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ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE A

Identification: This is an interview with Air Vice Marshal Trebilco on 19 May 1994 at his home at 18 Willundi[?] Place, Gold Coast.

Air Marshal, can you recall your first interest in aviation?

Yes, I can but it will probably surprise you in that when I was at school I wouldn't have known anything about flying, nor had any interest in flying. The Air Training Corps was very much in being during the early 1940s and friends of mine were in the Air Training Corps and it offered a lot of sport and I was very keen on sport and they cajoled me into joining the Air Training Corps and having joined I guess I developed a great interest in aircraft and everything to do with the Air Force but it was basically because of the sport that I joined the Air Training Corps.

Did you make your first flight during the Air Training Corps period?

Yes, I did. We made a flight which didn't impress me very much. It was in an Avro Anson, I think, from Tocumwal. I think I spent at least an hour trying to wind the wheels up or the wheels down or something because - it didn't really thrill me very much, I must admit. But that was the only experience I had with flying prior to joining the Air Force.

This is a bit unusual that you were later attracted to a career of flying yet that initial example wasn't particularly beneficial.

No, not only not beneficial but it didn't really excite me, either. But the whole life of the ATC, the Air Training Corps, was challenging. We did a lot of night study. We had good group activities. We had a particularly fine football team and, in fact, played a curtain-raiser to one of the preliminary finals down on the Carlton football ground, so there was a lot of interest and a lot of exhilaration about being in the Air Training Corps in those days. I think, naturally, you then tended to think, well, all I want to do is join the Air Force and be a pilot.

So did your parents object or were they very supportive of you wanting to join the Air Force?

I think the decision was mine alone to join. If my mother had had any choice in the matter, she wouldn't have let me join and in fact after I had joined and particularly when Korea was on, I believe, so she told me, she used to write letters to the Chief of Air Staff to get me back home for safe .... No, the decision was mine and I was reasonably self-accountable at that stage.

As a young man when you got the letter to say you'd been accepted for pilot training, what was your reaction?

Wonderful! In that particular period it was - let me just recount that a moment. When I left school after getting my Leaving Certificate and matriculating you had to go to a job which the government laid down as being necessary, depending on where you graduated and your leaving examination results in Victoria. So I finished up as a cadet draughtsman and a cadet draughtsman with the PMG's Department was a protected industry and you couldn't join the services, Army, Navy or Air Force, unless you were selected for air crew. So I had to wait until there was an air crew intake before I could join and unfortunately there was a period when they didn't want air crew and so there was a gap of about six to twelve months, from memory, when there were no call-ups. Suddenly in January 1945 they re-opened the call-up, I applied, my name was down, and I was able to get out of being a cadet draughtsman and I went down for flying training, yes.

How old were you?

At that stage I was nineteen.

So then you entered Point Cook, I presume it was Point Cook, you did your initial training.

There's a bit of a gap there actually, Ken. I went down to Somers and did three months of initial training down there - got categorised as PNBW, Pilot Nav. Bombardier or Air Gunner - and then the Air Force suddenly decided they didn't want pilots, again, so they offered our particular course which was number 63 course, the opportunity to do Japanese. So because I had been doing Japanese part-time during Intermediate and Leaving at school, I took the opportunity and we went to Coogee Bay Hotel in Sydney and did twelve months Japanese course and then went on up to Japan as an interpreter. So it was after I'd been in Japan for about a year and a half that they suddenly re-opened the post-war flying training requirement and I applied for that, came down to Australia and was selected and went on to 1FTS [Flying Training School] in 1948. So there was

a gap between 1945 when I joined up and 1948 when I actually got back into Flying Training School.

> You've got rather unique experience there as a very highly qualified linguist and as a fighter pilot. I think you are unique in the Air Force.

Well, I might be unique but it was a lot of hard work (laughs). I think I've always had an inkling for or a desire to be involved in intelligence because really and truly an operational pilot doesn't fly without good intelligence on what the enemy aircraft capabilities are, what their total capabilities are on the ground and in the air. So I've always felt that pilots should know as much as they can possibly find out about the enemy aircraft before they actually go into operation, so I am wedded a little towards the intelligence field.

> What was your ambition when you started flying training? Could you see your way ahead or did you just want to qualify as a pilot?

You're a day to day existence man down at that age and that level. You just want to pass the next exam. You just want to get on to the next aircraft. You just want to be a better pilot. You want to learn more about it because flying is - because it's all three dimensional, Ken, and this is where I've had difficulty with a lot of my friends who are two dimensional on the ground. The three dimensional environment in the air is infinitely variable, so you never feel as though you ever know enough about flying. And because you don't know enough about it every day is another challenge. So you have no ambitions, you just have a desire to improve and learn more.

> How did you regard yourself as a pilot? - that's a difficult question to ask a fighter pilot.

I felt thoroughly competent for each successive stage and bearing in mind that sort of answer requires that you take almost your flying in sections. At the end of the Mustang phase, I considered myself a thoroughly competent operational Mustang pilot. And then you move on to the Meteors and you're not a thoroughly competent operational pilot because you've got a lot of new techniques and tactics to learn, so you gradually get to the point where you consider yourself competent on that aircraft. And then I got on to Sabres and I had to do a full conversion onto Sabres and it wasn't until I was about twelve months into the operational side of Sabres that I felt comfortable on them, and similarly on Mirages. I did the full three to six months' conversion on them and then you gradually

acquire more and more knowledge and by the end of the time you feel competent on Mirages. In summary, I feel a ... I've instructed, I've controlled, I've commanded an operational conversion unit, an operational training, I've been a squadron pilot. I've handled all sorts of missions day and night - high level, low level, against defended targets, against enemy aircraft - so I'd have to say I feel I'm a reasonably competent pilot.

Why choose the fighter stream as opposed to the multi-engine stream?

(Laughs). It won't do my multi-engine friends any great service for me to say that I believe it's more exhilarating to be a fighter pilot. I think fighter flying embraces the totality of flying, from the highest altitude to the lowest altitude, to high speed flight to hygiene manoeuvres, air to air tactics, air to ground tactics - the totality of it, whereas the multi-engine people tend to be a little more restricted in what they can do, basically because of the aircraft type, and certainly during World War II, the aircraft were not capable of hurtling themselves, or hurling themselves at the ground. They were designed to take off, fly at a certain altitude, drop their bombs and come back. Transport aircraft do exactly the same. They get air borne, fly to the target and land and they don't turn themselves upside-down and they don't gyrate and manoeuvre through the air at sort of four, five, six, seven G. So I just see that they occupy maybe between twenty and sixty per cent of the spectrum and the fighter pilot occupies the whole 100 per cent of the spectrum - more challenging, more exhilarating.

The V12 Mustang has always been a great favourite to onlookers. What about you as a pilot?

A lovely aircraft, a lovely aircraft, the Mustang. To hear them come back into the circuit with that little purr of a sound is enough to excite the heart. They're a great aircraft to fly.

Why is it such a good aircraft to fly?

It had a comfortable cockpit. When we got into the Meteor, the Meteor cockpit was very, very much restricted and tight. The Mustang cockpit was spacious; you could stretch your legs out in it. In fact if I didn't have the seat about half-way down in the actual cockpit, I couldn't reach full rudder pedal in case I needed full rudder at any particular time; so there was room to move. It handled nicely - bearing in mind, Ken, also that I moved on to Mustangs after I'd flown Wirraways and, of

course, this is like going up-market to F1-type cars as opposed to go-kart racing (laughs).

> We'll just continue on this point of comparison of aircraft. You've flown the Mirage extensively. What is the difference for a pilot between flying a high performance piston-engined aircraft to flying a Mirage?

Oh, I think the range of capability. The high performance piston aircraft doesn't go as high, it doesn't go as fast. It operates in a much more restricted environment than the Mirage - or than a high performance jet aircraft. The envelope of performance ... when you can fly to, say, 1.5 Mack[?] in a Mirage as opposed to fighting at anywhere between 350 and 450 knots in a Mustang, it's altogether different. It's the range of capabilities that, I think, the jet fighter has. Again, it's a further step along the line of aircraft capability.

> What about the sheer exhilaration of flying? For example, if we take the example of driving an old Aston-Martin[?] to driving a more sophisticated car like a Ferrari. What was the difference as far as you as the pilot simply flying the aircraft?

The actual flying of the aircraft. Of course, they take off by pulling back on the stick and you have a much faster speed for take-off in the jet aircraft than you do in the piston-engined aircraft. They turn, alerons[?], work the same way; rudder control is a little less utilised in the jet aircraft mainly because of the speed at which it goes but if you get right down to the low speed manoeuvring in a jet aircraft you have to use rudder as much as you do in piston-engined aircraft, be it a Wirraway, Tiger Moth or a Mustang. What happens, I think, is that because the jet aircraft goes that much faster and at times you're right down low you really have to be thinking and planning your activities ahead of where the aircraft is at that particular moment moreso than you ever had to do in the Mustang. The Mustang you could almost deal with the situation as you arrived at it. In the jet you had to be a way ahead of the aircraft otherwise you were going to get into a lot of trouble; the actual amount of air it took to manoeuvre in meant that you had to be planning - not that you took any different action to pull it up or to put it down or to turn it or anything else but if you weren't away that you were going to have to do it in advance, it was too late to be thinking of subtlety doing it at the right time.

> Just one more point on aircraft. What was your favourite aircraft?

Each one I flew at each particular time, Ken. I enjoyed every one of them from the Tiger Moth to the Mirage. I don't think I ever wanted to go backwards and let me say that when I came back from Korea I was actually given another ride in a Tiger Moth and that Tiger Moth I used to love that when I was flying it. When I got back after having flown Mustangs, the Tiger Moth was noisy slow and I'd been in the thing for about ten minutes and I'd hardly left the circuit area. No, I never ever wanted to go backwards in flying, Ken, but I thoroughly enjoyed each aircraft when I was on them because each was a separate challenge and in order to fly it to the degree that I wanted to be able to be capable on it that meant that I enjoyed it for that length of time I was on it and I just didn't think of any other aircraft at the time and I didn't want to compare it with any other aircraft.

Air Marshal, let's just continue along your career a bit. What did you know about the politics of Korea in the late 1940s, as a squadron pilot?

A great question. You could ask me that. You could ask any other squadron pilot of 77 Squadron. You could ask the intelligence officer. Anyone who was at Iwo Kuni[?] at the time I was there and I was there for six months before the war started. We knew absolutely nothing about Korea. Again, we tended to focus only on activities in and around Iwo Kuni air base and our odd trips to the American bases for GCA practice or for a weekend's diversion; but we knew absolutely nothing about Korea and in fact when the war started we plagued the intelligence officer for information on the North Korean air force and any information that he might have. He had absolutely nothing. We didn't even know the markings on their aircraft. We didn't even know the markings on the South Korean aircraft. We knew nothing about Korea until we made our first trip over there and had a look down at the muddy waters of the Nacton[?].

So you didn't even know anything about the performance of the Mig15?

Oh, we didn't know anything about the performance of the Mig15 right through the Mustang phase. The Mig15 was hardly ever mentioned but don't forget, of course, that we were involved in ground attack work for the Mustang phase and even though we in fact flew missions all the way up to and around the Arloo[?] River, the Mig15 was never, ever mentioned in briefings. So until we got on to our Meteors and until the Sabres had actually had a lot more contact - that's the American F86s - had had a lot more contact with the Mig, we didn't get any information fed into us for briefings for missions at all.

Can you go into a bit more depth about the preparation before you left Iwo Kuni to go up to Kimpow[?]? I presume it was Kimpow you were operating from.

We went to Kimpow, of course, when we took the Meteors up there, Ken, but very quickly .... When we first started on Mustangs we flew our missions from Iwo Kuni, usually a pre-dawn take-off, arriving at Korea at dawn and bearing in mind that the North Koreans virtually swept right down to what they call the Pusan[?] Perimeter which was Pusan, Tagoo[?] and Pohang[?], around the Nactong River. And so in the first and second months there and most of our work was in close support for the Army to stop the North Koreans crossing the Nactong and driving us out of Korea totally. We flew those missions from Iwo Kuni. We would land, re-arm, re-fuel at Tagoo and fly the remainder of the day and return to Iwo Kuni at night. Then after the Eighth Army had broken out from the Nactong, from the Pusan Perimeter, we moved over into Korea to a place called Pohand which was called K3 airfield. We operated our Mustangs there for about a month and then because the advance of the Eighth Army was going right up the peninsula - the Eighth Army on the west coast and the Tenth Marine Corps up the east coast - we were then able to relocated from Pohang up to Hamhung[?] which was on the fortieth parallel. So we then flew missions all the way up to the Arloo and covered the whole of the peninsula because it was all ours. The Chinese hadn't come in and there was no thought of them coming in at that particular stage. However, when they did come in and the Marines had to retreat, we flew out of Hamhung back to Pusan and we operated at Pusan until about March/April in 1951, roughly nine months after we'd started Mustang operations, until we withdrew from Pusan back to Iwo Kuni to convert on to the Meteors. So the part that you mentioned about going to Kimpow, was after we'd had three months of conversion on to the Meteors; we then moved as a squadron up to Kimpow. So all the Mustangs days were originally Iwo Kuni, Pohang, Hamhung, Pusan and then back to Iwo Kuni and then transitioned on to Meteors.

What about your lines of control? Did the Americans have the overall command?

Yes, we were part of Fifth Air Force and we were targeted through the Joint Operations Centre. We'd receive what they called a 'frag' order, Fragmentary Order, which would come in most times during the evening which would tell us how many aircraft we were to put on station the following day, what missions we were to fly, and what controllers we were to contact and then usually if, for instance, we were flying out of Iwo Kuni, we'd fly over to Korea, contact the JOC at Tagoo and be allocated a controller. We'd tell him how many aircraft we had, what the armament load was. He'd send us to a particular area where the ground situation was tight. We'd do our mission, finish the mission, report back into JOC, land at

Tagoo, re-arm and re-fuel for the remaining missions. So, yes, we were under American control because we were part of Fifth Air Force.

How did that work?

Easily, effectively. I've the greatest respect for the degree of close air control that they showed there in Korea in those early days. There was never any confusion. We went straight out to an air borne or a land controller. We flew the mission in support of the Army who were in pretty dire straits, I must admit, on the Nactong. There were seventeen-odd crossings by the North Korean army - seventeen attempted crossings of the Nactong which were thrown back for the Eighth Army, American Eighth Army, actually broke out and pushed north and met up with Macarthur[?] going in through Inchong[?] with the Marines. The Americans were wonderful and I could add a little anecdotal information here. And that is that at that stage most of us who'd graduated from the flying training school courses, we were still NCO pilots. The Americans wouldn't have a bar of that. As far as they were concerned we were meant to be commissioned because they only had commissioned pilots. So we actually flew with a little pilot officer stripe on our epaulettes and the Americans always gave us the greatest hospitality in their tents and the Officers' Mess but they wouldn't accept the fact that we were NCO air crew.

Was there very tight control over your missions or was a fairly free-ranging brief?

'Tight control over missions', wait till I see what exactly you mean by that, Ken. The Frag Order would detail the number of missions to be flown. We would arm the aircraft in accordance with the Frag Order. We would check in with the Joint Operations Centre who in turn would send us to a grid reference, to a controller. I'd say the control was very tight, particularly in the Pusan Perimeter days, where it had to be very tight because in fact we were taking off from Tagoo and as we were climbing up after take-off. We were contacting a controller and we were rolling straight in on the target after take-off; that's how close they were to the airfield at that stage. So under those circumstances control was very tight. Where we went out after the break out from the Pusan Perimeter, when we went on to interdiction[?] missions, it's a lot looser in interdiction. All you have there is an area of road or an area of ground to cover to hit any enemy targets that you can possibly find: vehicular, POL, or anything else. But you still had to check into the controller before you got on to the interdiction mission and you still had to report your results into the controller as you came out. So in general I'd say the control of missions was very tight. We didn't do anything for which we were not authorised.

For example, the majority of your work was ground strafing but if you happened to see an enemy aircraft, did you have a free ranging brief to say ...?

In the Mustang phase we never saw an enemy aircraft; the air was totally ours. We didn't see an enemy aircraft during the whole of the Mustang phase. Whether we could divert from our targets? In a close air support mission in support of the ground forces, no, we only hit those targets which the Forward Air Controller, the air borne one, or the ground Forward Air Controller, authorised us to hit and that was totally in support of the Army. If we were on a route reconnaissance looking for what they call targets of opportunity, we could hit anything we saw which we assessed as being a legitimate target. We dropped 500 pound bombs. We dropped 260 pound 'frag' bombs. We dropped Napalm. We fired rockets and we fired our fifty calibre guns. We could use any or all, whatever arrangement we wanted on any target at the pilot's discretion. If we were given a target, it was our discretion to chose which weapon we used on that particular target but we never hit targets in close air support situation which were not authorised by the Forward Air Controller, and on the interdiction missions we hit anything that we could find. As for enemy aircraft, no, not until we got onto Meteors did we see any enemy aircraft.

What about the quality of the Australian and American pilots? Sometimes the American pilots have been criticised because of their rigid training program. What's your opinion?

Ken, I've been asked that question many, many times. Let me say, and I say this unequivocally and I'd take up any challenge on this. The top American pilots were as good as anyone in the world but there is a big gap between their top pilots and their ordinary squadron level pilots. I believe our system because we get much more authority and responsibility at a much more junior rank than the Americans, mainly because we're only a small air force and they're a very large air force so they have to be more rigidly controlled by their manuals - what they can do and what they can't do, who can do what and under what circumstances. I believe we are a much more flexible outfit and more capable of being used in any particular role, right across the whole fighter pilot spectrum. The Americans tend to be a lot more rigidly restricted but make no mistake, their good pilots are very, very good. It's just that I think, a bit like my assessment of society in general, their top people in any stratum in America are very, very good, wonderful people, but then there's a big gap, there's no sort of middle level group before you get down to the bottom level and that applies also in the flying world. I don't know whether that answers your question on my assessment but I've a great respect for ... the ones that we met and flew with, a great respect for.

What was the morale like of the American and Australian air crews?

High. Morale wasn't even considered in those Mustang days up there, Ken. We were on top of the world. We were doing a job efficiently and effectively. We had an aircraft with a red, white and blue spinner out the front there and it was eagerly sought after by people on the ground who'd asked for the Australian squadron to provide support for them. I think we enjoyed a better reputation than the American squadrons in actual fact on close air support partly because we were better trained at that stage. We'd done a lot of close air support work in firing weapons prior to the Korean War starting, so we were, I think, a very efficient and operationally qualified squadron. The question of morale at no stage, and I was there for eighteen months, at no stage did the question of morale come up. I have a feeling that just as I was about leave the squadron in December 1951 that the question of morale was starting to become an issue, mainly because we were being hit by the Migs, we were not really tactically capable of fighting them at the altitude that we were at, and bearing in mind that we initially started off giving top cover to the F86s and they were shooting down the Migs at the rate of eight and ten to one and yet we were top cover for the F86s and yet we couldn't handled up there. The Meteor wouldn't turn. One of the things that gets me is that we listened to a lot of British propaganda that this was the best high altitude intercept fighter in the world and as a result of it we were given the job of flying top cover for the F86s but in fact we were quite incapable of performing in that particular altitude band. When the Meteor was flown at high speed without sprung alleron tabs it was ...

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

... without sprung alleron tabs it was like a rock trying to turn the thing and therefore we had no manoeuvrability of any usefulness against the Mig15 and I think at that stage the morale of the squadron was just starting to change slightly because for the first time we found we couldn't do what we were required to do. Now, we had to drop our altitude down from about 36,000 feet down to 25,000 feet and from 25,000 feet we flew in five legs, dropping 1,000 feet of height all the time down to 20,000 feet to keep our Mach[?] number up so that when we were down at that level below F86s I believe we were a match for the Mig15s but we didn't stay in that role long enough for us to be able to prove it and sadly we didn't have any fighter training tactics at that stage which were being taught in Australia and applied in Korea, so we had to make them up as we went because we were basically a ground attack squadron that had converted to a high level, high capability jet aircraft but

we didn't really understand fighter tactics. The Americans, on the other hand, had a lot of experience with the Mig15 and every time a pilot got five kills he went straight back to the States into a training role and all the new pilots coming out got the benefit of his experience. We didn't have any such system at all in ours. We didn't start to become a fighter versus fighter capable air force in my mind until around about the 1960 period when we started to get range capable Radar in our Sabre aircraft and a side-winder which we could use and we were able to develop air to air fighter tactics. I'd say around about the 1960s is when we came of age as a fighter air force in air to air role.

Why weren't the skills maintained after World War II then?

I think because most of the people had got out. I think the really good pilots, to my understanding, bearing in mind, Ken, that I was a pretty young pilot at that stage and I didn't really know who was in and who was not in. It seemed to me on reflection that those who stayed in were not really the skilful air to air pilots. A lot of them who had stayed in were very good on air to ground work but the amount of air to air work was extremely limited to my understanding and in fact we had no fighter tactics. We had what they call Set G1, G2, G3 type exercises which we used to do when we trained initially to get our wings on Wirraways which were ordinary set what they call quarter attacks and a little bit of line astern work on an aeroplane but we had no what we call 'two v two', two aircraft versus two aircraft, four aircraft versus four aircraft, one aircraft versus four aircraft, dissimilar aircraft tactics, we had none of that, none of that whatsoever. Where the people went to, I don't think they existed, I don't think they existed. If you bear in mind there was not really a lot of air to air combat flown in the actual fighter versus fighter world by the Australian pilots in the islands or over in Europe. The wealth of it would have been reconnaissance, air to ground, escort sort of work but not the intensity that we suddenly had in a set situation such as Korea where every mission was a confrontation with the Migs virtually and a wealth of experience was suddenly built up and particularly put into force into the American Air Force. Mind you, they refined all their tactics after World War II, too, and as a result of their Korean experience they became a very operationally qualified fighter versus fighter air force and we learned from the Americans but we didn't learn about 1960.

In retrospect would you be critical of the air force hierarchy for the lack of tactics which weren't developed and even the choice of aircraft, although you have got a bit of a soft spot for the Meteor?

I'd have to say, and I say this advisedly, when I and a few of my friends came through the fighter world, the early stage, one of the sad things about the hierarchy in the air force was that very, very few of them flew. Very, very few of them had flown in fact from the day they got their wings and the amount of operational capability in the hierarchy of the air force was very, very little. My friends and myself said that if we ever got to senior rank in the Air Force, one thing we would continue to do, we would fly and lead from the front, and that never, ever took place during my early days in the Air Force, nor in the Air Force that my friends were in, either.

> That's a very important point which I'll just briefly cover now. It's often felt in the Air Force that the people that reach the very top are often peace-time staff officers as opposed to operational officers, that people who are staff officers, they've gone through the staff route to reach the very senior ranks and have been very ambitious along those lines as opposed to the operational pilot who sees the operational side as more important in reaching the senior ranks. Would you like to make a comment?

I think that was very much so in the earlier days of the Air Force very, very much so. They were staff officers. They were qualified staff officers and they didn't really want to fly any more but the present generation, I think, is different. The present generation now, right up to my rank of Air Vice Marshal and I flew on Mirages before I actually left the Air Force. I flew as late as the January period before I left the Air Force in February. The Air Vice Marshals these days and the Air Commodores and the Group Captains, they are active flying people when they are in those senior responsible positions, that did not apply during the Air Force period that I knew it during the 1940s and the 1950s. For instance, at Williamtown - to give you an example - when I was instructing on Vampires there with the Operational Training Unit, the 2OTU, we would get someone come up from operational command or someone come up for Air Force office, Air Force headquarters, to do a quick trip on a Vampire. We'd declare something called purple airways. In other words, we wouldn't put another aircraft in the air for fear that he might hit it and we'd give him a briefing, put him in the aircraft, let him go up to 10,000 feet, come back and land and then he could go back to Air Force headquarters and say, 'Look, I'm a jet qualified pilot'. Rubbish! He didn't know anything about the operational aspects of flying these aircraft. As I say, my vintage of young post-war pilots were determined that whenever we got to senior rank, if we got to senior rank, we would never perpetuate that abysmal record.

> Just going back to Korea again. How do you view your particular operations, your particular flying and the work

you were given as a retired air marshal? Are you horrified or do you think that what you did at that time was appropriate in Korea?

What we did in operational there? I had no doubts in my mind, Ken. We had an enemy and we had to beat the enemy. Anything that we did up there was totally acceptable to my way of thinking. The armchair specialists these days say that you shouldn't drop this particular weapon, it's bad and everything else. When you're at war, you've got to win. The whole trouble with Vietnam was that we didn't go in with the desire to win. If we'd gone in with the desire to win we would have hit North Vietnam. If we'd gone in with the desire to win totally after the Chinese came in in Korea, we would have moved into Manchuria instead of giving the Mig15s, for instance, a safe haven right across, right across the Arloo River[?] at Antung[?]. We would actually be on patrol and watch these aircraft take off and get to height and when they got to a height which was higher than our height they'd cross over, they'd make their pass at us from the advantage of height and with speed and when they wanted to disengage they'd fly straight back over the Arloo River and just go back and land and we couldn't chase them. That to me is .... If you're going to be in a war like that, you shouldn't be in it. You either are in a war to win it, because people get cool in war and that's what is very, very irritating; we have to obey the rules of engagement at the time set by people who are quite comfortable way back in the rear areas but we're the ones who have got our necks out and we've got to watch these people operate from the sanctuary and we can do nothing about it. So do I have any regrets about what I did up in Korea, not in the slightest. My only regret was I didn't have more of it.

Did you ever drop Napalm?

Of course I dropped Napalm, and I dropped it effectively, and what's more I'd have dropped more if I'd have had more of it. To see the poor US marines up there in the Frozen Chosen[?] reservoir area in North Korea where they were over-run by a bunch of bugle-blowing Chinese and they were frost bitten, they were out-numbered and the only redress of that situation was to try to drop Napalm or fire your guns or fire your rockets in in order to redress the imbalance of numbers. Yes, if I'd have had more Napalm I'd have dropped it with pleasure. If you're at war, you're there to win, Ken, you're not there to 'Mickey Mouse' around really.

When it came to your opposition particularly in the air to air role, what did you get to know about your opposition? You knew some of the North Koreans, maybe even Chinese and possibly Russians.

Well, it was always a subject of some discussion in the crew room area after missions and before missions. We assumed the majority of pilots were Chinese. There was always one .... If I could just give you what my estimate of the situation was from Antung. I figured they were running a four-week training program there, operational training program. First week you'd see no aircraft come across the Arloo River for engagement. Second week there'd be one or two incursions into our air space but no actual engagement. Third week there'd be some sporadic engagements. Fourth week up to 160 aircraft would come across in waves for a flat-out engagement for the whole of the seven day period and then back to the week where nothing was happening again, so we felt that that was a four-week training cycle. When they actually got to the final four weeks there was usually one aircraft sitting up very, very high directing the efforts of these Mig15s down below and if there was the odd Allied straggler, this one aircraft would come down and pick it off and then go back up there again and we felt that he was probably a Russian pilot, an instructor, running the air war from a very safe altitude; whether that's so or not, that's the way we saw it at the time.

Did you respect your opposition in the air?

Oh yes, Ken, you respect them for their abilities in the air. You don't have any personal animosity towards them. You don't have any feeling against them whatsoever. If anything, you've got more of a feeling against the ground troops who are over-running your ground troops on the ground and causing a lot of bloodshed and loss. But up in the air it's a ethereal in a way, it's you versus them and they're just another aircraft with a capability and you're out there to neutralise that capability and to effectively destroy it if you can.

This is very interesting. There seems to be an international pilots' club that they all respect each other for the environment in which they fly. It's different to ground troops. There seems to be this mutual respect for anyone who ...

Because of my time and the fact that, I've mentioned before, I've done the Japanese course, I also did twelve months intensive Russian course and spent time with Russians over in Europe and in England and I've spoken to Russian pilots and I've spoken to Japanese pilots and they're all confronted with the same problem. They're charged with effectively defending their air space and if someone comes into it, they've got to get rid of the threat or neutralise the threat. They have the greatest respect for the capabilities of the aircraft and the people flying those aircraft; they don't have any animosity towards them. If anything, all their comments, both Russian and Japanese and certainly Australian and British, it's usually

directed towards the politicians who send us there. We don't go there voluntarily because it's our neck that's out, it's not the politician's neck who's out. We get sent there so why should we be embittered about the person who is actually flying the other aeroplane. It's a job. It's a challenge which we've got to overcome but if anything we will question why we are there and why we are not given the full authority to effectively win the war or win the engagement or win the local battle or whatever it is. There's always got to be some political direction but unfortunately the political direction is given by people who don't understand what the operational situation is.

That must make you a bit jaundiced towards politicians.

Certainly it does, why not? I mean, their neck is not out.

How did you feel when you were in Korea? You lost quite a number of friends. You mentioned the morale was quite low but how did you feel when you lost your mates?

I think you have to shut it off; you have to not have any feelings. You can't afford .... I mean if they've shot off your wing and you lose them .... You distance yourself from emotion, Ken, because otherwise you couldn't fly the next mission. If you're worrying about the fact that you've just lost a very, very good friend on the mission before - I know it sounds cold blooded but you do get like that. I know my wife, when I came back to Australia - I wasn't married then but when I came back to my present wife she said I'd changed. She said I was cold and ruthless and a totally different person to when I went away and that it needed months and months for me to unwind and become normal again. And that's, I think, in part the answer to what you just said: 'How do I feel?'. You can't afford to feel because it might be you next time so you've just got to get on with the job and make sure you do it efficiently.

What about now as a retired air marshal? Do you reflect back on those losses?

Not really, not really. What I reflect back on is the fact that we got an inadequate solution to the Korean war. I mean, we're still in a state of suspended hostilities up there. They're still meeting daily at Panwanjon[?] and we've had a cease-fire up there but we haven't had a peace and one wonders then whether it was all worth it. Bearing in mind that we had done what we had to do in the Mustangs when we got up to the Arloo River and we'd totally and completely neutralised the North Korean Army threat. When the Chinese came in it was a different war totally which was never resolved satisfactorily

even though they pulled out and left the north to the North Koreans and the Thirty-Eighth Parallel became the Thirty-Eighth Parallel again. So when you reflect was it worth it and do you think about those people, I think what we do is, yeah, I remember, I remember all of them very vividly and you remember the good times you had with them when they were alive. They don't seem as though they're dead, they're just not presently around with you to talk with but you don't remember necessarily the circumstances under which they got killed or burnt or something else there. You just remember them as they were on a course or how they were when they were at Iwo Kuni or in the Squadron Mess or somewhere else.

> Just reflecting back, if you were running the war in Korea, what would you have done? Would you have done it any differently to the way Macarthur[?] ran it?

I have the greatest admiration for Macarthur. I was there in 1946 in Japan when Macarthur went in there and he was the ideal person in my mind - my young mind at that stage, and I've not changed it since - he was the ideal person because he was a man of positive decision and I think if you're going to run a way you've got to have a decision-maker who will be right sometimes and wrong sometimes and you hope that he's right more times than he is wrong. I think Macarthur ran the war very efficiently. I think his landing at Inchon[?] was absolutely great and when he sent the Marines around and landed at Wonsan[?] on the east coast, I think that was great. And the war right up to the Arloo was very effectively done and I wouldn't have done it any differently. I think he was very constrained from then on as to what he could do. You'd be aware that he wanted to go over and hit the bases in Manchuria from where ...

> The Chinese knew that through intelligence that there'd be no attack on China.

My understanding is yes, either Burgess or McLean who were in the British Embassy over in Washington had access to this information and had passed this to the Chinese or had passed it to the Russians who, in turn, passed it to the Chinese. So they were secure, I'm pretty certain, in their minds that if they came over the border they would not risk retaliation against their own bases, and I think that emasculated Macarthur's ability really and it's no wonder that there was this confrontation between him and Truman and he lost, of course. But I think the adulation heaped on him and the ticker tape parade that he got when he went back to the States plus his farewell address in the Congress were indicative of the fact that he was a widely and vastly respected person for his abilities.

Just recalling that time, at the cessation of conflict what was your feeling and your fellow squadron pilots'?

Well, of course, at the cessation - wait, till I think. When was the cessation, Ken? That would have been 1954. I think it was 1954 and I was instructing back at OTU at that stage. I was either there or I was just about to leave and go elsewhere. I don't think I was back in Australia when the Meteors came back home for their trip around. I must admit I had thought that the war was finished. I hadn't given it much thought but it was only later that I found that it had anything but finished; it was still the subject of these interminable discussions going nowhere and accusation, counter-accusation up at Panwanjon and a stand-off situation. I think in general, but I can't remember specifically, I would have been very happy that the war had been concluded. I would have been a bit disappointed that it hadn't been concluded other than across the Thirty-Eighth Parallel where it had all started and that we'd gained absolutely nothing, that the lesson that the North Koreans should have learned and did learn up to where we got to the Arloo River was being totally negated by the fact that the Chinese had come back in, but I can't really recall any specific thought but I'm sure they would have been along those lines.

The interpretation of some academics does still rankle you, doesn't it?

Yes, it does. Particularly when they've got the hide to say that air power was ineffective. I mean, there wouldn't have been a Korean war, it couldn't have continued had we not held the Nacton[?] and the Pousan[?] Perimeter area. Air power alone threw back all those attacks and allowed the Eighth Army to break out and for someone to say that air power was non-effective means that they are looking at the war from the moment the Meteors went in and the Chinese came in and we were basically ineffectual because we could not cut off the supplies which continued to come from the sanctuary on the other side of the Arloo River. And they ran into the same problem in Vietnam; they couldn't cut off the supplies because they wouldn't go to where the supplies were being originated. So yes, it does rankle me when I hear some of these armchair specialists say that air power was ineffectual up in Korea. For the first phase, up till when the Chinese came in, air power was totally effective, have no doubts about that, Ken.

What did the RAAF learn from Korea?

That we needed to get into the air to air combat business very, very quickly and effectively. We sent people to America on exchange postings. We brought back their fighter to fighter

training tactics. We applied them at OCU and gradually, gradually from about 1960 onwards we started to become a proficient air force which we are now. That was our greatest lesson. We never really had any worries about our ability to apply ourselves in an air to ground role, but air to air we were certainly weak but no longer.

So you felt as though those weaknesses were corrected.

Without question they were corrected, yep, they were corrected. If you go to the Red Flag missions now or any of the missions that the fighter pilots currently fly, they hold their own against any of these sophisticated ground defences or any of the sophisticated air to air defences, for sure. Ken, look, there is one other point I would like to make about Korea, I think might give a little better perspective to it. You've asked questions about Napalm and my feelings of attacks - do I have any strange feelings about what I did up there? The answer was no, but the point is, we didn't start the war and I'd like people to know that. We didn't start the war, we were responding to an aggression. The North Koreans advanced ruthlessly and without notice over the Thirty-Eighth Parallel. We went in in response to that. They had the advantage in every way and whatever we could do to redress that imbalance we did and I only wish that we had more at the time, which was what I was saying in my explanation of the use of Napalm.

It must have been with great pride when you fronted at Government House with some contemporaries of yours to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross?

Oh yes, it was, quite obviously. It was a surprise. Yes, I was there with Bay Adams[?] and Ken McLeod[?]. I guess anyone in the squadron who had completed his missions should have been and could have been awarded a DFC. Basically it's a recognition for a job that's, I suppose in the eyes of the CO, well done. But yeah, I was very proud. I'm still not quite certain why I got it but nevertheless I wear it and always have worn it with pride.

Life must have seemed a bit dull after Korea.

(Laughs). No, Ken, no. I don't look backwards, I look forwards. I did a twelve months' intensive course of Russian down at the Air Force language school at Point Cook. It was anything but dull. We were working from eight in the morning till five at night and two and a half hours every evening for compulsory night study. I didn't have time to think of Korea, I was busy wrestling with Russian grammar. No, I just take every day as it comes and I find that that challenge is enough

to keep me inspired. I've always felt that if you can leave a job a little better for having been in it then you've responded to the challenge and you get your own excitement out of that, but to continually look back, no, I don't ever do that. That's past, that's history.

You were rather unique being a Russian and Japanese linguist and a fighter pilot.

I suppose you could say that, yes (laughs). As I said earlier though, I do believe that pilots should be aware of the intelligence input into what in actual fact will be the basis for the development of their tactics. Intelligence gives them all that information. I mean, there's a wealth of source material that we get from a variety of means which allows us to assess the capabilities of a potential enemy and the pilot should know how that information is gathered and should be able to use it. So I have always been a keen advocate of a secondary duty for a fighter pilot, in particular, as being intelligence. I've always advocated that but it's always fallen on deaf ears.

Now, the practical application of Russian went through an interesting intermediary stage when you were sent to Paris to live with a Russian family.

Yes, I should mention that the RAF had a Russian training course going also and part of their post-graduate work when they finished their twelve months of intensive training was to go to Paris for six months with a Russian family and then go on to the British Embassy in Moscow or to an intelligence unit in Germany with second TAF[?]. I picked up the same system. I went and lived with a Russian family for six months, went to an intelligence unit, a signals unit, on the eastern side of German with second TAF, and in fact finished there and came back and did a further three months' Russian course - intensive Russian course, I might say - to qualify me for the Civil Service Commission interpreter examination in the Joint Services language school at Crale[?] in Scotland. So the two years I spent over in France and Europe were very, very productive in terms of language ability and in terms of intelligence training.

Because of the Cold War you became a fairly valuable commodity.

Did I? (Laughs).

Do you feel as though the Air Force used those talents?

No, I think most of that was self-motivated. I regret to say I don't think our Air Force was aware of what they could do with a person who was flying-trained and intelligence-trained. I think most of the initiative, and I say this unreservedly for my particular training, came from myself. People had to be convinced that it was for the good of the Air Force that I did certain training because they were very stereotyped in what they thought should be the normal course of training. And as for a fighter pilot doing any language training or being involved in intelligence work, that was rather an anathema to them. But with time, I must admit, that some of them did become convinced that it was of value.

Did you ever feel as though the KGB took an interest in your activities?

Very possibly (laughs). No, I think I'd be too in...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Did you ever feel as though the KGB took an interest in your activities?

Very possibly (laughs). No, I think I'd be too insignificant for the KGB, but I do .... When I was the Defence and Air Attaché up in Tokyo, I developed quite a warm and friendly association with the Russian Attaché. He was an army chap and he was obviously a professional intelligence officer - been there for eleven years, spoke very fluent Japanese and Russian but no English. I helped him out occasionally by interpreting for him when English was required. I had many a long talk with him. I don't think he ever passed my name onto the KGB but I did find out quite a lot about the Soviet Union and their methods, all of which obviously was passed back to our intelligence people in Australia.

Were they worried about you talking to the Russian Attaché?

'They' being the Air Force? - yes, I think they were. I think had I not had the credentials of being a Russian linguist with an untarnished reputation as a fighter pilot, I think they might have been a little worried but I faithfully reported every meeting that I had and I think eventually they decided that I was mature enough to be allowed to operate on my own. I'd had a period also of two years with the Joint Intelligence

staff. I'd had a period of two years with the Defence Signals Branch down in Melbourne, so I was not a novitiate in the intelligence world. I was as well trained in intelligence as I was in the fighter flying capacity and so I think that probably allowed them not to look at me with any suspicion.

Did you and the Russian ever joke about the fact that you both knew you were going back to report your conversations?

Oh yes, oh yes, it's a professional world. I mean, I remember we went on a trip once down to Hiroshima, in Japan, and I was talking to the Russian and he suddenly took me aside and he pointed to a Japanese who was working around in the garden outside, and he said, 'Look at that Japanese. He's been following me particularly ever since we've left Tokyo'. I said, 'But you do the same to the attachés over in Moscow'. He said, 'But we follow all of them over there' (laughs). He looked at me for a while and he burst out laughing and he said, 'Yes, we do'. I said, 'That's why they're following you here, in retaliation'. Rather friendly. We had another occasion when I was talking to the Russian and the Israeli Attaché - the army chap who'd been hit very badly, actually, up in the Gollan Heights and was bitter about the Russians - came up and the Israeli and I were very friendly and he said 'good evening' to me and I said, 'Good evening, Mushi[?]', and he just ignored the Russian and worked away. And the Russian said, 'It's sad, really, just because we're in Egypt helping the Egyptians, I wonder why he can't just sort of pass the normal courtesies of the evening with me' (laughs). So yeah, they have a sense of humour.

It seems to be essential; you've got to have a sense of humour in that sort of environment.

I think so. You professionally report. Everyone professionally reports. Attaché work is quite openly information and intelligence gathering; there's nothing clandestine about it, there's no covert work involved. It's just a question of reporting on the capabilities, in my instance, of what the Japanese Army, Navy, Air Force were doing and similarly the Russians reporting the same information back to Russia. The fact that we had our little exchanges on the side were a little bit of the 'hors d'oeuvres', I suppose.

Were you amazed at the rapidity with which the Soviet block opened up?

That's a good question, Ken. I think I was. I think I was and I think it was very close to not opening up. I think that some

of the stances taken were very courageous stances, over there, which forced it, but .... It's a large, complex country to try to evaluate and I couldn't even hope to. At the Joint Services language school that I mentioned that I was at in Scotland, we had about sixty Russian instructors there, about forty of whom were ex-Soviet military personnel who'd been freed by the British in Europe at the end of World War II and had come across to live in England. They were cold, hard, ruthless Soviet personnel who were now in England. I remember talking to one of them one evening and him saying that he couldn't understand this rather liberal democracy that was a way of life in England. He said, 'We would not tolerate that over in Russia'. And I said, 'Well, why aren't you back there in Russia, enjoying it?'. He said, 'Because I like the life here better'. That dichotomy of viewpoint is quite fascinating, but you've got to actually talk to the people and hear it from their mouths to realise that they are a total mixture. There are certain facets of that strict communist controlled authoritarian society which they like and certain parts which they don't like, and to know which they prefer is interesting. I'd have to say that I've drunk a lot of vodka and I've enjoyed the company of the Russians that I've met and that I find, as I've mentioned, on the flying side they are no different in their attitudes to life and living than we are, and we seem to get into these interminable, unresolvable situations because someone gets his political nose out of joint and needs to prove a point. I believe the military can co-exist country to country.

> Just talking on that Russian aspect, it was only in 1991 or '92 that Air Marshal Fennel[?] became the first western pilot to fly in a Supoid 27[?].

So I believe, yes, so I believe.

> That was quite an extraordinary change.

Yes. Yes, I think in general, I was surprised that the split was so comprehensive and so rapid. By the same token I would also have to say that beneath the surface there are, I would believe, many, many fine Russian people who would just like to live a normal sort of life. I met the pre-1917 revolution Russians in my time in Paris and to me they had their loves and their hates and their interests just as much and as widely as we had.

> It is [inaudible] aspect because when you travel it's always the same - people just have very similar interests and ambitions, yet going up towards the top it seems to get filtered and polluted.

They seem to get into positions that they say can't reverse; for what purpose, I don't know; whether it's a question of their personality or whether they it's their pride, I don't know. But what you can forgive and forget and accept when you're at a lower level, doesn't seem to be the case when you get to a higher level somehow or other. People are not ready to forgive and not ready to apologise and therefore they get more and more firmly entrenched in their viewpoint until they get to the stage where they just can't back out with grace it seems and I think that's stupid.

Their ego gets in the way.

Certainly their ego gets in the way, yes - certainly their ego gets in the way. I'd have to say I've met some fine Japanese and I've met some fine Russians as a result of my language background and, interestingly enough, when I was a young sergeant interpreter in Japan in 1946 and '47, I did meet some of the Japanese farmers in the country who were totally destitute of clothing and food and everything else but who were quite warm in their acceptance of us as the Occupation Force. Now, when I came back at the end of 1947 I, perhaps, very foolishly said that I'd met some fine Japanese people - some warm-hearted Japanese, sincere Japanese people. I can assure you the end of 1947 was the wrong time to be making that statement in Australia. Nevertheless, I made it then and I make it now. People have got to be a little more understanding. By all means crucify the guilty but don't necessarily apply that as a general rule to everyone because everyone is not the same in any country. Sorry, I didn't mean to get that serious but I feel these things - that a lot of these decisions and a lot of these comments are made by people who have no contact with the majority of people in another country and who are too ready to generalise and not be specific.

Were you ever tempted to enter politics?

Not really, Ken, no. No, I would consider that to be unrewarding. Let me say I've had a most rewarding and challenging, interesting, absorbing, fruitful life in the Air Force and I wouldn't have changed that for anything.

Just go back again to get back to flying, what was your next foray into that activity? Was it Woomera, when you were sent down by Bay Adams[?] to look at ...?

Yes, when I came back from my Russian experience overseas I was sent to Woomera. I was given to understand by Bay Adams, who was in Postings at that stage, that they had a problem with the

target aircraft over there and they were wanting it resolved and they felt that I could perhaps achieve that. I'd like to think that I did. We cut down the number of Jindivick[?] accidents markedly during my time at Woomera. We got the target Meteor into a very, very effective flying situation and we got to the stage where we were running three trials a day: one in the morning, one at lunch-time, and one in the afternoon, and that for the amount of activity at the range-head was exceptional.

You had an interesting experience with the Meteor when you flew it without touching the controls.

Yes, I did. Bear in mind that this was 1957 and as a fighter pilot, of course, we were not onto radio control, we not onto telemetry, we were not onto auto-pilot, but all these things were part and parcel of the target Meteor, the U Mark 15[?] Meteor, which was at Woomera. But as I taxied a Meteor out there one day, lined it up on the strip, folded my arms and from then on everything was automatic. The throttles were advanced by a signal. The aircraft was kept straight for the take-off down the runway. It was climbed up to 40 000 feet. It flew a racetrack pattern, the same as it would have done had it been under the range control for a missile firing. It was brought back into the circuit area. It was picked up by the directional controller. It was brought round on a circuit. It was flown down the glide path. A signal was sent to it to electrically close the throttles and cut off the fuel. A series of up signals were sent to it. It landed on the runway. Brakes came on automatically and it stopped and I was still sitting in the cockpit with my arms folded. Obviously I had the option at any stage to override the controls had there been a signal acted upon wrongly but I had no requirement to touch that Meteor for the whole of a one-hour flight.

As a fighter pilot it must have been very difficult not to [inaudible] the final approach.

Obviously you sit there and you make sure that everything is within tolerance. The speed has got to be right, the height has got to be right, you've got to be satisfied that it's within your acceptable parameters, then if it is - well, really, it's no different to sitting there as an instructor, say, at OCU, and you're putting a pilot through his first landing in a Mirage, for instance. You set there and you monitor, or in a Vampire or any other aircraft where you fly dual.

That's remarkable for 1957.

I think so, Ken, yes, I think it was. That plus Jindivick was a magnificent aircraft, it really was. To see that little thing take off from the trolley and climb up to height and come back. We had a couple of instances where 'Jindy' went a bit awry. For instance, we lost the role control on it one day and we couldn't turn the thing around and it just went out of radio control range and we thought it had crashed a little bit away from Coolimilka[?] or a little bit away from the range at Woomera. In actual fact, it flew all the way down to Port Augusta and landed in a farmyard back yard. So from then on the government aircraft factory, the GAF people and ARL, came across to Woomera and put in an automatic destruct signal that we could double jump the transmitters and send this signal to the aircraft which would give it a nose-down signal and it would crash immediately rather than jeopardise some farmer down in Port Augusta. We had a fully loaded Meteor that lost role control one day, too, and nearly dived into the Mess at the little settlement at Coolimilka. We had our problems but in the main it was, again, another fun-filled, challenging period.

Why do you call the Jindivick an aircraft?

Well, it was. It had an engine, wings, tail, fuselage and it responded to up, down, left, right and increase speed and decrease speed signals. It was an aircraft. It was a magnificent target aircraft. We sold it to the Swedes and we sold it to the Americans, and I think .... You've just reminded me, Ken. When I was the Attaché in Tokyo, I'd been instrumental in getting a lot of enthusiasm on the part of Marabene[?], one of the big organisations up there, to perhaps take over the production of Jindivick for the Japanese military and as a result, the Department of Supply sent one person up with a little briefcase of notes to give a presentation on the capabilities of Jindivick. This will show you how naive we were in marketing and export orientation. One man went into an audience of about fifteen of the top Marabene people, including their president. No slides, no other presentation than a verbal presentation and a bunch of notes. Ryan Firebee[?] sent over about twenty people with a very, very slick presentation and the Ryan Firebee was sold to the Japanese military and there was another sale that we could have had, had we known how to market our product overseas. I wrote back, quite obviously, very strongly to the Department of Defence to point out this anomaly but I don't think it changed the Department of Supply's activities very much.

Just as a little aside, who flew the pilotless aircraft? Was it actually flown by a pilot - the Meteor and the Jindivick?

Every Meteor was flown on a proving flight by a pilot. Obviously when it went up as a target, it went up as an

unmanned target aircraft, but proving flights were flown by myself or whoever happened to be the senior pilot there at the time. Jindivick was a proven aircraft by the time I got there. Previously it had been the Parker[?] and it was flown unmanned by both Fred Barnes[?] and Fred Knudsen[?]. Sorry, flown in its proving set-up by Fred Knudsen and Fred Barnes but certainly not by me; it was a proven concept in the unmanned situation by the time I got there.

On the ground when you were flying this aircraft without a pilot, did it actually have a joystick on the ground that you operated or a little throttle or how did it work?

We had what was known as a skipper's position, a major console position, over in our flight hut where, for instance, if I was skipper, I would control all the activities and delegate control to two positions on the field, one called a pilot position who monitored the actual take-off run, the speed, the clearance from the trolley and the final landing approach and touchdown. Then another position which we called a batsman, who sat at the end of the strip and controlled the aircraft in azimuth, left and right. So we had one controlling direction and speed and one controlling azimuth. The aircraft was then passed out of control of the tight airfield to a navigator who was up at the range head and he then took the aircraft after it was airborne and put it onto a racetrack to meet the range missile requirements. In the meantime, I would be sitting at the skipper's desk, controlling all this through a Radar screen and through all my instrumentation which was a duplicate of the instrumentation in the aircraft: height, speed and all those other relevant pieces of information. Then when it was finished on the racetrack up there, it would come back into the airfield. As soon as the batsman could see it, he would take over azimuth control again. I would still be controlling the speed and the attitude of the aircraft until such time as it got down-wind and the pilot took over - the other person monitoring by the side of the runway - and he would bring it round on base on final and touch it down and land it.

Fascinating procedure.

Oh, I've never really had a desire to fly any other remote control aircraft since then because, once again, I'd be going backwards if I did. The ultimate model aircraft, Ken, too true.

Air Marshal, it was 1961 before you actually physically went flying again, when you became 8 Flight Commander with 77 Squadron at Butterworth. I presume flying Sabres.

That's correct. I'd done a refresher course down in Sale on Vampires to get my instrument rating back again because I'd been off flying effectively for four or five years, really. And then I went up to Butterworth and that was the start, I believe, of an absolutely enjoyable two and a half years where 77 Squadron and 3 Squadron - we had a ranging capability in our Radar, we had side-winders on our aircraft, we fleshed out offensive and defensive missile tactics such as they'd never been fleshed out in the Air Force before. I think those two and a half years in Malaya saw the real start of air combat proficiency in the Australian Air Force.

> Where did you see the dangers when you were in Malaysia during that period? Were there any physical dangers being presented politically?

Not really, obviously they were still conducting anti-terrorist activities against the guerillas but basically those guerillas were on the other side of the Thai border at that stage, with minor incursions back into Malaysia or Malaya as it was then. No, it was relatively safe and stable. It was during that period, of course, that two things happened which removed a little bit of the instability. SEATO decided they wanted to send an Australian component up to the Ubon[?], Thailand. The 'Brits' went in up to Chengmai[?], the Americans were in at Karaten[?] and Tarklee[?] and Udorn[?]. But that was in 1962 so there was a perceived instability in the SEATO area, particularly as it related to a potential threat from Laos coming into Thailand, which was what our reaction was in sending aircraft up to Ubon. Later on, which would have been the end of 1963, as I was due to come back from Malaya, the confrontation started up, so, yes, there was that instability from Indonesia point of view but I didn't really see any of that because I came back home at that time. I was heavily involved in the initial move up to Ubon when we took eight aircraft from 77 Squadron, reformed as 79 Squadron down at Tanga[?], and flew up to 'Tent City' in Ubon in June 1962.

> You were a young, very experienced squadron leader fighter pilot. Where did you see your career going at that stage?

Well, that's another fascinating question. I guess we were of the time period when we weren't looking to see where our careers were going, Ken. We were deeply, intimately and on a daily basis involved with refining fighter tactics and our whole mission was to make the Air Force more proficient in the fighter world and we really didn't give any time or any thought or any consideration, either in private conversations over drinks or when we were in the squadron, to what our future was. We were totally and wholly interested in making the Air Force better at our level.

The reality is now - certainly it would apply to fighter squadrons and the transport squadrons - young pilots talk about leaving the Air Force and flying multi-engined aircraft for civilian organisations.

Ken, I think it's sad. I really do think it's sad. We were never that way inclined. We had a job, we got on with it, we tried to, as I said before, leave it better for us having been there. There was always room for improvement, be it the administrative side of the job or the personnel side of it or the flying side of it and we never worried where we were going. I guess we expected that we would go if we were doing our job efficiently and that we wouldn't go if we didn't do our job efficiently. I think it's sad that kids these days are not motivated with the same motivation that we had. We lived and breathed Air Force.

Why is this difference in commitment? You can reflect you're retired, you were Chief of Air Force Personnel. Why is this different? Is it community standards?

That would have to be a wide range of influences going back to the family where .... We grew up in tight families where you didn't look to see what your future was going to be, you were a loyal, devoted member of the family; you gave and you received. When we were at school we were in a disciplined environment; we didn't resent teachers giving us the strap or canes because we deserved it. If you broke into an orchard and pinched some peaches, you expected to get a foot in the rear by the local policeman, but you were basically decent citizens of the community. And if you did well, it was because you knuckled down, applied yourself at school, that you did your job as well as you could do it and you got your due reward in the end but you were not looking to plan yourself a career, really. What the difference is now, I don't really know. I feel a bit sorry for some of the extraneous influences that kids have got on now. We made our own entertainment in those days. We made our enjoyment. We created games. We were active. We were physically and mentally fit. We didn't spend all day watching a television set. We didn't spend all day griping about society and masters and parental authority or anything else. We got on with our job and did it. I don't know whether that answers your question, but I see it as a bit of a sad indictment these days that parents are not controlling children the way we were controlled. We're not any worse for having been controlled. I'm not any worse for having been brought into line at school. I'm not any worse for having had to pass formal examinations at which I was marked and graded and where we were competitive. I believe that disciplined society may in the long run have to come back in some form or other, Ken.

Let me pose it from a different angle, taking it from the Air Force side. That the very close-knit family that the Air Force experienced when you were a young fighter pilot doesn't seem to be apparent any more.

That's correct. It doesn't because firstly, they're getting too much money, secondly they've now got homes as single men outside the service airmen's, corporals', sergeants' and officers' messes whereas all our life because we couldn't afford to live anywhere else, was spent in the messes. We finished work and we came in and we socialised with each other and we shared our problems together so that it was a big family, the Air Force. Now, you can go to an Air Force mess and you won't find people in there after five o'clock at night. Well, if you've got no concern for how your fellow man is getting on and no worry about his problems, you don't really share with him the empathy that you need in order to be an efficient Air Force from eight to five during working hours. We had that advantage, they don't have it these days.

Did you see those changes being made as you progressed from squadron leader up to an air vice marshal in your time in the service? Or do you feel as though by the time you got to Air Vice Marshal and took over Support Command you'd become too detached?

I know you don't say that in an accusatory fashion. I guess all vice air marshals who become AOCs are looked upon as becoming detached. I used to value the trips out to the bases. Quite obviously I valued them very much because I'd go to the Corporals' Club, go the Airmen's Mess and I'd sit down there and talk to them. I'd talk to them on any subject at any time. I didn't feel that I was detached, but I suppose in a way the more senior you become you tend to have to spend a little more time in the office and look as though you are detached, but I never lost that attachment for the rest of the Air Force. Did I see that sort of situation arising? No, I think I was fortunate, Ken, because I left in end of January 1982 and I don't quite think the erosion had set in. Maybe some of the seeds of the erosion had set in, of people living off the base and having no real interest in other people who were working on the base. But I think up until when I left there was still quite a lot of solid, active mess life. But the sort of thing that we took for granted like, for instance, a mess dining-in night which had a long history through the wartime period and through the pre-war, World War II, period, which everyone knew the protocol of that. Now, people have to read it up, read about it to find out what they're supposed to do and it becomes artificial. It was rather like a dining-in night that you'd see in the American mess where they'd read all about how the British did it and so therefore they'd brought out a manual on how to run a dining-in night and then it became totally artificial because at such-and-such a stage you were supposed

to get up and ask a certain question. There was no informality, there was no genuine response to a very active social situation. So I guess the changes have been gradual. They've not been stopped as they were coming in. I think some of the senior people, perhaps, didn't address the problem as closely as they should have. I think even if they had've addressed the problems, I don't think they got the political support which they would have needed in order to apply the disciplinary measures which were absolutely necessary to run an organisation like the Air Force. There has to be discipline but if the outside society has already done away with discipline; if it's taken away the authority of the teachers as it's taken away at the schools; if it's taken away the authority of the parents as it's taken away; if it's taken away the authority of the boss at work in a business and a commercial set up, then how can the Air Force apply a totally different set of standards there and expect that there won't be complaints which will be supported by the civilian side outside. And that's where I think part of the difficulty has come into running the Air Force now is that there are a lot of extraneous, totally false, totally wrong pressures coming from outside as to how to run our Air Force to meet what will be a totally demanding situation in any operational environment.

> Following on from that point, following the Tange[?] Report when they started to build up this burgeoning defence area, what was your feelings when they split up the three Departments of Air, Army and Navy and really brought them under one defence structure and really, probably, weakened the RAAF independence?

Ken, it's really just a little difficult to generalise again on that particular subject. There are always, people will say, economies of scale, there's always a need to centralise. All I can is that most times when you centralise you lose a key operational efficiency. If you can't afford to have these separate compartments, then maybe the answer is to centralise but you will lose effectiveness after you've centralised. Every time we tried to take an independent squadron and create a centralised maintenance organisation for it and a centralised wing concept, and then suddenly, as in the case of Ubon, we wanted to deploy a squadron from Butterworth in Malaya, where were our people going to come from. They had to come from this centralised organisation. They had no squadron allegiance. You then weakened the central organisation and you created a weak squadron organisation which had to be built up into an operationally efficient organisation. I've seen this move from independent squadrons back into a wing and centralised concept, back into an independent squadron, back into a wing and centralised concept, again. Every time you try to save money, every time you try to economise you go for centralisation, and all centralisation does is cut down your efficiency. And if you ask me, what about the three services? What you've done is

you've produced a resultant inefficiency in the three individual services for the sake of having a glorified centralised paper shuffling, bureaucratic system down in Canberra.

> What about the emasculation of the Chief of the Air Staff's position, who really is now a titular head because the Air Commander now is directly responsible to the Chief of Defence Forces?

I can't really comment on that, Ken, because that occurred way after I got out and up here we tend to be a little remote from what's happening. We don't see very much in the newspapers, we don't hear very much over the air. We've gone to the American system quite obviously where there is a devolution of control. To the extent that I see it, I would have to agree with the way it's been done. I believe there ought to be a commander tactical fighter and transport, maritime and those things. I don't believe the CAS should be doing other than being the intermediary with the Minister and with the Secretary of the Department of Defence. I think I agree with all that concept as long as when we do get into an operational situation, full authority is given to the Commander Tactical Fighter forces and he doesn't have to go cap in hand back and answer all the time to CAS or anyone else that's back in Canberra, that he's given authority and financial delegation to control the resources that he gets out at the fighter and the operational end. The Americans did this classically in 'Desert Storm' by their Chief of Air Staff or Chief of the Defence Force staff delegating that authority out and letting the war be run, as it ought to be run in a very efficient manner and successfully. I don't really know enough about the situation to comment on it, Ken. I have sort of vague thoughts. I think they've gone the right way. I don't believe everything about the American system is right nor necessarily applicable to an Australian air force which is a much smaller, tighter and should be more flexible outfit and I would hate to see us get swamped with paper and reporting such as the American Air Force is swamped right now. Whether that's happening or not, I don't really know, Ken, because I don't have a close contact with it.

> From the rank of squadron leader where do you see the highlights of your career? - from there till you retired as an Air Vice Marshal.

(Laughs). You'll have to stop me smirking all the time but I keep saying that every step was a highlight, Ken. I enjoyed every position I was in. A Flight Commander was great. When I had temporary CO of 77 Squadron it was great. When I was in the Joint Intelligence staff it was great. When I went to America as the Intelligence Staff Officer and did the Armed Forces Staff College, Wing Commander was a great rank. Group

Captain or Wing Commander was the CO of 2OCU was wonderful. Air Attaché in Tokyo was another wonderful, strange world. Air Commodore and OC Air Base Butterworth - wonderful. DGOR was great. I haven't had a dull moment, Ken. I have no regrets at any rank that I've had. Highlights - every rank was a highlight. Every posting was a highlight because it is such an infinitely variable forestructure[?], the Air Force. There is something strange going on all the time, something new. If you're there to learn, it's wonderfully challenging and I just felt excited at the thought of every rank that I had, really.

What would you have changed in your career?

Not a thing. Not a thing. And let me just say also one thing. We didn't earn much money, and you'd be aware of that. We went through primitive housing with the 'toot' out in the backyard and with no heating and a nine and a half square/ten square houses that we came back to, and we put up with all that. And the wives were absolutely magnificent in their support of the people. And we didn't bitch about it, we got on with our job, but we had the mess life as a compensation. As I say, we had the value of a close community family environment where everyone shared everyone else's problems in the Air Force. I wouldn't have changed any of it. We didn't get well paid but we had a tremendously interesting life, and you got out of it what you put into it. If you didn't work you really didn't get promoted and the promotion system we had in the Air Force, I think, was excellent. People got promoted on ability and they had to show in their new jobs that they were prepared to learn and apply, and I think if you did all that you could expect a just reward from the Air Force life.

Were you disappointed you didn't make Chief of the Air Staff?

No, I'd have liked to have made it, quite obviously, as I think every person who gets to Air Vice Marshal rank would but that's the luck of the game there. That's a question of what age you are, who's available. When Dave Evans was always going to be that one year senior to me and by the time he'd done his time as CAS, I would have been due for resignations or retirement from the Air Force, so, no. That's the other point. I don't see any envy among the senior people at someone getting a job and someone not getting a job. We all realised that you have to be of a certain age. We've all filled the squares in. We've all got the background experience. We could all do the job but there can only be one and he's the one who's obviously the most senior who's due for appointment at the time. No, I'm not envious in the slightest.

You've led a very active and vigorous life since leaving the Services, including one important appointment as Administrator at Norfolk Island.

Correct.

How did you find that?

That was absolutely fascinating. Norfolk Island, again, was another challenge. It was something that I hadn't done before. I began heavily involved in the vice-regal aspects of the job where I was signing into law, bills which had been passed in the Assembly in Norfolk Island. Ones that I didn't have the authority for, of course, were passed back to the Governor-General for signature. But it was again a new different world and yet it was made up of people, Ken. It's a small community. In many respects it was a bit like an air base in some comparisons. I had to live my life seven days a week from morning till night irrespective of any decisions I took over there and I had to be seen to be firm and fair and supporting the Norfolk Island cause to the Australian Government. By the same token, I had to be seen by the Australian Government to be putting into operation, any policy issues from their point of view, so it was fascinating. We had a coup d'état, incidentally, over there which added a little stimulus to life and a couple of other instances but in general very challenging, very edifying and certainly from my own point of view, I learnt a lot about government. To answer your question: did I ever want to get into politics? No, not in the slightest. To the extent that I was Administrator, Norfolk Island, I was perhaps a political appointee but I didn't have any desire to join the large swing of politicians.

What future challenges do you see for Ray Trebilco?

I didn't mention, Ken, that before I actually fully retired, as I am now, that I had four years being the OTC representative in Japan. I was asked would I go up there and open up an office, and I did. I won't say that I was very au fait with the higher level of telecommunications but I thought I took the job up there a lot of the background knowledge that I'd gained from the Air Force and certainly my exposure to Japan in previous years allowed me to relate to the Japanese in a way that I think was productive for OTC. That was probably my last challenge. What challenge do I see now? Someone would have to offer me another challenge which I would certainly feel young enough, enterprising enough to accept, but in terms of my initiative, nothing that I see immediately. I did do some part-time Japanese teaching here on the coast. Again, that has fallen a bit by the wayside because there isn't the interest at the moment in teaching Japanese at the private schools that I

was associated with originally. There is a lot of Japanese being taught at TAFE. There's a lot of Japanese being taught at Queensland University and at schools but not being a qualified teacher as such, I'm not eligible to go and do that. I retain an interest in Japanese. I read Japanese every day for my own interest and I listen to my Japanese oral tapes every day. My major challenge at the moment is trying to get my handicap down to the stage where I can be a reasonable golfer. I enter into spirited conversation with anyone who wishes to speak but I am basically just enjoying life, Ken, and I would be responsive to any challenge that might be put my way.

Air Vice Marshal Trebilco, thank you.