

**Mr. Howard Wessbecher**  
**20 April 2000**

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**Mr. Brian Shoemaker**  
**Interviewer**

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*BS: This is an oral interview with Mr. Howard Wessbecher taken as part of the Polar Oral History Project, conducted by the American Polar Society and the Byrd Archival Program at the Ohio State University on a grant provided by the National Science Foundation. The interview was conducted at Mr. Wessbecher's home in Corvallis, Oregon, by Brian Shoemaker on the 20th of April, 2000.*

*This is Howard Wessbecher who has had terms in both the Arctic and the Antarctic. We'll discuss his background and his work in both polar regions. He's been to Alert, Resolute, and also to McMurdo in Antarctica and he wintered over in all three places. Mr.*

*Wessbecher:*

HW: OK. I've really enjoyed talking, and as I told Brian Shoemaker here, everyone likes to talk about themselves. To begin with, I was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1925. Both my folks came from Germany just prior to that and I was brought up in the NY City school system, graduating from DeWitt-Clinton in 1943. I was drafted and served about 2-1/2 years in the Pacific, in P\_\_\_\_\_, Leyte, Okinawa - all three, major events. Upon being discharged, I was lucky, and I think one of the finest things our Congress ever did was to give us the GI Bill which I took advantage of and went to Montana State University for all 4-1/2 years and got my degree in forestry. I graduated in 1951 and took various and sundry examinations. I was unable to get a forestry job because we had more top students

that were available than there were trees, So I looked around and worked for a while for Potlatch Forest in Idaho - private forestry - and decided there was not much future there because it was a very closed structure and I saw this job that became available in Washington, DC for the US Weather Bureau as a meteorological aide and I applied for that, got the job in November 1951, and started working in Washington at that time. My job for the Weather Bureau was as a map plotter - they called it a meteorological aide at the map plotter. You sat there all day plotting maps - weather maps - as the data came in off the national circuit. These maps were then assembled and turned over to the meteorologists who analyzed them for the national weather, which was of course passed out to the newspapers and the radio, etc., etc.

About three or four months at that job, I knew it wasn't going to be a career and I happened to notice that there was a call for people to go up into the Arctic for the Arctic Operations Project of the Weather Bureau.

BS: *Where did the call come from?*

HW: It was there at the office. They had, like in any organization, they had job lists. OK. To get back to where we left off, they announced the job for the Polar Operations Project - pardon me, Arctic Operations Project, that was the initial name. The Arctic Operations Project of the US Weather Bureau had 5 stations up in the Arctic. Five joint Canadian-US Weather Stations in five locations. One of them was at the main base in Resolute Bay and then there were four others. There was Isaacson, Eureka, Morrow? Bay and Alert. So I was assigned to Resolute Bay as a storekeeper. So I went up there in April 1952 to Resolute Bay, and I served there until the following year in March, '53.

BS: *Tell me. I'm going to back up a little bit to the Weather Bureau in Washington. Who were some of the people that worked with you there?*

HW: Oh, the Chief of the Project at the time was Jay Glendyer and his Assistant Chief was Ed Goodale.

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And also we had, every once in a while, at that time there was a gentleman whose name was George Rabbit. I hadn't met any other people except basically those gentlemen at that time.

BS: *Was Ken Molton there at the time?*

HW: Ken Molton - I don't remember him initially, but he came along later. He did come along later. Ken Molton - I met him when I came back and started working on the Antarctic Planning Staff. That's the way that went. Initially it was just those people with the Arctic Operations Project.

BS: *Ed Goodale. Was that the same Ed Goodale who was the dog sled driver for Admiral Byrd?*

HW: That's the same Goodale that was the dog sled driver. Right. He was a fantastic gentleman. I think between he . . . I never could quite figure out why Mr. Dyer became Chief when actually Ed Goodale had more experience in the actual Arctic and the Antarctic experience. OK . . . then I stayed up there, as I said earlier, until March '53 and

came out for a little leave, and then went back and I was assigned to Alert as an Executive Officer.

*BS: What were some of your experiences up there at Resolute Bay? Resolute Bay is in the Canadian Archipelago.*

HW: That's right. It's on Cornwallis Island. And I expect I should talk a little bit about Resolute Bay. It was the bigger station. There were about 12 people and they were about half Canadians, half US. And I went up there as a storekeeper. As a storekeeper, one of the jobs was to sort out the supplies for each station as well as our own Resolute Bay Station, and to keep track of those supplies to make sure that they lasted as they were supposed to - you know, that we didn't run out. They were resupplied in the spring. The satellite stations, the four smaller stations which were eight man stations, were resupplied in the spring by the US Air Force. Then in the fall, a lot of the second resupply which was the heavier stuff, mostly the oil, diesel oil which was contained in 55 gallon drums - that was one of the major ways of transporting oil was in 55 gallon drums. In fact, there were so many, the beaches were littered with empty 55 gallon drums that the government, and I think it was the US government, actually sent up a crew while I was there to start cleaning them up and checking for explosiveness. They had little meters to check for explosiveness so that they could bring them back out. They were steam cleaned so they could bring them back out.

*BS: Now you went up there. Were the Canadians involved?*

HW: Oh yeah. Definitely. The Canadians. It was amazing to see and I've got some pictures in my books there that was the difference between the Canadian resupplying and the US resupplying. When the US came up, we had major ships - two, three major

freighters with landing craft. When the Canadians came up, they had one little, what looked like a small ice breaker with a little tiny life boat that they brought a minimal amount of supplies and the basic supply and the sustenance was provided for the stations by the US. We used to kid up there and say well the Canadians provided the joint and we, the US, provided the effort and the supplies.

BS: *Well who was in charge of each of these stations?*

HW: The way it was organized, they had a Canadian OIC. He was the titular, the basic over in charge of the stations, especially of the Canadian property and the Canadian individuals. And then the second in command was the Exec - the US Executive Officer who was responsible for the US supplies and again, for the US personnel. It was a cooperative management which worked out pretty well.

BS: *And what did they call these stations?*

HW: They were basically joint Canadian-US Weather Stations. That's basically what they were.

BS: *OK.*

HW: And we called them the satellites - the four satellites and the main base, which was Resolute.

BS: *Resolute was the main base, and then you had another pretty heavy base at Alert?*

HW: Yeah. Well, no. They were all just about the same. The other four were about the same quality. By the way, at Resolute Bay there was also a Canadian Air Force Station about two, three miles from our joint weather station and then there was also another smaller, about three, four personnel upper atmosphere station - Canadian. Now one thing we discovered as far as the US people, it was strictly a voluntary program. We got fairly decent wages, plus we got a bonus. We got like a \$200 bonus. We got \$100 bonus for every month you stayed up there and you got an extra \$100 for four months during the dark period. Whereas the poor Canadians, because it was Canadian territory, it was part of their country and they were just assigned to it like Weather Bureau people in the United States are assigned down to Arizona, they're assigned to Louisiana, but it's still in the United States. But up there, the Canadians assigned to Resolute Bay, for instance, were totally isolated from their family and had to put in a year or two or three, whatever was determined. So there was a little bit of a bitterness there on the part of the Canadians.

*BS: Tell me, who were the people? Let's talk about when you were first at Resolute. Who was the OIC there? What was his name?*

HW: Oh I remember the, uh. . . well there was quite a tragedy up there which brings back that memory. When I got to Resolute Bay, it was in March. People were totally jittery, nervous. I couldn't quite understand it but it wasn't until I'd say several - two, three months later, I actually got the story. It turns out, Richard Harrison who was an American radio operator, was in the habit of going into the Canadian OIC's bedroom, throwing on the lights and waking him up when Harrison came off duty. There was always 24 hour duty - every function - radio, weather service, you name it, it was a 24 hour function. And when Harrison went into the Canadian OIC's room and threw on the lights and was going to wake him up the entire room was covered in blood and brain

pieces because the gentleman had put a rifle to his head and blown his brains out. So that was quite a traumatic experience for the people at that time. I arrived after that, ultimately slowly got the story how they cleaned up the mess and prepared the body and . . .

BS: *Was this in the winter?*

HW: This was in the winter, yeah. And the gentleman was apparently a neat person, the one that shot himself, and he wanted out of there, but it was one of these functions where the bureaucracy said, "No you're going to stay up there and do your assignment," and so he chose that course to get out of there.

BS: *Did they use psychiatrists then to \_\_\_\_\_ winter over people?*

HW: No. No. It's really something to realize the difference at that time - the Canadians were forced up there because it was part of their country and for the US, if you were warm, they would take you. I didn't feel myself especially qualified since I didn't know - it was a learn on the job situation and we had a number of people that were obviously not meant for that sort of environment and we had some that survived reasonably well, which I think I did too. Because there was so much to do. You could stay busy 24 hours a day if you wanted to.

BS: *So who was the guy who was the OIC when you were in service?*

HW: The one I remember, the best one was Mel Haglan. He came after the accident.

BS: *Where'd he come from?*

HW: I think he was from Edmonton somewhere. Very pleasant, very knowledgeable.  
Fine gentleman.

BS: *Was the CO at Resolute? And who was your XO?*

HW: At that time, I've forgotten his name now. Wait a minute. Holzapple. Yeah, Holzapple. That was his last name. Holzapple, right. He was the XO and then of course he had spent his year and when he left, then they made me an acting XO at that time.

BS: *So you became basically the senior American at the station.*

HW: Senior American, that's right. Although I was a very, more or less, you know how a situation like that is. It wasn't military so there were none of those hard and fast lines of authority. It was mostly persuasion.

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BS: *I understand. So you - Resolute was the main station, so to speak. And did that make you Exec of the whole effort?*

HW: Oh no, no. Each station - at the satellites, the other four smaller stations which were, you know, eight men there - they had their OIC and they had their Executive Officer - same organization we had only fewer people, but basically the same type of organization and responsibilities.

BS: *I see. Now tell me about your work there. What did you do, say, in the morning. You'd launch your weather balloons?*

HW: Yeah, well OK. At Resolute and at the other stations as well, there was a radiosonde program, there was a surface observation program, surface weather observation program and also a glacial ice program which was the most interesting of them all. But basically, we released a radiosonde with the . . . twice a day, every 12 hours and the idea was that this was done uniformly all over the world so that the meteorologists would get the same weather pattern at the same time. And we also had - that was one of the major . . . and that was an operation that lasted at least four hours. When I first got up there, you had to make your own gas. Now that was kind of interesting.

BS: *What kind of gas?*

HW: Hydrogen. And we made them under pressure and what you used, you had this cylinder which had a little safety cap on it, and you had this cylinder and you put in aluminum chips, water, then you dropped in a stick of caustic soda and then, of course, you put the cap on it. And we usually got out of the inflation gas building while the gas was generating. Then we had to tap it and what you did tapping it - you usually put the gas in different cylinders and you filled it up until the pressure was equalized. In other words, if you've got 3000 pounds - it ran around 3000 pounds per square inch, so if you put it in an empty cylinder, you got 1500 pounds in that and then you'd have to cap it off and the next one would be 750 pounds and then finally when we got to the point where we knew how much, approximately how much gas we needed in the balloons, which were neoprene, we put it in the balloons. The remainder was in the balloons.

BS: *Did you worry about explosions?*

HW: Oh yeah. That's why we got the heck out of the building. But again, as I say, the cylinders had little caps on them which were, you know, just . . .

BS: *Pop caps.*

HW: Yeah, pressure caps that pop. We never did have an accident, although we worked with this very flammable explosive substance. It was like a present from heaven, finally. It got to the point that the US Weather Bureau, bless 'em, were able to start delivering helium cylinders.

BS: *And that was in the middle of your tour?*

HW: About the middle of the tour when the helium, and then - oh, actually down at McMurdo, we also used the \_\_\_\_\_ low pressure hydrogen generator. And finally helium cylinders showed up. And so they changed that whole system. Made it so much safer.

BS: *What was the surface weather program all about?*

HW: Well that was where we - the typical life down here in the States - how much precipitation, the temperature, high and the minimum temperature, the wind speed direction, and everything - humidity, all of what you measure here at a regular US Weather Bureau station here in the States. Really, the fascinating one - we had a gauge out on the sea ice in the bay and you had to walk down there once a day to read the depth, you know, the thickness of the ice. And of course, as the person that had to do it, I went

down there by myself carrying a rifle and I had purchased a magnum and I'd walk every few - every . . . oh, I'd fire a flare.

(200)

I always had a flare pistol and every few, all during the duration of the flare light, I would hustle out on the ice and stop and look around to see if there were any polar bears around. They had actually had an incident of an individual being attacked by a polar bear at Resolute Bay reported by Lowell Thomas prior to my serving there. So that was always a kind of challenging, I guess to say, at the least. But that old flare - between the old flare pistol, a rifle and my magnum, I never had any problem. I never saw any bears, but . . .

BS: *None ever came into camp?*

HW: Oh. I actually had a fantastic sight one day where this major, huge polar bear was going up this ridge in deep snow - going up the ridge, oh I would say she was about 1000 ft. from where I was standing, going up a ridge and then as I watched up and behind the huge, these footprints in the snow came two little cubs climbing out and then dropping into the next footprint. And coming out in the next footprint. It was really . . .

BS: *You mean the cubs actually fell into the footprint?*

HW: Yeah. They just completely disappeared because she made this huge imprint. Oh, if we only had a video, it would have been fantastic to see. Now that's one of the reasons that each station had dogs and the reason was to warn the people there of bears. And the bears were not a problem during the summertime when all the snow was gone because they didn't care for walking on gravel or rocks, but in the wintertime when the place was

covered with snow, the bear would come ashore and wander around back. We got a call one day - this was still at Resolute - we got a call one day from the Canadians down below in that smaller station I had mentioned earlier and they said, "Hey we had a bear sniffing in our louvers" - you know the ventilation louvers. "She's headin' up your way." So . . . and that was another thing it brings to mind. We had an American gentleman - our cook. Bradford was his name. A fantastic individual at Resolute Bay. And in fact, he was the one that used to bake bread ahead and freeze it and he claims he's the one that discovered about freezing bread. Anyway, he'd bake two, three weeks supply at a time. But he was also quite a hunter. So he went out in the boat during the summertime and brought back some small whale and left it on the beach. And we were sitting there in our recreation room, about a dozen of us one day - you know how that goes, chit chattin'and what not and this kid comes running in - what we call a summer tourist - he comes running in and he says, "Hey there's a couple of bear down there right by the whale." Well, we always had rifles on the station because of the bears so here about 12 guys jump up, grab rifles and start advancing which was about 500-600 ft. from where we were in the lounge down at the beach. Start advancing toward these two bears and we could definitely see them, they were kind of - polar bears in the wild are kinda yellow, they're not pure white, they're kind of yellow. And we could see the yellow tinge to the fur. We could see the black eyes and so they're blasting away. Twelve of us. It was like a frontal squad, moving, blasting away. We got down there. It turned out the sucker had made the bear out of snow, and sprinkled it with farina. And those bears were - advancing down to the beach, I couldn't figure out - we couldn't figure out why those bears didn't drop. And we weren't missing them, we knew that. And I, myself - we had a couple of these 15,000 gallon oil tanks off to one side and I kept eyeballing the ladder going up them and I thought, that's what I'm heading for if those bears charged. Got down there and it turned out he'd made them out of snow and had sprinkled them with farina and put coal - we

used coal for heat. He made the eyes out of that and those bears were totally riddled.

They were riddled!

(250)

BS: *Who thought that joke up?*

HW: Well, this kid. We called him "the tourist." So . . . you interested in this stuff?

BS: *Yes.*

HW: Because later on, some of our other fellas said, you know, we're going to fix him. He was an ornithologist - a bird person. And he was out collecting eggs. And so we were going to fix that sucker.

BS: *So he was a scientist up there.*

HW: Well, a young scientist. Like a grad student or something, and they only came in the summer, you see. So we took some chicken eggs and painted little brown dots all over them and laid them out there and kind of helped him find them and he came back all excited because he had found these weird eggs he couldn't identify. So these are some of the things done to kill the monotony if you want to call it that.

BS: *So, there were natives there.*

HW: That's right, that's right.

BS: *How many? Where were they? Near the camp?*

HW: That's a whole story in itself. Initially, the first time I was at Resolute Bay, the native Eskimos had not been there yet, but the Canadian government was trying to reimport - the natives had naturally drifted south. They were about 1000 miles further south at Baffin Island and various native communities down there. Just because the weather was better down there, I suspect, and whatnot. So they had, naturally, over the centuries, drifted out of the severe total northern area. I don't think the Caucasians or the Europeans coming had any influence. That was just a natural movement. So anyway, the Canadian government decided they should come back further north, so they actually brought some, I suspect they were volunteer Eskimo families, up to Resolute Bay and they set up their summer wooden houses oh about 1/4 mile, 1/2 a mile from our station. In the wintertime, they actually built igloos of which I did visit with them in their igloos which was a fascinating experience. But, one of the major problems . . . oh, after - this happened after my second tour at Resolute Bay. They actually started - they put a Mountie there. A Mountie was stationed there that hadn't been there the first time around. On the second tour, there was a Mountie stationed up at the Canadian Air Force. And his biggest headache was trying to keep the Eskimos out of the garbage dumps because they were going in and collecting, like I'd go through the warehouse and pick out the swollen cans that had obviously deteriorated and throw them away. We'd put them down in the garbage dump, and the natives were coming back around trying to live off the garbage dump, and the Mountie did not appreciate that at all. The Canadian people in the Air Force actually helped the natives with their hunting and they actually brought in - and I've got pictures there of a polar bear.

BS: *Air Force did that?*

HW: Well they helped the natives, you know. The Air Force did that - provided the tractor and the sled. And I've got pictures of a polar bear on a sled where they had drug him back up and so I watched one time. They brought in some seals and the natives just cut the seal hide and just consumed that blubber, just like you and I would eat ice cream or candy. They would just - I don't know how to describe it to the machine here, but it was absolutely delicious to them.

BS: *Did you try it?*

(300)

HW: No. What I did try, though, and I was totally amazed by it. We had seal liver. Well we'd have banquets, you know. Not super frequently, but every once in a while we'd trade off and go up to the Canadian Air Force in their kitchen and their diningroom and have some banquet there. And they'd come down once in a while to our place and, I actually tried some seal liver. And I was totally blown away, as the saying goes. There was absolutely no hint of fishiness and it was the most delicious liver I've ever had. Literally, I cut it with my fork. Tender and absolutely delicious.

BS: *Were there any missionaries up there?*

HW: No. Not at that time. It was strictly Canadian Air Force people and maybe a dozen or ten. Again, I've got a picture of them. And the only thing they did provide was the Mountie. I remember he was from Gibbons Landing which is there in British Columbia. That was his home. He was quite an individual.

BS: *What did the Canadian Air Force do there?*

HW: Well, they - what I discovered up there was that up until about before World War I, the islands in the Arctic area, archipelago on both sides were basically anybody's and the only way to claim an island at that time, you had to have one of your citizen's living at it, or at least having visited it or whatever. And up there, when I was at Alert, we had the Mounties come through - young, rugged Mounties and one Mountie and then a native with the dogs and the sled, and they came through and this Mountie would live up there for four or five years - five years anyway. And make it every spring, make a trip on all the islands he could - maybe a 1500, 2000 mile trip by sled, touching all these islands so that Canada could claim them. So that was - again, I met this Mountie at Alert when he came through and we would provide him overnight with dinner, and whatnot and company and repairs. And anyway, contact with other humans again. He and the Eskimo.

BS: *So, you had a mix of groups that were there. You had the Air Force and you had the US-Canadian Weather Operation, the mounted police. . .*

HW: One.

BS: *And then you had the natives*

HW: The natives. This was Resolute Bay.

BS: *That was Resolute Bay.*

HW: The other stations were strictly just 8 people.

BS: *We haven't got up there to Alert.*

HW: I'd like to tell you one thing, though. During resupply . . . during the fall resupply, the US Navy tanker would come in and using a sea line - what they call a sea line pump and fill our 15,000 gallon tanks with diesel oil. And so they filled it with diesel oil and then that spring, it was my job to fill - to supervise and fill all the 55 gallon drums that were going up to the other four stations and they were going to be flown in by the airplane. Well it came the day for me to start the operation and I opened the main tap on the bottom thinking I'm going to start filling the 55 gallon drums and all I got was sea water - salty sea water. So I used my finger and said, "Hey that's sea water. That's not oil. Right?" So I opened it a little more, kept checking it and it must have run about 5 minutes, I don't know how many thousands of gallons, of sea water. And finally, we got oil. Finally.

(350)

BS: *Floating on the top of the water.*

HW: Floating on top of the water. So I would say, conservatively a quarter to maybe a third of that tank was sea water with oil above it. Now that was an interesting experience.

BS: *You say that these 55 gallon drums would be flown to the other stations.*

HW: By C-54s. That's right.

BS: *Canadian Air Force?*

HW: No. The US Air Force did all the heavy - the Canadian Air Force did all the mostly recon work and flying around having a presence, I think. All the heavy flying in of the diesel oil and the spring fresh foods, etc., etc., personnel, basically was done by the US Air Force using basically C-54s. Now that was another job that we had. And of course, at Resolute Bay, the Canadians had relieved us of that duty. But at the satellites, it was our job to go out there and clear the snow, the winter snows from the air strip and plow it which usually was a one or two weeks of work.

BS: *Who did that? The Air Force?*

HW: No, we did.

BS: *You plowed the air field at Resolute?*

HW: No, not at Resolute. The Canadians were taking care of that. At Alert, I was one of the plowers.

BS: *So the Canadians flew around - what was their purpose in flying around?*

HW: I think reconning, probably resupplying on a very small scale some of their Canadian outposts. But the real, as I say - if I remember right, a C-54 would bring in about 20 barrels of diesel fuel and they weighed 550 lbs. each.

BS: *That's a 55 gallon drum?*

HW: Fifty-five. That was the standard unit of oil transportation in the Arctic was a 55 gallon drum.

BS: *How did you get the oil or gas fuel out of these drums? Hand pump?*

HW: Usually hand pump. Now, even at Resolute Bay, because of the French experience on Greenland which kind of maybe wasn't - I'll put it this way. The French experience on Greenland a number of years prior to when I was up there, they had built one long building for their people which had everything. Well, it turns out, a fire started at one end and burned the sucker down. So the policy was at the Weather Stations was that we had many buildings. We had sleeping quarters which was one building. We had a kitchen/rec room which was another building. We had a garage where we had three diesel generators - one running all the time. There was another building, we had storehouses, there were other buildings. So the idea was to have many multi buildings, that, in case you lost one, you didn't lose the whole compound. So what we did, in each building, we had oh I think it was maybe a 500-1000 gallon tank which we filled from the 55 gallon drums the hard way, by hand.

(400)

And, of course, when I was at Alert - and I've got his picture - a little skinny shrimp of a Canadian and me had to go out there and uncover it and hoist, what do you call it, these drums onto a sled and drag it over to the building and then pump it out, which took us quite a while. Each building had it's own tank.

BS: *I see.*

HW: He was a neat kid. But he was pretty light for the job he and I had to do. That was an experience.

BS: *So, you were up there and it was - did you get into a routine for doing your meteorological studies? You had to work all this other stuff in between your observations, I assume.*

HW: Absolutely. Everything, the radiosonde was timed, and the surface obs were timed. Those were a definite routine. And we had two shifts and each shift, on the program, each shift worked twelve hours. I mean they were up for 12 hours and then in between when there were breaks and time, then you did a lot of maintenance. You worked, or else you cleared the airstrip, we painted, we rebuilt from storms, we moved supplies around, we emptied the urinals and the bathroom where the 55 gallon drum was the main toilet. We used those for all our bodily functions and then when they were full, they'd get rolled down the hill.

BS: *Is that right?*

HW: But there was a definite routine, yes.

BS: *Let's talk. You mentioned that you had a glaciological study program.*

HW: That, up there, was minor I think. The stations were basically weather stations. They had, if I mentioned that, I think, I had an ice - if I said glacial, what I'm thinking of is measuring the sea ice that was . . .

BS: *Oh, the sea ice study.*

HW: Yeah. It was basically a sea ice study. We had the weather, the radiosonde, the daily, the third world polar surface weather - that was one major program we had. We had the radiosonde which was the upper atmosphere and that was a major program. And then at Resolute Bay, I actually went out and did sea ice. Oh . . . I take that back. We also had a study on snow and we measured and tested the strength and what not of different layers. In other words, you would take a drift and you would dig a vertical hole in it and you would start at the bottom and you check the type of snow it was - I think you call it crackle or something. Pressure from the surface on down had changed the . . .

BS: *Frazzle?*

(450)

HW: Whatever, or . . .

BS: *Frazzle snow?*

HW: Or grapple, I mean there's a definite difference, the gradations of snow the longer it stays in one spot and then more pressure is applied to it from continuing other snows. Which reminds me, at several times at all the stations, we had to put out lifelines between buildings. You know, and during major storms when we tried to carry on our programs, several times we, during major storms, we tried to release the weather balloons two, three times, and I'd say they'll not make it just because it's too severe. And what you have to do during a major wind storm - a wind storm is what we're talking about. You have to take your radiosonde out and it has an extendible string and go down 50, 100 foot or what not from the window, when the wind was blowing in the direction, you went out into the wind and somebody with the balloon let it go and then as the balloon slowly was raising

in this terrific wind, you'd try to make sure that your radiosonde - the string and the radiosonde were so that the machine, the radiosonde, would get off the ground and not bump along the ground. And during a major wind storm, that was always a challenge. Sometimes we tried two, three releases and I'd say . . . oh, I'd say less than 5% of the time, we didn't make it. We'd say, "Hey, we can't get her up."

*BS: Let's explain a radiosonde. What does a radiosonde do?*

*HW: A radiosonde is a fascinating little instrument. It was a little white box, oh maybe 12 inches on a side and maybe 8 inches tall and what it had in it was it had a little radio transmitter and it had a pressure gauge which as it went up, it actually gave you the pressure and it also had a humidity gauge and temperature - don't let me forget that. You had temperature, you had pressure, and you had humidity. And as the radiosonde rose in the atmosphere, it alternated. It would send out a signal on temperature for a little bit, then it would send a signal on pressure, and then it would also then send a signal on temperature. And our radiosonde building was a two story affair with a huge plastic dome on the second story. All plastic was used to join it together - the sections together so that it wouldn't interfere with the antenna. And this huge, what we called a "bedspring" - just about the size of a bedspring. Maybe \_\_\_\_\_ size in dimensions. And it was used to follow the radiosonde. And from that you got the wind speed and direction. We calculated the wind speed and direction. With the radiosonde, you got the humidity, you got the temperature, you got the air pressure, you got the wind speed and direction. You got five elements out of that>*

(500)

*BS: Now how did you track that again? You had radar?*

HW: We had - it was basically, it wasn't radar. It was a radio signal. It was actually a signal that the transmitter was sending. And this wasn't radar. It was an antenna picking up a radio signal was what it was. This was before. You know when I was up there - the DEW-line, things like that were just, they were still. I think it was after, when I came out in '55 when they started getting serious about the DEW-line, an etc.,etc. In fact, we used to hear the Russians at Alert. We used to hear the Russians on the other side giving weather and what not.

BS: *OK. So, you spent a whole year at Resolute. Did you come back to civilization at all?*

HW: I took a two weeks leave. We got a two weeks leave and I came out and went home to Missoula - my folks. And discovered that it was tough to go back. But I did go back. And then when I went back and that was in, what did I say? '53? Yeah, in March, '53, I went back up and I went to Alert as an Exec up there. And it made a difference.

BS: *Where is Alert?*

HW: Alert is on the northern tip of Ellesmere Island and it's right on the edge of the Arctic Ocean. We figured we were 400 miles from the North Pole. And some interesting things happened. Oh, by the way, one other thing about Resolute Bay - during one of my walks around there, I found a couple of human skulls which I got a picture of them which I sent to the Canadian National Museum. They were just laying out there in the open.

BS: *Could you identify them?*

HW: I never heard from them. I sent . . . I made sure they were sent to the Canadian National Museum. I told them where I found them and when. And I never heard anything about them. And at Alert, that reminded me that one time one of the fellas walking around up there found this keg. And the thought was that it had to have been a keg of rum. Anyway, it was tapped and the rum was like molasses. On Ellesmere Island is also where, what is it, Greenlee had his experience at Sabine, whatever?

(550)

BS: *At Sabine?*

HW: In 1880-something, he spent with his what, 10 or 20 men he spent?. He had a camp there for two years and then his relief vessels didn't come out and it got pretty severe.

BS: *Did you get to see Sabine?*

HW: No I didn't. All I got was a little adventure when we went up with the icebreaker - on the *Eastwind* and we were in Cane Basin which I think wasn't that far from Sabine because it was on Ellesmere.

BS: *So you returned there at Alert in March of '53.*

HW: March of '53, right.

BS: *So you spent the winter at Resolute, came home for a two week leave, and then went to Ellesmere Island to Alert.*

HW: To Alert. I came up . . .

BS: *How did you get to Alert?*

HW: Through the US Air Force. Through Thule. Stopped there and then went on up to - they flew us into Alert at that time. You came up with say a C-124 to Thule, something like that. Then you picked up a C-47, usually, ski-equipped. Yeah, they usually were ski-equipped and although at our runway, the C-54s were wheels. I think so. I'll take a look at the pictures. Boy these things, you forget after a while. So that's how they got you in, basically. And then I had a little medical problem while I was at Alert, so they flew me out and took me down to Thule and I stayed there a week or two in the Air Force Hospital and got cured and went back and was started back up on the icebreaker.

BS: *So you started back to Alert via which icebreaker?*

HW: I think it was the *Eastwind*. I'm quite sure it was the *Eastwind*, because I got a piece out of the newspaper of the *Eastwind* having had a problem before I had gotten on her - a little fire or something.

BS: *So you boarded the Eastwind in Thule.*

HW: Thule, right.

BS: *Did you make it to Alert?*

HW: No. We got up to Cane Basin and we were going through ice, flowing ice, and then she broke one of her screws. So we sat there all day as they gently maneuvered her.

Turned her around and we went back to Thule. And so then I picked up an airplane and got into Alert that way.

(End of Tape 1 - Side A)

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(Begin Tape 1 - Side B)

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HW: After we were there in King Basin where the Coast Guard *Eastwind* lost the screw, or propeller, we turned around. It took all day to jockey that sucker around and then we went back to Thule and they were going to South to Boston or someplace to get it repaired and I picked up an airplane then and flew into Alert to start my year up there.

Now, I don't know if we mentioned it earlier, but Alert was the northernmost station of this system of the satellite system of the joint US-Canadian Weather Stations. It was the northernmost tip of Ellesmere Island. You could actually see Greenland off to the distance to the east and it was 400 miles off the Pole. And during the time of day, you could hear the old groaning out there of the Arctic ice floes coming and going. We had eight people there. Two were radio operators, two were radiosonde people, one was a mechanic and one was a cook. Did I come up with eight? Yeah. There was eight. That's what it was. And you pulled a 24 hour shift, in other words you were 12 on, 12 off. Two radiosondes a day, surface weather regularly every 4 hours, and all this had to be coded, by the way, so that it could be transmitted by radio. And what was really fascinating was, when the ionospheric layer dropped, it got really crazy. I remember one of the radio operators coming out, just talking to himself and he said, "Listen to that!" He turned his

volume way up. He says, "Just listen to that!" And all you'd hear was this crackling, popping noise. So he'd had a real problem with the atmosphere, depending on the particular status, if you want to call it that.

We had to make our own gas the dangerous way with hydrogen gas using those three items, the caustic stick soda and aluminum chips and water in a steel cylinder. I remember we had some fierce storms. We had our dogs, like I said earlier, there were dogs there.

BS: *Did you drive a dog sled?*

HW: No, no we didn't but the Mountie did. A Mountie came through while I was up there with an Eskimo and his dogs and I've got pictures of that, by the way. And, in fact, while the dogs were there, a polar bear came up and started annoying them. I've got pictures of the bear amongst the dogs. The dogs were tied down. They had staked them in the snow. By the way, the Eskimo sleds that we saw up there with the Mountie, the dogs were in a fan-shape. They weren't like they were up in Alaska where they were two-by-two-by-two. So these were actually in a fan-shape, so each dog was kind of in the front or at the side of the fan. And the Mountie was official Canadian representative making at least a minimum of a 1500 mi., 2000 mile annual trip, trying to make a presence on as many of the Canadian Islands up there as he could so that Canada could claim them. And these young, rugged individuals - I mean you talk about a rugged individual. They were single and they were up there for a minimum of five years making their rounds.

BS: *Was your work any different than it was down at Resolute?*

HW: Well, I would say it was a little less categorized and we definitely did everything at Alert because there were only 8 of us. And usually the cook, he didn't do anything but be

the cook. And he even did his own dishwashing. At Resolute, for instance, we had a dishwasher. But up at the small stations, the cook did everything. So that was his job. Of course, that man would get up about 3 AM in the morning and start bread and bake and you name it. And we were very fortunate in having some good cooks. One was, one time, an American and another time it was a French person Very good cook. And we were all happy that way. We had good food. Come spring air lift, they'd bring in fresh groceries, you know - lettuce and all kinds of fresh and we'd get another shot of that in the fall. Then about two, three months after the last air lift in the fall, we'd be out of the fresh stuff and we'd be living on the canned things and so on and so forth.

Now what was really interesting, after the last airplane left in the fall let's say, colds disappeared. We had no colds. Nobody had any colds. And they didn't reappear until the first new crew of what we called "tourists" showed up and then we'd start getting civilized problems - afflictions, you might say.

(50)

You might or might not get colds, but they disappeared during the dark period, during the wintertime. And it was absolutely inspirational up there to see the moon. It was like a grapefruit hanging up there. You wanted to reach up and touch it, it was so clear. And when we looked to the west where the US mountain range was, you'd think they were only 20-30 miles away and they were actually about 70 or 80 miles away, the air was so clear.

BS: *Did you have an aurora?*

HW: No, the aurora was way to the south. We did not see an aurora up there. And I think, if I remember correctly, at Resolute Bay, we just saw hints of it. It was far to the south. I think it's over Baffin Island where it centers.

BS: *Now which years were you at Resolute?*

HW: Resolute, I was there from let's see, from '52 I was there from '52-'53. Then I came out in March, '53. Then I went to Alert and stayed a year and then I transferred straight back to Resolute without any vacation. At that time it was just too hard to go out and see civilization, the girls and everything else and then come back to isolation. Although, I will say this about the isolation. We were busy. There was always something to do. One of the chores was hauling water. We had our \_\_\_\_\_ which was a building - a plywood building on a big sled and it had about a 1500 gallon water tank in it with a stove. And we would pull that to the local lake, either a mile or two or whatever it was, fill up. While at Resolute, we maintained an open hole by using one electric light - kept the hole open. Whereas up in Alert we didn't. It was too far away. We couldn't run an electric line. You'd lose voltage, by the way. And so we just had to chop the ice hole every time. So it worked that way. So then you would pump the water and you had your stove inside to keep it warm, get it to your wash house or whatever, the building, and transfer it to the tank in there. So that was one of the chores. But the chores were pretty much the same except, as I said earlier - one thing I did though - the German in me - it was a helluva a mess when I got to Alert, so I organized - I reorganized it. I threw out stuff that was from I think the Civil War that they had stored, you know, casually - absolutely no inventory control, no nothing. It was just thrown into the old Quonset and left there and I went through the stuff, sorted out a lot of it and got rid of it in the dump.

BS: *This was before the weather station was built?*

HW: No. This was at Alert. Well a lot of it was Army stuff, left over from Army days, I guess. Surplus military stuff that wound up there that we didn't use.

BS: *So they had an Army base there. When was that?*

HW: I don't know if it was an Army base as much as it was Army stuff that they purchased when they first started and brought with them, see. As far as I know, there was never any base at Alert except the weather station. That was the first station. While we were there, by the way, some tourist English type gentleman came - I don't know his name. An explorer-type. And went to the west about 70 miles to Cape Columbia where Perry had established a cache. And he brought back some artifacts from that like especially those little tiny sunglasses that you see in the older pictures and a few other items. Whether they wound up anywhere like in a museum, I don't know.

BS: *Were any of the Danes over there from Greenland?*

HW: No. We didn't see anybody. We just could barely see way off in the distance, you could see a little bit of Greenland.

BS: *But the Danish naturalist, you say, was there on Ellesmere Island?*

HW: He had been a Dane and he had walked the length of the island with nothing but a stick. And as far as he was concerned, there was no danger from the wolves which - two or three of them, by the way, had come into our camp and one of them had been killed. But as far as he was concerned, there was no danger from the animals unless you got sick

and fell down and were incapacitated. And then they might start working you over.

But he said they followed him. But he said they would never attack him.

(100)

BS: *So, this Dane. He hiked the length of Ellesmere Island with a stick for a cane?*

HW: That's right.

BS: *How old was he?*

HW: The gentleman was over 80. That's what he was telling us. He was just over 80. I don't know his name. I don't think he was one of the more famous individuals, but he was a naturalist and this was what he liked to do, or did.

BS: *So, there were no natives living up there.*

HW: No natives. The only native was that one time when the Eskimo came through with the Mountie.

BS: *Were you involved at all with the Canadian Air Force up there when they built the base at Alert?*

HW: Now the base was there when I got there and the only planes that I remember were the US planes, US Air Force planes. And they were strictly on resupply. The resupply came in in the spring, of course, and then sometimes in the fall, supplies would also be air lifted, but as well, the icebreaker would try to get in there.

BS: *But the Canadian Air Force manned the base.*

HW: Not Alert.

BS: *Not Alert.*

HW: No. There were no Canadians up there. Oh, I mean there were four Canadians at our weather station and the four Americans, but that's all there was. Just eight of us.

BS: *But at the air strip? Who operated it?*

HW: We did. No. It was just a little air strip that we plowed that was strictly. That's what I say. The routine was similar to Resolute Bay as far as the actual work and how much you did. There was more of it to do because there were only 8 of us and everybody worked there. Maybe two, three of us that did the actual plowing. And we had quite a bit of machinery. We had about three, four tractors up there that I can think of. I'm not even sure. I doubt if we had a snowmobile. We did have a bombardier snowmobile at Resolute Bay but not up there because we really didn't need it. So we had tractors which, during the wintertime they were shut down and left outside and then come spring, we had Herman Nelson's which were a heating device - if people are familiar with that. It's a gas-driven, gas-fueled fan with huge ducts. It's fired up and made a fabulous machine for my money. Very simple and very, very efficient.

BS: *What'd they use them for? Heating the engines?*

HW: You'd cover your tractor, you know. You stick one of the ducts on it, you'd cover it and you'd let it go for a day or two.

BS: *Warm it up.*

HW: Warm it up. Then all you had to do was crank it and away you went.

BS: *OK. Were there any Eskimos in the area?*

HW: None.

BS: *None that far North.*

HW: None. No, not even naturally. I don't even know if they'd been that far North. We had, by the way, three generators - three diesel generators - sets. One was running, probably for a week, while the other two were being serviced and on stand-by. Then the one that was running was turned off and another one was going, so we had electricity. It was a very good system. If I remember right, Caterbilt? 311 sticks in my mind.

BS: *So you used two in reserve, but one would power the station.*

HW: One would power the station.

BS: *Even in the winter?*

HW: Winter and summer. It would just chug along. A very excellent system. And we had a mechanic.

BS: *If one broke down, you still had two.*

HW: We still had two to go. Right.

BS: *OK. Two in reserve and one operating. Did you use electric heat?*

HW: No. What we used was what they called a space heater which was an oil fired stove that - civilians, people in the States had it too. It's just a little oil burner. Inside oil burner, and we'd have one per building usually.

BS: *Did you ever have a fire in any of the stations when you were there?*

HW: No. . . we . . . oh yeah. I almost forgot. Yeah. In the radiosonde building, we had a big old pot bellied stove that we fired with coal.

BS: *This was at Alert.*

(150)

HW: This was at Alert, yeah. And I started noticing after a period of time that, by golly, it's getting smoky in here. This was the downstairs part where the machinery was - the radiosonde receivers, etc., where we did our work. So I noticed over a several days period, it was getting kind of dense, smoky in there and I couldn't figure out why. I thought maybe the ducts were leaking or something because we kept that pot-bellied stove cherry red. It was cherry red. And all of a sudden one day, I went in there and here from the molding around the window, smoke starts pouring out really heavy. So we tore

that off and it turns out, behind the stove, the studs - the 2 x 4 studs had been totally charred. They were just totally gone. Anyway, we tore it up and we took care of that. And what we did - we rebuilt the wall and what not. Then we put sheet metal about 2 inches from the wall behind the stove and after that we fired her up, cherry red, and after that, you could put your hand back there. So that solved that problem.

BS: OK, so . . .

HW: But our neighbors . . . I don't know if I mentioned that? Our neighbors on Greenland - the French, earlier.? They had one big huge building and everything was in it - their weather, their sleeping, their cooking - everything was in that huge building, maybe a couple of hundred foot long and x feet wide - well it caught fire and the whole thing burned down.

BS: *Where were they in Greenland?*

HW: Oh I don't know. They were up - there was some French expedition. In fact, I remember LIFE Magazine had something about them. And they were hurtin'. They just about lost everything. And they were sitting out there without anything. And I think from that experience and probably previous experiences, the policy was to build many smaller buildings, separate, which was a good policy, especially when it came to the sleeping quarters. In our sleeping quarters, all we had were 8 rooms - 8 rooms for each person, per man and one stove in the middle and that kept the place warm. Although, by the time the dark period was over, usually the bunks were in the corner of our room, so they were up against the wall. Your sleeping bags and blankets were actually froze, stuck to the wall because the permafrost was creeping up slowly.

BS: *Yeah. So after Alert, you went back to Resolute and you went back to Resolute in April of '54.*

HW: Correct. I didn't go home. I didn't take any leave. It was so hard coming back, I just figured I just gonna . . .

BS: *So you really spent a third winter in the Arctic. Three winters in a row.*

HW: Yeah.

BS: *So what was different about Resolute the second time you were there?*

HW: Well, you could see things were starting to change. Number 1, they were actually bringing in Eskimo families to try to resettle that area. And they also brought up a Mountie and a Mountie was established - his station was at the Canadian Air Force Base, but he would do his Mountie thing, you know, wandering around. And we'd get to meet him periodically. And also, he was real - he loved to go to Thule and go shopping at the Post Exchange. I can remember seeing him, one time, having a tantrum, because he couldn't go and buy himself a new camera. He was pretty upset about it and was starting to threaten us with the King and the Queen and everything else, you know, unless he got his ride to Thule so he could go to the Post Exchange. But other than that, he was a pretty good guy. I mean, there was no problem there. But his business was taking care of . . . maintaining the peace, of which there wasn't too much violence, really. And also working with the Eskimos. His greatest frustration was the fact that they were trying to teach the Eskimos, or have the Eskimos revert to their original native ways and go fishing, go whaling, go sealing, go polar bearing - do all that sort of stuff. And our Eskimos were slipping up to the local dump and picking up the stuff we threw away. Old tin cans that

had expanded. You know, it was obvious when things were going bad. And whatever the Canadians threw away, they were picking it up and bringing it back and using it. And so that was one of his frustrations, the Mountie's frustrations.

(200)

*BS: Were the Eskimos interested in going back to hunting and fishing ways?*

HW: Well yes. Actually, one time - what happened - the Canadians helped them by providing big sleds with a Cat to pull their catches. I've got pictures of several polar bears, also some walrus that they had caught and put on a sled. And I actually watched the women and children running up to one of these carcasses and started cutting it up and just eating the blubber. They'd take a chunk of hide out and boy they'd be eating the blubber with both hands against their mouth. It was just like they were eating candy. I mean they loved it. You could tell it was a physical craving that they needed. They were starting to do things. They had a \_\_\_\_\_. And during the wintertime, they'd build an igloo. They had some igloos that they lived in and I had the pleasure of actually going in and seeing how it was inside, which was kind of neat. It was quite cozy in there which an igloo is basically divided into half a platform. You had the little entrance crawlspace that you crawl through - a little corridor. You came into the level space as you came in. Then there was this platform which actually constituted, I'd say, half or two-thirds of the igloo upon which they lived. And they also, if I remember right, now I hope I'm not imagining this, but I think they had things on the roof of the igloo to help ward off the heat to keep it from melting.

*BS: What was the temperature up on that platform?*

HW: Well, that I don't remember. It was livable. I mean, they had taken off their skins and their heavy outside gear, so it was quite comfortable. I think I had to take some of my stuff off.

BS: How high?

HW: Oh, I'd say the platform was about, I would guess it was a foot and a half, maximum two feet higher.

BS: *And then to the top of the igloo?*

HW: I don't think . . . I don't believe I could have stood up on the platform without bumping the top of the igloo. So I'd say, maybe it was four foot, something like that, to the top. It's been a while now.

BS: *Did you ever go hunting with the Eskimos?*

HW: No, I never did that. We were too busy and . . .

BS: *Did any of the locals fraternize or marry any of the Eskimo women?*

HW: Since that family . . . I don't know how many, I'd say there were two, three families they had come up - just become established. And I don't think that had developed yet. The Canadians were mostly - I would put it this way, well the Air Force kids, they had some, probably had some single people there, but I think their interests in that direction lay further south. I think it'd be a little bit different, in say, in Alaska, where there's more permanency there and they've established towns where mostly the Eskimo folks live. No,

I'd say that hadn't occurred yet. But I understand that Alert became a major base up there. Oh, was it? No I guess that was Resolute. I'll have to pop back to Resolute. One of the main operations started at Resolute while I was still there was trying to drill through the permafrost.

BS: *Who was doing that?*

HW: It was a private group - two, three fellas. A private outfit and it might have been through a university or whatever. Oh, and they also had a seismologist. We had a seismologist at Resolute Bay too, while I think of it. But the permafrost group - they had gotten down to something like 700-800 foot, but their major problem was every time they quit working, everything would freeze. The drill would freeze, so they had to keep pumping hot, boiling water down through the pipes and by the time it circulated and came out, it was very tepid when it came back out. But if they for some reason couldn't keep that up, their equipment would freeze in there. So they had a real problem. And then the seismologist - it was pretty interesting. First of all, they built a mound, leveled it, put a building on top of it, and then he dug a major pit and then put in a fan and a stove and kept that going and every day he would go in and scrape out the slush. And he kept this up, I don't know how long, maybe a week or two until he finally got the depth he wanted. Now this was in the permafrost layer. Got down to the depth he wanted, then he sunk his piers? for the seismograph, then let it freeze in again. And that was sort of interesting. I remember that. But this was at Resolute.

(250)

At Alert, when I was there, it was an 8 person station. We'd get a few tourists in the summer, but it was basically 8 people. Nothing there except the weather station.

BS: *The Air Force bases came along later.*

HW: Air Force . . . whatever came came along later. We had an air strip.

BS: *Yeah, but you maintained that.*

HW: I remember one time, a C-47 coming in and I was watching him and he was dropping lower and lower and no wheels. And all of a sudden, he was below the extended wheel depth, the wheels came out, they bounced, and they turned the engines and kept . . . they realized that they hadn't dropped their landing gear. The wheels just came down and bounced and then went back up and gunned the engine, and made another pass and came around. And then they landed. The wheels came down, they landed, and when the door opened you should have seen the mad crew because the other people on board realized the pilot hadn't been quite alert enough or something. But they were pretty up tight. I'll never forget that one.

BS: *OK. Then you went, when you were done at Resolute, or I guess before we ask if you were done, is there anything else significant that we should be discussion about Resolute?*

HW: Resolute was the major base. It had the most people and was the major re-supply center. Things were either brought in by ship or by plane. It had the permanent Canadian Mountie the second time I was there, which was all new. It was a going concern. It had brought in a Mountie. It had brought in the Eskimo families to start a communities. Our weather station personnel had pretty much remained to about 12 of us. I think that's about it.

BS: *So you were called out of Resolute a little bit early,*

HW: That's right.

BS: *to do something else. What was that?*

HW: OK. In January, '55, they got a call to come back to Washington, DC, and to join what had been designated as the Antarctic Planning Staff of the Weather Bureau. I got the title, or whatever you want to call it, of Cold Weather Logistics Specialist. And I was to assist in the development of logistic requirements, living facilities, the vital techniques and equipment for the proposed South Pole Station.

BS: *And what was the name of your group?*

HW: It was the Antarctic Planning Staff of the US Weather Bureau.

BS: *And you were planning IGY operations?*

HW: I was planning, it hadn't been called IG . . . no it wasn't IGY as such. What it was was the necessary items for living in the polar region. See IGY - if you said IGY, then you would have to include all the other sciences and . . .

BS: *Oh, I see. But it was for your part in the IGY - for the Weather Bureau.*

HW: That was later on.

BS: *Oh I see.*

HW: This was originally just to plan and provide for the living and surviving in the polar regions.

BS: *Who were some of the other people with you on that?*

HW: Well, there was Jay Glendyer and there was Ed Goodale and Ken. OK, Ed Goodale, he was there and he was my favorite person too.

BS: *Ken Molton there?*

HW: Ken Molton came there. Yeah, he was part of the group, Antarctic Planning Staff.

BS: *OK.*

(300)

HW: And then of course, Jay Glendyer was still the head. And by the way, it had changed its name now - not the planning staff, but it was no longer the Arctic Operations Project. It was Polar Operations Project. They had expanded now to the southern hemisphere too.

BS: *So the name of the overall group went from the Arctic Operations Project to the Polar Operations Project.*

HW: It was still the Weather Bureau.

BS: *The Polar Operations Project.*

HW: I remember Jay Glendyer got all excited because he went from a GS-13 to GS-15 if you want to include that, I don't know. But, you know how that is with expansions of responsibilities goes expansion of

BS: *Pay*

HW: Grade, etc. etc.

BS: *OK. So it's you, Eddie Goodale, Jay Glendyer, basically the same people who are on the old Arctic Operations Project.*

HW: And Ernie, Ernest Woods. He was one too. He was, you know, like a second tier leader or whatever you want to say.

BS: *OK. And was this when you met Sir Hubert Wilkins?*

HW: Yes. I think I actually met him in the office, which I really can't say I have a memory of, but I do remember him standing out there on a traffic island waiting for his trolley car. That I remember. And I remember thinking, "Man, now this gentleman is in the encyclopedia because I've read about him." I must have realized who he was and must have been introduced to him.

BS: *Yeah.*

HW: And he seemed to be, you know, what I remember a really nice, unimposing gentleman.

BS: *OK. So what did you do in the planning for what was to become the IGY and the US Weather Bureau's part played.*

HW: OK, for the Northern Project, we had a catalogue of about 19 different classes of items. As an example, No. 1 class - No. 1 would be food, all the food items. Class 2 would be the fuel items, and so on down the line. Living items and whatever, and buildings, the whole works. And then what you'd do - first of all, you have to come up with an estimate of the number of people that are going to be on a given station and then from our experience and the Arctic Project had great experience. They knew how much a person would eat and how many beans, peas and meat, etc., etc., and how much toilet paper. For instance, up North, well the same here, but in the Project, everything was provided. Your food, your clothing, your sleeping gear, everything. In fact, we even provided film. And up North, we had dark rooms. I developed many of my own pictures up there. But the idea was that there was a total - the members partaking in this project on site were not expected to bring anything for survival. Personal things, you know, pictures of their loved ones, that was something else. But as far as total survival, everything was provided by the Project. And that's the way we developed classes so the first thing was to figure out how many people were going to be there.

(350)

Then, of course, you could go from there using our previous experience. And then from that, I switched into a purchaser. I actually was contracting officer - wrote contracts for purchasing these items on the market - open market. Where we could, we got surplus

things from the military. But we bought - I even purchased bulldozer blades. I purchased radios. I purchased whatever, whatever we thought we needed. Camera equipment. So that was all part of the planning staff. And then while this was going on, Ken had come down or gone down at the beginning of Deepfreeze I in '55, had gone down and was actually on site when they began construction at McMurdo Sound. But for some personal reason, I did not know that why - he decided he did not want to overwinter. And so he returned and then the word went out in the office where I was - "Hey, we need a replacement." And so they're standing all there, by myself, you know, and theoretically being unattached, why, I probably was drafted and I probably volunteered too. Because it was, at that time in the early '50s, the only way you would get to a region like the Arctic or Antarctica was through a government operation. There was no tourists. There was none of that. So I thought at that time, "Hey, why not?" I was a young, single man. I was in my early 30s. And so why not? I had already put in three years up North and I wanted to see the contrast between the two areas. And the contrast was amazing. Of course there was ice and snow down there and up North, but I always felt if I had a .22 rifle starting from Alert, I could make my way out. I always felt I could do that because there was fauna and flora and the whole, everything - there was life up in the North. Whereas in the Antarctic, it's stark. Once you get off the shoreline, there's nothing. The only thing that's going over the Antarctic continent as far as I know, and I can be corrected - have been corrected many times - were the skua gulls, and they flew pretty high and fast and you weren't about to live on them.

BS: So, Ken Molton went down first and then he decided he couldn't winter and you came down. Did he build the facilities there? Was he in charge of the construction?

HW: No. Both he and I were civilians. We were guests of the US Navy down there and our job - now this is where IGY comes in. We were US NCY IGY representatives - International Geophysical Year representatives.

BS: *So you were the IGY representatives. . .*

HW: Yes. To the Navy. And I was supposed to stay on - you know, be aware of what . . . being a contact person. Now what happened, what developed, and I think Ken was already a part of it - a tremendous amount of IGY materials for the South Pole had already been delivered. And at the time, I had arrived down there, they were already there on the ground in boxes.

(400)

And there were tags on the boxes and it was our job and then when I got there the IGY reps as far as this material was concerned to organize it, inventory it, and with the help of two USAF, United States Air Force individuals, palletize it with parachutes so that it could be delivered the next season.

BS: *This is weather equipment.*

HW: This is everything. This was basically IGY - well, it was everything actually, I think. Everything excluding construction material for the buildings.

BS: *OK. So your job was to palletize all equipment and supplies for South Pole.*

HW: For South Pole as far as they were IGY items - International Geophysical Year Academy of Science items. Now what I got here and what I read in my notes, this is where this thing becomes interesting - that we had the . . .

*BS: Now I've got a question here because I'm a little confused. You didn't just work for the Weather Bureau. You worked for the National Academy in this capacity. Who did you report to? Back to the Weather Bureau to Dwyer, or did you report to the Academy itself?*

HW: OK. Like this final report I wrote to: United States National Committee - IGY Washington, DC, So basically I was reporting to the National Committee - IGY

BS: Reported to US National Committee for the International Geophysical Year, Washington, DC. And I think they were what, in the science, what'd we call them?

*BS: You were the Senior Science Rep in McMurdo then? Permanent - I know you had a lot of DVs going through like Gould and others.*

HW: Well, when I was there it was the beginning of the dark period - the winter period. So there wasn't too much going through.

BS: *I see.*

HW: And then when the sun came back and they started to come, that's about the time I came home.

BS: *So basically the first supplies that they parachuted to South Pole, then, were the stuff that you had to build up.*

HW: Yeah. That's what this report tells, see.

BS: *And you worked on that during the winter.*

HW: Yes.

BS: *Those are extremely important documents.*

(450)

HW: Yeah. This is the stuff here - "by box," "by pallet." And there were three of us - two Air Force men and myself. It was a heck of a job. I'll put it this way to you and this is not to denigrate the Navy, but I remember some Germans came in, some German reporters and they were horrified by the jumbledness of the supply area. And I've even got pictures to show you what I'm talking about. They were truly horrified. Oh by the way, here's - this was the officer's barrack and I happened to be a guest there of that's Bergie, Bergie and Jack that killed himself and there's Kannon, Dave Kannon, so this was the officers and they bivouacked me with them. But these two Germans were absolutely horrified by the jumbledness of the way the supplies and boxes were strewn about. Well you can see a little bit of it there. I mean, I had to laugh. That's it right there.

BS: *That's the base.*

HW: Yeah, that's it.

BS: *OK.*

HW: Yeah. That's McMurdo and things were really helter-skelter.

BS: *There's a helo there. Was that from the base?*

HW: Yeah. Don Nash was the pilot.

BS: *Don Nash?*

HW: Yeah. He was the pilot there and this is . . .

BS: *OK. You reported to the US Committee of the IGY so obviously your responsibility wasn't just to get weather equipment to South Pole or take weather observations at McMurdo. It was - I'm asking the question - did it cover a spectrum of other research?*

HW: It covered the total spectrum of all the IGY planned researchs and that included the Aurora study, geomagnetism, glaciology, we had seismology. Let me see here, I got another one here. The ionosphere and, of course, then they had US National Committee IGY Equipment which, whatever their forms, papers, and so forth, and even the US Weather Bureau items. And, let's see, here's another one I think. And then US Weather Bureau Meteorology. And did we also get geomorphology. Geomorphology. So there were all these disciplines which actually I think were in here, too. Because I kept my IGY information.

BS: *So you were taking weather observations at McMurdo at the same time?*

HW: That's where I started. I helped as soon as I got, you know, found out what there was to do and got organized, I figured I might as well help the local meteorological folks there with their weather observations. . .

BS: *This was Navy?*

HW: The Navy, right, and their radiosonde work too, which - that's what I had been doing up North.

(500)

I figured, hey I might as well. They could use another hand, so yes, I worked on the program there pretty regularly.

BS: *So you were responsible for helping with the weather while you were there and for staging all the equipment for all these disciplines that were to be begun at South Pole as part of the South Pole Studies program. Did you work with Paul Siple?*

HW: Yes, very closely when he finally came down. I was still there and, in fact, it's the transfer of the watch, changing of the guard, then, with us there at least a month with him.

BS: *So Paul came down to take over South Pole base when*

HW: He came down to stand by to get ready to go to South Pole and we went through the supplies and made sure . . . we had to reorder a number of things. Some things were

reordered clear from the States. Other things were reordered from New Zealand.

What had happened, in looking over my notes, it turns out that the original supplies had included everything as we talked about earlier about the different classes of items that included food as well. But there at McMurdo, the McMurdo Navy people appropriated our food and so they replaced them later on. Took the responsibility for providing that to the outpost stations.

BS: *Did you work with Dick Bowers?*

HW: Yes. I worked with Dick.

BS: *He knew that you were sending this stuff to South Pole and he was destined to go build the South Pole base then?*

HW: That's actually a different phase. See, basically the building materials, again I believe in my notes here, it says that the Navy committed itself to provide all that basically, you know the building materials. So it was the scientific equipment, the food supplies and other things, clothing supplies, things like that that we had - IGY had provided for sure.

BS: *Dick had a handle . . . he had a responsibility for the building materials. I would assume he must have had some coordination involved with that.*

HW: Yeah, well . . . we shared our inventory list.

BS: *I see. So he was doing supplies for building and you were doing supplies for science.*

HW: Basically, that's the way it was.

BS: *That's basically the whole air drop, right?*

HW: That's basically the whole air drop. But what really impressed me about Dick, he was out there in 90 below getting a fix on the stars, getting his latitude and longitude fixes and he was out there.

(550).

BS: *At McMurdo.*

HW: At McMurdo.

BS: *Practicing.*

HW: Checking it out . . . you know, so that when he got to the South Pole, he could make it work right and come up with the coordinates down there.

BS: *Exact spot of the South Pole.*

HW: Right.

BW: *He must have been responsible for surveying it in. Is that what you're saying?*

HW: That's what I'm saying, yeah. He was responsible, I'd say, for the location of the first base.

BS: *Location of the first base. The exact location. OK. That's very interesting. Now, tell me when did you leave McMurdo. I guess the better question that I'm trying to ask is were you in McMurdo when they made the first landing at South Pole?*

HW: Oh yeah. Admiral Dufek landing?

BS: Yeah.

HW: *Oh yeah. I had a little drama there. That was a real education. The Admiral came down and he and what is his name?*

BS: Pilot?

HW: \_\_\_in, yeah. They flew on in and landed there and then shortly thereafter we started getting the tourists or the scientists that were going to go down there to stay down there and they were antsy to get to the South Pole station. But things weren't moving as rapidly as they liked, so they conned me into going and talking to the Admiral and trying to encourage him to airlift them in there more rapidly. So that was interesting. And then what happened, there were about 20 reporters down there and it came out in the newspaper that there was this terrific conflict between the Navy and the IGY scientists.

BS: *Was that true?*

HW: No. And there were 19 different versions in the paper. So that was a real education for me as far as the newsworthiness of items go.

BS: *They like to report conflict.*

HW: I know. Well that's what I'm saying. There were 19 versions of this thing that the scientists had agitated a little bit

(End of Tape 1 - Side B)

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(Begin Tape 2 - Side A)

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BS: *This is Tape 2, Side A. of the Wessbecher interview on the 20th of April, 2000. We left off on the last tape, we were discussing a reported conflict between the Navy and science community by the press from McMurdo. There were 20 down there and 19 versions of conflict between Navy and scientists and you say, there was none.*

HW: Being either one half of the principles, there was no conflict.

BS: *You were the science.*

HW: Well, I was their representative. They came up to me and asked me to find out if they could get in there earlier. They wanted to go in there yesterday if it were possible.

So the idea was to . . . there was no firm - no firm date had been set. So these folks, it's all understandable. They're sitting there, you know . . . time is

BS: *These were the new scientists.*

HW: Yeah. And they were the one that were going to spend the winter down there.

BS: *And they were trying to manipulate the Navy into getting . . .*

HW: Yeah. They wanted to go right now.

BS: *What's the matter with that?*

HW: Nothing at all. That's right.

BS: *Would you say they were acting like good Navy people?*

HW: No, they wanted to get on with their show and more power to 'em.

BS: *Navy people would try and manipulate that way.*

HW: Well there was no conflicts. I actually had a chat with the Admiral and got a picture, an idea of when they might be able to go.

BS: *So you talked with the Admiral. Who was the Admiral?*

HW: Admiral Dufek. I went on board ship and he was in his office. So I talked to him and told him the people are getting antsy and if he could have any encouragement as to when they might be able to get in there.

BS: And he said?

HW: The famous ASAP.

BS: *Yeah. He wanted to get rid of them as bad as they wanted to get in there.*

HW: Yeah. We're talking about polar conditions. You don't know how it's going to be like even tomorrow, you know. You know what it was like yesterday. . . it was a white out.

BS: *I understand.*

HW: So, that's why I came back and said, "Hey as soon as they can, they're not wanting to take you, you know. They want to get rid of you. As soon as they can and the weather conditions are favorable when they can land and take off, you're going in."

BS: So you and George Dufek got along well.

HW: Oh he was a fine gentleman. I got along well . . .

BS: *How about Gus Shinn?*

HW: I didn't really have anything to do with Gus.

BS: *How about relations with the sailors?*

HW: Oh hey. You should ask Saunders. One of the things I learned up North was how to cut hair. I thought I did, see. So I became the volunteer barber down in Antarctica - in McMurdo. And the first thing they kept wanting to do was pay me and I'd say, "Hey, no, forget that. I wouldn't take that. No way am I going to take money," you know, because I enjoyed cutting hair. So I was their barber down there and I think the guys remembered that and appreciated it. They even gave me a cup entitled - oh, they called me "the sandcrab." So what I did, I got my coffee cup and I put on it - I cut out something, oh, I cut out part of the Seabee motto and I put "sandcrab" on my cup.

BS: *Were there other civilians winter over?*

HW: Just one. Elmo - Elmer Jones and he

BS: *Elmo Jones?*

HW: Elmo Jones and he was a, what do you call it? a photographer, film-maker from Walt Disney.

BS: *Elmo Jones was . . .*

HW: Yeah. Let me find his name here. Elmo Jones was - where's Jonesy? He's got to be in here someplace. Anyway, he was down there. So there were two of us.

BS: *So Walt Disney had a guy there. He had Lloyd Beebe over at Little America, correct?*

HW: I think possibly. Your information is better than mine. But Jones was with us. I used to say, "Well the way it was, the rating was 90 officers, and then 30 dogs and two civilians, of which I was the last."

BS: *OK. So you were Mr. National Committee for that first winter at McMurdo.*

HW: I was the representative, that's right. And I enjoyed everybody. I thought they were a fantastic group of people.

BS: *Um-hum. You maintain contact with any of them?*

HW: Oh yeah. Oh, you mean now?

BS: *Yeah.*

HW: Yeah. Like Dick Bowers. We have our annual, what do you call it? our reunion.

BS: *Yeah. You a member of the Deepfreeze Association?*

HW: I don't . . .

BS: *The one that Dick helps run.*

HW: Well whatever . . .

BS: *The one at Boulder.*

HW: Yeah, I'm on the list. We're planning to go to their next reunion again. I've been to one, I think, so far. Bowers. And Jim, every once in a while I see Jim Bergstrum every once in a while. As I say, he was the best man at our wedding.

BS: *Jim Bergstrum was the best man at your wedding?*

HW: Yeah.

(50)

BS: *Did you - you know Jim is one of the collaborators on this. He is sponsoring other oral histories through the Deepfreeze Association.*

HW: When did you see him last, Brian?

BS: *In October, when we met to discuss which people we would go after. And that's where we - I had your name because you're a member of the Polar Society. I didn't know what you'd done, but I learned about you there. OK. So, basically, to sum up one aspect of your career, you spent almost four years straight with a small break in Washington, DC, in the Arctic and the Antarctic.*

HW: That's about it.

BS: *You spent four winters, four consecutive winters in the North and the South. Tell me about the effects of wintering over on all these people that came down to Antarctica with you. I understand they had to lock one fellow up in the winter because he had mental problems.*

HW: Yeah. I think that was Emerson? . . . Well I've got a listing. They don't mention him. Oh here's the list of names, but . . . yeah, they had one kid. No, his name wasn't here.

BS: *Did you know Dave Baker there?*

HW: Oh yeah, yeah.

BS: *Did you get to drive dog sleds with him?*

HW: No. I didn't get down there. I was pretty involved in what I was doing there.

BS: *Did you know he lives in Medford?*

HW: Yeah. That's one of my intentions, to stop down there one of these days when I go by. And seeing . . . Jack . . . come on, Jack, Jack . . . the head of the dog sleds. Jack

BS: *Tuck.*

HW: Yeah, Jack.

BS: *Did he winter over with you at McMurdo?*

HW: Yeah. Jack was there and Eddie was there and then Sergeant Doberman who was there working with them and the dogs.

BS: *I see. So this is the list of all the people involved in the . . .*

HW: That's the list of the people still left.

BS: *From uh . . .*

HW: From McMurdo I.

BS: *From McMurdo I.*

HW: Deepfreeze I.

BS: *Can I get a copy of that too when you make copies.*

HW: Sure, sure.

BS: *OK. So . . .*

HW: Oh looka here. See . . . I don't know what date. . . oh wait. This was in '56. I guess that's from McMurdo, 'cause they'd send messages. Here's to my folks.

BS: *Oh that's nice.*

HW: They were good that way. I've got a number of these. That's the way they'd send a message. And then I got a Christmas greeting from Rifle D\_\_\_\_\_ "Hey, you're doing a fantastic job, blah, blah, blah."

BS: *So Eddie Goodale was Assistant Chief of the Polar Operations Project.*

HW: In the US Weather Bureau, right.

BS: *Do you know when Eddie Goodale transferred to NSF?*

HW: No. No, in '58 I left Washington and left the Weather Bureau and went back to the Forest Service.

BS: *I see.*

HW: Since then, I've been in Oregon, down in \_\_\_\_\_ and Mt. Hood on the \_\_\_\_\_.

BS: *I've got to back you up a little bit.*

HW: Sure.

BS: *You materialized in Antarctica in our discussions. How did you get down there? Tell us about that?*

HW: Oh. OK. Going down to Antarctica when I first went down there in '56, it was absolutely one of the finest trips I've ever taken. And what I've got in my hand here is a letter that I wrote about it to my folks. And I think I'll read it to you as I wrote it here. It's

starting . . . "I left Washington at 11:30 Sunday night. At Chicago, I switched planes. They had almost a foot of snow on the ground." (This is at Chicago.) "The next stop was San Francisco where I switched from United Air lines to Pan American. Here I boarded one of those big flying clippers, the one with the bar and the lounge downstairs. From Frisco, we flew to Honolulu, 9 hours flight time.

(100)

From Honolulu to Canton Island from where I sent you a card and also went swimming in the lagoon," (which by the way, it's not written, I found out they had sharks in there.) "Thence from there to the Fiji Islands where it was hot and damp and green. After the Fiji Islands came the North Island of New Zealand and the city of Auckland. I stayed there overnight and the next morning flew on down here to the South Island and Christchurch. Then by train, I went to Littleton where the *Glacier* is, only about 15 miles from Christchurch.?

BS: *The Glacier being. . .?*

HW: The icebreaker. The US icebreaker. That's the one that took me on down.

BS: *OK. So you boarded the Glacier in Littleton.*

HW: Littleton. "So that covers the itinerary to date. The food and service aboard the Pan American Clipper was terrific. My Uncle sent me first class," that Uncle being Uncle Sam. "My Uncle sent me first class - \$801 worth. In the afternoon we had the hors d'oeuvres with all sorts of cocktails. With dinner they served wine. Also French pastries.

I've actually eaten better and fancier foods on board an airplane than I have on the ground. That's something isn't it?" So that's . . . that was that.

BS: *OK. How was the ride on the Glacier compared to the ride . . . ?*

HW: Oh, that was rough. That was . . . I wrote that, what is it? The Roaring Forties, the Screaming Sixties and the Screeching Seventies? We were pulling a tanker too while we went down. She was towing a tanker.

BS: *From Port Littleton?*

W: From Littleton, yeah. That's one of those that they froze in. I've got a picture of it. And they froze her in for fuel. You know for . . .

BS: *You know who the Captain of that was?*

HW: I think our friend Fischer. I'm not sure if he was Captain or not. I think he was aborted. I can't think . . . you mean on the *Glacier* or the . . . ?

BS: *No, on the tanker.*

HW: I don't know. I'm not for sure.

BS: *OK.*

HW: Even if they had a Captain. . .

BS: *Who was the Skipper of the Glacier then?*

HW: Captain Maher.

BS: *Captain Maher?*

HW: Yeah. In fact, he signed my release - my welcome aboard, or whatever it was.

BS: *I see. Now how was the ride?*

HW: That was one rough ride. It was a fantastic ride. I still have memories of it. Times like that you wish you'd had videos. But what would you show. Just mountains of seas, sea water and what not. But anyway, I decided when I left there, I didn't want to fly back. I came back on ship. It was a fantastic return trip.

BS: *Well tell me. Did the Glacier go straight to McMurdo?*

HW: Yeah. She went straight. Well, she went straight.

BS: *Was that her first trip in there.*

HW: No that was the last one and we were, in fact, I remember writing someplace that we're not sure if we can get in because it was so late in the season. See, it was in March, I think. And they weren't sure she'd make it in.

BS: *Mountain of seas, huh?*

HW: Oh man, it was rough! Eewwee it was rough!

BS: *Did the ship roll much?*

HW: Yeah. It's a round bottom.

BS: *Yeah.*

HW: It's a round bottom vessel, yeah, she rolled all right. See, I traveled by ship to Europe twice as a kid. I went on a *Bremen*, one time - a big German ship when I went in '31, I went on that and in 1928, as a two and a half year old kid, they shipped me by myself to my grandparents. I was on a ship then.

BS: *Two and a half years old.*

HW: Two and a half years, by myself. Family wasn't getting along. And then I spent military time - a long time on ships. So I had done a lot of water travel.

BS: *Yep.*

HW: But that was the roughest going.

BS: *Did the Glacier have to do any ice breaking?*

HW: Yeah. She broke some ice to get back in there.

BS: *She had to rebreak it to get back to McMurdo.*

HW: And it wasn't too bad. She moved right along.

BS: *Just had to clear the channel.*

HW: Yeah and she was, well she was bringing in that tanker. That was it. It was just getting in and getting her in and for her to get out again.

BS: *Which was the tanker?*

HW: I've got it. I think I've got a picture. It's a little thing. They left it in there.

BS: *Oh, I see. You're talking about the . . . yes.*

HW: What'd they call them? Yog?

BS: *Yeah. Yog tanker - Y-O-G.*

HW: Yeah, that's what . . . there were two of them, yeah. YOG.

BS: *Was there one already there? Did you bring in the second one or the first one?*

HW: I'm going to say . . . I really don't know the answer. I really don't know.

BS: *Did you have any flight crew winter over with you then?*

HW: Basically the helicopter people.

BS: *Uh-hum. Who were those guys?*

(150)

HW: Nash. Don Nash, and another . . . he had some Navy person working with him. Yeah, Don was there. Oh wait a minute. Wait a minute 'cause I can remember a couple of lieutenant commanders, all up tight because they're going to . . . had gone through their third time, you know, what is it? This was the last time and if they didn't get promoted, that was the end of their military career? I don't know. I don't think they over-wintered with us. What would an enlisted person be called? What would his initials be? Like SW-3 or VU-2?

BS: *It depends on his rate. If he was a boilerman, you know, a boiler technician, it would be T, BT, and then there'd be their rank would be 3 or 2 or . . .*

HW: What would be the initials for the Air people?

BS: *Well, there's several types. There'd be an A-something. Here's your YOGs.*

HW: There they are.

BS: *This is the one you brought in?*

HW: I guess, yeah. As I say, . . . I remember we pulled one in , so . . . like I said, that's why it took the trip a little longer. See I got a Nolen AGAC-2. Would that be?

BS: *Yes. AG, uh-huh.*

HW: OK. He was there, yeah, I remember Nolen. And then Goodwin AE-3. Would that be a . . . ?

BS: *That's an electrician - aviation electrician.*

HW: And Jack, did I say Jack or Don Nash. He was the Lieutenant JG. I think he was a Lieutenant Commander. Now I'm mixed up as what rank . . .

BS: *Yeah. They've changed them all so it's hard even for me to get a handle on it. I see you've got a picture signed here from George Dufek. Lieutenant Commander Canhand.*

HW: Yeah.

BS: *Now did he winter over?*

HW: Oh yeah.

BS: *OK. He was an aviator.*

HW: He was there. He was there when I got there. I mean he was the commander of the base. He signed my acceptance forms and whatnot. Don Nash. It's gotta be Don. I even got things put out by Father Condit?. He had quite a . . .

BS: *Did Father Condit winter over with you?*

HW: Absolutely. He was the live-wire that kept us going, I think.

BS: *Good for morale.*

HW: Yeah. He was . . . and that gentleman, that gentleman - he was a Catholic priest, but he presided over the Presbyterian services and the Jewish services. I should say Protestant services.

BS: *Well, did . . . so he was the only chaplain that wintered over.*

HW: Yeah.

BS: *Had they build the Chapel of the Snows by then?*

HW: No. Well they were the ones that built it.

BS: *I know. But did they build . . . was it built by the time you got there, I guess was a better question?*

HW: I don't . . . I'm not sure. But I know they were working on it pretty much while I was there.

BS: *What was Father's Condit's first name?*

HW: I've got it here someplace. I have to look. Everybody knew him as Father Condit.

BS: C-o-n-d-i-t?

HW: C-o-n-d-i-t. Saunders met him too. He was there the last three . . . yeah, he was great. I gotta get me a cough drop. All this talkin'.

(200)

BS: *OK. We're back on. I see here that you got the National Academy of Sciences of the National Research Council of the United States of America, Special Award here signed by Hugh Audeshaw, the Executive Director. October 8th, 1959. "I'm pleased to forward you the attached certificate in recognition of your outstanding contribution to the Antarctic program of the International Geophysical Year. This certificate is an expression of very great appreciation of the US National Committee for IGY for the sacrifices and accomplishments in wintering over in the remote Antarctic continent under the most trying conditions. In the years to come, I hope this certificate will serve as a remembrance of your important role in the unique undertaking."*

HW: And it's got that little jewel right there.

BS: *That's the certificate.*

HW: And my answer to that is, that down there was a luxury. They should have been up North with us. This was a luxury, for me anyway.

BS: *You mean, the Antarctic operation was a luxury operation compared to the Arctic.*

HW: *Read my letter to the editor there, for your own information. That kind of sums up things for you. You might want to cut your thing off.*

BS: *OK. I understand that you - that the first pole that they put at the South Pole was a commemorative pole. They didn't have one and that they came to you and you made one. Is that correct?*

HW: That is my only claim to fame down there. Yeah. This was a panic of the ship - the 124s going to take off any minute now - we need a pole. And at the same time Doc Siple had this huge mirrored globe down there and he asked me to make a collar for it on top of a pole to hold it, so between that and the desire for a striped pole. See that's what he drew on the picture right there.

BS: *I see.*

HW: And so they wanted a striped barber-type pole, you know, with the red stripes and the what-not, so I went ahead and I made it. I got an old - I think it was for carpets. It was bamboo and I think it was, I'd say, four or five inches thick by about 12 feet long. And so I went ahead and I put this stripe on it and I fixed a collar on it so that it would hold this globe and at the same time, stay on top of the pole. And I just about got the darn thing painted and here comes everybody, including the Admiral, and they want to put their initials on it.

BS: *This was in McMurdo.*

HW: This is in McMurdo. Yeah. And so everybody wanted to put their initials on. I had some white paint or something, so I give them the paint and they put their initials on, including Admiral Dufek and the thing was still wet. They grabbed it out of my hand, put it on the 124 and away it went.

BS: *Did everybody in camp get their . . . ?*

HW: Oh pretty much. Pretty much. I'd say . . .

BS: *Sailors, the Admiral . . . ?*

HW: Sailors, everybody, that's right. I don't know if I put mine on. I figured well the pole was mine.

BS: *The first pole at the South Pole was YOUR pole.*

HW: That's my - right there.

BS: *And that's your chief claim to fame.*

HW: That's my claim to fame and it's still there because it's buried now. From what I understand, it's way down.

BS: *You don't think somebody stole it?*

HW: Well, I don't know.

BS: *Maybe it would be worthwhile to go get.*

HW: I don't know. I'd rather leave something there.

BS: *They're building a new South Pole now and they're doing a lot of digging in the old South Pole area. They might run across it.*

HW: They might. But I noticed for a number of years in the National Geographic, every time they showed the South Pole, that was my pole. I'm going to say that because I'll never say it again - that was MY pole. I got the proof. I've got that in an article right there. See I'm painting it. See that one there?

BS: *Yes I see it.*

HW: No, this one.

BS: *Oh this one. This is - oh this is you painting the pole?*

HW: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

BS: *This Howard . . . OK let me read this into the record: "Mr. Howard Wessbecher of the United States Weather Bureau and a member of the International Geophysical Year party at McMurdo Sound put the priming coat on the "South Pole." The 12 foot long bamboo flagpole which will be erected on the main building at the South Pole Scientific Station." The United States flag will be flown from the pole.*

(250)

*In the background to the picture is a part of the McMurdo Sound Supply Dump and the hills of Ross Island. And so you did this at Ross Island and they put it in. And they stuck it in at the actual Pole.*

HW: Yeah. That was at the Pole. And as I say, a number of National Geographic articles afterwards, it was still there but little by little, it got covered. Oh, it was fun. There were some good times down there.

*BS: Well, I think with that cheery note, we'll end this interview. It's been a very good interview and a very revealing interview and I've enjoyed working with you on that. I think we've done something very important for the United States as far as recording your thoughts and your experiences here.*

HW: Well I'll add the feeling is mutual. Thank you very much, Brian.

*BS: I've enjoyed it.*

**END OF INTERVIEW**