STUART LAWRENCE

Edited transcript of a video interview with Stuart Lawrence conducted by John Tolson at Fareham on 5th December 2009. BAS archives AD6/24/1/64.1 . Transcribed by Simon E. Taylor on 16th May 2013.

[Part 1 0:00:08] Tolson:
Stuart. Fifth of December 2009. Could you just tell me who you are?

Lawrence:
Yes. Stuart James Lawrence. Ex BAS Master of both the RRS *Bransfield* and RRS *Ernest Shackleton*, serving with BAS from 1970 to 2003.

[Part 1 0:00:32] Tolson:
Stuart, can we go back to your early days. You were brought up in Grimsby, and what . . . Tell me about your start, and how things seaward . . .

Lawrence:
Well, I can't remember my precise age, but I would have been about four and a half, five, when we moved – my parents moved house from a house that was more in the country into more into the centre of town. And apparently, unbeknownst to me, at the time, living on the same street that we moved to was the Captain Superintendent of the Grimsby Nautical School. And one day, apparently, I was standing at our gate and he came along and just being – passing the time, and very kindly asked me, probably, what I would like to do when I grew up. And I said to him, I said 'Well, it's not too difficult in my case', I said. 'I just want to be an admiral.' So it sort of went on from there, really. So my memories of wanting to go to sea probably do stem about as far back as my memories go.

[Part 1 0:01:53] Tolson:
What was the next stage in the career path?

Lawrence:
Well, I suppose, when it was school-going time, so I would guess about five, six, went to a local school . . . didn't really do very well – think, basically, from what I can gather from the reports was that I was pretty jolly lazy. So, as my brother had gone to a public school about two years previously my parents less-than-had sufficient funds to send us both, and so I had my eighth birthday at Stamford School in 1952. So I went away to school, then, in 1952 where . . . I would have said that was really the beginning of my education.

[Part 1 0:02:48] Tolson:
And a path towards the maritime world?

Lawrence:
Well yes, that's an interesting point, John. I mean – that really didn't lead towards a maritime world. My only real claim to fame from that period is that I had the what I would now have to describe as the honour of sharing – not sharing a bunk, no! – but actually, in the same dormitory and the adjacent bunk to the guy who did actually, was then Jackson, and he became the boss at Kosovo, didn't he? – whatever. Yes, yes, Brigadier General, so that's an interesting memory going back to those days, but I left because I'd always maintained that I wanted to go to sea, so at age 13 I transferred from Stamford and went to HMS *Conway*, the pre-sea school on Anglesea.

[Part 1 0:03:46] Tolson:
Tell me about the time at *Conway*, and how that formulated any firmer ideas in your mind of directions you were going to take.

Lawrence:
Well, I mean, *Conway* had been running obviously for a long time prior to my joining it. I guess I would have joined in about 1957, so it probably had been going for, oh, a hundred years or something like that. I can't remember the precise start date, but it had been an old wooden frigate on the Mersey, and then it moved during, I think, the Second World War, because it had become a bit hazardous on the Mersey. There were certain . . . a number of bombs that were getting a bit close, so they decided to move the old wooden frigate to the Menai Straits at Anglesey. But . . . she was there for quite a while, but then she started to need a refit and they were trying to take her to a refit when the tugs lost control of her in one of the narrows of the Menai Straits and she ran aground and then eventually burnt out, so from then it then went into a school that was part in the Earl of Anglesea's big home and then part of it was built (wooden structures purposely built) for the more senior people. After I left it did become all completely in a purpose-built school, and then shortly after, I think 1972 it all closed down, but . . . So yes, but it was a very good foundation, I mean we did everything – I mean we were supposed to so all the normal subjects but they were cut down, so you couldn't do History, Geography or Spanish, you had to do one or the other, you know, so it wasn't a full curriculum, and then we also did Navigation, and we did Seamanship and we rowed boats and we were taught how to drive motorised power boats, we went sailing, we went round the island sailing and you know, it was really, was quite a good basic training. So my three years there were certainly the foundation, really, of then going on to sea which I did. Well, I left *Conway* in 1960 I suppose, about December 1960.

[Part 1 0:06:00] Tolson:
Tell me about your first step, into the commercial world. You joined Canadian Pacific?

Lawrence:
I did . . . I mean, in the last . . . within the last year of your time at *Conway* you were presented with what was then an amazing range of shipping companies that you could serve with. And you had to choose one. Well, first of all I . . . being . . . always having this idea of being an admiral in the back of my mind, I thought 'Cunard'. And then during that last year a young cadet or a young midshipman who had <u>been</u> with Cunard came back to *Conway* and said 'You definitely don't want to go to Cunard. All I'm doing is peeling potatoes' he said. 'It's just ridiculous!' So I thought 'Oh. Gosh! Well, no, I'll take his word for it. So we'll forget about Cunard.' Blue Funnel (Alfred Holt) was probably the most honoured company, but you had to be, you know, probably in the <u>first</u> fifteen. Well, I'm not big enough to be in the First Fifteen, so that was ruled out straight away. You had to be fairly academic. I would say that I was more middle-of-the-road. So Blue Funnel really, and the P&Os of this world were, sort of, written out of the script. Anyway, I selected Canadian Pacific because they had a range of vessels. You had the cargo ships, the passenger ships, and they seemed to be, you know, quite a dynamic company in those days. So I thought that would be pretty good. So towards . . . in my last term there – going off early in the morning for an interview. Now, to get to Bangor station we had to take a bicycle. I was setting off with, I think, one other to go for this interview on this bicycle and got about as far as that dreadfully long-named railway station, Llanby-filbin-whatever-it-is, and somehow came off the bike straight over the top of it. So I arrived at my interview with Canadian Pacific absolutely covered in Elastoplast. I was just a mess – just looked . . . never mind! So I think they took pity on me and they said straightway 'Oh yes, you must come and join us because you just look like such

a . . . We've got to take you!' In fact the first person to interview me, actually, was the Doctor, who tried to sew me up again. So that was how I got into Canadian Pacific. [0:08:42] And then, as I say – I left *Conway* in December 1960, and in January 1961 went down to London to join my first ship, which was meant to be the *Beaver Lake*, a 10,000-ton cargo ship sailing between London and either, during the winter, St John's, Newfoundland or Halifax – and of course, even in those days – no *Beaver Lake*. Just was running just a tad behind schedule, like most vessels, so I actually joined, I think, one called the *Beaver Dell*, and then the *Beaver Cove*, and stood by those in the Port of London for about – two months? – before the Beaver Lake came on schedule and I did my first trip, which was from London to St John's, Newfoundland. Except that it wasn't. We staggered out of London and the next stop turned out to be Southampton. Now, I didn't know much about these things – and I still don't, fully – but she was a steam turbine-electric vessel, and the boilers were giving all kinds of trouble. So we went into Southampton to fix the boilers. Well, apparently they were fixed. Next stop Falmouth – they were not fixed. And so on . . . next stop Cove, in Southern Ireland. Still not fixed. Next stop Falmouth, because Cove couldn't repair them. So about two months into this what-was-meant-to-be a one-month voyage we still hadn't left the U.K. And really that's how it pretty well went from there onwards. We settled into a niche, really, with ??? [*inaudible*] Canadian Pacific. I mean, they weren't old vessels. They were pretty good vessels. We were somewhat unlucky, I suppose. Unlike yourself who served time on a cadet ship, where you had lots of cadets, I tended to be on my own. There was only really one cadet. Sometimes there were two, but normally only one, and the ideas of an engine cadet, or anything like that . . . we never had that. But they were very good, I mean they trained us pretty well and they gave us lots of time to study, so it did work out pretty well.

[Part 1 0:11:12] Tolson:
You stayed with Canadian Pacific presumably after your Second Mate's, and did you do Mate's?

Lawrence:
Ah! Now. Yes, I did the statutory, I think, three years as an apprentice, took my Second Mate's ticket – in Grimsby, amazingly – and amazingly enough passed it, and went back to Canadian Pacific. Now by this sort of time they were thinking 10,000-ton ships and they were thinking about opening up up the Great Lakes, so they'd actually decided that they were not going to run 10,000-ton ships, they were going to go down to smaller vessels, so the smaller vessels could go through the Saint Lawrence Seaway and get at the Great Lakes. Now this was a whole new ball game. This was great exciting stuff, you know. Just going across the Atlantic, even in something large, is pretty grim, especially in winter, but the thought of going up the Great Lakes . . . so having obtained my first ticket I went back with them and then started serving up the Great Lakes. And then I came ashore again and took my Mate's Ticket, and went back to them again because by <u>this</u> time they were talking about having an ice-strengthened vessel that was going to run during the winter months up to Montreal. And that really was another exciting venture, so having obtained my Mate's Ticket I went back and eventually (fairly shortly, actually) managed to get a job as Second Mate on this wonderful – what was, really, my first – ice-strengthened vessel. And we, the Masters, nobody really had very much idea about what we were supposed to do in ice, so it was up to us all to read it all up and become as expert as we could, and I was fortunate to serve on here for quite a few years, I mean about three or four years, so I did quite a few ice voyages, and as a result of that of course the masters changed and I was still there as Second Officer, sometimes Chief Officer, and it was my ice experience that sort of helped us get through the ice, so, you know, I was sort of used for that. So, I'd already obtained a Great Lakes Pilot's Licence, for going up the Great Lakes, so that was a good tick in the box, that meant I could help – we didn't have to have pilots – and that was cheaper for the company, and then I'd got this ice experience, so then I stayed there.

[0:13:39] But unfortunately then came the Container Age. Well, this ship could carry containers, and did carry containers (and eventually was lengthened so she could carry more, but that was just after my time). But we had some incredible disasters with containers. We actually took a candy-striped container to Toronto purely for a PR stunt, where the whole idea was we would have it in the CP colours, and we would get a band down, and we would have the whole thing set up so that, you know, this would introduce the whole of the container idea for Canadian Pacific. Some idiot had the idea that the best way to do this was to put the band on top of the container, lift the container, and then lower it from the ship onto the shore. Should have been OK. You wouldn't get away with it Health and Safety these days, but should have been OK. Unfortunately the crane that was doing the lift, although it was only a light container, when it swung over the side – failed, and gradually, slowly, fell gradually down on top of this container, scattering the band to the four corners and to jump off the container, and rather damaged the instruments as well as damaging the crane. I don't think that was a very good PR stunt, but it does stick in one's mind, doesn't it? – how things were. Yes, so, as I say – I was four years on that one, and then Canadian Pacific decided in their wisdom (well, they decided about a year before I left, so I'd been with them about ten years) that if you wanted further promotion, to be a permanent Chief Officer with them, they were going to have tankers and they were definitely . . . you had to get tanker experience. You had to go on another company's tankers and then you could come back, and then you were guaranteed promotion. You'd soon be Master. But I didn't want tankers. Like a lot of my colleagues – we don't ever want to go on tankers, thank you very much.
[0:15:40] So I said 'OK. Well, thank you very much, but if that's your options and I'm not going to get any further then I will – not necessarily leave, but there was an option of going to study in London for what was known as the Extra Master's Certificate. So they gave me a sort of leave of absence – that wasn't paid, you know, but I got a leave – a year's leave off them and went to Sir John Cass College, and spent a year studying for Extra Master's. [*pause for effect*] . . . Significant failure! The worst part that I remember of Extra Master's, really was that at one stage, because the mathematics was above A-level, we went through to Chelsea Town Hall (fatal for me to go along the King's Road to Chelsea Town Hall!) where we were supposed to sit an A-level Maths exam to complement what we'd already done. I took one look at the paper and realised I wasn't even quite sure where to put my name, let alone anything further from that, so I then went and spent the rest of the day on the . . . in that area, which was of course singularly pleasant for . . . We didn't get up that way very frequently. The King's Road – yes, that was good. And I'm afraid it was a bit like that with the rest of Extra Master's. All it said on my final thing was 'Extra Master's. Part B. Failed.' I haven't got it to show you, but it's in red when the rest of the bit is in black. So that was Extra Master's. But I did meet an awful lot of people. I joined the Royal Institute of Navigation, the Nautical Institute and things like that because being based in London this was where it was all happening and it was, you know, quite useful. I started to take a great deal of interest in the Royal Naval Reserve, and I thought seriously 'No, I don't want to go back to Canadian Pacific.' So at that time I thought about what would I really like to do.
[0:17:55] And I thought 'Well, what would be really interesting? What really fascinates me? – Royal National Lifeboat Institute' [*Institution*] . So I (they were, of course . . . being based in London) – I went up and saw them, and they said 'Well, yes', you know, and they actually invited me on a cruise of one of their newest lifeboats, on the Thames. And, purely coincidentally a chappie called Egg Irvine, who was associated with the Royal National Lifeboat Institute, who'd been Hydrographer to the Navy [*1960 - 1966, Rear Admiral Sir Edmund Irving*], and also had a great deal of BAS, was on board. Now there weren't many of us, and there wasn't much that we could do – because they was really just running this for trials, so it was interesting but we were pretty well kept out of the way, so I was chatting to this honourable gentleman – venerable honourable gentleman – and I was telling him about my ideas and he said 'Oh! No!' he said, 'Definitely not the RNLI. If you've got those sort of choices you must take the British Antarctic Survey berth. You've got to go there first. Far,

far more along your . . . absolutely perfect!' So I listened to him, applied to the British Antarctic Survey, went for an interview in what was then – back of Victoria Station, somewhere round there, and was . . .(because I'd . . . oh, I'd got my Master's Ticket by this time) . . . and they were more than happy, so I set off in – what was it? 1970? August 1970 I think it was – joined the *John Biscoe* in Southampton.

[Part 1 0:19:35] Tolson:
Just to stop there, Stuart – just change the shot. [*pause*] Right . . .

[Part 1 0:19:41] Tolson:
So, Stuart, we start British Antarctic Survey, nineteen seventy. Just take me in, after your joining of the *John Biscoe.*

Lawrence:
Interesting . . . Well of course the . . . with a background – commercial background, you might say – with Canadian Pacific it was all a bit of a shock-horror treatment really, because when I arrived on the *Biscoe*, which was in J. I. Thornycroft's yard in Northam, on the Itchen, I sort of expected, you know, the ship to be manned and to have, you know, everybody there – a Master and Chief Officer and, and I was joining as (what was I?) Second Officer or Third Officer or something. What was I taking over from? The Chief Steward! Unbelievable. He'd been looking after the ship. Chris Elliott had left. He'd gone up to join the new build of the *Bransfield*, and the guy who I took over from was Chief Steward, and nobody seemed to have a clue or what was going on about this refit, so I think it was a bit of a culture shock when I arrived on the scene because I'd say to the yard – well, you know 'Got down here. We're supposed to be testing the derricks. I'll set them up, you come and we'll test them.' – 'Oh, we don't deal with ship's staff!' [*laughs*] 'Good gracious me, no! No, <u>we</u> do all those sorts of things. No, you're just there. Just be there, and keep quiet' – you know. Oh, dearie me! So yes it was quite a culture shock. John Cole was Master. Well I eventually met him. That was good. I liked John. I could see that this was going to be a good relationship. But, and the other person who was – around – but not always there of course, was Malcolm Phelps. He was Chief Officer. Anyway, they sort of inculcated me into the ways of BAS between them, and I sort of settled down and eventually we got the ship all ready and all ready to go, and we decided yeah, OK, she's finished, and somebody would come along from . . . oh, I forget what it was called . . . the Department of Sea Transport or some sort of strange people – sign it all off and say ''Oh, yeah, we'll pay the bills. Yes. Fantastic! Was everything OK?' – 'Well, it seems to be working, so yup.' So we signed off from the refit, went round to the actual Southampton docks proper, and then loaded. Well, even in those days, in Southampton docks, if you blinked you couldn't see the *Biscoe*. She was <u>tiny</u> of course – bearing in mind that there were the big *Queen* liners coming in, you know – oh! – the Union Castle boats . . . and there was this tiny . . . and somebody would say to you 'What are you on?' and I'd say 'The *John Biscoe*', you know, really pleased, you know – ' <u>R.R.S.</u> *John Biscoe*'. – 'Well, where is it?' they'd say, and somewhere down there below the jetty was this funny little vessel.
[0:22:37] Anyway, I can remember one or two exciting things, like loading anthracite was a good one. They were so pleased, and the anthracite company . . . I don't know whether we'd been ta . . . well, I'd have thought they'd been taking anthracite to the Antarctic for years because they had to have coal down there in those days – but anyway, there was a charming young lady came down and made a film of u . . . just of us, you know, the *Biscoe* loading anthracite. Fantastic! Like this is really the life, isn't it? Really wonderful!
[0:23:04] Oh, there was one incident that I really ought to relay, although it's against myself. There was a brand new Chief Engineer joined the ship, just towards the end of the refit period – chappie called Peter Rimmer. Now Peter Rimmer (I forget where he'd come from – but he was another commercial guy) . . . and so one weekend, because obviously we didn't . . . <u>we</u>

didn't go home at weekends because he lived in Liverpool and I think I was still living in Grimsby, so we didn't go home , and he just said – well, you know – 'Should we take the boats out?' So I just said 'Well, yeah, that sounds like a pretty good wheeze. Do you think we ought to ask any . . ?' – 'Oh no!' he said, 'Do you know anything about these boats?' So I said 'Well, if we can get it started . . . ' – 'I'll get it started!' he said. So (we had an inflatable) well, that would have been fine, but this inflatable . . . we got it in the water, we got it out, we were going round, having a lovely tour round all the dock head round where the *Biscoe* was. Unfortunately the engine broke down, and we came rather heavily alongside one of the piers which happened to have protruding nails, and we split the whole of the side of this inflatable and we only, but only just got it back with just half the side. We had to paddle it back . . . got it back to the *Biscoe* . . . lifted it up. And so really and truly my first introduction to Captain John Cole was a *mea culpa*. I said 'I hope you weren't planning on going boating this week, Captain, because I'm afraid your boat is no longer.' That was certainly one of the incidents. Yeah, I've forgotten to relay that one about the refit. So, really and truly I wouldn't say I'd started off particularly well, but I think it picked up – well, I hope it picked up from there. Yes, so we got the *Biscoe* loaded, not that that took very long – I mean, used to 10,000-ton ships I should suggest in two days we'd more than filled her – well I can't remember precisely.
[0:25:04] And then it was decided that we would set sail. Well, that probably meant that everybody joined. And by the time everybody had joined and we were full, and then the Fids, of course, because in those days we used to take the Fids south with us. They would arrive on the last day, and there would be all these – all these parents . . . and there'd sometimes be a lone piper on the jetty, waving goodbye. These people were all going for two to three years and there'd be tears and there'd be . . . oh! I couldn't believe all this. I thought 'Oh! Let's just go!' – you know. Anyway, we survived one of these . . . I'd done it on the passenger ships, with Canadian Pacific, a bit. We used to go from Liverpool, and we'd go up to the Tail of the Bank to take on the last passengers, and they were all (is it immigrants or emigrants?) – all going to Canada and they were leaving Scotland for the last time. That was another tearful event. And of course they, once again, they'd got the lone piper, and as a junior officer on a passenger boat what you had to do was stand at the bottom of the gangway to make sure that only those that were going to go to Canada were on board and all those that didn't want to go to Canada were on the tender alongside. Oh, so I was pretty well used to it. But anyway, yep, we did get away.
[0:26:15] I'd done the North Atlantic, you know, so I was used to bad weather, but bad weather in small craft was a bit of a new experience. So the Bay of Biscay was pretty lumpy, I think I would describe it, in tho . . . yeah, it was lumpy. And it seemed to go on for ever. But, I'd never really been south, I'd never in my previous seagoing times enjoyed pleasant weather at sea, so once south of the Bay of Biscay this was bliss – flying fish, sunny days – halcyon, as we staggered along at our I suppose maximum of ten, eleven knots on the *Biscoe*, something like that, heading South. Well, we'd just got south of the Canary Islands when something completely esoteric happened. [0:27:09] The main motor [*pause*] burnt out. (I got used to that in my serving period subsequently.) Well, I didn't know much about it. There was a fault on the main motor. Now, that didn't mean to say she couldn't go anywhere, but she couldn't go anywhere even at eleven knots. So we were reduced considerably in speed and we had the options . . . we were given the option . . . would we go to Dakar or would we go to Rio? John Cole was the Master. John Cole said 'Oh! Definitely not going to Dakar!' So it was decided (although it was a lot further, at least it was in the right direction) we would stagger on to Rio. So we staggered down to Rio where we then spent . . . ooh, I don't know – two, three weeks possibly, something like that, alongside while they mended the . . . well, flew out the experts who mended this motor. Well, amazingly enough it did get mended. I have this strange recollection that the Chief Electrician, a guy called Gordon Lewis at the time, said to me, he said 'I could have done it with chewing gum!' But I'm sure that can't be, that must be a wrong memory. I can't be

positive, because these guys were obviously paid a fortune to come and put the whole motor right.
[0:28:33] But anyway, eventually we did sail from Rio and I should think we probably put into Montevideo, even though we probably didn't need to, and then arrived in Stanley. Now one of the strangest parts, of course, of ??? [*inaudible*] . . . I'd never been to anywhere like Rio before . . . exotica, I mean, jeepers creepers . . . but it wasn't just me. Don't forget we'd got all these budding young scientists and all their support staff (I can't remember how many, but twenty plus I would think, that were on the *Biscoe*) let loose in Rio. Well of course they . . . I mean it was just impo. . . when we came to sail I thought we were never going to find 'em. We had search parties out, you know . . . Oh! And you would have thought that after two weeks there or something they would have been more than happy to . . . b . . . no, no, no. Anyway, we did manage to get them all together. We didn't lose too many in Montevideo, and then we arrived in Stanley.
[0:29:28] Well [*pause*]. What a shock. Anybody who arrives to Stanley for the first time, it's got to be a . . . it's <u>got</u> to be a shock. I mean, looking back on it, really it is a delightful shock. But when you think that, at that time, the whole of BAS's southern operation was really run out of Stanley, and all you see is these sort of quaint little white shacks with their beautiful red roofs and blue roofs, or a union-flag-coloured roof or all . . . and not many of them! And then this huge cathedral with its whale-b . . . I mean it was like something out of, you know, Disneyland. I mean, just incredible to suddenly find yourself there and it's . . . this is where it all . . . say, anyway, we got into Stanley and that was fine, and we managed of course in those days to get alongside the Public Jetty, where we grounded on the beer cans from the previous expeditions that had passed along that jetty and put all the beer cans from off the ship . . . wouldn't be allowed to do it now. My God! Dearie me! And yeah, that got us as far as Stanley for the very first time. Yes. From there South. I don't have any strong recollections of anything specific about that first voyage.

[Part 1 0:30:55] Tolson:
By the time that you had been in Stanley, and you'd obviously become slightly familiar, even if only in conversation, with what was coming next, had you managed to get any mental picture of what Antarctica, in BAS terms, was going to be all about?

Lawrence:
No, not really. I don't think anything can prepare you for Antarctica. I fortunately, as mostly still . . . we went to South Georgia first, which is – acceptable. It's brilliant – I mean I think South Georgia is the most magnificent place, probably better than Antarctica really, but it was still withinside the mind's capability to absorb – all the old whaling stations, I mean it's all new but it was still sort of withinside the . . . you could sort of, if you like, cast a mental picture back to the Swiss Alps and that sort of thing. It was that sort of . . . it was acceptable. So South Georgia was OK, and we used to spend – with the *Biscoe* we spent a lot of time around South Georgia. But no, when we eventually got further south, even to the South Orkneys and Signy Island, the base at Signy, no that was completely . . . by that time it was icebergs, huge icebergs – completely . . . just the . . . all the island's completely ice-, or mostly ice-covered in those days. Quite spectacular. Very very different. Completely beyond one's comprehension. Didn't go to Halley on the *Biscoe*, but even then, going down the Peninsula, equally like the South Orkneys, the South Shetland Islands and then the Antarctic Penin ??? [*inaudible*] . . . it's just . . . I mean, your jaw drops, you're just speechless, really. Quite incredible.

[Part 1 0:32:49] Tolson:
You were obviously in awe of it – the beauty if nothing else. Were you . . . did the job frighten you – the navigating aspect of it, because in the nineteen seventies and before it was pretty dangerous territory?

Lawrence:
Yes. It was more dangerous in the nineteen seventies. That is true, because there has been a lot better mapping, a lot better surveying – a lot more is known. You know, in the seventies we hadn't even got to the satellite imagery that we've got now, so islands really could be quite a few miles out from where they were on the charts. You know, things were not correctly charted, and it's certainly . . . yes, I remember saying to John Cole, as Master, I said 'Well look, I'll so my best' I said – and he'd given me, you know, the hints and tips, as any Master would and we developed a plan as to the best way to navigate in an area where things just do not tie up. And he said 'No, nobody's expecting pinpoint accuracy, you can just tell me where you think that the *Biscoe* is, and what you recommend as the next best track, or stay on the track, or whatever.' And we built up a pretty good rapport, but based around, if you like, pretty indefined knowledge. [*pause*]

[Part 1 0:34:21] Tolson:
The relationship that you were developing with the crew and the officers in your very early days with BAS – do you feel that that was something that you continue, in that style? You have a very open, happy attitude. Or is that a style that developed – evolved?

Lawrence:
I think it probably was as a result of, if you like, working with a group of very enthusiastic amateurs. You would not have called the ship's officers, well . . . I mean – the Chief Engineer I think had come out of the Navy. He wasn't a Merchant Navy pukkah Engineer Officer. He would have been a warrant officer within the Royal Navy, and it was a culture shock. I mean, these guys . . . very very keen, but they didn't have the overall depth of knowledge that I was used to, that's for certain. But this was overcome by the sheer enthusiasm . . . even the ship's crew. I was used to unions and you know, multi-nation crews, and most of these were either Falkland Islanders or Brits. That was just amazing that we didn't have across-the-board cultural problems and everybody was just so enthusiastic, and that really does come across. So it is amazing – with that you can get round – you can still get round, actually . . . I'm not sure you'd be allowed to but you could still get round, if you like, the lack of experience – the fact that it was new for most people. And yes, it was working with this group of people that I did probably develop the fact that I'm a 'cup half full' person. I mean it is, you know, 'Let's go for it! If it's achievable, let's do it!' Do it safely, or relatively speaking safely . . . I mean you can't – in my opinion you cannot use the term 'safety' and 'safe operations' and put 'Antarctica' in to it because it's just not possible. I mean you can't go alongside ice shelves and think you're alongside a concrete jetty. It's a totally different ball game. But, I mean, safely yes – relatively speaking safely. And I was saying, and the camaraderie, and the – you know – the Fids working together with the crew, working together with the officers, everybody worked together and we achieved – well, I think we used to move mountains, personally, with this just sheer enthusiasm.

[Part 1 0:37:17] Tolson:
I think yours was a fairly new style of doing things, nevertheless – a very refreshing new style, perhaps.

Lawrence:
Yes, I think that's probably true. I mean, I know you've interviewed Tom Woodfield, and I know that when I first sailed with Tom Woodfield, which was two years after joining BAS, when I was moved mid-season from the *Biscoe* to join the *Bransfield*, Tom Woodfield really really didn't appreciate my style. He didn't . . . he's a dyed-in-the-wool old-fashioned – very good – excellent – I've got no complaints – he really is a very good seaman, but he just didn't like my . . . hands-on approach? – or my way of doing things. I c . . . A classic example would be, we had to go into Signy, where some ??? [*inaudible*], or somebody else, or maybe we had – we'd put a big Muskeg with a crane on it ashore, which happened to be nominated the *Magic Bus* – painted all over it. Well, we had to bring it out, and I discussed it with everybody – the crew, everybody that was involved (by this time, I should hasten to add, I was Chief Officer), and I discussed it with everybody and we'd all agreed – this was how we'll do it, this will work – yeah, pretty certain that it will. What we did – we lashed two great pontoons alongside each other, and a platform on top, got a ramp to go up it, and we reckoned that the two pontoons, because they gave it overall width, well secure in the middle, would give it sufficient stability to take this crane. Nobody, unfortunately, had mentioned the way we were going to do it to Captain Tom. So, we set off (Oh! It happened to be my birthday! Isn't that a surprise? 23rd of January, say '72, '73.) We set off from the ship with our pontoon, got into Signy at high water, got it off , got it loaded. Call from the ship! – 'Where are you?' So I said 'Oh. I'm sitting on top of the *Magic Bus*, and we're on our way out to you.' 'Oh no you're not!' he said. I said 'We are! It's no good telling me we're not – we are!' 'Oh! Well. No . . . I'm coming in to pick you up!' Now, it's a pretty difficult space to get even the *Bransfield* . . . she's not that big but she isn't that manoeuvrable, and he brought her right inside and we had to . . . there he was standing on the bridge wing panicking, but we were panicking just a little bit on board the pontoon because one of the rear tubes was starting to go down, and it was deflating, so the whole of the thing was starting to . . . [*gesture indicates tipping*]. Anyway, between us the craft was lifted, but . . . yeah, that sort of highlights the difference in approach that was between Tom and I, but he's still thank . . . I think we got on better as the time wore on.

[Part 1 0:40:24] Tolson:
Cut there. That's the end of Tape One.

[Part 1 0:40:26] Tolson:
Two. Stuart, in the '72, '73 season you found yourself as Temporary Master on the *Bransfield*. Can you tell me how that came about?

Lawrence:
Good question, because it's a bit convoluted, like most of the things that happen withinside BAS. The Chief Officer on the *Bransfield* had damaged his foot in going between the workboat and the workboat platform. Had to be medically evacuated. Chris Elliott was then promoted to Chief Officer, and I must have moved up the ladder under Chris. But Christopher, God bless him, was already booked to go on the Whitbread Round the World Race, and couldn't get out of it. I think he was doing it with his father, or his father was involved somewhere, and you didn't cross Chris's father. So, he had to go home as well. That left me, then, as Chief Officer, like I was mentioning earlier, and the antics that we got up to for that brief period that I was Chief Officer. Unbeknownst to any of us, [0:42:02] round about this time Captain Tom was thinking about leaving BAS and getting himself a shore job with Trinity House. So towards the end of the season (in those days about May time) he – I believe – was going to attend an interview, to become an Elder Brother. He could not get out of it. So, probably against his own better judgement, he decided to go home as well – so there's the Chief Officer, the Second Officer and now the Captain all leaving the

mighty *Bransfield*. I think he told BAS that he'd got a problem with his inner ear, actually, but that's really not abs . . . that's just hearsay, but I do know he got flown home, and that only left *petite moi* [sic] to run the whole show. Well, I wasn't unduly concerned. It's a big step, but we'd pretty well completed the season. As I recall, he flew home from Montevideo, so we'd completed everything down in the Antarctic and we were on the way home, so all I had to do was bring the ship back from Montevideo to the UK. Well, you wouldn't have . . . I mean that's not a great big deal, is it? I mean, in fact, sort of a bit of a holiday, really. So I had no compunction – I was more than delighted. But, lo and behold, what happened? We were about half way back, and I don't know (It had been one of those seasons. We didn't have very good crews in those days. They did get better.) but at some juncture, some time in the middle of the night, something to do . . . Oh! I know what it was – there were some specimens in a freezer in the laboratory, and the crew used to use the freezer to keep their beer – get their beer cool, because in those days there was no proper refri . . . we didn't have lots of fridges and everything, the crew weren't really treated very well, and you know – it was a good place to do it, so we're coming back through the tropics . . . but the trouble was there were samples in this freezer, so the scientists didn't want the crew's beer in there. So, instead of saying anything properly, and going through the King Fid to the Chief Officer to the . . . myself, you know, doing a sensible complaint, they just chucked the lads' beer out of it. So, the lads just chucked their samples over the side, together with several outboard motors. So that was the end, if you like, or towards the end of my very short stint as Temporary Master. I can remember very well the s . . . it was Andy Clark, who became head of Biology at BAS, and a chappie called Richardson who is – was, until recently, with the Foreign and Colonial Office [sic]. They both succeeded remarkably well considering they lost their samples. And I'm fortunate, as I sit here, that it didn't have too adverse effect on <u>my</u> career. We did sack the people involved. I think, if I remember rightly, we went into the Canary Islands, and they flew Tom and some Southampton policeman out to join the ship. So we arrived back in Southampton under Tom's control, with me under the policeman, you might say – under the guard of the policeman. I mean ??? [*inaudible*] my statements. Yes . . . funny you should ask me about my temporary promotion to Master. Yes, it's a wonder I ever stayed, isn't it?

[Part 1 0:45:53] Tolson:
And then I guess you went back down to Chief Officer again after that.

Lawrence:
That was the trip that Ella . . . Tom must have married Ella round about this period and, yes, and Ella was allowed to travel South. First female? Yah . . . to come South. So he did the whole of that season. He didn't have inner ear ache. He didn't have any problems. Yes – so Tom and Ella – yeah, that was a good season. That was an enjoyable season. Ella was a great leveller. She was very . . . she was excellent. Everybody got on well with her, and we didn't have . . . we had the odd hiccup I remember – a New Year's Eve hiccup where we had somebody from the Uruguayan Embassy on board who set off a fire extinguisher in jest, but the Bosun didn't think it was a very sensible thing to start using our safety equipment to a . . . so he decided to take this diplomatic representative to task, with a black eye or two. Yeah, it wasn't all sweetness and light, but by and large it worked very well, so yes, so that season Tom and Ella did the trip. We went right round . . . we did Halley – yes, I think we did everything, and then we took the ship back, but by that stage he had been offered the job with Trinity House, and . . . I don't know how many of your people know much about Trinity House, but to be offered a job as Elder Brother with Trinity House – it is not something you can refuse, and although it's a wonderful job being a Master with BAS, it was no way it was going to stop him taking this job with Trinity House.
[0:47:36] This all occurred about the same time as Bunny Fuchs was retiring and Dick Laws was just coming in as the new Director. So, I can't remember the precise timings of these,

but Dick would have been pretty much the new Director. So, never being one to hide my light under a bushel, having been Temporary Master, although it was rather in inauspicious circumstances (I think I also did it . . . I think I did that twice, once with the samples going over the side, but once again for a bit longer period. I'd certainly been Master down in the Antarctic for a spell. I can't remember how that came about, but . . .) I wrote to the then Director and said 'Look, if you're going to appoint a permanent Master and it isn't me, then I'm afraid . . . well, I shall just be parting company with BAS, because, you know, I've done it, I feel quite competent, I've got lots of background experience and certainly . . . more than happy to do it if you're happy to take me on.' And that was the beginning, really, of a remarkable partnership between Dick Laws and myself. He says to me, even now, he's never regretted appointing me and I've got no regrets about it either and we worked well as a good partnership – through some quite difficult times. I mean, BAS was always short of money – but oppressively short of money then. We had to start thinking about using one engine for trips through the Atlantic. We were told to save everywhere we could save, you know, and we just worked together, to see what we could do, and it was a good partnership.

[Part 1 0:49:17] Tolson:
In your early days as Master, and in fact for much of your time as Master, you were on the *Bransfield*. The *Bransfield* was a strictly logistics-only ship, but there was one area of science that you did do quite a lengthy period for, with Birmingham University and the magnetometer work.

Lawrence:
Oh yes. Oh yes, that's right! I'm not sure that I'm grateful for being reminded about that. Somehow we seemed to find time in a logistic season . . . Well, I suppose with the two ships, with the *Biscoe* still then doing logistics and the *Bransfield* doing logistics, we did have a split between the bases, we did have the capability to achieve the logistics, so we did have time on the *Bransfield* during the season, and it was postulated 'Well, what science can we do from the *Bransfield*?' Well, it wasn't going to be anything very technical, because we had no – unlike today's . . . well, you know, when they converted the *Biscoe* she could, and now with the *James Clark Ross* they certainly can. But with the *Bransfield* it had to be pretty basic. So it was decided that we would work for Birmingham University, Peter Barker, and we would go round towing a magnetometer wherever we could, and we did. Oh, well – we did except when, occasionally, ice got between the stern of the ship and the magnetometer and all of a sudden the bottle would come off the end, but normally we managed to keep it all together and we did tow the magnetometer around, and I think it probably was pretty useful. And we also were building up . . . because we'd got echo sounder and we were doing soundings, so wherever we did a magnetometer run we also filled in the depth soundings, and if we'd been a little bit more technical we would have done CTDs – the dreaded CTDs – we'd have done the temperature, salinity and depth. So, yeah.

[Part 1 0:51:27] Tolson:
Can you, in simple terms, just explain to me what the magnetometer was, and what they were trying to achieve with this long thing slung out of the back of the ship?

Lawrence:
Well, yes. I'm not a <u>scientist</u>, John. I mean – it's to do with Geophysics. My basic understanding of it is – it really goes back to Plate Tectonics and you can actually, if you can study what the residual magnetism in the substrate of the oceans then you can actually work out what part of the substrate belongs where, and you can see fracture zones, and you can find out . . . I think one of the main ones that was found was the Shackleton Fracture Zone which runs across the Drake Passage, and it's that sort of thing, where the basic plates of the Mantle are moving around, and you can tell where they've been – where they've come from,

that sort of thing, so it does build up a picture of the underwater parts of the planet. It was a fairly basic piece of kit but it did give that sort of information. It was a sort of forerunner of seismics. With seismics you can go one stage further and you tow something that goes 'chitty - chitty - BANG! - BANG!' – and keeps everybody awake, and that tells you a lot more about the substrate – and possibly whether there's possible hydrocarbons and so on – gas – underneath it. But it was just a forerunner of those sorts of things. I don't suppose there are very many sections of the ocean that haven't had a magnetometer towed over them. I would think, from the bits that we did and the repetitious lines that we had to do I'm pretty certain they must have been everywhere. And the worst part about it was, of course, that no matter the weather, you had to hold the course. So it didn't matter – the fact that the whole ship was rolling around and Cook couldn't cook or the, you know, nobody could really do anything useful. No, you had to hold the track until we got to the end of it, so it was not a pleasurable period, really. No.

[Part 1 0:53:49] Tolson:
In nineteen seventy-six or so you had a magnetometer run that ended close to the South Sandwich Islands, and perhaps that developed into one of your close runs with the Governor in Stanley Harbour. [*visible hilarity from Lawrence*] Can we just go back to that one?

Lawrence:
Well yes. Yes, it's a follow-up . . . as a sort of . . . indeed perhaps a little bit of excitement into what can certainly not be described as a very exciting period in the *Bransfield*'s operations, namely Geophysics . . . we were about to embark on a Geophysics cruise, and we knew we were going out towards the South Sandwich Islands. We'd got the chart and we'd got the legs and we had a pretty good idea of where we were being asked to go. And, I don't know quite how or why or where, but this information was known about in the Falkland Islands. It was pretty common knowledge where we were going. Now, it was equally fairly common knowledge, in the Falkland Islands, or it was strongly suspected by, if you like, the very suspicious Falkland Islanders, that if we got anywhere near the South Sandwich Islands it just so happened that there might actually be an Argentine base on the southernmost of the South Sandwich Islands. They had heard a rumour, from a rumour, from a rumour. So I said 'Well, if we're around, if we get that way . . .' Anyway, we'd done a fairly long transect going across, and we'd got round about the right sort of area, south of the South Sandwich Islands, and the previous evening I'd said to Peter Barker 'We've just got this one, and then how are we doing? I mean, we've just got a little time to spare.' – 'Oh, no, no, no! We must keep on. Oh God, I mean . . .!' – every minute counts, sort of thing. So I said 'Well, Peter, how's about a glass of port?' Well, the glass of port led to another glass of port, led to another glass of port, led to another glass of port. In the end he said 'What was it you wanted really to do?' I said 'Well, look, as we're going to be so close to Southern Thule do you think we could just go into Ferguson Bay. I won't go anywhere serious, I'll just take a turn out of Ferguson Bay, and we can just clarify, for the world, as to whether there is *Corbeta Uruguay* . . .' (which is the name that this Argentine station had developed). I mean, the rumours were fairly rife, because if I recall it they were sending met [*meteorological observations*] to a South African met station, and there was this place was actually sending met. Now, it could have been an automatic weather station – that the South Africans had been there – but people didn't really think so. So anyway, he very kindly gave us, I think, about four hours, just to do this trip round Ferguson Bay. So there we are, heading towards Ferguson Bay, quite happily steaming around, and all of a sudden the radio bursts into life. '*¡Buenos tardes! ¡Buenos tardes, mi amigo! ¿Como estas?* Come and have a cup of tea!' And, lo and behold, yes, there were certainly a lot of Argentinians on that island. Difficult to tell how many. We could actually see aerials, we could see the houses, it was a fairly complex structure. I would have guessed, at the time, probably about twenty, and I'd still only guess about twenty. I've no idea precisely, but I would think about possibly twenty

people. And, of course, typically Argentinian, it was bound to be *con junta* – it was bound to be a forces station. Army, Navy . . . it doesn't matter, they all work for the . . . you know. But it would definitely . . . So I thought 'Well, jeepers creepers, yes, we'd better confirm this.' And I thought 'Oh! One-time pads!' (We had all these one-time pads in those days, to communicate with the Governor in the Falkland Islands in case we saw anything like this.) So I sent him a message, and said 'I regret to report that we have definitely found an Argentine station on Southern Thule' and gave him details of the masts and, you know . . . not too much detail because I had to put this into a on-time pad, so it wasn't going to get that much. So, I thought 'Well, I'll get a medal for this!' I thought – 'Definitely this'll be well appreciated. Wait till we get back to the Falklands! They'll think we're absolute heroes, telling them that yes, they were right – yes, there is an Argentine station there.' Get back to the Falklands, well, dearie me, you'd think I'd committed the most heinous crime under the sun, by . . . and for going out there and going and finding it, and reporting it. Apparently, HMS *Endurance* had been there either the year before, or maybe even two years before. Everybody knew it, but nobody was admitting it. Good old British Government – it was one of those 'Run Silent, Run Deep' routines, and they didn't want to admit it. They was part of the negotiations about the Falklands with Argentina – they just kept quiet about it. So I spilt the beans, and rather embarrassed the British Government by doing so. But there you go! That was all part of life's rich patt . . . Young in those days.

[Part 1 0:59:19] Tolson:
In general, over the years with various governors, how did you find your relationship with them? Did you have to work a lot with Governors on BAS matters?

Lawrence:
No. Not . . . by the time I was Master, no. I mean, one of the things that had changed . . . my first Governor, as Master, was a chappie – a New Zealander called Toby Lewis, and I first met him because like most BAS masters we were made magistrates of the British Antarctic Territory, and we had to go and be sworn in and handle all the details of what that involved, and I met him. Well, he was a New Zealan . . . very open, very pleasant guy, and that was probably about the only dealings we had with him, and then subsequently it would depend on the personality of the Governor. Some you had a lot to do with. Some you didn't have very much to do with. I suppose one of the things that we always used to do try and do was have an annual party, on board the *Bransfield* because it was the largest BAS vessel, a sort of BAS thank-you to the Falklands, doing a lot, and of course you invited everybody – you know, all the BAS staff , and all the Government staff, and all those people that had helped us from the milkman to whoever that had supplied us with various cargoes and bits and pieces – so I think we knew them socially, and some of them were very social and would invite us back. In my days it was seldom that the governors didn't invite all the Fids up, to have a cocktail night, and so everybody would go along and it was very sociable. That sort of died a death. Died a death subsequent from '82 really, I suppose. Yeah. But it was more social than really work matters.

[Part 1 1:01:21] Tolson:
We can cut there . . .

[Part 1 1:01:24] Tolson:
We are running . . .

[Part 1 1:01:26] Tolson:
Stuart, the ship principally was taking cargo and supplies to the individual bases. How did the operation actually work? We came in, we anchored, and what happened and what was your liaison with a BC (a Base Commander)?

Lawrence:
Well . . . you recall that we had a basic itinerary. Sort of, we left UK (in those days Southampton) and we were due back on a particular date, with calls at Montevideo, say, and Stanley, but each base – we were sort of allocated an order to do them in and sort of ball-park dates to achieve the tasks. So that was promulgated throughout, so that all the Base Commanders knew when the ship was due, and we would . . . We would anyway, and in those days, don't forget we had what was called . . . I think it was called The Goon Show, and every evening all those people that wanted to know where the ship was, what the ship was doing, or what was happening on one of the bases, or base to base, everybody would chat, for . . . I think it was about seven 'til eight, on this open frequency, so if anybody had any questions, you know . . . I wasn't always there, but I was fairly frequently there, because it's amazing how much you find out from gossip. It's good stuff, gossip. I never complained about it, and if you listen in you can actually find out, you know, what's going, which can stand you in very good stead, because you can get a feel for the morale on stations. [1:03:16] I mean, the morale on a BAS station varies dramatically year from year. Some stations have generally a pretty good standard, but I mean – if you take the Argentine Islands, at about 64 South, down the Antarctic Peninsula . . . that was generally regarded as a pretty happy base. Ha ha! But it wasn't always a happy base. Sometimes it was far from that. Signy was known to be up-and-down, you know – sometimes. Sometimes it was the personality of the Base Commander, sometimes it was just that people didn't gel, sometimes people stayed on to do the third winter, or the second winter when they didn't really want to – they should have gone home, anything can change the whole . . . and it's jolly useful, as a ship's master going to these places, to have a feel for how it's going to be, before you get there, because you really do have to play each occasion by ear, because our arrival changes the whole schedule of the base. I mean, you can't suddenly arrive, with far more people than they've got, a whole load of cargo that they have ordered but probably don't really want to handle. You used to carry around quite a group of Fids on the ship – you've got to get them motivated. It's not their base necessarily, they're probably bound for Halley or somewhere and you've got to get them motivated in Signy, to suddenly work cargo, and get them up and going and, you know, it was just getting all these people to gel. And as I say, and from what we were talking about earlier, the camaraderie and the general enthusiasm was good, but it wasn't always good – sometimes it had to be worked on – they had to be jollied along. And so what you would do is, prior to arrival at any station you would always speak to the Base Commander. You'd make sure they knew exactly your arrival . . . well, of course that used to go wrong on occasions. I mean, you know, you're calling them let's . . . I mean it's, what is it? – twenty-one hours from, say, Adelaide to Argentine Islands. Twenty-one hours that can be bad weather and it can take forty-two, it can be . . . you know – and you can't be accurate. And of course you can really hack people off when you get it wrong, but you used to try and predict when you'd be there, so they'd have an idea – make sure they knew what they were getting, and then discuss the way we were going to do it. Starting time was always a very important one. Bases do not run to normal ship time. No, no, no. Quite often one could arrive at a base, if you haven't announced yourself, and you don't see a soul. Oh, no! They're just having a little lie-in. Well, that's all very well, but when you've only got so many days to get this cargo . . . and it happens to be good weather and you want to make a start you don't want them really having a little lie-in, so you have to get them out of their base thinking and into, for a few days, ship thinking. And you achieve that best by, definitely, getting it all sorted out before you get there, and then trying to stick to the plan. I mean – meal times. We probably on the ship have greater flexibility, inasmuch as we can probably work over meal times because we've got enough people to rotate. That doesn't mean to say the base have, you see there aren't so many of them, and unless you can flood them with lots of BAS personnel (or Fids) from the ship you've got to break and let them have their meals and things, and it is just a matter of . . . you've got to establish a rapport, and

the easiest way to do that is open discussion – transparency I think is the word these days. (Well, I thought transparency . . . when you see right through me. Probably your camera can. It's an X-ray probably. Gosh.) Yes, so that was the way it was achieved.

[Part 1 1:07:16] Tolson:
The work, of course, was done from a ship at anchor – normally – until recent times – in the main. That in itself would cause many problems, often because of the bad weather. Time was lost enormously by that factor, wasn't it, on occasions?

Lawrence:
Certainly was. Probably one of the worst places was Stanley, because Stanley can have four seasons in one day, and you might be able to start cargo work and, as you were saying, we would be at anchor, we would be deploying our scow (which was a dumb barge by any other name) with our launches towing it, and we would be picking up cargo, or taking cargo in, and we'd take it to the jetty where hopefully there would be some sort of a crane and it would be lifted out or put in, and we'd ferry it backwards and forwards. But I mean, after that – and you can only do that up to, oh, certain windspeeds, and Stanley Harbour is a fairly long harbour and the fetch made it just impossible. Half the time you were having to stop, call it all off, and then hope that the weather would moderate to be able to start again. It wasn't infrequently that it wasn't just the cargo operations that would stop – the ship would find itself drifting down the harbour, going out through Port William if you weren't careful. Oh dear, it was a nightmare in those days. So you didn't have to go to one of the Antarctic stations, one of the bases, for this to be it . . . so we were inculcated in Stanley. But you're quite right, it did become difficult in the bases as well. Signy is renowned for its pretty grim weather. Quite often there you'd start off and have to stop because the weather was . . . it just wasn't safe to continue working. Argentine Islands was known as the Banana Belt. It probably was therefore somewhat better. We used to get some pretty bad weather, but not as frequently as Signy, so yeah, each one was different. Adelaide – when we had Adelaide, before we had Rothera, that was a nightmare. It was open ocean. There was nothing between Adelaide and – I don't know – New Zealand or somewhere. The swells there! It was just dangerous – downright dangerous. They did have a little jetty, or a little quay, but on numerous occasions the scow would end up being carried on the swell, lifted up and planted on the . . . they didn't just get the cargo, they got the boat as well, until the next . . . with a bit of luck the next swell. Oh! No, no! It certainly was pretty horrendous. We have had some very, very difficult times, there's no question, and, I mean, just seeing you sitting there, I recall [1:10:17] the occasion when (having spoken about that other vehicle, or tracked crane, that we had) we lost one, trying to get one from the scow onto this dreaded jetty at Adelaide. I think that was . . . Nick Beer was Chief Officer with me at the time, and really he did exactly what I would have done, he very sensibly started first thing in the morning and it should have all gone according to plan. All that happened was – I think the vehicle was half-way in and half-way out (and when they're half-way in and half-way out of course the scow isn't very stable – it's sitting very high) and I don't think that the deals that it was on were actually grounded on the jetty and it just tipped over, and as far as I know that vehicle is still down there. I think it's been slightly crushed by numerous large bergy bits that have ground around it, but I think it's still . . . yeah, so it was difficult. It still is difficult. Bird Island – another one. The biggest problem with Bird Island? Once again, you're open to the weather. I mean, there's not much between the southern tip of South America and the Drake Passage and Bird Island. The seas just roll in there, and it's very seldom you get a reasonable working day. In those days the *Bransfield* really wasn't capable of getting too close, because we had no thrusters. We really just had to rely on being anchored and trying to maintain station, possibly with the engines sometimes to help, but . . . and trying to work. On occasions, when you're lifting drums for instance (drums of fuel) and you've got somebody in a scow alongside, and it's going up and down on the swell, and the poor old crane dri . . .

and it is, just, you know – it's a wonder we didn't have more disasters. So yeah, you're right to touch upon the difficulties. It was, and still can be, difficult. But it is made easier now the ship's a bit more manoeuvrable and they can get closer to the stations.

[Part 1 1:12:18] Tolson:
Halley Bay, of course, was a disaster waiting to happen, on almost every occasion – fraught with problems.

Lawrence:
Yes – Halley Bay. Well – you can't build a base on an ice shelf, no matter how substantial that ice shelf is, and expect it to be simple. I recently attended the fiftieth anniversary of Halley's being sited, so it must have been there about – nearly sixty years, Halley . . . It was first opened by the Royal Society, I think back in about nineteen fifty-six, something like that, I'm not too precise, but . . . and when they first went there they had these . . . they'd got these ice cliffs. Now, the ice cliffs must be about sixty to eighty feet high, in my language. (You can put it in metres if you like.) High, to put it mildly. And the only way you can actually get anything on top, where the station's been built, is that fortunately this ice sheet, as it flows towards the sea, grounds. And as it grounds it rumples over the solid rock beneath it, and fingers split open towards the sea, and as they do so (these are, if you like, ice cliffs – equally eighty foot high, but . . .) continuous-blowing snow off the continent gradually fills in, and the sea water freezes between these fingers, and the blowing snow off the continent forms a natural ramp between the sea ice that's been there from the winter . . . and if you're lucky and these all remain in place and you've got one . . . you can actually drive tractors and trailers (sledges) up and down these natural ramps. But of course, as you say, it was a disaster waiting to happen, because on occasions the ice sheet didn't flow so quickly, so we didn't get these fingers, we didn't get the ramps, and it just became really very difficult to relieve the station. Back in about 1972 (I have a feeling it might have been '72 because I believe one of my excuses as to why the scientific samples went over the side – I said it had been a bad year) . . . I think that was the year that Tom . . . we'd been working alongside a part of a ramp. That collapsed. Fortunately nobody was lost, but I do remember there were a few people standing on the ramp when it crazed and broke up, and one of the persons was a doctor, and regrettably the doctor, being a typical doctor, instead of being . . . we'd got a crane hook, to . . . you know – 'Grab the hook! Go on! We'll lift you on board!' No. He'd lost his glasses on the floe beneath him. So he was peering – of course, he couldn't see his glasses because he'd lost them. So he was peering down. Well, never mind the hook, never mind getting on board so we can get somebody else off this i . . . no. Anyway, he did eventually grab the hook. I don't think he ever recovered his glasses. Perhaps he had a spare pair. If he was a doctor he'd have been sensible, wouldn't he? Yah, so that was probably an ice shelf . . . part of the ramp that was probably all twelve feet high – let's say about twelve, fifteen feet high – bad enough if somebody's standing and it all starts to break up. I mean, don't . . . believe you me, I was . . . We didn't have anybody on one occasion, but on a similar sort of ramp I'd spoken to Tom and I'd said 'I'm not sure – I'm not happy leaving the sledges . . . ' (We'd stopped work for some reason. Perhaps we'd finished, or nearly finished.) 'Not happy leaving the sledges on this ramp' I said, 'but I haven't got a vehicle. I can't move them.' (If you haven't got a vehicle you can't move the sledges. They're hefty things, not as hefty as they are now, but even BAS Cargo Sledges are not something manpower moves very easily up a slope.) So he said 'Okay, we'll leave them.' Well, of course, Murphy's Law and another breakup of the ramp, and I remember these sledges coming down the ramp and crashing into the ship's side, and lo and behold . . . they sink, don't they? Yes, I think we lost three. So this was all pretty much in the one season. So then he decided well, we still haven't finished, we've still got people to move and there's still bits of cargo. We've got to get the outward-going guys, all their baggage and everything on board – so he went and lay alongside an ice cliff. Now he didn't just put the ship alongside

the ice cliff – we did have one of these pontoons that I described earlier for carrying the vehicle on – we did have that, so we did have a sort of fender between us and the ice cliff, but we were, in the evening . . . I guess about . . . in the evening, yeah, and we were all watching 'PT 101', which as far as I remember is the only film that Jack Kennedy, President of the United States, actually appeared in – it was a war film, and he was appearing in it, and we were all watching that, and it was all getting frightfully exciting and things were going bang. All of a sudden the ship heeled over about twenty degrees. The ice cliff alongside which we had been lying had broken off, landed on the side of the ship, pushed in the (not seriously, but pushed in) the side of the accommodation, flattened all the bulwarks fore and aft, and had there been anybody on that ice cliff or anybody on the side of the ship they would have been dead.
[1:18:07] But the Lord looked after us. Well, I think it's something like the Lord looks after us – there was nobody in either vicinity and so nobody was hurt. It was nearly exacerbated, this problem, because obviously the ship was tied up, somehow, to this ice cliff. When it broke, of course the ship just flew off, and had it gone across to the other side of the creek and hit the other side of the creek both sides would have been flattened. But the wave shot across ahead of us, bounced off the cliff, forced us back and we actually stopped mid-creek, at about twenty degrees with about I-don't-know-how-many tons of ice on board – but a huge amount of ice that we had to get off before we could achieve anything else. Yuh, it hasn't always been easy, as you said. Probably that was probably . . . if I had to think back to the worst time, it would have been that 1972. As I say, I wasn't Master, but Tom was. I mean, he'd be . . . he was impeccable. Without him it would have been even more of a disaster, but no, he was great. I think he was actually grateful for me on that occasion being such a jolly person. I just said 'Oh well. I think we'd better get rid of this ice, don't you?' So we started heaving it over the side. So we spent the whole night chucking it over the side. I said 'Oh', I said 'Don't, don't be ty . . .' (I went up and saw him, because we went and pulled out from the cliffs, sensibly.) He probably got his head down, because I mean it was a shock for everybody and I said 'Well, just don't ask us to go and tie back up again.' And subsequent from that I have always maintained you can't, you mustn't do it. You cannot. I mean, occasionally I've heard of vessels like the *Polar Stern* that go into Aker Bay a bit further east, that do go up alongside fairly ice cliffs, but not as high as this one, and I certainly have made it perfectly clear in my opinion that it is something that BAS just must not entertain. As I say, if anybody had been on that gangway they'd been . . . anyone had been on the ice edge . . . and it wasn't a huge amount. I mean, I'm suggesting – if you look from the ice edge it only broke back about ten foot, and then it was a forty-five degree angle. That's an awful lot of ice and snow even in a chip like that. Yeah. No . . .

END OF PART ONE

[Part 2 0:00:00] Tolson:
Roll Three with Stuart. Stuart, in all the many years as Mate and Master, how do you ??? [*inaudible – 'score'?*] the role that alcohol played?

Lawrence:
Interesting point. It's played a vital role. I really do think . . . We've discussed about the relationships between the crew, the officers, the Fids, in a fairly small community – tight-knit community, with people completely removed from their normal life-styles and thrown on board a ship and told to get on together. I would suggest to you that a direct answer to your question is – without alcohol it would have been a damned sight more difficult, without a doubt. It's a great leveller. It's also a great way of getting communication with people. You can find out . . . if people have had a drink or two – like I said about gossip – it's amazing how much more you find out – about the way they feel, what worries them, what concerns

them, you know, and you only can run any management team by knowing these things. And this is especially, I think, true on a ship. It's the only way to . . . you've got to sort of micro-manage, I mean it's no good macro-managing, you can't look at it and say 'Oh,' you know, 'there's stuff there . . .' You've really got to get to grips with the various individuals, you've got to know their strengths, know their weaknesses, know the problems that they've got and that way you can help them, or you hope you can help them, and that helps you, because, if that's working as a team, then it really does. I mean, no Master is a Master under God. The master is just a catalyst for a whole group of people trying to achieve the same objective on a ship, and that's where the term 'master' comes from. But it's only another management role. If you like, I suppose this is where myself and BAS Management always used to fall out. Because – I very very strongly believe in my style of management – believe very strongly in getting to know the people, getting to know their strengths, getting to know their weaknesses, getting to know and building a team from whatever you've got. And I believe that works. In my latter years with BAS they seemed to think that they could macro-manage. They think . . . they didn't . . . in the beginning, with Bunny [*Fuchs*] and Dick Laws as directors, and Barry Heywood to a certain extent, everybody knew everybody and it was all done in a similar sort of manner. Subsequent from those days no, it's different, and that is probably where I started to, you know, not fit in, if you like. Not really fit in. But nothing would . . . I mean, I am a bit tenacious – nothing would make me change my opinion. I might . . . one of my favourite phrases, fortunately not directly to the management, was that 'If only they ran BAS the same way as we ran the ships it would be a bloody sight more efficient.' I mean, people have heard me say that many times, and I genuinely believe it. I mean, I'm not blowing my own trumpet. I just believe it's not something that <u>I</u> do, it's just the way that we do it, you know, and I think that that is the thing, and I think you get the best out of people. You certainly get the best out of people that were employed, you know, by BAS – this sort of Boy Scout enthusiastic amateur. I mean, it's different . . . don't forget I was in the Royal Naval Reserve for . . . well, I was a Royal Naval Reserve Cadet at *Conway*, and then rejoined in '70, so I had thirty-odd years in the Royal Naval Reserve, from Cadet to Captain in the Royal Naval Reserve. That's a whole different ball game. They couldn't run it the way we do. The Royal Naval Disciplinary Act is vital for them. But you couldn't run a BAS ship – you can hardly run a Merchant Navy ship – on the way that the Royal Navy run their ships. It just wouldn't work. It just couldn't work. So . . . I think that's sort of gone off your point a little bit, but I hope that begins to explain my sentiment on the subject.

[Part 2 0:04:48] Tolson:
No . . . it certainly does, because I think that the alcohol aspect was an important part of BAS, and your difference of opinion with some of the management techniques. I suppose in the earlier days, in the seventies, you had these Masters' Meetings, up at H-quarters. Is that right? And that's where you got most of your stick from? Or is that not strictly correct?

Lawrence:
I wouldn't say stick. The Masters' Meetings were greatly advantageous, I think on both parts. It allowed, if you like, the masters . . . this was very much more important when we had four masters. Don't forget, when I first joined there were only two masters – Master and . . . well, there might have been three, but shortly thereafter . . . because there was Tom off by the *Bransfield*, there was Coley on the *Biscoe*, and I think we had somebody on the *Shackleton*, so we probably did have three ma . . . but I mean it wasn' . . . but as soon as we got two masters on each ship is what I'm really implying, then they had different ideas about things, and it was needed to get a catalyst – a group together and just iron out . . . so that you didn't have too much difference between the two masters, on one of the ships or the other ship, and you had a working relationship with the senior management withinside BAS. And I think they worked, I mean a great deal – I'm very saddened to hear that subsequent from my departure they've stopped having these Masters' Meetings . . . epitomised by a management

phrase that I heard just as I was leaving, that 'Well, you're only ship drivers'. Well, I'm afraid if anybody had said that directly to me, they would not be getting a Christmas card. I mean, I just do not u . . . you see I would never say 'Oh, you're just a chef'. The Chef is vital – absolutely important cog in the operation – if we didn't get decent meals and they could cook when it was nigh-on impossible to stand up, you know, it was . . . you can't treat people that way. Every person is vitally important to the whole operation. It doesn't matter whether it's a galley boy, a junior seaman or indeed the Chief Engineer. And they're all important. They've all got to be treated properly, and equally. And if you went around a ship making remarks like that about anybody – it just wouldn't work. I'm convinced it wouldn't work. So of course I just thought 'Well, if this is the way things . . . '. Well, it didn't make any difference, because I was already heading out of the . . . I'd already got venerable, and no longer acceptable, so I was already going anyway. But no . . . that is the sort of thing. And that was totally different in the seventies, eighties, you know – when you were with us and so on. It was different. It was. Yeah.

[Part 2 0:07:45] Tolson:
We'll cut there, for one moment.

[Part 2 0:07:52] Tolson:
Stuart, going back to the matter of drink and the benefits of drinking, take me through the process of where the *Bransfield* was, when you were Master at the start of the Falklands War in nineteen eighty-two – although you didn't know it was the start.

Lawrence:
No. Nineteen eighty-two. Very interesting season, nineteen eighty-two – I think one that nobody would want to necessarily repeat. Yes, that was the season, of course, that Cindy Buxton and Annie Price were situate on South Georgia, doing the filming of the wildlife in . . . is it Saint Andrews? . . . I think it's Saint Andrews, not King Edward . . . Saint Andrews Bay. Yes, the king penguins and everything – Saint Andrews Bay, and they'd taken over one of the BAS huts. And they had been put in by Chris Elliott, from the *Biscoe*. And way on towards the end of the season we were scheduled to uplift them and take them – I'm assuming – back to Stanley. Now, because they were down that season, HMS *Endurance* and Captain Nick Barker also had agreed to take Aubrey Buxton and Mrs Buxton – Lady Buxton – with him for part of the season, and because everybody was very friendly and they were all closely knit they also took Rex Hunt and Mavis Hunt. And it all started to go wrong, really, when the helicopter that Rex and Mavis were in, that was visiting Cindy and Annie – the first one, before Aubrey and Lady Buxton were going in one to visit their daughter – crash-landed, outside their hut. That was the end of one of the helicopters, or certainly nearly the end – it was the end of the helicopter for the time being. I think they managed to take the parts back and I think it was resurrected. So you see the season was already starting to go a little bit awry.
[0:10:36] Next thing was, I think both *Endurance* and ourselves, fairly early on – so January, January time maybe – were down in Marguerite Bay, and . . . I was very fortunate that Captain Nick Barker and all his guests came over on board the *Bransfield*, and I entertained them to lunch, and we all had a . . . I tell you, we just vaguely mentioned Eric Heathorne, but just to say that I had an excellent Catering Officer in those days, and when I had to entertain, you know, sort of quasi-royalty as far as I was concerned, he just pulled out all the stops and he really could produce an excellent meal, and so . . . we had the capability then of doing that. So we had all the – you know – an RN captain (a fairly senior captain) and Lord and Lady Buxton, and Rex Hunt and Mavis Hunt (the Governor of the Falkland Islands and his lady wife) and they all came, and we all had lunch on board – so that was an improvement in the season.

[0:11:41] But after that it seriously went downhill, because it was shortly after that that our good friends that are – really Scottish, but quasi-Norwegian Scottish, namely Salvesens – gave the contract for . . . They, Salvesens, had taken over the whaling stations in – I forget . . . 1976, something like that – just to hold on to the property in South Georgia, and they really couldn't do anything with it and so in about 1980 they decided . . . '82 they decided that they would issue a contract to a company that was fairly close by, namely Davidoff, and the Argentinians, to go and start to remove some of the scrap and the waste material from the whaling stations in South Georgia. What Salvesens hadn't appreciated, but should have done, and what the British Government hadn't appreciated, but should have done, was that of course . . . well, what were the Argentines going to use to do this? It shouldn't have surprised anybody that they used their – famous phrase – *con junta* – their armed forces, and their vessels, namely the icebreaker *Irizar* and one of their logistic support vessels, both really military. And so this was the start of then what developed into really a nasty little fracas which ended up with *Endurance* either running to South Georgia to deal with these scrap merchants or going back to Stanley to pick up marines or . . . Oh dearie me – it was a right shuttle diplomacy. Fortunately by this time the Governor had got off and the Buxtons had gone home, so that was . . . but still left on South Georgia were Cindy and Annie, and of course our people. So . . . we got involved because, in 1982, the ships were the – probably the best at communications – link between Cambridge Office and the stations. Certainly we had a better capability – a more powerful kit and we could maintain contact, so if there was anything that was going on we probably knew about it and we were in the link, whether it was to a base or wherever it was. We were involved in the fact that there was obviously [*those ten words are very indistinct owing to Lawrence taking hold of the microphone (0:13:58)*] the problems with these Davidoff's people, the hoisting of the Argentine flag, the shooting of the wildlife, and all these things that were going on on South Georgia, so we were well aware of it, and then we were well aware of the fact that *Endurance* was going to be deployed, and this hit home because *Endurance* was sent to South Georgia really to nip this whole thing in the bud and say 'Look . . .' – you know, put their marines ashore and say 'No, look, you can't stay. You've got to go. We're here. You're going.' And as a result of that *John Biscoe* picked up the relief troop, that normally came in at this time of the year (which would be about March time) for the Stanley marines.
So the *John Biscoe* (that was already on her way home) went to Monte, sent back south from Monte, got into Stanley and discharged the marines – the relief marine detachment. So we're already – BAS are already involved, if you like – we're already . . . had a part of this. *Biscoe* then obviously was delayed in getting home, all the people on there obviously were anxious to get home. They'd had a long season, so she didn't linger in Stanley, but we were. We were about two days later than her, leaving. As I say, at this time *Endurance* was in South Georgia, supposedly dealing with the scrap merchants. *Biscoe* was gone home. We were in Stanley. The weekend . . . two nights before we departed we had a party on board the *Bransfield* – as I think I've mentioned earlier, general Stanley party – end of season Stanley Party, where we had on board the Governor, his wife, the Chief Secretary, everybody, including the Argentine LADE people [*pronounced 'Lar-Day' – Linea Aereas del Estado*] – everybody was there, and it was a bit stilted. Fortunately my bit of Spanish helped with the Argentinians and a bit of liquor helped to sort of, you know, with the Governor and everybody, and it wasn't too bad an evening. One of the *Endurance* sailors, I think who'd been left behind, came on board and rather disgraced himself, but we won't go into that one. So there we were. This was two days before we actually sailed. Where were we sailing for when we left? We were sailing for Punta Arenas. Well, at the time, of course, I didn't think very much of it. We were picking up packages. We were then going to go south to the Argentine Islands and was desperate for this package 'cos they had a leak from one of their tanks (one of the regular fuel leaks, I should say) but we had to go and get this sealant so that they could re-seal the tank and stop polluting the Antarctic. So we were tasked to go. No

problems. Everybody in Stanley – the Governor, right the way through, including the Argentine Air Force, knew where we were going.
So we set off, went up – preten . . . actually going to Punta Arenas. But because the package was really, relatively speaking, transferable in a vehicle it was decided that the Agents would take the package to the Pilot Station – so instead of having to spend the next fourteen hours going to Punta and back, we didn't. That meant that on this evening we went to the pilot station, got the package, turned round and left. Now this was the evening of the first of April – a very appropriate date, you may well think, for the likely scenario that was about to envelop. We left with absolutely no knowledge, except for the fact that we were aware that poor old *Endurance* was still struggling with these rampant flipping scrap merchants on South Georgia but there wasn't too much else seriously wrong. There'd been background talk of problems between Falklands and Argentina but nothing more. I mean, we'd heard it all before, having worked by this stage for what? – ten-plus years down there . . . I mean the Falklands and Argentina – it was always an issue. So we didn't pay too much attention to it. Anyway, we were coming out from the Magellan Strait – having gone to Punta Arenas Pilot Station – on the evening of the first, and then we were heading for Antarctica, down to Argentine Islands. There's two stations that you have to report to in the eastern entrance to the Magellan Strait. One of them is Chilean and one of them is Argentinian, because the border cuts right through that very point, and we'd spoken to the Chilean station – said what we were doing, who we were and they'd said – you know – 'Thank you very much, have a good trip, hope all's well in the Antarctic', and very pleasant. We were then called by the Argentinian station. Now . . . maybe with the benefit of . . . only probably from the benefit of the fact that I really knew about this fracas that was going on between these damn scrap merchants and our base and the marines that were in South Georgia, I thought 'No, I'm not going to tell the Argentinians where they're going.' I mean, this guy was speaking Spanish and I was speaking English, and when I was talking to the Chileans they could have heard what was going on anyway.
[0:19:27] So we proceeded out. We went out having said nothing to the Argentinians, and about midnight . . . be about midnight . . . we had the . . . we could still get the Falklands Islands Radio – I was awake, and we'd already turned south, so there was nothing seriously navigational to worry about – by a statement that the Falklands Island Radio was broadcasting continuous music and the Governor was going to issue a statement. So I thought 'Oh, jeepers, this is . . . I don't know – what the hell is this all about?' And it transpired, of course, this was the beginning of the fact that they'd got aware, I think probably from Whitehall but I'm not sure, but they'd begun to become aware that this was not a military exercise that they may have thought – this was going to be the invasion, and it was going to happen the following day. So we stayed up and we listened to all the Governor's talks, because we could hear all these that he was broadcasting – very . . . great, old Rex, he did a marvellous job, because he kept everybody informed . . . beautiful job of transparency, you might say these days. And then, later on in the morning we actually sit and we could hear what the . . . until they were taken over we listened to the broadcasts of the invasion, and we sat and listened, and we . . . the Radio Officer trans . . . what's the word? – he wrote down – yes – all , as much of the statements that were being issued, so we kept a log of everything that was going on, so that we knew that they'd been invaded, we knew that Government house had been taken, we knew the Union Flag was down, we knew that the Governor had been taken prisoner, and then we knew that the radio station had been closed and Patrick Watts had been taken off, and we then started to get Argentine broadcasts.
[0:21:20] As from about the time I knew of the invasion I was trying to get in touch with BAS, to tell them of the situation. Now unfortunately, although as I say we had better kit than the bases, at that time of the morning it's not a good time for trying to get through to the UK. We eventually raised a station in the west coast of the United States, who in their phraseology 'patched us through' to the UK. We got Portishead Radio. God Bless Portishead Radio. The number of times I had contact with Portishead Radio after this was

just legion. Portishead Radio immediately put me through, the Director was – I think, yes, he was in the office, because we were behind time, yes – and he said to me, he said 'Lawrence' he said 'Look' – you know – 'I know you've got a bloody reputation to live up to as a bit of a clown' he said 'but pull the other one!' I said 'No' I said. 'Look' I said, 'on this occasion I'm afraid you've just got to believe me' I said, 'The Falklands've b'invaded, the Governor's torn up all his ciphers, he's got no means of communicating with Whitehall. I suggest you get in touch with Whitehall.' And he did. And then of course we . . . well, I said to him – oh, 'What shall we do?' and he said 'Well, just keep going south. I think that's the only thing you can do.' So we did continue, to keep on going south. Now, with the benefit of 40/40 hindsight it is interesting, isn't it, that when we left at about – between midnight and six, when we were going towards the Falklands before we turned south, the invasion force was no more than forty miles north of us, as it was leaving the Argentine coast, heading towards the Falklands. Talk about a close-run thing. Incredible. So anyway, we turned south, we were as I say going down towards the Argentine Islands. We didn't just have this one package. We had some more – other pieces, and I think we had some people that we'd picked up in the Falklands to go to the station as well. So we continued south.
[0:23:18] Well, that night . . . it was – we had quite a lot of Falkland Island crew members, and we had . . . everybody was wound up. I mean, it's not surprising that they were, and once again I was wakened at about midnight to be told that the whole ship was being taken over, and the Falkland Islanders and those people that felt very strongly about this were going to take the whole of the *Bransfield* back and sink her in the narrows in the entrance to Stanley Harbour. And they'd got the keys – God knows where they'd got the keys from, but we didn't just have one master key, and they'd taken over various places and they'd got somebody in the Engine Room who was on their side and it was all set up. It was all definitely going to happen. So, I said, I said – well, how many, you know – what is this? I said 'How many of you are there?' . . . 'Well, I dunno' he said. ??? [*that last sentence not clearly audible.*] 'Nearly all of us.' So I said 'Right. Go. Leave me at the moment. I just want to get dressed. Go and get everybody together and come back to my room immediately.' So they did. I can't remember how many – it wasn't as many as twenty, but it was above ten, so it was, sort of, quite largish numbers. So I sat 'em all down, and I said 'Righty' I said 'OK – now look, you'd better start – think – talk – let's talk this through – let's think about it' I said. 'Look, before we do that though, anybody want a drink?' (Back to your subject again – is alcohol important?) So I . . . they said 'Oh, yes!' I grabbed a case of beer out and everybody had a beer, another case of beer out and everybody had another beer, and in the meantime we were discussing the pros and cons of taking a completely defenceless vessel, sinking it in the narrows, which would have really only been to the benefit of the Argentine Republic. And eventually I think I was beginning to win the debate. But it wasn't just I was beginning to win the debate, of course. Alcohol won the debate. Because by the time six o'clock rolled round there were probably more slurred sort of statements of intent than there was anything else. So I had sat there, probably for six hours, with my brandy and my cigars, just listening to them and letting them have their say, and we continued on our way rejoicing. What I hadn't appreciated was – when we got back to Southampton somebody would tell the Press all about it, and so once again Lawrence was back in the not-really-to-be-appreciated headlines. But never mind. So yes, I think that gives . . .
[0:25:42] I mean, one of the staggering things, that still does amaze me, although it perhaps shouldn't, it is that nobody, although they knew where we were going, although they had some idea that possibly things were not right between the Argentines and that there was a possibility of something more dramatically – (they certainly were aware of the fact that there was an Argentine naval exercise going on) – nobody said 'Don't go!'. Nobody said 'Going all that way, if it's only for one package, no – I don't think that's very sensible.' Nobody told me that, and I . . . that still leaves me, even me, a little bit dumbfounded. But there you go . . .

[Part 2 0:26:31] Tolson:
Can we now move . . . jump quite a way forward from the nineteen-eighties to the transition period of the last, I suppose, year or so of the *Bransfield* and how the *Bransfield*'s demise was brought about and what was going to happen to take her place?

Lawrence:
Well it goes back, of course, a little fu . . . well, it actually goes back to the origins – for the build of the *Bransfield*. The *Bransfield* was diesel-electric, which means she had diesel generators powering an electric motor. The electric motor turned the shaft, the shaft turned the propeller, and that's what drove her forwards and backwards. A very very effective method of being able to navigate – do ice- . . . seamanship in ice. Excellent from that point of view. When they were going to install this main motor, back at the build, up in Bonny Leith or Bonny Dundee, they were delivering it and regrettably it rolled off the low-loader [*road transport*]. Now it's a big, big electric motor, and that would not have done it any good. It was checked out thoroughly, and it was installed, and for many a long year it reasonably continued to work very well. But twice towards the . . . I think probably in the eighties and then again in the nineties the main motor broke down. Once it seriously smouldered – both times it seriously smouldered – and if it weren't for the fact that we had excellent engineers, coupled with some very good supportive Fid power . . . we were able to perform, in the ice, on-board repairs. And this amounted to . . . the motor consisted of a forward end and an after end identical. Now normal . . . most . . . all the time you would use both ends and you could develop full power. What they had to do was (it was only the forward end that had been seriously damaged) they totally stripped down the forward end and then electrically speaking transferred all the cables to the after end and we were able to develop half power on just the after motor. And we finished the whole season – we actually relieved Halley, I th . . . well, we did relieve Halley on one occasion because we were going in there with just half a motor. I mean, it was seriously hazardous. It was not the best thing to do, but Halley had to be relieved, and the people, and we did it anyway. And then it happened again later. Now these were very, very expensive things to rectify. And this had really started . . . they started counting the days of the *Bransfield*'s survival because of those incidents. So towards the end it was driven by the cost of maintaining her. She had her 25th Lloyds Survey, oh – 19 . . .'95, '96 maybe. That cost BAS a fortune – well it cost NERC . . . it cost the taxpayer a fortune. There was so much that had to be put right, in the steelwork, pipework and everything, and that was very expensive. So you could begin to see that from BAS's point of view the writing was on the wall.
[0:30:13] Frank Curry had come in and relieved John Bawden as Institute Secretary (who was responsible in those days for the ships) and he'd got a bit of a marine background and he felt that what we should be doing was replacing *Bransfield*. He went all-out to find a method of replacing *Bransfield*. And of course it was in the era of – what do you call them? – Private Initiative? – Public Finance? – PFIs, Public Finance Initiatives [sic], where you get a commercial company to part-operate with you and they take part of the risks and so on and so forth . . . so he had to do it with a PFI. And he'd been working on this, with the senior people in the Government – certainly on the financial side of things – [0:31:09] and they'd managed to drag up slowly a deal with Riebers, who had been involved in selling the Royal Navy what was – is – the present HMS *Endurance*, and she was a vessel known as the *Polarsirkel* [*built 1990, later called 'Polar Circle'*]. And they dreamt up the fact that the same company had agreed pretty well in principle that they would lease BAS the *Polar Queen*. And this was the way that the whole thing was going. Now – it really was very difficult. The senior management in BAS was driven by the fact that this was a Private Finance Initiative. They really had to go through with it. They were getting pressure from the Treasury. And yet – we all knew, and they really . . . I mean, they never say so openly to me, but they knew that this vessel really wasn't completely suitable. She was too small. She couldn't carry the amount of cargo. She really isn't designed for properly Southern Ocean work. There's so

many things that just weren't right. But I kept being told to shut up! shut up! shut up! and in the end I was told definitely this is the way we're going, and in nineteen ninety-nine (I think it was) that was exactly what happened. Now, if it had been any other organisation than a government organisation, the *Bransfield* would have been put up for sale, because she is worth a lot – not that there's a great deal that you can do with her commercially, except if you now think that subsequent from her demise – and she did go for razor blades – so many vessels, older and less capable, have been transverted to be mini cruise vessels, expedition vessels, operating in the Antarctic. She would have been ideal. BAS, as a government . . . the government – the taxpayer would have got a reasonable sum for her, and we could perhaps have done better with the replacement vessel, knowing we were going to get a better deal on the *Bransfield*. If I tell you that she went for two hundred thousand pounds – and I won't ask you the embarrassing question, but even my house is worth more than £200,000 – that was not a good deal for the taxpayer. And, if you like, it was . . . it really was the beginning of the end for myself. I just was so . . . well, I lost a lot of heart. I lost a lot of, you know, the good feeling that I described to you about the whole running of BAS sort of went out the window when . . . as I was involved with it and I knew all the details and then the first few years of operation and so many things were wrong with this *Polar Queen* (that eventually . . . well was – within a year – named the *Ernest Shackleton*), and there are still so many things wrong with her. It is staggering. And it's things that, if we were a norm . . .commercial . . . if BAS were a commercial organisation, the owners, the <u>owners</u> should be paying for, and BAS is still paying for the rep . . . you know. And it's just crazy. And the other thing that I argued with BAS management about was that they suddenly decided that we guys, who were pretty competent ice masters, would now take this vessel and operate it in the North Sea, around oil rigs. And I said 'Well, hang on a minute' I said. 'I don't have any expertise on operating a D.P. vessel [*Dynamic Positioning*], and operating it around oil rigs' I said. 'I'm not sure that I totally agree with this. And the other thing that I don't think is that I don't think BAS has got the capability of backing me up, because I don't think you understand anything about operations in the North Sea.' Anyway, she's still doing it. I think I was, and probably still am, a voice crying in the wind. But never mind. Yeah.
[0:35:06] So yes – so it was a mess, and on the . . . it was <u>such</u> a mess . . . on the very final day, the handover day of the *Bransfield*. And she was handed over – can you believe it or not? – to an Egyptian guy, who had Ukrainians and God knows who else, who was going to take her over on behalf of Riebers, and they were going to do one run from Grimsby, picking up cargo, and then she was going to be taken to Bangladesh or Pakistan to be driven up a beach and broken up. But she had got this one run – and they came to take it over. They arrived at six o'clock in the morning. There was myself and the Chief Engineer. They hadn't organised a thing. I had to use <u>our</u> agents to get them sorted out. I had to take the water, load their stores, just myself and the Chief Engi . . . we had to do the whole damn thing. We left at eight o'clock in the morning. It should not have come as a surprise to anybody that that complex vessel didn't leave Grimsby for nigh on a fortnight before they'd learned how to wind it up and get it going. So . . . but it did eventually go. Yeah. So it <u>was</u> very controversial. And people have said that I reacted badly. Well, I did react badly, and I'm glad you've given me this opportunity to explain why I reacted badly. And I certainly don't apologise, and I certainly don't feel sorry about it. No. I mean I will say that, operating the *Ernest Shackleton* in the Antarctic, there's many plusses to operating a vessel with thrusters. We can get closer to bases, we can do things . . . it's much safer. The whole operation is vastly improved. We can't carry as much, and we have to trim . . . more trips. It's not exactly helping the global warming, with the length of journeys that we have to do, but no . . . she has got advantages that the *Bransfield* didn't. And it was always going to be a concern just how . . . with the motor of the *Bransfield* – could it happen again? Because if you haven't got proper power it isn't particularly safe operation, so . . . So, yes, it's an interesting question, the replacement of the *Bransfield*. Hope that's clarified a bit.

[Part 2 0:37:20] Tolson:
The *Ernest Shackleton* was also doing scientific work whilst you were down south.

Lawrence:
Yes, because she's not as capable a platform as the *James Clark Ross*, but the mere fact that she can dynamically position, which means she can stay on one spot above the ocean floor, with satellite navigation and then thrusters and power, in most weather conditions, you can – to use my phrase – dangle technical pieces of string over the side quite safely, and you know you're going to recover them. You couldn't do that on the *Bransfield*, 'cos she would have drifted miles. So yes, so she has done quite a lot of science, which is quite good. She's, you know, from that way she's quite a good support for the *James Clark Ross*.

[Part 2 0:38:08] Tolson:
On our final tape we will come on to your departure from the BAS scene and perhaps your rather happy departure from the *Ernest Shackleton* and to your subsequent time – your other careers. Change tapes.

Lawrence:
Thank you.

[Part 2 0:38:34] Tolson:
Tape four, with Stuart.
Stuart, your final trips with BAS on the *Ernest Shackleton* you've already described as not being too enjoyable. Your wife Sue had made one voyage with you, and then, very sadly, on what was your last voyage, she died. Is this broadly correct?

Lawrence:
Yes. Not totally correct. You're quite right that . . . God bless Dick Laws.
[0:39:15] After the *Bransfield* had had her <u>major</u> hiccup in her career, or one of <u>many</u> major hiccups, when regrettably she grounded at full speed in Marguerite Bay, I was not in command. It might surprise all your listeners, but I was <u>not</u> in charge. Captain John Cole was in command, except he wasn't, 'cos it wasn't going anywhere, and it went from twelve knots to dead stop in about two hundred feet. That's quite a deceleration factor, and didn't do a great deal of good to the bottom plating. Of course there was an enquiry, and that enquiry, like most things that are associated with government bodies, was not convened in a sensible time period, which meant that John Cole wasn't able to go south as Master because they hadn't come up with their findings. So I had to do two trips together. No, I didn't do two trips together – I had the pleasure of putting the bottom back in the *Bransfield* for one summer, which was very fascinating – I mean, to actually . . . that amount of steelwork. I cannot remember precisely how many hundreds of tons of steelwork it was – it was an awful lot of steelwork. And to actually see this going together, and to be involved in doing the surveying of it – it really was very very fascinating to be involved in it, but it was very hard work.
[0:40:52] So we had a very arduous summer. And then they needed me to stay on to take it down south. So I said 'Well, okay, but I think there's got to be a bit of *quid pro quo* here and that is – can Sue come with me?' Well, of course this was totally taboo, I mean – nobody really . . . anyway, eventually Doctor Laws said 'Yes, OK – but only as far as Stanley.' So I said 'OK. Yep. No . . . that's OK.' Sue was just delighted anyway to . . . 'cos I mean – you know, a wife that's heard all about it for ten years is . . . of course they want to see a bit more. It's not surprising. Most shipping companies allow their wives because it's beneficial – because they know what their husbands are doing, they know what it's all about, and they can see it first hand. I just think it helps. But anyway, BAS wasn't one of those organisations, but yes they did agree. So. 1980. What happened as well was that the Chief Engineer,

who'd been with me during the rebuild of the ship's bottom, he decided he wanted to stay with me, so he transferred as well, and he took his wife, and we went via Rio. So his wife got off in Rio, and Sue was supposed to get into Stanley. It could've caused a bit of friction but actually it didn't. They got on very well and that was fine. So we get to Stanley, and all of a sudden there was a crisis. Can't remember precisely what it was, but we had to leave Stanley in a hurry, long before we were meant to – and we had to get south. And so I phoned Doctor Laws (which you could do, just about, one way or another – probably from Stanley) and said 'Oh look' I said – you know – 'We'll be back before Sue's plane's gone on leave, because it's Christmas time, and the plane won't have . . . ' 'Oh, all right then,' he said. 'Yes, she can go.' So what did we do? I don't know – we went . . . we seemed to get to South Georgia. Fantastic. We certainly got to Arctowski – and we now have a phrase for it . . . if you've ever been Arctowski'd don't talk to me about liquor and Antarctica, because they certainly go together well. So, yep, so we went to Arctowski in the South Shetlands, and we went south and we got to Damoy where we . . . guess we had . . . that's what we were there for, to get these people to fly in.
[0:43.25] The aircraft normally flew from Rothera up to Damoy because the ships couldn't get down there, or they felt they couldn't at that period, and we would put the people on Damoy where there was a small hut and then the planes would fly. Well, these guys had been sitting on Damoy for about a week, and they were running out of food and everything. So the planes still said that they . . . We got there just on a Friday, co-incidentally, so I'd spoken to the base commander and I said 'Look, if your planes can't get up here – how about if we come down there?' I said 'I can pick 'em up. We can be down and back in a weekend. BAS won't even know!' So the Base Commander said 'Well, where would you take them to?' I said 'Adelaide. Do you think you can get across to Adelaide?' (This was the old base, on the other side of Adelaide Island. So they had to do a short flight – only about half an hour probably, if that – so they just had to hop over.) 'Oh, yeah' he said 'if you can get 'em on to Adelaide'. I said 'But I don't think there's any facilities there'. So I said 'Look, we've got to liaise very closely on this one, because I'm not dropping them unless I've got an aircraft on its way or there.' Lo and behold, we get there – two planes! Send 'em off . . . put 'em in the boat, send 'em off up there – they're on base, and they're never meant to be! Right. Go back to Damoy, start heading back to, presumably, Stanley and, Monday morning, just say 'Oh' I said, just said casually, sent a message to BAS saying 'Oh, we've deployed the Damoy personnel. They're at Rothera.' Didn't go into any more details. My God! That was another time the . . . hit the fan. Dearie me! Yes. They weren't too amused. No-one had cleared it. Nobody had said we could. Errm . . . but it did mean Sue got south of the Antarctic Circle. So, it wasn't the motive really, but it certainly was a bonus from the fact, so yes – so she got south of the Antarctic Circle. So that was 1980.
[0:45:22] And then I had agreed, chiefly because of what we've said about the *Ernest Shackleton* and the operations in the North Sea, that I would retire from BAS at 59, and not go on to the 60, which was the . . . So I'd already sort of agreed it. There wasn't anything in writing, but we'd sort of agreed it, and that was where we were. So this probably brings us up to about 2001. So I was anyway going to finish in 2003. But in 2002, when I was on my way back with the ship, Sue was taken very ill, and because I didn't do the North Sea I think Antonio Gatty took over as Master and he and John Marshall did the North Sea. I went home, and was able to nurse Sue, as best I could, but she gradually got worse and, although it seems impossible to me by now, in December 2002, in fact on the 15th December 2002, I thought she was just going for another check-up in hospital. I'd called the doctors out, and they weren't too worried. She was very desperately short of breath, but there wasn't anything that was really that obvious, so I didn't go along with the ambulance. She went in the ambulance to the hospital, and I got a call, couple of hours later, saying that she was on . . . in intensive care – I had to get there. So I followed immediately over there. By the time I'd got there she'd already, pretty well . . . I mean she was on what you might call a life support machine, but she was already dead. So that really did sort of . . . well, it terminated things. I

mean, you know, I wasn't really terribly able . . . well, I couldn't go back and continue my career – I didn't want to. But they very kindly – and this is back to the good old BAS – they did say that I could go back in 2003 for a month . . . or two months. I went back in 2003 and was able to take her . . . and scatter her ashes as far south as she'd got in 1980, and just really finish off my time with BAS and then hand over to the subsequent team. So it did actually work out reasonably well, and in the end I really am grateful to BAS for that. I mean we had our ups and downs, as I already explained to you, but no, they did . . . they were very good about that. I just, you know, I'm sure . . . I'm sure it won't happen to you . . . I just hope it doesn't, but I cannot – I still cannot believe that it's seven years ago. I mean, 2009, it's just incredible. – Yup.

[Part 2 0:48:39] Tolson:
So with your departure from BAS – and it obviously didn't happen just like that – other things were in your mind. You wanted to keep your Antarctic connections going. What then happened? There were a number of things that kept you in Antarctica. This . . .

Lawrence:
Oh yes. Well, yes. It's been happening . . . but it was beginning to get a bit more formalised and, you know, there were all these cruise vessels. Well, bear in mind that in one of my early trips a vessel called the *Lindblad Explorer* was taking passengers down to the Antarctic. I remember her being in Stanley and . . . on Christmas day, and all the jolly jacks off the *Bransfield* – so it can't have been '70, it must have been '72, '73 – went ashore and we were singing Christmas carols to all the passengers at the bottom of the gangway, thinking we'd be invited on board to get a nice hot drink. No way! They weren't letting us lot on board! We were seriously told to shut up and go away. So I do remember the first cruise vessel. Yes. But there were a lot more, and it was getting more serious [0:49:58], and an organisation called IAATO [*International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators*] had started laying down some sort of guidelines, and one of them was that these people should take somebody with ice experience. And I was conta . . . . . . no, I wasn't contacted. Funnily enough this is getting a bit out of sequence. But suffice it to say that I did a couple of trips with Saga shipping company better known for Saga insurance and Saga everything else – look after the golden oldies, and we had a group of golden oldies, and I did two trips as their Ice Master down to the Antarctic. Subsequent from that I've done one trip with P&O Carnival, on what was the *Royal Princess* and now called the *Artemis*, although she's no longer called the *Artemis* because they sold her [*to become Artania*], as Ice Pilot as well. So I did that. But, back to leaving BAS. I didn't really have anything particularly planned, but the only thing that I did know was that, you know – once I'd got over the shock of losing Sue and the grief and the whole of the, you know, that procedure I thought 'No, I've got to do something with my life. I can't just sit and vegetate. That's not going to do me or anybody any good.' And I'd started looking around for jobs. Now at that stage I was still in Cornwall, and I applied for a job with the *Scillonian*, with the Scilly Islands company. But they felt that I was a bit too venerable, or a bit too long in the tooth, or . . . I don't know, but they decided probably it was more of a young man's job, and so they weren't too keen. Having failed to get that I thought 'We've got . . .' (I say 'we' because I've still got Sue's son, who's very close to me, so . . .) 'We've got family in Cornwall, but ' I thought 'I know a darn sight more people back in Fareham. What is the point really of sitting in Cornwall?' We went there for our retirement. On your own it's not the same. I mean – if you've got somebody to share it with it's different. So I tried . . . like most people in those days trying to sell my place took a year and a half, and then I decided to move back to Fareham. I still had in mind, you know, try and find something that I could usefully do. And one of the thi . . . you know, just coincidence like some of these things often are [0:52:28], an advert came up for the job that I'm presently doing, which is a Sailing Directions Editor with the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office. And, I thought 'Well yeah. I mean, they want a Master's ticket –

somebody with master's experience. It's an honourable organisation. I'll be paying back something to the industry that's been so good to me for so many years – improving the future mariners' charts or publications or what-have-you.' So, I applied, and was offered the post fairly immediately, and then, despite the fact that I'd been in the RNR, as a Captain RNR, it took them a year and a half to get security clearance. So I sat twiddling my thumbs, but I have been working with them now I think for five year . . . maybe it wasn't a year and a half. Maybe it was a y . . . It seemed like a year and a half but perhaps it was half a year. So I've been working for the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office since 2005, and it was then . . . this is why I say this wasn't totally *sequitur* because Saga applied to the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office looking for somebody who might have ice experience, and it was the United Kingdom Hydrogr . . . who said to me would I do it, so that was how it came to . . . that I got with Saga. Yeah.

[Part 2 0:53:49] Tolson:
Can you tell me a little bit more about the work that you were doing? I know you're still working for the Department, but you were working on the Antarctic Directory ??? [*? - noise on tape*] – bringing that up to date.

Lawrence:
Oh yes. Well, the United Kingdom Hydro . . . which . . . it operates charts and publications that cover the whole of the world, so – everything nautical, around the world, there is something that the United Kingdom Hydr . . . it has a chart or it has a electronic chart or it has a publication or it has a light list or it has a tide table or it has something. And I had done a . . . my first book that I was put in charge of to bring up to date was actually a South Pacific, about which I knew absolutely nothing, but it did give me a very good grounding into how, you know, what . . . the way to improve books. Well, they were fairly pleased with that one, I'm pleased to say [0:54:48] and they said would I like to do the Antarctic Pilot, which basically is a set of instructions to mariners wishing to operate in the Antarctic – very much <u>how</u> to operate – I mean it goes with other volumes like the Mariner's Handbook (that's a separate volume) and there's lots of books on ice seamanship that deal more deeply in ice seamanship and ice navigation, but it does cover all the aspects – everything about Antarctic navigational operations. So they said would I be prepared to re-write that one? So I said yes, but . . . I looked at the previous one and I said 'Look, I've been using this for quite a number of years, and I can go back to one that was produced in 1974,' I said 'and that was much better than the latest two.' So they said 'Well, if you want to do it you can go back, you can use the detail from the 1974 one, you can go wherever you like to get detail. Editors have got a free hand. You can put in – you might not get it passed, but you can put in everything that you want into this book.' So I did all my research, went back to the '74 one, got all the . . . dealt with COMNAP, which is the Operators of National Antarctic Programs [*Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs*] – dealt a lot with them, got in touch with SCAR, Scott Polar, BAS – got as much information together and of course I was able to incorporate all this in the book and I'm very pleased to say that just recently it's been reviewed by Scott Polar – the organisation looks after, you know, north polar operations and south polar operations – and they've given it quite a good review. And it's not going to be a best-seller because not everybody goes down to the Antarctic, but certainly those that have seen it seem to be pretty pleased with it, and of course it gave me a great deal of pleasure, because it was absolutely my sphere . . . be able to have that input – you know, I really do feel as though I've passed on some of that knowledge that I gained doing the job, and it's now in book form, and other mariners can benefit from it. So yeah, it has been great.

[Part 2 0:57:07] Tolson:
You're probably the only person in the world then who has sailed a British Antarctic Survey ice-strengthened ship for so many years. You've written the latest Pilot and Directions, you've been ice pilot on these passenger ships . . . what concerns do you have, in 2009, about passenger ships operating in Antarctica?

Lawrence:
I suppose my greatest concern is – well, there is no proper qualification for ice navigation. Still there is not. Just because you've got a first class master's certificate for world-wide operation, it does not really cover those operations. There is still no hard and fast rule – there are guidelines but there is nothing mandatory about carrying an ice pilot. There is nothing that says that your junior watch-keepers have to be trained, if not as much as the master but at least trained in a watch-keeping . . . conditions . . . in ice waters. There is nothing mandatory, at all. There's nothing, necessarily, on the cards – although I do believe that it will come about, because we did . . . I was also on the initial committee for harmoni . . . for creating these rules, but they weren't accepted as mandatory. But they did come out as a set of guide-lines, and as the question of what's happening in the Arctic is so topical, I have a feeling that probably . . . politically, what happens in the Antarctic – the Antarctic Treaty . . . there may be an attempt to move that towards the Arctic, and the operations in the Arctic, and I believe that a knock-on effect of that will be that these guide-lines, that are for Arctic operations and Antarctic operations, that the Canadians desperately want to be mandatory (the Russians make them mandatory but only for their waters) . . . it will come about. I have a feeling that it will, but I wouldn't like to put a date on it. So, but yes [0:59:33], at the moment I'm afraid it's true to say that there are people that do not have experience taking passengers down into those waters without really knowing what they're doing. And the other problem is that they . . . it's happening less but there was a period when they were taking so <u>many</u> passengers . . . and there are no facilities ashore if anything happens – I mean, we all think that the ship's the best lifeboat: well, God bless 'em, it's goddabe down there because there isn't anything else. You can't suddenly put four hundred passengers on a point of land if there's nothing there, and the national operators should not be expected to come to the rescue of a situation like that. I mean, it is discussed by the national operators. Don't think they're washing their hands of it – they're not. They're addressing this problem. We've had exercises (which have been paper exercises mostly, but partially realistically) with the Royal Navy, and a possible cruise liner, and it is being seriously addressed, but as long as they allow these people with no real experience to be in charge of the vessel, be it on a watch or totally in charge in command, it's a potential disaster zone. Yeah, and it does bother me. No question.

[Part 2 1:00:59] Tolson:
In your own personal career in the British Antarctic Survey, professionally, what would you consider to be your worst moments?

Lawrence:
I think the worst moment was when the ice cliff collapsed. I've been in some fairly hairy moments, with dragging anchors, when you thought you were fairly safe and you'd get up on the Bridge, sometimes with only half of a machine available to get you out of the mire, look down over the bridge wing and you could see the rocks awash and you'd think 'What's going to happen next?' Yep, there've been quite a lot of hairy moments. That's not . . . that's why I'm as white as I am, Jack – for God's sakes. Yeah, there've been quite a few hairy moments, but all survivable. And I think they're survivable because when I was doing the job I had been pretty well trained. I'd had my experience with Canadian Pacific, I'd had very good grounding with Captain John Cole, on the *Biscoe*, I'd had an excellent grounding with Tom Woodfield, I had been a junior officer. I didn't go straight in – I didn't come straight in

at the beginning, and I suppose that I've always had a fairly positive attitude to things anyway, and all of that has helped. I mean – you've got to look at it – that you're not aground until there's no water underneath your keel. It might look as though you are, but you're not. So just deal with the situation. Just carry on. You've just godda do it. You're never quite sure how you do, or you're not even quite sure how you did it after the event, but you do, and I suppose just coping is the name of the game. And you haven't touched much on my RNR career. I'm very blessed. I did amphibious operations with the RNR, which is landing people on beaches, so that was quite useful with BAS. I'm absolutely staggered that although I never spent that many really . . . time with the RNR, to go from Cadet to Captain RNR, I mean I'm one of the very few Merchant Navy captains that is a Captain RNR as well. There aren't many of us. So, you know . . . I've just been very lucky, though. And, if you'd put it in a nutshell, yes . . . Wasn't I lucky to be there? Wasn't . . . usuall . . . incredi . . . Chris [*Elliott*] would have been where I was, but he was off sailing on the Whitbread, so he wasn't available, you see? Yes, luck does enter into it. I mean, luck probably enters into it that no-one was killed when the ice cliff collapsed. Perhaps luck entered into it when, you know, you think you . . . well, we were blowing half way down Stanley, going as fast backwards as we normally did forwards, with our anchor down. You know. Yeah, we have had some situations where you either say that there is some sort of divine intervention, which I don't wish to go into because I feel faith is a very personal thing, or you are a lucky guy – or a reasonably lucky guy.

[Part 2 1:04:24] Tolson:
Conversely, what can you single out perhaps as being one of your happiest moments, not necessarily for you but for a body of people around you perhaps?

Lawrence:
I think the greatest satisfaction – which is not answering your question, I'm being a bit political here, and not . . . put it . . . posing another question, but not directly. One of the greatest satisfactions is that in thirty years – thirty-three years – of logistics operations in probably the most difficult waters in the most hazardous conditions with the most enthu . . . bunch of enthusiastic amateurs, that never once did we fail in our objective. Every year the bases were relieved. Every year the cargo got through. Occasionally a few guys did a second winter because we just couldn't get in, but that was pretty rare. I mean, by and large the requirement of the British Antarctic Survey throughout the <u>whole</u> of the *Bransfield*'s history was a success story. Motors, problems, you name it – but we did it. We got there. We achieved it.
[1:04:24] Now, as to the happiest, happiest events: very, very – no. I really don't think I could single out a partic . . . there were many happy events. There were many many events. I mean, I'm a great believer that a problem shared is a problem halved and a pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled, so we used to share an awful lot, you know, if . . . I can remember a Chief Officer called Rory Jackson. We were fighting our way (well, I say fighting our way – that's a bit over . . . an exaggeration) . . . but we were ice-navigating out of the Weddell Sea having relieved Halley, and he got a telegram saying that he'd become a proud father, and he was . . . he must have got it on the Bridge. I was up the Conning Tower, and he phoned me up on the Conning Tower and said 'You're not going to believe this.' I said 'What d'you mean? What are . . . We're all right, aren't we?' 'No, no' he said '– nothing navigational' he said. 'Just had a telegram to say that' (I forget how . . . his wife's name, but –) 'We've just become proud parents.' 'Oh' I said. 'That's fantastic!' I said. 'Tell you what – slow her down' I said. 'I'll go down, we'll get the bottle, we'll have a drink!' And we had a drink on the Bridge to celebrate. That was the sort of thing. Yeah. Yeah. And there'd be more – several events like that. So yeah, lots of happy events. I mean, there have. I mean, you know, when you were sailing with us . . . I know memory plays strange tricks, and memory makes you remember the better things than the worst things, thank God, but no, we did, we

did have . . . [1:07:21] I'm very pleased to say that we did have some very happy times. And I don't think I'm blowing my own trumpet but to a certain extent I feel that I was a catalyst to some of those – you know, it was – it was just something . . . I bet . . . well I'm exceedingly grateful, because as I said to you right . . . ooh, hours ago, it seems to me, that – command is sharing. It is getting a group together. It isn't . . . the whole biz . . . the loneliness of command – Oh! Do me a favour! – that's straight from the poets. I mean, jeepers, no – you shouldn't be lonely. You should be working with . . . enjoying the company of . . . I mean, you've got to keep a certain distance, obviously. There's the . . . you can't just be friends to everybody. But, I mean, that's how you . . . that's something that you learn. It's a knack if you like.

[Part 2 1:08:09] Tolson:
Could you have worked successfully and happily on a commercial ship?

Lawrence:
I wouldn't have been . . . Yes. Yes. I feel that I could. I mean, as I said to you, I've had no desire to go on tankers – if that was my line of career, no, that certainly wouldn't have led to happiness, or satisfaction [1:08:31]. I look – having now done these ice pilot's jobs on cruise vessels and I look somewhat enviously at the cruise line masters. My present line manager at the U.K.H.O. was Master with P&O and he was on cruise liners, obviously, latterly, because P&O had sold its cargo fleet. Yes, I do envy them. I think I . . . probably this stems back from the story of when I was a Fifth Officer . . . and the second officer on the bridge of the *Empress of Canada* . . . and we were about twelve hours out from Liverpool coming round the North Irish coast and coming into the Irish Sea, and the Second Officer decided that he was going to stay at a party and unfortunately he lingered on that party at twelve . . . most . . . all of his watch. And he was observed at about three in the morning by the Chief Officer who reported him to the Captain. And he got the sack and I got the statement that 'Lawrence this is not the behaviour . . . You're not meant to take charge if you're not in charge.' I thought 'The hell – probably they're right but I'm not sure. I enjoyed being in charge.' And so I was sent back to the cargo ships and he became manager of a cement factory. So yeah, I think I've always had the . . . well, like I wanted to be an admiral – first question. Yeah. Would I have liked to be an admiral? I think I still would. Not really tall enough, not to wear all those medals – haven't got a big enough chest. But yeah, I still would have liked to have been an admiral. And I would like to have been a cruise master – and that's commercial.

[Part 2 1:10:12] Tolson:
Stuart Lawrence, thank you very much indeed. [*both laugh*]

Lawrence:
Thank you, John.

END.

Points of general interest:

PART ONE:

[0:03:46]	HMS *Conway* pre-sea school
[0:06:00]	Getting a first job at sea. Canadian Pacific.
[0:13:39]	The band on the container
[0:15:40]	Extra Master's Certificate
[0:17:55]	RNLI. BAS.
[0:19:41]	*Biscoe* in Southampton

[0:22:37] Loading anthracite
[0:23:04] Damaging the inflatable
[0:25:04] Sailing Day in the nineteen-seventies
[0:25:14] North Atlantic
[0:27:09] Failure of the propulsion motor. Gordon Lewis.
[0:28:33] Leaving Rio
[0:29:28] First sight of Stanley
[0:30:55] First impressions of Antarctica
[0:32:49] Navigation in the 1970s
[0:34:21] Style of management
[0:37:26] Tom Woodfield and the *Magic Bus*
[0:42:05] Samples thrown overboard
[0:45:53] Ella Woodfield went south
[0:47:36] Dick Laws became Director of BAS. Stuart Lawrence appointed Master.
[0:49:17] Geophysics on *Bransfield*. Birmingham University. Peter Barker.
[0:53:49] Argentine base in the South Sandwich Islands (*Corbeta Uruguay*)
[0:59:29] Governors in Stanley. Magistrates of the British Antarctic Territory.
[1:01:26] Working cargo at Stanley and the bases. The Goon Show.
[1:03:16] Morale on the bases
[1:10:17] Losing a tractor at Adelaide
[1:12:18] Working cargo at Halley Bay
[1:18:07] The Lord looked after us.

PART TWO:
[0:00:00] Alcohol and management
[0:04:48] Masters' Meetings
[0:07:52] 1982
[0:08:31] Cindy Buxton and Annie Price
[0:10:56] Eric Heathorne (Catering Officer)
[0:11:41] Salvesens. Whaling Stations. Davidoff.
[0:19:27] Invasion of the Falkland Islands
[0:21:20] Portishead Radio.
[0:23:18] Alcohol again (averting a mutiny)
[0:25:44] Lack of direction from the Foreign Office (– again. See also [Part 1 0:53:49].)
[0:26:31] Replacement of the *Bransfield*
[0:26:55] *Bransfield*'s prop motor
[0:30:13] John Bawden. Frank Curry. Institute Secretary.
[0:31:09] Riebers. *Polar Circle*. *Polar Queen*. *Ernest Shackleton*.
[0:35:06] *Bransfield* taken over for Riebers
[0:39:15] *Bransfield* ran aground at full speed. Subsequent repairs.
[0:40:52] Sue Lawrence and Joyce Allison sailed on *Bransfield*.
[0:43:25] Route to Rothera via Damoy
[0:45:22] Sue Lawrence died. Stuart retired from BAS.
[0:49:58] IAATO. Ice Master on cruise ships.
[0:52:28] The United Kingdom Hydrographic Office
[0:54:48] The Antarctic Pilot
[0:57:07] Cruise ships in Antarctica. Qualifications for officers.
[0:59:33] Not really knowing what they're doing, and no facilities ashore.
[1:00:59] Worst moments. Coping. The value of training and experience.
[1:04:24] Happiest moments
[1:07:21] Command is sharing.
[1:08:31] Envying the masters of cruise liners
[1:10:20] End.

A note on the transcription.
The fact that this is a video interview made surprisingly little difference to the task of transcribing it. Very occasionally gestures made clear what had been said, or in one case what had not been said (that was noted in square brackets). Lawrence frequently changed tack in the middle of a sentence, and often even in the middle of a word. In many cases the part before the change has been omitted from the transcription on the grounds that it was immediately corrected, but where both parts contribute to the sense or the mood they are both set down verbatim. Many 'I means' and 'you knows' and so on have been taken out to make it easier to read, but they have been left in where they affect the meaning or the mood. Additions in square brackets are either from my own knowledge or from an internet search, which usually resulted in a quote from Wikipedia.

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