

Cameron\_Alain

**Edited transcription of a recording of Alan Cameron by Chris Eldon Lee on  
31 January 2013. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/209.  
Transcribed by David Price 1 Aug 2014**

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Alan Cameron interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 31 January 2013.

**Alan Cameron Part One.**

Cameron: Henry Alan David Cameron, 15 July 1934.

[Part 1 0:00:20] Lee: So you are 79 now?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part1 0:00:22] Lee: And do I call you Alan?

Cameron: Yes, I'm called Alan. My first name was inherited from my father who died six months before I was born. The third name was the choice of a rich aunt who they thought might leave us some money – never did, but the family wanted to call me Alan so I've always been known as Alan, except on official things where sometimes you go and they call out Henry Cameron and I think 'there's another Cameron here somewhere.'

[Part 1 0:00:56] Lee: Who's he!

Cameron: Then I realised who it is.

[Part1 0:00:59] Lee: So you never knew your father?

Cameron: No, no.

[Part1 0:01:01] Lee: Do you know what he did for a living?

Cameron: Yes, he was a carpenter, ships carpenter and he worked for, at the time I was born he was working for John Players and Son in Nottingham where we, I was born.

[Part1 0:01:18] Lee: Did he have much of an education; your father, would you say?

Cameron: Not all that, he was an artisan, shall we say but ah, I learnt very little about him apart from the fact that he died, we think from the after effects of the first world war.

[Part1 0:01:43] Lee: Gas?

Cameron: Well, possibly, he wasn't actually in the trenches he was in a repair base behind the trenches, repairing guns and things like that.

[Part 1 0:02:00] Lee: Were you an only child?

Cameron: No, no, I was the fourth in the family, my eldest brother was twenty odd years older than I was, then I had a sister who was eighteen years older than I, another brother and then I think about ten years after that I turned up one Sunday morning. My siblings' say they were sent to church on Sunday morning, when they came back I was there, I don't think my mother knew too much about it either.

[Part1 0:02:46] Lee: Oh really?

Cameron: No, as far as I can find out anyway, so I was the, this is the generation almost behind the rest.

[Part1 0:02:58] Lee: What sort of education did you have Alan?

Cameron: I, my early education was a bit mixed up because I went to school almost the day war broke out and I was only in the school for about three days when they turned it into a recruitment centre. And then we did a bit of teaching in peoples' houses for a while and then I got evacuated outside of Nottingham because they thought Nottingham was going to get a beating so I went to a country school in Plumtree just outside Nottingham. When they saw that Nottingham wasn't getting hit, because they set up a mock town<sup>1</sup> further down the Trent. In those days aircraft navigated by rivers and things like that and I think that took most of the bombs so there wasn't a lot of bombing in Nottingham. So I came back and lived with my elder brother and his daughter who is the same age as I am, people used to think we were twins, in fact I was her uncle. She used to call me uncle when she got annoyed with me. Then I came back and lived with my mother, she was a nurse during the war, there was only the two of us at home. My elder brother wasn't fit to go into the services and my sister and brother were both, one in the Wrens and one in the Navy and I spent time in my school holidays staying wherever my sister was, she was in the Wrens on one of these listening stations listening to Morse code and sending the details to the place that did the interpretation. So I lived with my brother and went to a school just outside Nottingham, Aspley and then I got a scholarship to a grammar school and stayed there and finished up with three O levels, maths, physics and chemistry, technical stuff. At that time at eighteen you had to register for National Service and I wanted to join the Navy because we were into boats and things like that, my brother bought a dinghy when he came out just after the war. So I applied for the Navy and they were only taking one percent of the people, they wanted me to learn Russian.

[Part 1 0:06:05] Lee: Sounds a bit ominous.

Cameron: You move to the next one so I tried to get into Air Sea Rescue, boats again and they said 'well you'll have to sign on for three years' and as there was only my mother and myself at home I decided that I wasn't going to do that so they said 'Oh well you'll have to wait for the Army' I think they took ninety percent of the people, they said 'We can't fit you in for a while' so I got a job temporarily in a toy department in a department store until I got called up in '52.

[Part 1 0:06:49] Lee: What were the toys around at that time; was there Meccano by then?

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<sup>1</sup> Mock towns – refers to Operation Starfish, Starfish mock towns in Britain helped to dupe Nazi aircraft during the blitz. They were built to lure enemy bombers away from more populated areas. Tanks containing diesel and paraffin were placed on top of 20 ft towers, diesel was released on to coke or coal before water was released on top. This caused a virtual explosion of fire and steam, looking like a burning town. Saved estimated 2,500 lives and diverted 730 air raids. *Daily Mail Australia* 1.3.2013.

Cameron: Well yes, there was Meccano I dealt in the toy department with trains and the boys stuff, the rest of the department was all women so I stayed there until I eventually got called in, in '52.

[Part 1 0:07:15] Lee: Into what um?

Cameron: Into the REME the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and I was put on a, you did six weeks basic training and then I was posted to Arborfield in Berkshire, one of those nine months training on radar. I finished that course. I finished fairly high so I took another three month course to second class radar mechanic. And then being in the REME you get posted all over the, little detachments everywhere. The usual things was in the final exam the top three people had choice of where they went with their postings I worked quite hard, came second and then they said 'Ah yes, we are posting the first top three as instructors.'

[Part 1 0:08:22] Lee: Oh no.

Cameron : I got posted, I stayed at Arborfield for the following remaining years as instructor on the radar sets.

[Part 1 0:08:33] Lee: How sophisticated was radar in those days?

Cameron: Well it was left over from the war, getting quite good; it was manual in so far as tracking went. You turned handles to keep the aerals following the aircraft and that data was fed to the anti-aircraft guns to give them a position to aim at because obviously you have to aim in front of the plane. They were big machines, big four wheel things with the entire transmitter inside and the job as instructor we would; I had seven radar sets under my command as a corporal. They made me up to corporal. You'd have perhaps four or five students and you'd put faults on the machine, throw them in there and they'd write up how they found the faults, just teaching them the techniques of fault finding.

[Part1 0:09:41] Lee: So were you servicing the machines or just operating them for radar purposes?

Cameron: No they were just, they would be used for any aircraft that were around but basically the training was to get people to repair them in a logical manner. If you have a fault you don't start at the beginning, work your way through the machine, start in the middle and work outwards. So we'd do stupid things like putting little bits of silver paper between two pins on a valve, putting the valve back in or disconnecting something. Then you'd go round and they'd tell you how they found the fault and generally put another set of faults on the following day of a different type for them.

[Part 1 0:10:36] Lee: What happened when you National Service finished in 1954?

Cameron: Yes, I then got a job back in my home town with Ericssons making, the telephone people, they were making machines for all sorts of types but there was a proto-production line where they, before they put things into full production they'd make a dozen or so and I was one of three test engineers that would check that the thing was working properly and find any faults so that when they got to the final production line it was a continuous thing.

[Part 1 0:11:33] Lee: What do you remember working on in particular?

Cameron: We did a lot of work on Geiger counters for the Atomic Research Station in ...

[Part 1 0:11:44] Lee: Harwell?

Cameron: Yes, Harwell yes, and when the instrument was finished the Harwell people would come and do a whole series of tests, the machines would take the best part of a day to go through all their tests, and they all had to be done at once and that's when I ran into trouble with the unions. Because we were staff rather than works personnel, the works came in at eight in the morning and the staff came in at nine, so if anything went wrong between eight and nine there were no test engineers so the Company asked us if one could come in to cover that hour and after about six months or so we got a letter from the union, which was the Association of Scientific Workers I think it was called, saying we had been dismissed from the union for working works hours without their permission. So we were a bit upset about that so they said we could re-join again but three of us decided to not to bother so that didn't stand us in too good a stead.

[Part 1 0:13:17] Lee: So you were getting a bit frustrated in your job?

Cameron: Yes, yes and then I saw this advert in the *Daily Telegraph*, Electronic engineers required to go to Antarctica.

[Part 1 0:13:34] Lee: What was the first inclination you had in your life that there might be a place called Antarctica?

Cameron: Well I obviously remember being read Scott's book at school when I was quite young and then I took quite an interest in Shackleton particularly. I even remember reading Scott's book a second time at home in the hope that he actually made it back but he didn't

[Part1 0:14:07] Lee: It was the happy ending version?

Cameron: Well yes, looking for it. I just generally got interested, I had no idea that I would ever go there but I started collecting odd books on topics on Antarctic books, Nansen and god knows who.

[Part 1 0:14:30] Lee: Were you inspired at all by those stories?

Cameron: Not unduly it was it was sort of adventurous type things. I think it must have been in the background when I saw this advert. So I got asked to go to an interview I think early ...

[Part 1 0:14:56] Lee: So what made you apply, what was the driving force?

Cameron: Just seeing an advert and wanting to get out of this restrictive scenario I found myself in.

[Part 1 0:15:08] Lee: You'd worked out that the Antarctic was one of the few places in the world where there were no unions I suppose?

Cameron: Well, after the interview and when they told me vaguely what I'd be involved with I got more interested obviously because the IGY was coming up and this was to be a part of that.

[Part1 0:15:35] Lee: I appreciate that this is a long time ago Alan, but what do you recall of the interview?

Cameron: Well, being asked technical questions, the Crown Agents, I think there were about four people interviewing me, asking me things like 'How would I would heat up some water if I only had a battery and that sort of thing.'

[Part 1 0:16:01] Lee: Oh the practical stuff?

Cameron: Talking about what life on base would be like, generally it was interesting.

[Part 1 0:16:21] Lee: Do you remember who was on the other side of the table?

Cameron: I can't, no, it was Crown Agents. There must have been a FIDS representative obviously.

[Part 1 0:16:35] Lee: Somebody called Frank Elliott?

Cameron: Yes, Frank was involved I'm sure, that was early in '57 and I didn't hear, that was about February I think, '57 exactly can't tell you the date, until I got a telegram in early September saying could I sail on the *Shackleton* on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October. Prior to that they wanted me to spend a week at the Radio Research Station at Slough, where the ionosonde machines originated from, it was quite a busy time because I was supposed to give a month's notice at work but they were very good, they let me go. I think I got the telegram on the Thursday and I packed up on the Saturday, It was a close run thing.

[Part 1 0:17:14] Lee: What point then did you actually think that you'd got the job, were you told at the end of the interview you ...?

Cameron: No, after the interview I never heard anything, not until I got this telegram. So I presumed they'd found somebody, so obviously I think that somebody dropped out at the last minute and I was second choice as it were but I guess the fact that I was fairly familiar with small boats and done a fair bit of travelling during the war, I don't know why they chose me but they did. So I did this week at Slough and had all my teeth fillings removed and insulated and lots of other things. I told my girl-friend that I had got a job down South and she said 'Oh, London?' So I said 'No, a bit further than that.'

[Part 1 0:18:43] Lee: How did she react?

Cameron: Well she was quite happy for me, yes, the next time I heard from her it was the first mail in base the following winter, summer. Summer down South, when I got a letter saying she had got engaged to somebody else. So it was the usual Dear John thing you stick the letter upon the notice board and go and have a few beers

[Part 1 0:19:10] Lee: Were you surprised, upset?

Cameron: No, it wasn't all that serious she was just a current girl-friend as it were, but I did name the cat after her.

[Part 1 0:19:23] Lee: I'll come to that later on.

Cameron: Right.

[Part 1 0:19:25] Lee: This is Bridget isn't it?

Cameron: No She finished up as Bridget, she was called Dizzy when I ...

[Part 1 0:19:30] Lee: The woman was called Bridget?

Cameron: No, she was called Dizzy, the girlfriend was called Dizzy so I named the cat after her when I took it south.

[Part 1 0:19:44] Lee: I'll come to that later on if I may.

Cameron: She got to be named later when she was returned to Stanley.

[Part 1 0:19:53] Lee: What do you recall of the Journey South, Alan?

Cameron: Well, the first thing I recall was that the crew went down with Asian 'flu. We were all, the fids, never got it I don't know why. It never reached that part of the *Shackleton*. We were all commandeered into steering the boat. Crossing the equator, the usual palaver with duckings and things. Very happy group on the boat, there was one summer visitor a Dr Blundell from Birmingham who I used to play bridge with, I got taught bridge on the boat. A fairly uneventful trip down as far as Montevideo ...

[Part 1 0:20:57] Lee: Were you doing any hands on work?

Cameron: Whilst the crew were down sick we were doing helmsman, deck scrubbing and generally partying in the saloon on the way down so it was fairly uneventful as far as, until we got to Stanley.

[Part 1 0:21:21] Lee: And what happened in Stanley, what did you make of the place?

Cameron: Stanley, well it was interesting. There was only one made up road, between the jetty and the Government House which was laid down for the previous year's visit of the Duke of Edinburgh. I remember the Governor's car was a London taxi, all the other roads were rough roads. Visited the odd pub, I think there was only three in town anyway. We were issued with all the gear in Stanley at that time, having an interview with the Governor...

[Part 1 0:22:06] Lee: What do you remember about that, would this be Arrowsmith was it?

Cameron: Yes, well not much, obviously he had a list and knew a lot about you and asked questions. I think he interviewed all the people and then obviously I met Secfids, FIDS as was, his name I can't recall.

[Part1 0:22:35] Lee: Johnny Green?

Cameron: Johnny Green, yes, yes. Then we set off for, I think we went to Georgia first, can't recall but we went in and offloaded at Signy which was the first base we called at, and then got stuck in ice and then the famous ice-berg episode occurred.

[Part 1 0:23:08] Lee: Tell me what your memories were about that fateful day

Cameron: Oh, I was sat drinking about 11.30 at night playing bridge and we could hear the banging and clashing's as we went through this brash ice, it wasn't all that heavy I don't think and we heard the boatswain I think it was, on the boat, walk along and start sounding tanks. He opened the porthole, poked his nose into where we were and said 'There's six foot of water in the hold, do you think I should tell somebody on the bridge?' and a few minutes later all hell broke loose. We noticed that the beer in the glasses was sloped against the top of the glass and she started taking on a list. Thereafter it was boats out. They decide to throw cargo over the side, particularly the anthracite to lighten the boat and they slung the little tow-boat we had for taking stuff ashore over as far as they could get the crane out past its normal limit to heel the boat over to one side and then we started throwing stores trying to dig down into the hold to get to the lower hold. Quite a hectic time.

[Part 1 0:25:05] Lee: Do you remember, first of all that part of the story about the chap putting his head through the porthole suggesting that the bridge were not aware of the problem at that point?

Cameron: I think they sent him to investigate, I don't know if they had any indication on the bridge how much water there is in hold or anything like that, but no, it was quite hectic.

[Part1 0:25:17] Lee: Who was in charge, who was giving you the orders?

Cameron: Ship's crew, ship's officers, Flack and can't remember the second, Flack was the chief officer, Captain Brown I think it was the captain and Woodward<sup>2</sup> was the second officer, can't remember who the third officer was.

[Part 1 0:26:10] Lee: Tom Woodford?

Cameron: Tom Woodford.

[Part 1 0:26:13] Lee: Just take me through then what you were actually doing yourself at that point, you and the rest of the Fids.

Cameron: In the hold, sort of an hour on and an hour off.

[Par1 0:26:25] Lee: Up to your knees in water?

Cameron: And beyond, yes at times trying to get, they found out where the hole was, which was just below the waterline and obviously they heeled the boat over to stop the water coming in. We were trying to get so we could lift, we had only taken off one set of gear for Signy and that was in the upper hold so they needed to get down to the lower hold which was where the water was to get to where the hole was.

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<sup>2</sup> Correction: Tom Woodfield was the second officer on that voyage of the *Shackleton*.

[Part 1 0:27:07] Lee: Could you see the hole?

Cameron: Yes, oh yes.

[Part 1 0:27:09] Lee: was it substantial?

Cameron: Well it was a sort of split, it wasn't all that large I suppose, it was about an inch wide but water was obviously splashing in. by that time it was above the water line but the water was still coming in. We built a box inside and started filling it with concrete.

[Part 1 0:27:38] Lee: Inside the boat?

Cameron: Inside and between the outside wall, there were ribs and we built the box inside the ribs and started filling it with concrete.

[Part 1 0:27:52] Lee: The *Shackleton* was a single hull vessel?

Cameron: Yes, might have been double walls at the bows, she was strengthened at the bow, she didn't have side tanks.

[Part 1 0:28:08] Lee: Do you know whose idea it was to use Ciment Fondu<sup>3</sup>?

Cameron: Not really, the ship's officers, we knew we had it on board because it was being taken down to do work at Lockroy on the new generator shed. So anything which was, I won't say expendable but heavy was dumped, certainly an awful lot of anthracite and ...

[Part 1 0:28:36] Lee: A human chain gang was it?

Cameron: Yes, basically, yes

[Part 1 0:28:41] Lee: Were you worried at all?

Cameron: Not unduly, I didn't know how long it was a day before the *Southern Orbiter*<sup>4</sup> turned up which was a relief to see another boat. She stayed close by in case we had to evacuate completely. Some of it had blown over because we were all pretty tired and...

[Part 1 0:29:15] Lee: Tell me about the Ciment Fondu, how successful was it?

Cameron: Well reasonably so, I think it leaked through to the engine room as I understood it, and started blocking up the bilge pumps, and I think that later on they found that there was a watertight compartment between the hold and the engine room somebody hadn't filled in where a pipe went through and it was going through there and I think some of the cement had gone through and was blocking up one of the bilge pumps or something like that.

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<sup>3</sup> Ciment Fondu – A high-alumina cement which had the desirable properties of being quick setting and able to set using sea water, most useful in the Antarctic where there is a paucity of fresh water. Ciment Fondu is a French product.

<sup>4</sup> Correction – The ship that stood by the *Shackleton* was the *Southern Lily* a whale catcher belonging to Salvesson's whale factory ship *Southern Harvester*.

[Part 1 0:29:57] Lee: Did you have to clear that?

Cameron: Well I think eventually once we got the boat in calmer water, because I think he was heading down to a cove on one of the islands<sup>5</sup>, but we couldn't get in because it was full of ice. We got the water down as I recall and eventually the *Protector* turned up, I think that was several days later. The story I heard was that they were somewhere at a party or something and the SOS message was picked up by Cape Town who relayed it to Portsmouth who relayed it back to the Falklands and it got ... Eventually the *Protector* sailed and turned up I can't remember how many days later and they evacuated us all onto the *Protector*. They sent across a couple of engineers from *Protector* and they... First of all we tried putting canvas covers over the hole but it was still leaking and the guys from the *Protector* came over and shot bolts into the side of the hull, which had to be done fairly accurately and they made a plate which fitted the bolts and they screwed it on and made a temporary fix and we limped up to South Georgia.

[Part 1 0:31:41] Lee: Do you remember how they sealed the plate?

Cameron: Well they put some form of sacking and filled it up with something in between and clamped it on to the side. Made it watertight anyway, enough for us to steam slowly up to Georgia.

[Part1 0:31:58] Lee: What was it like in the days once you had stemmed the flow so to speak, you had two or three days I think it was before *Protector* turned up, and the ship was at a funny angle, was that, was life difficult?

Cameron: Not that I can recall no, not particularly, once they had fairly well sealed it we were in calm water. The pumps were getting water out rather it was going out faster than it was coming in.

[Part 1 0:32:31] Lee: other Fids who were on the ship at the time reckon you were really lucky with the weather.

Cameron: We were, yes, extremely lucky yes. Being in semi-pack there wasn't a lot of sea running, it calms down once you are in pack-ice.

[Part 1 0:32:54] Lee: Where did the *Protector* take you?

Cameron: She took us to Georgia and then we all went back to live on the boat whilst she was in dry-dock.

[Part 1 0:33:08] Lee: In the Falklands again?

Cameron: In South Georgia.

[Part 1 0:33:08] Lee: Oh, right.

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<sup>5</sup> Uruguay Cove, Laurie Island, South Shetlands. 60° 45' S 44° 43' W.

Cameron: She went into the dry dock in South Georgia<sup>6</sup> which could barely take her so all the stores were off-loaded and the *Shackleton* hung out both ends of this dry-dock but eventually they got her up high enough to repair her properly. But all the stores were totally soaked and Dave Price who was, I went down with, was going to be the engineer on base who had worked at Listers and these were Lister engines so he and I and others were involved with washing all the gear and seeing what was good and what was bad. They were massive Lister generators all in pieces because you couldn't take them ashore as a whole entity so they had to be assembled once we got to Lockroy so they were all re-assembled as much as we could on the quay side in South Georgia. We washed everything and dried as much as we could.

[Part 1 0:34:33] Lee: I suppose you were all making sure it was all still there were you because bits could have been dumped?

Cameron: I don't think anything of that was dumped at all because it was in the lower hold and in a different position. I don't think it was in where we were digging stuff out of but I can't remember how long we were at South Georgia but quite a long while. Putting the engines together and finding out what bits were totally useless like all of the switchboard gear was all useless with water in the meters but the Listers they didn't have a lot of trouble, they were all dried out and when we finally assembled them there was minor problems but we did have to have a new control board, shipped in before we got them going on base.

[Part 1 0:35:38] Lee: Thank you very much for that. That's really helpful, I've talked to several chaps who were there at the time each account gives you more information.

Cameron: Well recorded in many fids articles.

[Part 1 0:35:51] Lee: It is but it was very useful to hear your view as well. I hadn't realised that you were up to your waist in water.

Cameron: Yes, yes we were quite wet, yes.

[Part 1 36:04] Lee: There was mention of a frogman, do you remember a frogman called George?

Cameron: No.

[Part 1 0:36:09] Lee: No?

Cameron: From the *Protector*?

[Part 1 0:36:13] Lee: I guess so.

Cameron: He might have been a frogman but he was actually he was over the side with a harness on, going in or out of the water whilst he was putting these bolts in, he may have been a frogman in the Navy, I don't know.

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<sup>6</sup> The dry-dock was located at Stromness in South Georgia which was primarily a repair yard for whale catchers, the dry dock was in fact sized to carry a whale catcher but the *Shackleton* was too heavy to lift until the whole of the cargo had been removed.

[Part 1 0:36:30] Lee: Yes, using a Cox gun to put the bolts in.

Cameron: Yes

[Part 1 0:36:35] Lee: Ok, thank you very much. So let's get you to Port Lockroy, obviously you had been told where you were going?

Cameron: Yes, well I knew that from the onset, yes.

[Part 1 0:36:47] Lee: But did you have any idea what it would be like when you got there?

Cameron: Not really, I think I had seen a picture of the base somewhere down the line. I can't recall meeting anybody who had actually been there on the boat going down, I think there were the odd second time Fids on board. I know there were three people who never came back on our particular trip.

[Part 1 0:37:22] Lee: Black, Stride and Statham?

Cameron: Yes<sup>7</sup>.

[Part 1 0:37:26] Lee: I'll come to that a bit later on. So tell me about Port Lockroy, David Price describes it as a gentleman's residence.

Cameron: Yes it was very nice, a very small island that was quite a surprise for me, just above water level I guess, I don't know how high the island was but it wasn't very high<sup>8</sup>. We were very busy when we first arrived obviously everything was off-loaded and we started building foundations. I wasn't involved in any scientific work until we finished the generator shed and installed the engines.

[Part 1 0:38:20] Lee: So you were building a brand new shed were you?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 1 0:38:24] Lee: I gather you were partly responsible for laying the concrete floor?

Cameron: We laid pillars, I think there was eight, two foot square pillars, they all had to be levelled and I was involved in the building. I've actually got a scar on the head, it was an iron framed building with cross struts to support each side while we were building it. I was at the bottom of one of the stanchions, I think Dave Price was up on the top of the stanchion putting in this cross beam. He wanted a bolt or something, somebody threw it up to him and he let go of the cross beam and it came down on my head. I still have the scar.

[Part 1 0:39:18] Lee: Any other damage apart from that?

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<sup>7</sup> Correction – Although the names listed were tragically lost, only Stride was a passenger on the Shackleton on this particular voyage. Two others also died from this voyage, Dennis (Tink) Bell and Alan Sharman, both were lost in separate tragic accidents whilst serving at Admiralty Bay, Base G in 1959.

<sup>8</sup> The site at the base Base hut at Port Lockroy was about 40 ft. above mean sea level.

Cameron: Well people say there was but I still have a nice scar, you can feel it in my skull. It knocked me out for a few minutes and I remember we held it together with a bulldog clip once it had stopped bleeding.

[Part 1 0:39:43] Lee: That bad?

Cameron: Well yes it was just bleeding, they tried to, we tried to hold the skin together. It obviously made some dent in the skull but nothing serious.

[Part1 0:39:57] Lee: Was that a close call?

Cameron: Well it could have been but apart from when I do something stupid on base they say 'It's that blow he had' but hopefully it wasn't.

[Part 1 0:40:12] Lee: I think you were the craftsman that put the floor in, the tongued and grooved floor.

Cameron: Yes, we were all involved in that. I had some knowledge of carpentry because just left over from my father's tools and things. I was interested in boats and woodwork as it were. I still am, these are all model boats that I've made, one in the window there.

[Part 1 0:40:42] Lee: I noticed them when I came in.

Cameron: They are all made from, like you would build a normal boat, only in miniature.

[Part 1 0:40:49] Lee: Did the generator shed go up according to plan?

Cameron: Yes, very much so, I don't think we had, a little problem with the, can't remember. A key on one of the flywheels nearly came off one day, but no, it went well. A month or so later than anticipated, we were well into the year before we actually got it up and running fully.

[Part 1 0:41:27] Lee: How was the soundproofing, the previous year the base had complained about the noise of the generators?

Cameron: Well yes, they were noisy generators. Listers, it was in a separate hut which was panelled walls, we really couldn't hear the engines in the base. Once the generator shed was put up it was a separate building entirely from the base.

[Part 1 0:41:51] Lee: Were you generating power for the whole base or just for the ...?

Cameron: No, for the whole base? Yes.

[Part 1 0:41 57] Lee: There was a problem with flickering lights?

Cameron: Yes, yes we had it for a long while, Dave says that I cured it but I did notice that the vee rings<sup>9</sup> on the drive wheels between the flywheel on the generator and the actual

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<sup>9</sup> Correction – Vee belts not vee rings, the generators were belt driven from the engines.

electric generator were vibrating and I suggested to Dave that we take the tension off a bit and that actually cured it eventually.

[Part 1 0:42:39] Lee: He'd tried several other alternatives?

Cameron: Yes, they tried all sorts of things.

[Part1 0:42:43] Lee: Things like switching, swopping the flywheels over?

Cameron: Yes, we did that, that caused us a problem because we didn't put one of them back quite correctly and we nearly, it started wandering along the shaft. We were afraid it would come off and it would go straight out through the wall.

[Part 1 0:43:12] Lee: Like a Hoola Hoop?

Cameron: We decided to switch the generator off but we'd have to go past this flywheel to get to it. We worked out that the wheel would go that way so we went to the other side to turn it off. I think eventually we had to have a new key made, I think *Protector* made a key to put in.

[Part 1 0:43:34] Lee: Once you had the generator shed and therefore the power that you required, then your attention turned to the scientific work?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 1 0:43:39] Lee: How much did you know about ionospherics when you went to the interview?

Cameron: Well only what it meant and it ah, the radio wave reflected from the various layers in the ionosphere and what they told me on the week's course I did at the radio research station.

[Part 1 0:44:09] Lee: Were you doing the scientific work yourself?

Cameron: Well we collected data and then it had to be interpreted to send the data back to the radio research station at Slough. We were sending them these monthly statistics, things like the shape of the curve and the height and various frequencies, critical frequencies where it penetrates each of the layers. They sent us a big A4 sheet of figures which were correlated horizontally and vertically. They were all sent to the radio, to the ionospheric station in Stanley and then forwarded on to Slough where the data from all round the world went.

[Part 1 0:45:06] Lee: Is it being sent on paper or by Morse?

Cameron: It was sent by Morse as rows and rows of figures such that when they got it at the other end they could cross-check that the totals were right. When they came back they could say 'you're two short on this column.'

[Part 1 0:45:25] Lee: So take me through then what were you doing?

Cameron: Well, once an hour we, the machine would produce a slip of film about four inches wide and depending how many records were on it, four or five foot long. That had to be developed and printed and then we would take measurements on it with overlays to measure the particular frequencies that in the layers were penetrated. Virtually what you are doing is sending a radio wave straight up and listening for the echo back, which would change the frequencies with time, you get higher and higher and it penetrates the different layers. So you finished up with a sort of horizontal line from the first layer then it would curve away because it was going further and further in and then hit the next layer and then you would measure the shape of this curve and it gives a figure which is the frequency it goes through the shape of the curve etc. and that's where you get all the measurements to send all the figures through...

[Part 1 0:47:02] Lee: Were you finding it interesting?

Cameron: Oh yes it was quite time consuming, three of us were doing the interpretation on base but every fifth week you would be on cook, with five of us on base with the diesel mech and the radio operator and three of us on the ionosonde. But during the IGY they had special World Days when records would go off every 15 minutes and sometimes they were running continuously for 10 minute or something like that. Depending on information coming in on sun spot activity and we'd get messages saying 'Tomorrow's a special World Day' or that sort of thing. So sometimes when there were quarter hourly records they all had to be processed and interpreted, it was quite time filling just with three of us, because later on it was two of us doing it.

[Part 1 0:48:13] Lee: Did you get any sense of the bigger global picture or were you just doing your little thing and?

Cameron: There were other people doing it. They were doing it in Port Stanley, they were doing it down at Halley Bay, I think it was some over on the other side, New Zealanders and Australians. There was world-wide coverage of data for that period.

[Part1 0:48:42] Lee: And were you kind of aware of the importance of the International Geophysical Year?

Cameron: Well, yes, I mean I knew about previous sort of International Years and generally picked up some sort of picture.

[Part 1 0:49:06] Lee: So you thought it was an important thing to do?

Cameron: Well yes, certainly, yes it's similar it's like radar, its echoes coming back to be ... Later in life I got to be in echoes going downwards.

[Part 1 0:49:25] Lee: Did it ever go wrong?

Cameron: Oh yes, quite often, the machine broke down sometimes it burst into flames. You know, we had lots of spares but I don't think we were off the air all that much. I mean, we had the best generators possible, apart from Halley Bay within all the bases because we needed 24 hour power whereas other bases just put them on in the evenings for writing and things.

[Part 1 0:50:05] Lee: Were you in touch with the other stations doing this work?

Cameron: Yes, not the other radio stations, only Port Stanley really, because they were sort of our immediate overseers. They nominally were supposed to inform us when the World Days were but we in fact found communications direct, I think it was broadcast on some frequency, I can't remember but we were aware when these days were coming up.

[Part 1 0:50:42] Lee: That would be through the night as well there's a photograph in David Price's book of you working in the wee small hours?

Cameron: It could have been mid-winter of course or it could have been at the end of a day. We often we would work through the night if we were getting behind with developing the film and the interpretation.

[Part 1 0:51:16] Lee: This is all rather new to you wasn't it really?

Cameron: Well it was, the techniques I obviously knew because of the radar sort of thing, I mean it was new in terms of the pure science shall we say, yes.

[Part 1 0:51:33] Lee: Did you sense, how can I put this without putting words into your mouth, did it feel an exciting thing to be doing, at the time?

Cameron: Not unduly, no. It was the job, when you join FIDS you have to have an open mind, otherwise it's ah, I mean I hadn't really realised that I was going to be cooking every fifth week.

[Part 1 0:52:08] Lee: And all the other chores?

Cameron: Yes and all the other chores, collecting snow, emptying the toilets and ...

[Part 1 0:52:19] Lee: There was a story about the toilets wasn't there, there was a modification?

Cameron: Yes, this goes to the year I left the base. We were visited by the stores officer from FIDS and our toilet facilities were fairly crude at Lockroy. It was down at the end of the old generator shed which was un-insulated, shall we say, and it was emptied into a bucket, I think an old Ciment Fondu tin which we had to empty probably fortnightly. In the middle of winter it was fairly frozen contents and it was often put on the stove to free it up before we emptied it. Anyway the year I left the stores officer was there, he commentated on this thing, he said 'I've got something better for you; I've got these sort of three layer paper bags which you can dispose of.' So I said 'Well shall I put them on the stores list?' 'Oh yes' he said 'what shall I put in?' because the stores list is pre-prepared and these were new, so he said "just put 'em down as toilet bags.' The following year when I came back to the base on a summer trip, when I got to the base the base leader called me across and said 'Can I have a word with you?' he said 'What are all these?' and he handed me a bag full of little six inch square rose coloured ladies toilet bags. Obviously something had gone wrong in the stores and they sent down two years supply of these, we said we changed it once a fortnight so I said we wanted fifty to cover the two years. Anyway they finished up with these fifty little ladies toilet bags with roses on [laughter] I don't know what happened to them.

[Part 1 0:55:07] Lee: Oh, um, where was it emptied?

Cameron: Out at sea or off the edge of the island.

[Part 1 0:55:18] Lee: Just anywhere?

Cameron: Yes, I mean normally that's how it was disposed of in those days.

[Part 1 0:55:29] Lee: So there wasn't much awareness of environmental issues?

Cameron: No, no, Health and Safety hadn't been invented I don't think.

[Part 1 0:55:41] Lee: Your base leader, Jim Muir Smith became ill?

Cameron: Yes, just before Christmas<sup>10</sup> he reported to the doctor that he wasn't feeling very well, he had pain, and that was the doctor down at Base F.

[Part1 0:56:02] Lee: Was this Jones?

Cameron: Yes, David Jones and Dave said put him to bed on a slope, so we built a ramp on his bed and then he reported to us when Jim wasn't near the radio to say he suspected an appendix. So he was put to bed and then we had to take the contents of his urine, look at it under a microscope and report what we found to Dave Jones on a daily basis.

[Part 1 0:56:53] Lee: By radio?

Cameron: By radio.

[Part 1 0:56:57] Lee: by Morse or voice?

Cameron: No, that was voice, inter-base was voice.

[Part 1 0:57:01] Lee: So you were helping the doctor to diagnose the case were you?

Cameron: Well, yes I mean he was asking us questions of what we saw under the microscope and so that was a bit of hair or that's a dirty slide, I don't know quite what he was looking for but he obviously knew what to expect. Fairly stressful because it obviously took twenty percent of the workforce out of the picture and it made extra work looking after Jim as it were.

[Part 1 0:57:51] Lee: Did you try to get a doctor to him?

Cameron: Well we did contact through Secfids the base on the Danco Coast, Almirante Brown I think it was called and ask if, Doc Jones couldn't get up because the Peltier Channel was frozen during the winter and you can't travel between that and Lockroy because the water never totally freezes, very strong current. And they said<sup>11</sup> they could get across if it was

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<sup>10</sup> Correction – It was nearer Mid-winter than it was to Christmas, in late June 1958 in fact.

<sup>11</sup> They being the Argentinians at Almirante Brown on the Grahamland mainland at Paradise Harbour, Danco Coast.

necessary and we started making arrangements for them to come across when they could, which involved ... They did set out but got stranded at the Chilean base I think, but we were trying to provide them with ice observations which meant going up over the top of the glacier to look at the state of the ice at the north end of the Neumeyer Channel I think and also across towards Danco Coast. So that was at times a daily task a lot of which Jack Tinbergen did. He would go off skiing up the glacier first thing in the morning to do the ice report for the day. So this is all extra work for what was basically a static base, we had no dog sledges or anything it was all man hauled and ski, fortunately the trip to the glacier up to see the north end of the Neumeyer was reasonably straightforward, there wasn't any great crevasses or anything. The trip across the gap to look across to the Danco Coast was, you had to do a two day you had to camp out overnight.

[Part 1 1:00:05] Lee: How in the end did the Argentinians make it?

Cameron: They stayed at the Chilean base for a while and then they eventually came over one day and fortunately we told them the ice was reasonable. It would blow into Lockroy harbour it was always coming down the Neumeyer and if the wind changed it would blow into the bay so in fact they had to, we had radio contact with them and they landed away from our island, we managed to pull their boat out and get them back to base. Went back the following morning expecting the boat to have gone but it was in fact still there and we eventually got them and their boat back to base. They had a supply of penicillin and stuff we'd run out of. I mean prior to that we had all sorts of things about with the doctor, last resort where we would perhaps have to attempt to take his appendix out, so we discussed that we would try on the Peso first to find out where all the bits were. There were all sorts of ideas.

[Part 1 1:01:43] Lee: Did the Argentinian doctor confirm the diagnosis?

Cameron: Yes and Jim improved.

[Part 1 1:01:49] Lee: With the drugs?

Cameron: Yes we think so, they went back when the boats started coming south but then Jim's condition would change depending upon the news. The *Shackleton* got held up and he seemed to turn for the worse. Then the *Protector* sent out a helicopter but didn't have enough range to get to us, eventually a helicopter got to us then they took him out and I haven't seen or heard anything about him since except that he had his appendix out in Port Stanley as I understand and there was no problem.

[Part 1 1:02:39] Lee: And then you were left with four men on base?

Cameron: Yes, for a while, yes.

[Part 1 1:02:48] Lee: Did anybody thank the Argentinians ?

Cameron: Yes, oh yes and for the supplies they brought with them. They were nice guys, I'm sure they were thanked by Secfids and everybody.

[Part 1 1:02:59] Lee: You had to build a commode for Jim didn't you?

Cameron: Yes, we had to build a commode and this ramp for his bed so he was laying at an angle and of course we ...

[Part 1 1:03:11] Lee: Was that to ease the pain?

Cameron: No, just so he didn't have to go down to the far end of the generator shed to the loo, because it was quite a long trek down there, through the old generator shed.

[Part 1 1:03:29] Lee: So were you able to handle the extra responsibility and the extra work, not only nursing him but also doing his duties?

Cameron: Oh yes, Jack and myself just got through the work, we just did more time I guess some of our hobbies didn't get done, our photography, the odd bit of skiing.

[Part1 1:04] Lee: Were you exhausted?

Cameron: Not unduly I don't think. No I don't recall being, tired at times but I don't ... it had to be done.

[Part 1 1:04:18] Lee: Let's pause and I'll change discs.

## **End of Part 1**

### **Alan Cameron Part 2**

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Alan Cameron interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013.

Alan Cameron Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:14] Lee: Jim's appendix was not the only medical problem you were faced with; there was a dental issue as well?

Cameron: Yes, sometime after Christmas<sup>12</sup> Jack complained of toothache and we had a sked with Doc Jones down at the base, down at the Argentine Islands. He didn't sleep the following night and so the doc said that we would have to take it out. We did have tooth extraction instruments on base and a limited amount of, what we would call pain-killers; I can't remember what it was. Anyway he decided he would have it out, the doc said it was an abscess underneath one of the pre molars so it was decided that we would do it in the radio room so the doctor could hear all that was going on and then the ...

[Part 2 0:01:46] Lee: Was the doctor an expert dentist?

Cameron: No, I think he'd, he had never taken a tooth out or been present when one was taken out but I think they had told him something about it.

[Part 2 0:02:00] Lee: A case of the blind leading the blind was it?

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<sup>12</sup> Correction: should read 'sometime after mid-winter,' August 5<sup>th</sup> according to the base diary.

Cameron: Yes, anyway we drew straws to see who would do the extraction and I got the short straw. So, Mike Crockford who was quite young compared with the rest of us, he was only just out of radio school and was the radio operator and couldn't stand the sight of blood so we decided he would do the talking on the radio because there was an open link to Base F and the doctor told him what to do so I got the um, Jack [interruption by mobile 'phone] sorry about that.

[Part 2 03:05] Lee: That's ok just pick up from where we left off.

Cameron: Oh yes, so Jack sat in the chair in the radio shack and Dave held him in the chair and I put the extraction tool around his tooth as instructed and started, oh sorry, first of all we had given him some whisky and put some Pethadine tablets around his tooth to numb it and I started pulling and it's terrible when you're putting somebody you know very well in pain. And I pulled away for about fifteen minutes and wasn't getting anywhere and I said to the doc 'I think Jack is going to pass out shortly if I don't, you know, carried on like this' and Jones said 'That's all right you can pull as much as you like then' anyway the secret was not to pull out of the mouth but pull into the mouth, anyway I got this tooth out and we had a tin bowl and because we knew all the bases were listening to the conversation going on I dropped this tooth into this bowl and it made a big clang and ...

[Part 2 0:04:47] Lee: Sound effects?

Cameron: Sound effect and it came out alright I said to the doctor 'that's fine, it looks clean and complete with this root.' and he said 'Root?' I said 'Yes it's got a long root on it. He said 'I think it should have two.' Anyway it, apparently I may have pulled out the wrong tooth but the abscess was underneath both and it drained the tooth. After that, we did have some penicillin on base so the doctor asked us to give Jack an injection of penicillin and if it bled we may have to stitch it but it didn't bleed unduly but it did involve a comical incident somewhat a day later because when we injected him with penicillin I'd never injected anybody before and I said to the doc 'Where do you want to inject him and how?' so he said 'Well you stand to attention and where your thumb is you can inject him there in the thigh he said, you can either pinch it and put it in or give him a slap so it kills the pain of the needle going in.' they were quite big needles in those days and so I duly slapped Jack and injected him but the funny thing was the following morning you could see the shape of my hand on his thigh, it was all bruised.

[Part 2 0:06:53] Lee: This is Jaap isn't it J,a,a,p?

Cameron: That's his German<sup>13</sup> name he was always known as Jack, J,a,a,p yes.

[Part 2 0:07:00] Lee: And was it fully recovered?

Cameron: Yes, yes he was fine a day later, no problems at all.

[Part 2 0:07:06] Lee: That was in year 1?

Cameron: That was in year 1 while Jim was still in bed.

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<sup>13</sup> Correction – Jaap was his Dutch name, not German.

[Part 2 0:07:14] Lee: So a double emergency?

Cameron: Well yes, Jim was in bed, Dave was holding Jack down, I was pulling the tooth and Mike Crockford was relaying what was happening without actually looking. [Laughter]

[Part 2 0:07:34] Lee: Can we talk about wildlife perhaps even domestic life? You mentioned this cat, where did he come from?

Cameron: It was given to me by the Colonial Secretary's wife in Port Stanley after the, we went back to Port Stanley after the problem with the ice-berg and I don't know whether they had asked for one on the base, anyway I took it back down to the base with me and it was called Dizzy, who was a girlfriend I had prior to leaving. So that provided a bit of entertainment.

[Part 2 0:08:30] Lee: Why did you have a cat, was it pure company?

Cameron: Well most of the bases had dogs and things; I think they'd asked for a cat or for some reason they thought it would be company as it were. She was quite interesting.

[Part 2 0:08:50] Lee: How did she cope with all the snow?

Cameron: Well by stopping quite often and shaking her paws, chasing sheathbills, didn't go out an awful lot really, not as much as Peso the dog.

[Part 2 0:09:10] Lee: And did you have cat food on base?

Cameron: No she used to have whatever we ate, there was no special meals or anything, neither of them had.

[Part 2 0: 09:19] Lee: and when the 'Dear John' letter arrived from Dizzy the cat was re-named was it?

Cameron: No the cat was still, remained Dizzy until after I left and she was re-named sometime later when she went back to the Falklands.

[Part 2 0:09:35] Lee: Back to Bridget?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 2 0:09:36] Lee: And she shared quarters with this dog, this mongrel dog, just the one?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 2 0:09:41] Lee: Where did that come from?

Cameron: That came down a couple of years before I think, off the *Oluf Sven* I think, they picked it up and left it on base. She was picked up in Montevideo hence the name Peso which

was the currency, quite a happy dog and I think she eventually went to another base<sup>14</sup>, I never did see her again once I'd left base.

[Part 2 0:10:18] Lee: Was there any husky in her?

Cameron: No, no she was complete South American mongrel, black and white.<sup>15</sup>

[Part 2 0:10:29] Lee: Again, good company or ...?

Cameron: Yes, a distraction, used to enjoy running around in the snow but basically indoor.

[Part 2 0:10:45] Lee: You were experimenting with a sport called skiing for the first time while you were down there, I believe?

Cameron: Yes, I hadn't skied before, no.

[Part 2 0:10:50] Lee: How did you get on?

Cameron: Not awfully well, alright just using them as means of transport but not ah getting around to any ski jumping or, bit of downhill, falling, it wasn't my scene really.

[Part 2 0: 11:09] Lee: But boating was your scene wasn't it?

Cameron: Yes, yes, I'd done a lot of boating.

[Part 2 0:11:14] Lee: What did you have, on base?

Cameron: We had two dinghies on base, one was a Norwegian scow<sup>16</sup> and the other was, I think, a twelve foot dinghy with an outboard but the one we called a scow was quite light you could drag it up and drag it across the ice. We used to go out to Damoy Point I think it was where there was a rookery and do some egg collecting. But if you were out there and ice blew back into the bay then it was best to be in this light one because you could pull it up over the floes and get back in again whereas the twelve foot dinghy was a real clinker built job with outboards and was really too heavy for two men to haul over ice floes.

[Part 2 0:12:13] Lee: Was there any scary moments with the boats?

Cameron: I don't think we had many.

[Part 2 0:12:24] Lee: So the answer is yes, you did have scary moments?

Cameron: Well we did have, I can't remember being further from base when we didn't manage to get back ok, we didn't travel too far unless it was well into the summer when there was no ice around.

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<sup>14</sup> Peso was transferred to Adelaide Island Base T in the care of Dave Hounsell, DEM, when Port Lockroy finally closed in 1962. She ended her days at T when she was eventually put down with all the other dogs.

<sup>15</sup> Correction: Peso was liver and white not black and white and her lineage contained a fair proportion of Border Collie, an attractive animal with a happy disposition. DMP.

<sup>16</sup> Correction: The smaller of the two dinghies was a light Norwegian pram, not a scow.

[Part 2 0:12:48] Lee: There was, Dave Price talked about being fearful of whales in the area?

Cameron: Well yes. We did see the occasional whale but I don't think as I recall any of them came too close into the base because there's shallow water. I can't recall anyway.

[Part 2 0:13:09] Lee: And you learnt to bake bread?

Cameron: Well yes, I learnt to cook, stop. Yes we used to enjoy baking bread until somebody opened the door when it was rising.

[Part 2 0:13:26] Lee: When was the incident with the three guys from Horseshoe was that first or second year?

Cameron: Must have been the second year I think. We only heard through the radio that they were missing, yes. But obviously Dave and Mike and I took more interest because it was somebody that came down on the boat with us.

[Part 2 0:13:59] Lee: You knew all three did you?

Cameron: No, we knew one of that lot. The other person who never came back got lost at Signy. I think two were down at on the first incident and I think one fell in a crevasse in Signy<sup>17</sup>.

[Part 2 0:14:18] Lee: I maybe have got the wrong incident here, I'm thinking of the three men at Horseshoe.

Cameron: I think one of them was Stride was it?

[Part 2 0:14:27] Lee: Yes.

Cameron: Yes, he was on the boat, and the other, the second one, was possibly on the boat we came down on.

[Part 2 0:14:33] Lee: What was the reaction of your base to the news; what did you do?

Cameron: Well, we just took it in I'm afraid, we couldn't offer any help or anything. Because we were a static base, you know, we weren't explorers like the other bases with dog sledges and travelling, we were stuck at home, as it were.

[Pat 2 0:15.05] Lee: When the news, well, when it became apparent that they weren't going to be found again, did that affect the mood on the base at all?

Cameron: I don't recall it particularly, no. I mean we were so sorrowful it happened but we accepted that that was the risk we took when we, you know accidents weren't unknown in

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<sup>17</sup> Correction: Of the three men lost at Horseshoe we only personally knew Geoff Stride. The other two incidents Alan refers to took place at Admiralty Bay, Base G, not Signy Base H. The two at Base G were Dennis (Tink) Bell who fell down a crevasse whilst sledging and the second, Alan Sharman, who fell down a cliff whilst walking. All three of the above came South with us on the *Shackleton* and were well known to Cameron, Price and Crockford. DMP.

Antarctic travel in those days. What could you do? You couldn't radio for a helicopter or call out the coast guard or, you just had to accept it I'm afraid.

[Part 2 0:15:46] Lee: You were down for two years on this particular base, Port Lockroy and did you know you were going to be Base Leader for the second year or was that something that came as a surprise?

Cameron: It came as a surprise, I never even thought about it. I was made Base Leader I think just before Jim was flown out but that was I think just a message from Secfids saying 'You're Base Leader and you've got one hundred pounds a year rise.'

[Part 2 0:16:18] Lee: For being the arm band?

Cameron: Yes for being Base Leader, Harbour Master, Justice of the Peace etc. etc.

[Part 2 0:16:27] Lee: Did you, I appreciate it was thrust upon you at short notice but did you develop a particular approach to being a Base Leader, did you lead from the front or did you always have meetings and committees or ...?

Cameron: Oh no, it was very much a democracy, yes. I just did the bits I was supposed to do like look after the envelopes and posting for people who wanted letters with Port Lockroy stamps on them, but they were quite few compared with what it does nowadays.

[Part 2 0:17:02] Lee: I was going to ask you about that, was there a pillar box in those days?

Cameron: No, no, we just collected them in a bag until the boat came in; they were then posted in Stanley I suppose.

[Part 2 0:17:15] Lee: There was a change of personnel; a couple of new guys came down.

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 2 0:17:20] Lee: Whilst the first year had almost been entirely harmonious there was some less harmonious ...?

Cameron: Well, yes.

[Part 2 0:17:26] Lee: What's your memory?

Cameron: There were two guys came in to join Mike, Dave and myself. One was a semi-country lad and was, had long hair which wasn't quite the fashion in those days and a ponytail. The other one was a more educated guy who'd worked in London, had a German girlfriend and was very tidy and those two were direct opposites, whereas the previous year we had all been much of a similar sort of backgrounds I guess. One of the main problems was the gentleman with German girlfriends, newsletters of which we used to have had two hundred words, messages Morsed down from Port Stanley. They used to read the letters and transmitted it in Morse to the radio operator and normally on Morse, if it's in the language you know you only need two words and you know probably what the next two words are going to be, when it's in a foreign language you had to take it a one letter at a time which means that it takes a lot, lot longer to put back into English and the letters that the guy got

from his girlfriend didn't make sense because the person who's taking the Morse down doesn't know any German. So that cause quite a bit of friction, he had to spend probably ten times as much time over that one letter whilst anyone else's letter, monthly mail, as it were. Eventually this gentleman and Mike stopped talking to each other which is rather difficult on a base with five people when you're sitting round the table 'would you ask so and so to pass the sugar.'

[Part 2 0:20:20] Lee: Were the letters back going in German as well?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 2 0:20:25] Lee: Was there anything you as base leader could do or try to do?

Cameron: Not really, they didn't want to talk and I wasn't going to make them talk, they were just different personalities and I think, personally I would have thought they might have picked this one up before they got there but maybe there wasn't any alternative. A replacement if we could find one in Stanley who is not suitable and he's a gash hand and then there's no problem but if it's a specialised thing then, he didn't stay the second year he went round to Halley Bay.

[Part 2 0:21:20] Lee: So was he kind of sent to Coventry by the rest of the base, or were they both?

Cameron: Not unduly, I talked to him normally but I guess Dave and Mike and I were a clique because of all we'd been through, both coming down on the boat and all the problems we'd had in the first year. I guess we were cliquey together, so it may have been part of our...

[Part 2 0:21:49] Lee: Part of the problem?

Cameron: We certainly weren't one happy family, let's put it that way.

[Part 2 0:21:57] Lee: What about other issues you felt you had to resolve as base leader that year?

Cameron: Not unduly I don't think, no. I mean George wanted to put a wire rope across to the rookery, so he could get across there during the winter or when we went between the period when the ice wasn't there and we couldn't use the boats but I persuaded him that Secfids wouldn't allow the sort of equipment that was required to make an aerial sort of traverse across.

[Part 2 0:22:42] Lee: Like a boatswains chair you mean?

Cameron: Well yes, with a slope on it and pulling yourself back and forth across I guess it was a couple of hundred yards, I can't remember how wide it was across to the rookery.

[Part 2 0:22:59] Lee: Across the water?

Cameron: mmm.

[Part 2 0:23:00] Lee: Yes.

Cameron: But I didn't think that would be a safe ...

[Part 2 0:23:04] Lee: So you were employing some Health and Safety principals?

Cameron: Well, yes I guess, what shall we say, taking a certain risk and being damn stupid.

[Part 2 0:23:21] Lee: Apart from the social side of things the second year at Port Lockroy sounds a bit dull doesn't it?

Cameron: Well it was in comparison with the year before, you know; with all that had happened, was fairly routine. The IGY was running down so we didn't have as many, so much interpretation to do, we did a lot more skiing and radio hamming and our own personal pastimes, you know.

[Part 2 0:23:59] Lee: Tell me about the radio hamming, how far did you get?

Cameron: Well we had good, probably the best radio contacts than anybody else down there. Port Lockroy is an exceptionally good receiving place, we actually had tuned into British Television sound, we could hear the sound and that was mainly because it was during the IGY was a high solar activity and the higher frequencies didn't escape as much, they got trapped within the ionospheric layers and got round to us.

[Part 2 0:24:47] Lee: So you could fine tune for the six o' clock news could you?

Cameron: Yes we could tune for listening to the sound, you know, we'd actually knew it was on the right frequency. Lockroy was also used at one time during the Trans Antarctic the year before to relay messages from Fuchs back to base when they had radio communications problems.

[Part 2 0:25:15] Lee: So could you hear the Archers<sup>18</sup> and so on?

Cameron: Oh yes Home Service radio, Voice of America, Russian radio. While we were there, there was something happened in the Lebanon, I think the Americans went into the Lebanon to do something and you'd hear Voice of America saying 'They've gone in to help' and Radio Moscow would say they'd invaded. You know the same event from two different sources. We had excellent radio communications.

[Part 2 0:25:53] Lee: Did you maintain your interest in world events or because you were so far south things did not seem quite so important?

Cameron: They didn't seem quite so important, I mean we had to, we had good amateur radio and Mike Crockford had a contact in South Wales and we had regular talking skeds with him and he actually relayed messages from our parents and friends.

[Part 2 0:26:27] Lee: From your mum?

Cameron: Yes, particularly for Mike, Mike had good contacts with this guy in South Wales.

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<sup>18</sup> The Archers, a very popular BBC radio programme in the UK during the 1950's.

[Part 2 0:26:33] Lee: So he would ring your mum up would he, the guy in South Wales?

Cameron: Yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:26:40] Lee: And told her what you'd said down ...?

Cameron: Yes and pass a message back. I think Mike actually talked to his parents on the radio. I can't remember it was all strictly non, not supposed to do it on amateur radio. But we did a lot of amateur radio because you'd put out your call sign and somebody, you know twenty people would answer you particularly in America if they were on some form of competition and you'd get them, you know 'the first one down to the other end of the band we'll talk to.' The rest, I can't talk to everybody at once sort of thing.

[Part 2 0:27:20] Lee: Were there any aeroplanes around in your final year?

Cameron: Yes I think the *Kista Dan* brought down aeroplanes for Deception. The hanger was built at Deception that year I believe or the middle year I can't recall. Certainly when I left on the *Shackleton* we went down to the Argentine Islands and the, I can't remember, the *Sven* ... something was there with an aircraft on board and the three of us were down there with the *Biscoe* and Sir Vivian Fuchs was on board too.<sup>19</sup>

[Part 2 0:28:10] Lee: Was a plane ever landed at Port Lockroy?

Cameron: We had helicopters land, obviously to take Jim away, and when the Navy came in.

[Part 2 0:28:20] Lee: Was the incident was when two ships got too close to each other and the plane's wing was ripped off?

Cameron: That's right. That was down in the Argentine Islands if I recall.

[Part 2 0:28:28] Lee: Did you see that happen?

Cameron: I think I was aboard the *Shackleton* and it was between the *Biscoe* and whatever she was, *Kista Dan* was it? *Kista Dan* yes.

[Part 2 0:28:40] Lee: What do you remember?

Cameron: Just that it was a windy night and we noticed the following day that one of the wings wasn't sticking out from the *Kista Dan*<sup>20</sup>. But I didn't see it all or anything like that.

[Part 2 0:28:59] Lee: The two ships got too close together?

Cameron: I believe so.

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<sup>19</sup> Correction: There were only two ships at the Argentine Islands at that time in early 1960, the *Kista Dan* and the *John Biscoe*. It was on this occasion that an accident in a storm caused the two ships to collide and resulted in the loss of the wing of the DH Beaver which plane was being carried as deck cargo by the *Kista Dan*.

<sup>20</sup> For a full description of this accident see *Of Ice and Men* by Sir Vivian Fuchs pp.204, 205. This transcriber was present at the time and witnessed the accident. Sir Vivian Fuchs describes the events accurately. DMP.

[Part 2 0:29:04] Lee: On their moorings?

Cameron: Yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:29:06] Lee: So did you meet Fuchs on this journey out?

Cameron: You're getting me back into a time I think was the first trip I did south after.

[Part 2 0:29:22] Lee: Ok.

Cameron: I met Fuchs, yes, he was on board.

[Part 2 0:29:27] Lee: There were five men that went missing, went lost in your time down in the Antarctic ...?

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 2 0:29:33] Lee: ...altogether, which was the worst period I think for ...

Cameron: It was a bad period yes. Three of them went down on the *Shackleton* so I didn't know the other two. I think they were second year people as it were. Because it all happened in the first year if I recall.

[Part 2 0:29:52] Lee: So when you came to be relieved at Port Lockroy at the end of your second year. What was your overriding feeling, were you glad to get out or sorry to be leaving?

Cameron: Well to a certain extent, we knew that Lockroy was going to shut down and it was going to be moved to the Argentine Islands and I toyed with the thought of going back because ...

[Part 2 0:30:25] Lee: Back south again?

Cameron: Yes, to the Argentine [Islands] as base leader but I met this Doctor Griffiths on the *Shackleton* who was having trouble with a prototype magnetometer he had brought down with him and he asked me if I could give him a hand as I was an electronic engineer. An electrical engineer, I don't think it was electronic, we had valves. Anyway he borrowed this prototype magnetometer from Cambridge University and it was quite old fashioned, it had a pre-amplifier with three valves in it which he towed way back on the end of a long cable and he kept losing strands on this multi-core cable. So I helped him, instead of it having valves it used to have heater wires so we were losing wires down this...[word not clear] so I installed a battery for the heaters, for this valve instead of this set of valves in the pre-amp so we could get some results. I got involved with helping him.

[Part 2 0:31:56] Lee: This is on the way out as well?

Cameron: This was after I got on the boat; it had some work to do further south. And we just towed this thing wherever the boat went. It wasn't a particularly scientific, a programme as such, he was just collecting information randomly.

[Part 2 0:32:17] Lee: What information was he collecting, what was the thing ...?

Cameron: Magnetic field strengths.

[Part 2 0:32:22] Lee: And gravity?

Cameron: And he had a gravimeter with him, yes.

[Part 2 0:32:27] Lee: Was this early work, pioneering stuff?

Cameron: Yes it was, the magnetometers, the one he had was a prototype one which had been built at Cambridge. There weren't being made industrially shall we say, not industrially but scientifically. But they were, by scientists in universities.

[Part 2 0:32:50] Lee: So this captured your imagination did it?

Cameron: Well it did because after I got back, Doctor Griffiths got a grant from NERC<sup>21</sup> to continue his work and set up a geophysical group.

[Part 2 0:33:06] Lee: Do you remember his first name, D?

Cameron: Yes, Douglas, no, he was always known as Griff<sup>22</sup>.

[Part 2 0:33:19] Lee: Oh was he, ok yes. You were invited to go south with him again?

Cameron: Well he offered me a job at Birmingham University in the Geophysics Department.

[Part 2 0:33:30] Lee: Ok tell me more.

Cameron: He'd got a grant from NERC to start a Geophysical, Antarctic Geophysical Marine Group so he employed a geophysicist Peter Kennett and myself and we were to take this magnetometer and gravimeter back south and take whatever readings we could wherever the boat went during the summer. Which we did the first year and then the next year he got a bigger grant and borrowed some seismic equipment from BP and persuaded the Navy to let off explosives for him from HMS *Protector* so as we could do some seismic work. So the second year south, we went south with gravimeter, magnetometer and some seismic equipment, to collect seismic data. And we would do this whenever the ship went from one base to another we would persuade the captain to divert course so we could get cross sections across the Scotia Arc with the magnetometer because that's the device that they used for getting oceans spreading because the signals of magnitude on the opposite side of the earth's drift. So we started doing, whenever the boat went say from Stanley to Georgia we would persuade the captain to do it in squares back and forth across the ridge to collect data.

[Part 2 0:35:37] Lee: So you were dependent upon the captain's co-operation were you?

Cameron: Yes, yes.

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<sup>21</sup> NERC – Natural Environment Research Council. NERC is the UK's largest funder of independent environmental science, training and innovation, delivered through universities and research centres.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Donald H Griffiths ('Griff').

[Part 2 0:35:43] Lee: You couldn't command him to do it?

Cameron: No, no the captain was Frost ...

[Part 2 0:35:54] Lee: Frosty Turnbull?

Cameron: Frosty Turnbull, yes, known as Frosty. He was always in charge but we found a method of, when we wanted to do something getting the idea to him so he thought it was his by talking to the cook. He would come up to us, we told the cook we wanted to do something and then sometime later he would come and say 'Would it be a good idea to do this?' we would say 'Yes, excellent idea.' But navigation in those days was purely done on speed from the ship's log and heading on the ship's course so it did entail, when you had multiple changes of course doing that sort of course you don't always find the place you want heading to. On one crossing Falklands to Georgia we nearly missed South Georgia because the only other navigation was stars in the first few years. Of course that was totally dependent upon having a clear sky. So we started progressing, we got equipment improved, satellite navigation we took the first satellite navigator down south, on which you could only get readings twice a day on. It was a machine you had to hand load the programme, digit by digit, the results would sometimes, if you put the programme in one digit wrong somewhere, and that was just loading the programme, took you half an hour sort of thing, you'd finish up in Moscow, you know.

[Part 2 0:37:50] Lee: That was because ..., also there were very few satellites around?

Cameron: There were, they were only in position perhaps three times a day, there was only a dozen up or something like that. You had to get at least three in your hemisphere at the same time to get a reading.

[Part 2 0:38:10] Lee: There's a sense of excitement in your voice about all this as though you were really ...

Cameron: It is, because it was an era where ... I mean one of the first things I did at Birmingham was to get rid of this valve pre-amp in the magnetometer we had and put in a transistor on because transistors had just come out, you know, and so we were trying to increase the science and the science was increasing as we went along.

[Part 2 0:38:50] Lee: There's a couple of incidents you ... on the South Shetland Islands you were visiting Leskov Island<sup>23</sup> I think, was yours a first landing?

Cameron: Well one of the things we were doing, this was about the second or third trip south, we went to the South Sandwich Islands. We took a gravimeter wherever we went and would take readings, every base any time we saw any outcrop of rock, Pete Kennett and I would get in a ship's boat and go and land and set up the gravimeter and take a reading. We went to the South Sandwich Islands and we landed on quite a few of them. This one particular one is sheer sided all the way round and we found a ledge big enough just to stand the gravimeter on to take a reading, we looked into it and as far as we knew nobody had ever landed on this

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<sup>23</sup> Correction: Leskov Island is part of the South Sandwich Islands group. Its positional co-ordinates are 56°41' S, 28°10' W. And forms part of the Scotia Arc. it is not in the South Shetland group.

particular South Sandwich Island before, except possibly a helicopter on the top because there was no way to get up it. So any rock we saw we would get the boat out and just get as many readings spread around as you could.

[Part 2 0:40:17] Lee: So back in Birmingham what were you doing with the information, were you producing maps?

Cameron: Well, they were producing maps and getting data that matched up with the, to show that the Scotia Arc was in fact part of the great spreading because we matched up results which were similar to the stuff found in the Atlantic and the Pacific, over mid Atlantic ridges. That's all information enhancing the continental drift theories.

[Part 2 0:40:54] Lee: This was quite topical at the time weren't they?

Cameron: Yes, I mean that was more for the geologists than the geophysicist to do. I was involved in maintaining and looking after and trying to improve the equipment we were using all the time.

[Part 2 0:41:11] Lee: Did it always go smoothly or were there bad days?

Cameron: Oh no there were bad days, some areas you couldn't take magnetic readings you can't take magnetic readings with a particular magnetometer we had. First of all in the tropical areas because it depends on the magnetic field being different from the ... You have a coil and if this magnetic field is in line with the coil you don't get a reading. What happens you magnetise the coil and all the electrons line up in that line and then when you take that magnetic field away they progress back to the natural state and that progresses and gives you a frequency which is proportional to the strength of the magnetic field. So it didn't work going through the tropics until they developed one with two bottles in at right angles and transistors progressed, computers improved.

[Part 2 0:42:24] Lee: So in the eight years you were doing that kind of work you saw technological improvements?

Cameron: Oh massive strides, yes. The third, second year south we as I say we took seismic gear south with the help of the *Protector* which was begged, borrowed equipment from the universities and oil companies. And then we got more and more, they started making proper magnetometers for marine work.

[Part 2 0:42:59] Lee: There was a tragedy at one point, on the *Protector* I believe?

Cameron: Yes, the second year I went south we took this gear we begged, borrowed and stole, we didn't steal it, from the universities and oil companies and we were the listening vessel and *Protector* was setting off explosives for us. The method they used was to trail out a loop of cable, fit an explosive on the end they had on board, throw it overboard and before the cable got taught they would explode it and we would listen to the results. She would move further and further away from us putting up bigger and bigger explosives until in the end she would roll depth charges over the side. On the third year I went down the *Protector* or the Navy said they could speed up this operation because they were limited in the first year because they had to pull the cable back in again and put a charge on and re-deploy it. They

decided they could use two cables, they'd have one, while they were pulling one in they would let the other one over the side ...

[Part 2 0:44:39] Lee: With the explosive on the end?

Cameron: With the explosive on so that meant they could put over twice as many charges or twice as often as it were as they were steaming. Unfortunately the first one they tried which was fortunately only a small, I think one pound charge. They threw the cable over the side for the first shot of the run and said 'Right, we're going to fire it' I was watching the listening device in the little cabin we had on the *Shackleton* and I said 'Right, got it' and the answer came 'There's been an explosion on the *Protector*' I said 'no there wasn't it was an explosion in the water.' It turns out that when they fired the one in the water they were still attached to the one on the deck which was having an explosive put on the end, and it killed two men and blew a hole in the deck. That was the end of the *Protector* it went and off loaded the explosives at Deception. So we never saw her again that year but we did in fact load the explosives on to the *Shackleton* and put the recording equipment on the *Shackleton* onto an island and recorded while the *Shackleton* went off and set explosives off.

[Part 2 0:46:32] Lee: That was just bad luck was it?

Cameron: Bad luck, yes. I think the officer who set it off got into trouble, let's put it that way, but it was very unfortunate.

[Part 2 0:46:47] Lee: But otherwise it sounds like it was a very successful project?

Cameron: It was and carried on for many years after I left.

[Part 2 0:46:56] Lee: Why did you stop doing it?

Cameron: Well I got married had two young children and the people who were in the department at Birmingham were starting to go because the oil business had just started up in the North Sea. I got a phone call one day from one of the guys who'd done his MSc at Birmingham saying this company he was working for, an American company EG&G were looking for a Chief Engineer and would I be interested. I said well that depends and he said well, he quoted a figure which was about two and a half times what I was earning as a technician at Birmingham. So with two young children I decided I'd move.

[Part 2 0:47:57] Lee: To Aberdeen?

Cameron: No, no to Woking in fact.

[Part 2 0:47:59] Lee: Woking?

Cameron: Yes, they took me, EG&G had an office on the High Street in Woking, above a butcher's shop.

[Part 2 0:48:09] Lee: Why were they offering so much more?

Cameron: Because they were an American company who'd come and set up a small unit here and they'd started off with Americans and of course that's if they can get, the whole of the oil

industry at that time was virtually American. The English weren't doing all the exploration particularly, not on the exploring side, the oil companies were but they were using American techniques and American companies. When it started in the North Sea they Anglicised it shall we say and oil ... the sort of money these companies were getting, you know, a technician at a university was getting peanuts, really. I mean I more than trebled my salary when I left the university.

[Part 2 0:49:23] Lee: But were you also more than trebling your stress and your, the demands upon you?

Cameron: Not unduly, it involved a lot more travel whereas I was only going travelling once a year as it were at Birmingham albeit for a month. Well, started off being three to four months until we started flying down towards the end at Birmingham, and taking over the ship to do totally scientific geophysical work, a month or something like that. Greed or ...

[Part 2 0:50:09] Lee: No, no, no. I just wondering whether you, because it was a different type of work and again it was pioneering work whether you ...?

Cameron: It wasn't different to what I'd been doing, marine exploration.

[Part 2 0:50:25] Lee: Ok, the stakes were high were they because there was a commercial end product?

Cameron: Well, yes, I mean it was using all the techniques that I'd been using and they, the word Manager Physical Engineers in England at that time.

[Part 2 0:50:48] Lee: You'd been head hunted?

Cameron: Yes, if you like, yes. I wouldn't say that, they offered me a job as Chief Engineer.

[Part 2 0:50:57] Lee: And then you came, you stayed it that kind of work for quite some time because you worked for BP?

Cameron: Well yes, the American company decided to retire from the business and most of the people who were with them transferred to BP research station at Sunbury on Thames. Well, I at the time the Americans got out of it I was in Singapore for them and business there dropped off rapidly in exploration because both the Malaysian government and the Indonesian government changed their tax regime and the oil companies maintained what they developed but they weren't prepared to spend the money on exploration. So that work, when we went out there, we were there a year just over a year and a half there were twenty survey blokes working out of Singapore, when I left I think it was one, so the work had gone.

[Part 2 0:52:05] Lee: So redundancy came?

Cameron: Yes, well the people who were working in EG&G who were left in England moved to BP and they asked me to join them there as well. Then BP decided that they weren't going to continue doing their own exploration so they made us redundant and five of us set up a company called Hydro Search which was doing the same sort of thing, but acting as representatives to the oil company. So I would go off on a boat doing survey using all the techniques I'd been using all my life and making sure I didn't get up to the tricks I used to get

up to when I was not a consultant. Most of those sorts of representatives were geophysicists I was probably one of the few who came up through the technical.

[Part 2 0:53:19] Lee: So in a way those Antarctic years or Southern Ocean years kind of shaped the rest of your career?

Cameron: Well yes, I mean you could say it started with radar because it's seismics and radar and ionospherics are almost the same, make a noise and listen to the answer. Listen to the echo.

[Part 2 0:53:46] Lee: That's what we've been doing for the last couple of hours.

Cameron: Yes.

[Part 2 0:53:49] Lee: So going back over this career of yours how does the Antarctic years at Port Lockroy rate, were they the highlight of your career or was it a stepping stone?

Cameron: Well I mean it's obviously something which very few people have done so it has to be a highlight. I kept in touch for various reasons with various people, people who have been writing biography and wanting my input, Alan Carroll, Dave Price has written obituaries for Jack. I still get the monthly and annual reports and all that sort of thing, collected a few more Antarctic books. It's been there in the background all the time.

[Part 2 0:54:52] Lee: Have you been back since?

Cameron: No I haven't, I had a chance, my wife had a chance to go back down on a tourist boat but I decided that if I went and I know they only go ashore for a couple of hours and I just couldn't face having to walk up a restricted path to the base. For that short a time I prefer to remember it as it was. But my wife has been in and brought photos back, she now does lectures for the W.I on her trip south using some of my old photographs and my experiences to highlight the changes over the years. We donate what she makes to the Heritage Trust. So yes, it's been there all my life.

[Part 2 0:55:56] Lee: An important part?

Cameron: Yes I think so, yes. Perhaps more so in the last few years; when I've had more time to answer more questions.

[Part 2 0:56:15] Lee: Well I'm very grateful for your answers.

Cameron: You're welcome.

[Part 2 0:56:16] Lee: thank you very much indeed.

**ENDS**

## Possible Extracts.

- Early education at beginning of WW2. [Part1 0:02:58]
- National Service and the beginning of a career. [Part1 0:06:05]
- Working with Ericsson's. [Part1 0:10:36]
- Interest in Antarctica, interview with FIDS. [Part1 0:13:34]
- Sailing south on the *Shackleton*. [Part1 0:19:53]
- Drama on the high seas, collision with ice. [Part1 0:23:08]
- Saving the *Shackleton*. [Part1 0:25:17]
- Return to South Georgia for repairs. [Part1 0:32:54]
- Assessing damage to the cargo. [Part1 0:33:08]
- Port Lockroy, a gentleman's residence. [Part1 0:37:26]
- Building the generator shed; an industrial accident. [Part1 0:38:24]
- Ionospherics and the work involved. [Part1 0:43:39]
- Ancillary work, emptying the toilets. [Part1 0:52:08]
- Sickness, getting help from the Argentinians. [Part1 0:55:41]
- Becoming a dentist, the gory details. [Part2 0:00:14]
- Domestic animals. [Part2 0:07:34]
- Becoming a Base Leader. [Part2 0:15:46]
- The trials of a Base Leader, man management. [Part2 0:17:26]
- Amateur radio, quality radio reception. [Part2 0:23:21]
- Meeting Doc Griffiths, start of a new career. [Part2 0:30:25]
- Post FIDS work, geophysics. [Part2 0:33:30]
- A possible first landing, Leskov Island. [Part2 0:38:15]
- A tragedy on HMS *Protector*. [Part2 0:42:59]
- Moving on, marine exploration. [Part2 0:46:56]

**ENDS.**