

JOHN WRIGHT AND PHIL MARSH

Edited transcript of a recording of John Wright and Phil Marsh interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 19th November 2011. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/149. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 14 December 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is John Wright and Phil Marsh, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 19th of November 2011. John Wright and Phil Marsh.

Wright: It's actually Edward John Wright but it's always John and born 13th December 1952 in Birmingham.

[Part 1 0:00:20] Lee: So you are 59?

Wright: In about two weeks, two or three weeks, yes.

[Part 1 0:00:25] Lee: Phil?

Marsh: Phil Marsh, 10th of January 1951, from Oldham, Lancashire.

[Part 1 0:00:30] Lee: What happened? Why did you end up spending an entire winter underground in an Argentinian base called Belgrano?

Wright: I'll tell you what, shall I start and then you jump in. We had been doing a geological season in the Shackleton Mountains. I was a GA and Phil was one of the geologists. The other GA was Dog Holden and the other geologist was Pete Clarkson. We were using Belgrano as what you might call a forward operating base to refuel the Twin Otter, both on the way into the Shackletons and on the way out. We got airlifted out of the Shackletons to Belgrano where we met up with another field party who were operating with a Twin Otter, which was the Geociever Project.

Marsh: The same Twin Otter.

[Part 1 0:01:16] Wright: The same Twin Otter, yep. So it ended up with seven of us at Belgrano who were scientists or support staff, plus the air crew, the pilot and the flight engineer, plus all our gear, all to be got back to Rothera to get the boat to go out. The weather was pretty poor and we were hanging around waiting for good weather from Belgrano all the way across to Rothera which obviously is quite a tall order. And what was interesting is: I remember everybody saying 'Oh what a terrible base this is. It's mucky, it's old, it's crushed. Glad we don't live here!'

Marsh: 'We won't stay here.'

Wright: Eventually the weather cleared enough to get one flight away. I suppose there would have been the option of dumping all the scientific gear, and the rocks and so on, and taking everybody, but we decided no, three of us would remain behind – that was Phil, Dog and myself – for a second flight.

[Part 1 0:02:21] Lee: Who decided?

Wright: I think it was decided between us, wasn't it?

Marsh: Yes, because Pete Clarkson was there, the pilot was involved in it. I think the issue was: there wasn't really enough emergency gear on the aircraft for seven people. It would have been four in a tent and cobbling together some extra food from whatever Belgrano could find in their store. It was well more than a load for what the aircraft was kitted up for carrying.

[Part 1 0:02:50] Wright: Because we had taken our field gear back to Halley in the interim. We had been on a just pop up the coast, dump all our field gear, skidoos and everything at Halley. So we really were down to the Twin Otter's emergency gear. I hadn't remembered that. But the other thing was: Pete was married, the air crew obviously had to go, and I guess ... There were two Americans, weren't there with Les Stewart?

Marsh: Yes, which was obviously an international party to be ...

Wright: There was an international party so it seemed nice to keep them together. I don't think at that time there was really a big risk of getting left behind. So they went off, leaving the three of us behind.

[Part 1 0:03:30] Lee: And when did it begin to dawn upon you this was not a good idea?

Marsh: Progressively. I was to some extent forewarned, before I even went to the Antarctic. I was talking to someone who had wintered at Halley two or three years earlier. I said 'I am just going for a summer.' He said 'Mmm. Things can change, you know.' So there had been this little sort of 'Mm, what's going on here?' I think that as the various plans were formed and not been able to be followed through, I am fairly pessimistic anyway. So I work on the basis that this is something that is not going to happen unless we can make it happen, and as things go along, it wasn't happening. I think people realised at different times what the situation was.

[Part 1 0:04:16] Wright: I think we started getting an inkling as well when the first flight went. The weather turned bad at Rothera and they couldn't get into the Bluff either and they ended up landing on Alexander Island. The weather stayed bad and I've got an idea they had about a ten-day lie-up with the aircraft, on Alexander Island, before they got a window and could drop on to Rothera. So effectively it was a ten or eleven day flight to Rothera on that occasion and you start to think, at that stage in the season, 'Well if that's happened now, now that they have got to Rothera, then they have got to get a good window to get all the way back here. Then we have got to get a really good window to get all the way back; it is starting to get a bit difficult.'

[Part 1 0:05:00] Lee: When you say 'that time of the season', where are we in the year?

Wright: Well we got to Belgrano in ... end of February, was it? I can't remember.

Marsh: Yes, it was into February.

Wright: Well into February, certainly.

[Part 1 0:05:12] Lee: Seventy ...?

Wright: Seventy eight. So by the time that first flight had arrived at Rothera it must have been well into probably March, because we were at Belgrano for ... I could look up the dates at some point, if you are interested, and give you the dates.

Marsh: End of the flying season.

[Part 1 0:05:32] Wright: End of the flying ... and this is the crucial point. It was the end of the flying season, so ... Do you want to go on from there?

Marsh: Yes. Just the progression that there was possibilities of another aircraft coming to pick us up that was at Rothera but the owners couldn't give permission for it. There was an attempt for us to be picked up by the Russians who were just 40 miles down the coast, and did come and visit while we were there. And I think there was a train of communications that went via Cambridge and London and Moscow and what have you. They came to Belgrano and there was a sort of 'sitting round the table' meeting. I had an interesting conversation with an East German who was with them.

[Part 1 0:06:19] Marsh: When we were in the Shackleton Range, the Russian helicopter was going to a nunatak about 40 kilometres away, that we couldn't have got to. And the East German came and said 'I think the Russians would be very pleased to take you there but their protocol is such that they can't offer. You have to ask. If you ask them, I think they will say yes.' So he was in the position of being a guest with them, that he could be a bit of a go-between. I'm not sure he didn't try and introduce that idea when they were at Belgrano. In retrospect, I think he might have been nudging 'Why don't you ask them? To at least take you to Druzhnaya' (which was 40 miles down the road). But I don't know about that.

[Part 1 0:07:01] Wright: Sorry to interrupt. I will just rewind a bit because Phil mentioned another Twin Otter, a commercial one. There was actually the second BAS aircraft of course, at Rothera. We were with Alpha Whisky which had inertial navigation, which was quite an advantage on a long flight like that. There was Alpha Papa at Rothera but that didn't have such sophisticated systems although it was certainly usable for the job but they would have required a really good weather window; we keep coming back to that. But during this period at the end of the flying season, there was a big blow at Rothera. I think it was before Alpha Whisky got back there. Sorry I have got this wrong. They decided to send Alpha Quebec North. I have got the sequence wrong. So Alpha Whisky was there as well. On take-off Alpha Quebec damaged its undercarriage; the nose wheel went up through the cockpit. So it had to be taken out on the *Bransfield*. There was an aircraft operated by a commercial operator, called Survair. I think Dog had it as Sun-Air. I am 99% certain it was Survair, which was passing through Rothera, and its rudder was damaged in a blow.

[Part 1 0:08:17] Wright: They decided to ... the pilots were in agreement that they should put Alpha Papa's rudder on the Survair Otter, enabling the Survair Otter to come over and collect us if there was a suitable weather window. That flight was ... ,

as far as the pilots were concerned, that was good to go, and actually we did have some good weather. But the owners of Survair, the company, vetoed the flight, ostensibly for insurance purposes. Now what's interesting is: 30 years on, I have got a buddy in Canada, in Ottawa, who I drink with, who was an avionics technician. And I found out very recently he worked for Survair and as soon as I was recounting this experience, he said 'Oh that Antarctic contract they had. Yes, that's what caused them to go bust.' I wonder now whether, because the timings are so close, I just wonder whether Survair knew they were at risk of going belly-up and that was the reason ... You don't put your assets at risk when you are in that situation. So all the options for flying out had gone.

[Part 1 0:09:26] Lee: There was still the option of the Russians collecting you by ship? And I understand that there was tantamount to an agreement that they would call in when passing? Send a helicopter for you?

Wright: Was it an agreement?

Marsh: There was never an agreement.

Wright: I am not convinced there was.

[Part 1 0:09:40] Lee: What do you think there was?

Marsh: I don't think ... Partly because I have spoken to people in Cambridge afterwards, and this suggestion Completely separate from my conversation with the East German, was that I was told that they thought what was happening in the UK and Moscow was that the Russians weren't offering. They wanted to be asked and London wasn't going to ask. But people along the line thought this was still a viable option. My feeling is that certain possibilities were missed because they thought an option was there that actually wasn't there.

[Part 1 0:10:17] Lee: Who was not asking? Was this Dick Laws who was not asking?

Marsh: The implication was it was the Foreign Office. That was what the story was around BAS.

[Part 1 0:10:27] Lee: So stiff upper lip bowler hats?

Marsh: Or whatever. I got it as a sort of BAS gossip, so one can't be sure.

Wright: It's very hard to tell what the truth was. On a very local level, Dog was quite keen to go out with the Russians. He was quite keen to push that line. We felt that going out with the Russians, and asking, was to an extent embarrassing perhaps for BAS and we would probably go along with that. We were part of BAS, and it was a bit embarrassing to be going cap in hand and asking to go out with the Russians. I think Phil and I at one point said: Well if they could just give us a lift up to Halley, drop us off there, so at least we would be on home ground for the winter. That would probably do. Actually thinking about in hindsight, probably if we had said when we were at Druzhnaya (because we visited them at Druzhnaya), if we had said 'Could you hop us up the coast in one of your aeroplanes?', then they would probably have

done it. But the long and short of it was that, whatever the reasons, we ended up getting stuck there. Was it you or Dog who actually saw the last of the Russian ships go past?

Marsh: It wasn't me.

[Part 1 0:11:34] Wright: It was Dog. I remember Dog saying 'I have just seen some masts going past.' And that was probably the Russians going north.

Marsh: We'd had very good relations with the Russians during the end of the field season. They were in the Shackleton Range at the same time. We were on the radio to John and Pete Clarkson and there was the 'Brrph!' noise over the tent, and I stuck my head out and said 'Oh, it's a bi-plane.' And Dog said over the radio 'It's a bi-plane. Oh it's the Russians. They have landed. We will get back to you.' They thought we were joking, but we'd had this garbled conversation on the radio. Anyway, the story was: in the end that we camped together for a week, and looked at rocks together and agreed things. Then we had been to Druzhnaya and they had brought the rocks back. Most of the rocks that season came out with the Russians, and that was a case of Pete Clarkson asking, and saying 'Can we leave them with you at Druzhnaya?' and they said 'Oh yes, we will ship them back for you.' So actually we had been talking to the Russians.

[Part 1 0:12:36] Wright: We got on extremely well with the Russians. After Phil and Dog came on the radio that night, Pete and I weren't all that far away. We sledged over and joined them and the Russians had got this heavy ... We were travelling relatively lightweight, Fid field units. The Russians had got a fairly heavyweight camp and were blitzing a smaller area, and had just been dropped in for the summer. So we sledged over and camped with you at the Russians' field camp and we had quite a party, didn't we? The Russians had got fresh fruit and everything and lots of vodka, and we got on with them extremely well. So maybe I am being deliberately naive but I don't think there was ever any malice in leaving us there. It was just circumstances, and at this stage I don't think we will ever find out exactly what the story was.

[Part 1 0:13:28] Lee: Phil, go on.

Marsh: As I was going to say, the dawning realisation ... When it did become clear that we were going to have to stay at Belgrano, the Argentinian who spoke the best English and who we had spent a lot of time chatting to, said 'It's OK. We had a meeting and discussed this yesterday. We have got plenty of food and we can give you a clothing issue. Don't worry, you are welcome.' So the base commander, who I think was a very perceptive guy, had been watching this happening and he had been making his plans as well.

[Part 1 0:14:03] Lee: Famously, Fuchs apparently said he would have got you out. Is that feasible?

Marsh: Well I don't know.

Wright: I'm not convinced. I'm really not convinced. I read Dog's article that he put in the *BAS Journal*¹; he quoted Bunny Fuchs as saying 'I would have got you out.' Bunny Fuchs by that time was retired. He was still around BAS but if I want to be a bit cynical, and I am not meaning to be unkind, he was in a situation where he could say that. Nobody would ever know.

Marsh: It might have been a case of 'It wouldn't have been like that in my day.' That would have been another interpretation.

Wright: On the other hand, if you read Bunny Fuchs and the way he operated, I think he might have been 'Sorry lads, stiff upper lip. Crack on!' Because he had had an enforced winter himself I think at Stonington, or was it Ray Adie², I can't remember, but anyway ...

[Part 1 0:14:57] Lee: So what was the basis on which you stayed then? Were you guests of the Argentinian government? Were you supernumeraries? Were you conscripted into the workforce?

Marsh: We were supernumeraries.

Wright: That could be difficult because it was the Argentinian Army and I don't fancy being conscripted into them.

Marsh: The base was ... it was an Army run base. So all the services were provided by the Army and there were civilian scientists and technicians, and it was ostensibly there to do science and they were kitted up to do science.

[Part 1 0:15:23] Lee: And they were all staying for the winter?

Marsh: And they were all staying for the winter. They'd had their relief. They were all staying for the winter. So we just became three extra hands and for a lot of the work that goes on, I guess any base but particularly that base, where there was a lot of sort of dogsbody work ...

Wright: Manual labour, base maintenance.

Marsh: An extra three hands were an advantage rather than a disadvantage I think. We slotted in. We found our own niches.

[Part 1 0:15:55] Wright: On the other hand, I think to start with, particularly before it was confirmed that we were going to be staying, they were treating us very much as guests. We said 'Look, we have got to earn our keep. When you are doing gash or your equivalent of it, or whatever it is, we will help. We can shovel snow with you.' 'Oh, no no.' It changed a little bit after we were definitely marooned but it took a while to work our way in and to be accepted as ... and eventually I think they realised where we could offer experience.

¹ *BAS Club Newsletters* No. 54 (Dec 2005), pages 33-36 and No. 56 (Dec 2006), pages 29-32.

² Both Fuchs and Adie were members of the 'Lost Eleven' stranded at Stonington in 1949. See *Of Ice and Men*, Chapter 5.

Marsh: You had to give and take.

Wright: Yes. I think it was one of these things where you had to be a bit diplomatic because they had different ways of doing some things, and sometimes, one has to say, they were pretty amateurish about it. But on occasions you just had to say. 'Well don't say anything.' We found our niches, I think that's the point. You used to work on the Tenedos [phonetic], on the sledges and things like that.

Marsh: Woodworky type stuff.

[Part 1 0:17:00] Wright: Woodworky type stuff. I used to work on the mechanic side of things and Dog used to work on odd jobs.

Marsh: It's the sort of critical maintenance: like stopping leaks coming into the accommodation block.

Wright: And re-aligning the chimneys from the stove and things like that.

[Part 1 0:17:21] Lee: This base was underground, wasn't it?

Wright: Yes, very much like Halley, but whereas Halley gets about a metre of snow accumulation a year, Belgrano gets a matter of a few centimetres. So the base that was there had been there since the 1950's. In that period of time, Halley had had three rebuilds; Belgrano had had none. So actually it was about the same depth as Halley but didn't have the advantage of being built in Armco tubes as Halley was at that time. It had been built in trenches which had just been roofed over with big beams and railway lines which had stamped on them was it 'Wigan'? or ... 'Withington 1912' or something like that, they were made.

Marsh: Made somewhere in England, anyway.

Wright: They were British railway lines, used for reinforcing the roof of the base.

Marsh: And it had stood up very well, considering how long it had been there. The design seemed to have worked; it's just that it was well beyond its design life.

[Part 1 0:18:24] Lee: So it was distorting, was it?

Wright: Oh very badly.

Marsh: The roof was collapsing. Unlike Halley (John's the Halley expert³), all the buildings were underground, connected by tunnels underground. So you could move around between all the different scientific buildings without going onto the surface. But that did mean, because the ice very slowly, centimetres a month, moved in, there was a lot of cutting and carving to keep the passageways open, and a lot of that was above the main accommodation block where everything was sinking down.

³ Unlike Marsh and Holden, Wright had spent a winter (1977) at Halley.

Wright: Halley, certainly in the Armco days, the core base was connected by Armco tunnels, but things like the beastie, I think the auroral hut were in different locations, so you're right, Phil, but at Belgrano, you could get to I think every part of the base, to get through a tunnel. But these were winding tunnels that went all over the place and had to be kept cut open because otherwise they would crush.

[Part 1 0:19:27] Lee: Where did you sleep?

Marsh: There were two spare rooms in the accommodation block, one of which had a couple of bunk beds in it, one of which had a bed in it. Dog had one and we shared the other one.

Wright: When we first arrived there, we were put up as guests. Pete Clarkson and myself had two bunks in the major's room. Were you with Dog in a room?

Marsh: No I must have been in the one wing.

Wright: You were in the one which I moved into eventually. But just as a little aside, I remember seeing on the major's shelves in his bunkroom, his 9mm pistol with a full magazine of ammunition.

Marsh: This is a military base.

Wright: Yes, OK. I don't think there were any implications at all with that. It's just that it was a military base and you had the sign of them.

Marsh: We were basically in ... I think some of the others were sharing, weren't they?

Wright: Yes, some of them.

Marsh: Much the same set up as the rest of them.

[Part 1 0:20:27] Wright: But where it differed from BAS, certainly from Halley at that time (maybe it is different now) but certainly at Halley at that time, the pitrooms were really for sleeping in. And certainly my pitroom at Halley was actually a converted cupboard, a converted storeroom. It didn't matter because you slept in there and that was about it, and we socialised in the bar or the smoko room or whatever, at Halley. At Belgrano, there wasn't a bar in the same sense; there was just a dining hall and people used to socialise in their pitrooms, plus the fact that there tended to be long siestas. Very often work would finish at midday, if it even started, and people would go and gonk until ..., they would go and have a kip until dinner time, or people gather in a room and chat. So it was very much living space, wasn't it, the pitrooms?

Marsh: I think the short working day was partly the base commander realised that everyone was fed up there with the situation and he just wanted to keep it moving, keep people working but not press anybody too hard if he didn't need to.

[Part 1 0:21:38] Wright: I'll give the guys at Belgrano credit as well (maybe it was the military environment) but when they were meant to be up at 8 o'clock or 10 o'clock in the morning, or whatever it was, they were generally all there. It was very rare that

nobody ... because I suppose they did have a parade effectively. You turned up, then the jobs were allocated, and off you went. So I guess the bit of military discipline was ...

[Part 1 0:22:03] Lee: Were you lining up on those parades then?

Wright: We used to stand ...

Marsh: A slightly more ragged line.

Wright: Ragged line, yes.

Marsh: Everybody, just about the whole base, who wasn't actually doing something – the cook might have been in the kitchen – would be standing round the billiard table in the 'games room' (in thin quotes) in full outdoor gear, because it was that sort of temperature in the games room. The command of Attention, the military guys would I think stand to Attention, but in these baggy windproofs, it wasn't very ?? [inaudible]

Wright: It was a shuffle.

Marsh: We would stop leaning against a wall and stand up and look attentive, rather than actually standing to attention, and then the base commander would divvy up the jobs and it was mechanics doing mechanicking and people doing whatever.

[Part 1 0:22:45] Lee: And he was divvying jobs to you as well?

Marsh: Yes.

Wright: Well often he didn't need to, in as much as for example the mechanics went off and did the mechanicking and I would slope off with the mechanics.

Marsh: It was carrying on doing what you were doing there, because people knew what was going on. But it was really a case of a formal get-together and everybody knowing what they were all doing.

[Part 1 0:23:02] Lee: How about the food?

Wright: Do you like meat?

Marsh: We have both got pictures of the same plate of meat and two veg, Argentinian style, which has got this sort of chunk of – I don't know what it was – beef probably.

Wright: There was a lot of beef, pork and mutton.

Marsh: It was about the size of that pint glass and then this little pile of four peas in a sauce and a little green thing, that you couldn't tell what it was, and a potato maybe.

Wright: Lots of frozen meat.

Marsh: Lots of frozen meat It was a bit limited but they had It was OK. I think it was partly that it was the diet they had rather than any problem with what the stores were.

Wright: It was interesting because I remember asking Jorge, on one occasion, 'Is this a typical diet in Argentina?' And he said 'No. It's not.' He said 'We would eat this amount of meat in Argentina but at home we would have a lot more vegetables with it. That was the problem: there was loads of meat but very short on the veg. I can't remember whether we used to take ... I remember we used to have vitamin pills in our sledging rations. I don't know whether we half-inched any of them and took them.

[Part 1 0:24:08] Lee: What was the hygiene standards like.

Wright: Not as good as ...

Marsh: One went through the same mechanics as we would go through anywhere else. It's just that the facilities for doing it were somewhat limited. It was a shower; was it once a week a shower?

Wright: You were allowed a shower once a week, which was about the same as at Halley.

Marsh: And it was done in teams of two. We were a team, and one adjusted the temperature of the water in the melt tank by putting extra ice blocks in it if it was too hot, and letting it settle down and then. One had a shower and then one switched round and other one adjusted the melt tank while the other had a shower. The shower system needed one person managing it while the other person was showering. You were on the roof doing the water, so you were shouting through the floor.

[Part 1 0:24:55] Wright: 'Push some more blocks in. It's too hot.' Or on some days it would be freezing cold. I remember the first time Dog had a shower there. He went for the shower and he took all his clothes off and put them in a neat pile. He stood under the shower, turned the shower on. Nothing came out of the shower rose head but a jet of water came out of the wall at the side, all over the clothes that he'd put in a pile.

Marsh: They probably froze.

[Part 1 0:25:22] Wright: But the problem with the shower – you were saying about cleanliness – was that the area that we took the snow blocks from for the shower was immediately above the shower, because we didn't go inside. We chucked them from the roof, didn't we? We took them from the roof.

Marsh: A lot of them came from the roof.

Wright: From the roof space between the hut and the ceiling and it helped keep the hut from getting crushed. But some time previously, a rubber fuel bladder had leaked on the surface, so all this diesel – we didn't use avtur at Belgrano, we used Arctic diesel – had spilt into the snow and permeated down, so you were loading blocks into

the shower which were permeated with diesel fuel. If you were lucky you got a clean shower; if you were unlucky, you got a mixture of diesel and water pouring over you.

Marsh: Everything. I guess wherever one lives, one can accumulate smells that one gets used to. I think everything smelled faintly of diesel. I've got one of two bits of gear that I've still got stuffed in plastic bags in the garage and you open them up and you think 'Oh yes, that's the smell of Belgrano.'

Wright: Phil gets he fix every so often: goes in the garage and sniffs his diesel, sniffs his Belgrano gear.

[Part 1 0:26:32] Lee: A lot of the other Fids said that when they finally saw you, when you were released from Belgrano, you were black.

Wright: Pretty mucky, yes.

Marsh: Everything was done by burning diesel in one way or another and they had these drip-feed oil burners which were very smoky. But also, over the years, everything had got covered in smoke, so most of the work you were doing, you were handling things that had got smoke on it. We were issued with Argentinian windproofs which were just black. This is what these guys were seeing as we got to the aircraft, and we kept our own clean. So once we got to Halley, they were thrown away and we were back into the FIDS gear.

Wright: I guess it's a bit like going back to the days of Scott and living with penguin blubber stoves, or something like that. Yes, we were pretty filthy. But Phil reminded me of one point and that was the way that the base was heated.

[Part 1 0:27:21] Wright: Outside our room was an oil-burning stove or a diesel burning stove and it was I guess three or four feet high, but the combustion chamber was basically a pan in the bottom of the stove which was drip fed with diesel. It was just a flame in a radiator kind of thing. So this naked flame burning with drip fed diesel, and the area around the stove, the floorboards were impregnated with diesel and these boards had been there twenty/ thirty years and always in the back of our minds, I think, at Belgrano ... I think on any Antarctic base you are aware of fire but at Belgrano we were acutely aware of ... because if that stove had ever started to burn outside the stove, those boards would just have gone up like a rocket.

[Part 1 0:28:11] Marsh: Fire is something that you bear in mind as a concern. It was so much of a concern that it just became part of life. You were used to it. You couldn't worry about the fact that the place was a tinder box. You couldn't do anything about it. You just had to be very much aware that there were naked flames everywhere and a lot of diesel.

[Part 1 0:28:28] Lee: Would getting out of the building have been simple?

Wright: No.

[Part 1 0:28:34] Lee: And also, where would you go?

Wright: Well, you could probably confine the fire to one block. Then there was the ... I'm not sure; they must have had an emergency store somewhere. I think they did.

Marsh: If you could have got out of that bit, there were other places.

Wright: You could have wintered.

Marsh: You could have wintered, yes. It wouldn't have been a case of losing the lot. It was more a case of the immediate escape if there was a fire.

[Part 1 0:28:54] Wright: But there should have been There was an access shaft at the each end of the hut, but the one at the far end was completely blocked. I don't know whether we ever ... I think we made noises about perhaps opening it up.

Marsh: You really needed to open it up.

Wright: But it was one of these diplomatic things where 'Perhaps it would be a good idea if we thought about opening ... ' We tended to use the 'we' you know. 'Oh no, I don't think we need to worry about that.' I don't think it would have gone down well if we had started digging it out. So you just ...

[Part 1 0:29:25] Lee: How were you making these noises? How were you communicating, because they presumably were Argentinians and therefore ... Did they have much English?

Wright: One or two of them did,

Marsh: One of two of them did. One guy had very good conversational English and most of the technicians had something. Actually no, two or three of them had good conversational English and we started learning Spanish once we recognised our predicament and were being helped by these guys. So in the end we were getting on with a mixture of Spanish and English. At the table we would normally sit with the guys who wanted to practise their English. At meals we would chat in English, but when we were working we could well be with people who didn't speak English, so we would get on with what Spanish we had picked up.

Wright: Whenever there was a party, they were great ones for speeches so we were expected to make speeches, and we got to the stage where, I am sure the grammar was absolutely appalling but we could get by and we could make a speech.

Marsh: There was lots of cheers and applause after we had finished. In the context of the party, that was all that mattered.

[Part 1 0:30:25] Lee: So sociability wasn't a problem? There was never any tension?

Wright: There was inasmuch as sometimes they would do things, and most of them were quite inexperienced, but actually, having said that, for example the Principal (the Principal is sergeant-major). So the pecking order is in fact Base Commander (Major), Deputy Base Commander (Lieutenant), first among the men (Sergeant Major). He had been South before, hadn't he? But he wasn't the brightest guy.

Marsh: He was very grumpy.

Wright: Very grumpy. Perhaps he was a bit anti-Brit, I don't know.

Marsh: Well-liked by the men, though.

Wright: Yes he was.

Marsh: He was very well liked.

[Part 1 0:31:05] Wright: And he came round as time went on. When we left, I don't know if we got a bit hug off him, but certainly it was a very nice farewell and everything. But he wasn't very good at operating in that environment, was he? You would see him doing things. I will give you an example. We had an air drop. When things got really bad with the generators, eventually they did an air drop, and Flacco (one of the mechanics) had been out there getting the pallets which had been air-dropped and things like that. He came back into the base and he got too cold. His hands had got certainly on the borders of frost-bitten, certainly very badly nipped. They started doing exactly the right thing. They put his hands under a running tap, warm water, just body heat. Principal came in, put his hand under the tap. 'Oh no no.' Turned up the temperature: hot water. Do you remember this? Flacco was in absolute agony. He was on his knees, absolute agony, but ... Just what you don't do, but because he was the Principal, ...

Marsh: He was senior.

[Part 1 0:32:17] Wright: He was the senior. He was the Principal, and poor old Flacco was in agony over that. But we weren't in a position to ... I think we said 'No that's not a good idea.' But you could only go so far.

Marsh: I have one memory of the Principal. There weren't many auroras that winter. There was one where the aurora man had said 'Come on; it's good.' So the whole base went up and there were some quite nice little curtains, green curtains. After about twenty minutes it was a bit cold and people drifted away, and the last two out, to go down the shaft, were myself and Principal. And as we were about to go, suddenly these amazing coronas started and it was like a fireworks display. So we stayed up for another five minutes or so, and when we got down there, he was enthusiastic and telling everybody and pointing to me for corroboration, and I am pretty sure that, had it not been us two, who were least likely to collaborate on some wind-up, they would have thought he was inventing it, but they had to believe him because we were the two least likely to have agreed to cook something up between us. We were slapping each other on the back and saying how brilliant it was.

Wright: I think it was partly just his character. He was grumpy, but I don't think there was anything wrong with the guy. He was fun.

[Part 1 0:33:30] Lee: You had an awful lot of time to fill and you probably ran out of jobs quite quickly I would have thought, so how were you passing your time? Were you doing geology, Phil?

Marsh: I managed to practise adding about two hours sleeping onto the day.

Wright: We did.

Marsh: We were quite good at that. Have a siesta; that passed a bit of time. I had got my field notes. We hadn't got the rocks, but I had got my field notes, so there was a few weeks work going through those, thinking through them, doing the things I would have done when I got back. So that was useful. When they had this air drop, which the base commander had had to negotiate for quite a long time to get, a message got through via Cambridge that it was going to happen, and the British Embassy in Buenos Aires put a box of books in. They didn't know what we would like. There was just this cardboard box, wine box size maybe, slightly bigger than a wine case, packed with books, and it was a really good selection, There weren't very many that none of the three of us would read. So that was quite good. I think we had still got a few books left between us.

[Part 1 0:34:32] Wright: I think we had one or two books but we ran out of those pretty quickly. That box of books from BA was a godsend; there's no question about that. There was a Basic Spanish course book in there, I remember. The other thing was: we did use to go and sit with the guys, and I noticed in my diary, I've got 'Had Spanish lesson.' Well that was basically going and sitting with a couple of the lads and just trying to practise speaking Spanish and drinking *maté*, was a big thing, wasn't it? Fids would have smoko, while *maté* was this – you are probably aware of it – this tea which you drink from a gourd with a *bombilla* (a tube) and you put the herbs in it and you sit around drinking this and you pass it from one guy to the next, put some more hot water in it and pass it round. It's a very sociable thing so we used to partake in that.

Marsh: That often happened in the radio shack because that was the warmest place.

Wright: Yes, it was, yes.

Marsh: It was kept properly heated.

[Part 1 0:35:30] Lee: Were there any competitive opportunities, like chess or billiards or snooker or ...?

Wright: Table tennis and table football.

Marsh: And on party nights, they would play *truco* which is a South American game. It's a sort of a cross between poker and whist. I can't remember the rules. There are two sorts of plays but the significant thing for a military base is that cheating is allowed. Making signals to your partner, as long as they are the authorised signals and you do a sort of wink which means you have got a queen or something, and so some of these guys were very very good at passing an expression without their face apparently moving. I got partnered with the Principal in the tournament.

[Part 1 0:36:15] Wright: I don't recall playing that. I am not really a card player. You are more into that. I do remember Phil playing. I remember we played table football

and there was a league; there was a competition, and there was a table tennis tournament as well. I started off not too well in the table tennis tournament but I managed to get through. Eventually I ended up in the final and I was playing Hannibal, I don't know if you remember, in the final. He was a young Army lieutenant; I guess you would call him an A-type personality, pretty competitive, and I beat him. [Laughs] And he was very gracious but, boy, could you tell that he wasn't happy being beaten. I think we were playing for the Malvinas actually.

[Part 1 0:37:05] Lee: Well my next question was: did you ever discuss politics?

Wright: To an extent.

Marsh: To an extent. At the time they were more concerned with the relationships with Chile. They were thinking of having a war over the Beagle Channel. In fact I think they had stopped ... they had broken off diplomatic relations and because it was a military base, the base commander had these communiqués to repeat. So at the parade in the morning, he would very solemnly read out this statement in Spanish, and then he would shrug and say 'Nothing will happen. We are still talking to them. We are still passing met to them.' But I think we managed to educate them that the Falkland Islands were not populated by Spanish speaking ... to any extent, of South American extraction.

[Part 1 0:37:50] Wright: Yes, their level of ignorance was absolutely astounding. You would start talking about ... They would say 'Yes, but the people are Spanish and they speak Spanish.' 'No.' And you say 'Honestly, they don't speak Spanish.' 'Oh?' So they really were quite surprised. And generally speaking, you weren't going to change their opinion, so you just agreed to differ. There was one guy, and I was talking to Phil about it earlier, Raoul, who was a good lad. He was one of the beastie men I think, wasn't he? With him though, it got to the stage where we just didn't talk about it because he could get quite animated about it. But most of the time you just agreed to differ. What was more interesting, perhaps, was the issue of South Thule in the South Sandwich Islands where the Argentinians had put a base, which was actually only removed after the '82 conflict. I think the Foreign Office knew it was there but it was then that stage where 'Let's not do anything about it.' But we used to hear ... Just occasionally they didn't want us in the radio shack, and it was often when they didn't want us in the radio shack, you could hear them calling 'Thule, Thule, Thule.' And you are thinking 'Ah, OK.'

[Part 1 0:39:14] Lee: Were you able to talk to your, communicate with your families back home?

Wright: No.

[Part 1 0:39:19] Lee: No communication with Britain whatsoever?

Marsh: There was the 200 words a month.

Wright: They doubled it. I remember there was a ... We were having a radio sched I think with Rothera, and the comms weren't very good. This was after it had been confirmed we were staying there. And it was 'Krsh!'. All static and things and I forget

who the Op was at Rothera but he said 'I have got a message for you. BAS have agreed to double your ...' 'Krk!' [sound of static] And I thought Salary?! [Laughs] 'Say again.' 'Your telex allowance.' I think I would rather have had the double salary.

[Part 1 0:40:03] Lee: So you were on Morse to Rothera, were you?

Wright: No, it was voice but comms in that area are particularly difficult. In fact it was far easier to communicate with Rothera than Halley. This has always been the case. Trying to communicate with Halley, successful comms with Halley were the exception rather than the rule. We could normally get Rothera, although sometimes there was a bit of frequency changing involved. But no, we normally used to get air letters read out to us and we used to tape them if we could because they often tended to read them very quickly so we managed to scrounge a portable tape recorder; we taped them and transcribed them later.

Marsh: The same as we'd had in the field, really.

Wright: Yes it was. Definitely about the same really. No difference.

[Part 1 0:40:50] Lee: Dog seems to have had a really bad time, but you two are painting a much more cheerful picture of the experience.

Wright: I think Dog had a girlfriend who ... I think we all had girlfriends, didn't we? He was very very serious. I guess I was. I am not sure whether you were. But he was very very keen to get back for the girlfriend and understandably. I think we were a bit more philosophical about it. We were talking earlier on this afternoon and saying that there is no point in sweating stuff that you can't change. It gets to the point where you have just got to make the best of it, not to say you are enjoying yourself necessarily, although I think in many ways there were aspects of Belgrano that ...

Marsh: It was an interesting experience.

[Part 1 0:41:39] Wright: If you could do it again, probably I wouldn't, but on the other hand, life doesn't work like that does it? It was a valuable experience and there were good things about it.

Marsh: I wouldn't have wintered. I think I am probably the last one ...

Wright: Oh were you ...?

Marsh: I am probably the last BAS geologist to winter, I think⁴. I don't know whether any have done since. Certainly none did in the ?? [inaudible] years.

[Part 1 0:42:00] Lee: You weren't intending to winter, were you?

Marsh: I wasn't intending to winter, no. Geologists had stopped wintering at that point.

⁴ Correct. According to Keith Holmes' list of winterers, the last geologist to winter at a BAS base was C.V. Edwards at Stonington in 1974.

Wright: But I mean from that point of view you've got a ...

Marsh: I can tick an Antarctic winter.

Wright: You could tick an Antarctic winter.

[Part 1 0:42:08] Lee: You want your place in history?

Wright: I think yes probably we did have a different view of it to Dog and I think also, I don't know what your father's view was but obviously people at home were concerned. And I think Dog's family were very keen to get him back. My father still tells the story, in fact he retold it yesterday, about when this had been going on and obviously he and my mother had been in contact with BAS every few days about what was going on. Eric Salmon came on the phone to him on one occasion and said 'Mr Wright ...' It was probably first name terms by then, knowing Dad, but 'I need to tell you that (this and this and this) ...' And Dad said 'What you are saying is that he is not going to get out this winter?' And Eric said 'Yes.' 'OK.' Apparently Eric said 'Well thank heavens for that.' He said 'You understand the situation, Mr Wright.' 'Yes. It's John's problem!' Whereas I think Eric had had a bit of a hard time with Dog's parents.

Marsh: Yes, I think my father was much the same. 'He's gone off to do this.'

Wright: 'He's grown up. If he goes and does these things, well you know...'

[Part 1 0:43:32] Lee: Were you developing any sense of cabin fever? Were you desperate to get out towards the end of this, 8 months, wasn't it, you were there?

Wright: Yes.

Marsh: I don't know if it was cabin fever; it was just time to get on and do something. It's one of these things that: if it was interesting, it would have been just as interesting for less time, and it was a case of 'Right. Let's get on and get on with life and get on with other things.' And that had cut in before the opportunity to end it came in. But I suppose cabin fever is being bottled up underground. Not particularly. We'd go out. We'd probably go and ...

Wright: We went out every day.

Marsh: There were one or two guys on the base who you would often see walking round, but some of them I don't think came up from one week to the next. There wasn't much to see outside.

[Part 1 0:44:13] Wright: But it was the same at Halley. There were one or two guys who would never go outside. Well from the moment I arrived at Halley, I decided that I would be outside every day, no matter what. Sometimes it was warmer round the top of the shaft if it was blowing a hooley. And I think we adopted the same attitude at Belgrano, that we would go out every day. Would we have liked to be able to travel? Yes if we'd had a skidoo and a sledge unit, yes we would have loved to have got out,

but ... Shackleton base was just down the coast. That would have been a good tick if we had gone there.

Marsh: And probably accessible. There might have been big crevasses, I don't know.

Wright: I think it was probably a feasible one. I know the base was accessible because Gerry and Gary were sitting in there.

[Part 1 0:44:59] Lee: Did you ever feel threatened or under pressure at all?

Marsh: No.

Wright: Not really under pressure.

[Part 1 0:45:08] Lee: Fearful for your lives?

Wright: Oh gosh, no, no. I think we felt a bit ... sometimes. Health & Safety was different in those days anyway but at Belgrano it really was non-existent and there were situations sometimes where things would be going on and you would think (pardon my French) 'This is bloody dangerous.' I think I felt more, not threatened, but just very aware of the fact that you have got to be really careful about what you are doing here, because some of the guys around you don't seem to be aware. There was an incident: I don't know whether you remember pulling an antenna up the tower using a pulley and Dog got his hand trapped. The communicating hand signals broke down or something and he got his hand quite badly bruised. I think it was Dog. But yes, not in fear for your life, just acutely aware that you needed to be careful what you were about.

[Part 1 0:46:06] Lee: How did you find out that you were going to be relieved.

Marsh: Well we were just picking up the general news whenever we spoke to Rothera and I think at the end of the winter we were also speaking to one of the other bases.

Wright: We were speaking to Signy and occasionally Faraday.

Marsh: We had realised that we could hook our field radio we had still got with us up to the base antenna and a car battery, which gave us some extra channels which were BAS channels, and for a time just as the ionospheric conditions were right, we could chat for a bit longer. So we were getting a bit more news. But no, we were just getting the progress from Rothera on the ship. I think the aircraft came more or less on schedule.

[Part 1 0:46:52] Wright: They had said, right from the beginning, 'Next year, you will be the priority – the first thing the aircraft does'. We monitored the progress of the ship coming down; we monitored and the progress of the aircraft coming down from ... the aircraft used to go to Canada in those days for servicing and they would fly down through the Americas and we monitored the aircraft.

Marsh: I think it was just the same interest they have at Rothera when the aircraft are coming back. They were just passing it on to us so we could see, and then it came

down just the usual routine of waiting for the weather. With the aircraft there, we just needed the weather to ...

[Part 1 0:47:24] Wright: What I do remember is that there were quite bad sastrugi around the base and actually, I know a Twin Otter will land on all sorts of stuff but we wanted to make it as good a runway as we could, and we got one of the Sno-cats. Because I was working with the mechanics, I was actually allowed to drive one of these things. I don't know if you drive one or not. And we had some railway lines – very handy, railway lines are. You can do lots of things with them.

[Part 1 0:47:52] Lee: It's amazing how ?? [inaudible]

Wright: Railway lines and big beams behind the Sno-Cat and I used to drive it up and down the air strip, knocking the sastrugi down, to try and make it a decent strip. And then, it Giles who came for us?

[Part 1 0:48:12] Lee: Giles, it was, yes. Giles Kershaw?

Wright: Giles Kershaw, yes.

[Part 1 0:48:16] Lee: How did it feel then, as you left? Were you sorry to get out or glad to get out, or were you leaving behind people who became lifelong friends?

Wright: No, but perhaps I should have done. I don't know how you feel? I kept in touch for a few of the guys for a while and then I lost my address book and lost touch and I was just saying to Mike Pinnock actually, because he still deals with the Argentinians, 'If you put the word around that those three stupid so-and-sos who got stuck with you 30 years ago, we would actually like to hear from you guys, it would be good.'

[Part 1 0:48:50] Lee: Phil? Sorry to go?

Marsh: Not sorry to go, no, and the thing I can remember most about going was getting to Halley and getting rid of this dirty gear and having a shower with clean water, putting on some clean clothes (some of which I'd had with me all the time), and sitting down and having a beer in the bar. That was when the transition had happened.

Wright: And in a base where pride was taken over the base.

Marsh: So no, it was just a case of 'OK, that's it. We'll go now. Time to go.'

[Part 1 0:49:23] Lee: You are making it all sound terribly matter-of-fact, as if it wasn't really a big deal.

Wright: Well I do remember Dog saying ... We were literally in the aeroplane, we had taken off, and Dog said 'We're out!' And I thought 'Yes, I know what you mean' and I actually remember this, 30 years on, but I thought 'My sense of relief is different to yours somehow.'

[Part 1 0:49:44] Lee: He is still angry, isn't he?

Wright: I haven't spoken to Dog for a long time, but I would guess he is, yes.

Marsh: I think there have been times since, when work-wise I can look at a period that long and think 'Well, fine. What happened then?' It was routine. I was obviously doing all the other things one does, but there was no particular ... it was probably nine months we were there I think. There has been plenty of other periods of nine months when not a lot happened in the things that I was spending a lot of time doing. Obviously there would be holidays and things with family. But it was an experience. It could have been six months rather than nine.

[Part 1 0:50:20] Wright: I think six weeks actually. [Both laugh]

Marsh: You wouldn't have ?? [inaudible] in six weeks. We were on the gash rota and you see the things about the rota that ... they had a gash rota as these bases do, and for the first three or four months the base commander wasn't in it. We got put into it but the base commander wasn't and then everybody was in towards the end. Did we just follow him or ...? I think we might have followed him but he did a model gash and then the quality deteriorated part way through this. We were in it and had to feel we had to up the standards a little bit, having had this example set, and if we had been there six weeks, we wouldn't have got into that situation. We wouldn't have settled into the base routine the way we did.

[Part 1 0:51:00] Lee: A final thought really. Four years later, when we went to war with Argentina, against their military, what were your feelings at that point?

Wright: I think the first one would have been to the UK Foreign Office 'I could have told you that.' Certainly – and Phil will jump in – my feeling was that, having lived with the Argentine Army, I had always got the impression that no matter how friendly we were at the time, the Falklands were such an issue that if the Argentine Army could ever do anything about it, they would. And bear in mind though that this is only from Major, Lieutenant, down the ranks, but it certainly had involved the ?? [inaudible]. I can imagine them storming ashore. But having said that, I still regard the guys at Belgrano as friends. Thirty years on I haven't seen them but I would love to have a beer with them.

Marsh: I think if Hannibal had been in the Falkland Islands and had ended up in a prison somewhere temporarily, you would have thought it would be nice to say hello to the guy, say he was quite nice to us when we were his guests, as it were.

[Part 1 0:52:17] Wright: I think in many ways, historically ties between Argentina and Britain have been very strong and there is only one real issue and that is the Falklands, and in many ways the Falklands War was an aberration. I know the present Premier keeps making noises but the Premier of Argentina has to make noises about the Falklands. I was talking to Mike earlier on, I think throughout the conflict the bases were talking to each other still as things were going on.

Marsh: I think the perspective on the Falklands War was probably more influenced by being at BAS, and generally with people who knew more about the geography and

history than most of other people in the UK did, rather than particularly the Belgrano incident. It was the whole background that people who have been at BAS and have been through the Falklands, have got a better background on it.

[Part 1 0:53:06] Wright: And certainly from my point of view, having heard them from Belgrano talking to Thule, for example, I think the Falklands War needn't have happened if Britain had at the time done a little bit more about it perhaps and said 'Hang on, you are not playing cricket. Get rid of that base.' But I am convinced that if the Argentinians hadn't invaded the Falklands in 1982, they would have had a presence there now. There would have been some sort of cooperative agreement.

[Part 1 0:53:39] [End of Part One]

Part Two

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

[Part 2 0:00:09] Lee: What sort of education did you have, John?

Wright: Church of England primary school, secondary modern (11+ failure). A good secondary modern where the A stream did O-levels, so you could then transfer to sixth form at grammar school. Grammar school: moderate A-levels, good enough to get into a polytechnic to do a London University degree in geography and that was it. So: BSc Geography. And then I worked in the water industry for a year.

[Part 2 0:00:44] Lee: What was your first awareness that a place called the Antarctic existed?

Wright: Very early days, I think. I think one of my earliest memories is probably TAE and I can't remember much about it. I must have been about 5 but I do recall something about it. And my father was always interested in the outdoors. He wasn't a mountaineer or anything, but he was always interested in the outdoors and had various books around like the *Ascent of Everest* and things like that. He was well versed in the tales of Scott and Shackleton, and things like that. So I was brought up knowing a little bit about it and then getting into the Scouts, climbing and mountaineering. BAS starts to come in on the periphery of those kind of activities. So I guess from quite an early stage there was an interest in going South.

[Part 2 0:01:35] Lee: So what happened? You saw an advert or something or ...?

Wright: No. I had always known about BAS. When I left university, I was trying to decide what to do and I was interested in the military and I went for some interviews with the military, and they said 'Yes, we are interested in you.' I said 'Well I am also interested in going South, doing the Antarctic Survey.' They said 'Well, if you do that, you will be 22/23 when you get back; you will be too old for the military by then.' So I had a decision to make, and I said 'OK, I will bin the military option and go for BAS. So I applied for BAS and didn't get the job the first year. So I worked for a water authority for a year, applied again and got the job the second time round, I think possibly a bit fortunately, but I'm not sure. A friend of mine, my climbing

partner at the time, Trev Phillips, who was a dental surgeon, went South in '75 and we had this vague plan yet to meet up down South. I wasn't going down South because of Trev. I already wanted to go down South, but I got Trev to act as a referee for me and I got the job, basically, so that was it.

[Part 2 0:02:55] Lee: Do you remember the interview?

Wright: Yes. [Laughs] If it could be called an interview. I suppose in a way it was quite searching. I'd called in at BAS in Cambridge to find out what the score was and had a bit of a chat. I think it was Jim Conroy, and they were at that point moving to the new Cambridge offices. I filled in the forms and submitted them, got called for an interview and it was in that really hot summer of 1976, and I was wearing a sports jacket and tie like all good GAs do. I walked into the room and this was the new building in Cambridge but they were literally unpacking. There were packing cases all over the place, and it was Jim Conroy, Dave Fletcher and Steve Wormald and the first thing they said was 'Take your jacket off; loosen your tie.' which was great. Then it was 'How did you come across this nickname, Youth, then?' Of course what had happened was that Trevor had replied to BAS with a reference for me and I dare say he said something along the lines of 'With reference to the application by the Youth ...' So my nickname preceded me to BAS. So yes, I do remember the interview, but it didn't seem particularly searching at the time, but they did ask me one or two technical questions about crevasse rescues and things like that.

[Part 2 0:04:30] Lee: How did you know the answers?

Wright: Well I was a mountaineer. It was the GA's job. So they asked me one or two questions about 'If somebody went in a crevasse, could I get them out?' and things like that, what would I do? And I explained to them, and they asked a few things about my personality. Did I ever get drunk, and this sort of thing.

[Part 2 0:04:50] Lee: I trust you fibbed.

Wright: To some extent, but it seemed pretty relaxed, but I think they probably got what they wanted out of it. It was certainly before the days of psychometric testing and all the rest of it.

[Part 2 0:05:08] Lee: We've talked about the Belgrano incarceration on the other disc, but before that of course, you were actually doing geological work, weren't you, with Peter Clarkson?

Wright: That's right, yes. I was actually taken on as a GA specifically for the Shackletons project.

[Part 2 0:05:24] Lee: Which was what?

Wright: Well the Shackleton Mountains, which were only discovered in about 1955. I think there is some discussion, really as to who actually discovered them, whether it was TAE, the Trans Antarctic Expedition, or whether it was the Argentinians from Belgrano. So it seemed strange to happen but it was only just over 20 year previous that they had actually been discovered. Pete had already done geological seasons in

the Shackletons. The plan was that myself and another GA would winter at Halley, and then Pete and another GA⁵, who turned out to be Phil, would be flown in for a summer season, fly across in a Twin Otter from Rothera to Halley. Then we would go into the Shackletons, do the season and then come out at the end of that. Then I would have the option of either going home or maybe doing another season at Rothera or something like that. But there weren't many GAs wintering at Halley by that time because really Halley had ... Halley had always been an atmospheric research base, but it had also been a field base to some extent. But the field science had really shut down at Halley so there weren't many GAs wintering there and ...

[Part 2 0:06:35] Lee: But you did get involved in the atmospheric work, the ionospherics?

Wright: Yes. I tend to be a bit of a jack of all trades, I suppose. I will have a go at anything, how competently is another matter. The ionospherics, they had a programme for putting a remote receiving station out on the polar plateau, so I guess in that respect I was a bonus, inasmuch as they had GAs on base who could go out with Harry Matthews, the VLF guy from Sheffield University, and help them to get out there. We also had Ken Lax there who was the BC and had done quite a lot of climbing and travelling down South as well and Pete Witty who was a good mechanic. So I think the first trip we went out with, Ken and Pete came as well, which was good for me because Pete, being a good mechanic, was great with the skidoos. I was able to learn a lot from him. Although I was a motorcyclist and quite good with small engines and things like that, having somebody like Pete with you was very valuable, to learn a little bit more about the skidoos.

[Part 2 0:07:36] Lee: What was your contribution to the VLF work?

Wright: Going out with the remote receiving station, putting up a station on the plateau about a hundred miles south of base.

[Part 2 0:07:48] Lee: You were establishing a semi-permanent base, were you, station?

Wright: Well it was a station that was going to be unmanned, so it was a receiving station for VLF, Very Low Frequency radio waves. We dug a hold 12 feet deep in the bondu, put this package of scientific instrumentation in it to protect it. There was an aerial array on the surface, with a wind generator, and it would receive the VLF waves, and the idea was that with having that station out on the plateau and the station at Halley, and various other stations around, they could triangulate and find where the VLF waves were coming from. I believe that these VLF waves were generated by lightning flashes off the coast of Newfoundland or something like that. They came down as whistlers. You could actually hear them 'Twoo' 'Twooo' [makes whistling sound].

[Part 2 0:08:40] Lee: On the machine or on the air?

⁵ Phil Marsh was a geologist, not a GA.

Wright: No, on the machinery. Effectively it is a radio receiver at a particular frequency, and you could hear these things. I had a layman's interest, if you like, but it was worth getting interested in I think. It makes it more worthwhile, if you like.

[Part 2 0:08:56] Lee: How did that interest prosper? Were the scientists very keen to explain their work to you, or did you just pester them until they told you in the end?

Wright: Oh no, I think they were keen to. Certainly yes, Harry would explain anything that you asked him, and I think the same was true the other guys on base, certainly on the Met side. I guess I had a bit of knowledge of Met from: I had done a Met option when I did my geography degree, so I knew a little bit about it. Also I used to help with the balloon flights, and this kind of thing. I think there was only one occasion when I got a bit of a rebuff from one of the scientists. I decided it would be really useful if I was able to take sun-shots, for travelling, because in those days we didn't have GPS or anything like that. There were no mountain features or anything and I thought it would be really useful to be able to take sun-shots.

[Part 2 0:09:53] Lee: What's sun-shots?

Wright: Sun-shots: using a theodolite or a sextant, to shoot the angle of the sun, and then calculate your lat and longitude,. and there was one scientist on base who had been trained to do this, and he used to take sun-shots every so often to plot the drift of the base. I approached him and said 'Look, it would be really helpful if ...' He said 'Yes, I will do it if I get time.' It never happened. It wasn't essential, but it would have been nice to have ...

[Part 2 0:10:25] Lee: You mentioned with the Russians that you actually developed some sort of relationship with the Russians, and I am just wondering how that started, and how that relationship went.

Wright: I don't think the Russians visited us at Halley. They certainly overflew us.

[Part 2 0:10:41] Lee: Were they not also working in the Shackletons?

Wright: They were working the Shackletons, yes, and what happened there was: Phil and Dog were camped somewhere and the Russians came up The Russians actually overflew them. Then I think they came up on a radio sched and the end result was that Phil and Dog ended up camping near to the Russians, and the Russians had got a fairly heavyweight setup. We were doing sort of hit and run geology; the Russians were blitzing an area, if you like. Pete Clarkson and myself sledged over to their camp. We weren't all that far away. We sledged over and the Russians were extremely hospitable and they invited us into this tent which was a big dome tent with a stove. They actually had fresh oranges on the table because they had been put in by air just for the summer season, so it was great, having wintered at Halley, they gave us some fresh fruit and things. And then they got the vodka out.

[Part 2 0:11:41] Lee: It's funny how the Russians do that.

Wright: They do that, so this is vodka at about 80° South. They put these tumblers around the table, pour the vodka out and it was two or three inches of vodka I

suppose. I had never drunk vodka seriously before and I always wondered about how they drink it. You always see them stand up, 'Cheers, Nasdarovje' Whoosh, back in one go. I wondered so, sure enough 'Nasdarovje', whoosh, straight back in one go. We had a few of these and eventually, I can't remember if it was me or Dog, said to one of the guys 'Why do you drink it so fast?' The guy looked at us and said 'Well, we don't like the taste.' [Laughs] As far as they were concerned, vodka was purely utilitarian. It was there for getting smashed with. So yes, we had quite a party with them. They were good guys, and then of course we met them later on at Druzhnaya and there was all the talk that we previously discussed about possibly going out with the Russians. But certainly in the Shackletons they were very hospitable and very friendly.

[Part 2 0:12:53] Lee: You were kind of pioneering the use of skidoos. I know they had been around for a while but you were taking them one step further by doing unsupported skidoo trips?

Wright: I think so, yes. They'd had skidoos of one sort or another going well back into the 60s and then I think officially the use of dogs stopped in about 1974.

[Part 2 0:13:12] Lee: For research purposes?

Wright: For research purposes, yes. They were kept on for many years later as ...

[Part 2 0:13:20] Lee: Twenty more years.

Wright: Another 20 years as recreational and maybe a bit of science. But they'd had skidoos on the Peninsula for a while and what was then the latest generation of skidoos was the Bombardier Alpine. It was a 640cc two stroke machine with a twin track so a big track area so a very low bearing pressure and lots of traction and they had a lot of success with them on the Peninsula, and developed some travel techniques which we adopted. But we did find there were significant differences. On the Peninsula they'd had lots of problems with overheating. With a skidoo working hard, even when it was cold, it tended to overheat. They often used to do away with the cowling and things like that. We didn't have that problem. We never found they overheated.

[Part 2 0:14:03] Lee: But they did break down, didn't they ?

Wright: They did break down, yes. My first trip to the VLF site in early '77, pre-winter '77, I had a drive chain break. Now how it broke, I don't know. It was a triple chain and it broke, and that's one of the reasons I say it was invaluable having Pete Witty there. I could probably have put it right myself in the end, with a bit of discussion with Pete over the radio. But having Pete there, made it a lot easier. And then we had a ... it was Dog's skidoo I think, in the Shackletons, which was running very roughly, and because I had become the *de facto* skidoo mechanic of the four of us, I stripped the thing down. I think it had blown a crankcase or oil seal, as I remember it. But they used to get a lot of condensation in the crankcases. They used to freeze sometimes and you could even jam the thing up completely, but they were certainly effective and I remember Pete Clarkson, I guess reluctantly, saying that although he was a doggy-man, a doggy geologist, he had to admit the fact that he got

far more work... He could never have done the work that we did that season, with dog teams.

[Part 2 0:15:12] Lee: So they worked more often than they didn't?

Wright: Oh yes, certainly, and they pulled some big loads as well. They were effective.

[Part 2 0:15:20] Lee: Dare we talk a bit about [REDACTED]?

Wright: Yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:15:24] Lee: [REDACTED]

Wright: Yes.

[Part 2 0:15:27] Lee: In your team, your year? What was your first inkling that things were not right?

Wright: It's hard to say. What I would say first of all is that I got on very well with [REDACTED]. He was a thoroughly nice guy, a real gentleman. I think his degree was Chemistry or something, but his love, he real love academically, was the arts and literature, and he was a very nice guy. I'm not sure when I started to get an inkling that all was not well, but he tended to be fairly private and I became aware of the fact that he did used to drink, but he would go off and drink somewhere else. We always used to have a few beers, probably too many sometimes, but we tended to do it together and I became aware of the fact that [REDACTED] sometimes did this on his own. It wasn't until years later that I realised that he actually used to go off on a bender to one of the cabooses and sleep it off in there.

[Part 2 0:16:38] Wright: He went out on one occasion and I don't know whether he didn't sign out from base, because we had a rule that you signed out. I don't know whether he didn't sign out, so we realised he had gone missing, or what, but he disappeared. And we were literally on the point of organising quite a serious search party. I remember I was in the sledging store, loading rescue sacks and things like that. What had he done? Had he gone off towards the inland ice, had he gone down to the sea ice? This could have been a big deal, and we were literally just about to go off looking for him when he re-appeared, and I think that was the first inkling I got that there was something more than just the desire to go and have a few drinks too many or something like that. There was something seriously wrong.

[Part 2 0:17:30] Lee: Was the situation discussed amongst the staff, the Fids?

Wright: It was discussed between Ken and Leeches, I think. Leeches: sorry Iain Levack, the doctor, not surprisingly. And Ken and I discussed it to some extent. It was obviously a slightly difficult situation but the decisions were really Ken's. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:19:17] Lee: Were there any problems in communicating this situation back to Cambridge? Were Cambridge fully understanding of what was going on, or were they being a bit distant?

Wright: I can't really comment on that because I wasn't part of This was very much the base commander, Ken's sort of thing. The only thing I would say: if anybody from BAS at that time were to ask me about it, I would have backed Ken to the hilt and further.

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:20:56] Lee: Did you wonder how he got there in the first place? Because the BAS selection process, even then, was pretty rigorous, wasn't it?

Wright: I would say that when I was interviewed, it was all very relaxed but it was probably pretty rigorous in as much as the three guys I was talking to had all wintered and knew what they were talking about. But I think [REDACTED] was recruited at the last minute and this might have been ...

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:21:47] Lee: One thing I didn't want to ask you with Phil present, about the Belgrano experience, was that you heard about the death of your friend Trevor Phillips whilst you were in Belgrano. I just wonder whether ... Well I can imagine, but just tell me how that day was.

Wright: It was probably pretty shitty. I don't think it was a surprise. When you hear that somebody has got a brain tumour, that's pretty serious, and I'd had letters from

Trevor after he got back. We'd basically crossed over. He was on his way back North; I was going South. And I had letters from him saying he'd had the operation and now he was having radio therapy and I thought if he was having radio therapy, it wasn't benign, but he reckoned he was doing OK and he was hoping to go to South Georgia for a summer season in the first instance. I thought 'Maybe you are being a bit optimistic, Trev.' Later on I heard that he'd had a bit of a relapse. I'm not sure at what point I heard that. So it wasn't that surprising. It was very sad of course, but you get on with life.

[Part 2 0:22:57] Lee: I've never asked anybody else this question. I don't know why I am asking you because I think it is in your notes. The change in the name from Halley Bay to Halley: I got into serious trouble over this, referring to Halley as Halley Bay, when I should have referred to it as Halley. FIDS got very uppity about this. What was the reasoning?

Wright: It was simply that Halley Bay didn't exist. The base at Halley Bay had been named after an indentation in the ice shelf which had been called Halley Bay. And ice shelves are not permanent features; they change. The ice front had changed; the bay had gone, so why do you call something Halley Bay when it has gone. I do remember. It was in 1977 and we got a telex from Cambridge saying the base is going to be renamed Halley for that reason I think. I think they actually explained why, and I think the attitude was: 'Well, OK, there's a certain logic in that I suppose.' I think we were probably at the time a bit sad to see it go, and I still find myself referring to Halley Bay⁶.

[Part 2 0:24:04] Lee: Was there some kind of ceremony, or ...?

Wright: No, no. It was just: that was it, it was Halley. I guess we got used to it. I don't think it was a big deal.

[Part 2 0:24:15] Lee: We always ask about how things have changed over the years and most people point towards communications and IT as the big changes. What's your view?

Wright: I think it's got to be communications, IT. I'm sure everybody has said 200 words a month or whatever it was on the teleprinter. When it got bad, it had to be sent out by Morse Code and this kind of thing. And certainly at Belgrano it got quite difficult. We had the Halley reunion, the big Halley reunion a few years ago, the 50th anniversary, and we had a direct video link with the base. It's just absolutely unbelievable. I think even at that time BAS were behind the times.

[Part 2 0:24:57] Lee: Really?

Wright: In as much as, for example at Belgrano and maybe this is the fault of the Post Office or whoever it was controlled radio communications in the UK, but when we were at Belgrano, the lads there used to speak to their wives and families sometimes every day, sometimes twice a day.

⁶ It was also to make all the bases (except South Georgia) one word names. Argentine Islands changed to Faraday at the same time. Rothera and Signy kept their one word names.

[Part 2 0:25:13] Lee: Voice communication?

Wright: Voice communication, and it was by amateur radio phone patch. They'd call up, get an amateur radio operator in Argentina who'd phone up their spouse and do a phone patch.

[Part 2 0:25:28] Lee: A bit nearer, wasn't it?

Wright: It was, but it's interesting; if you read any of the books about TAE, they did have direct voice links with the UK on an occasional basis. It was an occasional thing, but it did happen. So in that respect, I'm not sure how feasible it would have been on a regular basis and I know that the amateur radio operators' regulations didn't allow in the UK, didn't allow phone patching, so I guess it was a non-starter, but as I say, compared with the Argentinians, we were actually quite a way behind in those terms.

[Part 2 0:26:02] Lee: It's ten years; you are talking about ten years after Man spoke live from the Moon.

Wright: Yes, but you look at things now. Things have moved on incredibly, the Internet ... I was impressed when I heard they had got fax down there but now I think they can actually phone. I'm not sure.

[Part 2 0:26:26] Lee: Yes. It's an extension on the Cambridge switchboard.

Wright: Yes? Amazing, absolutely amazing.

[Part 2 0:26:32] Lee: What about developments in Health & Safety? Looking back on it, do you think you ever took any risks.

Wright: I think we probably took risks but I think they were risks that we still take. Some of the risks, in my job as a GA, were mountaineering type risks, or travel type risks. You look at a bridge over a crevasse and you think 'Yes, OK. That will be all right. It can happen.' But you are ready for something going wrong. If a bridge breaks or something, you are roped up or whatever. So you are imagining risks all the time from that point of view. I do remember on one occasion, four skidoos, four sledge units driving through the Hinge Zone, all crossing a crevasse at the same point. All crossing a crevasse; we all crossed at different points and when each sledge unit had crossed the crevasse, there were four black holes behind us. But I guess you could argue that we had assessed the risk correctly. We had all got over.

[Part 2 0:27:26] Lee: And you are still here?

Wright: Yes, the last sledge had just punched a hole through it. So we hadn't all crossed at the same place. If we had have done, we would have gone through, but we crossed it absolutely fine, so

[Part 2 0:27:37] Lee: Is there a story about the *San Martin* when you were leaving the ...

Wright: Oh gosh, yes. The *San Martin*, the Argentinian ship, came in to visit us, and the sea ice was on its way out. We drove down to the sea ice in the Cat. Fortunately we didn't park – I guess this was common sense – we didn't park the Sno-Cat on the sea ice; we parked it up on the top of the ice shelf and we went out on the sea ice. As I said, the sea ice was breaking up and the Argentinians were coming in in launches from the ship to collect us, and to get to the launches, we were hopping from one ice floe to another. I guess from that point of view it wasn't that dangerous, in as much as there was the launch there to collect us, but in years past I thought about Neville Mann, the guy who was lost on the sea ice with his dog sledge, and you think 'Struth, if one of those ice floes that we were on had caught an eddy and got whipped off, because the current that used to flow along that coast was pretty fast. I thought 'Perhaps that wasn't so wise.' It might have been better to have stayed and waited for the boats to get in us rather than ... because when we came back from the ship, all the sea ice had gone. There was no sea ice left at all, apart from right at the foot of the ramp. The boats from the *San Martin* took us right to the foot of the ramp and then we walked to the top of the ice shelf.

[Part 2 0:29:01] Lee: Was there any time when you feared for your life, or in retrospect you thought 'That was a close shave'?

Wright: I don't think so. We did all right in difficult circumstances.

[Part 2 0:29:10] Lee: It's a question I ask.

Wright: No. I don't think I did. I think there were times when I thought 'This is possibly a little bit hairy.' I do remember when we were out in the field after the winter. It must have been probably August. We had a tear appeared in the tent and I remember going out there in a blow and trying to get a patch on it. I was with two scientists and I said 'Look, get the bivvy bags out and we need to be ready to get ourselves into some protection if the tent does disappear.' But it was never going to be a life and death situation. So I don't think so.

[Part 2 0:29:52] Lee: What about ridiculous or funny situations?

Wright: Oh gosh, probably loads. I've told you about the incident with Dog in the shower at Belgrano, getting his clothes soaking wet.

[Part 2 0:30:05] Lee: Halley toilets?

Wright: Well, you look at the Halley website; there's always stories about the toilets. When we arrived at Halley, there was the long drop toilet with the turdicle in it, and the turdicle had to be knocked down every so often. But while I was there we changed to what was supposed to be a more civilised Elsan toilet: a 45-gallon drum with a seat put on the top of it. We had a ceremonial opening of the new toilet with Ken, the base commander, sitting on the toilet and a ribbon cutting ceremony. The idea was that when the drum was a third full, or whatever, it would be taken out and the toilet had been placed near one of the shafts. The mechanics had made a clamp to go round the drum and it would be wheeled out and then winched up to the top of the shaft, and I often remember thinking ... I wasn't worried about the clamp breaking or the rope breaking but as it got to the top, it had to go through the opening of the shaft and if

one edge of the drum had caught underneath the shaft top, and it was still being poured, it would very quickly do a flip. It never happened while I was there but I am told on reliable information that after I left, one year that happened and the drum flipped and 30-odd gallons of Elsanated shit plunged to the bottom of the shaft. And I guess there were funny incidents all the time: Midwinter sketches and things like that were good fun.

[Part 2 0:31:38] Lee: Was a sense of humour fairly critical to survival in the Antarctic?

Wright: Oh I think so, yes. You had to have a fairly thick skin sometimes. Photography was a big hobby and people used to develop Ektachrome and black & white films on base, and if they developed a film, they'd give a slide show in the evening. The standard cries were 'Tilting horizon!' 'There's a bleg on that!' Actually I think we were doing damn well to develop colour transparencies in the Antarctic any way, but you had this what you thought was this brilliant photograph and it would be ripped apart by the rest of us. No, it was just good fun.

[Part 2 0:32:22] Lee: One of the side effects of the Belgrano issue seems to be that your love life was somewhat curtailed by this.

Wright: Yes it was. It was a bit sad actually because I had been living with this girl before I went South and she wrote to me religiously. I probably made a mistake by saying 'I might have the opportunity to stay on at Rothera for a few months extra.' So she had probably got the wrong vibes any way.

[Part 2 0:32:47] Lee: She might have got the right ones, John.

Wright: Well actually in retrospect she probably did. So any way I got back to Rothera and I got a Dear John when I was at Rothera but by then I had decided that I was going home and I thought 'Well I might be able to patch things up with her.' But it didn't happen, so ... I was pretty boot about it at the time but things turn out for the best. In fact the only thing I would say I regret about that is that I didn't go South again that summer. I thought 'If I go South again, is that because I am running away from the romantic involvement?' In actual fact, looking back on it now, I would love to have gone South again. Maybe I should have done.

[Part 2 0:33:32] Lee: Did you ever go again?

Wright: No, I didn't, no.

[Part 2 0:33:35] Lee: But you spent some time at the other end of the world?

Wright: A bit. I got involved with the British Schools Exploring Society and I went to Greenland with them in '82 as mountaineering leader, and I went to Svalbard with them in '87 as a sort of roving leader and base camp manager. And then I did an expedition with the Army in '95 across Greenland, a man-hauling trip across Greenland, which is a pretty standard sort of trip, but with soldiers who have never done anything like that before, it's quite interesting.

[Part 2 0:34:09] Lee: So which end of the planet do you think resulted in your Polar Medal?

Wright: I think I must have got most points for the South and that's unfortunate because I wasn't the only ... and Belgrano has got to have been a big part of that, and it's unfortunate because Dog and Phil were obviously there as well and I don't think they had any recognition of their time there. But I think it was that plus ... I got on very well with Pete Clarkson and we worked very well together. This sounds immodest but I know that he thought I was quite a good GA, probably both technically and the fact that I had got a geography degree and knew bit about geology meant that I was, if you like, a knowledgeable GA and able to help out a little bit. So that probably stood me in good stead, then plus the fact that I had done the stuff in the North, and I have to say the fact that I was in the Army helps. I'm sure it helped.

[Part 2 0:35:10] Lee: When you finally made it back to Cambridge after your nine months in the Argentinian subterranean Antarctic base, how were things with Peter Clarkson?

Wright: As far as I am concerned, they were fine. I hope he felt the same.

[Part 2 0:35:28] Lee: Was he feeling guilty?

Wright: Yes, I think he did. I think he did and he shouldn't have done. I honestly don't think Pete should have felt guilty about it. The choice that we made of who went and who stayed behind was made for very good reasons. I have heard that Pete came under some criticism, as being the leader of the Shacks party (if you like).

[Part 2 0:25:55] Lee: Captain goes down with the ...?

Wright: The captain goes down with the ship. Well I am not convinced. We were all grown-ups. Certainly on my part there's no ill feelings towards Pete. Occasionally if I was in Cambridge I would call in and see him. I would like to see more of him; no problem at all. But yes, I think he was (a) under pressure and (b) there was probably a bit of guilt on his part. If you ever listen to this, Pete, don't worry about it.

[Part 2 0:36:27] Lee: Final question, if I may. Where DID this nickname come from? I am looking at you. You are the same age as me but you look half my age, so I can see that side of it. There's another arm to the explanation?

Wright: Yes. I think the years are catching up with me but what it was: when I was doing a lot of climbing, particularly with Trev Phillips who we talked about before, Trev was about seven years older than I was. Of course a big climbing partnership in Britain in the 50's and 60's had been Joe Brown and Don Whillans, and Brown was ... I think he was only three or four years older than Don Whillans, but he always used to refer to Whillans as 'The Youth'. Manchester type accent, it was 'Ay up, Youth!' Trevor picked this up and so I was 'Hey, Youth!' He always used to refer to me as Youth, and I couldn't get away from this because, as I said, the blooming nickname followed me as far as the BAS interview, because the only way it could have come back was from Trevor who must have said 'With reference to the application by the Youth ...' Then Steve Wormald, or Dave Fletcher whatever, said to

me ‘What’s this about the Youth?’ I remember at the time I said ‘Oh, it’s my baby-face looks.’ Which actually it wasn’t; it was the Brown-Whillans connection. Probably we were getting over-inflated ideas about our climbing ability.

[Part 2 0:37:52] Lee: Just in a very very neat nutshell, what happened next to you? Did you ...? You didn’t pursue a career with the Antarctic so where did you go? Not back to the Water Board, surely?

Wright: No, not back to the Water Board because the reason ... I did that strictly to fill in. I decided not to join the Army. I still wanted to go South with BAS and I thought ‘If I do a job at the Water Board, ...’ I do regret not having gone South again, but I trained as a teacher of Outdoor Pursuits and Geography fieldwork and I got a job in an Outdoor Studies Centre in South Wales, which I enjoyed, but the promotion prospects were pretty limited, and I joined the Territorial Army. You will have gathered I was always interested in the Army, and I joined the TA actually in 1982, and I guess there was a link to the Falklands there. The Argentinian invasion did piss me off. It doesn’t change my views on the guys who were South at Belgrano at all.

[Part 2 0:38:52] Wright: So anyway I joined the TA and somebody said to me (this was after a particularly wet weekend on Sennybridge ranges) ‘You enjoy this, don’t you, John?’ ‘Well, yes.’ He said ‘You know there’s an Education Branch in the Army, don’t you? You are a qualified teacher; why don’t you make some enquiries?’ ‘OK.’ So I made some enquiries; the maximum age, even for the Education Branch, was then 29. I think I was 30, but they obviously liked what they saw, and eventually I ended up joining the Army, joining the Royal Army Educational Corps. But it meant I had to go to Sandhurst because you have to do all the standard officer training. So I went to Sandhurst at the ripe old age of, I think it was 31. I think the next oldest guy there was 26, something like that, and my father was telling me a couple of days ago that he came to a dinner night at Sandhurst. We were chatting to the Commandant at Sandhurst who of course doesn’t know all the officers, junior officers, all that well. So he probably assumed that I was 22/ 23.

[Part 2 0:39:53] Lee: And you do look young.

Wright: Yes, I do look young, and he said to my father ‘You needn’t worry about John, Mr Wright. We will look after him.’ And my father afterwards said ‘Bloody hell! Patronising so-and-so! Does he know anything about your background?’ So I said ‘Oh, you just have to live with that sort of thing.’ So anyway I joined the Army and had an interesting career; got around the world a bit.

[Part 2 0:40:20] Lee: It’s been a pleasure, John. Thanks very much for your time.

Wright: And you. I have really enjoyed it.

[Part 2 0:40:25] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:00:30] Background to the Belgrano situation
- [Part 1 0:02:21] The last flight out
- [Part 1 0:07:01] Possibility of a rescue by a commercial plane
- [Part 1 0:10:27] Failure of the pickup by the Russian ship
- [Part 1 0:11:34] But they took the rock samples
- [Part 1 0:13:28] Realisation of an unplanned forced winter
- [Part 1 0:17:21] Belgrano constructed with old British rails
- [Part 1 0:18:24] The collapsing roof
- [Part 1 0:20:27] Socialising in the pitrooms, not the bar
- [Part 1 0:23:02] The food: mostly meat
- [Part 1 0:24:08] The difficulty of having a shower
- [Part 1 0:26:32] Burning diesel made everyone and everything black
- [Part 1 0:27:21] The fire risk
- [Part 1 0:29:25] The language barrier
- [Part 1 0:33:30] An air drop brought welcome books in English
- [Part 1 0:34:32] Drinking *maté*
- [Part 1 0:35:30] Various games
- [Part 1 0:37:50] The Argentinians' inaccurate view of the Falklands
- [Part 1 0:40:03] Radio comms between Belgrano and Rothera
- [Part 1 0:43:32] Overcoming cabin fever
- [Part 1 0:45:08] Health & Safety non-existent
- [Part 1 0:52:17] The Falklands War "an aberration"
- [Part 2 0:07:36] At Halley: contribution to VLF work
- [Part 2 0:09:53] Not allowed to learn how to take sun-shots
- [Part 2 0:10:41] Vodka at the Russian field camp
- [Part 2 0:13:20] Problems with the skidoos
- [Part 2 0:22:57] Name change from Halley Bay to Halley
- [Part 2 0:24:15] Changes in communications and IT
- [Part 2 0:26:32] Assessing the risks of travel through crevasses
- [Part 2 0:27:37] Across ice floes to reach the *San Martin*
- [Part 2 0:30:05] Halley long drop toilet replaced by Elsan
- [Part 2 0:31:38] Photographic efforts criticised
- [Part 2 0:36:27] The origin of Wright's nickname: Youth