

JIM WILSON

Edited transcript of interview with Jim Wilson conducted by Chris Eldon Lee at his home at Dundonnell, Scotland, on 13th of April, 2011. Transcribed by John Zerfahs on 21st March, 2018.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Jim Wilson, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 13th of April, 2011. Jim Wilson part 1.

Wilson: Full name, James Murray Wilson. Place of birth, well it's Uswayford, a hill farm in the Cheviots, in the Borders.

[Part 1 0:00:26] Lee: And what's your date of birth?

Wilson: Oh! 15.10.1931, 15th of October, 1931.

[Part 1 0:00:34] Lee: So you're going to be 80 this year?

Wilson: I'll be 80 in October.

[Part 1 0:00:37] Lee: And what name were you known by when you were with FIDS?

Wilson: I think I was, [laughs], I think I was always just known as Jim – yes, I think so, yes, as far as I know. Occasionally I think, but it's a Navy thing, I think I was often, because I was Wilson I was often called 'Tug', because it's like 'Chalky' White, an...

[Part 1 0:01:04] Lee: 'Dusty' Miller

Wilson: Dusty, an' all that, if you were a Wilson you were 'Tug' Wilson, but I think it would normally went with just Jim.

[Part 1 0:01:13] Lee: Tell me about your education, Jim, where were you taught?

Wilson: Where was I taught? Well, Windyhaugh, well it's a little school, which is gone now, and, just a hill school, I walked to school and we walked eight miles to school, four there and four back and thought nothing of it because that's what people did.

[Part 1 0:01:45] Lee: Well, whereabouts was it, Jim?

Wilson: Just into Northumberland.

[Part 1 0:01:48] Lee: Oh it's actually in England?

Wilson: It was *just* in England.

[Part 1 0:01:50] Lee: So, are you English?

Wilson: No, Scots parents and born in Scot[land], yes, yes, no, no, but a Border family, Liddesdale, have you ever heard of Liddesdale? That's where we came from. There's the

old saying, 'Lock the door Lariston, lion o' Liddesdale, lock the door Lariston, Lowther come on. The Armstrongs are flying, the widders are crying. Castleton is burning, and Oliver is gone.' That was written by, you maybe ???[inaudible], James Hogg. [Note: The poem refers to the lawless era of the notorious Border Reivers].

[Part 1 0:02:28] Lee: Oh, right.

Wilson: The Ettrick Shepherd.

[Part 1 0:02:30] Lee: Well you became a shepherd didn't you?

Wilson: I was a shepherd, that's where, when I was at Uswayford, I was a shepherd, because we used to, well the house stood at a 1,000 feet, and we had Cheviot itself, there's the Cheviot Hills, and the main hill of the Cheviots is Cheviot, and we had sheep on Cheviot and on Bloodybush and, that's, I used to herd a hill called Yarnspath Law. It's a beautiful part of the world. It hasn't changed. I go every year, and in September I go for a month, it's like a pilgrimage every year I go doon to the Borders. I used to say to meself, 'I'm going home', because I'm a 'doon hamer'. I don't belong here, it's alright here I've been here a long time and I'm very fond of it, but it's not home. Home is where the heart is. But I'm quite content here, I've got good neighbours who've been good friends.

[Part 1 0:03:37] Lee: Here is Dundonnell isn't it...

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:03:39] Lee: ...near Ullapool?

Wilson: Yes, and I couldn't get, I suppose I looked at it now not that it matters Liz is gone I think but I couldn't get what I've got here, now, down in the Borders 'cos I can't afford it – quite simple – and I'm quite content here, but put it this way I look forward to me time going back home, and then when it gets to the month's coming to the end I start looking forward to coming back.

[Part 1 0:04:13] Lee: Tell me about your shepherding days, then. What kind of sheep did you have?

Wilson: Blackface, Scots blackface sheep, and in those days of course, cannot worth anything now, not the wool isn't worth anything much it's mostly for meat, but it was for wool and lambs and just, it was just a hill farm, and we had four shepherds, and it was a big farm.

[Part 1 0:04:35] Lee: So you were learning, you were 14 and you were learning from other shepherds?

Wilson: Yes. Well I, you pick an awful lot up if you're on a hill farm as a little lad because you're, well you're with your Dad, you just follow him around, and we used to do the clipping 'cos it's old fashioned clipping it's all done by hand then, in fact I've still got me shears doon in the shed doon there which I used to use. But it's all, I can't clip with the machine, but, no I enjoyed it was a, I think I'm glad I did because there was some very, we'll

not say characters, well yes I suppose there were characters, but not people from the sea characters, there was some very special men amongst the hills.

[Part 1 0:05:32] Lee: How do you mean?

Wilson: Well I think, well to me there was, well they were very independent, and very, they lived a lonely life in a way, so they had to be independent and look after everything themselves, and I don't know, they were a bit unique a lot of the old boys. I do remember once, my father of course, I remember 1947, which was a terrible storm, and I remember old Bob Dunn who was at Buchan's Wa's, Walls but pronounced Wa's, Buchan's Wa's, it's now a ruin, and I [re]member he came over to see me Dad, it was in the end of the storm.

[Part 1 0:06:33] Lee: Snowstorm?

Wilson: Yes, and it went on for months, and I would be, I don't know how old I was then, '47 I must have been about 16, 15/16, but even then in those days young men, young boys, were seen and not heard, 'specially when older men came in, and I'd never heard me father talk about the First World War, none of them did – occasionally – no he never did. After he died me mother told me things, that's what he had told her, but he wouldn't have told her everything. But I do remember this 'cos it's old Bob Dunn come in, an' he said to me dad 'Well, Dawson,' that was me father's Christian, Dawson 'Well I think, Dawson, that's the worst storm since 1917', and he said 'And ye kna where we war then?', me Dad said 'Aye, we were in the trenches, aye'. And I couldn't help but, well it was, you didn't hear this sort of stuff. He says 'That's afore we were taken prisoner.' 'Aye', says ???[incomprehensible]. They were sent to Poland to work in mines, and me dad had been shot, been wounded in the knee, and it got mended, but I suppose they were dressed in rags and probably not very well clothed, and not very well fed probably but I know that apparently they were coming back from work with guards round about them they just marched, and they were kicking an old tin, playing football, it hit me dad under the knee and it turned septic, and, well this came out and I, and it was a Ger[man] he was put in hospital and the leg had to come off, but it was a German doctor who was visiting them, and there was no need for the man's leg to come off, it was the Germans who saved it. And this conversation went on and I hadn't heard this before but I just listened, and another thing I didn't know, I did know it was an armistice they weren't defeated the Germans in the First World War there was a...

[Part 1 0:09:01] Lee: A truce.

Wilson: A truce, and all they did was, and I didn't know this, they just opened the prisoner of war, and they would walk home, and they walked, and it was in November, and they walked through Poland, bitter, they walked right through Poland, right through Germany, to the French lines.

[Part 1 0:09:21] Lee: And that winter of '47 in Northumberland was worse than that, was it?

Wilson: It's worse than that, but that's what he said, old Bob Dunn said that's how the conversation started. He said 'I think this is the worst storm since 1917', and that's what the conversation kicked off and he says 'And you knaw where we whar then'.

[Part 1 0:09:41] Lee: So, you were spending time as a lad then in this storm in the snow, at lambing time, I guess, were you lambing in the winter?

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:09:48] Lee: Lambing in snow?

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:09:50] Lee: So you kind of got used to snow did you?

Wilson: Well yes, we were high up and often I mean we would be clutching about in snow and you'd get onto the hills and the whole countryside's black, it was just the Cheviot Hills were white. You could look right down, and you could look right to the North Sea, and down in the North Sea it was black ground, but the Cheviot Hills were white, just a bit like these hills.

[Part 1 0:10:20] Lee: Let's move on because we're talking primarily about your Antarctic time, but before you went to the Antarctic you actually left the hills and worked in a shipyard, is that right?

Wilson: I worked in, yes, I worked in the shipyards, because they gave me father – I was going to have, 'You're going to have a trade!', 'Aye?'

[Part 1 0:10:38] Lee: Good parental advice that, isn't it?

Wilson: Yes, and well looking back on it, and I got a very good apprenticeship, and I worked at the people who invented, (you'll never have heard of Parson's?), on the Tyne it was, and good Parson's they invented the turbine, and well it was through that I got to the Antarctic, because I eventually saw a job advertised. But I had a friend who had been, and he give us the address, and I thought 'Well', what was it a tuppence ha'penny stamp? And you used to apply. Anyway I got an interview, but I only got an interview because I'd served me time as a ship's engineer, and if I'd gone as a shepherd you wouldn't have gone. So me father was right, it was better to have a ... Liz was the same, her father, she got a very good apprentice[ship] in Surrey somewhere with gardens, rose gardens, but she painted, she did go to Slade, some art college in Birmingham, but her dad said 'No, get a trade first and you can paint any bloody time you like'. Well mine was the same. I never liked the shipyards but again, I suppose, maybe it was the way I was brought up, but I used to say if your dad said 'Jump in the Tweed', you jumped in the Tweed [laughter]. Well, it's all changed now hasn't, well maybe I don't know how, you're about the same age as me you might be a bit younger but it's much the same.

[Part 1 0:12:38] Lee: I'm 58.

Wilson: 58, so you're quite a bit younger than me. But I know in those days that those fellas had to say 'Don't do as I do, do as I bloody say!'

[Part 1 0:12:53] Lee: So the shipyard was in Newcastle?

Wilson: It was down the Tyne.

[Part 1 0:12:57] Lee: Down the Tyne, and what was it that made you think about going to the Antarctic?

Wilson: Because I had a friend I used to go walking with by then.

[Part 1 0:13:06] Lee: This was Fred Oliver.

Wilson: Yes! How did you know that?

[Part 1 0:13:09] Lee: It's written down in front of me.

Wilson: Oh! Yes. Well I don't know where Fred is 'cos I haven't seen him for years, the last time I saw him was in Vancouver. Yes, Freddie I don't know where he is, he was a bit younger than me, not very much but. Yes. He'd served his time in the shipyards too, and had got to the Antarctic somehow, and I knew he was in the Antar[ctic], then he only did one trip, like two winters, and he came back and he came to where I was, to Uswayford to see me, then he told me all about it and I thought 'Well that's...' and he give us the address, and that's how I applied, and I thought 'Well faint heart isn't it? I mean just give it a go'.

[Part 1 0:13:58] Lee: Did you know anything about the Antarctic before Fred...[overtalk]

Wilson: Not a thing.

[Part 1 0:14:02] Lee: You didn't, not read about Scott and Shackleton?

Wilson: Oh I'd read bits about Scott and Shackleton, yes, and I, but I had no, actually I think I wanted to go but I must admit I didn't think I ever would. Because it didn't matter so much then, because the Fids in those days, there were very few had gone to university, I can remember whole winters I was there and there wasn't a university man there. The very first one, in fact the one I can remember was Peter Bird, and he was at Cambridge, and it's the first one I can remember, and, but I think, well I wouldn't have, nowadays, I wouldn't get a job with the British Antarctic Survey because I haven't been to university, but again in my time an awful lot of the chaps who were Fids on the bases were ex-National Servicemen. I'd been in Korea, and some'd been in Malaya, and that makes a difference. It was Korea made a difference to me and me dad. When I came back from Korea our relationship was much better, because he knew, and I knew, and he knew, and I knew, and that was it. But it wasn't 'Go and do that.' it was just 'What do you think of it?'

[Part 1 0:15:47] Lee: So he treated you as a man when you came back.

Wilson: Yes, yes, he did, that's absolutely correct. I remember him you sort of saying once it was pouring with bloody rain one day, and there was hor[ses], there was nae tractors there was horses, he said 'Come, come bring them horses in, it's far o'er wet for them to be oot, and after you've done that you can gaun away and cut thistles'. That is old time shepherding. It didn't matter, but the horses were more important than the men – they cost more than the men.

[Part 1 0:16:25] Lee: So you saw Fred, and you saw adverts, or rather you wrote to FIDS.

Wilson: I wrote to FIDS, and I, and they, well it's a long time ago, but it's beside the point I think I had to get three independent referees if that's the right word, which I got, I just asked three men that I knew, older men, fellas me father's age, and then eventually I got an interview and I went to London, and ???[inaudible].

[Part 1 0:17:07] Lee: What was the interview like, Jim?

Wilson: [Chuckles]

[Part 1 0:17:09] Lee: Rigorous?

Wilson: I think it rather was, but there was one part of it I always remember that bit, because I thought I'd blown it. I knew, I remember and they were saying about if you're sailing, you sailed in October, and I remember saying, I almost said, still the hill farm, you know, 'Oh!' I said 'Well I cannae come till we've finished the hay', and as soon as I said it I thought 'Well that's the end of that bloody job', because I thought 'Oh no, I couldn't leave it', but you couldn't, you see.

[Part 1 0:17:53] Lee: What was their response to that?

Wilson: Well they seemed to be alright, I did...

[Part 1 0:17:58] Lee: They let you finish the hay did they?

Wilson: Yes, I mean I just thought well it was a bit like having all these ships and aeroplanes waiting 'We can't go till Jim Wilson's finished the hay'. It's like a battle isn't it, like the Spaniards, there's time to beat the Spaniards *and* finish the game of bowls, just... What did they call him, ach, I knew him quite well, he was a nice chap, Sloman?

[Part 1 0:18:27] Lee: Bill Sloman.

Wilson: Bill Sloman. Well I got to know Bill quite well cos I went for quite a long time.

[Part 1 0:18:32] Lee: Tell me about Bill Sloman then, what did you make of him?

Wilson: Well I rather liked old Bill he was from Anglesey wasn't he? And, I think I mentioned this, he says 'I always remember you', I remember him telling me this, but I can't remember doing this, he says, and I used to smoke a pipe, I used to smoke a pipe right up till I was nearly 70, and I just stopped. Don't ask me why, I think, well I know why I did I stopped, they didn't have any baccy along at the little shop here, an' I came oot an thought 'Well I can go across to old Dave and get some, I thought 'No, I don't need this', and I stopped. And I've still got all me pipes, I did enjoy the pipe.

[Part 1 0:19:17] Lee: So tell me about Bill Sloman, what was good about him? Apart from the fact that he chose you?

Wilson: Well I don't know about that. I thought he was quite a shrewd cookie.

[Part 1 0:19:30] Lee: Do you think you were being sussed out in that interview by Bill?

Wilson: I think so, I'm sure of it, because I remember him saying, I can't remember this either, he says I got me pipe out during the interview, and filled it, and lit it and started smoking it, and I think, as you said, he says 'I remember that' he said, I said 'I can't', he said 'Well it showed you were quite relaxed' [laughter]. And, another thing and I do remember this, too, because the interview was over and then I had to go into another room, and there was a chap there sitting, and I didn't know him, but he, if you may remember, there was a thing called the Palestine police at one time.

[Part 1 0:20:16] Lee: Could you explain?

Wilson: Well there was a police force in Palestine.

[Part 1 0:20:21] Lee: Oh right, ok.

Wilson: And he had been up in the Pa[lestine], but he had re-applied for the Palestine police, and somebody said I had to go for a medical in, a very expensive place this must have been it was, well, Harley Street, and as I got, he said 'Well', and I didn't know, but he was an old timer I suppose, he says 'Well, you've got the job, son', I said 'How do you know that?', he says 'Because they've asked you to go for a medical, and if you've passed your medical you've got the job'. I had heather growing out between me toes, an' I was in London, and I was a hill lad, if I had a collie dog I'd a been a'right [laughter].

[Part 1 0:21:12] Lee: So how did you feel about it when you suddenly realised you were going to go to the Antarctic?

Wilson: Well I think I was, I was very, I was flattered, I suppose, because it was a wonderful thing.

[Part 1 0:21:32] Lee: What was your old dad's view, what did he make of it?

Wilson: Ha! I think he was too, but he would never show it. Me mother was.

[Part 1 0:21:43] Lee: She were proud of you, or worried?

Wilson: I think, both I would think, and me dad I think he sort of nodded, you know, 'That's a'right', and I don't know whether I had or not, but he probably thought 'Aye, I think 'e's got it in 'im', [chuckles], but maybe I haven't. But, yes, it was a very interesting time, because I never got to where I was going, not for many years, because I'd some very bad winters, and I eventually, I wanted, well I put out to go to Stonington, and of course Marguerite Bay was never opened up, and, was Fuchs on the boat, or maybe the next year 'cos he was, it was the Trans-Antarctic Expedition was on, that was in '58.

[Part 1 0:22:38] Lee: You'd heard about that haven't you?

Wilson: What?

[Part 1 0:22:40] Lee: Had you heard about that before you applied?

Wilson: Oh aye, yeah, yeah, and, what else was on, International Geophysical Year, which went on for years, and, so, well, you can either go back to 'Land of H.', what did the lad used to call it, England, 'Land of home and beauty', so I put out to go to Admiralty Bay, in the South Shetlands. Of course I wasn't the diesel mechanic when I got there, even better, because I became a dog team driver for Mr. Barton, Colin Barton who was our geologist, but he was going to go to W, so everybody never, half the people never got to where they were going.

[Part 1 0:22:30] Lee: Because of the ice conditions.

Wilson: Because the ice conditions, and Dick started to do geology in King George V Island.

[Part 1 0:22:38] Lee: Dick?

Wilson: Dick Barton.

[Part 1 0:23:40] Lee: Oh, Duncan Carse?

Wilson: What?

[Part 1 0:23:41] Lee: Duncan Carse?

Wilson: No, no I knew Duncan, yes, no, no this was a chap called Barton, he was from – can't remember the name of the town, but it was in Monmouthshire.

[Part 1 0:23:54] Lee: Oh right, so Dick was a nickname ...

Wilson: Yes, he was known as Dick Barton because he was, his surname was Barton, and, do you remember '*Dick Barton, Special Agent*'? Sandy an' Jock, because he was Barton he was Dick.

[Part 1 0:24:10] Lee: And Duncan Carse of course played Dick Barton [overtalk]

Wilson: That's it, that's correct, an' he played it.

[Part 1 0:24:14] Lee: So you were sent in fact to Admiralty Bay, is that correct?

Wilson: That's right, and then when I got there, there was a diesel mechanic there, and, but Dick wasn't supposed to be there either, and he was the geologist, but there was dogs, because some of the dogs that were going to go to Marguerite Bay they had nowhere to go either, so back at Admiralty Bay and I became a dog driver I would say.

[Part 1 0:24:43] Lee: This is 1959 wasn't it?

Wilson: '59, that's right.

[Part 1 0:24:48] Lee: Had you, you'd worked with dogs of course with the sheep hadn't you?

Wilson: I'd worked with dogs with the sheep.

[Part 1 0:24:51] Lee: And did that come in handy that previous experience?

Wilson: Very, very much. In fact we ended up we had the best dog team that there was.

[Part 1 0:24:59] Lee: They were called?

Wilson: The Shambles.

[Part 1 0:25:01] Lee: The Shambles?

Wilson: Yes, I used to call it the Shambles but, you know I could leave them, just to say to lie down.

[Part 1 0:25:07] Lee: What was their proper name?

Wilson: No I used to call them that was their proper name.

[Part 1 0:25:10] Lee: So just tell me the difference then between handling collies and handling huskies.

Wilson: I didn't find a great deal, 'cos they're much, no I didn't find a great deal. You got to know the kind of nature, and their nature is, huskies are quite, the ones that I knew, they weren't what people seem to think, ferocious beasts, they were quite, quite roll over on their back and want to be tickled more than anything else, or maybe the British are better at handling animals or dogs. I know that we had huskies at Deception, and they always used to go mad if the Chileans or the Argentinians came, but I think they smelt differently, 'cause Fids were usually [sniff, sniff] smelly, and all these other chaps had powder and squirry stuff on [laughter]. No, no, I didn't see much di[ff]erence], I worked them or tried to train them as I knew I did huskies, oh, as I did collies, I didn't know any other way. I'd come off from that height, and I'd been told, and that was what I did. But they were a good team, and...

[Part 1 0:26:38] Lee: Were they as disciplined as your collies had been on the hill farm?

Wilson: Well there was a difference that they loved to fight, and...

[Part 1 0:26:48] Lee: How do you deal with that?

Wilson: Wallop them, because you can bite them, that's what I used to do bite their ears, because they don't feel pain, I mean you could belt them with your hand but your hand gets sore. But, no, I didn't find, not a great deal of difference because I used to, not the word mind, but in those days there were hunts, great hunting country the Borders, and the fox hounds. They would let out pups to various farms to bring them up, and they were hounds, and the hounds are much the same they were, and you'd parade them and, I don't know.

[Part 1 0:27:46] Lee: What were the Shambles like on Admiralty Bay when you took them over, were they a fully formed team or would you have to work with them?

Wilson: They hadn't been worked very much, because, well there wasn't the work for them, but when Colin came he got a (when I find out the name of the chap, he was a South African, Adie? Doctor Adie?)

[Part 1 0:28:14] Lee: Ray Adie.

Wilson: Ray Adie, that's the fella, and he was in, I think Birmingham, at a university.

[Part 1 0:28:23] Lee: Correct.

Wilson: And I think the geology was done in Birmingham, and he got a programme for Barton to do, because he was going to work at Darbel Bay which is three or four hundred miles away so, all that work, that wasn't done, and...

[Part 1 0:28:44] Lee: Well I'm interested in how you worked with the dogs to get them into tip-top condition as a team.

Wilson: Well we took them out every day. You get to know them.

[Part 1 0:29:05] Lee: It came naturally did it?

Wilson: I think, yes, I would say it probably did – that sounds a bit big headed but, I had more idea than the other fellas.

[Part 1 0:29:21] Lee: Yeah you would have, wouldn't you?

Wilson: Exactly, I mean I had more idea than the other ones, but that's not to say they didn't learn, because the Brits are pretty good at, I think the Brits are, and Fids especially, I remember Johnnie Green who was I.C. troops he became a friend of mine, and Johnnie used to say 'Fids can do any bloody thing', and a lot of them could. They were an odd race really, they're mebbe changed now, but I think they have changed. I've never seen them because I haven't been to a, I've been to an Antarctic Club dinner many, many years ago, but, the only ti[me], well the chap I only see 'cos he was Lizzie's brother, and Simon was there a long time, and he used to tell me 'Well it's changed, Jim'. I saw it change, I saw the new type of Fid come in who were – we'd done all the exploration, all the work they all sort of had computers and things, and that didn't interest me one bit.

[Part 1 0:30:34] Lee: When are you talking about now the 1970's now are you?

Wilson: Well that's when I finished.

[Part 1 0:30:38] Lee: Yeah. So before you finished you saw the change then.

Wilson: I saw the change. The change was starting at the end of the '60s. I think in '58 and '59 it hadn't changed one little bit...

[Part 1 0:30:49] Lee: From Scott.

Wilson: From, exactly, or from the British Grahamland Expedition.

[Part 1 0:30:53] Lee: Tell me a bit about Johnnie Green, 'cos people mention him but I never actually met somebody who was a friend of his, so what was he like as a chap?

Wilson: Oh I liked John, he was good, he was alright. Well I got to know him, and I was there, I didn't, I mean just because I was there a few winters, and I remember saying ???[inaudible], so I said 'That's a bloody lie you've just told that chap, Johnnie', he said 'Yes, that's a lie, makes him happy', he said 'It keeps them happy, and when they find out it's a lie they're going home and they don't care!' So there was a bit of that about him.

[Part 1 0:31:44] Lee: He was a pragmatic man was he?

Wilson: I would say so, yes, but his heart was in the right place. I think he did quite a good job, he was Army. When I went first with FIDS, I think we got the least money of anybody in the Antarctic, I mean the Australians, everybody got more than us, and you got the, you could ... a doctor, it was very British the way they did it, you could be a doctor an' you got £300 a year, but you got top rate when you got to 26 an' you got £420 a year whether you wanted it or not.

[Part 1 0:32:44] Lee: What was a diesel mechanic on then?

Wilson: That was...

[Part 1 0:32:47] Lee: Same as a doctor?

Wilson: Aye, everybody was the same, everybody was the same. When you got to 26 you got 420 a year, if you'd be 40 you still got 420 a year. You came to the, because that's as high, and then, I remember they got £50 a year, and I think they got £50 if you were the Base Leader, if you wanted to, but nobody wanted to be Base Leader.

[Part 1 0:33:16] Lee: Really?

Wilson: Oh, a very few that I knew.

[Part 1 0:33:19] Lee: Why was that?

Wilson: I don't really know. I never wanted to be Base Leader, and I never was but I never wanted, I forget what they used to call them, second in command once or twice, Base Leader Under, but no. There was nothing very much to do anyway. I was quite happy, well I wasn't the diesel mechanic for, because the same thing happened me second year. I thought I'll put down to go to Horseshoe Island, again Marguerite Bay, and the same thing happened.

[Part 1 0:34:05] Lee: Couldn't get in.

Wilson: Couldn't get in.

[Part 1 0:34:07] Lee: So you did two seasons at Admiralty Bay.

Wilson: Two seasons at Admiralty Bay.

[Part 1 0:34:10] Lee: Let me just ask you, I'm sorry to bring this up but there were a couple of tragedies in your first season...

Wilson: I was there.

[Part 1 0:34:16] Lee: ...at Admiralty Bay.

Wilson: Yes, I was there.

[Part 1 0:34:17] Lee: What do you remember, this is the Alan Sharman [overtalk].

Wilson: Alan Sharman. Well I hadn't been there very long, 'cos Alan's was St. George's day I think, April the 26th or the 27th.

[Part 1 0:34:29] Lee: 23rd.

Wilson: 23rd, and I'd been there literally about a week. I did know him, but not very well.

[Part 1 0:34:39] Lee: You knew him before you got there.

Wilson: Oh I didn't know him at all.

[Part 1 0:34:42] Lee: So you met him for a week basically.

Wilson: Yes, yes. I remember the, what we called an accident. I remember Tinks much more because I was involved in it. Tinker Bell.

[Part 1 0:34:55] Lee: Talk about Alan first of all, 'cos I mean you're new, you're fresh in the Antarctic and within a week of your arriving one of your colleagues had been killed, hadn't he?

Wilson: That's right.

[Part 1 0:35:04] Lee: That must have been...

Wilson: It was an awful thing and it affected a lot of people, and certainly the second death affected people even more. In fact one or two people didn't want to go out. I can't say I was like that.

[Part 1 0:35:25] Lee: Tell me about Dennis Bell then, what happened to him?

Wilson: Well, he fell down a crevasse, and he did one or two things he should never have done. He had no skis on and he walked in front of his team up a glacier. Anyway Jeff was with him, and he got him...

[Part 1 0:35:53] Lee: Jeff?

Wilson: I'm trying to remember his surname.

[Part 1 0:35:55] Lee: Right, doesn't matter. We can look it up, don't worry.

Wilson: Yeah, Jeff – Stokes? I think it was Jeff Stokes. I've got some pictures of actually of us burying one of them, probably be Alan Sharman. There's four cairns but there's only two bodies, because Tink's is still there, because he dropped the rope but he came up, but again he it was his own fault, he didn't have a proper, he only had a dog's collar, which he had, and

he got jammed, and of course they were using the dogs, and the dogs just pulled and they broke the collar and down again he went and that...

[Part 1 0:36:38] Lee: He'd tied the rope to his belt, is that correct?

Wilson: That's right, that's right and, and the belt was a dog's collar but, and of course he went down again that was the finish of him, and er – I remember it quite well.

[Part 1 0:36:42] Lee: Where were you at the time?

Wilson: Well we were going out up to the glacier he was on to help, 'cos it was the middle of winter, it was, I think it was in July.

[Part 1 0:37:10] Lee: So you were on base when it happened.

Wilson: Aye.

[Part 1 0:37:11] Lee: And you were called out.

Wilson: Yes, that's right. I think Jeff called us out, 'cos that's how we knew about it. Alan Sharman's, you might have met with Russ Thompson.

[Part 1 0:37:24] Lee: Russell Thompson, yeah.

Wilson: That was, he went for a walk on a Sunday, an' he had, it was Fluffy, one of the bitches, and they came over the, there's a mountain called the Flagstaff, and there's a little glacier, it's nearly gone now 'cos I've seen pictures and you can hardly see it. Anyway Fluffy came and knocked their feet away and start to slide down this small slope, and there was a stone pointing up through this, and Russ hit it with his hip and he came into the base, limping, and the other lad hit it on the back of his head, and that was the end of it. It took the back of his head like but both were just, they went down this slope together, and well it was Sunday afternoon. You could see the base from where they, well we went up and got him an' that was that an', made a coffin an' buried him, and, he's not down very far.

[Part 1 0:38:40] Lee: So there were two deaths in your first year, did you feel as though perhaps you're making a mistake at this point, or was it just something you took in your stride?

Wilson: This sounds very big-headed, but I think that now, well I've just thought now when you said, but I probably thought exactly the same, 'You've been through worse than this, Jim'. I mean, the Battle of the River P... But no, it was bad, but it wasn't Korea. I think that, well that really, that would be, I'm not saying that that was my thought, but that would be my thought now – it probably was then, I think I would say yes 'You've been through worse than this, lad'.

[Part 1 0:39:33] Lee: But the atmosphere on the base must have been very affected?

Wilson: It was. It was very sad. There was one nice chap and he was...I forget, it's a long time ago. But I remember, but he was an ex-navy lad, I see his name up occasionally, and he

was alright, but it happened again with me when I went to Macquarie, we weren't there long and another one went down, and I thought 'It's not fun anymore'.

[Part 1 0:40:14] Lee: That was the Australian base was it?

Wilson: Yes

[Part 1 0:40:16] Lee: We'll come to that later on.

Wilson: No, no. I didn't have any, I don't, there wasn't any others.

[Part 1 0:40:24] Lee: Again, it was a crevasse accident was it – at Macquarie?

Wilson: No, he was going up to a nest, a sooty albatross an' pulled a piece of tussock grass which came away an', of course it was like this...

[Part 1 0:40:40] Lee: Vertical.

Wilson: Yes, and down he went, an' I thought 'Och no, not again'. He was just a young lad.

[Part 1 0:40:50] Lee: Did these accidents change the way you went about what you did in the Antarctic, were you more careful after the ...

Wilson: I was, but I think, yes, but I think, well if you know the expression, it's a Scots expression, and if somebody doesn't know, 'Ca' canny', an' I went ca' canny.

[Part 1 0:41:12] Lee: Which means?

Wilson: Take it easy, watch what you're...

[Part 1 0:41:17] Lee: Watch your step.

Wilson: Watch your step, yeah. Ca' canny. Well that's what it means, it means just watch – ca' canny.

[Part 1 0:41:32] Lee: So what sort of work were you doing at Admiralty Bay, you weren't being the diesel mechanic you...

Wilson: No, I just looked after the dogs.

[Part 1 0:41:38] Lee: You were in charge of the dogs.

Wilson: I was in charge of the dogs, an' I used to help Evan, (was it Evan, Watson?), he was from Argyll, he was a diesel mechanic, but I used to help him with any biggish jobs in the diesel shed. No, he was a diesel mechanic and he went there as a diesel mechanic an' I didn't think it was my place to go in unless he asked to be, that was his posting. I would have felt the same if I had got to Stonington and I was a diesel mechanic, I don't want anybody else to come in to the bloody diesel, I'm here to do that. But I got on alright, his position was he was going to Admiralty Bay as diesel mechanic, and he was there.

[Part 1 0:42:34] Lee: So how far did you get with the dogs then, on your sledging trips?

Wilson: All over King George Island, and, we did it all.

[Part 1 0:42:45] Lee: And were these working trips or were they..

Wilson: Oh yeah, always, yes always.

[Part 1 0:42:49] Lee: You were taking scientists with you?

Wilson: No, just myself and Colin, just the two of us, an' he was doing geology, he was doing the geology work. And then I remember we were away quite a long time because we couldn't get back. I remember coming back to get to Admiralty Bay, and what should have been came over Tern Nunatak, and what should have been all lovely sea-ice was black water, and it's not supposed to go out in August. An' of course we didn't have any, we only went away for a few weeks, so we were away for nearly six months by the time we got back, because we went back over the top to Cape, I think it was Cape Lions Rump they called it. We put ourselves immediately on half rations and the dogs on half rations, and we couldn't get home we couldn't get back, contacted base and kept that to the minimum because the batteries we had were the old '68' sets they were getting flat, we couldn't charge them up, and we just waited, we both knew that at the Cape Lions Rump we'll wait till the penguins and the seals come back. And that's all we did. We just sat and waited till the penguins and seals...

[Part 1 0:44:27] Lee: Because they were a source of food you mean?

Wilson: They were food, an' we would feed the dogs on them an' we could eat them. But by then we couldn't contact the ship because it was August, I think it was the *Shackleton* was in Southampton, the other side of the bloody world, had no intention of leaving for another two months. So that was that and we just waited there twiddling our thumbs.

[Part 1 0:44:52] Lee: So you had a tent I presume?

Wilson: Oh we had a tent, yes, we had a tent and we had plenty to eat in the end, and we still had paraffin, and I always remember that the dear old *Shack* came in on Christmas Eve, and picked us all up, and we got on board and ships as you probably know always have lovely hot water, an' we were – another Scots expression – we were *mingin'*, you know, were stinkin'. I remember getting on board in this shower.

[Part 1 0:45:24] Lee: So you were stuck. You were laid up for six months did you say?

Wilson: Well by the time we, yes, it was December, we left in July, which is quite a long time, and they were very good to us though, we got a good Christmas dinner, and they brought us round to base, and we had a very nice Christmas.

[Part 1 0:45:47] Lee: How did you pass the time in your isolation?

Wilson: Well, there's conversation sounds strange but conversation, and we always used to take, well it's Monopoly, I used to call it 'Monotony', and play 'Monotony', and I used to let Dick win, and we had a few books, not many. I do remember though when we packed up he

was lying on a *Readers' Digest* I think, that I'd never read, but it got underneath his sleeping bag, and he just laying on it, and I found that, 'Ah, bastard! That's a bloody book I've never read!' [laughter]. 'I didn't know I had it!'

[Part 1 0:46:41] Lee: I'm interested in the psychology of that situation though because it could have really deteriorated couldn't it. You're stuck for so long, with no prospect of getting home, running out of food, running out of paraffin, running out of radio...

Wilson: Everything.

[Part 1 0:46:53] Lee: Two blokes.

Wilson: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:46:56] Lee: You were never at each other's throats?

Wilson: No. No. No. No. In fact, no, in fact I stopped with him, he was a friend, and he must have heard I was going to Australia, and I stopped with him for three weeks when I first went, before I, because I got a tried, well the Australians were Australians and you could only get a job with ANARE by going to bloody Australia. So I thought 'Well'.

[Part 1 0:47:29] Lee: So Barton was in Australia was he?

Wilson: He, yes, he was married then, he married I think the secretary of Ad – Eadie?

[Part 1 0:47:38] Lee: Adie.

Wilson: Adie, she was Adie's secretary, and they had a family.

[Part 1 0:47:45] Lee: Do you remember her name?

Wilson: No I can't.

[Part 1 0:47:46] Lee: No, alright.

Wilson: But I know where they lived in Yallourn, and it was in Victoria. But I contacted him and I told him what I was doing, and, because we were, well I suppose, intimate buddies in the end, and he said 'Well if you come, come and stop with us', and it was in Yallourn, which is not that far away from Melbourne, maybe a hundred miles, that's not far in Australia, and it's a mining town. He was a geologist for, he got a very good job in the end, but he was a geologist for Victoria, and Victoria's a small state but it's still about the size of Britain. And he eventually got a very good job, an' he was one of the head geologists for Australia. And so I went out and I stopped with him, you could get a train up to Melbourne, I got an interview with the Australians, that was, I stopped with Colin for quite a, maybe I said three weeks it might have been more than three weeks, because I did the interview, and I think I had more or less got the, they were very quick in telling me, but ???[incomprehensible], I think I got there in April, well I sailed out, well that was the way I wanted to go, I don't think there was many flying, but anyway it doesn't matter, but I think I left in March and got to Aussie in April.

[Part 1 0:49:27] Lee: In which year?

Wilson: '70?

[Part 1 0:49:32] Lee: And Colin, what was Colin's second name again?

Wilson: Barton.

[Part 1 0:49:35] Lee: Colin Barton, alright.

Wilson: Trying to remember his - Rogerstone, was the name of the, he were a farmer's son, Rogerstone, his father was a, his brother was an ex, but he was wartime, he was a colonel, a wartime colonel.

[Part 1 0:49:57] Lee: So who was Rogerstone?

Wilson: Rogerstone was a little village he lived in.

[Part 1 0:50:00] Lee: Oh...

Wilson: In Monmouthshire.

[Part 1 0:50:01] Lee: Ok.

Wilson: I said Monmouthshire, but I couldn't remember the name, it's on the Usk, a river called the Usk. I think I was there once, it's quite nice.

[Part 1 0:50:11] Lee: But let's just go back a bit, Jim, 'cos we're kind o' leaping ahead here rather. So you did two winters at Admiralty Bay.

Wilson: Two winters at Admiralty Bay.

[Part 1 0:50:19] Lee: And apart from the tragedies were they happy years?

Wilson: Yes they were, yes they were. Probably me second one better than the first.

[Part 1 0:50:28] Lee: Because?

Wilson: I think I liked the, I liked the Base Commander of the second year better than I liked the one of the first year. But that was just, it was Mike Kershaw.

[Part 1 0:50:47] Lee: This is 1960.

Wilson: Yeah, 1960 I think, well he came from, he was a Lancashire lad.

[Part 1 0:50:56] Lee: Well you were closing the base down weren't you?

Wilson: We closed it down, that's right, we closed it down.

[Part 1 0:51:00] Lee: Why was that?

Wilson: Because all the work was done, it was abandoned and I believe it's been all cleared up altogether, so I've been told, there's no hut there now. I don't know about the old hut is still there.

[Part 1 0:51:15] Lee: What do you remember about that closing down period?

Wilson: Nothing very much. I remember painting all the windows and putting boards up and knocking bits of wood over to save the windows getting broken, and ...

[Part 1 0:51:30] Lee: You were painting the windows?

Wilson: Well, yeah, we used to paint the windows, not the windows the frames.

[Part 1 0:51:36] Lee: The frames.

Wilson: Then we used to creosote it every year. The Brits, we used to look after the huts quite a lot, and, but it becomes a, when we got picked up by the Royal Navy, it was over very quick. Some helicopters came in and the dogs went away, we went away and it was all over.

[Part 1 0:51:59] Lee: Where did the dogs go?

Wilson: Hope Bay.

[Part 1 0:52:01] Lee: The Shambles went to Hope Bay?

Wilson: Hope Bay.

[Part 1 0:52:03] Lee: All of them?

Wilson: All of them.

[Part 1 0:52:04] Lee: There was no culling?

Wilson: No, no no. Oh no, no. Might have been after but not to my, no.

[Part 1 0:52:13] Lee: And you came home, didn't you?

Wilson: I came home.

[Part 1 0:52:16] Lee: Is that what you wanted to do?

Wilson: Well I was finished, end of tale, and I thought 'Well...'

[Part 1 0:52:23] Lee: It wasn't.

Wilson: Well I still wanted to go to Marguerite Bay [Laughter]. I came back and, I think I was seeing Johnnie Green on the boat coming back, and he said 'Look', he said, 'I'm going to go to bloody Stonington'. I said, 'Can I c[ome]?', 'Yes' he said, 'You can put in for a ... and see', and so I got to Stonington.

[Part 1 0:52:46] Lee: So you were back for a year, for a season.

Wilson: I was back, I got back in May...

[Part 1 0:52:51] Lee: 19...

Wilson: May till October.

[Part 1 0:52:54] Lee: Right, '61 that would be.

Wilson: Yes, well I can't, I don't, yes,

[Part 1 0:52:58] Lee: And what did you do within those months?

Wilson: Came up here.

[Part 1 0:53:03] Lee: So you didn't have a job at all?

Wilson: Oh no.

[Part 1 0:53:05] Lee: Right.

Wilson: Oh no, no. I hadn't a job and I had no intention of having a job.

[Part 1 0:53:11] Lee: Because you were going south again?

Wilson: I was going south again. That was probably the summer I met the bold Valerie – I bet it was later – doesn't matter but that's, an' I went, no I don't think I did meet Val that time, because I did the 18 months at Stonington an' I came home again, an' I thought 'I wouldn't mind going to Deception', and I think that was in '63, that's when I met Val.

[Part 1 0:53:43] Lee: Val is?

Wilson: The lady that ended up by being the headmistress.

[Part 1 0:53:47] Lee: Oh...

Wilson: The friend of...

[Part 1 0:53:48] Lee: The school in Devon.

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:53:50] Lee: Ok. Let's just talk about the Stonington season then if we may, 'cos you did get there, and you were there for the winter of '62.

Wilson: Well I can't remember the years.

[Part 1 0:54:00] Lee: I'm pretty sure that's correct.

Wilson: I know who was there, because he was a very good friend to me, it was Ben Hodges, and John Cunningham.

[Part 1 0:54:10] Lee: And Willie Gilchrist.

Wilson: And Willie Gilchrist, yes.

[Part 1 0:54:13] Lee: The radio man.

Wilson: The radio man.

[Part 1 0:54:15] Lee: Tell me about them then, tell me about Ben Hodges. 'Cos he was a big dog man as well wasn't he?

Wilson: He was a big doggie man. Well Ben was just Ben. I remember he came out to build a hangar at Deception and then it went all – no, the hangar was going to be built at Stonington, that's right, and then they couldn't get into Stonington then, it was taken off the ship in Port Stanley an', put in a big heap of metal and then we came back and just decided to build it at Deception, and Ben came because he was a steeplejack, and, but he stopped for years. His sister, 'cos he was telling me I remember and she said 'When are you coming home, Ben!' [laughs]. He worked in the Falklands, helped to build at, Goose Green I think, and a school, a big school at Goose Green, and, he'd been to see me here.

[Part 1 0:55:35] Lee: As in here in...?

Wilson: Aye.

[Part 1 0:55:37] Lee: ...Dundonnell?

Wilson: Yes, yeah. And he's seen Lizzie's mam, and he's been up to the gardener who worked there, ???[incomprehensible] used to come up.

[Part 1 0:55:47] Lee: So there was Ben Hodges at Stonington in that year that you were there, and who was the other chap you mentioned?

Wilson: John Cunningham – he was, apparently well he was at that time one of the best ice climbers Britain's ever produced, he was a ex-Creigh Dhu man, great friend of Hamish MacInnes. Well I knew John quite well, and, he died, well he, it was very typical of him, he got a job with a school somewhere, it was a girls' school but it was in Anglesey, and one of the girls fell off, and of course it was typical of the man, he went in and he couldn't swim, and he drowned.

[Part 1 0:56:38] Lee: He went into the sea to rescue a girl?

Wilson: Yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:56:41] Lee: A schoolgirl.

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:56:4] Lee: And drowned.¹

Wilson: Yes. I don't know when, it doesn't seem long ago but it's, time passes. There's an old house at home, and there's a Frenchman's roll that's what hangs above it, but it's just got 'Mercy Beaucoup', 'cos I think their people went there during the Terror, in France, and then it's in English, 'Time passes but the memory remains'.

[Part 1 0:57:17] Lee: When you were at Stonington were you back to your old trade of being a diesel mechanic?

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:57:23] Lee: Tell me about the sort of work you were doing there, Jim.

Wilson: Well I looked after the engines, and I also did the met, 'cos we didn't have any met men. And I did the met.

[Part 1 0:57:37] Lee: Had you been trained?

Wilson: Oh no [laughter]. FIDS never train anybody, no, no, no. It was a field station and that's how I spent a lot of the time. Willie was the wireless operator and I was a diesel mechanic and of course everybody else was sledging all over the place and we were just left on base to our two selves.

[Part 1 0:58:07] Lee: How did you feel about that?

Wilson: I quite enjoyed it.

[Part 1 0:58:09] Lee: You didn't mind missing out on the sledging?

Wilson: Not really, well I did do some sledging but I didn't go away on any of the trips, because my job there was, I was the diesel mechanic, and I was doing the met. (I did the elephant seals at Macquarie, and giant petrels. I was sort of like a biologist or a bird man).

[Part 1 0:58:42] Lee: Did you get out and about on your own two feet much at Stonington?

Wilson: All the time. I was away every day for a walk, morning and evening, and Willie was just waiting for to do traffic and I just went for walks, as I still do. I've been for a walk this morning, I would miss me walks. I don't go as far or as fast as I used to but I still go. But I remember going, I used to love, I remember Stonington particularly when the sun was

¹ Jim's version of events is not quite correct. In 1980 John Cunningham had taken a group of mature students to climb sea cliffs at South Stack in Anglesey. Soon the weather deteriorated and some of the students ended up in the sea. John Cunningham was on shore being helped by another student to haul in one of the men, when a large wave washed them both into the sea. The helping student made it back to shore, but John was swept further out, couldn't swim, and drowned. In spite of three days searching by the RAF and Holyhead Coastguard Cunningham's body was never found. [*Craigh Dhu Climber: The life and times of John Cunningham*, Jeff Connor]

coming back, looking north to Adelaide, to the mountains of Adelaide, 'cos it was dark at Stonington, I mean dark, an' it wasn't very far south but it was dark for ten weeks, not like Admiralty Bay, it was black. But I mind the sun started to come back and you got all these beautiful colours of greens and purples, but the sun wasn't up and then comes the great day when the sun is above the mountains away to the north, and, yeah. And I used to like to sit in the of course it's the same as here, especially in this little spot where we're sit[ting], we don't see the sun for three months of the year it goes behind the mountain there, it only came back in February, and it goes in November, at the beginning of November. You can always get into it by going along the road, but if you happen to just live here, an' you don't have any transport, it's black, it's dark, but it's not like Stonington it's not, you don't need a torch to go about, but, no I liked Stonington. You've got the birds and you had all the wild life.

[Part 1 1:00:56] Lee: Did you have any rum?

Wilson: Rum?

[Part 1 1:00:57] Lee: Yeah.

Wilson: Oh yes we had plenty rum.

[Part 1 1:01:00] Lee: There's a story about some missing rum, or hidden.

Wilson: Och, oh well I, yes, well there was some put to one side. I think there was, well I did, because the place was closed. There was 37 gallons of it, in the hens [phonetic], we used to call them the grey hens, we used to get the Navy came from Greenwich, in them old fashioned Navy, well it was a gallon thing. Weave paper, stuff round about it, and, yes there was plenty, there was rum.

[Part 1 1:01:39] Lee: There was a story though about these 37 jars of rum going missing or being hidden or something, is that correct?

Wilson: Well I hid some, 'cos ...

[Part 1 1:01:50] Lee: Who were you hiding it from?

Wilson: Well, anybody that was going to take it away.

[Part 1 1:01:57] Lee: This was when you were closing the base?

Wilson: Yes, we were closing the base.

[Part 1 1:01:59] Lee: You hid the rum to stop anybody from pilfering it?

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 1 1:02:03] Lee: Is it still there?

Wilson: As far as I know it is, I didn't take any.

[Part 1 1:02:07] Lee: Where did you hide it?

Wilson: Ah, well.

[Part 1 1:02:09] Lee: You're not telling.

Wilson: Not telling. [Laughter]. 'Cos I might go some day. I'm sure somebody knows though, 'cos there was more than me knew where it was, but none of it was ever taken as far as I know. But it was part of the ration, it was likely like the Royal Navy, it was tot time. I enjoyed it, and I just think you get used to it. I know when you came back, I found it, well I was alright once I got home, but if I was in the cities I could never judge the speed of things, getting across a road, cars, I had to wait till there was a big gap, because the fastest thing I'd seen for about two year was a bloody husky dog, but I mean if you came out of Southampton station or something like that, or Edinburgh, and onto Princes Street, it was a bit odd, because you had to get a, because I'd know, because before I went, I could nip across the road just boom, boom, boom, and I was across, but I couldn't, I had to wait till there was a bloody big gap, and I knew I was safe to get across.

[Part 1 1:03:50] Lee: Let's take a pause, Jim, and then we'll come back and talk about your time at Deception Island.

Wilson: Oh well.

[Part 1 1:03:55] Lee: Ok?

PART 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Jim Wilson recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 13th of April, 2011. Jim Wilson, part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:10] Lee: You came home after your '62 season at Stonington.

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 2 0:00:15] Lee: Did you imagine that was it?

Wilson: No, I don't think so. I thought I'd like to go to Deception.

[Part 2 0:00:27] Lee: So what happened, did you have to re-apply, or...?

Wilson: Oh I replied an' re-applied and...

[Part 2 0:00:31] Lee: Externally, or did you ask somebody?

Wilson: I probably asked somebody, and I thought 'Well Deception seems a good, be an interesting place, and I went to Deception, an' I was diesel mechanic, and that was that, really. But there you are you see, I didn't think I'd, I suppose in many ways I didn't think any of it was terribly special. I loved the journ[ey], I loved the travelling out, and I like meeting the different people, an' I suppose, though I don't know if I thought this, it was

better than the shipyards. But a lot of fellas that came they just did two winters and that was it. But there were people like Ben and meself and Jim Shirtcliffe that were permanent Fids.

[Part 2 0:01:45] Lee: Deception of course was the air base at that time wasn't it? Or, there were planes there.

Wilson: Yes, it had just kicked off.

[Part 2 0:01:52] Lee: The air unit was based at Deception.

Wilson: That's right.

[Part 2 0:01:54] Lee: So tell me about the planes you saw coming in and out.

Wilson: Well there were, I think they kicked off was Otters I think, and Beavers?, Beavers too, well I put in two, Lister, no they weren't Listers, two Enfield diesels into the hangar, mainly just to provide electricity for heating, 'cos there was no fires and things in it, and it didn't have a generator in it or you had to keep, 'cos they worked in the hangars all winter, the fitters, servicing the aircraft. I used to put them in, under direction, and I used to pull them out when they went away to fly. Chaps used to shunt ???[incomprehensible] were tied to a Fergie 35², but they just fitted the doors, 'cos you haven't got to touch an aeroplane's wings very much, and it's had it, hasn't it? And if you're pushing it in backwards and it catches as it goes 'Oo..', and especially at the beginning of the flying season when you're pulling them out, and they haven't really flown yet. But it never happened.

[Part 2 0:03:21] Lee: So what were you keeping warm, you're keeping the men warm or the planes warm?

Wilson: The men and the spares, 'cos they had, well tens of thousand pounds of worth of spares, we had nowhere to put them, not in the hut, and that was what that was put there, and lights of course, 'cos they worked there, well that's what they did all, 'cos the pilots, they didn't do anything, in the winter.

[Part 2 0:03:53] Lee: So all winter was spent servicing the planes for the next season?

Wilson: Yes. I mean I think it must have been terribly boring for some of the pilots, because if they weren't interested in anything else, that was what they were there for because prior to that they didn't winter, they went away back, but when they were wintering there, I think some of the pilots used to get a bit bored with it. I may be wrong, but I think they were a bit cheesed off with it in the end.

[Part 2 0:04:32] Lee: Did they, the planes were they using wheels or skis or floats, or what?

Wilson: Wheels and skis,

² A type of Ferguson tractor.

[Part 2 0:04:42] Lee: No floats, there weren't any ...

Wilson: The little the Beaver had floats on it, that's a de Havilland Beaver which is the smallest. There's the Otter, it's as the Beaver is the smallest aircraft and then you came up to Otters. But they didn't have that very long because they broke a wing on that, it got bumped against, I think it was on the *Kista Dan* and it bumped the *Biscoe*, and that was the end of that.

[Part 2 0:05:13] Lee: Oh the plane was damaged whilst it was still at sea?

Wilson: Yes that is right. I think that was at Argentine Islands, and they give it to Antonius Quintus to destroy, he came from Tyrone, Tony Quinn, gave him a big fire axe and said 'Get shot of that!'

[Part 2 0:05:34] Lee: He trashed the plane did he?

Wilson: No, he just, I think the ships graunched the plane, but he just sank it.

[Part 2 0:05:44] Lee: Sank the plane?

Wilson: Yes, with a big axe and he was a big strong lad and just went and chopped bits off it.

[Part 2 0:05:51] Lee: What was the reason for sinking the plane rather than rescuing it?

Wilson: I don't know, they said 'Get shot of it, no see, not there!'³

[Part 2 0:06:06] Lee: There were other bases from other nations on Deception at that time I would imagine, did you have much contact with the South Americans?

Wilson: Yes, it was an Argentine base was the nearest to us, and right opposite was, not the Argen[tine] the Chilean base was nearest to us, and the Argentine base we used to go, well we used to go, not a lot but occasionally, but always used to go to the Chilean base for their Independence, *Dios [sic] Independencia*, I think that was in September, and then I think the Argie Independence Day, I think that was probably about June or July something like that. Was it Artigas, no Artigas is Uruguay, General Belgrano, no that was...

[Part 2 0:06:57] Lee: That was Argentina.

Wilson: That was Argentina. That was Argentine, but they named the cruiser was named after Belgrano wasn't it?

[Part 2 0:07:05] Lee: There was a base called The Belgrano [overtalk]

³ According to Fuchs in *'Of Ice and Men'* the plane was in fact salvaged and repaired back at Deception. However six months later, landing on sea ice at Argentine Islands a ski went through a weak patch of ice. Despite removing what they could to reduce the weight, the aircraft could not be pulled out, and was lost. [Fuchs: *Of Ice and Men*, p260].

Wilson: Was there a base called, well...

[Part 2 0:07:08] Lee: It was used more than once, that was it.

Wilson: Yes, that was it, and the Argentines were, I think the Chileans were Air Force, and I think the Argentinians were, I'll go and say Navy, but they could have been Army. But they were very, well they were alright, there was never any problems with them at all.

[Part 2 0:07:36] Lee: Deception was a volcano of course.

Wilson: That's right.

[Part 2 0:07:39] Lee: Were you aware of that?

Wilson: Oh yes.

[Part 2 0:07:41] Lee: Did you feel anything, any vibrations?

Wilson: Oh yeah, well I was there when it blew up.

[Part 2 0:07:45] Lee: Oh you were?!

Wilson: Yeah. That's how I got the job with the Commonwealth Institute. Years later I met Valerie I hadn't seen for many years and she had her children up in the hotel and I was looking round the bar 'Christ, there's Val'. Anyway...

[Part 2 0:08:04] Lee: What's your memory of the eruption that you witnessed?

Wilson: Frightening.

[Part 2 0:08:11] Lee: Did it come suddenly, or was there...

Wilson: Oh no, it came, it was there when we went, I mean it was still the sea was fumeroles and it was hot, and I think it was still semi-active. It had never really, it gave one little rumble, and then they got geologists, no well, but vulcanologists came and had a look at it from Cambridge, (it doesn't matter whether it was Cambridge or Oxford), and they said 'Oh no, it's had its little pop, won't do that for another 50 years', but it did, it did it next year, and blew a big hole, and the base was destroyed and ...

[Part 2 0:09:00] Lee: You were there the year before that.

Wilson: We were there the year before that.

[Part 2 0:09:02] Lee: So you did witness one eruption?

Wilson: Yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:09:04] Lee: Tell me about that, Jim, paint me a little picture – of what happened.

Wilson: Well it just starts to rumble and grumble, and the hut was shaking, and, well you don't know what's going to happen, but it just quiet then it quietly stopped, at which I think

everybody was very, very pleased. It had blown, I think, in the 1930's, and the ships lost all their paint 'cos it was, the whaling factory was going, I mean I just heard this, but I think the sea boiled, and, 'cos we were living in the whaling hut, which had been built for the whalers, and that was destroyed. But it was going to be changed anyway, and nothing ever happened they started building a new hut and then the second eruption came and destroyed the building, it destroyed the thing was, Deception was abandoned, and people have been back, well Valerie has because she sent me pictures of it and sent me bits and pieces. I've never been back, I don't think I've any great wish to go – seems strange. I've always been going to go back to Australia. I was very fond of Australia, but I was in the outback, I was in the, an' it suits me. I mean I wouldn't want to go to Australia and live in Sydney. I was in South Australia most of the time, and I liked, and I liked Antarctica, I liked the Falklands.

[Part 2 0:11:08] Lee: Well you liked it so much that when you left Deception at the end of your fourth season, that wasn't the end of that either was it, 'cos you kept going back.

Wilson: That's right.

[Part 2 0:11:18] Lee: So how did that come about, why did you keep going back and doing summer periods down there?

Wilson: I found it was very, that I enjoyed. It was a ...

[Part 2 0:11:30] Lee: Had they asked you or did you ask them?

Wilson: Oh I can't remember that, who I asked, I was probably asked I would think.

[Part 2 0:11:37] Lee: You think they invited you to go back?

Wilson: Yes, and it was a good little earner, and you were home, you were down in the Antarctic in the Southern summer, and you came back to the Northern summer.

[Part 2 0:11:56] Lee: What sort of work were you doing on these summer expeditions, Jim?

Wilson: Well, the very first job I think I did was build, oh I can't remember which way it was, I certainly don't know which where it w..., but one of those, that's at Signy, an' that's one of the jetties I built.

[Part 2 0:12:15] Lee: These are photographs, yeah?

Wilson: Yes, and I know I did the non-magnetic hut at Argentine Islands, I built that. That was very interesting because all the, even the cement was non-magnetic, and non-magnetic bricks, I built that an' it's still there as far as I know. Then I did a jetty, with a gang, we did a jetty, I think it took us two years to finish this one, and we went to they wanted a jetty at Adelaide, and we did a jetty there and I think that took nearly two, two summers. And then I did a jetty, and, I think the jetty and the magnetometer hut, that must be when I met Alan Wearden, that was at Argentine Islands.

[Part 2 0:12:59] Lee: There was a jetty at Deception – is that right?

Wilson: I think, yes we did the jetty at Deception too.

[Part 2 0:13:05] Lee: Tell me about the magnetometer hut, how do you actually avoid any magnetism in the building itself, is there a technique?

Wilson: Well, as far as I know I just followed my instructions.

[Part 2 0:13:19] Lee: Oh, right, ok.

Wilson: I mean I'm not a, I built it as I was told to build it and everything was, the plinth had a thing you put, it had to be dead level and I was a bit concerned about that, because I hadn't done much brickwork and things, but that was when I think I first met Alan Smith, I think he was in Argentine Islands.

[Part 2 0:13:48] Lee: How did you take to the jetty work, because you became quite expert at building jetties.

Wilson: I quite enjoyed it, yes I did. I think I found out that, well with one of the bases, I don't know which one, had the same tides as Singapore, because I had tide tables.

[Part 2 0:14:10] Lee: You had to work out how high...

Wilson: Well you couldn't – yes.

[Part 2 0:14:12] Lee: How high to build it.

Wilson: Yes, but that'll not be correct but it was something very like that, was it Deception and Hong Kong had the same tides, but it probably wasn't that but it was something like that, 'cos I had a tide table book, and then again you had to, you worked odd hours, at low tide to get it done, because you can't do it at high tide. No, it was FIDS powers-that-be that wanted the jetties built, and by then I got, I knew Sloman, and I knew Derek, was it [lengthy exchange to arrive at surname] Gipps, and I think they asked me, I don't think I asked them because I, well to be honest I think, I suppose, I was out of my depth. But I had done work on engines and that but I'd never done that sort of work, but...

[Part 2 0:15:15] Lee: What was the tactics you used for building a jetty then, was it high technology or was it very basic technology?

Wilson: It was pretty basic but it was built with strength [laughter]. No, I mean it was not the men, I suppose they were fairly fit, but it was a lot of heavy concrete, and big, yes, like, built for strength.

[Part 2 0:15:43] Lee: With the tide coming in twice a day, how do you harden the concrete, what was the tactic for that?

Wilson: We had, (what did they call it?)

[Part 2 0:15:51] Lee: Fondu is it?

Wilson: I was going to say cement fondu, we used to use. That's right, cement fondu, hundreds, hundreds of tins of it. It's French, isn't it?

[Part 2 0:16:03] Lee: The word is French, yeah.

Wilson: Yeah. It was cement fondu.

[Part 2 0:16:05] Lee: So the jetties were only useable at high tide, by boats say, later, when you [overtalk]?

Wilson: When they were finished, yes, more or less, or semi-high tide, but because we didn't, I mean I wanted a, I mean I never got it because, I've forgotten this, but I remember asking Derek 'We'll need a coffer dam, so we can work and build it and keep the sea out', but, no.

[Part 2 0:16:35] Lee: Money.

Wilson: Money. Yeah. Like De Gaulle, 'Non!' [Laughter]. As long as he was there we'd never be in the Common Market, and I thought 'Well, long as old De Gaulle's there we'll be alright', 'cos all 'e used to say about Britain, 'Non!'

[Part 2 0:16:54] Lee: You did one more season, one more summer season down at Argentine Island I believe.

Wilson: That's right, that was when ...

[Part 2 0:17:00] Lee: When you were building the sonde store jetty.

Wilson: That's right, I remember that, yeah.

[Part 2 0:17:04] Lee: But the difference this time was that before you went you actually had to go to the Cambridge conference.

Wilson: The only one I was ever at I think.

[Part 2 0:17:11] Lee: What did you make of all that 'cos you knew it all didn't you?

Wilson: Yes, well I didn't think I knew it all by any means, but ...

[Part 2 0:17:21] Lee: I didn't mean that rudely, I believe you had plenty of experience.

Wilson: Yes. I thought it was rather interesting, because the young gentlemen weren't back, but they were coming back and we were in some of their rooms an' their bok [phonetic] an' it was a, well for me I mean being going to Windyhough School, the dons were back and sat at the high table, and they did themselves very well. Their port was very good, we used to pass the port and things like that, and I enjoyed me time, I used to go out at night with I think John, and there was another lad from Glasgow, but being Glaswegians they complained about the size of the drams they were getting in Cambridge. But I did, I was only there the once and it was only three days, but it was very interesting.

[Part 2 0:18:19] Lee: Well did you learn much, because the whole point was to, they were supposed to be an introduction to the Antarctic, weren't they?

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 2 0:18:25] Lee: And they still are [overtalk].

Wilson: Do they still do them?

[Part 2 0:18:28] Lee: They do, they're more than three days now.

Wilson: I think it was about three days.

[Part 2 0:18:31] Lee: Yeah.

Wilson: Yeah. It wasn't any more than three days.

[Part 2 0:18:35] Lee: Do you remember learning stuff at that conference?

Wilson: I didn't learn anything.

[Part 2 0:18:38] Lee: You didn't?

Wilson: Not to my knowledge, that sounds big headed.

[Part 2 0:18:41] Lee: Well that's fine.

Wilson: I don't think I remember learning anything, because what we're talking about I'd heard it all before.

[Part 2 0:18:51] Lee: One of the things they're very big on these days, hot on these days is health and safety.

Wilson: Yes, I don't think that came very high on my list, [laughter], it didn't come very high on Wimpey's list then either, 'cos I worked with them during my time too. No, I don't think Wimpeys, or McAlpines in the early fifties were much interested in health and safety. There were big Paddies there and they'll do it for you.

[Part 2 0:19:20] Lee: But did you have to, if you worked towards it did you actually have to employ health and safety thinking when building these jetties? What were you doing to protect yourselves?

Wilson: Very little.

[Part 2 0:19:31] Lee: Really?

Wilson: I don't think I was. That doesn't look very protective is it?

[Part 2 0:19:44] Lee: These are photographs of you working at Signy on the [overtalk].

Wilson: Yes, and, I don't know.

[Part 2 0:19:55] Lee: Oh right, thank you. What else about that year at base F at Argentine which is where you met Al Wearden of course?

Wilson: That's right, I can't remember, well I do remember him vaguely but not particularly, 'cos I knew it was at the end. I think ANARE had already come into the frame, and I might even have applied for ANARE by then.

[Part 2 0:20:19] Lee: ANARE?

Wilson: Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition.

[Part 2 0:20:24] Lee: So what made you want to go there, then, or with them?

Wilson: I think I've always had a certain longing for Australia, not Canada, or America, but Australia's always, I used to enjoy like the black fella, what they used to call it 'The Land of the Never Never', and I think I've always liked, I mean I've been to New Zealand but I've always, the bloody New Zealanders are more Pommie than the bloody Pommies.

[Part 2 0:21:10] Lee: When you went to the Australian Antarctic service did you spot any big differences in the way they went about things compared to BAS, as it was then?

Wilson: Yes.

[Part 2 0:21:18] Lee: What were the differences?

Wilson: Well, they weren't as good at selecting the people as the old boys were at BAS. Maybe in my day I think a lot of them had sent chaps all over the world, and when I was at the Australians had, you had to fill in, you were interviewed by psychologists, and filled in psychological papers, they went into it in a big way, and they made mistakes.

[Part 2 0:21:49] Lee: Yeah.

Wilson: They got the wrong, and the money was too big, they paid the biggest money of anybody in the world.

[Part 2 0:21:57] Lee: Ah, it was tempting the wrong sort of people, was it?

Wilson: I think a lot of them, by then I was into my 40's, and a lot of the chaps who were coming, they saw the brand new car but they hadn't done the time, to get it. And when they got to McQuarrie or Mawson it wasn't, there wasn't many Australians worked for the Australian Antarctic Research Expedition.

[Part 2 0:22:24] Lee: Why was that?

Wilson: Because it doesn't appeal to the Australians. The Australians like Queensland, and the Gold Coast, but not the bloody snow and ice.

[Part 2 0:22:40] Lee: They didn't like the snow and ice?

Wilson: Doesn't like bloody snow and ice! [Laughter] At ANARE, at McQuarrie how many, there was, I think there was only two Aussies.

[Part 2 0:22:53] Lee: That's interesting, I hadn't thought of that, but did the...

Wilson: No it doesn't, snow and ice doesn't appeal to Australians. What appeals to them is watching bikinis on the beach.

[Part 2 0:23:06] Lee: You don't get many of those in the Antarctic, do you?

Wilson: No, but watch the bikinis go by, out on your surfing board, that's more like it. And I think I could have been a beach boy, I could manage that.

[Part 2 0:23:23] Lee: FIDS became BAS and they became more and more sophisticated in the way they went about things, so were the Australians as sophisticated as BAS at that time, or was it a step back in your opinion?

Wilson: I think, no I think they were more sophisticated.

[Part 2 0:23:34] Lee: Really? In what way?

Wilson: If you call what FIDS are now sophisticated...

[Part 2 0:23:40] Lee: Well, sort of, yeah.

Wilson: Yeah, they were more modern, because FIDS when I first went were really old fashioned, and that suited me. I didn't like it when they got changed, and got modern. Captain Johnson was, well, he'd been at the Battle of the River Plate, so that's good enough for me, under Fitzroy [phonetic], helped to sink the *Graf Spee*, but they scuttled it in the end but I know but.⁴ No I think the Australians were more, in fact they have had a slight American in them. I never liked, the one part of it, I got used to it, but they would call you Jim, and they didn't know you.

[Part 2 0:24:43] Lee: Were the bases better, better quality, the Australian bases?

Wilson: Oh yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:24:47] Lee: And what was the difference there?

Wilson: Well just better quality, just better gear, better carpets, better beds, better grub.

[Part 2 0:24:58] Lee: There was more money about was there?

⁴ Captain William Johnston, chief officer then captain of SS *Lafonia*, a wool carrier for the Falkland Islands Company. Ordered to sail for England *Lafonia* was in Montevideo Harbour during the Battle of the River Plate - he declined the invitation to go and see what was happening to the *Admiral Graf Spee* but lost his ship when it was torpedoed by a U-boat in Rio de Janeiro harbour. [*BAS Club Newsletter* No. 4, Christmas 1978].

Wilson: There's more money about, and your wage was, I don't know what I was getting but it was a big, compared with four hund[red], we were doing, I was getting a thousands a year whereas I was getting 400, but you're into two or three thousand and more dollars. Oh no it was, I think they paid more than the Yanks, I think.

[Part 2 0:25:29] Lee: And did you apply to go with the Australian Antarctic service or were you kind of roped in, how did that happen?

Wilson: I applied to go, and I wanted to go, and by then, which was late in life for me, I realised that money probably means something because I didn't, I would have went for nothing with FIDS, but I was getting into my 40's and I thought 'No, I could do with five grand'. But it was late, it took a, I was late I was a, that's one of Ben's sayings, he used to say that, Ben Hodges, you know Ben?

[Part 2 0:26:07] Lee: I do.

Wilson: He said, he used to call me 'Jay', he used to say 'You know, Jay, we were late developers', [laughter], I said 'But we've caught up.'

[Part 2 0:26:20] Lee: Caught up.

Wilson: We *were* late developers, but we caught up.

[Part 2 0:26:26] Lee: When you were at your last season with FIDS ...

Wilson: I'm going to have to stop soon.

[Part 2 0:26:32] Lee: Yeah, well, it's only quarter to three.

Wilson: It's alright. No, no I didn't mean ... me voice.

[Part 2 0:26:37] Lee: Oh right, I'll be quick then.

Wilson: No it's alright.

[Part 2 0:26:40] Lee: Your last season with the FIDS at Argentine you came across your first tourist boat, didn't you?

Wilson: That's correct, yes.

[Part 2 0:26:49] Lee: What did you make of all that then?

Wilson: Well, I didn't fancy it. I remember, well I didn't, I didn't bother with it, but I did meet Peter Scott.

[Part 2 0:27:01] Lee: Oh, the naturalist?

Wilson: Yes. Well they came in, I can't remember what they called it but it doesn't matter.

[Part 2 0:27:09] Lee: The boat, was it the *Lindblad*?

Wilson: I was going to say the *Lindblad*, it was the *Lindblad Explorer*, it certainly came to McQuarrie. But I remember everybody went on board, amongst with the, I used to call them, the grey..., it doesn't matter, all the ladies they had blue, the blue rinse...

[Part 2 0:27:33] Lee: Blue rinses.

Wilson: ... blue rinse girls, for a meal and a ???[incomprehensible] and I didn't – I thought, 'A bit of peace'.

[Part 2 0:27:41] Lee: You didn't want to know.

Wilson: I didn't want to know.

[Part 2 0:27:43] Lee: But they were nicknamed 'The Red Penguins' is that right?

Wilson: I think so.

[Part 2 0:27:47] Lee: When they came ashore.

Wilson: But I was sitting in the, there was nobody on the base but me, and I thought 'This is alright'. I was sitting in the bar – I don't know if I had a drink but I was sitting in the bar because it doesn't matter if I had it would just be a can of beer, because I never drank an awful lot, even yet, but I heard the door go and I heard somebody walking and this chap came in, and it was Peter Scott and he was the same as me. He got off the ship for a bit of peace, and we sat and talked, and a year later or two years later the *Lindblad Explorer* came to McQuarrie and the same thing, and all the lads wanted to be on board, and I thought 'Na, I'll have a bit of peace, I'll be on me own. I've just got the gennies, I've got a book, and I've got a can of Foster's, and that'll do me.' So everybody had gone, it was nice and quiet and I think I was playing music, and again I heard a door go, and somebody walking down, the door's opened to the bar, and it's Peter Scott again, and he said 'Good God', he says 'It's the other side of the world', and so we talked quite a bit, and I think we were very much alike in many ways. He was doing it for the same reason as I was doing it, 'cos he was just wandering about the beach, and when they'd brought all these young men back he'd get on the boat and go back on board. It was a night away from all the, well I suppose I was getting older and I couldn't - no, I wasn't into that at all.

[Part 2 0:29:33] Lee: Did you know some of the chaps with his father's expedition, Captain Scott's?

Wilson: I knew one, and I can't remember his name, but occasionally we used to go into Funchal, in Madeira, and I met him 'cos he used to come, 'cos he knew the ship been to the Ant[arctic], and he came down to see, I think he was just an old lad, he came down to see if he knew anybody. He may just been, not say just because he maybe was a member of the *Discovery* crew, but he was obviously had been, had retired into Madeira, and I saw him once or twice, but I didn't know him.

[Part 2 0:30:16] Lee: Did you talk to Peter about his father?

Wilson: I think I probably did, yes.

[Part 2 0:30:24] Lee: He never knew his own dad, did he?

Wilson: No, no. Maybe I didn't, because it wasn't right, it wouldn't be...

[Part 2 0:30:31] Lee: Right.

Wilson: It wouldn't be good manners, unless he brought it up – we used to talk, he was alright. I was interested, because we had one of his chaps that came with us once or twice, from Slimbridge?

[Part 2 0:30:47] Lee: Correct.

Wilson: I was interested in Slimbridge. I never went, I was always going to go but he had one a lad that worked there he was on the *Biscoe* once or twice, for watching birds. But he was a quiet man, I found, and he didn't spoil me little night that I was on me own.

[Part 2 0:31:18] Lee: He respected you.

Wilson: Yes, and I think I respected him, we respected each other, and he stopped a bit he didn't walk away, and when I saw him again I was rather pleased I thought 'Oh, it's yourself', and he perhaps thought 'Oh yes, doing the same thing'.

[Part 2 0:31:41] Lee: I've got a – conscious of your throat, Jim, but I've got one or two quick questions to ask if I may. If you want to stop please say. You had some scary moments I think, particularly when you were out boating. Is that right?

Wilson: Umhm.

[Part 2 0:31:57] Lee: Can you tell me about one or two of those?

Wilson: Well I suppose, nearly sinking that's scary enough innit?

[Part 2 0:32:09] Lee: Where was that?

Wilson: That was, er, Adelaide, that was in Marguerite Bay going ashore to Adelaide. It was a overweight scow, and event[ually], well we would have gone, but myself and a chap called, well I did know him but I knew him very well, Noel Downham – 'B'wana' as we used to call him, 'cos he was in the Kenya police during the Mau Mau business in Kenya. He's been here, he used to come to see me once or twice.

[Part 2 0:32:50] Lee: I met him last autumn.

Wilson: Did you? Were you in Canada?

[Part 2 0:32:55] Lee: No, he was at Windermere.

Wilson: Ah, was it Windermere? Oh I haven't seen B'wana for quite a while, 'cos he worked out on that estate out there. Our land goes out there. Whitbread had it then, it hasn't got it now, the brewer.

[Part 2 0:33:11] Lee: So what happened to this scow?

Wilson: We sank it, went with two axes and chopped, otherwise it would have pulled the boat down.

[Part 2 0:33:20] Lee: Sorry I missed some of the story, what was happening?

Wilson: Well the scow, it was overweight and it was low down, it was just taking water in. It was taking ashore hundreds of bags of sand, and of course it was getting heavy, and it was going to sink, and if it sank we would sink.

[Part 2 0:33:43] Lee: So it was tied to your ship was it?

Wilson: Well it was tied to the – ah, well, I did a lot of work with boats, and I think I was once known as the sea-going Fid, and I worked more with the crew of the ship than I ever did with Fids, and I was very friendly with sailors and seamen, and especially the Falkland Islanders, and it was Noel, and I said 'We're going to have to bloody cut it', by then I was old by then, and a lot of the young lads didn't know what to do they didn't want to, and the young officer didn't want to, because 'What would the captain say?' I said 'What'll the captain say if you come up in a bloody box?' And we had fire axes, little fire axes.

[Part 2 0:34:41] Lee: So you cut the rope.

Wilson: Cut the ropes that tied the scow to the motor boat ...

[Part 2 0:34:46] Lee: Right.

Wilson: And it went 'Pooof', 'cos it had about 20 ton in it.

[Part 2 0:34:52] Lee: So that was touch and go was it for a while?

Wilson: I think it was touch and go.

[Part 2 0:34:55] Lee: Yeah.

Wilson: And we had one or two like that, because they did things, well it was bad seamanship a lot of it. They're trying to beat the tide and get the ship unloaded, they couldn't get alongside the jetty an'. No, I think by then I suppose, it's only this very minute that I'm talking, I suppose by then I was old, and older and more experienced, but if I'd been a young, his first time. I remember being, yes the same captain he ended up being - Turnbull, captain then, 'What will the old man say?' It don't matter what the, and the ship's bearing down on us, they hadn't seen us. You see, when they're young officers an' I thought 'They're worried what the captain will say, but the captain can't bloody see you'.

[Part 2 0:36:04] Lee: So you were on the scow that was sinking.

Wilson: I was on the scow.

[Part 2 0:36:07] Lee: And you had to swim for it.

Wilson: No we didn't, we sank it.

[Part 2 0:36:10] Lee: And then what happened to you?

Wilson: We jumped onto the motor boat.

[Part 2 0:36:15] Lee: Right.

Wilson: And the motor boat was alright. You can always get more sand, and eventually that year we got the sand out and the scow lifted. But once everybody's gurgling in the cold water, it's not funny anymore. And that happened once or twice, and I think they used to send, there was a little lad he was from Sunderland, little Joe, he was a motor boat driver, but he was alright, but he was sent by the mate, he was told 'Go ashore with that', and little Joe didn't want to. He was about, let's say 19. But if he'd been 50 he would have said 'You bloody take it then if it's that good'.

[Part 2 0:37:13] Lee: Can I ask you about the black adders?

Wilson: The black adders?

[Part 2 0:37:18] Lee: Hmm, does that mean anything to you?

Wilson: No. I know that the only black adder that I know is the Blackadder.

[Part 2 0:37:25] Lee: Rowan Atkinson.

Wilson: No, a river in the Borders.

[Part 2 0:37:29] Lee: Oh right, ok. And what's a Birmingham screwdriver?

Wilson: Oh Birmingham screwdriver, that's a hammer isn't it?

[Part 2 0:37:39] Lee: You were a dab hand with the Birmingham screwdriver.

Wilson: Yes, yes. The black adder, no I don't know the [overtalk].

[Part 2 0:37:46] Lee: Ok, that's fine.

Wilson: But a black adder would be it's just a hammer.

[Part 2 0:37:50] Lee: A Birmingham screwdriver.

Wilson: Birmingham screwdriver, but there is a, there's the Whiteadder, and the Blackadder, an' it's near Lauder, in the Borders.

[Part 2 0:38:01] Lee: And what was this about a passion for boiled eggs? Did you have a passion for boiled eggs? Or was that somebody else?

Wilson: I don't think I had, well I would probably like boiled eggs but don't I don't think I had a pa[ssion], I was very fond of penguin eggs, mainly because we didn't have many. I get eggs from m' friend up there who has hens, and I don't eat, I would eat a lot more but I don't.

[Part 2 0:38:34] Lee: Was it you had two chaps you worked with quite a lot, one was Alan Green, and one was Joe Sutherland, was it Joe Sutherland you ...?

Wilson: Joe Sutherland, yes, I'd forgotten about Joe, and Alan Green.

[Part 2 0:38:45] Lee: It was Joe an egg fan?

Wilson: He might have been, Joe, and Alan I went to see him, he was from Udnay, Aberdeenshire. His father had the, well I, I went to see Alan once or twice, but he had a, he lived at a place called, it was beautiful, the Mill o'Minnes, and it was an old water mill, and his father was, well, much older than I am now but it's been intact and it still worked, an' I asked him, or maybe Alan asked him, 'I'll ask me dad if 'e'll set it to work for you', an' 'e set it away an' the wheel worked, the big grinder, it had for corn, it was powered, a beautiful old watermill, and it was called the Mill o'Minnes, it's in north Aberdeenshire on the way to, it was where Prof. Dunnet came from. But I would think Alan Green's probably dead, I'm only guessing.

[Part 2 0:39:53] Lee: I don't know, no.

Wilson: Joe could be, too.

[Part 2 0:39:57] Lee: An' there was this, again according to my notes I've been given by Al Wearden, when the Admiralty Bay boys went on a ship, did you have your own kind of language?

Wilson: Oh yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:40:11] Lee: What was all that about?

Wilson: Well I think we just had words, I thought it was very interesting, you could see how languages develop in a primitive or an isolated part of the world. They had words that meant nothing to anybody else, and it becomes like a language doesn't it? It's like a dialect.

[Part 2 0:40:31] Lee: But did you use 'em on purpose on board ship to confuse other people?

Wilson: Oh I don't think so, well I certainly would never do it...

[Part 2 0:40:38] Lee: It was just the way you were talking,

Wilson: You would just say it, because that's what you said for a couple of years.

[Part 2 0:40:47] Lee: So was Admiralty Bay particularly strong on having its own kind of – words?

Wilson: I think it was, yes. Yes it probably was. It had probably, that's because of the Welsh, you see.

[Part 2 0:41:03] Lee: How many?

Wilson: Well it had a lot of Welshmen there, and I found, Rosses, and there was another lad he was a Jones, and there was another, there was Jones North, and Jones South, and I found out how different for a tiny little country.

[Part 2 0:41:23] Lee: Different accents.

Wilson: Yeah, they were different people. I believe in Australia there's the Darling Downs, the Darling Downs [with mock Australian accent]? It's the biggest farm in Australia if not the wo[rld], it's about the size of Wales, an' it's a farm, whereas Jones North who came from Bethesda which again he ended up at Hull he was a prof at Hull, and he was very Welsh, well he spoke Welsh, and we used to get a records, once a year you would get a message from home, and ...

[Part 2 0:42:04] Lee: On the radio.

Wilson: On the radio, and I think the very first one, 'course we all was listening, his parents were talking English, an' they were stammering it, it was embarrassing, and I know they told me 'cos I knew him quite well, he said 'Well next year I'm just going to tell them to speak total Welsh – and they did. He worked in the quarries, in Bethesda. I met a well I didn't know her but, it's Dingwall I'm talking about, I haven't seen her for years. I remember there was a woman worked in Boots in Dingwall, and she was very Welsh, but that's beside the point, and I just happened, it's just conversation and I said 'Where are you from?', she said 'Bethesda', you see, 'Oh' I said, 'I had a friend from Bethesda', I said 'Neville Jones', 'Neville!', I said 'Yep', she said 'He was a conductor on the bus, you know', she said, 'He never took my fare!' [Laughter].

[Part 2 0:43:09] Lee: Just before you finish, Jim, I brought you some photographs of your time down south, they're just beside you there, do any of them spark any memories off for you?

Wilson: [Coughs] I haven't finished Annie's tea yet. Well, this does, which I'd forgotten about.

[Part 2 0:43:25] Lee: This is erm...

Wilson: That's the jetty at Signy – you better miss that cold tea. I've changed an awful lot since that picture was taken, I didn't even recognise me.

[Part 2 0:43:40] Lee: That's the *John Biscoe* in the background, the bright red *John Biscoe*, and then some black and white photographs as well.

Wilson: Yeah well that's, well that's Alan, and I think that's...

[Part 2 0:43:52] Lee: Alan Wearden?

Wilson: No. No, no that's Alan Green.

[Part 2 0:43:56] Lee: Alan Green.

Wilson: And that's McDermott, he was one of the fitters – this is the bar.

[Part 2 0:44:02] Lee: In which base?

Wilson: Deception.

[Part 2 0:44:04] Lee: Right. Well stocked isn't it?

Wilson: Aye, it was a good little bar, it had lots of ties, I think they're all about here, people used to get their ties cut off. The Duke of Edinburgh's is there, an' I think both his lady secretaries, they didn't have their ties but, and it was all destroyed, which was a pity because there was a lot of interesting things in the old bar at Deception.

[Part 2 0:44:36] Lee: What happened? Oh it was destroyed by the...

Wilson: It was blown up, went in the eruption.

[Part 2 0:44:39] Lee: Eruption, yes. This is a jetty that's being built somewhere.

Wilson: That's, an' I think that's Peter, that's at Adelaide.

[Part 2 0:44:48] Lee: And that's Peter Bird on the left.

Wilson: That's Peter Bird. That's Jim Wilson there. That's Alan Green.

[Part 2 0:44:58] Lee: And you're using metal reinforcing rods there?

Wilson: That's right, and this is...

[Part 2 0:45:01] Lee: Vertically?

Wilson: ... I forget the name of it. He was hit on the head with a rock.

[Part 2 0:45:07] Lee: Ken Doyle?

Wilson: Ken Doyle! That's that Ken he was a nice lad, he was very good at explosives. He blasted all this out.

[Part 2 0:45:22] Lee: So you used explosions to get the ground sorted.

Wilson: That's right, because that's where the ships anchored out here, this is Marguerite Bay.

[Part 2 0:45:32] Lee: So what happened to Ken Doyle then, did he...?

Wilson: Don't know where never heard tell where he went. An' that's at Deception, I think.

[Part 2 0:45:43] Lee: It is indeed, yeah.

Wilson: *Deception* [with Spanish accent]. Well that's me.

[Part 2 0:45:53] Lee: You were building a jetty there as well?

Wilson: Aye. And that's Hector Duguid[phonetic], he was from Aberdeenshire Duekit[phonetic]. An' I know this lad too, but I canna mind his name.

[Part 2 0:46:07] Lee: Let's see if we can find some names for you on that one, erm, Jeff Hodson?

Wilson: That's it! Jeff Hodson.

[Part 2 0:46:13] Lee: And Dave Walter. Dave Walter on the left.

Wilson: Ah yeah, he became, that's him, I think he became base leader eventually.

[Part 2 0:46:27] Lee: And there's one more black and white one, oh that's a colour photograph actually, of the...

Wilson: That's...

[Part 2 0:46:33] Lee: That's you.

Wilson: Is it? No I don't think so, that's Len Mole.

[Part 2 0:46:38] Lee: Oh it is is it, in the orange outfit?

Wilson: Well it is. Lenin Usher Mole, another friend of mine and, last time I saw him I was in the Goat pub opposite Kensington Hotel, near Kensington High Street, and he was with, he worked with the, which society, Royal Geographical Society?

[Part 2 0:47:12] Lee: Well that's Signy isn't it, that's the...

Wilson: That's at Signy, this is the old hut.

[Part 2 0:47:16] Lee: And that's the plastic palace is that right?

Wilson: That's right, yes.

[Part 2 0:47:19] Lee: What're you doing there? What are they doing?

Wilson: Well this is the foundations probably going in there I think.

[Part 2 0:47:25] Lee: But you're not on that picture then, Jim?

Wilson: No I'm not on that picture at all, an' I think that's Alan, ah I forget, but he sang, he had a very good voice an' he sang for Durham Cathedral choir.

[Part 2 0:47:48] Lee: And then the last picture is Deception last year.

Wilson: *Deception* [Spanish pronunciation].

[Part 2 0:47:54] Lee: Sad end isn't it for that base?

Wilson: Yes. I have if you're, are you finished with me or not?

[Part 2 0:48:01] Lee: I think so, just one more. In all your life, bearing in mind you're nearly 80, how big a part did the Antarctic play in your life? [Pause] Was it the best time?

Wilson: Well I wouldn't say it was the best part, to tell you the honest truth I've had a very good innings, very good time of it. I think the last few years have been saddest.

[Part 2 0:48:27] Lee: Since your wife passed away Liz.

Wilson: Aye. I don't know. Yes, I think so. Yes.

[Part 2 0:48:39] Lee: What sort of career did you have after you left the Antarctic?

Wilson: I went to work for the Commonwealth Institute, going round the schools giving talks, mainly because Valerie wanted me to, well no I mean I never thought I'd ever do but I did meet her at the thing and she knew about this eruption, and she said to me 'Have you got any pictures of it?' and I said 'Yes', she said 'You should get a job with the Com[monwealth]', I'd never heard of the Commonwealth Institute.

[Part 2 0:49:04] Lee: Was this a long term thing was it you did this for ...

Wilson: I did it for nearly 20 years.

[Part 2 0:49:08] Lee: Did you? Oh, right.

Wilson: Yeah. I didn't finish, well I finished when I was 60, and you finished at 60 whether you wanted to or not.

[Part 2 0:49:15] Lee: That was a government job was it?

Wilson: Well, it belongs to the Commonwealth, it was at Holland Park in Kensington High Street.

[Part 2 0:49:25] Lee: And you were going round schools in this country or?

Wilson: Yes, yes in this country, and I went they weren't insistent but I went to Northern Ireland, right through the worst times in the '70's, 'cos I thought 'If you stop, they've won'. Scotland is, London did England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Edinburgh, Rutland Square, did Scotland, and I did them all from Shetland to Sark.

[Part 2 0:50:01] Lee: And what were you, just tell me what you were talking about in front of these children.

Wilson: Well, the talks varied, and I had a lot of pictures from South Georgia, of the whaling, because that was all gone, an' you'll never see it again, asking head mistress or the headmaster whether they wanted to, but it was a different talk. If you're talking to six year olds, and then you're talking to the sixth form college, it's a different talk.

[Part 2 0:50:28] Lee: Was it always about the history of the place or were you covering other areas too.

Wilson: I think I covered, I think I just blethered, [Lee laughs]. I'd never done it, and I used to get letters from Val, very headmistry [phonetic] letters, 'Have you applied?', something like that, I said 'I'll apply, fail, and that'll shut her up, and that's the end of it', because I always thought, 'And we'll go back to Australia', but things didn't work out that way, because I'd met Liz, then me father died, and then me mother had to come into the house and then she got ill, an' 'course you're getting older and older then you're 50, and you think 'Well, I pack this up I wouldn't get a bloody job now', well I finished it when I was 60, and I enjoyed it very much. I still do an odd talk here. I could do it on me own but I'm not really much interested in that now. I enjoy the garden, but I don't do it full time now, there's a young woman, well, she's maybe hardly a young woman 'cos she's got three, a grown family of her own now, but I know her, Sue, she works with me. I'll be going up tomorrow if it's fine.

[Part 2 0:52:00] Lee: So the interesting thing is you spent 20 years blethering for a living.

Wilson: Yes, yeah. A bit like a politician.

[Part 2 0:52:06] Lee: Well you're a great bletherer, Jim.

Wilson: What?

[Part 2 0:52:08] Lee: You're a great bletherer!

Wilson: Oh, aye, I was good at it. When I got the job, 'cos I was in London, and they said 'Well no, you have to apply in Edinburgh', anyway, cut a long story, I went down to Edinburgh and I saw, got to know him in the end, Charles Carrie was the head man. Anyway, I got the job, which I didn't expect, but I remember saying to him, 'cos I'd never done it before, I said 'Well you'd better send me as near home, this home, as I can get, because' I said, 'by about the Wednesday of the first week, I'll know whether I can do it or not'. And I had a friend who was from my part of the world, from the Borders, who'd got a job with the Nature Conservancy and lived in the Black Isle, and I stopped by Andrew, he lives in Skye now, and me first school was Alness, I think, or Invergordon, and I suddenly, after a couple of minutes I thought 'I can do this', and I was very fond of children – I didn't know I was, but I did know in the end. I liked the bairns, I still miss the bairns. When I packed it up I thought 'That's what I missed the worst, the more, I missed the kids, and I enjoyed the bairns, and I thought 'And I can do it, and I can do it bloody well', and the money was good. By then I was more interested in the money, the money was very good. Well I don't mind telling you, I was getting, when I packed up, I was getting £500 a week, sort of like 20 years ago, which was good money. I was on about five grand a bloody, about, nearly two grand a month! And I enjoyed it. I didn't like the hotel life, I didn't like it for the first couple of weeks, but I didn't enjoy the hotel life but I thought 'Well, you can't have it all ways'. I enjoyed the travel, I enjoyed the company of people I met, you met a lot of interesting people I enjoyed the conversations. I liked the bairns.

[Part 2 0:54:51] Lee: Were you in anyway recruiting for the Antarctic do you think?

Wilson: Not to my knowledge.

[Part 2 0:54:56] Lee: Or sowing seeds of interest?

Wilson: Oh, yes, I think I've had letters, and I think, yes.

[Part 2 0:55:04] Lee: People who've gone?

Wilson: People have gone, yes, yes, I found that out, yes, and I think 'Well', and Valerie was the same I remember ???[incomprehensible] and I just didn't see her but a long time ago 'Well, I was always glad that you went, and I was part of making you go'. I says 'Well if it hadn't been for you and your bloody letters, I would never have applied.'

[Part 2 0:55:27] Lee: Always do what women tell you.

Wilson: Well, it was her, and another lady 'cos she was on her own then it was me mother. Me dad was dead but I always remember me mother said, 'That lass wants you to have that job, you know'. I didn't know that, but the old lady, she knew, she knew that Valerie wanted, 'That lass wants him to have that job', and it turned out alright.

[Part 2 0:56:01] Lee: Let's leave it there, Jim, it's been a real pleasure, thank you very much indeed. Thank you.

Items of interest:

- Upbringing and life on a Cheviot hill farm. [Part 1 0:02:30]
- BAS interview: 'Well I cannae come till we've finished the hay!' [Part 1 0:17:09]
- Skills transfer - collies to huskies. [Part 1 0:24:43]
- Double tragedy at Admiralty Bay. [Part 1 0:34:10]
- Out in the field for almost six months after sea-ice disappeared, [Part 1 0:42:49]
- 37 gallons of rum spirited away. [Part 1 1:01:00]
- 'Deception was a volcano, of course'. [Part 2 0:07:36]
- Building jetties. [Part 2 0:13:48]
- ANARE - the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition. [Part 2 0:20:19]
- Tourist boats, and meeting Peter Scott. [Part 2 0:26:40]
- Scary moments with overloaded and sinking scow. [Part 2 0:31:57]

- Post Antarctic career with the Commonwealth Institute. [Part 2 0:48:39]