

Captain FREDDIE LIGTHELM

Date: 8 February
Place: South Atlantic (Greenwich Meridian, 60 degrees South)
Interviewer (Q): Lize-Marie van der Watt | Geskiedenis Departement, Stellenbosch Universiteit
Interviewee (A): Captain Freddie Ligthelm | SA Agulhas | 2001+ | 3rd Officer, Chief Officer, Captain

Q This is the oral history interview with Captain Freddie Ligthelm. It is today the 8th of February and we are somewhere in the Southern Ocean... are we still in the Southern Ocean?

A Yes, South Atlantic

Q South Atlantic

A We're just coming up the Greenwich Meridian on 60 degrees South. We will be entering the 50s soon, and as you can see the weather is not very good. The outlook is also not looking very good but we're heading in the right direction, and that's the most important.

Q Now, my first question is just your own path to, how can one say, in this sense, the ocean, to Marion and Prince Edward Islands, or Antarctica, or Gough. How did your career take you there?

A Well, it was strange actually. I always wanted to be an aircraft pilot, and I initially did that for small aircraft. And my interest was sort of adventurous, you know. Flying, ships and things like that. But eventually I went to sea with De Beers Marine, to be able to pay for the studies becoming a pilot. And then, I don't know, the bug just bit me and I continued being at sea. But I always read, even as a cadet going with, working for De Beers Marine mining, I read about the Agulhas and the trips down to the South and to Antarctica. I always said to myself: "Now that is where I want to be". And I just got the opportunity, because the wife of a senior driller on one of the ships that I worked on, worked for Schmidt which was Venter at that stage. And I got to meet her there and she offered me a job on the Algoa, which is sort of part of this division, if you want to call it that. And next moment I resigned, seven years later, and came through [Penta] then in 2002, no, 2001, in September. And my first ice trip was in December 2001.

Q As...

A As Third Officer.

Q As Third Officer.

A Ja. But I came, I sort of de-ranked, I de-ranked myself to actually come on that voyage, because I was already a Chief Officer in my previous company, and I was a Chief Officer with this company. But I said to them "I'll take the pay cut" to be able to do the voyage.

Q To do this voyage.

A Ja. And then I stuck on this ship for years to follow then.

Q And the Captain during your first voyage?

A It was Kevin Tate, Captain Kevin Tate

Q Kevin Tate?

A And Captain Dave Hall was at that stage Chief Officer.

Q Okay. So that was in 2002, your first ice trip. 2001

A 2001. December.

Q Can you still remember your first impressions of Antarctica?

A Ja, it was just always exciting, you know. It was. The weather was always horrendous, but that's to be expected. But ja, seeing the first iceberg, I mean, you still had those film type cameras. And you took your first reel just on your first iceberg, and you know, you realised after that it was just such a waste

Q Ja, ja, ja.

A And, but as you know. It was exciting, and I enjoyed it. Every minute of it. I think if you, you know, as you become through the years and more senior, it becomes more monotonous, because it's a long trip. But there's always a surprise, you always learn something new, which is nice.

Q Like...

A This trip was extra-ordinary to all of us. And I mean, between Dave and myself we have almost, what, almost 18 years of experience if you add it up. And Charlton himself is also quite a senior guy for down here. But anyways. We didn't find much ice. The sea temperature was high. We had lots of snow. The swell up against the shelf was absolutely amazing. It was huge, which made our work against the ice shelf extremely difficult. And lots of large sections of the ice shelf broke away. Now we've got a couple of theories, but I think you

need to have a professional opinion from a glaciologist, or somebody like that to tell you exactly why the ice shelf is breaking away in sections like that. But in the previous year, massive icebergs struck the areas that we were working in and probably caused some energy to go through it and crack some sections up and that is why it started breaking. Due to the energy of the water there was no sea ice out there to stop the swell. The swell came in and sort of broke away the ice shelf, which is absolutely amazing, and dangerous. I tell you what; I'm definitely 20 years older than when we left Cape Town. I took two days now to recover from that last two days with the cargo work. It was slamming the ship up against the ice shelf like that; it's like somebody just punching you in the ribs the whole time.

Q Ja.

A Because I mean, if you think about the ship, the ship is run with hydraulics, engineering, electronics, and everything shudders with the ship. So, I mean the chances of things going haywire and people getting injured is high and you know, you always keep that in the back of your mind. Unfortunately there's no other way for us to do the heavy lifts. You have to do the heavy lifts up against the ice shelf.

Q Even the Kamov can't do those things.

A No, the Kamov can lift five tonnes, we need to lift 25.

Q Twenty-five tonnes, yes. And the ship itself is not a new one, so...

A Ja, she doesn't have the features that we'll have on the new ship where we'll be able to sit off the ice shelf on DP and work the cargo, so you have to physically manoeuvre her. And her machinery is not that reliable and responsive. I mean she was built in 1977, her keel was laid. So she's old, you know, you handle her with great care...

Q Care...

A ... and soft and don't want things to break. But still she does her job, she does an amazing job and again she pulls it through, so it's an amazing ship.

Q Amazing ship. Ja. And your first trip to Marion Island? Did that follow soon after?

A The following year, in 2002 then, in April. But we came back from that SANAE cruise to the Neumeyer cruise, because we used to do a Neumeyer charter directly... basically you'll do a SANAE cruise, come back, discharge and load within five days and come back to Antarctica. Do the Neumeyer discharge and come straight back?

Q How long did that take, all in all?

A Well...

Q A good four months?

A ... your SANAE voyage will be like this one, which is typically 72 days. Then you'll get back to Cape Town, load five days and, you'll steam in, discharge one day and you'll steam out. So its ten days there and ten days back, so you're looking at about 21 days for a Neumeyer cruise, after you SANAE cruise.

Q Was it very different working for the Germans than the South Africans?

A Yes, the cargo for the Germans are just 20 foot containers, they don't have great bulk like we have, you know. So it's a simple loading plan, it's a simple discharge plan.

Q So why is the South African plan not simple?

A Because they don't have their base close to the ice shelf and also they don't containerise everything, because they put it on sleds.

Q To take it...

A The Germans...

Q ... to SANAE.

A Ja, to SANAE. And they need to drag it all the way to SANAE which is 80 miles away. I suppose they could containerise things, but then you're not left with the option of being able to fly cargo off, which at times you would want to do.

Q Ja.

A And ja, I suppose containerisation sort of wastes a little bit of space, you know. You can fully pack a container always.

Q So your first Marion trip was then that year after, during April.

A April 2002.

Q Is a Marion trip, in your experience, very different to an Antarctica trip in terms of the duties that the ship has to fulfil?

A Ja, I think, you know, you don't have the ice navigation aspect of it. With Marion you've got the dangers of uncharted areas. Marion is still very poorly charted, and there's uncharted rocks in some of the areas there.

And I mean, up to even last year we discovered new anchorages which we never thought we'd be able to reach. The weather at Marion – Marion is situated past 40 degrees, so it's directly in the path of the major depression systems. So Marion's weather, it's always, it's pretty much always crap, you know. Heavy weather, especially in the winter months. So you prepare in the back of your mind for that, you know. You prepare for bad weather, rather than ice conditions, you know. But the SANAE cruise is the most challenging one, if you want to call it that. The challenging thing at Marion is refuelling the island you know. You have to put an open moor, and you're sitting very close to the rocks and it's a difficult operation, because it's a volcanic island, it doesn't have a long stretch of topography underneath that sits out and you can anchor deeply. You have to anchor straight next to the hostile rock face, and it's not a nice feeling for any mariner. Well again, we've prepared the new vessel for that sort of eventualities, to have a system where you can sit on DP, the dynamic positioning system. And I think that will assist us in that sort of operations.

Q Speaking about the new vessel, in what capacity are you giving advice? Is it the capacity of someone with expertise? Or as a representative of Schmidt? Or...

A Ja, I think it is a bit of both. The Department formed a small group of elected members for the planning of the thing. I was fortunate to a Master on this ship at that stage and I've got a lot of experience on this vessel. So they just used me in the capacity of being available from Schmidt already on this ship, so... And eventually I was nominated by the VG for participating on this programme, so now I've been, between me and Dave and some of the engineers, we've been involved fully with the programme from the start, which is nice. You've got a team of people that's been involved right from the start, from the request for information document, and we're gonna probably take it through to the end, hopefully.

Q Hopefully. And going to Finland? Have you been to Finland?

A No, I haven't been to Finland.

A No, I haven't. I've just been in conference call they selected Dave, because he's a contractor and he's retired from sea-faring actually, because of his experience they've elected him to represent the deck department, if you want to call it that. So he's been doing that trip and then they'll conference call us via Skype and then we'll give them advice from this side. We did it like that, but I'm scheduled to go on the first of September to see the last of the fitment of the equipment on board, and then to take the ship out for trials. Probably in one of the North Seas there, Baltic or whatever. It all depends on exactly what they want to test, because they're obviously going to want to test the ice capability of the ship, so they need to look for ice-covered waters. And then I'll probably bring the ship down, you know. That was the last word that I had and I'm looking forward to that.

Q Would it be your first experience sea-faring in the Northern Seas?

A No, I've sailed on container vessels and I've... not quite up that far North, but I've been to East and West. North America, Mexico, Canada...

Q Okay, so you've had experience with northern polar waters... well not polar waters exactly...

A Not polar waters. I did about two years on container vessels as a Junior Officer, to gain further sea time. And I did also the far East, Japan and Taiwan and China and all those places at some stage of my life.

Q How different is a container vessel to this?

A Well it's more commercialised, you know. You've got a lot of pressure I think, as an old man, I only what Junior Officer's, so I wouldn't know what the pressure is like, but I would think that, you know, you've got a certain time that you need to be at B if you started from A. And I think that pressure – it sometimes make you do things that is not safe, or speeds that you're not required to and all sorts of other things. But I don't fancy the commercial industry when you're just counting boxes on and off, you know. Perhaps the areas that you visit are interesting. But then again, I've been to Hong Kong, I don't know, maybe five times, and I never went ashore, because the time there is only about six hours and then you go again. So I prefer the science and the oceanography and the logistics that we do here and the challenges that we have on the DE-8 type ships you know, like the oceanography vessels and this ice navigation vessel. So I've served on most of the ships in this company. I also enjoyed the mining ships, that's also a total different kettle of fish, but I enjoyed that.

Q Speaking of this as an ice navigation vessel, what exactly is the Agulhas? Is it a passenger vessel, a cargo vessel, a research ship?

A It's a multi-purpose vessel.

Q Multi-purpose vessel.

A Ja. And it's classified as a passenger vessel. But in the way of the rules, it cannot actually be a passenger vessel, because it carries liquid fuel and no passenger vessel is actually allowed to do that. But between Lloyd's and SAMSA, Lloyd's is the classification society and SAMSA is the sort, the flag state authority,

they've come to sort of a compromise. And they, SAMSA sees us as a cargo vessel, Lloyd's sees us as a passenger vessel. So between the lot of them, we just follow whatever rules they apply.

Q Oh, Okay.

A We don't have a choice. We need to supply the base with the people... with the people and with the fuel. You need both. So it's difficult to then get a ship like that. They are working on an actual special vessel classification. But you see, when you get to the numbers of 100 passengers it becomes a passenger ship either which way.

Q Yes.

A So we've actually, with the new ship we've had a couple of challenges. How exactly we are going to apply these rules. And they've come to a couple of compromises, where they say "Right, you'll have to have an inner system around this polar diesel tanks" and so forth. So it's become a bit more technical and complicated.

Q In terms of science, do the Agulhas actually get taken out on dedicated science journeys, voyages? Or is it mostly logistic...

A Ja, mostly logistic, hardly ever... we've done one or two ornithological type voyages where you've got the ship covered with birdwatchers and they just go maybe south past Marion.

Q Were you on that voyage when they took the birdwatchers past Marion?

A Yes. Ja well... what you find is that during any logistical voyage, there will be a scientific part of it. Like on this voyage, we did the buoy run. But buoy run was added on with the oceanography work. So at some section we stopped with buoy run and continued with the oceanography section. So it is written as part of the voyage, it's not only logistics, it's combined.

Q That bird watching voyage, what was that like? Did you have to do things differently in terms of the passengers? Or was that...

A No look, they wanted to go past Marion, because they wanted to see the albatri and they wanted to experience some of the Southern Ocean birds that they didn't normally get to see. And then they wanted to get into the ice. So we sailed past Marion into the closest sea ice that we could get. One day in there and then we came around back to Cape Town.

Q Were they paid passengers?

A Paid passengers/

Q They paid?

A Ag, I think it was the institute, the ornithological institute that paid for it and then they made a certain price for the passengers to pay for it to cover most of the cost. But it was an interesting voyage and interesting people. It was a difficult voyage, because the ship's one roll damp tank didn't work properly, so it was an uncomfortable voyage. I remember that clearly. But other than that it was interesting.

Q Interesting. Exactly how does the relationship work between the DEA and Schmidt and the crew?

A Well, we all work for Schmidt Marine, alright, which is a third party, man and management company. So we man the vessel and we manage the vessel for them. And to do this we ask a certain fee, alright. I don't know exactly the... how the... exactly how much and how it works. What I know is that Schmidt asks a management fee, DEA pays for it and in that management fee certain things will be included. Like we will keep the vessel certified, we'll keep the vessel sea-worthy; we'll keep the vessel manned. So the DEA has nothing to worry about, except to get their people ready, their cargo ready and pay for the fuel, I think the fuel is a separate thing here as a ship needs fuel. And the insurance, it's covered by Schmidt from the personal point of view, like you and I, but the ship itself is insured through DEA. It remains their ship, it's their property, we just man and manage it for them.

Q So the other ships are also DEA?

A They're DAFF now. It changed department.

Q Department of Agriculture...

A ... Agriculture...

Q ... Fisheries...

A ... Fisheries and Forestry or Forestry and Fisheries.

Q But this one remains DEA

A Environmental Affairs, for now.

Q Ja, that's what I wanted to ask. Do you think that it will change, now that it falls under Oceans and Coasts? Who will own the new one?

A I don't know, there's talk about... there's talk about it. But I don't think it will happen, because DEA has

manned and managed the bases, and they co-ordinate everything, so I don't see how... Unless there's an institute, a scientific institute formed, where they take charge of them, maybe through the Department of Science and Technology, and they take charge of this ship and the new ship and... I think... I don't really how they're going to work it, but I there's a couple of ways they could do it. But I don't think it will shift.

Q Okay.

A Not in the near future.

Q In the time you've been working on the Agulhas as Officer and Master, has something changed in terms of the passengers that you could notice?

A The passengers change every trip. But the hierarchy stays pretty much the same. It's always... DCOs we all know, because they're from the Department and we work right next door to them on East Pier. So we see them on a regular basis. But the scientific staff from time to time becomes familiar and similar, because of the same project, like with sealers on Marion. And some of the ornithologists, like Peter Ryan, Steven Chown and those guys, you know. I mean Isabel from the oceanographers, Sebastian... so there's a couple of guys that remain the same. But the youngsters and the understudies, they always change. So you always get new people on the ship.

Q So there's no significant change that you can see, that they're getting younger or anything like that?

A No.

Q More mixed?

A No. No there's... sometimes you'll get more females, sometimes you won't. I think it's... it... no, there's not really been a major change that I've noticed, no.

Q Have you noticed any changes in the environment on Marion or on Gough or Antarctica?

A Ja, I've... you know, I think there's definitely evidence that global warming is doing something, or there's some heating period that we are going through, because, I mean, you find less and less ice, more icebergs, on this trip anyway. And even at Marion, we've seen presentations from Steven Chown when there was a glacier still running down the side of Marion, and there's nothing there now. So what exactly is happening there, I don't know.

Q Have you been onshore on all the islands and Antarctica?

A Yes

Q To the bases? Have you been to SANAE?

A Yes.

Q When did you go to SANAE?

A 2006.

Q 2006?

A When... just shortly after that one guy died there with Skinner – Dewald.

Q What is that like, for the Master of the vessel? Because obviously you're also involved in that kind of...

A It's sad, you know.

Q ... operation.

A I mean it's similar to what happened to Jamneck. And the thing is I knew both those guys personally. I wasn't with Dewald, I wasn't Master; I was Chief Officer at that stage. But I spoke to him the morning and said to him "Cheers, enjoy your year", because he was going to stay behind or... I don't know whether he was actually staying behind. But he said... he was from Hermanus Magnetic Observatory and... No, he was going to stay behind, he was with the team. And that afternoon, we took him off the helicopter and we put him in one of the freezers. So it was sad, man. He was... the feeling on the ship was awkward. And people didn't want to go down to that hold, you know. You get some people that are, I don't know, superstitious, I suppose. But for me it was just sad.

Q So did you actually have to go fetch him? Is that why you went to the base?

A No, no. But I had to carry him into the fridge. I was there helping the guys carry him in there, and it was preparing the fridge and so forth. And we actually had to do a long section of the voyage with him in the fridge, which was also a bit...

Q ... kind of...

A ... weird

Q ... weird, ja.

A But... and then with Jamneck, who also, I thought he was a great guy. I got to know him. And when I read it in the news, it was sad to read that. I think people don't always realise how hostile Antarctica really is. In my

opinion, you cannot be too careful. I suppose sometimes that is a little bit conservative, I suppose. But I'd rather be conservative. Especially with my guys. I always tell them "I'm not here to win a popularity contest; I'm not here for you guys to like me. I'm here to make sure that you can have both your hands and feet attached to your body when you kiss your wife hello when you get back home." That's my main priority. If I didn't do that, then there's something wrong. And I think this trip is very dicey in that way, because I could never guarantee myself that these guys are going to be okay. , because there's blocks and things swinging around, cargo weighing 25 tonnes swinging around like it's no tomorrow. So it was tough, and I'm just glad we're...

Q On the way home safely.

A ... we on the way home. I'm glad we came off okay and I'm happy for it.

Q Rescue operations, what are they like? I mean you've done a couple of either that you got sent out of South Africa, you did the Marion medevac.

A I did the [Cowrie Dancer], as Chief Officer, and I did the medevac as Master for the one that fell in the water. The [Cowrie Dancer] was the most interesting one, because it's the first time that we did rendezvous calculations that we... towards that [tick] to actually apply the search and rescue patterns and then to search for the missing person and to estimate the trip rates... What was fortunate for us is that, just before it happened, we actually worked in that area. We went to Marion and then we went up there and did scientific runs in exactly the area where it happened. When we came back to Marion then we were there for a couple of days when these guys sailed across it. So we knew what the currents and predominant drift rates were. So I feel... I strongly felt after that also to go and speak to the authorities, because i feel that people are allowed to take yachts, I mean even single-handedly take yachts and sail across to wherever they want. And the regulations don't regulate them properly. I mean they don't have [indiscernible?] on them, they're not properly manned, they're not properly trained. I mean, the one woman that we saved there... Okay she was the best off, but she'd never even sailed on a yacht before. So there were three, the skipper... no there were four. The skipper, he broke his femur when he got shunted across off the deck onto the... most of those yachts have got like a little poop deck thing there at the back. Broke his femur, then they took him in. The other guy took over the wheel. He got shunted off when they broached for the... I don't know many times they broached, but they broached again and the railing that he'd attached his harness to broke off and he went off. And he wasn't found again. The other guy had quite a bad head injury and the lady... she was okay, but she was also bruised up. You could see when you went into that yacht that everything was turned upside down.

Q What did you do with the yacht?

A We scuttled the yacht

Q Scuttled.

A Ja, when we got there we got them out and put them on a rescue boat. We sent the Second Mate and the medic to just point the yacht in the right direction so that it doesn't roll so much, and we gave them a couple of shots just to relax them and sea-sickness and so forth. Then...

Q Rescue boat? Sorry, what...

A Oh, the FRC. The fast rescue boat. I was driving the fast rescue boat. So then we put him on a big orange stretcher, a solid stretcher – that is the solid stretcher. Then we put him across the boat like that, and then we brought him onto the ship and then we just brought the rescue boat up to the level of the hospital, opened the aft hospital door and just carried him through into the hospital like that.

Q Oh I didn't know you could even do that.

A Ja, we did that.

Q The aft hospital doors.

A Ja. On the poop deck.

Q And did you use the helicopters as well?

A No. We used the helicopters just to land the guys initially there. But we couldn't use the helicopters too much, because the masts were still upright on the yacht, so you'll get everything tangled up there. And it was getting dark, so we were working in darkness when we rescued them.

Q That must have been very...

A It was exciting. There was about 3m swell with about 20 knots of wind, so conditions weren't perfect. And it was dark. But we used the ship's search lights and the Captain manoeuvred the vessel straight up to the yacht. I mean, we were okay. It was interesting and exciting.

Q Did you go immediately to Cape Town after that?

A No, we hung around for about two, three days in search of the other guy and their life-raft, because the life-raft also broke off. But we don't know whether it actually inflated or not. And we did search patterns with the ship and with two helicopters but after two days we couldn't find them.

Q But after that did you go to Cape Town or did you go back to Marion?

A We went back to Marion.

Q Went back to Marion.

A Ja, we had to still finish our work there. So we kept those guys on board.

Q They were stable...

A It wasn't a critical, ja, stable enough so we did our work at Marion, finished it and then went back again.

Q Was Petrus the medic on that one?

A No it was Tom.

Q Tom?

A From Brits. I can't remember his surname, but we just called him Tom from Brits...

Q Tom from Brits.

A ... because he came from Brits.

Q Moving on to something completely different, the reputation of the Agulhas in the maritime community of South Africa, what does it... what is the reputation of the Agulhas, I mean, when people speak...

A It's a prestigious... perception of the ship. If you think about the ship it's got a prestige... thinking of accomplishment, and challenge and adverse conditions and adventure. In the same breath I must say that in 2007 when the one guy stabbed the other guy to death, in my opinion, in my personal opinion, the ship got a very big knock. And, you know, it was a very un-called for event. And it doesn't portray the exact feeling on the ship. I mean if you sail on the ship, you're proud to sail here. I mean the guys that sail here, if you talk badly about the ship, they'll take offence to it. They are, this is their ship, you know, and they've learnt... this is not actually their ship. This is their house, their home. , because they're more here than they actually are at home. So the guys are proud of her and they are proud to sail here and they are most willing to boast about the ship to the public in any other which way. So the ship's perceived as being an accomplishment, I suppose.

Q Were you on the vessel when that stabbing incident occurred?

A No luckily not. I was on leave and I just read about it.

Q Who was on the vessel?

A It was Captain Jonathan Wonders and Chief Officer was Gavin Syndercombe, he's Master here now.

Q Syndercombe. Is that Gavin? So that must have... it's also then when it became a totally dry ship.

A Yes. The company already had a two-and-a-half percent policy, but these guys were drinking more serious liquor which they got from somewhere, which couldn't be explained. Whether it pulled down from the passengers or whether they brought it on from sailing, I don't know.

Q But it was an alcohol-fuelled incident?

A Yes.

Q Or is that just an assumption?

A No, that was the easy scapegoat. If you look at the... those three guys involved there were convicted criminals somewhere along the line. So if you put three convicted criminals in one space, there's bound to be something that happens, whether there is alcohol involved or not. So I think it was an easy way for Schmidt to finally put a blanket over the alcohol policy, which I didn't have a problem with, because it did make my life easier to manage, you know.

Q Yes. Are there research vessels that are dry for passengers as well?

A All the ships in our fleet for Schmidt are dry, they're all dry.

Q For passengers and officers and crew.

A For everyone.

Q Except the Agulhas.

A It's only the Agulhas that still has a...

Q So why is the Agulhas not dry?

A I don't know, because DEA doesn't want it to be dry. They want their guys to have a drink. They've got no grounds for not allowing it. But if DEA will make the ships dry, they'll also make the islands and the ice dry.

Q I understand.

- A** If that makes sense. But that will prevent people from going there and that would stop the programme.
- Q** Ja, that would be problematic for them.
- A** It is actually quite sad, because sometimes we do have the perception, you know, there's a lot of drinking happening on these programmes, a lot of drinking. And we feel that, you know, we're all trying to do something amazing and sometimes feel that it's more for a party than anything else.
- Q** Ja.
- A** Maybe you've got a different perception. You've been there now, living with the people, and I don't know how you feel about it?
- Q** Well, I definitely think that it should be discouraged a bit more, and...
- A** It's too freely available at any time.
- Q** It's too... yes. Let me put it this way...
- A** It should be at regulated times, like we've got on the ship.
- Q** Times definitely, but the other thing is I think it's also South African specific culture, like the Norwegian base and the German base, they even supply the alcohol, you don't have to even buy it yourself. But the people have a bit more of a self-discipline culture, if you can call it that? So I think it depends on a lot of things. But definitely, also from team to team it differs. I know the current team took down a lot less, a lot less alcohol than the previous team. And they took down something like three containers. And the whole of the one container was full of milk, so...
- A** And they still bought some beers from the ship, because they didn't take beers, because they thought it would freeze.
- Q** Ja. I think it depends on situation to situation. But I think the South African culture is too much of an inebriation culture.
- A** I agree with you.
- Q** And I do also think, though that there's not that much to do on the ship for passengers. So it's probably one of the reasons to have a drink.
- A** Ja on the ship it's regulated. But on the island it's not and on the island there's a lot to do, I'm sure. On the ice and on the islands.
- Q** Sorry?
- A** At the base.
- Q** Oh there's lots to do. No, there's no reason, very true. My own opinion is that there's lots to do on the ship as well, you just have to be creative. It's not really that, I mean you can read, you can watch movies, you can play board games, there's a hell of a lot to do. You don't really have to be bored.
- A** Ja, but some people aren't really into all of that sort of things. But on the new ship I think she'll be a little bit faster, so travelling time will be less and she's bigger, so there's more space, there's more exploratory means. The passengers have got two lounges and I think there's more space for... there's a lot of science happening...
- Q** Larger gym...
- A** Larger gym, there's a sauna. A separate gym for the passengers actually. So they've catered for that in some sense.
- Q** But then again, it's supposed to be seen as work, not as a pleasure cruise anyway.
- A** Exactly, you know. But okay, the guys aren't specifically required to do anything on the ship. But I would think, just the time they prepare their documents after their studies at the base, and do certain things. But you know, the PWV guys...
- Q** Ja, that's what I say. I think in terms of pure science, we've counted... we were about four people on base, and that's me included, who's not really a pure scientist. Hard scientists like real... only about three people who were doing science for themselves.
- A** Which is good, really. I feel a lot of people can be actually flown in so... you know I would have reduced the cabins on the space on the new ship to make it [indiscernible] cabins, and just keep the oceanographers and some essential personnel on the ships and just get all the other people flown in, because flights are frequenting to Antarctica these days.
- Q** And it's becoming cheaper.
- A** Becoming cheaper.
- Q** And, I don't know what exactly it costs, there's a lot of numbers floating about. I don't know what it costs the DEA to run this vessel for a day. If it cuts the voyage time there and back, instead they fly people, it might probably...

- A** Work out the same.
- Q** Work out the same.
- A** Well, it's not gonna cut the voyage time. The voyage time is the voyage time. But it'll cut the time that the people would have nothing to do.
- Q** Would you have to have 30 days purely for the oceanography? Or is that also so that people can be there on takeover, the 30 days that we actually spend at the ice shelf? Or on the ice? Won't it cut that time?
- A** No, it could... Ja, it could I suppose, but that time will be designated anyways. And it would be independent from the people flying in, so it doesn't matter whether the ship goes for a long oceanography cruise or not. The people will be flown out whenever they need to.
- Q** Okay. Other incidents. You weren't involved when the Agulhas came to rescue the Odendorf?
- A** No. I joined directly after that voyage, but that first ice trip in 2001 was when the Odendorf came out again. And we rendezvoused with them in the ice and we gave them some new crew and new stock and stores and stuff like that. But no, I wasn't involved with the actual rescue, no. I just read about it and read the logbooks and all that sort of thing.
- Q** And other ships you've been involved with? It's that one, then that you rendezvoused with, Polarstern you've been on a couple of times.
- A** Yes, Polarstern I've been on a couple of times.
- Q** Federoff? Federoff?
- A** Frolov, Ivan. Okay, I wasn't on there but I mean we've been working with them. But no, I actually haven't been on any other polar type vessel other than this one.
- Q** And the Polarstern.
- A** And the Polarstern
- Q** What are the duties of the Captain on the ship in terms of the passengers? Do you have any duties towards the passengers?
- A** The Master position on this ship is a bit of an intriguing one, since the DCO is the Co-ordinating Officer, he's actually in charge. So with regards with the passengers, I'm only here to make sure that they don't impede on the safety of the vessel or impede on the safety of themselves, or disobey rules. So I'm here to tell them what the rules are and then to enforce the rules. But from a co-ordinating point of view, it's purely the DCO. The DCO is in charge of the passengers. If something... if you would do something wrong the previous day, I would go to the DCO and say "What the hell happened there?" And then he'll have to report back and find out. And the team leaders... the team leaders are supposed to take care of each, of their own teams. And then via the DCO, he reports to me with regards to the passengers. And then obviously we take care of the guys and their specific needs and so forth, that's why we've got a Purser. The Purser is there to make sure that the catering department fulfils the needs of the passengers, whether it's food, water, those types of things, you know. But from controlling the behaviour and controlling their doings and programmes and presentations and church services and those sort of things, it's not the Master's responsibility.
- Q** Okay. And in terms of the environment, do you have any specific mandate in terms of the environment as Master of the vessel?
- A** Ja, you're Environmental Officer basically. You must make sure that there is no construing of any rules. I mean, you've got specific rules in Marpol which is a publication for any ship at sea. Any Master on any ship is basically an Environmental Officer. So we have to make sure that we don't dispose of garbage in the appropriate areas or when we go into a special area, which... Antarctica is a special area, that all other things are retained. But we delegate most of those jobs down to the Chief Officer, who delegates it down to the bosun and the galley staff. So we all work in... As a team to make sure we don't put anything... And the engine room, because they can pump over oily water, which is not allowed. So we've got a huge bulk holding tank which we use when we're down in a special area.
- Q** And then where do you get rid of the stuff then? When you're out of the special area?
- A** Ja, then we've got an oily water separator, which it goes through. And it pumps of 15 parts per million of clean, but totally clean water and then the sludge from that is kept on-board and when we get back to Cape Town it is pumped ashore into a tank, which is then disposed of in South Africa.
- Q** Okay. In terms of the environment, what are the specific challenges of Southern Ocean sea-faring, or whatever term you would use?
- A** Well, you at sea for 72 days. And people can generate a hell of a lot of garbage in 72 days, you'd be surprised. So we've got incinerators, we've got compactors; we've got various ways and means of giving... Fridges for storing slops and those types of things. So ja, it's a hell of a challenge to manage the garbage.
- Q** Is there any way in which the garbage can be reduced?

- A** Well, I suppose. When we pack our stores we get rid of all the cardboard and those types of things. We try to get rid of the plastics and cardboard before you sail. But human generated waste is gonna be human generated waste. But we've got a switch pump taking care of that stuff. We've got the compactors and we've got the holding tanks for the engine rooms. In Antarctica, I can't say we don't... we've got a footprint. Anybody, anything has got a footprint. But it's minimised, almost. It's regulated but it's minimised.
- Q** I would think that the Agulhas still have quite a carbon footprint.
- A** Oh ja, we've got a few emissions. But we've... I mean on the new ship again they've moved to tier two emissions, which is a very high standard. I mean we don't burn heavy fuels, we burn very clean diesel in Antarctica. And we've got an international air pollution certificate from Lloyd's which says that our things comply to certain regulations...
- Q** It could be a lot worse, I suppose.
- A** I mean if you burn like the container ships thick sludge and that, solid pieces come up in the air, it's amazing. Heavy carbon.
- Q** So why would you say is it important for South Africa to have a presence in Antarctica?
- A** That's a very good question. Everybody wants a piece of a pie. You know when we like, I suppose everybody is going to want to explore that next area and then the treaty will go for nothing. But I think South Africa needs to be present there, because we're at the southern tip of Africa, we're an African leading country and we sort of ground-breaking in some of our science. And in some of our things that we do there, we are very good. I think that we should have a presence there. We should perhaps even have more of a presence there. Some... the Germans have got two bases there. The Russians have got many. But I think we're doing a good job there, I think we should stay there. We are in charge of this search and rescue area from Cape Town to Antarctica.
- Q** Basically the pie-shaped...
- A** Ja, it's called NAVAREA VII. South Africa is sort of in charge of what they call MRCCs. Maritime Rescue Co-ordinating Centre. There we go. So if something would have happened here, MRCC Cape Town would manage it. Even if there's other ships involved or whatever, we are in charge of this certain... And then, the whole COMNAP group is involved to take care of this area.
- Q** Have you ever been involved in COMNAP?
- A** No.
- Q** No. Just...
- A** I've just been sailing on this ship as a third party man and manage crew. And, because of my experience on this vessel I've been kept here. But obviously I think we have been dealing with it in some sense, because we get COMNAP documents, we have to comply to the treaty and so forth. So to some extent...
- Q** In terms of previous captains, is there anyone that you know about or that you learnt a lot from? Previous Masters?
- A** Well Captain Dave Hall that is here now is basically my mentor. He started pretty much at the same time here, but he was already a Senior Master at that stage. He's already retired from port control. He's a noble that one can learn a lot from and he's quite willing to teach. So I think I've learned a lot from him, but also once I got qualified I learnt a lot from myself. You know, I mean you get faced with many challenges, especially on an older ship and the conditions that we go through. And you just learn and read and experience and, you know... I don't think anybody can accelerate the training programme at sea, because experience is something that you can't replace.
- Q** Would you like to share Marion and Antarctica with your family? Take them along sometime?
- A** Yes. I would love to do that. My wife has been down to Neumeyer in 2003...
- Q** Was she flown down?
- A** No she came on the ship. We did a SANAE cruise and then on the Neumeyer she came with.
- Q** Shorter cruise.
- A** Shorter cruise. But she gets very sea-sick, so I don't think she'll be joining me for future adventures. But a couple of weeks ago, or a couple of months ago, actually when we did the women in maritime voyage, both my two daughters and my wife came with me on the ship from Cape Town to PE, which they enjoyed thoroughly. But they were all sea-sick, which was quite sad. We had quite bad weather as well.
- Q** Do you like Antarctica?
- A** Ja.
- Q** Why?
- A** It's different, it's challenging, it's a specialty. It's like, I suppose, if you want to call... why do you like history,

you know what I mean? But it's a speciality that I enjoy. I like shipping but I would prefer to do shipping with a bit of a challenge.

Q So do you think you will continue doing this as your career option? Shipping...

A Yes...

Q ... in unchartered waters, if you can call it that?

A Yes

Q Or lesser chartered waters.

A I think I will serve on the new ship perhaps, for a while, and then I will try to take my experience and pass it on to other people in a different way. By teaching or... I want to move ashore, because I feel I owe it to my daughters to be ashore sometime.

Q One of the last questions: South Africa is... would agree to the statement that it's not really a maritime nation?

A Yes. It's not really a maritime nation. If you go into the public and you talk about the bridge of a ship, they'll be wondering and they won't be picturing the control centre on the top where the people stand and look out of the window.

Q Why would you think that is though...? Because the Cape of Good Hope played such an important role in maritime history in general.

A I don't know. I think it's... there's a lack of awareness, like pretty much everything else. I mean South Africa is coming up steadily on awareness of modern technology and certain things. But okay, sea-faring is not a modern thing, sea-faring is ancient and we've got a massive coastline. So there's not actually a reason why we shouldn't have more... be more of a maritime nation. But I think we just act as a middle post. We don't... there's massive ships sailing past Cape Town, but they come from first world countries and they just pass by here to either pick up stuff, pick up people or pick up bunkers. If the government would perhaps introduce [cabbage laws] where they say "Right, there will be a single big port where all big ships come to and from there it will be transhipped to smaller coastal vessels and then regulate them to be South African flagged vessels... because we only have one passenger vessel under the South African flag and you're sitting on it.

Q Oh

A We only have three large vessels on the South African register. And I think it's a result of that, that is not causing us... if we had more ships, if we had more people at sea then people would be more aware of it. But we don't.

Q Honestly, where's the pleasure cruises things, where are they registered then? In Britain...

A Well... If you... the pleasure cruises, ja okay, you know...

Q Those big MSC Symphony...

A Ja, well no. They will be registered with the proper authority, like in Britain perhaps or in America.

Q Probably not South Africa, but anyway.

A But you get setups where you've got what are called flags of convenience like the Bahamas and those places, where the government... because when you are registered at a certain place, you are regulated by that place. Like we're regulated by the South African Merchant...

Q Navy...

A Act. Merchant Shipping Act. But now in the Bahamas they don't even enforce that many rules. You know, they don't check the ships out. The ships are normally in a bad condition and the crew are paid poorly and it's people that's just trying to make money on the sly. So that's what they call the flags of convenience. But there's a white list out of countries that do provide the proper regulations and South Africa is part of it, so we actually do...

Q I can imagine, our labour laws...

A But it's not attractive for shipping companies to register their vessels in South Africa, because it's expensive and it's heavily regulated.

Q And is it regulated to the extent that the crew here must be South African?

A No, this is a DEA clause. Schmidt can get the contract and work with this vessel, but they want South African crew.

Q Is the crew South African?

A Mostly

Q Mostly?

A Ja. They either have permanent residence or South African passports or something like that. We do have some Congolese, you must know.

Q Ja, that's why I asked, but they... it's no different than any other South African kind of hospitality industry where you get people with permanent residency. What would you like to call the new ship?

A Mandela.

Q Mandela?

A Mmm. I think so, because he's an idol, isn't he? He's done a lot for us, for everyone. And I think we as a country owes it to him. And his legacy will live a little bit on, you know.

Q Thank you