

Oral History Recording
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This transcript is an edited version of this recording, and is suitable for virtually all reference purposes. Corrections have been entered in footnotes, along with appropriate comments.

A monologue by Alan Carroll, Base Leader at Port Lockroy, between 28 November 1954 and 2 March 1957, who subsequently worked at the same location in November-December 2006 on behalf of the United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust. This recording was made at The Language Centre of the University of Oxford.

(00:18) Hello - my name's Alan Carroll and I'm recording this tape at the University of Oxford (from where I officially retired in the autumn of 1998.) I was stationed at Port Lockroy from the end of November 1954 until early March 1957.¹

I was a bit of a restless individual in my younger days – I attended Wallingford Grammar School during the latter part of the Second World War, having been evacuated from Ealing in west London before serious bombing started. While I was at Wallingford, I played a lot of rugby and was selected to play for Oxfordshire; I spent holidays messing about with boats on the river and also joined the local Air Training Corps. Towards the end of the war I returned to Ealing, and continued at the Drayton Manor Grammar School where I matriculated, but I didn't want to go to College straight away and so I went to work at the Middlesex Oil & Chemical Laboratory in West Drayton. When I was called up for National Service, I was one of the lucky few who asked for and was selected for aircrew duty.

We had to complete the Cranwell College course, in just under eighteen months instead of the traditional three years, which made it the most intense period of study I've ever had. Those of us who completed the course qualified to A.M.I MechE standards as Pilot Officers, flying Meteor [twin-jet fighter] aircraft. Eventually I was posted to 65 Squadron at Duxford, which is not so far from Cambridge, of course. There I stayed until the end of my tour but, because the RAF at that time was constantly switching from an active role in seeing off intruding Russian aircraft one day and parading for visiting dignitaries the next, I decided to move on. I didn't go very far - I went back to a sister company of Middlesex Oil, but it wasn't long before I became restless again...

I read an advertisement for FIDS work, applied, went for an interview at the Crown

¹ Despite the spoken word, a subsequent check of dates revealed I left on 2 March 1957.

Agents Office in Queen Anne's Chambers off the Embankment, and was accepted. As I'd been involved in electronics from an early age it was suggested that I might go to Port Lockroy, where the ionospheric soundings were taking place. My only preparation before heading south consisted of half a day at the Scott Polar Research Institute for a look round and a talk from Vivian Fuchs who explained operations in the Antarctic and who concentrated on survey work and field trips, which was the main thrust of the work at that time. (It was only later that Ionospheric people would spend some time at the DSIR² before leaving the UK.)

Eventually I joined the *John Biscoe* at Southampton on the 4th of October 1954 and piled on board with all the other new Fids. Accommodation on board was amazing – tiered bunks and sixteen of us in one cabin. We got to know each other pretty well on the journey to Port Stanley... On the trip south we were expected to indulge in holy-stoning the decks, painting ship, and helping out in the galley. From time to time, a pair of recruits were invited to take dinner with the captain, and none of us realised at the time that skipper Bill Johnston submitted recommendations for potential base leaders when he berthed at Port Stanley. The *Biscoe* first stopped at Cape Verde Islands for bunkering, where many of us jumped into the sea for a swim, despite the very strong currents. Next stop was Montevideo where, by the tradition of those times, engine problems delayed sailing, so there was more time than expected for trips into town and a look at the night life.

(03:25) Finally the engine was repaired and it was 'next stop the Falkland Islands'. On arrival, we were introduced to Secfids Frank Elliott and his assistant John Green; kit was issued and postings were confirmed. Told that I had been recommended as a base leader, I was wheeled into the Governor's Office to meet Sir Miles Clifford, given a briefing on the political situation and handed a document to read out loud. I looked at the printed form given to me and said to the Governor "There are two options on this form, do I say Magistrate or Justice of the Peace?" His answer seemed to me rather vague, so I quickly opted for the two and was solemnly sworn in as either Magistrate or Justice of the Peace, or both.

Later, I learned that very few folk were appointed base leader before reaching the grand old age of twenty-two – that birthday I was to celebrate some two weeks after arriving at Base A. Soon enough it was time to steam south, when stories of the 'roaring forties', 'furious fifties' and 'screaming sixties' became reality and some of the deck cargo on the *Biscoe* was damaged. After stopping at Admiralty Bay, I particularly recall a bit of theatrics on arrival at Hope Bay, when we had gone ashore to help offload stores. There were no signs of any Fids personnel at all, although off to the right some of the Argentinian crew could be seen working around the Esperanza buildings. Eventually a figure emerged from the front door of Base D. He had jet-black hair and a long beard, was clad in dark trousers, Corcoran high boots, a red lumberjack shirt, and he had an axe over his shoulder. We just stood there staring at this apparition as he strode down the beach towards us. He stopped, looked out to sea

² The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Training was to take place at the Radio Research Station, Ditton Park, Slough.

and didn't say a word. I recall thinking to myself, "What the hell have I got myself into – is this sort of thing likely to happen when I get to Port Lockroy?" As it was, there was work to be done and I never did resolve the full purpose of this event; apparently a 'family joke' of some sort, it seemed one of those times when it was wiser not to ask for an explanation.

Four things I recall when eventually I arrived at Base 'A' in Port Lockroy – the outstanding scenery, hideous piles of ashes and empty tin cans a few feet from the door, and the rather odd attitude shown by the people we had come to relieve, which was not the usual, "Who are these people asking silly questions and trampling muck into my clean hut – and where's my mail?" ambiance felt at some of the other bases, but more a, "Don't ask me – go and ask whatisname over there, and I'm not talking to him" reaction; it wasn't quite the welcome I'd anticipated, particularly as these people we had come to relieve had only been there for one winter.³ And, finally, the first course of the meal they had prepared for us, which was soup that seemed to have been made mostly from dried cabbage and a minimal amount of Bovril. I thought on that very first day – "Things have got to change – I don't intend to live like this for the next couple of years". Anyway, after a minimum handover period they all disappeared, and we 'new boys' moved in.

Bob Whittock, who came from the Midlands, Bill Etheridge, who was a Falkland Islander, and myself were the Ionospheric people, while Bernard Taylor was the Radio Operator and John Smith was Diesel Electric Mechanic. Bill Etheridge had wintered at Port Lockroy in 1952, John Smith had been at Deception Island the previous year, and Bernard Taylor had been at Deception Island in 1953. Apart from maintaining the political presence, the other prime work at the base at this time was hourly ionospheric recordings and operating as 'control base'. These two functions went hand in hand, because upper atmosphere recordings were made automatically, so, except for a few minutes every hour when the Ionospheric recorder was running, radio transmissions could be made 'round the clock' – unlike all the other bases which only ran mains generators during the day.

(08:10) The function of 'control base' was to streamline communications between the FIDS bases and the commercial radio station VPC in Port Stanley. Our call-sign was ZHF77 and twice a day we would contact all the other bases in turn, and they would pass us their outgoing messages in Morse Code, and we would copy and file every base's incoming signals from Port Stanley. This meant we acted as a buffer, so that Radio Operators from other bases could contact us at any time for any of their incoming messages they might have missed. We alone transmitted out the collection of other bases signals to Port Stanley, thus cutting down the cost of working the commercial station. Bearing in mind there were seven other bases in 1955, and a further three opened later, there was a considerable volume of traffic, especially when the Telegram/Airmail service was in use for personal messages home. There were 57 Fids over-wintering in 1955 and 76 in 1956, which was the highest number since

³ Not correct. The Base Leader had served there for two years. The handover was completed in less than three days.

operations started in 1944⁴, and this wasn't exceeded until 1959. Fortunately for us, personal mail didn't occur too often, as these messages had to be timed to coincide with the *Fitzroy* going from Port Stanley to Montevideo, where the messages would be posted airmail to the U.K. Secfids frequently made use of our 'control base' system, by sending me a signal on a subject related to several different bases. I would contact these bases and collate the responses and respond, which again reduced costly 'air-time' and saved time in the Fids Office.

The BBC Overseas Service broadcast a regular programme 'Calling the Antarctic', compered by Peter King, which we also re-broadcast for several bases which did not have the extensive radio gear, also to various sledge parties and places like View Point. Every now and again Fids 'next of kin' were invited to the BBC to record messages for broadcast, which they enjoyed; but produced varying degrees of cringing from all the recipients. We also collected reception reports of several BBC transmitters from all the bases and sent these in after each broadcast. Having mains power all day meant a considerable amount of Radio Amateur work was done and I was issued with the call-sign VP8CL. We usually fired up the RCA 89M transmitter⁵ which was modified so that it could also cover the 10-metre band, but we also had other transmitters, such as the 5G unit.⁶

(11:30) Our main radio antenna was orientated to cover the Falklands, so many of our contacts were with North and South America, and throughout my stay we had weekly schedules with one amateur who worked at the Veteran's Hospital in Tucson, Arizona; many times everyone piled into the radio room to take part in the conversation. Having our own ionospheric equipment was very handy, as it helped us select the best short wave band for amateur work; ten metres (28 MHz) in summer and down to eighty metres (3.5MHz) in bad winter days, when we were generally limited to contacting the lower half of South America. It was quite common to network as many as six different amateur stations at one time, because VP8 call-signs were very collectable because of their rarity.

Weather recordings was done on a regular basis, but the Föhn effect from Wiencke Island made our readings useless for synoptic forecasting, so ours was the only location which didn't transmit daily reports to the Falkland Islands Meteorological service.

So, we had started to settle down to the routine work. The standard of cooking had improved overnight as, while everyone had to take turns doing the catering, I arranged for Bob who seemed to enjoy his food, to be the first cook, with John acting as experienced 'gash hand' to show him the way round the food stocks. A rota was made out for the regular cleaning of the base and, after most of the snow had melted from the island, those piles of ash and garbage which we had inherited were finally dumped in the sea.

⁴ An error – as stated, 1943 was when the operation was started, but the first two bases were established in early 1944.

⁵ Type 89M(modified) to specification 89Q – ET4336H

⁶ A clandestine transmitter, made in the Navy Dockyards, mostly for covert work in occupied Europe. We also had a T1154.

Port Lockroy was considered to be the safest anchorage on the west coast of the Peninsula. In February 1911 on one particularly stormy day, some 11 whalers and other ships were recorded as being anchored in the Bay.⁷ There was quite a collection of whales bones in the shallows north of Goudier Island, left over from the whaling days; some time in the past, a couple of whales ribs had been put up to form an arch. These were lying where they had fallen, and I re-erected them and paved a pathway under the arch, using a large quantity of limpet shells that had been dropped on the Island by Dominican gulls.⁸ This path led from our floating jetty up to the main entrance to the hut. The jetty pivoted from the rocks and the seaward end was supported by four empty diesel drums, which allowed it to rise and fall with the tide. This was hauled in and inverted every winter otherwise it would be trapped by ice.

On the [western] shoulder of Jabet Peak was a pair of crossed skis, possibly left by one of Jean Charcot's crew when the place was discovered fifty years previously. I've never seen written evidence of this but, as Charcot's crew spent some time in Dorian Bay and they set up a mail-box on Casabianca Island, this local legend may be true.⁹ Some fifteen years later, when whaling was taking place in the area, there also used to be a mail box fixed to a pole on Bill's Island, where letters were left for collection by the first ship heading northwards. This tradition continued, because Base Leaders also acted as deputy postmasters; they sold stamps, dispatched the mail and kept the Post Office accounts. Visitors from ships would come ashore to post letters but most of our customers by far, were collectors; they would write in from all over the world and send postal orders or international reply coupons.

(13:30) Many would write interesting letters and would collect franked covers from as many bases as possible. This was just one more aspect of the political scene of course. Another job for the base leader was to board any ship flying the Chilean or Argentinian flag and hand over an Official Protest against violation of British Territorial waters. I'm glad to say this was usually accepted as routine by the captains of these ships and most were very tolerant – which was just as well. I've still got my contract which shows my starting salary of three hundred and forty-five pounds for a year, and I think base leaders were paid an additional thirty-six pounds per annum for this hazardous additional duty. Mind you, this was only taxed at the Falkland Islands rate of 8%. Once formalities were over, everyone was usually invited on board for a meal.¹⁰ So, with one of us taking turns at base fire-watching duty, the rest would go out to meet new people and barter for some of the finer things of life, like wine and fresh meat. It's quite amusing to think what one could get in exchange for a bottle of scotch in those days! When we returned the hospitality, sometimes we had problems getting guests back to their ship safely and on the required time...

⁷ So much for memory! Subsequent research shows my spoken number was incorrect. The correct figure entered above comes from the 1960 edition of the 'Sailing Directions for Antarctica,' published by the US Hydrographic Dept.

⁸ The whale-rib arch was erected by John Huckle and Jimmy Smith in early 1947.

⁹ An item of 'inherited mythology.' Research revealed that these were two uprights that held a Chilean flag, painted on boards. The flag had been previously removed by Base 'A' members and the uprights left in place. I can confirm that in 2006 they had disappeared from sight.

¹⁰ (I never received a reciprocal protest.)

This was the pattern for the first summer; we'd all agreed that the base needed refurbishing and everybody mucked in with cleaning both the exterior and the interior, and after a lot of painting and decorating, the inside became a lot more comfortable. Some of the white paintwork needed three coats of paint before it looked the way we wanted it, and simple things like moving light fittings and fixing shades where bare bulbs had been helped a lot. Bob was invaluable in this work; he had been in the shop-fitting trade and he taught me some of the 'tricks of the trade' which I still use today. John spent many weeks cleaning, painting and reorganising the generator shed and workshop facilities; he also made several proposals which improved safety in fuel handling and instigated the project for a new generator room.

Other changes were made in my first summer; the Union Radio Ionospherics unit (or 'Beastie' as we called it)¹¹ had been located in the small room east of the kitchen, which made it difficult to access the unit for maintenance, and the radio gear was stuck in the corner of the flat-roofed extension. By transposing these, Bernard had peace to handle the large amount of communications, and the ionospherics equipment was now near the bench where the hourly recordings were analysed, involving much clattering of Marchant hand-operated calculators.

I made and erected a new flagpole, so the Union flag could be flown in the required prominent place, and the indoor anthracite bunker, which previously opened into the engine room, was re-sited so that dust wouldn't get into the diesel engines and alternators. We held stocks of up to fifteen tons of anthracite, all brought ashore in half-hundred-weight sacks. To help conserve empty sacks which had to be returned to Port Stanley for re-filling, I converted one of the old Norwegian scows¹² into an outside coal-store, so that full sacks would not stick to the ice on the rocks in winter and tear when lifted. A tarpaulin over the centre section helped to keep most of the drifting snow out, and the covered end compartments were used for storing the empty sacks as well as empty wooden packing-cases used for kindling. Every summer one ship was nominated to collect empty diesel-oil drums and take them to South Georgia for re-filling. Ripping off what was left of the side of the second scow provided a flat wooden platform as a holding area for those empty and full fuel drums.

As far as management of people at the base was concerned, the fact that most had done military service was helpful in the sense that they were all used to taking instructions. On the other hand, their experience gave them the ability to immediately spot inconsiderate or badly thought-out decisions. The nature of our work at Base A meant that all disciplines were in close contact with each other every day, and we all shared one bedroom. Generally, but not always, I was able to spot any sort of disagreement; my usual ploy, when one person was not happy with another, was to arrange for us all to do one of the more unpleasant chores. This usually resulted in them having a good moan to each other and consequently the original grievance was forgotten – they were united once more; especially when I followed up with a more agreeable task. The average Fid would, in my opinion, resist any formality in command structure and, at

¹¹ A Union Radio Co. Ionosonde, Mark 2, serial number 3. The nickname came from the local radio interference it generated.

¹² Whaler's water-boats, known as 'Jolle'.

most other times, a quiet discussion with the individual resolved most problems. Only once did I feel it necessary to pass down a ruling through my deputy, who was Bob Whittock in the first winter, because I felt a direct intervention might have seemed provocative.

(21:10) Another trick I used was to organise a 'spontaneous' party if I felt tension was starting to build up, and then be the first to retire; by leaving the bedroom door open, one could listen to the 'buzz' coming from the living room which gave a pretty good indication of how the rest of the team were getting on together without me. Probably the most significant differences between individuals I worked with during my stay at Base A was that, while most would arrive ready to 'have a go' at anything, one or two seemed uninterested in anything but their prime discipline; these were the most difficult people to motivate for those additional jobs which I felt should be done for our mutual benefit.

By now, my first summer was coming to an end, and I thought things were going quite well, until sometime in late February or early March, when Bill Etheridge handed me a letter to post to Port Stanley, and I still recall that grin on his face, which I thought nothing more about until the '*Norse*' arrived, and Ken Blaiklock came ashore. Blaiklock, charged with the new task of supervising summer field operations, spent some time ashore talking to us all, before taking me to one side, telling me that Bill had written to Secfids expressing dissatisfaction with the way things had been going at the base, and that Bill had suggested that I should leave. To say this was a surprise would be an understatement – this was the first I knew of any problem. Possibly Bill thought he should have been in charge of the base, in view of his previous service. Blaiklock told me the only thing he would fault me on was a tendency to state the obvious; this lack of elementary subtlety I still possess, I'm afraid. Being delegated with sorting out this problem, Blaiklock offered him the choice of staying at the base as it was, or returning home.¹³ Bill immediately packed his personal belongings and went on board the '*Norse*'. I didn't get to the root cause of his trouble – there wasn't much time for an inquisition; I was more concerned with rearranging routines so that the work programme could continue with a 20% cut in manpower.

Ralph Lenton also came ashore, and he made quite an impression – he had been base leader at Lockroy some two years earlier, and had been involved in some of the previous building extension work. It was many years later that I met several ladies (mostly New Zealanders) who told me they had also enjoyed his company and every one of them said what a marvelous dancer he was... In 1952 he'd cleared most of the black powder explosives from the Norwegian scows and electrically detonated it in the sea in 40-gallon drums using broken light-bulbs as detonators, and he also used this powder to burn a sign on the ice face at Flag Point in six-foot letters, which read 'Kwitchyabellyakin Hotel' with an arrow pointing towards the base, which was still readable in 1957. The remainder of the explosives were disposed of, when I modified the scows.

¹³ The Governor issued instructions to Blaiklock that Etheridge should either agree to work at the base for the next two winters, or he should quit.

By 1952, the base hut had already been extended twice; the original central part was now the living room, that also doubled up as our dining room and which had a loft that was full of old magazines, sleeping bags, blankets and sheepskins. We received books and magazines every year, for which a bookcase had been made, and a second bookcase between the windows held books on Antarctic affairs. A 'Bon-Fire' boiler in the [north-west] corner also heated water in a steel tank in the bathroom, which was located next door by the main entrance, and this contained the tin bath, wash-basin with mirror and tooth-mug shelves. There was no drainage system at the base; along with all the other waste, water had to be bucketed to the sea.

South of the bathroom was our dark-room where the ionospheric readings, recorded on rolls of photographic paper, were developed. By installing a spray-bar system for washing-water and fitting an electric drive to the ionospheric film processing drum, we were able to reduce processing time. We also clubbed together and bought a 35mm enlarger, which we used for personal printing. Beyond that was the kitchen which was fairly large, and here lived the Esse Q¹⁴ anthracite-burning four-oven stove, which heated water in a large copper tank, also warmed a radiator in the small room next door, the one we had converted for radio use. The only window on the south of the hut was just by the end of the cooker,¹⁵ and in early winter when the snowdrifts came up to the window-sill, we'd open this little window and feed kitchen scraps to the sheathbills who would be waiting patiently outside, looking in at the base cat who was waiting patiently inside. When the drifts became higher, one of us would clear snow away from all the hut windows, to keep them free in case they had to be used as emergency exits. The kitchen window was a little small for this purpose, but we also dug a tunnel through the drift for the sheathbills. A rack was suspended above the kitchen stove for drying laundry. Only Hope Bay had a privately-owned washing machine at this time, so most of us washed our clothes in the bath after bathing – which wasn't very often in the winter, as the person who had a bath had to carry out the waste water and was required to fill the bathroom hot-water tank with snow. By late summer all the snow on Goudier would have melted, so we then collected lumps of glacier ice from the shore and left them on a rock in the sun to melt sea-salt off the surface before carrying them inside. John managed to reduce his laundry to the minimum by wearing nothing else but overalls and shoes – absolutely nothing else – no socks, no underwear. He only dressed in other clothes when visitors were likely to be around.

Our bedroom was in the south-east corner and was fitted out with metal frame beds; it was Spartan and rather gloomy until a second window was fitted. When we cut through the wall to fit this new window, we found that the only insulation in the studding cavity was a layer of tarred paper covered in aluminium foil.¹⁶ This room was heated only by an electrical convector unit; in the winter, should there be no power available, we put granite boulders in an oven and used them as stone 'hot water

¹⁴ My mistake. It was an Esse 'Fairy' cooking stove.

¹⁵ Incorrect; there is a larger window to the west, above the worktop built by 'Chippy Ashton' in 1944 in what was then 'the scullery.'

¹⁶ This was part of the 1944 Boulton & Paul 'Spitzbergen' prefabricated hut.

bottles.' Each bed area had a few shelves above it and was fitted with a 12-volt reading light. Some of our clothes were hung on clothes-hooks and our other kit was stowed under the beds. We spent very little time in there, except for sleeping.

The long narrow engine room was on the west side of the building. The north wall was fitted out with long benches and metal-working and carpentry tools, which kept any mess as far as possible from the two operating alternators, which were powered by twin-cylinder horizontally-opposed Enfield air-cooled diesel engines. The back door of the engine room led out to the Stevenson screen which held the thermometers and the thermograph. On the east wall was another bench which held the emergency lighting batteries and charger; apart from supplying the 12-volt reading lights, the batteries also fed power to the wind direction indicator. Right at the extreme end of the engine room was our toilet, containing the bucket which was emptied into the sea, usually the last job done by the duty 'gash hand' at the end of each week. At the north-east corner of the building was the latest extension, which now housed the ionospherics gear, work-benches and the base leader's desk, the barometer, barograph and wind velocity and direction indicators. I modified the wind velocity indicators by installing a switch to allow them to work in series whenever the wind went above 100 knots, which happened from time to time. This room was also home for the medical kit, which was identical to that held by a Royal Naval destroyer.¹⁷

(27:10) I will not mention his name, but that summer one member of our team had to have regular injections of half a million units of Penicillin Procaine G to clear up a little infection which he'd probably picked up in Montevideo. It gave me my first experience of using a serum needle... The only doctor in the Dependencies that year was Paul Massey, who was based at Hope Bay. Medical problems were few and far between, mostly minor cuts and bruises. The most technical first-aid I was called upon to do was the occasional temporary tooth-filling job, using carbolised resin. We carried some specialised medical items, such as ophthalmic tablets, which were like little disks of soluble paper containing morphine for putting under the eye-lids in case of snow-blindness but these never were required, as we had no arc-welding gear and were very careful to use goggles whenever we were out on snow.

The ionospherics room had a solid fuel stove, but generally was heated by an electric convector heater and later on we fitted this with a relay, so that when the ionospheric equipment 'fired up' it switched the heater off, helping to balance the load on the generators. Except for the engine room, all the hut floors were covered in brown linoleum, and we used the same material to cover work-benches as well. In 1955 our only other building was the Nissen hut, located upwind of Bransfield House. It was fitted out with rows of wooden storage racks either side of a central aisle to hold non-perishable food stocks, a little stove and our emergency radio. In common with other bases, it held various emergency supplies, in case there ever was a fire in the main building. Fortunately we only had one fire incident when some empty coal-sacks, stacked outside the front door ready to be stowed away caught fire, probably due to a dropped match. It was quickly extinguished.

¹⁷ Some sources state 'The same as held on a Royal Navy submarine.'

For fire-fighting, the hut held six CO² fire extinguishers, with asbestos gloves hanging beside them to prevent hands being frozen to the nozzles should these appliances have to be used, and in the Inner Hall an open forty-gallon drum of sea water with fire buckets and stirrup pumps. I'm glad to say that the only time we used a stirrup pump was on longer boat journeys when it was useful for bailing out; if the boat was heavily laden, a hand-baler was awkward to use.

One must also mention Tiddles, the base cat. Brought here by Lenton in 1952, he was probably the most enthusiastic bird-watcher of us all, but he didn't catch many. In November in 1955, Tiddles fell off the roof and was trapped in the melt-gap between the snow-drifts (which were up to the eaves of the hut) and the walls of the building. We tried digging holes in the drift to help him but, as he struggled to climb out he slowly dropped down into the space under the hut. So eventually we had to remove a floor-board to rescue him. He would spend much of his time sleeping on top of the main radio transmitter, curled up beside the variable frequency oscillator stored there ready for Amateur Radio work – which ultimately was the death of him, because he jumped down on the 4th of April 1956 and dislodged the VFO, which fell on him. He promptly shot outdoors and hid under the hut and no-one realised how badly he was hurt; it was only when we looked for him later that we found that either his injuries, which felt like broken ribs, or a combination of shock and the cold, had killed him.

It wasn't long before I started to make a 'shopping list' of items needed for next summer, to improve life at the base. They were:-

Binoculars: because without them it wasn't easy to observe ship and aircraft movements which we had to report, and also made wildlife observation difficult;

Serviceable boats, which would allow safer movement in the area for both work and recreation;

Somewhere to store them would also protect them from damage when buried in snow and ice during the winter;

Rolling forty gallon fuel drums across the gully on two old sections of radio mast and planks to the back of the engine room was a major hazard, and this had to be sorted out:

An automatic Morse Code radio transmission unit would hopefully allow us to work 'duplex' schedules and to reduce time in handling radio traffic.

In 1956 this had been achieved. The need for a new generator room was also discussed at some length, and a drawing of our proposals sent to Elliott in Port Stanley. John and I both felt strongly that a separate generator building would reduce both mechanical noise and electrical interference but, in the end, we arrived at a compromise between Secfids' views and our own; and this compromise would eventually provide additional storage space as it was obvious that while it was in fair condition, the Nissen hut wouldn't last for ever.

Watching wildlife interested most people at the base. In early spring the first Gentoos seemed to be concerned about the amount of broken ice in the south of the Neumayer

Channel and in the Bay, and they'd walk across the glacier from Dorian Bay to *Flag Bay* and wait there for a time, before taking the shorter route over the fragmented ice to reach the rookeries. Gentoos did not nest in Goudier Island at the time, although these and Adelies and Chinstraps would frequently visit around the base hut; in each of the three summers I was there, a female Gentoo laid an egg on the rocks of Goudier Island and then abandoned it. Visiting immature non-nesting birds often rested-up by the hut on the very sunny days and would sit patiently, as if waiting to be photographed. Killer and humpback whales were very active in the bay and humpbacks and fin whales would often go down the Peltier channel, usually in groups of three or four. Occasionally, whales would also pass between Goudier Island and Alice Creek.

We held four fire-arms; a 12-bore shotgun, an SMLE .303 and a .22 rifle and a .45 revolver, which were kept in a rack in the inner hall. I replaced the anemometer, which was inherited with bullet-holes in the cups, and we had no incidents of this type of damage, although one or two of the team members were very interested in shooting wildlife. I didn't like the idea of random slaughter and came up with a ruling which was, "If you shoot it, you eat it" and that was acceptable to everyone. The end result was that, during the whole of 1955 and 1956, only one seal and three penguins were killed for eating, which was much less than most bases – if one believed all the stories that were told at that time.

Nevertheless, should sea-ice conditions prevent ships from approaching in summer, we were prepared to use these weapons to kill wildlife to help in surviving the following winter; although we were required to have a minimum of eighteen months stock of food when the last ship left at the end of each summer. However, we did collect Gentoo eggs for cooking, and we were issued with waterglass (which was a mixture of soluble silicates of potash and soda) with which we coated the shells for preservation. Penguin egg whites made superb cakes and meringues, but a boiled penguin egg was a gruesome sight; when cooked, the 'white' stayed transparent and the yolk was blood red – the taste was just awful, as well. We collected the first-laid egg just after the second was laid, and up to four hundred eggs each summer. By visiting Jougla Point, Lecuyer Point and Tombstone Hill rookeries, we tried to spread the harvest as wide as possible. Going further afield was not felt worthwhile, as the risk of breakages went up in direct proportion to the distances traveled.

I used to check on the insect colony in Alice Creek each time I was in the area – apart from lichens, it was our only large area of 'greenery' for miles around, covering as it did about two square yards. This first summer I spent quite some time mapping nesting sites, ringing birds and logging bird numbers; filling in the bird ringing reports, parceling the whole lot up and sending them off. The feedback from this effort was zero - nothing at all. I was delighted when, some forty years later, I saw a copy of part of my nest-site map on an Antarctic Heritage poster for the 1998-99 season. If only I had realised the work would have been kept for so long, I would have been encouraged to do more the following two summers.

(33:10) Food was rather limited, because there were no freezers at British bases at this time. Staples like potatoes, onions, carrots, green beans, peas, cabbage and some fruit came in dried form, although we also had smaller quantities of canned vegetables and fruit. Canned 'Meat & Vegetables', sausages, brisket and 'herrings in tomato sauce' figured large on the menu, but there were also occasional treats like canned crawfish, kippers and steak. Butter came in cans, as did margarine which we used for cooking; I recall some of our stocks of margarine tasted most peculiar and having a long-running battle with Port Stanley before it was eventually replaced. Milk came in three forms; mostly powdered, but also evaporated and condensed.

Every year we were sent a metal box with a soldered lid, containing crocus, snowdrop, hyacinth and daffodil bulbs, packed in enough compost to grow them in. These flowered well, on the little table beside the east window in the living room. We also received lettuce seeds but I can't recall growing these, and two packets containing mustard and cress seeds, which I grew on wet blotting paper, but somehow mustard and cress sandwiches seemed a little out of character for most of the base members during my stay, but it was an attempt to supplement our vitamin C! The mother of Julian Taylor, who was based at Hope Bay, sent down a case of a new cordial called Ribena to each of the bases, for the same reason. When working outside in warmer weather, we would mix equal parts of Ribena and lime juice and add water, topped off with ice granules from partially-melted snowdrifts, to make an enjoyable soft drink.

We had Christmas dinner early that year, because although we had buried our turkey in a snow-drift in an attempt to keep it until the 25th, I thought it wouldn't keep that long. As it was, we managed to scrounge some fresh beef for Christmas Day... Because we normally had continuous mains power, our consumption of light-bulbs was higher than any other base, but my request for additional spare bulbs was rejected. Eventually I sent off a private purchase order to the Falkland Islands Stores, which they must have referred back to Secfids, because suddenly I was informed the stock level was to be increased.

Alcohol was also limited; one bottle of spirits, either Vat 69 Whisky or Gordon's Gin for the hut, and one can of McEwan's beer per man every week was the free ration, if I remember correctly. In reserve, we also had Navy rum which was delivered every year in large earthenware jars. (One jar was 'broken in transit' by being hit very carefully with a chisel and its contents strained through cheese-cloth into bottles. The broken jar, still in its wicker-work cover and with the neck seal unbroken, was returned with the request "may we have another one, please"? And we got one!)¹⁸

I must say, I've never baked better bread than when using that Esse cooker; everyone made white and brown bread, rolls and plaited loaves several times during their weeks cooking duty. The only problem with this stove was when the wind got stronger than about 50 knots, when it became difficult to stop the oven temperatures running away. There were no detergents as we know them now; for washing dishes we put slivers of hard white soap in a tin with holes punched in the bottom – a few quick plunges in hot

¹⁸ These wicker-covered ceramic bottles held one Imperial gallon.

water soon worked up a lather. For laundry, we did have soap-flakes, but most of us just rubbed clothes with a large cake of the soap which was also used when scrubbing the floors.

The boats I inherited were in poor condition. One was a 12-foot stem dinghy; the other was a Norwegian 'Pram' dinghy, clinker-built. I remember recording that one, in particular, appeared to have had very little maintenance for some time. This became an important factor when our new neighbours on Anvers Island asked us to help their survey team. Base N had been established during my first summer, about thirty miles to the west¹⁹ with the aim of surveying the Island with a particular slant on petrology, as 'erratic' samples had been collected years previously with a very high copper content – in fact two of the mountains were already known as Blue Peak and Copper Peak. Peter Hooper was in charge of setting-up this base and the work went well, except when they assembled the main beam at ground level and the *Biscoe* had to make an unscheduled visit to provide extra manpower to lift the thing into place. When surveying of the south-east coast of Anvers got under way, Hooper and his team found it almost impossible to reach certain areas overland, particularly as they were man-hauling sledges, so they asked me to do some ferrying in early June.

With only four bodies at Port Lockroy, arrangements for this operation was rather critical – for a start there was no way I would leave a base with only one person on it, for operational and safety reasons. It was vital that our radio operator was available for schedules, and John was required to provide continuous power from the alternators, but as the ionospheric gear could be left to run automatically for a day or so, this meant that Bob and I were the obvious choice to go over to Børgen Bay and assist in the first move. To give Bernard a break from his demanding routine I arranged with Secfids for 'control base' to be transferred to Deception Island for a few days, so that he could have a short break away from base as the ferrying work progressed. Having already stored and covered our boats for the winter, we put the pram dinghy back into the sea to tighten up the seams and fitted long-range tanks to the Seagull engines. These engines were a bit temperamental in cold weather and one of the tricks we had learned was to carry a Hex-type²⁰ solid fuel 'Tommy-cooker' in each boat, along with tools and spare sparkplugs. If, after the third pull, an engine failed to start, we'd balance a spare plug on the rim of the cooker and heat it up to dry off any condensation, fit the heated plug and the engine would then usually 'fire up' first time.

(38:41) When working in brash ice, propeller shear springs often broke so our boating tool-kit always carried quite a stock of these. Vibration from the propeller hitting ice would quickly slacken the small Seagull transom-clamps and, although we always had a lanyard fitted from the engine to the boat, we would regularly tighten them up as we went along, for fear of the engine falling into the sea. There had been several unpleasant incidents with boats at Fids bases in the past and we were required to carry a considerable amount of emergency equipment, which limited space in the boats. We also carried patent anchors, but I'm not quite sure what use they would have been,

¹⁹ Spoken direction corrected

²⁰ Hexamine solid fuel.

what with an average depth of some 50 fathoms in the Bay! We never did find out... With this in mind, on June the 4th 1955, Bob and I took both our boats north into the Neumayer Channel, landed in Børgen Bay on the east coast of Anvers Island, collected Hooper and Jim Rennie and brought them back to Port Lockroy.

We had to move slowly because of the amount of sea-ice, and visibility was down to two-hundred yards at times which meant we had to navigate by compass. When we eventually returned to collect the rest of the survey team (Bill Hindson, John Canty and Doug Litchfield) we found they had gone back to their tents in *Windy Alley*, which was a few miles inland between two mountains, as they had assumed the weather was too bad for a second run. Bob and I moored our boats and went up to the survey camp to stay overnight; next morning we took the remaining three base 'N' lads back to Lockroy. Ferrying the survey team to south-east Anvers Island had to be delayed, because the weather remained poor until June the ninth, when Bob and I were able to set off with Hooper, Rennie and Bernard on the first run, back to Børgen Bay.

After Bob and I returned to Port Lockroy, I had great difficulty in making the pre-arranged radio schedules with Bernard. When I asked Canty, the Base 'N' radio operator to assist, he said the equipment we used was a little daunting for him, but happily 'Pidge' Palmer at Deception Island stepped in as our relay man; he could hear Bernard quite well, but his 68 portable radio transmissions from behind the mountains of Anvers Island were just skipping right over us. The weather became warm enough to make sledging on Anvers Island impossible, and at one time Hooper suggested that the three men in *Windy Alley* should try to head back to Base 'N' – however the wind had become very strong, so that idea had to be abandoned.

Weather conditions eased up a bit by June the fifteenth, and after contacting Port Stanley for a weather forecast, Bob and I set off once more, this time to collect Bernard from his vacation trip. Conditions in the Neumayer channel were a bit grim, with around 75% coverage of ice, but fortunately most of it was new; about three inches thick and fairly soft. The weather in *Windy Alley* had deteriorated even more and the snow had become even softer, so instead of just bringing Bernard home, Hooper and Rennie decided that there was nothing useful they could do on Anvers Island at this time, so they also asked to be brought back to Lockroy. It was agreed our guests should stay for Mid-Winter celebrations and we would try again when conditions improved.

Several short boat trips were made – Hooper and I went out to check conditions in the Neumayer Channel from time to time. The many boat trips were beginning to cut into our work commitments and it was June the twenty-eighth before the weather improved enough for me to feel it was safe enough to lend the base 'N' party a dinghy, so they could continue the survey work. They headed off, got as far as Cape Lancaster where ice conditions meant they could go no further, and then returned to Cape Kemp for the night. They set off the following day, but got stuck in ice, with only three days food on board. This time we were able to keep in touch as our 68 set, which we had also lent them, was well clear of the mountains. In order to assist, Bob and I prepared to take

our second dinghy via Lefèvre Point (the site of a large glacial moraine) so that if all else failed, a depot could be laid.

Next day the Base 'N' party radioed they'd managed to land at Gauthier Point, so all we needed to do was to cover a short distance to help. That wasn't quite as easy as it may sound, because of the amount of ice still trapped around Goudier Island, but John took a long rope and hauled us and our boat through the ice, until it was clear enough to start the engine. We dropped the supplies at Lefèvre Point as Hooper had radioed that he and his crew had decided to walk there, then carried on to pick up our abandoned dinghy and brought it back to collect the survey team. Eventually everyone was safely back at Lockroy, for a hot meal and a party in the evening.

It wasn't until the ninth of July that conditions improved enough to do a run back to Anvers Island. To try and avoid any further problems Bob used the Pram dinghy to carry the survey team; I used the [stem] dinghy to ferry their food and equipment. The trip to Børgen Bay was fairly uneventful, and Bob and I set off to return to Base 'A'. On the way back a gale sprung up, but we eventually got to shore through the ice and started to unload our boats. With most of his gear unloaded, Bob dropped a groundsheet into the sea and cast off to collect it as the wind was blowing off-shore. Suddenly he had trouble with his engine, just as the wind became even stronger. Prompt action was essential and I remember thinking, 'Don't leave one man at the base on his own' as I rushed up to the hut to tell Bernard and John what had happened.

Visibility was down to about 100 feet and Bob was out of sight and, even though most of my emergency gear was now on shore, to save time I started the engine and headed off. After a few hundred yards the fixings on my carburetor came adrift, and there I was, in the same situation as the person I'd gone to help – and with no tools! I could only continue down-wind, and eventually landed on Woogie Island. With no signs of the other boat, I was in limbo – staying on the island, I was of no use to anyone. The only option I could see now was to shove off and anticipate the wind would take me to Gauthier Point, where I hoped to find Bob.

After a dismal trip, rowing down-wind and having to bail at the same time, I found he wasn't there – what I didn't know was that, when he arrived earlier, he couldn't land because of the ice piled up against the shore. By the time I got there, some of the ice must have moved on but, by now, conditions had become very cold, very wet, very windy and very dark.

Hauling the dinghy halfway onto the ice ledge and digging a snow-hole, I tied the boat's painter to my leg and curled up, hoping that conditions would improve by morning. As they had been soaking in near-freezing sea-water for about ten hours, I knew my feet and hands were going to be in trouble. I just hoped Bob had remembered a point I made several times to the team – "As there's so few of us, if anyone goes adrift, don't rely on someone coming to look for you, they may have troubles of their own – so do whatever you can to make your own way back." When daylight eventually broke, I really wasn't certain where I was; the cloud was almost

down to sea level and every landmark was obscured, but at least it was much calmer. I looked around for signs of life, saw nothing and eventually started rowing back in a westerly direction.²¹

(38:41) What I didn't know was, that after being unable to land at Gauthier Point, Bob had decided to row up to Börden Bay, being somewhat sheltered from the wind in the Neumayer Channel. Once more he was unable to land, due to the ice against the shore. He told me later that he said a couple of very strong words and wrapped himself up in the wet groundsheet and lay in the bottom of his boat and tried to get some sleep. He didn't stir for several hours, and when at last he peered out from under the groundsheet he saw a single flash from the Argentinian light-tower near Cape Errera²² in the south east corner of Doumer Island, orientated himself, and set off up the Peltier Channel. Meanwhile, I was rowing slowly towards Base 'A' followed all the way by a very skinny-looking leopard seal – but it was impossible for me to get near the base for ice. Eventually I managed to land near Lecuyer Point, and moored the boat using a pair of crossed oars jammed in the snow. John and Bernard had been on the look-out all night and had rigged up lights in an attempt to help; without binoculars, John had tried using his camera viewfinder back-to-front but found that wasn't much help in the gloom and the spray, anyway.

He walked over the sea-ice into Alice Creek bringing some Canadian snow-shoes, and assisted me on the way back. Bob, meanwhile, had got as far north as Priest Island but beyond that, the Peltier channel was full of ice. Mooring his boat and dumping the engine in the snow, he climbed onto the *Sierra Glacier* and started walking home. At one stage he fell down a crevasse, but fortunately it opened out near the shore so he was able to walk along the bottom and climb back onto the plateau – he arrived later the same evening.²³ For several days the two of us couldn't put our hands in warm water and we watched, with some interest, the skin from all our toes coming off complete with toe-nails. Once he had recovered, Bob took John back over the ice to where he had left his boat and collected much-needed tools and personal effects.²⁴ Needless to say, before they set out we put a depot for them on Wiencke Island, just in case the sea-ice broke up before they returned. The incident made quite an impression on me – ever since then, whenever heading for some out-of-the-way place I've always carried the biggest 'Swiss Army' knife in the catalogue. We decided to erect a small refuge hut just in case a similar situation occurred. It certainly didn't deter anyone from boating, although we were a little bit more careful in the future.

As it happened, by the end of 1957 no significant deposits of copper were found and Base 'N' was closed. Whilst waiting for our replacement boats to be delivered, John and I rigged a dog-picket wire rope between two concrete piers as a safety line across to Wiencke Island, and built a raft from empty 40-gallon drums, so that we could cross whenever we wanted. Eventually a large growler ripped raft, wire and piers away, but by then it didn't matter too much because it was nearly time for our new boats to

²¹ 'Slip of the tongue' here. The direction was, of course, easterly.

²² On Py Point. As Bob later explained, this flash of light was much more intense than could have come from the light tower.

²³ At c. 02:00 the next morning.

²⁴ On 24 August.

arrive. We still wanted a boathouse, and that we knew was also in the pipeline...

And so it came to that time of the year when information began to arrive about summer shipping movements and we looked forward to mail from home and deliveries of fresh vegetables; it was also time when folk in Port Stanley were far too busy to advise of last-minute changes. This was probably why I sent off a peevish signal stating that a “net-laying vessel with an orange funnel” had been sighted steaming south down the Neumayer Channel – it was the *John Biscoe* of course, but everyone at the base felt she might at least have dropped our mail off en route. I flashed her on the Aldis lamp with the query 'triple A' signal²⁵ and was ignored – not that we would blame the Captain, because he probably had other instructions – anyway, he gave us a turkey every Christmas. It's not surprising that this time of year was known as the 'silly season'.

This, then, brought me to the end of my first year. We'd managed to do the work originally scheduled for five, and as no-one was demanding to leave on the first ship, I started to look forward with a sense of quiet satisfaction to the second year. More foreign ships arrived and anchored than last year – on some days, we had lunch on one and dinner on another. Bob, Bernard and John, having completed their contracts eventually left Base A at the end of February 1956. I was sorry to see them go, but Robbie Davies, Len Fox, Peter Bunch and Barry Golborne had arrived on the new *Shackleton*. Peter and Robbie had 'signed on' for one year, but Peter later extended his contract – the others were on two-year contracts. Barry had been south before at Admiralty Bay as Diesel Electric Mechanic; Peter, an ex-Royal Navy man, was our new Radio Operator, and Robbie and Len were to operate the ionospheric equipment.

'Control Base' operations improved with delivery of a Creed punch unit, which converted standard keyboard English to Morse Code on punched paper tape. Peter and I installed this and, after a bit of experimentation with receiver antenna bypass capacitors, I was able to rig up for duplex operating – which meant that incoming signals could be received at the same time as outgoing signals were being transmitted – further reducing costly air-time with VPC. At busy times I was able to help by typing outgoing signals from other bases, whilst Peter was receiving their incoming – the tape was looped into a box, so if the Creed unit was transmitting faster than I could type messages in, the trick was to hold down the letter 'e' key, which quickly generated a few feet of slack tape between the punch and the tape reader, which transmitted the Morse Code 'pause' signal while one was catching up.

(43:39) This worked very well, especially as we were now also handling signals for the new Bases 'O' and 'W' and for some time until they were fully established, also Halley Bay and the Trans-Antarctic Expedition base.²⁶ We only had one problem with the Creed unit; the punch foil had been damaged [in transit] so we set-to with replacing this postage-stamp-sized piece of perforated metal. Referring to the manual, everything went well until we got to the bottom of a page where it said 'Loosen the

²⁵ 'What ship? Where bound?'

²⁶ I recall noting that the amount of radio traffic in July 1956 was double that of the same month in 1955 - disregarding incoming - eighty outgoing signals a day were not that unusual.

screws from the top cover plate' which we duly did, removing the plate. Immediately, 40-odd springs and push-rods shot out of the revealed cavities and bounced all over the floor. Turning over to the next page we read 'Do not remove this plate, as all the springs, etc. etc...!' Anyway, two hours later they had all been collected up, cleaned and re-inserted and, with four pairs of hands holding in the bits, the cover plate was re-fitted and the job went ahead.

We had expected a new 89 transmitter to be delivered but the replacement was, we were told, 'damaged beyond repair in transit' which was a shame, as problems with the existing unit – which was getting rather tired – kept us busy later that winter. The main HT transformer burned out and, at the time, we had no provision for a spare unit. So, we collected together a set of six [spare] transformers belonging to the [original and new] ionospheric equipment, and wired them up in series/parallel to give the required voltage and current capability. This work kept three of us out of bed for nearly 72 hours. Peter's favourite saying (after spending hours searching for some other base's errant sledging party) was a loud cry of "Got 'im!" when he eventually made contact.

Robbie spent a few extra hours making an illuminated sign which read "Got 'im?" whenever the transmitter was switched to 'send'. This wasn't quite as juvenile as it may sound, because I encouraged Peter and Bernard (before him) to spend a lot of time on listening watch for all sorts of radio traffic. The intelligence they gathered allowed me to report²⁷ new bases being opened by other countries, and their shipping movements. This awareness was also of considerable benefit to FIDS, for example when a party from Base 'W' was stranded on Rouxe Island. This group, which included their radio operator, was out of contact with their base, so Peter maintained hourly contact with shipping in the area and the home Base until the sledge-party was picked up by HMS *Protector*.

Inevitably, our 'home-brewed repair' failed, just six days before the spares were delivered. Our new boats had been delivered but, to give an indication of the problems we had, I might mention that our new Pram dinghy had a quarter-inch gap in the stern-boards when it arrived. This was soon fixed, and in February 1956 we used our new boats to assist Base 'N', after a group of their surveyors had been out of radio contact for a week. This went off without incident and I was able to take Hooper round Doumer Island so that we could check nesting sites, while he collected rock samples.

Having five people for the second winter meant a reduction in domestic chores for us all; the usual drinks and chat session took place on Saturday after the hut had been scrubbed out, the hot-water tanks filled and the anthracite bunker topped up. Next weeks food items for the duty cook would have been brought over from the Nissen hut and more delicate tinned items issued from the cupboard in the hall, where they were protected from frost. Tins of tobacco and cigarettes were issued to those who used them, together with the weekly allowance of chocolate, which we referred to by the Naval name of 'nutty'.

²⁷ By use of 'Group Time Code' and 'One time pad' for cipherring messages.

One particularly dark Saturday night, after checking to ensure our Navy rum was not deteriorating in storage; Peter decided for some reason that the base was under attack. Taking the .303 rifle with him, he charged out into the drifting snow. After he'd fired a few rounds out to sea, it seemed there was a need to offer him some counseling. As he was about three inches taller and some 28 pounds heavier than me, I looked for his muzzle flashes, gave him both barrels from the 12-bore over his head from the living-room window; shut it quickly to stop the snow blowing in, and waited. It went very quiet out there for a while, but when Peter returned, he said he thought perhaps it was time he went to bed. I cleaned and oiled both weapons and from then on stowed both rifle bolts in the loft. Happily, we never were invaded again.

Many evenings, people at the base would continue working, but now and again the base wind-up gramophone was taken out and 78 rpm records were played.²⁸ A dart-board was provided, and cards, draughts, chess and 'uckers' (or Ludo, as civilians called it) was frequently played. Peter invented a new version of 'snakes and ladders' which was probably not an improvement on the original, in that it often took about three hours to get a result.

Soon after his arrival, Barry started to experience problems with the generators. This struck me as rather odd, as there'd been very little trouble the previous winter. We carried spare engines and alternators, and by now we'd been able to reduce load fluctuations quite a lot; also we had fitted voltage regulators. Everyone mucked in when required to help strip down and maul items around the workshop and we all took turns hand-cranking engines 200 times each, in order to calibrate fuel pumps and injectors. After some months of frequent power outages we were all in the Living Room discussing progress with these problems, when Barry turned to me and pronounced that the whole sorry saga was all my fault, and followed this with a dissertation upon my personal abilities. Everything went quiet, then Peter gave Barry a smack which bounced him off the wall and left him sitting on the floor – at which point he looked up to me and said “What are you going to do about this, then?”

I sighed, silently counted to five and left the room, sent a signal to Elliott saying that I felt this man was not suitable for any base for his second year. His response was, quite reasonably, one of concern; this wasn't Barry's first tour, and there were certain penalties when an individual's contract was terminated, so he suggested Barry could be posted to another base the following year. Having had time to think, I stuck to my guns and Barry was shipped out in early December, after Ray Cooper had been dropped off from Base 'W' as a temporary replacement. Ted Gutteridge, an engineer from Port Stanley, also arrived on HMS *Protector*; he stayed a few hours – and the generators began to perform properly again. Three weeks later I was told that Barry had initiated a fist-fight with Norman Brown, previously First Mate of the old *John Biscoe* and now skipper of the *Shackleton*. Even then, I was still concerned about my handling of this incident but nevertheless felt strongly that moving my problem to

²⁸ By 1953, private long-playing record players were in more regular use – the old gramophone was used as an 'old-time' novelty.

another base would not have been the answer. I discussed this with Elliott when I eventually returned to Port Stanley, and he was kind enough to apologise, which made me feel happier about the whole affair.

(50:14) Due to John Smith's renovation of the engine room the previous year, Ray had little to do, apart from keeping the generators serviced, so he offered to help get our new boathouse and store project under way. He was very enthusiastic and got this project off to a fine start by taking over the setting-out of the site and I helped with the pouring of the foundation piers, which gave the 'new boys' time to have an effective induction. Once this phase of the building work was done, the rest of the construction was straight-forward, as the wooden building came in pre-fabricated sections.

Jim Muir Smith and Jack Tinbergen (who was the son of Niko Tinbergen of Leiden University) had arrived to do ionospheric readings with Len, in preparation for the start of the IGYE in 1957. Because ionospheric readings would have to be taken at 15-minute intervals for the research year, I informed Secfids this would make 'control base' work very difficult at Port Lockroy. He agreed that this function should be transferred and Peter, who did not relish the idea of becoming an 'ordinary' radio man, asked if he could follow this move to Base 'G', where he was to be assisted by a second operator. Colin Clement was due to arrive as Diesel Electric Mechanic, and Gordon Farquhar was to replace Peter as Radio Operator and a second DEM would be coming in, which would give Port Lockroy its largest wintering party since 1944. Jim was a 'hi-fi' enthusiast and spent some time building a Williamson Class 'A' amplifier using a pair of 807 valves which – by anybody's standards – was a bit of an over-kill, and introduced us to the pleasure of 33-1/3 rpm vinyl disks.

The 'silly season' had got off to an early start at the end of September, when requests for unusually detailed sea-ice reports were made; which entailed us skiing all over north, south and east Wiencke Island to get the best sightings down the Gerlache Strait, whilst dodging avalanches off *Mount Luigi*. Little did I know then that several interesting events were to occur before I headed for home. The Thayer School of Engineering at the Dartmouth Naval College in Hanover, New Hampshire wanted us to do whistler recording during the IGY. Jim and I soon had the equipment up and running and were to enjoy the use of two brand-new Ampex tape recorders. This was the early days of recording low frequency signals travelling along the earth's magnetic field, and I was amazed at how little interference we picked up from the mains generators.

I sat with earphones on, listening for whatever was to come. On the second day I heard our first atmospheric signal. This equipment had been delivered from the USA to us in 11 days by means of air freight, an American icebreaker and HMS *Protector*, which was something of a record for that time. While this was going on, our replacement second-hand 89 transmitter was being commissioned. Quite where this came from I never did discover; it wasn't in good condition and it was giving Gordon all sorts of problems. Jim and I had the thing 'fired up' with the door off the unit and the interlocks defeated, and were kneeling on the floor to find out why it wouldn't tune up properly.

Gordon, who had come in to see how we were getting on, suddenly said ‘There's the problem – the roller's come off the P/A²⁹ inductor coil!’ and reached in, grabbing hold of the coil in one hand and the roller in the other. He disappeared. Jim and I looked round, to find the shock had blown him across the room onto the work-bench. As we got off the floor to help him, his face turned blue, then red, then green then finally back to normal. I'm prepared to bet he never did that again...

More excitement came with HMS *Protector*. When we learned that she had left Port Stanley on November the 6th, we wondered if we were to have a visit on this trip; next day the 'bush telegraph' told us that she would be calling in, so the usual preparations were made. On the morning of November the 11th, *Protector* informed us that a survey party of eight was coming ashore for the next few months. Muttering things like 'it would have been nice to have known in advance', everyone stood-by to see what would happen next. A flurry of helicopters and boats dumped the survey team and their gear on Goudier Island and, for added excitement, the Colonial Secretary came ashore for a brief visit, followed later by the new Governor.

The Colonial Secretary did his usual 'hut inspection' on behalf of our landlords, a formality which used to take about seven minutes. On this occasion he looked at the weapons rack and asked "where are the rifle bolts?" and I replied, "Put away for safety" but didn't expand on this point – we never liked to introduce complications on inspection day! As the survey party of eight still had their hut to erect, we bedded them down in the base hut and fed them until they were established. I also made sure they would join us for Christmas Day, regardless of whatever else they might be doing at that time. It was only later that I remembered that I was 'duty cook' that particular week...

A pennant buoy was installed between our floating jetty and Sinker Rock, for use by the survey launch, and I suggested a site for their hut just south of the Norwegian scows, so that they were close enough to be supplied with mains electricity. Shortly after this, some of the Base N team arrived in their newly-acquired dinghy, and we were now sleeping nineteen in the main building and the Nissen hut. So, it was a busy time for everyone, yet no-one would tell us the real purpose of the Navy survey.

Three weeks later it became obvious that the new chart was being prepared for use by Her Majesty's Yacht *Britannia* – and that meant Prince Philip would be visiting some of the Fids bases as part of his world tour, on his way back to England after his visit to the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. We were about to receive Port Lockroy's first official tourist... It was a busy period – ships of various nationalities called in and, as usual, various Fids were dropped off 'in transit' to other bases.

Members of the Base 'A' team helped the survey party and they in turn helped us – their twenty-eight foot survey launch made it easier for us to travel further afield - and visits were made to Base 'N' and Base 'O' on the Danco Coast. I had great fun driving

²⁹ 1500-Volt radio frequency power amplifier.

the thing – equipped with bucket steering,³⁰ it was superb for hovering a few inches away from rocky shores in heavy seas when folk were going ashore.

Just to add a little more excitement, the Argentinian Navy decided to put a large mooring buoy and a refuge hut in the Dorian Bay area. It's impossible to say whether they intended a covert action; there had been a lot of ship and Grumman Goose sea-plane activity in this area in the previous summer; their presence this year was suspected when we heard key-clicks from local transmitters. Next day, when we were out putting large survey marker flags on high ground on Anvers, Doumer and Wiencke Islands, some of us spotted two ships anchored in Dorian Bay.

Yet another Official Protest was made out, signed and, accompanied by the Governor, I carried it round the Neumayer Channel, only to find the intruders had already departed. The document was neatly framed, using a left-over Argentinian pane of glass and the box which it had come in, and fixed to an inside wall of the refuge. Three days later we returned to see if anything new had happened, but all was quiet. On the off-chance a returning foreigner might decide to throw our protest into the sea and pretend we hadn't objected, Jim Muir Smith used some bright yellow gloss paint to write "Bienvenudo a Puerto Lockroy" and some very large, and rather rude words, all round the perimeter of their eight-foot diameter mooring buoy. With so many aircraft flying in the area at this time, I painted 'PL' in 12-foot letters on the shiny black Nissen hut roof as a pseudo airfield marker in the hope it might alert pilots of these foreign aircraft that the air-space they were flying in might not be quite as empty as they thought.

(57:13) The impending arrival of Prince Philip caused a certain amount of preparation work for everyone; the royal standard was duly delivered, signed for and flown from the flagpole when, on the afternoon of January the second 1957, Bill Johnston steamed the brand-new *John Biscoe* into his normal anchorage north-east of the base at full speed, leaving the Royal Yacht and HMS *Protector* anchored between Flag Point and Lefèvre Point. His Royal Highness came ashore and had a good look round the facilities. He seemed very relaxed and informal, possibly because no press people were allowed ashore. I first introduced him to the Survey Party, who were all on parade with kit and weapons laid out, and he happily posed for photographs; I walked him round the Island then took him into the hut to meet the Fids. As we entered, he said "Ah..!" and I suddenly realised that, although it had seemed a good idea at the time, the hall had been decorated predominately in blue and white with some detailing, which linked in the colour of the window frames and barge-boards outside. Trying to divert the subject from red, white and blue paintwork, I quickly ushered him into the rest of the hut.

We had been told our visitor would be eating on board the *Britannia*, so we offered him a beer instead, served up in Ray Cooper's pewter tankard. Prince Philip produced a large photograph of himself, and signed it adding the words 'Bransfield House' and the date. He looked at our signed photograph of the Queen and said "Now you've got a

³⁰ Officially entitled 'kettle steering.'

matching set!" After a tour of all the operations, we had a pleasant chat; then the leader of the survey party, John Wynne-Edwards, took Prince Philip round the area in the launch before returning him to the Royal Yacht.

Whilst HMS *Protector* was anchored, one of our base members was on deck talking to the Senior Engineering Officer, as our twelve-foot pram dinghy appeared from behind Gauthier Point, over-loaded with 25-foot flagpoles, tents, sleeping-bags, jerry cans, boxes and other emergency gear and with the stirrup pump at full squirt. The EO stared in amazement as this little boat pattered under the fantail of his ship and headed for home. He watched it for a few moments, shook his head and said "Oh my Gawd – lets go and have a drink, shall we?" He never was told that we only loaded up like that when the survey launch and other ships were in the Bay. Sir Raymond Priestley came ashore the same day: once more I switched into tour-guide mode but this time we both tactfully ignored the paintwork. When he saw the whale-rib arch he said to me "That wasn't here last time I came". So I asked him when that was. "1907" he replied. "God bless you, sir!" I said, suddenly being lost for anything else to say...³¹

With the VIP's departure, construction of the new boathouse continued; and with some of the last winter's team staying on site to assist, the new 400-gallon diesel storage tank was set up behind the engine room and the two horse-power electric pump for filling it from drums on the beach was established by the boatshed. The pipe-run up to the tank wasn't very elegant, as someone had been unable to ship the number of pipe elbows we'd requested but in my opinion that didn't matter, compared with the possibility of someone being crushed underneath a 320-pound drum if it landed on him in the gully.

Towards the end of February 1957 I handed over the base to Colin Clement, who'd been base leader at Admiralty Bay the previous year and who didn't want to be a base leader for his second winter. Unfortunately, no-one in Port Stanley had made any other arrangements, so it had to be his turn again. It was time to say farewell to Port Lockroy and the people left behind.

In many ways I was sad to leave, but there was a whole world out there yet to be seen, so I cheerfully climbed aboard the *Shackleton* and waited to be dropped off at Admiralty Bay, as Peter Bunch had asked for assistance with his radio gear. It was an experience staying a few days at Base G. It was one of the more modern buildings of that time; so different from the 'cozy' atmosphere of Bransfield House – it was almost like living in a barracks again – except that there was no paint on the interior walls; not even red, white and blue!

I was able to help Peter duplicate the operating system we'd used at Port Lockroy. By putting in a crude but effective earth and fitting antenna by-pass capacitors, he was soon able to work control base in duplex again, and it was nice to see the Creed unit we'd sent up with him performing well. Knowing how I used to feel when some 'Fids in transit' didn't take much interest in helping at my base during their stopovers, I also

³¹ This given date was logged at the time, but does not tally (for his possible visit to Port Lockroy, that is.)

rigged the modulator of Peter's transmitter to take a dynamic microphone instead of the more usual carbon granule type so that he could make better quality voice transmissions, and did a repair on somebody's tape recorder, to make myself useful.

Finally, it was time to head to the Falkland Islands. On the way, at Deception Island, I met the team involved in the aerial survey and spent some time talking to Jack Corlett, one of their electronic people. Five years later, I ran into him again, when we were both working in Bahrain, and he was very helpful with some of the more obscure electronic problems I had. At Port Stanley in March, one of the first things I had to do was visit FIDS Office for de-briefing. When I arrived at the outside office, one of the girls told me that Frank wanted to talk about the base diary. Frank Elliott and I got down to discussions on the new generator room and firmed up what was to be done in the future; we discussed the problems I had with one of my Diesel Mechanics, shook hands and I left. On the way out I was asked "What did he say about the Base Diary?" "Nothing", I replied – and that was one more mystery I never resolved...³²

There was some time to spare before the survey ships sailed for England, so I took myself down to the Falklands Island Air Service. For the next few weeks I flew with them all over the Islands and eventually visited all the stations on the coast. If the weather turned bad and it was unwise to proceed, the aircraft would be moored at its last 'port of call' until conditions improved. It was tradition that the crew were fed and billeted for the night, but regular pilots of the float Beavers had certain accommodations they tried to avoid. This happened to me on a couple of occasions – on one in particular I fell off the float into the sea. (About 25 years later I met a retired director of Hunting AeroSurveys when he fell out of a tree near my home.³³ In our subsequent chat, he told me his daughter was married to a doctor and she lived in the Falklands. We talked about this for a while, until he suddenly said – "It wasn't you who fell off the aircraft, was it? – they still talk about it today." I thought to myself "Fame at last!" and we parted as firm friends.)

(1:04:39) When the *Fitzroy* brought mail, any letters and small packages not marked 'Fragile' were bagged up for a non-stop air drop. One day I was duty bomb-aimer and was told a critical drop had to be made at a certain station. Poised over an open hatch in the floor of the aircraft, I listened to the count-down and released the mailbag exactly on cue. A quick banking manoeuvre took us back over the area and the regular pilot said, "Thanks, Alan, I've finally done it – that bag's smashed straight through the greenhouse of that bugger who always feeds me old mutton every time I have to stay overnight. Perhaps that'll teach him."

A few weeks later, I learned I would be sailing north on the *John Biscoe* which was due to leave after the *Shackleton*. While chatting to another Fid in one of the bars, he told me he had been speaking to Bill Etheridge who had booked passage on the *Shackleton* in order to get to England in time for a job interview. Bill, he told me, said he hoped there were no hard feelings. I didn't know quite what to say to this, so I just

³² I think I had committed a mortal sin by not leaving wide enough margins.

³³ Given three months to live with throat cancer, after six waiting months he decided to renew his youthful hobby of bird-watching. I was happy to show him the nearby 'furthest inland' Dipper nest with two eggs in it.

raised my eyebrows and shrugged. Soon after this I was told I would be sailing on the *Shackleton* instead but, when it was time to go on board, I found Bill had arranged to sail on the *John Biscoe* – I've no idea why. Accommodation on the *Shackleton* was not like the old *John Biscoe*; there were twin-berth cabins and I was allocated a cabin to myself.

The trip north was very interesting, as we anchored at Tristan da Cunha and later at St. Helena, which gave us all the opportunity for a 'run ashore' on these two most fascinating islands. Eventually, it was May 1957 and I was in England, and still remember being amazed at how green everything looked on the car-trip home. The following month I went out for a meal with Robbie Davies and met some of his family; later on he asked me to give him a reference, as he had applied to work for the Defence Research Board in Canada, where his sister lived. This I gladly did and I know he worked there for some years.³⁴

I kept in correspondence with some of the people from Base 'A' and received one letter from Len Fox, who had continued as deputy base leader after I left; he said Colin Clement had passed a lot of the routine work over to him. I recall Len writing, "I used to think you were a bit of an old woman at times, now that I'm doing more of your job I realise why you had to be" – which made me smile for the rest of that day. After a few weeks creative pottering, I joined the California Texas Oil corporation and went off to Bahrain, where I spent some time learning the oil refining business before joining their public relations department, where I became responsible for directing, shooting and editing documentary films for the company, the Bahrain government and other organisations (with my employers encouragement), such as BOAC, as British Airways was then known, and Walt Disney. I also set up and ran a radio station, which for ten years broadcast to employees.

In 1959, I spent some time in the western Himalayas, and was lucky enough to ski into Tibet with some Indian Army paramedics who were assisting Tibetans who were fleeing the country as the result of Chinese activities. Travel for my employers took me all round the Middle East and again to India, where I spent several happy weeks working in Kashmir. When flying to Beirut I spotted Lofty Tyson, (who had joined Fids when I did) sitting with a small group of men on the flight. He had been based at Signy and spent a few days at Port Lockroy in January 1957 in transit, and helped us install a replacement transmitter. We looked at each other and, with what I assumed was typical old-fashioned British reserve, said nothing. At the airport we arrived in the bar at the same time and started chatting, where I learned he was with the Diplomatic Wireless Branch.

It was in Bahrain I met and married Jane, and where my two sons were born. Later on, I helped some Bahraini employees with training in film production, and assisted them in setting-up their own company, which was company policy. Eventually in 1972, I returned to England with my family, primarily to give my boys some roots and for some years I ran a post-production back-up company for my former colleagues and

³⁴ He later worked for the Film Board of Canada.

several other Middle East clients. As they became more competent, business started to show signs of tailing-off and I joined Mannesmann and stayed with them for twelve-and-a-half years.

I then went to the Language Centre of the University of Oxford, where, as part of my work, I was involved in the production of television language programmes; the earlier programmes, in six different languages, were broadcast to Europe by satellite. A further twenty programmes of advanced Italian were financed by the EC, and involved co-operation from many other universities. These programmes were each shown several times on BBC2 in 1997 and 1998.

One day at Oxford, one of the Spanish lecturers introduced me to a young lady from her group, named Rachel Duncan who, she said, wanted to go to the Antarctic.³⁵ I spent some time chatting with her about the way things used to be done in the old days, and she spent a day with Jane and me; I dug out some old slides for her to see. She applied, was accepted and, as I record this, is based at Rothera. Before she left England, I gave her my old Fids issue khaki Ventile jacket and Jane sewed an original Antarctic Ski Club badge on the sleeve for her to take south, for a bit of historical whimsy. Keeping in touch by e-mail today is such a contrast to communicating in the 1950's but, from what Rachel tells me, it's nice to learn that some things have not changed that much.

How then, after all these years, would I sum up my impressions of Port Lockroy in the mid-1950's? Not an easy task; thinking about the place triggers the memory, and a whole series of overlapping images come to mind. None of these are unique but they all made a long-lasting impression. For example:-

-uplifting times sitting out on the plan, soaking up the sun on one of those magical quiet days that occurred in the first weeks of November, when the sea really did look like a millpond, and reflections of the scenery were as sharp and as clear as the real thing: when the birds, having staked their territories were so subdued that one could hear whales sounding out in the Neumayer Channel, with the echoes bouncing off the hills:

(1:10:10) -unexpected visitors – before we knew how deep the sea was – when one of the Chilean ships headed for the harbour down the channel between Goudier Island and Joula Point, and I had to slap the red filter onto the Aldis lamp to warn them off:

-later, after they had anchored, the crew rowing through the brash in their longboat to visit us, and their sudden hilarity when they realised they were trying to row right over the top of Bill's Island:

-the mid-winters day party that got a little out of hand when Len Fox had some beer poured over his head, followed by a scoop-full of flour: next morning when he woke up and groaned – "I've gone blind and I can't get my eyes open!":

³⁵ Now Mrs Rachel Morgan, Director of the UKAHT.

-Winds going from flat calm to 112 knots in half an hour:

-skiing through ice-crystal clouds:

-belligerent terns, and so much more; the list is almost endless.

-and today, thinking as I record this, what would have happened if Stonington Base had been more accessible, and the Governor had not decided to re-open Port Lockroy in January 1950 – would Base ‘A’ now be just a pile of rotten wood?

<ENDS>

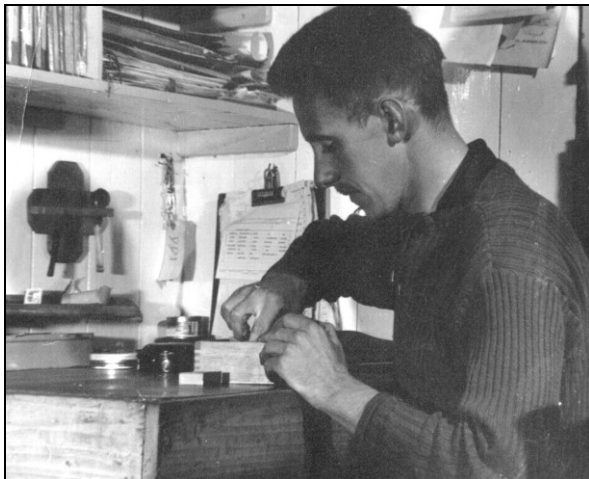
Some of the most regular visiting ships remembered as calling in during my stay at Lockroy:-

RRS John Biscoe(1)
Chiriguano
Oluf Sven

General San Martin
Bahia Agguire
HMS Protector

Lientur
RRS Shackleton
RRS John Biscoe(2)

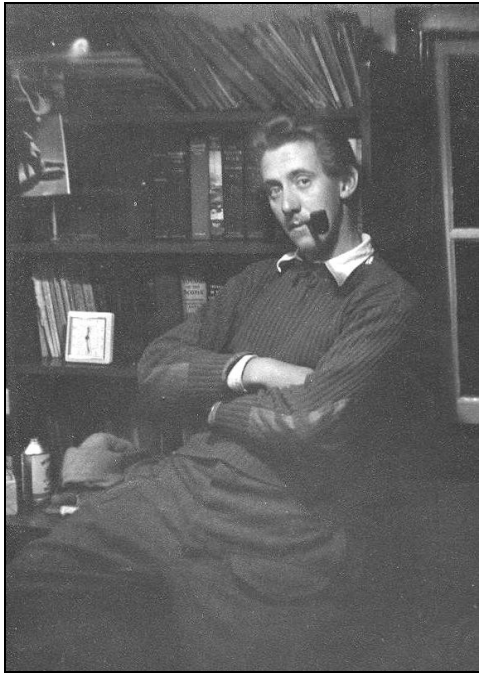
Lautaro
Sanaviron
Norsel



Alan Carroll in Deputy Postmaster mode, 1955
John Smith



Alan Carroll working on Whistler antenna, 2006
Jo Hardy



22nd Birthday in Living Room, at Base 'A', 1954
Trevor Vine-Lott



74th Birthday on board the barque *Europa*, 2006
Jo Hardy



Ionospheric Room in 2006. Alan Carroll with restored and installed Beastie –
a restoration project that took five months. Jo Hardy.

amc 22 10 2011