

DAVID LIMBERT

Edited transcript of a recording of David Limbert interviewed by Jaap Verdenius on 4th February 1993. BAS Archives AD6/24/3/20. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 2nd April 2020.

[0:00:00] Limbert: [looking at photographs] That's the *Theron*, in the Weddell Sea. Where are we? Ah, this is what made me laugh. This is Sir Edmund Hillary. He went down with Sir Vivian Fuchs with the Trans Antarctic Expedition on the first voyage. He came ashore with us, to see us, and referred to us: 'They were a tough cheery group, mostly tradesmen.' There were no scientists amongst us; just tradesmen. Rather amusing, that. That's the leader of the expedition, David Dalgliesh. The volume was up here.

[0:00:51] Verdenius: Careful.

Limbert: [Sounds of moving things around] That's the first expedition, that's the Main Party. That's the Advance Party.

[0:01:25] Verdenius: The Duke of Edinburgh?

Limbert: [Looking at picture of the Advance Party] That's me on the end there, not looking ... We don't know what happened to him. He's still alive; I know he's alive. Stan Evans is still alive; he's a lecturer at the university¹ here. David Dalgliesh, he's Surgeon Captain now, retired. He's dead. He's dead. Gus² is dead. So there are about three or four of us left. About par for the course. That's the Main Party. There are many pictures; we've got stacks of pictures upstairs and colour photographs as well, transparencies.

[0:02:32] Verdenius: Did you take a camera along on the expedition?

Limbert: Yes, I took a camera and took lots of photographs, mostly colour slides because colour prints in those days weren't very good.

[0:02:44] Verdenius: How did you, given the temperature ...? It must have been quite ...?

Limbert: Second home. I just kept them and sent them home. I tried ... I did some black and white in the winter, and did my own. I was there all of 1956. Then I came home and went back again in 1959, and did some of my own developing there. It wasn't all that successful, a bit spotty the pictures but I will just go and get them if you like. Do you want to have a slide show and chat about it? Hang on a minute. [pause, then starts slide show] Into lots of brash, lots of small pieces and it's rather like a thick soup. And if the wind compresses this, if you put a ship into this ... Ordinary ice floes which are not too thick, you can break and they break into a split. But if it has been broken up a lot beforehand, you get a lot of small particles of ice. It's just like soft toffee and if the wind compacts it evenly tighter and a ship pushes

¹ Cambridge University.

² Gus Watson.

against it, you bring up a pack of ice in front of you. I think you have probably done this with ice cream some time. You can with water ice, move it all up one end. All the ice is one end and it packs up tight. Same like a snowball effectively, when you make a snowball.

[0:04:36] Limbert: The same thing happens with a ship: if it goes into soft mushy ice, it can compact in front of the ship and it closes round behind you in the wake. And then you try to back out, it does the same thing there, so you have to have extremely powerful motors. And if at the same time the wind is driving it, compacting it all the more, and it's very cold – you need to be at a temperature of –8, something like that, –5, –6, –7 degrees – you can find yourself sticking in freezing ice, and then the pack builds up round you and you can get trapped. And it's only when the wind changes and the pack eases out, that you can eventually break free. It's not so bad in the summer but if it happens at the end of a summer season, when the sea is beginning to freeze permanently, then you could be in serious trouble. But nowadays with the ships, they are much more powerful than they used to be and they can extricate themselves from these problems. But on the *Tottan*, if we got stuck, we used sticks of dynamite on the ends of bamboo poles, just shoved in the ice. That's when you had ice floes. It was quite amusing. There were poles and axes and sticks of dynamite, just to try and break the ice up a bit. But if it is soft and slushy, it doesn't do much you see. It just stays slushy and you can't walk on it either.

[0:06:17] Verdenius: With dynamite you blow up ...?

Limbert: You just try to break it up so you make a bit of leeway, so the ship can move apart. But you can only do that if you've got floes which are ..., you haven't been able to break. And you want to break it into small chunks like that, you see. We are cruising through, on this one picture here, we are cruising through this at about 3 knots. Normal cruising speed with the same power would be about 10 knots. It's about walking speed. [sound of slide being changed] It's a bit scary and some people don't like it because they like lots of scenery.

[0:07:08] Verdenius: Did you say scary?

Limbert: Scary, for some people, but you don't go far from home, and if you do go far from home, you take all precautions, take all your gear with you. You have precautions. You always want to go and see what's further away, if possible. [new slide, building the hut apparently]

[0:07:33] Verdenius: What's that?

Limbert: Just metal, bare hands, metal and gloved hands, hammers, screws, bolts, nuts, nails; it was just assembled with bare hands or we used to have gloved hands in many cases, as necessary.

[0:07:51] Verdenius: There are some things you can't do with gloves on.

Limbert: It had all been cut to size. The worst thing was actually the nails, they had all been put in what was known as Kilfrost and this is a horrible grease. It was a menace

actually. Eventually we got rid of the Kilfrost by just shoving them in paraffin. It was much better to have them without the Kilfrost on them. [new slide]

[0:08:18] Verdenius: But none of you were experienced carpenters?

Limbert: We had two carpenters. In fact my interview, to go South, was at the Royal Society by the then Secretary, Sir David Martin. He said 'We thought we had better send a couple of scientists as well and we are sending a man to do with ozone and radiation and wanted a meteorologist as well, but really you are going as a third carpenter, a carpenter's mate.' So I was an assistant to Johnny Raymond most of the time. He is a general handyman. That's Robin Dalgliesh; he had been an officer in the British Army at one time. The two husky puppies were runts from a litter from the Trans Antarctic Expedition They were rather weak, not strong enough to make a good team dog, so we had them as pets. Intermediate dump; you see there's no sea ice this time, right the way out. It has just broken right back to here. [new slide] I've just taken a shot from underneath the ice cliff. Change to full tracks³ and looking back up the slope. You get the idea of the size of the cliff by the aeroplane which is parked there. [new slide] That's Sir Vivian Fuchs; you can see the back of Sir Vivian Fuchs sitting on a Muskeg. They are helping to deliver stores. They had the Main Party for the Royal Society as well, on board. [new slide] That is Sir Vivian Fuchs with his can of Guinness. [new slide] Looking back to the ships. Sorry about that – oh dear. It must have fallen out. [Glitch in slide show] Oops.

[0:10:45] Verdenius: You had better put it back.

Limbert: That's looking heading down towards the Filchner⁴ ... heading towards the Vahsel Bay, which is right at the head of the Weddell Sea, and you can see little dark bits in the cliff in the distance. Well that's rock showing through.

[0:11:09] [End]

ENDS

³ Fully tracked vehicles.

⁴ Filchner Ice Shelf, taking the TAE to their Shackleton base.