

GWION DAVIES

Edited transcript of interview with Gwion Davies conducted by Joanna Rae on 18 July 2003. BAS archives AD6/24/1/13. Transcribed by Allan Wearden in June, 2019.

Gwion Davies, Part 1:

[0:00:00] Rae: The purpose of the expedition and then we'd go on to the people after that?

Davies: Right.

[Part 1 0:00:05] Rae: And then we'd go on to some of the structures, the buildings and the rations that kind of thing.

Davies: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:00:16] Rae: That the sort of general layout.

Davies: Right, OK. [Unknown voice] Just introduce him Jo, OK!

[Part 1 0:00:23] Rae: Sorry.

[Unknown voice] Yeah, we're running cameras so if you could introduce him.

[Part 1 0:00:24] Rae: Oh right! So hello Gwion Davies!

Davies: Good morning, yes!

[Part 1 0:00:29] Rae: What we are going to do today is talk about your experiences with Operation Tabarin [Davies: Right], the World War Two expedition sent out in 1943. Perhaps we could start by asking you to explain what you understood at the time to be the purpose of the expedition?

Davies: Well...I understood it to be an expedition that Churchill had demanded, a naval expedition to occupy certain British, to reoccupy British territory in the Antarctic that the Argentinians had been busy trying to claim. That was one idea, and the other was the fact of going down there was to make sure that the Germans didn't make use of any summer harbours like Deception and Port Lockroy, for refuelling their raiders, because as you know there'd been a bit of trouble with them before. Yeah that was what it was, we didn't really think about it a lot!

[Part 1 0:01:41] Rae: Were you told then anything?

Davies: No, oh no, it was all top secret! 'Keep our mouths shut'. I couldn't tell my parents anything. I nipped home for a weekend of leave before going off and I couldn't tell them a thing! I said 'Don't worry', that's all! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:01:58] Rae: What I'd like to do, you just stumbled right at the beginning of that [Davies: yeah] and I just think that might be a bit we really want to use, can we just go back and do that question again?

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:02:12] Rae: So can you tell me again what you understood to be the purpose of the expedition?

Davies: Well it was a top secret, a naval expedition to the Antarctic to reoccupy British territories that the Argentinians were trying to take over, that was the most obvious reason that we knew, and also, as I said, to keep the Germans or we couldn't do much about the Germans if they came, but at least tell naval headquarters at the Falklands that the Germans were nosing about there, in case they wanted to use the place for storing fuel for the submarines or raiders or whatever.

[Part 1 0:03:02] Rae: And what did your activities involve in terms of trying enforce British sovereignty?

Davies: It meant setting up a weather station and setting up a flag and we had tin flags for the purpose! And, well, that was more less it I think from the political point of view, but of course there was a lot more to it than that!

[Part 1 0:03:33] Rae: Perhaps we can just talk about the post offices?

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:03:36] Rae: For a few minutes, [Davies: Yeah], because that's quite an unusual thing on the sort surface to end up running postal services!

Davies: Laughing. It was! Once a year delivery, aye that's right! Well we had a special set of stamps brought out it was the Falkland Island stamp over printed for the occasion and letters were sent out from Port Lockroy and stamped to various places, and I don't know if whether to advertise the fact of British occupation or what it was I never really figured that out. But anyway we sent these off stamped at Port Lockroy and later on at Hope Bay too where we sent up another weather station and post office, does that answer your question?

[Part 1 0:04:37] Rae: Perfect thank you! And tell me now the other aspect of the expedition, the science that was done.

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:04:45] Rae: Sort of what science was done and how it came to be included in the purpose of the expedition.

Davies: Oh right. Now the inclusion of the scientific work was due mainly to James Marr, the leader of the expedition when it set off, because as you know he'd been Scout Marr with Shackleton and he'd spent most of his life at sea in the *Discovery* vessels doing scientific oceanographic work on whales and whale feed krill and so on. Anyway he was out in the....Far East on minesweeping duties and the like I think, and he was recalled in the navy, and he was recalled by the government to set up this expedition in a few months which meant gathering together enough stores for at least 12 men for two years! Now he insisted, the

original purpose of expedition was political as you know, just to sit there and stamp letters once or twice a year and keep ourselves alive! But Marr said, well he'd make the most of this opportunity by getting some useful scientific work done and this is what he insisted on doing. So he got various skilled expert scientists like Dr Ivan Lamb and Dr Flett who was a geologist, Lamb was lichenologist Flett was a geologist, and other people. And of course there was Doc Back, he was a Surgeon Lieutenant and was also a weather expert, and Fran Farrington, he was an expert in wireless telegraphy which had to be, you had to have the wireless station regardless of the scientific work in order to keep in touch with the naval headquarters at the Falkland Islands! And....oh there were others, I just can't, I mean next year we had other people like Dr Freddie Marshall who was zoologist, but half of our crowd were from merchant seamen you see, like myself for one. And it was, we were there just to do our whack in various ways! But I'm sorry it's a bit sketchy my account of the scientific work, not doing justice to Marr but it stands for him that's the thing that matters!

[Part 1 0:07:37] Rae: That's the thing we want to record at that point that's fine. Let's go on to the top secrecy the secret nature of it.

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:07:46] Rae: If you could just tell us what that actually involved in terms of things like the use of Morse Code and what you could communicate to your family, and what you were told you could say after you came back off the expedition, those kinds of things?

Davies: Yes. Well to go at the end first we weren't allowed to say anything about it, we had to keep our mouths shut, we were bound by the Official Secrets Act for years and years up till the Falklands War! And then it came out and more about what our expedition was about and....as far, well we didn't see our families obviously, and as I said when I went to see my parents on leave I told them I couldn't say a thing, and the same for everybody else.

[Part 1 0:08:49] Rae: And did you have to use code in your wireless communications?

Davies: Well I'm sure they did. I knew nothing about that you see, that was to do with Farrington and Naval Headquarters and James Marr the leader of the expedition in Port Lockroy. But I had personally nothing to do with that and didn't know the first thing about it!

[Part 1 0:09:10] Rae: Let's talk about Marr now then, [Davies: Yeah], that's good timing! [You hear his clock striking]. So you could tell me a bit about his character, some stories, [Davies: Yeah], about what he was like?

Davies: Well I could write a book about Marr, he was a remarkable character and he's been a real example really to me all my life. He's such a fine man, and a very strong character, he'd been in sailing ships for years! And Jock Matheson used to say it about Marr 'He's a good man to have aloft with you out on the yard', so that means something! And oh he, I'd been along with him before you see but maybe you don't want to go into that side of it now there isn't the time, on another project?

[Part 1 0:10:04] Rae: Yes, talk about that!

Davies: Well OK. In fact that's how I got to know him it was like this, that I was awaiting my call up to the navy when the war broke out, and I was asked by the head of the Low Temperature Station at Cambridge where I was living, where my home was at the time, whether I'd go out on a whaler to help with some experiments they wanted to carry out making whale meat edible for human beings? And the man in charge of this was James Marr and that's why I got to know him, and we were out there for a season and came back, and after it Marr joined the navy and I carried on whaling! So don't know if you want to go over how I came to be in the expedition or not at this stage, but that's how I got to know Marr in the first place, but I can tell you if you want to hear that.

[Part 1 0:11:06] Rae: I think we won't go into that thank you.

Davies: OK.

[Part 1 0:11:12] Rae: Because we've got that on the audio tape.

Davies: Oh you have, that's fine.

[Part 1 0:11:16] Rae: And what sort of a man was he?

Davies: Well he looked like a prize fighter, very rugged face, stocky, very strong and a very quiet chap and yeah, if there was anything, any horrible job going on, Marr was on the thick of it! He'd never ask anybody to do anything what he wouldn't do himself and he was always in the thick of it! And I had a tremendous respect for the man, yeah! But there's so much more that can be said about him, he was a very, very humorous chap too and he had a lot of little semi-scientific sayings and jingles which he used to make us smile at times, I won't repeat any of them, well never mind! And he was a real caution really in that way!

[Part 1 0:12:19] Rae: He had quite a job to get the expedition ready?

Davies: Oh my word a job he had!

[Part 1 0:12:23] Rae: What would that have involved?

Davies: Well it was finding the fellows. You see everybody was either in a reserved occupation, the civilians, or out at sea, well not at sea but out in the services and he had to get fellows in from the navy, and merchant service and the army, like Taylor from the Royal Canadian Engineers, and gather them altogether and what a job he had you know!

[Part 1 0:12:50] Rae: And there was the ship?

Davies: Time of war!

[Part 1 0:12:53] Rae: The ship and equipment to get?

Davies: Yes, he had to get this ship. It was the ship that he first of all chose was an old sealer that an Icelandic sealer called *Godthaab*, and she was renamed HMS *Bransfield*, and she was

taken down to the Royal Albert Dock under the white ensign. But she was a very small thing and she used to take this two year 12 men expedition down to the Antarctic and to serve as a kind of a base there until we got landed and set up ashore, but I don't know how far if you want me go into the history of the thing? But it never came about. We did set off from the Royal Albert dock and I remember Marr saying 'Never in the history of Antarctic exploration has an expedition left with so little fuss', you see top secret. By the golly, on the way down her engines kept breaking down, her pumps breaking down, we had to put into one naval port after another and I should think most of the south coast knew all about it anyway!

[Part 1 0:14:10] Rae: So how far did you get?

Davies: We got as far as Falmouth eventually, over a minefield! And we got tied up alongside and we transhipped everything then to Avonmouth and in so doing we had to take most of the gear in a special train, and we spent about 24 hours on the trip from Falmouth to Avonmouth on this special train, we laughed about it for years after - it was a comedy really, a pantomime! Going, stopping at a signal box for a growler of hot water to brew tea in that sort of thing, anyway that's a separate story. I would wish the others were here because we used to laugh so much about it, and my memory a bit hazy now!

[Part 1 0:14:58] Rae: That's a lovely story, great thank you! Is there any particular anecdote you would like to tell about Marr at this time, I mean either humorous or serious before we move on to Taylor?

Davies: Well I mean I could go on talking about Marr for hours really, I'm trying to think.

[Part 1 0:15:22] Rae: Well if nothing occurs to you we'll just leave Marr there, [Davies: Yes OK], and go on to Taylor, Andrew Taylor, who became the leader during the second year.

Davies: Yes that's right, except to just repeat again what a tremendous respect I had for Marr and still have. He was much bigger and greater man than I realised at the time, and I want to pay fair tribute to him now in that sense, yeah, very outstanding man. They talk about Scott and Shackleton, well I put Marr along with them in character any day!

[Part 1 0:16:05] Rae: Right thanks. So tell us a little bit about Taylor what sort of a chap he was and what he had to do?

Davies: Well he was Royal Canadian Engineer he had a lot of experience of surveying in the Arctic, and the Canadian Arctic, and he was a very genial chap, very tough character, you couldn't mess him around or push him around. But very genial, easy going to talk to and we all liked him when he was in charge in Hope Bay in our second year after Marr had to be sent home with a bad, he was sick and a bad back. We enjoyed his being in charge very much.

[Part 1 0:16:51] Rae: He was a good leader?

Davies: Oh yes, very good. Oh I, we went, my wife and I went to stay with him, he stayed here years later and we went to stay with him in Winnipeg for a few days in his home there.

[Part 1 0:17:07] Rae: And how do you think he reacted to having to take over the expedition at short notice?

Davies: Well it was very sudden you see because Marr cricked his back. Well I don't know exactly what went wrong but that's one of the things he did and it happened suddenly sort of thing, and sudden he was landed as deputy leader with the leadership! Not much warning and preparation for it but he did very well, very well indeed. I take off my hat to him, yeah!

[Part 1 0:17:42] Rae: Would it have been very difficult to take over do you think?

Davies: Well in such a short time and under the circumstances it wasn't easy. I gathered that from his reminiscences it was a bit of a bolt from the blue as it were! Yes, nobody was expecting this.

[Part 1 0:18:05] Rae: Have you got any particular memoires of what he was involved with, or humorous anecdotes?

Davies: Who Taylor?

[Part 1 0:18:14] Rae: Yeah.

Davies: Well.....not in the same way as I can remember Marr's.

[Part 1 0:18:27] Rae: He was involved in one of sledging trips you did from Hope Bay.

Davies: Oh yes he was on every sledging trip. He sledged hundreds of miles, like David James and Vic Russell, and I was on one of them as well with Taylor. Oh yes he was an excellent man!

[Part 1 0:18:48] Rae: How was he as a sledging companion?

Davies: Well I didn't share the same tent, he shared with Dr Ivan Lamb, and he had a tremendous regard for him as a tough character, and I recall I think it David James who was with us the second year, who called him the Dr Wilson of our expedition, that's Lamb that I'm talking about now. And Taylor had agreed, he had great respect for him but no, no he was fine. I shared my tent with Victor Russell so I didn't really share a tent with Taylor, and it was the same when we were man hauling again out of Port Lockroy I shared tent with Marr, and Taylor and Lamb had the other tent, that was the way it was.

[Part 1 0:19:37] Rae: OK. Can you tell me, we'll talk about some of the other men that you served with. You've mentioned Lamb briefly.

Davies: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:19:46] Rae: Can you say a little bit more about him? I mean one of the things I remember from your earlier recording was how he was able to enthuse other people with his science.

Davies: Well I mean he made us aware of fact that there were lichens down there, but I never thought anything of it you see! And the importance and the variety of them it opened up a new world for me, but to be quite honest I didn't take the least interest in them! I was more preoccupied with my own humdrum daily jobs, the coal and the dogs, getting everything ship shape as well. But anyway no, no he was, I wouldn't say enthused other people, but we were very interested in what he was doing, and had great respect for what he was doing, aye, because I might say that's the only way you can be a botanise down there is to study lichens as there's nothing else, aye!

[Part 1 0:20:52] Rae: And we've got a ship in a bottle on a table here. [Davies: Yes]. Can you tell us the background to that and the man, about the man who made it?

Davies: Well this was made by Chippy Ashton who is a legend amongst us! He made about, oh he must have made at least a dozen and half of these, one for each member of the expedition and members of like Captain Pitt and Roberts of the *Fitzroy* and other people like that and it's an incredibly bit of skilled work! This schooner here now, you see she's got - hope you don't mind my digressing about the kind of work he was doing on it - these shrouds here and ratlines on them you see up there, now each ratline had to be clove-hitched in three places with black thread, and each schooner had to have about 200 clove hitches made - fiddly work to make one never mind 200! And he made as I said about a dozen or a dozen and a half of these - that was more remarkable just to give an idea of how meticulous he was - and the other thing was he put them in bows first. See now you look at this ship in a bottle my grandfather brought back, who was a Master Mariner too, and that went in stern first and what you did you pulled up the mast folded flat as many people know and then you pulled it up with a bit of line in the neck and the masts come up you see, that was fair enough and then that was it! But Chippy's is the other way round, she went in stern first see and how he got them in that way is a secret he took with him to his grave, because we could never figure it out! He would make a model and it would be looking like this on the table outside the bottle, and then he'd go into his cabin and shut the door and about an hour later, and he'd open the door and come out and the ship was in a bottle! And a lot of smoke hanging round and nobody knows how he did it. We've guessed and guessed because that was his secret, I just can't figure it out!

[Part 1 0:23:15] Rae: It's lovely bit of work!

Davies: Mysteries of this universe!

[Part 1 0:23:24] Rae: Yeah, and what was Chippy's role on the expedition?

Davies: Oh he was, well I mean he was the uncrowned king really in a way, with great respect to Marr and Taylor, but I mean without Chippy we would have been lost! He organised the building of the huts that was his obvious main job, he was an absolute expert in his work as ship's carpenter and he did most of the things that had to be made, from making up sledges and anything practical, anything like that after the hut had been built. He was quite an incredible man and amongst other things which he made were two tide recorders. He made one and he made it from bits and pieces from a bit of a microscope, and the Doc

gave him an alarm clock, and various things like that, and he just put it out on the sea ice and as the sea ice went up and down so did this sort of did it work kind of a there was a wire on a weight to the sea bottom and it went over a wheel which went on this, it's a complicated thing this tide recorder. Anyway it ended up with a needle going up and down on a rotating paper you see, like they have the barograph, and it worked fine! And the first time ever it had been done as far as I know and we got three weeks of recordings at Hope Bay and then got a south westerly gale and then the whole lot got blew out to sea. Well that was a disaster, all the trouble was he hadn't got all the same bits and pieces to start so used his carpenter's cramp and Doc gave him a clock, a spare clock from the weather clock or the weather machine, and goodness knows where he got the things from but he put them altogether but this time had got the whole month's cycle, which is what was wanted! But he was so incredibly inventive and undaunted, aye undaunted, yeah! And in a thing like this when a disaster like that hit him Chippy would say 'Oh well all these things are sent to try us'! He said that's what he wouldn't go all blowing and blasting and swearing, 'Oh these things are sent to try us'. Good philosophy yeah, oh we had a tremendous liking and respect for Chippy!

[Part 1 0:26:14] Rae: Another chap you've spoken of with great fondness is Jock Matheson.

Davies: Oh yes. Well he was a remarkable man! He's been in sailing ships, he started off in Zulu herring drifters as a lad, been in sailing ships and Q Ships in the Great War, and then he's been at sea he's been at the Hudson Bay Company and then he ended up before the war in the *Discovery* vessels, the *Discovery* the old sailing ship, the barque, and *Discovery II* the steamer, and that's how he got to know Marr you see. Oh yes a very quiet man, and he was really in the first year when we had to land at Port Lockroy he was left really in charge at Deception Island; Flett was nominally in charge but Flett had no Antarctic experience at all and Jock Matheson had, he's famous for the part he played in saving the crew of the *Discovery* or part of them on King George V Island before the war! I mean Ommanney has written about this in his book *South Latitude*, and so you see that was the calibre of man we had, extremely lucky! And of course he was an absolutely first class seaman and I was always trying to pick his brain because that was my main interest then to become a good seaman, and I was in the navy at the time you see, and I had great respect for him that way, we got on very well together.

[Part 1 0:27:48] Rae: One of the other people you had at Hope Bay in 1945 was David James? [Davies: Yes]. He seems to have been quite a colourful character?

Davies: Oh he was. He escaped from a prison camp in Germany, couple of times! He got recaptured once and then he managed to get out of Sweden the second time and before the expedition he was lecturing to airmen and people like that what to do if you got captured by the Germans, as prisoners of war. Then he was found by the - but this was during the second year of course I'm talking about now. Oh yes he was quite a remarkable man, a very nice fellow.

[Part 1 0:28:35] Rae: Is there anyone else particularly you'd like to talk about before we move on from the individuals?

Davies: Well I mean everybody really!

[Part 1 0:28:43] Rae: There's so many!

Davies: Everybody really.

[Part 1 0:28:46] Rae: Tom Berry of course?

Davies: Oh Tom Berry. He was a, used to be in the Clan Line personnel and chief steward and an extremely capable cook! And he kept us all happy and well fed in both bases and he was in charge of the Esse stove and, as I say, a good cook makes for a happy ship, and it was never truer than it was of him! And bucolic, not bucolic a strong character! And Chippy used to pull his leg a lot and get him really worked up. I remember Jock Matheson, could I tell a little tale about Jock Matheson and how he used to wind him up?

[Part 1 0:29:39] Rae: Yes of course.

Davies: He was easily wound up. Well we had a wonderful spread one day, wonderful meal on the table. And when it came to Jock's plateful, 'Oh', he said 'That's very good Tom', he said, 'Very nice. But', he said, 'Give me a dry potato and a salt herring anytime' he said! [Laughter] And old Tom just about went nuclear! [laughter] Winding him alright, there we are! So that's the kind of people we had, that's the kind of people we had and it was a privilege really to be along with people like that aye, aye yeah!

[Part 1 0:30:27] Rae: Did you find living in such a small community gave times to tension and arguments at all?

Davies: Oh minor ones. I mean there was a great big 'howdydo' about naming the dogs, piffing little things like that, but nothing much else not really, no. You see a lot of us had been to sea and you learned to get on with other people at sea, don't you, and make the best of each other? And most other people had been in the services and you couldn't afford the luxury of falling out really, no-no! And before I finish I just don't want to forget to mention Victor Russell, the man with whom I spent a lot of time sledging when we were in Hope Bay. He was a very fine chap, very fine, I had tremendous respect for him, tough as old boots! And he did very well after we, in his second year down there after we left him, and have the greatest respect for him yeah, as a man and as a sledging companion!

[Part 1 0:31:36] Rae: And he was a surveyor wasn't he, that's what he was down there to do?

Davies: In the second year. He joined us in the second year as did David James and Freddy Marshall yeah. I don't want to miss anybody out. There was Johnny Blyth, he was so called galley boy like, and he was a very cheerful fellow and we were glad of his company and he was very capable and hard working. He was in charge of Port Lockroy some years later. And there was Fran Farrington, well I mean he was one extraordinary man, ah great sense of

humour, I can hear him in my head laughing away. He used to make light of things and just keep you on an even keel really with his, he was a good backup good friend.

[Part 1 0:32:28] Rae: He had quite a difficult second year didn't he? Can you explain that?

Davies: Well it was very sad that, because we'd got landed and Fran Farrington amongst us at Hope Bay, and he set up the weather station there and the wireless transmission, and everything was going fine and then the Deception Island station broke down, went off the air. And the man in charge there was a young fellow, a young Tommy Donnachie, and he, what had happened was that the generator engine I think had broken down or went on fire or something. Anyway he was really up to putting it right and it wasn't his fault, he hadn't been trained for such things he was a young fellow and so Fran Farrington he volunteered really to go down and stay the next year in Deception Island. And Tommy Donnachie came to take over the wireless telegraphy duties with us at Hope Bay and it was sad for Farrington because he'd lived all his life really hoping to do this sort of thing, and land on the Antarctic mainland, and no fault of Tommy Donnachie's, I mean it wasn't. Farrington was a much more experienced and senior man and he knew more about the job, and Tommy Donnachie was very likable fellow and we got on fine with him so fair play to him you know, yeah, and did his job did his job well. But it was sad that Farrington had to be taken away from us that way.

[Part 1 0:34:14] Rae: Especially when you've served a year together at Port Lockroy.

Davies: That was it you see, we both belonged to the same crowd yeah. Yeah I mean I could say a lot more him but perhaps this isn't the time and place to.

[Part 1 0:34:25] Rae: No, we better not do too much.

Unknown voice: I'll just change the tape.

[Part 1 0:34:31] Rae: OK, what we're going to do now is just have a break for a minute.

Davies: Yeah. Do you want to say this about Marr?

[Part 1 0:34:37] Rae: If you think it's worth saying yeah.

Davies: Yes I do!

Another unknown voice [female]: Just prepare about it before you say it?

Davies: Yes, it's about Marr, about him being so fire conscious you see, and remembering what happened after you see.

[Part 1 0:34:50] Rae: Are we on now? Yeah, I'd like to hear that.

Davies: Right I'll tell you about it. In the hut we had a bogie stove and a pipe going out up through an asbestos outer pipe through the roof, and when the wind blew and when you got blizzards the top of the stove got pretty well hot at the draught, and Marr was always very anxious, tapping the stove so it didn't get overheated to draw the coals as it were you see.

And was conscious of the danger of fire and that dry timber hut catching alight and of course no water to put it out, and you know I'm saying this bearing in mind what a tragedy at Hope Bay later on - goodness knows what happened there - but it could easily have happened that way, aye. That was one thing, and the other thing is, as I said completely different again, I said that Marr was an expert on the food of the whales, the krill the *Euphausia Superba*, but well when we were working together in the Nissan hut one day, working in the stores, I remember him saying to me 'You know what we should do is not to catch whales but to catch their food, the krill, because there 10 times more of this in tonnage than there are whales'! And I thought 'Well, that makes sense', and so after the war I got some specimens of krill from Marr from the *Discovery* and analysed them, because I was taking a course in agriculture then, for agricultural drive for feedstuffs, and we found they were quite nourishing protein content and all that, and I was going to go on and carry on with this work on the whales and the arrangements couldn't be made and the whole thing fell through. So later on in my career I turned my attention to mussels, which seemed more productive! But anyway that's another story.

[Part 1 0:36:53] Rae: We'll just have to wait for the clock there. [It was chiming].

Davies: Yes, OK.

[Part 1 0:37:02] Rae: Finally as the clock's finished, before we move on from people I was just interested to know if you found if you missed family a lot or you talked about your families because I think Taylor was married I think wasn't he?

Davies: Oh yeah.

[Part 1 0:37:23] Rae: And I just wondered was there a lot of discussion about your families or...?

Davies: No, I mean, people had been putting up with this for years before. I mean it was wartime, everybody was away from home so you got used to it hadn't you? And just like making another long voyage or being away in the army you don't see your family do you, or the navy? Didn't expect to, no, no, we didn't go on about them, no.

[Part 1 0:37:54] Rae: Right well that's great thank you. I'd like to try and build up a picture now of the base, if we start with Port Lockroy?

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:38:08] Rae: There's sort of steps that were involved in sort of getting it ashore and what setting the base up?

Davies: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:38:15] Rae: Could you sort of describe that for us?

Davies: Well when we came to starting with Port Lockroy first, as you know we had to land at Port Lockroy because a landing couldn't be made at Hope Bay by the *Fitzroy*, that's the

vessel that brought our stores from the Falklands, because it was too dodgy. It would have been disastrous if it had got trapped by the ice for the winter because she is the only link between the Falklands and the mainland you see. So they didn't want to risk it, and in any case she hadn't got the bunkers, so we landed at Port Lockroy as a second best. It's an offshore island like landing on the Shetlands instead of the mainland of Scotland. And it is a well known harbour, a whaling harbour in the old days and they was a good anchorage there and shelter. And so we had to, luckily for us the crew of the *Fitzroy* were used to going round the islands picking up wool, bales of wool, for the market in Montevideo. And they were well organized, had a scow, and they were expert at the job! And so when it came to unloading stores they were dab hands at that sort of thing, and all they needed was enough water to float the scows and the boat that towed them next to the shore you see. And this was near a steep rocky slope, otherwise it was too shallow for them to get alongside, and so we landed everything on this steep rocky slope and it was a hill I came to call 'Heartbreak Hill', because it was so steep! You can see it on the films you see what I mean? We used to have a laugh about this and we carted everything from this, from the house timbers to boxes of stores, coal, everything up Heartbreak Hill it went! So anyway we got it landed by brute strength and ignorance you might say and so that was OK, aye!

[Part 1 0:40:32] Rae: And what sort of, did you have a prefabricated hut or...?

Davies: Yes, it was partly prefabricated Boulton and Paul but the timbers had to be nailed, I mean they had to be sawed to size and all that. It was the framework which I think that was prefabricated aye.

[Part 1 0:40:49] Rae: And how long did it take to get that?

Davies: Oh some weeks, some weeks. We had to build concrete foundation first and I think they used to put some calcium chloride with the cement to stop it getting frozen, anyway it all went OK yeah. Then there was a place under the hut, you see a bit of a space there.

[Part 1 0:41:20] Rae: Right....and once the hut was actually erected and you were living in it how comfortable was it?

Davies: Oh very comfortable, oh it was very snug! Kept the wind out and there was no snow coming in. Sometimes, particularly in the early days, you might find a little crack somewhere in the weather side of the hut, and when you looked at it you could see kind of a glistening cloud in the light and at the bottom a huge snow drift inside the hut! It came through like smoke this drift snow, it was that fine and dry and it was quite a job to make sure everywhere was properly sealed. It could be sealed like a boat really and I remember being in the Nissan hut and this was a second hand army hut from the Falkland Islands full of nail holes! And after the hut was built during a blizzard I was in there and I noticed there was a lot of this smoke spouting through the holes, so I thought 'Well I'll fix that'. So I made some paste and started pasting them over and it didn't work, the paste froze before you could touch it! So then in desperation I went round spitting at them and of course this froze immediately that sealed you know, it kept sealed for the rest of the winter! [Loud laughter!]

[Part 1 0:42:56] Rae: I was hoping you were going to mention that story [laughter]. Now in the film of Hope Bay there the pictures of the framework of the hut.

Davies: Yes?

[Part 1 0:43:07] Rae: Up, and then you shovelling snow.

Davies: That's right.

[Part 1 0:43:11] Rae: Can you tell us what was going on there?

Davies: Oh I expect what happened is that there was a blizzard during the night when the thing was half built and of course the thing filled up with snow, that's just all there was to it as far as I remember yes. And you had to keep shovelling snow all the time till you'd got the framework covered over because you might wake up in the morning, you might find the whole thing blown flat! The Nissan hut was blown flat once and we put it up again, aye, the wind was the worst enemy as much as the cold, hurricanes and things like that.

[Part 1 0:43:57] Rae: OK thank you. I'd like to talk to you about the rations now.

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:44:01] Rae: So if you could, tell us what rations you had as sort of your staple fare when you were sort of based in the huts?

Davies: In the huts well we weren't, when we were in the hut we weren't on strict 'pound and pint' rations as they call them in the merchant service. We had enough to eat, and the rationing such as it was, was a matter between Tom Berry who was cooking for us and, well, the chief steward in charge of that sort of thing and the boss, whoever he was, Marr or Taylor. And there was supposed to be enough tinned and dried foods for the whole crowd in two bases for two years. But, and when the seals were around we used to have seal meat and occasionally penguin meat and occasionally penguin eggs, but it wasn't a regular part of our diet naturally. Oh yes we had full and plenty in the hut, but sledging it was a different story, you were aware very much of your rations then one and three quarter pounds per day, the dogs got two pounds extra quarter pound for hauling the sledge [Laughter] which was appreciated!

[Part 1 0:45:23] Rae: And what did these rations consist of when you're sledging?

Davies: Well there was pemmican, it was wonderful stuff like it was a kind of Bovril mixed with lard and it was wonderful. It was rather like fudge in consistence at that temperature and you couldn't get enough of it! And you used to boil that up with melted snow and then we used to put pea flour in it and oatmeal, and that was our main food in the evening you see, and we had oatmeal for porridge for breakfast and we had biscuits and we had chocolate, a little bit chocolate for our lunch, and it was so hard it used it cut your mouth to get rid of it, it was like broken glass, [Laughter] aye! Anyway there you are, but it went down very well, but no, no, it was only when we were sledging that we were really on rations, yeah.

[Part 1 0:46:26] Rae: And how was that, how uncomfortable was that sledging on rations like that in terms of how you felt?

Davies: Well always famished like young fellows are, working hard specially both man hauling and dog sledging, and you wouldn't eat enough really. But don't know how much you want me to into these stories as I said before about the penguin eggs and the seal meat and all that, but I won't if you've had them before.

[Part 1 0:47:00] Rae: I quite like one of them, not sure which one would be, I mean either one really. Perhaps the one about the penguin eggs?

Davies: Yeah, well it's more wholesome than the one about eating the seal brains [laughter] anyway. Yes, well Victor Russell and myself we were sledging down the Bay of Thousand Ice Bergs, and we had the great good luck to come across an outcrop of rock in the middle of the sea ice, with a penguin rookery on it! It was nesting time, well it was like heaven sent manna, it was [some word for very happy?] something we couldn't wish for better so we gathered about three dozen eggs, they were the size of goose eggs, and had three dozen for breakfast and supper! And egg nogs and scrambled eggs, golly it was good, 18 eggs each. Well it sounded like gluttony that, but it wasn't really, because it gave us strength and kept us warm and we did appreciate it so much so we remember it till this day! Aye one of the best meals we've ever had aye, it was wonderful yeah! [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:48:18] Rae: Great, thank you, thank you! And how cold, generally how cold were you when sledging or camping?

Davies: Well I suppose, we had the right clothes. I mean it was ex-army stuff we made do with them, and you didn't want to wear too much around you, you start sweating and it cools you down as you probably know and, no, we got on OK. I never remember being bothered by the cold in my body - mind you your fingers and hands were a different story! And I used to pity the surveyors who had to turn out of the tent after we'd struck camp, fiddle around with these theodolite's metal controls with their bare fingers, and I thought 'I'm glad I'm not doing that job', yeah! But it was David James and Victor Russell and Lamb and Taylor, they can tell a different tale, when they had a lot of trouble in the first sledging trip they did around Ross Island, when they got very, they got into wet sea water underneath the soft snow, it was a terrible, terrible trip they had, and they got frost bite, David James did very badly! But that's another story, but personally I was lucky but it was a strange kind of place to be because in the height of summer the sun was quite strong, and sometimes when you were sledging on the sea ice you'd fall through it into water but it wasn't the sea it was melted ice, but you couldn't get on, the dogs were floundering and miserable! So what we had to do was stop and find a bit of higher ground and then travel at night and sleep during the day, when because at night it used to freeze over again, but it was an unexpected little problem, aye, but squeeze through this slopping through the ice you could only hope the next step doesn't go down into the deep ocean! [Laughter] You didn't know where you were you see, and the poor dogs didn't like it!

[Part 1 0:50:37] Rae: No I'm not surprised. Perhaps we can talk about the dogs, because you did both man hauling and dog sledging?

Davies: That's right.

[Part 1 0:50:46] Rae: So if you could tell us a bit about what you're feeling for the dogs and what their contribution is?

Davies: Oh well I have great respect, I think they taught us to sledge, to dog sledge, because none of us had seen or had anything to do with it before, and in fact before going down very few of us had even seen a pair of skis, so we had to teach ourselves to ski! A lot of sailors and other people you see and we got these dogs and they'd been trained in Labrador by the Eskimos, and they knew their work and we had instructions from BGLE and, that the British Grahamland Expedition before the war on dog handling and Freddie Marshall had been over and brought them over, and he knew a few words to say how to say left and right and stop and go on and that kind of thing. And we got a rough idea of what to do and how to harness them up and it went well without much problem really in the end. We learnt from them, they were well disciplined as far as the sledging was concerned, they used to pull like mad, they were raring to get away! But the job was keeping discipline, keeping them from fighting each other and tearing each other to bits if anything went wrong. But fair play to them they looked on us as referees, you could wade in amongst them and thump them around and they wouldn't turn on you! As long as they didn't lose face with each other, aye, yeah.

[Part 1 0:52:34] Rae: Can you tell us perhaps some of how your experience in the Antarctic influenced the rest of your life, or what sort of affect that kind of work had on you?

Davies: Oh yes, I've got something here, [Rae: Yeah], I've written about that. Do you mind if I read it out?

[Part 1 0:52:59] Rae: Probably prefer you not to read it. Do you want to have a look at it and then talk about some of it to us?

Davies: Yeah well?

[Part 1 0:53:09] Rae: Or would you rather just...?

Davies: I can't, my memory too bad I can't remember what I've written!

[Part 1 0:53:18] Rae: OK. What we can do is just leave that, we'll have that as a written thing.

Davies: OK.

[Part 1 0:53:24] Rae: I think it'll look a bit formal if you read it out.

Davies: Well it's just a few lines!

[Part 1 0:53:28] Rae: Well OK, let's give it a try! [Unknown voice: But can't pick what they say.] Well we can just read it and see how it comes over.

Davies: Hang on minute. [Hear papers being sorted.] Oh yeah. Well this is it, do you mind if I read this like that?

[Part 1 0:53:55] Rae: No.

Davies: Well I want to sum it up this way and I put it in rhyme. This is not poetry, but in rhyme because I tried to be factual you see and this is what I said:

*'Antarctica is frozen by the cold of outer space
For there the sunlight shines too low to thaw the snow and ice.
It is the icy threshold of the living world we know
Until the starry heavens at 265 below.
And when the blinding blizzard blows and scalds your hands and face,
It feels as though it's coming from the depths of outer space.
What makes it feel so awesome is not so much the cold
As being in the firmament beyond the living world!'*

And that's really the guts of it, because my great grandfather John Jones Towsal, and he was a well known preacher and revered to this day, and his speaking of the super natural, he said [in Welsh, then in English] 'We are nearer to the infinite than we think'! And that's how I used to feel about being south!

[Part 1 0:55:03] Rae: That's because it was such an isolated environment?

Davies: Well it wasn't so much, you're nearer your right up against the cold of space this is what it was you see? That was it and you felt, and it's a menace and be frightened of it, I was anyway! [laughter] It's all the clothes you put on. Anyway I hope you don't mind me saying that but I'm trying to be factual!

[Part 1 0:55:26] Rae: Yeah, I think that worked really well.

Unknown voice: It did, no problem at all, perfect!

[Part 1 0:55:31] Rae: I mean you were looking up a lot, [Davies: Yeah], you weren't just reading it flat so that's great thank you!

Davies: I can't recite it.

[Part 1 0:55:39] Rae: No you couldn't, agreed, I'm glad you did that thank you! I've just realised that we've forgotten actually, we'll just talk about Nordenskjold [Davies: Yes] if we can because that follows on quite neatly...

Davies: Right.

[Part 1 0:55:54] Rae: ...from that.

Davies: Well now in Hope Bay, right now there was this, when we landed at Hope Bay one of the first things we saw was a stone hut, a stone shelter that Nordenskjold companions had

built when they got marooned there, three men Andersson, Duse and Grunden and this is all well known history. And we found some relics there of an old boot and a crowbar and blubber stove, this, that and the other that had been left behind after they got rescued. [Loud cough] And we, we often used to think about these chaps when we had got our hut built and the blizzard was streaming across the place, and we see it whirling around this stone hut and thought 'By heck, glad we're not there'! What a tough time they had, living on frozen penguin meat and seal meat for a whole winter! Anyway I won't go into that part of the story because there's a separate history which is well known, but after the war just after we came back from the expedition I went to Sweden to work on a farm and I thought I'd take the chance to look up any survivors that were there. And was Skottsberg [note: had trouble picking up the name from the recording, but this seems the most likely. AW.] that was at Paulet Island and there was Andersson that was at Hope Bay, and there was K Andersson who I think he was at Paulet and a boat man who was at Snow Hill, so and anyway the upshot was they invited me to little dinner and I brought these photographs to show them round and they were ever so pleased that their expedition had been recalled as it were! Aye, and as you know I've written a little screed about this, rather a thin thing I know, about this visit for the centenary of this expedition of theirs, aye. But oh they were very hospitable and welcoming and Andersson had written a couple of books about the Antarctic of those expeditions which he did ask me to translate but I'm afraid I never got round to it!

[Part 1 0:58:14] Rae: Ah, thank you. Yeah, and what sort of people did they come over as?

Davies: Oh fine people, of course they were!

[Part 1 0:58:21] Rae: Were they tough?

Davies: What?

[Part 1 0:58:23] Rae: Were they tough?

Davies: Well?

[Part 1 0:58:26] Rae: Wiry?

Davies: I mean they were like....you know they were professional scientists and people like that by then you see white haired and so though a bit different from the way they were 40 years before, aye!

[Part 1 0:58:45] Rae: OK, thank you. One of the things we haven't talked about yet is the pig!

Davies: Ah!

[Part 1 0:58:53] Rae: I meant to do that when talking about the food.

Davies: Ah yes!

[Part 1 0:58:55] Rae: Could you tell us the story of your pig at Port Lockroy?

Davies: Yes, I'd be very glad. After the first year was nearly over in Port Lockroy the *Scoresby*, the *William Scoresby* and Lt. Commander Marchesi in command, she brought us mail from the Falklands, and a little pig. She brought one to Deception and one to us! And we were to fatten this little pig on scraps and some bran and stuff and some feed they brought as well, just to have a bit of fresh meat for a change, it was change from seal meat. So anyway they landed this little thing ashore, actually it was a little sow it was, and you could see her there shivering stark naked on the water's edge! Ho I felt sorry for it, so first thing to do was to get a box, a big crate, and nail up the side of it and stuff it full of wood wool and a little gap left you see and showed it to the pig and in she went no messing and all you could see was her snout sticking out of the wood wool! Anyway we became very good friends and it was my job, and I took on the job of feeding her scraps and whatever it was and we used to get on very well indeed and we used to have fun and games. I'd go running off somewhere and the pig would go running after me then she'd turn round and run back and I'd chase her, we'd go back and forth, having a rare old time tip and run. And she became like the tenth member of the expedition you see, and I remember one day on Sundays we used to have a lie in for about an hour after we got settled down, and we were having our Sunday lie in. And Doc had gone out to his weather screen to take his observations, and must have left the door open because I was half asleep in my bunk and I could hear something scrabbling on the floor of the mess room, and opened my eyes and next thing there was this pig stuck her snout round my cabin jumped out of my bed and 'Come on, out you get! - [Laughing] - I want my breakfast lie in or not'. So I had to get out didn't I and give her her breakfast! Anyway it was a sad day when we had to put her down, but I didn't want to cut her throat because I felt it to be such a betrayal and not too good for the pig, so we waited till she was sound sleep after a good meal and at point blank I put a '45 shot with the revolver through her head one jerk and she was dead! And I thought 'Well that's the way, that's the best way', because I'll tell you why we had to do this. If we'd kept her you see, or taken her to Hope Bay, she'd have been torn to pieces by the dogs because the Deception pig met her end that way, she was torn to pieces by the dogs, and we didn't want this to happen to ours so it was a more merciful way of ending her life! But there you see is a picture of the old pig on the mantelpiece next to my grandfather I think, is it, aye.

[Part 1:01:02:24] Rae: Shall we bring it into the picture?

Davies: Oh never mind about that.

[Part 1:01:02:27] Rae: No? OK.

Davies: Aye. Anyway there we are but we all got very fond of her, we didn't enjoy that meal very much! You know too fond of her like eating an old friend, aye.

[Part 1:01:02:40] Unknown voice: Jo, the tapes just about to run out.

[Part 1:01:02:42] Rae: OK. [Unknown voice: Should I put another one in?] The only thing we've got left really is whether there are any other anecdotes about the Antarctic?

PART 2:

[Part 2 0:00:00] Rae: Anything that would illustrate the challenges that were set for you?

Davies: Oh we never had any much in the way frights of course, I mean I haven't said anything about the *Eagle* the ship that brought us down. I don't know if you want me to mention her because that's a story in itself?

[Part 2 0:00:17] Rae: Yeah?

Davies: Captain Sheppard and the heroic and skilful handling of the vessel, I didn't see any of that personally of that because I was back at the shore and we just heard about it.

[Part 2 0:00:29] Rae: It could be there's not a great deal you're going to add?

Davies: Well I did not have a lot to do with her except the time we took, we ran down to the beach expecting her to be wrecked there and with all the ropes and gear there for rescuing them from the ship as far as one could, but then she managed to put to sea and that was that! But that was, I mean they landed the gear in their own scow, did an excellent job of work the Newfoundland crew, and we didn't have a lot more to do with them than that you see.

[Part 2 0:01:10] Rae: Did you actually see her in trouble out in the bay?

Davies: No, no I don't remember see, because about a mile away you see over the other side of the penguin rockery but I can imagine what she was up against, oh terrible, terrible!

[Part 2 0:01:27] Rae: What were the weather conditions like?

Davies: Oh terrible, blowing a hurricane down that fjord and ice berg carrying away her bow spit and the bowsprit getting stowed in then she ran for it to the Falklands in the end as you know! But they thought their end had come. Yeah they did wonderfully well, aye!

[Part 2 0:01:53] Rae: And Captain Sheppard was quite a character!?

Davies: Oh he was a wonderful man another sailing ship man and very nice chap, but he was extremely skilful. He had a wonderful bosun called Skipper Tom he was over 80 and he's still go shinning up to the crow's nest! Aye, he could flense a seal in ten seconds flat pretty well, yeah he was a wonderful man, aye!

[Part 2 0:02:17] Rae: What sort of vessel was she?

Davies: What the *Eagle*?

[Part 2 0:02:22] Rae: The *Eagle*!

Davies: She was a sealer, or she had some sail but mainly steam powered, aye, but a kind of a clipper bow which was unusual but a steam vessel, aye.

[Part 2 0:02:39] Rae: OK. Do you think that's probably enough about the *Eagle* then I think I mean?

Davies: Well I'm probably not doing justice to her or her crew by not saying more, but my memory being what it is I can't think offhand I don't want to waste your time!

[Part 2 0:02:59] Rae: That's fine, that's fine as that gives us a nice little clip about the *Eagle* [Davies: yeah] and her troubles.

Davies: I had great respect for them.

[Part 2 0:03:07] Rae: Let's talk about your time on the whaling [Davies: Right] factory ship now if you could start by saying, you've said at the beginning how you got on to the whaling vessel but if you could describe what the whaler and her name and what sort of a ship she would look like to a landsman?

Davies: Yes, well the vessel in which I served with Marr was the whaling factory vessel *Terje Viken*, United Whalers, and mostly Norwegians and a smaller British crew mainly ex- Hull trawler men who'd been kicked off their trawlers which were taken over as minesweepers. And so I wasn't actually along with the crowd that year because I was with Marr in a little lab, a makeshift lab workshop we'd rigged up aft to can whale meat, to dry it and play around with it and generally you see and all that sort of thing. But the next year I went back whaling and this would be along with the crowd as a labourer, and I joined up much more actually because you felt being along with the crowd, and the two languages you heard on the ship were Norwegian and Welsh! Hardly a word of English spoken. The mate spoke English he was English, and there was the second mate he was English too, and there were one or two English and Aussie amongst the crew but mostly just Welsh and Norwegian! And in fact I got my Welsh back again I'd almost forgotten it and Amlwch Welsh, aye they were a good crowd!

[Part 2 0:04:53] Rae: And how many people?

Davies: Oh quite a few dozen but Norwegians, oh I don't know, a tremendous number seemed to me like hundreds, wouldn't have been that, no!

[Part 2 0:05:06] Rae: And can you describe for us the process of catching and then processing a whale?

Davies: Well I didn't personally see much of the catching because it was done by catchers. They're like trawlers with a gun on the fo'c'sle head, which shoot a big heavy harpoon into the whale which explodes inside it, poor thing! And then after catching two or three of them they tow them back to the factory ship and then they get hauled up the stern, it's like a ramp at the back end, and there's a kind of scissors grab which grabs hold of them by the flukes, just beyond the flukes and hauls them up and as they could up so they get the blubber stripped off, like peeling a banana, by the flensers. And then after the blubber's been flensed off then the carcass is towed further forward and the flesh is cut off the bones and that is cut up and put down the cookers for the oil. And the bones are sawn up into chunks and put down in the cookers, that was the gang I was working with, the bone gang, and you could deal with a fin whale in 20 minutes when the going was good, and sometimes they were rather small the fin whales, 70 foot perhaps, and two or three of them in an hour! But when a

big blue whale came up, well there was a big winch mid-ships which towed up, which hauled them up the slip, it was kind of a scissors grab which and got hold of them round the tail, and knew when a blue whale was coming up because you could hear the winch going very slow, 'whump-whump' like that, and you'd think 'By golly there's a good one coming up now'. And sure enough a big 90 foot whale, it's a very impressive sight! And it makes me - I'm horrified now years after, you think of the slaughter we made of these, but there you are at that time it was more whales more dollars more oil. We had a bonus as well, so you didn't think much of it, so those days are gone now and I hope they won't come back either!

[Part 2 0:07:23] Rae: And what was, what were conditions like in terms of being able to wash, and what was the smell like and that kind of thing?

Davies: Oh, it was smelly enough alright! We got used to it but after the war I happened to get to know the navigating officer of an auxiliary cruiser which was sent down to those waters to keep an eye out for German raiders, because as you probably know there been a lot of trouble with them! And he was captain of one of Ministry research vessels and I was doing a trip in her, and we happened to realise that we'd been alongside each other, she came alongside us for bunkers you see, and this man said that some of the crew in their little navy hats [laughter] they were overcome by the smell and some of them were actually throwing up because of the stench and we never thought anything of it, no, got used to it, aye. But they looked so clean and looking at ourselves there's a lot of fellows got beards and blood and guts all over our dungarees, we had to keep scrubbing them mind you! So it wasn't a very, [laughter] well it was a bit of a smelly job! But you took no notice of that.

[Part 2 0:08:53] Rae: Did you find you were squeamish at all at first?

Davies: No, no. The only time that it made you sniff a bit was when you got a whale that had been killed some days before and it had gone rotten, and when you hauled it up the guts would blow out with a great gush of gas, and the flesh had gone green, and the bones were green and that was a bit ripe! But it all went down the hatch as it were and if it was too bad they'd dump it overboard but most of it you could use, the blubber particularly.

[Part 2 0:09:33] Rae: And would there be men actually working below?

Davies: Oh yes, oh yes. After the cookers had been filled up and steamed then and all the oil blown off, the boilers cleaners were the gang that were cleaning out the bones and all the bits and pieces that were left after this high pressure cooking. Oh yes there was a gang there down below.

[Part 2 0:10:00] Rae: That must have been hot and...?

Davies: Well?

[Part 2 0:10:03] Rae: Comfy?

Davies: It was a hot job yeah, it was a hot job below decks, but still it was cold on top! And this work went on night and day and you didn't stop. You took over if the bone saw was

working, and you had to steady it with a hook, you just went up to the hook man and you took over the hook from him and it didn't stop the saw, just like being in a kind of factory as it was so the work carried on, aye, but it was one of the most worthwhile jobs I've ever done!

[Part 2 0:10:38] Rae: Why do you say that?

Davies: Well you got to know your job and good crowd to work with and we had plenty of food, sometimes we had whale meat and it was OK, aye!

[Part 2 0:11:00] Rae: Well I think that's, unless you've got anything else about whaling?

Davies: Well I don't know if you want to talk about cleaning the tanks and the fellows singing down in the tanks?

[Part 2 0:11:09] Rae: Oh the singing I was quite interested in.

Davies: Yeah?

[Part 2 0:11:13] Rae: Yeah. [laughing] So can you either demonstrate, perhaps, demonstrate the song?

Davies: I can't sing I've got a voice like a carrion crow when it comes to singing!

[Part 2 0:11:22] Rae: [laughing] I don't expect many of them had good voices did they?

Davies: Oh they could sing alright! The thing was, after the shift on deck we had to go down then and clean out the fuel oil from the empty tanks, in which the fuel oil had been used up for the boilers and for the engines and make it all clean for the whale oil to come in, with paraffin, sawdust, scrapers and all this sort of thing, it was a routine job. And sometimes after about an hour or so sometimes the scrapers used to go quiet and somebody would pipe up a song, and they were Welshmen and brought up in chapel and jolly good singing I can tell you! And it was a mixture of hymns and hymn tunes but not hymn words I can tell you! [laughter] Some of them quite bawdy [laughter] put to well known hymn tunes [laughing] I won't repeat any of them but it was good singing you know! You used to join in and I remember there was a fellow who used to work in the tween-decks above the tops of the tanks, and I met him in Conway after and he was working for a demolition firm, and he told me that he once seen the bosun, the old Norwegian bosun who we used to call [in Welsh] 'The old greyhound', because he was always after us you see! And he came striding up when he heard this singing going on and the scrapers not working and, he said, he peered over the edge of the hatch and looked down and he listened and he listened. Then he went away without a word, I think he must have been quite overcome by the singing, aye, aye! That's the way it was, but there's a song you know and apart from that they had a song about the Amlwch fellows and I can try and give a rendering of it for you if you like?

[Part 2 0:13:20] Rae: Yes please!

Davies: Would you like me to do that?

[Part 2 0:13:24] Rae: Yes.

Davies: If you mind my just [sound of sorting papers out] well I can do it in English and Welsh you see, would you like me to do it in English, it would be pointless me singing it in Welsh wouldn't it?

[Part 2 0:13:39] Rae: Yes let's have it in English.

Davies: OK then. It's a song they used to sing about Amlwch fellows during the Great War!

[Part 2 0:13:49] Rae: And what is Amlwch?

Davies: It's a little town in the north of Anglesey not far from Holyhead, and it's about the soldiers going out to the Great War of 1914-18. And it goes like this I'll read it if you like or sing it whichever you like?

[Part 2 0:14:05] Rae: I'd prefer you to sing it if you don't mind?

Davies: On your head be it, aye! [laughter] *Where are the boys of Amlwch tonight, where are the boys we know they're are not in the port or Ortel Square no not there, no not there, they have taken a trip to the continent their rifles and bayonets bright, doing their duty doing it gladly that's where they are tonight.* And I've taken the liberty of altering it particularly in Welsh the last few lines. *No not there, no not there, they had put out to sea with Almighty God for the waters of Heaven's shore, where whales and men will meet again in peace for evermore!* You know, thinking of all the lads that had gone you see yeah! Then in Welsh.... that's what it is in Welsh!

[Part 2 0:15:15] Rae: Thank you!

Davies: Out of respect, you see, for all those lads!

[Part 2 0:15:20] Rae: Thank you, that's great!

Davies: But as I said I'm no great singer, aye! [Laughter]

[Part 2 0:15:27] Rae: That's lovely, thanks very much!

Davies: Good.

[Part 2 0:15:34] Rae: OK.

Some interesting clips:

- Purpose of Operation Tabarin as they understood it - top secret and not allowed to talk about it till about 1982! [Part 1 0:02:12]
- Talks about James [Scout] Marr and leader of the expedition and the respect he had for him. [Part 1 0:09:10]
- Leaving the UK and the problems with the ship, and a special train! [Part 1 0:12:53]

- Talks about the scientific members of the expedition! [Part 1 0:18:05]
- About Chippy Ashton and how made his ships in bottles. [Part 1 0:20:52]
- Talks about his friend Jock Matheson! [Part 1 0:26:14]
- The setting up of Port Lockroy and ‘Heartbreak Hill’! [Part 1 0:36:18]
- An unusual way of sealing the small holes in the Nissan hut! [Part 1 0:41:20]
- Their sledging rations at that time. [Part 1 0:45:23]
- Coming across a penguin rookery while on a sledging trip and the extra rations of 18 penguins eggs each! [Part 1 0:47:00]
- How they learnt to dog sledge without any experience. [Part 1 0:50:46]
- Gwion Davies’ rhyme of the Antarctic. [Part 1 0:53:55]
- After the war and meeting several members of Nordenskjold early turn of the century expedition in Sweden! [Part 1 0:55:54]
- The saga of the Port Lockroy pig! [Part 1 0:58:55]
- About the almost loss of the ship *Eagle*! [Part 2 0:00:29]
- The process of dealing with whales on the factory ship *Terje Viken*! [Part 2 0:05:06]
- The Welsh singing during the cleaning of the oil tanks on the factory ship. [Part 2 0:11:22]
- The whalers’ song about the boys from Amlwch! [Part 2 0:14:05]