? Well that's OK if it's the first night you didn't worry about anything like that there, the skeds, and it was the following morning I think that John Paisley, he walked up the hill and the bay was empty of ice, it was sheer water. There's something wrong here, there's something wrong, where the heck are they? So they didn't keep the second night and then the third night I got all the other bases, every base to listen out on the frequency, every one of them in case of atmospheric conditions, and we did this for 2 nights or something like that there during which time the bay refroze, so we knew there was something wrong and then one night there was a bit of whimpering and, I can't remember if it was me or not, but we opened the door and in walked one of their huskies. If the dog could talk.*

Track 7 [0:31:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *At what point prior to that had you begun to get very concerned for them?*

Track 7 [0:31:08] Ray McGowan: *Basically on the second night. Yes, you can forgive people not keeping the first night's skeds, maybe the weather thing, but it was always the one thing that I used to preach on about 'For god's sake keep your skeds. Nothing you can say but you know we know you're there.' And as I say we were worried about Henry and Pete, had they fallen down a crevasse? Not that you could do anything, very few ways you could ever rescue anyone in those days but you were trying to keep control of these all right lads, you know what I mean, and I looked forward to giving them a précis of the world news or something like that there, you know, from the radio point of view and that's when we started getting worried.*

Track 7 [0:31:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *And then the dog turned up.*

Track 7 [0:31:56] Ray McGowan: *And the dog turned up, and a couple of guys came down from W and, what you would call, help us out. We started to search the bay. They found I think it was 8 other dogs. Now the thing about it what we put together, there used to be this argument among all the bay fids and all that, did you leave the harnesses on overnight or did you take the harnesses off? Some people did, and we found dogs with the harnesses on and dogs with the harnesses off so assumed this happened in the middle of the night in the dark and they turned the dogs loose the dogs made it they didn't, trying to make their way ashore under ???[inaudible].*

Track 7 [0:32:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *What conclusion did you come to as to what had happened to the 3 men?*

Track 7 [0:32:46] Ray McGowan: The ice broke up and they were drowned.

Track 7 [0:32:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *They were drowned?*

Track 7 [0:32:49] Ray McGowan: Well, either that or they went away out to sea and we never found a sledge, box or hair the only thing we found was 9 dogs.

Track 7 [0:32:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *But they'd cut the traces had they?*

Track 7 [0:33:00] Ray McGowan: No, as far as I remember just the dogs returned loose. I can't see them cutting the traces because this was gonna happen in the dark and where are you gonna find a knife? You just went out and turned the dogs off, and the dogs OK they could survive I mean. They found another dog actually I think somebody was telling me almost a year later, it wound up somewhere else out there but way up, but the dogs were capable you see of living off - not off the land you know what I mean - penguin or anything like that there, but the humans didn't they just disappeared so we assumed they drowned but never found tents, sledge, anything - nothing.

Track 7 [0:33:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *John Paisley who was your base commander has written since that he had some for want of a better word premonition or psychic feeling about what was going on was that something you were aware of at the time? You're shaking your head.*

Track 7 [0:34:00] Ray McGowan: No - I want to be careful what I say.

Track 7 [0:34:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *Alright.*

Track 7 [0:34:05] Ray McGowan: No - I heard about this on the way home from John, but leave it at that.

Track 7 [0:34:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *Alright but although John - Johnnie Green had told you not to go searching for these men there was an attempt made by Paisley and Gibbs wasn't there to ...*

Track 7 [0:34:24] Ray McGowan: There's more than them actually, this is why I didn't it recorded, I could tell you what happened about going searching for them but I'd rather not record it because I'm only going to slaughter a couple of people.

Track 7 [0:34:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK, well let's leave it there. Tell me in the bar later if you want to.*

Track 7 [0:34:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *If you change your mind about recording it come back to me OK?*

Track 7 [0:34:43] Ray McGowan: Well I will talk to you about it when we're finished if you want to record it, I don't know maybe it should be recorded, but at the same time it could cause a lot of bother.

Track 8 [0:34:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK but that's your choice – what was the feeling like on the base afterwards.*

Track 8 [0:34:59] Ray McGowan: Well, there was not much said actually we - the first people arrived, well from the bases, was the W boys then the boys that came up from Y ??? [incomprehensible] then the Argentine boys arrived and they all started searching the bay, searching right round and it turned so cold and so fast actually they had to abandon one of the dog teams cos, I can't remember whose team it was, I remember they had to come back urgently because the dogs got frosted lungs. The temperature had really gone down, but unfortunately, well you know, there was so much shall we say accidents going on in those days you more or less accepted it thank god it wasn't me.

Track 8 [0:35:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *But it nearly was you, wasn't it?*

Track 8 [0:35:54] Ray McGowan: It nearly was but you accept things like that then you see.

Track 8 [0:35:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you?*

Track 8 [0:35:57] Ray McGowan: Yeah, you do.

Track 8 [0:35:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *You would have been 25.*

Track 8 [0:35:59] Ray McGowan: Yeah, yeah, you accept things like that there.

Track 8 [0:36:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *You didn't wake up in a cold sweat at night?*

Track 8 [0:36:06] Ray McGowan: No, no. You know I have trouble with my hearing without diversifying? The reason I have trouble with my hearing is one morning in Belfast quarter to nine, a Monday morning I parked my car beside a ford escort van, opens my boot, lifts my briefcase out and the van blew up - 400 pound bomb courtesy of the provisional IRA. You don't know, you don't know is it this day this is it. A thing that saved my life again an explosion goes Sthoom and then accelerates I was in the Sthoom bit according to the army expert and the whole flaming van went past me and missed me by every bit of it.

Track 8 [0:36:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were too close to be injured*

Track 8 [0:36:52] Ray McGowan: I was too close to be injured though when I got home that night I got a fright, you see. When I took my clothes off I was like ???[incomprehensible] sandpaper, my whole back, cos all the dust of the yard and all like that had been blown through my clothes and compressed and I had to scrape all the dust. You don't worry you don't know the day. I've always been that way you don't know the day.

Track 8 [0:37:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *The base report for that period hardly mentions this tragedy at all but I mean its talked about.*

Track 8 [0:37:30] Ray McGowan: Well its better not to talk about it because you only dwell on it – when tragedy happens you’re better forgetting about it, or not forgetting about it but just put it in the back of your mind OK? Else, now not everybody’s the same don’t get me wrong, and I always thought this is my feeling like get on with life its not our turn.

Track 8 [0:37:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *Practically of course you had to cope without half the base staff didn’t you?*

Track 8 [0:37:58] Ray McGowan: Yes, but we were doing nothing, lets be honest, we were only doing this met sked, then we started doing holiday trips and got other bases to cover for us and we went down to Stonington and went down the Argentine bases and the Argentine bases would come up to us. They were hell for banter. They had a big fridge so they’d come up with half a side of beef, came up once with a suckling pig, and what they wanted was pickles which our base was coming down with pickles, and white flour, see there was no white flour in Argentina, they went home with the sledge loaded with white flour. And the other thing that they wanted, if you gave them chocolate not one of them would eat the chocolate.

Track 8 [0:38:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Really?*

Track 8 [0:38:49] Ray McGowan: Yes – ‘this is for my children back in Buenos Aires’ because it seems chocolate wasn’t existed, and the only other thing with the Argentines, we got on very well with them once we come to an agreement: ‘You give us a protest note and we don’t give you a protest note cos its too much like bloody work these protest notes!’ - I don’t know if you remember them or not - especially when I had to code them all up. Don’t want any of these you know what I mean.

Track 8 [0:39:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *You would have to send the protests by radio would you?*

Track 8 [0:39:25] Ray McGowan: Naval 25 codes the same code as used by the Royal Navy. But I admire to this day, if you ever flaming watched any cracking the code in, and what do you call the park, you know like the Enigma?

Track 8 [0:39:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *Bletchley Park*

Track 8 [0:39:44] Ray McGowan: Bletchley Park – we couldn’t do it with the code books! One night we ???[incomprehensible] the code. I’m supposed to be doing them, sworn the official secrets act I wasn’t supposed to show the rest of them – the base leader if he needed to know ??? [inaudible] useless really. ??? [inaudible] I remember one night we decoded this thing and it started off ‘17 Norwegians’ was the first one and I said ‘We haven’t got one Norwegian never mind 17! We better go to square one, boys, and start again.’

Track 9 [0:40:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me about the conditions at the Horseshoe because again looking through the base reports the base was a bit of a mess, wasn’t it?*

Track 9 [0:40:26] Ray McGowan: In what sense?

Track 9 [0:40:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well it was draughty, it was warping, the wood was warping ...*

Track 9 [0:40:31] Ray McGowan: One little corner was a bit draughty but that's all I remember - I painted it, the whole outside of it, took this mad notion painted it blue, and I was going to - but I was talked out of it by John - I was going to put Taff [?] on the roof. It was a mixture of paint but it needed painted. Needless to say you see what we decided to do, as there only was the three of us, we'll go easy on the fuel you know with generators and things like that there. And the big laugh we had with the generators is one day we used to have the wire wool, eh not wire wool, you know the wool I mean, it is wire wool I think.

Track 9 [0:41:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *Wire wool, for cleaning things.*

Track 9 [0:41:25] Ray McGowan: We had this crowd of pups. We had some dogs but we discovered then. Their pups - the alpha female was allowed to have pups, the other bitches would kill every pup - so somehow or other these pups got under the hut.

Track 9 [0:41:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *Under the hut?*

Track 9 [0:41:50] Ray McGowan: Under the hut, and they had opened every roll of this wire wool and you couldn't see the diesels, you couldn't see the pups this heaving mass ??? [incomprehensible]. No I just sort of decided it wasn't a luxury hotel or anything like that, well I was used to sea the year before the basics room I didn't find anything wrong with the hut.

Track 9 [0:42:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *The windows let the snow in, one of them blew away.*

Track 9 [0:42:21] Ray McGowan: No I don't remember that at all.

Track 9 [0:42:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *You don't, OK. What about the technical equipment, your radio gear was that the latest*

Track 9 [0:42:29] Ray McGowan: No it wasn't, God knows when they made it. Everything we had was ex war surplus - seriously - I mean even the clothing you see was ex army even ??? [inaudible] was battle dress you know, war surplus and it was clapped out and I don't know where they bought it or what store they got it out of and I mean our back up radio was ones they carried in the bombers during the war, never worked, couldn't have raised anybody on them, this was your backup one that's why it was so important to keep the main one working and basically no, you had anything but up to date equipment that's the thing.

Track 9 [0:43:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *So it was pretty clapped out stuff was it?*

Track 9 [0:43:22] Ray McGowan: Yeah, yeah in the sense that you know that here we were down at sledging bases and basically you were relying on the guys in front of you the year before being honest and left their sledging anoraks behind because you

never got any new ones. You used the same anoraks, used sledging anoraks, handed down year after year. Oh no we very much seemed to be a shoestring operation, shoestring operation, maybe the money was going to the like of Halley Bay, was going up in the scientific parts but the sledging bases they got nothing.

Track 9 [0:43:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you have spares for things?*

Track 9 [0:43:56] Ray McGowan: No, no.

Track 9 [0:43:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *No radio spares?*

Track 9 [0:44:00] Ray McGowan: No, not a spare, not a spare.

Track 9 [0:44:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did it have a kind of amateurish feel to it back in those days?*

Track 9 [0:44:07] Ray McGowan: Yes, it was an amateurish feel, lets be honest you got that flaming impression actually, well known as you heard the expression 'Ach no use ??? [inaudible]'. It was all amateurs. And they didn't care.

Track 9 [0:44:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *Who's they?*

Track 9 [0:44:21] Ray McGowan: FIDS, SECFIDS and all that there, they were run at crown agents from the colonies, I think, we were registered there. That's where we got our paperwork from and when you were hired there were red stamps saying 'temporary temporary temporary' on every page but no I mean they didn't care if any work was done or not so long as you were in political occupation, that became obvious.

Track 9 [0:45:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *So politics was prime.*

Track 9 [0:45:47] Ray McGowan: Politics was prime. Every time as I said ??? [incomprehensible] 'Crown Land Keep Out' - we were supposed to take everywhere and several times we went round ???[incomprehensible] you were supposed to tell them to remove themselves. At least they were honest or decent and used to give you a year to get out. You have to leave tomorrow was our attitude.

Track 10 [0:45:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you make any friends among the Argentinians?*

Track 10 [0:45:21] Ray McGowan: Amongst the fids?

Track 10 [0:45:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *The Argies?*

Track 10 [0:45:24] Ray McGowan: Not really actually, they were very, very political, very, very political.

Track 10 [0:45:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *These are the guys on Debenham Island are they?*

Track 10 [0:45:33] Ray McGowan: Yeah, very political but then as it turned out to be, I don't know whether ???[incomprehensible] something like that, there were army bases except one guy he was an air force officer he was the political officer, you know the way they say ... they seemed to run it like that there. And they got themselves into a bit of trouble and we used to kid ourselves laughing, but at the same time what happened, you may remember, Peron was deposed so they went out and knocked down the statue of Peron, smashed it you see, and then Peron came back you see, and 'What were you going to do about the statue?' They couldn't see the humour of it. Well, 'Have they got salt mines in Argentina?' 'Its alright for you Paddy Paddy you laugh you laugh we serious trouble.' They actually burnt that base down and swore us to secrecy we weren't to tell anybody.

Track 10 [0:46:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *They burnt their own base down?*

Track 10 [0:46:33] Ray McGowan: Thank God they had a second base up - oh no you got on well with them, very well and no problem at all.

Track 10 [0:46:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *So they burnt down the base at Debenham Island you say?*

Track 10 [0:46:42] Ray McGowan: Aye.

Track 10 [0:46:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the reason was to get a better one.*

Track 10 [0:46:47] Ray McGowan: No no it was an accident one night.

Track 10 [0:46:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Sorry?*

Track 10 [0:46:49] Ray McGowan: It was some sort of accident. Oh no no no, this was in the middle of winter actually after the boys was killed. So they moved into the other and they came up to 'Eh, in case anybody, please, we've had an accident' - 'What's the accident?' - I think Mario you called the base there - 'We've had a fire - please do not tell anybody. We're in trouble.'

Track 10 [0:47:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you aware of the fire at the time?*

Track 10 [0:47:18] Ray McGowan: No, no not till they told, it was too far away, I think the Stonington boys were aware fire first, No problem as individuals, but once you crossed that line it became serious with them.

Track 10 [0:47:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *How do you mean, Ray?*

Track 10 [0:47:39] Ray McGowan: Serious with them in the sense that - I had an incident. You know I went to Deception, I went down twice and got hurt - coming down from the Argentine base and had been treated and they were giving me a lift back on board the *General San Martine*, and this admiral produces this flaming map of Deception and there in the middle is a little cross, a pencil cross. 'What is that?' What the hell did I know what that is. He'd stolen a British map. 'You're hazarding my ship, this is very, very serious,' and he wouldn't believe me I didn't know what it was, and this is where you know you went to a certain point and then all of a sudden

'Bang'. And the big thing you had to watch with any of the strangers and any of the boats at all was these protest notes. You could have a booze-up party and shaking hands on the way out you were handed a protest note. There was a line you didn't cross with them.

Track 10 [0:48:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *But did anybody take these protest notes seriously?*

Track 10 [0:48:49] Ray McGowan: Oh aye, yeah I was told afterwards. I had to code it up under navy 25, had navy 25 coding on my brain those days and that was sent to Stanley, Stanley sent it to the ambassador in Buenos Aires who took it up with the government. That's how serious it got, oh yeah it got quite serious these things. It was the work involved for the like of meself, this is why you wanted to avoid them like the plague. I mean tell each other you're trespassing, that's amazing what they were about, trespassing and putting some of the weirdest ideas you know. You see the second time I went down and got hurt at Deception, But one of the things at Deception is, another Argentinian ship would come in and park at the British base I was supposed to strap on my 45, my 12' dinghy and the wee outboard and charge them 1/6d for 1000 tonnes overnight for parking! It was crazy, absolutely crazy some of these things. People don't believe you ??? [incomprehensible] . . . says to us 'Paddy have you ever been to Punto Arenas?' I says 'No no'. 'Ah we'll drop you there on the way home'. With some of them you laughed but. We had a football match, that ship, I forget the name of it, with the boys on the base and they stuffed us you know there were 5-600 sailors on these ships and there's us and we got this navy 25 code all of a sudden. Yes, it was headlines it seems on the radio in Buenos Aires - the British Antarctic people had played such and such a ship and we beat them 12-0. And they gave us 25 codes 'You're not to do this again'.

Track 11 [0:51:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh really.*

Track 11 [0:51:10] Ray McGowan: Aye.

Track 11 [0:51:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Football was banned against the opposition?*

Track 11 [0:51:12] Ray McGowan: Football was banned against the opposition it was a laugh, and this as I say they were always trying to score political points.

Track 11 [0:51:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *I wonder if you're underplaying how difficult it was to maintain all that radio equipment? Was it a real pain in the neck?*

Track 11 [0:51:27] Ray McGowan: No it was pretty solid equipment actually, pretty solid equipment - don't forget it was way before transistor days the only thing that we had that was likely to go wrong, and we had a few of them, is that the valves would burn out now and again. What happened to that transmitter actually, there was a connector broke and that took me a month to find it and it was such a simple thing but you were cursing till you found it.

Track 11 [0:51:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there other equipment that you had on base which was letting you down? Generators?*

Track 11 [0:51:55] Ray McGowan: No these seemed ok generators, no everything was good solid stuff but it wasn't I think nowadays, maybe I'm wrong, but everything is so fragile you know everything is high tech, everything was low tech. You wanted to start a diesel you swung a flaming handle, and we found out how to start diesels by warming them by accident, and the one thing that actually happened on a couple of bases, they gave you ether to put in the air intake and after they discovered that blew a couple of heads off diesels and nobody would use it. And what you do is light a primus, blow it out and start it on the fumes of the diesel and this is it and I was down in the Argentine base they couldn't start the diesel ??? [incomprehensible] I was the expert once the diesel kicked she was away you know. Oh no it was good and solid stuff it wasn't fragile stuff.

Track 11 [0:52:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK.*

Track 11 [0:52:58] Ray McGowan: It was just old you know what I mean.

Track 11 [0:53:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *Yeah ok. It seems to me that you made a number of trips to and from Stonington is that right?*

Track 11 [0:53:06] Ray McGowan: Oh yeah.

Track 11 [0:53:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Quite a lot actually*

Track 11 [0:53:08] Ray McGowan: Quite a few yeah.

Track 11 [0:53:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was that for?*

Track 11 [0:53:11] Ray McGowan: Just freebies, holidays but we had nothing to do, what did we do was it 8 skeds a day? There was nothing else to do. So it was quite easy doing the skeds, go off for 3-4 days, I'll do you and all like that there. All you had to do was report it to Stanley and that's all.

Track 11 [0:53:39] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did Stanley know you were making these trips?*

Track 11 [0:53:41] Ray McGowan: I don't know, we didn't tell them. Yes we went down to Stonington and down to the Argentinian bases and the Argentinian bases as I said would come to us, they were on this banter Give them their due as I said they seemed to have this thing about pickles and white flour.

Track 11 [0:54:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *There is this odd phrase here which I don't understand but perhaps you might be able to explain. It talks about 'raised toings and froings to Stonington and back across Marguerite Bay and all the boxing and coxing that had to go on.' Were you having to do this in secret or negotiate it?*

Track 11 [0:54:27] Ray McGowan: Oh I don't know. The only boxing and coxing? I don't know, the only problem is we had a trip Pete, one of the geologists there, he had a thing about travelling in daylight and if you went down you had to do it in the dark, that's no exaggeration. I don't know what he means to understand, and so we'd set off after breakfast and give him his due after you'd had your dinner at night we got the sledge route written out, because you were wasting your time trying to help him.

And he had a thing, yes 3 times or something like that there, he travelled the whole way from Stonington to Horseshoe in the dark. I don't understand the thing like that there. Well I mean let's put it this way, anybody as I said even the Stonington boys sort of said everybody could do this. The only thing you were getting there once a month or something like that, you were allowed in from Monte these penny a word emails for what they call now emails. Other than that there was no traffic you spent most of your time on the base or you were sitting there on the ham bands on your radio ham bands which the world wanted to talk to you because of your call sign. I was VP8CN Canada Norway, as soon as you came on the radio 'Bang' the world was after you because in those days you used to send these cards to each other and this is a pain, and I laughed, the main problem was getting past flaming Brazil, we had a 1kw transmitter and they had an average of 10kw, we had about the lowest powered equipment we ever had but that did the job I mean we worked out right actually in the sense where you at certain times you could work straight into a gang in Glasgow and they'd put your mother on the phone.

Track 12 [0:56:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *You did some radio work in Deception was that right?*

Track 12 [0:56:47] Ray McGowan: Yeah yeah

Track 12 [0:56:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that any better or was that worse?*

Track 12 [0:56:48] Ray McGowan: No well we never got the chance we were doing the same at Deception. There were two of us on the thing that was Deception. What happened at Deception they discovered – you heard of the whistler programme? - I got involved in that like an idiot and after we went up and threw the cables over to the other side and of course Murphy's Law one of the problems was one of the cables didn't [?go under the sea] and I had to go down and pin it up, and that's when I got hurt.

Track 12 [0:57:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *What happened there, Ray?*

Track 12 [0:57:21] Ray McGowan: Ach it was my fault well I was coming up the rope and we had 200 feet of rope, it was stupidity when you think about it afterwards, and I just got over the top and I was jerked off my feet and I was jerked against a boulder. Guy sort of style he was frightened to come off ??? [incomprehensible] anyway he got him up there ??? [incomprehensible]. . more or less with me doing that, a disc out of me neck and a disc out of me back ??? [incomprehensible] in 3 places. Anyway we got back down to the wee boat and got back to the base and I says 'I can't get out boys I'm paralysed', and I couldn't. So they took me to the Argentine base and they had a doctor, we didn't, I think I was there for about 2-3 weeks, but then the contractor turned with up a doctor, and no way was I allowed to stay. And the funny thing halfway up the Atlantic back in the heat everything not to say it cleared up but this is it here, they just wouldn't let me stay so I didn't see actually much of Deception in the sense that, yes, the real work we done in Deception was that they got the first aircraft down there and I was putting up the serial beacons, the ray beacons and all like that there but we were so disorganised or unorganised. I mean the serial beacon for example which transmits a signal, this is for the aircraft to home in on, we'd put it out outside the hut which is in a hollow. We had no cable

around to put it up on top of the hill with. You couldn't hear it from one end of the flaming bay to the other didn't work that's it. Nobody ever thought, yes we're having these aircraft in Deception, they're in the bottom of a hollow, their signal homing beacon is in a hollow, how can you hear it? That's what used to drive you nuts about the organisation down there, nobody ever thought anything.

Track 12 [0:59:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *But on the whole, final question, Ray, on the whole how do you regard that episode in your life now?*

Track 12 [0:59:58] Ray McGowan: Oh brilliant, brilliant. Winter sports holiday, a lot of adventure, a lot of adventure, a winter sports holiday, nobody took it serious in my day, we didn't take it serious. We fell out with everybody and as I say I enjoyed it so much that I went down a second time, and unfortunately but then I knew the second time that was me days over after having the medical problems, so I had to settle down and make a living. Oh no it was a brilliant time and maybe they've now changed, maybe its all too organised. One of the guys when I was down there, when you were sick you just ignored it and got on and done your own thing because we didn't believe in all this, so that's basically it I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Track 12 [1:00:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *Lovely. So, Ray, thank you very much indeed.*

Track 12 [1:00:59] Ray McGowan: Not at all.

¹Sounds like Norton, but no record of a college of this name can be found in London. However, there was a Norwood college (now demolished) in south London which was where many Merchant Navy wireless operators went to gain their PMGs.

²PMG stands for Postmaster General, who issued the 'Certificate of Competence in Radiotelegraphy and Authority to Operate'.

³Sked – abbreviation of Schedule, the radio operators' prearranged time for radio communication.

Highlights:

- 03:11 First meeting with fellow fids
- 05:08 Depot laying at Cape Recluse
- 09:35 Dug out of tent
- 11:50 Field Scrabble
- 14:15 Surveying (or not!)
- 16:04 Cape Recluse hut, (including makeshift oven)
- 21:49 Difficulties providing for dogs
- 25:10 *Biscoe* stranded on ice floe
- 26:57 Horseshoe, and tragedy at Stonington
- 36:06 (Surviving IRA bomb in Belfast)
- 37:58 Contacts with Argentinians, protest notes and coded messages
- 40:31 Horseshoe base

- 42:29 Equipment issues
- 44:21 Political FIDS occupation and Argentinians – Argentinian base burnt down - banter
- 47:39 Incident with Argentinians at Deception
- 48:49 Protest notes etc.
- 54:27 Communications with outside world
- 56:48 Injured at Deception