

BERNIE CHAPPEL

Edited transcript of a recording of Bernie Chappel interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 18th September 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/186. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 25th January 2019.

Part One

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Bernie Chappel, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 18th of September 2012. Bernie Chappel, Part 1. I need to know. It's always the hardest question of all, isn't it? I need your name, your place and your date of birth, please.

Chappel: Bernard Morgan Chappel. I was born outside Warrington, a little village called Thelwall which is now infamous because of the viaduct on the M6.

[Part 1 0:00:28] Lee: Date of birth?

Chappel: Date of birth: 16th of the 7th '43.

[Part 1 0:00:33] Lee: So you are now sixty ...

Chappel: Approaching seventy (69).

[Part 1 0:00:38] Lee: Just repeat your middle name again.

Chappel: Morgan.

[Part 1 0:00:40] Lee: Morgan?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:00:41] Lee: As in the car or a Welsh connection?

Chappel: As in a Welsh connection, yes. I have two Welsh connections: one from my mother and one from my father.

[Part 1 0:00:54] Lee: Would you say that your father was an educated man?

Chappel: Yes, he was privately educated, which was unusual, and my mother as well.

[Part 1 0:01:02] Lee: How did that happen?

Chappel: They belonged to ... Well my father belonged to a very wealthy family in Warrington. They owned a good third of Warrington at one stage. In all there were seven brothers, one sister and they were all privately educated. My mother to some extent was privately educated but also went to St Albans High (she was from Harpenden) and Altrincham Grammar School.

[Part 1 0:01:43] Lee: So would they have been academics, then?

Chappel: Not in the least. My father became an engineer. My mother didn't work at all. But the crash came within the family and that's why my father had to go out to work. Previously he hadn't needed to work.

[Part 1 0:02:14] Lee: So they lost money in the Depression?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:02:18] Lee: Engineering is such a broad church. What kind of engineering was father in?

Chappel: He was involved with the wire weaving industry which Warrington was noted for at one stage and he was responsible for maintaining looms. And he actually invented a wire weaving loom which went world-wide, but unfortunately his lack of interest in money really ... and he completely lost out there. But it did mean this loom, instead of ten people working a wire weaving loom, that was reduced to three as far as I can ..., so a huge saving.

[Part 1 0:03:10] Lee: Are there other repercussions too, in terms of employment? You are getting rid of seven people.

Chappel: Oh yes. Yes but the ... at the time, the company was expanding, and doing huge amounts of business. So I don't think it had serious implications.

[Part 1 0:03:38] Lee: By the time you came along, were you able to enjoy a private education too?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:03:46] Lee: That was very emphatic. Tell me about your education.

Chappel: Well my father and mother didn't see education as particularly useful so I went to the local village school and ended up failing the 11+, going to a secondary school where they discovered that I couldn't read.

[Part 1 0:04:17] Lee: Really?

Chappel: Yes. Or read not very well. So I was placed in the bottom class, but within six months I was in the top class. Very very good school actually.

[Part 1 0:04:36] Lee: Do you want to name it?

Chappel: Well it's called Stockton Heath High School now I think. It was one of the secondary modern schools but it was run by a chap who was highly religious and very strict, and the whole of the teaching staff and him in particular, we had a lot of respect for. So it did us no harm, or did me no harm.

[Part 1 0:05:18] Lee: That's a very particular kind of childhood story isn't it, that the gentry who lost money, at the next generation the gentry still don't feel education is

important because it wasn't when they had plenty of money, thirty or forty years earlier?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:05:34] Lee: So how do you feel that has shaped your view on the life you then had to lead?

Chappel: I was disappointed for many years because most of my contemporaries were at grammar school, in fact all my primary school ones were at grammar schools. So for a long time I felt, even though I knew I was on their level or above, I was seen as sort of secondary, if you like.

[Part 1 0:06:11] Lee: So what happened to the reading? Was this something that again the parents weren't too bothered about?

Chappel: No, as many parents weren't in those days. I think my mother was quite keen that I did well at school but she wasn't too keen on knowing about the process. She was so busy with other things. She was chairman of this and chairman of that – a very busy lady.

[Part 1 0:06:43] Lee: Public works?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:06:49] Lee: But when you did learn to read, so you would be about 11 or 12, by the time you could read fluently, was there no opportunity then to move up to a higher grade school, to a grammar school?

Chappel: Yes there was but it wasn't made easy and on going to grammar school, you would have to step down a year which I seriously thought about but then I considered that I was actually receiving quite a good education anyway. So apart from not having a language or the more academic side of things, as I said the school was a very good school.

[Part 1 0:07:46] Lee: So when you were old enough, would further education have been on the agenda or firmly off it?

Chappel: Further education was on the agenda. I went into catering and I did two years at secondary school, myself and forty girls, which was interesting.

[Part 1 0:08:10] Lee: Was that a good experience?

Chappel: Oh excellent experience, yes. I was the go-between, the arranger if you like, because I knew all the girls obviously.

[Part 1 0:08:21] Lee: Are you a matchmaker?

Chappel: Matchmaking.

[Part 1 0:08:23] Lee: Oh I see.

Chappel: I then went to catering college for three years and became a chef, but I trained in hotel management. So my idea at the time was to go into hotel management, which I did eventually, but that was a fairly short spell in the career.

[Part 1 0:05:53] Lee: What was Mother's view about all that? Was she happy for you to have a trade?

Chappel: She was quite happy, yes. I had two brothers and they had trades, the same.

[Part 1 0:09:04] Lee: You worked for, was it the Red Rose chain?

Chappel: Yes, now DeVere's.

[Part 1 0:09:09] Lee: Did you sense a career structure there or were you simply growing older?

Chappel: They had a mapped out career structure but I very quickly learned that people in my position were just being used, cheap labour. I became the under-manager for three hotels, I think it was, and there didn't appear to be, at the time, any possibility for progress. Whenever I asked, they just said 'You need to get married first' and all this business. So I then started looking for something else.

[Part 1 0:10:02] Lee: And that's when you saw the fatal advert?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:10:05] Lee: Tell me about that, first of all seeing it and then your reaction to it.

Chappel: I'd had an ambition. I had already travelled a little bit through Europe and I had an ambition to travel some more. That also was in the family so ...

[Part 1 0:10:30] Lee: How do you mean?

Chappel: Well my mother's brother lived from the war, the time of the Second World War, lived in India and then in Iraq for most of his career before retiring. He was an engineering teacher working for Shell, I think it was.

[Part 1 0:10:57] Lee: So exotic tales were being told in the family, were they?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:11:00] Lee: At Christmas time and so on?

Chappel: Yes. I think he wasn't the only one. Many of my family had been to various places.

[Part 1 0:11:08] Lee: Had you read about the Antarctic when you were a lad? When you could read?

Chappel: Well the very first book that I was ever given was *Moby Dick* which is not the easiest book to read. I don't know whether you have ever read it.

[Part 1 0:11:27] Lee: I must have done at some point but it was many many years ago

Chappel: So I was forever having to go (which was useful), for ever having to go to the dictionary. And that fired something, I think. And then, along with another student, when we were about to leave catering college, he came up with the idea of working for a company called Southern Cross, a Norway whaling company. So we jointly wrote off to them and they eventually replied, saying that it was father-son arrangements, certainly within the catering side of things, so there was very little chance of us ever joining them. Then we looked at moving to Monte Carlo, Hotel de Paris, and that fell through because my buddy at the time, his family were friendly with Winston Churchill and he used to stay at the Hotel de Paris, I think it is called, and that is who we applied to. But again, that fell through. So I then went to the Red Rose company, saw the advert in the *Telegraph* and applied, just like that.

[Part 1 0:13:08] Lee: Why did you apply? Can you recall?

Chappel: I think it was a sense of adventure, wanting to experience things different. I was getting into a ... I could see the road mapped out before me and I didn't particularly like the look of it, so I obviously decided that I needed to change something.

[Part 1 0:13:38] Lee: So was it a positive decision to apply to go to the Antarctic or was it a decision to get out of where you were at present, or somewhere between the two?

Chappel: Somewhere between. Yes it was positive and it meant I was getting out of the rut, if you like, that I was in at the time.

[Part 1 0:13:58] Lee: *Moby Dick* isn't a complete understanding of the Antarctic, is it?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:14:02] Lee: Had you read about Scott and Shackleton?

Chappel: Well I knew about them, yes. Obviously Shackleton appeared to be the hero, and subsequently turned out to be, although I have a lot more ... Having read quite considerably about Scott, I have a lot more respect for him these days.

[Part 1 0:14:31] Lee: What tipped the balance for you?

Chappel: With Scott?

[Part 1 0:14:34] Lee: As far as Scott is concerned, yes.

Chappel: Again I think it was understanding his upbringing and where he came from, as to why he did some of the things he did. He was wrong about dogs, obviously; that was the classic one, but had things gone reasonably well for him, then it would have been a different story, wouldn't it? They just had exceedingly bad luck.

[Part 1 0:15:11] Lee: So you applied to BAS. Was it an advert for a chef or a cook?

Chappel: Base cook.

[Part 1 0:15:19] Lee: And you were called for interview?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:15:23] Lee: I appreciate it is half a century ago but what do you recall, if anything, of the interview? Was it a challenging interview or was it a shoe in?

Chappel: Very challenging.

[Part 1 0:15:34] Lee: Oh right? That's unusual.

Chappel: You haven't heard that before?

[Part 1 0:15:39] Lee: Well frequently the answer is 'I got the job before I got there.'

Chappel: Right, I would imagine that was the case with many who applied but I would have been completely out of the blue.

[Part 1 0:15:55] Lee: No connection?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:15:57] Lee: Tell me, what do you recall?

Chappel: I do recall being asked whether I had a girlfriend or what my present situation was, which I thought was very strange, having not thought about things particularly, prior to the interview. It is an obvious question at the end of the day.

[Part 1 0:16:26] Lee: 'What are your ties?'

Chappel: I suppose yes, what sort of relationship I was in at the moment and I had actually just finished with one female, so that seemed to satisfy that side of things. But the interview, I remember, was more about how I got on with other people and what did I think about religion etc. etc. which again in retrospect, these were obvious questions they needed to be asking.

[Part 1 0:17:09] Lee: So they were more concerned about your sociability than they were about your catering ability?

Chappel: Yes, well I don't think there was any expertise across the table anyway.

[Part 1 0:17:20] Lee: Do you recall who was across the table?

Chappel: I think it was Eric Salmon. There was a psychiatrist.

[Part 1 0:17:32] Lee: Was there?

Chappel: Apparently, yes.

[Part 1 0:17:34] Lee: Introduced as such?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:17:37] Lee: How interesting.

Chappel: And there were three people on the panel. I can't remember who the other chap was.

[Part 1 0:17:44] Lee: This would be '64, when the interview took place?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:17:51] Lee: OK. I think most Fids felt they were being psyched out but you are the first person to suggest that there was actually some professional psychiatrist on the panel. Because I have been interviewing chaps older than you mainly. How interesting.

Chappel: Yes. It may have been something they introduced, or they introduced specifically for the likes of myself.

[Part 1 0:18:13] Lee: Because they didn't know anything about you?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:18:15] Lee: Yes, OK. Were you surprised to get the job?

Chappel: I was surprised to get the job, yes, and it all happened very quickly. I had to give my notice in more or less straightaway. Off I went. It was all done very quickly.

[Part 1 0:18:35] Lee: Were you taking a pay cut?

Chappel: Difficult to say.

[Part 1 0:18:45] Lee: Well if it was a significant pay cut, you would remember it.

Chappel: Yes. I don't think so. I didn't think about pay anyway.

[Part 1 0:19:01] Lee: It was the adventure rather than the ackers?

Chappel: It was, yes. I had always something to fall back on, if you like, my family. They weren't destitute by any means. Still ...

[Part 1 0:19:14] Lee: Right, so they had recovered from the crash?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:19:19] Lee: So what did Mother make of this? 'Our Bernie going to the Antarctic.'

Chappel: Yes, well in one respect she was not surprised that I would choose to do something like that, but on the other, she didn't have an understanding really of where the Antarctic was and how remote things could be. Just seen as an adventure, perhaps she wouldn't have liked me to go on. And at the time it was for at least two and a half years. My mother and myself were quite close. I was the eldest boy and all that goes with that.

[Part 1 0:20:12] Lee: Was she a good cook?

Chappel: My mother? Hopeless. No time for cooking.

[Part 1 0:20:22] Lee: So you must have had ... Did the family employ a cook? I suppose my question is where did you get your interest in cookery from, if it wasn't you mother?

Chappel: Well I think possibly the poor standard.

[Part 1 0:20:37] Lee: So were you actually in the kitchen quite a lot at home?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:20:41] Lee: Preparing food for the family?

Chappel: From an early age, yes, doing my bit. I don't know quite why ... It was either agriculture, because my mother was a farmer's daughter, or my grandfather managed estates, but basically he was a farmer. My mother was a farmer's daughter, quite a wealthy farmer's daughter. So it was either going into farming in some way, and I had worked on farms since I was ten years old: summer holidays and every opportunity. So it was either that or I did always have a keen interest in cooking and having some decent food at home, because my mother never had time for cooking. It was a chore, you know.

[Part 1 0:21:54] Lee: So in your childhood kitchen years, were you actually also ordering food and buying it?

Chappel: Yes because I liked to ring the changes somewhat, although my father was used to his meat and two veg, and didn't particularly like all the changes that I was bringing in. But I did like to experiment, even before I went to catering college.

[Part 1 0:22:28] Lee: And would he recognise that you were doing that and encourage you?

Chappel: Not particularly. I didn't properly speak to my father for all the time I was growing up, until I was in my late teens really, I think, and I never understood why. I now understand why.

[Part 1 0:22:56] Lee: You do now?

Chappel: I do now.

[Part 1 0:22:58] Lee: It's probably beyond the remit of this interview.

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:23:00] Lee: But one gets the sense of a probably late Victorian relationship.

Chappel: Yes, which was a pity in a way, because my father was a very interesting guy to talk to. I used to hear this from other people but he never actually spoke to me at any length.

[Part 1 0:23:20] Lee: In your experiments, would you have been introducing food from overseas: pasta, rice, curry?

Chappel: No no. That would be a step too far.

[Part 1 0:23:31] Lee: OK. So you were actually pretty well qualified in a rather roundabout way, to work for BAS, or for FIDS as it was then?

Chappel: Oh yes. Well I not only had my three year college experience, but also practically, out in the field if you like, for what is now De Veres Hotel Company.

[Part 1 0:23:55] Lee: Tell me about that short period between being told you had got the job and sailing South. Were you ordering food or was it all preplanned to take with you?

Chappel: Oh no, that was all done for you. All the staple things: sea biscuits for example, that existed at the time, were all on base anyway, and it was like a pre-order each year.

[Part 1 0:24:39] Lee: So you had no say in your store cupboard?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:24:32] Lee: Did you take cookbooks?

Chappel: No. I didn't need to, no.

[Part 1 0:24:35] Lee: You didn't need to?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:24:36] Lee: OK. How was the journey, on the *Shackleton*?

Chappel: The journey for me was horrendous to begin with. I never had been a particularly good sailor. I'm not too bad once I have settled down to the journey, but immediately, it seemed, out of Southampton we were into the Bay of Biscay in one of the most horrific storms the captain, Captain Frosty ...

[Part 1 0:25:10] Lee: Turnbull?

Chappel: Turnbull, yes Frosty as we knew him, had ever experienced. And I was laid up for seven days I think, something like that, without food, in fact nobody really looking after me. So I was in dire straits after four or five days, unable to keep anything down, not even taking liquid on board, which I now know that was foolish. But once I settled down to the journey, once that was over, then I was fine, but I had missed out the first week mixing in with the other Fids and the crew. So they all knew each other.

[Part 1 0:26:16] Lee: You were not being cared for because there was nobody on board to care for you, or because everybody else on board was feeling the same way?

Chappel: Well I've no doubt some were feeling the same way.

[Part 1 0:26:17] Lee: But there's no nurse or medical or even matron?

Chappel: No. Everybody must look after yourself.

[Part 1 0:26:36] Lee: So you had to break into the social circle rather later than most?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:26:42] Lee: Was that a struggle?

Chappel: No not really. I have always been an outgoing type, but I was one of the youngest on board.

[Part 1 0:26:55] Lee: You were twenty, weren't you?

Chappel: Yes, so initially I was the butt of everything, as you might imagine. The same happened on base. I knew I had to cope with that but I think (little did I know) that my upbringing and the people I mixed with, sort of prepared me in a way for that.

[Part 1 0:27:28] Lee: Was this good-humoured, or was there more to it than just being jovial?

Chappel: Oh no.

[Part 1 0:27:35] Lee: It was good humoured?

Chappel: Good humoured.

[Part 1 0:27:37] Lee: Right, so you weren't being bullied or victimised?

Chappel: No no. A lot of people ... I was a big chap anyway, so I am not easily bullied. A lot of the people I was mixing with were very experienced, well-travelled. And the crew, in fact I got to know many of the crew before I did my fellow Fids because I made ... A lot of the Fids wouldn't talk to them particularly and I made a point of talking to them which they took on board. I used to go down to their mess which they thought was a good thing to do.

[Part 1 0:28:36] Lee: So was that something which came from the back channel that we talked about earlier, this sense of equality – Everyman – equality between men?

Chappel: Yes. I didn't see any difference – I never have in my life really – any difference from the so-called 'lowest of the low' up to the highest of the high. I have never seen that sort of demarcation.

[Part 1 0:29:07] Lee: This comes in again later, doesn't it, on Deception Island, when you were one of the first Fids to want to offer the hand to the Argentinians and socialise with them.

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:26:16] Lee: We will come to that a bit later on. Tell me about Port Stanley. What was it like in 1964, turning into '65? You had arrived by about Christmas time I guess?

Chappel: Yes. For me it was sort of turning back to the early fifties, what I remember of the early fifties, and it appeared to me to be in an idyllic way of living, in the way the community were together in many respects. There were parties every other night for us and dances and all the usual social things. I don't remember an awful lot about it, to be honest, because we were that busy loading and unloading the ship and helping with ... and the round of parties.

[Part 1 0:30:36] Lee: On the way South in the *Shackleton*, there was an adjustment that had to be made because I think there was some confusion over how long you were going to be down there for and what you might do when you got there.

Chappel: Yes. My understanding, because it was all rather hurriedly done after my interview, was that I was committed, or down there for two and a half years. But on board the *Shackleton*, I discovered that it was only for six months, which I was rather surprised at, and I immediately applied to make the two and a half years, because I had already told everybody obviously about that, and I didn't see the point of just experiencing a summer jolly. I wanted to know about the winter and I wanted to move from the base I knew I was going to, Deception Island, further south to experience things further south. So I had already committed myself to that, so I applied whilst on board and I was successful.

[Part 1 0:31:55] Lee: So you knew you were going to Deception Island. Had you had a chance to do any homework about the place before? Were you told on the boat or were you told back in the UK?

Chappel: No, nothing at all really.

[Part 1 0:32:09] Lee: Suddenly this volcanic rim appeared on the horizon?

Chappel: Yes. On the way down we'd had the experience of going to Punta Arenas. We'd had the experience of going to the Falklands and then South Georgia, called in at Signy Island. So I had a sort of slow introduction to the sort of life I was going to lead, yes.

[Part 1 0:32:43] Lee: Tell me about Deception when you got there. It wasn't quite the archetypal Antarctic landscape you were expecting?

Chappel: No, but I don't think I ever ... I was more interested in the old whaling station and things like that and the history behind the place. We did, I think, have a fairly coloured view of what to expect but that never fazed me in any way. I quite liked the look of what I saw when I arrived and I enjoyed my time at Deception Island quite a lot, yes, more than most I think.

[Part 1 0:33:50] Lee: The catering facilities would not have been the same as the De Vere or Red Rose hotel chain kitchens?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:33:58] Lee: So what were you faced with in '65?

Chappel: Very fortunately, most of the guys I was to spend the winter with and others were used to fairly basic foods anyway, so it was nothing... The requests came more or less straight way 'No fancy foods.' There had to be bread on the table at every meal and basic stews – nothing fancy at all.

[Part 1 0:34:38] Lee: Was that a relief for you, or frustration or disappointment?

Chappel: No, not at all. No I was very quickly into other things on base, so I only had a certain amount of time to spend in the kitchen anyway. I took over the dog team more or less straight away and quite a few other duties, as we did. We were only a small base anyway so you found yourself sort of multitasking.

[Part 1 0:35:15] Lee: Before we move onto other things, tell me a bit more about what you were cooking on and what was in the stores that surprised or disappointed you? Was it an Aga of some sort?

Chappel: It was an Aga.

[Part 1 0:35:27] Lee: An Aga?

Chappel: Yes, which had mind of its own.

[Part 1 0:35:33] Lee: I've yet to meet one that hasn't.

Chappel: That's right, and during windy times, it was horrendous trying to cook. Everything got so hot and you couldn't control ... You hadn't got the control over the ovens for example, that with the more modern, even Aga, you would have. So until I got used to it, there were a fair number of disasters which I didn't expect. But it was understanding the vagaries of that sort of oven of the cooker.

[Part 1 0:36:27] Lee: So to be a decent chef, you had to be a good met man as well, did you? One or two sources suggest that being the base cook is actually the most stressful job on the whole base, because you are the butt again, of various comments. Is that true? Was that true in your time?

Chappel: That was true in my case, yes.

[Part 1 0:36:52] Lee: Do you remember any particular moments when you were in despair?

Chappel: Never in despair, no, because many of the people that made comments, or the few people that made derogatory comments, weren't people I would normally associate with anyway, and they were temporary on base, not the people I spent the year with. So I could dismiss ...

[Part 1 0:33] Lee: And presumably you had a day off and somebody else had to step into your shoes and they had the same problems I guess?

Chappel: Oh yes, but I was having to do the training of course because many of them had cooked in their lives. So yes, I spent quite a bit of time with them and gave them basic recipes that they could use virtually every time. So they were only on duty one weekend in seven, so to have a seven-week cycle was OK. One or two liked to be more experimental and try different things but no, they were quite concerned that they should produce something that was edible.

[Part 1 0:38:24] Lee: Right. There was an edge to it all?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:38:29] Lee: Did you get into the habit of having a backup if the Aga was misbehaving? Did you have Plan B?

Chappel: Oh yes. I can't remember now what but yes, there was always a Plan B or C, yes.

[Part 1 0:38:47] Lee: Depending on what went wrong?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:38:49] Lee: Tell me about the dog team. Was it a serious dog team? Were you using it on a regular basis?

Chappel: I had to exercise them on a regular basis, and BAS decided that I should go in for a breeding programme. Somehow the fact that I was that interested got back to

somebody or other and they decided to have Deception as a breeding, pup-rearing base.

[Part 1 0:39:29] Lee: You were taking over the dogs from, was it Mike Warr?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:39:31] Lee: So was there already a training programme and a breeding programme in place when you took it over?

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:39:38] Lee: So tell me about the process of developing the dogs.

Chappel: My mother was a dog person, so we had always had a dog at home, so I was used to handling dogs but the husky is a different matter altogether. And it was a process of selecting for various features required by BAS of the dogs, selecting from those that I had on base.

[Part 1 0:40:21] Lee: How many altogether, would you have, say?

Chappel: I can't remember exactly now but ...

[Part 1 0:40:26] Lee: A dozen or two?

Chappel: No, about 15 I think, adult dogs: three bitches, 12 dogs, something like that.

[Part 1 0:40:38] Lee: Would it be HQ that was deciding which dogs to match together, or would you make that decision for them?

Chappel: No, I made all the decisions on that.

[Part 1 0:40:53] Lee: So they told you what kind of dog they were looking for?

Chappel: Well no. I knew what sort of dogs they were looking for. So the Antarctic dog became almost a variety, if you like, on its own, because there was a requirement for long legs but powerful bodies. So they were looking for big dogs, so I had to think about the pairings. Yes, a very interesting exercise, a very interesting time of my life.

[Part 1 0:41:43] Lee: Did you meet any problems with the dogs at all or were they all ...

Chappel: No.

[Part 1 0:41:47] Lee: ... perfectly OK?

Chappel: I, very very fortunately, had what was termed a 'king dog', Pooka his name was. Have you come across that before?

[Part 1 0:42:04] Lee: Yes. I can't remember what the name of the dogs' pack was. What were they called?

Chappel: The Huns, of Deception, yes. And he was a fierce animal, but away from the pack, if you like, as soft as anything. So he had obviously had to maintain – I think he came from Stonington originally – and he carried that on through later life, and maintained superiority. But an absolutely fabulous dog to work with: intelligent, massively strong, although he did show his age towards the end of my time with him.

[Part 1 0:43:06] Lee: Were you involved with his despatch?

Chappel: No. That came after I left.

[Part 1 0:43:13] Lee: So were the Huns being used to do serious work, or was it more a recreational ...?

Chappel: Recreational thing, but being involved in the breeding programme, obviously they were a lot more use.

[Part 1 0:43:30] Lee: So some of the dogs you bred would eventually have been shipped out to other bases?

Chappel: To Halley Bay and down to Stonington, sledging bases, yes.

[Part 1 0:43:43] Lee: We talked about the journey down and your being given an extended stay in the Antarctic. You trained on the ship to learn about meteorology on the way down, so was Deception using your meteorological knowledge after all that? I think Dave Walters was the Base Leader and the guy who trained you?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:44:04] Lee: So did he put you to work?

Chappel: Oh yes, I had to do my stint. There were three of us, so every third day, on Deception.... Every third day I did my 24 hour stint as the met man.

[Part 1 0:44:26] Lee: So how was that? Here you are, somebody who trained as a chef, suddenly being involved in animal husbandry and weather forecasting, or weather recording?

Chappel: Well I have always been adaptable, and even as an early teenager, I wasn't just about catering; I was about other things as well.

[Part 1 0:44:54] Lee: So the variety was welcomed?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:44:59] Lee: Let's talk a bit, if we can We are going to dart about a bit but whilst we are at Deception, this is of course where you began to observe other things apart from the weather, in the sky. And we have been looking at some notes about a number of UFO sightings reported from the three bases on Deception Island:

yourselves, the Argentinian base and the Chilean base around that time. I am just wondering whether you would like to tell me what it was that you saw.

Chappel: It was on a night observation, I am told around July period, so well into the winter. And in doing my cloud assessments on I think it was the midnight observation. I can't remember obviously but midnight or 3 o'clock observation.

[Part 1 0:46:04] Lee: You were alone?

Chappel: I was alone, and obviously doing a cloud assessment, cloud cover assessment. I noticed initially the night was quite clear, the sky was quite clear, but there, hovering almost above me was this very bright bottle-green light which I hadn't observed ever before, just stationary in the sky. I didn't think an awful lot of it really. It could have been anything. I don't know where I got it from but Venus can appear like that on occasions. So I didn't think an awful lot of it until it started to move, and it hurtled away at great speed, if memory serves me, off towards the north, and disappeared. I thought that peculiar, and it was in a straight line. I did my observation. Obviously I was interested still in the sky and what was happening up there, and as I was walking back to the hut, this bottle-green light appeared again, but appeared as a tiny dot in the sky and then came and hovered above before disappearing off towards the south. As memory, people now here dispute whether it was going north, south or whatever it was doing. I thought at the time I had witnessed something quite unusual but to regale the story to the rest of the members on base, I thought perhaps it was prudent not to. Because I was the youngest person on base by far and used to, although not liking, the ribbing I used to get, but well able to hold my own. I thought that might be a step too far, that I had seen something like that. But I was interested to find out, because I knew the Argentinians took observations at the same time, whether they had seen anything similar. And subsequently, when I had the opportunity of meeting up with their met man, he described to me virtually what I had seen.

[Part 1 0:49:35] Lee: At the same time, on the same evening?

Chappel: At the same time. And he had reported it back to – I think they had a direct reporting system – back to Buenos Aires. And the Press got hold of it and it all went ...

[Part 1 0:49:52] Lee: The South American press or ...?

Chappel: The South American press.

[Part 1 0:49:55] Lee: Right. Not the World press?

Chappel: No, well not that I am aware.

[Part 1 0:49:58] Lee: No. It's difficult to know of course, in the Antarctic, isn't it? Is that the only sighting that you made?

Chappel: That was the only sighting that I made, yes.

[Part 1 0:50:07] Lee: So once you had established that the Argentinian Met Officer had seen the same as you, were you then more confident about talking about it back at the British base?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:50:18] Lee: And how was that received?

Chappel: Some scepticism I suppose. I can't remember. I wasn't in any way vilified – well I don't remember being. It was just sort of accepted as one of those things that could happen. But I was trying to think of what else it could have been, and there didn't appear to be, because there's no aircraft flying over the Antarctic, not that I knew. Satellites: it was out of their route around the Earth, and the way it behaved was quite peculiar.

[Part 1 0:51:16] Lee: There was definitely an intelligence involved, was there? It couldn't have been a random ...? It couldn't have been a slightly strange side-effect of the aurora australis?

Chappel: Oh, it could have been, yes. I have never considered that it was visitors, aliens. No, just a peculiar phenomenon. It might have been due to ice crystals. All sorts of effects you get with ice crystals in the air. It might have been something to do with that or who knows.

[Part 1 0:52:03] Lee: But the way you describe it moving suggests that it was moving because somebody or something wished it to move, but you are saying it could have been a natural phenomenon?

Chappel: A natural phenomenon.

[Part 1 0:52:16] Lee: Was the guy at the Argentinian base of the same opinion?

Chappel: He, I think, was more convinced that it was a UFO controlled device of some sort, and the base leader was certainly, once it was reported to him.

[Part 1 0:52:36] Lee: This is Perisse, isn't it?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:52:39] Lee: There's also reports from the Chilean base around about the same time.

Chappel: Yes, I wasn't aware of that.

[Part 1 0:52:45] Lee: Differing observations of unexplained flying objects.

Chappel: Yes. I was quizzed at length, again trying to remember back to the 35 or 40 years it was, when I was being quizzed by this Spanish guy and Argentinian fellow. There was no way I could remember which ... and I wasn't aware, for a long time, that the Chileans has seen something as well.

[Part 1 0:58:20] Lee: Who were you being quizzed by? An academic?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 1 0:53:24] Lee: A Spanish academic?

Chappel: A Spanish academic, yes, and well initially an Argentinian academic, because they wanted to know more.

[Part 1 0:53:32] Lee: We had lunch with Pablo Justo earlier this month and he was pretty dismissive of all this, saying that the Argentinian base leader was a UFO enthusiast anyway, and so any excuse to see one, he would have pounced upon. Which surprised me slightly because there is quite a lot of documentary evidence from other places too. What's your feeling about that? Did it shake your confidence in what you had seen?

Chappel: Not one bit. No, I saw what I saw and that's it so far as I am concerned.

[Part 1 0:54:06] Lee: Was there any concerted effort then, on the British base to keep an eye open for these things?

Chappel: I don't think so.

[Part 1 0:54:15] Lee: It was just one of those things?

Chappel: Just one of those things, yes.

[Part 1 0:54:22] Lee: You didn't acquire a nickname or a reputation?

Chappel: No. Obviously from my initial response you could see I would play something like that down, because of the extra opportunity for a bit of ribbing.

[Part 1 0:54:44] Lee: Well precisely, yes.

[Part 1 0:54:46] [End of Part One]

Part Two

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Bernie Chappel, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 18th of September 2012. Bernie Chappel, Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:11] Lee: We hinted earlier that you formed some friendships with the Argentinians and that you were the first person to go across there and say hello. Is that true?

Chappel: Yes, as far as I can remember, yes.

[Part 2 0:00:23] Lee: Tell me about that relationship.

Chappel: Well it began with ... I developed severe toothache and I was not prepared ... There were people on base, obviously Dave Walters the Base Leader, and the diesel mechanic Geoff Hodson, who volunteered their services to extract said bad tooth. But I had heard that the Argentinians did have a doctor on base so I thought that was going to be my best option. So on a day off, as soon as I – because I was in agony – as soon as I was able, I walked around the island to the Argentinian base, on the way visiting the Chileans who we had met up with previously. And the male nurse on the Chilean base, a chap called Denavides, said he would come round and offer his assistance. So he and others followed me around, but I was in such agony that I carried on on my own.

[Part 2 0:01:52] Lee: How were you communicating with these Spanish-speaking people?

Chappel: Well initially with great difficulty because there was only Pablo I think on base and one or two other Argentinians who spoke halting English. But Pablo spoke near perfect English, but I didn't meet him straightway, so they couldn't quite work out why it was I had turned up as I did. But I had by then a few words of Spanish so managed to make clear ... and then Pablo appeared and things were set in motion to extract said tooth.

[Part 2 0:02:51] Lee: Successfully?

Chappel: Yes, but initially the Novocaine didn't work. Apparently it had been on base for a year or two and lost its potency, so after 15 injections nothing seemed to happen. The doctor, I have forgotten his name, the doctor on base decided to use ether.

[Part 2 0:03:24] Lee: Doctor Soria. Mario Hernando Soria.

Chappel: Soria. Yes, that's it.

[Part 2 0:03:30] Lee: So he removed your tooth for you?

Chappel: He did.

[Part 2 0:03:34] Lee: And did that begin the kind of friendship, cross-party friendship, with the Argentinians?

Chappel: It did, because they were a very friendly bunch. The Base Leader was a little aloof and I don't think was quite sure about this creating a liaison between certainly the Brits and themselves.

[Part 2 0:04:02] Lee: Even in the '60s there was a certain amount of difference of opinion about the Falklands, wasn't there, with the Argentinians?

Chappel: Oh yes, very much so.

[Part 2 0:04:13] Lee: So was that getting in the way?

Chappel: Yes, and I suppose he was doing his official bit by intimating that we were on their territory. The Falklands I don't think were ever mentioned, for obvious reasons, but I was made to feel that we were the interlopers and not themselves.

[Part 2 0:04:49] Lee: That Deception was an Argentinian island and you shouldn't be there? If that was from the top, whereas the ratings, because it was a military base, no problem at all?

Chappel: It didn't mean a thing to them particularly, no. We were just a group of chaps on an isolated spot on three places on the island, and we ought to mix a good deal more than we had, i.e. there was no mixing.

[Part 2 0:05:19] Lee: But was there a reluctance amongst your British colleagues to socialise with the ...?

Chappel: Obviously I was not aware of the political situation; I was never made aware. I often acted knowing full well that I may be stepping over the mark but I often acted on my own volition rather than consulting perhaps when I should have done officially, because I saw the whole thing as quite ..., as utter nonsense. Even the fact that we shouldn't be associating particularly with the Chileans, who we were and always have been friendly with, I thought was odd. So I think I made a mental effort to meet the Argentinians in particular, because they had such a reputation, and the Chileans because they were so friendly. They had visited us but we

[Part 2 0:06:53] Lee: The Chileans had been to Base B?

Chappel: Yes, but we hadn't been to them. And because of the politics on our base, other people, who might have been interested in meeting up with the Chileans again and the Argentinians ... So it needed somebody to break the ice away, and the most naïve person on base was myself, and I took it upon myself to break the ice if you like, but fortuitously, with a bad case of toothache.

[Part 2 0:07:40] Lee: So did you consult the Base Leader Dave Walters about ...?

Chappel: No.

[Part 2 0:07:43] Lee: You just went?

Chappel: I just knew what the answer would be.

[Part 2 0:07:46] Lee: Right. How was his reaction when you got back one tooth fewer than when you left?

Chappel: I wasn't admonished at all for what I had done, and I think the fact that I had broken the ice – this is how I remember it anyway ...

[Part 2 0:08:15] Lee: That's all you can do.

Chappel: ... was a relief to the other guys on base, who would have liked to have met up with the Argentinians in particular, but were reluctant to do so if it might upset the Base Leader, i.e. Dave.

[Part 2 0:08:35] Lee: So how did it settle down then? Did it lead to weekly soirees and so on?

Chappel: There wasn't that much to-ing and fro-ing. I think I had more opportunity, particularly when there was sea ice in the bay, I could cross to the Chileans on my regular dog exercise runs. So I got to know them a lot more, a lot better than other people on base.

[Part 2 0:09:16] Lee: They were there militarily?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:09:20] Lee: Some of them had been sent there rather than chosen to go, I suspect?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:09:24] Lee: Whereas you were all there because you wanted to be?

Chappel: Volunteers, yes.

[Part 2 0:09:27] Lee: Did you spot any kind of difference of attitude or opinion or culture between the two bases?

Chappel: Not really. I mean there was the military aspect, but on the Chilean base it was very relaxed, and on the Argentinian base to a large extent, because a number of them were civilians anyway and they weren't going to knuckle down to their base leader, if you like. And largely, I think, the Argentinians very quickly relaxed, even the base leader, and part of that may have been due to ... I mean he was interested in meeting me and talking about as much as we could talk about. Peter Bird followed me to the island. I think he was quite interested in meeting up with the Argentinians and was quite impressed with their ... because he was an educated guy, their base leader and there was quite a rapport between Peter and he.

[Part 2 0:11:03] Lee: Did Peter speak Spanish, then?

Chappel: He did have some Spanish, yes.

[Part 2 0:11:09] Lee: Was there any trading, because Pablo Justo surprised you by suggesting that the Argentinians didn't have any beef worth eating and all their wine was off, so was there any exchanges of produce?

Chappel: There were exchanges and I can't ... I thought about that in there and I was trying to remember. I don't think there was an awful lot. I think cigarettes might have been one thing. They (and us in a way) were as much interested in sampling their

culinary delights as they were in sampling ours. So I can't remember an awful lot of trading.

[Part 2 0:12:09] Lee: Did things change when the ship came in, because I know that the Argentinians had a fairly important visit and I guess the British ships were coming in and going occasionally?

Chappel: Yes. We sort of lost touch, if you like, not with the Chileans but certainly with the Argentinians once the military arrived, yes.

[Part 2 0:12:33] Lee: So you were pretending you weren't fraternising?

Chappel: Not us particularly. We didn't do a lot of socialising with the people that visited from off base.

[Part 2 0:12:51] Lee: Sorry, what I meant was when a ship came in, you and the Argentinian base didn't communicate quite so much, until the ship went away again? So there was a bit of hide and seek going on?

Chappel: Oh yes.

[Part 2 0:13:01] Lee: Whilst the cat is away, the mice will play.

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:13:05] Lee: I can see the attraction of having an enlarged social circle on such a remote island as Deception.

Chappel: Yes, but I think the people on the British base were so interesting anyway, and knew when to – not hide themselves away but do their own thing in their own quiet way. There was a lot of respect between the individuals on Deception, and an understanding that we all came from wholly different backgrounds. So I don't remember ... what was the original question? I've forgotten.

[Part 2 0:14:15] Lee: I think we have kind of dealt with it.

Chappel: Dealt with it, right.

[Part 2 0:14:18] Lee: Anyway I will move on. As the year came to a close, you were looking to go further south, as you said earlier that you were keen to sample the deeper Antarctic. So how did that come about? Did you ask to go to Adelaide Island or were you sent?

Chappel: You were given the option, and if it fell in with plans at Cambridge, then that was OK. So if people needed to be replaced on Stonington or Adelaide or wherever, Argentine, then we would be the people – a natural progression, if you like. And I expressed a wish, at an early stage to go on what you would call a proper sledging base, to have that experience. And as it turned out, Peter Bird had the same desire. He wanted to experience things further south, whereas the other people on base were either going home or were quite happy where they were.

[Part 2 0:15:38] Lee: So you and Peter Bird transferred to Adelaide in '66?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:15:42] Lee: And you picked up the dog team there as well? Were they different?

Chappel: Yes, straight away.

[Part 2 0:15:47] Lee: Tell me about the dog team you inherited on Adelaide.

Chappel: Well they were a much younger group of dogs and the breeding programme had moved with me, so I was supplied with suitable females with which to breed, and quite a sizeable team of dogs. I used to run, for exercise purposes, an eleven-dog team which was quite unusual. The largest dog teams are normally nine, eight or nine, but to get through the day I had to control eleven dogs not seven or nine. But by then I think I was quite accomplished anyway.

[Part 2 0:16:59] Lee: And this team of dogs were doing serious surveying work, I presume?

Chappel: Had been doing, but they were again ... they weren't being used because on Adelaide Island we had no surveyors or the people doing the field work, on base, who would require a dog team at the time. So they were purely left with me for operational purposes and part of the breeding programme.

[Part 2 0:17:44] Lee: You were involved in something called Decca Hi-Fix. I'm afraid I don't know what that is

Chappel: It's a seabed sounding, so you get the ...

[Part 2 0:18:02] Lee: Fathoms deep?

Chappel: Yes, topography of the seabed around all the islands, a very precise method apparently, at the time.

[Part 2 0:18:17] Lee: Was this being used on a dinghy or ...?

Chappel: No no. It was being used ... I don't know whether they used the triangulation – they probably did, but it was one of the survey ships. In our case it was the *John Biscoe*, and then a shore base, which was what I was on: looking after the shore base.

[Part 2 0:18:49] Lee: That was another skill that had to be learned, I guess?

Chappel: Well yes, looking after the Decca Hi-Fix stuff. I did that on Anvers Island as well. I was out in the Marguerite Bay, on the Maurice Faure's Island¹, so I had

¹ Commonly called the Faure Islands (see *British Antarctic Territory Gazetteer*).

already had some experience before looking after the base kind, if you like on, I've just mentioned it, Maurice Faure's Island.

[Part 2 0:19:34] Lee: Tell me about going to Fossil Bluff, because you did go off there with Peter Bird for one expedition, which is even further south.

Chappel: A lot further south, yes, the farthest south (apart from Halley Bay) British base. Yes, if the other bases were remote, this was very remote, a small base, absolutely idyllic setting. We were there to check over the engines and the stores because there was a possibility that later in the year people doing survey work and geology work on the mainland would come over to the base and spend the winter there.

[Part 2 0:20:32] Lee: So was Fossil Bluff actually not staffed at that point?

Chappel: No.

[Part 2 0:20:37] Lee: OK. What did you make of it?

Chappel: Absolutely ... If you can conjure up a picture of the Antarctic deep South ... I don't know from our joint experience whether you would have observed anything quite like Fossil Bluff. I mean you are talking Antarctic proper: just an idyllic spot.

[Part 2 0:21:27] Lee: Was it called Bluebell Cottage by that time?

Chappel: No. I've heard that one. No.

[Part 2 0:21:25] Lee: I think women who have been down there since there have raised a rather 'Laura Ashley' look to it.

Chappel: Right.

[Part 2 0:21:32] Lee: OK, you did some flying as well, which again must have been another departure for Mr Chappel?

Chappel: Yes. I took the opportunity, whenever possible, to fly with the aircraft, wherever they were going. And quite a number of people on base were reluctant, knowing that there was a possibility that things might not go quite as they should, but I was, I suppose, a little bit more gung-ho, so I volunteered whenever possible, to effectively go as co-pilot, because there would only be the pilot and myself on board.

[Part 2 0:22:25] Lee: You flew with Jules Brett, didn't you, around Deception Island, so tell me about that.

Chappel: That was when they had to do test flights obviously, before going South, so I took the opportunity, whenever Jules was going up, to go with him. He always had to have somebody with him, and the air mechanics were always reluctant to go, so ...

[Part 2 0:23:00] Lee: What did they know that you didn't?

Chappel: Well exactly, yes. I think they'd just had that much experience and obviously if anything did go wrong, then they weren't too happy about being ..., crashing in some remote spot and having to get back to civilisation, if you like.

[Part 2 0:23:30] Lee: We are talking about Single Otters, I think, aren't we here?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:23:35] Lee: And you flew with Bob Burgess as well when you got to Adelaide Island?

Chappel: Yes, on a number of occasions.

[Part 2 0:23:40] Lee: There was one in particular which you have noted here. You were heading south from Adelaide.

Chappel: We were heading ... Something I had wanted to do was go onto the mainland proper, i.e. the ice piedmont of Antarctica, and I had the opportunity. So again I volunteered whenever it was possible, to go up with Bob, and on one occasion, he wasn't too happy about going this particular day. And it was very quickly after take-off that he realised that things weren't all they should have been. The radio cable snapped; I think that was the first thing. Then he couldn't retrieve one of the skis, so we had a ski down and a ski up, so he was trying to work out how he was going to land in such a circumstance. I don't think we actually went anywhere that time. I think he turned round. The weather was getting that bad that he turned round and we landed back at Adelaide.

[Part 2 0:25:05] Lee: How did he land?

Chappel: He managed to ... I think there's a cranking method, mechanical method of pumping the ski down, which he had to do for us to land, and that worked.

[Part 2 0:25:24] Lee: So that suggests a sense of Health & Safety almost, of caution amongst pilots. Was that a general approach, you felt from pilots, that they were very careful, or were there gung-ho elements as well?

Chappel: I obviously hadn't ever experienced being with pilots previously, and the first time I went up with Jules Brett, I was thinking 'Well he's gung-ho and all the stories he's come up with of his experiences in the RAF'. But once in the cockpit, it was a changed man.

[Part 2 0:26:10] Lee: Oh right.

Chappel: Both Bob Burgess and Jules are the same, although Bob Burgess was the same on land or in the air. Jules was a totally different character once it was take-off time, and initially I do remember carrying on in the same jokey vein with him because he was such a hell of a nice guy, Jules. You've met him, yes? But he didn't want to know. He was in charge of his aircraft and that was that and I had to quickly learn to keep my mouth shut and do as I was told.

[Part 2 0:26:57] Lee: Tell me about some of the scary moments. You have got a list here which goes from A to J, so there must have been quite a few. Perhaps I could guide you through them. 'Forming a bridge across a crevasse with a Nansen sledge.'

Chappel: That was on Adelaide Island. I was following the Muskeg tractor. We'd been out on a piedmont heighting survey for a week or two, with George Green and Peter Bird. They were in the tractor and when it came to going home, going back to base, George was obviously in a hurry as the driver. He shot off ahead and was just a speck in the distance with me following along behind on my own, which I was quite happy with. But unfortunately, he had taken a direct route home which led me straight into a crevassed area. And I stopped by quite a large hole, not knowing whether to go back or forward or what to do, and I thought 'Well the lay of the land looks slightly better going forward than going backwards', because the tractor had opened up quite a number of crevasses. So I bridged a crevasse and that was quite an exercise, getting the dogs over the bridge using the sledge, harnessing them up again and then veering off seaward to get away out of this crevassed area. Obviously the dogs wanted to follow the tracks of the tractor – easy for them, so they were reluctant, but eventually I managed to get them away and I made my own way back.

[Part 2 0:29:16] Lee: There were a couple of incidents at Lincoln Nunatak, again with dogs involved. This is again on Adelaide Island, is it?

Chappel: On Adelaide Island, yes. Lincoln Nunatak was a hillock, if you like, or small rocky hill, but formed from it was a huge ice scoop and I had to avoid this obviously because at its highest, it was something like (I can't remember exactly but it was something like) two hundred feet high, so quite something to go over. But for some reason, the dogs wished to go over and I was trying to get a view of where the Muskeg tractor was so I could decide on a route to get to them. And halfway down this windscoop the dogs decided they'd had enough. They wanted to go the direct route rather than ... which was often the case, and as much as I pleaded, they went over the edge and down we went, but it was no more than I would say seventy or eighty foot by then, so although we all ended up in a heap at the bottom, no bones broken including myself.

[Part 2 0:31:11] Lee: Was your life flashing before your eyes?

Chappel: No, I was just attempting to keep some sort of control because halfway down the scoop the dogs were still in line, running like the blazes, but not actually tumbling. It was only after we got over the halfway point that they started doing tumbles themselves, and fortunately I had my foot well and truly on the brake, but the sledge was going down in that fashion. I don't know how you'd describe that.

[Part 2 0:31:56] Lee: The rear of the sledge was ...?

Chappel: ... was digging into the ice and snow, but the front of the sledge was in mid-air.

[Part 2 0:32:05] Lee: Right. The Wellington boot effect?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:32:10] Lee: You had rather a nervous night at Lincoln Nunatak, in a storm. Was that around the same time or was that later?

Chappel: That was the same time, when I managed to contract snow blindness was that? On no.

[Part 2 0:32:28] Lee: You had lost Peter Bird ...

Chappel: ... and George Green. They had been out surveying, hadn't returned, and then a storm blew, quite a severe storm. I can't remember how long it lasted but I was beginning to fear for their safety. And in fact it was 24 hours; they spent a horrendous twenty four hours with very little food, and in a bad place, if you like, while I was in the tented area on my own.

[Part 2 0:33:12] Lee: They didn't have a tent?

Chappel: No. They were sat in the cab.

[Part 2 0:33:17] Lee: What had happened to Peter and George and how were you reunited?

Chappel: Well as soon as the weather turned, I got together my dog team and went out to look for them. And they weren't in a particularly bad state when I actually found them. They had spent the night in the cab, absolutely frozen.

[Part 2 0:33:50] Lee: In the cab?

Chappel: In the cab of the Muskeg tractor with not a lot to keep them warm particularly, so I think it was pretty horrendous. I have never heard a great deal from Peter about it other than that it was particularly cold and quite an experience.

[Part 2 0:34:22] Lee: You had a couple of very interesting moments with a pram dinghy, I believe, as well.

Chappel: Yes. On Adelaide Island I often used to trip across on my own to Avian Island which wasn't too far from the base. This was to watch the bird life in particular. And on one occasion, I was ... The pram dinghy isn't a big craft by any means – 8 ft long, I would think, by memory – very small, and when somebody as big as myself got in it, then it was quite interesting.

[Part 2 0:35:19] Lee: It was lying low, was it?

Chappel: Not just lying low. The front would rise, so you weren't very far from the sea at the rear, controlling the engine. And on leaving base on one occasion, I was followed quite closely by a leopard seal, very curious to see what was going on, and he followed me all the way over to the island. And these are quite large creatures and particularly fierce looking because they have got a good set of teeth. He (or she) was just curious obviously but I don't know, I suppose I had to steady my nerves somewhat, because he was quite close: within three or four feet.

[Part 2 0:36:12] Lee: Did you ever fear for your life, in those two years?

Chappel: It's a very strange thing, in retrospect. Some of the things I did and some of the things I got up to, they could easily have gone wrong but it didn't appear ... I didn't ever have any thoughts as to my own mortality. It was merely coping with that situation, and carry on to the next one.

[Part 2 0:37:17] Lee: One situation was: again a pram dinghy, sharing a pram dinghy with Geoff Hodson in inclement weather.

Chappel: This was returning from the Argentinian base. I was a little bit worried about the weather conditions because obviously, in the Antarctic, it can blow up within minutes.

[Part 2 0:37:41] Lee: So was this at Adelaide?

Chappel: This was at Deception Island, yes

[Part 2 0:37:44] Lee: Deception, yes.

Chappel: This was after I'd had my tooth removed and Geoff came over to pick me up, insisted that he was needed back on base, so we had to make the return journey and as soon as we left the Argentinian base, it blew up. The wind got very strong. There was only one way we were going, and that was towards the glacier. There was a glacier between our base and the Chilean base, and that's where we were heading. So Geoff had to edge – he was in control of the tiller – edge the boat towards a landing point and some of the waves were ... because these pram dinghies were not, as I have already described ... Some of the waves were almost boiling over the back of the boat and I didn't ... To me, sat at the front, Geoff seemed to be well in control, but I did keep talking to him as we were going across, and we edged away from the glacier and managed to land, but he was in quite a state. He landed and ran off back towards base and left me with the boat.

[Part 2 0:39:39] Lee: Really?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:39:42] Lee: Was he frightened?

Chappel: Oh he was very frightened, yes, quite upset. Apologised later, for leaving me in that situation, but I was only thankful that he held his nerve, because we could easily have overturned because a very choppy sea and it would sort of slide back down waves.

[Part 2 0:40:14] Lee: That's what happens in the Antarctic, isn't it? Things become cumulative: something happens and then something happens on top of that and then it's slightly worse and then suddenly you have a full scale crisis. Very quick, almost from nowhere.

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:40:27] Lee: But there's rather an odd one when you were working in a loft space on a Nansen sledge, when things were happening which you hadn't quite realised at the time.

Chappel: Yes, well I was ... anybody that travels with dogs needs to put together their own sledge. This is like an unwritten rule, so that if anything goes wrong out in the field, (1) you know how to repair it, and if something seriously goes wrong, with the mechanics of the sledge, then you have only yourself to blame. So that is the mind-set. So I had already done one at Deception and so I was quite experienced, but the working area was quite cramped, in the loft of the radio shack I think it was. Not the radio shack, the workshop. And when I came to go back to the main hut, found I couldn't actually stand up, so I had to go through a hole in the floor and lower myself down to the ground floor in agony.

[Part 2 0:41:53] Lee: Had you actually kind of frozen?

Chappel: No no, I had done something ... I had slipped a disc and it locked, so I couldn't stand up. I then had to – this was at night; it was dark – crawl, in a blow (or storm), crawl back from there, up what we called High Street, Adelaide Island, to the main hut, living hut. And I did that with all the snow blowing around, and I was finding it very difficult. I had to feel for – there was like a ridge going up what we called High Street – feel for the ridge and then realise how far I was away from the hut when I got to that point, and then make for the hut. So it was that serious a blow. Anyway I managed to get back to the main hut but couldn't open the door because it was too high off the ground. I couldn't stretch that far. So I was knocking on the door, and it being soundproofed and I don't know how many inches thick, nobody could hear. But eventually somebody came out of the door and I managed to get in. So yes, it was quite an interesting episode.

[Part 2 0:43:40] Lee: Was that a close call?

Chappel: No.

[Part 2 0:43:43] Lee: You were never in danger?

Chappel: No.

[Part 2 0:43:45] Lee: How did you resolve the back problem? Was there a doctor on ... no there was no doctor on base?

Chappel: No doctor, no. The Base Leader on Adelaide, George – a chap called George Green – he rang through to Port Stanley and got some idea of how to treat me. Basically it was lying on a flat board, however long it was until things went right again.

[Part 2 0:44:18] Lee: Are you OK now, fifty years later?

Chappel: Well I have suffered with back trouble ever since.

[Part 2 0:44:26] Lee: I have often heard people talk about the eruptions on Deception, but you actually experienced an earthquake on Deception, which I have not come across before.

Chappel: Mm, quite a serious ...

[Part 2 0:44:37] Lee: When would this be? This would be sixty ...?

Chappel: Sixty five.

[Part 2 0:44:420] Lee: Tell me about what happened please.

Chappel: Well we had all retired to our bunks.

[Part 2 0:44:49] Lee: So it was night-time?

Chappel: Night-time, and night-time by a good two or three hours I think, and for some reason I woke to find the hut shaking quite violently, and I thought I was experiencing it on my own, but in fact Geoff Hodson, the diesel mechanic, he experienced it as well, and he shouted across the bunkroom 'Anybody awake?' And it was quite violent, quite worrying in a way.

[Part 2 0:45:36] Lee: Well you were, of course, in the cone of a volcano.

Chappel: Yes, which eventually blew up.

[Part 2 0:45:48] Lee: So what happened, once you had realised what it was?

Chappel: Again, I think we just accepted that that might happen from time to time because we were inside an active volcano, and you could see signs of it all round the island. There were hotspots and you could see fumaroles with form, bubbling away.

[Part 2 0:46:19] Lee: Did the earthquake do any damage?

Chappel: Not that I can remember, no.

[Part 2 0:46:26] Lee: Were there amusing incidents too, things that made you laugh, either at the time or in retrospect?

Chappel: Constantly.

[Part 2 0:46:39] Lee: One involving Ken Doyle?

Chappel: Oh that was a classic, yes.

[Part 2 0:46:47] Lee: Tell me the story please.

Chappel: He was an explosives expert. He worked in mines for most of his life, or around mines, and responsible in part for building a jetty, a concrete jetty at Adelaide

Island. But at the beginning of the process there were quite a lot of explosives being used to make a way down to the jetty, if you like, a track. And the procedure then for most of us, because obviously this was quite a spectacular thing to observe, was to get well away whenever the explosives were being used. But for Ken, and I can't remember who was working with him, but for Ken certainly, he was only able to light the fuse and only able to dodge round the nearest large rock, to escape the blast. And we had a classic view of a large rock being hurled into the air and you couldn't have placed it any better than right on top of Ken's head. Obviously it was hilarious at the time but not a good thing for Ken, and he was quite seriously wounded by it, but we all thought it was hilarious, but there you go.

[Part 2 0:48:34] Lee: And again there was no doctor?

Chappel: No. I can't remember whether he actually ended up with stitches or not, but it was always a case of: if you had things like that, then you read through the manuals. We had all the information down there. If there was a real difficulty, then it was getting through to Stanley, Port Stanley.

[Part 2 0:49:09] Lee: The radio doctor was in Port Stanley in those days?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:49:16] Lee: When it came time for you to leave, at the end of your two and a half years, do you recall what your feelings were? Were you glad to get out or reluctant to go? Or both of course; it is also possible?

Chappel: Reluctant to go, thinking at the time that I would like to revisit. I wanted ... my mission really was to work with dogs, full stop, as what they called a Gash Hand, dog driver, helping the surveyors or scientists, so my idea was to return to the UK via South America and America – do that journey; spend maybe six months back in the UK before returning. So I did apply to return but the only job they offered was on South Georgia and I didn't altogether fancy that.

[Part 2 0:50:22] Lee: But you did return, albeit thirty five years later?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:50:26] Lee: On the Marguerite Bay 2000 trip, which was where we first met.

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:50:32] Lee: How was that for you? For me it was fascinating because I had never been there before. For you, you were comparing it to what you recall from thirty five years before.

Chappel: Yes, well I was very interested to see Deception Island of course, all the destruction there, although not as much destruction as I had imagined. Still, quite a lot of destruction, and the fact that on Deception Island, the only bunk remaining was mine. A lot of people kept saying to me how much they preferred our time down there rather than the revisit, because things had changed quite considerably, but I didn't see

it like that. I thoroughly enjoyed that trip as much as the two and a half years, for different reasons. A lot more wildlife around when we went in 2000, which interested me a lot. And it was a different I just saw it as a completely different experience, mixing with people like yourself.

[Part 2 0:52:01] Lee: People say it was a different place, partly because of the retreat of the ice in the interim decades, but also because the Fids are a different breed now. How would you compare your generation of Fids to the guys and girls who were at Rothera in 2000?

Chappel: It didn't really come home to me until we were sat having coffee and whatever with the people at Rothera, and discovering that they were totally in awe of characters like ourselves. I don't know because we had lived the life of a truly, as they saw it, a true Antarctic explorer type, whereas they were completely cossetted and there were rules and regs and they couldn't do this and they couldn't do that. I don't think they were unhappy about that because they seemed to me anyway to want those sort of limitations, those sort of rules, whereas there were none virtually when we were there in the '60s certainly.

[Part 2 0:53:38] Lee: Did they almost regard you as the tail end of the Heroic Era? Or did you regard yourself like that?

Chappel: Not at all, but that is the impression I got, yes, very much so. They were in awe, which I found astonishing.

[Part 2 0:53:59] Lee: Rothera today is thousands of steps away from Scott and Shackleton. You were only two or three steps away from Scott and Shackleton.

Chappel: Yes, very little difference, yes. Even the clothing and the food, was very similar to Scott and Shackleton's time. Not a lot had changed.

[Part 2 0:54:24] Lee: Whereas Rothera 2000, and it has evolved even more in the 12 years since that trip that we took, it was a university that happened to be in the Antarctic.

Chappel: Yes exactly. Yes, an era gone.

[Part 2 0:54:43] Lee: What do you make of the reunions? I have seen you at a couple, in fact several I think: Marguerite Bay and BAS Club.

Chappel: Yes. It's very useful for me to meet up with my colleagues, diminishing year by year but ... and chat about old times, but I am as much interested in those that came after us, or even before. But I find that trying to get information from people '80s onwards is very difficult because they led a different life to us, and not able to talk about ... One of my main things was being with the dogs, which a lot of Fids / BAS people experienced in my era, so that is like a commonality. And the conditions for us were totally different from the people who came in the '80s as I have already said.

[Part 2 0:56:13] Lee: When you came back to Britain, you actually changed your career path completely. You sidestepped away from catering and became involved in marine biology and worked for environment agencies and river authorities. Did you ever, were you ever conscious of using stuff you learned in the Antarctic about yourself or the environment in your new career? Were you applying concepts you had?

Chappel: Not really because previous to that I hadn't really mixed with academics at all, so I wasn't aware of the gulf between myself and the likes of them. But the Antarctic taught me that the gulf wasn't that wide and as soon as I returned and decided I wasn't going down to the ... wasn't going to make the Antarctic my career, I had always had an interest in science, and in particular biology, so I thought 'Well go for it', and spent seven years gaining a degree.

[Part 2 0:57:52] Lee: At Liverpool?

Chappel: Yes.

[Part 2 0:57:55] Lee: But the point I was asking was whether you felt that in your later career, either as a scientist or in management, there were bits of the Antarctic that kept cropping up, that you thought 'I know how to deal with this because of something I learned when I was down there.' Man management?

Chappel: Yes, well that cropped up through life away from work as well, but certainly at work it has helped me as I've progressed up the ladder. Many of my experiences mixing with disparate people has helped me enormously to cope with that rise in status, if you like, yes.

[Part 2 0:58:55] Lee: Final question. How does the Antarctic, those Antarctic years rate in the life of Bernie Chappel?

Chappel: Pretty much first and foremost really. I don't think there's, as you have no doubt heard from many others ... It's an experience that can't be duplicated, I don't think, in any other sphere, and one I would not have missed for the world, yes.

[Part 2 0:59:36] Lee: Thank you very much.

[Part 2 0:59:38] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:35:27] The Aga had "a mind of its own".
- [Part 1 0:41:47] Pooka and the Huns dog team.
- [Part 1 0:44:59] A UFO sighting.
- [Part 2 0:00:23] Tooth extracted by Argentinian doctor, using ether.
- [Part 2 0:15:47] The dog breeding programme.
- [Part 2 0:23:40] Landing a plane with one ski up and one down.
- [Part 2 0:26:57] Bridging a crevasse with a Nansen Sledge.
- [Part 2 0:37:17] A worrying trip in a pram dinghy.
- [Part 2 0:41:53] Shut out of the hut in a blow with a slipped disc.
- [Part 2 0:44:26] Earthquake on Deception Island.
- [Part 2 0:52:01] Fids a different breed now?