

Antarctic Deep Freeze Oral History Project
Interview with Edward M. d'I Ward, CDR, USN (Ret.)
conducted on January 20, 1999, by Dian O. Belanger

DOB: Today is the 20th of January. This is Dian Belanger and I'm speaking with Edward Ward about his experiences during Deep Freeze I and II and his experiences on Task Force 43 and VX-6.

Good morning, Ed, and thank you so much for talking with me.

EW: Good morning, Dian, and it's great to have you aboard.

DOB: Thank you. Just briefly tell me something about your background: where you grew up, where you went to school, what you decided to do with your life. I'm interested in anything from that period that will perhaps give some hints as to how you ended up on the ice.

EW: I sure can. I grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I first went through La Salle High School and then college—

DOB: Where did you go to college?

EW: La Salle College in Philadelphia. But I think that during my era, Dian, the heroes for the most part were those who flew airplanes. You had Amelia Earhart, and of course Lindbergh, Admiral Byrd, and a host of others. And I think that more than anything else, when I was about seven, Lindbergh's flight impressed me and he was my role model. And from that time on, I did nothing but make models and dream of airplanes. In high school I was the president of the La Salle Wings Club and this sort of thing. But of course you must remember that was during the depression.

And as I was going through college, I did want eventually to get married. Incidentally Marilyn and I have been married for fifty-seven years now. I joined the Marine Corps first while I was in La Salle College and went through their Officer Candidate School in Quantico. I was all set to take a commission in the Marines, and I went down to take a physical exam for marine aviation. Their quota was filled for a year so they had applications stacked up. But the flight surgeon told me, he said, "If you want to go in the Navy, they'll send you down to Pensacola in three months."

So in November of 1940 I reported to Pensacola, went through training, graduated in May of '41, was commissioned an ensign, designated naval aviator number 7740, and married Marilyn. I instructed in Corpus for a couple of months before the war, and then during the war I was stationed in Corpus for two years instructing in the old PBY Catalina flying boats. And then during the remainder of the war years, I was with both the Atlantic Fleet and the Pacific Fleet.

And following the war, when I finally got back from the Pacific after World War II, the bureau promised me that they would put me in a shore station very close to my hometown

which was, as I say, Philadelphia. I was assigned to the Naval Air Station in Johnsville, Pennsylvania. My orders read, "You will report to Johnsville and take charge of a PBY 5-A and crew. You will proceed to Pt. Barrow, Alaska, and conduct an aerial magnetometer survey of the Naval Petroleum Reserve #4. At that time they were searching for oil up there for reserves.

So Marilyn said to me, "Where's Pt. Barrow?" I said, "I don't know. It must be a place where I can take you and our little boy." So we looked at a map, and my golly, finally there it was at the top of the world, so to speak, and of course it was an unaccompanied tour. So that triggered off cold-weather flight operations. That was 1946.

I had no sooner gotten through the airborne magnetometer survey of all of north Alaska—which incidentally included Prudhoe Bay, which was a biggie, a nice big pond—when the bureau called and said, "Now we have a new project for you." I was assigned Officer in Charge of Project Volcano, an aerial survey of all the dormant volcanos in the Aleutians. There was a good reason for it. If a dormant volcano should ever blow, it would be much like Krakatoa. The military bases that were close by would just blow away. In addition, we were to conduct an aerial magnetometer survey of the Aleutian trench, which we did.

Following that, I flew from Adak down to Midway then to Honolulu. From there we flew to Bikini and Kwajalein atolls to survey the residual atomic contamination that was very, very heavy at the time. I thought I had finished with anything to do with the Arctic.

The next thing you know, in 1951 I got a call from the bureau and it concerned this project Ski Jump. They asked if I would volunteer to fly a ski-equipped R4D up to Barrow, Alaska, and in conjunction with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Laboratory, fly out of Barrow over the Arctic ice cap, find a nice, smooth landing place, land, and set up an oceanographic station.

My first reaction to that was, this is all well and good, but this means landing on an unprepared ice floe. How do you know how thick the ice is? Well, nobody seemed to know. In 1951 no one in the Navy had ever thought about it or had tried it. The Air Force had done it to a limited degree, but they operated off a prepared ice strip just off the shoreline, but this was different.

We had to fly three, four, five hundred miles north of Barrow, then find a suitable place to land. A hole would be cut in the ice, and the Woods Hole scientists would lower their long cable with drogues. Then they would record salinity, temperature, and ice drift.

DOB: To what purpose? Why would they be interested in that particularly?

EW: I think because they had no idea if the bottom of the Arctic Ocean was fairly constant. They didn't know whether there were mountain chains, because few soundings had been made. I don't know about the Russians. I'm sure they took soundings. And I think the Navy was thinking about submarines eventually going to shoot up to the North Pole.

So we got a pretty good idea that it was a fairly uniform bottom, about ten thousand feet in depth, as many soundings as we got, which I think has turned out to be pretty accurate.

The only other reason I think is because—well, yes, there was one other reason. I got this at our Arctic research get-together at Byrd, and I spoke to the scientist after I had made my presentation. I mentioned a fellow named Valentine Worthington, who I'm sure had his doctorate in oceanography, and he had explained to this young scientist I was speaking to at the Byrd Institute that the reason they were performing this is, by the temperature of the water, they could check what regulated at that time a lot of the weather conditions that permeated throughout that area. It was above and beyond my layman's ability to grasp, but that essentially was another one of the considerations.

DOB: I interrupted your story about landing on the ice.

EW: Oh no, not a bit. You mean the first landing?

DOB: Well, whatever.

EW: You know, they say sometimes the first time you go around it's the best you're ever going to do. It's like the first time they ever land a new airplane, and normally it's the best landing you'll ever make.

Well, the first time we went out, we had no idea as to how to estimate the depth of the ice. As a matter of fact, it looked to me just like one big ice-skating rink, but you could see that there were very different and vastly distinct sections of the ice. Almost all of the Arctic Ocean is old ice, hummocky and lined with pressure ridges. The ice fields had pushed together, crumbled up, and were just a jumbled mess. Then there were frozen leads. These were great, wide areas where the ice would split in mid-winter when your temperatures were forty, fifty below, and it would expose blue water. Just as blue and as pretty, but it didn't last very long because it immediately started to freeze. I don't know how long it took, but it sure wasn't long. Maybe a couple of weeks. An ice rink could not have been any smoother or flatter, and for the most part, we found out, we had perhaps three feet of ice to land on which was more than ample to support the weight of our airplane.

The first time around, knowing nothing about landing on sea ice, I had a Woods Hole scientist stationed between myself and the copilot. We went three hundred miles north of Barrow and circled around. I saw what I have just described as a newly frozen lead. I said, "You know, John, that looks pretty good. What do you think?" So he turned to the copilot and said, "I don't know. What do *you* think?" The copilot turned to me and said, "I don't know, Ed. What do *you* think?" And I said, "Yes, I think we might give it a whirl."

So we circled around and landed, and the *modus operandi* was to land touch-and-go, as we call it. You land, touch down, stay on the ice for about two or three hundred yards,

and then take off again and check the surface. We noticed the first time the snow surface was maybe two inches because you could definitely see your tracks in the snow. So around we came again, and this time I thought, well, we'll just come to a dead stop and I'll keep the engines turning because you never know. And we did, came to a stop, the two Woods Hole scientists jumped out with their chain saw, cut a hole in the ice, and it measured about two-and-a-half, maybe close to three feet. So everything was fine. Could not have been better, and I thought, well, this is going to be a piece of cake.

Very briefly, the next oceanographic station was about another hundred miles further north. I saw a landing site that to me looked identical to the first except there was no snow cover. So I said, "I think we'll give it a go. I'm sure this is just as thick as the other." So we landed, I stopped the engines, and the two Woods Hole scientists got out to check the ice. We had no more than about eleven inches of ice, and that's when the radioman came up and he said to me, "Skipper, unless I'm mistaken, the nose of this airplane is bobbing up and down." And what we were doing was rolling ever so gently as the sea went by below us, you see. So we got out of there fast.

That fortunately taught me a lesson, and from there on we could tell it was safe if it had a snow cover of two to three inches. We never had another problem.

DOB: Now this was going on in the early '50s, and in the late '40s the Navy also had Operation Highjump in the Antarctic. But between that time in '48 and '55, there was no U.S. Antarctic activity—

EW: No, not a thing.

DOB:—while there was some apparently in the Arctic. Have you any knowledge of why the U.S. was inactive in the south polar region during that time?

EW: Yes, I do. I happened to have the very good fortune back in 1953 of meeting Admiral Byrd at the Bureau of Aeronautics where I was stationed at the time. As far as I was concerned, it was an honor to speak to the man, and I asked the admiral that precisely. I said, "Admiral, I hope one day to get to the Antarctic. Do you know of any forthcoming operations down there?" He said, "No. You know, with the budget constraints today, there's no way in the world that we're going to get enough money to mount a big expedition."

Then in the spring of 1953, a letter went across my desk. It was from a senator who asked the Secretary of the Navy if there was going to be another operation in the Antarctic. The Secretary of the Navy came back and said, "No, absolutely not. There's no reason for it." And then, of course, within the next two years, somehow the International Geophysical Year came into being and it was all systems go.

DOB: So there was just no strategic interest.

EW: I think that's the way the Navy felt.

DOB: Where the Arctic would've been closer to the Russians and all that.

EW: Yes, that's exactly right. They built the DEW Line, an early warning system to intercept all incoming Russian missiles and aircraft.

DOB: Well, let's talk about Admiral Byrd for a minute. You mentioned in your book that he was your childhood hero.

EW: He was indeed.

DOB: Do you want to talk about that for just a second? How did you come upon him?

EW: Well, when I was a little boy twelve years old I joined the Boy Scouts. And my mother and father gave me a subscription to the official Boy Scout magazine called *Boys Life*. And one of the first editions that I read had pictures of Admiral Byrd in the Antarctic having just completed his first successful flight to the South Pole. It also featured a young Boy Scout named Paul Siple. He was about eighteen and I was twelve. I thought, there's the guy you want to emulate. Go as far as you can in the Scouts, and maybe Admiral Byrd will take you to the South Pole? So that is the early tie-in that I had with Admiral Byrd, and then later on, as I said, a chance meeting with the admiral in the Bureau of Aeronautics.

DOB: Was it really chance, honest to God, or were you making an effort to be in that corridor?

EW: Well, what I was doing was walking a Navy aircraft purchase order around to be signed off. For some reason I was up on the fourth floor and I was looking for I forget which admiral, and all of a sudden I saw Admiral Byrd's name. I thought, my gosh, that can't be *the* Admiral Byrd. I found out it was and then I knocked on the door and went in and introduced myself.

DOB: What did you think?

EW: I thought he was one of the nicest, most considerate admirals I'd ever met. He couldn't have been more cordial.

DOB: Did you expect that from him?

EW: I didn't know quite what to expect, to tell you the truth. Because you know, you're in such awe of these childhood heroes that the first few minutes are a little awkward. But it was just a wonderful get-together, and I certainly thought more of the man after that than I had before, which was saying an awful lot.

DOB: You wrote that he had known about your experiences in Operation Ski Jump. Had you expected that he would know that?

EW: Not really. But then again I should have. As a courtesy the Navy gave all retired officers of flag rank an office. I think Admiral Byrd was still actively involved in not only the Arctic but also probably all sorts of cold-weather operations that were going on.

DOB: How do you feel about various people's attempts to discredit Byrd's discoveries over the years, and there have been a number.

EW: There certainly have. And I think as night follows day, every great explorer, so to speak, has had these confrontations. Admiral Byrd, of course, has been questioned by many of the experts as to whether he really got to the North Pole. Some say that he fell behind, possibly missed it by three hundred miles, some say fifty miles. But it's the same as Admiral Peary and Dr. Cook as to who walked to the North Pole the first time. That was a bitter dispute, and in both instances, after careful research and study and what have you, the scientific community did come to the conclusion that Admiral Byrd had in fact gotten as close as he claimed, and that in fact Peary was the man who had first gotten to the North Pole.

And then you get into the history of exploration and it's just replete with all sorts of bitterness. There's something in the human psyche to get the honor and the credit for being there first, and if there's a dispute to be had, it's going to happen. I found it very prevalent amongst the older explorers that I met. The attitude was, "well, he did pretty well but I think we did a little better." But the first-it-is bug, to be the first one to do this, to do that, to site a mountaintop or whatever, it's catching.

DOB: Well, a few months later then you were sent to a meeting with then Capt. George Dufek to talk about cold-weather aircraft configurations.

EW: Right.

DOB: Why you? And do you think your meeting with Byrd had anything to do with that or was it just quite independent?

EW: No, not a thing. That was quite by coincidence. The only reason that I was told about the meeting to begin with is that my job in the Bureau of Aeronautics concerned transport-patrol bombers and utility aircraft. And normally in cold-weather operations it would be one of these types of aircraft that would be involved. So my boss at BuAer said, "If you have nothing better to do, drift on over to the Pentagon, and some captain that I don't know by the name of Dufek is having a powwow and it's about cold-weather operations." And I thought, well, right down my alley.

DOB: You liked that cold-weather stuff.

EW: Yes.

DOB: Why?

EW: It was different. It was not only challenging, but it would take you to awesome places. You know, Dian, not to digress, but several times when I was up in the Arctic and we were maybe four, five, six, seven hundred miles north of Pt. Barrow, midway between the pole, I'd walk away from the airplane, perhaps a quarter of a mile or so, be out of earshot as far as sound. There was no sound—perfectly quiet. And I'd look around and I could not believe it. It was almost like being on the moon. It was just the most fascinating type of place to be. And I felt completely isolated. It's hard to put it into words. And of course then you come back to reality, and you walk back and join the rest of the guys, finish your oceanographic station, and fly home.

DOB: Okay. Well, what did you think of Dufek when you met him?

EW: I had never heard of him, and of course I was not involved in any way with Operation Highjump. He'd been the skipper of the *Pine Island*, a seaplane tender. So he was very knowledgeable about the Antarctic. I wondered, what's he doing taking over when Admiral Byrd should be the man in charge? He did confuse me a little bit.

DOB: Kind of an interloper in Byrd's territory?

EW: Yes, I thought, I wonder what his background is, and of course I found out later that he not only had a wealth of experience in the Antarctic, but also in the Arctic. Strange I never had heard about him.

DOB: Well it was, in fact, a rather tricky official relationship between Byrd and Dufek. Can you tell me anything about that?

EW: I'd say it was a very sensitive relationship. Because again, hearkening back to the feelings of old explorers, Admiral Byrd had been Mr. Antarctic for years and years and years. And I must say that when I finally saw the admiral again in 1954, he had aged. He looked terribly old and frail. And of course Captain Dufek was then I guess a young guy of fifty or so and hale and hardy and quite a driver. And there was no question about that.

When Admiral Byrd came to town to coordinate this whole show, I think he felt that to a degree he'd been slighted because he had no control whatsoever—I should say no operational control—of what was going on. He was in an advisory capacity, consultant capacity only, and in that respect he did a magnificent job. He had a wonderful staff, and had it not been for him, we'd have been unable to do half as well as we did. But as far as Captain Dufek was concerned, when he made flag rank he let it be known that he was the man in charge, and he'd listen but that was about it.

And I'd like to go on record as stating that in my estimation, the one man totally responsible for the success of Deep Freeze I and II was Admiral Dufek. The task that faced him, Dian, was almost insurmountable. We had to put together a squadron in a year, get ships, icebreakers, and transports assigned. The logistics of the whole thing was just beyond your imagination. And then of course money. That was always a consideration.

DOB: Was money hard to get for this project?

EW: It wasn't all that easy, and I think the reason that money became much easier to get was due to the International Geophysical Year. And it would have been a serious mistake had the Navy not put on a real good show for them.

DOB: Okay. Did Dufek know anything about you before that meeting in the Pentagon?

EW: He'd never seen me; I'd never seen him.

DOB: He must've been impressed with you. It sounds like he right off asked you to join his staff.

EW: Well, I think he probably was amazed that out of the blue some guy came over and knew what he was talking about in the way of cold-weather-configured ski-equipped airplanes. And as I gave my little presentation, I didn't think it was that impressive, but he apparently thought that he had a live one. So when our meeting ended he asked if I would care to join him, be a member of his staff. I would be his flight operations officer, and we would set sail for the Antarctic in a little over a year. I was delighted.

DOB: Were you involved at all in any of the international aspects of the planning?

EW: Not a bit.

DOB: I'm curious about the rivalries between the U.S. and the Soviets and if you had a sense of that.

EW: Very much so. Now granted, I was not there to witness what went on, but both Admiral Dufek and his staff meteorologist, Mirabito, Comdr. John Mirabito, who incidentally spoke six languages fluently, went to Brussels the end of 1954. This was a gathering of all those nations who intended to participate in the International Geophysical Year.

Of course the two prime movers were the United States and Russia. They were going to launch the largest attack on the great white continent, and we had the ability and we had the equipment to do it. So the rivalry, I'm sure right off the bat, became very obvious, and it became even more obvious when this little incident, as recounted by Admiral Dufek, happened.

At the end of one of their meetings with the other nations, most of the room had emptied out except the admiral from the Russian camp and Adm. George Dufek. Their interpreters had disappeared, so just the two of them sat there smiling, looking at each other. Then the Russian went over to a great, huge chart of the Antarctic that was painted on one of the walls. He walked up and pointed to Mirnyy, their base being built at the time. Then he pointed to himself and smiled. He then pointed to McMurdo Sound and Little America and pointed at Admiral Dufek, and he smiled. And then he went up to the chart on the wall, put his finger right at the South Pole and stamped both feet!

[Laughter]

EW: There was no doubt in Admiral Dufek's mind what he meant. So I am sure that had they had the opportunity to do so, they would've been first to get there. Not that the South Pole station is as difficult to get to as some of the Russian stations that they built inland, but it's the prestige of being right at the South Pole and the great publicity you'd get. And of course back in those days it was a propaganda battle, as you know, between U.S. and Russia. So that was the reason I'm sure the Russians would've loved to have beaten us to the punch.

DOB: Why couldn't they have flown in two weeks before or six months before? And then would it have been theirs?

EW: No, I think it would've been pretty much of a stunt. But there were a couple of reasons why they didn't. One, the temperatures at the South Pole itself prior to about mid-October run, as you know, from a hundred and ten below to a normal of fifty or sixty below. And at these extremely low temperatures, ski-equipped airplanes just don't operate the way they should. It's more like landing on sand than snow. So yes, the weather conditions precluded any landings I would say earlier than about the latter part of October. And of course from where we were located at McMurdo, it was about seven hundred miles to the Pole, whereas where they were over at Mirnyy, I don't recall the mileage exactly but probably fifteen hundred or so.

DOB: Couldn't they have gone down in '54 or something and done it?

EW: Oh, back then. They probably could've, but you see, I think like we, there was no incentive, really. The Antarctic then was just a great big old kind of a nothing filled with ice. There just wasn't the interest.

DOB: You mentioned earlier that you had a year to get all of this ready—Dufek had a year—which isn't very much time. And one wonders why the planning got started so late. But my question for you is, how did that looming deadline affect the kind of decision making in planning that you could do? Did you have to cut corners or do things differently than you would have had there been more time?

EW: No, not really. Let's see, I've got to go back and put this in proper perspective. It's been, after all, a few years since I was involved in this. I joined Admiral Dufek's staff in October of 1954. In January of '55 I was transferred to the squadron, VX-6, as the first member and acting CO. As a matter of fact, I took over the 17th of January 1955. Our squadron was scheduled for deployment in November of 1955. So yes, it didn't give us much time.

It was about a year that we had to get everything ready, everything squared away and ready to go, and this was difficult. As you can imagine, we really worked—I mean the staff worked night and day. The squadron worked night and day trying to get their act together.

It was sort of a pickup team effort, really, when I look back. We got wonderful volunteers all the way around, the enlisted couldn't have been better, and great officers, great pilots.

But when it came to the equipment, there was just so much that was available. The squadron ended up looking like "Noah's ark," as the maintenance officer called it. They came in twos. The first year we had two R5Ds, two ski-equipped P2Vs, two ski-equipped R4Ds, two UF Grumman Albatross, triphibian twin-engine aircraft. The triphibian could land on land, sea, or snow. And then we had our little Otters. They would be crated and sent down by ship with the helicopters.

So yes, the first year it was difficult to get our ducks in line. I think I mentioned the only four planes that got in the first year were the two R5Ds and the two P2Vs. They made it to McMurdo Sound on the 20th of December 1955.

DOB: So the other ones never—they turned back and they never got there.

EW: Never made another attempt, no. It was just too critical.

DOB: But they did the next year.

EW: Yes. We put additional fuel tanks on the poor old R4Ds. How those airplanes stayed together, I'll never know because they were way over their recommended gross weight. And of course single-engine performance was just about nil. The pilots and the crews of the R4Ds are to me the ones that performed the most heroics in the Antarctic. I think it was something like an eighteen-hour flight to get into the Antarctic from New Zealand.

DOB: I want to back up just a little bit and talk about first the staff position that you had on Dufek's staff. What particularly were you supposed to be doing on that staff position?

EW: My specific job was to get the squadron organized, work on the recommended complement of officers and enlisted men, and numbers and type of aircraft—where we could procure them.

DOB: Where can you procure them? Are they just sitting there waiting for you?

EW: The only thing we could do was to go to what had been used. Fortunately the two ski-equipped P2Vs were being tested up at Bemidji, Minnesota, to see how their skis operated. And we had two ski-equipped P2Vs that were in the process of doing cold-weather research and development. Now I knew from my own experience that we had R4Ds that could be ski-equipped. I knew in the Navy inventory there were a few skis kicking around in warehouses. At that time, Dian, there was an abundance of older R4Ds. They were being gradually replaced, of course, by newer aircraft. But the old R4D lent itself well to being ski-equipped.

So to answer your question, we had to draw on the existing inventories. Now the new airplane, the DeHavilland Otter, was a real winner down there. They performed exceptionally well.

DOB: I don't read much about the Albatross on the ice.

EW: No, well, the Albatross never got to the ice.

DOB: Ever?

EW: Never. The two Albatrosses and the two R4Ds during Deep Freeze I took off for the South Pole, or for McMurdo rather, and they never did make it. They turned around, short of fuel, and returned to New Zealand.

DOB: But they didn't come back the next year ever?

EW: The Albatrosses didn't, no.

DOB: Why did they decide this isn't going to work? Because the R4Ds did eventually perform.

EW: You see, the Albatross was an unknown quantity. The Air Force air sea rescue had used them for a while and had tested them out on some ski operations. But the performance of the Albatross on skis didn't come close to the efficiency of the R4Ds. My idea was just to take the UFs down there if we could get them there, check them out—see if they worked. If they worked, fine. If they didn't, well, you know

DOB: Okay. Then you mentioned in January of '55 you went to Patuxent as the acting commanding officer. Why just acting? Somebody else eventually got the job.

EW: Yes, they sure did. Admiral Dufek had a very, very close friend and an old shipmate, Bill "Trigger" Hawkes. Hawkes was the younger of the two by far. He and the admiral had been in old Scouting Squadron Three before World War II. Then they were together again during the Highjump operation. Bill Hawkes was the one who led the R4Ds off the carrier *Philippine Sea* in the Antarctic and flew into Little America. He was one fine guy and one fine pilot. And this was the man that Admiral Dufek had in his mind all along to be the first commanding officer of VX-6.

As it so happened, Comdr. Bill Hawkes was an AEDO (Aviation Engineering Duty Only) designated officer, and because of that he was precluded from exercising command of a squadron or ship. He could command a shore station. And although we tried time after time to get a waiver for Hawkes, the Bureau of Naval Personnel finally said there is no way. He accepted AEDO and that's where he stays. So Admiral Dufek had Bill Hawkes transferred to his staff. He took over as the air operations officer.

DOB: Did that bother you that you did not get that commanding officer designation?

EW: I would've liked it, but I knew the competition was pretty great. And it so happened the person who got it the first year around was a very dear old friend of mine by the name of Comdr. Gordon Ebbe. We'd been together up at Pt. Barrow, Alaska, for the better part of a year, and he was a great, close personal friend. He had it for a year, and then Capt. Doug Cordiner, who had been on Admiral Dufek's staff, took over. I found Captain Cordiner to be a wonderful guy. We became very close friends, not only during the Deep Freeze II operation, but for years after. And then, of course, as everything else happens in the Navy, you go one way and he goes another.

[End Side A, Tape 1]

[Begin Side B, Tape 1]

DOB: I want to ask you about VX-6.

EW: Okay.

DOB: Is there some significance to those letters and numbers that someone not in the know would have no knowledge of?

EW: Yes, I think there is because VX-6 is a rather unusual designation for a Navy squadron. What it stems from is V stands, of course, for aviation. X in the Navy at that time was the designation of a utility squadron. Now they not only performed utility work like towing targets and all these sort of mundane things, but they also were flying guided missiles around and were involved in research and experimental work. So it was sort of a natural that a squadron going to the Antarctic, which was totally different, be given this X designation. Six, only because we were the sixth VX squadron at the time.

DOB: Okay. I'm glad I asked you that. Now I understand that you had all kinds of applications from people who wanted to be members of VX-6.

EW: Yes.

DOB: How do you choose the ones that you want? What were you looking for?

EW: Now that's a very good question, and not to digress, but we got many more applications and requests to volunteer for the squadron than we ever anticipated. I forget how many thousands and the same for the enlisted men.

DOB: How do you account for that?

EW: I don't know. I guess it was peacetime and they wanted a little more adventure, you know, one of these sort of things. Well then it becomes one, that if you know of a person and you know his reputation and he's volunteered, then the chances are he's the guy that's going to be picked, and it makes it very difficult to select, no question about that. Our selections, I think, were done very well. After they were selected for this duty, they had to pass a psychological exam given by a battery of shrinks, which was rather amusing because I think the shrinks themselves were probably a little strange, but Nevertheless, we came out, I thought, with the finest group of men I've ever served with.

DOB: How many altogether?

EW: I think we had two hundred and twenty enlisted men and I guess about forty officers which included, of course, the administrative officers and this sort of thing. And we had one great staff flight surgeon.

DOB: Who was . . . ?

EW: Oh yes. The staff flight surgeon, incidentally, his name was Dr. Hedblom. Earl Hedblom, Commander, United States Navy Medical Corps, when he first came with the staff. His middle name, or his nickname, was Bloss, B-l-o-s-s, which as I mentioned how that was derived I'm not too sure, but I figure that with a last name like Hedblom, it went from blossom to blossom, as far as the nickname. But he probably was one of the best, most suited medical types to go down to the Antarctic.

DOB: Why was he well suited?

EW: He was an outdoor guy; he loved all sorts of outdoor sports. His demeanor sort of belied the fact that he was a great doctor. He was a comedian, he was humorous, had a lot of sea stories. Big—six feet three or four, booming voice. And when you first met him you sort of thought, well, is this guy for real? But Bloss Hedblom and I became great friends, and yes, he was one of the finest—he was a stabilizing influence down there, I would say, for a lot of the guys. After a tragedy, as we had a couple of them down there, it does tend to shake up the troops. Bloss was very knowing and understanding.

DOB: Are pilots automatically officers? Does that come with the territory?

EW: They did have flying midshipmen for a while. From midshipmen they would be promoted to ensign. But by and large, yes. Back in those days all designated naval aviators were commissioned. There were exceptions, a few enlisted pilots with a rating of

aviation pilot. My flight class had sixty cadets and five enlisted men going through flight training. So that would be about the ratio of enlisted to officer. I think enlisted pilots have gradually been phased out.

DOB: Now you had to pass up going to the ice in Deep Freeze I for family reasons.

EW: Yes.

DOB: But instead were Officer in Charge of the VX-6 at Patuxent. What did you do there to support the effort?

EW: Well, I felt very sorry for myself, to tell you the truth because I had dearly wished that I could've made that first deployment. But as it turned out, I was an Albatross pilot and they never did make it to the Antarctic. So I would've been stuck in New Zealand. That would've been kind of nice but it wouldn't have gotten me to the Antarctic.

But there was more than enough to do as the Officer in Charge of the Patuxent detachment. We were constantly having to plan for the following year's operation. Planes returning from the first deployment kept us busy. During the time that I was the OinC at Patuxent, one of the P2Vs that had returned from the Antarctic was sent back on a rescue mission. It crashed in a Venezuelan jungle. This was quite upsetting and kept us hopping for a while.

DOB: So did the aircraft for Deep Freeze I meet their goals, those that got there?

EW: Yes, I would say they more than met their goals.

DOB: Which were?

EW: The two R5D four-engine transports. They were wheel-equipped. They had no skis and could land only on the ice runway the Seabees had prepared.

DOB: And what were their goals and did they meet them?

EW: Yes. The two R5Ds were configured with a trimetrogon camera. Now that is a rather strange term perhaps, but one of the three cameras within the airplane took a picture straight down and the other two photographed pictures out on either side. So you can make a beautiful aerial map while flying over miles and miles of unseen and uncharted territory. These pictures, when put together, form a mosaic that gives you a good idea of what's down below.

DOB: And that was what their primary mission was?

EW: The R5D, yes.

DOB: Okay. In February of 1956, an Otter crashed flying from Little America out to the Byrd trail party to bring the people back, and you were fairly critical of the pilot. What should he have done differently?

EW: Well, not exactly critical. I felt very sorry for the guy because you know, pilots are a different breed of cat, and we've all gone off half-cocked and figured we're going to beat the odds. And most of the time you do, but when you don't, well, it's just curtains.

The Otters primarily supported the trail parties out of Little America. They would fly two or three hundred miles down the trail to exchange personnel, to deliver mail, to do whatever little chores had to be done—

DOB: Fuel?

EW: Fuel, food, what have you. Now the rule was that you'd fly VFR which means flying by visual flight rules, constantly keeping the trail in sight. There were no navigational aids, no nothing down there, and once you got off the trail and lost, it would be very, very easy to just wander around and eventually crash. So that was the strict rule that we had.

As I've said, we're all tempted. He decided that when the weather closed in due to snow squalls, he could climb on top of the overcast, fly maybe for half an hour, and then pop down and everything would be fine. Well, it didn't work quite that way. To begin with, he never did get on top of the overcast. My guess is that he got up to about seven thousand feet, and then he started to ice up, and the first thing you know the plane was just nothing but one great, huge iceberg. Then they started down. The weight of the ice was just too much for the plane to handle.

By the greatest of good fortune, they landed on Prince Edward VII Peninsula. Way, way off course. And they landed on the down side of a mountain, if you can believe it. Although the plane was a total washout, all the crew members survived. As a matter of fact, I don't think there was an injury.

DOB: Not much.

EW: No, except their pride.

DOB: And then they started walking.

EW: Yes. That was one of their major faults. It's well known, well established that if you crash and your plane has not burned or otherwise been demolished, that you stick with your airplane. First of all, you have shelter. And secondly, search aircraft can spot an airplane, particularly the red wings, far easier than you can spot a man walking along in the wilderness.

So that, I think, was a great error in judgment, more than anything else. Of course it had nothing to do with the flying. When they finally got those men, they were getting close to the end. They were suffering from the cold and they didn't have much food. I mean it was getting kind of critical.

DOB: George Moss said, "Yes, but it was something to do." And there was a great urge to take action.

EW: There's no question about it. I've been down that road—I've crashed. And you say, why sit here and wait? Why can't we make an attempt to do this on our own? There's no question about it. You are motivated to take this sort of action. But if your good judgment takes over, why I think most would say, well, okay, so it's boring.

But in this case it didn't quite work that way. The plane that crashed was spotted well before they spotted any of the survivors. He landed, checked the plane out, and it was empty. So he concluded, and rightly so, they were attempting to walk out. That's when they began to search for them.

DOB: Was there a trail that they could follow from that?

EW: No, it was just dumb luck they came across them.

DOB: All right. Well, finally then it's Deep Freeze II and you've got your chance to go to Antarctica.

EW: Exactly.

DOB: In October, the 17th of October, 1956.

EW: Yes.

DOB: And you wrote very vividly about this, so I don't want you to repeat that, but just to set that up a little bit. Now Admiral Dufek flew out from Christchurch the day before you did—

EW: The day before. Right.

DOB: —with Hank Jorda. And there were to be six planes then that followed. There were four R4Ds leaving from Dunedin, and you in a—

EW: A P2V.

DOB: —P2V. You were in an R5D—

EW: R5D, yes. I had the R5D.

DOB: —and a P2V.

EW: And a P2V.

DOB: And the weather forecast is kind of iffy.

EW: Very iffy.

DOB: And once airborne from New Zealand, you had problems with head winds and icing, and fuel was being gobbled up, and then there was a communication blackout.

EW: Yes.

DOB: And even an engine fire—

EW: Right.

DOB: —to add to all of this drama. And there is to start with very little margin for error in any direction. And you had a wife and five children that you left behind and it's pretty dark and cold and wet down there.

EW: Yes.

DOB: So I want to know how you kept your head during this fourteen hours of uncertainty and what you did think about during that time. Start with that.

EW: All right. Again, I hearken back and I think that most aviators who have been on a long-range mission will tell you that when trouble starts, for instance weather problems, fuel shortage, it's most disconcerting. And the fact of the matter remains that there's nothing you can do about it except sit and wait. And again, it's the sitting and the waiting that become so nerve-racking.

A quick emergency like a close midair collision—you're scared for a moment and then it's gone. But when you have to sit for hour after hour after hour watching a fuel gauge go down to zero, or some other deteriorating aspect, it becomes very grim.

But then I think this, Dian, within everybody's psyche you go through sort of a progression.

First you're disappointed. I thought, my gosh, I've gotten this airplane all the way from Quonset Point, Rhode Island, to within a couple of hundred miles of McMurdo, my goal, and suppose we don't make it. Frustrating. So you're frustrated, you're worried, you're concerned, you don't know what's coming next. And then you lapse into resignation and you say, oh well, c'est la vie—what happens, happens—and become resigned. And then you turn around for some reason and you say to yourself, I'm going to make this one way or another. Your spirits pick up, and sometimes you make it and sometimes you don't. In our case, we did.

DOB: So how do you calculate your options and your chances and decide on backup plans?
Did you have backup plans?

EW: No, as a matter of fact. What fuel we had, of course, was aboard the airplane. I knew I guess when we got to within an hour of McMurdo, I thought, I'll make this thing one way or the other. Either we can just about stretch it and land at McMurdo, or if we don't, I knew there was quite a bit of ice surface, and having landed on an ice surface before, I figured, well, so we come in a little short. So what? So we just sit and wait out here.

DOB: Were there ships in line to do rescue while you were flying?

EW: No.

DOB: That was true the year before.

EW: The year before they did. The year we flew down there was one destroyer escort, as I recall, about midway between New Zealand and McMurdo Sound. It was a guard ship, and he was there in case we had an emergency and had to ditch. But other than that ship, no, there was nothing else.

DOB: So finally then it got to be morning and you sighted the continent. You were still on course?

EW: Yes.

DOB: What did you see and what did you think about this place?

EW: I'd never been as impressed in my life. When I took a look at that huge continent coming up ahead of me, it was perfectly awesome. And the closer I got to it, the more in awe I was. I can recall flying straight down the coast.

DOB: From Cape Adare?

EW: From Cape Adare, yes. From Cape Adare you fly parallel to the coast of the Antarctic all the way to McMurdo. And I had never seen more beautiful country, more grandiose country.

DOB: What was beautiful about it?

EW: The glaciers. Unbelievable. And this huge ten-thousand-foot plateau of nothing but sheer ice and stretching as far as the eye could see on one side, and on the other side, the ocean churning little bits of pack ice. It was just something difficult to describe.

DOB: Were you surprised at it?

EW: Yes, I was.

DOB: Did you expect to see what you did?

EW: No, I was surprised. I had no idea of the sheer beauty of the Antarctic.

DOB: Well, then, to conclude this story that we were on, after fourteen hours you managed to land at McMurdo—

EW: Yes.

DOB: —in a snowstorm, minutes of fuel left—

EW: Yes.

DOB: A P2V is trying to land just about the same time that you were. What are your thoughts and actions during those final minutes?

EW: Well, I was, of course, so anxious for him to land. I knew he was about ten minutes ahead of me, and the sooner he got on the ice, the sooner I'd get there. And I was terribly concerned. When I heard him say he had the runway in sight, I thought, well, this is great. And the next transmission was, "I'm going to make a low visibility approach," which meant that he'd missed on his first go-around. And he was going around the field to make a second attempt. A low visibility approach takes about six or seven minutes. Essentially it's a tight turn coming around, going downwind and then back on the final approach. And it was in the tight turn when the accident happened.

DOB: He was just not high enough?

EW: I think it was a combination of a lot of things. First of all, it was a whiteout condition. It's terribly disconcerting, particularly when you're going from instrument flight rules, where you're flying the gauges, to visual flight rules. The transition is difficult. In a tight turn it takes only an instant for the nose to drop a few degrees, and he was in.

DOB: Did you know any of this when you were coming in?

EW: I didn't know it then, no. When I finally got clearance for a straight-in, I said, well, Dave's made it. This is great. I'm right behind him. It wasn't until after I had landed—

DOB: Let's finish you first. So you finally saw the runway.

EW: The copilot did. I was on the gauges all the way in. The copilot hit me on the arm and he said, "There it is!" And that's when I transitioned from instrument to visual. At first the only thing I saw was a red flag on the end of the runway, and then gradually the ice runway materialized. And again, it was sort of nip and tuck. I thought, I hope I'm landing on the runway. It looks like it to me. And as it turned out, it was.

DOB: And then you saw the red tail of the P2V.

EW: I was on the runway waiting for the follow-me vehicle to come out because I couldn't see anything. I didn't know where I was; the snow was still coming down heavily. But I could see about I guess maybe a hundred yards off to the left, and I saw this great, huge, red tail. I said to my very good copilot, Hank Hansen, "Hank, it looks like old Dave landed out in the boondocks." I kept looking and finally—you know, in these snow squalls you do get kind of a little break occasionally. I thought, my gosh, that's just the tail! And that was a tragic accident, yes.

DOB: How could your exhausted mind and heart cope with that after all that?

EW: It was tough because we're all very close friends. It was a most difficult time. My introduction to the Antarctic was anything but pretty.

DOB: So you knew what the implications were of just seeing the tail immediately.

EW: Yes.

DOB: Still hoping that—

EW: Still hoping that they all survived. Yes.

DOB: Well, but you went on to do a lot of flying on the ice.

EW: Yes.

DOB: What are the significant challenges and dangers of Antarctic flying compared to shall we say ordinary flying?

EW: First of all, there are no navigational aids. Everything was done by celestial navigation and a grid system of navigation. I won't go into the details. And then it's the unknown. You have no weather information whatsoever. You don't know what you're going to be flying into or out of, or what the weather will be when you get to your destination. Let's take a photo mission. You fly out about seven or eight hundred miles, turn around and start back to McMurdo. You wonder about the weather because communications weren't all that great.

DOB: What did you have?

EW: Well, the radioman had CW code, and we also had VHF, UHF, and low-frequency voice which, for the most part, operated fine. But then a lot of times you'd work into a blackout, couldn't hear anything. So yes, it was sort of nip and tuck. You certainly didn't have the backup facilities that you do in the States.

DOB: Did you ever land where there was no runway?

EW: No. You mean in the Antarctic?

DOB: Yes.

EW: No. Of course my plane was wheel-equipped. I didn't have skis, so we had to land on the ice runway.

DOB: So you didn't make any flights to the Pole?

EW: No. We would cover the Pole operations when the R4Ds were taking the Seabees in or bringing them back. We'd act as a guard plane to make sure that they landed okay.

DOB: So you flew—

EW: Flew three missions to the Pole, yes, during that particular operation.

DOB: Okay. What does it mean to feather an engine on a plane?

EW: On the old prop-driven airplanes, if you lost an engine or it caught fire and you had to close down, you would punch the feathering button and the propeller would automatically go from its normal bite size shape and stop straight up and down. In other words the blades would be vertical which decreased the drag of the propeller. If you couldn't feather it and the prop windmilled, you'd get additional drag from air pressure.

DOB: And that was a condition you could reverse.

EW: Yes. You can reverse feathering.

DOB: So you would do that under what kind of conditions?

EW: Well, I would say the only time you would ever reverse a feathered engine would be following an emergency situation like a fire. And then the indications were that it was just a blowout, as you sometimes get. At night, an engine fire is much more dramatic as far as brightness. I don't know what caused our engine flare-up. I think it might have been a buildup of fuel or fumes and all of a sudden it popped off. But the engine fire was not sustained. When I brought her back on line, we still had a malfunction. It turned out later that the engine swallowed a valve plus carburetor problems. But it was still operable at lower power settings.

DOB: Lucky.

EW: I count my blessings every day.

DOB: Tell me about JATO. Jet-assisted takeoff. What's in those canisters?

EW: Now you're talking to a layman about propulsion. Essentially it looks like a big—one of those things you use for carbonated water. The JATO bottle is about the same sort of thing, compressed air. When you release JATO, you get a jet effect for perhaps ten or fifteen seconds. It gives you quite a boost. After the JATO bottles have been fired, because of the weight they're released like a bomb.

DOB: So they'd just land wherever.

EW: Just land wherever is right. You hope not on somebody. And they did work well. That's going back almost fifty years.

DOB: Do they still use that?

EW: I don't think so, not in a jet, no. The power plants today are so infinitely more powerful and more efficient that I think the JATO bottle is a thing of the past.

DOB: I'm wondering about the environmental effect of it, too, to have all these things dumped.

EW: I'm sure that there was one, but again, going back that far really the environment wasn't all that much of a consideration, if you recall. I'm sure you don't recall because you're too young, but there wasn't the same let's say awareness back then.

DOB: You were in the Antarctic in the summertime.

EW: Yes.

DOB: So it's daylight all the time.

EW: Yes.

DOB: What effect did that have on your life as a pilot and scheduling and did you adopt a different clock than a twenty-four-hour clock?

EW: No. I think they do things to make it very easy for your transition. For instance, the living quarters all have big, thick, heavy curtains so when you go to bed, let's say your usual bedtime is at ten o'clock, and it's still as light as noon outside, it's dark inside. Then you turn off your own little light by your bed, and you might as well be back in the States in the middle of the night. When you get up, let's say at six, someone runs around and opens all the curtains and it's a beautiful, bright, sunny day.

DOB: If you were flying and you knew that the weather is going to be better at two o'clock in the morning than it's liable to be at ten o'clock in the morning, would you then do your flying in the middle of the night?

EW: No, no. As a matter of fact, we were on a pretty rigid schedule. But yes, you could always vary your flight operations. For the most part we would go to bed when you usually go to bed and get up when you usually get up.

DOB: Okay. You had done a lot of the planning for Deep Freeze from the very beginning. And then you got to the ice yourself. Did you have any thoughts about those plans after you got there to think, oh, why didn't we do this? Or we did too much of that, or . . . second guess yourself a little?

EW: No, really, because the second time around, which was Deep Freeze II, we learned so much from the shortcomings of the first operation that from a squadron standpoint, I think we were very well set up all the way around. Now when you get into the other side of the picture, your supply corps side, your logistics support, I don't care how well you plan, there are always things you're going to forget. And they were the boys who I think did most of the suffering if there was any suffering to be done.

DOB: So you would occasionally say, we do need another—

EW: Yes. Why didn't they send down a spare engine when they were doing it? That sort of thing.

DOB: Well, there were a number of airplane losses on the ice by the end of Deep Freeze II, I think maybe about half a dozen by then?

EW: Yes, there sure were.

DOB: That must've been a tremendous cost. But I am also assuming that the Navy expects certain losses. Can you comment on—

EW: I sure can. First of all, although the Navy will never admit it, when they assign aircraft to an experimental squadron, particularly one like VX-6 where you're going into the unknown for the most part, those planes are just written off the book. I mean they figure they'll never see them again because there'll probably be accidents or they'll stay down in the Antarctic or whatever.

So I don't think from the Navy's standpoint they worried about getting their planes back. And you're right. When you lose a plane it was costly. But bear in mind again, with the exception of the new Otters, all the rest of our airplanes were old. And they were all gradually being replaced by new, modern equipment, and that goes for the R5Ds, the R4Ds, the P2Vs, and helicopters.

DOB: Was that on purpose that you took old ones?

EW: No, they were the only things available.

DOB: Okay. All right. Well, I think I want to change the subject a little and talk about living on the ice. A number of people have written about liquor policy and liquor use, and it seemed to me that policies were honored in the breach sometimes as well as in fact. Tell me about it. What did you think should be done?

EW: I really, Dian, don't think it's any different than living let's say in a nice, beautiful, suburban community. You're going to find that some people unfortunately have a tendency to imbibe a bit too much. Again, and I say, it could be the country club set or it could be down in the Antarctic. I do think that a little round of say two ounces of what we had down there called Old Methusalem, I believe it was something like ninety proof, tended to relax you. But then there were always those who wanted maybe a little more than two ounces. So you did run into that.

I never saw a person on the ice completely inebriated. But occasionally they'd have a little party. We had a New Year's party down there the first year I was down, and they served, I think, hundred proof alcohol mixed with orange juice. And again, most of the attendees, which was practically the whole McMurdo camp, drank within reason. But there were maybe three or four that had a problem.

So I don't know. I don't really think that alcohol was a problem on the ice. Now it may have been during the long winter night at either McMurdo or Little America. You know, boredom sometimes can bright that sort of a thing on. Nothing to do except sit around and drink and tell sea stories, and that can be overdone. But I can truthfully say I never saw an abuse of liquor down there, not to my knowledge.

DOB: What was Dufek's attitude and policy?

EW: He liked to drink with the rest of us. It was only because of a very uncalled-for event that Admiral Dufek put prohibition into effect for a while down at McMurdo.

DOB: What brought that about?

EW: Well, as I remember it was just after the admiral made the first successful flight to the Pole. And incidentally, Gus Shinn did a magnificent job on getting that old R4D in and out of a ten-thousand-foot plateau.

But somehow or another, he'd heard, and then saw, a message go out from one of the civilian news media down there to the effect that decisions by the people in charge were being made sometimes under the influence, which I thought was a rather snide, uncalled-for type of reporting. First of all, it wasn't true. But all that has to happen is something like this to get out, followed by an accident. Then the people in charge do have a difficult time explaining it. So the admiral thought it best for that reason that there would be no alcoholic beverages consumed at McMurdo from that time on except beer. And of course by that time we'd run out of beer, so that was total prohibition.

DOB: Were there problems about that? Did people grouse about it?

EW: Yes, they did.

DOB: Was that lifted after a while or was it simply forgotten?

EW: I think it was overtaken by events. When the civilians came in for the IGY, they all brought their own cases of whatever. And many of the other reporters coming in, some under contract to *Life* magazine, some under contract with *Time*, they were always pretty flush, and I should say very generous. So it just sort of faded away, yes.

DOB: Were there problems of living in close quarters with so many other people and the same ones day in and day out for months?

EW: No, I don't think so. People tended—it's a good question, because I think you'll find that when a group of people are isolated, if they're not occupied they'll tend pretty much to be by themselves. You sit down and read by yourself or you write letters by yourself. Our quarters all had separate rooms—

DOB: Officers, some officers did.

EW: Well, no. This was just in the "vip" quarters. The quarters next door we called Boys Town. That's where the rest of the squadron officers lived. It was like a big barracks with double-decker bunks. I think it would get a little old, because some of the guys might stay up all night telling sea stories—

[End Side B, Tape 1]

[Begin Side A, Tape 2]

DOB: Okay. We were talking about living quarters, and I don't know if we were finished on that or not.

EW: I think we just about were.

DOB: Okay. The military no longer plays a significant role on the ice. What difference do you think that will make, plus or minus?

EW: I don't think it will make much difference at all, Dian. As a matter of fact, back during our era and up until about . . . well, back during Deep Freeze I and II and possibly through V or VI, the only organizations that had the equipment to do the job down there were the military. And probably they were the only ones that had the money to boot. But today the planes are so sophisticated, so much better. I understand that now the administrative control comes under the National Science Foundation. The Air National

Guard, flying better equipment than the Navy, is going to take over. So no, I don't think there will be the slightest problem.

DOB: Okay. I'd like to ask you about a number of people who were on the ice. Some of them you've already spoken about, and if you've said enough we'll go on. I have a long list and I would like to hear what you thought of these folks and why and with maybe a specific example that illustrates that point. Admiral Dufek.

EW: Admiral Dufek. Great leader. I admired him, I respected him, and he was just a very likable person. He was severe at times, strict. He had to be. But I have only the highest regard for Admiral Dufek.

DOB: And you had a falling-out with him.

EW: Well, it wasn't exactly a falling-out. The problem, I guess, was that I was appointed as head of the accident investigation board that investigated his very close friend, Capt. Bill "Trigger" Hawkes, when he crashed the Otter. And there was only one way, one conclusion that the accident board could come up with and that was a hundred percent pilot error. And I signed it. It wasn't resented, I don't think, but things were never quite as cordial.

DOB: Never after that?

EW: When I left, I never saw Admiral Dufek again.

DOB: Paul Siple.

EW: A great man.

DOB: Did you see him on the ice?

EW: Oh yes. Yes, Paul would drop around to the vip quarters and we'd talk about this, that and the other. I perceived Paul as I did as a twelve-year-old boy. I thought then that guy is the personification of a scout. And it was really interesting to sit down as a grown man and talk to him. He wasn't all that much older than I, but I'm sure as far as his attitude, his outlook on life, his general demeanor hadn't changed a wit since he was eighteen years old. I thoroughly enjoyed Paul. And I think he really showed his courage, and it took a lot of courage to go in there to the South Pole station and winter over the first year. You talk about unknowns, that was a big unknown because had anything gone haywire down there in that station between the latter part of February and the end of October the following year, nobody could've gotten in or gotten out.

DOB: They can get in and out now, can't they?

EW: I think they can. I haven't been keeping up too close.

DOB: Trigger Hawkes.

EW: Yes, Trig, a great guy. As a matter of fact, Trigger Hawkes was a Notre Dame graduate, and of course I being a La Salle college graduate, there was a certain amount of rivalry between the two schools. But yes, we were a couple of Irishmen that saw eye to eye and talked about the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and so on and so on. Bill Hawkes and I were never at odds. It was just that—and I'm sure that he didn't particularly care for the hundred percent pilot error being stamped on him, but I think that Bill was a reasonable guy. He probably figured, well, you know, I guess it was my fault because I wasn't qualified.

I might add about five years ago, I wrote to Trigger Hawkes. I had heard he'd retired in the San Diego area, and I further heard to my sorrow that he was suffering from a bout of cancer of the jaw. So I wrote him a long letter and brought up old times and then wished him well. And about two weeks later I got a cordial telephone call from Bill. It was wonderful to talk to him. There was no animosity. It was just a good old friendly conversation. Now I haven't heard, I don't know—I hope he's all right, but I haven't heard.

DOB: Capt. Douglas Cordiner.

EW: Great guy. To begin with—I should say at first I thought, oh, brother. This guy's going to be tough. He was moody, he was sarcastic, he was difficult. I said to myself, Gordon Ebbe told me about this guy. He said, "You know, I don't think I'd like to be his exec." But as I mentioned before, I missed the Antarctic the first time around; I was not about to miss the second.

Well, to make a long story short, within a month or two after Captain Cordiner's arrival in Quonset Point where he relieved me as skipper—officially took over the squadron, we became very, very close friends. On the ice we were . . . well, just that. Kind of kindred spirits, if you will. And we both thought along the same lines. And I found out that although he had these traits, a rather sarcastic attitude, and sometimes snapped at people, it never happened to me.

DOB: So you overcame that.

EW: I think I did, yes. I might add that poor Capt. Doug Cordiner passed away about six or eight years ago. Gordon Ebbe also passed away. And Jack Coley, the skipper that followed Doug Cordiner, has passed away. So there are getting to be few of us left.

DOB: How about Gus Shinn?

EW: Great little guy. Banty rooster. You talk to Gus and I think you'll see what I mean. I knew Gus when he was a young man, a young pilot, a naval aviator, and he was just that. He was like a little banty rooster, fired up. A great pilot.

DOB: What made him a good pilot?

EW: I'd say not only natural abilities but he worked at it. Some can fly a little better than others right off the bat. But you do have to keep your proficiency up, and he was a particularly proficient instrument pilot.

DOB: You wrote a little bit about Finn Ronne. Did you know him?

EW: Yes. Now I didn't know Finn as well, of course, as I knew the others. I knew him through association with the Task Force 43 staff. I'd chat with Finn, talk about this, that and the other. But I knew that he did have this propensity, if you will, to be antagonistic. Let me just give you a quick example.

One of the members on Admiral Dufek's staff was a very personable fellow named Dick Black, Richard Black. He came to the staff as a commander, Naval Reserve. And if you look at a chart of the Antarctic, you'll see over by the Weddell Sea the Richard Black coastline, which is named after him.

Well, he and Finn Ronne were together on Byrd's US Antarctic Expedition at East Base, 1939-41. However, I noticed at the meetings when Finn Ronne would come in, Dick Black would look the other way and Finn never acknowledged that Dick Black was there. One day Dick Black and I went out to lunch at Duke Zeibert's, a local restaurant in Washington that used to be the place for people to gather. I just felt, you know, I'm curious, so I said, "Dick, I notice that you and Finn Ronne who were buddies and shipmates in the Antarctic don't talk to each other." And he said, "Well, we had a little falling-out." I said, "Oh, you did?" He said, "I still respect Finn." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Let me tell you this story." Now Dian, this might be out of school but I think it's worth repeating. Here was Dick's story very briefly.

He and Finn were out on skis, the two of them, nobody else. And I forget where they were going and what they were doing. Nevertheless, Dick Black fell into a crevasse. Now as you know, when you're operating as a pair down there, you have a lifeline that goes from one to the other just in case somebody slips into one of these crevasses so that he doesn't keep on going, and hopefully the weight of the other will support him. Well, he and Finn were on this mutual lifeline, and when Dick went through—and Dick was a big man—when he busted through the crevasse, Finn Ronne reared back with all his strength and held him so he didn't keep plunging God knows how many feet down.

Dick told me, "I was dangling on the end of that line, and about ten minutes went by. I tried to pull myself up but my hands would slip. Then I'd get a little bit further up and wait. While I was looking up, all I could see was Finn Ronne's boot." And he said, "You

know, Ed, in our boots we carried a knife in case we got into this sort of a situation and it was impossible to rescue your buddy, you would just—that's the way it was. You took your knife from your boot and you'd cut him loose." Then he said, "Finn never went for his knife."

DOB: Well, Finn Ronne had a rather unhappy year on the ice and people had an unhappy time with him, and it is interesting to hear people talk about him.

EW: Yes, that I thought was a very interesting tale. Well, I think essentially at heart, Finn was a great guy. And old explorers, they have these snits and fallings-out, but let one come in harm's way and the others are the first guys to back him.

DOB: Did you know John Condit or was he gone by the time you got there?

EW: No, I did not know John Condit.

DOB: He was a chaplain of great renown.

EW: Oh, wait a minute. Father Condit down at McMurdo.

DOB: Yes.

EW: Oh yes. When you mentioned chaplain, okay, yes. There was a real character. I think he should've been a walk-on comic rather than a priest, which is of course joking. The fact of the matter remains, like Dr. Hedblom, he was the right guy for the job down there. Father Condit not only had organized a combo, but he was a dynamo. Everybody loved the guy. I mean he was just great all the way around. He'd hold these little get-togethers and what have you. Yes, I thought he was a magnificent man. I never knew the other chaplain. He was over in Little America.

DOB: I think he had a hard time with the competition.

EW: I think he might have.

DOB: Was there someone that you met on the ice that you were just really glad was there, that you admired or enjoyed or just someone that was particularly special?

EW: You might be referring to Dr. Robertson?

DOB: I'm not referring to anybody. It's just an open-ended question.

EW: Well, there was a man that came in. Robby Robertson, we called him. He was Dr. Robertson . . . M.D. Dr. Robertson turned explorer Robertson. And I guess about 1948 or '49, he'd gone to the Antarctic aboard a whaling ship. He spent eight or nine months aboard this ship and was amazed at what he saw. He was fascinated by the

size of the whales, their habitat and their habits. And he wrote a bestseller at the time called *Of Whales and Men*.

DOB: Oh yes.

EW: Dr. Robertson was under contract to *Life* magazine to do a story on the Deep Freeze program, and he came down with his entourage. I'd say he had about four or five people with him, and I don't know how many cases of Scotch.

Both Captain Cordiner and I met him, and we had quite a number of good times together. He was one of the most fascinating guys I've ever spoken to. He was just—well, he was just that, in any subject you wanted to talk about, from an M.D. standpoint to exploring. I last saw him in New Zealand. And then off he went and I never saw him again. But he was, yes. He was a pretty fabulous guy.

DOB: Were you ever truly scared?

EW: No, I don't think that scared would be a term. You're terribly concerned, you're terribly apprehensive, but not scared. I think most aviators tend to be pretty . . . oh, what would you call it? Pretty down to earth. You recognize danger, and your immediate reaction is what can I do to correct it, rather than one of just sheer terror.

DOB: So you were able to do that.

EW: No, I never had, I don't think, a huge fear.

DOB: What was your proudest moment?

EW: Well, it was probably quite unrelated to the Antarctic, but the proudest moment I had was when I arrived back home and saw my youngest child then aged I think a year-and-a-half, who'd grown from a tiny baby to a cute young lady. And the welcoming committee, Marilyn and the five children, were there to meet me, and that was one of my most joyous moments when I returned to Quonset.

DOB: Having been on staff, you must have been very aware of the broader events in the rest of the world. And when you went to Antarctica, did you think a lot about, well, we are here but there are other countries also involved and there's a scary world out there. Did you think about that a lot when you were there?

EW: No, not really. No. Never gave it a thought.

DOB: So you didn't concern yourself particularly with the social and political issues of—

EW: Of the time?

DOB: Yes.

EW: Well, you know, the Navy's very parochial, and you tend to all think alike, think about flying, where you are, what your mission is, and how you're best going to accomplish it. So for the most part, you're cloistered in a way. You're out of the world, yes.

DOB: Did you have any interaction with counterparts from other countries while you were there?

EW: No. Never.

DOB: We talked a little bit about concerns over pollution, namely the lack of them. Did anybody worry about the living resources, either on land or in the ocean?

EW: No, no, they didn't. But do you know what concerned me? Now at the time the last thing that I had in my mind was the environmental good of the Antarctic. But one thing did bother me. We were operating off the ice runway, as you know, and it was a parking area to boot. We'd change oil and we'd do this and we'd do that, and from October on through until mid-December, I kept noticing black trails where the vehicles had run back and forth to the runway. You'd see big oil splotches all around. And then sometimes old rags laying around. It went from a gorgeous, white, beautiful fairyland to just a bit of human degradation of the environment. And that bothered me.

DOB: So that was the beginning of environmental awareness.

EW: In *my* book, yes.

DOB: Now you can't even

EW: No, you sure can't.

DOB: And nobody seemed particularly worried about the penguins and the seals?

EW: Nobody gave them a second thought. No.

DOB: When we were in Columbus for the symposium of the American Polar Society, there was a big discussion and quite a lot of controversy about the issue of tourism in Antarctica today. What's your take on that?

EW: Well, I thought it was pretty well defined by I forget who gave the presentation. I don't think there's going to be any problem whatsoever as long as they control it as tightly as they're controlling it now.

As you recall one of the things that the scientists mentioned, they wondered what the impact of tourists would be on penguins and their mating habits. I think one of the prime spots where they take the tourists is close to a penguin rookery. Over the years they've

found that the penguins have, if anything, thrived rather than lost ground. So I don't think it's a problem, at least not yet. I'm not concerned.

DOB: Do you think it's a good thing? There are some people who have been there who aren't so sure that they want to share that experience with just anybody.

EW: Yes, that's a human quality, there's no question about it. But I'll tell you, Dian, I would advise anybody who ever has any thoughts on seeing the most fabulous land in the world to take a cruise to the Antarctic. I've not been everywhere in the world, that's for sure, but there's no place where I've been that can beat it.

DOB: Well, it's not in my grant but I hope you'll help me get there.

EW: There you go.

DOB: Well, in 1959 after the International Geophysical Year had proved to be such a success, the participating countries sat down in Washington and hammered out the Antarctic Treaty that set aside the continent for science and peaceful purposes. And it's now forty-some years later.

EW: Yes.

DOB: What do you think the chances are of maintaining that peaceful scientific intent and purpose there indefinitely?

EW: In betting odds, I would give it about a 70-30 shot. I'd say 70 percent of the time, it stands a much better chance of succeeding than it does of failure.

DOB: But 70-30 isn't 100.

EW: No, it sure isn't because there are always those rogue nations, and you never know what they're going to be up to. Minerals down there. My goodness gracious. Fishing, the krill. The waters are just loaded with an abundance of food that can be used by both fish and humans, and there has been a tendency in the past for these to be overfished. So yes, I still think there's about a 30 percent chance that something might go very bad down there, but I'm not sure.

DOB: Did your polar experiences have any effect on what you did later in your life in other career moves?

EW: No, other than one respect. In my retirement I've taken up creative writing just for my own amusement. I found the most fascinating thing. I'm currently working on a novel about the Antarctic which I'm quite certain has a very slim chance of ever being published. It's mostly for my own amusement and entertainment and for those friends who might like a copy.

DOB: And that came out of that experience.

EW: Yes. It's taken directly from my experience in the Antarctic.

DOB: Have you been back?

EW: No. Wish I could. I'd give my right arm to go back.

DOB: For an extended tour or

EW: No, I think at my age I'd just like to go down and take a final see and kiss it goodbye.

DOB: Do you have a favorite story? When you're at a cocktail party and someone hears that you've been in Antarctica, do you say, oh, Is there a story that you particularly like to tell?

EW: Well, there's one that I hadn't thought about in years. It concerns the medical officer at McMurdo Sound, Dr. Taylor. Dr. Taylor looked like an old, old man to me then and I guess he was about forty. Just after we arrived at McMurdo, the scientists over at Little America had come across Admiral Byrd's old habitat. By this time, of course, it had sunk well under the ice. They dug down, went in, and were absolutely amazed at what they found: a complete state of preservation. Apparently the admiral had been in the process of putting a chicken in the pot to cook for his dinner when he left. And here was this chicken, let's see, by that time I guess it was about, what, twenty years old? Here was a twenty-year-old chicken sitting in a pot on the stove perfectly preserved.

One day I went over to the sick bay at McMurdo Sound. While Doc Taylor and I were chatting, I mentioned the chicken. I said, "Doc, you'd be amazed. You're a scientific guy." And then I explained when they dug down to Admiral Byrd's old habitat, they came across this twenty-year-old chicken sitting in a pot, just exactly as it was the day he put it there. Old Doc Taylor looked at me and said, "Man. Would I like to get my hands on a twenty-year-old chicken."

[Laughter]

DOB: He'd been there a long time.

[Laughter]

EW: Yes, he had.

DOB: If you were an artist and could capture on one canvas the essence of your Antarctic experience, what would you paint?

EW: I think I'd paint the approach of the Antarctic, Cape Adare—gateway to the Antarctic. That was my first impression of the Antarctic and I'll never forget it.

DOB: What would be in it?

EW: The beautiful glaciers and mountains and a huge area of the ten-thousand-foot plateau behind. In general, a look at the total grandeur.

DOB: What colors would be in it?

EW: They'd be pastel, a lot of them, because of the glaciers, the blues and light blues, much like the Gulf of Mexico. And of course beautiful white snow and the dark streaks that run down the mountains. If I had the ability, I would love to do it.

DOB: Paul Siple wrote in *Ninety Degrees South* that being in the Antarctic has a profound effect on character and personality, and that almost nobody who has been there comes away the same. Do you think you were changed by your experience?

EW: I think Paul probably was a bit more, should we say, affected by this phenomenon than I was. You see, Paul, spent a year isolated at the South Pole, and he spent a year there as a young Boy Scout—whereas I went down in October and left the end of February. But I know exactly what he means. When a group of men are isolated, it takes a strong character to maintain your temper. That's the first thing that usually goes. Tempers will flare over something really small. I do think it builds character, yes. No question about it. If you spend as much time as Paul did, you do get a profound change in your outlook or your character, yes.

DOB: What haven't I asked you that I just really should have?

EW: Dian, I think we've covered the waterfront. I don't think there's anything else that I could possibly add to it. I think that you've done a most admirable job with your interview and your questions. And it's been such a great pleasure to rethink this and to feel as excited once again as I did forty-five years ago.

DOB: Well, thank you. I truly enjoyed it, too. It's been a wonderful morning. Thanks a million.

EW: Great!

[End of interview]