

MAURICE SUMNER

Edited transcript of a recording of Maurice Sumner interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 30th January 2013. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/208. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 28th September 2013.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Maurice Sumner, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 30th of January 2013. Maurice Sumner, Part One.

Sumner: My name is Maurice Reginald Sumner. Place of birth is Brighton, Sussex. My age is 77 now. The precise birth day is 25/03/1935.

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

Sumner: No, he was a very humble man. He was a shopkeeper in Brighton. He never asserted anything; he was just an ordinary primary school boy of a large Edwardian family. Then he went off to the war for 5 years, to India, which on reflection turned out to be his great adventure. He didn't like the idea. He would never have volunteered, but he had a whale of a time. It was difficult getting back into Civvy Street when he came back; that was an adventure and a half. He didn't see front line action. He just saw India probably in its best way, in many respects. But I had a lot of time for him.

[Part 1 0:01:40] Lee: Were you born over the shop, then?

Sumner: No, I was born nearby, but it was in the same locale. The background to the family is: my mother and her five sisters were Irish immigrants. They had run out of potatoes and they needed to do something. When you think of it now, they just up sticks, with Grandad, and came to Britain. Many many Irish families did. They went into service in the hotels. Grandad went into the front room and they lived through the war like that. I just took it as normal. You don't think much about those things as a child, [clock chiming] but it must have been a tremendous heave for the family, and we saw the war out together, sitting huddled in an Anderson Shelter. [laughs]

[Part 1 0:02:45] Lee: You are talking about the Second War now of course.

Sumner: Yes. I am only 77!

[Part 1 0:02:50] Lee: What about you own education, Maurice? What was that like?

Sumner: My education was fairly poor. The normal rudimentary first school was down the end of the road, which I reflect on it now, wasn't really that great. I managed to fail the 11+. I now think with just a bit of extra care I could have flown through that, but I didn't, and therefore I missed out on grammar schools, and just ploughed on with the normal primary school. Then some politician had a brainwave, to make other schools into building schools, where they taught you the labours of the building trade. I thought 'Well, this is better than what I've got.' My parents thought it was too, so I went there. In fact it was a bit of a disappointment because that particular recipe, the teacher, who was the head teacher, was really a frustrated public schoolboy who wanted to make this into a grammar school. Well he missed out a

stage and it didn't work, and that school didn't go far. But anyway it may still be there; I don't know. But I went to a couple of (one in particular) Roman Catholic schools. We were ... they were all Roman Catholics in Southern Ireland. We went to Mass on Sunday; Confession every ...

[Part 1 0:04:35] Lee: Five minutes?

Sumner: Well, every month, and we took it very seriously. This little school in Elm Grove, in Brighton, called St Joseph's was ... I met the headmistress who was an 'iron lady', just a few years ago. I hadn't seen her for years and I was able to say to her, 'I went to about five schools, and yours was the best ever.' And she glowed; she really did. And I think it was. It had a discipline and a way of teaching which appealed to me.

[Part 1 0:05:12] Lee: Do you feel that stood you in good stead for later, then?

Sumner: Yes. Yes, I do, because I did not have a key education; I often wish I had, a school with a proud pathway and when people ask you 'Where did you go to school?' it's naff, isn't it?

[Part 1 0:05:39] Lee: If you can't say Eton, you might as well keep your mouth shut.

Sumner: Quite. Yes, that's right. Anyhow that was the schooldays and I left.

[Part 1 0:05:48] Lee: How old?

Sumner: Fifteen, and I then started interminable evening classes, just trying to catch up, and that seemed to go on for years in various further education colleges in Brighton. Eventually I finished up with an education in engineering, National Certificate.

[Part 1 0:06:13] Lee: Why did you lean towards engineering?

Sumner: Well when I left school, my first job was at a factory quite close to where my father's shop was. He was, I think I told you, a retailer in men's clothes, an outfitter, and behind him was Alan West which was a big employer in Brighton. They made switchgear and electrical equipment, and I went into that as a callow youth out of school and started to learn how to hit a hammer. But it was reasonable. You didn't have to hunt for a job; you could just walk into those. It is a bit different now.

[Part 1 0:07:03] Lee: What would have been your first awareness that there was a place on this planet called the Antarctic?

Sumner: Well I can't remember the first, but I can remember the day I spotted an advert in I think it was the *Mail*, which said 'two years in the Antarctic' and they invited people to go for two years as a meteorological observer. I was restless then; I was looking for some way of seeing across the Western Approaches. Maybe a little bit before that I had been called up for National Service and I leapt at it. I could have been deferred but I leapt at it. I thought 'At last I can go to Malaya and these places like that.' In fact I enjoyed my National Service – two years in the RAF. I finished up

on boats, the Air-Sea Rescue, and I enjoyed that. I was trained quite close to here, but I was 18 months there learning to be a wireless mechanic. Then when I passed out from that, we were distributed and I hoped I would go abroad. Then I went to Newhaven which was one and ninepenny bus ride from my family and they used to come down in the evening and make sure I was all right. So I hadn't seen anything of the Antarctic there until I spotted that advert and I applied for it.

[Part 1 0:08:45] Lee: Had you read, though, about Scott and Shackleton?

Sumner: Yes, vaguely but not an in-depth thing, but when I started to look at it, I then gathered all the literature I could get, so that I could at least be interviewed on the subject.

[Part 1 0:09:08] Lee: What was it that made you go for it, do you think?

Sumner: Well it was adventure. I could have stayed in the Air Force for another few years but I couldn't see that I could get into air crew. I wanted something with a purpose and it was just another job. But I hadn't seen much on television then. This was in the early '60s, or late '50s, wasn't it? Just a 'lollipop' that I fancied.

[Part 1 0:09:40] Lee: What was your parents' reaction Maurice?

Sumner: They didn't mind at all. They followed it with interest and they never actually expressed ... They didn't stand in my way. They felt it was somewhere I wanted to do; that was what I did. And I signed on for that. Well I had an interview.

[Part 1 0:10:04] Lee: Do you remember the interview?

Sumner: Just with Johnny Green.

[Part 1 0:10:09] Lee: And somebody else? A female person?

Sumner: Yes, there was a female, wasn't there? What was her name?

[Part 1 0:10:16] Lee: Anne Todd?

Sumner: Yes. She is still there, isn't she?

[Part 1 0:10:19] Lee: Still alive, yes.

Sumner: She still goes to the office every .... I don't think she knows about retirement. I don't think I was interviewed by her. She didn't do much interviewing. There were one or two ... There was a bevy of women – I eventually married one – and they were very loyal people. The interview went well. You have to be careful, there are apocryphal questions that bring out silly answers, like what was the one about 'Have you read anything of Scott?' 'Yes, I have read all his novels.' [laughter] That sort of thing. So you have got to be careful what you say.

[Part 1 0:11:06] Lee: What happened next, then?

Sumner: Well, then I was told on the phone – I can remember the day – ‘You are accepted for training.’ We were then shipped out to the Met Office in Essex to be trained, and the training was excellent.

[Part 1 0:11:22] Lee: How much did you know about meteorology prior to that?

Sumner: None.

[Part 1 0:11:26] Lee: Nothing at all? That didn’t matter?

Sumner: No, it didn’t. We weren’t forecasters; we were just data collectors. They didn’t dress it up and say you were a scientist or anything like that. You just had statistical forms to fill in, in a precise way, for every working hour of the day, through the two years and that stood us in good stead. But that was long term monitoring at its best. It’s not sexy; it’s boring to anybody who is looking for something with a headline, but because we had such precise data, we discovered the ozone hole. One leads to the other. You have got good data, and you can see an aberration there and that’s what Joe Farman did. Have you met Joe yet?

[Part 1 0:12:22] Lee: Not Joe. I have met Brian, Brian Gardiner.

Sumner: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:12:26] Lee: I will tell you a story about him later on, if you like. When you say ‘We discovered the ozone layer.’ you mean the British Antarctic Survey? But you were recording weather patterns 25 years ahead of that paper being published?

Sumner: Yes, that’s right. But that’s what you need. You need it over decades, and they got the model of data collection really very well, because we put a balloon up every day of the year we could. If it was blowing a hooley, you couldn’t get one up, and filled in the stats straight away. And then it was signalled straight to the collection centre via Port Stanley. So the whole of that section of the globe was really covered beautifully for the whole of the Southern Hemisphere.

[Part 1 0:13:20] Lee: But you weren’t actually taking ozone readings?

Sumner: Well I did a bit of that. There was an ozone spectrophotometer on the first base, and the second one, and it was really Heath-Robinson. In order to get the curve that you were trying to measure (I can’t remember the details) we had to soot up a brass plate and then run a line based on the readings we were looking at. So that came ... that was being done for decades beforehand. Then when Joe suddenly found something odd, only he could do that. He is an exceptional man; he smoked like a chimney, and he could look at a bunch of printouts that thick where most of us glass over you know. It is just figures on figures on figures and he spotted an aberration. Now this stuff was all in the public domain; it went out to the States and all the contributing countries and nobody had spotted this aberration. So he just lit his pipe yet again and ran it again, thinking it might be a computer glitch, and it wasn’t. Then he had that moment in time which scientists dream about, that they found something and they can do a short paragraph for *Nature*, and suddenly the world heard about it.

Then a week later they were sitting in Downing Street with the Iron Lady. She was looking at it, wondering what it was all about, and the rest is history now.

[Part 1 0:15:15] Lee: When you heard the news in 1985, what were your feelings? Were you surprised? Were you pleased to be part of it all?

Sumner: Yes, I was. I mean that's what we were down there for, to get a first like that, and it took a long time for the implications to be digested. A lot of people said 'No, it's nothing.' It will close up tomorrow.' It didn't. I know there was a lot of traffic about what was the cause. PCBs, HCBs, something like that, which was the reason for the hole.

[Part 1 0:15:55] Lee: CFCs?

Sumner: CFCs.

[Part 1 0:16:00] Lee: One thing that worried them, as they prepared to publish (I remember this from my interview with Brian Gardiner, who was one of Joe's three<sup>1</sup> colleagues) was: whilst everything in front of them added up, they couldn't be sure of the veracity of the recordings, and the readings made by Fids in the field 25 years ago. Now, can you put your hand on your heart and say that the ozone readings you were making were faithfully and carefully and scientifically recorded?

Sumner: Well we did what we were told to do, and it wasn't difficult. We were inside the hut, looking through a hole in the roof, and I can remember there was a wheel we had to turn, and keep a needle going. I can't remember the details of it. But we had no reason to think that we weren't measuring ozone, and that it had suddenly found itself wanting, and there aren't many examples like that.

[Part 1 0:17:00] Lee: So your view is that you were diligent in the work you did at that time?

Sumner: It wasn't difficult, no. Compared to the ordinary meteorology, which is just a measure of temperature, pressure, humidity, that was so routine. You could hardly mess it up. You could miss an ob, but we didn't miss many. They were quite diligent about it and we had to get the line right in the stats. They were quite good, yes.

[Part 1 0:17:28] Lee: Did you know at that time why you were recording the ozone levels?

Sumner: No.

[Part 1 0:17:33] Lee: It was just a reading?

Sumner: It was a reading. I thought that came from Brighton. Ah, a breeze.

[Part 1 0:17:42] Lee: The ozone is far better in Rottingdean, isn't it?

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Farman had only two colleagues (on the ozone paper): Brian Gardiner and Jonathan Shanklin.

Sumner: Yes. [laughs]

[Part 1 0:17:46] Lee: We have leaped about a bit. It's not a problem but technically you are still on the northern side of the equator. We haven't got you on the ship yet.

Sumner: Oh yes, that was the first year on the base.

[Part 1 0:17:57] Lee: Sorry, you went to Stanmore and did your training. You said it was very good but why do you think it was good?

Sumner: Well it was particularly detailed. At the end of the session you knew what you were supposed to be doing. It wasn't airy-fairy. With lots of courses I have been on which have been: at the end of it you say 'What did I learn?' and you still don't know. So it was a good, well-constructed course, and then we went up to Hemsby and I met a girl there, but I won't go into that. And I got very good at darts there.

[Part 1 0:18:35] Lee: Well I am told that you were exceptionally good at darts, in the Bell.

Sumner: Yes. The Bell at Hemsby?

[Part 1 0:18:45] Lee: Yes.

Sumner: Yes, we transformed that little village.

[Part 1 0:18:50] Lee: [laughs] Tell me how you did that.

Sumner: Well we were down there every night. We played a game of darts and then whoever won took on the next one. You bought each other a half of beer and by the end of the evening we were pissed, and that was a nice way of doing it. We threw a party for all the local workers who came into the bar, and they took us into their hearts. We were some almost like Martians, I think. [in Norfolk accent] 'Where you go?' [laughter]

[Part 1 0:19:25] Lee: They must have been used in the Bell to the trainees from ..., the met trainees.

Sumner: Well, I don't know. Not necessarily going to the Antarctic. They were just for the Met Office, so they would be bound for stations in UK.

[Part 1 0:19:42] Lee: Dudley Jehan, who is a long-term friend of yours, said that 'the result was that Maurice won so many pints, not only for himself but also for me and for everybody else in the pub, that we would wend our way back to our digs the worse for wear.' Do you deny that?

Sumner: No. That was the object of the exercise.

[Part 1 0:20:05] Lee: You were learning radio-sonde in Norfolk. How did that ...?

Sumner: That was another very good precise course. It was a bitty thing, this little gadget. I don't know if you have seen them. They have got a little windmill on them. They have got the temperature, pressure and humidity, which had to be calibrated in a separate container inside the hut. You started off with the calibration. So you had an hour's work; you had blown up the balloon the night before. Then you transferred this thing underneath the balloon. The trouble was getting the balloon high enough. You had a trail of twine from the neck of the balloon to the sonde, and if you couldn't get it high enough, it would just smash on the floor. If the wind was that strong, it would be too horizontal. So we would try twice, and then say 'Well we can't get it up over 30 knots. We can't just get the darned thing up.' And nobody complained about that.

[Part 1 0:21:18] Lee: What were you filling it with?

Sumner: Hydrogen.

[Part 1 0:21:20] Lee: How were you creating that?

Sumner: We had a hydrogen mill – a scary thing. It was a lump of metal with crystals of caustic ... Caustic crystals and then lead pellets, I think it was, and then you had to shovel it in and then it started to brew. I often thought then it must have been a terrible hazard. It was away from the station itself, in a balloon shed of its own. Nothing ever happened; we never had a problem with the generation of hydrogen. But it took about an hour and a half to get the balloon filled so that it was on the surface. Then it went up to about 30,000 feet, burst and disappeared.

[Part 1 0:22:19] Lee: What was the diameter of the balloon?

Sumner: It was about six foot when it was launched but by the time it had got to the top, it was about 35 feet. But we followed it with a radar; we had a radar on the base. We could follow it and plot its position every few minutes, and get the upper atmosphere winds.

[Part 1 0:22:42] Lee: And what was hanging from it?

Sumner: A transmitter, a radio transmitter with a battery, and that was cycling these three readings, of temperature, pressure and humidity. Humidity is always a difficult thing when the temperature gets low. It's a vertical line and you can't really measure it.

[Part 1 0:23:04] Lee: Would this have been a kami-kaze transmitter? You never saw it again?

Sumner: No, we never saw it again. It was accepted that they probably dropped on a few people's heads, but I never heard of an occasion when it did.

[Part 1 0:23:20] Lee: And the information that you received from the radio-sonde, that just was logged in the usual way and sent to Stanley?

Sumner: Yes. We had a beat instrument, where you had to get a null point, and then plot it. It was quite a difficult thing to do. You were listening to the signal as it

circulated 1-2-3, 1-2-3. You had to get the beat, measure the cycles of that beat, then find it on the graph, and you would finish up with three separate graphs. At first it was chaos, but we got quite good at it. In fact the people in the Hemsby school reckoned that our performance on the radio-sonde was better than the Met Office's, but they were just buttering us up I think.

[Part 1 0:24:11] Lee: So that particular part of Norfolk must have been showered with radio-sonde transmitters then?

Sumner: No. They would maybe travel 30 or 40 miles before they came down. The flight would take maybe 2½ hours, and then it would probably drop in the sea, the North Sea. So I never heard of anybody ever getting hit, and they are still doing it, every day of the week.

[Part 1 0:24:42] Lee: They are, yes. Was there any other kind of training before you departed? Were you given Health & Safety and crevasse rescue training? Skiing lessons?

Sumner: No. We talked about it, and sidled up to it, but somehow I don't remember specific courses. Certainly we weren't taught to ski; we all skied with our feet out here, you know. Wide base! But it was difficult skiing in the Antarctic. The snow was brittle and wind-cut so it was full of ruts and holes, and you always had to climb the hill you just slid down. It soon wore off.

[Part 1 0:25:33] Lee: So the next step really was to catch the boat I presume, was it?

Sumner: Yes. We were all summer at Stanmore and at Hemsby, and we felt that we really knew our stuff by the time we had finished, but we knew little or nothing about the Antarctic. Then we went down to Southampton, to where the Cunards came in; it was the premier quay, Berth 37. And there was this squatty little red ship, the *Kista Dan*. It was known at the 'F\_\_ing Hell Ship'. It had a round bottom. I expect the others have told you this, it's a round bottom and it rocked on damp grass! It was that shape so that it could squeeze up when pressured by the ice, and in fact that's what happened when we got down there. We were pressured, and it tilts and then nothing stays on the table. But before that, when we got there, we were allocated the fo'c'sle bunk, right on the sharp end, and we thought it was quite nice. It had all the facilities. It didn't have a shower. It had a loo of its own. But you had to go across the open decks. When we got on it they were open, but by the time the ship sailed, it had a thousand drums of fuel in the well-deck, and you had to get across that to get your cabin.

[Part 1 0:27:12] Lee: Clambering over the fuel?

Sumner: Yes, and invariably we went into a typical Biscay storm. Did Dudley tell you about that?

[Part 1 0:27:24] Lee: No. Go on.

Sumner: Well I have done a lot of sailing since then. I don't know if he mentioned it but I spent a lot of time on small boat sailing.



[Part 1 0:27:34] Lee: New Zealand and back?

Sumner: That's right. Nothing compared to that journey. We stood on our heads and rolled more than I have ever rolled before, and every time we wanted to get up to the back end to eat, we got drenched. Green seas came over. It was quite dramatic. It went on right past Madeira, and then the climate gradually improved.

[Part 1 0:28:07] Lee: Did you fear for your life?

Sumner: No, we didn't have any fear for that. We were just bloody uncomfortable. The ship was just a little cargo ship; it didn't have any drying facilities. If you put your wet clothes on the railings, by the engine room, they dried all right. They dried like a stiff board, with loads of grease marks on. You chucked those out. No, it was not very good. The other thing about it was that it was a Danish ship, Lauritzen Lines, and they felt that the right food for us was dainty little ... what's the word?

[Part 1 0:28:54] Lee: Smorgasbord?

Sumner: Yes, a variety of little biscuits with things like caviar and bits of egg. They tasted nice but they didn't fill you. But that was what they thought was good cuisine. What we wanted was bread and dripping, I think. We were on that boat a long time, a couple of months really, and I will come back to that in a minute.

[Part 1 0:29:21] Lee: Was the word you were looking for canapés?

Sumner: Canapés, yes, that's right. But they treated us well and we enjoyed it once the weather improved, and found things to do like taking the engine out of the little ship to get the scow to the shore. We dismembered that and rebuilt it, which was nice. So we found things to do. But we were on it for a long long time before we hit Montevideo, which was the first port of call.

[Part 1 0:29:57] Lee: What do you mean by a long time? Weeks? Months?

Sumner: Yes, weeks. We were doing 10 knots, walking pace really, but it didn't matter. We were enjoying it, we were sleeping well, but the movement in that forward cabin was so violent that when you lifted up, everything came off the floor and revolved round whatever it was tied to. There would be tables bolted to the deck and we tied all our suitcases around it, and the whole lot just lifted and moved round. We had nowhere to pack anything; we just lived out of suitcases. It was a rough ...

[Part 1 0:30:44] Lee: Passage?

Sumner: Yes.

[Part 1 0:30:47] Lee: Were you sick?

Sumner: Yes, at first. We soon got over it. Some of them were sick for over a month, and we felt for them. They were retching after weeks and weeks before they acclimatised, but eventually they did. One bloke, he came out onto the deck. He

hadn't been there since Southampton. It was well over a month, and he said 'It's gone. I feel better.' And he never looked back. But that was a violent intro to the sea. You couldn't have picked a worse place. It was December and a typical winter storm coming out up from the southwest so we were butting into it, and the sea was coming over in shedloads.

[Part 1 0:31:40] Lee: Was it better in the Southern Hemisphere? How was the passage down to Stanley?

Sumner: Once we got into the tropics, then it all changed. We all dried out. We were able to get to meals without getting drenched and things like that and it all changed completely. Then we got to Montevideo and that was an eye-opener.

[Part 1 0:32:07] Lee: In what respect?

Sumner: Well, we didn't have much in the way of language, and some of them had little beards which were quite unusual for Europeans in South America. Then we found steaks that we had never tasted better before, and bought cow-hides and things – typical tourists. I have still got some, I think. So it was a ... No, I won't say that.

[Part 1 0:32:46] Lee: Come on. You can if you want.

Sumner: There was one chap who looked over – I will always remember it – he looked over the bow of the ship and there was a chap coming on a boat towards the ... He was a pilot from ... So jesting, he said 'This is our first wog.' [laughter] Awful. You will have to ...

[Part 1 0:33:15] Lee: Well, that was OK at the time, wasn't it? Well it wasn't OK but it was common at the time.

Sumner: Well we howled with laughing. He was an irreverent type.

[Part 1 0:33:24] Lee: Mmm. What was Port Stanley like?

Sumner: Well that was another violent change. That was like Scotland at its most bleak, but we were a ship full of people. The Navy were there, *HMS Protector*. I was living on board the ship but I was invited ashore: 'Clem' Clements and his wife Sadie who I still exchange Christmas cards with. They live up in Aberdeen way now. We enjoyed it. Two of our geologists were asked to go out into the 'Camp' to look at a water source to see if they could pipe it closer to where they wanted it to go, and we went to help them, just to carry their bags for them, and that was interesting. We could get a feel for the land. It's a very broken country, rugged, and the meat was called '365'. I expect you heard there?

[Part 1 0:34:43] Lee: No.

Sumner: You get it every day of the week. [laughs] But there was nothing wrong with their meat; it was lovely. They lived very well: upland geese and sea trout. So it was a good sort of living, and we went to the local dances and things like that, eyed up the local girls and they eyed us up. Life goes on; we were like servicemen coming down.

[Part 1 0:35:16] Lee: Were you there for a while, then?

Sumner: Yes. We were there then for about three weeks, I think. We had to be kitted out. We were kitted out with all your polar gear right down to your underpants and that was all stored in a shed down by the quay. You finished up with a kitbag full of stuff for two years. That didn't take that long but there was a lot of cargo coming from Stanley to the bases. A rock crusher, I seem to remember. We would get bags of crushed rock because we were making up concrete as foundations and things like that. That was heavy work but it was all right. Then I got transferred onto the *Biscoe*, I think the, and went down to my first ... We went towards the ice across the Drake Passage. That was a moment. You felt at last we were on the doorstep; long times from Hemsby to there.

[Part 1 0:36:32] Lee: Did you go straight to Argentine Islands?

Sumner: No, I went to Deception Island first, then Lockroy. We usually had something to deliver everywhere. I hadn't been down to those bases before, but latterly I visited them each time. We will come to that later. But we got shovelled ashore at Argentine Islands. Half the base was doing their second year, so there was always some knowledge and experience and we enjoyed it. It was a beautiful looking base, F it was called then, Faraday then. Now it's called some Balkan something<sup>2</sup>, isn't it? I don't know what it is called now. But we had a very enjoyable year there, and we did the same stuff, the observations every three hours, day and night, and the balloon ascent once a day.

[Part 1 0:37:39] Lee: Did you not have a hole in the ceiling or a hole in the roof of the hut to let the balloons out of?

Sumner: No. It was too big for that.

[Part 1 0:37:49] Lee: The balloon was too big?

Sumner: Yes. We had a roller gate door. A big shed; it could stand it up and it wouldn't touch the top, and when we were ready we rolled open the gate and then we would string out the line from the transmitter to the balloon and there would be a radar target too. So it was a right bunch of knitting, and then you had to go running as the bloke came out with the balloon because as soon as he got into wind, up it went. You couldn't hold it; you had to let it go, and if you weren't far enough to get some vertical displacement, then you did a flying rugby tackle and hoped that it would not bounce. And often it did bounce and that was it, finished. You can't recover that; it just smashed to bits, which was a pity after all that preparation, but we got used to that.

[Part 1 0:38:54] Lee: What was the base like at that time? Was it comfortable?

Sumner: Yes, very comfortable.

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<sup>2</sup> Vernadsky, now a Ukrainian base.

[Part 1 0:38:59] Lee: And warm?

Sumner: Yes, yes. I can think of nothing to complain about. It had a good library and records. There were some BBC records down there. I wish I had pinched a few of them, but they were sent to Stanley for their local radio. There was *Round the Horne*, and all the regular known BBC programmes, and they were smashing.

[Part 1 0:39:34] Lee: *The Goon Show*?

Sumner: Yes, the *Goon Show*.

[Part 1 0:39:37] Lee: Did you tend to learn the sketches, over the time you were there?

Sumner: Not specifically. We listened to it, and laughed every time it was played. Good stuff, that, really good stuff. It was high quality stuff. It was a nice place but we were kind of lucky there, because you got this strait, Penola Strait, between the offshore island and the mainland which was the spine, and that was a very dangerous place. Some people were lost there. They were trying to cross it and then the ice broke up and that's it.

[Part 1 0:40:18] Lee: So did you get off the island much, if the conditions were a bit dodgy?

Sumner: Only on boats.

[Part 1 0:40:23] Lee: Right.

Sumner: We skied across to Petermann Island – which was about ten miles – and stayed the night there. But again I think now, that was a risk.

[Part 1 0:40:34] Lee: When you got to Petermann Island, what would you do?

Sumner: We shot a seal, gutted it, and ate the liver, and it was gorgeous. We had some onions. That was nice but we were taking risks there.

[Part 1 0:40:50] Lee: How do you mean?

Sumner: Well the ice looked solid but you know you are isolated and you have got no rescue. A little later we had a death in Halley Bay which I expect you know about<sup>3</sup>, and the same thing: the ice broke up. It's only after you have experienced that, you think to yourself 'God! Should we have done that?' But there was no embargo on us. We had to stand on our own feet and decide that the risks were worth it. And before my time, some people tried to climb the mountains and got lost<sup>4</sup>. Mount Peary? There was a big mountain there. I find mountaineers a funny group. They really are 'death and glory', aren't they.

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<sup>3</sup> Neville Mann in 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Hargreaves, Michael Walker and Graham Whitfield in 1976.

[Part 1 0:41:50] Lee: Well yes. Glory rather than death I think they prefer, but sometimes it works out the other way.

Sumner: Yes, a very comfortable base.

[Part 1 0:41:59] Lee: Your base commander for the first winter was Cyril Aubrey Murray, known as Bill. What did you make of him?

Sumner: Well he was an interesting character, a bit public school (we were secondary moderns), but he was a nice man, a very nice man, and very gentle with it. He wasn't a martinet. I know one day we were walking up the beach and he was shouting at somebody about 20 yards away. [loud posh voice] 'John, can you victual me?' We looked around. 'What the hell's he talking about?' He had a way with him, old fashioned charm. A very nice bloke. He's dead now though.

[Part 1 0:42:42] Lee: He appeared on a postage stamp or something?

Sumner: Yes he might have done, yes, with a tellurometer machine. He was a surveyor, and there was a picture of him and his sidekick next to the tellurometer, with the mountains in the background. I think it was used as a stamp design.

[Part 1 0:43:10] Lee: For the Falkland Island stamps, or Antarctic stamps?

Sumner: For the Dependencies stamps. We used to be able to get designs made for a commemorative issue or a definitive issue. You can only do a definitive issue now and again. You couldn't press it, but you could do a commemorative issue if you had a reason. Just the cost of printing the stamps made the Dependencies a lot of money because people all over the world wanted them. We used to get sacks of mail in with the relief, just to give them the frank, and that was difficult because we had to do the franking. That was just a ...

[Part 1 0:43:52] Lee: A hand stamp?

Sumner: Yes, and it was difficult not to smudge it. Sometimes people just went 'bom, bom' and it was rubbish. It should have been a specimen hand stamp and it wasn't very good. There were complaints about that. They had to try a bit harder.

[Part 1 0:44:10] Lee: Some of the base commanders actually resented all that work?

Sumner: It wasn't science, so 'why am I doing it?' I said 'Who else is doing it?' I used to argue with them about that. It was a money spinner, and it was part of the ethos that we joined, and there were people all round that world who were collecting. I have still got some upstairs, with the frank on them. Fids tend to bitch about nothing if they have got nothing to bitch about.

[Part 1 0:44:45] Lee: The ice was pretty heavy that year, wasn't it? Quite a substantial ice year?

Sumner: What, when we joined ...?

[Part 1 0:44:53] Lee: At Adelaide, yes.

Sumner: No, Base F. That's where we were.

[Part 1 0:44:59] Lee: I'm sorry, Base F.

Sumner: Yes, it was. It was difficult to get in; let me think. There were places they couldn't relieve. They had to either fly them out or walk them out, and close bases up until the following year. So it was a heavy ice year.

[Part 1 0:45:24] Lee: There was a party that should have wintered at Adelaide Island; they ended up staying not far from you.

Sumner: Yes, Wordie House. That was a little base that was produced for *Penola*, the *Penola* expedition<sup>5</sup>, and they just wintered there and joined with us – two bases together really, just for convenience' sake because they couldn't go where they intended to go.

[Part 1 0:45:52] Lee: What was the distance between the two huts.

Sumner: Oh, you could walk over.

[Part 1 0:45:56] Lee: And did you?

Sumner: Mm, often. Yes, it was a cosy little base, but they kept to themselves and they didn't come and raid our stores.

[Part 1 0:46:11] Lee: Who else do you remember from that first season, at Argentine Islands? [pause] Well let me give you a couple of thoughts. Alan Piggott was your radio man, wasn't he?

Sumner: Yes. I didn't know him very well. He was all right. I wasn't great friends with him. Somehow you either gelled with some people or you didn't, but most of us got on all right together. Alan Piggott I knew, Bill Murray. Er, it's a long time ago now.

[Part 1 0:46:48] Lee: I will look it up. Let me just look it up for you. It's quite a long list. Also at Argentine Islands that winter was somebody called Agger. Harkness, Haynes ...

Sumner: Harkness was the diesel mech; he was a New Zealander.

[Part 1 0:47:05] Lee: Quinn?

Sumner: Quinn, an [REDACTED]

[Part 1 0:47:12] Lee: Really?

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<sup>5</sup> The British Grahamland Expedition, 1934-37.

Sumner: Well, a bit like that.

[Part 1 0:47:16] Lee: [continuing to read list] Smith, Sparke, Sumner (that's you).

Sumner: Sparke was the doctor.

[Part 1 0:47:18] Lee: Thomas and Wigglesworth.

Sumner: Thomas was a met man. Wigglesworth was met, a forecaster. He did an extra course to make him capable of giving forecasts for the aircraft.

[Part 1 0:47:35] Lee: And was he doing that? He was sending predicted weather was he?

Sumner: I think he did it in parts. It wasn't a real setup. The aircraft either turned up or it wasn't available to turn up. Not a scheduled airline.

[Part 1 0:47:52] Lee: Did you see many aeroplanes?

Sumner: No, only ours, and only when they came and visited us. No, I was thinking about that just recently. They were based at Deception Island, the aircraft, which was an ash runway, and they would then take people into the field, deposit them with their depots and then go back. They wintered in Deception Island which had big hangars, but that's all a bit dim now, isn't it?

[Part 1 0:48:37] Lee: Is there anything I have missed off, about your time at Argentine Islands, or shall we move on?

Sumner: No, I think that's ... It was a good year, and then after that I moved on to somewhere else; where else was it?

[Part 1 0:48:50] Lee: Well, I think you went to Halley

Sumner: That's right, I did, yes. Halley Bay.

[Part 1 0:48:54] Lee: In '61.

Sumner: Yes.

[Part 1 0:48:56] Lee: Was that part of the plan or was that news that was brought to you whilst you were South?

Sumner: No. I think I volunteered for it. They wanted people to go there, and I wanted to see as much as I could of the bases, and that was a good move. It was an entirely different environment.

[Part 1 0:49:16] Lee: Both you and Dudley Jehan went together and you became a Senior Met Man?

Sumner: Yes, that's right.

[Part 1 0:49:22] Lee: Was that thrust upon you or something you sought?

Sumner: No, I was just told. I don't know why me. I just took it on. Somebody had to be in charge. Somebody had to do the stats, lots of stats for the met records, and we got quite good at it. Just data collection.

[Part 1 0:49:48] Lee: What was your feeling about Halley, after having spent time at Argentine Islands, with that fantastic view? Halley was a bit bleak wasn't it?

Sumner: It was a bit bleak, but it didn't seem to matter. We enjoyed what we did, but we almost worked day by day.

[Part 1 0:50:06] Lee: How do you mean?

Sumner: Well, you didn't say Wednesday was a running day or a particular day. You would just decide that day what you would do.

[Part 1 0:50:20] Lee: On the strength of the weather, I guess.

Sumner: Yes, on the strength of the weather, yes.

[Part 1 0:50:27] Lee: How did you take to living underground?

Sumner: Well, once you are in, you have got nothing to see outside because it was all buried by then. The base was built on the side of the hill but in half a year it had buried, and you had just looking out certain places.

[Part 1 0:50:52] Lee: Were you living in the IGY hut or Halley I?

Sumner: IGY.

[Part 1 0:50:57] Lee: So it was the original IGY hut?

Sumner: Yes, it was.

[Part 1 0:51:00] Lee: Tell me about it. What was it like inside?

Sumner: It was in good condition, buried down to its eaves, and it was comfortable and warm, and was a good place to be.

[Part 1 0:51:15] Lee: How did you get into it?

Sumner: Well we had to dig at the front door. There was a shaft into it. No problem at all. It was a good hut.

[Part 1 0:51:28] Lee: Would you have had any mechanical vehicles or was it just dogs?



Sumner: We had no mechanical vehicles, as I remember it. We had some dogs<sup>6</sup>, but a lot of it was manhauling.

[Part 1 0:51:49] Lee: Manhauling?

Sumner: We didn't go far. We didn't have to go far. It was a base ... The Argentine Islands base was a static station. It had routine readings of meteorological work, so there wasn't much need to travel at all.

[Part 1 0:52:10] Lee: But there was a trip to the Tottanfjella, wasn't there?

Sumner: Yes, that was done by the base commander.

[Part 1 0:52:22] Lee: That was Colin Johnson?

Sumner: Colin Johnson, right, and his mate<sup>7</sup>. They did a good job there. I am not quite sure of the reason for it, because it was a hell of a way. It is about 800 miles. They took dogs and they were prepared to eat them if necessary. But we just travelled locally across the ice cliff<sup>8</sup> and went inland as far as we needed. We didn't really get very far though, because it was just void, ice shelf.

[Part 1 0:53:05] Lee: But didn't somebody establish the Bob-Pi Crossing, in your time?

Sumner: Yes, that's right.

[Part 1 0:53:11] Lee: What do you remember of that?

Sumner: Let me think. That you got to the crevasse zone and then had to pick your way through this chaos. I think it was the base commander and his mate who found their way across it. It was a bit hairy, but later on I did it myself, but by then it had been well marked, and there were no real dangers on it. There was a hinge zone where the ice shelf met the inland ice, and that was chaotic.

[Part 1 0:53:52] Lee: What was special about that particular patch, where the Bob-Pi Crossing was created? Was it less crevassed than surrounding areas?

Sumner: I can't quite remember; let me think. When you approach this area, you are looking for signs of how to get across this jumble, and eventually you choose a way which may or may not have been a good one, but you persevered with it and eventually got across. But even after you got across, you still had more broken territory to get across. We did that and were relieved to get across, because we had the inland sea, the inland frozen bit which was available to us, and could take us right through to the Tottan Mountains, which was the 'promised land'.

[Part 1 0:54:42] Lee: How do you mean?

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<sup>6</sup> 20 dogs in 1961.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Ardue.

<sup>8</sup> He probably means ice shelf.

Sumner: Well, we knew it was there. We knew Johnson (the base commander) had got there the year before, and that was a first. It was like a first ascent really. And then we all wanted to go over of course, and I managed to get there. But it's a long long way, across ice shelf which by and large is all fairly secure. You can still fall down holes but less so because we had done that previous work.

[Part 1 0:55:18] Lee: So this trip yourself, was that manhauling still or with dogs?

Sumner: No, I did it with tractors. It's a long time now, isn't it? We had motor toboggans. We used those. We had some dogs; we used those. Anything but manhaul. That's a bloody waste of time that was. But we got there eventually and everybody found their own method really.

[Part 1 0:55:51] Lee: When you got to the Promised Land, was it as promising as you thought it would be?

Sumner: Well it was a sort of '18<sup>th</sup> hole'. You got to where you wanted to go, and the weather allowed you to, the weather on the shelf<sup>9</sup> (which was all shelf there) was fairly secure. It wasn't massive crevasses. Oh you could find them if you wanted to. You just plough on, 20 miles a day and you eventually get there.

[Part 1 0:56:22] Lee: Do you know why or how the Bob-Pi Crossing was made?

Sumner: Bob-Pi Crossing? We had a physicist there, named Jarman. He tended to put names like that onto features, which didn't mean much; just another way of labelling things, I think.

[Part 1 0:56:47] Lee: It was a kind of a nickname, was it?

Sumner: Bob-Pi, yes. There is a bit of geometry in it I think: pi.

[Part 1 0:56:55] Lee: Wasn't Alan Etchells with you that year<sup>10</sup>?

Sumner: Yes. Have you interviewed him?

[Part 1 0:57:03] Lee: I have.

Sumner: He was a good mechanic, a sturdy man, just got on with it. A very good engineer.

[Part 1 0:57:14] Lee: And you also had Neville Mann with you as well, who disappeared one night?

Sumner: Yes. Who died.

[Part 1 0:57:19] Lee: What do you remember of that incident, Maurice?

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<sup>9</sup> He seems to be talking here about the ice sheet, south of the hinge zone, rather than the ice shelf.

<sup>10</sup> Etchells wintered in Maurice's second year (1963) not his first (1961).

Sumner: [pause] I am not sure where he died, whether it was on the crossing or whether it was on the coast. I can't remember now.

[Part 1 0:57:52] Lee: I am reading from Fuchs' *Of Ice and Men*, August '63, 'Gordon Mallinson and Neville Mann took two dog teams and their camera down to the sea ice on a training run, hoping to get some pictures of the ice cliffs. A strong wind arose and they lost each other in the all-enveloping drift. For some time Mallinson searched without success and then, confident that Mann must be finding his own way back to base, he returned to base where he was horrified to discover that his companion was not there.'

Sumner: Yes.

[Part 1 0:58:23] Lee: Then he talks about a search party. Do you remember that?

Sumner: No, I don't know. I don't. It is 50 miles from the base, this loss, I think. It is a vast place. You would have to wait until the summer to get some light. There is only twilight in the winter time. I don't remember that.

[Part 1 0:58:48] Lee: What do you remember about when the news broke that he hadn't come back, or Mallinson turned up on his own?

Sumner: I don't remember that. Mallinson came back on his own? There were proper reports written about this, aren't there. It's a long time since I read them. I haven't even got them now.

[Part 1 0:59:13] Lee: Do you remember the atmosphere on the base?

Sumner: Yes, I do, but [pause, then a clock strikes four] not specifically I don't.

[Part 1 0:59:44] Lee: OK. If it's not coming back, don't worry about it. Shall we pause there and ...?

Sumner: Yes. Do you want a cup of tea?

[Part 1 0:59:53] Lee: Yes, thank you.

[Part 1 0:59:56] [End of Part One]

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Maurice Sumner, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 30th of January 2013. Maurice Sumner, Part Two.

[Part 2 0:00:11] Lee: You did that season at Argentine Islands and at Halley in '61, and then you went back to Halley in '63 as a base leader. How did that come about?

Sumner: Well I went to the Office and they were looking for somebody with experience at Halley Bay, and was I interested? So they just picked me out as somebody who had the experience of Halley Bay. Most people want mountains and the pizzazz of the Grahamland peninsula was much more interesting than the ice shelf.

[Part 2 0:00:48] Lee: But you said yes?

Sumner: Yes.

[Part 2 0:00:50] Lee: What had you been doing in between time?

Sumner: I was an engineering draughtsman at the time and I picked that up again and worked on it.

[Part 2 0:01:13] Lee: So why did you say yes to the idea of going back to Halley?

Sumner: Well it's good adventure. It's a great experience. I thoroughly enjoyed it. To go back to South America and I had a look at that when I went the second time.

[Part 2 0:01:19] Lee: But did you have a particular approach to being a base leader? Did you have a philosophy or did you lead by committee or discussion or by something else?

Sumner: No. You had to get them with you. You had to decide what you were going to do and then go and do it. If you prevaricated you found that everybody dissolved into the mist. But they were easy people to work with. If you wanted something done, they were there. So it wasn't a difficult job if you were comfortable in your station, and we mostly were.

[Part 2 0:02:09] Lee: What developments had taken place in your absence, at Halley?

Sumner: People were more aware of the history and trying to keep it simple. The first year was at Argentine Islands and that was routine meteorology and that worked all right. You were programmed. You knew what you had to do every day, every hour of the day. Halley Bay was slightly different because there wasn't anywhere to go except by lots of planning. We got out into the Shelf and then beyond it and it's all in the reports then, but it's difficult to remember. It's a long time ago now.

[Part 2 0:03:13] Lee: Do you recall any difficult decisions you had to make as base leader, giving people permission for things or sorting out controversies?

Sumner: No, they tended to sort themselves out once you had talked about it. Everybody was trying to make their mark; they were happy to go along with the *status quo*. We argued about what to do and what not to do and when to do it but that's just normal.

[Part 2 0:03:47] Lee: Were you still doing met work then or were you just simply ...

Sumner: Well as a base commander you don't do met work, but I could help out if I wanted to. But I was interested to get the consensus of the base on what we were doing. We had a fairly loose plan: where we were trying to get to, what we were trying to do, and of course it is a long time ago now. It is 40 years<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Actually 50 years.

[Part 2 0:04:13] Lee: What were the achievements in that year, do you think?

Sumner: They had got to the Tottan Mountains, which was the sort of 'promised land' – the nearest land that we could get to from Halley Bay which was on an ice shelf floating in the sea, in the Weddell Sea. So just getting there was a requirement and we did that, and then they did it subsequently year after year, and thoroughly mapped it out and so on.

[Part 2 0:04:44] Lee: All the time though, the old IGY hut was becoming more and more submerged, wasn't it?

Sumner: Yes, it was a death trap really.

[Part 2 0:04:50] Lee: Was it? In what respect?

Sumner: Well you had to be careful. Fire precautions could be neglected. It was just used for storage so why bother. But we were fairly conscientious to make it easy to get in and out of, because it was 12 feet deep<sup>12</sup>.

[Part 2 0:05:09] Lee: So had you got a second hut by this time?

Sumner: Yes.

[Part 2 0:05:13] Lee: What was that like?

Sumner: It was fine.

[Part 2 0:05:16] Lee: Was that built in your absence?

Sumner: No, I was there when it was being built. They go up quite quickly. I don't particularly remember anything specific about that. It took up about three months of our time.

[Part 2 0:05:36] Lee: And who was in charge of the building project?

Sumner: I don't know.

[Part 2 0:05:47] Lee: Were there any snags, that you remember?

Sumner: No, I don't think so. There is something in the back of my mind that something was missing, and we just worked our way round it<sup>13</sup>.

[Part 2 0:06:12] Lee: Let's take you to London, because you had come out of Halley at the end of that season, and came back to London. Did you then go and work for BAS HQ more or less straight away?

Sumner: No, I went back to being a draughtsman at an engineering company.

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<sup>12</sup> Probably 12 feet below the living hut, not the surface.

<sup>13</sup> The nuts and bolts (or at least some of them) were missing.

[Part 2 0:06:38] Lee: So how did you reconnect with FIDS?

Sumner: Well, reunions. I wanted to go back. I had written in and said I would like to have another tour, and ...

[Part 2 0:06:52] Lee: But when it came for you to work at BAS HQ in London, how did that come about?

Sumner: That was a year after, when I had come back, I think. It's a bit disjointed isn't it really? I wanted to go on the mountain trip to the Tottans, and so I had to go and winter. You can't half do it; you have got to go and be there, a full base member. So that was the reason for going there, and that was a good year. We achieved what we wanted to achieve and got there.

[Part 2 0:07:40] Lee: When you came back from the Antarctic at the end of that final season as base leader at Halley, what happened in order to get you the job at BAS HQ in London?

Sumner: Well I had heard that there was a job. They wanted some local knowledge. They were all civil servants. Derek Gipps was a civil servant, Bill Sloman was a civil servant. You look like Bill Sloman.

[Part 2 0:08:03] Lee: Do I? [laughs] I will take that as a compliment. Thank you. You had worked with Derek Gipps in the Antarctic?

Sumner: In Gillingham Street in London. Yes; he was the 'Crown Agent', and we got on well together. He wanted some local knowledge, once removed from the Fids, who are not the most logical bunch of people, so he was able to provide that to them.

[Part 2 0:08:58] Lee: And there was Paul Whiteman, who also worked in Logistics with Derek Gipps?

Sumner: Yes, Grand Prix driver, or Grand Prix mechanic, yes.

[Part 2 0:09:10] Lee: Tell me about your time working with them, because I think you were there for several years weren't you?

Sumner: Well two years they were there but Paul Whiteman was a good engineer, a really good engineer, and he gelled well on the base, He was a 'get up and go' man, as was Alan Etchells. Most of the mechanics were uncomplicated. They knew when an engine was running right and that was all that mattered. But they were very strong people.

[Part 2 0:09:53] Lee: What was the Logistics unit that you joined, doing exactly?

Sumner: Well we were ordering the stores and trying to get the gaps in the supply line that we perceived filled up. So we had to hunt for it sometimes but most of the time there was a pretty good database of information to find out where things were. So I

operated that in the London Office and Paul Whiteman operated on the engineering side; he was a good engineer.

[Part 2 0:10:34] Lee: So the materials you were finding were domestic consumption materials or building materials or ...?

Sumner: Yes, anything but engineering, but even then I was involved with the engineering. There is such a variety of stuff that you need to run a base.

[Part 2 0:10:51] Lee: And you have got to get it on the ship and you have got to get the ship down there.

Sumner: That's right, yes, although it can always be dumped in Deception Island when you need it now, and it won't go there until next year, a tortured sort of link from West London to the bases.

[Part 2 0:11:14] Lee: So was it a frustrating job?

Sumner: No, we knew what we were capable of doing and we got quite good at it, and if necessary we could fly stuff down to Montevideo to be picked up there, that had missed the ship. But we refined the inventories of supply and by the time we had finished refining it, what you got was what you needed. You didn't have any ...

[Part 2 0:11:41] Lee: What do you mean? Can you explain a bit more about refining the inventory system?

Sumner: Well you needed to have a list of stuff: for the generator, the machinery, and it just needed to be for a particular overhaul. Now you had lists and you ordered them up and got them into the right places, but having said all that, you could have tortured lists of thousands of things and you don't know what day it is.

[Part 2 0:12:12] Lee: Were you getting ..., were you dealing with requests from base leaders?

Sumner: No, that came in the relief with the inventory, and it is a list of stuff they hold and a list of stuff they want. My job was to get the stuff they wanted, but we would look at it critically and say 'What do you want that for?' and there was a bit of that. But it was quite a tidy arrangement and it worked out quite well.

[Part 2 0:12:42] Lee: Did that generate friction then sometimes, between London and the bases, when ...

Sumner: No.

[Part 2 0:12:48] Lee: No? There were no ... ?

Sumner: No, the bases were 'on another planet'.

[Part 2 0:12:56] Lee: Really?

Sumner: We could talk to them on the radio and send signals, but by and large, if we couldn't get it, they had to do without it, and they always did. They had so much stuff, they didn't know what to do with it all.

[Part 2 0:13:09] Lee: You mean having been a base leader yourself, you could put yourself in their shoes, couldn't you?

Sumner: Yes, and it is funny how it is a circular thing. As soon as you start looking at something, you can find exactly an occurrence needing that, or not needing it, and you had to separate out the peripheral stuff which you could do without. But rarely did we stop them having things, not for money. That worked out quite well.

[Part 2 0:13:53] Lee: Were you also organising the food supplies?

Sumner: Derek Gipps did most of that. He had an 'in' with the supplier of food and he knew a lot about it. Because that is so personal, you know. You have got to concentrate on the main scheme of things.

[Part 2 0:14:19] Lee: What was it like in Gillingham Street in those days? Was it a very tight-knit little office, or ...?

Sumner: It was tight-knit. There were only about twelve of us, and we were dominated by women.

[Part 2 0:14:30] Lee: Anyone in particular?

Sumner: Eleanor Honnywill. Did you know her?

[Part 2 0:14:35] Lee: No, but go on.

Sumner: She was the matriarch, really. Just a secretary but she had been Fuchs' right hand for a long time. I don't know whether it was a relationship that went any further than that; I doubt it, but it might have done. But she was a great friend, I found her so. But the lines were often blurred when you got to a domestic side. Everybody is an expert on domestics, aren't they? We muddled through. It was not a streamlined office but we didn't go short of much.

[Part 2 0:15:27] Lee: Did you have any form of direct links with the bases themselves?

Sumner: We could send signals from London Office, from Gillingham Street.

[Part 2 0:15:39] Lee: Morse code?

Sumner: Yes, but you were often too far removed from it really and I felt uncomfortable at times. I had to try and guess what they wanted. They couldn't articulate it themselves, or they may have already articulated it in a dozen different ways. The lines of communication were so extended but we somehow muddled through. It wasn't a streamlined arrangement but it worked. Then we started to try and



refine it, so that we started with a plan and then we went through that plan and got a result at the end of it.

[Part 2 0:16:30] Lee: Was Sir Vivian Fuchs around at this time?

Sumner: Yes, he was.

[Part 2 0:16:35] Lee: Did you have much to do with him?

Sumner: Yes, a lot.

[Part 2 0:16:39] Lee: How did he ...? How do you remember him?

Sumner: Well he was a father figure and you could talk at any level to him and he knew his stuff. But he (I am making this up as I go along really and I probably will contradict myself), he had a way of dealing with things, and I think it was intuitive, his method of dealing with it. So it was quite difficult for somebody in the office to emulate. Most of the time we were just trying to get through inventories. They are tedious but ... He was an 'open book'. I could just go in and talk to him about anything. He was quite exceptional in that respect. And Derek Gipps was my mentor; he knew what he wanted and he got it.

[Part 2 0:17:48] Lee: Were there any serious cockups?

Sumner: I'm sure there were. I am just trying to think of one. [long pause] We want Derek Gipps here really. I can't think of an example of it but ... [another long pause]

[Part 2 0:18:20] Lee: Did you (how can I put this?) ... When you were dealing with the bases, and sending stuff down, to Halley or to Argentine Islands, did you miss being at those places.

Sumner: No. I was trying desperately to read their minds. I knew that anything went, on the bases. 'Let's put that down. Let's have six of those.' You had to be fairly realistic about what the requirement was, and you would ask questions about 'why do you need seven of those?' A sarcastic remark would come back 'because I want them.' It was a muddled sort of ordering procedure but I can't think of another way of doing it. You can't polish it so everything fits.

[Part 2 0:19:18] Lee: Do you remember receiving 'short' messages from bases when what they wanted didn't turn up?

Sumner: No, very few of those. Usually they were overburdened with stuff. If there was any doubt we would send them three.

[Part 2 0:19:38] Lee: You did, I think, four years of that, five years working in Logistics and then you transferred to Personnel at BAS HQ.

Sumner: Yes, Bill Sloman.

[Part 2 0:19:50] Lee: Tell me about Bill Sloman. Everybody mentions him, but I don't know anything about him, really.

Sumner: Don't you? Well he was a civil servant of the old school. Very straight, and in particular a Welshman through and through, and he did the personnel side of the work. Very little on the logistics side but he would bend to it if it was needed.

[Part 2 0:20:18] Lee: What more can you tell me about Bill, Bill Sloman? What was he like?

Sumner: He was a nice man, and very good on the personnel side. He got most of the problems solved at the bases, on the bases. He had less problems than the logistics side, which was much more difficult to work with.

[Part 2 0:20:52] Lee: Was he an intuitive man about people?

Sumner: Well, no more than we were.

[Part 2 0:21:02] Lee: The comments I get are that he made very few mistakes about recruiting people.

Sumner: I think that's true, but he didn't delve very deeply. He found someone who wanted to do something and he tried to make it happen. He didn't go very far in the field. He did a bit of sledging but not much.

[Part 2 0:21:39] Lee: But he was good at spotting the right people to go South?

Sumner: Yes, in the interview stage, at Victoria station, which is where the interviews were held.

[Part 2 0:21:58] Lee: Would you meet the Fids who were going to go South next year, before they went?

Sumner: When I was on the Headquarters staff, I would interview them.

[Part 2 0:22:09] Lee: With Bill?

Sumner: Or with Derek; sometimes with Eric Salmon. We would have a series of interviews and then we would choose. A lot of people were rejected then, after they had been interviewed.

[Part 2 0:22:32] Lee: There was an episode on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April one year when a practical joke was played upon the women in the office. Do you recall this?

Sumner: Vaguely. Was it to do with the place where we ...? You tell me.

[Part 2 0:22:51] Lee: Well it was something to do with a ruse (it was April the First). Let me just find the passage. [rustling paper] It was Derek Gipps who set up a situation where he pretended there was going to be a staff inspection by the Civil Service Commissioners, an inspection of junior office staff, and he asked all the girls

to come in on that day well dressed and groomed properly to give a good impression. And then a bloke turned up with a bowler hat and striped suit, umbrella, briefcase, and he interviewed all these girls one by one with Eric Salmon, and asked increasingly preposterous questions which left them fuming and looking really cross about it all. And they would go back to the office, apparently, and say 'Who is this man? Why is he asking these questions?' Now on the stroke of midday, on April the First, they produced a bottle of champagne and revealed it was all a practical joke.

Sumner: Yes.

[Part 2 0:23:46] Lee: Were you around?

Sumner: No, I wasn't around then. I heard about it but it wasn't quite as specific as that. Eric was a comedian, a practical joker.

[Part 2 0:24:05] Lee: And when you were with Bill and Eric, did you go on the 'milk round'? They went round the universities didn't they?

Sumner: Yes. I sometimes stood in and did a lecture, but I was always slightly uncomfortable, because I thought they would ... They never gave their parameters of what they were going to talk about, and you would get repeats of the same thing. But it was all right. They all enjoyed it.

[Part 2 0:24:32] Lee: Did you enjoy that?

Sumner: Yes, I did. Yes, there was no problem there.

[Part 2 0:24:41] Lee: You left BAS in the early 1970s and went to work for the Natural Environment Research Council. Do you remember how that came about?

Sumner: Well that was the parent body. That was the only employer that I could get my hands on, and they had references and they allowed you to put in for a particular vacancy.

[Part 2 0:25:18] Lee: Why did you choose to move, I wonder?

Sumner: I was looking for advancement. I was trying to cash in on my experience and they needed that experience to follow on. It was an essential thing and to keep it all together was quite difficult. Everybody has got different views about how it should be done, so it was just a natural progression really.

[Part 2 0:25:51] Lee: What was your job at NERC?

Sumner: I was on the logistics side, under Derek.

[Part 2 0:25:57] Lee: You both went to NERC?

Sumner: Yes. He joined NERC shortly after I did, and he was a force to be reckoned with.

[Part 2 0:26:11] Lee: Was there a different atmosphere between the two bodies? Was it different BAS and NERC; were they not the same?

Sumner: No. NERC was the senior body, but they were much broader. They were looking at posts in Africa and places like that, like Crown Agents, that sort of thing. So that is where the recruitment for BAS started, and they then started to look at the security aspects of our work. It hiccupped itself into reality.

[Part 2 0:26:55] Lee: NERC did?

Sumner: No, the BAS bit. It was a cowboy outfit to start with and you had to keep on saying 'Who is in charge?' Was it BAS? Was it Crown Agents? Was it NERC? They all overlapped, and we had to have a debate about what we were talking about and who was involved. And that was quite a business because everybody had a different view; the whole place was full of experts.

[Part 2 0:27:35] Lee: Looking back on this, Maurice, were those years in the Antarctic a highlight in your life?

Sumner: Yes, I think they were. But they level out. It gets samey after you have done three winters. You could create crises and other objectives, but nonetheless it is usually the first one that is the best, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. I think we were very lucky, very lucky indeed.

[Part 2 0:28:05] Lee: And were you just as happy with your work at HQ, back in the UK?

Sumner: No, it was different. It was just an office job. It was all right. It paid the rent. So that was all right.

[Part 2 0:28:23] Lee: But it didn't excite you as much as actually being South?

Sumner: Oh no, no it didn't. No certainly not.

[Part 2 0:28:34] Lee: Have you been back since?

Sumner: Yes, I have been for two summer 'charleys', as we used to call them, summer charleys, but the magic has sort of gone when you have wintered three times. You can't upset the applecart by creating diversions or things that wouldn't happen unless you pulled the plug on them, but it was a marvellous period of my life, very good indeed.

[Part 2 0:29:05] Lee: Excellent. Shall we leave it there?

Sumner: Yes, fine.

[Part 2 0:29:08] Lee: Thank you very much indeed, thank you.

Sumner: Thank you.

[Part 2 0:29:11] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Joe Farman and the ozone hole. [Part 1 0:13:20]
- Launching a met balloon. [Part 1 0:20:05]
- Voyage South on the Kista Dan.[Part 1 0:25:33]
- Launching a balloon at Base F. [Part 1 0:37:49]
- Philatelic mail. [Part 1 0:43:10]
- The Bob-Pi Crossing. [Part 1 0:53:05]
- Working in the Logistics Section in London. [Part 2 0:11:14]
- Memories of Sir Vivian Fuchs.[Part 2 0:16:30]