

AV 9: Alexander Glen oral history summary

Recorded at Dower House, Stanton Broadway, Worcestershire. Interviewed by Charles Swithinbank (CS)

Track 1: 12.12.1999. [01.01.22] [00.00.45] Introduction by CS including overview of Alexander Glen's (AG) career and interests. [00.02.20] Description of Scottish interest including comments on devolution; AG feels "very Scottish but also very British". [00.03.13] Description of 1932 Cambridge Expedition to Spitsbergen led by Meredith Jackson. Mention of member Gordon Welchman, later a code breaker at Bletchley Park. [00.04.24] Description of leading the 1933 Oxford Expedition to West Spitsbergen. Mention of Lancelot Fleming, James Martin, Bob Ryder, Oliver Gatty. Anecdote about AG's poor leadership and learning from the experience. [00.06.30] Discussion about AG and CS's mentors Charles Elton, Ken Sandford, Kenneth Mason; mention of the Oxford Exploration club. [00.07.32 break for sound check] [00.07.45] Description of 1934 Oxford University Spitsbergen expedition, which was a jaunt without purpose. Anecdotes about travelling on this expedition with Evelyn Waugh. [00.10.55] Comments on these Expeditions being funded by foundations and suppliers who were keen to help the young after the war; Mention of AG's book "Young men in the Arctic" and his love for writing. [00.12.30] Comments on his work ethic as an Undergraduate at Oxford. Mention of George Binney and Allman. [00.14.55] Description of 1935-36 Oxford University expedition to Northeastland (Northeastlandet) including: Whatman and Hamilton studying the ionosphere; implications for WWII radar work; German army active in the area wanting to see maps and charts but not equipment "spies extremely stupid people... only look at what they've been told to look at"; mention that AG was a spy; the expedition tried to study ozone but the equipment was submerged making the results unreliable; ornithology. [00.20.52] List of explorers' AG sought advice from including Vilhjalmur Steffanson, Knud Rasmussen, Helmer Hanssen; James Wordie; Fritz Loewe; Adolf Juell; Mention of meeting Dr [Otto] Schmidt in Leningrad. [00.21.50] Description of financing the Northeastland expedition; donation of equipment and supplies including from Fortnum and Mason; anecdote about sugar; building the base - suitable for experiments but not ideal from a travelling point of view [00.25.35 phone rings] [00.25.40] Repetition of description of building the base; Comments on Karl Bengtssen (KB), Norwegian trapper. Anecdote about KB's tobacco withdrawal causing him to threaten AG. [00.29.40] CS mentions the Germans reconnoitring bases in the mid-1930s [CS break for water]. [00.30.00] KB was the only paid member of the expedition; members paid £100 each; grants from Royal Geographical Society, Royal Society, Cambridge Colleges and book profits. [00.30.35] Description of German naval planning in Spitsbergen region; mention of Alfred Ritscher. [00.32.25] Description of living in the Ice Cap stations on Northeastland. [00.35.55] Mention that dogs used for transporting materials and equipment to base. [00.36.20] Anecdote about suffering amnesia for 10 days after a fall. CS mentions he suffered a similar experience. [00.38.31] Memories of the surge of Bråsvellbreen glacier. [00.40.32] Description of work at winter stations; digging in to an unexpected crevasse; construction of tunnels in ice cap stations; mention of Carbon Monoxide poisoning and fire escape plans; hard blue ice layers made up the ceiling and floor of tunnels. [00.45.05] Description of Daniel Godfrey's illness on the 2nd winter depot-laying journey. Mention of hypothermia and heart problems. [00.47.02] Description of sending a note of protest from "the people of Northeastland" to Mussolini on the invasion of Abyssinia. [00.48.45] Description of expedition science and successes including the ionosphere programme; ice cap station construction; John Wright's imaginative survey work; significance of the ionosphere work to the north Russian convoys in World War II (WWII); mention that the ionosphere programme continuing in 1942 with revised equipment. [00.52.26] Memories of WWII including time in Belgrade before and after German attack, 1940-41; horror of the partisan wars in Yugoslavia; contrast with the clean and wonderful pre-war

time in the Arctic. [00.57.25] Memories of the evacuation of Spitsbergen, July 1941. Conflict with Canadian General who did not want to leave them behind; Mention of Sverdrup family including brothers Einar and Jack (Leif). [01.00.28 END].

Track 2: [00.26.58] [00.00.30] Description of AG's WWII Arctic convoy operations in 1942. Mention of meeting Ian Fleming, PA to the director of naval intelligence. [00.04.28] Detailed description of the operation on Spitsbergen, April 1942. Mention of the German attack; rediscovering supplies left on an earlier expedition; Bletchley were aware of the attack; wish to remain on Spitsbergen rather than for immediate evacuation. [00.10.21] Description of WWII operations in Albania and Yugoslavia, September 1943. Mention of Fitzroy Maclean; long-term plan for mining the Danube; parachuting in to Serbia was a "civilised method of travel"; AG part of the first contact between allies and Russian forces; demobilised in 1945; told he would not live 6 months due to his weak heart; family doctor told him to rest and put him to sleep for 17 days. [00.15.44] Mention of Archie Dunlop Mackenzie, Hilmar Reksten, Fitzroy Maclean, Bunny Fuchs who were all in contact for a long time. [00.16.14] Description of meeting his wife in Belgrade, 1940 including escape after the German attack and capture by Italians; married 60 years; generalised comments on women. [00.17.55]. Discussion after end of official interview about AG being "plain lucky" and being "in the right place at right time". AG believes in teams and continuing friendships and relationships; mention that he got to know German opposite numbers; sadness with current Yugoslav wars and "same old problems again and again". [00.19.40 CS reads questions etc. for editing; brief conversation between AG and CS] [00.26.58 END].