

**Antarctic Deep Freeze Oral History Project**  
**Interview with Brian C. Dalton, MD**  
**conducted on August 5, 1999, by Dian O. Belanger**

**DOB:** Today is the 5th of August, 1999. I am Dian Belanger and I'm speaking with Dr. Brian Dalton about his experiences in Operation Deep Freeze II at Byrd Station.

Good afternoon, Dr. Dalton. Thanks so much for talking with me.

**BD:** Good afternoon, Dian. Nice of you to come to Maine.

**DOB:** Would you start please by telling me just briefly something about your background: where you grew up, where you went to school, what you decided to do with your life, and in particular anything that might suggest you'd end up in a place like Antarctica.

**BD:** Well, I was born in Ireland, Dublin, Ireland, where I had my education, including my medical education. And after completing that, I came to the United States to get further training.

In so doing, I incurred the obligation for Selective Service, which I welcomed as an adventure, and applied for the Navy and duly got a commission in the Navy with the intention of becoming a flight surgeon. However, in my two weeks of orientation in medicine in the Navy at Chelsea Naval Hospital, word came through that I could not attend the flight surgeon school at Pensacola because they had overlooked the fact that I wasn't a citizen.

At the same time, the base commanding officer came around to our small group in training and said he was looking for a volunteer to go on a special assignment to Antarctica, and I found myself the only one of the dozen or so with his hand up. And next thing I knew after a few telephone calls I was ordered down to the staging base at Davisville, Rhode Island, which at that time it was COMCBLANT, the logistical coordinator for the whole Deep Freeze operation.

There I learned what had happened was that the unit, Detachment Bravo as it was known, was in training for the most part of a year, and they had set up the organization so that the seven U.S. bases who participated in the International Geophysical Year would be each staffed by a Navy physician. And at the smaller bases, the doctor in fact would be the officer in charge.

The officer who had been picked and assigned to Byrd Station, one of the smaller bases, had to cry off this opportunity at the last minute because his wife was becoming seriously disturbed. And so a replacement was urgently needed, so they acquired me.

And as the ships were about to leave and the . . . it was a rather hurried affair to get me outfitted with cold-weather clothing and such, and I asked for further training because I had only completed one year of internship. I felt from the medical point of view, I was inadequately trained for the responsibilities I might have to assume, particularly in surgery, trauma, orthopedics, and things of that nature.

So they agreed to allow me to take the last ship down and to make arrangements to go back to Chelsea Hospital where I would stand some surgery training and also to be assigned to the leading orthopedic unit in the city which was at the Shortel unit at Boston City Hospital which was then the major training area in orthopedic surgery. I was there for several weeks until the time came to ship out and join the last vessel to go down, which was the USS *Curtiss*, AV-4, nonused seaplane tender with an interesting second world war history.

**DOB:** Why did you want to go?

**BD:** Why did I put my hand up at that moment? Because I was unmarried and I have a very strong calling towards adventurous activities.

**DOB:** Did you know much about Antarctica at the time?

**BD:** I had read a few *National Geographic* magazines, so when the word Deep Freeze came up, I was familiar with the general idea but not very well informed, no. I knew who Scott and Amundsen were and things of that nature. I had a school boy's knowledge of it, but that's about all.

**DOB:** Did the cold weather aspect have an appeal particularly or—

**BD:** No, it did not appeal to me.

**DOB:** —disappeal?

**BD:** I was neutral on that, really. I felt that if I was sent down, I would be adequately outfitted for the cold. For the rest, that was up to the Navy. They, in fact, had screened everybody. In the course of this long selection and indoctrination, they had screened everybody. They put everybody through the toughest physical that existed, called the submarine physical, and given a psychological evaluation to everybody . . . everybody except me because I was the last one in, which gave me some funny thoughts after I got down there.

**DOB:** Do you want to elaborate?

**BD:** Well, I thought they had taken a gamble, and I wondered would I not have been better if I had both of those examinations, particularly the psychological one because I didn't want to fall apart down there. I would have been more relieved to know that I had passed somebody's assessment. It didn't happen. In either event, I didn't get the examination and I didn't need it, as it happens.

**DOB:** Did you have any cold-weather survival training or did you have any particular medical training to deal with . . . ?

**BD:** No, I grew up in a temperate country where if the snow stays past midday it's an unusual winter's day. I was not used to extremes of cold or anything of that nature, or heat. I . . . well, that's about all I can say on that right now.

**DOB:** So this was your first trip then to Antarctica?

**BD:** Absolutely the first trip. I recognized the uniqueness—that's one of the things that I suppose made me volunteer. It was such a unique part of the world, and the chances of getting there were so very, very uncommon. It must have been extremely rare to have the opportunity to go, and that gave me a great sense of awe . . . added to my sense of adventure knowing that this was something that very few people had the opportunity to do. And as I subsequently found, I would be standing on a piece of the earth, in frozen form, that nobody had ever stood on before.

**DOB:** And what did that feel like?

**BD:** It was a very exciting feeling. And it still stayed with me that to know that a few of us, we could each walk in different directions and claim it for ourselves, if others thought about it. I never discussed it with other members or remember discussing it. But it is an astonishing feeling.

Where we were at Byrd Station it was totally flat—360 degrees. At the time I remember saying, "This is what it must feel like to stand on the moon." And that was 1957. It was truly the same experience in many respects, except it wasn't as great an achievement as those who did go to the moon and walk around.

**DOB:** Tell me about approaching the continent . . . what that was like.

**BD:** It was very enjoyable. As I said, we went down on the last ship, the *Curtiss*, which sadly missed all those nice places like Hawaii and Tahiti. We sailed right through the Tahitian group, and our first stop was New Zealand where we had three days ashore, which was very pleasant. And that led to other tales how I almost ended my expedition on the slopes of Mt. Cook in the Southern Alps with

a small climbing group. But after three days we plowed on then through somewhat roughish seas.

I remember as we went through the Furious Forties, the Frightening Fifties, and the Screaming Sixties, as it was advertised, it wasn't that bad at all. But in those 2,000 miles was a chance to make the final set of adjustment for what was coming. And I've not so much in a memory of any severe weather, but I do remember when we first began sighting icebergs. It was a very memorable moment. Small odd ones at first, but then as it got thicker and thicker, we then had to rendezvous with an icebreaker, and I believe it was the *Glacier*.

There were four icebreakers on duty down there. Three others were then in the control of the Coast Guard—the *Northwind*, *Westwind*, and something else [the *Eastwind*]. You probably have this type of information.

But I do remember how exciting it was because being a supernumerary on that ship, the *Curtiss*, we were literally passengers. There were two other doctors of our division—Pat Unger for Little America and Charlie Novosad who was at McMurdo Sound. They had a regular ship's medical officer, so we had no duties, nothing to do, and we welcomed the chance to do anything. One day during lunch, word came down that officers who wanted to, even medical officers, could stand bridge lookout, this was a diversion and something to do.

We picked up the *Glacier*, our icebreaker, as the ice got thicker. The rendezvous was at night by radar. It was my first time to see radar used in CIC, the Combat Information Center. I found that very fascinating as it gradually got closer and closer. And then finally to visually see the icebreaker ahead in the polar twilight ready, waiting to take us through the thicker ice.

**DOB:** Was there a lot of ice?

**BD:** To the extent that the icebreaker did not have to create leads, no, not a lot, but enough. One significant event happened while we were going through those thick pieces of ice—I've forgotten the terminology, they were classified in so many different ways. But we then were ferrying mail and personnel back and forth between the icebreaker and our ship. We had a helicopter flight deck on the bow, and this operation had been in force for several hours.

We were at lunch in the ward room when general quarters was sounded and I dashed up on deck. I went down to my cabin first, picked up the spare medical kit I had, and went up on deck to see what was going on, because they announced at the same time that a helicopter had crashed. This helicopter ferrying things back and forth had mistook the slow roll that was present in the ocean, and as it rose the deck rose and tipped the wheel of the helicopter and

flipped it into the water. The water then was 27 degrees. As you find that even below the freezing point of water, seawater and water in motion can stay in a liquid state.

The helicopter sank almost immediately, and we were fearful that the two pilots would not get out because they had to exit through one door on the side. This they did, and our ship's lifeboat was launched very quickly and efficiently, picked them up, brought them back, and they were rushed to sick bay where we had our first chance to try and treat some very chilled pilots who were quite hypothermic but both otherwise in good condition. And that was the first exposure to cold weather I got.

**DOB:** Was anything surprising about Antarctica?

**BD:** Probably the biggest surprise was the purity and clarity of the air. And when we got ashore at McMurdo Sound where the *Curtiss* landed, we were there for some time before moving on to Little America V. At McMurdo, looking across the expanse of the bay and seeing the Royal Society Range in the distance and guessing that it was probably about ten or twenty miles away, I think it was probably five or six times that amount. Because of the clarity of the air, judgment of vision was seriously affected. And this, in fact, had been the case in Scott's party where they thought they would get to that mountain range for their sponsors, the Royal Society, hence giving it its name, and found that it took them several days to do what they thought they would do in a day. That was very exciting.

And also seeing the active volcano, Mt. Erebus, which is right there overlooking the camp at McMurdo. That is at eleven or thirteen thousand feet and still put out an occasional wisp of steam, and that was a very impressive sight.

**DOB:** Tell me about arriving at Byrd Station. You must have . . . well, how did you get there?

**BD:** The ship moved on from McMurdo Sound to off the Ross Ice Shelf where we were ferried in by helicopter to the landing strip at Little America V. I was there for a day or two and told that Byrd Station had not been properly completed. Of the thirteen building structures that I was told we could just move in and set up housekeeping, only four buildings had been built, and there was still an operational decision pending as to whether occupancy would be scrubbed for the year and we would be withdrawn.

Meanwhile, I was to go out and attempt to find where the cargo destined for Byrd Station was, go through the containers, pick out a minimum amount of medical supplies, and get ready for a flight to Byrd Station.

**DOB:** This was in the fall of '56?

**BD:** No, this would have been January.

**DOB:** Of '57.

**BD:** Of '57.

**DOB:** Okay. So Little America has been there for a year, and they were just trying to establish Byrd Station in that summer.

**BD:** Yes. In that Antarctic summer they had sent out a party, a trail party, a tractor trail party on the surface, the odd six hundred miles—I forget what it is, five or six hundred miles—and established the site which was easy to do because it was at the coordinates of 80° South, 120° West. They did set up that site and attempted to get the buildings going but completed only four of them. We were then to try and bring up more supplies and complete the construction.

So I went out on a very famous airplane, nicknamed *Que Sera Sera*, #12418, the Navy's version of a DC-3 called the R4D, which was equipped with skis and landed on skis, took me to . . . sitting on my medical supplies, took me to Byrd Station. And we were told, well, goodbye, we'll see you next year, meaning that we cannot get in touch with you during . . . there's no flying during the polar night. We may have a few more flights coming up with more supplies. There is a tractor train on its way. That's one of these convoys of heavy Caterpillar tractors towing sleds which are bringing up the building supplies so you can complete the construction of your base.

So when I stepped out of the plane onto the concrete-like snow, I was met by the cook, our station cook, Marsh, petty officer first class, and he welcomed me. And that was my first look at Byrd Station. Four structures on the surface luminous even in overcast weather due to their "international orange" paint.

**DOB:** What did you think of these four teeny little buildings on this vast plain of ice?

**BD:** I don't think I had any feeling of expectation. I just felt that whatever is there will be there and we'll make it work.

**DOB:** So by then you were convinced that . . . and the decision had been made to go forward.

**BD:** No. The decision still had not been made. And unfortunately as my first job—I was then the Officer in Charge, you see—I had to get everybody around and say,

"The latest news is that we may not be staying. The decision would have to be made by the Admiral and his staff in the very near future. And I felt very badly at the time because it drew a very negative response from everybody. They were really looking forward to staying. So whether it was the right decision or not to have told them at that time I don't know, but I felt it had to be done.

**DOB:** Were they all there by then?

**BD:** No. I think a few more were to come. But all the Navy personnel were there, yes. They were all in place, and I was the last of the Navy group to join. One or two of the civilians might not have come yet. I can't remember. We were a total base population of twenty-three.

**DOB:** What did you have to do still to get the base ready to live there for a year?

**BD:** We had an enormous amount to do because our mission, of course, was to serve the disciplines of the IGY. And we had many disciplines in our base, but the facilities to conduct their work were not in hand—were not ready. Most of the equipment was still in crates. So the urgency of the situation required that we first get buildings up to house their equipment and supplies, make them operational, and have them ready for launching their programs.

Technically, you see, the IGY was not to begin until the first of July which gave us a lead of several months. But in actual fact, the plan called for them getting on the air, so to speak, as soon as possible so that they could become familiar with the equipment, I suppose, and also to gather data because the data was data. It didn't matter what the calendar said.

**DOB:** Well, I understood that you were still working on those buildings and it was getting dark.

**BD:** Yes. We were starting to lose . . . this period of constant sunlight, which at those high latitudes was a great aid in getting work done, but it meant that gradually we could see the sun getting lower and lower as it orbited around the sky. And eventually we began to get sunsets and the weather turned colder and windier and such, as I remember. It meant that we felt we were racing against the clock.

We had enough supplies to put some buildings up, and by then the tractor train had delivered all they could give us—all they had for us. We then, I think, had almost all the building panels. We definitely did not have all, so we had to construct, I think—we were one or two buildings short. But we decided we had enough up to make the programs work.

The task force decision was made to stay except, strangely, an inquiry came from command as to whether there was enough fuel for the winter. And I must say I . . . all of these things were very new to me—all these duties I had to assume—and I was constantly told as I was going on my way down that everything would be in place.

We launched an inventory of our fuel drums, and I reported back what we had. But by some simple calculations, they realized we didn't have enough fuel for the winter. And they then undertook a special airlift of fuel, four drums to a pallet and the pallet dropped by parachute. A squadron of Air Force Globemasters was down there assisting the Navy, based in New Zealand. They flew a mission to drop what they felt was the required amount of fuel for the winter, and reserves and the fueling for the tractors that might come up and down on the tractor trains.

So that was a special operation because . . . it was literally a crash operation because some of the drums burst on impact, but also it had to come with gaps in the weather. And it was a round-the-clock operation to search for and recover those drums, so we . . . all station work stopped except for the gathering of the fuel, and we worked in teams and everybody worked, myself included. We worked in teams of three or four, going out with the single tractor we had at the base and hauling in these pallets of four drums to the fuel cache which was set up near the base. And that went on twenty-four hours a day until we had all the drums close-by for our use. We were then, at that point, reasonably equipped for winter.

**DOB:** What didn't you have?

**BD:** Lots of things. It was expected that we would run out of certain food items because they could not be preserved and could not . . . the perishables could not. The food department had a great abundance of steaks.

**DOB:** Really?

**BD:** Enormous abundance so we got quite tired of eating steak. I would have loved anything else for variety. We missed the perishables, I think . . . having vegetables and fruit. I don't remember . . . we must have had some type of reconstituted milk, I can't remember. We certainly had no fresh milk.

In contrast to the other stations, we had no paint to paint the interiors nor some type of flooring to put down. We just were trying to get the station going without these things. We did not have some of these minor refinements of interior design.



And one rather significant thing we did not have was a supply of alcohol, which was one of the incentives, I think, for many thought that they would have very inexpensive beer. And my memory at this point, forty-three years later, could be quite off, but I thought it was eleven cents a can of beer. And an unlimited amount for suitable distribution at the correct times which the other bases enjoyed. Supply for Byrd Station for one year for having twenty-three men was two hundred and forty cans, at the time when no further supplies were going to be delivered.

So my immediate concern was . . . I was more concerned would this lead to more problems or less problems. I think it made for a lot less problems, I'd say. But it meant that I had to guard the beer, the two hundred and forty cans, under my bed, along with my medical supplies, my drugs, the narcotics, and things of that nature that were restricted.

**DOB:** How did you dole it out?

**BD:** The beer? Very arbitrarily. When I felt morale was slipping a little, I would say, "Well, on Saturday night you'll each have a can of beer before the movie." And it was on a basis like that and it happened . . . I must say those men were really marvelous the way they took my arbitrary decisions and with my foreign background, because I spoke differently from they did, I came from a different background, I was not even a U.S. citizen. But I was their Officer in Charge. A very unique situation in some respects, but paradoxes like this are not unknown in military circles.

**DOB:** They must have thought you were fair.

**BD:** I tried very hard to be fair, and they must have perceived me to be so because I really had no disciplinary problems. I made certain edicts when I arrived. I said, "First of all I've come through some of the other bases, and I don't want to see any yellow stains in the snow. There are good latrines, use them." And I said, "I don't want any fighting." I can't believe that would have stopped people from allowing release to their tensions and passions or pugilistic instincts, but we did have no fights. We had some grumbling. Some of the other stations did have physical fights, but we did not.

**DOB:** George Toney told me that, too. Did you have other alcohol besides beer?

**BD:** Yes, we did. The Navy in its wisdom has something called medicinal alcohol which is bottled under a label called Old Methusalem. I enjoy a drink, but as a physician, I don't really feel that alcohol is, in any sense, a medicinal item to be dispensed by a physician. I know in wartime it is so considered, and I guess it's on that basis that it's supplied to medical officers. We did have, I think, possibly

about half a dozen or a dozen bottles of this medicinal alcohol, which I sampled to see what it was like, and it was absolutely terrible.

**DOB:** Everyone says that.

**BD:** Along with the cans of beer, this was also kept under my bed in my doctor's office-cum-hospital-cum-office. And that had an interesting end because I knew of the great polar tradition of having a celebration—at least an Antarctic tradition—of having a celebration on midsummer's day which is on the 21st June but in Antarctica the height of winter. The tradition called for a party, rather like a Christmas party, upside down. And for that I pulled out bottles of Old Methusalem and put one on each of the four tables in our mess. It was consumed.

**DOB:** Terrible or not.

**BD:** It had an enormous therapeutic effect because people who hadn't been talking to each other for weeks began doing so again. And that continued for quite a while afterwards, so it had a good effect. Again, probably because we were all so deprived, or thought we were deprived of alcohol, and such an occasion was such a rarity.

One interesting story about that, too, was you obviously know that all males—and for all I know females may do it, too—in isolation like this tend to resort to pictorial reminders, so called pinups. When I got there, as I said before, there was a lack of paint to paint the walls, and the interior walls were bright aluminum panels so they put out quite a glare. So really anything that would cover them would be welcome, except for some of the things that my sailors wanted to put up were indeed right on the limit, even by those days. And such as the walls were up . . . but I felt that they had a right to express themselves, and if it's good for their morale, it's fine.

Our mess hall, which was our general living area, had these pinups around the walls. Some slightly better ones, I believe, were in some of their living quarters. But a strange thing happened about the third month. One morning I came in and I noticed something different in the mess hall. And the difference was the pinups had all vanished.

**DOB:** Really.

**BD:** And in their place were advertisements cut out of many magazines that were left lying around—advertisements for liquor. And they were pinned up on the wall. And they stayed up for the remainder of the year.

**DOB:** How do you account for that?

**BD:** I would hate to make any comment, particularly to a lady.

[Laughter]

**BD:** I don't think this was a permanent transition . . . or preference.

**DOB:** Oh my. Well, overall it does sound like conditions were fairly spartan.

**BD:** Yes, that's true enough.

**DOB:** Did that affect the way people responded to being there?

**BD:** Oh yes, undoubtedly. I mean . . . what I know now, which I didn't know then, being a young doctor, very young too—

**DOB:** How old were you?

**BD:** Twenty-six. But yes. Had I been trained in psychiatry or psychology even, I would have been able to detect an enormous number of patterns. But, as I say, largely I give credit to the good screening that went on for everybody. We did not have any collapses, any really seriously aberrant behavior. Anything that could be called medically abnormal behavior, there was none. And those manifestations of isolation and deprivation were what would be considered normal.

**DOB:** How much did you or other of the Navy men have to do with the scientific research that went on there? And how interested were the Navy personnel in the science?

**BD:** I would have to say that the enlisted men at the base were . . . it was their function, and they knew it, to provide logistics support. But there was a serious educational lack to understand the real purpose of the year, and this did show up. There were the inevitable remarks made which indicated a form of resentment, a form of "we versus them" attitudes in small things.

I really suspect that this was bigger than I realized at the time, and this is probably a great compliment to George Toney, who was the scientific leader of the station, because George was such an absolutely wonderful fellow to get along with, my opposite number, that he probably did not knock on my door as often as he might have for deficiencies he felt the Navy was not providing him in terms of logistics support.

This might have been particularly evident at the early stages, the construction stages, rather than the maintenance stages which assumed a matter of self-sufficiency and interdependence, when the fellow who had to fuel the heating machines did it because he knew everyone depended on him. The cook turned out the meals because everybody had to eat. And that type of interdependence was just characteristic of a unit . . . a military unit took over and then functioned quite well.

Nobody abandoned their work, wouldn't get out of bed to do their duty that I remember, nothing needed my attention on that side. I can't speak from the civilian side as to whether civilian workers were meeting the expectations of *their* programs. George could give an account of that.

**DOB:** Overall did the Navy and civilian people get along with each other? Was there . . . you spoke of something of a clash of cultures.

**BD:** There was decidedly a clash of cultures because I think most of the sailors had a very limited education. Some I know were not high school graduates. Some were actually attempting to complete their education through specific programs down there. A few of them did attempt to keep ongoing educational programs going while they were down there.

But it was quite clear from the conversations, their interests, their outlook on life, that they did not have very broad opportunity in their past to enjoy the best of life. And we had, I think, two or three Ph.D.'s among the civilians, so there was quite an educational gulf.

**DOB:** But still there are twenty-three of you for the winter, so one would hope that they'd find a way to bridge those chasms.

**BD:** Yes, and I think they must have. If we did not have fighting, if all of them . . . if it just settled on the level of just a little backbiting, that's acceptable.

One situation which I think was there and it would have to be addressed was that one of the civilians resented George Toney—he was appointed scientific leader—because he had expected, right or wrongly, that *he* would be the scientific leader. And so that was the genesis of some friction, but not from me. It was friction that I could detect, but it existed between those two individuals, at least on one individual's part, the aggrieved one.

He was a meteorologist with polar experience and a sort of barrackroom lawyer . . . how should I say . . . sort of a strong voice in the barrackroom is what I'm trying to express myself. A person who . . . he was older, and he could entertain and had an engaging personality in some respects, and he could draw

to him people of a similar outlook. So I would think many of the sailors would have been in his camp, so to speak, whereas most of the other civilians would have been better educated and did tend to . . . .

In fact, there was a clear division about where the two groups slept. There were two dormitory buildings, one for each. The civilians' was also used for office and laboratory space, and that was a social divide. I, on the other hand, I slept alone. I slept in my own office, so to speak, so that I was not part of these two buildings and quite happy to be detached.

**DOB:** Yes, I'd heard about the difficulty. That was too bad. Well, let's talk a little bit about your counterpart, George Toney, the scientific leader. That could be a difficult relationship because you each are in charge of your piece of it, and yet there's no one person in charge of everything. How did that work between you, and did it?

**BD:** Yes, it did work, and I was extremely lucky because the whole relationship was never defined. I was merely told I was going to be the Officer in Charge down there. I had no military training. I had been in the Navy for ten days before I got into this, so it was all a great adjustment for me, but I had to just rely on common sense and hope that worked.

But the relationship with the scientific leader was never discussed and *ought* to have been discussed, really. So many things ought to have been discussed, because had it not been a person as nice as George Toney was to work with, as understanding and as friendly and as hard-working—he was a hard-working fellow—that I think it could have been a terribly difficult year.

**DOB:** Was he the right person to be the leader?

**BD:** I think . . . he was from *my* point of view. Whether he satisfied *his* superiors or not, I'm not sure.

**DOB:** I guess what I'm asking is, from the standpoint of the running of the station, would the other fellow who wanted the job had been a better choice or would Toney have—

**BD:** No, Morris would not have been a better choice, no. He would have entertained people by his old sea stories all night but he didn't have the breadth, the understanding, the education, the abilities of George Toney.

**DOB:** How did you work out the relationship and keeping the base going between the two of you? Did you talk about it a lot or was it just an instinctual thing?

**BD:** No, it was very much an instinctual thing. In fact, I'll set up the social standing of the place. As I said, we had four tables in the mess hall. So that meant six people at each table, except five at one. And since all our meals were at the same time, even people who would have been off-duty always turned up at the meals.

So for me, that was . . . I wanted it that way because if somebody was missing or sick, I wanted to know about it—I had to know about it. And an empty place at the table was, for all of us, a sign that somebody was missing and could have got lost in the snow outside in the darkness.

And this was a problem, as some of the outside work had to be done in total darkness and in blizzard conditions, difficult conditions where they had to crawl back and forth. And on more than one occasion somebody did get lost and was lucky enough to find their way back to the station, because by then we were all underground, and this was like trying to find a rabbit hole in a dark night. But that tragedy didn't happen. [There were pre-laid lifelines connecting outlying buildings and tunnel entrances.] So the importance of having everybody accounted for at every meal was important to me.

Now at the table which I ate, and I left this for everybody else, I just picked a table and I went there and I said that anyone who wants to could sit there. But the stratification did occur immediately . . . on an educational basis, principally. The least educated, I would say, sat at one table and filled that, and probably filled two tables. The third table was filled by the other educated civilians, or scientists as they were called, and most of them *were* scientists using the narrow meaning of the word.

And then there was the table I sat at, which George Toney also sat there and Charlie Bentley and Ned Ostenso. I would say we represented the higher level of education and opportunity. So there was probably better conversation at our table. By that means, my relationship with George was kept fluid all the time. It was very useful. And George was a most entertaining fellow, and we all entertained each other at that table.

**DOB:** George was very sympathetic with your situation as you have described as being very young and new to all of this, and he thought that the year must have been a big disappointment for you professionally. And so I'm curious. What were you expecting and/or hoping to do and what did you do? And were you disappointed or was he overreacting?

**BD:** I was very pleased to get my commission in the Navy. At that time I had a great, strong feeling for the Navy and I still do. I was disappointed I didn't get to flight surgeon school, but I quickly lost that long before I came down on the ship because of the impending adventure of taking part in Deep Freeze II, and also

recognizing that I was lucky enough to be a part of an elite group, a hand-picked group, which always appeals to me. Having been so young in medicine, I had no great expectations of what I would find. My biggest fear was would I match up to the possible requirement—

[End Side A, Tape 1]

[Begin Side B, Tape 1]

**BD:** No, I was not disappointed medically. I didn't have anything to do, but I think I was pleased about that from the respect that my training was so limited that what I did would have been pretty fearful. Amusingly, with Navy medical department, they had equipped me with a marvelous library including many books on tropical medicine, which I thought was a little funny.

**DOB:** [Laughs]

**BD:** I had the obligation to try and prepare myself for a disaster and that meant having (not disaster) all you would need to perform surgery. There was a table and a pretty good set of surgical instruments.

So I then had to—I solicited help from somebody to take some basic training to be a surgical assistant and that was Ned Ostenso. And then I had to encourage other people to give up small lumps and bumps so that we could, you know, put the team in operation. One of those lumps and bumps came off the head of . . . what's his name . . . [Vern] Anderson (now deceased), who was a glaciologist. I can't think of his first name right now.

And that turned out to be a struggle which I'm certain gave Ned Ostenso dining-out stories for the rest of his life, as he told it, because we met recently in Washington. He just died last year, I'm told, and he worked at NOAA in Washington. He was one of the higher-up people by then. And he remembered details of that particular surgical operation on a little skin lesion on this fellow's head. But he obviously had embellished it a little in the telling, so he was an experienced teller of that story at my expense, which is all right.

But that's one of the things we had to do to be prepared. I was totally unprepared for every other aspect of my work because I had so many things to do. I was supply officer, communications officer, which is fun because I learned how Navy communications went.

**DOB:** Were you the only officer?

**BD:** Yes. But I had two radiomen, two petty officers first class who were absolutely marvelous. They were the best of all the—I have to say in the privacy of these remarks that they were the best of the enlisted men, of the Navy people there. Of course the Navy radiomen are a very hand-picked group. They're some of the smartest people in the Navy, and these two were very well picked. They made my life very much easier in terms of naval communications, which were going all the time unless we had a radio blackout.

**DOB:** What were the most serious or troublesome medical problems at Byrd? Or were there?

**BD:** Really nothing. I had to submit a situation report—a so-called SITREP in the terminology—every week. And one of the divisions of that report did call for an anonymous list of the complaints I was seeing. They really were pathetically harmless.

There was nothing in that year that amounted to any serious medical experience, with one minor exception was when one of the elderly civilians, who had prior polar experience and he was a mechanic for the Sno-Cats—these were these tracked vehicles that the traverse party used on the trail. In the course of preparing their equipment for the summer work, he lifted a heavy battery or something and came into me saying he thought he had produced a hernia, which he had. So he had to be excused from heavy work and was eventually one of the first to leave and be replaced, I think, or could not at least go on the summer traverse in that state.

That, to my knowledge . . . oh! One other minor casualty—well, pretty minor—was myself.

**DOB:** Oh?

**BD:** I had to set up my own laboratory, do everything, for any medical testing I would have to do. I was in preparation for all of this and pulled out a spirit lamp they provided me with, a brass affair which you filled with alcohol and then lit, like a Bunsen burner type of thing.

I didn't know how to work it properly, and the next minute the whole thing had exploded in flames. And I knew the terror of buildings burning in polar situations because that is the greatest disaster that could probably happen. So I just picked the thing up and ran outside and threw it in the snow. But by then my hands had gotten pretty badly burned. I only say this because that is the only other time which was anything like a medical incident that I can think of.



I tell you the story because it's probably registered in George Toney's memory and others who had to sit at the table with me because I just soldiered on. My fingers were swollen. They were like enormous sausages and all discolored and frightful-looking things. And I insisted I could cut my meat, eat my meals and kept on going. But I was selfish because I didn't think what these other fellows had to watch across the table.

**DOB:** Well, not only that, but if they needed your help and you didn't have your dexterity . . . .

**BD:** Well, that's what the idiocy is. I was semi-incapacitated from that.

**DOB:** How did you treat it? Did you have to have someone else help you?

**BD:** Yes, I did. I had to get somebody. I remember the whole thing. I said, "Put your hand in my right trouser pocket. You'll find a set of keys. Take the keys, go under my bed, pull out the medical locker, unlock the lock, take out a vial of morphine or Demerol or something. Go to the sterilizer, lift up that, pull out that, put out that, stick it in so you don't touch it, grab a needle over there and put it on without touching it [inaudible] the forceps. Then draw up some of that, push the air out, get an alcohol wipe, dab my arm, stick it in my arm." And he did. So that was all good training, you see. It was real-life training. It happened.

I felt very sorry for the others after realizing that I had made them view my horrible, mangled fingers for days until they eventually subsided.

**DOB:** You had no permanent damage?

**BD:** No, I had no sequela. It must have been second degree at worst, because I have no skin damage.

**DOB:** Fortunate.

**BD:** And other than that I don't remember any other medical . . . well, the usual small things. And it was sort of fun. I remember getting my microscope going and then mixing up the bacterial stains. They provided a manual but you have to do everything. I mean normally the technicians do all this stuff in the hospital for you, but I got it all together, got the right stains together, and then took samples from people's sore throats and I could identify certain organisms, something I hadn't done since medical school, and it's really fun.

Because one of growing myths down there was that there were no bacteria in Antarctica. And of course this has since proved to be incorrect in actual fact. But of course there were the bacteria we brought down with us. But in a base, and

isolated living like that, you tend to quickly exhaust the contagion effect. And you're living with the ones you came down with, they've all died off, or you've all got immune to what you have. There's no new infection coming in.

But I did discover one particular organism which I thought was peculiar in somebody's throat, and I remember turning up under my microscope and I was being very impressed with that. But it had no pathologic consequences.

**DOB:** What about the leadership issues? You've been talking about that earlier, but was there a particular recurring problem or type of problem that you had to deal with?

**BD:** Well, you know, I kept a diary. This is it. I haven't opened this in forty-two years. I opened it this morning to glance through it to see if I should try and get something out of it. It is amazing how much you forget. But I see in that, I was commenting, yes, I had to discipline so-and-so or talk to somebody today, some of the sailors. One fellow in particular, our electrician. He was a pleasant enough fellow, but he was probably the type of person who was always testing the boundaries of control. He was the only fellow I ever had to talk tough to. But that was the only . . . and there's evidence that I did that. I'd forgotten all that.

You know, I tried to do what was common sense, but I had no military training in leadership. But I did have the Naval Academy's manual on leadership, and I remember reading that. There were a few good pointers I got from that. I tried to do what I thought I should be doing in terms of doing whatever I did.

**DOB:** There wasn't much recourse was there? You couldn't send them home or . . . .

**BD:** You couldn't dock their pay, you couldn't put them in the brig, you couldn't ask the shore patrol to take them off your hands, you couldn't transfer them. No. No. That's right. None of those options were there. There were really none.

There was one problem, though, that I had . . . I must have behaved more as the leader of the station in terms of discipline in general. George must have allowed me to do that, because I remember having to get up and tell people . . . we had . . . mostly we were, as I was saying, responsible for each other and to each other.

There were occasions when the snow melter didn't get filled. Now the snow melter is the device which entraps the exhaust gases from the generator which gives us our electricity, and that heat from the exhaust was used in a type of manifold in a big tank in which snow was put. So this gave us our water.

Now we all used water. We used it for washing, for our showers, for washing clothes, and of course it was always in use in the galley. But if somebody was doing a big load of clothes and taking a shower as well, they were always expected to go outside and shovel some snow just to make sure that their consumption had been replenished.

It was clear, particularly in the winter, that some people were not doing this because the head mechanic would come to me and tell me, "The snow melter was almost dry today." And if that got dry, we were all in trouble because it would burn the manifold. Therefore, I had to make growling remarks before dinner on a few occasions and that might—I don't know if that registered with anyone else. That's the only time I can ever remember having to really say, "If I catch anyone not doing this, I'm going to see they get recompense later." I remember saying that. It was all I could do.

**DOB:** Okay. An unusually high percentage of the personnel at Byrd Station had had previous polar experience.

**BD:** Well, I don't know what the percentages were for the other bases. George Toney had and Wesley [Morris] . . . what is his name? I can picture him but I'm not getting people's names right [Ned Ostenso, Morency]. We have a group picture in here with names. Wesley Morris was the meteorologist who didn't like George Toney. He had prior polar experience.

**DOB:** I think there were about four, five, or six of them, which is quite a few for that—

**BD:** I either never knew that or I've forgotten it.

**DOB:** I just wondered if that made any difference in what kind of way . . . .

**BD:** No. The only . . . from Morris, of course, you heard about it all the time. He constantly referred to his prior achievements and prior experience and everything else. I guess one of the glaciologists, an Argentinean named Mario Giovinetto, I think he might have had some prior experience. Ned Ostenso, the other glaciologist, I think did, too, because he had been in the Army and had, I think, worked in Greenland. So there were—I guess it's coming back to me now—there were other people with polar experience, yes.

**DOB:** Tell me about the winter night and how that affected what people did and what they could do and how different it was actually and perceptually.

**BD:** I think it fell into two patterns of activity for people, again pretty much along the lines of education. Those without education completed their duties and then slept. Those who had better education tended to keep themselves busy. Apart

from their work, they also found other things . . . when their duties were finished, would do other things. Charlie Bentley was playing a recorder. Several of us learned Morse code from the very experienced ham operator [Virgil Barden] that was there whose discipline, whose work, was ionosphere research—an older man. Probably the oldest man at the base.

**DOB:** How old was old at the base?

**BD:** I don't . . . I should . . . I must have known their ages. I would guess he might have been in his thirties, upper thirties or perhaps forty.

**DOB:** Really old. [Laughs]

**BD:** Well, when you're twenty, you think they're old.

**DOB:** I interrupted you. You were talking about the night and the effect it had.

**BD:** Yes. So that would have been one example of people's behavior I noticed—those who tended to sleep an enormous number of hours, and it was a medical curiosity to me that people could spend that long asleep. But it's well recorded now that if there's no challenge, some people seem to go back into an intrauterine state, as it were. It varied, of course, as I said.

And some of the people had outside duties to do, and they had to go out every day and read instruments and that was a lot of exertion. And I demonstrated the physical side of that to my own satisfaction when I arbitrarily said, "Well now, you're halfway through the winter. I think everyone should have a physical." So I got everybody, in turn, in, and one of the physical exams I did was to do a blood count. And it supported . . . the four people who had the highest blood counts, red cell blood counts, were the four who did the most strenuous work, which is what you'd expect because that would demand oxygen, and the elevation (less than 5,000 feet) we were at as well would accentuate that effect. So their blood would compensate by having higher red counts. And that did.

But some of these people had . . . because I had no reason to go outside. I did go outside occasionally, but these people had to go out every day and read instruments and go out and do this or that or the other. And that was some very demanding work for them.

I think we probably all did show signs of such isolation and missing loved ones and such, yes. And it was clear that when—our communications system to home was by ham radio and that meant a lot to people. And I guess there were people who could be very disturbed at those times. It was said that the worst thing of all was to have a phone-patch conversation, when a U.S. ham patched the

conversation into the telephone system, because then things didn't get said. You were better off if you never had a call.

There was the direct-voice, two-way conference which could sometimes happen or else we had a simple telegram, called ham-grams, where the message could be relayed in Morse and you get the text and could read it—a one-way message.

But it was often said that . . . I've forgotten what the exact phrase was, but it was sometimes better not to have a call because it left you more dissatisfied and upset. But these are common military experiences.

**DOB:** George Toney wrote about weight gain among people at Byrd Station and said then that—

**BD:** He was probably thinking of me. [Laughs]

**DOB:** Well, I don't recall a name, but he said that meals then were cut to two a day.

**BD:** Yes, that's correct.

**DOB:** And that would seem to me an excuse, but he says well, it was to relieve the one cook that you had. But then there were these reports that there were food shortages and talk of shutting down the station and returning everybody to Little America.

**BD:** Yes.

**DOB:** Apparently, among some of the Navy people, that was a real concern. Bill Lowe, who has died since, seemed very concerned about the supplies.

**BD:** Did you talk to Bill Lowe?

**DOB:** No.

**BD:** Unfortunately he died, because he, too, was writing a history. And I guess no trace . . . I haven't . . . I'm forgetting so much. You're reminding me of things. Absolutely true, everything you say, except that I would color them a certain way. First of all, the decision to stay or go was decided fairly early onwards, and that was no longer an issue. There was never really a food shortage inasmuch that I had knowledge of what food we had. The cook and I did talk about this. Navy cooks are very good and they're very responsible. He wouldn't have given me false information on that. But also, that particular person, you see, the psychologists call them the mother role in our group. Whereas I'm the father role, he's the mother role.

**DOB:** The cook?

**BD:** The cook. And he's a tremendously important individual. I knew that and therefore I was prepared to make little sacrifices . . . have people make sacrifices on behalf of that because he had to get up every morning and make meals every day without a break. Nobody else could do it, you see. He was the most important man on the base.

So as we were gaining weight, I did suggest a minor midday meal (snack). I don't think he wouldn't have suggested it. I'm sure I initiated it, so I take responsibility for going to two meals a day. But I reported it into the command. I said, "We're doing this on an experimental basis because we are gaining weight, because there's so little activity, and because it makes good medical sense."

Now we didn't go to strictly two meals a day. Yes, we had two main meals—early and late—but we had intermediate meals, sort of snack meals where the same cook turned out a whole batch of donuts and other poisonous things, which we now know, we didn't then, which everybody enjoyed. A sort of confection of some sort in the middle of the day you'd have with coffee or cocoa. So it wasn't as if you had to wait twelve hours to get your meal. So it's not strictly speaking. We called it going to two meals a day but . . . and it did alleviate his work a little, but not much.

**DOB:** Was the cook good?

**BD:** I think very good. I had a lot of institutional cooking at colleges and hospitals and things, and I thought the Navy cook was very good. It always had a reputation for training these people very well and they do. Given the supplies they had, they're very good. Now since I got married and my wife is a very good cook, I wouldn't hold that opinion anymore, but I did then.

**DOB:** Well, I understand even that Admiral Dufek showed up the next summer having heard concerns about shortages.

**BD:** That gets on to what you mentioned in your list there. I didn't know Bill Lowe . . . Bill and I . . . Bill was very loyal to me, and I think we realized afterward we had begun a very good friendship. I saw him intermittently afterwards. He was a very fine fellow.

But I didn't know he had anxieties about food. I don't think he ever . . . well of course enlisted men don't come and talk to you like that. I didn't present myself as that sort of a medical officer or whatever. I kept my distance, I suppose. I do believe distance is important in a leadership role. And I didn't know that, frankly, that he was concerned about enough food or not. But we did have enough.

We had monotony, yes. For instance, when the cook ran out of vinegar, I said, "Well, wait a minute. Vinegar's acetic acid, and I have acetic acid in my medical supplies so I'll give you my acetic acid, dilute it one in ten. Try it." He tried it in the salad, and he said, "Yes. That's like vinegar." And we told everybody, "Basically you don't have to have it, but this is the nearest thing to vinaigrette you're going to get." [Inaudible] canned beans or canned peas or something.

When the winter was over and communications had started again, one of the first to leave the base was this fellow Wesley Morris. And the first thing he did when he got out was he met reporters at Little America V, and he painted a very black picture of life at Byrd Station.

**DOB:** Ah. So it was *his* doing.

**BD:** Yes. So much so that when the visitors, as we used to call them, began flying up—and these are the transients [inaudible]—a planeload of reporters came up. And you wouldn't know of this until they were airborne. You'd get a dispatch saying, or the radio saying, there's a plane coming up and onboard you have so many things or so many—put them up for the night or something.

A whole group of reporters came, so they asked us . . . they immediately wanted to speak to me, so I said, "Fine. Sit down, have a cup of coffee. What can I tell you?" And they said, "Well, we have reports here. We have reports there was fighting and that somebody cut off a penguin's head and stuck it under your door." I said, "No. No. You've got your stories wrong. That happened at the other base." That was Finn Ronne's base. So they got their stories mixed up.

And Finn Ronne had forbidden them to use Navy communications and all that sort of thing. I realized there was something wrong with the story when they said, "Well, was anyone at the base denied military communications for the so-called class-easy message?" And I said, "No. Absolutely not. And further we had ham opportunities as well. No. I placed no embargo on anybody's use of communications."

Then I began to sense the story. And then when I heard about the penguin, I said, "We've got no penguins up here." It was obviously the other station's story, which that must have reached me through the grapevine. I was surprised. It's early on but it must have . . . and therefore I was somewhat prepared for that. But then there were questions asked which did reflect the Byrd Station and some of them were about the monotony and about things like that. So that was the source of the subject because they said, "Well, this fellow Morris just told us these things at Little America."

**DOB:** And that could've come from his sour grapes?

**BD:** Yes, it did. So then I explained to the reporters, I said, "Look here. You may not know this, but this individual harbored resentment about an appointment he didn't get. So make that your consideration of what you believe about what went on."

**DOB:** That's interesting because I know that George received that appointment quite at the last minute.

**BD:** That, I think, was it, you see. They must have realized that Morris was insufficiently trained for it and that it wasn't the right decision and appointed Toney. I don't know. You'd have to speak to the IGY people on that.

**DOB:** Okay. Let's see. Were there problems with . . . well, it seems sort of ironic that the problems of being in an isolated base like that, that the problem with people is that there are too many and too few and the same ones every day. And one psychologist has compared being in Antarctica with being in prison. I've suggested that to a few people and they've all scoffed at the idea but I see you nodding affirmatively.

**BD:** I think it's a very close simile, yes. Or nowadays I would say it's like on a Polaris submarine, except they only go down for four or six months.

I don't know if everybody really realized what they were getting into. I tried to when I got off the plane. I said, "I'm here for a whole year." I'm really wondering was I going to survive emotionally or mentally. When I really tried to . . . I got off this plane, I'm here, this is the four buildings. I've got to live my whole twelve months of my life in these little boxes. Can I do it? I didn't know. It concerned me. I'm sure everybody else had the same feeling to some degree, although I don't recall anybody ever telling me that.

**DOB:** That's interesting. Were there people at Byrd Station that shouldn't have been there?

**BD:** Well, in a way it's like saying, who do you want to come to your party? You don't have control over that. Yes. Are there people I never want to see again? Yes, one or two. This one Navy enlisted man who was the laziest fellow I'd ever come across, who had not a very pleasant attitude towards people. He was the only one, though, that I really felt was a bad apple. I mean in a minor way. He didn't ever cause . . . his particular specialty was very little in demand. He was totally redundant, really, and perhaps that's . . . although it wasn't why he was who he was. That was him. But he might've been a better individual.



I'm speaking socially now. Not in terms of military discipline because none of them gave me any trouble, other than one or two which I had to reprimand from time to time. But that's no more than the friction you get in any military situation in which, if all my reading and viewing is any indication, is far worse in the Arctic.

**DOB:** Well, the men all had pin-ups, but what if there had been women there?

**BD:** Thank heaven there weren't.

**DOB:** Why? Today there are.

**BD:** I know. But they're there in a special qualified way today. Many are married. The sexual liberation today allows practices which would not have been available to us then. There are many reasons why it can work today, why it couldn't have worked in our time.

We heard the Russians had taken women down with them at that time when there were Russians . . . as you could see from that map behind there were Russian bases. And we sort of said, "Oh, terrible." But early on I realized, I don't know why, but I realized thank heavens we don't. It would have been more problem than it's worth. It would have caused fights, frictions, everything. Missed them, of course. Called them all the time. But didn't want them there.

**DOB:** Was there someone that you met on the ice that you were particularly glad to have there?

**BD:** I'd put George Toney in that category. I'd put the two radiomen in that category. I found Ned Ostenso a very friendly fellow. I found Charlie Bentley's intelligence extremely pleasant and his broad general education very pleasant. Most of the others would just represent the panoply of persons you meet in the course of life with whom you have to get along.

**DOB:** Were you ever truly scared?

**BD:** Yes. Once I can remember. When the ship was tied up on the ice before we got off it, the last mail call that night was to go from another ship going back. To get that delivery we had to deliver the letter in person to that other ship which was tied up at the next ice floe. The only way off our ship was down a thing called a Jacob's ladder. A Jacob's ladder is a collapsible rope ladder—you may know the thing—that was off the bow of the ship. I happen to have acrophobia, I think it is, which is fear of heights. I looked over the bow of that ship and looked down. It must've been fifty feet, and you know if you look down ten feet with my condition it's alarming. But I thought it had to be done, so I just got over and climbed down. But that terrified me.

It's a condition which is totally irrational. I'm told it's congenital. My mother had it and I asked . . . it's a real entity. But it means you can know . . . I had known a terrible terror when exposed. You can become paralyzed in terms of being able to do anything sensible. It's a terrible feeling.

**DOB:** And not in the wide spaces of Byrd Station, which wasn't very high at all.

**BD:** No. No, no. I cannot remember feeling terrified personally. I was maybe horrified, particularly on one occasion when we were all leaving and they were taking out groups. One of the fellows to go ahead [Curtis Brinton]—the plane came in to reach us but didn't stop its engines, kept the propellers turning—he walked out with the seabags, and I guess he was so exuberant to the thought of getting home, he walked that close [inches!] to the spinning propeller of the plane. And the pilot was there, I could see him get up, and he got up like that in his seat as he saw this danger approaching but could do nothing. And this fellow didn't realize how near yet he had come to dying. He does now.

**DOB:** What are you proudest of?

**BD:** That I survived . . . that's about it. Well, I felt very proud in many respects. Proud that I had done it as an individual, that I had done it as a foreigner, that I'd been the first Irish person probably to do anything like that, that I'd been a human being to set foot where nobody had ever walked before. They were all internal feelings of pleasure and pride.

**DOB:** While you were there, how much were you aware of or concerned with affairs in the outside world? And I'm thinking of the era of the '50s as being the Cold War and all of that stuff.

**BD:** I have clear memories of many aspects of that. One was through the kindness of George Toney who came down with a stack of old *Christian Science Monitor* newspapers. I was able to read newspapers, old ones, but nonetheless newspapers for several weeks after we got there.

Also through the kindness of George or some organization that he had access to, he brought down twelve shortwave radios, the ones called Helicrafters. But they were functional, and he said, "Who would like a shortwave radio?" Well, there was a big rush of hands, but I got one. And I got a set of earphones from the radioman so that the radio would not disturb others. So I could, in my office, plug in my radio, much as I do here, and listen to shortwave. So I kept in touch with the world to my satisfaction.

**DOB:** What were the big issues at that time?

**BD:** Oh, the big issues were, of course, the Cold War. And the biggest, most exciting thing was when Sputnik went up, and we heard it. Dan Hale, who was the Ph.D. from MIT, he was in charge of the aurora observation and he could figure it all mathematically. He could work the orbit out from the information that was coming in, [inaudible] released as hot news.

President Eisenhower was president and he was in Bermuda. And a call came through that he was going to call the base and speak to me. But he didn't. Something happened to prevent this.

Other than that, I don't think I suffered. I really lost a whole year's news, apart from the BBC, VOA items I was picking up on shortwave. As I recall, I don't . . . now I'm just currently reading David Halberstam's book about the '50s, which is very fascinating for me because I had just come to the country in 1954 and so much of the names and events I knew in a very cloudy way. So I'm catching up on the details now. But, of course, I read quite a lot of history so it means that I'm much more knowledgeable now about what was going on then than I was at the time.

So you said the Cold War and all of that. I was marginally aware of the Cold War and who the enemy was and all the rest, but I didn't feel deeply involved in it, no.

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

**BD:** Not at the other bases, no. I kept contact with my family in Ireland. I kept contact with my girlfriend in Boston—then girlfriend. I hadn't met my wife. And a few other individuals I might have communicated with through ham-grams and things like that. But not with any other scientific people at the bases, that I remember. I think I would have remembered. I talked once or twice on the radio with my opposite number at Little America—Pat Unger. I had a radio interview with Walter Sullivan, scientific correspondent of *The New York Times*, which he published.

**DOB:** I'd like to ask you just some questions that relate that period to where we are now. And one of the big issues today in Antarctica is tourism, and I'm curious to know how you feel about that. It's quite a raging controversy among people with polar experience.

**BD:** Well, first of all, I'm glad I did it for nothing—did not have to pay current fares.

[Laughter]

**BD:** And I had far better views. They go down to the Palmer Peninsula and they go ashore in a rubber boat and come back out again, that type of thing. Although I don't know, perhaps they can go to McMurdo and even to the Pole. I don't know how far it's developed. When I was there I would have thought they were a damn nuisance to have to cater for them, as we did the other "tourists," as we called them, who were official and semi-official who came out.

Some of them were interesting. Sir Hubert Wilkins, the polar explorer, came out for a visit and wore his old sealskin clothing which he said was the warmest in the world and all the rest. We had interesting visitors like that. And we had the Admiral on another occasion, which was direct—that's another story. I won't get to that now.

Anyway, the tourists today . . . I think they should be entitled to go there—they're paying for it. They should not spoil nature down there and they don't. They make less pollution than we did. I know it's very strictly controlled now; they have to take everything out. It wasn't that way in *our* case. Environmentally we did pollute, yes. That was the way things were done in those days.

**DOB:** That was my next question was about pollution. There doesn't seem to have been too much concern about—

**BD:** Did George Toney ever allude to the famous dispatch he sent about our latrine getting full?

**DOB:** I don't know. You'll have to start the story.

**BD:** Well, we had a situation where we had . . . I have pictures of all of this, too. I don't want to bore you by showing you hundreds of pictures. But we had a three-hole latrine in our head. We had the best head in Antarctica, because every one had a heater in it, but none kept half warm enough.

We had a bad design problem in our generator shed which was next to it where the heat from the generators was so powerful that it had to be dissipated some way. The engineers had designed a fan which blew the hot air from this generator building into a tunnel into the head next door. The fan was so powerful that it sucked in so much cold air, it never got a chance to warm properly so it was putting out pretty tepid air into the head. So it wasn't really effective.

I took one look at this and I said, "I know what the problem is. The fan is too powerful." And I explained it to one of the mechanics and he said, "Oh, no, no. The Navy designed it." I said, "Do you have a smaller fan?" The electrician said, "No. It won't work, Doc. It won't work." We went to the movie. Somebody must

have discovered on a trip to the head during the movie, "My God! The head's warm!"

The slower fan allowed less drawing up of the hot air which got suitably hot, the diesel generators in the building then began to work better at a warmer temperature, and the head was warm and comfortable. So we had the warmest head, and it was well known. The pilots used to come up and pay us a visit. They preferred to come to our place than their place, it was so warm and comfortable.

But we had, in any event, the three-holer as they're called, and it was showing signs that it was starting to get full, because all the matter put into it, you see, froze instantly and it formed a stalagmite perhaps. And there was a great deal of discussion on how we should handle this.

Of course, some of the more adventurous Navy fellows, particularly the fellow who was licensed or certified to set off explosives, for which he got hazardous duty pay, he wanted to put an explosive down there. But I thought it might go further than that and we'd end up with no building at all as well as other consequences which you know well.

A message came down wanting news. The Navy news service wanted news, and George composed a wonderfully witty report about the problem [laughs] and sent it off under my name through Navy channels. And immediately it came back from Washington, "Under no circumstances send another dispatch like this," from the Chief of Information of the Navy.

[Laughter]

**BD:** So George got me on that one but it was very . . . it was a masterfully written thing. George can write very witty prose.

**DOB:** Well, yes, it certainly is a different world there today in terms of trying to keep it clean.

**BD:** So I agree. I have no objection to tourists going down there. I think if they're paying their own way and not being subsidized . . . they won't be subsidized. All *our* visitors *were* subsidized. They got a free ride from the government under whatever excuse. All the tourists going down are paying their way, they're seeing a lot, many of them are very, very keen naturalists and birdwatchers, and it means a lot to them.

**DOB:** Did you have any living resources at Byrd?

**BD:** Meaning what exactly?

**DOB:** Well, I mean penguins and—

**BD:** You know we didn't have girls. [Laughs] No, no penguins. See, we were inland. Penguins are on the coast. In fact, it was thought we had no birds at all, except that birds were sighted at some point.

And you see, we were far inland back on the ice cap, and it was so cold the snow we got didn't fall from the sky. It was all snow blown up from the surface, from this coastal area, and there's where it did fall, although the accumulation was massive. We began the buildings on the surface, and pretty much halfway through the winter we were underground and had to build tunnels connecting the buildings. George took great leadership in constructing the tunnels, and I must say I had a very strong non-active role. Not deliberately, but just George had everything in hand. George was absolutely a good organizer.

**DOB:** Because the IGY was so successful and things were set up so well, there was a great wish to continue this work indefinitely and the result of that was the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, which basically set aside the continent for peaceful purposes and for science. Do you think that that can continue indefinitely?

**BD:** Hard to know. As I get older, I'm very much more cynical about politicians and treaties and lots of things like this. However, I think there is a serious case . . . I see no reason to extract oil, coal, diamonds, anything else from such a place when it's not life shattering. We're not at the point of dying because we can't get something that can be found in Antarctica. I think it should be preserved for what it is, a magnificent piece of pristine nature.

[End Side B, Tape 1]

[Begin Side A, Tape 2]

**BD:** —Antarctic treaty, I hope it lasts. I understand there's been thought of revising aspects of whether it should be reconsidered. Cousteau, when he was still alive, I remember made a great trip through this country through Washington to try and make people aware of what the Antarctic Treaty was about. I fully support that idea.

**DOB:** What if we ran out of this, whatever mineral that they've got there, and they don't have it anywhere else?

**BD:** That's a different situation. I'd be prepared to reconsider then. That is how man must survive. There's no point in having a wonderful world of national park when

nobody can do anything. We have to live on this land. We have to use it for its resources and its animals.

**DOB:** What effect, if any, did your polar experience have on the rest of your life?

**BD:** This, I suppose . . . it was very internal. When I got back, I had the . . . I don't know if everybody had this, I'm sure they did. But when you leave there, you come out with an extraordinary sense of euphoria. And I know I had this for perhaps weeks, particularly when I arrived in New Zealand. I can remember absolutely clearly vegetation, children, dogs, color. I've never had that experience before in my life.

Looking out the window of the plane and seeing green grass, seeing dogs, four-legged things, seeing children, things which I hadn't realized what the visual impact of that was on my brain after a year. You suddenly realize it—you get hit by it. And the general euphoria of yes, you've come back, you've been part of something special, you've survived. Very impressive.

I internalized it all. I didn't speak about it. Many did. Many went off the deep end as is the human experience. You'll tend to boast about things like that you want to impress and extract value from it. I didn't. My friends knew where I'd been. They didn't make any great fuss. After reaching Boston, I caught a quick plane back to Ireland just before Christmas with my family. Some reporters came to our house and wanted to know all about it, but I just gave them yes or no answers. I didn't want to exploit my experience.

**DOB:** Really. Why?

**BD:** That was my nature at the time. I think now I've changed a bit. Now I think I was too inhibited about many things in my personality. I'm more relaxed about things now. I wouldn't have sought to exaggerate the thing, but I would've let things take a more natural course.

**DOB:** Maybe you needed to process it yourself.

**BD:** Well, I needed to grow up. I was very young. That's what the years do to you.

**DOB:** Have you been back?

**BD:** No.

**DOB:** Would you go back?

**BD:** Yes.

**DOB:** For a year?

**BD:** At this point, no. No. I'm far too old for that sort of thing. I have substituted other forms of cruel and unusual punishment. I've taken up ocean sailing and things like that. I don't have a boat anymore, but I've done similar types of adventurous activities, and even in that I see myself getting past it. [I have a boat again. Took it to Florida in the fall and we are sailing it back in stages now.] But not the Antarctic. I definitely would love to go back to visit it. I wish I was one of those lucky ones who was invited back. We went close to it this spring. My wife and I went down around Cape Horn and went into Punta Arenas and the place where all the expedition ships go off and the smaller tourist ships go from. And saw some icebergs, too.

I would like to go back and see the same place, particularly McMurdo, Mt. Erebus, the Royal Society Range, because that's physical beauty. The Pole, like Byrd Station, is just a plateau and a lot of romantic associations. And Byrd Station's gone, so there's nothing there.

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

**BD:** I would try to paint the impossible, which is a white-out. In a white-out, a true white-out, you walk into a hole in the snow without seeing it or into a snow bank—you don't see it. There's no depth perception because there's light but no shadow. It's a nightmare for a pilot flying down if he gets into this situation because he can't see the ground that he's going to land on.

**DOB:** That really spoke to you. Did you have that a lot?

**BD:** We had enough of it to become conversant with it.

**DOB:** Paul Siple wrote that "The Antarctic generally wields a profound effect on personality and character, and few men are the same after a stay there." Do you agree with that statement and were you changed?

**BD:** No. I don't agree with that statement. I think that it *can* happen. I think it's a powerful statement, probably sincere in his case, but certainly the sort of thing you'd expect to find a writer saying. I am certain that there were many individuals who were not changed by their experience. This didn't stop them from coming back and boasting about their achievements or what *they* thought were achievements. But I don't think it changed them.

**DOB:** It didn't change you.



**BD:** Oh, it *did* change me. It was another piece of . . . it's something done which I can look back on and feel personal pride, yes. So that had to be a change for me. I suppose it gave me more self-reliance that I could do that sort of thing. None of my friends had ever done anything like that. Yes, I recognize I was different in that respect and that it would be different. It's when you've had an experience like this you obviously are going to feel different about something. Yes, it changes, so to that extent, Paul Siple was right. But I wouldn't agree in the generality.

**DOB:** Okay. What haven't I asked you that I should have?

**BD:** I don't think I've given you the chance. I don't know. You see, you do open up a tremendous store of memories, and that's why I'm struggling so in talking with you. I suppose could go on for many hours, which is inconsequential to you. I don't know what you have not asked.

I think you might be interested to know what persons who . . . the loved ones of those who had to wait . . . who had somebody down there—what their responses were, their feelings. George Toney might be a source there.

**DOB:** A number of people have.

**BD:** Because he was having some difficulties there. Perhaps I'm breaking a confidence. I don't know at this point what I should say or what I shouldn't say. I think that I can tell you that because he certainly made it common knowledge in the station. He was told he had to come back pretty soon or not come back at all.

**DOB:** And that's hard to do in the dark.

**BD:** No, they couldn't go back then, but when he was thinking of taking a second year. That's when he got this word back from home, no, nothing doing.

**DOB:** What about your family? You were not married.

**BD:** I was not married. I had a serious girlfriend in Boston, a relationship I thought I was going to make permanent, and it didn't afterwards and that was a bit shattering. The second phase of response—the first was the euphoria—the second phase was a peculiar type of syndrome. It's a syndrome that's now described as people coming back from wars. They don't know quite where to fit in in some ways. They have difficulty handling certain emotional issues. It's a transient phase you go through. I went through it.

That girlfriend relationship broke up and I was very upset. That's when I realized how unstable I was at the time. I initiated the breaking up, but after it happened I was still surprised at the impact.

**DOB:** Did you have a sense of, my goodness—I've missed a year?

**BD:** Sometimes I think, yes. Yes. I did have that sense that I had missed a year out of my life, but I had gained enormous things. I have that experience of a year on the ice. If somebody does extract that information from me now, "Gosh. You were down there for a whole year?" That's a response which I suppose—it doesn't do anything to me, but it shows me that *they* regard it as something extraordinary that I'd done.

**DOB:** Anything else?

**BD:** No, I don't think so.

**DOB:** Well, in that case, thank you so much. It's been a pleasurable and informative afternoon. Thank you, Dr. Dalton.

[End of interview]