

## CAPTAIN BILL LEITH

**Date:** 26 January 2012  
**Place:** Plumstead, Cape Town  
**Interviewer(Q1):** Lize-Marie van der Watt | History Department, Stellenbosch University  
**Interviewer(Q2):** Dora Scott | C-I-B: Antarctic Legacy Project | Stellenbosch University  
**Commentator (JC):** John Cooper | C-I-B: Antarctic Legacy Project | Stellenbosch University  
**Respondent (BL):** William (Bill) Leith (Captain) | Master S A Agulhas | 1978

- Q1:** Just for the record, when did you start serving in South Africa's Antarctic programme, when was the first time you went over?
- A:** Well the first time I did anything with the Antarctic programme was in 1963 when I was the Chief Officer on the RSA. But I only did Marion Island and Gough Island in those days because I was actually in the South African Navy and I went back again, but my interest in the South African, or in the South African Antarctic programme only really started in 1978 though there was a period when I was in the South African Navy when I went down to Marion Island when they burnt the base down there, to go along and take emergency clothes and food to the to the people, but I think that was in about 1967 I think.
- Q1:** '66, '67 yes. So you went down on the RSA then?
- A:** No I went down with the...
- Q1:** Ag, with the...
- A:** With the President Kruger.
- Q1:** With the President Kruger, *ja* that went down to re-supply them. And what was it like? Did you get to interact with the people on the island?
- A:** Well I'll tell you it was a wonderful experience. It was wonderful for me because I had just joined the President Kruger and I was supposed to take over from a very good friend of mine that was the navigator on board the ship. We were going up to Durban for the, to, for the Freedom of the City celebrations that the Navy had up there. And because I was a spare officer on board there, they made me the parade commander.
- Q1:** *Ja?*
- A:** And if there is anything I hated more, it was marching around on a damn parade. So when we were on our way there and we heard that this base had burnt down and that a ship had to go down there and take emergency supplies, we went into Port Elizabeth and the supplies were flown down to us over there and they went on and we went down to Port Elizabeth and by the time we got back to Durban again after that thing the parade was over so I didn't have to take charge of it.
- Q1:** [laughs] That sounds like luck! But I, what do you remember about arriving on the island with the people?
- A:** Well, we could see that a part of the base had burnt down and there was, but there was enough of them to live on and we knew that the RSA was being prepared with new building material and all that sort of thing so what we had given them was clothing, and uhm, clothing and uhm, clothing and food more than anything else like bedding and things like that. They had quite enough place to live in, it just didn't have enough, they still had all their fuel supplies, their diesels were running but the buildings had burnt down so there wasn't any great problem to them.
- Q1:** Okay, I see.
- A:** And then another interesting experience that I had as far as the islands are concerned is in 1963. I went down to Tristan da Cunha, and this was when the islanders had just come back after the volcanic explosion, and there was only, I think, 12 or 15 islanders on this island who had been

dropped off there by one of the Royal Inter-Ocean liners, and these poor people, these men folk on there were trying to fix up the houses and things like that, so that their families could come back. And one of the problems that they had there was all the timber that they had there was around the corner on the island where they have their, their orchards and their pine tree plantations and things like that. And they couldn't get there because they had no boats, so the RSA, we went along there and we loaded, we took them on board and then we sailed around the island and we picked these people up and we landed them there and then they went ashore and they spent the whole day cutting trees down and chopping them off and then bringing them back and then they brought them back and we loaded them on the rafts and we took them back and landed them. Now those and the days before they had that harbour of theirs so it was very difficult landing these people and I mean the volcano was still steaming and smoking over there, at the time.

**Q1:** And that was 2 years later?

**A:** *Ja.*

**Q1:** Wow.

**A:** It was still... I think you know sometimes when it rains in Tristan da Cunha under certain circumstances they still get a certain amount of steam out of the centre of the volcano there.

**Q1:** Wow. So, but the RSA wasn't sent down specifically to help them, it was, or were you doing the round at Gough, or...

**A:** Basically, we basically gone down to re-supply the base at Gough Island, but whenever anybody wanted anything done at Tristan da Cunha they just had to ask the Department because the Department... I'm not a hundred per cent sure about this, John. You can correct me on this thing. I think South Africa used to pay the British Government two peppercorns per year...

**Q1:** *Ja.*

**A:** ...for permission to keep the base on Gough Island. But the agreement was that if you, you know, you had your base on the island and we need assistance, you will give it to us...

**JC:** Yes.

**Q1:** Yes.

**A:** ...at cost price only you won't charge us or anything like that, and so when they said can you please go along and help these guys over there we were...

**Q1:** Obligated...

**A:** Because the RSA didn't, you know, she was not a scientific ship. So when she went down there and she landed everybody on the island she had no more work to do. So it was easy for us to spend a day and a half steaming up to Tristan da Cunha and drop the "okes" there and spend the next 4 to 5 days there helping them out.

**Q1:** What do you remember about the Tristanians as people?

**A:** I loved them. I loved them. I got on very well, I was... Every time the SA Agulhas went to Tristan da Cunha, they declared a national holiday.

**Q1:** [laughs] Wow.

**A:** It was, they had a holiday and they used to put a concert on at the school.

**Q1:** *Ja?*

**A:** And I and a whole lot of all the senior officers and people like that were invited over to the school to this concert. We used to cheat, a little bit. We had helicopters on board and we used to, we weren't supposed to use the helicopters on Tristan da Cunha at all so I don't know if you can record this, I don't know whether you will ever be allowed to use it, but we used to send the helicopter over to the island and then we would do little favours for them. We would move something around from Tristan around to their, their settlement where they kept all their cattle. And then we used to give all the little kids a flight in the helicopter. They used to get the helicopter with 20 little kids all sitting in it. We had no seats in there. We would get them up and then fly them around the island and then land them and then another 20 would get in and they

would fly around the island and do things like that.

**Q1:** It must have been fun for the kids, I'm sure they didn't complain.

**A:** And I loved them. My late wife presented them with an organ so that they could learn to, you know, play music. Because they had one, they had an organ in the church which was presented to them by the Queen.

**Q1:** Wow.

**A:** And the organ was getting a little bit on the old side so they didn't want to use it for practicing on. So when I bought an organ for my daughters we got a little, little organ given to us, a second hand one, which I gave to the island. And then John may recall that we presented them with a big plaque, which had a brass thing on it with the poem "If". And this was, this was, had a brass plate on it and every year the child in the school who had done something towards environmental protection or the history of the island, was awarded this, this plaque. Which, to the best of my knowledge is still there. Whether it's still issued every year, I don't know.

**JC:** That I don't know. I haven't actually seen it.

**A:** Well if you go there find out if they still give...

**JC:** I'll ask.

**A:** ...the, I think it's called the island, the island history plaque or shield or something.

**JC:** Because I was always generally ashore on Gough while these things were happening at Tristan. Because in those days we would always go to Tristan first, but sometimes the ship would call at Gough first and so we would get off.

**Q1:** Would you do some fishing at Gough? Sorry, speaking of Gough...

**A:** We used to do fishing at Gough, but then they stopped it, they, they, they said that we were, we were stealing the natural resources even though we didn't take very much. But I used to call up the administrator and I said can we please have permission to fish, and he would say yes, so we did fish.

**JC:** It still does occur.

**A:** But we weren't allowed to catch crayfish. You were not allowed to catch crayfish. We did catch crayfish on the first couple of times...

**JC:** That is still the case.

**A:** ...then they had about 10 or 12 traps on board. And then they stopped that.

**JC:** That's still the case. And I have a memory, Captain, of you, walking briskly down to the poop deck in your black PT shorts going over the side to try and cut some line free.

**A:** Oh yes. That was...

**JC:** So you didn't... You didn't send a member of the crew you went to do it yourself.

**A:** That wasn't the line – that was the hose itself. Yes, I went down with a snorkel on to go and see if I could get down to the propeller, somebody had got a hose wrapped around my... Well I won't say somebody because I did it, because we were getting the hose back in and I said to the officer in the boat "For God's sake don't let the hose get..." Because the propeller is going all the time, even when it stops. So I said "Don't let that hose get anywhere near the propeller, please. Because I never liked to stop my engine in case I needed to leave in a hurry. And while I wasn't there, I was somewhere else, he got the hose in there and just 'tshh'..."

**Q1:** Oh no.

**JC:** Was that at Gough or at Tristan?

**A:** So well I went down to try and get it. So I had to go all the way to Tristan da Cunha, they had one of their, one of their people on the island was trained to dive so they went down and cut it off for me.

**Q1:** And the officer? Did he get a disciplinary hearing?

**A:** No no, he was one of my best friends, so I let him off.

**Q1:** [laughs] Okay.

**JC:** He was lucky the water is a bit warmer than it is at Marion.

**A:** You will remember him, George Willenkamp. George was about 10-15 years older than I was.

**JC:** Yes, I remember George.

**A:** He was an old gentleman. And he just, he had retired at the age of 60 and he, he'd been a second officer with Royal Inter-Ocean line and he said he would like to go away to sea again, so he joined me as my, first of all as my third mate, and ultimately we promoted him to second mate.

**Q1:** Okay. You said your interest started, officially started in 1978. How did that come about?

**A:** Well I was in the Navy up until 1970, and it was embarrassing at that time the chief of the Defence Force was a gentleman with the name of General Magnus Malan.

**Q1:** Yes.

**A:** And Magnus Malan had been the, the officer in charge at the Military Academy before that, and then when he was made Chief of the Defence Force he issued an instruction that said that from now on, no officers in the army, Navy and the air force would ever be promoted to flag rank, which was you know admirals and things like that, unless they were Military Academy Graduates. And I was a Captain with four years seniority then. And all of a sudden at the age of about 43 or 44, my promotion prospects had suddenly stopped. So I contacted the Department of Transport and I, well I tried to get a couple of, well I thought I'd leave the Navy and go somewhere else, so I contacted the Department of Transport, and they, they told me that they were building this new ship and that the gentleman in command of it, Captain Ernst Funk, was due to retire shortly. He'd iterated that he wanted to retire, he just wanted to fetch the ship and bring it down to South Africa and then he wanted to retire. So I thought well alright, I will go back and I will be Chief Officer for a year and then I will get command. And then halfway through he changed his mind, and decided to do another couple of years, but unfortunately for him we came back from Antarctica and we'd had our very strenuous trip down to Antarctica and I think it was too much for him. And when he, about fortnight after he got home he just dropped dead. So I...

**Q1:** Was that your first trip to the ice then? In 1978?

**A:** That was my first trip to the ice, yes, in 1978. Well it was actually I would say 1979 really. Because in those days we used to leave a couple of days after Christmas always. This was bad news because by the time we got there we had to do three month's work. When we were coming back at March the sea was beginning to freeze up and it was getting dark and things like that, so when they went back to start leaving for Antarctica in the middle of December it was, you know, we used to get another three weeks good weather conditions down there.

**Q1:** Well, what was the reason for them wanting you to leave only after Christmas, did it have something to do with the holiday season?

**A:** Well they, they didn't... They thought that nobody wanted to go, that everybody wanted to have Christmas at home. Government, government organisation, everybody must have Christmas at home.

**JC:** You were on the ship, Captain, when, when the bosun got killed. Was that, was...

**A:** That was the very first trip that we did, yes.

**JC:** The very first voyage was it? Was that to Marion?

**A:** That was to Marion.

**JC:** And the story that I always heard that, that on the way back when the ship was just off the peninsula here, the person who, you know, was, who caused the incident disappeared...

**A:** Well it was quite, it was quite a...

**JC:** And the thought was he might have jumped over the shore and tried to swim to Hout Bay or something.

**A:** No, no, no, no, no. It was, it was... The bosun got murdered. It was very unfortunate. Captain Funk allowed the crew to have booze, and, you don't give sailors, you don't give sailors, allow them to have booze. And they had themselves a bit of a party that night, and they had far too

much to drink. Then one of the crew got himself in a fight with the bosun and before they knew what happened he hacked the bosun to pieces with a fire-axe.

**Q1:** The one that's ostensibly still there?

**A:** And so everybody knew who it was.

**Q1:** Did it happen in the common area or...?

**A:** No it happened while we had anchor off of Gough Island. We had actually discharged all our cargo, we had no other work to do and we were there at the island, and, we all knew who it was, but we, what could we do I mean we didn't have a set of handcuffs, we didn't have anything to do there. When this guy sobered himself up he, he was very sort-of sorry but the crew now left him alone, they wouldn't go anywhere near him. And of course all the crew locked their doors every night and of course they stopped the crew having anything to drink by the end of it but it was already too late. So we had to get the, we got the body, and we, the guy who murdered him was the guy who had along cleaned him up, cleaned him up on a bench in the passengers lounge and things like that. And when he was there we rolled him up in a couple of sheets and things like that and then we took him down and we put him into the deep freeze down in the, in number 3 hold, and froze him. And then, we, after this lot they told us come back to Cape Town so that we could carry out the instruction. On our way to Cape Town, it was only one day after we left, we left Marion, that in the morning they came along there and they said that this guy had disappeared. So we turned the ship around and we looked for him all over the show. It was a very, very bad, the wind was blowing, and we put sailors out on look-outs but I can tell you no sailor would have seen him. If they had seen him they had to look somewhere else, because they were adamant that they, they didn't want him on board. And then when we came into Cape Town and we had to go out and anchor in the bay over here we said well we can't find the guy. We don't know if he'd, you know if he'd jump overboard or whether he is hiding on board the ship or anything like that, we've searched the ship we can't find him and then when we got into Cape Town they brought some sniffer dogs on board and they went all over. They got his gear out and they went all over the ship.

**JC:** That was before you docked, was it? They...

**A:** That was before we docked.

**JC:** You had to stay in the bay.

**A:** *Ja.*

**JC:** Because I can remember that. So Captain you were one day coming back from Marion when he disappeared?

**A:** *Ja.*

**JC:** Because the story I heard was second hand or third hand that people spoke about was that he disappeared on the last day...

**A:** No, no.

**JC:** ...and that he tried to swim ashore and then people would say well maybe he's still living, you know. Maybe he made it.

**A:** No he didn't.

**JC:** Oh right, *ja*, well.

**Q1:** So you didn't, so you didn't find any trace of him?

**A:** We didn't find any trace of him, but the wind was blowing force 5 or force 6, there was just white caps all over there...

**JC:** Yes.

**A:** Unless we'd sort of run him down, we would never have...

**JC:** So he wasn't actually locked in his cabin?

**A:** No, he was nowhere on the ship.

**JC:** No, I mean before he disappeared.

**A:** No, he was just walking around by himself and everybody was keeping well clear of him.

**Q1:** Okay so you didn't... And you were Chief Officer on that voyage?

**A:** Yes.

**Q1:** So what do you do, as a Captain and Chief Officer when something like this happens? Because if I have it correctly the Chief Officer is in charge of the... Speaking to those...

**A:** Well, I was lying in my bed at about... I was asleep when the Chief Officer, a fellow with the name of Pieter Kroon came and knocked on my bed, and he said: "Mr Leith, we've got a problem." And I said: "What do you mean we've got a problem, what's the problem?" And he says: "The bosun's been murdered." And I said "What?" And he says the bosun's been murdered, just come up and they said that someone just hacked the bosun to pieces, and so I got up there and said look we better go tell the Captain and get him as well to come down there and we went down there. And then sort of snide remarks from the side of us said "Boggom over there, he did it". So he said alright we'll clean up the place and everything like that, and uhm... But then, then there wasn't much that I could do, after the entries were made in the log book it's up to the Captain. The Captain got hold of, and he, he made a signal to the office. I can't remember the poem, but this guy, I mean, he was a very, very ordinary seaman...

**Q1:** The murderer?

**A:** But on his table in his cabin he had some poem, and it wasn't "If", but it was some, some other, some other poem, and I remember that the Captain, Funk, when he sent the signal off to the, to the office, he said that we got into his cabin we'd searched everything, the cabin was neat, his life jacket was not there, but on his desk he had this poem and then he sent that, he wrote out the whole poem. It's one of these poems that everybody who had been to school knows. And I thought well you know, why send the whole poem you know, and he just turned around and said... No I can't remember what the poem is now. But he, he then went to the officer and the officer said I'll come back. Now I had this problem what the hell are we going to do with this guy on board? But he just kept a very low profile and kept out of his way and I didn't talk to him, nobody else talked to him, I mean there was no, we never wanted to have anybody saying that we, we were coercing him to give a statement, we never went down and asked him to give a statement. I don't recall that the Captain called him in to his cabin and asked him to make a statement or anything like that. But I sure didn't.

**Q1:** So, did Captain Funk at all call you all together and sort of told you that okay, this happened, now all disperse, or, was it in a way that things...

**A:** Captain Funk didn't, no it wasn't like that. I know what I did was when I got into Cape Town and I knew now that the crew were now like cats on a hot tin roof. So I called up, I phoned up the padre at the mission to seamen. What was his name, that guy, weren't his...

**JC:** Oh the one that did the hunger strike up at, at Signal Hill?

**A:** Yes. Well anyway I got him down there and I said listen, I want you to come on board and have a little service over here I said and I want you to basically exorcise the ship so that nobody thinks that there's going to be spirits wandering around the ship or anything like that. And he did it. He did it very nicely and from there on everybody fortunately managed to forget it.

**Q1:** Until the second murder?

**A:** Until the second murder, *ja*.

**JC:** That time they did have the people restricted to their cabins.

**Q1:** Yes. Why did the second murderer get off?

**JC:** Sorry?

**Q1:** The second murderer, he got off, why?

**JC:** Paperwork got lost. The case got dismissed.

**Q1:** When was this?

**JC:** About 2 or 3 years ago. That was off Gough.

**Q1:** *Ja*.

**JC:** I was there.

**Q1:** Also some or other drunken brawl?

**JC:** Well the Tristan passengers didn't want to travel, not surprisingly, back to Cape Town on a ship that had an ostensible murderer and accomplice on board because they felt unsafe and in different countries that was a bit of a diplomatic issue. So that is why they sent out the Sara Baartman, and met us at Tristan and then two big policemen came across in a rib and they took this bloke, brought him out in handcuffs, undid the handcuffs, he went down the ladder into the rib, they climbed down after him, put the handcuffs back on again and they sailed off to the Sara Baartman you know, sort of half a kilometre away and then so that was a very expensive...

**A:** Arrest.

**JC:** And then they, then after they transferred these two persons they brought the body out on of those, one of those stretchers and craned it over into the rib and took that away. And only after that did we bring the Tristan passengers aboard and sailed back to Cape Town.

**Q1:** But you had to deal with more than one death, or more than one body? Tell us about the...

**A:** I, well you're talking about what's his name? The...

**JC:** James Gleeson.

**Q1:** James Gleeson.

**A:** James Gleeson. Now James Gleeson wasn't a South African, he was a Rhodesian. And James Gleeson was working on Amsterdam Island. He was doing, he was... Bird research. And we were operating off Marion Island. I was actually doing research job for WITS University and we were working to the west of the... when we got a message to say that we must please, one of the South African scientists had been killed on Amsterdam Island. Would we please go there and collect the body. So of course this was somewhere in the region of about 1 200, 1 300 miles away from where we were working. So we thought, well you know, the guy is dead and they want us to go and... Anyway, we did what we were told, we went along there and we headed off to there and we wanted to tell them come in and I could not get any communication with Amsterdam Island even though it's got a radio station on there which collects weather messages from ships and then draws and sends out the weather. We could not get any communication with them. My radio officer tried for days to get them on. And ultimately I sent a message to them and I said "For Pete's sake please get through the French government in Paris on to Amsterdam Island and tell them that we're trying to call them on all the frequencies which are laid down on the list of radio signals that they operate and anything else, and we just cannot get through to them." Well we ultimately got contact with them when we were only about 8 hours away and they said okay listen. We said look we've come to get the body and they said okay fine, but now unfortunately he's already been buried.

**Q1:** Oh no.

**A:** So we've got to go and exhume the body or something like that so when you get over here it's going to take us a little bit of time. Will you please, you know... So we got on there and we had a helicopter on board and we sent the helicopter over and I went over with them, and they had now exhumed the body and they brought it up and they had actually put it in a very, very nice coffin, which they had on the island. They buried him in the, you know, in the shroud or something like that, not in the... And they... And they actually gave it to us and so we put the coffin in the helicopter and we flew it off to ship and we thanked them all about this and then we steamed back towards Marion Island. And then when we got in... When we got to Marion Island, we got a message to say that his parents, who were now divorced, one living in South Africa and one living in Rhodesia, they didn't particularly want the body back because they weren't going to bury it, so could we please bury it at sea. So we now had this great big coffin which had a lead lining inside it, so we had to open this lining and take it out and get the coffin out or something like that and we had to drill a couple of holes into this... And then we had a, we had a burial service on board the ship, and we buried him just off Marion Island. So we had gone something in the region of about 2 400, 2 500 miles to have a guy exhumed and brought on board and then buried him ourselves. So, I mean...

- A:** The most expensive burial service in the South African Government.
- Q1:** [laughs] Yes, no. I can imagine. But these burials at sea, do they have a specific ceremony that you conduct or something?
- A:** There is a special ceremony, I haven't got a copy of it anymore. There is a, there is a, we have a book on board the ship which is called "The Ship Captain's medical guide". And it tells you in ships, how to handle virtually everything, and the very back page has what they call the approved service for the burial at sea, and that's the one we used.
- Q1:** Speaking of this "approved burial", it makes me think, when did you start having Muslim crew members, or did you ever not have Muslim crew members?
- A:** I think they were always there. I think they were always there. I never... I never asked anybody whether they were Muslims or... I mean I had coloureds and I had black crew members so I mean they...
- Q1:** But you mostly had coloured and black crew members? There was hardly any white crew members?
- A:** I... Actually in all the time that I was on board the ship I think I only had two white crew members on board the ship, but that was fairly late, certainly after 1994 or something like that. I... A number... I personally never had any black officers but I had Coloured officers, I had Indian officers.
- Q1:** Before 1994 or after?
- A:** No, only after 1994.
- Q1:** And, I mean, how often did these crew members go ashore?
- A:** My crew members never ever went ashore anywhere on Marion, Gough or Tristan or Antarctica. But in Antarctica they might have gone onto the ice. But uhm...
- Q1:** Not help with cargo loading?
- A:** Pardon?
- Q1:** Did they never help with cargo loading?
- A:** Oh, we helped with the cargo loading, but I mean we, we took the cargo and they packed it down in the holes and hatches and things like that and put it into nets. And then we put it onto our rafts as you saw over there. Now I had one officer in each boat, my second officer and my third officer each had a boat, and they... They had a raft and we used to... We started off when I first took over the ship, using the old RSA thing where we had two rafts. We had a boat and one raft each side. But then we found out that these... It was a lot safer, because sometimes in heavy seas these rafts would turn over and we'd lose all the cargo. So then after that we took the rafts and we tied them together. And then we, we would tow them in, and I had two crew members on each raft. So we bought another two brand new rafts and then we found out that this was taking a rather long time to load and discharge, so we got the old rafts back again and we patched them up. The one, the one set of raft was known as "patches", because it had so many patches on it and it used to lose air all the time and every, every 2 or 3 hours we used to have to send the air-hose down and pump it up again. And then we were taking two rafts in with about ten nets of cargo, you know about somewhere in the region of about 20 tons of cargo in each net. And then we would load the other one up and the boats we had, rather old decrepit boats to start off with, so when I, when I took command of the ship I took a look at these two bloody boats of ours and I decided this was not good enough and we ordered, we got ourselves a new boat. We had an old boat, a lovely old thing which we called "Smokey". She, but she was open and of course the poor guys in there would get as wet as hell. And then we, then we bought another one which we called "Orca"...
- JC:** I remember Orca.
- A:** This had a nice little wind-screen on it and power steering and much more efficient. And then when we got our, our two new rafts we got rid of Smokey and we got ourselves another nice



boat, a sister one to the one that we had. And then of course it was all very efficient boat work, but then they decided that the guys on the island wanted all the cargo flown off. So then I ended up with 4 rafts, 2 nice boats and we started flying the cargo. So I don't think they use the rafts at all anymore.

**Q1:** No, because...

**JC:** The last time I saw the rafts used was about 2 or 3 years ago, about 3 years ago at Tristan to off-load some vehicles for Tristanians.

**A:** Ah yes. At Tristan we used it. We, we used to lend them our rafts but we didn't use their, our boats.

**JC:** But *ja* they towed the rafts with a...

**A:** They, they towed... They towed them with their boats...their boats...

**JC:** With a couple of Landrovers and things...

**A:** Were much more powerful than ours were.

**JC:** But you had an incident at Prince Edward once, I mean with the ship did... When one of those, one of your ship's boats sank there wasn't it?

**A:** Yes.

**JC:** And you had to go and recover it?

**A:** *Ja*, that was, that was quite a hairy situation. They'd... We'd landed the guys on, on Prince Edward by, by raft, and the boat hit the rocks and started to sink. So we sent the other boat out to try and get it to, to, to tow it back as quickly as possible, but it sank in very, in deep water, close to the island, but... So we then got our two rafts together and we rigged up a little sort of a crane on it. Fortunately when the boat sank, the mooring rope that they'd been towing on, they hung onto it. It was just long enough so that the boat was sunk, but we still had the mooring rope on there. So we connected the buoy onto this thing and then we got this boat and we went... We sent the, we sent the rafts in over there and we connected this thing on and we put a chain-block on it and we lifted it up and then held the rope and then moved the chain-block and then pulled it a little bit more...

**Q1:** Oh, okay.

**A:** And we pulled it up a little bit more and I took the ship right into Cave Bay. We were right into Cave Bay you know, you could throw bricks on there and things like that. And then they got it there and I... the bows of the boat were just sticking above the water and I got my crane onto it and I picked it up and we brought it on board and we took the engine out immediately and the engineers flushed it through with diesel so that it won't corrode or anything like that. And then we brought it back and then we, we checked her out, and we found out that the guy who built the boat hadn't made the glass fibre on the hole as thick as he had supposed to have.

**Q1:** Oh.

**A:** So they, they sued him for that and he had to fix the boat up for free, gratis, for nothing, for us.

**Q1:** Wow. Gosh. Now when you started out, just going to Marion and Gough, scientists weren't part of the regular, I mean especially on the RSA, scientists weren't, it wasn't as institutionalised scientists that came later that you had to take team of scientists along. Uhm, did something change on the ship the moment you got more passengers, more scientists?

**A:** Well listen, the RSA could carry 36 people I think, only 36 passengers. So when we got the SA Agulhas and we had accommodation for 99 passengers, then they found out unless they were busy building a base, like when we built the base down at SANAE, then we needed every piece of accommodation that we had on board there for the building team. But after that, I mean you only took 12 or 14 people down for the base, you didn't have much more than about 10 or 12 scientists on there and the helicopter teams were only about 12 or 14. So then we had about, taken about only 40, 45 people, there was a lot of spare space. And because the ship the ship had been built with all this extra laboratory space on board there we used to take quite a number of scientific teams down and... It was a very good idea, but it didn't really work as well as

it could have. Because we had, sometimes we had 3 or 4 different scientific teams on board, and then one of them was appointed as the chief scientist. Now, of course you can find now they turn around and they say what work everybody else had, everybody was going to do. But I mean if you ever took the work that they wanted to do and you divided it in the number of days that you had and you found out somewhere along the line somebody was going to lose out somewhere. This guy said "Oh I've got 8 days of work" and then say okay, I've got 8 days of work, then this guy would say "I've got 4 days of work", but this guy's got 8 days of work over here, and this guy's got 4 days of work over here, and it takes you a day or 2 to get from there, now whose going to lose their time? And sometimes we did lose, sometimes we lost our... Like the time for the James Gleason... They'd sent down a team of geologists from the University of Cape Town and Wits University who were going to do a lot of drenching, and of course, the 5 or 6 days that we went down there, I mean they lost all that time. But all the time and the scientific teams that were going down was organised for us through CSI, uhm, or however they call themselves?

**Q1:** It was called the CSIR and later the FRB.

**A:** Yeah, the FRB, Foundation and Research Bureau.

**Q1:** So, did they, did it just work alongside until the ship is big, there is enough accommodation, we can take scientists. Or was it a case of you have to take extra passengers to make it worth your while because there is extra space?

**A:** I really don't know whether. I know that the ship, having built a scientific research ship, they wanted to use her to the maximum effort. Which they never ever really did do. Because the ship did very, very few purely scientific voyages. I mean when we started off with the ship we would run, we would averaging somewhere in the region of about 21 weeks per year of scientific, well, of say... Which meant that for about 34 weeks of the year the ship was doing nothing, just lying here in Cape Town. And then afterwards when the fuel prices went up they cut down a little bit. So I always felt that the ship was very, very, very underutilised. I mean we should have been, we should have been spending somewhere in the region of about 200, 230 days at sea a year. Which we never... I mean 170 days was about the most we ever did.

**Q1:** How much maintenance... How much time, maintenance-wise, is necessary to check the ship after, let's say after a voyage to SANAE? Obviously the ship needs to be checked and refuelled. How long does that take? Or does it depend?

**A:** You know, the ship spent a lot of time in Cape Town so she didn't, she didn't 'wear-out' as per se. Our biggest problem of course was corrosion and painting and things like that. The minute you sailed from Cape Town and you went out to sea, you get, I mean 2 days, 1 day out of Cape Town you're in the roaring 40s already, and the weather is always bad down there. The wind is blowing, there is spray in the air, the temperature is cool. You can't go and paint. It is very difficult to go along and scrape and clean and get, take off old paint and try and get rust... So we developed a hell of a lot of rust on board the ship. And we just did not have the, the crew and the weather to clean it. Once the ship was taken over, because the crew were government servants hey, they only worked 5 days a week and only worked 8 hours a day. Anything over...

**Q1:** [laughs] On a ship?

**A:** Anything over that they had to be paid overtime for. So of course some of them had to do nights on board and things like that so you lost them over there. So we never had enough crew members on board really to maintain the ship. When the ship was taken over by Peplow Marine or something like that, they sorted this thing out and I'll tell you the ship is cleaner and has less rust on it now than when I left the ship 15 years ago. Because we just could not cope with it. And when I left the ship, I left the ship primarily alright South Africa had become a Republic in 1993 or something like that and then the Trade Unions became too powerful. And when I, John will tell you that I am a bit of a Otila the Hun or a Genghis Kahn or Adolf Hitler or a... Which you had to be...

**Q1:** You run a tight ship.

- A:** With the crew that I had. And the officers that I had. And when I started getting these guys were giving me trouble then I just knew that I was going to be in no end of trouble with the Trade Unions all the time, and I decided that... I had the best job in the whole world, without a doubt, the Captain of the SA Agulhas up until about, well I don't care about what's happening now but I'll tell you up until I left the ship basically... I really left the ship in 1993 or 1994, I had the best job in the world. And I went back every now and again but basically then I was, I'd been co-opted to take the ship down because I had ice-experience or something like that and when it came to disciplining the crew I would discipline them myself, and then I'd come in and say this guy is no good, sack him, and then I would leave and they would keep the guy you know, and I would come back again and he was still there. And that didn't work very well.
- Q1:** Were you on that voyage, I've been told about a voyage in the 80s, that suddenly nobody was allowed on the bridge anymore, well the voyage where the Agulhas was supposed to go for an oceanographic research but arrived back like 2 days later with helicopters on it, rumours about Israeli Helicopters landing on Marion Island from there. Were you involved with that at all?
- A:** No. That's a story I hear every now and again there that... The only thing that... At one stage they looked at Marion Island to see if they could put a runway on the island. And I think the idea in those days the idea of putting a runway on the island was because they were going to use Bredasdorp Range as a missile firing site. And because the missiles would have been long range things, they would have fired them somewhere down in the region of Marion Island and they wanted to put... They'd have to fly an aircraft out there to go along and find out if there was, you know if it was clear for firing and that... And then would want to land at Marion Island and refuel the helicopter and bring them back.
- Q1:** *Ja.*
- A:** Now, that I say I heard. I never, ever was told whether that was the problem, but I took a team down from the, from South Africa and we went down there and we were told not to have any contact with the island per se, but the islanders saw that we were there, they could see us there and they said "What are you doing here?" and I said "Ask the office."
- JC:** Yes I know, because one of the, one of the colleagues I had, Nigel Adams, was on the island. He was sort of walking away from the base and then unexpectedly bumped into some people shovelling around who sort of said you know, "Hallo, but we're not here."
- Q1:** [laughs] *Ja*, yes yes.
- JC:** ...Which was sort of the story that came back. Captain, one thing that I always wanted to ask you about, because I'm interested in the early sealing history of the island, and in some of the early, early accounts that I've read, you know the big cave at Cave Bay on Prince Edward island, there was meant to be a tripod there. And there isn't one there now.
- A:** I took the tripod...
- JC:** And so one of the questions was...
- A:** No no, I never took the tripod off. I took the tripod off Trypot Beach.
- JC:** And then they...
- A:** And then I brought it back to South Africa...
- JC:** Then you have...
- A:** ...to have it put in a national in a museum in Pretoria. And then you complained about it so we took it back to the island...
- JC:** Was it me that complained? I can't...
- A:** ...and we put it there and we filled all the, filled it up with stones again...
- JC:** Which is where it still...
- A:** But what I did take off the off the, uhm, off Cave Bay was the Annexation certificate. There was the Annexation document was kept in a, in a shell on the island. And somebody told me that everybody who was going to the island must take it off and write in their names on it.

**JC:** Well they were taking it out to photograph it and it was getting wet and it was starting to fall apart.

**A:** So I took it out and I brought it back on board and I kept it in my fridge all the time so it never dried out or anything like that. And then I had it sent up to Pretoria and to the best of my knowledge it has been kept in the national... Because nobody knows where the Annexation document on Gough Island, on Marion Island is.

**JC:** So it went, that is very interesting, because I hadn't realised. I mean I have seen photographs of it taken at Prince Edward Island and then subsequently people have stopped seeing it.

**A:** *Ja* but they...

**JC:** But when you sent...

**A:** ... weren't writing their names on it you see.

**JC:** *Ja*, but it when it went up to Pretoria...

**A:** So as far as I was concerned it was graffiti.

**JC:** Yes of course.

**Q1:** *Ja*, vandalism.

**JC:** Did it sort of go to the, that Antarctic Museum the transport handled?

**A:** I don't know where it is. I think it's gone to the South African National...

**JC:** To the archives?

**A:** To the archives or something.

**JC:** Well we must try to track that down because that would be...

**Q1:** Possibly to the museum...

**JC:** ...a very significant document.

**Q1:** Probably to the cultural museum there on, on the plain.

**A:** But I didn't take the tripod off, I just took the sitting. But I took the tripod off Trypod Beach.

**JC:** But did you ever see a tripod at Cave Bay? Because I've never seen one.

**A:** Well I never, I never went into the cave.

**JC:** Right, yes. But there is one there now.

**A:** The closest I got to, to Cave Bay was taking the boat in there one day and then walking up to help somebody carry something up to their tents there and then I had to go back because I couldn't leave my boat. But none of my staff ever, you know, ever landed...

**JC:** That story remains a mystery though because I think it's Hendrik Verwoerd who, who used to be quite adamant there used to be a tripod there. But it's not something that people can souvenir – likely, I mean, you know, they are very, very heavy and big. But there definitely is one there now. But, but if I could ask, when you took the Annexation Certificate off, it was in a brass tuba bar, or a tube.

**A:** I can't remember no. As far as I am concerned when I saw it, it was in nothing but a plastic bag.

**JC:** That is what I saw it in.

**A:** I understand...

**Q1:** That's the picture of...

**JC:** We've got photographs of it.

**A:** According to, according to the lay pathway here, which was the one about the Annexation? Yes that's the one.

**Q1:** *Ja*, lay pathway, *ja*.

**JC:** That's right.

**A:** It was supposed to be kept in a, in a four inch shell. Sealed from the top.

**JC:** That was the one at Marion. But I think they did the same with the one at... Valdon Smith took...

**Q1:** Prince Edward Island

**JC:** ... It out of whatever casing it was in and photographed it on the island. And then a couple of years later somebody else did it. And when you compare the two photographs, you could see how much that paper had fallen apart. I think putting it in a plastic sleeve was a bad idea because

that kept it moist.

**Q1:** Who do you prefer working with? Pilots or scientists?

**A:** I like working with everybody. I don't know why there should be any difference. A lot of the scientists that I had, came back time and time again, pilots came back time and time again. You would always find that there might be one or two that a, either didn't like the way I did things. I mean I had one, not a pilot I had an engineer come and knock on my door at bloody 2 o'clock in the morning and come and tell me "I don't like the way you run your bloody ship".

**Q1:** Oh my word. What do you say to that?

**A:** You'll know him, old Willy Borain.

**JC:** The one I remember he was one of the researchers who came and woke you up, asking whether you could give him a couple of AA batteries.

**Q1:** What?

**JC:** [laughs]

**A:** I don't recall that, I must have been fast asleep.

**JC:** That was the story, I'm accused.... Go and ask somebody else...

**Q1:** Did you fraternise the crew with officers at all?

**A:** *Ja*, fraternised with them often. Well I mean I saw my officers' every day, I mean we dined together. But I never, I never... I never sat in the lounge and drank with either the passengers or the crew and I certainly didn't... Our officers had their own lounge and that was their, you know... I, I had 15 years in the Navy. And in the Navy the Captain doesn't fraternise and drink socially and things like that with the crew, you can't rub shoulders with a man and then haul him over the coals tomorrow. So, I was a bit of a recluse I suppose, but I still am.

**JC:** But Captain I can remember from my years in the, in the early 80s that once a week or maybe it was only occasionally, you and a couple of the senior officers would just drop in the passenger lounge stand by the bar and say hallo to a few people, you were there just for a short period...

**A:** Yes I used to come...

**JC:** And look around and talk to a couple of people.

**A:** ...Down every now and again. I used to come down more often than not with my person, my catering officer and play a game of Scrabble with him at the bar.

**JC:** Yes. I think that was very nice, because I've been on the ship afterwards and apart from the Captain's briefing at the beginning, you may never get to talk to the Captain again because he's up there with his job and you are doing yours. And just that sort of quarter of an hour, half an hour socialising you came in with that days, was Brian Witfleet that I remember.

**A:** Now that... I know I can see what you're getting at leading up to questions over here. I know that I wasn't a very popular person, and I know that people thought that I was a little bit too dictatorial and things like that. But you've got to bear in mind that I was the Captain of a ship, of a single ship company. So it meant that I had all these people in various ranks beneath me who had no prospects of promotion at all, they had their job. And the vast majority of the engineers that I got over there were not career engineers and things like that and I mean I had a lot of real troublemakers down there. And in my offices virtually every single one of my officers was doing the job that he was doing. The third mates were okay, that was fine. But the second mate was usually doing the second mate's job for the first time in his life. The Chief Officer was the Chief Officer doing a Chief Officer's job for the first time in his life, and they had no, they had no experience. They were, they were young and I knew they weren't going to stay there. They just... They had joined because they could go down to Antarctica and all they wanted to do was go down to Antarctica and say I've been there and they'd get off the ship. And so if I could have shown you that list of the officers that I had... In the space of about 18 years I had something in the region of about 20 Chief Officers. Now the Chief Officers are the Captain's right hand man. And you would expect your Chief Officer... You know, the Chief Officer is the man who is responsible for the maintenance of discipline in the ship. He's the guy that goes along, the Captain issues the standing orders and the instructions and things like that, the Chief Officer has

got to go along and see that these things are...

**Q1:** Implemented?

**A:** Adhered to. But because he's so young and inexperienced, I never had anybody to do this, I had to do it myself. And so when it would come to loading the cargo, I would have to go in early in the morning and I had to load, I had to do the Chief Officer's job because he didn't know anything about loading cargo. And if there were... If the officers were drinking or something like that, too much, I'd expect my Chief Officers to go and tap them on the shoulder and say "Listen buddy, you're pushing your luck over here." I would go down there and find that my Chief Officers' was as drunk as the rest of them. So...

**Q1:** That's just dangerous.

**A:** It wasn't easy... It wasn't easy to be a hail fellow well met.

**Q1:** But I also suppose that some of these Chief Officers and officers also came from, did not necessarily come from a military background, or a Navy background.

**A:** Oh no, none of them had a military background. They were all Merchant Navy officers.

**Q1:** Merchant Navy officers.

**JC:** But I do remember there were some...

**A:** But a lot of them were borrowed, you know. We... I'd lose my Chief Officer and Captain Rob, Richardson would phone up somebody like SAF Marine or somebody like that and say "Listen can you lend me a Chief Officer?" And they'd lend me a second mate, who had a Chief Officer's certificate, and he'd do one trip and he'd get off. So I mean his, his loyalty to the ship, his loyalty to the company, his loyalty to me was 'pfft' [gesticulates]. And it wasn't easy.

**Q1:** Did they get paid well? The chief... Or did they get like any danger pay...

**A:** No, no, no, no. That's the bane of my life. This is why I'm a poor man who lives in a little flat like this. When I was working for the Department, I got a salary which was not, it was basically organised on a shore based [indiscernible]... But then I got what they called a personal allowance. Now everybody at sea got personal allowances and things like that. And personal allowances were basically somewhere around about 20 or 30% of your, of your salary. And what I didn't realise when I retired, I retired on my basic salary and not on my... So my, my pension was a hell of a lot less than what I thought I was going to get.

**Q1:** Wow. That must have been quite a shock.

**A:** That is why I teach now.

**Q1:** Do you teach?

**A:** I teach part-time *ja*.

**Q1:** Where? Or what?

**A:** Of all things at a fire-fighting school.

**Q1:** [laughs] Alright.

**A:** I teach nautical subjects. I teach stability for fire-fighting, I teach uhm, marine advanced fire-fighting in tankers and...

**Q1:** Wow.

**A:** I train helicopter landing officers for all the oil rigs and things like that.

**Q1:** Interesting.

**Q1:** Did you go ashore much or was it?

**2**

**A:** Did I go ashore much?

**Q2:** Yes.

**A:** You know, I sat foot on Marion once in all the years that I was there, or twice I think. On Gough I went ashore perhaps twice, Antarctica I would go ashore, well I would, I went off and I visited both bases and things like that, but no. I didn't go ashore. Because, because I didn't, I didn't have the opportunity of having, a fully trained Chief Officer that I could leave behind you know. And some... I remember on one particular occasion I went, I flew ashore with the helicopter and I left

my Chief Officer there and I told him what to do, what I wanted him to do, and when I got back there about 12 or 14 hours later, he'd got himself so stuck in the ice because he decided he wanted to take a shortcut instead of going the way that I said, go around everything. And then come in over there and then he said no, I'll just go straight through here, and it took me hours to get the ship out of this...

**Q1:** And those kinds of things are costly, I mean it's not like a...

**A:** Well this was a, this was a particularly bad Chief Officer.

**Q1:** Oh is it?

**JC:** I think it's still very much the tradition, I mean all the years, 30 years I've been going to Marion and Gough I've seen the Captain of the ship ashore not 3 or 4 times. I mean they even, when you ask them "Are you coming to visit?" they'd, you know, they just realise that they've got the ultimate responsibility...

**A:** I think you'd like to but you, you've got to be, you've got to have 100% surety that you could get back to the ship when you are wanted there, you know? And you, you know as well as I do, at Gough the weather doesn't change as quickly, but...

**JC:** Yes.

**A:** Marion? In a couple of hours you can get the wind from here and then the wind from over there and I mean I've had, I've had no... On any number of times when I've been at Marion Island where, where the wind change, I've, I've battled to get myself out to sea again, because I would never shut my engines down. If I shut my engines down and I phone down the engine room and tell them I want the engine, I couldn't have an engine for 20 minutes because they had to heat it up first before they could start it. And 20 minutes would have been too late so I would shut one engine...

**Q1:** Yes 20 minutes is long...

**A:** Down and I would leave the other one running and I'd disengage the propeller and I'd just leave the engine running. So that if I'd wanted I'd just phone down and engage the propeller but then I'd have one engine to get offshore. But I'll tell you there were sometimes when the wind would come up so fast that one engine wasn't really powerful enough to, to get me off there. And I reached a stage, I think in the 15, 18 years that I went to Marion Island I think I can num... Hand... On one hand I can, the number of times that I remained at anchor overnight, otherwise I got up and steamed off and stayed out at sea and I would come back early in the morning again. Because it just was too damn dangerous.

**Q1:** Ja, there weather is incredibly capricious there.

**JC:** Two or three years ago when we were going. I can't remember exactly which year... We were going down to Marion and the, one of the engines blew up.

**Q1:** Ja, it was two years ago.

**JC:** Essentially half of the thing came through the side of the casing. And there was quite a big discussion as to whether we were coming back to Cape Town or not. And that was exactly, Captain, what you were saying. That the Captain, then Captain on the ship was saying you know if there's an onshore gale, I can't be absolutely certain that I would get the ship off Marion on one engine, if I'm really being driven in under... But anyway they did decide that they, they would continue. So we did the whole thing on just the one. It woke me up at night I mean it was like, you know, running into a wall, walking into a door. It made a great noise and a clunk and it really shook the whole ship.

**Q1:** Ja, I spoke to the Chief Officer about that, and he said that it was... Because he's also a young... It was one of the scariest moments of his life, because at that time he was up on the bridge, and everybody could hear it, and he could feel it.

**JC:** It was lucky that nobody was actually standing there when the piston or whatever it was came through the side of the casing. So but that's all part of the age I suppose.

**Q1:** [laughs] I suppose ja.

**Q2:** What was your favourite place to go to, and why?

- A:** What was my favourite place to go to? I suppose Tristan da Cunha was my favourite place, because I always used to have such a nice time there. I mean I didn't go ashore, I mean I went ashore but then maybe because I didn't go ashore in the other places so you know, I wouldn't know what it was... I didn't like going to, to Marion Island because the weather conditions over there were terrible all the time. Gough was nice, but Gough I would never ever spend time at anchor because I used to have anchor so damn close in... If the wind had turn around and gone the other way I would have been ashore because the water was so deep, that the amount of cable I had to put down was so long, that if the wind had blown the other way, my stern would have been on the rocks. But one of the beauties of Gough Island was, is that there's a very, there's a, virtually a permanent current over there. And because the current flows past the island, we were, we never ever got too close. But I had to be very, very close. I think you'll see in some of these photographs over here how close we were when we ran the hose to the island to pump the fuel. And you can see that its, uhm, that there's... That I ever had any favourites... I loved Antarctica but I mean I had more scares down in Antarctica than I'll ever wish to live through again.
- Q1:** What is the scariest thing about Antarctica?
- A:** Well you never know what's going to happen down there you know. Every year I went down to Antarctica something would happen to me that I'd never experienced before.
- Q1:** In what sense?
- A:** Whatever it was, whether, whether I was nearly locked in by an iceberg or whether I'd got too close to an iceberg without really looking and then look down and seeing the ice underneath my ship through the clear water, or whether I'd... One time I lost my rudder down there and I...
- Q1:** How'd that happen?
- A:** And I'd had no rudder. Uhm. Lots of things. And if, if any two of these things had happened at the same time then I wouldn't have come out at all.
- Q1:** Losing the rudder, how does... Sorry I have very little background of ships.
- Q2:** How does that affect...
- A:** Well, if you, if you, if you know about ships is that, you don't just carry on steaming through ice all the time because the ice is too damn thick. You've got to find places where the ice is weaker and then you manoeuvre yourself around it and you've got to look at the ice and you've got to, this is where experience comes in, you can see the difference in the colour of the ice and you can see the texture of the ice and you say well I can go through there and I can't go through there and of course you'd go through it. But sometimes you reach a place where you do go through and there is clear, well, clear-ish water on the one side but their two flows had got together like this [gesticulates] and then they grind up against each other and they build up. Now the only way you get through there, is you've got to hammer it, you've got to go stern and then you rush it and ram it and then you ride up on it and then you break it and then you go back and you carry on doing this. So now whenever you go back you must always have your rudder amidst it so when it meets the ice it will, it will break the ice. But if your rudder is like this and it meets it over there, it bends it. And on this particular occasion I was doing just that but I know on this particular occasion I had my rudder amidst ship, but I went up and I got hold of it and when I backed into the ice behind me, it had a large piece which was running sideways like this and it pushed my rudder aside and it bent the shafts on my rudder so while I could still use the rudder it would only go from 90 degrees to port to 5 degrees to port but it wouldn't do anything to starboard it. So it meant I could never, I could never steam with this thing if it had gone 80 degrees to port, 10 degrees to starboard then I would have been lucky... I could have still come all the way home. But now I had no rudder and I couldn't steam around in a rudder that was only 5 degrees to port because I'd keep on going to port. So what we had to was we had to disconnect, unbolt the whole rudder. And then we had to jack, pump the ship down by the head so that the stern was out and then we had, we put a man on the, the ice behind us to look at the



rudder and then we, we hydraulically jacked the rudder until we got the rudder exactly amidst ships, and when we got the rudder amidst ships we welded it into position and we bolted it down and things like that. Now we could go, we could go in a straight line, and so I was now stuck in the ice there, it's like trying to drive a bus around in Cape Town without a steering wheel.

**Q1:** Gosh.

**A:** You know there's everything around you and you've got to keep clear of it but you can't, you can't steer it, you know. If you lean on this side it might go this way, and if you lean on that side, it would go that way.

**Q1:** Oh my word.

**A:** So, uhm. I had a bow thruster which could push water from this side to that side, so to start off with, we carried on and we did our scientific programme because we were working something for Professor Sayed al Sayed from Texas University.

**JC:** Right. Yes, I remember him.

**A:** He was doing some work over there and he was doing it with Hugh Burg and we carried, no, and we were also doing seal survey for Marthan Bester. So we would move our ship to areas and then we'd fly the helicopter off and the helicopter would fly PASSEX for them and then come back. And I could move my ship around but I had very little manoeuvring skill, but I didn't have, I couldn't force my way out of the ice. But anyway, we carried on and did all our work without rudder for two months. But then it came time to get everybody on board and we loaded everybody on board and they arranged for the Palashtan to come along and break us out and take open the ice so we could get out. And she came and we decided not to take a tow rope because I could still steer my ship. So we asked her to go ahead and break the ice, but the Captain wasn't being very sensible, he was going along and he wasn't breaking the ice in a very straight line. But I got right up close to him to try and follow him where he was making this gap for me. But with his great big powerful twin, two twin propellers there was so much wash behind him that was moving me and I had to fall far back behind him so I could get away from this wash and then follow him out. Well, we did that and we got out, and then they'd send down the, the Drakensberg from the South African Navy to tow us back. But I was doing very well because I'd made my own, my own rudder. I'd made my own rudder by putting a couple of... It was called a Labrador Rudder because it was made out of two laboratory doors. We took two big doors that were on the ship and we had a big boom that we used for tying, used in our boats. And I got the engineers to drill bolts in it and they bolted this thing and they welded it onto the end of this boom, which we then welded a pivot on the after end of the ship. And we put this thing in there and we went over there and we had a rope on the top of it so could lift it up and two ropes on the sides so that we could move it like this.

**Q1:** Wow. That's creative.

**A:** And we went along and we used this thing and we were actually doing quite well with it, but I had a chief... I had a second officer who I said to him "Listen my friend, what you've got down there is a trim-tab, not a rudder. You'll pull it over so much and then you'll leave it over there and then you'll get your ship slowly to go along on this way and when she gets too far off this way, then you'll put it amidst ships and then you'll carry on and you'll go." He kept on telling them down "Heave-o 5 degrees to port, heave-o 10 degrees to starboard", he carried on doing this without my knowledge and he wore the wires out on the bloody sides, and the wires bloody broke.

**Q1:** Ag no man.

**A:** So I had to get the whole damn thing on board, but by then I'd got hold of the... I'd met up with the Drakensberg and I said to her "Look, we'll keep on going, I'll, and I'll follow you out if anything... If I need any help I'll call on you. I'm fixing up my trim-tab now and I've got another way of doing it so that the ropes can't go over there." And he said "No, no, no, no, I've got to, I want to leave now. We've got to get back to Cape Town, so I'll give you a tow." And when he

gave me a tow, he wouldn't let go of that tow. So, what we did was he carried on steaming at a certain speed at about, he started off at about 6-7 knots, and I could run my engines well, because I'd now got divers down who'd chain my rudder so that it wouldn't break out of the welding. And I followed on with him and I ran my, my engines the same speed as he did. But we had this big rope bite over there, now I would always want to go up into the wind. So he'd carry on over there and I would sit up here and I would want to go into the wind but this big bite is here so the tow rope was actually going behind me. But it was pulling me over. And so we then increase the speed to 6 knot, to 7 knot, to 8 knot and I think we got up to 9 knots when we found that we were going here, but he wasn't, he didn't trust his... He wasn't towing, what he was doing is he was just pulling me in the right direction. And so we carried on, and we came back to Cape Town and there was the tow rope going around this way, but it was stopping me going up into the wind. And if the wind would change to the other side then we would go over to the other side again, but we got to Cape Town... Instead of coming to Cape Town at 12 knots we got to Cape Town at 9 knots so it took us a little bit longer, but...

**Q1:** But, you now spoke... How did you, the rudder or, what was the word you used? It wasn't a rudder. It was a try?

**A:** Trim-tab.

**Q1:** Trim-tab, that you constructed, the Labrador one. Did, did you need divers to go down to...

**A:** No no no no. We made it on our flight deck and we, we rigged it up and we, we just hung it over. We had to put it into this slot of ours but I couldn't have done that with my, with my boats, you know. I used to keep one of my boats on board. And it was on a swivel and it went down like this into the water and when it... I tied a wire up here that I could lift it up if I wanted to get out of it. And then they had two wires on this side so that I could pull it this way or that way.

**Q1:** Or that way. And those are the wires that wore out.

**A:** But then of course...

**Q1:** And it's very cold water to dive in.

**A:** The very... The very pleasant part of it was when I got back here to Cape Town and we threw off the tow-rope onto the, the Drakensberg, then I... I had the pleasure of bringing my ship all the way into Cape Town, putting it alongside without any tug-assistance because I had my behind stern thrusters which I could use for manoeuvring. So I made the Captain, who is... He's a good friend of mine, Fred Marais, I made him very cross and I said "Well thank you for helping me, for coming down and helping me, but if you hadn't helped me I'd have been here yesterday."

**Q1:** [laughs] Oh no!

**JC:** Yes, I remember Captain Fred Marais because I went down to Marion on the Drakensberg. It was possibly shortly after that. I guess the Agulhas was still being repaired. So after, *ja*... The SANAE trips in early the next year, we went down on the Drakensberg.

**Q1:** What is it like to a Captain if his passengers are bored? Say for instance you're stuck in the ice and passengers can get quite bored and perhaps do risky things. Have you ever come across that?

**A:** All Captains will always tell you, ask a Captain of a certain passenger liner in the Mediterranean just a... Passengers are just about the worst type of cargo that you can carry. Because, all due respect to you and anybody else, passengers always want something that you can't really give them, and... I mean I had no end of trouble when I was on the Agulhas and I went down to Antarctica the first time, and then I'd get stuck in the ice. And it's dangerous on the ice. And then I'd wake up in the morning or I'd go down and get myself some sleep and then I'd look over the side of the ship and there were footprints walking around all over the ice next to the ship. The people would go over the side and do things like that. You know. No, I mean that's sort of a dangerous thing. I had one case where I had Swedes on board, I had a Swedish... And a... We were... Did you see the photographs where we put our bowels up against the ice there, and we land. And the ice was all alongside here and they said "We'd like to go ashore. We want to go and walk on the ice. We want to go along and have a look at the ice there." And I said "No, you

can't go on the ice, it's too damn dangerous, because I'm stuck here. I can't get away from here if something happens to you." And they kept on asking, they kept on going at me "Can we go on the ice?" And then finally when we finished discharging the cargo, I said: "Okay, you can go on the ice." So I put my gangway down on the side there and they all went off on the ice. And they got about 3 or 400 meters away from the ship when all of a sudden the ice started breaking up, all over the show. So I blew my whistle. Now the ice was all over the ship and there were... Some people looked at me and said "There's that bloody fool, what's he's calling us back again." You know. "He just let us go now he calls us back again." And then they saw that the ice was breaking up all over the show. And when it breaks like that it moves out and you end up with 8 people on this piece of ice and 5 people on this piece of ice and they're right in the ice, you know. Now it's very difficult going in and rescue them because this ice is now about this thick.

**Q1:** And it's floating. So it moves.

**A:** And you can't push it around, you know, you've got to...

**Q1:** It might just topple over.

**A:** Push it in the... And it can cause the other pieces to crack and things like that. And you can't get the people up by a gangway anymore because its not there, so you have to rig your crane up with a, with a big net and a big board on it and then you go along. And you have to go along and put this down next to them and then they climb on board and you have to bring them on board and you have to grab... And you get all these people and, uhm... This Swedish, Sweedarp, Swedish Antarctic Research Programme, they had an Englishman who was there, and I suppose they appointed him as communications or something like that. And he came along to me and he was very nice and he said "You know I was very cross with you that you wouldn't let us go, because I didn't understand why you didn't", he says, "if we had gone the first time we'd ask you, when this happened", he says, "I don't know how the hell you would have gotten any of us back because we would have been 2, 3 miles away from you by then, and there was no way you could have got in there to get us back, except get the helicopters to go and do it." Because that is exactly what happened to a German team once. We were down in Antarctica, once we were discharging our cargo and they had taken their, they had their aircraft down there as well. And my helicopters are up in, sorry, Maria Base, when the Germans called me up and said "Is your helicopter out there with you?" and I said "No, why?" and they said "Well, we've lost communication with our airplane, and we don't know where he is, and we've got 5 people who'd gone off on a skido onto the ice and they've now called us up on the radio and they said the ice has broken up, and they are now afloat in the middle of Antarctica."

**Q1:** Oh my word.

**A:** So I, fortunately, was always in communication with my helicopter, so I called him up and I said "Listen, the Germans have got a problem. Whatever you're doing, come back here, come back here and refuel, and in the meantime I'll try and get information." They went along there and they went out there and they went right down and put their wheels on the ice and the Germans got on and then they, they picked up their skido and flew them there. And then they went up and then they called. Now the German aircraft that landed, he'd had a problem and he'd lost part of his electrics. So he couldn't use his radio, but they had a walkie talkie. And the aircraft heard this thing about the walkie talkie and found out where they were. They, they'd... Actually I think they'd run out of fuel, they had a fuel tank leakage, and so they picked up a drum of fuel and flew it out to these people and they pumped it over onto the aircraft and then they took off and went back to the base and things like that. So, we, unfortunately it was, it was very embarrassing for us because there we were helping somebody who had got, you know, themselves into sort of a problem, but when we notified the office over here they'd got onto this great bloody song and dance sort of thing "South Africans rescued Germans in distress" and things like that. Which wasn't very nice, you know. You would have liked to keep the whole thing quiet.

**Q1:** Ja.

**A:** I didn't do it, the aircraft did. Not me.

**Q1:** Speaking of the Germans and the Swedes, I just want to know how often in the 80s did you have international team members abroad. I mean how...

**A:** Oh gosh... We... We...

**Q1:** Like contact?

**A:** We had lots of them. I don't know. At one stage we had the craziest thing, a thing called "Icebergs for the future". This was a, this was a team in America that was trying to persuade the Saudi Arabian government that what they to... to... To sort out a water problem in Saudi Arabia they should come along here and get hold of some of these big ice bergs, and tow them all the way through the Indian Ocean up into Saudi Arabia and pump fresh water.

**Q1:** Through the warm Indian Ocean...

**A:** So what they wanted to do was they wanted... I had a fellow... I had a German and I had an Egyptian and I had an Iraqi on board. Now they wanted to try and get tracking devices to put on top of big icebergs to see where these icebergs went and how fast they moved and different latitudes, what their direction of movement was... But I had no helicopter there so they worked on a thing that they'd made a kite. They made this big kite that we were supposed to fly over the iceberg and when it was over the iceberg they would trigger a thing and it would drop this buoy on top of the iceberg and they could track it. But everywhere we went when all we were finding these things we never had enough move... Wind to get the kite to fly, so that didn't work. Now we had that thing and then we had the fire-bex and the sy-bex where we had foreigners. I, I had a lot of people. I had a lot of people from, uhm, from, uhm, a university in the United States from La Holla. I used to take Professor Sayed and his people from Texas, ANM...

**JC:** Did you take down that that all women German team on the Agulhas?

**A:** *Ja.*

**JC:** Because they only ever did that once.

**A:** *Ja.*

**Q1:** *Ja, I...*

**A:** That was not a good...

**JC:** Experiment?

**Q1:** I've heard of other people, well one other guy, Eric, and then Jenny, who went on that same voyage. Eric Minnie I think. And he also said it was a bit of a strange...

**Q2:** Wait, *ja*, tell us what was the voyage like?

**Q1:** *Ja*, tell us. Did, did the Germans warn you in taking an all women team down?

**A:** Did the Germans warn us?

**Q1:** *Ja*, did they tell you?

**A:** *Ja* the Germans asked us to take, to take them down. And we took them down. I mean the, the leader of the team was, uhm, was the doctor. Dr Bushkabeleit. She was very, very nice. Very... But they had a lot of trouble with them. The biggest problem they had there of course was they vetted all the people that were going to go. Now, remember the scientists, the meteorologists the cooks, the diesel mechanics and things like that and all female. I think there were 11 of them. 11 Females. But their biggest problem if you'll excuse it, and I am not a geneticist or something like that, they had 2 gay ladies on board. And these two had partnered up with each other and then they had split out or something and they created all sorts of problems with the rest of them and things like that. And there was no way that they could sort this problem out, so they just said, won't do that again.

**Q1:** So it was completely interpersonal?

**A:** It was interpersonal relationships that had caused their problem. I don't think there was any problem with the competence of the people and things like that. I know that the... Because of there was fighting and people wouldn't listen to her and things like that... We know that when we took the next team down there, comes the winter, just before the winter comes in, all the vehicles, they bulldoze it out and then they take all the vehicles down and then they put them

into a big shed. But the shed gets snow build-up on them. And now they have to go and dig this, this trenching out to get the vehicles out. And when it came to dig this trench to get the vehicles out, I don't think they were strong enough to dig. Because they had to dig it out by hand to start off, to get the first one out so that they could get the first bulldozer out to start now clearing it. And they couldn't get their vehicles out so when the next team arrived in, they were not ready for them.

**Q1:** Oh. So no what I meant when I asked 'warn' did the, did the Germans specifically tell you that this was going to be an all women's team or was it just a team?

**A:** Well I think they must have told, they must have told Antarctic division that "Could you please take a team down, and they're all women, it's an all women team."

**Q1:** Because have you taken...

**A:** Because I knew they were all women.

**Q1:** Have you taken down German teams before that?

**A:** Ja. I've been taking down Germans team for years.

**Q1:** And Norwegians? Have you taken down any Norwegians, or...?

**A:** I took, I took... I'd taken Norwegians down on a couple occasions. The Norwegians had a base not very far from where SANAE I and II was, which they... I can't remember the name of the station. And we had to, we had to land all their bits and pieces by helicopter for them to construct this base and it was only going to be a temporary station. But they also wanted to take up some vehicles. But the vehicles were heavier than what our helicopter could pick up. So we had to dismantle these vehicles into three different parts and then fly them up and then had a crane over there and they put it... They used the crane to put the three pieces together to make up their, to fix their vehicles. And then in 19... 2000, I didn't take them down but I had to bring back the Norwegian team and that gave me just about the scariest moment of my life because they'd gone in miles beyond Neumayer station, I can't remember the name of the place just at the moment, and they'd gone into a Bhukta where they'd been landed over there and then they'd moved inland to create their station and then they left their station there and came back with all their vehicles and then they asked me to go along and fetch them. And I had the coordinates and I went into, in this place down there to go and fetch them, and I put my bows up there and then they arrived, and they arrived very late at night. So I had this problem, I was loading because it was late now, it was March, so we had night, and it was blowing a hooligan! It was a real blizzard. And I went along there and I had to start loading them. Fortunately you know the Agulhas has this big crane on her. So I'd picked them up and I'd bring them down and then I'd put their vehicles down into my hold and things like that and I got them all aboard. But then I had to get out of there. I could... I backed myself out of this place, and I went as far as I backed there and then I put my bow thrust to push me as far as I could on this way over here and I put my engines full ahead and rudder hard away and I went along there and the wind was just so strong, I started going towards and I knew I'm not going to do it... I had to stop everything and put my engines, and the ship was shaking and just pulled out.

**Q1:** That sounds so scary.

**A:** Then I had to go, and I tried it three times, three times to get out of there, and then the fourth time I actually went as far back as I could and I put my stern up against the, the ice and I managed to get into a position a little bit higher up where the wind was actually going over me. And then I used my bow thrust that pushed me just that extra 10 degrees this way, and when I got that sort of thing and I knew I couldn't go anymore then I went full speed with my, with my engines and my bow thruster pushing right this way and my stern thruster pulling this way and I went out there and [claps] I just [claps] hit the side of the ice as I was going out there and I got out. But when we went down I think the ship... If you go down in the port side of the engine-room you're going to see still some of the...

**Q1:** Still...

**A:** Some of the frames are still slightly...

- Q1:** There must be like...
- A:** But I couldn't... I... I...
- Q1:** Some... some red paint on the higher shelf there. Oh, that sounds very scary.
- A:** I should have, at that stage said I'm sorry I can't do it, we'll just stay here for two days until the wind goes away and then we'll come out quite easily. So sometimes you've got to be very careful that you don't do... If you don't do things that other people want you to, do what you know you should.
- Q1:** In the 80s when you took foreign team members, now I mean Norway and South Africa, they didn't exactly sit next to the table in the 1980s, next to one another I mean there were heavy sanctions. Did the people like just fly down to Cape Town?
- A:** *Ja* ag... We still worked with each other. The Norwegians sent a team down there in a ship called the An Denis. I can't remember what year that was. Anyway she went down there and we met up with the An Denis and we, we couldn't land our helicopter... Her flight deck was too small for our big helicopters. So we went over and we visited each other and we chatted to each other and had a whale of a time. I had the same with the Indians when I went down to Dutchengangodfrey. Down to where the Indians had their base. They'd gone down, they were taken down by with a Swedish ship. And the Swedish ship took them down there and they had the Indian teams on board there. Now the Indian teams didn't particularly want to have anything but when they saw us coming along the helicopter came along and looked at us and, you know we said to them "Listen, we're going to... we'll be going back to Cape Town some time, would you like us to take your mail?" No, no, no, they wouldn't trust us with their mail. But the Swedes gave us all their mail and we brought all the mail back.
- Q1:** Did you ever...
- A:** But they were, they were the only people. The Russians, the Soviets... The Soviets when they were whale... Whaling down there, they were very... Their... All their whale, their whale factory ship and all their whale catchers were faster than us. So when we saw them whaling, and we wanted to go along there and hear them, hell, they'd just pick it up and they'd steam away and get the hell away from us, so we couldn't... But we'd see all the trails and the things like that on the water. But we didn't know what sort of whales they were catching and to the best of our knowledge they had an international whaling inspector on board who was seeing that they wouldn't catch anything illegal.
- Q1:** But, uhm, when you visited the Soviets, the picture we saw, was that... Did you just fly out to their base Novolazarevskaya or what was the...
- A:** You know all the bases in Antarctica talk to each other by radio everyday. And on that particular occasion I had some of the big shots from the Department of Transport there. I had two or three of the Heads of the Antarctic Division who had come down with us. And of course they could tell me where to go, see. So, having spoken to these people over there I think somewhere along the line there they said "Can we pay you a visit?" And they were at Novolazarevskaya, and the Russians and East Germans had a base at the same place, and they said *ja* come and pay us a visit. So very, very kindly these big shots and all that they invited me to join them so this was one of the occasions that I went along there. And we flew. They had given a... Well we didn't have GPS in those days. They had told us where to go and we went along there and there was nobody there. And we landed where we saw the drums and things like that and then all of a sudden a, a great big...
- Q1:** Shaft opened...
- A:** No, a great big snow tractor came along there and then they came along and we were all good friends and things like that and they put us in there and they took us to, to their base. And they... And I... somewhere over here I've got photographs of their base. One of the things about their base was the amount of rubbish lying around all over show. The Russians were not clean hey. They left everything there.
- Q1:** Well picture yourself Novolazarevskaya now doesn't look much different either.

- A:** And up on the top of a hill somewhere they had one of these, one of these big tractors of theirs, and this was called the Maid of Karkof. And when it finally wore out or something like that and I don't know how they got it, but they drove it up onto the top of this hill near them over there and it's sort of a monument. But about a mile away from them the East Germans had a base. The East Germans invited us to come and have lunch with them and then we went up and had afternoon tea with the Russians. And we got the impression from the East Germans they didn't like the Russians much. And one of the things that amused me, here we were up at about 2, 3 000 feet, and there was this enormous big cave over there, and here was this river coming out of this cave, I mean running, I mean the air temperature is -15 degrees, but this river was running hey, strongly. It was going down there and just sort of getting onto the plain and freezing up. But this river was running and I don't know where...
- Q1:** Uhm, so, when you visited the Russians, did you take them something along? After...
- A:** Ag we took, you know because we knew that...
- Q1:** They fed you vodka and tomatoes.
- A:** We, we took them a couple of boxes of fruit and apples and grapes and things like that.
- Q1:** KWV or something...
- A:** Because we'd come down there, we discharged our cargo...
- Q1:** Oh, fresh things.
- A:** And so we were only about 4 or 5 weeks out of Cape Town, all our stuff was still fresh. Now Novolazarevskaya is one of the bases that the Russians go to but I think it's one of the last ones that they supply, because their supply ship goes down and does the other bases first. And then they get theirs, so of course they were so pleased to get all this fresh food particularly. And I still remember them giving us chocolate. And I'll tell you the best chocolate I ever tasted in my life was Russian chocolate. Man that was lekker. It was lovely. They also gave us biscuits with what you would call is, uhm, shrimp paté, but their shrimp paté was made out of krill, and you'd eat it and you'd [gesticulates spitting]. It had all...
- Q1:** [laughs] Ja, krill by all accounts aren't really nice.
- A:** It had all this carapace in it.
- JC:** Oh right.
- A:** It was terrible.
- Q1:** And, speaking about krill and things, when... Did you sometimes have to take live cargo, like penguins and stuff and seals back from the islands?
- A:** We didn't... Seals and penguins we used to... No I never brought seals back from Antarctica. Penguins I brought back quite often.
- Q1:** And what do you do with the penguins on board. I mean do they eat?
- A:** Well, there was a fellow by the name of John Visser who had permission, authority from the Department of Environment Affairs to collect penguins which he sent off to zoos in America and all over the world.
- Q1:** So what did they just catch the penguins, put them in a crate, and...?
- A:** Well he had 2 or 3 big crates on board and we used to take them into a penguin colony and then he used to go and he used to catch them, because he knew, he could sex them. And he could tell which were young ones and which were old ones and things like that. And then he'd bring them on board and he'd put them into this crate and then whether it was once or twice a day he'd go along and he'd wash them down and then he'd go along and pick them up [and then he'd pretend...] and he, he had pilchards. Not frozen pilchards but...
- Q1:** Tinned?
- A:** And he used to cut them in half and he used to feed them pilchards and then give them a couple of pills of some sort or the other and then he'd take them from this crate and put them, so that everybody got fed. And then we'd bring them back, I think, I don't know... I think, don't think there were ever more than about 12 or 15 of these things. And we did this at Marion Island. At

Gough Island he got rock hoppers and like the running penguins. But no seals.

**Q1:** But that's probably...

**A:** We never did seals. Seals, I think he used to...

**JC:** They had them earlier years.

**A:** The seals that you get down there are too big.

**Q1:** *Ja*.

**A:** I mean the, the ones that he would have wanted to take are the fur seals, and you got the fur seals of South Africa here...

**Q1:** I just want to ask before I forget, how did it happen that your wife and daughters went along to Antarctica?

**A:** I asked the Department if I could take them, and they said yes.

**Q1:** So they didn't have any issue with it?

**A:** No.

**Q1:** It was your wife, your 2 daughters...

**A:** I was... I'd been...

**Q1:** And 3 other people.

**A:** I had been in command for the 2 years. Look, my wife and my daughters didn't use up any space on board. My wife shared, and my daughters all shared my cabin. The one little girl slept on a mattress on the floor because she was only 7, and the other one. No, no she was... The 9 year old one slept on the floor, and the other one I just took my two chairs and put them together because she was so small, she slept on there. She was only 7 years old and so they used my accommodation they didn't take up any accommodation. They weren't issued with any Departmental clothing or anything like that, I provided all their protective clothing and things like that, so it didn't cost the Department anything except the food that they ate.

**Q1:** *Ja*, and that's not much.

**Q2:** When was this? In the early 80s?

**A:** *Ja*, that was, that was 1980. Now my present wife, she's been down with me twice. But when they asked me they said "Listen, we need somebody to take the SA Agulhas down to Antarctica now, somebody with ice experience, are you prepared to go?" so I said well... The first time... I got married in October, and when they'd ask me to go down in December and I said "Well I'm only prepared to... you know, I just got married. So if you want me to go you've got to let my wife come down otherwise, go and find somebody else." And they said "No problem."

**Q1:** *Ja* I think nowadays its kind of the regular. Always some senior officers get to take someone with.

**A:** And then a year or two later they asked me to go down again and I said well I'd like my wife to come with me and they said *ja*, okay.

**JC:** In Captain's and in chief engineers, in my experience... The Captain that was on the ship when that second murder happened, he, several voyages, had his partner come along. Really, big woman, she must have been about 6 feet 4 , 6 feet 5 tall. We called her Brunhilda. But she didn't like that. But then he, I didn't hear the details but I think he lost his job over that incident, because he was not seen again after that.

**Q1:** Now I know, well, I know nowadays, any of the senior officers can sort of, if you ask soon enough, take your wife along. Or partner.

**A:** Well I guess that they let you go, but I don't think they'll use accommodation that could be used for anybody else.

**Q1:** No, no. You have to share accommodation.

**A:** They once allowed my second officer to take his wife, and remember the second officer's only got a single bed. But we just organised one of the spare mattresses from the hospital.

**JC:** Yes. It's only really the Captain and the chief engineer that's got a...

**A:** It's only the Captain and the chief engineer, but in this case...



**JC:** That's got a bedroom with a dayroom or anything like that.

**A:** Double bed *ja*. Chief Officer, second engineer have double beds as well.

**JC:** Do they?

**A:** Or, not double beds but queen-size.

**Q1:** *Ja*. But, well was that something you enjoyed? Having your wife on board and all?

**A:** Well of course it is. You know, as I say I'm a bit of a recluse so of course having my wife there was a, was a pleasure. Having my daughters there was absolutely wonderful. They had the time of their life, these two little girls. They, to them... They had... The year before they had been overseas with their mother to Switzerland, they had flown overseas, and she, she was strong on the moral re-armament so she went over there and they travelled, she travelled over Europe with them. But the year afterwards when they went down there, but everybody spoiled them, they were spoilt rotten, they had themselves a whale of a time... They...

**Q1:** *Ja* I can imagine, all the passengers must have...

**A:** Every time the helicopter was flying, "Come and fly with us." They were in the helicopter, they were in the dinghis to go and catch seals, they went down in, down in the bottom of the... They were taught how to drive a skido at their age. They could drive a skido before they could drive a motorcar, a bicycle even.

**Q1:** [laughs] It's [indiscernible]

**A:** They were driven around in Caterpillars, they... One of these days, one of the days the two of them came with me and said "Daddy, you can't come into your cabin tomorrow afternoon, evening, tomorrow evening." So I said "Why not?" She said "Because we've invited the team up for drinks."

**Q1:** [laughs]

**A:** So they had the whole SANAE team up into my cabin, my wife and I had to get the hell out of it. They came there and they entertained them and they got the cooks and stewards you know to make them snacks and things like that.

**Q1:** *Ja* I can imagine they would have had cooks and stewards around their little pinkies.

**A:** And they made some of their own. And they made sure my booze locker was over there and these guys came in there and they had you know in that tiny little cabin of mine they got I think 12 team members with the two little girls in there and they had themselves a party. These guys could have but they didn't, they didn't clean me out completely in booze. But, they...

**Q1:** That's so sweet.

**JC:** Do you have any photographs of, of... With your family down there, Bill?

**A:** You know I think there somewhere along there might be.

**JC:** Because those would be quite rare in a way because in all the years I've been up and down it's only been on the Gough-Tristan round the children, and that always makes a very different atmosphere on the ship. Otherwise it's all adults.

**A:** These little girls went everywhere.

**Q1:** And, *ja*, I think Gustav Nel's wife also went along? Or there were one or two other wives as well. That time.

**JC:** *Ja* well, Funk's wife went down on the RSA because I've actually got that. He got that off, uhm... He was keen on making the stamps for the envelopes so we've got a photograph of the envelope that says first South African woman in Antarctica or something. *Ja*.

**A:** Are you talking about Louise Muller?

**Q1:** *Ja*?

**A:** Louise Muller has probably been further South than any South African woman. Because when she was on board the ship we were doing, we went down to Halley Bay, and then we went right down in the Wendell Sea, much further down south. We were going to go to the Argentinean base, Belgrano or something like that, but we didn't get quite that far down, so Rhoda and Louise went down South but I can't tell you exactly what the latitude was. But I don't know of any other

South African woman who's been that far south.

**Q1:** Well what was it like on the ship when there suddenly more women came along? How did it change the atmosphere?

**A:** Well I'll be quite honest with you, I, I didn't like having women on board the ship. Not because I didn't like women, I mean... My big problem was that if we had trouble, if there was any trouble about the women... Look, girls are all very nice and things like that and they, they'll behave themselves perfectly and things like that. But if there are a couple of guys who try to get off with the girls and the girls don't want anything to do with them, then you're going to end up with this... With the one guy who is getting off with a girl... I mean a difference of opinion with a guy who is trying to get off and they're now trying to cut him out. And if there's any sort of trouble in this area, hell, I really don't want that, you know. I'm a great believer, if you know where trouble is then leave it behind, don't take it with you. And we did have some of, some of those young ladies that, what was his name? Le Roux, Geology, UCT?

**JC:** Anton le Roux?

**A:** Anton. Anton sometimes would take some of these girls down with him for... And, hell, they were women. They were, they weren't lecturers, they weren't, and they were just students. They put a notice up on the board saying "Students required for a trip down to so-and-so. No pay, but..." or "we'll give you R10 a month" or something like that. No pay or something like that, we'll give you protective clothing and experience... And of course everybody volunteered on this thing but they had no dedication to the programme. So all they want to do is have themselves a ball. And of course the moment you start having a ball then there's all sorts of bloody trouble you know. Once you've landed the people at the island, you're down to a small nucleus of people on board. If there... Some people are causing problems you know if the chief scientists, the scientists comes up to you and says "You know the bloody girls they're drinking too late at bloody night" or something like that. "Then I can't get them to get up and you know to help me because we've got to do some of these things early in the morning, can you help me here?" then I'd say "How the hell can I help you, it's got nothing to do with me."

**JC:** Yes. I can remember once, getting back on the ship to come off Marion Island, I think after you're time, it was actually Dave Hall, Captain Dave Hall. And we all got on the ship and there we found the bar is closed. The passenger lounge was locked. So I sort of just asked the person there "Why is the bar locked?" and then it starts to become clear that there was some fun and games and, you know, a bit of raucous behaviour while we were on the island.

**A:** Were there people on board the ship?

**JC:** Ja well the, the oceanographic party that had been left behind you see. Anyway, so I think the chief shore scientist went and spoke on behalf of everybody who came off the island and say, you know, perhaps you can open the bar now because it had nothing to do with us.

**A:** Ja well I had one problem like that where somebody, somebody had a birthday. So we heard oh so-and-so is on board, he's having a birthday. So we went along and we asked the cook to bake a cake. And I don't know whether the cook's cake didn't come up to standard or something like that, but the guys had themselves a hell of a bloody party there, and then they had this cake about as big as this tray, and they started having a bloody snowball fight with bloody cake and bloody icing and...

**JC:** I'm afraid I remember the cake-fight, I was there.

**A:** All over the bloody show. And then my chief steward came, or my purser came and he said "Captain, you've got to come down and have a look at this bloody lot here." And I went down there and there was... Cake had been thrown around all over the bloody show, I mean shredded and trodden into the carpet... So I locked the bar and I said "The bar is staying closed until such a time as I can get the stewards to come in and clean," and I said "but it's going to be outside of their normal working time so, well, you know, quite possible that the bar won't be open today at all." But you know its behaviour like that that sort of...

**JC:** *Ja*, well after that one they solved the problem on the ship because if the birthday cakes, and it still is now, if you get a birthday cake it comes out at afternoon tea. Not arrive in the bar at night. That was...

**Q1:** And they're getting quite strict... And they're quite strict with the bar hours and things.

**JC:** Yes. I can remember one or two of the people who were there involved with throwing cake, you know. Ten years later their quite senior people who probably wouldn't want to be reminded probably in public at least of these things.

**Q1:** Oh, please tell us, do we know them?

**JC:** Well one was Denzel Muller who went off to run Kamalla.

**Q1:** Oh *ja*, well I can imagine Denzel Muller throwing cake.

**JC:** No I can't... I can't say that Denzel threw any cake. But he was in the room at the time.

**Q1:** *Ja* well...

**JC:** And so was I, and I personally don't remember throwing any cake.

**A:** Well probably the most embarrassing thing that I had, I don't know you might not have been there, but I know. Valdon Smith was there because he was as mad as a snake with me. The night before we got into Cape Town they had themselves a hell of a bloody party coming back from Marion Island. And they went along and they knocked off some fire extinguishers and they squirted foam all over the bloody ship. And I said "Okay, I want to know who, who it is." And no taming them. So I came into Cape Town, I wouldn't come into Cape Town, I went out and anchored in the bay there. And I said "Now we are not going to go into Cape Town docks until such a time as I know who is responsible for this.

**JC:** Yes I remember that.

**A:** And I then subsequently found that one of the guys who has caused this was one of my junior engineers.

**Q1:** Oh my.

**Q2:** Uh oh.

**A:** But they came along and they told me, they told me who it was and I... The one guy, I, I had him arrested. I had him arrested on the grounds of the Merchant Shipping Act says that you are not allowed to damage or deface safety equipment. And if you do that thing you are liable to a fine of R1 000.00 or 6 months in prison, and I said to this guy, "You're going to go to prison my friend." "But I've been on the island for 15 months" or something "and I want to go home" so I said "You should have thought of that before you picked up the..." But the officer, he got a sack on the bloody term... But I would have, I would have sued. But then Captain Richardson came down and he said no. Let the whole bloody thing go. So it was, but, you know...

**JC:** But I mean it's a very serious business. Its like if you steal the, the rope or the ring off a beach. You know the safety ropes they have on beaches for rescuing? And that rope is made with a special blend of colours in it. And it's only supplied for that purpose. So if you've got a piece, it means you've stolen it. You know you're taking away the chance of somebody being rescued.

**Q1:** Well fire extinguishers anywhere you're not supposed to...

**JC:** Well I can remember...

**Q1:** Tamper with them.

**JC:** Because the occasion that I remember I'd actually, genuinely had gone to sleep so I wasn't aware of what was happening. But the person had been unintelligent enough to remove the fire extinguisher from the corridor that the Captain walked down every day to breakfast. If he'd taken it from the other side of the ship, you might not have noticed it was missing. But you walk down, and there's the empty frame with the little thing attached on the top, and its missing, and you're just going to see it. So you...

**A:** It's a mess that they...

**JC:** Probably said what's happened here?

**A:** Created, because this foam, when it dries out, it leaves a foam on board. It's a hell of a lot...

**JC:** In my memory, after they had fired this thing off it had got thrown overboard, and so it wasn't even there to put back.

**A:** *Ja.*

**JC:** And then we waited and then eventually we came into, we were in the harbour, and we all had to go to the dining room. And a policeman came along and he was going to interview all of us before we were allowed off. And there was a bit of a resurrection about that, a lot of moaning and you realised that you were surrounded by 10 people from the island. So we ended up all putting our names and addresses and phone numbers on a piece of paper and then we were allowed off. Nothing further happened. But, you know, it was a serious event. Well I've seen people instantly sacked on Marion Island for doing exactly the same thing. Back on the ship within an hour.

**Q1:** Were you ever given any directives as to how... If you were to come across international ships, especially in the 80s, how to deal with them, what to say what not to say?

**A:** I had a very, very good relationship with the Director General of Transport.

**Q1:** Who was it?

**A:** I'm trying to remember now.

**JC:** Was that Eksteen?

**A:** Eksteen, yes.

**Q1:** *Ja*, AB Eksteen.

**A:** Now Eksteen, I got on very well with him because I was open with him and he was open with me. He... I never ever said anything to the press or anybody that could have, that was contentious or anything like that. And he came along to me and he said "Look, you are free to go because I know you won't say anything." But now on a couple of occasions every, every year or sometimes twice a year I would arrange to sail on my own back from Cape Town and then go around to False Bay. Now, because I was in the Navy, the Navy never... Doesn't fight, the Navy just trains, trains, trains, trains. So we spent all our time training. But the trouble with the SA Agulhas was you would join a ship and you would have to go down there and you have to do a job. And you had no... The people were thrown in the deep end there. The officers didn't know how to drive a boat, the crew hadn't been in a raft, they didn't know how to... And the air force also, in those days, the Puma pilots had no big aircraft ships that they could operate from so they, they needed to know how to operate their aircraft, they needed to get experience. So I would go around, I would sail early on a Monday morning and I would go around to False Bay over here and I would stay here for 5 days in False Bay and I would put my boats over and my rafts over and I'd let everybody drive around and get the aircraft, the aircraft would fly out and we'd do lifting and hoisting and flight deck handling and things like that, all under our own thing. And another thing that I used to do is I used to go to Walker Bay, Hermanus. Now this 35, no, what was it? 30 Squadron as we were, as it was then. 30 Squadron had the freedom of the city Hermanus, and one of the 30 Squadron air force guys there owned a big steakhouse over there. And so they always used to want, you know they used to say can't we do something about it. So I would go around there and I would anchor off Hermanus and I would send my helicopters in and I would get the Mayor and the Magistrate and the Chief of Peace and a couple of people and things like that and we'd fly them all out onto the ship and we'd all have, I'd give them a luncheon on the boat. And then we'd fly them all ashore or something like that. I would keep up good relations you know with, with the pilots and with the... Hermanus and things like that. And then of course we'd come along and do this. Now on some of the occasions that we'd go along there, Eksteen would come along to me and say "Can I have a... I want to have a cocktail party on board your, the, ship." Or a party, and I'd say "*Ja*, sure." Then he would tell me what evening it was and we'd go along there and all his friends would come on board the ship, all his colleagues, I mean these were colleagues, and we'd sail the ship and we'd go out and we'd have a... we'd have a... This sort of cocktail party and then I'd come in and then they'd all get off the ship and then I would sail again and I would go along there. And then you would see in the paper "Government ship

used for..." you know, "...used for parties." Or something like that.

**Q1:** Oh. Blown out of proportion.

**A:** And I'd say you no, you know, as far as I'm concerned I have to sail I have to come off the jetty, I have to go on the jetty, the crew need experience and time to "ship-up" and doing that sort of thing, and when we'd go around there, we'd do an exercise with, with PENTAE Marine on picking up a tow from each other or something like that, which we might have to do. And the passengers all stand around. If you go to the Cape Times or the Argus you would see photographs of those sort of things. And I said "No, this is all done in a thing, the ship has got to sail. Its got to... Needs training and the people need all this experience and I have to give it to them." And I'd take them around there to False Bay, and I said "Were not wasting any money, we're training people. We have no time to train when we're on the job down on the island, its dangerous down there, I need a good..." And I would talk to them directly. I wouldn't say "I'm not allowed to talk to you without permission." Eksteen would say then "Say what you like, I know you won't say anything..." And then he'd phone me up and he would say thank you, you know, nice and simple end to the saga. So I never got into trouble with anybody about that sort of thing. But I mean I never ever used the ship for anything shouldn't have. I used that ship myself, both my daughters had their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday parties on board.

**Q1:** That's a lovely idea. I wouldn't mind...

**A:** And I'd get the cooks and the stewards in, but I paid for all the booze and all the food, and I paid the stewards and the cooks, I paid them their overtime out of my pocket. But it was a nice venue...

**Q1:** It's such a nice idea...

**A:** And we did the hanger up with frons and flags and things like that. And of course for their friends at 21 this was quite a unique occasion so it was... Yes, I used the ship. Why not? I gave it enough of my time.

**Q1:** [laughs] And you never got any directives from, from the Navy or anyone?

**A:** No, the Navy had nothing to do with me. When I left the Navy, after I'd had my... I won't say I got it down with General Magnus Malan. When I left the Navy I asked could I be transferred to the Department of Transport, and they said "No, we can't transfer you. We can't transfer you because if we allow you to transfer there's going to be a spate of resignations or people all wanting to transfer and we don't want that to happen." So I then found myself now in an embarrassing situation. I'd been with them for 15 years, I'd been paying my pension fund you know, that sort of thing, and I was going to lose the lot. So I went down and I explained this to the Department of Transport and they said "Look it doesn't matter what the Navy says, as far as we're concerned you're transferring, so we'll just carry on with your pension," which they did do, and... But when I went along to Admiral Walters who was there, and then he said "Bill, I am not going to, I am not going to allow you to go." And I got on very well with Charlie Walters. He said "I am not going to allow you to go because there's going to be a spate of resignations and I can't say well they'll say 'Well you allowed him, why can't you allow us?' so I am not going to do it." And when I'd come along and I said "Don't worry about it sir, I've sorted it all out now, and I am telling you sir I'm going to do more for the Navy after I've left it than when I was in it." Because I was now going to be shovelled around from one office job to another one because I couldn't go to sea, I was too senior. And I was doing jobs which I disagreed with entirely. So he said "*Ja* okay, well fine." So when I joined the Agulhas I made an arrangement with the Navy and every time it went down to Marion Island, not to Gough Island or to Antarctica, and every time we went down to Marion Island, I used to, the Navy used to send four swans to come down and travel on board the ship for, for experience. Because in those days it was the only time swans could ever go away to sea other than the day trip from Cape Town to Simon's Town or something like that. So I used to take these girls along there and they usually used to send me one officer I used as a midshipman or a sub-lieutenant, a petty officer and a couple of radio

things, but they were all communications and things. And they used to, I used to put them on watch, and they used to spend time on the look-out, second officer, the watch on the bridge, and in the radio room, you know operating the radio and they would operate the radio from the ship to Silver Mine, to... And they got all over, you know, very good experience. Then another thing that I did for the Navy is, we... When the ship was built, she had a couple of very, very advanced deep sea echo sounders for working with the bottom of the, how deep the bottom of the ocean is. And so I spent every single voyage on board the ship, I would never travel down on the same route, I would go down to Marion Island, to Gough Island, down to Antarctica a different route all the time. And we would run this echo sounder all the time and then we would mark every time we got a good satellite fix what our position was. And then we would transfer all those things from the echo sounder trace onto a thing called a GIP code chart. And then we'd take this gip code chart and we would give it to the hydro graphic office. And this gip code information was sent to an international organisation, General Telemetric Charts of the Ocean at the international hydro graphic office. And they gave me a, the Navy gave me a medal for it one day.

**Q1:** Good time, good work. One last question about the Navy, during the Falklands War, was there anything... I mean I mean... It took place in the South Atlantic and we probably mostly sail in the Indian Ocean... But did you come across any extra restrictions or anything?

**A:** Listen the Falkland War was basically when the Falklands... When the Argentines invaded the Falklands or something like that, it was March April May, I think. And we were down there. But I know we were down, we were down at Antarctica when they took over, when they took over the Falklands. And at that particular time we had to go and put a weather, a weather buoy up as a, as a weather station on an island called Southern Tuli. And when we went to Southern Tuli, there, there was this base, the Argentine base which was on a breach territory and this very tall mast... Now this very tall mast was a white emblem from the Royal Navy, and there was all these bases over there. Now I didn't go ashore unfortunately, I sent, I sent my meteorologist and a couple of my crew over there and they went there and they said this base has been ransacked... Has been ransacked. But they actually took a couple of bloody photographs of what it was like and they came back on board the ship from there and they said "No", and I said "You guys haven't brought anything back from the, from the base with you, have you?" And my chippy came along and he choked and he had a packet of Elasto plasters and I said "Throw it over the side. You're not going to keep it." But when we looked at the photographs, there written in the mirrors were names of leading seaman so-and-so, HMS Heckler. It was the British who'd come over there and taken over the... They'd taken over the base... They'd captured all the Argentines, they'd put them on their ship and they'd taken them away. But they had...

**JC:** They trashed it down.

**A:** Littered... There were bottles... There were bottles of booze all over the show there as I, as I understand it. Anyway, we went along there and we sat up our weather station, got everybody on board and then went off. Now, because of that particular time I took a whole lot of videos of parts of the, of the southern, South Sandwich Islands and things like that, which I've never actually looked at whatsoever. And I don't know if they're still here.

**Q1:** That would be interesting.

**Q2:** Yes.

**A:** I don't know.

**JC:** *Ja* I think the British just took that base down, burnt it down I think.

**A:** And I though oh well, I'll give all these, I'll give these to the British if you know, if they wanted to land on the islands I filmed you know a good landing beach here and a good landing beach there and things like that. But then when I went around there a year later to put another weather st... Buoy over there, somebody had burnt this base down, they had open fire at it with guns and they shut up everything, and to me this was one of the most iniquitous wastes that I've ever seen. I mean all the buildings were there they were perfectly good. But if you kick the Argentines

out then you might as well say we're now going to take over the base, but they didn't. They burnt them down, they destroyed them.

**JC:** The British took it down. Yes.

**A:** And all they left there was this hell of a bloody mess.

**JC:** One wonders if there still is a big mess there. All these years later.

**A:** I bet you there is.

**Q1:** I wonder...

**A:** I don't know if they'd ever gone back there again.

**JC:** Because the base has never been replaced.

**Q1:** Well they're still going to Southern Tuli now for the weather buoys. Hanlie Gouws was going...

**A:** She's going down there now. I saw it in the Burger that she was going Southern Tuli to put up one of these weather buoys.

**Q1:** They went there last year as well. We should tell her she... Oh but its still, it's still messy. *Ja* I know last time, last year the oceanographers told me it's still a lot... Still messy, nobody cleaned it up. Lots of debris. Well, at the...

**JC:** Well the Argentineans aren't going to do it, so the British have to do it, or nobody does it.

**Q1:** And they're at one another's throats again now.

**JC:** Yes, yes.

**Q1:** David Cameron said the Argentineans are busy with colonialism... The British can hardly... Anyway, so then you left the service of the... *Ja* we should start going back... Then you left the service of the Agulhas early in the 90s?

**A:** I retired early because I couldn't stand the Trade Unions, as simple as that. I loved the job.

**Q1:** But you still went back as an ice pilot?

**A:** Well I went back as an ice pilot but then I, just to... For a little... *Ja* I went along and I took command of the *Tristania* and I went along cray fishing off Tristan da Cunha for two years. And then I came back and I... But I joined the Hydrographic Office and I wrote a couple of books.

**End of recording**