

JULIAN BRETT

Julian [Jules] Brett interviewed at his home at Kingswood, Surrey, by Felicity Aston on the 6th July, 2010. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/83. Transcribed by Allan Wearden on the 29th December, 2016. A minor addition was transcribed by Kevin Roberts on the 14th of October 2022. From part 1 55:20 to the end of part 1 no additional timings are included due to a recording discrepancy.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Aston: This is Felicity Aston interviewing Jules Brett in Kingswood, Surrey, on the 6th of July, 2010.

Brett: Yes, my full name is Julian Brett always known as Jules, born 16th of May, 1936.

[Part 1 0:00:21] Aston: Thank you! So what was your first job out of school, what did you do there?

Brett: National Service in the army and I served as a squaddie in the Parachute Regiment.

[Part1 0:00:33] Aston: Right. So, when did you start flying?

Brett: Standing orders came round that the army was going to start up the Army Air Corps again, and I immediately volunteered and my troop Sergeant Major, who was a former glider pilot, informed me that the army would never get any decent aeroplanes, and if I wanted to fly a decent aeroplane I better join the Royal Air Force! This was interspersed with numerous expletives!!

[Part 1 0:01:10] Aston: So did you enjoy National Service, I mean was that a success for you?

Brett: Yes, it did lead me to join the Royal Air Force once I'd finished my 2 years.

[Part 1 0:01:21] Aston: And was it very different in the Royal Air Force?

Brett: The food was about 300% better and I was lucky enough to go to Canada to do my flight training, which was very practical, and once the snow had snowed and was cleared, the weather throughout the Canadian winter was good for flying, clear skies and very easy to navigate.

[Part 1 0:01:50] Aston: So what planes did you train on?

Brett: I trained on the Harvard T6-Texan and then on the T33 which was the 2 seat version of the F80 Shooting Star.

[Part 1 0:02:06] Aston: And did you take to flying immediately, was it something that, were you a natural flyer or was it difficult for you?

Brett: My Canadian instructor might have something to say on that! But I thoroughly enjoyed it and the whole exercise only took 14 months and returning to England my contemporaries, who had stayed in England to be trained, were only half way through!

[Part 1 0:02:34] Aston: Wow! So what made your training so quick, was it a good place to train or were you very good!?

Brett: Well, all our course, all that lasted, the course did it in 14 months, the efficiency of the Canadian Air Force, good weather, excellent maintenance of aeroplanes and we ended up with 300 hours and our contemporaries in England had probably only a 120 or 130 in the same time!

[Part 1 0:03:10] Aston: So once you'd finished your training what happened to you then?

Brett: Ah, then I went on a conversion course to Canberras, to Canberras out in Cyprus for two and a half years and then went on the Vulcans, volunteered for the Antarctic Survey and was the reserve for that year, somebody dropped out and off I went!

[Part 1 0:03:36] Aston: So how old were you when you started flying?

Brett: I was 21.

[Part 1 0:03:43] Aston: And what did your friends and family think about your chosen career, were they supportive, were you from an Army or RAF family?

Brett: My father served in both wars in the artillery and my grandfather had also served during the Boer War and First War, but none of them was regulars.

[Part 1 0:04:05] Aston: So what about the flying aspect was there a history there or was this something you fancied doing?

Brett: No, in fact my father never flew in his entire life and my mother eventually flew after some years after I became a pilot!

[Part 1 0:04:26] Aston: Right, did you fly her?

Brett: I did yes, many years later on a 747 from Bahrain to Hong Kong.

[Part 1 0:04:40] Aston: And what made you want to fly, what was that attracted you to being a pilot?

Brett: It didn't take me too long to work out as a squaddie in the army, that jumping out of serviceable aeroplanes involved a very long march, with a heavy pack, usually with an ex-World War 2 sergeant shouting at you! And meanwhile the aircrew were back in the coffee shop enjoying themselves!

[Part 1 0:05:06] Aston: Brilliant! So how did you first become aware of the British Antarctic Survey, where did that first come from?

Brett: Well that was regular thing, every year the Royal Air Force supplied 2 and sometimes engineers as well, although the Army Air Corps also sometimes supplied engineers. And I'd applied previously and on this occasion I was the reserve.

[Part 1 0:05:16] Aston: Right. So did you know anybody that had applied or worked for BAS, or FIDS as it was then, before?

Brett: No.

[Part 1 0:05:26] Aston: Right. So, what attracted you to that particular job?

Brett: Well I did know a little bit about the survey ships, because I'd come from the Isle of Wight and they got a regular feature in our local paper, because they sailed out of Southampton in those days.

[Part 1 0:05:42] Aston: OK, so you were aware of Antarctica, and what was your sort of impressions?

Brett: Well one of my school friends a little bit older than me, Mr Hoskins, became quite a well known glaciologist amongst other things and I think did either one or two spells. Unfortunately he was killed in a car accident two years ago!

[Part 1 0:06:07] Aston: So what was your impression of Antarctica in that time, what were you expecting?

Brett: I'd read a great deal and I'd already travelled a fair bit, and it was definitely, it had been an ambition to go on one of the less mundane squadron duties!

[Part 1 0:06:36] Aston: And so were you interviewed for the job, is that how it came about or was it just an application?

Brett: Yes, I applied and was interviewed and told I would be the reserve for that year, and was then asked to go - somebody had dropped out for some reason.

[Part 1 0:06:53] Aston: Do you remember what that interview was like, was it who interviewed you from FIDS or was it the RAF?

Brett: No, that was a joint FIDS and I think there might have been one RAF on the panel, I don't remember it as being particularly arduous!

[Part 1 0:07:11] Aston: And what kind of training did you get, what kind of preparation for going south?

Brett: Reg Drown who was the other pilot selected and myself went to Canada and we did a short course with de Havilland of Canada, mostly on a float plane because they didn't have a wheel plane available. And we then went to RCF Peterborough where they had an Otter and we did about a week of short take off and landing practice at Peterborough.

[Part 1 0:07:51] Aston: Do you think the fact you trained in Canada with de Havilland planes, perhaps worked in your favour when you were applying for the position?

Brett: I think the fact that I'd flown tail-wheel aeroplanes and pistons, whereas although this was in 1960's and I had trained in 1956, by 1964 most of the younger pilots had only ever flown jets!

[Part 1 0:08:22] Aston: Right, so what happened then, you were given your training in Canada and how long was it then before you were sailing south?

Brett: Oh, we returned to England and two weeks later we sailed on the *Biscoe* for Montevideo and Stanley.

[Part 1 0:08:36] Aston: So you flew south with the other air unit pilot?

Brett: Ah, so we went on the *John Biscoe*!

[Part 1 0:08:42] Aston: Sorry! You sailed south with the other pilots, so what did you think when you met them because that was going to be your team for the winter, who were the others in your team and what did you think of them?

Brett: Well I hadn't met, the other pilot Reg Drown I had met in Canada when we did this training, and certainly Brian McDermott was already in the Antarctic he was going to do a second winter. And Hugh Field I think went on a different ship.

[Part 1 0:09:26] Aston: OK, so you hadn't met him in the UK [Brett: No.] so tell me about Reg Drown.

Brett: Well he was in his early 50's and unfortunately he strained his back severely whilst unloading the *John Biscoe* and had to return!

[Part 1 0:09:50] Aston: So was he a more experienced pilot than you?

Brett: Yes, although he'd had a desk job for quite a long time. And he'd of course had flown piston engine and tail-wheel aeroplanes.

[Part 1 0:10:08] Aston: Right, and what kind of reputation did the air unit have at that time, was it known for being a dangerous flying job or was it known as a soft position for a while, or what was its reputation?

Brett: Well, I think it was just a very interesting job to do it certainly wasn't a soft option! Squadron pilots in peacetime have a fairly relaxed job, well certainly in my day they did!

[Part 1 0:10:42] Aston: And how did you feel about going south, were you excited, were you nervous, was this just a big adventure or was this a step on the career ladder for you, what were your thoughts?

Brett: Oh I don't think it was a step on the career ladder, in fact my squadron commander on Vulcans had said 'This is not a good move for your career'! But at the age of 28 does one listen!? No!

[Part 1 0:11:07] Aston: Why was that, why was this not going to be a good move?

Brett: Oh, you had to continue if flying in the V Force this was considered to be the top job, certainly in heavy aeroplanes, and you then had to do your promotion exams and carry on up the career ladder! So going to the Antarctic for 2 years flying a fairly ancient piston engine tail dragger and not doing one's promotion exams was not a good career move!

[Part 1 0:11:44] Aston: So was it the adventure of it that made you do it?

Brett: Oh yes, it was certainly and I knew probably the Air Marshall's baton was not in my particular knapsack!

[Part 1 0:12:01] Aston: And what about your friends and family, what did they think about you taking this position in the Antarctic, were you married by then or were you single?

Brett: No!

[Part 1 0:12:07] Aston: Right, so what did your family think of you going off for 2 years?

Brett: Oh, my father was very interested. My father had travelled far and wide in his younger days, Cocos Islands among others, Mocambique, Lokitaung railway so he was actually in Nairobi before the railway reached Nairobi! So he could understand my desire to see other parts of the world, my mother probably was a bit concerned that her only child would be out of reach for some time!

[Part 1 0:12:52] Aston: And so you sailed south, so when did you leave UK?

Brett: We left it must have been late September early October '64 and arrived 3 weeks later in Montevideo and a week after that in Port Stanley.

[Part 1 0:13:12] Aston: And what was that sail south like?

Brett: Lovely weather, got to know other people on the Survey, and what other people were doing, getting friendly with one or two crew members on the ship, and a very good evening or two in Montevideo! And extremely hard work unloading the ship when we got to Port Stanley!

[Part 1 0:13:38] Aston: Right, so this was your first real introduction to FIDS, [Brett: Yes], and was that what you expected or was it more fun than you thought it was going to be, how was that?

Brett: It was more or less what I expected.

[Part 1 0:13:57] Aston: And so this was the first time you had met Field who was going to be your fitter, [Brett: Yes], while down south, so can you tell me about Hugh Field and what you thought of him?

Brett: Well he was a very nice chap, an older man married, children and very pleasant, extremely good engineer.

[Part 1 0:14:19] Aston: Right, gosh! And so he was leaving his wife and children, was that normal amongst the guys that were sailing south or were most of them young single?

Brett: No mostly young single, but we did meet the two of the outgoing engineers who were also in their early 50's, one an ex-Japanese POW. There is a photograph somewhere entitled 'Cream of Britain's youth', which is a bunch of the air party all in their 50's!

[Part 1 0:15:11] Aston: [Laughing!] Bet they were delighted! To be labelled so in their 50's! And so you mention the two outgoing, so that would have been Mills and Skinner?

Brett: Ah, those were the two outgoing pilots, we didn't meet those till we eventually ended up at Adelaide.

[Part 1 0:15:29] Aston: Right, so, sorry, who were the two that you met on the way out?

Brett: Those were the two outgoing engineers or one of them certainly and I can't remember their names.

[Part 1 0:15:42] Aston: Barrett and Leigh, no Barrett and McDermott?

Brett: No, McDermott was with me. [Aston: Oh, right!] Yes, Barrett I think was the outgoing one, yes and I think it was Barrett had been the POW.

[Part 1 0:15:56] Aston: So Drown at that time was the senior pilot [Brett: Yeah.] And were you happy with that?

Brett: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:16:00] Aston: Quite happy for him to be in charge?

Brett: Well, I think he was...25 years older than me!

[Part 1 0:16:09] Aston: So it was quite natural then?

Brett: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:16:15] Aston: An so you sailed down to Deception Island, so what were your first impressions?

Brett: Ah, we had a little detour, we transferred in Stanley on to the *Shackleton* and went to South Georgia to resupply the Met station. And on the way to Deception we were severely damaged in very heavy gales and had to run for Punta Arenas!

[Part 1 0:16:46] Aston: This is still on the *Shackleton*?

Brett: Yeah, [Aston: Right!] so we had a week in Punta Arenas with, undergoing repairs!

[Part 1 0:16:54] Aston: And so what happened then with the *Biscoe*, did the *Biscoe* come back too?

Brett: The *Biscoe* went on to carry on whatever it was going to do and we eventually went on south still on the *Shackleton* towards, we missed Deception and carried straight on to Adelaide.

[Part 1 0:17:19] Aston: Right, OK so you landed at?

Brett: I think we might have just called in at Deception on the way, yes I think we did and then we got stuck in ice for a month!

[Part 1 0:17:28] Aston: Off of Adelaide Island?

Brett: Yeah, well in fact somewhere near the Argentine Islands and eventually, they didn't think they were going to get in at all to Adelaide, so they anchored up on the ice about 4 miles from Adelaide, and the plan was then to transfer my aeroplane from the side of the ship on to Adelaide with all the supplies for the year!

[Part 1 0:17:57] Aston: So that would have been your first Antarctic flight, if that had gone ahead?

Brett: That would have been my first Antarctic flight! I was given a demonstration flight then had a go myself with Ted Skinner, and I went off to bed to be woken up 4 hours later to be told that one of the aeroplanes had crashed!

[Part 1 0:18:17] Aston: So tell me about that, which aeroplane was this?

Brett: That was 377 that crashed, beautiful clear day, very heavy load and misjudgement I guess of the approach, and it drove the left hand undercarriage up into the cockpit! Nobody injured but the aeroplane was deemed un-repairable!

[Part 1 0:19:01] Aston: So just to recap briefly about what planes were there, there were two planes in the Antarctic?

Brett: Yes, two single Otters on a wheel/ski combination, well proven Arctic/Antarctic workhorses.

[Part 1 0:19:18] Aston: So how long had those particular craft been in Antarctica, had they arrived a long time previously?

Brett: They must have been there at least 5 years.

[Part 1 0:19:26] Aston: Right, so where were they both when you got there, were they both at Adelaide?

Brett: Both at Adelaide.

[Part 1 0:19:33] Aston: And so you were just telling me that 377 had crashed?

Brett: Yeah!

[Part 1 0:19:39] Aston: So what was the atmosphere around like when that happened? It must have a major blow to their plans for the season?

Brett: Yes, that curtailed over the ensuing weeks decisions of who would remain and who go back as surplus. There were certainly cutbacks on sledging activities and the outcome was that I was to then to return to the Falklands. However Reg Drown then damaged his back lifting up or tipping on to its end a barrel of diesel fuel, or aviation fuel, and so he went back and I stayed!

[Part 1 0:20:30] Aston: Gosh! This must have been a bit of a rollercoaster of emotion, first of all the plane crashes, I mean how did you feel about that? Who was flying the plane at the time?

Brett: It was either Bill Mills or Ted Skinner I can't remember which one it was.

[Part 1 0:20:44] Aston: And how did you feel? Because here you are a brand new Antarctic pilot and before even you have really flown, you're hearing that one of the planes has crashed!?

Brett: Yes, it was a bit disturbing and also one of the problems would be of course, if a subsequent engine failure took place anywhere there would be no second aeroplane to fish you out of it! So it would be a long walk home!

[Part 1 0:21:13] Aston: What was their safety record like, I mean was it a fairly dangerous occupation to be a pilot in the Antarctic at that time?

Brett: No, not particularly, the aeroplanes are very reliable, Pratt & Whitney engines were very reliable and as I mentioned earlier deHavilland aeroplanes, were the real workhorses of the Canadian Arctic and Alaska very well proven aeroplane!

[Part 1 0:21:44] Aston: And then of course they tell you are no longer needed as pilot, and you are going back to the Falklands how did that feel?

Brett: Well that was a great disappointment having taken nearly 5 months to get there! However that disappointment didn't last long, the unfortunate Reg Drown had to return and I stayed, with all be it a very curtailed summer workload!

[Part 1 0:22:12] Aston: Because then you were left as senior pilot!

Brett: The only pilot! [Laughter!]

[Part 1 0:22:20] Aston: So that was unexpected responsibility, were you happy with that or did you think 'My goodness what have I let myself in for here!'?

[Note: Someone enters the room and says hello!] [Also seems a slight break in the timing].

[Part 1 0:23:10] Aston: So you were left in charge, so how did you feel about that, were you worried about that at all, or was it par for the course?

Brett: No, it was fairly straight forward an abridged summer programme, just got on with it!

[Part 1 0:23:23] Aston: So the ship was stuck in ice off of Adelaide, how did they, did the ice release the ship eventually?

Brett: It did eventually and after a farther 4 or 5 days the ice started to break and the scow was able to get from the ship into Adelaide and then things were unloaded in more or less the normal way.

[Part 1 0:23:51] Aston: So kind of skipping back a little bit, you were sailing down to Antarctica do you remember what you were thinking at that time, was it what you expected or, I know what it's like to sail into Antarctica, it's a fabulous thing, but when you are looking around and thinking I've got to fly over this? Like you mentioned there is no back up you are very much out there and exposed!

Brett: Well I had done my training in Canada so I'd had a Canadian winter so I was, had a fairly good idea in fact the Canadian winter I had in Gimli was actually colder than it ever got in the Antarctic!

[Part 1 0:24:35] Aston: So this was all old hat! [Laughter!]

Brett: I wouldn't say that!

[Part 1 0:24:41] Aston: So Adelaide, you must have been some of the first people that those winterers had seen after their winter?

Brett: Yep, yes.

[Part 1 0:24:47] Aston: Of '64?

Brett: Well they had seen, they had seen the air party had arrived they had departed Deception before we got there, so they had already arrived at the start of the summer season.

[Part 1 0:25:03] Aston: Right, and it had it been a happy winter for them did you get a sense of that when you arrived there?

Brett: I think so, yeah.

[Part 1 0:25:10] Aston: They were all happy and healthy, and then you sailed back to Deception Island, which you'd already called in on briefly, so you'd met the guys that were wintering there, already on the way down?

Brett: Ah, we called into Deception briefly and then we carried on to Adelaide, got stuck in the ice, carried on a bit farther and then they started airlifting stuff off the ice for Adelaide and then unloaded the ship, once the ice had broken up a bit. And we then started the, or Reg went back to the Falklands with the ship, and we then carried on with the abridged sledging programme.

[Part 1 0:26:52] Aston: OK, so you then spent the summer of '64 or '65 mostly at Adelaide?

Brett: Yes.

[Part 1 0:26:59] Aston: Right OK, so what was Adelaide like at the time, what was that like as a base?

Brett: Adelaide was quite busy, at least one new hut being built and I met the Base Leader, Cunningham, and his great climbing mate whose name slips me at the moment! And the other climbers cum dog drivers Jimmy Gardener, a very well known climber.

[Part 1 0:27:37] Aston: Right so they were off quite a lot climbing were they?

Brett: Yes they, climbed Faith, Hope and Charity that year and with supplies, depots laid for them. So the number of sledge journeys were curtailed and Fossil Bluff replenishment was also curtailed somewhat!

[Part 1 0:28:11] Aston: Right OK, so that first season your flights that you were doing were down to sort of Fossil Bluff area [Brett: Yes.] opposite the Sound from Faith, Hope & Charity that's right isn't it, the Eternity Range is just across the way from Fossil Bluff? [Brett: Yes.] And so flying, doing that flight from Adelaide Island down to Fossil Bluff Sound, how was that as a flight, for you as a pilot?

Brett: Well that was a 2 hour flight and McDermott had been there before, so he was able to show me the way more or less! It was fairly easy to find it was just a case of picking a good day, when fairly certain the weather would hold, so we did several trips to Fossil Bluff but we only managed one trip to the East Coast in the whole of that year! Those to Neil Marsden and his, I forget who the other guy on the sledge was.

[Part 1 0:29:21] Aston: Was that due to bad weather?

Brett: Well there was only the one party over there and running short of supplies, the weather had been poor on the East Coast. And they'd been holed up for something like 3 weeks, without being able to get out of the tent! So we only did one trip to the East Coast that year and then we had the business of supplying the marooned crew on Detaille Island!

[Part 1 0:29:55] Aston: Was this in '64/'65 season or that might have been?

Brett: I think that might have been '65, no that would have been '65/'66.

[Part 1 0:30:09] Aston: Yeah so at this time in the first season you were there, you were flying 294 which at the time was the only workable plane? [Brett: Yes.] And what was that like as an aircraft when you flew it for the first time, was it alright?

Brett: Oh, just the same as the Canadian Otters wheel/ski combination, slightly different but you only moved the skis once a year that was to land back on Deception, where you landed on wheels, everywhere else was on skis!

[Part 1 0:30:39] Aston: So did you enjoy flying that particular plane?

Brett: Oh yes, very much!

[Part 1 0:30:41] Aston: Right, and what was special about flying in Antarctica as opposed to the flying you had done in Canada and elsewhere?

Brett: Well it was more of a job, as opposed to practicing for Air Force duties or having fun! Oh! Not allowed to say that in present times!

[Part 1 0:31:05] Aston: And what about some of the risks involved, I mean how much weather information did you get, and where did you get that information from?

Brett: We'd get, if the radios were working, we'd Fossil Bluff would tell us what the weather was like and Stonington, and that was really the only clues we had! And if you took off, you could see Stonington from Adelaide anyway so that was quite easy!

[Part 1 0:31:36] Aston: And how often did you get caught out with the weather, I mean how reliable was that as a system?

Brett: Only got caught out once, and that was on my trips to south from Deception the following year!

[Part 1 0:31:48] Aston: Ah, I was going to ask you about that bit later! I was reading in the reports that the landing at Adelaide was notoriously a bit tricky is that right? There was a mention in one of the reports, that the ground was very rough on Adelaide so it was a bit of a bumpy ride!?

Brett: Well there was seventy miles of it to land on! [Laughter!]

[Part 1 0:32:08] Aston: Right, so it wasn't?

Brett: No!

[Part 1 0:32:12] Aston: And what about Fossil Bluff, was there any particular hazards about landing there?

Brett: No, no problems at all at Fossil Bluff

[Part 1 0:32:18] Aston: Well considering one of the planes had just gone down at Fossil Bluff, wasn't that where he'd had his accident, wasn't that quite extreme?

Brett: No that 2 years later I think, that was the Porter Pilatus I think that turned upsides down.

[Part 1 0:32:30] Aston: Oh, sorry 377 where was that?

Brett: 377 was at Adelaide!

[Part 1 0:32:34] Aston: Oh sorry, my mistake! So what kind of, did you feel a risk when you were flying around, I mean did feel like you were sort of out on a limb a little bit, because you have got the only plane that is working? You are flying from Adelaide Island to Fossil Bluff which is a quite lengthy flight and were you worried at all, about if something happened if there was an engine failure, what kind of backup did you have?

Brett: Well there was no backup really, apart from the safety gear, the survival kit that one carried you sort of just get on with it!

[Part 1 0:33:13] Aston: If something had happened and you were looking after yourself, what hope of rescue would you have? Would it have been sledge parties that were out there, or were they too far away?

Brett: It would have been a sledge party, that would have been it! Possibly if asked nicely the Americans might have come over and to have a look for us.

[Part 1 0:33:40] Aston: What other planes were around at that time?

Brett: None!

[Part 1 0:33:43] Aston: OK so wasn't there a helicopter, was it the Argentines that had a flying boat and the Chileans a helicopter, so were they mostly local to their bases or did they do excursions?

Brett: No, they had nothing. *HMS Protector* had a helicopter but she didn't venture as far south as Adelaide!

[Part 1 0:34:05] Aston: So in the time that you were south did you come across any other aircraft at all? [Brett: No!] Or was it just you in 294 [laughing!] flying around? Gosh! So tell me about landing on sea ice, did you have particular protocols to follow on sea ice and things or how did that work?

Brett: Well the basic idea as drummed into me in Canada, do not attempt a smooth landing, you fly it into the ground with a 200 feet rate of descent and when you touch, take the power off! And she'll settle and even with my training in Canada, basic training before I joined the survey, quite often the airfields were covered in snow and so it was very difficult to get a perspective of how high you were. And this before the days of things like radio altimeters and things like that, so you just as soon as the aeroplane touches you just take the power off!

[Part 1 0:35:18] Aston: Right, I read a lovely quote from the air unit report from that season, which said flights over the Peninsula were made at a height of 8000 feet and difficulty was experienced with the engines, and that's all it says! [Laughter!] So I wondered if that is the rough height you fly at, and was that a common experience? It seemed quite calmly written in the report!

Brett: That might have been very much earlier, you have a thing called carburettor heat on a piston engine which you apply at certain times, if you don't get it right the engine doesn't like it! If you apply it too much the engine doesn't like it!

[Part 1 0:35:59] Aston: So did you often have difficulties flying around with that?

Brett: No!

[Part 1 0:36:02] Aston: OK, then finally flying the dogs, what was it like to have a plane full of dogs, huskies in the back?

Brett: Rather nice! I was used to the smell of massed dogs by then, there was always the dog driver with them keeping order! And they seemed to be quite content that they were going to have a 200 mile trip, which would save them about a month of extremely hard work! The beauty of the Otter was that you could get a full Nansen sledge 2 men and a full team, plus their tent radio, and survival kit all in the aeroplane.

[Part 1 0:36:55] Aston: And the dogs went on the plane quite happily did they?

Brett: Yes absolutely, lifted up, quite used to being lifted by anyone really and there were hard points all down the aeroplane to chain them up, and so the dog drivers would know which dogs disliked other dogs and they weren't sitting together.

[Part 1 0:37:20] Aston: And did fights often break out with the dogs?

Brett: We had one fight break out!

[Part 1 0:37:25] Aston: So you're at the front flying the plane and there's a fight breaking out in the back was it distracting, or did you just have to concentrate on what you were doing or was it a distraction!?

Brett: I think probably amusement would be, later on I saw far worse with drunken oily boys coming out of Saudi Arabia!

[Part 1 0:37:48] Aston: Oh dear! So we get to the end of the '64/'65 season, did you then fly back with the plane to Deception?

Brett: Yes flew back to Deception, the aeroplane had sustained some damage, to its, to the undersides of the tail so there was a lot of work, remedial work to be done, which was done by the air party in the hangar at Deception.

[Part 1 0:38:20] Aston: Right, so how did the damage happen, just a rough landing?

Brett: No, the tail end went down a crevasse!

[Part 1 0:38:27] Aston: Where did that happen?

Brett: That happened I think at Stonington, and I think that was Ted's but we carried on flying, it had buckled the undercarriage underneath. There are formers and stringers, so they had cut out the formers from the rear of the crashed aeroplane 377, and there was stringers that can be cut to size and there was ample spares, so we had to cut away the damaged part and replace during the course of the winter in Deception!

[Part 1 0:39:06] Aston: Right, so that's Ted Skinner who was the pilot?

Brett: I think, again I can't remember that had actually happened before I had arrived!

[Part 1 0:39:15] Aston: Oh, so you did a full season with that, the damage on that plane?

Brett: Yes.

[Part 1 0:39:18] Aston: Oh right, so it wasn't affecting the capabilities of that plane then or anything [Brett: Yeah] so what happened to 377 did that stay at Adelaide or?

Brett: That stayed at Adelaide and gradually sank into the snow over the next 30 odd years! Until it was dug out I believe in about 2005 and sold!

[Part 1 0:39:40] Aston: So was that stripped for spares immediately or did that happen over a period of years they stripped it down?

Brett: Well they took out the formers, I forget which numbers but towards the rear end of the fuselage to be put on to 294, and I can't remember possibly the ailerons were taken out, although one aileron had been damaged in the original crash and then it just sank into the snow!

[Part 1 0:40:18] Aston: So you returned to Deception Island with 294 and some spares from 377 and so what was it like landing at Deception Island, what was the set up there for planes?

Brett: The only thing to do was to remember to pull the skis up! The one time in the year we did it, and land on wheels on the ash, volcanic ash runway and into Admiral Byrd's hangar, built in 1929, and for repairs and general servicing for the following season! [note: Actually the hangar had been built by FIDS in the early '60's, but maybe on the same site].

[Part 1 0:40:51] Aston: So OK that was your last flight in the plane until next season? [Brett: Yeah.] OK so now you're going into winter and it was McDermott wasn't it who volunteered to stay, because Drown had gone home because he'd hurt his back? [Brett: Yes.] And so it was you?

Brett: Hugh Field!

[Part 1 0:41:15] Aston: Hugh Field and McDermott volunteered for a second winter so?

Brett: Well McDermott did a second, or was it a third winter it must have been maybe a second I really can't remember? He lives in Brighton, you'll have to phone him up!
[Laughter!!]

[Part 1 0:41:32] Aston: And the rest of your wintering crew, how many of you were there?

Brett: So there's just McDermott, ah the wintering crew at Deception must have been 8 possibly, so there was the three of us, Base Leader, two Met men and diesel mechanic, radio operator that was about it.

[Part 1 0:41:55] Aston: Right, and were you a happy crew?

Brett: Well it was quite a happy crew until Bill Geddes suffered what we thought was appendicitis, after the last ship had left!

[Part 1 0:42:15] Aston: Right, I'm just flicking through my, I've got a copy of your winter base report and I'm trying to see where it was this happened, this was quite, June! It was quite far into your winter?

Brett: Yes!

[Part 1 0:42:30] Aston: So when did the boats leave, when the last call of the ships?

Brett: I would think May as the very latest!

[Part 1 0:42:36] Aston: Right, tell me about what happened, he started to feel unwell?

Brett: He started to feel unwell, by radio it was diagnosed as appendicitis and the Argentinian doctor agreed to have a look at him. And there was a Chilean male nurse who very kindly walked from the Chilean base to the Argentinian base, and Bill was taken over by boat so before the sea had frozen!

[Part 1 0:43:12] Aston: And what happened then, so he arrived at the Argentinian base?

Brett: Ah yes, he was greeted by the Argentinians dressed up as a surgical team carrying saw's hammers and other large pieces of equipment to lighten the atmosphere!! I'm not sure if Bill was quite in on the joke!?

[Part 1 0:43:32] Aston: So was he quite seriously ill?

Brett: Yes he was, it turned out to be not appendicitis and the Argentinian doctor was being instructed by the radio from Buenos Aires! He was not a surgeon, in fact I think he was a child specialist according to Paul Hoosto who knew him quite well, but he did discover a blockage in the intestine, and managed to free it and this is what actually saved Bill Geddes!

[Part 1 0:44:09] Aston: Wow, but there were 2 attempts to operate on him wasn't there, because in your base report again, a lovely quote June 12th "Attempt to operate on Geddes's appendices thwarted by ineffective knockout drops!" Which sounds truly frightening to me!

Brett: Yes well, I was still at Deception, so there would have, the Base Leader had gone over with Bill and I have a feeling McDermott might have gone as well, possibly to look after the boat engine, I forget who actually, I think three of them took him over.

[Part 1 0:44:45] Aston: So that didn't work because of the ineffective knockout drops, then he went back again did he, a second time? [Brett: Yes.] And they found a blockage in his intestine. So Deception and what was the facilities on Deception like, what was the base there like?

Brett: Well this was still the 1906 tongue & groove Norwegian sealing hut. The great advantage was we had a well so we always had water, which meant we could have a hot bath, which I think was about the only place in Antarctica, in those days, when such things were available!

[Part 1 0:45:25] Aston: Sounds like a luxury, yeah!

Brett: Half the, one section of the hut was actually full of ice and behind the hut was the graveyard with I think 48 graves at the time, mostly Norwegians, mostly memorial crosses to those that had drowned in the vicinity, and one or two who had died in fights, and from alcoholic poisoning! One or two suicides and of course in the winter time with the gales howling through the broken down whaling station, bits of metal clanking and it was an eerie place!

[Part 1 0:46:19] Aston: And wasn't there a new hut being built that season?

Brett: There was yes.

[Part 1 0:46:22] Aston: A job for the winter crew?

Brett: Well that was actually put up the following summer.

[Part 1 0:46:27] Aston: Right OK, so did you do any preparation work during the winter, [Brett: No], or was it all done the following summer?

Brett: They may have laid the base the previous summer, and then came down with a construction party to put it up, which I believe then became the main living hut. [Aston: Right OK.] Well there was a very nice little bar in Deception, I think we had about 5 long playing records one of which was the noises from the Gibraltar Grand Prix of 1956! [Laughter!]

[Part 1 0:47:00] Aston: Sounds fascinating what was that, just car noises!?

Brett: It was a splendid frame with, people's the end of people's ties on there, and the Russian ice breaker skipper insisted that a tie be brought from the ship, and then end of his tie be placed next to that of Prince Philip! Much to the annoyance of the commissar!

[Part 1 0:47:24] Aston: So were you there at the time of the...Royal visit, because that was in January of that year was it? [Note: The Royal visit was actually 10 years previously!]

Brett: When Russian ice breaker came, oh yes I remember the skipper saying 'You no see woman for two year'!? We all said 'That's right skipper, but you have 3rd engineer that is woman and nobody had noticed!' [Laughter!]

[Part 1 0:47:58] Aston: So was that the only woman you saw during in your time in Antarctica?

Brett: I wasn't too sure even then!

[Part 1 0:48:02] Aston: Wow, so your base leader was Twiggy Walter?

Brett: Walters, now what was his first name, Dave!

[Part 1 0:48:14] Aston: Dave, so what do you remember about him?

Brett: He was pretty good base leader, things went fairly well and Bill had his problems [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] He coped pretty well I think with everything, I knew his brother latterly, yes he was an intelligence officer in Oman!

[Part 1 0:48:48] Aston: Deception Island was quite a busy island in terms of bases wasn't it, there was two other nearby bases?

Brett: Yes, the Chilean base was about a two, two & half hour, walk across a crevasse or across a small glacier, but there were posts marking the safe track to go and of course once the sea had frozen one could just go round on the ice! And the Argentinian base was on the opposite side of the main harbour, which was a good two day walk.

[Part 1 0:49:29] Aston: Right and how were the relations between all the bases?

Brett: Excellent between us and the Chileans, and once all the ships had gone and the big Argentinian navy ship had gone, relations were then between all of us! I went round with the Chilean male nurse and played bridge for a couple of days at the Argentinian base, walked walking, yes they were, it was good!

[Part 1 0:50:01] Aston: So how often did you visit each other?

Brett: The Chileans and ourselves being so close, saw quite a lot of each other - standard trading rate was one bottle of whisky for a case of wine! And the Argentinian base was more difficult to get to. It was a good, not many of us were prepared to walk for two days, you had to overnight between the Chilean base and the Argentinian base, there was a refuge hut.

[Part 1 0:50:42] Aston: Was there a more practical relationship between the three bases, did you rely on each other for logistical backup or anything like that?

Brett: No, no later on the following year when the volcano went up, I think *force majeure* was decreed and everyone got on extremely well!

[Part 1 0:51:06] Aston: And so when Bill Geddes got ill, why did he go to the Argentinian base was it because the medical expertise was there?

Brett: Yes, there was a doctor there, and the Chileans had a male nurse who was very helpful and he made his way round to the Argentinian base.

[Part 1 0:51:24] Aston: Right, and so in the winter I was reading through the base report, you said you celebrated you're birthday on the 16th of May?

Brett: Yes.

[Part 1 0:51:37] Aston: Do you remember that celebration, [Brett: No.(Plus laughter)], and you were also bitten by a dog, that month!

Brett: I was yes!

[Part 1 0:51:45] Aston: So what happened?

Brett: Oh dog fight, training pups, so dog fight and I was bitten by a Podger, who thought he was probably biting Caesar, because he always bit Caesar!

[Part 1 0:52:01] Aston: So what was your relationship with the dog teams, were you very involved with it, the dog teams training them?

Brett: Well McDermott and I would train, or put some of the semi, half grown pups into a harness and we would be on an individual sledge standing being towed around. Inevitably races would take place, but the idea was that the pups as they matured were introduced to the sledging.

[Part 1 0:52:41] Aston: Was this your first experience with huskies or had you come across them in Canada?

Brett: I had come across them in Canada, but not to operate with but I had seen them.

[Part 1 0:52:50] Aston: Was there someone on base that had a lot of experience with dogs, that was teaching you what to do, or was it kind of like following your instincts in what to do with the dogs?

Brett: Those that had been south the previous year, the harnesses were all made up it was really a case of just bringing the pups to maturity, getting them used to harnesses, having some practice runs, the refuse from the base was put on the sledge and taken out to sea and then dropped off, and disappeared during the following summer! That sort of thing, so the working dogs were virtually semi -retired 6 or 7 years old, not up to a full season but strong enough to pull a sledge for half an hour, and to get the younger ones used to being on a trace and behaving themselves!

[Part 1 0:53:54] Aston: So how many dog teams did you have at Deception?

Brett: About one and half teams, plus 6 or 8 pups.

[Part 1 0:54:03] Aston: OK so weren't worked on Deception, and they were brought from Adelaide, is that right, because they could be kept inside?

Brett: Yes, the idea was that it was the only place that we had which was not so extreme, or had enough accommodation to accommodate bitches to have pups during the winter!

[Part 1 0:54:25] Aston: Alright so where were they kept?

Brett: They were kept in the old whaling station.

[Part 1 0:54:31] Aston: Right.

Brett: Oh that's the bitches that were expecting were in there, once they were within about 2 or 3 weeks of producing they were then kept inside, then the pups were kept inside till they were about two months old.

[Part 1 0:54:50] Aston: Right, and then you had Midwinter's Day it came to the middle of winter, do you remember the midwinter celebrations?

Brett: I think we went to the Chilean base from what I remember.

[Part 1 0:55:03] Aston: Oh right OK, a riotous affair or very [laughing] civilised?

Brett: I would imagine it was!

[Part 1 0:55:11] Aston: I was really interested to read later in that month, 'Field was marooned in the hangar'!

Brett: Ah!

[Part 1 0:55:20] Aston: Because of a blizzard!? So do remember that incident?

Brett: Yes I do. Hugh and I were working on the rear of the airplane, riveting the new skin onto the plane. I was inside holding the dolly and he was outside doing the proper engineering bit. And the work was going quite well, I heard the wind getting up, and of course it was then dark, so looked outside and could see nothing. I said, "I think we had better stay here for now," but Hugh opened the small door of the hanger, the access door, and was swept away in the wind. No sign of him. The telephone was down between the hanger and the hut.

Aston: How far was the hanger from the hut?

Brett: Not far, it was only about one hundred and fifty metres, one hundred metres. So I put on my cold weather gear and went back to the hut. I could see the hanger for about thirty yards and then fortunately I stumbled across one of the dogs buried in snow by this time, knew which dog it was and then worked my way down the line of the dogs and I could then see the light from the hut. I went in and alerted everyone...and they got themselves toggged up and we made a chain, went out the hanger and by an absolute chance Hugh had found his way back to the hanger again. It was just sheet ice outside the hanger door and the wind had just caught him and taken him away and by an absolute chance he had managed to find his way back.

Aston: So was that a common type of blizzard or was that particularly extreme?

Brett: Oh, it was a common blizzard at Deception when the winds were...I think the average wind speed for that month was 55 knots. So it was quite common.

Aston: There is a cryptic entry about a UFO incident in July 1965. What's that referring to?

Brett: The Argentinians thought they had seen a UFO and got very enthusiastic about it. I was sure that Paul Hoosto was stoking the flames about it.

Aston: Was it ever resolved, the mystery of the UFO? What did they think they had seen?

20

Brett: It made the news in Argentina and I think Chile. I think imaginations had... No one on the British base saw it.

Aston: So what did they say they had seen? A glow (?) of light in the sky or..?

Brett: Something like that.

Aston: I was also reading something about the Deception Island ghost. Was that something..?

Brett: Well there was rumoured to be, some years before, somebody had committed suicide and was buried in the graveyard amongst the Norwegians. I never saw something...and I never saw or heard anyone while I was there saying they'd seen anything.

Julian Brett Disc 2:

[Part 2 0:00:00] Aston: This is Felicity Aston interviewing Jules Brett in Kingswood Surrey on the 6th of July, 2010. And you hurt your ankle in the August of 1965 and it was serious enough to call the doctor from the Chilean base. I guess that was the male nurse rather than a doctor, so was it a serious injury?

Brett: No!

[Part 2 0:00:25] Aston: Oh, OK you don't even remember! [Laughter]

Brett: No, probably a sprained ankle or something I expect!

[Part 2 0:00:27] Aston: Oh, alright, and it also mentions he tended to Field so was that the same time that Field was becoming quite ill?

Brett: Yes, he then started getting stomach pains and he thought he'd got appendicitis as well, his very nasty experience from being blown away outside the hangar surviving by the skin of his teeth! [REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:01:01] Aston: And the final sort of strange entry in the report, is something about Commander Perrise thought transfer experiments?

Brett: Yes, the Argentinians were carrying out experiments with whatever it's called, transference of thought! So all the Argentinians were supposed to sit in one room and transfer their thoughts to whoever. I queried Paul Hoosto about this. He said he was sitting in another room trying to block them!

[Part 2 0:01:40] Aston: So did they take it seriously or were they just sort of paying lip service to all this?

Brett: Well, I think Perrise was taking it seriously but Paul Hoosto suffers the dreadful complaint of having the British sense of humour!

[Part 2 0:01:55] Aston: So what was Paul Hoosto position in the Argentinian crew?

Brett: I'm not really sure? I think he was probably a Met Observer or court jester possibly!
[note: He was actually the radio technician.]

[Part 2 0:02:09] Aston: So how many men were there at the Argentinian base and the Chilean base, roughly the same as the British base?

Brett: I think about 8 or 9 at the Chilean base, which was a proper met station, and about 12 at the Argentinian one.

[Part 2 0:02:28] Aston: Right, and so your main priority during the winter was repairing?

Brett: Repairing and then its usual annual service as well, plug change, oil changes and things like that.

[Part 2 0:02:41] Aston: So was that tough to do in the hangar was the hangar heated or was it?

Brett: Well we had a heater, the tools of course were difficult to handle and it all had to be done by hand, riveting cold rivets!

[Part 2 0:03:00] Aston: I understand you got a bit of training at the beginning of the winter, how to be a riveter, is that not something you'd done before!?

Brett: Well how to hold a piece of metal against one end of the rivet, yes it was not a long course!

[Part 2 0:03:15] Aston: Brilliant! And was it just the three of you looking after the planes or did you enlist help?

Brett: No just the three of us.

[Part 2 0:03:22] Aston: Right, so then by the beginning of September the repairs were finished, and you wanted to do some test flights but I understand you were hindered by the hangar doors?

Brett: It took about a week to dig out the hangar!

[Part 2 0:03:44] Aston: Had the doors been a particular problem, they seem to come up in the reports quite a lot, as they were big sliding doors?

Brett: Yes, what tended to happen, I mean they were big sliding doors probably under 2 or 3 feet of snow, some of which might have melted and got into the runners of the wheels, so you just had to thaw it out bit by bit having dug it out to start with!

[Part 2 0:04:06] Aston: And you did some test flights, were they short?

Brett: Short test flights to the next island, I've forgotten the name of it. And we took a couple of the Argentinians up on one occasion to have a look at their base from the air, so all was well and in due course we departed.

[Part 2 0:04:32] Aston: So what about preparation of the runway for those test flights, did you have to dig out the runway?

Brett: No, no it was blown fairly clear and we used the wheel, there wasn't enough snow on the runway it tended to blow clear!

[Part 2 0:04:51] Aston: And all the repairs were all done?

Brett: Yeah, all fine and the airplane continued till it was eventually retired!

[Part 2 0:04:57] Aston: Right, do you know when that was?

Brett: I have a feeling it was probably two years after I left, when the Porter Pilatus came in and turned itself upsides down at the end of its first season!

[Part 2 0:05:13] Aston: Right, as well as fixing the planes you were recorded as fixing tractors, dismantling jetties and doing all sorts of things, so was it a busy winter?

Brett: There was quite a lot to do!

[Part 2 0:05:27] Aston: So you did the test flights in the plane, everything was OK and then you flew down to Adelaide on September the 26th and that was a pretty eventful journey, do you remember that journey?

Brett: Yes, yes we got as far as the northern end of Adelaide Island and then ran into bad weather, had to turn around and rather than go all the way back to Deception, we landed at Argentine Islands on the sea ice!

[Part 2 0:06:00] Aston: Right and fuel was brought out to you is that right?

Brett: They had an emergency supply of fuel there, although we did have enough fuel on, so we used some of their fuel but we stayed there I think for 3 days, till the weather cleared at Adelaide, by which time the skis were stuck to the snow! So wetook quite a long time to dig the aeroplane out, yet again!

[Part 2 0:06:31] Aston: So was that a worry, that happening, the bad weather and the turning round?

Brett: Yes because by that time the weather had closed in behind us, but Argentine Islands did a radio beacon which was working! It was designed especially for just such an eventuality. However, by the time we were approaching Argentine Islands it was clear there, which just made a normal landing on the ice, about 300 yards from the hut and had rather an eventful night!

[Part 2 0:07:13] Aston: How did they test the sea ice was good enough for you to land on, was there a particular method for testing whether to see if you could land on it?

Brett: I think at the beginning of the Antarctic winter it's thick enough, [Aston: Right], and of course it was clear as well, so there was no icebergs or growlers stuck in, because you had to make a blind landing on ice! That's one of the worries you might just run into an iceberg or fortunately I never had to do that, so doing blind landings on Adelaide Island again there was a small beacon which you could pick up about 20 miles away, you flew over it at a certain height and it just set the aeroplane up to land in a certain direction!

[Part 2 0:08:02] Aston: What was the radio coverage like, did you have a lot radio communication, was it reliable?

Brett: It wasn't very good, Morse code was more effective than anything unfortunately the Morse code lever, was on the far side of the cockpit so you had to, and there was no autopilot, so you had to lean across and try and tap out where you were and so on!

[Part 2 0:08:26] Aston: So which base did you keep in contact with, did you keep in contact

with the base you'd left until you were out of range, and then contact another base is that how it worked?

Brett: Yes basically we were able to speak to Deception till we were in range of Argentine Islands, then Argentine to Adelaide. And Adelaide said the weather had come down and certainly we pressed on hoping to, but it wasn't good enough so just turn round and go back!

[Part 2 0:08:53] Aston: And then you got to Adelaide and they were the first people that you'd seen, that they'd seen since there winter, so what was the arrival like at Adelaide?

Brett: Oh, nice arrival of course we knew everybody there from the previous summer and shown to our quarters and started work!

[Part 2 0:09:16] Aston: And what was the landing like there, had they prepared an area for you because you were using the skis?

Brett: There was a line of fuel drums out which showed a crevasse free area, so bearing in mind what had happened the previous year made sure we didn't try to do a smooth landing! Because flew into the surface at 200 feet rate of descent so the aeroplane won't stall, if you keep the speed right.

[Part 2 0:09:49] Aston: Did you feel slightly under pressure because you had the only working plane down there, because if something happened to that plane the whole season would be very different, was there a bit of pressure on you?

Brett: Well we had to carry rather more survival kit than we would have perhaps normally have carried, but the programme having been cut to a certain extent we weren't inhibited too much!

[Part 2 0:10:17] Aston: And so you then went into the '65/'66 season and there were a couple of priorities when you arrived, such as the stranded men at Blaiklock?

Brett: Yes.

[Part 2 0:10:28] Aston: Was it?

Brett: Detaille Island!

[Part 2 0:10:31] Aston: Ah, OK so what happened there, how long had they been stranded?

Brett: They had been, I forget when they were actually stranded. They were very hopeful that I would arrive and fly them back again! But we had a very long, McDermott and I, had a very long hard look, and I wasn't prepared to, there was a bit of sea ice attached to Detaille Island when I didn't think, I thought it was not on! So didn't chance it and we elected to resupply them by air, by dropping stuff out of the back, Brian McDermott chained securely to one of the dog anchorages and pushing things out of the rear door!

[Part 2 0:11:24] Aston: So they were running low on food?

Brett: So three of them there, I think Ryder was one of them, Bill Ryder who I will have to look up the names in my log book of the other two.

[Part 2 0:11:37] Aston: And there was a lost bottle of whisky I understand on one of the air drops!?

Brett: I don't know what they did with it, they may have claimed they lost but we certainly put one in! [Note: For another interview, I understand the whisky bottle broke!] We did several drops and the ice just didn't shift, and eventually Ryder made a solo trip to the Peninsula and then got stuck again! He was then on the Peninsula much to everyone's annoyance and the two of them were still on Detaille Island!

[Part 2 0:12:15] Aston: So how did the situation resolve itself, what happened?

Brett: Eventually a party made its way from Stonington and picked up Ryder and I think the remaining two from what I remember, made their way across the sea ice.

[Part 2 0:12:32] Aston: Right, and then the other priority early in that season was a sledge party. Sledge D had had a broken radio since October and you had to fly out and try and find them?

Brett: That was probably Marsden and Holmes, [Aston: Right], would that be Marsden and Holmes?

[Part 2 0:12:55] Aston: Ah! But they were near the Eternity Range is that right?

Brett: Yes, on the far side.

[Part 2 0:13:00] Aston: OK, [Brett: Yeah], so what happened there?

Brett: Well we found them!! And landed and to our dismay discovered that we were in very soft snow which came right up to underneath the wings! But luckily we were able to keep the machine going and ploughed through the snow until we got to an area, that wasn't full of Marsden, and I'm almost sure it was Marsden and Holmes, had been making, trying to sledge their way through very, very soft snow about 7 or 8 feet thick! Able to make less than a mile a day!

[Part 2 0:13:48] Aston: So you hadn't heard from them, gosh it must have been about a month, I mean did you have an idea where they were?

Brett: Well we knew roughly where they were, but it was case of waiting for good weather going across the range to the East Coast and found them fairly easily, in fact they came up on their hand held radio, which of course only work for about 20 miles! So as soon as they heard us coming, squawking 'What have you got for us!?'

[Part 2 0:14:20] Aston: I bet they were very pleased to see you! So was there anywhere that was particularly treacherous to fly, was there anywhere you avoided?

Brett: No, the East Coast was always a problem because it was so much colder on the East Coast, so you had to keep the engine running but that was the only occasion we flew right across on to the East Coast. The only other incident we had as far as I can recall was taking the Governor, who was Cosmo Haskard at the time, to Stonington and he stepped out of the aeroplane and fell down a crevasse! [Laughter!] Brian McDermott as ever said 'You'll be filling in a lot of forms to the Air Ministry, when you get back, you've lost the Governor'!!

[Part 2 0:15:10] Aston: So how was the Governor rescued?

Brett: Well the Governor only went down about two feet! [More laughter!]

[Part 2 0:15:16] Aston: Oh wonderful! And so what about any part of the job you

particularly didn't like, was there anything you thought 'Oh no! Not this one again'?

Brett: The only part I didn't like was I quite enjoyed getting the aeroplane going in the morning, so we had a heater, which was one small heater which had been taken out and put in the hut, so it was nice and warm, it was just a prime mover so you'd start that up, take it out in the morning put it on the sledge where the aircraft heater was, having drained off the oil the night before. We'd keep that in the hut as well, so that was warm and it probably had some fuel in to make it less viscous, so heat up the oil put the main heater into the engine, with the engine cowling on. Put the oil back on again, sweep the frost and the snow off the wings, start the engine get the engine up to up a temperature to boil the fuel off that you'd put in the oil, and there was set time to how much oil you'd burn, however much fuel you'd in the oil you had to boil it off for a certain length of time. By which time the weather would probably clamp in again and try it all again the next day. That was a bit wearing!

[Part 2 0:16:56] Aston: It sounds very fiddly, was the maintenance of the aircraft quite time consuming, to do a lot of maintenance on it?

Brett: There was very little maintenance to do, because so few hours were being flown. Checking the oil levels, checking the skis weren't too badly scratched and there was really very little.

[Part 2 0:17:21] Aston: And what about the good moments, are there any particular moments that really stick out in your memory, you know moments when you are flying around and thinking this is really marvellous?

Brett: Well quite a lot! Certainly flying up Marguerite Sound to Detaille Island absolutely spectacular! And then flying down the glacier where Bill Ryder had got himself stuck, also very spectacular, I believe that is where poor Bill Kershaw eventually [note: Actually Giles Kershaw, killed in 1988] died, and it's certainly where Noel, somebody I've forgotten his first name, Noel was the surname. He and his mate, as a reward for their long service in the Antarctic, went on a camping trip with a dog team and were swept away in a storm! And were lost. John Noel, a Welshman, he was the radio operator at Adelaide and he died at the end of his time there! [Note: It was John Noel and Tom Allan, lost on a camping trip from Stonington in May '66 covered in *Ice and Men* page 271.] Going to the East Coast absolutely spectacular, flying along Faith, Hope and Charity it's just wonderful!

[Part 2 0:18:52] Aston: So at the end of that '65/'66 summer season and did the plane again return to Deception?

Brett: Yes, I handed over to Bill Burgess and his engineer and they flew it back to Adelaide and I got on the ship and then returned!

[Part 2 0:19:12] Aston: So had you got attached to the plane, by this stage was it sad to say goodbye to the plane to hand it over to someone else?

Brett: Yes it was, but of course Burgess in his turn had a very curtailed programme to operate, again he was the only aeroplane that year! And I have never seen him again, I haven't met him again.

[Part 2 0:19:42] Aston: So you left with McDermott, you both sailed out on was it the *Shackleton* or the *John Biscoe* that picked you up?

Brett: Yes, I think I came back on the *John Biscoe* via....Port Stanley and Montevideo, nearly

missed the ship in Montevideo!

[Part 2 0:20:05] Aston: And you know, how did you feel about leaving Antarctica at that time?

Brett: Well I was very sorry, I was inclined to put in to go back the following year! However the Air Ministry had other plans for me!

[Part 2 0:20:20] Aston: Well what did happen to you next, when you got home what happened then?

Brett: I joined the Royal Oman Air Force for the duration of the civil war in Oman!

[Part 2 0:20:28] Aston: Oh right! And how did you feel about the memories and experiences that you'd had in Antarctica, what kind of effect did that have on you professionally and personally?

Brett: Oh it's certainly one of the times I remember, and very fond memories. I think one probably cuts out the bad bits of which there were some! I certainly remember arriving in Oman to fly yet another ancient piston engine tail-wheel aeroplane! Yes, well you'll find your Antarctic experience of a great deal of use there in the desert and mountains of Oman!

[Part 2 0:21:18] Aston: One extreme to another! So professionally what did your time in Antarctica have? Was it useful skills that you'd picked up there or seemed a bit of a blip in your flying career or how did that turn out?

Brett: Well that was virtually the end of my Air Force career, so I then became, I joined the Oman Air Force during the civil war in Doha, and then went on to, and then got a proper job finally!

[Part 2 0:21:59] Aston: And then sort of personally what experiences has, sorry what affect has that experience in Antarctica had on you, as a person?

Brett: Well I suppose there's all these things, you find your inner self and all this stuff! But think it is all a load of rubbish personally, there's always the danger you might look too deep and not like what you find!

[Part 2 0:22:27] Aston: Well thank you very much.

Brett: You're very welcome, Felicity!

[Part 2 0:22:30] Aston: For the interview, thank you!

Interesting clips:

- Jules' first Antarctic flight as a pilot! [Part 1 0:17:57]
- How to land a plane in the Antarctic! [Part 1 0:34:05]
- Bill Geddes being operated on at the Argentinian base! [Part 1 0:42:36]
- Hugh Field blown out of the hanger/UFOs [Part 1 from 55:20]
- Failing to reach Adelaide Island and landing at Argentine Islands on sea ice! [Part 2 0:05:27]
- Flying to the East Coast and landing on deep soft snow! [Part 2 0:13:00]