

Reverend Alan McArthur

Edited transcript of a recording of Alan McArthur at his home in Locharron, Scotland by Chris Eldon Lee on 12th April 2011, BAS Archives AD6/24/1/116. Transcribed by Stuart Lawrence 18th July 2014.

[00.00.00] **Chris: The Reverend Alan McArthur Part 1.**

[00.00.14] Alan: My name is Alan McArthur, my place of birth was Miavig on the Isle of Lewis and my date of birth was the 22nd May 1928.

[00.00.24] Chris: So you are now eighty?

[00.00.27] Alan: Coming up for eighty three.

[00.00.29] Chris: How do you feel?

[00.00.31] Alan: Fine. (Followed by joint laughter.)

[00.00.33] Chris: Well you look fine. Tell me a bit about your childhood then on the Island, what sort of an education would you have had there?

[00.00.40] Alan: Well, my father was a schoolmaster so I was, that maybe helped a wee bit.

[00.00.46] Chris: There was no escape.

[00.00.47] Alan: Very good education, actually, on the Islands. After doing Primary education we went to the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway, which was the main Secondary School there, and later on after I had been working for a while, I went to Glasgow University.

[00.01.12] Chris: To study?

[00.01.13] Alan: To study first of all for my Master of Arts degree and then later on I went back to study for my Batchelor of Divinity degree, for the Ministry.

[00.01.23] Chris: That was after the Antarctic?

[00.01.25] Alan: Oh, yes, that's right yes.

[00/01.26] Chris: Had you wanted to be a Minister from quite an early age or was this something that came to you later?

[00.01.32] Alan: No I didn't. It was much later, like when I was in my early twenties and there was quite a Movement of God on the Island and I was involved in it and

immediately after my experience of that the local Minister came to see me right away and said “well you are being called to the Ministry”. But I wasn’t having any of it; I wasn’t going to be pushed into that. It was there at the back of my mind all the way, but, I didn’t want to and, in fact, that was part of the reason that I wanted to get away from that environment altogether.

[00.02.15] Chris: Just tell me about what you remember of that moment was there a specific moment when something happened?

[00.02.19] Alan: Oh there was...

[00.02.20] Chris: Can you describe it?

[00.02.21] Alan: I was a dance band leader in the local community and we used to visit various parts of the Island as concert parties and it was during one of these that I had this experience. Something happened that had never happened before; I don’t think it had ever happened before in the Islands. A local Minister came in to the dance, where we were having a dance, and, of course, that was never thought of in the Islands, but he felt he had to come and speak to all the young people that were there, and it was during that time that he asked; we were singing when he was coming along and this lassie that was singing and he wanted her to sing. I got a bit annoyed with him, actually, and I wanted to sort him out. (Combined laughter) He came in through the back door, you see, he didn’t come in through the main door, and I asked him who gave you the right to come in here, you never went and bought a ticket like everyone else did you? So I got his reply, but, I had passed the thought of taking it anyway, so one of my colleagues pulled me back from doing something that I shouldn’t have been doing.

[00.03.33] Chris: He was in Dog Collar was he, the whole regalia?

[00.03.34] Alan: Oh yes he was, that’s right.

[00.03.40] Chris: So just a little bit more then. So what happened inside you that...?

[00.03.42] Alan: Well inside me; I knew that God had spoken to me, very much so, and I just left the dance, I couldn’t stand it any longer and I waited until the others finished and went home with them on the bus. And that was the beginning of it all as far as my calling was concerned. I think the pressure that came from one or two people at that time, especially that I wasn’t fit for that kind of calling and of course they were proved wrong eventually.

[00.04.17] Chris: You were not ready at that moment?

[00.04. 19] Alan: No. No not at all, no. People tend to think that way, right away. Oh you have been called. Well I did have a personal call experience or something like it, but, I first came to know that this was not the time for me; I wanted to get away and get some experience of the wide world.

[00.04.42] Chris: What prompted you to show an interest in the Antarctic?

[00.04.46] Alan: Well when this happened to me, actually, I had already applied for work at what became the Air Ministry with the Meteorological (Met) Office and shortly after that experience I went in for training to London...

[00.04.58] Chris: To Stanmore?

[00.04.59] Alan: No we went to London, the Air Ministry had asked for us and we were ten or probably twenty of us there for about six weeks and then we allocated a place to go to. I opted for going back home to the airport at Stornoway, and, the Met people were based there. It was during my spell there that this circular came in asking for people to volunteer for the Antarctic. Previous to that I had applied to the Weather Ships in the Atlantic and I had been accepted for that, and that was getting away from it all as well. But, when this came in from the Foreign Office, Crown Agents, I applied and was given, and whisked off down for, an interview.

[00.05.55] Chris: Just backing slightly, your interest in the weather forecasting, in meteorology, where did that come from? Is it something that everybody on Lewis is concerned about?

[00.06.02] Alan: Well no, it is very much the fishermen; they are always very much interested in the weather. And the strange thing is that were I was born and brought up there was a barometer, in a sort of mounted thing, at the top of the gate leading into our house and all the fishermen used to gather there to see what was happening, whether the glass dropping or what, and it is still there, actually, by the Met Office...

[00.06.36] Chris: Really? Nearly sixty years later...

[00.06.38] Alan: And I had very strong interest in the weather from that time on, because, well things were happening in the sea around the Hebrides, unfortunately, people caught up in storms and that sort of thing, but, I always had an interest in the weather.

[00.06.52] Chris: So you saw this advert for Falkland Island Dependency Survey as it was then...

[00.06.56] Alan: That's right.

[00.06.57] Chris: And you wrote off?

[00.07.00] Alan: Yes.

[00.07.01] Chris: And you got the interview?

[00.07.02] Alan: That's right.

[00.07.03] Chris: In London?

[00.07.03] Alan: Yes.

[00.07.04] Chris: What do you record of that day?

[00/07.05] Alan: Well, it was a very, very rushed affair because I had to come all the way down from the Islands to London, met with a couple of blokes, I think it was, and Met books and asked their purposes and how, you know, and why did I go in for this particular thing and they tried to make me aware of the loneliness of it, the place where I might be going to...

[00.07.28] Chris: Did you explain that you were a 'man on the run'?

[00.07.32] Alan: Well not really, no not really...

[00.07.38] Chris: I am sorry, please carry on.

[00.07.40] Alan: No I didn't explain that, no. In any case I went back up home after the interview and by the time I got home there was a telegram waiting for me to come back down for a medical examination.

[00.07.53] Chris: What else do you record from the interview? Would you say it was a rigorous interview or just a general chit chat?

[00.08.00] Alan: Well I can't remember exactly who the person who interviewed me was or anything like that. It wasn't rigorous, in a sense, but it was more to see what was at the back of my application for going there and why the Falkland Island Dependencies Survey, and I tried to explain that I was very interested because I had actually seen in the Picture Post, I think it was, a photograph of the *John Biscoe* down in the Antarctic and there was a little piece about Deception Island, I think it was, and what was happening down there, and I think that, you know, created my interest in me as well. I thought that was probably better than going on the Weather Ships.

[00.08.50] Chris: So did you have a sense of them 'sussing' you out psychologically, or where they just making sure that you would fit in?

[00.08.57] Alan: Yes. Yes I think one of the things that I was questioned on was, was I used to being on my own for spells, you know, would that bother me, well, I said that didn't bother me because I was a keen fisherman and I used to go away for hours and hours on the moors on my own, maybe at six o'clock in the morning and stay out all day, with nothing there other than maybe the odd white goose that I found. So it didn't bother me at all being on my own.

[00.09.26] Chris: What did you make of Vivian Fuchs as a man?

[00.09.30] Alan: Well, I thought he was very, very nice and, you know, I thought he was a quite a gentle man in all sorts of things, but, I suppose that it was all so quickly over I didn't really pay much attention to that.

[00.09.47] Chris: Have you not met him again later?

[00.09.48] Alan: No I didn't meet him again, no. So I thought, you know, he was quite an interesting man obviously.

[00.09.58] Chris: So you got back to Lewis, the telegram had beaten you to it.

[00.10.01] Alan: That's right yes.

[00.10.02] Chris: What next a medical of some sort?

[00.10.03] Alan: Back down to London.

[00.10.05] Chris: Again?

[00.10.06] Alan: Again and I had to get all the various 'jabs' and what have you for yellow fever for South America. In fact we were flying out the *John Biscoe* had left and it was just a matter of getting these and then back home again where I waited for the date to fly down effectively.

[00.10.34] Chris: The journey from Lewis to London is fairly tortuous now, what was it like then?

[00.10.36] Alan: Well it was lengthy, about five hours on the boat to Ullapool and then the train sort of thing, it was quite a performance actually and the train journey down and then the train back again, it certainly was a long trip.

[00.10.52] Chris: Overnight?

[00.10.53] Alan: Yes, but anyway...

[00.10.54] Chris: They were paying you expenses I trust?

[00.10.57] Alan: Yes oh yes they were.

[00.11.00] Chris: So when you had done the interview and the telegram had arrived where you enthused, or where you a bit nervous, or?

[00.11.06] Alan: No I was quite enthused, you know, I thought this was great, this was certainly, in a sense, a way out for me from what was pressurizing me as far as the Church was concerned and I thought maybe I could cast it all off, who knows.

[00.11.25] Chris: What was the parental response to our Alan going off to the Antarctic for two years?

[00.11.28] Alan: Well really there was no problem with me going, you know, no why or what, they were quite encouraging, I think that was probably the word for it, they knew I would be away for from two to three years. But, my younger brother had been in the Merchant Navy, of course, and he would be away for long spells to New Zealand and Australia and places like that so they were quite used to it. So anyway I was off.

[00.12.00] Chris: So you flew down to Montevideo?

[00.12.03] Alan: Montevideo yes.

[00.12.05] Chris: To meet the ship?

[00.12.06] Alan: Yes that's right.

[00.12.07] Chris: Had you flown before?

[00.12.08] Alan: Yes I had flown once before, not overseas, but, I had flown a number of times because I was a Flight Sergeant in the Air Training Corps and had to go away for camps, you know, so yes I used to fly regularly.

[00.12.30] Chris: Do you think that the fact that you had been with the Air Training Corps stood you in good stead in getting this job, because at that time FIDS employed quite a lot of military men didn't they, or men with service experience, so do you think that counted in your favour?

[00.12.38] Alan: I don't know, possibly, I don't know. I never questioned whether it did or not but it may well have done.

[00.12.49] Chris: Tell me about Montevideo?

[00.12.53] Alan: Well, we had quite an interesting flight out in an Argonaut of what was then BOAC from London airport and went to Madrid and then on to Dakar, West Africa, all in the middle of the night, and then from there we went to , not to actually Montevideo, we went to Pernambuco before there I think it was, but is just a name now. Because we had problems, we lost power on two engines on the way across, and this delayed our flight quite considerably. No it was Recife.

[00.13.35] Chris: was it nerve wracking?

[00.13.37] Alan: No, it was no great order really; you're just comfortable when you are adequately seated. Whether we landed there because of that I don't know, rather than going straight to Montevideo. We went to Rio first, anyway and then to Montevideo.

[00.13.48] Chris: that is five stops.

[00.13.49] Alan: Yes, of course they were airport hopping in those days. So we got to Montevideo and there was no one there to meet us. I thought there would be somebody at the airport because there were with us two personnel for FIDS on the flight and there was an engineer for the *John Biscoe*, a junior engineer, and I forget who the third person was, but, we expected somebody to be there to meet us at the airport, but no. Fortunately there was somebody meeting a *Times* messenger off the plane. So he took us into town and arranged accommodation for us at the El Lobo Hotel in the town of Montevideo. And so we had a couple of days there before the *John Biscoe* arrived.

[00.14.40] Chris: We all know what most FIDS do in Montevideo, were you tempted?

[00.14.42] Alan: No, no, I know, well... (Laughter.)

[00.14.43] Chris: You enjoyed yourselves?

[00.14.45] Alan: We enjoyed ourselves, yes.

[00.14.47] Chris: And then the ship. Now when you saw the *Biscoe* what was your first reaction, because I expect you...?

[00.14.55] Alan: (chuckles). When we saw this little ship, the tide was very low, and we said that not the *Biscoe* and then; it didn't look any bigger than a trawler, well it wasn't that big anyway, however, we said it must be OK it has been down before. We thought it would be a bit bigger than that; I think that was the most obvious first reaction.

[00.15.19] Chris: And how was your trip to Stanley?

[00.15.21] Alan: Very good. I enjoyed it yes, yes for a few days. And coming into Stanley was very interesting with all the coloured buildings there; it was very interesting to see the place. We were expecting to be there for several days, but, it didn't turn out to be that. We had to get kitted out of course.

[00.15.41] Chris: Scotsmen sometimes think that the Falklands area very much resembles their homeland?

[00.15.46] Alan: Yes very much so. The place it reminded me of was Uist in the Islands and certainly from the wind point of view, (laughter) that was very much the case. There were a number of people there who still spoke Gallic.

[00.16.01] Chris: In Stanley?

[00.16.02] Alan: Yes in Stanley. There were some people called McLeod who were from Scalpay in Harris and the man who owned the Globe Hotel, I think it was called, the Ship

Hotel was another Mcleod and his parents had come from Harris, from Cajer. Now they all spoke Gallic so I was quite at home in that respect, when conversing with them.

[00.16.24] Chris: You travel 8,000 miles and nothing had changed?

[00.16.27] Alan: Yes and yet. (Chuckles). But I think a lot of them went out there to work on the sheep farms and settled there. Mind you they were very similar to the Islands in many ways. The same problems too I think in many ways...

[00.16.41] Chris: How do you mean?

[00.16.43] Alan: Well, I think there were problems with over imbibing for one thing and the sort of feel of the place, the sort of sheep farming was the main thing there. And I think they still hadn't lost a lot of what they were accustomed to back home and all that. Their bairns; burning peat as well, of course, it was interesting so that was it of course. We weren't there very long before we were told we had to go because there was a problem at one of the Bases, Admiralty Bay.

[00.17.24] Chris: So you had been kitted out. Do you remember what sort of kit you got, was it the latest thing, or was it all ordinary?

[00.17.30] Alan: Well, aye it was really, it was very good some of it, some of it we never used. Yes, string vests, of course, which we wore under our anoraks, we found that was all you needed to have, actually, which was quite amazing that, you know...

[00.17.47] Chris: Say again.

[00.17.48] Alan: String.

[00.17.51] Chris: That's all you wanted was a string vest and an anorak was it?

[00.17.52] Alan: And a wind proof anorak that's all you needed really. Because it was the wind, the chill factor, really, that was the problem, but, we were given these long under pants that were used by Southern Islanders, I think, but we never used them, we didn't have to. If you went out sledging, I suppose, at times for long enough they would be quite useful, but we never used them.

[00.18.17] Chris: Where were you being sent? Did you know that, where you were going?

[00.18.19] Alan: Well I was told I was going to Deception Island, but possibly and as it turned out I was going to Argentine Islands eventually.

[00.18.24] Chris: But there was a problem wasn't there that you had to deal with?

[00.18.32] Alan: There was a problem in Admiralty Bay, but I don't know whether I can say this or not, but anyway...

[00.18.40] Chris: Say anyway. We can always take it out later in the archives.

[00.18.42] Alan: Ok. One of the people there had apparently, flipped his lid, as we would say nowadays, [REDACTED]. And we found out that he had been sent there because they were short of a man and they just picked somebody [REDACTED].

[00.19.15] Chris: [REDACTED]

[0.19.16] Alan: [REDACTED] many of us think that perhaps the people that were on the Base with him, that were related and indebted to him, they were all high up intellectually, Cambridge graduates and so on, and I think he felt out of it. That was what we thought some of us; [REDACTED]. When we arrived at Admiralty Bay he was taken on board [REDACTED]. And from that time moment there were no problems with the man at all.

[00.20.24] Chris: [REDACTED]

[00.20.26] Alan: [REDACTED] they were short of somebody in his job he was sent down. I think they were wrong in doing that, they should maybe have 'sussed' him out a bit more. But, it was interesting from then on he was no problem to anybody.

[00.20.45] Chris: Do you recall his name?

[00.20.47] Alan: (pauses). I can't remember, no. [REDACTED].

[00.20.56] Chris: [REDACTED]

[00.21.00] Alan: [REDACTED]

[00.21.01] Chris: It was just a worrying moment?

[00.21.01] Alan: Yes that's right. I think they were taking it quite seriously in Stanley, and all was OK at the end of the day.

[00.21.07] Chris: So did you replace him at Admiralty Bay?

[00.21.10] Alan: No, no I didn't. Somebody else was on board and we just went on from there to Signy, I think, Signy Island and then to Deception where I was based temporarily, before; I was supposed to go to the Argentine Islands, more or less, on that trip, but, for some reason, whether they were short on Deception or I was sent there and I had a wonderful time on Deception Island.

[00.21.47] Chris: How long were you there?

[00.21.48] Alan: About three months. And, of course, it was a crater of this volcano and some morning you got up and there was steam everywhere, you couldn't even see across the bay. And you could go down to the larva basin and you couldn't put your hand in it was absolutely boiling.

[00.22.11] Chris: The water?

[00.22.12] Alan: Hot, hot; and there was parts of the old bones of whales lying all over the place and the remains of the oil fuel whaling station there, which turned up some very interesting things there, which were interesting to look at...

[00.22.29] Chris: Such as?

[00.22.30] Alan: There was a roof or whatever on one of the buildings with some snow on, but the snow had melted very quickly during the month's I was there and the roof came down and we went in and there were cases of whisky and there were rum and cigarettes, and you name it, obviously it was a store, and they were perfectly OK.

[00.22.50] Chris: You found out they were OK did you?

[00.22.51] Alan: Yes they were fine.

[00.22.52] Chris: You tried them?

[00.22.54] Alan: We tried them yes, aye, that's right. (Laughter). After all Shackleton's whisky was discovered recently, with brands that we thought had gone long ago. Well we didn't do anything with them apart from move them on to the Base where we took a bottle each just to try them out. The cigarettes were very handy because I was smoking then.

[00.23.18] Chris: What was the British Base like in those days, this is 1951 we are talking about now isn't it?

[00.23.21] Alan: Where Deception?

[00.23.22] Chris: Yes:

[00.23.23] Alan: I was a long black hut and it was very bare of snow when we got there at that time, it was all melting away. They never walked anywhere there then. There was a Met man; Bill Calder was the Wireless Operator, where was I, he had been a baker, must have been very handy for he made better bread than I did, anyway; they used to fish there as well, it was very interesting, with fresh fish, you could take the boat out...

[00.24.02] Chris: They didn't come ready boiled did they; these fish?

[00.24.05] Alan: No, I should hope not. We went to the other side of Neptune's Bellows, the entrance to Deception, where there were Notothenia, I think they were called, quite big fish, and you just got a bit of seal bait on a hook and you could catch as many as you like. So that was quite good you could get fresh fish.

[00.24.26] Chris: How was it as compared to what you had expected, or compared to what you may have been lead to believe? Was it more rudimentary than you had thought the accommodation?

[00.24.34] Alan: Well not really no. I wouldn't say that I think they had more or less what we had expected it to be. All the essentials were supplied and a big Esse Cooker with anthracite and it wasn't cold by any manner of means. No it was fine. And of course I had got the seal hauling as well. I was the strong man of the Base, dragging seal everywhere. There were quite a few seals on the ice floes and sometimes they came ashore and we got them there.

[00.25.10] Chris: Was that for human consumption?

[00.25.12] Alan: No it was for the dogs. We had dog teams there and I remember the dog teams very well. *Panda* was the team leader of the pack and *Bolokov*, I think that is what he was called. There were two young ones we were training *Gift* and *Geisha*, they were young pups and we had opportunities to take them out on sledge trips and to feed them every second day with seal meat. I always remember an incident when we took big big tins of gammon or ham I think it was, about 7 lbs, that kind of thing. We opened one up in the larder, but didn't eat it all ourselves, sometimes the door was left open and on one occasion *Panda*, the dog had got off his span and run into the house found the tin of ham and just wolfed it down. Now I was a bit annoyed about something that happened; I don't know whether he is still alive or not, John Green, John was captain of the team, but he beat the dog with a spade and I was really, really more than annoyed. That dog began to bleed and I was fuming because of that.

[00.26.42] Chris: Is this the man who later became secretary of FIDS, Johnnie Green?

[00.26.43] Alan: It may have been, I am not sure. Is he still alive?

[00.26.48] Chris: I don't believe so.

[00.26.49] Alan: No, I don't think so. I am using his name and all. He annoyed us all in doing that and from that time on relations were not as warm as they should have been. So, you know these things...

[00.27.04] Chris: How did you get on with the dogs, had you had previous doggie experience or was it all new...?

[00.27.06] Alan: Well, you know, only Collie dogs. I had experience off my Grandfather with Collie dogs; we had one ourselves, as well. Fine with the dogs, OK, yes.

[00.27.16] Chris: And what sort of trips did you do because Deception is quite a small...?

[00.27.19] Alan: Yes it was small. We had to go way up, high up, well it's not that high anyway, but we had to get them up there to sledge. That's all you could do the short runs to keep them active because that was part of the reason to train them.

[00.27.34] Chris: So that was the reason they were there, they were being trained?

[00.27.37] Alan: They were being trained there, that's right. They had come down from the Arctic, from Greenland, I think. They came down on the *Biscoe* on the way to the Bases. They were great dogs, one of them was *Jeeves* and he finished off in London Zoo, I think. It was good to have the dogs with us, you know.

[00.28.12] Chris: Do you know how *Jeeves*, the name of the dog was *Jeeves*?

[00.28.13] Alan: *Jeeves*, yes the one that finished up in London Zoo...

[00.28.15] Chris: How did that happen, do you know?

[00.28.16] Alan: I think when they come to an age, you know. I probably don't want to speculate, you know, but you could track him down, I don't know.

[00.28.27] Chris: Where you pupping the dogs?

[00.28.30] Alan: Pupping?

[00.28.31] Chris: Where they having babies?

[00.28.32] Alan: Well just these two we had *Gift* and *Geisha*. I don't know why they were called that or where they got the names for the dogs. That was the only time we had pups there. And then, of course, there were the dogs that were down at the Argentine Islands, they had plenty of scope for breeding and sledging there.

[00.28.50] Chris: Were you able to name the dogs and do anything you wanted to?

[00.28.53] Alan: To name them?

[00.28.54] Chris: When the puppies named was that just the choice of a few...?

[00.28.59] Alan: Oh, it was just the choice of someone on the Base. Have you any idea of what to call them. Some names were very strange. (Combined laughter). Where *Gift* and *Geisha* came from, I have no idea.

[00.29.07] Chris: So this was your introduction to the Antarctic?

[00.29.16] Alan: Yes.

[00.29.17] Chris: This is not the real Antarctic really is it? It is not the frozen wastes?

[00.29.21] Alan: No.

[00.29.23] Chris: And after about three months you were moved on, what happened?

[00.29.26] Alan: Well there was a sudden decision taken that I would go to South Georgia. I was trained quite a bit in working for the Air Cadets in morse and radio and in fact I became an instructor; my father was that in the First World War, and I was therefore to have the wish to carry it on. And they requires someone in South Georgia who was able to pick up stations from South America and South Africa and the normal means was morse, anyway, for weather reports, so that is how I found myself in South Georgia. In one way I was quite disappointed because I wanted to go to the Argentine Islands, on the other hand the way it turned out was quite good and the way it happened that way because it gave me a opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

[00.30.26] Chris: Such as, what opportunities?

[00.30.27] Alan: Well, to see South Georgia and the whaling side of it. Because many of the whalers there, quite a large number came from the Islands and I knew them, quite a lot of them.

[00.30.43] Chris: Personally?

[00.30.43] Alan: Personally yes. And I remember when we went into South Georgia we didn't go to Grytviken first of all we went to Leith Harbour where Salvesen's were based and in charge of things. We went alongside this whaling station jetty and we were there a day and some of them came on board the *Biscoe*, just to see, and one or two of them there were from the same village as I was from and asked what on earth are you doing here. It was quite good to meet up with them.

[00.31.28] Chris: What did you make of what you saw of the whaling that the Salvesens were conducting, it wasn't everybody's cup of tea was it?

[00.31.35] Alan: No, not really. Grytviken, of course is where I was based, and certainly the smell was very, very; once you got used to it, it was OK, it was nothing at all. But, for

a while it took quite a bit to get used to the smell of the boiling of the blubber and what have you. But it was very interesting and there were sometimes, you know, that killing whales; as the numbers there were then, but now of course things have changed completely because of their extinction. But it was interesting to see how it was done, and the flensing of the whales, it was quite dangerous work for someone. And the size of them you didn't really appreciate until you saw them up on the plan, being dragged up; the actual size of the whales.

[00.32.23] Chris: Where you aware of there being an anti whale hunting lobby even then, back in 1951?

[00.32.29] Alan: No, no I wasn't aware of that at all I don't think. There may have been but we were certainly not aware of it, no.

[00.32.38] Chris: So where would have been your Met Office then on South Georgia in 1951?

[00.32.40] Alan: It was on the point.

[00.32.48] Chris: King Edward Point?

[00.32.49] Alan: King Edward Point that's right. Shackleton's grave was just along there beyond the Base. There was a Met Office, a small Met Office detached from the building itself. And of course they had some Customs and Excise based there as well; and the Government Radio Station, was just behind us. It was an interesting place. We used to go round to the whaling station it was the Norwegians mainly were in charge there, and we made quite a lot of friends there, in fact, they came along to give us classes in Norwegian which was quite useful in some ways. They had a *Kino*, of course, a cinema and we used to go to that. Sometimes we were recruited when a ship came in, or half recruited, from Montevideo, Buenos Aires or South America somewhere, and we were recruited to go through her along with Jack Bowles, who was the main man in charge of the Customs and Excise...

[00.34.06] Chris: What was his name again?

[00.34.07] Alan: Jack Bowles, yes. He had the job of going through the ship to find any liquor that was not supposed to be there. As I remember after one ship had come in all kinds of booze was brought across to King Edward Point some of it was beer but there were also wines and spirits and we had to break every one of the bottles on the bollards to make sure they didn't go back across the harbour to the whaling station.

[00.34.46] Chris: So all this alcohol went into the sea?

[00.34.47] Alan: Yes, oh yes. However, I suppose it could have caused problems. The only persons who seemed to have any drink over there were those in charge.

Occasionally they would invite us over for a diner or whatever and their sports of course, annual sports, and then they would give us a meal and wine and whatever.

[00.35.12] Chris: So was Grytviken dry in 1951?

[00.35.16] Alan: Dry?

[00.35.18] Chris: I mean was there no alcohol allowed in Grytviken?

[00.35.20] Alan: Well we were allowed a bevy, but, it was apportioned I think, if I remember it correctly, the alcohol on Base. So much was allowed per person. I may be wrong, it's the first time I have thought about it after the number of years, I don't fully remember, I think I had a bottle of whisky.

[00.35.48] Chris: And Grytviken itself was it?

[00.35.49] Alan: Grytviken itself, we took that down with us...

[00.35.53] Chris: What I am trying to establish is whether, because alcohol causes problems, was there a ban on alcohol at the whaling stations and in Grytviken?

[00.36.01] Alan: Yes, oh yes at the whaling station yes, but, not on the Government Station not in my time anyway. We were allowed alcohol or we took maybe a case or two of beer, but we lost it all once; they were always under our beds where they froze and it broke all the bottles. No I think it would be a bad thing to allow too much alcohol, you just don't know what will be triggered off by it.

[00.36.37] Chris: What did you make of the Natural History of South Georgia?

[00.36.38] Alan: Well it's a very interesting place I thought, I mean you have got; and you are looking across to the Allardyce Range from the Base and Mount Paget was very impressive every morning when it was all lit up. And the reindeer of course, once or twice we went on a reindeer shoot up with the Manager of the whaling station and that was quite interesting, fresh reindeer meat. There was a lot of wildlife. The Sooty Albatrosses we used to go down to their nests on the sides of the cliffs, they were beautiful birds the 'Sooties' you know. Anyway it is a very interesting place of course. We used to go skiing over the hills and away to the other side altogether and that is where I learnt the hard way, with the Norwegians, just get on your skis and off. Then the varying surfaces sometimes with ice and you would end up on your face.

[00.37.56] Chris: You were going head first where you?

[00.37.58] Alan: Head first yes. So eventually I got used to it and was quite glad because they really taught you about it and the Norwegians are expert skiers. To see them at the "Games" doing the jump; they would actually build an area for jumping from, and they were fantastic coming down there and away out into space...

[00.38.20] Chris: There is a ski jump on South Georgia?

[00.38.21] Alan: Yes there is a ski jump there and it was one thing I have seen in particular, you see, the jumping skis are wider and this fellow came down and lost a ski in the air and I wondered what would happen, but then came in to land with one foot behind the other on just the one and there was a tremendous cheer for that as it was quite a dangerous thing, you know. He didn't seem to mind...

[00.38.51] Chris: You say we, I think there were five of you on the Base, on South Georgia at King Edward Point, can you remember who was with you?

[00.38.54] Alan: Yes, Ian Biggs, It's hard to remember names...

[00.39.12] Chris: Dick Laws?

[00.39.13] Alan: Dick Laws yes and there was Jack Newing from Stanley, Me...

[00.39.24] Chris: That will do.

[00.39.25] Alan: Oh yes he was the mechanic I know, in fact, he went off later on along off to Iceland, he was an ornithologist, and I can't remember.

[00.39.35] Chris: All right...

[00.39.36] Alan: Oh I know Arthur Mansfield.

[00.39.40] Chris: How did you get on the five of you?

[00.39.43] Alan: Fine. Yes very good. We didn't have to do so much cooking there as we had to later on because they sent a man down to South Georgia, he and his wife actually, he became butler in the Government Office, she was a sort of house maid there and her husband; I can't remember his name there; he offered to take a turn every week cooking and he wasn't too bad a cook.

[00.40.15] Chris: His name again was?

[00.40.16] Alan: No, no I can't just remember his name.

[00.40.19] Chris: Ian Biggs was it?

[00.40.20] Alan: No, Ian Biggs was the man in charge of the Government Station, but they were appointed to look after him in the Government Office. He was in one part of it and Laws was in the other part of it. So he took up cooking each week and was keen in helping out.

[00.40.48] Chris: Was the cuisine all right, did you seem to think the food was palatable?

[00.40.49] Alan: Yes. Oh yes. The one thing is that we got a bit annoyed at South Georgia over the food we were given apart from the washing up with the seal meat, not the seal meat of course, but whale meat, because whatever went wrong with the allocation of the food for us at South Georgia at that time we finished up with American Army rations in small tins, "M&V", that they had over in Malaya, I think it was, and some of the tins were rusted right the way through and I think Dick Laws made a complaint about that because he thought it wasn't good enough what they did in the allocation. Whoever was responsible, I don't know, but they never sent down any replacements.

[00.31.43] Chris: What did you make of Dick Laws, because, of course, he rose through the ranks didn't he?

[00.41.49] Alan: Hid did that yes, yes, aye.

[00.41.51] Chris: Did you spot that in him at that time, did you spot a potential Director?

[00.41.52] Alan: Oh yes, yes. Dick never forced himself on you in any way, but you knew the potential was there for something far more. He would be away for maybe two or three days at a time on the other side of the Island and he would ask the manservant to go too. But no, Dick was never perverse as far as relations were concerned; He was a fine, fine fellow and charismatic.

[00.42.37] Chris: And Ian Biggs, I met Ian about a year ago?

[00.42.38] Alan: Ian was; his sister was married there, his sister married one of the men in the Wireless Section, who was from Stanley as well. Ian was receptive to snow blindness. On a few occasions when we were out he would come back from a day out in the mountains and he couldn't see anything again. Mind you snow blindness can be really bad, and he had to wear glasses for it, he had had it once before, I think, and it had come back again. But no Ian was fine. I didn't realize that he was still around; I think it was Alan that said he was in London.

[00.43.18] Chris: Indeed he did, in South London. He lives in South London now, south of London in Croydon, I think if I remember rightly. Did you, now this may have happened later, but, did you ever hear about another incident, you talk about a man with a knife, did you ever hear about another incident, of that nature, at Hope Bay?

[00.43.34] Alan: Hope Bay, no.

[00.43.35] Chris: Involving Ian?

[00.43.37] Alan: Ian Biggs, No.

[00.43.43] Chris: No you didn't, it may have happened after you had left.

[00.43.45] Alan: I'd say this; the drink, but say no more.

[00.43.54] Chris: Ok there are a few FIDS who fit that description, I suspect. You also met Duncan Carse, who became Dick Barton.

[00.43.58] Alan: Duncan Carse yes Dick Barton Special Agent.

[00.43.59] Chris: So how did you come across Duncan?

[00.44.04] Alan: Well he came with all his stores and we had had to lodge him and all his gear for him before he went off on his expedition. That is the only time we met him though. Whether anybody thought he was a special agent, I am not sure.

[00.44.24] Chris: He was already well known for that even then?

[00.44.26] Alan: Yes he was that's right. So we wondered, if you like, what qualifications he had to go off and do something else, however.

[00.440.39] Chris: Tell me something about the Met work you were doing, was it fairly routine or were there interesting aspects to it?

[00.44.42] Alan: It was fairly routine in South Georgia and Deception; I mean you had your shifts of course, 24 hour shifts, you know. South Georgia yes there was more occasion for us to do more upper air, balloons and that sort of thing, the weather was suitable for that. The wind was the problem, trying to get them off. It was really routine; picking up the other stations from South America, which was a pain, whoever the operator was dah dah dit dit, dah dah dit dit, dit dit dit, CCS, and it took a while to get used to this method. There are some people on the key that you can know exactly what they are sending; the wireless operator on the *Biscoe* I could tell right away what was going on, he was quite clear on the key ...

[00.45.39] Chris: It was his style?

[00.45.40] Alan: From his style yes. So that fellow was quite good but as for the South American, Chile I think it was, aye Chile, CCS, they ran everything into the other so you had to try and break it down, so they could be quite difficult. The other part therefore, of course, we had the forecaster (hesitation), from Glasgow...

[00.46.09] Chris: I will look him up when we take a break.

[00.46.09] Alan: Why were you in radio communication with South America, why were you trying to meet up with them?

[00.46.19] Alan: With South America; because they were giving us reports from stations in that area in order to fill out the chart for the forecast for the whalers in the area. And of course we had to pick up the whalers as well, they all had a code of their own in case

their location was given away, because they didn't want anyone to know where they were. We had a code we could break down for them, Southern Harvester, Southern Adventurer and one or two of them, and they could send us their weather reports as well, which all fitted into doing the chart for the day.

[00.46.54] Chris: So your job was not just to take readings on your location but also to build up a chart for the area so as to give a forecast for the Southern Ocean?

[00.47.06] Alan: That's right to give Danny Borland, which was his name, the weathers from all the stations to enable him to make up his forecast. He was a very good forecaster, Danny, you know.

[00.47.17] Chris: Where you getting, or did you ever have unusual readings, or extreme conditions?

[00.47.21] Alan: We did in South Georgia, we in South Georgia did, from time to time, experience a *Fohn Wind*, and the temperature can go from 32 to 65 Fahrenheit, just like that. And this hot hot air, you can feel this hot air blowing and of course with it, it can be quite bad as it can cause avalanches, and on the route that we walked round to Grytviken to the whaling station from King Edward Point was quite steep. Once we had something like ten inches of rain in a matter of hours and all the scree was washed down from the slopes and completely blocked the pathway until eventually it was cleared. These things can happen, you know. It is amazing how it can be transformed from freezing with the *Fohn Wind* effect coming down from the mountains. The *Fohn Wind* was originally named in Switzerland for the wind coming down from the Alps. These were very unusual events when the temperatures shot up...

[00.48.23] Chris: Sorry, where was the hot air coming from, from Africa or?

[00.48.26] Alan: The hot air was coming because of the wind coming down from the mountains, and it is caused by something to do with the pressure, I can't remember the exact technical detail of it, but, it causes this *Fohn Wind*, well actually it's a hot wind and you can feel it, the heat of it effects the temperature of course.

[00.48.49] Chris: And that was being generated in the Antarctic itself?

[00.48.51] Alan: Yes.

[00.48.54] Chris: It's not coming in from somewhere else?

[00.48.56] Alan: No it's coming from South Georgia itself because of the mountain ranges there. No other place in the Antarctic, as far as I know, there may be other areas that I am not aware of, except in South Georgia this was something that happened, fairly regularly during the summer months.

[00.49.15] Chris: I imagine it was a fairly full on occupation wasn't it, what with regular observations to make, where you working long hours?

[00.49.23] Alan: Yes of yes you had your own shift to do and there were other things to do as well of course, keeping records, making sure everything was up to date. The situation in South Georgia was that you just handed your reports into the radio station, alongside on their desk, and they would send them off to Port Stanley. Probably we had more time on our hands in South Georgia it seems, because you could do things and go places on you days off rather than; you didn't have any dogs to feed and seals to kill and what have you. So we got the occasional run in a catcher as well up the coast and there was one of the old ship there absolutely immaculate as far as her maintenance was concerned; *Lille Carl*, was her name, yes *Lille Carl*, I think she was a German ship from the first World War. She used to do a lot of taxi runs to the other stations and occasionally we got a run on her to Leith Harbour, Stromness and Husvik. Some days they would take her out for days fishing; the management, the Norwegians would take her out and would invite us if we wanted to go at weekends, and that was OK.

[00.51.01] Chris: Am I right in thinking that the Met Office changed hands at some point, that FIDS handed it over to somebody else?

[00.51.07] Alan: In South Georgia?

[00.51.10] Chris: Yes.

[00.51.11] Alan: I am not aware of that. Probably it may have happened once, I have no idea.

[00.51.22] Chris: All right then, it may be a red herring. We were talking about your culinary skills and I think that you became a dab hand at baking bread, is that right?

(Combined laughter)

[00.51.32] Alan: One thing that I did. One thing that I could get right! I could make scones, Scottish scones, but bread was a disaster! I don't know why.

[00.51.41] Chris: Really, you don't know why?

[00.41.42] Alan: It was a lack of patience, waiting for the yeast to rise. I remember having to throw them out at Deception, out into the sea and they sank! Big chance for bread! Bill Calder would make fantastic bread, having been a baker before he went down there. But, aye bread I am afraid no, not my best.

[00.52.08] Chris: So you spent a winter at South Georgia and then the Spring came and you were on the road again weren't you?

[00.52.14] Alan: That's right.

[00.52.16] Chris: Where to?

[00.52.17] Alan: To Stanley where I; the *Biscoe* took us up to Stanley to pick up some various bits and pieces, I think that was the sequence that it was, and after that we went to Hope Bay, I think, where we had the problem.

[00.52.33] Chris: So you went to Stanley first, just after South Georgia, and that was just a 'pit stop', so to speak. And then Hope Bay; again, you were just passing through Hope Bay?

[00.52.45] Alan: Well, we were there for two or three days.

[00.52.48] Chris: Because you were on your way towards the Peninsula. So tell me what you really remember of the incident at Hope Bay?

[00.52.50] Alan: Well the very first thing of interest was that the ship ran aground, we never fooled anyone, but, because we were very, very strong there, and the ship ran on to a reef there...

[00.53.06] Chris: The ship was called?

[00.53.07] Alan: The *John Biscoe*. So we sat there and wondered what was going to happen. It was then, irrespective of that, we got our stores ashore to the revitalized Base, there used to be a Base there, you know, so they could rebuild the Base.

[00.53.23] Chris: It burnt down didn't it?

[00.53.24] Alan: Yes. An interesting there was as well; because the man who was there when it happened, his brother owned the Lodge at Glen Hadden.

[00.53.40] Chris: You are talking about Bill Sladen?

[00.53.42] Alan: Sladen yes aye. He was there when this happened because they came back to find the Base burnt down and of course a member of the Base was there, their remains were there. The whole thing was that we were ashore with the bits and pieces; we took a scow with all the bits and pieces and were taking them out and then the 'Argies', the Argentines appeared. We noticed that there was a ship in, they were near their Base, and the funny thing about the *Biscoe* and: we stopped off at various places and near a place where there was a big sign on the ice, on the ice shelf, which read British Crown Land, and of course the background of the white shone through making it plain. Then the 'Argies' came along to take it down and replace their own, what with the Malvinas and all the rest of it. It seemed to be a 'carry on' that seemed pointless in a way. But, anyway they were there and they were waiting, obviously they came; two of their Officers, or whatever they were, came to tell us get off here this is out land and there they stood. Anyway, who was it who went over to them; two of our group went over to their Base and with that they were fired at with machine gun bullets over the top of their heads.

Then there were ski troops all around with guns trained on us. So any way, was it ?????, or was it ????, I can't remember, but, anyway I think it was one of the ones that were on board. And eventually they said no you are going, whether you like it or not, back to the ship. So they took those who had gone ashore first of all onto one of their boats to run them back to the *Biscoe*...

[00.55.40] Chris: The Argentineans did?

[00.55.42] Alan: The Argentineans. Then they towed our scow with all our stuff in it back to the *Biscoe* as well and left it alongside. It became, you know, quite serious I wondered what they were doing. But eventually they came alongside, two officers if I remember rightly, with something we had to sign, at least whoever was in charge, saying that they had not threatened us and all this. By then Bill Bonner had been trying to get in touch with Stanley and, of course, 'VPC' Stanley Radio was off the air, so he got on to the frequency of the local radio and he asked anyone who was listening to phone the radio station and tell them urgently to get in touch with the *Biscoe*, which they did. Then, of course, right way the *Bigbury Bay*, I think it was, a Frigate, was sent down with some marines. It didn't take her very long. The *Bahia Buen Suceso* was the Argentine ship. When the Frigate came in the Bay none of the tugs came out and went round her with a gun trained at her. Eventually they sent Marines ashore to take control. I am trying to think for a moment, but, I don't think they were actually put off, I think they were just told, look no more of this, we are staying here on the basis of previous Base and the fact that we are here and that's it. By then the *Biscoe* had got off the reef. Bill Johnson, wouldn't give in, he was the Skipper of the *Biscoe*.

[00.57.40] Chris: Did you get, the way you describe it, I got the impression that the Argentineans were waiting for you?

[00.57.46] Alan: Well yes. They obviously knew we were coming. Of course I had known the ship from the Deception days, because she came in to Deception whilst I was there and we were invited everyone on board. The Captain of the ship was a Captain Panzarini and in the course of conversation apparently his grandmother was a McIennan from somewhere in the Highlands. (Laughter). But, the thing that I think was concerning us was that a lot of the officers were German, I think, ex German, you know...

[00.58.24] Chris: The Argentineans Officers?

[00.58.26] Alan: Yes, yes, yes that's right. Obviously they had gone to the Argentine from Germany. The Argentineans yes I think they were, and then there was the incident that I had at Deception, as well. I didn't mention it before, but when one of their tugs came in, the *Lianto*? and the *Retaro*?, there were two of them, and they came ashore and they wanted water. There are a lot of wells that were there from the days of the base, from the whaling station and they seemed to know about them. Oddly, this may tie up again, I don't know, we had a visit from two Argentineans in Deception looking for dogs that they had lost. So many dogs seemed to be there; they weren't Huskies they seemed to be something like Alsatians that they had, but how they got over to where we were I

don't know, because its not; they can come by land I suppose. Anyway they were looking for two dogs that had been missing for days that had never turned up. But the Argentine tugs, sorry, the Chilean tugs that came ashore for the water they found two dead dogs in the well. I don't think we can have been drinking that water all that long because it's in our tank. Anyway they got them out and they loaded up water and then got away. And they invited us as well to the tug for dinner, so Bill Bonner and I, we went out, I think. It turns out that the Skipper was Angus McRae from Tay! So I got a seat of honour. (Laughter). Fancy that Tay?

[01.00.14] Chris: So was it a happy cordial meal, or?

[01.00.16] Alan: Oh ye, yes. The Chileans were very, very, very cordial in every way. We never had a problem with them. And they gave us a big basket of freshly made rolls.

[01.00.28] Chris: At Deception. Let's just go back to Hope Bay then and the Argentinean incident, for want of a better phrase. I was fascinated by you saying that some of the Argentinean Officers were Germans, so that suggests that they were actually fighting in World War II for the Germans and that they escaped to Argentina. You are convinced about that are you?

[01.00.49] Alan: Oh I think so yes, yes. They were a different club altogether from the others. I wouldn't have thought that the ordinary Argentineans maybe acted that way, I don't know. It was very difficult to tell.

[01.01.03] Chris: Where these moments of great concern, the whole of that stand off. Waiting for the Frigate to arrive?

[01.01.08] Alan: Well we were waiting for the Frigate to arrive, because we were not going to move, we couldn't move anyway, we were aground you see. {Laughter} We all thought that once the Navy comes in that will be it, and, of course, it was.

[01.01.22] Chris: So it wasn't a tense day at all. You weren't, you don't remember being frightened?

[01.01.28] Alan: Oh no, in fact the opposite. Sometimes when you are in a corner like that I think; that's the way I felt when I was ashore, you know, I say I wonder why people do things that they do in the face of things. Maybe with hindsight it's just as well we didn't.

[01.01.53] Chris: You might have retaliated you mean?

[01.01.54] Alan: That's right yes.

[01.01.55] Chris: How could you have retaliated?

[01.01.56] Alan: Well we couldn't, we had nothing to match. We didn't have any guns, no, no, so we couldn't have done anything. So we thought, oh well, with the Royal Navy coming and that was it. It definitely was interesting to see the reaction, you know, that they went to that level to try and prevent us, when at the end of the day it wasn't going to do them any good anyway. And with a Base there, having been there before in any case, but, of course they always claimed Argentina, islands, the area was Argentine islands, but the Falkland Islands took it that way, the Malvinas. But it was, it was no problems it was just a...

[01.02.45] Chris: Let's take a complete break.

[00.00.00] **Chris: The Reverend Alan McArthur Part 2.**

[00.00.12] Chris: In your second year you were sent to Argentine Islands.

[00.00.14] Alan: That is correct, yes.

[00.00.16] Chris: What were your first impressions on seeing the Base?

[00.00.18] Alan: Well, the voyage down there was very spectacular I thought, down the Lemaire Channel and that, and it was very interesting to see where we were going to be for the following year. Argentine Base was; well first impressions, I thought that Wordie House was small; it didn't look much like a house. (Joint laughter) Anyway it was fine there was no problem there. As always when we get to a place like that, and of course by the time the *Biscoe* came in we had to spend our whole day off-loading all kind of oil drums and loads of anthracite and whatever else there was. We did our best to get it all ashore in the time. I think the big problem with the Argentine Islands was that it sometimes got iced up very quickly and that meant that the *Biscoe* had to leave sooner than normal. But it didn't happen on that occasion, it happened later on of course, and we could all step ashore and hump our way to the Base. Some we couldn't take the same day so we left it for the dogs to follow later on. I was quite glad to be there.

[00.01.40] Chris: How did Wordie House compare, as a living quarters, as opposed to your previous Bases?

[00.01.45] Alan: Well it probably wasn't; there wasn't as much room for one thing. There were bunks up the side of what was the sitting room cum kitchen and everything, they had two bunks on each side and in the middle, probably not as comfortable maybe as Deception, no, and certainly not as comfortable as South Georgia, but, it was adequate, it was fine.

[00.02.14] Chris: You had been promoted?

[00.02.16] Alan: Yes. (Combined laughter), that's right.

[00.02.18] Chris: You are now Senior Met Man, did that make a difference?

[00.02.23] Alan: Well there was quite a bit more responsibility, because then you were responsible for all the reports and in particular at the end of the year, which was quite important, what had happened in the year. And the other thing was that at the Argentine Islands there was much more opportunity for upper air work as well. The climate there was different in many ways, probably the best of the Bases for sunshine, for long spells of sunshine. But very stormy at times as well, quite, quite stormy, but we were always impressed upon when there was an opportunity to get a balloon up that had to be done, because that gives you a lot more information about the weather that's coming. We had our own special balloon shed there, but, again the wind was a problem getting the balloon up. You could follow a balloon up to amazing levels with a theodolite, to hardly like a

little speck. This meant that each time you did that there was extra work for reporting back to Stanley, because it had to go more or less immediately back to the Met Office in Stanley for processing.

[00.03.50] Chris: Tell me a bit more about releasing the balloons from the shed, what were the tactics?

[00.03.52] Alan: Well you filled the balloon from a hydrogen cylinder and obviously before that you had to have the theodolite ready and gauge just where it was going to go and that wasn't too bad. It wasn't much of a problem because the balloons are not as big as those that we had in upper air when I was based at Stornoway, because then these were massive balloons, you see, and I could tell you some stories about that, but perhaps they should be kept quiet. We didn't have a radio set attached to them, there was nothing attached to them; everything depended on following the balloon with the theodolite giving the speed it was traveling and the direction, and what have you, at every level. So it was quite an interesting process; you had a slide rule and every minute you had to check out the whole process on the slide rule and you didn't lose the balloon in the mean time. So you had to get quite adept at that and I found it was quite interesting to do that.

[00.05.00] Chris: There was just one man then, where you?

[00.05.02] Alan: There was just one man was doing the whole thing.

[00.05.03] Chris: So you couldn't keep your eye on it all the time?

[00.05.04] Alan: No, no and it was quite a lot of, you know, attention and your mind working at the same time with the slide rule as well as; every minute, you see, had to take an observation, so it was well...

[00.05.18] Chris: Correct me if I got this wrong, but, is this the Base where they put a hole in the roof of the shed?

[00.05.23] Alan: No. You had to take it out. We didn't even have a hole in the roof when I at the upper air work was in Stornoway, it all had to come out, but, sometimes you had two people there, one holding the transmitter, and the second getting the level and direction for the balloon launch. Sometimes you had to run as fast as you could so that it didn't stick in a wire fence or something. But there, there was no problem like that.

[00.05.53] Chris: Again, did you, do you remember any particular extreme weather conditions that you were recording?

[00.05.56] Alan: In the Argentine Islands wind speeds sometimes got very extreme, if it went over 100 knots we had to switch over; we had an internal, what's the name, what do you call the internal thing, for switching over, it would halve the wind speed...

[00.06.20] Chris: Anemometer?

[00.06.21] Alan: Yes anemometer that right, and it would give me the accurate speed of whatever the wind was. Occasionally this happened and it meant that some days when that was the problem with the wind, you had to dig yourself out of Wordie House, because it just covered completely and we had a rope all the way up to the thermometers, where we all had to go regularly for checking the temperature, while the rain fall was pretty hopeless anyway. And if you went out in the night, of course, because it was quite dark there most of the time, especially in the winter, you had to follow that rope and hope you didn't lose it, because; the drifting snow was the big problem. But anyway, generally, it was all, all right.

[00.07.14] Chris: So how was that winter, what was the sea ice like?

[00.07.16] Alan: Sea ice was, well there was plenty of sea ice that winter, it really was quite a thing because we would go sledging on the sea for miles and get the dogs out as well. You could go right across to Grahamland, you know, on the other side. I was seldom away because of the fact that we lost Jock Tait there, you see, he had to be taken off.

[00.07.47] Chris: What happened?

[00.07.48] Alan: He and I used to go sealing every summer, twice a week, and Jock had got an expert at that and one of the days when we were getting seal he cut his finger and I thought that's OK, it happens you know. Again another couple of days after that it wasn't healing and his hand was all swollen, so we got in touch with the doctor, who was at Hope Bay, and he advised us to give him so much penicillin, which we did, but, he didn't seem to improve very much with that. Fortunately the following day a Chilean tug came in to the anchorage and they had a doctor on board and he came ashore and he called it a 'Speck Finger', which is a Norwegian term. They get this from seals or from whales or what have you; and it is very often fatal, but, he gave him a tremendous booster of penicillin and that helped. But, the advice was that he shouldn't be here and to get him out if possible. They were quite prepared to take him, but the *Biscoe* was coming back within a matter of days anyway so they decided to leave it until the *Biscoe* came. He was taken away, so he wasn't replaced whatever, Jock; so that meant we were down to four.

[00.09.19] Chris: Was his name also Murdo?

[00.09.21] Alan: Yes, Murdo Finlayson Tait, that's Jock Tait.

[00.09.28] Chris: Right. Before he left what sort of chap was he? Did you know him already before you arrived at...?

[00.09.33] Alan: Oh yes I had met him at Hope Bay and we had a chat, because when he heard I was from Lewis, you know, he was a lighthouse keeper, or something, and he had been round most of the lighthouses on the Scottish coast and Murdo we just got on obviously.

[00.09.57] Chris: There was a chap called Norman Petts with you as well and there is a story about him as well I believe?

[00.10.03] Alan: He was the Base Leader.

[00.10.04] Chris: Oh was he right, OK.

[00.10.05] Alan: Kind of.....(Consumed with laughter!)

[00.10.11] Chris: Go on tell me the story?

[00.10.12] Alan: I don't know, no I am not saying. He was a; what do you call these people who are without cares again, you know?

[00.10.18] Chris: A 'potholer'.

[00.10.19] Alan: A 'potholer'. And of course the ruling is, you mustn't go away from Base on your own there must be always two of you and Petts being Base Leader should have more sense, but he used to go off on his own irrespective of what the rules were, and this day he went off and never came back. We were very concerned because all we could do; we went looking for him and fortunately we discovered him. He had fallen off an ice shelf down onto the ice and broken I think it his arm, was it, I am not sure. Anyway he was injured so we got him back to the Base and put him in a bath of hot water because he was suffering from hypothermia. Norman was an odd fellow, it didn't deter him from trying to do the same thing again and we said now way Norman you're not going to go, but things went from there, I remember; you know you had to empty the cooker, the ashes that is, and of course we had to take the ashes to away to a place on the sea ice a way out from the Base, where you could put all the stuff on it where it would get washed away. But Norman went to do it; and there was a small window at the side and this morning he came up with the ashes and just bashed through the window with the ashes and we thought he had done something wrong but he was not concerned. Anyway he got over that, but he never should have been Base Leader. And of course we had also got Norman Thyer.

[00.12.04] Chris: Norman?

[00.12.05] Alan: Thyer. Norman finished up as a professor of some kind in California, a very clever fellow Norman, but, probably after about three/four months we began to see signs of; that things were not as they should be. Norman died two years ago. He used to come in and wash his hands, dry his hands and then do the same all over again. With this kind of thing going on we got in touch with the doctor at Hope Bay, who said put him on phenobarbitone. So that helped a bit, but obviously he was not happy in himself and it was difficult to know what to do. We took him off night duties and that was fine, but his actions didn't seem to bother him, but, he was pretty adamant that he was an exile and that's a condition of some concern, so we stopped him doing that. But anyway when he

was ready to go, the *Biscoe* was going to come in on two occasions, one to load offshore, they were building the Base hut at Hope Bay, which they began before I left, and the *Biscoe* couldn't get in, and, of course Norman was hoping to get off on that visit and when we were told the *Biscoe* couldn't get in he was absolutely; well we tried to calm him down. He was at the stage of screaming, you know. And he ran out of the Base and away up the side of the hill on Skua Island, because you could see from there right up the Lemaire Channel, but of course the *Biscoe* couldn't get in. So anyway we got him back to the hut and calmed him down, because she would be coming back anyway eventually. The next attempt a couple of days after that she got in. So Norman would have been a problem really, and we just wonder what would have happened if they hadn't been able to relieve us. Anyway it worked out didn't it, but you know.

[00.14.16] Chris: It sounds like it was a very hairum scareum winter that one with these slightly unusual occurrences?

[00.14.25] Alan: Oh yes, yes aye. I suppose you can expect things when you are only two or three and you are completely isolated. You know, if they been accustomed to anything like that, if their mind set is such that, you know. We had plenty of reading material if we wanted to, but, and there were other things, of course, you could have an interest in. And we always tried to look at things as optimistically as possible. But, obviously there are dangers, problems, it's how you get round it at the end of the day that matters, possibly they may be able to do a bit more in the way of interviewing people to see whether that can stand up to it.

[00.15.10.] Chris: Bearing in mind that you later became a Minister and Pastor were there any latent skills inside you at that stage of your life which you could bring to bear on the situation on what to do in those circumstances?

[000.15.20] Alan: Yes, oh yes. I think I learnt a lot about people's attitudes, a lot of things that have been a help to me as a Minister with regards to helping people overcome mental problems, or, whatever kind of problem. I had, did a quote from when I was preparing for the Ministry from one of the professors of practical theology who thought that it would be a good idea if I was to have this short course in a hospital in Glasgow, Southern General Hospital, and he was a Jewish professor of psychiatry and they had a unit there so they brought us in for some training in this matter. We were sitting behind a large screen so the people couldn't see us when they were coming in for treatment, but, we could see them. And, some of the things that happened, as I say, in my time South, it was very evident that this was quite helpful for dealing with problems of people with loneliness, people living alone and people who can't cope and helping them, being with them. So it was, I felt it was quite a benefit.

[00.16.44] Chris: Where you able to help either of the two Normans at that time?

[00.16.48] Alan: Oh yes.

[00.16.51] Chris: With what we now call counseling, can you recall anything about that, it is a long time ago I appreciate?

[00.16.59] Alan: Well, not really. I think probably that I was trying to keep them interested in some things that could be a help. He didn't read, you know, and if you gave them something specific to do, you know I must have this, that helped as long as his mind was occupied with that.

[00.17.19] Chris: If you gave them a job?

[00.17.20] Alan: Yes that's right. No he wasn't any use for doing jobs or anything like that, he wasn't a very strong fellow, and he was a small thin fellow.

[00.17.36] Chris: This is Norman?

[00.17.37] Alan: Norman Thyer, yes. But these things happen to some people. I always kept in touch with Norman so I knew he had gone because I used to get these e-mails from him of course, that he had passed away. They never told me for long enough, it was about two years after that I got it that he had passed on. He died of ?????

[00.18.00] Chris: Do you recall any scary incidents whilst you were South, where you ever worried about your longevity?

[00.18.07] Alan: Well Norman had a thing, that was Norman Thyer that we have just been talking about, about anything that was endangering him, and one of the things were, the ones that hunt seals, Killer Whales, and sometimes when we went out, particularly in the Argentine Islands, to get seals, you had a seal up on an ice floe, and you went up on the ice floe and killed the seal and there is blood, you know, and you sometimes wonder what is around in the water. And on one occasion Norman was with me and we actually saw a fin and Norman touched it, you know. Anyway Norman this time, because he could have, you know, broken off sealing you know, but he was actually screaming because of that and anyway we got a little bit worried on the way over. He had this thing about not Leopard Seals, but, Killer Whales. The other incident was in South Georgia we went off in a craft with the Manager of the whaling station, who was Norwegian, and we went over in this large motor boat to the other side of the bay to hunt for reindeer. And on the way Killer Whales came right around the boat and I was astonished, I really was that this man was absolutely scarred stiff by these Killer Whales. He started shouting, shouting, what was the Norwegian term he shouted, I can't remember the name, we must get away we can't stay here type of thing, they might jump onto the boat, no I can't remember his name, but, anyway he was the Manager of the station. I don't know what he thought was going to happen. There was no problem with them; I didn't think there was a problem. There may be; they do on occasions do that, having seen them in South California tamed and jumping up on the thing, you know. In San Diego, I remember, I went there a few years ago; I can see what they can do.

[00.20.22] Chris: Well there is quite a concern that they might capsize a boat isn't there?

[00.20.25] Alan: Oh yes this is the real thing because if they had then we were all in the water! A boat is vulnerable. That's another incident we had with a rowing boat in South Georgia, and we went again over the other side to shoot. (Hesitates) Yes we were going over to the other side to shoot reindeer and the Wireless Operator was with us, from Liverpool, from the station, and I think Ian Bates was with us too and Jack Newing. Coming in (Editor: to the beach) we thought we had had quite a rough crossing and the waves were fairly high and I said "we must keep the boat either nose on, or, stern on, otherwise we are going to have a problem." And the, what do you call him, the Wireless Operator said "oh I'll do it, I'll do the rowing", and he hadn't got a clue how to handle a boat, with the result that it went side on; capsized, and through us all off into the sea, guns and all. So much for a 'Scouse' (combined laughter) not knowing what to do. And that, I mean we had to walk all the way back now. Our clothes were absolutely stiff and we lost the guns and the boat, but, we went back and got her eventually. Of course it is a long, long trek all the way round, but fortunately we didn't have to do any high climbing but just to walk along the shoreline. But things like that happen from time to time, you know.

[00.22.10] Chris: Whilst you were at Deception there was that South African boat that came in, there was a misunderstanding I believe, a South African boat came in thinking you had been marooned, at Deception?

[00.22.20] Alan: Oh yes that's right. We hadn't seen any shops for weeks, you know, and all of a sudden we saw a boat coming in through Neptune's Bellows, as we call it, the entrance in to Deception. It looked like a whaler had come in, she steamed around and we thought that maybe she would be dropping anchor and coming ashore, but, no she was off on her way out back again and just as she was going out, we got our Very Pistol and fired it...

[00.22.51] Chris: A Maroon?

[00.22.52] Alan: Maroons, off it went and then a couple of minutes after the boat came back in, turned around, and a small boat came ashore and to find out; thinking we were marooned. He had been the Captain of a whaling ship, twenty odd, something years ago when the boats were rusting in the harbour there, you know, they lost about twenty of them, and he had come back to us to see what was what as he thought that we had been marooned there as well.

[00.23.30] Chris: A considerate South African? (Combined laughter)

[00.23.32] Alan: Yes well he was from South Africa. So any way he gave us a bottle of Van der Hum, and some bread and stuff and so all was well, yes...

[00.23.40] Chris: When the, sorry.

[00.23.42] Alan: The other thing was when I was telling you about the dogs in the well, well about a week after the Chileans had gone having cleaned the well we thought; Neville and I went to the well for water because we hadn't got a lot left, and lo and behold there were two dead dogs in it again! And these were the Argentine dogs that, we don't know whose the others were; they must have been the Argentine dogs as well. Why they ended up in the well, I don't know, were they doing this deliberately, or what. I would have assumed that they had fallen in; and yet there was quite a thing round this well, I don't know. You wonder if there was anything running in, you know, an under water stream that they could have got in, but, we were quite surprised, you know, another two dogs dead.

[00.24.36] Chris: When it came to leaving the Antarctic after your two winters down there, what were your feelings at that time Alan?

[00.24.41] Alan: Well my feelings were that I wanted to go back.

[00.24.45] Chris: Back where?

[00.24.46] Alan: Back to the Antarctic. In fact I signed on to FIDS roster to go on to another Base. And lo and behold I got home anyway. Naturally, we were landed at Southampton; we were on the Spithead Review, the Queens review of the Fleet. We were all kitted out in uniforms. I lost all my whale teeth, I had got a stack of whale teeth from South Georgia there and, oh what's his name again, he had the bag with them, or, he took it with him and he was supposed to share with me half and half, but, any way I never got...

[00.25.28] Chris: Was this Arthur Martin?

[00.25.30] Alan: No, no. Arthur Marshall no, no...

[00.25.33] Chris: Arthur Martin? (Editor. Arthur Mansfield?)

[00.25.34] Alan: No not that no. He went immediately after that on an expedition to Mount Paradyne??, to the Arctic, I saw his name being mentioned. He died a couple of years ago. Oh. He was down there a couple of times as well. Anyway that was it back home and then...

[00.25.54] Chris: So tell me about the Spithead Review, what do you remember of that?

[00.25.57] Alan: Well it was very interesting to see all the different ships and we alongside a big Russian, what did they call it again, ????, some kind of Cruiser. Oh it was a flag flying business; there were all kinds of ships there. The day the Queen came out on and went round the whole lot; it was at the time, I think it was the time of; I think somebody was caught diving under the, I can't remember; do you remember that incident when there was the edict underwater because he had been spying on the Russian ship at the time of the Spithead Review? At least he was accused of that anyway. There was a lot

about it in the papers for quite a little time. And probably he was, you know, spying on whoever, MI 5 or whoever, but, it was very interesting to be on it, yes, you see all these ships from all the nations from all over the world. Big sailing ships as well.

[00.27.09] Chris: What happened to your quest to go South again?

[00.27.11] Alan: Well they were expecting me to be back down to join the *Biscoe* again, once she left again, but things changed you know at home.

[00.27.25] Chris: Tell me?

[00.27.27] Alan: (Laughs). Well, for one, my home was different because my father and mother, who had never had much interest in Church things, were now very involved and so were other members of the family, you know, completely different. And I just thought well, what I am I going to do, is this pressure on again? My father had a colleague who came up at the time to visit him, from I think it must have been Greenock, and my father invited him to the home, and I met him and he was very interested in what was happening with me. So I think what he said to me more or less was you have got to do it lad, you can't run away all the time, you must answer the call. So I said that I would, and so I notified FIDS that I wouldn't be going back down again, and that seemed a bit of a shame. But, initially training for teaching because I thought that might be a better course; you can get quite good positions in that, religious education and that sort of thing. But, when I had finished that course it was still obvious that it had to be something more than that, so I did my divinity course at Trinity College Glasgow. And well met Heather???...

[00.29.18] Chris: Your wife?

[00.29.19] Alan: Yes and that more or less put an end to my wanderings.

[00.29.22] Chris: Do you have any lasting regrets about not going South again, or did you think that this is the way life pans out sometimes?

[00.29.29] Alan: Not really, having thought it through, obviously. You can never run away from something in a sense, whatever it is; although some people run away from all kinds of things. And I found that very useful here, because shortly after I came here there came to be a massive death roll from a platform in the oil industry so I had to do the chaplaincy for that as well here.

[00.30.01] Chris: So you kind of understood the men did you?

[00.30.03] Alan: Oh absolutely because a great number of them had been running away, running away from all kinds of problems. And I found that very useful.

[00.30.14] Chris: Did you at any time in the Antarctic, in such a pristine environment, did you feel close to God there at any time?

[00.30.21] Alan: Yes absolutely.

[00.30.22] Chris: Can you tell me about that?

[00.30.23] Alan: Well particularly, I would say, in the Argentine Islands. Because the sheer beauty of the Allardyce, not the Allardyce Range, but, what they call it, of the other side of Grahamland, I think it would be difficult not to realize that there was the hand of a Creator behind it all. And the beauty of the sunrises and sunsets on the mountain ranges themselves. And I think all that had an influence really. South Georgia certainly did as well. So here I am.

[00.31.11] Chris: The view from your window here is not too bad, is it?

[00.31.13] Alan: Not too bad, and there are hardly any trees here as well. (Combined laughter)

[00.31.19] Chris: So in some respects going to the Antarctic kind of sealed your future for you because although you went away for a while it was whilst you were away that you had a second revelation, is that true?

[00.31.32] Alan: Yes. Well I knew in Deception one day that I first had to eventually give in. I tried something that I don't all the time do, I stopped praying, and I stopped reading my Bible, which is something I very rarely did...

[00.31.55] Chris: Whilst you were South?

[00.31.56] Alan: Yes. I stopped, for what reason I don't know, but I just stopped and I had a strange experience because, I think I told you that probably I was the strongest man on the Base, and I always used to call a lot on my strength absolutely, and suddenly I was in bed for several days I just couldn't move and I didn't know why, but, I said well I would try and get back to the praying and the Bible, which I did, and I was back to normal within a day. So I think there was some evidence there of something that God sent. I tell that story occasionally when I feel I need to.

[00.32.41] Chris: Looking back over your career, your life; how important were those two years in the Antarctic to you, on a scale of one to ten?

[00.32.51] Alan: Oh I think they were really number one because of what I saw, what I felt and the meeting with others and mixing with others. Trying to cope with all the problems that arose. I would say yes definitely that it had; particularly for the end of the day of my calling this was something; some people would say oh you are on a 'whizzer'?, you know, but they can't enter in, you see, to what we experienced, it is so personal in the end what it means to you what it meant to me.

[00.33.35] Chris: So did those two years make you a better Minister?

[00.33.38] Alan: I would say so. A very interesting thing happened when I got back after a few days. A Minister came into the hall where I took the concert and came down to see me and kept on touching me whilst I was on air, and first as he came through the door he realized that this was that 'Jonah' come back. (Combined Laughter) There you are.

[00.34.08] Chris: It has been a real pleasure Alan, thank you.

[00.34.10] Alan: It has been nice to meet you I have enjoyed it.

There have been occasions in this transcript where Alan's voice has 'trailed off' and I have had to give my best interpretation of his Scottish dialect.

????? Indicates that I have either been unable to decipher either words or names.

For details of special events please see the 'Summary Record' a copy of which I was given with the CD.