

# KENNETH KOCKJOY

**Date:** 18 March 2010

**Place:** Germiston, Gauteng

**Interviewer (Q):** Lize-Marie van der Watt | Department of History | Stellenbosch University

**Respondent (A):** Kenneth Kockjoy | Radio Operator | Marion 3 and 4 | 1949-1950

**Q:** The first thing I want to know is, how did it come about that you went to Marion Island?

**A:** Well, I was working for the Department of Civil Aviation and the island fell under them; they supplied all the personnel and they asked for volunteers, and I thought it would be interesting, so I volunteered.

**Q:** So how much did you know about Marion Island before?

**A:** Not much at all. I just heard it was ... I'd read the book, 'No Pathway Here' and just for a little experience, I thought I'll ... try.

**Q:** What job did you do on the island?

**A:** I was the radio operator and the only link to the rest of the world. We never had telephones; we didn't have TV; no satellites; nothing.

**Q:** So if you didn't want to do your job that day, everyone was just off the planet?

**A:** That's right.

**Q:** Okay. So you went down, you said, on the Good Hope?

**A:** On the Good Hope, yes.

**Q:** How was that journey?

**A:** Very rough. We left Durban and we were two hours on the sea when the storm came up, and we made no headway the whole night. We actually did probably about one or two kilometres. They had to keep the nose of the ship into the storm, otherwise it would turn; it would capsize. And it was ... You know, it was my first experience on a ship and most of the crew and all the chaps of the ... the other seven blokes that were with me, they all got sick, and funny enough, it never affected me at all. Because the ship was rolling and tilted from side to side. It would tilt and pick up water this side and this side, and even the stanchions on the ship; they were bent from the rough sea. It was about five days, so ...

**Q:** So you weren't even close to the island yet and the ship was already rolling around?

**A:** It took us five days to get there.

**Q:** So when you arrived at Marion, what was your first impressions? Can you remember?

**A:** Well, all I remember, was, when I got on land, I thought to myself that the bloody island is moving! Because, you know, the movement of the ship ... And other than that, I didn't really form an opinion, 'cause I hadn't been there long enough.

**Q:** And the base? Had you seen the huts where you stayed?

**A:** Yes, we saw ... They were all put up before I got (there) by the previous relief chaps.

**Q:** So this was Marion 3, the third trip down, that you first ... ?

**A:** The second relief, yes.

**Q:** Oh, so you went on the second relief?

**A:** The first blokes went out, I mean they were the originals, then they had the first relief with Clarence Godfrey – he was the second operator – and then I was the second relief. That was in October 1949.

**Q:** So you met some of the chaps on the island then that were there the year before?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** How long did the ship stay close to the island?

**A:** Just to offload the supplies. I think it was about three days.

**Q:** Oh, so it didn't really stay there long and then it went back?

**A:** And then they went back.

**Q:** Did you meet any of the previous team?

**A:** Yes, because they were on the island when we got there, and we introduced ourselves. And when everything was sorted out, they went onboard ship and we took over.

**Q:** So nobody from them stayed behind?

**A:** Yes, one chap, what is his name...? Des Warnick, one of the carpenters, a PWD ...

**Q:** Des Warnick?

**A:** PWD had two carpenters there, and he was one of the carpenters. He stayed behind.

**Q:** Did they have any servants there?

**A:** No servants, no!

**Q:** Did you have any servants?

**A:** No. What happened ... The medical orderly was the cook; he did all the cooking. The chap in charge – we called him the "Governor" – he didn't do any cooking or... And then two of us used to do the breakfast and wash-up and the other two blokes, two carpenters, would do the lunchtime stuff and then two med chaps would do the evening, dinner stuff. That's how it was. And that's how we got through the day.

- Q:** Can you remember a guy with the surname Triegaardt?
- A:** Dan Triegaardt.
- Q:** He was a meteorologist?
- A:** Yes, that's right. He was the second ... He came with the second ... He came after I was there six months. He came along with the other ... Who was it? Malherbe ...
- Q:** The names I have here are from September 1948 until March 1949. They had a guy called Godfrey, Laurie, Triegaardt, Van den Bogaard, Strydom, and two Cape Coloured people.
- A:** The bloke in charge with us was Van den Bogaard. I think his name is Hennie.
- Q:** Hennie van den Bogaard?
- A:** And the one bloke that stayed behind was Dennis Warnick. He was one of the carpenters. The seven of us who went down was myself, Rudolf Skawran, Hennie Bogaard, Gerrie Mostert and Tiny Strydom – he was the cook and the medical orderly.
- Q:** He was from the army, the military?
- A:** From the army.
- Q:** Yes. Okay, we'll chat a little bit about that later. I have a list here with the names as well, and it's very nice to hear their names, because we only have their initials, and we can't imagine these people. Something like Tiny Strydom – that's such a descriptive name. I suppose ...
- A:** I'm surprised I'm remembering all these names. Some of the things elude me, so ... Anyway, I'll come on them.
- Q:** What kind of food did you take down?
- A:** Originally we took a lot of fresh food down with us. We took about 500 dozen eggs. We had a galvanised tank and put them all in there; that was outside and we had mixed water glass at the time, with water, and we put it in with the eggs and that kept them fresh. Also, in the olden days, they used ... to keep raw eggs fresh, they used to smear it with lard – pig fat – and it stops the air from getting in through the shell. Apparently the water glass did the same.
- Q:** Okay, that's interesting. I never knew that that was a way to keep them fresh. Did you take any animals down as well?
- A:** No. When I got there ... Now we come to the cats. When I got there, there were four cats: one female – it was a black cat; her name was Ma – three males. The one was Soldaat; the other one was Kaptein, and Junior was the other one. Now this female had three litters – I think it was three – in the time that we were there. Two litters caught cat flu; they were blind and we put them in a bag ... with a rock and tied it and threw it in

the sea. The third litter she had a couple of months before I left there after a year, and all the blokes took one as a pet. And when we left, they left the cats there.

**Q:** So they didn't take them back to South Africa?

**A:** No, no. This is why I say all those cats that you heard of is from that one female cat. Now we used to feed them. They were always around the house and walking around with us, and we used to feed them tinned fish and we used to have powdered milk – I think it was KLIM; I'm not sure – mixed with water, and we used to feed the cats every day.

**Q:** So they weren't wild at all?

**A:** Not at all. And the last litter she had before we left there, they let those cats all go wild. And they disappeared onto the island and started killing the birds and multiplying, so you can imagine from one cat... Because there were thousands of cats...

**Q:** And from a cat called Ma; that's so interesting!

**A:** Ma, yes. It was a black cat.

**Q:** How big was that litter? The litter that they left behind.

**A:** I think it was about eight, I'm not sure.

**Q:** And Junior? The cat, Junior – does that have anything to do with Junior's Kop?

**A:** No. Apparently this was one of the kittens, before I got there, this Junior. And maybe they named him after the koppie; I don't know ... Junior's Kop.

**Q:** Do you know what they named Junior's Kop after? Was it called Junior's Kop when you were there?

**A:** That was the name. I don't know if it was named that before. But this is the name that I got to know. It's a volcanic ... extinct.

**Q:** You don't know why it was called Junior's Kop?

**A:** No, I don't know.

**Q:** And other food? Did you take ...

**A:** Fresh food we took out – cabbage, potatoes and things. But of course that didn't last. And then everything else was tinned. Even ... You had a tin with a whole chicken in there.

**Q:** Oh, wow!

**A:** They're all cooked and all you do is open and warm it up. Even the bones were so soft, you could eat the bones.

**Q:** Oh no!

**A:** Brittle.

- Q:** Did you take live chickens or sheep?
- A:** No. We took nothing live with us. But what happened was, after six months, they sent out six sheep – I think it was six – with the relief that came to ... And we let them go there, on the island, and we didn't worry about them for a long time. And eventually we started looking for them; they'd disappeared.
- Q:** So could the sheep walk on the marshy ground?
- A:** There were parts where you could; where you didn't sink in. You had to... Normally, it you went walking, two of you had to go together, because you get a place that looks like a ... you know, it looks nice, and if you tramp, you can sink in so deep in this. And I think these sheep all disappeared, because three of the blokes walked around the island looking for these sheep, but they couldn't find them. They just disappeared. That's why we had no fresh meat! Apart from the sea elephants that we slaughtered there.
- Q:** Did you kill the sea elephant, or was it dead?
- A:** No, no. I didn't kill it. I think Hennie van den Bogaard – he did all the skinning and the ...
- Q:** So he shot the sea elephant and ... ?
- A:** But the meat ... You know, the meat was this colour almost ...
- Q:** Oh, blacky...
- A:** Blubbers; thick blubber, to keep them warm. But I could smell the bloody ... When I came back from the radio shack that day, they were busy cooking it... in the Governor's House – we called it the Governor's House, where we stayed; 'cause each one had his own room – I could smell this thing coming down there. And I thought bugger this ...
- Q:** I'm not going to eat that!
- A:** I'm not going to eat this stuff!
- Q:** Did you ever eat some of the birds or the bird eggs on the island?
- A:** We ate penguin eggs and even that skua gull. The skua gull had quite a size egg, and the penguin eggs that we had, it's got sort of a pinkish, faint pinkish colour, you know, when you take it out the shell.
- Q:** Really? That's interesting.
- A:** But it's all got a fishy taste, because these things lived on fish ...
- Q:** Oh, so it wasn't very nice.
- A:** And of course the skua gulls ... No, not the skua, the...p etrel, that's what we ate. It looked a lot like a fowl egg; we scrambled and even that had a fishy taste. Now they used to eat all the dead things there, so ...
- Q:** So it wasn't your favourite meal ...

- A:** No.
- Q:** But the birds themselves? Did you ever try to shoot a skua or ... ?
- A:** No, no.
- Q:** So you didn't do any hunting?
- A:** No. They used to attack us some times. You know, sort of dive bomb, you had to duck. And then they had these other birds, called night birds. They lived in burrows in the ground and they used to come out at night only, and I think the cats cleaned a lot of those out. Because you know, the light used to affect them. At night, we had the lights on in the Governor's House and you'd hear this thud against the ... And the next morning, you'd wake up and there's a couple of them lying dead. 'Cause the light attracted them and they couldn't ... sort of blinded them.
- Q:** They didn't know there's an obstruction and then ... ?
- A:** They were called night birds.
- Q:** How did you communicate with the outside world? Just tell that.
- A:** By Morse code and by radio. You'd tune in the radio and we had two diesel machines there that gave us the power. And I used to do the signal for all these ...
- Q:** So you spoke a lot with Heard Island?
- A:** We spoke to them every day; well, also by Morse code. They also had ... But they had three operators there. I think it was a bigger contingent there than we had. We were only eight.
- Q:** And what did you talk about when you spoke to them, apart from the weather? Did you sometimes chat socially as well?
- A:** More or less. You know, we had to keep schedules. You have so many hours, you know. And then we just, more or less, passed the weather information. And the weather information is all – you'll probably get that from the met – it's all groups of five figures, and they interpret it. I don't know how they did it, but they used to interpret it.
- Q:** But you got to know the radio operators on Heard Island? Did you know their names?
- A:** I knew their names. They alternated – the one day the one bloke; the next day the other chap. And the one bloke – I think I've got the names here somewhere of these three blokes ... They wrote me, just before I left, a ship came out to bring supplies out to them, and this one bloke posted a letter to me, which I received here in South Africa; it's got my address. I got ...
- Q:** And how did the chess game work?

- A:** We won most of the games. They started playing from the time they took the island over; each of the Governors – it was usually the Governor who played against them. And we did well, especially Dan Triegaardt; he was won all his matches!
- Q:** So what was a day in the life of a radio operator like in 1949?
- A:** Well apart from my work – as I say, we had schedules; certain times we had to call up South Africa, pass the data they wanted to know and the weather reports – and then, if I had nothing to do, we all used to help the carpenters making those pathways and things like that.
- Q:** Oh, so you first constructed the pathways?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** Were there pathways when you got there?
- A:** Some of them were there, but we made a lot of extra ones. Some of those pictures there, where you see us knocking down those ... The ground is so soggy there. You see this quarter round at the bottom, here – you could take one of those and push it down to about six feet into the ground without any trouble. But then we built pathways on these four by two pylons. We used to knock them down with another pylon until it reached rock bottom, and they'd saw it off, put the crossbeams on, and you'd put all the slats on. So we used to help them build pathways; that was their job.
- Q:** Did you ever explore a bit of the island?
- A:** No, not me. I didn't have time to do that. I was stuck with schedules; I had to keep my schedules every day.
- Q:** And some of your other team members? Did they go inland, for instance?
- A:** Well, they used to walk around to ... You now, also us, like that pot...; it was at Try- ... What's it ... ?
- Q:** Trypot Beach.
- A:** Trypot Beach. That's where the pot was.
- Q:** And that little rowing boat that we also saw; where was that?
- A:** That was from the previous ... I don't know what they used that for.
- Q:** But where did you find it?
- A:** It was on the island, there where you saw it. It was just lying there.
- Q:** At Ship's Cove?
- A:** We never used it.
- Q:** Okay. But was it close to base?

**A:** Yes. I forget where it actually was, but it was close to the base.

**Q:** Did some of your team members attempt to walk around the island?

**A:** Yes, two of the blokes walked around. As I said, they were looking for the sheep.

**Q:** Who were they?

**A:** It was Dan Triegaardt and Malherbe.

**Q:** H.L. Malherbe?

**A:** Yes, Malherbe.

**Q:** What was his name? Hennie?

**A:** No, not Hennie. He worked with me after we came back. He was stationed at Jan Smuts, at the airport here. 'Cause that's where I was stationed when I came back after ... at least Germiston Rand Airport, and when they built Jan Smuts, we all moved over here.

**Q:** Maybe his name was Henk ... or Hendrik?

**A:** No, we called him ... His name was H.R.?

**Q:** H.L.

**A:** Laurie.

**Q:** Laurie Malherbe?

**A:** Laurie Malherbe.

**Q:** That's a funny name ...

**A:** I don't know if it's spelled Lawrie or Lorrie; I don't know. Lorrie Malherbe.

**Q:** Was there a guy called Halliday?

**A:** Halliday ... He was the second cook that we had there. I forget his name ... As a matter of fact, the previous bloke that we had was Tiny Strydom, and he'd been there before.

**Q:** Yes, on the first team.

**A:** Yes. Now as I said, they used to write letters to their girlfriends. And he said to me one day, Tiny Strydom, he said man, there's a girl he wants to write to in Pretoria, who's also in the army; can I help him with the letter? So of course, I helped him, and I duly sent it off. He gave me the address and everything. I sent it off, and every day he used to worry me. He never got a reply. Every day he used to worry me – he used to call me Kockey, 'cause of my surname, or Ken; whatever – he'd worry me ... Haven't you heard ...? Has she written back? And I said no, man; nothing yet. And this was going on practically every day. I thought well, I'll just play a trick on him. So I wrote a letter as from her.

**Q:** Ah, he must have been very happy!

- A:** I made it all hunky-dory, nice and sweet, and I gave it to him! He was so happy about it, he actually wrote another letter. And you know, he was so cross ... After a while – ‘cause it stopped then, you see – I told him; “oh, you bloody ... “
- Q:** I can imagine! Can you remember what his real name was? I suppose “Tiny” was a ...
- A:** No, we only knew him as Tiny.
- Q:** Tiny, Tiny Strydom. Did he ever speak about his first experiences on the island?
- A:** Yes, he told us all about that. You know, what to expect, because he went out with us. And he made us familiar with what’s expected of us and what is going on there.
- Q:** Did he mention the Tristan islanders? Or didn’t he meet them?
- A:** No, Tristan was another island all together.
- Q:** Yes, I know, but there were some ... The first expedition took some Tristan islanders along.
- A:** No ... As a matter of fact, John Bennet – the first operator on Marion – he was on Tristan da Cunha as well. He spent a year there.
- Q:** And Dan Trigaardt? Was he also there previously?
- A:** No, not as far as I know. I came back with Dan Triegaardt on the Transvaal, and the Captain of the ship wanted him to forecast the weather on the ship. The only way he could do it ... There’s a station that used to broadcast at a certain time every day, in Morse code, the weather – not from the island – and then the Captain told his radio operators onboard ship that they must copy this every day at a certain time. I had to give them the frequency and the time and the call sign and this. And I duly gave them this and I sat there, watching them. These blokes copied it, but there were two of them at it; this one would leave, forget this; you know, he’d miss this, and that one would miss this. And they handed it to Dan Triegaardt and he said to the Captain, no man, I can’t make head or tail of this; have I your permission for my operator to take this every day? So I had to go sit there onboard ship and tune in, back at work, and give it to Dan; then he’d forecast the weather.
- Q:** Was the journey back a bit better than the journey to the island?
- A:** Yes, much better. And we landed at Cape Town and then we stayed at sea for that night. We made land in the afternoon; we stayed at sea that night and then the next morning, there was a South-Easter blowing, and they tried to berth the ship and as they got near, the wind would push it away again. It took hours for them to berth it.
- Q:** What did you do for relaxation on the island?
- A:** Well, we had a quarter-size snooker table; we used to play snooker, or billiards. And we had the radio; we used to tune into South Africa. And as a matter of fact, it was the time

that Willie Toweel, the boxer, won the world title, and we listened in to that fight that night.

**Q:** And you were there, far away ... Can you remember what the time difference was between South Africa and Marion?

**A:** It would be more or less the ... Look, it's more or less in line with the Greenwich Mean Time and South Africa is also to the right of Greenwich. And we're actually two hours ahead of England; Cape Town I think is one hour. I'm not sure.

**Q:** I think so.

**A:** But I think we're more or less in line with the ... Because the times I had to work were more or less the times ...

**Q:** That they worked. Before you went, did you get any instructions from the Government?

**A:** No. We had to go through a test ... I don't know ... a psychology test or what, to find out if you were ...

**Q:** Mentally sane.

**A:** Yes. Other than that, no; nothing.

**Q:** And did you visit Prince Edward Island?

**A:** No, I didn't visit. The ship ... The Natal ... After six months, the Natal came out – you saw that sign, HMS Natal, or SAS – they came out with Dan Triegaardt and the other crew, and they went and performed a ceremony of course on the island, and then they came back. And then they left for South Africa again.

**Q:** Did you ever have any fights on the island with one another?

**A:** No. The one bloke, Van der Walt – I think his name was Ben van der Walt – he was a bit difficult. He was the only married bloke, and he had problems ...

**Q:** Oh, I see.

**A:** What happened was he wrote a letter and then he wrote another letter. And she answered the second letter and not the first letter, and when I gave it to him, he got the hell in with me. He said where's the other letter? This is ... And I tried to explain to him, and eventually we had to get the Governor to sort this lot out. And he didn't like me, because this one time ... He blamed me for it. It wasn't me. But there was no fights.

**Q:** Did some of the other people have girlfriends back in South Africa? Sweethearts.

**A:** Yes. Gerrie Mostert, he had a girlfriend. Hennie van den Bogaard, he had a girlfriend. Dan Triegaardt had a girlfriend. I actually met her, long after that, when I got ... Back in South Africa, I got a certificate from the Department of Transport, which we fell under, for 30 years' service, and that one there I got for 40 years' service from the Prime Minister.

- Q:** Wow. Did you meet him?
- A:** No, I didn't meet him. It was given to us by the Department of ... the Minister of Transport, which was ... What was his name? I forget his name now. Very nice bloke. I actually got a picture of him, pictures here of where he's handing it over to me. He was a farmer here somewhere other.
- Q:** I'll go and look that up. I should know it – I mean it's 1984, right?
- A:** 1984. And then I went on pension in 1985, so I've been on pension now for 25 years. They're probably hoping I'll die, so they can save money!
- Q:** You met your wife after you'd been to the island?
- A:** Yes, I met my wife after I came back from Marion Island. I met her in 1952, I think it was, and we got married in 1954. She was married before; she's divorced. She had three children, two boys and a girl. I was 29 when I got married and I never had ... I've got no children of my own. We brought them up. They're all around here. One is in Natal; the rest of them are all here.
- Q:** So you get to see them regularly?
- A:** Yes, they come and see me now and again, especially the grandchildren. I've got grandchildren; actually now I'm the last of my family. My mother and father died some time ago; my younger sister – she's in Bloemfontein – she died 7 years ago and my eldest sister, she was 4 years older than me, she was 88. She died last year in June and I went to the funeral in King William's Town.
- Q:** Ah, so she stayed in the Eastern Cape?
- A:** I'm on my own ...
- Q:** Did any of you or your team members have some special interest in some of the birds or seals, that you did some research ... ?
- A:** No, we didn't do anything like that. We just watched the behaviour of these things, and other than that we didn't really ... Now, of course, you've got scientific research there. They do all sorts of things there. But we didn't; it was just pure and simple a weather station. And that's it.
- Q:** And did you ever try and make pets of the penguins, or maybe a skua chick or something?
- A:** No. Actually, when it snowed a lot, we made our own – we used the wood from the carpenters – we made a sort of a sled and we'd sit on this thing and slide down the slopes.
- Q:** That must have been fun! Had you experienced snow before you went to Marion Island?
- A:** No, not at all, but that the first time I saw snow there.

- Q:** Okay. But you played in the snow?
- A:** Yes, we got more wet than anything else.
- Q:** What did you do to relax on the island? Did you have films ... ?
- A:** Well, there were books we could read, and we had gramophone records we used to play on the bloody ... So we amused ourselves, and just sit and talk; chat to each other.
- Q:** And would you sometimes listen to the radio as well?
- A:** And the radio of course.
- Q:** Which radio was that?
- A:** I think ... Wasn't that Mozambique Radio ...
- Q:** LM ... Lorenço Marques.
- A:** Yes, Lorenço Marques. That was quite a good programme they used to have there. And then we'd have stories on the ... Those days, you know, those dramas and things were on ...
- Q:** Springbok Radio.
- A:** Springbok Radio.
- Q:** Was it mostly Afrikaans blokes that went with, or English people?
- A:** Well, let's see now ... Hennie van den Bogaardt was a Hollander; Des Braunschweig is English-speaking; he's also German. Skawran was a German; he also spoke English; I spoke English; Ben van der Walt, he spoke Afrikaans; Dennis Warnick spoke English and Afrikaans. Tiny Strydom spoke English and Afrikaans. So it was just a mixture.
- Q:** So you mostly spoke English with one another, I suppose, when you spoke socially?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** How often could you talk to folks back home, back in South Africa?
- A:** To my folks?
- Q:** Yes.
- A:** My mother was always the worrying type, and as a matter of fact, my mother had a stroke while I was on the island.
- Q:** Oh. Cooking, on the island ...
- A:** I didn't do any cooking.
- Q:** Tiny did all the cooking?
- A:** Tiny did the cooking, and the other cook was...
- Q:** Who was that?

- A:** The other cook was ... What was his name? Did you mention there ... ?
- Q:** Uh ... Was that third or fourth? Halliday ...
- A:** Halliday; he was the cook.
- Q:** What was his name, Halliday?
- A:** I can't remember his name.
- Q:** And Braunschweig, what was his name?
- A:** Des; Desmond. Des, we called him Des.
- Q:** And I see here's also a name "B. Schaaf" ...
- A:** Oh, wait a minute ... That was the bloke with the second relief; he was a PWD carpenter as well. Bernie Schaaf. As a matter of fact, he nearly killed us.
- Q:** Wow! How?
- A:** You know, on the Gunner's Point, that Point that you had there, you've got the walk, which you lower ... From the top, you could lower this walk. Now you've got two cranes there – we call it the gib. Now we wanted to take ... Dan Triegaardt wanted to take photos of the island as seen from the sea. Now we had a rowing boat there, on which we had an outboard motor, which you could connect on there. So what happened was I was going to go out with him and the other one was Mostert, not Mostert, Laurie Malherbe. So they hook the boat on to the ... the boat was kept on Gunner's Point; they hooked it on with a hook, with the ropes, and then they lower this boat, they wind it down, but two blokes had to get into the boat – one in the front, one in the back – to stop it from *swaaiing* and hitting the side. And you've got an ore in your hand and you just keep it straight.
- Q:** Away from the ...
- A:** So then, Bernie Schaaf, I don't know what he did, but he hit me – there's a fork that goes through two holes, like this – and he hit this thing out, and my whole bloody back hit the gib arm; the cord snapped and Lorrie and myself fell into the sea with the boat. And that water is cold. Now we've got those inner flying suits, those flying boots with the wool in here; you know, you can't swim with that lot. They managed to get both of us to the side, on this walk, 'cause it was down, and they took us by stretcher to our rooms; put us in the room, piled blankets on us. We had these paraffin heaters and they gave me a stiff tot of bloody brandy. You know, you're shivering; your teeth chattering; you know, the hypothermia; we could've died. They say five minutes in that water, you go.
- Q:** You're dead. Oh my word! Did he say sorry afterwards?
- A:** He was so thunderstruck about this lot; dumbstruck. *Jirre*, he felt sorry for himself.

- Q:** Shame. So the Department sent down some brandy and wine ...
- A:** No, we had all that with us. One happened was, at the – this is another thing about this Van der Walt bloke. Now Hennie van den Bogaardt said, look, we've got all this stuff – we had wine, we had beer, we had whiskey, brandy, cane, ginger; whatever you wanted to drink. So Hennie asked us, now what do you actually drink, so most of the blokes said, I drink beer and brandy, and some whiskey. So what happened was, he dealt this stuff out – so many bottles of beer, a bottle of brandy, a bottle of whiskey, a bottle of cane, or whatever, to each one. So what happened was, this Van der Walt, he was drinking the stuff as though ... You know, it was supposed to be just every now, every day, a tot or two. They were drinking the stuff as though it was going out of fashion.
- Q:** So they finished it?
- A:** So it was finished and then they'd come look for more here by us, you see. So Hennie said, no. So then he rationed it down to two tots a day for everybody. So that was our drink. Cigarettes were all free.
- Q:** Did all of you smoke?
- A:** Well yes, I think we all did smoke, yes.
- Q:** It sounds like you gelled quite well as a team.
- A:** Oh yes. As a team, there were no problems, excepting as I said this one episode with these blokes boozing, and then Van der Walt with his bloody nonsense with his wife. But I think what set him off – I suppose, being married, he's missing his wife and all that.
- Q:** Did you have a Midwinter festival?
- A:** Well, to me it was bloody winter all the time. The seasons changed so quickly. One minute it would rain, then it would be sleet, then it would be snow, then the sun would shine. In winter, you had ... at four o' clock, half past three, it was dark.
- Q:** Oh, and then you couldn't go out?
- A:** And early in the morning, it was light again, you see.
- Q:** Did you go out after dark.
- A:** No. There's nowhere to go in any case.
- Q:** So you didn't have like a special thing in the middle of July to ... ?
- A:** No.
- Q:** Okay. Now would you say that it was one of the more interesting experiences of your life?
- A:** Oh yes, it was quite an experience.
- Q:** Did it change you?

- A:** No, not in that sense, no. As a matter of fact, I don't know when I changed, but as a youngster, a small boy, I was very shy, oh hell. And if anybody teased me, I would cry; things like that. But I think that when I went to the Air Force, I changed from then on. And now, you know, even at work too, I didn't mince my words. I used to, you know, if I wanted to say a thing, I said it. If I was right, of course; if I was wrong, I'd apologise the next day.
- Q:** That's a good thing to do. If possible, can you describe Marion Island?
- A:** Oh. I've even forgotten the size of it. It's more or less ... I wouldn't say it's round; sort of oblong, more or less like an egg shape, oval. And Prince Edward I wouldn't know. All I saw, I was on that day, from the sea really you can't get the full picture. And they're about I think 7 miles apart. And then another experience we had is, one day we woke up, and there was this big iceberg flowing between the two islands, slowly past us between the two islands.
- Q:** Did you tell that to the people at Heard? Can you remember?
- A:** Yes, I think I did.
- Q:** And the terrain? What was the terrain like?
- A:** Just like here. They say you never knew when ... the seasons changed so much during the day: one minute, the wind would be blowing; then you've got the sleet, you know, the small little ice particles; then you'd have snow and the sun would shine. It changed probably about two or three times during the day.
- Q:** And the terrain itself?
- A:** It was all that marshy stuff, as you see on those pictures.
- Q:** Did you climb Junior's Kop?
- A:** I didn't go out there, no.
- Q:** Back to the iceberg ... It just made me think ... Did you see any killer whales?
- A:** No. Yes, killer whales we saw. They often used to come around the island, follow the shoreline. And they used to catch these seals and penguins, you see. That's what they fed on. They were these things with white patches. As a matter of fact, we didn't know what they were. We sent a signal to South Africa to find out what these things were. We described it, and they said they're killer whales.
- Q:** Okay; yes, because obviously you hadn't seen them in South Africa before. When you got back to South Africa, did you miss anything about Marion?
- A:** No, not really. You know, people asked me all sorts of things. The press got a hold of me and they even asked me, I think one of ... I still have a write-up on some of the articles they wrote about the stuff that we took out for Christmas, you know, all the stuff we

had for Christmas. But other than that ... As a matter of fact, about two years after that, they had to send another crowd out, and a chap from Cape Town, the radio operator from Cape Town, surname Tait, he volunteered to go, but then he had a medical, and they saw a spot on this lungs, or something – something wrong with him – so they wouldn't let him go. So then they asked for volunteers again, and I volunteered again. And I was due to go, and then they found out that there was nothing wrong with him, so they asked me if I'd step down. This bloke hasn't been there yet, so I stepped down. And I'm not too worried about it.

**Q:** Would you have liked to go again?

**A:** I would have gone again, yes. I would've probably stayed another year then.

**Q:** So it was a good experience, all in all?

**A:** Oh yes; well something you'd never ... Not everybody gets the opportunity of seeing these places and being there. It's primitive; there are no cars, hooters, no nothing. All you hear is the sound of the birds, the sea elephants grunting and groaning, and other than that nothing. It's quiet.

**Q:** Can you remember ... Next to base, there was a lake called Gentoo Lake?

**A:** Yes. I think it's on a picture there; one of my ...

**Q:** Were there penguins there?

**A:** Yes, there were always penguins around the water. There were four kinds of penguins: the King Penguin, the Gentoo, the Rockhopper and the Macaroni.

**Q:** Did you see them all?

**A:** I saw them all, yes. Oh yes.

**Q:** So that lake ... down ... You get Gunner's Point and then you get the beach, down at Gunner's Point ...

**A:** Yes, and just down from the Governor's House, there was the lake there.

**Q:** So there were Gentoos there, at the time?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** **Ok.** Did you take some of their eggs?

**A:** No, I think the only ones we got from is the King Penguin. And you know, the King Penguin broods the egg in a pouch on its feet; they walk around with these things like that.

**Q:** Okay. On this photo, who is this guy?

**A:** This is Des Braunschweig. He was the radio technician.

**Q:** Oh.

- A:** Actually, I got one of the teeth, but I haven't got it now. I don't what happened. He took the teeth out and he gave me one.
- Q:** Do you remember where this was?
- A:** I think it was round about Trypot Beach somewhere; yes, I think it was Trypot Beach. That's the only one we saw there; only that one.
- Q:** Only that leopard seal? Okay.
- A:** They're not from ... They're not indigenous to the island. They ... You know, it was probably washed ashore there.
- Q:** So it was already dead when you got to it?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** Okay. And then you pulled the teeth, because ... were they very sharp?
- A:** Pardon?
- Q:** Why did you pull the teeth? You said you had the tooth.
- A:** Oh, just as a souvenir.
- Q:** You said that you saw that pot and ... Did you see any other shipwrecked stuff?
- A:** No.
- Q:** Any of the other people?
- A:** No.
- Q:** And you mentioned that Dan Triegaardt went around the island. Who was with him?
- A:** Laurie Malherbe.
- Q:** Did they also go inland, to the interior?
- A:** I don't know which route they took, but they did walk around.
- Q:** Did any of your team walk into the interior?
- A:** No. As a matter of fact, while they're walking around there, to play a trick on me, the rest of the blokes ... You know, lunchtime, after we've eaten, I used to have a bit of a rest in a chair in the lounge in the Governor's House; I always had a bit of sleep there before I went back to work. And these blokes ... I don't know how they got a hold of these things, these smoke bombs, a canister, and these chaps saw me sleeping there. Now you can't open the windows, and I was sleeping there, and the next minute I smelled something. These blokes opened one of these smoke bombs, and they opened it in the lounge.
- Q:** Oh no!

- A:** And when I opened my eyes, all I saw was smoke. I couldn't see the walls; I couldn't see nothing. And I crawled – I knew where I was sitting, so I crawled out of the door and I got out. You know, my chest burned for weeks and weeks after that. You know, this bloody smoke. They could've killed me there too, playing a bloody joke!
- Q:** Yes! When you were relieved, on the fourth relief team, no, on the fifth relief team ... where are we now?
- A:** The fifth one, yes ...
- Q:** I wanted to ask about a guy called Rook; his surname was Rook ...
- A:** Jimmy Rook.
- Q:** Jimmy Rook.
- A:** Yes, he was a technician.
- Q:** Where did you ... Did you meet him?
- A:** I knew him from Germiston, here, from Rand Airport. He used to be at Rand Airport.
- Q:** Because there's a bay called Rook's Bay on Marion ...
- A:** No, it's nothing to do with Jimmy Rook.
- Q:** What does it have to do with then?
- A:** I don't know. But he was also on the island. And as I say, before they built Jan Smuts, it used to be Rand Airport, and Palmietfontein was the other airport. You know, we've got Lanseria now; that used to be the standby airport before they moved to Jan Smuts Jimmy Rook used to be at Germiston with me then.
- Q:** So, he was also on the island for a year. But do you know Rook's Bay on the island?
- A:** I've heard of it. I've never been there. Maybe it was named after one of the ... You know, what they called a ... You know, a lot of penguins together, they called it a rookery, and I think because of the penguins there, they called it a rook, Rook's Bay, because it was probably all ...
- Q:** Oh ... Did some of the people on your team go to Rook's Bay?
- A:** I don't know.
- Q:** Maybe when Dan Triegaardt and them went round, maybe ...
- A:** Are any of these other blokes still around?
- Q:** I don't know. I wanted to ask you that!
- A:** I know Des Braunschweig is dead; Mostert is dead.
- Q:** Van der Walt?

- A:** I don't know. He was older than us; he was the eldest one on the island. I don't know about him. He could be dead as well.
- Q:** Warnick?
- A:** I don't know either. They came from Pretoria, him and Van der Walt.
- Q:** And Skawran?
- A:** Skawran, also from Pretoria; I don't know.
- Q:** And Van den Bogaardt also not?
- A:** Van den Bogaardt ... He was also much older than us.
- Q:** Then he's probably already also passed on.
- A:** Why I think most of them are dead now, because I don't believe myself ... You know, I've kept so healthy, at my age. Now I don't know how healthy these other guys were, so I'm only surmising that ... I don't know. Maybe I've been put on this earth for some reason or the other.
- Q:** But when you were there, you were 24.
- A:** 24, yes.
- Q:** And when were you born?
- A:** Where was I born?
- Q:** When and where?
- A:** 16 September 1925.
- Q:** Wow! And where? In King William's Town?
- A:** King William's Town.
- Q:** And you also fought in the Second World War, which I think is impressive. What was the first thing you noticed when you got back to South Africa? Can you remember?
- A:** The heat. Oh, the heat! Hell, it was hot. You know, wearing long pants in King William's Town ... It was in bloody summer, too – we came back in October; it was almost summer. My legs used to perspire. I used to more or less walk around without a shirt at home at my mother's place.
- Q:** I have here the names of the team you stayed on with, the fourth team. Okay, Van den Bogaardt is Hennie; you don't know what his second and third names were, because H.M.E. ...
- A:** No.
- Q:** He has a river called after him. Did he name the river? There is a river called Van den Boogaard on the island.

- A:** No, some of the places were named after the chaps and it could be that one of the rivers is named after him.
- Q:** And Des Braunschweig ... Mostert – Gerrie?
- A:** No, nothing... as far as I know.
- Q:** What was Mostert's name?
- A:** Mossie; we used to call him Mossie.
- Q:** Mossie Mostert, okay ... And Skawran, the other German guy?
- A:** He's Rudolph.
- Q:** Tiny Strydom ... Van der Walt?
- A:** Van der Walt ... We just called him Van.
- Q:** Van van der Walt ...
- A:** We used to make Laurie Malherbe... You can see on all the pictures there, you know, we all grew beards. I shaved my beard off when I got home. I grew it ... The last time I shaved was when we left here; I never shaved again until I got home to my mother's place to show them. My beard was down to here.
- Q:** Wow! Down to you waste; that's impressive!
- A:** You know, when I shaved it off and I looked at myself in the mirror, I started laughing. You look so funny, you know! You're not used to seeing ... It looks like you've got no chin! And as a matter of fact, Tiny Strydom too. He shaved his off just before he left. I couldn't stop laughing at this bloke, because I was used to his beard. And then Malherbe, we used to tease him, because he didn't have much of a beard.
- Q:** Oh shame.
- A:** And also old Mostert.
- Q:** And Warnick?
- A:** He had a beard like mine too.
- Q:** What was his name?
- A:** Who?
- Q:** Warnick.
- A:** Warnick ... Des.
- Q:** Was he Des?
- A:** Desmond. Also Desmond.
- Q:** Desmond Warnick and also Des Braunschweig?

- A:** Yes.
- Q:** So there were two Desmonds?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** Is it Warnick, Warwick or Hormick?
- A:** I think it's Warnick.
- Q:** Warnick, okay. That makes sense. And Halliday ... Okay, what made you decide to stay another six months?
- A:** Well, I really couldn't tell you. Maybe because I like it; I don't know.
- Q:** And then, when the Natal came, did it bring newsletters; did it bring letters to you when it brought the fourth relief team?
- A:** They brought the sheep and the fresh supplies.
- Q:** Did they also bring letters from home?
- A:** Yes, there were letters onboard ship. As a matter of fact, my mother mentioned ... In one of the newspapers, when I got back home ... I wrote a long letter – the longest letter I ever wrote – told her about everything, the food we had and I sent that back with the Natal and she got it and they posted it to her. And the press got a hold of it before I even got home.
- Q:** Oh?!
- A:** Yes, they published this.
- Q:** So the press was quite impressed with you guys!
- A:** Oh, you know, King William's Town is not such a big town, and our surname was well known in King William's Town because of my great-great-grandfather – he died at sea when he came over here – my grandfather and his family settled there in the district of King William's Town. And the surname is well known there, and when I got back, everybody wanted to speak to me. The manager of the bioscope ... Dick Clemens; I knew him, because my sister was an usherette at the bioscope long before that, you see. So he called me in the one day; he said to me, you're on leave now – the bioscope yours. Anytime you want to come to the bioscope, it's free of charge! I almost had the freedom of the bloody town; I don't know.
- Q:** Speaking of the bioscope – did any of you take a film when you were down there?
- A:** The only one who took films is Dan, Daniel Triegaardt.
- Q:** Dan Triegaardt? I wonder where that would be ... Did he have children?
- A:** He wasn't married when ... I met Dan again, as I said, when they had a do here at Jan Smuts, for all those who'd had 30 years' service. It was a big palava, and I saw Dan there

and he introduced me to his girlfriend. He wasn't married then yet. So whether he ... I don't know if he's still alive or what.

**Q:** . But he also spent a lot of his life in civil service, like yourself.

**A:** Yes; very nice chap, Dan Triegaardt. I got to know him very well.

**Q:** We spoke about the historical sites that you saw, or some things like the sealers' pots and so on ...

**A:** Yes, well bits. I didn't walk around much, because I couldn't; I had to keep schedules.

**Q:** Did the other people walk around a lot?

**A:** Even they. The only who really ... I used to walk around ... Two of us would go to Trypot Beach, or walk a bit this way, to one of the other spots, but not far from our main building.

**Q:** Afterwards, when you came back, did you keep contact with the team members?

**A:** Yes, Des Braunschweig – we used to exchange Christmas cards with him at Christmas; he's dead now. Not the others. Once, a few of us met in a pub in Pretoria; we had a couple of drinks together.

**Q:** But the radio operator, did you write back to him?

**A:** Which one?

**Q:** The one from Australia.

**A:** Yes, I wrote to him. What happened was – I think I mentioned it to the SABC – the one day I got a message from Heard Island. Their doctor, he was a Yugoslav, he developed appendicitis, and he was going to operate on himself, so they said to me, they'd lost contact with Australia. You know, you get these sunspots and you can't ... there's a break in communication. So they sent me a ... They spoke to me that one day; we're passing our weather data. They said, look, we've lost contact with Australia; can you find out if there's any shipping in the area around by Heard Island, because this doctor was going to operate on himself, but he got cold feet and he didn't want to ...

**Q:** To do it.

**A:** And one of the scientists onboard, he had plenty of experience cutting open sea elephants, he wouldn't let him do it, you see. So they wanted a ship to take, to see if they could take him off. So I contacted Cape Town and sent them the message of what the problem was there and to find out if there was any shipping in that area. Eventually, they got the ... an Australian ship came out and took him off the island.

**Q:** So you saved a life there?

- A:** You know, he wrote quite a letter. I got the letter when I got back to South Africa. Because he sent that letter back; the ship that took the bloke off. He wrote a letter quickly and posted it and I got it when I got home.
- Q:** Do you know it the relief teams before and after you also spoke to Heard Island regularly?
- A:** Yes, yes, they kept contact, but I don't know for how long. I know that the team after me definitely contact, but for how long after that, I don't know. As a matter of fact, here at Jan Smuts ... What happened was, we still used to work ... They stopped work in Cape Town, and we, at Jan Smuts, had one of our radios connected with Marion Island, and they used to send all their stuff to us as Jan Smuts, because we used to punch it out. You got your earphones on; you hear the Morse code and you punch it out on a teleprinter, and it comes out on a tape, and you also get a copy on paper. And that we used to tear off, address it, and we used to send it then to the various people. And they used to send letters to us, not Cape Town, and we used to send it to Marion Island. So that's the only contact they had with Marion Island after that. And then of course it stopped, because now they could talk to each other on the phone; they've got their satellites and TV and every bloody thing.
- Q:** You can just pick up the phone and ... As a radio operator, you got to read what people wrote home, right? You got to read what they spoke about to ...
- A:** They'd write it down in English; you know, tell them all what they wanted to say – his girlfriend and all the endearments and what have you – and then I'd have the thing in front of me, and then I interpreted it as I'm looking at it, into Morse code. It goes straight to the receiving end in Cape Town, or to Jan Smuts after that, and they'd copy it down, write it down, and then they'd post it, because the address and everything is on there, and then they'd post it to the various people.
- Q:** What did people talk about in these little letters? Can you remember?
- A:** Well, they just talked about their life, you know, and what they did, and what have you, and what the weather was like, and what we did today, or what they're going to do tomorrow, or whatever the ... But as I say, I knew all the blokes' business, so I played a trick on this one bloke.
- Q:** Was the base warm? The huts where you stayed – Governor's House – was it warm?
- A:** Well, the buildings were all wooden buildings. It was double and you had this stuff in between. The windows were also double; you couldn't open the windows. And we had these – I don't know if you've seen them; they used to use them in the olden days – these paraffin stoves; it's a round thing like this. You fill it with paraffin and you've got a wick, put a ... light a match and you put it on and you could turn it up, and these things gave you quite a nice heat. I think you still get some of them; you can still buy them. And we used that for heaters.

**Q:** And clothes; what kind of clothes did the Government give you?

**A:** They supplied all our ... It was an inner flying suit, with a kapok lining inside, between the layers, and these flying boots that we used to use during the war, you know, in the Air Force; I was in the Air Force. This flying boot – it used to up here – with the sheepskin lining and then the leather outside. And then we used to have waterboots. What do you call them? Gumboots.

**Q:** Gumboots, Wellingtons?

**A:** Wellingtons. When you walk off the pathways, to walk in this mush and what have you, you put those on.

**Q:** How much did your time in the Air Force prepare you for Marion?

**A:** Well, all it was ... I learned ... I joined up; I was going to be a pilot. Then they found out my eyes was...[?], and now they had trouble landing an aircraft. So they said, anything else; so I changed to be a radio operator and an air gunner. Now we did our radio – that's where I learned to do Morse – at Bloemfontein 64 Air School. We had a tempe... [?], so we did a 10-month ... I think it took us 10 months to learn the Morse code, to receive and to send. We learned navigation as well. And then you had to pass here with 125 symbols a minute, so that's 25 counting a ... A word they'd count as four letters, so it counts as 25 words a minute. That's quite fast. I think what's helped my brain ... You've got to think so fast, that I can remember these things that I'm talking about; I can remember it, and my brain is very active, so I think that helped me. Now I learned the radio operating in the Air Force, and then, as an air gunner ... Every aircraft used to carry two pilots, a navigator and two air gunners. One air gunner used to be at the back – what they called a "straight air gunner". I, as a radio operator, I was the dorsal ... In the middle, they had the ... You've got your turret with two machine guns, you see. So you could look around. The bloke at the back ... If you were attacked from the back, you know, he guarded the back. In some of the aircraft they had one in the nose as well. And, like I said, that's where I learned my Morse code. And then when I left, when I got my discharge in East London, they offered me a job ... A lot of us chaps from the Air Force took jobs with the Post Office, so I joined the Post Office in King William's Town. So I went to the Post Office school there; I had to learn as a P&T assistant – post and telegraph assistant. So then I did telegraphs there. Now that's a different sound all together. You had to start again from scratch, because this 'L' is dot-dash-dot-dash; this 'L' is a double click. So I had to learn it. It didn't take me long. So I had to learn that as well. So then I was at the Post Office for two years, and then the Department of Transport, they still had Civil Aviation, wanted eight chaps qualified as radio operators from the Post Office. So I applied, and they took two of us – one from ... a chap from Bethulie in the Free State, and they took me. They sent us here to Germiston. That was in 1948, October 1948. And then I was a radio operator here at Rand Airport, and then this came up at Marion Island a year later, and I volunteered, and that's it.

- Q:** And you went for a year. Okay, that's quite something. So lastly, how would you describe your experience on Marion Island?
- A:** Well, as I said, not everybody gets that experience. To me, it was something unusual. And to live amongst seven other blokes and yourself, no women on the island ... It taught me a lot.
- Q:** Would you ever have thought ... When you were speaking to one another on the island, did you sometimes maybe think that women would one day also go?
- A:** No, we never ever thought that. And even now they have black people on the island too; they live together there.
- Q:** Did you sometimes miss servants, if you had servants at home?
- A:** No, that's where I learned all about ... Though I say it myself, I'm fully domesticated. The only thing I can't do, pardon my expression ... The only thing I can't do that a woman can do, is to give birth; I can do everything else! I learned from going there.
- Q:** Yes. And you said, like today blacks are also going there. Did you ever discuss that on the island?
- A:** No, never. We never thought it would happen, because you know, South Africa was governed by the Nationalist Party at that time. We never ever thought that something like that would happen.
- Q:** Had you ever spoken about politics on the island, because that was the year ... just ...?
- A:** No; no politics. Politics and religion ... It was ... No, we didn't; we never ... 'Cause you know, politics and religion can cause big arguments.
- Q:** Yes. Do you know – if you can guess – how many of the people that went down with you were Nationalists and how many were *Sappe*?
- A:** Well, at that time, it was the United Party.
- Q:** Yes, the United Party. How many were *Natte* and how many were *Sappe*, if I can ask it like that?
- A:** No, well, we didn't ... All I know is, I was United Party. But as for the others, I don't know, because we never discussed it.
- Q:** Okay. Well, thank you so much. It's been a great pleasure talking to you.
- A:** It was my pleasure. As I said, I never ever thought it would come to this.

**END OF TRANSCRIPTION**