

ROBIN PERRY with JIM FRANKS

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

Perry: My name is Robin Perry, I was born on the 9th of June 1930 at Te Awamutu in the North Island of New Zealand.

[0:00:22] Lee: So you are now how old?

Perry: I am now 82.

[0:00:26] Lee: 82 OK, what was your first awareness of that somewhere called the Antarctic might actually exist?

Perry: Well it was stories of Scott and Shackleton, yeah I was quite early into those epic stories. I can't say I was immediately attracted, I was more pulled towards the North you know, I spent a lot of time in Scotland and about, well we had a chap called Dick Hillson was sent after his pre-training at the Met Office, was sent up to Dyce for practical experience and it seemed a good thing to get on to. So that's really what gave me the initial impetus.

[0:01:25] Lee: But you'd already trained as a Met man hadn't you?

Perry: Oh yes! I went straight from school to the Met Office training school that was down at that time in Kingsway London and after, there should have been an 8 week course, but they were so desperate it was cut to 6 weeks! And then we were sent out to some airfield stations and for me was chosen Blackpool it being reasonably near my home at Grange over Sands!

[0:02:04] Lee: But then you ended up in Aberdeen somehow, how did that happen?

Perry: Yes, well quite a lot of things, I was....we were all, when we first started we were regarded as suitable fodder for moving around! And I was at Air Traffic Control Centre Preston which is, was then for the Northern England flight information region and from there I, yes I was sent to, I was going to be sent to Wick, but in fact I was sent to Dyce, Aberdeen airport.

[0:02:50] Why was it then that you got transferred to BAS [Note: In fact in those days it was still FIDS]

Perry: Well I applied but that's jumping it a bit, I went to Aberdeen in 1951 [Lee: Right] Then I was brought back to Preston and I then went down to take an exam in Maths, Physics exam at my old school near Nottingham! Which the Met Office kindly gave me a travel warrant and after that returned to Aberdeen and had spells on the Isle of Tiree and also on the Orkney Islands, so I was quite used to.

[0:03:41] Lee: You were an experienced Met man! So by the time you got to 1958 you'd done several years of met work?

Perry: Oh yes, yes.

Lee: What was the ...?

Perry: Mostly observation and chart plotting of course.

[0:03:58] Lee: So what happened to make you want to go the Antarctic?

Perry: As I say this Dick Hillson he was, (what base was he at?).

[Note: He was at Admiralty Bay (G), & Horseshoe Island (Y)]

Franks: I can't remember.

[0:04:10] Lee: Doesn't matter, so he was the inspiration?

Perry: Yeah, well the impetus, yes. So I applied and so they liked to be rid of me for a period in the Met Office!

[0:04:27] Lee: But in fact they didn't get rid of you. Am I right in thinking you went to BAS as an attachment from the Met Office?

Perry: Not from no, I went for what is called leave?

Lee: Leave of absence?

Perry: Something like that, yes.

[0:04:43] Lee: So BAS was paying you?

Perry: Yes BAS was paying, but I kept pension rights which was useful.

[0:04:53] Lee: You said that on the interview, you felt you were being psychoanalysed by somebody.

Perry: Because there was a chap sitting in the corner of the room, couldn't see what he was doing I imagined they were sort of space, office space!?

[0:05:14] Lee: Was he not listening to what you were saying?

Perry: I suppose he was obviously yes. That was after I stopped being so naive!

[0:05:23] Lee: So was he a psychologist?

Perry: Must have been yeah.

[0:05:30] Lee: Do you remember, it's a long time ago now do you remember much about the interview?

Perry: Oh, are we talking about the BAS interview? Sorry I was on my initial Met interview. BAS, I can't remember who, I didn't know who it was I think, Elliot, I think Elliot!

Franks: Frank Elliot!

[0:05:52] Lee: Frank Elliot and Bill Sloman? Jim Murray [Franks] prompting you from the wings there, which is fine. The trip down, you must have sailed on the same boat?

Perry: Yes, yes.

Franks: Oh, yes on the *Shackleton* together [Lee: In '57] Yes we all sailed together.

[0:06:07] Lee: did you get flu, Robin?

Perry: No, I didn't no!

Franks: None of us got the flu, it was the crew only!

Perry: Yes, yes.

[0:06:14] Lee: Were you aware of having to help out on the boat?

Perry: Oh, yes it was quite fun. Well my main job was doing the weather observations which I did, all except the 3am one. I spent a lot of time going up to the bridge to do and taking the 'ob' and going back down to play Bridge and yeah!

[0:06:38] Lee: You got to Stanley in Christmas 1957?

Perry: Yes about that, it was a bit before.

Franks: A bit before Christmas, sometime in November. [Lee: Right!]

Perry: Just before the *Shackleton* had her, because I was earmarked for W, base W. [Lee: Detaille.] And *Shackleton* wasn't going down there so I lost all my buddies who went off and had an accident on the *Shackleton*!

Franks: No we lost Robin, he was taken away from us! [Loud laughter!]

Perry: Yeah!

[0:07:17] Lee: You had to hang around the Falklands for a bit didn't you?

Perry: Yes, I was dragged by the chief met officer up to his place, you know the met office was right up on the range above Stanley, but it was all experience!

[0:07:30] Lee: What was the social life whilst you were there that month?

Perry: Oh a month was about enough!!

[0:07:40] Lee: Including Christmas?

Perry: No we were at sea for Christmas.

Franks: We were away by Christmas.

[0:07:45] Lee: Oh you were, OK. There was a complication because your name was actually on the *Shackleton*'s passenger list wasn't it?

Perry: Yes that's right.

[0:07:54] Lee: So what happened to that, what happened as a result of that?

Perry: I don't know. Nobody, FIDS least of all, thought of telling anybody that I'd changed ship at Stanley.

[0:08:12] Lee: So were there repercussions back in the UK when this was published, no?

Perry: Not that I know of. I got a few letters saying how horrified they were I'd been in such peril!

[0:08:32] Lee: In fact you'd been stuck in the met office in Stanley! What was Detaille like when you got there, tell me about Detaille Island base was like?

Perry: Well we arrived in a howling katabatic wind that blew us down from the Forel Glacier I think and right up Lallemand Fjord. Detaille Island is right in the axis of this jet katabatic jet, the other side of Andresen is pretty well calm, you haven't experienced that?

Franks: No, no I haven't been through that!

Perry: This held us up 24 hours before we could go ashore, we were just at anchor off Detaille Island and the other group was under Andresen and I took over, or did I? Who'd it been before I took over? It had been Eric Salmon.

[0:09:42] Lee: As Base Leader?

Perry: No as met, chief met, and I can't remember who it was immediately before Eric?

[0:09:54] Lee: What was the weather patterns like at Detaille, was it windy all the time?

Perry: No, but very often either from the south or from the north, westerly or easterly hardly ever.

[0:10:13] Lee: Did you do much sledging work at all?

Perry: Yes, oh yes.

[0:10:18] Lee: Tell me about it?

Perry: Local depot journeys, and my main journey which was also a depot journey, but we went up what was, what is called the Murphy Glacier to the plateau which was called Petrol Nunatak I think.

[0:10:43] Lee: And there was a sledging accident I believe at that point, did the sledge not roll over?

Perry: It was always happening, often! [laughter!] Coming down, this was coming down to what we called Top Rocks, above the Johnson Point. It's not called that anymore, you can put that right, the refuge and the dogs just didn't want to stop!

[0:11:22] Lee: They were enthusiastic were they?

Perry: Well they were getting down to somewhere interesting!

[0:11:29] Lee: It wasn't really known Detaille, nobody knew what the weather was going to be like because it hadn't been open very long?

Perry: Not very long, no.

[0:11:37] Lee: And you were getting exceptionally cold spells?

Perry: Yes, yes we had nothing like as cold as the next year, but think minus 25 something like that, with a wind that counts!

[0:12:00] Lee: I think in your diaries you mention minus 45 at one point!

Perry: For Base W?

Franks: No, Centigrade and Fahrenheit here!

[0:12:07] Lee: About the same at that point aren't they on the scale?

Franks: Well 40 is but.

Perry: Well I stand to be corrected but.

[0:12:17] Lee: OK, alright.

Perry: Ah, sorry he's right minus 50 was at Horseshoe wasn't it?

Franks: Yes, minus 50 at Horseshoe!

[0:12:25] Lee: I beg your pardon, yes it was, I think it got to minus 40 something at Detaille Island as well?

Perry: Perhaps we did yes, the ice once it formed the ice was very solid and we could travel more or less at will.

[0:12:47] Lee: Was sledging an enjoyable experience for you?

Perry: Oh, yes!

[0:12:50] Lee: What was the magic of it?

Perry: Magic?! It was just travelling, you seem to see some different mountains, scenery.

[0:13:06] Lee: OK. There was, unusually for a Fid you were able to make contact with your parents?

Perry: Yes, well for one thing they were allowed to broadcast twice on the radio. What was it? Radio the BBC.

[0:13:23] Lee: The World Service? [Perry: Yeah]

Franks: Everyone got an annual broadcast from parents!

Perry: Radio operator Colin Johnson at W, was a very keen Amateur and I suggested, he had a contact at St Andrews and my parents were good friends and I suggested he gave best wishes to these people in St Andrews and the result was the next time my parents were up there and they called me, yeah we arranged to QSL! [Note: Ham radio shorthand for acknowledgement of contact].

[0:14:12] Lee: Was that voice contact?

Perry: Yeah, it worked. When Colin was there things usually worked, not always with us!

[0:14:23] Lee: Tell me about Johnson Point, there's a reference in your notes to the misery of Johnson Point?

Perry: Not always but, when you arrive at a hut without any heat it means you've got to prepare a meal and everything steams up, ices up what else can you do, you've got to experience it!

[0:14:55] Lee: Did you ever go to Johnson Point, Jim?

Franks No, no I was never outside of Marguerite Bay to the north, you know. No I don't know that bit at all and we could never get the ship in there either, so I've never been there.

[0:15:10] Lee: The other thing I noticed about your diaries is the extraordinary number of films you seemed to have watched when you were down there?

Perry: Number of what? [Lee: Films!] Films? [Lee: Movies!] Oh, watched on the boat, it was usually once a week .

Franks: That's normal ship board you know, you get that even in the Navy.

[0:15:34] Lee: Everybody turn out for it?

Franks: Well mostly, it's a change [Perry: Yeah] from repressive routine!

[0:15:48] Lee: And you got your own radio licence after a while?

Perry: Yes, so that I could communicate with this chap at St Andrews and then later with another chap at Seascale which is just up the coast from here.

[0:16:09] Lee: It's quite remarkable that your signal would reach back to UK, isn't it?

Perry: With experienced wireless people they usually managed it, when we were trying to do it ourselves troubles came!

[0:16:27] Lee: So lots of knob twiddling? [Perry: Yes] OK, you took part in a surveying trip to Lallemand Fjord in 1958 and there was problems with your resources I believe on that trip?

Perry: With the resources?

[0:16:50] Lee: Food, paraffin?

Perry: Wait a minute I think we are talking about the trip from Horseshoe to visit Detaille the next year, is that it?

[0:17:00] Lee: I think so, '58, yeah. Oh, no no!

Perry: No, no sorry!

Franks: That was at W, '58.

Perry: With Jim Young, that's it!

[0:17:10] Lee: What do you remember of that expedition?

Perry: It was wretched weather! Don't know it was the month of November something like that, never really cold but always windy and sleet sometimes a bit of rain and the ice was too thick for the seals to come up, no penguins so the dogs were getting hungry, yes it was a bit unpleasant!

[0:17:55] Lee: Were you getting hungry too?

Perry: We must have been, yes!

[0:18:06] Lee: There was also because of the strange weather conditions a penguin population suffering as well I believe?

Perry: I'm sure they were, yes.

[0:18:17] Lee: What do you recall of that, the Adelies?

Perry: Well of course they had a long walk on the ice to get to their nesting places, but that happens with other penguins not only Adelies!

[0:18:41] Lee: It was the chicks that were suffering most?

Perry: Yeah, I suppose the skuas were as well because there wouldn't be the chicks for them.

[0:18:51] Lee: OK, at the end of your year at Detaille at the end of '58, how was the relief? Was that straight forward?

Perry: No, the ice didn't break up as it always had done before and eventually it was decided that we would have to or I was going out, going farther south. [Lee: To Horseshoe?] Would have to go out to join the ships which were at the ice edge in Matha Strait, and the others would go out a bit later when the ships came back going back north. And on the way out a

dog got off the trace and didn't had, had enough and went back. Oh I have got my timing wrong here!!

Franks: Yeah, that was when W was evacuated, when Steve went back.

[0:20:03] Lee: The dog was called Steve wasn't it?

Perry: Yeah, the dog was Steve but it, was it not on the trip back, no can't have been!

Franks: No it was when decided to abandon W because the ships couldn't get through the ice and eventually it was decided you all pulled out! [Perry: Yes] Despite having put a lot of stuff into W on choppers and that, we then pulled out and all got onboard and went down south to Marguerite Bay.

[0:20:39] Lee: What happened to Steve, what did Steve do?

Franks: Well as Robin's got in his book, it was his dog. He went back to base so running off dog 'I've had enough, I'm going to sit and wait till you stop this!' But of course nobody ever came back to base did they? He was left there on his own but with a lot of food!!

Perry: Seal pile!

[0:21:03] Lee: Right. What was his fate in the end?

Perry: The dog's fate? Old age, I think he outlived his brother; what was his brother called, Steve and ...?

Franks: I can't remember, think it's in your book. [Perry: Yes]

[0:21:20] Lee: But didn't Steve turn up somewhere else?

Franks: Yes but.

Perry: Steve, yeah.

Franks: But his total life he lived on beyond, but he turned up at base Y in Midwinter. [Perry: Yeah]. Because he had decided to leave W where he was on his own and come and join us at base Y, because he'd been there before. You'd been over with him and the team to Y, [Perry: Yes], while you were at W hadn't you?

Perry: He had, I hadn't

Franks: Oh, he had Steve had, oh I thought you had! Steve had anyway, and he knew the way and he came over. Luckily we were all there!

[0:21:55] Lee: That's 70 miles isn't it?

Franks: I think about that, is it 70 or is it more?

Perry: Yes I think something like that, yes I had measured it about 70.

Franks: And over the top of the glacier at, what, up to a 1,000 feet? [Perry: Feet yes, partly]. But it's all feet & inches and Fahrenheit in my time!

[0:22:15] Lee: Before we move on to your joint year at Horseshoe, I don't know whether you do or not, but do you remember a guitar at Detaille?

Perry: A guitar? I remember a tennis ball signed by Prince Phillip! [Loud laughter!]

[0:22:34] Lee: But you don't remember one of the Fids making a guitar?

Perry: Making a guitar, no! [Lee: OK]. I ought to but no.

[0:22:44] Lee: You and Jim, Robin and Jim ended up at Horseshoe in 1959, you became Base Leader of Horseshoe of that year so what are your memories of that time? Because of the problems with the sea ice, wasn't Horseshoe a bit under provisioned that year?

Perry: Yes, we had emergency supplies. There is with every base an emergency hut with emergency supplies should the main base be burned and I don't think we can consider ourselves particularly hard done by!

Franks No, no! Dog food was a bit short that's why Malcolm and I went out.

Perry: And of course there were no seals and very few penguins because of the ice!

[0:23:43] Lee: Had you arrived by air Jim?

Franks: We were chopper in from the edge of the ice, we got in just past Cape Alexandra on Adelaide, on the south end of Adelaide, and I've got an aerial photo from the chopper, it was one of those lovely little Bell helicopters! Glass bubble under the Meccano back end! And you sat there and you looked through your feet at the, [Perry: Ah yes!], we flew in from there and I have got a photo from there and the 2 ships were dug into the ice a little bit, not very far into Marguerite Bay a bit east of Cape Alexandra, and so we were flying in something 25 to 30miles into Base Y in the choppers.

Perry: I was in the big chopper!

Franks: You were, they needed you! But I enjoyed that as I'd done quite a lot in the big ones, but I'd never done the little one. [Lee: Whirlybirds!]. Yeah, it was like a goldfish bowl!

Perry: You were a well-travelled traveller, I'd never been in a helicopter in my life before.

Franks: No, I'd done quite a lot of the summer stuff and that.

[0:24:50] Lee: So I think you were actually quite short of food and obliged to start looking at depots?

Perry: Yes.

Franks: But there was Stonners [Stonington Island] and there was W, the thing was we hadn't been resupplied fully!

Perry: Yes.

Franks: Minimally only you see!

Perry: And also we were only 6, [Franks: Yes the numbers cut down], which were less than the previous year!

Franks: Fuel was down, so we had to sort of cut the hut in half and shut down sections of it because we couldn't afford to heat it, and we moved out of quite a bit of the hut to keep that low, and fuel was quite short.

[0:25:33] Lee: And the bath was in the part of the hut you closed down is that right?

Franks: Not exactly, there was, alcohol doesn't freeze anyway till it gets quite chilly!

[0:25:45] Lee: No, the bathroom, not the bar!

Franks: Oh, I beg your pardon! [Perry: Oh, bath!] Oh, yes the bathroom was cut off as well because Gordon the Radio Op, Gordon Parsons, he made a bucket, an ordinary galvanised bucket, put a tap in the bottom, a brass tap, and hung it from a sky hook in the ceiling and when you want a shower, your weekly wash, he would bring it down, fill it with hot water haul it back up and open the tap and stand there in the middle of the kitchen under the wash!

Perry: In front of the Esse stove!

Franks: Yes in front of the stove.

[0:26:35] Lee: Keep you warm. Were you able to do much surveying work from Horseshoe?

Perry: Well we weren't supposed to, we were really maintenance.

Franks: And geology, Keith!

Perry: Keith was Geology.

[0:26:44] Lee: Keith?

Franks: Hoskins!

Perry: And yeah.

Franks: He'd been at Stonners the year before and he had still half his programme to finish, so that was the main reason for the year really.

[0:27:06] Lee: Was there a big difference between the weather patterns at your previous places and that at Horseshoe? Horseshoe was rather extreme, rather different from the rest of the area wasn't it?

Perry: Well basically the weather pattern was much the same, the wind direction was different, in as much of being from the south the katabatic winds came down from the east at Horseshoe.

[0:27:33] Lee: And it got to minus 50 at one point?

Perry: Not, luckily, in a katabatic!

Franks: Decent weather, yes it did it was extremely cold period throughout, I mean I had already had the coldest in base G that they had ever recorded you know, it was a cold period! There must have been several years of it, it was a bit like Scott got into a lot of trouble because it was a very cold period, you know, it wasn't like what they had told him from before. We had a cold period of several years which I don't think has ever come back has it?

Perry: Not to that extent no, but also it might be tied in with the sun spots?

Franks: Yes that's being looked at a lot more seriously these days now, sun spots effect on weather, which has always been pooh-pooh but!

[0:28:30] Lee: So the theory would be after a lot of sun spot activity, which would be 1957, the next 2 or 3 years would be particularly cold?

Perry: Well in that case it was. [Franks: Yeah, yeah!]. When was the next?

Franks: Well they maximum it the next year, but it's not a very big maximum at all in this 11 year period I gather, but that's only part of the Milankovitch cycles and there are many of them and all affecting the weather and you've got to get scientists to agree, and I know yours doesn't mind!

Perry: It may be ironed out, by the general warming.

Franks: Yes it's all up for grabs really, there's nothing definite involved!

[0:29:18] Lee: How did you get on with your South American neighbours?

Perry: Well, oh yes made a great variety of company and they enjoyed coming up, having a bit of skiing.

Franks: Yeah, there was a lot of inter-mixing, I mean we would have to go down to Stonners quite often and in the winter, the days being very short probably you'd get as far as San Martine and stop there and then finish off to Stonners. I don't think they would have let us go by anyway! They had burned the base hut down and lived in small '*chico casa*' which they had built out of bits and pieces and they gave everything they had got, I love the Argies they were wonderful to us! There were great, [Perry; Oh yes!], and as I said when I went to Esperanza, Gustavo, who was Teniente in charge at San Martin at Marguerite Bay, was captain in charge when I went to Esperanza! And so had a great time in that year with him, and he went on to become the first Argentine who, as second in command, the first Argentine trip, dog trip, to the Pole in '64. I'm not quite sure, I've forgotten it, but I've got his maps and his report.

Perry: Well congratulations to him!

Franks: Yes he did a great job, and he was lovely guy. [Perry: Yes.]

Franks: He visited my parents' home in England, but I was up in Scotland. His time schedule did not allow for him visit me there, but he came, made the effort!

[0:31:06] Lee: Did you actually go through the protest note fiasco each time you went there?

Perry: Yes.

Franks: Yes in those days, I've got copies of them!

[0:31:14] Lee: I suppose this was your job Robin as Base Leader I presume?

Perry: It was yes.

[0:31:17] Lee: Did you write your own notes or was it a pro forma one?

Perry: No it was pro forma.

Franks: I've got copies of them!

Perry: The trouble was used to have to sign them! [Loud laughter!]

Franks: That's done then, get a bottle of whisky!!

[0:31:28] Lee: So there was a wry grin when you delivered this was there?

Perry: Oh yes!

[0:31:34] Lee: OK. So did you enjoy your life at Horseshoe, a more attractive and pleasant base than the previous ones?

Franks: B was my first base and it was interesting and I learnt a lot, but I was anxious to farther south and be more of a polar man!

Perry: Yes.

Franks: I think we were all like that, if you took to it all. And I found Marguerite Bay in general the whole lot that was the best I'd done! Hope Bay should have been, but because I'd damaged myself I didn't get any of it! But yeah, it was a beautiful area and we had, [Perry: And we were blessed by having solid ice all the time!], we could sledge anywhere!

[0:32:18] Lee: So were you sanctioning lots of additional sledging trips?

Perry: Well?

Franks: We were always on the run somewhere weren't we? There'd be somebody or other on the run 2, 3, or 4 men or more somewhere!

Perry: Collecting or a depot here, Keith yes, I went with Keith to Millerand Island.

Franks: Stonners and Neny Fjord, Lagotellerie.

[0:32:46] Lee: When it came time to leave Horseshoe, at the end of your second season '59/60 it wasn't a straight forward process was it? [Loud laughter!] You're both laughing! What was the problem?

Perry: The problem, not knowing quite what was going to happen!

Franks: The same problem, the ships couldn't get in!!

[0:33:12] Lee: But as Base Leader because it was you're responsibility to get the men out?

Perry: Mine!?

Franks: No it's Sec Fids in Stanley responsibility to get them off!

[0:33:22] Lee: Were you not being kept up to date?

Perry: No! Well I suppose that's the normal thing in politics!

[0:33:33] Lee: Tell me about that period of time, when you were waiting to be relieved.

Perry: Well we were watching what the boats were doing, taking, listening to the met. observations, and whenever we could we tuned into the frequencies where they exchanged messages; by then I was getting into being able to read a bit of Morse, in letters as well as numbers, but anyway we had a professional to receive!

Franks: Yes the radioman could take everything down with ease, and I think the main thing sort of not knowing what was happening to get out was nobody knew, because it was a matter of weather with the aircraft! We had to be flown out over that glacier between the mountains, and it was some distance, it was kind of there and back was a bit edge of the range, wasn't it, on an Otter?

Perry: Yes just about.

Franks: And weather was always going to change several times in a month.

Perry: He took off several times into a muck!

Perry: It was only the single engine Otter!

Franks: Yes, not the twin engine Otter they have got these days, the original single engine Otter.

[0:34:58] Lee: Would you say that Sec Fids was keeping you well informed?

Perry: Well I suppose he wouldn't really know, it was even higher than him.

[0:35:10] Lee: So this was Fuchs was it, who was...?

Perry: Yeah.

[0:35:14] Lee: In charge of that?

Perry: Oh, he took charge of the, yeah!

[0:35:26] Lee: In your diaries, Robin, you say how frustrated you were about the whole process.

Perry: Well, I was still enjoying it! What was the worst thing was we were coming to the end of the whisky supply!

Franks: I was alright I drank rum! And they very few people being Navy I drank rum, and it was Navy rum came in the gallon kegs and is about 120% proof! And very few people drank it, and you get so many gallons a year on a base, and it's resupplied every year you know, everything is when you have used it or not. And there was something like 7 gallons there I believe, because people hadn't drunk it for several years, and it was all mine!! [Loud laughter!]

[0:36:16] Lee: Did the whole base listen to the 'Goon show', because you were picking up what information you could from the omnibus radio?

Franks: You always listened.

Perry: Oh, yes. Did you listen to the real *Goon Show* after that?

Franks: Oh, yes definitely wasn't a patch on it! You know Sellars and thingy tried but they weren't a patch on our 'Goon show' really, no!

[0:36:46] Lee: So how did they get you out in the end?

Franks: By the Otter, eventually it.

Perry: Well the new aircraft it was the first time it had been flown, more or less was assembled at Deception wasn't it?

Franks: Yeah, flown by stages to the ice north of W.

Perry: Where the ships were, near Beascochea Bay was it?

Franks: Yeah the *Biscoe* and the *Kista Dan* were the on the edge of the ice at some thingy Straits, Matha Strait, so it was just then waiting for it successfully get over when it would take off and get here and turn back, [Lee: Beaten by weather?], time after time, yeah!

Perry: There was one time when they had narrow [Lee: Squeak?] escape where the dynamo packing up, this was up near Deception, just managed to get back on the battery I suppose!

Franks: Yes, they were great, Ron Lord and Paddy English wasn't it? [Perry: Yes.] Yes they were great pilots, terrific stuff! New Planes from de-Havilland Canada, I think they did wonderful jobs, no doubt about it. What amazed me when they eventually they did appear, (and it was quite manky wasn't it?), and they appeared and they came into land, and we'd been asked to go out and peg out a smooth level enough strip that he could land on, and we managed about the right length, [Perry: Yes], and they came.

Perry: And there was layer of snow on pretty old ice, partly melted here and there so we had to wait until there had been enough frost to harden these bits of ice as much as possible in any rate! This was the only chance that he had really.

[0:39:17] Lee: Did you all leave on the same plane?

Perry: Yeah.

Franks: Yes, there was only one trip! I think they made a second did they?

Perry: Oh, yes.

Franks: They did make a second, but there was only going to be one. You couldn't say 'I'll catch the second bus'!! What amazed me as a man in the aircraft industry, some knowledge of the aircraft, was he came in on to the strip and landed, because of his ski-wheel system you know, and he landed and he stopped there, [Perry: Yeah!], and took off what there was and the guys that were to replace us, or some of them. Put all our stuff on, all kit onboard OK, shut the door, revved up and took off! Now he didn't turn round and go back to the beginning [Perry: Oh no.] of the landing strip, he took off from where he stopped and the strip wasn't very long at all, and we just got in and he started up, and rose up in the air just like that! But the Otter was a fantastic plane for that sort of thing. Forty knot wind and that thing lifts in the air and blows away. I've got pictures of the Argies' 2 Beavers which are the smaller version of the Otter lying on their backs on top of 433 at Hope Bay, they came in from Matienzo down south on the shelf, they needed some dogs replaced, and that was an air force base Matienzo, and they came in and landed on the top layer, and picketed the planes and came down and it blew a typical 'Hope Bay Therm', which melts the top of the glacier there! And they had got iron pickets in the ice and the planes well held down, but the trouble was, or is, the 'Therm' melts the ice, and put an iron picket in the ice and the heat goes down the iron picket and they pulled out and the 2 planes went 'Whee'!! Over on their backs, and half of a whole wing of one of those Beavers disappeared into the ocean, it went beyond and over and they were both irreparably broken, the wind just like that and over!

Perry: It happened in another way to our Beaver, when they were trying to come down to W. To start with there was the Otter and the Beaver and the Beaver was deck cargo. [Franks: Yeah on the *Kista*]. *Kista Dan*, and there was a sudden squall and we had it at Y in fact, no particular weather just a sudden squall and that seems to be the moment when the *Biscoe* and the *Kista Dan*, [Franks: *Biscoe & Kista Dan* at Argentine Islands], came into contact or at least brushed off the wing of the Beaver, which meant all our eggs were all in the Otter now!?

Franks: Yes it was blown off its anchoring and the winds rubbed down the edge of the Beaver and off it went plop in the water! That was why we were so late in getting home because we had to go to Monte [Note: Montevideo], pick up a wing, go back down south to Deception give them the wing and then start going home.

[0:43:47] Lee: Oh right, so you brought the spare wing in did you?

Franks: Yeah.

Perry: From Monte yes.

Franks: We had to fetch it and bring it back.

Perry: We weren't allowed off, [Franks: No!], we just had to anchor.

Franks: In the harbour and get it picked up on a barge and straight back out, we just went in and turned round and back again!

[0:43:05] Lee: At least FIDS had organised another wing hadn't they?

Franks: Yeah, they got a wing a damn sight quicker than they got the prop for the *Shack* in Monte! That was a kerfuffle that was, about a fortnight in Monte instead of one night because of the prop!

Perry: That was going down, yes. But still we made pretty good use of it!

Franks: Yeah, we did, Robin, we did!

[0:43:29] Lee: How do you mean?

Franks: Well Monte is a pretty interesting place to stay in, not just spend the evening at, it's a very interesting to stay put for awhile for seamen and others!

[0:43:40] Lee: The comforts of Montevideo!? [Franks: What?] The comforts of Montevideo!

Franks: The whole place, yeah definitely the comforts!

Perry: I organised for the *Shackleton*, yeah the *Shackleton* Fids a bus tour, which took us to the film place, where they make films, just 70 or 80 kilometres east more or less the real mouth of the Plate.

Franks: Yeah, West Point, no not West point, (what's it called?), hang on it's a lovely place out there a rich spot.

Perry: East yeah.

[0:44:27] Lee: Would you say that Horseshoe was a happy base?

Perry: Yes.

[0:44:31] Lee: Did you all get on all of the time?

Perry: Ah, I'll pass that to Jim.

Franks: Well they spent 3 years down there, fateful years down there and I have never seen anything more comfortable between the men, mix of men coming together from here there and everywhere under tight conditions you know, I have never seen a mix of men like that! And in fact I remembered before coming down a little while ago and I thought I must mention this. There was one night I was on night met Mid-Winter, it's when the stress is supposed to, you know Mid-Winter that's when people see flies, and that's Mid-Winter

madness but you can get, but I don't know what it was this night, but I was a bit short and you came up, whether you were working late as well in office or something it was the middle of the night and you said something to me, I can't remember what the hell it was!?! But I kind of!! You see.

[0:45:37] Lee: You snapped!

Franks: Just a light snap and a cross word, I don't think it was terribly bad swearing! It didn't really, wasn't very much, and I remember saying to Robin the next day after I'd had my kip and got up in the lunchtime and that, I apologised to you for a sort of slip of the tongue and bad language, I don't think you remembered or knew what I was talking about!

Perry: You dreamt it all!

Franks: Well may be I dreamt I don't know, actually that's the only time. There are reports, there was a report of a guy on, I think it was Base G, who they had to tie down, he went a bit funny and was threatening to get people with a knife! 'I could get you while you are asleep in your bunk at night you know'! So they had to tie him down so they could get him out you know. There are reports, George said...

Perry: Not when we were there!

Franks: No, no it would have been some years before, George McLeod said that his life on J [Prospect Point] it was a very small base, there weren't many at J were there? [Perry: No]. And they were supposed to put a place there, they thought they would be able to get up on to the Plateau and do exploring and felt they couldn't do anything so were tied in there.

Perry: It was very, very frustrating for them!

Franks: And nothing to do, frustrating, and George said they had a bit of a quarrelsome time you know, but I've never come across anything.

[0:47:12] Lee: Did you in your capacity as Base Leader have to use your authority or pull rank at all?

Perry: Did I? Well he'll tell you if I did, I can't think!

Franks: No, no!

Perry: I think I had an excellent year crew!

Franks: I think the authority of a Base Leader was the awful responsibility the headquarters had put on him, of 'You're in charge. It's on your slop chit and you've got to write all the reports'! It was like I said about me being made Senior Met Man, it was my responsibility, I got £50 a year for that and it wasn't that onerous and it wasn't anything else at all you certainly had no authority over, or pulled rank. There's no rank you all do different jobs, and you all share everybody else's jobs.

Perry: Yes more Shackleton's type than Scott's!

Franks: Yes, definitely, oh very, yes!

[0:48:11] Lee: Shackleton lived didn't he?

Franks: Yes, that's the great thing isn't it! Shackleton was the great favourite of Fids, there's no doubt about it. Scott was recognized for what he did and what he was, Shackleton was definitely Fids' man wasn't he?

Perry: Yeah, [Franks: And still is!], and let's hope so would have been Dr Wilson?

Franks: Yes, of course he would!

[0:48:37] Lee: How do you rate those 2 or 3 years in the Antarctic in your lifetime, Robin, is it the highpoint or ...?

Perry: Oh yes, yes certainly!

Franks: Yes.

[0:48:46] Lee: Why do you think that?

Perry: It's so different from, [Franks: Yes.], my life had been very humdrum otherwise! Apart from climbing in the Alps, when I say climbing I don't mean real, [Franks: Rock climbing finger nails gripping?], no, but I was leader of what they call 'Moyenne Montagne', sort of middle mountain!

[0:49:19] Lee: How about you Jim?

Franks: Oh, yes most of my life and character alteration and I think many of the real Fids would echo this absolutely, a most wonderful experience! It gets you away from man's civilization, politics and everything about it, an you're a fixed man for a year or 15 months at a time and as I say all is happy, and you'll get out and do wonderful things that you never have imagined you'd go and do! The only problem is, when you get home 'I want to go back'!! What else could I do?

Perry: Yeah, well!

Franks: No it is very, very powerful!

[0:50:05] Lee: You peaked early in your life did you?

Perry: I wouldn't have liked to have gone down and done just the same thing again. Which I mean being a meteorologist, I would have but it was, anyway I had more or less promised the Met Office to come back after 2 years!

Franks: Yes, it's a big change in people's lives, it opens up what the real world of nature, and man's position and that, out take you of all this civilization and everything is provided for and there'll be another bus along, and the government will do something, and away from all that and its marvellous!

[0:50:57] Lee: I want to ask Robin one more question before we conclude, that's about the 'Bob Martin marriage service'! [Loud laughter!] Tell me the story?

Perry: Rather good wasn't it!

[0:51:10] Lee: Do you know this one?

Franks: No, no I don't know this one!

[0:51:13] Lee: Robin the floor is yours!

Perry: Well, you remember the boxes of pemmican?

Franks: Oh the things that come in, through Duncan Boston's letter?

Perry: Yeah.

[0:51:27] Lee: What's the story Robin?

Perry: Well these pemmican blocks, which are for sledging of course they weren't supposed to be used all the time, seals and penguins for the dogs on base, and they came in wooden, no, tin cases of perhaps 48 blocks and so that they didn't fracture in transit, they padded them with a variety of magazines, all sorts of things. And the which, did you enjoy the most?

Franks: Oh, yes, yes quite!

Perry: Well I don't know, oh no it was Duncan Boston!

Franks: Yes the men, they would be the women packers of the things put these magazines in, and they would put letters in to these wonderful brave explorers etc. And people, come the summer, would reply, and something Duncan Boston who was Base Leader at O, Danco, he said ...?

Perry: It was a similar situation to F [Argentine Islands], they couldn't do anything!

Franks: But he wrote a letter to one of these, in reply to a letter and what on earth Duncan said I don't know, but the next season the ships brought down 20 odd I think it was Royal Mail sacks stuffed full to Duncan Boston at base O!! So it was shared around amongst all the bases and it was all magazines, books, love letters, proposals of marriage, tins of cake everything from all the women - this had gone out about the women's own people and all of this piled in and it kept piling in for all of that year!

Perry: Well I don't know, I lost interest!

Franks: It was quite fascinating.

Perry: After the event, I wrote to I think it was 40, 45 perhaps just because they'd written interesting letters to Duncan Boston not knowing him at all of course. And we followed 6 or 7 replied and one of those in particular sounded interested, a girl, a lady in Geneva.

[0:54:29] Lee: And her name was Liliane?

Perry: It was yes, I don't know if I need to say more?

[0:54:34] Lee: Please do, complete the story!

Perry: She was secretary to a solicitor and she wrote particularly interestingly, also made clear she was very, very fond of climbing in the Alps, and came over for a wedding of a great friend of hers in Somerset and we met at my suggestion! We met in London on her way back and it went off OK, and then she said, she invited me to go to Switzerland, just be given the once over I suppose. And that went off alright, and she came to England.

[0:55:31] Lee: To give it the once over?

Perry: Yes, and we were married in the December of 1961! Just passed our 52nd, 50, no coming up to our 51st.

[0:55:55] Lee: Wedding anniversary and you have flown in from Geneva for this Fids' reunion, is that right? [Perry: No.] You've flown in from Geneva?

Perry: For this yes, yes but that has nothing to do with the state of my marriage or not!

[0:56:12] Lee: As you are still living there?

Perry: No we are not living there, to be quite honest we are living near Lucerne because that was her home, she had to go and look after her father, her mother died first and he died and we occupied the house which happens to be a chalet, because he was so keen on chalets, not altogether a good idea down at lower levels because of humidity, they are fine for attitude, but.

[0:56:56] Lee: And the bold truth is it was dog food that brought you together!?! [Loud laughter!]

Franks: Yes.

[0:57:04] Lee: It's been a pleasure gentlemen thank you!

Franks: Thank you.

Perry: Well thank you!

Interesting clips:

[0:20:39] A dog named Steve running back to Detaille Island to live by himself!

[0:36:46] Flying out of Horseshoe Island.

[0:50:57] The 'Bob Martin marriage service'!

