

GRAHAM DAVIS

Edited transcript of a recording of Graham Davis interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 8th June 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/144. Transcribed by Murray Roberts February 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:01] Lee: This is Graham Davis interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 8th June 2012. Graham Davis Part 1.

Davis: Graham Davis. Born in Tottenham, London – 24 [?] Bedford Road, Tottenham, London – and I was there on and off for up to 30 years.

[Part 1 0:00:24] Lee: What is your date of birth, Graham?

Davis: 13th August 1931.

[Part 1 0:00:28] Lee: So how old are you now? You're 80?

Davis: Just gone 80. Going on to 81

[Part 1 0:00:36] Lee: You don't look it.

Davis: Must be the tablets!

[Part 1 0:00:40] Lee: Was your father an educated man?

Davis: I wouldn't say so really because my father was born in 1900. So he was the end of the Victorian era. I wouldn't say he was highly educated. Very intelligent, but not educated, and he was a bus driver in London. He drove a bus until he was 70 in London.

[Part 1 0:01:06] Lee: Seventy?

Davis: Oh they used to in those days, but these days I think they limit it to 65. They had to have a medical every year but he drove it until then. And then of course he was an enterprising man and he went on a college course to learn about silver and trademarks. Then he worked in the markets fleecing the tourists.

[Part 1 0:01:32] Lee: What about your education?

Davis: Well, normal for the time I suppose. Infant School, Middle School and then I went to the Grammar School. Due to family circumstances I had to leave before we took any exams. I had to leave at 16 when they were going on to 18 in the grammar school at that time. But really I never qualified in anything at school. I never got any certificates for anything.

[Part 1 0:02:07] Lee: So how did your career in radio come up?

Davis: I went to – of course – did National Service in the RAF and after you do the square bashing period they take you into a big hanger where you have to choose a trade to be trained in and there wasn't much going at that time. There was something like batman or general orderly, and the only thing that interested me was Wireless Operator, so I took that as a course. I did a 12 week training course in the RAF and subsequently went out to Hong Kong.

[Part 1 0:02:52] Lee: Do you know where your interest in wireless sprang from?

Davis: Well it wasn't an interest as such. It's just that I wanted to do something a bit different. I wouldn't say I was madly keen on radio or wireless technology, or anything like that. But it was the only interesting one available and you had to choose.

[Part 1 0:03:16] Lee: In the RAF?

Davis: Yes

[Part 1 0:03:18] Lee: Were you a technically minded lad – do you think?

Davis: I wouldn't say I was very technically minded, but of course that did have a bit of a bearing on when I joined FIDS. I wasn't greatly advanced technically, I would say. In the RAF course it was merely learning Morse, but the technical side was probably limited to about a 3 week course in tuning transmitters and that sort of thing. That was all. Nothing very deep at all.

[Part1 0:03:54] Lee: What do you think was your first awareness that there might be a place on this planet called the Antarctic?

Davis: Well, after leaving the RAF I worked in London, I worked for Remington Rand repairing electric shavers for about a year. Then being in my early 20's I was looking around for something else and then I saw an advert in a magazine – I don't know if it is extant now – called *Wireless world*, which had an advert for radio operators and technicians required for the Antarctic. So I just applied.

[Part 1 0:04:34] Lee: Why did you apply?

Davis: Because I wanted to get something I thought might be more interesting, to get my interest going better than repairing electric shavers.

[Part 1 0:04:49] Lee: So what did you know about the Antarctic? Had you read about it?

Davis: No absolutely nothing. I mean the usual things – you know films and that.

[Part 1 0:05:00] Lee: You'd seen John Mills had you?

Davis: John Mills, yes. *Scott of the Antarctic* but that was about the limit of my knowledge of the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:05:10] Lee: So this was just a lucky punt on your behalf?

Davis: I suppose you could call it that. Yes. Of course if there had been something else interesting I might have gone for that.

[Part 1 0:05:19] Lee: So you were called for interview?

Davis: And I went up for interview – Millbank – and the interview team were Dr Vivian Fuchs, Ray Adie who was 2nd in Command of FIDS at that time, and the equipment and supplies man Bill Sloman. They asked me a few questions and I showed them the certificates I had on demob from the RAF and then I remember this Bill Sloman. He got his pencil out and he tapped. 'Well tell me what that said in Morse' he said. And I said 'Well I'm afraid I can't tell Morse by tapping it. Tapping with a pencil is not the best way.' Anyway he said 'You'll be alright.' That was it. I must have been about 15 minutes in the interview. They just asked me how I felt about living in a remote place with just five or six other people.

[Part1 0:06:27] Lee: Looking back do you think they were more interested in you as a man than you as a radio man? They wanted to know how you would get on?

Davis: That was part of it, they wanted to feel how you were and how you would get on with people and in the end it was very brief, but I carried on there and eventually I got a letter saying you'd been accepted.

[Part 1 0:06:56] Lee: Did you also get the sense that they were quite short of radio operators?

Davis: Oh yes, yes. That was it. If they hadn't been short I don't think I would have got the job.

[Part 1 0:07:06] Lee: It might have been very different?

Davis: Yes, it might have taken a different path altogether.

[Part 1 0:07:11] Lee: So when the letter arrived, Graham, and suddenly this dream became a bit of a reality, how were you feeling at that point?

Davis: Well I was feeling a bit elated really, because first of all I got the acceptance letter and then they said 'Oh, you can go down to Cambridge to Dr Vivian Fuch's house.' They had various bits of equipment on display in his garden in Cambridge.

[Part 1 0:07:39] Lee: Camping gear – that kind of thing?

Davis: Camping gear – yes, that's right. Because even then it didn't mean a lot to me because I wasn't a camping person.

[Part 1 0:07:50] Lee: You weren't an out-door person?

Davis: Not really, no. So that was it. I went there and got the letter saying to report to the *John Biscoe* – the ship – at Southampton docks, at berth so and so. I can't remember the berth number.

[Part1 0:08:07] Lee: What was your memory of Vivian Fuchs? What sort of a man was he?

Davis: He was a very kind man. He was a gentleman really and he seemed to get on with everybody really well.

[Part 1 0:08:24] Lee: What was his house like?

Davis: Oh, it was very big to me. I was living in a two up, two down, one out the back in London at the time. So I mean it was a magnificent house to me, because I don't think I had ever been in a house like that before.

[Part1 0:08:41] Lee: Extensive gardens?

Davis: Oh yes a very big garden. He had a husky that he brought up from his previous Antarctic expeditions. Darkie, I think he called it.

[Part 1 0:08:56] Lee; quite right

Davis: Is it?

[Part 1 0:08:57] Lee: Yes, that's right. The old grey cells are still working! Darkie – he brought it with him to Cambridge and he lived out the rest of his life in Cambridge. Did they send you off for any training between being appointed and?

Davis: No, not at all.

[Part 1 0:09:13] Lee: Nothing at all?

Davis: No. That was the last thing. The interview; the letter to go and visit Cambridge – Dr Fuchs and Ray Adie was there as well, I think; and the next letter I got was just to report to the *John Biscoe* at Southampton docks.

[Part 1 0:09:30] Lee: What did you think of the ship when you saw it?

Davis: Well, I distinctly remember. I got a taxi from the station, gave the driver the berth number and when we got there he said: 'there's nothing here. Are you sure you got the right berth?' And then we saw the two masts sticking out of the end of quay on the jetty there. Because the *John Biscoe* was only 900 tons and the tide must have been out and it was way down. And you had to look down over the edge of the quay to see the ship.

[Part 1 0:10:03] Lee: And you were about to commit yourself to a voyage halfway across the globe weren't you?

Davis: That's right. She was an old Canadian navy net layer – harbour defence vessel. *HMS Pretext* she used to be.

[Part 1 0:10:21] Lee: This was at the tail end of 1953?

Davis: That was in November 1953, yes. I went down there and got onboard, stayed overnight and next morning we set sail and that was it. And, of course, everybody was sea sick because it was a flat bottomed boat and even in harbour she used to roll alarmingly.

[Part 1 0:10:46] Lee: Did you get to know people on board?

Davis: Oh yes, quite a few. I think everybody was comradely and generally eager to get on with each other. There were no disputes or anything like that. I think there must have been 25 or 26 of us and, of course, in the *John Biscoe* you were all below decks. There were no portholes, because there was no superstructure as such. You were down below and that was it. Various people going to various bases and the doctor who was very good – a bit of a card.

[Part 1 0:11:32] Lee: Who was that?

Davis: Bill Turner was his name – Bill Turner. I think he died a few years ago.

[Part 1 0:11:40] Lee: Did you know which base you were being sent to?

Davis: No. Not until we actually got to Stanley. I don't think anybody had any illnesses or anything on the way down but I remember Bill Turner had to take a tooth out – or drill somebody's tooth because somebody had toothache, and all he had was a Victorian treadle drill. You had to pedal it to work the drill, and the thing with that you had to get it in synch., like an old fashioned sewing machine. You had to get it in synch. And if you paused it would start to run backwards and the thing is he just couldn't get the hang of this – Bill Turner – he just couldn't get the hang of treadling this without it stopping and running backwards, so in the end we had to take it in turns pedalling for him while he did the drilling, and the amusing thing about this was when I came to Scarborough we went out to a village – a reconstructed Victorian village and town.....

[Part 1 0:12:56] Lee: Beamish?

Davis: Yes Beamish, that's right, Beamish. There they've got a dentist's surgery reconstructed and they had exactly this foot drilling machine as they had in the Biscoe.

[Part 1 0:13:11] Lee: I feel sorry for the poor Fid.

Davis: Yes, That's right.

[Part 1 0:13:14] Lee: His toothache must have been worse?

Davis: Yes

[Part 1 0:13:18] Lee: The treatment must have been worse than the toothache. What else do you remember about the voyage down? Was it fairly calm and peaceful?

Davis: Well it was calm but everybody was seasick because it used to roll in anything. At anchor it used to roll alarmingly and I used to give the ship's radio operator a hand sometimes. I used to go and stand in for him when he wanted to have a few beers or something like that. And the radio room in the old *Biscoe* was right amidships and the thing is you were looking out the window in your chair and she rolled so badly that you'd be looking straight down at the sea because it was rolling so badly.

I remember – the only incident I remember – they'd concocted a thing called Moose Milk. It's a mixture of rum and condensed milk. And one of them brought it out to me in the radio cabin, and I was sitting in and the ship gave a terrific roll and the chair I was sitting in was supposed to be attached to the deck - snapped off because we were going backwards so far, and this Moose Milk went everywhere all over – this sticky mess of condensed milk and rum.

[Part 10:14:47] Lee: Did you have to clear it up?

Davis: Oh yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:14:52] Lee: Did it do any damage?

Davis: I don't think so, no. It was just a mess everywhere.

[Part 1 0:14:58] Lee: Was it actually worrying – the behaviour of the ship? Were you concerned that it might go down and not come up again?

Davis: I didn't know how ships were supposed to behave. I'd never been on one before. It was up and down and you soon got into a routine and we stopped in Montevideo and had a couple of days there before going on to Stanley.

[Part 1 0:15:22] Lee: What was Stanley like in 1953?

Davis: It was primitive in that there was only one road in the town that was made up. Everything else was holes and stones and things like that.

[Part 1 0:15:43] Lee: Many vehicles?

Davis: Very few. I think the policeman had a van and there were one or two cars, but not many.

[Part 1 0:15:53] Lee: What were the people like?

Davis: Oh they were all friendly. Quite good. I never had any problems there. A lot of them had relatives who were working on the *John Biscoe*. A lot of the crew were Falkland Islanders.

[Part 1 0:16:10] Lee: Were you there for some time?

Davis: We were kitted out there, of course, in the style of the 1950's. When you see the equipment they've got today. I think we got two ex-army battledresses; two ex-army surplus trousers; a cardigan – I can remember and a woolly hat with flaps on, and a couple of army shirts. The only thing I can remember that we had anything remotely to do with cold weather was a pair of mukluks, which are boots – quite tall boots.

[Part 1 0:16:55] Lee: Can you describe them?

Davis: They were made of canvas, but they were just like Wellington boots made of canvas really. All we had was an outer anorak covering. There was just this. It wasn't padded or anything – it was just a cover and that was it. That was our equipment

[Part1 0:17:17] Lee: And the other boots?

Davis: Yes, just a pair of army boots – everything else was surplus.

[Part 1 0:17:24] Lee: I think you got a scarf didn't you?

Davis: Oh, I've still got the scarf.

[Part1 0:17:28] Lee: Versatile?

Davis: Yes, you're supposed to be able to turn it into a hat. Yes, that's the only thing I've got left. I've still got it, I'm sure.

[Part 10:17:34] Lee: Did you know how to do that?

Davis: Oh yes. The only thing to make a hat is to pull it down over the ears, yes.

[Part1 0:17:42] Lee: What about the clothing you were travelling in? What happened to that?

Davis: Oh we just put it in the kit bag and took it with us.

[Part 1 0:17:50] Lee: Did you take it to the base or leave it for 2 years?

Davis: No, we took it with us.

[Part 1 0:17:54] Lee: You had it on base as well?

Davis: We had it on base as well. Yes. I don't think it would have been much good.

[Part 1 0:18:02] Lee: Gloves?

Davis: Oh there were gloves, yes. I think there were gloves. I can't remember the gloves – but there must have been gloves, yes.

[Part 1 0:18:09] Lee: Was all this ex-army then?

Davis: Yes, everything except for these mukluks and this anorak without any padding, just an overall really, with a hood. Everything was ex army.

[Part 1 0:18:26] Lee: So what colour was it?

Davis: Everything was khaki.

[Part 1 0:18:33] Lee: Did it feel like you were going back into the forces?

Davis: Not really, no. I didn't think so. I think we were all looking forward too much to getting down and seeing the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:18:47] Lee: Did you have much time for socialising in Stanley?

Davis: Not really. Just the odd pub. That was all. One of the many pubs.

[Part 1 0:18:56] Lee: Did you meet the Governor?

Davis: Oh yes, yes – you had an interview. That's right, yes. Sir Miles Clifford.. He had everybody up to give them an interview. I can't remember anything about it at the moment.

[Part 1 0:19:13] Lee: Do you know why he was interviewing people? It was a bit late wasn't it because you were already there? Or was he just meeting you?

Davis: Oh no. I think we had to go to his office in Government House and have like a formal interview. I honestly can't remember anything about that at all.

[Part 1 0:19:31] Lee: Did you peek inside the Stanley Radio Station?

Davis: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:19:35] Lee: What was it like in there?

Davis: Do you mean the Government Wireless Station? Well it was a bit old fashioned even at that time because they were using transmitters that use to belong to the navy in the war. Well on the base we were using transmitters that were ex-American surplus.

[Part 1 0:19:59] Lee: In fact there were two radio establishments in Stanley? One was.....

Davis: The Met Office. Met Radio, yes. Stanley Met. They had their own separate radio control station for the Antarctic bases.

[Part 1 0:20:13] Lee: And there would be the public radio station?

Davis: The Government Radio Station. Yes, but any information we had a control station. On the base if we had a message for Government House or whatever, we would have to send it to base A at Port Lockroy and then he would have a schedule each day with the Government Radio Station in Port Stanley and pass any official traffic.

[Part 1 0:20:45] Lee: So when you came to go further south, how did you get to Signy?

Davis: Well first of all we set sail from Stanley and went to Deception Island first of all. Our first duty getting to Deception Island was to bury somebody. Yes, somebody had committed suicide on the base. He had a “Dear John” letter from his girlfriend just as the ship was there. He committed suicide.

[Part 1 0:21:22] Lee: A gunshot?

Davis: Well I didn’t hear it myself but there must have been – yes. He had one of the revolvers on the base. It’s very difficult to dig a grave in solid permafrost. It’s very, very difficult. We all had to take turns because the ground was so hard. There’s a whalers’ cemetery on Deception Island and we had to bury him there. That was our first experience of the Antarctic – burying somebody.

[Part 1 0:21:53] Lee: That must have been a bit grim?

Davis: Well, I don’t know whether you thought of it as grim. They said we were going to dig this and we went and dug it and that was that.

[Part 1 0:22:07] Lee: Perhaps not what you were expecting as a wireless man – digging graves?

Davis: I think it was so bad at one time that they had to set some diesel alight on it to try and soften the earth.

[Part 1 0:22:22] Lee: So it was a real problem?

Davis: Oh yes, it was a real problem. We all- more or less - had to take turns in digging it.

[Part 1 0:22:30] Lee: Having performed that duty what else did you get up to at Deception?

Davis: Nothing much. We were just unloading stuff. Everything had to be unloaded by hand on the scow – a big barge – from the *Biscoe*. Then everything had to be carried up to wherever they wanted it put, which must have been 2 or 3 days hard work. It really was.

[Part 1 0:22:57] Lee: Were you expecting this kind of manual work to be part of....?

Davis: Not really, no. Not that I had ever thought of it.

[Part 1 0:23:04] Lee: You did it because everybody else was?

Davis: Yes, yes, that’s it. When you’re that young you don’t think too much about it

[Part 1 0:23:13] Lee: You do now don’t you? So after Deception what happened next, Graham?

Davis: Well, we went to Signy, and took over and this is where my problems began. Not grave problems – but problems. I got there and the wireless operator before me said: ‘Oh, there’s the transmitter and receivers; the *Biscoe*’s sailing tonight – I’m off’. And there it was no handover time or anything like that. There was me, hadn’t even seen this transmitter before in my life... Or I hadn’t seen a transmitter that big.

It was an ex American Army surplus transmitter, and fortunately the operator before had left some settings for the transmitter, so I muddled through to start with. I had been using it for about a month and I discovered I’d been using it in – what they called – tune position, which is just a very low power when you’re just supposed to tune it up in very low power. I’d been working with that and hadn’t realised that I had to throw this switch to put it on full power.

[Part 1 0:24:32] Lee: Did it work OK?

Davis: It worked OK, yes. This thing was so powerful – even in the tune position it was probably just as powerful as the present day transmitter.

[Part 1 0:24:43] Lee: That’s all very amateurish isn’t it – to have one hour of handover?

Davis: Well I think that the whole FIDS at that time could be termed amateurish, really. It was ‘as you go along’, sort of thing. Make things up as you go along. It gradually settled into a routine and did quite well.

[Part 1 0:25:11] Lee: This was the American army RCA?

Davis: RCA 84/336.

[Part 1 0:25:18] Lee: Faced with that problem, how did you actually go about learning how it works? How to operate it?

Davis: Well, they had a manual with it obviously. But as I say Owen – the operator before me – had left the settings for the transmitter for various frequencies, so I could more or less muddle through on what he’d left, until I got more accustomed to the transmitter. And of course the receivers were ex Admiralty surplus receivers called B28’s or CR100’s.

[Part 1 0:25:59] Lee: In the first day or two after you took over, were there serious cock-ups as a result of not being trained properly – or did you just step into it smoothly?

Davis: I think I stepped into it fairly smoothly. I don’t.... The thing was I think our keenness got us through. We were keen to do anything – to try anything.

[Part 1 0:26:22] Lee: So Signy. What did you make of Signy, because it wasn’t really the Antarctic was it?

Davis: No, not really. It was....

[Part 1 0:26:28] Lee: The banana belt?

Davis: Yes, we did use to call it the banana belt. It's up a bit. We had some pretty bad weather. It used to freeze all around and I think it's..... The temperature did get quite low at times. It was, I think, probably we were lucky because we could get out more in Signy because the snow wasn't as deep. There were plenty of places to climb around and get out and walk around, rather more than I should imagine on the other bases where they were completely surrounded by snow. So that was quite good. I enjoyed it at Signy quite a lot.

[Part 1 0:27:19] Lee: did you do any sledging? Off base work?

Davis: Well not as such. We had a sledge and we had dogs – I think we had about 10 dogs – and we had a sledge. I mean it was more of a pleasure trip really when we took a sledge out. We'd go around the Island with it and across to Coronation Island. If we wanted seal meat for the dogs we had to get the seal and shoot it, and bring it back to cut up for the dogs.

[Part 1 0:27:55] Lee: Did you do that?

Davis: Oh yes. Well, I never fired a weapon in my life. I had fired in the RAF but only in training – a couple of days with a Sten gun or a .303.

[Part 1 0:28:13] Lee: So, again, this was an aspect of the job that wasn't mentioned in the advert?

Davis: Oh no. No. Nothing mentioned. In fact there was nothing mentioned as far as I know. It just said Wireless Operator/Mechanic required. It didn't say what you were going to do.

[Part 1 0:28:26] Lee: So were you in the position.... I think you were at Signy for a whole season, were you? For a year?

Davis: Yes. Yes.

[Part 1 0:28:30] Lee: Were you able to actually improve the facilities at all?

Davis: Well at that time the hut in Signy was called Clifford House of course, after the Governor of the Falklands and it is a bit of a hotch potch because they'd built an original hut and the following season they'd added a bit more and then they added a bit more, and it was all a bit of a hotch potch – bits added on. They said, of course they were building a new hut there the following year -1954 season - so there's not much we could have done that would improve the existing hut conditions, really.

[Part 1 0:29:30] Lee: What about the radio equipment? Could you work on that? Did you have the skills and knowledge?

Davis: Oh Yes. I gradually got to know and I was a keen amateur at the time.

[Part 1 0:29:32] Lee: A radio ham?

Davis: A radio ham, Yes. And of course being down there it was a fairly rare call sign and you only had to put out a call and you'd get about three thousand people calling you.

[Part 1 0:29:44] Lee: Really?

Davis: Yes. Oh yes, yes. You'd listen – particularly when the ionosphere was open to America. I mean you'd only put out a call and all you'd hear was your call sign being sent all over.....

[Part 1 0:29:59] Lee: So talk me through that then. You'd sit there and had some spare time presumably?

Davis: Well – oh yes. In the evening I mean that was it. People played cards or games or chess or read. The evening time there was not much else to do really.

[Part 1 0:30:20] Lee: So you'd sit there of an evening with a beer....?

Davis: Oh yes. yes, plenty of that. There was plenty of that.

[Part 1 0:30:26] Lee: And were you sending out your call sign by voice?

Davis: No – well both. I used voice and Morse – yes.

[Part 1 0:30:39] Lee: Then you'd lots of replies?

Davis: Oh yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:29:43] Lee: But how did you decide what to do next?

Davis: Well you just had to pick one out and have a contact with them. You usually picked the loudest one but, as I say, there were so many hundreds – if not thousands – listening for you. And if they knew you were going to be on the next night they'd all be waiting to pounce on you again.

[Part 1 0:31:01] Lee: So you almost got a persecution complex?

Davis: Yes, yes I enjoyed that.

[Part 1 0:31:08] Lee: So how far could you reach with your radio?

Davis: Well worldwide really. I used to have regular contacts with somebody in Alaska from down there. I also had lots of contacts with Los Angeles Ladies Radio Club.

[Part 1 0:31:29] Lee: Well you would, wouldn't you?

Davis: Yes

[Part 1 0:31:32] Lee: Did you form any pen pal relationships then?

Davis: Well, more or less yes. They sent me letters and boxes of chocolates!

[Part 1 0:31:41] Lee: So what did you talk about on these calls?

Davis: Well mainly it was technical talk. Signal strengths and that sort of thing. There were so many calling you that you didn't really have a lot of time to chat generally. I must have had – while I was there – several thousand contacts, and that helped pass the time for me, but other people on the base were doing other things.

[Part 1 0:32:12] Lee: Was all this being done with FIDS knowledge and approval, or were you doing it as a.....?

Davis: Well of course we were licensed. It never occurred to me to ask anybody's approval.

[Part 1 32:22:] Lee: The best way isn't it?

Davis: And of course it was an official call sign allocated by the Post Office in Port Stanley.

[Part 1 0:32:31] Lee: So it was all above board?

Davis: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:32:34] Lee: What about the more serious use of the radio? Were you sending messages every day?

Davis: Oh yes. You were sending met reports. That was really what you were there for. We sent them back to Stanley. There used to be a morning sched. at 9.00 o'clock and then an afternoon sched. and then an evening sched. Three times a day you used to contact Stanley Met. Of course you only had the generator at that time. The generators weren't running all the time.

[Part 1 0:33:06] Lee: Why's that?

Davis: Well I suppose it was policy, whether it was fuel – or what. The generators were only running from..... when you had the scheds. To start with, and then they used to put them on again in the evening, while people were relaxing and doing other things. Because we had a diesel mechanic there of course. He was quite a nice guy and we never knew what happened to him. He just disappeared when he came back.

[Part 1 0:33:40] Lee: Were the generators reliable?

Davis: Well on Signy they were. They were two horizontal Enfield engines. They had two. They used to run alternately and I think John Pearce - our mechanic - he kept them running smoothly all the time. But the only thing was he was a bit possessive about the engines. He used to.... If he'd gone out for a walk, or across the ice during the day he'd always run back to start them up. He must be the only one starting them. So, unfortunately, being the types we were, we used to wait until we could see him coming in the distance - running back. We'd wait until he got to the bottom of the cliff and we'd start them up.

[Part 1 0:34:38] Lee: Did he take it in good heart?

Davis: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:34:42] Lee: Presumably you were also dealing in more personal material, as well, were you? On the air waves – passing personal messages.

Davis: Oh yes. Everybody was allowed official telegrams which they paid for and everybody was allowed 100 words a month – or it might have been a week – a letter. They used to type them up in FIDS office in Stanley and send them through the normal post.

[Part 1 0:35:08] Lee: So you'd get them handwritten would you?

Davis: oh yes. I'd get them handwritten, yes.

[Part 1 0:35:13] Lee: So you'd tap them through?

Davis: I'd send them by Morse to Port Stanley.

[Part 1 0:35:17] Lee: And somebody would write them up?

Davis: In the office they'd type them up and send them by post.

[Part 1 0:35:24] Lee: And would that also work in reverse?

Davis: Yes it did.

[Part 1 0:35:31] Lee: So you might be receiving messages which had to be written out?

Davis: Yes. I think they were limited in the number they could have. It was two way traffic, yes.

[Part 1 0:35:43] Lee: Did it ever put you in a difficult position?

Davis: In what way?

[Part 1 0:35:47] Lee: Well you would have seen private communications.

Davis: Well, I don't think they were private as such. I don't think there was anything you could take offence at, or you thought you were spying or listening in to anybody – or anything like that. They were all pretty general things.

[Part 1 0:36:07] Lee: So on a standard day, how many hours of that day did you spend at your wireless set?

Davis: Well, I'd say you'd spend about 15 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes in the afternoon, and the same again for the official Met. sched. in the evening, then perhaps I might spend 2 or 3 hours in the evening hamming.

[Part 1 0:36:32] Lee: So what did they make you do when you weren't sitting at your wireless? What other duties did you have?

Davis: Well of course everybody took turns cooking. You were the cook for the week and everybody – well most people – tried to do their best. On some occasions we had somebody who thought his idea of cooking a meal was to dangle a tin of meat pudding into the hot water tank and serve it up, but everybody else put quite an effort into cooking making bread and doing everything during the week.

[Part 1 0:37:13] Lee: So these were more skills you were learning? Or had you any?

Davis: Oh no. I hadn't done any cooking in my life before. You got on reasonably well. Of course there wasn't a lot of fresh food. Everything was either dried or army surplus. These days they go on about use by dates, but in 1954 we were using army surplus food dated 1944! There was an army date on it.

[Part 1 0:37:51] Lee: How was it?

Davis: No ill effects. I'm still here.

[Part 1 0:37:57] Lee: How did you decide what to cook? Was there....

Davis: Well it was up to you to do your own menu of what was available.

[Part 1 0:38:07] Lee: So each man was his own boss?

Davis: Oh yes. When you were to cook you were just serving up food and that was it. Of course during that time you didn't have a lot of time to do anything else – all being amateur cooks. Howard Smith, our base leader was very keen on living off the land and so we had things like stuffed seal hearts and penguin casserole. Penguin breast casserole and of course we had penguin eggs. The only thing about penguin eggs is when you fried it the white stays completely transparent.

[Part 1 0:38:55] Lee: So, if cooked it doesn't change colour. Is that right?

Davis: That's right, yes.

[Part 1 0:39:02] Lee: So when you were doing your week of cookery were you also doing your radio duties at the same time?

Davis: Oh yes. You just had to fit them in. So obviously if you had to bake bread in the evening, once you'd finished your radio sched. You'd go and bake some bread – enough for the week.

[Part 1 0:39:22] Lee: So was there anyone else that was able to use the radio gear who could sit in for you?

Davis: Well I don't think there was anybody trained in it – no. I don't think anybody else showed much interest in it. Of course our met. Man – Peter Cordell – I don't know if you interviewed him?

[Part 1 0:39:42] Lee: I haven't, no. The name's familiar. Go on tell me about him.

Davis: Well I was just going to say he was like the amateur bird man. He use to go ringing – well we all used to go ringing albatrosses and that.. and the nests and the chicks. Of course one day he started on the Sheathbills. The Sheathbills were little white birds. It's a small bird – a bit smaller than a pigeon, and then a week later somebody said: 'Oh, I think we'll try Sheathbills for a meal.' So they went out and shot a few and found they'd still got the rings on that he'd put on two weeks before!

[Part 1 0:40:26] Lee: Oops!

Davis: And that's it. I mean we tried everything. We tried stuffed seal hearts and penguin casserole.

[Part 1 0:40:43] Lee: How were the Fids about eating seals and penguins? Were they OK about that?

Davis: Well I don't think they were.... well it was presented and they ate it. That's all I can say really. The only thing I can remember – somebody didn't like it when we tried Skua soup one day. And he was a bit – this was John Pearce – he was a bit of a finicky eater and so we gave him this soup and he said: 'This is nice. What is it?' So we said: 'Oh, its Skua soup.'

[Part 1 0:41:32] Lee: So was there an unofficial competition among the fids to produce different or better food? Was it competitive?

Davis: Well, I never felt it was competitive. I mean it was just a job to be done and you did the best you could. I think if you'd served up rubbish a lot you would know it. You'd be told about it.

[Part 1 0:41:47] Lee: A lot of the time is spent on base just keeping things going – isn't it?

Davis: Well that's right, yes.

[Part 1 0:41:52] Lee: So what was your daily routine when you weren't sitting at the wireless?

Davis: Well, of course, on Saturday we used to have a cleaning day. We all used to scrub out and do everything like that.

[Part 1 0:41:08] Lee: Would the hut get quite dirty over a week?

Davis: Not really. We had this stove in the middle. It used to glow red hot when we stoked it up sometimes. Nobody thought about Health & Safety and things like that. Of course the only other thing is, when you got to Signy you had to unload everything and I found that was the worst. You had to carry everything up from the beach because the hut was quite high up there and you had to carry all the boxes of food and everything else up and everybody used to try and find the boxes with Cornflakes in because they weren't so heavy.

[Part 1 0:42:51] Lee: So relief was the hardest work was it?

Davis: Well the hard work was the coal sacks. We had coal in sacks. We must have had about 300 sacks of coal. We had to carry them all up from the beach, right to the top of this hill – so it nearly killed us all doing it. In the end we had to limit ourselves. We'd each do 5 a day because it was really hard work. They weren't exceptionally big sacks but they were about half of what you'd think of as a coal sack.

[Part 1 0:43:30] Lee: They'd be stored outdoors I presume?

Davis: Oh they'd be stored outside the hut, yes. So whenever you wanted one for the fire or the Esse stove...

[Part 1 0:43:43] Lee: Where was the food kept, Graham?

Davis: The food was kept at Signy in an old Nissen hut next to the end. It was stacked up with this food and various things. A lot of it never got used, of course. They must have unloaded so much of this Army surplus food. You'd never have got through it anyway. There were a few items of new food. I can remember we used to have bacon – rashers of bacon in a tin. That was quite up to date stuff and there was other stuff. Of course a lot of it was completely dry, like dried potatoes, carrots and everything all dried and you had to reconstitute those before you used them. As I say this hut was stacked with food and the year before they'd gone round collecting penguin eggs and they'd got boxes and boxes of penguin eggs stored in flour.

[Part 1 0:44:50] Lee: Were they OK?

Davis: They were OK yes. I never thought about it. We just went and got them. So we just used them. They were there and we used them. They seemed to be OK, yes.

[Part 1 0:45:04] Lee: Did the weather ever interfere with your routine? I wonder whether you lost any radio scheds.

Davis: Oh yes, yes. There was one period when.... The thing was the radio masts at Signy were aluminium poles. They weren't steel poles, but aluminium. So I got up one morning and found there'd been a terrific thick frost and the aerial wire was covered in frost about 5 or 6 inches in diameter and it had bent all the masts over.

[Part 1 0:45:41] Lee: The weight of the frost?

Davis: The weight of the frost had bent the masts.

[Part 1 0:45:46] Lee: How was that solved?

Davis: Well we were off [the air] just for a day while we rigged something up, and straightened them up.

[Part 1 0:45:54] Lee: Of course you depended on the generators being reliable didn't you?

Davis: Oh Yes. That was the main thing I remember that time at Admiralty Bay. Their generators were out virtually the whole season, so all they were relying on for communications was some battery standby sets. War surplus batteries of course, and the standby transmitter was a little transmitter. That was battery powered – war surplus. They had some little field radios supposed to be taken out sledging but they never worked more than about half a mile, so they weren't much good.

[Part 1 0:46:34] Lee: Did you lose any radio schedules due to generator failure?

Davis: No, I can't remember any.

[Part 1 0:46:44] Lee: Would you also be communicating with local handheld radios. Were you in touch with people in the field – biologists in the field?

Davis: Well we didn't have any biologists in the field at Signy and, of course, at Hope Bay where they did a lot of survey work and that – in the field. The transmitters were too small to carry any distance. Of course we often used to have an evening get together around the bases on the RT with them.

[Part 1 0:47:22] Lee: The Goon Show was it?

Davis: Yes

[Part 1 0:47:25] Lee: Was it called the Goon Show?

Davis: I'm not sure. I can't remember. But all the bases used to have a chat about this and that; what's been happening among themselves.

[Part 1 0:47:37] Lee: Do you remember anything in particular from that?

Davis: Well, the only thing I remember was an emergency at Hope Bay. They lost... A field team had lost a sledge through the ice with the dogs and everything and they were contacting... and we all had to listen out to see if we could hear them. But we couldn't at Signy. All the bases were listening out for members of the field expedition. They were all right. They managed to get to them, but they'd lost their sledge and their tent and their dogs – everything through the ice.

[Part 1 0:48:15] Lee: I'm surprised there were no biologists because it became a real biological station didn't it – Signy?

Davis: It did later, yes

[Part 1 0:48:21] Lee: So there must have been quite a lot of wildlife?

Davis: Oh there were terrific penguin colonies there. All sorts of different penguins. Different breeds. And you used to get loads of wildlife. I mean seals. Everyday you'd find half a dozen seals on the beach and that sort of thing. There was no scientific work in that way. It was purely the Met. they were doing, apart from Pete who was doing some bird ringing.

[Part 1 0:48:51] Lee: Pete?

Davis: Cordall. Yes he was doing some bird ringing. Of course they subsequently developed it and did more biological work there.

[Part 1 0:49:04] Lee: You were able to pick up the BBC broadcasts from time to time weren't you?

Davis: Oh Yes, you were able to pick up the World Service. In fact even once I remember one of the other bases said: 'Oh, you want to listen on 6 megs' or something. He said 'You can hear Radio Luxembourg'. You could. He'd picked up Radio Luxembourg. It was on the short wave.

[Part 1 0:49:29] Lee: They were playing jazz in those days weren't they?

Davis Yes, Oh yes. And the Ovaltinies.

[Part 1 0:49:36] Lee: Gosh, I remember them. I've got their CD somewhere. Had we got to the era when the BBC was doing '*Calling the Antarctic*'?

Davis: No. It was before that. As I say they had this programme... The ship that came down the following season – Expedition South – where they had – I can't remember the name of the BBC commentator – but he's travelling with them and then relaying his messages back. You know, about the personnel on board and what they were doing and the whole voyage from Southampton down to Stanley. They called it '*Operation South*'. We called it 'Operation Mouth'.

[Part 1 0:50:21] Lee: I'm just wondering whether that involved somebody called Ellery Anderson who wrote a book along those lines, that got nicknamed 'Operation Mouth' as well. He was at hope Bay.

Davis: Oh, that's right. Captain...

[Part 1 0:50:38] Lee: Wasn't it William Ellery Anderson?

Davis: Yes it was. Captain Bill.

[Part 1 0:50:43] Lee: Did you come across him?

Davis: I didn't meet him myself - no. Because I went from Signy to Admiralty Bay I didn't actually meet him. But I heard all about him.

[Part 1 0:50:58] Lee: The programme you heard that the BBC covered the voyage South. Do you have any memories of that programme?

Davis: Not really. I think I've an idea there was a record programme. That's right... I don't know whether it was called 'Antarctica' but there was a record programme.

[Part 1 0:51:19] Lee: With messages from your folks back home? A bit like Two-way Family Favourites? Or one-Way Family Favourites?

Davis: That's right, yes. I remember my mother sent a message by that. She recorded a message.

[Part 1 0:51:34] Lee: So was the base all gathered in the radio hut to hear that kind of thing?

Davis: Well yes they were, but I think a lot of people found it embarrassing.

[Part 1 0:51:40] Lee: Why was that?

Davis: Well, your mother saying so and so on the corner: she's had another baby or something like that. Or the greengrocer up the road has died – or something like that.

[Part 1 0:51:54] Lee: So it was kind of local gossip was it?

Davis: Just local, yes. Yes, now you bring it to mind there were record requests. I don't know if that was called 'Calling Antarctica', but I remember they asked everybody to send a request to be played. I remember asking for Ertha Kit – 'Under The Bridges of Paris'.

[Part 1 0:52:23] Lee: That information – those requests – would have gone through your radio presumably?

Davis: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:52:27] Lee: You would have transmitted them back to the BBC?

Davis: Well, back to Stanley and they forwarded it on.

[Part 1 0:52:32] Lee: Just go back to this programme about 'Operation South', which was the documentary coverage of a particular journey south. Have you any memories of listening to that?

Davis: I remember listening to it, yes certainly. But I can't recall it individually. Except that they were bolstering up how brave everybody was down South.

[Part 1 0:52:57] Lee: If only they really knew! Did you have any tricky moments in your time South?

Davis: Not as such, no. I think we were pretty aware of the dangers around. The worst one I ever had was after FIDS when I went back to Stanley and worked in Stanley Radio for a while – 3 years. And I had a trip around the bases just before I came home. I said I'd stand in for the radio operator at the base and he came out and I went to start going back to the base to work his scheds.

[Part 1 0:53:39] Lee: This was Signy was it?

Davis: That was at Signy, yes. Then all of a sudden thick fog and mist came up and I couldn't see a thing and I didn't know where I was for a minute. A bit of a panic session because you couldn't find or see your way ahead. Fortunately I just kept walking for a little while and eventually saw a piece of iron. I was a bit frightened about that.

[Part 1 0:54:05] Lee: You found something familiar?

Davis: Yes. The Skua Lake peninsular sticks out a bit at Signy – so I came across that and found my bearings after that.

[Part 1 0:54:25] Lee: But I suppose it was a bit stupid to go off the ship on your own and start walking? It does go against all the rules as they always say to do everything you planned – or they do now.

Davis: Well they do now. This was before they'd heard of Health & Safety.

[Part 1 0:54:35] Lee: You did one season at Signy, Graham, and then were you already destined to go to another base – or did you choose? What happened next?

Davis: I think they chose. The following season they were building a new base and they wanted somebody with a bit more technical expertise on electrical – for wiring up the base. Somebody to wire the base, so they asked me what base I'd like to go to. I just chose Base 'G' which is Admiralty Bay.

[Part 1 0:55:12] Lee: Why did you choose that?

Davis: No particular reason. I just didn't think about it. They said 'Would you like Admiralty Bay?' and I said 'Yes'.

[Part 1 0:55:25] Lee: What were the attractions of Admiralty Bay?

Davis: Well – less than Signy when I got there.

[Part 1 0:55:34] Lee: Were there more travel prospects?

Davis: No. Still the same type. It was only a met. station. There was no other activity going on there, but the hut was a bit more dilapidated than the one at Signy – or hadn't been maintained as well. The year before the generators had packed up for most of the season, so they were on emergency power, and of course we had this little wind generator as well, which used to charge up the batteries. Besides the mains we had a battery bank for lights, so that at night when they switched the generator off you could still read. You had these 12 volts.

[Part 1 0:56:19] Lee: Was there a more sophisticated set up? A bigger hut? Or even the reverse?

Davis: I think it was the reverse really. I don't think Admiralty Bay was as big as Signy. Mainly because at Signy they'd added bits and pieces. Most of it was not even used. They had this big laboratory at the end of Signy – empty – nobody used it.

[Part 1 0:56:42] Lee: So Admiralty, again, was primarily a Met. office?

Davis: Yes

[Part 1 0:56:46] Lee: But was there any surveying going on at that point? Any trips out?

Davis: No, nothing at that time in 1955.

[Part 1 0:56:57] Lee: What was the hut like there?

Davis: It wasn't as comfortable – that's the wrong word – it wasn't as big as Signy and it was a bit more worn.

[Part 1 0:57:14] Lee: Clapped out? Was it well insulated?

Davis: I suppose it must have been really. It had this pot- bellied stove in the middle that we used to stoke up. Why it didn't burn the place down I don't know.

[Part 1 0:57:35] Lee: So would the daily routine be different from Signy?

Davis: No. It was exactly the same. Exactly the same because it was only Met. Wherever I went everybody got on well together. There were no problems of a personal nature. Everybody got on really well

[Part 1 0:58:01] Lee: Did you find yourself at either base having to send back signals about extreme weather conditions? Were you caught in any memorable weather patterns?

Davis: Not really. I remember Admiralty Bay once. We had a Norman Hedderley. He was the Met. Man, but he was an old man to us because he was what we called the oldest Fid. We put banners up about it in the hut. He had his 40th birthday when we were there and of, of course, most of us were in our early 20's. We considered him the old man.

[Part 1 0:58:54] Lee: Tell me about him. What was his background?

Davis: He was a Geordie. As far as I remember he just used to work in the Post Office before he came down as Met. Man. I don't know whether they were advertising for Met. Men as they were for radio operators. I think the Met. Men used to do a course wherever it was. I don't think it was Bracknell then. I think it was somewhere else. I know they all did a course. That was it.

[Part 1 0:59:25] Lee: Was he a chap with a remarkable moustache?

Davis: Yes, he had a moustache.

[Part 1 0:59:30] Lee: A handlebar? Ex RAF?

Davis: I can't remember. I know he had a moustache but I wouldn't call it a handlebar moustache.

[Part 10:59:40] Lee: I'll produce a photograph in a few minutes. Tell me whether you recognise him or not.

Davis: He must be getting on for 90 or 100 now.

[Part 1 0:59:52] Lee: I meant of that time. You might be able to solve a little problem that arose this morning – as to who this man was. When it came time to leave the actual Antarctic itself, what were your feelings? Were you glad to get out?

Davis: Well, I was glad to have a change of scenery, and I came back to the UK. I wouldn't say I'd missed it desperately. It was just carrying on life – the next stage, and I got home and had various jobs. In those days you'd leave one job one week and start another on the next, which I often did. I'd resign on the Friday and start somewhere else on the Monday.

[Part 1:00:49] Lee: Let's talk about that in a minute because your good wife is producing some tea I'll show you this photograph and then I'll talk to you a bit more about the 4 years you spent in Stanley after you'd been home. Thank you Graham.

PAUSE

[Part 2 0:00:01] Lee: This is Graham Davis interviewed by Chris Eldon-Lee on 8th June 2012. Graham Davis Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:11] Lee: Can we just pick up one or two points from the first half of the interview – about Signy – one or two things that didn't get mentioned at the time? One is, of course, the famous Signy toilet. Tell me about the facilities at Signy in 1955.

Davis: 1954, yes. They were perched on the edge of the ... by the hut about 10 or 15 yards away from the main hut. They had this magnificent view. You could sit on the toilet and see about 50 miles up Coronation Island to the end – on a clear day, and the only sound you hear would be bits of ice dropping off glaciers. It was a real attraction – a real soothing place to be.

[Part 2 0:01:01] Lee: Was it chemical or a long drop?

Davis: No. It was just a bucket. You threw the bucket away. What we used to use were the flour buckets, because the flour came in big tins and we used to use those and then throw them over what we called Gash Cove.

[Part 2 0:01:21] Lee: An area not to go swimming in?

Davis: That's right, yes. Anything used to go there: dead dogs – all your rubbish.

[Part 1 0:01:29] Lee: What was the superstructure of the toilet like, then? Was it a little hut?

Davis: Oh, it was quite a big hut actually. I think it was a two-seater.

[Part 2 0:01:40] Lee: Did anybody use it simultaneously?

Davis: No, I don't think so.

[Part 2 0:01:45] Lee: If the weather was foul I suppose it was a deterrent – was it?

Davis: Well it depends. If you just wanted a pee you just did it in the snow outside and that was it. But anything else you just had to brave the elements.

[Part 2 0:02:00] Lee: So was it heated?

Davis: Oh, no.

[Part 2 0:02:03] Lee: Did you get frosty bottoms?

Davis: Oh, Yes. Not that I remember any in particular, but it was extremely cold.

[Part 2 0:02:12] Lee: Was there a jetty at Signy to help unload?

Davis: Oh, yes. That was another thing. The previous season they built this jetty using oil drums and cement. When we went to Signy they gave us a new dinghy, because the other one had been damaged. We used it a few times and then, at night, we used to haul it up on the jetty out of the water. Then one night there was this terrific gale blowing and a big load of sea ice came in the bay and it took the jetty away with it and took our new dinghy away with it as well. We'd only been there a few weeks and we had to ask for another dinghy.

[Part 2 0:02:59] Lee: Did you get it?

Davis: Eventually, when the *John Biscoe* called again at the end of the season, we did get another one. Because we had this Seagull outboard motor we used to have. It used to be a terrible thing.

[Part 2 0:03:14] Lee: They were notorious weren't they?

Davis: Oh, it would never start. You used to spend half an hour trying to start them: terrible.

[Part 2 0:03:22] Lee: Why were they so bad?

Davis: I don't know. It was just difficult to start. I mean, when they were working all right there was no problem, but getting them started was the thing. We used to end up putting ether in the air vents to gee up the initial start. We used to do that with the generators as well. We used to have a supply of ether to put into the air intakes to assist the easy starting of the generators because they were hand cranked things. We used to crank them.

[Part 1 0:03:58] Lee: How did the ether help?

Davis: Well I think it just used to ignite, because they were diesel engines, these Enfield's. Horizontal twin Enfield engines. It used to ignite quickly. It would give a loud bang and a big cloud of smoke and the engine started.

[Part 2 0:04:23] Lee: We were talking about 'Calling Antarctica' which you now remember listening to.

Davis: When we were back in London, one day I had a letter saying if we wanted to visit Oxford Street Studios, Fids were invited to go up any time. At that time there was a Fid called Harry Dollman who was visiting me in London, that particular day, so we went up together and had a look around the studio and there was a producer called Innes Brown. Did you know the name?

[Part 2 0:05:01] Lee: I don't know the name, no.

Davis: She invited us in and bought us a cup of tea in the canteen and showed us around the studios. In fact once she did say: 'Would you like to do a short programme on the Overseas Service about the Antarctic?' But being a bit shy I didn't. I declined.

[Part 2 0:05:25] Lee: Did you meet the presenter?

Davis: I met Peter King, yes. He was there.

[Part 2 0:05:31] Lee: What sort of a chap was he?

Davis: I can't really remember much about him. It was only a brief meeting. I think he was working at the time, but his voice was familiar to us down South with 'Calling Antarctica'. As I say this Innes Brown was the scruffiest person I ever met in my life. She used to have a cream cake and she'd smear it down her front. I've never seen such an untidy person in my life, but evidently she worked for the BBC for years.

[Part 2 0:06:12] Lee: Did you get any sense about whether she was committed to that particular radio programme?

Davis: Well, she was the producer, yes.

[Part 2 0:06:19] Lee: So she was proud of it?

Davis: Oh yes she was, she certainly was. She said: 'Any of you Fids can come up and see me anytime'. Then, I would say that she was getting on for retirement age.

[Part 2 0:06:36] Lee: When you came out of Admiralty Bay you didn't come straight home, because you went back to the Falklands?

Davis: Oh no. I did come home.

[Part 2 0:06:43] Lee: You did come home?

Davis: Yes

[Part 2 0:06:44] Lee: Tell me what happened – the sequence of events.

Davis: Well, I came out from Admiralty Bay and I came home. It was a bit of a problem because my mother had been taken ill. She had been taken ill with cancer and so they said they'd give me a flight home from Montevideo back to London. So that's what I did. I got the boat from the Falklands – which was the *Fitzroy* at the time – and got a plane back to London and looking around for a job. I took a job with a firm called Hilger & Watts, which were instrument makers at the time in London. They used to make scientific instruments. I worked for them for about 6 or 8 months and then I got a bit fed up with that. Being still in my early 20's I'd do something new, so I went up to Millbank to see Eric Salmon. I said 'Do you want any operators this year?' He said 'Oh, we want one in Stanley.' So I said 'Oh well I'll go to Stanley.' So eventually I went to Stanley.

[Part 2 0:08:11] Lee: Just like that?

Davis: Just like that, yes.

[Part 2 0:08:13] Lee: No Interview?

Davis: Oh No, nothing. As I say it was a bit of a slap dash organisation really. They were making things up as they went along, sort of thing. At that time I think they were just starting to get a bit more scientifically inclined. Before, all they did was mainly ionospheric work at Port Lockroy, but it was mainly surveying and surveyors going out, and the Met. And that was about the total sum of their activity at that time.

[Pat2 0:09:03] Lee: There was a more subtle activity wasn't there, though, which was simply being there?

Davis: Oh yes, being there was more of a political gesture.

[Part 2 0:09:11] Lee: So you were aware of all that?

Davis: Oh well, because previously they had had an incident at Hope Bay with the Argentines firing some shots at the British Base. I did go to Hope Bay once, that's right, because I can remember the ship called in there. I can't remember exactly when, but all this had been forgotten because all the Argentines were drinking whisky at Hope bay at Base D.

[Part 2 0:09:47] Lee: So tell me about going back down to Stanley then. Was this a career move or just simply that you were fed up with what you were doing?

Davis: Fed up with what I was doing really. I didn't have any sense of a career move at that time. No career at all. Just playing it as I went along. Then again they must have been in a hurry because I flew down to Montevideo this time and I picked up the *Biscoe* in Montevideo. That's right; the *Biscoe* had just left when I went up to see Eric Salmon.

[Part 2 0:10:24] Lee: Flying in the early 50's was a bit of an adventure wasn't it?

Davis: Oh it was, yes.

[Part 2 0:10:29] Lee: Tell me about that.

Davis: Well, I think I remember the aircraft going out was the Constellation, which is a massive 4-engined airliner. One of the first Post-war twin tailed airliners. That was quite an experience for me. Apart from my trip home I hadn't flown much at all.

[Part 2 0:10:55] Lee: So did you fly direct in either direction?

Davis: Well you do eventually. It's not non-stop. You go into West Africa somewhere – Dacca I think it was – and then refuel and then go over to Brazil and down the coast.

[Part 2 0:11:18] Lee: Is this the era when people used to dress up to catch a plane? Sunday best?

Davis: Oh yes. No one went scruffy. Yes, I think times have changed. You wouldn't think of going in shorts on the plane or anything like that.

[Part 2 0:11:42] Lee: So tell me about settling in to this job. You were there for nearly 4 years weren't you – at Stanley?

Davis: Well over 3 years, yes.

[Part 2 0:11:51] Lee: Were you one of the lads or were you in charge?

Davis: Oh no, I wasn't in charge. Lofty Tyson – I suppose you've heard the name....

[Part 2 0:11:58] Lee: I met him.

Davis: Oh you've met Lofty have you? Has he done an interview?

[Part 2 0:12:03] Lee: Yes

Davis: Oh Right. I was on the phone to him yesterday. I see him quite often. He's in Doncaster. He was in charge of the FIDS radio station and he equipped it. We were originally just in the Met. Office using these old American army surplus transmitters – the same as on the bases. The same transmitters. When they moved to Stanley Radio Station – because we had a section of Stanley Radio Station – he equipped it. There used to be an Admiralty Radio Station at the end of the bay in Stanley and I think they bought these transmitters off the Admiralty for £10 each, and they transferred them all up from there into what was the FIDS Radio Station in the home of the Government Radio Station.

[Part 2 0:13:15] Lee: So were you in the same building as them? The same building as Radio Falklands?

Davis: Yes that's right, yes.

[Part 2 0:13:20] Lee: Were you working side by side with Lofty?

Davis: oh yes.

[Part 2 0:13:23] Lee: So you were working on this together?

Davis: Yes, that's right. Putting up aerials and that sort of thing.

[Part 2 0:13:29] Lee: So was there an improvement programme going on? Was Lofty in charge of upgrading everything?

Davis: I suppose so if you call installing a 25 year old transmitter upgrading!

[Part 2 0:13:43] Lee: Well it was, wasn't it – really?

Davis: Well it was more power: 4 Kw transmitters – massive things. Valves the size of goldfish bowls. He set the station up. He was the one who went to Signy after me to set up this new hut and all the wiring and the radio section. So, yes, he set it all up really. He was in charge. We really got on well. We had some local lads – apprentices - working with us as operators. We had two or three – one still in England [?] Toddy Summers – lives down near Southampton.

[Part 2 0:14:38] Lee: So was there a constant slow evolution of the facilities?

Davis: I think there was. They were gradually getting better and better. We had between our radio stations – we used to take the message down. We had a desk fax – which is a kind of primitive fax machine. They put on the roll and send it to the Met Office which was a few hundred yards away – or perhaps half a mile away, from the radio station. So, I mean, facilities were improving and they had other transmitters. He eventually sold some other transmitters that were self tuning and we only had to press a button, which was a great improvement.

[Part 2 0:15:25] Lee: So did that improve communications with the bases themselves?

Davis: The thing is they weren't voice transmitters. They were only Morse transmitters. I don't think communications were ever bad, really. It was always fairly good and very few bases missed a radio schedule. When I went to Stanley they were just the same except we used to broadcast a collective weather forecast, and all the Met. reports we got from the bases we used to retransmit on the general frequency for all the Mets. in South America to listen to. We were quite busy with that and there wasn't a lot of difference between what we used to do – except that we were retransmitting them at certain times of day and we got reports back from stations in South America or ships – the odd ships that were by nearby.

[Part 2 0:16:53] Lee: The Morse code system that you were using the: was that open for anyone to listen to, or were you still using one-time pads?

Davis: Oh no. Of course there was a system. We had the Marconi Code Book, which if there was anything that could be called private – they used to put into this code. You look up the book and there's a code for a phrase in the book. You'd just go through the book and pick out the phrases to pass on the message you wanted to.

[Part 2 0:17:27:00] Lee: The met. Information was just on general release?

Davis: Oh, that was general. It wasn't encoded at all. But, as I say, anything encoded use this Marconi code. The only thing I remember is the word for money is 'loli'.

[Part 2 0:17:45:] Lee: Was this to try to fool that Germans?

Davis: (Laughs)

[Part 2 0:17:48] Lee: Did you use it much? Were you getting much in the way of encoded traffic?

Davis: Not a great deal, no. It was only if something happened on the base. You know – somebody had hurt themselves or been in some accident or something like that.

[Part 2 0:18:01:] Lee: Do you remember any particularly dramatic messages you had to convey? They are usually connected to disasters of one kind or another aren't they?

Davis: Oh yes. I don't think they used the one-time pads as such. They might have done for extremes – but I don't think we ever got to that stage of something extremely important.

[Part 2 0:18:19] Lee: So what messages of that nature were you responsible for passing on? Newsworthy messages?

Davis: The only one I really recall is once when the *Shackleton* hit some ice in the Weddell Sea.

[Part 2 0:18:40] Lee: A growler?

Davis: Yes. And she started shipping water and they threw the hut that they were taking to Halley Bay overboard. Then they found it wasn't as bad as it was thought in the first place. That was Captain Brown.

[Part 2 0:18:54] Lee: Yes, I was discussing this a couple of days ago. They had to throw a lot of the cargo over to try to heel the boat over to one side, so that the tear in the ships side was above the water line. So you were hearing all that on your radio?

Davis: I didn't actually hear it myself, but it eventually got to us that they'd been sending out an SOS and it had been picked up by a South African coast station. They'd relayed it to London and they'd relayed it to everybody else, mainly to the whalers at South Georgia because they were the nearest boats – the factory ships – the whaling ships.

[Part 2 0:19:37] Lee: One of which did in fact go to help

Davis: Yes. But eventually they found it wasn't as bad as they thought it was.

[Part 2 0:19:50] Lee: Were there any deaths or tragic accidents in your time – as you were in charge of the radio station at Stanley – it would all have come through you, wouldn't it?

Davis: Well, yes. There was a party lost – I don't know whether it was from Port Lockroy, or perhaps Anvers Island.[Actually it was Horseshoe Island] They camped on the sea ice and the sea ice broke up and there were about 3 or 4 people were lost. The whole lot were lost. One of the men I knew quite well because I knew him in Stanley.

[Part 2 0:20:28] Lee: Who was that?

Davis: Dave Statham

[Part 2 0:20:30] Lee: Geoff Stride was one. Tell me about Dave. What do you remember of him?

Davis: Well, he was quite a jovial or funny lad. He was always joking and laughing and, I would say that he was the soul of the party. He was really upbeat about everything.

[Part 2 0:20:56] Lee: Heart and soul sort of chap?

Davis: Yes, that's right

[Part 2 0:21:00] Lee: So how did that story unfold for you in your – in Stanley's radio station?

Davis: We just got a message in clear addressed to SecFids in Port Stanley that the party had gone missing. They'd lost contact with them and they'd tried various things. I think some of the dogs turned up later, at other bases.

[Part 2 0:21:24] Lee: So you were there for – correct me if I am wrong – you would have known that one of the men missing was an old buddy of yours. Would you?

Davis: Oh yes.

[Part 2 0:21:33] Lee: And you were having to convey the messages back to London?

Davis: Yes, to SecFids. Because there was not a lot they could do really. The only other incident I remember was when I was at Signy. Somebody at Port Lockroy had appendicitis and they didn't have a doctor with them. They suspected appendicitis and they got advice on the radio and it was evidently a certain position – if you got appendicitis - you were supposed to lie in. Eventually the Argentineans went there in a boat from one of their bases to fetch him down the Lemaire Channel.

[Part 2 0:22:27] Lee: So they pulled him out did they?

Davis: Yes. I think they took him to the Argentinian base where there was a doctor.

[Part 2 0:22:33] Lee: Just going back to the Dave Statham story. I'll just jog your memory to see if it does in fact remind you of something. There was traffic between London and the Antarctic about whether to go and try to find the men. Do you recall any of that?

Davis: No. We wouldn't see that in FIDS station because it would go to the Government Radio Station to relay to London. It wouldn't pass through FIDS.

[Part 2 0:23:02] Lee: But the reply would have come through you?

Davis: Well yes, I suppose it would. We were on a shift system there and I might not have been on when that particular one came through. I can't recall it.

[Part 2 0:23:22] Lee: The Transantarctic Expedition took place while you were at Stanley?

Davis: That's right.

[Part 2 0:23:27] Lee: Were you aware of all that?

Davis: Oh yes. Of course we were in contact with Halley Bay and the Transantarctic Expedition.

[Part 2 0:23:35] Lee: The actual tractors themselves?

Davis: Well yes. At times we were. Not in regular scheds but they used to contact us from time to time. The operator on there was Ralph Lenton and he was also the operator on the *Biscoe* when I went down.

[Part 2 0:23:55] Lee: What do you recall of the radio traffic to and from the Transantarctic Expedition?

Davis: Not a lot really. It would be personal stuff mainly, I think. I can't honestly say that I recall much about the traffic. Of course there was an American icebreaker down there, the *Nothhwind*. She tried to contact – not to do with that incident – but to try to conduct some weather one day, and of course the Government Radio Station closed down about 6.00 in the evening and that was it. They couldn't contact us so they sent a Met. message to Washington who relayed it to London, who next day relayed it down to Port Stanley. And they were only 50 miles off Stanley!

[Part 2 0:24:57] Lee: So did you send the information the next day?

Davis: Yes. I always thought: they were only 50 miles away and it goes thousands of miles to get to us.

[Part 2 0:25:07] Lee: It reminds me of mobile phone conversations. You might ring somebody up in ? Scolby? But it all goes via satellite. So whilst you were at Stanley for those 3 or 4 years, where were you living, Graham?

Davis: First of all I lived in a boarding House – Mrs McLeod.

[Part 2 0:25:29] Lee: Quite famous

Davis: Yes. And it wasn't a very luxurious place. Everybody used to stay there from Camp: the shepherds and everybody and she'd serve up mutton chops for breakfast. It wasn't luxurious but then eventually I met a lady - Mrs Smith - and she said: 'Oh, I take lodgers if you want to come'. So I went to stay at her house for a while - nearly a year. She was very nice. Very pleasant little house.

[Part 2 0:26:13] Lee: Tell me about the house.

Davis: It was like a little English country cottage, really. Stone built. One out the back and this massive garden. She was a very nice lady but she went to join her son in New Zealand eventually. So I had to find another place. She passed me on to somebody else - Mrs King. She had a lovely big house. Her son was the town printer. He worked at the printing works in Stanley. I saw out my time there. She was a very nice lady. Very old - she must have been near 70. Then she went to New Zealand.

[Part 2 0:27:06] Lee: Was there a tidal drift?

Davis: Well there was a steady flow, I think, to New Zealand from the Falklands.

[Part 2 0:27:13] Lee: Oh really. Any particular reason do you think?

Davis: I don't know whether they touted it as it was another island. In fact there are quite a lot there now. By coincidence - you wouldn't believe - my disabled daughter has got a social worker and her name is Jennings. She said once: 'Oh my husband's from New Zealand.' I said I knew a Jennings who went to New Zealand - Hamish and Gerald. She said: 'Oh Hamish is my husband's father.'

[Part 2 0:28:04] Lee: There can't be many Hamish Jennings around.

Davis: No It's just an amazing coincidence.

[Part 2 0:28:11] Lee: How do you fill your time in the Falklands or were you just in the radio station all the time?

Davis: Well no. There was always quite a lot going on. We used to belong to a club called the Glue Pot. It was open all hours - drinking sort of thing. There was a snooker table. We used to congregate there. There was also plenty going on in Port Stanley. There were always dances going on; film shows; the Glue Pot; and plenty of other pubs as well. About 6 or 8 pubs in the small town.

[Part 2 0:28:55] Lee: Was the Glue Pot somewhere that Fids went on a regular basis?

Davis: Well the Fids who worked in Stanley did. Lofty Tyson used to belong to it and people who worked at the Met Office there in Stanley used to frequent it.

[Part 2 0:29:10] Lee: What were the attractions?

Davis: Well , beer and you could be on your own. You know, you're a group on your own sort of thing. We had little parties and gatherings there. People from the FIDS office. It's quite an enjoyable time there. The roads were terrible. I didn't have any transport. Lofty Tyson had this big BMW motorbike. He used to go to and from.

[Part 2 0:29:44] Lee: So you would prefer to go to the Glue Pot rather than to the Globe?

Davis: I rarely went to the Globe. I don't know why. I suppose I just didn't fancy it.

[Part 2 0:29:56] Lee: The cinema was quite famous wasn't it? Was it in the Town hall?

Davis: Yes. In fact one of the operators in Stanley – I forget his name – but when I was working in GCHQ I went on a course to Bletchley Park, and while I was there I saw this chap who'd been an operator in Stanley. He'd come up for an interview for a job in GCHQ. He didn't get it but I was surprised to see him after about 6 years or so.

[Par 2 0:30:44] Lee: So life in Stanley was not dull then?

Davis: Oh, it wasn't dull, no. If you felt like a walk there was plenty of walking and beaches. A bit on the cold side and half a gale blowing most of the time. I really enjoyed them, yes.

[Part 2 0:31:04] Lee: Did you meet any young ladies?

Davis: There were some young ladies there, yes, but not very many. I think they were in short supply.

[Part 2 0:31:16] Lee: What happened at the end of your time in Port Stanley – the FIDS Radio Station? Did your contract run out or did you get fed up?

Davis: I only went down there for a 3 year contract to start with. I did a bit more than 3 years, but I came back. While I was there I saw an advert in this *Wireless World* magazine for operators for GCHQ, so I wrote off from Stanley and they sent me a letter back saying: 'apply when you return to the UK'. So that's what I did and got accepted and eventually went on a training course at GCHQ

[Part 2 0:32:00] Lee: And the Government Communications Headquarters was a career for you wasn't it?

Davis: Oh it was, yes. I served over 30 years there, so I was only just 29 when I came back from the Falkland's. I retired at 61.

[Part 2 0:32:15] Lee: I'm conscious of the fact that you've got some notes there.

Davis: Well I think we've covered most of them really. It was just to remind me of a few bits and pieces. There's nothing we haven't covered.

[Part 2 0:32:38] Lee: I'm just wondering. In all that time of your lifetime, how highly do the years with FIDS rate in your life?

Davis: Oh, they rate very highly.

[Part 2 0:32:54] Lee: Was it the highlight of your career?

Davis: I would say so, yes. I enjoyed it. I must say looking back I enjoyed it quite well. The only other thing I've got here is that we used to have..... At Signy we used to have a big steel oil drum, which we used to have our baths in.

[Part 2 0:33:15] Lee: Tell me about that..

Davis: It was a massive heavy steel thing – I don't know if it was an oil drum – but it was a big tub – like one of these Ali Baba things made of steel.

[Part 2 0:33:27] Lee: So it was upright was it?

Davis: Yes, you had to climb into it. It had water in the tank heated with the stove that heated the hot water as well, so we used to use that.

The only other thing, in Stanley, we had a tragedy. One of the operators drowned in Stanley harbour while I was there.

[Part 2 0:33:54] Lee: I didn't know about this. What was the story?

Davis: Well, he liked his drink. He was an ex Lancaster air gunner and he used to knock around with a couple of Falkland Islanders. One night evidently they challenged him to swim out to one of the boats that were moored – these old vessels they used as warehouses – moored in Stanley harbour. I think having a few he tried to swim out and he never came back. They just left him and they went home. They never reported it and he was found the next day.

[Part 2 0:34:49] Lee: Do you remember the year and his name?

Davis: 1958. I would think it must be. Stan – I forget his name now.

[Part 2 0:35:07] Lee: He was a Fid was he?

Davis: He'd been down on the bases, yes. For some reason he only did a couple of months there and then he came back to Stanley. So whether he didn't like it or I don't know what the story was on that, but he came back to Stanley anyway.

[Part 2 0:35:25] Lee: It's a small community isn't it – Port Stanley? How would that incident have affected the community?

Davis: I think there was quite a bit of upset about it because the other two Falkland Islanders just left him and did not mount any rescue. He was found on the beach the next day. He had drowned, but I think they had all had too much to drink anyway. They were quite a heavy drinking crowd, the Falkland Islanders, anyway.

[Part 2 0:35:57] Lee: Did you get out beyond the camp much?

Davis: Only once. I went to a dance once at Fitzroy. That was the only time I went out. Walking to beaches and that sort of thing. One day there was a frightening incident, for me anyway. Lofty Tyson borrowed a dinghy and he said 'We'll go out'. So a crowd of us went out to Stanley harbour with this outboard motor. We got across and we got out and this terrific gale started to get up, and then the outboard motor packed up. We were in the middle of the harbour and it was quite choppy, and it's a small boat with about 6 or 8 of us. We were trying to row ashore and it took quite a while to get ashore. It was a bit frightening – for me anyway. Not being a nautical person.

[Part 2 0:37:25] Lee: I think that's all I was hoping to cover. You've done a very good job, so shall we call it a day?

Davis: Yes, that's fine.

[Part 2 0:37:31] Lee: Thank you, Graham, very much.

Points of interest in transcription:

Part 1 0:29:45 – Digging a grave at Deception

Part 1 0:29:32 – Radio Hamming

Part 1 0:38:07 – Exotic food at Signy

Part 2 0:18:19 – Crisis with the *Shackleton*

Part 2 0:35:54 – Drowning at Port Stanley