

PETER HOLLOWAY

Edited transcript of a video recording of Peter Holloway interviewed by Jack Tolson on the 2nd of October 2010. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/134. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 3rd November 2019.

[0:00:08] Holloway: My name is Pete Holloway. We are being filmed at my cottage, a Jacobean cottage in Stourport-on-Severn, the place where I was born and bred and went to school, left when I was eighteen to join the Royal Marines. 2nd of October is today's date, and do I mention you? No?

[0:00:40] Tolson: You can do. You can mention me, OK.

Holloway: It's actually being done by Jack Tolson who is the man making the movie, who I haven't seen since 1973/4, something like that.

[0:01:00] Tolson: 1974/5, yes.

Holloway: It's been a long time and we both recognised each other which was nice. Yes, it's really good to see him. That's Jack anyway. I'm sure you'll see him as well. All right.

[0:01:18] Tolson: OK Pete, now we'll just go back, if we can, and pick up on your childhood here. I didn't realise you actually lived and were brought up in this town.

Holloway: If I want you to stop, Jack, if I do that [hand gesture], is that possible?

[0:01:33] Tolson: Yes.

Holloway: Because I can't just keep talking about ...

[0:01:37] Tolson: No, we'll try and move things along. If we can just go back to your very early days: Mum and Dad, here.

Holloway: Right OK. ??? [inaudible] [gets up and gets photograph]

[0:01:48] Tolson: No but I can get that later.

Holloway: OK, well that's there.

[0:01:56] Tolson: Take me back to your very early childhood. What Dad was doing and ...

Holloway: Well I was born and bred in Stourport-on-Severn, where I live now, as I said, having left when I was eighteen to join the Royal Marines. I had a great childhood here. I went to the local school when I was five and sat next to a girl who was also five, and we are still friends now. She still lived in Stourport. She got all these cushions for me. She's a dressmaker/ seamstress by trade. We have always been friends since that first day at school. I obviously did all my schooling in Stourport: junior school and then secondary modern school, all in Stourport. And then I joined

the local carpet factory when I was fifteen, where my Dad worked, and began as an office boy. Yes, light and it was good but I had interest in other things like: one day I saw an advert in the *Daily Mirror*, when I was reading it in the office lunchtime, to join the Royal Marines and be a Commando. So that's what I did.

[0:03:44] Holloway: Then my mother got the paper, had come through and said 'What's all this Royal Marine Commando rubbish?' I said 'I want to join.' So 'Wait until your father hears about this.' Blah, blah, blah. So anyway I joined. My childhood was superb. I lived in a place called Olive Grove which is the other end of Stourport, and we had this huge park, Memorial Park, 20 yards from our front gate, with football pitches and swings, and all the trees that I think I must have climbed, apart from about two which were a bit too high. But it was a great place to be brought up as a child and I particularly liked when the council cut the grass in the summer. They used to bale it up and we used to roll them down the hills and play in them and make camps etc. And in winter: the snow. There was a nice bank at the top of the end where my house was. There were sledges and turned up pieces of tin. We used to go down the bank and have great fun. Those were my earliest memories of living in Stourport and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I must have done because here I am, back again.

[0:05:06] Tolson: So you won the day with your parents and you got yourself into the Royal Marines? Tell me how that happened, then take me very quickly through your Royal Marine career.

Holloway: OK. Well I was the only son. Two sisters older than me and according to my sisters, I was always 'Daddy's favourite'. So what I wanted usually happened. I wouldn't say I was spoiled, but I was. My sisters, this is their biggest moan to this day. One is 83 and the other one is 75 I think. They were made to go to Sunday School and I wasn't. That was because my Dad said to me 'Peter, do you want to go to Sunday School?' I said 'No' and I didn't go. My sisters still haven't forgiven me for that and they still remind me quite regularly now that I didn't have to go to Sunday School and I was spoilt, etc. etc. Joining the Royal Marines was probably the best thing I ever did. I had a great time in the Royal Marines. My first commission was 42 Commando. Halfway through that tour, the Borneo problem flashed up with the Indonesians and we were sent to Borneo.

[0:06:37] Holloway: I didn't know it was the real thing until they gave us live detonators for our grenades. We all thought 'Mmm, something's going on.' Anyway, that's what it was. I was on the first landings at Limbang and the rest is history. My Dad used to always moan because he never heard anything in the papers about Borneo, never even mentioned it. But these days they seem to mention it a lot, which I am all for of course, but in those days, they didn't. But no problem. After having 2 Commandos, I decided, after running across Dartmoor one day in the pouring rain with a Bren gun, I thought 'Peter, there's got to be better jobs than this here Royal Marines, than this.' I applied for a ship. My first ship was *HMS Tartar* which was down to the West Indies, would you believe? And I had a great two and a half years on the *Tartar* in the West Indies, based in Bermuda. That can't be bad. And we went to the States a lot: Key West. We were always in Key West. I was actually there last year on holiday. Flew into Miami and picked up a hire car and drove through Miami which was a complete nightmare, got lost about three times, but eventually found the road that runs down to the Keys. By the way, we hired an open top car as well which

was all a bit posey but it was great fun to drive down the Keys to Key West. It had changed slightly since I was in the Marines, because in those days you just had to go ashore in uniform. Now I am a civilian, of course, you don't have to do that, but it is still a great place.

[0:08:43] Tolson: Then the *Protector*, that was one of your ships, which really led you towards the Southern Hemisphere; rather the polar Regions.

Holloway: That's right. *HMS Tartar*, then I came off the *Tartar* and went on board *HMS Victory*, would you believe; the old wooden Nelson's flagship. I was a guide on there, which I really enjoyed. I loved it; I really did love it because I was really into Naval history and the original books are still on the ship, and if you see the Chief Officer, and tell him which one you want, he will get the keys and take one out and you can sign for it (obviously) and read it, which I did a lot of. I really got into Naval history. And yes, it was great, and I used to make that part of my tour which used to always give you – I'm not supposed to say this, but ... We used to get money off the tour people. You are not supposed to accept it. Anybody on *Victory* now hearing me saying this ... But we did, and I never used to touch my wages and that's the truth, never. So if you did a good tour, then there was loads of afters, let's put it like that.

[0:10:17] Holloway: But the thing we used to dread was the person who used to hang back. There was always one on every tour: somebody hung back. You knew this chap or this woman, was going to ask you a question, but not just a question but keep you ... You'd done your turn; now it was your hour off, and you were supposed to be off but these people just keep you nattering. The one I always remember: there was this bloke, a Londoner dressed in a beautiful camel hair overcoat; I think it was called Cockney lingo. In those days we used to actually live aboard the *Victory* ship up forward. And on the forward mast we had a television aerial, because we had a television in the mess, and this chap said to me 'While I was waiting in the queue, I just happened to look up and on the foremast, there's what looks like a TV aerial. Would that have been the radar in those days?' I looked at him and I knew he wasn't joking, and I said 'Yes, it was, yes. Well spotted.' 'Oh, thank you very much.' He gave me a £5 note and disappeared up the ladder. So yes, I always remember that bloke. Radar? In 18-whatever it was? Very funny.

[0:11:43] Tolson: Take me down South now, to your first visits to the Falkland Islands.

Holloway: The first visit was on *HMS Protector*, which was an old flat-bottomed Naval ship. Also her last commission because she was going for razor blades after that. She was my first introduction to Port Stanley. The Naval ships never actually went far South. South Georgia and the South Shetlands Islands were probably as far as they went because they weren't ice breakers or anything like that. They had to be a bit careful. But it was my initial introduction to going South at the Falkland Islands. Then when I left the *Protector*, because she was going for razor blades, I joined *HMS Endurance*, the first one, which was taking over from her, and yes, I enjoyed both ships. I went round Cape Horn five times on the *Endurance*, why I can't remember, but we did. Yes she was a good sea boat whereas the *Protector* was flat-bottomed, ex-minelayer or something, from the Second World War, but the *Endurance* was a better sea boat. Yes, I had a good time on her.

[0:13:13] Tolson: Was it when you on *Protector* or *Endurance* that you were involved in the initial look at pulling off the *Great Britain*?

Holloway: That was on the *Protector* I think, but it's a long time ago. You are talking '67/ '68. The old brain is a bit fuddled these days.

[0:13:44] Tolson: That must have been quite an exciting period, and interesting too?

Holloway: It was. The first thing I knew was the Chief Officer said 'Pete, we have a bloke coming down who wants to go across to the *Great Britain*' which was ditched at the head of the bay in Port Stanley. Beached; she was actually on the beach. 'Will you take him across in a Gemini?' I said 'Yes, no problem.' So I met this chap and in the boat we got and off we zoomed. I said to him 'What do you want to do? Do you want me to wait or do you want me to come back for you?' He said 'Could you give me like, a couple of hours?' I said 'Yes, I'll come back at noon.' He said 'Fine.' So I went back then for him and took him back to the ship. He never told me anything obviously. I was just the boat driver. But a few years later, she was towed back and is now in Bristol in the docks, looking pretty fine by all accounts. As a matter of fact, we are having the BAS yearly dinner¹ next year, 2011, on board the *Great Britain*. I am looking forward to seeing it and seeing what state it is in now, camera at the ready. So looking forward to that next year.

[0:15:17] Tolson: Now, you turned your attentions to BAS at some stage presumably in this period. How did that come about?

Holloway: In the pubs in Port Stanley, talking to Fid-type people. I was due to leave the Royal Marines within the next year and I thought 'That sounds pretty good to me, this BAS outfit.' Again, talking to all the Fids I could find in the Globe and the pub on the jetty which I can't remember the name of now. When I got home I knew I was coming out. I wrote a letter to BAS with my credentials, my CV, and they just about said 'Well, when can you start?' And that was the start of it. Then I joined *RRS Bransfield* in Southampton, at Husbands shipyard, in 1973. That was when I started my seven years on the *Bransfield*.

[0:16:34] Tolson: Just cast your mind back as best you can. I remember Husbands shipyard. You joined initially as an AB, your first season?

Holloway: Yes.

[0:16:47] Tolson: What were your very first impressions of this ship. It was all laid up, I know.

Holloway: After being on Royal Naval ships, it was paradise. It was a cabin to yourself, and a dining hall and a bar. I'm afraid the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, don't have things like that. Yes, it was luxury. I loved it, especially having a single-berth cabin, which was great. One of the problems I had in my cabin was the bunk was athwartships and opposite was my locker and on my locker I had a roll meter, so

¹ Actually the BAS Club annual dinner.

when we were in rough weather I could lie in bed and watch this roll meter go click click click [gestures a swing one way] and then eventually click click click, [and the other way] she would come back again. I took it down in the end because it was giving me nightmares: some of the rolls we did down South. But yes, I enjoyed it.

[0:17:54] Tolson: And after some weeks, we all got the ship ready to go. We sailed, loaded in Southampton docks and then these Fids arrived. Tell me about these final moments before departure and Fids. You'd seen Fids but seeing them come on board ...

Holloway: When you first meet them, we didn't really know what to expect but a typical ... This is what I would call a typical Fid was: when we got them on the ship, they were made to work, obviously, because they couldn't go all the way South just sunning themselves. But we used to get them as working parties, and I used to look after the flight deck and I had them painting the flight deck rails. But unfortunately they were putting more white paint on the flight deck than they were on the rails. How do you talk to a budding ionosphericist about dropping paint on the deck, because he just looked at me and said 'Well I am an ionosphericist; I'm not a painter.' That was the sort of thing we used to have to do, but all good fun.

[0:19:10] Tolson: And your own routine, you were an AB. Were you keeping watches as well?

Holloway: Yes. The first trip I was doing watches on the bridge and then I took over as launchman on my second trip which meant I didn't do watches, which was rather nice. But it also meant that I spent about nine hours a day in a boat, sometimes the open boat was very wet and very cold. But it was good fun. I enjoyed it. I must have enjoyed it to have done it for seven years. And the pay wasn't bad.

[0:19:56] Tolson: Tell me about some of the other deck crowd and your bosun and other colleagues.

Holloway: Yes, there are some great characters and the biggest character obviously was my mate Trev who I met when I was a Royal Marine in the West Indies. He was an AB on the *HMS Tartar*.

[0:20:23] Tolson: Could you just tell me his full name?

Holloway: Yes, his name was Gary Charles Trevor. He was from Leicester and we became great friends and my first introduction to him was that I was walking on deck and I saw this gentleman who turned out to be Trev, giving this magic sign which I found out later was the sign for rum. Somebody wanted him to do them a favour. The first thing he did was that [gives hand sign with two fingers] or that or that [variations of sign]. It meant gulpers, sippers or the whole tot. And that's what they were talking about on deck. And he was giving this young AB a right hard time about getting him round his mess to have half his tot. He used to do that every day. I used to walk down the Royal Marine Barracks, which we called it, which was our mess deck, and Trev would be sat there most days. I used to walk in and said 'What are you doing here?' and he would say 'Well, Jan invited me.' That was another of the Marines. He used to bend his ear on deck, saying 'Can I come down today Jan?' Because when you are

down in somebody's mess, all the members of the mess give you sippers of their tot because you are a guest. So that's what he used to do and that's how I first met him – my first introduction to Gary Charles Trevor. He was bumming rum off some poor innocent AB.

[0:22:09] Tolson: On the *Bransfield*, he ... You got him onto the *Bransfield*?

Holloway: I did, yes. I rang him in Leicester and said 'Look, we are looking for a ...' I don't know what happened. One of the ABs didn't turn up or something, and he said 'Yes' and he came down the next day and joined the ship. I think it was the fourth trip, he became bosun. And so I was the launchman and he took over as bosun. Yes, we had a good time.

[0:22:41] Tolson: You were quite happy to remain launchman, were you? You didn't ...?

Holloway: Yes, I was. I enjoyed driving boats. I drove boats in the Royal Marines and I drove boats in the Antarctic and I used to like getting amongst it. Sometimes, when it was really cold and snowing, it wasn't so much fun but yes, I still enjoyed it. There was always a bottle of rum at the end of the day when it was really really cold. I've got a picture somewhere, in one of these books, of me [dog barks] in oilskins. [dog barking]. ??? [inaudible] care of the dog barking. Do you want me to put him outside, yes?

[0:23:26] Tolson: We'll just stop there.

Holloway: OK. [Resumes] There's a picture there of myself in yellow oilskins, just having spent the day in the *Terror* which was an open boat, a beautiful old boat: oak and polymer I think she was. She was open and I used to get the spray, and this photograph shows I am absolutely soaking wet but my beard is frozen, and it was frozen. With the spray, it had actually frozen. It soon falls out when you get inside and get in the shower so not a problem.

[0:24:10] Tolson: Take me through the routine of what you were actually doing. I know I know but for the bigger audience.

Holloway: Yes. The job was: the ship was down in the Antarctic to supply the British Antarctic bases each year of obviously food, materials, aircraft fuel, things like that, and my job as the launchman was to ferry the stores ashore in this great big ... The first one we had was wooden, a wooden barge type thing that we called the 'scow'. That was unfortunately lost. And then we got a metal one which was then called 'Big Red' because it was painted red, and I used to tow this thing into the base, either alongside the boat, where I could handle it better, i.e. bring it alongside the ship and get it into the bases. Or when the ice was pretty thick I used to have to tow it astern to get through the ice easier. So that's what I used to do every day. Sometimes we used to do it 24 hours round the clock. I wasn't in the boat for 24 hours but another person would take over. And this is when I think we got word that the weather was going to crack up or get bad or something, so we had to get the supplies ashore. But it was still good fun.

[0:25:53] Tolson: And the bigger routine, who was involved in all of this work? You had people on the ship; you were presumably in the boat. Was there another group of people or were there people on the shore.

Holloway: Yes, everybody involved in this apart from watch-keepers who had obviously been on the bridge the night before. Or the chefs of course, the cooks, they weren't involved. They had to feed us so ... Yes, there was myself and a deck boy or an Ordinary Seaman in the launch and the scow. No we had another one in the scow. There was two in the boat. Mainly, when we dropped the boat down each morning, we used to have the falls so I could tow the boat away. Then we used to have somebody in the scow to throw the ropes when we got ashore. And then there was the bosun usually on the deck, doing this [makes crane-directing hand signs] and the people down the hatches were normally at least one AB and mainly Fids, that were going to probably the next base.

[0:27:04] Holloway: And then ashore would be all the Fid-type shore party, the people that lived ashore, and they would unload the scow. We didn't do a lot when we would go alongside. I used to just get the boat tied up and the scow and then the Fids would do the rest. Apart from one day we were taking gas bottles, you know the big gas bottles and I was helping out because we were a bit short handed, and I said to this Fid, 'Don't lift it until I tell you.' Of course he did and dropped it on my foot which I found out when I got back to the ship, had broken my toe, had broken my big toe. So I can't wear footwear for two or three weeks and somebody else had to take over the launchman's job. But I was hobbling around on board the ship, but it soon healed.

[0:28:12] Tolson: You must have had, developed at least, a very good rapport with these Fids, You were working with them a lot, despite the fact of them being scientists, some of them.

Holloway: Oh no, they were good blokes. They were good hands. Some I couldn't get on with but yes, the majority were good blokes. But, as I say, there was a couple I won't mention any names, but I met a certain one at the BAS meeting last year in Cambridge. He made a beeline for me and I made a beeline for the toilet. So he never did catch me. But yes, they were good and they worked hard, very hard. We also drank some beer afterwards, either in the crew 'pig' as it was called, the crew bar, or in the Fiddery where they also had a bar. And we had some good times.

[0:29:12] Tolson: They were actually fairly liquid times on these occasions.

Holloway: They were.

[0:29:19] Tolson: But looking back on it, quite normal was it? Do you think that it was excessive now, 25/30 years later?

Holloway: No because ... It probably was to some people. But to me, I always had the thought that the next day I was back in that boat again, and there is no way I am going in a boat in ice with a hangover. So I used to have a few beers no problem, but don't get too carried away. I am going to put my glasses on because that sun is going to move [puts sunglasses on]. Is that OK?

[0:29:58] Tolson: Yes, that's fine.

Holloway: Yes, so we had some good times and Christmas was always good if we were really far down South. The skipper would ram the bows of the ship into the ice and everybody would relax. Obviously they would leave the generators going and all that sort of thing but we used to go onto the ice and play football and chase penguins and all sorts of things like that. To get off the ship just to get onto the ice itself was relaxing. And again, we would probably take a few beers with us and do whatever. But it was good.

[0:30:46] Tolson: In the seventies and eighties, what do you feel the relationship was between the crew's deck, the Fids' deck and then the officers' deck? Was there a narrow deck feeling? How was it? There must have been some sort of theme.

Holloway: There has to be some sort of ... You can't have the captain coming down every night and drinking with the crew, because it doesn't work like that. But he did come down a couple of times. They all did. And so did some of the officers. Certain officers used to spend quite a bit of time in my cabin, drinking gin and tonic. We won't mention any names but it was all good fun. We got on well together. We knew they were officers and they knew we were crew but we were still friends. But there are certain people that you don't get on with; you can't get on with the whole world. I can't get on with the whole of the crew, but the majority, yes. We liked each other. We had to like each other to work together because if you don't like each other, it's a bit awkward, so we used to all try.

[0:32:07] Tolson: Going down, let's talk about Halley. Halley, for all of us, could be a pretty grim place.

Holloway: Was it? The best part for me, being launchman: when I first went down there, we used to tie up to the ice cliffs, and the Fids used to lower a heaving line down to me in the boat, to attach the ships ropes, so they could pull them up the ice cliff. Put whatever it was, a sleeper I think it was, a railway sleeper, through the eye and they would have already dug a pit six foot deep, and they would drop the sleeper in with the eye of the rope on, and then bury it. Me being launchman, and using the open boat so I could hear what was going on, the rope going up over the overhanging ice and snow used to knock it off. It used to all fall on me which was all part and parcel of being launchman I suppose.

[0:33:18] Holloway: But you used to have to keep your eye open because some of the icicles were quite big. I used to have to keep my hand on the fore-after control and make sure we could get out of it. But it was interesting. But I think we only did that once and then the rest of the time we went down and we tied up alongside the ice shelf² itself, put the ship alongside, and that was a lot easier, and a gangway across. I used to make a fence out of the ... Because there was no boat work I used to be on the ice cliff, loading the sledges with fuel or whatever we were taking, cargo, and taking charge of the Fids basically. So I built, out of the spare wood we had there from off the pallets, I built a fence about a metre away from the edge of the cliff; a metre in

² This would actually have been sea ice rather than ice shelf.

and I built this wooden fence, so anybody coming up would think 'I don't want to back into that and go plop, into the sea'. I think they give you three minutes or something in the water down there. So anyway that was another of my jobs, building the fence on the ice cliffs.

[0:34:37] Tolson: But we all very nearly went plop, didn't we, on one occasion when we had a very nasty storm?

Holloway: And it was blowing the ice and the snow off the cliff, because the ship was alongside ice cliff, so it was just blowing straight off on to the deck of the ship. I took a photograph of it when it first started and all you can see is like there has been a snowfall on the deck. I took one about an hour later and it's like six foot high all over the deck. So it was then all hands to the pump, as they say and the Mate said 'Pete, get in the crane and try and scoop it off with the cane jib'. Everybody else was shovels and picks and hands and buckets and bowls, getting the ice off. But we had already broken our mooring ropes because of the weight of the ship. I believe she went over slightly. We broke the mooring ropes and drifted off the ice cliff. So that was all quite a – I won't say exciting – I will say it was dangerous because it was dangerous. That's when everybody, including the captain, I think, was down there shovelling, with everything you could grab: spoons, shovels, anything and we got it looking pretty good. We got the ropes back on and pulled back into the ice cliff. So that was panic over with, not that anybody panicked because they wouldn't, but it was a close call.

[0:36:23] Tolson: I think it was occasions like those when you really do see everybody pulling together in the same direction.

Holloway: I think you have to in that situation because you couldn't stand by and watch, could you, leaning on a broom or something. You have got to get in there and give a hand because it's your life as well as everybody else's. And I think it was, or it could have been, a life-threatening moment. It could have been but as luck had it, we survived. But it was one of the stories that I am still telling about the Antarctic. Everybody must be bored to tears. OK.

[0:37:06] Tolson: I'm stopping there at the end of the first tape. [Recording stops and resumes.]

[0:37:10] Tolson: This is Pete Holloway on Tape 2. Pete, you have memories of certain bases and I know we all have a fear of one particular base, Adelaide. And as boatman, I am sure that you had your own ...

Holloway: Going in the boat, to me there was always a swell at Adelaide. No matter when we went there, there was a swell, and taking the scow, pulling alongside the jetty in a swell is a bit tricky because if the scow went up that high, it actually landed on the edge of the jetty. It then tipped back onto my boat, onto me in my boat and whatever I had in it. So I had to be completely aware of what it was doing, with the throttle ready to pull it off the instant that the side of the scow caught the top of the jetty. And the boat was powerful enough to be able to pull it just a bit to one side and then all went plop and went back into the water. Because when you have got a tide, a swell that's going six foot and six foot down again, if you suddenly land on top of the

jetty, it could have caused all sorts of problems but that's what happened. But it has always been in my mind.

[0:38:33] Tolson: You never lost anything valuable, did you?

Holloway: Yes. I didn't personally but somebody on board lost, I think it was a tractor, one of these things with the shovel on the front. What do they call them?

[0:38:51] Tolson: JCB?

Holloway: Yes, JCB. That was unfortunate because the weather was pretty bad at the time and the scow was sent in with the JCB. I was in bed so it was nothing to do with me. But it hit the top of the jetty and the whole thing turned over and ended up on the bottom of the sea at Adelaide, and it is still there today as far as I know.

[0:39:25] Tolson: I think it just joined a collection of several ...

Holloway: Probably, yes. But it was a horrendous place. The base was nice but the jetty was just something else. The main reason was because it just stuck out into ... It was on the point and there was no shelter from the incoming sea or anything. That's as much as I can remember about Adelaide.

[0:39:53] Tolson: I have discovered, through talking to people on interviews, that what happened originally, when the base was built in the 60s, that it was a very very quiet spot because there was a lot of protruding ice, so it was an ideal spot. But then, over the years, the ice disappeared.

Holloway: No ice.

[0:40:14] Tolson: And the swells came in. That's how you and I found it.

Holloway: Yes, it was probably the worst base to unload cargo at. It was, yes. Most of the others were pretty sheltered. Argentine ... was it Rothera or Faraday? Which one was ...?

[0:40:37] Tolson: Argentine Islands was Faraday. That was ...

Holloway: Where the aircraft are now?

[0:40:43] Tolson: No, that's Rothera.

Holloway: That's Rothera. That was a simple one; that was easy-peasy because it was well sheltered and easy to do but it does make a lot of difference when you haven't got the sea pounding against the jetty. But it was all part of the job and we survived.

[0:41:06] Tolson: As a season went on, and we would go round the bases, most of them two or even three times except for Halley which was always a one-visit ...

Holloway: One stop there.

[0:41:46] Tolson: And then we would gather up the Fids who were coming out, in the 70s, after their two years many of them, and we would head up to the Falklands and then usually or sometimes across to Uruguay where many would get off to do their big jolly. Take me through the trip going home, the northward trip because by this time you were with scientists and technicians who had had two years of storytelling. It must have been quite an unleashing of memories?

Holloway: It was, yes; it was good. Most weekends (because obviously we worked during the week), but most weekends we used to drink and that's when the stories came out. It normally started Saturday lunchtime and it would go through until dinnertime when we would all go into dinner. Some of us used to take wine with us. And then after dinner probably end up in the Fiddery upstairs, and carry on drinking wine. But it was Sunday the next day and we were at sea so I didn't have to drive the boat. It was OK; it was good, yes. But the stories that came out then were absolutely amazing. A good friend of mine, a chap called Ken Lax, who was the Base Commander at Halley Bay, he told me some great stories.

[0:42:55] Holloway: They had a doctor, the doctor on the base. They went to explore the old base before they moved to this new one they were in then, and he fell down the gash hatch or the chute and did himself quite some severe damage. They eventually got him out, got him back to the base they were living in then, and he had to talk Ken through medical procedures. Ken was just an ordinary chap and the doctor knew what he was talking about or he wouldn't have been a doctor. And he was saying 'Ken, you will have to give me some of this or that.' I know they got on the radio to the air people and whether they sent somebody in for him, I cannot remember. But luckily enough he got back from the old base and I think he actually got out by himself. I am not sure about that point but it would have been a bit silly going by himself to any base even if it was a hundred yards across the snow. We were always taught 'Down South there has got to be two of you and you have got to carry a pack with a sleeping bag and warm clothes and things.' So I would have thought that, being a doctor as well, he wouldn't have been by himself but I really can't remember.

[0:44:35] Tolson: Did these stories of base life ever enthrall you enough to perhaps want to become a Fid?

Holloway: No, in short no. I would have got bored, especially during the winter months. What do you do? I don't mind watching films, like we had one film on board the ship which we all laughed at because we had seen it that many times that it became just a joke. *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* it was called, and if I saw somebody now mention it, I would go into hysterics because we watched it that much. It was pretty rubbish anyway. But no, I would have been too bored. At least when I stayed ashore in the Falklands, you could walk down the pub or you could just go for a walk or whatever, but to be stuck in Halley Bay during the winter, because you can't go anywhere, would have been a bit too much for me.

[0:45:45] Tolson: Your first trip was Captain Woodfield's last trip and of course he had his wife Ella on board with him. Tell me a little bit about your feelings of Captain Tom and Ella.

Holloway: Yes, I liked Captain Woodfield. I always did. We always got on – I won't say we got on well – he was the captain and I was an Able Seaman, but I was always on the bridge on watch, when it was my turn obviously, and I met Ella quite a lot, and talked, and she was absolutely gorgeous. Well she was just a lovely lady. She got on with everybody and everybody loved her. And she gave us all a present, I remember, when we were in Port Stanley. I'm trying to remember what it was. She gave all the crew a present, a Falkland Islands spoon or something. It had the Falkland Island crest on it. Anyway that's beside the point. The one time I do remember Captain Woodfield when I was on the wheel one night and there was some really bad weather. I can't remember where it was.

[0:47:01] Holloway: We needed to turn the ship. It was three in the morning, something like that, and with the height of the seas coming ahead of us, the turning round of the ship had to be spot on. Even myself, as an ordinary sailor, knew that he had got to get this right, to turn this 6000-ton (I think, something like that) round in these seas. Anyway I was on the wheel and he said 'Right, when I say "Hard to starboard" go hard to starboard.' So I'm just waiting and we had the searchlight that was on top of the bridge, on the oncoming waves, which when you are looking in the searchlight look like mountains. I'm sure they were quite mountainous. All of a sudden he said 'NOW!' and I went 'bourr' [gesture of turning the ship's wheel] hard over starboard and the ship actually came round and as we came round, a great big wave hit us up the stern and we sort of snowboarded (or whatever you call it?) skied towards the next ... That was amazing but it was judged (as far as I was concerned) to perfection. And that's why he was what he was: the captain. Yes, good bloke, good mover, but again, when you are in that sort of situation, it has got to be right, because if you got hit by one of those seas, on the beam, you would be in trouble, as all sailors know. I was a Royal Marine, not a sailor. Yes, he did a good job. I think Ella enjoyed it too.

[0:49:00] Tolson: For her it was the most amazing experience.

Holloway: As a civilian and her first trip South, she was ... aahh. But it was good; it was great.

[0:49:18] Tolson: You had, over the years ...; we had some very interesting passengers on board. We also of course had some senior scientists on board. Are there any ones you particularly remember?

Holloway: Not a senior scientist, no, because I didn't really get involved with them apart from me taking them ashore in the launch wherever that was: Port Stanley, on the bases. But one of my favourite people has always been Dad Etchells. He wasn't a senior scientist but he was one of the finest Fids I ever met and I met him this year at the BAS Reunion and he still looks exactly the same and he talks exactly the same and he still drinks exactly the same and he's just a great bloke. He's, to me, a good hand. Yes, Dad Etchells.

[0:50:24] Tolson: He was a tractor mechanic originally?

Holloway: Tractor mechanic, yes.

[0:50:23] Tolson: And he knew it all.

Holloway: And the other one was the tall fellow: Pete Witty who again was at the meeting last year. The picture is up there. Did you see that picture? He was bringing one of the 'cats'³ back to the ship when it went through the ice, and he scrambled out and managed to get onto hard ice. And again, this 'cat' just disappeared, and that was all within about 600/ 700 yards of the ship. So you had to be on your guard 24 hours a day, basically.

[0:51:18] Tolson: I remember that too, that disappearing tractor.

Holloway: The disappearing 'cat, right. [Reaches for drink.]

[0:51:26] Tolson: Have a slurp.

Holloway: This is thirsty work. I must have a slurp. [Drinks] Mmm, lovely.

[0:51:42] Tolson: I think that you had a fascinating artist on board.

Holloway: Dave Smith, yes. He was a good bloke and he was a character. I do like characters, good or bad. I'd rather a person who was a character than somebody who just sits there. He was a character and he got on well with everybody on the ship from the captain downwards to the deck boy, and he was a very nice chap.

[0:52:17] Tolson: Where did he do his painting?

Holloway: Everywhere but I particularly remember him at Halley Bay. Some photographs I've got of him actually ... The ship's alongside the ice cliff and he's about 600 yards in on the ice cliff with this easel and his Russian fur hat on and he's painting merrily away. And the weather was superb, sunny, and I think we were out there playing football, waiting for the next batch of sledges to arrive, to be loaded. And we used to play football in between sledge-loads, or sledge arrivals. And the penguins used to join as well. The penguins would always bob up and have a go at the ball, but yes, it was good. And the summer is so hot. We were in shirt sleeves but as soon as the sun went down, obviously *mucho frio*.

[0:53:22] Tolson: You never sailed in the *John Biscoe*.

Holloway: No I didn't.

[0:53:26] Tolson: Was there a friendly rivalry or did you just feel that they were completely separate institutions almost?

Holloway: We hardly ever saw them and when we did ... well I don't know. I think whether it was rivalry or not, I don't know but I didn't get on very well with any of the *Biscoe* crew because ... I don't know why. I think they were jealous because we had a posh ship, and their's was an old rusty thing. But no, she was a good ship, the *Biscoe*. We never got on; we went alongside her once somewhere – I can't remember

³ Sno-Cat tracked vehicles.

where – but we didn't invite them on board and they didn't invite us on board unless they were friends from years ago. But en masse we didn't join up together.

[0:54:31] Tolson: I'll just stop there for one moment. [Recording stops and resumes.] We are running now. Pete, just going back to the rivalry aspect or the plain difference between the two ships, the *John Biscoe* and the *Bransfield*, there were some nice wonderful characters, weren't there, that you met up with, and in fact came across to the *Bransfield*.

Holloway: Yes, there were characters, obviously, on both ships, but you don't actually, well I don't like all characters and one that came across to the *Bransfield* was not my favourite cup of tea and we just didn't get on together. Why, I don't know. I think he was full of himself and never stopped talking about Wales [or possibly whales]. That might give you a clue. No, we didn't get on very well but we do see a lot of each other, I must admit. I think as I've said before, we were alongside once and there was no invitation from the whole of the *Bransfield* crew to the *Biscoe* crew, like 'Come across and we'll have dinner with us or something. Or have a drink.' They came across in dribs and drabs because obviously they knew people on each other's ship but we didn't gell as two crews. I don't know why but we just didn't.

[0:56:04] Tolson: When did you meet these wonderful people like Mozzy and Kenny Thompson?

Holloway: Oh yes. Ken, I just met him on the ship. I can't remember when he actually joined but he was always a great character. He lived, or he stayed, with his auntie just up the road from my first house in Southampton, and we used to meet in the local pub. He used to come to my house and I had a highly polished table, similar to this one, and he could never get over this highly polished table in my dining room. He used to say 'You must spend hours polishing that, Pete.' I said 'No, I just polish it once a week like doing the housework.' But he used to stare at it totally mesmerised. I don't know if it was the polish or what, but he would still drink his beer off it, so it didn't really matter. Yes, he was a good bloke, Ken, damned good seaman and just a good bloke. More better Falkland Islanders. They are a pretty good crowd out there. I always got on well with the Falkland Islanders.

[0:57:26] Tolson: And Sterling Alldredge (Mozzy)?

Holloway: Yes, Moz was a good bloke. He never drank a lot, Mozzy, well not when he was in my company. He was not a boozy chap. He was always putting ships in bottles and doing things like that, and macramé. I mentioned today that on the actual post that ran through the ship, the *Bransfield*, that went from the conning tower through the officers' mess, through the Fiddery, through the crew to wherever it ended up in the bottom, Mozzy and myself macraméed it. We got all sorts of sledging string off the bases and spent hours macraméing every night the post which made it look quite nice. Drinking beer at the same time of course. Mozzy was a good bloke, good seaman as well, excellent.

[0:58:32] Tolson: Getting back to the UK, of course, you would all get ... we would all get laid off in ... shortly after arrival, wouldn't we, and ?? [inaudible] away for the summer months.

Holloway: And come back when, yes.

[0:58:46] Tolson: What did you ...? Did you go back to sea or did you just ...?

Holloway: No no. We were getting paid, weren't we, so I just went home and had a great time. Normally we went on holiday, wherever I was going to in those days, mainly India. I spent a lot of time in India then. I still do; I was there two years ago. But the place has changed so much, I shan't be going back. Yes, I used to have six months great time, just doing nothing and going to the pub every lunchtime, and watch all the chaps going back to work, and wave to them and say 'Cheers' and things like that. Yes, it was good.

[0:59:34] Tolson: And then they introduced, in the mid-seventies, the two ... Initially it was the two captains system.

Holloway: Swapping over.

[0:59:46] Tolson: Yes, so on the *Bransfield* there was Stuart Lawrence and John Cole.

Holloway: John Cole, yes.

[0:59:51] Tolson: Two masters. Good arrangement?

Holloway: Yes. It didn't really make any difference to me. I liked both the captains and they were always more than fair to me. I think John Cole was probably a little bit quieter than Stuart but yes, they were both good blokes and obviously excellent seamen. I always felt safe in their hands. Whatever the sea was doing, I knew that they were good seamen and they would get us through, whatever. Yes, good times.

[1:00:34] Tolson: It was a long time, perhaps never whilst you were still with BAS, that you did half trips? You always did full trips?

Holloway: Full trips, yes. It was always a full trip. Yes. I didn't even know they did half trips now.

[1:00:47] Tolson: They do for the entire crew now.

Holloway: Do they?

[1:00:51] Tolson: Yes. You should have gone back.

Holloway: I should have waited. Do they have 68-year olds?

[1:01:08] Tolson: Now high points and low points. Let's look at a few high points in your time in BAS. Rate moments, a great moment.

Holloway: Oh I could tell you some great moments in the Royal Marines but with BAS I don't really know. Surviving certain instances, like I had some hairy moments in those boats. One was towing the flubber back from Bird Island and we hit this

wave. Luckily enough I was bow into it but took out the front window of the launch and we all got wet that day, but ...

[1:02:05] Tolson: Tell me what is a flubber? What were you doing with it at Bird Island?

Holloway: Bird Island is one of the places where they have a small hut where the scientists live. I think there's normally no more than two that stay there and it's called Bird Island because it is full of birds. I've got some amazing photographs of albatross and albatross nests, because they are so tame. You can actually go up and you can lift them off the nest and photograph them. I know you shouldn't but the things we used to do ... We wouldn't hold them just to get a photograph. But talking on the part of the launchman, it wasn't a good place to go into. It was not a good place to go into. When you actually got inside, it was no problem; it was calm. But getting to the base was a ...

[1:03:08] Holloway: The sea was always rough there and we used to use the flubber, which was a great big rubber sausage which I believe Captain Woodfield saw, I think, in France and decided they would be good for loading stores on places where they haven't got jetties, I couldn't get the boat and the scow in. You could float a flubber anywhere. I used to tow it into, say, Bird Island and I would say to the deck boy 'OK, let 'em go.' And he would let go the rope and she would drift in on the surf. And we used get them off exactly the same way. They would throw the rope over to my deck boy and we would tie them up and tow them back to the ship. But it was the only way you could do it when you had got surf breaking on the beach and no jetty to take the boat alongside or anything.

[1:04:11] Tolson: You had an interesting moment with Chief Officer Graham Phippen.

Holloway: Oh yes, I had quite a few interesting moments with the Phippen but this one was particularly interesting. He decided to come in the boat with me, in the launch, and look at the operations as they were going on, not stay on the ship like he used to do. We came ashore and we let go of the flubber at the right time when I said 'Right, let go.' The boat is facing into the surf. The flubber is obviously in the surf. Let it go and then it float. Now the way of getting it back off, when they are ready to come back to the ship is: I put the launch in stern first as far as I can without going aground and then the deck boy, or whoever is in the boat with me, throws a heaving line to the flubber. On this occasion, Mr Phippen decided to throw the heaving line which snowballed and dropped into the water and went round my prop. And the first thing I knew about it was Clunk and the engine stopped.

[1:05:32] Holloway: So Mr Phippen says to me 'I think before we get aground too much, Pete, you will have to jump in and cut the rope off the prop.' I said 'No. You threw it. You jump in and you cut it off.' And he did. He was about two foot taller than me anyway. It came up to above his waist so he did get in and he cut the rope off. In the mean time I had radioed the ship and Mozzy, who was the Bosun's Mate then, brought the other boat in and towed us back to the ship. So all was well, and we got the flubber back at the same time as well. So Mozzy in the *Terror* was towing the *Erebus* and the flubber, so we all got back no problem. We got back to the ship and it

was a bit different because it was pretty rough and there was rope flying everywhere, but at least it didn't go round the prop any more. Yes, it was interesting.

[1:06:37] Tolson: There was one particular moment in a lot of people's lives on one trip. Tell me your version of events on the grounding of the *Bransfield*.

Holloway: Oh yes, that was a special day. The first thing I remember was when we went on to the rocks. Obviously I was in bed. I think it was early in the morning: 5 o'clock, something like that. I was in bed and all of a sudden, We got this lurching and I looked at my wall meter on my cupboard. It was all over to one side so I thought 'Oh, we have hit something.' I thought it was ice at first and then my cabin door burst open and it was the lad from the bridge saying 'Pete, we have run aground and Captain Cole wants you to put the boat down.' The only boat we could get down was the *Erebus* because the way it had gone onto the rocks, the *Erebus* was still hanging. When you let go, she would still hang free. But the *Terror* was on the other side and you couldn't get her down.

[1:07:50] Tolson: So the ship was in fact leaning heavily to starboard?

Holloway: That's right, yes. So that's what happened. They lowered the boat with me in it and the lad off the bridge. I had a radio in the boat and also an echo-sounder. So Captain Cole said 'Can you go round the stern of where we are and give me the soundings of the depth of the water, because I am going to try and pull the ship off on the engines by going astern.' And I thought 'Right, that sounds pretty good to me.' So I did the soundings as he had asked me, and then he said 'Right, I am going to pull off now. Stand well clear.' And the next thing I heard, was the engines really revving up astern and this horrible grating noise as he pulled the ship off the rocks, and it was a terrible terrible noise.

[1:08:52] Holloway: I will never forget the noise; it was horrible, but it came off and it bobbed around for a bit and righted itself and I thought 'Now it's probably going to sink.' But it didn't, thank God, and we eventually got back to England after a surveyor had come to Montevideo, I think, and surveyed the bottom of the ship. We got back to UK. We went to Newcastle and she was put in dry dock straight away. Of course as soon as they drained the dock we were all racing off the ship to look at the split. I was one of the first off and it looked as though somebody had got one of these old fashioned tin openers and just gone 'kk kk kk' for about ten foot down the bottom of the ship, and we had come home like that. So double skinned hulls have got to be a good thing when you are down South. But again, it was a very interesting time; also a very lucky time I think. We all survived, especially the ship.

[1:10:04] Tolson: You were telling me that the lad on the bridge heard Captain Cole ...

Holloway: Yes, when the actual boat went onto the ...

[1:10:13] Tolson: Actually I'm just stopping there.

Holloway: OK. [Recording paused]

[1:10:18] Tolson: [Recording resumed] Yes, you were saying when the ship first went on to the rocks, ...

Holloway: When the lad eventually came off watch, the one that woke me in the morning, I said ...I'll tell you exactly what I said. I said 'What did Coley say when he realised he had hit the rocks?' And he said 'He pulled the lever back and said "Oh shit!"' And that was it. And so the rest, I suppose, is BAS history, but again an interesting time.

[1:10:56] Tolson: A very interesting time. How, in the weeks immediately afterwards and the weeks after that, how did John Cole ...? How did he behave?

Holloway: Still exactly the same. Exactly the same as always. Still did his rounds on a Sunday morning. Nothing changed at all and obviously no-one said anything to him because he got us off. That's what the crew were thinking. He had pulled us off and I think that was a real courageous thing to do, to pull the ship off a rock on its engines, not knowing that it is not going to sink or do something really stupid. So he did it so he was our hero for a few weeks, I tell you.

[1:11:50] Tolson: Would you like to return to the Antarctic, at the grand age of 68?

Holloway: No, because I think after seven years, and two years in the Royal Marines down there, not so much the Antarctic but South, I think I have really seen enough there. There's not much more that you could show me about the Antarctic, to be perfectly honest. Trev took his wife down on a cruise. They picked the ship up at Ushuaia and they did this cruise to the Antarctic because she wanted to see what Trev and myself were always rabbiting about when we were drinking. So he took her on a cruise and she saw the Antarctic from the bar window – never even went ashore in a Gemini or nothing. No I wouldn't go South again. I would go to the Falkland Islands again, Port Stanley, because everything has changed since I first went down there in '67. It's got quite modern now I believe. They have got roads and things instead of dirt tracks. Yes I would like to go and see that part and of course the airport. I would like to see Port Stanley. I would like to go and visit the pubs again. I'm sure there must be a few more by now.

[1:13:15] Tolson: I think so, yes.

Holloway: In '67 there were five pubs and that was it. When people said to me 'How did you enjoy your time in the Falklands?' I used to say 'Not baa-d.' Terrible joke. 'Two thousand alcoholics clinging to a rock.' It used to get a laugh in England but it wouldn't get a laugh in Port Stanley, and it was just me being a bit silly. But that's how I thought of them at the time, when I first met them. They certainly like a drink. [Pause in recording]

[1:13:59] Tolson: We are running again. Pete, you left BAS at the end of the 1980 season. What happened after that? Where did you head off to?

Holloway: At the time I was still living in Netley Abbey, just outside Southampton. Luckily enough I applied for a job with British Telecom and because of my experiences I think, in the Royal Marines, of climbing etc. etc. I got a job as a pole

climber putting in lines to business centres, and then putting in the actual telephone system. Unfortunately I had an accident while putting a system in a marina in Southampton and badly damaged my knee which meant I couldn't climb telegraph poles any more. So I was given a job in the office looking after all sick people, or to put it a better way, all people who were ringing in sick each day. I used to have to ring many and tell me why they were going sick and then I used to go onto their line managers and tell them that 'Joe Bloggs will not be in today because I don't know; he's got a headache or whatever.' But that was my job and it was a good job. It was a desk job but it was good.

[1:15:39] Tolson: And then you went to South America?

Holloway: And then, yes, I left ... I am still going to Uruguay on holiday with Trev and his wife on Trev's big ranch and I decided that when I retired, this was the place I wanted to retire to because it's twice as big as England in size and only three million people, and two million people live in and around Montevideo. So there's nobody there. I told Trev that if ever he saw a house for sale on the beach, in this place called Las Flores (which means the Flowers) then he could ring me and I would fly out and have a look at it. And I got home from work one night and there it was on the answer machine 'Pete, there's a place on the beach for sale in Las Flores.' So I rang him back and said 'I'm on the next flight I can get.' So off I went, he met me at the airport and I bought the place basically, and retired from British Telecom and went out there to live, taking my two Jack Russells with me. And again, it was a good move because I thoroughly enjoyed it. And now I am back home, where I began, where I was born. So it's like a big circle has been completed.

[1:17:10] Tolson: Pete Holloway, thanks very much indeed for your recollections on BAS life

Holloway: Right, good.

[1:17:18] [End]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [0:17:54] 'I'm not a painter'.
- [0:24:10] Getting stores ashore in the scow.
- [0:27:04] Gas bottle dropped on foot.
- [0:32:07] Next to ice cliffs at Halley.
- [0:34:37] Shovelling ice off the ship.
- [0:38:33] Tractor lost at Adelaide.
- [0:45:45] Memories of Ella Woodfield.
- [0:47:01] Turning the ship in a storm.
- [0:51:42] Dave Smith, painter of Antarctic scenes.
- [0:54:31] Relations between Bransfield and Biscoe crews.
- [0:57:26] Macramé.
- [1:03:08] The flubber at Bird Island.
- [1:04:11] Rope round the propeller.
- [1:06:37] The day Bransfield went aground.