

ALAN TRITTON

Alan Tritton Reminiscences. BAS Archives Ref: AD6/24//1/13. Transcribed by Barry Heywood, 2014.

This is Alan Tritton, recorded at Peterhouse College, Cambridge on 15th September 2007 by Chris Eldon Lee.

[00:00:12] My name is Alan George Tritton. I was born in 1931 in Knutsford, Cheshire, as my father was working in Manchester at that particular time.

[00:00:30] Lee: What were you doing before FIDS?

Tritton: I was a lieutenant in the Army fighting against the Chinese Communists in the jungle in Malaya. If you really want to know I was rather badly wounded and I was repatriated.

[00:00:47] Lee: I was going to say there is quite a big leap between there to the Antarctic! How did that leap take place?

Tritton: Well anything was desirable [laughter] compared with the jungle where you had very high temperatures and very high humidity and you were fighting and you were, and... Anyway, in fact I always wanted to go to the polar regions ever since I was at school, and even before, even at my private school, preparatory school. In fact, actually, I, when you [one?] left, I called them preparatory school actually, private school I lectured on the 1924 Mount Everest Expedition because I was very interested in geological and glaciological aspects. And in fact I had a very good Geography Master there and little did I know actually in 1943/44 when I gave my leaving lecture on the Everest Expedition that I would be with Chris Bonnington on the 1975 Everest South West Face Expedition [laughter]. So it was something [laughter, Lee interjection: a moment of fate] [laughter]

[00:02:03] Lee: Do you know why you had always wanted to go the Antarctic? What was the attraction?

Tritton: Well I love the hills and the mountains. I love the snow and the ice. I, there's... My family, on one side of my family were... Travelled very extensively. And I think really the motivator came from this extraordinary man I had as a Geography master at my preparatory school which had evacuated up to Yorkshire because the school was being bombed and shelled in 1940.

[00:02:42] Lee: Where was the school?

[00:03:03] Broadstairs. Broadstairs, in Kent. The school evacuated up there. The actual geography master was called Commander Holmes, and in the First World War he had been a submarine commander in the Royal Navy but he was a passionate Geographer and Glaciologist. And the limestone area around where we had evacuated to, which was effectively one side Pen y Ghent and Ingleborough was of absorbing interest, and he rather took me under his wing and opened the whole geomorphology, and geography and glaciology to me, which I never actually forgot. And in my book,

which is being published next Spring I think, it will show the profound influence that Commander Holmes of the Royal Navy had on me.

[00:03:40] Lee: What will the book be called Sir?

[00:03:42] It is going to be called 'The Half closed Door'

[00:03:45] Lee: [laughter]

[00:03:46] And the reason for that is that Jane Morris, I don't know if you know Jane Morris, I've known her both as a man and as a woman, she was on the 1953 the first Everest Expedition, under my old friend John Hutton. And she wrote a book, many books actually, and one of the books was a short of an Imperial trilogy. And the last one of that ilk, so to speak, was called 'Farewell the Trumpets, and the Preface to the book was 'Say farewell to the trumpets, you will hear them no more, but their sweet sad silvery echo will call to you still through the half closed door'. And the reason for my calling it that is that on my mother's side were all soldiers. They were... My mother's family was an impoverished Highland aristocratic military family. In other words they had to live on their pay. And so they served the Empire all over the world. They never had any money and they died in Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, Sudan, France, but they were professional Imperial soldiers, actually. And so, I was a soldier as well. And so I thought 'Half-closed door' sort of sounded a bit right [laughter]

[00:05:23] Lee: And so we have established the passion to go to the Antarctic.

Tritton: Yes.

[00:05:25] Lee: How did it actually happen? How did you actually materialise that passion?

Tritton: I will tell you exactly what happened. When I eventually came out of the Army having been six months in hospital, I was discharged and I tried to go on Commander Simpson's British North Greenland Expedition in 1954/5. But by the time I came out of the Army, and he wrote a very nice letter to me, but he said he was full up. And of course, whether he would have accepted me or not, I don't know. But he was full up, and I was rather dispirited about that, but not entirely dispirited because I actually did want to go to the Antarctic rather than the Arctic. It was more of an adventure. And so, out of the blue, I wrote to a friend of mine, Vic Russell.

[00:06:26] Lee: I know his daughter.

Tritton: Oh, you know his daughter. Who actually, curiously enough, is a relation of mine. He died – he's dead

[00:06:33] Lee: He died a couple of years ago.

Tritton; Yes, that right. I knew him. I didn't know him terribly well. But I wrote to him, and I also wrote to Launcelot Fleming who I knew, and said that I very much

wanted to go down to the Antarctic.¹ I wasn't terribly well qualified as I hadn't been to University and so armed with the letters from Vic Russell and Launcelot Fleming, who was Bishop of Portsmouth at that time, I went to see them, and I said I very much want to go South. And they were all very positive about it. So I was emboldened to write to the Crown Agents who were the people in those days acting for the Falkland Islands Dependencies. And I went there for an interview and then I was accepted.

[00:07:34] Lee: Do you remember the interview? Was it a stiff one or a...

Tritton; Actually as it was 55 years ago, I don't! I think that they were actually interested because I had first of all been on a mountaineering expedition in northern, in the Arctic Norway when I was 17. I went up to the Svolværgeita Range which straddles Norway and Sweden at the top there, and went sort of mountaineering. And I think that they were also impressed... So there was a thing there... And I think they were also impressed because I had been commissioned and had actually fought in command of 20 to 25 men in the jungle, on my own for long periods at a time, being supplied by air and I think that I made possibly a good impression.

[00:08:34] Lee: Do you remember who was on the other side of the table? Was Fuchs there? You don't know [inaudible]

Tritton: No it wasn't Fuchs, certainly not. No I have no idea actually to this day. They didn't make any impression on me. [laughter]

[00:08:50] Lee: What do you recall of that period, having actually been given the job? [pause] Were you given a job or were you just sent South?

Tritton: No, no! I was accepted into the service of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey and I said I [was] not really very qualified. And they said well I think you ought to be trained as a meteorologist. [inaudible] And so I went for 3 months off to Stanmore, which is the Met. Office, which was then controlled by the Air Ministry. And I have to say... I commuted up to Stanmore, and I have to say that I found it absolutely fascinating. And I thoroughly enjoyed that and then I was given, so to speak, my embarkation orders. It was the second time I had been given embarkation orders, once to the Far East and once to the South. And [I] joined the *Biscoe* in October 1952 at Southampton.

[00:09:58] Lee: Did you have to... Were there special preparations, equipment you had to gather together or did you travel very light?

Tritton: Gosh. No I think I travelled very, very light. And I think, thinking about it now, you're asking me that particular question I think that pretty well all the equipment was picked up in Stanley. I cannot remember taking a whole lot of mukluks, that sort of thing. I think I picked them up in Stanley. And the voyage South... I was in fact very surprised... I was only 21, just 21 at the time, and I had already been in the Army for 2½ years. And I was very surprised when I got to Portsmouth or Southampton wherever it was, I was told where the ship was berthed

¹ Fleming was part of the BGLE.

and I went there and I couldn't see anything. I said "There isn't a ship!" Somebody said "There is a ship but you can't see it. It is below the dock". And the only thing that was sticking up above the dock level was the crow's nest. But there were a lot of television people there and film crew actually, filming our departure. And it was not dissimilar to a troop ship leaving for the Far East, actually. And I also remember, particularly, that the ship was grossly overloaded, grossly overloaded. And quite a lot of the deck cargo became adrift in a huge gale that we had in the Biscay. I mean it was an absolute dreadful storm and ...

[00:11:53] Lee: Touch and go?

Tritton: It was touch and go. And the Wardroom got flooded. And where we were, all our bunks, where we were down the companionway as they called it, was completely flooded with water about three feet deep before they could actually... It was a very severe gale. The engine stopped. We were hove-to for a very long time and the deck cargo, most of it, all the hydrogen cylinders broke away and damaged the scow and everything like that. It was what we in the FIDs used to call a 'fornicator' [laughter].

[00:12:31] Lee: Yes, I heard that phrase from Kevin Walton before now [laughter]

Tritton: Anyway after that we had a very good trip down [loud laughter] to Montevideo and Stanley and it was a good trip.

[00:12:43] Lee: I presume Signy was pretty basic?

Tritton: Ah yes, we left Stanley and we relieved Deception which was a horrible place, Hope Bay, Port Lockroy, I think. I've written all this in my book. And yes, we arrived at Signy, and yes, I've described it at length in my book.

[00:13:11] Lee: In a nut shell.

Tritton: It wasn't anything I wasn't expecting actually. I did expect something like that, but compared to now, yes it was extremely basic. We all lived, slept and ate in the same room, and had one coke fire (anthracite I suppose) and you were not allowed to let it out on pain of death. We all took turns in cooking. Yes it was very basic. It didn't worry me at all. I was the leader. Of course, I was chosen leader in Stanley.

[00:13:57] Lee: Oh I see, you didn't know you were to be leader until you got to Stanley.

Tritton: I was interviewed by the autocrat Sir Miles Clifford, who had a sort of, what you call them? in his eye.

[00:14:11] Lee: Monocle?

Tritton: monocle in his eye. Very, very Imperial, autocratic. And his wife was drinking gin rather heavily and, he said "My boy, I think you should be the leader of Signy" And I said I don't want to go to Signy And the reason I don't want to go to Signy is that I want to go to Hope Bay and do the sledging, certainly journeys. "No" he said "You will have to go to Signy" So I said "Orders is orders, so to speak" and so

I went to Signy. And took over from a very capable, competent, efficient man called Arthur Mansfield. There were five of us there. We were there for 15 months all living together. There was no incompatibility. We all came from very different backgrounds, totally different backgrounds actually. We all lived and slept and ate in the same room. There was no incompatibility at all.

[00:15:07] Lee: Did that surprise you?

Tritton: Well it did surprise me but it didn't surprise me all that much because when you are fighting in the jungle...

[00:15:16] Lee: Same rules apply.

Tritton: Same rules...They rely on you, you rely on them. They fight with you, you fight with them. They, you have their food, I have their food. We were altogether. We were totally interdependent. So it wasn't anything different. And I didn't find...cause I'm... You know, was at a Public School. And all that sort of thing. I actually. I don't know what they thought of me. But I... There wasn't any tension, put it that way, even in the winter. So I was very fortunate. And we... Everything we shared. We shared...We shared everything actually. We shared the cooking, feeding the dogs, everything. And, as I say, I was rather proud of the fact there was no tension actually. There could easily have been tension. As I say, we came from very different backgrounds. I actually thoroughly...Even with the benefit of hindsight, you know, the golden glow, you know, and all the rest, of the past. It was a very happy time for me.

[00:16:22] Lee: After Malaysia, how did you handle the cold?

Tritton: I, well, put it the other way round, I much prefer the cold to the heat, particularly human heat: the jungle. You don't get used to the jungle. You always, you always feel ill in the jungle. You are always wet. You are always sweating. You're soaked. You've got jungle sores. You've leeches. You've fear. Everything is...You always came out of the jungle feeling ill, looking dreadful and green and awful. Sores, and fevers and things like that. And of course you never got...I never got a moments illness in the Antarctic at all.

[00:17:10] Lee: No. The Antarctic is a pristine [inaudible]

Tritton; Yes. I was... There was one thing I do remember before going down ... My father, I never knew, died when I was 2 years old, as a result of a gangrenous appendicitis which had burst. And of course one forgets that in 1933/34 there were no antibiotics. So he died in great agony. And I remember thinking about it for a long time as to whether or not I should have had my appendix out because of this history before I went South. In the end I decided not to. With the benefit of hindsight, it was the right decision.

[00:17:55] Lee: What was it...? Were the tasks you had to perform sophisticated or rudimentary?

Tritton: Fairly rudimentary. The days and nights were fully taken up and, in fact, I can almost honestly say I had hardly time to read a book. If you were a Met man, there were 3 Met people, and we did all the Met work and so and so forth, and another glaciological...I also did a fair amount of glaciological and geological work, as well as the seal counting and penguin counting, and all that sort of type of thing. I am sorry, I have forgotten what you said now.

[00:18:32] Lee: Well I was asking do you have a [interrupted]

Tritton: Well, yes there was a routine. Every five weeks you were cook for five [seven] days, the week, and you had to cook all the meals, and there were three meals a day.

[00:18:47] Lee: Decent food? [Repeated]

Tritton: Yes. No worry about the food at all. We ate a lot of seal meat and penguin meat. And in fact I will have to tell you a little story at this point. And that is that I learned all my cooking from a book 'The Penguin Cookery Book'. Now this Penguin Cookery Book was written by someone called Bee Nilson, who you may know or not know. Probably not know. Anyway, rather facetiously, I wrote to Bee Nilson and I said...I was pretty young and stupid in those days... "I have learned all my cooking out of your Penguin Cookery Book. I greatly admire and respect it but of course there are no recipes for cooking penguins in your Penguin Cookery Book". "Oh", she said "how very interesting!" And, she said, "Do send me all your recipes". Which I did, actually. And, and she wrote... I had a very nice letter back from her [laughter].

Tritton: The other thing in fact which was fairly rudimentary was of course there were no bathing, bathing facilities. And I had a bath in a whale oil barrel once a month, I think, which I thought was quite excessive. And the reason why we didn't have baths was simply because you had to chop up so many snow blocks and shovel them in the bloody, you know, what ever boiler thing, what ever it was. And it was the work of Sisyphus really pushing these bloody snow blocks in order to eventually acquire enough water to have a bath. But yes, it was a pretty unsophisticated way of life. It wasn't technical, the dogs. Nothing was really, sort of...

Tritton: The routine for the met assistants, the meteorologists, and two were qualified, I was the unqualified one, was that you got up at six-o'clock in the morning and you went all the way through 'til three-o'clock the next morning. In other words it was a 21-hour day. And then you were allowed to sleep in 'til mid-day. Then you had the next day off. And then you started again.

Tritton: But in between time, we did quite a number of sledging journeys over to Coronation [Island] although it wasn't a very good ice year. I think the ice came in [during] April/May, and unfortunately went out in August. So some of our journeys to Coronation...although we did a lot of climbing on Coronation, I mean it would have been nice if the sea ice had stayed in longer.

[00:21:33] Lee: Were those trips recreational rather than...

Tritton: No they weren't. No, they, they...I was asked to do them for geological reasons. And not for anything else. And as I went along, you know, the south coast of Coronation Island, as well of course Signy Island as well, I picked up a lot of geological specimens. And then it was from that and other reports that [inaudible] that Derek Bailing [Mailing] and somebody else wrote the geological report on the eviden..., what they had discovered and also what I had discovered. And they were very kind to me, because I am amateurish, they gave me a jolly – a very nice thank you – for the work I did.

[00:22:23] Lee: Was the work you were doing scientifically sound, or was it is bit...?

Tritton: I didn't do any, I didn't...I don't think in my case anything I did was scientifically sound in the way you are asking it. But I did, I collected a lot of information of various things, which enabled others to write the various scientific reports.

[00:22:48] Lee: You were the gatherer/hunter!

Tritton: I was the gatherer/hunter. I mean, I did write for instance a geological/glaciological report on my little mountaineering expedition in the Arctic. But no! I am not qualified as a scientist. But I am interested! [laughter]

[00:23:07] Lee: But back, back to the conditions on the Base. A topic which everybody seems [to] bring up is the toilet facilities.

Tritton: Oh well, yes, well in my day it was the thing called the Bingham bog...and... The thing... This again is in my book. The reason for the Bingham Bog was that it was designed by Surgeon-Commander Bingham. It was outside and unfortunately it was situated the wrong side of the hut. For a pee, if I can call it that, we... You went to the front door or front as it was, and there was a pee glacier there, which melted in the summer. So you didn't, if you just wanted a pee, that was all right. If you wanted to do anything else, you had, and hopefully not in the middle of the night or winter or anything like that, you had to go round the hut in a blizzard, and you sat on this seat and with the great admonition in front of you in writing saying 'no micturation before defecation!' And the reason for that is that if you actually peed in the biscuit tin before you, sorry excuse my language, defecated it made if impossibly heavy to get the biscuit tin down to the tide crack, which was the, you know, between the land ice and the sea ice. It was impossibly heavy so as I say, there was this great admonition 'no micturation before defecation'. And of course you didn't.

[00:24:48] Lee: So, just to clarify that point, you peed elsewhere...

Tritton: Oh yes.

[00:24:54] Lee: And defecated in the toilet.

Tritton: In the bog. We all called it 'the bog'. It wasn't a toilet in any accepted sense of the word.

[00:25:00] Lee: It was outside, round the back of the hut?

Tritton: Yah, yah. I show it to you if [laughter]

Tritton: And then the generator shed. 'Cause we only... We started up the generator in the morning. We had no... We had no light at night. It's dark. No we didn't, because we didn't have the generator. And somebody... We took it in turns to go out in the morning and start the generator up, because we were utterly dependant on the generator, particularly not only for light but, of course, also for wireless transmissions, which we conducted all the time. But that, and sometimes... I call the generator 'the crouching beast' because sometimes it was extremely reluctant [laughter] to start because it was so cold. In fact I think, we used to put, ether or something, you know, to really give it a kick.²

[00:25:58] Lee: So there were no oil lamps or candles for when you went to bed?

Tritton: No we had, yes we did have oil lamps and candles but we had, I mean... The generator was turned off, as far as I recollect, and I am not absolutely certain, when we went to bed. And then we were... As I said we all lived and slept in the same room. And I had, I had a bunk. And I was there, I was there for nearly 15 months something like that, and I never changed, I never changed my sleeping bag. It must have been terrible smelly. I was quite happy there. I had a lovely view...

[00:26:41] Lee: [laughter]

Tritton: [laughter]

[00:26:45] Lee: Did the Antarctic live up to expectations then?

Tritton: Oh yes! Absolutely. Yes. And I was very fortunate, 'cause when I left Signy in 1954 I went on the Antarctic relief voyage and... Which was fairly normal, except that in fact actually two things happened. First of all, we built the International Geophysical Year Station at Argentine Islands on Galindez Island. So we were there nearly two months building it and we had most incredible good weather, wonderful weather. And we built this new IGY Station there. So that was lovely. Headed down the West Coast of the Antarctic Peninsula, Graham Land. And the other thing apart from – we went several times to South Georgia. And then the other great bonus, although in one sense it wasn't a bonus, we went all the way down in Winter to inspect, although that is not quite the right word, the South..., every island in the South Sandwich Islands for, you know where they are [laughter] for any signs of Argentinian presence. Well there wasn't.

[00:27:57] Lee: And that was in which year?

Tritton: That was in early 54. And we went down from South Georgia and didn't discover anything, but of course it was in May and, so the actual voyage itself was absolute hell. But we were lucky to see them, because they hadn't been really

² Ether was standard issue for cold-starting of the Auto Diesel generators at this time when most Bases did not run a continuous mains supply.

surveyed at all. They weren't surveyed until probably 1963/64, I think, [the] South Sandwich Islands.

[00:28:27] Lee: Did you then do some basic survey work on Signy while you were there, or was it purely just meteorological stuff?

Tritton: We didn't do any geographical survey work, no. I did geological and glaciological, which I have touched on, which was my contribution to Derek Mailing's and, I don't remember who the other person was, might have been Gordon Robin, and... But I did all the seal counts, all the bird counts. You know, all that sort of type of thing. I kept very regular records for that and they all ended up in Stanley or I suppose in London.

[00:29:07] Lee: Did you sense at the time this was really important pioneering stuff you were doing?

Tritton: Not pioneering, no! No because for in fact, it wasn't, you know, primary survey like Hope Bay was doing down the east coast of the Peninsula, which is actually what I would have liked to have done. But on the other hand, it was intensely interesting. And [Coronation] Island, which we spent a lot of time on, hadn't been surveyed in those days, not properly surveyed anyway. We did the survey but we spent a lot of time there.

[00:29:42] Lee: You were there for the Coronation?

Tritton; Yes! You know the story?

[00:29:47] Lee: Well no. Please tell me.

Tritton: Ah yes. Well I will tell you the story. I was very angry about it at the time, because we were actually on Coronation at the time of the Coronation. And I sent a wireless message to Her Majesty the Queen, saying 'We Falkland Island Survey surveyors on Coronation Island send our felicitations to you on your coronation'. That got through all right and [laughter] by the relief boat we had a photograph signed by Her Majesty the Queen, saying 'Thank you very much indeed for this'. And but, I had, I was balled out by the Governor, Sir Miles Clifford, and I had a message from him, although afterwards we became good friends, saying I'd usurped his authority by sending a message to Her Majesty the Queen without his authority [laughter]. I thought, well... [laughter]. That was quite funny.

[00:30:50] Lee: And what was this, this protest note business with the Argies?

Tritton: Well, that was... Well, that was very peculiar actually. But it all...I think I have written about it. It is slightly embellished. But the thing is that, when the Argentinians put a base on Deception Island – and this was in 1953 – Churchill sent, a cruiser, yes it was a cruiser, to destroy it. And the Royal Marines went ashore and destroyed it. And then suddenly I had this message saying, 'Expect reprisals as a result of the action on Deception Island'. And, you know, all in this four-figure code³

³ This was by use of the Royal Navy 'One-time' five-figure cipher pads.

which I found extremely difficult to decipher actually. Anyway, I did. And I sent a cipher back direct to the Admiralty and said ‘Well what do you expect me to do?’ Which is in my book actually. And they said ‘Well you have got to make a formal protest in the name of Her Majesty the Queen that, you know, the Argentinians are infringing her Majesty’s territorial, you know, sovereignty, or something crap like that’. Sorry, excuse my language. And I said ‘Well, what do I do? I have only got a very leaky pram, which did leak actually, and I have only got a shotgun, which happens to belong to me, and a few [laughter]. And they, as far as I recall, said ‘well do your best’. [laughter]. [inaudible] it wasn’t very satisfactory. But I cannot actually remember well if I actually told them, I don’t think I did. I didn’t want to tell anybody very much about it. So I kept it quiet.

[00:32:45] Lee: Well, you went to make a protest!

Tritton: Yes, I did.

[00:32:49] Lee: How did it proceed?

Tritton: I said ‘you are infringing the Presidents’ [?] sovereign waters’ So I said ‘well stuff you!’ [laughter] Anyway, we had a glass of whisky, and that was the end of that.

[00:32:59] Lee: Oh, just a glass of whisky. There was no prolonged celebrations?

Tritton: No, no, no, no. I was a bit embarrassed about the whole thing.

[00:33:11] Lee: You mentioned that communications were a bit patchy. So in your 15 months there were you able to speak at all to England?

Tritton: No, never. No never. No, I think that I... No, no, you couldn’t do that. What you could... All I think, I used to send occasionally the odd wireless message. But I am not absolutely certain I even did that, actually. I think that FIDS in London did actually send my Mother occasional reports as to what was going on or not going on, as the case may be.⁴

[00:33:57] Lee: But not composed by you?

Tritton: No, no. I don’t think I did it once. It was rather like I was in Malaya. I never actually spoke to my Mother at all. Actually, you couldn’t do it. No, I think there was no communication, per say, between my Mother and myself while I was down South at all.

[00:34:28] Lee: Well, the time came to go back to civilization for want of a...

Tritton: Yes, yes.

[00:34:32] Lee: how did you feel about that?

⁴ London sent Monthly Reports to NOK. These were mainly made up from the Situation Reports transmitted to Stanley every fortnight by each Base Leader.

Tritton: Well, the thing is... Yet again it is in my book. When I left Signy, it was a filthy day and I didn't... I ask myself the question when I left Signy whether in fact I was sorry to leave. And the answer was I was not sorry to leave. And the reason I wasn't sorry to leave because I was going on about six months on the Biscoe doing these very extensive journey, you know, sea journeys. And particularly, as I say, two months building the IGY scientific station on Galindez, in Argentine Islands. When that was all over and we... I mean, going out on the so called expedition is always very exciting. Going back is depressing in the extreme. Montevideo was great fun, 'cause you know, Nightclubs, bars and that sort of type of thing. And the ship had been slightly damaged in pack ice so we were there a bit longer. And so I, I, and in fact and again I put this in my book, I spent all my available cash in a bar in Montevideo on the first night. So I went to the Captain, who, I think, had been put into jail for being drunk, Bill Johnson, who was a great character, and said "can you lend me some money or give me an advance of my pay?" And he said, "No". So I was actually there in Montevideo without any visible cash, or anything like that. So I went back to the Nightclub... is this what you want to talk about? And I went to the proprietor, and there was a very nice girl there, and said, "Look, I am a pianist. I play jazz and classical and when your band is not here I can, you know, fill in, so to speak. And I said, I haven't got any money but what I like is free drinks, and be able to sit at the bar and chat to girls and all the rest of it "[laughter]. And he said "yes". [laughter]
So I survived in Montevideo without any money.

[00:36:55] Lee: For how long?

Tritton: I think it was for about a week, I think. [laughter] Anyway it was... But any way, after that, it was depressing in the extreme. Arriving back at Portsmouth, or Southampton with all... You have to remember in 1950s, in those years England was a most depressing place. It was grey, bombed. Nobody had money. Rationing. Ugh! It was, ugh, I mean. You just wanted to get out of it actually, England.

[00:37:34] Lee: Did you?

Tritton: No I didn't... What happened, actually that I had no idea what to do. So I went into a bank [laughter], which wasn't quite my sort of thing. But I stayed in the bank and I became Group Executive Director of Barclays. So it sort of, sort of worked out all right. But I continued expeditioning, and I helped with the British Trans-Arctic Expedition, the Trans-Globe Expedition, Chris Bonnington's Expedition to Everest. You know, I sort of participated in them all and I kept that all alive. And then I spent a great deal of time in India, and again, if you pick up my book, you will see what I achieved in India. And then I was given the CBE for what I achieved in India. It was basically restoration and conservation, and working in a sense, indirectly for the Indian Museum's service. And the British Government gave me a CBE for all that. And then other things happened.

[00:38:45] Lee: In a long and colourful life, how does the Antarctic rate?

Tritton: Top.

[00:38:51] Lee: Really?

Tritton: Absolutely top.

[00:38:54] Lee: Because?

Tritton: 'Cause, of the beauty, and the spiritual beauty of it. I was never happier, to some extent, [mumble] when I was, again it is in my book, we were climbing in the Cullins and elsewhere on Coronation Island in the winter and it was so, actually no wind, it was a beautiful day, pack ice everywhere, and it was so beautiful and serene. Actually it was, I am rather religious, it was quite, quite spiritual. And, and I have never seen anything quite as beautiful as the Antarctic in my life and, and I mean that actually. So I was sort of – I loved it – absolutely loved it. And it was one of the happiest although... Actually it was one of the happiest periods of my life. And, so there you are.

[00:40:01] Lee: Have you been back?

Tritton: Yes. I once went back to South Georgia as a lecturer. And, and I went to South Georgia several times. I wasn't really a lecturer. Bob Burton was doing the lecturing. And, of course you know... It is very different being on a tourist ship. It's all very diff... Bob Headland will tell you that. Do you know Bob Headland? Yes. No, it was very different. It was, you know [laughter] having your claret in the evening, I mean...

[00:40:38] Lee: [laughter]

Tritton: Curiously, one of the things which a lot of people have asked me, is that, 'Did you drink' And the answer is 'We didn't drink'. We... None of us wanted to drink. What we did do was smoke. But then I smoked in Malaya, and I still smoke a bit. The reason why one smoked in Malaya was to get all these bloody leeches of ones body. And we did it every hour. But we didn't... actually there was no desire to drink, actually, which was interesting (To me, anyway.) Anyway, is that all? Do you want to ask me another question?

[00:41:15] Lee: Thank you, thank you very much.

Points of interest

1 [00:03:03] *Interest in Antarctica stimulated by his Geography Master, an ex-Royal Navy submarine commander, who was a passionate Geographer and Glaciologist.*

2 [00:08:56] *Although an ex-Army Officer who had fought Chinese Communists in Malaya, finding the Met Office training course at Stanmore "absolutely fascinating".*

3 [00:18:50] *Chastising the author of a Penguin Cookery Book for not having included recipes for cooking penguin.*

4 [00:26:47] *Helping to build the UK International Geophysical Station on Galindez Island.*

5 [00:29:48] *Sending, whilst sledging on Coronation Island, congratulations to the Queen on her Coronation, and earning a reprimand of the Governor of the Falkland Islands.*

6 [00:30:52] *Carrying out Churchill's instructions over the establishment of an Argentine Base on Deception Island and sharing a glass of whiskey with the 'foe'.*

7 [00:34:30] *Broke, and having to play the piano in a Montevidean bar in exchange for free drinks.*