

JACK COGGLES

Edited transcript of interview with Jack Coggles conducted by Chris Eldon Lee on 28th January, 2013. BAS archives AD6/24/1/203. Transcribed by Allan Wearden in March, 2019.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Jack Coggles interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 28th of January, 2013. Jack Coggles, part 1.

Coggles: Alfred Batson Coggles.

[Part 1 0:00:13] Lee: Batson!?

Coggles: Batson, that's my middle name.

[Part 1 0:00:17] Lee: B-a-t?

Coggles: S- o- n!

[Part 1 0:00:19] Lee: But you're known as? [Coggles: As Jack] When and where were you born?

Coggles: I was born on March the 26th, 1920 in Rochester, Kent.

[Part 1 0:00:30] Lee: OK so you're now 92?

Coggles: Yeah, I'll be 93 in March!

[Part 1 0:00:32] Lee: OK. Would you say your dad was an educated man?

Coggles: Not highly educated, he was well read. He introduced me to a lot of books, authors I mean; he liked Dickens, he liked 'Cubus' [phonetic] as well and Somerset Maugham, people he liked. He had lots of books at home it was a big introduction to me to read.

[Part 1 0:01:08] Lee: Was he interested in aviation?

Coggles: No.

[Part 1 0:01:12] Was there any aviation!? [Laughter]

Coggles: Only a little; he was in the army right through the First World War he was in the Royal Army Service Corps, he used to drive a horse ambulance round the front, and there were quite some stories he used to tell me about those or the family, yeah, not gruesome stories funny stories really!

[Part 1 0:01:40] Lee: Can you remember one?

Coggles: Well there was one it was particular to the family. He had taken somebody to the dressing station in the frontline and he found his brother-in-law there! That was my mother's

brother who was in the Gloucester regiment who had been wounded, and he wrote a letter to my mother telling her that Arthur was wounded and was in the dressing station, and my mother got that letter before the army told his mother, her mother, so which was quite remarkable really that they could communicate as quick as that!

[Part 1 0:02:40] Lee: What was your dad's profession then Jack?

Coggles: He wasn't really a profession he worked, well he was in the army and I think for a time he was a groom, because he got to know horses and use of horses very well. And he was a groom to a doctor in Rochester for a while, I don't know how long that went on for. But I know that when I was a boy he used to work for Pickfords, the delivery people. So he worked hard but he'd got no basic profession really.

[Part 1 0:03:25] Lee: What about your own education, where did you go?

Coggles: Well I passed a scholarship to the technical school, the junior technical school in Rochester. That was a three year course and it was quite technical because not only did we do the normal physics, chemistry and mechanics and normal thing like history and geography and English, we also did carpentry and metal work; we had a metal shop there, a machine shop, and also a forge, for forging tools. And we also used to forge our own machine tools for the lathe when got on to the machines, so it was quite a good highly technical school! And it wasn't so many years after I realised - somebody told me why it was like that - it was a cram school for the Chatham dockyard, and I thought that is possibly true. Anyway it was a good technical basis for me. How I got into the RAF, well I'd always been interested in aircraft, I used to go round to Shorts which was on Rochester, on the river, and watch them launch the flying boats and the seaplanes there and thought that was really wonderful to see that and everything! And when it came to me leaving school there was quite a few of us, Post Office Telephones they used to come round in the final term to recruit people, but also Shorts did as well. I wasn't too interested in either of those really, in factories. But my brother, my elder brother, came up with the idea, he said 'There is a scheme in the RAF were they go in for three years as an apprentice and take an exam', so I took that exam from school. I remember I was the only one in the classroom, taking it sitting there all alone!

[Part 1 0:06:00] Lee: How old would you be?

Coggles: How old would I be? [Lee: 15?] 15.

[Part 1 0:06:04] Lee: Yeah, and you passed I presume?

Coggles: Yeah I passed that. So I went to Houghton for three years, another three years, which was good!

[Part 1 0:06:15] Lee: So Houghton they were teaching you workshop skills or more than that?

Coggles: Yeah workshop and aircraft, aircraft and engines, we used to do both and a question of, on a photograph on the wall there a 50AK, that was the aircraft they started us off taking it to pieces and building it up again. It was the same with engines, all sorts of aircraft engines

and associated and the equipment associated with airplanes. So I went to Houghton for three years or so. It was quite tough really but I met some nice - it's amazing, you see I was meeting people from all over the country what I'd never known before, or people from that part of the north/south, I'd always been stuck in Kent!

[Part 1 0:07:29] Lee: Would, I know it's a long time ago Jack but would you say that aircraft technology was making great strides in [Coggles: Yeah it was] pre-war years?

Coggles: It was yes!

[Part 1 0:07:38] Lee: Can you give an example?

Coggles: Well hydraulic systems was one of the things, because of the aircraft we actually trained on hadn't got hydraulic systems as we know it today, until the very end part of the advanced course was at the end, going through an introduction to these hydraulic systems. But yes, and also the obsolete biplanes and single engine monoplanes and things, most of the aircraft that we were trained on were bi-planes, I forget the names of them now.

[Part 1 0:08:33] Lee: And at what point do you think they started thinking about the Second World War, were they designing and introducing planes in the late '30s with a war in mind?

Coggles: Well yeah, the Spitfire and Hurricane was being developed then!

[Part 1 0:08:49] Lee: And you saw that happening did you?

Coggles: Yeah, and the Battle as well which was very heavy all metal monoplane which was used at the beginning of the war, and of course the Blenheim twin engine bomber came up; as a matter of fact I passed out of Houghton and that was the first aircraft I was on, the squadron had just been re-equipped with the Blenheim from, they'd had Hawker Harts and I was posted to Eastchurch which was quite near me.

[Part 1 0:09:33] Lee: So there was a sense that there might be a war?

Coggles: Oh yeah! Because what was it that Austria had? Or then there was Chamberlin was it going to, or was it to Chamberlin?

[Part 1 0:10:00] Lee: Yes but it was early in 1939, wasn't it.

Coggles: Yeah '39 there we are just after I passed out.

[Part 1 0:10:09] Lee: Yeah.

Coggles: Yeah, that was the feeling about it.

[Part 1 0:10:13] Lee: Did you spend anytime abroad in that six years of World War Two?

Coggles: Yeah, I was in Iceland and was on a Norwegian marine squadron. There was five RAF NCOs there I suppose as far as marine capacity or anything else, that was in Iceland - not that what you'd call Iceland a polar region, but well...

[Part 1 0:10:42] Lee: It was snowy!

Coggles: A bit snowy there and that was, we came back to England and we got re-equipped with Sunderlands and we came back to Oban which was quite good!

[Part 1 0:11:00] Lee: At what point did you become interested in the Antarctic then?

Coggles: Oh very late on I think, when I first heard about Shackleton and also - (How did I get to know about Priestly?).

[Part 1 0:11:22] Lee: Sir Raymond?

Coggles: Sir Raymond Priestly, that was another one.

[Part 1 0:11:28] Lee: You knew him did you?

Coggles: No, I met him.

[Part 1 0:11:30] Lee: You met him?

Coggles: Yeah I met him.

[Part 1 0:11:35] Lee: How did he strike you?

Coggles: Extraordinary man! Especially he wrote his book about that didn't he - that was a party that got forgotten wasn't it?

[Part 1 0:11:46] Lee: The Northern Party!

Coggles: The Northern Party yeah. I've also got a book down there by Campbell who was Scott's first lieutenant wasn't he, or a mate, it's called *The Wicked Mate* and he was in charge of the Northern Party, that lived in that cave!

[Part 1 0:12:08] Lee: How did you meet Priestly then and why did you bump into him?

Coggles: Ah, when I met Priestly it was at, when we went to Birmingham University for the briefing before we came down to the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:12:23] Lee: So you'd already got the job by then?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:12:25] Lee: Yeah, so alright you had an admiration of Shackleton? [Coggles: Yeah!] So you must have read about him?

Coggles: I'd read about him yeah, read some of his books I've got over there, I've got the original film - it's been re-mastered - by Frank Hurley of Shackleton's expedition there, which I've watched on till it's going to disappear!

[Part 1 0:13:01] Lee: So how come you ended up working with FIDS, what happened, with BAS this was 1965?

Coggles: Well it's, I've got peculiar hand disease and I was downgraded medically that I couldn't go to hot climates [laughter] and I didn't want to do a long tour, and it came out on orders they were looking for aircraft engineers to go down to the Antarctic for this period of time, so I volunteered for it! It'd be a short tour and I could go so that's why I went.

[Part 1 0:13:52] Lee: But why did you volunteer?

Coggles: Because I was, so I could actually to go to the Antarctic that's why, because of Shackleton and Scott! I was interested in, I wanted to go and I thought all the circumstances seemed fit in with what I needed at that time so that's why I volunteered to go!

[Part 1 0:14:22] Lee: You were in your 40s weren't you?

Coggles: I know!

[Part 1 0:14:28] Lee: 45 or so!

Coggles: 45 yeah, but if they wanted me!? I went on this interview with, what was his name the Personnel Officer at BAS?

[Part 1 0:14:43] Lee: Bill Sloman?

Coggles: Bill Sloman. Well when I walked into the room for this interview he said 'Crumbs you look fit!' So I thought 'Well I'm in there!' [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:15:00] Lee: So the process was that you volunteered within the RAF and then they put your name forward, [Coggles: yeah] but you still had to be interviewed by FIDS?

Coggles: By FIDS yeah. There was also an RAF officer there as well to make sure I wasn't going to let them down I suppose! [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:15:20] Lee: What do you remember about the interview do you remember anything much?

Coggles: I remember I knew Peter Weston!

[Part 1 0:15:33] Lee: Explain about that please?

Coggles: Well he was an apprentice in the RAF but I knew him after that. He was an entry or so after me but I did meet him he was down at Locking on another course and we were on the course together. And that was before he went on the Trans-Antarctic - that was, I'm talking '48 or '49, and it was '53 wasn't it, the Trans-Antarctic?

[Part 1 0:16:05] Lee: Trans-Antarctic Expedition?

Coggles: Trans-Antarctic Expedition, yeah.

[Part 1 0:16:07] Lee: So he was on that?

Coggles: He was on that, yeah.

[Part 1 0:16:10] Lee: And you maintained contact did you after he came back?

Coggles: No I didn't, not too much.

[Part 1 0:16:13] Lee: Oh!

Coggles: But I did meet him again in the RAF, yeah.

[Part 1 0:16:18] Lee: Was he a kind of inspiration would you say?

Coggles: I think so yeah, if he could do it so could I sort of thing! [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:16:26] Lee: So that helped, you reckon?

Coggles: Oh yes it helped. That was, they asked me about that when I did mention it and said 'Yes I knew him' and sort of struck something with them! And I'd also been on some previous, I think this also may have helped as well, some years previously I got, I wasn't picked for it I was a sort of the only bloke available to do it, when in charge of a target towing squadron for a specific exercise and I had a party of tradesmen there to look after and it seemed to go well. And as a matter of fact this, the officer that was in charge of the target towing, wrote a letter to my CO saying what a splendid job I'd done looking after all these aircraft and keeping the men happy and I don't know over long hours of work etc. And that was in my documents so this was something they looked at and thought, 'Well that lad was good with small aircraft, Otter's not a very big aircraft'! So, these things added up to but why am I being selected? There was three of us down there for this interview if I remember rightly, and I was the one that was picked to go!

[Part 1 0:18:19] Lee: What was the reaction back home to our Jack going to the Antarctic?

Coggles: Oh my wife was a bit, I'm not certain she accepted it to a certain extent but, I'm not certain she was really certain about it all. The children, 'Oh that sounds good Dad!' and they weren't that old and my eldest son thought I might be able to pull a few strings and get, because he used to work for a bank, and get transferred back to Chippenham for compassionate reasons, I suppose that was in his mind, but the rest of them thought it was good! Well I had to write letters to my youngest daughter to be read out at school which was something I did!

[Part 1 0:19:12] Lee: While you were down there?

Coggles: When I was down there I had to write her letters, explaining it all about this so.

[Part 1 0:19:20] Lee: So you were a bit of a celebrity were you?

Coggles: [Laughing] I don't know!

[Part 1 0:19:29] Lee: So had you consulted Nora, your wife, before you went for the interview?

Coggles: Yeah, but she said ‘You really want to go?’ I said ‘It’ll be short tour. It’ll be an overseas tour but it’s finished with and done with, then we could settle down till I retire’, so she said ‘Alright, but’!

[Part 1 0:20:05] Lee: You retired just ten years later didn’t you?

Coggles: ‘75 yeah.

[Part 1 0:20:08] Lee: ‘75, Ok. What preparation do you think there was, Jack, when you got the job and I expect there were a few months, between doing the interview and heading south what preparation was there?

Coggles: Well I thought I’d better get myself fit....I went potato picking to toughen myself up [laughter] over a holiday which was worse than being in the Antarctic I think! [Laughter] But I didn’t really do too much of it.

[Part 1 0:20:54] Lee: How did you get to the Antarctic, what ship were you on?

Coggles: *Shackleton!*

[Part 1 0:20:57] Lee: Oh it was the *Shackleton* with Frosty Turnbull?

Coggles: Exactly!

[Part 1 0:21:01] Lee: Did you meet him?

Coggles: Yes, he didn’t mind me!

[Part 1 0:21:03] Lee: He didn’t mind you!?

Coggles: No don’t think he did. I remember being on the stern with him one day, and we used to take, during the day we used to take turns and go and steer the boat, and he standing there looking at the wake which was all wiggly, where the man kept the boat straight and he said ‘Oh God I don’t know, why do I put up with this?!’ [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:21:36] Lee: So you were being allowed to take the helm [Coggles: yeah] in the middle of nowhere I presume?

Coggles: Yeah and certainly not in a dock! And we used to do other research like taking readings and things.

[Part 1 0:21:57] Lee: How do you mean, Jack?

Coggles: Well I’m trying to think, it was such a long time ago it was something to do with the magnetic field of the sea bed and the depth of the ocean, I just can’t remember what we did there. Actually it was such a long time ago, I can’t really think about it because I can’t remember what we did. I haven’t thought about that for such a long, long time!

[Part 1 0:22:31] Lee: It sounds like you were doing soundings and things?

Coggles: Yes possibly, yeah.

[Part 1 0:22:33] Lee: Yeah, so they were doing research on the ship as it went south
[Coggles: Yeah] and you were called on?

Coggles: To help, yeah.

[Part 1 0:22:41] Lee: Lend a hand on that, yeah. How was it sailing, being an RAF man did you mind sailing?

Coggles: No not at all I thoroughly enjoyed it, I think it was good, did all these useful things holystoned the decks and things like that - well sailors do it don't they, but it was alright!

[Part 1 0:23:09] Lee: You sailed to Montevideo?

Coggles: From Portsmouth to - or wasn't it Southampton? - from Southampton to Montevideo that we went ashore. I remember going ashore and going in the shops, didn't buy much! Listening to all the political messages coming over the loudspeakers along the street, more interested in picking up mail as well our post there. I don't know how long we were there, a couple of days more or less that's about all. Then we went to Port Stanley, met the BAS people, I met an RAF man there he was with another chap, can't think of his name now, and was running the Falkland Isles air service.

[Part 1 0:24:14] Lee: Oh yeah?

Coggles: I think it was a couple of Beavers on floats they were using and he was an ex-Houghton boy and he had been at Stonington!

[Part 1 0:24:29] Lee: Would this have been John Huckle?

Coggles: No it's the Welsh bloke and I can't think of name now, [Lee: right], he was there when they had the Auster and it was....who was the Base Leader, Kevin?

[Part 1 0:24:57] Lee: I can look it up later on, which base are you talking about?

Coggles: Stonington.

[Part 1 0:25:09] Lee: In '65?

Coggles: No it must have been before this bit, about '48.

[Part 1 0:25:15] Lee: '48!?

Coggles: Yeah was it Kevin Waters or something?

[Part 1 0:25:17] Lee: Oh Kevin Walton?

Coggles: Yeah Walton, Kevin Walton, he wrote a book *Two Years in the Antarctic* [Lee: That's right] and I read it and it was the same time that Finn Ronnie was there from the American and Jenny Darlington and his story of Jenny Darlington!

[Part 1 0:25:36] Lee: So you met Kevin Walton in Stanley is that what you say?

Coggles: No I didn't! I met the, Kevin Walton was the Base Leader at Stonington at the same time, but I can't remember the name of this man, but he was a Welshman!

[Part 1 0:25:53] Lee: Who was with Kevin Walton?

Coggles: He was with Kevin Walton!

[Part 1 0:25:56] Lee: In 1948?

Coggles: I think he was servicing the Auster there at the time!

[Part 1 0:26:06] Lee: H.D. Jones?

Coggles: Jones is right!

[Part 1 0:26:09] Lee: Sounds Welsh doesn't it!

Coggles: Yeah it does!

[Part 1 0:26:16] Lee: Flight Sergeant H.D. Jones!

Coggles: That's right, he was running the Falkland Islands Air Service and I had a word with him there, which was quite good instruction to it!

[Part 1 0:26:26] Lee: You also I think met the radio ops there, that you were going to communicate with later. [Coggles: yeah] Did you go to Stanley Radio?

Coggles: We did yeah, I can't remember peoples' names!

[Part 1 0:26:41] Lee: Don't worry!

Coggles: Well we met a lot of people there!

[Part 1 0:26:50] Lee: I'm interested in the fact you went to the cathedral to a memorial service?

Coggles: Yeah. There had been these two men who had gone down a crevasse with their sledges and dogs. This was a memorial service for them which I thought was a good introduction to the Antarctic!! [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:27:09] Lee: It didn't put you off!?

Coggles: It might have put my wife off if she read about them going down the crevasses(!) because that would have come back in the papers and the BBC news, wouldn't it? Because this happened as we were going out, when we were on the boat going out, when they had this terrible accident! But when we got there, there was this memorial service and we all went to it.

[Part 1 0:27:36] Lee: Do you remember their names?

Coggles: I don't.

[Part 1 0:27:42] Lee: do you know what base they were from?

Coggles: It was, it must have been Stonington mustn't it?

[Part 1 0:27:55] Lee: I should know this Jack.....in '65 it was.....I'll have to look this up later on, don't worry about it!

Coggles: I can't remember their names. In a matter of fact it wouldn't have meant much to me going out there names like that, because I didn't know anybody out there at the time did I?

[Part 1 0:28:41] Lee: It must have been a sombre occasion?

Coggles: Yeah it was a sombre occasion. I think hearing this on the boat going down does bring you back to life as the dangers that could be!

[Part 1:29:01] Lee: Then you set off, I think you went round quite a few bases before you ended up at Adelaide Island which was your posting, wasn't it?

Coggles: Well Deception is, would be the winter base for the air party as you can't park aircraft at Adelaide. We would have at the beginning of the procedure we went to Deception first of all on the *Shackleton* and then, the *Shackleton* couldn't go any farther south than Deception because it wasn't strong enough! And then we stayed until the *Biscoe* and went down in the *Biscoe* to Adelaide and this is where we went to Stonington to help unload at Stonington, and then a lot down to Adelaide, and we stayed at Adelaide there, because the next thing would be when we bring the aircraft back to Deception for the winter.

[Part 1 0:30:09] Lee: So you met the Otter at Adelaide?

Coggles: At Adelaide, yeah.

[Part 1 0:30:13] Lee: On the way down you had some bad news?

Coggles: Well my father died yeah, that would have been '66 wouldn't it?

[Part 1 0:30:22] Lee: Early '66.

Coggles: Early '66.

[Part 1 0:30:24] Lee: Yeah.

Coggles: But I'd had Christmas at Deception, it's.....there was nothing much I could do about it, unfortunately I couldn't get back there it was impossible so I did send a signal off and I got help with that.

[Part 1 0:30:50] Lee: The RAF helped you to send a message home?

Coggles: No BAS did!

[Part 1 0:30:54] Lee: BAS did a telex or a telegram?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:30:58] Lee: A telegram OK.

Coggles: They'd got those series of those where you could pick what you wanted to say there already on a list there, you picked out what you want.

[Part 1 0:31:13] Lee: So they had some suggested messages did they?

Coggles: That's right, yeah.

[Part 1 0:31:18] Lee: And you just ticked one?

Coggles: They used that during the war as well.

[Part 1 0:31:19] Lee: Did they?

Coggles: Yeah, I can't remember what they call them now.

[Part 1 0:31:27] Lee: So you didn't write your own telegram you just selected one from this list?

Coggles: Selected one to be sent.

[Part 1 0:31:32] Lee: On behalf of you?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:31:39] Lee: We're getting out of synch here I think. So you arrived at Deception and then from Deception you went down to Adelaide and that's where you met the aircraft?

Coggles: That's right.

[Part 1 0:31:45] Lee: In the summer?

Coggles: In the summer, yeah.

[Part 1 0:31:48] Lee: Yeah, what was your first impression of this single engine Otter when you been working on Spitfires and bombers?

Coggles: Well to me it was another aircraft. It had got main planes and a rudder, controls and an undercarriage - didn't retract of course it was an undercarriage - in addition it had got skis on it, and there was a load of ice there and the ice used to build up there. Of course if the aircraft wasn't used for days the snow would freeze and you've got to get everything free. But looking out it was quite impressive to stand there and look out over Marguerite Bay. You'd see all these ice bergs there andthere was, that time I think I wrote, put in that when I saw these penguins coming over the ice going to Avian Island to the rookery there yeah, that was quite a sight. Pity I'd hadn't got a camera with me unfortunately, it would have been a big help!

[Part 1 0:33:18] Lee: Was the Otter in good condition?

Coggles: Not really, but it was serviceable. It was ageing, it was similar I suppose it was the same age but the engine was quite serviceable.

[Part 1 0:33:45] Lee: What was it being used for?

Coggles: Well it's like a *Carter Patterson* isn't it? It seems to transform for one thing. I mean visiting the sledging teams it was the main purpose of it to help them in the field to lay, to take fuel and dog food and man food, to lay bases for them where they wanted to go. We went out to the Wordie ice shelf afterwards south for the two teams that were there and I know Bob went on a reconnaissance, like a model reconnaissance to see where they could go next.

[Part 1 0:34:52] Lee: Bob Burgess?

Coggles: Bob Burgess, yeah.

[Part 1 0:34:54] Lee: The pilot?

Coggles: Yeah, to lay them, and on the aircraft there was a fuel drum and dog meat, lots of dog meat and man food, and it was all loaded up and unloaded stacked there with a pole over the top with a flag, and this was major task of us. And also any emergency that might crop up it would have to done!

[Part 1 0:35:30] Lee: Were you ferrying dogs in the plane as well?

Coggles: They used too apparently, although we never did.

[Part 1 0:35:34] Lee: You never did, no?

Coggles: That could happen.

[Part 1 0:35:40] Lee: Did you ever get into the pilot's seat?

Coggles: No. [Lee: No?] Oh yes I must have done when servicing it.

[Part 1 0:35:45] Lee: But not flying, you didn't fly?

Coggles: No, no.

[Part 1 0:35:50] Lee: But you were co-pilot?

Coggles: Well I used to sit with Bob, I used to feed him [Laughter] sandwiches and soup!

[Part 1 0:36:00] Lee: Were they good for the job, was it good for the job the little Otter?

Coggles: Yeah, it was good for the job it did that job well!

[Part 1 0:36:11] Lee: What were the things that went wrong on it, what were you most having to do with it?

Coggles: Sparking plugs needed changing at times. We had damage to a wing tip once at Deception where a terrific gale caught it, and the picketing points at Deception weren't all that great for tying the aircraft down, not at that time. But the wing tip did hit the ground and we had to change that wing for that!

[Part 1 0:36:55] Lee: So - I know we are jumping around but it doesn't matter - at Deception when the plane was being anchored how was that done?

Coggles: It was on spruth pickets, now I'm going to jump now again! After I built the Pilatus Porter I have got some time to spare and I thought 'Well those picketing points for the aircraft are not very good! I think if the Base Leader will let me have some of the cement' - that's another that was in short supply - 'I can dig out those that were there', (actually used for what they used to call volcano dust), 'Scoop that out, screw in some screw pickets and pour some cement in and make them major holding down points for both the aircraft' I thought there, but the Pilatus Porter didn't come back. I think that's another story!

[Part 1 0:38:11] Lee: We'll come to that later, yeah.

Coggles: So I did those while I'd got some spare time and after the aircraft was built.

[Part 1 0:38:19] Lee: And that improved things?

Coggles; Well it would have done but it was the following year - well that's another story, It blew up didn't it, the island!?

[Part 1 0:38:31] Lee: The eruption!

Coggles: And that was the end of everything there sort of!

[Part 1 0:38:36] Lee: So it was just before you built the second plane you only had one?

Coggles: We only had one!

[Part 1 0:38:40] Lee: At Adelaide you only had one the one Twin Otter?

Coggles: One Twin Otter yeah. [Note: It was actually a single Otter. AW]

[Part 1 0:38:42] And they were quite happy to operate that plane without a backup plane were they?

Coggles: Well there was nothing else they could do was there?

[Part 1 0:38:55] Lee: And there were two fitters, yourself and a colleague?

Coggles: There was Roy Brand I don't know if you've met him?

[Part 1 0:38:58] Lee: Roy Brown?

Coggles: Brand!

[Part 1 0:39:01] Lee: Brand, OK, no I haven't.

Coggles: No.

[Part 1 0:39:10] Lee: Was the Otter ever grounded because of mechanical problems?

Coggles: Well they grounded it when it came back from Adelaide they thought it was getting a bit old, and it had metal fatigue which I think, you see, it did. Even getting the aircraft away from the ground was quite a strain on the aircraft, because Bob had to waggle the controls to break the ice on the skis and under the wheels and that it must have been quite a strain on the aircraft!

[Part 1 0:39:47] Lee: So it was frozen to the ground?

Coggles: Yeah, to the structure so it never flew, but then of course it, Deception Island, blew up as well!

[Part 1 0:40:08] Lee: Yeah. Let's just talk a bit more about Adelaide if we might?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:40:11] Lee: If we can what sort of accommodation did you have, where were you living?

Coggles: In a hut. You did spend a lot of time sleeping in the radio hut to be near the radio, because all the requests used to come through on the radio from the bases and from the dog teams and Bob used to work out his route and Ron and I kept the aircraft loaded with fuel and everything.

[Part 1 0:40:55] Lee: So you were handy for the scramble! [laughter]

Coggles: Handy for the scramble yeah. We used to get a cake from the cook for the boys in the field and that!

[Part 1 0:41:07] Lee: Precious cargo! [Laughter]

Coggles: Sandwiches for us on the way because, and that was OK.

[Part 1 0:41:16] Lee: So when you were visiting field parties you were landing just on the straight snow sort of thing?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:41:28] Lee: Did you have regular landing spots or did you land anywhere you felt like it?

Coggles: Well we didn't often go. Well the way things were what happened is I only made two trips to the field, as a lot of the boys on the base there thought they'd like to go out as well and so Bob said 'Well I better take one out there!' So that first time when I went, somebody else went the next time from the base just for experience, but then things changes and we had to go and pick up this man from Argentine Islands and take him back to Deception, so that sort of phase of the work halted! Because we were going to be away for, if

you go on one of these you've got to wait for the weather to come back, this is the way it was, weather was so important!

[Part 1 0:42:45] Lee: Let's talk about that then because there was a man on the Argentine islands base who had a perforated ulcer?

Coggles: Right.

[Part 1 0:42:52] Lee: A British man or Argentinean?

Coggles: British!

[Part 1 0:42:54] Lee: British.

Coggles: Well Argentine Islands is a British base!

[Part 1 0:42:56] Lee: Yes.

Coggles: They just called it the Argentine Islands.

[Part 1 0:42:59] Lee: Confusing isn't it! [laughter Coggles: Yeah] So tell me that story from the beginning, what was it the first news you got of this?

Coggles: Well from Port Stanley telling us efforts must be made to get him, take him back to Deception where the *Shackleton* could take him to Punta Arenas! So when this was decided to do this, but then we had to wait for suitable weather then to go which we did, then when we got to the Argentine Islands, you've got to wait for suitable weather to go on. We couldn't land at the base it was unsuitable we had to land on the sea ice, which I don't quite know how far away it was, but it seemed an awful long way to me, about - if I said two miles I might be exaggerating, I don't know.

[Part 1 0:43:54] Lee: two miles from the landing to the base do you mean, yeah?

Coggles: Yeah, but, so we - and I wasn't too happy about the fact we'd got no way of a decent way to secure the aircraft to the ground. We used to carry these five ply wood about 18''square with a nylon rope attached to it to tie down the two main planes and the tail unit. Now these used to be dug into the snow and packed up with snow, full of snow to freeze, I wasn't too happy but what could you do under the circumstances?! You're on sea ice, it isn't if you could drill a hole through the sea ice to put an anchor in, so we just hoped the weather would keep calm and that would hold! And we went to the base then but we had to wait for weather to change, and I can't remember how long we were there but it was a good number of days! And then we got a weather forecast saying it was good and we went back to the aircraft and got it ready and they brought the man out there on a sledge and we secured it in the fuselage so that an he was quite warm and safe, and I kept my eye on him while we were flying, so then we flew up.

[Part 1 0:45:47] Lee: There was no doctor with him?

Coggles: No doctor!

[Part 1 0:45:49] Lee: No.

Coggles: The doctors I could put myself in trouble here, the doctors there for the dogs really!
[Laughter] There was a doctor at Stonington, yeah, he was the only doctor.

[Part 1 0:46:09] Lee: So you flew the patient to Deception?

Coggles: To Deception and then he was taken, the boys came out on the sledge and took him back, put him into a nice bed and waited for the *Shackleton* to come, and then Bob and I would wait for decent weather to get back again. But this is all time that's gone we weren't working in the field you see! But then when we did get back it's this other emergency arose. This would be - I don't think I've mentioned this - at Anvers Island which is an American base. The *Biscoe* was bringing out Dr Charles Swithinbank, and he'd got this ice measuring machine to measure the depth of ice and he was bringing it out to fit on the Otter, to measure the depth of ice over the Peninsula.

[Part 1 0:47:28] Lee: From the air?

Coggles: From the air!

[Part 1 0:47:31] Lee: So like radar equipment?

Coggles: Radar equipment which he'd devised I presume, and we were going to go up Anvers and wait for the *Biscoe* to come in because that's far south as it could get at the time! And at the same time from Adelaide a sledging team was going to sledge up Adelaide Island to the top, and the idea was to unload all the goodies that the boys at the base wanted from the ship that they'd ordered and we would transport it over from when the ship came in! So the ship came in and aboard was what would have been the relief pilot coming out, also the mechanics that were coming out, and John Ayers the pilot for the Porter, for the Pilatus Porter. Well that was the general idea and I had that explained to me before we left Adelaide to go up to Anvers! And I wouldn't be coming back because I would have to go up and build the Pilatus Porter which I thought, well something different so that was alright! And aboard that was an army sergeant, and I can't remember his name, who was going to work with me on the Pilatus Porter. So all this was brought off the *Biscoe* and with Charles Swithinbank the idea then was to fly, but there is one or two stories about the Americans there....they'd only ever seen one Englishman(!), [laughter], and he was a scientific officer on Anvers Island with the Americans, and their idea, and they were dreading us coming because they thought - well I hate to say this - that we were all like him! Because one the Americans said to me after about a couple of days, he said 'I'm sorry everybody seems so cold but we'd only ever met what's his name' and I can't remember his name so it doesn't really matter, but he wasn't a very nice man at all so!

[Part 1 0:50:12] Lee: So they presumed all Limies were difficult!?

Coggles: Like that, yeah.

[Part 1 0:50:17] Lee: Were you leading up to a story? You said when you went to Anvers Island there was a problem there. No? Or have I got that wrong?

Coggles: That was the problem!

[Part 1 0:50:30] Lee: The one Englishman?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:50:32] Lee: Oh I see!

Coggles: But they were alright after a while. They had plenty of food I've got to admit that!

[Part 1 0:50:48] Lee: Their fridges were stuffed were they?

Coggles: Yeah. I asked them 'How do you sort the things out?' and he said 'We just go through the spare ribs until we come to the steaks'! [Laughter] There's us living off tinned food!

[Part 1 0:51:02] Lee: Which summer was it that you built the Pilatus Porter, the first or second summer?

Coggles: The second summer.

[Part 1 0:51:10] Lee: OK - so we'll come back to that shortly, in the meantime as winter descended on the Antarctic in your first winter, your one winter, the end of your first summer you were then transporting, you then took the plane back to Deception Island?

Coggles: We have got mixed up with timing haven't we?

[Part 1 0:51:25] Lee: It's alright we can work that out later. So the winter, that first that one winter you were down south which you'd actually spent at Deception Island [Coggles: yeah] with the Otter?

Coggles: The Otter had been serviced and then it was in the hangar.

[Part 1 0:51:37] Lee: Right. So you were working in the hangar were you, you were doing the repairs and the serving in the hangar?

Coggles: In the hangar.

[Part 1 0:51:45] Lee: Yeah, but it was still rather cold I would have thought?

Coggles: Yeah it was cold because, I won't go into that just now, but it was cold, yeah, there nothing much more we could do after a while. The engines had been inhibited and serviced and that was it, so that there was a bit of time to spare!

[Part 1 0:52:17] Lee: How did you fill it?

Coggles: Well one of the met men said to me 'Oh we've got to do all the statistics of the weather we dread that'! So I thought 'That's not so bad', I said 'I'll do it for you', [laughter],

that being something I've always been interested in, so I said 'I'll do all the statistics'! The only interesting one was the wind because that was, quite a lot of wind there variable speeds directions, the rest of it like precipitation interesting, sunshine - no there wasn't any!

[Laughter] So I did all that for them, I'm not certain that Bob agreed that I should do it but I thought 'Well it's something being done positively', and eventually I started doing observations with them, for them, as well. I took my turn at going out at night checking all the readings in the screen, so that's another thing I did!

[Part 1 0:53:41] Lee: And that was because there was nothing for you to do?

Coggles: No, except for internal painting, except they built another fibreglass quarters that was attached to the old whaling station and that had to be painted, so there was always that to do.

[Part 1 0:54:06] Lee: Was that a significant improvement over the previous hut?

Coggles: Oh yeah!

[Part 1 0:54:09] Lee: In what respect?

Coggles: It was more comfortable, warmer as well, being fibreglass.

[Part 1 0:54:18] Lee: Did you have your own private room, or were you sharing?

Coggles: Oh yeah, private room yeah!

[Part 1 0:54:20] Lee: You did! OK and how was, presume you had to move into it at some point, move all your things across from the old hut to the new one?

Coggles: Well it was connected.

[Part 1 0:54:32] Lee: Oh they were connected?

Coggles: Yeah, they were connected, yeah. They still used some rooms in the other, the library and the bar was still in the old hut, well if you've seen the DVD you've seen it!

[Part 1 0:54:50] Lee: Well your Christmas meal was in the old hut and your Mid-Winter's meal was in the new hut!

Coggles: That's right.

[Part 1 0:54:56] Lee: And you didn't have to wear, you were in your shirt sleeves on your Mid-Winter meal?

Coggles: I was, yeah.

[Part 1 0:55:02] Lee: So it must have been quite warm inside that hut?

Coggles: It was yeah, because we've got fires, we had coal fires didn't we!

[Part 1 0:55:13] Lee: Yeah. On the DVD you mentioned about dealing with scurvy or avoiding scurvy.

Coggles: Ascorbic tablets, they were always on the table at the mealtimes, ascorbic tablets yeah. We used to take those because we had no green vegetables did we, at all?!

[Part 1 0:55:31] Lee: And the photograph of the bar, the walls seem to have strange objects pinned to them.

Coggles: Ties! Our ties, but you requested you cut off a piece of your tie with your name on and pin it to the wall! [Laughter]

[Part 1 0:55:51] Lee: Do you know when that started?

Coggles: Oh that started a long time ago right at the beginning with a, because at one period of time that would have been when Prince Philip was on the, he went on a tour round on the *Britannia* and he called in at Deception, that would have been in the '50s!?

[Part 1 0:56:19] Lee: It was yeah.

Coggles: I often wonder did he leave his tie, I don't think he did.

[Part 1 0:56:27] Lee: I think he did!

Coggles: Did he?!

[Part 1 0:56:29] Lee: I think there's a Prince Philip, I seem to remember reading there's a Prince Philip tie there, yeah!

Coggles: Oh I don't remember seeing it unless somebody pinched it as a souvenir!

[Part 1 0:56:39] Lee: So you wintered at Deception Island, at what point would you then start thawing out the plane?

Coggles: It would be in September I would think or October. First job then would be to get the hangar doors open, because they would be frozen, and it's not good putting antifreeze down there because it would just get diluted and freeze again! [Laughter]. So it's just a question of hard work digging out the ice so it might take a couple of days to do that. [Lee: Yeah.] And then we've got to get the aircraft out and fit the skis. Once together you can't get the airframe, you have to put the aircraft in sideways because of the wing span. Hangars were built for the shortest wing span and you can't keep rebuilding hangars when you change your aircraft, so then you've got to get the skis on as you air, ground test the engines.

[Part 1 0:58:04] Lee: Would you have drained the aircraft for the winter?

Coggles: No.

[Part 1 0:58:09] Lee: No, so you had a lot of very thick oil in there by the time, would it freeze up?

Coggles: It didn't seem to make a lot of difference to the oil. At Adelaide we kept, all the fuel was outside at a depot roped together and frozen in and so was the oil! So it didn't seem to affect it a great deal I don't know why.

[Part 1 0:58:43] Lee: So there wasn't a great deal to do really to get it flying again?

Coggles: No, but that's when we had the accident, the thing when we had to change the wing tip which delayed us a bit! I can't quite remember when we did go down there it must have been October.

[Part 1 0:59:03] Lee: Back to Adelaide Island?

Coggles: Back to Adelaide Island, yeah. But then we had bad weather and had to divert into Argentine Island for some days as well, it may have taken us a week to get down there if not more?

[Part 1 0:59:26] Lee: I'm just going to pause for a minute and we'll change disc. [Coggles: OK]. So let's take a short break and I'll put a fresh disc in.

PART 2:

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Jack Coggles interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 28th January, 2013, Jack Coggles part 2. In your second summer at Adelaide Island you had a rather unusual job to do in that you built a second aircraft which had been delivered to Anvers Island?

Coggles: Ah, that wasn't at Adelaide was it?

[Part 2 0:00:24] Lee: Tell me the story then?

Coggles: We are talking about the Pilatus Porter?

[Part 2 0:00:27] Lee: Yeah.

Coggles: Yeah, yeah when the message came through from Port Stanley that we'd got to go up to Anvers Island to meet the *Biscoe*, they said 'And at the same time Jack Coggles will go back with the *Biscoe* to build the Pilatus Porter that is arriving on the *Perla Dan*'!

[Part 2 0:00:54] Lee: At?

Coggles: At Deception. So that was it, and onboard the *Biscoe* would be this army sergeant who was going to work with me and also the pilot John Ayers. So after we'd unloaded everything from the *Biscoe* that's got to down south again to Adelaide on the Otter. The *Biscoe* then went back then to Deception with me on board and I got to know John Ayers and this army sergeant and so they got to know me and know what we were going to do, and planned all the building when we got there. But we then had to wait for the *Perla Dan*, so John Ayers was full of ideas, he wanted to create another runway across the plateau at Deception and I helped him do that - I don't remember the army sergeant doing much about that, so not certain where he went to, but John Ayers and I used to do that and wait for the

Perla Dan to arrive, now that *Perla Dan* would have lots of Fids aboard that were going down to Halley Bay or quite a number of them, and I came then with the belief these were the people we were going to use to help us, lifting things, so.... the *Perla Dan* came in and I think there's a photograph of me looking at fuselage there saying 'How did I get mixed up with this lot!' [Laughter]

[Part 2 0:03:02] Lee: Well you had put the kit together didn't you? [Coggles: Yeah.] Had you ever worked with that kind of plane before?

Coggles: No, but I knew what we'd got to do, we'd got to lift that fuselage up on the ships derrick and put the undercarriage on (that's the only way we were going to get the undercarriage on!) first thing because there is a system - I remembered it from my days at Houghton of assembling aircraft - the fuselage, undercarriage, centre section, empennage (which is the tail unit), then the main plane. So that's the way we set about it, except it didn't have a centre section, but we lifted the fuselage out and got the undercarriage fitted and then they got some of these rubber boats, the thing is to drop that down on to these rubber boats and the launches then to tow it up to the slipway at Deception and then a tractor could take over, and pull it out and get it into the hanger. So that we could carry on, the next thing would be to put the tail unit on which we did - I mean saying these in minutes but obviously it takes hours, possibly days to do some of these jobs - anyway so then that was the start now for the main planes they got all, they loved doing this did the boys from the boat, to lift up the main planes!

[Part 2 0:04:52] Lee: The wings?

Coggles: The wings, technically speaking they're main planes, and I would guide them into position to fit the transoms on the fuselage, and it was a question of utter doubt telling them backwards and forwards to get them to align and I would put root end bolts in and tighten them up, put nuts on and tighten them up, and that's the same for the other one. It was a question of doing all the controls, at being at the controls, putting cables through and locking them, and checking the controls are working properly and then getting the skis on. It was then that we realised there was this drain plug missing from the kit!

[Part 2 0:05:53] Lee: What's a drain plug?

[Note: In the next couple pages, Jack talks about Bob and what was needed for Pilatus Porter, I believe he means John [Ayers] who was the new pilot at that stage: A.W.]

Coggles: Well it's a reservoir with a fluid, hydraulic fluid, for raising, it was pneumatic hydraulic system [Lee: yeah] for putting and lifting the and pumping it was a hand pump to pump the skis up and we needed that, and I can't imagine why it was missing but there you are! But I knew if the *Protector* was down here had a machine shop so it's a question of getting on to the radio to Port Stanley to ask the *Protector* to come in, which they did and it was quite a sight to see them, a cruiser, come into Whaler Bay! And Bob and I went onboard and Bob said 'Well we've been invited to the wardroom'. Well I know I'd already had a message come back from the ship from the artificer sailors, 'Come and visit us'. So I said

'I'm sorry but I've been invited to the artificers' mess and knew it was a better place to go than the wardroom! [laughter] So I introduced myself and the next thing I got was a pint of Watney's Red Barrel in my hand and I thought 'This is worth it', so had a chat with them.

[Part 2 0:07:31] Lee: When was the last time you'd had beer?

Coggles: Oh before I left England, [Lee: Right] draught beer!

[Part 2 0:07:38] Lee: Shame it was only Red Barrel wasn't it!?

Coggles: That's right, but still under those circumstances.

[Part 2 0:07:45] Lee: I gather you had two pints?

Coggles: Right I had two pints so that was good, the next thing was to go and get the drain plug and I knew they could make a dam good job of it!

[Part 2 0:07:58] Lee: So you machined one onboard there?

Coggles: We machined one, they've got all the machines on board but I knew that in the navy, and I knew they'd pick a good material for it, and I said 'Thank you all round' and said to Bob 'Did you enjoy yourself in the wardroom?' he said 'Yes, I had a cup of tea', so I said 'Oh!' [laughter] So we went back and fitted all that and got the skis going and air tested the engine, ground tested the engine, so I said 'Right, next comes to air test them', and I said to Bob 'I'll come with you on the air test', he said 'No you won't', he said, 'No this is my job what I get paid for, nothing to do with you!' I said 'Yes it is because I built it!' at least I did a lot of it, and he said 'Well I'm sorry Jack but you're not going, you can come on the next one, but this one is mine!'

[Part 2 0:09:11] Lee: Is that because of the danger of the risk?

Coggles: Yeah, so I said 'It's OK there's just a few adjustments wanted for the controls', but that was easily done on the trimming tabs, and I went up with him and thought 'Well this is nice is this, lovely aeroplane seems good!'

[Part 2 0:09:35] Lee: Was there a general nervousness about that maiden flight?

Coggles: Well I wasn't nervous at all about it I'd be quite prepared to go on it!

[Part 2 0:09:45] Lee: You were confident?

Coggles: It was an aeroplane, I'd seen it built!

[Part 2 0:09:49] Lee: Yeah!

Coggles: And that was it, it was number one.

[Part 2 0:10:01] Lee: So Bob was sticking to the rules was he?

Coggles: It was John!

[Part 2 0:10:03] Lee: So John was sticking to the rules was he?

Coggles: Yeah, because he was a nice bloke John Ayers, yes!

[Part 2 0:10:10] Lee: What was compared to the single Otter how was it, was it a better plane, more useful?

Coggles: The only thing I got I didn't like about it, I didn't think the fuselage was big enough and I'm just wondering, I remember saying to John 'I'm not certain you could get two dog teams in here in the fuselage', he said 'Well I don't know but we might'. I said 'It doesn't seem as big as the Otter for a start, the fuselage'.

[Part 2 0:10:42] Lee: Was it better to fly?

Coggles: It would have been better to fly, I mean a prop jet is. It seemed quite powerful, it was nice looking aeroplane as well, but I heard from Bob and this army sergeant flew down to Adelaide, it wasn't until a few weeks ago when I was talking to Keith Holmes that he said that he broke a ski down at Fossil Bluff and he had to stay the winter, so that's why the aircraft never came back to Deception then! No I'm not really certain to what happened to it after that.

[Part 2 0:11:34] Lee: There was, is that the end of that particular story, it flew happily ever since!?

Coggles: I was stuck at...Deception, no aeroplanes, and as I said I built those parking I thought that would be a good thing to do because it seemed to be needed, because that's one of the reasons why we had a wing tip broken before, and I thought that would be a good idea to get that done there. Dave had already built the jetty I think, so he's got some cement, this sort of a low temperature cement that he used, and thought it would be a good job for me; I could do this on my own I don't need any help and would be fine.

[Part 2 0:12:35] Lee: There was another Otter in the Antarctic at that time on the Peninsula but it was in a wrecked condition?

Coggles: Yes that was at Adelaide. It apparently, I'm not certain what year it was, it was used as when the ice didn't fully break up in Marguerite Bay. And they were using the Otter to ferry supplies from the ships to the shore and he got trapped in a whiteout situation and he wasn't certain about his height at all - when you realise what a whiteout is - and he dropped it from, I don't know how many feet, 20 feet possibly which pushed all the undercarriage upwards which meant the aircraft was a complete write-off!

[Part 2 0:13:23] Lee: There was nothing you could do to fix it?

Coggles: Nothing you could do to fix it under the circumstances could you, no!

[Part 2 0:13:31] Lee: And I presume when you built the Pilatus Porter you didn't really have a whole workshop of facilities did you, that would have back at Houghton?

Coggles: No you wouldn't have done, that's why you had to use the men to lift the main planes up. Yeah, so I suppose it was a good job done!

[Part 2 0:13:48] Lee: Proud moment?

Coggles: Well yeah.

[Part 2 0:13:50] Lee: See it fly, yeah?

Coggles: Yeah I think that was a good thing done.

[Part 2 0:13:56] Lee: At Deception Island you were also involved in putting up a new aerial mast, weren't you?

Coggles: Ah well only as far as being manpower situation, and it looked pretty *Heath Robinson* to me, the way they were lifting it up and putting it on ladders a bit at a time. And I thought 'Crumbs people wouldn't like this at home', and dragging it up with a tractor. Once or twice it slipped and fell down again, I thought 'This is the Antarctic, I suppose this is what you expect to do'!

[Part 2 0:14:41] Lee: It was a bit hair-raising was it?

Coggles: Bit hair-raising! Yeah!

[Part 2 0:14:44] Lee: What was the risk they were running?

Coggles: Well you'd get the aerial down on top of your head I suppose, there we are!

[Part 2 0:15:00] Lee: It could have collapsed do you mean?

Coggles: Yeah it could have collapsed.

[Part 2 0:15:02] Lee: Yeah OK. Did you feel flying around the Antarctic did always feel fairly confident and comfortable or was it always a bit of a worry?

Coggles: I was always looking for flat ice bergs(!), [lot's of laughter], in Marguerite Bay, that's in case we were forced down, but it behaved itself, the aircraft, and we went up to Deception and back again, and to Anvers Island and back again, out to the Wordie Ice Shelf two or three times. I don't think they got the work from the sledging teams, because of these other jobs that cropped up I think then but?

[Part 2 0:15:58] Lee: Would people on the ground always know where you were?

Coggles: Yeah, all the time you were flying all the radios in the British sector, particularly on the Peninsula, like Deception, Adelaide and Argentine Isles would be on alert on radio compass frequency so they could always pin point it if you went down!

[Part 2 0:16:31] Lee: And would you always know where you were?

Coggles: Bob might know but I didn't! [Laughter] I relied on Bob a lot, he was quite reliable he was a good pilot Bob was [Lee: yeah] he knew what he was doing!

[Part 2 0:16:49] Lee: They say the reason why the Antarctic planes are painted red is so you can find the wreckage!

Coggles: In the snow!

[Part 2 0:16:53] Lee: Is that true?

Coggles: Yeah that's right, yeah!

[Part 2 0:17:00] Lee: So it was recognised in it being a risky thing to do? [Coggles: Yeah] Flying in the Antarctic?

Coggles: I think it was really, yeah.

[Part 2 0:17:06] Lee: But you never felt particularly nervous?

Coggles: Anxious would be the word! Or that clock keeps stopping I was going to say keep going, so this is why I was always looking out for these flat ice bergs he could land on them!

[Part 2 0:17:26] Lee: Do you ever have a dodgy moment?

Coggles: No.....it went fine. Well I suppose when you say dodgy moment, you're always worried about weather going back from the Wordie Ice Shelf to Adelaide, and you feel if the weather clamps in, that was the biggest worry I think was changing weather, but!

[Part 2 0:18:03] Lee: You were never forced down by the weather?

Coggles: No, never forced down.

[Part 2 0:18:07] Lee: OK. You went to the Chilean base at some point didn't you, or was that on Deception Island again?

Coggles: Well that again was in the winter and it wasn't real winter then, but it was near enough, it was Bob's suggestion that we have a little holiday, call it! And we'd walk over to the Chilean base which was over the other side of the island, they liked visitors and they liked coming to us as well and so we went over there and they were very friendly, couldn't do enough for us really! Major Stangis, I've remembered his name, was the CO there and they thought that the English always stopped work at 4 o'clock had tea and then played bridge! This was their life, so this is what we were expected to do when we were down there and we did, and there was a lot of wine there I tell you! And it was major thingy and his met man, Hector and Bob and I played at bridge and I can't remember how we got on. And there was plenty of wine around I'll tell you!

[Part 2 0:19:44] Lee: And they had this stereotype image of the Englishman having tea at 4 o'clock!?

Coggles: Yep.

[Part 2 0:19:50] Lee: Did you play along with it?

Coggles: Yeah we did. We were only there a couple of days but it was nice, they were very friendly and welcomed us in! [Lee: Sorry?] Well I was going to say the Argentines used to come across on Mid-winters day, across the ice from their base to stay the night and drink our whisky! [laughter] Which we hadn't got much of, and they were quite friendly as a matter of fact. Talking about the Argentine base there, which was over the other side of Whalers Bay before, just before I got to Deception in '65 on the boat the wireless operator there had a appendix, and there was a doctor on the Argentine base and they went across there, took him across there, and he operated on (I can't remember his name now) for his appendix, cured his appendix, and do you know what?, this wireless op wanted all the Fids to go there with their cameras and take photographs of it while it was happening! [laughter]

[Part 2 0:21:19] Lee: So it was an Englishman from Deception base?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:21:24] Lee: Bill Geddes! [Note: Bill is proudly Scottish!].

Coggles: That's it, Bill Geddes yeah. Bill Geddes was there when I was there as a matter of fact, I was....we are jumping about here!

[Part 2 0:21:38] Lee: It's alright don't worry!

Coggles: Before we went down to Adelaide the first summer there, I'd been cook and it was Bill Geddes who told me, said 'A radio message has come through for you, that your father very ill', and he wouldn't leave me alone and he got everybody else to come in and talk to me, didn't want me to be on my own, so I thought that was quite good of him to think like that.

[Part 2 0:22:21] Lee: Give you a bit of comfort and support?

Coggles: Yeah, but then of course there was nothing I could do and it was after we left Deception and we was on our way down south that it came through that my father had died!

[Part 2 0:22:50] Lee: Tell me about some of the other guys that you were serving with on Deception; in your video, your DVD, you've got photographs of the various chaps.

Coggles: I was very friendly with Mike Whitbread the wireless operator, I used to say 'Mike you'll know everybody's secret', because we had these, we could have - how many was it 50 words that we could send once a month? And your wife would send out 50 words; and I said 'You know everybody's secret like', he said 'I know!' I got very friendly with him and my wife and I went to his wedding after we got back. He come and stayed a weekend with us as well so I was quite friendly with Mike. And there was Graham, Graham Jones the diesel mechanic, and my first memories of every morning early was of Mike Whitbread coming out of the radio hut and shouting 'Brian, power!' he wanted the diesels on, and then you'd hear the patter of feet of Brian, Graham dashing in and starting the diesel up!

[Part 2 0:23:06] Lee: So you could use the radio again?

Coggles: So he could use the radio, because the radio was used very sparingly this - was really so we didn't use the diesel oil up and we had a bank of batteries that were charging all the time, and this gave us power for what we wanted, lights mostly, from the bank of batteries. There was Dave Walter the Base Leader he was quite a character he was.

[Part 2 0:24:39] Lee: How do you mean?

Coggles: I think he'd been SAS I think in his time. He used to love climbing around mountains and things while he was there and skiing. I know I've seen him when the snow really was bad and going up to the top of this hill, puts his hands on his ankles and just goes down madly! Whereas me trying to walk on skis, never been on them before in my life just learning, but there's Dave and a very good Base Leader. There was Phil Myers he was a Met man, he was assistant Base Leader.

[Part 2 0:25:28] Lee: Your colleague the other air fitter was Brand wasn't it?

Coggles: Roy Brand, yeah.

[Part 2 0:25:33] Lee: Roy Brand, and there was somebody called Purbrick?

Coggles: He was a carpenter, [Lee: yeah], he was there over the winter really to finish off the carpentry work in the new hut, yeah.

[Part 2 0:25:57] Lee: And Barlow the met man.

Coggles: Barlow was a met man yeah I got quite friendly with Barlow, and who else? Oh there was Bernie was the other met man is it?

[Part 2 0:26:07] Lee: Bernie Chappel? According to this he was at Adelaide Island, well maybe he came to Deception with you for the winter did he?

Coggles: Well I don't know I thought he, who was the other met man then, there was Dave Walter?

[Part 2 0:26:24] Lee: Myers and Barlow were the met men.

Coggles: That's it so Bernie wasn't there over the winter then?

[Part 2 0:26:28] Lee: I don't know, I did interview him quite recently and I think he was basically at Adelaide Island.

Coggles: OK.

[Part 2 0:26:35] Lee: But you would have met him there?

Coggles: I would have met there yeah, but there was nine wintering at Deception - there would have been Bob, Roy Brand, myself the three met men, the radio operator and the diesel mechanic and the carpenter - there we are!

[Part 2 0:26:53] Lee: Now you'd be the oldest by quite a bit wouldn't you?

Coggles: I was the oldest, well no Roy Brand was older than me!

[Part 2 0:26:59] Lee: Was he!?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:27:01] Lee: So the RAF men were both older?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:27:04] Lee: So did that matter?

Coggles: Didn't seem to!

[Part 2 0:27:08] You didn't get your leg pulled?

Coggles: No, not at all.

[Part 2 0:27:18] Lee: And were you treated as if you were just ordinary Fids or were you given RAF status?

Coggles: No, there was no rank down there at all. I think people did appreciate my name because in the winter you had these radio contacts, and the BBC used to go to sort of the local radio station and your families used to go out down there; like my wife went to Bristol with the children and recorded messages to me. I noticed with these younger people their wives or girlfriends saying silly things to them, when they make a great big laugh of it with me it was quite normal to listen to my wife and the children because I was older I suppose.

[Part 2 0:28:19] Lee: Were they very important moments those radio?

Coggles: Those were yeah! It's only happened once!

[Part 2 0:28:27] Lee: *Calling Antarctica!*

Coggles: *Calling Antarctica.*

[Part 2 0:28:28] Lee: BBC World Service.

Coggles: Yeah, yeah.

[Part 2 0:28:33] Lee: Did you think at anytime did your age restrict you at all or limit what you could do? You were 46 you weren't terribly old?

Coggles: I'm trying to think, it did restrict me skiing a bit I think it did! [laughter] No I don't think so.

[Part 2 0:29:04] Lee: And you weren't seen as father figure you and your colleague?

Coggles: Well, [Lee: RAF man] Roy tried to, tried to sort of treat the others as youngsters and telling them what to do about things, but I never did. He was a bit like that way I suppose!

[Part 2 0:29:32] Lee: But the team got on well did it?

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:29:36] Lee: Yeah, who was the foreman, you mention on the DVD the foreman?

Coggles: The penguin!

[Part 2 0:29:40] Lee: A penguin!?

Coggles: Yeah, that was at Adelaide, it used to come and sat watching you what you were doing, that's why they called him the foreman!

[Part 2 0:29:49] Lee: He'd follow you about would he?

Coggles: Yeah, an Adelie penguin.

[Part 2 0:29:29] Lee: I've got a question about sledging, I don't think you did much sledging?

Coggles: No I didn't do any sledging, no.

[Part 2 0:30:04] Lee: No, but there were husky pups being born at?

Coggles: There was a husky pup that was born on the Wordie Ice Shelf, and they'd been a litter and this was the only one that survived! And I brought it back to Adelaide and you can imagine there was a lot of fuss made about that, and the dog handler there, there was always one used to look after the dogs, and he tried to keep him going but he didn't survive!

[Part 2 0:30:48] Lee: No, do you know why?

Coggles: Well I suppose he wasn't nourished enough under the circumstances where he was born. Huskies don't tend to look after their [Lee: pups] pups at all really, they're just born.

[Part 2 0:31:16] Lee: But you had dogs at both Adelaide and Deception?

Coggles: Yeah they weren't used a lot at Deception really, because there was nowhere that you could go with them, just a good idea to have dogs.

[Part 2 0:31:32] Lee: As the time came to sail back to UK what were your feelings, Jack, at that point were glad to get out or sorry to leave?

Coggles: Obviously I missed the family and I wanted to get back to the family.....I don't say I wasn't sorry to leave really it had been an experience! And I think I'd done some good things and it was well worth remembering all these things. And I wanted to get back to the family, and see how they were because my son was in, he hadn't gone to college then, he was going to college, he went to Exeter. So, and that's the eldest son. My eldest daughter, how

old would she be she was 15, just starting the second stage of her career, her life. And Terry he would be about 12-13, very mischievous! [laughter], see how he was getting on. And Suzie you see was quite young, that was the one I used to write letters to. She was born in '56 wasn't she, so she'd be about nine or ten, just settled in school getting on to senior school. And of course my wife who had all the problems of keeping the family together and looking after the house and I'm sure, no I wanted to get back!

[Part 2 0:33:53] Lee: So there were distinct, whilst there might have been advantages in going to the Antarctic for the experience, there were distinct disadvantages because of the separation from the family?

Coggles: From the family!

[Part 2 0:34:05] Lee: Because most Fids.

Coggles: Haven't got family [Lee: Yeah!], well they've got their parents, maybe a girlfriend.

[Part 2 0:34:11] Lee: Yeah, but no kiddies!

Coggles: No, but I suppose a girlfriend they might want to get back to?

[Part 2 0:34:18] Lee: Sometimes they came back the girlfriend was no longer available but!

Coggles: Possibly, but Graham, I don't know I think he married her.

[Part 2 0:34:25] Lee: Did it affect your career at all, did it stop you getting...

Coggles: I don't know.

[Part 2 0:34:33] Lee: ...stop you getting promotion?

Coggles: When I was on leave I had a message saying I had been promoted to Warrant Officer and I was going to St. Athan as Planning Officer. 'Oh', I thought, 'Well that'll be good!' I just wondered if they'd waited for me to come back before they promoted me, I'm not certain about that.

[Part 2 0:34:57] Lee: There's no point in paying you more money is there?

Coggles: No! No, but I remember that the Base Leader at Adelaide, he was.....at the time?

[Part 2 0:35:18] Lee: Green!

Coggles: Yeah, he was a staff sergeant in the army, and I heard that he'd been promoted while he was out there, so possibly the RAF had got different ideas to the army I don't know!?

[Part 2 0:35:36] Lee: Most people that have been to the Antarctic regard it to have been the highlight of their careers I wonder whether you feel the same way?

Coggles: Part of my career, I wouldn't say it's the highlight. I think my final job in the RAF was the highlight of my career!

[Part 2 0:35:59] Lee: It was what, Jack, what was that?

Coggles: I was engineering officer on a squadron in Germany, I got the MBE then!

[Part 2 0:36:06] Lee: Well I was going to ask you about that, what was the MBE for?

Coggles: Well my, it's hard to say what they do it for. My CO, squadron CO, put me up for this, but it has to go to the Air Ministry and I think they go right through your career to see any black marks, [laughter], or any good things, so the Antarctic may have had a say in that, I don't know.

[Part 2 0:36:39] Lee: So it may have helped you get the MBE?

Coggles: It may have helped, yeah.

[Part 2 0:36:42] Lee: Services to the Antarctic!

Coggles: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:36:46] Lee: So when you went to Germany did the whole family go with you?

Coggles: Only my wife, oh and yeah because....the son was at St Luke's at Exeter and his girlfriend from Malmesbury Grammar school was there as well, when he Malmesbury Grammar school they met and they've been together ever since, and she was at, not St Luke's she was at Exeter University. Suzie was starting off in the civil, at social services, no Netta was, Terry at was at a boarding school or was he in a boarding school then?

[Part 2 0:37:49] Lee: So the children generally had things, places to be?

Coggles: Yeah, Sue was at school and that, yeah.

[Part 2 0:38:00] Lee: I've got one more question unless have I missed something, asking you about something?

Coggles: No you've been very thorough I think!

[Part 2 0:38:07] Lee: In the slides of you in the Antarctic you're the only one that doesn't have a beard!

Coggles: But I did have beard at the end!

[Part 2 0:38:12] Lee: Oh you did!

Coggles: When I'm going home by then I'd got a beard, didn't you see it?

[Part 2 0:38:17] Lee: I did on the final slide on the ship! So what was your beard policy then?

Coggles: Well I liked a shave really. No I did have at that Christmas dinner at Deception in the first summer, [Lee: Hut], Christmas dinner in that hut, I'm not certain, I'm sitting at that table somewhere and I've got a beard! And my wife said you look like Professor Joad - I don't know if you remember Professor Joad on the radio or television *The Brains Trust!*

[Part 2 0:39:58] Lee: Oh yes!

Coggles: So I did have a beard at the Antarctic not all the time, but I did have at Deception!

[Part 2 0:39:13] Lee: And were you ever defeated by a mechanical problem whilst you were down south or did you always manage to make do and mend?

Coggles: No, we got things worked out quite well really yeah, very well! Well there was, no it was OK!

[Part 2 0:39:45] Lee: Was there something else you were about to say?

Coggles: I'm trying to think, actually I'm trying to think your last question, I'm trying to revise everything we did down there.

[Part 2 0:40:04] Lee: 'The season I was south had difficulties and unforgettable incidents', you've written in your notes, is there anything you have forgotten?

Coggles: What was that, say it again?

[Part 2 0:40:15] Lee: 'The season I had south had difficulties and unforgettable incidents'.

Coggles: Oh difficulties. Well I think parking the aircraft at Deception was a difficulty as far as could see, especially with the fact as we had that wing tip smashed! Lack of equipment I suppose especially hauling and lifting equipment but then the circumstances are different and you can't expect to go to the Antarctic and have all the gantries and the lifts and of course cranes, and everything you're used to in England but the workshops to do things for you, but no, you've got to do it for yourself!

[Part 2 0:41:19] Lee: And unforgettable moments, was there a moment of natural beauty or comradeship?

Coggles: Well I think the comradeship's there, beauty some of the midnight suns at Adelaide I took photographs of are quite good, or the ice bergs in Marguerite Bay are quite lovely. No I don't think it's not too bad!

[Part 2 0:42:10] Lee: Shall we leave it there?

Coggles: If you're happy with what I've done, sounds like a lot of hotchpotch to me!?

[Laughter]

[Part 2 0:42:16] Lee: Don't worry about it!

Interesting clips:

- First RAF posting just before start of the Second World War, and equipped with new monoplanes! [Part 1 0:08:49]
- Good work on target towing base leads to BAS interview. [Part 1 0:16:26]
- Meeting up with an old RAF colleague in Port Stanley who had wintered with Kevin Walton in 1947 at Stonington! [Part 1 0:24:29]
- Medivac from Argentine Islands using the single Otter aircraft! [Part 1 0:42:45]
- Spending time at the US Palmer Station base on Anvers Island! [Part 1 0:47:31]
- The bottoms of ties on the wall of the bar at Deception Island! [Part 1 0:55:31]
- The building of the new Pilatus Porter aircraft at Deception during the winter! [Part 2 0:03:02]
- Getting a pint of Watney's Red Barrel in the PO's mess on HMS *Protector* then to have a missing part needed for the Pilatus Porter built in their workshop, a drain plug! [Part 2 0:05:53]
- A few days stay at the Chilean base on Deception and what they thought the British did every day at 4pm? [Part 2 0:18:07]
- Back with the RAF and being awarded the MBE just before he retired? [Part 2 0:35:59]