

Interview Transcript: Alan Etchells

Interviewer : Christopher Eldon Lee

Location : Alan's Home in Ellesmere Port, 15th June 2009.

(Note: Occasional voice 'off' is Allan Wearden [AW])

CD 1 : TRACK 1 [4:01]

[0:00] CEL: This is Alan Etchells, recorded at his home in Ellsemere Port, by Chris Eldon Lee on Monday 15th June 2009. Alan Etchells, part one.

AE: William Alan Etchells, 17th May 1928.

[0:20] CEL: Where were you born?

AE: Furness Vale, near Whaley Bridge, in Derbyshire.

[0:25] CEL: OK. And what kind of schooling did you have?

AE: Ahh – just elementary really. Left school at 14, and started work.

[0:35] CEL: What was your first job, Alan?

AE: In a machine shop, where they made dynamos, well small ones to big ones. Doing assembly work really and lathe work for about 18 months.

[0:54] CEL: Was engineering in the family blood somewhere, or was it a new occupation?

AE: No, it wasn't really, no, no. My dad worked on the railway, he was a shunter and a guard and a yard inspector, and a lot of the others – uncles – seemed to be carpenters, for some reason I don't know why, must have been the trade that the time calling, you know.

[1:26] CEL: Yes. Where you...where you perceived as a bright lad at school?

AE: No, about average, or less!

CEL: And proud of it!

AE: Yes – no it was during the war and there wasn't a lot of schooling really, no sport or anything.

[1:46] CEL Yes. But... so you don't know where the interest in engineering came from, there was no meccano kits as a kid or...?

AE: Oh yes, there was meccano kits and things like that, yeah, but doesn't mean to say you are going to go into the engineering side does it really?

[1:59] CEL: Mmm – were you happy as an engineer?

AE: Oh yeah, yeah I liked it actually, yeah.

[2:04] CEL: So how did you first get in contact with BAS.

AE: Oh, I was a bit older than most of people that joined BAS really. I'd been in the Army, and come out there and been a mechanic again for a number of years.

[2:24] CEL: Doing what?

AE: Just working on private cars and commercial vehicles really. And, I was about 35 I think before I joined, before I saw this advert...well, I didn't see it, my mother saw this advert, I think she knew I was getting a bit fed up I think. She said 'There you are, try this', and I applied, then got an interview and...

[2:49] CEL: Can you remember where the advert was – a newspaper...?

AE: Yeah, *Express. Daily Express*, yeah. Just a little advert in the back somewhere.

[2:59] CEL: Saying what?

AE: Well...just that they wanted mechanics and...yeah just that they wanted mechanics to go south and work in the Antarctic for two years or so.

[3:11] CEL: Had you ever thought about the Antarctic prior to that?

AE: Not really no, not until then no. Sort of read a couple of books – find out what it was about?

CEL: Oh you did read...I see.

AE: I did read then yeah, yeah

[3:21] CEL: What did you read, do you remember?

AE: Well, Fuchs' book, the obvious one, crossing the Antarctic. And I don't know what else it was.

[3:30] CEL: Did he inspire you, Vivian Fuchs?

AE: Well...yeah, he was that sort of person I suppose really, it was the days of the great explorers really. Well I suppose it had come to an end then, but he was one of the last ones really.

[3:52] CEL: So you fancied yourself down south did you?

AE: Well I didn't know much about it really, I mean you don't know what's going to...what you are going to find down there really.

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[0:00] CEL: So when...when you went to the interview, I guess that was in London?

AE: Yeah, yeah.

[0:05] CEL: And they said the classic question 'Why do you want this job?', what might you have said.

AE: [laughs] I don't know – I might have said 'I'm short of cash' – you know.

CEL: [laughs]

AE: Although you didn't get much in those days, I mean it was...used to get 500, no 450 per year, if you signed on for two years you got 500 for each year.

[0:30] CEL: You're giving me the impression you just kind of fell into it?

AE: Well yes, pretty well yeah. Yeah – I didn't know what to expect at all really.

[0:34] CEL : They didn't warn you?

AE: Well no, I was...they'd already recruited a lot of people and somebody had dropped out – and that's why they'd put this advert in, and they'd already had a ... a conference - they have a conference in Cambridge, where everybody gets together , and everybody that's going down to the Antarctic, you get to know one another and they have lectures and all sorts of things, but I missed all that, so first time I met anybody was going down to Southampton to get you on the ship.

[1:02] CEL: And what year was this Alan?

AE: Ahh – '62. November '62, or December I think this was, December 5th, something like that.

[1:13] CEL: A lot of people I interview are surprised at how short a time there was between getting the job and going south, and it sounds like you also didn't have much time.

AE: Yeah, yeah, yeah – well I think it was because this person, whoever it was, had dropped out sort of thing and they needed another one – somebody to replace him.

[1:32] CEL: Did you get any sense of that they were asking questions about your personality, how you would cope with being locked away for 12 months or.?

AE: I don't think so. I can't remember them asking them sort of questions, no. There was three people, Bill Sloman, John...no, that's not...who was the other bloke?

AW: Chris Sumner?

AE: No, no, no, before him.

AW: John Green?

AE: We've done that really – and the engineer from Crown agents.

[2:07] CEL: Oh right. What do you make of Bill Sloman?

AE: Oh he was a fantastic bloke, yeah, yeah, very nice.

[2:11] CEL: Why, in what way?

AE: He was just a gentleman. He just treated everybody so good really, he did a lot for quite a lot of us really.

[2:21] CEL: So he kept...he didn't just appoint you and then forget about you?

AE: Oh no, no, no, he used to go down on the ships any case, and one thing about him...he had these crib cards, which told him everybody's name and which base we were on and all the rest of it, and he used to look at these before he got to a base, and then he'd get off the ship and meet somebody and say 'Hello, Fred' sort of thing, you know, and they'd say 'I wonder how he knows me?'.
[2:47] CEL: You saw these cards did you?

AE: Yeah, yeah, he used to carry them all the time, yeah.

[2:51] CEL: Where they a closely guarded secret or was it obvious?

AE: Well, I don't think many people knew, but later on I saw them when I was part of HQ, you know.

[2:58] CEL: Did you ever see your own card?

AE: No, not really, no. No I didn't – I didn't really look for that, no, perhaps I should have done.

[3:06] CEL: You're the first person to mention that...

AE: Well perhaps nobody knows!

CEL: ...answers some questions about how he could do that.

AE: Yeah, yeah.

[3:14] CEL: 'Cause he was impressive I gather?

AE: Oh he was yeah, yeah, very good, quite a gentleman really.

[3:25] CEL: So here you are at Southampton, November 1962, with a ship in front of you...

AE: A little ship mind.

[3:33] CEL: What was it called?

AE: *Kista Dan*. Danish charter ship on a 100 day charter from UK to UK.

[3:42] CEL: Right. Was this your first time on board ship?

AE: No, no, no – I'd been on a ship in...troop ship in the army and various things as well.

[3:53] CEL: What did you make of her?

AE: Well, it was all right, moved about a lot. Only small, an icebreaker. But it was quite comfortable really, yeah.

[4:05] CEL: Where you surprised how small she was, considering how far you were going?

AE: Well, yeah, yeah. She used to berth in the same dock as the Queen...Queen Mary in those days wasn't it, Queen Mary, yeah, looked like a life boat belonged to the big ship, you know! Well in those days it was treated more as an expedition sort of thing, people from HQ used to come down and see the ship off, have you photograph taken with Sir Viv, and all the rest of it, you know...which made it quite exciting I suppose really.

[4:41] CEL: You felt...felt important?

AE: Well...yeah, a bit yeah, 'I'm part of this expedition' you know.

[4:49] CEL: And so your first meeting with the rest of the expedition was actually...

AE: On the ship, yeah.

CEL: in Southampton.

AE: Yeah, yeah...yeah. And all younger ~

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AE: ~ than me, well no, except for one, the radio op, he was older than me. What was his name...per...its useless...Irish Bloke.

[0:15] CEL: The fact you were older, did that matter, did that make you separate from the rest?

AE: No, not really no, it didn't seem to matter, no.

AW: Hugh O'Gorman

AE: Hugh O’Gorman his name, yeah. It was him that started off with calling me ‘Dad’ actually.

[0:34] CEL: Tell me about that then please, what happened?

AE: Well he didn’t want to be known as the oldest on ... well on the base really,

CEL: Which is...

AE: He was radio op, he’d been at sea for a long time, he was – I was 34 I think at that time, he must have been about... getting on for forty. So, someone else started calling me “Dad”, the bloke that worked with me in the garage, and O’Gorman heard this, picked it up, pushed it, and pushed it and pushed it, you know, so in the end the name stuck and it’s been ‘Dad’ ever since.

[1:10] CEL: Did you mind?

AE: No, not really no, no. Everybody had a nickname in any case, it might as well have been “Dad” as anything else – it could have been something else really!

[1:22] CEL: Was that nickname used purely in BAS circles, or did it also get into every-day life back home as well?

AE: Well it has with ex-FIDs and all the rest of them, now their family’s they all know me as “Dad”, but not in my family.

[1:40] CEL: Tell me about your first few days at sea, what do you recall of the passage?

AE: Ah – it’s quite a long time ago actually.

CEL: Yeah, I know

AE: Well, no, it’s just getting to know the ship I suppose really, and being on that Danish ship we had people – stewards looking after us. It wasn’t like a BAS ship sort of thing, we had to do the washing up but the meal was served by stewards, they did the cleaning up and all the rest of it, which was quite...quite good.

[2:12] CEL: So that was the change I guess when you got to the Antarctica, where was the first port of call?

AE: Well after the Falklands it would be ...went down to Hope Bay, picked up some dogs, then South Georgia I think, pick up the seals, after we shot them.

CEL: You had to shoot a seal did you?

AE: Yes, it was a regular thing really, picking up seals from South Georgia, we had about a hundred of them on the foredeck...

CEL: Dead?

AE: Dead... and smelling.

[2:53] CEL: Had you shot anything before?

AE: I didn't actually shoot, it was people off the ship shot them... the crew, bosun, whatever.

[3:03] CEL: I presume that was a bit of a rude awakening was it?

AE: Yeah, it was a bit really, yeah. You had to gut them all, yeah – and then towed them out to the ship, all a bit messy but everybody was doing it, so I mean... 's alright.

[3:19] CEL: Did it cross your mind that this was not why you'd signed up for the job?

AE: Well no, it was all part of it really, if you're gonna go down to the Antarctic and you're gonna run dogs, they need seal so you got to get them from somewhere. We had to go round the other side of the bay though, so that the magistrates wife wouldn't see us – what we were doing, so we were out of sight, sort of thing.

[3:44] CEL: You didn't want to upset nobility?

AE: No

CEL: Never the less, if they hadn't explained in advance that you'd have to do that, it must have been...

AE: Well, everybody was involved in it, all the FIDs on the ship ..., were in to it, sort of thing. So you know - it wasn't just you were doing it by yourself, it was new to everybody.

[4:10] CEL: You'd been allocated to Halley, hadn't you?

AE: Yea, yea, yea.

CEL: And you were going to be there for how long?

AE: Two years, on base yea.

CEL: Two winters or one winter?

AE Two winters, yes.

[4:24] CEL: Two winters...so ... tell me about your first impressions of Halley in 1963.

AE: Well, it was 63 by the time I got there. Usually...the ship usually got into Halley about the 10th of January, something like that. Well, I mean the first impression was

just the cliffs, about 90 ft high, and sea ice in the bay sort of thing, which we tied up to, or the ship tied up to., so people had to go over the side and dig holes to put

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AE: (ctd) the sea ice...ah... they used big timbers actually, dug big holes to put the timbers in and put a wire round them, and used those as a mooring for the ship.

[0:15] CEL: And would that take a long time?

AE: Well it took a few hours, yea, yea. They put you ashore and then they sailed round for a bit, until we'd got them all in and then they came back and threw the lines ashore and tied the ship up.

[0:37] CEL: Alright, OK. And then the showed you Halley base, this would be Halley one?

AE: Yes, Halley one, yes. It was about two miles of sea ice and then a ramp up to the top of the cliffs, and then the base was only about two miles away at that time.

[0:57] CEL: So you arrived by sledge, or would you walk?

AE: Sledge, I think we all put on our sledge harness, and went up there. But I mean you were... allocated jobs before that really. The ship had to be unloaded and you were all involved in that, and they did working for 24 hours because it was 24 hour daylight, so you were divided into two twelve hour shifts really, so we didn't see a lot of the base for quite a time.

CEL : Days?

AE: Well, I mean you got backward and forward but you hadn't got time to do much, just a matter of taking a load up there, unload it and going back to the ship – for the next one.

[1:34] CEL: Right... that was a big job was it?

AE: Oh yes, went on for about six days I think, five, six days.

[1:44] CEL: Where were you putting all the stuff when you got to the base, leaving it on the...?

AE: Well a lot of it was just laid out on the ice, on the snow, and marked with stakes to show where it was in case we got a blow and it disappeared. Ah...well a lot of the perishables went inside and that sort of thing.

[2:10] CEL: So at some time in that first [???] you saw your new home?

AE: Well yes, yes,

CEL: Under the ice.

AE: we had a quick look round, yes.

[2:15] CEL: What were your impressions Alan, 'cause this is all...

AE: It's a bit rough, actually

CEL: In what way?

AE: Well the base had only been built - three years I think, but when it was built, they hadn't sent the bolts down to bolt it all together. Ah...I forget who built it, Harboroughs, I think, in Leicester. And they forgot to send the bolts and ah, it had to, a lot of the panels and the rest of it had to be put to... they had quite a number of six inch nails on bases luckily, so it was put together with six inch nails.

CEL: So these are...

AE: Once it was built they couldn't get the bolts in for them, it was a bit late by then. So it ah... wasn't the best of bases.

[3:06] CEL: Describe the faults as you saw them.

AE: Well, the roof was already leaking, the heat from the hut - it had a cavern over it, an ice cavern, but the heat from the hut was causing melt, going on to the roof and then dripping down through holes in the roof - well not holes but through the panels and that sort of thing.,

CEL: Gaps

AE: Gaps, yes. And, it wasn't very nice at all really. They had strings coming down from wherever there was a leak, running down so that the water would run down the string into a can, instead of just dripping everywhere.

[3:53] CEL: So at least the bunks were dry were they?

AE: Sorry?

CEL: The bunks were dry were they?

AE: Well, the whole base was leaking really, but the bunk room wasn't too bad actually. But everywhere else was.

[4:07] CEL: At this point did you consider changing your mind?

AE: No, no, not much point really. The ship had already gone, sort of thing. You have to make the best of it.

[4:20] CEL: Yes, but it was probably not as good as you expected?

AE: Well no we didn't expect it to be raining inside the hut, no.

But, I mean they put guttering up and did all sort of things to channel the water away, sort of thing. Then the next year they sent a few tile roofing felt down, which was to put on the roof to stop it really, but some of it got put up, but a lot of it didn't because you couldn't really get up there.

[4:56] CEL: What was your first...you were set to work as a mechanic on... on what?

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AE: Muskeg tractors mainly.

[0:03] CEL: Had you seen one before?

AE: No, I'd seen a picture

CEL: You knew which end was which?

AE: Oh yes, yes, I knew that, yes. I knew.. ah.. well nothing complicated about it really just a small tracked vehicle with Chrysler industrial engine in it, steered by two handles. A bit awkward steering because there's no brake on them, it was just a ... it was a brake actually, there was no clutch on it, so as soon as you pulled the handle back to brake that track you lost power, so it was a bit of a job to drive them really.

CEL: So you couldn't steer if you were coasting?

AE: Couldn't what?

CEL: Couldn't steer if you were coasting?

AE: Oh, no, no... well there's no coasting, no. I mean they're powered all the time really.

[1:08] CEL: Did you think they were fit for purpose or...

AE: Well they had to be didn't they, that's all they'd got really

CEL: Yes

AE: I think we had four I think, at the time, two new ones – that's right – two new ones went in on the ship, the Trista Dan, with us, which had been built in Totton – Southampton – with big cabs on, which we modified, well you got to really – that's part of being down there is modifying everything that comes in – you know.

[1:41] CEL: So what did you have to do to the Muskegs?

AE: Ah we but two bunks on the... the cabs at that big that the just a waste of space really so we built two bunks behind the driver's seat and the driver and his mate slept in there and used it to cook in and allsorts – just lived in the cab rather than put a tent up.

CEL: Was that your idea?

AE: Well yeah...

CEL: Did you have to ... – you have the idea quite quickly then who do you have to talk to about it before you could do it or anything.

AE: No nobody really – I was the mechanic there and that was it!

CEL: You just did it?

AE: Well yes – you might have spoken to the base commander, but he wasn't a mechanic so he didn't know what was involved really.

CEL: But it changed the way of working because they would have to take a tent otherwise?

AE: Ah to what?

CEL: Did it change the way of working?

AE: Not really no...

CEL: ...for field work?

AE: Oh yes, in the field, yes, it meant you hadn't got to put a tent up and all the rest of it, yes. It was a big help really, yes.

[2:58] CEL: How reliable were they?

AE: Well very good really, once we modified them a bit, you know, made them better. We – well I didn't have many breakdowns – although coming back we... we were using these two new ones with the big cabs, and coming back there was a squeak started, coming back from the tongues, they found out it was a wheel bearing on one of the vehicles, so it was a matter of – we had to strip the track off and the wheel bearing had seized onto the shaft. So we were stuck there for a couple of days while we eventually managed to get the bearing off the shaft. Then we found out that the spares that we got were for the old vehicles, and they were different bearing to the new ones. Nobody had told us the bearings had been changed so it was a matter of changing... I don't know if you know anything about a Muskeg... its got six...eight wheels and a track running round them, so we had to take the middle wheels off and put them on the back, to get the track running round. It worked all right but it was a bit of a pain at the time – we didn't know what we were going to do really.

CEL: so you had to operate with less wheels.

AE: Yes – worked all right – went along, yeah.

CEL: And all this was done in the field?

AE: Oh yeah, yeah, it was pretty cold I remember that.

[4:44] CEL: Did you get a reputation for being able to fix things?

AE: I don't know, I suppose so yeah, yeah. Well it's a matter of... you've got to haven't you if you are there, you're the mechanic – you've got nobody

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AE(ctd) : else to rely on really. You've got a diesel mech, but he's busy enough with his own jobs.

[0:08] CEL: Generators and so on... so what else did you have to fix, what did people bring,, did people bring things to you?

AE: Oh yes, anything on base really in those days

CEL: Such as?

AE: There were just two mechanics, no electrician, well if they wanted anything modifying or making for the base, sort of thing, they came to us.

CEL: Can you think of jobs you did?

AE: Seemed to be quite a few plumbing jobs, we hadn't got any sophisticated plumbing at all really, it was just a melt tank and pipes coming out of that – they seemed to leak quite a lot and we had to modify that. There wasn't a lot of things on base that needed repairs like that. Repair the stove in the kitchen – but it was just jobs that needed doing and somebodies got to do them.

[1:18] CEL: And you mention there was no electrician so did that fall to you?

AE: We had a few electrical jobs to do, yes.

CEL: Had you had any training in electrics?

AE: The obvious bits, yes – you know, could put a plug on and things like that...but you soon learn when you get a few shocks.

[1:39] CEL: OK. Let's talk a bit more about the Muskegs, because apart from maintaining them you also did some field work in them as well?

AE: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CEL: Is there a particularly memorable trip?

AE: Well the first trip – after we'd been there a couple of weeks, because there was nobody...well there was once person one base who'd got some field work – field experience rather – it was decided it would be better if the people who were going to go out in the field, the drivers and the dog drivers and whatever, would do the trip into the – away from base just to get some experience really. We set off with two

Muskegs, and one dog team I think – yeah one dog team – and it was just chaotic really, we didn't know what we were doing, it was like somebodies circus – whatever's the name going off in different directions and whatever. But it was a good job we did that because it showed up such a lot of problems with the Muskegs, these things that had been built in Totton in Southampton. The engine sits in the centre of the chassis, and they'd insulated the.. this box, chassis box with polystyrene and stuck it on the sides. Well we found out the as soon as that got wet in the field and froze again – got wet with heat from the engine and drift going – it – the water the next time it thawed had nowhere to go, they'd blocked all the holes up, all the drain holes in the bottom and that sort of thing, so we spent quite a bit of time in the field chiselling this frozen polystyrene off the side of the engine well sort of thing. Lying on your ... with the engine there lying on the ah....quite a job that.

CEL: You were lying on the ice were you?

AE: Yes. And they'd also fitted six bladed fans to the engine, I don't know why cause they were already fitted with four bladed fans – and they'd reversed the blow of the fan, and originally it used to bring air in through the radiator, so if there was any drift there it stuck on the radiator and the snow sort of melted and that was OK. But with them reversing the thrust of the blow of the fan it drew drift and air in through the side of the engine cowling and it just covered the complete engine. It was amazing it was there was ice all over it, even on the manifold, you know with all the heat there. So I thought well the only thing we can do is take the fans off, and cut a couple of blades off, so we cut three blades off and made it in to a three bladed fan, which improved it a bit, but

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AE(ctd): we were still drawing air in the wrong way, sort of thing. So for all it was a good job we went out in the field then, cause if these had showed up when we – it gave us an opportunity when back on base to do all these jobs before we went out in the field proper.

CEL: So this was a trial run in that regard?

AE: Well yes, it was a good idea really yes.

[0:22] CEL: Were you surprised at how badly designed they were?

AE: Well I suppose in those days BAS had no technical people attached to them and they were just relying on Crown Agents really, engineers and Crown Agents, who didn't know much about the Antarctic I don't think.

CEL: So you got the impression they'd never been there did you?

AE: Well they hadn't been there no, no, they're just buyers really the Crown Agents in those days – used to buy for all these different countries round the world really.

CEL: So was there any way of feeding this information back to the Crown Agents so they wouldn't make so..?

AE: Yeah, I think they got the message, yeah.

CEL: how did they get the message?

AE: Well, through BAS HQ, in London at that time.

CEL: You'd write a report would you?

AE: Yeah – most people wrote a report of some description at the end of their year, sort of thing. But I mean there was nothing you could do until the end of the year. There was no... well you had a, what they call a four port and a month port went back, but the radio was still on 'da-da-da-da' morse code in those days so you couldn't say much really, or else you might get the wrath of the radio op, you know, given this big spiel to type out.

[1:49] CEL: You say it was chaotic this first dummy run, this test run?

AE: Yes, we were only out about three weeks I think, two weeks, but it's a good job it happened really.

CEL: Was it chaotic in more than just technical terms? Was it chaotic in human terms?

AE: Well the two lads with the dogs, they – one bent down to – they'd stopped and one bent down to do something with his skis, and the other bent down at the same time and the dogs went, and they chased them for about six miles before they caught them up, and they'd only stopped because they were having a fight – so that was a bit chaotic really, they weren't very pleased about that. But I mean that taught them that you don't both leave the dogs – without one of you at least keeping an eye on them.

CEL: So it sounds like there was a lot of inexperience.

AE: Well there was yes, nobody had been out in the field before, no – just one person actually.

CEL: There's only one person doing a second trip?

AE: Well there doing – from the previous year, yes.

CEL: Right. So sounds like they were ill prepared then?

AE: Well, I don't know, you were on base and ... I don't know really. I don't say they were ill prepared, no. Just the way it happened really.

CEL: Did it get better over the years?

AE: Ah yes – had to, didn't it? Yes it got better, yes it got a lot better. We had people with more experience. And once you've done one year you know, well you think you

know it all, but obviously you don't – and you teach the people coming in then in your second year.

[3:41] CEL: So having modified your Muskegs and realised how to do all this there was an expedition wasn't there to – I may have got this wrong – was it to Tottens?

AE: Tottens, yes.

CEL: So you named part of the Antarctic after the company in...

AE: No that was a co-incidence actually. This firm in Southampton named Totten Engineering – although I think there must have been some tie-up with the Antarctic because they named these two vehicles Stancomb and Wills – well Stancomb Wills is a promon..... – what do you call them..?

CEL: Promontory.

AE: Promontory – something like that – which is higher up than Halley Bay, sort of thing, up the coast. So somebody must have known something, but the Totten name was just a co-incidence really.

[4:34] CEL: So what do you remember about that first long trip, your first proper experience of the Antarctic away from base?

AE: Well it was 240 miles to the nearest mountain, which were the Tottens, from base. We had no compasses or anything to – well we had compasses but they wouldn't, you couldn't

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AE(ctd): set them up in the vehicle, because as soon as you started they were sitting on top of the axle, and as soon as you started and the axle started turning then the compass wouldn't... you couldn't fix them anywhere else really.

CEL: So the axle is generating electrical field?

AE: Well not electrical...

CEL: Vibrations?

AE: Yes, so we had to set up a system on the vehicle to put a mirror on the front windscreen with a line on it, and welded a piece of rod onto the exhaust pipe which was behind the vehicle, behind the back window, and the driver looked through the mirror, sighted the line up on the mirror onto the line on the exhaust pipe, and then on to the following vehicle went and travelled in the tracks of the first vehicle. So to start with the driver, your spare man went outside and set the Muskeg up with a compass, sighting along it, so it was running on the bearing, so and then the second ...

CEL: you were pointing it in the right direction?

AE: yeah, well you needed to be, yeah. And the second vehicle went in the exact tracks of the first vehicle and stayed about 30 yards behind, so if the driver of the first one looked through the mirror, sighted on the exhaust pipe and on the back vehicle, he could more or less drive a straight line.

CEL: Was that your idea?

AE: Well it sort of – not mine particularly no – sort of accumulated, you know.

CEL: But it's a good example of problem solving isn't it?

AE: Well, yes. Well they had to do something really. But I mean once you got going we put a flag in every two miles – they called a 'Glacio flag' – and measured it so they could measure it again next time they went past., for accumulation, find out what accumulation was on that particular area, sort of thing. And because the surface is up and down, you could look back, sight back, and you could perhaps see one or two flags and you could move your bearing about and just keep a straight line. I worked out very well actually, yes. Once we got...we could see the bit... we got within about 100, no less than that, about 70 miles or so you could see the mountains so you could aim for them. So that was a bit easier.

[2:58] CEL: Was that something which was corrected in the second season – that system. Did the compasses work second season, second year?

AE: No, we, well the route was already in so that was OK. Once the route was in with a flag every two miles, made life a lot easier. We could just stay on the route and go.

CEL: That was the only survey work you were doing was it; those routes to the mountains?

AE: Well, yes – we had surveyors with us and we put those in the mountains. They stayed in the mountains with Geologists for four months I think it was.

CEL: Ah right OK.

AE: We came back and resupplied and did another trip.

CEL: Were you laying depots as well?

AE: Yeah, there was one already put in – somebody – they'd put on one in the previous year at eighty miles from base. So that was used – a depot of fuel and rations.

CEL : there was a chap called Neville Mann, in your first year – what happened to him?

AE: They were ah – there was two of them training dogs, they had small dog sledge down there, they were training pups actually, and they put ...harnessed them up to this smallish sledge and put a bit of weight on it, and they were going from the base, down the ramp, on to the sea ice, and along about a mile – mile and a half – and up another

ramp back on to the top of the cliff and back to base, sort of thing. And they were usually running together, but this particular day, they both set off together, but when they got down on the sea ice, it was blowing quite

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AE: (ctd) quite,,drifting quite a lot, and they missed one another, and the other chap, I forget his name now, he came back to base, expecting that Nev had already... would be there or would be not far behind him, sort of thing, ahh..but he never turned up, so he went back on to the sea ice but decided that the wind had got up quite a lot and it wasn't safe to go down there. So he went along the top of the cliff to the other ramp and couldn't see anything, so he came back to base again but...so they decided that they'd mount a rescue party so they got a muskeg and went down to the cliff top, and by the time they got down there the sea ice had all gone out. And they looked around and couldn't see and signs of dogs or sledges or Nev or anybody else, sort of thing. So we came back to base and the wind got up then and we couldn't get back down to the cliffs for another two days, it just wasn't safe to go anywhere. So after two days...after wind dropped down a bit, they went down again and did a big search along the top of the cliff, in case he'd manage to get up. But we never found anything so it was quite tragic really.

CEL: He was never seen again?

AE: Sorry?

CEL: He was never seen again?

AE: No, no. Nor the dogs nor anything. So not the best...

CEL: What was the theory? What did you assume had happened to him in the end?

AE: Well, the ice had just broken up, I don't know, he'd either gone with it, or gone through it, or whatever.

[2:02] CEL: Were there any lessons learnt from that ?

AE: Don't go on the sea ice when it's blowing! No not really.

CEL: You were already aware...

AE: Yeah.. they were just taking a chance by going down on the sea ice when it was blowing really, although it got worse as they were down there. It wasn't too bad when they left base, it was...yeah, quite tragic.

CEL: Was there any change of working pattern as a result of that? Did the base commander change the way that things - the way...

AE: Well, I mean the sea ice had gone so we certainly didn't go down there no, and it took another month before it formed again. Not really no, you just take more precautions – you know.

CEL: This wasn't really a serious expedition though was it, it was a..?

AE: Oh no, no, no. They were just training, just running along the sea ice and back again. But it was something that had to be done.

[3:00] CEL: What was the... how long did the mood last back at base? Did it go on for weeks?

AE: Yeah, I suppose, I suppose it did really, yeah. They built a monument to him and things like that, and he had a service. Built a monument on a sledge, so it could be moved, because with everything down there you build it on the snow and it just gets covered up so they had a small sledge there which they built this monument on, from bricks that were spare down there and that's been going for years and years and years really. Have you seen that?

AW: Still there yes. With more names on.

AE: Yes, there is actually yeah.

CEL: More names have been added to it?

AW: Yes.

[3:57] CEL: So this was...this was a bit of a little lesson for you was it, in terms of how dangerous the Antarctic could be?

AE: I suppose so. It was... it was before anybody had gone out in the field really, it was in the Autumn time. He was a... he was a surveyor. So that pulled the base together a bit really.

CEL: In what way? You mean just shared loss?

AE: Yeah, that's right, yeah, yeah.

[4:41] CEL: OK. You were there through the summer, the Antarctic summer, and then the winter closed in again. How did your life pattern change from summer to winter?

CD 1 : TRACK 10 [4:59]

AE: Well obviously you can't go out as much, it's dark outside. We had quite a lot of work to do really in the garage doing these two Muskegs, so they were ready for the field again. We had the winter months to prepare them, because we wouldn't be going out till the following September I think, September 10th we found there was enough light to travel. So we needed about eight hours really before it was worth travelling. So we were kept quite busy in the workshop getting these vehicles ready really.

[0:49] CEL: Did you have all the spares you needed or were you having to create them?

AE: Well we had a lot of spares, but there was a lot of the old spares wouldn't fit the new vehicles, although we didn't find that out till later.

CEL: You were having to manufacture parts were you?

AE: Well not really, no, we hadn't got... we'd got a small lathe, but it was only a small thing we couldn't make anything of any size for them. A lot of it was just welding and that sort of thing.

[1:27] CEL: What about social life in the winter – presumably there was more time for socialising, partying?

AE: Well, we had a... decided we'd have a party each month, for the people that had a birthday that month sort of thing. So that was quite a... quite a night yes.

CEL: Can you describe it?

AE: Well it was a big – it was decided that whoever's birthday it was would have to make a speech, which wasn't very good. And there was a big meal put on, in those days we had party boxes, don't know if we had twelve or not, would we have twelve?

AW: There was twelve man rations in a pack

AE: one a month, which consisted of various bits and pieces, extra rations and things that you wouldn't normally have on base. And we had extra beer and spirits.

AW: Quart of sherry in the party box as well.

AE: That's right yes.

CEL: A quart of sherry?

AE: Yes and boxes of biscuits and stuff like that, which all made the party go quite well yes.

[2:41] CEL: So you must have had a birthday down there?

AE: Yes, me, yes.

CEL: In the middle of winter.

AE: Well no, no not the middle of winter. Well yeah.

CEL: Early winter?

AE: Middle of winters 21st of June. And that was a big celebration as well, mid-winters day. Went on for a few days, yeah.

[3:00] CEL: What happened – tell me about that? Was there a party box marked 'midwinters day'?

AE: No, I think they just took some of the other stuff out I think. Because during the summer you didn't party too much. People off base...

CEL: Where there any strange ceremonies attached to any of this?

AE: No not really no. No I don't think so.

CEL: Oh, OK. Just basically men getting drunk was it?

AE: Well, yes and ah... I suppose it was really yes. We had a bit of a sing-song if anyone could play an instrument sort of thing.

AW: You had your mid-winter present.

AE: Yeah, that was a thing as well yes.

[3:46] CEL: The presents, tell me about those?

AE: Ahh...I don't know if we had them in the first year actually. We had them the second time. The base commander, when he was... before he went down, when he was working in the office, got in touch with all the relatives, the parents of the people that were down there, or all going down there and said would they send a small present of some description, what they thought was ... the person would like or not like, and he would ah – he kept them till midwinters day, nobody else knew about them at all really, and then he brought them out and said “oh there's presents here for you from your parents and relatives and whatever”, you know. It was quite a nice surprise really, yes.

CEL: Were you ever lonely, or homesick?

AE: No, not really no. Well I wasn't, I mean other people might have been, I can't remember being homesick no. I'd been away from home quite a bit beforehand sort of thing.

CEL: And, did you have to do cooking, were you on rota?

AE: Yes on rota Yes.

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CEL: What were your culinary skills like Alan?

AE: Not too good.

CEL: Is that what people told you?

AE: Spaghetti Bolognese and stuff like that. I wasn't a great cook really. We had a different system there – we had different people were on – you know about gash –

two gash hands and a cook for that day sort of thing. So.. no the cooks had a day off on Sunday didn't they – so somebody was picked to do the Sunday cooking, and there was quite a lot of volunteers really. So if you didn't want to do it then you could get out of it, you know. I wasn't too keen on in actually.

[0:53] CEL: From those first two winters down south, tell me about one or two of the characters you remember who may have... who stick in your memory.

AE: Well. Barry, Barry the diesel mech. He was an Australian actually, about six foot four.

CEL Barry?

AE: I can't pronounce his name actually,

CEL: Alright..

AE: It's a name that's from a long German origin.

CEL: We'll look it up.

AE: Yeah. He was quite a character really. He was on a – doing a gap year in Europe actually, at the time when he was recruited, and he was in...happened to be in London when he saw this advert for ah – this before I saw mine actually – for diesel mechanics and electricians and things like that. And he applied for this job, and got an interview and they said they would take him, but they had to get special permission from the Commonwealth Office, to take this Australian. First time they had anybody from...ah not from the UK sort of thing. Anyhow he went down and typical Australian, he hadn't ... your advised to take a... in those days your advised to take a suit with you, well shirt and ties and things like that, you tended to dress up on a Saturday night on the ship on the way down, and also to take a suit because in those days you would be interviewed by the ah...oh - how do you pronounce it?

AW: No idea

[2:37] CEL: Krachenbuhl

AE: Yes, something like that.

CEL: Krachenbuhl.

AE: ...be interviewed by the ahh..what was the ...

CEL: The Governor at Stanley

AE: Governor at Stanley yes, sorry yes.

CEL: That's alright.

AE: Governor at Stanley, and everybody had to dress up and go meet him there and you had about quarter of an hour or so with him, and he asked you where you come from and all the rest of it, you know all these sort of things they ask you. And then at night they had a cocktail party for all the ship, and he went up there and drunk as many gins as he could sort of thing. They were quite weak actually but as the years progressed they got stronger as you got to know people, you know. And he went up there for his interview, he hadn't got a suit, he hadn't got a decent shirt, hadn't got a tie, people round the ship were kitting him out – he borrowed somebody's suit, somebody's jacket, somebody's tie, and walked in there dressed up like this - 'hi governor' – typical Australian, you know. He went down very well actually, he became quite good friends I think.

[3:56] CEL: You came back home for a couple of years didn't you – you did your first two years in Halley.

AE Oh yes, sorry – yes. Did two and a half years down there then came back.

CEL: So what was... what happened when you got back? What were you doing – did you leave BAS at that point?

AE: Yes for a time, about twelve months I think. I went down...I went to - back to the same job I had before. And then I applied to go down again and they...I was accepted, and they said do you fancy coming working in the office for a time, so I went down to London and worked in the office for a time and then ah.. doing various things, office work and doing ordering, checking engineering indents and things like that. And then went down again for the second time.

CEL: How had things changed in the...in the interim...

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CEL: (ctd) ...at Halley?

AE: Well, they'd built a new base.

CEL: Number two?

AE: Yeah, Grillage Village it was called yeah.

CEL: Grillage Village?

AE: Grillage Village, yeah, because it was laid on steel grillage and then timbers on top. In fact they'd started building that when... in that first year, in the '63 year. No they hadn't, sorry, I'm getting the years mixed up. Sorry, it's the '67 year. Yeah, they started building that, that year.

CEL: Where you involved in building it?

AE: Yes, to a certain extent yeah, with the building team went down, about six builders I think, went down and they were more involved in than we were really.

They built it about two and a half miles inland from the base we were living in. so once they'd got a couple of huts up there the builders move up there then. I think till then they'd been living on the ship, actually yeah. Two ships went down.

[1:07] CEL: And so... it was finished while you were there?

AE: Well the outer skins were put up and all the rest of it, yeah, but there was a lot of work inside the base to be finished, and it wasn't until about half way through the following year that the old base moved up entirely to the new one, sort of thing.

CEL: Describe that process to me, what was the ... what were the great advantages of Halley II over Halley I? Obviously the lack of drips?

AE: Yes, it wasn't raining inside, no. We had a lot better accommodation, cause the bunk rooms were bigger, had a big lounge, and there was quite a lot of people there, actually, there was thirty odd... first year there was twenty four, and the second year – that's right – there was forty people, but at the time we were running two bases, sort of thing, then everybody moved up to the newly finished base there were forty people on base.

CEL: was it cosy?

AE: yes it was quite good actually. Yeah, yeah.

[2:18] CEL: Was there an improvement in your workshops?

AE: Bigger, better, yeah,

CEL: Had you been involved in ordering for the workshop?

AE: Oh yeah, yeah.

CEL: So back in London you were feathering your nest down South were you?

AE: That's right, yeah. But there was a limit on what you could... how much you could spend sort of thing.

CEL: What did you order that was a step forward for the new workshop?

AE: Well, more spares! That year as well two new IH's were going down for the first time.

CEL: The IH's?

AE: IH's – International Harvesters – tractors.

CEL: Tractors?

AE: Yeah, so we had to order spares for them as well, so that was new to the base, yeah.

[3:02] CEL: Tell me about those, were they any different from the Muskegs?

AE: Oh, yeah, bigger, heavier, seven tonne actually, each one. Slower, although the Muskegs weren't very fast out on the bondoo. These ah... these could pull a heavier load, and they also had a blade on the front, a bulldozing blade, and a big winch on the back.

CEL: So they were better in many respects were they?

AE: Yeah, but they weren't as easy to drive as the Muskegs really, no.

CEL: Were they easier to maintain?

AE: Well, yes, because they were heavier and bigger, things didn't wear out as quickly, sort of thing. Ahh ...but we did have a few problems with them really, had tracks up, some of the tracks....they had very wide tracks on them, and quite heavy really for the machine, and they had – on the tracks they got big springs, rebound springs, and they tended to break, which is quite a job to replace them with them stripping all the track out and the idler wheel and various things – it was just a heavier job really.

CEL: But they were more reliable in the field?

AE: Yeah, I suppose so, yeah.

CEL: You sound doubtful about that?

AE: Well, they were more reliable, they didn't ah...when we'd driven out to the field we had no problems with them at all really

[4:37] CEL: Whilst you'd been back in the UK there'd been a tragedy with a Muskeg going down into a ravine – a crevasse and I think three men were lost?

AE: That's right, yeah.

CEL: And you addressed this problem when you got back did you?

AE: I knew – I knew two of them, I actually worked in the London office with them really, Dow Wild, who was a Geologist.

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[ctd] AE: and the doctor. Yeah it was quite a...quite a tragedy actually yeah.

[0:11] CEL: So you were able to do something about it for the future?

AE: Well you mean as far as the vehicles were concerned?

CEL: Yeah.

AE: Well yeah, we thought about it and wondered what we could do, it seem that the Muskeg broke into a crevasse, but it usually went three quarters of the way across, and then went backwards, all the weight was at the back, and dropped in that way

CEL: Rear first?

AE: Yeah, and because the – the Muskeg wasn't very high sort of thing, off the ground, it was only about three foot – three foot six or something, so it would slide down a smallish crevasse once it started going – so we wondered if we could extend the body of the vehicle sort of thing. There was a lot of scaffold tube on base, that had been used in the erection of the new base, so we decided to build a ... a frame round the back of the vehicle to extend the size of it really, not put much more weight on it but to extend the size of it, and that ... that in fact did save one vehicle from going down, yeah.

[1:39] CEL: so you were making a sort of frame – rather like a roll bar?

AE: It's up there on that picture.

CEL: Oh, yes.

AE: Just to extend the size of it really.

CEL: So you would require a bigger crevasse for it to go into.

AE: Yeah, that's right, with a bit of luck, yeah. And it did actually save one. And we also...by that time we got bigger better sledges, we'd designed a bigger sledge to go behind the Muskegs, previously we were using Moorhands, which were all wood sledge, and we designed one which had more steel in it, like a BAS cargo sledge, and it had a steel frame out at the front, so we put crossed ropes...wires in the front of the sledge to the back of the Muskeg, so that would help if the Muskeg went down, because where the...when the lads were lost, the A-frame which attached the sledge to the Muskeg, broke and if that had have held, it would have held the Muskeg up. So we decided to put these extra cross wires on in the hope that if anything did happen then that would also keep it on the surface, yeah.

[3:12] CEL: Was this...these modifications that you made, you were constantly being inventive, it seems to me?

AE: Well, yeah. Look at the vehicle and stand there and think 'what the hell can I do now?', sort of thing, you know.

CEL: Well, my next question was would you... did you feel you were being stretched as an engineer?

AE: Oh no, no, no. Nobody was saying 'do something' or anything, you know. It was just to try and make them safer vehicles really.

CEL: So it was all routine, obvious things to do?

AE: Well it was when you saw it, when you saw what had happened and why it had happened, yeah.

CEL: So you didn't have sleepless nights thinking how could...

AE: No, no, no, no, no. Didn't have many long nights to sleep and dream sort of thing, you know.

[3:58] CEL: There was a trip out to reach the Shackletons wasn't there, which I think you were involved in, in a big way?

AE: Yeah, that was later on, that was in '68 yeah.

CEL: Tell me about that....what was the point?

AE: Well, the previous year, '67, there'd done a big ah... the dogs had been out with the Muskegs, to another mountain range, which I forget the name of at the moment

AW: Therons.

AE: Therons.

CEL: Therons, OK.

AE: That's right, and it was decided then that we would try and get to the Shackleton mountains, which were the next range further on, which involved going up the Slessor glacier, which is from the Therons to the...we had two dog teams...three dog teams, were it at the time?...two dog teams...four dog teams, sorry four dog teams –

CD 1 : TRACK 14 [4:43]

[ctd] AE: out at the time. And they were recy-ing further on, sort of thing. And they would go so far and turn in to try and get – there was a big crevasse area running alongside the mountain range – and each time they would turn back, it was just impossible to get through it. So they would go on further and further, we were following them up slowly with the Muskegs, but up the Slessor glacier its quite a climb actually, we had to double head – which means put two Muskegs, one towing the other one and one sledge behind. So that took us some time actually, we would go so far, 100 miles, then have to go back for the other sledge, and carry on again. In the meantime they were recy-ing further and further on. It got to a point where we ... we had to decide whether – well we to make a decision – we couldn't go much further because we were running out of fuel, we had to think of fuel going back. So we... the Muskegs came back with two of the dog teams and we'd have two dog teams in the mountains, to try and find a route through. And they found a route, as it was we'd come from the Therons, we'd gone direct from the Therons from the crossing point on to the inland ice, but then we'd gone onto the Shackletons, but they'd decided it we'd put a line in straight from the crossing point to where they'd terminated and start back, we could – didn't need to go round the Therons at all, we could save a few – well a hundred miles or so. So that was put in, but then we got a message from

London to say that there wouldn't be any more travel the following year. The Americans had decided that they would fly in two dog teams from Halley bay into the Shackleton mountains, because they were doing some work out there as well. And there would be no need for us to go, so there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing with the telexes and things, and more or less said that 'what we got to do then', sort of thing, 'where we going?'. Sir Vivian in his wisdom, he was still director then, said that it would be a good idea if we had depots along the route so if anything happened to the aeroplane, or anything else, or the Yanks couldn't get in – he didn't trust the Yanks too much I don't think – if they couldn't get in and pick the dog teams up when they'd finished, and they had to come back, we needed depots in. So it was decided that we would go to the Shackletons after all. So we put together two Muskegs, two IHS, it was the first time the IHS had been out in the field really, and six...five... no six I think, six people went out, with...we had a full load of thirty two tons...no twenty nine tons, sorry...twenty nine tons of various things. It was the longest trip that BAS... longest unsupported trip that BAS had ever done.

[4:02] CEL: And you went did you?

AE: Yeah, I went, yeah. I needed to go! Yes I went yeah. We had ah...five of us went up, had a fantastic trip yeah, and we eventually got to the Shackleton range, yeah.

CEL: Were they beautiful, the mountains?

AE: Well it was beautiful to see it for the first time, yeah, as you come over this ridge, you've been grounds undulating, undulating, eventually you come to a height you can see it, in the distance, you know, and it's something to ah...

CEL: We'll just take a pause should we Alan.

CD 2: TRACK 1 [4:01]

CEL: This is Alan Etchells, recorded at his home in Ellesmere Port by Chris Eldon Lee, on Monday the 15th June, 2009. Alan Etchells, Part 2.

CEL: Where the Americans trying to get one over on the British?

AE: No, I don't think so, I think it was just the fact that Fuchs didn't trust the Americans to come back and pick our lads up, sort of thing. And he didn't want them stuck out there with no way of getting back. That's why he proposed that we should put a route in, straight from the crossing, ah straight to the Shackletons, sort of thing.

CEL: So it wasn't a two fingers gesture, it was...

AE: No, I don't think so no.

AW: Safety was his intention, safety was...

AE: Well, could be yeah.

CEL: He strikes me as the sort of person who wouldn't be messed around with – he'd get what he wanted?

AE: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

[1:04] CEL: OK. Let's go back slightly. You were going to the Therons,

AE: That was ah... after the... Totnes runs, then when I wasn't...when I was back in the UK, the trip went out to the Therons. And they surveyed out and geologised and that, and that took a couple of years I suppose. And then when I went the first trip, I went back, we went via the Therons, cause they thought that route would be the best to get to the Shackletons, but in fact it turned out not to be really, going up the Slessor glacier was a bit of a poor outcome.

CEL: Hmm, was that when you began to run out of sugar?

AE: No...that was another time. That was we...that was another trip.

[2:02] CEL: Tell me about that.

AE: Well, it was just the fact that we were getting a bit short on sugar, and I think I was sharing a tent with ahh...

AW: Pete Noble

AE: Pete Noble. And I said we'd need to cut down on the sugar ration, we were getting a bit short. I think everyone should cut down by half. So...he only had one sugar lump, and at the time I was taking seven. So if he cut down by half, he'd be nothing...I don't think it actually went that far – I think I cut down by one or two – amazing how much sugar you took when you were out there really.

CEL: Hmmm...

AE: Same with butter as well. You'd just...we'd these hard tack biscuits – you'd just coat those with butter, you know, thick.

[3:08] CEL: To make them palatable, or because of the energy?

AE: You needed the energy, yeah, yeah.

CEL: Fats.

AE: Yeah. In fact we didn't get through all our butter, even so, the doggie men used to come along and ahh, take it – our surplus.

CEL: For the dogs?

AE: Yeah, well not for the dogs, for themselves.

CEL: Oh really?

AE: Yeah.

AW: Every man food box was for twenty man days had twenty pound – oh no – two pound of butter.

AE: Yeah, Yeah. And you could get through that, two of you in ten days.

[3:38] CEL: Were you actually in charge of these trips then?

AE: No, not the ah... not the Shackleton one no, that was Pete Noble

CEL: But you were driving?

AE: Yeah, I was driving, yeah,

CEL: You were driving the International Harvester?

AE: Myself and J.C. – Johnny Carter, yeah.

CD 2: TRACK 2 [5:00]

CEL: Were there any...any tricks of the road, to keep them rolling smoothly and to keep them fuelled properly?

AE: No, not really. We had sort of ah... what you call tanker sledges, we put 45 gallon drums of aviation fuel, on the – standing up on the sledge and made some frames for them so that they could stand there and ahh... tied the down with wire...turnbuckles. So it meant that if you wanted to refuel, all you had to do was drive alongside the other blokes' sledge and he could re-fuel without getting drums out or unlashng, you know, or anything, just straight from the drum, and he would do the same with you.

CEL: That was the answer you were looking for was it?

AW: They had a 45 gallon drum and the blade of the IHs.

AE: Ah, that was for weight, yeah.

CEL: Just tell us about that sorry...

AE: The ah...IH's were back-heavy, big winch on the back, 20 ton winch, why they put a 20 ton winch on I don't know. Anyhow they did and it was all back-heavy and it tended to go along a sort of incline and ahh.. it would – occasionally dig itself in at the back, so for the field we decided that we would put two 45 gallon drums, and mount them on the front of the bulldozer blade with wires just to give it a bit more weight at the front. And that seemed to work OK, yeah.

CEL: Your idea?

AE: Well yeah, well this I suppose yeah.

[1:34] CEL: So they were running on aviation fuel?

AE: Yeah, well in Halley Bay, everything's run on it, well the Muskegs were petrol, but the IHs and the generators on the base all on aviation fuel.

CEL: Is that how they were designed or is that also an...?

AE: Well, it's just 'cause there's more...less water in aviation fuel, so it won't freeze till - it starts freezing at about minus fifty-five, something like that, whereas diesel would freeze at minus ten.

CEL: Right, so was that an innovation of yours, or were they designed...

AE: No, no that was ah...

CEL: They were designed to run on it?

AE: Yeah, that was it. They were designed to use that yeah. 'Cause we had to put engine oil in with the fuel because it's a dry fuel, the aviation, it's more dry than diesel, so we needed to mix it with some engine oil.

[2:30] CEL: And you were mixing it at base?

AE: Yeah, we put so much in each drum, not a lot actually, just ahh...pint or so I think.

CEL: Once you were out with these International Harvesters and had the balance right, were they good to drive, or was it a rough...rough job?

AE: It was a slow job. Two miles an hour, I mean...

CEL: Really?

AE: Yeah.

CEL: You could walk faster?

AE: You could just about, yeah, walk, walk, yeah, you could certainly keep up with the vehicle yeah. At times you used to get out and walk alongside it, you know...just, a bit of exercise!

[3:08] CEL: Was that a severe handicap – because it limited your range I presume?

AE: Well, no, I mean that was... they were built and they were pulling in second gear, you couldn't change up to third gear. With the old tractors they put it in a gear and set off, you know, once you are going you can't change up, you can't change, you want to change you got to stop the vehicle, put it in next gear – it wouldn't pull in the third gear – in the next gear so...it was a matter of just staying in second gear. The

Muskegs weren't much faster in any case – they only got about two and a half miles an hour.

[3:43] CEL: Oh right, OK.

AW: You were driving 24 hours a day weren't you?

AE: Yeah, yeah.

CEL: Somebody would sleep in the cab would they?

AE: Well, we had a caboose on – like a caravan on the back, for cooking and sleeping, relaxing, and if you didn't mind banging about you could get to sleep in it – when it was moving- but if they were going over sastrugi which is quite – it used to go over then come down with a thump. Actually on the way back, the wind must have changed direction and it smoothed the surface out, and you could sleep on the way back.

[4:27] CEL: Where these – where these vital expeditions or where they surveying the area just because it was there – or was there a secondary purpose – were you trying to find...?

AE: No, well the idea was to get to the Shackleton range, and look at the Shackleton range, the geologist and surveyors want to get...wanted to get there that was the whole purpose of it. We still put the ah...oh...markers in each two miles and measured those every time we went past, sort of thing.

AW: So the route was already... it was already planned out for whoever..

CD 2: TRACK 3 [4:59]

CEL: You had your own techniques at geology I understand?

AE: Well there's this ah, we got to the Shackletons, then there's this beautiful green mountain, green rock it is – no that's not it, it's in the front room on the windowsill – and we decided we'd take some back for the lads on base, so we pulled the vehicle up to it, and the sledge had a box on the back, and a sledgehammer, and knocked hell out of this ah, well we didn't take all that much really. But there's a few photos knocking around of ah...beautiful rock.

CEL: Kind of a green Gypsum?

AE: Yeah.

CEL: Looking at it now...

AE: Pete Noble, he actually got ahh - got a thing made for his wife actually.

CEL: A locket?

AE: Polished up, yeah, yeah he polished it up lovely yeah.

CEL: That sample there's about size of a house brick isn't it?

AE: Yeah, yeah...so we bought quite a lot back to base actually.

CEL: So it was agricultural geology was it?

AE: Yeah... yeah you could say that!

[1:12] CEL: And you had your own depots named after you...that you put down?

AE: There wasn't a depot for me, there were depots for mountains. We were depotting them all along, as we were going along, they had dogs with them we used to put a depot in every fifty miles, and ahh – a vehicle depot every hundred miles – but when we got to the mountains the whole idea was to get as much stuff out there as we could. And we left a depot there of - I think it was twenty nine tons or summat...no... yeah must be twenty nine ton, wasn't it, that's where twenty nine ton came in.

AW: And that was 'Depot Dad'.

AE: Yeah that was 'Depot Dad', yeah.

CEL: Did you christen it or was it christened for you?

AE: No I didn't no, no I didn't christen it no, no, no. Somebody did.

AW: Mr Noble?

AE: Mr Noble perhaps yeah – could have been.

CEL: But you also had a mountain named after you as well?

AE: Yeah

[2:07] CEL: Tell me about that. How did that happen?

AE: Well...we ahh...when we first went to the Shacks, we said we should have ...well we should have something. And we...we thought they just be named locally sort of thing, cause the surveyors used to name peaks and things. So when they were doing maps say, you know, they put a name on them, a local name sort of thing. We didn't realize that the names had been taken up by the Antarctic place names committee. But in fact we found out a couple of years ago, last year I think, so all the six or five of us who went out there had a mountain named after them.

CEL: What's yours like?

AE: I don't know, never seen it. I'll show you a bit of rock, there's a bit of rock there from it.

CEL: Does it feel special having a mountain named after you?

AE: Oh yeah – a mountain – Mount Etchells it's called...yeah.

CEL: I bet you're the only person in Ellesmere Port who's got a mountain named after them.

AE: Yeah, could well be actually..., yeah, yeah.

CEL: There's a sample there – polished rock.

AE: Yeah, that was the geologist at BAS. Mount Etchells - nine hundred meters high, 80° 18' south, 28° 21' west.

CEL: And it's - this sample a kind of pale yellow and black...granite, really.

AE: Granite with the looks of it, yeah.

AW: Very appropriate!

[3:54] CEL: OK. There were one or two other incidents that happened in the Antarctic, famous incidents that you were around at the time of. I'm thinking particularly of when John Brotherhood was evacuated.

AE: Yeah, I wasn't actually on base at the time, we were halfway up the Slessor Glacier in a tent with John Galsworthy. He said 'What's that noise?' I said 'I dunno, sounds like an aeroplane' and that's the only thing we saw of it. Looked out and there was this aeroplane flying across. We tried to get in touch with base, but the radios we had at the time, were pretty useless, so...we didn't really know anything about it till well they'd found out the ... until we met up with somebody who knew about it.

CEL: This is the American planes coming in to pick him up?

AE: Yeah that was the first time that the Americans had flown over that far yeah. They sent two planes over, one to land and the other one to circle round. I don't know what he was going to do if anything happened but... that's the Yanks for you.

CD 2: TRACK 4 [5:00]

[ctd] AE: And they said they wanted a runway marking out, sort of thing. So they decided on base, they'd got hell of a lot of coffee.....cocoa there, which nobody ever drank, don't know why, well, that's don't what to say, so they, Abdul, who was the electrician, he decided he'd mark the runway out with this cocoa powder. So they went out, a couple of them went out with this cocoa powder, and marking this mile or so of runway, where they expect the plane to land, [REDACTED] But then they landed, the Yanks landed, and just drove up to the base, sort of thing, you know, in this big...

CEL: plane.

AE: aeroplane. And they said 'no, no, we didn't want... it was very good of you to do that but we didn't want that, what we wanted really was a wind direction'. So they used all our years' supply of cocoa.

CEL: Oh I see, all right, OK.

AE: So they flew over a few days later, and dropped this parachute. We thought 'oh they've dropped some beer for us', but they hadn't they'd dropped cocoa, to replace...

CEL: That was the follow up was it?

AE: Yeah..

[1:31] CEL: An American joke. Again you just give me...you give me the impression that there was... the British looked down slightly upon American intelligence.

AE: Oh I don't know really.

CEL: Well you tell me, was there any kind of sense of superiority?

AE: I don't think so really...I don't know. I don't know really, I don't think so.

CEL: Were they the butts...?

AE: What...the thing wasn't it, you know. You always think Yanks are a bit ahh... perhaps you don't actually.

AW: You never had much to do with the Americans.

AE: Well I haven't really no.

CEL: Were they the butt of jokes?

AE: Yeah, Yeah, yeah.

CEL: But in practice there was co-operation?

AE: Yeah, they...I mean they...John Brotherhoods father was an Air Marshall in the RAF, or something, and he got in touch with somebody he knew in the States, and that's how we got the plane over really.

[2:36] CEL: What other memories do you have of Halley at that time? Was that your second spell at Halley?

AE: Ahh...what have you got down there?

CEL: Well I haven't that's why I'm asking the question.

AW: You were leader of the black gang.

CEL: What was the black gang? What's the black gang?

AE: Well it was just the mechanics and electricians. We had our own office in the workshop there, which was very nice really, was decorated in photos of...I don't know who'd done it all...photos of ahh...lightly clad females.

[3:16] CEL: And tell me about Golly's Folly, that's the other note I've got here?

AE: Well that was the caravan type thing that we took out to the mountains.

CEL: The caboose?

AE: That's a caboose yeah. It was mounted on a sledge, and he..., one, two, three, four ...three..., five, six bunks in there, and a cooking space at one end, ahh had a library in there, a little shelf with books on it. It was very good actually yeah.

CEL: Why Golly's Folly, why the name?

AE: Well, don't know ...don't know whether the name originally came from really, just the fact that Golly built it, or modded it, and the name stuck I think.

CEL: Golly was one of the team was he?

AE: He was yeah, he was a carpenter.

AW: John Galsworthy.

CEL: Oh I see, OK.

AW: He went out with us, yeah.

[4:18] CEL: So you came to the end of your second spell at Halley Bay, and decided to come back to Britain, were you leaving with regrets, or were you glad to finish?

AE: Well I suppose so, yeah, we had a good two years, it's always a regret to leave anywhere, isn't it really. You're leaving friends behind that have come in that second year sort of thing, yeah.

CEL: What happened when you got back to Blighty?

AE: Well before Blighty really, we went into South Georgia on the way back, and Bill Sloman was there and he said 'Do you fancy a job in the office?'

CD 2: TRACK 5 [4:59]

[ctd] AE: I said 'Yeah', and so he fixed me up with a job on the logistics side...on the technical logistics side.

CEL: That didn't last long did it?

AE: No, well I went back then to South Georgia.

CEL: So tell me about that. Where you itching to go South again?

AE: Oh yeah, I really enjoyed it, yeah, being down there yeah. And they were... we were... BAS were taking over from government at South Georgia, government wanted to come out, Falkland Island - Falkland Island government really were there at the time - administrator - and they wanted to come out, and foreign office wanted BAS to go in. They said they would do, but they needed some cash, sort of thing, you know. So they got five million, I think it was.

CEL: In 1970?

AE: Five million, yeah, only going down each year to nothing, went down a million each year, for the next five years, so they said under those circumstances they'd go. Cause money was short in those days. So, we went in and took over from government and in four days I think it was, to take over all the equipment and administration and whatever, and I looked after the genny shed.

[1:42] CEL Did you have to apply for that, or were you just - was it just understood?

AE: Well they said they needed somebody to go in to South Georgia, I'm saying 'that's me'.

CEL: You volunteered?

AE: Yeah.

CEL: You were keen to go?

AE: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And ah, we didn't have a cook actually.

AW: Fanny Hill.

AE: Yeah, that was it, that was after though, yeah. We didn't have a cook at the time, and Dick Stocks said he would go down as the cook, he was... he's an old... and old FID actually, I don't know what he was, a builder wasn't he - builder or carpenter - he said he would go down as the cook, you see, so they said 'Ok, fair enough', so he went down on the ship with us, he got off the ship, walked up to Shackleton House, where the accommodation was and into the kitchen, and saw that it was all electric, it was... I mean it was big, it had been built for the Falkland Islanders, sort of thing, not for the FIDs, you know, it had this big oven in the centre of the room, which used to take about twenty kilowatts to run it all, and had all sorts of equipment, you know, potato peelers - he said 'Oh no, that's not for me', walked out, got back on the ship. Anyway, Dave Hill, 'Fanny', was coming up from Adelaide at the time to go home, and ahh... so they talked him into staying, for the twelve months we were there, as cook, were he became more or less my assistant - well I don't know, he became my assistant - I became his actually.

[3:39] CEL: Describe the base because it was very different from anything else you'd ...from any of the other bases in the Antarctic?

AE: Oh yeah, well it was built for single accommodation, for the administration staff, for the King Edward Point, sort of thing.

CEL: For the whaling ships?

AE: Yeah. Ahh...we had single bunk rooms – bedrooms, sort of thing, with wardrobes, sink, and all you could ask - writing desk – all you could ask for really. Hot water – as much hot water as you wanted, you know, water was running all the time off the dam, central heating, everything, big fridges, walk in fridges, very good it was, washing machines galore. But then they decided it was too posh for the FIDs, so they put two men into each bunk room, which was still good actually, I mean the bunk rooms were as big as this room, sort of thing. So ahh, we lived in luxury there really; had billiard table, full size billiard table, dart board, a bar.

AW: film projector

AE: What? Oh yeah,

CD 2: TRACK 6 [5:00]

[ctd] AE: film projector, yeah, we had films, yeah, film projector. It was a good year really.

CEL: Was it too like being a FID, or was it too good to be a FID?

AE: Oh no, no, it was good actually, no, it was very nice.

AW: You had a run in with a scientist called Gary Maxwell while you were there?

AE: I didn't really have a run in, it was just ah – he wasn't used to my way of working.

CEL: What was the problem?

AE: Well he came in...he'd just come down actually, on the ship, and got a...he'd got a program to do. And he wanted some equipment making, so he came in to the workshop, and said 'I want' ...'I'd like' ... well he didn't say 'like', 'I want this doing and this doing, and this welded and that doing'. So I sent him out, sort of thing, you know, I said 'we're not here to do your work like that', sort of thing. So he went to see Ricky Chinn, who was the base commander, and complained to Ricky, and Ricky said 'Well how did you do? Did you demand it to be done' Well he said 'Well I need it, you know, it's got to be done'. 'Aye' he said 'but the mechanics aren't here to do your work, there here to look after the engines and whatever, you know', he said 'Go and try again – say that you're prepared to cut the metal and things like this'. So he came in all apologetic and said he'd ah.. so I said 'yeah, fair enough'. He'd cut the metal for it, if I weld it up. I said 'yeah, yeah, I'll weld it up'. So I said 'What do you want', sort of thing, and gave him the metal to be cut, and gave him this hacksaw,

which had very few teeth on it, you know. So he's there I don't know for how long, sort of thing, I went 'So how you getting on?'. He said 'it's not...it's pretty hard this metal' I said 'Let's have a look at the hacksaw then. Ohh' I said, 'You'll need a new blade in it'. And we became friends after that.

[2:22] CEL: Was there a lot of practical joking going on?

AE: Sorry?

CEL: Was there a lot of practical joking going on?

AE: Well, I suppose there was a bit, yeah, like that, yeah, yeah.

CEL: You had to lay on the water supply for this new South Georgia base?

AE: No that was later on actually yeah. That wasn't while we were there.

CEL: That wasn't?

AW: You did it?

AE: Yeah, it was a summer job we went down to do, Dave Hill and myself.

CEL: You went down again did you – I see.

AE: I used to go down each summer to see the bases, see if there still there, you know. And they decided they wanted a three inch pipe laying, supply pipe put in there from the whaling station which is about half a mile away I suppose, into the King Edward Point where BAS was. And so we decided we could go down and do it, Dave Hill and myself, got a pipe, and put an IH in there, with a back actor on it, and a bucket, and three of us put this pipe in. It was quite a nice job for two weeks.

AW: It's still being used now.

[3:39] CEL: Did you have any visitors on South Georgia? Overseas visitors? Foreign Visitors?

AE: Had quite a few Russian ships came in yeah.

CEL: What were they doing?

AE: Well, they were fishing round about, sort of thing. And they asked permission if they could come in for water really. Over at the whaling station the water was still running there, and they used to fill their tanks from there, I think BAS charged them so much, I don't know how much they charged them, but they did charge them for it yeah. And then they usually came up to Shackleton House and we had a bit of a do at night, you know, bit of a sing-song and a few jars.

CEL: Schnapps, vodka?

AE: Be vodka, yeah, vodka was very nice actually, if you could get the proper stuff.

[4:30] CEL: Is there a captain that sticks in your memory?

AE: Ahh yeah, the one with the one hand, yeah. Only had one arm – he was ahh... he was a very nice bloke actually yeah, and the engineer, was short and tubby chap, and I believe Fanny was going to marry his daughter at one time I think, after they'd been drinking - got engaged to his daughter!

AW: What?

AE: Don't you know that?

AW: No!

CD 2: TRACK 7 [5:00]

CEL: Not really got engaged?

AE: No,

CEL: OK, Sorry I see. So what was it ...could you communicate with the Russians, I mean...

AE: The what?

CEL: Could you communicate with the Russians or was it all sign language?

AE: Well a lot of it was sign language – one or two of them could speak English. Not on that particular ship, but on the big factory ship that came in, they had ahh... how do you call him – commissaire – sort of thing, he was ahh...he's in overall charge of whatever, and they daren't do anything without his permission, sort of thing. Bit of a rouge really.

CEL: Was the whole, kind of, whaling, fishing business tailing off at that point?

AE: No, no, it was all starting up.

CEL: Was it?

AE: Yeah.

AW: The fishing, as opposed to the whaling?

AE: That was before the yeah, that's right, yeah. That was before the Falkland Islands got into it really, they decided that there would be a lot of money there, and they registered all the ships in the Falkland Islands, and they bought two fishing vessels, hadn't they, to ahh, protection, yeah.

[1:11] CEL: Did the FIDs have much to do with the fishing fleet or did you socialize with them?

AE: Well we socialized when they came in, yeah, and we got asked back to their ahh...when they were leaving, the following morning, we'd go and let the ropes off and get on - go on board for breakfast sort of thing, you know, have a little tot to see them on their way.

AW: And they had one or two ladies on these fishing ships sometimes?

AE: Yeah, big ones!

CEL: You didn't get engaged to any of those?

AE: No.

[1:48] CEL: So, what was the main thrust of the work being done at South Georgia, the actual serious side of being there?

AE: Ahh, well, they were doing,,, starting all sorts of programs really wasn't they, there's counting the seals, biology - what was Dave Worton, what was he?

AW: There was a greenhouse there.

AE: Yeah, they built a greenhouse, yeah. They had sites which they railed off, sort of thing, and were doing...I don't know quite what they were doing really... sites which they were monitoring against the normal areas, sort of thing. And they were studying all the plants, little mites and things, they found ahh... they found a lot of mites which they didn't know existed and that sort of thing.

CEL: So it was more zoology and botany than surveying?

AE: Yeah, by that time, no, there was no surveying from...was there surveying? No they were checking - there was a party came in to check the water flow off the mountain, sort of thing, they were putting little dams in and measuring flow and that sort of thing. They were catching fish...

AW: Dave Worton was a botanist.

AE: Who? yeah, that's right yeah.

AW: It would have been his greenhouse. And they were doing atmospheric as well.

AE: There was quite a lot of programs actually in the summer period, people used to come down just for that, in the few months sort of thing.

[3:30] CEL: And your job was to make sure they had plenty of power?

AE: yeah, yeah. Well we hadn't really, we hadn't got that much until we put...we put two new generators in that time.

CEL: Was that your initiative?

AE: yeah well we had to have them yeah, the old ones were a bit ah...they'd been there forever and a day I think.

CEL: So were they sent down from Britain?

AE: yeah, two Scaniers, yeah, hundred and twenty kilowatt, I think.

CEL: Did you have any problems ordering those, or where they...?

AE: No, no. there's plenty of firms that will build them for you.

[4:00] CEL: Getting permission – arguing the case for them?

AE: Well I think...that was when they still had the extra five million I think, so I think we were OK just then, yeah. It was the second year after I had got there I think, we decided we'd put new generators in.

[4:22] CEL: Allan Wearden is with us, who he has set this interview up, and I was wondering how you two met, was that in South Georgia?

AE: No, that was in Montevideo actually. I was just walking along the road and he was coming the other way. Was that me?

AW: Not quite...I think it might have been to do with young ladies in hotels.

AE: Yeah, no, no, no. That's first time we met actually, was in Montevideo.

CEL: Was this on one or your...?

AE: I'd just ... he'd done -he were on the ship weren't he?

AW: No, no, I'd been South America.

AE: Oh you'd ahh

AW: You were leaving the ship and I was joining the ship.

CD 2: TRACK 8 [5:00]

AE: Oh, OK. What year was that then?

AW: 1971.

CEL: '71, OK. So this, this is in your period when you were... you'd finished your season at South Georgia and you were back in London, so you were travelling backwards and forwards quite a lot were you?

AE: Yeah, I used to have the summer here, and the summer down there.

CEL: Why was all that happening?

AE: Well, somebody had to go down and check the bases each year, make sure they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, check the indents, and report any, well any engineering problems or whatever. Electrical problems, and as time went on, they got more and more equipment sort of thing, they had desalination plants at Signy, and we rebuilt...when did we rebuild Faraday, we rebuilt Faraday, didn't we?

AW: '76?

AE: Yeah, put new generators in all the bases, in different years sort of thing. So there was always a lot to do, yeah.

[1:07] CEL: And you were travelling every six months?

AE: Yeah, yeah.

CEL: How were you getting up and down? Were there different routes?

AE: Flying mainly. Towards the end, used to fly straight into the Falklands, but previous to that used to fly into South America, and then used to be a flight across from...mmm... Mar del Plata?

AW: Mar del Plata at one point, it was Mar del Plata.

AE: Yeah, down into the Falklands, yeah, it was the Argentinians that were doing that. Used to make it as hard as possible for us, yeah.

[1:43] CEL: In what way?

AE: Well, you...well more for the...not for us, perhaps, more for the Falkland islanders, they had to have a white card, or a green card, I forget what colour it was...a white card I think, to travel, and they'd get to Mar del Plata, and they hadn't got this card, and they'd have to go back to B.A. to get this card to come back to Mar del Plata, they just made it awkward for the Falkland Islanders, at the time. And yet they were doing quite a lot for the Falkland Islanders, I mean they ah...they provided a lot of stuff for the kids at school, and they ahh...boats for them and all sorts of things. If they'd just kept up like that, you know, the Falkland Islanders would have accepted them in the end I suppose. Apart from Velma of course, she would have never accepted them, she owned the pub there in ah...

[2:36] CEL: Who was this?

AE: Velma – Velma Malcolm hew name was...

CEL: Belma?

AE: She's dead now, yeah.

CEL: Velma, or Belma?

AE: Velma, Velma.

CEL: With a 'V'?

AE: Yeah.

CEL: She was a character was she?

AE: Yeah, she married George, he was ahh... he was down there in the army in the war, and came back, and went down again as ...

AW: A shepherd.

AE: A shepherd yeah, he was, yeah, a shepherd, yeah.

[3:00] CEL: So Velma was the landlady of the one pub in Stanley?

AE: No, no, not one pub no, the Rose Hotel, but there was about...one, two...

AW: With the Rose I think there were four.

AE: Four yeah, but there was some right down the...near the lighthouse and things weren't there? At one time there must have been about seven pubs.

AW: In the end there was,

AE: Yeah, yeah.

AW: But in those days there was only the four.

AE: The Rose was one of the main ones the FIDs used to go in. That one on the ah...what's the one off the jetty?

AW: The Grove.

AE; The Grove, yeah.

[3:29] CEL: What was the ah...what was the atmosphere of the Rose like?

AE: They ruled it with a rod of iron! It belonged to Mrs. Johnson, that's Velma's mother. And she was...well we had this argument the other day...she wasn't all that big, actually, but she was ah...she used to stand there at the door, at 10 o'clock it closed, that was it, no drinking up time or anything. You'd get a...a gin and tonic at one minute to, and you'd have to be up the road at 10 o'clock. And she'd stand at the door and..'GO! and no swearing. Why are you swearing? Don't you come in here with him!'

CEL: Was that attitude you think a response to the clientele or is that the way she was?

AE: That's the way she was, yeah. It was her pub and she...yeah. Women weren't allowed...in those days women weren't allowed in the pubs neither.

CEL: Women weren't allowed?!

AE: No they were...they used to go in but ah... they were frowned upon I suppose, for ladies. Well there was ladies of the night used to go in, but the other ladies didn't.

[4:34] CEL: Where was the beer coming from?

AE: UK, it was all tins in those days.

AW: Or bottles.

AE: Bottles, sorry, bottles, yeah.

AW: The Rose used to sell a lot of bottled beer down to the bases.

AE: Yeah,

AW: Used to do an order...

AE: Yeah, in boxes with straw around them, yeah that's right yeah.

AW: boxes of Newcastle brewers.

AE: There's a boat, the boat there, it's a dredger actually.

CEL: And the ladies of the night?

AE: No, no, they were more in Monte than

CD 2: TRACK 9 [4:59]

AE [ctd]: the Falklands.

CEL: All right.

AW: They was only one in Stanley.

CEL: Was there? What was her name Alan?

AW: Yellow submarine I think?

CEL: Yellow submarine?

AE: She was a big girl. Bit more like a submarine actually.

CEL: Do you want to elaborate or is...

AE: No, I don't want... Allan, he knows more about it!

AW: I know nothing about it!

CEL: Did you ever go to the Antarctic via Panama?

AE: No, no, no.

CEL: OK,

AW: *Bransfield* used to go that way occasionally.

[0:33] CEL: There was a kind of second - there was a special class, wasn't there, devised later on, called the super-FIDs, travelling south, was that - was Al playing or - tell the tale about that.

AE: I thought it was a good idea actually, somebody in this room wouldn't say that, but I thought it was a good idea.

CEL: What was the idea?

AE: Well the idea was it got all these people like me, and quite a number of people who were going down there year in, year out, sort of thing, senior scientists and people like that.

AW: Super-FIDs!

AE: And, if you got...if you mess with the FIDs, not mess with them but you know, mess with them, then you had to do everything like the gash and all the rest of it, clean the bogs and all the rest of it. And the idea was that the super-FIDs, as he keeps calling them, should have been living in the wardroom really, but you could only get about four guests in the wardroom, they wasn't enough room for everybody, so they decided they would make - knock two cabins down, a four man and a two man, and make this dining room for us senior people, who had been down there year in, year out. And I thought it worked very well actually. They had their own steward, he used to serve the meal, and he used to wash up.

AW: Your own bar in there.

AE: eh?

AW: You had your own bar.

AE: Had our own bar, yeah, I thought it was a very good idea really.

CEL: So what happened to it though, did it not last?

AE: Well, I don't know why it ahh...

AW: They weren't any...it wasn't happening that there was that type of people going down on the ship any more, cause they'd just fly.

AE: It was the dentist that shouted about it as well yeah.

CEL: You have some questions Allan

AW: It became the...it became the computer room eventually, on the Bransfield.

CEL: You got some points about it?

AW: No these were general ones. You had a motorbike down at South Georgia

AE: Oh yeah, on the first....

[2:43] CEL: You had a motorbike?

AE: Yeah, first year I was there, when we took over from Government, we thought it would be a good idea to have a motorbike there yeah, so, yeah...we got Paul Whiteman in HQ to buy us a bike, only a cheap second hand rough thing, you know. We got this one that was a 500...it was a Norton Strain with a 500 beezee engine in it. And I think it had been run on ah...I don't know what it had been run on, but it had special oil in it – why he bought that I don't know, anyhow he did, but ah...anyway you couldn't go all that far in it really.

[3:22] CEL: What was it used for? Messages or..?

AE: Well, just messing about on really, yeah.

AW: These are really just Halley things. Pete Whitty went through the sea ice on...with the IH at Halley?

AE: Yeah, that was ah...that must have been after South Georgia actually, yeah.

AW: Right, when you were summer?

AE: Yeah, I was down there for the summer. Whether he...he was on the ship, he come back from somewhere, I think, and there was two vehicles to come back to the ship, that were coming back to UK for overhaul; there was a Muskeg with a crane on the back, a Tycho crane, and an IH, and I was just getting these ready at the base, ready to bring, well one of them back, and he came past, he said 'I'll drive one back if you want'. And so I said 'OK, which one do you want?'. He said, 'Well, I'll drive the IH', cause they'd taken the top of the cab off half way up. He said, 'I've got this duvet on' he said – the wind was getting up a bit, it was quite cool actually, he said 'I can button this right up', and...good job he did really. We started off along the...we got down to the bottom of the ramp, and across the sea-ice, we hadn't got a radio with us, the idea was that when you got to the bottom of the ramp you'd let the ship know and

they'd keep an eye on you as you came across the sea ice, they was quite a bit of...couple of miles I suppose, mile and a half or some of sea ice. Anyhow, as we got there, Ken Lax came down in a SnowCat, he was going back to the ship, so we

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AE: [ctd]: said let them know that, when you get there, that we're coming across. Anyhow, we set off, and we got, I don't know, couple of hundred – well about quarter of the way across I think, and he was in front of me on this IH, and suddenly I looked...well... he'd gone, disappeared. I thought 'Oh Christ!'. So I stopped and rushed to where it had gone in, and there's all these bubbles coming up and whatever, I think it was still running actually, and suddenly this – he popped out! I thought 'ruddy hell'. Anyhow he got to the side and we managed to get him out, pulled him out sort of thing,

AW: You pulled him out.

AE: Well, I pulled him out yeah. He climbed out, pulled him out. 'God', he said, 'All me fags got wet!'. It's a good job he went in and not me, his foot had got caught under the ah...one of the brake pedals on the thing, and he went down quite a time, quite a way he said cause he looked back up and he could see this hole getting smaller and smaller, and he managed to free himself, and because he had this duvet on, which was quite airtight, so it trapped air and he came popping up sort of thing. So then we said 'well what are you going to do?'. 'oh I don't know' he said. He started getting cold, but there was some skis on the back of the Muskeg, and I think they were his actually. I said 'Why don't you go back to the ship', he said – I said, 'before you freeze to death'. Anyhow, he put skis on and went back and they must have been watching from the ship, cause halfway – he got halfway back to the ship and the Snow Cat come and picked him up. We had the problem of getting the Muskeg across the ah...across this crack. I did quite a lot of probing with a ice chisel, trying to find a safe way across, in the end I just ah...I found ah, it narrowed a bit, and then widened out again, I thought "well – just go for it", you know. I just drove it across, and came back to the ship.

[2:39] CEL: The International Harvester was never seen again I presume?

AE: They put him in a hot bath actually.

CEL: No, the tractor that went down. The tractor went down – was that seen again?

AE: No. About 600 yards down there somewhere.

AW: Rubbish in the Antarctic!

[2:58] CEL: You were based at um..back in Britain, when BAS moved from London to Cambridge, do you have much memory of that process?

AE: No, not really no. It didn't really involve us actually. Except the fact that because we were single people you couldn't get any of these allowances that all the married families were getting – you know, moving house and government things you get if

you are part of the government, you know. Moving allowances and all sorts of things. All we got was a fixed allowance of a hundred quid I think.

[3:32] CEL: Did you see it as better at Cambridge? Was working conditions and life better?

AE: Oh yeah, the place itself was better, completely better, yeah.

AW: Did you have a tiny office to start with in Cambridge? It was a tiny office to start with in Cambridge?

AE: Yeah, yeah, well the brought all the units that BAS had, which were all round the country, from...when we were in London, that was just administration only, and all the units, like the Met was up in Edinburgh, something else at Aberystwyth, there was a unit at Sheffield and Birmingham was geology...they were all over the country really. And going to Cambridge brought all these units together, so it was better as far as BAS was concerned, yeah.

[4:20] CEL: Looking back over your time with BAS, Alan, I mean you've been connected with BAS for a very long time, so how has the kind of whole ethos of the organisation changed? It sounds – sounded very 'Fred Karno' at the beginning? What are the major changes?

AE: I don't think it was 'Fred Karno' so much sort of thing as ah...all new to everybody really. Then up till late 50's, sort of thing it had been expeditions going down. But then it became a more permanent ah...the bases became more permanent sort of thing.

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AE: And they were doing programs which kept them on base, so they didn't ...well...we were down there to do the actual travelling, really. I wouldn't really like to go down now and ah...I think we had the best of it really, to join the sixties.

CEL: It's all a bit staid now is it?

AE: Well yeah, tends to be yeah, yeah. I mean they do a lot of travelling from Rothera, but it's mostly by planes, sort of thing, you get taken out and brought back again by aeroplane. They travel round on skidoos when they're out there, but the actual...whereas in the sixties, I mean the dog teams from Rothera were doing...from Adelaide rather wasn't it?

AW: Stonington.

AE: ...were doing... yeah Stonington sorry, yeah; were doing thousands of miles a year sort of thing, you know. I don't know how much science they were doing, but they were doing a lot of miles.

[1:06] CEL: Your scariest incident, the one you were actually was there at, rather than one you heard about? Was there something that makes you shiver even now?

AE: I don't shiver easily actually.

AW: You never run out of gin then?

AE: We never did! No not first trip out, in '63, the Muskeg went down a hole, I was driving. That was a bit hairy actually. I was following Jehan – 'cuddles' Jehan, and he would – I don't know whether you know the crossing between the inland at the shelf ice and the inland ice, there's about 15 - 18 miles across, but the actual route that you take to miss all the crevasses and all the rest of it, takes about 26 miles altogether. And then each flag you've got a compass bearing to the next flag. So if you see a flag there you can't ...until you take a bearing you don't know if it's that one or that one sort of thing. Anyhow, he'd come up onto this flag, and I was ten yards behind him or something like that, and suddenly the Muskeg [fell] and I ended up in the corner right over – this was a big cab ones – and actually bent a piece of dexion with my elbow, I don't know why it didn't break really – not the dexion, my elbow! And I had the ah... 'Neddy' Brind was with me, he was the radar mechanic, but he was coming out on this trip, and the Muskeg had gone in like at an angle like that, and I looked up through the back window and I could see – cause they mounted the petrol tanks quite high up above the engine – I could see this petrol come down – we'd just filled up actually – and you could see this petrol coming out of the filler cap, I said 'Owick, quick, switch the engine off'. And he was the nearest to the switch, I was just still clambering out of the – anyhow he'd switched it off and he'd gone. He said 'That's not going to happen on the way back is it?'. I said 'I bloody hope not'. Anyhow, we put a long wire on to the other Muskeg to hold it there so it wouldn't go any further down. The A-frame at the back of the sledge, that was holding it up sorry, there was nothing we could do about it, so we got onto base, managed to get through on the radio, which was quite spectacular really. Course, we weren't far away really, 20 miles, and they came out next day, couple of days, no two days – that was it cause we had a bit of a blow – and with the help of another Muskeg we pulled it out. But that was a bit hairy while it was all going on, you know.

[4:07] CEL: Were you lucky to live?

AE: Well, I mean, if it had gone down...if it had gone – if I had been another five yards that way, cause it opened the crevasse up, you could see there was a big hole there, nothing underneath, you couldn't see anything at all, water further down.

CEL: Did that hmm...did that change your – your approach to what you were doing in the Antarctic?

AE: Yeah, walked around tiptoe after that yeah. No it took us a long day...it must have changed completely after that winter actually as to what it was earlier on, and it took us about another fortnight to get across, actually. We screened most of it, Cuddles and myself, and we had to re-route the whole thing.

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CEL: You've met a lot of FIDs in your time, one or two may stand out, but what is it about them – what is a common factor about FIDs, what's special about them?

AE: I don't know – they all believe in what they are doing, sort of thing. Well most of them believe in what they are doing, most of them want to be down there. We used to say at one time that they'd have gone down there with... whatever they'd been paid, sort of thing, you know. But I don't know – most of them get on with one another. I suppose they're easy going sort of people. Yeah.

[0:42] CEL: One or two people I suppose as you say it was the best years of their lives.

AE: Well, I think it is for most of them, yeah, it changed their lives a lot of them, yeah.

CEL: Did it change your life?

AE: Well yeah, I ahh, yeah. I stopped being a mechanic working on a... in a garage and became something different yeah. Yeah, changed mine completely really.

AW: You were involved for 45 years.

AE: Yeah, that's right yeah.

AW: 45 years!

CEL: As a FID?

AE: No not as a FID, 26 years

AW: With BAS – no 26 years sorry.

[1:21] CEL: Did it change your...your...you psychologically, your psyche.

AE: Did it what?

CEL: Did it change you internally – are you a stronger man or was there something about it which has stayed with you. On a subtle level has it changed you?

AE: I don't know really, it's ahh...I don't know whether it's changed me or not really. I suppose it must have done to a certain extent, but I don't know...

AW: You can drink gin better than you used to!

AE: Ehh?

AW: You can drink gin better than you used to!

AE: Well there's that yeah! That takes a bit of doing as well.

AW: Yeah it does.

[2:04] CEL: OK, one final thing. You have a Fuchs medal, in 1984, tell us about that. Why...why...what happened. Why the award?

AE: I don't know, it's ahh...the Fuchs medal is ... you get that from all the rest of the FIDs thinking you were a good bloke, sort of thing.

AW: Good tempered.

AE: Good tempered. I don't know, they must have thought I was worth it.

CEL: Are you proud of it?

AE: Oh yeah!

[2:41] CEL: Did you retire from BAS, or did you have another job after it?

AE: No, I retired actually, in ahh – 80... '88. Went down again in '89 because they were rebuilding the base and using the Army.

CEL: That Halley?

AE: Yeah, one of the lads – they were on manoeuvres in Germany, the army before they went down – one of the lads broke his ankle or leg or summat, and couldn't go. So they said do I want to go down as a driver, just as an ordinary driver. Same money. So I said 'yeah'. It's different life isn't it, it's a different thing altogether. I'd jump at a chance...I wouldn't - no I wouldn't jump at a chance to go down again now, no. I think it's changed completely now to what it was. You've got health and safety and stuff like that down.

AW: They'd have a fit these days.

AE: You wouldn't be able to do half the stuff we did.

CEL: Different breed down there now is it?

AE: Yeah, yeah. Well I think the lads are still the same, it's the thing that's changed – the organisation's changed, it had to I suppose.

CEL: OK. Alan thank you very much indeed.