

Edited transcript of a recording of Richard Taylor, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee at his home in Twickenham on 18th February 2005.

**Taylor, Richard. BAS Archive ref: AD6/24/I/20/I REDACTED,
Transcribed by Barry Heywood on 12 November 2016.**

Part 1

Taylor: Richard Taylor is my name. I was down on Horseshoe Island from 1955 to 1956. I was down there for the establishment of the Base. We actually built the base. At that time there were two bases being built. First there was Anvers Island. We dropped the fellows off there and then went down to Horseshoe.

[01:00:42] Lee: What year were you born?

Taylor: I was born on August 10th 1933. That makes me 71 years old.

[01:00:55] Lee: What were you doing with your life before BAS?

Taylor: I went to a Public School. I was the only one of my three brothers ...I was the only one that went to a Public School. I was the eldest. I left at a fairly early age. I took what was then called High School Certificate at 16. When I passed it, I was desperate to leave school. The longer I stayed there, the more I wanted to get out into the wide world. I am a farmer's son. I was brought up on a farm. I lived in the countryside in Berkshire. I was fairly rebellious and as the eldest son, I didn't have a good relationship with my father. There was no question of me ever taking up farming. I wanted to get up to the big city. I wanted to be in London. What I did was...I knew by the age of 14 what I wanted to do was to be a film maker, a documentary film maker, which was rather useful to know, at 14 exactly what you wanted to do. But there were no film schools... in London.

[01:02:22] Lee: What had you seen that wanted you to do that? Pathe News? What was the inspiration that made you want to do that?

Taylor: When we were at school, they once showed Grierson's Drifters and one or two others of the old classic documentaries. [Drifters (1929) is silent documentary film by John Grierson, his first and only personal film. It tells the story of Britain's North Sea herring fishery. Transcriber] I remember two. They had 'Nanuck of the North'. That is what inspired me. I just knew from

then on. It was an interesting thing. I just absolutely knew that this is what I wanted to do.

[01:02:54] Lee: But there was nowhere to go!

Taylor: There was nowhere to go. The nearest was the EDHEC in Paris. I came from a farming family. The idea of learning French and going to France to study was a totally exotic idea. So with tremendous scepticism on part of my parents and my family generally, I tried for RADA [Royal Academy of Dramatic Art -Transcriber]. I got a scholarship to RADA. I went there. I was there for a year. I went into the Army. I was there for two years in the Army. I served in Korea. I was a soldier in Korea. I got a commission. That probably was the most formative year of my life. The year I spent in Korea. It was during the latter part of the war, just before and just after the cease-fire. I had a lot of adventures there. I had a marvellous time, partly I have to say, was because I was in the Military Police. I am not by nature a Military Police type of person. But I... They made me Military Transport Officer but because I was such a lousy Military Transport Officer, not being very technically minded, they attached me to SIB Special Investigations Branch, which for a nineteen year old, it was an extraordinary opportunity. That fascinated me. I loved Korea. I loved being in that country. I liked the people. Of course, being in the SIB you came much more contact in with the people. In a way, if I had been in the infantry, I would probably not be sitting here today, as a Sub-Lieutenant. So that was my experience in the Army. Then I came out of the Army, and at that point...I was then 21. I did a number of odd jobs. The sort of jobs that you would like to see on the back ...as an Autobiographical note on the back of a Penguin Novel. [Laughter]. I always remember John Steinbeck who had done all these jobs, like working on a trawler and so on and so forth. I had decided when I came out of the Army that I would not go straight into filmmaking. What I wanted to do was to do all sorts of different odd jobs of one sort and another. I did do. I did all sorts of things. At the Shinfield Agricultural Research Institute, I think it was called, I worked as an artificial inseminator. [The Research Institute in Dairying was established at University College, Reading by the Board of Agriculture in 1912. In 1921 the Shinfield Estate was purchased to accommodate it and in the same year it changed its name to The National Institute for Research in Dairying (NIRD). The Institute was concerned with research into the production and uses of milk and improving methods in the dairy industry. Part of this involved the testing of dairying apparatus. On 1 April 1985 the Institute was replaced by the Grassland Research Institute, Hurley and the Food Research Institute, Reading. Transcriber] My job was to hold this warm, it had hot water in it, cylindrical tube with a great big, massive contraceptive at the end. When the bull came to

mount the cow, I had to dash in quickly and catch it before penetration. This was one of my jobs, working at Shinfield. I did various things and in the course of that time, I tried . . . because I had been brought upon a farm, I went up to Liverpool... I tried to get a job escorting bulls to Uruguay. They were being exported. This meant handling about a dozen bulls during their shipment to Montevideo. I had worked on a farm and I knew a little bit about bulls but it was terribly out of my capacity really. At that age you think that you can do just about anything. Fortunately they sussed the fact that I wasn't up to it. Then at that time I also met a chap called Munro Tate. Now Munro Tate is well known in Antarctic Circles and he had worked down in South Georgia on a Sealing vessel. I said, "That is exactly what I would like to do". He gave me some very good advice. He said, "Richard, it is a very tough life on sealing vessels. What you have got is a lot of very tough guys, you know. You with your very nice Public School voice, they will eat you for breakfast! Why don't you go in for FIDS? Go down to one of their Bases." I had never thought of this. I had no scientific qualifications, but I went along for an interview. I was very lucky. Somebody dropped out. They said, "Do you think that you could be a meteorologist?" I said, "Well, I am not sure". They said, "Well we will give you some training. We have got two other Meteorologists going down, and you can stop off at Port Stanley and you can have a month's training there on the way." That is how I got the job.

[00:08:44] Lee: Tell me about the interview. Where did you have to go? Who interviewed you?

Taylor: Whew! I can't remember now. It is so very long ago. It was very informal. I think three people interviewed me. Because I had been an officer in the Army, and I'd had a little bit of war experience, and I seemed to be a fairly reasonable sort of bloke . . . I think that the main reason was that they had suddenly got a gap in the number of people they wanted on this particular new Base they were setting up. So in fact, I was extremely lucky.

[00:09:35] Lee: So the time scale between the interview and heading South was extremely short.

Taylor: It must have been 2 – 3 weeks. Very quick. At that stage of life, you don't own very much. What I did do was I suddenly thought, "Wait a minute, I am going to the Antarctic. Something that I had never really given any serious thought to! Not everyone goes to the Antarctic . . . I could make a film down there!" So what I did, in short, I borrowed from

my youngest brother, who had been gifted £350 . . . I knew the salary I got was going to be just a bit more than that for the year that I was going to work down there. Was it £300 or £400? It may have been £600? I don't know. I borrowed this money. My father insisted on little contractual agreement in writing. I borrowed this money. I bought a Bell and Howell camera. One of those with swivel turrets, with three lenses on it. . . very solid, marvellous. A little sixteen millimetre camera plus some lighting and some other gear. I had never used a cine camera before. I had never used a still camera before! In those days, one wasn't so rich. Everyone has at least a still camera these days. You had to be slightly well off to own things like that. I needed to get stock. I went to see Vivian Fuchs, I was advised to do this, who was then, before he became Sir Vivian Fuchs, was in charge of the Scientific Bureau of FIDS. Marvellous man! He was very sympathetic. I think he thought this guy can do something. He made a deal. "Look, if you get your gear (I hadn't told him that I got the gear at this stage) I will give you the stock. That was the 'quid pro quo' arrangement. . . the film. That is what happened. I then told him a few days later that I had got my camera. I had got everything else. So if I could have the stock? I had 80 rolls of film. One minute? The very tiny 16 ml films. I can't remember how long they ran for, all I do know, Chris, that the ratio of the final film, it was an hour-long film I think, a ratio which is normally 10:1, it was just over 1:1. I chucked away about 5% of the film. I never did that ever again. [laughter]

[00:13:10] Lee: You are talking about what you shoot to what ends up in the final film.

Taylor: That's right. One must think that must be a terrible film you produced there but in fact, photographically it is not too bad at all.

[00:13:25] Lee: It is unique. Were you aware of any nervousness at any stage of anyone going down there with a film camera?

Taylor: I think they felt. . . do you mean in terms of wasting money or politically? No. I don't think so. I think their attitude was 'This chap is going to be on a Base, if he manages to do what he wants to do, it will make a good record of the year there'. There was no sound recording, it was all silent. There was no tape recorder. If you had had a tape recorder it was going to be one of these great L2s. Massive things. I couldn't possibly afford that. [The L2 was one of the first portable reel-reel sound recorders that EMI produced. The machine was produced around 1957 and cost £102 18s. It had a frequency response of 50Hz - 7KHz and weighed in at over 14lb with the

batteries in. Transcriber]. I just had lights and a camera. With the stock . . .now this is an interesting thing . . .!shot one roll of film before I went down, just to see if I was getting pictures . . . and then when I went down there of course there was no way . . .we were totally out of contact. . . so there was no way of getting anything back to the UK. I buried my stock in the snow. I had a special stash where I put it.

[00:14:50] Lee: Before use?

Taylor: Before and after use. I kept it in cool conditions and when I had shot it, I put it back there. That was it. I had no idea whether I was getting any film on it. That was quite nerve wracking.

[00:15:06] Lee: There were no rushes that night. . .

Taylor: No! No rushes that night [Lee laughs] and when I got back, it was quite a nail-biting experience to see whether it had come out.

[00:15:19] Lee: Were there technical questions because . . .

Taylor: I had the . . . Somebody had advised me that I should have the camera graphited to work in cold conditions.

[00:15:32] Lee: Graphited?

Taylor: Yes, they take the oil out and they replace the oil, which can freeze up, with graphite. All I know . . . again I am being a little bit non-technical. . . I know how to use a camera. The mechanics of a camera I am always slightly vague about. Basically the oil is replaced with graphite, which means that you don't get things freezing up. From that point of view I never had any problems. I had very few problems actually.

[00:16:14] Lee: You had no problems with glare, because you were working with snow?

Taylor: I had a UV filter. I didn't have a polaroid filter. I took down books. I learnt. . . all my filming I learnt from . . . I became a BBC producer. I never went on a BBC course. I never had any training. The only thing I have ever trained at. . . I have had any training for was to be a soldier. All my film making . . . indeed my contemporaries would say the same. . . we learnt our profession on the job in an apprenticeship way.

[00:17:01] Lee: Condensation, was that a problem? Moving in and out of...

Taylor: Yes. One had to take precautions there. Yes. When you brought it in, when you got condensation, you had to let it dry out and so on. But a lot of the time I was keeping the camera outside. If I knew that I would need it later in the day or the following day, I would simply keep it outside. The more I could keep it outside . . . there was no problem in keeping it outside. It was obviously under cover. So I would only bring it inside when I wanted to clean it, check it over and so on.

[00:17:52] Lee: I suppose understandably your film is primarily taken during the summer period of your year down there.

Taylor: I can't really remember much detail but yes! When I think of the film itself I don't think that there is much winter shooting in it. I did wait for the summer months . . . because . . . I was playing it safe. I was not going to shoot in the days when . . . it is not like these days when you can see what you are getting in terms of exposure immediately on an LCD viewer. You had to get your exposures right and I wasn't keen to work at extremes on the edge of light conditions and so on.

[00:18:40] Lee: How about the actors?

Taylor: [Laughter] Well...

[00:18:48] Lee: Did they imagine they were in Hollywood?

Taylor: No, no. Well you know Polar people . . . especially British ones. There is a very sort of anti-bullshit. . . anything that smacks of pretension and also that slight tendency to 'cut down the tall poppies' as the Australians say. I used to get the 'Micky' taken out of me a little bit too with my planning this and planning that and wanting little sequences set up etc. Generally speaking, people are quite pleased to be filmed. People were cooperative because I worked hard at it. I took it seriously. I discovered the other day my script where I had worked out all the sort of scenes and everything that I wanted to get. It was very ??? actually but then it had to be when you have only got a limited amount of material. You want it to go a long way.

[00:20:09] Lee: So nobody was a 'shrinking violet'?

Taylor: No. Some were more reticent than others. Generally speaking, everybody joined in and was cooperative.

[00:20:23] Lee: When you came to compile the film back in the UK, did anyone want to have any influence over it?

Taylor: No, not at all. I was extraordinarily lucky really in that way. I came back and I said, "Look, I have shot the material". They paid for the processing. I think Vivian Fuchs was there when I ran the material to see what was there before anything was cut because I then had to try and get financing to get the editing. It would have been Sir Vivian who did look at it because he was the one who had to say yes to that. So they viewed the rushes and said, "This looks very promising" . I then went to a little cutting room. I edited it myself. I had an Editor to advise me on how to do it. Again, extraordinarily lucky . . .I shot it myself and I edited it myself. It was a wonderful learning experience. In the end, we produced this...it is an hour-long . . . film with somewhat 'toe-curling' rather artistic commentary [Laughter]. The pictures are all right but. . .

[00:22:00] Lee: How did that bit happen, because there are two voices. There is the Commentator, who is very 'RADA'...

Taylor: Yes he was at RDA. . .we were at RADA together [Pause] the name will come back to me [Pause]. He went to Canada with Sir Tyrone Guthrie [Sir William Tyrone Guthrie (2 July 1900 – 15 May 1971) was an English theatrical director instrumental in the founding of the Stratford Festival of Canada. - Transcriber], there for many years. He did 'Blythe Spirit' with Joan Collins a little while back. Anyway, he and I, and Alan Bates were at RADA together. Yes, he did the RADA bit.

[00:22:48] Lee: You wrote it for him? There was a second voice!

Taylor: Yes! There was a second voice, who was an Irish man, who was with the Dublin equivalent of the BFI [British Film Institute – Transcriber]. I can't remember what it was called. He had written a book on Film. I think I met him at the BFI, an older man. I love the cultivated Irish way of speaking English, and the Highland Scot's way of speaking English. It has always seemed to me to be the finest way of speaking our language. I thought 'That is the Guy I want. . . '

[00: 23 :27] Lee: Again, you wrote for him. So that wasn't actually a member of the party...

Taylor: No, no! In those days that would have been rather sort of innovative [Lee laughs] to have had...the real guys just chatting.

Subsequently one did that all the time. What I should have done was to have got the blokes, the people who were on the Base with me, to interview them and get them chatting away, and then edit that down but I didn't have any sound equipment. I could have done that when I got back, but I didn't. It was only subsequently did I learn the skill of editing down interviews...

[00:24:14] Lee: That was the Silent Fifties.

Taylor: It was the Silent Fifties. It didn't occur to me actually.

[00:24:23] Lee: There were a lot of graphic scenes in the film. Such as the slaughtering of seals, the cutting of a seal's throat. Did that cause you no... I suppose that today we are more sensitive to that sort of thing than we would have been years ago.

Taylor: The seal killing was an interesting thing. Purely personally, I was brought up on a farm and one saw quite a lot of blood and guts sort of thing. It never worried me, that but there was one... this is an interesting experience... We had to go out kill seal for purposes of feeding our dogs. Otherwise they were going to be fed on pemmican, which was not really an adequate diet. So it was the tradition at that time that the dogs should have at least a portion of their food fresh seal meat. I do remember going out... first we had difficulty locating seal... at certain times of the season... I guess it was the breeding season when the seals came up to give birth to their pups. It was mainly Weddell Seal, which is a very attractive... well most seals are attractive, but they had particularly 'doe' eyes. Of course, the little baby seals as well. At that time I didn't like the method that was used, which was to go out with a blooming great metal rod and hit it as accurately and as hard on the nose to stun it and while it was stunned, to slit its throat. I remember the very first time I went out, we happened to come across a lot of seal. I found that at first I would be very practical about it. This is it. This is what we have decided to do. But as the day wore on, there was so much blood around; I suddenly felt a growing sense of, not of nausea so much but of that this is killing. It was a satiation. It is not a human being, it is an animal but it is a sensate thing. It became excessive. It was like a massacre. By the end of the day, I felt disgusted. I think quite a lot of us felt that. We recognized that we were killing the seals to feed the dogs. You killed as many as you needed to and absolutely no more. But it was a little bit like... you live on a farm and you shoot as many pheasants or rabbits or what ever it is you need to feed yourself or to sell or what ever. You don't do it for the hell of it, although some people do. I have always

made that very clear division. You kill for a practical purpose of eating and so on. You kill for survival, for anything else that is a total anathema.

[00:28:32] Lee: My memory of the film . . . the shot that is shown is of a seal being shot with a gun.

Taylor: Oh, that is interesting. Maybe I did that for political reasons . . . even at that time there may have been the idea that what we used to call badging a seal was thought not something that should be shown on film. We did not have enough ammunition to . . . I am sure other FIDS have said to you, we were, to put it in its politest terms, very frugally equipped in every sense. To go on to a slightly different subject here, I do remember that by the time we had finished offloading at Anvers Island on the way down, certain blokes' boots were already worn out. We had a lot of ex-Army surplus stuff where the stitching on the boots . . . they were that old and dried out, that they just broke. We had ice axes that we discovered had wood worm. There were lots of jokes made about this, and of course when one saw . . . well one didn't see, because we never got to an American base . . . but we knew stories about the American base at Marguerite Bay where they had something like 364 feature movies so they could have a different film every day. That was quite mind-boggling from our point of view.

[00:30:30] Lee: There may have been a little bit of sanitization in the final cut.

Taylor: Well now you mention that. . . I haven't seen the film for years and years . . . yes, it must have been.

[00:30:48] Lee: The reason I mention that is that there is a gunshot, and you must have added that later back in the UK. Also the sound of the boat breaking the ice, that must have been added later.

Taylor: It had to be. Yes.

[00:30:56] Lee: How was it received when you finally showed it to . . .

Taylor: [Interrupts Lee - Transcriber] They were delighted. First, obviously, the FIDS people saw it, and approved it and passed it. Then it was shown at the British Scientific Association annual meeting. I showed it there, with a little introductory talk. Fuchs also came at that

time, and he introduced it. I was questioned afterwards and TWW, Television West Wales...

[00:31:43] Lee: Television Wales and West.

Taylor: Wales and West, right. They bought it. I was highly chuffed at that. There was my first film and it had been shown on television, even if it was only in Wales on a Regional basis.

[00:32:10] Lee: Was that still in the 50s? Late 50s, shortly after you got back?

Taylor: Shortly after I got back. Six months after I got back. We had it already and completed fairly quickly. Yes. And that is how I got my start in what was to become my career.

[00:32:37] Lee: Did that then lead to other projects and...

Taylor: Well, when you have gone out to the Antarctic, and you have shot a film, and you have edited it yourself, and you have sold it to Television, you imagine that the doors of Waldorf Street, as one thought of it at that time, would be thrown open to you. [During the 20th Century, Waldorf Street became a centre of the [British film industry](#), with the big production and distribution companies having their headquarters in the street. Film House at 142 Wardour Street, was formerly the headquarters of the Associated-British Pathe film company. By the end of the century most of the big film companies had moved elsewhere, leaving some smaller independent production houses and [post-production](#) companies still based in the area – Transcriber]. Of course, it wasn't quite like that. It was trudging from door to door, so to speak, and getting jobs and starting off as an Assistant Director, then Assistant Film Editor, and so on. Doing that until I got a job at the BBC. I was first...we don't want to go into all of that...

[00:33:20] Lee: Just a little. I know you were working as a...

Taylor: Well again, especially in those earlier years, I was terribly lucky. I joined British Transport Films. Do you remember Edgar Anstey, who made *Housing Problems* and other milestone films of their time. [Edgar Anstey OBE was a leading British documentary film maker – Transcriber] Well, like Sir Vivian, he thought this guy seems to be quite enterprising and so on. He took me on straight away and I got a job as an assistant editor at British Transport Films. Today to most people, that would sound like nothing but they made such good documentaries, like the GPO Film Unit.

[00:34:09] Lee: Laurie Lee did...

Taylor: Laurie Lee did work for them [Lee, Poet and Author, had been working with the GPO and Crown Film Units in the early Forties – Transcriber]. Humphrey Jennings, Film Editor, a very dour Scotsman, was in charge of film editing there. I learned a lot from him. There was also a chap called Ralph Sheldon, who became a Features Editor, I was working directly to as assistant. I had a marvelous grounding in film editing.

[00:34:42] Lee: And then the BBC? The 'Tonight' programme and so on. Films around the world since.

Taylor: Yes. I came back from Nigeria, rejoined the BBC and frankly 'lived the life of Reilly' actually, because I travelled the World.

[00:34:58] Lee: So what came first? Looking at chickens and eggs; the trips to the Antarctic. Was the trip to the Antarctic the chicken and the film the egg or was it the other way round? Did you seek to go to the Antarctic so that you could make the film?

Taylor: Why did I go to the Antarctic? At that time of your life you want to have as many exciting and interesting experiences as you can. To me this seemed to be a pretty interesting adventure. I never thought that I could possibly do it because I wasn't a scientist. I wasn't a geologist or surveyor. I had no qualifications. So given the opportunity I jumped at it. It was only then that I thought perhaps I can make a film here. I saw it then from that point on. I realized when I got the support of Sir Vivian Fuchs that this was my opportunity to make my first break into film making.

[00:36: 12] Lee: Lets move on then away from film making, because presumably you had to put your camera away from time to time to pull you weight on the Base in every other respect. You were helping to build the Horseshoe hut?

Taylor: Oh yes! We all did that. It was interesting because it was a great lesson in co-operative activity. As you may well know, we went in at a time when it was already beginning to freeze up. The Captain of the M V Norsel [MV Norsel was a Norwegian sealing ship launched during the final weeks of the Second World War as Lyngdalsfjord and only completed in late 1949, the ship sailed in both Arctic and Antarctic waters for more than 53 years until shipwrecking off the coast of Norway in 1992 – Transcriber.] that we went down in, was dead worried that he wouldn't get out again if he didn't get a move on. He

virtually threw the stuff of the boat and left us. I can remember there were masses of stuff left on the shoreline while the boat sailed away. We had to get it up to where we were going to build the base. We then had to decide where we were actually going to build the base. Then it was a three-month period of living in tents. It was quite hard. It got darker and colder. Of course everyone joined in. Again, for me it was a marvellous experience in that I learned so much about electricity, about carpentry, about cooking. We used to take it in turns once every eight weeks to do a week as Cook. Then you would have a week working as Gash Hand, I think it was called, whereby you did all the dirty jobs that had to be done. Everybody mucked in. Everybody did. In that sense there was a great sense of cooperation and camaraderie. It wasn't to say that there were not social problems as there is probably I think on most bases. I don't know whether we had more than most. If anybody said to me "what was the toughest thing about being in the Antarctic" I would have said unequivocally was the social aspect of it.

[00:38:51] Lee: Can we explore that a little bit, because your public school back ground and rural background may have been rather different to the rather more boisterous chaps, shall we say.

Taylor: [Laughs] There were contrasts. There were particular contrasts. Somebody like Gordon Farquhar who a remarkable guy in many ways, he was. . . for a start he was a Glaswegian. He wasn't just Scots, he was a Glaswegian. He had a massive great chip on his shoulder. I think in retrospect, he would recognize that was the case. He had had a very tough childhood. He had lost his mother and father at a very early age. I think that he had even lost his sister. He was quite a loner. He had a very tough job. He was the radio operator. His equipment. . . I think we never knew whether he was a competent operator. I think he probably was. It seemed his equipment wasn't quite up to it. As often happens, he hadn't had time to test it before he came out. We never really had radio contact. . . proper radio contact. We had intermittent radio contact the whole time we were there. We were very, very much out of contact. Nobody could reach us, no radio contact, no Doctor of course. I remember Ken Gaul, Base Leader, doing a bit of dental treatment on Jim Exley, who had severe toothache. Looking back, it was a high-risk thing. I remember we had 'Omnopon' as a pain killer. [Omnopon contains both the phenanthrene and isoquinoline groups of opium alkaloids. The former includes codeine and morphine, which exert a marked narcotic action on the central nervous system. The second group is represented by papaverine which acts as an antispasmodic, in vitro. Its effects in vivo are limited.

Omnopon has the analgesic and narcotic properties of morphine – Transcriber]. If somebody had got appendicitis one would have . . . I don't know what one would have done. It just wasn't meant to happen! On the social side, Gordon and I had an accumulating abrasive relationship because . . . he got very depressed because he wasn't able, like the others, to do his job properly. He was frustrated. We had a fight in the end. It was ridiculous really. It was particularly ridiculous down there because one of us could have got severely hurt . . . broken something or whatever. . . and there was no way to get that sorted. As far as he was concerned, I was a South of England, Public School Puffter. Not so much a Puffier but I was Public School. A Southern Softie with a silver spoon in my mouth. I had had it easy all my life, and so on. I deeply resented this because I came from a very violent family as it happened, with a very difficult relationship with my father. I took a deep offence to this. I think there were two or three occasions when he said, "Come outside, we are going to sort this out" His Glaswegian way of doing it. I remember him once demonstrating how you head-butt people. [Laughter] By the way, I used to box! I was a good boxer. This was my main sport at school. I was at a very minor Public School but in terms of boxing we used to box Eton and Harrow. I boxed in the Army too. So it was a rather interesting match. I backed off for it wasn't sensible. I was 21 years old but it did strike me as childish that one should resort to fisticuffs in this kind of environment we were living in. But finally, he provoked me sufficiently and I said, " Alright, if you want to do that lets get on with it". We went outside. The others let it happen because I think they felt that there needed to be this 'lancing of the boil' so to speak. There needed to be this little bit of blood letting to sort out this matter between the two of us. We went out in the snow, just outside the hut. I remember thinking at the time of seeing Alan Ladd in 'Hell below Zero' where they actually fought with pickaxes. This was just bare fisted stuff. I realized that I had never fought! I had boxed but I had never fought bare-fisted before, which is a different matter. It hurts. We had this fight. It wasn't at all like in the movies in that, very quickly, both of us were exhausted. Very quickly both of us were doing very bad punches. The fact was Gordon had never boxed before. He was a street fighter. I think that I was actually stronger and I was fitter. It was quite evenly matched but, because I had boxed . . . What actually happened was, in the end we were too exhausted and we sort of. . . At which point, I think it was Ken Gaul who came out and said, "Alright, you fellers, pack it up". I think that if this had happened back in the World so to speak, to use the American Vietnam expression . . . if that had happened back home what you do you return. . . you separate but we had to sleep in the same room together that night. We had to be together then and it actually didn't resolve everything then, sadly. It should have done, but it didn't. I think

it was partly because the following day Gordon looked an awful mess and because I had learned to box, I didn't look a mess. There was an assumption that somehow I had got the better of him when in fact it was not true. It was a very even match.

[00:46:29] Lee: It was a draw.

Taylor: It was, I think, a draw. Now having said all that, Gordon in a different environment would have been very different too. He was a very witty guy. He was wonderful at the Australian type of 'laid back' humour. I remember going down on the Norsel with this lousy food that we had. I remember once, that he sat down in front of what we had been served to eat, he looked at it and said "No wonder the seagulls have stopped following us!" [Laughter]. He had that very limpid sense of humour.

[00:47:29] Lee: Had the difficulties actually begun at that point?

Taylor: No! Not on the ship. Then again, poor old Gordon. He was terribly sea sick. I think that I can safely say he nearly died of sea sickness. I have never seen a person so sea sick. Of course it was quite rough going down, especially when we went across the 'Roaring Forties'. There is that point when you can't be sick anymore, you can't keep water in you. You start to dehydrate. He was in a very rough situation. There was no doctor. No one to tend to him and I think a lot of us thought, 'Is this guy going to survive this trip?' When I got married 2 years after I got back, I invited Gordon to the wedding. On the way back, I think we made up. We both had been released from this 'hot house', this enclosed atmosphere. Suddenly we were going back to civilization.

[00:48: 45] Lee: In the gap between the fight and the return journey, you obviously came to some sort of understanding.

Taylor: We did. He came to my wedding. He gave me a very nice chess set, which I have still got up stairs. Gordon is the one of the eight of us we've . . . everybody has lost trace of. . . I don't know what happened to him. How many of us have died? Four of us have died; three of us are left, and one missing!

[00:49:22] Lee: Generally speaking, did the rest of the crew hedge round you for a while?

Taylor: Round the two of us you mean?

[00:49:35] Lee: Did they take sides. People do in those enclosed...

Taylor: I think that they thought we were both bloody fools! And should have known better. On the other hand, one might have argued they should have stopped it. No, I think they thought, "Lets hope this sorts it out between us". I wish it had done. I wish I could say that was a happy ending to it. It wasn't quite.

[00:50:03] Lee: Who did you get on with particularly well? Who did you have and still have great affection for?

Taylor: That is an interesting one. I am going to speak very frankly now. The person that I had the best relationship with, were two people really. One was Ken Gaul. He was the 'old man' of the team in that he was all of 32 years old. I was the youngest. He was very well read. I came from a farming family, rather philistine. There was certainly no tradition of reading good literature. I was desperate to enter a cultured world of reading good books and so on and so forth. I was very much driven in that respect. Ken had done a lot of reading and was a marvellous sort of mentor. Apart from his job as Base Leader, he was a very good intellectual mentor to me. I will talk about the Base Leader aspect probably in a minute for that was slightly different. The other person I got on with very well with there was Derrick Searle. Now the interesting thing about Derrick was that he was the one person out of the eight of us who didn't go slightly 'off his rocker' at one stage or another. He didn't lose the plot, and I believe that was for one simple reason. He was the only one who was engaged to be married . . .to Petra. He was the only one who had a stable relationship in that respect. It enabled him to hang on to that. It was always there in the background. Even though we were not able to get messages out to each other because the radios were not working properly, he had that. None of the rest of us did. I think that this just meant that he was a very equable personality. Strange thing was that as the years went by, I kept a little in touch with the FIDS people, only slightly. It was interesting in that he became a disappointed man, I discovered, and then became quite sarcastic, and not very generous. This surprised me and rather hurt me because I thought this was not the Derrick that I knew.

[00:53:00] Lee: He was a complete man when you knew him, and became less complete later?

Taylor: Yes. If you put it that way, yes! I don't know what in the years that followed had made him not the sort of person that I thought I knew. Then there was Don, Diesel Don as we called him.

[00:53:32] Lee: He was the man diving naked into the sea on the film?

Taylor: Was he? Ok! You know that film better than I do [Laughter]. I don't remember that. Don was a... When I went down on the boat I thought 'Who is he?' Don is a little, compact, sort of Hobgoblin of a guy. He was like a... what do you call them in the 'Lord of the Rings'

[00:53:58] Lee: Hobbit.

Taylor: Hobbit. A Troll. He was a Troll! He was a sort of Troll-like character. I didn't take to him on the way down so much. But in that year, I really did begin to like that man, partly because of his competence. He was so capable in so many ways. He was marvellous at his job, being the diesel mechanic. He knew a lot about engineering. He knew a lot about electricity. He did all the wiring in the place. He was a good carpenter. He was an excellent skier, excellent climber. He, Derrick and I went climbing. I was the one who hadn't any climbing experience. I actually scared myself witless, going with the two of them. That's another story. Although when I said Derrick was the one who did not lose the plot, Don got depressed at times, I think, but then again he was a pretty equable guy.

[00:55:13] Lee: You mentioned a chap called Jim Exley, a geologist wasn't he?

Taylor: Jim, yes. I know now Jim is a good old friend. For him the Antarctic, I think, was a high spot. It is like the Army is for certain other people. He has such a good memory of those times. Jim was a big, slightly gallumping bloke, sort of rough on the outside with an incredibly soft heart. He loved the animals. He loved the dogs. He was marvellous with the dogs. He had a way with the dogs. He was basically in charge of the dogs. That was an interesting thing too because when we had to put down some of the pups, he couldn't do that. Again, because I had been brought up on a farm, and basically, because I have always had that attitude, if it has got to be done, I would rather do it myself than some one else to do it. I remember I used to chop the heads off.

[00:56:27]: Lee: The male pups?

Taylor: Male or female. We needed . . . I can't remember now, to tell you the truth, whether we needed any pups. There was a feeling at this stage, that we didn't need any pups. So they were put down when they were born.

[00:56:50] Lee: The mother, was she cared for? Losing . . .

Taylor: She was allowed to keep the pups for a certain time. That was awful really because by that time they had become very lovely, sweet. . . and you had become very attached to them.

[00:57:12] Lee: You talk about 'losing the plot'. I am not quite clear as to what you mean by that. Was that periods of depression or. . . in what way was someone 'losing the plot'? Did you ever lose the plot?

Taylor: Ok! Yes. Oh goodness yes! You really ought to ask someone else that question, who was there, rather than me! [Laughter]. I was glancing through these diaries, last night, and I can see that I got very, very depressed. Just before I left, I met a girl who I. . . It was the first time I, what you would call, had fallen in love. I had had girl friends before. Not so many, when you go to public school you can't get near women for ages [Laughter]. I had only just lost my virginity for goodness sake, which was in the Army. With this woman . . .

[REDACTED] I met her, I suppose, eight or nine weeks before I went. We had this tempestuous relationship. She, at that time, was already attached to some guy who was up at Cambridge. What happened, I thought - this is the arrogance of youth - since I had fallen in love with her, that it was reciprocated and that I could go swanning off to the Antarctic for a year and she still be waiting for me when I came back, even though she was unofficially engaged to this other bloke up at Cambridge. When I came back . . . and I had had no contact. . . I remember taking all the letters she had written me, which I had read. When I was in deep depression, I used to take these letters out and read them. Partly this diary was written so that she might see it one day, and so on. When the boat came in and we had our letters, I had my "Dear John" letter from her, which did shatter me. It, perhaps, didn't totally surprise me really but. . . I had lived with that thought that I was going to see her again.

But it wasn't the same as Derrick's thing. He married Petra. It was a much more established solid relationship. Mine was a young, headstrong thing that had had no time to really solidify.

[01:00:28] Lee: So 'losing the plot' would be sparked by an incident, in yourself or by other people around you. People would go very quiet for a while or uncommunicative?

Taylor: We could have some flaming rows. I think, when you have got eight men . . . no women, a big factor. . . all at a high testosterone time of their lives in a very enclosed . . . very enclosed . . . the four of us were sleeping in one room, in bunk beds . . . We were no longer kids, we were in bunk beds...the trouble is, if you had a row, there was nowhere to go. There were places where you could go into a corner and sulk. You could go into the loft area. That is why it was so important when the sun returned . . . it was those winter months . . . it was that three months when, living in tents, finally getting into the hut, living in total darkness. I think we had three and a half months of living in total darkness that was by far the worst period. Although of course the biggest differences . . . at a certain point when the sun did return. . . There were four of us that didn't smoke. There were four of us who did. I personally think that Ken should have said that there should have been no smoking after a certain time in the area where we sleep! Ken Gaul, Base Leader, was an absolute democrat in this respect. He had been an officer in the Army too! He never talked about that while we were down there. He had been in the Parachute Regiment or rather he had been a parachutist. He trained Gurkhas. He had had quite a distinguished military career. But he was so antipathetic to what that stood for. The idea that you give orders and that others obey. He absolutely would not run the Base on that basis. I did disagree with that. I felt that there were times when you listen to people, you consider it, and then you make the decision. You are the Base Leader. Unless you are totally outvoted. There are ways and means of doing it. I would have been a little more authoritarian about things, if I had been Base Leader.

[01:03:50] Lee: He would not have had a casting vote?

Taylor; Absolutely not! There was this situation; four of us smoked and four didn't. The four who smoked were also the ones who insisted on having the windows closed at night. The four non-smokers, of which, I was one, wanted the windows open at night because you put off the stove since you were snug in bed. It didn't matter if you got cold air, you got up in the morning, lit the stove, which quickly warmed the room. Fine! The only way it was resolved was where we, the non-smokers, said, "Ok. To hell with it"! The sun was back by this time. In fact, by the time we did this, it was the time when the sun did go down and never actually went behind the mountains and then came up again. We went out and

slept on the rocks. We each found a place in the lee of the wind. That is where you would feel the cold. It was one of the good things we did have, good sleeping bags. We had double sheep skins to sleep on. We would just wrap up there and it was absolutely marvellous. In fact, it was rather good we were driven outside because to sleep outside...we didn't get much snow. . . and to sleep out at night and watch the sun nearly go down, and then come up again with this wonderful evening sky...it was absolutely wonderful. In essence, what I would say about this, if anybody asked me, what was the most difficult thing in the... sorry. . . if anyone asked me what was the most difficult thing about the Antarctic, it would be the social relationships. The most joyous thing in the experience was the beauty of the place and the physicality of it when you went out sledging, and so on. The exhilaration. . . I can still remember now those times when you had marvellous sledging weather. You had this deep blue sky. This whiteness, everywhere. On the sea ice, the surface is just beautiful, crisp and you can just skim over it. Round you, where we were, this fjorded coast with these magnificent 6000ft peaks all around us. We had the dogs so excited too, and the exhilaration. . . the purity of it. ..was just magnificent. All the petty little squabbles were just totally forgotten and were as nothing. This made it all absolutely worthwhile.

[01:07:25] Lee: Did you feel that this was a common held feeling among the eight of you? The majesty of...

Taylor: Yes. Yes the majesty of the place, yes. There were other things like that that one remembered. I can remember moments like we would all go off for solitary walks at times. I particularly did. I loved to go off on my own. I can remember the first time going off on my own, sitting down and realizing that for the first time in my life I was listening to total silence. There was no wind. There was no bird sound or anything like that. Nothing. It is virtually, as you know, as somebody who does interviews and sound recordings, that it is virtually impossible to find total silence. It is virtually impossible. That was a magic thing, and of course rather wonderful magical things that I can remember, skiing at night when there was a full moon. Don, I think, was the only competent skier. The rest of us were distinctly amateur skiers. We would go skiing in the full moon light. Just sometimes, that would coincide with the aurora australis, and again that is something to be experienced. You know there are certain things in life that, until you actually see them ...It is like seeing wild game in the natural habitat rather than on film. It is like going into the Sistine Chapel and actually seeing it rather than seeing pictures of it. The auroras were an example of that.

Part Two

[01:09:40] Lee: What we haven't talked about, Richard, is what you were supposed to be doing, Meteorology! How did you take to meteorology, bearing in mind you were a novice?

Taylor: A pertinent question! When I went down, I was due to stop at Port Stanley to have some training. I can't remember whether it was two weeks or four weeks probably two weeks. Because it was freezing up earlier that year, they couldn't afford for us to stay in Port Stanley. So I didn't have any training. But there were Brian Kempt and Trevor Vinelot who were qualified meteorologists. Again it was an apprenticeship sort of thing. They taught me how to do the job. To be honest, I wasn't at all interested in meteorology, but on the other hand, I like to think that, as when I was in the Army I wasn't a natural soldier or natural military policeman, but I always believed that if you were doing a job you did the best that you could. So I saw it again as a learning opportunity. It was like learning about carpentry and electricity and cooking and things like that.

[O1:11:03] Lee: How sophisticated was it?

Taylor: What the meteorology? I suspect not very. I don't think that there was any sort of interpretive work being done. We were just doing observational work and collecting material. Those records were simply dependent upon whether you did it conscientiously or not. Which meant that you made sure that when it was your tum to do met-obs, you got out of bed and you did it.

[01:11:44] Lee: Rather than sometimes not 1

Taylor: [Laughter] Yes, it did not happen at times...not excessively but, these days when I... as a film maker, you do listen to weather forecasts...I become slightly skeptical of weather forecasts because if you are somebody who depends on knowing what the weather is likely to do, you do observe that they are quite often wrong. You do sometimes wonder if everything has been arrived at in a less than totally conscientious way . . . whether observations have been done and material has been collected. But generally speaking it wasn't a total. . . it is just that I think when there was...I do remember that there were occasions when there was a real blizzard blowing and it was terribly cold. You were doing the night observation and you thought, "I think that I will invent a few figures!"

[01:13:06] Lee: It wasn't left blank. You had to write something in didn't you?. So there were a few estimates!

Taylor: There were a few estimates, yes!

[01:13:13]} Lee: And that was kept quiet about?

Taylor: That was kept quiet about, yes!

[01:13:16] Lee: For fifty years [Laughter]

Taylor: For fifty years, yes. [Both Laugh] You got that out of me, quite well, didn't you Chris!

[01:13:25] Lee: Most Bases then radioed their readings back to... [Stanley Meteorological Station- Transcriber]

Taylor: We didn't do that at all.

[01:13:32] Lee: So there was an element of frustration there, and perhaps a concern that when all this information arrived back at Stanley, or wherever it was, it wouldn't have been looked at too close.

Taylor: That is possibly the case, yes! I trust the second year, when...of course, four of us left and four of us stayed on...that the new radio operator. ..they knew that the radio wasn't working properly so I guess the second year, that was sorted. I am sure that it was.

[00:14:07] Lee: So you were doing wind and temperature , precipitation? Anything else? Barometric pressure? The usual things.

Taylor: The basic schoolboy stuff, yes!

[01:14:23] Lee: Did you get time for recreation?

Taylor: Itwas extraordinary how busy one was. How little time...no, we did a lot of reading. It was the time of my life when I probably did a lot more reading than I can ever remember. I like playing chess and we used to play a lot of chess down there. Gordon was the one I used to play chess with.

[01:14:55] Lee: Really!

Taylor: Oh yes! He was a very good player. He usually beat me. He had a very good brain. He had a very good analytical brain.

[01:15:07] Lee: I assume you predicted your book consumption, because there wasn't a library round the corner?

Taylor: I brought a lot of books down. Ken brought a lot of books down. We weren't short of good literature. We weren't short of heavy literature too. A lot of books on philosophy and so on, we had. We had quite a lot on polar exploration. I don't know how we had that. I think that probably was part of the standard issue. That was fascinating. Obviously, when you are in a place, you are interested in reading about the literature of that place. I did a lot of my polar reading at that time.

[01:15:57] Lee: And outside activities? Did you get much chance to do recreational outdoor activities?

Taylor: We certainly had enough exercise. It was certainly pretty physical a lot of the time; in winter times less so. There was always feeding of the dogs, the met observations; we did go out to do them. There were always a lot of things to be done. In that first year, the building never stopped really. There were a lot of things that needed to be finalized. In terms of recreation, there was a little bit of skiing and so on. Once the sun came back, the survey work could begin, going on the sledging journeys. Of course, we all wanted to go sledging. That was seen as the high point because that was the adventure. That was when we thought we are Antarctic explorers.

[01:17:15] Lee: Did you get your share?

Taylor: Yes. Even though I wasn't a geologist or surveyor. The Geologist and Surveyor needed to have a 'gofor', which was exactly what I was. Again, talking about wonderful experiences . . . let me start a little bit further back here. When I first went out on the ice. . . I never went up on the plateau where you were confronted with crevasses and things like that, which is altogether more doggy . . . all the sledging I did was the sea ice. You did meet some variable conditions, but generally speaking you were pretty much secure. Unless the sea ice broke up and blew out, you weren't in that sort of danger. I remember at first going out and suddenly you are in this vast landscape. You are so tiny! A little team of dogs and you are so dependent on what you are carrying with you. Your life depend on whether that primus stove works. Without that primus stove you cannot heat your tent. If you are a big distance from base, you can

get into very serious trouble with very simple things like that. . . the lack of a primus pricker in order to get your primus working. The enormity of your environment meant that. . . which you didn't really know. . . I didn't know, it was a new environment. You didn't know quite how the sea ice behaved. You didn't know how anything behaved. I can remember the first time I went out with Derrick Searle, and there was suddenly along the fjorded coast there was an avalanche that came down. I remember, in a rather panicky way . . . I was driving the dogs at that time . . . turning the dogs and driving out away from the land. Derrick, more experienced than I was, although it was his first time in the Antarctic, he had been out sledging two or three times, saying, "What are you doing Dick? This is crazy. What are we running away from?" "An avalanche!" Of course, the avalanche was two miles away. No way the avalanche could have reached us. I had to bring myself up short. It was like when you were sleeping in your tent. There would be all this creaking and cracking because you were often sleeping quite near to the coast-line. You suddenly had this fear that it was suddenly going to open up underneath you . . . a tide crack . . . and you were going to be crushed between it. You got to know that. Travelling through slushy ice, where it had melted on the top, that was quite scary. Moving on undulating ice, where the tide was lifting and dropping . . . travelling across that kind of terrain could be initially nerve wracking until you knew. . . In that short time, we got to know how it worked and what you could and could not do. In the last few sledging sessions I had, I had that lovely sense of confidence. You felt you were in communion with your environment; that you were working with it. That was a great feeling. I remember one marvelous experience. Again I was with Derrick and we were going along the coast. We saw an opening, which was not on the map. We went into this enormous cove, which had never been drawn on a map before. We realized that we were the first people in the whole of this world that had ever seen this cove. That was a marvellous sort of feeling. It gave you a real sense of awe and being privileged. That is a really pertinent word here. The privilege of this experience was enormous. So any little quibbles, gripes, all petty arguments and things like that. . . forget it! Ultimately, that year that I had in the Antarctic was just. . . so many marvellous things happened . . . and I learned so much. It was the tough things too. The social things taught me to be a little more cooperative with people. I have always been a bit of a loner, I think.

[01:23:00] Lee: I am mildly surprised that you had much in the way of maps at all, because part of your job was to create maps.

Taylor: It was. Where we were, the maps had been done, in the summer time when the ice had broken up, from ships. They were quite old maps, hence that narrow opening that we went through could not be seen because no vessel could have got through that.

[01:23:37] Lee: So you had theodolites...

Taylor: Yes, and whatever was necessary for surveying. I was just the gofor. What I did do, what did interest me, was what was the sledging diet. It was absolutely standard. I made a record in my diary of what the sledging diet was. Breakfast was porridge with milk, sugar, salt and butter. We used to put massive amounts of butter in. You could eat butter by the spoonful. You just needed it. You were like a seal. You needed blubber on your body. And coffee, or tea if that was your preference. Lunch was three biscuits with lots of butter. . . the butter we used to put was thicker than the biscuit. . . and marmite. Half a bar of chocolate, and cocoa. Cocoa chocolate, you just consumed it for the energy and the heat. Then we used to have a cup of tea. That is interesting, how did we use to . . . when we stopped. I think we probably prepared that at breakfast time and put it in a thermos. Supper was the proper meal really, which was pemmican. Have you ever tasted pemmican? It is absolutely not like corned beef. I like corned beef. No pemmican is. . . some of the old polar hands got to like it. It was like soul fruit to them. I though it was disgusting actually. It had the consistence of grated toenails. It had a slightly vomity taste to it I always found. It was highly nutritive. It was made from beef extracts and all sorts of things. You had to disguise it. What we used to do to disguise it was. . . We used to have two fifths of a block each. We used to disguise it with onion, curry powder, raisons, dates and pea flour. We use to mix all that into it and then it became reasonably edible particularly with the onions. We used to fry up the onion. And then we used to have three biscuits with butter and half a bar of chocolate, and some more cocoa. That was it. It was an absolutely cold climate diet.

[01:26:30] Lee: You were referring to your diaries. We noted that it was fifty years ago this very week, you were on your way South in February 1955. Your diaries are almost to the day . . . do you have plans for that period?

Taylor: Yes, it was Allegra my wife who said, "Why don't you, on a daily basis, each day as it crops up in your dairy, exactly 50years on, type it out? It will take you half-an-hour a day or less. Get them typed out and..." I think that they are strictly for my own consumption, or perhaps

my children or grandchildren but I will do it. If anybody else wants to look at them, they are welcome.

[01:27:26] Lee: Will they find your innermost thoughts?

Taylor: Oh no! No, when I am feeling pissed off with somebody, I have said so. I have talked about the various battles and arguments, and so on.

[01:27:50] Lee: Have nobody read them since you wrote them?

Taylor: Nobody. Even myself. Last night was the first time I have actually opened them and read them. I wrote them and I put them aside. The Antarctic thing was behind me and now I was going out into the big wide world to be a filmmaker and so on. I just put them away and I never looked at them.

[01:28:18] Lee: How does it feel, Richard, to open them again? How does it feel with the references to what you are fifty years later? Is there something inside you...

Taylor: I think that if I go through them in more detail that might happen. I was giving them a very cursory look, last night. It only partially brought back memories of that time.

[01:28:52] Lee: I suppose what I am thinking is, people regard that period of their lives as one of the most memorable periods of their lives. Unlike other people that I have interviewed you have done things elsewhere in the world on a grand scale. I am just wondering how important Antarctic is to you now you are in your seventies, looking back?

Taylor: For me, much more powerful and more traumatic was my experience in Korea, prior to going to the Antarctic. Interestingly, when I said Ken didn't talk about his experiences, strangely enough I didn't talk about mine. When things are quite traumatic, you don't talk about it, for a long time. And after that, I had just a marvellous life really. I went to so many places with a lot of excitement and so on [See Addendum – Transcriber]. So I suppose the Antarctic was just one of those experiences. But one possibly interesting and possibly revealing thing is that... I dream a lot and I have had lots of recurring dreams in my life... I am left now at the age of seventy one with two recurring dreams. Forget the other one for the moment. It is not relevant. But one of them is that I suddenly find at a very late stage in my life... I am married, I have

children, I am virtually as I am now. . . I sign on to go down to the Antarctic again, and I am on my way down. . . in my dream. I think suddenly, 'My God! What have I done? I am going to be on a base with just blokes. No female company'. I am horrified. 'I am not going to see Allegra for a whole year. It is absolute madness'. It is an awful sense that I have lost myself into this rather special world. It is very claustrophobic world. A tiny world where you are thrown back immensely on your own resources and you have got to work with other people who you may not find you have too much in common with. I suppose the truth of the matter was that I think I had got on reasonably well but I was a bit of an odd man out in that, because I wasn't a scientist and because that business of not being pretentious, I have always . . . I am not a bull shitter so much as somebody who . . . I wear my heart on my sleeve and I talk about it. I may have boxed but I also have a very feminine side to my nature. I think I was with very 'men's men' and that I think I found difficult. I really found not having female company and everything that that represented very difficult.

[01:32:55] Lee: So now, here is an interesting question! Knowing what you know now, would you have gone?

Taylor: Yes! That age, for just a year, seems an awfully long time. I was an awfully long year but I would have gone again.

[01:33:12] Lee: Even though you were a square peg in a round hole?

Taylor: Yes. It was all made worthwhile by the Antarctic environment itself.

[01:33:23] Lee: And after going quite swiftly from Korea, to the Antarctic, and the traumas of Korea war, did the Antarctic - the majesty of the Antarctic - offer you any sense of peace, of healing or recuperation from what I imagine were scars from Korea?

Taylor: [Pause] I don't think I had too many scars. I don't pretend that I had that from Korea. The trauma from Korea was not so much. . . I wasn't in the infantry although. . . We were shelled and things like that, but nothing very dramatic, in that respect. No, the experience in Korea was a different story for me. Any experience, hopefully at the end, you are a little wiser at the end of it. My wife read some letters I wrote when I had just come up to RADA and she said "What a prig you were! If I had met you then, I would not have been at all interested in you!" I think it did that. I had left Public School. I was quite snobbish. I was quite –

maybe I still am, I don't know – I was quite a child of my environment, and I think that it knocked a few rough edges off me. It needed to.

[01:35:27] Lee: Normally, at an interview it feels that it is coming to a natural close, but I feel that there are one or two detail points that I would ask you about. You mentioned in passing a tricky moment on a climb.

Taylor: Oh yes. There was this one mountain on Horseshoe, which was very prominent. You could see it wherever you were on the island. It was really like Mount Fuji. It looks like a doddle to climb it. I am sure to a climber that it is a doddle. I went off with Derrick and Don. I didn't take the camera with me, which I perhaps should have done because it would have given me something to concentrate on. It would have given me something to do. I remember that first we went up this scree slope, which got steeper and steeper. Suddenly, it was getting just too steep, and although we had crampons on, if you slipped, if you lost your footing, you would just slither down and it was an awfully long way to go. We went up this and I was getting more and more frightened, and I suddenly found, as we were getting pretty sheer, my knees started to quiver. I couldn't control them. I hadn't had this experience before, never. It was very humiliating. I was very glad that I had thick clothing on so you couldn't see it. Then we arrived at and had to cross an arete of ice and snow with a sheer drop on either side. . . a sheer drop on one side and a sheer scree slope on the other. When we got there, I thought, 'Are we really going to cross that'? We roped up at that stage. I was in the middle so it was not too risky, I suppose. But it was very narrow, and I do remember half way across, Don suddenly said, " Isn't this grand! Isn't this grand!" He gets out his camera and he takes a photograph. I was looking at him and thinking. "You are mad, you are mad!" He climbed with the best, with people like Joe Brown. [Joe Brown is considered the foremost rock climber and mountaineer of his generation, and perhaps the greatest all round mountaineer ever – Transcriber]. [We] got to the top and then we had to come down again. Coming down was actually easier. By this time I was. . . you know, when you are very frightened, it is like battle fatigue. You suddenly go into a sort of exhaustion, and nothing seems to matter very much. . . That night I was doing Met. Obs. I was sleeping out. I remember getting into my sleeping bag. As soon as I closed my eyes, I had such a charge of adrenalin in my body that I was having visions of not so much as of falling but of seeing the great big steep things. I had to stay awake because as soon as I closed my eyes I had these visions. I certainly had not had this before, and I don't think that I have had it since.

[01:39:31] Lee: Did you communicate this to anybody, or did you just keep it to yourself? Would your sudden softy image be reinforced?

Taylor: {Laughter} I think I did, actually. That was typical of me. Instead of being stoic, I would shoot my mouth off. I can't remember but I probably did.

[01:40:00] Lee: I must ask you about the Norsel. This ship was very rarely used by FIDS. It just happened that you took it, a charter vessel. So very few FIDS used the Norsel. What memories do you have of it? Was it terrible?

Taylor: Well it was quite tiny and I slept at the back, which meant that we used to have to cross the deck to where we used to mess, to eat and so on, and indeed to go to the loo. There were just two cabins at the back. Something that I did read in the diary, it got pretty unpleasant at times. For a start, the water already had diesel taste in it and it had salt water in it. The cabin was awash with water at the bottom and it had about this amount of water sloshing around. Somebody in Montevideo bought a big cask of wine and it had broken . . . [Laughter]. . . It is not the best way to smell your wine, mixed with diesel and so on. I do remember one night getting up to go and have a pee. When the water was rushing over the thing you didn't bother frankly to go to the loo, you just peed on the deck. I remember I was standing there taking a leak and suddenly a freak wave came and . . . whoosh! I just instinctively grabbed on to the rail and held on tight. If I hadn't, I would have gone straight over the top, in the middle of the night, with nobody there. Brian Kemp, who I shared with, was sound asleep. They would not have discovered that I had gone until the following morning. From that time on I was extremely careful when I went out on deck at night.

[01:42:22] Lee: Was it sea-worthy the ship, or was it a leaky old tub that you were lucky to get to Stanley?

Taylor: I have got a feeling that some people, who were more knowledgeable than I was, would have said that it wasn't the best of vessels. It seemed to me that it served its purpose. It got us there! [Laughter].

[01:42:48] Lee: Did you come back on the same vessel?

Taylor: No, came back on the Shackleton.

[01:42:51] Lee: I am just intrigued by this 'Doris Day ' record that got broken. Is this something that you remember? In the film there is reference to a Doris Day record being repaired.

Taylor: Stuck together. I don't even remember it. All I know is that we had a very limited range of 78s, that by the end of the year you could hardly hear them. They had worn out so much. It was a pretty strange old collection too. Jim would remember. Jim Exley would tell you every one of them.

[01:43:39] Lee: Is there anything else that you would particularly like to bring up? We have talked for a couple of hours and... I am delighted...

Taylor: OK. Let me see [Checks though diary – Transcriber].

[01:43:55] Lee: You haven't mentioned penguins. You realize that. It is the first interview about the Antarctic...

Taylor: ... and not mentioned penguins. I haven't got anything particular to say against penguins. I remember filming Emperor Penguins, and that was rather exciting. That was a great experience. I loved filming things like penguins. I suddenly realized how a wild life photographer... what a satisfying form of work that must be, because it was a quite a sort of 'Zen' like experience it must be. You sit there and you quietly wait. You are observing in a way that perhaps if you weren't filming, you would not observe so closely. All I do remember is that little Adelie Penguins were damn strong. When you tried to catch them the strength of their arms was extraordinary.

[01:44:53] Lee: What occurred to me was, with so little film stock to play with, did you in fact rehearse the shots because you wanted to get them right?

Taylor: I am sure that we did.

[01:45:01] Lee: Were you asking men to do things two or three times...

Taylor: Yes, we couldn't afford to... yes, yes. Those were the days in which that is how you filmed. You put your camera up on a tripod, you rehearsed the scene and you shot it. Yes! I am sure that that is how I worked.

[01:45:20] Lee: Just one more question then. I have heard this story from other people but I would love to have your version of the British attack on the Argentine flag. Who instructed it?

Taylor: This was on our journey back. I can't remember whether the Governor was with us the whole of that journey back, or whether he joined the ship somehow or other, and then left us. The Governor, at that time, was from my memory of him, a distinctly pompous and blustering establishment figure. He had come down from Port Stanley. Information had come to him that there was a... Chileans had put up a flag at a certain place. So he had got together a task force. I was one, and we were to go with him, in a boat, landed with pickaxes, crowbars and things like that to demolish this Chilean flag, which incidentally was a metal one. An ordinary flag would not have lasted five minutes in a place like the Antarctic. It was this metal thing on a very strong plinth with a wood base. We got there. Most of us had been for a year in the Antarctic. We had read a lot of Polar literature. Most of us would have thought that, like the Americans and the Russians, as I remember it at that time, were the only ones that believed in the internationalization. That there should be no specific ownership of any part of this Antarctic continent. I certainly felt bad. OK, the Chileans and the Argentinians were claiming land as much as the British were, but I thought that this was not the right thing to do. When I was asked to take my crowbar and set about this Chilean flag, I thought, 'To hell with this' and 'I don't have to do this. I am not under military instruction now.' Anyway, even when I was in the military there were certain things that I had refused to do. That is another story. I refused, and then a couple of other guys thought 'Yes, you are right'. They said that they didn't want to. I am afraid the Governor was apoplectic. I think he thought he felt we should be clapped in irons. Anyway he was left with his apparatchiks to finish of the Chilean flag.

[Laughter]

Recoding ends abruptly

Highlights

Part One

- [00:24:23] Killing seal for dog food.
- [00:29:14] Comparison of quality of equipment British v American
- [00:32:30] Development of career as a documentary film-maker
- [00:36:14] Landing stores from M V Norsel and building Base hut
- [00:38:49] Toughest thing about being in Antarctica
- [00:40:00] Poor radio equipment and communications
- [00:42:19] Bad relationship

- [00:48:47] Reconciliation
- [00:50:03] Base members
- [00:56:27] Disposal of unwanted pups
- [00:57:12] 'Loosing the plot'
- [01:03:50] Smokers v non-smokers
- [01:04:10] Sleeping outdoors
- [01:05:10] The most difficult thing about Antarctic life
- [01:06:02] The most joyous thing about Antarctic life

Part Two

- [01:09:40] Lack of meteorological training
- [01:13:06] Guessing of data
- [01:14:23] Recreation time indoors
- [01:15:57] Recreation time outdoors
- [01:17:16] Sledging on sea ice
- [01:23:28] The sledging diet
- [01:28:52] The importance of the Antarctic experience to Taylor 'today'
- [01:35:27] A memorable climb on Horseshoe Island
- [01:40:00] Conditions on M V Norsel
- [01:44:53] Method of film making
- [01:45:20] Attack on Chilean Flag

Addendum [Obituary by Hugh Thomson, published in the Independent – Transcriber]

During a long and distinguished career as a documentary director for the BBC, Richard Taylor made around 50 films in 61 countries, several of which won international awards. He then went on to make successful films as an independent and was working right up until his death at the age of 81 in London on 24 February 2015. He brought to his films a rare integrity and commitment, and his background as a cameraman rather than university graduate marked him out from many of his BBC contemporaries .

He was born in Newbury in 1933, the eldest of four sons born to Dennis and Kathleen Taylor. His father was a farmer with whom he had an abrasive relationship. He went to Bloxham, a public school, which left him a lifelong socialist with a suspicion of authority and a need for good food and wine to make up for the privations he had experienced. Following national service in Korea and a stint at RADA, he joined the British Antarctic Survey and spent a year on Horseshoe Island shooting a documentary single-handedly, subsequently selling it to commercial television. This launched both his career and interest in exploration: he was later to make films with the Arctic explorer Sir Wally Herbert and about the Empty Quarter, Rub' al Khali, retracing Wilfred Thesiger's epic journey.

While working with British Transport Films he met a 16-year-old music student, Allegra Honig, who had a small part in one of their films and was to become his lifelong companion. They married in 1958, and two years later they went together to Nigeria, immediately after independence, and stayed for three years, the beginning for

both of them of a long love affair with Africa. Allegra came across two orphaned twins whom she adopted alongside her own three children; they were later also to adopt a girl from Kenya.

Back in London and now with a large family to support, Taylor joined the BBC in 1963 as a director for Television Features and for the next 25 years worked for the Corporation on documentary and current affairs programmes. The early days of BBC2 under David Attenborough can now be seen as a golden age of television documentary in which directors like Taylor were given considerable license to follow their passions and convictions, very different from today's "top down" style of commissioning.

His controversial *Equal Before the Law?* was the BBC's first film to address the question of the relationship between the Metropolitan Police and the black community in Britain. Initially banned, it led to picketing at the BBC, questions in Parliament and its eventual screening. *The Fight for Clydeside* followed events surrounding the doomed work-in at Scotland's UCS shipyard; in the trade union leader Jimmy Reid Taylor found a subject as pugnacious and determined as himself.

His films were driven by a deeply felt sense of social justice and determination that those who had got "a raw deal in the world" should be given their own voice, whether on Clydeside or in the Caribbean. He made films in Vietnam, returning so exhausted that he collapsed at the door when met by his family, and in Korea, where he had served as a military policeman during national service days, an experience he compared to Orwell's in Burma, and one which likewise opened his eyes to inequalities.

The coming of colour television towards the end of the 1960s gave documentary-making a deeper immediacy, and with the creation of *The World About Us*, launched by the BBC2 Controller Aubrey Singer as a series that would "make people both wonder at the world and wonder why", Taylor was given the opportunity to make a wide range of films with a large audience that today's documentary makers can only envy in a more multi-channel environment.

During the 1970s he made 16 films for *The World About Us*, criss-crossing the globe for stories such as the deforestation of the Himalayas and the ecological impact of the Trans-Amazonica Highway in Brazil. His documentary on the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster in India revealed the full extent of that tragedy to the world. With the reporter Onyeka Onwenu he made "*Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches*", which won first prize at the 1985 Geneva International Television Festival.

His final film as a staff producer at the BBC was *The Unleashing of Evil* (1988), which examined the complicity of Western democracies in the use of government-instigated torture around the world; as with so many of his films, it was ahead of its time. He was only able to make it, he told me, by shooting a large part of it on the back of other films when he happened to be in a country. When he then presented the BBC with a film which they had, unwittingly already paid for, they felt an imperative to screen it which was as much financial as moral.

Like many directors, the moment came at the BBC when he had to choose between becoming an executive or leaving to continue making films. Never a man to sit behind a desk, he left to form Orpheus Productions.

He was able to make several more films on Africa, including one for the BBC on Ethiopian music for *Under African Skies* at a time when world music was not yet fashionable. He made a film supported by Band Aid for the charity *Safe Hands for Mothers* and many other films for NGOs and causes, which he passionately believed in.

At his 80th birthday he danced a tango with his wife, Allegra (they had gone to Buenos Aires together to take lessons) in front of their 13 grandchildren, and he was still making films right up until his final illness and death.