

KEVIN WALTON

Edited transcript of a recording of Kevin Walton interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 7th July 2003. BAS Archives AD6/24/3/12. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 8th January 2022.

Part One

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Kevin Walton, interviewed at his home in Malvern, in July 2003, by Chris Eldon Lee. Kevin Walton, Part 1.

[Part 1 0:00:11] Lee: Why did you go to the Antarctic? What drew you?

Walton: Well, two people. There was a fellow called ... I was interested in, at the university, there was a chap, the Surveying Professor called Stephenson and he was known to everybody as Steve. And he came in, joined the staff and was a Survey lecturer straight away. He had been with Gino Watkins in Greenland for two years. He'd then done another trip and then he went down to the Antarctic with the British Grahamland Expedition as a surveyor. So he was a real inspiration. By this time I had got interested in mountains and I was at Imperial College in my second year and there was this splendid man talking to us. And very quickly the whole group of us got interested in that sort of life. So that was fine. I finished up with Imperial College, very interested in the survey and president for life of the mountaineering club. And then all through the War, wherever I went, whenever we got anywhere like Aden or Iceland or Greenland or anywhere, I would go ashore and go up anything I could.

[Part 1 0:01:24] Walton: And then there was another chap called Lancelot Fleming who was the parson for the British Grahamland Expedition and he was also the senior geologist and the senior scientist. And the first Christmas of the war, I was in *HMS Rodney* and a chap came and took the service on Christmas Day. We were in dock at Rosyth and I noticed he had a Polar Medal. That's all he had, just one Polar Medal. And I knew there was only one person in the world who was a parson and had a Polar Medal, and it was Lancelot Fleming. And the two of them, of course they were great buddies so I just walked into *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and said 'Lancelot Fleming?' 'He's down below.' And typical, I went there and the curtain was drawn. He said 'Come in.' I walked in and there he was, stark naked in his cabin. He was welcome to anybody. And so he was the link between Antarctica ... I kept up with him all the war by post. He was in *Queen Elizabeth* in the Mediterranean and did an awful lot of things and he always knew that I was interested in Antarctica.

[Part 1 0:02:27] Lee: So you went to see him on board *Queen Elizabeth I*?

Walton: That's how I met him.

[Part 1 0:02:30] Lee: Where was that?

Walton: In Rosyth.

[Part 1 0:02:33] Lee: And what year?

Walton: 1940. So I kept up with him all the war and I knew where he was and he knew where I was. And we kept getting other people who had served in ships with him and so on. And then, at the end of the war – it was literally at the end of the war, Peace had just been declared – I was the Engineer Officer of a destroyer called *Relentless* and we were coming home. And we were on our way home at the end of the war, in the Red Sea with a following wind, 12 knots, and it was bloody awful. And the Signaller came down to my cabin and said ‘There’s a signaller here for you. Captain said he would like your answer.’ So I went up and the signal read something like: ‘Is your Engineer Officer interested in two and a half years in the Antarctic? If so, he should be flown home forthwith.’ And the Captain said ‘Well, what’s the answer?’ I said ‘If you ask a silly question, you will get a silly answer, and the answer is Yes.’ So we got to Part Said.

[Part 1 0:03:37] Lee: What were you doing in the Red Sea, Kevin?

Walton: I was in the destroyer, coming home for the end of the war. All the ships were coming back to England. And so we were in the Red Sea on the way home. So it was the next stop. Well about 8 hours later we were in Suez and I managed to fix up a flight back to UK. So from getting the message, the signal, to being on my way, was two days. And I then picked up a Dakota at Suez and hitchhiked with a stopover at Malta and was back in England. I had hardly seen my parents all the war because I was very rarely on leave. I think in the whole war I only had three weeks leave, I think. So I got back and they were very thrilled to see me and I said that ‘But the trouble is I am off again in three weeks’ time and you won’t see me for two and a half years.’ My mother was very distressed I think. She and I got on very well together but we had been separated a lot and she had great plans for things she was going to do. She was a great person for doing things. She could make trouble with her tools, and so on and suddenly to have me arrive back and go ...

[Part 1 0:04:55] Lee: A very difficult time, then, those few days?

Walton: It was because it was obviously hurting my parents. Very exciting for me. I didn’t know what I was in for; I knew nothing about the job. It was still a secret operation, Operation Tabarin, and you weren’t allowed to say anything to anybody. I went up to London and met the leader of the expedition who was another one of these characters. He was on the same expedition as Lancelot Fleming and Steve and this was a doctor, Ted Bingham. So I just met him in London, a little tubby Irishman, a very friendly man but very very Northern Irish, I mean pretty intolerant of lots of things. And I then had to go off to Scotland to learn how to put an Esse stove together, and came back. And then I was merely told: be at such and such a place and such and such a time. And my father wheeled my luggage, me and my luggage to the station at Bromley at about six in the morning and I didn’t know what I was in for, just didn’t know a thing. Got picked up in an RAF lorry or van or something in London. I looked around and there were 16 people and I said ‘Well you are the perishers I am going to live with for the next two and a half years’, never having met any of them – no contact whatever. And we then flew from Northolt to Lisbon and picked up a ship there which was a liberty ship that had been converted to a ... It had been a liberty ship and it was on its way with a cargo of something or other to Montevideo.

[Part 1 0:06:37] Walton: And so we travelled down together, all this bunch of people, all of whom, on the whole had a very distinguished war. Some remarkable people. I can think of the wireless operator; he was an Army signals officer, and he had been involved in all sorts of things. That was Butler. Ted Bingham was the leader. The doctor was an Irishman who had worked with Ted Bingham as a doctor of the Navy and had brought all the dogs down from Labrador in a little 140-ton ship. We were all living in very rough conditions in the merchant ship. All merchant ships carried what they call 'dems' which were the people who defended the merchant ship that had the odd gun or two, and they were just dumped on the top of a deck in a cabin. And we lived there, through the Tropics. There was no air conditioning, no fans and we got to know each other very well. So that took us to Port Stanley.

[Part 1 0:07:45] Lee: Let's go back a little bit, to those few days in England, first of all. Because you had more than just ... You had more to do than just learn how to use a billycan, didn't you? Tell me those first few days. You arrived home in Bromley.

Walton: The next day I went up to see Ted Bingham at his office in Charing Cross. He interviewed me and said 'Right,'

[Part 1 0:08:09] Lee: You were interviewed, were you?

Walton: Well, only by him. He had accepted me. There were three of us who were in the war together. One was a chap called Blackburn, one was a chap called Moore, and one was me, and we had been reading *Southern Lights* with great delight because it had just come out. This was the book of the British Grahamland Expedition. And the other two were Midshipmen. We used to go down and read *Southern Lights*, and one of the things we made was: we made a model of a sledge.

[Part 1 0:08:40] Lee: Out of what?

Walton: Anything I could get. I used to work away with the two of them and made a model of a sledge. And that came out of a book that we had. It was just a sledge picture and I have still got that somewhere.

[Part 1 0:08:52] Lee: Was it big or small? Eight inches?

Walton: Yes, about that, and we used to do this in my cabin, and they also met up with Lancelot Fleming, and so our three names were sent in to Bingham. Lancelot must have just said 'These three people might be interested .' And in fact they contacted all three. One was the First Lieutenant of a submarine in the Pacific. He was asked to come. One was a chap called Moore and he had only very recently got married and he wasn't prepared to ... or she wasn't or something, I don't know, but think of it. The one in the Pacific finally became very well known in submarines and was captain of the *Affray* when she was lost with all hands. So that was three of us. Of the three, I was the only one that was able to go. So it was just rushing round, very practically putting things together. I knew my mother wanted to make me a dressing gown and things.

[Part 1 0:09:55] Lee: Your mum made you a dressing gown?

Walton: Yes, I've still got it. And that sort of thing, but it was a very much of a getting together. My father having been a missionary and my mother, they knew the sort of things that mattered, and they were busy putting together the Christmas presents for a year ahead. We were this October, so we had to have Christmas ready, all packed for that Christmas, and the next year. So they sorted all that out and I had a tin trunk and it was a pretty fair rush, just saying goodbye to everybody, and none of us knowing what was going to happen next and really knowing nothing about it. And we just had to learn as we went South. We read a good deal.

[Part 1 0:10:47] Lee: But you went to Scotland to learn how to use the stove?

Walton: Well, no. We were the first expedition The British Grahamland Expedition took a larger cooker and it was essential to have a slow-burning stove. So all the bases that year, the big bases, all had Esse stoves, because Aga's wouldn't make it. Esse stoves were meant to be terribly difficult to put together, so I had to go up to, I can't remember where it is, in Scotland somewhere, where they made Esse stoves¹, and had two days learning how to put them together. So I got a warrant and went off to Scotland, and learned how to put them together, and then I was there to assemble them when they got to the bases. Then after that we just met up as a motley collection of ex-Army and Navy people. No clothes except I just had a tweed jacket and a pair of trousers; there wasn't much more, and all clothes were to be issued when we got down there. And we all went to Lisbon which was where the ship was sailing from and lived in a very posh first-class hotel that had been built to take tourists and hadn't had any for five years. So we lived in absolute luxury in hot weather, with tweed jackets. We felt terribly out of place, and got to know each other. And then we went from there through the Tropics, down to Montevideo, and that's where we met up properly, all of us.

[Part 1 0:12:25] Lee: Wasn't there another issue to be resolved as well, a matter of a heart?

Walton: A heart? Oh I see. You mean a heart in terms of a girlfriend? Oh yes, that was probably ... I'd kept up through the war with a cousin of mine, Pam Phillimore. She was a Wren and she was having a splendid time and suddenly the whole thing ended and she certainly met up with me. She was very unwilling that I should go South but I just was going to go. And I had a pretty rough time with her. She put all her feminine wiles into place. I remember ringing up my mother and I said 'I talked to Pam and she was very tearful.' and I said 'I think I will have to take her back to Folkestone and sort of settle her down.' And Mother just said 'Good luck!' and that was that.

[Part 1 0:13:29] Lee: She was chasing you, was she?

Walton: She was at that time, I think it's fair to say, that she had realised that being a Wren had ended. She had been demobilised and I wasn't following her very hard. She hadn't been the best of letter writers, but I think I was ... It could well have worked out, but ... We have kept up with each other a bit but not much more than that. So that took a bit of sorting out. And then on the way, when I was at Montevideo, in the back

¹ Esse stoves were made at Bonnybridge. Source: *Wikipedia*.

of my mind I also had Ruth sort of there, and I realised that the idea of Pam was no good and I wired Ruth and I said 'Will you marry me? I will be back in two years.' (or words to that effect) And that was the first time I had ever suggested anything like that. I had written to her quite a lot, not much more, and so that shook her a bit, particularly as her mother opened the telegram. But she was quite brave about it, saying 'I'm not going to give you an answer now, but if I am still around in two and a half years, we will think about it.' (or words to that effect). I have probably still got her letter still somewhere. And then I used to write to her quite a lot, and you will find in my diary, I say: 'I wrote to Pam and wrote to Ruth'. And I did continue to write quietly to Pam but I don't think it would have worked out, now that I have watched her grow up.

[Part 1 0:15:09] Lee: And did you see Ruth whilst you were in England for those few days?

Walton: I don't think so.

[Part 1 0:15:17] Lee: So you hadn't seen her ...?

Walton: I hadn't seen her, no. She was a great friend of my sister's. I don't think I had seen her ... I suspect if I read through my diary again, I suspect I would pick up threads but no, I hadn't seen her for a long time. But she lived across the road from us and she was a person that I had worked out in my own mind ... Rather like the Prince of Wales, I think, I didn't know what ... One day when he was being interviewed 'I am in love with Diana, but what is love?' That was the Prince of Wales' remark and I think in many ways I was as dumb as that. I think all of us in those days, we didn't quite know why.

[Part 1 0:16:05] Lee: What did Ruth have that Pam didn't have?

Walton: I haven't a clue. I don't know. I remember she wrote to me at school and used the word 'the devil of a' something or other. I thought 'That's a bit unusual from a girl.' Or 'a hell of a' something. I just don't know. I really couldn't tell you. I don't know why. I have got no record of that in my diary of the thoughts that went through my mind when I was in Lisbon.

[Part 1 0:16:38] Lee: So you sent the telegram from Lisbon?

Walton: I sent it from Lisbon.

[Part 1 0:16:40] Lee: And was that a spur of the moment thing?

Walton: No. I don't think it was spur of the moment. I think being stimulated by all these characters around. No it wasn't. I really couldn't tell you.

[Part 1 0:16:53] Lee: You weren't feeling lonely?

Walton: No I wasn't. I say you couldn't be lonely in that bunch.

[Part 1 0:16:59] Lee: But you know what I mean?

Walton: Yes. No, no. I just realised that I was really ... It was a pretty rigorous change. There was I, trained as an engineer, ... I think I had planned to go back into civil engineering. In fact, I know I had, probably abroad, probably the Works Department in Sudan or somewhere. And I just realised I had really cut my boats. I was no longer a civil engineer. I was a naval engineer trying to run clapped out machinery, worn out machinery, outdated machinery, and I was really more like a person driving a vintage car. I was a mixture of keeping the machinery going and the people going. I was more man interested and more keeping the machinery going, and I really hadn't ever ... I cut myself away from civil engineering. So it was a pretty bold decision to say 'Yes, I am going for two and a half years.' knowing that all the people who had been at university with me were going to be coming back to the country doing all sorts of jobs and I was going to be out of a job market for three years, which is what I was. So I think it was a mixture of just wondering what of the future, I suppose.

[Part 1 0:18:23] Lee: And perhaps also the nice idea of having somebody to write home to whilst you were away?

Walton: Yes. Of course we were always a family that wrote to each other, and I used to ... Certainly when I read my diary, I used to write to her quite a lot. And things that I had never said to her, and I think she was pretty brave to wait two and a half years.

[Part 1 0:18:47] Lee: How did you feel when the reply came 'I will let you know in two and a half years' time.'

Walton: I could do nothing. I just thought 'That's fine. I will live two and a half years.' I don't think I'm a very romantic individual and I think I was asking a lot from her, to suddenly do that, out of the blue, very.

[Part 1 0:19:10] Lee: It was out of the blue, wasn't it?

Walton: Oh yes, very much so.

[Part 1 0:19:12] Lee: Was the telegram received with shock back home?

Walton: I don't know. I never saw a copy of it. I didn't tell anybody else. My sister might have guessed that something like that might happen. I had no real idea at that stage. I think I sort of sat down just like assessing the situation without any romance in it. 'What's going to happen in two and a half years?' And it has worked.

[Part 1 0:19:42] Lee: Was it purely a two horse race, or was there a third filly involved?

Walton: No, no. Well Pam was still ... When I came back to England, Pam wasn't really involved. We had a very tearful departure, when I finally took her into London and we broke. Took her down to Folkestone and left her. She was pretty rough. But after the war, there were only two people: a girl called Midge Whitaker who was a geologist. A very nice person who I knew in Tyneside, and it could have gone either

way, I think, if you see what I mean. Ruth and Midge would have both put up with me.

[Part 1 0:20:37] Lee: You met Midge in ...? What was her real name?

Walton: Midge Whitaker. She was a girl who lived in Newcastle, and it really was one or the other in my mind. That's all I can tell you, and Roth always says 'Why did you ask me?' And the answer, which the family laugh at to this day, was you had a house. And I think it was really ... This was when I got back, Midge Whitaker I mentioned and Ruth were around and the fact was that security mattered a little more and she had a house because her uncle had died and there was a way of sorting it out so we took over the uncle's house and kept the aunt, who was an alcoholic, lived with us. And so it was Ruth had a house and that is a great joke now, was: 'Why did you ask me?' and the answer ... Somebody said 'Why was Ruth involved?' 'I thought she had a house.' And I think that has always been a bit of a joke between us.

[Part 1 0:21:46] Lee: Tell me a bit more about Midge. What ...?

Walton: Oh she was a delightful Geordie girl. I don't really remember an awful lot. She has gone out of ... about her. She was very nice. She was a nurse in London. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A very nice girl indeed.

[Part 1 0:22:15] Lee: So when you were in the Antarctic, were you writing to all three?

Walton: I couldn't tell you until I read my book. I certainly wrote to Ruth. I don't think she has kept many of my letters. I don't think I have ever seen them, but it figures in my diary a bit. All sorts of things, just sort of talking to other people who were much more experienced in these things than I was. We had some rum characters. One was a Met chap, Willie Salter, he had been on a power station in South Africa keeping watch and he wrote about ... Did he have a copy of the letter? No, he wrote an eight page letter to his wife. Chances in two words, yes. But he was a difficult man. He should never have been sent South. So the answer was, I think, it was all very amateurly handled and I really didn't know what being married meant, and that is all I can say, I think. Yes, I think we had better change the subject.

[Part 1 0:23:29] Lee: So the rest of the time, those few days back in the UK, were spent really just preparing yourself?

Walton: Yes, getting myself organised. There was a few odd bits of time. I don't think Ruth came down to Bromley when I was there. I don't think so. I can't remember it. Yes, I just don't remember.

[Part 1 0:23:51] Lee: Did you have time to go to the pub with your mates much, that kind of thing?

Walton: Well where? In London?

[Part 1 0:23:57] Lee: In those few days.

Walton: I hadn't got any mates. I was living in Bromley, having just come home. My Mates were spread all over England and I had to be at a certain place in London on a certain day. They had a party the night before which I was asked to, but I couldn't come... I couldn't leave my parents the night before. So I turned up in London at seven o'clock in the morning, the first time I saw any of them.

[Part 1 0:24:19] Lee: Just thinking back now, a little bit. You were inspired by Fleming and Stephenson to go to the Antarctic, but was there anything else that made you want to go?

Walton: Oh yes, there was, yes; certainly there was. My father had been at school with the doctor of the Shackleton expedition, a chap called Eric Marshall, and he had come and lectured at school a bit about the Shackleton expedition. When I was five I saw the first film I had ever seen, which was the story of the 1923 expedition when Shackleton died, and I had met people like that. Of course in those days you all read about Scott and Shackleton. So I had a link with Eric Marshall from my father. Obviously that wasn't a very happy link. Eric Marshall was a controversial figure. Shackleton was a controversial figure. But they were all people that we all read about in those days and all the diaries of Scott and Shackleton – the great bravery of the British doing this that and the other. I think we all read it, some of us with more tongues in our cheeks than others.

[Part 1 0:25:34] Lee: So there was a degree of admiration for your predecessors, then?

Walton: Oh yes, particularly because the British Grahamland Expedition book *Southern Lights*, had come out, and I had got a signed copy from Stephenson, and I went to the Royal Geographical Society when it had its first lecture report at the RGS in 1937/38. And John Rymill was there and Steve and Fleming, and all these people were household names to me. So I knew quite a lot about it and I've always had immense admiration for that bunch ever since.

[Part 1 0:26:17] Lee: And this desire to go?

Walton: Yes. I knew where Grahamland was and I read the story of the British Grahamland Expedition, and all the pictures in this book were ones I knew, and all the people were ones I knew and we went down to the exact area where they had been. We set up base seven miles away from where they had wintered.

[Part 1 0:26:40] Lee: We left you at Port Stanley. You went through Montevideo?

Walton: Yes. Then we went right down South. We had the *Trepassey* which was the ship that's over there on the wall. *Trepassey* was a little wooden, very very new wooden ship, to do the trade run from St Johns to Newfoundland and she had very fast running engines, very little punch when it came to icebreaking. She brought the dogs all the way from St Johns, Newfoundland, with the doctor, the other doctor. Willy Salter, Willy Slessor, Rodney Slessor and they had all survived the Tropics. It was a remarkable journey. They lost three I think, and brought down something like fifty dogs right through the Tropics. So we all met up in Montevideo. We had three weeks there, having a whale of a time, with no money; and we went out and did

things together. They had never saw any ex- people who had been in the war. At that stage, Montevideo was reliant on itself. We had some very good get-togethers. Then we went on to Port Stanley and the same. And then we finished up down South; there's a place called Deception. And the whole of the operation we were on, Tabarin, was a secret operation run by the Navy.

[Part 1 0:28:08] Lee: Was it still secret even though the war was over?

Walton: Yes, it was. We weren't allowed to say where we were going, though everybody knew, and we went down. The year before they had ... They went down the year before in a big ex- Hudson Bay Company sealer called the *Eagle*, a wooden ship with steam engines. And they decided, while it was all secret; they brought her over to this country and loaded her up, and the story of the *Eagle* is that when she was in the Channel on her way South, she said 'I have limited steam. I can either pump my bilges or move. Which should I do?' She was a clapped out ship, terrible [?? incomprehensible] very good in ice with powerful engines but [?? Incomprehensible] at all. She had been there the year before and nearly lost the ship. They had a hell of a time. They had formed three bases in Antarctica, only just The ship had run aground and there was Deception. And they had also used the trading ship in the Falklands, the *Fitzroy*, which was a little steamship that went round the islands and every six weeks went to Montevideo, she had towed a great big barge down to the Antarctic, a big 1000-ton oil barge.

[Part 1 0:29:33] Walton: There we found in Deception, there was this oil barge. And that was when they were trying to stop the Germans using the oil from the whaling station to fuel their ships with. So a lot of the year before was there. We just went alongside in Trepassey which was half the size of the barge. And all our stores had to be sorted out and put back in the ship in the right order. And then we proceeded to go eastwards until we found a new base, and went and visited Hope Bay, the previous year's base and Port Lockroy. Then gradually reloaded the ship in Port Stanley, headed down to Deception and then went South with Bingham. And we literally had the whole of our expedition was on board the one ship. And then *Trepassey* came too, a pretty daring thing to do, a steel ship, and we just built our own base. Of course the Americans had been there nearly five years before.

[Part 1 0:30:34] Lee: So you arrived at Stonington?

Walton: We arrived at Stonington, knowing that there was a base there, a base that had been used by the Americans in 1941 and abandoned, literally abandoned. The Americans had been down there in '41. They had taken down an enormous biplane, put it together down there, stayed a year and then the war was declared. So they then were told to pull out in a hurry. So they pulled out in a hurry and they had to leave their dogs; they had to take 21 men out; they had to take everything out. The ship was stuck two hundred miles away, so how you get 22 men 200 miles away to a ship that was stuck, by air. So they loaded their aircraft which had skis, very very full, with 22 men, flew it back to an iceberg near where the ship was, and if they hadn't been able to land on the iceberg, they would have had to come back to their base and spend another two years. So they had to abandon the base, abandon 40 dogs, all their food, all their equipment, very extensive equipment, and fly out in such a way that if they

couldn't land the other end, they could fly back to where they had been, and all the facilities were still there, and they could have lived for another three years there.

[Part 1 0:32:01] Walton: But in fact they planted ... The dogs were all tethered in groups and they planted explosives underneath them, tied to a time bomb, a timer fuse and they knew that if they went out, they either landed to the ship or they turned back again, which would have been eight hours later. So they had to set their fuse for eight hours later. And in fact they got out with the ship and all the dogs were blown up. So when we arrived, there was a base, a very big base, three times as big as anything we had ever seen or expected, fully equipped with wonderful cools and we just walked ashore. The Argentinians had been there but they had left the doors open so the thing was full of ice. So we went to a base that was already there, as long as we dug the ice out, and we lived in their hut for three weeks while we built our own.

[Part 1 0:33:07] Walton: And so we built our own and then moved from their hut to our hut and of course very quickly the equipment that they had left, which was far better than anything we had, walked over to our huts. So we finished up being a very well equipped base., much better than we ever would have been if we had just been an English ten. And that is how it started. We then had to learn from scratch. Bingham was the commander. He was always the commander. You did what you were told, never argued because he was going to be there for a year and we had to extract from him all about working in Antarctica, according to Bingham, all of which was right. And then we knew that in the end we would be able to use our own discretion and continue as he had told us we should, and we then settled down.

Part 1 0:34:03] Lee: So the training really began when you got there? On the job?

Walton: Yes, absolutely. We didn't have any knowledge at all. He wasn't really very good at that. He should have insisted on all of us being wireless conscious and radio conscious on all our communications. But we didn't really do that. We got out. He got all his sledging gear out and we had to use it in the way he said. And we just did what we were told because we knew that he had ... That's the way he had done it in 1933-37 and it worked and rather than try and argue about it, the best thing to do was to do it exactly as he had done. Use the lashings as he had decided on, the equipment, the tents, the windproofs, and just do what he said. And it was quite dicey.

[Part 1 0:35:01] Walton: He had absolutely no ... In spite of his experience, he had no real experience at all at working in ice. We had no crampons or anything of that sort. If you went out, if it was cold weather, you put on moccasins which were like boxing gloves, smooth boxing gloves with lots of wool inside, and your feet were inside. Well one of the worst things you could possibly do to work on a glacier, You had no way of securing yourself. And we spent most of our time training dogs for the first three months, and yet we hadn't got even any sea ice. So we were training dogs with very little snow. We got pretty good at it. Yes, old Ted Bingham was a law unto himself.. I am reading this from my book and so on. He drove dogs the Greenland way. He had learned them from the eskimo and he had a long dog whip that he had from Greenland.

[Part 1 0:36:01] Walton: He then took it down to the Antarctic and you all had to learn that – 40 foot long with a flexible sort of handle at the handle end and then it got

less and less flexible. And it was an absolute bastard to use because if you didn't get it absolutely right, you would finish up with a whip round your head. It would catch your head as it went past. But it was very necessary because that was the way he wanted to do it. So we worked and worked at this and in the end he had spotted one of the dogs was a leader, Darkie, and we merely used one dog to train all the others. So gradually we got our teams together. Each of us had a team and they all were expected to be able to steer like a car in terms of left and right and stick on a bearing. And then we went out and all his equipment for camping was there. We weren't allowed to question it because it was proved 'all right in 1937 therefore it is all right now'. And it wasn't worth saying, asking whether we could exist on it. They had, so we could. There were no such additions like dried onions because they didn't exist in those days, and there was no cook in our base because that's the way they had done it in 1937.

[Part 1 0:37:22] Lee: Did he take the dogs?

Walton: Oh yes, you couldn't help it. When they were in the Falklands, they were all in a quarantine pen and they lived together. We used to go across the harbour to feed them before we went South. They were a fearsome lot but we very quickly realised that they were ... We were their boss and they knew it. They loved a good fight, the dogs did but if you waded in with your bare hands, they would never bite you. I don't think any of us were ever bitten. They would do that with their claws; their grip and then they would look up and say 'I didn't mean to, honest I didn't mean to.' We very quickly had our teams and they were the ..., I think we all found they were the things that made life worth it. You had your own team. You had moments when you were ... We weren't all compatible with each other. There were arguments but very often it was necessary to go and take a deep breath. And you would go out and take your team out. But at the end of that first year, we made a lot of mistakes. That was the year when we had a chap down a crevasse, and the mistakes we made there were appalling. I was involved in rescuing him when he went down, purely by chance.

[Part 1 0:38:42] Lee: Would you tell me the story?

Walton: Yes I can tell you that. We were going up (I think it's all in one of these books). We were going up to the plateau; it was 5000 feet and ten miles over there and the approach was across a glacier which was heavily crevassed. And then a steep slope coming up from the island to the glacier. So you had a 1 in 2 or a 1 in 3 to get up and then you had a long trek up a glacier which we knew the Americans had used in 1941. So we knew it was there, and we had to just learn how to drive the dogs. We had never worked in glacier country before and Bingham hated skis. That didn't help matters, and we all had to use snow shoes because they were the only things you should use. In fact they are almost as long as they could be. I went up on one occasion – four of us went up and we went right up the steep slope in the ice fall, and it was absolutely frightening because he was walking in front of me with ...

[Part 1 0:39:51] Walton: We didn't have ice axes; we had long ski chisels which are a pole about seven feet long with a chisel at the end, which is what they produced in Greenland. Therefore they were right. And you went along and you poked into the snow if you suspected there was a crevasse. As long as you could do three prods of the chisel and you didn't go through, it was all right. But then he would be walking

ahead of me on boxing gloves, because that's what moccasins were, and he had never handled a rope before in a mountaineering sense.

[Part 1 0:40:23] Lee: He was ...?

Walton: Ted Bingham. So he didn't know how to walk with a rope, and he would stop and then of course you would catch him up, and then he would tread on the rope and then you would get the blame for not handling the rope right. But we were very lucky. We went up icefalls and things with no crampons, just in things like smooth boxing gloves on our feet, and if anybody had gone down, we would have ... I don't know what would have happened. We practised nothing. We didn't practise rescue or handling ropes. And then one day a chap did go down and he went down because he had been walking ahead of his dogs, which was frowned on because if you were ahead then you fell into a crevasse ahead of the dogs. And he went down and disappeared. We came up and there was Ted Bingham with a hole in the ground and he said 'Johnny is down.'

[Part 1 0:41:15] Lee: Who was down the crevasse?

Walton: John Tonkin who was the finest leader I have ever met in my life anywhere. He was down the hole and I just happened to be there and I knew that nobody else had practised going down ropes at all. We hadn't done anything like that, and I just knew how to go down a rope in a mountaineering sense, So I just said 'I'll do it. I will go down.' And that was the diciest moment I have ever had. I slid down the rope, and when you are doing a mountaineering abseil, as they call it, you slide down and the rope comes up, because it is round your body. And then the tail comes up as you slide down. The tail gets shorter and shorter. And I realised that at one stage – I was about thirty feet down and the tail was in my left hands. So if I had gone any further, I would have gone. So I am afraid I am quite clear – all I did was to use my mountaineering knowledge to get John out. There was nothing courageous about it all. I just was there and I knew that there were ropes, there were people that could pull, methods of climbing that I knew. None of us had practised it.

[Part 1 0:42:25] Walton: And so I finally went down and came up and went down again and came up about three or four times, and nobody knew what was happening except me, and nobody could do much about it. So I always feel that my particular rescue of John was purely a mountaineering rescue, and in mountaineering, you never ever do anything that risks your life. If somebody is in trouble, you have simply got to make sure you survive, and I have always been thoroughly embarrassed. I never even thought of that rescue as anything unusual at all. And I read in my diary ... I know when I read another diary, belonging to the doctor, he just mentions it in two lines. 'Kevin went down and pulled him out' Stop. There was much more concern: was he damaged or paralysed when he was down?

[Part 1 0:43:17] Lee: He was wedged, was he?

Walton: He was wedged. The crevasse was very narrow and he was wedged, and if he let his breath out, he went down a little further. So he was very panicky, which he should have been. We got away with it, but it was an absolute miracle.

[Part 1 0:43:33] Lee: And you released him by doing what?

Walton: Well I went down and I had to go down – and I couldn't get down to him because the crevasse was so narrow. So then I had to move two foot sideways and start again. And then finally I got down and there was no room to use an ice axe. So I cut off the bottom of an ice axe and did the whole thing at arm's length, chipping. I chipped him and we got ropes round his legs and his arms, and finally pulled him out. But to me it was exactly the wrong situation to ever be given to solve a battle. They could not think of anything and I did everything wrong, and I have always been embarrassed because all these other things that people have done have been so risky and dicey, and I know that mine wasn't

[Part 1 0:44:27] Lee: What medal were you given?

Walton: That was the Albert Medal which I then had to give back and get a George Cross in lieu. When I meet up in London with the George Cross holders, they were a completely different category. I was just doing a mountaineering job. They were doing some astonishing things in the war. One I think of is a Quaker who was sweeping mines from Taranto harbour. Six men started sweeping mines and five were lost with their mistakes. They would do something to the mine and it would go, and he was the only one that survived. He must have gone back time and time again, knowing each time that 'if I make one mistake, I've had it'. And he finished up and the whole of the mines in Taranto harbour were cleared. But I just know. But it was mostly learning how to live with each other, and learning how to camp and travel.

[Part 1 0:45:26] Lee: How was the medal given to you, because I presume it wasn't there?

Walton: No they didn't. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know it had been recorded officially by anybody. If you read the diaries and things. As I say, I have got the diary by the doctor and it's only two lines. It was 'Kevin pulled him out.' Stop. And then, when he got back to base 'he was paralysed in' this that and the other. And I had no idea anything was being thought out. And then when I got back in 1947, suddenly this came out of the blue.

[Part 1 0:46:03] Lee: It arrived in the post?

Walton: No no. It was announced. I suddenly had a notification that that had happened. So I think that's ... Anyhow it was reasonably well recorded.

[Part 1 0:46:15] Lee: When you got to the Antarctic, was it everything you imagined it would be? Or were there surprises?

Walton: No, I had read the book. *Southern Lights* is so good as a book and it was eight people at their southern base. They were very practical people on the whole. They had lived together and this book was very ... You had the feeling of what it was like to live in a small ... It was exactly what I had expected. The other people: some of them had some of the inklings of what it was going to be like. I certainly knew more about it because I knew Steve and Lancelot, and other people had never met Steve and Lancelot. So I knew what I was in for exactly and it was exactly as I

expected it to be. The book *Southern Lights* written in 1937 was really a repetition. I repeated it that book. All I did was to say 'This was the way we lived and this is why we lived that way, and I am very much referring to *Southern Lights* and so on.

[Part 1 0:47:25] Lee: Was it more severe? Or more beautiful?

Walton: Oh there were some very rough times. There is no doubt about that but we learned the equipment was very good. It was a the sense that if you used it right and this comes through time and again. There's still equipment is used down there now that was used by us in anoraks and things. I have got my set. Jonathans has got his set, and it was pretty unsophisticated clothing we had. When you went sledging, you just took what was necessary and a spare set of underclothes and you always had something clean to put on because it was cleaner than what you were wearing. You took spare vest, spare shirt, a pair of this, that and the other and you used them and they must have got very smelly, but I don't remember that. I think the rations weren't that sort of ration. And then every now and again you would say 'It's time I changed.' Then you would dig out your gear. Now all of that changed as the ability to travel and carry fuel changed. A typical example is: the only thing we had at night in the tent was candles – about the stupidest things you ever could imagine, naked flame candles. And if you were out for thirty days, you would finish up with no lights at all in the tent. We hadn't got any of the things we ought to have had: torches that were reliable and that sort of thing. We just didn't have them; I don't know why.

[Part 1 0:49:03] Lee: This does sound a bit Fred Karno, doesn't it?

Walton: It was Fred Karno, it really was. It was typical 1937. We just picked exactly up from what they had done in '37. I mean a typical thing is: nobody can tell me when they started using pressure lights. Now a pressure light is about the ..., the Aladdin Lamp, is about the most efficient way of burning fuel, paraffin, that there is. If you can burn paraffin and keep yourself warm, and provide yourself with lights, you are away. But if in fact you use candles instead, you had no warmth and not much light. Somewhere, in about five years after we were there, somebody said 'Well why don't we take lights?' 'Oh well we would take a little more fuel.' Well we could take a little more fuel. It only means a couple of extra pints a week to keep your pressure lights going. So gradually improvements came in but in the early days it was really pretty ... Rations were pretty blunt in the sense that you were hungry. You ate them but you didn't get much enjoyment out of them.

[Part 1 0:50:22] Lee: You said earlier that you were following the Bingham plan from the 1930s?

Walton: Yes.

[Part 1 0:50:27] Lee: Even though things had moved on. Was there at some point was there any tension about that, when the men realised that things could have been done better, with the passage of time?

Walton: Ah, yes. Well I think there was a little bit of tension, We just put up with it because there was nothing much we could do about it. We had the rations; we could pick up a box and say 'That will last two of us for ten days, that box.' You checked

that it was sealed, still sealed when you took it out. That was your rations. No, there was not a lot of bitching about it. We just out put with it. We made our own dog harnesses; we did everything ourselves.

[Part 1 0:51:10] Lee: Tell me about some of the long trips you made.

Walton: Yes. Well for us it was such a different year because a different period ... We went down in '46, we landed, 10 years to the day after Bingham had left from just nearby. So we were pretty inefficient at exploring because of this lack of experience. Nobody had worked on ice. I had seen more ice just walking around in Spitzbergen than I had seen anywhere else in the world. Nobody else had any experience. So it took a long time to get up into the mountains, and the weather was pretty bad. It was weather that could blow up from nothing to a full gale and back again in minutes almost and we had to learn, the hard way, how to anchor tents when you had to. We might be anchoring in lovely still calm day but you had to anchor them down in such a way that if it blew up to 70 mph that night, you had to be secure. And on the whole we didn't have any ... So that was the first year. We were just doing very limited journeys. We got up to the plateau, which was 5000/ 6000 ft. up and that had a series of very long steep hauls which Ted Bingham would always tell us 'We had to haul like that in Greenland in 1932. We called it "Buggery Bank"' So when we had a haul up to the top, in 1946, we called it Sodomy Slope. And they were, they were very very steep hauls and difficult weather, I mean we went out for thirty days and probably had eight days when we could work outside. So we were lying up or sleeping up and so on. But it was ... When I look at the pictures here, putting the base up, it was all very crude on the whole.

[Part 1 0:53:40] Lee: But you were on thirty-day expeditions which ...?

Walton: Well we would go out until the job was done. I mean if we were trying to get the load to the plateau, the plateau we had to cross, and the plateau was 6000 ft., and this was the sort of country we were in. Sometimes it was very steep; sometimes it was heavily crevassed. We had very little knowledge of how to behave on crevasses. We learned quite quickly that you must always cross them at right angles, otherwise, if you don't cross at right angles, it is a twelve foot bridge wasted. You can run along the line of a crevasse, you just drop it down in. But we did have some pretty shocking weather, and all the time we had this ... We had to prove that Sodomy Slope was not as bad as Buggery Bank. But we did; we established, reading my diary, we were something like 45 days in the field, to take five tons of stores to 6000 ft. Until we could do that, we couldn't cross eastwards. Because we were told, this long spine of a land, it was 5000 ft. and we had to go over the top and get down the other side. The Americans had done it but they had all arrived with trained dogs and trained mountaineers. We weren't either.

Part 1 0:55:05] [End of Part One]

Part Two

[Part 2 0:55:07] Lee: This is Kevin Walton, interviewed at his home in Malvern, in July 2003, by Chris Eldon Lee. Kevin Walton, Part 2.²

Walton: [presumably pointing to a map] So Cape Horn is up here, 500 miles. That's the Peninsula which is mountains, and the British Grahamland Expedition, this is the area we were in, down here. That is where the BGLE ... That is mountains. That is frozen sea. So all of that is sea. That is frozen sea that has moved around, so all of those are open leads, probably a mile wide or so, and there is where the frozen sea has moved away. That is a 600 foot ice cliff. This is all big icebergs and things floating around. And so we were right down here. We came right down to somewhere about there, about here somewhere. We came in, dropped a base off here, another base off north here, and another one.

[Part 2 0:56:07] Lee: So you were laying the ground for future surveying expeditions?

Walton: Yes because this was the area that Bingham had been in, so we finished up down here, and we put our hut up on the island where the Americans had been. This was part of the politics of it, and it was only five miles away from where he had been ten years before. So we were then able to sledge over to where he had been and pinch all the things from his base, and make ours better. So Bingham was a man who knew everything about everything. So we just accepted it because we had to because it was the easiest way to learn. So we had to get over here and our aim was to get on this side and to work up and down that coast. That meant crossing a five thousand foot mountain range. Still we were very green. We could navigate all right if we could see. But then you had fog conditions; and the whole of this thing would be fog bound, You can't travel in snow if you are fog bound. So it was all together, that first year was a year of learning dogs and learning how to camp with reasonable safety.

[Part 2 0:57:18] Walton: And that is why what followed, years later, is so interesting. People like McMullen when they were there. They were using our background but they were a very competent bunch and they did some incredible journeys, and very well organised journeys. We had very bad radio. We could just about contact base. They didn't have classes in the base, so everybody knew had to work radio. I had an occasion when I was ... Four of us were out but three of them were out doing a reconnaissance and I was left in a tent with the dogs and then the wind got up. I suddenly realised it was blowing a hooley and they weren't there. If they hadn't got back that night, I would have been in a real jam. I would have had eighteen dogs and just me.

[Part 2 0:58:11] Lee: And a sledge?

Walton: Well the sledge was there but they were out with the sledge and they had taken no dogs. So I had just been left on the plateau at 5000 feet with nobody. We weren't all that competent. We were lucky to get away with it.

[Part 2 0:58:27] Lee: Tell me about some of the chaps you were with, then. How did you strike up ...?

² Usually Part 2 is in a different audio file and the timing restarts at 0:00:00. In this case Parts 1 and 2 are in the same audio file, so the timing continues.

Walton: Well I think they were astonishing. They were all people who had been through the war in the best sense. The most outstanding, undoubtedly, was Johnny Tonkin who was SAS. He had been in the war. Two people who had been in the Long Range Desert Group, working out of Egypt westwards. One was Mike Sadler and one was John Tonkin. Mike Sadler had an inbuilt compass. He was a wizard person at knowing where he was and what he was doing, and a navigator. He used to be an astronomical navigator in the desert. But John, as I say, he was the most outstanding. He was in the Western Desert. He was transferred to the SAS. He landed at Anzio, was captured at Anzio when they had no more ammunition left at all, nothing they could fight with. So they surrendered which was all they could do. Then he was a paratrooper and they were invited up to the German Army base. General Guderian was the general. He just said to John 'I think I should warn you; you should make sure you escape, because you are going to be shot.' That was it.

[Part 2 0:59:52] Walton: So John took him at his word and escaped and then got back to his base. And then he did other things, all sorts of things but he finished up with a group of 47 SAS people who were dropped into France to disrupt the fuel sources going the German 7th Panzer Division against the D-Day landings, and he was just to disrupt the fuel. He was the youngest of 47 people and in command. Well you can't be the youngest of 47 SAS people and be in command, and not be a leader of some incredible qualities, and he was just that. He was just a born leader. His buddy was SAS on the Western Desert. On the whole we were ... Two surveyors had come from the Royal Ordnance Survey. One was a trained surveyor and one was an Ordnance Surveyor. We weren't really a very outstanding bunch, I don't think, compared with people who followed. We got on very very well.

[Part 2 1:01:17] Lee: Were there chaps who you just didn't humour? [?? Incomprehensible]

Walton: OH yes. We had all sorts of routines as we developed there. You see the hut was only as big as – not much bigger than the room we have got here. It had eight beds in it. We all had bunks on the side. You had no privacy so you had to develop it. If you were in your bunk and you drew your curtains, as far as the hut was there concerned, you weren't there at all. So you didn't talk to somebody who was in the bunk behind his curtains, unless the chap heard what was going on and suddenly picked up. The first year was not a very astonishing bunch really. We had a nephew of a geologist of the Mawson expedition, I think from the Mawson expedition. We had Willie Salter who had been a chap on the South Africa. He was the one who wrote a 20-page letter proposing to his wife. We were just an unusual bunch but there were some of the leaders there. Johnny Tonkin, Willie, Mike ... The doctor was a typical Naval doctor. Ted Bingham, typical 1937 expeditioner. You liked him but you didn't argue. But we certainly were a bunch that knew how to get on with each other.

[Part 2 1:02:48] Lee: So how were they chosen then? Because if they weren't chosen as being remarkable men, were they chosen because Bingham thought you would get on?

Walton: I haven't a clue. He must have written round to people he knew from the Navy, like Lancelot Fleming, and said 'Do you know of anybody?' 'It was floated

around in the SAS headquarters that there were people wanted for Antarctic expeditions. We had a chap called Paddy Main who was the most astonishing SAS person you ever met. He was a triple DSO, bit of a drunk and as a commander he was a real legend. We had all done reasonably efficiently in the war in various roles. I mean why should an engineering officer who had joined a destroyer, been in a destroyer, be any use. But I'd travelled. I think I knew more about living in the mountains than anybody else, but on the whole we were pretty dumb. But we were prepared to learn and we did learn. We lived through some pretty horrendous days, when things didn't go right, on the whole.

[Part 2 1:04:02] Lee: Such as?

Walton: Well getting holed up. Once there were four of us. Ted Bingham was somewhere on the coast, somewhere north of us, somewhere up here. This is Square Bay and we were going to find another route. And we went and we camped, and unknown to us, it was an area where snow collects and we nearly got blown away. I mean the wind was taking the snow away as fast as [pause] and yet the day I remember there was going from 5000 feet to 2000 feet behind a dog team that was trying to get home. And it was like driving a cart down a series of steps completely out of control, and watching Ted Bingham with immense ability just shouting at the dogs, and dodging down the very rough icefall and getting away with it. But certainly we had some rough times. But on the whole were a pretty ... nothing very exceptional as a bunch, except they were people who could get on with each other.

[Part 2 1:05:21] Lee: Then the Americans arrived?

Walton: Well the Americans had been there in '41 and we knew that they were coming because they had left their base in very good shape. And the Argentines had been down there and the Chileans and got into the base and left the doors open and that sort of thing. And, as I say, the equipment there was absolutely incredible: wonderful tools, a circular saw bench, and diesel generators – all this sort of thing, that we never had at all. They arrived and they had a leader, a Norwegian American called Finn Ronne who had been with Byrd in the Antarctic in nineteen twenty something and nineteen thirty something. And they of course were a very well equipped expedition that went down with a big ship and lots of equipment, and aircraft and all sorts of things.

[Part 1 1:06:15] Walton: And it wasn't a very happy expedition. Byrd was a difficult man. He nearly killed himself by not knowing how to light a primus, and all sorts of things. Anyhow he came down. He was a brilliant organiser, this man, but quite the worst leader I have ever met anywhere, and he brought this party of Americans down. We were up in the mountains, sledging, when they arrived. We merely had a radio message one night that said 'The Americans have arrived; 21 people: 19 men and two women'. The person I was with said 'They should have brought another 19 women.' And it was a very interesting expedition, very well planned, but everything was a personal man and his glorification, because he had financed this from all sorts of sources and he was short of money and so on. But they had some very very competent people.

[Part 2 1:07:11] Lee: Can you give me examples of that?

Walton: They had a chap called Bill Latady who I remember. He was an expert mechanic. He was flown over here, to England, in 1941 as a master machinist. And he was flown over and he was based over the hill here in Malvern as a master machinist for the research side of the radar. And so he – brilliant man, a brilliant mountaineer. He made the first ascent of the highest mountain in Alaska³ a year before, a very very competent mountaineer. But this appalling leader. So we had 19 men and two women. The women didn't talk to each other and we had them living over the hill 200 yards away and they would relax by coming over to see us. And we used to have no women were allowed in the hut at the No two ... They were never allowed in the hut together.

[Part 2 1:08:17] Lee: Why?

Walton: Well they were so rude. They were so rude about each other, they loathed each other's guts. So the Americans: it could have worked very very well if he hadn't been such an incompetent person.

[Part 2 1:08:30] Lee: Is this Finn Ronne you mean?

Walton: Yes.

[Part 2 1:08:32] Lee: Was one of the women his wife?

Walton: One was his wife and one was the wife of the second in command, and he wife of the second in command was a New York debutante who could do nothing except paint her face and look pretty. She couldn't sew; she couldn't cook. She couldn't do a bloody thing and her husband was a millionaire. And Finn Ronne's wife was a hard-bitten Washington typist. It was altogether not a very satisfactory thing. The Americans had come down and they had brought their trained dogs with them and lost them all on the way down because they hadn't injected them properly. So they arrived with thirty dogs of which about ten were huskies and all the rest were rag tag and bobtail that the police had collected from the streets of Santiago and dumped on board their ship before they left. So we had Scotties and collies and greyhounds and God knows what.

[Part 2 1:09:33] Lee: When the women came over to your hut, what conversation could you have with them?

Walton: Well we greeted them as women. We enjoyed them but they just disliked each other, so we made a rule that they were never allowed in the hut together.

[Part 2 1:09:48] Lee: And the conversation was about the work you were doing or ...?

Walton: Oh yes, we would take them. They would long to go out and do some sledging, so you would take them out with your dogs.

³ This is wrong, the highest mountain in Alaska and also North America Denali (formerly Mt McKinley) was first climbed in 1913. Latady was on the second ascent of the second highest, Mount St. Elias.

[Part 2 1:09:57] Lee: They never went out with the Americans?

Walton: Well after a while they obviously realised that there had to be a compromise, and the compromise was they would use their aircraft. We were so strong in dogs. They had no dogs worth talking about but they had very good aircraft. So the compromise was that we would use their strength in aircraft and do journeys which would involve putting stores in the field, and we would support them with dogs. So I was going to do a long trip with one of them with dogs and then ... It was a compromise. It could have been an absolute example of how to do things in the field except for this bastard of a man Ronne.

[Part 2 1:10:46] Lee: What was so wrong with him, was bad?

Walton: Not very competent, always impatient, never wrong. I mean the typical example which is very well recorded in the book is: we had a little light aircraft. Why we had it for ...? It was a little light Auster aircraft for flying round England, quite tough but a light aircraft. They had a big Norseman which was a big single-engined plane that is used in the north of Canada by all. Very tough, right cycling engine and a Beechcraft which is a twin-engined reconnaissance one, and a very heavy little military plane called a Wycoming L5. So they had powerful aircraft and very competent pilots and very competent people to look after the aircraft. But he was all the time trying to build up publicity to get money and it didn't ... I was going to go on a long journey with the Americans until I saw their equipment and their equipment was so bad, and my dogs were so good, that I was going to do a long journey right down here, down to there. We'd come from here.

[Part 2 1:12:12] Walton: But the equipment was so bad: single-skin tent because 'We always did it ... That was good enough for me; I did it in the war. I did it before and my grandfather did it before.' And it was absolutely incompetent in the field. Their axes were bad, their dog handling was bad. They weren't trained. So we were teaching them as much as everything about travelling in Antarctica. They were anxious to get into the mountains, the mountaineers. I wasn't allowed to do that because we weren't allowed to do mountaineering. It was altogether a bit difficult. But in fact what worked out was that the Americans provided the aircraft and they crossed over from the air and then they went right down to about there with dog teams supplied from the air. And I was left here and the Americans, the geologists went down here. I didn't do that journey. It should have been, it could have been a real, very well-run coordinated expedition of the two. As it was, it was half done. A very good journey done by the American pilots but Ronne was difficult.

[Part 2 1:13:32] Lee: Were there outstanding men in the American team?

Walton: Oh Bill Latady was outstanding, Bill Latady and the two American pilots were very very good. There were some very competent people there indeed, but badly led – and it was an unhappy expedition they had. It really was. When Ronne wrote his final book, it was an autobiography and it was called *Antarctica – My Destiny* and the subhead was *The Story of the Last Great Polar Explorer*. That was his own book, written by himself. But I think the thing that I think of most was the extraordinary

way as a group we got on and we learned how to live with each other because I suppose we had done it in the war in various ways, each of us different.

[Part 2 1:14:32] Lee: When the women came over to your hut, did they help out at all?

Walton: Oh no no.

[Part 2 1:14:39] Lee: Purely social?

Walton: They would come over and see us and we would give them a cup of tea. I think we once had a dinner party which half of them came out, came across. And then two days later we had another dinner party which the other half came out. I think the story of the expedition is probably best ... The story of life down there, I think, I still think and I wrote it *Two Years in the Antarctic*, is undoubtedly the only one of its sort. Nobody has done it since, and it's a pity because things are changing all the time. The questions of lights, for instance. As the sledging techniques were changing, and the loads were changing, and the ability to take aircraft and dump stuff in the field was changing. So by the end of the dog era, some astonishing journeys had been done and of course all of that has borne fruit. Dogs have all been phased out but they are a very well organised bunch. They miss the overwintering I think. That was the part that we remember most, I suppose. They are now doing a job. They fly down there, they do the job and they come back again. And the last of the people who were really working in the old fashioned sense – Jonathan was one of the last. He was right down here. He was right down there. It was just a four man hut miles and miles from anywhere. That was one of the last of the isolated huts before being abandoned.

[Part 2 1:16:24] Lee: How do you think – final question for today – how do you think BAS experience in the Antarctic, those two and a half years, changed you as a person.

Walton: OH, there's no two ways about it, it did. I certainly, and I expect we all did, I learned my failings. I was an enthusiast but not a very practical person, and I know that. It has completely changed our attitude to people; people matter much more. I think they do. I mean to me people is what makes life interesting, and I think that is Jonathan's remark. I don't think I will make a lot of money but I will live an interesting life. He is a people person, very much so. We all changed; we all gained.

[Part 2 1:17:16] Lee: How did you change?

Walton: Well when we went down there, Bingham had to provide a list of all the people in seniority, because if he had just gone out and got drowned or something, the Governor of the Falklands had to know who was the senior member. Now I don't know the details but I know that list was revised every month, and I know that I gradually went down on the list – I know I did. I can see I irritated people. I know I went down. John Tonkin gradually went up on the list. So if somebody could get hold of the signals that went from down south, by Bingham, I would put he always had a list. That would be the most interesting thing that I would like to see, because I know that sometimes ... You just knew. It's rather like a dog team. You admit that that person is superior to you. I know I went downwards because I was too much of an enthusiast and I think I made lots of mistakes. But then I hadn't to do much leading during the war, you see.

[Part 2 1:18:30] Lee: You weren't a bull in a china shop, though, were you?

Walton: Oh no, not by any means but I was not the leader that John was. My particular background was running an engine room. Why should I expect to be a leader? John was running people. Reg Freeman was running a survey team. Dougie Mason was running a survey team. So I really had no leadership training at all.

[Part 2 1:18:56] Lee: But did your people skills improve?

Walton: Oh yes, we had to. I think we all improved. I knew there was this ladder. You didn't know it was a ladder but I do know that happened, and I would have loved to have seen that series of signals over two years, how we were left. The first year, Ted Bingham went. He went home after the first year, so there was our guru gone. We were then all in a situation; we were all going to try and incorporate our changes we wanted to do. So our guru was gone and Ted Bingham had to decide who was going to take over his leadership. Now in fact he asked John Tonkin to be the leader but the person who is really in command of a base, knowing what is going on, is in fact the wireless operator because the wireless operator is your only contact with the outside world. The wireless operator can say 'Look, this signal has arrived,' It may not have arrived. It may have been made up by him on the spot. I won't say it did. And Bingham said 'I think I want you to be the leader' to John and John said 'No, it has got to be Ken.' He was the wireless operator. 'I think I would be a better leader from Number 2 position.' In fact that's what he was. Ken was a very ... Even by the end of two years, I didn't trust him an inch. None of us did. I think that is fair comment.

[Part 2 1:20:26] Lee: Ken?

Walton: Ken Butler who was our wireless operator. He became the leader for the second year and John was Number 2. And John, in fact, he had that ability of leadership to be the leader without being the Leader, and he in fact held the base together in the best sense. Ken was the link between ...and in fact later on he was a ... He wasn't dishonest but he was a bit devious. He wouldn't tell you straight and he was devious. He in fact did the best journey of the whole lot. He came right down ... He didn't do it all. The base of Scott is over here. A British party went from there to there, across the Peninsula. A British party went from there to there and Ken had decided, as he was the leader, he never actually walked out of the ...; never camped in his life. As the leader, he would be flown from there to there. He picked up the dog team that had come across, and they then went right down here and turned round and came back again. And he had never actually travelled in his life on dogs but he opted to take it over. All the difficult work had been done by the bunch that had gone up there. Ken was lucky. He did it and got some of the credit for it, most of the credit for it. I think we all learned an awful lot about each other, and that's why, when I came back, I knew I had to try and get back into engineering, and equally well I wanted to get back into people.

[Part 2 1:22:13] Lee: Did you come back in a more cautious mode, because you had learned to take risks or a more thoughtful man or a more confident man?

Walton: I'm not a very well educated person in the academic sense, not like my brother in law. He will quote poetry at you all day and be right. I was much more pragmatic as a person to get things done. That was what I had to do in the war. I don't know. I came back wanting to be ... I had learned so much from what I called adventure and I knew it meant so much to me and I knew mountains meant so much to me. I wanted to find a way of mixing all those together. And when I came back, I did a course in Survey, thus compounding it to more qualifications. I filled in.... My survey was not very good, and I did that and then I was offered a job, out of the blue, to work with Outward Bound as the first instructor of the first school. Now that suited me because ... at least I thought it would probably be all right to do, and then I would go back to Engineering after that. Then when I was there, I was asked to go to Oundle. I then did a complete change and went into schoolmastering for three years.

[Part 2 1:23:31] Lee: We will talk about that on the next occasion Kevin but when you did get back, was Ruth still waiting for you?

Walton: Oh yes. We contacted each other pretty smartly. I don't remember the getting back. I can't remember how we got back. We flew back. No we came in by ... I don't remember. No we flew back. I just do not remember that at all, the return. My mother and father were still in Bromley. No I just don't remember that. My sister had got married and that sort of thing. Funny, I have no recall at all of the return journey, except that we were in a ship that was coming all the way to this country with the wool supply from the Falklands for the previous four years. Yes, that's right; we came back in that. I don't remember the return journey, where we came to.

[Part 2 1:24:30] Lee: Was Ruth at the dockside?

Walton: No. I don't think anybody was. I don't remember. I just have no recollection. Did we come into London, London docks? I don't remember. I just don't. Then this mixing of engineering and Outward Bound and so on. That comes later, but that was a ... I went back into engineering after that. I couldn't cope with what I was facing at Oundle.

[Part 2 1:25:08] Lee: We are leaping ahead so we will leave it there for today and thank you very much.

[Part 2 1:25:11] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:10:14] Text