

Jim Preece

Edited transcript (AD6/24/1/239) of a 2.3 hour video-interview with former BAS ships Chief Officer Hubert "Jim" Preece, at his home in Broadstairs, Kent: conducted by former BAS ships officer & cameraman Jack Tolson, on 29th April, 2014.

"Two former ships officers talking over the old days !!"

Transcribed by: Mike Dixon, Oct 2019.

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Notes: The interview appears to have been conducted throughout using a fixed camera on tripod, with Jim Preece centre-shot seated in an armchair, with his back to the garden-room windows. The interviewer was close out of shot.

The interviewer's sound plays back on "left" stereo headphones, while Jim Preece' voice appears from the right. It is necessary to play-back on both channels.

Periodically during the video playback, historical still-photographs, (believed taken by Jim), are displayed full frame. These have been briefly described within the text in *Italics*.

The transcription is verbatim, omitting only oft-repeated habit-words.

Use of Symbols in text: ' - ' denotes short pause or subject change: '....' denotes speech trailing off unintelligibly.

Video playback commences.

[00.00.00] Jack;

Photograph: B&W image of the first 'John Biscoe', dark, against sky background;

Caption: "Jim" Preece C/O 'John Biscoe 1950 - 1953.

BAOHP interview, 29th April 2014 Broadstairs, Kent.

Jim: Well, my name is actually Hubert Middleton Preece but everybody knows me as Jim, so it's Jim Preece from now on, but since I have been retired I have used the name Hubert Middleton Preece.

Well my background, one could say very maritime, Cardiff, South Wales, when it was a Klondike of shipping. I was born in 1925 so that will give you an indication of my long and, eh' well to me a very interesting life and I only wish my own grandsons and sons will have an equally exciting life, but I'm talking about the past and like many of us at our age especially somebody that lived through the war and at sea which was an exciting life.

I'm not so sure that that is the case today with containerisation, and hardly any time in port, sitting in armchairs on the bridge with electronics and no eyeballing, it's not their fault they wouldn't be able to use Nories Tables or use a sextant, wind the chronometers - they'd think you were barmy.

I'm speaking from my home in Broadstairs, 5 Ocean View, Broadstairs with a nice sea view and I'm living in quiet retirement with my wife, and John has come to interview me. It's now the 29th of April 2014.

John and I have had quite a long chat already about my background which of course everybody's got their background and sometimes I think well I don't want to bore people with irrelevant things but the main subject of course is FIDS my time in FIDS or Falkland Islands Dependency Survey, which is now the mighty BAS.

I joined as Chief Officer of the *John Biscoe*, Survey Vessel *John Biscoe*.

Photograph: Dark B&W image of John Biscoe pictured in ice and snow scene.

It was an American light net-layer, that's for laying boom defence across estuaries in the second world war, American built. It was *HMS Pretext* for a brief time but when I joined I was already a lieutenant RNR but I had already got my extra Master academic qualification and I was desperate for excitement, although I'd had enough - but something out of the ordinary, and this suited me.

Photograph: Extra Master document with signature.

The question of command didn't really come into it but that would have been very nice and I'm glad my successors that have been there, Norman Brown and Captain Woodfield. I've noticed their career and they've gone from strength to strength and got their command there. However I had only a very limited period there, three years and I had a most exciting time, met wonderful people and I've still got them in my memory.

[00.03.57] Jack: Just take me back to your earliest days, where were you brought up, what did Dad do, was he an important man in his eyes ?

Jim: Well yes, I was born actually in Cullen Road in Cardiff, and we lived in Axminster Road which was a nice area, practically everybody in the road - I can even remember their names, they had some connection with the sea, whether it was with Reardon Smith line, in the office, J.T.Duncan, all these companies, and there was a friend of mine, his father was a Chief Engineer in certain companies, Elders in fact.

All those well known names were represented there and all my friends, particularly one called Chew, his father was Chief Engineer of the Highland Brigade and that always impressed me so.

My father, he was - well on my Apprentices Indentures when I went to sea he is the surety, and he is classed as Docks Auditor, but I always thought of him as the chief manager and boss of all the Docks [laughs].

Photograph of the Apprentice's Indentures document with signatures.

He didn't sort of correct me about it. He was dead against me going to sea but by this time it was 1939, I was at Howard Gardens School, high school, don't forget we've never had Grammar schools in Wales. I had a very ordinary academic record there and I only came into my own when I persuaded my parents that I wanted to go to Smiths Nautical School in Cartase Park, Cardiff, which is now a beautiful area, it's now part of the University. I was in a cadet's uniform with little red tabs on the side and it was titled Sir William Reardon Smith's Nautical School, and I was there for the last year.

I'd got the usual academic qualifications, Central Welsh Board and all that, and had a very ordinary career at school but I came into my own and I was very excited as soon as I got on nautical subjects and I actually left there with practically all the prizes that were awarded - the Norie Prize and everything, I got them all because I was intensely interested in anything to do with ships.

My father was bitterly disappointed' me with when for some reason or other, I must have had his permission, I joined the Cardiff Naval Brigade when I was around about thirteen years old. He didn't like it because I would then have been in a ratings uniform, and he thought 'No - that's not ..." and that's class ridden society, 'No, I don't my son to be just an ordinary rating'.

I was quite happy to be there but he didn't like me and it was in a poor district of Cardiff and that didn't go down well, ' .. go down there there's not very nice people', [laughs]
That made me more than ever - I could not understand his - he even disliked mining people and people that lived in the valleys, 'Oh he's a two-shonny, he's from the valleys'.
I thought it was awful even at that young age.

So those were the prime employers - the collieries and shipping. I mean Cardiff was tremendous shipping there.

[00.08.22] Jack: By the time your father had finished with you, you were a right socialist and he was a hard Tory ?

Jim: Yes and he spent his leisure time in Fulton Dunlops in the Mahogany Bar, men-only of course, and his friend was Leslie Bryce who was chief commercial traveller and when I think back at him he was always semi-paralytic. [laughs]

I never ever saw my father in any way drunk or worse for wear, very talkative. His background himself, he was of the Splott Park tennis club, and but didn't do much sports and had the very best clothing because I remember when he died we had all sorts of bills from the tailor [laughs] - A.B.Rose in Cardiff. These would be names that people knew in Cardiff.

On February 19... or was it, yes 1941, 11 Axminster Road received a direct hit. I wasn't in the house, my mother was under the stairs and my father was in the kitchen, and if you can recall it - couldn't have been a very big bomb, but it hit the rear of the house, blew all the back of the house out and my father ended up in Whitchurch Hospital.

I was in the Globe cinema in Albany Road, I was a cadet at the school and as I came back as it was all exciting the raid was on, you know the air-raid siren was gone and there was an air-raid in progress so I made my way - only I could hear the excitement of, well what we thought was exciting, the shrapnel and the bomb splinters and the anti aircraft.

As I came toward Axminster Road there were ambulances and everything, and somebody stopped me, I don't know who it was, probably a neighbour and said 'Your house has been bombed'. It's all very vague to me then, I went to stay with friends, my sister was not in there, and my eldest sister Betty, she was with her boyfriend Helmut Vogel, a German refugee who she had a long-standing association with and he ended up in the Isle of Man camp for people that were suspect until they were vetted. I remember she went up there ... and he became a very successful chief executive of the Western Board Mills at Treforest, a huge organisation.

Several of my friends started to go to sea, some of them only lasted one trip but then, they were liable to be called up, and actually in later life a pilot friend of mine, he was actually a

Bevin Boy, because he was at sea and didn't like it, he ended up a Bevin Boy and went back to sea again [laughs].

The greatest secret weapon of the war was, nobody knew anything that was going on. Nobody knew of the losses, nobody knew of what ships were lost, they would just say they were stragglers. They lost a convoy - they didn't print everything like that I mean it was the greatest weapon of all. I don't think you'd get away with it today, y'know they had the Defence of the Realm Act you mustn't talk and you mustn't ...

I remember we used to have a magazine called Neptune, I wonder if there are any copies around. That was a propaganda magazine in about three different languages, all maritime, for the free French, free Norwegians and all that.

But I'm digressing a moment, getting back to my boyhood, childhood or whatever. I then went to the last year at Smiths Nautical School and I had great difficulty in finding anybody that would take on apprentices but you didn't know because they had lost so many ships.

A friend of mine said 'Oh with a nod and a wink I've got friends in Strict Line'. *Strict Ghost* of Swansea, run to the Persian Gulf. 'I can get you an apprenticeship there', but I couldn't get there. I applied to quite a few, I had a booklet from the shipping federation of all the shipping companies that took on apprentices.

Some of them had huge premiums. I remember one outstanding premium was Shaw Saville. The parents would have to pay a 100 Guineas for their son who would have been on the *Wooster*, *Conway* or *Pangbourne*, these were the - actually those training ships, they had public school status, sure they did. But whether my father - he was too mean to pay for my - to go there because we did - Leslie Bryce's drinking partner his son Ian Bryce did go to the 'Wooster' and subsequently was a lieutenant and got the DSC in convoy work and went - course he was almost a hero to me.

He had a wonderful career and was Chief Officer of the *Green Goddess* the *Caronia* one of the first liners of the Cunard, you know the first ones that they built, beautiful ship. He was a gifted pianist and everything, had everything going for him and he killed himself. Don't know why.

But there we are, I seem to have had a life where I have seen a lot of tragedy, that sort of tragedy of people ending their lives. Very, very sad but I won't dwell on that.

[00.15.17] Jack: When you did finally get to sea, you had a pretty, you might say as an apprentice, exciting time out in the far east, tell me of some of your experiences and who you were sailing with then ?

Jim: Well when I joined the *Trouper* the Anglo Saxon tanker, 11,000 Tons, 11 knots. The three elevens they called them. I had come from a home, a very comfortable home and family but this was something different, it was silver-service, Chinese crew, I'd never had such comfort and we were in Greenmouths DryDock in Sunderland (T.W.Greenwell ?) and the first thing I had to do was go to the MNDC.

I can even remember the name, Merchant Navy Defence Centre at Coburn Bay just outside Sunderland where we were taught to strip a Hotchkiss and a Lewis gun and fire at a ... and I got the certificate to come back.

Photograph; B&W man standing holding two large firearms underarm.

The *Trouper* was having all sorts of armour put around the bridge. They put a wooden shell round it and filled it with Tarmac and had slits on the window, and we had parachute cable, rockets and balloons to fly to stop dive-bombers. It was all exciting stuff and the other apprentice joined with me was Charles James Breen, CJ Breen.

He was from Trabbo in Waterford so he didn't have to be there because they were neutral and he had all sorts of Sweet Afton cigarettes and his own soap and everything. He lived in a different world to me but he'd been to a Nautical school in Dublin same as I had and he didn't have to be there and that's extraordinary.

It just goes to show how secretive life was. I mean now, when we get descriptions of that time it is horrible of what went on, but we never heard nothing about what was going on, you know, of the death and destruction, so it was all exciting stuff. We had a big porthole put on, with a bar so you could get out of the porthole quickly, and the lifeboats were always on fenders and all that sort of thing, and off we went.

The first trip was from Sunderland to Loch Ewe and as soon as we left Sunderland with another ship we came under air attack. This is all exciting and by the time I'd got to my station which was a Lewis gun on the tripod, they'd gone, [laughs].

'Oh gosh what a shame'.

I think the third mate was injured because he did his back in by suddenly turning with the gun.

Some of the things are ... and then before we left Sunderland, we were in dry-dock there, and we had a gun layer and three naval ratings and four army royal artillery. They had to have the saloon on the stern as their accommodation ... and we had twelve pounder anti-aircraft gun.

The sirens went for midday, say midday, and eh' Sunderland was under air attack and a ... a Dornier - we were supposed to know all the recognitions and all that of course, flew over us and the gun there ... and I was number seven to fire and I always remember it was a palm thing and I hesitated and he swore at me. I'd never, I was all exc ... and I did and it was far too late the bloody thing had gone long ago. I believe the gun-layer got hauled over the coals by the person in charge at Sunderland - the anti-aircraft ... that we weren't supposed to operate armament while we were in dock or we weren't part of the town defences.

So that was that so we went from there to Loch Ewe where we seemed to stay an age waiting for convoys and I have been there since to Loch Ewe because I have done a lot of charter sailing on the west coast of Scotland in latter years.

So Loch Ewe is full of memories you know, and off we went from Loch Ewe to Halifax and every night there were depth-charges going with 'tick in the bum'. 'It's exciting but aren't we going to see anything ... '? flames in the distance, on we plodded and y'know convoy; 'Up one, down one, up two', y'know the revs, it was done by revs. A little blue light on the stern of the ship ahead of you. One of the worse ... humorous incidents ... both of us were green and some of the things that we hadn't been prepared for, at least I hadn't been prepared for, I had quite a shock that we had to keep night watches ... [laughs], between midnight and four. I thought 'Well we weren't told about this' [laughs].

Fog, the notorious fog buoy which was really two planks and a thing and a scoop which you towed astern on a huge hemp line and that had ... as you towed it, it was like ... the boards they use on a trawler only not as big, as big as a table a small coffee table and this scoop and as you towed it through the water there was a spout came out and the ship astern of you could keep that ahead of them you see. The second mate he was a very friendly Geordie, some of

the others were a bit harsh, looking back they weren't ... he said 'Fog buoy in, you and your mate go down take the fog buoy in'.

So that was a very foolish thing for him to say because it was on the bitts and you are supposed to stopper it off and take it to the steam winch 'cause we are going along at ten knots. So I got it off and before I could say jack-knife, Charles Breen he took it off the bitts whoosh' [laughs] away it went. We were lucky, y'know if it had got him it would have killed him. So that was that.

Then to Londonderry and then always back to Halifax and many attacks, many false alarms, and 'When are we going to see the excitement, when are we going to get...', y'know it always seemed to be at night. Then down to Curacao, oh my first trip was Curacao, and then back again to England, I did many round trips, but the second trip I'd been there about 6 or 7 months which would be unheard of today. The time came for ... you could go home, one of you but not both of you.

So we tossed up who was going to go because Charles Breen was going back to Ireland ... he doesn't have to come back anyway, so he won, but the tragedy happened. He then came back he joined the *Tricula* as far as I know, and that was lost, so that was the end of him.

All vague I didn't find out ... I didn't know he was on the *Tricula* there were several tankers that were very well known on the run, *Donax*, *Donicella*, *Jupa*, *Tricula*, *Goldshell* all of them, back and forth all the time. Of course there was a famous captain of the *Donicella* Paddy Dove, who was a prisoner on the *Graf Spee* and he wrote a book about it. When the *Graf Spee* was scuttled, well he was on the ... a tanker which took all these prisoners, I've forgotten the name of it now.

But having said that I've survived the war and ended up the war as third mate of the ... the, I'm trying to remember ... *Ondina* !, another very famous tanker, not while I was on her, but it was the only tanker that was attacked by a Japanese raider in the Indian ocean. She was under the Dutch flag and that was a mistake on the part of the Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company. There was me a young rookie third mate with a temporary second mates ticket. I thought they were very very kind issuing a temporary second mates ticket. Instead of doing four years, you only had to do two and a half or something actually at sea. I thought how generous they are. Looking back at it, it was because they didn't have anybody [laughs].

Anything was better. So they issued a temporary second mates ticket ... and said 'Oh it is the same and it will become permanent after eighteen months'. So there was me with a brand new second mates ticket and I joined the *Ondina* at Bowling or Old Kilpatrick, that's at the mouth of the river Clyde, and I've since looked at it and I don't think it exists. They were all Dutch on board except the radio operator who was New Zealander. So ... it was quite a job for me, they were all Dutch speaking, but they spoke English when I was there and they were very kind to me but they lost me with their navigation and everything and I was keeping a watch. I think the captain, Captain Hopco A. Koops, I think he must have been exasperated with me, 'Why can't I have a proper Dutch Mate ...'.

I had no experience whatsoever of being in charge of the bridge, and it was in convoy. I wasn't happy there, Oh and I had to do all the catering with the Chinese Chief Steward - I had to keep the books and I found that very onerous. I found it was the worst possible introduction I had to being an officer on the bridge and I thought, I have no cargo experience, none whatsoever so I'm going to go in a cargo ship.

So I eventually got -went as Third Mate on a ship called the *Harpaleese*, which was then run by Harrisons but was taken over by Foster Haines - Haines Steamship Company. I went to their office in Salvage Buildings in Cardiff and I was delighted to be made third mate of the

'Harpaleese' in Hull, and off we went. Mr Warden a bible-punching Chief Officer and Tommy Stephens, a notorious Captain from Cornwall, and that was a disaster that happened there.

We went off and it was going to be a North Atlantic trip, it was in convoy, the war was still on, and eh, I wasn't on watch fortunately but the *Robert F Hand* a big American tanker astern of us rammed up the stern and did a lot of damage but not the propulsion. All the accommodation and the gun platform and everything all collapsed, into the crews accommodation. So we ended up in New York, into Harlem Drydock and everything, and said 'Oh we will soon be home' and the Captain came back, Tommy Stephens, he said 'I've got news for you, were going to ... India, we've been taken over by the Sea Transport of the Navy and we are going to be converted'. No need to worry when we get to India even when it's hot well probably be sent up to the hill stations for a rest ... [laughs], I believed everything [laughs].

So anyway, we eventually went through the Suez Canal, so ... the Mediterranean must have been safe but the war was still on in Japan and we were converted in Madras to take on Indian troops and Sea Transport and everything else. We fiddled around between Calcutta and Madras and eventually ... 'When is the action going to start' it was Operation Tiderace or something, we all had to assemble at Accia in Burma. We had an air attack, but again, it was all over in a second, 'Oh my gosh they've gone' [Laughs]. How foolish I was then. We did several runs there, we were there a long time, and of course all the crew wanted to get back, they'd fake illness anything to get out of it, the food was rotten, we didn't have any ... it was terrible.

Captain Stephens Tommy Stephens, - Oh I got on very well with him, he was a very practical - but he was on the booze. We were coming down the Malacca Strait, which you would know, and you know its pouring with rain all the bloody time there, rain storms all the time and I was - came off watch there and was in oilskins and one thing and another and I came in we were all blackout curtains and everything else, we were travelling independently down to Penang or somewhere and as I got in with my oilskins on there I sat down on the chartroom settee, and the next thing is, I was unconscious.

He'd given me the most almighty smack in the face with his fist. The second mate was in the wheelhouse, couldn't leave, pouring with rain, dark, man at the wheel and all that, no automatic. Called the standby man and I'm like this ..., [hands over face], blood streaming down my face and everything presumably ..., in the light of the chart table, and there he is in his whites there ... [fists up].

So, I said I don't want anything to do with this, he said 'No you will do 'this that and the other'. How it ended I got out of there quickly, and I went down aft to the engineers.

I said 'The Captain's gone mad ...'. So in the morning, Alexander Warden came,

I said 'How am I going to deal with this'. I said 'I'm not going on watch, not with the Captain there'. He said 'Oh you must ...', I said 'I'm not', I said 'Look at this', (face),

He said ... 'You know what he's like'. You know that sort of thing.

He did persuade me but we were going to Singapore and I wanted to see the sea transport officer to complain about it you see.

I didn't have in my mind that I wanted to get home. It was something pretty bad that ever happened and had always been respectful to him and there was no reason for him to be like that it was only booze.

So before ... whether it was after Singapore he called me up into his cabin, and this was before we got to Singapore and he said 'I want to talk to you'. 'I said well I'll only talk to you if Mr Alexander Dorwood... if he's there with me. He said 'Oh he doesn't need to be there'.

So I went into bedroom and, on the side of the bed there was a revolver.

He said 'You know what I'm going to do, if you report what has happened, there's only one way out for me'.

Well what do you do in this. I said 'Well this is terrible'. He said 'Well I'm just telling you. He said 'It would be the finish of me. He said 'I'm sorry what I did and everything ...' He must have sobered up - this must have been two days later or something, I had been keeping watches but I was very careful.

[00.34.37] Jack: I'm wondering how you now come to see a job with FIDS, and what developed there, how did you get ... ?

Jim: Ah well I had to go back for my statutory RNR training, to keep the commission going and get my - you got a token amount every year and a substantia commission, and I was lieutenant RNR. I was doing actually ... the first course after the war for RNR - see RNR was disbanded in 1955 I think. It became - everything is RNVR but not ... do you remember the chain braid?

[00.35.28] Jack: Not well no ?

Jim: I wish I'd kept mine, it was the most expensive braid of all. I mean a Captain ... it was chain, gold chain and that was RNR. That was for professional people with a Masters ticket or whatever and of course it was very much sought after, because you could fly the blue ensign if so many people were in the RNR.

So the Cunard and BI they liked their Captains to be RNR, or so many people on board and they could fly the blue ensign. Yes, when I was in Pembroke, as I think I told you before, I saw this advert somehow, I think it would have been in the Daily Telegraph, because when we went into the officers wardroom at Chatham, the lovely Wrens there that waited on you in their white gown, and when you went in for breakfast they put a newspaper stand in front of you, ... and what paper do you want and they would put the Telegraph in front - you had to have the Telegraph !! They wouldn't have the News of the World [laughs]. That's there I must have seen it. I think I was on the first peacetime course after the war of the RNR, and it was a complete failure.

You see there were people that were teaching us that weren't wartime, and it was quite extraordinary. They were botching together the course, it hadn't been well organised. I was on the 'Vernon' for Mine Clearance, I was at *Excellent* for gunnery, I was at *Collingwood*, I was at *Mercury*, it was all over the place - with another six. One of them being Lawrence Portet. I used to call him Perpendicular Portet. He was about six foot four and he was with me and he became Captain of the 'Queen Mary'.

I don't know which 'Queen Mary', I mean there are so many now aren't there, there's *Queen Mary II*. But he, all his life with Cunard and I was in good company there, most of my colleagues ... Geoffrey - forgotten his name, he became a high ranking person in the Lifeboat Institution.

No ... I'm digressing a bit there, that's where I saw the advert for FIDS.

[00.38.23] Jack: How did that evolve next, what ... ?

Jim: Certainly people didn't pickup telephones as they do today, so I must have made a written application to the Crown Agents of the Colonies at Millbank, which I had never been to.

I had the interview there with Bill Johnson and one other - he seemed to say hardly anything, very florid, and they were obviously were satisfied and I joined in Thornycroft's Yard at

Northam which is now a television studio. That's where it always used to go it used to be hoisted up on a slipway. I had lots of friends there in Northam, and that's how it all started.

Photograph; B&W; John Biscoe under way in port (departing ?).

The first trip down there and I've got some snaps there, crossing the line. My memory's fading a bit there, we always ... I think it was something to do with the fuel capacity of the *John Biscoe*. We always fuelled in Cape Verde, which was a pretty rough sort of place and then next stop would be Rio, I think only just for the sake of FIDS people, to give them a break. Then down to Stanley where it all started, and ...

[00.40.06] Jack: If you go back to Southampton, you joined as Chief Officer in 1949 was it?

Jim: No '50.

[00.40.15] Jack: You joined in 1950, and Bill Johnson was just taking over from ?

Jim: Yes, now memory is very vague there because I believe they'd had trouble with the previous Chief Officer, and the Second Officer, so it had been and then it wasn't talked about for some reason or other. I mean I would have been very keen to know even then what was going on, I was more or less excited about going on the *John Biscoe*.

The Second Mate and Third Mate which was Norman Brown and Peter Croft. Peter Croft was a Lieutenant RN, a proper RN person, he'd been Naval Attaché in Finland or somewhere, married to a lovely Finnish girl. He was a real top drawer RN person and no side on him at all.

Peter Croft and he lived I will always remember, something like Woodfield, he lives in Wimpole in Devon, a very nice sounding place. Better than Liverpool [laughs], Scotland Road.

[00.41.41] Jack: You must have - after your previous rather rough ships to come to the *John Biscoe* and be surrounded almost by Royal Navy people, it must have been a fantastic feeling of security almost ?

Jim: Yes it was, especially Lieutenant Commander Hunt. He was the Survey chap and he lived in Bill Johnsons cabin, abaft the funnel. You see that cabin in the front of the 'John Biscoe' which isn't there, so this is a very old picture. That was for the Governor of the Falkland Islands. But while he wasn't on board, and it would only be about a fortnight a year, if that, Bill Johnson had that cabin. But when he was there he went to this cabin behind the mainmast and Lieutenant Commander Hunt had that.

We had a Taut Wire measuring machine on the stern which I never saw used. That was for measuring distances, you know you put a huge fire-bar on the end of a piece of wire, you dropped it over and you ran the wire out and how much wire you got was how many miles you'd gone. Taut Wire measuring gear, I never saw it actually used. He had an assistant, and a recorder, a survey recording, a rating, P&O with a Survey badge on.

In my day young boys knew all the Naval Insignia, you know the Boys Own Magazine, all the ranks and everything, all the ratings, stripes and insignia, something like Boy Scout badges I suppose.

And, eh, yes ... I had quite a friendly relationship, and also with the Doctor. I was fascinated when he had any patients and I was always wanted to know when he was going to use the

drilling machine. He had a treadle machine to do fillings [laughs]. So that gives you an idea of the time, the time-warp if you like.

[00.44.03] Jack: Your job as Chief Officer on the *John Biscoe* - in Southampton, what did that entail ?

Jim: Almost in charge of the refit. I think I could have sat back and allowed everything, but I was intensely interested, I remember the foreman of the shipwrights, I was very friendly with them I used to go ... I was invited to their homes, I went on a fishing party with one of them because we went back there every year, to the same yard. So that was three times so I made a lot of friends there, at the yard.

But I would never see Bill Johnson, he lived in Whitefriars in Belfast, and he used to disappear there and then come back to the luxury of the hotel in Southampton and we would never see him.

I was on my bicycle from my digs, it was a guest house not digs, there were commercial travellers in there and we did have a television so that dates it. We had a Colonel somebody or other who was living there in the guest house, because he used to embarrass everybody by whenever the television ended, and they played God Save the Queen - King, he'd jump up at attention and all of us would look sheepishly at him, [laughs].

Yeah, those days in Southampton - off we would go - we almost had a marine band to see us off ...

[00.45.58] Jack: Cargo operations, what were you loading, what sort of?

Jim: Ah, good question. Everything was, I didn't have anything to do, I can remember the foreman from Royal Mail, they were our agents, Royal Mail their connection was South America and the Falklands of course, and they had their own stevedore and everything, and from what I'd been used to it was nothing. We were loaded in two days and all marked Base A, letters A, B, and all packaging, Bolton Paul and all that sort of thing, then that was that. Occasionally, well we had sheepdogs, on one occasion, Ehhh - sheep, Romney Marr sheep but they were on deck as far as I can remember, I looked after those a bit.

When we were in the Falklands of course we did at least one trip, possibly two, from the Falklands to South Georgia with 600 sheep and about fifty carcasses hung on the rigging. If it was known today, we would be prosecuted, the way we carried those sheep, dreadful.

If you got 500 alive there, you were lucky. I used to take it upon myself, with Sorensen, I used to say that one looks - that's dead, Sorensen, he'd been a shepherd out in the camp, he knew all about that, I said 'Oh he's had it' ... he said 'Bring him up anyway'.

So we bring him up on deck, put his head into the wind ... and he's alive again [laughs].

I used to be doing this all the... see I was on the four to eight, it's tropical weather - no down in South Georgia I'm getting mixed up a bit there, awful weather but I was very fortunate I did not have sea-sickness. I don't know why, where there's no sense there's no feeling ??

I never had ..., and I've had pretty awful weather, I mean I'm not boasting about it - awful bloody weather, but it didn't ... and I had a great regard for cooks who brought the meal up.

I remember Silas on the *John Biscoe*, how the hell he managed, in all weathers he was so proud of the uniform they'd given him that he even cooked with his peaked hat on. [Laughs]

Silas, he was well known in the Falklands.

There we are, memories keep on coming.

[00.49.04] Jack: When you left England of course you also took some of the scientists and the technicians and people down?

Jim: Oh yes, oh that was their main ... about thirty three of them, living in pretty primitive conditions, double bunks, yes you are reminding me of that narrow stairways going down, and all I can remember of that of people lying prone in there, 'I wanna die ...'

[00.49.32] Jack: Give me a feeling of the size of the *John Biscoe* and as you have already said the cramped-ness ?

Jim: Oh it was terrible. My immediate reaction to that sort of question is, ... there was Peter Croft, Lieutenant RNR, and Norman Brown in a double bunk in a tiny little cabin. Now that's ... impossible, so we must have been really keen, my cabin was luxury. It was the length of the bunk, there was no walking round bunk underneath the porthole and, did I have a washbasin ...? Yes I think I did but nothing else, but I accepted that because of the excitement of it all.

There was no luxury there at all and I didn't know, perhaps it was arranged by Bill Johnson that I never go in there otherwise I'd get dissatisfied with the luxury that he had!

But that was the way it was. It was a normal routine, eleven o'clock, sit down in the wardroom with Digger, with Gin and Angostura bitters.

Photograph; B&W; Young man in white shirt, drawing Gin in a glass, from optics behind the bar in wardroom.

I can't recall how we must have had a bar chit or how that ... We had good food, we had a radio operator from the Falklands called Bonner, I know him facially, I can see him now I was very friendly with him he was the only Falkland Islander that ate with us, you know there was definitely the crew and the officers and that's that. I used to go down the engine-room quite a lot, I don't think Bill Johnson had ever been in the engine-room I don't think. I used ask if I could start the engine or do something like that, fiddle around. So I did have a great interest in the ship. The derrick that we had there, I think by the look of it, it couldn't have been more than fifty tons safe working load, in fact it doesn't even look like that but it must have been quite substantial. We had a barge and inside the barge, nestling inside the barge was a tow-boat, almost like a dory-type tow-boat.

Photograph; B&W; Launch and barge in ops off thin sea-ice. 6 persons visible.

That towed the barge, so we lowered the barge over from the foredeck, no we'd had to take the motor boat out first from inside it, I used to like fiddling around with the motor boat and the barge and that was used to ferry the stores ashore. We used to have lots of barrels, forty gallon barrels, and Cliff Jennings the chap that had to leave us, we had to let him go, he impressed me tremendously because he lifted with his bare hands, a forty gallon drum of diesel. So he wasn't a chap to argue with, never seen that done since, ... [laughs], that was putting them ashore.

But there we are some interesting things. Bill Johnson used to get the ship in the nearest possible place.

Photograph; B&W; Ship moored tight ashore surrounded by snow, rocks and ice.

I particularly remember Port Lockroy, I keep on harping back to that, that seems to stick in my mind because of the boat channel. I think Bill Johnson used to say we can't blow the horn to say we're coming because the sound vibrations will start the glacier on the side of the boat channel it will all start falling on top of us!! Whether that was true I don't know but there was quite an impressive manoeuvre and then we put stern lines out.

Very few places ... there was no places I went to in the Antarctic ... I remember Signy, and eh what was the other ... there was Coronation Island, Signy, South Georgia. We did that trip always to South Georgia and that was another thing that was part of my experience ... life, we had Falkland Island crew had been out on the camp as shepherds. We had one particular chap there, I think it was Aubrey Goodwin his name was, and he used to slaughter the sheep, he said to me 'You ought to come along and see it done.'

I didn't like that, he had a forty gallon drum and he had a sort of platform up there and you slit the throat of the sheep and drain all the blood into there and this all went on. Then we used to hang those up, oh and then, before I forget because I'm going through so many things, the abortive business of sealing.

The dogs Pemmican or whatever it was they were fed with, was very expensive, it was imported ... and somebody in authority said well what about the seals, we can have a seal cull on the 'John Biscoe' and that will be the stock for the winter for the dogs.

[00.55.42] Jack: Originally then it was, they were fed Pemmican that was brought down, this was a new idea.

Jim: Well yes that's right it's from England, yes, let's save money, what about the seals. So this sounded exciting I must admit, it sounded exciting to me. Several times you were in the ice, close to these bases somewhere. We must have been under way out there and there was no sign of seals. Then one morning, there were seals all around us on floes. So we had the boat over the side ... and we shot around about fifty seals, something like that and then of course there was this business of putting a strop through their jaw, through a hole in their jaw and out through their mouth and towing them with the motor boat three at each side.

Then hoisting them on deck of the John Biscoe and then I've got some photographs of us doing it, small ones, and then taking them to the various bases or maybe only two bases, they were put there.

Photograph; B&W; Barge near a low wharf, two timbers spanning with a part-flensed seal on top. Two men in the barge assisting, two men in the shallow water cutting, more men on wharf.

I was very disappointed when I came back next year or so and so, they hadn't been eaten. They were still there in an icy lump.

So I think they stopped that in the end, I'm not sure of my facts there, but it seemed to me dangerous and a waste of time. Looking back at it now - got more sense now. But it was all exciting stuff at the time, wouldn't be tolerated today, now it's not necessary and of course there are no dogs there, not anywhere in the Antarctic as far as I know.

I think the dogs were shot, [Note: They were not], the remaining dogs they were Malmut Huskies, I believe they were from Newfoundland, and I believe, I might be wrong, that Vivian Fuchs kept one dog as a pet in Cambridge, but I'm not sure of my facts there.

I can always remember the dogs, how they attacked each other, for food, they were jealous if you made a fuss of one they were all on a trace, the others would go mad.

Photograph; B&W; Three Huskies on trace, on snow.

They ate each others doos, but they were very affectionate and their breath smelled terrible and they had plates, that was something that they had to be very careful of. All their hair their fur would get so matted that it would be a solid plate like a big block and you had to keep moving them onto snow, that was another problem when the scree was exposed you had to take them off and move them, I've got photographs of them being moved.

[00.59.02] Jack: Its interesting you seem to have both photographs and very good recollections of Fid activity. Were you particularly keen on being involved with FIDS in other areas

Jim: Oh yes, yes, especially ... all the things that we did I found very exciting and Bill Johnson left everything to me.

Photograph; B&W;

Lifeboat and barge with 14 men working in tight ice with poles.

Elevation view old base, snow, antennas, glacier background.

Launch bow-onshore, small clinker rowing boat, 5 men.

Base portrait five men.

Base image, three men busy close around the stove.

All credit to him he was a good Master as far as I was concerned I could do what the hell I liked and that was ok by him. So, yes thinking back, it was all a happy time, I can't think of any time when anybody was down in the dumps it was very different for people like yourself on the bases, that was a different psychological thing altogether, you were there for the winter. When we talked about that tragedy of Arthur Farrant, still in my mind, thirty seven years old, too old ...

[01.00.19] Jack: Yes, tell me the whole story of Arthur Farrant.

Jim: Well for a start he was thirty seven, which was considered over the top, too old for that. Whether that has been proved right or wrong, I don't know, I'm sure they have people ... because there were people like Slessor and those over there, but he was a diesel-mechanic and I had a particular interest in him because he was from Cardiff. I think it was Roger Banks....., anyway when we came in to relieve a base after their wintering there say in Deception, we must have come in and anchored there, the boat goes ashore and they've seen us for the first time since the previous summer.

So they come out, I can't remember they used to come out and we really didn't mix in the wardroom they used to go down, I can't remember much alcohol or what would be the sort of hospitality of today or even going on a bender today anything would go. I don't know what

restrictions they have of alcohol on bases or anything like that they might have it today because it can lead to problems.

So I went ashore and it was I recall about five in the afternoon, four of them which included, there would have been me and Aubrey Goodwin, the Coxswain of the boat the two of us would have gone ashore and four of them got in the boat to come back, amongst them, I might be wrong, would have been Roger Banks and Ralph Lenton, I'm not quite sure of my facts but we only got halfway to the ship when there was a bang.

We went back and of course he was in the diesel-hut and he'd shot himself through the mouth. So that was nasty, but the revelations that followed the problem, what are we going to do with his, what are we going to do with poor Arthur Farrant.

I think some of the base members, without being unkind to them if they are still alive, I think some of them did say he was an odd person, possibly moody, which was understandable not the right person for that sort of thing although whether he'd done previous stunts I don't know. However, the main thing then was, what are we going to do with him. I was all for burying him at sea and I'd had experience of it, but Bill Johnson said no, it's got to be on telegraphed to the Governor of the Falkland Islands, we have to involve him and all that sort of thing, and of course FIDS Office, and all that sort of naturally, what are we going to do?

They said 'Well there is a whaler cemetery there'. It's the furthest south cemetery in the world I think, or something like that. There are about twenty graves, stones or cairns - 'Go in there ...'

Then they had a high level coded message back ... 'Can't go in there, is consecrated ground'. ... Bloody hell !!, lets bury him at sea. ... 'That wasn't so', 'What are we going to do?'

We ...', 'It's as hard as rock', 'What are we going to do? ...'. So Ralph Lenton took over and he built the box, they seemed to have plenty of timber in Deception, all the corrugated iron the redundant boiler houses.

It was a compromise, we buried him outside the consecrated ground and it was a very pathetic grave, hardly - although it was volcanic, Deception, so it wasn't rock hard it wasn't permafrost or anything like that, we didn't go down very far and I often think I wonder if that's been exhumed and then we built a cairn over it. I've got a picture somewhere of the ceremony.

There was a sequel to that round about six months later. I was home on leave, from the 'John Biscoe', and his brother and sister-in-law from Cardiff had found my name and address and came to me. I invited them in to 11 Axminster Road, I think they came on a motorbike and side-car of all things. They said 'I'm Arthur Farrant's brother and sister-in-law or something, and we're not happy about the circumstances of Arthur's death'. So I went full astern right away. 'I said this is to do with the FIDS in London, have you been in touch with them at Millbank'? I wasn't very happy about getting involved with that because I would only add certain speculation and I didn't want that, it was nothing to do with me, I only had the practical side of it. So they weren't very happy that I couldn't tell them any, I said 'I'm very sorry I can't add anything, how sorry we are', the usual things and that was that.

Then I think FIDS, and I might be wrong they had a much more stringent psychological thing, they examined people a lot more, before, whether they were suitable or went into their CV or background a bit, whether that is so I don't know. They don't just take anybody, but then it was very loose. Well it's like everything else, things have developed much more and the majority is, at the risk of getting more boring of course, but it's safer and that seems to be the whole way of life today doesn't it. The dangers and everything and the excitement have gone, now it becomes possibly a bit boring.

And of course, I understood that they were trained, I didn't know at the time they were trained for the Key for Morse, they were the radio operator, because of course, again you were taking about navigational things we did not have radio telephone on the ... and radio telephone was around at that time, ships had it but we didn't, we were still on the Key, continuous wave and had to have a radio operator, and I'm digressing a bit on the *Biscoe* as you said, very minimal navigational equipment.

[01.08.24] Jack: On the subject of navigation, you didn't have GPS, you had ... tell me how you operated - you must have felt your way through some of these channels, what tools did you have at your disposal ?

Jim: Ah well it was such a relief leaving Stanley and going across the Drake Passage, avoiding Beauchene rocks which is in the middle if I remember, between ... not many people know that in fact I'm not sure of my facts there. There are rocks across the Drake Passage and it was such a relief to see Graham Land but it was all dead-reckoning and I can imagine because of the British Antarctic Sector being so beautiful compared with the rest I've never been to the rest, you have.

Graham Land in itself with its mountains and it's channels, the Lemaire Channel, the De Gerlache Strait, the Bransfield Strait. That isn't anywhere else as far as I know, it's just the Ice Shelf, the Beardmore Glacier I know around the Australian side.

From the Navigation point of view it would be all dead reckoning and we did have a radio-direction finder, but there would be no beacons and most people even in my day were very wary of the radio beacon, it wasn't to be trusted. You know, you had to get a cross. But I would say 100%, when we left Stanley I would say we never ... and you will have to remind me of the distance, is it 600 miles, so that's at least two days it was dead reckoning, and we always used to ask Digger the Chief Engineer, I can remember asking 'How far are we off the ice Digger', because he used to say he had a sensory smell, he said he could smell ice. So we always asked Digger how far we were off the ice [laughs].

To see, it was a big landmass you couldn't mistake it I don't think we ever had any frightening experiences don't forget we were there in the summer. Very different, I've never been there in the winter, I've never been across Cape Horn or anything in the winter so really speaking, we were there at the best times and it would have all been dead-reckoning and we were so thankful to get anywhere near ice, that was the main thing to get in amongst it rather than this terrible passage across the Drake Passage rolling the guts out of the ship nobody could eat, can't even have a cup of tea it sloshed all over the place.

Photograph; B&W; Ship berthed in ice.

Ship from foredeck with heavy ice build-up

Ship berthed in ice, sunny day. Mountains background.

Oh we were so glad to get in the Bransfield Strait, and out of it. Then we could expect - I'm not quite sure how long we did, I think we must have done about three trips during the season round there and back, not sure ... probably seven or eight weeks each one, and we ...

Stonington Island was the furthest south and that was being dismantled, we never went there, when I was on the *John Biscoe* I never, I can't say that I've ever been in the true Antarctic.

I've never been south of the Antarctic circle, because not many bases were - I think only one, and I think there's only one today isn't there, south of sixty six and a half south. So I'm not really a true Antarctic person. [laughs]

[01.12.37] Jack: I'm fascinated to hear how when you were in the narrow channels, you must have on occasions been really having to feel your way around, I mean your radar system probably wasn't very long range, you didn't have an Echo-sounder - you did?

Jim: Yes, Oh we had that, we never used it, hardly used it. It was nearly all by sight and some of the things that you had to be very careful of I can remember is thinking that this was the land on the charts, it's well charted, Admiralty Chart of around there it must be perfect now. The Admiralty chart would show and you'd get mistaken and it wasn't it's a big floe, a big ice, and that isn't the headland, it's further in.

The most exciting things were always Port Lockroy. I think that through Lemaire Channel and there's a boat channel and when I see the present day ships, I even and you correct me there the second 'John Biscoe' whether it went through that - I'd be surprised if it went through that boat channel. We used to go in there and it was very tight, and put stern lines out. Oh yes, that is most in my mind and of course I understand now that it's a museum ?

Photograph; B&W; As before, ship berthed in ice.

[01.14.15] Jack: It is. Yes.

Jim: I've got my name somewhere in the structure, you know people - not graffiti but they put their name and the date, and it is there, but it has got a panel over it.

Which leads me to the question, I can remember that they had a big contract with Bolton & Paul, that's the aircraft people but they built for sectional buildings and as far as I can remember there was no such thing as insulation, no such thing as Fibreglass - nothing, or wool even, or horse-hair or whatever, there was nothing between the ... I might be wrong, but nowadays you would have blocks wouldn't you.

The other thing I always had a gripe about, FIDS couldn't afford aggregate. So for the foundations of Hope Bay wherever it was to build the foundations of concrete we had cement fondue, which I've never seen since, I've never seen it for sale, cement fondue you can use salt water with it you see, instead of water, with a mix - four in one and the there were two, there wasn't enough in the funds to have just bags of aggregate, so we had to dig our own aggregate

[01.15.42] Jack: At the base?

Jim: Yes, so the bases which were only columns as far as I can remember they weren't huge rafts, they were on legs I think. That was aggregate dug at the shoreline, you know where the snow had receded and there was scree. So that was quite a job, digging enough scree to mix to make concrete. So that used to take some time.

I used to be very keen on carpentry and I used to help, I'm absolutely certain we did not have an electric drill There we are.

Photograph; B&W;

Image of the timber framework of a building extension.

Erecting roof trusses, three men, ship and sunny Antarctic scenery in background.

[01.16.34] Jack: What's your understanding of where they built a base and why?

Jim: Well, the location of them I just accepted, for instance in the sector we used to go a lot to Signy. There was an Argentine Base there as well, and that is still the same today.

But the Argentines, they went there on a documentary, they have got a dock there now, a jetty, and on this documentary I saw, I was quite astonished they live on the other side of a bay of some sort in Signy.

[Actually Orcadas is the Argentine Base, on Laurie Island, still within the South Orkney Group]

I can recall that the FIDS people they didn't want to ever go to Signy. It's in the South Orkneys isn't it, of Islands, and I think that young men they think well that's not really the Antarctic, y'know it's not the Antarctic Continent. So I don't think they liked going to Signy. They had to accept Deception and they certainly didn't like going to - I don't think they had a base at - no that was just the Magistrates base at Grytviken. I remember him.

If you'd have come in I've got a whales tooth from there. Of course a lot of the Norwegians and Tynesiders they used to come to the 'Biscoe' they weren't allowed no booze or anything. And of course you know Scandinavians, when they get on the old Aquvit, there's no stopping them. So they would offer - actually hundreds of cigarettes just for a bottle of anything. The story was, you couldn't even give them 'cherry bottom boot polish', because they'd strain it and get the alcohol out of it. I was most interested in the whaling industry there and the 'Southern Garden' and the smell of it for miles, that was going full swing then.

[01.19.01] Jack: Give me a flavour of your vision of it in the 1960's?

Jim: A huge factory, I saw Shackleton's grave there, I've got a photograph that I took of it. My main thought was the 'Southern Garden', a big factory ship which they seemed to run up onto a shale beach and they had all these whale-catchers alongside and I got friendly with some of them, the Southern... they were all named 'Southern' - 'Southern arrow', 'Southern this', and they all came down through Dover latterly. When I was a pilot we used to - it was in the dying days and of course Salvorsen ran Leith Harbour the big Dundee company and Edinburgh.

The Magistrate was on more or less a peninsula, I've forgotten, but away from the whaling station. The manager had a nice house there, corrugated, but it was work all the time and the steam and everything and the 'Southern Garden' was this huge factory ship which seemed to be beached bow-on, it seemed to have been run up there. I don't think that moved.

I got friendly with a several Captain, one particular Captain, they didn't call themselves Captain they were Gunner, the Captain was the Gunner. They had half season Gunners, I was most interested in that. Some only allowed to shoot for half a season and if there was a British Gunner there, he was lucky to get a half season. I used to go with this friend of mine, he showed me the Svend Foyn Harpoon Gun. They had a training one and they used to fire at a box and train and you know, get used to it.

When I say, it sounds as though I know a lot about it, but I was there for I'd say a week three times, so you can do a lot in a week.

Again, I never saw Bill Johnson ashore there, you know - he'd never go ashore there, he'd probably say to me 'You please yourself I don't know what you are going to see in that bloody dump for', [laughs].

[01.21.30] Jack: Did Bill not love the Antarctic ?

Jim: No, he didn't - he appeared not to have any interest in it and one of the most funny incidents looking back at it... When they had an incident either at Hope Bay or one of the bases, it was a Hope Bay incident, they decided to send a cruiser down from the West Indies Fleet, and it was the 'Superb'. 'We'll show these Argies' who's what's what'.

They were about a month late mind. But, down came the 'Superb', and anchored in Sparrow Cove, couldn't come in, actually, when you see - no it couldn't, the cruise liners even today don't go in there.

It was anchored by the 'Great Britain' that area you know outside, just outside the Heads there and of course there was a Naval pinnace coming back and forth. We were alongside and I knew that the 'Superb' was there and suddenly - this is leading up to Bill Johnson - I was always on the lookout, talking to people ... and I saw a stranger on the public jetty and he was almost in plus-fours and a shooting jacket and a deerstalker hat almost, with a stick - '...

Oh who's this?'

So I went down straight away onto the public jetty said 'Hello' and everything and he said 'Oh how nice to see you', he said 'I've heard about your ship the 'John Biscoe' and I said 'Oh have you' and he said 'I'm off the 'Superb'. [laughs].

I said 'Would you like to come aboard and see how the other side live?'

He said 'Oh yes can I?'

So I made him a cup of tea, I said 'Do you want anything stronger and everything'. He said 'This is jolly good, I'm very interested in what you are doing here and how do you enjoy life here', and this that and the other. Suddenly the pinnace comes alongside the public jetty - chap with ... you know, his boathooks [demonstrates holding one aloft] almost piped aboard and, he said 'Well I've got to go now' and so I went down with him to the thing and they more or less piped him aboard there.

Well he was Admiral Andrews, C in C of the West Indies Fleet, on the 'Superb'. So off he went, he said 'I'm going to arrange - you haven't seen the last of me - that sort of thing and off he went. Then the pinnace came back about a day later with an invitation to a guest-night on the 'Superb', with Marine Band and everything else, for the Captain, and - the invitation must have a limitation on it, anyway it turned out it was three of us could go on this invitation to a full scale guest-night, I'd had these in the Barracks and things.

So I was telling Bill Johnson, he had it, he said 'You go, I don't want to go'. I said 'I'll go', he said 'Well yeah if you like you're representing me'. I said 'Well there's a free nosh there, it'll be a great time they'll have all the naval silver out on the table, the Marine Band playing in the gallery' [laughs].

And so I went. They put the boat on for me and I went with Dick Award. Now of course he was a chief ERA. He was now a chief Engineer in the Merchant Service, rather different, so he and I went off and we had a marvellous time on there.

They had the awnings up, on the quarter deck and it was just like the King and Queen going aboard there. We were ushered aboard and were given a place of honour at the table.

Everybody was passing the sherry round and all that sort of thing and the speeches came.

Ah, I wasn't so keen on that, 'Now what's going to happen'.

And so Admiral Andrews, he was looking straight at me and he said 'I want to welcome especially', and he got it wrong 'Our Bluenose friends', and I picked up on that you see.

Digger said to me 'Well you better go and answer'. I got up very nervously and said 'Thanks for having us on board it's great to see you down here and all that', and I did say 'We are not Bluenose, we're not from Newfoundland, were just ordinary people from Subant'.

One of the incidents that comes to my mind - you brought up about the 'Burghead Bay' which is rather fleeting to me, and I'm quite astonished that I don't remember the photograph, how it was taken, but whether it was the 'Burghead Bay' or the 'Veryan Bay' I'm not sure.

I had the job of freeing it from the moorings in Deception and the name of the Captain was Captain Hall-Wright, I thought was a rather unusual name Hall-Wright.

He was a real RN gentleman and when I come to think of it, RN officers, true officers Dartmouth of the Royal Navy, they are of a different species altogether and when you come to think of it, their time at sea naturally can only be limited because they all want a chance at command and they haven't got the ships and they're not there as in the Merchant Service, we're there for life, if you choose that life. There's no sort of shore based appointments which I would suggest that most naval officers, the majority of their career would be shore-based appointments.

If they get a chance at command whether that's same today and the boring life of a Trident submarine, I would think is terribly boring, but I think they do have smoko. They surface and allow them on deck to smoke. Rather different [laughs].

So, what other incidents can I recall there with naval ships?

I've never been aboard the 'Bahia', they were Chilean Naval ships there but I never had any contact with them, only ashore. I've got some pictures of me with Argentine officers, but like myself you would never recognise them as naval officers. You'd look at them and say 'Just ordinary labourers' [laughs] and the same with us, you know, anything went.

Photograph; B&W; Portrait of Jim with four men, close against a building.

The only time we ever suddenly put on regalia and this will date it again, was we were in Southampton and we were all titivated up, and all the crew, the Falkland islanders were all given uniforms and naval ratings hats and everything for the Coronation naval review.

We were there and we saw the Queen in the distance so that dated it 1953.

Then we had all the top brass from Millbank the Falkland - FIDS office they all came aboard in a - looked like a converted torpedo recovery class. I've got a picture of them all standing including Fuchs coming aboard and Scott, who had the bird sanctuary in Gloucester...

[01.30.30] Jack: Peter Scott;

Jim: Peter Scott. I met him and he thanked me. We brought some Upland Geese back in a crate, for, what's the name of it, 'Slimbridge'. I've been there, but that's gone from strength to strength hasn't it. Peter Scott, he was amongst the party that came aboard with Vivian Fuchs and I recall that Bill didn't want any of that ceremony ... y'know because you had to line the side. In the distance - we had, all the crew had to take their hats off and I had to organise this ... ratings say 'Hooray', the officers say 'Hoorahh' [laughs].

Whether that goes down today I don't know [laughs].

I've got a picture of us all lining the ... again I don't recall any real celebration of y'know lets open bottles of champagne, I never saw any of that I think we were rather mean even though we had guests on board, of course you can imagine the wardroom would have been full so that's all rather vague.

What else has happened we must have gone back to the Falklands after the review. Well, what else can I say about ... I'm trying to not go away from FIDS too much.

[01.32.17] Jack: I'm interested, this is personal now for you, you had a very bad accident didn't you, in the Falklands?

Jim: Yes, yes, in the middle of my term on the *John Biscoe* which I never thought I would come back, and FIDS, they pulled all the stops out for me and I had an operation in University College Hospital, I had to go there, and I was there for by present day standards ..., not in Hospital these days, but anyhow.

My wife when she had that was only a day wasn't she, something like that, but now - it was quite common to be in - I must have been in University College Hospital for three weeks and they had operated on me for pleuredesis or something, and that was the sealing of the left lung to the pleura, to be sealed, so as there could be no more of the red in the lung cause it's a spongy thing isn't it.

That was done by Dr Haniman and also the surgeon was I believe the honorary surgeon to the Queen it was all top level stuff. I was there for three weeks and then I was sent to a convalescent home which you wouldn't have today, in Seaford in Sussex, for convalescence. I was quite active and I think I discharged myself, not in an unfriendly way, I said 'I'm alright' and I went back again for the last season.

The accident I had was George Marsh, he was a doctor, several doctors and Dr Slessor was involved. In the Falklands you see I had this respite waiting for the 'Fitzroy' and the 'Andes' back to Southampton. The whole accident was a month in the Falklands, around about a fortnight living in Moody Street, as a convalescent and take-it-easy, and then 'Fitzroy' to Stanley to Montivideo. I think that must have been once a month, and then off to Southampton and then home for a week and then by train to University College Hospital in Gower Street, and that was that incident.

Naturally - they couldn't do enough for me. I mean I don't know whether that would be the same - they felt a responsibility I suppose.

The actual incident is just a blurred memory to me, I woke up in hospital

[01.35.20] Jack: Do you remember were you doing cargo work, or what was happening?

Jim: No, don't know what the hell I was doing - yes there was - they were loading a wind ..., that was what I was told I was hit by, a bundle of sort of girders and things like that. But eh, it was at the time well, just another accident. I'd been so used to eh, well you never get used to things really like that but eh, I had age on my side, you know, what would have happened if I had been much older or if it had been Bill Johnson maybe. I had another narrow escape on the 'John Biscoe', I often say to Rita, 'I've had nine lives'.

For some reason or other, the lifeboat was on its davits, and it was swung out over the public jetty. Now I must have been responsible for it, don't know why it was swung out over the jetty, y'know, we're in port, you do these things you lower lifeboats, and I thought well I'm just going ashore for a minute - what I was going to do and I went under the lifeboat and just as I cleared it, it crashed - missed me by inches, one side went right down.

It would have killed me instantly phew! [laughs]

So that was that. Then they had the - I've forgotten the incident - when we went round to Stanley under our own power but with limited helm, I think we had an escort, we went round from that creek which figured in the Falkland War, gosh my memory - what is the name of the famous creek where ship was bombed immediately, and the chap had that terrible burns that creek there

Anyway, we got around from there and of course when we got to the public jetty, volunteers to go under water to see it. It was cold water, how are we going to get down to see what is happening underneath the skeg.

So the chief engineer of the Falkland Island Company said, 'I've got just the thing', he said 'We've got a Siebe Gorman diving apparatus, the one with the helmet and the pumping thing', he said 'We've got one here'.

He said 'but I'm not going to use it, you can use it if you like ...' So I think it was, we tossed up who would use it. The pumps would be on the public jetty and you had to don a rubber suit and the helmet and everything, and presumably the helmet would - you'd be around about a meter above you the water, that would be, yes.

It was Norman Brown did it and he only did it by walking in, he wouldn't go dropped down - so he walked in until the water came up and I think I've got a photograph of it somewhere there but it was.

'He said well, the pintle of the rudder is on one side, it's as we suspected, and the skeg, that part that holds where the pintle goes in - gudgeons and pigeon, pintles we used to call them, but that had been fractured and it was part of the hull where it went in that's why it was so serious.

But you could use the rudder because it was suspended. We did, we went up to Montevideo with it like that and we didn't have an escort I don't think. We were a fortnight in dry-dock there. I've got a picture of us in dry-dock there and the whole thing had to be taken to pieces and they had to go into the structure, you know the stern frame and all that, remember your ship construction and stability, the stern frame and all that, well there's all wood in there and it was a long - the skeg went right through and met up with the keel.

So that was another incident.

[01.40.07] Jack: Montevideo must have been quite a fun place to be in, in that period for such a long time, can you recall any - did you remember much about the agency and agent.

Jim: Yes, I remember there was one agent there and I've forgotten his name now but he was a great friend of Bill Johnson and when you were in Montevideo we never saw Bill Johnson, he was away with this chap. Always used to come steadily back on board, and more or less with a cigarette, 'Everything alright?'

Oh yes I've had some good times as a matter of fact, another dangerous thing happened, which, humorous I hope, hope it's not too boring.

Dr. Edwards, he was an amateur botanist and he knew all about Montevideo and he said 'Come with me to the hills above Montevideo', and we did and he looked under bricks and everything and he'd got a box, a specimen box and he put a scorpion in it. I remember saying 'Is it dangerous?' he said 'No no these aren't, they are scorpions but they're not lethal'. He knew all about this sort of thing and I was very impressed. He said 'I tell you what, we'll have a bit of fun here', he said 'I'm going to put this scorpion in Digger's bed ...' [laughs].

Unbelievable isn't it ??? but I went along with it. Anyway - the bloody screamsI would have been frightened out of my wits with it and Digger said, 'Do you think that's funny ... he could have killed anybody', and of course Edward said 'No it's quite harmless' and he picked it up. 'I wasn't actually getting into bed', he said 'just have a look at what you've got in your bed', or something like that.

Another little incident.

[01.42.29] Jack: Tell me about another different sort of funny incident, that the Base Commander I think it was Frank Elliott having to do Notes of Protest with the Argentineans?

Jim: Oh yes, he used to be exasperated with me, I think it was because I didn't take it seriously. 'It is a serious thing you know'. He used to stand in front of the Argentine

commander and from notes and everything and say 'This is a formal Protest from Her Britannic Majesty Queen Elizabeth on this the day of our Lord so and so, and everything, and we protest that you are violating article so and so of our constitution which governs the Falklands Islands Dependencies and Survey and Falkland Islands Dependencies and you are trespassing or you are outstandingly not to be in this property ... and there's me there....[laughs].

But Frank, after that - anybody else would have sat down and had a laugh and said 'Lets shake hands - let's have a drink now ...' but no he didn't. He would go back 'I've formally done the job - I've done it and it's registered' - the time and everything and when it was done latitude and longitude where it was done, 'That is our property'. [laughs]

[01.43.50] Jack: This was on bases?

Jim: Well that particular one I think was at Hope Bay because when I was there, Hope Bay was being established and there was controversy about it because there was the Argentines already over the hill. They were already there, they'd been there about fifty years [laughs]

[01.44.15] Jack: What we had our unfortunate incident with the hut burning down didn't we ?

Jim: Oh yes, I've got pictures of me with the grave, paying my respects.

[01.44.27] Jack: Yes because that was 1947 the hut burning ?

Jim: Yes. Yes that's right and then there was a complete change of the the diesel had to be away or something, or there were changes with the fire precautions because that sounded a terrible tragedy. Yes there was that - I don't recall anybody having - oh I can remember, and this is more up to date now, and I don't think I should mention names,

[01.45.11] Jack: Mention the story.

Jim: Somebody, and it fits today's life, somebody came on board and they could use the showers, 'help yourself ...'. It was very primitive there were only two showers I think and a bucket in a hole on a board and all that sort of thing.

I had a shower, and I came back to my cabin and a this particular well respected person tried to kiss me.

What was my reaction ??? But this is life! And I said - I won't mention his name, he's well known, today they'd have a historical thing wouldn't they, same as Max Clifford or something.

Anyway, I said 'you've made a big mistake here - I'll call him Robin, 'You've made a big mistake here'. He said 'Oh don't be silly ...' and I said ... 'I'll have to report you about this because of this carry-on, and I did I mentioned it, and as far as I know he was demoted. But he did well after that - but he was obviously gay which in the context of things today you'd say ... 'Oh cripes what you worried about that for'.

There we are it was unknown then - it was a criminal offence !!

I had a very wonderful time in Stanley at the time, I knew, I have to say I'm boasting a bit now, I knew more about Stanley than Bill Johnson who'd been there all his life, or to me he had all his background, the Lafonia and all that and he was with the Falkland Island

Company so I had that interest my great friend was Forrest McGran. He was the clergyman of the free church although I'm not a churchgoer myself I'd never been in Stanley Cathedral, I was friendly with Mr. Akint, Chief Constable from Swansea, Mr. Akint, Madge Biggs, Terry Biggs, Chris Andraesson who lived in the villas which everybody has an interest in if they go to the Falklands.

At the head of the public jerry there are six detached villas and they are something out of London. You'd think well how did they build these all the way from thousands of miles from the mother country, and they just look - do you remember them?

[01.48.41] Jack: I vaguely do yes.

Jim: Yes and above that was Ernestina Roe's place. You could - whether I'm repeating myself, you could go to the government stable, anybody could have a horse and I did ride out to one of the ranches and that was a great day for me having never been on a horse before.

Joe Butts was the shepherd, he's probably dead and gone now.

But I remember the gymkhanas we used to have at the race course, and I recall that they used to land an aircraft there at times. Oh and once we had, you know those big Sunderland flying boats, that came into Stanley and I've got the first day cover of the flying boat going into Stanley, but I gave it to a very old pilot friend of mine who was an avid philatelist. That was quite an occasion. John Huckle would know all about that I should think - am I right in saying it landed in Stanley, I'm sure it did.

[01.50.02] Jack: It's in there, there's a picture in there actually, yes.

Jim: We happened to be there at the time, and other incidents that we ... Oh I was involved with the 'Ajax Bay' with the sealing station.

See nowadays the British Antarctic Expedition and that, they wouldn't be doing these commercial - I wouldn't think so - I mean we were taking the equipment and the boilers to 'Ajax Bay' and we built that jetty - I didn't build it but we sent the men there and they used to have a lot of labourers that came from England and they'd had two months in Montevideo whooping it up, and when they came to Stanley they again whooped it up there and they got rather a bad name.

The Overseas Food Corporation were spending money as though there was no tomorrow and they were getting all these people in to build things which in the end did prove - you know, they were all failures.

The sealing station, the - Oh that was another incident, they had a ship from - can't remember not the Royal Mail, Houlder Brothers, the *Contessa* or one of those, *Duchessa* and it was to come to Port San Carlos to pick up the first cargo of sheep they'd processed, the first one under the Overseas Food Corporation, a Government sponsored thing.

Bill Johnson who had more experience than me, and I had never piloted a ship, he declined to go over and act as pilot. It was going to come off Port San Carlos and you can only go in these places more or less at low water but plenty of water so as you can see where the kelp is, you know the channels, the kelp and all that sort of thing.

It was quite well surveyed but I was gonna go there, cause I had never piloted a ship before but to assist, I was gonna go over there I think by plane, you know by the Oster, the little Oster float plane. To my relief I heard that the Captain had used his discretion and would not go anywhere near and used his authority and it was all cancelled and they never did come there.

The only way they got those sheep out was to get Dutch coasters all the way out, which used to take the fleece, these Dutch coasters they used to take it to Montevideo for transshipment in larger cargo ships and that's how they did it. They did not - Houlder Brothers, I've forgotten the name of the ship 'Duchessa' or something, made a big song and dance it was gonna be the first one, there'd be flags flying in the UK, first shipment of Falkland Island sheep. Of course I might be wrong but Falkland Island sheep were not reared for their edibility, they were for the fleece so they were probably sending a lot of old culls [laughs].

That is derelict to this day and it was used - I recognise the jetty for the landings of the marines at Port San Carlos. When Rita and I were looking at it, I said hey hey - it didn't mean much to her, I said we used to trundle all the stuff along there and it's a big sort of corrugated iron warehouse there, never came to anything and that was when I got this invitation by Ernestina Roe.

[01.54.06] Jack: Getting back to - and were talking still of Stanley, the Governor was a very, very important part of FIDS wasn't he ?

Jim: Oh yes it was his baby, I suppose he thought he'd take over this, I mean he had that cabin built, which looking at this book here [holding a magazine with colour image of *John Biscoe* on the cover] that shows you how old the *Biscoe* is because the cabin isn't there. It must have been put on a year later. It was the most extensive - it was more than any of us a bedroom and a conference room with table and everything, green baize cloth I suppose, I never actually saw it. He would come on there - I was never on the *Biscoe* when he was there. While I was away I think he did go there but I never actually was there with him. My memories of him was, he was a very jovial - I had to laugh when I used to see these ceremonies when he could hardly get into the Governors special uniform with chicken feathers on his hat. He was bursting out, he could hardly close them [laughs].

We were down at the memorial, the Sturdy Memorial, and the Falkland Island Defence Force, you know that sort of home guard at that time, and the Hon Sec of the Colonial Secretary Colin Cameron in an Admirals uniform and everything, and of course every time he came in the room, everybody had to stand up and God Save the Queen was played.

I went to Government House on invitation. Every time you go back to the Falklands every trip, you are supposed to go up and sign in I think, in the conservatory there and then you might get an invitation.

I did find there was a division between the Falkland Islanders, and the Governor. That did happen, I have to be very careful in my memory. Things got so bad, the tension between Falklanders and Expats as they all them today, that he was recalled as Governor of the Falklands, Miles Clifford he went there Governor of the Falklands Mr Miles Clifford and he came back Sir Miles Clifford [laughs].

So that was a bit of a blow and then they had this Ledge-Con, Legislative Council to give more opportunities to the Falkland Islanders, amongst them Adrian Monk who I was very friendly with, and he was a thorn in the side of the Government.

In the end he might not even be invited to Government House and that's the end of the world then you're not allowed course he had a London Taxi and, everybody used to stop and look and you'd stand back, some of the people, I don't say they'd stand at attention, I don't think he wanted that.

But he had a problem poor man, he had a wife on drugs.

I can remember Rose Floret in the hospital saying how they had to deal with ... She was addicted to Pethadine. That's the first time I'd ever heard of that, I don't know whether it's harmless. But he had a problem with her, maybe she hand-bagged him every now and again.

I've always found it very interesting especially when Government House with its conservatory there still seems to be the same as it was. Anyway he came back with more power than ever and 'course there was this attitude that you gotta keep in with him. It was a colonial territory, it was the same in India wasn't it? It was them and us.

Then they were given a lot more opportunities to sit on the Legislative Council and then probably, they realised if they were moaning they didn't want that. 'We want to get on with our own lives, anyway we're not interested in the Legislative Council', so that does happen you know, it gets boring listening to committee meetings I'm sure you have, I've had enough of bloody committee meetings, I was bloody glad to get out of it. [laughs]

When I was a pilot I was on the committees and what not of Trinity House and all that sort of thing. I used to go up to London in my city suit and we used to go into the Mountbatten Room and pass the Sherry around at the table. It was all good stuff [laughs].

[01.59.17] Jack: We'll come on to Trinity House in just a minute but finally with FIDS, what drew you to your closure at the end of your three seasons?

Jim: I wasn't going to get command, permanent command. I'd only had the one couple of months and I think I'm right in saying I wasn't given any encouragement. There was no contact with FIDS office, I had no contact whatsoever only Bill Johnson that's all, and I'm sure when I left he was genuinely sorry but he said ... he didn't more or less say to me 'Your mad going, they will be a command any moment'. But it wasn't like that and maybe it was my own fault. It might have been that.

But then I went into the luxury of a super brand new ship with twelve passengers, brand new off the stocks. I joined her in the builders yard, first trip to Southampton on New Zealand Shipping Company charter, via Panama Canal to New Zealand and Australia twelve passengers and I had a bedroom, a shower, a bathroom and an office and a double bed. [laughs].

When I was in Australia, when we came off charter in New Zealand, the chap who was doing the survey he said he invited me out to his home, a beautiful home as I did the off survey with him, you know going back to the owners which was van Ommeren's. Van Ommeren's owned the ship and he said 'Would you consider coming in, could be a partnership for you in cargo surveying in New Zealand'. His daughter was there.

So ... in those days you'd be in port - Oh we were in Auckland and Wellington for about a fortnight and then we went to Adelaide and the surveyor there said 'You ought to apply for a Department of Shipping in Colin Street Melbourne, and we'd be training you as a surveyor and you might go to Tasmania or Queensland as the surveyor'.

You could remember in your days the horrible grain regulations, of shifting boards, and the feeders and all that, they all had to be under survey and the examination of candidates, lifeboats and all that's what it was. That appealed to me but I applied and I went to the interview in Australia House in the Strand.

I was interviewed by the chief examiner for the Board of Trade here. I thought well I've got it, I've got the job but I suddenly had a letter from them saying, I remember the words,

'Due to a reorganisation of the Department in Australia, we cannot offer you the job', in other words, you didn't get the job. [laughs].

[02.03.17] Jack: You then went into Trinity House Pilotage?

Jim: Yes, and that was purely by - coming out, I had very little experience of London, very little, although other pilots and my contemporaries, they'd purposely been in coastal ships and the chocolate boats you know the sludge boats, that do the sewage, anything to get experience. Then if you were accepted at Trinity House and I have to say it was a plum job, people at sea would give anything to be a Trinity House pilot at London, or in any Trinity - at Southampton because it was a really good job, very highly paid.

We did long hours and very unfriendly hours, and we were all self employed of course and we were our own independent we were very independent, but they only licence us Trinity House.

We had to go up for a medical every year, they did all that, and Trinity House were the most benevolent institution you could come across. They trusted us implicitly they didn't want to know about any disputes - 'settle it amongst yourselves' - because they had lovely life there, y'know passing the wine around at the table in the Mountbatten Hall, pacing your glasses.

William Hickey the columnist, he saw the annual procession of the Trinity House Elder Brethren in their gowns going to St Olaf's church to pray for guidance and prosperity.

He put in his column, he said 'I didn't know whether to laugh or cry'.

I always remember that because, and Prince Philip used to do it. You know they used to wear this black gown with a peculiar hat on, buckles on their shoes, good stuff. [laughs].

This went on - I had a bit of it because in latter years I became a pilot examiner for ferryboat Masters and that sort of thing, and I got quite the reputation in the end. They used to - my fellow pilot Broadcliffe, he was a very competent - and he was very thorough and he wouldn't brook any wrong answers or anything and he'd got a reputation - it would say 'Who is the examiner?', because it meant a lot to them Chief Officers or Masters, if they got their pilotage certificate they got more money, if they got a pilotage ... it was well worth it financially and I have to say, I seem to have got the reputation 'Wait until he's there and you'll get through. [Laughs].

Because I used to enjoy it and I used to say - they used to leave it to me there'd be two elder brothers there and a ship-owners representative. The ship-owners representative just went there for the booze, he never said a word it was all left to me because it was - obviously you were dealing with professional seamen.

I took the view they knew more about their ferrying and their route than I did, and I made that quite clear and of course I was there at the time when we went on the IALA system.

Remember the new system of buoys so even the dimmest person could look at a buoy and they'd know which side to pass you know the cardinal system and all that.

These ferry boat Masters Belgian and German - the French found it very difficult because French ferry boat people who we knew - we used to do the French train ferries and I knew them personally. They had [bad language] and when that IALA came in, they were completely I used to say to the other ... when we adjourn for lunch - that was my standard thing, and it would be near lunchtime because we didn't start until 1130, would you like to come back after lunch. They'd go out and swot it up. [Laughs]

[02.08.09] Jack: I gather you had, some, some involvement with Captain Woodfield when he was,

Jim: No - no.

[02.08.25] Jack: an Elder Brother ...

Jim: Yes, yes.

[02.00.00] Jack: There was some specific?

Jim: Yes, his name came up and I was involved very much politically with this sort of business. Woodfield came up in the dying days of Trinity House, he decided to - against all the ship-owners and against - I thought it was inevitable - taking on the pilotage authority privately and getting a sort of - as far as I can make out like a 'commune'. What do you call it when everybody has a chance, like ?

[02.09.07] Jack: A cooperative ?

Jim: A cooperative, something like that. It was something privatised them' but he didn't have a chance. I think he was the architect of it, so I didn't take much notice of it but I'm not the sort of person to say 'Oh pshoo'.

But that's the only time I knew because I think I told you Trinity House backed the wrong - a terrible thing, in the dying days of Trinity House they were persuaded by a pilot, to reverse the routing in the Channel, which was to me, ridiculous. I fought against this - the people that were for it - and the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, you know their place up in Wellington, they were for it and Trinity House.

I thought it was the craziest scheme - the ship-owners and especially the Dutch and the German ship-owners representatives were dead against it. Reverse the routing? You are only reversing it so they take a pilot at Folkestone going on the wrong side of the Channel.

A lot of my brother pilots, they supported it and we had one very vociferous representative who I was friendly with but I never agreed with him, and he was a very voluble - he was almost like Nigel Farage he had the gift of the gab and he persuaded - and I'll go on air and say 'He persuaded Trinity House, the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. Those two highly respected - you know they sat on the Admiralty Bench, Trinity House. They were the authority and they backed this ridiculous scheme.

So I went up to London on a meeting once and they had the Dutch ship-owners representatives there, they had the German representatives they were all against it and they had the Master was Captain Tibbetts. He was the ex Captain of the eh' aircraft carrier so and so, I've forgotten.

Captain Tibbetts, he was the deputy Master - Prince Philip was in there ..., and he was in charge of the table and we were all sitting round there and I wasn't very used to this and I was nervous about that and he pointed out, when the Dutch representative, I think was the most talkative, he said 'This is nonsense, you're going against all international regulations and everything'. He said 'It's only because you want the Trinity House so as you have got a pilot station at Folkestone and you are gonna get the traffic in'. He said 'It's all unseamanlike and ridiculous' ... and everything else. Tibbetts came up and he said 'Well you are quite wrong'. He said 'We have a Trinity House pilot here, he introduced me and he said 'He - I have to say,

he is completely against it'. I was caught by the - I think almost in the toilets afterwards, this Dutch representative and he was typical Dutchman and I get on alright with them. He said 'That's all you bloody well want, you want the ships to come to Folkestone'. I said 'Forget it, I don't want them. I'm the only one', but he wouldn't listen.

He said 'Well if your with Trinity House, that's what you are doing and you've got Trinity House and the Honourable Company of Master Mariners'.

Of course it did fail - they even pointed it out the most ridiculous example of where it had been done. It was reversed.

You would remember with all your background keeping starboard side of the Channel. To reverse it to me was unbelievable in a narrow strait. Unbelievable, and of course this was all brought about by the *Texaco Caribbean* which was off the pilot station, remember the terrible accident.

The *Texaco Caribbean* blew up, a heavy loss of life at the pilot station in Folkestone. Then another ship ran into it and Trinity House put the wrong buoys up then another ship ran into it all off the pilot station. Heavy loss of life and this brought about IALA.

Anyway the most ridiculous example they brought was the Bosphorus. Apparently there going into the Black Sea past Istanbul and Constantinople, going through the Bosphorus there is a length of water there where it is the wrong way round. It's because of the countries. It must be Turkey and Asia, the country on the North bank of whatever it is, and that was quoted as an example Anyway it faded out and that was that.

I wasn't best flavour with the pilots because some of them believed in Knowles who's recently died. It was all a very peculiar situation and I felt I was always on the side of doom and gloom if you like, that's what I'd be accused of, 'Oh yes, he would say that';

I was against the pilot station at Folkestone. I called it the Folkestone folly, they spent millions on it. The Elder Brethren came down and one of the Elder Brothers said 'Oh you've got all the Fleur de Lis the wrong way round on the carpet, they should be facing that way on the carpet'

I had to fight for a chart table - it was doomed to failure, what - 'Well if you're so worried about it and your against it as usual, what's your answer? I said fair enough, if you're going to complain about something what is my answer;

I said 'The pilots want to be called from home. 'They don't want to sitting on their arse in a lovely wardroom watching television all day waiting for a ship to come in or even .. They like to be called from home , digging the garden - then had - what was the thing before mobile phones. You could go to the phone box they had them in hospitals ... eh paging things. They had some sort of things like that for paging. That was the beginning but they were we did have mobile phones but they were big and it was only a matter before the building was finished they were there and then we had some crackpot scheme of - we had a draft gauge telling them because we were doing these huge tankers of forty two foot [draft].

I had a tanker forty two feet for London, you know three foot underneath you - it was all exciting stuff. But of course we don't have any of that now and it wouldn't be tolerated. We had them into the Medway. They'd leave the Persian Gulf, Mina Al Abadi and these places, loaded for the date they arrive for that tide and they were loaded for that tide, so no margin. It was something that had to end and it did.

Well I've had some exciting experiences of that.

[02.17.53] Jack: Jim, after many very exciting years of piloting, being Captain, Chief Officer in the Antarctic and being attacked during wartime, you finished up September '88 retired. I would imagine you would love to go back to the Antarctic though, wouldn't you ?

Jim: Oh yes I would, I'd be highly critical but I see all these empty oil drums scattered all over the place and the garbage. I saw that at Admiralty Bay, I said 'Oh look at that, why... are they going to take this garbage away, do they? Hopefully?

[02.18.37] Jack: Yes. What do you think of women being there?

Jim: My answer to that is I would have liked it, but whether it was good for discipline, if you could call it that, whether it could lead to problems, too much emotion there....

Could lead to trouble. Women would be very much against what I say that, what do they call people like me ?.... I've forgotten the term. But I'm not like that, I can't see I'm strictly against - I don't like women in armed forces. I don't think it's their job being frontline. I don't like seeing women at Brighton on the riot squad, controlling thugs. I don't think that's their job.

They are probably better off looking after those that have to do it, the men the male. The same thing creeps in a mild way in the Antarctic even more so. I think they have got women down on the South Pole Base and here's another extraordinary thing.

At the South Pole the Americans are the only nation as far as I know that have no territory in the Antarctic I mean the Australian is a massive territory isn't it? The lines of longitude they have a huge sector. Now they're there are they renting the place or what, I can't quite make out what they're there for?

Yes to go back to the Antarctic ... I think I'd be a sort of grumpy old man. I think that's what I am now. Fast becoming or have become a grumpy old man. I try to stop myself saying that, but my in some way my sons, as I told you before he's in love with the city, four hours a day travelling by train. Commutes from Broadstairs to Cannon St to the mighty M&G.

[02.21.20] Jack: Anyhow Jim, thank you very much for your memories and recollections of a very, very interesting life.

Jim: Well I hope, yes I felt that compared with you, my contribution to FIDS is minimal but there you are, I hope it will be of some use.

[02.21.42] Jack: It's of a period thank you very much.

Photo: B&W image; John Biscoe underway in temperate coastal waters.

Caption: 'Jim Preece talking with Jack Tolson'

END

Items that may need data appraisal:

03.57; Mention of father snobbishness
Other man drunkenness

1.00.19; The story of the suicide of Arthur Farrant

1.54.06; "wife addicted to drugs"