

British Antarctic Survey: Oral History Recording No. 9
Archive reference AD6/16/1997/2.1

A recording of Mr Derek Gipps, NERC Senior Logistics Officer 1960-74, in conversation with Miss Alison Martin, Archivist Assistant of the British Antarctic Survey.

Date: 30 July 1997.

Location: Mr Gipps' home in Shrivenham, Wiltshire.

Part 1 (Side A)

Alison Martin: This is Alison Martin speaking to Derek Gipps at his home in Shrivenham in Wiltshire on July 30th 1997.

Derek Gipps: Going back to the mid fifties – um - I had previously been working for a number of Attorneys General and – um - I got rather fed up with the Law and transferred to the Crown Agents - as it was then, Crown Agents for the Colonies - and I was given a two-part job. One part was to provide all the British hospitals in the West Indies with drugs and pharmaceuticals. And coupled with that was to co-ordinate all the work done by the Crown Agents to provide BAS with its stores or logistics.

BAS - I am using BAS now, um, as the current name, but at that time it of course was FIDS. Um, the organisation of FIDS in London – um - was a very basic one; it was Sir Vivian Fuchs - Vivian Fuchs as he was then - as director of the FIDS Scientific Bureau. He was assisted by Anne Todd. His secretary was Eleanor Honnywill and they had another typist. On the supply side there was Barbara Wells - who eventually - who he married - Denton Thomson, who was the Colonial Secretary for the Falklands at the time, and the system was that towards the end of the Antarctic season the ship went round and collected indents of stores that the bases thought they needed – um -bearing in mind that in those days the only communication with the bases was by Morse key to Stanley, and from Stanley it was by letter mail on the RRS Darwin, no - RMS Darwin - to Montevideo, and normal post from Montevideo onwards. The only speedier method was by telegram, there was no telephone communication with the Falklands in those days.

So we never got anything out from Stanley much before April. In those days also, the ships – um - used to sail very much earlier; they regularly sailed in September, taking supplies and people down to Tristan da Cunha before it ever went on to the Falklands. In the Falklands, the Governor was titular head of FIDS. He had a Secretary FIDS who was known as SecFIDS, who originally was Pearce Butler, then Frank Elliott, and at the time we're talking about, Johnny Green. He was assisted by Eric Salmon and Jock Tate and several other local people. They had a radio station in Stanley, because they had to receive all the Morse communications from the bases. They had a colonial treasurer, Charlie Hall, who looked after the accounting side. These indents of need were sent back to England and they were perused by Barbara Wells, who then sent them to me in the Crown Agents and I allocated various sections in the Crown Agents – um - to acquire the commodities that were needed. Many of the things I did myself, the non-specialist items – I did – um - food, all the chandlery stuff and various things of that sort. Um - then we had to get those things shipped. The goods came in to the Crown Agents, who had a packing store. They packed them – um - moved them to Southampton, where the ships sailed from and they were loaded onto the ships. Um - and I

got my experience from when Bunny Fuchs was crossing the Antarctic - um - and I had something like five years of experience before I ever went to the Antarctic.

I went to the Antarctic largely because the Crown Agents, who worked on a commission basis, found that the work for BAS was very time-consuming and the value of the goods acquired for BAS was very low, so therefore they were making a thumping great loss on the BAS work and although they liked doing it – um - their generosity had a limit. And one of the reasons for me going down - it was - I think the suggestion came originally from Eric Salmon - was to see if we could streamline the system so that the loss became less painful. Um - somebody from the Stanley office came home every year, because they used to come home, I think, if my memory's right, every three years. Jock Tate would come home one year, Johnny Green another and Eric Salmon the third. Um - and they would spend a leave in England and then pop into the office to be of any help they could.

Eric Salmon in those days was probably the world's greatest practical joker and Johnnie Green was the world's best party maker and party participater in the world, but he didn't do a lot of good for BAS. Um - fortunately he's not here to hear what I have to say. Um - Johnnie was a great drinker, he was a great womaniser and the last thing he ever wanted to do was work. Even when he was in Stanley, he would go off on jollies around the base and take dog teams out and fall through the ice and he did very little useful. When we first had tractors, he lost a couple of tractors because he was playing about where he shouldn't have been, and it was only because of Bill Sloman and I that he survived as long as he did. However, the situation - when Bunny Fuchs came back from the Antarctic, it was seen by all that the system with the Governor in charge some several thousand miles away really wasn't – um - very practical and Sir Vivian as he became after Transantarctic was then made Director of the Survey. It was changed from FIDS to BAS. He became Director. Um - there was still the Stanley office. Stanley Green – um - Johnnie Green was brought home and decided that he ought to have been Director and Bunny Fuchs shouldn't have been, so for six months he didn't turn up in the office. Um - and eventually, after a lot of unpleasantness, Johnnie was retired on abolition of office grounds because he really was not prepared to do any work.

Um - after my first visit to the Antarctic as a member of the Crown Agents' staff, I got on well with the then Governor, Sir Edwin Arrowsmith, and with Bunny Fuchs, and when I came back and gave my report to the Secretary of the Crown Agents, who was a man I can't remember - I will in a minute – um - it was clear that the system couldn't work as it was working and I was transferred on secondment to BAS. So although I was still paid by the Crown Agents and a member technically of the Crown Agents' staff, I went into the BAS office. Barbara Wells left on marriage; Dick Foster, who had been on base and who was there for a few months, departed, and I was left on my own. Um - I inherited one secretary and we set up shop and we started trying to set up a system that would work.

The problem was, basically, communication, because still, even in '60, the only communication – um - with the Antarctic, was by Morse key, there was no difference – um - and one of the first jobs I had in mind to do, and we achieved, was to improve those communications. Let me say here that the - at that time - when I first - in '60, we didn't have Halley Bay - Halley Bay was still then part of the International Geophysical Year and owned by the Royal Society, and George Hemmen, who had been with BAS as a met man, was sent down on the old Tottan to close the base down and do an inventory and from that time we took over Halley Bay. We took over the staff and we then operated Halley Bay. But prior to

Halley Bay, all our bases were small huts, they just had common bunk rooms - and some of them - the living room had bunks round the wall and you could fry your eggs from the - from your bunk. Even Halley Bay didn't have separate - the original Halley Bay - the IGY Halley Bay - didn't have separate bunk rooms and people shared and we were just all in together. Probably the most sophisticated base was the Argentine Islands Base F as it was then, which had two bunk rooms rather than one room with everyone in. However, again, the scale of things - to demonstrate the scale of things - when I first went down the biggest generator that we had on any base was 3 kw and it really was fairly basic. I mean, we were still doing sledge-wheel and compass surveys, we were still doing basic geology, a bit of botany and - um -

Alison Martin: Biology?

Derek Gipps: .. biology at Signy and - um - basic meteorology and things of that sort. In the Falklands, there was a met service - um - that was paid for by BAS and run for the benefit of the Falkland Islands Government. This - er - stemmed from the days when the Governor was head of both FIDS and the colony and he rather saw FIDS as a milche cow. Back in the early fifties - no - late forties/early fifties, we had two aircraft at Stonington. Well, the Governor pinched those and that was the start of the Falkland Islands Dependencies, er, the Falkland Islands Air Service. Um - and - um [laughs] - we didn't have aircraft again until 1960 and - um - the met service was run - um - entirely for the benefit of the Governor of the Falkland Islands [laughs], who was a very charming, charming chap, but -um - it really was a bit - um - not very efficient and of course it didn't conform to any kind of accounting practices where responsibility and expenditure ought to have been identifiable, and they never were.

My first trip as a member of BAS - that was my second trip to the Antarctic - I went down with - we were in - we had - we were on a Comet. We went down, Johnnie Green and his family - that was his wife and three children, two or three other Falkland Islanders, a man called Bob Moss, who was going to make a film. You've heard of him?

Alison Martin: We've got lots of photographs.

Derek Gipps: Yeah, Bob Moss. Well - the - in those days it was London, Madrid, Lisbon, Dakar, Natal, if there was a headwind in - er - Brazil - er - because the Comet could only just get across the headwind. Then Recife, Rio, San Paulo - er - Montevideo, Buenos Aires and - um - Santiago, if you went on that far. And we all - and every stop you had an hour and I remember Johnnie writing back to the office, having a drink in the bar with the boys, nine times during that trip. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But they were days when drinking was fairly hard - um - and there wasn't much science done really. There was some - in those days there was some superb science done but it was few and far between. Um - we - our first - the first activity I became closely involved with was the closure of a number of bases. We closed Hope Bay, we closed Admiralty Bay - um - Loubet Coasts, Danco Island, and there was one more, I've forgotten it,

Alison Martin: Port Lockroy?

Derek Gipps: uh, uh, Port Lockroy, that's right. And we moved what science was being done, there were geophysical sciences being carried out at Port Lockroy. And we moved those to the Argentine Islands, building a new - um - non magnetic hut, a balloon shed, and extending the old hut - um - and a new generator shed - and we increased the capacity to generate power to 7 kw - um - Halley Bay, of course, had bigger power - uh - supplies - but - um - not very - I - I don't think no more than 10 - they had three 10kw generators. Um - having closed the bases that we did - we then had to build up the others to bring them into some kind of - uh - useful scientific - to have them as useful scientific establishments - um - so they were all extended. Soon after we took over Halley Bay, which was - the original Halley Bay was built for the IGY - was of conventional structure with a pitched roof, extremely strong, but with the floor bay - the floor coming up - and the pressure of ice on the eaves, the ridge split by about two feet six inches and, because of the heat escaping through the ridge, the water poured in and it was decided, because of the - its depth below ground - of which I think there was about thirty feet - it would have to be built - abandoned - and a new base built. Johnnie Green brought home the - um - um - his ideas from the Falklands of what should be built and, unfortunately, this was what was built. The idea was to built a flat-roofed base complete in itself as a totally new base, abandoning entirely the old IGY hut and to construct the flat-roofed buildings - um - at some convenient spot at Halley Bay. Unfortunately, the flat roofed base was built far too close to the old dome of Halley Bay and it was - er - drift was affected and it soon drifted up. The idea of Johnnie's was to - that as soon as it drifted up to the eaves, you would - um - build another base on top of it and carry on ad nauseam, but the twist and heave within the ice rendered that a futile - um - operation and that, I think I am right in saying, was abandoned in '63 - um - so it probably lasted no more than four years. Um - Paul Whiteman was Base Commander when the - um - base was abandoned.

Alison Martin: And you said that before that - whilst they'd been in what we know as Halley 1, they had in fact been using the old IGY hut, as ..

Derek Gipps: yes, - um - when, when - um - the - er - the heat was taken out of the old IGY hut, the condition of the hut stabilised and water ceased to pour into the building and conditions were found to be better down there, thirty foot below the surface, than in - um - the flat-roofed base which was known colloquially as Harbrow's Folly. Harbrow being the company that constructed it - um - shipping out only half the requisite number of bolts to hold it together - um - so Harbrow's Folly was not a success, but it was the first base that was built for BAS where the two-man bunk rooms were built. [tape misses out words here] had a number of projects that we wanted to - um - get on with, we wanted to improve all the bases that we were going to continue with. We wanted to extend them, improve facilities, improve communications, but in those days money was extremely tight. I don't think it's ever been as tight as it was then, but I'm sure each generation always thinks that the money's tighter - tightest - um - when they were operating. Well, in the first couple of years I did all the logistics myself, I did every - I placed every order that BAS had for two years - um - I think I got three days' leave in two years - um - and also went to the Antarctic for two periods. Um - in 19 - in - towards the end of sixty - in April, May of '62 Maurice Sumner came out of - er - been Base Commander of the Argentine Islands - um - and then went to Halley Bay and I recruited him as an assistant to help me with the logistics.

I first met Maurice when he was at Argentine Islands and we had come down on the Biscoe and we were the first ship in and we - it was foggy - there was ice in the channel and we were stuck in the channel, we couldn't get in and we radioed to the base if they wanted, to

ask them if they wanted to come out and get their mail. Um – well, we're in this quite dense fog and we hear dogs barking – in those days every base had dogs – and we heard dogs barking, a great commotion. And out of the mist came a dog team, going about 40 knots – it - with Maurice, as I found out afterwards – hanging on grimly behind. They ignored the ship and went down the channel into the distance and weren't seen again for two hours [laughs] and Maurice then got the dogs under control and brought them back for the mail. Maurice remembers this but is always mildly embarrassed by his ability as a dog driver. So my first meeting with Maurice was there – rather inauspicious, but he took the leg pulling he received after that rather well. He then went down to Halley Bay, where he had the unfortunate experience of loosing a man on base and he handled that superbly well, and I went down in the – the - as he came out, and we had a memorial service – um – on base for the man that went out to sea [tape goes off here]¹. He went down to the ice edge – er – to look at the condition of the ramp and the ice – um – presumably to see so – keep an eye on things for when the ship came down and he – they found tracks down the ramp onto the ice – um – and there was a blow and he was never seen again. He went out – it must have gone out to sea on the ice – um – we had – in those early days we had a number of fatal accidents – um – all of which – um – were avoidable, but it's very easy to have hindsight – um – we lost a man at Signy egg collecting² – um – another three I think at Hope Bay in the early days when they were having a fag, filling up the petrol generators³.

Alison Martin: And that's when the whole base

Derek Gipps: .. burnt down, yes. We had another death at – um – Admiralty Bay – um. We had another funny one early on at Admiralty Bay. In – they used to have a wind generator there – a – like a windmill.

Alison Martin: Turbine - wind turbine.

Derek Gipps: Turbine – wind turbine, and the doctor who was on the base, walked into it and it smashed his head rather badly and – um – he was unconscious for several days and the carpenter was preparing to trepan his skull, to try and relieve the pressure, under instructions from Stanley. And the doctor woke up and it was only three years ago at the Antarctic Club Dinner that I sat between the doctor and the carpenter. The doctor was able to show me his scar, because he was now bald and the carpenter expressed his extreme disappointment that he wasn't allowed to trepan the doctor's skull – um – so that happened there. Um – turn off. [tape is turned off and on].

During the time I was involved – um – we used to go down most summers, most Antarctic summers – er – Bill Sloman would go down sometimes and I would go rather more often. But the whole idea was that we were there as coordinators and – um – organisers – to try and make sure that the programmes worked as near as possible to that planned. The ships' captains – I mean in the early days there was a captain of the Biscoe, Bill Johnson, who probably drank three bottles a day – um - and although he never showed it – um – could be very difficult. Then there was David Turnbull, who probably didn't drink as much but was rather more difficult – um – and then after that we rather got – er – younger captains who were prepared to cooperate rather more than the older ones were. Um - And there was always

¹ Neville J Mann, died 15 August 1963.

² Roger Filer, died 13 February 1961.

³ Oliver R Bund and Michael C Green, died 9 November 1948

difficulty, there was always problem – communication was bad – there were enquiries to be held – all kinds of things. There would be a punch-up on base and the Base Commander would come up with two black eyes and somebody had to try and keep the peace and things of that sort.

But in that time, we re-built Halley Bay three times, we built the plastic building at Signy, a new water tank and a new fuel tank, new generator shed and a jetty. We extended the Argentine Islands, built a new – um – non magnetic hut and a generator shed. We completely built Adelaide Island up. We turned Stonington Island from a two-storey – single storey – building to a two-storey building. Um – we built Fossil Bluff – um – and we extended – um – Deception Island with another plastic building. Um – all of that was done in about five years, rather more than Halley Bay, the three buildings of Halley Bay took rather longer than that. But we had quite a spate of building at that time and it all went – it was all done in – er – a rugged manner.

Um – during this period we of course – um – increased generator power at all bases. Everyone – every generator was increased so that people had power. We went to single side band communication and it was much easier to – um – communicate with Stanley, and before I left BAS in '74 all bases had teleprinter communication with Stanley and Stanley with England, so it was possible then to get a far better control of stock in the Antarctic and knowledge of what was likely to be wanted much earlier and therefore – um – we were able to get better value for money, because in the early days there was no point in going to tender. You had four months to get the lot, so you went to any supplier that happened to have what you wanted – um – there was no question of delay because there was no way of getting it to the Antarctic if it didn't meet the ships in September and October. There was no alternative. So in many ways it was easy because we didn't have to go through any kind of complicated tendering process. But nevertheless, there was a vast amount of work to be done.

Um – a lady who was a sterling help to me in the BAS office was – who is now dead – Ray McPherson – she worked for me for many years. And she was really the anchor lady in the office and she was terribly knowledgeable and she checked everything. We used to check to see – we had a system to see that all orders were placed and all orders were received and delivered. One of the major problems of course was with so many destinations, they all had to go in the same hold and they have to go in the opposite order they come out and we often lost bits and pieces. We had the Kista Dan – no – perhaps the Kista, I've forgotten which Dan it was, at Signy Island, when I was down there with Ray Adie, and the mess boy, mess man, on the –um - Kista - er- developed acute appendicitis and we couldn't find the medical equipment on board. And in the end we found all the – um – surgery equipment – surgical equipment – we couldn't find the autoclave, so we - fortunately we had two doctors. One was John Brotherhood and one was – oh – the man who became Chief Medical Officer of the Canadian Army, I can't think of his name – er – er – I could look it up there and find it, but nevertheless.

Part 1 (SideB)

Um – we had two doctors, but we only had one pair of surgical gloves. Um - we then found two more, so the two doctors had – um – surgical gloves and one other pair and there was a biologist who had been – who spent his winter cutting up seals who offered to act as the third pair – man – with surgical gloves. The rest of us who were helping had diesel mechanics' big, thick rubber gloves on and on the first incision, the – um – John Brotherhood acted as an

anaesthetist, as I remember rightly, um- the, um – the biologist, the botanist – no boil – um – the scientist who was – I’ve forgotten who he was – what’s Duncan Olden?

Alison Martin: Biologist.

Derek Gipps: Biologist – who had been cutting up seals all winter, on the first incision fainted and we dragged him out feet first. So the rest of the time we had two pairs of surgical gloves and the rest with the diesel mechanics variety. However, the mess man was up the next day and he recovered. The doctor I’m trying to remember was Ron Lloyd – er - he did the surgery. Um, that was – er – quite interesting. We were so relieved we went back to the Kista Dan in a force nine gale and nearly drowned getting on board, but we did drink two bottles of scotch, Ray and I, that night. Um – it was –er – quite interesting.

Another time - the same occasion we were on Signy, there was a very large iceberg about twelve/fifteen miles across, just off Signy, and in this gale - we – we got on board and had to put to sea, we couldn’t hold our anchors. Um - and the Shackleton was coming in and – er – we spoke on the radio and we were both going to shelter behind the big berg and - um – as we were going round, about a mile of it turned turtle, broke off and turned turtle, nearly sank us. Um- Turnbull thought we’d gone and came steaming round looking for survivors but we were not close enough. Had we been closer, we would have gone, it just broke off and turned over. Um – it was a really nasty, nasty night. But Ray and I, we had had enough scotch to make it all seem quite normal and [laughs] – nobody worried too much. The mess man recovered and –um, um - that was fine. Um- the chartering of the Kista Dan took place from when we took over Halley Bay. We – our – the Shackleton and Biscoe were unable to supply Halley Bay as well, so we needed – um – another ship and we did like so many other Antarctic nations, chartered one of the Dan’s ships, which again was my job – to go across to Denmark and arrange the charter. Um – and we did this for – oh, until ’70 – um, when the Bransfield was built. But the – we had the ship for a hundred days, that was all, and the price went up and up and up and it was getting more and more difficult to justify. Um – let’s stop a minute.

Let’s talk about Deception Island. Um – Deception Island, the British base was the old whaler’s hut in Whaler’s Bay. Um – it was a fine old building and in 1960 we bought our first aircraft – um – um – that we had had in the Antarctic since the late ‘40’s. we bought a single Otter and a single-engine Beaver. They both had to be shipped down because there was no way they could fly in and [laughs] the – we left the – um – Otter on Deception and took the Beaver down to the Argentine Islands, where it was going to operate off the ice. As we came through Mick (?) Channel the aircraft assembled – which had been assembled in Deception – was on deck and the ship went too close to the island and took the wing off. So we then had to steam back and order a new wing - go back to South America, get a new wing and put it on and we got that safely to – er –

Alison Martin: Deception?

Derek Gipps: No, to Argentine Islands with the aircraft and the pilot, who happened to be Ron Lord, no I’m sorry, Paddy English, strayed off the marked runway and disappeared into a 100 ft of water. So, I think that aircraft had six hours on the clock. So we then went back and bought a second Otter, which was slightly bigger. And the idea was that these Otters would operate from Deception Island. We built up the base. We built a plastic building for more accommodation and we built a large hangar. Unfortunately, the hangar had been

designed when we had a Beaver and an Otter and before we could build the building, we'd lost the Otter and bought a second – um, lost the Beaver and built a second Otter. So never was the hangar really big enough. However, we operated from it and the – there was the air party – two pilots and two mechanics. They would winter at Deception, they would fly in the Antarctic summer and the Antarctic spring. But, it worked alright for a couple of years and then became very, very difficult because they would get the aircraft back from its operations in the Antarctic summer to Deception Island, they would then carry out the necessary servicing and, inevitably, they would find they needed a part that they didn't have. So the engine – aircraft – then had to stay in bits till we could them – the part down – next summer. So it then had to be re-assembled.

So the start in the summer became later and later and we were operating then – it was flying down to – doing some spring work if it could - over - supporting the Hope Bay people before we closed Hope Bay going down the – the east coast, and then it went to Adelaide, to fly down to Fossil Bluff and Bill – and it's first – the first job there was to carry Fossil Bluff, down to the Bluff and to build it. But we sometimes didn't get more than thirty hours a season out of each aircraft, because it got down to Adelaide when the weather started deteriorating and the best weather was in the spring and we could never get it down there. However – I mean that was the best we could do and we operated like that for many years. Er- we lost several aircraft. Fortunately, there were no people lost. I think we lost three or four, but I can't remember – it was in the record. Um – then we – um – they went up on - onto the glacier and got icing up and the aircraft came down on the glacier and we managed to rescue them, but we found out it was a bit of a jolly and they were all in Wellington boots and they weren't properly equipped, so we had to tighten up the rules. We had – we couldn't get enough money out of the Colonial Office, so we went and bought a second-hand Otter, that was probably from the Norwegian Navy - er - Norwegian Army. We got it through an agent.

But then things started going wrong and it was clear that single-engine operations, some major catastrophe was going to – um -occur and I think it was quite late on – it was after we were under the aegis of NERC that Irene Fairy, the accounting officer, the Finance Officer, said to me – um – in February time – can you buy a Twin Otter before the end of the financial year? So I took – I think the price was £350,000 quid in those days. So I took a cheque and Paul Whiteman and I went across to Canada and we found that we – that there were exchange controls – there were all kinds of problems. However, we acquired a Twin Otter and that was the first Twin Otter that BAS ever had. We got – we flew that down of course and we wanted another one, but we couldn't get enough money. The Single Otter crashed and we crashed another one, I think that came – it rounded out at thirty feet, instead of nought feet and the undercarriage came through the deck and the pilot was sitting up, hunched up, although it didn't hurt him, it shook him up a bit but we then went aboard Polatus Porter. The reason for buying that – it had been operated in the Alps and – um – and – but the reason for purchasing it was it had the same engine as the Twin Otter, so we weren't having to carry extra spares, it was the same and interchange of an aircraft. However, John Ayres managed to crash that, so it didn't last very long and John Ayres had to spend a winter – an extra winter – at Fossil Bluff because he wrote it off down on the Bluff.

When I went to buy the Polatus Porter, it was interesting. It was built by the Polatus Aircraft Corporation of Switzerland and I went across to Zurich and with John Ayres, who was the pilot, we were picked up at Zurich airport by Polatus Porter and flown in to the factory and it was the factory in which they filmed "Goldfinger". And it came - we landed on

the car park with stall capability. Um, and we then went next day, we went up to one of the – we went up to about twelve thousand feet to try the aircraft out and there was an American – I'm sure he was the CIA because he was about 70 - and there was myself and John Ayres and the company pilot – John Ayres was going to fly the aircraft for the first time. And they decided that we – the American and I – they wouldn't take passengers. We, dressed in our lounge suits in a beautiful day, were put out onto the ice field and we just stood there – lovely – sun shining, beautiful. And over the lip of the glacier came a string of climbers. And there was an old man of seventy, with two hassle blades round his neck and a younger man of about forty, with a cannon round his neck, standing talking in the middle of the glacier. And they walked up to us, and the leader was an Englishman. He said “Where the bloody hell have you come from, we've been climbing since five o'clock this morning”. And then the aeroplane came back and he knew where we'd come from.

But we purchased that aircraft and flew it, but it didn't last long. Its ski undercarriage was not strong enough. However, after that crash we then got our second Twin Otter and operated very much as we operate now. Um, but Paul Whiteman was instrumental in all of this work and his value to BAS in the past, I don't think was ever appreciated. I think he was worked to death. Um, I think he let – he had a tendency to let himself be worked to death, but I don't think people realised what he did. Um, he designed so many things other than aircraft. It was only latterly that he – um - concentrated only on aircraft. He had been a flight engineer and he had been trained as an aero engineer, but his background was in Formula 1 racing and he joined me on a part-time basis in 1964, um, and he was still, um, acting mechanic - as a mechanic for Ian Raybee, a private entrant onto the Grand Prix circuit, and he didn't come and work for BAS, then, when the Grand Prix were on and before that.

About this time, of course, we acquired Barry Peters and Ricky Chinn and David Rampton, who has since gone on and is working in NERC. But at the time that we reached that stage, I suppose, in '65/'66, we had got things fairly well under control, with Barry Peters looking after all the geophysics and radio equipment, er, Ricky Chinn looking after most of the sledging and, er, Maurice Sumner moves on to be assistant to Bill Sloman – um – David Rampton assisting me – and it was a fairly, er, smooth-running operation, although we did – um – have our cock-ups – they were fairly regular. We had – I had an interesting experience when – um – Jim Shircliff and John Brotherhood were out on a jolly at Halley Bay and fell down the cliff. Um, I was in Stanley at that time with my wife, doing another job, but was generally co-ordinating things and Bunny Fuchs managed to persuade – um - the Americans to bring out John Brotherhood particularly, because Jim Shircliff had damaged his leg – broken his leg – but John Brotherhood had badly smashed up his face and he would have been disfigured had it not been attended to, and Bunny had arranged for the Americans – um – to fly across a C130 and land at Halley and take John Brotherhood out. Well, I was in Stanley at the time and we were working the communications net and the operators were working 8 Station, the Pole, McMurdo and the aircraft that were flying in, which was quite a task, because they were doing it with morse – um – and Ted Clapp was coordinating – he was standing – he was in charge – he was a radio op by training – and I was [tape goes off] “is there anything I can do?” and Ted Clapp told him to bugger off and make some coffee and sandwiches, which he did. Um, during all this, it was funny, one of the operators saying “they're breaking in, they're breaking in” and Ted saying “what, who's breaking in?” and he said “that silly bugger from Deception. And Ted saying “what's he saying”. “He's saying SOS”. And Ted said “well, better see what he's – what's the matter”. And that was when Deception erupted and ..

Alison Martin: when they were trying to fly [tape indistinguishable]?

Derek Gipps: Yes, the same night. We were up – I think we were up thirty-six/thirty eight hours, trying to organise that in Stanley. Um – I then rushed, this must have been about eleven o'clock at night, I suppose, because we had the Biscoe in the harbour. The crew were at a dance. The captain, Tom Woodfield, I managed to find in the Colney Club, told him the story, said "for Christ's sake get the crew together and sail". We got the crew together and found the tide was out and the ship was sitting on the mud. So it couldn't sail. Um – fortunately – um – it sailed as soon as the tide rose but the Shackleton was able to get to Deception, but not until the Chileans had got in and rescued our people, but it was – a -really a hairy night, because we succeeded in getting Brotherhood out and relieving Deception at the same – on the same evening.

Alison Martin: Was that the first eruption?

Derek Gipps: Yes that was the first one – yes. And they went back again and ..

Alison Martin: You were still hoping to maintain Deception?

Derek Gipps: Yes, yes, yes. And that, of course – that was before we acquired the Twin Otters – that made – almost the Twin Otters – almost - absolutely essential. Because we could fly those into South America and there was no single-engine aircraft you couldn't fly across the Drake Passage – it was nonsense. So it was an ill wind, and we went into Deception again and, I think it wiped out the Chilean base, didn't do much to - a new island formed in –um – Telefon Bay and we were the first people to set foot on that. It soon started to disintegrate and then it blew up again and that was the end of Deception. But it was an interesting place, with the old – as you went through there was a very narrow opening, known as the Bellows, to go into the island, and there was an old whale catcher that got too close to the shore and was up on the beach, that we used to loot periodically.

The – uh - I remember that we had a – we had some strange Base Commanders at – um – Deception. There was an Irishman – and I shall remember his name – I'll look it up in the book – and the - both the Argentinians and the Chileans were military bases and relationships with them were good, but he felt that he was at a disadvantage, so he got some gold braid and put four rings on his dinner jacket and used to parade across to the Argentinian and Chilean bases, with four rings on the dinner jacket [laughs] and if it was a table tennis match – you know - advantage Great Britain. And of course it was at Deception that – um – Tilmann, the mountaineer, turned up in his boat, quite out of the blue. We gave some diesel oil to him and he was never seen again.

Um – Deception was – er – I mean when Eric Salmon was there, I mean going back in the dark ages – they – the old whaling station – they had 303's and they would play Cowboys and Indians and the Indians would inhabit the whaling station and they'd shoot the 303's to just miss the Indians, and this was – they were – they were – I mean they had the year at Lockroy where they were – when the boat came in they were all standing a hundred yards apart – they were – not that anybody was speaking to anybody. They were – um – they were very very – um – they were all ex-servicemen and they were all older then. Um – right now. Well – it was geophysics at Halley and Argentine islands, it was still doing survey – um – from Adelaide and Stonington – um – and Fossil Bluff and biology and botany at South Georgia and Deception. But the quality of the work was much – I think the quality of the

science, of course, really rose when Dick Laws took over. But – er – by then the infrastructure had been laid, communications were good, conditions were good on bases, tractors – there were tractors, there were skidoos which were – had been – um – brought in from Canada – um – there were aircraft – um – there was the opportunity for people to get into the field quickly and easily and not spend all their time trying to get to their point of operation. And it was much easier for that generation because they didn't have to change from a boy scout operation to – um –

Alison Martin: to a well organised ..

Derek Gipps: well organised scientific. I mean Eric Salmon when he was in the Falklands, I mean he used to do terrible things. They had a big ballroom and – um – they had the Christmas Ball and the Navy were in and they were doing pantomime and everyone was dressed up and part of the props was a forty-man inflatable dinghy, one of these things that – and Eric pulled the thing and it just inflated in the ballroom. I mean the French chalk came – everyone was covered in French chalk and he was banned from Government House for twelve months for that. He was a terrible practical joker. Um – and he would do all kinds of things would dear old Eric, we miss him dearly. Sadly, I mean, he –

turn off a minute, will you.

Um, I said earlier that when we took over Halley Bay, the capacity of the Shackleton – um – and the Biscoe – weren't sufficient to supply Halley Bay as well as the other bases, so we had to charter another ship and as the years went on the cost of that charter became larger and larger and, of course, the – you had virtually the same number of people, whatever the size of ship, so if you had three ships you needed something like a hundred crew – um – with two ships you only needed sixty, even if they were bigger ships. So when we came under NER – when were transferred from the Colonial Office to NERC – um – Bunny said to me “If we're going, we're going to have to go with something, otherwise we're not going to be wanted”, so we went to the Treasury and I'd done us a very rough design and said “this is what we want” and we – NERC wouldn't have us without it, so we – um - because they could see the economy of having a second ship and – um – that was agreed, that we would transfer from the Colonial Office to NERC, but we'd go with the cost of the new ship – um – and that enabled us to pass over the Shackleton to NERC, so they gained a ship and – er – the – um – we would have a cargo capacity sufficient for all the bases – cargo and passenger capacity enough for all our base requirements. The Shackleton of course was never built for us, it was the Arandall, it was a Baltic vessel that we purchased, I think, in '51/'52, something of that age, and converted, it really wasn't strong enough and twice it had been badly holed and once it only survived by putting the lifeboats out and acting as stabilisers and getting up to our necks in water and chucking cargo over the side, we chucked the whole cargo over the side.

Alison Martin: When was this?

Derek Gipps: Oh, when was that? We did it twice. One was I think about '58 and the other time in the sixties. She was very vulnerable and after that we tended not to put her into ice, so it did put a great pressure onto the Biscoe, to all the southern bases – um – the Biscoe of course was built for us in, I think, '54, it might have been '56 – um – and that was the first ice-strengthened ship that had been built in England for a hundred years. Um – though the – I mean we employed the same design – the same company of marine architects for the

Bransfield as those that built the – um – Biscoe, but they weren't the same partners, the actual people who designed it were the same company, but the same partnership, the actual people who designed the Biscoe were – um – dead. What – the reason – the advantage was that we were able to keep better control of it, I mean the Biscoe, the problem with the Biscoe, I mean on one occasion John Cole was captain, the – um – it was the middle of the night and John Cole had a great habit of ringing me up in the middle of the night from somewhere, and I remember him ringing me and saying "The Chief Engineer's tried to get trial speeds out of the ship" (this was in the sixties) "I'm half way between Rio and Dakar, where should I go? We've burnt out one half of the armature." You know it's a diesel electric ship, it was then before it was buggered about with by Dick Laws – um – it was diesel electric as the Bransfield is and that means you've got two generators that generate the electricity and the armature, the windings, turn an electric motor that then is transferred to the propeller which drives the ship. The advantage being that any shocks through the propeller don't transmit to the engine because there's this electric motor that isn't in physical contact with anything, it's spinning with the electric current passing round it. So that was the advantage of it. Um – and of course when they built the ship, they'd forgotten that you have to get from here to there to work in the Antarctic and go through the tropics, so the engine room was a nightmare, and he'd tried to get these trial speeds in the tropics and the temperature had just burnt out the armature. Now that's – so I flew out to Rio next morning and got – well first of all I got the firm that had made the armature, and they sent me a technician, with bits and pieces to try and repair it. We went into Rio, we were in Rio – into Rio - and I arranged with the Embassy to meet us because – um – were were importing some strange things – one of which was called elephant hide but had nothing to do with elephant, it was an insulating material. And of course the Foreign Office in its usual bland way didn't bloody well turn up. Anyway, we got through customs eventually, this technician and I, and we got to the ship through a Japanese shipyard – a story I won't go into, rather devious – and um – we got onto the ship and when we looked at the – um – motor, the windings – the electric motors you're probably conversant with are wire, wire endings, but this was copper bar, about that wide and about that thick – um – and a great hole in it – bloody great hole in it – um, um. Anyway, we couldn't see any – the technician says "there's no way I can repair that". So I was ashore trying to negotiate - it weighed eight tonnes, this piece of equipment – tried to negotiate with the airline to fly it home.

We had, what, forty FIDS on board, thirty six FIDS on board, all spending their money like bloody water in Rio. The crew getting drunk. We were moored out in the bloody harbour.

Part 2 (Side A)

We couldn't keep the prostitutes off – they used to come out in their dozens. So I went ashore and saw the Chief of Police and said, "What shall I do?" and he said, "Do what the other boats do". I said, "What's that?". He said, "Rig your fire hoses. And as they come over the side, squirt them back in the water". I said, "But we're a mile offshore". He said, "If they can't swim, they'll drown. There's plenty more". He was absolutely completely casual about it. Um – and – um -.

Alison Martin: Did you?

Derek Gipps: No. We tried to keep them off. Um – I think one man, who's now a Master, lost his wallet. Um – anyway, I was trying to negotiate with an airline to take this –

this large piece of equipment, it was before the days of jumbos, remember, we're back in the mid-sixties, back to England to get it rewound. And we were having a drink on board and a boat came up – and a bloke came up and he said, “Oh,” he said “I’m ..” - perfect English - “I’m from the Rio Tramway Company”. I said, “We haven’t got any trams”. He said, “Oh no, but we’re still a company”. And he said, “I’ve heard about you, we’ve got some copper strip, just like you want.” So I said that was fine, you know, “Can you let us have a bit?”. So he said, “Yes, I’ll give it to you”. I gave him a few gins and on board came some copper strip. Still the technician didn’t want to know and he said it couldn’t be done. So on the Sunday we were going to see Rio play Santos with Pelee – um - and it rained – it rained like only Rio seas rained – absolutely straight down – bonk. And it was rained off, we couldn’t go to the football match. So we went back on board and got stuck into a gin, which was their, you know, cure for everything. And in the end we persuaded the technician to have a go. He was - he’d had half a bottle of gin – to have a go. We’d wasted the afternoon, we’d all help him. And he got down there, we all got down there and I never forget, he reinsulated it, he cut out the bad copper bar strip, and re-spliced the new copper strip and he had to put back the banding wire which holds the whole thing in place, and that’s about – it was - ooh, as thick as your finger, and the only way he could do it tightly was to do it with the engine running, and he just turned the engine slowly and altered the tensioner, and got this band, it was singing, this banding wire. I could see it breaking and cutting somebody in half.

And it worked, we got Lloyds clearance, and sailed to the Antarctic and I came home with the technician. It was – and that man, I mean he saved us, I don’t know how much - hundreds and certainly on today’s prices – hundreds of thousands of pounds. And he was paid an hourly rate and I had to certify his overtime. It was in – you know – and I – I authorised eighteen hours a day, though most of the time he didn’t work at all, but I mean he was worth so much to us.

And that was - John Cole was captain then. We went to – um - at that time we went to a beer festival in Rio and they had a wonderful idea - they had all the – um - brewers and when you went in, you paid your money and you got a big china stein and you went up to any – um – counter and they had like petrol pumps and they filled your stein with beer – a big barn of a place with a concrete floor. When you got drunk and dropped your stein, that was the end of it – it broke and you got no more beer. If you kept your stein, you could come in the next night for half price and so on. So we had two nights – um - at this beer festival – John Cole – um – Stuart Lawrence – names which you may well be familiar with? Do you know Stuart?

Alison Martin: Not personally ..

Derek Gipps: Yes, um – um – and on the third night we were down on Copa Cobana and John Cole got one of these big Black Mammys and told her I was interested in her and she picked me up and carried me – carried me away – and I only escaped by giving her my stein, so we didn’t go back for the third night [laughs]. However, we got away – well it was that kind of thing and the breakdown of the Shackleton – the holing easily – the costs of chartering a ship – that decided that we should build the Bransfield. But we kept a control of it and Tom Woodfield sat in with the designers at every stage and he stood by the ship as it was built, with the chief engineer and they saw every stage of it and you will be interested to know that that was built on budget for £1.75M. It was the last fixed price ship that was ever built in England.

Alison Martin: Goodness. And it was built as a science-based ..

Derek Gipps: No, it wasn't. It was built as a logistic ship, with the ability to do some science. It was too big and too heavy, really, for a – it was really built as heavy as we could get and not be an ice-breaker. We wanted it to be able to break ice – um - the problem was we ran out of money and we didn't have it – um – tested in the tank after it was – the final design for the flow test and we got a vibration on the prop, which we still have. But that was funny – we went out on trials – it was – went out to tender. The Board of Tender as they were – they told us who we would go to tender to. I think we went to four companies – um - two in Scotland - Henry Robb, Caledan, Swan Hunter and another one, I've forgotten the fourth one, Appledore I think. Um – Appledore didn't - weren't interested; Swan Hunter got another contract and withdrew - um – before the tenders were adjudicated. And Robb and Caledan amalgamated. So there was absolutely no tender.

And we went out on trials when the ship had been put in. First of all we – the – um – alternator fell off a lorry and sat in ditch for four days because it was so heavy they couldn't get it out. That was General Electric. We got it on board and it was all wired up and went out to sea to trials and there was an enormous explosion. They'd wired it all up the wrong way round and the switchboard had gone solid – it was – I mean it fused all the buzz bars, and when I mean fused it had melted them and fused them together. And we were – we were a salvage – we were still – it wasn't our ship then, it was still in the – um – hands of Henry Robb – they were still building it. And it was funny, old Henry. When he used to get nervous, he looked a tiny stubby man, stocky man, his teeth used to clack, false teeth used to slip and I knew he was under tension because stress, because his teeth were going like nothing on earth. And he got on the radio to one of his buddies, "Och, Jock" he says "will you a wee turn," he says "we got a wee problem out here". We had nothing on our lights, but candles. He says, "We've got a wee problem out here" he says "we, oh we could set it out here" he said "but it would be better alongside, can you give us a pull back in" he says "How much?". This bloke, if he had known, we were salvage, he would have taken us and taken us for the full cost of the ship. We were - absolutely had nothing. And he conned this poor tug, tug man, to pull us back to Henry Robb yard at least, to sort out the chaos of the switchboard and as part of that it was seven months late and we sailed on the – midnight New Year's Eve out of Leith, locked harbour, the lock keeper was drunk and we just got out – we got out for four days in a Hogmanay in Scotland.

We sailed - pointed down to Southampton, loaded and sailed. Bunny and I picked it up in Monte and we were down in – going to shore somewhere, I've forgotten, going down the ladder and I saw oil running out. I went like that and – diesel – the sheerstrake - you know the basis of a ship is, the strength of a ship is the keel, the stem and stern and the top strake of the ship, the steel, it acts as a box beam. Well, the sheerstrake had split, the whole plate had gone, top to bottom, four or five feet of steel, split in half. So we had to go up to Deception, and – um – not Deception – Punta Arenas – and get – de-gas the tanks and weld a big plate over it till we got back. Um – so it was really quite chancy. I mean our plans were to do a trial run down to Gibraltar or back in the summer. It was due for delivery in April and we didn't get it till Christmas, but we did get it on budget and on time. I mean we had some hairy breakdowns in the Shackleton in the old days - and when we came back, all through those western islands of round Terra del Fuego, magnificent scenery with the Shackleton in a state of falling apart – um – and we got back into Punta Arenas, only just. The engines were falling out, the captain was drunk. If Turnbull is still alive, I mean he was – when I was living in Stanley. One of the purposes of me going to Stanley was to sort out the Stanley office –

um – because Ted and Clem were a bit chaotic. You knew – did you know them – Clem, lovely fellow if he’s still alive, he was retired, both still alive. Clem was a lovely fellow. Um, bright, bright as a button, but he was a bit, he used to operate near the knuckle – uh – and many of his activities weren’t strictly – um - in the code of practice that you had in the organisation. Ted was as thick as two short planks, but everything Ted did was – uh – with honest intent, you know what I mean, and then we wanted to close this mess station.

We had thirty families down there, from, we had three/four costers, six assistants, so we had nine people, nine families on secondment from the Met Office. It used to cost us – in those days a £100,000 a year. And all doing it, not doing it for us, doing it for the Falkland Island Government, so – um – I went down there for six/seven months to try and sort things out and that was when the – um – Deception erupted and we were getting Brotherhood and Shircliff out. Um, so I said, the Governor – the Governor there was Cosmo Haskard and his wife Phyllida. Now, Phyllida, ex Roedean girl, she was about 5 feet tall and about 5 feet wide. She was enormous and had a voice like a foghorn. Um, Haskard was tall and slim, very elegant, with his tall cocked plume hat on. He was a very elegant man. He wouldn’t let me have any passages on the *Darwin* to get these families out, because he was losing his met service, so I had to bring the *Shackleton* back from the Antarctic, put the families on the *Shackleton* and take them across to Punta Arenas and fly them out from there.

But, they were very, very hospitable, the – all the Governors I knew were very hospitable, particularly the Haskards. We were living down there and my daughter was about 18 months and they invited us to Government House for Christmas, and. They thought we were lonely. Of course, we weren’t and Phyllida, she used to drink. I mean Cosmo, he was a terrible man. When I used to stay there without Sandra, he would wake me at five o’clock in the morning with a gin about that big and say, “We’ll do the telegrams now, Derek, let’s get the new telegrams.” He was dressed and would expect me to be up and bathed and go and look at the telegrams with a bloody great gin before breakfast. And I’ve been in Government House when they’ve all been playing silly games, they used to play round the billiard table. You had to roll the ball up and get up there before it reached the end and, she used to pull her skirt up, long dress between her legs and tear around and she organised the ladies’ cricket team and she was wicket keeper, you know, oh God, she was, she was priceless. They’re living in Bantry Bay – fending off - I expect she’s fending off the supertankers. Um - but they were very hospitable and very nice and they were very helpful, considering we were taking money away from the Falklands.

We bought the first muskeg tractor, I think, in 1960 and it was the result of money took, snowcats and muskegs across the continent. Um –

Alison Martin: Transantarctic Expedition?

Derek Gipps: Transantarctic Expedition. Um – the muskegs – the snowcats were beyond our budget at the time. We had no tractor. The only tractor we had was two tiny miniature Ransomes farm tractors that were trapped [background noise, tape switched off and on]. I’m sorry, I’m, um, and we, you’ve probably got photographs of them. We used them to drag the supplies up from the little jetty at Hope Bay, up to Hope Bay. And that’s all we had. Everything else was dogs. And because of the success of the muskeg on – um – the Transantarctic Expedition, um, we decided we would have a go and – you know - we just had to mechanise. So we got enough money – and we scraped together enough money to buy two, get them across from Canada. They were – um – they were meant for Muskeg – work on the

muskeg – um – which is swamp-like – um – Canadian tunnelling, Canadian north. Um – they had a bearing pressure of about a pound a square inch – big wide – um – tracks on rubber wheels, low pitch cab – um –

Alison Martin: Where did you get the idea of going to them?

Derek Gipps: Because Bunny had used them on the TransAntarctic.

Alison Martin: The same company?

Derek Gipps: The same company. Bombardier. Do you see, it was their trade name. Bombardier were a tiny company. So he got two from them and we put them on the *Biscoe* in 1960. We went out from Southampton. I happened to be on board. The captain had had his usual bottle before sailing - Bill Johnson. We went out into Force 9 and by the time the captain surfaced the next day, the tractors were flat, been flattened by the sea, written off virtually. So, um, we continued on to Montevideo, flew out bits to refurbish them in Monte and get them refurbished – we got them to Stanley and then Johnny Green had one of his ideas to take them over the Falklands bogs to show the farmers. It was really Johnny's jaunt. And he wrecked them again, so we had to refurbish them a second time. However, we got them to – um – Adelaide, and John Cunningham then took them over the sea ice - couldn't do it now – hair raising – to Fossil Bluff and – they're still operating at Fossil Bluff, I believe. They were a few years ago. Um – living in the open and just operating and that's how we – we then bought them and took them down to Halley – um – where, of course, we had the terrible accident with the three down the crevasse. Dai Wild, the doctor, [telephone rings] excuse me. Terrible accident, you know the one I'm talking about do you, when three went down a crevasse?

Alison Martin:

Derek Gipps: yes, yes, yes. And we then, eventually –um – SCAR asked Paul and I to go across to Canada and see if we could find a skidoo that would be – Charles Swithinbank had had this – it seemed while on the – um - in McMurdo – a thing that worked and we had bought two for Adelaide and they were an absolute disaster, they just – they didn't work, they just fell apart. We used them down, oh, only for about three weeks and they fell apart and they then developed them a bit and Paul and I were asked by SCAR to go across and see if we could get somebody to develop one that was suitable for the Antarctic.

Alison Martin: What was the problem, especially, with the Antarctic?

Derek Gipps: Well – um – the thing that – um – Charles had seen was badly engineered, that was the truth of the matter – um – and it wasn't - and when we went across there must have been 200 different manufacturers and we went – and the idea was that we might get one to do fifty vehicles for the Antarctic, but just as we went across there, just at that time, Bombardier, who were a small company, started making well engineered motor toboggans for recreational use. So we went and visited probably fifty different manufacturers all over the mid-west of Canada and the States and found nothing really suitable, but it wasn't until Bombardier went into it and developed the vehicle that it became useful for us, because the power was right there. It was done for high speeds in Canada and racing and this kind of thing and, it's like everything else, it has to be rugged and they became useful for us and we used – and we bought the first rubber-tracked – um – Sno-cat. We went across and tried that

out in Medford, Oregon, because the old – um – Sno-cat had metal tracks, it had two hundred bolts. Everytime we had to change a track it was endless hours that they did in TransAntarctic services, and we went across when they developed a rubber-tracked one and we bought the first one, the first one was manufactured, bought those. Um – but again it was when money was available and things developed, you had to try and keep abreast with what was going on and most of it was Canadian. Um – it was strange – we went across, Paul and I, to Medford, Oregon, to see – um - the Tuckers, Orville Tucker who was the maker of the Tucker Sno-cat and we stayed with the Tuckers – and you can tell when it was – it was the time of Biafra, do you remember the Biafra War? And he was a very tiny American, who was pulling our legs about our colonial history. And to rather take the edge off the conversation, I said to him, “Well, I didn’t see any black people in Medford”. “Oh”, he said, “they wouldn’t settle here”. I said “why not?” “Oh” he said, “we’d take the buzz saws to them”. I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Oh, we take the chain saws and chop up their house and their furniture and they leave”. And that was in the mid-sixties.

Um, but the muskeg was the first tractor we had in BAS, other than the little farm tractors, to heave up at Halley Bay, and they proved very useful. And of course, when we built the – the - Halley Bay within the Armco, um, all we had as lifting gear was a muskeg with an A-frame crane on the back and we had to lift these great steel plates and we conned the marines to send down two parties of marines to do all the – a lot of the – the heavy work and screwing up all these bolts. Um, they did that, and that did work very well and that base lasted – that’s the longest lasting base we’ve ever had at Halley Bay, that Armco.

Alison Martin: That was Halley 3?

Derek Gipps: I would have called it Halley 4, but yes, you called it Halley 3, yes. That was a – and the only reason was its depth underground that really finished it and then, of course, you had the wooden one, which was a disaster about to start and I’m afraid, Alan was so tied up the design, he couldn’t really – I mean we recommended to him – I went down and looked at it – we recommended to him that until the ice got at it, it wouldn’t stand up, that he should put – I don’t know if you’ve seen these great cargo straps they have in aircraft? And we suggested that he put a nylon strap round every circuit and pull it up tight, and put steel wires linking the – to hold it all together until it drifted up. But he chose not to and it fell apart, it just collapsed on its own weight.

But that was the only base that – um – Alan was responsible for the design – um – and I do feel rather badly that he took so much credit away from Paul from the Armco Halley, which was not – er – Alan Smith’s design at all. Um – but there again, it’s trial and error and you – you’re going to make mistakes and the trouble now is that there’s always a hue and cry when you make a mistake, I mean in the old days if the ships should go around and we’d patch up the hole and patch it up properly when we got home and nobody said another word. Um – when we – when Endurance was first bought, the Navy were very worried about Endurance because normally captains who bend their ship are court-martialled. Well if you’re going there to break ice, he was going to bend his ship and we agreed to give them details of all the damage that has ever been done to our ships and how we repaired them. And we took Peter Buchanan, who became an Admiral and was the first captain of Endurance. We took him down on the Kista Dan and let him break ice on the Kista and on the Biscoe – um – before he ever took over Endurance.

Um – but we used to bend the ships fairly regularly because very little of the waters were chartered in the early days. There were safe passages you knew the course, you knew if you steered that course you were safe, but when they actually chartered the area, you found rock pinnacles within two or three hundred yards of the course we'd been steering for years. And the Navy did a great deal of work in the surveying, and so did the ships, I mean Tom Woodfield, when he was Mate, did a lot of survey work with the – um – Navy, with Protector and later with Endurance. But the Navy didn't – I never felt in my time they ever gave us the help they really could have done, they always had to break off and do - go up to a party in Santiago or go up to show the flag in Rio or do something when the season was in full swing. So I don't think they gave us the help they could have done, but they did give us help and it would be churlish not to recognise the help they gave.

[tape goes off and on here] they were on strike. The ships were in Southampton, there was a dock strike. Do you remember Jack Dash?

Alison Martin: No

Derek Gipps: Well Jack Dash was the militant docker's leader and there we were with the Shackleton, or the Biscoe, or both - I don't remember – fully laden, or almost fully laden. No cargo was moving, couldn't get it on board the ship. So, everyone was scratching about, nobody knew what to do. So I rang up Jack Dash. Got on the phone and I thought I'll speak to Jack Dash and eventually at the Transport and General Workers headquarters I got through to Jack Dash. By just sheer effrontery, and I nearly crawled down the phone because he called me "Brother". Um, but I said, "Look, these poor - poor sods in the Antarctic, we're not a commercial organisation, they're going to starve to death". It wasn't as bad as that, of course, but – um - "Oh", he said "Oh, yes" he said "you're not a bad employer" he said, "we're not striking against you". I said, "No", I said, "couldn't you, um, let us go, just let us load the one ship?" – um - and he said "Well", he says "pickets, you know, pickets" he says, "not to antagonise the pickets". I said, "I'm sure if you spoke to the pickets they might have some consideration for us." He said, "Yes, I'll speak to the pickets". He says, "there's twelve on the gate. A case of whisky?" So we took a case of whisky and he talked to the pickets and I gave them a case of whisky and the ship sailed.

But, I mean, the dockers of Southampton, I mean the old Spanish customs in Southampton were priceless. And of course, Southampton was particularly prone to strikes because the crane drivers were NUR and the dockers were Transport and General. So they – if the Transport and General strike - were on strike - the NUT wouldn't work and vice-versa, so you got disputes from both of them. But, I mean, there were all kinds - their trick was - you say, alright we want to sail the ship 30th October, so the cargo would be on the side – and in those days they used to have it on hand trolleys – one box at a time onto the hand trolleys, dozens of men. There used to have to be a gang in the hold, for each hatch, and a gang on the shore, for each hatch. Now the Shackleton had a little tiny booby hatch at the forward end, which probably wasn't as big as half this room. It had its main hatch which wasn't very much bigger than this room if it was as big, and an afterhatch, where we used to put ship's stores on. Now they said you used to have a gang, two gangs for the forward, that little booby hatch, two gangs, you know you had nine-a-gang, six nine's - 54 dockers. They were all falling all over each other, they weren't doing any work, and they'd say to you, and they'd go slower and slower and slower. Um, and, you could see that the 30th October was not when they were going to finish. And then they'd come up to you and say, "Job finished, guv?",

Part 2 (Side B)

and you'd say, "Yes". So that meant you paid them their rates up till 30 October. They would then chuck all the cargo in the hold, like a big tip, and disappear to another ship and they'd draw double money for next day. So you got a great mess in the hold, you couldn't find anything and they got double money – one lot from you and one lot from the next ship owner. So what we used to do was announce the sailing date a week before we actually wanted to sail. They used to get slower and slower and slower. We used to shrug our shoulders. And in the end they got fed up with it and put it in and went away.

But, no, we used to – we had no, um, compunction about a little bit of bribery. In South America, bribery, I mean, you couldn't move a ship, you couldn't clear a ship in any of the South American ports without – for the more senior officials, a bottle of scotch and two hundred fags. For those beneath them, a bottle of scotch and for those beneath those, two hundred fags. I should think we got rid of two cases of scotch and a thousand fags every time we went into port. But they didn't - it didn't cost us, I mean whisky in those days was about £12 a case, I mean it wasn't really. They used to come on with their bags [tape inadvertently switched off/slowed down for several seconds?]. Yes, we, when we could we visited other bases, we visited, all, I visited all, all the foreign bases in the Antarctic Peninsula and also at, um - the Argentinian base at the head of the Weddell Sea – what was it called? – don't know – I'll remember it in a minute.

And that was funny, um, we, on the first maiden voyage of the Biscoe, we went to Halley Bay and I did with Bunny the first flight of the light aircraft between Halley Bay and Adelaide, um, and um, we had no beacon, so it was a bit hairy. So we went down to Halley Bay the year after with the Biscoe – Bransfield – on its maiden voyage and we finished unloading quickly and we had some time to spare and Bunny said we'd got an old beacon that we could pinch from his old base at Shackleton. Belgrano was the Argentinian base I was thinking of. Um, so we decided to go down and rescue this beacon from Shackleton Base. So we pushed down with the Bransfield and did that and we were quite close to the Belgrano, so we, um, decided to go and pay a visit, um, and it was a low ice shelf, well I suppose of about twenty foot. And the bow of the Bransfield, we just put it up against the ice edge, kept the engines running, just held it there, the wind was coming straight on our nose off the continent, and put a rope ladder over the bow, and said anyone who wanted to go to see the Argies can, you see, and a lot of us went up there. And then I came back with the Base Commander of the Argentinian base to introduce him to Bunny and the Captain, so we came back and we were in the Wardroom on the Bransfield, and it was the maiden voyage and we took on board, when we left Southampton, an engineer from General Electric, to make sure that everything worked.

He turned up in Southampton, I'll never forget, with a lounge suit, um, a raincoat and a little bag about that big. He was going for six months. Well, he – very, very, very good engineer. But he never had less than a quadruple gin. He used to have one, two, three four, drink those all day. Um, and he was on board when we were entertaining the Argentinians, and I saw him in his lounge suit, nothing more, going along the deck and over the bow. Now, I suppose the temperature was probably about minus two, but there was probably a ten-knot wind blowing, off the ice, so the chill factor I should think would be probably minus fifteen, something of that sort. And I said to Tom Woodfield, "For Christ's sake, send one of your junior officers over there, because he'll be in the ogg before you can say "knife" ". Well, when they got over there, he'd gone over the side. Once the wind had hit him, his eyes had

watered and had frozen his lids to his cheek, and he was walking about like a blind man. And he could have walked right off the ice edge. And they had to bring him back like a blind man on board, and bathe his eyes with warm water to get them open. He never went ashore again. That cured him.

But, again with Bunny, we went to the Chilean Base GGV - it's Gonzalez something Videla, always known as GGV. It's - I can probably find it for you. Anyway, we went ashore there and they'd set up this base in the middle of a penguin - well they'd set it up but they didn't know - it was in the middle of a penguin colony, about a million penguins, and the stench. And they'd brought down sheep, goats and young bullocks. And they were standing there in piles of straw, just in this little - like a nest - each one of these domestic animals in this windswept bloody wilderness of penguins. And the Base Commander came down to us, met us, and he said, "Welcome to GGV, knee deep in shit". [laughs]. And it summed the place up. [laughs]. I mean [laughs]. It was lovely, lovely.

But we used to go down to see the Argies when they were - and that was the very strange thing. We went down and, um, and saw - it was when Hobson was the Ambassador, we stayed with him and we met with the, um, Foreign Minister, and they asked us to bring our ships in rather than Monte, to Buenos Aires, and rather than go to Punta Arenas, going to Puerto Williams. So we agreed to this and it was all written down and we sent the Bransfield into Puerto Williams and they were chased out. The Navy said, "We don't take any notice from the Foreign Office - clear off". And that's, you know, that was years before the Falklands War.

And there was one incident, as I say, with Hobson, that same period. We - they sent down - I can't remember the man's name - but he was Wilson's organiser of the Fearless talks - and he subsequently became our Ambassador in Washington - big, curly haired man. And I think Master of Oriel or after he retired, and I shall think of his name perhaps before you leave. And he came down, and I was the boy, and there was Bunny and there was him, there was Hobson the Ambassador, and there was the Argentinian Ambassador to the United Nations and somebody else from their foreign ministry. And the reason they had the man from - he knew Bunny. And myself and a lad from the Foreign Office. And the man from the Foreign Office said, "We're quite prepared to relinquish sovereignty of the Falklands, but you must convince the islanders. And" he said "it may take you a generation". And that conversation is in my diary - um - and that was said in the early sixties. And the - the Foreign Office were giving signals from then on to the Argentinians that they weren't interested in the Falklands.

And that, I believe, was the first real sign I saw that the Foreign Office. I was there - I mean there was no doubt that the Foreign Office were - said - at that dinner party, they were prepared to relinquish sovereignty. And then after that they then allowed the Argentinians the only rights to fly in, didn't they? And they were using military Focca Friendships into the Falklands. Then they gave the Argentinians rights - the only supplier of fuel to the islands. And all the signals to the Argentinians were that they weren't interested. Fortunately - for them - we had Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister when they did take it over, but it was clear from those early days that the military were the power and not the diplomats and the - there was an Admiral in charge of the - um - Antarctic operation and he would come into a meeting with a complete phalanx of bodyguards around him, although he was a retired Admiral. And - um - they were - they would just barge into the room and he would come out to the middle and shake hands and talk. It was clear that the military had no, no interest in

doing what the politicians said, they had their own agenda. And I'm just absolutely surprised that the Foreign Office were sucked in. I can't tell you the year, offhand, but it was the year that Callaghan was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Harold Lever was Financial Secretary. BAS were told to close. I was told to organise the logistics to bring everyone home and take nobody down. Close – the Survey was to close – finish. Bunny and I and Bill Sloman, we went to see Sir Lesley Martin, who was Secretary of the Royal, but a very powerful man, not like subsequent Secretaries.

Alison Martin: The Royal?

Derek Gipps: Royal Society. Um, nonentities that they've had since then. But he was a real powerful Victorian type - Secretary of the Royal Society. And he brought pressure to bear and Bunny was very close to the Royal Family then. He used to be invited quite often to dinner parties as a guest, to talk to other people, you know. He got quite, after the Transantarctic Expedition. And – um – the story is that Bunny was – got a ticket for the Royal Box at Wimbledon and met Callaghan, and as a result of that meeting the previously held decision was rescinded and the Survey survived. Had it not been for that we would have closed and – um – we – I mean, the whole system was in place. We weren't recruiting – um – and – er – it was a close run thing. If it hadn't been for the Royal Box I doubt if we'd have had Callaghan's ear. I don't expect that's written down anywhere. It's not the kind of thing you can say. [tape goes off and on].

... Tosh we employed as a welder, lovely name, and he used to have a - like a drink - and he'd had a few drinks round the bars in Stanley and he turned up in the Colony Club, making a nuisance of himself and the doctor said to another FID, "I'll grab him, pinion his arms and you hit him, knock him out, stop him making a nuisance of himself. So the doctor seized Tommy Tosh, pinioned his arms. The FID took a punch, Tommy Tosh moved his head and he hit the doctor between the eyes. And he had two black eyes the next morning. And Tommy Tosh walked off scot free. However, he went down alone and built that tank on his own.

Alison Martin: To Signy Island ?

Derek Gipps: Field tank, and we were going into Signy at the end of the season and it was getting dusk and as we approached we saw a flashing light and it looked like morse, so none of the ships officers know any bloody morse. They were all on the bridge with binoculars trained on this flashing light, trying to - looking up the book to see what it was saying, and it wasn't. But we got there, [coughs] excuse me. It was Tommy Tosh, working on finishing off the fuel tank and every time his torch, you know, welding torch, struck, it was flashed out to sea. But he built that, with a little bit of help from the base, alone.

And we used to have other characters - um - the Scot - the adopted Scot - who used to call everyone "Mistress", and he never did any work. I've forgotten his name, too. I can find that. But there were characters then. But, because, you see, in those days we used to recruit people because they were nice people. Anybody could be a met man, you only had to read the met screen three or four times a day, and some of our most successful Base Commanders were met men. I mean Paul Whitegman, Maurice Sumner, Ricky Chinn – they all, they were good fellows, good people that we wanted, but now you have to have long qualifications to go down.