MICHAEL DAVIES

Edited transcript of a recording of Michael Davies interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 19th November 2011. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/148. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 2nd February 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Michael Davies, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 19th of November 2011. Michael Davies, Part One.

Davies: Michael Davies. I was born in Surrey, Carshalton, moved when I was a year or two up to Sawston which is South of Cambridge, and that's where I grew up, basically. I went to all the schools there: primary, junior and secondary modern (well it is known as Sawston Village College). And I started work from Sawston. I was about 13 miles away in Royston and I started as an agricultural mechanic.

[Part 1 0:00:54] Lee: What was your date of birth?

Davies: 6th of the 12th, '51.

[Part 1 0:00:58] Lee: So you are nearly …?

Davies: I am very close, days away, from being 60. That's where I was just now, arranging three days away on the East Coast. So that's a bit of a surprise for my Marian when I get back.

[Part 1 0:01:18] Lee: Did you go into Further Education?

Davies: Yes, during apprenticeship; good old days of apprenticeships, we were allowed to do one day a week at college. I did a City & Guilds mechanical engineering course, which was a five year course. I was one of the last ones to do a 5-year apprenticeship, and that was equal, apparently, to a pass degree in mechanical engineering. The last year of the course, we were encouraged to go on and do an HNC. By then I should think two thirds of the class had fallen by the way and there was just us, dedicated mechanical engineering types, that were still thrashing away with maths and science – and all the theories of mechanical engineering.

[Part 1 0:02:24] Davies: So it seemed like a good idea to go on to do an HNC and the company I was working for wouldn't let me have 30 days off a year to do it. So that's when I decided to become … , it was one of the main reasons to become self-employed. So rather than leave or stay at school and go on to do a 3-year degree, I opted to leave school at 15 and do 7 years of day release at the local tech. I think, what I know now, and the undergraduates that I have seen, I had by far the best education. It was a mixture of the theory, the brain-straining maths, and also earning a wage and working and learning hands on, which was a very nice balance.

[Part 1 0:03:32] Lee: What was it that drew you to mechanical engineering?

Davies: Oh right from … As soon as I could hold anything, right from a wee lad, I was fiddling. Meccano was a love of my life. I had a train set, I had a Triang train set, and my father (bless him) said 'We will organise a large board of wood and we can do

a train set layout.' I thought about it and even at a young age of about 7 or 8, I didn't want to do that because it was such fun to build up a rail network as I felt at the time. It sometimes went from room to room; it went over a bed; went under the beds; it went through the dog's basket. To create, to build things, to be fiddling with my hands, I have always done it, always done it all my life. I can remember doing a head gasket on the lawnmower engine when I was about 10. There was replacing a water pipe on the family car when I was about 12 or 13. That was with help from the local garage, pointing me the right way.

[Part 1 0:05:07] Lee: Were there any genes in the family which suggested this, any …? Did your ancestors? Isambard Kingdom Brunel, does he figure in your ancestry?

Davies: [Laughs] Good old Grandad. No, not that I know too much about my father's side. I didn't know too much about his family, although it was interesting that his father went across to Canada in the early 1900s. He got a business going and then he sent for my grandmother (my father's mother), my father and his sister. And on the way over by boat, my grandfather caught cholera or yellow fever, one of those nasty ones, and my grandmother arrived in Canada to find that her husband had passed away. So she sold up his bits and pieces and came back to England and on the way across, Dad lost his mother and sister, through (once again) cholera or one of these prevalent diseases of the time. So my father arrived back in England about eleven years old I believe without sister, mother or father, and he was brought up by two maiden aunts in Warwickshire. So I don't know too much about his side.

[Part 1 0:06:53] Lee: OK.

Davies: My grandfather certainly had a bit of an entrepreneurial side to him because he got himself a job at Sawston Tannery and he revolutionised the way that skins were treated, sheepskins were treated. And through this revolutionary way of doing it, he became managing director of Sawston Tannery. My cousin, he has got a strong engineering background, although he went on to become managing director of the tannery but he has always had a great love of cars and has recently gone down, done the London to Brighton Run again.

[Part 1 0:07:46] Lee: So there were hints of that, technology wise?

Davies: Yes, perhaps a little bit.

[Part 1 0:07:50] Lee: What was your first connection with or memory of the Antarctic? When did you first become aware that such a place existed?

Davies: Ah well that would be: one of my favourite subjects at school was geography and I think it was just realising that little old England here, there was so much around it, other countries. And I can remember in the classroom a large 3-foot globe, and of course the top and the bottom, there was just painted white. And of course Antarctica is one of the seven continents, and even at school it intrigued me. 'I wonder if you could travel to all the continents? Of course Antarctica would be a bit of a no-no but there we go, unless I joined a whaling ship.' That was about the sum of my knowledge when I left school, of Antarctica, and I really never thought about it until I saw the advert.

[Part 1 0:09:12] Lee: In the local paper?

Davies: In the local paper.

[Part 1 0:09:15] Lee: In Cambridge?

Davies: The *Cambridge Evening News*.

[Part 1 0:09:17] Lee: So BAS were actually advertising in the local Cambridge newspaper?

Davies: I think BAS at the time had a bit of a problem because the ship had left Southampton. It's about a three month journey down to Antarctica, and one of the mechanics had resigned on board the ship, and they wanted someone a bit sharpish to go through the interview process, all the document signing, passports, jabs various and get him to South America to catch the ship.

[Part 1 0:09:57] Lee: Right.

Davies: So they had a very small time frame and I guess they may have thought 'Well let's go for someone local. It will be worth running a local advert.' Because, as you may know, they normally go in the national papers.

[Part 1 0:10:10] Lee: So your favourite subject of geography served you well on this occasion?

Davies: I realised how little I knew.

[Part 1 0:10:17] Lee: No but the fact that you were local to Cambridge was …?

Davies: Oh absolutely, yes. But it is extraordinary. I read that paper. For a start, if you can picture, I was self-employed. The business was getting on its feet. I was living at home with Mum and Dad and I was working morning, noon and night. Not much of a social life. Not much of a social life, let's put it that way and I really did feel that if a job came up I ought to crack on with it and do it now because there may be another one, and just keep on top. So I really was working hard. I found the local paper very parochial and yes, there were bits that were interesting. I didn't generally read it, I must admit. A national paper interested me more.

[Part 1 0:11:27] Davies: So I may have only read the local paper about half a dozen times a year. We didn't often get the local paper; it was just as and when, but it just so happened that the paper was in the house. I happened to pick it up. That was two odd things: as I say we didn't normally get the local paper. Secondly I actually sat there and read it, and as soon as I saw that advert, I knew, I absolutely knew to my inner core, that was where I was going. That job had my name on it, and I am sure at the interview, because I was so confident, I knew I was going to get that job. I am sure the nerves, interview nerves, didn't exist. I knew it.

[Part 1 0:12:27] Lee: Were you in competition, with other applicants?

Davies: I believe so.

[Part 1 0:12:31] Lee: OK, and do you have a kind of concept of a guiding hand in life, fatalistic or a Superior Being?

Davies: I don't know about a Superior Being. I struggle with the ideas of Superior Beings but certainly a believer in Fate.

[Part 1 0:12:55] Lee: Right.

Davies: And a believer in intuition, but I have read some very interesting articles about intuition where people say 'It's your training.' If you have an intuitive thought that you may have this problem with an engine, really it is your highly trained subconscious guiding you into that decision. I will go with that because the subconscious is a very powerful tool I think, but in this case it felt so right, I just knew it.

[Part 1 0:13:39] Lee: So it wasn't a Greek god of diesel engines, then?

Davies: No no no, and also in the advert they said that it was going to be for possibly six months or 18 months, whether you were going to winter or not, but I knew I was going to winter. I knew, I knew.

[Part 1 0:14:01] Lee: This was all happening in the November of 1976 and you went off on the ship. No you flew didn't you?

Davies: Flew down, yes. Ouff!

[Part 1 0:14:09] Lee: To Monte or to Port Stanley?

Davies: To Monte.

[Part 1 0:14:13] Lee: Then caught the boat? Which boat was it?

Davies: *Bransfield*. *Bransfield*, yes.

[Part 1 0:14:18] Lee: Did that set you at a disadvantage, because part of the purpose of that journey at that time was to meld the Fid into a working unit? You were the outsider.

Davies: Now this is M. Davies, who had been struggling with his business. Cash flow was beginning to get really a problem. One of the recessions was coming in, or starting.

[Part 1 0:14:47] Lee: One of the many recessions?

Davies: One of many, yes. I had never been abroad, never had a passport. The only holidays I'd ever had was just a couple, a handful with the family. So I had been working very very hard for many many months. I saw this advert, went for the advert

and then I had to, in effect, close my business down. I know I was only a sole trader, working out of the back of my van …. But of course the accounts, Inland Revenue (bless their little cotton socks) had to be satisfied. The bank manager – wonderful chap, wonderful wonderful chap. I thought I had better have a word with the bank manager and breezed in and he had very kindly, a year ago, had lent me £6000 to buy a combine harvester. Keeping in mind I am not a farmer, he said 'Why?' I said 'Well it's a bargain. It's only two years old. It's had a rough life. I want to buy it for £5000, spend £1000 doing it up and I am sure we can make a good profit on the resale.' So, bless him, he said 'Oh all right then. I'll put you down for six grand.

[Part 1 0:16:17] Davies: And it came to pass, that's what happened so Barclays and I were very happy. But I breezed in this time and I said … 'Not another loan of some incredible amount?' 'No no. I am going away. 'Oh, right. Where?' 'Antarctica.' 'Mm, interesting.' 'For about a year or so.' 'Oh, right.' 'So what about your business?' 'I have got to close the books up.' 'Right. How are you going to get paid?' 'By the British Government.' 'Oh that's good.' 'But I am going to get paid quarterly.' 'Oh!' And of course going back in the '70's the cheque was the way to pay for everything. I told him I was going to leave a chequebook that I had signed every cheque and my Mum was going to open the bills the letters and pay everything off that we between us now, in the next ten days, can sort it out. So that's how … So I had that to sort out, I had the Inland Revenue to sort out. What do you take? You are going to be away for a year. What do you take? You are going to fly so you can't take a skipful of stuff. I was told that you could buy stuff on the boat. My father, he was an absolute star. I had always felt I had been a bit of a disappointment for Dad. He was very much an academic.

[Part 1 0:18:02] Davies: My sister, she is the one that got ten O-levels in one sitting. I couldn't wait to leave school. But now, because my father, being an older father, he had served during the Second World War, in the Army, and this was in his field of: a group of men working together. On this occasion not going into battle, but the so many parallels with Army life: living together, sleeping together, the whole business. So many parallels that he could identify with and he was a great help. He said 'Well really you don't need much because if it's like the Army, they will supply everything', which is so true. They supply everything that you need; not necessarily what you want. I flew down again to Antarctica and all our luggage went to New Mexico. I then realised that all you need is some cash, your passport. You can always wash your underwear out in a hotel but you need a toothbrush, because there is nothing worse than green velvety-feeling teeth. So that's really a bare minimum.

[Part 1 0:19:48] Lee: Let's get you down there.

Davies: Right, OK.

[Part 1 0:19:50] Lee: Fascinating though this is, have another sip of coffee and let's get you down there, because you were going to Halley. You knew in advance you were going to go to Halley and I guess you probably didn't know a great deal about Halley, so how did it strike you when you first arrived, at the end of 1976, early 1977?

Davies: Well I have just got to quickly say at this build-up of winding up a business, the excitement, there were two main feelings. The excitement of flying internationally

and the second feeling of exhaustion. I was seriously tired. Met at the airport by the agents, taken to a hotel, the ship docked, went on board ship, and there was this tremendous weight coming off my shoulders: 'I have no longer got to worry about cash flow, about people phoning up moaning about a job that has gone wrong, this that and the other.' The tremendous feeling of freedom, of 'I am being paid to be a mechanic. I am going to be looked after. There's a lot of excitement involved. Let's go for it.' So eventually we got down to Antarctica, onto the ice shelf. The guys on board, the supernumeries, the Fids (as I later learned) were a brilliant bunch, very welcoming. They tried to fill me up with beer every night: 'Let's see what he is like when he's pissed!' They were lovely, a lovely group.

[Part 1 0:21:36] Davies: On the sea ice: absolutely breath-taking. Dad had got a couple of books out of the library and we pored through them, particularly Shackleton's, Ponting's photographs and that and it was just like it, absolutely to a T. Of course it would be. So it didn't come as much of a surprise. I supposed forewarned, I was given a job. It was an important relief when I went in there. They had had a couple of bad reliefs; they had lost a fuel dump. Things were a bit grim. This one had to be a good one and there was talk of: if the weather was bad, or whatever whatever, they were going to pull everyone out and close the base down. There was talk of it. I think everyone had everything crossed that it wouldn't happen. And with my knowledge now, I think things would have been terrible if they had done that. The conditions would have had to have been awful. But we had a good relief, and the first view really is up against the sea ice and there was an ice cliff about half a mile away and you could see the ramp where all the vehicles went up. And you came onto the ice shelf and of course it is dead flat, absolutely stunning.

[Part 1 0:23:16] Davies: The weather was beautiful: blue blue skies which you can only get those blue skies down there, and it was absolutely gorgeous. I loved it, but of course my background of being in the Fens, this dead flat horizon-to-horizon business. I absolutely loved it and it was interesting that there was 21 of us there. Two of us were south of Watford Gap: Phil from London, me from East Anglia. There were 7 of us, a third of them, were Scottish and the rest were from the Midlands or from the North. And of course past, north of Watford Gap it starts getting hilly and it's those people that didn't like the flatness; couldn't get on with it, and I loved it, absolutely loved it. Of course the air's so clear you can see for miles. Oh, it was beautiful!

[Part 1 0:24:26] Lee: What was the accommodation like at that time? What number Halley is this? Halley …?

Davies: Oh Heavens! I don't really know[1].

[Part 1 0:24:34] Lee: We can look that up later on. Were you living underground?

Davies: Oh yes, in wooden huts in Armco tubes.

[Part 1 0:24:44] Lee: How did you adjust to living underground?

[1] It was Halley III.

Davies: A bit odd. I don't know if I was that keen on that and it was very interesting. You have these large tubes with the offices, living accommodations, workshops, genny sheds in and you had smaller tubes connecting them – firebreaks I suppose. That's why it was designed like that. And in one of the shafts, one of these interconnecting shafts (they would be about 10ft in diameter) we had fitted out shelving down one side and that was where all the tents and camping stuff were stored. The electrician had put in lights underneath the shelves and if you stood at one end of the corridor, and the light would shine from underneath the shelves, you couldn't see the bulbs or the tubes. You had these beams of light just as though it was light coming through a window and I would stand there and think 'Yes, we are on the surface. This is the sun shining in through the windows.' Weird that, weird, but I loved that corridor.

[Part 1 0:26:04] Lee: But what about the actual accommodation for you? There you were. 'You are here for a year, Davies. Here's your bunk.'

Davies: Wrong. I was the 21st member of a 20-man base. Twenty bunks.

[Part 1 0:26:21] Lee: So where were you sleeping?

Davies: I was sleeping up in the loft in a sleeping bag: in the loft in the dorm, where all the freeze-dried food, beer, was stored. And in the first month or so I had a very very small area to sleep in, but as the stuff got consumed, my bedroom got bigger and bigger.

[Part 1 0:26:47] Lee: Was this a cock-up, back at BAS, then?

Davies: I think more of a planned cock-up, because they were very worried about the condition of the mechanical bits and pieces and this is why they stated in the adverts: 6 or 12 months because I was an extra mechanic. They normally had a generator mechanic and one tractor mechanic, so I was a second tractor mechanic.

[Part 1 0:27:13] Lee: We have already had you arriving in that team late, and now we have got you living in separate accommodation, so let me ask you again about this, whether you felt you became part of the team. Were there any barriers to that?

Davies: Barriers? No. I think I was just in this mental condition of: everything was so different and new. Never been at sea before, let alone flown. I was in this mental condition of absorbing everything and I don't suppose I was giving too much out myself. I felt that I was a new member to the club. Everyone started to have nicknames, had already developed their nicknames, that sort of thing.

[Part 1 0:28:14] Lee: So where did 'Honk' come from?

Davies: Ah, well I have just described my palatial bedroom. I had to climb up a ladder, through a loft into the loft where my sleeping bag was. The ship had just left and everything, everyone was settling down. We still had a lot of tidying up to do. The place was in a sort of organised shambles and the cook (bless his little cotton socks) had done a quick evening meal which was a huge curry. So we all tucked into that. Lovely, brilliant cook; wonderful food. I'd had a few curries before, out with

some mates, obviously a lot of beer as well. But that evening, or the previous fortnight, at least a fortnight, I hadn't had a drop of drink. Anyway I went to bed. I thought 'Oh, I don't know if I feel very well.' And then it just erupted. Talk about projectile vomiting. I remember calling down and someone passed up a bowl because I just knew I wasn't going to make it to the loo, because of this climb down the ladder and having to get out of the sleeping bag. It wasn't just rolling out of bed. And that's where the nickname came from.

[Part 1 0:29:46] Lee: What was not so different for you was of course the kind of work that you were going to have to do, because I guess the majority of the work that was put in front of you was similar to stuff you had done before?

Davies: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:30:01] Lee: With the exception that the temperature was somewhat different. So tell me about some of those early mechanical engineering jobs you found yourself being presented with.

Davies: Someone came up to me. I was doing a little job underneath an International BTD6 crawler. It involved me being underneath. It was only a minor job and someone came up and said 'Honk, are you all right?' I was falling about with laughter. I got out and I said to them 'About a year ago, in Lincolnshire, I was underneath a BTD6 crawler and I swore that I would only get under one of these crawlers when the weather was better.' I said 'At the time I was in two inches of snow. Here I am, hundreds of feet of snow, and doing exactly the same bloody job.' I said 'It just seems ridiculous to me but …'

[Part 1 0:31:01] Lee: Were you getting things to do that were a challenge or was it all taken in your stride?

Davies: Technical challenge? Bunny (Mike Houlcroft) was doing some bulldozing; he was pushing these big rolls of snow. He put it in reverse, backed off and he left his blade behind. The actual bulldozer blade had sheared off. So that involved manhandling half a ton of blade back into position, welding it back on. That was a good interesting project that you don't often come across. We had a Muskeg, which is a rubber-tracked vehicle with a GM or Vauxhall 6-cylinder engine, lovely engine, nice smooth-running engine, Solex carburettor, absolutely cream-crackered, a bugger to start, petrol engine. A bugger to start so during the course of the year we had that in, fairly early on in the year and we gave it: head off, gave it a bit of a clean off, ground the valves in, and breathed new life into it.

[Part 1 0:32:19] Davies: Later on someone went out, was using it, and the engine 'Clonk'. It stopped dead and it had a piston hanging out the side of the block. I believe at the interview Mr Witty later on, he did a most wonderful patch over the hole in the crankcase. It didn't leak a drop of oil and we thought 'This is the time for a rebuild, new pistons.' Went into our stores: five pistons. 'Oh!' Much scurrying about looking here, found another (sixth) piston. 'Oh, but it is an over-sized one.' So we turned it down on a lathe to make it fit. That was an interesting project which wouldn't necessarily happen in this country, because you would just phone up and say

‘Oi, give us another piston.’ But a turning, thread turning: we had, there was an adjuster on the track on one of the crawlers.

[Part 1 0:33:27]
Davies: The track was iced up so when they moved forward, it just bent this adjuster. A bit of inch steel just buckled up. So we had to make a new one: a bit of thread turning which was very interesting, which you wouldn’t normally do in this country. The cold. Interesting little techniques you develop. On a skidoo, on the pull cord (very similar to a lawn mower) is held on, the mechanism, the pull cord mechanism is held on by four screws and the bottom one, at 6 o’clock, is difficult to access. But if you lick your skin, lick your finger, and get a cold bolt, it will stick to your finger for about 20 seconds and that will give you enough time, with this bolt on the end of the finger, to put it into place give it half a turn to get the thread started. By then the heat of your hand has melted the ice bond. But hopefully the thread has started and you can then put a spanner on it and do it up.

[Part 1 0:34:43] Davies: I under estimated what −20 was like. We were out in a Sno-cat and we had a bit of an ice blockage in the petrol fuel line. Traced it back. The engine just died so we traced it back and it was the tap at the bottom of the fuel tank, the fuel tank holding about 40 gallons. So I knew that I had to unscrew this tap, warm it up, and shake all the water out (it was ice crystals at that point and causing the blockage); and then screw it back in. Well of course the petrol was at −20 and that went straight over my hand. And it was: the only thing I can liken it to is putting your hand in a vat of boiling oil. It was so cold and it took about two months for the feeling in my little finger to return properly. I’m not 100% sure what I could have done to overcome it because petrol – flames – heat; a bit of a tricky thing. I didn’t want to end up blowing the thing up but at the time we were travelling, we wanted a quick fix and that was the quickest way of doing it, but I don’t know if I would ever do that again.

[Part 1 0:36:09] Lee: Would you have been …? I know you were recruited in a short time scale, but would you have been given any training or advice or guidance about working in such cold temperatures, or were you literally having to find it out for yourself first-hand experience?

Davies: There was a lot of finding it out for yourself I think, and one thing that you did have on your side was time. Time was an advantage. You never felt pressured. During my apprenticeship I used to go out to combine harvesters and the farmer would be jumping up and down. ‘I want this bloody thing working now. Get it fixed. I don’t care what it takes, just get it going.’ So I have experienced customer pressure, if you want, as part of my apprenticeship, but out there that customer pressure was self-imposed really. So if a job was going to take an hour, it was going to take an hour. ‘Well I might as well have a cup of tea while you get on with it.’ And that advantage of time; you could think. Something had stopped working. You could walk round it a couple of times, poke it and kick it and have time to think ‘Well why has it stopped working then and what is the best way to get out of this position?’ So that is quite a strong element I felt, certainly being brought up with the customer elements of ‘I want it going now.’

[Part 1 0:37:56] Davies: You just use common sense in so many things. Welding outside really ain’t going to be that good because if it’s −20 and you have got to get a

piece of steel up to melting point, 1800 degrees/ 2000 degrees … It doesn't sound much but if you could do it in a workshop, where you are warm, you are not trembling with cold, you are in a more controlled environment and it will be worth the hassle of getting all that machinery back into the workshop so that you could do a … This is what I mean about time. If it was on a farm: 'Get that blooming thing welded now. I want it now. I want it now!' So you would do a 95% job or a 90% job *in situ*, in the mud and the rain. Whereas out there, having this element of time on your side, you think 'Well no, we would do a far better job if we took the time to get it inside the workshop, lined up properly.' And for sure we welded that blade back on and it never fell off again.

[Part 1 0:39:18] Lee: So in terms of pure physics, those few degrees … I mean the difference between being in the outdoors and being in the workshop is a small percentage of the temperature you have to get the metal up to, to melt, but those few degrees were pretty critical were they? Or was it more to do with human rather than …?

Davies: It was more the comfort of the welder rather than the welding. Yes.

[Part 1 0:39:41] Lee: Just to get my chronology right. This was the year when you were second tractor mechanic at Halley, wasn't it?

Davies: Yes.

[Part 1 0:39:46] Lee: So you were doing 20-odd overhauls that year?

Davies: We went through everything. Just before the ship left, Dad Etchells was there and he was … and he had made the decision that a second mechanic was required, because everything was in such disarray. Thinking of just the vehicles now, everything was shot. It was absolutely run into the ground.

[Part 1 0:40:14] Lee: Was this because of the failure of the previous two reliefs.

Davies: Yes right. I think as much, and possibly the previous mechanics weren't quite up to scratch. Yes, when you saw some of the jobs that had been done, it really wasn't good quality work.

[Part 1 0:40:36] Lee: There was a bulldozer that you had, which had a small accident and you decided to remove the cab. Can you talk me through that decision?

Davies: Yes. We had a ramp down into the workshop and it was quite icy, and this bulldozer had to be pushed into the workshop and I can't remember why it wasn't under its own steam. Or was it? No, it might well have been under its own steam, but going down this Armco tube, which had an icy bottom to it, it slipped. The steel tracks on the steel Armco, it slipped on one side and it actually twisted the whole machine, went skew-whiff in the tube. If you can imagine a square box in a reasonably tight-fitting tube and then suddenly twisting it, the cab took the brunt on the roof of the tube. And it twisted it. It didn't just bend it over; it actually twisted the cab. So we eventually got it into the workshop. We removed panels off the cab. We

had found that in the main structure, so many people had drilled holes, it was like a Gruyere cheese. It really was a very weakened structure.

[Part 1 0:42:05] Davies: It was in the spring and we had already been talking to Dad Etchells; decided that that particular crawler had had the least amount of work done to it during the winter. It was the mainstay of the base at the time. It did all the bulldozing, found that missing fuel dump. … that it would go back to Cambridge and would be completely overhauled there. The tracks were fairly shot on it as well and that was a job that was beyond … not required to do on base. It was a far better job to be done back in this country. So it was decided that … We knew that the crawler was going back to Cambridge. We thought 'Well spring is coming. We have got the other crawler on the go if the weather is inclement. We will make this one a convertible. And we took the cab off (in discussion with Mr Etchells as well) and it was just junked.

[Part 1 0:43:06] Lee: Let's have the second half of that story then.

Davies: Aha.

[Part 1 0:43:11] Lee: There was a remarkable consequence.

Davies: Ah, it was incredible. Now you asked earlier about fate and guiding lights, People looking down on you. I don't know. But it was true Fate. Pete Witty, at the end of the relief that year, that was left till last, that crawler, to go back to the ship.

[Part 1 0:43:35] Lee: This was early '78?

Davies: Yes, yes. January of '78. The relief had been done. It was just literally the personnel changeover and Pete was taking this crawler across the sea ice towards the ship. He got on what we termed as the 'good bit' of sea ice. What a fallacy that was! He got into the middle and it just split and the crawler just went straight into the ocean. It was that quick that Pete had only managed to get his backside about ten inches, a foot, off the seat when the water went over his head. He had a non-issue jacket on, something that he had bought himself which was one of these puffer jackets full of goose-down and what have you, which acted like a lifebuoy. So that took him to the surface. But the speed with which this crawler went down; this area of sea ice literally collapsed just and it went straight down.

[Part 1 0:45:01] Davies: Pete actually felt the engine still running when it was under the water. It hadn't sucked in water. It was just the last few turns of the engine, if you want, and we all feel that if that has still got its cab on it, it had got this little escape hatch in the roof, Pete would have never … (because he is a big boy) with his puffer jacket on, he would probably would never have got through the escape hatch. We genuinely seriously feel that he would struggled to have got out of that alive if the cab was still on. It's amazing. At the time we hummed and harhed: 'Shall we repair the cab? Shall we do this? Shall we make it a racing version?' And the cab was in such poor condition and we were starting to … We had got a number of jobs to do for relief and we thought 'Well, it's just an extra job that we could do without.' So that's when we decided to just scrap the cab, but my goodness, Witty was a lucky boy.

[Part 1 0:46:26] Lee: The machine was never seen again I assume?

Davies: Oh no. It was hundreds of feet down.

[Part 1 0:46:30] Lee: Did that have any implications? Did you make decisions about cabs on other pieces of equipment in the light of that close shave?

Davies: Well there was certainly a lot of discussion with Dad Etchells and I believe … Well we always had a rule that if you were going on sea ice, that you always kept a window open or you took the hatch off. But it's just the hatch isn't that big and it's just the physical … the panic of the situation. If you can imagine the panic of the situation of getting your body through this hatch as the water is going over your head, and icy cold water as well. I don't know if I would have been able to do it myself. I am not 100% sure what the result over the next few years … Whether they have got bigger escape hatches, but it was certainly … I can remember in discussion with Dad Etchells, that 'Ooh, that's only a small escape hatch and we either have dwarf drivers or you have to have bigger hatches.'

[Part 1 0:47:51] Lee: Is there anything else you want to talk about, about the time at Halley, because you will know that we want to talk about Rothera. Oh I know: actually apart from just working on the engines, you were also doing other mechanical work such as working on the ventilation at Halley.

Davies: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:48:11] Lee: Tell me about the kind of work you did there.

Davies: Well there was a bad … This was one of the factors of the base being run down. Between the steel Armco tube and the wooden huts, there had been a significant build-up of ice which was then pressing on the wooden huts and causing distortion and failure of the wooden structure. So every week we would have a thrash at just simply getting in that cavity between … Most uncomfortable work, ghastly work, with ice picks and just chewing away at this ice and filling buckets and manhandling these buckets of ice out. And I believe, the following year, they did manage to get rid of, manually remove all the ice. But the main reason for the failure is that there should have been a ventilation system where cold air was brought through that cavity between the steel tube and the huts to keep it ice-free. It's when you have got stagnant air and it gets moist, that's when the ice forms, but if you have got a ventilation, only …, not a great howling gales but some air movement, it does keep it ice free.

[Part 1 0:49:47] Davies: We also had: one of the main problems was in the generator shed. You had got this hut with two engines of which one was running all the time, but the engine would overheat simply because there was no cold air to cool the radiators. So we built this tube and brought in, funnelled in cold air. We had to mount an electric motor with a fan on it and there was great fun in finding the right fan. Was it a motor powerful enough to drive it? Also the generator room was used as a place to dry clothes and particularly heavy items like sleeping bags. There is an amusing tale there. The cook who was of small stature had flung his sleeping bag over a rafter and it had flipped over, straight into the fan of a running generator.

[Part 1 0:51:01] Davies: You knew when there was a power cut coming because the lights would flicker. Pete and I – it was just an unconscious thought – that you would look for a torch and there were torches dotted everywhere. Grab a torch; by then the lights would have gone out. We made our way to the generator shed and we were greeted on this occasion with a room full of duck feathers, and this cowering cook holding six inches of sleeping bag in his hand, eyes on organ stops, and of course the rest of the sleeping bag was wrapped round the fan which had caused the motor to stop. Steve Emery, he was the one, he was in charge of ventilation. He laid the lines for the ventilation systems through the Armco tubes. Did a cracking job I think, at the end of the day. They extended the life, by getting rid of this ice, they extended the life of the base by several years I believe.

[Part 1 0:52:17] Lee: Did you have your own particular method of drying underpants?

Davies: Drying underpants? [Laughs] This strikes me as someone who has …

[Part 1 0:52:29] Lee: You have been set up. [Both laugh.]

Davies: Gosh, I can't remember the story. Oh, running about with underpants on your head?

[Part 1 0:52:39] Lee: I heard that's roughly it, yes. [More laughter] Any truth in that?

Davies: I can't remember why it seemed such a good idea at the time, but yes I believe there was an occasion when that was done.

[Part 1 0:52:55] Lee: In order to dry them?

Davies: I think so. I think one might have had an accident in one's underwear. Is this pertaining to …?

[Part 1 0:53:05] Lee: I don't know.

Davies: Oh right.

[Part 1 0:53:07] Lee: The sordid details were not revealed to me.

Davies: Oh right.

[Part 1 0:53:10] Lee: Somebody will remember.

Davies: Oh God yes. I can't remember the full details though, I am afraid.

[Part 1 0:53:16] Lee: You did your year at Halley, came back to Cambridge. Was it already agreed, or understood, that you would do a second year?

Davies: No no. On the way back, Dad Etchells was on board. This was the bit from Antarctica up to the Falkland Islands or South America where Dad flew home. I said 'Yeah yeah. I want another go. I want another go. I want to come back again.' For me

there was only two bases, Halley and Rothera, which had all that heavy machinery. Not that interested in the boats at South Georgia and Signy. It was the crawlers and all the heavy machinery. Old Etch, bless him, said 'You go home and have a month's holiday. You have a few weeks off and just see if you are still keen to come back.' Over the years he must have had many, no end of people, that said 'I want to come back. I want to come back.'

[Part 1 0:54:12] Davies: Of course you remember 'home' as when you left it but 'home' has moved on in that 18 months/ two years that you have been away and a lot of people, it's just like putting on a coat again. It's lovely to be back and 'Oh knickers, do I really want to go back for another two years, or a year?' So a lot of people must change their minds, but I was determined. I loved it. I really had a cracking time. So I went home, had a whale of a time for a few weeks and phoned up Etch and said 'What about it?' He said 'Well All right then. Come in. Start next Monday. I've got a little project in the workshop at Cambridge. So that's what I did, worked for the summer at Cambridge. We cut a Sno-cat in half and put an automatic gearbox in it. That was a good project. Then I went back down to Rothera, but of course a mature Fid then. Responsibilities by the score heaped on your shoulders but it was all fun, good fun.

[Part 1 0:55:27] Lee: Let's take a pause and I will just put a fresh disc in, if I may.

[Part 1 0:55:31] [End of Part One]

Part 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Michael Davies, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 19th of November 2011. Michael Davies, Part Two.

Davies: Yes, this spooky feeling. I have never experienced it in my life. During the relief there was the ship's crew, there was the people who had been on Halley Bay and there was us new lot coming – people milling about left, right and centre. Then all of a sudden, after a lot of work, a fortnight of work, there was just 21 people and a Sno-cat on the sea ice. There were two main hawsers to ice anchors holding the ship in and they said 'Right, the time has come. We have got to go.' And just as that was said, the sea mist rolled in and I was just suddenly conscious: 'Blow me, what have I done?'

[Part 2 0:01:02] Davies: Just these 21 strangers and this ship which was moving sideways into the fog, and as the outline of the ship became all blurred, you saw the blurry lights from the portholes and the bridge and, blow me, right at that point, someone started with a set of bagpipes. I can picture it. It was the boatman at South Georgia and I don't know whether it was a lament or what, but it was one of these quieter … not a marching type song. And this this ship slowly disappeared into the murk with the sound of these bagpipes and we were stunned to silence and then you heard 'Ding ding – ding ding' and then a gentle thrash of water and the ship just disappeared and we just stood there, mesmerised. And then someone said 'Right, come on. Right, that's it.'

[Part 2 0:02:12] Lee: That was at Halley?

Davies: That was when I went into Halley. So, as to a man, we all turned through 180 degrees, climbed on board the Sno-cat and went back to base. But it was a spooky, eerie, real … ah, out of some film it was. Then Rothera.

[Part 2 0:02:36] Lee: You were deputy base commander at Rothera and ??? [incomprehensible] and also I think the mastermind behind trying to get the desalinator running.

Davies: Oh God, yes.

[Part 2 0:02:43] Lee: Tell me about the desalinator, because that sounds like it was a pig of a job.

Davies: It was …. The base, an amazing base during the winter, built to house 50-odd people, just 12 of us during the winter, like little mice in a windmill in old Amsterdam, playing merrily. And of course, during the summer with all the new people, water was at a premium. You had to have water. We needed water. So it was deemed a desalinator would be a good idea. [Sighs] We got it going. I don't know about an engineering exercise; it was a basic work to finish the drain from the desalinator room down to the sea. It was just basic engineering work really. We eventually came to strike up the boiler and pump in sea water and try to convert this sea water into something that was drinkable and it very quickly became apparent that for every gallon of fuel spent on producing, on changing sea water … and at the time I didn't cotton on – I was producing laboratory pure water.

[Part 2 0:04:20] Davies: The expenditure was horrendous and then it dawned on us that perhaps we didn't need the fresh water laboratory-standard pure. We could do with a little bit of salt in it; it didn't need to be filtered; it didn't need to be this pure. So the ratio of fuel to fresh water became a far better, more reasonable ratio. But it was still a frightening amount of fuel this damned thing consumed. I seemed to be forever filling it up with fuel, far more than the generators. It was just frightening. I would love to see my report, because you are supposed to do a report at the end of each year and that was I think 90% of the report. 'This thing is insatiable for fuel.'

[Part 2 0:05:18] Lee: Was this also the source of this problem with the earthing plate?

Davies: Well I think that is a history with any base that is built on permafrost rock, that they cannot get a decent earth. Now I believe there are two types of earth: electrical and for "radio earth" (he said, holding his two index fingers up – inverted commas), so it was deemed that it was a good idea to try and use the sea. I cannot tell you whether it worked or not. I've got a feeling that it 'cleaned' the radio signals. Flo, in the radio room, said that he noticed an improvement. Now whether Tony, the electrician, noticed an improvement or not, I don't know, and of course electrical systems have improved so much over the years: all this Residual Earth Trips and all that sort of thing these days, where the Residual Earth Trip measures the resistance between the various circuits; and if it rises a certain amount, it trips out. So I couldn't really tell you whether it was a significant improvement or not but it caused a lot of pain putting that plate in the sea.

[Part 2 0:06:52] Lee: How did you go about it?

Davies: Well we tried floating it out on a couple of 45-gallon drums and the idea was: once it was out to sea, 20 or 30 yards, we would then shoot the drums with a .303 so they would then sink. Well that was a waste of time. Of course we didn't have a boat you see, so we tried using a crane, and backing the Muskeg into the water. But we were very conscious that we had this gently shelving beach and then it suddenly dropped off, literally like the edge of a table, and no way was I going to send a telegram back saying 'We have accidentally lost a Muskeg into the sea.' So we ended up, after several hours of mucking about, of picking this plate up, walking into the sea, and on the count of three just heaving it over this edge where the shelving bit finished.

[Part 2 0:08:05] Lee: With some sort of wiring attached to it?

Davies: Well yes, indeed, the electrical cable and the chain attached to it. And it actually did knife itself over the edge, we believe. But of course you don't walk into the sea and then walk out again and think everything is fine. It's just so incredible. Within minutes you are starting to lose muscle function. We happened to have a Sno-cat down on the shore, and we all struggled to get in the back of this Sno-cat, and it took us the hundred yards up to the base and we all needed a hand to get from the back of the Sno-cat into the base where we could undress and get warm again. It's just amazing how the cold just wrecks your body. You can't undo buttons; you struggle with zips. We all needed a hand to get undressed and dignity, pride, all that went well out of the window. 'Just get this wet stuff off us!'

[Part 2 0:09:23] Lee: The Americans came to Rothera. It says here 'The Americans carried out an official base inspection at Rothera.' Is that correct? I mean did they have the right to come and inspect you?

Davies: I was under the impression …

[Part 2 0:09:37] Lee: You were making the arrangements, weren't you?

Davies: Yes, because old John Jewell (bless him), the base commander, he was off on one of his jollies again. I was under the impression that all the nationalities could do an official visit once every two years or whatever, and this was going to be one of the official visits. So there was I believe a few coded telegrams to Cambridge and what have you, because we didn't have that much warning. We sat round and talked about it and it very quickly became a case of 'Well we have got the base in pretty good order. Let them come and have a look at us. We are not going to put dicky bows on. We might get the old flag up somewhere but let them come and have a look.' And that's what happened. Whether it was the official visit, I don't know but there was an awful lot of high-powered people turned up and I have got a feeling that one of the very early aircraft flights made it in full of SuperFids. So although it was my responsibility to get the base up to gear, up to scratch and make sure there was nothing nasty lurking about, and as tidy as possible, I think by the time the Americans came, we did have some SuperFids there to greet them.

[Part 2 0:11:21] Lee: SuperFids being top brass?

Davies: Yes, permanent members of BAS, but I can't remember who. It might have been Mr Laws himself, I don't know.

[Part 2 0:11:36] Lee: You were there when Tim Fogg had a problem with travel on ice. Tell me about what happened and how close a shave that was.

Davies: Well as this was quite a new base, base maintenance was pretty much at a minimum. There was a fair bit of wiring to be done and some building work but out of the twelve of us, the General Assistants and that had a whale of a time; because there wasn't much call on their time, they spent a lot of the winter months travelling. Tim, and I believe it was Rick Airey, went off with a set of dogs and they nipped across the sea ice. They were playing their Antarctic Explorer bit and I believe there was some reason for them going. They were checking up on a fuel deposit on the other side of the fjord, so there was a vague reason for them going.

[Part 2 0:12:42] Davies: Anyway on the way back, I think they were a bit late in leaving. They got halfway across the sea ice and they thought 'Well no. Night's coming on. Let's make to this little island, camp for the night and press on in the morning.' In the morning the wind had changed direction and all the sea ice had gone and there they were, stuck on this little rocky knoll and it was quite serious because it was in the spring, there was a good chance that the sea ice had gone for good, until next winter, and they were going to run out of rations. We didn't have a boat. The nearest proper ship of any nationality was hundreds of miles away and it had all the beginnings of unravelling into quite a serious problem.

[Part 2 0:13:43] Davies: We decided not to tell Cambridge about this for a few days, to see if we could come up with something and we were seriously thinking about … Because they weren't that far away, could we make a boat out of old oil drums? Could we go and get them, even to the point of abandoning the dogs maybe? But if we were going to build a boat, we might as well build it big enough to get the dog team as well. And it did really concentrate our minds at the time. What the hell do you do for these two lads? Any way I think on the third or fourth night, the wind changed direction and blew all the sea ice back in, although it was very uncomfortable travelling – I think they got very wet and in no way had it re-frozen – they were able to make the couple of miles back to land again and I believe we sent someone off to meet them with a Sno-cat and a change of underwear. But we recognised, in the beginning, this could be serious.

[Part 2 0:15:08] Lee: Do you know why Rothera did not have a boat? It does seem rather a strange ??? [inaudible].

Davies: Well I say that. I have got a feeling there might have been some little plastic oracle[2] that I don't think I would have risked going to sea in. I think there was something actually but I do feel that a small launch …. Oh yes, there was a rowing boat. I believe there was a rowing boat, and that was all it was. I do believe a launch would have been a far better idea. But saying that, I suppose the argument is that there is sea ice there for three quarters of the year. When are you going to use it?

[2] Presumably he mean coracle.

[Part 2 0:15:54] Lee: Well the danger of course is that if they had given you a boat, you might have tried using it.

Davies: Well indeed these things are there to be used. You have got to try these things and the next thing is 'How thick a bit of ice will it break?' And I can imagine a lot of glorious fun but, once again, Oh God I don't think it would perhaps have been a good idea.

[Part 2 0:16:19] Lee: Whilst we are talking about security and safety and so on, one of the ever present worries of course is fire and I think as deputy base leader, that was your bag wasn't it, being fire officer? Tell me about the cooperation you got and all the precautions you had to take.

Davies: [Chuckles] Well it was like anywhere, a public building, we had a log of trying the fire alarms. It was quite a sophisticated fire alarm system built into the base and every – I think it was once a month – I manually activated the fire alarm system and I tried to encourage my colleagues to use it as a fire drill, which basically meant convening outside the front doors at a given point. Because the whole place was wood, the emphasis was to get outside. Do not go for heroics by yourself. Account for everyone first and then see what you are going to do. Well this response to the fire drills was very very casual, so one evening I thought I would really go for it. I got a 5-gallon drum with the top cut out, put some oily rags in it, set fire to it, put it in the generator shed. Volumes of black greasy smoke.

[Part 2 0:17:54] Davies: I killed the power at the main switch, the main electrical switch, flicked that off, went up the corridor shouting 'Fire!' It was evening, we had darkness, we had smoke. I thought 'This will test the buggers.' And sure enough, it was amazing to see how everyone just clicked into position. Instantly everyone was accounted for. There was instantly one person not accounted for and that was 'Tinsel' who was the generator mechanic, and he was standing by in the generator shed. So instantly, within literally seconds, we accounted for everyone. Within seconds 'What are we going to do? Oh there is a fire in the generator shed. We need dry powder.' which is quite right; you don't need water in electrical systems.

[Part 2 0:19:01] Davies: There was then sort of like six abreast, chaps with dry powder fire extinguishers, heading for the generator shed, at which point I went 'Right that's it. Enough, enough.' I make pretend it is a drill. 'All right Tins. Put the power on.' He flicked the switch up. It was too much for the generators, so the generators cut out and we were then … 'What do you mean? No look. There's smoke; there's smoke!' 'That's all right. I did it, I did it.' This panic of, or controlled panic should I say, certainly adrenaline coming out of everyone's ears, turned into absolute, I don't know about hatred, but the thought that they had been conned …

[Part 2 0:19:51] Lee: They were not best pleased?

Davies: Oh no. They were really seriously pissed off.

[Part 2 0:19:54] Lee: Who is Tinsel?

Davies: He was the generator mechanic at Rothera. You are going to come and ask me his proper name.

[Part 2 0:20:03] Lee: If you don't know it, it doesn't matter.

Davies: I am afraid I can't bring it to mind[3]. But he was a lovely lad, trained by Rolls Royce, knew everything about diesel engines, but a young lad.

[Part 2 0:20:14] Lee: What was the general feeling about the culture of Health & Safety that was creeping in the late '70s. Were you …? Did you embrace it with open arms?

Davies: Being brought up in an engineering discipline, there was always, with electricity, gas, hydraulics, heavy lumps of machinery … I was brought up with 'You want to go steady here. Think what you are doing.' So Health & Safety was a little bit sneered at, although it hadn't come in that heavily. I understand now that they have got to wear hard hats when they are outside. I do find that strange. I do find that strange. What is going to fall on your head in the middle of Antarctica.

[Part 2 0:21:12] Lee: Skuas?

Davies: [Laughs] Surely a woollen hat at −20°C is better than a plastic hard hat, but they must have addressed that.

[Part 2 0:21:25] Lee: Two more things we must get in in the next ten minutes, if I may. I want to talk to you about your friendship with Pete Witty and how that's a lifelong friendship that was formed at Halley in '77. Was it because you were both working in the same generator shed and couldn't actually hear each other speak? What was the basis of this relationship?

Davies: Well I think the initial attraction was: both mechanics. It closely followed that we were firm believers that if you are going to do something, do it once. But do it properly so you only do it once. And I referred to having time on your hands … Sorry, that doesn't sound quite right. You weren't pressurised timewise, so you had time to do it properly. If you are going to cut a bit of metal, you have got time to de-burr it and round the corners. It's those details that we both, unspeakingly, without any comments to each other, we both did naturally.

[Part 2 0:22:38] Lee: Perfectionists?

Davies: Possibly. Marian, my wife, might not agree with that, but certainly in that area, yes we wanted it right.

[Part 2 0:22:49] Lee: So were you communicating on a level above speech?

Davies: Certainly on that point, certainly working in that generator shed, that first time that we were together, really working together, yes yes, we … You just could not hold a general conversation. Yes, and we both knew what each other was going to do

[3] It would have been Stuart Jones (according to Keith Holmes' list of winterers).

and how we were going to approach the job, literally without talking. It's amazing really.

[Part 2 0:23:21] Lee: That wasn't your last connection with BAS, because you seem to have been re-recruited just after the Falklands War, in '82 to go back down, this time to South Georgia. What was your mission?

Davies: I was part of a small team that were sent down there to just weigh up the condition of the base, from BAS's point of view, after the little fracas. And God, it was a mess; it really was a mess. I was looking at things mechanical: generators, central heating units. I think the other members of the team were looking at the science sites, but as far as my bit of the report went, it was just 'Let's have a fresh start.' Everything was wrecked.

[Part 2 0:24:21] Lee: By who? By what?

Davies: Erm. Uncaring-ness I think. I think the people … whether it was the Argentinian forces or the British forces, they just didn't … I can imagine they just didn't have any mechanics there. So they ran the generators. They didn't think about checking the oil and water. They just ran it and ran it and ran it and I believe one of the engines ran out of oil, and the second generator … They had two Scania generators and they had this old Mirrlees, and then the second generator had got a serious problem. It may have overheated actually. But these two generators were out of commission and the time I arrived there, the Army had put in a generator pod on a self-contained skip. I can imagine it being plonked in from a Chinook helicopter. There's a generator set, plug it in and away you go.

[Part 2 0:25:21] Davies: And the central heating system had frozen up and in consequence burst all the boilers. It was just, I should imagine at the time, they were more concentrated at shooting each other than looking after the central heating. The main building had got several bullet holes in it but just lack of care, lack of maintenance, because it would take hours (let alone days) to achieve that level of destruction (if you want). The boiler has only got to freeze once and it is snookered. They probably had a power cut one night and that was the boilers gone. That power cut was probably caused because the generator had run out of oil. That's it: engine gone, particularly oil failure. That really is serious. And they didn't know how to bring on the other one. I don't know; it was lack of knowledge probably.

[Part 2 0:26:28] Lee: So were you preparing a report for BAS about this? Was this just simply a recce, a survey?

Davies: Just an initial survey I think. The first BAS people in really, just to have a nose around. It was still in the hands of the British forces when we were there.

[Part 2 0:26:46] Lee: How was it for you to go to South Georgia as a (minor) battlefield, because the skirmish was quite brief, but how was it for you to be somewhere that only weeks previously you had been seeing on the news?

Davies: Oh exciting, initial thought, but it was sad to see the British Antarctic Survey base in disrepair, but it was even worse to go to the Falkland Islands.

[Part 2 0:27:14] Lee: Why was that?

Davies: The top street – Stanley is on a slope and the top street is called Davis Street, and those houses had suffered terribly: mortar fire, shelling. Previously it was like going to the Orkney Islands: quiet, just a few people here and there. Just a lovely quiet atmosphere, people just quietly getting on with it. When I went back it was literally a military base: Army personnel. 'Don't go here. Don't do that.' Checks: 'Who are you? Let's see your pass.' Ah, it was such a change in atmosphere, and I do wonder if they would ever achieve how it was again. Maybe after thirty years, I don't know, but of course the big thing is the mines. You just could not leave the paved roads because the mines in the boggy marshes were all there, and apparently mines move in bogs. What was previously a cleared area, might suddenly throw up a landmine again.

[Part 2 0:28:37] Lee: How was it that you were selected to go back and do that survey on South G?

Davies: Heaven knows. I just happened to be handy at the time. I had been working out in Saudi Arabia and I'd had enough actually. I'd had three years or so in Saudi and I'd handed my notice … That's right: I wanted to come back and I had said to Dad Etchells for a long time about 'When they come to rebuild Halley Bay, I would love to go back and help.' So I had handed in my notice at Saudi Arabia and I was going to come back and have a summer back home. I think that is pretty much how it happened and I was available. I had been South before. I knew roughly … I had been to South Georgia, only briefly. I had a rough idea of the layout and they just wanted a quick recce I think.

[Part 2 0:29:29] Lee: Was that your last connection with the Antarctic?

Davies: The rebuild of Halley Bay, yes.

[Part 2 0:29:36] Lee: That was in 19 …?

Davies: Oh gosh, are we talking about the early 80s now?

[Part 2 0:29:42] Lee: OK.

Davies: I can't remember quite when[4] but yes, and I felt that was a good time to leave Antarctica. A new base, helped to build it. Unfortunately it didn't last very long. It all fell down, but there you go.

[Part 2 0:29:57] Lee: How did the Antarctic years rate in your life? You mentioned you are 60 in a few days' time.

Davies: I was very lucky. I consider myself very lucky because I ended up working with a damned fine good bunch of chaps. My theory about a group of people working together, personally one of the people I would get on exceptionally well with, and

[4] Halley IV was constructed during the 1982/83 summer season, and during the subsequent 1983 winter.

there is one person I would have communication problem issues with; not get on so well with. And then the rest fall in between; the mass (sort of thing). I got on very well with Pete Witty. I can't really think of anyone who I didn't get on well with.

[Part 2 0:30:47] Lee: Well in terms of the experience …?

Davies: The experience, ah incredible, incredible. Really glad that I did it. It's one of these things. I am sure ex-Forces people say 'The more you put in, the more you get out.' It was just an exceptionally good time in my life.

[Part 2 0:31:13] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- 'The job had my name on it.' [Part 1 0:10:17]
- First impressions of Halley. [Part 1 0:21:36]
- Living underground. [Part 1 0:24:44]
- Origin of his nickname. [Part 1 0:28:14]
- Challenge: welding a bulldozer blade back on. [Part 1 0:31:01]
- Challenge: turning down an oversize piston. [Part 1 0:32:19]
- Lick your finger and stick a bolt to it. [Part 1 0:33:27]
- A painful spill: petrol at -20C. [Part 1 0:34:43]
- Cab removed from bulldozer. [Part 1 0:40:36]
- And the consequence: a narrow escape from drowning. [Part 1 0:43:35]
- Chipping ice from the voids. [Part 1 0:48:11]
- Power cut caused by a sleeping bag. [Part 1 0:49:47]
- An emotional moment as the ship departs. [Part 2 0:01:02]
- A fuel guzzling desalinator. [Part 2 0:02:43]
- Deploying an earthing plate in the sea. [Part 2 0:06:52]
- American inspection of Rothera. [Part 2 0:09:37]
- A sledging party stranded: potentially disastrous. [Part 2 0:12:42]
- An unannounced fire drill. [Part 2 0:17:54]
- South Georgia machinery found wrecked post Falklands Conflict. [Part 2 0:24:21]
- Port Stanley after the Conflict. [Part 2 0:27:14]