

JIM FRANKS

Edited transcript of interview with Jim Franks (GA/Met) conducted by Chris Eldon Lee on 26th October, 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/195. Transcribed by Allan Wearden in February, 2019.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Jim Franks interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 26th of October 2012.

Franks: Jim Franks and was it place of birth and date of birth? Hampton Wick, Middlesex, 9/2/33.

[0:00:19] Lee: So you are now how old?

Franks: [Big sigh] That plus a bit!

[0:00:26] Lee: So you'll be 80?

Franks: Yeah, yeah I'll be 80 in February!

[0:00:30] Lee: 79 and 80 next February, yeah.

Franks: Yeah, yeah that's it!

[0:00:35] Lee: What drew you into engineering?

Franks: When I left secondary school, grammar school, living in Kingston I had taken an interest in aircraft sort of naturally, and living through the wartime I most interested in all the aircraft of all nations and we had the Hawker aircraft company factory in Kingston! There it was, a small walking distance from me and I applied there for an apprenticeship. I was too young, I worked there for up to a couple of years as an office boy in the design and a shop boy on the floor, and then they offered me a trade apprenticeship on the shop floor. In other words I'd be a fitter or a lathe turner or something or other which is not what I wanted! I went back to school and the careers master said 'I told you go to Vickers Armstrong in Weybridge!' - [Laughter] - which I don't remember he did tell me but, and I went there and the system was entirely different; instead of sitting in front of a board you sat an appliqué [sic] exam and I was given a five year engineering apprenticeship!

[0:01:56] And I did with college with days off because Armstrongs are at Broadlands race track and the college was Broadlands host, and I did the five years and that with ONC in mech-engine[ering] carrying on to HNC when I got kind of fed up! You worked five days a week, you got up early, you got your breakfast, you ran down the road catch the bus to go to the station to catch the train to go to the station to jump off the train to catch the bus and if you didn't get there on time you lost money! And if you lost money as an apprentice two or three times a week you were liable to get the sack! And then I thought, well I'm earning and spending five days a week and you have to recover to earn enough money to go on a holiday in the summer for a fortnight which is stupid! I was a Boy Scout and every other year we went abroad and this is daft! And I had a grandfather and a half brother who

owned a golf club on Florida Keys, and I'd seen him, he'd been over I got some golf balls off him and I was wanting to get over there. So I had to do my National Service before I could go abroad and I said 'Well how do I do that?' and they said 'If you notify the college to cancel that you're cancelled your course you'll get your papers', which I did in a great hurry. And I was tipped off on how to get in the navy - despite my interest in aircraft I wanted the navy and I was given several tips, like I could half invent a relation who had been, (he wasn't quite a relation), who had been an officer in the original Fleet Air Arm in the early days, and that with my Scouting with the Sea Scouts with boats and various other things, and insisting on all three choices for National Service were navy, navy and navy and refusing, I got in! And I did two years there in which I was lucky enough to get via various drafts in submarines, which is another impossibility for a National Service man, and I got into submarines which was fantastic and I came out of that and I'd forgotten about America I thought I wanted to go back to sea! So I got myself into the Marine, the Merchant Marine, and I did one trip in the Baltic on a BP tanker, we came back from that and paid off in Gateshead and in the mail was this letter from FIDS! I had applied - the brother of an ex-girlfriend had said to me when I was wondering what to do after coming out of the navy, said 'I have this. I saw it in the paper and I have applied but I've been turned down, perhaps you'd like it?' And I had forgotten all about it but there it was in the mail in Gateshead, so I stayed ashore, went to Crown Agents on the due given date and saw Bill and...?

[0:05:20] Lee: Bill Sloman and...?

Franks: Yeah Bill Sloman, yeah and...?

[0:05:23] Lee: Frank Elliot!

Franks: Frank Elliot, that's right, and they well we'll tell you because they always had a delayed principle in it, which I think is very sensible, then I got word, 'You will go to north....Stanford in...'

[0:05:44] Lee: Stanmore!

Franks: Stanmore, that's right, the Met Office in Stanmore, to the school in there for six weeks' met training, 'You'll be a met man'! They couldn't get met men from the Met Office trained.

[0:05:55] Lee: Did you want to be a met man?

Franks: Well it didn't matter, I mean that'll do. As I say they couldn't get met men very much, OK they got Robin, but most of the met men thought we were crazy! You could go to Christmas Island who the hell wants to go to the Antarctic!? Well perhaps some of them wished they hadn't gone to Christmas Island but there you are. We did that and we were all there together, Robin [Perry] was already a professional met man. But my mates Alan Gill, [and] Fritz Koerner of the North Pole and lots of them via, I think well there's a lot of them, a lot of them went to Hope Bay and we were all together there, went down on the *Shackleton* and the great thing about that trip was two days out, I just looked it up and it was two days out Southampton the crew started to go down with Spanish Flu! And we had three MO's

onboard, I think it was three, and they signed them off you see - it cancelled out a visit to Dakar unfortunately! They were signed off and so crew was needed and as I was the one qualified and held a current helmsman's ticket, I was the first one to take the first watch and teach the others, and we took the ship all the way to Monte!

[0:07:21] Lee: You were steering the *Shackleton* were you?

Franks: Yeah, and taking the engine; the relevant guys that were to be the mechanic engineers on the bases or whatever, they did that, and we did the various duties. The only one that the doctor never signed off, probably because the captain refused to let him, was the chef!

[Laughter] But we did that and when they started to come back after a couple of weeks or because they were cured, it was decided we would continue the watch keeping and they would do the on deck maintenance work and the general on deck day time ship maintenance.

[0:07:57] Lee: So how was it to be responsible for running the *Shackleton*?

Franks: Well I'd just come out of two navies, I mean it was fine. Basically it was just steering the damn thing all the way down that line, and Monte here we come! More or less a straight line, relatively safe, you'd very seldom see a ship because they'd go across we were going down and out at a crossing angle, and I loved the sea and I loved steering the thing and I was quite happy. And eventually I knocked it off because I'd been doing watches all the time and, well everybody else could do it, and there was more than enough of us to do the work - you only need three watches to run a ship and there was plenty. So I knocked it off so that I could some daytime other fun and games until we got to Monte, and going in and they came to me and said 'We want to take it into Monte since we brought it all the way'! And the skipper says (that was, oh I had the name yesterday)...

[0:09:10] Lee: Bill Turnbull?

Franks: No, no before that.

[0:09:13] Lee: Tom Woodford?

Franks: No he was the Mate, Tom Woodford was the Mate ahh - oh never mind it doesn't matter. [Note: they mean Woodfield!]

Franks: And he said 'Well it I'll have to be me' as I was the only one with a ticket and the pilot wouldn't accept it otherwise you see. So we went into Monte under pilot - and this is where something that becomes relevant later notices - hydraulic steering seeps you see, the pressure seeps from one side to the other if you tend to have that wheel on; if you tend to turn one way and you have to put that wheel on because of the currents winds, weather etc, you're not going from here to port-starboard, starboard-port or whatever, you tend to keep on going from starboard to port the pressure seeps to the other side, and you find that the wheel gets farther and farther on that side, instead of being midships! And when going into the harbour at Monte and the full force of the points that were coming out and probably the tide as well and it was pushing it to port, and there's this sort of big way between this jetty here and the wall across the area and we are gradually heading across to port towards the wall! And the

pilot said 'Starboard helmsman, more starboard!' eventually turned on me and said 'Starboard helmsman, starboard, we're drifting to port!' 'There is no more, pilot, there is no more!' Now this becomes relevant - we got through it OK - but it becomes relevant when we got to the hole in the *Shackleton* [laughter]! What I think was very much to do with that, the fact that the ship crept to port all the time, but when we got to that...

[0:11:05] Lee: Well let's get to it now because this was hitting the iceberg?

Franks: Yes.

[0:11:10] Lee: Near South Georgia?

Franks: We were just north of Coronation, we'd relieved Signy, yeah we'd gone through Stanley the routines and that and we were away down to bases, I was going to base G on King George Island, Ad[miralty] Bay. We'd relieved Signy, we came out and turned right to go south west on the way down to the South Shetlands and we ran into solid pack, which being pressed up against the islands there the south side of Coronation and we got stuck! And we were stuck in there for several days, I forget exactly how long, we got out and the skipper said 'Well I'll go north of Coronation it should be more open there, got more room', and we're going towards Coronation and go all the way round it travelling west. So we were out there fine, scudding along through the open with pack ice against the north shore of Coronation pressed in, and the night of, I think it was December 1st or 2nd and it was getting on for near midnight I think, and we felt a shudder and a scraping and that, and we'd been in the ice and that was, and then somebody comes in from off the deck and spoke to me, 'Jim come up on deck', said 'I don't know but I think we are listing you see'! And I went up on deck and we'd got a few, 10, degrees on by then and what had happened - this is where, there was a young seaman I believe on the wheel and everybody, was making whoopee at the time of night as usual in the fiddery and that nobody was paying that much attention. It's 10 o'clock at night, its broad daylight, there's a line of ocean on your right and the pack ice is comfortably away there, and we were doing 10 or 12 knots and it must have crept gradually and he couldn't do anything with it! And he can't have said anything about it until we bumped into the edge of the pack ice which would have been not too bad, except that then threw the ship to starboard, just as it was crabbing all the time to port just knocked it starboard, and that went like that all the way down the side and instead of running on to it and into it, it turned and scraped from bow to stern! It took out about two ribs I think it was, and the ribs were heavy duty and very close together for the ice, very thick skinned, and we were holed just below the waterline and it was all hands went down where it was pouring in! So what we had to do and what has been said and I'm sure it's quite true, if it hadn't have been for the Fids onboard if it had just been crew that would have been it!!!

[0:14:16] Lee: You would have been overwhelmed!?

Franks: We had so many people that we went down in there and we started to heave the cargo out of the hold, the motor boat was hung on the crane because it had its own crane there on the *Shack*, the motorboat was hung out starboard to tip it up a bit, and we could just about get below the waterline and just adjust the body if we stayed still and heave a lot of cargo out!

[0:14:45] Lee: Over the side?

Franks: Yes, yes we just ditched as much weight as we could. We had a lot of timber there because there was going to be huts built and things, extensions whatnots, and Denis Wildridge, who was what we call Queen Fid, have you come across this term?

[0:15:00] Lee: I've come across King Fid!

Franks: Well we called him Queen Fid! I mean we had a wicked sense of humour in our lot you see, he was Queen Fid! It means nothing in modern times stuff we thought it was just that, but he was a chippy and he took charge and we manufactured, in fact he manufactured with the hands, we'd got a shuttering box we had a lot of cement *fondue* that was poured in, and I don't know if you've seen footage of cement *fondue*, you must have heard of it, you fry eggs on top when it's in there and it scorches the woodwork, but it was a great stoppage, it wasn't a complete seal but it was a good stoppage!

[0:15:39] Lee: At this point was the hole above the waterline again?

Franks: Well we could just about with this juggling the weights, but of course there was water coming in so we were going down all the time as well, we could just about keep it around the waterline as long we were more or less stationary. Luckily it was very calm and that wasn't too bad, at least we were hovering and there was nothing disastrous! The *Southern Lily* was the first ship to arrive, one of the whale catchers, and she stood alongside as a guard ship. Eventually the *Protector* turned up a day and a half later because God knows where she was, I can't remember! She turned up and then took all the Fids off at great protest, because we sailed it here, we saved it we think, 'Oh no, we had to get off'! And they put some of the navy men on board, divers and that, and they welded plates and shot bolts and welded plates and sealed it and we tried moving. The captain was going to, Norman Brown the captain, Norman Brown! He sent signals that he was going to try and beach on the south side of Georgia you see which would be the next nearest thing that we could reach within reason, but the *Protector* turned up. We tried moving it but at more than three knots we were taking too much water on board, so we were only just edging.

[0:17:06] Lee: Were the pumps working?

Franks: Yeah the pumps were working fine, but it had a bloody great big hole there!

[0:17:12] Lee: Yeah.

Franks: I never actually got a photograph of the hole when it got into dry dock, but by time I got the photograph the plates were off, but I believe it was around 20 odd feet long! And as I say broken ribs as well.

[0:17:27] Lee: Let's go back slightly whose thinking was it to apply the cement *fondue*, because that presumably that was destined for a base somewhere to be a platform of some sort?

Franks: You don't think of things like that when you're in a sinking ship in icy waters! I mean it was there and we used it!

[0:17:43] Lee: Somebody had the right idea!?

Franks: Yes, well I think it was Denis Wildridge. As a chippy he said 'I know what we do here, here's the stuff cut the wood up, put it together I can design it and we'll put it together and there's the cement *fondue*, you guys get this and pour it in!

[0:18:01] Lee: So how long would it have been from the initial crunch and the water being stemmed?

Franks: Oh I think it was a day and a night and into the next day something like that, I have my diaries with me and can more or less check it.

[0:18:14] Lee: It's OK.

Franks: But something like that.

[0:18:18] Lee: More than 24 hours?

Franks: Yeah, I'm sure it was [Lee: yeah] and then the docs we had onboard then started to take some charge of us being in the soaking water for hours on end, and hauling us out and making us go and lie down and change clothing and that you just did it Fids' fashion, it was just done. I mean there might have been other people that had a word in what to do with Denis, but Denis was the chippy and far as I know it was very much his management that did that.

[0:18:53] Lee: Just give me his name again Denis?

Franks: Wildridge.

[0:18:55] Lee: Wildridge.

Franks: He was going to Hope Bay.

[0:18:58] Lee: OK but you were in fact off the ship at that point?

Franks: Well we were then taken off on to the *Protector* when it arrived, they took us off you see. We protested because we belonged to it and we had done it all! But no, no we were in the way, the crew was enough and their men were enough and we were taken off and put on the *Protector*, and taken back to Port Stanley!

[0:19:24] Lee: Was it a bo'sun chair to get you from one ship to the other?

Franks: No, the motorboats were used, their boats and ours.

[0:19:29] Lee: Oh right!

Franks: And I remember was Tony Richardson, another Yorkshireman one our met man trained, he was a guitarist and pictures of him and we had the press onboard, and we fed them the *Sunday Times* or somebody, something like that covering it. So we fed them and there's pictures of Tony and us coming off from the motor boat on there and pictures of Tony Richardson climbing over the gunwale to go down to the motorboat to go to the *Protector*! And he said 'Stiff upper lip chaps, we are British you know'! [Laughter] And that was actually put in the paper in court it was said deliberately and they took it up it was just!

[0:20:22] Lee: At any time in that 36 hours did you feel that the battle was going to be lost?

Franks: I don't think so, no. No it was like sort of all the stuff, we were all new to everything but we took it, there wasn't, no I mean some them might have done. I know there was a member of the crew was in the lifeboat along with the whisky that he'd smuggled down there, and he was frightened, but everybody else, just it was a job to do!

[0:20:54] Lee: You weren't fearful for your life!?

Franks: No, I'd just come out of submarines and you know!

[0:21:01] Lee: [Laughing] So you were used to being under water weren't you!?

Franks: Yes. No with all that stuff are frightened off going down glaciers or falling through the ice, well if it happens and it does to a lot of people, people died down there! You know three, four, five of my friends down there on both the bases I was on - but the year I wasn't on it - have died down there, and as you know there's a long death list but so!

[0:21:25] Lee: We'll come up to them in due course I expect. So you ended up back at Stanley?

Franks: Yeah. So there was a lot of, we had to go to Stromness then to where the *Shack* was took and put into the dry dock. We then had to go to Stromness and help sort out the gear; the *Shack* had to be emptied of stuff that was still in there, and that had to be sorted as to what had to be thrown away being in saltwater that could be washed down like the tins, or what would be restocked in either the *Protector* or the *Biscoe* when she came in and picked up. And the whole schedule had to be re-planned, obviously, with the one ship missing, and then we were then sent off to our bases. I was on the *Protector* and the *Protector* had to take a lot more part than it would have done, and do different things to its normal survey. And I was taken down to base G along with Alan and Tinker Bell and we arrived at base G on the *Protector* and were put ashore there and then we spent the whole year there.

[0:22:36] Lee: Admiralty Bay?

Franks: Ad Bay.

[0:22:41] Lee: Was the base therefor not fully provisioned if the ship had lost quite a lot over the side?

Franks: Well of course they made up what they could and they rehashed what was going to where and the plans of the new stuff and things it all had to be, and they called this in Stanley 'Head scratch'. Johnny Green, Sec FIDS, had to think some new route for things, get extras that they could via Fleet wing and via the whalers' stores and things, and obviously we were short of stuff and that. But you see there's an emergency supply of foods and equipment on every base hut, which is some hundreds of yards away from the base hut in case of fire, so there's always plenty of stuff being that you stored, the store you have on indent in all the stuff on a base is for 18 months, right, not a year you see. So I don't think that was a hell of a problem with them, I don't think anybody went particularly short. There might have been some items, things you went without till resupplied up here, nothing noticeable, not like when we went base Y!

[0:23:56] Lee: Let's talk about Admiralty Bay then. What was it like to go to Admiralty Bay then in the late 50s?

Franks: Well it was a good hut, it was a very modern hut it was a proper dormitory hut, the old explorers huts like Hope Bay, built on that style. It's a big hut a big rambling affair which offices and workshops and things and a big lounge, with bunks all round it with the check gingham curtains and things, lovely! You know that's what we had read all the books up to then on the way down on the ship and that's what it was about. Ad Bay was a new hut, it had a corridor down the middle, it had a dormitory of double deck bunks, and various rooms and everything separate, it was a good hut, it was very comfy, very comfy!

[0:24:44] Lee: And what was the met office like?

Franks: Well how big will we say? it was about as big as this here you know.

[0:24:54] Lee: So about 10 by 15 feet, something about like that?

Franks: Something like that I would say. I've got the photos there and in which you've got a working top bench, you've got the charts with the shelves with the instruments indoors, the graphing, all the graphing instruments indoors with the instruments themselves and a recorder outside. I was Senior Met that was the thing - Alan Gill and I we fought each other over 'I'm not suitable, he's more suitable than me' to the chief met man in Port Stanley who had to appoint one of us to Senior Met you see! Senior Met you got another £50 a year and all the responsibility for it not working out, but I lost and I got to be Senior Met!

[0:25:41] Lee: But you weren't actually a met man were you? And so you had that training course at Stanmore?

Franks: Well that, we'd done the course that any person going into the Met Office did, we were as fully trained as any of them!

[0:25:55] Lee: Do you remember slipping into the role easily or were there some teething troubles or problems did you expect it?

Franks: You're taking over what has been running for years, you've done your training and you interlock on the base changeover; it's not a turnover it's an interlock, people do two years [Lee: Right] sometimes on the same base and the 2nd year you go home, the 1st year ones come in and the others a 2nd year. [Lee: right] It's a continuous flow of experience knowledge, new information and new jobs to do etc and etc, perfectly sound.

[0:26:34] Lee: Were you OK in Morse and, did you have to Morse?

Franks: We had a radioman separately.

[0:26:39] Lee: Yeah, so did it for you.

Franks: Yeah, we had an ex navy radio op.

[0:26:44] Lee: Did it mean on the hand you were stuck on base rather a lot because you were doing, was it, three-hourly observations?

Franks: Yeah we were doing three hourly, but then we had four met men so that's not terribly onerous and you only really need in the night time, just get up and go and do the met then kip again really, you'd just take the records.

[0:27:06] Lee: So did you get out much?

Franks: Pardon?

[0:27:10] Lee: Did you get out much?

Franks: Oh yes, yes. I mean other than your duty there's duties of running the whole team and the base, you've got to be a gash hand cleaning, you've got to be a chef, a week everybody has to do a week in their turn round. And gash hand he has to do the dishes and to bring the ice in for the water tank etc, etc. You're always very busy but at the same time, people said 'What did you do in your spare time when there wasn't any TV anything?' No, thank God! But well in the spare time, which there was plenty, in between things you could go walkies along the beach, you could perhaps go out and row the boat in the summertime if it wasn't out on something, you could go skiing practice, skiing, learning skiing and falling arse over tit all the time! Oh yeah there was plenty. As quite a few of us said here just now it was all dam good fun and a wonderful experience, it really was!

[0:28:16] Lee: So did you get off much, you got out with the dogs a bit as well, did you?

Franks: Well Ad Bay wasn't a big base and it wasn't a big, I mean Hope Bay was the big sledging base, had been since 1948, Tabarin, but we had, oh what I don't know I can't remember 20 to 30 dogs perhaps say altogether? And pupping of course and breeding and interchanging dogs with other bases, but we had a good running team with a good old experienced leader. And we had a surveyor, Graham Davey, and Hunting Aero Survey had done the big aerial survey job throughout the South Shetlands and the Peninsula, the year before they had finished. And the surveying that Graham was doing there on King George

and in the summer we did on the other South Shetland Islands. You link a rock part on the photo you link that to and you survey by trigging through snow beacons...

[0:29:20] Lee: Yeah.

Franks: ...to the other end through parts of the island and down to the rock again to anchor those photographs because they can twist them. So that was being done by Graham; he had done some the year before, the first guy to go out with him was, was Alan Gill I think, and they did some from just west of the centre up to centre, and then I went, he came back and we went through mid winter and in about the end of August, I went out with Graham and we went up on to the Plateau which is between two or three thousand feet, just ice capped long rocky islands, ice capped which are quite awkward to travel on because the edges fall off! So you can only travel if you can see where you're going and via the starting point and picking up on the last snow cairn, and trigonometrically angles all the way down the island to the far end and to the rocks at the north foreland of the eastern end of King George Island. And then Tinker Bell went out on the next lot where they had some more to do at different sections of the island, and then in the summer Tinker and I went out with Graham on the other Shetland Islands and we were lifted by *Protector's* chopper, mostly from one to the other or *Protector* or *Biscoe* or whatever they were doing, we were taken from one island to the other on the same process.

[0:31:06] Lee: Wasn't there a problem with one of the helicopters rides?

Franks: Not on that one! We did have later, but no that was fine. They had two choppers and navy chopper pilots are quite something!

[0:31:22] Lee: Lady!?

Franks: Navy!

[0:31:23] Lee: Oh navy!

Franks: You see the *Protector* had choppers we didn't; a navy chopper pilots are quite something!

[0:31:28] Lee: So where was this incident with Dick Harbour?

Franks: Ah that comes the next year when I went back again in '62.

[0:31:35] Lee: Right.

Franks: That's not on this trip.

[0:31:37] Lee: Well we're going to for the time being miss out 1959 because Robin Perry going to join us.

Franks: Yes, yes!

[0:31:43] Lee: Well let's now look at what happened in 1962, starting with that interesting helicopter incident?

Franks: Well when I, [Lee: This was at Hope Bay?] well when I went down again, see, I was dog man in Hope bay and I went down at the end of '61, October leaving Southampton and we get down there and I've got the experience of being there and I'd done this before! They were redoing and putting in other little islets and things for the survey work, so I given to Dick Harbour who was the surveyor there on the *Protector* and choppering from here to there to the other place, and we did one or two rather hairy things! There was mank down to about 200 feet and there were ice bergs bigger than the hut, and we went up to about 8,000 feet still you couldn't see anything. You'd come back down and wonder what's underneath, but they don't care! So then we go to Greenwich Island. I'd been there before and the chopper pilot said 'Can I land there?' I said 'No way, not on the point where we put the tripod, there's a scree slope and a sheer clough!' And behind it there's a bit of rock and steep snow slope out on to the top of the island, but you can walk up here and round the back up on the peak you see, and the weather was bad and we couldn't see the top, and so he said 'Well never mind.' First of all he said 'Can you stand on this little peak?' and I said 'Well you can put the tripod on the top', and the surveyor to do a round he actually had to put his leg out over the edge to come right round it, because you have to do a round if you slack the thing off or you take it back, it goes wrong you see a certain amount of play. And he said 'If you can stand there I can land you there'! Because they have this principle, 'Put one wheel down and sit' Well we couldn't get to the top but there was mank down here he said 'That's the nearest point I can put you is the top of the shale slope, can you get up from there?' And I said 'Yes from there we'll just walk round and up', so he said 'Right, when I tell you one of you get off your harness go to the door and jump out'! - and Dick did that because he was sitting nearest the door, because you always flew with the door open - 'And the other one then, throw everything out to him and when you've thrown it all out you jump out. Keep down!' Dick gives me the thumbs up and I fly away, OK? Right, so he puts the wheel down and says 'OK go!' and Dick jumps out, and I didn't even get unbuckled when we had cold air come down off the top and slammed this, we were sitting there hovering with one foot on the edge and it slammed the chopper down and turned it round and we were sledging down the shale slope!

[0:34:50] Lee: In the helicopter!?

Franks: Yeah, on our belly, and the pilot screaming at it and revving like hell trying to but he couldn't lift it up in those conditions! And I thought 'You're not supposed to do this in a chopper, it shouldn't be doing this sort of thing'! And we went down the slope and there was a big boulder which it caught and turned over, that went through the cockpit on the pilot's side and it lodged there and it was held lying three quarters on its side, the starboard side, and we all got out!

[0:35:28] Lee: A write off!?

Franks: Oh yes, very! It was more or less in one piece but the rotor, the tail rotor end, had snapped off. I took some of that home and kept it for donkey's years, a piece of that!

[0:35:43] Lee: A critical thing was that the radio was a write off wasn't it?

Franks: Oh that was an amusement that was, the pilot said 'Right I'll quickly see', but choppers don't explode or anything, their fuel is not as explosive as jet planes, this was a *Westland Whirlwind 66* or something. And we gets out nothing, I didn't have cameras or anything at all which to a Fid it's always very annoying when you can't take pictures of these things! I mean they wouldn't let us get back in until they'd been ashore and secured it and made sure it's secure. So we're sitting there and the first thing he does is the immersion suit on, and he just pulls the tab and this little button it's about the size of a cigarette packet and the emergency radio throws it's aerial up and bleeps the emergency signal on the emergency frequency! And that then also has got a key on the top which you could either Morse code on, or on over off and speak and we find that we're not making contact. The *Protector* saw us, the other chopper is up overhead and nothing's happening! It couldn't hear him and it turned out they'd had the radio out, either ours or the other one, no it must have been ours, for maintenance and put back and the control on the radio frequency is right hand up to the roof of the cockpit and adjust the frequencies. Now the emergency is all the way to the right, you don't look at it, you just go click and it's on emergency frequency and they had put it back in the wrong spline and they had put it back one farther and it went one past the last frequency and it was on nothing, that's why we couldn't contact or speak to them. But yeah, we were saying 'Yeah come on have you got any fags?' [laughter], and they went back off to the ship to tell them, and get the boat to come out. The Chilean base is just down below there, they had dogs up to us and took us down to dinner and wine before the navy turned up! The whole thing was a once sort 'Well we're OK, no harm's done except to the chopper'. It was good fun! But they would insist that we went back to the ship; the doc gave us a pill to sleep it off, we were doing fine on Chilean wine!

[0:38:28] Lee: But you had lost a helicopter!

Franks: Well the navy had, it didn't belong to FIDS!

[0:38:33] Lee: Did you fear for your life?

Franks: I remember just thinking, 'Well don't let this go wrong, it shouldn't do this, don't let anything go wrong'. I'm rather cold blooded, I don't seem to have any emotions or panic!

[0:38:53] Lee: Obviously Hope Bay was a rather more of a dog base than the other ones, so you were doing a lot more work with the dogs. You had a troop called the Gangsters which I think you were in charge of?

Franks: Well I was the dogman so I was in charge of the lot and the total there was lower than it often is, up to a 100 dogs, I had 68 dogs there the dogman's team is always the Gangsters, you take that always the dogman's team. I ran that team, but I was dogman in charge of medical care, breeding and all that sort of thing. The drivers drive have their team and they drive it but overall arrangements of all the dogs and any movement of any going anywhere or anything is the dogman's responsibility. So my first trip, Hope Bay gets very full of people, they don't go out very quickly they're still finishing their work. A lot of people come in,

people from everywhere come in, it's a big base but it gets a bit over-stuffed in the summer! And over the hill and across the bay up to VP, View Point, people are put at this time to relieve the base somewhat of a few chaps and a couple of dog teams or something, and I went out there with a new boy just down, and we went out over Duse Bay and the ice foot, that is the difference between low tide and what is there, was quite big in Duse Bay and before I could gentle the team over they took a jump and we went head over heels and the sledge somersaulted, and I went and what I found later I just kept going. We'd spent time out at VP until we were brought back in, the ice had gone out and we had to go round and over Blade Ridgewhich is quite an experience, that's from underneath Mount Taylor. Julian should be here I'm told. And when I got back I found difficulty in picking things up and my thumb didn't quite work as a thumb should, and I wouldn't have any strength, couldn't manoeuvre it properly to pick something up so trouble. Now the Argies are just a quarter of a mile along the beach and I was great friends from base Y with the head of and was now Capitano Gustavo Giro Tapper of Hope Bay Esperanza! And I was very welcome there and was in and out quite a lot, so I wandered down there and told the doc, I said 'Look at my hand', and they've got everything in their base. So I got an X-ray and I've dislocated the thumb, and the little bone of the base of that on wrist is a little cube, so that when it comes out it turns around and it sits there, but it's not quite the same, it's the same size but it doesn't work properly, and so he said 'You'll have to be in plaster'! Under extensions with a plaster and that'll be on there for six weeks to two months or more, but I had to keep working, everybody had to go out on sledge trips and I couldn't do it, so that was another went out, that was Roger the radio man went out and....I was left on base. The guy who took, Mike Cox the magnetometer man, who took the Gangsters over, he got to the other side of Duse Bay, did something similar and dislocated his little finger on his right hand - mine was the thumb on the left hand - so he had to stay on base. So there was two of us ran the base with one hand each and the other one in plaster while everybody else went out sledging, because they were closing the base anyway so they wanted all these various surveys and works finished for hundreds, up to a thousand, miles down the shelf and they wanted all this done. And they were out came back again, went out again, people didn't come back they were met by people going out restocking them. It was very, very busy! Yeah, it is a different base much in its background history there is so much work to be done, all the way down that eastern side. Well it couldn't be done now unless you had a rowing boat!

[0:43:40] Lee: But by the time you got there most of that survey work had been done?

Franks: Yeah, we were finishing off you see.

[0:43:44] Lee: So what happened to everything when the base closed down in '62, what happened to the dogs?

Franks: Well they carried on into '63 before they actually shut and then dogs were got rid of. Dogs were banned from Antarctica anyway some years later! But we were spreading dogs out to other bases and letting dogs die off and not having any farther breeding. And Fothers, the Base leader, was putting my team, the Gangsters, to Halley Bay. Halley Bay was doing some dogging but were going to expand their dogging, they were going out to the Tottan

Mountains and doing some serious stuff, so they needed a good dog team so the Gangsters were one of the oldest and best. And he said 'I'll send them on the *Kista Dan*, she'll come in here before she goes to Halley bay and we'll restock them and I send off the Gangsters, and I'll have to think who I'll put on the ship to look after them on the ship or whether one of guys already on there', and I said 'No you won't Fothers, they're my team, I haven't been able to go sledging, I've to get home to have it seen to I can't do anything but they're my team and I'm taking them and handing them over'!! And he said 'Yeah, well I suppose so', so I went off with them.

[0:45:05] Lee: On the ship?

Franks: And I went off with them on the *Kista Dan* and took them to Halley Bay and then home on the *Kista* to England, direct more or less direct from Halley Bay via Georgia and Stanley!

[0:45:19] Lee: I missed a story about your first year at base G, to do with the dog trips there by the Tony and Tex?

Franks: Oh yeah it was out on the north foreland at the far eastern end of King George Island where we were encamped. And you, when you are in camp you've got inside man and outside man which rotates you see, inside man does the cooking and looks after the tent cleans it and the outside man has to get out and feeds the dogs and thrash them when they fight ,to look after them! And I wake up in the night and there's this 'Woof-woof, woof-woof' but 'What the hell's going on?' It was no harm but 'What the hell is it, a nice clear night!?' I stuck my head out of the sleeve, obviously if asleep you stick your head, and the thing is the dog Tony, it was quite comic, a good dog, full size dog, and he's digging a hole and he is, well, head in this big hole, quite a big hole it was a crater he was in it. And 'Woof-woof, woof-woof', just yapping, and it was more out to Tex who was a big no neck, head to shoulders, hefty thick as two planks all muscle to pull, a good dog to have, and Tony is getting at him! And Tex is lying there trying to sleep and shut up, and Tony's is yapping at him and all of a sudden Tex can't stand this any longer and they are attached to the span or the pull if you leave them on there, so they can't just reach each other, there's enough space between each other to keep the separate you see. And all of a sudden in one leap forward at Tony who just jumped to the other end of his trace and Tex fell in the hole! [laughter] And it was 'Yap, yap', it was the most comical thing you've ever seen!

[0:47:32] Lee: Was it a set up?

Franks: What by?

[0:47:35] Lee: Had Tony planned all that?

Franks: The dog, well he must have done, he kept digging this hole between them as far forward as he could get knowing that Tex was back until...

[0:47:48] Lee: So it was a trap?

Franks: Yeah, until eventually Tex lost the rag and 'I will chew you to pieces mate!' and he took one jump forward and he stepped back and Tex fell in the hole, it was quite ridiculous!

[0:48:01] Lee: What was, why did you go back to the Antarctic because you came home for a couple of seasons didn't you, then you went back in '62?

Franks: Well when you come home, you get home we were late that year for having to replace the wing on the plane that got ripped off etc and various things, and we were still in Deception at about May and we were late home we got about June or something. When you get home the next trip down is October, now they won't let you go back until the next October.

[0:48:35] Lee: Right!

Franks: There's no quick rebound, jilted girl rebound marriage type of stuff. Yeah its terrific, 'I want to go back', 'Yeah, you can go back next year'.

[0:48:45] Lee: That a psychological pause?

Franks: I think all of the Fids working in those days they didn't take you for an interview for quite a good many weeks after you wrote to them, thinking time. Then they told you to come for an interview later and there was always this thinking time, this pausing time, 'Do you really mean this?' And so you couldn't go back the year you went down you had to wait until the next October. Now I, the first thing an awful lot of them there have always wanted when they come back is 'When can I go back, I need to go back?' You see it gets in under your skin, it gets in your blood you need to go back! So the first thing you think, 'So I want to go back', they said 'Well you can't until next year, but would you go to Hope Bay as a dogman?', and I said 'Oh terrific that's what I like, I'd love to do!' That's where there is a lot of dogs sledging, miles of it, and lots of stuff to do, so I had contracted myself with them and they took me on. But then when I met Patsy and she wanted to marry me before I went, 'Well this doesn't sound too good an idea, but I must do it you realise that?' She said 'That's fine but we'll get married and you go and do that and when you, because if you don't go and do it you'll be sorry if you don't let me do it'. So that's what happened that way round, so I was married and went down to Hope Bay.

[0:50:18] Lee: You'd lost some friends in the Antarctic hadn't you?

Franks: Yes!

[0:50:20] Lee: Did that not put you off at all?

Franks: Well look how many tens of thousands of people are killed, well thousands, on motor car accidents and all sorts of things, does it put you off!/? Do you not cross the road, do you not get out of your bed just like that!

[0:50:37] Lee: It is slightly different isn't it? Losing a colleague in the Antarctic is quite, I would imagine is quite a serious affair quite traumatic!

Franks: It is. I was not present in any of them. When we arrived at base G at Ad Bay there are three crosses up there at the back of the dog span from the past, death different times from that base! There was three deaths at base Y when I was at base G when they went out on the ice. I went to base Y that had happened it was tough everybody had looked and they couldn't be found! We looked around to see and we still went out on their tracks and I had a load of their dogs under me, because a lot of the dogs came back and still around, but they'd gone! Now base G which I've just left Tinker Bell who we'd lived with all year he was a marvellous chappie and he went down a crevasse! They tried there was just the two of them with the dog team, sent him down a rope which he tied to his belt which is all he could do, he was probably badly damaged and the belt broke and he fell even farther and he was sadly lost! The hard thing then was in the summer after that, Alan Sharman was out walking with a new met man on, again, on the scree slopes at the mountain Flagstaff at the back of the base hut at G, and they were walking with dogs and either the dog was on a lead and pulled him or tangled him, or the dog tumbled him but he fell down the frozen scree slope and although he was a long time mountaineer and a rescue man up in the Cairngorms and other places he was killed in that tumble! He just went out of control he couldn't hold it and he was killed, so that was two on that base that year. No, the guys who suffer are the ones that are there and particularly the Base Leader who has got to carry the responsibility and all the work and effort that go into it! I was on one base when three died, I went to that base and the one I came from two died, great friends, I knew them all and Tinker Bell particularly I lived with for the year. Yeah as I say people get killed, it's no less a feeling than thought about it I think that the people can suffer and do! John Paisley suffered I'm sure he did for the three down on base Y.

[0:53:22] Lee: John Paisley?

Franks: Yeah he was the Base Leader then at Y when the three died. That's tough, that's hard, that touches you seriously otherwise it's people you know who die, it's no more I think that somewhere a relation dies in a car or in an accident, it's all, I mean Keith Hoskins our geologist he was killed in a car crash a few years ago, oh dear that's sad! Sorry but it's his wife is the one you feel sorry for, he's dead well it's not a no feeling and coldness it's just you have to accept life as it is and goes on, the government can't stop it happening for you know!

[0:54:12] Lee: Let's pause, Jim we're going to bring Robin Perry in.

Franks: Robin yeah.

[0:54:17] Lee: If you'd like to stay around we might talk to you again when we come to Robin's second year?

Franks: Yeah.

Interesting clips:

- Most of ships' crew going down with Spanish Flu and having to help out on the sail south! [0:07:21]
- The *Shackleton* being badly holed in the ice! [0:11:10]
- The *Southern Lily* stand by till *HMS Protector* arrived in case of sinking! [0:15:39]
- Survey work from Admiralty Bay in the 50s? [0:29:20]
- A survey flight in *Protector*'s helicopter which then crashed and was written off! [0:34:50]
- An interesting night time dog fight! [0:45:19]

