

Edited transcript of a recording of Thomas Miller, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee at his home in Welwyn Garden City on 2 March 2004.

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Part 1

Thomas Jeffrey Miller, date of birth 10th of August 1923, Ealing, Middlesex.

01:00:23] Lee: What was your career before you joined FIDs?

Miller: When the war started, I was at the Cordwainers College in London, on an industrial course, which was preparing me to go into the shoe industry. My family were in it. But in 1941 I volunteered and went to sea. I served my time on Dutch ocean going salvage and rescue tugs during the war. We carried a [Royal] Navy liaison officer and Naval gun crews and communications personnel. I was one of those who were posted to a ship to make up for wartime losses. Obviously they [the Dutch – Transcriber] had no access to their own kind and I fell on my feet there. I felt at home amongst them. I learnt to speak a certain amount of Dutch. Of course it was a pretty rough and demanding training school. I went as an ordinary seaman. We did a certain amount of boat work with boarding parties in the open sea. I have reason to believe it was a factor in me being selected to go on the *John Biscoe*.

[01:02:46] Lee: You learnt in the school of hard knocks, did you?

Miller: Yes, definitely.

[01:02:51] Lee: How were you chosen?

Miller: I was at a post-service course in Leicester after the war. I should say here, that after I had served the time I went to the Navigation School and qualified as a Second Mate, Merchant Navy's Foreign-going certificate. I was then on transports, and so on, and finally on a timber ship. Then in 1947, I came ashore and resumed industrial training. I was somewhat disillusioned by post war Britain.

[01:02:53] Lee: How do you mean?

Miller: I felt that there was too much lax inefficiency. I found the course unsatisfying and poorly run. I heard that there was this expedition setting out. It was under the auspices of the Colonial Office. That is how it was described to me. They wanted young officers and so I made a written application.

[01:04:44] Lee: Did you hear on the 'grape vine' down the pub?

Miller: I was a member of the Navigators' Association and as part of this industrial course we visited...it was at Leicester, the College of Technology. As part of the course we went on factory visits to London. Not many of them, but we did do some. By this time I was having serious misgivings about whether I really wanted to go into Industry at all. I went to the Navigators Office, which I think was in Leadenhall Street. I saw Captain Griffiths there, who was the General Secretary. I told him, more or less, what I have just told you. He said, "There is this expedition setting out for the Antarctic, you know. Would you be interested?" I said, "My goodness, I would be interested!" He said, "Here is an address; write in!" What the address was, I can't remember. Anyhow, I wrote in. I didn't hear anything for a few weeks, but I read in the paper that, for two or three vacancies, they had had six or seven hundred applications. So I thought 'Ah well, that's a lost cause. They have something better to do than to write to tell me that they don't want me'. Then, I was sitting in a lecture and somebody came in from the Principle's Office and said that there was a message for me – would I phone my digs, my lodgings! I thought that probably there was somebody in the family who had met with an accident or died, something like that. "No" he said, "A Commander Bingham had rung up and said would I phone him or call at a certain number in Queen Annes Mansions in London." I tried to ring this number but there was no reply. So I got on the train that night and went to London. Stayed at home and the following morning went into Queen Annes Mansions and asked for Commander Bingham. He was fairly gruff but he said, "I am glad you are here now", or words to that effect, as far as I can remember now. But I do remember very clearly he said, "When did you get this message?" So I told him 'yesterday afternoon'. He said, "Well, you weren't in touch with me." I said, "I was, Sir. I rang this number but there was no reply!" He said, "You didn't think to ring me at home." "I didn't know the number." "Well, I am in the [telephone] book!" I thought 'there is nothing more I can do, if this chap has got a bee in his bonnet about that'. Well he asked me a few questions about my seafaring training. I had given these details in my letter of application and he asked me a few questions. I can't remember exactly what they were but it was to

establish my competence, as far as he could. Then he said, “I think you had better meet Commander McPhee. If you go to Platform so and so, at Fenchurch Street for the 1.45pm train, you will see him.” “Will he be in uniform?” “No, he wont, but he is a rather tall Scotsman. He will have with him a Lloyds Surveyor who will, of course, have a bowler hat. You are looking for a tall Scotsman and a Lloyds Surveyor with a bowler hat. Go and talk to him.” I thought that ‘this is an odd way to carry on. Still, never mind’. I was really intrigued by this time [Laughter].

[01:11:32] Lee: Very MI5!

Miller: Yes! So I turned up at this Platform. I thought it was amazing...there was this tall chap [Laughter], there was this Lloyds Surveyor with a dark overcoat and a bowler hat! So I went up to him and said “Commander McPhee?” “Yes, that’s right. Who are you?” “I am Miller. Commander Bingham has sent me to you” “I see, well you had better come on the train with us.” So I went down to Tilbury to meet the *John Biscoe*. [Laughter]. Ships, that are undergoing major refits, are dirty, grimy inhospitable sort of places, and, one thing that I do remember there was a chap in a boiler suit and a trilby hat. I thought he was the ship’s carpenter. Then the Captain said, “Number One, this is Miller, I think he might be joining us. This is Lord Headley, the Chief Officer”. I thought, ‘Lord Headley!’ I had heard the name but that was all. I talked to these two and looked at the ship and so on. Then the Captain said, “Yes, I think we would like you to join us. Could you join us on Monday?” “Yes, I can do that”. There I was! [Laughter}

[01:13:44} Lee: So was there no paperwork? Signing on? You weren’t formally interviewed?

Miller: I had been interviewed by Ted Bingham and of course, the Captain had asked me various questions and so on. He had seen my letter of application. Although I say it myself, I write a good letter [Laughter]. I think the letter had impressed them. The following week there was a signing on process at the local shipping office.

[01:14:42] Lee: What was your impression of this rather strange organisation? Was it the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey?

Miller: Yes, it was. Well of course, it was quite different from the organisation I had previously worked for or had dealings with. I was greatly intrigued and thought that this was all part of doing interesting things in far-flung parts of the world.

[01:15:28] Lee: An adventure?

Miller: Yes. That's right!

[01:15:31] Lee: So how is it different from the Merchant Navy or the Royal Navy that you had been in before? More relaxed?

Miller: It wasn't a lot different really, except those Dutchmen were real professional at their work and they were quite hard-nosed. Very fair, but my goodness, if you didn't toe the line and do a good job, you were very soon made aware of it in no uncertain terms! To be fair to them though, the line of business that they were in and the lives that could be at hazard, governed their approach.

[01:16:36] Lee: Was the difference a bit like 'gentlemen and players'? FIDS were a bit more aristocratic, more gentlemanly?

Miller: Yes. There was this...what shall I call it...typically English sea-faring sense of venture really.

[01:17:09] Lee: 'Boys Own'?

Miller: To a degree, yes! But I was at home with it. I was that glad that I had the opportunity. The way that developed like that...I can remember coming back on the train to Charing Cross and saying "Cheerio" to McPhee in the forecourt of Charing Cross Station and leaving him as if I was walking on air [Laughter]. I thought it was wonderful!

[01:17:45] Lee: What was the family reaction?

Miller: My father, who had been a regular naval man...when I tell you he went into the [Royal] Navy as a seaman boy and he came out as a Warrant Officer, you get the measure of the type. He was a gunnery officer on a destroyer, his last ship. He, I think, really was envious. [Laughter].

[01:18:26] Lee: He didn't mind?

Miller: Oh no. He didn't mind. In any case if he did mind it would not have made any difference to me. [Laughter].

[01:18:34] Lee: So what did he make of your new ship? What was the *Biscoe* like? She wasn't the *Biscoe* originally, was she?

Miller: No, she was built as an American Boom Defence vessel and she was of a timber construction and very heavy transverse timbers to counteract, at least I would have thought that was the reason, the potential buffeting they might get from the heavy buoys, which were a feature of boom defence arrangements. So they were a pretty tough construction. Our accommodation was a bit cramped because of the number of people that we carried...the shore parties.

[01:19:39] Lee: Had she been altered much from her previous incarnation?

[The ship had been built in the United States in 1944 as *Satinwood* (YN-89) as a net tender of the Ailanthus class and transferred to the Royal Navy under Lend-Lease in August 1944. Commissioned as HMS *Pretext* (Z284), she served the United Kingdom until she was returned to United States Navy custody in November 1945. Sold by the United States Maritime Commission in 1947, she served as a research vessel for the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey under the name SV *John Biscoe* – Transcriber]

Miller: This is how she was. This is a picture of her, which I took at our furthest South. [Long Pause]

[01:19:56] Lee: So she was very much as the *Pretext* had been.

Miller: Yes, except the gun had been removed from the gun platform in front of the bridge. Otherwise, she was very much as she was.

[01:20:19] Lee: What was she like at sea?

Miller: She rolled because this rounded bottom structure, which they had, meant that they rode the seas well but they rolled tremendously. We had to nurse her through bad weather because of the tremendous amount of deck cargo that we carried. We carried a Hornet Moth [a single-engined cabin biplane designed by the de Havilland Aircraft Company – Transcriber], crated on the foredeck, as well as many, many drums of fuel both for the bases as well as the aircraft. When you have got a deck cargo like that, you have to nurse a ship in heavy weather.

[01:21:22] Lee: So, she was not top heavy but certainly not very stable?

Miller: [Long Pause] I would think that that was a fair comment.

[01:21:31] Lee: They must have loaded her up very carefully to ensure that she retained her upright position?

Miller: Yes. But the Number One, Lord Headley, was very competent in that. Of course, that would have been his responsibility. All Merchant Navy deck officers learn proper stowage of cargo. It is most essential. If you have got light weights and heavy machinery, the heavy machinery has to go at the bottom...not in the 'tween decks. That is a basic thing. It gives you some idea of what's got to be done in those circumstances. All these things come aboard in crates. You have got to know what is in them. They have to come and go in to the ship in the desired sequence, because otherwise, as soon as you get out into the open sea, you are in dead trouble.

[01:22:57] Lee: What was your cabin like...apart from being pokey? Did you have your own?

Miller: No, I...of course, on the ships that I had been on, I had...but on the *John Biscoe* I had to shack-up with the Third Officer. There were two of us in that cabin. One accepted that. It was an expedition ship and the Mess Decks were very crowded, as I said in that article. There were folding bunks on the Mess Decks, which when they were not being occupied, were folded away to give eating and living space. That is just how it was!

[01:23:56] Lee: So she was a bit too small for the job, really.

Miller: I suppose you could say that. Then again in the post war period it would have been a question of what ships there were actually available. She was brought back across the Atlantic. She was in America when she was purchased and brought back across the Atlantic by a temporary crew. It was the Colonial Office, acting on behalf of the Falkland Islands Government that saw to the refit in Tilbury. When we went up the river to the old victualing depot, that was, at Deptford, we were provisions stored and all that material for the Bases as well, watered and fuelled, compass adjusted in the river, all in three days! It was an almighty rush.

[01:25:38] Lee: I guess you were in a hurry because it was December, wasn't it?

Miller: Yes. It was late, very late for the Antarctic season. Hence of course, all that hassle... the hassle, the hurry, to get us ready for sea.

[01:26:04] Lee: What do you remember about the Engine Room, in this context?

Miller: Very little, because I had very little to do with it. Although I had always been interested in all parts of a ship because I think it good advice that when you join a ship you go all over it from keel to masthead. Really get to know it. I looked in the Engine Room but I don't remember a lot about it. I do know that she had twin diesel-electric engines, single screw. In the hands of our engineers they were pretty reliable.

[01:27:08] Lee: You said she had a refit but she hadn't been changed a great deal. What were they doing in the refit?

Miller: I saw so little of that refit. Probably those works on the mess decks [the folding bunks – Transcriber] , and they may have been extra bunks fitted in our accommodation. Maybe that was being done there. But I would also have thought that in those circumstances things like all the ship's generators and the engines would have a major overall...be virtually taken to pieces...because obviously down there you had got no access to a dockyard [Laughter]. As far as things could be foreseen and attended to, any deficiency would be attended to as necessary.

[01:28:22] Lee: Let's talk about the people on-board. Obviously there would be the FIDS who were going to the Bases. You had a basic crew as well, a dozen or so. Who do you remember of that team, that crew?

Miller: Do you mean officers or seamen?

[01:28:44] Lee: It doesn't matter. Who sticks in your memory?

Miller: Quite a number do. Obviously the Third Officer, the Chief Officer, the Captain I had most to do with...had most fellowship with, and of course, professional association.

[01:29:05] Lee: Shall we start with them? Who do you remember and where do they come from?

Miller: The Captain, McPhee, was a pretty impressive man. I was to find out that, particularly when one hit adversity, he had a drink problem. I didn't learn that until much, much later. His history was that he was an RNR Officer who had served during the War.

[RNR - Royal Navy Reserve - professional seamen from the British Merchant Navy and fishing fleets, who could be called upon during times of war to serve in the regular Royal Navy. The RNR was originally a reserve of seamen only, but in 1862 this was extended to include the recruitment and training of reserve officers – Transcriber].

One of the jobs he had was the captain of a minesweeper than ran the gauntlet in and out of Tobruk, when it was beleaguered and surrounded, to supply the military garrison there, which of course was a highly dangerous and hazardous occupation. He got so that he could only do it if, as the saying goes, he was ‘Three sheets in the wind’. It is very easy to look down on people who have got a drink problem, but I didn’t see it like that at all. To me it was a tragedy of a man being put in the position during the War to being called on to give more than he had got. If you are in that situation, I think it behoves one to consider well ‘How would I tackle it?’

[01:31:30] Lee: How did it manifest its self; if the weather got bad?

Miller: No, no. If there was a real problem, and I can remember one instance very clearly, if there was a very difficult problem like when we went from Marguerite Bay to go to supply the Base in the Argentine Islands. We had sketch maps of some of the bays but there was nothing about the Argentine Islands, and of course they were nothing but specks on the South Polar chart. We were approaching the Argentine Islands and it was going to be a real problem to get in there because there were a lot of these small islands. You had to go up the right waterway, preceded as it turn out by a boat...

[01:32:55] Lee: They were taking soundings?

Miller: ...but as we were approaching there, approaching the Argentine Islands, which I knew was going to be a difficult assignment, the Captain said, “Well Pilot, she is all yours.” Then he left the Bridge.

[01:33:17] Lee: He left it to you! That was your nickname, wasn’t it – Pilot.

Miller: Yes. I found that a bit of a desperate situation.

[01:33:34] Lee: Where did he go?

Miller: Down below to have a drink! That's how it turned out.

[01:33:45] Lee: So it was no secret?

Miller: Oh yes, it was, but...I asked the Number One, who had to take over the Bridge when I said, "The only way we can do this Number One is to go in preceded by a boat and I should take that boat." He agreed. I said, "I don't know where the Old Man's gone." Every ship's captain is 'the Old Man'. He said, "I do, but let's not worry about that at the moment." So he went on the Bridge and we lowered a boat, and we asked the Base to light a fire and guide us with smoke signals. We did that mainly because we wanted to get in there before darkness. Also because some of those channels were so narrow that if you wandered up the wrong one, if the ship followed you, it could be rather difficult for her to turn round. Anyhow, as it happened, we went in with the boat, coned the ship in and we moored up pretty near the Base. We did that, as I put in that article, by hammering the steel bars into rock fissures or the ice on either side [of the ship – Transcribe]. The fact that you were able to moor a ship like that indicates the narrowness of the channel that you had to negotiate. Of course, it was there that we examined the hull because we had been working through rather a lot of pack ice by then. It was there that it was discovered that the greenheart sheathing had been worn away completely at the shoulders of the bows and there was quite a substantial inroad into the outer wooden skin...it was double skinned...but there was quite a considerable inroad into the outer skin! It was not a reassuring thought! [Laughter].

[01:36:38] Lee: Was that when you were spotting splinters coming from of...

Miller: No. That happened later. We knew that...we knew the condition of the hull and of course, when we were going north, by this time it was the onset of the Antarctic winter. The edges of the pack, instead of being to a degree mushy, the crystalized ice was then hard. It was that that was teasing the splinters off the ship and you could look in the wake in the ice that you forced your way through and you could see the wooden splinters. You knew that that could only go on for so long.

[01:37:47] Lee: You managed to get far enough North for it to stop happening.

Miller: Oh yes.

[01:37:49] Lee: Just go back a little bit, for we were talking about the people on board. In an incident such as that, where McPhee went missing, how long would he be missing for? The rest of the day or...?

Miller: I find that difficult to answer. I would think he would probably appear at meal times because another thing that the Number One would say to me some times...oh no, for when this came about, because of course I was quite concerned and I said "I had no idea that this was the case Sir, you know, the Captain drinking." He said, "You can always tell." For I said, "For he carries his drink well then". He said, "Oh yes, but if you see his fingers going out like that, to steady himself against the [Bridge]Telegraph or whatever, that's the warning sign." So I said, "What can one do. You can't countermand his orders, if you consider them unwise." He said, "Well all I can say is we've got to use our initiative and ingenuity."

[01:39:35] Lee: I was going to ask you whether this rather undermined his Captaincy, his authority?

Miller: Very few people knew, and in those days there was a lot of basic respect for Rank. He was a good captain. He was a competent officer, but for this shortcoming.

[01:40:10] Lee: Did it crop up several times, then?

Miller: No! That was the only occasion. The other time was when we were in Port Stanley, and we can go into that. This was after we had come back from the far South and with the prospect of having to visit the Governor of the Falkland Islands. He took to the bottle then.

[01:40:48] Lee: He didn't turn up?

Miller: Oh, I think he turned up. Although he physically carried his liquor well, I should imagine from what happened that the Governor must have divined that he was under the influence and not a suitable captain.

[01:41:20] Lee: What was the incident this time then.

Miller: Well, when we went back to Port Stanley, you mean?

[01:41:28] Lee: Yes, when it became apparent.

Miller: How it came about?

[01:41:30] Lee: No, when the Governor spotted the problem. What was happening for him to spot...

Miller: I think he was...Well he had been summoned to Government House. I can't quite remember the timing of separate incidents. There was an incident that, I understand, the Governor was very worked up about it. It was this...you know when they have had a few months in the ice, any ship's crew, when they come ashore they head for the Boozers and hit the beer. They weren't bad. In my opinion, they were rather more civilized than the Matelots from some of the [Royal] Naval ships. That's just a personal opinion. But what happened on one evening was, at throwing out time there they were...and Port Stanley was quite primitive, particularly in those days -1947,'48...I believe the Colonial Secretary and a friend were walking along. The Falkland Islands were very much a Crown Colony and the local islanders deferred to the Colonial officials. This was the set pattern, they just did. These sailors were out there on the sidewalk and this Colonial Secretary and his friend apparently assumed, so I have been told, they would part and let them through. They didn't and the Colonial Secretary, again I wasn't there but I was told, tried to brush them aside all of them out of the way, which ever. Well of course, they were not going to take that, and one of them went to lay his hands on the Colonial Secretary and threatened to throw him in the harbour, if he wanted to make some [thing] of it. I think the Governor thought this was rather unseemly behaviour and he wanted to take this up with the Captain. I also understand that it was a factor in the Governor deciding that the following year he was going to have [Royal] Naval officers seconded to the ship, regular Naval officers, and that he would have a Falkland Islands' crew. This would be a better arraignment. I though I had found my niche, and when I heard about this I thought of all the half-baked, stupid things to do, this is crazy. So I went to see the Governor's ADC [Aide de Camp – Transcriber], who was a 'Colonel Pierce Butler', whom you may have heard of. He was quite a sensible chap and I went and said to him...There was this Proclamation put up on Notice Boards in Port Stanley about 'Volunteers for a crew for the *John Biscoe*'. When I heard of this, I went to see Pierce Butler and I said, as a professional sailor, that I though this was absolute nonsense because at that time any Falkland island seamen – and there were very few – were just small inshore fishermen. They were not people who could operate a survey ship in the far South. I said to him that I could understand if the Governor wanted to bring Ordinary Seamen...Falkland Islanders as Ordinary Seamen, and bring the Quartermasters and Petty Officers – Bosun and so on – from home. But a Falkland Island crew that would come home to the UK with us, and we got to train them to operate

a survey ship. To me it was a totally unreal and impractical way to proceed. I made this very plain to Pierce Butler and he said, "You do realise that this is the Governor's doing and it is his pigeon altogether. If anything is to be done about it he is the one... Would you be prepared to talk to him?" So I said, "I would only be too delighted!" So the next thing I know is that I get a summons to Government House. I put on my best uniform and went to Government House, and duly presented myself, with cap under arm, at the Governor's desk. He said that he understood that I disapproved of these arrangements. I said, "Yes, and as a professional seaman, I thought it a most unwise course". He then tried to... I think from what I said, he probably thought that there was something in it, but didn't want to accept it. Of course, I am looking at it in prospective now. At the time it was a hot subject and something that I felt very strongly about. He said this is what he had decided and that was what was going to happen.

[01:49:45] Lee: This would be Miles Clifford, would it?

Miller: Miles Clifford, yes. So I really let rip [Laughter] and said that I thought it highly impractical. I said to him, "If you had a Falkland Islanders as Ordinary Seaman, and Petty Officers out from home...and Leading Seamen...that I could understand". I said that as a professional seaman...and I told him that I had served my time in deep-sea Salvage and Rescue and I knew what I was talking about! He said...as far as I can remember and the exact words I cannot...but you get impressions... he had decided and that was it.

[01:50:56] Lee: Did he have your respect, Miles Clifford? Was he a decent sort?

Miller: Well I was brought up to respect Rank but my respect was always qualified. Those Dutch men, some of them, were quite 'hard-nosed' but they were very competent seamen. But this chap...oh yes...and another thing he said which caught me on the raw, he said, "I will also tell you I want Officers that will obey orders and not question them!" This is when I really lost my rag and I said this was a highly dangerous and ridiculous course of action, and not the way to go about it! He had said that he wanted Officers who would obey orders and not question them, so I thought 'well you get on with it Jack'! I had no option, but I was very disappointed because I had thought I had found my niche.

[01:53:00] Lee: Let us backtrack slightly...what were the consequences of the meeting between McPhee and Clifford?

Miller: To tell you the truth, I don't know.

[01:53:08] [both talking at once]

Miller: That interview was probably...in my view and I say I wasn't there, I don't really know...but in my view...that interview was probably the deciding factor in Clifford getting in touch with the Admiralty and having Regular Naval Officers seconded. [Pause] Of course, that didn't work right, either. But that was tantamount to...if I was put on the Bridge of a Cruiser for battle evolutions, I wouldn't know were to begin. Well those chaps didn't know were to begin either.

[01:54:02] Lee: So McPhee stayed in Post, but he was given a Minder?

Miller: No he wasn't! When I say he stayed in Post, he remained Captain yes, but only for the homeward voyage. Bearing in mind that that ship was pretty much 'clapped out' as far as the engines and equipment were concerned. We had to nurse her up to Montevideo, and she had more work done there on the engines, so that we could make the voyage home. I think it was decided at that interview that McPhee would no longer be in command and that Naval Officers would be appointed. But that is just my understanding.

[01:55:07] Lee: So let us get this right – the Number One would be Second in Command? Who was your Number One?

Miller: Lord Headley.

[01:55:14] Lee: Of course. How was he recruited? Did he volunteer?

Miller: To tell you the truth, I do not know. What I do know is that he had a Master's Ticket in Steam and Sail, which at that time was quite a marine pedigree. [Pause]. He got his Master's Ticket the year I was born! [Laughter].

[01:55:57] Lee: Who was your Number Three then; your bunk mate?

Miller: He was a Sub-lieutenant Cox. He had joined the navy during the war as a hostilities-only and we, at first, didn't get on too well. We had one or two set to's, and as sometimes happens in those cases, we finally

understood one another and became firm friends. He had joined the Fleet Air Arm but I think he [Pause] had some problem with his Sight. I can't remember what it was now, but he was not actually appointed to a ship in the Fleet Air Arm. He was doing flying training and there was some physical shortcoming...of whatever kind I can't remember now...which prevented him going ahead. I forget what kind of ships he did serve in. How he was recruited, I don't know. He was very much an intellectual and [Laughter]. I couldn't believe it in the early days when we were on the Bridge, leaving Harbour, you know, particularly with a new ship and a new ship's Company that's always a formative time...everybody's wondering who they can rely on...if the chap is really competent in his job or whether he isn't, and so on, and over the issue, I can't remember, but the Captain gave an order...because then you had an Officer on the Telegraph...now it is direct control... but then there was an Officer on the Telegraph. McPhee gave an order, and I just couldn't believe it but Cox said to him, "Do you think that is wise Sir?" I thought, you just don't do that! Of course McPhee turned round and said, "What the hell did you say?" [Laughter] Then said, "Mr Miller, take over that Telegraph! I will deal with him later". [Laughter]. That is just to give you an instance. Actually, the Chap, after he had left the *John Biscoe*, Cox I mean, he did a three year course at Oxford in two [years] and I think, took a good degree in Mathematics. He was really a nice chap but we had one or two 'up and a downers' before we shook down together.

[01:00:12] Lee: Do you remember anybody else? Any other characters that stand out from the Crew or...

Miller: Oh yes, there was one seaman there, McCray, quite a modest man, a broad Scotsman. I think he came from Stornoway. He was on my watch. I can remember saying to him, "With your experience, I am surprised you are rated an 'Ordinary Seaman'!" Or when he joined he was rated as an 'Ordinary Seaman'. I think he was promoted on the voyage to 'Able Seaman'. He said, "Oh yes, that's the way of things" or word to that effect. He said, "Really you see, I am what you would call an 'Inshore Fisherman'". Then it turned out that he and his brother had built their fishing boat. They used to be out for three days at a time from Stornoway fishing. He had been one of Lord Lovat's scouts and he was a first class military skier and quite a knowledgeable chap.

[The Lovat Scouts were formed in January 1900, during the Second Boer War by the 14th Lord Lovat and served as a Scottish Highland yeomanry regiment of the British Army. The Scouts saw action in both World Wars. After receiving

specialist ski and mountain training in Canada they were sent to Italy in 1944 where they served until the end of the war. The Regiment lost roughly 10% of their strength clearing roadside bombs and booby-traps left by the retreating German Army. [Transcriber]

I found this out by just talking to him usually when we were on harbour watch together. There was that occasion when we found to our dismay that the... When we went into Admiralty Bay, and we had to set up this base from scratch and the Argentines were already there, it was decided to protest at their presence and I was asked to take the boat in to deliver this Protest. The weather conditions were not good and we were about a mile and a half offshore. This was a case when...I talked it over with Number One, and he agreed with me, it was a case of volunteers for a boat's crew. I went down to the Mess Deck and asked for volunteers for a boat's crew. I was received with silence. You start to feel a bit stupid then. [Laughter]. I waited a bit and then repeated it. Then a voice from the back said, "Who is taking the boat in?" Well by this time I was a bit annoyed and said, "Well, what bloody odds is that to you?" Then McCray, who was not the one who asked the question, said, "Well, I will come then", when I said it was me. He said, "I will come then". Then I soon got others. Later I came to regard that as an accolade. [Laughter]. They could hear the wind in the ventilators. They knew what the weather was like. We had a rough passage, there and back. Anyhow we made it.

[01:04:23] Lee: Anyone else you recall? [Long Pause] How did the ship's crew relate to the passengers, the FIDS? Did you have much to do with them or were they just cargo?

Miller: When we arrived at Antarctic Bases it was all hands in! This meant seamen and FIDs of whatever sort or kind, and that worked pretty well. But as often happens in those circumstances the seamen tended to think that the FIDs were different...you know, they are not one of us, like. I don't think that was a very strong factor in it and my general recollection is that they all shook down well together. Of course, to some of those FIDs the actual physical hard work involved was a bit of a shock and also very tiring. They were not up to it. Most of those Bases had, if not all, solid fuel stoves. The solid fuel was in rope-bound canvas bags. The amount of those that needed to be man-handled for a year's supply for a Base was quite a lot. If you were part of a boat's crew, particularly when the motorboat broke down, the ease with which you could supply a base depended entirely on the efficiency of the organisation of the boat

work...and the oarsmanship. The physical conditions meant that you loaded a boat, which made it lower in the water, and of course, the bigger the load the smaller the crew that you could carry, and so the harder it was to row the thing. Also when it was deep in the water, although you chose a beach where it was as steep-to as you could get it, you were absolutely bound by the physical conditions. If the boat touched bottom too far out, it was still all hands overboard to lighten the boat a bit, to pull it in. There were no Jetties! This was physical labour, and then the stuff had to be carried from the beach up to the Base. Then you had to come back and row the boat back to the ship. Well you didn't have to do that too often, if you weren't used to it, for it to be quite a grind!

[01:09:08] Lee: You recruited some Falkland Islanders, didn't you, for the Crew. Is that right?

Miller: That was on the homeward voyage.

[01:09:14] Lee: Were they different as well?

Miller: [Pause] Oh yes, they were! Most of them had not been to sea before! Not in the sense that they were making an ocean passage. [Pause] They were really just spare hands on board. [Pause] By this time, most of the Crew, and people like me for reasons that I said, were pretty fed-up with things anyway.

[01:10:06] Lee: You weren't going to get re-employed!

Miller: No! We had been cast aside in favour of what we considered this highly unsuitable arrangement that was going to follow. You tended to think, in their own way, the seamen too, 'well if they want it that way, let them get on with it!'

Part Two

[01:10:36] Lee: This is Tom Miller, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, at his home in Welwyn Garden City, on the 2nd March 2004.

[01:10:48] Lee: Some of the people you might have met...did you meet Vivian Fuchs?

Miller: Oh yes! He was the senior FID. He was in charge of the Shore Parties.

[01:10:52] Lee: Did he go with you?

Miller: Oh yes! He did the whole voyage with us and of course, over things like going into these harbours and so on, he was consulted. There would be a meeting of the Number One, the Captain, Fuchs, probably one or two others of the senior Fids and me.

[01:11:30] Lee: How did he strike you?

Miller: [Long Pause] A good sort...a true leader. Certainly I respected his opinion right from the beginning because I thought well here is a man that knows what he is about. I won't deny that I was a bit flattered because the way he spoke to me, obviously that was his opinion of me too, and I was a lot younger than him!

[01:12:24] Lee: So would he actually be quite a substantial influence in what happened? Was he actually making decisions?

Miller: Not about the safety of the operation of the ship. But what was going to happen about the landing parties, and whether we were going to work throughout the night or not, and that sort of thing. Oh yes!

[01:12:52] Lee: Sound decisions?

Miller: Yes, certainly [Pause]. I know that some of the seamen, that I have said regarded the Fids as a bit of a separate crowd and not one of us, soon got to know that Fuchs was something different...from the other Fids.

[01:13:44] Lee: Was he a likeable man?

Miller: Oh yes, he was. Mind you, he didn't suffer fools gladly. He was extremely courteous and a chap who was a real leader...who also gives evidence of a certain humility of mind. I am speaking from the perspective of years. I don't mean that I thought this at the time but I am trying to see the situation in perspective. Those two things together means to me, that he is one of the great ones.

[01:14:32] Lee: Would he have been oblivious to McPhee's problem?

Miller: I would have thought so. That he came to hear of it later, I have no doubt. I always think, because I wrote a letter when I was so disappointed...I wrote a letter about the welfare of the ship, its suitability

as regards manning matters for survey work in the far South. Then I thought...I realised that he was the Leader of the Shore Parties...Then I thought, he is going to be down in the ice for two years, if this gets delivered, he can't do anything about it...I don't think it fair to send it. So I didn't. But I have regretted it, because two years...there is something else I was going to tell you. We got back to the UK and I knew that I...well, all the Officers knew...that they were not going back in the ship. The ship would 'pay off' and that would be the end of it, as far as they were concerned. McPhee was then appointed Captain of the *William Scoresby*, which was an oceanographic research ship. They did a pilot voyage in 1948 [1951 – Transcriber], investigating the Benguela Current of South Africa. I can't remember whether I wrote to him first or he wrote to me but anyhow the understanding was that I would join the ship as Navigator the next voyage and that he was pleased to have me with him on this oceanographic research ship. I was, of course, delighted with this. Then, a few weeks later, I got a letter from him that the whole thing was off, because the Labour Government had withdrawn its support from the Institute of Oceanography. The ship was to be 'laid-up' and he would be going ashore. I never heard any more from him, but I was bitterly disappointed. I thought that the rug had been pulled from under me, not once, but twice! My family were pressing me to go in for Industrial Training again. When it was discovered that the Naval Officers and the arraignments that were made, didn't work out, I was at Exeter doing some industrial experience. I got a signal from Pierce Butler, asking me if I would go back as Navigator on the *John Biscoe*. Well by this time, I was disenchanted...I was going to say that, what had happened, rankled with me. I wrote a letter back on these lines; 'unless I received written understanding that there was going to be no interference in the running of the ship from Government House in Port Stanley I was not interested in the Position'. I now think that that was an arrogant thing to say but you will understand, I trust, the reasons! I came in later years... and also when I knew that the Governor General was relieved, and that there was somebody else there that didn't really interfere with the ship at all, and that the ship was under Merchant Navy Officers and Merchant Navy Articles...the whole situation was different. I later came to feel that my decision then was a mistake, but there you are.

[01:20:43] Lee: There was clearly a power-battle going on between Clifford and Bingham, I suppose, for when Bingham found out what Clifford had done about...Bingham had chosen what officers to go South hadn't he?

Miller: Yes!

[01:21:10] Lee:...and Clifford was saying that they were not good enough!

Miller: You know, I never...if that is the case...

[01:21:12] Lee: I am just speculating.

Miller: Oh, I see. I was just going to say that I never realised that. But if it did occur, it occurred after I had left. I was never aware of that. I never saw Bingham again. He was one that I had respect for, because he asked the right questions. He was a shrewd man.

[01:21:45] Lee: Also on the ship on your inaugural voyage, was there Dick Laws?

Miller: Yes. He was the Naturalist. He went to Signy Island and he was one of the FIDs who...I am very pleased for him how his career turned out. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society, and later a Director of the Survey.

[01:22:34] Lee: What did you make of him? Did you come across him much during the voyage? Was he at the meetings?

Miller: Not that I recall.

[01:22:42] Lee: You met him a few times?

Miller: Yes, indeed, because they were all on boat parties, and shore parties. I say it was all 'hands-in' at every place we went to, which meant of course, you went to a Base, you landed the stores, you landed the personnel, you re-embarked the home-going personnel. Whether those people were home-goers or people who were just going out for the first time, they were all 'hands-in'.

[01:23:33] Lee: What was Dick Laws' character like?

Miller: [Long Pause] I didn't have a lot to do with him but he struck me as an impressive character. I kept in touch with him on and off, over the years.

[01:24:00] Lee: You are still friends?

Miller: Yes, because, I finally got very fed-up with Industry. Also my first marriage wasn't working out too well and I wrote to see if I could get back, in any capacity, to work for FIDs. It was still FIDs then. He was one of those who had a hand in the dealings of it. But I was too old by a few years. It was just not practical, and I came to see that.

[01:24:55] Lee: Was there anybody else on board who I haven't thought of? Any Notables?

Miller: We carried Dudley Beavis who was a *Times* Correspondent. I suppose that he was sending bulletins to the *Times* every so often.

[01:25:26] Lee: Was he making for one of the Bases?

Miller: No, he was on board

[01:25:29] Lee: He was seconded to the ship as a journalist?

Miller: Yes

[01:25:34] Lee; He sent stuff back to the *Times*. How would he do that; by radio?

Miller: I suppose so. You know, I don't know! I was that busy! [Laughter] Because of my experience, you see...and the fact of age... the Captain and the Number One being the age they were...I mean, they were over twice my age...and the fact that they wanted and encouraged me to do this and that and the other... and my training, the organisation of the boat work fell to me. Normally it would have been the Chief Officer's.

[01:26:24] Lee: The work on the ship you mean, or on the small boats?

Miller: On the small boats, but every thing to do with them...the servicing of them, the raising, the lowering, and so on...[Pause}...and their actual operation. The organisation of that rested with me. That was bound to be, given the circumstances.

[01:27:03] Lee: On the long voyage south, what was your responsibility on the way down?

Miller: The navigation, mainly but I was very concerned when I learned that there were no proper charts on board. I didn't know, until we got to Port Stanley, that I was not going to get any either! There were these

sketch-maps on tracing paper from the captain of the *Trepassey*. The captain of the *Trepassey*...the *Trepassey* was a Newfoundland sealer, which had been chartered the previous year to supply these Tabarin bases. You have heard of Operation Tabarin [Operation Tabarin: Britain's Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica 1944-46 – Transcriber]. Well, that was just a make-shift arraignment to...obviously the bases needed to be supplied, and possibly change of personnel. Well, they chartered this Newfoundland sealer to do that, and it was the captain of the *Trepassey* who left the sketch maps. Presumably, he had no charts to go on either! It is an interesting thing, that about three or four years ago...something like that...on one of these visits to BAS I went to the map section and I saw some up-to-date charts for places you had gone into. All those years later, it really shook me...all the hazards that there were, that we so nearly missed! [Laughter].

[01:29:20] Lee: You didn't know about them?

Miller: No.

[01:29:29] Lee: So navigation was a real touch and go job, was it?

Miller: It was. You got used to operating in Antarctic waters...in uncharted waters, I should have said. You have to keep your eyes on what you were doing...on the sounding machine because there were places where you would get very little warning of shoaling. I think we were marvelously preserved!

[01:30:27] Lee: Tell me more about...you were looking at your notes...that you would sometimes use the icebergs as a guide.

Miller: Yes, because if you saw a berg that was canted and therefore partially aground, you would think that if there is room for that, there is room for us! Because if that is about 150 ft. tall, then there is 900 ft. below the water. We drew about 30 ft. so...[Laughter]

[01:31:03} Lee: Was the equipment, the sounding equipment, reliable?

Miller: It was, but as I related in that incident where...and I remember it very clearly because it was my responsibility entirely...we were proceeding between Bases and it was open water and the ground began to...the sounder was on, well it was always on...You see it had a circular dial and you get a bleep or a red flash where the depth was. This showed about...the manual said that it couldn't over-register.

[01:32:19] Lee: What is over-register?

Miller: Well if you got a reading of 10 fathoms, then it was 10 fathoms. It had got a circular dial that went up to a 100 [fathoms] you see, I think it was. It would stop there. If the water were deeper than that, you would get no signal. So you would be safe. Well if you switch on, as in this case, and you get 20 fathoms and then it is going quickly to 10, alarm bells start ringing and you reach for the Telegraph. 'Slow ahead' and see what is happening here. This happened one night...12 to 4 would be my Watch...and it was shoaling quite rapidly. I thought 'Shall I call the Old Man? No, we have come so far without difficulty. If there is a rock there, I can go astern.' Then it was still shoaling so I thought 'God, this is serious!' So I pulled the Telegraph to Stop! I thought that I had better not go astern yet because if we do touch, you can do as much damage by going astern...doing anything...going ahead or astern. You have got to see what really is there, as far as you can. It got so that there were 5 fathoms registering, so I thought 'Goodness me'. I called the Bosun, and said "I want soundings taken all the way round". I thought it unlikely but the only explanation is a sharp peak under the water, near the surface. Although this was very unusual, the indications seemed to be that this is what there was. In any case, I could not afford to take chances. We sounded all round with a deep sounding lead, which would only have been about 20 - 30 fathoms [long] anyway. There was no bottom! So I put the Telegraph to 'Slow ahead' and it went up to zero and then 200 [fathoms? - Transcriber] to my great relief! [Laughter]. I thought 'That bloody thing!'

[01:36:22] Lee: It was an 'eggy' moment. The compasses weren't always reliable, were they?

Miller: We had a very good Sperry gyrocompass but when that was out of commission for 24 hours, you had to rely on the magnetic steering compass, because whether by design or accident, we had no standard compass, which is usually on the Upper Bridge. Of course the Steering Compass, down in the Wheel House is subject really to all sorts of interference.

[01:36:57] Lee: How do you mean?

Miller: There can be other magnetic things that would affect it; steel fittings that could affect the needle. On one occasion I got an excellent azimuth bearing, which was not easy because it was in the Wheel House,

and trying to get an azimuth bearing you usually have a standard compass on the Upper Bridge where there is nothing around it and you can see the star or the sun, and bring the image down quite easily. It is more difficult and you have to adjust the ship's head[ing], and then you only get the reading on that heading. We found the error to be 40 degrees! Well 40 degrees means that the only thing that you can do is to proceed with caution and post good lookouts, and keep your eyes glued on the sounding machine. If not the Officer of the Watch, he has got to have someone who is watching the sounding machine and reporting.

[01:38:17] Lee: Navigating in pack ice...was that even more complicated? I don't know anything about that.

Miller: Yes it is. You have to make changes of Course according to the ice conditions, more than you do as regards making your destination. It can mean that you have a very zigzag track.

[01:38:56] Lee: You can't leave a straight wake.

Miller: No, but you keep your eyes and bearings on physical features, mountains and so on. You can keep track of your position if you have got a chart that shows those things. I did have some aerial maps. Aerial maps show you where the land is and also may show you where the ice is...it depend on when they were taken. What time of year. But it doesn't show you anything of the topography at all and it doesn't show you what depth of water there is. So they are of limited use. Nevertheless, having said that, they are some help in helping you with ice navigation, because although you are weaving about, here and there and all over the place, you can get bearings from the mountains. You get some idea of where you are relative to the coast.

[01:40:49] Lee: Was anyone drawing maps from the experiences you had? You were adding to the knowledge...navigational knowledge.

Miller: We were reporting that there was a shoal at such and such latitude and such and such longitude. We did that about a few things, but frankly we were so busy and time was so pressing. Although it might sound dramatic, we only got away with it by the 'skin of our teeth', at the end. The Antarctic winter had started and we had this ship with a damaged hull. We knew we could not withstand any prolonged encounter with pack ice. The ship would have foundered. What I am saying is that, rather than chart any of these entrances into Bays, that didn't come into it! We had to get into there, keep the ship safe, do what

we had to do and get out. By the time we had done that, we only got away with it by the 'skin of our teeth', really.

[01:42:30] Lee: Days? Few days or...?

Miller: I don't know because it would depend on the conditions.

[01:42:41] Lee: You were all aware of the time. You were all aware that you were in a hurry, were you?

Miller: Yes.

[01:42:47] Lee: Did that raise tensions?

Miller: When I say that we were aware of it, I was aware of it, the Number One and the Captain we aware of it, but we did not 'make a meal of it'. You do not spread alarm. There is enough nonsense goes about on the 'bush telegraph' without us adding to it!

[01:43:13] Lee: Whilst you were going round the Bases, you were really following Bingham's orders, weren't you...as to which Base to go to next?

Miller: Oh no, that was decided by Fuchs and the Captain.

[01:43:28] Lee: So Bingham's orders were simply, 'In your own time, supply the following Bases'.

Miller: Well, he was in London. He was nothing to do with...not at that stage. He had been previously. He was a man with a lot of Polar experience. I believe, unless I am wrong, he was on the British Graham Land Expedition in the 1930s [Surgeon Lieutenant Commander E W Bingham, Royal Navy, was that Expedition's medical officer – Transcriber].

[01:43:56] Lee: So he was distant from all this...

Miller: Yes, he was.

[01:43:59] Lee: ...and decisions were being made on board by your table.

Miller: If you want to know the most hair-raising...

[01:44:08] Lee: ...that was my next question!

Miller: It was undoubtedly this session in Hope Bay. By this time we were aware that the hull was weakened. We were aware that it was the onset of the Antarctic winter and therefore we had got to get in and out of Hope Bay, do what was necessary, and then head North, back to the Falklands. So it was decided that although the weather outlook did not look good, we would nevertheless press ahead...all hands on deck, work through the night and discharge the stores for the Base and the Personnel and embark the next lot. Of course, if you are going to do that quickly, it depends on entirely on your ship to shore transport as I have said. So what we did was to organize all the loading parties, the shore parties and of course the boats and rafts! We used the life rafts. The boat would tow them. You could put a lot of stores in a life raft...the wooden ones with metal tanks in. You could tow that to the beach and then it had to be pushed and maneuvered and then unloaded, and then brought back. Well, all this was in full swing when we got one of these sudden sharp storms. It was almost hurricane-force winds. The boats were in the water. There was the Whaler between the shore and the ship. We suddenly found ourselves dragging the anchors with both anchors down. Two anchors were down! The reason for this is the sea-bottom there is, like many places in the Antarctic, composed largely of volcanic ash. That is very poor 'holding ground' for ship's anchors. We were dragging anchors. So what we had to do very quickly, as best we may, is hoist the boats that were alongside – no, we hadn't time to do that! I am getting it wrong. We had to adjust those boats so that we could tow them, because we had to go to the rescue of the Whaler that was, under oars, being blown out to sea! So we were towing boats and rafts, and going to the rescue of the Whaler. Fortunately we got there in time. If men got into the water in those latitudes, the maximum time of survival is three minutes. Fortunately we made it in time. We rescued the Whaler. We had to hoist the boats and the rafts, lash everything down and go to sea to ride out the storm. Until we did that there were some pretty hairy moments.

[01:48:40] Lee: The storm was already around you; the storm that hit?

Miller: Oh yes. I was amazed at the suddenness of it and the strength of it.

[01:48:56] Lee: So you were doing all this work under storm conditions.

Miller: Yes.

[01:49:02] Lee: The rescue work?

Miller: Yes.

[01:49:05] Lee: How long did it last for?

Miller: I would have to consult the record to tell you that.

[01:49:22] Lee: So you were out at sea, riding the storm waiting for it to...

Miller: Yes, that is right. We...because that took so long we, by arrangement, made a rendezvous with HMS *Nigeria* that had been dispatched from the West Indies Squadron. But I think in fact, it was the South Atlantic Squadron, and that she had come from Simonstown in South Africa. However where she came from, she came to Deception [Island] and she brought amongst other things this narrow crate, which everybody assumed would contain the missing aircraft skis, which had been requested. When it was opened it was found to contain a spare chimney for the Base AGA. The pilot's comments were unprintable...[Laughter]...and his disappointment complete.

[01:50:29] Lee: So despite the adversities and the dangerous day or two of the storm you completed your mission.

Miller: Yes we did. We got very good conditions...in the Antarctic, good astronomical sights you don't often get; the reason being that it is the most cloudy part of the world. Also, you often do not get a clear horizon. Here I had a clear horizon and it was a sunny day and I got an excellent latitude by Sun. When it was put on the chart it was on land! [Laughter].

[01:51:24] Lee: Another incident I wanted to ask you about was the rescue on the way back. What was all that about?

Miller: That was an old Liner that had been chartered by UNRRA, the United Nations Relief or Refugee Rehabilitation Unit [Administration – Transcriber]. They were taking people, refugees from Europe. I think that they were bound for Paraguay...I am not to sure about that. The *Charleton Monarch* it was called. It was registered in Belgium, but the ship was of British origin. But it was chartered by UNRRA and they had engine trouble and were drifting onto a lee shore. They sent a message

out for assistance. Not an SOS, I believe, although I am not too sure about that. I am fairly sure that it was just a request for assistance. We made contact with the ship and I spoke to the Captain because, you know, I served my time in this Salvage and Rescue business. What we did was to come close and throw up a heaving line and attach that to a messenger. We had a heavy wire winch on the stern of the ship that had been part of the net-laying equipment from when the ship was a Boom Defence vessel. I suggested to the Captain, and he agreed, because...he was a competent seaman...that the best thing to do with a ship that size...we were a midget compared to that...was for them, if they were sufficiently competent...fortunately they turned out to be so...to knock out a shackle of their anchor chain and connect our hawser up to their anchor chain and pay out so that we had enough scope between them and us for there to be a seaway. That is what you have to do because otherwise the line would part, directly that it came under strain. There has to be what we call a catenary so that you never get a direct pull. You are pulling on that catenary and there is room for both ships then to work in the seaway. We towed them to just inside the precincts of Recife harbor in Brazil, so that they were safe.

[01:55:31] Lee: Where were these...did you ever find out why these refuges were on...why these European refuges were on the sea in 1948? Where were these refuges from?

Miller: They were from mid-Europe. I think, as far as I can recall, they were Mennonites and that they were from...when I say Eastern Europe...

[01:56:05] Lee: They were escaping from the Russians, were they?

Miller: Well, there were a whole lot, thousands if not millions, of refuges in the middle of Europe at that time. Whether they had been rendered homeless by German activity in the Ukraine or places like that, I really don't know.

[01:56:42] Lee: They were all going to Paraguay?

Miller: As far as I know, yes.

[01:56:47] Lee: Paraguay or Uruguay?

Miller: Paraguay, I think. Anyhow, it was later that...because all this becomes quite complicated legally, I understand...and the ship was declared a constructed total loss so that we would receive no salvage

money for saving the ship. They had quite a good Advocate...I think that was his proper title. I think I may be able to think of his name. It was Heywood, I think, and he had been a seaman and a Merchant Navy officer and then gone into the law. He was very active in these cases in the Admiralty Division. I heard that he maintained that if a ship was a constructed total loss, we were then entitle to a certain sum of money, which I think was £9 at that time, for every soul on board...and there were 3000 of them. [Laughter].

[01:58:20] Lee: [Laughter] Did you ever see your money?

Miller: Yes. So, a couple of years later, this was paid out. But of course, it was much less, to our great regret, because due again to the Governor of the Falkland Islands we had two crews on board and it had to be split between all them. There is a sliding scale for this. The Captain gets so much and Chief Officer...

[01:58:50] Lee: Can you recall how much you ended up with then?

Miller: My recollection is about £30, which was a fair sum of money in the early 1950s. I know that I had a decent holiday on it [Laughter].

[01:59:07] Lee: [Laughter] So, you came back, knowing that your short career with the FIDS was over.

Miller: Yes, so I then thought I would be going on to oceanographic research ships, but that didn't work out either.

[01:59:26] Lee: So what did you do then Tom?

Miller: I went back for experience in the shoe trade, and my first job I work with the Shoe and Allied Trades Research Association in Kettering...for experience. Because, you went into manufacturing; you went into the testing of materials; you went into retailing; the statistic for... All this seems out of date now, but the last that shoes are made on, were in some cases quite unenlightened then. The Research Association was conducting all sorts of foot surveys, and then transforming this into suitable information for last-makers to adjust their lasts so that shoes would fit people's feet better than what they had done before. I found the transit to this form of work pretty tough!

[02:01:00] Lee: No adventure?

Miller: No! I became a walker and climber in my spare time. I got interested in Outward Bound, but I couldn't get a job with them. They hadn't got any vacancies at that time. I think that that was probably a good thing because I wouldn't have earned enough to keep a family there, I don't think.

[02:01:28] Lee: So did you stay in the shoe trade?

Miller: I did stay in the shoe trade, yes. I had my own business and then sold it, and moved to Devon, where I could be near an Outward Bound School. With hindsight, that was pretty much a disastrous thing to have done. The assets that I invested in in Devon...I did well in near London but in deciding to move to Devon, which I did partly because what, by then, had become an unhappy marriage, and I was convinced that I was going to be spending more time with the Outward Bound school. I was to find out that the assets that I invested in in the West Country did not provide anything like the income that I expected. Also, due to deteriorating economic circumstances, the Outward Bound School closed. I didn't have that interest there. It was not a good time because I had made the wrong investment decisions. There we are!

[02:03:10] Lee: You actually retired from the shoe trade?

Miller: I did retire, and I sold the business in Devon and went to work in London. I ran 6 shops and a hand-sewn workshop in Central London for a few years...

[02:03:33] Lee: So this year in the South has remained a key memory in your life?

Miller: Oh, it has! Yes.

[02:03:43] Lee: You would not have not done it!

Miller: Oh my goodness, no! I think, as I say, I made an unfortunate miss-judgment when I didn't go back when they invited me, because the man who did, had a Command within three years.

[02:04:08] Lee: Who was that?

Miller: I think Brown. [Pause] But still, there we are. I smarted from the fact that the rug had been pulled from under me twice, and I thought that by that time, if I wanted to get married...and I thought 'if you go

back and then some damn fool decides to wind up this or wind up that, I shall be on the beach again. I shall not have these opportunities'. I thought 'Let me stick with this! Well you make your decision, and you have to live with the result! So I come to this stage in life, and I find it very interesting, a fascinating time frankly. This is a different subject altogether, but [Long pause]...I read a saying of Teilhard de Chardin's [French idealist philosopher, 1881-1955 – Transcriber] about a couple of years ago, where he said that 'we were not human beings who some times had a spiritual experience, those that have, but that we were spiritual beings having a human experience'. I got to thinking about that, and what I was learning from this human experience, because for various reasons, which I can go into if you are interested, I believe in reincarnation and I think... I am satisfied that now, within a very few minutes of passing from this life I shall feel just as alive as I do now. I have good grounds for saying this. Again I can elaborate if you would want me to. I will only do it if you did so want me to! I feel that this life is in a sense like a journey in a railway carriage in Eternity. At a certain stage, not of our choosing, we have to get out of this carriage and go into another one! But that would still be a learning experience and an adventure.

[02:07:07] Lee: I will not ask you dwell on that now because it is not to do with the interview and not part of our conversation of the moment. But, did you gain anything spiritual from the year in Antarctica?

Miller: Yes. [Pause] Now here I have a problem because I wrote down my experience but because it could be so easily classified as...well, that is subjective and you could be kidding yourself. There are always people who will want to take that view, or even just knock what you say for the sake of knocking it. So I haven't spoken about it.

[02:08:02] Lee: You are 80-odd so what have you got to lose?

Miller: Are we being recorded?

[02:08:07] Lee: Yes, we are being recorded. Do you want to talk about it?

Miller: [Long Pause] I have always said that I would not, except if privately written down and for the interest of the family. There was an occasion on the voyage back from Hope Bay to the Falkland, where...you see, you need to get the thing in perspective. When you have been down in the ice, you are so...the navigation...the ship's

safety...taxes you all the time...that when you are then sailing in open water, the sense of freedom is profound. Also, I suppose the common phrase is 'familiarity breeds contempt'. It is more than that really. But you don't expect trouble, and you are well south of any Trade Routes. You have got look-outs, anyway, and on this voyage I...there just wasn't anything to do in the Watch. I had the 12 to 4 Watch again. I thought that I would go and look at the Chart - because we had some good Charts of the Falklands - and see when we are likely to come into soundings. Because, if you get bad weather meaning that you can't take sun-sights, when you come into soundings, across that 100 fathom line, which had been very well surveyed, it is a very good guide to your latitude when you have got a sight or when you haven't. So I was in the Chart Room looking at the Falkland Island Chart, comparing it with our dead-reckoning position, and working out when we were likely to come into soundings...when, I can only say to you that I felt as though something had got hold of my shoulders and was propelling me out onto the wing of the Bridge from the Chart Room. When I got onto the Bridge, I could see something white in front of me, which I could not tell...this is all split-second happenings...I could not tell if it was ice or whether...if you have been looking at a white chart with a restricted light on it...a projection of that, as you know, comes to the eyes.

[02:11:55] Lee: It stays on the retina!

Miller: Yes. Yes it does. In order to be certain, I ordered hard to starboard and pulled the telegraph to full astern. Well, a ship with a right-handed screw, when you do that, it is pretty disastrous down below because everything goes on the move. The ship when it is going at speed turns more or less in just over its own length. Quite a sizeable growler berg, which is about the size of a house above the water, sailed down the port side. The chap at the wheel said "Good thing you saw that one, Sir!" I said, "Yes it was, wasn't it".

[02:13:00] Lee: Nobody else had seen it?

Miller: No! One look-out had gone to make the cocoa, and one had fallen asleep!

[02:13:16] Lee: You had a Guardian Angel.

Miller: That is what I think. [Pause] This is not connected with the Antarctic but there was an occasion when I... These rescue ships went the whole way with a convoy, and we would come out from St Johns,

Newfoundland, to join a convoy, when a U-Boat caught us on the surface and started shelling us. We were zigzagging, and these shells were falling very close. The gunnery was good. All of a sudden, I felt enveloped by, what I can only call, love and light. I knew in an instance, that whether I was this side of the dividing line called death...whether I was this side of it or the other...was of no consequence and didn't rush [stet –Transcriber] with me in anyway. All was well, and would be well; life was eternal. It was an internal thing. Then it went away. Our gun was firing. We were trying to bring this thing onto the beam, and so on. How it would have finished, I don't know. The convoy that we were to join, had an aircraft carrier. One of the planes attacked the submarine. It got away but it had to crash-dive. But it saved us, for we were being out-run and out-gunned. There was that experience and I have since met people who have had near-death experiences but give very much the same...whose opinion I or whose statements I believe...that give very much the same description of the same experience. To me it is real.

[02:16:26] Lee: Did you sense, for want of a better phrase, God's beauty in the Antarctic? Where you stunned by it?

Miller: I was. This idea of tremendous forces at work and the, at times, the beauty of those ice fields in the moonlight was absolutely wonderful. I put that incident there about the first time I saw a big tabular berg moving through the pack against the wind! Then of course you realize it is due to the effect of the current on the greater mass under the water. It does give you the impression of the tremendous forces that are at work.

[02:17:38] Lee: I need to leave you there. It has been a pleasure. Thank you Tom.

Miller: You are very welcome.