

ALAN COLEY

Edited transcript of a recording of Alan Coley interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 6th June 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/169. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 14th October 2018.

Part One

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Alan Coley, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 6th of June 2012. Alan Coley, Part 1.

Coley: My name is John Alan Coley, spelled with one 'l' in the 'Alan' and I was born in Beechwood Sowerby in West Yorkshire as it was then, 12/10/29. We lived there just for one year and then moved to Bradford. My father bought a small shop, cigarettes, tobacco, sweets, newspapers and my mother and father delivered them round the streets. Just above the cathedral in Bradford.

[Part 1 0:00:50] Lee: Was he a shopkeeper all his life?

Coley: No, no. My father started as a delivery boy for Greggs grocers in Birmingham. He comes from Birmingham. He was quite a bright lad and they put him on work in the store from delivering groceries round the Edgbaston district, brought him into the store and he was making up pats of butter, weighing out sugar and things like that. So he got an idea of what a business ..., how it was run and so on. When he was 14 he went into the foundry team that my grandfather Coley had begun to form, with my dad's elder brother, making cast iron bedsteads and the brass finials that they had on the bedsteads in those days.

[Part 1 0:01:54] Coley: My dad joined that and his then younger brother joined it, so they had quite a nice team. He was recruited, or engaged, by a Methodist entrepreneur in Sowerby Bridge and brought up from Birmingham to start the same kind of business in Sowerby Bridge. And all the brothers were involved in that, apart from Bill during the war and he was called up and served ... I don't know what regiment he was. The only telling phrase that I remember was when my son asked if Bill would talk to him. My son had been very interested in reading about the Western Front. Bill had never spoken to anybody about his experience so I said I would ask him, and Bill, amazingly, said 'You tell James to come along; we'll have a chat.' And the telling phrase is 'I went over the top three times.'

[Part 1 0:02:59] Lee: Oh really? Did that put you off joining the Forces then?

Coley: Well that kind of situation, yes, but he was a very gentle fellow and must have had very mixed feelings about his experience of getting through and surviving, I think, yes.

[Part 1 0:03:24] Lee: What was your education like, Alan?

Coley: Education? Fortunately, due to my father's braininess, or entrepreneurship and go, he sent me to grammar school, to the prep school, because he conferred with his old headmaster, who was my headmaster, that I wasn't very bright and wouldn't get

my 11+ exam. So my dad worked out that if he sent me to the prep school, I automatically went through into the First Form. So that is how I came to be in a grammar school. And I failed my School Cert. because I didn't pass my English Language or Maths but I was able to re-sit those and went into the Sixth Form and I took two A-levels, as they were then, and one subsid. The A-levels were Geography and Geology and the subsid. was Zoology. The Geography led me into following my uncle's trip out to India when he was doing National Service during the war. So my dad bought me a war map, a *Telegraph* war map and I followed his voyage down, round the Cape of Good Hope to India and out to Burma. So that's how my interest in geography came up. And then we got a new Geography teacher and he introduced Geology and so I took that, and as I say I got poor marks in them but I got accepted by Manchester when I passed my Maths and English.

[Part 1 0:05:23] Lee: Manchester University?

Coley: Manchester University, following Eric Platt. Eric Platt was at the same school and my Head Boy when I was in the Fifth Form and he went up to Manchester and two years later I followed him. Now then going back a year or two before that, a fellow called Ken Pawson had come back. I don't know whether he was in the Forces<sup>1</sup> or not. I can't remember that but he had been down South and he gave a talk at school. And so I suppose that's how Eric, and certainly me, began to have an up-to-date interest, as it were, in the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:06:08] Lee: Did you know Eric Platt well?

Coley: I wouldn't say I knew him well. My memory of him at school was: he was, in a sense, he was a bit of an odd bod. He was very keen on doing things, keen at football, but not flamboyant but a bit ... (I find trouble in searching for words these days).

[Part 1 0:06:32] Lee: Was he reserved?

Coley: No, he was quite ebullient but not quite coordinated. He was all over the place, but a very keen kind of guy.

[Part 1 0:06:44] Lee: I think the modern word is focussed, isn't it?

Coley: It could be, yes.

[Part 1 0:06:50] Lee: Were you aware if any potential illness in him at that time? Because he died ...

Coley: No, he was a very very keen sportsman at school. I don't know, I can't remember whether he was in a team at university but I would think that he would be, judging from what he was like at school. So no, I think it was a complete surprise to everybody, probably including parents. Because in those days, things like that weren't necessarily picked up, were they?

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<sup>1</sup> Pawson was in the RAF during the war (British Antarctic Oral History interview of Ken Pawson).

[Part 1 0:07:21] Lee: No.

Coley: No. I thought he was an only one but in the *Halifax Courier*, when something that I had reported to one of their reporters was put in to the *Courier*, and it was about the Antarctic, and I mentioned that Eric was the only one, apparently he had two other brothers and I wasn't aware of this. His mother was a teacher at a West Riding primary school at a little village up in the Pennines. I think they lived at a place called Lighthazles but again my memory is a bit vague about that.

[Part 1 0:08:09] Lee: I think he was a Base Leader, wasn't he?

Coley: Yes, he was at Admiralty Bay. I have it in my mind that he would have been into one of the further south bases as a geologist but it was one of those years that they couldn't service the base, so they put him in at Admiralty Bay. So I don't think that was the regular thing. I think it was a makeshift thing because of the situation.

[Part 1 0:08:51] Lee: When you left university, what did you leave with in the end?

Coley: I left with an ordinary Geography and Geology degree, a Teacher's Certificate (I didn't get the Diploma) which stood me in good stead because when I got back to Stanley I was able to teach for nine months and I didn't have to come home on that dreaded little *Biscoe*, which I'd had enough of on the way out, having gone down to Punta Arenas and then across to ... Yes, that was great. I came back on the *Alcantara*.

[Part 1 0:09:22] Lee: So did you go more or less straight from university to FIDS?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:09:29] Lee: So it was because of Pawson and Platt that you thought this? What made you apply?

Coley: Well again it was a fortuitous thing. I had been down to the Festival of Britain, spent a week down there with a friend from Manchester University, a girlfriend, and came back to my parents' house. They had a guesthouse in Nidderdale, Over Longside House, above Ramsgill, the village of Ramsgill. I came back there. There was a *Manchester Guardian* (as it was in those days) lying on a settee that one of their guests had left behind. I was looking through it and saw this advert: 'Meteorologists needed in the Antarctic', something of that kind. So I wrote the letter, posted it on a Friday night, and I got a call, either on the Monday or the Tuesday, saying could I go for an interview later in the week? which I did, and I was appointed and asked if I could be ready to sail within a week. Fortunately some of the cargo was delayed or wasn't available so it was delayed with that, so I had a bit more time to gather myself. So that is the story.

[Part 1 0:11:18] Lee: What do you remember of the interview? I appreciate it is sixty years ago. Bill Sloman, was he there?

Coley: I can't remember who was interviewing, possibly Elliott was there, I don't know. I can't remember, Chris, but one of the things that stands in my mind, and I suppose I shall never forget, was: they came down to the point where they were

making the appointment and they said ‘Well, the tours are one year or two years. Which are you thinking of applying for?’ Immediately I said ‘Two years’, thinking that if it were one year, they may not accept me. So I plumped for the two years. At that stage I was very fancy free I suppose and some might say reckless, and also lacking appreciation of what my parents had done for me.

[Part 1 0:12:21] Lee: Why were you so keen to go, then?

Coley: Well I had always been keen. I am not a good reader, as you can probably gather from what ... I am a very slow reader and this runs through the family. I found that my two younger sisters, they had difficulty reading, and I think ... And my grandson, he had reading and hand dyslexia. So in those days nobody talked about dyslexia and I think possibly that is in the genes somewhere. So I had read, if not Scott’s memoirs, résumés of his, and Shackleton, and I had come to the opinion that Shackleton was my guy. Yes, so I think it was from that. I can’t imagine that there were any television shows that brought this topic up at all. I don’t know.

[Part 1 0:13:35] Lee: But you qualified quite well from Manchester University and then you got a job as a meteorologist, and you had never done meteorology presumably?

Coley: My introduction to meteorology was on a course in Manchester, at Manchester. We had to do one week’s observations in Platt Fields, Manchester, the Met station there, which was the official one for Bradford City, I guess, and I did my stint from the Geography Department. So that’s the only experience I had, yes.

[Part 1 0:14:28] Lee: That’s fine. Did you get the sense, then, they were a bit short of meteorologists, that they were taking somebody with limited experience?

Coley: They obviously couldn’t recruit enough from Air Ministry Met people to go down. The fellows that did go down from Air Ministry could count that as their National Service, and I, unbeknown to me, went down without applying for exemption from National Service. So when I had done 5 years on Her Majesty’s Service, as it were, and the experience with the Argentines, when I came back I was served with my call-up papers to do two years National Service. But I dropped lucky because they had the record that you have of my experience and I got a call from Air Ministry, from Squadron Leader Gordon Cumming. He told me about the Mountain Rescue Service. He was in charge of all rescue services and they had a vacancy at Kinloss, RAF Kinloss Mountain Rescue Team, to take command of it. Then there was a pause and I said ‘Oh. That’s interesting.’ And his comment was ‘Well, what about it?’ So I just said ‘Yes. I will go.’ So that’s how I got into Mountain Rescue there.

[Part 1 0:16:07] Lee: So the way to avoid National Service was to sign something before you went South?

Coley: That’s right, yes.

[Part 1 0:16:13] Lee: But nobody told you?

Coley: Whether it was upon me to get the papers or not, but the rapid recruitment was such that I was not aware and nobody got the papers to me if they should have done. So either way it meant that I had to serve for another two years which I dropped lucky because from that, being at Kinloss we used to take the 18-year olds from Gordonstoun and take them out on training trips on Wednesday afternoons which were the recreation afternoons in the RAF, and at weekends. Then again, when I was demobbed I saw an advert for a maths teacher at the prep school to Gordonstoun, so having known about it, read about it when I was doing my teacher's qualification, Kurt Hahn and his forward thinking ideas which seemed to suit me, I applied and I was appointed even though I failed School Cert Maths first time. And I quite enjoyed it there. I married Dorothy. We settled in an upstairs flat with one of the other masters in the big Victorian-like mansion overlooking the River Spey and the Glen Fiddich and the Glenfiddich pub down below.

[Part 1 0:17:54] Coley: We had a happy time there but coming from my background, I didn't feel that I was really going to make ... I didn't think I would quite really fit in, so I decided to go into mainstream local authority teaching, and went down to Brymore. But the link back to the Fiddich is tremendous really. It's one of the most fantastic co-incidences I have come across. Jimmy Smith was on the *Biscoe*. He was a Falkland Islander and had become a crew member, deck-hand, and I became quite friendly with him on the way South and met up with him when we were in Stanley and he invited me up to their house for a meal and I met up with his sister, Kita, and we were regular partners at the Saturday night hops at the town hall.

[Part 1 0:19:01] Coley: Coming back, and back up to Craigellachie, Dorothy was befriended by a Yorkshire lady, a Mrs Grant, who had come back to Grantstown fast country because her husband was called Grant and he was in the steel industry in Sheffield and married her, came back to retire there and she was now a widow. And on her mantelpiece were two photographs, two young men, one in Merchant Navy seaman's uniform, officer's uniform, and another guy in civvies. And when I went across one time, she related who these two were. 'One is my son. He comes into Southampton now and again, and when he can he gets up here and he often coincides with this other fellow, Jimmy Smith.' So we then made contact with ... it was his step grandmother down at the Fiddich pub, and I just couldn't believe that.

[Part 1 0:20:17] Lee: Just before we start talking about the years you spent in the Antarctic, can we just go back to the Festival of Britain, because you said you saw a polar exhibition there.

Coley: Yes, I mentioned that but I can't remember any detail about it but I think ... I am pretty certain that there was an exhibit to do with ... Yes, I can't remember the detail except that I think that I visited on that walk round, an exhibition, a polar exhibition but I can't remember any detail.

[Part 1 0:20:48] Lee: Do you remember any huskies?

Coley: I would be pushing it if I said yes. I couldn't say so.

[Part 1 0:20:55] Lee: But that was all part of the incentive to get yourself South, was it?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:21:05] Lee: OK, so when you did go South, you sailed on the *Biscoe*?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:21:09] Lee: Had a rare old time apparently?

Coley: Yes, it was great. They were a great bunch. Twenty two seems to keep cropping up. We sailed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and then when we come to mention a bunch of people, there were a hell of a lot of us down there. Whether there were 22 of us or not, I don't know but we were crammed into that bunk space, three decks of bunks. I can't remember how many ranks of bunks there were but it was a pretty tight space, and of course on the ship's side there were bunks and the central aisle of them as I remember. A very hot and sweaty place in the tropics and whenever we did, we spent most of the time on deck. I am trying to remember the name of the cook. He had a hell of a job but he produced food, you know. I wouldn't enthuse about it. But it was great to get off the boat in Rio de Janeiro of all places, because there was a strike in Montevideo so we called in and bunkered with oil in Rio, just in case Montevideo was still closed when we got down there. And to be able to go into a restaurant and eat a beef steak, plate size, having come from UK where things were very tight still, yes it was a great ... and also Simon the cook (I think his name was), some of his lashings up. So then we went on down to Montevideo and called in there.

[Part 1 0:23:13] Lee: Did the ship ...? What was it like as a vessel? Was it rough at sea or was it ...?

Coley: Oh, it was the worst possible ship for going across an ocean. I mean it was built as a net-layer for harbour duties, with a great shovel snout nose, big bent bow and you thought it was never going to come up. It went into these South Atlantic waves or Bay of Biscay waves. Yes, it was obviously serviceable but it is not a friendly ship at all, but it was wooden. That was why they chose it, so that if it got into ice, it would squeeze and relax a bit in the ice, as a steel ship would have been opened like with a tin opener, an ice floe opening a metal ship. The first time it went down – I heard a story about it – the first time it went down, it came back for refit into Southampton and the phrase was 'It looked like a porcupine.' Because it was just soft timber, relatively, so they sheathed it with greenheart for its future voyages. So that's a bit of what I heard about it.

[Part 1 0:24:29] Lee: It looked like a porcupine because bits had come off the hull, you mean?

Coley: Yes, the ice had created shavings on the side, and the wood being relatively soft; it just splintered it, yes.

[Part 1 0:25:02] Lee: Was there a strike in Montevideo or did you get in?

Coley: No, it had finished so we were OK there. We berthed there and bunkered again, topped up. I think we went in on a Saturday night and the Church of Scotland

minister in the Falklands was on his return journey from his leave in the UK, in Scotland, and he just announced on the Saturday night: 'I will be going into the Methodist church here. If any of you want to go, I will be pleased if you can join me.' So I joined him and we had a wonderful time. That's a thing that I notice about people in ports and towns where they are used to having visitors. They are very generous in their hospitality and we were just shared out at the end of the service. We came into the service just after it had started and everybody looked round and of course they wanted to know who we were. There were about eighteen of us I think, something like that, maybe not as many as that. But we were then parcelled out to the various people and because I had geography, geology interest, I was handed over to the – I think his name was Eduardo Jones and his son Gordon had studied in the UK, geology, and so that's why I was paired with them, and we had a wonderful weekend of hospitality. And then we set off South. Yes, we were taken round, shown the various monuments and so on.

[Part 1 0:27:07] Lee: What was Stanley like when you got there? This would be the winter of 1951, well the summer in fact, Christmas '51?

Coley: That's right. I would have to look at my diary to read the detail. It was a pretty busy community, only about 1200 people living in Stanley in those days and I think there were only 1500 people on the islands altogether. We went in to the Public Jetty. There were other jetties sticking out with old ships stuck at the end of them, that had been condemned and were used by the Falkland Island Company's storage for their wool clip and cargoes, bringing stuff in and out. And a very pleasant looking place in the sense that all the houses were brightly coloured. They had red or green roofs, all corrugated iron roofs for the most part. Along the front were semi-detached London brick built, yellow bricked? Semi-detached houses, but behind, most of them were wooden houses.

[Part 1 0:28:42] Coley: And of course there was the odd pub, the Colonial Club, the Globe pub which was the main one that Fids frequented, the Cathedral with its whalebone arch, the Cathedral so named because the Bishop of South America, that was his seat apparently so he had to visit there once a year to maintain that link. And the Tabernacle, which was Horace McCorm's [phonetic] church, was a little low building, wooden, with again a corrugated iron roof. What other features? Government House and Little England where all the UK expats were housed, separate from the UK Falkland Islanders, which I found very strange. I didn't agree with that at all, the separation of the two.

[Part 1 0:30:11] Lee: Were they separated by the government or did they just drift into certain communities, I wonder?

Coley: It was built that way.

[Part 1 0:30:18] Lee: Oh right.

Coley: Yes. They were almost classed as second class citizens I would say. I had better be careful what I am saying but that was the impression you had.

[Part 1 0:30:30] Lee: So we are talking about people who had moved from the UK to the Falklands?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:30:36] Lee: Who were having to live in a separate place?

Coley: To do whatever job they were ... working for the Falkland Island Company or working in the PWD, Public Works Department.

[Part 1 0:30:45] Lee: Incomers?

Coley: Yes, yes. Probably some of them going back to the Norwegian whaling and Swedish people. In fact one young woman was a dancing partner, her partner was ... Her name was Ingrid Pedersen I think it was. So that gives you links with the whaling and where people came from.

[Part 1 0:31:18] Lee: Was it like stepping back in time?

Coley: As far as the weather was concerned, it was variable obviously, quite wild windy periods but in the calmer time it was very pleasant. Not much to do apart from walk backwards and forwards along the promenade and popping into Les Hardy's café. Apart from the Globe and the café, there was just nowhere else to go.

[Part 1 0:32:14] Lee: What was the Globe like? What could you compare it to?

Coley: Well I come from a Methodist family so I hadn't got much experience of what pubs were like. It was very much 'stand at the bar'; I won't say spittoon but it was, you might say, 'rough'. It was certainly not pretentious. It wasn't trying to be up-market in any way, but a very friendly place.

[Part 1 0:33:01] Lee: Were you kitted out in Stanley?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:33:05] Lee: What kind of kit did they give you?

Coley: My memory here is a bit ... Whether we went up over to the Camber, where a lot of the FIDS stuff was stored, Camber being the Royal Navy refuelling place, whether we went over there or whether we were given stuff in Stanley, I can't remember. But yes, we were given thick woolly socks, a number of pairs of socks, long woollen underwear, long johns we called them. The big woolly fleece with wolverine fur round the hood which would have been issued to troops or Navy people who were doing a kind of on-guard in wintry conditions, certainly not meant to go sledging in. It would be far too hot, blanket fleece, wolverine fur round the hood. We were given two pairs of mitts: one was a sledging pair, yellow and had a fur nose wiper on, and it had an elastic band so that you could pull the sleeve over your anorak and keep the wind out.



[Part 1 0:34:52] Coley: The other pair were just a grey leather mitt with duffel inners. The others had duffel inners of a more refined type. The duffel inners of the grey mitts were just kind of blanket wool mitts and they were for doing work around the hut, going out feeding the dogs, checking the dog spans, pulling the chains out of the ice. So those were the working gloves or mitts. The windproofs were ex-WD anorak, not tailored at all. It just came down .... I don't even know whether it had a draw-string on the sleeves or on the waist, well below the waist. It had a couple of tapes on the hood but that was about it.

[Part 1 0:36:17] Lee: When you say WD, you mean War Department?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:36:20] Lee: Do you mean khaki?

Coley: Yes. They were effective, very fine Ventile cloth, I think they called it. These are words popping up in my memory now, that I haven't used for years. It was a very fine weave and it was effective except that it wasn't tailored to fit. So you could almost go off like a balloon if the wind got up underneath it.

[Part 1 0:36:48] Lee: One of the drawbacks that later emerged was that it did make you look like you might be a soldier.

Coley: Of course. The whole kit, I realised only just recently, it made me realise that we were like an invading force. No wonder the Argentines got a bit uppity about it. George Marsh the doctor, Dave Stratton and Ken Blaiklock, certainly those three went ashore in their civvies, not in the gear.

[Part 1 0:37:25] Lee: At Hope Bay?

Coley: At Hope Bay when we eventually got a boat ashore and parleyed with the Argentines. But by this time they had reloaded one lot of our stores into their scow and brought it back alongside the *Biscoe*. Unfortunately (or fortunately) Captain Johnson, of the *Biscoe*, refused to accept it or sign for it because that would be recognising their authority. And so it wallowed in the sea, so a lot of our stores were certainly swamped by salt water.

[Part 1 0:38:16] Lee: We are leaping about a bit in time but that doesn't matter. We can go back a bit. So let's just look at this Hope Bay arrival a bit more closely then, because you were destined to go to Hope Bay?

.Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:38:30] Lee: To rebuild the hut?

Coley: That's right. Yes, I was in the party of twelve. We became fourteen because Jock Tait came up from Argentine Islands on the last trip of the *Biscoe*, with a very septic hand. And somehow, and I don't know how, it came about that Max Unwin also came onto our base, and it was a bit iffy about how he came to be at our base. I

think he was supposed to be a Met man but we only ever knew him as a gash hand, I forget what the official term was.

[Part 1 0:39:16] Lee: GA, General Assistant.

Coley: General Assistant, but I believe ... He never did a Met duty, so there is a story behind that but I don't know the official story.

[Part 1 0:39:29] Lee: But tell me how you saw the arrival at Hope Bay and the uppity Argentinians. How did that pan out for you?

Coley: Well we loaded the scow. It's manhandling stuff into the scow. We had nets down the side, and I guess they had a derrick and they lowered stuff as well. And we started taking all the cargo ashore. We had all the boxes of food, Met equipment, two great big crates containing diesel engines. We manhandled those. They were put on spars on top of the scow, not into it, and then we slid them off sideways and somehow manhandled them up the small ice cliff away from the tide crack, so they wouldn't fall back in the sea. Yes, it all had to be manhandled. There was no mechanical aid to do this at all. And we got on happily with this. And then during that I suppose there must have been this objection by the Argentines and the firing to warn us off. But we kept on, carried on regardless, as it were. This is where the Argentines brought the stuff back and Johnson wouldn't sign for it, and so on. As a result of that episode, we were very very fortunate, though it didn't turn out that way for the matelots on board the *Burghead Bay*.

[Part 1 0:41:36] Coley: The guard ship from the West Indies Fleet that was stationed in Stanley was dispatched to Hope Bay pronto when this incident happened. And the captain, seeing our dilemma, of having to sledge these stores up, on the Nansen if it was fairly light stuff or the Greenland sledge, he detailed each watch of matelots ashore and they manhailed it up for us, and that was fantastic. I don't know where we would have been without that. We had got the temporary hut up in no time, put the concrete pillars in, posts into the ground. It was prefabricated so it went up in a morning, wire strops over the top, installed (believe it or not) a two-burner Valor stove for us to cook for us. And we established ourselves in there. We had two chippies, I can't remember their names, who were Falkland Islanders, came down to help us with the huts and the main aim was to get as much done on the main hut as we could, to get us in residence there. So again, it was digging out all the holes for the concrete emplacements for the eyes for the wire strops to hold down the hut.

[Part 1 0:43:35] Coley: We also decided that we were going to build the hut on a ridge about 200-odd feet above sea level, not down by the sea where the old hut was, because that got drifted over. So we wanted it on a prominent ridge and we aligned it along the main wind direction which we got from the drifts of snow. We put it on these pillars so the wind would blow underneath and it was very successful. We had a door at each end and they did drift up, but we built porches with doors out to the side so there wasn't so much of a problem and there would be no danger of us being, as it were, iced in. And I think within a month or six weeks we were in the main hut, in the main building. We might have been cooking on Primus stoves. I don't know whether we got the Esse up and running in six weeks because there had to be a concrete base for that.

[Part 1 0:44:54] Lee: So did they configure the doors in such a way that if there was another fire, you would be able to get out, because the problem with the previous base was that the doors had all snowed up.

Coley: Yes. There were porches. The main doors of the original hut were on the end faces of the hut, a door opening out, straight out from there, so we built a porch, so we went out through the main hut door and had to turn right to get out, and in that way we didn't get much snow building up at all.

[Part 1 0:45:39] Lee: And those doors opened inwards, did they?

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 0:45:42] Lee: Just to go back to the shooting again, what is your memory of that, that moment, when the Argentinians opened fire.

Coley: It's very vague. I can't picture it all as it were, have an auditory memory of it. We must have been watching them going ashore with the first scow load, or was I a member of it, of that scow load? I can't ... I suppose if I must have been a member of that party going ashore, I would have really remembered it.

[Part 1 0:46:21] Lee: Mmm. Do you remember being frightened?

Coley: Yes, that's right. No, I can't remember whether I was a member of the party or not, Chris. I'm sorry.

[Part 1 0:46:34] Lee: That's all right. Don't worry. There's some episodes that you have made notes about here, of your time in Hope Bay, so perhaps we could look at one or two of these and there was a trip out to find a depot. You went out with Murdo, Murdo Tait.

Coley: Yes, well that was on the main sledge journey that we mounted as soon as we could in the winter as it set in. Again I would have to look at my diary to find the dates of that. I don't know whether I have mentioned it there or not but the aim of the first sledge journey was to fill in gaps in the mapping of James Ross Island. And it was chosen to do it a south-about way. So we went down the Crown Prince Gustav Channel and round into the channel between Snow Hill and James Ross Island, near where the glacier that became known as the Coley Glacier was to be found. And they came across open water. Jock and I were the support team to do that. We were running with extra dog pemmican and man rations which we depoted at Pedersen Island, in the Crown Prince Gustav Channel in a bay just on the southwest of James Ross.

[Part 1 0:48:21] Coley: We had been given notes from FIDS in London of the depot laying that previous parties had laid down, had carried out, so Jock and I set out for Cape Longing and picked up this very prominent short pinnacle of rock on the mainland and checked out the depot that had been laid, I think, at least four years previously and found everything intact. The jerry can full of paraffin, all the man rations, all the dog rations were OK and we left it intact and reported that back so that

it could be used on a journey further south. And we reached as far south as Cape Longing. I think that was on that first trip, because we did a second trip the next winter, early winter, to do the navigation round, the trip round James Ross, and it was decided to go as early as we possibly could round the north part of James Ross, and do the circumnavigation north-about, and that was successful, though it was pretty new ice that we were going over in places.

[Part 1 0:49:48] Lee: Is that when you got to the summit of James Ross Island ice cap?

Coley: No, I wasn't on that. As a result of their failure to circumnavigate it the first winter, I think it was on the way back, and this would have to be checked – on the way back they had time and they ran a survey route out of one of the bays and up to the summit of James Ross Island. That's George, David and Ken (George Marsh, Ken Blaiklock and Dave Stratton), and it would be the geologist – I have forgotten his name now.

[Part 1 0:50:56] Lee: We can look that up. Don't worry. You were there primarily to support the geologists, weren't you?

Coley: Really yes. Well I was given the training ... For three months I was in Stanley, I was doing Met duties.

[Part 1 0:51:12] Lee: That was at Stanley Met Office?

Coley: At Stanley Met Office. I was living in digs at Mrs McLeod's where a lot of the FIDS people used to lodge. So I was trained to a sufficient standard from their point of view. And so I was an extra Met man (or extraordinary Met man).

[Part 1 0:51:43] Lee: And then the geology work: what sort of work were you doing?

Coley: I didn't do much. If I was running independently of the geologist, Bob Stoneley, that's his name ...

[Part 1 0:51:54] Lee: Bob Stoneley?

Coley: Bob Stoneley, yes. He of course died and I think possibly his wife has died, but Ellie, his granddaughter, she has been in contact with FIDS recently, and picked up on the fact that there are some photos that she might pick up of her dad, that I had. Anyway ...

[Part 1 0:52:34] Lee: What I am interested in is when you were out in the field in support of geologists, what sort of things were you doing? Can you remember?

Coley: Knocking bits off rocks really, and I had an alidade, what do they call it? A portable one, where you can measure heights and the compass bearings. So I could get bearings on particular features and get an elevation, and therefore back at the base we could work out heights of particular things. So I was probably given specific things that had been missed out, or would I check on? But really it was a very kind of minor thing that I was doing. It was mainly that we were running the supplies. We dumped it

and got back as quick as we could, as fast as we could because we didn't want to be using up and picking up stuff from other depots on the way.

[Part 1 0:53:41] Lee: So you were obviously operating very much as a General Assistant, or a Sledging Assistant.

Coley: On a trip like that, yes.

[Part 1 0:53:53] Lee: Do you remember, were they finding anything unusual in the geological specimens?

Coley: No I don't think so. I can't remember anything special. The only thing special was what one of Nordenskjold's men found when they were ... They left two men to just spend the summer, but in fact it turned out to be two years at Hope Bay, and one of Nordenskjold's men, found right up on the flank of the mountain, some Jurassic age fossils. Which was, at the time, late 1800s, was a vital piece of that jigsaw that helped people to realise what was happening with the continents, because it was a tropical type fossil stuck high up in the Antarctic. But I can't remember anything about what Bob picked up, at all, no.

[Part 1 0:55:03] Lee: You had one or two problems with your own supplies back at the hut.

Coley: With what kind of supplies?

[Part 1 0:55:08] Lee: Well I am thinking particularly of the coal supplies.

Coley: Oh yes. Well Elliott of course knew exactly what was at the base when they left. I don't think he really knew the state of the old base site, and all the meat, American Lend-lease meat and veg, and the anthracite that he knew of, was buried. So in his estimation he allowed us so many bags of anthracite, I forget how many now, and they ran out. So towards the end of our first year we were burning blubber, anything that we could keep the Esse cooker going with, because we couldn't dig out enough sufficiently quickly to dry it out. Because that was the other thing: it was completely compacted with ice and when you dug it out, you had to leave it out on a tarpaulin to melt, to get the water off, to get the anthracite into a serviceable condition. So yes, we were pretty pissed off about that.

[Part 1 0:56:43] Lee: Were you cursing Frank Elliott's name?

Coley: Always, yes, but as I say, he knew what was there but he didn't know the condition it was in. Our dogs were starving as well.

[Part 1 0:56:57] Lee: Why was that?

Coley: Well we'd had this problem right at the beginning. The imperative was to get a habitable place in the main hut. And they then got us established ashore doing that. The Navy came and they helped us out, but we still had to build the hut, but they left us forty dogs to feed while we were building the hut, and there was no permanent population of seals in Hope Bay. And it came to a point where they were starving, so

again, George Marsh, Dave Stratton and Ken Blaiklock manhauled a sledge, a light small WD Nansen sledge with their kit, and tent and supplies, over to Duse Bay, killed a lot of seal, depoted them, brought one seal back, fed that to a team. And then they took that team, went over to Duse Bay and brought a seal and a half back, fed another team and gradually brought the team up to scratch again. There were plenty of seals there, so we decided to establish a base over at View Point, a tented base, and we used to do stints of a month at a time out there and feed the dogs. When they came back from a trip they would go in there, feed them up, and bring them back to base, that kind of thing. When the dogs were starving, we got down to the business of opening small cans of meat and veg for the dogs, and for forty dogs, the number of cans you needed, it was a crazy situation. So that's why we were so angry about the situation we had been put into.

[Part 1 0:59:15] Lee: So if you fed the dogs manfood, wasn't that causing another problem later on?

Coley: Well yes, it wasn't up to scratch for dogs. It was just meat and veg. It didn't satisfy their needs to keep them alive, never mind to work them.

[Part 1 0:59:31] Lee: But it also meant you were running out of supplies, did it, because later on that food would not be there for man food?

Coley: Well we never ran out of Irish beef steak, stewed steak, Irish stewed steak; that was it. We never ran out of that. There was a plentiful supply of that, so there was no worry about us being short, no. One of the things I did forget to say, that we built the temporary hut, we built the main hut, we got into it but also we had to get all the hydrogen cylinders into a hut which we then called the Balloon Hut. And that's where they were kept, well away from the main hut. And then there was a third hut put up at a later stage. I can't remember what that might have been for, but I think on the photos I can certainly see the emergency hut, the main hut and the balloon hut, and I think there was a fourth hut, but I can't remember what it was for.

[Part 1 1:00:50] Lee: So the shortage of seals, was that predictable or was that a surprise?

Coley: Was that ...

[Part 1 1:00:55] Lee: The shortage of seals around Hope Bay.

Coley: Yes, there just wasn't a permanent population.

[Part 1 1:01:00] Lee: Did FIDS HQ think there was?

Coley: I think they must have thought so. We soon let them know there wasn't and that we were having to send manhauling teams out because the dog teams had got into such a poor state. And we found plenty of seals in Duse Bay. The best point, as I said, was View Point but that was right across the bay and one time when Jock Tait and somebody else was over there (I think may have been Ken Powell in the second year, who was the diesel mechanic in the second year) were over there, the ice went out in Duse Bay and they had to get round all the glaciers. How they did that I don't know.

Jock's a pretty resourceful guy and he got them home but it must have been a pretty tough haul, that one.

[Part 1 1:02:04] Lee: I saw Ken last month.

Coley: Did you?

[Part 1 1:02:06] Lee: Yes, in Honiton in Devon.

Coley: Right.

[Part 1 1:02:09] Lee: I interviewed him.

Coley: Did he remember that?

[Part 1 1:02:12] Lee: Yes, he did.

Coley: It must have been hairy.

[Part 1 1:02:14] Lee: Yes. Let's pause, and we will take a short break and come back and do some more.

Coley: Yes.

[Part 1 1:02:26] [End of Part One]

Part Two

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Alan Coley, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 6th of June 2012. Alan Coley, Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:11] Lee: Let's just pick up on a couple of details from what we were talking about a while ago. The hut that you were building at Hope Bay, there was a problem with the insulation wasn't there?

Coley: That's right. It had been stored in Stanley on the Camber, from what I gather, because it had been intended for a base south of ..., I think it was going to be south of Stonington. I can't remember the name of it now.

[Part 2 0:00:43] Lee: Fossil Bluff?

Coley: Possibly. It was definitely intended to go in as another base and I think it was further south than Stonington and it had been left at the Camber. I don't know how many years it was there but in fact all the insulation disappeared. So there will be some nicely fitted out houses in Stanley. I don't think it went to Government House.

[Part 2 0:01:15] Lee: Some cosy hovels, were there?

Coley: Mm.

[Part 2 0:01:18] Lee: So did you have to replace the insulation?

Coley: We had no insulation. They didn't supply any more in replacement. A lot of the wood was rotten as well. We only had one layer of flooring board whereas there had been two layers I think. So what we did, with what bits of best wood we could, we put a decent layer, second layer down in the bunkroom, with a Ruberoid felt lining with it. And then the rest of the places: we collected all the wood from the packing cases, matched them up to size, and used those in the rest of the building. I think that the workshop and engine room didn't have a second floor. I'm not certain about that. But yes, it was a very gash set-up really. If it had been checked on, they hadn't done anything to remedy the loss of those things.

[Part 2 0:02:38] Lee: So did you wind up with a chilly hut or a cosy hut?

Coley: Oh it was freezing, yes freezing. We had three stoves in it you see, just three stoves and none of them ... yes one of them, the one in the Met room, radio room, was a slow combustion stove. You could put the doors together and seal it. The Esse was of course – that's a fourth stove – I had forgotten about that. The one in the living room was a slow burning stove but you couldn't clamp the doors together; you couldn't control the draught really. There was a control below the main doors but you could shut it right down but it wasn't as controllable. That's what I am trying to say. And then the third one was in the workshop which was used for washing our own clothes which we had the upkeep of that stove on a rota basis, one day in a period of fourteen days if there were fourteen on the base. And they all burned the anthracite of course. Again that one in the workshop wasn't a sophisticated one. It wasn't really controllable in the fine sense. So yes, that was the situation.

[Part 2 0:04:28] Lee: So was there no insulation at all? You couldn't even use silver foil or baking...?

Coley: No we didn't have anything apart from Ruberoid felt. I think we had loads of Ruberoid felt. I can't remember now whether there was an insulation layer of Ruberoid felt put on in between the two boards or not. And the windows of course were double, but they were ordinary opening sash windows. They were fitted very badly and certain windows let the snow in in a blizzard. Ken Blaiklock used to wake up with a small drift on his bed, all dressed up in his gear including his wolverine hooded anorak, blanket anorak, he used to wear that, and piles of stuff on his bed.

[Part 2 0:05:25] Coley: We all drew lots for position in the bunkroom. And call it a bunkroom? We decided when we saw the plans of how it was intended to be arranged was: it was in cubicles of two people and we threw that out straightaway. We said we were going to have the space in one bunkroom, which we did. So we then drew lots for the bunks. The ones obviously on the outside walls had got the coldest bunks. Coley was lucky in that he drew the lot for the bunk by the door into the galley. So I had the heat from the galley to come the other side of the partition. They were double sided partitions but again, no insulation in between. So yes, it was a pretty perishing place.

[Part 2 0:06:19] Lee: When you were building the hut, was it a kit you were building from?



Coley: It was a Boulton & Paul manufactured hut and it was all labelled in the sense that each of the main roof struts and partitions were labelled A, B, C, D, E, F, G and so on down there and so it was like putting a kit together. And of course we had two chippies with us as well; they helped. So there was no problem in constructing it. It was pretty straightforward. It was just that it had to be constructed one spar at a time: A1, 2, 3 all had to be slotted together and get them all ready and then put them in one by one. It was just a slow business and very disheartening when you saw the Argentines down there with a great big hut, much bigger than ours and the thing was walled and roofed in a day, certainly, probably half a day. They just went up in big pre-fabricated sections. So we felt a very neglected and backward kind of set-up.

[Part 2 0:07:52] Lee: So theirs was prefab and yours was more Airfix kit, was it?

Coley: Yes, that's right, yes. I can't think of anything more to say about the main hut. The other two were easy to put together because they were a matter of pre-fabrication sides and walls and roof.

[Part 2 0:08:18] Lee: When you were struggling to feed the dogs, did they all survive, or were there some casualties?

Coley: I think we lost three or four, or possibly more, over a period of say two or three months. Unless I read my diary, I wouldn't be able to give you the detail of that but we realised we had to get on with getting the accommodation fixed and then the next thing was getting parties out to feed the dogs, either by taking them over to Duse Bay, or bringing seal back.

[Part 2 0:08:54] Lee: What did you do with the dead dogs?

Coley: I don't know. I can't remember that detail, Chris.

[Part 2 0:09:04] Lee: All right.

Coley: Whether you close it out of your mind, or what. If it had happened when we were on a sledge journey, we would have fed them to the other dogs. I mean they were voracious; they would scoop up anything. If you had been to the toilet and if they got off, they would go round.

[Part 2 0:09:30] Lee: You had a radio room. Pete King ...

Coley: Yes, that's right.

[Part 2 0:09:36] Lee: ... had a radio room. Were you all welcome in there, from time to time?

Coley: I wouldn't say it was a kind of general thing, you were all welcome. There were certain times ... When he was busy, receiving particularly, or sending messages out, he didn't want to be messed about, or bothered with by people. But we used to gather round for ...

There was a Falkland Islands broadcast that we used to listen to: *Messages to the Bases*, when they read them out. It was a bit hit and miss, the reception, particularly in the winter time, but I was very fortunate in that we happened to be listening one time and a request came through from my mum and dad. I think it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, something like that, which was very touching. And then all the rest came in by Morse and we were limited to send out one hundred words a month because there were fourteen of us, so it was limited to that; George limited it to that.

[Part 2 0:11:06] Lee: That was by the Morse? But your parents, when you heard the psalm, that was by voice was it?

Coley: That was from the Falkland Islands radio programme that they broadcast. I think it was a special programme to the bases, a bit like *Forces Favourites*, something like that.

[Part 2 0:11:26] Lee: So that was regular?

Coley: I was very fortunate in that it was almost by chance that I heard it.

[Part 2 0:11:32] Lee: So would your parents have written to the Falklands?

Coley: Yes. They could mail to FIDS Office London, I think, and they could also send airmail to FIDS Stanley and perhaps put 'For Broadcast' or something like that on.

[Part 2 0:11:56] Lee: We have just been celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee but you remember listening to the Coronation?

Coley: Oh yes, we crowded round and I have a shot, Midwinter, of the temporary hut where we had a flagpole and the Union Jack full out, beautiful sunshine. Yes, Coronation Day.

[Part 2 0:12:21] Lee: But did all fourteen of you listen to the broadcast of the Coronation?

Coley: I can't remember whether we were all there or whether there were some out on a sledge trip. I might have to check the detail in my diary to get the number.

[Part 2 0:12:37] Lee: But you heard it yourself?

Coley: Those that were there would be listening, yes.

[Part 2 0:12:43] Lee: What was communication with the sledging parties like?

Coley: It was very chancy, is the word I think. You couldn't rely on it at all, because we just had ex-Army 68T sets which were the ones that the infantry uses in the Army in the trenches, a steel-framed thing which Pete King took the innards out of it, the actual wireless set out of it, and made a plywood case to cut down the weight so that we could use it. And the rule was: George Marsh had asked all the other bases to listen out on the scheduled times when we would be trying to get in contact with Hope Bay. Reception at Hope Bay was pretty bad really, but Geoff Collop at Port Lockroy

was a great guy. I went down with him on the *Biscoe*. We had a hell of a time, sick as could be. I became quite friendly with him. He particularly was ... I think he was an ex-RAF radio operator and he particularly coordinated it.

[Part 2 0:14:07] Lee: There's something about having to warm up the dry batteries from time to time.

Coley: Yes, we hung them up over the primus stove from the tapes, you know the tapes that you hang your clothes from, in the centre of the pyramid tent, when the primus was on. We didn't put the primus on specifically to warm it up, we hadn't got the paraffin to do that. We warmed it up when the stove was on and kept it warm, or had a sched when we were about to eat, or something like that.

[Part 2 0:14:43] Lee: So you would actually warm the battery up in the field, before you could make communication back to base?

Coley: Yes, yes. It was pretty pointless trying to make contact if you hadn't warmed it up, yes.

[Part 2 0:15:01] Lee: Tell me a bit about George Marsh, because he was a doctor on the base, wasn't he? But he had an accident of his own I believe.

Coley: Yes, he was a great guy. He was, in my opinion, a very very good base leader. He read people very well and he dealt with situations in a very diplomatic but firm manner. As I say, he dealt with Jock Tait and his septic hand and any other scratches and bruises, things that we came up against. But his role was handed over to Ken Blaiklock because we saw a seal on a floe, so we launched the pram dinghy with its two oars and two blokes in it. They rowed out to the floe and thought it was a Weddell seal, with no idea what other kind of seal it was, got onto the floe and we had an iron picket with a big ball on the end, that the Army used to use. We used those to picket the spans, the dog spans, and we used to use one of those that was spare to go and kill the seals.

[Part 2 0:16:37] Coley: With the Weddell you just hit them on the head and they were out cool and you slit their throat and get on with the job. George went to do this to this seal and it raised its head and launched a bite and it got him in the arm. I don't know who it was with him but realised ... I think it was possibly Ken Blaiklock, realised that this was serious, jumped out of the boat, threw the boat anchor onto the floe, grabbed one of the oars and started beating the seal about the body to try and put it off. And in fact it did open its mouth and let George go. So Ken had the pleasure of stitching George up when they got him back to base. But it certainly was a very near thing. If it had got him into the sea, that would have been it – a very powerful seal is the leopard seal, very sleek.

[Part 2 0:17:4] Lee: I'm surprised that there hadn't been any training about leopard seals. You'd not been warned about them?

Coley: No, not to my knowledge.

[Part 2 0:18:03] Lee: I'm sure you are right. There was very little training.

Coley: There wasn't, no.

[Part 2 0:18:06] Lee: Post-war.

Coley: No. I mean if Ken had come up against, if it was Ken that was with George, if he had come up against a leopard seal before, it obviously did not show on that occasion until George was actually being bitten.

[Part 2 0:18:26] Lee: Did George recover?

Coley: Oh yes. Ken Blaiklock stitched him up. We all sat round watching him stitch George up much to our pleasure and George's chagrin.

[Part 2 0:18:46] Lee: There was a bit of a diplomatic kerfuffle when the Argentinian base was expanded. There was an Argentinian base opened up at Hope Bay.

Coley: Yes, that's right.

[Part 2 0:19:02] Lee: And then was it not expanded on the east side of Snow Hill Island?

Coley: That's right. It was very puzzling. These supply ships, the *Bahia Bueno* and *Bahia Suceso*<sup>2</sup>, used to come in during the open season, drop things off and then disappear and would only be away for 24 hours or a couple of days and then they would be back again. It was very puzzling and it wasn't until some time later that it was found that they had established a base on the east side of Snow Hill Island. We hadn't a clue when we were down there and the *Biscoe* didn't go down there. Nor did the *Burghead Bay*; the *Bay* came in and out. They were poling off icebergs and things. They wanted to get away again. So those two ships didn't go down to explore, to see what was happening, but that's what it turned out. I don't know how I learned about that, because the other thing is: I found out that there was a colony of emperor seals on the east side of Snow Hill.

[Part 2 0:20:29] Lee: Emperor Seals or penguins?

Coley: Emperor penguins, sorry. Yes, emperor penguins, and this had been a puzzle to us, had the emperor penguins, because (again I can't remember whether it was the first year or the second year trip) we camped quite nearby a hole that the seals were obviously keeping open, to keep coming up. We thought it was a good spot to get a seal or two, to feed the dogs and to feed us as well on this trip. And we woke one morning to a heck of a noise. The dogs were in a frenzy about something or other, so we poked our heads out and there were two sleepy emperor penguins by this hole. And at that time, the only place we knew of, emperor colonies, were over in the Ross Sea side<sup>3</sup>. So it was quite an interesting thing that they had in fact at some time established a colony on the east side of Snow Hill. As a result of thinking about that,

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<sup>2</sup> Three Argentinian supply ships at that time were *Bahia Buen Suceso*, *Bahia Aguirre* and *Bahia Thetis*, all built in Halifax, Nova Scotia (*Antarctica: An Encyclopedia*, Stewart, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> A colony had been discovered on the Dion Islands in 1948 (Bernard Stonehouse, Oral History interview).

and the things like the *March of the Penguins*, I have a theory that the penguins marched seventy miles inland because they first established their rookery in an interglacial.

[Part 2 0:22:04] Lee: How do you mean?

Coley: Well the ice on the Antarctic would have been much smaller and perhaps even sea level higher and so they came ashore and marched or even got out of the water. I don't know. I haven't got the figures of the lie of the land and so on, but why would penguins march seventy miles inland?

[Part 2 0:22:35] Lee: So they had a folk memory of a historic breeding ground?

Coley: That's what I was thinking. I don't know. It's complete conjecture.

[Part 2 0:22:43] Lee: Interesting. So was there any fraternisation with the Argentinians?

Coley: Yes. On my desk you see one of the first pictures is a party down at the Argentinian hut. After the brouhaha of the initial landing, and the handing over of the usual Protests – a thing which was a kind of ritual – we got to know them and they were very hospitable. I got to know the geologist very well. I think his name was Diaz, but I'm not certain. I would have to look at my diary again. So there was a person there that I could relate to. He spoke good English as well and it got so good, did this relationship, that they gave us a demi-john and we had to go down and fill it up whenever we needed, because their wine was brought in tuns. Is that what they call a big barrel? A great big barrel of wine, and when we were just getting (I think I mentioned this before) one bottle of gin, one bottle of whisky, one can of beer a fortnight, that was quite a good supplement to our intake. So we became quite friendly with them. The commander was a fellow called Eduardo Kelly<sup>4</sup>, or something of that name, obviously from the Isle of Man, or his antecedents at one time.

[Part 2 0:24:38] Lee: So whilst you were fraternising OK at ordinary Fid level, at a higher level was there antagonism between the two bases, between the two governments?

Coley: I don't think so. It was a kind of acceptance of the situation between ... I can't remember any kind of messages coming through that we shouldn't do this or that or complain to the Argentines about whatever.

[Part 2 0:25:13] Lee: So Frank Elliott wasn't getting worried Fids ...? HQ weren't concerned?

Coley: No. I think it was just an accepted situation which had calmed down and things were going reasonably smoothly from our point of view. We even had a visit by a group that had sledged over from the Chilean base at Legoupil<sup>5</sup> and they had great big

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<sup>4</sup> The leader of Esperanza station in 1953 is given as Juan Carlos Kelly by Stewart (*Antarctica: An Encyclopedia*, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> General Bernardo O'Higgins Station.

huskies. I think they must have been from Russia – great big dogs, not like our motley collection.

[Part 2 0:26:01] Lee: This chap Jock (or Murdo) Tait was obviously quite a character, wasn't he?

Coley: He was.

[Part 2 0:26:07] Lee: Because wasn't there some practical joke about some new 12-inch records?

Coley: That's right. He was also always into brightening the base up and he burst in one time when we were all in the bunkroom and said 'I have just found a case and I found some new records in .' So we got the wind-up gramophone out and he brought them in and we sat back and listened and it was an absolute musical cacophony, an unbearable noise. And he had a great big laugh because what he had done, he had drilled a hole in each of the 12-inch records, slightly off centre, and so you can imagine the noise that it would produce when you put the arm of the needle down on it. He had a great big joke about it. He didn't ruin them. You could play them normally but that was it. I think we had about 48 12-inch records for our recreation; something like that.

[Part 2 0:27:17] Lee: You must have known them all off by heart?

Coley: I suppose I did. I don't remember any of them now. They were all classical, I think. There might have been some early shows but I can't remember them.

[Part 2 0:27:30] Lee: How many years, then, did you do in the Antarctic altogether?

Coley: Two and a half altogether. I was two and a quarter on the base because I was Deputy Base Leader and took over the base when a new commitment was given to George to go over onto Joinville Island, I think it was, when the boat came in on the first trip. We had to have everything ready: dogs, rations, sledges, men, ready to go on to the *Biscoe*, and they took them across to Joinville Island where they did a survey. New base members had come in but I was one of the older members and so I took over the base for about three months during the summer season. And then I spent another three months on the *Biscoe* because we sailed southwards and went into the Argentine Islands and built a new base there which was in preparation for the Geophysical Year. I think that was in '55<sup>6</sup>. Again that would have to be checked. So again, Johnny Raymond was the carpenter; he came down and we built the new Argentine base there. So that takes up the other three months of my two and a half.

[Part 2 0:29:17] Lee: Well the IGY was 1957.

Coley: Was it? So it was in good time for that, then. Right, yes.

[Part 2 0:29:25] Lee: And you were building what became Faraday?

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<sup>6</sup> The International Geophysical Year was actually 18 months from 1 July 1957 to 31 December 1958.

Coley: I suppose that was it, I can't remember that bit, Chris, no.

[Part 2 0:29:35] Lee: So when did you come out, back to Stanley? Was that '55?

Coley: Yes. Going back to the new base, Faraday, no steel was used in its construction.

[Part 2 0:29:49] Lee: There's a reason for that?

Coley: I think I'm right in saying they were copper nails. I may be wrong about that; they may be something else instead of steel for that project. It was special in that sense.

[Part 2 0:30:05] Lee: And the reason was?

Coley: To keep out extraneous magnetic influences I guess. Yes, I remember something being mentioned about that. Whether I got the actual fact right, I don't know.

[Part 2 0:30:20] Lee: I think you are right because they were doing magnetic work.

Coley: That's right, yes. And it was there that they found the hole in the reflective layer.

[Part 2 0:30:39] Lee: The ozone layer?

Coley: Ozone layer, yes.

[Part 2 0:30:44] Lee: Thirty years later?

Coley: Well I think it was an indication that there was a diminution in the magnetic reflection.

[Part 2 0:31:01] Lee: What, even in your day?

Coley: Yes. I think it was that base that discovered that, I think. It would have to be checked out with that. I may have got it completely wrong, but that sticks in my mind, yes.

[Part 2 0:31:17] Lee: When you got back to Stanley, you did some teaching?

Coley: Yes, I was very very fortunate. Having got this Teacher Certificate, the Education Office were short of staff at the secondary school in Stanley, because a number of the British teachers, expats as they were called, had gone home on leave, and so they were short of teachers. So I was able to fill in for nine months, teaching in the Falklands, and that was a great relief to me, to be able to do that because it meant I didn't have to come back home on the *Biscoe*. I came back home on the Royal Mail Ship *Alcantara*. The only thing was that as the *Fitzroy*, the Falkland Islands Company ship sailed into Montevideo, the *Alcantara* was sailing out. We missed it by a few hours, so I was in Montevideo over Christmas for a fortnight, three weeks, I'm not

quite certain how long. But I remembered the welcome I got at the Methodist church and went back there and joined their life and was royally entertained. It made a big difference, and then sailed home on the *Alcantara*.

[Part 2 0:32:47] Lee: So how did you spend Christmas Day?

Coley: Again I would have to refer to the diary but I've no doubt I went to church and would be well entertained by one of the families. Whether it was the Jones family or not, I can't remember.

[Part 2 0:33:08] Lee: To go back to the secondary school in Stanley, can you describe it to me? Was it extensive or just a couple of huts?

Coley: Oh no. If I remember rightly .... I may be confusing it with the town hall. Whether it was in the same building as the town hall, I can't remember. I seem to remember it as being on the front road. But again my memory fails me on that, Chris.

[Part 2 0:33:38] Lee: What do you recall of the pupils? Were they well-dressed or rough and ready?

Coley: Again I haven't got the detail but it didn't strike me that they were scruffy at all. I think they were well turned out but again I couldn't swear on that, no.

[Part 2 0:34:03] Lee: Was the school a happy place?

Coley: My memory of it is that it was a happy place. There was a Mr Draycott in charge and the secretary was a Falkland Island woman, a young person, Joan Andersen, and another Falkland Islander whose name I have forgotten. I have photographs of them and I may have a reference to her name. Those were the two that I remember, three that I remember.

[Part 2 0:34:58] Lee: Did you ever have occasion to go back to the Antarctic after you came home from Stanley?

Coley: I didn't, no.

[Part 2 0:35:05] Lee: By choice or ...?

Coley: Sorry, would I have liked to have gone back?

[Part 2 0:35:10] Lee: Yes.

Coley: I wouldn't have minded going back at all. As I say, the Queen stepped in, in having me serve two more years. And then I thought I had better get back into mainstream teaching, because I was getting on for 27 by that time, when I came out of the RAF. So yes, I would very much like to go down on a trip now, like the one that Brian Hunt went on just recently, but that hasn't been possible. We have a person in the village, goes to the Anglican church, and she has just come back from an Antarctic cruise. So I have got to fix up with her to go and show my slides to her.



[Part 2 0:36:11] Lee: Show each other your slides. She can show you hers.

Coley: That's right, yes, better up to date ones.

[Part 2 0:36:15] Lee: Most Fids are deeply shocked by how far the ice has retreated.

Coley: Yes, that's just what Brian Hunt said to me. 'You just wouldn't recognise it now.' When he went down on the ex-Russian icebreaker into the Weddell. As I say, it is just completely different, yes.

[Part 2 0:36:36] Lee: The Polar Medal,

Coley: Right, yes.

[Part 2 0:36:39] Lee: Which you received from the Queen.

Coley: Yes. I usually have it in the bedroom but my cousin was here just a few days ago and was rummaging round through my Antarctic stuff and asked if he could take the ... No, he has taken a lot of my stuff and a friend at church has borrowed the Polar Medal to fit in on a picture of my mum and dad when we went to Buckingham Palace. I can't show you that but yes, it was a great event, particularly for my parents and my two sisters. The unfortunate thing is: I didn't see anything of it, in that I was the last of the medals to be presented. I was the last person to be presented with a medal and therefore I was in an ante-room, waiting, under the command of the liveried gentleman. I marched down the long room in my RAF uniform and stood in front of the Queen. She spoke to me and said something – I can't remember what it was – and then pinned it on my tunic.

[Part 2 0:38:06] Coley: And as soon as I got into the doorway, they struck up with *God Save the Queen*. So that was my experience. I didn't see any of the other but my parents and two sisters were in the ranks of people watching, and they saw all of it. My two sisters don't remember very much of it. I have asked them what went on, but they were very pleased to be there. In fact they both came down to the St Pauls dedication of the plaque in the Crypt. Being that age, 17 and 19 years younger than me, they followed all that I did and read my diaries I sent them back home. And they wrote air-letters to me and so on. So they have a great attachment as well.

[Part 2 0:39:14] Lee: The Polar Medal almost got you into trouble later on, on the Isle of Man.

Coley: Yes. Yes, I kept my cool. The Queen was going to visit the Isle of Man and I was in the initial training wing of the RAF in the Isle of Man, at RAF Jurby, and they were selecting people for the honour guard, and I was selected and placed on the front row, obviously by the Group Captain, Officer Commanding of the station, because I was a little bit different. And we had a preliminary inspection by an old Air Marshall who came down the line checking everybody to see that we were fit to be presented to the Queen, and he stopped in front of me and with his stick pointed and touched me on the chest, by my Polar Medal ribbon, and said 'That will have to come off.' Fortunately I had the presence of mind just to say 'Sir, that is the Polar Medal.' And

the Group Captain Station Commander tried to quickly move him on before he made any more faux pas.

[Part 2 0:40:44] Coley: Yes, so we sailed through that one. It also caused consternation at Kinloss when I presented the letter from the people that issue invitations to become invested with their honour to my Commanding Officer at Kinloss. He read it. His eyes brightened and shone and said 'Right, Coley, we will have to do something about this. Come and see me this afternoon.' So I went away, came back. 'Right, I have fixed up ...' he said. 'It's going to be a Number One job.' So I said 'Number One, Sir? I am a National Serviceman. I don't have Number Ones.' 'Oh, oh, right. Right, come and see me tomorrow.'

[Part 2 0:41:48] Lee: What's a Number One, Alan?

Coley: Number One is best RAF blue uniform, Number One Dress, and as a National Serviceman, you don't get issued with a Number One. We had to make do with the Royal Air Force blue battledress and trousers. So I went the next day and he informed me that the Station Anson, which is a twin-engine plane that was at the disposal of the Station Commander, would fly me down to an aerodrome near Cranwell, Spitalgate, where the officer cadets were housed, in training to become officers. If they failed, they handed their uniform back in and went back into the ranks. So there were surplus uniforms. I was issued with one and kitted up with it. I don't know whether they put the medal ribbon on but somehow I got the medal ribbon. Whether there was a station tailor who did it or not, I can't remember, put the medal ribbon on. And the only cost to me was £5 to buy my hat, which had to be a Number One hat, and I was kitted out to go to meet the Queen.

[Part 2 0:43:39] Coley: The only thing I can remember about that was: when I was in the Isle of Man, doing the training, and selected for this parade, when it came to the actual Fall In for the parade, I couldn't find my gloves anywhere, which we had to be wearing. I searched all over the place in a panic, daren't mention it to the officer (CO), and fortunately one of the other guys said 'Here, have mine.' They were in the peak of my hat all the time but I was again saved. My memory in those days, you see, wasn't good. In fact the memory goes back to the Antarctic, the lack of it. Do I tell it to myself out on that main sledge journey the first time, we didn't remember to take the met instruments that Brian Hampden had assembled for us. We had a whirling hygrometer, wet and dry bulb, for use for temperature and wet bulb, and aneroid barometer for altitude, for going onto shelf ice and so on. So we were kitted out with that, but we forgot them. So Ken Blaiklock said 'You will have to use ours.' He reluctantly let us do it.

[Part 2 0:45:11] Lee: The other incident I would like you to tell me about took place in the Tower of London, concerning the Polar Medal.

Coley: Yes. Going to the investiture, Mum and Dad and my two sisters had time to visit the Tower of London and they went to the Jewel House to look at that, Dad being very interested, and the children I suppose as well. I wasn't there. And one of the warders did his spiel, saying 'All the medals that have ever been struck and issued by the monarchs of the realm are in this display cabinet here.' So they walked round it, Mum and Dad, looking at things and apparently Dad was specifically looking for the

Polar Medal. So he went up to the warden and said 'They are not all there' or something of that kind. 'Oh yes they are Sir!' That was the kind of riposte. 'No no, they are not. Show me the Polar Medal.' said my father, and that meant that the fellow in fact couldn't find the Polar Medal on display. So again, my father was one up. And I don't know whether they have remedied that situation; I have never been back to the Jewel House since but perhaps they have.

[Part 2 0:46:51] Lee: That was in the 1950s, was it when you ...?

Coley: That was when I was up in London for investiture in 1956 it would be, yes '56. I was married in '57.

[Part 2 0:47:13] Lee: Well they have had 50 years to get it right, haven't they?

Coley: Yes, they should have got it right by now.

[Part 2 0:47:17] Lee: Looking back now, Alan, in what way do you think those years in the Antarctic changed you and your future life?

Coley: Well, I think it made my life completely different. I think if I had done National Service and then gone into teaching with my kind of poor academic background, I wouldn't have done very much apart from the fact that I might ..., since I had done a supplementary part of my diploma, teacher's qualification, in physical education, I might have made something through that, because Outdoor Pursuits was beginning to flourish at that time. But the fact that I had been down South meant that I was a completely different person on a piece of paper for anybody reading my curriculum vitae for employment purposes, and that is how the headmaster at the prep school to Gordonstoun picked me out. I don't think he would have picked me out otherwise, without my Antarctic experience. And I think meeting the people I did, from all walks of life, public school, ex- Merchant Navy seamen, wireless operator, gave me a breadth of understanding of other people, particularly in a close situation like we were in.

[Part 2 0:48:57] Coley: And travelling and meeting people in so many different places certainly gave me a confidence which I wouldn't probably have had previously, and I think it made a vast difference. I eventually did a Master's degree. I got an MPhil in a completely different area. Through a contact in the Bradford University, I became attached to the Yugoslav Studies Department at Bradford University. Now my interest in Yugoslavia started through my research into British national parks, but Dorothy (my wife) has a cousin in Athens so we made two trips out to Athens in our Volkswagen camper van, and this fellow geographer, when he knew I was going out through Yugoslavia (as it was then) said 'Oh I can put you in contact with people in national park work in both Slovenia and Macedonia.'

[Part 2 0:50:25] Coley: So I met people in both places, and in the case of the people in Stamopetavin [phonetic] in Ljubljana we became so friendly that the family visited us at least once here, and I was able to show him and help him to meet people in the national parks here, particularly in the Lake District which was nearby where we lived in Yorkshire. And also, as I say, I met Filipovski in Skopje in Macedonia. So it is things like that that helped broaden my understanding and my experience, that all

came out of my Antarctic trip and meeting people in the Falklands and South America. Even in Punta Arenas I met a person, I can't remember his name now, and he gave me some American dollars to buy sets of Falkland Islands stamps, to be mailed back to him, which I did. It is things like that that broadens one's life and understanding.

[Part 2 0:25:56] Lee: Well that has been marvellous. Thank you very much indeed, Alan. Thank you.

Coley: Yes, thank you very much. It's been great reminiscing.

[Part 2 0:52:05] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:21:09] Cramped conditions on the Biscoe.
- [Part 1 0:23:13] Porcupine ship.
- [Part 1 0:33:05] Antarctic kit in the sixties.
- [Part 1 0:39:29] Hope Bay arrival opposed by the Argentines.
- [Part 1 0:55:08] Coal stocks buried.
- [Part 1 0:56:57] No seals for dog food at Hope Bay.
- [Part 2 0:01:18] Freezing cold hut - no insulation.
- [Part 2 0:05:25] Drawing lots for places in the bunkroom.
- [Part 2 0:14:07] Warming the sledging radio batteries.
- [Part 2 0:15:01] Encounter with a leopard seal.
- [Part 2 0:19:02] A secret Argentinian base on Snow Hill Island.
- [Part 2 0:22:43] A wine supply from the Argentine base.
- [Part 2 0:26:07] Practical joke drilling gramophone records.