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A recording of JEBF Farrington, Senior Wireless Operator with Operation Tabarin between 1943 and 1946, in conversation with Miss Joanna Rae, Assistant Archivist of the British Antarctic Survey.
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Location: 12 Courtney Road, Wantage.

Joanna Rae: Fram, could you give me an outline of your career before joining Operation Tabarin?

Fram Farrington: Well, Joanna, I don't know if I'd call it a career, exactly but, in 1908 I was born and reared in Northern Ireland and I stayed over there with my family for thirteen years and, when the family moved to Yorkshire I went to Leeds Grammar School – incidentally I failed Matric. – but my main interest in those days was travel and exploration and I used to attend lectures and read books on travel and I remember particularly in Leeds, attending a lecture by Wild on Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition which thrilled me. So you can say that my only ambition to visit the distant parts of the world was to find a way to be paid for doing it.

Now, in 1929, at the age of 21, I qualified as a Marine Wireless Operator; was accepted by Marconi Company, and joined the British Merchant Service. My first ship was a P&O passenger liner to Australia and back – then I had two years foreign service, sailing out of Singapore to many parts in the Far East and islands in the South Pacific as far as New Zealand, on case oil ship and tanker.¹ In '32 and '34 I had a lot of experience in cargo ships, as well as colliers and coasters plying between Britain and Eastern Europe. And then, during that period, I was trying to find a way of either going north, by making an application to the Hudson Bay Company in connection with their ship *Nascopi*, or south, in one of Salveson's whalers or supply tankers and all these attempts were unsuccessful.

Well, in 1935, as I'd failed to reach the colder regions and had no intention of staying at sea for the remainder of my working life, I burnt my boats by resigning from Marconi Company and began a search for a shore job. Now during that summer while staying with my father in Swaledale I learned, by chance, of the Discovery Investigations and applied for a job in one of the committee's ships. After satisfying a selection board in the autumn, in London, I was appointed to the Royal Research Ship *William Scoresby* – my ambition was beginning to materialise.

Well, between 1935 and '38: three commissions in Antarctic waters, whale marking, marine zoology, trawling and re-charting [*Tape stops.*]

The first commission took us to the south east of Cape Town as far as Enderby Land and Camp Land and MacRobertson Coast as far as Longitude 75° East and on

¹ Case Oil: oil carried in drums.

the way back we actually climbed Scullin Monolith to about 800 feet. I remember I was with Mr Rayner² who was the scientist – the executive man in charge of that particular commission, and I remember at the very top of the monolith, he turned to me and he said, ‘It would remind you of the Cat Hole at Keld, wouldn’t it Fram?’ In actual fact, the Cat Hole at Keld,³ in the old days, was a pub where you used to get a very good lunch for about 2/6d., and it amazed me that Rayner, who was a Yorkshireman and I, who had spent a lot of time in Yorkshire, were able to make that joke on top of Scullin Monolith.

Well, that was a wonderful trip because, further on, as we came back west, we discovered that the coast was different to what it said on the chart, and we found an extra inlet there, that was eventually called the – the ...

Joanna Rae: It’ll probably come back to you later.

Fram Farrington: Yes, I’ll try and remember that. Oh! It’s the William Scoresby Inlet...

Joanna Rae: Ah!

Fram Farrington: The William Scoresby Inlet, and there was quite a change, changes in the coast there, as I discovered on the Polar Record later on.

Now, the second commission was, in fact, in the same section of the Antarctic waters but it wasn’t anything like so interesting – I was sorry for the people who were doing one trip – because it was a very bad year for ice and there was so much of it, and bergs, that we couldn’t get near enough to sight the coast at all. So that was the second trip. But the third trip, which started in ’37, and finished in ’38, was almost entirely inside the Falkland Islands Dependencies sector and that, of course, was a marvellous trip. After going south from Montevideo we called at South Georgia and there I remember my first sight of South Georgia; it was a very misty evening and the Operator at the South Georgia Coast Station was guiding us in by word of mouth, and I remember that after we got in through the narrow entrance to Grytviken, he said, ‘Well, I can see you now, you’re only about three or four hundred yards from the anchorage: do you mind if I close down, because this is the first night of ‘talkie’ films at Grytviken and I want to go to them.’ So, I thanked him for that but I mentioned him because I will be mentioning him later on. His name was Tim Hooley.

Well, from South Georgia we worked our way down to the South Orkneys, and then back to the South Shetlands and, eventually, out as far as Peter 1st Island. Now that was really most interesting, because the west coast of Grahamland is absolutely superb and of course, during it, I made my first visit to Deception Island, which I was to hear about very much later on.

Joanna Rae: Yes, I wondered if you had visited it during that time.

Fram Farrington: Yes. And it was really, really marvellous.

² George W Rayner.

³ A well-known pub in the village of Keld in Swaledale.

Joanna Rae: What sort of thing did your duties consist of? Were you solely Radio Operator, or did you have to muck in....

Fram Farrington: Oh yes, on the *William Scoresby* I was solely the Wireless Operator but of course, in addition to the sending and receiving messages, and making rendezvous with the factory ships, from which we had to get our oil: the actual range of the *William Scoresby* was only about 5000 miles, and on each voyage we did something like 40,000, so it was essential to have somewhere to get our fuel from: and in addition to that I used to, on the *Scoresby*, run what was called the Pelagic Newsletter and that had to be produced each week. But particularly at Christmas time, we had a Christmas number and we used to go up with the Captain's permission: we got pretty well the whole crew to write something or do something for it...

Joanna Rae: What a lovely idea! How was it distributed amongst the factory ships, or was it just...

Fram Farrington: Ah, that was only a 'one-off' on each occasion, and it was only read by the crew of the *Scoresby*.

Joanna Rae: Ah!

Fram Farrington: However, when we got back from the end of that commission, the Discovery Committee Office did us the honour of actually having it duplicated and a memorial copy, as it were, issued to each of the people who had taken part in the voyage.

Joanna Rae: Oh that was really nice; good gracious!

Fram Farrington: Mind you, I must say it was only because of the talent amongst the different members of the crew that made it so good.

Joanna Rae: Did you actually witness some of the whale marking that the *William Scoresby* carried out?

Fram Farrington: Oh yes, very, yes...

Joanna Rae: Could you describe it?

Fram Farrington: Well, you probably know that the *William Scoresby* was not much bigger than an ordinary trawler and, instead of a harpoon, she had a forward foredeck and a flying bridge, from the proper bridge, out onto the foredeck so that they could get there no matter what the weather was like; and they used to fire a stainless steel dart of about nine inches, with a suitable gun, from the shoulder, after chasing the whales until they got into a position where they could actually hit them. Now, this stainless steel dart penetrated the blubber of the whale – we believe it didn't hurt the whale very much, because these Blue whales weigh as much as a hundred tons, and had a lot of blubber on them – but the dart was marked with a number and a note to the effect that, if found, it should be returned to the Natural History Museum in London. We knew where the whale was marked, and of course the factory ship cleared the information as to where the dart had been found. And that was the way,

rather like marking birds you know; that was the way the Discovery Committee scientists got to know about the movement of whales.

Joanna Rae: In fact, we have the records of the whale markings by the *William Scoresby* at the British Antarctic Survey now, as part of the Sea Mammal Research Archive. (Crosstalk.)

Fram Farrington: Yes, I must tell you some time again about marking, 'cause there was a poem written about it in the Pelagic News.

Joanna Rae: Oh... Yes, I've never seen a copy of that, actually.

Fram Farrington: Yes

Joanna Rae: They're certainly few and far between, that's why.

Fram Farrington: Yes. Well now; that brings us, more or less, to the end of my third voyage in the *Scoresby* and in 1938, when they returned to the United Kingdom, the threat of war with Germany had interrupted the Discovery Committee's fieldwork and the *Scoresby* was laid up, to be taken over later on for Naval duties.

Now, that left me unemployed. However, in the autumn my fiancée and I were married and I got a job with the Aeronautical Inspection Directorate, inspecting wireless equipment and the like...

Joanna Rae: Where was that situated?

Fram Farrington: Well, we had a flat in London and I was working on behalf of the Air Ministry at various firms. Plessey was the one I started at, and then I went on a course, and I was moved from there to other jobs in other parts of the country.

Joanna Rae: And how did you actually come to join Tabarin?

Fram Farrington: Well, now: I remained with the Air Ministry job, and I was appointed to Metropolitan Vickers in Manchester about 1940, and there I found myself on a very Top Secret job, inspecting equipment in connection with 'Radio-Location', as it was then called, and Beam Navigation.

Joanna Rae: Is that Radar?

Fram Farrington: That's now Radar. After I'd been five years out of the *Scoresby*, I was up at Metropolitan Vickers: I got a summons to visit somebody in London at the Park Lane Hotel, and my Group Leader at Metropolitan Vickers had no idea what this interview was going to be about.

In fact, he told me – he actually came to see me, on the night before I was due to go down to London – and said that after I'd been to this interview, would I telephone the Director of the Aeronautical Inspection Directorate and tell him what it was all about. Well, when I got down to London, I got to the Park Lane Hotel; I found that it was JWS Marr and he told me about Tabarin.

Joanna Rae: Had you met Marr before?

Fram Farrington: I'd never actually met him but of course, he also was one of the scientists connected with the Discovery Committee and, although he hadn't sailed on *Scoresby*, he'd sailed in the *Discovery II* which was designed for that sort of work, and had done a lot of work in her and furthermore he had, of course, sailed with Shackleton as Scout Marr, when Shackleton chose him as a King's Scout to accompany him on his last voyage in the *Quest*. And, in the early days of the Discovery Committee, Marr had also done a lot of work when the Discovery Committee were using the Scott's old ship *Discovery* for whale-marking.

Well of course Scott's ship wasn't anything like so manoeuvrable as it would need to be for that and eventually, it was the *William Scoresby* that was designed and built to take over that work – in 1929, I think.

Joanna Rae: Did Marr tell you why your name had been picked?

Fram Farrington: Yes; he told me, of course that it was all a very hush-hush job and it all had to be done in an absolute minimum of time and he, having been appointed leader of the expedition by the Discovery Committee – who was helping the Colonial Office to mount this expedition – he naturally went for the sort of people that had experience in the Antarctic.

Joanna Rae: and, really, that was Discovery Investigations I suppose, solely.

Fram Farrington: Yes. When the Cabinet learned that the Argentines were putting up the flags and cylinders about the sovereignty of – about claims, I should say – for the Antarctic Dependencies, the Navy had never mounted an expedition for anywhere so hard to get at; a thousand miles of sea all round it and ice and so on, and so they turned to the Discovery Committee because of its experience in arranging that sort of thing.

Joanna Rae: Were you responsible for selecting the wireless stores and equipment?

Fram Farrington: No. Before I was free to leave the Air Ministry job and join the expedition in London, all the vital selection of equipment had been made and ordered with the valuable assistance of Admiralty staff, and the Equipments Pool at HM Signals School at Ledine; and so all that of course I had nothing whatever to do with, apart from seeing the requisitions.

Joanna Rae: Did that, in fact, make your job more difficult, or were you very satisfied?

Fram Farrington: No, I was very satisfied, because I really hadn't had the experience, and particularly I'd been out, away, from the sea for six years: I hadn't got the knowledge to know what was best from the point of view of communications in Antarctica at that time.

Joanna Rae: Was it the sort of post that you actually could say ‘No, I don’t want to go’? Or was it, more or less, ‘You will go.’

Fram Farrington: Well, that’s a pointed question, and I don’t know whether I should answer it.

Joanna Rae: O.K. [laughs.]

Fram Farrington: But, I did ask Marr if any of the previous Operators of the *Scoresby* had been invited to go, and he said ‘No; that I was his first choice, so far as Operators were concerned.’

Joanna Rae: Obviously communications were vital to the expedition – could you explain your responsibilities as the Senior Wireless Operator?

Fram Farrington: Yes; my original brief in London was that I should be responsible for assembling the radio equipment at the bases, and establish communications with Port Stanley, between the bases and with the expedition ships when they were in the vicinity.

Joanna Rae: Were the other Operators responsible to you; did you have to supervise them? Well – in the first year you only had base ‘B’ in the first year, I suppose.

Fram Farrington: Well, they were responsible to me by the fact that I was the oldest man, and had been connected with that sort of work in the Antarctic before: they weren’t really junior to me, or at least I didn’t think of them as being so. Really, to achieve my brief, as quoted in London, it was essential to obtain friendly co-operation between myself and the other Operator, or Operators, as they were later on, but, as I expected, this was not difficult to do; and then, it was just a matter of arranging things like schedules, and procedures with regard to passing information between bases and through Port Stanley, to London and, while I was at the main base – in the first instance at Port Lockroy – while I was there, I automatically was the main collector of information.

But, I encouraged the other Operators to contact with Stanley when they desired.

Joanna Rae: So, it didn’t have to come through the main base and be relayed, then?

Fram Farrington: No, no, except that later on, you see, with regard to the first three months, while the whole expedition was still supposed to be secret, we had to be very careful about not cluttering the æther with signals between the different stations, and chats about how we were getting on – so that our communications were brief and at fairly regular intervals in the early days but, later on, I think it was in May of 1944, that London gave us permission to send three weather reports daily to Stanley and, at that time, we naturally had to collect and relay the weather reports direct to Stanley by one station, in order to perform efficiently, and not to clutter Stanley with calling different stations. But, in general, it was very free between the bases.

Joanna Rae: Could you explain what the different forms of communications were, because I'm never quite sure..?

Fram Farrington: Yes – well, from a radio point of view, in that first year it was all done by Telegraphy – it was all Morse.⁴

Joanna Rae: That's Morse, yes...

Fram Farrington: We had no Telephony equipment with us. The expedition didn't have any dogs for the first year because, had somebody gone to Labrador to collect twenty or thirty expedition dogs, it would be quite obvious where we were going and, because of the secrecy – and also because of the fact that, apart from Deception Island, we had to build the bases – it wasn't anticipated that we would be doing any sledging during that first year. And we also didn't know what conditions were going to be like from an ice point of view, or from the beach point of view; the cargo space was limited on the ship and they...

Joanna Rae: So in fact dogs weren't really appropriate...

Fram Farrington: ...not really appropriate, no. We had enough to do without them. In actual fact, Marr and three of the others at Hope Bay⁵ did do man-hauling expeditions of about nearly a month but they were handicapped, in that they had no proper ship, or even a strong enough motor launch; they couldn't get to the mainland, because of the currents in the Gerlache Channel, and so on. So, they did a month's work surveying from Wiencke Island itself.

Joanna Rae: Could we look at some of the effects of the secrecy that was imposed on Tabarin at first, in terms of its effect on your duties as Wireless Operator? I think that until at least May, everything had to be in cipher.

Fram Farrington: Yes, that went on for quite a long time afterwards, actually. We used what were called 'One-Time' Pads, and that meant that these pads were rather like a collection of something like 500 sheets of paper, with lots and lots of numbers on them.⁶ (*Crosstalk*) A 'One-Time' Pad involves putting your plain language into code and subtracting the five-figure ciphers that you get from other figures, and then sending the third lot of figures in your messages, in five-figure groups. So, it was the sort of thing that you had to be really good at, mental arithmetic, but I made it easy, by getting Doc.Back to help me, and he was a tremendous help, and he was a younger brain than I had, and he did all the work really there – or a good deal of it.

Joanna Rae: So presumably you had to translate what you wanted to send into code and then send that, and when you got something back, you had to translate it and...

⁴ The bases were equipped with clandestine 5G transmitters, made in the Naval Dockyards, and these were not fitted with Telegraphy modulators.

⁵ A 'slip of the tongue' occurred here. As will be seen later Fram was, in fact, referring to Wiencke Island.

⁶ The 'Navy 25' system.

Fram Farrington: To decipher it, yes; decode it.

Joanna Rae: How long would that have taken on each – of one day?

Fram Farrington. Oh well, it depended on – in the early days, when we weren't sending many messages, that didn't take very long; but when it came to the middle of the season, when we were sending requisitions for stores, particularly to replace the stores in the existing bases – but even more, when we were ordering for bases like Hope Bay or down at Signy Island or somewhere like that, these groups would run into as many as a thousand groups; they were quite long messages.

Joanna Rae: Is the numerical Morse Code quicker to send than an alphabetical one?

Fram Farrington: No. If anything, it's slightly longer, I think, because the figure one is a dot and four dashes; whereas a letter 'Z' even, is two dashes and two dots.⁷

Joanna Rae: Did you ever have voice-voice radio?

Fram Farrington: Yes, we asked for that, for portable receivers, in particular, for the second year when we had dogs, and they were going to send out sledge parties. Now, they sent down a large receiver, which weighed something like about twenty pounds, and was not really what we intended but, in addition to that, we asked for portable walkie-talkies and they sent us down Army-type 3, I think it was, which worked off batteries but which weighed about 28 pounds and it was Morse or Telephony.

Joanna Rae: And how did they work? Were you satisfied with their performance?

Fram Farrington: Well there was problems with them, although I wasn't involved in this so much because I was at, by this time, Base 'B'.

Joanna Rae: And they were just used from 'D'.

Fram Farrington: But they were just used for either working between the base and the ship while it was unloading at Hope Bay, or on the sledge journeys. But, on the first sledge journey they had very little contact with base on them – it may have been that we weren't used to them but, on the second journey, they had much more contact and it was Layther who by that time was at Port Lockroy (Base 'A') and he succeeded, together with Andrew Taylor, who was the Leader and also on that sledge journey and he was operating out in the field; and they did get rather a good success with it.⁸

Joanna Rae: Oh good. And how was the main base equipment? Did that...

⁷ Operators sending large blocks of all-digit signals, did later use a form of Morse 'shorthand', when the figure 1 was represented by one dot, 2 by two dots, 6 was represented by one dash, 7 by two dashes and so on.

⁸ An early example of radio 'skip', which frustrated many sledge journey communications in the early years.

Fram Farrington: On the whole, the main base equipment worked very well. In other words, I couldn't find fault with the selection of the receivers and transmitter, which were used for the main bases, and they gave very little trouble.

Joanna Rae: Would you have had in the right kind of spares, if something had gone wrong? Or, would you have been...

Fram Farrington: The communications was so important that we had duplicate sets of equipment (*Crosstalk*) and that was very useful when we had a fire – I'm now getting off the line of your questioning – I think I'd better leave that 'till later on.

Joanna Rae: That's the fire at Base 'B'. Yes, we'll probably come back to that later. Could we, in fact talk about establishing wireless communications at Base 'A' – and 'B', when you landed there in 1944?

Fram Farrington: Yes.

Joanna Rae: You got the station actually operating in very short time.

Fram Farrington: Yes, we did. And I think you're going to compare that with the long time we took at establishing communication at Hope Bay? (*Crosstalk*) So far as Base 'B' and 'A' were concerned – Deception and Port Lockroy – stores had been transferred to the *Fitzroy* at Port Stanley, and the *Fitzroy* was a Falkland Islands Company ship which ran between Stanley and Montevideo and the southern ports of South America, and also ran round all the Falkland Islands. She was a ship of about 1000 tons and her crew were very experienced in storing equipment aboard the ship, and also in man-handling it, under difficult circumstances when they had no port facilities, like cranes and so on.

Now, both the landings at Deception and at Port Lockroy: the ships were in sheltered, almost harbours – at Deception by the very shape of the island and, at Port Lockroy, because of the mountains round about. Whereas at Hope Bay, it was a very much more exposed site altogether.

Joanna Rae: And, of course, the *Fitzroy* wasn't there... (*Crosstalk*)

Fram Farrington:... there was the *Eagle*. The other thing too, about Deception that made it so quick was that we didn't have to build a hut. They selected one of the old dormitories, which hadn't been used since the whaling finished there; the land whaling finished about 1931 and, except for odd times when people were there for a short duration, it had never been used until we got there.

So, we didn't have to build. So I and Layther, with the help of some of the others, was able to concentrate on getting the wireless cases ashore and all the equipment into one of the rooms, getting an aerial up, and that was very quick; I think in fact we did it in something like 36 hours. It would have to be arranged differently later on, but that was all we had to do at that time.

Joanna Rae: Was it difficult to put things like the aerials up, in terms of the weather and that kind of thing?

Fram Farrington: No, there were telescopic metal masts, with cod-line stays and Chippy Ashton was a great help there with regard to if we needed any concrete put down to hold the metal pegs, so that they weren't really hard to put up. Later on, they always used stainless steel guys and...

Joanna Rae: So, what had you got? I don't really understand about cod-line.

Fram Farrington: Oh, we had – it was rather like rope – rope guys...

Joanna Rae: Oh, so it's not as enduring.

Fram Farrington: ...nothing like so strong. At Port Lockroy, Chippy Ashton built a wooden frame with a canvas covering so that I could get my motor generator operating in there, under cover, before we had the hut finished. But even there it didn't take longer than about five or six days to have it going.

Joanna Rae: Were there any problems – or not really: it all went smoothly?

Fram Farrington: Oh yes, there were odd problems; gaskets would need replacing and sometimes we'd have difficulty starting an engine, but those were all kind of run-of-the-mill things: didn't cause any trouble.

Joanna Rae: Oh I see. You'd sort of had experience of maintaining generators and that kind of thing?

Fram Farrington: Well no, I hadn't actually, because of course all my wireless work had been done at sea so that I would have liked to have had more – and I'm not a driver, I don't drive cars – so that I hadn't had a lot of experience of petrol engines and things; but of course I did get some very useful advice and help for instance, from Andrew Taylor about that, when I did run into some trouble.

Joanna Rae: So, there was expertise around.

Fram Farrington: Yes, but if I remember, I write in my report at the end of that part of the expedition I made a point that all Operators ought to be really mechanics as well, to have it all within your own...

Joanna Rae: So that if no one was around, you could actually solve the problem. I think you were also responsible for the lighting as well weren't you?

Fram Farrington: Ah well – of course everybody had more than their own job to do and one of the jobs that seemed to fall into my sort of sphere was looking after the Vapalux lamps that we used for lighting the building and, there again, we could have lit the building from the motor generator that we used for charging the batteries and driving the equipment. But again, for that first year, it would be unfair to load your motor generator with the problem of providing light for the whole of the base.

And also, of course, it would have used a lot more petrol (*Crosstalk*) whereas the Vapalux lamp – they don't all go out, if one of them happens to go out – and the Vapalux lamps were very suitable, really. So I looked after them for the whole of my time at Port Lockroy and, again, when I went to Deception I took that over. I looked after about twenty-odd lamps...

Joanna Rae: And what did that involve?

Fram Farrington: It only involved keeping them clean, keeping them filled with paraffin and occasionally changing a mantle, or something like that. But it was a routine thing; it was quite good. We all had other jobs to do.

Joanna Rae: I suppose there were a lot of jobs that individually didn't take much time, but you've got to have someone who's responsible for making sure the job is done. Could you tell me what communications with those directing the expedition were like, and did you feel you were given sufficient information when it was needed?

Fram Farrington: Yes well, I think the main time that I was a bit worried about it was on our way out on the *Highland Monarch*. I remember that time after time, Marr would call us to an isolated spot on the boat deck, when we expected to be told what we were going to do when we got down south – only to find it was another lesson about not giving away any information to the other passengers on the ship.

However, so far as Marr and I were concerned, he was quite communicative with me in London and whenever I wished to ask him questions at the bases. But as the man through which all these messages went, I did feel that there were times when both Marr, and later Andy Taylor, felt that they weren't being kept up-to-date with what London was wanting us to do.

Joanna Rae: Can you remember if it was the Discovery Committee that would actually say what they wanted you to do, I think there was an Expedition Committee, actually?

Fram Farrington: Yes, well of course, the Discovery Committee was all-important, particularly where the scientific work of the expedition was concerned and I think all the messages probably went through the Falkland Island Governor's Office and they might have been dealt with at the London end by the Colonial Office. But I feel that there was some sort of lack of contact there, that might have made things easier down south.

Joanna Rae: Are there any particular instances that you can call to mind?

Fram Farrington: No, I can't really remember, except one, which was mentioned in some of the reports that I read and that was the Hope Bay people and Andy Taylor, who was then the leader, were never really told specifically when they were going to be relieved – that must be the beginning of 1946.

Joanna Rae: Did you find Base 'B' were kept informed – were you told the ship was coming down, that second year?

Fram Farrington: Oh, in general, when the ship got near the bases, we would be in communication with them by radio – but, before that, we wouldn't necessarily know that they'd left Stanley, for instance.

Joanna Rae: Sort of just thoughtless, really; the people at Stanley didn't think to let you know that they were coming.

Fram Farrington: It's just possible, in all that they had to do in Stanley, and so on, they didn't realise how important it was to us, living from day to day, as it were.

Joanna Rae: Did you find communication with the outside world was important to your lifestyle?

Fram Farrington: Oh yes! Particularly as more than half of the people on the expedition were married men. Therefore, it was important to hear fairly regularly, about our wives and families and relations – particularly wives and families, who were in the very centre of things in Britain – with bombing and doodlebugs and the like. Whereas we were in perfect safety, barring accidents, out in the Antarctic.

Joanna Rae: Were your relations allowed to send telegraphic messages to you, or was it just mail coming, in the normal way?

Fram Farrington: Yes, after a certain period, which I think was May 1944,⁹ we were given the opportunity of sending one message a month, or something like that, and I think our relations could do the same

Joanna Rae: We spoke earlier about setting up the wireless stations at Bases 'A' and 'B', and in February 1945 the Base 'D' was established at Hope Bay. This was in much more difficult circumstances than the earlier bases were established of course; and I was wondering if you could tell me something about the establishment of the base, including the wireless operation?

Fram Farrington: Yes. Well of course there was good reason why that should be more difficult because, in the first place, it was a much more exposed base area and anchorage for the ships involved, than it had been at Port Lockroy or Deception Island. The ice and icebergs coming out of the Weddell Sea were very liable to float on the currents into the bay which the *Eagle*, which was being used at that time as the expedition's main ship, and which was a Newfoundland sealer, was very unlike the *Fitzroy*, which had helped us with the establishment of Base 'B' and Base 'A'.

Now, as I mentioned, whereas the *Fitzroy* had a very experienced crew dealing with handling cargo, and dealing with loading and unloading at places where there were no support facilities HMS *Eagle*, her crew was very experienced in their own way but she was, after all, a sealer and was used to handling seal carcasses and so on. So that it so happened that when the *Eagle* came down to Hope Bay on that occasion,

⁹ This quickly followed Winston Churchill's demand to the Foreign Office to explain what was the purpose of Operation Tabarin, following the BBC World Service broadcast of 14 April 1944 broke the remaining cover from the Expedition, and their reply of 27 April.

for a start, she had to manoeuvre the cases of stores in the hold and so on at Deception Island.

She'd also taken on board a tremendous amount of extra building material, which was available there for the taking, and other things like 40-gallon oil drums and lots of that sort of bulky equipment on her deck and, in addition to her having to moor herself in the cove, she was much further away from the site of the base and most of her cargo had to be towed in a scow by launch for something like over a mile to the beach near the base and some of it was unloaded nearer, on the ice near to the ship.

Joanna Rae: This was to try and speed things up a little bit?

Fram Farrington: Yes. Now, because of the less-experienced sailors, so far as this particular work was concerned, it took much longer to get the required equipment at the right time out of the ship.

Joanna Rae: Had they been able to load it in the same systematic way, as earlier? So that you've got (*Crosstalk*)

Fram Farrington: When it was transferred at Port Stanley I don't think the same care was taken about having the 'B' stuff in, at the top of the cargo, and the 'A' stuff at the bottom. Therefore, there was the same problem, I think, with regard to the *Eagle* when she was coming down to Hope Bay and probably whereas, in the year before, the *Fitzroy* had the building material and the wireless equipment and that sort of thing near the top of the hold. I know, in particular with regard to the wireless equipment, there was something like a week before we were able to get out even what was called 'portable' equipment so that we could keep in touch with the *Eagle* from the base. It was much longer than that before we got the main wireless equipment out from the *Eagle*. Well, the other thing was that of course she experienced a lot of bad weather when she was in this position near Hope Bay.

The next thing that delayed us was that Base 'B' radio station went 'off the air' and neither Layther at Port Lockroy, nor the Operator of the *Eagle* nor I could make any contact with them, and this happened towards the end of February while the *Eagle* was unloading her first load and it was then decided that, after Taylor had talked to me, that I and Flett, who was Taylor's deputy, should go back with the *Eagle* as soon as she was empty, to Deception to find out what had happened. I agreed with Taylor that no matter what had happened – provided it was not that the base was burnt down, or something like that – that I should take Donnachie's position at Deception, which appeared to be the weaker link in the radio side of things, as I was the more experience Operator.

Well, we decided to go to Deception but, on the first attempt a gale blew up, and when we tried to reach the *Eagle* in the motorboat, we ran into some small bits of ice which damaged the bow of the motorboat and, in fact, we had to shove sleeping bags into the hole to prevent the boat from being filled with water...

Joanna Rae: Good gracious! I didn't realise it was as bad as that!

Fram Farrington: ...and we carried on and eventually reached the *Eagle* (wait a minute, I'm wrong here, you know...) On the first occasion we had to turn back (*Crosstalk*) because of this wind. And, we arrived back at Hope Bay, where most of the rest of the expedition were attempting to settle down, in what was called 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' which Chippy Ashton had built from corrugated iron and timber from Deception Island, bearing in mind we would have nowhere to sleep for a very long time, owing to the larger hut they were putting up at Hope Bay¹⁰ and the slow rate at which the stuff was coming ashore.

Most of us slept in that 'Tom's' cabin; it was rather a crush. Now that was the one night, the next day the gale had subsided a bit, and it was then when we had the accident with the ice. We were very glad to get under the stern of the *Eagle* at anchor; the experienced crew of the *Eagle* saw that we each got a life-line, and I can tell you we were very glad to scamper up the rope ladder and get aboard the old *Eagle*.

Joanna Rae: I can imagine. Presumably someone had to come over in the launch, to take the launch back again, as well. Was that so? (*Crosstalk*) Did they have to get the damaged boat back?

Fram Farrington: Yes, I think at that time I'm not quite certain what happened there – you know, I'm getting on now a bit and memory fails me – I was so glad to get aboard that I didn't care what happened... (*Laughter*)

Joanna Rae: It could sink, then! So, what happened when you reached...

Fram Farrington: So, when we reached Deception Island, of course we found that one of the generators, which Tommy Donnachie was using in order to give some of the 12-Volt batteries an initial charge which had actually caught fire, which had ruined the generator and had caused some other incidental damage in the hut.

Now, it's not quite certain how this happened except that it could be, for instance, that one of the leads – with the vibration of the motor – came loose, which possibly created a spark which in turn ignited, say, the oil on the generator. On the other hand we had found that if you bring in what was called 'white spirit petrol' from the cold temperatures outside the hut, and if you filled the generator too near the top of the tank, because it was in the hot atmosphere of the hut, the petrol tended to expand and overflow. So that again, with the help of a spark, could have set the thing off. But it's the sort of unfortunate thing that could have happened to anybody; especially somebody who had not experience of very low temperatures.

Joanna Rae: So, did Tommy Donnachie mind changing?

Fram Farrington: I don't really know whether he minded, but I would think he was very disappointed at what happened although, as I say, it could have happened to anybody. The point was; whereas I had some experience of the equipment and motor generators, I'd also on occasion had to ask some of the other eight members at Port Lockroy to give me help with keeping the petrol motor going. It's just possible, if

¹⁰ 3048m longer than the first two Boulton & Paul 'Spitzbergen' type huts supplied in early 1944, with loose materials for constructing an annex/porch on site.

he needed that sort of help he would get it out of the twelve or thirteen members of the new Base 'D', Hope Bay.

Joanna Rae: So it was a reflection of experience rather than technical ability. So, how did you feel about it? It was quite a change for you, wasn't it?

Fram Farrington: Well, I did agree with Taylor that it was the right thing for me to do, but I must admit that I was very disappointed at having to leave the centre of main activity which was going to be quite a lot at Hope Bay and, to leave the team of eight other blokes that I'd been through and shared such a unique experience with, up 'till then, and particularly Port Lockroy, to go to a base where there were only three other people and where I expected it to be an uninteresting ten months or a year sitting in a hut looking out at the uninteresting hills round about and the ash-ridden snow-covered areas and an old, ruined, derelict factory – with very, very little to do but, in fact, it turned out to be not like that at all.

In the first place, I found it a challenging and interesting experience to spend that time alone on an island with just three other people, and I found that, as the winter progressed, and with gales and lots of blizzards, the drab-looking Deception Island became covered with snow and all the old loose corrugated iron that was being knocked about in the winds of the summer became either frozen or weighted down with snow and were no longer creating a hazard in high winds by being blown about the old whaling station. It was quite a scintillating and sort of lovely fairy-like place in the winter and the sea in the middle of Whalers Bay – the whole of Whalers Bay and the area – became a highway that we were able to travel on skis and get about the island. So that it was quite an interesting experience.

Joanna Rae: Did you travel very much?

Fram Farrington: Well Reece who, of course, was a geologist and also taking the Met. Observations, he organised laying three or four depots round strategic points [*Sound fades and continues on CD2*] on the inside circumference of the island, so that if anybody was away on a journey and couldn't come back at night, or was blown away in a dinghy during the summertime, they would have a depot where they could get food and shelter.

Joanna Rae: So you all took part in laying those depots.

Fram Farrington: Well, Reece and I did that. Charlie Smith was, of course, a real Cockney, and the great thing that he did at Deception – and it was very important, he was the Cook – and we looked after our Cook and he helped with the odd jobs outside but cooking was his main duty, and we kept him to it.

Then, of course, there was Sam Bonner. Sam Bonner was the eldest of the four of us: Reece had asked for somebody to be sent down from Stanley to strengthen the team – he felt that three was too small a party to be left for the whole year at a base like that – and Sam Bonner was selected and we felt that it was really unfair that a man of that age who was not A1 in health and, to some extent, had not the same attitude to what we were doing in the Antarctic, was ever allowed to come south.

Joanna Rae: How old was he when he got there?

Fram Farrington: He was somewhere between 50 and 60, and he looked that. Now, we think that it was unfair of them to send him down to the base and it was unfair to allow him to come because, as it so happened later on, before the winter really set in, he had a heart attack and Reece was entirely dependant on wireless communication, and at that time it was Morse, with Doc Back at Hope Bay for advice and information as to how to treat Bonner.

It was almost a continuous communication for some days – if not longer – but in the end the Leader, Taylor, asked for the *Scoresby* to pick Bonner up and take him back to the hospital in Stanley. Now the *Scoresby* had set out from Stanley on her last trip of the season and was on her way down, but you can imagine our disappointment, not only for ourselves but for Bonner, when Marchesi found that on entering the Bransfield Strait from the north, it was so full of ice that it was too dangerous to come on, either to Deception or Hope Bay and eventually [he] had to go back to Stanley.

Now that was serious for Bonner and it was unfortunate, because there were two new generators aboard, one for Deception Island to replace the one burnt out and another, to replace one at Port Lockroy, which they'd had trouble with. So Port Lockroy and Deception had to do with one generator for the whole of the winter season.

Joanna Rae: This meant you didn't have a backup if anything went wrong?

Fram Farrington: Exactly, yes. Luckily, nothing did go wrong.

Joanna Rae: It must have been very worrying, with Bonner being so ill there...

Fram Farrington: It was worrying particularly for Reece and Doc. And the rest of us, of course, were sorry for Bonner.

Joanna Rae: If we could go back in time a little, to the period when you'd just landed and decided that you would replace Donnachie, could you tell me, from that point, what happened.

Fram Farrington: Yes, well while the *Eagle* was loading her second cargo for Hope Bay, the *Scoresby* arrived at Deception and after a short time she left Deception, taking Donnachie and Flett back to Hope Bay. That was very roughly, the end of the second week in March. Now, the *Eagle* at that time was loading her final cargo at Deception for Hope Bay and this included things like 30 tons of coal, building material picked up at Deception and other stores which were to be her last load for Hope Bay.

Joanna Rae: Had the *Eagle* actually brought these stores down from Stanley and then left some of them at Deception on an earlier trip – is that how it works?

Fram Farrington: That was true of the main cased stores, and coal, but things like lumber and building material was buckshee stuff that Chippy had indicated would

be very useful to complete the building of extensions and so on, to the main huts at Hope Bay.

Joanna Rae: So you were actually dismantling bits of the old whaling station?

Fram Farrington: That's true. Then, the *Eagle* left on her final trip to Hope Bay about five or six days later and we settled down to our routine for the rest of the season, except for the arrival of any ships in the meantime.

There was a period then of quite nasty gales and blizzards around about the middle of March and, one morning when I switched on at our usual morning schedule and contacted Donnachie, I learned they were in real trouble at Deception...

Joanna Rae: At Hope Bay?

Fram Farrington: That's Hope Bay, yes. And the *Eagle* had apparently lost an anchor, had had to put to sea because of the gales, had an accident with icebergs, had attempted to beach and decided against it, and was then on her way towards Port Stanley with a broken bowsprit, damaged foredeck and the *Scoresby*, at Port Stanley, had been asked to come to her assistance.

Joanna Rae: What was your reception and Deception's to that news?

Fram Farrington: Well, of course we were shattered at the idea that this should have happened to the *Eagle*, especially as she'd had to leave with quite a lot of the cargo that she'd taken in her last trip from Deception...

Joanna Rae: So that was material that wasn't landed at Hope Bay for the new base?

Fram Farrington: That's right. It included coal and other things that were important. Now I didn't take much action in that, because Donnachie had the whole thing in hand and I must admit, as I learned later on, that Donnachie had handled the communication problems connected with that accident in a fine way and, in his own mind, it must have made up for any feelings he had had about changing from Deception to Hope Bay.

However, in due course, about a week later we learned with great relief that the *Eagle* had made it to Port Stanley and had arrived safely.

Joanna Rae: So, back at Base 'B' now, you settled in to the winter routine, I suppose. Could you give me some idea of what that routine consisted of?

Fram Farrington: Yes, by this time, as I say, we were finding that Deception was a much nicer place than it looked like in the summer but there were the four of us and Alan Reece was an extremely nice chap – somewhat younger than I was – he was a geologist but his main routine work at Deception was taking the meteorological readings three times a day and keeping a weekly observation on the state of the sea and the ice in Bransfield Strait, outside Deception Island, which meant a walk of something like a couple of miles to a look-out point to the east of Neptunes Bellows

and Neptunes Bellows, as I think you have said to me in the past, is such a romantic name – all I can say is that it lives up to it!

Joanna Rae: I suppose you got very familiar with it over the years?

Fram Farrington: Yes indeed, and having seen it for the first time, in 1938.

Joanna Rae: Never thinking you were going to be wintering there!

Fram Farrington: Exactly, it was almost like coming home to me, in a way. But to get back to the weather reports, the actual outdoor weather equipment was very roughly about 200 yards nearer the sea and away from either our building or old factory buildings. Particularly in bad weather, it was quite dangerous to make that journey for Reece. So we had arranged that if the weather was bad he would do the journey and I would sit in what we called the Met Room (we'd plenty of rooms in this big dormitory place at Deception) that I would sit at a desk taking down the information that he was collecting down at the Met. Station, as we arranged a telephone system between us and the actual outside station, but in extreme cases, we would at night sometimes during the winter use the Aldis lamp, which we had, as a lighthouse, to enable him to get back to base but, in extreme cases we also used to use a lifeline, so, if he went out he could definitely get back. Otherwise, in the really bad weather, with visibility down to about two yards and gale force winds which were liable to blow you over, it would have been quite dangerous.

Joanna Rae: Presumably, if the weather was bad the sea ice observations weren't taken.

Fram Farrington: No, but he only did those once a week, anyway. The other routine thing connected with the weather was, of course, he did put up balloons to measure the direction of wind at very high altitudes, up to about 24,000 feet. It was then that I was able to help them, particularly on the telecom. connection between the two points.

Then there was the usual business of getting snow in, or ice preferably, to provide water for the kitchen and cooking and washing and that sort of thing; so that took up quite a bit of time. Observations of birds and things during the summer and I suppose, too, you ask me how we kept ourselves: there seemed plenty to do. For pastimes, Reece and I played chess and we played chess for part of the time, over the radio with the other bases, having one move at a time at the morning schedule – I know it was passed over by Morse and we played cards, Charlie Smith and Bonner really enjoyed cards, and they also played draughts; Charlie Smith was a great draught player and we tried to teach Charlie how to play chess and we succeeded up to a point but we could never get him to realise he wasn't playing draughts, so there was a lot of fun over that. We occasionally listened to gramophone records...

Joanna Rae: Was each base provided with a gramophone, then, or was it up to the individual to bring one?

Fram Farrington: No, each base had one of the old-fashioned portable gramophones and a selection of records, which had been provided for us; I think they

had been provided for us in London – I think they had been provided by some organisation like the Missions to Seamen. We also of course had a very good library at both bases; not only technical and scientific books but novels, and that sort of thing, again supplied by Missions to Seamen I think.

We were lucky of course at Deception, that we each had a bedroom to ourselves and apart from the fact that it was difficult to keep them warm; that was very nice and we were able to spread ourselves. We also had a Library, and we had the Met. Office and the Wireless Office. And then there were a lot of empty rooms along the corridor, which we never used, but I must admit that most of our spare time indoors was spent in the rather large kitchen, which had a tremendous range in it, as well as slow-combustion stoves like the old ‘pillar-box’ type.

But now I haven’t said anything about my friends on Deception. There was Sam Bonner, who was of course older than any of us and wasn’t a fit man and hadn’t the interest in Antarctica that we had – particularly Reece and myself – and hadn’t, of course, read anything about Antarctica. But he was a nice bloke and there were times when we wondered whether he was as happy- [*recording stopped.*]

Well, Charlie Smith was a great bloke – he’d been in the Navy as a volunteer and he had been cook in the Navy – and the great thing about him was that he cooked for us and we were very satisfied with whatever he turned out. He had a great sense of humour; he could sing songs quite well, popular, not necessarily bawdy songs but the sort of songs that you’d get in the mess-deck at sea, and that livened us up and he played draughts; he was an absolute expert at draughts and we tried to teach him chess – he learnt a bit of the moves but he always played it as though he was playing draughts so it didn’t make it a very good game – but it was great fun and I never saw Charlie depressed; he was always in good spirits and, although he did have a damaged hand of some sort, he did help out of doors occasionally when his help was needed and occasionally he went for walks with one or other of us.

Joanna Rae: ’Cause he had been at Deception the year before hadn’t he?

Fram Farrington: He had been there at Deception the year before and of course he’d learned from people, particularly like Jock Matheson, who had spent so much time in Antarctica, particularly on *Discovery II*, and I mean there have been books written about Jock Matheson; so he’d learnt from Jock and from some of the other members like Howkins the Met. bloke, and Flett the Leader, the year before, a lot of the things we knew about Antarctica, which made it such an interesting experience. So he fitted in very well.

Joanna Rae: And he wasn’t disappointed not to be moved to a different base?

Fram Farrington: No, I don’t think so. On our first trip to Hope Bay, on the *Eagle*, at the beginning of that season, both Alan Reece and Charlie Smith came with us and so they had an opportunity of seeing what it was like establishing a base, they’d had the advantage of just walking into a house that was already there, and I think he fitted in very well at a small base and he had already after all, of the four of us, he was the oldest inhabitant of Deception Island.

Joanna Rae: So what age was he...

Fram Farrington: Not in age, but I mean in experience.

Joanna Rae: In experience, yes: and Alan Reece was the youngest of you?

Fram Farrington: Alan Reece was the youngest. And then of course there was Alan Reece; now as you would expect, he was keen on his work as geologist and he carried out the meteorological and ice observations most efficiently (*Crosstalk*)

Joanna Rae: But that must be terribly exacting work.

Fram Farrington: Yes...

Joanna Rae: The monotony...

Fram Farrington: Yes, but he never missed one to my knowledge and, no matter what the weather was like he would be out there, at any rate he would be out there even if he could only read the temperatures and humidity. He also, of course, had read books – literature – one of his favourite authors at the time was GB Shaw, and he had brought the prefaces to Shaw's plays with him, which he and I enjoyed while we were there and, of course, even Charlie had a go at them – though I don't think he got very far! And he, of course, knew a lot more about the history of Antarctica, more like the people at Port Lockroy – most of them like that...

Joanna Rae: Yes, he was in the Navy, wasn't he, had he volunteered for Antarctic service?

Fram Farrington: I think he was RNR, but he was the sort of bloke who would have read about – not only read about it before he was connected with Antarctica, but he was the sort of bloke, that having been selected to come to Antarctica he would be reading up about it. He was great and of course we could have great conversations about the more serious side of what the expedition was doing with Alan Reece.

Joanna Rae: Is it possible for you to describe to us the derelict whaling station at all? It's quite difficult to imagine (*Crosstalk*)

Fram Farrington: It must be difficult to imagine but when you went through Neptunes Bellows, into Whalers Bay, and looked at the base from about a mile away, you might have thought you were going to see people who manned it but, in actual fact, it hadn't been used as a whaling station since 1910.

Now, although in Antarctica, where the humidity is very low, even though there's lots of blizzards and bad weather, an awful lot of snow that you see and that is eventually deposited, is being blown from one place to another and, because of the dryness, the buildings which are built of wood last for a very long time; they don't get damaged by damp.

But a great deal of the working buildings connected with the whaling were wooden frames and corrugated iron walls. Now, in the thirty or forty years since it had been used by the whalers, that corrugated iron had deteriorated and because of the great gales and blizzards, the corrugated iron had been loosened, some of it had been blown away; the loose stuff was being broken off and blown about during the summertime in the gales. So, the buildings were ruinous when you got near; that is to say, the corrugated iron ones.

The other thing that would have struck you, and I was asked a question about it quite recently when I was showing some photographs, ‘What were those great tanks for – did you have gas down there?’ There were about three or four¹¹ of these tanks and of course they were tanks for holding whale oil while it was being collected, before tankers would come down to take it. All of those tanks in any case, had been purposely made unusable by holing them, so that they couldn’t be used say, during the war, by Germans providing oil for their surface raiders and a purpose like that.

Joanna Rae: So, when you actually arrived in 1944, it was decided straightaway to make use of some of the derelict buildings for the base.

Fram Farrington: Yes, the best one, the one that was in best condition, had been a dormitory and that was the one we decided that should be used for the base as living quarters and working quarters. In addition to that, there was a much smaller building which had, in the old days, been a hospital for the whalers and that was in good enough condition to put our spare stores in and, to be absolutely certain that we had stores with which to survive in case of fire at the main building.

Joanna Rae: That must have been a hazard that you were particularly aware of?

Fram Farrington: In those days, when buildings were made of wood, including the buildings that we took out for the other bases, that was the most important threat to the existence of a base and of course, at Port Lockroy, we had taken out a Nissen hut which was used to keep most of our stores in that we weren’t using and the same, eventually, was used at Hope Bay.

Joanna Rae: While we’re talking, or mentioning, establishing Deception Island, would you like to tell me about Tim Hooley, whom I think helped you out?

Fram Farrington: Oh yes, yes – Tim Hooley of South Georgia. Yes, well I told you he was in charge of South Georgia when I first went there in 1938, and how helpful he was to me then as an Operator and, as a friend; I was entertained by Tim and Mrs Hooley.

Just in passing, I would like to say that the first time I visited Tim, which was the day after the *Scoresby* arrived there, he invited me to go in for coffee in the evening, and he agreed that I could take one of my friends with me; and that friend was a chap called Dennis Calligan, who was the bosun of the *Scoresby* and normally on the *Scoresby* under those conditions, we were wearing serge trousers and jerseys

¹¹ Four large and four smaller tanks.

and sea-boots and, as we were about to go down the gangway, I thought perhaps we ought to change our sea-boots into shoes or something, which we did. When we arrived at the wireless buildings, which included the living accommodation of Mr and Mrs Hooley, I knocked at the door – Tim answered and said ‘Oh, come in’ – took us along the corridor and then said ‘Go on in and meet my wife’ and we walked into the sort of room that you might have walked into in the residential part of London. Wasn’t I glad we hadn’t taken sea-boots! (*Laughter*)

And Mrs Hooley entertained us, and coffee, as you would expect to be entertained by a practiced hostess in London. Anyway, I got on very well with Tim and strange to say, about three years after I left the *Scoresby* a very great friend of mine who I’d met at Metro-Vickers and who was a very keen Amateur Radio enthusiast, a Ham, wrote to me after I had come to live in Wantage, and said that the previous night he’d been in touch with South Georgia and a man called Tim Hooley, the operator at that end, had asked my friend Richard Kelsall, ‘Did he know a bloke called Fram Farrington?’ Now, wasn’t that a coincidence?

Joanna Rae: Amazing, yes...(*Crosstalk*)

Fram Farrington: Now Tim Hooley, to get back to him; it so happened that when the *Fitzroy*, on which we were travelling to Base ‘B’ and Base ‘A’, had aboard about three passengers for South Georgia, which she was going on to after visiting the bases. Now, two of those passengers were Mr and Mrs Hooley¹² and Tim Hooley was of the utmost help to Layther and myself in assembling the radio equipment at Base ‘B’. And then afterwards, when we got to Hope Bay, again, while he was there he gave me great assistance. Now, with hindsight many years later, I couldn’t help wondering if it was more than a coincidence... (*Crosstalk*) that he was there. I thought if some far-thinking person, possibly Marr (but he didn’t know of my friendship with Tim Hooley) or possibly somebody in the government’s office in Stanley – I didn’t think perhaps they were far-sighted enough to do that – or possibly it was Tim Hooley himself, or whoever was in charge of the Falkland Island Radio at that time that thought ‘Tim would be useful to the Operators on that initial trip.’ It’s only just...

Joanna Rae: You never know... (*Laughter*)

Fram Farrington: You don’t! I was very grateful for it at the time. And I never thought of asking Tim at that time.

Joanna Rae: If we could move on to the end of the expedition, could you recall your feelings when the relief ship finally arrived?

Fram Farrington: Oh yes. Well that was mixed, strange to say. When the relief ship arrived, we were delighted to get our mail from home. We were glad that they had brought the stores that were needed. We were glad to meet somebody different after two years and particularly after a year with just three other blokes. But that was mixed with a little bit of – you see – the people who came down, tended to think ‘What an awful time you blokes have had down here; how bored you must be, and how terrible the winter conditions must have been, and how did you keep yourself

¹² The third passenger was their daughter Dawn.

occupied?’ And, therefore they were of a rollicking sort of cheer-up brigade that really we almost tended to, in fact Taff [Davies] did once, hide himself away in the kitchen at Port Lockroy when the relief ship arrived, for a while.

And we were of course, in 1946, were very much looking forward to getting home, particularly those of us who were married, but the others to see their family as well. And most of us, not all, but most of us were sorry to be leaving.

Joanna Rae: The culture shock must have been quite strong (*Crosstalk*) that quite isolates the community for moving back.

Fram Farrington: Yes, it did.

Joanna Rae: Did you find it difficult to adjust?

Fram Farrington: I did. Of course we went north, and our first meeting with civilians and people who had not been to the Antarctic was at Port Stanley, where I had a couple of friends, a man and his wife called Sullivan who had entertained me previously when I had been there in the *Scoresby* years before, and that was marvellous, meeting them.

’Cause they knew the sort of work we were doing, and there was a crowd of people on the quay to meet us. We were all in our civilian clothes (most of us) and I must admit it was nice to see a woman again, particularly friendly women and friendly people of the Falklands. But, when I got to London, because my wife was there to meet me, and that was marvellous. The next morning (we arrived at night) my son was in bed; he was in a cot in our bedroom and when he woke up and looked over, he said ‘Hello Daddy!’

Joanna Rae: ’Cause how old was he, when you went away?

Fram Farrington: I think it was my wife – her influence – that kept my memory clear in his mind. But what she forgot to tell me was that, when I went away he was two-and-a-half, he had absolutely blonde hair; when I saw him in the morning and had responded to his welcome, I said to Eileen ‘You never told me he had black hair!’ She’d forgotten to tell me that...

Joanna Rae: It had happened slowly...

Fram Farrington: That’s roughly the way we felt, I think, most of us at Deception.

Joanna Rae: What do you remember with particular pleasure when you think back to those days, now?

Fram Farrington: Well, there’s so many things I think back to with pleasure, but things like oh, in the wintertime, moonlit night, the mountains, the scintillating snow, the sea ice creaking. In the daytime, in good weather, the colouring of the sky – pastel shades.

I think the lack of clutter, and of people and, even in the bad weather, the noise; particularly at Deception in this great long wooden building with the loft overhead and the high blizzards blowing and the wood creaking – almost like the wood in an old wooden sailing ship.

But I think the two things that were most important was the very fact that I was there and having such a unique experience that I'd really hankered after all my life, and how lucky I was to have got that: and then, I think, particularly at Port Lockroy and Deception, was the wonderful association with nine people and three other people and how worthwhile that was, and how well we got on together!

Joanna Rae: It's sort of wonderful experience, just in terms of the people that you really get to know, I suppose...

Fram Farrington: Yes, of course; probably affected my whole life...

Joanna Rae: In what way?

Fram Farrington: Oh, to realise how wonderful even, at Port Lockroy, nine people from different walks of life and different experiences could form such a marvellously staunch, sort of efficient team, without any fighting – arguments – that was marvellous.

Joanna Rae: Was there anything you really disliked about your time in the Antarctic or, afterwards, in connection with it?

Fram Farrington: Yes, Well, there was nothing I disliked about the life down there in any serious way but, with hindsight, I would like to say in talking about Tabarin expedition as a whole that, in reading books about what went on down there and listening to some lectures about it, I have felt that the fact that it became called a Naval Party to some extent gave a wrong impression. People who haven't read a lot about Antarctica and so on tend to think that, 'Oh well, it was Navy, their ships and their men, that went out and formed a party that would sit down there and occupy the bases.'

But, in actual fact, of the fourteen or so people or so who were chosen,¹³ for the most part, as the result of the Discovery Committee's assistance, were not sailors or soldiers; they were scientists who were re-opening the fieldwork of the old Discovery Committee people, and seven or so out of the fourteen members of the expedition had served on Discovery Committee ships, and had experience of Antarctica.

It's also true that, as expeditions to Antarctica go, there were at least half of them who were married men of an age between 30 and 40 or 50, and I've been disappointed on hearing references to, operation Tabarin [*indistinct*] 'Oh yes, well that was a Naval Party.'

Joanna Rae: That simplifies it, too much.

¹³ Fifteen men were originally recruited. One resigned before departure, a second was relieved of his duties during the first summer and replaced by a Falkland Islander.

Fram Farrington: Yes – it gives the wrong impression to people who don't know enough about it.

Joanna Rae: Yes, it's nice to put the record straight on that.

Fram Farrington: Yes, I wish the record could be put more straight in the future: although we couldn't have done without the naval ships – we couldn't have done without the naval stores – particularly, so far as wireless is concerned, we couldn't have done without the knowledge and the experience and the advice of people at the Admiralty with regard to the equipment.¹⁴

But, so far as the men on the expedition were concerned, although the majority of them had had experience in the British Merchant Service, a good deal of which was in the Discovery Committee ships and that was experience of Antarctica, they were much older than the majority of people on many of the other expeditions; mature men.

Joanna Rae: And they were in fact picked for their Antarctic experience.

Fram Farrington: And I'm quite certain, although I wouldn't know for sure, but I feel quite certain in my own mind that the fact there were scientists there, like zoologists and botanists and so on; geologists, that they were there, I think it's because the Discovery Committee said 'Yes, we will help you with this project provided you will allow us to restart our fieldwork, by sending scientists instead of ordinary servicemen.' Now, that's rather serious.

But I would like to tell you something on perhaps a lighter vein, and that is with regard to something else that I couldn't stand, and that was the first time that Tom Berry provided boiled penguin eggs at Port Lockroy for breakfast and I took the top off mine. I had a certain feeling that I've never got over when I looked and tried to eat the opaque, jelly-like 'white' of the egg, which would normally be white in a hen's egg but remained jelly-like and most repulsive-looking, although I was able to eat the yolk alright, I never got used to the other part. (*Laughter.*)

Joanna Rae: Did you manage to eat the egg in the end, or not?

Fram Farrington: I left the outer part in the shell.

Joanna Rae: Finally, to complete the picture, could you give me a brief summary of your career since Tabarin?

Fram Farrington: Yes. When I returned in 1946 my home was still in Manchester I had a long leave due to me, and I was unemployed. My wife and I and son aged four did a trip down the west coast of Ireland on bicycles and camping, between my sister who lived in the north and my wife's old home, which is in County Cork.

I then came back and had to decide on what I was going to do for the rest of my life. Now, up till then, I had never worked in commerce except, perhaps, in the very

¹⁴ The 5G transmitters used by Operation Tabarin were made in the Naval Dockyards.

beginning – after leaving school – I'd always worked either for the government or for the Discovery Committee, and I'd had a rather interesting, in my opinion, career.

But, when we were on our way back from Freetown on the *Highland Monarch*, I happened to pick up a copy of 'Picture Post', which described and illustrated the village of Harwell and the opinions of the villagers on the fact that there was going to be a research station going to be built by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Establishment and, after I'd had a word with a friend of mine who had already joined Harwell staff, I was bold enough to put in an application for employment at Harwell.

At the beginning of 1947 I attended an interview and was given the job as a Technical Officer on the Harwell staff which at that time, as it was connected with electronics, was based at the Telecommunication Research Establishment in Malvern and I was there for about two years, working mainly in connection with the equipment needed to detect radioactive rays and so on, before the piles at Harwell went into operation.

When there was sufficient accommodation at Harwell, I moved to Harwell at the end of 1948 and I remained there working in the Electronics Division until I retired in 1973 at the age of 65. Since then I've been one of the lucky ones, together with my wife, of having thirteen years of most interesting life, keeping in touch with old friends and colleagues, including quite a number from my *Scoresby* days and particularly from the Tabarin days.

And we're still living in the same house that we occupied in 1948.

Joanna Rae: Well, thank you very much indeed for your help in making this recording.

Fram Farrington: Well, thank you Miss Rae, for giving me all the help I needed.

<ENDS>