

# GORDON ARTZ

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**Place:** Fishhoek  
**Interviewer (Q1)** Lize-Marie van der Watt | History Department | Stellenbosch University  
**Interviewer (Q2):** Dora Scott | C-I-B Antarctic Legacy Project | Stellenbosch University  
**Respondent(A):** Gordon Artz | Halley Bay | 1959  
(MA: Marion Artz, spouse)

**A:** So.

**Q1:** Was that your first time on such a long sea journey?

**A:** Yes. I'd been on a troop ship during the war coming ... but that was from Suez to Durban. You know, that was about two weeks.

**Q1:** So did you fight in Egypt or Abyssinia, or where?

**A:** It was in Italy.

**Q1:** Oh, in Italy? Were you there? As a RAF pilot?

**A:** I was ... No, I wasn't a pilot; I was in the South African Air Force Met Service. So I was a *Weerkundige Waarnemer*.

**Q1:** Oh. So did you have to forecast a bit for aviation purposes?

**A:** For operations for most of Europe. From Italy, our planes took off; they raided Poland; they went into Germany ...

**Q1:** Have you ever come across Sailor Malan, or met him?

**A:** I met him when he retired in Kimberley, to the Oppenheimer farm. I met him, but he was already ill, and you know, he suffered tremendously. So there you go. I think this tells you how it came about.

**Q1:** It's wonderful that they kept your wife informed.

**A:** Yes, you see, this was the difference. Because the only communication that the *Weerburo* had with my wife was to tell her that I owed them money! So there's a lot there. Then ... I've saved this. They had a fortnightly broadcast from the BBC. She had to go to Durban and record a message, but the magnetic storms at night ... the message sounded like she had severe tonsillitis or ...

**Q1:** Okay. Just from the beginning. How did it happen that you went down? They wanted to continue the base; the Royal Society wanted to hand it over to the ...

- A:** The Royal Society wanted to get rid of it as quickly as possible, so these were the logical people to take it over.
- Q1:** The FIDS (Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey; later BAS – British Antarctic Survey) people?
- A:** The FIDS people. And they were short of people.
- Q1:** And they need two more men?
- A:** They needed two upper air meteorologists. Johan (Bothma) was expert in radio sonde, and I had just been recently trained in this wind-finding radar. But of course, when I got to the Antarctic, I found that they had different equipment from what I'd been trained on. You know, that's how it used to go. A lovely word is *slapgat*!
- Q1:** *Slapgat*, ok, I understand! So who contacted you and told you you must go? Was it Schumann, or ... ?
- A:** Engelbrecht. Did you ever come across Tollies Engelbrecht?
- Q1:** Oh, is that what he was called? S.P. Engelbrecht. I just know ...
- A:** Sybrand Abraham.
- Q1:** Oh, S.A. Engelbrecht; Sybrand Abraham.
- A:** He was from the West Coast area; a lovely man. He was Head of Liaison with the world met organisation, the International Geophysical Year, so he had been my boss way back at Germiston Airport, straight after the war. And he asked whether we were interested. And Johan said, yes, of course.
- Q1:** Did you ever meet T.W. Schumann?
- A:** Yes. Theo Schumann.
- Q1:** Is that what he was called? Theo Schumann?
- A:** He had more of an academic than an administrative background. He was ... Well, for a meteorologist, that's where you should be – up in the clouds. And he didn't – in my book – he didn't make the contribution to a strong weather bureau that he could have made. Also, there was a political factor. He had been interned during the War, so he had to unite people like myself, who had been in the Air Force, who were the *Rooilussies*, as were called in those days, and ... This is where we generated our own hydrogen ...
- Q1:** My grandmother's sister was a *Rooilussie*, and her family never spoke to her ever again.
- A:** I know!
- Q1:** So he was interned during the War?

- A:** And, you know, he had a tough time, until 1948, when the Nationalist Government took over. And then he was recognised.
- Q1:** Yes, I somewhere read that somebody ... Brain Roberts of the Foreign Office in Britain who wrote that he, Schumann, had close ties with Eric Louw as well. They knew one another personally.
- A:** So I think ... Ask me all the questions you wish, but I think at you leisure, you're going to pick up a lot more from these (photos). This I've cherished for years, but it was stuck away somewhere.
- Q1:** Okay, you were in Durban. And then what? Did they fly you to Montevideo?
- A:** That was a story too. Now we had to go to Pretoria to the central medical establishment of the Air Force; we had to go there for medical check-ups. So we get there – both of us, Johan and I; we went by train. There was only about two weeks available, but because of the tight budget of the *Staatsdiens* at that time, we went by train, second class. And we had the medical check-up, and the nursing sister said, now I'm going to give you and anti-cholera inoculation. I said, what for? She said, *al die ouens wat na daai plekke toe gaan, hulle kry hierdie inspuiting, inenting, of wat ook al*. I said, but there's no cholera down there. She said, look, it's the same as Korea; there's cholera everywhere!
- Q1:** Oh, my word!
- A:** So, then we went back to Durban to pack up. Now I've got to organise my family. Johan was single; it didn't matter to him.
- Q1:** But you had a school-going child, who was...
- A:** Ten years old, yes.
- Q1:** That's your daughter? She was absolutely aware of the fact that her dad was going to leave to a foreign place.
- A:** Yes, she was, you know, in a state of shock. So then we flew to London, SAA, and we had one week in London before the ship sailed from Southampton. And I had to learn their equipment. Johan had to be trained on the British radio sonde, which was totally different from the German one, which we were using. So, you know, it wasn't easy. And we didn't know any of these guys. We met them on the dockside; I think there was one I had met – David Limbert.
- Q1:** But, sorry, from where did you leave for Antarctica, from Cape Town?
- A:** From Southampton. We had to fly to and fro.
- Q1:** So you flew to London, and there you ...

- A:** There we met Fuchs and they'd arranged a programme of introduction and familiarisation, and then, when we met on the Tottan, was the first time I had met most of the people. There was no adaptability or suitability test for any of us. It was a blind date. You know what you feel when you go on a blind date.
- Q1:** I remember Fuchs calling Hannes le Grange a blind date on the Trans-Antarctic Expedition.
- A:** Yes, it was the same with us. But Fuchs had been so impressed with Hannes, that when he needed to meet people, the first people he asked was South Africa, because Hannes created such a favourable impression. You see that flag – I've still got it ...
- Q1:** What?! Oh! Do you have any idea how precious that is?!
- A:** I don't know.
- Q1:** Can we see? Ah, this is wonderful!
- Q2:** It's great.
- A:** That's the wind that tore it to shreds.
- Q2:** Antarctic wind, for the record.
- A:** Yes, that flew at Halley Bay.
- Q1:** My goodness! That's so impressive.
- A:** What do I do with it?
- Q2:** Give it to me!
- A:** You've got it!
- Q2:** Fantastic; thank you!
- Q1:** No, really?! This is so impressive.
- Q2:** It's fantastic.
- Q1:** Okay, so you only met them then on the ship, the Tottan. But that must be one very, very long journey from Southampton to Antarctica?
- A:** What was it? Seven or eight weeks, 'cause it was a very slow ship. It was a sealer that operated in Newfoundland, normally. And it managed about 11 to 12 knots at full speed. So we went down in easy stages to Montevideo – that was four or five weeks – one night in Montevideo, and then we went to Port Stanley, Falklands, and we had Christmas there; Christmas 1958. Boxing Day, we sailed to South Georgia; refuelled and did all sorts of things. Sailed from South Georgia on New Year's Eve.
- Q1:** But the seas must have gotten quite rough for such a little sealer?

- A:** It did; it did. Some of the guys took to their bunks, and I will tell you that we slept in the fo’c’sle – you know, the front part of the ship, the sharp part – and there were 10 of us in this cabin. right up front.
- Q1:** So you didn’t have anything like a private cabin, or anything?
- A:** No, the doctor and the leader had a private cabin, which is tradition.
- Q1:** Who was the leader?
- A:** George Lush. He was a Royal Navy officer. He’d been before, when they built the base for the IGY (International Geophysical Year).
- Q1:** So you were in the fo’c’sle – how do you pronounce it? I only know how to spell it, but coming from the Free State, I have no shipping experience whatsoever!
- A:** F-O-apostrophe-C-apostrophe-S-L-E; it’s short for “forecastle”, the front ...
- Q1:** Ah, “forecastle”, okay. Now I’m learning something! But when it hit the ice, that must have ...
- Q2:** Did you even sleep?!
- A:** No, we couldn’t. It would sound as though the whole ship was being smashed; the structure of the ship was being battered by the ice. You know, you go through bergy bits, which vary in size and density, and one of those hits the stem – the front part of the ship – it reverberates through the whole ...
- Q1:** Yes.
- Q2:** So you were invited to a cocktail party and *braaivleis* “on the occasion of the visit to this country of Sir Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmond Hillary”.
- A:** And that’s when I decided I liked the look of BP, because they entertained rather nicely; and that’s why I joined BP. I had no future. Look, I had joined the Air Force at the age of 17. I was trained in the Air Force. I had no academic background whatsoever, except learning on the job, and after the War, I was sent on forecasting courses. I was taught physics and mathematics at Pretoria University, and so on. But I hadn’t done my Matric, and so my future in the Weather Buro as a non-graduate was ...
- Q1:** Very limited.
- A:** I had just about reached the peak. I became a forecaster at Louis Botha Airport in Durban and we had shifts, and I saw other people going with their fishing rods and their picnic baskets on a Sunday, and I thought, you know, this isn’t really for me.
- Q1:** Did you write those bilingualism exams, to show that you could speak Afrikaans and English?

**A:** I never wrote any exams. It was just taken as read. But when I went to Pretoria University, all the lectures were in Afrikaans. And you know, maths and physics ... *dis 'n bietjie straf*. Yes, we've got a grandson at Maties (University of Stellenbosch). He's doing law, and he's got no – he's English-speaking – he's got no problem with language. You see, fortunately, as a child, I'd lived in the *platteland*, and I have no problem speaking Afrikaans; it was never a problem for me. And being in the South African forces, where it was completely bilingual, I didn't have a problem.

**Q1:** So you went with this British team. Did you and Johan know each other beforehand?

**A:** We were working together at Durban. We were working together.

**Q1:** And on the ship, did you get to know your team mates?

**A:** Well, some of them never moved from their bunks, because this ship was ...

**Q1:** They were seasick. But you didn't get seasick?

**A:** But certainly, on a selective basis, you established which ones you had a common sort of outlook on. And you know, the ones that Johan and I took to most, were the Scots; the Scottish people. And you will see in my photographs, frequently I'm with the Scottish people.

**Q1:** So at Halley Bay, it was G.R. Lush – was your ... ?

**A:** Base leader. Blackwell was geophysicist; he was the chief scientist.

**Q1:** Who were the Scots? Mace?

**A:** No.

**Q1:** Who was the cook? What sort of cook was there?

**A:** He was an Army cook. He liked to call himself a chef; enough said. Nelson Norman, the medical officer, is a Scot; Mike Sheret, geophysicist, was a Scot, and Willy Whitehall, diesel electric mechanic (DEM) – he was a Scot. And we got on very well with those; got on very well with Limbert – he died just recently. A lot of these guys are no longer with us. Mick Blackwell; I got on very well with him. He was a very good scientist. He was a Cambridge graduate, and that's where most of the British Antarctic come from.

**Q1:** Yes, it's very much a Cambridge institution. Still is, in a way.

**A:** Yes, because the Scott Polar Research Institute is at Cambridge; the Falkland Islands, FIDS – that's at Cambridge. And that's where they draw their major resources from, personnel resources.

**Q1:** So on the ship; what did you have to do if you were not seasick? Did you have to work on the ship?

**A:** We had to be instructed by George Lush in survival, in safety, in discipline – he was a Naval Officer, and discipline was important.

**Q1:** Oh, so was it still sort of the “officers” and the “men”, kind of separate?

**A:** Yes. And you’ll see it in that little Scott book. ... You see, personnel, men, ship’s party. And the distinction in officers and men in the British – it’s not like that now – but it’s still existed, and George Lush was a Navy Officer, and he was the boss. His knowledge of scientific matters was limited, but boy, he could work and he could enforce discipline, and we had the cleanest hut – every Saturday was cleaning day and washing and polishing. That’s how they grew up in the Navy. You know, they used to say, “If it moves, salute it; if it doesn’t move, paint it.”

**Q1:** So, on the ship I suppose you still had to wear shoes and a tie, and so on, when you went to dinner?

**A:** No.

**Q1:** Not that formal?

**A:** No. This ship, you know, this ship, it was Norwegian, so the crew were Norwegian sealers; rough, tough, not allowed to drink. But ashore at Montevideo, they went overboard, and the doctor, two days after we sailed from Montevideo, was treating sore heads and treating them for other sort of things that they may have contracted in Montevideo, because no one knew where they ended up in the early hours of the morning; you know, these were tough guys – they earned their living killing seals.

**Q1:** When you were on South Georgia, did you see the whaling stations there?

**A:** Yes... , Gridføyken... You see he was the first mate; Norwegian guy.

**Q1:** Cigarette; he seems like a ruddy guy.

**A:** Yes, tough; you know, he had a scar, right round his back. In the Tropics, when we were going through the Tropics, he was stripped to the waist, and somebody asked him what that was, and he said, oh, that was in a sealing knife fight.

**Q1:** What?! Could they speak English a bit?

**A:** The Captain did. And one or two others, but a little... We had to adapt to their food on the voyage too, which was rather nice.

**Q1:** What did they eat?

**A:** Lots of fish. Fiskeballen. Lots of fish, lots of fish and great big soups, you know, broth.

**Q1:** And did you get drinks on the ship? Did they give you some Norwegian wine ... Well, they don’t have wine in ... What did they drink? Vodka, or something?

**A:** No, we had our own whiskey.

- Q2:** So you had whiskey, but the sailors weren't allowed to drink?
- Q1:** It's usually so on ships, that the crew isn't allowed alcohol. It's definitely so on the Agulhas.
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** Especially after somebody got killed. The Captain, do you remember his name?
- A:** Leif Jacobsen. He was great; he was great.
- Q1:** It must be something to steer such a ship through those waters?
- A:** And when we were in pack ice, he'd go right up to the top of the crow's nest – and it was a small ship; you can see in pictures – and he'd be up there for hours. He had these steel blue eyes – he was a good-looking man; tall Norwegian – and he would be scanning the horizon to look for a lead, a shoal or altered sky lead, and when we were in the ice, he showed his true skill as a navigator. No, he was good.
- Q1:** So then you arrived in Halley Bay?
- A:** About eight weeks after leaving Southampton.
- Q1:** What did that look like at first, when you came to Antarctica? Can you remember something of your first impressions?
- A:** Yes. It looked very much like ...
- Q2:** Like that?
- A:** That's very much what it looked like. And we were in a hut, 20 feet below the snow surface that had been built on the surface originally. But that hut had been extended – you can see there, there were extensions to chimneys, for ventilation, and we had to go down ... See there ...
- Q1:** But did you find it cold in Antarctica?
- A:** I was more comfortable in -40, -45 than I am in Fishhoek when it's +8! Look, the hut was heated throughout; we maintained 15 degrees throughout. The met people, who had to do three-hourly obs, were responsible at night for safety and security, and one of the biggest threats in Antarctica is fire. You had to make sure that there were no faulty electrical connections. We had the SE-type, Argos-type slow-combustion stove for heating, because it was economical; a whole bag of anthracite would last for days. And you had to go round, every three hours when you did your obs, you did a complete circuit; checked everything. Because down there, underneath, if a fire had come, we were doomed.
- Q1:** I think you would suffocate.
- A:** Yes, exactly.

- Q1:** So did ...
- A:** This one dog ...
- Q1:** Did anything ever happen?
- A:** No.
- Q1:** No spark; no ... nothing. At what point did you meet Fuchs? Only in London?
- A:** In London, before we left. He was the boss. We had to be introduced to him; we had a programme for us. And then I met him again when we came back. When he came to Durban – he and Hillary came to Durban; Natal University had a scientific convention, conference, and two of the keynote speakers were Fuchs and Hillary. And that was ...
- Q1:** Were they on friendly terms, Fuchs and Hillary? I got the idea there was some competition ... They had different ideas about things.
- A:** They were totally different in that Fuchs was a scientist, first and foremost, and an explorer second; Hillary was a mountaineer, first and foremost. He was not a scientist. He made a big contribution to science, but he didn't have the scientific discipline that Fuchs had. Fuchs was one of the nicest, one of the greatest guys I've met. And if you asked Piet du Toit, I think he would say the same.
- Q1:** Yes, we did ask him, and he said exactly the same thing.
- A:** And Hannes le Grange ... Hannes was ... *Hy was 'n boerseun gewees; Hannes het alles bymekaargemaak – hier 'n skroefjie en daar 'n boutjie* – and on his sledge, if something broke, he'd say, hang on, and he'd go to his sledge and box and he'd find a bolt or nut or something that could fix it.
- Q1:** That makes a useful ... That's a useful talent to have when you're exploring.
- A:** And that's why Fuchs showed a preference for two South Africans, I think. He didn't know us; he hadn't met us.
- Q1:** I'm sorry; I interrupted you there, where you were saying they had a big scientific conference in Durban ...
- Q2:** Is that where the invitation to the cocktail and *braaivleis* ... ?
- Q1:** Cocktail and *braaivleis*? Does it say that?
- Q2:** Yes, it does.
- Q1:** Really?!
- A:** Yes. This was after we got back ...
- Q1:** No whale meat, though ...

- Q2:** No, cocktail and *braaivleis*.
- Q1:** Just good old Karoo lamb. Did you eat whale meat when you were down?
- A:** We had whale steaks. Johan and I met him at Durban Airport.
- Q1:** Immediately on your return to South Africa, did you go back to Durban?
- A:** Yes. I wasn't charmed with them, because I got back and had a month's leave, and then they said to me, well, you're going to Pretoria now for three months at the University to brush up your maths and physics. And I thought hell, you know, I've been away from home; I've got a wife and a – by then she was a twelve year-old – child, I don't want to ...
- Q1:** Between ten and twelve a lot happens to a girl ...
- A:** That's right. So they sent me to Pretoria, and I was not very charmed. ... I think we were meeting ...
- Q2:** Now; being at Halley Bay for a year, did you ever communicate with the South Africans of SANAE 1?
- Q1:** They weren't there yet.
- A:** No, but we passed each other; we were coming home, and they were going down.
- Q2:** So there was never a point in time where ...
- A:** We sat ... I don't think ... I saw Hannes le Grange once after he'd got back, and he'd left the Weather Buro; he went to some other ...
- Q1:** Yes, he went into surveying and city planning, and so on. He was a city planner when he passed.
- A:** He was, like myself, one of the people who had not serious academic qualifications, and for us there was no future there.
- Q1:** Interesting.
- A:** Yes, Johan Bothma also had no tertiary education, so he became Head of Climatology, crunching out numbers and things. You know, I didn't see a future for myself in crunching numbers.
- Q1:** In Halley Bay; you arrived, and was there an old team that went back on the Tottan?
- A:** There was a big team – they were the Royal Society People. They were about 20 in number, which was fine, because that left a fair amount of space for us. We weren't pushed for space. And the Tottan brought them back.
- Q1:** How long had they been in Antarctica by that time?
- A:** Some had been there one year; some had been there two years.

- Q1:** So some of them must have looked quite haggard...
- A:** Yes, probably. I think, in the photographs, some are there.
- Q1:** And what did they tell you? Did you communicate or talk to one another? Did they give you some tips on surviving and handling the dogs?
- A:** Yes. We had just this one dog. It was a remnant of dog teams, because at that time, they were doing away with dog teams, and having tractors and so on. You didn't really have much opportunity to get to know them, because they were packing up, and the weather was bad – ship had to run for *skuiling*, because – *sien jy, ek praat Afrikaans?* – because bad weather cropped up when we were off-loading. And that was serious, because you had to move from the sea ice, or the ice shelf, about three or four miles up to the base to get all those supplies safely stored; and then you had to get people aboard, so that the ship could go and look for a safe anchorage around the other side of the ice shelf. So you really didn't get much opportunity in becoming acquainted.
- Q2:** It sounds like a time where you had to do a lot of things in a very small amount of time?
- A:** So quick, and the Captain, he says, look I'm sailing; whether you're ready or not, I'm not going to risk being here for another year.
- Q2:** Yes, because if the ship's frozen in, there's nothing you can do.
- Q1:** And then the Norwegian crew would have to be there ... !
- A:** Yes, absolutely.
- Q1:** Okay, then the ship left and you were left alone. What did you do that first week or so?
- A:** We looked at each other and we said, *en nou?* Because then we had to immediately maintain ... We had to get stuck in and maintain the records; met records go on, you know, you can't have a break.
- Q1:** They don't wait for you to start ...
- A:** And I had to learn the new equipment that we'd come to.
- Q1:** Did you and Johan sometimes speak in Afrikaans to one another?
- A:** Mostly.
- Q1:** Mostly? And then, what did the other ...
- A:** We still ... I've got letters here. He still writes to me in Afrikaans. He never puts the date on them.

**Q1:** So you put in on when you receive it – “letter received ... “ But did some of the English and the Scots, were they interested in the South African history and culture?

**A:** Very; very much so.

**Q1:** Did they ask you questions and ...?

**A:** And *Die Burger* got hold of that. They interviewed me when I got back, and they got hold of a story, which perhaps is a bit unfair – “*Stryd op Suidpool oor Apartheid*”. You would hear something on BBC, and usually it was critical; very seldom did they say anything kind about South Africa.

**Q1:** Well, they never do. The international press don’t like us.

**A:** Yes, well, whether it was justified or not, is not for me to say. But the reporter of the Burger asked that very same question. I said, yes well, there were disputes and discussions; we had to defend whatever we could; we had to justify whatever we could. But here, amongst my cuttings “*Stryd op Suidpool oor Apartheid*” – not ...

**Q1:** But in 1958 Apartheid wasn’t that entrenched already. I mean, it had been the policy for 10 years, but not ... It only got very bad in the 60’s.

**A:** Yes, but when we got back in March ’60, there was the ...

**Q1:** Sharpeville?

**A:** Sharpeville, you see. And these things were being reported on the BBC, and it didn’t make me sour or bitter or any other sort of thing. This is what ... I’d been to Scandinavia a few years earlier on a met study thing, and the same thing. I remember in Stockholm, I was questioned about – they called him “Streedom” – Strydom, Hans Strydom, you know ...

**Q1:** “Lion of the North”.

**A:** Yes. And either you made bad friends through refusing to discuss it, or you tried to stay good friends by discussing and justifying, and excusing if you could. So that could’ve been a problem, but with us it never was; it never was.

**Q1:** It sounds like it was more of a cordial discussion. Where do you come from; how do you think ...

**A:** Yes, these were educated people, except the cook and the wireless operator, and you know, they were people who were well read and well informed, so you discuss it with them on a rational basis; you don’t get het up – if you do, you’re lost.

**Q1:** Especially if you’re just living there with – what were you? – twelve people.

**A:** Yes, and you’re in the minority. There are two of you and ten others.

**Q1:** Although I suppose the Scots must have had some sympathy?

- A:** Well, they were against the English right from the word go. I think, somewhere here, I've got lots of things here ... I don't know; you go ahead and ask me – I know this is what you were asking yourself.
- Q1:** Ooh ... Wow!
- A:** This is the film we went to see in London before we sailed.
- Q1:** Oh, and is it sort of a ... ?
- A:** It's a BP film, you see.
- Q1:** So BP was very much involved with Antarctica?
- A:** BP was, instead of screwing up the environment in one way, it was doing it in another way, giving them fuel to burn up in that pristine Antarctic place. But these were the guys. That was the doctor. I have a book that he wrote.
- Q1:** It must have been difficult wearing glasses on Antarctica. Don't they freeze to your nose?
- A:** I don't think he had a problem.
- Q1:** And he still had such a moustache? Wonderful.
- A:** He was the chief scientist; he was the Scottish diesel mechanic; he was the Scottish physicist; he was the doctor.
- Q1:** They all look very young.
- A:** Yes, I was 34. He was older; he was about two years older than me. Then I was the next ...
- Q1:** Who was the youngest?
- A:** He was. He'd just come from Edinburgh University with a very good physics degree. He was ... And he's gone on ... I've got ... He went on to become ... He's living in Australia now. He had two or three professorships in Australia and Papua New Guinea, and ...
- Q1:** And this looks like a radio operator ...
- A:** He was ... He should never have gone, because he was totally out of sync with the rest of us. He didn't gel; he didn't fit in with the others. He used to sit in his radio shack, talking all over the world, rather than talk to the guys he was living with.
- Q2:** Was he educated or not? ... Not.
- A:** You know, he was in the British Army as cook; he was in the British Army as a radio operator; he was in the British Army – Jock – as a diesel mechanic, but he was a musician – he was the one playing the accordion ...

- Q1:** So did you sometimes sing a little bit; have sing-along's?
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** Sort of a British-Scottish ...?
- A:** He was there a year before we came; he was in the Royal Society. He was also in the British met office. He was British met office; David Limbert was British met office; Mike Blackwell was also ...
- Q1:** British met office. So did you learn from them about their way of doing things?
- A:** Yes, and they learned from us too, because we were able to tell them how we operated in temperate climates, that sort of thing.
- Q1:** Yes, because obviously they have a much different climate ...
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** And the meteorological data; where did you send it to? To Pretoria, to Britain ... ?
- A:** It went to Port Stanley, and then they had this international met exchange. Melbourne was one place; Melbourne, Australia, and Pretoria was another. And then there was somewhere in South America. So all the data was exchanged by radio. And that was our only form of communication with the outside world. Nobody had a PC or a laptop, or ...
- Q1:** Or Skype ... ! But could you speak to your wife once in a blue moon?
- A:** No.
- Q1:** Nothing? Did you send letters?
- A:** She sent ... Yes, we were allowed 100 words, which went by Morse code, a month out, and 200 words a month in. And she spoke once on the British BBC, which I couldn't hear, because of atmospheric conditions – magnetic storms and so on.
- Q1:** What did a normal day look like? I mean, in summer, the days are extraordinarily long, but it sounds like when you're a meteorologist, you have a very set programme – three-hourly ...
- A:** Every three hours you send off your full observation. Once a day you'd send your radio sonde and upper-wind finding things. And then the other disciplines, you know, they had to send off geomagnetic and seismological ... and that was his job.
- Q1:** But did you sometimes rotate? I mean, you were quite a few meteorological officers. Or did you all have to work together?
- A:** Yes. We ... Each was a specialist, really. David Limbert was a specialist in glaciology. He was a meteorologist, but he used to do all the glaciological observations, oceanographic observations. He did geomagnetism, seismology. He did the ozone

observations and all (whole) sky camera – aurora, and that sort of thing. And he was Jack of all trades. I had specialised in upper air meteorology and Johan likewise. And Hedderley was a sort of ... he'd been to the Antarctic once or twice or maybe three times before; he was a professional FIDS guy. He couldn't settle down, and he'd go back home and then he'd come back to the Antarctic.

**Q1:** Was he married?

**A:** No. He died, sadly. He was a good mountaineer; he died in a rock-climbing accident.

**Q1:** So it sounds like most of you had some contact afterwards? After you returned.

**A:** Yes. Well, I'm still in contact regularly; well until ... This chap died about a month or two ago, and now I'm in contact with his son, who lives in the UK. This one died recently. I don't know what happened to him. And Nelson Norman, the doctor, I have contact with him. And Johan of course regular contact – we phone each other for birthdays and for Midwinter's Day and so on.

**Q1:** About Midwinter's Day; I see here you did have a Midwinter celebration.

**A:** We had a special menu ...

**Q2:** It was a wonderful menu; I looked it up.

**Q1:** So at that time, let's say at Midwinter, did people like your leader ... I almost want to say, did ... I mean when the ship left, and he's still a leader, but I can't see that he ... Did he, all the time ... ? Was he sort of separate, or ... ? Did he help with things?

**A:** He was part of the ...

**Q2:** He was one of the boys?

**A:** Yes, he was part of the everyday activities. He was a wonderful handyman; he could fix buildings – we had prefab things that had to be erected; he did all of that. And he was very much the leader, but Mick Blackwell was the chief scientist. The scientific programmes were coordinated by him. And an interesting thing about that ... They asked me if I would propose a toast to the Queen – you know, a British base – and we got greetings from Her Majesty, from Buckingham Palace ...

**Q1:** Really?!

**A:** You know who forgot to send greetings for Midwinter's Day? Pretoria. We got from Melbourne, Australia; we got from all over the world; the Americans on the other side of Antarctica. But Pretoria forgot... Anyway, they asked me to propose a toast, so I said, no, I'm going to propose that Johan does it. And Johan did it; and they loved him for that, because they knew he was Afrikaans-speaking. And he stood up – *“n heildronk op Haar Majesteit” en al daai dinge ...*

**Q2:** He did it in Afrikaans?

**A:** No, in English.

**Q1:** In English, but still. So who did you toast to as well? I see the “Loyal Toast” ... What was that?

**A:** That’s the Queen.

**Q1:** Just the Queen?

**A:** Oh, *nee*, the British ...

**Q1:** So they loved the Queen, the English?

**A:** Yes.

**Q2:** All very nationalist ... well, ...

**Q1:** Monarchist ...

**A:** Monarchist, yes.

**Q2:** Royalists, yes. This is a fantastic menu: sherry, followed by a shrimp cocktail, consomme royale, roast turkey with sage onion stuffing ...

**A:** All of those came out of tins or boxes ...

**Q2:** That’s why I’m astounded!

**Q1:** Oh, and look at all those French wines! From 1953 ...

**A:** Yes, those didn’t come out of tins; those were ... Talking about wines, I’ve got to watch ... No, we’ve got lots of time.

**Q1:** Was it good wine? Can you remember?

**Q2:** French wine?!

**A:** French wine.

**Q2:** Must have been; 1953 – a good year.

**Q1:** So all these things came out of a tin? So you didn’t have any fresh meat with you anymore?

**A:** We took down with us a few sides of pork that we got at Port Stanley, in the Falklands. We didn’t have refrigerated storage, so we had it on the deck. It was fine, because when we left South Georgia, the temperatures were around zero or sub-zero, but suddenly, a wind from the north came up, and these great big chunks of half pigs, these sides of pork, got a little bit off. And when we got down there, we dug out a whole in the ice and we put them in there, and if we needed them, you cooked away that slight “off-ishnes”.

**Q1:** I see that this was hand-drawn; this menu? Did one ...

**A:** No.

**Q1:** Well, the logo on it.

**A:** No, that's the Falkland Islands' Research and Discovery.

**Q1:** You can see the lion and the penguin and the guiding light of science; it's very interesting.

**A:** One of the chaps; I can't remember who did it.

**Q1:** So what else did you do in your spare time, what spare time you had?

**Q2:** In between the hours of obs?

...

**A:** I'm getting the other one back soon, and I will let you have it and you must read it, because it describes his other job – apart from looking after our health – was biology. He did a study on the Emperor Penguin. He brought back embryos of penguin eggs for study in ...

**Q2:** Were they frozen embryos?

**A:** Yes. You know what happened? Somewhere from the ship to the Falklands Islands' Head Office, they lost them.

**Q1:** Oh no.

**A:** And they ... You see ... I don't know; if you want all this stuff, you take it away and keep what you want. This is a paper written by David Limbert, you see? You can have this.

**Q1:** Look at this ozone hole ... That was discovered above Halley Bay, wasn't it?

**A:** Yes, Halley Bay discovered it; our year.

**Q1:** Oh! Was it in your year that you discovered the ozone hole?!

**A:** But we didn't believe it; they said the instruments were wrong.

**Q1:** Phew! Who discovered it then?

**A:** There you go. I'll give you all these things. Keep what you want; what you don't want, you can give back to me. Simpson ... What the hell was he...

**Q1:** It must be something like ... It's "G.C." or something like that.

**A:** Yes. I met him somewhere along the line.

**Q1:** He was very much a proponent of meteorology in Antarctica.

**A:** Yes. And Priestley. G.C. Simpson.

**Q1:** G.C. Simpson ; yes. And Raymond Priestley.

**A:** Raymond Priestley; I met him ... I don't know if you want these things ...

**Q2:** Yes; I'll just take a look.

**Q1:** So what did you do for fun?

**A:** There's more of these ... For fun ... The hole in the ozone. I edited the quarterly magazine. Unfortunately, I haven't got any of them left anymore. And that was one of the things I did for fun.

**Q1:** Ah, that could be ... So you edited the quarterly magazine. What did you do with the magazine? Was it just ... ?

**A:** We had one typewriter; no copying facilities – I had lots of carbon paper. You're too young to know about carbon paper ...

**Q1:** Well, I've read about carbon paper!

**A:** Marion will know!

**Q1:** A lot of the documents you read in the Archives are carbon copies.

**A:** I've got some here. Oh, there they are.

**Q1:** Oh my word!

**Q2:** Oh my goodness. Was it just sort of the newsletter for you at the base?

**A:** Just to create a bit of a ...

**Q1:** The Halley Comet. This is so nice.

**Q2:** "On with the party."

**A:** Are you recording what I'm saying?

**Q1:** Yes.

**A:** Don't use it in evidence against me.

**Q1:** We won't!

**A:** But here we go – *"Terugvordering van onkostas aangegaan deur FIDS namens Meneer G.M. Artz, met verwysing na 'n brief so en so en so ..."; "Voorskot teen salaris"; "Kontantvoorskot, Montevideo – verhaal 1960"; "Min oovordering op briewe ... Benewens die bedrae van £13, 15 en 2, is die volgende bedrae ook van Mnr. Artz in Maart 1960 verhaal ..."; "Belastingdelgingssertifikaat"; "Verhaal teen voorskot van £10" ... Toe dag ek by myself nee gids, ek wil nie vir julle ouens werk nie.*

**Q1:** *Nee, kyk ...*

**A:** You know, after ...

**Q1:** It's not like it's going to bankrupt them to ... !

**A:** You look at the amounts ...

**Q1:** And that's the first thing you receive when you get back; that's horrible.

**A:** I want to show you ... Oh, this was our programme. This is all the scientific disciplines.

**Q2:** Glaciology, meteorology, oceanography ...

**Q1:** So this was the ... Halley Comet was what you edited, and then you'd distribute around the base?

**A:** Yes. And typing it, I used to – because you can't make twelve copies; the numbers 9, 10 and 11 you can't read.

**Q1:** Yes. So ... Oh, look at this! Did you ever go into the field, I mean, take a tractor and went a bit into the field?

**A:** No, we walked ... "Sledging Report: 1959" ...

**Q1:** Ah.

**A:** We walked with sledges. ... "Solar and terrestrial radiation" ...

**Q1:** This is so funny! "Your horoscope in brief"! "Moon subjects: Coming months could see big build-up; you may reach great heights". "General forecast for 1960: Strong indication for long sea voyage for most."

**A:** That; I was one on the four of us who went on that.

**Q1:** On the sledging journey? Did you sleep outside? Did you take tents along?

**A:** We slept in tents; two little tents.

**Q2:** That's the doctor; that's you. Who's that?

**A:** That's the doctor; Norman Hedderley; David Limbert, or no ... Who is it?

**Q2:** I think their names are in front.

**Q1:** Norman, you, Hedderley and Whitehall.

**A:** Whitehall, yes.

**Q1:** So one of those ... ?

**A:** That would be Whitehall.

**Q1:** Okay, brilliant.

**Q2:** And Nescafé Instant Coffee ...

**A:** Yes!

**Q1:** Wonderful. So wasn't it very cold, out in the tent in the Antarctic?

**A:** It was very cold, and you feet were very cold. And Marion will tell you that I still suffer from cold feet.

**Q1:** So you sleep with socks?

**A:** Yes!

**Q1:** The dog; what was the dog's name?

**A:** Stumpy.

**Q1:** Stumpy? So was he sort of just your pet?

**A:** He was the last surviving member of the dog team, and he stayed on as a pet.

**Q1:** Was he a nice pet?

**Q2:** A comfort?

**A:** You know, when you got *gatvol* of life and everyone else, you'd go and talk to the dog. He listened to you.

**Q1:** I can imagine.

**A:** And you do get *gatvol* down there.

**Q1:** What do you get *gatvol* of?

**A:** Of the isolation; of the monotony. The doctor writes about it there. You see, I compiled these sorts of things.

**Q1:** So you had ... In you spare time, did you have books down there? Did you take books?

**A:** Books.

**Q1:** Films?

**A:** Films.

**Q1:** Can you remember...?

**A:** Every Saturday night we had a film show.

**Q2:** Can you remember what films you watched?

**A:** The ones we watched over and over again was "The Dam Busters"; then there was another one, "Whiskey Galore" – a lot of them were rubbish, because they were films that hadn't been a success on the circuit, so they said, oh, let's give them to the guys in Antarctica ... ! You see ...

**Q1:** So did you make yourself a little bit of something to eat for these films?

**A:** No, we had it sort of after our Saturday evening meal, which was accompanied by our weekly ration of whiskey or beer; and there was lots of rum.

- Q1:** Rum? Why rum?
- A:** Because it's a traditional Navy drink, and in cold weather it gives you warmth. You see, all of these had to be compiled during the year: "The accumulation of snow and migration of snow surface features"; "Survey Report"; "Physiology" – the doctor wrote about physiology.
- Q1:** Did the doctor ever have to work as a doctor?
- Q2:** Was there ever any medical emergencies?
- A:** There was one.
- Q1:** What happened?
- A:** One of the chaps got some sort of icicle in a lung. He ... I don't know. He was outside and it was very, very cold, and he came in and he was having breathing problems. And the doctor said it was some sort of inhalation. So he treated him and fixed it. But we never had a broken arm or a broken ankle, like you and I have had in this year!
- Q1:** And one of the more recent, much more recent, doctors told us that one of the major problems she had down in Antarctica, were dental, actually.
- A:** There were one or two dental things. And he attended to those as well, because he'd done a crash course on dentistry before he went down.
- Q1:** So to pull teeth and things like that? Wow.
- A:** Yes, but nothing serious.
- Q1:** And on Sundays, was it a British tradition that must have some or other prayer meeting or church meeting, or not really?
- A:** No, you just did your own thing; sat quietly, you know. But Sunday was like any other day, because the routine went on.
- Q2:** You still had to work.
- Q1:** Didn't the cook prepare anything special on a Sunday?
- A:** Saturday evening was sort of special. Evening meals were well attended. There was always somebody asleep; somebody who'd been on duty all the last night. So midday meals were not that well attended. Somebody was outside, and he'd come in late for his meal.
- Q1:** But what did the cook do? I mean, cooking is a hard job, but for twelve people, you don't actually have to work all day. So what did he do in between?
- A:** He baked. We had bread rolls, which he baked and froze. And he had to clean his kitchen. And once a week, you were given what we called gas duty – you were on domestic duty; you helped the cook with the washing of the dishes and ...

- Q1:** Sort of what you would call in South African a “skivvy”.
- A:** Yes, skivvy; yes. And you emptied the buckets, the soil buckets; there was a huge hole, and you’d just put them down. And you tidied up generally, because ... And then you were able to do your own laundry, on that day. And at the end of the day you were worn out – like any good housewife is – and you were allowed to have bath, because we only had a bath ...
- Q1:** So you only had one bath a week?
- A:** Yes. About every ten days; your turn came around every tenth day. We had a roster for ...
- Q2:** For baths?
- A:** For domestic duties. On domestic duty day, you ...
- Q1:** So did you ever think, during your domestic duties and everything, that someday there would be women going down to Antarctica?
- A:** It didn’t bear thinking about. What would I do with women there? They’d be telling me what to do; nothing has changed! *Waar is jy, ou vrou?*
- MA:** *Hi, hier’s ek.*
- A:** And the other thing – you had to be tidy. *Hoor jy, Ma?*
- MA:** *Ja, ek hoor.*
- A:** You had a locker that size on the ship. You had a kit bag; in a suitcase, you had your civvy clothes that was down in the hold somewhere. And you had that space; you had to live in that space. All your belongings had to live in that space. When you were down there, you had a sledging box and you had a locker. You couldn’t leave your things lying around, like some people I know ... !
- Q1:** Did you each have your own, private room, or did you share rooms?
- A:** No, a dormitory. We slept ... The diesel mechanic built a little room for himself, because he had to get up and watch meters and fuel gauges and so on. The leader had his own cabin; and the doctor had his own cabin. Other than that we were, I think, six in one dormitory and four in another; something like that.
- Q1:** But didn’t you sometimes wish for a little privacy?
- A:** Of course you did.
- Q1:** And what did you do then?
- A:** Go and talk to the dog!

- Q1:** Okay! I understand. Well, I don't know so much about South Africa at that time, but did you have domestic workers back in South Africa? I mean, didn't you miss somebody to clean everything?
- A:** No, we did it ourselves. Didn't miss them. We couldn't have the luxury of people coming just to clean up for you; you did it yourself.
- Q1:** Did you sometimes talk about how you missed women, or not really? 'Cause you had a wife.
- A:** You avoided it, because you were going to make yourself miserable if you talked about it or think about it too much. Funnily enough, among the films we had there was one ... At that time – it was long before your time – there was a report written by a Professor Kinsey, I think his name was, in the United States.
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** The Kinsey Report, on the behaviour of the different sexes and all sorts of things. And we had a copy of this thing.
- Q1:** In Antarctica?
- A:** Yes. And whoever sent it needed his bloody head read, because that's the last thing you want to be reminded of!
- Q1:** Okay, that's a very funny story! So, I suppose, the mere idea that someday in the future, there would be black women in Antarctica was totally incomprehensible?
- A:** You know, 1958, '59 was fifty-two years ago, and at that time, they hadn't even gone to the moon yet, you know.
- Q1:** Wasn't it around that time that Russia launched Sputnik?
- A:** Yes, because we used to, on a clear day, or night ... Because remember, we had three months of darkness, total darkness, and in the summer three months of total sunlight. But you'd look up on a clear night, and you'd see the Sputnik going by. Another thing, and it was very, very rare, was to look out for the aurora. We saw it once – the shout went up "oh, it's there!" and we all went out. We had a ladder going down, to get into the hut, and we all scrambled up the ladder and stood out there and we watched. And by the time we all got there, it had gone, because it's very, very quick. The aurora doesn't stay; it's unfair, it should stay longer, but wouldn't.
- Q2:** That's interesting, because someone we spoke to who was on the South African team in the past two years, said they saw the aurora and it was on there for hours.
- Q1:** It's a different place.

**A:** You see ... And also, conditions have changed so. Whether it's geomagnetic storms, sun flares, solar flares, whatever, conditions are not what they were. The universe is undergoing huge changes. This planet, I don't know where it's going to end ... Girls, you've got to rescue it, because nothing I can do anymore, you know. And conditions, meteorological, geophysical conditions have changes over the fifty years. It's one of those things.

**Q1:** So during this very long winter, that must have, at some times, been a bit hard to cope with?

**A:** You know, it depended a lot on your inter-personnel, interaction with others. And there was music; we had lots of gramophone records. There were no CDs or ...

**Q2:** What kind of music?

**A:** It ranged from serious classical music to ...

**Q2:** Did you have opera?

**A:** Yes. And look, the doctor was an authority. He played the organ beautifully; we heard him in the cathedral in Port Stanley, playing the organ. And music was one of this loves in life. So we had lots of gramophone records and ... Radio reception was very, very poor generally. BBC World Service not too bad. Occasionally I'd pick up SABC and my old mother used to send me messages on SABC. I got some of them, but she was always sending me messages. On my birthday, we were sailing – it was on route to Montevideo, and we were celebrating my birthday – and she sent a message. I never received it. Years later, I heard that she'd sent it on what was then Springbok Radio. And she had asked for the request "Where is my wandering boy tonight?" – there was a sea shanty; it wa a sea mans' song. So they played "What shall we do with a drunken sailor?"! I never heard it. And she was horrified! I said, don't worry, ma."

**Q1:** Speaking about Sputnik; did you have any contact with the Russian base at this time at all?

**A:** Yes. They were the other side of the continent. We had regular communication, and especially at Midwinter, with everybody except the Argentineans, because the Argentinean base was just next to ours, but they believed that Britain had deprived them of the Falkland Islands or, as they called them, Islas Malvinas, and they wanted South Georgia and they wanted the Falklands, and they wanted us to get the hell off there. And they go in the summer, once or twice, they'd go past our base and not even send a greeting. That was Argentinean, but ... And of course, ten, twelve years later, they were at war; the Falklands War.

**Q1:** Yes. But did you speak to the Argentineans?

- A:** No.
- Q1:** Send them a Midwinter message, also?
- A:** No. No, there was no communication, but the Americans ...
- Q1:** But the Argentinean base and Halley Bay, they're actually within reaching distance; you could travel there.
- A:** That's right. They were just ... They used to go past us. But it was an emotional, political thing.
- Q1:** Did you celebrate the fact that the Treaty (The Antarctic Treaty System, ATS) was signed? It was signed in December 1959. Did you hear about it?
- A:** We were virtually on our way home, and we heard about this 13-nation treaty. We didn't know much about it, you know, because we didn't have all the details; we just knew that South Africa was a signatory and so and so and so. So one learned about it when you got back.
- Q1:** And when you got back in South Africa, did any Minister try to meet you, or any dignitary? Any sort of official recognition?
- A:** Nothing; nothing. A letter to tell me I owed them £25 or something.
- Q1:** It's quite interesting, because apart from Hannes le Grange, you were the first South Africans there.
- A:** Yes, Hannes was the first South African to winter; Johan and I were the next two.
- Q1:** And it's actually due to your activity there, and the fact that you were there, that South Africa was kept in the Treaty, because otherwise they had no activity there.
- A:** Yes. We were a participant, and from the information exchange point of view, South Africa was vital in the global network. South Africa was ...
- Q1:** Were you involved in producing that book on Antarctic weather, 'Antarctic Meteorology'?
- A:** No, I think Lou Hayward of the Weather Buro, he did it. I know the book.
- Q1:** N.P. van Rooyen; Harry van Loon was also involved.
- A:** Yes, N.P. van Rooyen. I had the book, and I gave it to our son and law, who is head master at a school in Franschoek. And he was geography master before he became head. And he was very interested in these things, so I gave him quite a lot of my Antarctic stuff for use in the school. I don't know if you know Bridge House School in Franschoek?
- Q1:** Yes.

- A:** He's head; Rory Malcolm. And all these scientific reports I lent him at some stage, and he gave them to geography mistress, who utilised them. And you know, that is why I feel uplifted that you are interested in these things. I don't want them to rot in my garage! They're already rotting; like me!
- Q1:** But when you were back in South Africa, the press ... It seems that the press did pick up on some of the stories.
- A:** The press; certainly in Durban. I had a lot to do with them, because they would phone me, when I was a forecaster at Louis Botha Airport, they would phone me for information about the weather.
- Q1:** Was Louis Botha Airport in Durban?
- A:** Yes, that's the one that they've changed now to King Shaka.
- Q1:** King Shaka; yes, I know.
- A:** It was new. Johan and I went there when it was new, to set up this upper air thing, and then after Antarctica, I became a forecaster. So the press knew me, and they'd phone me and ask me, what's the outlook for weekend fishing? And the Durban July is next week; what's your long-range weather forecast?
- Q1:** So you already had contacts in the press?
- A:** So the press were well disposed to us. If you look in these scrapbooks and so on, there is so much from the Natal Mercury.
- Q1:** Yes, it's interesting that it's very much ...
- A:** And Die Burger, here, was quite close. We had ... Alan Crawford was the port met officer here, and so the Burger was close to sub-polar – it was sub-polar activity then, and I think Alan Crawford gave them a lot of assistance there.
- Q1:** Yes, he did; and Marsh as well.
- A:** Yes.
- Q2:** Were you in contact with him at all?
- A:** Alan Crawford? Yes. I knew him very well. He was the sort of uncrowned king of Tristan da Cunha. Tristan, incidentally, on our way home, we went in the (RRS) John Biscoe, the new – it was then new; it was its maiden voyage – and they had a bit of a difficulty getting in ...
- Q1:** That must have been nice, being on a new ship? After the sealer.
- A:** Oh, boy! What a luxury! I had my own cabin. And we went as far as South Georgia in the Biscoe, and we changed ships there. I can't even remember ... vaguely, we went back to Port Stanley and back again, and then we had to call at the – the Shackleton

was our ship then. And the Shackleton was going to be chartered for a Marion Island relief by South Africa, so instead of going back to Port Stanley and then the UK – because that was the only way of getting home; there was no airline between Montevideo and Cape Town – so instead of going the long route round, we stopped at Tristan, and picked up the Governor – or whatever; I don't think he was "Governor"; a lesser ... official Magistrate or something. We picked him at Tristan and brought him back to Cape Town. Within a year, Tristan had that earthquake.

**Q1:** The volcano, yes.

**A:** The volcano, right. So Tristan and Alan Crawford and Day – Day was the name of this Magistrate guy. I freshen my memory: we didn't go ashore there; there wasn't time. There was never time.

**Q1:** I wanted to ask, because Tristan sounded like such an interesting place.

**A:** Yes. And then a lot of the population left after the volcano, but they went back again. They couldn't adapt; they couldn't live here.

**Q1:** Yes, just a couple of their younger people stayed behind, but ... There's now still, what? 272 inhabitants.

**Q2:** So, if I understand you correctly, you went from Halley Bay in the new ship to Tristan ...

**A:** To South Georgia, and then we left that ship and then we came on the Shackleton back again.

**Q1:** So you all went back to Cape Town then?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** And then the British flew from Cape Town?

**A:** The British guys, some of them took leave. John Blackwell got married in Cape Town – I think there's a thing there about the *huwelik* in Cape Town – and ...

**Q1:** To a girlfriend he had before, or did they meet in ... ?

**A:** She flew out from Scotland to meet him and they got married here.

**Q1:** Ah, that sounds so romantic.

**A:** And when *Die Burger* got hold of that story ... It was quite a ...

**Q2:** I see it here.

**A:** And then the others went home by Union Castle. And they loved that. And I had brother; my late brother was living in Cape Town, and he entertained them quite a lot. Because I had to go back to Durban. My wife came down to meet me and we flew back that same day to Durban. You know, I had a child and ... I had to ...

- Q1:** What was it like to see your daughter after a year?
- A:** You had to re-familiarise yourself with each other, because, you know, at that age ...
- Q1:** Things change so quickly.
- A:** You know, she was growing up; she was twelve years old. And she hadn't seen me for 15 months, so ... But we've caught up since then. She lives in France now, and we're in regular contact.
- Q1:** Is she French-speaking now?
- A:** Yes. She's been there ... She worked in Foreign Affairs – *Staatsdiens*; she also went into the *Staatsdiens*. And ended up marrying a Frenchman and living in France. She loves it.
- Q1:** Okay. When you were down on Halley Bay; 15 months is quite a long time. What did you miss about South Africa or about home?
- A:** Well, *braaivleis*; *dop-en-dan* – the things that young South Africans ... You know, rugby ...
- Q2:** “Braaivleis, sonskyn en Chevrolet”?
- A:** Yes. But it never became a sort of nagging longing, because there was ... You had to keep your routine going, and the routine is so important.
- Q1:** And when you were back in South Africa, did you miss Antarctica at times?
- A:** Not really. I've never regretted having gone; I benefitted intellectually – not materially, because I ...
- Q1:** Owed them £25 afterwards!
- A:** And it opened new doors to me. I went to work for BP and I got a good second start to life. So I've never regretted it. I was perhaps just a little bit older than I would have liked to be.
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** Thirty-four, you know, thirty-five – it was a bit of an upheaval. I would have liked to be ten years younger when they offered me the opportunity, but I took the opportunity and I've never regretted it.
- Q1:** You earlier referred to the fact that you missed rugby, and that made me think ... Did you ever play sport in Antarctica? I mean anything?
- A:** We played darts.
- Q1:** You played darts!
- A:** We had no snooker table or anything; there was nothing.

- Q1:** Not even a ball to throw around a bit?
- A:** You can't.
- Q2:** How did you go about getting exercise? Or was that just moving around?
- A:** Just moving around, and lots of it. Periodically, you had to go and dig out supply dumps; you had to salvage supply boxes. Coal; you were always digging out coal, because we burned a lot of anthracite.
- Q1:** So each of you had a shovel and ... ?
- A:** No. It was in bags of coal, and there were three tractors; one burned out during the year, because of ... Before you started up your tractor, you had to put a paraffin heater underneath it to warm it up – otherwise it wouldn't start – and you had these start *pilotte* things, cartridges for starting. And the wind changed, and the tractor blew out. It came back to England, where it was repaired and refurbished, so then we had just the two tractors. And all your supplies; you had sledges, and it had to dug out of the snow, loaded on to the sledge, tractor-driven back to the base, and put into short-term storage for use.
- Q1:** Gosh. It sounds like ...
- A:** Food; food, ah. Sugar; we had enough sugar for 20 years. I don't know how it came about.
- Q1:** And cigarettes? Did they give you cigarettes?
- A:** We had a free issue of cigarettes, and free issue of beer – not much beer, because beer is bulky to transport, so we had whiskey and rum. We took a bottle of KWV with me, and hell, they loved it!
- Q1:** I can imagine! And then a couple of bottles of wine?
- A:** Well, wine was for sort of Christmas, Midwinter – those days; special ...
- Q1:** Can you remember what the ration was for rum?
- A:** More than enough! We never used it all up. And we were very disciplined, because nothing was locked.
- Q1:** Really?
- A:** The bar wasn't locked, and whoever was on duty on that day, it was his job to open up the bar. We had this very small bar; you can see it on some of the photographs. And you'd have one or two ... Nobody ever over-consumed; nobody ever took advantage, and that was that. And at night, if you were on duty and you had alcoholic tendencies, it was there.
- Q1:** You could have, if you wanted to.

- A:** You could have, if you ...
- Q1:** You could put some in your coffee if you liked.
- A:** That's one of the things that has stayed with me forever, that sort of self-discipline with your own belongings, with your own ...
- Q2:** It sounds as though you really trusted one another. Would you say that that kind of discipline, that you might have learned it from the leader, because he was a Navy man and he was disciplined enough.
- A:** That's right. And I had been in the South African Air Force for five years during the War, so I had become accustomed to self-discipline for a start, and then any other sort of discipline imposed on you is not difficult, as long as you have the self-discipline for starters.
- Q1:** Yes, it sounds interesting. So most of the people there had a military background, or not?
- A:** Yes. Because in Britain, in those days, they had military service. It was like we had here. And the doctor, before he went down, had done his two years or whatever; or this was part of his two years military training. He graduated at Glasgow University and worked for a short while in National Health – they had National Health there – and then this came up, so he did the rest there. The radio operator, the diesel mechanic, the cook – they were all military background. And I think that does help. I know there are different views on military service, but I'm convinced that the transition from writing a Matric or going to university would be so much easier if instead of a gap year – floating around the country or around the world at daddy's expense – they were taught some sort of discipline. But I mustn't get onto that, must I, Ma?
- Q1:** Well, they do have similar systems sort of. In Germany, for instance, you can choose between military service or civil service, where you can go work in hospitals or whatever; so if you're not the military type, there are other options available.
- A:** Yes, it's ... Now you know Dick Bonnema?
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** Dick came to me – I was at Kimberley; I was an officer in charge of the met office in Kimberley. Dick was one of ... A few other Hollanders and one or two Germans were recruited at that time – I think he came about '53 or '54, and his first posting was Kimberley. And I took Dick under my wing and I introduced him to people and to customs, because he had come from the Dutch Army or the Dutch Air Force, and he had a good sense of self-discipline and he was an excellent worker. And he worked with me for about for a year, and then he was posted somewhere else; I can't

remember where. But there was an example of somebody from a foreign country who had sufficient self-discipline to adapt to conditions here. And Kimberley – you know, if you were brought up in Friesland, in *Nederland*, and you come to Kimberley ...

**Q1:** That's diametrically opposite.

**A:** Yes. You can't imagine the contrast.

**Q1:** Yes, it must be ...

**A:** Have you seen him lately?

**Q1:** We saw him two weeks ago.

**A:** Because he had a serious heart condition, and we sort of lost contact for a while.

**Q1:** He's in Muizenberg actually.

**A:** Yes, we've been to his home there, and he's been here.

**Q1:** We went to visit him at his home in Swellendam; they also have a house in Swellendam. I just want to hear a little bit more about life on Antarctica. When it's dark the whole time, how does that affect your sleep?

**A:** It becomes a problem, because, for a start, if you're one of the met people, you have staggered sleeping hours anyway. But I had experienced that during the War in the Air Force. So for me, it wasn't so great a problem. But sleep rhythm became very irregular and ... The doctor writes in that book about the people who came to him for sleeping pills, and he had to guard against addiction.

**Q1:** Yes, because that's something one can get addicted to.

**A:** Over-indulging in those things. I did have problems sleeping, especially during that dark period, because ... You can only just imagine what it would be like to have sunshine again. Three months of darkness has a depressing effect, for a start. And if you're sleeping badly, that adds to the problem.

**Q1:** And you get more depressed and you sleep even worse.

**A:** He writes about depression there and how he tried to treat it, and how people would go to him – and I wasn't aware of this then – with their problems. And he was one of the youngest there ... !

**Q1:** So he was also sort of a psychologist?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** About the Emperor Penguins; were you close to an Emperor Penguin colony, or rookery, and did you see them?

**A:** Yes, Emperor Bay, nearby, was one of the most densely populated Emperor Penguin rookeries.

**Q1:** So did you go visit it?

**A:** Yes. And the doctor and the other Scotsmen actually lived in a tractor box for six weeks, in the dark, observing bits of penguin biology.

**Q1:** Oh? That's sounds like a lonely vocation.

**A:** There was our little bar, you see? There was our little bar.

**Q1:** Oh, it's very little! And you all look so happy to be there. Why are you wearing ties?

**A:** That was Midwinter. We all dressed up for Midwinter. That was the one time in the whole year that you got dressed up. And of course when you landed back in Cape Town, we were all dressed up.

**Q1:** Did you shave before ... ? Did you let your beard grow when you were down there?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** So did you shave before you landed?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** What did your wife say about your beard?

**A:** She thought it was cool!

**Q1:** Nice!

**Q2:** I'm just reading the caption here: "Contented members of the sewing bee in the surgery" ... ?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** So you had to sew your own clothes, or mend it?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** So did you keep these skills of sewing?

**A:** Yes. Nowadays of course my eyesight isn't so good; I can't thread a needle anymore!

**Q1:** But through your life?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** And did you sometimes take turns to cook as well, or did the cook always cook?

**A:** The cook got a day off every tenth day, and then somebody else took over. The radio operator, I think, escaped this. He was an escapist; he didn't conform.

**Q1:** It sounds like he was not somebody who wanted to be part of the team.

- A:** He went to Antarctica as a means of escaping a military posting to Cypress, because there was war and upheaval and unrest in Cypress, and he thought he would go somewhere else; and he went to ...
- Q1:** Cypress ... Antarctica! I think there's more to do in Cypress than on Antarctica!
- A:** Yes, but ... So he sat in his radio shack with his key, calling up all over the world. But once a week, once every ten days, you would have a turn at cooking. And I had been given, by my mother-in-law, a recipe for bobotie, and we didn't have fresh meat, naturally, but you had tinned mincemeat; you had dehydrated potatoes, which you had to restore, or resuscitate, or whatever you call it – there's a fancy word – and so I would do ... and rice of course.
- Q1:** So did you take the spices for the bobotie along?
- A:** I got spices from Durban – you know Durban ... ?
- Q1:** Yes!
- A:** Got all those spices, took all those things down there. And I think Johan did a bully beef stew or something.
- Q1:** But they must have liked your bobotie; I mean the British aren't exactly famous for their cuisine.
- A:** Well, you know, it's the huge Indian and Pakistani living in Britain now. They have been introduced to Tandoori chicken and ...
- Q2:** Yes, nowadays ...
- A:** Yes, nowadays the Brits probably eat more spicy food than we do.
- Q1:** Yes, but it's not their own food; it's imported.
- A:** No, it's because of the ...
- Q1:** But when you were, was there somebody who really could not cook?
- A:** I don't think so.
- Q1:** The radio operator did not want to cook, evidently.
- A:** No, he didn't. But I don't think anybody was totally unable to cook.
- Q1:** And when you came back, what was the first thing you ate? Do you remember? Even on the ship ...
- A:** Biltong. Because my family had sent down – in the mail, it came – and the Brits loved it, the biltong.
- Q1:** So when the ship came to fetch you, did they send mail on that ship?

- A:** Yes, and it was sorted out and for days, you know, you'd be going through your mail. And it was a bit pointless really, because you were going to see the writers of those letters in a couple of weeks.
- Q2:** Yes, even before a reply would get to them anyway, so.
- A:** Yes. And it took ages, because our surface mail went from here, or airmail say from here, South Africa to London; London to Montevideo; and then by sea from Montevideo – there was one ship a month, the Darwin, which went from Montevideo to Port Stanley, and it would carry supplies and mail and so on. So by the time you read a letter, it was six months old.
- Q1:** But did you send anything back? I mean, did you have postage stamps on Halley Bay, or a stamp or a first day cover, or ... ?
- A:** Yes, I distributed those. And what I had sent back with the guys who were coming back from the Royal Society expedition ... In Montevideo I bought leather things – their leather was terrific; a handbag and shoes for my wife, and so on. And I'd ordered a (?) fur for the return journey, but we didn't come back via Montevideo, so I saved money on that, because I never had the opportunity to go back there again.
- Q1:** Only to pay it back to the Government. Did you ever settle this bill?!
- A:** Yes, I had to settle it; they deducted it from *my salaristjek*.
- Q1:** Phew. So your salary, at this time, did they just pay it into a back account? Because you couldn't buy anything.
- A:** It was paid to my poor wife, who battled with it. Wives aren't so very good at balancing books, are they? Are they?!
- MA:** I'm busy reading! He takes digs at me all the time!
- Q1:** Your wife, at the time did she work?
- A:** Yes. That helped, because our salaries were ...
- Q1:** It doesn't sound like you had a big salary at all.
- A:** No! We were still in pound, shilling and pence ...
- Q1:** "*Kantienrekening*".
- A:** And they charged me for all kinds of things.
- Q1:** "*Seëlrekening*". They charged you for stamps?! Nowadays, you can just go to the cupboard, in the Government, and take out ... whatever.
- A:** And I was allowed so many days leave when I got back, calculated on the 15 months I'd been away and ... I said *wat van siekteverlof? Nee*.

- Q1:** *Oortyd ... ! Who was Minister of Transport then?*
- A:** I think it was Ben Schoeman.
- Q1:** Was it Ben Schoeman?
- A:** Yes. But before we left, Johan and I had to go to Pretoria – I don't know how we fitted all this in – and we had to have an interview with the Secretary for Transport, who was Danie Joubert, and who had been an Olympic athlete.
- Q1:** Oh, really?
- A:** Yes, he'd one very well. He was a world athletic champion, gold medal, or so. And I think he was bored; he didn't know what to say to us. And he had to do this; this was part of his job. And his closing comment was, "*Julle gaan seker al twee 'n baard groei, né! Ha-ha-ha!*" and "*Totsiens en voorspoed!*", you know! He was glad that that was over; I don't think it was ...
- Q1:** Yes, it doesn't seem like it was something the Civil Service was very interested in?
- A:** You see, the people like Triegaardt, Du Toit, Le Grange, Engelbrecht, had a feel for what was happening. But they were not ... They were more scientists than civil servants; they didn't know the manual off by heart, like those guys did – *jy mag dit doen en jy mag nie dit, daai doen nie* – you know, so it was less of a scientific than a bureaucratic organisation. And I mentioned this to Fuchs, and when he came out, they spoke to him, and he told them how his organisation functioned; and it functioned very well.
- Q1:** And what did they reply?
- A:** I don't know; I'd left by then.
- Q1:** Okay. Just a little more about Schumann, because he did write a couple of letters to the Norwegians for ... He wanted to establish a station on Bouvet Island. He was ... what? Was he more science-minded or bureaucratic-minded?
- A:** No, he was a scientist; he wasn't a bureaucrat. And at the time of the International Geophysical Year, he was still Director then, and Engelbrecht was the coordinator, the link with Switzerland, because the WMO (World Meteorological Organisation) was in Geneva. And I was working ... I had worked with Engelbrecht at Rand Airport just after the War – when I came back from the Air Force, he came back from civvy life; he was not a *Rooilussie*, but we got on very well.
- Q1:** You and Engelbrecht?
- A:** Yes, got on very well. So much so that one time, I was on a tour of the Cape – training lay observers and calibrating instruments and so on – and he employed me ... When I went to Head Office, I was in this upper air research thing, and he

employed me as his letter writer to Switzerland, and I learned the most flowery language ...

**MA:** Oh, you want to hear it!

**A:** ... and I used to write such things as “Be assured, dear Colleague, of my enduring esteem”!

**END OF TRANSCRIPTION**