

PETER SANDEFORD

Date: 5 August 2010
Place: Robertson
Interviewer (Q1): Lize-Marie van der Watt | History Department | Stellenbosch University
Interviewer (Q2): Dora Scott | Antarctic Legacy Project | C·I·B | Stellenbosch University
Respondent (A): Peter Sandeford | Radio technician | Gough 14 &15 | 1969-1971

Q1: This is an oral history interview with Peter Sandeford ... Like the Norwegian Sandeford?

A: Like the Norwegian Sandeford.

Q1: Are you of Norwegian descent?

A: Yes.

Q1: From whalers?

A: Yes.

Q1: Really?!

A: A long way back!

Q1: From the Sandeford in Norway as well?

A: Sandefjord in Norway, yes.

Q1: Interesting!

A: They went across to the UK, and then the name became bastardised and became "Sandeford" instead of "Sandefjord", and the family came out here.

Q1: Oh, okay.

A: ... Three generations ago.

Q1: From Norway, or ... ?

A: From the UK.

Q1: Okay. Do you have any whalers in your family in your immediate lineage?

A: No ... !

Q1: Whaling is a very big part of this history, so I'm interested in speaking to – especially a Norwegian – whaler.

A: No; basically the family's South African. As far as I know. But my grandfather came out from the UK.

Q1: And his ancestors came out from Norway?

- A:** They came out from Norway and across to the UK, from what we can piece together.
- Q1:** Okay. Now, how did it happen that you went to Gough?
- A:** Okay. I worked for DCA, the Division for Civil Aviation, in Port Elizabeth, and I'd actually applied to go to Gough, and I was turned down, because I was part of essential services at Port Elizabeth Airport. And then two people on Gough Island went walkabout, and got themselves killed, and the radio station went off the air, and they needed to get a fully qualified radio technician, which I was at that stage, and I was given four days to get to Cape Town and get on the boat.
- Q1:** So were you glad to hear that in the end you could go? Or was it a bit sudden?
- A:** Yes. Except that it's a bit of an upheaval when you got a nice stable life, and all of a sudden they say 'pack up everything and get down to Cape Town'.
- Q1:** Were you married then?
- A:** No; no, fortunately not. So that's basically it. I got to Gough, but not the way I wanted to get to Gough!
- Q1:** Okay!
- A:** I stayed there for 15 months.
- Q1:** You stayed there for 15 months ... So you stayed behind when ... ?
- A:** One and half shifts.
- Q1:** ... When the relief came.
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** So how was it arriving at Gough and meeting up with this team that just lost two members? Can you remember?
- A:** It wasn't traumatic; it was fine. I think they were just pleased, because we went down with a big crew. We went down with a couple of radio technicians and a lot of new radio equipment; we went down with diesel macs; we went down a PWD work group. So it was a big team that went down to the island. And two of us stayed behind afterwards, when they went back.
- Q1:** So what did the team do? Did they work at the base? I mean the big team that went down with you on this trip?
- A:** Maintenance and repairs. The crane was broken; as I say, the radio station was off the air completely, so they had to put in new radio equipment and they upgraded a lot of the radio equipment; they did repairs around the base.
- Q1:** Okay. So was there more liveable space after that?

A: I don't know what it was like before, but there was quite a lot that needed repairing.

Q1: Can you remember the ship's name?

A: We went down on the RSA.

Q1: Was it the RSA?

A: Yes.

Q1: So did they explain to you that two people had died and ...

A: Well, that's why I went down! I knew about it; everybody knew about it.

Q1: Oh. Was it in the newspapers in South Africa?

A: Yes.

Q1: Did you know the people who died?

A: No; no.

Q2: Which year was this?

A: 1969.

Q1: Four days don't really give you a lot of time to prepare ...

A: No, none at all!

Q1: So did they ... ?

A: They wanted me down there the next day! And I said 'give me until the end of the week!'

Q1: So did they give you a kit bag when you arrived there, or ... ?

A: Yes. When you're kitted out for the island, you get a full kit of clothes and everything.

Q1: So you had none of the cooking classes; nothing like that?

A: No.

Q1: Did the rest have cooking classes that you know of?

A: They did, yes. They do quite a bit of preliminary training. I had about a one and half day-course on the diesel engines, but and that was it.

Q1: Okay.

A: So I was dumped in the deep end!

Q1: Yes!

A: And I was taught on the new radio equipment that was going in down there. I was actually taught by Martin du Preez, who was a senior Post Office guy. You know Martin?

Q1: Yes.

A: He's still alive, hey?

Q1: Yes! We've spoken to him.

A: Have you? Yes, he actually taught me about the radio equipment we were going to install on the boat, while we were going down there.

Q1: Oh. So he with you on that ship?

A: Yes, he went down there to install that lot.

Q1: Okay. So then you arrived at the island ... What did it look like? Did you have any idea what it would like? Had you read ... ?

A: Didn't have a clue ... ! Walked into it blind. It was so ... It was great. It was what I expected.

Q1: What did you expect?

A: Like this; exactly what I expected.

Q1: What is that?

A: A chunk of rock with very little vegetation on it in the middle of the ocean.

Q1: Okay.

Q2: Sounds about right!

A: Sounds about right.

Q1: So did you pass Tristan on this (trip)? Because it was special trip ...

A: We went to Gough and we couldn't land, because it was bad weather. So we went to Tristan and off-loaded some stuff. And we went ashore briefly ... I think we went ashore going in; I think we went ashore briefly, and then went back to Gough from there.

Q1: Okay.

A: As far as I can remember. I know we went to Tristan on the way back as well.

Q1: So you don't have any specific memories of Tristan and the Tristanites?

A: Yes. Tristan I know ... I've got some pretty good memories. I've got some good photographs too of Tristan; terrific. Terrific island and lovely people; fantastic people.

Q1: The people had then recently returned after the volcano erupted?

A: It was pretty soon after, yes.

Q1: Tell me a bit more about the people. What kind of people were they?

A: They struck me as being coloureds – they're dark-skinned people; very friendly. Some strange customs ... They segregate the men from the ladies, and things like that. It was after the volcano, so most of the people were back. Very few young people on the island; most of the young people move off, or moved off. We went and walked around the

volcano and listened to stories; nice people. Simple folk, like Boland folk, you know; like on farm. When you go out on farms in the interior and out in the country, and that's the sort of thing ... You meet a different type of person to what you meet in the city. It's the same sort of thing.

Q1: Yes, rural folk.

A: They had quite a few modcons, and of course there was a lot of ... They were staying in Cape Town and the UK and stuff like that, so some of them had visited there and they'd got quite a bit of modern ideas; but still very basic. Nice people.

Q2: Do you remember who was the head Tristanite? Who was the person in charge? Or was there a British officer?

A: No, there was a British officer – the Governor of the island, the British Governor.

Q1: Yes. What was his name? Do you remember?

A: I've got no idea what his name was. I've got a diary that I could probably pick it up on.

Q1: Okay.

A: I've got photographs of him too.

Q1: Did you have to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen?

A: No.

Q1: Did you have to hand in a passport or anything?

A: Not at all; no.

Q1: Because it is a British island ...

A: Tristan is a British island, yes. No, there was no immigration, nothing.

Q1: No paperwork?

A: No. This is out in the sticks!

Q1: So then, after all the maintenance work was done and the moment the ship left, left you behind, what was it like integrating into the new team, where you're the only team member ...

A: No, there were two new people.

Q1: You and ... ?

A: Moppy ,Glen-Williamson; he was a met bloke.

Q1: Moppy?

A: We used to call him Moppy, because he had a mop of hair.

Q1: Did you also have mop of hair?

A: Yes, and a beard. I used to have hair!

Q1: So you let your beard grow on the island?

A: Yes.

Q1: But how was it like integrating into the team? Did they already have a set routine?

A: We seemed to just drop into it. You know, we had our jobs to do. They were pleased to get the base going again properly. And there was no problem with integration at all. Not as far as I can remember.

Q1: Who was the team leader?

A: Jan Combrinck ... Now you're pushing my memory, hey! Jan Combrinck was the first team leader, and the second one was Gerry Reynolds.

Q1: What made you decide to stay another year?

A: They asked me to. They couldn't get somebody to take my place.

Q1: Okay. So was it different the second time around?

A: It was a lot easier; a lot easier; a lot changed.

Q1: What changed?

A: When I went down, we had electricity for about 2 hours a day, when they were running the main transmitter for skeds with South Africa. When I left, we were running the generators for 24 hours a day, which meant that we could have deep freezers, which they brought over – we had fresh meat in the freezers; things like that.

Q1: So they brought more comforts in the 1970's?

A: Yes.

Q1: Was there ... ?

A: I actually insisted that they get a 24-hour generator running. I put in a very strong recommendation.

Q1: What was your motivation for 24-hour ... ?

A: Morale ... and things like deep freezers! And if people wanted to sit and listen to the radio or something like that, at least there was power.

Q1: Okay ... So morale; also so they could read at night and that ...

A: Yes. 'Cause it got pretty dismal when you're running on battery lights.

Q1: Were there any scientists with you?

A: No. Only the met guys – meteorologists doing forecasts and that, yes.

Q1: You went down as a radio technician?

A: Radio tech.

Q1: Okay. So did you go walkabout on the island?

A: Yes.

Q1: Where?

A: To the top.

Q1: To the top. Did you sleep over outside?

A: No.

Q1: Were you allowed to?

A: We could've I guess, but nobody wanted to. I certainly didn't want to. And we took radio equipment; we had to take radios with us, which were bulky and heavy and a bit of a nuisance to walk around with. But I went up to the top of the mountain a few times, and explored quite a lot around the base.

Q1: Okay.

A: Didn't go to the old base. We went to the old base when we were on our way back. They actually took us off on the boat and took us around to the old base, but we never walked over the top to the old base, like the two guys who died did.

Q1: Oh, is that what they attempted to do?

A: They did, and they died of exposure.

Q1: So did they also give you new clothes?

A: Yes, you get a full outfit; you don't have to ...

Q1: Yes, but a new type of clothing, after those two guys died of exposure, or was the technology ... ?

A: No, not at all. No, the clothing was fine. They got lost. They were wandering around, and they had ... The temperature can drop dramatically at the top of mountain, in a few minutes. And they just got lost. They were within sight of the base. If they had walked for another 50 m in the direction they were going, they would actually have seen the base. They wouldn't have died. But they didn't know where they were; obviously they got disorientated. And they died of exposure.

Q1: Were there heavy mists on the island some times?

A: Yes. It comes down almost instantaneously as well.

Q1: Tell me a bit more about the animal life.

A: There's no animals!

- Q1:** No animals? No birds ... ?
- A:** Well, there are seals. Seals and sea elephants. Those, if you want to call them animals. Then there are birds; tremendous ... Penguins – Rockhopper penguins and then a whole host of burrowing ... what you used to call night birds – prions, broad-billed prions, Cape Tern, Gough Island Bunting – which is unique to Gough Island, the Gough Island Bunting – which a small, sort of sparrow-like bird that’s also unique to Gough Island; Wandering Albatross breeds; Yellow-nosed Albatross; Sooty Albatross ...
- Q1:** It sounds like you had quite a good ornithological knowledge?
- A:** I had nothing; I learned it all there!
- Q1:** Who taught you, or did you just pick it up?
- A:** Pick it up from other people and looking at books and learning notes and things that people had left about the birds. It was terrific.
- Q2:** Did you interact at all with the seals and the birds in any way?
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** What did you do?
- A:** Got eaten! Got pecked; got bitten.
- Q1:** Did you sometimes slaughter some of the birds for food?
- A:** No.
- Q1:** Did you eat penguin eggs, or try them?
- A:** We did. They were fishy.
- Q1:** And seal?
- A:** No, I didn’t eat ... Didn’t kill any of the animals or birds for food.
- Q1:** For food ... For fun?
- A:** No, not for fun. Somebody killed a penguin, and salted it and took it back with him to stuff. But I wouldn’t do that.
- Q1:** Okay, no. Not for recreation?
- A:** No, not at all.
- Q1:** What did you do for recreation there?
- A:** Photograph birds. Photograph birds; photographed seals; photographed penguins photograph sea elephants; photograph whales when they came past; photographed boats when they came past ... We played snooker; we had parties for Midwinter and Christmas and all that sort of thing. And birthday parties.

Q2: Did you have films?

A: We had films; we had about 15 films or something.

Q1: Were there any in particular that you can remember of the films?

A: There were ... No! Seven Brides for Seven Brothers was one of them; things like that. Those sort of things! I mean, proper films, not DVD. I'm sure it's totally different now; in fact, I know it's totally different now. It was very very basic. What else did we do for fun? I don't know ... I did amateur radio; a lot of it, which kept me quite busy.

Q1: Oh. Were you an amateur radio operator before that as well?

A: Yes.

Q1: It must be interesting having Gough as a call sign. There must a lot of people ...

A: It was fantastic!

Q1: ... who want to speak to you. You know, it's not ...

A: Been there; done that. Yes, it was great.

Q1: It's not Washington, or some place ...

A: No, it was great; I was very much in demand.

Q1: Interesting. Did you ever speak to aeroplanes going past?

A: No.

Q1: Not?

A: No.

Q1: Not at all?

A: No, we spoke to the boats and we spoke to amateur ... well, I spoke to amateur radio guys, hams. But we spoke to the boats when they came past obviously.

Q2: Did you speak to Martin du Preez?

A: I spoke to Martin regularly.

Q1: The boats that went past, were they passenger ships, fishing boats?

A: Crayfishing boats. There was a navy training yacht or a schooner or whatever it was – a huge sailing ship that came from ... a South American one; they came past. We got a cruise ship, came past. They didn't come ashore at all. We spoke to them.

Q1: Did they ask to come ashore?

A: No.

- Q1:** Were you given any instructions about what to do when another ship wanted to come ashore?
- A:** Not at all.
- Q1:** So did any ship ever ask to come ashore?
- A:** Well, we had the Gilian Gaggins and the Tristania and the RSA; you know, those ... the crayfishing boats that ...
- Q1:** So the Tristania sailed at that time as well?
- A:** Yes, Tristania used to come ... They came twice. The Gilian Gaggins came twice. They sailed out of Cape Town, the crayfishing boats. RSA we saw about ... well, over the 15 months, I saw the RSA three times. And we went back on the Agulhas.
- Q1:** Oh. Was that the trip where there was a murder?
- A:** No ...!
- Q1:** Okay, none that you know of! It must have been one of the Agulhas's earliest trips?
- A:** I heard something about a murder ... That was on ... That wasn't on Gough Island, was it?
- Q1:** I think it was on the ship.
- A:** Oh, a murder on the ship? No, I know nothing about that.
- Q1:** But when the Agulhas ... Did the Agulhas come to fetch you, from the island?
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** Was it her maiden voyage, or not?
- A:** I think it was; in fact, it was.
- Q1:** Was it her maiden voyage?
- A:** Yes. It was super luxury!
- Q1:** Oh, compared to the RSA?
- A:** To the RSA!
- Q1:** Okay. Did you also give a nickname to the RSA?
- A:** "Rusting Slowly Away"! "Rolling Slowly along"! [McGintey's Maroo]. Captain McNish used to hate us calling it [McGintey's Maroo].
- Q1:** Why?!
- A:** 'Cause it was a Japanese ship; it was built in Japan, and he just didn't like the idea of it being classified as a ...
- Q1:** Can you tell us more about Captain McNish? He sounds like quite a character.

- A:** Yes, Captain McNish ... ! What do you want to know about Captain McNish? He wasn't a very captain. He was dead scared. Whenever it went into ice, or got into bad weather or something, he used to just lock himself up in his cabin. And there was an ex-German submarine commander ...
- Q1:** Herr Funk.
- A:** Captain Funk, yes; Herr Funk. And he used to run the boat.
- Q2:** That's interesting.
- A:** So McNish actually wasn't ... He wasn't the captain by any means ... !
- Q2:** We've heard about Herr Funk ...
- A:** Herr Funk. I used to sit up on the bridge with him for hours and hours and hours at night, chatting to him. He was a really nice guy.
- Q1:** Did he tell you stories about his time in the Second World War?
- A:** Not very much. It was difficult to get him to talk. I got him to talk once, I think, but he didn't say too much about it. But he was evidently highly decorated in the Second World War
- Q1:** This wasn't too long after the war ... I mean, it's decades after the War, but there's still something ...
- Q2:** It's in living memory. It's not like us, who
- A:** He read that boat and he read the sea like you can't believe. He was amazing.
- Q1:** What did you eat on Gough? Did you catch fish?
- A:** Caught fish, crayfish. We had crayfish until I got allergic to them ... !
- Q1:** Really? Did you grow allergic to them?
- A:** I got a crayfish allergy there. We used to eat 2 or 3 a day; no problem at all.
- Q1:** Gosh!
- A:** As many as you want. Fish, as much as you want.
- Q1:** Did you take any fresh meat? Chickens or sheep?
- A:** When the boats came we had fresh meat, initially; just enough for a couple of days. And then when I stayed for the second relief, we had deep freezers, so we had plenty of fresh meat. We had chickens on the island, and we used to kill them and used them for eggs.
- Q1:** What did they taste like after living on the island?
- A:** Fine.
- Q1:** Fine?

A: Yes. No, the chickens were good!

Q1: Did you learn how to pluck a chicken?

A: Yes, and killed chickens ... Instead of being killed killing the animals, we killed the chickens.

Q1: Okay. How do you kill a chicken? How do you ...

A: Chop it's head off.

Q1: With what? Did you have like an axe, or something?

A: Yes.

Q1: And it runs around with the blood splurging?!

A: Yes ... ! And then of course, when we had fresh meat, we didn't bother killing the chickens, so I think they probably bred quite well, till they ... I don't know if they've got chickens there anymore. Then we had a lot of dehydrated stuff. We had stacks of rancid butter that was tinned in South Africa and was supposed to last for a year, and it didn't last for a year.

Q1: And bread? Did you bake bread?

A: We baked bread at least once a day.

Q1: So when you were on the island, did you ever consider the idea that the day might come that there will be women and men on the island?

A: I think we all prayed for it! Penguins get boring! No, I don't think we did. I don't think we thought about it. It was just seven guys, you know; it was just accepted.

Q1: Did you become friends with any of the other guys?

A: Yes, but then once we got back we lost touch with each other. I contacted some of them every now and then, but it ... You just drift apart, you know; you've got your own lives.

Q1: The team leader, was that his only job, team leader? Or did he also have another position?

A: No, he ... Let me just think ... Johan Combrinck was a met bloke; and Gerry Reynolds was a met bloke. So they were meteorologists.

Q1: Were they called "met people" or were they called "metkassies"? Was that word already used?

A: No, met people ... I don't know.

Q1: Just met people?

A: Met people, yes.

Q1: How would you describe island life?

A: I would do it again tomorrow. Fantastic!

Q1: What about it is fantastic?

A: Ah, just everything. It's just ... You learn so much about yourself. As long as you can live with yourself, that's a great life. The people who battled were the people who couldn't live with themselves. You learn a lot about yourself. You learn a lot about other people. If you can get on with people and you can live with yourself, it's fine. But it really was great; it was a great life. I can't say that I disliked island life at all, apart from the isolation.

Q2: Would you describe "a day in the life of" ...? A regular day in terms of your routine, what you did ...

A: I got up early, because I had to make sure that there was power for the early morning radio transmissions through to South Africa. So I probably started at 6 in the morning: make sure the generators were running; make sure everything was ... that the transmitters were working. Breakfast about eightish; we tended to have breakfast together. And then it's work; it's maintenance; moving diesel up from the stores. They've got it easy now; they've got big tanks of diesel there and they ... You know, it's all changed. We used to roll 45-gallon drums and 25-gallon drums of diesel up from the store to the base. Make sure diesel's there; make sure the paraffin's there for the stove; fix anything that's broken, which happened all the time. Check the filters on the ... my job – check the filters on the water supply. Check that there's water, which stopped every now and then. So it was basically maintenance. Lunch. Again changing over the diesels when they had to change over to second engines; that sort of thing. And maintenance until about 5, 6 o'clock. If it was raining and miserable and you couldn't work outside, you'd read if there was no work to do.

Q1: Did they supply you with books?

A: They had a very good library there. ... Have supper; have a couple of drinks; chat; play snooker; go to bed. Wake up, work ... go for a walk; take photographs of the birds. Yes.

Q1: And the seals ... Did you ever go on board any of the passing ships?

A: I went on to the Gaggins, yes.

Q1: On the ... ?

A: I went on the Gilian Gaggins I couldn't leave the island for any length of time. I went on to the Gaggins just for lunch. And they brought me back, because I couldn't be away from the island in case something packed up. Some of the met guys went for a little sail around the island, that sort of thing, but basically I had to be on the island.

Q1: Most of the time ... Was there something that you missed on the island?

A: Girls ... !

Q1: Okay!

Q2: The answer we usually get is fresh food ...

A: Was there anything ... I don't think so. Probably fresh food, yes.

Q1: When you came back to South Africa, was there anything you missed of the island?

A: Missed of the island? I missed the island. I was glad to be back, but I missed the island. You know, it took years ...

Q1: Any particular aspect?

A: No, I just had a longing. I wanted to be back there.

Q1: If there was an opportunity to go back, just on a relief, would you do it?

A: Absolutely.

Q1: So, when you arrived back in South Africa, what was the first thing you noticed?

Q2: Girls?

A: Pantyhose.

Q1: Pantyhose?!

A: They didn't exist when I went out there!

Q1: Really?! Wow!

A: They were stockings when I went out there!

Q1: That's true, it's something we take for granted, but it was actually introduced ... I know another person said, when he came back, bikinis had been introduced.

A: Yes, that also.

Q1: It was a very sudden ...

Q2: He was very happy about that.

Q1: Very sudden ... one season, there were just bikinis.

A: When I went to Tristan, I met a teacher there, on the island, that I thought was the most beautiful person I'd ever met in my life. And looking at slides of her, she wasn't that great. But after 15 months ... !

Q1: So you went past Tristan again on your way back?

A: Yes, we went past Tristan on the way back; yes.

Q1: Were there any historical artefacts, like sealers' remains or remains from the time of sealing, and so on?

A: There were pots and stuff lying around at the old base. Sealing pots and things like that, and they were just lying around. When you went for walks, you'd come across an old shovel and things like that.

- Q1:** Did you ever take some of these things for souvenirs?
- A:** No. I've got a chunk of Tristan rock here; that's all. Magma from the volcano.
- Q1:** Okay. Would you say the 15 months on Gough Island taught you something?
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** What?
- A:** A lot. How to be patient and how to work out problems by yourself, and how to live with a small team of people and how to understand what your feelings are in relation to other people. You learn a lot.
- Q1:** And would you say you had a favourite animal on the island, or a favourite plant or something you grew attached to?
- A:** Not really. I think I just loved the albatrosses. But I liked all the animal life, apart from the mice.
- Q1:** Yes, tell us a bit more about the mice. Did you try to catch ... capture them?.
- A:** We killed mice.
- Q1:** Did you?
- A:** We killed mice. We caught mice.
- Q1:** You did. Did you keep a tally of the mice?
- A:** No, but we caught 45 one night.
- Q2:** Wow! How did you catch them?
- A:** We put a tin with a little seesaw-thing on it, and we put water in the bottom of the tin. And we put a bit of ... hung a little bit of ... another little tin inside it. And we put some food in it – meal I think – and these mice ran up and tipped off into the tin.
- Q1:** And drowned.
- A:** And drowned.
- Q1:** So, were the mice a nuisance, or ... ?
- A:** Yes, they were totally destructive, and they were everywhere, hundreds of them. And they killed the birds.
- Q2:** Did they?
- A:** Yes, the ground nesting birds ... The mice had a field day.
- Q1:** Do you know whether they ever considered putting cats on Gough?
- A:** Not after the disaster they had at Marion! Have they killed all the cats at Marion?

Q2: Yes.

Q1: They shot them all.

A: No, they introduced cat flu; shooting them didn't help. They got too ...

Q1: Yes, they gave them cat flu, then they decimated ...

A: They got too clever.

Q1: ... Cat flu, and then they grow imune... Their numbers got decimated, but then they grew immune. And then they actually brought in people to hunt ... not just ... real hunt, like ... I almost want to say hunters; that's their job, to go out and hunt cats.

A: Yes. That's a bad move ...

Q1: Did you ever have any opportunity to go to Marion?

A: I was offered Marion after I left Gough, but after one and a half stints at Gough I said no. I had a girlfriend back here, so I ...

Q1: O, okay. Did you have a girlfriend before you went to Gough?

A: Yes ...

Q1: How did that go?

A: It didn't ... ! I didn't marry her!

Q1: How did you communicate?

A: Radio and letters. You used to letters by telex; now of course they've got satellite radios and things like that. It's totally different. But no, it was radio skeds and you know, you were allowed a phone call – I think we were allowed a phone call a week – and you could send so many words by telex.

Q1: Did you send some letters with the passing ships?

A: We sent letters with the boats as well, and got letters with the boats.

Q1: So communication was irregular but there was?

A: Communication was ... Well, communication from the island was regular, but limited.

Q1: Limited?

A: I was fairly lucky, 'cause I was running the transmitters and I could sneak in a couple of extra calls!

Q1: Nobody on your team got into a big accident after those two guys ...?

A: No. We had one bloke that was quite suicidal at one stage.

Q1: What did you do with him?

A: We should've shot him! He survived.

Q1: Did he survive that full year?

A: He survived, yes. And he was actually homosexual, so it was quite a stressful thing.

Q1: Did you realise he was homosexual when he was on the island?

A: Yes. He was trying to get involved with everybody.

Q1: So he was quite open about it?

A: Yes, in a sneaky way. But he actually applied to go to the ice. And I put in a big letter, saying 'your psychologists are totally insane if they let him go down there'. But he got there eventually.

Q1: To the ice?

A: Yes.

Q1: Interesting. So what ... Did they ask you for a recommendation?

A: No, but I put a recommendation in.

Q2: A non-recommendation ...

A: A non-recommendation. I told them what was going on; I said there's something wrong with their screening, something very, very wrong. I was one of the oldest people on the island, that's the thing.

Q1: So you could ... You probably had more life experience.

A: Yes.

Q1: So, if he was suicidal, what did he do? Just tell ...

A: No, he just went walkabout, and it took us hours and hours and hours to find him.

Q1: Because he probably knew how easy ...

A: He just wandered off, yes.

Q1: To die of exposure ... ?

A: Yes.

Q2: How did the team get along with one another otherwise?

A: Generally pretty good. We had very few incidents.

Q1: Did you have any guns on the island?

A: No.

Q1: No weapons?

A: No, just flare guns; that's all.

Q1: Were you yourself screened by psychologists before they sent you?

A: No ... ! They knew I was insane, because they said 'you've got 4 days to get to Cape Town', and I got there!

Q1: No, I'm just asking, because the ...

A: No, the team went through psychological assessment generally, under normal circumstances; psychological assessment. They went through the dentists and the doctors and all the rest of it ...

Q1: They still do medicals ...

A: I just ... No medical; nothing. I bypassed the lot; went straight down and picked up my goods and got on the boat.

Q1: They probably knew it from your position, that you're probably quite a sane person...

A: They probably asked my boss if I was okay, and he said, 'yes, please take him away'.

Q1: So when you returned to South Africa, did you go back to your job?

A: Yes. For a short time; for about a year. And then I bailed out.

Q1: Then you went out. Okay. Were people later years interested in hearing about Gough?

A: Yes. I did quite a few talks and slideshows and things when I got back.

Q1: And what did you tell them?

A: Just general ... A slideshow about the island life and what they do there and ...

Q1: And questions afterwards ... Did you have any interesting questions that you can share?

A: No; just sort of general questions about bird life and life in general, like 'who cleaned the place?' – We did; we didn't have ...

Q1: You didn't have any labourers?

A: Labourers? No; nothing at all, no. Uh-uh. We were the labourers.

Q1: Were you used to cleaning?

A: We were by the time we left! We had a roster, you know. These guys would be on cooking duty, or passage cleaning duty, or moving stores up. You know, we'd actually worked out rosters and people took it in turns.

Q1: Had any of you been in the Army before then?

A: The medic on the first shift was an Army medic, and the medic on the second one was an Army medic as well. They seem to get the medics from the Army. The rest of the guys weren't; they were just civilians.

Q1: Okay. But you hadn't done any service in the Army before that?

A: I didn't do any service, no.

Q1: I thought ...

A: No, it was compulsory, but I was essential services, 'cause I was working for Civil Aviation.

Q1: How did you decide to become a radio technician?

A: I was interested in electronics when I left school.

Q1: Okay.

A: It would've been either that, or medicine ... ! I actually applied for two jobs and I got both. And my father thought it would be better if I got into the electronics side; he didn't even tell me the other one had got through till after I'd already accepted. Fathers do things like that.

Q1: Were you ever asked, or briefed, on what would happen, say for instance – because this is the '70's – if the Russians called, or ... ?

A: We were asked to keep an eye open for whaling vessels – Japanese whalers and things like that. And we were just asked to report on any foreign boats that we saw; and if they tried to land on the island. That's basically it.

Q1: So there was no security briefing?

A: No. I didn't ... Not for me. But I don't think ... You know, there's nothing on Gough. I mean, just to get somebody on shore is a major effort, so I don't think these guys would do it for fun ... ! 'Cause we had to be hoisted off of a raft; that's the way we got on to the island basically.

Q1: It's very ... It's got high cliffs.

A: Yes. We all climbed up the ladder. or go round the other side, and climbed up to the top. You know, it's just not easy. Now they get on with helicopters. I mean, these guys have got it so easy now!

Q1: Yes, I know there are hangars and things ... Any medical emergencies?

A: Teeth ... Apart from the medic getting totally drunk one night and falling against the snooker table and smashing the inside of his mouth open ... So we had to stitch him up!

Q1: He got drunk and you

A: He was drunk; he didn't feel a thing. I stitched him up; he didn't feel a thing.

Q2: Good.

Q1: It was probably all the ... What kind of alcohol did you have there? Beer?

A: Beer and hard tack. You got a ration.

- Q1:** Of beer and brandy ... ?
- A:** Yes, and when the boats came out, you could buy more; cigarettes and booze.
- Q1:** So did you get cigarettes as well on rations?
- A:** Yes, you got a ration of cigarettes. I don't ...
- Q1:** Today you're not allowed to smoke ... !
- A:** I don't know what they do now.
- Q1:** You're not allowed to smoke. If you want, you have to take your own, and then you can only smoke outside.
- A:** Oh really? Okay.
- Q1:** It's government buildings, so you're not allowed to ...
- A:** Oh, we smoked! We smoked like chimneys.
- Q1:** Really?!
- A:** Yes. And good American cigarettes; it was great stuff. And duty free – we bought them duty free as well, which was ... they were for nothing. And the booze was for nothing as well; it was ridiculous. So, apart from our quota, we could buy quite a bit.
- Q2:** Tell us about the Midwinters.
- A:** The Midwinter party?
- Q2:** Yes. What did you do? How did you celebrate it?
- A:** Partied!
- Q1:** Big meal ... You cooked?
- A:** A big meal; drank quite a bit and played snooker. The guys got their guitars out and played guitar and sang a round and it was great. Dressed up sometimes ...
- Q1:** Did you dance?
- A:** Yes, we danced!
- Q2:** Did you have sort of music records and LPs; that kind of thing?
- A:** Yes, we did. And some of the guys, including myself, had some music sent out to us too. I got *Abbey Road*, I think – t'was one of the Beatles' things – was sent out on one of the boats.
- Q1:** Cool. And could you ... some of the guys play their own instruments, it sounds like?
- A:** Yes; guitars ... Just guitars basically. On the crowd that I was with.

- Q1:** Okay. And conversations, what was those about? Because I suppose that after a year, or 15 months ...
- A:** Funny enough, we talked about anything and everything ...
- Q2:** Politics?
- A:** Not so much. We didn't ... We lost touch with politics when we were out there. The latest cars – people got *Car* magazines out when the boats came and things like that, so we'd discuss cars and ... You know, that sort of stuff. But there was quite a wide range of interests that people had; a lot of knowledge that certain guys had on various subjects. And we used to have informal sort of little teaching classes and little discussions and things like that. On the birds, especially; some of the guys were good.
- Q1:** But I can't think of that much that happened in South Africa at that stage ...
- A:** I don't know; I wasn't here!
- Q1:** Yes, but it's not like Verwoerd suddenly got assassinated
- A:** No, I don't think there was any drama. We used to listen to *Ver in die wêreld* and things like that ...
- Q1:** *Ver in die wêreld*?
- A:** Yes, that was the RSA program. We used to get messages sent on the radio and that sort of thing.
- Q1:** Did you speak Afrikaans before then?
- A:** Yes. I worked for the Government for years, so I spoke Afrikaans quite well.
- Q2:** How was ... The seven men on the island, were they mostly more Afrikaans men, or more English or more mixed?
- A:** I'd say almost 100% English.
- Q2:** Oh really? Interesting.
- A:** Some of them were Boer Afrikaans ... The universal language was English. I very seldom heard them speaking Afrikaans. But there were a couple of Afrikaans people, but they spoke English.
- Q1:** That's interesting. Well, it's a Government job, so you were supposed to be able to speak both languages.
- A:** Yes.
- Q2:** Yes, that's true.
- Q1:** Okay. Anything else that you can remember?
- A:** No ... ! Not specifically; no.

Q1: Any anecdote?

A: No.

Q1: Not specifically?

A: Not specifically; no. We brought the... We actually brought the bodies down from the mountain; that was a bit traumatic.

Q1: Oh? Did you have to carry the bodies ... ?

A: Yes.

Q1: Wasn't it difficult? Were they not heavy?

A: Yes, they were heavy. It was quite a mission.

Q1: Did you cover them first?

A: Yes, they were wrapped up and ...

Q1: Who wrapped them up?

A: They took an undertaker down there.

Q2: So they were ... The bodies were then just shipped back to the families?

A: They were shipped back, yes. They were embalmed on the island and then shipped back to South Africa.

Q1: Who found them?

A: They sent a team of ... They got a team over from Tristan, of Tristanians, and the guys from the base, and found them. They sort of backtracked the path that they were likely to have been walking, and they found them.

Q1: Okay, cool. I think that's all for now.

Q2: Thank you.

A: Okay.