

Ian Biggs

Transcript of a recording of Ian Biggs interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 27th September 2010. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/88. Transcribed by Charlie Robb, 31st March 2014

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Ian Biggs, recorded at his home in South Croydon, Surrey by Chris Eldon Lee on 27th September 2010. Ian Biggs Part 1.

Biggs: My name is Ian James Biggs. I was born on the 6th of May 1929 in the Falkland Islands, in Stanley.

[Part 1 0:00:22] Lee: Tell me about your parents.

Biggs: My parents; my father was the 4th generation of the original settler, Patrick Biggs, who was in the Army at the time, went out with the Governor, the late Governor Lieutenant Moody. My Mother came to the Falklands with her father when she was about one or two years old, he being a blacksmith employed by the Falkland Islands Company. She had been born in Dens Road, in Dundee.

[Part 1 0:01:03] Lee: So you are half Falklander and half Scottish.

Biggs: Yes, with a touch of Irish thrown in as well. My paternal grandmother was Irish, who came from some little village, I understand, near Cork in Ireland.

[Part 1 0:01:26] Lee: What was your schooling like then? Because I guess there was just one school wasn't there?

Biggs: Yes there was, it was very basic, in fact our arithmetic didn't reach anything like the standard in this country, even in those days, because as far as - I don't know whether they are used these days - Logarithms, we got to that stage and our maths was stopped. You didn't go any higher. English, I suppose because we used a lot of Spanish words, our English was reasonable. History and Geography I really liked and because we lived in the locality of the South Atlantic, any other country held a certain fascination I think, not just for me but for other children, so we knew basically the layout of the world. History, well, I used to be quite good at that but over the years I've forgotten it all so don't ask me any questions!

[Part 1 0:02:51] Lee: Do you remember what you were taught about the Antarctic at school?

Biggs: Nothing, nothing at all. We knew it existed, we knew that people went down during the war because the local ship - I think it was the *Lafonia*¹ in those days -

[Part 1 0:03:09] Lee: Again, the name of the ship again?

Biggs: *Lafonia*. I think it was *Lafonia*. And, I'm not sure but also I think we had another one called the - oh the name escapes me, but they used to go down and take I think bases, Deception, King George Island and two or three other places, it used to drop two men off,

¹ S.S. Lafonia. 86m Steam-engined steel passenger/cargo ship, built 1911. Later renamed S.S. Fitzroy. – CKR.

where they stayed for, I think, about a year and in the following spring or summer they were picked up and brought back to the Falklands. Who they were, I don't know.

[Part 1 0:03:53] Lee: Had you read about Captain Scott?

Biggs: I have.

[Part 1 0:03:58] Lee: Had you then, as a child?

Biggs: Sorry?

[Part 1 0:04:00] Lee: Did you read about him as a child?

Biggs: Ah, yes, we had - not through the school I might add - my mother was an avid reader and she was a very intelligent woman, so much so that she won the Governor's Prize prior to leaving the school, and she used to, when we were kids, to select certain books for us to read. At home, not at school. Captain Scott, I've read his version of his trips and things, oh right up until I suppose just prior to me coming to England. Shackleton, now Shackleton was quite well known in the Falklands, in fact my maternal grandfather, a dour old Scotsman he was, a very nice man really, he'd done quite a lot of work for Shackleton on his last voyage. He was a blacksmith obviously and he strengthened a lot of Shackleton's sledges with, oh I suppose cast iron, in various places. Of course which none of them got used much - you know what happened. But Shackleton, believe it or not, is in most, in my day anyway, with all the youngsters, Shackleton was the Man. He, well, he pulled all his men back safely didn't he. Whereas Scott relied too much on Naval discipline to have a happy expedition.

[Part 1 0:06:11] Lee: So Shackleton was something of a hero was he?

Biggs: Well, everybody certainly up to and during the Second World War, everybody, you know, Shackleton was the man they talked about. Because I suppose one of the reasons for that was that Shackleton did go to the Falklands and stay there for some little time, whereas Scott never did.

[Part 1 0:06:40] Lee: Did you ever go to Shackleton's grave?

Biggs: Yes, I was in South Georgia for two years and he's buried there in the local graveyard for the whalers of the Grytvicken Whaling Company.

[Part 1 0:07:00] Lee: But you didn't see it as a boy, just when you were...

Biggs: Oh no, only when I was... no I didn't, not as a boy, no.

[Part 1 0:07:06] Lee: Did your father make a decent living?

Biggs: Well, my father was a very hard worker, for obvious reasons - there were four of us children and his mother was living with us. He was a painter and decorator for the local Government and like everybody else that lived there, the local people, he had to grow enough vegetables in the garden to last us a year, potatoes and stuff like that. He then had to also cut enough peat to last us the year until the following year, now that's - if I explain to you that

the average person out there cutting peat could cut four cubic yards of peat an hour. Three and a half to four. Now, it's wet, heavy, and hard work. The average household needed 250 to 300 cubic yards of peat a year for cooking and for heating, but mainly for cooking. Once it was dry - it had to be dried obviously, it was spread out - it was then rickled and this is where us kids of course were brought in to the picture, we had to go up and rickle the peat. It was then stacked into stacks...

[Part 1 0:08:50] Lee: What's rickling?

Biggs: Rickling was small heaps of peat about so high and about that round, so the air could blow through. It was stacked up and the air could blow through and dry it.

[Part 1 0:09:05] Lee: Like a hay rick.

Biggs: Yes, not as big as a hay rick but yes it's that sort of thing. So the air could blow through. Once it was completely dry, it had to be stacked to keep the rain off too much, so it could be carted home, to the peat sheds. Every house had a peat shed, a big one for obvious reasons, to get all the peat in. Everybody had their own - I say everybody - most people had their own chickens, for eggs. A lot of people had their own cow, for milk, not all but there were quite a few, and also my brother and I with two other lads, we had a - we used to do a milk round. I don't know how old we were, I think I was about eight, eight and a half, my brother would be a year younger and the other two lads were roughly the same age. We used to do it on bikes, we used to carry two cartons of milk, one of two gallons and one of a gallon, and we used to - I don't know if you've ever seen, you've never been to the Falklands have you? No. The only... do you know Porlock Hill?

[Part 1 0:10:43] Lee: In Somerset?

Biggs: Yes, not as steep as that but somewhat like it. And we had to trundle our bikes up and down these hills serving people with a dipper out of these cans into whatever receptacle they put out, a jug or whatever, bowl. We'd cover it over so that the dust and stuff couldn't get in, or flies, and we used to start at, oh I don't know, our Mum used to wake us up about half past four in the morning and we would finish our milk round I suppose by about eight o'clock. We used to help to milk the cows at the little dairy, it was all done by hand and again in the evening we had another round but not quite so big. And we were paid in those days eighteen shillings a month. And that was that, that was what we done before, while we were still at school.

[Part 1 0:11:58] Lee: Were you living at Stanley?

Biggs: Oh yes, yes. 6 Moody Street. Lived there all my life until I went down to the Antarctic, my dad built his own house actually, with I think help from one or two other people, but basically he did build it, of wood, which most houses out there are, were wooden. And there you have it.

[Part 1 0:12:29] Lee: Did you - was there such a thing as further education?

Biggs: No.

[Part 1 0:12:33] Lee: So you left school at what age Ian?

Biggs: I was about fourteen and a half I think, or fifteen. Fourteen and a half roughly.

[Part 1 0:12:40] Lee: What did you do when you were fourteen, did you get a job or help your dad?

Biggs: There was four of us again, we got employed by what was known as the Agricultural Department of the local Government, and they were training us to, in all sorts of what they termed, of all aspects of animal husbandry. Planting of so-called crops, which you couldn't really plant because the weather and the wind wouldn't allow crops to grow as they grow in this country. But all in all, that's what we done and eventually the other three sort of drifted away doing other things and I was then given the job of looking after all the common - sorry, all the animals that grazed on common land, making sure that none of them got bogged down in swamps, or cows ready to calve, or help to bring them back in to the owner and all this sort of thing. It was done on horseback and I suppose I had done that for about two years up until the time I went down to King George Island.

[Part 1 0:14:10] Lee: Well now tell me how it was you came to work for BAS, or FIDS in those days.

Biggs: Well, again I think it was influence from basically my Mum. She was determined that we weren't going to stop in the Falklands and have dead-beat jobs, which basically they were. And she instilled in us that there were better things over the other side of the hill. But, to be able to do that you had to have money, and we didn't have any, so although... Or that's not strictly true, I did have a little bit but, when I say a little bit, through doing messages and what-have-you for other people, see I was never idle, and through all the course of the years I was at school, when I left school I had a hundred pound in the bank, or in the local bank.

[Part 1 0:15:12] Lee: That you'd saved up?

Biggs: Which was saved up with sixpennies and thrupennies and things like that doing these various messages for people, and of course in those days, let's be honest, 1945, a hundred pound was quite a lot of money. My Granny, my paternal Granny, used to give us a penny a week pocket money and you could go down to the local store and buy for that penny a big gobstopper - you ever seen one have you, the big ones - a quarter of hard toffees, and have a ha'penny change. And farthings were still used obviously in those days as well. But you get a ha'penny change which then you could, well, go and get a stick of liquorice or whatever with that. It was - how could I put it - in hindsight it was a hard life but you didn't realise it at the time.

[Part 1 0:16:32] Biggs: And my brother was a wee bit shy and nervous of anybody having a go at him so consequently he used to get bullied and of course I had to stick up for him and I had some horrendous fights at school, after school was over. I used to, my brother and me used to come home together walking up the steep hill and you'd have a gang of little - I was

going to say little kids - gang of kids shouting and yelling and taunting him because he wouldn't turn round and fight. So I used to turn round and I used to pick out the biggest and we'd have a set-to. Well of course I always made sure that they always took a swing at me first, I never went to hit them, and as soon as that happened - and I used to be quite good with my fists, learnt the hard way - and consequently with that you had other lads who thought, 'Oh I'm better than him.' And they used to come at me to have, you know, so I had a bit of a job to keep on top of the pile, so to speak. Didn't do me any harm, I've got plenty of scars, which have faded over the years, and there you have it.

[Part 1 0:18:17] Lee: So you were talking about how you got yourself a job with FIDS. Your mother wanted you to improve yourself.

Biggs: Yes, to get money to leave the Falklands. I went in 1946, the beginning of 1947, I had to go and see Sir Miles Clifford, who was then the Governor, to apply to go down to FIDS, and he looked at me and he said, 'You're too young, and you're not heavy enough. Put some weight on and come back in a year's time.' And there you have it. I went back in September, I think it was, or October of '47, saw him and he said 'Yes, alright, you'll be going...' and of course it must have been worked out beforehand, 'You'll be going...' And just after the New Year of 1948, there were four of us.

[Part 1 0:19:36] Lee: Four Falklanders?

Biggs: Yes, two of us were dropped off at King George Island at Martel Inlet² I think it was, yes Martel Inlet, where there was an old Nissen Hut and a wooden, small wooden hut or shed if you like, a lean-to on the back of it, and that was our living accommodation, this lean-to, six by eight. And they gave us two hammocks and enough tinned food and stuff to see us until the Biscoe arrived, and that's how I went down there. I think we left Port Stanley on the, I think it was, I'm not sure about this but I think it was the 2nd January '48, on the HMS *Snipe*. Which was a Frigate or whatever you want to call it, Frigate or Sloop³. And we were all violently sick, seasick for about three days and we recovered somewhat and then two of us got dropped off in King George Island and the other two went down to Port Lockroy, and we waited for the Biscoe to arrive.

[Part 1 0:21:22] Lee: There was some family history wasn't there? Because I believe your cousin Pat⁴ had already spent a winter at Signy, is that right?

Biggs: Oh, no his first - he first went to Deception, he was at Deception Island and then I think, I can't remember whether he went from Deception to Signy after that, because he was at Deception in 1948 when I was at Admiralty Bay. He was at Deception with Ralph Lenton⁵ who was the wireless operator, I can't remember the names of the other ones that were there.

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

³ HMS *Snipe*. 91m Steam-engined steel sloop, built 1945. – CKR.

⁴ P.E. Biggs. Signy 1947, Deception 1948. – CKR.

⁵ R.A. Lenton. Signy 1948, Admiralty Bay 1949, Deception 1951. Apparently did not winter with P.E. Biggs. – CKR.

And then, I don't know whether at the end of '48 whether he went to Signy or came back to the Falklands for a year. I don't know, I can't honestly remember.

[Part 1 0:22:30] Lee: OK. Did he encourage you to go at all, did he tell you 'This is a good thing to do'?

Biggs: No. No, I didn't even know he was going. He was a couple of years older than me, he was two or three - three years older. But no, I didn't know he was going but I, well, when I said I didn't know, I knew he was in Deception, he had already gone I think. I think he had been down there a year and '48 was his second year, I'm not sure.

[Part 1 0:23:06] Lee: I think he went in '47. So yes, he'd been there the year before you.

Biggs: Yes, and then I think he, I don't know whether he came back for just a couple of weeks and then went back down to Signy. I don't think he spent a year in the Falklands.

[Part 1 0:23:29] Lee: When you were interviewed by Miles Clifford, what sort of questions were they asking? Was it...

Biggs: Well, Miles Clifford I liked, he was a nice man. He was a typical Civil Servant I would think in hindsight, a typical Civil Servant, but he was a nice man, he never ever made you feel inferior in any way. But no, you see, he strangely enough - and nobody ever realised this including me, that he took quite an interest in everybody who lived in the town. Bearing in mind the population then was only about 900 people including children, so, I mean I knew everybody, I was virtually related to everybody through marriages and what-have-you. And he of course, it didn't take him long to, in his own mind, sort out people and put them in various little boxes I expect, I don't know. But questions, I don't think he asked any questions really.

[Part 1 0:24:51] Lee: So he knew you anyway?

Biggs: Yes, oh yes.

[Part 1 0:24:55] Lee: Do you suspect, in retrospect, that he thought, 'He's a good man to go south'?

Biggs: One of the reasons why he knew me was that I had to, in my job looking after all these... He liked to go for a ride, old Miles Clifford, and I used to have to gear his horse up and take it down to Government House for him, where he would climb aboard and he would tell me how long he would be, and I would be doing other things and at the allotted time when he was coming back I would go down and collect the horse and take it back to the stable, give him a rub down and obviously unsaddle him, and that was it. Now, he didn't like the horse-riding gear that was used in the Falklands, it was based on Spanish riding gear with a sheepskin what's-his-name thrown over the saddle to stop you getting saddle sores or whatever, and he subsequently got an adjutant-type person who was an ex-naval, no he wasn't ex, he was a naval commander, and he was a bloody alcoholic.

[Part 1 0:26:27] Lee: What was his name?

Biggs: Ah, Christ, I can't think of his name but he was a nasty bugger, I'll tell you that. He obviously didn't like colonials and I was, at that time, I was about seventeen I suppose and Miles Clifford and he used to like to go out - he used to go with Miles Clifford riding. And they sent to this country for English riding gear. It arrived and it was given to me by my boss, 'There you are,' he said. 'There's their riding gear, you gear up the two horses and take them down.' Now, I had never seen anything like it because the horses in the Falklands are trained - neck trained - for reins. Very soft mouths, no harsh bits apart from the snaffle. This gear was double reins, and I don't know what they called it but the thing that came down and went underneath between the forelegs and the cinch was put through, and this was to stop the saddle moving forward - moving back or something.

[Part 1 0:28:01] Biggs: Anyway, cutting a long story short, I had put this thing the wrong way round or something you see and I go down and this bloke, this adjutant-type person, came out, looked at it, and of course he knew what he was looking at, I didn't. And he called me an effing idiot, and that was something I did not like and I sort of said, 'Bugger you, you're not going to talk to me like that.' With that, Miles Clifford arrived and heard me say it. So he said, 'What's going on here, Biggs?' So I said 'He's just called me an effing idiot and I don't like it, and I've told him so.' 'Right,' he said, 'you forget all about it, I'll sort it out.' So anyway, off they went and next thing was this bloke was on the next ship back to the UK. And that was that.

[Part 1 0:29:13] Lee: I think his replacement was somebody called John Huckle. Does that name ring a bell?

Biggs: Well, the name is familiar but I must say that, again at that particular time I was moving backwards and forwards to the Falklands. I came... His name was mentioned to me last night and I said, 'Yes, well I know who you mean but I've no idea what he done, who he was or where he comes from, I knew he wasn't an islander but I didn't know... I got the impression from what people told me that he was a Naval, Royal Navy man, I don't know if that's true or not. He held rank, but I don't know what, so no, I don't really...

[Part 1 0:30:08] Lee: He wound up being the Harbourmaster at Stanley.

Biggs: Yes, so I believe.

[Part 1 0:30:13] Lee: OK, it doesn't matter, just seeing whether you remembered the name. So, let's go back to - you were heading south then, you picked up the *John Biscoe*⁶...

Biggs: No we were on the *Snipe*, HMS *Snipe*.

[Part 1 0:30:25] Lee: Ah, HMS *Snipe*, I beg your pardon. And did that take you then to Admiralty Bay?

Biggs: Yes. Now, this is quite interesting, we were in the Chief Petty Officers' Mess, they got turfed out and we had the - I don't know where they went - somewhere else on the ship. Not a

⁶ RRS John Biscoe. 59m Diesel-engined wooden net-laying ship converted for Antarctic service. Built 1944. Later sold and succeeded by another RRS John Biscoe (1956). – CKR.

very big ship these Frigates. And we were in their Mess, I think we had one in there with us, one Chief Petty Officer. And we messed in there, and we had our food, well not that any of us could bloody eat for the first three days! Oh, it was bloody horrendous I tell you, I'd never been on a ship like it and I'd sailed on a few. But any way, we were invited up to the Wardroom on the last day at sea for drinks with the Captain and the other officers. Oh we were the bee's knees, we were going somewhere we'd never been before.

[Part 1 0:31:42] Biggs: Anyway, they unloaded us, the *Biscoe*, we were there for... now Pat Davis, the bloke that was with me had been sworn in as a Magistrate. He was two years older than me, I was the youngest man - or boy if you want - there. I was eighteen, coming up nineteen but I was about eighteen and a half. They were all, he was 21 or 22 and we got there in this little lean-to. *Biscoe* arrives, now he, Pat Davis, was a very, very good carpenter. No doubt about that, he'd done his time locally but he was an excellent carpenter. Unfortunately he didn't have a bit of paper to say that he was, because he had not done it in this country. Anyway, that was why he was sent down there with me. They knew that this hut was going to be built, we had no idea what was going to happen, I might add.

[Part 1 0:33:00] Biggs: The *Biscoe* finally arrives, the hut's unloaded and that's it, it's built; Vivian Fuchs who was in charge of the whole caboodle wanted me to go down with him down to Stonington Island, then. Eric Platt said, 'Oh, let him stay here until we've finished the inside of the hut.' Because the *Biscoe* was going. 'You can pick him up on the next trip and he can go down on the next trip.' So, Vivian Fuchs agreed so I stayed at Admiralty Bay. The inside of the hut is completed, the bunks are built - my bunk wasn't built because I was going to be leaving on the next *Biscoe* trip and I had a hammock slung. Fine, that was it, so next trip the *Biscoe* arrives, I pack my bag and go on board and the Chief, the First Mate says to me, 'Sorry mate,' he said, 'we can't go there, it's all iced in down there and we're not going, you'll have to stay here.' So I had to stay at Admiralty Bay.

[Part 1 0:34:28] Lee: So Stonington was not relieved that year?

Biggs: Oh yes, they were relieved but... Vivian Fuchs and his men relieving the others had gone down on the first trip which was ice free and the blokes had come out and gone back to the Falklands and the *Biscoe* re-provisioned in the Falklands to come back down with more supplies and what-have-you. They'd been given news that Stonington was iced in and they would not get through, and they weren't to attempt it. And of course they didn't.

[Part 1 0:35:06] Lee: So, there you were at Admiralty Bay with no bed!

Biggs: Well no, we had - I don't know where it had come from, I think it must have been already there, or it was an overflow from the hut - we had quite a bit of Brazilian pine, which is very similar to the pine trees in this... except that the texture is the same but the grain, and that is red as opposed to it being white or brown in the northern pine. And Pat Davis built me a bunk out of that, on the other side of the hut. Oh it fitted in quite nicely, the bunks, there was three down one side and one at the end for the Wireless Operator and then this one down here which backed onto the galley was mine. There we are.

[Part 1 0:36:08] Lee: What else do you remember about the hut? I believe you took about two weeks to build it, 10 days, two weeks?

Biggs: Well the main thing, and I was bloody peeved about it, this bloody great tree trunk come ashore, well there were two of them, for the hut to rest on. And it's most odd but whenever anyone goes to lift anything, and you've got five or six people, they don't space themselves out down the length of it, they all go to one end. Well I'm at the far end on my tod and the beach of course slopes slightly and I never thought to say anything or shout or do anything like that. No when they said lift up we lifted and of course once the weight come on, well I bloody near sunk into the ground. I managed to stagger up the beach with these five or six other blokes up the other end, and when they turned round they said, 'Oh, you were on your own down there!' I said, 'Yeah, bloody right I was.'

[Part 1 0:37:19] Biggs: Anyway, we got it done, we laid them in the right... It was a good job old Pat Davis was there because he actually knew what he was doing, which was what a lot of other people didn't know. And, we got the floor down, got the sides up, the roof on and I said to... Because Eric Platt was then, he was the Magistrate as well, had been sworn in, so we had two Magistrates at Admiralty Bay. I said to him, 'Look, we'd better get the deadmen in.' You know what a deadman is? No, well it's a... You dig a big hole, and you dig a hole, say - there, and you put a cable over the roof and you dig another hole - there, and the cable is attached to whatever you want to attach it to, a big lump of rock, whatever, but the hole has got to be down quite deep.

[Part 1 0:38:34] Biggs: Do that and you have bulldog clips which clipped the cable together, the end of the cable on either side to the main piece going over. And then you fill the hole back in. Now the reason for that is - and you had one either end of the hut, on the roof - and the reason for that, that the wind, in the state it was in at that particular time if we had a heavy blow, would have lifted the roof right off. Well he didn't want to do it, he said, 'Oh no, the weather's fine.' And I said, 'Look, the weather can bloody change.' This is one of the reasons why we were employed, I might add, because we knew roughly, living in the Falklands, what gales were like. So he got me and some others to dig these four holes and off we went, done it, put in and that was fine.

[Part 1 0:39:47] Biggs: *Biscoe* left, all the stores were scattered and he put me in charge of sorting all the stores out. And we had... What I'd done, I'd rolled all these drums of fuel oil and what-have-you for the generators into a pile standing up round about, and all of a sudden this bloody gale hit us. Christ did it hit us. It blew everything away virtually. Drums of fuel oil went careering over - well we couldn't go out, it was too fierce. We'd also put up a mast with a weathervane on top, I forget what they call it now.

[Part 1 0:40:45] Lee: Anemometer.

Biggs: Yes. And again that wasn't put up how we wanted it put up, how Pat Davis and I wanted it put up. It was put up as per UK. Well we tried to tell them that you weren't in the UK! Well, it's supposed to withstand any amount of wind, and that's how it's done in the UK and they don't come down in the UK. Well of course this was up when this bloody gale hit

us. Three stays from the middle of this thing, sitting on a metal plate on top of the ground. Well, it just took it didn't it, the wind. Whoof, gone. And of course when it all blew itself out and we were able to get back out again, our fuel oil, we managed to - because the wind was going away from the sea - we managed to salvage most of it, I think we lost one drum but that was really peanuts. The mast we never did find it, Christ knows where that went. It was metal but it just vanished.

[Part 1 0:42:07] Biggs: Well fortunately somebody in this country when they got all this stuff together, decided to double it all. So we did have another mast. We also had a wireless mast for the wireless, and a box for the barometer and thermometers and things to go in. So, Jack Reid it was, was the Meteorological man, we said to him, 'Well how do you want this done now, bearing in mind that we have already lost one lot?' 'Oh,' he said, 'you do it as you want, you do it.' So we did. We sunk the metal plate down into the ground by about nine inches, we had three stays from the middle, and three stays from right at the top, and all fastened down with deadmen. And we put the - his box for his barometer and things like this, we put two stays over that and fastened them down with deadmen and when we left it was still standing there, they were there, you know.

[Part 1 0:43:40] Biggs: The wireless mast was still there then, I don't know what happened afterwards, but I think they moved the hut. That was another thing, we didn't want... Pat Davis and I didn't really want the hut to be built where it was because behind it was a slope. Not a big slope, only about perhaps 12 or 15 foot high, higher than the hut, and we knew what would happen, that when the winter set in and it started to snow, the snow would drift and cover the whole shebang up and we would have to dig tunnels and things. Which we did have to actually, we had to dig a tunnel to the generating shed, which was a little way away from the main hut, and it was, it drifted over, it was snowed under, the whole hut was covered. I understand that - I dunno when they done it but I understand that when they didn't move that hut but they rebuilt it up on a higher level, so that the snow and that couldn't cover it up.

[Part 1 0:45:01] Lee: How sophisticated do you feel the hut was compared to the days of Scott and Shackleton? Was it just the same?

Biggs: Oh I would have thought that probably we were, oh I don't know, you see Shackleton, he was a hands-on man wasn't he, he liked to mix with all his men, he was one of them, and I think that their accommodation was based on - that they would all sort of live together. Whereas Scott, he was a rigid Naval man and he had upper and lower decks. Which doesn't work.

[Part 1 0:45:46] Lee: I was thinking of the building though. I mean, did you have double glazing or was it all...

Biggs: Oh yes, oh I see what you mean, yes. Oh yes we had double glazing, it had wooden walls, you put up the inner wall and then you put battens on and you had, I suppose it's something like, oh...

[Part 1 0:46:16] Lee: Foil?

Biggs: You've got to bear with me, my brain doesn't work properly. Foil.

[Part 1 0:46:23] Lee: Kitchen Foil

Biggs: Kitchen Foil, like that. Big sheets of it. And that was put on, then you put another set of battens on and you put on tarred paper. Tarred paper was allegedly, if it did get damp, that it would stop the damp creeping in. Of course the foil was reflecting heat coming out of the hut back in and the cold coming in back out. That was the theory which did work, or at least appeared to work anyway. And that was that. That's how it was built, the whole thing as I said was wooden, we had enough space, it was about the length of this room, the hut, 27 feet. About, let me see, three... six... about twelve foot wide I would think. Perhaps not quite as wide as that but about twelve foot wide. Table, the chairs, for eating our meals and what-have-you.

[Part 1 0:47:41] Biggs: We had a very limited library, a very limited amount of 79 long players, 78 rather, 78 long playing records, a hand gramophone. Of course, the wireless operator with his wireless which he very seldom managed to get to work for some strange reason. And of course the galley with the AGA, a big fuel drum which we'd emptied and as I was quite handy with a sail needle we had some canvas and we made, oh a canvas inner if you like, to try and stop it going rusty with - what we done, we got a lot of snow and melted it and filled this thing up with water so we always had plenty of water for cooking and other, you know washing and all the rest of it, and it was always replenished every day.

[Part 1 0:48:57] Lee: So you made a canvas inner bag to go in the oil drum.

Biggs: Yes.

[Part 1 0:49:02] Lee: So that was for fresh water to...

Biggs: Well it was to try and stop the rust but of course it didn't actually work completely, it did work up to a point but it didn't work completely, but it allowed - the rust seemed to sink to the bottom, between the canvas inner and the metal barrel.

[Part 1 0:49:28] Lee: Was that your idea?

Biggs: The idea was mine to make the canvas thing but, I thought it would have worked properly but it didn't, it didn't work properly. But it did up to a point, it kept the top part of the water anyway clear from rust.

[Part 1 0:49:50] Lee: What else do you remember making, you were there as a "Handyman," that was your title, so what else - did you make a bath?

Biggs: No, we had sort of a tin bath thing that was done... I used to help... Well my actual job as such, when everything settled down and we got living in the hut, was to look after stores, to go out and get the rations for the day, so to speak, and bring them in, and every fourth week I was a cook. Was it every four, yes every four weeks, because it was considered that

the wireless operator and Jack Reid could only cook once every eight weeks or however it worked. So every fourth week I was a cook but I still had to go and get the rations and everything else for the, you know. And it was my job to ask the current cook what he wanted to cook for the day and I had to go and sort of get it, if you like. Look after the fuel for the stove, and that was buried in the snow, so I had to dig that out.

[Part 1 0:51:22] Lee: How would you know where the food was?

Biggs: It was in the Nissen hut.

[Part 1 0:51:28] Lee: Right, it wasn't buried in snow then.

Biggs: Not completely, no, we had enough... see, I don't know if you've ever noticed how snow and the wind work, I don't know, perhaps you haven't or perhaps you do, but the wind used to come in over a slight slope off the glacier, which was about, oh, a couple of miles away. It used to come over the Nissen hut, and in coming over the Nissen hut and the slope behind the Nissen hut, of course the wind lifted up and this allowed the snow to drop down, and then when it got to where our hut was, it started to pick up again and it drifted right into - it covered the hut up. So the front of the Nissen - the back was all snowed in where the lean-to that we lived in was but the front of it stayed relatively snow clear. Oh it had snow round it, no, but it stayed fairly clear so once you got out of our hut you could walk in and out of the front of it.

[Part 1 0:52:40] Lee: Did you make any sledges?

Biggs: Well, that was a cause of quite a lot of grief.

[Part 1 0:52:46] Lee: Tell me about that, Ian.

Biggs: Well, as I said, Pat Davis was an excellent carpenter, he knew what he was doing and he knew when he spoke about various grains of timber and things like this, he knew what he was talking about. Well cutting a long story short, we had skis but one of them got broken, one of these skis. I don't know, I'm not sure where it got broken, I think it was at the end, one of the ends. Anyway you couldn't ski with it properly. So Eric Platt wanted Pat Davis to make a Nansen sledge, could he do it? Yes, he could do it. Right, so where we had the generators, we turned it into a sort of a workshop if you like, with a bench there for him to do all his sawing and planing and what-have-you. And I used to give him a hand with it.

[Part 1 0:54:01] Biggs: Anyway, we constructed this, or he did, this sledge, but we only had this Brazilian pine, and because of the way that the grain was, he couldn't put the brackets on the end of this sledge like the proper Nansen because he said it will break, it will split along the grain and it won't work. I'd have to put in what he termed as a "triangle," well, triangle in wood, and that wouldn't break because the weight would come down on the point and it would extend and stop and it wouldn't break off. So no, Eric Platt didn't want that, 'Oh no, no,' he said, 'I want a Nansen Sledge.' He said, 'It's no good me building these brackets and putting them in because the first time you take it out they'll break.'

[Part 1 0:55:06] Biggs: Well, he wouldn't have it so he put these brackets in as per Nansen sledge. Right, so him and Jack Reid, when it's completed, take it out on the slope behind the hut and of course there's all sorts of - all this Sastrugi, and they go up the top of this slope, sit on it and come down, nothing happened. Of course he gets a smirk on his face doesn't he, Eric Platt, more or less, 'I bloody told you so, see.' So they take it up again. Down they come, crack, the things break. Oh. Well, instead of saying, 'Oh you were right,' you know, he said, 'You didn't bloody do this properly, you don't know what you're doing.' So of course old Pat, he was quick tempered but it did take a lot to upset him, but that did upset him, when he said, 'You don't know what you're doing.' So, 'Alright,' says Pat to Eric, 'It's yours, you do it, you think you know what you're doing, you go and do it.' Because Eric Platt reckoned he had done a bit of woodworking when he was in University or somewhere.

[Part 1 0:56:47] Biggs: Anyway, again, he couldn't, could he. He couldn't do it. So, I don't think he quite knew what to do really, so anyway eventually he says to Pat, 'I want you to do it.' So Pat Davis said, 'Well I think an apology is called for for a start, and also I'll only do it my way.' 'Oh yes, yes,' he said, 'and I do apologise.' So that's what he done, he put these triangular brackets in at the back and the sledge was still going strong when we left. But that did cause quite a lot of grief, purely and simply because of what had gone on prior to that, being that we were colonials and we weren't really, you know we weren't - how could I put it - not bright, and yet we proved that they were wrong time and time again, and that rankled obviously but it was borne without anybody getting too uptight about it, if you understand what I mean. Certainly it didn't cause me to start losing my temper but I think with Pat it was building up in him.

[Part 1 0:58:40] Lee: Would you say Eric was a difficult man then, Eric Platt?

Biggs: He was what I have since discovered a typical Yorkshireman. And he was obstinate in that until he tried something and couldn't do it he wouldn't accept that we were right if we - you know, like the sledge - until he'd tried to do it he wouldn't accept that Pat Davis was right.

[Part 1 0:59:15] Lee: So how would you rate him as a Base Leader?

Biggs: Ah, now I must confess that I never had any serious rows or anything like that with him. I often used to think he was a bit of a pratt but not to the extent that he was completely ignorant of anything, he obviously wasn't, he was, I would have thought, probably quite a clever man in many respects. He'd been to university, he'd got a degree in geology. What we couldn't understand at the time was that he never used to go out doing any of his geological work. And of course it culminated in his death, the reason why he didn't go out. But that's another story.

[Part 1 1:00:22] Lee: Well we'll come to that in the second part of the interview Ian, let's take a break now for a cup of tea.

Biggs: Right, yes, fine.

[Part 1 1:00:28] Lee: Excellent, thank you very much.

[Part 1 1:00:30] [End of Part One]

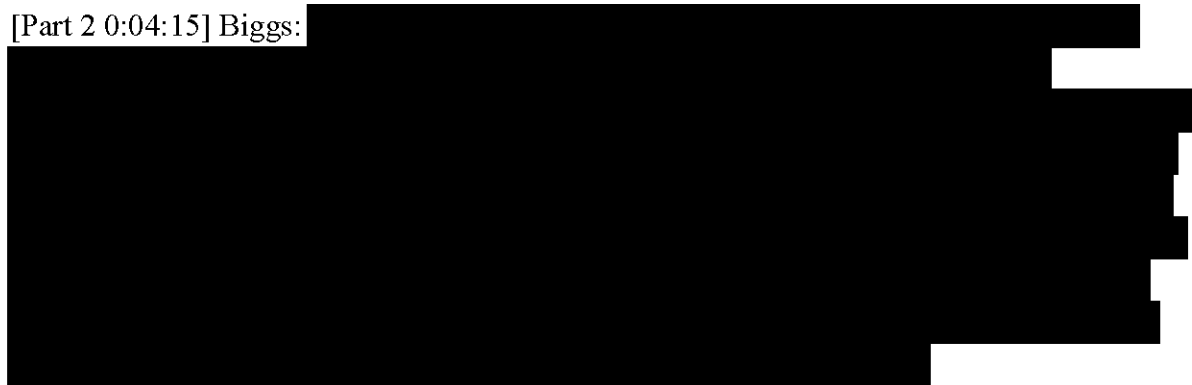
[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Ian Biggs, recorded at his home in South Croydon, Surrey, by Chris Eldon Lee on 27th September 2010. Ian Biggs, Part 2. We were talking before the break, Ian, about the Base Leader Eric Platt and this seems now an appropriate moment to talk about his last day. Tell me the story as you experienced it please.

Biggs: Well, it is rather difficult to know where to begin with that because we had news of the... Well, before I start that, I always say that in our provisions we had no powdered egg. Now, mightn't seem much but because we didn't have any powdered egg, meant that our cooking of various things was restricted. And not being trained chefs, you know, we couldn't cook any sort of cake or anything like that. Now then, that said, we heard about the *John Biscoe* leaving the UK to come down to relieve us and we decided – we'd been given a certain amount of alcohol to drink whenever we wanted to, I suppose but there was no beer, it was all spirits. Rum, Whisky, I think a bottle of Brandy, but we had quite a lot of Rum, quite a lot of Whisky, I'm not sure about Gin but we had sort of mixer-type cordials to go with it. And apart from birthdays where we'd all have perhaps one or two drinks on somebody's birthday, it had hardly been touched, the alcohol. Anyway, we decided when we heard this news, to have a party.

[Part 2 0:02:35] Lee: When would this be, this would be the...

Biggs: It would be probably, let's see, the end of September? '48? Beginning of October, I'm not sure of the date but I would think probably the beginning of October time. And, we decided to have this party to celebrate the fact that the ship was on its way, if you like, and I was put in charge of the telephone [*sic*] and records, and the rest of them were indulging in - well no, I mean I had a drink, I'm not suggesting that I didn't, I had one or two drinks but I didn't get drunk. And I was playing these bloody records; anyway, I still can't fathom what went wrong but something went radically wrong. I'm sitting at the table - it was there, lengthways, my bunk was there and I'm sitting at the table with the gramophone, kept winding it up and putting on various records, the other three were sitting - the other four rather - were sitting around having drinkiepoos and things, we were all chatting away and what-have-you.

[Part 2 0:04:15] Biggs:



[Part 2 0:05:22] Biggs:

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:06:45] Biggs:

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:08:10] Biggs:

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:09:03] Biggs:

[REDACTED]

[Part 2 0:10:06] Biggs:

[REDACTED]

[Redacted]

[Part 2 0:11:41] Biggs: [Redacted]

[Part 2 0:12:50] Lee: [Redacted]

Biggs: Sorry?

[Part 2 0:12:54] Lee: [Redacted]

Biggs: [Redacted]

[Part 2 0:13:20] Lee: Let's go then to the October when the ice started to form.

Biggs: Yes, well anyway, the sea ice had started to break up. Eric Platt - we knew that there was a penguin rookery about between 10 and 15 miles away, we had to cross the sea ice, climb up a slope, and you went down into a big sort of dip, and then walked back up onto what we called The Plateau. And then you had a fair length to go to get to the penguin rookery, and they were Chinstrap penguins⁷. Because we hadn't any eggs, Eric Platt asked me and Dennis Farmer, for some strange reason, to go with the sledge and see if we could get some penguin eggs. So off we went, cross the sea ice, we climb this slope... Now this sounds a little bit easy, it wasn't easy, it was about two to three, two and a half to three miles across the - we had to go across the sea ice, we had to climb this fairly steep slope to the top which

⁷ Official records suggest that the rookery visited was on Penguin Island, off the eastern entrance (far side) of King George Bay. This is over 25km from the base and would have involved a long sea ice crossing, an unfeasible day return trip. Both this account and Jack Reid's indicate that the rookery was on the near side (west side) of the bay, perhaps at Lion's Rump, roughly 15km from base, where there is a large Chinstrap colony. – CKR.

was probably about, I don't know, 700 feet, 600 feet, then go down into this dip and then climb up this slope onto the plateau, as we called it.

[Part 2 0:15:08] Biggs: We get down to the bottom of this sort of dip and start to climb and, bloody hell, Dennis Farmer virtually broke down. And I couldn't believe it; 'Oh I can't go on any more,' he went, 'I can't go on any more.' So I said, 'What do you mean you can't go on any more?' 'I can't climb up there,' he said, 'I can't go on any further.' And he was virtually almost bloody crying, he was, and I thought, 'Oh Christ, what am I going to do now?' I couldn't leave him, not really, I didn't want to go back empty handed - as it happened I had to - so I thought, 'Oh well,' I said, 'alright Dennis, you hang about here, don't go to sleep, just amble about and I'll go up the top and see if I can see the penguin rookery.' So I climbed up the top of this slope and, yes I could see the penguin rookery but it was a long way away, it really was, you could just see little black dots moving about. So I came back down and said 'Alright Dennis, we'll go back to the base.' So off we went, we both got on the sledge going down the slope onto the sea ice, whoof.

[Part 2 0:16:41] Biggs: Now up on the slope you could see where the rotten ice was and where the good stuff was, so off we go and I don't know how the hell it happened, I really don't know but we walked on the safe ice for, oh, some considerable distance and then all of a sudden I'm in the water up to me neck. Boof. Christ. I can't swim, never have been able to swim. He fell in up to his waist and managed to wriggle up onto the safe ice again, and he looked at me and I said, 'Well for Christ's sake do something Dennis, I can't get out on my own!' 'Well what do you want me to do?' He said, so I said - I mean it's funny now but it wasn't bloody funny then, I tell you - so I say, 'Get hold of the sledge.' Well he gets hold of the sledge. I said, 'Push it to me, arse first.' So, he pushed it to me, arse first and I caught hold of it and I sort of tried to jump up, but it didn't work quite, so I come down with a crunch, and up again and I managed to sort of half-wriggle, I got my top half out to there, up on the ice, and he's still bloody sitting there, hanging onto the rope at the sledge and not doing anything, so I said, 'For Christ's sake give us a hand and pull it.' So he did and I got up out of it.

[Part 2 0:18:31] Biggs: By the time we got back to the base we're both bloody frozen, all our clothes are frozen stiff and to make matters worse I suddenly realised that when we'd changed and had a hot toddy, that my eyes were very sore. And I'd forgotten to take my goggles with me, and of course when I woke up the next morning I couldn't see properly, water was pouring down my face from my eyes, I was bloody snow blind. Now, that lasted about a week, gradually got better. On the day that Eric Platt and Jack Reid set off for the rookery, of course Eric Platt I think thought we were a couple of silly sods not getting there and getting back. I didn't say why we'd come back, all I said was that Dennis couldn't really make it, by climbing this slope, and left it at that.

[Part 2 0:19:53] Biggs: So they set off, the two of them. Didn't take the sledge, they took a haversack each. Now, again, Pat Davis and I were used to going to penguin rookeries, used to collecting a few eggs or whatever and we knew what to do. So, we instilled - or tried to instil - that when they got to the rookery to only take the eggs from the outer edge of the rookery

because they are the last birds to arrive and the eggs will still be fresh, they won't have started to turn. If you're not sure, just break one open and see what it is. 'Right, OK, we'll do that, yes, fine.' Off they go, I'd virtually recovered by this time from the snow blindness, my eyes were still a bit sore but I'd virtually recovered. Anyway, I don't know what time they set off, it was quite early in the morning - very early in the morning - and they did get there, they did fill their haversacks with eggs, and it started to snow on the way back. And I don't know whether Jack Reid could remember the times, I can't, but certainly it was snowing, it was snowing quite heavy but fortunately there was no wind, it was just coming down.

[Part 2 0:21:42] Biggs: So he gets back to the Base – they'd taken a compass with them that Jack Reid had, and he came in, all of a lather, saying that he'd carried Platt some considerable distance and couldn't carry him any more, and so he'd come back to get some help to bring him in. Now because it was snowing and he had the compass, he took the wrong readings on the wrong set of rock. An easy enough mistake to make while it's snowing and you can't really tell exactly where you are, and he thought that he was somewhere close to a pillar of rock we called Cleopatra's Needle⁸. In actual fact he was at another group of rocks which is some two or three miles away from that, and he had taken the readings of his compass onto what he thought was Cleopatra's Needle, and it wasn't. Anyway, he gets back to Base and it had stopped snowing. So, the three of them, Dennis Farmer, himself and Pat Davis took off. Now this just shows you where not enough thought and being in a hurry, they forgot to take any rope with them. Easy enough done.

[Part 2 0:23:27] Biggs: And off they go and because it had stopped snowing they could see Cleopatra's Needle quite beautifully sitting there, so old Jack Reid takes them there. 'Yes,' he said, 'it should be just about here...' And plop, down a bloody crevasse goes Dennis Farmer. Now he had a haversack with some chocolate and a small bottle of rum, a flask of rum, in it. And of course - might I say it was dark at this time, there was no - it really was dark. They couldn't get him out because he was too far down, they hadn't got any rope, so they come all the way back to base, got rope, got me, and off we went and believe me, he was very, very fortunate, because they told him not to move except just to keep his feet going and have little sips of rum and a bit of chocolate to keep himself going. If he'd have fallen six feet to his left, we probably would never have seen him again, because it was - you just could not see the bottom of this crevasse.

[Part 2 0:24:49] Lee: He was on a ledge was he?

Biggs: Well what we called a snow bridge. He'd landed on this and it was heavy enough - thick enough and heavy enough - to bear his weight, but if he'd have moved just a couple or three feet from where he was, he'd have gone, you know, there was no argument about that, we would never have found him. Anyway, we hauled him out and that's the first time I've ever seen an adult male cry. I'd never seen a man cry before; I wasn't proud of my thoughts at the time but, well I didn't know what to say or do, well I didn't say anything, I didn't do anything, I just, I couldn't believe it. I've seen some quite nasty things in my life but it's just

⁸ Probably Ternyck Needle, a prominent 90m bullet-shaped brown basalt nunatak. – CKR.

never affected me as I want to howl, if you understand what I mean. I probably can understand his reaction, the fact that he suddenly realised that he was safe, if you like, or safer, he'd been found and hauled up.

[Part 2 0:26:05] Biggs: Anyway, while we were getting him sort of brushed down and getting him ready to move on, old Jack said, 'Oh, I've taken the wrong readings, it's not here at all, it's down there about three miles away.' All of three miles I think it would have been, I must confess I don't know the distances but probably all of three miles to another set of rock. Anyway, off we go and we find... Everybody's looking and I suddenly saw three little black dots sticking up out of the snow and I pointed them out to the others and said, 'Look, there's three little black dots there.' And it was about, I don't know, a quarter of a mile or so.

[Part 2 0:27:17] Biggs: Anyway, it was his haversack, Eric Platt's haversack, and these three little black dots were part of the metal frame that went round to the back, and they stuck out a bit. Norwegian haversacks they were, and these things - the haversack was covered with snow except for these little black dots. Anyway, there was no sign of Eric Platt, no sign of him at all. So, I think Pat Davis said, 'Well he must be around here somewhere.' So we started doing a search and moved out. I don't know who it was found him, it wasn't me, I don't know if it was Jack or Pat Davis or even Dennis Farmer, I don't know who found him but yes, we found him and he was dead. There was no argument about it, he was as hard as, well, that slate on my fireplace, he was absolutely frozen solid.

[Part 2 0:28:28] Lee: Had he been alive when Jack Reid left him to come back to the house?

Biggs: Yes he had, he had been alive and Jack tried to impress on him to keep moving around, not to sit down, not to go to sleep, no nothing. And obviously what he'd done, he'd got so tired that he had stretched out in the snow, folded his arms like that, so his elbows stuck out - we couldn't even move them, his arms - anyway, we had to leave him there, we didn't have the sledge with us so we had to leave him where he was. We brought the haversack back with us and Pat Davis and I that afternoon, we went back, had a meal, got the sledge, the rope and all the rest of it and we went back and put him on the sledge and brought him back to base.

[Part 2 0:29:33] Lee: Do you know what the cause of death was?

Biggs: I've a very good idea - a heart attack. Heart failure. And I mentioned before that he never went out doing any geological work except very locally, but he never went, you know, up the sort of mountains or slopes or whatever to get rock samples, and we didn't ask him but I often - I think we all wondered why, he was there as a Geologist after all's said and done but he never seemed to want to do it. There was one other occasion previous to him dying; we had been out and we had a dinghy, and we had been out across to one of the local points to drop some provisions off, and he was with us. Now he didn't take any part in rowing the dinghy or anything like that, and we got back onto our piece of ground, if you like, where the hut was, and it started to snow, and we still had about a quarter of a mile or so, or more to get back to the hut.

[Part 2 0:30:59] Biggs: And during that time, he twice got disorientated for some - well we know now - for some reason, and started going round in a circle, and we had to catch hold of him and bring him back, made him walk and got him back into the hut, where after about an hour or so he was his old self again. We didn't, or at least I didn't know why he'd done that, and I don't think anybody else did, but somebody - certainly not me or Pat Davis but either Jack or Dennis Farmer - said it was because he had a weak heart, his heart must be weak. How true it was I don't really know, but certainly something gave out on that walk which shouldn't have done because he was only a young man, I think he was, what, 22 I think, 22 then. So, I mean he shouldn't have packed up like that. So there was something sort of radically wrong with him.

[Part 2 0:32:28] Lee: In Jack Reid's account⁹, he is of the opinion that Eric had an enlarged, off-centre heart, and it hadn't been picked up at the medical before going south because the medical was conducted at the School of Tropical Hygiene in Liverpool and not the regular Harley Street doctor that the rest of the Fids went to. Does that make sense?

Biggs: Well there was certainly something wrong obviously with his heart and I wouldn't disagree with that, I mean I'm... I must say that I thought that Jack really played an excellent bloody game that night to try and get him back, there's no two ways about that. It was unfortunate that snow was falling, thick snow, and he took a reading from the wrong set of rocks. Having said that, even if he knew exactly where it was and not made the made the mistake, he probably would have been probably dead anyway, when we found him, so...

[Part 2 0:33:48] Lee: How did that affect the rest of the men on the base?

Biggs: Well, we were so busy making the coffin, me digging the grave, Dennis Farmer - I never really knew what to make of him, he was an Anglo Indian and he'd been a wireless operator in the Merchant Navy and therefore he didn't know anything about generators and powering up his radio with generators, and consequently... I mean the big diesel generator, we never ever did get it going properly because none of us were mechanically minded, we didn't know anything about bloody engines, and he - because the wireless operator actually was responsible for the generators and the wireless, and he should have known how to, you know, but he didn't, so that was that.

[Part 2 0:35:05] Biggs: Well, I think that yes, we were very subdued I suppose in the sense that we had lost somebody that needn't have been lost, so to speak. And then, when - I still can't believe it - when we opened the haversacks and we started breaking the eggs, they were all bad. They had all started to turn, you know you could see the young chicks inside. We got one egg I think out of that lot that was good, and there was something like, I don't know how many eggs, but there was bloody quite a lot, and I said to Jack, I said, 'Here, you didn't get the eggs from the outside of the rookery, did you?' 'Well no,' he said, 'we went in the middle because it was quicker to fill the haversacks.' So, well you can draw your own conclusions from that, can't you?

⁹ BAS Archives AD6/24/1/66. – CKR.

[Part 2 0:36:23] Lee: Was the good egg made use of or did nobody want to touch it?

Biggs: Sorry?

[Part 2 0:36:27] Lee: Was the good egg made use of or did nobody want to use it, to eat it?

Biggs: No, well, I don't know... It was just, well I don't think anybody mentioned anything about all the eggs being rotten at all anywhere, and the fact that it was, when you look at it in hindsight, it was a useless bloody journey really, because the wrong eggs had been bloody put into the haversacks. But anyway, there you go.

[Part 2 0:37:06] Lee: How long did it take for the base to function properly again after that, or were you in a state of shock for some time?

Biggs: Oh, no, well we functioned quite well, I mean Pat Davis was... We didn't want to break any bones or try - we could not move his arms, he was absolutely frozen solid. You try to tell people this and it's very difficult for them to imagine a human being being bloody frozen stiff, and that's what he was, he was just like a big plank of wood, and you couldn't move his arms, so what Pat Davis had to do - good old Brazilian Pine again - he had to build a coffin so that where his elbows were, it came out like that and then, like that, so that it encased his elbows without trying to move his arms. And he was put in the coffin, I had, we had two shovels, two spades, two pickaxes, and two crowbars. I broke the two pickaxes, the handles, I broke the two spades' handles and I broke the two shovels' handles in trying to dig down. It was frozen solid, the summer hadn't really started properly so there was no give in the shale and stuff whatsoever, it was all matted together.

[Part 2 0:38:49] Biggs: Anyway, I managed to get down - we put it on a little slope, but the slope wasn't wide enough to take the coffin complete at the same depth. In other words, in the middle I got down to three foot six but at either end I was only down two foot six to three foot. And I had to leave it because I had broken all the tools. Or I say broken them, they got broken with me digging this grave, so we decided that that would be deep enough and with the crowbar we would go out and lever off lumps of rock and fill the hole in, so to speak, over the top of this shale and stuff, and then build a cairn on the top of it, and stick a wooden cross on it. And of course when it come to burying him, unfortunately none of us were religious enough to know a burial sermon, so we just had to read a couple of prayers out of the bible after he'd been laid down in the grave, and that was it. I understand that since then a proper cairn has now been built, with a decent cross on it, but I haven't been back down there since, so you know, I can't comment or say when it was done, if it was done.

[Part 2 0:40:36] Lee: Was there any kind of inquiry?

Biggs: Well if there was I was never informed of it. Nobody ever asked me how or why he died, I've not broadcast it to anybody apart from this, it's too... I've just said he died and that was it, if anybody asked me.

[Part 2 0:40:58] Lee: Do you know if anybody went to see his family, did you go?

Biggs: I have no idea.

[Part 2 0:41:03] Lee: OK

Biggs: I have no idea, I would assume that somebody from Cambridge office would have visited, would have called, would have gone to see his family, I don't know.

[Part 2 0:41:17] Lee: But you didn't, you never went to see...

Biggs: Oh no. No, I didn't even know his address, to be perfectly honest.

[Part 2 0:41:25] Lee: And you were in the Falklands then.

Biggs: Yes, and I certainly didn't know Jack Reid's address or Dennis Farmer's. I knew that Jack originally come from Brighton, at least that's where he said he come from, and Dennis Farmer from, oh North London, oh, bloody hell...

[Part 2 0:41:53] Lee: Don't worry, don't worry. Is there anything more to say or shall we move on to other things?

Biggs: No, that's it, you know. Oh I don't know, in hindsight I think the whole thing was, not exactly a disaster because you learn an awful lot about human nature being stuck in a bloody hut with four other people, and in particular when you couldn't get out, when the blizzard's bloody raging and what-have-you. I mean, it always makes me smile when you get a snowfall in this country and they say it's a blizzard. Well, alright perhaps out in the moors and what-have-you it might be a bit of a blizzard but quite frankly, the people who write that sort of stuff, I don't think know what a bloody blizzard is. I often wonder - have wondered - why everybody was so insistent on having bases down there - the Argentinians, the Chileans and now I understand that King George Island is now Brazilian people there, scientists. Sort of BAS, or whatever it was or whoever's responsible for running at BAS have evacuated it, so to speak.

[Part 2 0:43:37] Lee: We haven't got much time left, Ian, and I'd like to talk a bit about South Georgia if I may, because you went there the following winter.

Biggs: I went down in the end of November, I think, in 1949. Danny Borland was the Meteorological person who was going to be in charge, and he was in the Falklands and he knew me, and asked me if I would go with him. And I did hum and ha for a little bit, and as I needed more money to get away, I said yes, I would go. And it was when they had the seaplanes to go down to try and relieve Stonington Island, and they had the Naval tanker-type ship *Gold Ranger*¹⁰ to go down with all the fuel and stuff for them. Not all of it but some of it, and now that was quite a horrendous journey, we had some quite severe gales, nothing that stopped the ship from ploughing through, it was quite a rough trip.

[Part 2 0:45:24] Biggs: Anyway, we got to Deception and unloaded these planes, in fact there was a picture of me on the scow - just me, I don't know why, it didn't show anybody else - in

¹⁰ RFA Gold Ranger. 111m Diesel Engined Steel Fleet Support Tanker. Built 1941. – CKR.

the Geographical Magazine, I would think probably March or somewhere 1950. Anyway, it's all unloaded and off we went to South Georgia, where - I can't for the life of me remember the names of the blokes that came with us, I know one, there was four of us, there was Pat Peck, he was our cook, myself, Danny Borland, and there were two others but I can't think what their names were. Well one of them didn't last very long because his girlfriend or somebody wanted him back in the UK, so he decided he would go.

[Part 2 0:46:41] Lee: Right, the Meteorologist was called Lankester, the Radio Operator was called Stock.

Biggs: Oh Richard Stock, I remember him alright, but he wasn't there...was he there in 1950?

[Part 2 0:46:59] Lee: Well according to Fuchs' book he was, although it's not infallible. You were down as a Meteorologist.

Biggs: Lankester must have been the one that came back to the UK then. His girlfriend wanted him, or somebody...

[Part 2 0:47:19] Lee: So were you doing Meteorology yourself or were you a Handyman still?

Biggs: No, just a Handyman, I looked after the, central heating and all that sort of thing, and we had a... Now that must have been when we had that horrendous bloody gale, yes it was. When I said we had a rough trip going down to Deception, we hit this bloody gale and we were hove to for two days, Christ yes I remember, I thought it was later on, another trip I'd done. But we had - that's right, it's coming back now, we had a team of Huskies on board...

[Part 2 0:48:09] Lee: What was the ship called - the *Biscoe*?

Biggs: The *Biscoe*, yes, and we had these two planes, the Auster and the other one¹¹, and the pilot was a French Canadian, I can't think of his name off hand, but he was going to pilot these planes down to - one of them, the big one - down to Stonington Island. Lee something or another, it was a French name he had¹².

[Part 2 0:48:51] Lee: Do continue, I don't think he'll be in here but...

Biggs: Yes, we also, there were some Chickens on board that I used to look after as well for the Customs Officer in South Georgia, and funnily enough, during this bloody gale, they laid eggs! And the poor old Huskies, they were miserable with getting bloody wet with all the spray and stuff coming over the side and over the bow, and they looked like bloody drowned rats, you know.

[Part 2 0:49:33] Lee: The planes on the boat were the ones that then later went down to relieve Stonington.

Biggs: The planes?

¹¹ De Havilland Norseman. - CKR.

¹² Peter Borden St. Louis. - CKR.

[Part 2 0:49:38] Lee: The aeroplanes, yes? To rescue the “Lost Eleven.”

Biggs: Yes. I can't think of the pilot's name but he...

[Part 2 0:49:46] Lee: Doesn't matter, it will be recorded, don't worry. There was a chap called Macarthur with you, a Scotsman from Skye?

Biggs: Ah, yes, now when did he arrive? If he was there in 1950, whether he took place of the bloke that went back, he could well have taken the place of the bloke that went back to the UK.

[Part 2 0:50:21] Lee: Well again, according to Fuchs' book he was there in '51.

Biggs: Ah, yes, ah well, '51...

[Part 2 0:50:34] Lee: What do you remember about an expedition with him?

Biggs: I'm sorry?

[Part 2 0:50:38] Lee: A duck shooting expedition with Macarthur. What do you recall about that?

Biggs: Ah, Christ. Well, there was three of us, there was him, me - I don't know who the third one was, whether it was Richard or not - there was three of us, and again a twelve foot dinghy. We went across Cumberland Bay to the far shore where we arrived, with my shotgun and 22 rifle, underneath the thwart. Pulled up onto the beach, got the firearms out and we went in search of... Because there are Teal Duck down in South Georgia but we didn't have any luck. And I don't know, I suppose we spent an hour and a half, two hours or more, looking for these - to see if we could find any. No luck. In the meantime the wind had risen and as we were virtually facing the opening into Cumberland Bay from the ocean, waves were coming in and they were quite big. They weren't too big that we couldn't launch the dinghy but they were a fair size.

[Part 2 0:52:14] Biggs: Anyway, we stowed the firearms back where we had them before and, I can't think of Macarthur's first name but he said, and believe this or believe it not - I couldn't believe it, 'We will launch this dinghy, he said, 'stern first.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'We'll launch it stern first,' he said, 'that's how they launch the lifeboat up in the Isle of Lewis.' So I said, 'I don't believe this...' 'Oh yes,' he said, 'we'll launch it stern first...' he said - I don't know who the third man was, I'm buggered if I can remember - but anyway, he said 'I'll stand up in the dinghy and old matey will stand in the dinghy, and you push, and you jump in over the bow when we are afloat. And then we can sit down and pull away.'

[Part 2 0:53:23] Biggs: Well, I don't know whether you know anything about launching small boats or whatever in a bit of rough weather, but you do not launch a dinghy stern first into a sea which the waves are coming at you. What's going to happen? You know what's going to happen. Sure enough it bloody happened, the dinghy filled up with water. By this time of course I was in it. It turned turtle, or onto its side, we all went into the water - I can't swim - well, anyway, I did not know what to bloody do. I felt something moving alongside and I

grabbed hold of it and it was somebody's leg. I don't know who's leg it was; anyway finally we got up onto the beach and there's the bloody dinghy wallowing there, full of water. I said, 'You silly sod.'

[Part 2 0:54:25] Biggs: Well, we had to obviously bail it out, well we managed to get it and tip a lot of the water out - I think we did have a bailer, we must have done in the thing - and we finally got it bailed out so I said, 'I think we should now,' I said, 'do it the right way, and bow first into the waves. If you want me to push it off, fine. But you two, if you're going to use the oars, will sit down with the oars at the ready, and I'll jump in over the stern.' 'Alright, OK,' says Macarthur. No problem. Went off, and that was it. And I don't know where he got this bloody idea from to launch it stern first, I still even today cannot understand it.

[Part 2 0:55:22] Lee: His name was Alistair.

Biggs: Alistair. Yes, I think we used to call him Mac. Because he's in the Church now isn't he?

[Part 2 0:55:34] Lee: And you did some work with Dick Laws as well, with his Elephant Seal survey.

Biggs: Yes, he came there, only for a short time, very short in actual fact. I took them across to virtually where this dinghy... He wanted to go further up towards the glacier, and I forget the name of the glacier now. Anyway, there was an Elephant Seal colony or rookery there and I dumped him off, and I come back to King Edward Point. I can't remember him being - I don't know where he was living because I don't think he lived in our accommodation.

[Part 2 0:56:35] Lee: One or two more little details, if I may before you finish. Somebody called Barry Goss. Tell me about Barry Goss. How does he fit into the story?

Biggs: Barry Goss was an Islander, his wife was an Islander, and he was... Because of the whaling communities they had to have a policeman. The Magistrate then was an Islander and Barry Goss was the Policeman. Actually, the Jail was a bloody huge building, big building, the Jail. Christ knows why they built it that big. Whether they thought all the whalers they'd get drunk and have to end up in there, now I don't know, but he was more of a handyman as opposed to Policeman, he used to do a lot of work around King Edward Point, doing this and doing that. Going across to the whaling company and getting his own stores and also the Magistrate's and the Wireless Operator's stores in the motorboat, which they agreed to supply to them, at a cost of course. And that was it, he only put his uniform on on a special occasion like visiting a dignitary from somewhere and the Magistrate wanted him in his uniform so that they could see that they had a Police Constable there.

[Part 2 0:58:25] Lee: So he was South Georgia's one Policeman, was he?

Biggs: Yes.

[Part 2 0:58:29] Lee: You must have become quite friendly with him because he's the Godfather of your son now?

Biggs: Yes, he was quite a good... Well, I didn't actually, I knew of him, I knew him vaguely before I went to South Georgia because he'd been on South Georgia for some considerable time. Anna I knew vaguely. Was she Anna or Hannah? Hannah. And I knew her vaguely but when I went to South Georgia I got to know them very well, in fact him and I, if he had a job on, I used to help him, and vice versa. So, yes, I got on very well with him, and his wife, and his - at that time - his little son, Brian, who was about, oh I don't know, probably eighteen months, two years old.

[Part 2 0:59:34] Biggs: And when the Husky bitch gave birth to puppies it became my job to look after her and I would... He, this little lad wanted to see puppies and fortunately she allowed me to go into her - she was in a sort of shed, I could go in and handle all her puppies and... See when I first done it she was a bit, a bit wary, she showed all her teeth but didn't do anything, and then the next time I went in she was alright but she sort of kept an eye on me, if you like. And then gradually I could go in and she was no hassle, so I was able - he wanted to see these as he was a kiddie he wanted to see the puppies - so I couldn't take him in to where she was but I could leave him outside and get one of the puppies and take it out to him. It was the first time I'd done that, to actually remove a puppy from her den, if you like. Anyway, she followed me to the door and looked, and when she saw what I was doing she was quite happy. So he got his chance to fondle a puppy, and there we are.

[Part 2 1:01:21] Biggs: And that same lad now, he didn't go to school until he was - eight? Eight or nine, because they'd come to this country to live, they lived in Norfolk and we used to visit each other quite regularly even then, when they came here. I was in the Guards then, that's right, I was in the Guards, and he - I was courting Brenda - and they come up the barracks because his son wanted to see what Army barracks were like. Anyway, as I said, he went to school when he was eight, he then went on to university, believe it or not, got very very high exams in his degree - medical degree, went across to one of the universities in America for a short while, then came back to this country, done his Housemanship as they call it, in hospital, and then went as a GP somewhere just outside or in Ipswich. And I've got a feeling now he's retired but I don't know, I never kept in touch. After his dad died, well, when his son moved away and got married, I never kept in touch with the son.

[Part 2 1:02:59] Lee: You've brought us back to the UK, in fact your mother's plan worked because you had enough money by 1952 to come to England.

Biggs: Yes, what I'd done - the end of 1951, I approached the local Magistrate and said, 'I want to terminate my contract, I'm not going to stay on any longer.' My contract ended anyway on New Years day. 'That's alright,' he said, 'that's fine.' So, I knew that a Norwegian ship that was at the whaling station unloading all her goods, so to speak, at the whaling station, was going to fill up with oil - whale oil - and come back, calling at Tilbury before she went on to, I think it was somewhere in Norway where the oil would be sold off or whatever. So, I approached the Captain and said, could I join his ship? He said, 'I can't take you as a passenger.' 'Oh,' I said. 'You can sign on as crew,' he said. 'I'll pay you a shilling.' That was because that was the same as the *Biscoe*, you'd sign on as crew on the *Biscoe* and they'd pay... Not that I ever saw any bloody shillings but they'd pay you a shilling.

[Part 2 1:04:53] Biggs: So I said, 'Fine, that's alright.' 'And incidentally,' he said, 'they are taking one of...' I can never remember his name, he had a radio programme. Duncan Carse. Duncan Carse was down there, in South Georgia at the time and one of his party had gone out and - I don't know what he'd done, something bloody stupid up on one of the mountains or something - and broke his leg. And he had to be brought back to this - to England. So he said 'I'm taking him back and he's cabin so-and-so, you can look after him. And that's you sorted,' he said, see, the Captain. He spoke quite good English, he was Norwegian, he spoke quite good English, in fact all the officers on board that ship, they all spoke excellent English. Anyway, and that's what happened, so I didn't pay a penny.

[Part 2 1:05:58] Lee: Worked your passage.

Biggs: Sorry?

[Part 2 1:06:00] Lee: You worked your passage.

Biggs: Yes, I got to Tilbury, there were two Scottish blokes on board, one going to the Outer Hebrides and one to Dundee, where I was going, Dundee. Well, just outside Dundee but he actually lived in Dundee. And they took me in hand, so to speak, and we went from Tilbury to the City where they had to go into their shipping office, and we got there at midday or thereabouts, on a taxi. And I looked out this taxi bloody window and I saw all these people rushing about and I thought, 'Bloody Hell, where are they all going?' I thought, 'People rushing here, rushing there, here, there, everywhere.' And to me it looked like a load of headless chickens, you know, I'd never seen so many people, all rushing about, and in my mind they didn't know where they were going. Of course it's not true, of course they knew where they were going but I didn't know that.

[Part 2 1:07:16] Lee: This is a Falkland Islander's view, isn't it?

Biggs: Yes, I never saw anything like it in all my life, I'll be quite honest with you. Nothing.

[Part 2 1:07:25] Lee: And there, Ian, we must leave it. Thank you very much indeed.

Biggs: Thank you.

[Part 2 1:07:32] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible Extracts:

- Upbringing and schooling in Port Stanley, Falkland Islands. [Part 1 0:00:22]
- Peat cutting and processing for primary fuel source. [Part 1 0:07:06]
- Milk round by bicycle in Port Stanley aged eight. [Part 1 0:09:05]
- First Job with Agricultural Dept. tending stock on horseback. [Part 1 0:12:40]

- Mother encourages Biggs to save up to leave Falklands. [Part 1 0:14:10]
- Saving pocket money. [Part 1 0:15:12]
- Boyhood fist fights. [Part 1 0:16:32]
- Applying to Miles Clifford and getting first job with FIDS. [Part 1 0:18:17]
- Seasick journey south on HMS *Snipe*. [Part 1 0:19:36]
- Spanish v. British saddles and heated argument with Adjutant. [Part 1 0:24:55]
- Building Admiralty Bay Hut and staying for winter unexpectedly. [Part 1 0:33:00]
- Davis builds Biggs a bunk from Brazilian Pine. [Part 1 0:35:06]
- Difficult manhandling of tree trunks from shore to site. [Part 1 0:36:08]
- Stores blowing away in a severe gale. [Part 1 0:39:47]
- UK Metmast installation method inadequate for Antarctica. [Part 1 0:40:45]
- Dimensions and construction of hut with foil lining. [Part 1 0:45:01]
- Home-made canvas lining for snow melt-tank. [Part 1 0:48:57]
- Dispute between Davis and Platt over Nansen Sledge construction. [Part 1 0:52:40]
- Friction between UK Personnel and “Colonials.” [Part 1 0:56:47]
- [REDACTED] [Part 2 0:00:00]
- Attempts to collect Penguin eggs lead to death of Eric Platt. [Part 2 0:13:20]
- Dennis Farmer crevasse fall. “I had never seen a grown man cry.” [Part 2 0:24:49]
- Coffin for frozen body, difficult grave dig, makeshift burial service. [Part 2 0:33:48]
- Rough journey to South Georgia for a second wintering contract. [Part 2 0:43:37]
- Near drowning on a duck shooting expedition by dinghy. [Part 2 0:50:38]
- South Georgia jail; policeman does odd jobs, rarely wears uniform. [Part 2 0:56:35]
- Caring for Husky Puppies and showing them to policeman’s son. [Part 2 0:59:34]
- Working passage to UK on a Norwegian Whale Oil tanker. [Part 2 1:02:59]
- First impressions of UK. People seemed like headless chickens. [Part 2 1:06:00]