

DAVID PRICE

Edited transcript of a recording of David Price interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 21 February 2013. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/212 Transcribed by David Price. 1st August 2013.

David Price Part One.

[Part1 0:00:00] Lee: This is David Price – Interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee via Skype on 21 February 2013.

Price: David Michael Price, my date of birth 16th October 1935, I was born in Berkeley, in Gloucestershire.

[Part1 0:00:25] Lee: So how old are you now, David?

Price: I am 77. Coming up 78 in October.

[Part1 0:00:32] Lee: I have read your book with interest, but for the record, would you say your father was an educated man?

Price: My father?

[Part1 0:00:40] Lee: Yeah.

Price: Not particularly because he was deaf, and that caused him a few problems.

[Part1 0:00:51] Lee: How was it for you then as a child communicating with a father that could not hear?

Price: Well he wasn't stone deaf, as such, totally deaf, but we got along OK. And I think with that sort of deafness one gets used to the tone of a persons voice, and that makes it easier to understand.

[Part1 0:01:16] Lee: So you learnt early on in life how to communicate, did you?

Price: I suppose so: he was a clever man but not an educated man.

[Part1 0:01:27] Lee: In what way was he clever?

Price: Well, he was very good at designing and making things. Particularly electrical equipment and things like that.

[Part1 0:01:45] Lee: Did he run his own Company for a while?

Price: He did.

[Part1 0:01:50] Lee: Yeah, tell me all about that...

Price: He worked as an electrical maintenance engineer in a dockyard at the early part of the war, but he decided that he wanted to do more for the war effort that he was seemingly able to achieve, and because of his deafness he had trouble with telephones and things like that, so he left and started his own Company.

[Part1 0:02:25] Lee: Doing what, David?

Price: He set up a small factory for producing brush gear for generators, he was a subcontractor to a company called Mawdsley, in Dursley and they were major contractors to the Admiralty.

[Part1 0:02:47] Lee: Was he employing a lot of people?

Price: Not a lot of people, I mean it was a very low key and small operation of about I suppose, Oh, about 8 women, all women actually because all the men had gone to war and the women had to do the job. He taught them how to use lathes and drilling machines, and how to do the assembly of the equipment and things like that. We had a very big garage at the end of our drive and it was all set up in there.

[Part1 0:03:30] Lee: So he was clearly a resourceful man to be able to do all that without the benefit of hearing.

Price: That's right, he was.

[Part1 0:03:38] Lee: Do you spot anything in this episode of your childhood which kind of shaped your later life?

Price: No, not really, I don't think, I suppose it all harks back to the Price family, really because they were all Bristol Channel Pilots. They were all resourceful men, agents of their own destiny to a large extent, they had all done their apprenticeships and got their mates and masters tickets under sail so they were a pretty tough lot.

[Part1 0:04:18] Lee: But I'm thinking of your own resourcefulness, being your own boss, employing people and dealing with them, whether you felt you learnt early on in life that resourcefulness was a useful attribute?

Price: Yes, I suppose I did really. I was exposed to it an awful lot just in my sort of formative years. Yes, I suppose it did.

[Part1 0:04:45] Lee: But you were also a country lad, weren't you?

Price: Oh yes, I mean where we lived was in deep country, in the Vale of Berkeley I don't know if you've been to Berkeley.

[Part1 0:04:56] Lee: Is this in Gloucestershire?

Price: Yes

[Part1 0:04:58] Lee: With a famous castle?

Price: It's got a castle there and it's right on the River Severn.

[Part1 0:05:02] Lee: Yes

Price: And there is a small port there which is called Sharpness. The ships used to come up and down the Bristol Channel as that is where the family came in as pilots, Bristol Channel pilots. And of course Sharpness became very important during the war effort, the Americans came during the war and they began shipping in stuff for D-Day... Stock piling equipment and things like that.

[Part1 0:05:35] Lee: Tell me a bit about your schooling David?

Price: Well I went to the local Primary School when I was a lad and then it was a case of the 11 plus exam and I ended up in Lydney Grammar School which is on the other side of the Severn in the Forest of Dean.

[Part1 0:05:57] Lee: This resulted in a rather unusual journey to school?

Price: By train, there was a bridge across the Severn at Sharpness in those days. It has now being demolished. But we used to go on the Great Western Railway, on the train. There was quite a number of us going across the river each day. I think I crossed the river, I calculated, something like 2,200 times during my school years.

[Part1 0:06: 27] Lee: Was it the same every day?

Price: No, the river was always changing, sometimes the tide was in, sometimes the tide was out and of course being a river estuary there were all sorts of changeable weather conditions and things like that, and it was a very picturesque journey anyway.

[Part1 0:06:49] Lee: What was it like on a really bad day though, because I mean, I've seen photographs of this viaduct and it is jolly exposed isn't it?

Price: Ah, yes, the wind used to blow up through there a fair bit. If it was fairly windy it was a good day to keep the windows shut on the railway carriage.

[Part1 0:07:09] Lee: What sort of subjects did you do well at, at school?

Price: Let me see, I did very well at English and geography and history and parts of mathematics. I wasn't very good at Latin and I wasn't very good at French.

[Part1 0:07:35] Lee: There's no mention of metalwork or woodwork in that, did you have lessons?

Price: We did, there was woodworking in the curriculum but it wasn't given a lot of emphasis and I didn't take a lot of interest in it.

[Part1 0:07:54] Lee: Why?

Price: My main interest in that regard was generated by my father's workshop. He always had lathes and things like that. So I got to learn how to play around with those when I was quite young.

[Part1 0:08:07] Lee: So was there a sense of inevitability that you might end up in engineering in one form or another?

Price: I was always going to be an engineer. Yes.

[Part1 0: 08:16] Lee: Was there an attraction above just doing what your dad did?

Price: No, not really. Well, I went to Listers and did my apprenticeship. That's where most of the young fellows who were interested in engineering went: simply because it was so convenient.

[Part1 0:08:39] Lee: Yes

Price: And it was easy to get to every day.

[Part1 0:8:45] Lee: Well, Listers was in Dursley wasn't it?

Price: It was indeed.

[Part1 0:08:50] Lee: I think it was quite a large outfit at that time...

Price: Yes, during the war and just after when I was there, they employed something like about 3000 people. Which was pretty small beer, I suppose by some standards. But in the deep fastness of Gloucestershire it was a big deal.

[Part1 0:09:11] Lee: Tell me a bit more about the apprenticeship, was it a tough time for a lad?

Price: Ah well, the pressure was on. I mean, this was before the days of what they called Sandwich Courses and things like that. You were expected to start work at half past seven in the morning and to go to night school about 3 or 4 nights a week. So one's day started at about, oh, bright and early, so that you got to work by 7.30 and you didn't get home again until about 10pm.

[Part1 0:09:43] Lee: And I presume it was a broad based training?

Price: Oh, very much so, yes, very much so.

[part1 0:09:50] Lee: Do you remember some of the things you were taught to do?

Price: We learnt all about machine shop things and things like that, operating machines. I spent a lot of time in the drawing office and Listers always maintained that as well as teaching us how to be engineers they taught us how to work. Which meant they got their pound of flesh out of us, I suppose. Also they told us that we had to learn to take orders if we were expecting later on in life to give orders to others.

[Part1 0:10:38] Lee: So it was a good grounding then for later life?

Price: I think it was actually. It had the reputation of being a very good engineering apprenticeship.

[Part1 0:10:51] Lee: And doubtless you were expected then to stay at the Company and then sort of pay back the apprenticeship?

Price: Well no, that was the funny thing. I stayed on doing an extra-curricular course, if you like, for two years after my apprenticeship finished. But then in those days we had to get out and do our National Service either in the Army, or the Air Force or go into the Merchant Navy as a marine engineer, and that was the course I chose. But of course if you have read the books you will know that FIDS came along and that attracted me. So I joined them.

[Part1 0:11:40] Lee: So you never made it into the Merchant Navy?

Price: Not into the Merchant Navy, no.

[Part1 0:11:46] Lee: In national service, I mean?

Price: No, not at all. When I got back from FIDS there was a nice letter from the War Office or whoever dealt with those things telling me that as I had been South they thought I had done my duty by the country and that I could consider myself exempt from National Service.

[Part1 0:12:09] Lee: Do you remember whether that arrangement was made before you went South or whether it was agreed after you came back?

Price: Well, I came back and the letter was there waiting for me so I suppose the wheels of whatever it was turned around whilst we were away and they said that this is where this lad is.

[Part1 0:12:35] Lee: OK.

Price: That was it, and you know, I mean, it wasn't just me, I suppose there were lot of others as well like that.

[Part1 0:12:39] Lee: There were indeed, there were quite a few chaps who took the Southern Option rather than National Service option, yes?

Price: Yes.

[Part1 0:12:46] Lee: The fact that you joined FIDS came about in a rather unusual way because Listers got an unexpected contract, which I would like you to tell me about please?

Price: Well, I was an Applications Design Engineer working with special contracts and one day my boss came up to me and dropped a file on my desk and said 'Have a look at this', he said 'I think it will be right up your alley' because I had a bit of a reputation in Listers for going off climbing and doing things like that at the weekends. Most often on a Friday I would turn up at work with a bulging rucksack, with a pair of boots and a saucepan hanging off the

back, and they used to call me Sherpa! [laughs] So he thought that something to do with the Antarctic would appeal to me. So that's how I got to know all about FIDS and what was happening there.

[Part1 0:13:47] Lee: So what was the job that was inside this folder?

Price: It was to design all the generating equipment as a power station for Port Lockroy.

[Part1 0:14:01] Lee: Port Lockroy was at that time an Ionospheric Station for the International Geophysical Year?

Price: Yes, and the Year of Geophysical Co-operation which followed on from the IGY.

[Part1 0:14:20] Lee: Both of which was pretty high profile so this was quite an important commission wasn't it?

Price: Well it was really, yes, it was indeed.

[Part1 0:14:28] Lee: So what did you have to do? In what way did you have to adapt Listers existing product to make them serviceable in such an alien environment?

Price: Nothing much really, because they were extremely robust and reliable pieces of equipment. Which was one of the shortcomings that they were suffering from; with the existing equipment they had. We just modified the engines to have an auxiliary sump, lubricating oil sump so that the engines could run for about three weeks without stopping 24/7 and then having two generators I would then swop from one to the other and do a bit of maintenance as required on the one that was shut down and then let the other one take over and then three weeks later do another swop.

[Part1 0:15:22] Lee: So, in the design process in preparing these generators to go South, did you have to take into account the coldness of the Antarctic?

Price: Ah yes, but the engines were designed in such a way that they would start in very low ambient temperatures and the ambient temperatures we had at Port Lockroy weren't sufficiently low to cause them any problems.

[Part1 0:15:50] Lee: Was it more or less a case of taking two machines off the peg – or was there more to it than that?

Price: Oh there were a few modifications, I mean the switchboards and things like that were special because of the nature of the sets, and we kept one of the old Enfield sets as well so there were three sets of instrumentation on the switchboard and things like that.

[Part1 0:16:15] Lee: Do you remember how it was that Dursley got the contract because they weren't using Lister generators before that point?

Price: No that's right but Listers did a lot of work with Crown Agents and Crown Agents did a lot of the buying for agencies such as FIDS and so I suppose it came to Listers – came out to tender to Listers.

[Part1 0:16:42] Lee: And if you had said no, what would have happened?

Price: If Listers had said no?

[Part1 0:16:49] Lee: If you said 'I don't want to do the job?'

Price: Oh well, one didn't do that sort of thing [both laugh].

[Part1 0:16:58] Lee: Fair comment...

Price: No you did the job, it looked very interesting, especially the environmental conditions and the fact that once the engines were built and tested at Dursley they all had to be stripped down into their component parts, and shipped out as a pile of parts.

[Part1 0:17:14] Lee: Yes.

Price: And reassembled back together again at Port Lockroy. Now it was part of the contract that Listers send an engineer to go to Port Lockroy on secondment to rebuild these engines and to commission them on site. But Listers declined to do so, I don't know why. So I thought this is a good idea, so I stuck up my hand to FIDS and we started talking from there.

[Part1 0:17:47] Lee: So how did that happen then, did you have to resign from Listers?

Price: I did, yes, but it was a very benign sort of resignation, whilst I was down there one of the Directors took me under his wing and wrote me letters and kept me up to date with what was happening. So it was never considered that I would be permanently leaving the nest, even though in my mind I certainly was. Because there was a wider world out there, I wanted to see part of it.

[Part1 0:18:20] Lee: The key factor was that it was not Listers who were paying your salary but somebody else?

Price: That's right.

[Part1 0:18:28] Lee: Knowing then that you were likely to go down to the Antarctic with these machines, I imagine that you took great care in choosing spare parts to go with them, didn't you?

Price: Oh yes I did, there was a list of recommended spare parts which the company would produce for Lloyds and people like that for marine engines that were on ships, and it was based around those sort of requirements. Also Listers themselves had a list of spares for these remote places, maybe for 12 months operation or another list for a more comprehensive, say two years operation. So it was all built around that.

[Part1 0:19:24] Lee: So Listers in fact were already supplying engines to other remote parts of the world were they?

Price: Well you could go to any part of the world and you would find Lister engines, specifically in the remote parts where they needed particularly power generation or water pumping, things like that. You would find them in the deserts of Africa, you would find them

in the Australian outback. For instance, I know that in the States of South Australia and the Northern Territory, which is just the middle part of Australia, there were over 17,000 Lister engines in that area alone driving pumps or generators. You would find them everywhere, they were ubiquitous.

[Part1 0:20:23] Lee: So reliability was a most important factor?

Price: That's right.

[Part1 0:20:28] Lee: You were uniquely placed of course to approach FIDS but did you have to go through the usual interview phase?

Price: Well that was the understanding. Justice had to be seen to have been done.

[Part1 0:20:37] Lee: Yeah.

Price: So they said they would treat me as though it was a normal application.

[Part1 0:20:44] Lee: Do you remember the interview at all?

Price: Not a lot, I was asked a few questions, most of which I could answer. They were very concerned about me because of my referees. Two of the referees I nominated were clergymen. They thought I was going down there on a missionary trip [laughs]. I don't know who they thought I was going to convert but I assured them that that wasn't the case, these people happened to be family friends.

[Part1 0:21:28] Lee: Was there a medical, Dave?

Price: Was it what?

[Part1 0:21:36] Lee: Was there a medical?

Price: Yes, yes there was. They said it was a good job I was going to Port Lockroy because the Harley Street specialist I was sent to had detected a heart murmur with me, which was the first time I had ever heard about it. So at Port Lockroy, being a static base I wouldn't be exposed to any strenuous long sledging journeys and things like that. Nothing untoward happened of course.

[Part1 0:22:08] Lee: So your appointment was not in any doubt despite that?

Price: I don't think so, well, I don't know I mean, FIDS, I read articles and things other people have written about FIDS and not one of them really got told they were going until the last minute. I'm sure you would have come across that from other people you've interviewed, and certainly they hung on, but they rang me at Listers one day and said, you know, you're on. Get down to Southampton on October 1st. or something.

[Part1 0:22:43] Lee: So do you remember how much warning you had?

Price: I think it may have been a full fortnight [laughs by both.]

[Part1 0:22:53] Lee: What was the feeling back home from mother and father about this, about our David going down to the Antarctic?

Price: Oh well, I suppose that they looked upon it all with an amount of trepidation, but you know I come from a seafaring family where people were always going away, so it was accepted.

[Part1 0:23:22] Lee: What do you recall about the journey south, Dave?

Price: What do I recall about it? I recall that all the crew got Asian 'flu just out of Southampton and we had to work the ship and I had to do engine room watch through the tropics. That was a wake-up call for me I can assure you.

[Part1 0:23:45] Lee: In what way?

Price: Hot man, very hot.

[Part1 0:23:50] Lee: Very hot...

Price: And down in the ships engine room in the tropics, there was no air conditioning on the *Shackleton*.

[Part1 0:24:00] Lee: Who was on the ship with you that you still remember today?

Price: Alan Cameron, Mike Crockford who is unfortunately dead now, oh golly, Mike Rhodes, Duncan Boston, Alan Gill quite a few others. I'm sure that if I sat down I could list quite a lot of them off. There were about 30 of us on board.

[Part1 0:24:32] Lee: And you must have, I guess at that point have known which of those members were going to go to Port Lockroy with you, did you?

Price: Oh yes, I mean there were three of us, there was myself, there was Mike Crockford who was going to be the Radio Operator and Alan Cameron who was going to do Ionospherics.

[Part1 0:24:51] Lee: And did friendships form on the journey?

Price: I'm sure they did, and that was good, we didn't stick together as such because at that stage we were all feeling our way. We all had different interests, but by the time we reached Lockroy we had been through the *Shackleton* incident as it were. I suppose we cemented into a little team.

[Part1 0:25:18] Lee: You say in your book *Climate Change* that being a supernumerary on the *Shackleton* was irritating, what do you mean?

Price: Well, have you ever had to holy-stone a deck, a wooden deck on a ship on your hands and knees? Have you ever come across anything more boring in your life doing that sort of work, that sort of thing?

[Part1 0:25:25] Lee: It was a system where they paid you a certain sum of money and you had to do what they said?

Price: A shilling per month.

[Part1 0:25:51] Lee: A shilling a month?

Price: Exactly, which we never received [both laugh.]

[Part1 0:25:59] Lee: Was that the source of any resentment then or were you just glad to be having something to do?

Price: Not resentment about the money it was just that we were big explorers and we were expected to do menial tasks on the way. I think that's what stuck in people's throats.

[Part1 0:26:15] Lee: Yes.

Price: It stuck in a lot of peoples throats far more than it stuck in mine, but I can't really answer for most of them.

[Part1 0:26:26] Lee: OK. You shared a cabin didn't you, with one or two of these guys on the ship?

Price: Oh yes, Tony Richardson, he and I shared a cabin, he was going to Hope Bay doing met work and we quickly formed a good friendship and he had a lot of other met men who constantly invaded our cabin.

[Part1 0:26:53] Lee: There is a reference in the book of the Cabin 11 Glee Club...

Price: Well they were all mountaineers like I was a spare time mountaineer and all had played rugby as I played rugby. You collect a repertoire of songs you know doing these sort of things. Tony Richardson, he was quite a good guitar player so, that was it. We used to amuse ourselves.

[Part1 0:27:22] Lee: I was going to ask you about arriving in Stanley. It was the end of 1957 that you sailed into Stanley?

Price: Yes.

[Part1 0:27:31] Lee: What was Port Stanley like at that time?

Price: A bit like Berkeley, except there were no trees.

[Part1 0:27:42] Lee: Would you care to elaborate?

Price: Well it was a little country place not much bigger than a village. Berkeley wasn't much bigger than a village. It was in the back of beyond like Stanley. I didn't feel alienated with the place at all.

[Part1 0:28:01] Lee: Did you have time to socialise?

Price: Oh well, everybody did to a certain extent. Yes because we were new faces coming in and I think in those days they didn't see too many new faces in Port Stanley so, we got the treatment.

[Part1 0:28:17] Lee: Well you were young male faces weren't you?

Price: Well, there was that about it I suppose, yes. There were a few ex-pats there working for FIDS and people like that.

[Part1 0:28:31] Lee: So, when a ship came in was there a bit of excitement among the young ladies of the community?

Price: Well I don't know whether they were excited or not, I don't know but, as well as our ship coming in there was the *Protector* in port and they had a much greater complement of young men than we had, so there was a bit of competition around.

[Part1 0:28:57] Lee: Yes, I'm thinking of the dances in the town...

Price: Well they were all based around Jimmy Shand records and all the girls would sit down one side and all the fellows would sit down the other.

[Part1 0:29:18] Lee: And did you meet in the middle?

Price: And there were mostly Scottish reels and things like that.

[Part1 0:29:24] Lee: Were the girls shrinking violets or were they willing to dance?

Price: Oh no, they would get up and take us around, yes they were pretty active in a dancing type of situation.

[Part1 0:29:41] Lee: Then came the serious stuff, of heading South, which ship did you go down to the islands on?

Price: On the *Shackleton*.

[Part1 0:29:48] Lee: Of course, yes. You were heading to South Georgia, weren't you?

Price: I went to South Georgia, twice, yes, well you know all about the *Shackleton* incident when she...

[Part1 0:30:01] Lee: Well, I've heard other of versions of it but I'd love to hear it from your viewpoint...

Price: Well, my viewpoint is as in my books, you know I've said what it was. Well on the night that the incident happened, I had gone to bed early for no particular reason other than I wanted an early night. Tony Richardson came in and gave me a shake and said, 'Dave, you had better get up. We've hit a bergy bit and the ship's taking on water and it's all hands on deck.' I thought he was joking so I took a bit of persuading but eventually I went up there and

sure enough by then the ship had a list on it and, you know, the situation became fairly obvious.

[Part1 0:30:59] Lee: What did you have to do, what were you instructed to do?

Price: Well, they wanted to dump cargo because of the amount of water that was getting in, they wanted to lighten the fore end of the ship. So we were chucking stuff like anthracite, bags of anthracite and there was a fair amount of bagged up shingle and sand which was going to Port Lockroy to make concrete foundations. All that got chucked overboard, various things like that

[Part1 0:31:32] Lee: Yes, I understand that the throwing of things overboard was a bit haphazard, so were you concerned about your engines at all?

Price: Oh yes, but there was nothing like that, nothing in a packing case, to my knowledge went over. I was worried about the engines and even more so about the generators and the switchboards because they were submerged in sea water which is not good for them.

[Part1 0:31:57] Lee: Were you ever worried about your safety during this incident with the *Shackleton*?

Price: Well, I suppose we were all concerned in a detached sort of way. We were all too busy chucking the stuff overboard, we didn't have time to get concerned. But like a lot of instances, things were happening which we didn't know about and were not party to, so not knowing some things could have been a bit unnerving.

[Part1 0:32:30] Lee: So you weren't aware of the attempts to repair the ship?

Price: Oh yes, yes.

[Part1 0:32:36] Lee: What did you know?

Price: We knew that the First officer, the Mate, had a couple of goes at rigging a tarpaulin round the outside of the ship like a baby's nappy to try and stop the water from getting in. Didn't work the first time, had a second go and it worked to a certain extent then which allowed a team of guys, the boatswain, Second Officer and a few of the Fids to go down into the hold to build a coffer dam using *Ciment Fondu*¹ which we had on board. This was quick setting cement which would set in sea water. And that's what they used to block the hole up. Meanwhile the ship had sent out an S.O.S and the *Southern Lily* turned up, she was a whale catcher, standing by us to pull us all out of the water in case we had to jump overboard.

[Part1 0:32:46] Lee: Did you see much of the Captain, Norman Brown at this time?

Price: No, he was busy on the bridge. Saw the First officer and Tom Woodfield the Second Officer, saw a lot of them, they were there, very busy and well involved but we didn't see much of Norman Brown at all. Don't forget, I was just a lowly Fid, I didn't move in such exalted circles.

¹ High-Alumina cement.

[Part1 0:34:13] Lee: Was there any sense of panic?

Price: Certainly not by the Fids, we weren't in a state of panic. There was a suggestion that perhaps some of the crew were a bit panicky but I would have to admit that I didn't see any evidence of it myself.

[Part1 0:34:31] Lee: And then you were taken on the Protector weren't you?

Price: Yes, the *Protector* came to us eventually and they sent a couple of shipwrights over to help with the repairs and all us Fids were taken off on to the *Protector*.

[Part1 0:34:53] Lee: How were you transferred?

Price: You know, I can't remember. I think we went down into the *Shackleton's* boat, motor boat.

[Part1 0:35:03] Lee: The world at large was aware of this because I think the BBC World Service picked upon the story didn't they?

Price: Yes they did, and Lew Chanter who was a correspondent for the Daily Telegraph was on board the *Shackleton* with us anyway and he was sending bulletins back and as well as that I suppose there were reports through the official channels, there was quite a lot going on.

[Part1 0:35:32] Lee: So was that generating concern back home?

Price: I suppose it was although I must admit, not a lot was said about it when I eventually got home.

[Part1 0:35:48] Lee: The ship eventually made its way to South Georgia and you were able to start unloading your equipment?

Price: Ah well, the situation was this, we went to Stromness where there was a floating dry dock but the *Shackleton* with all its cargo on board was too heavy for the dry dock to lift. So what happened was that all the cargo had to come out of the ship which was a good thing because it gave me a chance to spend some time looking at the condition of the engines. I had to unpack the packing cases and pull the pieces... to pull the bits out, and clean them all off with fresh water rather than sea water and the generators were in a bit of a state because being electrical windings. They don't like being submerged in water and what happened was that we put... we warmed out, after sluicing out and drying the generators we put electric bulbs inside each generator to warm the air and to dry out the field windings, and we got those right. I assembled one engine and just gave it a run to make sure it was all right and then I had to pull it to pieces again a re-pack it. But the switchboards were absolutely ruined.

[Part1 0:37:38] Lee: What exactly is a switchboard?

Price: Well, it's a board with all the instrumentation where the output from the generator connects so we can read all the electrical indications of load and frequency and voltage and things like that. That is wired to the generators and then it also had circuit breakers and things like that on it so the power is then distributed around the base or wherever it has to go.

[Part1 0:38:17] Lee: So the generators would be fairly useless without them?

Price: Without the switchboards?

[Part1 0:38:22] Lee: Yes.

Price: Oh absolutely and the switchboards were totally ruined. So fortunately the ship got on to Sec FIDS back in England, back in London and they got on the phone to Listers and Listers worked all night and all day to make new switchboards and they were airfreighted down to South America, to Montevideo. Later on in the season the *Shackleton* or the *Biscoe*, I can't remember which went up and collected these and brought them back down so that they could be installed.

[Part1 0:39:06] Lee: That's a quite remarkable incident isn't it that they should be replaced so efficiently?

Price: I suppose there was a little bit in the fact that the boys in the factory knew that it was me, and they all knew me and they put their shoulders to the wheel, not to let me down I suppose. They must have had a few thoughts about me because they filled the void spaces in the packing case with girlie magazines.

[Part1 0:39:33] Lee: Which would have made you very popular on base I suspect?

Price: Well yes, I suppose so, for a while.

[Part1 0:39:38] Lee: So you genuinely think that if it had been any other engineer that may not have happened so swiftly?

Price: I wouldn't like to say that. You know there were a lot of interpersonal relationships involved. After all the manager of the department that made the switchboards was a relative of mine. That might have helped.

[Part1 0:40:08] Lee: Can I ask you a layman's question – why was the switchboard equipment not waterproof in the first place: would that not be normal practice?

Price: No, I mean most of the switchboards you buy even today, I mean that if you put them out in the weather they would get wet inside and that's the short way to being stuffed up. But Listers being... These generating sets were sort of what I would call a country house generating set where a stately home had a bank of about three or four of these things and they were made specially to be easily serviceable. So the switchboards were made of a big thick Zelamite panel, the material was a sort of insulating material mounted on a steel frame. All the wiring was exposed on the back of it and the iron clad instrumentation was all bolted to the front. This made servicing very easy which would be important in a place like Port Lockroy, but not the most sophisticated way of doing things.

[Part1 0:41:25] Lee: What do you remember of your first sight of Port Lockroy when the ship came in, was it impressive?

Price: Well, I'll say, I was up very early that morning as we sailed down the Neumayer Channel and was absolutely amazed at the scenery, mountain scenery around us.

Remembering we turned in to Port Lockroy itself, I mean surrounded by those wonderful mountains. At every point of the compass there was a mountain. We had been told by those who had been to Port Lockroy before that the base hut there was considered to be a gentleman's residence, especially when compared with some of the other base huts that FIDS had. Mainly because I suppose it was occupied all the time, people were not going out for long periods of time away from it and it was the main place where they had to live 24/7, a comfortable place.

[Part1 0:42:34] Lee: Did you get to climb many of the mountains because you were a member of the Gloucester Mountaineering Club weren't you?

Price: It wasn't really encouraged because after all there were only five of us there and if an accident had happened or anything happened then somebody else would have to do your work and that in fact happened with Jim Muir Smith being taken ill.

[Part1 0:43:01] Lee: Yes...

Price: So you know, we didn't take any risks I mean there were other things to do. We taught ourselves to become proficient at skiing and took a few trips away on Wiencke Island and did some man-hauling sledging away for a few days, that sort of thing. That prevented any frustrations from creeping in and we would only be a party of two of us anyway.

[Part1 0:43:39] Lee: How did you adjust to the idea of being a chef?

Price: Well, I didn't mind at all really. My mother... I would hesitate to call her a qualified chef but she was a qualified cook. She had always taught me the rudiments of cooking anyway, as a young lad, so it was no problem. I slipped into it: the only difference was that I was using dehydrated material instead of fresh.

[Part1 0:44:09] Lee: You were also using a rather strange Esse cooker weren't you which had to be coaxed?

Price: Oh yes, if the wind was blowing the chimney got red hot if there was no wind the thing would go out, just about.

[Part1 0:44:25] Lee: And there's a story about a little disaster with a tin can...

Price:[laughs]. The tin of asparagus: I don't know if you've ever seen the standard FIDS issue of asparagus, they were imported from France, quite a delicacy, beautiful asparagus, the tin was quite tall. Anyway, I suppose one week it was my turn to be cook and we were going to have a tin of this asparagus as a treat so I stuffed it in the oven and I forgot to pierce the top. Of course it became a pressure vessel and the inevitable happened, blew the door off the oven and made a mess [both laugh] it took me quite a while to see the funny side of it.

[Part1 0:45:17] Lee: OK, well the first thing that had to be done when you got to Lockroy was to build a shed for these generators?

Price: Yes.

[Part1 0:45:23] Lee: What do recall of that process?

Price: Well, it all came prefabricated from Boulton and Paul and first of all we had to put in the foundations, the piers, and which was cement of course and then we built it up on that. Mind you, it just wasn't me doing it, I mean we were helped by everybody, Alan Cameron was a great help. We had a chap Dennis Wildridge seconded to us who had been a builder in a previous life. He was sort of Clerk of Works who directed what we had to do. We got it up true and square and what's more it's still standing to this day, a monument to our efforts.

[Part1 0:46:16] Lee: Was there no temptation bearing in mind it was so far from civilisation to employ Fids bodge tactics on this building process?

Price: Oh no, not at all, I don't think we deviated from the drawings one little bit. It all went together very well.

[Part1 0:46:38] Lee: Alan Cameron talks about a tongue and grooved floor he was involved in laying...

Price: That's right, it was a wonderful job that, he and Dennis Wildridge did. The floor was diagonal tongue and grooved: pine I suppose it was. Then on top of that they put on a layer of Ruberoid and then they re-laid another diagonal floor going in the opposite direction so that the two boards were at ninety degrees to one another on top of that and made a wonderful, strong, level, true floor.

[Part1 0:47:15] Lee: Which is crucial because the machines would have been heavy – I guess – the generators?

Price: Oh well, the generators were set on huge concrete blocks which went down into the rock below, I mean they weren't set on the floor.

[Part1 0:47:28] Lee: Right, OK. Was it warm in there?

Price: Well it was, with the generators running 24/7 the place was always warm. Beautifully warm, at a constant temperature.

[Part1 0:47:45] Lee: Was there a temptation later in the winter to sneak in there to stay warm?

Price: Oh I always found a job or two in there.

[Part1 0:47:54] Lee: What about the other chaps?

Price: Oh well yes, sometimes they would come in and have a little bit of a jolly in there, yeah.

[Part1 0:48:02] Lee: So installing the generators began from the kit of parts: was this a one-man job?

Price: Except the parts, things like the flywheels that were too heavy to lift or things like that. Some parts were too heavy for one chap to lift so I had to get help then.

[Part1 0:48:27] Lee: So was it a very straightforward job or did you hit any snags?

Price: Well, we had snags in as much as (goodness me – we’ve just got a storm!)

[Part1 0:48:36] Lee: I can hear it...

Price: Pouring with rain. Did we hit snags? Yes, because when we left Listers the flywheels particularly were all labelled with the engine number and there were two flywheels on each engine, one at each end. Because they had been submerged in the sea water in the *Shackleton* incident, the labels were written with soluble ink not insoluble ink so we didn’t know to which engine which flywheel belonged... Flywheels belonged. So we put them on and we had a... I spent a lot of time trying to improve the cyclic irregularity by swapping the flywheels around but we had a big job to get them off. We ended up with a flicker on the lights which was a bit of a nuisance because it affected the trace on the Ionospheric equipment and we mucked around with that for a long time and then Alan Cameron said ‘what if we just run the belts a bit slacker’ just like that, you know. I thought well, that’s a good idea, why didn’t I think of that [laughs by both]. Anyway we did and it cured the problem so, that was the only problem we had.

[Part1 0:50:14] Lee: Did Alan Cameron have an engineering background?

Price: I think he had an electrical background or in telecommunications or something.

[Part1 0:50:25] Lee: He mentioned about one thing about one flywheel that was beginning to wander and there was concern about it flying off...

Price: Well, the flywheels were held on with just one single key; it was a big key mind you and one of them worked loose, fortunately there was about a foot or so spare crankshaft sticking out. One day, one of these flywheels started wandering toward the end. I smartly shut the engine down of course, and replaced it.

[Part1 0:51:00] Lee: How long do you think the whole process took, to get the whole thing running properly?

Price: Well, because we had to wait until the last ship of the year to get the switchboards and all the work had to be done towards that. It was June or July before we got them running properly.

[Part1 0:51:21] Lee: When the switchboards arrived they just slotted in perfectly, did they?

Price: Well, the wiring had to be done on site, I mean there was no prefabricated wiring.

[Part1 0:51 38] Lee: What happened to the generators that were being replaced by the new ones?

Price: Well, we kept one which I installed as a standby just in case we had a catastrophe with the Listers and I used that for pumping fuel oil mostly. The others, I can’t remember, I think one got possibly taken away to one of the other bases and the other one we stripped down for spare parts.

[Part1 0:52:10] Lee: The Listers were seen as a technological advance then were they?

Price: Well, yes I suppose they were.

[Part1 0:52:22] Lee: Why was it considered most important to have 24/7 power at Port Lockroy, whilst other bases only had it for an hour or two every day?

Price: Yes, that's right: well, the thing was it was the Ionospheric business, where readings were taken every hour, 24/7. Additionally, the IGY held what they called special World Days where transmissions on the Ionospheric equipment were made every 15 minutes on a 24/7 basis, this could go on for a couple of days. That's why they had to have continuous power.

[Part1 0:53:05] Lee: I gather from Alan Cameron that the 24 hour – sorry – the World Days were quite stressful on Base?

Price: Well they were for the Ionospheric chaps, they weren't particularly stressful for Michael Crockford and myself, he being the radio operator and me being the diesel man. I suppose some of the frustration of the Ionospheric boys might have rubbed off on us, I don't know. But of course there were just two of those, Alan Cameron and Jack Tinbergen doing the work of three men because Jim Muir Smith was laid up in 1958 and he couldn't help in the winter.

[Part1 0:53:54] Lee: Let's talk about him then, what do you remember about that particular episode Dave?

Price: Well, I remember that Jim didn't feel well shortly after New Year's Day, Midwinter's Day, rather. He put himself to bed and we looked at one another and wondered whose cooking was at fault. But anyway it got to the situation where Alan Cameron got on the radio and spoke with the doctor at Argentine Islands Base F who was Dr David Jones at that stage. David Jones suggested that he go to bed, rest and Alan Cameron with the help of some of the others made up a bed so that Jim could lie on a bed at a slope of about 30 degrees.

[Part1 0:55:05] Lee: Why was that important?

Price: Why? I don't know, I'm not a medical man.

[Part1 0:55:11] Lee: But presumably Dr Jones had to diagnose the problem remotely so how did that?

Price: Well, he did and from what he told us but didn't tell Jim Muir Smith that he thought he had an abscessed appendix.

[Part1 0:55:25] Lee: Right. That sounds quite serious didn't it?

Price: Well that's right: anyway we had whatever drugs were in the base medical chest that could be used. And they were used of course. Jim was given all the help we could give and he sort of oscillated between feeling worse and feeling better over quite a period. Then he got worse, quite a bit worse and it was suggested that we try and contact the Argentinians at Almirante Brown which was the Argentinian base over on the mainland in Paradise Harbour. We got in touch with them by radio. Fortunately somebody there, the Base Commander,

spoke excellent English and we explained the situation. We asked if they would be prepared to make a boat trip to us because they had a doctor on base. He could bring the doctor with him and all the necessary drugs and whatever else he needed and they said they would try and make the trip which was about, as the crow flies it was only about twenty five miles but with deviations around the bottom of Wiencke Island and Doumer Island it was further than that, longer than that.

[Part1 0:56:58] Lee: What time of year was that, David?

Price: Oh well it was the end of winter, it was September, early September I think. August, early September, round about that time.

[Part1 0:57:11] Lee: So there was plenty of ice around?

Price: Oh yes, it was a very hazardous journey under the circumstances.

[Part1 0:57:21] Lee: What could you do to guide them in firstly?

Price: Jack Tinbergen and I did a trip to Wiencke Island to get a better view from over the other side of the island and to get a good view of the Gerlache Strait. We could give them ice condition reports and things like that to give them a bit of confidence that they weren't running into dense pack ice or anything like that. So we went off to do that..

[Part1 0:58:02] Lee: So you radioed your observations back to the Argentinians did you?

Price: Oh yes, we took a small 68 set, radio transmitter, with us and radioed the situation back to Mike Crockford back in the base at Lockroy and he in turn got in touch with the Argentinians.

[Part1 0:58:22] Lee: And did they make a start straight away?

Price: Well they had to wait for suitable weather conditions and when they did they got as far as the Chilean base which is in another part of Paradise Harbour and they got stuck there for a while because of ice conditions. So they had to go back home to their base and wait for better weather conditions at their end.

[Part1 0:58:52] Lee: When did they finally arrive?

Price: Oh, I would have to have a look at my notes or look at my book.²

[Part1 0:58:58] Lee: Was it months?

Price: I would have to look at my book to tell you that, I'm not sure what the exact dates were off the top of my head.

[Part1 0:59:08] Lee: Did it feel like months. That you had to wait a month for them to get there?

² 19 September 1958, at 19:30 local time.

Price: Oh not at all because things were going on, pressure was on with all the work that had to be done around the place, with just four blokes instead of five. We were worried about Jim of course but I don't think we were worried about time hanging on our hands waiting for the Argentinians to come.

[Part1 0:59:32] Lee: Yes.

Price: But when they set out they got to Lockroy very quickly in the end. Although they were just about knackered. They were all in when they arrived and they had to be helped back to the base. Because of ice conditions around Port Lockroy they could only land at a further point of the island and we had to get them in.

[Part1 1:00:10] Lee: Was the doctor actually an Argentinian?

Price: Well he was an Argentinian but he was of Japanese birth.

[Part1 1:00:16] Lee:] Right.

Price: Doctor Mario Yamasaki or Zamasaki³ or something like that.

[Part1 1:00:24] Lee: So how was communication, did the base leader come too?

Price: There were three men that came, there was Teniente Horacio Méndez who was the base leader and I presume a lieutenant in the Argentinian navy, he could speak fluent English, there was no worry. The doctor could speak Japanese or Argentinian and the other chap Oscar Bammater⁴ could speak Argentinian. So the base leader, Horacio Méndez was the go between, between the other two and he was able to tell Jim Muir Smith what the doctor was saying and also able to translate it into Spanish so that the doctor could understand it in his own language.

[Part1 1:01:28] Lee: So was it at this point that Jim was told what his problem was?

Price: I don't, well, not being in on the consultations, as it were, I don't know whether he was actually told or whether he just jumped to that conclusion.

[Part1 1:01:48] Lee: Yes, What was the Japanese doctor able to do?

Price: Well he had drugs, drugs which we didn't have. Don't ask me what those drugs were because I couldn't tell you. Probably some Penicillin type antibiotic, more powerful drugs than the ones we had.

[Part1 1:02:12] Lee: Did they work?

Price: Yes they did up to a point. He got Jim to the stage where he could sit up for meals and on a sunny day he could sit out with a rug around him. But I mean, it didn't cure him by any means.

³ Dr. Mario Yamazaki. Unfortunately, some 40 years ago he was later killed in a traffic accident near his home. His relatives shut up his house, only unlocking it about three years ago. It was found just as he left it, 'With sugar still in a bowl on the table...'

⁴ Deputy Base Commander and Radio Operator.

[Part1 1:02:31] Lee: So what was the long term solution to Jim's problems?

Price: The solution was that he would have to be picked up by a ship and taken to Stanley for proper medical attention. Which eventually happened in about November, I think.

[Part1 1:02:49] Lee: In the meantime you had this Argentinian party on your base and the weather closing in again?

Price: Yes that's right: we had them for a month: quite a house-call, really. You have got to twist a doctors' arm to make a house- call these days.

[Part1 1:03:07] Lee: How was that socially for you?

Price: Well it was very enlightening really, I mean, we all got on very well together. Our ways were not their ways and their ways were not our ways. We all learnt a lot from one another; we were all enriched by the experience.

[Part1 1:03:28] Lee: What kind of house guests were they, did they muck in and help in the kitchen?

Price: Oh yes, yes very much so, they would do that. They brought slabs of fresh steak and things like that with them. We were living out of tins and dehydrated stuff so it was quite a thing.

[Part1 1:03:54] Lee: And how did you spend the evenings with them, were there things you could do to entertain them or vice versa?

Price: Oh yes, there was a lot of radio ham work going on, and yes Horacio Méndez was still the base leader at Almirante Brown and he still had to keep in touch with those people who were there to make sure that they were doing everything he needed them to do. We had a great supply of records and things like that. We would talk and yeah it was good. I taught Oscar how to use a dark room and use an enlarger and develop and print his own pictures, which he hadn't been able to do before. Things like that. We got on very, very well with them really.

[Part1 1:04:43] Lee: Technically, you were enemies weren't you?

Price: Oh yes, of course.

[Part1 1:04:50] Lee: What do you think would have happened if the Argentinians had declined the invitation to help, or failed to get there?

Price: I shudder to think really, I really shudder to think. I don't know what would have happened because the drugs that we had on base were insufficient to bring about any resolution for poor old Jim, it would make him a little more comfortable but that was all. So I don't know what would have happened really, I don't think anybody would have ventured South from Stanley in a ship in the winter.

[Part1 1:05:38] Lee: It kind of underlined the vulnerability, didn't it, of FIDS bases in those early years where there wasn't a doctor on each base?

Price: That's right, we had no doctor and, I mean it wasn't long after that the Chileans had a problem with an appendix, a burst appendix on the base and they sent a ship to act as a radio beacon for an aeroplane that flew from San Diego or somewhere with a doctor they dropped off, but the ship sank, lost all hands so, you know, that's the winter in Drake's Passage. I wouldn't have been a good thing.¹

[Part1 1:06: 22] Lee: So you weren't sitting there thinking ... 'Why aren't FIDS doing more for us? There was nothing more that could be done?'

Price: Well, we did everything that we could do, we were young and we didn't dwell on the pessimistic side of things. It wasn't our nature I suppose. We were all young men.

[Part1 1:06:43] Lee: You even built Jim a commode I believe?

Price: Well Alan did, yeah, he was a great carpenter, Alan, he was good at making things like that and he made a commode for him, yes.

[Part1 1:06:53] Lee: How was Jim finally got away?

Price: Well the *Protector* came and took him off in the end, and took him up to Stanley, he went into hospital and had his appendix taken out.

[Part1 1:07: 09] Lee: Was he replaced on base?

Price: No, we were managing; we managed all winter so we continued managing with four men until the normal base changeover came at the end of the year.

[Part1 1:07:24] **[End of Part One]**

{Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is David Price – Interviewed by Chris Eldon-Lee via Skype on 21 February 2013. David Price Part Two.

[Part 2 0:00:14] Lee: There was another medical issue with Jaap, um Jaaps: is his name Jaaps?

Price: Yes Jaap, Jaap really, but we all called him Jack, we called him all sorts of things, but Jack, he answered to Jack.

[Part 2 0:00:31] Lee: What was that story?

Price: He had an abscess on his tooth and we had to run a DIY programme to get his tooth out with radio help from our radio doctor David Jones at the Argentine Islands.

[Part 2 0:00:48] Lee: Did he know about dentistry, David Jones?

Price: Well he said he did but he had never taken a tooth out so one has to wonder [both laugh].

¹ *Peter Bird notes that it was the Argentinians rather than Chileans involved in this incident. The Argentinian tugboat 'Guarani' lost will all hands 7 miles S of Tierra del Fuego, 15th October 1958.*

[Part 2 0:00:59] Lee: Tell me about the process, did he...

Price: On that particular thing we all drew straws to see who was going to pull the tooth out. Poor old Alan Cameron got the short one and I got the next short one so I had to be the nurse. Mike Crockford had to operate the radio. He couldn't bear the sight of blood so he had to turn away, but he operated the radio and that was it. Alan Cameron and I did the medical bit with Alan doing the pushing and shoving to get the tooth out.

[Part 2 0:01:48] Lee: What did you do for anaesthetic?

Price: Well, we filled Jack up with whiskey or brandy – I can't remember which – and a couple of cocaine pads on either side of the tooth.

[Part 2 0:02:00] Lee: Did it come readily, the tooth?

Price: No, not at all it was a real tussle. The Doctor told us not to turn the tooth because it would be a double molar and when Alan eventually got it out it turned out to be a single molar. But anyway it got out and we gave Jack some antibiotics or penicillin or whatever it was and tucked him into bed and he was alright in a day or so.

[Part 2 0:02:34] Lee: Was there an audience for this operation?

Price: I think everybody that could get to a radio was tuned in and listened to it all and of course the radio operator at base F made a tape recording of it anyway.

[Part 2 0:02:54] Lee: Did he? I wonder where that is now?⁵

Price: I have a copy of it here somewhere.

[Part 2 0:02:58] Lee: You've got a copy for yourself have you?

Price: Alan Cameron had a copy too.

[Part 2 0:03:08] Lee: Oh, right, OK I'll ask him about that.

Price: You could give him a call and ask him 'what about the tape' of Jack's tooth.

[Part 2 0:03:18] Lee: For the archives, yes. I read somewhere because it was an audience there were some sound effects introduced into this operation?

Price: Oh well we played it up a bit although I couldn't say that for poor old Jack because he was the one doing the suffering. I can assure you that the moans and groans from him were quite genuine.

[Part 2 0:03:44] Lee: Yes. And when the tooth was finally extracted?

Price: It rattled into the dentists bowl at the end of the operation: I think that was a nut and bolt or something like that to make a suitable clunk.

⁵ Edited and transcribed recording of Radio consultation, recorded by Barry Shaw at Base 'F'. BAS Archives ref: AD6/16/1958/4.1

[Part 2 0:03:58] Lee: [laughs]... So it was a theatre in more than one way then?

Price: Oh very much so.

[Part 2 0:04:06] Lee: Let's talk a bit more about the Beastie work, I know you were providing the power for this work to be done but were you also gathering, were you learning, about the process at the same time, the work they were doing?

Price: Well I was interested in what they were doing, they were always behind the eight ball, so they couldn't spend too much time telling me about the ins and outs of it all. Basically it was a radio transmitter, a radar transmitter...that transmitted vertically rather than across the horizon.

[Part 2 0:04: 41] Lee: But did you and the other non-ionospherisists understand why they were doing it?

Price: Yes, it was to sound the density of the various ionospheric layers and the echoes that were returned from the transmissions were photographed and were then developed, on base in the darkroom, and then Alan Cameron and Jack Tinbergen, the most part of their job was to analyse the traces on them. It was a system called reduction, they called it, and then tabulate all the results which got transmitted by radio to Port Stanley and thence on to the DSIRO in Slough.⁶

[Part 2 0:05:48] Lee: In where, sorry?

Price: Slough, in London.

[Part 2 0:05:52] Lee: Slough, yes OK. Did you have a sense of where you were a small cog in a huge research process?

Price: Well, we knew we were doing our bit and we were also doing a series of experiments for an American organisation on Whistlers. I don't know if Alan might have told you about Whistlers but that went on all the time. We made recordings of that on the hour on magnetic tape. We weren't involved in the processing of that, it all got packed up at the end of the year and sent off to America but apparently the results from Port Lockroy were better than the results they got from anywhere else in the world.

[Part 2 0:06:51] Lee: Was that because of its location?

Price: I suppose partly. Also, the incidence of those things which generated the Whistlers.

[Part 2 0:07:04] Lee: Yeah. And, of course, the people doing recordings for that...

Price: Of course.

[Part 2 0:07:11] Lee: You had your own interest in radio didn't you I think; weren't you a radio amateur David?

⁶ Department Of Scientific & Industrial Research, Radio Research Station, Slough.

Price: Well I wasn't until I got to Port Lockroy and I became interested. In the second year I built a transmitter with help from Alan and also from Paul Leek and we used that a fair bit and I managed to send messages as far as Scotland from the Antarctic which pleased us greatly.

[Part 2 0:07:46] Lee: When the Beastie was in operation did they interfere with the radio for ham work?

Price: We wouldn't do it when, I mean, mostly it was on the hour, every hour so that we knew that we had to stop mucking around on the airwaves whilst that was going on. And on World Days we wouldn't do it at all. But we fitted in you know.

[Part 2 0:08:16] Lee: Were you able to have worthwhile conversations with the other hams or was it simply a case of recognising that contact had been made?

Price: Oh well, there was always a fair amount of talk and banter and things. Sometimes some of the chaps managed to get on to a ham that was close to their home. Although it was really not allowed, messages got passed and sometimes parents got on the radio.

[Part 2 0:08:50] Lee: Oh really?

Price: Oh yes.

[Part 2 0:08:54] Lee: So were your family able to do that?

Price: No, no my parents lived in Berkeley which is on the dark side of the moon compared with the rest of the UK.

[Part 2 0:09:04] Lee: But there were conversations between Fids and their relatives back home?

Price: Oh some, yes.

[Part 2 0:09:12] Lee: Yeah, that's nice isn't it?

Price: Oh well it was, yes. I was going to say some of them had regular contacts like once a month or something like that.

[Part 2 0:09:22] Lee: So being in touch with the outside world was quite important then, were you following world events at that time?

Price: Well we had shortwave radio we would listen to the BBC World Service when we could get reception or The Voice of America or something like that. We were well up to date with it all.

[Part 2 0:09:43] Lee: I think there were instances where sometimes you listened to two different radio stations who gave you different stories about the same event?

Price: Oh of course.

[Part 2 0:09:52] Lee: Can you elaborate on that?

Price: It was just, I suppose different nations had different slants on things and the way things were done.

[Part 2 0:10:01] Lee: What kind of things did you talk about whilst on base? There was a library where you sometimes would go as a group to meet and discuss things?

Price: There was a lot of reading done on base because we had a good library but we also had lots of discussions. We talked about our lives. Jack talked about his life in Holland and the fact that his family had suffered fairly badly in the war. His father got locked up for a couple of years by the Germans, it didn't stop him from winning the Nobel Prize eventually.

[Part 2 0:10:44] Lee: So you would talk about Berkeley and Gloucestershire would you?

Price: Oh, we would talk about this and that and our interests and our girlfriends, those of us that had girlfriends and the football teams we followed, and our interests. Alan Cameron was a great jazz enthusiast. I belonged to an operatic society. Jack was interested in classical music, we were never short of things to talk about. We played cards and cribbage was a great game we played, things like that – Chess.

[Part 2 0:11:26] Lee: There was quite an extensive LP collection?

Price: Well I don't know what it's like there nowadays, in our day what happened was, you've got a standard sort of issue from FIDS and we all supplemented that with our own offerings. So you've got quite an eclectic taste.

[Part 2 0:11:52] Lee: What did you take down there?

Price: Mostly Gilbert and Sullivan.

[Part 2 0:12:02] Lee: I'm dying to know what FIDS thought was an appropriate record collection to put on base, can you remember any of the LPs that were there, before you arrived?

Price: Oklahoma, that was one of them. Oh, one or two of the more popular classics and things like that. That was all; it was fairly limited I mean they couldn't give us a huge collection.

[Part 2 0:12:31] Lee: And you built your own transmitter for the amateur work, was that I'm not clear if that was the very first ability you had to use amateur radio or whether it was a second transmitter later on?

Price: Well, the transmitter came in the second year actually.

[Part 2 0:12:51] Lee: Yeah.

Price: But the first year we used the base transmitter, in fact we used the base transmitter mostly. The transmitter that I had was very much experimental.

[Part 2 0:13:04] Lee: So, a bit more about it Dave?

Price: There's not a lot I can tell, it was built on well defined and classical lines as far as a radio transmitter was concerned. But we had to make it up using scrap bits from the Beastie and other electronic bits and pieces that were lying around. It wasn't very sophisticated.

[Part 2 0:13:32] Lee: But it worked?

Price: It worked. The modulator used to give us most trouble. I wouldn't have got through loud and clear like I get through to you.

[Part 2 0:13:46] Lee: No, well it is more than half a century later isn't it now?

Price: Well that's exactly so. It was all thermionic valves and things like that.

[Part 2 0:13:55] Lee: So, no transistors then?⁷

Price: Oh no, long before the invention of transistors.

[Part 2 0:14:00] Lee: So, but it was still quite reliable, the radio communications because you were so dependent upon it weren't you?

Price: Well it was reliable up to the point of ionospheric conditions, which is why we were there. All these ionospheric readings that were eventually transmitted and collated. They were worked up into what was called useable radio frequencies for different times, because a lot of it was dependent upon the activity of the sunspot cycle. And that was why the IGY was at that time, a period of maximum sunspot activity, which could be very disruptive in terms of radio communication.

[Part 2 0:14:51] Lee: And you suffered from fluctuations in your ability to communicate did you?

Price: I'm sure on occasions, yes.

[Part 2 0:15:03] Lee: Alan Cameron said that he had a fantastic first year in '58 but 1959 was a lot quieter, like a lot more routine...

Price: Oh that's right, well we didn't have the excitement. We had no generators to build, we had no generator shed to build, we had no sickness, not that it was exciting, that was a drama. But you know there was a lot happening. The second year with two different blokes, because Jim Muir Smith left and Jack Tinbergen had left. Paul Leek and George Lewis came in.

[Part 2 0:15:41] Lee: How did they fit in?

Price: Different kettles of fish, altogether.

[Part 2 0:15:42] Lee: Can you talk about that a bit? How did they settle down?

⁷ The first point-contact transistor was produced in 1946. Some transistors became commercially available by 1952, but some years elapsed before technology and life-testing permitted much industrial use.

Price: Have you spoken to Paul or anybody like that?

[Part 2 0:15:51] Lee: No. I've not spoken to Paul or George...

Price: George is dead anyway and has been for a number of years, yeah, well they came in. They were diametrically opposed as personalities I suppose you would say and it took a while for them to fit in. George had come to FIDS, he had worked in Germany as a technical translator and he was an avid enthusiast for everything German and the efficient German way of doing things. Which to us, just after the war – 1959 – almost 10 years after the war maybe, but it still rankled a bit and he got on everybody's nerves quite a bit. Paul was an easy going bloke, a bit scruffy, but you know, he was easy, he was a good friend, easy to get on with.

[Part 2 0:16:55] Lee: There were complications with George's messages to and from home I believe?

Price: Oh, I don't know much about that.

[Part 2 0:17:06] Lee: Well, he was wanting to send messages in Morse in German?

Price: Oh I don't know, I wasn't involved in that.

[Part 2 0:17:15] Lee: OK.

Price: I can't comment because I don't know. Now you mention it I remember there was something but it was not something that penetrated my...psyche.

[Part 2 0:17:32] Lee: Was the base less harmonious on the second year?

Price: Oh no, not less harmonious, we got on, we got on well. In fact I was a very good friend of George. We used to correspond after we both got home, I used to go and see him occasionally when I was in England. I used to see Alan too. So yes, it was harmonious enough it was just that old George was a bit older than the rest of us and he was somewhat irritating, we found. That was all, but not to the point of being acrimonious.

[Part 2 0:18:13] Lee: Now they weren't the only other people on board base, there was a cat and a dog as well?

Price: Ah yes we, Alan brought down a cat which the wife of the Colonial Secretary had given him it was christened Bridget for some unknown reason and then later on it had a name change and it became Dizzy which I believe was named after one of Alan's girlfriends. Don't quote me on that.

[Part 2 0:18:46] Lee: Well he mentioned it too in fact; he got a "Dear John" letter from Dizzy?

Price: Yes that's right, about two weeks after we arrived on base. Bit rough, I thought, that one.

[Part 2 0:18:58] Lee: Was it a case of opening some drink, something, being of moral support to him?

Price: Well we didn't have enough drink to give people moral support. But we all felt sorry for him and we jollied him along shall we say.

[Part 2 0:19:17] Lee: And the dog?

Price: The dog Peso?

[Part 2 0:19:21] Lee: Yeah...

Price: Well Peso came from the Aero Survey Expedition they gifted it to Port Lockroy. Peso was a beautiful dog, I thought she was. She was a cross between Border Collie and something else, I don't know, she was a dark liver and white dog with a very nice personality. She got on well with everybody on base except George Lewis. She bit George one day and she'd never bitten anybody else. Dogs can sort people out. But anyway, poor old George got bitten for one reason or another. I'll put it like that. They were great, we wouldn't have...the base was a much better place with those two animals there.

[Part 2 0:20:29] Lee: How good, yes. How were relations with BAS⁸ HQ, SECFIDS and those distant people who were supposed to be running your lives?

Price: Those distant people that always got everything screwed up... [laughs.]

[Part 2 0:20:45] Lee: Tell me more about it?

Price: Ah well, they did, I can't give you instances but it always seemed that you'd open a packing case and what was inside bore no relation to what was on the manifest, things like that. Poor old SECFIDS got the blame for everything and that was the way it was. They were the whipping boys really.

[Part 2 0:21:08] Lee: Yeah, a serious resentfulness, or more jocular?

Price: Oh well, when we had to have a moan and complain about somebody to get the dirty water off our chest. We would blame SECFIDS.

[Part 2 0:21:23] Lee: Within the base itself though, you hinted earlier it was very much a democratic management of the base?

Price: Very egalitarian, yes, we got on extremely well as a team. The Base Leader who, when we got there first it was a chap called Clem Clement and then Jim Muir Smith took over from him and when he got sick towards the end of the year they made Alan Base Leader and he remained Base Leader for the second year. Of course it was all a very relaxed sort of outfit.

[Part 2 0:22:05] Lee: So what was the most stressful thing for you then in your time down there David?

⁸ BAS did not exist until it was established in the UK to take over FIDS operations in 1962.

Price: Well for me I suppose the most stressful thing was to clean up those engines and get them right so that they ran properly, and on the electrical side of things, get them running correctly. That was stressful at the time because it was something that nobody looked for and it was a big problem at the time.

[Part 2 0:22:40] Lee: A big problem?

Price: Well a big problem in as much as we could have done without it and we had this continued running the old generators and things like that which were really noisy and whereas with the Listers you couldn't hear them running when they had the door shut.

[Part 2 0:22:59] Lee: So, a big stress waiting for the control boards to arrive, the switchboards to arrive?

Price: Although that was part of it, it was all very frustrating. I mean it was something that was outside of our control really. I mean nothing much we could do.

[Part 2 0:23:17] Lee: Coming from a long line of ships pilots did you get much boating in whilst you were down there?

Price: Oh, we did a fair bit of boating around the place, Alan Cameron was a very keen boating man, and Mike Crockford had spent half his life in a boat, so we all knew what we were doing.

[Part 2 0:23:38] Lee: How reliable were the boats and engines?

Price: I consider that two and a half horse power in that sort of environment, which was all we had by way of a British Seagull outboard motor, was puny. You know we used to turn our nose up at everything the Argentinians had, not whilst they were there of course, but they had a British Anzani engine in their boat which was 15 horsepower, which was much more useful if you got caught in ice or anything like that. You could push your way through. With a little Seagull, they wouldn't pull the skin off a rice pudding really. They were fairly reliable as long as you kept the fuel mixture right.

[Part 2 0:24:34] Lee: And did you get far?

Price: Well we just dodged around as far as Dorian Bay and places like that: down the Peltier Channel and all around. We didn't do anything... we didn't try and do a *Shackleton*.

[Part 2 0:24:57] Lee: Comparing yourselves to the Argentinians then, they had a doctor, they had fresh meat they had decent outboard motors did you feel at any time that the British men were being treated as slightly second class citizens by our government?

Price: Well I think a lot of it harks back to the way things used to be in the heroic days, when, if there was a hard way the British did it the hard way. It has been ever thus. That was the way I saw it. If there were two ways to do things, an easy way or a hard way it was felt that there was more kudos in doing it the hard way. But that's only a personal view.

[Part 2 0:25:56] Lee: Yes, well that's what I am after. So was that just character building or was that a sense of deprivation?

Price: I'm sure it was character building.

[Part 2 0:26:02] Lee: Yes. You said in your book you learnt a lot about yourself in those two years down South and I was wondering if you could summarise what you felt you learned?

Price: I was a country boy; you could put it like that. I lived in deep country in amongst farmers and people like that and I lived a quiet sheltered life and suddenly I was thrust out into a world of men.

[Part 2 0:26:35] Lee: Did you feel you matched up to them?

Price: I could hold my own I suppose, yes. I said to Alan Cameron subsequently when I was writing these books, I said 'the trouble was in those days I was green' and he said to me – 'you were never green'.
So I must have matched up to the rest of them somehow or other.

[Part 2 0:27:03] Lee: What do you think happened inside you in that time?

Price: Well don't forget we were growing up of course: I was 21 when I got on the ship, 22 when I got off the ship at the other end, its going through a very formative time in one's life. So, one becomes slightly more mature as we get older. Some of us never learn.

[Part 2 0:27:36] Lee: One of the most frequent things is that most Fids say: they become a lot more self-reliant after their time down South...

Price: That would be right, you wouldn't go round looking for somebody to get you out of a fix; you would have to get yourself out of a fix whether it be the job, burning the cakes in the oven or the exploding asparagus [both laugh].

[Part 2 0:28:02] Lee: As the time approached for you to start coming back home again what were your feelings about the Antarctic, were you sorry to leave or was two years long enough?

Price: I was keen to get home at the time but it wasn't long before I realised that up until that time it was the best years I had spent in my life. Maybe because they were closer in time-scale than anything else. I took a job after having a holiday: I took a job in Bath with a company called Stothert and Pitt. I worked in their design office for a while. After a month or two I got fed up with that, I couldn't stand the regime, the regimentation, whereas the life at Port Lockroy had been free and easy and you made your own decisions about things, about life. Having to work in an office really felt like having a tight dog collar around my neck. So I applied for a job in Malaya.

[Part 2 0:29:17] Lee: So it was a bit like going back to school was it, going back into an office?

Price: Well, you know you were expected to do things certain ways. There was a company way of doing things. I don't know, I suppose after a life of Fids one just didn't fit into a routine environment, that's what it amounted to really.

[Part 20 0:29:41] Lee: So hence the application to Malaysia, or Malaya as it was then called. What were you applying for?

Price: To be an engineer, on a tin mine.

[Part 2 0:29:53] Lee: Was that anything you knew about or was that a new departure?

Price: I knew absolutely nothing about it. If we all wait until we know about things we would never do anything. No, I didn't know about tin mining. I knew that Malaya mined two thirds of the world's tin. I knew that they had what they called an Emergency on their hands where tin miners were being murdered but I was assured by one of the partners of the company I was joining that that was all over. I thought a different culture, a different climate, a different job, and I became a lowly shift engineer which as a European was about as low as you could get in the echelons of tin mining for an European, or as an Orang Puteh as they call an Englishman, and I started as a shift engineer.

But I quickly figured out that by taking a few examinations I could soon become qualified to be a bigger and better engineer. We'll put it like that. That's what I did. I spent the best part of three years learning the job. I was working on a tin dredge. I don't know if you know what a tin dredge looks like except if you have seen a picture in the one book.

[Part 2 0:31:33] Lee: Well, tell me what it does?

Price: It digs soil and tin and everything out of the ground and passes it through a treatment process and it's all on a big floating pontoon. The particular one I went to first of all was called Hong Kong Tin. It weighed in at about 4,500 tons so you can see it's not a small affair and it would dig below the surface to about 135 feet, which was a long way down. That brought a whole new range of technologies for me to learn, processes to learn. New languages to learn to make myself understood: a wonderful life.

[Part 2 0:32:26] Lee: A very different climate to cope with?

Price: Oh yes, it wasn't the difference, that didn't seem to bother me in the slightest. I have to tell you nowadays I can't stand the cold and I can't stand the humidity or the blinding heat that we get here sometimes so whatever it is we don't carry it all the way through life.

[Part 2 0:32:49] Lee: Yes.

Price: But at that time it was no problem.

[Part 2 0:32:53] Lee: Were there things you think you learned about life or yourself or working with people in the Antarctic which you were able to apply to your new career in Malaysia?

Price: Well eventually I got myself in the situation where I was in charge of blokes, fellows, other Europeans, I also, in the beginning had about thirty of mixed race, Chinese, Malays, Indians, I had to learn their language very quickly so that I could get myself understood.

[Part 2 0:33:31] Lee: Were there skills or attitudes that the Antarctic provided you with in which you were able to use later?

Price: I was self-reliant: I didn't have to go around to the boss every two minutes. I got on with the job. I also put up with idiosyncrasies of some of my fellow men and if you go East you'll come across a lot of idiosyncratic people [both laugh].

[Part 2 0:34:00] Lee: Just to cut a longish story short, you of course fell in love and ended up in Australia?

Price: When I was in Malaya yes, I met Helen; she worked for the Australian High Commission. In the Diplomatic service she was a secretary, in the Australian High Commission there. It's very interesting because my company, Osborne and Chappell they were called, a company with Cornish roots, were very protective of their young engineers. We weren't allowed to marry during our first tour of duty which was for three years and even then, afterwards, the prospective wife had to be vetted by the company, by upper management of the company, the partners if possible to see whether she would be a suitable wife.

[Part 2 0:35:08] Lee: Did she pass?

Price: Of course, flying colours... [both laugh] I got to be Chief Mechanical Engineer so she must have said the right things to the right people.

[Part 2 0:35:20] Lee: How did you come about moving to Australia?

Price: Well Helen was Australian, is Australian. I am Australian these days and having had my mouth widened and my brains removed we always decided that when we married we would come to live in Australia. It was a much more egalitarian country than England with all its class barriers, still there in the 1960's and we wanted to live here and so that's where we came.

[Part 2 0:36:04] Lee: And to bring the story full circle you ended up working for Listers again in a fairly senior position?

Price: I did, first of all when I got a job, when I got to Australia I had no job. I had to find myself a job. I joined the English Electric Company I think it was called and I worked for them for quite a while and got on well there. But eventually word got to me that Listers were opening a new branch office in Adelaide, well we were living in Adelaide so that was quite convenient, and somebody gave me a copy of the advertisement for a State Branch Manager for the whole of South Australia and the Northern Territory. So take the middle slice out of Australia, it was to run that for Listers and so I applied and I got the job. We stayed there for a while, we bought a farm, lived on the farm had a few animals, our children were growing up. They loved the life in the country.

Eventually, I rang my boss who was an old Naval Commander, rang him up one day and said, 'You know, Arthur, we've finished restoring this old farmhouse, we can enjoy it now'. He said 'Now look David, I'm sorry to tell you that you had better put it on the market.' I said, 'Why?' He said 'Come over to Sydney and we'll discuss it'. I went over to Sydney as directed and he said that he was retiring and that I was the anointed son. So they had all done their homework and they got in touch with Listers in Dursley about me, and they all knew what I had been up to in the Antarctic and everything and they wrote back and said, 'Have

no fear with Price, he has an impeccable pedigree' their words, not mine. That was their words, so I became the anointed CEO of the company.

[Part 2 0:38:42] Lee: Almost a prodigal son, because you went away and came back?

Price: Exactly; well they like that at Listers. They like you to go away and learn the secrets of the opposition. And they thought the fact that I had been in English Electric for a while I would have known a few of their diesel engine secrets you see.

[Part 2 0:39:04] Lee: You said earlier that you thought those Antarctic years were the most exciting years of your life is that still the case or, how do they rate in the life of Dave?

Price: They would be run a very close first by Malaya.

[Part 2 0:39:20] Lee: Yes...

Price: I thoroughly enjoyed my seven years I spent in Malaya, I thoroughly enjoyed the time there I only got out in the end because the Malayan Government were running a scheme which they called Malayanisation. It was a determined scheme to get rid of all the European ex patriots in vital jobs in the country and replace them with locals. And as I could see that the writing was on the wall so as I came to the end of my contract and I was talking with one of the Partners of the company one day he said 'Well', he said, 'Are you going to sign this contract for another year, another period of a couple of years'. I said, 'no'. He said, 'Why not?' I said 'I don't think there is a future for us here in this country'. He said 'Well, if you ask me personally I have to agree with you'. I said 'I want to get out whilst I'm still young enough to carve myself a good life somewhere else'. And that's what we did. I went with their blessing, as I came away with FIDS blessing, by the way.

[Part 2 0:40:42] Lee: Yes...

Price: Yes, they gave me a letter saying they were well pleased with the work I had done at Port Lockroy, so that was pretty pleasing. So I think I made my mark.

[Part 2 0:40:55] Lee: Have you ever had the chance to go back South?

Price: Well, there's always a chance. The only problem is the old Doh, Ray, Me, isn't it? It's a long way from Australia.

[Part 2 0:41:09] Lee: Yes...

Price: To go South I would have to fly to Argentina and then go down to Patagonia and then pick up one of the tour boats. I'm not prepared to do that.

[Part 2 0:41:24] Lee: Do you keep in touch with Antarctic issues and people?

Price: I'm a member of BAS Club and all those things and I read the BAS reports, yes I do. I keep up with it all.

[Part 2 0:41:45] Lee: So you are keeping a keen interest even now in how the Antarctic is faring and the climate change that's going on?

Price: Oh yes, everywhere I go, I have contacts – In Malaya – I have contacts in the Antarctic – I like to keep an iron in the fire because old habits die hard anyway; one has got to keep up with these things.

[Part 2 0:42:12] Lee: Well, I think I have asked you everything I have wanted to ask you David, unless there is something else that you particularly wanted to say?

Price: I thoroughly enjoyed my time with FIDS as I think that at the time we went, and I'm sure that you have heard this from other people who went at a different time to me. The time we went were the golden years of FIDS, I thought. We were our own agents, life was free and easy, we had a base leader but we weren't screwed down to our jobs. Nowadays it is much more regimented, I mean science is the thing and the bases are run far more professionally than they were when we were there. I'm not saying they weren't professionally run I meant that there is a far more disciplined regime than there was in those days.

[Part 2 0:43:10] Lee: Is that a pity?

Price: Well, I suppose the science is the reason for being there anyway, and so you have to do it in as a professional way as you possibly can. Everybody is on limited budgets and all the money needs to go towards the science rather than maintaining a few blokes going around, whilst they are doing a useful job of work, having a jolly good time at the same time.

[Part 2 0:43:42] Lee: Fids of your era sometimes say they have a unique understanding of what it was like for Scott and Shackleton and his colleagues because life for them was not that different from the heroic era?

Price: Well that has been said.... partially.

[Part 2 0:44:03] Lee: How do you mean?

Price: I mean our communications; although they could be considered crude by today's standards, were far better than anybody had in those heroic days and I think that the understanding of rations and things like that were far better. But you know, to be on a small base with five people, no doctor, no cook, do everything yourself, was a wonderful experience and I wouldn't have missed it for quids.

[Part 2 0:44:39] Lee: Well thank you very much David for sharing it all with us.

Price: Just one word I have to tell you, before you sign off?

[Part 2 0:44:41] Lee: Yes.

Price: That when I worked at Listers before I went to FIDS the manager of the Marine Department went by the name of Ernest Shackleton. That was indeed his name. We used to call him 'the intrepid explorer.' For obvious reasons. No, it was wonderful, I wouldn't have missed it.

[Part 2 0:45:06] Lee: It's been great fun talking to you. Thank you so much.

Price: Well I hope that I haven't been too flippant and I hope that what I have said makes a certain amount of sense.

[Part 2 0:45:17]

[End of Part Two]

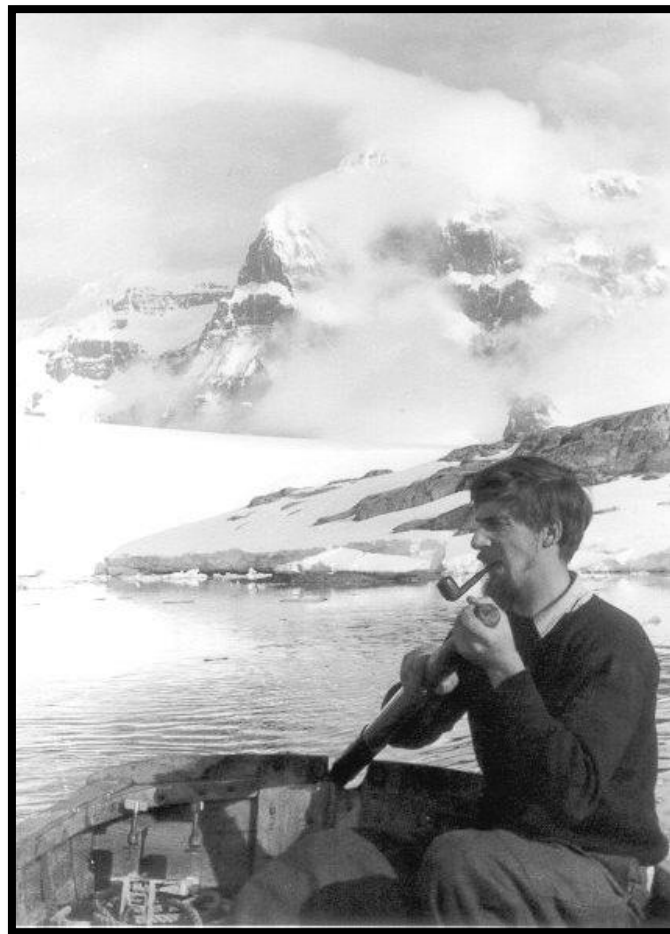
Possible extracts:

- Early life with a handicapped father [Part 1 0:00:40]
- School days [part 1 0:05:35]
- Engineering apprenticeship at Listers [Part 1 0:08:07]
- Joining FIDS [Part 1 0:20:28]
- The voyage south and pleasures of Port Stanley [Part 1 0:23:22]
- The *Shackleton* accident [Part 1 0:30:01]
- First sight of Port Lockroy [Part1 0:41:25]
- How to blow the door off an oven [Part 1 0: 43:39]
- Building a new shed for the generators[Part1 0:45:17]
- New generator sets and associated problems [Part 1 0:48:02]
- Jim Muir Smith's medical problems [Part1 0:53:54]
- Medical assistance from the Argentinians [Part 1 0:55:25]
- Help from an Argentinian/Japanese doctor [Part 1 1:00:10]
- Entertaining the Argentinians [Part1 1:02:49]
- DIY tooth extraction [Part 2 0:00:14]
- Ionospheric work [Part 2 0:04:06]
- The home brewed radio transmitter [Part 2 0:12:31]
- New inmates 1959[Part 2 0:15:03]
- Pets on base [Part 2 0:18:13]
- Messing about in boats [Part 2 0:23:17]
- A new direction, Malaya [Part 2 0:29:41]
- Marriage and a move to Australia [part 2 0:34:00]
- Full circle, back to Lister [Part 2 0:36:04]

Pictures on pages 37 & 38



Jim Smith getting some fresh air surrounded with sleeping bags, under a sheepskin rug, with Dizzy on his lap while Chief Nurse Peso carefully hovers in attendance.



David Price boating in Port Lockroy Harbour



The Argentinian medical assistance team, about to return to Paradise Harbour and 'home.'



The new Generator shed nearing completion, with one of the Lister units in the foreground.

<ENDS>