

GODFREY (DOG) HOLDEN

Edited transcript of a recording of Godfrey (Dog) Holden interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 29th October 2010. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/99/1/4 Transcribed by Chris Smith, 12th December 2016.

Part One

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Godfrey (Dog) Holden, recorded at the Marguerite Bay Reunion Bowness-on -Windermere by Chris Eldon Lee on the 29th of October 2010. Dog Holden Part 1.

Holden: Godfrey Holden, born Lymington Hampshire on the 6 February 1948

[Part 1 0:00:22] Lee: So now you are how many years old?

Holden: 62

[Part 1 0:00:26] Lee: 62, And the nickname, that is not as obvious as it may appear; you're called Godfrey I guess there is something of that in the nickname is it?

Holden: Yes that's right, with a name like Godfrey people were always searching for a nickname. I was often misnamed Geoffrey, Rodney, Gordon, Gregory, so I was seldom called Godfrey other than by my family. But after being called by some of my climbing friends Yerfdog which was Godfrey completely reversed there came an occasion when I was climbing on some cliffs in North Wales and a friend who I was camping with, but not actually climbing with, was shouting to me from the road below the cliffs and he was shouting up to the sky; he was calling me 'God' which was obviously a nickname and people were, non-climbers, were walking along the road, tourists, they didn't realise that there were cliffs up there behind the trees, this is at Tremadoc in North Wales, and that there were people on there climbing, so when he was shouting up to the sky 'God I'm going back to the tent to make a brew of tea' or some such comment they were giving him some very funny looks. So that evening he recounted this he said 'we are going to have to do something about this' and reversed 'God' to 'Dog' and it stuck well and then obviously with Antarctic experience it stuck even better and I've always been a dog lover anyway and I had a dog after the Antarctic which was very close to me.

[Part 1 0:01:59] Lee: Don't tell me you called the dog Godfrey?

Holden: No, but I was Dog and he was 'Our Dog'. So it appeared in local papers as quite a story about Dog and his dog called Harter; so it stuck well

[Part 1 0:02:17] Lee: Contrary to popular opinion it does pre-date FIDS.

Holden: It does pre-date FIDS - yes.

[Part 1 0:02:20] Lee: What was your, in your memory, what was your first knowledge of or brush with the Antarctic? What do you remember first?

Holden: I first remember reading Shackleton's book 'South'; of the famous story of his journey into the Weddell Sea and his famous escape from it and that was probably five or six years before I went to the Antarctic. But as a mountaineer and I'd been climbing for several years and started in the early sixties, the idea of wild and remote places of which Antarctica is the wildest and the most remote was one of the appealing things about mountaineering, as it is for most climbers. So in some ways it was an extension of what I was already going for and aiming for and indeed climbing in the Alps, so it's a natural progression and I think a lot of Fids had come through that route.

[Part 1 0:03:09] Lee: So it was inevitable that you would end up in the Antarctic?

Holden: Yes I think so, I think a lot of mountaineers are, loners is perhaps too extreme, but certainly independent types and Antarctica is very much a mountaineering experience.

[Part 1 0:03:24] Lee: How did you go about getting there then because it's not easy is it?

Holden: No it's not. I suppose I nudged my career and made contacts and asked around, but as things were moving to a stage in my career when I was coming to the end of some accountancy training I began to think I need to go for this properly and as it so happened I was climbing in Scotland and met up with a Fid Ian Sykes, 'Spike' Sykes, through a mutual climbing friend and I was told this chap's just come back from the Antarctic. So I was already on a bit of a go for it but didn't know how to how to get to it and he gave me a few pointers and so I followed that up; so that was the route in.

[Part 1 0:04:16] Lee: So you applied?

Holden: Yes I applied, I didn't apply to an advertisement in the papers although there were some around at the time but they were mainly for trades people but I never saw those. I applied and he told me what to apply for and I wanted to go down as a mountaineer I didn't quite know exactly what that meant and what it led to, but as trainee accountant I didn't have a trade that was otherwise useful to them. Because British Antarctic Survey would always take your trade before (...), they had lots of itinerant mountaineers who wanted to go down but they were after trades but I didn't have one that was any use to them.

[Part 1 0:04:55] Lee: But you still got the job?

Holden: I still got the job, yes. I had worked as a student; I'd worked several times, many months, in operating theatres in a hospital. So they were desperately trying to sign me up as a medical officer. In fact I did that job since there were no medical officers, I sort of filled in for it but all these other jobs, I was unaware of it at the time, most of the other jobs and certainly all the trades jobs would have led me to a static base existence rather than the field

existence that I was very lucky enough to have. So I suppose the advantage in those days was that the less skills that you had the more likely you were to have a good time down there.

[Part 1 0:05:40] Lee: You did four turns in the Antarctic or four seasons but I'd like to reverse things and talk about your last season first for reasons that are fairly obvious to you and to me as well because you were stuffed weren't you?

Holden: Yes

[Part 1 0:05:54] Lee: Tell me the story about Belgrano and spending your winter with the Argentinians at Belgrano.

Holden: That's right. I will start a little earlier than that because it was slightly topsy-turvy how I even came to be anywhere near there. When I'd signed on to go back down for a second tour it was going to be for one winter at Halley Base, although it was called Halley Bay at that time, and that was for a specific winter field experiment. But it was going to followed up with a summer in the Shackleton Mountains which are at the base of the Weddel Sea discovered by Sir Vivian Fuchs on his Trans-Antarctic Expedition and for us on the Peninsula it was always one of those Nirvanas those sort of promised lands, everyone wanted to get to the Shackleton Mountains, not necessarily for any particular reason other than that they were very remote. So that experience attracted me and I signed on for a second time. As it so happened before I ever got down there, whilst I was working at Cambridge to prepare for all of this, a vacancy came up, as it were, to be the first Base Commander at the new Rothera Base. There had been a small field hut there in the winter of 1976 but the major first building phase that was turning Rothera into what it is now was over 76 -77 and I was asked to go down and be the Base Commander for the following year. So I suppose you could say it didn't seem so exciting as the Shackleton Mountains but it was a challenging and suppose you could almost say a career move not that I was especially thinking of that . So I agreed to do that and I swapped to Rothera. Towards the end of that third winter I did,

[REDACTED] So I went back in a way into my old intention which was to do this field trip with Peter Clarkson in the Shackleton Mountains so that's how I came to be there. So I flew in to the Shackletons from Rothera where I'd, if you like, given up the Base Commander's job at the end of the winter season. So anyway we had the winter (...). we used Belgrano on the way over the Weddel Sea as a refuelling and re-staging post to get to the Shackleton Mountains.

[Part 1 0:08:36] Lee: Did you go inside at that point?

Holden: Yes we did. We went inside we'd already been told by our pilot Giles Kershaw who'd a few weeks before had done an emergency mission and rescued somebody, [REDACTED], but anyway he 'd done this incredible flight over the Weddel Sea, picked this chap up, taken him all the way up to the top of the Peninsula to Marambio base [REDACTED]. So he'd made ...it was one of the great heroic flights and he did many .. but that was one of the great ones. But he came back to us at Rothera and he said 'you'd never believe this place' he said 'I've

been in every base in the Antarctic' this incredible Polar pilot he said 'I've never seen anything like this' so we all sort of chuckled and passed on you know and that. Anyway a few weeks later we landed at this place and spent two or three days there before moving on the Shackletons.

[Part 1 0:09:32] Lee: So you were staying there?

Holden: Yes we stayed there, literally for a couple of nights, because there were other teams, there were other flights there was a bit of a fore-gathering place and a refuelling place so we spent a couple of nights there.

[Part 1 0:09:47] Lee: What were your first impression of Belgrano?

Holden: Well I'd never been to an if you like under-ice base an underground base before; the previous winters I'd been on the normal British base which was built on rock and certainly plenty of snow around the place in the winter but didn't actually get submerged. So this was a base in the Halley Bay tradition that was built in snow and this had disappeared long into the snow so that was a slightly bizarre experience to see that but we were all gob smacked at the state of it the very, very badly crushed state of it and the dazed expressions of all the inhabitants having spent a winter there. It's along way South, 77-78 South so it's right in the cold belt of real deep Antarctica but quite obviously the conditions there were poor and every system, electrical and mechanical, every system was clinging on by its eye teeth with a lot of serious damage to the base. But then they were due to close it but they'd been due to close it for every summer for the last 15 years but the Argentinean Antarctic Institute had always sort of kept it on and kept it on and the Army had wanted to keep it on for it's political presence everything so it was just clinging on. We were expecting it almost to be closed by the time we came back, or very nearly so, so we passed through it and we passed on and that was almost the end of Belgrano at that time as we thought.

[Part 1 0:11:22] Lee: How clean was it?

Holden: Oh it wasn't in the slightest bit clean. I suppose that was no surprise because that was no surprise as we'd met Argentinians from other bases that were actually built above ground but they all were heated by these drip feed kerosene stoves great big '*estufas*' which produced as one could imagine huge amounts of lamp black, black smoke, not that you necessarily saw black smoke billowing out but that's what came out of these things. So anybody that lived in close proximity to them their clothes were covered in them so we were always amazed that whenever we appeared at an Argentinian Antarctic base, wherever it was, the inhabitants all looked like colliers. They had sort of orange stuff on like we did and white mukluks on but everything was as black as coal and that was why. So everything was besmirched by that and very very untidy, not that they were necessarily untidy people, but the fact that there had been a base there for 25 years which had been seriously crushed and damaged meant that everywhere was just chaos and dirt and filth and untidiness.

[Part 1 0:12:40] Lee: So when the time came for you to move on you were glad to get away were you?

Holden: Yes we were. We passed through this strange experience, this strange other life and of course we were part of another life anyway but this was something else this was a stage beyond. And we could tell there was no useful work being done, not that we were all necessarily fanatical scientists you know dedicated to furthering the advancement of human knowledge. A lot of us you know we were there enjoying ourselves as well as producing good science.

[Part 1 0:13:09] Lee: Were they miserable?

Holden: Pensive I suppose, yes subdued and in the private moments, for those that spoke English, they all thought that the winter had been extremely difficult for them and some of them I suppose you could say they were all volunteers in a way, though many of them were army, but they did get a lot more money for being down there so they'd volunteered to go down for a lot more money in the Antarctic than they would have done fighting the terrorists in the North Western reaches of Argentina. I didn't meet any who'd enjoyed it.

[Part 1 0:13:47] Lee: So you flew away thinking that was that.

Holden: Yes so we flew away and spent a few months working in the Shackleton Mountains and that was an incredible interesting experience. The only down side for me was that we didn't have the dogs and it was very good dog sledging country it is very free of crevasses and what have you and we were skidoos around the place. Two geological parties, I was helping one geologist and we were working in tandem with Peter Clarkson the senior guy who'd been there several years before and basically this trip was to complete the work that Peter and other geologists had done out of Halley in the sixties. So we had three interesting months sledging round the Shackleton Mountains.

[Part 1 0:14:28] Lee: So were you pioneering skidoos so to speak?

Holden: Yes, we were, but the real pioneering work with skidoos I had to do a couple of years before in the winter 75, which was when the dogs had basically finished as the major primary source of travel and we were swapping over to skidoos at that time. But this was one these were one of the early the early pioneering skidoo trips when we were still developing safety techniques and what have you.

[Part 1 0:15:05] Lee: Weren't you largely responsible for designing the safety plans for these?

Holden: Yes, yes and that was the winter 75, my second winter there, with the guy who became my future brother-in-law. We spent the whole winter, we still had the dogs, but we spent the whole winter working out how to drive skidoos as safely as is possible.

[Part 1 0:15:27] Lee: Who was that man?

Holden: A guy called Ian Henderson; unfortunately he's not here tonight but he doesn't live too far away.

[Part 1 0:15:39] Lee: Was it a real challenge to actually decide how to handle these machines safely?

Holden: Yes it was.

[Part 1 0:15:42] Lee: What were the biggest problems?

Holden: The biggest problems were the fact that you were on a seven-hundred pound crevasse probe as we all called it. The areas we all worked in were..... weather and things is what might popularly be thought of as the great enemy, but for us in the mountainous areas of Grahamland crevasses, were the great enemy. And whilst dog travel was not necessarily safe or easy it was very very much safer for the humans than sitting up there on a great piece of whirling metal with the sledge behind you rather than the reverse which was standing on the back of a sledge with a fifty foot length of dog team out in front of you.

[Part 1 0:16:27] Lee: So that gave you warning I suppose?

Holden: That's right, warning and lightness and flexibility and everything else so you were out the front there testing the holes. So that was a real challenge and a bit of a frightener.

[Part 1 0:16:38] Lee: How do you ameliorate that? You can't get round it, what could you do to make it less dangerous?

Holden: Well it was a way of trying to attach yourself by a rope. Obviously the skidoo had a rope which towed the sledge just as the dog team had a rope a trace which towed a sledge and so you needed to attach yourself to something, the sledge, by another method by another rope. But that's easier said than done because all these ropes, particularly these days the nylon ropes, they all stretch so you have to be able toand as a skidoo takes the load of the sledge the tow rope stretches so you have your rope back to the sledge had to have some slack in it to allow for this stretch that occurred on the tow rope.

[Part 1 0:17:30] Lee: Otherwise you just get pulled off backwards.

Holden: Otherwise you get pulled off backwards But any slack then is a danger of getting wrapped up in skidoo tracks or run over by the sledge or catching in the ice and it's just a thundering nuisance. So we devised a method by which the driver wore a climbing harness, the climbing harness of the day; we attached ourselves to the sledge by a separate rope but we had a system of climbing jumar clamps that are used normally to ascend a fixed rope, of having those and being able, as soon as we got started, to take the slack in and leave that slack as a loop on the shelf of the skidoo. So then as you were travelling along hopefully for mile and mile you had a taut tow rope between the sledge and the skidoo and you had a reasonably taught tow rope between yourself and the sledge behind. So if the skidoo went down a hole you would hopefully go in a different direction and you had a different system and then the sledge would be dragged to the edge of the hole naturally by a skidoo and sometimes it might go down the hole; in which case you were sunk. But what in fact tends to

happen is that the rope cuts into the bridge, the edge of the skidoo and as the skidoo hangs down it's cutting through and that's providing enough friction to leave the sledge sitting up there..

[Part 1 0:19:00] Lee: Cutting through the ice....

Holden: Cutting through the ice and snow - yes and so leaves the sledge horizontally on the snow. So you can see from that complicated one that it's not a very comforting thought but it was the best we came up with.

[Part 1 0:19:13] Lee: Was it ever put to the test?

Holden: Oh many times put to the test. I don't think there were any deaths in that respect, the only deaths that I know of that happened were when people ignored it altogether and just sat on the skidoo and felt safe and not long after we'd left, there are people here who were on base with lads who dropped down holes on the skidoo and didn't have that technique so they had no chance whatsoever. But I know that, not necessarily say to this day, I don't know but only a few years ago I asked people who'd been down and they were using exactly the same technique they hadn't come up with anything different. It may be so now. I don't think they do so much sledging in so many difficult areas now, I think the whole system of sledging has changed.

[Part 1 0:20:00] Lee: Has been done

Holden: It's been done and they're much different journeys and much shorter journeys now.

[Part 1 0:20:02] Lee: Thank you for that digression interesting very interesting digression. So lets get back to the plot - you were in the Shackletons with Peter Clarkson.

Holden: Yes that's right So typically come February time everybody is thinking about going back home as the Antarctic winter gets closer, particularly in those high latitudes. The Shackletons are one of the last ranges before the Pole so about 81 South so quite far South. Good stable weather, quite cold but that was quite good for working and the idea was that the two sledges with me and my geologist Phil Marsh, Peter Clarkson and his GA John Young we would be flown back to Belgrano and by that time there were other parties, two or three other sledge parties, in the Trans-Antarctic Mountain ranges not too far away. There was a team in the Pensacola Range. There was also an American team that were doing what was called Geociever, I suppose we would now call it GPS, but they were doing surveying with what were then cutting edge computerised GPS techniques. Damn great pieces of machinery compared with now, very very large and heavy suitcases. So they were all around and the idea was that the planes would come over, or a plane would come over, from Marguerite Bay because there were no planes generally operating on that side of the Weddel Sea so it relied on the planes at Rothera to come over and move us out and that's exactly what happened. We were picked up on February 6th 1978 which was my 30th Birthday and we went back to, sort of foregathered at Belgrano, and then the other teams came in so there were about maybe 7 or

8 of us Brits, Americans all gathered and I had a splendid 30th birthday party which the Argentinians laid on for me and I've still got mementoes from that day.

[Part 1 0:22:10] Holden: The idea was that after a day or so of shaking ourselves down and everybody sussing things out then we'd be ferried back to Rothera base which was 1100 miles away so you know a big distances over there. It was 9 hours flying in the Twin Otter and that was the extreme of its range because people might say why didn't you all just get on the plane and take off . Well the plane couldn't take that number of people, it had to have ferry tanks inside with extra fuel in, so this was the extreme of it's range. So we were 1100 miles apart in an obviously turbulent part of the world and for the next several days we all waited for weather forecasts and the days stretched out and we began to think about possibility that we might not all be able to get out. We needed to look at the options, particularly Peter Clarkson and myself who were by far the most experienced Fids down there at the time. But we had a good fall back in that there was a Russian base not too far along the Filchner Ice Shelf front from Belgrano which was called Druzhnaya which means friendly or friendliness in Russian so I believe. We'd worked with them and met them and socialised with them in the Shackleton Mountains so we knew some of the Russians and their East German workers so we knew that ...we'd flown over there with the Argentinean Base Commander just on a days jolly from Belgrano. So they said 'well we'll do a return trip'. And sure enough the Russian Base Commander and several of the people came over including the East German translator who was a geologist and a couple of the other Russians and we all had a good chinwag and a drink at the Argentinean base at Belgrano sat round a table. And I'd sat down with Peter Clarkson there and others and said to him 'It's beginning to look like its going to be quite difficult to get all of us Brits and American back over to Rothera given the way the weather systems are shaping up so would it be at all possible for you to pick up us and take us out if we are still here when your relief ship comes' because we knew their relief ship was due within a couple of weeks time and this was translated but there was no question about it - it was a fairly simple message, yes that would be fine - they would check with their headquarters. But we also said and also agreed that radio communication was very difficult between the Argentinean base and the Russian base because although they were close together they both had their antennae pointing North to where they wanted to transmit and it may sound ridiculous but the couldn't transmit 70 kilometres along the ice shelf but that was the case. So we also said that we would try to confirm all of this but they said 'that's OK if when we go we'll send a helicopter over to pick up whoever is here and if there's nobody here you've gone then so be it', nothing lost because their ship was steaming within half a kilometre of the shore, the ice front of where we were. So that was the failsafe.

[Part 1 0:25:43] Holden: Then we got a little weather break and that enabled Pete Clarkson and the Americans and one other Brit, Les Sturgeon I think' to take all their equipment onboard. The Americans were insistent that they had to get their equipment back which was very interesting that was more important than taking one of us, but diplomatically that was agreed, and we seemed to have a good failsafe. It was agreed that they would go first and I acceded to that, there was no sort of pressure on me from Peter or anybody else it seemed perfectly reasonable. So the plane took off. As it so happened they didn't have an easy trip back to Rothera, they didn't just whiz over, they got hit by bad weather and they spent I think a week camped on the plateau well South, the Southern Grahamland plateau before they finally managed to stagger back into Rothera. So there really was some very very bad weather it was a wicked end of Summer season I suppose you could say a very bad Autumn. Anyway so we were there then still expecting the British plane to be able to come back but the weather got worse and worse so the efforts to contact the Russians increased and we were

even able to use the radio operator on our base up at Rothera who although he was British he spoke Russian. So he was talking to Russian bases Bellingshausen maybe just Bellingshausen on the Antarctic Peninsula sort of saying our colleagues are down there and Druzhnaya are going to take them back and do you have any contact with Druzhnaya; that didn't seem to work very well. We had the Deputy Director of British Antarctic Survey at that time was Dr Ray Adie an eminent geologist who was on the Bransfield ship which was moored at Rothera and he was obviously involved in this developing story and he had very very good contacts through his many years in the Antarctic with the Arctic and Antarctic Institute in Leningrad. So he got the message out and they agreed that yes it would be fine for us to be taken home, so there was all of that. So it looked a pretty safe bet and one day I was outside, up top as it were, because this base was 60 foot down, wandering around and I saw the masts of the Russian relief ship the *Kapitan Kamerad*¹ [phonetic] steaming across the ice shelf so I was able to go downstairs and say to the lads 'right the relief ship's on its way so it will be there in half a day so we should be you know hearing from the Russians any day now'. And they never came. No helicopter ever came They could have actually stopped the ship at the ice front literally stepped on to the ice front and walked up to us, we were only half a kilometre away, to see if there was anybody there.

[Part 1 0:28:45] Lee: You didn't go out to meet them?

Holden: Well we kept looking out for them but you know you couldn't be out there 24 hours a day but we were there as often as we could. You know the... even so the sort of standing on the [inaudible] waving - but we were looking but we never never saw them and there was bad weather around as well. So that never happened and the radio messages such as we could were getting more and more frantic and eventually we had to give up hope but there was never any message back from the Russians either via our Base Commander our guy at Rothera who spoke Russian never got a story from Bellingshausen they said they didn't know what happened. We never got any communication then, or to this day, as to what went wrong. And I sat and others sat in that conversation around the table at Belgrano and there was no doubt whatsoever, the interpreter spoke flawless English - we were good friends of his, East German geologist, so there was no misunderstanding and even the radio... Anyway they never came. So there was another way and this in a way this was the most difficult one because the Russian one you could put it down to all sorts of things cock up or whatever. But there was another Twin Otter. Oh of course by this time the British Twin Otters had flown back, they had their schedule to do and they'd given up on us and we'd said 'it's alright we're going out with the Russians'

[Part 1 0:30:28] Lee: They'd flown north

Holden: They'd flown North from Rothera. But there was a plane there, a Twin Otter belonging to Sun Air² which was a Canadian company, I think they must have been doing some sort of survey I can't remember what now. But that had had some damage done. But the Base Commander at Rothera, the Summer Base Commander, a guy called Dave Fletcher ...I was talking to him over the radio, that was easier said than done, agreed to... this plane

¹ Holden has subsequently corrected the name of the Icebreaker to 'Estonia'

² Holden subsequently corrected the name of the company to be 'Survair'

had been damaged and so it had been winterised it had been stripped down and it has been buried in the snow up to the wing levels waiting to the ships to come down the following year to repair it. But Dave Fletcher in discussion with other people they reckoned they could get this thing airworthy that there was a part and this that and the other and the Canadian pilot was still there because he was going to go out on our ships. So this was all agreed and the lads at Rothera spent two or three days digging this plane out and getting it airworthy, with the pilot getting it airworthy and we spent two or three days with a snow tracked tractor at Belgrano dragging a railway line up and down the snow to clear off all the sastrugi and get ready for this and the galling thing was by then though it was getting very cold the weather had settled down. And so the plane was ready to go and we were ready to receive it and then we got the message that it couldn't fly because the insurance company for the Canadian company for Sun Air, wouldn't insure them for a flight. Now I'm not a blamer type but that was the time when if BAS had stepped in and grasped it they would have said 'we'll insure it we'll cover that'. But there was none of that whatsoever. And that was the end of it. So they said we can't insure them for that flight therefore you can't take off. Now I know all insurance and even then I did but it was quite obvious that the message wasn't getting through and you can imagine that transmission from Rothera at that time up to this organisation in Sun Air was not that this was almost a (...) it wasn't quite life and death, but this was a serious rescue mission for some people who were in a great deal of difficulty. And that's where BAS would have stepped out. And just to cut back to the very end of this story, Bunny Fuchs had retired by then, when I met up with him in Cambridge and he'd followed this and of course he would understand what was going in. Bunny said to me 'I would have got you out' and it's that ...we knew then that the message wasn't getting through and the people weren't.... somewhere in the BAS HQ they weren't grasping it and taking this and saying to the right authorities and the right place, this flight must happen if it possibly can, if the weather would allow it.

[Part 1 0:33:34] Lee: So how would Fuchs have got you out by coughing up the money?

Holden: Yes...we'll cover, I mean there's plenty of it, BAS has insurance cover for Twin Otters flying all over the goddamn place you know and it wouldn't have taken a great deal of excess to at least negotiate. Now if they'd come back and said we tried all that and we tried it and we tried and it can't possibly (...) but there was no effort whatsoever in that respect.

[Part 1 0:34:01] Lee: There was no physical reason they couldn't get you. it was purely administration.

Holden: It was purely administration at that stage and before then we'd understood - we know all about weather and stuff like that, the Russian thing still gets me, but that insurance thing, that it should have hung on that, that was the killer.

[Part 1 0:34:19] Lee: What was the message you were getting then as individuals from that I mean I don't want to put words into your mouth but it sounds as if you weren't worth it really

Holden: I'm not sure about that I'm not sure that any.... there wasn't anybody who'd got the grasp of this as a sort of project.

[Part 1 0:34:40] Lee: No one had taken ownership of the problem.

Holden: That's right, different people along the lines were helping. Dave Fletcher was helping though that was his first time as a summer season, you know, but he was the one who'd got the Sun Air thing and said 'I think we can do this' and Dave had spent winters at Halley so he knows what its like down there. He was doing what he could but the whole, the chain wasn't there, we didn't have a champion or a project manager. It seemed to us, and it even seemed when I got back home, somebody in Cambridge who was driving this you know.

[Part 1 0:35:14] Lee: It must have been desperately frustrating because you knew what you were in for didn't you?

Holden: Yes, it was getting, it was the day to day, as it built up worse and worse and worse and worse and suddenly you realised that literally the last hope was gone and we were there for a long long long time.

[Part 1 0:35:31] Lee: How was your psychology the day when you realised that it was all.. there was no escape?

Holden: It was difficult, I'm quite robust characters as most Fids are, but it had gone, it was going very much downhill at that stage.

[Part 1 0:35:43] Lee: There were three of you weren't there?

Holden: There were.

[Part 1 0:35:44] Lee: Who were the other two guys?

Holden: There was Phil Marsh, geologist, it was his first summer season that he'd done in the Shackleton Mountains he was a bit younger than me 23, 24 and..

[Part 1 0:35:57] Lee: A little chap?

Holden: Yes.

[Part 1 0:35:59] Lee: From Shropshire.

Holden: Yes, quite short. You know I can't even remember where he came from, but that does sound about right.

[Part 1 0:36:05] Lee: I know who you mean.

Holden: OK, and a GA called John Young³ known as 'Youth' who'd done he previous winter at Halley he was going to be my fellow General Assistant at Halley for the previous winter. So he'd done a winter, Phil had just come down for his summer. It's difficult for me to say, I think they took it rather better than I did.

[Part 1 0:36:32] Lee: I guess you felt some responsibility did you?

Holden: I felt responsibility and they, it was a bit of a novel experience for them and the whole deal was a novel experience. Phil was much more sanguine about it; he had an easy winter writing up his geology notes at some leisure. I'm not saying he would have wished to do it this way but he had that at some leisure to do rather forced back into the University of Birmingham under the pressure of senior geologists. And Youth it was his second winter but it was still novel, it was novel for me, but I'd had three fantastic winters before with the dogs and building Rothera and all the rest of it, very varied and here we were stuck in this desperate situation.

[Part 1 0:37:20] Lee: Did the Argentineans welcome you to their (...)

Holden: Very very much so.

[Part 1 0:37:26] Lee: The individuals ..

Holden: Yes, they welcomed us as individuals and they seemed to welcome us as a group and they didn't seem any political edge to it. We didn't get any unwelcome noises come down from Buenos Aires via the radio operators about what the hell are these Brits doing there etc. It didn't get any of that whatsoever ...so total .. they were quite glad I think that we were there they found us to be, you know, something to add a bit more interest to their winter.

[Part 1 0:38:02] Lee: Was your work ethic rather stronger than their work ethic. Did you find yourself doing maintenance work on the base?

Holden: Yes, hugely so, and that's not just to blow our own trumpet but the whole ethic of the volunteer Fid working for small amounts of money and ninety-nine percent of us have probably said to you and would say to anybody we would have gone down there even if we weren't being paid , particularly in my case as a GA, as a mountaineer, I didn't have a scientific career to further. So I was even astonished when I realised there were salaries going down there which were certainly as good as mine as an articled clerk in accountancy. So even from that point of view. So they were volunteers, they were pressed men.

[Part 1 0:38:50] Lee: They were military weren't they?

Holden: They were military although there were some civilian scientists, and they were a bit more Fid like. They were younger longer haired studenty types but unfortunately for them

³ Dog later confirmed it was John Wright who was the third person stranded at Belgrano not John Young

they were down under a gross pretence, not their pretence but they'd been led to believe that there was valuable scientific work to be done which there should have been but all the equipment was in as bad a state and as old as the rest of the base so it's 1950s and nothing worked it had real you know Argentinean heavy hand on it. It had never worked so there was no useful science that they could do so they were all highly peed off, but everybody earned a lot lot more than they could possibly have earned in the UK and I've just been saying to the lads down stairs the military got... their wage was twelve times what they would have received for fighting the terrorists in North West Argentina which was what the alternative was for them at the time. So they were very well rewarded.

[Part 1 0:39:59] Lee: They were being paid twelve times as much and nobody was shooting at them.

Holden: And nobody was shooting at them, so although I'm not saying they necessarily enjoyed it. As an Army recruit of course you could be in a lot worse state you may as well be in the Antarctic earning a lot of money able to buy your apartment in Buenos Aires and your motor car and I know some of them still to this day and they live in the same apartment that they were able to buy in those days and good for them.

[Part 1 0:40:22] Lee: So tell me as bit about the daily life then in this rather unusual environment you found yourselves.

Holden: The daily life was...

[Part 1 0:40:29] Lee: Particularly as the nights the winter the nights got longer.

Holden: Yes that's right, the nights very quickly got longer at those sort of latitudes. There was a structure to the beginning of the day in that we used to get up, I think probably about seven o'clock in the morning, fairly early and at about eight thirty we'd have some breakfast, and at eight thirty after breakfast there'd be I suppose you'd say a parade in that we would stand either to attention or at ease but it wasn't too militaristic but with an Argentinean flag there, and remember these were Army, so there'd be a salute to the flag and this was all indoors in bizarre crushed huts with ice coming through the walls in this strange situation and the Base Commander who was a Major would receive a quick report from his deputy, a Lieutenant, and would dish out the jobs for the day. And much of the time there weren't any jobs, there was the routine work that the mechanics or the cook had to do but if there was anything extraordinary had to do such as take the gash or rubbish outside which was a fairly major exercise of carting all this stuff into sledges and taking it up a ramp and clearing all the snow off so it used to take half a day to get all the rubbish outside. So if there were any major communal tasks like that he would instruct us otherwise then everybody would just go off and do whatever they wanted to do which wasn't very much for the rest of the morning until lunchtime.

[Part 1 0:42:19] Holden: The Brits certainly myself and Youth, Phil was more into writing his geology reports, but Youth and I used to find, it wasn't difficult to find, but we used to bring communal, what we took to be communal work, to get the Major to give us some people to

work with and much of that was clearing all the debris which was crushing the base, all the ice and all the stuff that was embedded in the ice. So we might do that, more often than not it was more trouble than it was worth because we could do it quicker than having some unwilling volunteers. So what we tended to do was go off and do what we possibly could and then perhaps ask for some labourers to cart it all away once we'd done it. So that used to be to try and retain some interest. There was some useful work but it was as much to keep ourselves interested and almost keep ourselves alive to find that sort of work. So we would go ..if you think of these huts as being, I suppose you could say wooden huts, clad in aluminium buried in a trench 60 foot down in the ice with a space around them, not underneath them, but a space around them that was constantly being narrowed by the crushing snow and ice but you could get up onto the roof of these huts. So the roof of them you were.. a bit like a coalmine there was the snow and all the stuff that was in it was six feet above your head or a few feet above your head and there were pipes going up it to lead the exhaust, the generator exhaust, or the stove exhaust or other antennae that were coming out of the radio. But all these were going up through the ice that were being twisted and bent and crushed again by the moving ice and by the accumulating snow. So there were an awful lot of difficult and dangerous physical work in cutting this stuff away and the tools that we had to cut with were rudimentary. We had a couple of electric chainsaws so they were just about useful for cutting away at the snow and ice but to cut away at the big metal railway lines and the wooden beams the wood saws and the metal cutting saws were rudimentary. Although we had we had an oxyacetylene kit there was no cutting head on it so we couldn't cut, it was typical third world stuff we had a brazing head on it so that was no bloody use whatsoever. We had hacksaw blades but no hacksaw handle so I spent many days I suppose if you totalled it all up cutting through railway lines which were sticking out of snow and ice embedded in it and twisted by them by cutting them by hand-held hacksaw blade which was pretty blunt anyway but when you've got months and months to do it. And if in case anyone wonders it used to take an hour and a half which I thought was pretty good.

[Part 1 0:45:33 Lee: That's very good. I'm not quite clear why you were bothering to do this, what was the game?

Holden: The game was that these.. these... there were pillars up the side of it so if you think of a sort of Greek temple idea there was wooden pillars along the side vertically from around the hut and the across the top of those there were laid, this was originally when it was built, old railway lines and then above that was board chipboard or fibreboard and then with some chicken wire and cloth and that was covered in snow and the idea was that had a zero low profile and these things sat in the trench so the snow wouldn't build up and crush it. But you always had to have sticking up through the snow and they had to have ramps and ladders and things and the snow accumulates round that and over the years that all builds up of course you still have the movement because you are on the glacier, the front of the glacier, that is floating on the sea which is twisting and crushing .. so that over the years twists and crushed the pillars and these horizontal railway lines laid across the top they all get crushed and enveloped by the snow and ice around them and bent and screwed and twisted and then they start to jag into the hut. Because the hut sat there supposed to be protected by them but they eventually start to threaten it themselves and cut in. So what we tried to do was clear all that wood and metal out and then what you were left with was a hut sat inside and this was a seventy foot hut not some wee thing, a hut sat inside a snow cave and as long as ...but that meant you could get at the snow and ice and cut it away and it was cleaner ... the snow and

ice moved faster but not so fast that it threatened life and limb but it meant you could get at it otherwise all these pieces of wood and metal were being literally pushed through the walls of our living quarters and into the roof of it and that allowed whatever heat there was inside to escape which would then melt the snow which then provided water to come down and freeze instantly on the floor. So the very thing that was designed to protect it was actually damaging it. So all this .. and it was literally as if you'd put a bomb down or a mine explosion had gone off down a pit and you had this terrible great chaotic scene of twisted beams and crushed metal and girders all in this horrendous great explosive mixture, so that's what we tried to cut away.

[Part 1 0:48:24] Lee: Did you succeed?

Holden: Yes we did.

[Part 1 0:48:26] Lee: All seventy feet?

Holden: Yes we got it all cleared it you know we kept at it, there were lots of other jobs to do but we got rid of all this stuff eventually down there.

[Part 1 0:48:37] Lee: You were doing most of this in the dark I'd imagine weren't you?

Holden: We took pressure lanterns up there. What they called 'sol des notches' you know 'night suns' - what we called tilley lamps you know pressure lanterns they had down there. Although even that was touch and go because fairly early on the first month or so, we were running out of generators. A fairly chaotic system of supplying the bases with what they needed at Belgrano. The base was very short of spare parts and we hadn't been there very long when the last generator died the death and a mixture of old age and mistreatment so we had no power. There was one small American generator well a Honda generator which the Americans had left behind which we had used in the field, a tiny little one, but that was going to be enough at least to keep the batteries charged to keep the radio going so we'd have contact with the outside world but it didn't take five minutes for one of the Argentineans to bugger that one up. A typical two stroke it didn't start first of all so rather than just waiting a few minutes he took the needle out and bent it and that was the end of that. So we had no generators we had no power, the only light came from these tilley lamps 'sol des notches' -- we had lots and lots of those but as people will know or remember they work on a incandescent mantle which is extremely fragile the '*camase*' [phonetic] the mantle and we had seven of those to last us for the whole winter. And since they usually go at the rate of one a week in each individual lamp, seven obviously wasn't going to last twenty three people very long. So those seven were kept in the control of the Base Commander and he issued them to the cook because he needed the cook. So we had virtually no light and don't forget this was sixty foot down in the ice so there was no other light.

[Part 1 0:50:48] Holden: The only heat came from these lousy drip feed kerosene stoves which ...it still meant you had to dress up ..you would dress as you would on the top of a high mountain in this country so you we were all we would we had our normal Antarctic parkas on with fur collars on and all the gear we had those underground because as soon as you stepped away from the stove the temperature was minus twenty anyway. So that was the ambient

temperature. But the stoves were OK and you had sleeping bags and what have you so we weren't all in danger of freezing to death don't get me wrong but it was the darkness that was wrong. So the scientists who were down there started experiments in how to make an incandescent mantle and there were one or two chemists and very little material and we got (...). They used bandage you can imagine and dipped it in some sort of solution but it didn't really work. The nearest we came to any success was to get the bottom of a can of food put some kerosene in it, find some old felt or lampwick drop that in the kerosene and light it and then protect the flame with a bottle with bottom cut off, so something like a Coke bottle and that provided enough light as you might get from a match just before it goes out so a tiny little flame. So we used to walk around with these things which just about meant that you could see somebody else with them.

[Part 1 0:52:27] Lee: Like glow-worms.

Holden: Like glow-worms yes. All this time with the dying power of the batteries the Base Commander was trying to persuade the authorities in Buenos Aires that we were in desperate straits and that we were going to lose the radio and could they send an airdrop or a plane for us. So, and don't forget this was an Army base and although there were two Air Force guys on, they were meteorologists this was an Army base and what they were actually asking for, they were asking the Air Force to fly them, so there was inter-service rivalry. And although there is a civilian Antarctic Institute such as British Antarctic Survey it doesn't have a great deal of sway and certainly not in those days. If you remember in those days, this is 1978, the 'guerra sucio', the 'dirty war' was going on so there wasn't a great deal of love lost between an academic sort of university based organization such as the Antarctic Institute and the Army and the Air Force usually just the opposite. But he finally managed, he was a good man, he finally managed to make them aware of the seriousness of the situation and so it was agreed that there would be an air drop and the 'Fuerza Aerea' did in fact send a C130, a Hercules plane down from Buenos Aires via Rio Gallegos in the southern part of Argentina and it flew down to us and at first we thought this is was great it can take us home but then we were told it didn't have skis. The Antarctic Institute had given the Air Force two and a half million dollars the year before to put skis on their aircraft because it would help with so many difficult (...) but they bought some helicopters which were no bloody use to us.

[Part 1 0:54:26] Holden: But we'd managed to get a message out to our loved ones and parents and British Antarctic Survey that there was going to be a relief flight so if anybody could send some mail send it off to the Antarctic Institute in Buenos Aires and at least we could get some messages that way. And could we have some books because we all, there's a big bookish thing on FIDS it's one of the things you were able to do when the blizzards are blowing outside was read and we had no English books whatsoever. Anyway so the aircraft appeared about ten days later and flew overhead and I've got photographs of it and it dropped three big loads with parachutes and really although it was midday it was pretty dark by then we were into late May and those Latitudes it's really getting dark by then. Anyway these three blew... but there was a real blow going on at the time, a blow from the North, and we managed to capture two of the parachutes but one was just blown out South out across the bundu and it's probably somewhere near the South Pole by now, it just disappeared. And I think in there was our mail, of course it would be, but in the rest of them there was enough incandescent mantles so we had light. There was a new generator and a half generator so we managed to coax those and keep those going so we had power for the rest of the winter.

[Part 1 0:55:55] Lee: So how long were you without power?

Holden: A month.

[Part 1 0:55:59] Lee: That's quite a long time.

Holden: Yes, it was quite a long time and you know we were entering Winter and it was beginning to get really really serious.

[Part 1 0:56:07] Lee: And the books?

Holden: And the books arrived and we we just asked for some books and somebody and I don't know who but somehow this message and there was somebody in Cambridge but maybe one day I'll find out I ought to find out who got the message to the British Consulate in Buenos Aires we didn't have an Ambassador then perhaps we don't now, so the chief in charge was a Charge d'Affaires and these books arrived. There was a big case of them and there were 60 books I remember it and a lot were second hand but quite a few were new obviously somebody had taken the trouble to go out into a British shop and buy some books and it's a strange thing to say but they were exactly the type of books that Fids would have chosen. I'm sure the groups of Fids like every other society like that go through phases of what they liked but the types of books proved exactly what we were reading. It was uncanny as to how they would have chosen this brilliant mixture of English classics and not too much if you like modern you know junk not the very latest things but great books by good authors and interesting subjects.

[Part 1 0:57:29] Lee: Is it possible that a Fid could have chosen them?

Holden: Only if there was a Fid there in Buenos Aires. With all due respects to any Fid that was there I don't think anybody at Cambridge could have come out with a list you know but somebody had gone to the libraries and thought these were the ones you know. It was fantastic, so that saved my life I don't know about the rest of them but it certainly did mine.

[Part 1 0:57:54] Lee: What about keeping clean then, with all this soot around were showers on the agenda?

Holden: Well I'll just mention something else about the books if you don't mind it will just take another couple of minutes because there was one book in there that as a climber I'd often sort of seen on the shelf and never quite got round to reading. The intriguing title was 'A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush' so never quite knowing what it was about a Short Walk in the Hindu Kush but it seemed to be a book that I ought to read it as a mountaineer so I read it but there were it was written by the famous travel writer Eric Newby and it was one of the funniest books I've ever read in fact probably the second funniest I've ever read it was absolutely brilliant and I've read it many times since and anybody who has ever read it has always thought the same and there were two guys there was Eric Newby and his companion who at the time of the journey of these two had gone out to climb a mountain in Afghanistan

in 1957 had been a diplomat in Rio de Janeiro and his name was Hugh Carless he's still alive, Eric Newby's died, he was in the diplomatic service a very very interesting life and when you opened this book a paperback book and inside it said 'To the British Antarctic Survey from one of the walkers Hugh Carlos Buenos Aires 1978' and I've still got that book and he was the Charge d'Affaires in BA at the time we were down there and as well as that book and that inscription this guy obviously got it and when you read his life story he certainly would have got it and to cut to the end when I finally got out and I went to Buenos Aires I got a taxi round to the British Consulate to go and thank him personally and he was on leave in London and I've never met him and he lives somewhere in Kent or the Malverns and I just found that out the other day and I thought I must go and see him as he would get that story.

[Part 1 1:00:04] Lee: Had he chosen the books?

Holden: I'd like to say yes but I don't know but if you know about him and you read him and you read that book you'd say probably yes.

[Part 1 1:00:17] Lee: Alright we've got about fifteen minutes left so tell me a bit about keeping clean.

Holden: Keeping clean was extremely difficult. I suppose you could say keeping clean for Fids wasn't necessarily a top priority particularly in those days where water was a bit difficult anyway even the British bases you'd have a shower once a week if you were lucky and when you were out in the field you didn't wash apart from hands and maybe face didn't wash for months on end. I hadn't washed for six months on one field trip but that was in relatively clean conditions but obviously in Belgrano it was absolutely filthy filthy black there wasn't much running water and what water there was was produced by putting snow blocks into a tank up which ran an exhaust from one of the stoves so that produced enough water well that was the type of technology we used to use in those days on FIDS anyway. But the trouble was these tanks sat on the roof of the huts so they used not clean snow from outside but the snow from the roof, this gradually descending roof of snow, and that had been snow twenty years before which was on the surface which of course...so it was full of all the crap and diesel oil mainly from all the generators and what have you. So that had come down so you cut away at the blocks or somebody would and unless they were careful it all got tipped in. So the chances are the water was very heavily impregnated with diesel oil. Well if you just wanted to wash your hands that was probably enough and that's what many of the Argies did. But if you wanted to have a shower and try and do some washing you had to fill a bucket, a big bucket, with this stuff in a metal shower cubicle that was at minus twenty and the way we heated it up there was a giant, what you might call a primus stove a pressurised stove. By giant I mean this thing was about two foot high, and it produced a hugely roaring powerful flame a bit like a Saturn rocket but the trouble is there was no spreader ring on the top to make it into what you might think of as a nice cooking stove. So this used to be a huge great vertical column of roaring flame but it produced a huge amount of heat but above its level, so the heat below knee level there was none it was minus 20 and above quite hot into this cubicle. But you only got a few minutes of water or water mixed with diesel so you could pump this thing up rev it, put it in the middle, edge past it because there was this roaring flame and there you were stark-bollock naked trying to get a shower. You'd get a mixture of water and sometimes almost pure diesel oil to try and wash in and then when you got some

soap on and full of this stuff the flame would go out and there'd be the huge gushing amount of hissing gaseous kerosene when your eyes were full of smoke and you had to turn it out then you couldn't possibly relight it and try and wash this stuff off and you used to come out stinging with diesel oil and choked to death and freezing cold so many of them never bothered to shower we ...I certainly tried to keep it up once a week. This stove was known in Argentinean slang as 'La Chancha' which is a slangy word for 'The Pig' and so it was.

[Part 1 1:04:02] Lee: What was the food like?

Holden: Limited. There was a lot of meat as you would expect that was frozen meat obviously frozen stuck in the ice, there was a lot of cheese there was dried vegetables there was lots of dried mashed potato and lots of tinned of Frankfurter sausages and quite a lot of polenta and soup and that was about it. I've virtually gone through it all then so it was extremely limited. We had two cooks, one was a little Indian guy from the Guaranice speaking from the North of Argentina on the borders with Paraguay and Brazil he was a little ?? [inaudible] a forester and he was a great cook and he used to make his home made pasta every Saturday reels and reels and reels of it spread all over in this desperately cramped kitchen. The other guy just used to open a tin of *salchichas* a tin of Frankfurter sausages and that was it. So it was very very limited food and so everybody got constipation as well as everything else., I mean nobody went to the Antarctic those days expecting great grub and as a sledger we were used to perfectly limited food but this was (....)

[Part 1 1:05:20] Lee: That naturally leads us to ask about the toilet facilities then if you had constipation.

Holden: The toilet facilities were a big yes quite big, I don't know why it was so big, quite a big cubicle metal lined and obviously so desperately cold no heating in it whatsoever with a hole in the ground and so, and this wasn't just common to Belgrano, but a big turd-icle used to build up and every now and again you had to go in with a big metal bar and break it up. In normal situations most of the countries in the third world have holes in the ground and of course not a great deal of smell because it was very cold but it was basic and certainly if you had any constipation which we all were with a diet like that then it led to some fairly trying times.

[Part 1 1:06:11] Lee: Were you able to get outside at all?

Holden: You could go outside although that got increasingly difficult as the two ladders up to the top although only one was continuous, this was a ladder running up a shaft a wooden shaft that had been constructed up through the ice it was a bit of a haul to go sixty foot up this ladder and then emerge through a hatch at the top although that used to get covered in by the blowing snow. So whilst later on in the winter Youth and I spent a lot of time extending these ladders up continuously to keep them up above the snow, nobody else seemed to get it, that if we didn't do this we weren't going to be able to bloody well get out they seemed to be very sanguine about it. So that was our job but then when you went outside for two months of the year it was pitch black, for another two months it was very dark, and for another two months it was twilight which was quite bonny but up there there was absolutely naff all apart from looking around. There were exhausts from the base below you and the temperatures got

well down into the minus fifties and I used to try and go out for a walk but you couldn't do that in the darkest conditions and you couldn't do it when there were blizzards blowing so there were several days on end when we didn't go out and there were months on end when some of the Argentineans didn't go out. The doctor was known as doctor Tutankhamen because he used to spend so long lying in his pit that they decided he'd turned into a mummy.

[Part 1 1:07:43] Lee: So what happened to your muscles were you wasting away down there?

Holden: Yes, we did get unfit no matter how much you tried to get out and walk and as the light came back even though the temperatures were well down into the minus fifties I used to muffle up and go for as long a walk as I could. You couldn't go too far because there were crevasses and just nowhere to go but I used to have a bit of a circuit for a couple of hours a day and of course we used to do all this physical work of shifting the snow and cutting the railway lines but quite clearly that is nothing like normal existence and certainly nothing like normal life existence which was extremely strenuous you know you could get very very fit dog sledging and mountaineering. So yes physically it was trying time but we were young men so we recovered from that.

[Part 1 1:08:38] [End of Part 1]

Part Two

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Godfrey (Dog) Holden, recorded at the Marguerite Bay Reunion Bowness-on-Windermere by Chris Eldon Lee on the 29th and 31st of October 2010. Dog Holden Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:16] Lee: What happened to your psychology over that winter?

Holden: I found it very trying I don't think I cracked up, I probably got a bit short tempered although I've perhaps always been a bit short tempered anyway. But I don't think I went into serious decline, it would be interesting to see what other people think about it or what Phil or Youth thought about it. But I was certainly, I was very upset, I was upset not just about being stuck but the way that we'd been stuck. I didn't sit there you know blaming anybody, blaming BAS or blaming the Russians, I just couldn't grasp the series of events I couldn't understand how it was that all this had happened. Perhaps that's a bit silly when you think about the Antarctic and all the events that can happen, there other people might say 'well of course you get stuck in the Antarctic, that's what its all about' but up to then things had gone so well. I suppose you could say that I was more affected because by then I'd met my future wife and so I was supposed to be going back to see her, she was my girlfriend at the time and although I wasn't engaged to be married at that time it was quite a serious relationship and so the expectation of going back to see her and so the disappointment, the unexpected disappointment. Again one might say 'well you signed on to go to the Antarctic' so that was it. I'd actually signed on to go back before I met her I then met her she was heading out from England to the United States to work which was what she wanted to do and what she did in fact go and do and I went off to the Antarctic but the idea was that we'd get together after I'd come back for a year whether that be in the States or wherever it was. And the day she found

out via a message from her brother, the Fid who'd left by then, that I was stuck, was the day she found out her mother had died so there was a fairly traumatic situation for her. So I was feeling very guilty about that and the fact that after three brilliant interesting winters with Fids and all that that meant the contrast with that that was all extremely difficult. So when I said before the books kept me alive that was almost, that was true mentally, because it gave us something to go for as well as the crazy physical work kept us going during the day.

[Part 2 0:03:07] Lee: So the psychology of the three Englishmen and the psychology of the Argentineans was somewhat different was it? Because of the expectations, you both had different expectations.

Holden: That's right I wouldn't want to put Phil and Youth in the same pot as I was, as I said they had different circumstances and certainly Phil was much more sanguine about it and Youth was to a considerable extent. I was the one, I did take responsibility for it, I couldn't understand, I must have cocked up somewhere along the line. But the Argentineans they ... they wanted to be there they ...

[Part 2 0:03:44] Lee: They planned to be there

Holden: They planned to be there, yes that's right

[Part 2 0:03:47] Lee: Did you learn any Spanish?

Holden: I did, I learnt good Spanish or, actually that's wrong, I learnt bad Spanish. I learnt Argentinean, South Americans do speak good Spanish but it was Argentinean, it was Army slang it was Army Antarctic slang and it was very what they would call '*porteños*'. which is Buenos Aires slang. *Porteños* is the lingo they speak around the port which is the rough area where all the bars and the brothels are, so that's the real real rough area. So when I speak Argentinean to my friends, perfectly understandable but they all laugh because I've got this ridiculous accents and all these weird slangy words some of which they recognise and some of which they've never heard, just like the Fids have got their own glossary. So I had a good ear and I worked quite hard at it in speaking it and it stood me in very good stead, it stuck well with me. So that was the up side, the other way I passed my time apart from the reading was I played the tin whistle one of the first phrases I learnt was '*Puedo tocar mi flautista*' - 'may I play my whistle'. I used to have to ask the cook because while everybody else was 'conking' sleeping after lunch, because they used to have a protracted Latin lunch which went on for a long time, so they'd all go off conking and I'd go off and play my whistle while the cook was making supper. But to say the time dragged would be the understatement of the year that time still drags with me today. I still look back on the time, not each individual, they were great people, I still look on that drag time as a huge great prolonged period of horror. It was really really difficult it was endless I mean nine and a half months is a long time even now or at any stage of life but it loomed ahead and it never got any closer and where some things get shorter when you look back at them and you forget about the bad times that never does with me it is still the full nine and a half months and it still feels exactly like that.

[Part 2 0:06:08] Lee: It was a prison sentence was it?

Holden: It was a real prison sentence and I hadn't forgotten any of it whatsoever.

[Part 2 0:06:14] Lee: When you heard about three months ago about the Chilean miners on the news, they were incarcerated, what were your thoughts that day when you heard the news?

Holden: I thought very much of our experience. Obviously I felt for the guys and of course they were in a much more mortal danger than we were, but many of the feelings will have been the same, many of them and I was very tempted when they were rescued, which was a most brilliant feat of engineering and everything else and human endeavour, I was very tempted to send an email to Youth and say nobody sent a capsule down for us. Lucky guys, they got out after sixty nine days, we were there for nine and a half months. There were similarities definitely, in the mental state not necessarily in the physical other than they were underground and we were but (...)

[Part 2 0:07:22] Lee: We were all very excited when they did come out, but would you have been more excited than me?

Holden: Yes, I was I felt very much I understood them and I think they would have understood me and the feeling they had of that release and going back to their loved ones and all of that. It was the day that the planes came over for me; although even then things got quite difficult after that about getting home, but that was the most wonderful day I could ever imagine.

[Part 2 0:07:50] Lee: Well tell me how you got away.

Holden: Well it I mean we actually got away finally when the planes got down from Canada as they used to do and arrived at Rothera it was simply a mechanical thing of finding good weather at each end and again we had to wait for a few days about that and the plane came over and picked us up.

[Part 2 0:08:08] Lee: This would be a Twin Otter?

Holden: It was a Twin Otter and Giles Kershaw made absolutely certain that he was the pilot I mean there were only two and he was the senior. He knew what we were at because he knew the base and he made sure that he was the one who came and picked us up. And we went up to Halley to deliver the mail and they had a couple of nights there and a party and then we actually flew back to Belgrano again because we needed to refuel before hopping over the Weddel Sea. So the three of us went back to Rothera. The Argentineans were sorry to see us go and wanted us to stay to do the full term because by then the sun was appearing and the relief ship was only a few months away and they wanted us to stay and see it out and go back to Buenos Aires with them. But anyway we went back to Rothera and the other two guys Phil and Youth they'd not done a summer at Rothera on Marguerite Bay so they were keen to stay there and do that and wait for the ship out and I was keen, I'd done plenty of Summers at Marguerite bay and Summer to me meant being in the field. So I'd already got approval from the Argentineans to get a lift from their airbase in the North of the Antarctic Peninsula, Marambio Base, and get a lift back from there. But we were spunned again with several weeks of bad weather between the two so and when Giles finally got me off the

ground at Rothera we flew up through a hole in the cloud with ice forming on the wings so we only just made it and when we finally got to Marambio Base, a few hundred miles away North, a C130 was stood on the tarmac there, well on the gravel, and its engines were going and I jumped out of a Twin Otter and ran across and jumped into this Hercules and took off so even that was touch and go.

[Part 2 0:10:01] Lee: Who is Colonel Cow or what is Colonel Cow?

Holden: *Coronel Vaca*. The plane had already picked up, they'd picked up by helicopter and brought to Marambio an outgoing wintering team of Argentineans from their base at the very Northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula it was called Esperanza same name as the camp for the gold miners which means 'hope' it also means 'waiting' by the way hope and waiting so Esperanza base was at Hope Bay as the British called it and this was the first winter they'd had when they'd really gone for it in terms of making a solid very solid political and socio-political claim on the Antarctic. So they'd put in not just soldiers or scientists they'd put in women, nothing unusual about that now but it was then; a married couple and the lady was pregnant so that the child could be born on base so that would be quite a statement of occupation; an engaged couple, a priest who could marry them so that was quite another good sign that this was Argentinean territory and there were people living there, a family unit already. So they'd had this complete mixture of people who'd been planted there to make these statements and this poor chap *Coronel Vaca* - is Colonel Cow and he was the Base Commander. He was the most relieved person, as relieved as I was, and I sat next to him in the hold of the C130 on the flight back to Rio Gallegos and then to Buenos Aires and I had a good chat with him and I had enough Spanish to get by then and I was a Base Commander an ex-Base Commander as well so he said it was the most desperate experience and he was a Colonel in the Army so he was used to commanding troops of people he said it was the most desperate experience he'd had in his life, he said it was an absolute disaster, all of this the social tensions and the difficulties with all these people that didn't really want to be there; they were just a social experiment and so it was a nightmare and he was visibly, visibly relieved to be finally leaving this base so he and I both, for slightly different reasons. I always think of Colonel Cow because the Major in charge of Belgrano was Major Papa which means several things Pope, Father but it also means potato, so us Brits used to call him Major Potato.

[Part 2 0:12:30] Lee: There is one little detail we missed I think - or I may be wrong there is a note here about checking stores at Belgrano in case a war broke out between the Argentineans and the Chileans.

Holden: Yes, well

[Part 2 0:12:40] Lee: Is that true?

Holden: Yes it was; many will remember the lot of tensions between those two nations over claims for the islands around Cape Horn. And this was not just a claim about an island it actually has major effect on their claims for an and their slice of Antarctica that overlaps with the British claim. The British claim it on we'd discovered it first or something like that, the Argentineans and Chileans both claim it on the extension of their lines the extension of lines of Longitude which border their countries and if you run those lines down to the Pole they clearly take a slice, a sector, and so where your islands are can shift those lines of Longitude

considerably so it meant quite a lot to them and there'd been many spats about this in the past but they came very very close to war in late-ish Autumn, British Autumn 1978 and so this was a military base so we went on full standby, bizarre as it may seem and so we had to do an inventory of all the stores and the icebreaker wasn't going to be able to come down to relieve them because the countries were at war. It really did come very close. As it so happened this was defused because an emissary of the Pope came down and both sides agreed that he could adjudicate on the issue in fact the adjudication on the critical island fell to the Chileans and I suppose you could say to their credit the Argentineans have abided by that ever since. So we didn't go to war but we were used on FIDS to have plenty of food, basic food in those days, lots of tins and dried whathaveyou but we used to get fresh meat once in a blue moon. There was a very small amount used to arrive down fresh frozen meat; but of course Argentineans like it a lot and so the guy who came back to report and everyone read out their inventory of what they'd found how much fuel there was and when it came to the meat he said 'Major there is a very serious situation we down to our last 700 kilograms of meat' which would have kept the FIDS bases going for about 20 years. But that was really serious and faces got even glummer at that stage.

[Part 2 0:15:11] Lee: A final question if I may. A lot of people in the First World War didn't talk about it, people in the Second World War never talked about it. Did you talk about when you got home to Britain maybe to your girlfriend or your family did you talk about those nine and a half months - was there any point?

Holden: In general I did yes, people asked and I thought if they asked they were interested and I realised it was an interesting story, it is an interesting story, perhaps some of the most difficult times I didn't speak about. But it was different from the Army, there were no issues of secrecy of section D Act or any of those that wasn't instilled upon us and I don't know it was an interesting story and it didn't seem like, and I hope it doesn't come across as a moan or an complaint, and I think for many of the people in the war if they started telling the stories it could well seem that they were just moaning about how difficult it was and so they seemed to have a natural reticence about it but I've never had a problem in answering people's questions such as these questions today; no I've not.

[Part 2 0:16:36] Lee: I think a lot of the soldiers didn't talk about it because they didn't want to talk about it because the person listening wouldn't possibly understand and its very difficult for me in doing this interview now to really understand what it was like to be incarcerated for nine and a half months

Holden: It is and it was difficult but it's still not as bad as people shooting at your pal next to you and you know all the blood coming out and all of that. I did mention the word horror and that's perhaps it is an over exaggeration and I would never put it on the same line as being in the trenches.

[Part 2 0:17:09] Lee: Was there any humour, did you survive because of humour?

Holden: There was a lot of humour and the Argentineans were an absolutely brilliant bunch I couldn't think of a better nation. Their humour was wonderful and I couldn't thank them for treating us the way that we did. There was a bit of tensions between some of them and because they were Army and they were young men and I dare say that.. I can think of one of the Army possibly two who would be an enthusiastic member of the '*Guerra Sucia*' the

'Dirty War' particularly the Deputy Base Commander and the students knew what was happening back in their own country, because this was the height of it you know when 'the disappeared' the 'desparecido' were going... so there was a bit of tension there but in general it was a huge amount of humour. I suppose it was helped that this was the year that Argentina won the World Cup the 'La Mondial' and it was played in Argentina so they could all listen to that on the radio. We all got quite embroiled in that and ... they were great party people but first the ..the First Sergeant, Sergeant Pernaro [phonetic] he used to keep the wine under lock and key and that was partly because we lost a very large amount of it early on in the winter and all the wine was stored in a room which was kept warm with a heater and we were all standing outside this room outside a heater keeping warm one day when suddenly there was a huge noise of breaking glass came from inside this room and a second later this great flood of wine came, we didn't know what it was because we didn't know the wine was in there, came streaming out from beneath the huge gap that existed under all the doors because of the crazy angles of the floors and the walls were at and went rushing down the dirty wooden corridor and froze within a minute or so into a great big long glacier of wine and the back wall of this had gone too far off vertical and tipped this huge amount, dozens and dozens hundreds of bottle of wine that had all smashed so we were on strict rations for the first half of the winter but then as time went on we had a party for every single imaginable excuse. So we had parties for the birthdays of girlfriends of the lads who were on base and they were back in Argentina so the parties got more and more .. and they have lots of feast days and they have Republic Day and Revolution Day and Flag Day and Army Day and Infantry Day and Navy Day so all these were great big long parties followed by endless games of the national card game '*Truco*' which means trick which is a bit of a bidding game a bit like bridge. But I got quite good at it because I used to play with one of the Argentineans who spoke English and with it being a bidding game you exchange signals and coded signals and we could do them in English which we understood. He obviously and me to a lesser extent than he, understood the other signals or at least he understood the language so we got to be quite a good pair because we would play it in English you see and those would go on until six o' clock in the morning. You could imagine that time got to have no meaning and it was quite difficult to keep up the regime of getting up in the morning and going to bed at night you'd loose touch with all of that so it was an extremely bizarre topsy turvy experience. All of those things added together made it into a very very odd, it was a 'Franz Kafka' experience it was a 'Crazy House' at the funfair experience and it was all that jumbled together it wasn't all black and it wasn't all light and it was all at strange angles and strange sounds and even for somebody who'd done three winters in the Antarctic it was off on another planet of space. This wasn't Antarctica this was Belgrano.

[Part 2 0:21:21] Lee: Thank you very much indeed Dog for sharing with us.

Holden: You're welcome.

[Part 2 0:21:26] Lee: Thank you Dog for agreeing to do a bit more of this. I'd like to spend a bit of time talking about your first season at Stonington which was right at the very end of the dogging period wasn't it?

Holden: It was my first season was the winter 74 and I and most of the other base members weren't aware that this was going to be the last winter. It's possible somebody was, possibly the Base Commander was, but there was no indication of that. So I arrived after a good summer season on South Georgia which was excellent rather than wandering around on the ship. So I arrived in March 74 and like generations of Fids before me I took over a team with

a few minutes hand over and a race around the rocks of Stonington Island from the previous driver of the team.

[Part 2 0:22:21] Lee: The team was called?

Holden: The team was called 'the Gaels' G-A-E-L-S and it had been driven by a vet beforehand Bob Bostelmann so I took over I suppose you could take a healthy team and well documented and Bob had all the inside knowledge of all the dogs as well as his own so I took over a good team a prosperous team and at that stage as I say we were .. we just thought we were one of the long line of dog sledging Fids. And again we proceeded through the winter starting with training runs which of course there were some experienced Fids there four or five who had done at least one season of dog sledging so the four or five of us that were new to it were well inducted and well trained some of the early trips were quite harrowing with us newcomers completely out of control with the dogs dominating and taking us where they wanted to go. So for a lot of very frustrating moments it's a tough job learning to drive a dog team and its driven many Fids to frustrating tears and some of them have never actually got it. It's not something everybody can do and you have to work hard at it and it's extremely strenuous and tiring and often frightening but extremely rewarding of course when you do get it. And like everybody else I came to love the dogs very very much as well as relying on them and appreciating them and admiring them for all their qualities and their resoluteness and their pluckiness.

[Part 2 0:24:05] Lee: What work were they doing with you because by that time Stonington area had been quite well serviced hadn't it?

Holden: Yes it was, there was always the odd bit of tie up to be done and the odd survey line that needs or the odd bit of rock that needed to be revisited. So there's a bit of picking around to be done. There was actually an ongoing scientific work going on on Adelaide Island and four Fids who were supposed to be with us at Stonington had been dropped with their teams at Adelaide Island to do some geophysical work, and then the plan was that they would join us, sledge across the sea ice and come to Stonington. So quite a lot of the, I wouldn't say the very earliest days, but as we got into winter we were expecting the sea ice to form and so we were going out doing reconnaissances of the glaciers where the glaciers run down into the sea ice, you tend to get that's where the ramps of snow form to enable access from the sea ice up to the shore. Because it was always possible that the sea ice would form in the area known as the fjords but not necessarily at Stonington so they might have to get on to the inland ice earlier than arriving at Stonington so we were doing quite a lot of reconnaissance trips and of course as you get into winter and the cold and the blizzards really start to bite some of those trips were rugged in the extreme I quickly got into my first ten day lie up which became fairly routine. So ten days confined to the tent other than going outside for calls of nature or to feed the dogs once a day. So there wasn't much scientific work of course there was a lot of writing up to be done and people were working on the base, the scientists that had collected data the previous summer were still on base and drawing up their maps and writing up their geological notes. So that went on but the field work was mainly training work dog training work and getting us fit.

[Part 2 0:26:07] Lee: What was the condition of the ramp because by that time it was beginning to deteriorate wasn't it?

Dog: It was , it was deteriorating it was narrowing and it was cracking. It was never so narrow that one was in extreme danger of falling off the edge but certainly if you got on the dog team from the spans that decided it didn't want to go where you wanted to go which was up the glacier and it decided they wanted to go back to base when we were still rookies the dogs took us where they wanted to go and so the careering, hurtling descent down a ramp which was seldom covered in decent snow, it was usually bare hard green bottle ice from the glacier, was a shattering experience. So it was narrow but we didn't feel that it was going to go any day it was obviously thinning.

[Part 2 0:26:56] Lee: That added to the stress and strain of trying to get up onto the plateau?

Holden: No it didn't really because getting up onto the plateau the dogs were by this time spanned well up onto the North East glacier. I mean there were holes right alongside the dog teams when I cleared up the blubber after a feed, all I had to do was to throw it a few feet to the right it would drop into a hole so the area was badly crevassed. So the ramp wasn't what gave problems getting access onto the plateau, it was what gave problems on trying to bring the seal feed that we'd chopped up, trying to get that up the ramp to feed the dogs every couple of days or so ..so general access to the teams was the problem.

[Part 2 0:27:36] Lee: And the weather wasn't exactly brilliant.

Holden: No No the weather every few days another great katabatic blizzard would sweep down off the plateau. You could see wisps of wind and snow begin to come from the plateau 6000 feet above and 15 miles away and you knew that that was the cold air that had built up on the plateau at 6000 to 7000 feet would start to tip down the glaciers and could come roaring down and we were at the snout of the glacier as it went into the sea so the wind was very often over 100 miles per hour rattling everything to blazes but if you met that when you were in the field it could make a mess of things and there were some signs of some most astonishing blizzards that we came across. There was an old Argentinean hut turned over and half buried in solid solid glacier ice at the foot of Sodabread Slope and we'd used it and the wind scoop around it to put a depot in ready for our ascent of Sodabread at the beginning of the summer season and we'd lashed big drums of kerosene and lots of man food boxes and dog food boxes which weighed 50-70 pounds in the wind scoop of this hut and we .. I personally.. put in the ice pitons into the ice and they went in, because they were one foot long pitons, and they went in absolutely perfectly so it was as solid as it possibly could. And after one big particular blizzard where we were camped out not far away we came to find that the whole hut had disappeared and I don't know how on earth that was because it was six feet buried in solid ice and the only sign that there was ever been anything there was that one of these ice pitons, these one foot long pieces of steel, was bent over at right angles, it was in the ice by about an inch and there was tiny little scrap of rope left and that was the only indication -four hundred pound drums had gone, 70 pound boxes had gone and this whole hut somehow had been taken out of the ice and scoured out and disappeared and it had been there for 15-20 years.

[Part 2 0:29:52] Lee: And you never found any remnants?

Holden: We never found any remnants whatsoever and we went searching down the glacier. Presumably went into holes but you'd have expected to find something here and there but (...).

[Part 2 0:30:02] Lee: When you realised it had happened did it make you wonder about the security of your own huts?

Holden: It made us, not so much about the huts, but it made us wonder about the security of our tents camping because although they were fantastic tents one thought now that we'd been.... What it made you feel was fear, apprehension, because we knew we had to ascend Sodabread and at that ascent often took a few days to do. I think it took us three days that was fairly typical so we would have to be camping at the bottom the middle and at the top and so we thought if one of these blows comes down these katabatics of that ferocity which was obviously quite exceptional then we were goners and so all the time on the ascent of Sodabread one wondered the biggest worry and of course there were holes and steepness and there was ice steep ice but the worry was that one of these blows would we were committed to it and as it turned out we got up without that happening. Although we did have what we called a phantom blow in other words we saw the drift begin to form above us on the edge of the plateau and it looked like a blow was starting and we were all worried stiff and making preparations for this and then it just dissipated and disappeared.

[Part 2 0:31:25] Lee: What happened at the end of that season when you left Stonington did you ...were the dogs still there or were you taking them out?

Holden: Yes, during the winter we got news down from Cambridge that the base was to be closed and that many of the dogs were to be culled and we had a sort of programme all dogs over four years old were to be culled so this came down to us like a bolt from the blue that this was going to be the last season as I say the beginning of the year we had no indication of that whatsoever.

[Part 2 0:31:55] Lee: This was an edict from Dick Law?

Holden: This was an edict from certainly from Cambridge, I can't remember I didn't handle the telex or the message myself but I'm sure but I think it did come from the Director, yes.

[Part 2 0:32:05] Lee: What was the mood on the base once that telegram had been absorbed.

Holden: Shock, anger, puzzlement, all of that. These days you would say it would seem to be taken without consultation. Perhaps we weren't the best people to ask but it came like a bolt out of the blue. There was no real explanation as to why and there is in fact some logic behind the decision not necessarily the decision precisely at that time but the way the survey and the work was changing and the planes and everything else were improving and the state of the work that had been done, much of the broad brush work had been done over the whole of Grahamland and the more concentrated work lent itself better to the modern style. I'm not making excuses as I say there was a logic but the decision when it came had none of that explanation and it ..we were shocked and furious and sad but determined to make a good go of the last season for the dogs and for us.

[Part 2 0:33:13] Lee: So tell me about dealing with the dogs then. Did it occur to you to ignore that instruction?

Holden: No I don't think it did occur. I didn't hear any of that on base we weren't really in control of it. At the end of the summer season we would be picked up by an aeroplane and taken back to a base and some of the lads would go home so we couldn't have sort of gone out and lived in the wilderness on our own and we had several months. In fact from when we got the news it was probably about nine or ten months later by the time the dastardly deed was done.

[Part 2 0:33:46] Lee: And how was that deed conducted?

Holden: All the field parties that were in Southern Grahamland or Central Grahamland at the time were brought back to Fossil Bluff as a staging post before being flown North back to Adelaide which was the airbase at the time and we all had our teams with us obviously.

[Part 2 0:34:12] Lee: So you'd been transported from Stonington to Fossil Bluff with dogs?

Holden: No we'd left Stonington in August time at the end of the Winter sledged up Sodabread. We'd gone to our secondary work areas and done work for two or three months until the planes arrived on the Peninsula and then the planes came down and flew the various parties down to Southern Grahamland which was further South and that was were most of the outstanding work was still to be done.

[Part 2 0:34:52] Lee: So the dogs went too?

Holden: So the dogs went with us yes and that was the normal way of things. In other words there were two work areas there was one you went to and filled in whilst waiting for the planes and then once the planes came the Summer Season got into full swing and so there were quite a number of sledges all working within a large area but what could be called Central or Southern Grahamland. They brought us back to Fossil Bluff and by then we knew which dogs were to go as I say it was all dogs over four. I think one or two exceptions were made for one or two outstanding leaders that were allowed because they could train other dogs but the general rule was it was a bit like Herod's all children under two were to be slaughtered well all dogs over four were and there were a few younger dogs actually went as well the dogs that weren't so very good or weren't very well or something We arrived back we were offered the option by Steve Wormald who had come down as Summer Operations manager and he was a dog sledging Fid from Stonington beforehand. But we were given the option by him that he would kill the dogs or the drivers would kill the dogs he didn't want to take them off us if we wanted to do the deed. I think the vast majority of people asked him to do it which wasn't very nice for him but it would have been clearly much more difficult for drivers to want to shoot their own dogs. Of course we had to do it at times when we were in the field and dogs got too old or too badly injured so we'd all had to kill a dog but that's for a different reason just the fact that it was over four. So we left all the dogs we left half the dogs or three quarters of the dogs at Fossil Bluff and then most of us wanted to get out so we flew out with our remaining teams the remnants of our teams and sledges back to Adelaide and Steve and possibly one or two others spent a unpleasant day or two having to shoot a large number of dogs.

[Part 2 0:36:58] Lee: So three-quarters of the dogs gathered at Fossil Bluff approximately were put down.

Holden: Yes

[Part 2 0:36:04] Lee: And you weren't there to see it happen?

Holden: No

[Part 2 0:36:07] Lee: And the gun was used rather than an injection?

Holden: Yes, the gun was used I think that because of the numbers involved I daresay, I wouldn't like to state too dogmatically, because there may have been some that were done by injection but injection was a bit slow and it was quite difficult you had to shave the dogs leg and keep the dog quiet find the vein, if it was cold the fluid would freeze and things so whilst we used to do that in certain very controlled conditions and in some ways it was better, a 303 rifle was the most effective way.

[Part 2 0:37:45] Lee: I would imagine it would leave a bitter taste in your mouth at the end of your first year as a Fid.

Holden: It did very very much so. As that summer season drew to a close and we'd all been out for six months with the dogs and of course the bond by then was extremely close and they'd had magnificent wonderful time and you knew that shortly, as days went by, half of these wonderful animals were getting closer to death . So it hung very heavily over us and I still think that some of us didn't even believe it was going to happen that there'd be some change of policy. But no indeed it happened and we were all extremely downcast and all the surviving dogs knew precisely what was going on.

[Part 2 0:38:32] Lee: Really?

Holden: Yes, dogs the dogs knew very well when one of their fellows was to be taken away to be shot they could feel it in our thoughts. Just like dogs now know often know their masters and what they are thinking and what they are going to do. They have the intuition that nature's bred in them. If a dog was to be culled the rest of the dogs would go very quiet before the event.

[Part 2 0:39:03] Lee: Hours before?

Holden: No minutes, several minutes before but it wasn't that they saw you waving a gun around or anything like that. They knew something was up and they'd go very quiet and avert their gaze in case they were the one to be picked. I remember once after when I had a dog to be culled in the field I went to dig a .. we were in completely open country with no shelter or no crevasse or no mountain no nuntak so I went 100 yards away and began to dig a wall so I could take the dog behind it and shoot it there rather than in full view of everyone. As I went away to dig this little igloo thing all the dogs started to howl at me because they were all watching me do this and then having done that I walked back and I got the dog

concerned and put him on the trace to walk him over and the dogs started howling again as I walked him over and they all faced away and averted their gaze in case they were next.

[Part 2 0:40:14] Lee: And did the dog in question try and resist?

Holden: Yes, Yes.

[Part 2 0:40:18] Lee: So he knew as well.

Holden: Yes he knew and then gave up resisting and walked rather downcastly to his (...) to be shot.

[Part 2 0:40:29] Lee: What did that do to the trust between dog and human?

Holden: Yes that's a very good point. The dogs were a bit shifty for a while after things like that had happened but again like everything else they would bounce back. I didn't see any real overt change in behaviour they didn't all start barking at me or they were still friendly but not for a while it took them a little while to get over the fact.

[Part 2 0:40:56] Lee: So there was quite a bond even though they would fight tooth and claw there was quite a bond between the dogs.

Holden: Yes indeed. They'd fight like blazes to start with but once you'd been out in the field a bit they tended to calm down they had their exercise and working hard. Every now and again a fight would break out if a bitch was on heat or there was some particular reason but in general once you'd been away from base for a while and the dogs had got a couple of fights out of their system, they'd settle down you could go for quite a long time without too much trouble but other than that you might say that they were great friends, there was a bond between them and they worked together as a team.

[Part 2 0:41: 36] Lee: So when it came to the Fossil Bluff cull and how some dogs were put on the planes and some weren't.

Holden: Yes.

[Part 2 0:41: 43] Lee: Would they have known then what was going on?

Holden: Yes, oh yes, they knew that because we were splitting the dogs and leaving some behind and they were very very subdued the behaviour of the dogs was extremely subdued, they weren't jumping around.

[Part 2 0:41: 57] Lee: They weren't rebellious.

Holden: No not rebellious. Just subdued is the way I would put it instead of being their usual jumping around and barking excited particularly in an area like that when there are a

lot of teams around and a lot of people and there's planes and everything happening. The dogs loved that sort of activity so they're normally jumping like crazy on the end of the traces so no they all went.

[Part 2 0:42: 25] Lee: I realise this is a subjective question you can only give a personal subjective reply but do you think that the dogs when they were being divided some to fly and some not to fly. Did they just know they were being divided and didn't like that or did they know what the ultimate consequences were going to be?

Holden: Again they knew something was up because this was unusual behaviour for us to do that sort of thing so they would sense... and unusual behaviour is something that dogs which are the most conservative of animals don't like.

[Part 2 0:42: 57] Lee: Yes You had to work with dogs again at Adelaide

Holden: Yes we were left after the cull we were left with 52 dogs and of course Stonington had been closed whilst we were away from it so we didn't go back to Stonington all our belongings had been left there and marked and were waiting for us when we flew back to Adelaide Base.

[Part 2 0:43: 18] Lee: So somebody had done a pick up ?

Holden: Yes.

[Part 2 0:41: 36] Lee: The removal men had been in.

Holden: The ship had been in and the base was closed and Genghis Wright had to be flown out in the field to conduct that closure and so they took everything that was needed including our belongings back to Adelaide base and that was waiting for us. So we still had teams and we managed to put together out of the 52 dogs we put together four teams and of course were younger dogs so these were dogs below the age of four so they were fit and strong and we got some good teams out of it and by then the four of us with teams were experienced we'd had a year sledging and so my second winter at Adelaide Base we did some terrific sledging and we were blessed with a fantastic sea ice year whereas the year before when we needed some sea ice to get these lads back we hadn't had any but we had a terrific sea ice year. Particularly with my future brother-in-law I did some wonderful trips and that was great to be able to have the dogs. And it wasn't that well these dogs will last another couple of years and then they will have to be put down it hadn't been said that you have 50 dogs carry on using them during the winter but not in the summer so during that winter as well as taking dogs out we had to do trips with the new skidoos and start to develop safety techniques and sledging techniques for the skidoos.

[Part 2 0:44: 50] Lee: Which we talked about earlier.

Holden: Yes that's right.

[Part 2 0:44: 54] Lee: Why weren't the dogs used in the Summer then, the snow was too soft?

Holden: No it was because the summer seasons was were the vast majority of scientific work was done was to go over to the new methods which were using skidoos. Shorter Summer seasons so instead of scientists wintering and writing up their previous summer's work preparing for the next one - scientists used generally to do two, two and a half years like the rest of us but the new method was that scientists wouldn't winter because that was a waste of salary and a waste of their time and so they would always go back to Cambridge then and come back down. To be fair if you are going to adopt a method like that you can't suddenly fly a scientist in and say there's a dog team we're out in the field tomorrow so that's another reason that the time had come for the dogs because of the new method but you could give them a skidoo and say sit on that and press that button and we're off tomorrow into the field.

[Part 2 0:45: 56] Lee: I just want to spend a couple of minutes if I may with you Dog talking about your first year at Rothera because you were the first Winter Base Commander at Rothera - am I right?

Holden: [Hesitation] Not quite because ...

[Part 2 0:46: 09] Lee: Things are never that easy.

Holden: That sounds rather strange. For Adelaide's Base last year there was a sort of advanced party living in a small hut just like the old days a very small hut indeed as big a carpenter's shed doing meteorology and if you like preparing the ground not necessarily literally but stationed at Rothera for that Winter so that was an advanced party but there had been no construction work or anything of that sort just this little hut was put there so Brian Sheldon was there in that little advanced base as a Base Commander so it's a bit like Fossil Bluff really four of them but the following summer of 1976 -77 the big construction work came in and that was the start of Rothera as it is now and some of the buildings are still there but the concept of Rothera began then as a major air base with modern methods and modern buildings and two storeys and using very much as a summer camp, an intensive summer camp, that's where the concept had come which Antarctic Survey had developed at that time. Steve Wormald was very much involved with that as a concept with people with people like Alan Smith who were here this weekend also very much involved. So that's when Rothera as we know it now began not just as a series of huts or buildings as a concept.

[Part 2 0:47:44] Lee: Were you the first Base Commander to do a proper Winter?

Holden: Yes that's right

[Part 2 0:47: 48] Lee: Even so you weren't necessarily sleeping in huts.

Holden: No we weren't because it was a very very big building operation far greater than anything that had happened at that time. Very large buildings and so there was an awful lot

left undone when the summer season ended and the big parties all went home and there were eleven of us left and the basic buildings had been put up but there had been no fitting inside so we had an extremely hard working winter in fitting out and painting and preparing the huts and these were huge huts designed to house seventy odd people for the summer and yet there were only eleven of us to do the work and we still had to live so that was very intensive but until mid-winter we hadn't been able to prepare the inside of the huts to sleep in so we were living in tents at the time and the cooking was being done indoors but not the sleeping so that was hard work that winter. All Fids would say all winters are hard work but I'd known several winters and that was an absolute corker on that first base.

[Part 2 0:48: 57] Lee: So it was possible to sleep in a tent in the winter in the Antarctic?

Holden: Oh yes, yes and many of us spent many months in the field in the winter anyway, we had wonderful double sleeping bags most of the time in the summer you only ever needed to use a single skin so they were well set up for it. Winter sledging was slower than ..ice would build up inside the tents and your water would freeze and you couldn't make your porridge to soak because the water would freeze and you had to go very carefully in the morning letting the heat of the primus and the tilley lamp melt all the condensation off the inside of the tent and of course you had to be careful with the cold on your hands and feet when you were outside so everything was a bit slower but once you got going it was it was great and the days were short but we weren't at extreme southerly latitudes so the days were short but it was never pitch black around Marguerite Bay so you were sledging in .. if it was a nice day .. you were sledging in beautiful sort of Alpenglow it was permanent sunrise or you could say permanent sunset with the sun just below the horizon but lighting things up with beautiful colours.

[Part 2 0:50: 06] Lee: One final thought have you have you been back to Rothera since or you must have seen photographs of it?

Holden: I did actually go back I was one of the cruisers in 2005 and we went back and I recognised the layout and the main living quarters huts still then were built on the basis of what we'd done and they'd just extended it. I didn't enjoy the experience in the slightest of going back to Rothera I found it rather depressing and soulless and of course the whole of the system had changed anyway. Things such as everybody with their own specific tasks to do rather than everybody mucking in together as we'd been used to. So to have specialist French cooks and construction companies down there rather than the Fids doing it I thought rather took the fun out of it. Although again I appreciate why from a scientific and a business point of view why that makes sense but from a personal experience and the general camaraderie that FIDs bases had above perhaps anything else other than maybe the Services then all that had been lost. To actually open the door and find someone on an exercise bike the thought that you'd needed to keep fit by going on an exercise bike is I think about it every day it's still shocking to say we got plenty exercise outside was the understatement of the year so that sort of thing didn't (...). I suppose I had some pride in Rothera that we'd done ..and I had pride at the end of that winter that a small band of men had achieved such a huge amount to get this thing ready for the next summer season when the planes came in and we had this wonderful gleaming new base and generators all working. When the planes came down bingo it was all there and all the beds were ready and stuff it had taken a phenomenal amount of work over many many months. So that was some pride and it was nice to see it still there and the layout and as I say the concept of it that we'd started that.

[Part 2 0:52:11] Lee: Dog thank you very much indeed.

Holden: You're welcome Chris thanks.

[Part 2 0:52:14] [End of Part 2]

ENDS