

GEORGE HEMMEN

Edited transcript of a recording of George Hemmen interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 8th November 2010. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 20th July 2011.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is George Hemmen recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 8th of November 2010. George Hemmen, Part One.*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:10] George Hemmen: The name is George Ethelbert Hemmen. You have got the spelling of all that, I guess?

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Ethelbert? As in the king?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:18] George Hemmen: Yes, as in the king. The date of birth is the 1st of March 1926, a long time ago, and I was born in west London.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did your father have aspirations for you then, naming you after a former monarch?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:33] George Hemmen: No. It was my mother's father's christian name, and she was very fond of him. So that is how that came. My father's name was George, so that bit, the Ethelbert, was Grandad's name.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well you are the first Ethelbert I have met, as far as I know.*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:57] George Hemmen: Probably. Probably the first Hemmen you have met, too?

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:01:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well that is also true. Where does that come from?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:01:03] George Hemmen: We do not know; we really do not know. As a guess, probably a little town in Holland called Emmen, but ...

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:01:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was your childhood like? Were you privately educated or did you go to a state school?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:01:21] George Hemmen: No, I went to the Latymer Upper School in Hammersmith, but do not forget this was during the war years. I left there and in 12 months or so I went into the army. Then after the war finished, I saw little point in staying in the infantry so I transferred to something more directly interesting (but not from the fighting point of view) and I went across to the Royal Artillery and trained as a surveyor.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Just go back to the war years for a moment. The infantry suggests you might have seen active service.*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:12] George Hemmen: No, no. We were ready for it but that was it.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK.*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:17] George Hemmen: I was in the King's Royal Rifles then.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me about learning to be a surveyor.*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:23] George Hemmen: It was something... I have always been interested in the outdoors, and maps and suchlike things, and there was this opportunity to go and be trained as a surveyor, which I felt would be kind of useful and an interesting thing. We went to the Royal Artillery Survey School on Salisbury Plain. I cannot remember how long that took, but then I got my surveyor's badge. That was fine.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:03:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Can you recall where your fascination for maps sprang from?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:03:05] George Hemmen: No, not really. Probably during the war years when I was in the school army cadet corps.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:03:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *What would have been your first brush with the Antarctic, your first appreciation that such a place existed?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:03:26] George Hemmen: Oh, I had read various articles by people who had been there. I was quite interested and then it was in 1952, there was this advert in the *Daily Telegraph* or *Times* or something, for Fids. I applied and went up for an interview. The only positions they had available were as Met Observer, and they sent us up to the Met Office Training School in Stanmore and that was it. Then we went down, we sailed South the first time on the old wooden *John Biscoe*.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *How old were you then?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:17] George Hemmen: I must have been 25/ 26, something like that. Mid twenties anyway.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *What do you recall of the selection process? Do you remember who was interviewing you?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:30] George Hemmen: Yes, indeed. There was Sir Miles Clifford who was the Governor of the Falkland Islands. There was the Secretary of FIDS, people from the Colonial Office.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was Bill Sloman around in those days, or was it before his time?*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:49] George Hemmen: I do not think Bill Sloman was involved, that I am aware of anyway, because I would not have known who the people were apart from the ones I had direct contact with in the immediate future, like the Governor and SecFids and so on. Bill I came across, of course, during the IGY Halley Bay set up. He was on the personnel committee.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *Interesting that Clifford should be at your interview. You are the first Fid I have met who remembers him being on the interview panel, so he must have come back to the UK for that, I guess.*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:35] George Hemmen: Yes, I am pretty sure he was.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it an easy afternoon, or did you have to work hard at the interview?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:45] George Hemmen: No, I did not find it too difficult. I thought it went relatively easily. Odd questions like ‘Why do you want to go to the Antarctic?’ is something you really cannot answer. There isn’t an answer to that.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Fifty years later and there is still not an answer?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:13] George Hemmen: No. ‘You must be mad.’

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *So did you then undergo any training before you were packed off to the Antarctic?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:23] George Hemmen: You mean physical training?

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *Physical, any kind of training?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:28] George Hemmen: Well only, as I say, we had the Met Office Training School but apart from that, no, not at all.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *Crevasse rescue?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:38] George Hemmen: No, no, you learned that the hard way in those days. You had the fairly serious medical check and dental checkup. They would remove all your fillings and replace them to make sure you do not have any trouble when you are down there, which is fine. But no, nothing more than that. You just went. What I would say, though, is that there must have been a dozen and a half or a couple of dozen of us on this little wooden boat in very cramped conditions, but it was very good inasmuch as it sorted people out – that long voyage down the Atlantic. The quirks of people come out in this little closed community and you get a pretty good idea who, under no circumstances, would you want to spend a winter with.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you think you were being observed whilst you were travelling South, by anybody who was going to distribute the men?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:43] George Hemmen: No, only perhaps the ship’s captain.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you remember his name?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:51] George Hemmen: Yes, Bill Johnson.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was Bill Johnson?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:52] George Hemmen: Oh yes, it was indeed.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *What did you make of him?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:54] George Hemmen: Great guy. Oh yes, he knew his stuff all right.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *Can you elaborate a little?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:00] George Hemmen: Yes. He had this bluff exterior, but I think we got on very very well. When the ship was in bad weather, you had great confidence that he knew what he was doing, and certainly once it got into the ice, he was great. But it was a funny little ship.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me about the ship. What was it called?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:32] George Hemmen: *John Biscoe.*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *The original one?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:34] George Hemmen: The original *John Biscoe*. Yes, it was a wooden wartime netlayer. I have got a picture of it if you want to see it.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it a bit of a squeeze?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:08:47] George Hemmen: It was very much of a squeeze. You are talking about a few hundred tons, that is all. Quite small; in fact when you first saw it at Southampton you think 'Oh that must be the tender that is taking us out to the ship.' But it was not.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did it handle at sea?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:05] George Hemmen: Like a pig.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:06] Chris Eldon Lee: *Really?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:07] George Hemmen: Well yes, because it had no keel. It just had a couple of rubbing strakes on the sides, so of course there was nothing to stabilise it at all. In Biscay she was rolling 55° each side of the vertical every 5 seconds. That is some moving.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you relaxed at this point?*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:32] George Hemmen: No, far from it. No, we were not at all well, most of us. You just lie on your bed and hope it will all soon end.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *I would imagine that you had not done much sailing in the Royal Artillery, so ...*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:46] George Hemmen: No, not at all. In fact I had not done any sailing whatsoever till then. But it was a good voyage. As I say, it sorted people out. We stopped at Cape Verde Islands for refuelling, then on to Montevideo, a couple of runs ashore, then down to Stanley. Stanley was an interesting place. Have you been there?

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:10:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *No I have not, but tell me what it was like in 1953 or so.*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:10:23] George Hemmen: Oh well very 'back of beyond'. There were roads there and a couple of shops and a couple of pubs. There was a dance in the local town hall once a week or something like that. But it was all corrugated iron roofs, even the Government House and the Cathedral. It was very very primitive but it was very nice and the people were very welcoming. That was really where all the FIDS headquarters were in those days. That is where all the staff... The London Office of FIDS in those days consisted of one secretary only and that was it. The rest were all down in Stanley.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:11:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you come across Fuchs at this point?*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:11:20] George Hemmen: Yes indeed. Fuchs was Director of the FIDS Scientific Bureau. He may have been on our interview panel; I think he probably was. But the introduction (if you like), once we were all signed up and we were doing this Met Office course, we all went up to Cambridge for a day and Bunny introduced us to the things that ... how it was going to be. He was very good.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:11:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *This was the Girton College conference?*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:03] George Hemmen: No, it was in Scott Polar.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it? So how many would you say there were of you in those days?*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:08] George Hemmen: Well I think on that party, I don't know. A dozen or so? Not terribly many.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *And what happened when you got to Stanley, George?*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:21] George Hemmen: Kitting out, briefing, getting told where you are going to go, because we had not been allocated bases until that time. Then off we went : a few days later South Georgia. We spent a couple of days in South Georgia. Did we go to South Georgia? No we did not, not at that time. We went straight down South. The first call was Hope Bay, then Admiralty Bay. That was quite good. The base leader from the previous year stayed over the summer. Then there were the four new people. But there was a building programme going on, with a carpenter from Port Stanley. So we were engaged in adding bits to the hut, essentially.

Then the ship, what can I tell you about it? Not a lot. The summer, it was an enjoyable summer. Things were happening. Of course there was that famous boat trip incident. We had an Argentine tug came in one day. Anyway come the end of the season, *Biscoe* left and winter set in and you settled down to your routine.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *Before we talk about the famous boat trip, this was the one that did not quite work out according to plan I presume.*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:10] George Hemmen: That is right yes.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *Just tell me about the meteorological set up in, this was 1953/54 wasn't it?*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:16] George Hemmen: No it was winter '53.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *How sophisticated were the Met Office ...?*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:25] George Hemmen: Not very. It was pretty basic Met observing that we were doing down there. The odd balloon ascent, followed by a theodolite, but basically it was Met obs every 6 hours. There were three of us: 3 Met people, a diesel mech, a radio operator and that was it, that was the wintering complement of the base: just five.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:15:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you take satisfactorily to meteorology?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:15:05] George Hemmen: I think so. It was interesting. One of the tricky things: you have to judge the height of clouds. OK, guesswork. No it was OK; that was fine. You were doing a job of work and that was what you were there for. The observations were sent off by radio a couple of times a day. No, it was a very good winter, I would say.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:15:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you feel at the time that the work you were doing was really worthwhile? It was doing something, a major contribution to science at the time, and looking back on it, do you still feel the same way?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:15:55] George Hemmen: Right, let me try and see how I can answer that one. It certainly was not a major contribution to science. It was a simple straightforward meteorological observing station. That was what we were doing, we were sending the observations in, and of course writing them up. It was satisfying in that respect, but of course we travelled about quite a bit. It was interesting, and it was a fascinating time. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Mind you, you have got to remember that if there is just five of you on a little station, surviving takes quite a lot of time.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:16:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *Can you elaborate on that for me?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:16:52] George Hemmen: Well, you have got to do your own cooking, mending and washing, cleaning and getting food for the dogs and feeding the dogs, looking after them and all that sort of thing. It takes time.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:17:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were there any surprising weather results, or any particular extreme weather that you recorded?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:17:15] George Hemmen: No, not really. You get your ration of storms and gales, days when you cannot see a hand in front of you, but then on other occasions you will get a brilliant blue sky and calm, no wind, and life is absolutely wonderful. I have got a lovely picture somewhere of one of these days when the sun was shining and there was no wind. The hut was fairly well drifted up and we strung a line between chimneys and hung our washing out to dry. Of course it froze solid but it did not matter, it still evaporated. It was a lovely picture, with blue sky behind it all.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:06] Chris Eldon Lee: *So when you brought it in, it was dry was it?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:08] George Hemmen: Oh yes.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *So it froze solid and then it dried out?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:11] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you got the ironing done at the same time?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:15] George Hemmen: Well no. I do not think we bothered with ironing very much. [laughs].

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *No, ironing and Fids does not equate.*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:22] George Hemmen: No it doesn't.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you think you were also ... (again you might know more about this now than then) but do you think you were also aware at the time of the political game that was going on?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:31] George Hemmen: Oh yes. I mean ...

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was obvious, was it?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:34] George Hemmen: Well that was a very large part of why FIDS existed, wasn't it?

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:39] Chris Eldon Lee: *And that had been explained to you at the time?*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:16:41] George Hemmen: It must have been because we were certainly aware of it. It was a factor, no question about that.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me about this slightly unfortunate boat trip then. It is briefly described in Of Ice and Men, but I would love to hear a more detailed version from your experience.*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:19:06] George Hemmen: Well it was just one of those things. Four of us – it was one of these beautiful summer days – and there was a penguin rookery, a big penguin rookery, on a point about 6 or 7 miles from the base. There was an emergency food and fuel dump maintained there. Now you have to go and look at these emergency dumps once a year, to make sure they are in order. It was an opportunity to collect eggs, which of course they cannot do any more. The four of us went across and checked the dump, collected our eggs, had a very nice time. Then when we came to launch the boat to go back late that afternoon, the wind had got up but we had not noticed it because where we were was quite sheltered, and the sea was just too rough to get back. So we were stuck there for two or three days.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:20:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *How well-equipped were you for staying the night?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:20:18] George Hemmen: Not at all well-equipped. We had food; we had paraffin; we had cigarettes. That was about it. We upturned the boat and propped it up on some cases and that was our shelter. It was really quite uncomfortable but you were stuck with it.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:20:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you having to hang on to that boat?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:20:49] George Hemmen: Well once the wind did get up underneath it and tipped it over. Then we sort of re-anchored it and held it all down with old whalebones. But that was fine and then after a couple of days or so it seemed to be calming down, so (and this is where it all went wrong on us). The boat was in: there was a sort of a shelter, if you like, of a few rocks out at sea. It looked as though it was fairly calm so two of us said 'OK, look. We will take the boat our beyond this sheltered bit, round the corner, which is where the bad weather was, and see what we make of it. At worst we will have to come back.' So anyway we took the boat round the corner. It did not seem too bad. OK, it was still a bit of a sea running but we thought it was not that bad. 'Let's go for it.'

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:21:54] George Hemmen: So we went in to the shore to pick the other two up. Then all of a sudden one of these katabatic gusts, whoosh came down, by which time of course we were on a lee shore and we had to get out. We were going to try and go back around to our little sheltered bay but by that time the wind had just come out of absolutely nowhere. We were riding on it, in fact I was driving the boat at the time. Ach, there was just no way that I could turn it across the waves; it would have been over. So you had to just run with the sea, run with the tide, but the trouble there was that the waves were taking us out into the Bransfield Strait. Every time we got up on top of a wave, I pushed the tiller over and tried to ride along on top of it and inch our way to the left. Anyway we ran I suppose about 5 miles across and eventually got across the other side. We did not go out to the Bransfield Strait but the people at the base who were watching all this on their theodolite, they saw something happening. And that was really about [?? incomprehensible]; very unpleasant.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were not one of the most experienced boatmen in the Antarctic at that point were you?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:31] George Hemmen: No.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was instinct that was driving you to do the right thing?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:36] George Hemmen: Yes, purely. I was glad I was driving it because I had something to think about. [laughs]

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *At one point you put up a message in the snow, with stones; I think it was with stones, which read 'Boat OK'. I cannot quite interpret that message. What did it mean?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:24:00] George Hemmen: Well what it meant was that as we were crossing the bay, this forced crossing which we had not wanted to do but you could not turn the boat so you had to go with the tide. Once we got across the other side, we were on a point which, if we went across, walked across this little point, there was a nice snowfield more or less facing the hut. Now we knew they had got the theodolite there; we knew that had got binoculars, so we just got some rocks and said OK, just to let them know, if they could read it, in great big bold a setting against the snow 'Boat OK'.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:24:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *Which meant that your boat was fine?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:24:44] George Hemmen: Yes, sure.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:24:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *Not 'Please send a boat.'?*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:24:46] George Hemmen: No, no. What we meant was 'We are OK; we will be back as soon as the'

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:24:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *So it was a reassurance message rather than an SOS?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:24:55] George Hemmen: Oh sure. Oh yes absolutely.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:24:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *But somebody sent out an SOS at some point because a ship turned up, the Snipe?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:25:03] George Hemmen: Yes. Well yes, as soon as we were stuck for the night they told Stanley, and then they saw us going across I suppose. Anyway *Snipe* came in and sent a motor boat out. It pissed you off a bit, quite honestly, because another hour and we would have been on our way, because the wind was dropping again. We would have got back all right. Well when we got back, can you imagine living under this upturned boat? We had cigarette tins, which we filled with paraffin, stuck a bit of string in the top, and that our lamp. That gives out a lot of sooty muck – absolutely filthy. So I do not know what the crew of the *Snipe* thought when they saw us, but there we are. That was it.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *What were your feelings about being rescued? Were you slightly indignant?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:12] George Hemmen: Yes, as I say, pissed off. We would have got back all right eventually.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you at any time fear for your life?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:20] George Hemmen: I did not, no. As I say, do not forget that I was pretty busy. My guess is that some of the others did.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *And when the ship came to get you What was the ... (I am trying to avoid putting words into your mouth because that is not the thing to do). Did they present an attitude? Were they delighted to have rescued you, or fed up that you had detoured the boat?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:50] George Hemmen: I do not think so, no. It was all quite friendly. They sent a motor boat out and the motor boat towed us back. We went up to the hut. They could not stop very long because they were off to do something else. No it was all quite amicable and friendly.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *So there were no hard feelings that the base commander had sent out an SOS?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:12] George Hemmen: No, not really. You cannot have hard feelings about these things, can you?

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you think there were lessons learned? I mean did practice change as a result of this near miss, shall we say?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:25] George Hemmen: No, no, no. It was just... It was not lack of planning; it was not lack of forethought; it was not anything that needed to be changed. It was just a salutary lesson that if you are mucking about with small boats in that part of the world, you really have to be very much aware that the weather can change in a flash.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *I was thinking though, you ran out of fuel; had to refuel the boat.*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:55] George Hemmen: Only very very close inshore. We got pretty well right the way across. So we were not in the really bad rough sea by that time. I mean we started off with a full tank. Oh yes, don't worry about that.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *I see. OK. And the radio was u/s. Is that right?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:17] George Hemmen: The radio was u/s. Oh yes well that was u/s from day one. Yes, it did not work. Funnily enough, when I knew you were coming, I scribbled the note. I wrote some notes about all this immediately afterwards

and I came across them fairly recently. Yes we did have radio but the transmitter would not work. We could hear the base.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh right, so it worked in one direction?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:47] George Hemmen: Yes, but we could not transmit.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the base commander did not sit down and say 'Right. This is how we avoid these things again.'?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:56] George Hemmen: No, well you can't., you know.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the fact that it was an exceptionally high tide, was that something that you would have been able to predict?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:06] George Hemmen: Oh no, it was not the tide, it was wind. It was a high wind that suddenly got up, and of course when you are dealing with these ice-capped islands, you can get these katabatic winds just suddenly streaming down from nowhere.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *One of the chaps on the boat was Roger Banks who wrote a novel later on.*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:32] George Hemmen: Oh yes.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *'The Unrelenting Ice'. What did you make of that?*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:36] George Hemmen: [laughs] Well, I was lent a copy of it, which I have read, and I thought it was rather fun. You recognised a lot of the characters in it. I could put their real names to some of them. He had written it with his tongue in his cheek, but there was a lot of truth in it; a lot of make-believe as well. Oh Roger was quite a character.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:30:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *In what respect?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:30:13] George Hemmen: He did not suffer fools gladly, for a start. He was always willing, very willing. Whatever had to be done, Roger was there to help, but he was away with the fairies most of the time. I think one of the things that I said when it was written up for the BAS Club Newsletter about him: he was convinced that his paintings of clouds would have been a far better record than all this dull records that appear in the met logbook. He was probably right.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you spot yourself in The Unrelenting Ice?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:05] George Hemmen: Yes, oh yes. Quite a bit of it. But he had mixed up some of me and somebody else, so it was not that clear, but there was a lot of it that you did see.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:22:] Chris Eldon Lee: *I think when you were working on the base, Admiralty Bay, quite a lot of renovation and restoration work was going on. There was a chap called John Raymond who was in charge of all that. Is that correct?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:36] George Hemmen: Johnny was the chippy. Yes, what happened was the hut was there but it needed a big extension building to it, and Johnny Raymond was the chippy who was sent down from the Public Works Department in Stanley. Great guy; little fellow. I had a lot of time for him. It did not matter what the weather was, you know he would get on with it. If, as did happen, he got a bit of a wall up and then a blow came and it got shifted, he would fix it somehow. It was largely because we knew Johnny so well, and his work, that we got him as chief chippy for the first year at Halley Bay.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:32:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right, I see.*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:32:41] George Hemmen: Him and his brother in law were the two chippies.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:32:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *I want to spend some time talking about Halley Bay later on of course. I will come back to that later on. Did you get much sledging done at Admiralty Bay? Was it good for sledging?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:32:56] George Hemmen: We got a bit done. Nothing terribly serious, I must say, because you cannot get very far. You have to rely on sea ice of course, to get you out of that little peninsula that we were on. But on these small met bases, there was not any what you would call serious long-distance sledging. It was more recreational as much as anything.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was the island surveyed before you got there?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:29] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you had maps already?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:31] George Hemmen: We did, yes.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *So your surveying training did not actually come into play, then, at that point?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:40] George Hemmen: No, not at all, not at all. Really it was the Admiralty charts of that part of the island, that we used as much as anything.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what are your abiding memories of Admiralty Bay, then, bearing in mind that you are one of a very small number of Fids who have ever spent a winter there.*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:34:07] George Hemmen: I thoroughly enjoyed it. We got out and about a lot – particularly Roger Banks and Lofty Worswick (who was the Base Leader). He had already been with FIDS before. We got out and about quite a lot. It

really was a wonderful experience. The wildlife; and the scenery was just absolutely incredible. It was a good year, a really good year. Then the following year, of course, I moved on to Deception.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:34:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *Had you signed up for two seasons?*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:34:50] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:34:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *And when did you find out you were going to be moved, or did you volunteer?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:34:57] George Hemmen: No, no. You just got a message on the radio: 'Your next year will be at Deception and you will be BC there.'

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh right, so that was how you found out that you were going to be Base Leader?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:13] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *I see. Were you surprised?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:16] George Hemmen: I suppose I was really, yes. Well fine. You know it was good. And then of course, once we got there, then we had this notice that Norman Leppard and Dick Kenney were coming to re-map the island, and of course we needed to provide the support for them, and it went very well.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well tell me about that process, because I think you were divided up into two parties, and you had some external assistance as well. Tell me about that.*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:57] George Hemmen: Well yes, Dick Kenney and Norman Leppard, they both did different parts of the island from time to time, but they had to be supported separately in the field, one way or another. Depending upon what they were doing, we either left them to get on with it on their own – they were mainly plane tabling – or you would give them support if they were going to do any mountain work. Either you went with Norman when he wanted to go up to the top of Mount Pond, which was the highest spot in the island. We went up there and he wanted to do his tabling. That was interesting. It was one of these silly things. It happens. You flog up this ice slope, up to the top of the mountain, all roped up. with your ice axe in a loop of rope dangling from your waist. You get up there. 'OK we have got there.' So what do you do? You throw the ice axe down into the ice, point first so it just sort of sticks there. It didn't, it just went 'Zoik'.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:37:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *It went straight through?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:37:21] George Hemmen: Yes. We were standing on a snow bridge on top of a crevasse. [laughs] We did not stay there very long. But yes, these things happen. But of course that was the summer after the fracas with the Argentines.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:37:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *Hope Bay?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:37:46] George Hemmen: No, on Deception.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:37:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *What did you learn about that, while you were then coming in as a new team? Were you given a warning or a briefing?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:37:58] George Hemmen: Yes. We knew about it. We know while it was going on, on the radio at the time, in the '52/'53 summer, and now we were the '53/'54 summer. We were fully aware of it. Also there was a team of Royal Marine Commandos put there with us, just in case there was any more nonsense. But there was not and we got on famously with both the Argentinians and the Chileans.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *Again I will come to those in just a moment, but I am interested in the relationship with the marines, because I think you had 8-10 men detachment of marines.*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:42] George Hemmen: Yes, that is right.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did you get on with them?*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:45] George Hemmen: Wonderfully.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you work side by side?*

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Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:48] George Hemmen: Oh yes, we got on very well indeed. You remind me of things, don't you? One of the marines had a, I cannot remember what it was now, but a boil or something of that sort, and the doctor at Hope Bay (we were on the radio) said 'Right, you have got to give this guy, (the symptoms whatever it was), he needs a course of penicillin injections.' 'Fine.' And I can remember Conrad Edwards who was the major. I said 'Yes, we have got penicillin in the medical chest. Here it is.' He said 'No, it is your penicillin, you have got to give it him.' I said 'No, it is your guy; you have got to give it him.' So here was this Royal Marine sergeant, what do you do. Neither of us had ever injected anybody before, so what do you do? There you are, one of my sole claims to fame: I have stuck a needle in the backside of a Royal Marine Commando sergeant and got away with it.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me a bit about Con Edwards. Because he was in charge of the marines that were there?*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:09] George Hemmen: That is right.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well tell me what you thought of him.*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:12] George Hemmen: Oh we got on famously. We got on very well indeed, and of course there was all this political nonsense going on. Sometimes we would both go out to one of these Argentine or Chilean ships, we did the nonsense, and then had a party. That was the routine.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *Again I will come to that in a moment. The marines were actually helping you surveying, weren't they? They were accompanying you?*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:39] George Hemmen: Oh yes, they were great as support personnel for the two surveyors.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Why were they taking weapons with them when they went surveying?*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:49] George Hemmen: I doubt they did. No I do not think they did.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *Dick Kenney writes that they had a weapon in one hand and a survey tripod in the other.*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:03] George Hemmen: Oh maybe they did. I have no recollection of that. I suppose it would not have struck me as being odd that a marine would have a rifle with him.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were surveying right around their huts, weren't you, at times?*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:19] George Hemmen: Well at some distance, yes. Maybe that was true; maybe it wasn't. I suspect a little imagination.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *It is a very imaginatively written piece, I must say. He says you were all terribly unfit for this surveying job.*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:45] George Hemmen: Who, the marines?

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *No, you were, the Fids.*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:52] George Hemmen: I do not think they were. Well I will tell you something. We used to go from our base to get across to the penguin rookery. On Deception Island you have to go across a ridge and get down, and a bunch of marines said 'Where is this penguin rookery? We would like to go and have a look.' We told them and they came back knackered, so I do not think there was anything too bad about the fitness of our people.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *And do you remember a particularly large explosion when they were trying to get rid of some ordnance?*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:34] George Hemmen: No.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. Fair enough.*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:37] George Hemmen: We got on very well with the marines and I met Con Edwards in London that summer after we got back home.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did you get on with the South Americans, then, shall we say? Because you wrote a very interesting report about relationships with the Argentinians and then with the Chileans, and it sounds like you had a different relationship with the different nations. And this is all to do with having to hand out notices to visiting ships' captains. So tell me the story behind that, George.*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:43:15] George Hemmen: Ah well, do not forget this was pre-International Geophysical Year. Chile, Argentina and the United Kingdom all laid claim to the same sector of the Antarctic, which included places like Deception Island. On that island there were three stations: ours, the Chileans and the Argentinians. Whenever a ship came in, we were required by the Government of the Falkland Islands to go and deliver this Harbour Regulations and Notice to the captain. OK if it was an Argentine ship, and there were some pretty big Argentine transports came in. It was a big transport and tugs. The routine was more or less the same. You would storm onto this ship with your Regulations. You were told that the captain was asleep. After his voyage, he had got his head down and, tough, he could not see you. So that leaves you in a bit of a spot. You hand this Notice to the First Officer. He says 'Thank you very much.' And then you storm off the ship in high dudgeon. The moment you step back into your dinghy, a little sailor comes running down the steps: 'The captain invites you back on board the ship for a drink.'

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:44:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you ever actually succeed in handing this envelope to ...?*

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:44:40] George Hemmen: Oh yes, we always handed it over and the Chileans of course, they had a different approach. You handed your protest to them and they would hand you one back.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *Pre-written?*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:01] George Hemmen: Oh yes. The thing was: the job was done. You had done what you had to do. What happened after that was almost inevitably social. We got on very well with both the Chileans and the Argentinians.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was in this envelope that their respective governments would object to?*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:26] George Hemmen: Oh, a protest about their presence, and as you say, the Harbour Regulations.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there a paragraph or a phrase in the Harbour Regulations which they could not accept?*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:39] George Hemmen: Yes. 'This is British sovereign territory.' To them: they said 'It is our sovereign territory.' It was stalemate really.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *One gets the impression that both sides knew it was a game.*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:57] George Hemmen: Of course. When you are down there, as people, you get on very well but you have to do this nonsense. In fact I will tell you a little story which I don't know whether you have ever heard it. It was getting quite late in the season when one of the British Navy frigates came in. She was tied up in Port Foster. I do not know what the purpose was. I cannot recall the purpose of that visit. Anyway a Chilean helicopter comes over and hovers. He did not land; he actually hovered a foot or two off the ground. So I went out to see what this was, and it was a, I think it was a first lieutenant who said 'Look, we are on our way home.' But the commodore wanted to bring *Maipo* in (that is their big transport), just to say farewell for the season. 'But' he pointed to the ... he said 'What do we do about that?'

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:47:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *The British ship?*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:47:18] George Hemmen: Yes. I said 'I don't know. Hang on.' I went out to the British ship and I had a word with the captain and I said 'Look, you know, this is a purely social visit that they are planning to make. Can we sort of ignore the nonsense?' He said 'Well if they are prepared to, so am I.' So we go back OK. Then they bring this thing in. Now they had these two ships lined up side by side and then it started. Oh, wow! The first thing that happened: a football match between the two navies. Then the Chileans, up at the end of the ... they had laid on a big barbecue all along the beach. So the British ship provided some [?? incomprehensible]. Then we had a party up at the hut; it went on into the small hours of the morning. But it was fine. I do not suppose that is in the official record. Well it should not be!

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:48:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *No, I have not read it anywhere, although I am not the least bit surprised. But you got on better with the Chileans, I think, because the Chilean personnel had better English than the Argentinians. Is that right?*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:48:34] George Hemmen: Yes, and I think it is true to say that the Chilean navy is very anglophile. The Argentines, yes we got on very well with them, and we went to visit them a few times at their station. Oh, we got on famously. Afterwards, when we came back from Deception Island, I was back in the UK now in early part of ... well spring. It does not matter what time we got back. We left there about April '54; I must have been back here about June or July time, something like that. I had a very nice little letter from the commodore of the Chilean fleet. He had asked the naval attaché in London to invite me over for lunch one day. That is the level of the relationship.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:49:43] George Hemmen: Similarly with the Argentines, two of the captains of their ships, one was Rodolfo Panzarini who became ... He was an admiral in the end, and he was the vice-president of SCAR. We got on very well indeed. In fact we were great friends also with Luis Capurro who was another one of their captains. He became a hydrographer of the Argentine navy, and then ultimately he went to Texas, A & M University, and he was one of the early presidents of SCOR. Again a great friend. I met him again, funnily enough, in 2008, by which time he was 90 and I was 80 something, but this was this Woods Hole 50th anniversary of SCOR. Ah it was just like old times. Anyway, we have gone on to 2008 now.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:50:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *No, that is fine. Do you think the fact that both parties, all three parties were in such an unusual and remote environment helped to foster the good relations?*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:51:07] George Hemmen: Oh I am sure it did.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:51:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *If you had all met in central London, it would not have been the same?*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:51:09] George Hemmen: No it would not. But I will let you into another little story on that line, at the time of the Falklands War. We had a SCAR meeting in Leningrad, and it just happened that I went down to the hotel reception desk the moment the Argentine delegation arrived through the front door, but the SCAR meeting was there to talk about science. It was not to talk about the war or anything like that. We sort of looked at each other. A little tricky because you do not know how they are going to react, and they did not know how I ... You just go straight across, shake hands. You have known them for years, so why should things change. This is one of the things that international science and international science programmes can rise above a lot of political conflicts. To my mind over many many years that I have worked for the Royal, this was one of the things that always seemed to me to be quite important. People of different nationalities and different creeds and cultures can work together if they have got a common goal, despite all the political conflicts. But we have gone on too long.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:52:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well just to finish off that episode in Deception, the Chileans found an alternative water supply later on. They found they could get water in Pendulum Cove.*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:15] George Hemmen: Well that was where we were. That was our water supply.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh right, So that was OK, was it, sharing your water supply with the Chileans?*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:23] George Hemmen: Yes, sure.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the reason why you wrote this report in 1955 was to try and persuade the British Government to abandon this policy of delivering Harbour Regulations to South American ships?*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:40] George Hemmen: Let me have a look at that.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *I will read you it. 'I would respectfully submit that the delivering of Harbour Regulations to all ships anchoring in Whalers Bay might be discontinued or be left to the discretion of the base leader to decide whether the visit of any ship is in any way regarded as official or purely social.'*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:58] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you have any impact with your plea?*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:01] George Hemmen: I have no idea. I have absolutely no idea.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *I will leave this with you any way.*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:05] George Hemmen: Oh I would love to read that. [laughs]. You mean I actually wrote that?

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *It would appear so, George. 'G.E. Hemmen' It has to be you.*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:14] George Hemmen: It does indeed.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well I will leave that one with you.*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:16] George Hemmen: Great. Oh well, I do not know what happened.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me a bit more about Deception, then. The general things you were doing apart from eating beef and drinking Argentinian wine.*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:27] George Hemmen: And Chilean wine.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *And Chilean wine. You were there when Jim Shirtcliffe was there?*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:32] George Hemmen: That is right.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well that would suggest there was a fair bit of construction work going on.*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:35] George Hemmen: Well yes. Do not forget the hut that we were living in was not a FIDS hut. It was an old whalers' hut, and it was huge. It was massive, a great big long ... It was very very big and very heavy timbers, and one of the things that Jim and I decided: we turned one of the rooms into a sort of a bar/lounge with a darkroom because there was not a darkroom there at the time. So we set about doing that. Jim was great.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *You struggled to keep the place warm, I read.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:21] George Hemmen: Well yes because it was so big. It was a big hut, and you cannot have fires burning in every room. The kitchen was where most of the ... the centre of life, if you like. It was a big kitchen. It was the size of this room.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it particularly mild all winter or a particularly bad winter?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:50] George Hemmen: I think it was a fairly normal winter.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *Because there is talk of the dog bowl freezing inside the hut. So you were getting below zero Celsius.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:05] George Hemmen: Yes I suppose that is possible. Well if it is written, it must have happened.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *And it was not the best insulated hut, was it?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:12] George Hemmen: Well no it was not insulated at all. It was just great slabs of timber. I do not think there was a double wall or anything like that, but it was all right.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *You tried to improve the conditions whereby you were launching Met Office balloons and also observing their departure. What were you trying to do there?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:40] George Hemmen: Well that was one of the routine tasks of any of these small met stations. When you got a day that you could do so, you would launch a balloon to trace the winds in the higher levels of the atmosphere, and you would follow it with a theodolite.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *What you did, as far as I understand it, was to actually improve the conditions under which you were able to do that.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:09] George Hemmen: We probably built a shelter or something like that. Do you know, I do not remember that at all.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. Well you cleared up part of the old lower generator shed and also you built a little observatory on the beach where with a theodolite you could watch the balloons ascend.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:33] George Hemmen: Yes, that is what I surmised, that we built a little shelter down there.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. It is a long time ago, George. Don't worry about it. And it was 'the worst winter that anybody can remember at Deception for many many years.'*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:45] George Hemmen: Oh, was it indeed? You mean I wrote that?

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *You did.. 'The months of June, July, August and parts of September brought frequent temperatures around 0° Fahrenheit. For instance the mean August temperature was only 8°F.'*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:00] George Hemmen: Who wrote that?

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *You did, I believe.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:04] George Hemmen: Is that the Met report?

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:06] Chris Eldon Lee: *It is the General report.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:07] George Hemmen: Oh right. Oh well.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *It actually has not got a signature at the end of it.*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:09] George Hemmen: Oh that was probably me then.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *And there was snow coming in at the windows?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:14] George Hemmen: Oh yes.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *So there was still work to be done?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:18] George Hemmen: Still work to be done.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you remember the episode of the weather vane being damaged?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:23] George Hemmen: No, but I imagine it is quite likely. I know one thing that did get moved was our lighthouse. One ship came in once and said 'You have got a red light showing over the entrance and a green light showing over the rocks.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *The wind had done that, had it?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:46] George Hemmen: No. Somebody had gone up there and ... Any way we went over and put it right.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *So obviously not much sledging at Deception, but a fair bit of climbing wasn't there?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:59:03] George Hemmen: Oh yes there was quite a lot. If you wanted to make, say, some ice observations out in the channel, you had to climb up on the ... Yes, but that was what we did. I mean that was our recreation really, getting out, quite a bit of skiing.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:59:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *So a couple of quick then about that. Comparing it to Admiralty Bay, I mean it is nothing like as attractive a place?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:59:30] George Hemmen: Oh no.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:59:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *So were you as happy there as you were at Admiralty or was it more dour?*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:59:37] George Hemmen: I think I would say it was a bit more dour, yes. But the summer months were quite fun, with the Chileans and the Argentinos and the ships coming and going and all that sort of thing. It was quite a busy old time, and the Marines were great.

Disc 1, Track 13 [0:59:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *When a British ship came in, there was a signal to you to come aboard as soon as it was anchored, because there had been some coded messages going on, apparently. Can you tell me about that?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:00:08] George Hemmen: Yes, I can. That is exactly what happened. I do not know. Is that something that is written there?

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:00:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *These are notes provided for me by Al Wearden.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:00:21] George Hemmen: Well OK. That is exactly what happened. As the ship came in, the light was going and our radio operator read the message which said 'Please come aboard the moment I drop anchor.' which I did. And the captain told me about these coded messages which had been flying about, and they were quite concerned because they could not read them and they assumed that it was some naval thing that was being planned or something like that. It was just this mystery. I do not know whether this should be recorded or not; maybe it should not, but I said 'Well why don't we go over and ask them?'

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *The Argentinians?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:18] George Hemmen: Yes. 'We can't do that!' 'Why not? I mean they will either tell us or they won't.' 'Well all right.' 'OK I will bring my boat.' 'We are not going in that thing.' So: 'No we will go in the ship's launch.' So there is this fancy cutter, with sailors up the front and all the rest of it, and there's the Argentine sailors along the banks, saluting. Any way we got there and the first thing they told us was what this was all about.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *Which was what?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:57] George Hemmen: It was that one of their ministers, either the Minister of Marine or the Minister of the Services (I cannot remember which one) was coming on an official visit to the Antarctic station. Simple as that.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the Argentinian base spilled the beans about the coded messages without batting an eyelid.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:15] George Hemmen: Yes, no problem. Without batting an eyelid. We did not even ask them. They told us why they had been so busy polishing the place up.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *And that is a good example, I suspect, of local relationships being different from those that the ship was experiencing in the wider world.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:39] George Hemmen: Indeed.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *The British naval captain, how did he react?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:45] George Hemmen: I think he was fairly impressed. [laughs]

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you find the duties of being a Base Leader onerous?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:54] George Hemmen: No, no. It was really all quite interesting.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you ever have to make a difficult decision?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:01] George Hemmen: No. Only once. I suppose you have little problems but most problems get ironed out. Do not forget, of course that the base leader is a magistrate. I had a case once.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:20] George Hemmen: Oh yes.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *Can you tell me?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:21] George Hemmen: Yes, sure. One of the sailors off one of the ships had been caught killing a penguin in a not very pleasant way, and because it was on our soil, he had to be hauled up before the magistrate, which was me.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right, carry on.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:47] George Hemmen: Well we listened to all this, and I think I might have ... I mean can should you do? You could not say 'Ten days in the cells.' Because we did not have any cells. I think he got a reprimand. It was something that had to be done.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:04:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Would it have been taken seriously by all concerned?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:04:15] George Hemmen: I think it probably was, yes. Because OK, those were the days long before conservation of nature and natural resources and all that sort of thing. Dogs were fed on seals and penguins, and we fed on seals and penguins, and penguin eggs – and all that sort of thing. But nevertheless, if you are going to kill an animal for food, no matter what it is, you do it as humanely as you

possibly can. It cannot be tolerated that somebody would be brutal to even a little penguin.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:05:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *Can you remember what he did?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:05:04] George Hemmen: No, I cannot now. I really cannot, but it was possibly picking it up by its feet and bashing its head on a rock, or something of that sort, which observers took unkindly to. It might have been ships' officers. I cannot remember the details but that was what it was really all about.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:05:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *So in terms of the hierarchy, the base leader actually had authority over the ship's captain?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:05:33] George Hemmen: On things that happened on shore, yes. Oh yes, in that respect. I think it was the ship that asked us to do it. I do not think we would have bothered. I am sure it was them, as a sort of little lesson to the rest of the crew, if you like. 'That is not the way to behave.'

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:05:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *You left the Antarctic at the end of that time, Deception Island, with mixed feelings? Or were you glad to get away?*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:06:04] George Hemmen: Oh I think two winters had been enough, at a time. But we left there April. That was a bit of a hairy journey back. You have heard about that one? Well we went to Hope Bay. Margo is coming back. Are you going to come and listen to this? Are you coming in? No. We were in Hope Bay on *Biscoe* and the ice came in. Well first of all there was a blow, and Bill Johnson put out a second anchor. Now if you have got two anchors down, you tend to be drifting around and they get a bit wound up. But then a load of ice came in and we were absolutely stuck. The ship was being pretty well bashed by the ice.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:07:05] George Hemmen: At any rate eventually it all died down. The ice went out again. By this time, of course, the two anchor chains were completely wound up. We could not bring them aboard because it was still a little bit rough, so what Bill decided to do was to go round to Duse Bay, which is just round the corner, which would be a nice sheltered anchorage, and he could put a boat over the side to unwind these two anchor chains. Fine, great. OK. Anchors aboard. Full speed. By the time we got up to about 5 knots, the masts were whipping like fishing rods. What had happened was that all this grinding ice had just bashed up the propeller was bent, and the stern gland; that had all come adrift, and the highest speed he could do from there to Signy to South Georgia was 4 knots max. Luckily it was calm all the way. Then we had to go into dry dock in South Georgia and get it patched up, which got us to Montevideo and then they put some divers over the side and they said 'Yes it is OK to go back to the UK.'

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:08:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *Let us leave it there then, because I think I heard the kettle being warmed up.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:08:43] Margo Hemmen: Would you like any tea?

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:08:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *I would love some. We will come back and do some more in a moment or two.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:08:47] George Hemmen: OK, fine.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:08:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Thank you.*

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:08:49] [End of Part One]

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is George Hemmen recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 8th of November 2010. George Hemmen, Part Two.*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *When you left Deception at the end of that '54 season, were you expecting to return to the Antarctic again?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:17] George Hemmen: I had no idea. I mean we left at the end of the '54 summer, which must have been about April time. I cannot remember the dates, but it would have put us back into this country round about June time, I guess. Then I had 3 months paid leave, that was end of contract, but two things I wanted to do. One, I wanted to go back South.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *Why?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:54] George Hemmen: Because I loved it, but I also wanted to go back as a surveyor which was the trade I had learned in the army. But of course I had not followed this for many years, and I talked to Secretary FIDS in London and FIDS agreed that I could go back and do another winter or two winters or whatever I wanted, and that they would send me on a one-to-one brush-up survey course with the professor of geography at Imperial College, which was Alfred Stephenson at that time, who had been on the British Grahamland Expedition.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:01:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did you get on with him?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:01:46] George Hemmen: Fine. Oh yes, absolutely fine. So that was the plan. So I happily went off back home, waiting for a date to go to Imperial College, when in August of 1955 a telegraph boy came up the drive one morning and delivered a telegram. It was a lovely telegram. You must have hear the story. Oh, did you not see the transcript of the Halley-50.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:02:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me the story please George, even though I am shaking my head.*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:02:24] George Hemmen: OK. The telegram said 'Next time you are in London, will you please call in the office because I have something important I wish to discuss.' I thought 'Oh Gawd, what's this?'

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:02:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that from Fuchs?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:02:38] George Hemmen: No, this was from Frank Elliott who was the Secretary of FIDS at the time, and I thought 'Is this anything to do with my survey course or what? What is it all about?' Anyway you get a telegram like that, what do you do? You pack a bag and get on the next train and find out what the hell it is all about. This was August 1955 and he told me then about the International Geophysical Year and that FIDS had undertaken to look after the coordination of all the logistics for the Halley Bay operation, using their knowledge and experience and the Crown Agents' facilities and knowledge, but they had not got anybody to do it because their London staff consisted of one secretary only.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:03:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *What you say 'to do it', what do you mean?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:03:41] George Hemmen: To organise the coordination of all the logistics: the stores, supplies, ship charter, everything which was ... The Crown Agents actually were the experts in doing, but we had to tell somebody how to tell them what was needed. FIDS had undertaken to do this, on behalf of the Royal Society, so would I do it?

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:04:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *How long did you take to think about the answer?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:04:13] George Hemmen: Five minutes? But it was only a year. It was only going to put off my return to the Antarctic for a year. That was mid-August and the ship had to sail in mid November – just 3 months.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:04:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *So this was a desk job they were offering you, really?*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:04:34] George Hemmen: Yes, you did not really have much time to think about it. You have only got 3 months. 'Let's get started as soon as possible.'

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:04:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *I suppose you did not have much choice, either, because if your ambition was to go South, saying 'No' at this point presumably would have been bad for your ambition?*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:04:55] George Hemmen: That did not occur to me. All it was was: this is something that needs to be done. Obviously it is important, and it is only going to put off my return by a year, so that is neither here nor there. In fact it never happened.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *It never happened?*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:12] George Hemmen: IGY happened but I never got to go back as a surveyor.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what did you do? You spent those 3 or 4 months putting together the logic.*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:24] George Hemmen: Yes, and then I went down with the ... I took the ship down as charterer's representative and all that. And there was quite a lot to do on the way down on the stores side of things, because you get these packing lists and you have to know what is in which box. Anyway there was quite a lot to be done and when we actually got down as far as ... We were heading for 78 South which was the Vahsel Bay area but we got well and truly stuck, stopped at about 76½ and came back north a bit. Tried a couple of landing places. There were only three of us on that ship that had been in the Antarctic before, and so we formed the reconnaissance party. When we saw somewhere you could get ashore and get up a slope. Because the whole of that area is bounded by the ice front which is, what, 90 to 100 feet high with very very few breaks in it. The first couple of landings were hopeless. Then the third one, there was a nice little bay with some good looking sea ice and a nice slope at the back of it, up to the top. So we went up there and got to the top. It was just unbelievable. It was as flat as a billiard table as far as you could see. So we went in about a mile, mile and a half, something like that. It still looked pretty good. So that was where we said 'OK this the spot.'

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:07:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *The spot for what?*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:07:13] George Hemmen: For building the Royal Society station. It was within the latitude that had been specified. It was south of 75°S and as it happened, it turned out to be a pretty good location. I think there had been only one year since then that ships have not been able to get in, and it turned out to be right under the auroral belt which was excellent from the geophysical observation point of view.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:07:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was also of course on the ice shelf. It was not actually on the continent?*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:07:50] George Hemmen: No, no. As I say, the front of the shelf was 90 to 100 feet high, There are not many places you can get up onto that, and this was one of them.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:08:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that expected? Were you expected to be creating this base on floating ice?*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:08:06] George Hemmen: Yes, oh yes. I mean the hut was designed for that very purpose.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:08:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was it designed, then? Because rumour has it that it was not a particularly successful design.*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:08:17] George Hemmen: It was. It was a very successful design. Now let me think. What are you thinking of? I have heard this comment before.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:08:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well it did not last long on the surface, did it? It sank.*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:08:32] George Hemmen: It did not need to last long on the surface. It just needed to last. It was designed for the IGY which was a two year operation.

Three years. What happened was: you start and put a mat down of expanded metal, then on top of that some huge levelling timbers, about 6 x 8. Then your foundation: the grillage for the floor. Anyway it was all a timber building. I will tell you a bit more about the routine of that but the building itself was 128 feet long and by the following summer it was pretty well covered. By the end of the IGY it was virtually completely covered and the only way in and out was through the hatch in the roof. But it had done its job by then. That was what was required of it, and at the end of the IGY the station was taken over by FIDS and so the hut did last a few more years. Then they had to build another one, and in fact they are now building the 6th station on that location. The first one went out to sea years ago. Somebody once told me (I forget who it was now which is a shame), but they had a picture of it sticking out of an iceberg. I would like to see that. [Transcriber comment – it was seen by a German expedition 1979/80 and the photo appeared in the book of that expedition. Details on the Z-Fids website. – Andy Smith]

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *I have heard about this and seeing it.*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:10] George Hemmen: You have seen it?

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *No I have not seen the photograph, but I have heard people tell about seeing it appearing through the ice.*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:16] George Hemmen: Yes, I would love to see that picture but I forget who told me about it. I was promised a copy of it. It never came.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *So at this point, I think you were called the 'Tottan Three'. Is that correct on this sort of ship? The advance search party looking for [?? inaudible]*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:30] George Hemmen: The Advance Party: there were ten men in the Advance Party. David Dalglish was the Leader of the Advance Party. He had been down with FIDS earlier. Ken Powell who the diesel mech; he had been at Hope Bay. And myself. These were the three that ...

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Fids? The three earlier Fids.*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:50] George Hemmen: Three ex-Fids, yes. And the rest of them, the other eight, had not been in the Antarctic before. Anyway to go back to the beginning. Yes, as far as I was concerned, it was a one year operation, but when I got back I was asked if I would do the same for the Main Party, and then I was asked if I would stay on and bring them all back at the end of the IGY and see to the handover to FIDS. So now this was three years on and then ... Well we will come on to the other bit later on. What happened after that. The *Tottan* sailed from Southampton on the 22nd of November 1955, something like that. But that was a bit hairy because, I don't know if you have seen the pictures of it. Well the ship was loaded and then there was planking, gas cylinders and God knows what being piled on the deck. The Board of Trade man came along and said 'Mm-mm. Stop. I don't think that ship is going to be very safe if you put much more on it.' So they had to conduct some stability tests and they said 'OK, you can take another *x* tons aboard.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:12:13] George Hemmen: But by this time, it was quite interesting, George Lush, whom you mentioned, Ken Powell, and Robin Dalgliesh, who were the three tractor people; there was still a tractor sitting on the quayside, which it looked as though we not going to be able to take. We got two aboard but not the third one. So they nipped off the ship, broke the case open, and took all the valuable most useful bits off it as spares, and shoved all these under their bunk in the accommodation. So eventually the Board of Trade man said 'OK you can take so much more.' That tractor was one thing that went back on board, and that is what you see in that picture of them putting it back together again on the ship in the tropics. But we had to leave the second floor of the hut behind. We just could not take it.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:13:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that bad planning from somebody then?*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:13:30] George Hemmen: Not really. It was just busting at the seams,. You know how much you have got in cubic footage of cargo. You know the cubic capacity of your ship's holds, and it not always exactly the same thing, that you can put a pint into a pint pot if it is all boxes and ...

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:14:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *How much damage did that do to your plans when you got South, having to leave some of it behind?*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:14:07] George Hemmen: Nothing. Not at all. Not at all. No. What happened then: OK the ship sailed. We had to call in at Las Palmas in the Canaries, which was not planned, because Johnny Raymond went and bust his arm. Some cargo broke loose in a storm and he hurt his arm. Now you cannot have a chippy with a broken arm. It is not a lot of good, is it?

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:14:39] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was Johnny Raymond, not George Lush?*

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:14:42] George Hemmen: No, no Johnny Raymond. On no George Lush bust his arm later. [laughs] Then we called in at Rio. Now this is a nice little story too. We nearly ran into serious trouble in Rio because our captain Leif Jacobsen goes along to the ships chandler and says he wants a load of dynamite. Norwegian sealing ship captain ... just go and buy dynamite if you are going into the ice. But of course what he did not realise was that there was a revolution going on at the time. So the police were somewhat interested in this guy that was trying to buy dynamite. Anyway it all blew over. Then we got to South Georgia on Christmas Day, sailed on Boxing Day, hit some ice about 3 days later, got through that, and then you get into this wonderful shore lead. For 6/7/800 miles you have got this ice front, the front of the ice shelf which as I say is 90-100 feet high. Then you have got beautiful open water, blue skies; life is idyllic. And then of course you have got the ice but that is not holding you back, until we hit it at 76½.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is the Weddell pack.*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:09] George Hemmen: Yes, it was about 4 miles from where Shackleton's *Endurance* got stuck.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that an ominous thought in your head at that time?*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:20] George Hemmen: No I do not think we realised it at that time. It was afterwards, when you look at the latitude and longitude and it Oh my Gawd!

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *So just to recap again and perhaps put a bit more detail into this. Looking for the site for the IGY hut, which then became Halley Bay, just remind me what the criteria that were most important to you for finding the right place.*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:41] George Hemmen: Well first of all you have got to find a break in the front of the ice shelf, and that usually means somewhere where there is some under ice or undersea feature which is causing the flowing ice to break up a bit and then you will have a break, a gap in the ice front and maybe a slope behind it which has filled up with snow, which gives you access to the top. Not very many places in that summer. But the criterion (the essential one) is it had to be south of 75S.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:17:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *Because?*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:17:20] George Hemmen: That was the instruction that ... That was what the ... If it was not south of 75° South, it was going to be of less value to the IGY.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:17:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *So geophysically it had to be that far south?*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:17:35] George Hemmen: That was the requirement, yes, and Vahsel Bay, which was our target place, was 78-ish. But after 8000 miles, to be held up just 90 miles short of your target is a bit hard but nothing you can do about it.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:17:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *So did you personally oversee the construction of the IGY base?*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:18:00] George Hemmen: No. As I recall, we got there January the 6th 1955 [Transcriber comment – he means 1956. Andy Smith] and everything was busy unloading. OK there are all sorts of tales about the unloading.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:18:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Such as? Give me a little example.*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:18:20] George Hemmen: Well one classic example was when: there must have been some breakup or some tipping over of an iceberg, but there was a sort of tidal wave ran round the crew and ran through the sea ice in Halley Bay, and just sort of broke it up. They could see this from the ship, which pushed off., had to get out of the way. But at that moment one of the tractors was coming back down the slope, and of course he could not see this. This was a bit hairy. Anyway that worked, but that was the sort of thing that you cannot predict. The ice just broke up. I suppose we were all busy unloading. You could not leave anything on the ice unless there was

a sledge and a tractor there to take it away, for this sort of reason, and the other thing was, the temperatures were round about zero.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:19:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *Fahrenheit or Centigrade?*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:19:26] George Hemmen: Centigrade, which meant that the surfaces were a bit sticky, which was not good, so we had to give up working during the day and worked during the night. The sun was a bit lower, but it was still up 24 hours a day. So we worked at night; that was until about the 15th and then started laying the foundations for the hut. All the timber was up there by that time, all the materials, and it was Johnny Raymond and Doug Prior were the two carpenters and myself. I was up there overseeing what was going on up there and I got the theodolite out because we had been told by the designers how critical it was to get these levelling timbers absolutely level.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right.*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:25] George Hemmen: So Johnny had the levelling pole and I had the theodolite, and we got the first one perfect. We put the second one in; that was OK. Then we started to lay the third one down by which time the first one had gone out of level. So all this perfect levelling ... Oh dear.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *The ice was flexing that much, was it?*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:54] George Hemmen: Well no. Of course as soon as you put something on the ice ...

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *It melts?*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:57] George Hemmen: Radiation, warmth, it melts, tips. Anyway Johnny said 'To hell with it; we will just sort of do the best we can.' This critical levelling was not that critical after all.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:21:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *That is slightly surprising. I mean I know FIDS was fairly 'Fred Karno' in those days, but that is a slightly surprising oversight, isn't it?*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:21:24] George Hemmen: I do not think so, because one would have thought that the mat underneath would have ... You don't know what radiation does. Anyway they got the foundations. I have got a nice picture of the foundations.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:21:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *So in the end it was all done by rule of thumb and ...*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:21:44] George Hemmen: Yes. Lick your finger and ... Or in Johnny's favourite phrase 'Fix it quick before the guv'nor comes.' Yes, and the foundations were all nicely down. The tents were up for the boys to live in, and then I came back with *Tottan*. We left there on the 22nd of January, something like that.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:22:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you were there just for a few weeks, literally.*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:22:15] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:22:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *But you made two more return visits, I believe?*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:22:19] George Hemmen: That is right, because I was coordinating the logistics for the Main Party, and took them down on *Magga Dan*. We shared *Magga Dan* with the Trans-Antarctic Expedition that year and we only had half the cargo space. By the time everything was being ordered: new huts, more huts, non-magnetic hut, generator shed, balloon hut, all this sort of thing, more aerials, it was obvious that we were not going to get it all into half of *Magga Dan* so we had to charter *Tottan* again, which was fine. She got down there first, much to everybody's delight: one is the fancy ship, the other is the little struggling one which gets there ... Then in the final year there was the handover to FIDS and bringing them all back.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:23:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *First of all one is getting the impression that money was no object. Is that the case?*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:23:33] George Hemmen: No there was a limit to it, of course. You had to be economic, but you had to be sensible. You could not take short cuts. I was not really aware that there was a restriction on what needed to be done financially. There must have been, but I do not really recall it.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:24:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *What sights came to your eyes when you went down a second summer?*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:24:09] George Hemmen: Well the first thing was of course that wonderful picture of the ... Have you seen it?

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:24:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Go on.*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:24:17] George Hemmen: Of the hut 12 months on.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:24:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *I will look at it later, George. Just describe what you saw. This is radio, so describe what you saw.*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:24:28] George Hemmen: Well, there was this hut, virtually up to the eaves, buried. Access was ... but it had been completed. It was very very comfortable inside. It was huge, and the boys from the Main Party who were going into it all seemed quite happy with what they were going to be living in for the next year. No it was fine.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:24:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the hut had sunk into the ice evenly, on an even keel?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:03] George Hemmen: Oh yes. Well do not forget as soon as you put something down on the ice and you get a bit of a blow then your drift is going to

start building up, so it was a combination of drifting snow and precipitation, rather than the hut actually sinking.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *So when you saw that hut, up to its eaves in snow, that was what you were expecting to see, or did it come as a slight surprise?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:29] George Hemmen: It came as a little bit of a surprise to see it that far down, I must say. But there we are.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *And was it pretty much complete?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:36] George Hemmen: Oh yes the hut was complete by that time. The main hut was. That was the whole object. I mean the Advance Party's task was: find a site, and to build the main accommodation hut, which as I say was 128 feet by about 27. A big building for that part of the world.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the second summer's duties were what? What were you hoping to achieve in your second, rather brief, visit?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:26:06] George Hemmen: Well much the same. I had to take them down and any problems with the ships, I was there. Put them in and brought the Advance Party back home.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *So again you were acting as the hirer's representative?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:26:23] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:26:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were there any problems that second summer, things that had to be dealt with that you were not expecting?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:26:30] George Hemmen: No, I do not think so. OK the ship got stuck in ice a few times, but then they always do. You dig it out and ... As I so often say: I really do not know what happens in this day and age, because I am quite sure Health & Safety would not look kindly on people leaping over the side of the ship to dig it out, with poles and ... I don't know, maybe they do it that way. I did ask one of the captains once but never got an answer.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:27:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you there to see Fuchs depart, on his Trans-Antarctic Expedition?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:27:15] George Hemmen: No, because ... OK. In 1955, at the end of 1955, the plan was that Bunny's ship, the *Theron*, which is a Canadian sealer, would sail a week before us and we would follow them down, and the target for both expeditions was Vahsel Bay. The plan was to build two stations adjacent to each other. They got badly stuck in the northern part of the Weddell Sea. We kept going further east and got round that. But we could not get farther than, as I say 76½. We tried twice, but it was just impossible. But the requirement for us was not that critical. Ours was 75 to 78. I had left by the time *Theron* came through. Bunny had an aeroplane. They took off and they could see from the air that that site at Halley Bay

would not have been any good for them at all because farther in there were far too many crevasses. So they then pressed on and they in fact got through to Vahsel Bay, but their story I am sure you have got from other people. How they survived that first awful first winter takes some believing.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:29:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *How do you mean? What had happened? What is your admiration?*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:29:13] George Hemmen: Well the *Theron* got down to Shackleton OK. Got down to Vahsel Bay and the name of that station became Shackleton, but of course it was getting a bit late in the season. They could not hang around too long, otherwise they would be completely stuck. So they unloaded all their gear and they were taking stuff up to the site as and when they could. Then, it will be in the record that after the ship had left there was this storm, and the ice went out and took half their coal, half their anthracite, a load of their timber and goodness knows what else, out with them. So they were in a bit of a dire straits at that time. But that is all in the TAE record.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were aware of that at the time, were you?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:06] George Hemmen: No, I was not. This was something that I became aware of afterwards. I mean I was on the way home by then.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *And the third summer? Why did you go a third time?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:15] George Hemmen: The third time? Well, as I say, that was for two reasons. One: to hand the station over to FIDS and also to bring our main party back home.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *On balance, do you think the IGY was a scientific success? Were people delighted with the results?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:36] George Hemmen: It was a magnificent success. It was a magnificent success in many many ways. It saw the spawning of the whole concept of World Data Centres, systems. It was the first of what were to become a long series of international multinational collaborative studies of major problems of the world. There was an International Geological Correlation Programme. There was another study, a few years after the IGY (which was designed as a time of maximum solar activity), a period of minimum solar activity, there was another international multinational programme. There was another scientific committee of ICSU set up to look at problems of the environment. Then there were organisations that sprung from all this, like SCOR and SCAR, which have just gone from strength to strength ever since, and they are still vitally important today.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:31:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *So how different would the story of the Antarctic in modern times be if IGY had (a) not happened or (b) been a bit of a flop?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:31:55] George Hemmen: That is a good question, a very good question. I do not know. I suppose if it had not been a success, a lot of nations would have not continued. Difficult to tell.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:32:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *To what do you attribute the success. You described what was successful but underneath all that, what was it that enabled it to be a success?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:32:27] George Hemmen: I think what enabled it to be a success, was something that Georges Laclavere said at the very first meeting of the international planning committee: “We are here to plan, to talk about the scientific and technical aspects of this programme. Politics and all that sort of thing is nothing to do with us.” That was the theme that has been continued ever since. The scientific groups talk about the science. That is it.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:33:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Leave your guns at the door? The old cowboy style?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:33:12] George Hemmen: That is right. Absolutely, and that to my mind is one of the great achievements of these international programmes, but especially as it is going on today. The world ocean covers 7 tenths of the world. The Antarctic continent covers a pretty hefty chunk. International collaboration in both these areas is still going on. Wonderful.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:33:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *When you came away from Halley, from that third trip away, did you still hanker to go back, or had you sated your appetite?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:33:55] George Hemmen: I think by that time, I was now, what, 30? Yes 30 odd. I realised that ‘Listen laddie, you have got to get yourself a job.’ This was, what are we talking about, 1959. Yes, I was into my thirties, 33. I really had to think seriously about getting a job. That really was ... Going back again would not have been a sensible move, but I never had to bother.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:34:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *How do you mean?*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:34:39] George Hemmen: Well I never needed to look for a job. I was conscious that I had to find one, but then I was asked by the Royal Society ... What had happened was: towards the latter part of 1958, at the time of the celebration of the centenary of the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, the Royal Society decided that they would not just celebrate this with the usual round of receptions and suchlike, but they would also send a scientific expedition back out to that part of the world where Darwin did a lot of his work, with a specific scientific objective in mind. That was: it was realised that there were similarities between the fauna and flora of southern South America and the South Island of New Zealand, so let us send an expedition out there, a small one (5 months), to look at these issues.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:35:49] George Hemmen: Again I was sitting in my office over at Crown Agents this time and again with the backing of Crown Agents, the Royal Society said ‘Would you look after the stores side of this expedition?’ which we did. Because of the success of the IGY operation, this big thing, and the success of this

small mobile party, the Royal Society felt that there was a lot of knowledge and experience. Martin Holdgate for instance, who led the Chilean expedition and the people who had planned it all on the scientific side, and me on the logistics side. They did not want to lose that, and so they thought ‘Well what we can do is set up a Scientific Expeditions Advisory Service and an Expeditions Department.’ And they asked me if I would join the staff and head that up, which I did. Again, I did not take five minutes to say Yes or No; I mean it was a dream come true.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *So Mr Darwin’s or (Mrs Darwin’s) timing was very good, was it?*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:07] George Hemmen: Absolutely. So that was mid/ end of 1959, but then 1960 was the tercentenary year of the Royal Society and everything was all focussed on that at that time and so we came into about 1960 before the expeditionary side of things started to pick up.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there a lot of fuss made about Darwin’s publication centenary? We just last year celebrated (I am from Shrewsbury so I know) the bicentenary of his birth and the 150 years anniversary of the book and he was everywhere, including the back of a ten bob note.*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:53] George Hemmen: Yes indeed he was.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *What about 50 years previously? Was Darwin’s anniversary a big one?*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:58] George Hemmen: Oh it was, a very big one. They made a film about it. I cannot remember the name of the film, but it was probably *Darwin and the Beagle*, I suspect, but it was a major film production. Alan Moorehead wrote a new book. Yes they made quite a lot of that.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:38:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the projects you were helping to plan were high profile projects?*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:38:25] George Hemmen: I am not so sure that the project, that the expedition was particularly high profile. The centenary of the publication was, but the expedition, I do not think that was. I will tell you a lovely little story, if you want aside. Martin brought back one of the Chilean ... Do you remember *Picture Post* and those sorts of glossy weeklies?

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:38:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Martin Holdgate?*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:38:53] George Hemmen: Yes. Some of these glossy weeklies. Well of course the Chileans had a similar sort of thing and he brought back one of these and there was a lovely description of the planning of this expedition by the Royal Society. These long grey-beard gentlemen sitting in Burlington House, in the committee rooms there in London, smoking their big fat cigars, and drinking their glasses of whisky, planning this expedition. A bit far from the truth, but sounded good. Right.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:39:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *There is a gap in my notes now of a couple of decades in fact, so were you working for that organisation for several years?*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:39:37] George Hemmen: For the Royal? Yes. I joined the staff in 1959 and I retired from them in 1985.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:39:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *And this is the Royal Geographical Society?*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:39:47] George Hemmen: No, the Royal Society, and that was what that talk was that I gave just ...

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:39:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *And in all that time you had no plans to go back to the Antarctic?*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:39:59] George Hemmen: No.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:40:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *But you did not leave it behind, did you?*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:40:04] George Hemmen: Not entirely, no, because from the IGY, the first thing that came out of that was the formation by ICSU its the Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research, and the second thing, the following year, was the formation of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. The third one was the Scientific Committee on Space Research. The Royal Society, being the UK adhering body to ICSU, the International Council of Scientific Unions, had four national committees for all these organisations, and I was responsible for running the British National Committees for Oceanic Research and Antarctic Research. Now SCAR, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, elected Gordon Robin who was Director of Scott Polar, as its Secretary in I think it was about 1960. But Gordon said that he would not be able to manage to do this administrative work without some support. So David Martin, who was the Secretary of the Royal Society at the time, was happy for me to provide that support.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:41:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *So when did you start at SCAR?*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:41:50] George Hemmen: I would guess it was around 1961, somewhere about then. Peter will tell you that; it is in his records.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:41:59] Chris Eldon Lee: *Until?*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:42:01] George Hemmen: 1990?

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:43:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *And SCOR? The same time?*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:43:09] George Hemmen: Well SCOR again: Do not forget ocean science in those days was really growing, and we were running the British National Committee, and George Deacon was our chairman. He was the director of the National Institute of Oceanography in Wormley in Surrey, which is now ... Well we won't go into what it all now is. It is down in Southampton. It has grown and grown.

But SCOR was growing as well. The first major thing that they undertook was an international study of (in) the Indian Ocean. A lot of things resulted from that. As British National Committee we were much involved in all this. It all started off with: Roger Revelle was the President. Then he had to leave (his term was expired) and Luis Capurro, the Argentine ex-hydrographer, he became president of SCOR. He was supported as secretary by Warren Wooster who had come from UNESCO's Office of Oceanography. That is all another story.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:43:27] George Hemmen: Now Warren then became president of SCOR and in those early days he was able to devote a lot of time to it. He had a professorship in Miami, so he really virtually ran the secretariat as well as being president. But when his term came to an end there was a problem because by this time it was taking so much time. This was – I can give you a date, but not off the top of my head. It well in; it must have been 1972, round about then. The agreement was that Ron Currie, who by that time he had been at the National Institute of Oceanography (he is now director of the Scottish Marine Biological Association laboratory in Oban), that he would take on as secretary if he could have some support. So again David Martin, who saw the Royal Society's role as being reflected in all this sort of thing, said OK you can do that as well.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:44:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you ran the two posts side by side?*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:44:49] George Hemmen: For a while, yes. Well three (and the Expeditions). Yes for 8 years I was the SCOR Executive Secretary, and SCAR all those years. But we are supposed to be talking about the Antarctic.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:45:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK, it is good to get the context but let us just talk for a few minutes now about what you were able to achieve with SCAR during your time there, because it is nearly 30 years, isn't it, you were there? So you took it from something fairly embryonic?*

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:45:23] George Hemmen: Oh yes, it grew and grew.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:45:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *What do you regard to be your major breakthrough, or your major achievements on the back of a postage stamp, George?*

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:45:32] George Hemmen: Well, it is difficult to say. You cannot put your finger on it. It is the achievements of SCAR not the achievements of George Hemmen, because he did not achieve anything. Some of the notable things, I suppose: There was a big study into the mineral resources, the effects on the environment, and all that sort of thing. A big effort went into things like Global Atmospheric Research Programme, and then the World Climate Research Programme. Then there was the very very big Biomass Experiment, which again was a multinational multi-ship multi-year operation to study the whole marine ecosystem of the Southern Oceans. The focus of that was the krill. Now krill have been the foodstuffs of big whales. The big whales had all been killed off so there was thought to be a surplus of krill. Some estimates said that there was a sustainable take of protein from that equivalent to the total world fishery landings which would have been a bonus. But was that true? Or were other things now moving in like seals. Were they maturing younger? Anyway this big international programme was set up to look into that, and the convener of that

was Sayed El-Sayed from Texas, the Biological Data Centre was established at British Antarctic Survey. That was a big achievement.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:47:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it all sweetness and light all the time or did you have a few sticky moments?*

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:47:45] George Hemmen: Oh you are always going to have sticky moments, but in the early days, particularly in SCAR, it was really quite good because if you were in a meeting and you came to a sticky moment, something really sticking in the discussion between a few nations, the president would say 'OK, look, let us sleep on that and come back to it tomorrow.' A bottle of whisky in a hotel room can sort out so many problems.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:48:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *So did the scientists always leave their guns at the door or did politics ...?*

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:48:22] George Hemmen: Pretty much.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:48:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *In those 30 years, did politics ever get in the way?*

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:48:26] George Hemmen: OK I will tell you this story. It is a classic of its kind. It illustrates: intergovernmental meeting on the Southern Ocean, by which time the United Nations had banned all communication with South Africa. Do you remember those years? But South Africa was a member of the International Coordination Group for the Southern Ocean, but they were not allowed to be communicated with. So they were never told when there was to be a meeting. They had not actually been thrown out, they were just never told that there was to be a meeting. But of course you know friends of friends and they, shall we say, learned when there was going to be a meeting.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:49:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *You mean they mysteriously turned up?*

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:49:32] George Hemmen: They mysteriously turned up, but of course one of the delegations (I will not tell you which one because that could be a bit tricky) had a brief from their government to object to this, and go into all the ins and outs of United Nations Resolutions banning communications with South Africa blah, blah, blah. He went all through this in his own language and when he had finished his spiel, he plonked his papers on the table and said, in English 'Right, now let us get on with the business.'

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the Protest Note diplomacy was still very much in evidence? Even then?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:15] George Hemmen: That is right, and this was at an inter-governmental meeting.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *That was in, what year did you say it was, roughly? Some time in the 60's?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:23] George Hemmen: No, no, after that. Probably late 70's early 80's.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *What kind of kerfuffle was there in the world of SCAR in April 1982 when the Argentinians set sail?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:41] George Hemmen: It did not make any difference to us. We still communicated with them and they communicated with us. I told you the story when I met them in the hotel.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:50:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *How about 3 years later when news began to filter out about the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer? Was that significant? Did that have a significant impact on SCAR?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:05] George Hemmen: That was after I had ... That was in the 1990's was it not?

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *25 years ago.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:12] George Hemmen: 25? It was about the time I was retiring. This was Joe Farman discovering this hole? No, it was a very real thing and again you see, this is where the international side comes in. The Americans picked this up. They had all these satellites whizzing around and they were able to look at it in much more depth, and confirmed it all.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you had left by that point, had you?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:42] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *In '85. So you were there for 25 years, not 30 years as I said.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:46] George Hemmen: Possibly yes. [Transcriber comment: According to the SCAR website, George was at SCAR from January 1962 to September 1989. Andy Smith]

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you left SCAR around about 1985. Was that the end of your relationship with the Antarctic, or did you still...?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:53] George Hemmen: Yes it was. Oh yes. When I left SCAR (my last SCAR meeting was 1990), that was it.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *You left in 1990, so it was 30 years.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:06] George Hemmen: Yes. I had retired from the Royal Society in 1985, but I kept SCAR on, and I also was still involved in another programme on a part-time basis.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *So just to get my facts right, you were at SCAR when the ozone hole was discovered, in '85?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:27] George Hemmen: Was it '85? As early as that?

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *Yes. I hope I am right. We have just had the 25th anniversary.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:33] George Hemmen: Yes, OK. Fine. It was just another of these things.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. It does not matter.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:41] George Hemmen: It was notable, of course.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *So I was asking you to explain whether you still had contact with the Antarctic after you left SCAR. When professionally you stopped being ...*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:52] George Hemmen: Professionally I stopped but then ...

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *But as a retired gentleman?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:52:55] George Hemmen: Yes, but when the 50th anniversary of the establishment in 2006 ...

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:53:06] Chris Eldon Lee: *The establishment of Halley?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:53:08] George Hemmen: Yes. There was this reunion organised in Northampton for anybody who had ever been to Halley Bay, and I was asked if I would do a little presentation on the beginning.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:53:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was the event? I did not get to that one. It was just before I became more deeply involved. Tell me what it was like.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:53:43] George Hemmen: Oh it was absolutely superb. There were something like 250 people who had been there, and there were about 150 wives and girlfriends. There were about 400 there altogether, and they had a video link to Halley Bay. Video links, I ask you. They had a video link to Halley Bay which was great. It was a fantastic couple of days.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:54:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *When a base has been going that long, with so many people involved, do you get a sense of base community over all those decades?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:54:25] George Hemmen: I think you do. Andy Smith is the focus, if you like, the camaraderie. He produces this *Base Z Newsletter* and there are always little snippets of what is going on there, and I think there is a kind of ... They do not have reunions every five minutes, like some of the bases do. Probably every 25 years. It was a very nice atmosphere, I must say, and there is that sort of camaraderie about.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Andy Smith may well be transcribing this interview for us. He does that sometimes.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:05] George Hemmen: Does he? Oh.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Particularly with ex-Halleyites.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:08] George Hemmen: Yes, he is ex-Halley.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *My final question unless there is something else you want to say, concerns the Hemmen Ice Rise. You are the first Fid I have ever come across to have an ice rise named after them. So tell me about it. First of all, how did you find out?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:25] George Hemmen: How did I find out? I was informed by Charles Swithinbank.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *Have you been to see your ice rise at any point?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:34] George Hemmen: No. That is way down on the Filchner Ice Shelf. No I have never seen it. I would love to. No it was just a feature. I think Charles was behind it, and the Antarctic Placenames Committee, which is a Foreign Office thing, had obviously approved the naming of this ice rise, and there it is. It is on the map.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:55:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *How long ago was it named? Which decade?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:04] George Hemmen: I would think it was probably in the 1990s. I could tell you. I could certainly look it up.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *So it was many many years later?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:17] George Hemmen: Oh yes, I could certainly tell you. I have a lake named after me as well.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:22] George Hemmen: Yes.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *Where is that?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:25] George Hemmen: It is not in the Antarctic. In central Brazil.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *You are the first Fid I have ever met to have two topographical features named after them.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:34] George Hemmen: Well I am sure Gordon has got some things named after him, Gordon Robin. Yes there must be others. There must be many others.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *I have not met them though. So summing up, then, how do you regard the Antarctic in your life?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:56:58] George Hemmen: I would say that it is dominantly important, or has been. It was the most wonderful experience. It is an experience that you do not forget. It is something I am so delighted that I did, and quite honestly it is really the basis of what I have done the rest of my life. It was the gateway, the doorway that was opened for me to do what I did with the Royal. One thing leads to another.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:57:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *So responding to that advert in the Daily Telegraph was a good thing?*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:57:47] George Hemmen: Oh it certainly was a good thing.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:57:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *It has been great, George. Thank you very much.*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:57:51] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Snippets:

- Captain Bill Johnson and the old *John Biscoe*. Disc 1, Track 2 [0:7:51]
- Infamous boat trip, Admiralty Bay. Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:51]
- Injecting a Royal Marine Commando. Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:48]
- Relations with the Argentines and Chileans. Disc 1, Track 9 [0:43:15]
- A SCAR meeting during the Falklands War. Disc 1, Disc 1, Track 11 [0:51:09]
- *Biscoe* damaged by ice. Disc 1, Track 13 [1:06:04]
- Deciding where to build the Royal Society base. Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:24]
- Buying dynamite in Rio. Disc 2, Track 3 [0:14:42]
- 'Fix it quick before the guv'nor comes.'. Disc 2, Track 4 [0:19:26]
- Antarctic Science and politics. Disc 1, Disc 2, Track 10 [0:48:26]