

British Antarctic Survey: Oral History Recording No 2.
Archive reference AD6/16/1986/1.1

A recording of Captain VAJB Marchesi, Commanding Officer of HMS *William Scoresby* between 1943 and 1946, in conversation with Miss Joanna Rae, Assistant Archivist of the British Antarctic Survey.
Date: 13th August 1986.
Location: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

N.B. This transcript is an edited version of the full transcript of this recording, and is suitable for quick reference purposes. While this version avoids many repetitions and stumbles in the original recording, it is recommended that, should the fuller transcript not make clear the sense of the spoken word, the recording must be the final arbiter.

amc 27.8.2003

Joanna Rae: Captain Marchesi, could you give me an outline of your career before your involvement with Operation Tabarin?

Victor Marchesi: Yes, I started – if you like to call it – my seagoing career by going as a cadet to the training ship *Worcester* at Greenhithe in Kent. When I left *Worcester* I became a Midshipman RNR¹ and I joined a shipping company called T&J Brocklebank's of Liverpool² and I was with them for three years; during which time I did some RNR training as a Midshipman and, at the end of my three years, I sat for my Second Mate's Certificate, which I obtained in early 1934.

This was during the time of the Depression and I eventually went back to sea as a Fourth Mate in Brocklebank's, which I did for a year. I then left to do my RNR training as a acting Sub-Lieutenant; and during my training I met a chap called Boothby, who was actually in command of the Royal Research Ship *William Scoresby* and I was talking to him and I said, "I suppose everybody in your outfit has to have a Master's ticket" and he said "Oh no, not necessarily."

However, I never thought anything more of it, until, when I finished my RNR training, I went up to the Admiral Commanding Reserves office, which was in a building in (I think it was called Queen Anne's somewhere or other) just off Victoria Street and, as I came down from having seen the Admiral Commanding Reserves Office, I noticed on the board was the 'Discovery Committee', and I went in and saw the secretary and asked him whether there was any jobs going. He replied, "If you like, give me your name and address; we haven't got anything at the present moment but we'll put it on the records." About four weeks later I got a letter asking me whether I'd like to be considered for the job of Second Officer of the Royal Research ship *William Scoresby*.

I went up for an interview and, at the end of the interview I went out with another chap, who I knew, who was also up for an interview for the same job; and we came to the conclusion that neither of us had got the job. About a fortnight later I got

¹ Royal Naval Reserve.

² Founded in Whitehaven in 1801, T&J Brocklebank moved to Liverpool in 1819. The company was absorbed to become Cunard-Brocklebank in 1968 and the last two Brocklebank-liveried ships were sold in 1986, when the Company disappeared.

a letter to say that I hadn't got the job and very soon after that I got another letter from them saying, "Would I like to go as Fourth Officer of the Royal Research Ship *Discovery II*?" And I said, "Yes" and, to cut a long story short, I got the job in *Discovery II* as Fourth Officer and my friend (we'd gone out together, after the interview) actually got the job as Second Officer of the *William Scoresby*.

And that is my connection, my personal experience of the Antarctic.

Joanna Rae: How long did you go South for, with that ship?

Victor Marchesi: Well, we were away fifteen months and, at the end of my time there; this was in 1937, the Admiralty had starting taking Merchant, RNR Officers into the RN and, at my age – I was only then twenty-three – it was the obvious thing for me to do, so I transferred to the RN from the RNR and, after doing my courses as a sub-Lieutenant, I eventually specialised in hydrographic surveying, and went to a surveying ship.

After that my career was rather the same as any other Naval Officer's, except that in 1943, I was First Lieutenant of a surveying ship called HMS *Franklin*, and we were serving on the east coast of England... And we got a signal to say that I had to report, I was to report to a Mister (I think the name was Moxon,³) in the Military Department of the Admiralty. I hadn't the vaguest idea what it was all about and nor did my Captain.

And, so, I went up to London and went and saw this Mr Moxon, who told me about Operation Tabarin (which at that particular time had no name whatsoever) and that if I went to a certain address, I would meet – did I know Jimmy Marr? I said, "Yes, I did know Jimmy Marr" because he'd been in *Discovery II* with me.

He said, "Well, he is going to run this expedition and he has asked for you, and the best thing to do is to go and see him, he'll be arriving at Waterloo", I think it was, with his wife, at about whatever time it was; he was coming up from his home in Hampshire.

Well, I met him on the station, and he told me more or less all about it and my first words were, "Well what about a ship?" and he said, "Well, they've got a sealer, called the *Veslekari*⁴ and [it's] a wooden ship" and, he said, he thought it was suitable for the job. And that it was then in dry dock, in London, being prepared for the expedition.

Joanna Rae: What time of the year was this?

Victor Marchesi: This would have been in about June? Might have been July – June, July – it might even have been earlier. But anyway he said that he had an office in part of the then Colonial Office and there was himself and a chap called Berry.⁵ Now Berry had been Chief Steward of *Discovery II* and he was helping Jimmy Marr

³ Possibly John Mossop? (*amc*)

⁴ A two mast sealing sloop of about 180 tons burden, *Veslekari* was chartered by the Cambridge University Mountaineering Club in 1934 for a visit to North-East Greenland. During WW2 she was escorted from Jan Mayen Island by destroyer to Aberdeen in January 1941, with a crew of twelve, three civilians and one Officer, E Hopp on board.

⁵ Alfred Thomas Berry (b 1896) Chief Steward *Discovery II* 1929-39.

with the stores required for the expedition. And, that I would have an office there as well.

So, I went to this office, and all was well. I went down to the ship; she was a funny little wooden ship. They'd removed some of the greenheart planking, and said that they thought she was sound: she was schooner rig and she had a small engine, which they said you could get six knots out of. I had my doubts about this but I hadn't anything to say and I had been told, by the Military Department, that if the ship was unsatisfactory at this particular moment, then they would produce a minesweeper, to take its place.

I had no reason to suspect that she wouldn't be suitable, so we went on with everything. The then Hydrographer of the Navy, Admiral Edgell said, "You be careful of these wooden ships!" and he said, 'I have had experience of them, years ago.' But anyway, that was beside the point and eventually we had various committee meetings, at which all kinds of things were brought up, mainly personnel; and the time was rapidly approaching when all the stores, which were gradually accruing and the *Veslekari* was renamed HMS *Bransfield* and some officers were appointed and the crew and in due course – this must have been in September, everybody came aboard the HMS *Bransfield* and we sailed from London.

I should say, amongst the people going South was a chap called Jock Matheson, who I've known in *Discovery II* who was a seaman, and he was a very good sailor; he had been boatswain of *Discovery I* in the BANZARE Land⁶ expedition and on the way out, was going to be my Sailing Master.

However; we got down to Tilbury, and we were told to sail in a convoy to go into Falmouth. It was a six-knot convoy, so we thought we might be able to keep up with it. Er, the Senior Officer of the escort was a French Captain or Commanding Officer of a French destroyer, who thought HMS *Bransfield* was a Hunt Class destroyer, which was not so. Anyway, we sailed, we got clear of the Downs, by which time the convoy was just over the horizon. We had something wrong – I can't remember what it was, now, offhand – and we went into Portsmouth.

Joanna Rae: Were you concerned by this time?

Victor Marchesi: Oh yes, I was getting a bit concerned. We went into Portsmouth and they did what repairs there were, and we went on to Weymouth. Now, on the way to Weymouth the engineman, who looked after the engines, came up and said that we were making water, and he didn't know where it was coming from. So, I put into Weymouth and we pumped all the water out and, as we were supposed to be Top Secret, nobody knew anything about us, very much; but they did in Falmouth, the NIOC⁷ Falmouth knew all about us, and so, the obvious thing to do was make Falmouth.

Well, we sailed from Weymouth for Falmouth, at- I remember we got off Falmouth at about eight o'clock in the evening; it was dark, the engineman came up and said, "We've got to stop the engines" because he hadn't got enough steam for the

⁶ Presumably this refers to Mac Robertson Land (*amc*)

⁷ Naval Officer in Charge.

pumps. And we eventually got into Falmouth, and Jimmy Marr and I went and saw NIOC Falmouth, and then we went up to London to meet the committee who had originally been responsible for the expedition, or still were, I suppose, indirectly, and they said, “Well, you can’t get a minesweeper, because there isn’t one available now”, and that knocked that one on the head.

And so, it was eventually decided to use the *William Scoresby*, which was actually in the Falkland Islands at the time, and the expedition would go out by passenger ship, or on a trooper, the *Highland Monarch*, [*sotto voce*] which we did do, and we eventually arrived in Stanley.

Now, I should point out that I was originally appointed Second-in-Command of the expedition...

Joanna Rae: Under Marr?

Victor Marchesi: Under Marr, and the object of this was partly twofold. One: he knew me, and I knew him; he didn’t know hardly any of the others, which was one thing: the second thing was that if I was up in Stanley, if he made a signal to Stanley and there were stores or anything like that, I could deal with it, and this is roughly what the idea was. So, off we- [noisy splice.]

We got to Stanley, the Governor met us, the Naval Officer in Charge and...

Joanna Rae: How much had they been told about you?

Victor Marchesi: The Governor knew all about it, because it was partly his idea, so he said. That was a very nice chap called Sir Alan Wolsely Cardinall – he was a dear old boy – and the first two nights Jimmy Marr and I slept at Government House and then the next day I went to the *Scoresby*. Now, there was trouble as far as the *Scoresby* was concerned, because she had no hardly any room to carry stores – in fact she had no room, really.

As the object, as far as we were concerned, was supposed to be showing sovereign rights over territory; it really didn’t make a lot of difference providing they [Operation Tabarin] got there and I went around putting up flags here, there and everywhere.

So the *Fitzroy*, a ship which belonged to the Falkland Island Company was chartered, and they took the stores and most of the people who were going to be at the bases, and we sailed in convoy together, down to Deception Island. We got to Deception Island and I went in first, just in case there was a Argentine ship there, which [there] wasn’t, and we got in and we unloaded the stores for Deception and set up the base in one of the huts there; and then we went off to the next place we were going to. So, we sailed in convoy to Hope Bay.

Now we got off Hope Bay and the *Fitzroy* would not go in because there was pack ice in the bay, and outside, so I went in, in *Scoresby* – with Jimmy Marr on board, and we got into Hope Bay and looked around – *Fitzroy* wouldn’t come in – so we said, “Right, it is no good using Hope Bay at the present moment.” So, even if I

could have ferried the stores in, which I doubt very much, if I would [not] have been able to...

Joanna Rae: Did you feel the *Fitzroy* had made the right decision?

Victor Marchesi: Yes, well, the *Fitzroy* was a commercial ship and one couldn't afford to lose her I suppose, if she got holed in ice. And so, we sailed from Hope Bay, and we went around all the bays on the Western side of the Graham Land Peninsula; we never found anywhere else and then eventually we decided to use Port Lockroy. And we went into Port Lockroy and we built a hut there.⁸ We landed the stores and we built a hut there and, as it was beginning to get later in the season; obviously one couldn't keep on going to look for places. And so, we put up the hut there, and the *Fitzroy* sailed, and I think I stayed,⁹ [then] went up to Deception Island and also, Jimmy Marr we wanted to go further South and put a mark up, or i.e., a Union Jack on a Point. I can't remember the Point now, but it was not all that further South...

Joanna Rae: Cape Renard, I think...

Victor Marchesi: That's right, and off we went, and it was a beautiful day, I remember; we went down the channel and it was beautiful. It was one of those beautiful Antarctic days – blue skies, sun shining the snow. Oh, it was wonderful! And, unfortunately, on the way to Cape Renard there was a lot of small, snow-covered islands – they weren't very large, you know, some only about forty or fifty feet long, and snow covered. We went to Cape Renard, we put up the flag and everything and, everybody re-embarked in the ship and we were returning to Port Lockroy.

Jimmy Marr asked me whether he could have a bath and so I said, 'Yes, by all means, have a bath' you know; it had to be salt water, but that's beside the point. And, so he was having a bath as we were coming along and I was on the bridge [with] the Officer of the Watch, leaning over the side, and there was a few bits of ice hanging around, not very much, and I saw ahead what looked like a piece of ice. I didn't pay a great deal of attention [*sotto voce*] and suddenly the Officer of the Watch leant over the side and said "My God! I can see the bottom!" Just then there was an awful CLANG where we hit the bottom – rock.

Luckily, we weren't going very fast. Now Jimmy Marr was in the middle of his lovely hot salt-water bath and [with] this clang, he thought, "My God! The ship's sinking!" and he came rushing up in his birthday suit [Laughter] up to the bridge. [Laughter] Anyway there was no damage done and we got back to Port Lockroy. I then returned to Stanley.¹⁰

Joanna Rae: Leaving them for the winter?

⁸ The two ships arrived at port Lockroy during the afternoon of 11 February 1944.

⁹ Both ships departed from Port Lockroy on Thursday 17 February 1944.

¹⁰ The visit to Cape Renard took place on 22 March 1944, during the second visit of the *Scoresby*, which had returned on 19 March 1944.

Victor Marchesi: And then I came down again in April. I can't remember the exact dates now, unfortunately I haven't got a copy of my Reports of Proceedings but it was certainly in April [when] I went down South again.¹¹ (Oh no! I'm sorry; I then went on to the South Orkney Islands.) We looked around the South Orkneys and then went on to South Georgia, and refuelled in South Georgia and returned to Stanley. Then I went South again – with really mail and stores for the bases, and having left all the mail and what stores I had for them, at both Deception and Port Lockroy, I said goodbye to them and came back to Stanley.

Scoresby had a twelve-pounder gun up forward and the ship was going to go to Montevideo to refit. And I'd managed to get the Admiralty to agree to removing the twelve-pounder gun because I couldn't really see what the benefit of the twelve-pounder gun was going to be down there, and even if I'd met the Argentines, they probably had larger guns than that.

And, we caused a bit of a commotion in Montevideo, because when we arrived up there, we also had some depth charges – and we removed the pistols¹² and so forth, but unfortunately, [when] unloading these things, one went to the bottom of the harbour, you see? And there was panic. And I said, “Well no, nothing to panic about – you get a diver to go down, hook it on, and bring it up, it won't go...” Ah! Anyway, this went on for about three days and eventually, at great expense to the British Embassy and including two bottles of brandy for the diver, it was hooked on and brought back up – and nothing happened. I should tell you that the Ambassador in Montevideo, a bloke called Gordon Drover said [that] in his biography he was going to head one of his chapters, ‘The Bomb.’ [Laughter][*sotto voce*.]

Anyway we refitted and we went back to Stanley. When we were in Stanley we did odd jobs like going round the islands, and so forth.

Joanna Rae: What, sort of doing mail and deliveries?

Victor Marchesi: Well not mail deliveries; just helping out, you know, and then, about October, a number of new people came out for the bases and we sailed, if I remember rightly, in November. I got down, I suppose, about a hundred miles off [*Clears throat*] the South Shetland Islands and we met pack ice. I started going through it but then I decided it was too heavy – it really wasn't worth it, at that stage, because I couldn't see anywhere, so we turned round and went back to Stanley; waited ten days and then went South again. [At] which time we found pack ice was clear and I went to Deception and Port Lockroy.

Now, because of it being difficult to get into Hope Bay, they chartered a Newfoundland ship called the *Eagle*, commanded by a chap called Sheppard¹³ and they came down just towards the end of November, when I was already down South.

Joanna Rae: So, you didn't have any liaison...

¹¹ After NOIC Falklands signalled that Marchesi could proceed South from Deception Island at his own discretion, *Scoresby* arrived at Port Lockroy at 14:35 on 17 April 1944 and departed 06:30 on 18 April.

¹² Depth/timing detonators.

¹³ Robert Carl Sheppard (1897-1954)

Victor Marchesi: Oh yes, we did, but she came to Stanley; she was in Stanley whilst I was still South. Now, at this particular time Jimmy Marr wasn't very well... and it was decided that he had to come home.

Joanna Rae: What was wrong with him?

Victor Marchesi: Well, he complained about various pains here, there and everywhere. In retrospect, I think it was the beginning of the cancer, which killed him, in actual fact; but that was some years later.¹⁴

Anyway, I brought him back and he [went] home and Captain Taylor, of the Royal Canadian Engineers took command of the expedition, and it was already been decided that Hope Bay would be set up and the *Eagle* came out specially to do this, really. So, the stores were loaded on the *Eagle* – I can't remember whether she went to Port Lockroy¹⁵ or not; I don't think she did – she may have done, but I don't think she did, and of course I think I brought everybody out of Port Lockroy and everybody swapped around.

And the *Eagle* then went and set up Hope Bay. I was in Hope Bay with the *Eagle* for some time – not very long, and then I returned to Stanley. I'd no sooner been back in Stanley about a few days when we got a signal to say that the *Eagle* hit an iceberg and was in danger, so I went down South to escort her back. I met her off the South Shetlands, and she had hit a berg which had calved off the barrier there. And I think it had been blowing quite hard and she'd dragged her anchors, and that was it.

Joanna Rae: Was it a dangerous bay, to anchor?

Victor Marchesi: It wasn't a very good anchorage. It's like all the bays in the- or, I won't say all of them, but a large percentage of them. Very deep water and you were never quite certain what the holding ground was going to be like and of course, in a ship, the deeper the water the more difficult it is if you're using anchors, for the ship to hold, and it wasn't all that good really.

Joanna Rae: Do you know why they decided upon Hope bay beforehand?

Victor Marchesi: It was decided on Hope Bay because they reckoned you could get inland from there. The shore parties would be able to sledge from there. You couldn't sledge from Port Lockroy, and of course you couldn't sledge from Deception. But you could, and Nordenskjöld, I think I'm right in saying, was wrecked, got to Hope Bay; and then sledged [to] Snow Hill Island in the Weddell Sea. So, you could sledge from there, and this is really the reason for Hope Bay.

And then at Hope Bay, the *Eagle* having returned, I went down there again and Taylor wanted me to go down to Snow Hill Island, in the Weddell Sea. Unfortunately, at that particular time I was having boiler trouble and I didn't really think it was a very wise thing to do, to go down the Weddell Sea at that particular time of the year, to Snow Hill Island, just to drop some stores off and return, especially as it was in that

¹⁴ 1965

¹⁵ *Eagle* did not visit Lockroy. (*ame*)

vicinity, or not far, that the *Endeavour* got crushed. So anyway, I didn't; I went on to the South Orkney Islands where I put up a hut on Signy Island. And this was quite successful as far as putting it up; whether the hut was a good place to live in, I don't know, because nobody was going to live in it.

Joanna Rae: What was the purpose of it?

Victor Marchesi: Again, showing sovereignty. I then went back to Stanley [*sotto voce* – I'm getting a bit mixed up now.] I then went back to the South Orkney Islands and went to the Argentine Met. Station, and I arrived there before their own relief ship, and I was on the Southern side of the isthmus. And when I got there, I went ashore with the carcass of a sheep and a bottle of whisky, because they'd been there all the winter. They were delighted with the sheep; they had more than enough whisky, [Laughter] so I kept my bottle. And they presented us with some penguin eggs and told us that they were pleased to see us because their own ship hadn't got through because of ice, so they said. They couldn't quite understand it, but that was beside the point.

Anyway, forty-eight hours later, this Argentine Naval ship, or Transport, came in and I made a signal to him, asking the Commanding Officer to come and call on me: nothing happened. I was still trying to show acts of sovereignty. Anyway, they sailed, and so did I.

Joanna Rae: So, they didn't approach you?

Victor Marchesi: No.

Joanna Rae: No.

Victor Marchesi: The Met. People yes. I went up to South Georgia and, from South Georgia I went back to Stanley, then I went back down South again. (Oh yes, that's right, they needed another man in. Deception Island. They decided they wanted one as a cook, and so we thought we'd get somebody from the Falklands to do this. We had an interview committee, which consisted of the Naval Officer in Charge, a chap called Hamilton who officially was the Government Biologist and also the Magistrate for Stanley, and Uncle Tom Cobley and all, and myself.)

Hamilton, I should explain, had been down South in *Discovery*; I think he had been in *Discovery I*, in actual fact. We selected somebody, which I wasn't all that keen on, but the other two were, and he came South and...

Joanna Rae: Was this Sam Bonner?

Victor Marchesi: Yes. And, as you know we couldn't relieve [him, to] get him back in the winter...

Joanna Rae: He became ill?

Victor Marchesi: Yes – he had cancer.

Joanna Rae: Did he?

Victor Marchesi: And, he'd been medically examined well beforehand. And afterwards Hamilton said to me, "I thought there was something wrong with that man...!" Anyway, that's beside the point. That ended that year really, as far as I was concerned.

I eventually went to Montevideo: and again refitted, and whilst I was there the British Embassy got a signal saying that a chap called 'Mime' was coming out, and I thought it had been a coded message or in cipher and I thought it was Marr coming back again, and Ted Bingham. Anyway, the British Ambassador said to me, "Well look, you'd better meet 'em, if they're going to come here..." (That was the embassy). I went and met them in the morning and it was Ted Bingham, who I knew before, anyway, and I them under my wing. And we then waited for the *Trepassey* to come down, which was a little ship which had taken the place of the *Eagle*, again commanded by Sheppard, who had been in command of the *Eagle*, and they brought a lot of dogs down, and all was happy, except that the dogs stank to high heaven because they had been fed on seal meat and some of it must have gone rotten, I'd have thought. Anyway, they then went on to Stanley and I went on to Stanley. During this time the *Scoresby's* boilers had been re-tuned.

Joanna Rae: So that solved the boiler problem.

Victor Marchesi: Well not quite, because they couldn't get the right sort of tubes for that. I'd say this was wartime, you've got to remember; or the war was over by then, but...

We went down South and started relieving the bases, because Ted Bingham brought out a completely new crowd of people and it was then known as the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, I think. We did a lot of relieving one way or the other, the *Trepassey* and ourselves; we worked in conjunction and then, of course, they set up another base down South, at Marguerite Bay.

And that was the story of the *William Scoresby*, because after that I brought the *Scoresby* home, and she went back to the Discovery Investigations and, as far as I know, she sailed once more, but I don't think she ever went South. She went and did some scientific work in whaling, but it was mainly round South Africa, I think. And that was the end of the *Scoresby* as far as I know. One amusing thing, as I think about it, is I'm expecting a grandson before long – it will be my fourth grandchild – and my eldest son, for some unknown reason, wants to call it William Scoresby [Laughter and Crosstalk.]

Joanna Rae: That's lovely.

Victor Marchesi: I don't know whether he was serious [*sotto voce*.]

Joanna Rae: I think that's a good time to stop for this half.

[Switch noise on end of original recording]

Joanna Rae: Could you tell me about the organisation of the expedition?

Victor Marchesi: Yes. There was a committee, which was headed over by a man called Acheson, who was an Assistant Secretary in the Colonial Office. On the committee was James Wordie (or later Sir James Wordie) who had been with Shackleton. There was a representative from the Admiralty, who was a civilian, there was a Dr Macintosh, from the Discovery Investigations; there was another couple of representatives from the Crown Agents, [*sotto voce*] Jimmy Marr and myself. And we used to meet, usually at least once a week, if not twice a week, depending on what was required.

Now stores and so forth were obtained through the Services, mainly the Navy: one or two bits came from the Army, as well. For instance I got hauled over the coals by the Hydrographer, who got in touch with me and said, "What's this list of surveying equipment you've ordered? We don't have half of this stuff – I don't even know what it is" and I said, "Well I don't know, I haven't put any [requisitions in.]" Then I found it was Captain Taylor's surveying equipment which was mainly based on land survey and this had to be obtained from elsewhere. I should point out that one of the theodolites he had which were German, [Laughter] was very good indeed... [Laughter]

And, when the ship sailed, I still believe they used to meet, but obviously not so often, and to discuss how things were going. The Hydrographer of the Navy had a great interest in it, although he wasn't actually on the committee but, obviously, he had probably other things to do; I don't know.

But that is mainly about how it was [Crosstalk] organised. I would like to say that Jimmy Marr did a hell of a lot towards it and I always felt that poor old Jimmy Marr really didn't get quite the recognition he deserved, really.

Joanna Rae: Because, presumably, he had to decide all the stores that were needed, where they went... [Some Crosstalk follows.]

Victor Marchesi: Yes, in fact when I first met him in the office, he had sheets and sheets of foolscap, of stores that were required.

Joanna Rae: Do you know why he was selected as the leader?

Victor Marchesi: I don't know. You see, I don't know if you know this – Jimmy Marr went down South originally, he was Scout Marr of Shackleton's last expedition in whenever it was – 1919/1920.¹⁶ And, when he came back (of course, that was the expedition Shackleton died on) he eventually went to Aberdeen University and took degrees in Marine Biology, I think, or Zoology, and he then joined the Discovery Investigations, as a scientist.

Now he also went on the BANZARE Land expedition with Mawson, and I would have said probably he was quite well known as an Antarctic explorer. I don't think he really knew a great deal about the land side of it, but he certainly did about the sea

¹⁶ Shackleton-Rowan Antarctic expedition, 1921-22.

side, but that is at the only reason I can think of why they selected him. I know, for instance myself, I was about the third on the list, I think, of people who were requested. I know that one of them was Colegate, who had been on the BANZARE Land expedition in *Discovery I*, he was one of the ones suggested and I think the only reason I was actually selected was because I was a hydrographic surveyor, although I didn't really do any surveying, you know; although I was supposed to but, the opportunity just didn't exist. But that's beside the point.

Joanna Rae: Were you pleased that you were selected?

Victor Marchesi: Oh yes, yes. I must confess that I always – I'll put it this way, this was really something at the bottom here.¹⁷

Joanna Rae: Oh, all right. [Laughter] Perhaps we'll ask the next question. Were you conscious of changes about the bases when you returned after a winter season, and what kind of changes did you notice?

Victor Marchesi: Well, strange though it may seem, there was always a certain amount when you got there. After all, the chaps had been there in the winter, and up to a point, sometimes you thought there was a certain amount of friction going on between various people. Now, this is understandable after six months with not a great deal to do, possibly, and generally speaking I don't think they were always pleased to see you, if you know what I mean, I say the fact that you came – A: one brought mail, and could take their mail back which was a very important thing in actual fact.

That was one thing; [an]other thing was you brought fresh stores for them, fresh food, if nothing else. In some cases you even brought something to drink, one way and the other, because like everybody else they used to have a tot of rum from time to time, and one could talk about things... But in lots of cases, when you got back after the winter, the places were looking so neat and tidy and everybody seemed to be getting on extremely well.

Joanna Rae: Because, for instance, after leaving Hope Bay, having just established it, it must have looked a complete tip, really.

Victor Marchesi: Oh yes, oh yes; and a lot of the stuff was still as it was originally, covered over by a tarpaulin and probably then weighted down by snow, but the place itself, was [Crosstalk]

I should, also, say I think this is one of the amusing things, that when I relieved Hope Bay, when they were coming home, I went down [and] I got held up by ice and I eventually got clear of it and got into Hope Bay and arrived there at about five o'clock in the morning and, as I steamed into Hope Bay, I blew my whistle and so forth, [*sotto voce*.] Nothing happened. No, not a sign [Laughter] and we anchored; and I said to my First Lieutenant, "Well, I'll go ashore and see what's happening up there." I went there and I got to the hut, I opened the door – everybody was sound asleep! [Laughter] So I shouted, "Wakey-wakey! – Don't some of you so-and-so's want to go home?" and they –[Laughter] "My God! [Laughter.]

¹⁷ He was pointing at his personal *aide memoir* notes at this time.

Joanna Rae: Oh, it was lovely!

Victor Marchesi: It was lovely! Oh yes, it really was, it was quite- [Laughter]

Joanna Rae: Because I expect you were expecting quite a reception when you came in with the whistle blowing...?

Victor Marchesi: Well I was hoping that, but they said afterwards that they had been expecting me a couple of days before. When they heard I was held up by ice, they thought, "Oh my God", you know, and then, when I did of course arrive, it was a sort of slight anti-climax.

Joanna Rae: Yes, yes. Could you describe some of the nature of problems of sailing in those latitudes?

Victor Marchesi: Well, One of the problems in those days – I say in those days, because I would have thought in this modern day and age, it's much more simple – but in my time down there when, after all, the only navigation gear I had in the ship was a compass (which was a magnetic compass) and an echo-sounding machine (which didn't work properly) and that was about all; and obvious[ly] I had sextants and so forth.

But, you had to worry; A: about icebergs at night; if you were in a vicinity where there were bergs around, and you can never tell whether there wasn't a berg around. It wasn't so bad on a moonlit night, but on a very dark night you really had to ease down, at times. Of course you get very bad weather going through the Forties and Fifties in the Southern Ocean... [It could be] very uncomfortable. For instance, in my cabin in the *William Scoresby*, on one occasion I had about a foot of water sloughing around in it for about three days.

Then, on top of that, you've got no really decent harbours; you probably [would] have in time, when one's managed to survey them a bit better, but you just have to take your chance. And then, of course, the major thing is a lot of the places [in] the area weren't well surveyed at all. I'd say you'd quite easily hit a rock which nobody knew was there. And it wasn't marked on a chart and so forth.

Joanna Rae: Was there any precautions that you could take?

Victor Marchesi: Well, the only precautions you can take is have your echo-sounder going, or use your knowledge of the Antarctic, or the sea, to the best of your ability. That is the only way you could deal [with it.] Today, with radar and all this sort of business, I would say completely different; you can get your position so accurately, I mean [to] say. When I was going down South you may not see the sun or the stars for a couple of days, so you just had to rely on dead reckoning.

Nowadays, I can say, you can press a button and get your latitude and longitude on the screen; doesn't matter where you are. [Crosstalk] So, you had all these problems; and as I say, the charts you were using were very inaccurate, and so you

had to use your own initiative and judgement and hope that you were going to be right.

Joanna Rae: Was it your first command of a ship?

Victor Marchesi: It was my first command, yes. Well, it was a good one, and it was an enjoyable one.

Joanna Rae: Yes

Victor Marchesi: And...

Joanna Rae: I think that leads us neatly onto the next question. The *Scoresby's* association with FIDS ended in 1946. Would you outline your career since then?

Victor Marchesi: Yes. After that, when I came home from FIDS I asked the Hydrographer to go back to General Service, and they didn't want to send me back to General Service so they sent me-

Joanna Rae: could you explain what that means?

Victor Marchesi: Well, I didn't want to continue in the surveying service as a Hydrographer, and I wanted to back to General Service; what in Naval fashion was known as salt horse, i.e., you had no specialisation and you can go anywhere. So the Hydrographer appointed me to the Joint Intelligence Bureau as a surveyor, which I was there for eighteen months, actually, during which time I used to lobby a friend of mine, who was the Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord, Mike Townsend, and Mike used to say, "Oh! – I'll do what I can for you", but he said, "You know, it's very difficult to get you away from Droggie."¹⁸

Eventually it happened, and Archie Day, in vain effort, offered me a command of a surveying motor launch and I said "No, I want to go." So, I went, and I was relieved eventually in the Intelligence Bureau and I was appointed in command of a ex-German destroyer called HMS *Nonsuch*. I never actually took command of it, because I was 'phoned up later (by Mike Townsend) who said they had the finest job for me, on Operation Hornet, and this was carrying out Chemical Warfare experiments, so that's all I'll say about it.

I did actually have command of HMS *Narvic* for a time and then I eventually was a Staff Officer to the Commodore for this operation and that went on for about eighteen months or two years; and then I went and did a Staff course and I then went to the Admiralty. (No – I didn't do a Staff course – I did a tactical course, sort of thing) and I then went to the Admiralty and in the Naval Training Department as the Admiralty Lecturer to Schools, and Schools Liaison Officer.

And I borrowed, from the Discovery Investigations, slides – I think they were George Deacon's – and I used to use these as part of my spiel to schools and, I used to show them what things were like down in the Antarctic as I thought, "Get away from

¹⁸ Common Naval term for the Chief Hydrographer.

this business of firing guns all the time, and torpedoes, and the war.” And it went down reasonably well, and I did that for eighteen months – I didn’t like working in London. And then, I was relieved and I went on leave (I was on leave for about three or four months.) And I then was appointed First Lieutenant of an aircraft carrier, during the Korean War, and I was in HMS *Unicorn* out in the Far East for two-and-a-half years and I then got leave, came home, and then I went on the Staff of C-in-C Med., as S.O.O.¹⁹ and Fleet ABCD²⁰ Officer, as it was known as in those days.

I was on the staff there for nearly three years, then I came home, and I was then passed over as a two-and-a-half²¹ and went as a Staff Officer to the Ulster Division of the RNVR – which meant running the RNVR in Ulster, basically. And then I retired from the Navy, at the age of 45. Then eventually I got a job with BASS – the brewers.

Joanna Rae: Really, Ah! [Laughter]

Victor Marchesi: And that was just a shore-side job, you know, ‘prop the foresail.’ I was made redundant, ten years later [Laughter] and I then joined Cunard as a port relief officer, and from Cunard eventually, when I was sixty-three, they said, “You’ve got to retire now, whether you like it or not.” I got a job in the *Cutty Sark*, where I am at the present moment. And that’s basically my career up to date.

Joanna Rae: Is the *Cutty Sark* and HMS ship or not?

Victor Marchesi: No, No. *Cutty Sark* is [what] we call CS, which stands for Clipper Ship.

Joanna Rae: Ah Yes, Well, thank you very much indeed [Laughter]

Victor Marchesi: All Right?

– RECORDING ENDS –

¹⁹ Staff Operations Officer 2.

²⁰ Atomic, Bacteriological and Chemical Defence.

²¹ Lieut-Cdr.