

## Interview Transcript: John Huckle

*Interviewer : Christopher Eldon Lee*

*Location : John's home in Monmouth, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009.*

### **CD 1 : TRACK 1 [4:01]**

[0:00] CEL: *This is John Huckle, recorded at his home in Monmouth, by Chris Eldon Lee on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009. John Huckle, part one.*

JH: My name's John Huckle, I was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1924, which happens to be exactly 85 years ago today.

[0:28] CEL: *So it's your birthday!*

JH: It is my Birthday, today yes... and I was born in Abbots Langley in Hertfordshire.

[0:36] CEL: *What kind of childhood did you have, were you born into a wealthy family or a poor one?*

JH: No...a middle class family. My father was manager of a paper mill, and later director of the company. I went to Berkhamsted school. I left at 17, well I was nearly 18, and that was during the war, and went straight into the navy from school.

[1:06] CEL: *Do you think that was pre-destined, had you always intended to be in the services?*

JH: Not really, no. Mind you, I'm glad I did go into the services then, because I would have probably ended up being conducted into the paper trade, which didn't appeal to me, so in some ways it was a...it was a saving to go into the services.

[1:33] CEL: *But it was more by accident than design would you say?*

JH: Well, the war was on you see, and I was called up.

[1:40] CEL: *Oh right...*

JH: Well... actually I volunteered, but I would have been called up if I hadn't volunteered.

[1:46] CEL: *And by volunteering, you had some say in where you went I guess was it?*

JH: Well yes, I chose the navy.

[1:53] CEL: *Why the navy, a fascination with the sea?*

JH: Mmm possibly, but my family were military in fact on my mother's side, and...

no, I think the navy always attracted me as a kid. But also I did have something which in fact in wartime you obviously couldn't do anything about, I did have a fascination for the Antarctic, and particularly the stories of Scott and Shackleton. Then during the 1930's, the British Graham Land Expedition went down there, and there was a boy who actually left Berkhamsted school on the very day that I joined Berkhamsted school, and he went with the B.G.L.E. So, you know, I'd always had an interest in the Antarctic, and of course that sort of automatically lead to the Navy as well.

[3:00] CEL: *What was the boys name, do you recall?*

JH: Yes, Colin Bertram.

[3:04] CEL: *So, was he talked about at...back at Berkhamsted, was he a fascinating figure?*

JH: Well, yes because... well it was in my case because I was interested in the Antarctic. I don't think he was a great sort of a cause celebre at school or anything like that, but you did know about the B.G.L.E, because has was with it you see, and he was an old boy.

[3:33] CEL: *Can you put your finger on then where this fascination for the Antarctic came from – the first hint, was there a particular book you read, or did somebody one night tell you the story of Scott?*

JH: I think it was the headmaster of my prep school, was telling us the stories of both Scott and Shackleton. I...I mean he was advocating a most heroic Englishman who should be followed ~

### **CD1 : TRACK 2 [4:59]**

JH: ~ and you know I read a bit about Scott and Shackleton obviously as a kid and then as I say B.G.L.E cropped up while I was at school.

[0:12] CEL: *So you went into the Navy..?*

JH: Yes.

CEL: *...and you found yourself under the water rather than above it?*

JH: Well no, actually I had a very fortunate naval career which we won't go into in any length because this interview is supposed to be about the Antarctic. But I was very, very lucky because as an ordinary seaman I did my training in a battleship, the *King George V*. which was the last of our battleships to be used in action really. Then I got promoted...got a commission and I went to a frigate which was built in America as an American warship, and before she was actually manned by an American crew, lend lease allowed her to go to the British Navy and we were a lucky a ship, and we did sort of do relatively well in the battle of the Atlantic. I had been as an ordinary

seaman, for a short time in submarines, in fact in a very old submarine of the First World War vintage, and after I had become 19 and a half years of age, I could then apply to go back into the submarine service, which I did, but it was a long time before I got back, and then I went back into the submarine service as an officer, and at the end of the war in 1946 when things were going quite well for me in the Navy in a way, I decided I didn't want to stay in a peacetime Navy, and I was looking around for something else to do.

And one of the possibilities was to go with Douglas Mawson, the Australian explorer, down to the Antarctic. He was arranging for an expedition to go to Hurd Island in about 1948 and I wrote to him - he was at Adelaide university - and he couldn't really start his expedition anything like sort of '47, and I couldn't afford to wait that long, so then I looked around for something else to do. I did get an appointment as an assistant district officer in the Colonial service, with my first appointment was to be in Ghana, or is now called Ghana, it was the Gold Coast those days, and I was to sail from Liverpool aboard the *SS Acklar* [???]<sup>1</sup> at the end of October 1946. I was in London clearing up a few odd jobs at the Admiralty, when I read in a newspaper, I think it was the... I believe it was the Evening Standard, an advert put in by the Colonial Office, for young men, single, tough and unafraid of loneliness to explore the British Antarctic Territory, or what was then the Falkland Islands Dependencies. I thought ahh, my new employer actually wants polar explorers - that's good - I'll go along and see if I can get seconded, from Ghana, or Gold Coast, to the Antarctic. So I went along that afternoon and I managed to see a chap named James Marr, who had run operation Tabarin, and he said 'Oh yes we are, we're a bit desperately short of personnel'. So I said 'well can you arrange for a secondment from the Gold Coast to the Antarctic', and he said 'Well I'll see what I can do, but how soon can you start?'. Well I was footloose and fancy free so I said 'Well, when do you want me?', and he said 'The ship's sailing in five days time'. So that was how I managed to get started going to the Antarctic.

[4:43] CEL : *What did you make of Marr?*

JH : Well, I mean I only met him for the afternoon, and he was very friendly and he was perfectly helpful because he organised that afternoon, for me to be transferred from ~

### **CD 1 : TRACK 3 [5:00]**

JH: ~ tropical Africa to Antarctica. Presumably they wanted more Antarctic explorers than they did tropical administrators, it's the only conclusion I can arrive at!

[0:13] CEL: *Where you given the third degree? Did you fell as thought you'd earned [the post???)--faded out/ JH talks over]*

JH : No, not in the slightest. It was all very friendly and [inaudible]. I've never actually been given a sort of bad time at any interviews... until now!

CEL: *[laughter]*

JH: Well, there's a first time for everything.

[0:37] CEL: *Where you surprised at the ease with which you got that transfer?*

JH: Yes, I was to be honest. I mean I didn't think it would be that easy, I certainly didn't think it would all happen in sort of... well I think it was the next day I got final confirmation from the Colonial office that they were going to let me go. I really didn't think...and then I sort of had to tie....there were all sorts of odd things.... you see, I'd been buying mosquito nets and things from the Army and Navy store. I had to go along and say well, can I hand back this mosquito net and will you let me have a pair of fur lined boots. Actually, I was telling Allan last night, those bloody fur lined boots were absolutely useless. When I wore them in the Antarctic, I did get them down there, and when I wore them there, the sweat on my feet used to freeze up on the fur lining and it became an ice trap. However I wore them later in the Falklands where they were much more comfortable.

[1:40] CEL: *So you got the sense that they were desperate for men to go south did you?*

JH: Oh, I'm quite sure they were. In fact I know they were.

CEL: *And the here was John Huckle saying "Please sir, can I go"?*

JH: Yes, that was it.

[1:54] CEL: *What happened next then, because the turn around time was quite quick?*

JH: I went down to Tilbury where the *Livonia*<sup>ii</sup> [??] was waiting to sail for the Falklands, and I joined the *Livonia* and there were six of us. There was Doc Mutson, Don Muer, Frank Elliot, myself, Bernhard Stonehouse and Oliver Bird, who was tragically killed in a fire at Hope Bay later. So there were the six of us going on the *Livonia* to join the expedition. And the table we had in the saloon had two other faces at it, which were for Miles Clifford and his wife Peta, who was the...he was then the new governor for the Falklands, going out for his first tour of duty there. Now by a strange quirk of fate in a way, it's widely assumed I think by a number of people in B.A.S, that I knew Miles Clifford very well before we met on the *Livonia*... that's totally untrue. We had met, once in Gibraltar, at a cocktail party, I was a very junior officer, and he was the senior civil servant in Gibraltar at the time, and so it was a question of me saying 'Good Evening, Sir' and him saying 'get out of my way boy' or something like that. The next time we met, was when I did my interview for the Colonial Service, he was the chairman of the interview board. So in fact I had met him then, but again it was only briefly, I mean I don't know how long the interview lasted, but probably about twenty / thirty minutes. The next time we met, the third time, was when he walked into the...into the saloon in the *Livonia*, and his eyes fixed on me, and he looked at me and he said 'Good heavens! Aren't you supposed to be going to the...to Africa?' And I am afraid I was a bit cheeky at the time, probably because we'd had a few gins before dinner, and I said 'Good Lord! Have I got on the wrong ship?'. And everybody, ever since then, has assumed that I knew him well, in fact that was the sum total of my acquaintanceship with Clifford before then.

[4:40] CEL: *Before that interesting meeting with Clifford, had you been told what your duties were going to be down south? How much preparation were you given? What were you expecting to be doing?*

JH: All I knew was, that the bases ~

#### **CD1 TRACK 4 [5:00]**

JH: ~ had various options as it where. There were meteorological bases, there were some bases that might be able to do a bit of biological work, although that wasn't in any way sort of emphasised when they were talking to me, and you would be expected to try to do a bit of mapping or surveying, and travelling of course, and they did say that the travelling would be using dog sleds – husky dogs – and would I like mind driving a team of huskies? Well...I was at...let's face it, I was only 22 years of age, and no I mean obviously one doesn't mind driving a team of Huskies at 22. So no, I didn't really have much idea, what the thing was about – what was not made clear, but which I later came to appreciate, was that the whole emphasis of the thing was to maintain a British presence and a British Sovereignty in that sector which is now the British Antarctic Territory. I don't think anything was said to me at the original interviews which indicated that that was the purpose of our being sent there. Now of course there was the pre-cursor – Operation Tabarin, which during the war was a naval expedition sent down to... simply to maintain British Sovereignty, which the Admiralty quite sensibly realised that if they just sent men and sat them as lookouts, they'd probably go mad, so they gave them the job of doing a bit of surveying and a bit of meteorology and so on. We, the original FIDS, more or less continued in 1946, exactly where the Admiralty had left off, because the Admiralty said we're not going to pay for it now it's peace-time – the colonial office must pay. So that's as far as I know how the thing sort of escalated – well it didn't escalate, it just...

[2:27] CEL: *Transferred?*

JH: Yes.

[2:29] CEL: *But you had no meteorological or surveying experience, presumably?*

JH: Well I was a fairly competent navigator actually, so you know I could do a bit of survey work if necessary.

[2:43] CEL: *On the journey down things began to change didn't they?*

JH: Yes.

CEL: *Your meetings with Sir Clifford – or Clifford as he was then...*

JH: Yes, Miles Clifford then.

[2:52] CEL: *...led to a different scenario for you?*

JH Yes. I'd managed to wangle it that I was keeping a watch on the bridge of the ...oh Sorry!

[3:12] CEL: *No – you stick with your story...*

JH: I'd managed to wangle a watch keeping – or a watch that I could keep on the bridge of the *Livonia* just to give me something to do, because three weeks at sea with nothing to do, after 5 years in the Navy was going to drive me up the wall. So...and it happened to suit the captain of the *Livonia* [] Freddy White [Wright ?3:42]<sup>iii</sup> because he wanted his first mate relieved from the early morning watch, so he could be doing things with the cargo and things like that. They were a bit short of watch-keeping officers on the *Livonia* so it suited him, and I did the early morning watch. I used to come off that one – Clifford one day said to me 'I would need an A.D.C when I get to the Falklands, and it might help your promotion in the colonial service if you come as my A.D.C. , but it's up to you whether you opt for it or not, but of course it will mean you will not be able to go down to the Antarctic.' He knew that I wanted to go to the Antarctic. So I had a day, or couple of days to think about it, and then I told him I'd do the job, because it did seem to be quite a good opportunity – I thought it would be interesting. He then said 'Well you're doing the morning watch, and I go for a walk before breakfast every morning round the deck, so perhaps it would be a thing – after you finished your morning watch, we could have a stroll round the deck together every day, and I could give you ~

#### **CD1 TRACK 5 [4:59]**

JH: ~ a run down on what duties you might be involved in'. That was agreed and the next sort of convenient morning I came off watch – brushed my face and had a wash – and went up on deck and there was Clifford. Now, the Clifford's had at that stage a little Yorkshire terrier named Buttons, and they were both absolutely devoted to this animal, and of course they were taking it out to the Falklands with them. Every morning, the...Buttons was released from the Clifford's cabin where it had spent the night, and Clifford would walk round the deck with it, and of course the first thing it did as soon as it got out from the cabin was to foul the deck. And Clifford had prepared him for this...prepared himself for this emergency, and had in one hand a little hand brush, and in the other hand, a little shovel. And he used to scoop it up and whisk it over the guard rail. I found that the A.D.C – aide-de-campe – aide or help, is the operative word. You become the aide to do everything that your boss doesn't want to do himself. So, the very first morning as an A.D.C. I was handed a hand-brush in one hand and a shovel in the other and was scooping it up and throwing it over the guard rail. And I am extremely glad that the term 'pooper scooper' had not been invented in 1946, because I am quite sure everybody in the Falkland Islands would still be calling me that if it had been!

[2:04] CEL: *Would you like to lay claim to the world's first poop scoop?*

JH: No I don't think so no, I'll leave somebody else to have that claim.

[2:13] CEL: *That honour, that honour, OK. But did you discuss... as you went round the deck, did you... did Clifford tell you the kind of things you would be doing?*

JH: Some of them yes, not all of them by a long, long chalk. But some of them yes. But of course it really began once we got to Port Stanley, that's when life became much more hectic. There were all sorts of things like the deciphering of confidential ciphers to the Governor, which Clifford was very good about it, he used to let me read them nearly all, and it was then I began to realise that there was more to this business than had met the eye when I was in London. Because some of the ciphers were dealing with the fact that the Argentineans and the Chileans, amongst others, were mounting expeditions to go down into our sector of the Antarctic. And they weren't the only ones, there were others as well. So, I began to see there was another side to the expedition, but then life in Stanley itself was quite hectic because Clifford insisted on, well I say insisted, he used to like to ride round on a fine day, a fine morning, before breakfast, he would ride round the outskirts of Port Stanley or even down to the Cape Pembroke light or something like that, on horseback, and he expected me to accompany him. Well, five years in the Navy had done very little to improve my horsemanship. And, I did persuade the agricultural department to give me their most docile creature, which was an old mare named Princess – I can still remember it's name – and poor old Princess, she only had one vice, and that was she seemed very likely to drop dead from old age underneath me. But apart from that she was very docile and involuntary dismounts, which is my terminology for falling off, were fortunately few and far between. There were other little advant... adventures at Government House as well. For instance one night we had a light shining in the green house at the back, and I think it was... I was probably still up doing a cipher or something, the Governor had gone to bed but he had seen ~

#### CD1 TRACK 6 [5:00]

JH: ~ this. And he came down and said 'There's somebody in the greenhouse, they'll be doing some damage or something. We must get the Chief Constable', and he rang up Higgins [??? unclear]<sup>iv</sup> the Chief Constable, who sort of came puffing up and the Governor said 'There's somebody in the greenhouse, Higgins, and we have got to get him caught.' And then as Higgins said 'Well I'll go in', Clifford said 'Well, if he comes out this way, if you flush him out this way I'll skewer him'. And at this point he sort of produced his ceremonial sword, and Higgins and I had to persuade him he wasn't really suppose to skewer the King's subjects, see. Actually it was a drunken Falkland islander who was trying to pick a posy for his girlfriend.

[laughter:CEL] And there are little things like that sort of made life quite interesting.

[1:00] CEL: *But, on a more serious note, Clifford was quite determined to revolutionise things in the Falklands wasn't he...*

JH: yes, he was.

CEL: *to improve. What were his first targets do you recall?*

JH: Well, almost everything, I can remember [coughs] excuse me.

CEL: *Bless you.*

JH: I can remember one – we went into the Memorial hospital, and the nurses then lived up in an attic in the Memorial Hospital, and it had a ladder up, and it was

literally a ladder, not a staircase, you went up a ladder to get into it, and I must admit when I saw it I thought, well it just so happened I stood at the wrong angle when I saw it, and I thought well it ought to have a courtesy panel on the back of the ladder, because you could... I mean the nurses were wearing skirts and you could see everything as they went up the ladder. So I thought well that would be an improvement. Anyhow, when we got back to government house, Clifford said 'Did you see where the nurses live?'. And I said 'Yes actually I did sir yes.' And I said 'It's a good job they're nimble and agile'. He said 'Don't be facetious about it John, if we ever had a fire in that hospital, the whole lot would be fried to death – they'd never get out'. And one of the first things he did was to put a new nurses hostel on the list. He also put the improvement of the Stanley roads, and the rebuilding of the ..hmm.. town hall which had burned down during the war. And then of course he found that there was no means of bringing in a sick person from the Camp – the surrounding area around Stanley, or all the farmlands, or settlements. There was no sort of ambulance or anything of that sort. There were no tracks for an ambulance. So he then got, quite early on, a ship called the *Philonel*<sup>v</sup> [???] – motor fishing vessel converted into a hospital ship, to bring in... and then of course later on, he developed the air service, but that was another couple of years later.

[3:32] CEL: *What..what do you think was motivating Clifford? Was this good for his career or was he actually very determined?*

JH: He was quite young, still, and I think he did hope to get a bigger... actually I think he really hoped to do well in the Falklands and then go on to a bigger colony like Nigeria. But of course we were in a way it was an unlucky era, because we were already beginning to abandon our colonies, and instead of getting that, he got an extra tour of duty in the Falklands, which meant he probably did as long, if not longer than any other governor. But he did well...he...no, it would be unfair to say that he did it for his personal ambitions. I know that he would like to have done more than he did do, but... I mean as is career wise. But in fact he did do the best he could for the people, and he genuinely did want to help the Falkland Islanders, and it was a side that I think Falkland Islanders failed to realise for a good many ~

### **CD1 TRACK 7 [5:00]**

JH: ~ years. Now they do. Many of the older ones now recognise that he did a great deal for them, but at the time because he was a bit brusque and a bit abrupt in his methods...it never hurt me, I mean I never minded him being... not rude, he wasn't rude, in fact he was always very polite, but he was a bit adamant in his orders – you know, and he was with everybody, and some of them rather resented that. I think it was a mistake that they did resent it, however that's by the by.

[0:37] CEL: *Did you sense that he was happy to be there, or he'd rather be somewhere else?*

JH: Ahh, I think... he would have been quite happy there, but his wife was utterly miserable. And she was out of her depth totally. Now the Falklands when we arrived in '46, I immediately thought 'God, they're way back in the sort of 1920's here.' You know if you had a Government house dance, the ladies turned up in their ball gowns with long gloves, and the gentlemen wore tails, and everything else, I mean it was

really way back in the 20's. And, Mrs Clifford as she then was, did absolutely nothing whatever to correct that impression of the past. In fact she probably took it even further back, because she'd done all her time in the colonial service, about 20 years in Nigeria, where the Raj sort of reigned supreme. And I mean...I...

[1:55] CEL: [??? Inaudible – overlapped with JH] .. Raj .in Nigeria, the Raj in Nigeria?

JH: I mean, it was Raj like....

CEL: *The equivalent...*

JH: Yes.

CEL: *The equivalent, Yes.*

JH: And... actually I have got a very good example of how she could put her foot right in it, and did.

[2:10] CEL: *Yes, please.*

JH: Ahh...one of the jobs... you see the selected people in the Falklands when the new Governor arrives, they go up to Government House, they troop up and they solemnly sign the visitors book – that means they've paid their respects to Governor. Now the tradition is, or certainly was in 1946, that their visit was returned by – if there was a Governor's wife – the Governor's wife and the A.D.C, would go round to these people's houses, and just make a polite call, and only stay a few minutes and exchange notes about the wind or something, and then move on to the next one. And of course it became my job to go round. But, there was also another bit of etiquette that came into this, and that was - if you went to a married couple, I as the A.D.C, had to deliver three visiting cards, two of the Governor's and one of Lady Clifford's. If it was only a bachelor you were visiting there would just be one of the Governor's you see, and they only.... this visiting card business was really going to extremes. Now, I would go in and very few Falkland Island houses had a card tray, in fact I don't know there were any at that stage.

CEL: *[Laughter]*

JH: And, so I would look upon the first bit convenient furniture and stick the three cards on it - which is fine. We went to one house, and we were walking down the garden path afterwards to get back to the road where the car was parked, and the lady from the house came streaking down the garden path afterwards, after us shouting out 'You've left these behind', sort of twitching the three cards in her fingers. And Mrs Clifford looked at the woman, and looked at me and said 'John, explain to this' – she didn't say woman, thank God, 'explain to this person, the etiquette of leaving cards'. So, I sort of mumbled something to the effect that the Governor and Mrs Clifford had returned their visit to Government house, thank you very much. And she then sort of thought 'Well that's not a very good explanation', so she seized the three cards and ~

**CD1 TRACK 8 [5:00]**

JH: ~ she said ‘This is the Governor’s card. This shows that he has visited your husband. This is another of the Governor’s cards. This shows that he has visited you. This is my card. This shows that I have visited you. I do not visit your husband.’ And I thought well this is the bloody end – I’m never going to get caught like this again. So the next day we went out visiting, I would look for any bit of furniture where I could hide the damn things until we were at least we were well clear, and it was that way that three cards were accrued underneath the cover of an upright piano – never got discovered till they went to play the Christmas carols later in the year.

[0:52] CEL: *So did Mrs Clifford deserve that reputation do you feel, or was it misunderstanding all the way round?*

JH: It was very largely misunderstandings, but she made herself thoroughly unpopular. I mean the sort of thing which...it went round Stanley in a matter of seconds, she said to the driver, ‘Why have we stopped driver, why have we stopped?’. And the Government House driver said that ‘There are chickens on the road, ma’am’ . ‘Drive over them driver, driver over them. A governor’s wife doesn’t stop for chickens’. Well that would not be a particularly sensible thing to say here in Wyesham, but out there where farming was the be all and end all of life, it went down like a lead balloon. And they did actually send a petition to Parliament - I mean this is all documented so anybody can read it – they sent a petition to Parliament asking for the Governor’s wife to be removed...

CEL: *[laughter]*

JH: ...which of course Parliament just threw out, because it was ridiculous, I mean you know, they don’t appoint Governor’s wives.

[2:03] CEL: *In order make all these improvements, Clifford had to get money I presume?*

JH: Yes.

CEL: *So he must have had the muscle to get that money, or were there things in his favour?*

JH: He worked damned hard at it actually. It wasn’t a question of having the muscle, but he did point out quite rightly, for things like the hospital ship, you see, he pointed out that the Falkland Islanders had for years made do and people were dying, you know, because they couldn’t be got into the hospital. And he made good cases and mmm – but money was always short when I was out there, for the whole time I was there.... I can’t go into sort of details but it was always incredibly short. And, we really did make...Falkland Islanders make do and mend with very, very little.

[2:59] CEL: *But was..do you feel at that time the climate, the political climate at that time, where observations were being kept open for other nations trying to muscle in to the Antarctic area, do you think that helped Clifford get some money out of it?*

JH: No, I don't honestly think it did because, actually for '46 and '47. FIDs was really pretty leanly – you see we did have an aircraft that went down there in '47. That was *Ice Cold Katie*, but we...she only flew for a fairly short number of hours, I don't know but I mean she didn't fly for very long it was... actually she started flying I think in April and she finished by September, so she only had about five months flying. But, that was the only mechanical... we had no tractors or anything like that to go, and that aircraft was the only one we had, up until the rescue in 1950, when the next lot of aircraft arrived. We didn't have proper radios, travelling radios or anything. We made do and mend with FIDS as well and...I don't think he... were he did have... I've got to be a bit careful what I say here, I have no proof whatever for what I'm going to say, but I'll risk saying it all the same. There was a fair amount of money came in to South Georgia in whaling dues, and I think Clifford did manage to siphon some of that off to support his...

[4:54] CEL: *social program*

JH: Yes, and ~

### CD1 TRACK 9 [4:59]

JH: ~ I think actually he'd probably made a very good Member of Parliament in the last year!

[0:08] CEL: *[laughter] ...You were clearly very valuable to him, but nevertheless you were in fact sent South, what happened?*

JH: Oh well, he was going to go South himself. He wanted to go South, and sort of go round all the bases and inspect everything down there, because we weren't getting a whole lot of information from London, though sort of MI6 and everything, about these foreign expeditions and everything. And Clifford wanted to see the lie of the land and everything, but he couldn't do it because he couldn't get away from the Falklands. There were some important council meetings coming up, and some of the projects he'd started, had to go to these council meetings and he had to push them through. So then he wrote out ... I can remember the time actually, he was...he told me about this when we were waiting for midnight mass on Christmas...Christmas Eve we were going to midnight mass...Chris...Clifford was actually was a Catholic, I'm not, but he was. And we were going to midnight mass, but we were playing snooker and Clifford said 'Well you are going to get your ambition of going South, because I have got to send you there as liaison officer.' And then on the last day of the year he gave me a set of orders to...what I had to do.

[1:41] CEL: *And that was nineteen forty....?*

JH: Six. That was the end forty...that was the new year, well the end.. last day of the year nineteen...

[1:48] CEL: *31<sup>st</sup> December...*

JH: Yes.

CEL: 1946...

JH: Yes.

[1:50] CEL: *And there's a copy here of the orders you were sent. What was your reaction to the news that you were going to be sent South?*

JH: Well, of course I was thrilled to bits in a way, until I found what I had to do. It went quite well. I went down... I sailed with the *Trepassey* on the 1<sup>st</sup> January '47. We would cross the Drake passage, which is normally... Drake's strait, you know south of Cape Horn, normally considered a rotten area, with *Trepassey* we went across in fine style, there was a nice, good breeze so we had all sails set, *Trepassey* did use sails as well as engines, and we made good progress, got to the South Shetlands, and went into Deception. Now this was the first shock was when we got to Deception, because Deception had been off the air, off... out of radio contact, with outside world, for four or five months I think, and everybody had assumed it had just been a wireless failure, which was quite likely. It turned out that the hut had burned down and been completely destroyed, and the two men... the four men in the base had had to sort of survive in one of the old whaler's huts, which they'd managed to sort of convert into reasonable living quarters. And fortunately had plenty of fuel and food, so they weren't too bad, but they were a bit scruffy in that they hadn't got any clothing or bedding to save, and they weren't exactly sort of clean and tidy and everything. Anyhow, we did the best we could for them and two of them said – they were due to stay on for another year down in the Antarctic, they'd signed on a two year contract – but they said after this experience they weren't going to. So, now I left Deception, I... we left on time, but then I was now two men short.

[4:02] CEL: *Where the men that had that experience, were they demoralised, were they deflated by it? What would you assess... how would you assess their psychological condition when you found them?*

JH: No... I mean it would be wrong to say they were demoralised or anything, but they'd obviously had a traumatic experience having their hut burn down. And they just weren't prepared to stay on for another two years. Actually, they did have in some ways, and I only say in some ways because I don't necessarily support it myself, but they did have a valid argument. No effort had been made to find out what had gone wrong. And ships could have got into Deception, we could have sent down some sort of ship, I mean a ~

#### **CD1 TRACK 10 [5:00]**

JH: ~ Chilean tugboat or something like the *Yelcho* could have gone there, oh a couple of months before we got there, because Deception is not all that difficult to reach if the ice... and that year the ice was fairly free. So, they did feel that they'd been badly done by, in that nobody had come to see what had happened to them. I think that rather than say they were demoralised, they were disgruntled, and they just were not going to stay for another year.

[0:34] CEL: *Did you try to persuade them? Or was it a hopeless cause?*

JH: Well, I think it was more or less a hopeless cause, I mean I...and I mean after all men have got to be free to choose ahhh... I mean I said that they could go, as indeed they were due to go to a sledging base, which is the thing that all of us wanted to do is to go to a sledging base. But...and I knew that they could do because they were scheduled to go to a sledging base. But that didn't appeal to them – they said no, they'd like to go home after it.

[1:12] CEL: *So you...your manpower was somewhat re-arranged by that was it?*

JH: Well I was two men short by now but that...or at least the expedition was two men short – not John Huckle – the expedition was going to be two men short for the next year. However, we went on, not though, everything was all right and in order – they were perfectly ready and they'd done a good job. And we then went on...and we were literally in Lockroy only a few hours. And then we went on to the Argentine Islands. Now there, conditions were slightly different because the creek leading up to the base hut, was fast ice – in other words it was absolute solid ice, probably a meter thick, something like that, and *Trepassey*, which was...well about 400 tonne Newfoundland sealing vessel, built of greenheart – she was very sturdy and Burden, her skipper, was extremely adept at handling ice, and he broke a passage up this creek - it took us quite a long time, because we only... although we only had about a mile to do, to break through the ice, you had to break off a pan of ice, put a claw onto it, tow it away out of the creek, then go back and break off another pan and keep on doing this until you got round the corner. When we got round the corner, you might say what my welsh neighbours here would say “look-u, there it is, gone”. Because that was what was... we found we'd got. The hut had gone, there was no hut exactly where it should be, and when we got there, up to where it should be, we went ashore, we found the ring bolts which had been holding the hut, where wires had gone over the top of the hut, the ring bolts in the rock was [noise on microphone – JH: Sorry about that] ...the ring bolts were still in the rock, but the wires had gone completely, carried away, and the... there was no sign of the hut at all, no wreckage, no nothing. The only thing that was there, still half buried in the ice, was a Newfoundland Dori, which had been left there beside the hut. Other than that there was absolutely nothing. And of course I reported this on the radio, by – we hadn't got walkie talkies, I could only do it by W.T. and sent the message to Clifford, and of course to Bingham, who was the commander of the expedition down in Stonington. And he, - I know he actually said ‘Stupid young lieutenant – he doesn't know where to look – tell him he's got to search the islands for the hut – he's obviously looking in the wrong place.’. The fact that we'd found the tie-down points rather sort of knocked that one on the head. But anyhow, the next day we did a complete search of the islands, and obviously there'd be no hut. Clifford meanwhile said ‘Well you've got to do the best you can, because we want to occupy these islands before the foreigners arrive – the intruders arrive. Get some timber’ ~

### **CD1 TRACK 11 [5:00]**

JH: ~ ‘from somewhere or other and build them up – build up a hut’. So I went back to Lockroy and knocked down half the hut there, and again you see, this is the thing which I don't think is generally known, that I was told to get timber as quickly as

possible and build a hut. So I knocked down half a big hut at Lockroy, and took that down, and built a small hut at the Argentine Islands, and then when we got some sort of hut at the Argentine Islands, I went back to Deception again with *Trepassey*, and knocked down a bit of the old whaling station – I was on a real tour of destruction at this time....

CEL; *[laughter]*

JH: ...and took that down to the Argentine Islands, and built that up, or added to what was already there. And at that stage, we were at... well, we'd got the whole thing sort of reasonably set up. Then...I ... after we'd got the Argentine Islands reasonably set up, my orders were to go back to Deception to meet Jimmy Wordie, who was coming out with the *Fitzroy*, and he was going to take over from me, and carry on the voyage of the *Trepassey* down to Stonington Island, which they hoped would be open by that time. Anyhow I got back to Deception, and there was a message for me to say that the *Fitzroy*, which was bringing Jimmy Wordie down, was delayed, and had I ... well I would have had time to go and do a reconnaissance of Admiralty Bay, which was one of the sites that Clifford wanted surveyed as soon as possible for a possible base site. And we did a quick reccy of Admiralty Bay, and went back to Deception and stole a whalers hut from the beach at Deception - you see my destructive tour continued – it was literally one of these small whalers huts, and we transported that to Admiralty Bay and stuck it up near the beach there, and stuck two men in it, and said 'Well, here's some food and best of luck mate – we'll come back some time or other'. I mean things were actually pretty chaotic in those days. And then we got a message that *Fitzroy* was now making for Hope Bay and not Deception, so we went across from Admiralty Bay to Hope Bay where I met Wordie and was able to transfer myself from *Trepassey* to the *Fitzroy*, and then Wordie said 'Well, look we're desperately short of men now' – I don't think he was too happy about the fact that I'd stuck two men on Admiralty Bay! And he said 'We're desperately short of men, if I can persuade Clifford, to let me have you, will that be alright?' Well, of course I mean it was obviously alright with me, I...I was overjoyed at the prospect of being left South. So, Clifford was approached by Wordie who said 'I've got to have more men, and John Huckle says he'll stay down'. So then they took me back to Lockroy and dropped me there, but I was dropped with one Falkland Islander, and that was Jimmy Smith. And...Jimmy and I then remained at Lockroy for the rest of the summer months, and we a talking about from the end of January through to oh...middle of April I suppose it was.

[4:22] CEL: *It was around this time that you got.. you came into contact with your first protest note – is that right?*

JH: Yes, well yes.. it..then ...ahh

[4:40] CEL: *Where was it?*

JH: Well... it was when Jimmy Smith and I were at Lockroy, you see, and we had no radio, bare minimum of food, practically speaking no clothing whatever, I'd got my naval uniform, and I'd got an army battle-dress ~

**CD1 TRACK 12 [5:00]**

JH: ~ and a submarine sweater – which wasn't from my service in submarines, it was part of the issue down in the Antarctic. Jimmy Smith had his army battle-dress, and submarine sweater, and we both had... we both had army ski boots. And that was about all we had in the way of clothing, and we didn't have all that much food, because everything had been moved down to the Argentine Islands, and then from there, as much as possible that was left was going to be transferred to Stonington Island when the ship finally got to Stonington. But Jimmy and I were left holding the fort at Lockroy. And then one morning – remember we didn't...no knowledge of what was going on...we didn't even have a radio receiver, so we couldn't receive any messages or anything – one morning we heard the 'thump thump thump' of a ship's engine coming round the headland, and we hoped it would be the *Trepassey*, so we went dashing out and...when we got outside we found it was a...well, now, it was an Argentinean warship, but let's get this absolutely plain, it was in fact a Norwegian whale catcher, which had been chartered by the Argentinean navy, and it was wearing the Argentinean naval ensign, so it was in fact a warship. But it was the most minor warship that's ever existed. Well anyhow, when the ... the...he was George Personi Riley<sup>vi</sup> [??] was the lieutenant in the Argentinean navy who came ashore, and... I'd been told if the Argentineans or Chileans arrive you are to deliver a protest. But nobody had explained what I had to do to deliver a protest, I just had to 'deliver a protest' – no wording or anything was given to me. Anyhow I sort of met this chap and said 'These are British Crown lands and British territorial waters. You are only supposed to enter these lands with the permission of the Governor of the Falkland Islands. I haven't been notified that you have received such permission' – actually I couldn't have been notified because I hadn't got any... got a radio, but still, I didn't tell him that – 'I haven't been notified that you've received such permission, so I must ask you to leave as soon as convenient. Of course if you in need of help of any sort I shall assist you.' And he sort of was quite polite in reply and he said 'I have to tell you that these are Argentinean lands, and I do not require any permission to be here. However, if you will put your protest into writing, I will take it to my senior officer and he will give you a formal response.' So, I did type out – on the old Remington typewriter which is still in the Port Lockroy hut and of historic interest – I typed out the first... and I think it is the first official protest that was ever made about the ... Argentina's intruding onto British territory.

[3:54] CEL: *And you had to make it up?*

JH: Had to make it up, well yes...actually, apparently it was all right, I did the right things, I got the wording more or less right. And... a few days later I received a letter back from their sort of mini-admiral, very courteous, and it was addressed to 'Don Juan Huckle', which made me feel great, I would love to be a 'Don'. Anyhow, he was very courteous, but had pointed out as these were Argentinean lands, he had no need to get any permission to be there, but in fact I should have asked before I came to live there. So - oh well, empassé. That was the end of that. Well obviously the whale catcher, *Don Samuel* which was..., that was the name of the whale catcher *Don* ~

### CD1 TRACK 13 [4:59]

JH: ~ *Samuel*, She was obviously working near Port Lockroy, but we didn't know where. And...nobody would say, the Norwegian crew didn't say, and the

Argentineans didn't say, but she was doing something, 'cause she'd sail early in the morning and come back fairly late in the evening. And... then, one day she went away for a fair time, and Jimmy Smith and I thought 'Oh she's away for a couple of days, perhaps she'll be away tomorrow, and if it's fine we'll row round Dumay island' – which is a little island near Port Lockroy, when I say little island, it was a fair sized island. And Jimmy and I sort of set off early in the morning, with what sort of emergency stock as we could make, and we went round the island, and we saw at the southern end, the Argies were building a little light beacon. We didn't actually go up to it because we were getting pushed for time and had to get home and we weren't very sure of how the tides were running in the channels there, we went up the Bel... we went out done the Neumaier and up the Beltiere channel, and we got back into the house – oh incidentally there were three of us there, there was a sheepdog named 'Crown', he'd been left by one of the previous citizens at Port Lockroy the year before, and he said would I like him you know, when he was leaving, and we'd got this dog. Well the dog was very pleased to see Jimmy and I back on that occasion.

Anyhow, that was the story of that one. The next big event from that angle, was the arrival of the Chilean warship, *Angamous*. She was quite a big thing, she was a big depot ship. And, we had a commodore, a Chilean commodore or admiral, he came ashore with a bloomin' great staff of you know, about ten or a dozen men. And I met him and ..oh the Argies were back in port again, the *Don Samuel* was back, so the Argentinean officer was also ashore, and the Chilean chap arrived and I sort of met him and saluted him, and sort of welcome...said welcome to him – 'but I am afraid I have to point out to you, that you are not supposed to be here without permission', you see, and read the riot act to him. I'd already learned – don't know whether I ought to say this – but I'd already learned from reading ciphers which I shouldn't have been reading - that in fact we were to treat the Chileans a bit more leniently than the Argies, because the Chileans weren't really sort of trying awfully hard to take our territory. So ... I was sort of reasonably polite with him but anyhow, when I said 'These are British Crown lands' and he said 'they are Chilean lands', the Argie who was standing beside us stepped forward and said 'Gentlemen, you are in error, these are Argentinean lands'. I thought 'oh bugger this for a game of soldiers', and I did the usual thing of saying 'Well, we can't settle anything here.' And I said to the Chilean commodore, 'Would you like to come up to the hut and have a drink with me' And he immediately said 'Yes', and I thought 'Oh God, if he brings that staff, or even half a dozen of them, let alone ten or a dozen, I've only got half a bottle of whiskey left and it won't go very far, but fortunately he only brought an interpreter with him and the interpreter got a very small drink, the commodore got a bit more and I had a drop – so we did manage to have a drink. And that night, the Chileans invited Jimmy Smith who was with me and I for a party on board the *Angamous*, and we really did have a ... a really first rate party. I suppose politically I shouldn't have done but we did have a first rate party and it was quite interesting because, it was made more sort of ~

#### CD1 TRACK 14 [5:00]

JH: ~ in a way more memorable because the Captain of the *Angamous*, not the Commodore - the Captain, had actually been a sub-mariner. So he and I had a bit in common, we were sitting together at the meal and had quite a chat about how to handle submarines and things.

[0:25] CEL: *Did you mm...you're alluding there to a difference in temperature between the British relationship with Chile and the British relationship with Argentina. Is that accurate, that the Argentinians were more of a threat?*

JH: I think at that stage the certainly where, because the Argentinians were absolutely ... you see the Argentinians claimed the Falklands as well, the Chileans never claimed the Falklands, but they did claim the Antarctic. So there was a difference in what they were claiming to start with and the... I mean, one has to be fair about this, the Argentinians from the 1830's onwards never let up their claim to the Falklands, they always persisted that the Falklands belong to Argentina. And it was only the British public that didn't know this. Anyhow...

[1:35] CEL: *So relations with the Chileans were more cordial, but you are guilty I gather of kissing an Argentinean officer?*

JH: Ahh this was later though. This was much later, and I didn't kiss him, he kissed me. Well, actually we can cut this section now, I don't want to go on forever pontificating about. My first year down south was really sort of almost a com... [Coughs – sorry about that] ...almost a complete waste of time, I did practically speaking no useful scientific work at all. I think the only thing I did was I re-wrote the international ice reporting code. Other than that I did absolutely nothing except protest and protest and protest. After we shut down Lockroy at the end of the season in April, I went to Deception Island as base leader, and there the Argentinians and later the Chileans came in, but the Argentinians were determined to build a base, so we had a lot of protesting to do, with the Argentinians, and I did the best I could to keep it on a fairly friendly sort of basis, and in general it was. The Argentinean officers were under strict orders not under any circumstances to seek help from the British, I happen to know this because their orders they were not to seek our help. Equally, I suppose I was beholden to give them help and try and make political advantage out of it, but I used to think that's ridiculous, our claim to the Antarctic is worth far more than just helping an Argie, or you know and odd Argie sailor or something. Anyhow, the story you were talking about – kissing an Argie – came about at the end... almost at the end of my time in Deception, when I was really getting cheesed off with all this political work, and not being able do anything sort of, of my true...true role. An Argie launch came across to the whale station one day where we were living, and when it drew up, I noticed that there was an Argentinean officer in, well what amounted to his best uniform. 'Oh what the hell's he come here for?' – so we all trooped down to the jetty to find out what they wanted, and he came ashore and he announced that he'd brought back my 'bandera'. Now bandera's a flag, and the Argies take ~

### **CD1 TRACK 15 [3:32]**

JH: ~ ...put a great deal of store in their flags. I mean, you know... we tend not to make a great deal of fuss about the Union Jack and things, but the Argies were really sort of red hot on their flag, and he'd got one of our flags. And I thought 'That's impossible'. I had a quick look at the hut and our flag was still flying there so I mean 'this is ridiculous, how can he have one of our flags?'. And he produced this flag, and I looked at it, and I stood...I thought 'Well that's very odd it's a very tattered old flag, what does he mean it's our flag?'. And he said one of his sailors had taken it from our

little tent depot on Mount Pond, and then it rang through my mind. I'd left a tent up on the lower slopes of Mount Pond, just in case anybody, any parties up on Mount Pond, and sort of got caught with the weather or anything, and sort of about half way down was this tent, it was a good position, and in it I'd left a sleeping bag, a bit of food and a primus stove and things, and my sleeping bag which I'd left in there had this rolled up old tattered old remnant of a flag which had been battered to death flying in the wind, and was quite unsuitable for flying anymore. I'd rolled it up and used it as a pillow in my sleeping bag, and some Argie sailor had gone along and found this bloomin' flag. And of course had taken it back on the ship and said 'Look what I've found', and the ... Argies, Argie officers were horrified, that he'd stolen our flag. But anyhow they were now presenting it back to me, and they said 'Of course the sailor will be most severely punished for doing this.' And I thought, well poor bloody sod, I mean it's obvious that any sailor out like that would steal a... it's not really stealing it, just purloin an old battered flag for a souvenir. So I told this Argie officer, 'Oh don't worry about it, it's not important, I'm not even going to report this, it's nothing – neither one thing nor the other – any sailor might have done a thing like that'. And he was obviously absolutely delighted with this response, but his reaction certainly didn't delight me, because he stepped forward like a sort of president of France bestowing the 'Legend d'Honneur', flung his arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks, and the chaps who were with me at the time said they watched the red rising up at the back of my neck, until it got embedded in my hair. And I must admit it was one of the most embarrassing things that had ever happened to me in my life, and it was made more embarrassing by the fact that the whole of the other four men on Deception kept pulling my leg and saying 'Wait till the Governor hears you've been kissing the Argies'.

**CD1 END**

**CD2 TRACK 1 [4:01]**

[0:00] CEL: *This is John Huckle, recorded at his home in Monmouth, by Chris Eldon Lee on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009. John Huckle, part two.*

CEL: *Let's pick up if we may, John, with your trip to Stonington, at last you were being invited to do some sledging work.*

JH: Yes.

CEL: *So how did you greet the news that you were going to be going to Stonington?*

JH: Well of course I was... obviously I was dead pleased about it – I mean it's a thing that all Fids wanted to do was to get to a sledging base.

[0:36] CEL: *What were your instructions?*

JH: Well, just go to the sledging base and.. ahh - I mean we always sort of did whatever we needed to do really. In my case it was to take over Kevin Walton's "Orange Bastards", as the team was called – that was because the three of the dogs

were a sort of brown/reddy colour...he called them the "Orange Bastards" before I got there, so that was alright, I just inherited them. And, once we'd learned to drive a dog team – those of us who hadn't done it before – we were ready to set out and do the necessary.

[1:20] CEL: *You were working with Colin Brown, weren't you?*

JH: Yeah, he was the surveyor that I went with, yes.

[1:24] CEL: *Tell me about him...*

JH: Dear oh dear – do you know it's an extraordinary thing. Colin and I met up in life on at least four different sort of projects. And yet I don't know very much about him, I don't even know him now, which school he went to, I know he went to a decent school. He was trained as a surveyor by the army, the Royal Engineers presumably it is, anyhow he was a surveyor for the army, and he...do you know I'm not sure he was a Royal Engineers though come to think about it. He certainly was a surveyor in the army and he was trained there. Then of course he joined FIDS as it still was in those days, and came down at the beginning of 1948, with the *John Biscoe*, and he then went with me to Stonington Island.

[2:45] CEL: *Was he a man to get on with...a good man to get on with?*

JH: Oh very easy yes, he was probably one of the nicest men I've ever met. That's why I was always quite pleased to see him again later in life.

[2:58] CEL: *And to work with?*

JH: Yes, very easy indeed. Yes we managed to work on most...I mean some of the surveying actually is a bit difficult if...you get sort of freezing conditions and you are trying to stop a stop-watch or you're dead on something, you know its...can be a bit hair raising, but we always got on well enough on that sort of thing. And then, well we get on later when we met up again, but that's a later incident.

[3:33] CEL: *Where you doing some significant surveying work, or just filling in the gaps, or were you pioneering – breaking new ground?*

JH: Well it's not...well, it's very difficult to know what is meant by saying "Were we doing any significant surveying?". We were more filling in gaps, but it was still possible in those days, and this is the thing which appealed to me, it was still possible  
~

## **CD2 TRACK 2 [5:00]**

JH: ~ to find a new... a new island which had never been recorded before, and we did find, well quite a few – inverted commas – new islands – that's one aspect, but the main outline of course was already there. But sometimes, main outlines could be horrendously out of position, I think the chart, when we... Colin Brown and I got to the northern-most point of Alexander Land, I think the chart was something like 15-20 miles out of position. So you know you were making significant improvements

without actually discovering a new island or anything. But we did discover some new islands and we even actually sort of sledged over one or two of them.

[0:59] CEL: *How did you take to that kind of work, and that kind of operation – the sledging and the dogs and so on?*

JH: Who me or...?

CEL: *You, you.*

JH: Hmm...well I...I enjoyed it, I mean I really did because it was great fun and to try and get... I was very lucky with the lead dog, Rover, who was incredibly good at understanding what I was asking him to do, and I found that if I could direct his attention to a distant iceberg, he would run straight for it. So what Colin and I did, and this was quite an easy way of getting your course accurate, we would see an iceberg which was within a few degrees of the direction we wanted to take, and then we would line our compass up and take the bearing of that, and then direct the dogs, or Rover on to that point and he would then run for that and that would be it. And then once we got there you'd to choose the next one and so on. And in that way it was surprisingly accurate, and we had a sledge wheel which was a bicycle wheel towed behind the sledge running the track of the sledge runner so that it had a hard surface to run on, and this was clocking up on a cyclometer... and again that was surprisingly accurate, you would think that this whole thing would be pretty haphazard, but in fact you could get within half a mile, you know, over a distance of fifty to a hundred miles, which is quite good.

[2:54] CEL: *You also came across Vivian Fuchs at this time didn't you?*

JH: Oh well, Vivian Fuchs was the expedition leader, and of course he was at Stonington, now he and Ray Aide, both of them were geologists, they were also doing what I'll call the King George VI Sound, which was the area that Colin and I were surveying. But you see the geologists wanted to be close into the coast so that if there was any rock exposures they could go and pick up rock samples, the surveyors preferred to be five or seven miles off the coast, so that you could see things. If you are up against the coast, you are all the time just going round the headlands and... or else finding you've got a great big ice wall or something blocking your view of the hinterland, whereas if you are say seven miles off, you can see into the back and do plotting of that. So in fact, the down the sound trips consisted of Fuchs and Aide doing the geologising, down the coastal areas, or down the sound but close into the coast so that they could get samples, whereas Colin and I tended to be more into the centre of the sound, both going down and coming back, and then Colin and I were carrying extra food with us, that we could leave at our furthest point south, so that Fuchs and Aide could go on and pick this up on the way back. And I mean it was well planned, Fuchs did the planning for that, and it worked quite well. There is...was one horrendous depot laying trip that we did, in ...sort of in winter time to lay a depot for our future summer ~

### **CD2 TRACK 3 [5:00]**

JH: ~ work, and that really was our...I think it took us over three weeks to do something like a hundred miles, I mean you know that's a sort of horrendous

progress. But we were all learning our way at that stage, we got better as the years...well the year wore on.

[0:22] CEL: *How did you...how was your psychology, how did you cope with being laid up for such a long time, and be heavily delayed, did you ever worry about what might happen?*

JH: You mean the second year at...

[0:35] CEL: *Well, I was thinking you were trying to do this big...this big surveying trip and it took you much, much longer than you thought?*

JH: No, that was a depot laying trip. But...one of the...one of the snags, and this is one that's been experienced by other people in the Antarctic, is there is a slight danger that when you get a blizzard, and you lay up, the blizzard eases to the extent that if you weren't laying up, you would travel in it, but because you're laying up, you tend to go on laying up when the blizzard eases. That actually is easy enough to overcome that syndrome, if you know about it. If you don't know about it, it can be a difficulty.

[1:30] CEL: *Was there a time when you feared for your life, in your time down there?*

JH: Hmm - oh dear - not...not re...certainly not when I was with the expedition, no. But as you see I went back again for two lengthy periods after I'd finished with the British Antarctic...well what is now the British Antarctic Survey. Hmm - there has only been one incident where I might have...it's just possible... anyhow we might come onto that later.

[2:18] CEL: *OK, alright. Around about this time, much to your...I don't think you actually knew about this they were...somebody else was busy naming a mountain after you.*

JH: No I didn't know about that till about 30 years afterwards, when H??? Smith<sup>vii</sup>, was working in the Foreign Office, was kind enough to write me a note and say that...naming...in the old days people named mountains and valleys and things like that, after - well some of them were after themselves - but most of them tried to be a little bit modest about it and say it was after their wife or their mother or something you see - same difference. I didn't know anybody had named anything after me at all, until oh something like 30 years afterwards. Actually the very first I heard of it was when I was in the States, I saw an American map and one of the chaps - I was working with some American pilots and he said 'Was your father down there?'. I said 'No, my father was never down there'. He said 'Well look, there's a Mount Huckle here'. And sure enough there was, it was... it is the Mount Huckle that's now Mount Huckle, and I suddenly realised that had been named after me. But I didn't know it was on sort of the later versions of the international maps, so I didn't really count that one as being...and anyhow that was certainly 25 years after I'd been down there. But...names have always been a difficulty, there is the Detroit plateau, which is actually originally named the Detroit Aviation Society plateau. The Douglas Range, in which Mount Huckle is, is actually the Douglas Aircraft Corporation Range. I know - those were the names that they were originally given you see.

[4:34] CEL: *But there are a couple of features named after a woman you knew?*

JH: Ahh not really...well not entirely – I don't know how you can say its' two features. The entrance to the Lemaire Channel, there's a very prominent cape – Cape Renard, it's a...it's two ~

#### **CD2 TRACK 4 [4:59]**

JH: ~ sheer precip...don't know what the adjective is – precipices, which reach up into the ...well about 2000 – 2500 feet, and they are side by side, and at the end they have a rounded top with a sort of little point at the end. And I think it was in either '47 or '48 they acquired – Cape Renard being its proper name – they acquired a nickname “Una's Tits”. And, now... we ought to be very careful, 'cause I hope I am not going to be slandering anybody with this. But Una at that time was a very nice young lady, who lived in Port Stanley, and who was well endowed – let's leave it at that. So this was “Una's Tits”. Now the interesting thing about that, is not that which is perhaps a rather cheeky way of describing a cape, but the really interesting thing was something like 20 or 30 years later, I was talking to somebody who had just returned from the Antarctic with BAS, and he was showing me some pictures of the entrance to the Lemaire Channel, and I said ‘Oh, what's this cape’, and he said, ‘Oh, that's Cape Renard’, and I said ‘Yeah, have you got another name for it?’. And he sort of looked at me and sort of suddenly realised that I obviously knew what the other name was, and he said ‘Oh yes, it's called “Una's Tits”’. And I said “Yes, but why is it called that? I mean we know why it's called Cape Renard, but why is it called Una's Tits?”. They hadn't got a clue. BAS didn't know why it was called it, they...many members of BAS knew that it was but they didn't know why.

[2:10] CEL: *Does Una know?*

JH: I haven't the slightest idea. I knew Una very well, but I have no idea whether she ever knew she was honoured in that way.

[2:23] CEL: *The name does not appear on the map at all?*

JH: Oh no, certainly not – no, no, no. Ah – actually naming can produce some funny results though. There was one group of islands which I know on some maps have the name ‘Fly-spot Islands’. No that's an odd name for a group of islands, but there was an origin to that. Colin Brown and I were going across...or planning a route across Marguerite Bay, and I always used to look at any old...well all the old charts before I went anywhere to see what other people had seen. And one thing was...or one of the 1909 French charts showed a little tiny group of dots, getting out into the middle of the bay. And that wasn't going to be many miles off our route, so I said to Fuchs who was the expedition leader ‘Look shall we go out and have a look at this, and put them on the map properly?’ And he sort of looked at it, and I can still picture him rubbing that map with the back of his hand and saying ‘No no, no, no, don't bother about that, they're only fly-spots, they're fly-spots marking the chart.’ Well it so happened that

as we went south, Colin Brown and I didn't wilfully go out to look, but we did see another little island, and we went out to that one – I mean we could see this other little island – and when we stood on the top of that, we could see these fly-spots on the horizon, so we did go out and see the fly-spots, they were on some charts as the fly-spot islands.

[4:11] CEL: *Let me take you back now to Stonington and your time there. What is the John Huckle version of the story of the lost eleven?*

JH: Well to start with we weren't bloody well lost we knew exactly where we where!

CEL: [*Laughs*]

JH: That was a good start. The other thing is that some people sort of say 'Oh, five of them were the first people to do three years in the Antarctic without a pause'. Well it's probably...well in fact it is true. But I think more to our credit than that, was the fact that the whole lot of us in many ways, were the last people to use the old traditional ~

#### **CD2 TRACK 5 [4:59]**

JH: ~ Antarctic exploration methods. In other words we had...certainly the first trip down the George VI Sound I did with Colin Brown, we were out for sort of 90 days or thereabouts, and we had no radio, there was no aircraft with the expedition to help us, we had no mechanical transport like a tractor or anything like that. You just relied on your husky dogs to pull, you relied on the food and clothing you had. The clothing was pretty minimal compared with what is supplied nowadays. The rations I think were very good indeed, but terribly monotonous, but they were good, and they certainly sustained us even if we did lose weight – which would be good for you at some stages. No I...I enjoyed that time I was down there in Marguerite Bay.

[1:07] CEL: *When you realised you were going to have to spend a third winter, in the hut what did that...*

JH: We weren't in the hut you see, we were going out sledging, and we had to do trips to bring in food for the dogs, as you know, seals and things. Even in midwinter we were still trying to get food for the dogs. And, for some of us – actually opinions did vary, there's no doubt about that, the effect it had on people did vary from person to person. Once I realised that there wasn't going to be any relief that year, I mean it was obvious that they'd turned away and gone back to Stanley, I sort of thought well there's a lot of surveying that we didn't do last year, we can do next...you know this coming year. And obviously Fuchs and Aidie thought similarly. And then Bernard Stonehouse wanted to do his big project with the Emperor penguins you see, so we did have...all of us I think had projects. There were some who must have found it a bit of a bore, because we had two people who were really unlucky. We had a pilot, Pat Toynbee for the aircraft, and we had an aircraft engineer, Dave Jones, and they were with us...and they were with us for the two years, and the aircraft was up at Deception, rotting away on the edge of the crater there. So they actually were hard done by.

[2:57] CEL: *Was there any homesickness about that time when it sank in that you weren't going back to Blighty?*

JH :Hmmm...I don't know – we did organise our parents and wives to speak to us from the BBC in London, who sort of one broadcast each, and we did also manage occasionally to get through on the telephone. There's a lovely story I could tell about that. There's David Dalgliesh who was our doctor, he got through on the telephone to his father who I think in - who I think was, I believe down in Devon but I am not sure – but anyhow he got through on the telephone to his father, but he sort of got the operator to say to the father 'Will you accept the call, you sons calling from the Antarctic?' – which I think is a nice touch!

[4:02] [CEL] : *So how were you relieved in the end – perhaps not in the way you expected?*

JH: Hmm well no...well we did know in advance of course that the plans were being made to evacuate us by air. What finally happened was that Clifford organised two aircraft, a Norseman which carried about ten...ten people altogether, and an Auster. The Auster was going to be used...both were going to be on floats, the Auster was going to be used to do reccies of the ice for the *Biscoe*, and the Norseman was going to be used to pick up the...well as many as it could from Marguerite Bay. If necessary it would pick up the whole lot, but the hope was that they'd pick up the most urgent cases ~

## **CD2 TRACK 6 [5:00]**

JH: ~ in other words the ones who had done three years first, and then hopefully the *Biscoe* would get in and pick up the others. And that's actually how it went, it went absolutely perfectly, the Norseman came in, picked up some, didn't get all of them, but it picked up some, then went back to the Argentine Islands where it was waiting with the *Biscoe*, then it came in a second flight, and this time the water was reasonable clear, and it picked up all the others who were scheduled to go out, just leaving a few behind to load the ship when that got through, and the ship eventually got through and loaded up and kep...went out.

[0:49] CEL: *When you...when you got back to Stanley after having been away for two and a half years, what were your...do you remember your feelings, were you surprised by the greenness?*

JH: No, no, no, no, no, I don't think I ever...was very much as I expected. The actually...understatement of my life came when I got back to Stanley the...I went from Deception where I had been landed by the Norseman, I went back in the *Bigbury Bay* which had been put in there – that was a frigate which had been put in as a longstop to ahh...in case anything went wrong. And I got back into Government House, and Lady Clifford – Miles Clifford had just been knighted in the new years honours – Lady Clifford met me and said 'Well after your trip you must need a decent bath, John'. I don't know whether she thought I had been away three years without a decent bath, but anyhow – but I think that was the understatement of the year.

[1:57] CEL: *One of the unfortunate things about the whole story is of course having to cull the huskies before you came away. Tell me about that day – what to you recall?*

JH: Well...no I mean that was a thoroughly squalid business, but it was absolutely essential. We couldn't get them out, there was no way we could have got that lot out, because we had somewhere getting on towards a hundred huskies, certainly had something like eighty, and you couldn't just let them go loose because they would have starved in the winter months when there weren't seals around. I mean they would have killed seals alright, but there wouldn't have been many around in the winter, so it was better than leaving them to starve, it was decided the only thing that could be done was to shoot them. It was not a good idea, but hmm I mean they are ...we saved those that we could, - my lead dog Rover survived and went away, I don't know how he got on. Bouncer, my big dog, that was the biggest one of the lot, he did come back and he was in the Festival of Britain in London, and then ended his days in Whipsnade Zoo.

[3:15] CEL: *What was the...what was the Festival of Britain all about, what was happening there?*

JH: I don't know, I wasn't there. Pat Toynbee and I think Bob Spivey represented Fids at that. You'll have to sort of get on too...

[3:29] CEL: *Alright. And you some...some minor brush with the filming of Scott of the Antarctic didn't you?*

JH: Oh God, that was right at the beginning, when we went down in 1946. On the hmmm... Bob Moss was a cameraman who was filming the ice barrier for Scott of the Antarctic, and also some of the sort of manhandling of stores and things, and that...we did that and round an iceberg, where the ice barrier was cruising the *Trepassey* round an iceberg in fact – but that goes right back to the beginning of my story in 1946.

[4:20] CEL: *You didn't meet the stars though I don't believe?*

JH: No.

CEL: *They were elsewhere?*

JH: No. No.

[4:24] CEL: *Okay. Let's move on. You wanted me to ask you about this mystery ship – the ship that BAS didn't know it had?*

JH: Ahhh!

CEL: *Called the Penelope – tell me about her.*

JH: Ahh – well now we...well actually it follows directly on from that decent bath. Because remember now, at this stage we were at the beginning of 1950, and I had

been away from England for over three years. And I was certainly due for some leave, and I thought ‘Oh well I’m bound to get a bit of home leave in the UK now’ ~

**CD2 TRACK 7 [5:00]**

JH: ~ Actually it was a year late this UK leave. So I went along to the governor’s office sort of full of myself to report for duty as it were, and I thought ‘Well he’ll tell me to go on leave’. And not a bit of it – his first words were ominous ‘Oh there’s a little job I want you to do John, before you go to the UK, it won’t take you very long.’ Now remember the last time he’d sent me away for three or four weeks and I’d come back three years later. So I said ‘Oh yes, and what is this little job?’.

Well we had bought a ketch, called the *Penelope*, and the object of the exercise is for Fids to use her to survey the harbours of the South Shetlands. And I thought ‘Well that’s a good idea’. And he said ‘But we have run into a problem’. ‘Oh yes what’s that?’ Well her skipper came out and said that she was unseaworthy. And, he was a chap called Selvey-Smith – and I thought ‘Well that’s funny, Selvey-Smith, I know a Selvey-Smith’. Yes it was George Selvey-Smith. Well George Selvey-Smith by the most extraordinary co-incidence, had been in the same class as myself at school. Anyhow, he’d come out to skipper the *Penelope*, but unfortunately he thought she was unseaworthy, the Governor disagreed, so he said ‘Well, I’ve got to have a proper enquiry’. And he set up an official enquiry which was chaired by Captain Kirkwood of the *John Biscoe*, and had the colonial secretary on it as well. And they concurred with the skipper, that the *Penelope* was unseaworthy – which meant she was condemned, she was just finished, because the governor couldn’t send her to the Antarctic as part of the FIDS program, and he couldn’t even sell her if she was unseaworthy, because that would be immoral. So he was stuck with her, and he said ‘Can’t you do anything about it John?’. And I sort of explained that Kirkwood was much more experienced at sea than I was and he was a good deal senior to me in the navy and nobody was likely to trust a junior officer against a senior officer. Anyhow, there was one gleam of hope, there were several Falkland Islands skippers of sailing craft around the Falklands, who said that *Penelope* was as safe as houses and she really was a very well built boat. And I had a look at her and I must admit I agreed she was very soundly built and I thought she was perfectly seaworthy. So, I said to the Governor ‘Look, I shall have to give her some prolonged trials, I can’t just take her up and down in Stanley harbour – that’s no good at all. I shall have to give her a long sea trial in some rough weather to see what she does do.’ And he said ‘OK, we’ve just taken delivery of the first radio telephone sets to be established on the sheep farms, so that they can contact the doctor in an emergency’. And one has to remember, we are now talking about 1950, at that stage there was still farms in the Falklands that were using beacons – smoke signals – to pass messages, and if they wanted to get to a doctor or...well if they wanted to get a doctor to them, it required a long horseback ride, or a trip in a tiny boat, and I mean sometimes it took three or four days to get to a doctor. So...and that was to get a message through. So out went the *Penelope*, on this voyage and this is... I mentioned earlier that Colin Brown and I kept meeting up, this was the first occasion after we got back from the...sort of Marguerite Bay, where Colin Brown and I met up again, because Colin came along as part of the crew for this voyage round the islands, with the radio telephone sets. Ostensibly his job was to point the aerials in the right direction – in fact I think it was a jolly so he ~

**CD2 TRACK 8 [5:00]**

JH: ~ could see the Falklands – which was fine. We went round, and we did manage a very successful voyage, wasn't easy by and manner of means, in fact off Cape Meredith we ran into an absolutely blasting full gale, and the mizzen topsail came down with a crash and landed on the deck, bounced over the stern, and I had to hack the rigging through to prevent it fouling the rudder and the propeller. And...as I was sort of slashing away at this over the guard rail I was thinking of Nelson's sailors when they had to clear away masts brought down by cannon fire – it was all very reminiscent of those pictures. Anyhow, we got rid of that and we did eventually get back to Stanley and as I say it was in the most...it was certainly the biggest advance in the internal communications of the Falklands that had ever, ever been made. There had been no other advance in the internal communications as great as that voyage had been, when I don't know how many it was but it must have been well over a dozen farms were connected up to the doctor.

[1:27] CEL: *And this was a Clifford hmm...*

JH: Oh yeah.

CEL: *initiative?*

JH: Yeah, yeah. Well, yes in a way because the vessel was now being used for a purpose which was totally different to the original purpose of going and surveying in the South Shetlands. However, she was owned and operated by FIDS, because I was still working as FIDS. But then I did get home on leave, and I...I got two months away from Stanley, I was wondering how I did that in 1950., and I flew home from Montevideo and I flew back from London to Montevideo, and that journey in those days took thirty-six hours in a DC6, and that was considered remarkably quick, so I didn't lose too much of my leave travelling – and hmm, still it was 3 or 4 days from Montevideo to Stanley, but that doesn't matter. Any anyhow, I came back in and found *Penelope* was still not wanted, she was unloved, and lying in the harbour at anchor looking very forlorn. So I went along and enquired what was happening, and the Governor said 'Well, nothing much we can do with her, cause I've got no skipper for her or anything'. So I found myself lumbered with *Penelope* again, and I took her out on a number of short trips, I took the boys brigade to a summer camp, and I took the hunting and shooting club to Port Louis, we had over 30 geese when we came back in, and half a ton of mullet, which are a lovely fish. This was of course in the days before the conservationists spoiled every bit of fun anybody ever had. So anyhow, then after a few short trips, we did get a long one, we got two months or so out on Pebble Island, to take the place of the *Gentoo*, which was their drifter which needed urgent refitting in Stanley, but they had to have a ship for the farm, because Pebble Island is a farm with many island attached to it, on which their flocks are spread all round, including the Jason Islands, the furthest west of the Falklands group. And that was very successful, I mean I enjoyed that, I enjoyed that time out at Pebble and exploring all the harbours and things. Came back in, did a few more short trips, there was only one that I remember vividly. I got...I got sent out to bring in a lady who was expecting a baby. And, we got oh about thirty miles out from Stanley, and everything was going all right, and then she suddenly announced that she had gone into labour. And I thought 'oh well if I increase the...open her up to full throttle, I can save twenty minutes anyhow – that'll help.'. And then I suddenly realised that at full

throttle the propeller vibration increased dramatically, and I'd be shaking the guts out of the thing, and probably out of this woman as well. So gave up that idea and sort ~

**CD2 TRACK 9 [4:59]**

JH: ~ of settled for setting the sails to maximum efficiency. And then the radio telephone which we had established came to my help. I managed to use that radio telephone system to get a message through to Stanley to say send a doctor out in the harbour launch to meet me at Cape Pembroke. And that saved a whole hour of medical assistance time by doing that, so the radio telephone had already paid off to me directly. And, anyhow after those few short trips, we then got one big contract, which was to move, oh many hundreds of times – I don't know how many, from Fanning Head Cove to the Ajax Bay where they were building an abattoir.

[0:57] CEL : *This was tons of gravel you mean? Tons of rock or gravel?*

JH: Sand Actually.

CEL : *Sand?*

JH: Yeah. And they used the sandy beach there. And...we...the system was CDC, the Colonial Development Corporation, had an old WW2 infantry landing craft with its' propulsion removed, and *Penelope* used to tow this to the beach, then we used to run it aground just after high tide, lower the ramp, lower...load it with sand, take it off and take it back to...tow it back to Ajax Bay. And Ajax Bay actually was a total failure with the abattoir and the station went derelict. Incidentally, I had a Falkland Islander...I had three men in the Falkland Island crew for the *Penelope* at that time, and myself, and we did quite nicely thank-you, because we were paid a bonus on the sand and we were working 13 hours a day, 7 days a week for two and a half months, and we did very well out of it, but I think the bonus was well earned, better than some bankers bonuses recently.

[2:24] CEL: *And just...just encapsulate for me the relationship between Penelope and...well FIDS it was in those days. Was she owned by FIDS?*

JH: Yep – she was owned by FIDS.

CEL: *But there's no record?*

JH: Well as far as I know, no. They don't seem to have any sort of record of *Penelope* at all.

[2:41] CEL: *Where is she now?*

JH: Ahh – glad you asked that question. She was sold by FIDS, after the Ajax Bay thing. And before we leave Ajax Bay, I should explain – Ajax Bay abattoir went derelict and for something...nearly thirty years, nobody went anywhere near it. And then when the invasion or the... hmm, the occupation of the Falklands came about, we used it as a casualty clearance station, so in fact all the effort I'd put in to hauling that bloody sand to it, did pay off, but it came...

CEL: *In '82, yes.*

JH: Anyhow, *Penelope* was...after that, almost immediately afterwards, sold by FIDS to recoup their losses on her, which had been – well actually I had managed to recoup a bit by doing the work you see – but they were still down on...obviously on the capital costs of the thing. But they did manage to recoup quite a bit by selling it to the Falkland Islands Company, who used it at Speedwell as a farm boat, and that meant that FIDS lost the *Penelope*. Since that day, and we are now going back you see to the 1953...yeah '53 – since that day there have been a number of other owners, one of the most recent was Jimmy Smith, who was the chap who was on...onshore at Lockroy with me when we were first there. Well, Jimmy Smith - now this is so far an unsubstantiated rumour, so I cannot vouch for the truth of what I am going to tell you – but I've heard the rumour that she has been taken to Germany where she is being restored to her original role as the *Feuerland*, the expedition base ship for an expedition to Tierra del Fuego, made ~

## CD2 TRACK 10 [5:00]

JH: ~ by a 1<sup>st</sup> World War German flying ace, Gunther Pluschow. And if so, she will in fact once she is restored, look really quite grand again, and the idea is to keep her in an historic vessels museum thereafter. I must admit, I very much hope it's the truth, because I'm hoping if it is, that Eileen and I will get an invitation to visit her in Germany. Well no harm in trying!

[0:35] CEL: *Let's hmm...let's put you in the air for a while shall we? How did hmm...you were back at Stanley, you were back under Clifford...Clifford's control and he...he insisted you take the air and become a pilot?*

JH: Ah well no no...no no. The first stage was after we got rid of *Penelope*, I was then unemployed because you see once *Penelope* had been sold, there was no excuse for paying me as a Fid. I'd had my leave and I'd ...well you know I might have been paid for a couple of months as a sort of extra you know... but there was no ongoing employment and Clifford had no vote for paying an A.D.C. So more or less we were in a situation where if I wanted to stay out there and Clifford wanted me to stay there, we had to find something for me to do. Well Clifford wanted to get a proper harbour master, because the Superintendent of the P.W.D. was nominally the harbour master, knew nothing whatever about...I mean he knew how to build a building, but he didn't know anything about boats or anything. So...unfortunately the councils in the Falklands accepted Clifford's idea that John Huckle would be a good harbour master. I think this was because I'd sort of sailed around with the R.T. sets and sort of got to know a lot of people and it all stood me in good stead. So I got this job as the harbour master, and the first thing I found was the hospital ship, which had now been there for five years was all corroded to hell and gone and really quite unsafe. Its stern gear was bi-metallic corrosion, you know, salt water and two metals in the stern gear and the didn't...and the crew were very worried about this but there was no-where we could slip it in the Falklands to change the stern gear. And the only place we could do that was Punta Arenas, but the *Philonel* crew refused to sail it there in that condition.

And I had to ask for voluteers and Pete Starling is the one that sticks in my mind – he was FIDS, and he'd been down south and he'd come back, and he said he'd like to go to Punta Arenas, and he became the chief engineer for the *Philonel*, to take it over to Punta Arenas. I think had another one, and I also was known to the signalman from, I think it was the *Burghhead Bay*, or *Veryan Bay*, I'm not quite sure which Bay it was, but one of the frigates, and then the frigate escorted me to the entrance to the straits of Magellan, and thought – oh well you know I'll be able to get up there by myself. And went to Punta Arenas, got the stern gear fixed, loaded up with a lot of oil and came back to Stanley. And then I started harbour mastering, which involved a lot of other things it wasn't just the harbour masters, I found I'd got things like 'registrar of shipping', which involved me in registering the *Shackleton* and *John Biscoe* for FIDS because they wanted them registered in the Falkland Islands and so on. And so I still had the sort of ongoing contact with FIDS in rather obscure ways. But the next blow came when the FIDS aircraft, which was one float Auster and one Norseman on floats, were bought by the air service from FIDS. But we now had - in the past we'd had a situation ~

### CD2 TRACK 11 [4:59]

JH: ~ where...well we now had three aircraft, because the air...Falklands already had one land plane Auster, we had three aircraft but we only had one pilot and one engineer, which of course was an absurdity. And Clifford came to me and said 'Well we have got to have another pilot because people expect you know to have a pilot on call all the time. And now we have got three aircraft we can have a pilot on call all the time.'

And I said 'Yes that's fine, where's the money going to come from?' And Clifford said 'Oh that's easy, you'll do it and then we won't have to find any more money, because it will be part of your harbour-master's pay'. And he said 'It ought to be under the charge of the harbour master anyhow, because they're sea planes.' I mean I suppose the argument is logical. So I said 'Well, you know I'm not very keen on flying'. He said 'Oh that doesn't matter. You'll have to go to...of course you've got to go to England to get a proper licence, can't do that here'. So I was dispatched to England to get a proper licence, and I had to do all that in...before the coronation, because all the shipping places would be taken up at the coronation and all the aircraft passengers, and I wouldn't be able to get back to the colony for ages. So I think that was six months in which to do the commercial pilots course and everything and that was all right, it went very quick despite the fact that I didn't like flying, and I came back and then that was how I got involved in the flying in the Falklands.

[1:51] CEL: *So what sort of flying where you doing?*

JH: Well I...I mean I was running a department you see, my official designation on the flying side was Director of Civil Aviation.

CEL : *[laughs] Sounds grand!*

JH: Oh yes, well yes I mean everything's grand, the only trouble is there's only half a dozen people in the aviation department, but it sounds grand.

[2:15] CEL: *Where you flying passangers or emergencies?*

JH: Oh yes, but I...I used to try to give the passenger flying to...there was no difference between the pilot and myself in qualifications, but I used to prefer to leave him with the passenger flying, while I did the medical emergencies and also the mail dropping, which I happened to like – I liked mail dropping, that was great fun. And .. so we developed quite a good working relationship in that way, and we built up the air service quite considerably, and then I began to realise the system of changing the pilot every two or three years from England was a ridiculous thing, we wanted a permanent pilot, so I suggested we train a Falkland Islander, because if I could qualify in six months, I was damn sure any Falkland Islander could qualify in six months, so we got a student pilot, and he eventually did, just as I was leaving, he qualified to assume all this – to replace me as a...not as a harbour master or director of civil aviation, but as a pilot. It all fitted in quite nicely.

[3:46] CEL: *One of the anecdotes from that time, I think you did lots of early morning flying didn't you?*

JH: Yes, well I was either famous or notorious, and I'm not sure which, for that. There is a period in the early morning when you can do it. It meant taking off at absolute dawn, and getting a flight in and getting back. It was particularly good for mail flights and the medical, if you could advise the medical that you would be there early. There was one medical which I did very early, I was a stretch of coast from Danson Harbour...yes Danson Harbour, and went out and brought him in quite early, and when I got to the jetty, Stuart Sylvester the senior medical officer, Stuart of course was down in the Antarctic with FIDS. Stuart had a look at the patient and said 'Oh I'm sorry John, I don't think – we've been too late this time, we should have got you there earlier'. Meaning you know he should have called me in earlier to fly him out, but actually ~

### **CD2 TRACK 12 [6:00]**

JH: ~ the really lovely part about that story, was three weeks later a chap came to my front door with a huge jar of cream to say thank you for getting me – so it was worth while at times.

[0:14] CEL: *And the early morning was a good time for flying was it?*

JH: I always thought so. The townspeople didn't agree...I used to take off in the harbour you see and the old beaver would roar along the harbour making a hideous noise.

[0:33] CEL: *What were the hmm...find a delicate way of putting this... I've been asked to enquire about the facilities for ladies?*

JH: Oh well, the facilities weren't just for ladies – for everybody. The Beavers with floats on were slow. The Auster was even slower, but the Auster was thank God was more or less a private aircraft, you only had sort of one or two passengers in it. The Beaver of course you might have five or six in, and if you were doing a long flight round, the last poor devil was probably three or four hours in the aircraft, and by the time they were getting sort of one from last, or two from last, they were wanting to go

to the loo – understandably – and again its one of those things I don't know whether I'm famous or notorious, but if you let them go to the loo by going up to the manager's house, and I'm talking particularly about the ladies, they would go up from the jetty to the manager's house to go to the loo, the manager invariably gave them a cup of tea which instantly undid any good work they'd already done, and kept them there for at least a quarter of an hour while I was fuming at the jetty, wanting to get on with the flight. So I didn't allow them to go up to the manager's house, I used to point to the outboard float, and say, you know, 'go to the loo on the float', which most of them did. Occasionally there'd be an argument, and if they started an argument, and this is were I did become a bit notorious, I used to say 'knickers or floats'. Frankly I didn't care which, but that was the way we worked it. The thing was they were getting a way of transport which sort of three or four years before had taken them about five or six days on horseback to get there. I mean, you know, it's not much of a sacrifice to have to go to the loo on the float of a seaplane, particularly as I used to say 'everyone look inside' – I mean you know look away.

[2:59] CEL: *Do you think it was a...looking back was there a reliable passenger service? Were you able to fulfil your targets?*

JH: We didn't...we never achieved what I wanted to achieve. It was a good passenger service, and touching wood during my time we never had any acc... touching wood [sound of knocking on table]... we never had any accident whatever, I mean I had three forced landings, but we never had any accident which hurt anybody at all. After I left there had been some accidents, but certainly in my time there was never an accident, and we did the best we could and we stepped up the number of passengers we were carrying. We were carrying over 2000 a year, which is quite good going because the population of the Falklands was only just 2000, so you know we were doing sort of a good shift.

[4:01] CEL: *In the early 50's I think you found when you got back to Stanley that the regulations that he been perhaps rather relaxed in your first spell there had become rather more stringent in the second time you were there. You were gradually...Stanley was gradually being dragged into the next century?*

JH: Oh no, no, no, no, no.

CEL: *No?*

JH: No. While I was there it never...well we never could, we couldn't afford while I was there, we just could not afford to meet it. Nowadays, they have to meet it and they can afford it. The result is...it's far safer, well nominally safer, I mean the fact that I never killed anybody and nobody suffered while I was there, means that it can't be any safer than safe. But having said that, in theory they are much safer now, but it's not nearly so much fun! And in that I know a number of people who would back me up, people who knew the conditions then, and they say 'Well it's not the fun it used to be'. I mean it was fun, lets face it.

[5:24] CEL: *I asked you earlier if there was any time you feared for your life, and you alluded to one episode which – would that be the episode which Fuchs talked*

*about in "Of Ice and Men" where he says 'the moral is never go boating in low temperatures'*

JH: No and I ...and frankly I don't know that reference is so I'm...no, no it certainly wasn't. No the ahh...we've left out a whole, virtually a whole chapter of my time down south, because you see I went whaling for three years, and I was flying a helicopter off the whaling factory ships ~

### **CD2 TRACK 13 [3:59]**

JH: ~ and while I was flying a helicopter on one occasion, I was flying over South Sandwich, which one of the islands was on eruption – erupting. And I decided it would be nice to have a look in the crater to see what was going on. But as we got near, the sulphur fumes filled the cockpit and it wasn't just the human beings that didn't like it, the engine didn't like the shortage of oxygen either, and it did a bit of a cough and splutter [sic], but those... splutter...those whaling days were really the – they were too risky, I ought not to have done that but at least I got my helicopter ratings out of it so I was happy from that angle.

[1:06] CEL: *So you learnt to fly helicopters in the South Atlantic did you?*

JH: No, I learnt to fly the helicopter actually just a few miles from where we are sitting now. I learnt to fly it a Cheltenham, but that was the home base for the Selversons whaling outfit you see, for the air unit. Actually how that came about, how I became sort of whaling was ... while I was flying around with the Beaver and the Auster in the Falklands, H. K. Selverson who was the chairman of Selversons and the boss out there in Leith in Scotland, he came out to the Falklands, and he was... I flew him around and we got chatting from time to time, well inevitably, I mean you know as we were going around the islands. And when he was leaving he said 'Well if ever you want to change your job, and don't know what to do, come and see me in Leith and I shall see if I can give you something to do'. And, I thought 'Well that's a nice enough offer'. I wasn't at the time sort of absolutely sure I was going to leave, but I was getting near the stage where I had done everything I could in the Falklands. Anyhow, when I did decide to leave, I did go to Leith, and I did sort of ask to see H. K. Selverson and he said 'What to you want?', and I said 'Well you said I could come to you for a job, well here I am – what have you got?'. He said 'Ohh, we want helicopter pilots for our whaling factories'. And I said 'Well I don't fly a helicopter', he said 'That's alright we'll give you a course'. So that was how I got that, which was all to the good.

[3:14] CEL: *Where they the best years of your life?*

JH: Which?

CEL: *The Antarctic years.*

JH: I just do not know – I knew you were going to ask that question – ahh there was so many incidents which I look back upon with great pleasure, I mean you know I really did enjoy many incidents and everything. Its...its very, very difficult to say which of these are best, its...actually by an odd quirk of fate ~

**CD2 TRACK 14 [2:53]**

JH: ~ I'm going to suggest that..ahh [shuffling of papers]...wait a minute no, not that one, ahh, not that one no. Have you got that thing I gave you, the anecdotes? No not that one, you know the file...

CEL: *Oh!*

JH: Ahh...that's it. Now, I think the thing that has given me most pleasure of the whole of my time connected with the Falklands is probably that...

[0:54] CEL: *This is you being presented with a gold coin in recognition of your service to FIGAS. – the Falkland Islands Government Air Service – signed by Vernon Steel, General Manager. And you've still got the coin I guess?*

JH: Oh yes, yes. But read the next sort of paragraph there is...

[1:13] CEL: *That FIGAS maintains such impact on the social scene of the Falklands today, is testimony to you and the standards and values you set those early years – so it's a lasting memorial?*

JH: I think that is in fact probably the...in some ways my happiest moment, although when that gold coin arrived, wasn't my happiest moment at all, because the postman knocked on the door – I don't know whether you want to record this or not – the postman knocked on the door and said 'I've got a package for you, but I've got to collect 21 pounds and 51 pence customs duty'. Well, I mean normally we don't have any money in this flat, I use a credit card, or actually a debit card, and we keep a minimum amount of money, we have done for many, many years because elderly people sometimes get robbed, you know, but if you haven't got any money, they can't rob you of it you see! But it just so happened we managed to scrape up 21 pounds and 52 pence – and it was for this bloody gold coin and that was customs duty on it. Eileen said 'well you should be able to get that back'. And I must admit the customs in the end were very, very good and did re-imburse the whole sum plus the postage.

[2:37] CEL: *Well first of all, congratulations, and secondly thank you very much indeed, John Huckle.*

JH: Oh, thank you for doing it.

=====**End of Interview**=====

Notes:

<sup>i</sup> SS 'Acklar' – unclear as to spelling of name – ship John was to have sailed on from Liverpool with Colonial service had he not joined FIDs.

<sup>ii</sup> Livonia – unsure on spelling of ship name – UK to Falklands voyage with Clifford.

<sup>iii</sup> Surname Unclear – Freddie Wright/White – Captain of Livonia.

<sup>iv</sup> Name Unclear – Higgins? – Chief Constable of Stanley.

<sup>v</sup> Philonel – ship name unclear of spelling – early hospital ship in Falklands.

<sup>vi</sup> Name unclear

<sup>vii</sup> Name unclear