

## ALAN SMITH (“Big Al”)

Full transcript of recording of “Big” Al Smith conducted by Chris Eldon Lee at his home in Masham, North Yorkshire on 3rd September 2009. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 16 December 2009.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Big Al Smith, recorded at his home, in Masham, in North Yorkshire on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2009, by Chris Eldon Lee. Big Al Smith, Part One.*

*[Introduction and family background]*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:15] Alan Smith: My name is Alan Smith. What you are about to hear is a brief story of my life. I was born in Leeds 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1935. My parents came from a good background.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:30] We lived in the district of Woodhouse. There we lived in a rented house which was back-to-back: two bedrooms, no electricity, gas lighting, no cooker except on the fire, shared outside toilets, cobbled streets with gas lamps. Because when it rained it would give wonderful patterns. A lovely place for a child to live, a wonderful peaceful environment to grow up.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:01:06] My father was a self-educated man. He taught himself German. He had great ambitions, but unfortunately there was no chance for further education. He had to start work at the age of fourteen. My mother was the same, had to be a breadwinner at the age of fourteen, and worked in Leeds where the main business for ladies was actual fact tailoring. But her main hobbies was music. She played seven instruments. She actually fact became quite good and she to found her education in music – she worked in places like the cinema, which had no voice, and she played the backup music. She also sold sheet music, and this brought revenue so she could get further training and buy further instruments.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:09] My father, he became very good at German, very fluent, he could read and write. He was asked to join a group of men, who to go to Germany for three months to promote beer, which he did and he was the only speaking German. He went off to Germany and it was very successful. When he came back he astounded my mother. He said ‘Whatever the government is saying, in my opinion we will be at war within twelve months. I am going to join the army, so I can pick the regiment and get training to improve myself for survival.’ Remember that my grandparents never came back from the Great War, the ‘war to end wars’ in that area. Twelve months later we were at war. I was still young but to me war was exciting. I did not really understand the reality of death. I had seen death because, in those days, people were laid out in the front room, but not the horrors of war.

*[Evacuation from Leeds]*

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:03:39] Well, like all families, the dads went off to war. My mother went into munitions and eventually the systems, evacuee systems identified I was a big strong lad although very young. ‘We have a place for him.’ Because I was looking after my mother, lighting the fires, getting the tea, looking after the ration books.

Although very young, I was independent. My mother brought me up right. Eventually they said 'You must be evacuee and go away from Leeds because it could get bombed, in that area.'

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:04:19] Oh, I saw this as a great adventure. I was evacuated on a farm and my job was to look after cows, help to milk in that sort of area. Oh, it was absolutely wonderful. There was no war; there was plenty of food: milk, water. All the things which you could do most weeks. No hot drinks, coffee or anything like that, but I was not used to that. I used to just drink water. But wonderful excited. One day, I was in actual fact sort of laying in the meadow, looking at a plant. It was an harebell. And I was looking at it and I thought 'How does that thing grow?' And a farm operative, which I called a labourer (he fought in the First World War, was too old to do the Second World War) came over and said 'Alan. Have you got a problem?' I said 'No.' I said I did not understand how this beautiful flower could grow in such a place, in that area, so delicate, so beautiful colours. 'How does it?' He actual fact explained to me (and this was beginning of my further education), and it was wonderful. We built a comradeship.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:34] My father was long away. I did not know he had come back. But, I loved my parents very dearly but he became another father, another form of education, far better than any of the schoolteachers I had at school. He was living in that area. So I have no regrets for my evacuee time.

*[Schooldays]*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:57] War was finished. Sadly, I was brought home. Cor, it came as a bit of a shock to come back. As rationing still went on in that sort of area. We actual in fact went back to school. And er my dad's younger brother, actual in fact, who was.. he was in the army and he was captured by the Japanese. He was repatriated. My dad's younger brother and his civilian wife. He actual in fact was an artist, a commercial artist, he used to make sort of advertisements for stills which were put on the cinema slides in that area. He was really talented. He sent me letters in beginning of the war, was 'I can't tell you where you are, but just a few squeals.' But I knew he was in India because of the Taj Mahal; there was a snake in that sort of area. In those days they actual in fact photographed the letters, edited them, took out what they wanted, but somehow or other, this went through and it sprung out and told me where he was.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:08] My father did not want me to go see his younger brother after the war. He resisted this. And I said 'No, I need to go and see him'. But I got a heck of a shock. He was a skeleton. He never really survived that. And I thought I could not understand this. Why the Japanese could be so cruel. And that hate for Japanese stayed for a long time and took a long time to heal. However, time moves on.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:40] Went back to school and all the young teachers came back. What a life they'd had. They all do. Either, they were either in the RAF, the merchant navy, or the army, in that area. All stories to tell.. But then I was good at athletics, sport in that area. So now it was available because the young teachers was back. But unfortunately I had grown big and strong and I could no longer play against

equivalent age. So I was barred, in that area, which was really sad. There was another lad called Geoff Titterton; he was six foot, in that area. He was barred as well. [laughs] So how did we do? Did we sort of do things against each other, in that sort of area? But very fortunately I'd been spotted by Leeds Rugby Club who were a very wealthy club based at Headingley and they took me under their wing. To give my further sort of training in that sort of area to get me a standard to become a professional player. This went very successful. Oh, I was eager; I loved the sport. I knew it in that area. And eventually I signed what they call 'A forms', which I lost my amateur status. But they opened account for me. First time I'd been paid something, like. It wasn't very much but it went into account. Well, the good lives at school come to an end.

*[Apprenticeship]*

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:24] I left school; I wasn't quite fifteen because you know, you, my birthday fell in August. And I thought: I knew what I wanted to do. My main love; I wanted to go into forestry but I did not have the qualifications. So I thought my next best thing is apprenticeship. It's sound; it's good. And my father said William Nicholson's was a great place in Leeds to have apprenticeship. They would have high quality standards. Working in hardwoods, in that area. They built the Bank of England, in that area. I duly went along to my first interview, and had an interview with a chap called Sir William Nicholson, the man who built the banks. Oh, dear me. I was trembling in my toes. Never met a 'Sir' or anything like that. Lo and behold: 'Ee, I like you, lad! I'll er, I'll give you a chance in that sort of area. But I, you can't start work until you are fifteen.' So most people had a day off on their birthday, but on the eleventh of August I started work.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:10:38] Well. But unfortunately it was not in a joiner's shop, it was at a timekeeping office because you had to begin at the bottom of the level, and I was looking after the time clocks, the timekeeping in there, and keeping the log book of what people worked. This was a learning curve because to try to find out whether you could write, fill a, fill a time sheet in and things like this sort of area. So I sensed [phonetic] that. I did a year of that. Successful. [??incomprehensible]. Quite happy with me. So I was signed on; deeds apprenticeship. I had to honour the deeds of apprenticeships which was quite severe you know. You, you couldn't stay out late at night and you couldn't do jobs for other people in that sort of area. It is an old-fashioned term in that area.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:11:29] This was absolutely fabulous. It were great. I was very honoured because there, today they would be called, if you like, they were just joiners, but there in my mind you had wood carvers. They were more, they were artists in that sort of area. And the standards, the willing standards, were very high. In actually fact, inspected the work before it gone out, and he, not anybody else, he would come along on a Friday and would go to your journeyman, the person who was teaching you his trade. 'Has he earned his money this week?' And he would get a little report, and said 'Right, we will pay you.' And he would open out his big wallet and he would pay you, the grand sum of ten shillings. But it was wonderful.

*[Mountaineering and the Arctic]*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:25] So I finished my apprenticeship and I became highly qualified, not only, not only work-wise, experience-wise, but academic-wise, paper-wise, which opened a whole new horizon. But, first of all, before I could go into local government, I needed to find out how good I was a joiner, outside world, in that area, which I did. I also did various other things.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:58] As well as apprenticeships I did outdoor pursuits where I met various people who were experts in their field: mountaineers, in that area, been expeditions to the Himalayas in that area, which were a source of knowledge in that area, which led in turn to me going to, if you like, solo climbing in Scotland, in the Alps. So why did I go solo climbing? Because I needed to find out how good I was. Would I break down under hard conditions, lose my nerves in that sort of area? You have to learn it. There's no school for that. That's how you find out.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:13:38] Well, how did I get to the Antarctic, in that sort of area? Well, first of all I .. William Nicholson's were asked to support a group of men who were going off to the Arctic, and they actual in fact had a hut, and this was provided free, as sponsorship. And they wanted a guy to go and put it up. So that is how I got to the Arctic, to East Greenland coast in that sort of area. Further on in life, in my mountaineering career I met tremendous people who were very successful. I had quite a few near-misses, and these near-misses made me re-think. I had lost a lot of good friends. I had lost them, in that area, and I thought 'Hmm'. So I took from other pursuits. I went into motor rallying in that area.

*[Work as a building inspector]*

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:49] And I met a girl. Because girls were not on my sort of agenda, in this sort of area, but I met Kathleen Price, and I liked what I saw. She herself was adventurous, in that area. My mother (my father had died by now), my mother was very pleased and thought 'At last he is going to settle down, in that area.'

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:15:11] So far, what I, what I chose to do is thought well I've got to have a bit of a stable life and look for a pension. So I applied as a building inspector. And this was in the 1960s, and there was a transition of all the building laws. Now, I had got qualifications in building law, wherein this sort of area, and I understand the new forms of regulations, with the local government did it under standards new. Because at that .. the code of practice, the local code of practice, they varied all throughout the nations.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:15:50] Well I became a building inspector. Well it was very difficult. Building inspector was great in that area. I quite enjoyed it, but I found some of the senior managements had very narrow views. They would look a bit timid to take on the big boys, who wasn't quite fulfilling their duties and building to the appropriate standards which as a building inspector, you have to force.

*[Successful job interview with BAS]*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:16:19] Well we continued on doing adventures, like in Scotland, working on crofts, lobster fishings, in that area, but I still had this one dream. Mount Everest had been crowned, the crossing of the Antarctic had been done by Sir Vivian,

but I still had this thing about need to go to the Antarctic. But I'd I'd actual in fact I'd erm I'd I'd I'd applied early, in the late fifties and been rejected. I never really found out the true reasons, but I think it was like the old boys' schools, which I, which I agree with. You've got to know somebody who's been to the Antarctic before you give them a chance.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:17:05] I was married [pause] and had been married .. I got married in 1961, and Kathleen knew I had still got that dream to fulfil. She said 'Why don't you apply to go to the Antarctic again?' So I did. To my amazement I got an invitation to go down to the interview. Well, this interview. You know I'd studied, always been interested in history, and I knew about you know the early expeditions, pre the first expeditions, the expeditions of Cook and thereafter and understand the climatic conditions. And also understand about permafrost, understand about the glacial things within that area. I was, I was really armed with things.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:17:59] And I got.. I left Leeds on a train, early morning, and at that time the interview place was at Gillingham Street, in that sort of area. And I duly arrived at Gillingham Street. You'd time to reflect on what you were going to do, like you know. The interview panel were there, leading people, who were, made my very welcome, and they to my amazement didn't really ask me any questions about this. They were really more concerned about my age, because I'm much older, in that sort of area. And one of the problems is, like, but: some of my references were, were quite, if you like, mature; tremendous achievements in that area, and I think one of the major concerns was: In the past there are some people who had used a trip to the Antarctic to conquer mountains for their own gain but I wasn't like that. I was going to go there to support science in that sort of area.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:59] Well the interview didn't last very long, only thirty minutes. And I thought I'd blown it, I've in actual fact blown it in that area. I was told to go and claim my spark [phonetic] in that area. Then Sir Vivian came along, and I knew Sir Vivian; read his books, great man here. 'Oh right I'd like you to come and have a.. come down and have lunch with me'. So we went to a local, local pub. I forget the name but it was only a short distance away. And I think that was a proper interview.

*[The briefing conference]*

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:19:28] Then I got home and ten days later I were there. And I went to the conference then. I was invited to go to this conference. But what you have got to bear in mind that the conference, it was not really formalised in any proper structure as such. Because you were still fids at that time. I like to believe it was still an expedition; it wasn't a job. In my interview I did not even know I was going to get paid. I would have gone for nothing. It was not until the interview, that I till you know until the sort of er conference, that I realised I would be paid. OK, it was not a grand sum. I think the figure was about £700. I think earlier it was about £500 in this sort of area. But it would not matter. I wanted to fulfil that dream..

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:20:21] Well what was the purpose of the conference? The purpose of the conference was actual fact was to bring all the people who were going to travel down to the Antarctic together for the very first time. Because normally I, you had been able to choose your friends, but here they were being choosed for you, to bring

you together. It was really exciting. We stayed in the college. Well, First time I had stayed in a university college that was. I was overwhelmed with the facilities and I thought 'Good God, this is first class!' in that area.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:20:55] Well, the conference was very well structured as such. Each of the disciplines, the scientists gave their aims and ambitions and explained the science in that area. Well there were some of them I really understand: particularly the biological, marine biological and geology, in that area, but upper atmosphere I did not really understand. I understand what the ionosphere was like in that area. But I wasn't afraid to ask the question or two to find out the situation. OK, also what was very important, it was a, it was to meet the senior staff because at that time everybody was spread about in the various universities.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:21:44] The headquarters was in Gillingham Street, which was something like about twelve people only, you know. And there Sir Vivian, well Sir Vivian as far as I am concerned he was actual fact correct, a great chap, very understanding within that area. I could see nothing wrong, he was a chap I would like to sort of really admire. And Sir Vivian had a deputy director, Ray Adie. Now Ray Adie was another character, a geologist. Ray Adie actual in fact went down to the Antarctic before Sir Vivian. He sledged down the, what was called Palmer Land, the Antarctic Peninsula, and put the geology of the Antarctic Peninsula together in this sort of area.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:22:39] There were other people which I met, but what really stuck on my mind, will always stay there, but the last lecture was by Sir Raymond Priestley. Sir Raymond Priestley had been, if you like, he was on Scott's expedition, last expedition. He spent a winter in a, in a cave in that area and survived. He gave a lecture which I found very fascinating is: 'The past, the present and the future.' Absolutely superb. Later on in life, when I moved up the ladder in BAS, as you might say, I had the opportunity to speak to him in great depth. In fact, if I could just skip a few years here, I think it is very important. I said 'Sir, may I say to you: You are a man of steel, who sailed in wooden ships and I am a man of wood who sailed in steel ships.' And he said 'No lad', but his bright eyes, he said 'No' he said 'I am a man of my time and you are a man of your time' which is quite true in, that area, because time moves on.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:50] Well the conference was over, which was really good, really enjoyed. It wasn't like a modern conference today [??? Inaudible] because in those days the General Assistants were all keen mountaineers. They had done their apprenticeship. To look, the main aim of a General Assistant was to look after the, if you like, the scientists who probably hadn't had adventurous life in that sort of area. But so be it. Went home. I just had enough time to hand in my notice, which came a bit of a shock to my employers but when I explained where I was going, I was very well supported because I needed a bit more longer time than I should have done. But they did support me and they said 'Well your job is there when you come back, Alan. Tell us the tales.' in this sort of area.

*[Departure for the Antarctic]*

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:24:43] Well, the sailing date had arrived. I don't like saying farewells at the quay, in that area, because I think it is terrible to drift away from your loved ones in that area. I like them to be calm. However, my wife, she wanted to go see the vessel I was going to make this wonderful trip on, which I can understand. So we went, with a friend, the day before.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:25:10] And we went to the docks and had a look at this little red ship called *John Biscoe*. And the tide was out. [laughs] It was down, down on the mud at the bottom, just the mast and the crow's nest sticking up, like. We went around and my wife said 'This little ship Alan. It is only like a little yacht, isn't it, like you know?' 'Ah, yes, but' I said, 'it has got a history, hasn't it like you know?' I said 'I am in good company here.' I said 'Do you know,' I said 'the Duke of Edinburgh sailed on that in 1957, and if it is fit for him and safe for him, it is safe for me, like. So don't worry about that.' So, well, I said. That night we went out to dinner, and then the following morning my wife went home with her chauffeur to drive back because it is the right thing to do.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:25:56] And, I joined the ship in that area and got stuff stored away, and well the time was for the blom [phonetic] guests to leave in that sort of area and, as I had imagined, the ship slowly drifted away, and the tears and the waving, that area, and off we went down the Solent. The great adventure had beginning in that sort of area; why, what an adventure!

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:22] We immediately were given a lecture, basically, which is quite right, on lifeboat procedures and the safety of the ships and this sort of situation. And also introduced to the king fid. Now the king fid, is a name which actual fact was, he was the liaison officer between the rest of the fids and the captain and his officers in that area. And so that was good, because if you had any complaints, or the captain had any complaints, they went through, backwards and forwards. And he had been down to the Antarctic probably more than once in that area, so he knew the roles in that area. But it was a very relaxed atmosphere; it were, it was not undisciplined in that area; but it was a good procedure. And normal base life was set up as well by, because you did scrubouts, you did er, you served on gash in that area. You did not do cooking because there were professional cooks in that area.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:21] And, the ship, I found quite difficult. I had spent time at sea, but it stank of diesel fuel. So I was sick for a week. But I did not stay in bed. I got on with it. But if you have been seasick, it is uncomfortable a bit like you know. However we got past the Bay of Biscay. Because her top speed really was twelve knots. But average steaming it was eight knots. So it is very relaxed sort of speed, as you might say. We got further down the tropics, and things got warm, and we did courses: first aid, you name it, everything, in this sort of area. And we worked on the ship, painting, holy-scroping, in that area.

*[Montevideo]*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:04] Well, it went very quickly and we arrived at Montevideo. Well Montevideo was a place .. I had never been to South America before. But it was like a time capsule: old cars in that area. A beautiful place, very relaxed. Very British in so many ways you know. I mean they had a system like Britain had with a health

service. Very poor, you had a vary between poor and very very rich in that area. I had a wonderful stay. I met quite a few people; we became permanent friends. Well, time to leave there. And it was incredible. When we came out of the River Plate, it only seemed a matter of hours but the water was still brown from the effect of the River Plate which is a great river. But then, after about twenty-four hours or so, we saw penguins for the very first time. These penguins skipping along in the water. We thought 'This is great.'

*[The Falkland Islands]*

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:05] I think it was about three and a half days later we arrived at the Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islands, well. We sailed through what they call The Narrows into Port Stanley which is ??? [incomprehensible] in that area. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, the water was crystal clear. You could see the kelp floating in the water. You could look across at Stanley is laid out in a grid. And there the houses were: white houses with red rooves in that area, laid out in a grid fashion, and the concrete road going up the centre, and the smell. The smell which I am familiar was peat in the air, and of.. it reminds me of home, the west coast of Scotland.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:29:53] Duly landed, unloaded the cargo, in that area, mail and provisions, in that area, and we got kitted out. There was, there you, they were taking measurements at the conference in that area. Unfortunately I was last of the line, as you might say, and I could not get kitted out properly because, but I had preempted this. My experience is: never be separated from your knife and fork. To survive, take what you need yourself; lesson to be learned many years ago. Anyway windproofs fit, boots fit, and gloves fit, and hat fit. That was the lot in that area. It was no problem.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:30:37] Well I found the people very very friendly and very welcoming, because you have got to remember at that time there was, there was an office there as well, all the communications, they run the communications, so BAS really was a big employer of the, of the economies. And I went along and I went to the er one of the pubs and there I met George and Velma. They actual in fact were very welcoming, because there were no restaurants at all. But if you, for instance because of the weather, could not get back to the ship, they provided you a floor to sleep on. They would provide you with some food if necessary in that area.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:31] Now George, over the years, became a great friend, in that area. He was, he was in the commandos during the war, went to the Falkland Islands but he thought he was going to the Hawaii-type islands in the Southern Oceans, but finished up in the Falklands. But he were a shepherd; he loved the life, where in that area actual in fact. Because he was interested. He was interesting to listen to about bringing the wool in, with six-in-hand in that area. So I thought 'This it, class characters wherein that area?'

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:32:02] Now in the Falklands at that time there were two sort of systems. There were cheys, and there were ex-pats, as you might say, which had all the key jobs in that area. So, I had had previous experience of that sort of situation, like, which I simply had to accept. But anyway we were invited along to have an interview with the Governor. Because the Governor, actual in fact at that time, said



where if you go further, down to the Antarctic. Well the Governor, basically, we had an interview and it was very interesting really. He asked me some questions. I knew about living and I knew what was on the Falklands in that area. I knew the coastline in that area. Never been but I had read the information. And we became very friendly, in that sort of area. Anyway, that interview was over. Then we had the, the dreaded party, where you stand up with cocktail sticks in this sort of area.

*[Signy]*

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:33:05] And then it was a time to leave Stanley and the next phase of the adventure started. And we were bound for South Georgia, sorry, we were bound for Signy Island. At Signy Island there, we were about erm forty-eight hours away and the ship entered pack ice. Now I'd, I had experienced pack ice before, but my cabin mate hadn't seen it. And the ship (it was night, although light) came to a rest. It wasn't beset, it was just that the captain needed to go to bed, in that sort of area; it was of value each time in that area. Anyway next, next morning we went forward and we could see the base in the distance. But there was fast ice there, meaning fast ice that the ship couldn't; at that time didn't have the strength to break it. It did its best. So we did part-relief, as such, which was manhauling the stores to the base, in that area.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:34:10] Oh the base was a wonderful society. Coronation Island with, with glaciers and mountains, such a wonderful setting. And Signy is packed with life, in that area. So a decision was made that really what we ought to do is to. We've got the main supplies off, the main mail and some goody food, in that area, and some people were getting off to do their work, and left there. So we left.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:34:37] Now I had been scheduled to support a geologist, and make some landings in some remote places, which I don't want to go in I have because basically I've followed, I've forgotten all the places we landed in that area, but what had came to my mind was, when he said 'Oh I am on fixed orders.' He said, like. 'Sealed orders. I could not open them. I did not even know where I am going to go.' He said 'You know where your end destination is Alan.' I said 'Why do they do that?' 'The reason why they do that' he said 'is because we can read all the stuff and we can get fixed ideas in that area.' Which I thought was a good idea really. And this was Ray Adie, because he didn't want them to read his geology, because he had made some mistakes, and he wanted some original science, in that area.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:29] So it was great, and I really enjoyed that, supporting the scientist. My main thing really was, it was dead easy, I was the humper really, to make sure. We had a small boat to make these landings, to take some samples, we had a mother ship to be picked up. Oh, it was great fun.

*[Argentine Islands]*

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:46] And then that bit was over, and so then we sailed down to Argentine Island, which was Faraday. And to get there you go through the Lemaire Channel and it was incredible because we'd left sort of fast ice and some.. some brash pack in that area. Lemaire Channel was completely clear. And the Lemaire Channel is . . . We had beautiful weather. It is very difficult, there is no film, no speech can tell all

this, but if you just think of mountains, narrow fjords and mountains reaching up covered in snow, glistening in the light, all sorts of different colours. Absolutely stunning, absolutely. It was beyond words.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:36:30] We called in at Palmer Station which was an American station in that area. Well, the Americans have got everything, haven't they? Walk-in freezers, you name it, like you know. I thought, Good God I hope my base is not like this [laughs] in that area like you know. However we dropped their mail off, like and went to have a look at the old abandoned base, which was at the side of it like, in that area.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:36:53] And then we went further on and we went to Argentine Island there. Ah, this was a wonderful setting. Argentine Island is just a small island but you get wonderful views looking back up to the main channel. And you know it is very restricted, the island, but it was a static base for doing upper atmosphere work, not for adventurous types who needed to get to cross with in that area, ??? [incomprehensible]. But a lovely timbered building and it had the old linoleum red floors. And they shone because people wore tent shoe .. slippers and polished the floors, and each of the places were heated with coal, coal fires in that area, cooked by coal fires. Well everybody had all this new gear, and the first one was the coal run as you might say. So we did the work, and the people were covered in coal dust, as you might say. But it was great, a great place wherein that area. However, time to come.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:03] We couldn't go any further south, because the new .. at that time the Marguerite Bay area was still in ice, in that area. They used, the radio officer used to have what they called "the Goon Show". And the Goon Show was [laughs] where the radio, the ship's radio officer used to talk to all the radio operators to get conditions, in this sort of situation. And he knew there was fast ice, because there were no satellites or that sort of thing. It was just visual things. And the captain had very flexible sailing orders. All the sailing orders said was 'Relieve the stations'. You know, that was it; that was it, under his discretion.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:38:41] So, and now I was bound for Halley Bay. And so therefore the idea was to come back to Signy, where we did the full relief, we came back to the Falkland Islands and I transferred to the *Perla Dan*. The *Perla Dan*, on aboard the *Perla Dan* was the rest of the wintering parties and other people who would give support in erecting the new station. We duly left on the *Perla Dan*. Now the *Perla Dan* was so different to our ships because you did not have to do gash duties, people washed up, in that area. And the food was different. It was the type of food I liked: fish in that area and cold starters in that area, and you got beer, you know, although it was bloomin' like lager-type stuff, but it was beer. And I thought 'Good God! This is five-star living. I have never lived like this.'

[*South Georgia*]

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:39:33] So the ship was very comfortable and we sailed for South Georgia. We landed at South Georgia which is a spectacular island. We went to a place called Grytviken. And Grytviken is, well it was just about an operating whaling station, just coming towards the end. That was quite an experience. There on the, what they call King Edward Point, was the Point was the administration office in that area.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:00] And there had been earlier, the *Shackleton* had dropped off two people to do: one geologist Mike Skidmore and one general assistant, and he in actual fact, part of their brief was to cull elephant seals to feed the dogs at Halley because getting seals at Halley apparently was very difficult, not easy. And so they were all on the shore, they were all killed and were got duly on board in that area, and the coal sack came on board, and had a look round. And we had huskies on the deck, so I immediately volunteered to look after these husky pups in this sort of situation like you know, and they were aware that I had had some experience on this. Anyway you know, the system. And it was quite remarkable the system and pick up things up like you know.

[Halley Bay]

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:40:52] So off we were duty bound. We sailed off in that area and we entered the Weddell Sea, and the Weddell Sea was notorious like. And in those days you could guarantee that you would have eight hundred miles, maybe a thousand miles of ice to get through, and of course they would navigate backwards and forwards in that area taking the fixings. And there you would do your duties on the deck, you would do whale-watch in that area, and check certain things.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:21] And eventually, yeah, we got within sight in that area of the mainland, Coats Land. Now then, I knew about, I had read all the histories, of the early ships going down. And I knew like but on Shackleton, when Shackleton was in that area, he had done a recording of all that area, and I knew roughly the latitude where we were, but what he was seeing was there in that area. Right so we came round the.., there was a lead we sailed down the lead between which is risky because there's a possibility, but if the wind and current changes, the ship could be crushed across the ice shelf. But these, these Danish chaps were very skilled in that area.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:07] Now, the station where I were going, called Halley, called Halley, Halley Bay, in actual fact it was so unlike the Antarctic Peninsula. It is in actual fact built on a floating ice shelf. Now this ice shelf, it rises and falls with the tide, and it's about, something of about er fifty six miles or eighty seven miles. It actual in fact sort of is attached to the inland ice er by a zone called the hinge zone. Why the reason why they call the hinge zone because the, it rises with the tide and it flexes in this sort of situations. So this was, this was featureless, it was flat where in this sort of area, apart from it's got undulations until you get inside. All I knew that, but some of the lads didn't quite think. They were looking for mountains. [laughs] I did not let on to them.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:43:07] But eventually we got to the, we got to what we call .. There were two bays. There were Emperor Bay and there were Halley Bay. And Emperor Bay is where the breeding colonies of emperors were like, and Halley Bay is where the IGY first made their landing in that area. And we were in actual fact going to take over rebuilding of the station to replace the old stations, which had a chequered history of building work in that area. So we duly landed, twenty four hours were all worked off and the set was to get the cargo off as quick as possible and as safely as possible without losing anything. And it's as well, the original plans did this.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:43:56] It was interesting. I'd., I'd been talking to the captain, trying to pick his brains on ice conditions in Antarctica because it's nice to talk to people who understand these things. And I said what I couldn't really understand is. I understand that they do calve off but why has Halley Bay stayed there so long, and he put it down to a fact that there was a great big grounded iceberg there. Now then, what happened is, this.. this.. this iceberg, joined on the shelf [phonetic]. I noticed it along with the ship's officers noticed but it shifted position, another joining the course and an iceberg had come down and hit it and the buoyancy had altered and it went off.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:44:45] Well we just got all our stuff ashore wherein that area and people were safe and then there was an almighty crack in that area, and Halley Bay and Emperor Bay were no longer there. It was just a clean ice front, just leaving a very narrow entrance to a steep sort of ramp in that area. And I thought that was fascinating. But people go on about but this is this is natural way. It comes to a point where it's, it's gone beyond its length and it breaks away in that area. Ah well OK. The other problem is, well next year what happens if this lot goes away next year? How do you get relieved you know?

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:30] Anyway we were very successful. Well what we did is, we, we got on the building phase and we started the buildings. And during the summer we did very well, we got, we got the buildings up, we got everything er shipshape in that area, the generators installed, and it was in time ship for the *Perla Dan*.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:45:49] Now I, one of my jobs was, because they said I was a GA, I was capable of being plumber in that area. So I, my task was to build a coal stove, which is very important because that would do the cooking and make the water in that area. Well they, I never saw the ship leave. My duty was to finish that stove, and light a fire for my comrades to return warm, because the weather was inclement, in that sort of area, which I achieved. But I thought, Good God, I had a problem there, and when I closed the door, everything was done right, you know; I hadn't been on a course but I just used my skills to put it together. The door would not close. I opened it up and I thought 'Why won't this close?' And on it was a little plaque in that sort of area. It says 'If you have problems during the course of erection, ring this number, in that area'. And I noticed there were some really big screws on it. So I took these screws out on the plan and clunk, it closed. [claps] Fire lit and I could make, I could make water because I had got the tank in, in that sort of area.

*[The old (Halley I) and new (Halley II) bases]*

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:46:51] So the ship duly departed. Now then I went down to have a look at the base with the base members who were living in the conditions, and there I thought 'Good God, we need to get this place finished quickly.' In my mind's eye (I wasn't in charge, a chap called Jim Shirtcliffe) and I was very aware but I was just a fid, you know, and no powers, and I had a look round in that area. And er, the bunkrooms, there was hardly any room from the bunkrooms; they were crushed in that area. Because what there is, is the original. If I had explained first, which I should have started to do, there were very layers. It is like being in a coal mine.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:47:33] You have got a very deep IGY building; then you have got another stage of buildings, then another phase, so it is like three tiers in that area. And there were Dexion ladders, moving around it difficult. But the living block; when they built the living block and the office blocks in that area, and.. and er, and this was designed, designed and shipped by Crown Agencies like, and I am not criticising here, but they forgot, forget the bolts, or a high percentage of the bolts, to put together. And the lads, the lads there, the builder and his, and his supporters did all they could, like, to ensure it, like you know, but the unrelenting ice had crushed the roof in that area.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:48:27] And in the bunkrooms during the summer and the lounge they had drip trays. Ingenious idea, where they led off all the water around, people were sleeping there. But in winter it's another thing, in that area. There the, there erm it was -18 in the lounge. It is not so bad -18 in the bedrooms; you are in your sleeping bag, you are all right. -18 is the average temperature like, so it wouldn't get any colder, like in that area, although the air temperature outside, it could go down to about -57. And this is not wind-chill factor, this is.. this is just still air factor.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:48:55] But it was great on the base in that sort of area, and we used to shower, we used to go down there on a Saturday night, the cook would cook a meal where in that area, and we used to show films in that area. Oh, it was great in that area. And the film used to break, because celluloid does not like cold. [laughs] There was more patches and patches on films but they were great.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:49:18] And there was a chap there, very talented in that area. And they had a.., they made a magazine in that area, which, which I still have the copy. And it's called, it's called *Halley Comet* in that area, and he drew little cartoons in that area. 'Close the flaming door you know; it is cold' and what it was: he was inside the oven of the fire, like, and the beer was on top of the thing. Absolutely superb.

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:49:32] Although there were two stations, there were no divisions in that area, and at that time Ricky Chinn was the base commander, who was living on the original base, and Jim was in charge of that but we didn't, Jim wasn't base commander, he was team leader, as you might say. And we had done very well. We were all prepared to work out in all sorts of conditions. We got the external finished and then our aim was to so the base, existing base could come up at Midwinter's Day, use the lounge, and the kitchen would be finished, and we would have entertainment which was great, it was superb, and it did work.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:50:21] Unfortunately, the Crown Agents had under-estimated. This was the very first that they had ever sent quite few professional joiners down. Normally it's been only one or two. But here there was more, and we ran out of materials. In fact we were using packing cases to make things in that area. So we couldn't do any more work within that sense; the materials just wasn't there. But the base was really in first class conditions in that area. And er it was so, 'cause it was interconnecting. It wasn't climbing ladders, it was all interconnected – you could move round, and it was a heck of a size as well. It could accommodate forty people wherein that area.

[The dogs]

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:51:07] Well this was a very important time. About er there was eighty five dogs there to be looked after. I helped with that: the breeding of dogs, looking after puppies in that area. The survival rates of puppies at Halley were a bit, a bit delicate because.. because unfortunately the breeding programme was midwinter when the coldest temperatures there, but we did our best. And we built a snow tunnel for dogs to go in, but they don't like being in snow tunnels in this sort of area. Then feeding, you know feeding the dogs, cutting carcasses up with axes and chain saws in this sort of area.

*[Training courses]*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:51:46] Well there were other things went on. There was never a dull moment because, during the night you did first aid courses. You had to use, learn Morse code in that area: CW because there were no walkie-talkies or anything like that. It was CW. And people gave various lectures on what they were doing in that area. I learned how to launch balloons, how to plot things in that area.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:52:13] I also learned about tellurometers, measuring great distances, because that's would use these in the field, and tellurometers were relatively primitive today's, today's standards, but they were great. Because at Halley there were some of the longest measurements ever taken in the Antarctic in that area. I'll explain about what is a tellurometer a bit later on.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:52:36] Well, Halley was an operating field stations, and previous time, they'd actual in fact got across the hinge zone, because the hinge zone was a natural barrier, it really was a natural barrier. There'd been several attempts and been failed, and it's chaos, an unsafe place. You need to be very careful indeed, and you can never take the same route, although flagged in that area. There had been established what they call a Bob-Pi hut. They had managed to get a Bob-Pi hut there which was an emergency hut place in that area. Well that was done before I got – a great achievement. And the planning and the geology and the mapping of the, of the Tottans and the Therons, but our aim was to get to the Shackleton Range. Not my aim but the field people's aim was to get to the, to the Shackleton Range.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:53:32] I was destined to, although I loved dogs, I don't know why, but Ricky Chinn chose me and another person to be the first to use skidoos at Halley. There had been, skidoos had been used at Signy quite successful getting round there but never pulling great weights, and had been used at Stonington, but they condemned them because they were doggy men, in that area you know. But erm so be it. But the skidoos we had at that point in time were nothing like the skidoos today. They were toys wherein that area.

*[Glaciology field trip]*

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:09] So, I was a GA; so a chap called Bob Thomas, and er we... The light returned, the temperature was still about round about minus thirty five. He was a very keen chap to get going, so we got going. And he had a motor toboggan called an Eliason and I had the skidoo and we set off. Now operating in these temperatures, a two-stroke engine at that sort of temperatures, and a four stroke

engine, is not easy, in that area. But we went off and we went through there and we had to find a way across the hinge zone in this sort of area.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:49] We had some problems which I won't go into. Quite erm, quite difficult problems. Now comradeship in the Antarctic is, is usually pretty good, but you, you all intents and purposes you know, you always have some sort of disagreements. And we, Bob and I, we had a disagreement. He was a scientist. *Bob?* Bob Thomas, Bob Thomas, Bob was a scientist, He was keen because he was the first glaciologist, and he wanted to get to his work, which I understand. But my job was to find that we get there, do the work, and get back safely. [laughs]

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:27] We were pushing beyond what I considered, because I understand whiteout conditions in that sort of area, although you know um I understand all that because I have experienced it before. I can explain whiteout conditions. If you, you can't see a metre in front or anything like this, and we got to a point where visibility was down to, er, five metres, and I said 'Bob, we stop. We camp.' He said 'No, no, we've got to go on.' I said 'No, we are in a dangerous zone here. We are surrounded by crevasses. We stop.', and gradually he agreed. We pitched a tent, and the visibility twenty-four hours later was improved. And by God, he was glad we stopped. There was holes everywhere. In fact, in my log I wrote like you know, I was beginning to think that the Antarctic was full of holes, you know, in that area.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:56:19] Anyway Bob was quite happy then; we'd great comradeship from then. We, we sat it out. He realised that I was looking out for his benefit, that we would get through it and we had no problems. Because, when the weather was good, I didn't need sleep, so I was like him, yeah. And what we did is, there, we set up, we were doing sun shots, fixings, astronomical shots, and all that area, bringing in the tellurometers which another team, some fifty, sixty kilometres away. What we were trying to measure is, is the, is the, the, if you like, the movement of the Brunt Ice Shelf, and we need triangulations to find how it's moving, the drifting in that area, stresses and strains. I won't go on about glaciology but, but it's fascinating. It was the first time, and we set up these, we made contact. Now these was used for, during the army, as such. And they, all they are is like a rangefinder in that area, and you can speak to the other one; which is, we had the master and there was a slave over there. But you have to take temperatures, because it would affect the wave frequencies, because you are measuring how long it took the wave frequencies to come back in that area.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:57:30] And we were pushing the limits, like all fids pushed the limits of man and equipment, we were, we were doing that, and this was really successful. Now then, the first time actual in fact there was another chap actual in fact who was a surveyor and he um.. I could use a theodolite; that wasn't any problem, I could do sun shots in that area because I took my own sextant with me, because I thought 'Well, I need to navigate.' and I'm used to my sextant. But my sextant was not like a ship's sextant, it was a sextant which was used by the RAF in this sort of area, which the lead aircraft would use, and you could set it up. You didn't need a horizon in that area; you just needed to see the sun's shadow, and you kept it on for a bit, so it was light not bulky wherein this sort of area. But I'd never done a star shot, particularly when the sun is shining you know [laughs], but it is so easy when you

think about it. You actual in fact got to get the star almanac out and calculate where it is like, you see it like you know, which is much more like it than the sun you know, because of doing a pass, where in that area. Bob was quite pleased with that like, active positioning. Nothing like where you stick a post in and a satellite goes over, but we were getting within sort of you know, plus or minus, er say, four metres which isn't bad, is it, like, within that area? However that glacial programme was, came to an end, in that area, and I came back to base.

*[Accident and evacuation of John Brotherhood]*

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:57] Actual in fact, wonderful, a wonderful time, winter. And my, sort of er, May, the time was going by and we had an accident now, John Brotherhood (oh, great character) and Jim Shirtcliffe like you know, and as far as I am concerned, later on, I have always put doctors down as "hazard rangers" because if anybody's going to get injured on a base, it's a doctor, like, in that sort of area. But I, I'm not taking the mickey, er absolutely wonderful character. And he, what he was doing, he had done carried out tests on us. He really liked me like: energy expenditure, and fat gain, did night depredation and all sorts of weird things he did with you like, in that area. But he was wearing IMP which is energy expenditure recorder and we did manhauling in that area.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:59:46] Now they'd filled in the log book, where they were going. There were two routes, in this sort of area. And unfortunately the weather, the weather had turned badly and er they were far from that area, and they never reported back. And Ricky came to er er in all intents and purposes er to me and to Alan Johnston, who had just returned from the field. And er he said 'We need to go look.'

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:00:12] Now then I should have explained slightly earlier, but on base there were, there were three Alans in that sort of area. Now then, ha, Alan Etchells was the oldest, so what do you call him? Ha. 'Dad'. Ha. I was the.. I was the second, second oldest sort of thing, so what do you call me. My name can't be any shortened to Al, so I was 'Big Al' in that area, and Alan Johnston, Alan Johnston, you know Alan, ha, Alan was called 'Mad Al' Now why did he get 'Mad Al'? Oh! Very bright, intelligent person. He was something of about twenty nine. This was his first job, had a couple of PhDs in that sort of area. Had a crack at various things. One he'd to go into the..., to be a priest, in that sort of area, but backed out from that, in that area. So this was his first job. But he was actual in fact superb in that area, so he'd got to be mad to spend all that time at school and college, and learning, like in that area. So that was how we got the names.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:22] Anyway, the erm, Ricky came out; he said 'Look, the weather is not good, but I am worried about these.' So we both said. 'No we will go and look, in that sort of area.' We tried the first route, and we couldn't find any signs of them, so it was obviously the second route. When the weather is not bad, if.. if you are looking for tracks, you look sideways, and everybody at Halley .. there was no maps. You worked on compass bearings, so if you were following the same compass bearing, you'd got a fair idea but you'd pick some tracks up. Well we got off. Now, Alan, he was a great surveyor, and I actual in fact said 'We haven't got a map at all.' and said 'You can go to the darkest Africa, you can get a Shell map and drive on it



like, but here, Al, it is all compass bearings.' I have a map on the wall in my study which he did for me as a present. But he was, I knew he was very reliable.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:11] We sledged out to the end, using a sledgewheel for distances, in that area, and I'd got a glimpse of tracks but were on the right line. But the weather .. We knew we were getting close, so what I did is I made snowballs. And my windproofs were covered in seal, red and black, and threw 'em. I got to the edge, till they disappeared, and I knew I was on the edge. I was on a safety line tied to the skidoo, just in case I had taken one step too far, and ... we had to turn back. We er, we couldn't make contact with base, to tell them, because we had put the call, a erm a Squadcall, a radio which could get somebody in on call like but you know sort of er 25 miles away, no. So we returned back to base and said 'Well sorry Rick, we were unsuccessful, but we did see tracks in that area. We're not sure what happened to them.'

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:04] Any way, this storm, actual in fact, it er, it went over in about eighteen or nineteen hours. As soon as, as soon as the visibility we could see, we went out again, a group of us. Made it tracks to actually come down a ravine and we found a tent pitched, in that area. We thought 'Good God, they are alive' because there is always a problem of the sea ice going out, and all that area. 'They are alive!' and inside Jim Shirtcliffe who had broken his leg and the doctor was in a very sort of bad way.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:34] He'd er, he'd.., his knee had gone through his face, in that area, and did damage it. We weren't quite sure whether he had broke his, his back or whatever so we treated him that way and did a .. did a erm, er brought him back safely using skidoos and sledges under the safe conditions and got him to the er, got him to the hospital, in the surgery place in that sort of area. And there we had to start using X-rays on him. Well, phwoar! This X-rays should have been in the archives somewhere, you know. We hadn't a clue, but we had some knowledge about photography, in that area, so what we did was we lined .. because we knew about overdosing, because the doctor was the expert and he needed our help. So we tried it out on various people in that area; we get by. And we had.. we had brainy people and we had common people, and we, we all put our heads together and we got these X-rays.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:04:25] Now we'd, Ricky had made contact with Sir Vivian. And it was at weekend. Accidents always happened at weekend, and Sir Vivian was aware, in that sort of area. And it was quite clear that he needed evacuation because we couldn't do a lot for him and we could see like but it would be permanent damage if he did not have some facial rebuild on his face, in that area. But, I might not be true facts in here but I imagine Sir Vivian just picking up his phone and ringing his counterpart in, in the White House, say, in the States, saying 'One of our guys at Halley is actual in fact in trouble like you know and we need help in that area.' And the other bloke said 'Ah, leave it with me like you know. I'll, I'll dispatch an aircraft, like in that sort of area.'

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:05:16] Lo and behold, not only one aircraft but two aircraft left over er you know from New Zealand, MacMurdo, over the Pole and flew round. But what the remarkable thing about it is, we were able to send details because one of the

guys was really good. He came up with this idea of breaking the image down into boxes, in that area, breaking the image down into boxes and we transmitted that data and it worked, in that area. I mean.. Now it is all digital. Well these aircraft landed, in that area. We were equipped, we had fuel, where in that area. And the.., one aircraft was circling; the other evacuated him, thank God, in that area.

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:06:02] But there's lots of stories to tell there but it is written. Anyway they erm, that came to the end of that episode, and we actual in fact came to the end of this period, as you might say, because the relief was about, and the time was to go out. We'd still work to do, and I then left on the *Perla Dan* and went back to the Falklands. Do you want to stop? Yep.

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:06:29] [End of Part One]

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Big Al Smith, recorded at his home, in Masham, in North Yorkshire on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2009, by Chris Eldon Lee. Big Al Smith, Part Two.*

*[Second Antarctic tour]*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:00:14] Alan Smith: Right OK. Now then we moved on, I returned home, and what I did during the summer, I in actual fact, I thought I'd give something back to the community. And a friend of mine had set up a trust, which would help under-privileged children to have an adventure in the Yorkshire Dales. And this is a way as I could give back – as I had a wonderful life – give something. So I taught children from major cities what country life was about, about catching fish with their hands in the rivers and taking them on adventures. This was very rewarding for me, because I were taking them on the, on the high fells of Yorkshire Dales. They were, they were all admiring and said 'Is this explored?' I said 'We are doing it together' and this was great.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:01:19] I don't really fixed up to go down to the Antarctic because I was hooked. I'm going to talk about my next trip, to the Antarctic Peninsula. Well once again but I, I sailed, this time I sailed on the *Shackleton* and the *Shackleton*, wonderful ship, much more comfortable. It had been a coastal yacht in Norwegian fjords in that area and it was a bit more modern looking, in that area, and the captain was called Captain Turnbull; he was nicknamed Frosty, because he was a bit frosty by nature, but ah he was an incredible character, absolutely fabulous bloke. And - what had happened is, an American was to go and install the first Satnav on a merchant ship, although it be a scientific vessel. Because the main role of the *Shackleton* ship was to do geophysics and so needed accurate positions. Well unfortunately the American who was going to do the installations, he was violently seasick, in that area, and we had a rough passage through the Bay of Biscay. And we had a medic on board and he said 'It is dangerous; we have got to evacuate him off the ship, in that area.' Well, he didn't do the installations in this sort of area. However it was left to us to sort it out, and fids' ingenuity, ah man, a new toy! [laughs]. So everybody got together, in this sort of area.

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:02:48] But unfortunately, it seemed to be working right but it was giving fixtures, it were giving fixtures in the wrong hemisphere, and that. It just

needed calibrating, but it took us a bit of time. Not me personally, but the lads putting their heads together to work out how to calibrate the thing, because that it wasn't easy, you know, as the original technology wasn't, like. But there was one incident when, it was early morning, a beautiful still day, in that area. I were up on the deck having a look and see what I could see on the sea and I noticed the captain went in a place where the satnav was, and I thought: Oo I would go and watch him, and he had this sextant. 'Why is he taking a sextant?' and there he was. He was saying 'Ha, ha. You will never replace this. He, he!', talking to this machine. 'You will never replace that.' Well, ha, Captain Turnbull, how wrong you were. [laughs] There isn't a ship now that don't have one. But it was a pain for him, because it wasn't giving accurate positions, until it was calibrated, wherein that area. So off we set, down the same, the normal thing, we had a very comfortable smooth voyage. We had the normal lectures going on, the normal routine.

*[Falkland Islands]*

Disc 2, Track 1 [0:04:02] We put into Port Stanley, and it was great to meet old friends. Kitted out again, in this sort of situation, and um it was a wonderful situation. By that time I had made, I had made a friend with the governor of the Falkland Islands, and my next interview was very interesting, in this sort of area. And he asked me some questions, really, which was erm what did I think about the Falkland Islanders, in this sort of area? I said but you know I said I thought great people in that area, but I said 'What are the opportunities,' I said, 'which are going missing if I don't mind, Sir, is but really that they're all ex-pats: your vets, your nurses, your people who fly the aircraft. I know there's intelligent young people out there because they get a damn good education by going off to schools in Britain or in South America. Why don't you go down that corridor?'

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:05] Well it's obvious there's all sorts of problems on that, but I was very pleased to see but, later on, they did that. A chap got trained as a pilot, somebody got trained as a police officer, within this sort of area, and this was great, because I honestly believe that the future in any small island, is the youth and you've got to create an interesting place, for some alternative rather than being a shepherd, and work in that area. So it was great. I like to think – I'm sure it isn't me – I like to think that my conversation was there.

*[Signy]*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:05:54] Now then, we.. we left the Falkland Islands and we sailed down, and this time we called in to Signy. Ah, beautiful weather (Signy is plagued with bad weather), no sea ice, and relief was over in twenty four hours. But at that time the ship stayed a little bit longer erm just for social reasons, within that area.

*[Argentine Islands]*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:06:09] And then we did the normal voyage, er, down to erm Faraday Island (Argentine Island), and er there I were to disembark. My main project was to er, was to tackle the leaking Braithwaite tank. A Braithwaite tank is a multi-plate tank and it holds the fuel, and it was contaminating the sound and islands by

leaking in that area and going into the sea, which wasn't environment friendly in that area.

*[Aftermath of a medical evacuation]*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:06:30] Now there had been an incident over the winter. Unfortunately the cook had been ill and they had to do a medevac for him, and fly him back for hospital aid. And the Chileans undertook this. These Chileans were really good first class pilots, no question about this. They actual in fact, sort of er, how can I say, they are er, they, they are very bold in that area. They landed their first aircraft, which was a single-engined Otter, and er, and on take-off it in actual fact sort of er didn't quite make it; it was a write-off. Fortunately they didn't .., nobody any sustained any serious injuries. But it could not be mended there and fly it. Chileans, being the Chileans, will send another one and that was very successful of doing this kind of thing.

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:07:39] In fact the cook, Ken Portwine, he became very ill in hospital and died, in that area. I think the base, as far as I was concerned, did a remarkable job in trying to help him throughout the winter, because no doctors in that area, and to do blood counts and all this sort of situation is .. and I must give all credit to the base commander. I sailed with John Dudeney um who, I never told him this but when I sailed with him on my first trip to the Antarctic. There's a nice slim-built, very educated, university chap, in that sort of area, but just lacked in maturity; he'd, he'd, he'd spent his life studying so he was a bit raw. But on my return what I saw was a mature person. He'd, this somehow or other, although tragic, with the loss of a comrade, it helped him to be more mature. Not only..., the rest of the base was in good mood, which I found incredible. The standard of the base, its cleanliness, was absolutely superb. So it's all credit to that hard winter. There has been deaths on other stations before but it's not for me to talk about that but this one here, I thought well done the base as a whole.

*[Rescue of a BAS plane by HMS Endurance]*

Disc 2, Track 2 [0:09:13] Well duly we stripped the tank and built the frame, straight forward, a mucky job, and deglazed it and it was successful. But, there was a .., a new ship coming on the horizon. There used to be a Merchant .., sorry a Royal Navy ship called the *HMS Protector*; it was nicknamed the Grey Ghost, in that area. It never really went down to the Antarctic at all, but the Royal Navy bought a second-hand ship, and it was refurbished. It were called *HMS Endurance* which was ice-strengthened in that area. And I had met Captain Buchanan before in the previous seasons because he had been trained by BAS in ice, manoeuvring, what to do, what to expect. Incredible character. I was fortunate enough to share a cabin with him. So although he was "up there" and I was lower down, lower down decks, as you might say, he was brilliant, like in that area.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:10:13] Anyway the *HMS Protector* duly arrived, absolutely crisp, just like the Royal Yacht as you would expect from a Royal Navy ship, with its small helicopters but the.. the helicopters were small; they had no real lifting powers. And I was invited on board, with John, and er another couple of lads, guys to attend a small reception, held by the captain, which was really good, in that area. And this was very

enjoyable indeed. So this was the very first time, and I had really taken the mickey out of the Grey Ghost, because I had an experience on the Ghost, Grey Ghost. Not in the Antarctic but elsewhere, during geophysics work. And I thought ‘Hmm, yeah, not very good, like you know.’ And what Captain Buchanan was going to try and wipe the slate, in this sort of situation, but on this other previous episode, um which he did, in that area. At that time we were doing air operations, and I mentioned about having an open radio network, in that area, and I was interested to listen in the “Goon Show” what was going off, and er, in my spare time of course.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:11:19] But we had an aircraft missing, in that area. What had happened is the weather had.. had really clamped in and in actual fact he didn’t know where he were. And if there is a Biggles comic or anything like this, this was incredible. It has been logged and it was being managed. The logging was er.. er from our base at Adelaide, in that area. They were, they were logging this episode; we were just simply monitoring. ‘And oh, we have twenty minutes time left flying and we still don’t know where we are. We’re still inland, in that area.’ And the countdown went down, to the last minute, and then suddenly the air went dead. We thought ‘Good God! That’s it. That’s the end of it.’ Then, all of a sudden the radio came alive: ‘Well we’ve landed. Hah. We’ve no fuel left, ha ha ha, but we landed safe. We still don’t know where we are, in this sort of area.’

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:12:28] So what, what happened is, we need to get a fix on him, in this sort of situation, but what he could see was, roughly speaking, was mountains on the left, and ice on the right, which was frozen sea, in that area. So, he’s flown over the.. over the Antarctic Peninsula. Yes we got to do, anyway, triangulations, radio fix. He had to be very careful because he did not want to wind his batteries down; he needed to fly up. *Endurance* stepped in. Da da da da! The Royal Navy. They did a tremendous job because when we found the location, the.. the ceiling height for the helicopters, the lifting capacities were beyond their ceiling height so they could really only take half a drum at a time to get it over, in that area, which they did remarkably well. They pushed themselves and their equipment to the limits. Really big tick for the Royal Navy. The slight is greened [phonetic]. They refuelled the aircraft sufficient just to get it back to the air. Absolutely superb, so that’s very very very memorable.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:13:35] OK, I’d finished my tour of duty there. I’d done my work and my colleagues were very happy in that area. The *John Biscoe* had come in and it was going to relieve Argentine Island. Well Argentine Island is, is erm well, how can I explain this? What a location as such down there. If ever you wanted a most difficult place to do discharge cargo, then ha that base has got it, you know. It’s got everything against it. It’s got.. it’s got a high.. it’s got big tide situations, fast currents, waves coming in. In fact you could call it suicidal landings as you might say, wherein that area.

Disc 2, Track 3 [0:14:37] And the base itself, it was a complex of little tiny huts spotted around, in that area, and um all separated. It had twenty-four hour electrical power and er that area, and what happened there is there was a piedmont going up onto the runway which was quite steep and because of people had been living there and the generators, that area, you’d get balloons and various cross-contamination on the snow ramp which leads to degredation of the snow ramp, and er it was quite exciting. Now then in those times we only used to put two hundred and fifty barrels of

fuel ashore for aviation problems, but Argentine Island and Faraday Island, as you might say, they need for more fuel because of bigger generators going on and aviation was extending. We finished up at Argentine Island with something like about eight hundred barrels, which, where do you put eight hundred barrels? However that was a later problem.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:15:22] But a real tick for me, this was my first flight in the Antarctic. We'd done the work, and then time for play, as you might say. The work was to put up a new office block, which didn't take very long because it was the same footprint as the building I'd put up at Halley Bay. We actual in fact, I thought this was great.

*[Fossil Bluff]*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:15:47] I volunteered to be co-pilot or whatever you want to call it, refuel the aircraft and whatever, and off I was flying to the Fossil Bluff. Oh what an adventure, in the skies. I thought 'This is great, you know. I hope we don't get back from Fossil Bluff because I don't.. I could let my wife know, that erm, that um we um you know we'd been out the winter there.' But it was quite.. it was quite successful. I made several flights, in that area. However the last flight, and I got sort of blamed for this, the last flight, we landed but the next flight after that the actual fact the aircraft came round and it had er it had what they call a heavy landing, in this sort of area. A heavy landing where he touched down and I think there was a error, shall we say an error, by .. but I don't know. An error and the aircraft got tipped over and it became a depot marker, in that area, so we needed a new aircraft.

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:16:41] Well what organisation can accept like well, because the Antarctic is not a safe place for operations of anything. You can lose equipments in that area. Sir Vivian his em, took over in good faith and er... 'Right I will go and try and seek funds for a new aircraft' which he duly did, in that area. But that was really a golden era, as such. It was still expedition work. Nobody was hurt in the both flying incidents, and that's the most important thing like you know wherein that area, it really is.

*[Setting up the Royal Society research station at Aldabra]*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:17:17] Any way I then made the trip back and came back to the Falkland Islands and I came all the way home. I received a signal from Sir Vivian saying 'The Royal Society need a guy like you and I've put your name forward. Now there is a carrot here Alan. Your wife can go with you. Wow, can't go to the Antarctic but your wife can go with you there, and that was the Royal Society. So I won't really talk about this, but the Royal Society I went on a job and I worked actual in fact setting up a research station on an atoll in the Indian Ocean which was very exciting and my wife joined it, and it was a break for two years from the Antarctic. So I think I will stop at that period, at that point in time. Is that OK?

*[Need for a BAS in-house project team and facilities]*

Disc 2, Track 4 [0:18:11] How did I actual in fact get involved in the design and working for BAS permanent? Well I have to wind the clock back to 1967 when I was

at Halley and the work had completed. Erm Derek Gipps, who was the Senior... Senior Logistic Officer actual in fact wanted to see me. And I thought 'Oh Good God! What have I done like? What have I done, in that sort of area' But he needed to take me aside, in the newly completed library, and he asked me some certain questions. He said 'How did you enjoy your time?' and he said 'If you were in a situation to make recommendations how you would alter the Survey, what would you do?' I thought 'Good God. No, it is fine as it is, in this sort of area'. But then my thinking cap went on, you know, because you've got to think fairly quick on your feet. But I said 'Well,' I said, 'over the years you've had some fantastic people through your hands, in that area.' And I said 'I believe, like, you've got key scientific posts which you retain. You need that in the support staff as well.' I said 'This is very important.' And I said 'What you really need to do as well' I said 'is you need to be self-sufficient.' And he said 'What do you mean by that?' I said 'Well,' I said 'you use Crown Agents.' And I said 'Don't get me wrong. Crown Agents are very good; they don't really charge you a lot but it would be far cheaper if you could do in-house design and procurement, within that sort of area.'

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:19:56] And he took this on board. And I said 'OK, if you ever got together, what you really need as well,' I said 'you really need workshop facilities because' I said 'you.. you need workshop facilities to carry out modifications on vehicles so they work will efficiently, in that area.' And I said 'You've got some first-class mechanics, where in this sort of area, and er such as Alan Etchells, Paul Whiteman, this sort of area.' And I said.. and I said 'You really need to think about that, where in that area.' And he took it all aboard. I didn't think it would ever come to that. And he shook my hand and thanked me very much. So that was a seed planted.

*[South Georgia]* Disc 2, Track 5 [0:20:40]

Now then, I then, when I came back from Aldabra working for the Royal Society, the system contacted me and said 'Well we want you to go to er South.. to er South Georgia, Alan, and we want you to winter there, and.. and be the wintering base commander, in that area. Take over from Ricky Chinn. So I thought 'I'd been there.' And I thought 'What an heaven. What a place, you know!' A beautiful island, full of mountains. It's a dream for a person like me. Wildlife, photography, within this sort of area.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:21:16] I'd still be a joiner, still on contract, in that area, and I had certain briefs of.. of.. of building certain things. There was a slight difference here. They offered.. they said 'Would you put the specifications together for a non-magnetic building, in that area. Put together what we need to do er piling for the wharf in this sort of area.' A slipway; they need a slipway, a new one. 'Would you put the specifications and an environment control thing?' 'Oh,' I said 'no problems!' I said, 'I'll.. I'll do that willingly for you.' So I worked at home, put the specification together. No computers of course. It was all done with my portable key typewriter with carbon copies, in that area, a drawing board in that area, put the ??[inaudible] and took them duly back, in that area. They took them to Crown Agents, said.. well er I think they did took them to Crown Agents, said 'Do you agree?' and they procured it like you know.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:22:13] So I.. So that was a trial period for me, where in that area. So off I went, er down there. And duly material arrived and what I had first done, Derek Gipps said 'Well you've ordered five percent extra material. Why Alan?' I said 'Because things get lost in the Antarctic, damaged, in that sort of area.' 'We've never done that before.' 'Well, I tell you, put it this way, you can't replace it, can you?' I said 'I was on the ship once, we were diverted to go get a cement mixer. Ha!' I said 'Look at the cost involved in that.' Because they did not consider these things, you see, and that was my.. my brain, my commercial brain kicking in. Anyway they were quite successful. Then I were, towards the end of the summer, when the work and the base was wonderful to be there and I did manage to get out and get photographs of albatross and all that area. And um because the word "jolly" wasn't really used as such because you worked long hours but free time, you managed to get some in.

*[The Halley Bay III rebuild]*

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:23:15] I received a signal from the assistant there: 'We want you to come home and take charge of the next rebuild, in that area.' I thought 'Oh Good God! Yes I will come home.' and along with Alan Etchells to come home, in that area, and so therefore we flew home duly and this was the first time they actual in fact, flew people like us down at the level. And this was quite exciting because we had to get by ship, obviously, to the mainland, because there were no flights from the Falkland Islands, and fly home and duly back.

Disc 2, Track 5 [0:23:51] Now the next design was going to be armco, in that sort of area. Now the design was being done by the Crown Agents, solely and provisionally in that area but I had direct contact with the architect Colin Baldwin; I had direct contact with him, because I.. I.. during the previous one we had a nice armco sort of structure there and I had taken measurements, only because I was interested; not because it was part of my brief. I wanted to understand how pressures of ice deformed things, in this sort of area. And this was just a hobby. It wasn't.. I hadn't no pressure sensors or anything like that. I passed this data on to him, in that area. And I think.. you know, and I understood armco because my qualification took me to structural engineers and underpasses. And Armco had been used in the Antarctic before, er but erm, because it's an American invention; but they call it "miracle span" and that had... that had been built.. used in Greenland, in that area, but not to the same specifications as the Crown Agents were going to do, because it was going to be better.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:02] So off we went, and I was involved in the recruiting of people, within that area, but there was a limit to how much money we could spend on recruiting. There is always a problem of finance. And then between Derek and er.. and er Eric Salmon and myself, we came up with the idea: Why not connect the Governor and ask him about using military people like the Marines, and call it a 'cold weather exercise', [laughs] but don't take any guns with them, [laughs] which they.. they accepted, in this sort of area. So what we did is, we selected a group of people who would be the winterers as the main team, what was made up of joiners, steel erectors, and electrician and diesel mech, in that sort of area.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:25:57] And um. So off we went, we sailed on the.. we sailed on the ship and went down to the Falklands and I was given the task of interviewing the



Marines. Well, oh dear me, you know. March up to the table, me sitting round, salute with another an officer, like you know. And I'd already spoken to the officer and I said ... because I knew the system. I don't want to go in about this but I had a little bit of experience of the military in my past life, but I said 'I.. what I want is a sergeant.' I didn't want anything higher than a sergeant, like, which had been cleared in that area, because I thought officers were deadweight, you know. Didn't work! Hah! Any way they er.. we protected [phonetic] a team. And they.. they were really superb. They weren't given any training; it was training on site, but they were.. they were fantastic.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:26:47] And this was the first introduction of.. of working ERDS protections, because we used.. going to use automatic tools in the form of nut runners. The beginning of Health and Safety which I'll talk about later. But.. but this actual in fact we needed ear defenders in that area and we came up with a scaffold idea, we were cumbered [phonetic] but it was still primitive like, because I was still viewing it as, how can I say, as an expedition form of buildings. Well, the marines worked their heart out for it and all credit to them but they wouldn't wear the ear defenders. And Sir Vivian came up to me [laughs] 'Why isn't that guy wearing his ear defenders downline? You said you have to wear ear defenders.' I said 'Well they won't listen to me.' And I said 'I..' I said 'I.. I don't.. I'm outranked by the sergeant, like you know.' So I had a word with him ??[inaudible]. He says 'Sorry Sir, I can't hear you. I've gone deaf'. [laughs] Well, how embarrassing. But no, they were really good.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:27:48] And this was.. this was a tremendous achievement because we'd put together all the buildings and the inter.. structure buildings inside, and it went quite smoothly, within that area. The generators was installed, and th.. the wintering base now were in a really good position to finish the base off. So we duly left that station. *That was Halley .. ?* and, that was Halley III. Right OK, Halley III which was the armco structure, in that area.

*[Signy again, and an unplanned trip to Halley]*

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:28:23] Now I was.. I was still on.. I was still on contract then, you know, there was no.. no permanent job at all, in that sort of area, so I.. I went.. I went.. I went back home, in this sort of area. And er I then, actual in fact, was er erm the following season I went down South again, where in that area, to do work at Signy Island, because I'd.. I'd come up with a design of a new slipway, a new boatshed, and new generators. And Alan Etchells had done all the specifications for the,, for the new power house, the generators in that sort of area. We were still on contract at that time, and we duly went down there to do that.

Disc 2, Track 6 [0:29:05] Now then, I wasn't scheduled to go to Halley, huh, but I suppose this is the first strike, you could say, in the Antarctic, but it wasn't really a strike. But the lads were so disappointed but me, Alan, wasn't going to see their work. So I.. I'd identified that problem but this was a question of timing. They wanted me to finish this. Well I explained it to my team, because I've always been a team player. But well 'If we get this in a position here,' because we were working tidewise, 'if we get this in a position we could go to Halley, in that area.' Well they wanted to make a trip. 'Another adventure, we'll go.' And I er sent off the erm the telegram off to.. off to the system saying 'Look, we are in a good position here. I can go to Halley. Please grant it. I will recommend it. Grant it.' They did, in that sort of area.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:29:57] So I took my team off to Halley. And there the lads had done a wonderful job, you know. Not only had the.. the floor finishes were laid accurately but they'd put maps of the Antarctic in the lounge, in that area, because I had given them a brief, and saying 'Look, use your skills' (and you.. you don't pin 'em down) 'use your skills to make it interesting, in that area.' And by gum, I was really, really pleased that I did that and go and visit. And they just wanted to see me and.. and see what they'd done in that area and give them personal thanks, because I believe in that, is going and giving them thanks. Well we went back to Signy, we completed our work; very very successful, and that was that over. Then we came back.

*[Appointed to a permanent position with BAS]*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:30:48] Then eventually I, there was a point where I said to Sir Vivian 'Well Sir Vivian, I am not getting any younger. You know I'm.. I'm.. I'm not far off forty. I've got to go and look for a job,' I said, 'with a pension, or something like that, in that area.' And.. and Sir Vivian said 'I.. I didn't realise,' he said, 'Are you permanent, Alan?' I said 'No,' I said, 'I signed a contract when I first.. when I first signed on;, I'm still on contract.' Now it's not .. I.. I didn't mind that, like. But I wasn't a pusher, you see. I didn't do pushy, like. So I said 'Oh, all right, OK.'

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:31:26] So Eric Salmon who was.. he was the accountant and personnel officer, he did all sorts of things. He said to myself 'Well OK.' he said 'Hang on, you've done a civil service commission haven't you?' 'Oh' I said 'yes, because I am officially a civil servant; I have got a pension somewhere, in the pipeline, in that area.' 'Well I'll.. I'll ring up, like.' So I had to go and have an informal interview to become re-established as a civil servant, you know, and seal.. er sign the Secret Service Act and all that sort of area, like. But that was just informal, that was just a chat and came back, and fortunately enough there were er.. there were.. I.. I.. I was accepted but previous to that Paul Whiteman had been accepted and Ricky Chinn had been accepted, and Barry Peters had been accepted. And so there was a nucleus of people who were.. who were going to be permanently employed.

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:32:19] Now then what happened here is.. is, at that time Gillingham Street was not possible to house all the people in, and had been planning for quite some time to relocate, and they looked at various sites, and got some money to relocate, and relocated to Cambridge and they built a purpose-built building. And in it were logistic workshops, logistic stores, and there were places for permanent staff to be, so Alan Etchells, we had us own .. I worked under a chap called Paul Whiteman who was in charge of logistics. And I was classified as a Projects Officer responsible for design and development, and manage the um, how can I say, the Antarctic projects. But normally that ... in actual in fact I er.. I.. I.. became responsible for the building in UK. which I wasn't very pleased but I thought 'Oh I can't see that being a big problem like, you know.' [laughs]

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:33:22] Anyway we er.. we er., that was .. I was in there, in that area. Well we under.. we undertook, how can I say, er I was given a brief actual in fact by Dick Laws, the present director, who took over from .. Richard Laws. And Dick Laws, I'd a lot of time for him, because he was a director like Sir Vivian who'd

wintered, he'd wintered at Signy and he then actual in fact, we had a fairly good working relationship between us, that area. And we started together, secretly, it had to be in confidence because we couldn't talk to them because we were planning long term then, because I first introduced, if you like, erm realistic costings. Realistic costings, if I try to explain, is.. is.. is how much does it cost to do a scientific programme or keep scientist in the base? And this is broken down in percentages by cost of UK, the cost of the ships, cost of aircraft, the cost of the base, in that area. Unheard of! Certainly never done that, but this was in my brain. Because I knew you needed to do things like this to get it back up.

*[Plans to close Faraday and replace Adelaide by Rothera as the air facility]*

Disc 2, Track 7 [0:34:42] Now then, Argentine.. Argentine Island. I was sent down to Argentine Island to do evaluation there, and I always thought this was secret but I really need to think in terms of closing that station, and Adelaide station was no good. To close that station and my brief was to go and look at Rothera to find out whether it was suitable for.. to build a station there with a runway, a hard surface runway. I.. I was given a couple of days to do that, and I wrote a report giving the pros and cons of it, and the reason that the pros were but there was plenty of real estate within that area. It was a fairly good location. It was accessible, but there were some downsides to it as well. Is mainly is but we.. we did not really have any meteorological data particularly where the aircraft was going to land on the skiway. I was concerned about the approach, because the wind direction but had come over what ... over a bay where there were grounded icebergs, like it was a steep approach, within that area, which needed to be evaluated by the air unit, and there was no fresh water and there was no place to anchor, within this sort of area, where we came round. But ideally it was a good place to build if we could overcome these problems.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:36:16] So what the Director decided to do, he took up on my recommendations and we put a proper surveyor in which.. which was Kevin Walton and he did a survey in that area, because you need that. I couldn't do that in two days. The aviation people operated the station in summer in that area. Everybody agreed we should do that, in that sort of area. However what wasn't accepted was the closure of Argentine Islands (Faraday) station because it was so important to keep continuous of the geophysics station there, that way.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:36:58] Winding the clock a bit, it did take place, they did move it. Right, now, it's always been a dream, and the dream of Swithinbank is what they call having an international access.. air access to the Antarctic bases. We hadn't had that, and part of this really is.. is there are aviation regulations which is not for me to go in, but to fly people over you can't do it in twin engined aircraft, you have got to have a little bit more. And then there was the.. the Falkland Island war, which was the building of the runway which was part of the link which they did. And Charles had always had this aviation and it looked as if the Chileans were going to provide this, which they do, you know, there's no question about this.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:37:47] But then it was possible for the Survey to do that but we needed to get another station in, er which Damoy Point, which was a staging station where people would go, erm would go by ship, get a temporary ride, then they would fly from Damoy to Rothera. Now the flight, it was based on, because you can't fly

across water. That's fundamentally it, but you could fly across the Peninsula. So that was what was there in that area. And this was quite successful.

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:38:18] But money has always been short for the Survey and so what we did is we really divided the.. the building programme into several phases. But one of the.. one of the phases which was the latter phase, I said 'It's beyond fids' capabilities', and you needed a specialised company to do it, and this was the building of the runway. You know because at Deception Island we'd, we maintained the runway there but that was volcanic ash – you just bulldozed it and rolled it in that area. Big difference like, you know. And that was took on board, but where the money was coming from I.. I.. I just don't know. So the, so the planning was in different phases, which we duly undertook and we completed all our phases.

*[Consequences of the Falklands Conflict]*

Disc 2, Track 8 [0:39:07] Then the Falkland Island war did happen to us and then Maggie Thatcher took note of this British Antarctic Survey, like, and she er opened all treasure trove, and the.. the Director went off to see Maggie and a lot of the other people were very very jealous because I mean access to Maggie Thatcher, at first right. And she basically said 'Well, um, what do you want?' you know. Well the Director came to me and said 'Alan' he said 'I'm asking you if possible to take, I am going to see the prime minister tomorrow. Can you give us some budgets of how you think, how a development phase would go?' Well it was easy for me because I was a long-term planner, I'd got that. I said 'Yes, Sir! Here we are! Here's.. here's.. here's what we need.' And I said 'But you've got to stress these are only approximate budgets, and most likely to go up than down in this sort of area.' Off he went.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:40:07] Well she provided money, extension, redevelopment of Cambridge. Communications were redeveloped because during the war, in the Falklands, we lost communications. So we had satellite communications which were very expensive to install on our stations. A replacement ship, you know, which was very expensive, the state-of-the-art, all these things. And then Halley, Halley was ready to be replaced in this sort of area. So all these things were, were, if you like, *Do you remember how much it was, your budget?* Ah yeah well roughly, roughly you are talking about in different books er something er like, phew, I can't really give a... Well I mean the ship cost twenty seven million, the Halley cost eight million. Cambridge, which I had nothing to do with, like, that must have cost a few million. So I have got something like, probably forty, forty-five, fifty million for all over like in that area.

*[The armco techniques passed to the Germans and South Africans]*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:41:17] OK, I've.. I've missed.. I've jumped the gun a bit here, unfortunately, because we had another station prior to that which was quite interesting so I'm sorry chaps, we've got to wheel back in time in that area. Must be getting old, ha. OK. So the armco tube proved very successful. I'm going back to that period. And what I'd done there, I'd put monitoring in, I'd done monitoring systems and checking on the performance in this sort of area. Now the Germans had em.. the Germans had actual in fact sort of were going down to the Antarctic and the er er the South

Africans they were already in the Antarctic and they were very interested in our armco technique in that area.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:42:05] Now the South Africans wanted me to do an exchange although there was a party on. I'd really go to South Africa. I.. I've got no mixed feelings, and by the Antarctic Treaty that was possible in that area. But my director said 'We need you here, Alan.' So they came over to see me and I.. I actual in fact gave them all the data and my.. my recommendations. And it's very strange this next stage.

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:42:30] The Germans were going down, and Paul Whiteman, Ricky Chinn, and myself, and we went over to er, to Hamburg in that area, where the Germans were going to build their new institute. But there we were talking to German engineers which was a whole new ball-game to me because they.. they don't call you 'Alan'; it's er.. it's all 'Mr', in that area, and this boardroom. I'm very laid back; I don't worry about things, but big boardroom table and all these engineers sitting round here like, you know. 'Good God', you know, and two people were taking transcripts, there was voice, and writing in that area. I thought 'Good God! Where are we now, like?' you know. Anyway, ha ha, we got up like, in that area, and it was up to me to explain about what had happened to the station, and how we'd actual in fact sort of chose the er, chose.. chose the armco in that area and bah, bah, bah like in that area. And they took all that on board in that area and copied it, but their budget was astronomical in that area, so they could build very big in that area, but duly. So in fact BAS was passing technology on to people who had much bigger budgets and went our course and that was achievement where in that area, but I'll.. I will come back to that.

*[Halley IV]*

Disc 2, Track 9 [0:43:58] But out of the armco.. the armco lasted quite well. It was quite successful, it probably.. probably one of the most successful, but it had come to a time to replace in that area. And er and I .., I was sort of er in the, in the format of replacing it but better, to a slightly higher standard if money was available using armco where in that area. But there was a company called Structaply which we'd used, er which er, which were very good. They were.. they were in the price range bracket in that area, and er they'd undertaken some developments themselves at no cost to the Survey of er of of er sort of a design of a nine metre tube, for two-storey buildings inside: interconnecting columns with staircases and a staircase out to the surface when buried in that area which, all our previous stations had been vertical ladders which are very difficult for access in this sort of area and it was very attractive was that idea.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:45:06] Now then what um what happened is is but um they came and.. and presented this to a team. It wasn't my decision to the directors and other people where in that area and they presented the case. But I did advise the um the director but I thought we were embarking, I like the idea, I can see the benefits of the idea and the price is in the same price bracket as er as as what I was doing because I'd done quite extensive cost effective and that were pleased the all it but it was I respected but I think what we should do, we should actual in fact carry out tests on it. And this is the first test the Survey had ever done. Timberaid Development which did

the design work on the Thames Barrage in this sort of.. tests on the Thames Barrage they'd er.. did a.. did a.. we did a model panel and we did tests on it. And it and and it proved reasonably successful but we knew the weaknesses in that area. However a joint decision was made.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:46:13] Er we went ahead with it you know in that area, because heh the Survey um if you like um in some ways leaders, risk-takers in this sort of area and the facilities would be fantastic, really the space facilities; they would have cold rooms for food in that area, ??[inaudible] staircases, two-man bunk rooms, environment heat exchangers, heat recoveries and all this sort of situation. So they're stepping over here in the right direction in that area. But it would be a joint um er.. a joint.. a joint partnership where the final development would be their engineers, myself, and Alan Etchells and a guy called Tony Escott which was a fid at that time but he was a electrician because we were moving on to bigger things and better things in that area and we did it.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:47:12] We, ah, we had a trial erection, where Dougie Allan, er what I tried to do with Dougie Allan.. I.. I saw a need to make a film of it in that area because I was aware but we need to record this visually for past people in that area. Now I'd.. I'd allowed a sum of money in.. in my forward planning for the film but it.. but it.. it.. wasn't.. it wasn't allowed; this aggrieved me in that area. And I fought, fought very hard for this. And I said 'Look we.. we've got to have this.' And I contacted Dougie, Dougie and I said 'Hang on, if er.. if I..,' I said 'Would you go out for a year, be a base commander and a film man like you know?' And I said 'Well.. ' and I said 'I'll er, can er... If you've got the camera,' and he.. and I said 'I want it in cine but we can't do it in cine' I said 'It's got to be films.' And he pages the er.. my friend in the personnel departments, and it was um agreed. And Dougie did and Dougie, and I believe that's the finest archive pictures of building a station ever, in that area. And.. and that went successful.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:48:23] The reestablishing in that area went smoothly, the facilities were great. Unfortunately the design factor was that er it wasn't structurally stable in this sort of area. Although theoretically their engineers and it was always a suspicion is but without going too technical, the .. once the station gets buried in that sort of area it was relying for forces to be fairly equal at the.. at the sides, and the overburden pressures in that area. But there is what they call um er evaporation from the sun penetrating down evaporates and gradually er it, it distorted it; it went into like an egg shape in that area. And that was the end of it.

Disc 2, Track 10 [0:49:05] Now in hindsight, if we'd been a cooper we would have put, we'd have put cooper rings round barrels in that area. However that weren't tried. But it was a really good facilities. So right, OK. So this is one of my real failures in my life. But I never saw it as a failure, I just saw it as another technical advance forward in that area, because it has some good points, although some bad points in that area. Now then what we'd, what happened there is, is we, one of the problems is there was um, there was an inquiry in er, er, about the system, why didn't it support. And um er... There was no blame, it was just an inquiry, because we were seeking for some money.

*[Halley V]*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:49:52] Now er Halley, this.. this thing I built, cost less than a million pounds wherein that area and the build.. the building we were going about to build was eight million so there got to be an inquiry why.. why that sort of area. Now then sadly the audit people said it couldn't be done in house which I would support; I didn't argue with that. But we should go out to tender and get the er.. get professional companies. Now then there are, there's not many companies who design work for the er.. for a floating ice shelf in that area and, ironical, one of the companies who were asked to compete is the company Paul, Ricky Chinn and myself had grounded on building on.. on.. on ice, in that sort of area. But they'd moved on because they'd got experience on.. on doing that in that area and Dietrich Genscher, their chief engineer was a bright cookie, there's no question about that, in that area. And the other one was um.. was in all intents and purposes was the Americans. They design it in that area. But erm we.. I thought.. we thought eight million was a lot of money but they wanted something like about er er I don't know a hundred million dollars or something like that you know, they weren't interested, in other words like you know. So we got no alternative.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:10] A contract was placed for them to come up with a design. Part of the design we actual in fact did further tests in the design. We needed wind tunnel tests to find out the er.. the height of the er.. we needed to get the module and I'd given their designers all the data on how the Brunt Ice Shelf behaves, its stresses and strains in this sort of area, the climatic conditions. They.. they had to have that because they could not receive it in any other way, so any flaws, I'm taking that responsibilities on like, you know. And eventually they came up with a concept.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:51:53] But what we did is, we actual in fact er er er we er recruited er er an an American consultant who was English, who went over in the nineteen fifties and in er Malcolm Penny which was a... Erm he.. he was a.. a designer for cold weather in that area, brilliant bloke in that area and he offered us to carry out tests, he off.. the cost of the wind tunnel test but you could create snow because they were working on military concepts for 'How do you park aircraft in Korea?' or.. or wherever or even private aircraft, in that area. And this was a Japanese idea, using china clay and blowing. But it really really stick in this sort of area. So a little bit more innovation, so we went through and agreed. Everybody was on board and we went. Now we, our.. our in-house thing, actual in fact we had no because they did purchasing, the lot, in that area. Our responsibility was to build it, this sort of situation.

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:53:00] And er, so off we went. They went to er.. they went to er embarked. Unfortunately it was put into phases. They didn't procure all the necessary items for the first phase (one). And er Phase One went so easy it was unbelievable. But.. but we actual in fact could have done with the extra work. The team worked well in that area, and in Phase Two er.. Phase Two we had the extra work to go on and the weather had changed, in that area. And I had to tell the Director at the time, we had a change of director, but er.. er 'Sorry, I cannot achieve the target.' It was the hardest decision I've ever made, in that area. But we just couldn't. If we'd had had the materials before, it was achievable. Which had a knock-on effect because it meant we had to go into a third year, which was money. It was really hard.

*[A near fatal injury]*

Disc 2, Track 11 [0:54:09] We had some bad weather, and what happened is. I actual in fact.. I was concerned about a young chap and he'd been left at the.. at the station and some bad weather was coming in, and I was a bit concerned about his own safety. Because ah he were a chap was, nice.. nice young lad, but lacked the experience. And I very.. I felt safety.. conscious of his safety. I went on a skidoo to go and rescue him but unfortunately my skidoo had er been er.. had er.. was under repair. It was parked in a big windscoop and I had an accident, which I don't mind saying this, I demolished a temporary workshop facilities, which was a tent, in that area, which one of these inflatable things. Unknowing to me, I picked myself up, but I was seriously injured, but I wasn't going let ?? [inaudible] stop.

Disc 2, Track 12 [0:54:58] All the team were having their meal. Now how.. how does the boss tell the team that we've come to the end of the thing under .. I had a big notice saying 'Don't .. the first one to demol.. demolish the.. the.. our workshop facilities will be for the high jump.' How does the boss tell.. tell them that the boss has demolished it, in that area? Well it went down well. I.. You've got to face it, now. They're going to find out, where in that area.

Disc 2, Track 12 [0:55:32] Anyway I went and recovered the bloke and he couldn't hear the radio because he'd a Walkman.. he had a Walkman on. Oh, I detest those. They so.. He'd a Walkman, he was listening to er music, in that area. You know I really.. I really detest that situation because you are not aware of what is happening around you, you know. However that cost me my career in the field, that trip. I got on board the ship and I became very ill. I finished up in hospital in Montevideo. And er.. being in hospital in Montevideo .. People go on about our hospitals, the National Health. They want to try an hospital in Montevideo. I actual in fact sort of er.. er.. finished up with er clots, in this sort of situation. I thought 'Well I don't fancy dying here. I'll die at home then at least my.. my wife will see whatever it is, like.'

Disc 2, Track 12 [0:56:31] So I more or less volunteered because I wouldn't admit how ill I was, you know. But I could inject myself with all the necessary drugs to keep me going. Ironically it's the first time I have ever flown first class. They flew me back first class. [laughs] But when I landed at Heathrow, my.. my strength and whatever give up and I collapsed at Heathrow, and it was touch and go for me and I was in er.. I was in er.. intensive care. But there'd been two occasions. They say your life over death, in that area. Well one occasion in the Antarctic where I thought my time was there and suddenly my dad came to me. He said 'You're not a loser, Alan. Get off your arse!' which I did, and I saved myself. Same thing happened there. 'Come on, it's not your time yet.' And it wasn't, and I recovered. But I could no longer go down, unfortunately. I.. I was seriously ill; and my doctor wanted me to retire there and then but I wouldn't. I had Halley, to finish Halley.

*[Retirement]*

Disc 2, Track 12 [0:57:41] After three months I went back to work on a temporary arranging, and planning. I was still working at home. But they had to... the medical system said 'That's it, Alan. You've had it.' Because I was pushing my luck. I was.. I was old, in that area. I wouldn't admit to myself but, ha, I were getting tired. But erm..



but they did find somebody else, who was a great guy. And I knew him personally and I supported him, in that area, but it was a hard time for them to finish. So that was, more or less, my, my end of that type of career.

*[Changes over the years]*

Disc 2, Track 12 [0:58:16] What I'd like to do now is to, is just talk about changing times. I covered like twenty, something like twenty eight years, commencing from what I call the exploration time, expedition time to modern times, in that area, which is totally difference. I saw the, if you like, the developments of lots of things, and I will start with, if you like, communications which is very important.

Communications, when I first went down was CW, Morse code. I saw the introductions of teleprinters, absolutely fabulous, teleprinters, you know. Because in those days, you were only allowed two hundred words in, and a hundred words out, in that area. Post once a year. But I.. that was no problem for me. And then the next one, as I was in the sort of like management side, introduction of fax. This means that I could send drawings and help over. What a breakthrough! Absolutely superb! And then, compression data, satellites, the dreaded emails, but you could.. but.. but it was ??[incomprehensible] It really helps design and planning, there is no question about that. Step in the right direction for communications.

Disc 2, Track 12 [0:59:39] The next one, as far as I am concerned is an environment one. The Survey originally were environment friendly but not as.. as great as they should have been in that area. But I'm not knocking it because nobody else was. We weren't environment friendly in the UK even. But they've made tremendous steps in.. in how they manage their waste, how they pack the waste in that sort of area, and bring it out, in that area. So tremendous in that managements and in various... I can only speak too highly about that. People are dedicated to that.

Disc 2, Track 13 [1:00:20] The next.. the next phase actual in fact was diet, in that area, but this was all tied up to the development, and the diet. The diet before was really burning calories, big calories.. big calorie diets. But science changed. It wasn't as physically hard, and the provision of walk-in freezers – you were able to provide frozen food as opposed to tinned food, where in that area, and having good back-up and were able [phonetic] that facility. So the diet actual in fact tremendously improved.

Disc 2, Track 13 [1:00:58] Right, the next one which I saw was.. was in all intents and purposes, was medical. Tremendous breakthroughs in medical, is but they had dedicated hospitals at the base, well equipped within that area. And the most important things: in the early days, it wasn't the fault of anybody but it could be possible but you were working with outdated drugs, and what the system evolved is actual in fact, was replacing annually all the drugs, all the medical equipment went out. The other thing was.. was the writing of a manual called "Kurafid" which way it goes back to the 1967, when the original author actual in fact had his accident, and he wrote a simple book called Kurafid, which is a good guide to medical aid, which is in field medical boxes.

Disc 2, Track 13 [1:01:59] The second er.. er.., the other thing is, like, used to be called base commanders, but then they, actual in fact.. Er, sorry, used to be called

base leaders but then became base commanders in that area, and what they started to do is to offer long-term contracts for them in that area. And I think that was a great point. Now you can debate it, you can say ‘Well, what makes a good base commander?’ and this is my assessment, not anybody else, but what you have to be to be a good base commander, you have to lead from the front, you have to be fair and just. You’ve got to be able to, if there’s a dispute, in anyway whatsoever, whether it’s time for discipline, you’ve got to be able to compromise and sort those out. And I think that’s, actual in fact.. and I think you’ve got to actual in fact sort of er. I know a base commander sometimes is privy to private and confidential information, but then, but you’ve got to keep the base aware of what’s happening, wherein that area. So these.. these are the qualities. Now there was, in the beginning there was no base commander manual, but the modern days, now, I understand that there is a base commander’s manual. I think it covers some of these options.

Disc 2, Track 13 [1:03:18] Well the other things what has changed is clothing. When I first went down, it was ex-army, it was scratchy suns [phonetic]; it was er.. it was, if you like erm, it were er.. er Norwegian sweaters, er.. er.. and er it was sort of like I just er string vests, in that area. Well you know, they were great, it was great at the time in that knowledge, but the modern clothing today is absolutely superb. It’s based on a layer principle, and it dries very quickly, in that area – easy cleanable like you know. I mean tremendous, improving the safety in that area.

Disc 2, Track 13 [1:04:00] Field communications is completely different now. Field travel is completely different, as actual in fact it’s.. it’s with motorised vehicles, small motorised vehicles of various kinds from skidoos to.. to tracked vehicles in that area, which are suited to er erm.. to go in aircraft in that area, and aviation, with the development of Rothera, erm twin.. twin-engine aircraft. You could fly quickly into the field in that area. So that aspects has made tremendous service.

Disc 2, Track 13 [1:04:35] Now Health & Safety, Health & Safety ... How did Health & Safety get into the Antarctic? I have no facts for this, but this is my opinion, because I was deputy Safety Adviser/Officer. Because I had training in the Health & Safety when I was a building inspector, when it was on the racks to come in. Health & Safety where.. is really ... We’ve always been responsible for our own safety, wherein that sort of area, individuals I’m talking about, but because our operation zone was connected to the Falkland Islands and we had an office in the Falkland Islands, the Health & Safety really, as such, was based on the Falkland Islands which really would be round about, if you like, the nineteen-thirties in that area, which suited expeditions type of things which was great, you know. That’s why the ships were registered there, the aircraft were registered there in that area.

Disc 2, Track 14 [1:05:35] However, once you closed the um er.. that facilities, the.. the mother base, actual in fact, was Cambridge in that area, which brought you into the umbrella of UK legislation. I can remember writing to Bill Sloman, said ‘Well, we’ve got to worry about Health & Safety.’ And this is when Bill Sloman, quite a few years.. I can remember saying, ‘Look, our present.. present operating system we could not operate under the existing laws, in that area.’ Because we multi-skill, we stevedores, we lift heavy weights, we manually.. manually working, all exceed the modern terms of EEC regulations, in that sort of area. Ah, I was involved in risk

assessments in that area. But I mean.. I mean, how do you do a risk assessments, you know, in the Antarctic. I mean, life's a risk.

*[Finale]*

Disc 2, Track 14 [1:06:31] There are.. there are tremendous changes, but I think I won't say any more about that risk assessment because I'd just like to say, that I go back to one of my other statements when.. when I met Sir Raymond Priestley and he said that he was a man of his time and I am a man of my time, and as far as I am concerned, my early days were right for me. I couldn't be a modern fid. I hope any historian finds this interesting, but I had a wonderful life, and as far as I'm concerned, I had a wonderful wife who supported me and without her support, I actual in fact wouldn't be able to achieve this, because it wasn't work to me, it was my hobby.

Disc 2, Track 14 [1:07:24] Out of that I received some very awards. I received the Polar Medal. I couldn't understand why I received the Polar Medal at all, because I was enjoying life in that area. But somebody in the wilderness thought I decided it in that area. I was given .. I was given the.. er I was chosen by my workmates, the Fuchs Medal. Oh, unbelievable, and the Fuchs Medal was, actual in fact going to be presented to me on the get-together of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of er.. of the IGY, crossing of the Antarctic. But unfortunately, I couldn't understand, but I have written a report, er sorry an acknowledgement for this. Because my wife had booked a holiday in Italy in that area.

Disc 2, Track 14 [1:08:12] And then, lo and behold, I got a.. I got another award was my.. was my clasp to the Polar Medal and MBE, and I thought 'Why did it.. Why me, in that area?' So ??[inaudible] in that area. In fact it.. it took well over a year to get.. to get my.. to.. to get the Queen to present the Polar Medal, because my Antarctic life [phonetic], erm my engagement diary, clashes with the Queen's in diary. [laughs], and at one time I said ' Well why don't you put them in a jiffy bag?' But I was wrong. It was a wonderful experience. Not only for me but for my wife and to take a friend to Buckingham Palace to be awarded by the Queen. Well thanks for listening to me. Cheers.

Disc 2, Track 14 [1:09:02] [End of Part Two]

ENDS