

Jack Reid

Transcript of a recording of Jack Reid interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 12th March 2010.
BAS Archives AD6/24/1/66. Transcribed by Charlie Robb, 28th March 2013

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Jack Reid recorded at his home in Swards End, Saffron Walden in Essex by Chris Eldon Lee on 12th March 2010. Jack Reid Part 1.

Reid: John Douglas Reid, Andover in Hampshire. 07/10/1926.

[Part 1 0:00:23] Lee: So you are now?

Reid: Eighty Three

[Part 1 0:00:26] Lee: Eighty Three Years old...And the nickname Jack is obvious is it?

Reid: That arose in the Navy where I think all Johns are Jacks and obviously there are a lot of Naval blokes with FIDS, but I think possibly my Jack went across because a mate I'd had in the Navy joined FIDS with me and of course he always called me Jack anyway so, yes the name stuck.

[Part 1 0:00:50] Lee: Who was that?

Reid: Dave Bolton, he died, oh 10, 15 years ago I suppose, but he was just down for the one year at Admiralty - at the Argentines, the year before I went there.

[Part 1 0:01:05] Lee: So what sort of childhood did you have? Education, normal education?

Reid: Yes, I was born in Hampshire as I said and we moved when I was, I don't know, a few years old, to Southwick in Sussex which was a very desirable little place. I think it's changed a hell of a lot now, but in those days midway between Brighton and Worthing on the coast it was great. I had a very normal education, I had great hopes of course of winning a scholarship and going to Worthing High or Steyning Grammar but I failed on both of them so I had to stop at the normal, pre-comprehensive type school that it was, which was a very good one actually but seemed to suit me quite alright, yes.

[Part 1 0:01:48] Lee: What was your Father's profession?

Reid: Father was in the clothing trade, either he was, up to the time I suppose we moved to Sussex; yes he was in clothing shop management and then after that - after a while anyway - he left that and became an agent where he used to - having a lot of experience with clothing - he used to act as a representative for various manufacturers and wander around, I suppose, flogging the stuff or putting the manufacturer in touch with somebody.

[Part 1 0:02:24] Lee: Did Mother have a job?

Reid: No, a hobby of which she was very interested, and I think very good too, was playing the piano, and so she did that at local Schools and local clubs and all kinds of things, yes. Unfortunately I never learned the piano but there we are, can't be helped.

[Part 1 0:02:44] Lee: Thinking back, what would have been your first brush with the Antarctic, when would you first become aware that it existed, shall we say?

Reid: I certainly can't remember the first occasion of course but I presume it would have been hearing about Captain Scott... a very slight Naval connection of course between he and I. I had an interest in Antarctica but it wasn't the be-all and end-all for me by any means because I had other work to do which I enjoyed, but yes I had an interest in the Polar regions, I didn't know much about them but I had an interest there.

[Part 1 0:03:29] Lee: So you'd read, and maybe seen the film, John Mills' Film?

Reid: Ah, that was done a long time after I was down South.

[Part 1 0:03:41] Lee: Ah, right.

Reid: Yeah; no I don't think I've ever seen a film about it at all and I'm not even certain I read much about it, I certainly never read expedition books, I wasn't that interested, but I had a general interest in knowing something about it, as I would do about Australia or New Zealand or any other place.

[Part 1 0:03:59] Lee: What did you do when you left Education?

Reid: When I left school? Well, this was in the middle of the war and so things were a bit up and down and I joined a small local engineering firm, civil engineering, mainly Marine work, which I enjoyed - the work - very much. Not very big, a few dozen people, a few hundred maybe I suppose at the busy time, but what we used to do was, say stuff for the marine education, various things come to mind. One of them was converting London river barges into landing craft; we cut the bows off and we put a ramp in it, and then we fitted two large Ford engines in the back end to give propulsion to what was a dumb boat in those days, and we also, due to the invasion coming up, we also put in the ramped walkways where the craft could moor and then the soldiers could go up and down the ramps to climb on board. So, yes there was always work of that nature going on, it was quite an interesting job actually.

[Part 1 0:05:17] Lee: And you ended up in the Navy, didn't you. Was that during the war or afterwards?

Reid: Well, no, my main interest during the war was gliding, I was an NCO in the Air Cadet Corps and on the strength of that I volunteered to fly in the Fleet Air Arm, and I went up to London, had an interview and was accepted. Fortunately that was when I was sixteen. Obviously they didn't call me then but they called me when I was eighteen, when unfortunately by that time they didn't want anybody else so they gave me the option of... I reported actually to the Butlins Holiday Camp at Skegness, which was - I forget the name of it - as a Naval Vessel, but it was named nevertheless, and that's where I arrived, and I was given the option: 'Well look, since you volunteered to fly you haven't got any chance of doing it, you will leave the Navy if you like.' So I said 'Well I'll have a go.' So I got in touch with the Paratroops and the Royal Air Force and anybody else I thought would fly, but there was

nothing at all. So, I stopped in the Navy to do Meteorology which was as near as I could get to air work.

[Part 1 0:06:26] Lee: Had you had an interest in the weather beforehand? In Meteorology?

Reid: No more than average, I don't think, no. I don't think so.

[Part 1 0:06:34] Lee: It just came your way?

Reid: It just came my way, yes.

[Part 1 0:06:37] Lee: And were you in the Navy right until...?

Reid: I came out of the Navy, I joined in January '45 and I came out somewhere mid-1947.

[Part 1 0:06:52] Lee: Right, so that was when you went from the Navy to FIDS?

Reid: To FIDS, yes.

[Part 1 0:06:56] Lee: What do you remember of the interview; well first of all, how did you apply, how did you find out there were jobs going?

Reid: Actually, you have led me onto one of the stories I always love to tell at this particular time...

[Part 1 0:07:09] Lee: Please do.

Reid: I can remember actually, I came out of the Navy and I didn't do much at all really, I sort of mucked about for a couple of months or something and I can remember shoving - remember hearing a talk on the radio (no television in those days), a talk on the radio by Surgeon Commander Bingham, who as far as I'm concerned was one of our leading blokes, Polar blokes at the time and he'd just come back from South with the the pre-FIDS organisation, whose name eludes me at the moment...

[Part 1 0:07:42] Lee: Operation Tabarin?

Reid: Tabarin, yes he'd come back from a Tabarin session and he was coming back to get more people so I can remember shoving my head through the serving hatch to the kitchen where my mother was working and saying 'I like the sound of that, I'll have a go.' So she said 'Up to you!' So I did have a go. I stood an advantage I think, because I was ex-Navy and he was Navy as well, so up I went and we had a good interview, it was one of those lovely ones I think where it was man-to-man, he and I. There were no psychiatrists there or personnel managers or anything else to get in the way, it was just the two of us chatting, and he quizzed me about various things and obviously decided that he quite liked what he saw, so he sent me off to Harley Street to do a medical. And he also sent me to the Air Ministry to be checked out, so I did both of those and came back and he said 'Oh well that went all right; tell me,' he said, 'Another question for you before we come to an answer; if you were sledging and you were limited as to the weight you could carry, what three books would you take?' and I thought 'Oh my god, what a terrible question to throw at somebody, so I said 'Right, I'd take a

book on Gliding,' which is what interested me at the time. I said I'd take the Bible; not that I'm particularly religious but it would seem a good time to read it, and I said the third book I'd take would be the four adventures of Richard Hannay, by John Buchan. 'My God,' he said, 'do you know, that's exactly the book I used to take when I went sledging!' So I couldn't go wrong after that, could I?

[Part 1 0:09:20] Lee: It doesn't sound like it was a particularly rigorous...

Reid: Oh it wasn't at all, oh no, no no.

[Part 1 0:09:27] Lee: And in retrospect do you think you were being psyched out, to make sure you were suitable mentally to do down to the Antarctic?

Reid: Oh I think one had to, I really believe after all, he was a bloke who had been doing this for years on and off, and he know that when you get four blokes - and it was only four - stuck together in a hut, they have got to gel as best they can, and so I'm certain he knew precisely what he was looking for. Obviously he made mistakes at times, we all do, but he knew what he was looking for, the type of bloke he thought would gel with other members down south. I think it was possibly more important than one's technical knowledge.

[Part 1 0:10:08] Lee: Was he right?

Reid: I think he's absolutely right, I think so, yes.

[Part 1 0:10:13] Lee: What sort of man was Ted Bingham?

Reid: I didn't work with him unfortunately, I got interviewed by him and of course I met him at various other times before I went south. Smallish, I think a very pleasant bloke, surgeon of course and by the time we left he was a Surgeon Captain. But I think as regards Polar knowledge and Polar experience, I think he was one of our leading blokes at the time, without any doubt at all, he'd been doing all kinds of things. No, I had a great deal of time for him and I think most people did too.

[Part 1 0:10:50] Lee: Been there, done it, got the anorak?

Reid: Pardon?

[Part 1 0:10:54] Lee: Been there, done it, got the anorak?

Reid: Yes, Yeah.

[Part 1 0:10:58] Lee: So, how much of a gap was there between being given the thumbs up and actually sailing?

Reid: Oh, not a great deal, we sailed....oh I was given the thumbs up I suppose September or October.

[Part 1 0:11:16] Lee: In '48 we are talking about?

Reid: In '48. And we sailed beginning of December. So yes it was a month or so, which was about the right amount of time I suppose. I mean I might have had a job which I had to finish, I didn't as it happened but, yes it was about the right amount of time to leave.

[Part 1 0:11:33] Lee: Can you remember the reaction back home from the parents?

Reid: Well, yes not vividly of course but obviously to them, their knowledge of Antarctica was no greater than mine, in fact it may even have been less, and so I suspect they possibly wondered a wee bit what I was letting myself in for. But then of course the press started to arrive, the local papers heard about it and they came along and wanted to interview me and I suppose they chatted to my parents, but yes it all went well, yes.

[Part 1 0:12:10] Lee: So you became a local celebrity for a short time?

Reid: Well, yes for a short time when I went and for a short time when I came back. Yes.

[Part 1 0:12:18] Lee: How much training did they give you? Did you have to go on courses to learn what to expect?

Reid: No, nothing at all.

[Part 1 0:12:26] Lee: Nothing?

Reid: Nothing at all. For Meteorology, I mean I wouldn't have expected them to do that. I suppose one could have expected that you might have sat down with somebody and had a chat about what life was generally like down there, how to use clothing and equipment and what to do with dogs and all the rest, but no you just picked it up as you went along and obviously we had two months on board the ship where you chatted to a number of people who had experience. Slesser was on board with us, he was a doctor in the Falkland Islands then after he'd come back. Bingham didn't come down; Vivian Fuchs, he was our leader but he hadn't had a great deal of Polar experience, certainly nothing down south. So no, really it was a matter of experiencing things and learning as you went.

[Part 1 0:13:17] Lee: What was the trip down South like? This was the old *Biscoe*.

Reid: The *Biscoe*, yes the old wooden one.

[Part 1 0:13:24] Lee: They had only just acquired it hadn't they?

Reid: Yes they had, yes, that year it was still in its Naval form, we slept in the front hold as it happened, with bunks which were just sort of put up for us, and it was very crude and rough, but they'd only just acquired the *Biscoe* quite rapidly from the Yankee Navy, and it went well I think, yes well we didn't expect too much else anyway.

[Part 1 0:13:51] Lee: Some people are surprised at how small she was.

Reid: Yes, alright, small, I'm trying to think, about 12,000 tons if I remember correctly. OK, small but efficient, made of wood which of course was the most important thing there. When she came back the second year she'd been rebuilt inside and my impression was she was a

much nicer thing to travel in, she was a bit more like a liner or a properly equipped ship than she was when she went down.

[Part 1 0:14:26] Lee: So in the year that you went, just describe the facilities that were available to you on board the ship.

Reid: Well we certainly didn't have cabins. As I say we had the hold where we had about fifteen bunks I would have thought, which had been put in there, so we lived down there. We had a dining room up top which was one of the rooms alongside the mess - alongside the wardroom rather, but apart from that I don't think we had anything else at all.

[Part 1 0:14:58] Lee: What were the heads like?

Reid: Presumably the old original heads would have sort of been... they could have coped with three or four blokes and that was all, I wouldn't think it would be much more than that. Certainly no showers and I would have thought no baths, I can't remember any anyway.

[Part 1 0:15:20] Lee: And there were quite a few of you on board weren't there?

Reid: I would have thought there were about 25 or 26 expedition people yes, because we were going down to fill six or seven places, four blokes at a time, or on average four or five. Yeah, there were twenty-odd of us going down, yes.

[Part 1 0:15:38] Lee: Apart from Doctor Slessor, Vivian Fuchs was on board; did you get a chance to get to know him?

Reid: Fuchs? Well, to a certain extent, yes, mark you there were as I say 24 or 25 of us, so he wanted to get to know us all in time because he was the governor of the expedition, the senior bloke there. But, when you've got that number of people, concentrating on one man - there's not a great deal, you don't get a great deal of time to sort of get to know him all that well. But he seemed a very nice bloke anyway.

[Part 1 0:16:13] Lee: And Dick Laws, did you get to know him?

Reid: Oh yes, yeah, Dick came down as just a plain common or garden Geologist when we went there and he was dropped off of course at Signy and he went ashore with two others, there were only three of them the year he was there.

[Part 1 0:16:33] Lee: And the First Mate was Lord Headley¹?

Reid: That's right, number one, Irish chappie, he was nice, a nice bloke.

[Part 1 0:16:41] Lee: He had a nickname apparently?

Reid: It doesn't ring a bell, no. What was it?

¹ Rowland Patrick John George [Allanson-Winn], 6th Baron Headley

[Part 1 0:16:51] Lee: I don't know, I'm asking you!

Reid: Oh I see, I'm sorry. No, no, he was just Number one as far as we were concerned. The Skipper was a chappie who'd been the commander of the old Discovery Investigation ship *Discovery*; I'm under the impression he drunk a bit actually and I've got a feeling that's how he lost the command eventually, I might be wrong but I think that's the case.

[Part 1 0:17:18] Lee: In your kit bag you took a film camera, Jack, because I saw the film just the other night.

Reid: Ah you did! Yes, I took a 16mm, big old thing which I took down, yes, which I used a lot, I used it as much as I could. I couldn't afford film to a large extent, in fact I couldn't afford colour at all. It was all black & white but I think it was actually Dick Laws who gave me a spool of coloured film. So yes, there was a bit of colour to illustrate what it really looks like down there.

[Part 1 0:17:50] Lee: And were you a keen cameraman beforehand?

Reid: I was keen to the extent that at one time I wanted to join the BBC or the film profession as a cameraman, yes, but it didn't turn out. But yes, from that point I was interested, yes.

[Part 1 0:18:10] Lee: Were you given any guidance whilst you were down there from anybody else on using the camera?

Reid: No, I don't...

[Part 1 0:18:19] Lee: A chap called Bob Moss?

Reid: Oh, I'm sorry, you are quite right, Bob was with us, yes, of course he was the cameraman on board the Scott film, he went South during that. Yes, I must have learned something from him! Yes I'm sorry, I had forgotten about Bob.

[Part 1 0:18:38] Lee: Was it fun to be filming?

Reid: Bob?

[Part 1 0:18:43] Lee: No, was it fun? To be filming.

Reid: I don't know about fun, no. It was interesting. Because you are always looking for the right light, and the right position for you to stand without falling into the ice, and for the other blokes to do the right thing at the right time. So, yes, it was interesting, I wouldn't say fun.

[Part 1 0:19:06] Lee: No, okay. You were filming - most of the film seems to be concerned with the transfer, doesn't it, from one base to the other. Is that right?

Reid: That's right, yes, when we were going round, I mean I did a lot, rather I can remember at Signy, when we were bringing the boats, putting the boats ashore. Dick Laws and his crowd, and of course we had... to every bloke who goes there must be 40 tons I suppose of spares; no, 40 tons of spares and food and all the rest of it which accompanies each bloke in

time. So yes, there's an awful lot of work to do at a base when you're setting one up and re-staffing it.

[Part 1 0:19:48] Lee: Watching the film of unloading supplies, I think that was at Signy in fact, on the first port of call, it did look a bit haphazard, it didn't look as if it was particularly safe!?

Reid: I would have thought that was fair comment, I mean after all we only had, I suppose, two boats in order to bring the stuff ashore. It was loaded - the boats were loaded off the *Biscoe* by a crewman there, so they did the right thing. I don't say they took everything off in the right position but they took it off as it was in the holds and then in turn when it came ashore, that was always unloaded by expedition blokes, so most of them like me had never had experience of doing it before so we just sort of grabbed whatever we could and made our way up to the base hut as best we could.

[Part 1 0:20:38] Lee: I guess you were in a fairly tight timeframe to do all this weren't you really?

Reid: Oh yes, I suppose we were limited to two or three days, I would think, to take the old blokes off a base and put the new blokes in plus all their year's supplies.

[Part 1 0:20:56] Lee: So tell me about your first season at Admiralty Bay² then. What sort of - your main job was to rebuild the hut, is that correct?

Reid: No to build it.

[Part 1 0:21:04] Lee: To build it?

Reid: There was nothing there at all.

[Part 1 0:21:06] Lee: So they offloaded you with tents and so on to live in?

Reid: No, no, in that case what we did, we built it with the aid of the other expedition members and the ship's crew who could be spared, on the *Biscoe*, and she sat in the harbour at Admiralty Bay and helped us. And I suppose we took, I don't know, a week or ten days to put the hut up and to get it basically assembled and basically liveable, and then we were then left with what we had to do to finish the hut off and with all our supplies. So yes, I suppose it took 10 or 14 days, I suppose, to sort of get the hut as ready as we could when we were left in it, five of us.

[Part 1 0:21:49] Lee: Was there any discussion about where exactly the hut should be, or was all predetermined?

Reid: No, no, that point came up at the time. That's one of the jobs that Fuchs would have done. Possibly it was Slesser I suppose but the rest of us hadn't got enough experience to sort

² Admiralty Bay, Base G. Location: Martel Inlet, Keller Peninsula, King George Island, South Shetland Islands. All buildings have now been removed from the site to foundation level. Two graves and two memorials remain.

of offer much guidance. We might sort of offer guidance and say 'By Christ, do you expect us to walk from the sea up to that height?' But no, it was all reasonably straightforward.

[Part 1 0:22:17] Lee: We are talking about just after the War aren't we, 1948 I guess by this time. So how primitive was the hut, were there any improvements would you say, over Scott's day, or was it still...?

Reid: I wouldn't have thought it was a great deal over it. All right, the windows were double glazed I expect, I can't remember but I feel certain that they were, and the hut was nicely lined, but it wasn't very big and, no it was pretty bare inside, nothing sort of desperate about it, we didn't have a lounge or anything else. We had a sitting and a dining area but there was nothing flashy about it at all.

[Part 1 0:22:55] Lee: And there were going to be four of you, is that right?

Reid: No, there were five. We finished up with four I'm afraid, yes.

[Part 1 0:23:02] Lee: Yes, well you are talking about Eric Platt aren't you?

Reid: Yes.

[Part 1 0:23:07] Lee: Will you talk about that for a couple of minutes?

Reid: Yeah sure. Eric was the Base Leader, a geologist. And he was very good at whatever he turned his hand to. Very good with tools, yes a very handy bloke anyway. Coming onto the first spring we were there, we thought we ought to have some penguin eggs. We hadn't got a rookery anywhere near us but Admiralty Bay - if you've got a large lump of land here, Admiralty Bay is here and we were on that side - and we knew on the outside there, against the sea there was a rookery. So we were going to go across here, you know I've been trying to think and I can't think whether we rowed across there or skied across there, I just can't remember. Anyway, we got there and then Eric and I climbed up a steep run between glaciers, crossed over the top and had a much steeper run down towards the sea and there was the rookery, sure.

[Part 1 0:24:13] Lee: Was this manhauling?

Reid: Pardon?

[Part 1 0:24:15] Lee: Were you manhauling?

Reid: Manhauling, yes, yeah. We had skis once we were on the other side of the harbour to get us up over on the breast and then drop down to the sea. So we got down there and loaded our bags up with, oh, a few dozens of eggs of course. Eric, being the keen bod that he was, he shot off up the very steep slope on the sea side and I was still sort of dawdling following him up, stopping every few feet I suppose, and having a pant. Got up there and found he was a bit knackered. So we had a word about it and decided we'd move on, so by this time we'd reached the top of the brow, ready to start dropping down to the harbour again, and we hadn't gone too far when he said 'Look, I can't go any further.' So I said 'Well, dump your eggs and

I'll give you a hand and we'll go as far as we can.' And we got a bit further on and eventually he said 'I can't do it any more, I'm knackered.' So I said 'Well look, stop there but for God's sake don't sit still and idle because it's too damn cold for that, try and keep on the move if you can.' And by this time I was going to drop down and hopefully I could have got in touch with the base. We hadn't got any radios or anything - I would have hoped that I could have waved to the base, it was about a mile on the other side of the harbour - or that for some reason they might have come. As it happened, by the time I got down to the bay, three of the blokes had landed. They were obviously a bit worried the fact that we had taken such a long time and I said 'Thank God you're here - quick we've got to go back up, I've left Eric on top, he's not at all well.' So, the three of us started the climb up and eventually I could see Eric as a dark mark on the brow of the hill before you drop back down to the sea. God, we got on as best we could and unfortunately one of the blokes fell down a crevasse on our way up there. I forget who that was, Dennis Farmer was it? Doesn't matter, I can't remember. Anyway, we got him out, went up the hill and of course by that time I'm afraid Eric was dead. So we brought Eric and the eggs back - for what that's worth - came back down to the shore and then crossed over again. I can't remember if it was ice or not, either by boat or by ski and sledge, and we left Eric outside the hut in the cold where of course he'd be conserved as best as possible for what that was worth, and got in touch with Fuchs and he then instructed the Biscoe to come back, where the Captain of the Biscoe plus one or two other people held an enquiry into it where I was called in and I repeated just about the same story to them as I've said to you, and I was asked if I could think of any reasons why, and I said; well, he was a terribly enthusiastic bloke and went in like a bomb out of a what-have-you every time to tackle something and I said that there was one other point which I think might be of note. Obviously being comrades for a year we'd chatted to ourselves and we all learnt history about the others for various other reasons. And I said there were two points which Eric came up with which I think have a note; he didn't go in the service although he should have been because he was the same age as the rest of us, and that was because he was turned down by the military service medical people on the basis he has an enlarged heart, slightly off-centre. So, I said, what that means I really don't know but it might be one of the reasons his heart packed up or whatever it was on this particular occasion.

[Part 1 0:28:16] Lee: Let's go back to Eric describing to you that he couldn't go on. Did he explain why he couldn't go on, what did he say? How was he at that point?

Reid: Well he would have said he couldn't go on but, I mean he wouldn't have said that with any degree of logic, he would have said it from the point of view of 'Oh my God, I'm knackered, there's something wrong, I can't go on.' He was obviously aware that there was something wrong and I was equally aware, and by this time I was trying to hold him, but I just couldn't do it, he was just too much and too unstable. So, yes, he degenerated from when we came up from the sea to the top before we started to go back down again towards the harbour bay. I mean, we took, oh dear, we took three-quarters of an hour I suppose, and say half a mile, when we got progressively worse and worse until eventually he couldn't move at all at the end.

[Part 1 0:29:23] Lee: What happened to the body, was it taken on the ship? Or was it buried?

Reid: No, no, he was buried near the site. We had a little hillock which we decided we rather liked, and we laid the - I was going to say coffin - I can't remember honestly what we put him in. Anyway, he was buried on this little hillock, and covered in stones. Which I hope is still there.

[Part 1 0:29:54] Lee: So there was no autopsy, no medical examination?

Reid: No, no, they presumably - the skipper of the Biscoe and whoever else was on the committee with him - presumably they accepted it, and they must have also discussed it with Bunny Fuchs, and he presumably accepted it as well.

[Part 1 0:30:16] Lee: Looking back now on that incident, is it surprising to you that FIDS should recruit somebody with a heart condition? Or with a medical so... informal?

Reid: Ah, well alright, there's another point there of interest; I went to Harley Street, now presumably they sent me to somebody in Harley Street who knew what he was doing and who particularly was picked for his ability to check a bloke over medically for the job that was coming up. Eric, on the other hand, if I remember correctly, he went to the School of Tropical Hygiene in Liverpool because that happened to be nearer to where he was living than Harley Street was to where I was living. Now, if you can send a bloke to the School of Tropical Hygiene, I wouldn't have thought there were too many people there knew what you were going to do when you went south and how to check you out physically for it anyway.

[Part 1 0:31:06] Lee: How old was he when he passed away?

Reid: Well I would have been 21 and he was 21, 22, I wouldn't say any more.

[Part 1 0:31:28] Lee: Can you remember the impact his death had on the rest of you back at the base?

Reid: Well, yes of course because, when you've lived with a bloke for, in this case, seven or eight months I suppose, when five of you have lived together as a group and you've worked together, you've all got your own little jobs and to take one of you away, sort of upsets the whole system. I'm not saying that I was being annoyed at Eric for doing that, but that was a fact, the whole system was upset and so from that point of view and the fact that the poor blighter had died as well, yes, it was a shock but we were young and we had to get on with it and as best we could, we did.

[Part 1 0:32:28] Lee: So what was the recovery time like before spirits were somewhat restored? Or was there always a cloud?

Reid: I don't say there was always a cloud because although obviously there were times when you suddenly said 'Oh we did that... oh I did that with Eric.' And then you thought, oh God... that sort of thing. So, but of course again it was November I think when he died and we were due for the ship to come in presumably about January. So, I would have thought that the real effect had very largely worked off after a month. You never forget a thing like that of course,

naturally, but being young down there and having to work to keep yourself going, you really have to get around it somehow or other.

[Part 1 0:33:27] Lee: Who took over as base leader? Or did you not just do that?

Reid: Yes, I think it was one of the Falkland Islanders actually, because he had experience down there before. He'd been down the year before we went, putting up a temporary shed at Admiralty Bay, which we in turn used as stores. I ought to know his name³; Ian Biggs was one of the Falkland Islanders and the other one... no, I can't remember I'm afraid.

[Part 1 0:34:13] Lee: Don't worry about it, we can look it up later on.

Reid: Yes, that's fine.

[Part 1 0:34:15] Lee: Just looking through some... I've got some of the base documents from Base G from that year, which have been sent from Archives. There's one or two nice little things here that... I understand that you were surprised to find some fossilised plants in the area, is that right? Do you remember that?

Reid: No, I don't remember that, no. But Eric would have done that as part of his geology.

[Part 1 0:34:45] Lee: I'm reading Eric's report here.

Reid: Ah, no I don't remember them I'm afraid, no. What date was that report by the way?

[Part 1 0:34:54] Lee: Well, it covers the period December 1948 to November 1949. And it wasn't written by Eric Platt because it says here "Eric Platt died on duty 10th of November 1948 aged 22 years," ah, right. It also suggests you were only actually at the base for a short time, which seems a bit odd.

Reid: No, I was there for the whole year.

[Part 1 0:35:21] Lee: So, what sort of duties, apart from the meteorology, how far out and about did you get, did you get on many sledging trips?

Reid: No, we didn't have a sledge, we had no gear at all.

[Part 1 0:35:34] Lee: Nothing at all?

Reid: No, it was quite a hilly place, was King George Island, and we used to fiddle about on skis, and tried to run as best we could, but we certainly had no sledging equipment. I mean, I had my weather reports, four a day I suppose I did, of which we transmitted twice, but of course apart from that, one of you is cook of the day for a week, one of you brings the food in and also brings ice in to melt down for water. You've got no dogs to look after there as it happened, there's another big time job if you've got dogs. But there's always sort of work which you fit into and which also fits into a pattern which you have to build up as a group.

[Part 1 0:36:27] Lee: Did you find the work interesting, the meteorological work?

³ G.E. Davis (Handyman)

Reid: Some of it was, I mean it was mainly routine, I'd been doing it in the Navy and then I'd carried on with FIDS so it was very largely routine but obviously there were things that cropped up, and I can't think what they were at the moment, but there must have been things that cropped up that I thought 'My God, I've never met that one before,' or 'Why did that happen?' etc., etc.

[Part 1 0:36:57] Lee: Having built the hut, did it take quite a long time to develop into a proper full-blown base? Were you still working on it throughout the whole season?

Reid: No, no, to put the hut up I said was a month, which I suppose was a round figure to work on. After that, we had lots of fiddlings about to do, I mean the inside fittings had to be done because we'd been concentrating on doing the basic shell. So, it took a bit of time but it wouldn't have taken overmuch because after all you're going down there, you haven't got too much gear with you because you just haven't got room to bring it in, or get to the shore or even use it, so, no it was all very basic really.

[Part 1 0:37:46] Lee: What was the communications like in your first season?

Reid: We had Dennis Farmer who was the Radio Operator, he'd been in the Merchant Navy; twice a day he would contact the main base, Marguerite Bay, by radio, with my Met reports, and then I suppose, I think that was the only routine stuff, we had no other routine stuff, we used to like to listen to the Falkland Island radio because that was the only sort of natural civilian type radios we could come across. And of course if anything came up, if you got an illness and you wanted advice from the doctor, that would have been the quack down at Marguerite Bay, you could have chatted with him over the radio and sort of worked out what you could. But there was nothing desperate about it at all.

[Part 1 0:38:54] Lee: Were you very much left to your own devices or was there still a certain amount of control coming from the Falklands? Miles Clifford I think was the Governor of the Falklands at the time, wasn't he?

Reid: Yes he was.

[Part 1 0:39:02] Lee: Were you aware of his shadow, if you like?

Reid: No, I don't think so, I mean he came down once or twice on the *John Biscoe*, and he was a decent bloke I think. But I would have thought that once you were at a base, no you were very largely on your own. Alright if things went wrong you got hold of the radio quickly and asked for help. In many cases of course you couldn't get it because the nearest base was 500 or 1000 miles away. But, no we weren't over-controlled at all by any means, no.

[Part 1 0:39:41] Lee: Was there a sense of excitement about the whole thing? You'd obviously gone down to the Antarctic with optimism and excitement about what you were going to be doing down there. Did it live up to expectations?

Reid: I think so, and I think with me particularly dealing with weather it would have been the weather which would have excited me because it was so totally different from anything I had

met before. What was interesting actually was to find - had we got the right boots, had we been issued with the right boots? Sometimes they were right, sometimes they were completely wrong. Had we been issued with the right sheath knife? The first year we had super sheath knives, the second year they gave us a sheath knife which was about as much use as that blooming table! When it came to sort of operating outside and using a knife to carry out your work, so... Sorry, what was the original question?

[Part 1 0:40:40] Lee: Whether the whole Antarctic experience lived up to you expectations?

Reid: Oh I see; oh I think so, yes. Yes I think it did by all means. Obviously life at our base without any sledging was a lot quieter than if you were at a base with dogs and sledging, as I discovered of course in the second year.

[Part 1 0:41:00] Lee: Well let's move on to your second year then shall we because - and I'll perhaps come back to Base G later on - but what I find interesting is, did you actually choose to go to Base F for the second year?

Reid: No, there was talk at one time of opening up another base, and I was told by Bunny Fuchs I suppose that I might be going to this other base as Base Leader. I forget which base it was but it wasn't opened up, so it was then decided - they usually used to try to move the blokes around from base to base - so it was then decided I suppose by somebody that I would go around to the Argentines.

[Part 1 0:41:37] Lee: And you had no choice, were you happy to go?

Reid: Oh, quite happy, oh yes. I mean I knew nothing about it at all, except what I'd read in Bingham's book, or not his book but the base leader's book on the activities of the British Graham Land Expedition, where they were forced to stay at the Argentine Islands for a year because they couldn't get the ship in. So, one knew a bit about it from that but yes, it was looked up on as... and I knew there were dogs there as well which again was going to be a point of interest.

[Part 1 0:42:13] Lee: Did you go straight from one to the other or did you go back to the Falklands in between?

Reid: At one time I went to the Falklands because I had something wrong with a tooth and on one of the excursions between the islands and the Falklands they took me back and took me to the local doctor - the local dentist in the Falklands and he pulled the tooth out.

[Part 1 0:42:36] Lee: So tell me about arriving at Argentine Island, was it very different from Admiralty?

Reid: Um, no, all bases are very similar really, you've obviously got to approach all of them by sea, so that means they've all got to be in the same position, they've all got to be accessible

from the beach. In this case the Argentine Islands is a much smaller bay⁴, I can't think what the name of the bay is but it's far smaller than where the ship went in to get to the base, but like most of them, having got ashore, you've then got a fifty yard run up the beach to get to the hut. So no, there's not a great deal of difference between any of them really. The size of the hut is different, the shape of the hut is different, but otherwise no, not a great deal of difference.

[Part 1 0:43:30] Lee: So the big difference was the activities. Were you still Metman officially?

Reid: I still went across as Metman, yes. There were four of us there so I went as Metman and I had the number two team and Jumbo Nicholl, who was stopping on as leader for the second year, he had the number one team, and so he and I used to do all the sledging and either just he and I together or - we did about five trips I think it was - or we'd have, on one trip all of us went out. But that wasn't a very good idea I don't think and eventually it finished up with just he and I would do the sledging and the other two blokes would stop behind in the hut.

[Part 1 0:44:10] Lee: I'll come to the sledging in just a moment but there's a lovely note here, somebody wrote a note on the Meteorological Instruments at Base F '49/'50 which may well have been you, and you talked about the Hydrogen Generator and the cylinders. You weren't able to do any balloon ascents; is this you again? "It was impossible to do any balloon Ascents during the course of the year, the only chemical held for the generator was Ferrosilicon and the protective caps for the hydrogen cylinders could never be removed. It is suggested that these caps be loosened before the cylinders are sent down south as once arriving with tight caps little can be done to them." Does that ring any bells with you?

Reid: That doesn't ring a bell but I can well imagine it took place, yes, and that presumably would have been written by me if it was concerning '49.

[Part 1 0:44:58] Lee: Well it was Base F in '49/'50, an inventory.

Reid: I don't remember it physically taking place like that but I can well imagine it never the less.

[Part 1 0:45:06] Lee: An inventory of all of the equipment including the anemometers and the height of them and so on.

⁴ The surviving building is Base F, Wordie House, located on Winter Island at the junction of Stella Creek, Skua Creek and Cornice Channel. Designated and maintained under the Antarctic Treaty System as Historic Site and Monument No. 62. The original intention was to re-use the old 1936 British Graham Land Expedition hut at the site as the basis for Base 'F', as it would make an ideal 'site hut' from which the base could grow. However, when FIDS arrived in early 1947, they found that the old BGLE hut had disappeared, having probably been wiped out by the 'super tsunami' of April 1946. The new base was constructed using building materials from the hut at Port Lockroy and material salvaged from the whaling station at Deception Island.

Reid: Yes, sure.

[Part 1 0:45:10] Lee: OK, so let's look at some of the sledging then. Tell me about your first big trip. Well first of all you had to train the...

Reid: No, the dogs were already trained. The Argentines was kept not as a main sledging base because an awful lot of work had been done up and down it by the British Graham Land Expedition, and FIDS, when they got there, they wanted to have different bases to explore different lands. The main two bases of course were Hope Bay, which was north of us, and Marguerite Bay which was at the bottom of the Graham Land Peninsula. They were the two main bases and we were kept really as a base to look after the dogs, maintain them, train them, and keep them ready for any other use that may arise.

[Part 1 0:46:04] Lee: And you had your own personal team...

Reid: Yep, I had had a team of seven dogs.

[Part 1 0:46:10] Lee: Led by who?

Reid: They were initially led by Rebecca, but I wasn't too happy with her actually, so I changed it to somebody else - what the devil's the other bloke, do you want me to get my book and look at it?

[Part 1 0:46:27] Lee: Was it Whitey?

Reid: No, no.

[Part 1 0:46:29] Lee: What was the problem with Rebecca? Because there's a lovely film of her.

Reid: Yes, I don't know, I can't remember at the time, I can't remember now I must admit but I was a bit unhappy with Rebecca. I can't think of the reason for it, no. But anyway I moved one of the other dogs up and she came back and she ran in the team.

[Part 1 0:46:55] Lee: How did you take to working with dogs because again I guess you'd had no training as such?

Reid: I'd nothing at all. Jumbo of course had had a year at it and he'd had to pick it all up as he went. No, it was very largely a case of, you get a feeling for animals which I had, and you also get a feeling for dogs and doing the work, and if you learn the routines, the routines always vary with individuals. The way you drive the team, the way you talk to the team, all the rest of it, they all vary between individuals but, no you very quickly pick up the routine.

[Part 1 0:47:37] Lee: So tell me about the first significant trip then.

Reid: The first trip we did was - again due to lack of experience or much experience - we just decided to go mid-winter because we decided that that would be the time when the ice would be at its thickest and we should have less chance of falling through it. So we loaded up the sledges, we had them outside the base hut and then up early the next day, well of course it

didn't get light until about ten o'clock in the morning I suppose and got dark at about three in the afternoon. In that case, we wanted to go somewhere down south, I can't quite think of the reason I must admit, but anyway in this case we were taking the loaded sledges down to dump them and make a depot. So we had two of us on each of the sledges and we just worked as best we could.

[Part 1 0:48:34] Lee: Was this to Garcia? Does that ring a bell?

Reid: Garcia was certainly one of the places, I can't remember on this occasion where we were going.

[Part 1 0:48:45] Lee: OK, and because it was midwinter it was actually quite hard work was it?

Reid: Yes, as I say, all our work was over sea ice, there was no land - well there was land when we got there because we'd climb up and do that, but we sledged over the sea ice, we camped on the sea ice and since it was our first trip we decided, as I've said, that possibly the ice was at its thickest at that stage and that's the best time to go. And we went, I don't know, fourteen or fifteen, sixteen days I suppose the first trip, again I could look it up in my diary but I can't tell you off-hand, but it was enough to keep us going anyway. And so, having arrived at our particular spot we picked an island no doubt, I can't remember which, and we left most of the stores there as a depot, so that in future we could go back down there without having to carry too much and have a depot of supplies left there ready for our future use.

[Part 1 0:49:42] Lee: Were the dogs amenable all the time or did they have a mind of their own?

Reid: No, they were remarkably friendly to the human, they aren't always friendly amongst themselves, but I have... I am now and always have been a cat lover. I don't have much to do with dogs here, that's the only big time in my life of dealing with dogs, and they were working dogs not pets. But, I think if you've got that sort of feeling for animals, be they dogs or anything else, I think it all fits in rather well. I liked them all but, as I said, they scrap between themselves given half a chance. And if you fed them wrongly, I mean when you're out sledging you've got the trace end that fits on the sledge and the other end we'd put a spike in the ground, so that gave you three pairs of dogs plus a single one at the end.

[Part 1 0:50:52] Lee: On spans....

Reid: Yes, on spans, and then of course you've got to do that, you've got to feed them by chucking the food as far out as you can so the mate on the other side can't get to the food. And as long as you did that it was OK but some of them were greedy enough they'd eat quickly and they'd try and pinch their mate's grub. But I suppose that's to be expected amongst animals of any sort isn't it. But otherwise no, they all worked very well.

[Part 1 0:51:17] Lee: When you were camping on sea ice, was that because you had no choice? Because it was later discovered - well later in FIDS history, camping on sea ice was really frowned upon, wasn't it?

Reid: Well, I suppose it might be from the point of view of the possible danger but, we never came across any problems at all. No, that's wrong, we came across a problem one time I can remember, and this was possibly our fault, we were cutting around the side of an iceberg and presumably - and I can't think who it was - one of the blokes sort of went in up to his waist in water. The team didn't luckily but he managed to hold on and he got pulled out but yes, alright in that particular case the iceberg presumably had been moving backwards and forwards, broken the ice and it then froze but nowhere near as solidly as the rest of the stuff was that we were working on.

[Part 1 0:52:16] Lee: I think travelling on sea ice was recognised all the way through as being the best way of travelling but the whole concept of camping and sleeping on sea ice, you didn't have any worries about that?

Reid: No, we didn't, no, no.

[Part 1 0:52:28] Lee: There's a note here about when the *Biscoe* arrived at Argentine Islands the first time. This would be February '49, no February '50 I guess. They'd actually got to the point where they were very low on food for the dogs at all and they were killing Skuas to feed the dogs. Does that ring any bells?

Reid: No that certainly wasn't us, that must have been, that could have been the beginning of '50. Could be, I mean, I don't know why because we had... one of our jobs of course when we had these fifteen dogs to look after, plus any pups that had arrived, we had to kill as many seals as we thought were required, and we used to kill them and leave them on a small island. Which of course didn't sort of cut it off when there was ice there, but when there was water there you'd got this little island and we used to have to take a boat out and get hold of a seal and tow it back again before we broke it up for the dogs, cut it up for the dogs. So we never had any problems but I can imagine that they might have done in '50. But I hadn't heard of that one, no.

[Part 1 0:53:37] Lee: So, you'd never kill the Skuas to feed to the dogs - I was trying to work out how it could be done.

Reid: I quite agree, I don't know how you'd do it, I mean I suppose you'd have to shoot it but then you can hardly feed a Skua full of shot, can you, to anything. I don't know how you'd do it actually. They're a very active bird, is the Skua. No, I don't know, I wouldn't like to do that at all.

[Part 1 0:54:10] Lee: You had your own team as you mentioned. How did that happen, because you had no experience of dogs, so was it just the case that you chose or volunteered to run your own team and the other chaps didn't?

Reid: Well as I said, Jumbo was there for his second year, he'd had one year and presumably he saw me as being possibly the best choice to run the second team. And he asked me I suppose, I can't remember, and he asked me if I wanted to, and obviously I said yes, so that was the way it was accepted, I was accepted as being the driver of the second team, yes. The teams, for what they're worth; he was number one, which was a long-legged team, generally

long-legged because they can get through the snow much more easily than the short dog, a short-legged dog, and I was the number 2 team with heavier-set and shorter-legged dogs. With a heavier load, so yes, my team had to pull more than his.

[Part 1 0:55:14] Lee: So there was tactics was there, the long-legged dogs blazed the trail and the short-legged dogs follow on, I've not come across that before.

Reid: That's the way we worked it anyway.

[Part 1 0:55:25] Lee: And there were some pups arrived as well at some point?

Reid: Yes we had, I can only think of two pups we had actually, they must have been Rebecca's pups I suppose, and we got into a terrible fix at one time, I don't know if it was Rebecca or not - we were out sledging and she gave birth to them. Luckily we were only about a day from home but...

[Part 1 0:55:54] Lee: This had been Whitey in fact?

Reid: Whitey was the other team actually, that wasn't my bitch I don't think, again I could look it up but I can't remember offhand. Whitey I think was Jumbo's bitch. It was my bitch, that must have been Rebecca, who had two pups when we were out sledging. We thought originally that we could get back to base before she did it but she beat us to it and had the pups, so we had to carry the pups on the sledge, wrapped up as best we could, and she was in the team and then we'd stop every hour or so and we'd take the pups out and give them to her and she'd feed them and we'd repeat again and we eventually got home like that. No problem at all.

[Part 1 0:56:38] Lee: There's a reference in one of the Base Reports where I think Whitey also gave birth and the person writing the report had to decide whether to knock the pups on the head there and then or to take them back.

Reid: Yes, alright I must be wrong then, that must be Whitey because I can remember us discussing this, yes. As to whether we should bother to take the pups or not.

[Part 1 0:56:59] Lee: What was the decision about really, why would there be a debate?

Reid: Because of the hassle that's involved in trying to run a dog and a team and also bring the pups along as well. But we decided we'd give it a go and it wasn't many days we were away from base so we did it and it worked out quite happily.

[Part 1 0:57:19] Lee: So were you fond of the pups when they arrived?

Reid: Oh yes they were lovely, yes. Beautiful things.

[Part 1 0:57:24] Lee: And they were given names, Danco... where are we... of course I can't find that immediate reference right now.

Reid: No I can't remember their names I'm afraid, no.

[Part 1 0:57:47] Lee: OK, I'm just picking through the reports here; there was an injury when you were out sledging, to Farmer.

Reid: Dennis Farmer?

[Part 1 0:58:02] Lee: He got dragged and hit his side against some ice and hurt his kidneys. You were running a team one morning with the dogs and the dogs bolted.

Reid: Yes, could be, I must admit I don't remember that. I think I remember Dennis being in bed, yes. And that's one of the occasions we'd had to rung up the doctor at Marguerite bay and had to ask his advice. But I must admit I'd forgotten how the occasion arose, that must have been it as you say.

[Part 1 0:58:37] Lee: Shall we take a break there Jack and come back and do some more shortly? Well done thank you.

Reid: Yes sure. You'd like a tea?

[Part 1 0:58:42] Lee: I'd love one thank you.

[Part 1 0:58:44] [End of Part One]

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Jack Reid, recorded at his home in Swards End, Saffron Walden in Essex by Chris Eldon Lee on 12th March 2010. Jack Reed, Part 2. What I thought I would do now Jack is, I've got some of the base reports from your period on my lap and I'll throw up one or two quotes and you can see how much of this you can remember. What I was talking about earlier was, this was all to do with Base F which is Argentine isn't it?

Reid: Yes.

[Part 2 0:00:31] Lee: You transferred there for your second year.

Reid: Beginning of '49, yes.

[Part 2 0:00:39] Lee: And the supply of dog food was very very low at that point according to the base report and you were reduced to killing penguins and also to killing Skuas to feed the dogs. But they were also concerned about human food as well. "Owing to the unusual early season, I, the Base Commander, was getting a little anxious about our food supply at the base. We had sufficient food to last another year but it only consisted of the bare essentials such as corned beef, biscuits and herring and a few other items such as sugar, butter, milk and flour would have lasted just two more months. So it was a great relief when the *Biscoe* finally arrived on the 25th of March and dropped anchor." Now, do you remember any tension about that?

Reid: No, I remember nothing at all about that actually. Whether about our food or the dogs' food.

[Part 2 0:01:32] Lee: It looks like you could have ended up doing another year, if the *Biscoe* hadn't arrived.

Reid: Well, yes, as I say the previous year they'd done another year at Marguerite bay, and this year, '49, there was every intention of getting the people out from Marguerite Bay, so we were the next base to Marguerite Bay so the *Biscoe* - I don't think anything else was involved - the *Biscoe* along with an aircraft flown by a Canadian pilot, they both operated from the Argentines.

[Part 2 0:02:13] Lee: Was this the Norseman aeroplane?

Reid: The Norseman, yes, and I can't think of the name of the chap, the Canadian pilot⁵, but both the ship and the Norseman were based at the Argentines and, I don't know how many times they tried to get to Marguerite Bay, I just can't remember actually but I know on the last trip I went down with them because I was then due to be transferred anyway. So, I went down on the *Biscoe* to Marguerite Bay, when we got the last of the blokes out.

[Part 2 0:02:50] Lee: So this was the so-called "Lost Eleven" wasn't it, including John Harcourt?

Reid: Yes, that's right.

[Part 2 0:02:54] Lee: So you were on the *Biscoe*?

Reid: I was on the *Biscoe* when we did the trip to bring the last blokes out, yes. We'd had some out by aircraft.

[Part 2 0:03:02] Lee: By the Norseman?

Reid: That's right. But the bulk of them, and of course all their records and everything else, the samples and what-have-yous had to be brought out on the *Biscoe* and we did that in the spring of '49.

[Part 2 0:03:14] Lee: Was it touch-and-go?

Reid: Sorry, I'm just reflecting a bit. It was '50 actually that we did that, not '49. Touch-and-go? The only real bad ice we found was Marguerite Bay which was absolutely solid, but we broke our way through it over the course of a day or so and got to the base quite easily. No, it was quite alright once you got away from the base. It was just drift ice generally but the base, certainly the bay at the base was absolutely solid but we broke through there anyway.

[Part 2 0:03:54] Lee: Do you remember seeing them being brought aboard from Stonington, the Lost Eleven?

Reid: From Marguerite Bay? Yes I do, oh yes, I went ashore and I no doubt gave hands to various people, bringing their baggage out or samples or anything else that was required, yes. We were there for a few days, loading up the *Biscoe*.

⁵ Peter Borden St. Louis

[Part 2 0:04:16] Lee: What condition were they in, physically and spiritually?

Reid: Well, some of them had spent an extra year there, that made three years total, no I can't remember any particular difference about them, no.

[Part 2 0:04:32] Lee: They took it in their stride did they?

Reid: I think so, yes.

[Part 2 0:04:36] Lee: One of the big jobs at the second base, Base F, was to extend the base, wasn't it? Argentine.

Reid: That's right.

[Part 2 0:04:43] Lee: Was this a carefully orchestrated scheme or was it a bit, make it up as you go along?

Reid: What we had to do - what we wanted to do was extend the radio cabin into something, I can't remember for the life of me what we wanted to extend it into. Because it was a very small hut, it was only about 14 or 15 feet square I suppose, and we did extend it but I can't for the life of me think why.

[Part 2 0:05:15] Lee: "The extension had to be built onto the hut, it was decided to build on the west side, furthest away from the engine room as the extension was to be used mainly for the new wireless room."

Reid: That's right, yes, for Dennis' wireless room, that was it. So, the extension I would have said was about 8 foot out from the hut and about 10 or 12 foot long. So we had timber come down which we built a framework and we put the bits we built onto it, yes. All four of us worked on it, so I don't know what it had taken us, a month or so I suppose.

[Part 2 0:05:56] Lee: So you had to put the foundations in first, didn't you?

Reid: Yes, we had to put foundations in, yes.

[Part 2 0:06:01] Lee: "By the end of April, work on the extension, the Nissen hut, the engine room and the general base work was completed, which enabled you to spend more time training the dogs."

Reid: Yes.

[Part 2 0:06:21] Lee: And then there was some talk about ringing birds as well. Was something you were involved in?

Reid: Well the only ringing I ever did as I said was with Bill Sladen when he came down on board the ship. Now whether that was the time when the ship came to us on its way to Marguerite Bay I really can't remember but certainly I did some with Bill Sladen, yes.

[Part 2 0:06:52] Lee: Do you know why you were doing it?

Reid: Just to keep a record of the Penguins in the area.

[Part 2 0:07:01] Lee: Was it fun, was it quite tricky?

Reid: It can be awkward at times trying to catch the things and hold them but putting the ring on is no problem. But yes, like any other job I suppose you get the good bits and the bad bits.

[Part 2 0:07:17] Lee: Did you get to know Bill Sladen?

Reid: Yes I got to know him quite well I thought, I liked Bill, yes, nice chap.

[Part 2 0:07:24] Lee: Tell me about him, what was good about him - what is good about him?

Reid: He was a relatively quiet bloke but I would have thought very organised, in fact the fact that he finished up at Hope Bay on his own must have really have brought that home to him in a big way, when the other three blokes died in the fire. No, he was just a very nice, controlled bloke. He hadn't got too much medical work to do, obviously people down there have to get outside their own professions and I feel certain it was Bill I was doing this with, it was one of his professions was to work on seals and birds and anything else that came his way as long as it was alive!

[Part 2 0:08:19] Lee: Here we are again quoting from the Base Report from Base F in the '49/'50 season. "The next trip we made was Reid and myself in September." This is September 1950 I guess - no, '49. "We went north with our teams to the Weddell Islands, open water was seen north and northeast of Hovgaard Island. The party sledged south to Petermann Island where a cairn and a plaque of Charcot was found." Do you remember that day?

Reid: Yes I do, very much.

[Part 2 0:08:55] Lee: What can you tell me about it?

Reid: The Islands were about 20 miles north of the Argentines I suppose and we hauled in there and there was a plaque which had been erected over a memorial site which had fallen down, it had broken. So we decided we wouldn't leave it there because it might get lost completely, so we put it on the sledge, we either put it on the sledge then or I suspect we left it and then picked it up on our return back to base. And then it came back to this country and then there was a bit of a kerfuffle arose, I can't quite think of the details now but we brought the plaque back with the request it be passed over to the French for them to renew it and reinstall it, or we'd reinstall it after they'd renewed it. And there was a bit of a kerfuffle came up about... somebody had pinched this thing and they didn't realise that we'd taken it away to preserve it. But, yes, it eventually went back onto the islands I gather, the next year I expect.

[Part 2 0:09:59] Lee: Was it in poor condition then?

Reid: Yes, it was, yes, it was a wooden one, with a metal plate on if I remember correctly, which had got in a bit of a bad state, yes. So, it was rebuilt, or renewed, and put back on the site the following year no doubt.

[Part 2 0:10:14] Lee: What was it like to be stepping onto the spot where Charcot had stepped himself half a century before you? Did you recognise it as being a romantic or a significant moment?

Reid: No, I don't think so, not in that particular case. I think that being a great fan of the British Graham Land Expedition I'd got very used to walking in their footsteps and appreciating all the work they'd done and I'm afraid that might as well have led me on to, to accepting Charcot and any other person who was down there in the same way as I accepted the BGLE.

[Part 2 0:11:04] Lee: So he wasn't a hero figure as far as you were concerned?

Reid: No, not particularly, no.

[Part 2 0:11:12] Lee: And you found two previously unmarked islands as well, according to here?

Reid: Yes, could be, I can't remember much about that.

[Part 2 0:11:21] Lee: "In the Penola Straits, two small uncharted islets were found under the ice cliff."

Reid: Yes, they were on the mainland, I can remember we went there actually; at one time we did have it in mind to climb the glacier on the western face of Graham Land, and get on top, but we decided it was quite out of the question and we couldn't do it. But yes, we did come across a couple of small uncharted islands.

[Part 2 0:11:48] Lee: In the reports I am reading, there's a comment from Miles Clifford at the end, it's almost like a school teacher marking the report, his handwriting and his scribbles are all over the place, all over this report, which isn't terribly well written, and Clifford says "This is a very ill-written report, and should have been checked before submission to me. This comes of leaving things until the last minute."

Reid: Ha Ha Ha!!

[Part 2 0:12:16] Lee: You are laughing, was that classic Miles Clifford behaviour?

Reid: No, I don't think it was classic Miles Clifford as an individual, but I can well imagine it would be a classic remark from a civil servant who suddenly was faced by that report, which of course explains itself away when he said it was written at the last moment. You have to leave things to the last moment under those conditions, you can't write that sort of report half-way through the year, you've got to wait almost to the ship is just about coming round the corner of the island next door to you before you write it you see.

[Part 2 0:12:50] Lee: So you can't write instalments as such?

Reid: Not really, no.

[Part 2 0:12:54] Lee: Well we won't embarrass the person by naming who it was who wrote it. In your film, Jack, I saw something I'd never seen before, or was not aware of, in the Antarctic, and that is keeping dogs in cages. That seems a very strange thing to do.

Reid: Yes, it was purely an experimental idea which FIDS came up with. Now, who that would be I don't know. That might well have been - wouldn't have been Fuchs because he was with us - but the chappie who ran FIDS from this end would have been Ken Butler. Now, it might have been Ken Butler's idea, I don't know, could well have been. But we had these cages, as you say, sent down. They were panels which were all about 6 or 8 feet high and about 10 foot square, and we made them up. We had four cages of that size if I remember correctly and the idea was that we would put the dogs - take the dogs off the spans and let them go into the cages either on their own or with a mate if they could put up with the mate. And we did it but it didn't seem to lead anywhere at all actually.

[Part 2 0:14:16] Lee: Was it more sociable to do that, do you think, for the dogs?

Reid: Well, I would have thought life was better for them because when they were on the span they were on a 6 foot wire from the main span so they naturally only moved 6 foot in any direction. That must have been restrictive I suppose although they'd done it most of their lives and they'd got used to it, whereas when they were let into the kennel they could either be on their own or with a mate, but of course the drawback to that, I would have thought, was possibly that having got used to living on a span, with a dog either side of you, you may have felt very lonely and on your own when you were put into a kennel - into a cage. So, I think possibly the answer was that it wasn't worth doing.

[Part 2 0:15:06] Lee: Well it didn't catch on, did it?

Reid: No, it was never continued, we were the only base to have them. It was an interesting thing but we didn't see any advantage for it at all actually - I don't think the dogs did.

[Part 2 0:15:25] Lee: There's another report here on your sledging reports, this is a depot laying journey in June 1949.

Reid: That was our midwinter's one then.

[Part 2 0:15:39] Lee: Yes, it would have been, yes. I can tell you it was June 26th, 27th, "The very low temperatures recorded of -51 degrees Fahrenheit, this is believed to be an all-time record for this part of Graham Land." Do you remember that night?

Reid: Oh yes, I do very much. We laid in the blooming bed and it really was cold, in the sleeping bag. And also it was somewhere about that time when I was unwell and I had to be left in there for the day when the others went back to pick up the sledges and bring them back up to base again.

[Part 2 0:16:16] Lee: Two days earlier, 25th June, "Reed was feeling very seedy at first with a slight case of Primus fumes, so he was left behind with Farmer whilst Tait and I went back to collect the depot."

Reid: Yes, that's right.

[Part 2 0:16:33] Lee: You felt much better in the evening. So what happened then?

Reid: Well, what I'd done, I'd made a mistake, when you get up and light the stove ready to start cooking breakfast and also to get it warmer so that you can get out of bed, I'd stood up too quickly and my head had gone into the peak of the tent which is full of smoke, and that's when I'd taken in a dose of smoke, and that's what had caught me out. I shouldn't have put my head up that high into the peak of the tent.

[Part 2 0:17:05] Lee: This is a bell tent?

Reid: No, a pyramid tent.

[Part 2 0:17:09] Lee: And that knocked you out for the best part of the day did it?

Reid: Yes, there must be other things which we get in a civilised world I'm certain, where you get affected by fumes or gas, yes that's right, which makes you feel completely unwell, possibly sick, and really unable to do much at all until you sleep it off.

[Part 2 0:17:35] Lee: Tell me about trying to sleep in temperatures of -51, I mean what can you do? 51 Fahrenheit we are talking about.

Reid: Well of course the bags we had were beautiful, there was nothing to my knowledge, or to my memory, there's nothing you can do extra than get into the bag and go to sleep, or try to go to sleep. All you've got is just a hole left like that you see, round your face, so there's no chance of cold air getting in, and, no, during the night it was no problem at all, you used to sleep quite happily under any temperature conditions. But it was during the day when, as I was ill or you may have been caught out by the weather and forced to stop in the tent during the day, that's when it seemed to be so hard. I'm not quite certain why it was actually, just that I suppose we weren't used to doing it during the day, we were awake during that period and possibly more conscious of the cold because of that.

[Part 2 0:18:54] Lee: So were you actually warm inside these?

Reid: Oh yes, lovely.

[Part 2 0:18:58] Lee: Oh you were? What were they made of?

Reid: I don't know what they were made of but they were beautiful bags, yes, I mean as you can imagine that at that time not everything was beautifully done, the bags were beautifully done, most of our clothing was ex-army, ha, no if you went to the highlands of Scotland or Norway with some of the clothing it would have been ideal but it wasn't much cop when you were down south. But, the bags, no they were beautifully done, they were bought from one of the big London stores, no doubt, that specialised in climbing and camping gear.

[Part 2 0:19:36] Lee: So you were actually warm at -51 degrees; and didn't your nose freeze or get frostbite if it was out, sticking out from the bag? Or was it actually quite warm in the tent as well?

Reid: No, it wasn't warm in the tent, no, because we'd turn the stove off, so within an hour, no within half an hour in fact, it was gone down to the same temperature outside. Yes, I think we used to get stuff on the outside of the sleeping bag but not much.

[Part 2 0:20:02] Lee: So in the daytime when you were sledging I guess it got a bit warmer than -51?

Reid: Yes, it did, it would come up to about 40 say, -40, but you are on the go the whole time, you don't really get much chance to get cold when you are out there.

[Part 2 0:20:20] Lee: You were so cold the radio batteries froze and you couldn't communicate.

Reid: That's right yes, we couldn't.

[Part 2 0:20:28] Lee: This particular trip though, it was regarded as a failure in the end because it was not completed. You did 8 days out from base with only 15 days of food supplies left so the decision was made to come back again. So you never made it to your destination which was to lay some depots.

Reid: That's right, yes.

[Part 2 0:20:54] Lee: Which must be frustrating I would have thought?

Reid: Well, yes it was, because the depots we were laying were for our future work and if you can't lay them, that's going to curtail your future work anyway. But, there's nothing much we could do about it under those conditions.

[Part 2 0:21:11] Lee: Was there a sense of failure or was it just an adventure anyway?

Reid: I don't think, no there was no sense of failure, there was a sense of not succeeding maybe, or of not getting as far as we'd wanted to or doing as well as we wanted to but, no, failure is a bit of a strong word actually to use.

[Part 2 0:21:35] Lee: There is another sledging report here which is later in the year when you went south, this is in November 1949. "The objective was to pick up and move the depot which was laid on the sea ice south of Lahille Island. To observe the ice to the south, to visit as many islands as possible collecting specimens of rock en route and to make observations on seals and birds. So we set out from base with Reid driving two teams... And, Clifford has written "That's very clever of him."

Reid: No that's not quite right, "I set out with Reid driving two teams." Nicholl you see drove the number 1 team and I drove the number 2. So, Nicholl, who wrote the report, should have said, "Reid and I" or "I set out with Reid." I didn't know that one actually.

[Part 2 0:22:31] Lee: "Some of the dog Pemmican boxes had leaked, so the contents had swollen and became useless." Then Clifford has written: "I presume he means that water had got into them. Why? Surely they were proofed." At one point you got down to... "There was a blinding snowstorm one morning, visibility was down to 20 yards." But nevertheless you carried on, working off a compass.

Reid: Well you work off a compass, yes. You can do it under those conditions because you haven't got things to avoid. OK, you can't also see things and you can't make a decision to go to a particular point because you can't see it, but at least you can get another few miles nearer to it, so that when the weather does clear you are that much nearer home, or nearer the base or whatever you want.

[Part 2 0:23:25] Lee: The implication in that report is that the dogs knew where to go, even if you couldn't see yourselves where to go. Or is that a romantic notion?

Reid: No, I don't think so. Mark you, the dogs wouldn't have known where to go because they hadn't been there before. But, nevertheless, once you've got them lined up and set on a course, they normally keep to it very accurately.

[Part 2 0:23:48] Lee: Right, they've got an inbuilt compass?

Reid: Something of that sort, yes. They don't twist and turn much at all, no.

[Part 2 0:23:55] Lee: Interesting. There's one or two things in your film which I quite enjoyed as well, and raised one or two questions that we haven't already discussed. There's a sequence of film about the brakes on the sledges, which I found unusual. There's rope brakes, is that right? The sledges seemed to have ropes underneath them.

Reid: Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, there were two brakes on sledges, on the normal one you've got a rod that sticks out at the back with a foot pedal on and a metal bar, and as you stand on it that acts as a brake. But that only does for slowing the sledge down. If you're going to come down a very steep slope, and you want to make certain that you can control the sledge and not have it run away from you, you turn the sledge on its side and you wire - you turn rope around each of the runners, so that when it goes, it doesn't run at all easily. So, it can't run away from you.

[Part 2 0:24:53] Lee: But that must hamper it going uphill.

Reid: Ah, when you've got to the bottom you've then got to put the sledge over on its side and take the ropes off again, and coil them up on the handlebars.

[Part 2 0:25:04] Lee: So it's rather like pinning down the brakes for a descent on a truck isn't it? And there's also some film of this greenhouse, where according to one of the reports you were growing tobacco, but you don't seem to remember that.

Reid: I knew we grew various things in the greenhouse, yes. It was a nice little greenhouse on the Southern - the Northern side of the hut yes, and we did grow various things in there but I can't think what.

[Part 2 0:25:32] Lee: OK, looking back at that period in your life now Jack, most FIDS I talk to seem to regard it as being one of the more significant periods of their life, is that the case for you?

Reid: I would go along with that, yes.

[Part 2 0:25:47] Lee: Just summarise why it was so significant, if you can.

Reid: I think because it is so different, I think because you were lucky enough to be accepted and put onto it, because you were doing something which you'd never done before and you had to learn as you went along, it was just a complete education in its own right actually.

[Part 2 0:26:27] Lee: When the time came to go, what were your feelings at that point, did you want to stay on longer or had you had enough?

Reid: Well of course the only way you can stay on longer is for another year, and I don't think I would have wanted to stay on for another year, I had had two wonderful years and I don't think I'd have wanted to stay on for another year. I'd have liked to have come back and then gone down again possibly, but that's a different kettle of fish altogether.

[Part 2 0:26:58] Lee: That never happened though.

Reid: It didn't happen, no. The nearest I got to going back was that when we came back we brought a team of dogs back, or a number of dogs, and it was suggested if I was available that I might do some dog driving at the *Festival of Britain* show.

[Part 2 0:27:21] Lee: In '51?

Reid: In '51 in London, but no, I wasn't available, I'd gone away after that so I didn't get the chance.

[Part 2 0:27:31] Lee: So you left the Antarctic, you went south to Stonington, that was your last...

Reid: Yes, we may have called in at other bases on the way north up to the Falklands but certainly Stonington was the last active working base we visited, yes.

[Part 2 0:27:47] Lee: And when the ship turned north for the last time, how did you feel about it? Were you glad to get out or were you very sad?

Reid: Oh no no no, I think that it's nice to come out because you're going back, you'll be seeing the family and you'll be seeing a world which you haven't seen for two years and which you've heard nothing about at all, I mean we had no television, we don't know what went on. No, it was going to be quite a nice surprise to go home. But, I'll go onto one more thing later on actually if I may; now, I'll do it now. Over the course of the last ten years I suppose, I've had various opportunities to go south I think but I've never taken them up because I was so impressed with the Antarctic I knew back at the end of the '40s and the way it has changed, largely because of climate change or any other reason but I am very glad that

I never did go down because I think I would have been terribly disappointed, and that would have brought home particularly to me - I've got a daughter in Australia and we used to go by aircraft or anything else, and I remember saying to the missus at one time, 'Let's go by train to Hong Kong, it will save a trip and it will be a nice trip anyway.' So she said 'Alright, fair enough.' So we organised a trip to Hong Kong, now I'd known Hong Kong at the end of the War because I'd gone into the Royal Observatory and taken it over from the Japanese and got it running again. And that was a wonderful place, it was like it was in the same class as Antarctica, it was a lovely, interesting place, that was all new, but when I went back in the early '90s I suppose, by train I was absolutely horrified by it, that it was just a modern, concrete jungle now, Hong Kong, not the beautiful place it was when I knew it, and that really brought home to me most forcibly that for Pete's sake never go south again because you might have the same experience as with Hong Kong. And I've got such wonderful memories of Antarctica that to have it spoilt by going back and finding nothing but rock or huts or blooming aircraft or roads or whatever they put there now, that would have been terrific. So, I've never done it and never would do it now.

[Part 2 0:30:20] Lee: OK, what did you do then when you got back to Blighty? First of all, had Britain changed in the two years you were away, because we were still only a handful of years after the War? So did you find Britain had moved on?

Reid: My parents had moved house, which made a bit of a difference. In the same village, the same small town actually as it is now, but still in the same area, very nice, and I came back and I must admit the first two things I tried to do was to join the - the first two things I tried to do - was to either join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Hudson's Bay Company, and I sort of got in touch with various Canadian authorities but nothing seemed to work for me. So, I gave that one up and I then had a mate who lived in the same village, who'd gone out to India tea planting, and he must have come back on leave I suppose because I saw him and had a chat and it sounded all rather nice so I got the address of his company, Duncan Brothers they were known as in Calcutta, always known locally as "Drunken Brothers" ha ha, so I wrote to them and yes, they gave me a job out there.

[Part 2 0:31:30] Lee: In India?

Reid: In India, on a tea garden, yes.

[Part 2 0:31:33] Lee: Did that become a career or was that just passing?

Reid: Well I had every hope that it would become a career, but I spent two years out there, by which time of course we'd had the Indians take back the country, rightly or wrongly, and things had changed a lot, and I couldn't see a working life for me there. So, I decided I'd pack that in and I'd come back home and I'd go to Africa, which seemed to me to offer a working life, in Kenya or any of the other tea-growing countries. But I came back here and of course found to my horror that there'd been an awful lot of nationalistic revolt out there of one sort or another and I didn't see that that would give me a working life anyway so, no, I didn't do that either.

[Part 2 0:32:19] Lee: So what direction did your career take?

Reid: Well in that case it went on to farming.

[Part 2 0:32:24] Lee: Here?

Reid: In this country, yes. Or Sussex as it happens. And I spent about another seven or eight years farming I suppose in one place and finished up in managing a farm in Winchester, or just outside Winchester, and then again that changed a bit, the farm was taken over by a manager who had taken over - by an owner actually who was a bit of an awkward bloke to work for, so I decided that maybe I couldn't put up with that for too much longer, so I then left that and I joined a corn merchants firm.

[Part 2 0:33:09] Lee: Did you ever find any use for skills you gained in the Antarctic, either practical skills or just the experience of growing up?

Reid: Yes, I feel certain that one meets enough and does enough in the Antarctic that it must really influence your life afterwards to a certain extent.

[Part 2 0:33:34] Lee: It changes you does it?

Reid: I think it does, yes, I think it does.

[Part 2 0:33:38] Lee: How did it change you?

Reid: I think that would be a terrible question to answer but I think that it is so different down there that I feel certain that you learn different skills and different attitudes that must affect you later on, but I can't list them I'm sorry.

[Part 2 0:33:57] Lee: You say you haven't been back, but when you hear the word "Antarctic" on the news or on the TV or the radio, do your ears prick up still? Is it still in your blood?

Reid: It's still in my blood from the point of view, more likely from sound than from vision because to me, and I haven't particularly seen my own sights 40 years later, but the other sights I see where I can imagine what they looked like in my days, they are totally different nowadays, I mean the snow has gone, they've got rocks everywhere, so no, I really don't want to see it. It would upset my memories too much.

[Part 2 0:34:41] Lee: Well I hope I haven't upset you Jack.

Reid: No, no not at all.

[Part 2 0:34:46] Lee: Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Reid: Thank you, that was very interesting.

[Part 2 0:34:51] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible Extracts:

- Antarctic job interview, books to read when sledging. [Part 1 0:06:56]
- Voyage to Antarctica on original (wooden) *RRS John Biscoe*. [Part 1 0:13:17]
- Amateur filming with 16mm camera, subjects including base relief. [Part 1 0:17:18]
- Building Admiralty Bay Hut, Base G. [Part 1 0:20:56]
- Death of Eric Platt from a suspected heart attack while on a Penguin Egg collecting trip. [Part 1 0:22:55]
- Second year move to Argentine Islands (Wordie House, Base F). [Part 1 0:42:36]
- Unable to do any balloon ascents due to hydrogen problems. [Part 1 0:44:10]
- Building new wireless room at Argentine Islands. (Wordie House, Base F). [Part 2 0:04:36]
- Sledging with and living with dogs. [Part 1 0:45:10]
- Account of feeding skuas to dogs when short of seal meat. [Part 1 0:52:28]
- Dog gives birth when travelling; debate over whether to kill the pups. [Part 1 0:56:38]
- Rescuing the “Lost Eleven” after an enforced extra winter at Marguerite Bay. [Part 2 0:01:32]
- Ringing Penguins with Bill Sladen. [Part 2 0:06:21]
- Controversy over removal of a French memorial plaque from Petermann Island for renovation. [Part 2 0:08:19]
- Base report criticised by Miles Clifford. [Part 2 0:11:48]
- Tent life – cold conditions and an episode of Primus fume poisoning. [Part 2 0:15:25]
- Discussion of film of rope brakes on sledges. [Part 2 0:23:55]
- Reflection on changes in Antarctica due to development and climate change, and comparison with development of Hong Kong. [Part 2 0:27:47]