

MARTIN SCARFFE

Edited transcript of interview with Martin Scarffe conducted by Chris Eldon Lee on the 26th of March, 2013. BAS Archives ad6_24_1_215. Transcribed by Allan Wearden, December, 2018.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Martin Scarffe interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 26th of March 2013.

Scarffe: John Martin Scarffe, Wallasey, New Brighton, Wallasey.

[0:00:14] Lee: What's your date of birth Martin?

Scarffe: 4th of February, 1935.

[0:00:18] Lee: So how old are you now Martin?

Scarffe: Seventy eight.

[0:00:21] Lee: OK, was your father an educated man would you say?

Scarffe: Yes, he was a Customs and Excise Officer.

[0:00:29] Lee: How about your education, where did you go?

Scarffe: Went to boarding school in Yorkshire.

[0:00:33] Lee: Which one?

Scarffe: Eshton Hall it was called, in the West Riding. I went there till I was 15 and I left there to join the Royal Navy.

[0:00:43] Lee: What was it like, was it a good school?

Scarffe: Oh yes it was a pretty good school yeah!

[0:00:47] Lee: What were strongest subjects?

Scarffe: I was pretty good at most things, I tried to be good enough at most things best but I left at 15 as I say, so didn't do any higher education.

[0:01:08] Lee: What was the attraction, Royal Navy then, were your family?

Scarffe: I'd always wanted to go to sea!

[0:01:13] Lee: You had?

Scarffe: Yeah, all our family always had connections with the sea; my oldest brother's a master in the Merchant Navy and my younger brother followed me into the Royal Navy. I had a great, great, grandfather who owned his own shipping line, sailing ships, 27 ships eventually! One of the biggest lines in the world!

[0:01:34] Lee: What was the name of the company?

Scarffe: Red Cross line [Lee: Oh yeah]. Singlehurst his name was, Robert Singlehurst. That's our family's sole claim to fame so I want to write a book about it, would have loved to have written a book about it - trying to encourage some of our relatives to write it!

[0:01:52] Lee: Can you remember what it was about the sea that made you want to go there, to go to sea?

Scarffe: Never wanted to do anything else! Never thought about anything else, always wanted to go to sea. When I was child I used to go down to the park, Harrison Hills, overlooking the Mersey, and watch all the ships and note down all the ships coming in and names and all the skippers and what they were carrying and everything. I was going to join the Merchant Navy, that's right, but my father said 'I don't mind you going to sea, son, but I would prefer it if you joined the Royal Navy than the Merchant Navy'.

[0:02:29] Lee: Can you imagine why he said that?

Scarffe: No, because my oldest brother did well in the Merchant Navy. So I said 'OK', so that's what I did.

[0:02:41] Lee: Do you remember the interview? [Scarffe: What?] To get the job?

Scarffe: In the Royal Navy? Not really, went to the recruiting office in Liverpool, I can't really remember now.

[0:02:58] Lee: Was it what you hoped it would be?

Scarffe: The Navy? No I left when my time expired about 1960, Feb 1960. I'd done a lot of sea time and I got a bit fed up with it

[0:03:17] Lee: Fed up with being away all the time?

Scarffe: Yeah, not so much just being away, just being at sea, of going round the world!

[0:03:28] Lee: What were the more exotic places you went to?

Scarffe: I didn't go round that much. I loved Rio - when we sailed into Rio harbour I always remember Corcovada Mountain was covered in mist and you could just see this huge figure of Christ just peeping out of the top of the cloud, very moving! Thought it was Christ appearing myself! [laughter]

[0:03:55] Lee: You're wearing a cross today?

Scarffe: Yeah, I always wear one, worn one most of my life, always worn one!

[0:04:01] Lee: So the church is very big in your life is it?

Scarffe: To a degree, although my parents never were; my mother was for a while yes, my father was an atheist, he'd seen too much of the troubles in Ireland, seen brother fighting

against brother he said it just put him off religion! My father was from Omagh in County Tyrone where the big bombing was and we, my eldest brother and I, were evacuated to Omagh where they lived, my uncle in Omagh in County Tyrone. We were evacuated at the beginning of the war from New Brighton, so that's one the best times of my life!

[0:04:44] Lee: Why was that Martin?

Scarffe: So very kind my uncle and my aunt, very generous and very kind, yeah!

[0:04:56] Lee: Was it a carefree time in Ireland?

Scarffe: Yeah. I'd never seen so much food. With the rationing and very little food, very poor, but there my aunt would cook such wonderful confectionery cakes, about half a dozen different kinds of soda bread everyday with our dinner! My uncle would go out and shoot a couple of rabbits for lunch, he had a big timber business, well known. See the big lorries running through the town, Scarffe Timber Merchants! But he died early of an ear infection, I do know that.

[0:05:57] Lee: When you joined the Navy what was your first ship?

Scarffe: *Boxer*!

[0:06:03] Lee: The *Boxer*?

Scarffe: The *Boxer*, a radar training ship. I joined the electrical branch you see, always into electrics.

[0:06:14] Lee: Had you trained as an electrician prior to that?

Scarffe: No, I was 15 when I went in the navy.

[0:06:21] Lee: Right, so they trained you in the navy?

Scarffe: Yes.

[0:06:24] Lee: How did you take to being an electrician?

Scarffe: I quite enjoyed it, yeah.

[0:06:32] Lee: Did they teach you about radar as well?

Scarffe: No I was just a general electrician, oh I did some, just basic.

[0:06:45] Lee: Tell me about the *Boxer*, what sort of ship was she?

Scarffe: Radar training ship, just people training. We had, oh I don't know, about a dozen different radar aerials. We didn't go that far we stayed mainly around the coast of Britain, exercised with other navies and one thing and another.

[0:07:17] Lee: So how did you wind up on the *Protector*?

Scarffe: I don't know, just drafted there.

[0:07:30] Lee: Straight from the *Boxer*?

Scarffe: Oh no. I went to other ships that I was on, about 1955/56 that I joined the *Protector*.

[0:07:48] Lee: Tell me about that ship. What was she like to work on?

Scarffe: She was OK, a pretty happy ship, but I didn't know much about the Antarctic or anything like that, never really studied or read about it much.

[0:08:04] Lee: Did you know where it was?

Scarffe: Oh I knew where it was yeah! I never applied for this, just drafted to the *Protector*!

[0:08:17] Lee: Did you have any choice at all?

Scarffe: No.

[0:08:19] Lee: No so you were just ordered to go [Scarffe: yeah]. But you must have known you were going to go to the Antarctic because that was her patch wasn't it?

Scarffe: Not really studied it much, so I suppose I must have known, yeah. Went to Gib first, Gibraltar first, then, (what's it name?), Rio next, no, no it was somewhere in Africa?

[0:08:54] Lee: Do you remember?

Scarffe: Freetown, that's it, I'm sure yeah!

[0:08:56] Freetown! Do you remember the first time you would have been aware that a place called the Antarctic existed? Did you read about it as a boy?

Scarffe: I always read books on adventure and that, that's what I was always interested in. I can't remember when I first read about the Antarctic, no?

[0:09:28] Lee: You would have put into Port Stanley wouldn't you on the way there?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:09:32] Lee: That would have been 1950 late 1956 I think?

Scarffe: Somewhere around there.

[0:09:40] Lee: Yeah, or possibly 1957. What's your memories of Port Stanley at that time?

Scarffe: Just like a little, just like approaching a little Scottish Island, handful of little houses, handful of buildings, very rough moorland! In fact it looked like a Scottish island to me, no trees very wild. I enjoyed walking on the islands, yeah.

[0:10:14] Lee: Did you spend much time there?

Scarffe: The ship?

[0:10:16] Lee: Yeah, well you?

Scarffe: I don't know how much time we spent there, I can't remember.

[0:10:21] Lee: Were you there over Christmas?

Scarffe: We had Christmas at sea I think at that time 56/57, there's a picture of Christmas day there on the wall there.

[0:10:39] Lee: Behind you - oh yes, yes you can tell by the Santa hats!

Scarffe: That's me and my men the electricians!

[0:10:49] Lee: That's on board the *Protector*?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:10:51] Lee: You've still got the *Protector* sticker on your front window, [Scarffe: Aye], so it must have meant something to you actually?

Scarffe: Yes I enjoyed the *Protector* yeah, we've got an association that I'm a member of.

[0:11:08] Lee: That's the sticker on the window?

Scarffe: Yeah that's right yeah, I keep in touch with them.

[0:11:15] Lee: So what happened then to transfer you to the Antarctic? What's the story behind how did you end up being in the Antarctic?

Scarffe: I don't know much about it honestly. I met Angus Erskine, Lt Angus Erskine, aboard. He was a leader down there at 'W'.

[0:11:33] Lee: At Detaille?

Scarffe: And he approached me one day and asked me if I was interested in adventure. At that time I was a keen rock climber and mountaineer, he must have heard about me climbing on Table Mountain when we went through Rio, Cape Town! There's some pictures there of climbing Table Mountain, and he asked me, he said one of their men had gone sick he was going down to base 'W' I think?

[0:12:05] Lee: Do you remember who it was?

Scarffe: No.

[0:12:07] Lee: No, OK.

Scarffe: And he wondered if I'd be interested in going down there for a while?

[0:12:10] Lee: Do you know what he went down with, this sick man?

Scarffe: I don't no, don't even know his name now. I said 'Yes, sure'!

[0:12:20] Lee: Why did he approach you, because you'd done some mountaineering?

Scarffe: Yeah basically, yeah, I was into that kind of life.

[0:12:33] Lee: You must have been talking about it on board for him to know?

Scarffe: Yeah, or perhaps he knew I'd been climbing, I was talking to my daughter last night, he must have, somebody must have told him I'd been climbing Table Mountain or whatever. We went to any port the first thing I was looking for was somewhere to climb, or somewhere to drink like the rest of them! [laughter]

[0:12:59] Lee: So Angus was on the ship with you was he?

Scarffe: Yes. I hadn't met him it was just then before that he approached me, and I didn't really know who he was.

[0:13:08] Lee: What sort of man was he?

Scarffe: A very pleasant man. I don't remember too much now, can't remember too much about him now.

[0:13:27] Lee: What were his strengths would you say?

Scarffe: Apparently he was a good leader, good with men.

[0:13:38] Lee: Democratic or autocratic or a bit of both?

Scarffe: I reasonably so yeah, reasonably democratic.

[0:13:46] Lee: So he'd seek advice from the Fids?

Scarffe: Yeah he'd ask advice.

[0:13:53] Lee: Or would he seek advice?

Scarffe: Oh I see, I would imagine so yes.

[0:14:00] Lee: And a compassionate man?

Scarffe: Well I lost my father when I was down there, in fact I applied just after we left Cape Town, I applied see if they'd fly me back home because they have done in the past, to go to my father's funeral. But they said 'No, I couldn't be spared. There's only another electrician onboard', and he was quite sorry about that!

[0:14:27] Lee: Angus was?

Scarffe: Yeah, he sort of apologised for the Navy as it were!

[0:14:37] Lee: He wrote to you is that right?

Scarffe: Yes he did write to me, yes, a nice letter if I remember, yes. I can't remember now I'm sorry. Yeah I do remember he did write to me, you're right.

[0:14:56] Lee: What do you think made you say 'Yes', when they asked you if you wanted to spend a year?

Scarffe: Well I was interested in expeditions and I was always reading about expeditions, mountaineering especially, yeah, so just something I'd like to do.

[0:15:15] Lee: Something different?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:15:17] Lee: Did you get much mountaineering?

Scarffe: Tough environment like that?

[0:15:20] Lee: Sorry?

Scarffe: No not as much as I would like to have done, I was hoping to but didn't!

[0:15:26] Lee: What was the problem?

Scarffe: Well mostly the members were already picked for the going out on the Plateau doing survey work and that also had exited and gone, I was mostly left on base!

[0:15:51] Lee: You did do some survey work I think didn't you?

Scarffe: Not much!

[0:15:55] Lee: What did you do?

Scarffe: I remember going on a sledge trip with ... we didn't do any really important survey work as far as I remember.

[0:16:20] Lee: Were you not doing some survey work in the bay or the shore?

Scarffe: Yes that's right, as I remember yeah. Jason Island was it, you more that I do I've forgotten all this you see!

[0:16:39] Lee: What do you remember of the survey work you did?

Scarffe: I don't really,... no sorry I don't remember.

[0:16:51] Lee: Alright, tell me about the base at Detaille Island. What do you, how do you describe the picture in your mind that you have now of Detaille and the hut and the island and the base?

Scarffe: Just a big hut on a little island in the middle of a fjord. We were usually iced in... pretty compact, we had all the facilities that we need. We used to take it in turns for cooking,

I enjoyed that! Used to cook on base for two weeks, I seemed to enjoy my cooking I was quite a good cook, especially the bread baking!

[0:17:37] Lee: What did you bake the bread in?

Scarffe: We had all the equipment.

[0:17:45] Lee: So you mean you had an oven?

Scarffe: Well we just had I think it must have been an Aga, we just had a regular oven yeah. I seemed to make, I made good bread they seemed to like my bread - all came in when I was baking!

[0:18:02] Lee: Did you know you were a good cook before you got there?

Scarffe: Yeah well reasonable.

[0:18:08] Lee: And were you cooking food that had been caught locally? [Scarffe: Yeah]. Such as?

Scarffe: We had penguin.

[0:18:16] Lee: You ate penguin?

Scarffe: Yeah. Well if you're going to eat any meat, that's about all you can eat, or half a seal -, yeah we had some seal meat.

[0:18:25] Lee: Penguin eggs?

Scarffe: Penguin eggs, yeah, made very nice. The whites seemed to stay clear though, it wasn't very exciting!

[0:18:42] Lee: And what did you make with the eggs?

Scarffe: Tried to make omelettes I suppose and things like that. Penguin was OK, bit like sort of liver, a strong liver, very nourishing I suppose! Healthy vitamins poor little thing, that's all you had to eat though as far as meat goes!

[0:19:05] Lee: Fresh meat. How did you acquire the penguin?

Scarffe: Probably a waste of a 303 rifle bullet to kill, I can't remember. Must have bopped the thing on the head or so, poor little thing! I never caught them!

[0:19:28] Lee: You never did it yourself?

Scarffe: No I never killed them!

[0:19:30] Lee: On principle?

Scarffe: No, I would have killed a seal because that was for feeding the dogs. Had to be very big, lot of dogs, eight teams took a lot of seal meat to feed them, without them they wouldn't

have lived healthily. In winter you gave 3lbs of seal meat and 3lbs of blubber, build up the fat on the skin to keep them from the cold, protect from the cold; they could stand much lower temperatures than us! Summer you gave them the meat, though pass the blubber through the body, they didn't need it!

[0:20:17] Lee: So were you involved in looking after the dogs?

Scarffe: No we had a man that did that which was mainly his job, I helped feed them.

[0:20:32] Lee: Did you get out with the dogs at all Martin?

Scarffe: Not as much as I would have liked to have done! Just as you said, dog sledging it was quite good fun.

[0:20:45] Lee: So you did do some?

Scarffe: Yeah, using Inuit terms to control the dogs.

[0:21:01] Lee: So you were driving a team for a while, were you?

Scarffe: Yeah, take it turns yeah.

[0:21:12] Lee: What was it like?

Scarffe: Good fun. We lost a team one day though!

[0:21:17] Lee: You lost a team!?

Scarffe: We hit something, we must have hit some ice that had frozen on the sea ice, a lump I think that must have been it, there what was it.

[0:21:34] Lee: What happened?

Scarffe: What do they call it the...?

[0:21:50] Lee: So you were sledging along?

Scarffe: The sledge went over.

[0:21:56] Lee: On to the side?

Scarffe: Yeah, we fell off, we lost the sledge for a while we had to chase it!

[0:22:01] Lee: Into the water?

Scarffe: No. Then it got tangled up again, I think some of, got tangled up so we caught up with them!

[0:22:13] Lee: What happened to the dogs?

Scarffe: Oh the dogs were alright no doubt!

[0:22:19] Lee: So it was the sledge that went not the dogs?

Scarffe: Just went off, the dogs just went off without us, see we fell off!

[0:22:26] Lee: Oh I see!

Scarffe: I fell off or whoever was driving at that time at the time, yeah!

[0:22:37] Lee: How were you, were you reunited with the dogs?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:22:41] Lee: They came back?

Scarffe: No, they got tangled up with something on the sea ice I think, I vaguely remember just caught up them, it wasn't for that long, about 10 minutes.

[0:22:49] Lee: Oh I see, thank you. So were you breeding from these dogs?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:22:55] Lee: So you had pups as well? [Scarffe: Yeah]. I think there's a story about a pup going missing isn't there?

Scarffe: Oh yes, the one, one was missing for a few days.

[0:23:06] Lee: Tell me the story Martin?

Scarffe: Somebody heard the whimpering of the puppy coming from a crevasse and this little pup had fallen down a crevasse!

[0:23:17] Lee: A deep one?

Scarffe: Not too deep no, so I said - I was pretty slim - so I said 'You better lower me down and I'll get it', so lowered me down head first. It was 'V' shaped crevasse and it was stuck in the bottom, so they just lowered me down and I put hands out in front of me till I could feel him and just feel a bit of fur - poor little thing was whimpering - and just managed to grab him and said 'Pull up quick' and pulled it up!

[0:23:53] Lee: How did it feel hanging upside down in a crevasse!?

Scarffe: Well I was saving the pup I was just thinking of the pup...and got him out alright, it was only a few minutes.

[0:24:07] Lee: So it's interesting the dogs were important enough for you to take a risk in getting that puppy back?

Scarffe: I never thought it being a risk really. I used to take risks anyway, done some pretty hairy climbs hanging off on one finger, sometimes with two fingers!

[0:24:28] Lee: Tell me about that?

Scarffe: No, I mean when I was rock climbing.

[0:24:31] Lee: Oh I see yeah.

Scarffe: I was used to taking risks and doing silly things!

[0:24:38] Lee: Would they be calculated risks I guess, would they?

Scarffe: Too a degree yeah. I had no fear though when I was younger, just didn't have any!

[0:24:49] Lee: Young men live forever don't they!?

Scarffe: Yeah, I started when I was about 9 or 10. Front of the school there was a mountain, I've forgotten the name now, I was thinking about it the other day, I'd always wanted to climb this thing so?

[0:25:13] Lee: A statue we are talking about?

Scarffe: No, this mountain from the school always wanted to climb it and when I was 10 I did, I ran off from school, I knew I'd get beaten when they got me back but just had to climb it! That's when it started, climbed it and came back and got beaten of course, this was what started me off in interested in hills walking and mountains climbing!

[0:25:40] Lee: Do you remember the name of the mountain or where it was?

Scarffe: I looked it up the other day I've forgotten it again now!

[0:25:46] Lee: Where was the school again?

Scarffe: It was near Gargrave, near Skipton that way, I thought of it the other night.

[0:25:56] Lee: A mountain in Yorkshire?

Scarffe: It's not a big mountain just a fell, just a couple a thousand feet or so, but to me it was a big mountain!

[0:26:07] Lee: Can you imagine what it was that made you want to do that?

Scarffe: No. I used to look it every day and think 'I'd love to climb that', so that's what I did eventually though I got beaten badly!

[0:26:26] Lee: So was there a sense of achievement? [Scarffe: Yeah!] When you'd done it?

Scarffe: Yeah, yeah, oh yes almost a relief. I met the owner of the school on the way up - he was walking too which was a bit embarrassing! [laughter]

[0:26:48] Lee: So bound to get caught then!?

Scarffe: Oh it came to me then, but it's gone again, the name!

[0:26:55] Lee: Don't worry, don't worry!

Scarffe: The first serious climb huh!

[0:27:03] Lee: And you were hooked were you?

Scarffe: Yeah, yes I used to go for, I remember going fell walking with this group of lads from Wallasey from around where I lived, used to go fell walking up the lakes and that, and we saw a bloke fall off a cliff one day, off a rock off a face! And I said 'I'm never going to do that', and I said 'me neither'! A week later I was though, falling off a rock climb, and never looked back I loved it!

[0:27:40] Lee: So when you said you took risks rock climbing, because that, what do you mean not climbing with ropes or?

Scarffe: I very rarely climbed with ropes, I didn't like ropes!

[0:27:48] Lee: Rarely?

Scarffe: Lots of free climbing yeah, and I preferred that actually.

[0:27:57] Lee: So would you [Scarffe: A nuisance] would you assess dangers beforehand?

Scarffe: To a degree yeah.

[0:28:04] Lee: Or just go for it?

Scarffe: Yeah, I just knew that I could do it, and I remember saying that, my brother called the other day, my youngest brother, and after I'd climbed Mont Blanc one day with a couple of members of the Royal Navy ski mountaineering club, and he said 'I went to Mont Blanc the other day and I remember you going up, Martin, and I followed the route you went up', yeah!

[0:28:38] Lee: What's been the biggest challenge, climbing challenge, of your life?

Scarffe: Biggest challenge? That was the biggest mountain climb, Mount Blanc.

[0:28:52] Lee: Have you tried the Himalayas?

Scarffe: No, wish I had! No never had the money for it.

[0:29:04] Lee: Tell me a bit more about Detaille then. You were living in a wooden hut I presume were you?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:29:09] Lee: Can you describe it to me?

Scarffe: Nothing very notable just in a big wooden hut as you say, don't remember it too well. Always remember I went straight back into the Navy after we left there, I was never sort of given the chance to think about things just thrown into it! Dragged out and straight back into the Navy!

[0:29:40] Lee: Tell me about the daily routine on the base?

Scarffe: Well I was working, I was assistant mountaineer, meteorologist too. They gave me that so I used to work with the meteorologists and do Met readings, the Met screens outside. Then was also studying the penguins doing that, and the sea ice, mapping out the sea ice every day.

[0:30:11] Lee: So you were measuring the sea ice were you?

Scarffe: Yeah, making drawings of it, of the ice formed that day I was.

[0:30:20] Lee: Did you have a map to work with?

Scarffe: No not a map, we had a little sheet which you drew out the ice each day on it.

[0:30:34] Lee: Would you measure that each day or just estimate it each day? How did that work?

Scarffe: Estimate yeah, it wasn't that accurate so yeah.

[0:30:45] Lee: What was this stuff, what were you doing with these penguins then, what were you watching for?

Scarffe: Just studying them, and just studying them, seeing if any I suppose.

[0:31:00] Lee: What were you looking for, behaviour?

Scarffe: Yes, in the penguins. One thing that struck me was they could, they could I remember that, when we were evacuating the island they'd all stand on the edge of the water waiting to see if any predators like killer whales or anything like that, and they all look at each other and nobody moving somebody just look and somebody and just give him a little nudge and push him in! Then all waiting standing around to see if he is attacked or approached by a predator and then all dived, and thought it was a pretty mean thing, almost human!

[0:31:55] Lee: These are Adelie penguins aren't they?

Scarffe: Adelies, yeah.

[0:31:58] Lee: Did you like them?

Scarffe: Oh yes, I liked any most animals, yeah, penguins are very cute yeah, tough little things!

[0:32:06] Lee: How do you mean?

Scarffe: You wouldn't think how strong they are; if you approached them close they can be quite strong with their little flippers!

[0:32:15] Lee: They'd attack would they, or defend themselves?

Scarffe: They'd defend themselves yeah, especially if they had eggs or young, just like any animal!

[0:32:35] Lee: What about the met observations, what were you doing weather wise?

Scarffe: Just taking readings from the different instruments daily, not long at it, had to radio them off to base in Port Stanley. I was going to have to learn Morse code and send them off, that's right had to send off transmission of the readings taken each day, something like that.

[0:33:09] Lee: How do you learn Morse code, on the job?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:33:12] Lee: Was it difficult?

Scarffe: Sorry, no not really, no you soon got the hang of it. Yeah, quite I enjoyed it!

[0:33:26] Lee: Were you releasing balloons?

Scarffe: I didn't often. Sometimes I went to helped them watch them when they were releasing balloons, I wasn't that deeply involved actually, I hadn't learnt or done any courses or anything, but that's just something I did with them when I was on base.

[0:33:48] Lee: You all mucked in together?

Scarffe: They called me 'assistant meteorologist' so just one of my jobs, my duties, so I did taught me about it.

[0:34:00] Lee: Was it beautiful, Detaille Island?

Scarffe: The which?

[0:34:04] Was it beautiful, Detaille Island?

Scarffe: Yeah, not especially it was just a little rock, rocky islet, nothing special about it, the surroundings were wonderful, beautiful! Closer to the fjord and the mountains were absolutely spectacular, just wish I'd been able to climb them!

[0:34:32] Lee: Some Fids say they felt quite close to God in the Antarctic.

Scarffe: Oh yes, can be yeah.

[0:34:38] Lee: Tell me what your feelings were about that?

Scarffe: Well I'd always felt an affinity with God, always felt close to him, so yes it's a spectacular environment no matter how you feel, even just being close to nature, but I did feel close to God, yes I did!

[0:35:08] Lee: Can you elaborate on that?

Scarffe: Well I'd speak to him I suppose by prayer, tell him about my experiences and how I felt and about the environment and his environment that I was living in.

[0:35:27] Lee: Were you able to get the peace and quiet that you needed for prayer?

Scarffe: Oh yes, yeah.

[0:35:33] Lee: How would you go about, where would you pray?

Scarffe: Well you could do it indoors or outdoors, there was quite a freedom of movement. It was only a small island but you could go off. There was a little cliff I made, put supplies on a little rock and a little guide to it the amount of climbs I'd done, I used to store them in there.

[0:36:03] Lee: So you had a special place did you Martin?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:36:06] Can you describe that to me again?

Scarffe: Just a little...what will I say.....just a break close to the edge of the island a little, what do you call it, a chasm sort of?

[0:36:46] Lee: An inlet?

Scarffe: An inlet yeah, a little vertical cliff on each side, and I used to rope up there and was told not to go out there, although I did write a little guide and I left that there! [laughter]

[0:37:00] Lee: And so you don't often do that?

Scarffe: I called it Gumboot Gulley, that's right I called it Gumboot Gulley!

[0:37:04] Lee: Gumboot Gulley! [Scarffe: Yeah!] Did you give it that name?

Scarffe: Yeah!

[0:37:10] Lee: Was it slushy at the bottom?

Scarffe: Yeah! [laughter]

[0:37:15] Lee: When you went off to do that did you have to tell somebody where you were going?

Scarffe: No, you're off doing things anyway like studying the penguins, or there was the freedom to move or off cutting blocks of ice for the freshwater tank. You cut big blocks of ice with a saw, load up the sledge and take them to the hut for the freshwater tank, that was another little duty you had.

[0:37:56] Lee: It sounds like you had quite a lot of freedom?

Scarffe: Oh yes, yeah.

[0:37:59] Lee: What did you do for, what we would now call, recreation?

Scarffe: Oh taught myself to ski. [laughter]

[0:38:03] Lee: Yeah, was it good skiing?

Scarffe: It was alright yeah. Reading at night I suppose, I'd got a good collection of books yeah.....it was just a lovely time! Would have preferred to get to get out more on the Plateau with the surveyors!

[0:38:42] Lee: Did you ask for that?

Scarffe: No I was too late, they'd gone when I got there! Just to do my mountaineering leading, leading surveyors up mountains things like that, doing trig points things like that!

[0:39:09] Let me mention a few names of people that were down there with you?

Scarffe: OK.

[0:39:11] Lee: See who you remember? You mentioned Angus Erskine [Scarffe: Yeah] There was a chap called Dennis Goldring who was a geologist?

Scarffe: I remember him yes, I'm just trying to picture him. Yes I do remember yeah I remember Dennis yes.

[0:39:26] Lee: Anything in particular about him?

Scarffe: He was right sort of jolly person wasn't quite I would call him a sort of jolly person!

[0:39:37] Lee: He was yes?

Scarffe: If I remember rightly yeah.

[0:39:43] Lee: You had a doctor, it was unusual wasn't it?

Scarffe: Henry Wyatt, oh he was odd!

[0:39:53] Lee: In what way?

Scarffe: Oh he was always looking for hairy things to do! He started the Antarctic swimming club!

[0:40:00] Lee: What do you mean by that, what was that?

Scarffe: Jumping in the sea and swimming!

[0:40:05] Lee: In minus temperatures!?

Scarffe: Yeah!

[0:40:08] Lee: Did you try that?

Scarffe: I would have done, I'm sure I would have done the kind of daft thing I would have done then, however yeah, it's the kind of thing I would have done - I don't remember it but probably did!

[0:40:26] Lee: Was it something that most of the chaps on base had a go at?

Scarffe: Not many, no about two or three I think!

[0:40:32] Lee: Who else was in the club?

Scarffe: I don't remember now – Henry - I can't remember now - oh probably what's his name Donald the meteorologist, he used to be friendly with Henry - was it Donald?

[0:40:54] Lee: The Met men were Smith and Thorne according to this. [Note: Eldon Lee made a small error, there was also a Met man called McDowell who Scarffe was probably thinking of]

Scarffe: That's right wasn't there a McDonald or ...?

[0:41:03] Lee: Connochie?

Scarffe: He was the radio operator wasn't he?

[0:41:07] Lee: Yeah, and somebody called Oliver?

Scarffe: Yeah - oh no! I didn't get on with him or he didn't get on with me! He made that clear as soon as I arrived on base! He was ex-merchant navy and he somehow felt jealous of me because I was Royal, don't know why, didn't get on with him, tried, yeah! Angus knew that - he sent us off on a sledging party for a couple of days trying to see how we'd work out together but we never did!

[0:41:43] Lee: Did you have arguments?

Scarffe: He didn't even try! Yeah we'd argue about anything!

[0:41:49] Lee: That spoil it for you?

Scarffe: Yes to a degree yes, all the others I got on with great!

[0:41:59] Lee: So did anybody get on with Oliver?

Scarffe: Don't remember!

[0:42:01] Lee: No?

Scarffe: No he was very argumentative, especially when it was his week to cook, he just cooked rubbish, anything that was easy, and if anybody tried to say anything to him he'd just smile and laugh at them, no not somebody I like to remember!

[0:42:23] Lee: Do you think that upset the atmosphere on the base?

Scarffe: To a degree yes, when he was around you could feel it, cut through it with a knife when he walked in the hut, never got on with anybody!

[0:42:37] Lee: Did Erskine try?

Scarffe: I think he did try to bridge it, couldn't, didn't succeed. He knew what was going on, you can't be like that in a close environment when you're all living together! He spent most of the time outside as much as he could you see with his dogs!

[0:43:00] Lee: He did?

Scarffe: Yeah, cutting up the seal and hunting seal. Oh he had a pair of bagpipes that's right! He used to play the bagpipes [laughter] he used to play these right outside the house, not anyway near the hut, that's right, although he wasn't Scottish - think he was from Northumberland don't know if they were Scottish pipes or not?

[0:43:25] Lee: Can he play well?

Scarffe: Fairly well he was sort of learning himself not too bad!

[0:43:33] Lee: Was it a pain in the neck though?

Scarffe: When he played far away from the hut!

[0:43:40] Lee: Oh he went off?

Scarffe: Yeah, he went off that's so he didn't bother anybody!

[0043:45] Lee: Was there anybody else musical down there? Did you have much music?

Scarffe: No, just instrument wise, no I don't remember anybody with instruments.

[0:43:56] Lee: Gramophones?

Scarffe: I think we had a gramophone I'm sure we did... honestly can't remember now?

[0:44:11] Lee: Did you hear much news about what was happening in England or anywhere else in the world?

Scarffe: No.

[0:44:17] Lee: You were completely isolated were you?

Scarffe: Afraid so.

[0:44:21] Lee: Did it matter that you weren't?

Scarffe: Only one time was at Christmas. One year the BBC arranged a radio broadcast with us and I got to talk to my mother and father, I think so had about five minutes to talk to them, yeah!

[0:44:39] Lee: On the phone?

Scarffe: On the radio.

[0:44:44] Lee: So they could hear you or you could just hear them.

Scarffe: Both yeah.

[0:44:48] Lee: Alright so it was a two way, like two way family favourites?

Scarffe: Yeah Manchester I think it was. Yeah that was the one time I got to talk to my parents, strange because I never even got to talk them at sea! Didn't have global comms or anything like that in those days.....yes it was interesting to talk to them of then what had happened while you're away. I only got to talk to them for about four or five minutes.

[0:45:30] Lee: So you didn't have any news of world events like the 'Suez Crisis'?

Scarffe: No.

[0:45:39] Lee: Or 'Cold War' or 'Sputniks'?

Scarffe: Nothing like that no. I suppose Ossie would tell us anything major that happened in the world, the radio operator.

[0:46:00] Lee: So he would know?

Scarffe: Yeah I'm sure he would tell us anything.

[0:46:04] Lee: This is Connachie?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:46:12] Lee: Yeah, did you enjoy your time in the Antarctic or was it ...?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:46:17] Lee: You didn't fancy doing a second year?

Scarffe: I would have liked to do more though, get out this sort of thing. [long pause] My father died when I was on the way back - oh I've told you that haven't I?

[0:46:44] Lee: It must have been difficult and to be so far away from home when tragedy strikes like that?

Scarffe: Yeah, I didn't know anything about it - see he took his own life. I didn't know anything about it!

[0:46:56] Lee: You mean you didn't know the circumstances? [Scarffe: Sorry?] You didn't know the circumstances?

Scarffe: No.

[0:47:00] Lee: Just knew he'd passed away?

Scarffe: Knew nothing about it, and a strange thing happened to me when I got home though!

[0:47:11] Lee: Go on!

- Scarffe: One night I was in bed and fast asleep for a few hours and suddenly something woke me and I shot up, lying there, and there's my dad sitting on a chair alongside me, I definitely saw this!

[0:47:25] Lee: Sitting down?

Scarffe: This is why I believe in ghosts, and he's looking at me just like I'm looking at you now, looking at me and he suddenly gave a big smile as if to say 'I'm alright'! And he faded and he went. I definitely saw it, I definitely had that experience, it wasn't a dream I could tell if it was a dream and I know it wasn't!!

[0:47:47] Lee: Did you hear anything?

Scarffe: No.

[0:47:51] Lee: But you were aware of what he was trying to say?

Scarffe: Yeah I just got the feeling he was trying to tell me he was alright.

[0:48:00] Lee: Did that change you at all, make you feel better?

Scarffe: Yeah, by missing the funeral and all that [Lee: yeah] yes to a degree yes I think that's why he did it!

[0:48:11] Lee: Oh right, why he came back?

Scarffe: He controlled it, yeah.

[0:48:14] Lee: Just to tip you off saying 'Don't worry about it'?

Scarffe: Yeah. I felt bad not being able to go to his funeral you see, it was quite a few months before I got home after he died and nobody would tell me the circumstances why or anything like that.

[0:48:36] Lee: Have you ever seen anybody else like that?

Scarffe: No.

[0:48:39] Lee: Just that one occasion?

Scarffe: Yeah, it was so clear, so vivid that I know I didn't dream it!

[0:48:47] Lee: In colour?

Scarffe: No, it was the middle of the night!

[0:48:51] Lee: So grey?

Scarffe: So anybody that tells you they believe in ghosts I sort of shrug my shoulders, and certainly that's when you say 'Yes I do', I had that happen to me!

[0:49:04] Lee: Was there anything in the Antarctic to make you laugh?

Scarffe: Well mostly we were mostly pretty good natured joking and all this yeah good guys, good crew. George was a good mate yeah.

[0:49:28] Lee: Do you remember ever being fearful for your life, close misses, near shaves?

Scarffe: In the Antarctic?

[0:49:36] Lee: Yeah, or anytime?

Scarffe: Oh very many times when I was rock climbing! [laughter]

[0:49:41] Lee: In the Antarctic any close calls?

Scarffe: I can't recall one no I don't think so, no.

[0:49:56] Lee: Did you do any improvements to the hut whilst you were down there?

Scarffe: No, any electrical work that needed doing I do it for them, other than that no.

[0:50:06] Lee: So what were the electrics like in the house?

Scarffe: Very primitive!

[0:50:11] Lee: So there was an electric supply when you arrived?

Scarffe: Yeah there was a generator, I connected it up for them, yeah.

[0:50:20] Lee: Did you improve the wiring?

Scarffe: No, it was very basic.

[0:50:27] Lee: You didn't have the temptation to try and improve things?

Scarffe: I did the best I could for them with what they had, with what they had yeah. No it was alright it worked alright, all worked OK, efficient [Lee: Did you..., sorry...] served its purpose, served its purpose!

[0:50:47] Lee: Did you fancy a second year, as most Fids did two years didn't they?

Scarffe: Yes I would have done, yes!

[0:50:53] Lee: But you weren't given a choice?

Scarffe: If they changed my what I was doing [Lee: Yeah] and had an opportunity to do more than I did, go out with the surveyors on to the Plateau and help them, especially the

mountains, and help leading. Fancied doing that, that's what I thought I'd be doing, leading surveyors up mountains doing trig points and things like that!

[0:51:24] Lee: So it feels like a bit of a lost opportunity, right?

Scarffe: Yeah.....to a degree I felt some of the time was wasted quite honestly!

[0:51:41] Lee: Was it different - what the difference between working for FIDS and working for the Navy was it a different atmosphere?

Scarffe: Well I never got to know any, only the members on base. I didn't get to know any of the officials really.

[0:52:00] Lee: But I'm thinking the Navy's a very structured regimented organization isn't it?

Scarffe: Oh yes!

[0:52:05] Lee: And how does that compare to being a Fid on base?

Scarffe: Well it's a more stricter environment in the Navy of course, but I was never bothered!

[0:52:22] Lee: Sounds like you had quite a lot of freedom in the Antarctic?

Scarffe: Yes, I don't remember being, yes.

[0:52:37] Lee: Are there any other memories popping into your mind?

Scarffe: I honestly can't think of any of any. See, as say I went straight back into the Navy and didn't have time to think about you know! I was assessed and somebody like John Thompson and some others that I knew well, I was in the fell rock club with him he was on base 'N' I think, they got to walk around the whole of South America when they finished with their FIDS time. I didn't do anything, had to go straight back in the Navy!

[0:53:15] Lee: Tell me about Saturday nights on base, were they party nights?

Scarffe: I don't know I never had much to drink or anything like that.

[0:53:23] Lee: You didn't?

Scarffe: Well nobody did. Probably we probably had a couple of cans of beer or something, I was never a big drinker, a certain amount, I don't drink at all now, never drank much even in the Navy!

[0:53:43] Lee: You're the first Fid I've ever met who then went on to a career in Hollywood!

Scarffe: Oh yes, yes!

[0:53:49] Lee: What happened there?

Scarffe: When I came, when I left the Navy I joined Cammell Laird, the Liverpool ship builder, as an electrician.

[0:54:02] Lee: Birkenhead?

Scarffe: Yeah, and working on submarines at night doing electrical repairs, and after about a year, no maybe less than a year, the problems became very bad in the area all over and the job finished, we were sent off! It was hard finding a job it was, in fact eventually I thought 'This is no good for me, it's not me, I'm going to emigrate'! So I thought Australia or New Zealand, now we had relatives, the Scarffes, in Hawaii. You know at the time I told you about the shipping my uncle through him the Singletons?

[0:54:48] Lee: The Red Cross fleet?

Scarffe: Yes, my mother that was her family. She was in touch with two uncles who lived in Hawaii from that group, one was a multi-millionaire, the other used to run, he was in charge all the railways and pineapple plantations and things like that! Anyway Tom, my uncle Tom, used to write to my mother regularly and every Christmas he'd send us a parcel, food parcel, right through the war, even we got one, and when or was it him no, anyway he heard I'd - oh that's right she told him I was going to emigrate - he said 'Why don't you come to California where another Singleton was living and we'll sponsor him?'. Because you've got to get a sponsor, you can't just walk into the country like you can here, you've got to have a sponsor or somebody to take care of you; you didn't have to go on the State you had to prove that somebody would sponsor you. Anyway, well I was getting, I was engaged to this lady at the time and she said she'd go with me - I didn't think she would but she did go with me! So the long and short of it we went to California and we spent 15 years there, I guess we liked it! My first job, well my main job, I was a film technician, I got to be a film technician after a few months and working in the processing labs in Hollywood, biggest one in the world CFI, Consolidated Film Industry, yeah got to work there! I was luckily - the personnel officer was an ex-pat, an ex Brit - so he said the difficulty is getting in the union, but he said 'I'll get you in the union if you want'. So he did, took me down to the union, there was this big Italian bloke like the Mafia with a big cigar sticking out of his mouth! Always thinking all the union out there are run by the Mafia. Anyway he introduced me and asked if I could join the union and he said 'Yeah, sure', and never looked back after that. Good job, good paying job, we had three cars, big house, yeah enjoyed it!

[0:57:38] Lee: Did you work on any big films?

Scarffe: Quite a lot yeah.

[0:57:42] Lee: Such as?

Scarffe: What's it called now, the main one I can think of that people always ask me about was *Easy Rider!*

[0:57:53] Lee: Oh right!

Scarffe: Did hundreds of prints of that thing, God! I was sick of it. [Laughter] We used to do all the work for all the major TV companies, ABC and NBC, CBS used to do all their shows that you see here, and still see some them.

[0:58:15] Lee: So you were making the print, you were making up the films for distribution?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[0:58:19] Lee: Right, so you had to make the same film several hundred times?

Scarffe: Yeah on these big quite complex machines big as this room, you'd do oh 50,000 feet on a shift, more than that!

[0:58:39] Lee: How many feet in a film?

Scarffe: Depends if you are talking a full film or just a short. We, when I left the States I went round looking for a job, and went to Ranks offered me a job, they'd just got this machine, it's a complicated machine never seen anything like it! It was a very high speed machine I went 'Oh I've been running them for years'! [Laughter] So I never looked back after that the job, nice flat free in Denham as well as a nice salary, looked upon almost as a god there, running this big complicated machine!

[0:59:28] Lee: Did they train you?

Scarffe: My company made it see, they'd built it, built the machine.

[0:59:31] Lee: So you knew how it worked?

Scarffe: Yeah, I'd been running it for years!

[0:59:34] Lee: Yeah. Did you meet anybody very famous, big stars?

Scarffe: In the States?

[0:59:40] Lee: Anywhere!?

Scarffe: I met most of the *Rat Pack*, as I worked on the films! Oh before I went into the printing side I worked at more or less at setting up the lighting on the sets. I met Sinatra and what's his name?

[1:00:11] Lee: Dean Martin?

Scarffe: Yeah.

[1:00:15] Lee: Sammy Davis Junior?

Scarffe: No I never met him no. Dean Martin they were always on the set together, or he'd come on the set even though he wasn't in the films, come in pretending he was a drunk. He always kidded you even though he actually had a glass of water you know!

[1:00:30?] Lee: What did you make of Frank Sinatra?

Scarffe: Nice bloke, very nice bloke!

[1:00:33] Lee: Did you speak to him?

Scarffe: You'd say 'Hello' and that, yeah I've got all his records and tapes.

[1:00:47] Lee: So if an old movie comes on television these days you're sitting here watching, do you see films that you worked on?

Scarffe; Yeah, yes saw one the other night!

[1:00:56] Lee: What was that? [Slight pause] It wasn't *Roman Holiday* was it?

Scarffe: No sorry my memory just gone, some days I can remember everything!

[1:01:13] Lee: OK, it was a Frank Sinatra movie was it or a ...?

Scarffe: I was on two or three movies they were in.

[1:01:22] Lee: Final question. That one year that you spent in the Antarctic, even though it might have been a bit disappointing in that you didn't achieve everything that you wanted to achieve, but looking back over your life how does it rate? Was it an important year or just ...?

Scarffe: Always stands out in my mind, yes!

[1:01:39] Lee: Always sticks out in your mind. Do you know why it sticks out in your mind?

Scarffe: Well obviously a wonderful environment, great gang of guys, good guys, I enjoyed their company. Yes it was an incredible environment....yeah lucky to be there to be able to work in it. *Robin and the Seven Hoods*! [Laughter] That's one I worked on, one day we did they wanted to keep going and we went on for five shifts nonstop, three days nonstop! [Lee: Gosh] Double time, triple time quadruple, made more money in that week than ever I made in a couple of months!

[1:02:39] Lee: Did you get any sleep at all?

Scarffe: Well you see if they save money, because if they had to go off in another gang for lighting rig or lighting, you had to stop shooting and time lost and wasted if you keep the same gang going, for the longer that you go it saves them money, even though they have to pay you a lot!

[1:03:03] Lee: Would you get the chance to sleep for a little while?

Scarffe: No!

[1:03:07] Lee: Straight through no sleep!

Scarffe: We were tough then, we were young then, I was only about 20 odd, early 20s anyway!

[1:03:18] Lee: Do you think the Antarctic toughed you up?

Scarffe: I was pretty tough before I went there, no I never found anything to challenge I enjoyed it...no I was tough little devil anyway!

[1:03:39] Lee: Tell me about Midwinter's Day?

Scarffe: Yes, all the sledge parties were back from the Plateau you see, so a full complement in the hut. Midwinter's Day we used to celebrate it like a Christmas Day I suppose, big dinner, games and yeah I remember sitting at the table playing these silly games, ones like pass the parcel; Hank started that you got to say 'La-di-dah, la-di-dah, la-di-dah and diddle-di-le dah' and say it faster and faster as the thing goes round! And if you missed a word you were out - silly, silly!

[1:04:26] Lee: Did you do the cooking?

Scarffe: Midwinter's Day no, I don't remember who did the dinner somebody did it.

[1:04:36] Lee: Can you remember what the food would have been like on midwinter's day?

Scarffe: It was good I remember that! Can't remember what it was though whether we had something special....brought down to us, I don't know, probably just had the usual seal or penguin. Whoever cooked that day I know it was a good meal we all enjoyed it, big singsong!

[1:05:09] Lee: Were there presents?

Scarffe: No, I don't remember any presents.

[1:05:14] Lee: Boxes from home?

Scarffe: No, no.

[1:05:23] Lee: Plenty of booze though was there?

Scarffe: Well I wasn't a big drinker myself so I don't remember much anyone getting drunk or serious, can't even remember whether if we had spirits or not, -know there was cans of beer there was a beer ration that we used to get every week, don't remember if there was any spirits, I can't honestly remember, we must have had something though. Special ration must have been given out. Midwinter's Day as I say was celebrated just like Christmas Day.

[1:06:11] Lee: Yeah, was it dark all the day long at that time?

Scarffe: Yeah!

[1:06:15] Lee: No sunshine?

Scarffe: No.

[1:06:22] Lee: So how did you fill your time in the winter when you couldn't go out much?

Scarffe: I honestly don't remember now. Well we had to do all the usual duties we had in the past anyway even when it was light, you still had to go over blocks of ice for water and things like that, still had to do all the met readings, maybe still like a twilight, I don't remember how we filled the time in.

[1:07:06] Lee: Martin, thanks very much!

Scarffe: OK.

[1:07:09] Lee: Thank you.

Some interesting clips:

- Joining first Royal Navy ship HMS *Boxer*. [0:05:57]
- Being asked by Lt Angus Erskine if he would be interested in being seconded to FIDS from RN, and winter at Detaille Island. [0:11:15]
- Rescuing a puppy from a crevasse! [0:23:06]
- A piper on the base! [0:43:00]
- Seeing a ghost when back at home! [0:47:11]
- Emigrating to the USA as very little work at home. [0:54:48]
- Going to work in Hollywood as a technician. [0:57:53]
- Working on *Rat Pack* films and meeting Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. [0:59:40]

