

BRIAN HUNT

Edited transcript of a recording of Brian Hunt at the BAS Club reunion in Cardiff by Chris Eldon Lee on the 12th June 2010, BAS archives AD6/24/1/78. Transcribed by Stuart Lawrence 30th April 2014. Monday, April 07, 2014

[00.00.09] Chris: Brian Hunt.

[00.00.10] Brian: My name is Brian Hunt and I was born in Dartford in Kent in July 1930.

[00.00.20] Chris: So you are nearly?

[00.00.22] Brian: In about two week's time or three week's time I will be just passing the big 80.

[00.00.29] Chris: You don't look it.

[00.00.30] Brian: Sometimes I feel it. No I don't think we do feel it actually, me and my wife, no.

[00.00.37] Chris: Which means that your time in the Antarctic was quite early on, in the early 1950s?

[00.00.42] Brian: I went down in October 1950 on the Old *John Biscoe* as a FID, but, then FIDS at that time also operated Port Stanley Meteorological Office, so I did the first year in Port Stanley and then went down to Hope Bay.

[00.01.02] Chris: What was your call, first brush or connection with the Antarctic, did you read about it or what?

[00.01.05] Brian: Well yes I always read about it, but I hadn't really thought that I would want to go to the Antarctic, but, the opportunity arose. After I had done my National Service I was in the Meteorological Office and so I applied and got the job.

[00.01.25] Chris: Why did you apply if you hadn't got a lifelong hankering to go down South, why did you apply?

[00.01.30] Brian: Well I think we were the sort of outdoor types. I was an outdoor type, I wasn't a climber, but, I was a walker, cyclist and wanted a sort of outdoor life really, rather than be cooped up in an office somewhere. In fact my father wanted me to go into the bank, and so this is why I joined the Meteorological Office somewhat earlier than expected. I got a choice between the Meteorological Office and the Ordnance Survey, both sort of outside jobs, which were the sort of jobs that I wanted.

[00.02.00] Chris: So you applied to FIDS. I presume you had some sort of an interview?

[00.02.05] Brian: I had an interview yes.

[00.02.06] Chris: Do you recall the interview?

[00.02.08] Brian: I do yes. I think it was at the Crown Agents then wasn't it. I am not sure I think that Vivian Fuchs was one of the interviewers. Anyway mine was for the Port Stanley job it wasn't for the Antarctic; it wasn't for a Base job at that time.

[00.02.25] Chris: Would you say that it was a rigorous interview?

[00.02.27] Brian: I would think so yes. I mean they really wanted to concentrate on whether you would be able get on with another dozen people, I would think. That was the main object of the interview I am sure. I was already a trained Meteorological Observer so that would cover me for the job that I was down there to do, so the interview was all for things on the side like your character and that sort of thing.

[00.03.03] Chris: So they were looking beyond Stanley do you think?

[00.03.04] Brian: Well I raised at the interview that I would like to go South, rather than Stanley, and I think at the interview it was explained that this job is Stanley, but that it might be possible to go South later on. This is what happened in the end.

[00.03.23] Chris: Tell me about Stanley in 1950, what was it like as a place to live, first of all?

[00.03.26] Brian: Well I was working up at the Meteorological Office, which was up on the top of the hill. That was, as I say, a FIDS job and the Boss there was Gordon Howkins, he was an ex Antarctic chap from *Tabarin*, he was a Navy Officer, a Navy Forecaster. There was a *radio sonde* station there as well, that was actually operated by the United Kingdom Meteorological Office with a couple of local employees. It was a very nice office, it was a very interesting job, because, as I think I said from some notes before, we were then forecasting for the whaling fleet which was still going strong. So it was forecasting for the whaling fleet. We also broadcast all the weather reports from the Bases worldwide.

[00.04.26] Chris: By Morse I presume?

[00.04.27] Brian: Yes, that was through the Radio Station. We had a small radio station which was linked through to the Government Radio Station in Stanley which was only just across the field really.

[00.04.37] Chris: Was that the British whaling fleet you were talking about there?

[00.04.39] Brian: Yes it was the Salvesen's with the *Southern Harvester* and big ships like that. Because, when I eventually went down to South Georgia the whaling stations were still going at Grytviken and Stromness and across the other side of the hill. We went

over to the whaling station, terrible stench, but, once again, it was all very interesting. In Stanley it wasn't just the Meteorological job that was interesting, I mean I was there for over a year and then after I came back from the Base I went back to work there for a while. I did a lot of walking and learnt to ride, so I visited all the Camp, as it is called in Stanley. I made friends with several of the shepherds who lived out in the little houses and in fact made lifelong friends because I used to go out to a place called Port Harriet. They taught me to ride, Crook and Nellie Middleton, they would send a horse into Stanley for me, or I would walk out, and I would go gathering with them. In the end I was called from the estancias around, who had got to know me from the walking, advising they were gathering the sheep, or the cattle, the next week and so will you come out? We will send a couple of horses into Stanley for you. So it was a marvelous life. I say these lifelong friends, they were from Port Harriet. Everybody in the Falkland Islands who emigrated had to pass through the United Kingdom and I think they used to get a boat from Tilbury. Well my parents lived just over the River from Tilbury, so they became the Falkland Island 'transit hotel'. Three families on their way to Australia and New Zealand actually stayed with my parents while I was still down in the Falklands or on the Base. Those, as I say, are the lifelong friends because when we visited Australia we met them out there. There was another Antarctic connection there, because, Crook Middleton, John Middleton, from Port Harriet, when he went out there to work worked for John Rymill of the *Penola* Expedition at *Penola* Farm in Australia, and that is where my Sister went when she decided to emigrate with her family to Australia, the whole thing sort of went full circle. John and Nellie Middleton looked after and sponsored them when they arrived in Australia.

[00.07.30] Chris: So give me the full thumb nail sketch of Stanley in 1950 when you first arrived? Was it a sophisticated sort of place?

[00.07.37] Brian: Not really. The weekly dances, I think, were always attended. I used to join in with all things like the fishing; I used to go out with a local fisherman. I used to go peat cutting, and I used to help out, where I was in digs with the Clarke family, he worked for the Falkland Island Company on the docks there, but, he also had a peat business, peat cutting and peat delivering, so I used to help out, once again there. So I learnt to cut peat as well.

[0008.24] Chris: You seemed to get to know quite a few shepherds in the Falklands?

[00.08.25] Brian: Oh I did. I used to walk right out to Goose Green. Port Harriet was fairly close, only about 15 miles, and Bluff Cove of Sir Galahad fame. I used to go out to the Bluff Cove House, and if I was walking along the hill range from Stanley, when I was passing Bluff Cove they would be very annoyed if I didn't visit. They would then call the next farm along the walk and say I have just seen a chap walking out your way. It was all these little wind up telephones, you know, 3 rings for Bluff Cove and 5 rings for Port Harriet and they would say there is a walker heading your way so make sure he calls in. I used to stay overnight at all the shepherd's houses. I really enjoyed it.

[00.09.22] Chris: We are jumping around, but, you went back a few years ago, did you go to Stanley at that point as well?

[00.09.27] Brian: Well a few years ago, I was still with the Meteorological Office, where there is a thing called the Mobile Meteorological Unit; so if there is a spot of trouble anywhere like the Falkland's War or Iraq, you just put your uniform on and go. Hence I did about 4 tours up at the old airfield at Stanley just at the very end of the war and through into 1983/1984.

[00.09.56] Chris: What were the sort of changes you noticed?

[00.09.57] Brian: Oh, masses of changes. There was a lot of refrigeration, television/videos. During my time there the satellite phone came in, which made a terrific difference. Instead of just a monthly mail run, or something, it was phone call home to the UK with no problems at all. The actual standard of living had gone up a lot. They hadn't got the big fishing revenue which they have got now, by gosh now, now it's even greater. But, in those early days it was a simple life. You went out and dug your peat or you went and got some meat from a farmer; or you went shooting and shot a few geese. Out in the Camp, with John and Nellie Middleton, out at Port Harriet, we would go out and there it was the case of killing a bullock say for some meat and the rest would go to the chickens. There was no way of keeping anything, and because, the Falkland Island Company, who had the store in Stanley, didn't want any meat to come into Stanley to be dished out amongst the local people. I used to bring in for evening meal food from Port Harriet and such like when I was walking, but all that has changed. Far more boats now come in. When I was there it was still the tail end of the war, so, the conditions for us were pretty poor. We lived out on the Alcantara in the harbour. It was a big ship the Alcantara and we were transported into Stanley in landing craft each morning, where we did 24 hour shifts. Sometimes you would have to wade ashore if the tide was wrong. So you would start your 24 hour shift soaking wet. This was up at the old airfield. I think that then it was possibly the most stressful forecasting period that I have ever done.

[00.12.28] Chris: Why was that? Can you elaborate on that?

[00.12.29] Brian: Well yes I can. The information we were working on was very sparse, and we had to pick up our own satellite images from the orbiting satellites coming over Stanley and the Antarctic.

[00.12.45] Chris: So you are talking now about the 1980s?

[00.12.46] Brian: Yes. This is the 80s. I mean we had none of that in the 1950s, this is the 80s. There would be things like the aircraft forecasting. We were still officially, I think, at war although there was no real military activity. If the aircraft was coming from Ascension Island, the *Hercules*, it had to be refueled halfway. It would have been very embarrassing if it had had to divert into Argentina for any reason whatsoever and you had to make a decision with the Wing Commander flying at that point of no return as to whether to bring the *Hercules* on to Stanley. We might have been in thick fog at the time,

and the question was as to whether it was going to clear in time for them to land because if they couldn't land they were stuck. It was the same with the Fighters. If they got a warning that there were aircraft approaching and we had to scramble the *Phantoms*. *Harriers* were alright, they had *Harriers* as well. I mean they could come down vertically and come over the airfield and land anywhere. But for the other aircraft that was also very stressful. We had to launch the Fighters which had only got a limited range and limited time and we had to launch them, whatever the weather, to go and possibly intercept, and then we had to get them back. So, they would launch a *Hercules* Tanker and then it would be a case of are we going to be able to get both the tanker and the Fighters back. Hence, it was very stressful and one or two of our people felt it.

[00.14.34] Chris: Did you volunteer to go back after the Falkland's Conflict or were you sent?

[00.14.40] Brian: Well I was in the Mobile Meteorological Unit.

[00.14.43] Chris: So you had no choice?

[00.14.45] Brian: Yes.

[00.14.46] Chris: The liaison between the Meteorological Office then, who had the information and the Fighter Command, or whatever it was that was giving the planes their instructions, was that a close knit liaison, or was it difficult?

[00.15.00] Brian: Oh yes. I mean you were up at the airfield, it was just the old airfield, with the Wing Commander in charge in just the next building, so he would come into the office, or, would be standing out there looking at the sky and he would then have to make the decision based on what you told him.

[00.15.22] Chris: You knew that your information was critical didn't you?

[00.15.26] Brian: Oh it was critical, yes.

[00.15.29] Chris: So you knew you were kind of making the decisions?

[00.15.29] Brian: It wasn't only the safety of the aircraft, it was also that you would have been a very unpopular fellow if you had got the aircraft to turn round and go back to Ascension Island when there were 50 people in the Falklands, who had finished their tour, and wanted to get on that *Hercules* and go home on leave.

[00.15.50] Chris: So were you under pressure at times too, well was your judgment under pressure from time to time?

[00.15.55] Brian: Yes, and as I say, it was the most stressful period of forecasting that I have ever done, because, you were working on very limited information as well.

[00.16.10] Chris: Was that overt pressure or just pressure you imagined would be there where you to, whereas we had been told things to do, or, where you fearful that if you made the wrong decision you would get pressure afterwards?

[00.16.22] Brian: Well no. I think you knew the situation, you knew what would happen if you were wrong. So I think the pressure was always there.

[00.16.37] Chris: It was very real was it?

[00.16.38] Brian: Yes. As I say in forty years of work I would say that was the most stressful period back in the Falklands.

[00.16.50] Chris: Do you remember how you coped with the stress, where you having trouble sleeping or what?

[00.16.53] Brian: No I was perfectly alright. No I think that after being down on the Base helped I came back and re-joined the Meteorological Office. Actually I worked for FIDS for a while in the UK because Doctor Pepper was writing a book on the weather of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies. So I went to Harrow, once again on secondment from the Meteorological Office, to work with him writing this book. Then I went back to my ordinary job in the Meteorological Office and could have possibly stayed at one airfield or one office for the rest of my life. But, I think that, because of the life in Stanley and the life on the Base, I wanted something different. So that is why I did all these other things.

[00.17.53] Chris: So let's go back again. That was fascinating thank you so much for talking about that, but, let's go back to the early 1950s again when you where in Stanley for one year and then, did you apply to go South at the end of one year, or what?

[00.18.04] Brian: No I think it just happened really, but, they knew I wanted to go South and they were opening a new base at Hope Bay. When I say a new base the previous one had been burnt out two years before. Therefore, I suppose, they knew that they wanted a Senior Met Man to go down there and set the place up. So we built a hut up on the hill and lived in a temporary hut while that was being built. Then, of course, there was the little incident with the Argentineans, which is possibly off the record?

[00.18.48] Chris: Other people have talked about it.

[00.18.50] Brian: Yes.

[00.18.50] Chris: So do you want to tell me?

[00.18.53] Brian: Well probably. Possibly the only other chap you would have spoken to would have been Alan Coley would it; he was one of the people at Hope Bay?

[00.19.00] Chris: I have not spoken to him, but, other people have told me.

[00.19.03] Brian: Well we arrived at Hope Bay and it was quite a shock to see that the Argentines had already built a hut. I mean nobody knew this. They had already built a hut and their supply ship was in the harbour, was in the Bay, there was no harbour then. Bill Johnston asked why he was anchored so far out, saying that, he could get in much closer to anchor. Bill Johnston was Captain of the *John Biscoe*. He came straight in and ran us aground for two days. Then we started unloading the stores and it was a case of everything into the scow because there was no way you could get ashore at that time. There was a small icefoot at our landing point, so we brought the scow in alongside the icefoot and started unloading stores up the ice cliff, getting them ready for sledging farther up as we were going to build the base hut at the top of the hill. Then the Argentine people came over with an Argentine Naval Officer, I should imagine.

[00.20.17] Chris: From the Argentine Base or from the ship?

[00.20.18] Brian: From their Base. With these chaps all in white suits, armed, and I suppose they handed over the usual *Protest Note*. Frank Elliott was the chap in charge of us at the time. This carried on for some time and they must have said if you do not leave we will open fire, which they did. Of course at that time we didn't leave. We couldn't leave the stores there. In the end it was decided that we had got to go back on board the *Biscoe* and wait for the Navy to come. We couldn't afford to loose any stores at all, so those stores had to go back on the *Biscoe* again.

[00.21.14] Chris: So just go back a bit and paint a little picture of this scenario from your mind's eye? When the firing started where were the opposing forces so to speak, where you on the beach?

[00.21.23] Brian: We were just up above the icefoot on the beach. I mean they were obviously firing above our heads. It was either that or they were very poor shots. (Laughter) But, no they had a *Bren gun* position right on the two graves. There are two graves of the two chaps who were lost in the fire, and they had actually set a *Bren gun* up on the graves, which was only about 100/150 yards away, probably, from us. Then we eventually took all the stuff back to the *Biscoe* and waited for the Navy to come.

[00.22.03] Chris: When they opened fire what did your Base Leader do?

[00.22.08] Brian: I think he had decided that it was time for us to go.

[00.22.11] Chris: Did he tell the Argentineans that you were going to go?

[00.22.12] Brian: Well I don't know that he actually spoke to them; no, I don't think that there was all that much contact. They said, afterwards, that it was all a mistake and that the Argentine Officer was exceeding his brief, as it where.

[00.22.32] Chris: At that time it was all a case of gesture, really, and it was obvious what you had to do. So you did start loading everything back onto the *Biscoe*?

[00.22.39] Brian: Well we had to because we just couldn't afford to lose anything, because, I think that they had said if you do not, you have got to take all of your stores back otherwise they would probably have destroyed them. I remember this *Ciment Fondu*, it's in drums, quite heavy drums, small drums, which we had hoiked all the way up the ice cliff and then we had to hoik it all the way back down again to take back to the *Biscoe*. I had already handled all that stuff once in Port Stanley, because it was from the old *Fennia*, the stores ship, to load on to the *Biscoe*.

[00.23.18] Chris: What were your feelings at the time? Do you remember what your predominant feeling was?

[00.23.23] Brian: Well I think the feeling was that it will be sorted out in the end, we were a bit disappointed at the time that we couldn't get ahead and start building the hut because time was a big factor there and we had got to get the hut built before winter.

[0023.41] Chris: So when the "Cavalry" arrived what shape and form did it take?

[00.23.45] Brian: It was the Frigate, one of the Bay Class Frigates, the *Burghead Bay*, which arrived with the Governor on board. At that time I think there was still the Argentine Transport Ship in the harbour with one big gun. The Navy people afterwards said that they were a little bit apprehensive because one shot from that gun and, I mean, the Bay Class Frigates are not built for work in the ice, they have only got a thin skin, in fact so thin that while they were anchored in the Bay there was a bit of a "Hooley" blew up and they had to have sailors with long poles all around pushing the bergy bits away in case they actually pierced the hull. Certainly they were not an ice breaking vessel.

[00.24.43] Chris: So opening fire was a bit of a risky strategy?

[00.24.25] Brian: Well they couldn't do anything, I mean they couldn't do anything with the Argentine ship unless they had started it first, and one shot from them would probably have fixed the *Burghead Bay*. Anyway it was a good thing that the Navy came in because all the matelotes came ashore and helped us haul all the stores back up to the top of the hill.

[00.25.14] Chris: The Argies retired to their huts?

[00.25.15] Brian: They retired to their hut. Later they had another couple of visits from other ships, but, that was after we had built our hut. There was no further contact with those people, I would say, for about three months. I mean there was their hut, a few hundred yards away, and we had built ours, and yet there was no contact, this was silly really. Until we were desperately short of seals for the dogs, the dogs were starving, at that time, but that was another completely different story. But, we had to go and dispatch a seal which was right on their front door step and they invited us in. They explained that they were not the people who had shot at us and that they had all gone home now. Expressing the wish that as we've all got to live here for the next year let's be friends. So

from then onwards there was a fortnightly dinner party alternating between the two huts. They were just there as occupation, they weren't doing any scientific work.

[0026.32] Chris: Was the dinner party competitive, did you feel obliged by the need to trump the last fortnight's meal on the other Base?

[00.26.37] Brian: No I don't think so. They had much better supplies of food than we had. And they had a whole roof full of spirits and wine and such like. Not our usual two bottles rationed or whatever. As to the business of the shortage of stores and food for the dogs it was desperate. Because, once we got all the stores ashore, we lived in this small hut, 20 x 10, twelve of us, so that was six bunks each side, no three and three and three and three and a small paraffin cooker and we lived in there for between two and three months, I would say, while we were building the main hut. However, there was one amusing story and that was, if you can imagine two or three months without a bath, I think we were all smelling a little bit. Jock, Murdo Tait, one of the Base people, built a bath. He cut an oil drum down lengthways, riveted the two pieces together and built a bath and set it up in the new hut. So you, obviously, had a bath every twelve days, if there were twelve of you in the hut. You actually lit the little stove to heat the water which was down the other end of the hut when it was your turn for the bath. Well Jock Tait, set up a big ceremonial for first in the bath and he heated his water, got all stripped off, and, of course, the water is far too hot and he can't get in. So he asked if I could you get him some snow, you see, to cool it down a bit. I think in the end we came in with great big ice blocks, and he finished up in this bath with bergy bits floating around in it. That was the first ceremonial bath and he also finished up much dirtier, because, he had painted the inside of the bath and the hot water had lifted the paint and it had all stuck to him. That was Murdo Tait, he had the honour, because he had built it; he had the honour of the first bath!

[00.29.08] Chris: Was that bath, because it was only every twelve days, something that you really looked forward to?

[00.29.12] Brian: Oh yes.

[00.29.12] Chris: And washing clothes was that also done in the bath?

[00.29.14] Brian: I think it was washing clothes as well. I think it was a case of well you have had your bath and you should now wash your clothes at the same time because you have got the old ration of hot water there, you see. So you used the odd occasion with the bath water to wash the clothes. I think the following year they actually got a washing machine down. George Marsh got me to order, through the Falkland Island Company, a washing machine.

[00.29.44] Chris: You have missed out a little bit about before you went to Hope Bay; there was a possibility at one time of you joining the Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Where you actually invited?

[00.29.56] Brian: Oh yes this is when I came back from Stanley, I came back in 1953 and then there was this Coronation Review of the Fleet which *John Biscoe* took part in.

[00.30.00] Chris: Do you want to talk about that first, as it's chronological?

[00.30.09] Brian: Oh could do yes. Well we came back on the Old *John Biscoe* and during the course of the trip we were all measured up for uniforms. Those measurements were radioed to the UK, because, the *Biscoe* was going to take part in the 1953, I think it was, Review of the Fleet at Spithead. So we got back to Southampton, went and picked up our uniforms, went home for a couple of days and then had to report back to the *Biscoe* to go out to Spithead. We lined the decks and then, of course, they took the uniforms back off us.

[00.30.57] Chris: Was that a habit that you went to?

[00.30.57] Brian: No, no it was a one off. It was the Coronation Review of the Fleet.

[00.31.03] Chris: So this would have been the famous commentary, have you heard about this, where the commentator got drunk?

[00.31.17] Brian: Oh yes, yes whether it was that one or whether his was George VI's, he may have been earlier than our one for Queen Elizabeth; it may have been the 1937 Fleet Review.

[00.31.21] Chris: Sorry we are darting about a bit but it doesn't matter too much.

[0031.25] Brian: Sorry. You were saying; when I came back I was stationed at; I did this job with Doctor Pepper and then went back to the Meteorological Office where I was at a place called Bovington in Hertfordshire, and it was whilst I was there that I got a phone call from Vivian Fuchs, and he said, "with a couple of months notice could you get packed up and go and join the Trans-Antarctic Expedition?" It was once again one of those big decisions you had got to make. However, they had already got the weather man; the Met Man was Hanislav Rawlish, a South African. Now he would be the Met Man for the Crossing and Vivian Fuchs was ringing me up to go down with the Advance Party with Ken Blaiklock and others to set up an air base and there wouldn't be any guarantee that we would get on the Crossing at all. But, if you did, it would be a case of two and a half, three years away at least, and I had only been married three months before, so I don't think that there was, you know really, too big a decision to make. But then David Stratton who was with me on the Base got on the phone, and George Marsh came on the phone to try and change my mind, as they both went on the Trans-Antarctic and David Stratton was Deputy Leader with Fuchs. David said well you must, you must come, but I couldn't, married for three months, possibly going away for another three years. I had already passed my Aircrew tests at Hornchurch and I was due to go into the RAF in another three months time, so I had a back up for my decision.

[0033.29] Chris: I know your dealings with the Trans-Antarctic were limited, but, did you get the sense of it being a fairly professional set up, or, was it like FIDS at that time a bit of bungling around issues?

[0033.43] Brian: I read the book about the setting up, you know the first year when they lived in a crate and lost a lot of their stuff. Ken Blaiklock, I spoke to, he was in charge there, and I read this book, whether you can believe everything that is in it, you know, but I am probably glad that I was not there for that year, because there were lots of personality clashes and they were let down pretty badly, I think, by the people back home.

[00.34.19] Chris: Did you meet Fuchs?

[00.34.19] Brian: Oh yes, yes.

[00.34.22] Chris: Once, more than once?

[00.34.22] Brian: Yes, yes.

[00.34.24] Chris: What did you make of him?

[00.34.25] Brian: Ooh I would think he was; I mean he had got to get his own way all the time certainly. I think this came through with the planning of the Trans-Antarctic and the setting up of the original base, where it was set up and everything. Things just didn't work out very well. I mean the Crossing was alright in the end, but I think that first year with Ken Blaiklock would have been pretty hairy. I mean they lived in a packing crate, a SnoCat packing crate.

[0035.12] Chris: Let's go back to Hope Bay then, we had this exchange with the Argentineans and you were talking about there being a lack of food for the dogs and lack of other resources. Was there a strange, rather odd, explanation as to why the base came to be so poorly supplied, or the supplies were poor I should say?

[0035.32] Brian: Yes, it was. Now this was the fault of the Sec FIDS at the time.

[0035.32] Chris: Johnny Green?

[00.35.36] Brian: Well there was Johnny Green and there was Frank Elliott. You always had two years supplies when you went in, in case you couldn't be relieved for the second year. We had two years supplies minus what was on this piece of paper, a plan, a little plan, which had been drawn up and which said that: 'from when the old Base was burnt down and was evacuated there was "X" tons of anthracite, there were 50 seals, there were two boats, there were "X" tons of this and that and there was all this food, left there, so that was all deducted from our new two years supplies, because it was already there. However, it was under about 20 feet of 'blue' ice. We were chipping out to actually get at some of those supplies; but, we still worked on our two years worth of new supplies. I

was in charge of the food and I had to issue the cook, the weekly cook, with his rations for the week, so I just divided what we had got by two years, and so that was the ration. But, we did get other stuff out of the hut eventually, out of the old store hut. We fed the dogs on tins of herrings in tomato sauce and things. We eventually found some stock fish, dried fish, which we were feeding the dogs on. We were also feeding the dogs on meat and vegetables, canned meat and vegetables, which were army rations, because in those days a lot of FIDS clothing and supplies were ex wartime stuff. So, therefore, we were very short. We didn't have the boats, so we couldn't get any seals that drew up on the beaches other than the ones that were right on the closest beach. So we had to get every available seal as the dogs were literally starving. People were jeopardizing the whole of the next year's surveying and all the sledging trips as the dogs were no good. So, it was George Marsh, Ken Blaiklock, and David Stratton and, I think, Bob Stonely that man-hauled, they fitted themselves up as per Scott and man-hauled over to Duse Bay. Once there they killed as many seal as they could find in Duse Bay, and then man-hauled them round the Bay; because at that time the Bay was completely ice covered. Duse Bay was called the bay of a thousand icebergs. They stock-piled them most of them there, but brought back, man-hauled, a certain amount of seal to Hope Bay. From which stocks they fed up two teams of dogs and got them fit and then we went over with those two teams of dogs to ferry all the seals back to feed the rest of the dogs. The dogs were using all our medical supplies, George was looking after the dogs and trying to save them. It was a rough time really, purely and simply because you couldn't get at the buried stuff. David Stratton eventually got the boats a year or eighteen months later, because they had quite a melt the next year, just after I came out, and the boats were uncovered. But, we were picking out pieces of anthracite with ice axes, you know, one piece at a time out of the ice. Then, of course, when we were down ten, fifteen feet or more, which we had excavated to get at the stores the first blizzard filled the whole lot up again. So it was quite a time and I am afraid Sec FIDS name was mud for a while.

[00.40.01] Chris: Morale poor?

[00.40.03] Brian: Oh no, no, no. No I would say the morale on the Base was good. We had got so much work to do; I think this was one of the other things that helped. We were setting up a completely new Base, building the hut and getting the dogs trained, teaching them how to sledge. Ken Blaiklock was the only sort of trained man there and I had got my Meteorological work to do. There was no, as far as I know, there was no friction on the Base.

[00.40.41] Chris: How many where there of you?

[00.41.43] Brian: Well there were twelve of us, because it was a sledging Base. But, the twelve were not there all the time, obviously. There was one; I mean I can say it now as I don't think the chap would mind. Once again this possibly reflects on organization for FIDS; we had twelve people. I had two other Met Men with me; Alan Coley was one of them and Brian Campbell the other. We had to take the Met observations in turns, obviously, keeping the twenty four hour reporting system going. If people were going out sledging then we would be reduced in numbers. However, we also had Murdo Tait, who

came on to the Base and wasn't due to be on the Met staff. He came from another Base and joined us and stayed for the year, so he joined in with the Met work roster. At the end of the year, when I came out, I discovered that one other Base Member was in fact down there to do the Met work, but, he never let on! He said he was down there to do something else.

[00.42.12] Chris: Ok we will leave that one hanging.

[00.42.15] Brian: We will leave that one hanging, but, there was one person on the Base who should have been taking his turn in the Met observations roster and who didn't.

[00.42.22] Chris: And the Base Leader hadn't known?

[00.42.22] Brian: The Base Leader didn't know. I didn't know until I got back into Stanley afterwards, after the year, but, there we are. During my first year in Stanley, of course, I learnt to radio operate to a certain extent, but, I wasn't very good on plain language, but certainly could send and receive figures and suchlike; receiving weather forecasts I was OK. So on the Base we had Peter King, who is still around, he is in New Zealand or somewhere, I think, he was our Wireless Operator. However, as such there was no way that he could get out sledging unless somebody else could take over the communications. Well I had my Morse key and everything set up next to his so I did some of the operating with him. We had to get permission from Stanly for him to go sledging and for me to take over the radio operating just for a couple of weeks and so I did that. Pete, I have seen in things that he has written since that he felt that if it wasn't for myself he would never have got sledging and that he would have really have regretted. However the day he came back from the sledge trip he took my key out of the Radio Room and said that's it, I won't be able to go sledging anymore, this is my Radio Room and that was it.

[00.44.03] Chris: How did you take to sledging?

[00.44.05] Brian: I only did this hauling over to Duse Bay and a bit South to Eagle Island and that was good. I was also interested in the differences in the weather once I was off Base. I mean Hope Bay had so many local effects that really I think in the end they dispensed with it as a weather station because it was so unrepresentative.

[00.43.33] Chris: Was there an inkling of that when you were doing your Meteorological Observations, that the readings you were getting were atypical for the Antarctic?

[00.44.42] Brian: Oh yes because you could see the local effects. I mean the Argentine Hut, as I say, was about three hundred yards away and would be perhaps having a wind of about 80 knots and we would be in flat calm. You could see the line across the Bay where the wind which came down from the glacier, and which was the 'fornicator' as we called it, as opposed to the 'fohnicator' after the fohn wind effect that you get in the Alps, where you get the wind which flows over the Alps and you get a warm wind. So Hope

Bay got not only the coldest temperatures but also the hottest temperatures in the Antarctic at that time.

[00.45.28] Chris: I have heard of the 'fornicator', but I have never heard of the 'fohnicator'?

[00.45.32] Brian: The 'fohnicator' yes, well that is the fohn wind. The wind had only to go round from, say, south to west and then it came across the Peninsula, descended on our side of the Peninsula and as air descends it warms and therefore that is why we used to get temperatures over the 50 degrees Fahrenheit, if you got the 'fohnicator'. If you got the other one it was minus twenty something.

[00.46.04] Chris: So it came as no surprise that Hope Bay was closed down then?

[00.46.05] Brian: I don't know if it was closed down because of the Met observations, I don't think it was closed down because it was no longer representative of the climate. I should imagine that it was closed down because all the sledging and everything from there had been completed and done. Because, Ken Blaiklock went back there and he did stuff on the Outlying Islands as well as on Seymour Island and suchlike.

[00.46.33] Chris: Now I got a bit confused a little earlier. You went back to Hope Bay in 2003, is that right, on the Larsen Expedition?

[00.46.39] Brian: The northern shore of the Larsen Ice Shelf.

[00.46.43] Chris: It was a Centenary of the Veterans Expedition, for want of a better phrase?

[00.46.44] Brian: My wife went with me, so she saw where all the letters went, once or twice a year. We weren't married then but she wrote the whole time.

[00.46.56] Chris: Quite a few FIDS who have done that have been shocked by what they saw when they went back?

[00.47.00] Brian: It was a shock. I mean Hope Bay of course is a little Argentine Settlement now and they have got a school families and everything. But the old hut, that we went up to, is still up there and everything was there. Where we used to have to sledge over the hill to get to Duse Bay or start any sledging trip you had to go up over the highest slope and then when you came back you always had to let the dogs off at the top, otherwise, they would hurtle off down the ice slope; that is just now bare rock. Where we hauled all the stores up to build our hut, we now see that that is a deep valley. We had about 15 foot ice cliff which we had to get the stores up and now there is no ice on the beach at all. When I spoke to somebody at the Antarctic Club Dinner the other day, who goes down regularly as a lecturer, I asked how was the snow and ice situation at Hope Bay now and he just said there isn't any. It wasn't disappointing because it was good to go back to the old hut and have a look round and for Joyce to have a look as well.

[00.48.27] Chris: What did she think?

[00.48.28] Brian: Well, she really enjoyed the trip because it was to re-visit all the places associated with Larsen and Nordenskjold, because they had lost their ships just the same as Shackleton did, but you don't hear about that, well you probably do in Norway and Sweden, but you don't here. They lost their ship and the people were stranded ashore and had to be rescued the following year. But they built a little stone hut at Hope Bay and they built another little stone hut at Paulet Island and they had already built their main hut at Snow Hill Island. So anybody who had been at those places, Hope Bay or had been down through Snow Hill Island or had been down to the Larsen Ice Shelf was invited to go on the trip if they wanted. That is how we actually came to be on that trip.

[00.49.26] Chris: So you saw, I guess you came to the conclusion that this was a side effect of climate change of some form or another?

[00.49.32] Brian: Well whether its climate change or whether it is a natural cycle that is happening.

[00.49.46] Chris: How doe you feel about climate change now?

[00.49.47] Brian: I think that it is climate change now.

[00.49.48] Chris: Induced by man?

[00.49.48] Brian: Yes and Ozone Hole or whatever it is as well. I mean such a fantastic difference as has taken place at Hope Bay, when you consider how much ice has had to melt.

[00.50.07] Chris: Of course my next point was that the climate change work that was done 25 years ago, or was published 25 years ago would not have been possible without the readings you were taking, 25 years before that?

[0050.22] Brian: Well possibly not. It is also is all the work with ice cores and things as well, with which you're talking then in terms of years, hundreds of years, which would reveal the long term patterns, and we may be getting part of one of those patterns now. No, but that was really disappointing, it meant that I couldn't really point out to Joyce, apart from the photographs that we had got, what it was really like all those years ago. The hut was still the same, virtually the same; the old cooker was still there. The rooms; I mean we were lucky, when we went into Hope Bay on this trip we had good weather and the Argentine chappie went an unlocked the hut for us, because it had been used by the Chileans, I think, but there was nobody there when we actually visited. The winds, going back to some of the winds we got. I don't know if you know, but, we had no recording anemometer, we had to just watch the anemometer dials as it where, and because we were expecting such strong winds we had two dials and they recorded at half speed, when you hit the switch. They only generate a current, they are measuring a current and then

converting it to a wind speed and so if you then put the current through the two dials instead you got half the wind speed and I have got a photograph at home which shows the two dials with the needle just over 40 knots which means that, because it was a time exposure, it means that the mean speed was 80 knots. Then you were getting the gusts on top, so it was often when you got a real 'fornicator' going the chaps would all come into the Radio/Met room to look at the wind speeds and once all of a sudden one day there was this gust, you know really strong, and we looked at the dials and they were both on zero! I had lost the anemometer tower, it had blown over! We then spent time sorting through the wreckage of that 40 foot tower, so that out of the wreckage we managed to build a 30 foot mast, 30 foot tower, from the angle iron and suchlike. Then we had to re-mount the anemometer. Of course it was winter, so we were out there day and night for about a week with hammers and chisels and bonfires to make the supports and to stop the freezing of course as well with the *Ciment Fondu*, to build the new mast, which we did. We had to then apply corrections to the wind speed because it was a lower mast than the 40 foot one. Later I was very pleased to learn that the following year after they had come down with a brand new mast to install, this was after I had left, and they installed the brand new 40 foot mast to replace the original one, but still left my botched up 30 foot mast there and during the course of the next winter the brand new 40 foot mast was blown down again and my little 30 foot mast was still standing and they had to use that as the back-up!

[0054.28] Chris: I am trying to paint a picture of Hope Bay at that time, well the hut was, as you say, quite a small hut wasn't it?

[00.54.41] Brian: No. The first hut was 20 x 10 foot.

[00.54.43] Chris: The one you built was quite a bigger hut was it?

[00.54.43] Brian: Yes oh yes that was quite a big hut. It had a sledging workshop and generator room and everything, and one big room; it's in Fuchs book, *Of Ice and Men*, where there is a plan of the hut. There were our bunks around the room.

[00.55.00] Chris: Was there any escape for privacy?

[00.55.04] Brian: (hesitates). No not unless you went off and had a wander somewhere.

[00.55.08] Chris: What like outside?

[00.55.09] Brian: Yes. There was no real privacy in the hut. I mean you slept all round the room; the twelve of us had the twelve bunks around the main room. I would say, once again, that we all got on very well together, so it was all ok.

[00.55.38] Chris: I am interested in this period that you spent in the Pacific, which I guess, was that before or after the Falklands?

[00.55.47] Brian: No, as I said, when I got this thing about the Trans-Antarctic, I had already passed my aircrew, and I think that it all harps back to Stanley, doing all sorts of jobs in Stanley and then in doing all sorts of jobs on the Base. A lot of them now I couldn't do; I mean I couldn't splice a wire rope now, which I learnt to do there, I am sure I couldn't do it now. But all those things made me want to do different jobs in the Meteorological Office rather than being stuck in one job for the rest of my life. So therefore I went on this flying job which was based in Northern Ireland and it was a weather spotting in that we did all the Atlantic weather flights. We were Air Met Observers so we joined the RAF for two and a half years and I finished up doing six, because I became Met Leader when I instructed new people coming in. I did other jobs. We had a *Canberra* to extend our vertical range of soundings, so I did most of my flying in the *Canberra*. I was at Christmas Island for the four Hydrogen Bomb tests.

[00.57.12] Chris: Well tell me this about that because, were you there on purpose or was it just serendipity that you were there?

[00.57.16] Brian: No it was that we had to do all the weather flights there and though our squadron from Aldergrove didn't go out there, there were *Shackleton* squadrons allocated for each set of bomb tests. So I was then attached to a *Shackleton* Squadron, actually it still was a Northern Ireland squadron, but based over at Ballykelly, where we trained the crews there to do the weather flights. Then we went out in these adapted *Shackletons*, through the United States, and out to Christmas Island, where we did all the weather flights for the Christmas Island tests.

[00.57.53] Chris: So you were doing the weather flights prior to the tests?

[0057.56] Brian: Prior to the bombs.

[00.57.58] Chris: I suppose that was so you knew the place to make it safer for the bombs?

[00.57.59] Brian: Well there were four bomb tests, so we were doing this all the time really, and we were also acting as Search and Rescue capability and everything as well.

[00.58.09] Chris: How close did you get?

[0058.10] Brian: Too close I reckon. You hoped that the scientists knew what they were doing. I think the fact that they were out there testing them meant that perhaps they had got to test them to see that they knew what they were going to do. When you look back you think how stupid you were. You swam in the sea at a point that was less than twelve miles away from the Test site. Therefore, you were swimming in the water at Christmas Island; you were showering using salt water soap with the water straight from the sea; you were eating fish straight from the sea. When you went out; nearly all the time, you see, I was flying, so whenever a bomb was dropped all the aircraft would go and take off; so we would all be flying and pointing away from the bomb site, because of eyesight protection. They took the children; there were some local children, native children, and

they took all those out to a naval ship and put them down below because they couldn't be trusted to look away from the blast. For one bomb test I was actually on the beach. When the aircraft took off, if you weren't flying, you went into a landing craft in case a plane had a problem. So you all went into this landing craft ready to scoot out to sea for rescue purposes. You then came back and sat on the beach; we had had to take our winter greatcoats to Christmas Island, which was one of the things we were told before we started; we had to take our heavy blue RAF greatcoat, to protect us against the heat. So there we all are sitting on the beach facing away from this thing, you see, and you had the countdown, the bomb has now left the aircraft, or, the device has left the aircraft and then you got the countdown to the explosion. You had also got your gloves on; you had got several handkerchiefs wrapped together over your eyes; you had got your greatcoat on with the collars up and everything, and then you got this terrific flash right the way through this eye mask followed by the heat on your back through the greatcoat. Then after a certain time you were told you can now turn round and look at the cloud; then, of course, you got to see the nice looking mushroom cloud etcetera. Probably some of that might have to be crossed out, but it isn't; everybody knows now.

[01.01.12] Chris: Absolutely, I mean a lot of people have actually become very ill or died.

[01.01.20] Brian: I am afraid most people, well no not most people. I consider myself very lucky. Any mention of Christmas Island or the Falklands when I was down with the Mobile Meteorological Unit, because I was a Squadron Leader then, has been deleted from my RAF Records. I do a lot of family history research and I do one day a week for a family history firm. I was providing their customers with all their forces history as part of the job, perhaps, if they said their uncle or great granddad had been in the army, I would get his Service Records. One day I thought, well, I haven't even got my own Records, so I wrote to Gloucester, Innsworth, to get my RAF Records. Which I eventually received, but you could see where they had put a piece of paper over the Overseas Service. I have therefore got no record. So, I got in touch with them and they said we have no record of you having any Overseas Service whatsoever! This is in case you were thinking of claiming for subsequent illness or something. Because successive Governments have denied that there was ever any Service Personnel involved.

[01.02.39] Chris: Where you ill at all?

[01.02.40] Brian: No, not as far as I know.

[01.02.47] Chris: And here you are nearly eighty and looking very healthy.

[01.02.50] Brian: No, but I think we had to be very careful. If you did get any signs or anything you would have to be doubly sure. My doctor knows about it, but, when I went to join the Mobile Meteorological Unit the RAF Doctor would not do my blood test, to get my blood type on my chain, he wouldn't do the blood test because of the Christmas Island thing. He said no, no you will have to get a civilian doctor to do that. The RAF would not want to give me a blood test, which was quite revealing.

[01.03.40] Chris: At the time of these tests you clearly had no choice about where you were, you were military personnel so you had to sit there and take it. Was there any sense amongst you and your colleagues about rebellion?

[01.03.53] Brian: No. No we were doing our job and most of the time, as I say, I was flying. But you hear stories afterwards. I mean, I was down in the Falklands and there was an RAF Navigator, who had become an Air Traffic Controller, and he sometimes used to give us a lift out to the airfield. Well it transpired that he had been out at Christmas Island at the same time as me on *Shackletons* as a Navigator. His was a different squadron, I mean; their squadron was going out as ours was coming in and vice versa. Of his crew of about ten, and this was in 1983, and so we were then only about twenty one years after the bomb tests, there were only two left. Now those were young fit aircrew. I mean that was the RAF, that was just one other job, you see, which you wouldn't normally do in the Meteorological Office.

[01.05.12] Chris: How do you rate your time in the Antarctic, because, most FIDS, that I come across, seem to regard it as being the most remarkable part of their lives, does it rate with you?

[01.05.19] Brian: I don't know about it being the most remarkable part, but it certainly would rate very, very highly and it probably led me to do these other things like the aircrew. I then became a glider pilot; I specialized in the forecasting for gliding. Once again this was another little sideline job rather than the normal Met work. I then went on and was the forecaster for the British Gliding Team at the two World Championships in Poland and when we had it in the UK. So I worked with the British Gliding Team. Then I went up on the trawlers each winter. We had lost a couple of trawlers through icing, they just capsized and lost their crews. Such that from that time onwards whenever the British Trawler Fleet was operating in Icelandic Waters they would have to have a support vessel with them, with a weather forecaster, a doctor and a radar mechanic, to service the fleet. We had a hospital on board, I think. I went up there each winter. We were slung out of Iceland, because of the Cod War. We then went over to Greenland the next winter, but, it was too hazardous fishing off East Greenland, and then up into the Arctic, Bear Island and Spitzbergen for my last year. So Joyce and I have been up to Spitzbergen, as well, just to see that part of the world.

[01.07.12] Chris: Ok, one last question. Was there ever any time in your FIDS service that you feared for your life? Any time with FIDS or in the Falklands?

[01.07.22] Brian: I don't think feared for my life, but...

{01.07.31] Chris: Near misses then?

[01.07.32] Brian: No. But near misses from being pretty badly injured. We had a rope from the corner of the hut out to the weather screens because you had to clamber out there sometimes on the rope if it was really bad and I think once I went out and I got blown away and I was just going faster and faster, I was airborne, and in the end the only

way I could stop myself was to try and throw myself down. So I was hospitalized for a few days after that with George tending to me. No I don't think there was any time we risked life. I mean, when we were sledging there were obviously dangers, but I don't think you really thought about them, I don't think Health and Safety Regulations came in at all. No I don't think with FIDS, but, there were times in the RAF when we were flying over the Atlantic and we were at low level and you have got a couple of engines on fire, it's perhaps a bit dodgy then, but I never had to ditch. I never had to use a parachute.

[01.09.00] Chris: Well I am glad to hear it. It has been great fun thank you very much indeed.

Possible highlights

- 00.03.26 Stanley Meteorological Office in the 1950s.
- 00.04.39 Falkland Island life in the 1950s.
- 00.09.27 Falkland Island life in the early 1980s.
- 00.12.46. Weather forecasting immediately post the Falkland Crisis.
- 00.18.04. Re-opening of Hope bay in 1952.
- 00.29.56. FIDS at the 1953 Coronation Fleet Review.
- 00.31.25. Setting up of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition.
- 00.35.32. Deprivations during the 1952/53 year at Hope Bay.
- 00.41.43. FIDS Base organisation in the 1950s.
- 00.44.05. Climate anomalies at Hope Bay.
- 00.46.35. Returning FIDS views on climate change.
- 00.50.24. Hope Bay anemometer tower.
- 00.54.28. Life at Hope Bay in the 1950s.
- 00.55.47. An ex FIDS life as a RAF Met Observer.
- 01.05.19. Life after FIDS.