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TRANSCRIPT
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Commodore Norman Ernest Lee RAN (Ret'd) on pilot duties 817 Squadron Sydney Carrier Air Group, Korea 1951-1952, interviewed by Ben Evans

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
on: 6 July 2001
by: Lenny Preston, Australian War Memorial

Description

Lee speaks of his service background and experience as well as training; joining 817 Squadron 21 Carrier Air Group Nowra; his deployment to Korea with the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney; Sydney Carrier Air Group's role in supporting United Nations forces in the coastal corridor Seoul to Chinnampo keeping communication lines open and spotting for naval gunfire; the Fairey Firefly aircraft; weapons - armament including cannon and bombs; deck landings; various in-flight incidents not all of them combat-related; how Sub Lieutenant Knappstein sold his plane; failed experiments with rocket-assisted take-off gear (RATOG); combat missions over Korea; the effects of the weather in particular Typhoon Ruth in the winter of 1951; morale within the squadron; life on board an aircraft carrier during the Korean winter October 1951 to February 1952; effects of the cold at sea compared with the Army experience on land; and the return of the HMAS Glory.

Transcribed by: C L Soames, Gondwana Scientific, August 2001

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Transcript methodology

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

> Identification: This is Tape Number 1 of 1 of an interview with Norman Lee, conducted by Ben Evans, recorded on 6 July 2001, at 10 AM at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered on this tape are Korean War service on HMAS Sydney.

> Welcome and thank you for coming along.

Thank you.

> If you could give me your name and rank just so we can identify your voice on the tape.

Norman Lee - I retired as a commodore but during the Korean War I was a sub-lieutenant.

> We are going to have a very general discussion today, looking at your recollections of service in Korea as a pilot. If I could get you to start by telling me about your service background, your previous experience before going to Korea, and the training you went through leading up to your service in the Korean War.

Fine. I joined the navy in 3 May 1948 as a recruit rating pilot - which was the method of entry in those days. I saw an advertisement in the Melbourne Sun in 1947, 'Join the Navy and Fly'; I didn't hesitate, tossed in my school course and applied and was put on Number 2 Course, post war.

Initial training was at Flinders Naval Depot, recruit training for about three months and then we were released into the tender mercies of the air force at Point Cook for an eighteen-month flying training course - which is less than a year nowadays - where we did six-months ground school before we'd even got to look at an aeroplane. I trained on Tiger Moths, Wirraways and Oxfords, and on completion we went to the United Kingdom for our postgraduate training which was weapon training and deck landing training. We went to Lossiemouth in Scotland and I trained on Mk I Fireflies at Lossie, and then the [Eglinton] in Northern Ireland where we completed our weaponry training on Mk IV Fireflies, and then I did my initial deck landings on HMAS Illustrious in the Irish Sea; returned to Australia, commissioned as a sub-lieutenant - because the system had changed by then, all air crew were to be commissioned - did my 'knife-and-fork' course, as they call it, and then joined the 817 Squadron of the 21st Carrier Air Group at Nowra on 1 April 1951 - which I will always remember as a good day.

Just by the by, I flew over to Nowra fifty years later, just recently, to visit my old squadron which is still in the same hanger - how about that? - a hanger at Nowra.

The Squadron embarked, or the Air Group embarked. The Air Group consisted of 817 Squadron and 808 with Sea Fairies - I was flying Fireflies - and we were in Port Lincoln on a normal Australian cruise when we got the word that we were going to Korea. So the ship returned to Nowra - or back to the Nowra area, we disembarked and commenced a weapon work-up, and then left for Korea. We flew on the way up because we had to stay and practice, in those days, on a freight deck carrier.

I had an interesting diversion into Guam when my deck hook failed to come down and my section leader and myself - fortunately we were near Guam - flew into Guam, I landed, whereupon my brakes failed. We fixed the hook, I was told to return to the ship regardless, got

airborne - my battery boiled. I got back to the ship and my hook skipped all the wires except the last one and I stopped with my spinner sitting over the barrier. So that was a good day, I can tell you.

Anyway, we arrived in Korea to berth alongside HMS Glory which we were relieving. Glory was to come down to Australia for a refit and to change its air group. When we berthed alongside Glory her band was playing, 'If I'd have known you were coming I'd have baked a cake' which was the current tune. We had a briefing from the US Air Force on escape and survival. I'll never forget, this major got up and said, 'Some of you wont be around here this time next week', which was very encouraging.

We were in Kure - we departed to the west coast. Patrols consisted of ten days at sea with a replenishment day half-way through - one day to replenish with fuel, and bombs, and ammunition - and then we alternated going back to Kure or [Sassabo] for a week, for R&R as it's now called. I well recall, we sublieutenants, on the replenishment day, had to go to school, which I thought was a bit odd.

Our task was operating in an area roughly sixty miles square, north of Seoul, west of Seoul - around to [Chinampo], round the Haeju, across the coast, Haeju, up to Chinampo, and then back down; that's roughly the area, and the Firefly task was to cut all lines of communication. We started off dive-bombing which we had practiced worked up in Australia dive bombing from 8,000 feet carrying two 500-pound bombs, releasing at 3,000 feet in a 55 degree dive, which the poor old Firefly wasn't very keen to do. If you didn't get the rudder trimmed right it went down sideways. And we found that we could straddle the target with two bombs and inflict no damage at all - bridges was the main thing we were attacking.

Fortunately for us, enemy opposition was pretty low at that stage of the war. The Armistice discussions were going on - and as you know, they went on for another two years. So it was decided we'd convert to low-level bombing because we were all trained in anti-submarine bombing where you actually dive at the submarine, and the aim is to straddle the two bombs across it - or depth charges.

We were using 35-second DI fuses and in a flight of four aircraft, if you were the last one in you had to be pretty quick to make certain you didn't arrive as the first bomb went off - and we were aiming for the abutment of the bridge and we were very, very successful. So we steadily reduced from a whole flight of aircraft to one aircraft - and it's on record that we actually knocked a bridge down with one bomb at one stage.

Anything moving was a legitimate target, mainly ox carts. The rationale was that ox carts were being used by the North Koreans to carry ammunition. I must admit, I was a little reluctant to attack an ox cart by I did attack one and the poor old ox with 40-millimetre cannon didn't stand much of a chance, but that's what the rules were. We were also, if there were seven or more people on the ground, we were supposed to attack them, but we didn't, you couldn't do that. The Chinese were involved at that stage, when we were there. You could tell the difference between the Chinese and the Koreans: the Koreans ignored you whereas the Chinese would duck for cover.

And I tell a rather amusing story of sitting in the bridge mess with my air group commander, the late Vice Admiral Sir Michael Fell, complaining about the lack of a gun sight, my gun sight picture. I said, 'We've come across these Chinese and all I could do was point the nose of the

aircraft down and spray.' And there was a knock on the door and a petty officer put his head in the door and he said, 'Sub-lieutenant Lee?', and I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'We've found out what's wrong with your gun sight, Sir', I said, 'Yeah, bad maintenance', he said, 'No, Sir, the brilliance was turned right down' - and my air group commander said a few words.

What else can I tell you? We also had to do anti-submarine patrols because we didn't know whether there was a submarine threat or not and we used to do what was called a Cobra-15 which was a circle of fifteen miles radius around the ship, which is a bit tricky to fly in a circle fifteen miles radius around a ship, which we did. We hated doing those patrols, we'd far rather be out doing the real stuff as we saw it.

My reaction to being there was, I really didn't have a reaction. I'd been sent to go to Korea, it was the culmination of about three years of training and I saw it as the logical progression to what I'd been trained to do. I only ever once, as we were forming up, near the [Han] estuary - in fact, where we were - and as I formed on my leader I suddenly felt, what the hell am I doing here, 10,000 miles from home? what's the point? and the thought went out of my mind and we carried on to the ship.

What else can I tell you?

> Perhaps tell me something about the Firefly itself, what it was like to fly, whether it was regarded as a good piece of equipment, as a good aircraft, perhaps something about what your observer did, that sort of thing.

Well, the Firefly was evolved out of the [Fulmar] which, in turn, evolved out of the Battle two-place aircraft, and it was meant to have a multi-role of anti-submarine strike, night-fighter - which had pretty limited capability in all those roles. Anti-submarine wise it was pretty limited because of the weapons we had in those days, or detection devices which were very limited indeed. It was a good, solid aeroplane, I loved it - excellent deck-landing aircraft because it sat in a good attitude. If you were steady at ninety knots, two knots either way made a big difference. Too fast and you could flare and miss the wires, too slow and you'd be sinking onto the round-down, whereas the Fury, it deck-landed at hundred knots, the Firefly at ninety knots. Once you cut the throttle in a Fury the nose dropped and you had to be quick to get the tail down whereas the Firefly had stacks of control. I flew every mark of Firefly there was from the Mk I through to the Mk VII and I never had one stop on me, I never had one seriously do anything wrong. It was a good, solid aeroplane, loved it. I can remember all the check lists even now.

Weapon wise we originally had Mk VI Fireflies in 817 Squadron because we were strictly anti-submarine but when we went to - warned of - to go to Korea we took our sister squadron's aircraft, Mk V's from 816 Squadron and they got our Mk VI's because they had cannon - four 20-millimetre cannon. The aircraft could carry up to 1,000-pound bombs on both wings, which we did. We had occasion to bomb a tunnel on the east coast which the Koreans were using for trains to be hidden, and we went off. To be catapulted with 1,000-pound bombs on you had to reduce the fuel load to keep the weight within limits. My section leader dropped his bombs into the mouth of the tunnel and they didn't go off. I managed to get mine into the mouth of the tunnel and I countermined his and we got credit with one train, which was good stuff.

We normally just carried two 500-pound bombs plus full cannon, and both drop-tanks on each wing. The aircraft was configured with a 55-gallon drop-tank on the left wing and a radar set on the right wing for normal roles, but you could replace the radar set with another drop tank.

Another amusing story, whilst we were working up in Harvey Bay - where we used to go because of the smooth waters to work up the deck landing - I got airborne with two 500-pound bombs on and two drop tanks, and my radiator shutter jammed - and, of course, it was Queensland hot weather. I reported my problem, was told to drop everything and return to the ship. So I dropped the bombs live and they made a very good splash, big bang, went to drop both tanks and only one tank came off. There I was with a full tank on one side and nothing on the other. I had to get on the ship because I was overheating with the radiator shut and I made a bit of a skidding, fast approach. I must admit, I got on alright and I thought I was very good, but the batsman told me a few [groups] afterwards. And this affected me subsequently when I dropped a G-dropper dinghy, which is a rescue dinghy which we carried under the aircraft to an American crewman from a B29 up off, roughly, Chinampo - a bit north of Chinampo on the west coast. And in my ignorance I thought the whole system went. When I returned to the ship I thought I had an asymmetric problem and I kept on being waved off because I was skidding out of the approach - and it was getting dark and you could see the top lights on the destroyers, and things were getting a bit tense. Anyway, the batsman finally cut me and I got on the deck, stepped out, and low and behold, all that had come off the wing was the dinghy, not the whole container - it was a psychological attitude.

R&R; we used to love going ashore to the officers' mess in Kure - great big steaks which, of course, we didn't have on board in those days - food was very basic in those days - fresh milk, forget about it - and we had chateaubriand steak, for two - marvellous. Sassabo; the big thing was milkshakes - we were only kids, you've got to remember and we weren't in to booze of any great degree.

Typhoon Ruth, which is well featured, occurred whilst we were in Sassabo and in accordance with Royal Navy practice you always steam to sea. The US Navy, their policy, if it's a secure anchorage, you stay in harbour. Well, off we went and it was pretty rough.

It's amusing how people go on. A lot of little fires on the ship, because water was going down [trunking] into electrical motors, with the ship rolling - she rolled thirty-five degrees allegedly and there were fire broadcasts all the time, you know, fire in such and such a place. And we subs were up forehead in what was called the kasbah - we were playing pontoon, cards, you know, and there was a pipe, 'Fire, fire, fire, fire in the bomb room', and we looked at each other - because we were sitting on top of the bomb room. And what do you do? You deal another card, there's nothing you can do. Pipes were being made like, 'Fuel danger' - the standard pipe, 'Fuel danger, no smoking on the flight or weather decks' - well, you couldn't even stand on the flight or weather decks, let alone smoke on the flight or weather decks. Paint was ripped off the ship's side, we lost seven aircraft damaged - a Firefly went over the side leaving its wingtips which were still lashed to the deck. It was chaos when we got up the following morning, I can tell you.

Can I take a break?

Yes, please do.

(Break in interview)

One thing I didn't mention in our work-up to go to Korea, because we had three squadrons embark as opposed to the normal two - we took one of the squadrons from the 20th Carrier Group, 805 Squadron, and as a result the Air Group was known as the Sydney Carrier Group,

not the 20th, or not the 21st - a lot of people get it wrong - but it was known as the Sydney Carrier Group. And because we had three squadrons on board we had a problem of getting aircraft off - with the amount of thing - it was decided to use RATOG - rocket-assisted take-off gear. And I must admit, my briefing was a bit limited. It consisted of, apply as much power as you can hold on the breaks, let the breaks off, and when you are alongside the red flag (that) a fellow's holding on the side of the flight deck, hit the button on the end of the throttle. That was my briefing.

I did it and I expected to get a fair old acceleration, and I certainly did, but what I hadn't expected was the nose-up pitch that occurred - naturally, because the aircraft was thrust forward, the lift was generated, the balance of the aircraft was upset, and I really had to poll forward. The Sea Fury behind me, one can only assume, didn't cope with the pitch-up; pitched up badly, the rocket stopped and he just stalled, straight into the sea. We weren't cleared to drop the RATOG gear - you could jettison but we weren't cleared to, the aircraft wasn't, so we had to land at Jervis Bay to remove the RATOG gear which sort of negated the whole point of having RATOG gear, and that was the end of RATOG in the RAN, never took place again. So all our operations were catapulted which previously had been free take-offs but we just got used to the catapult - it was good, it was the old hydraulic catapult which gave you a kick up the backside like an elephant because you got instantaneous pressure as opposed to the latest steam catapult which was a progressive acceleration.

On deck landing there were ten wires. The Firefly had a belly hook, the Sea Fury had a sting hook. With the Firefly you could get a nine wire and not hit the barrier whereas the Sea Fury you get a nine wire and you'd hit the barrier - but the barrier operators were very good and they could judge whether the aircraft really had it and they dropped the barrier. The barrier was there obviously to stop aircraft going to the forehead deck park - problems all solved with the angle deck subsequently.

> Returning to operations over Korea - flying operational sorties - tell me something about the enemy forces such as anti-aircraft fire, ground fire, and whether you were ever operating far north enough to be worried about, say, Mig 15s.

Well, to answer your last question, I was when I went and dropped the dinghy to the Yank up off the west coast. I must admit I very consciously tested my cannon in case I came across some Migs - who would have won I don't know.

No, we weren't at all worried about air opposition, we didn't see anything except, on one occasion, we encountered a flight of US Marine Corps Corsairs and, of course, the Firefly looked like a Yak to an uninitiated person and we were going around each other like this in these flights until it was all sorted out.

Ground opposition, yes, we lost two - well, we lost lots of aircraft to ground fire, both my course mates were shot down - and Neil McMillan, who is the biggest rescue that took place in Korea, they were shot down, he and an observer - and Noel [Napstein], he was shot down, in fact, just where we were that day, looking over - I should have mentioned it at the time but didn't. McMillan was rescued by the chopper we had on board, a US Navy Sikorsky Dragonfly - and it's well written up and it's well recorded, I don't think you need it from me.

The amusing bit about Napstein is that he was hit doing spotting. I don't know what ship it was - it was either Murchison or Shoalhaven, I don't know - but anyway, it matters not - and he was hit

in the oil cooler and the engine stopped. He jettisoned his tanks and by the grace of God the correct tank - only one dropped off and it was the right one because it spun him into the southern shore. He went up over the beach, hit a stone wall, the aircraft stopped, broken in two, and he was uninjured, he got out. And it's true, he sold his aircraft to the local Koreans for twenty million [wan], which is two and sixpence, and arrived back on board the ship a week later still carrying his parachute. Remarkable fellow, Noel.

We knew we were always being shot at. People collected numerous small arms bullets but not major stuff, and we did have one Fury shot down by a radar controlled gun. Again, the pilot was rescued. We had one Fury shot down and he baled out and hit the tailplane, and he was buried at sea subsequently - because the body was recovered. But no, there was no major ack-ack, I mean, you weren't seeing masses of fire, it was mainly rifle fire because you couldn't see it. In fact, we bombed a village once because it was allegedly housing enemy soldiers and I came back with a dint in my wing and I thought, I'm a hero at last, I've been hit. And when I got back to Australia I still had this bit - and my father was an engineer officer in the air force - he said, 'How did it go, son?' and I said, 'Rough, dad, I got hit', and he said, it looks like a piece of bomb to me, son - it was my own bomb.

We kept all the bridges down, very little road traffic. They'd build the bridges up over night and we'd go and knock them down the next day. That just went on all the time. My CO, who wasn't a terribly popular chap, got hit. My CO, on the radio, said, 'Found a truck attacking', and my section leader looked across at me - we were in formation - and gave me a big wink. And I knew exactly what he meant, it was a flack trap and, sure enough, shortly after he said, 'Attacking' - 'I've been hit, I've been hit' - and he got hit in the main tank and he was losing fuel, and they were having bets back on board the ship whether they'd make it back to the ship or not - which he did - very amusing.

He was also (laughs) - most amusing incident took place - it could have been deadly but it was amusing. A young sailor was doing a check on a Firefly in the hanger and the Firefly's wings folded with the cannons pointing up. And in peace time you weren't allowed to have aircraft armed in the hanger, war time you were. This kid checked the aircraft was safe, got out, went to get a tool, came back in, pressed the button and off went the cannon; and the reason was, he got on the wrong aircraft. And the two cannon shells went through the hanger deck, through the flight deck, and the squadron CO with the ship's air engineer officer were walking up and down, having an evening constitutional, had missed them by a few yards. Everyone was most amused by that.

Anyway, over to you.

> Tell me something about what it was like serving with your unit, what the other pilots were like, whether this constant battering away at the same targets that keep on getting rebuilt, how that affected morale, whether there was ongoing training as you were flying combat missions, that sort of thing. Talk about your fellow pilots, what it was like to be in the Unit.

At that stage the RAN aircrew were a lot of ex-air force people, both observers and pilots. I don't know how much you know about RAN history but the RAN slavishly followed the Royal Navy - absolutely slavishly. In fact, the expression was that the RAN was more RN than the RN in their attitudes and so forth. And I must admit, we sublieutenants knew our place in the Squadron, particularly from the air force people who had adopted this attitude that we were only

sublieutenant and therefore lesser mortal - it wasn't that bad, it wasn't like you hear about Duntroon and so forth, but we knew our place.

Morale; morale was excellent, no question about that. Our deck landing performance was excellent. Prior to that you could guarantee that you'd have barriers, quite a few of them. In peacetime operations, because we flew about two sorties a day, and we had constant practice and therefore it was very rare to have a deck-landing accident.

There was no further training as such, we'd trained as much as we needed to train. There is only one way of bombing a bridge, only one way of strafing something on the ground - very satisfying I might add with four 20-millimetre cannon, unless you got a stoppage - and the Firefly, with the cannon out on the wings, the aircraft would slew - all subsequent later aircraft had all the cannon in the nose.

Can you just stop for a second? There is something I am trying to think of.

(Break in interview)

October to February, it wasn't a very long deployment. We then were relieved by Glory which came back. And Glory, unfortunately, had been pretty badly savaged before us, and we pretty badly savaged after us, aircrew wise. You may have seen that Commonwealth 'No Grave' thing down at Pusan, you see all the 'RN' - yeah, they lost quite a few aircrew - we were lucky, we only lost three and one of those was, he spun in, so it wasn't really a battle thing.

Because we operated - we went right through the Korean winter, which was not bad, not like the army. At least you were warm between decks - cold on the flight deck, freezing on the flight deck, we had snow and everything. And because the Firefly was liquid cooled it was necessary to oil dilute the engines at night so that you could start them in the morning - and to oil dilute you inject petrol into the oil, there was a special system that you did. And of course, you can imagine who won the job, last thing at night, of doing all this. We sublieutenants had to go up all these Fireflies, start them up and check the petrol, shut down, go to the next one. That was pretty chilly I can tell you - nowhere near as bad as the poor maintenance people on the flight deck, and the handlers.

I mean, they had a pretty rough time, we weren't really properly equipped for it, clothing wise, by any means. In fact, neither were we, aircrew. We didn't have proper survival boots, we had cooks' boots, galley boots, for boots. We had a 38-calibre pistol, forty rounds of ammunition - all wrapped up in a condom, I might add. We wore what we called 'poopy' suits, immersion suits, in the cold weather - that was damned uncomfortable - and an ordinary flying suit in the warmer months.

Towards the end, in February - it was just the beginning of February as I recall - we encountered some bad weather and the two padres on board, the White Bishop and the Black Bishop as we used to call them - the Protestant and the Catholic - got together, obviously praying on the flight deck - the weather had stayed bad so we wouldn't carry on any more operations, and sure enough, it did stay bad and we sailed for home. We sailed back, didn't fly [any of us] on the way back, handed our aircraft back to the RN - because when we got to Korea, I should mention, we only had a few Mk V Fireflies, but on the way up we took over Fireflies from the Royal Navy which were Mk V's and operated those.

We had to do maintenance test flights at Iwakuni in Japan and I went with two observers to do a compass swing on a Firefly. We did it and on the way back we stopped at Hiroshima - or 'Hirosheema', whatever you like to call it - which at that stage was still absolutely flat - and we were in uniform because we were still at war with Japan, and we wandered round very warily wondering what the Japanese reaction to us would be. It was surprising, they were very open and friendly. We were looking for somewhere to eat and we found a place, and we thought it was just a cafe, and we went in, and the reception was not very good. It then turned out that we had made a mistake, it was a club, Japanese club, and then they realised we'd had made a mistake, and it was genuine, whereupon they welcomed us. It was quite remarkable. Three hours later on and umpteen bottles of [Asahi] beer, we staggered on the train and went back to Kure.

> To return just briefly to the weather; you've talked about your immersion suit, you've talked about Typhoon Ruth; how did weather affect finding your way around the Korean Peninsula while you were in the air?

Not a problem for us. I've noted the air force comments, and I spoke to air force contemporaries. One has to remember, it depends where the battle was. At that stage we were in a static situation and the area where we were operating was relatively flat - relatively. I can't recall weather ever being a problem whilst we were flying. Once, I remember, we got caught up in a bit of cloud but it was no problem. So either it stopped us totally, with the ship at sea - but it didn't seem to affect us on our operations; once we were launched we seemed to be okay, no problem at all. Wind; I can't recall us ever having any problems with wind, which is essential for a carrier. We were on the west coast, which is shallow - as you know, the east coast is fairly deep - but that wasn't a problem for the ship.

> Perhaps, to finish up, I suppose, in modern parlance, it would be the question really, what was it like operating in a multi-national force, so to speak? Did you ever operate alongside the Americans, for example? Were you ever involved in close support of United Nations units on the ground?

Yes, we were - I should mention, yes, we were. We alternated with an American carrier - if I try hard I'll remember the name - it doesn't matter. When we were back in Japan, the other carrier, they were operating Corsairs and Cougars, as I recall.

Yes, we went to the east coast at Hangnyang - that's where we caught the train in the tunnel - and we were meant to put on a display because it's a fact of life that when peace talks are on you beat the hell out of the enemy, and that's what we were supposed to be doing. And I'll tell you an amusing story.

My section leader and myself were sent off to do a bombardment with HMS Belfast and - I think it was Anzac - and we had designated targets, all pre-planned - they'd worked out where the targets were - like a D-Day type situation where you have pre-planned targets and off you go. And I exchanged call signs with the ship, and spotter will adjust, and they fired their first round, and I gave a correction, and then they fired another round and it was nowhere near where the correction should have been, and I made another correction and then the destroyer said, 'We'll have to come closer to effect your last correction', and I thought, 'Whoops, something's wrong here' - because they were very close to where the target was. And the penny dropped, I asked them were they using blue Peter, white phosphorous. The answer came back, 'Negative' - I'd been running the destroyer on the cruisers fall of shot - nobody told me they didn't have white phosphorous. And then, of course, I'd screwed up their gunnery table completely and we had to

start again - and you can't see HE on the ground, it's just a very dirty, dark, smudgy, thing, that's whey you use white phosphorous for marking. In the end they were firing broadsides for me to try and pick up where the rounds were falling, which I finally did, I found where the rounds were. It was an area target so it was a simple correction back onto the thing. We had a number of rounds designated by musical instruments - 'Big Base Drum', 'Trombone', were the number of rounds that the ship could fire.

Anyway, the sequel to the story was that when I came back to Australia I joined HMAS Murchison to do my watch-keeping time, and we had Anzac's officers over for lunch, and a gunnery officer said, 'Oh, you are a birdie', and I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'I met the biggest idiot aviator in Korea ...' - blah, blah, blah. Of course, I had to tell him it was me (laughs).

I shot with the US destroyer, the USS Blue whose call sign was 'Jelly Jar' - so I'm not senile yet. And there was allegedly a gun emplacement and they were getting nowhere near it - nowhere near it - and in the end, in desperation, I dived down right on the deck to look at this thing. There was nothing there so it terminated.

We had the Dutch ship, The [Vangalen], with us - and with gunnery spotting the procedures are - well, there are various procedures but one of them was that the spotter will adjust, that's the aircraft spotting will adjust. The drill would go, 'Ready' - the ship would say, 'Ready' - the spotter would say, 'Shoot' - the ship would say, 'On the way' - and then five seconds before the round arrived, 'Splash'. And Vangalen - you'd say, 'Shoot' - and Vangalen would come back, 'On zee vay' - 'Splish' (laughs).

> Well, perhaps to finish up - you've covered everything that I have for you to talk about - do you have any general recollections you'd like recorded, anything you feel should go on the record?

I consider myself very fortunate to have been involved, I really do; not very many of us did. There were those who were on the subsequent crews, which was after the Armistice had been signed.

By the way - what was the ... there was a code word that's escaped me ... it'll come back to me anyway - if the Armistice had been signed and you'd dropped a bomb, and you heard this code word, you were sort of meant to dive down and grab the bomb.

No, I was only twenty-one years old - well, I was twenty-two by the time I'd finished - and I just saw it as what I was supposed to be doing. I still see it that way, I have no hang-ups about it. I can recall visiting my air force course mates at [Kimpo] - because I flew ashore a number of times to take the mail ashore - and they were living in tarred paper huts, really roughing it, and I'd fly back on board and have a shower, put on my mess kit, have brandy, dry, before dinner, silver service, and in the morning, get up and put your poopy suit on and go away. So it was a totally different war - totally different war. To us we still operated in almost like a peacetime operation, from the ship's point of view, even though we stood-to every morning, with the guns, in case of dawn attack and all the rest of it.

But no, absolutely no hang-ups about it. We came back and just got on with the job. I think you've got to realise that the Korean War was only five years after the Second World War – well, I know you know that - and the population was war weary but war was a fact of life, if you follow me, and the fact that we'd been away to war, well, so what? and nobody was either 'agin'

it or for it and we just came back and went straight into peacetime operations - no counselling or any of this nonsense, and nobody that I know of ever suffered any psychological or traumatic what-have-you at all - straightforward.

> At the time did you see the significance of Australia operating an aircraft carrier in combat?

Yes, very much indeed. To me it was, gee whiz, this is what we set out to do. And at that stage we had four front-line squadrons of twelve aircraft each, two air groups with two reserve aircraft in each squadron, something in excess of fifty aircraft which we could support the army, in particular. I was surprised the army didn't support the navy as much as it should have done in terms of carrier replacements because we were the ones who could actually get there and support them with the ground support activity they needed. But no, it didn't quite work out that way.

No, all right and proper in my opinion.

Just to finish it off, I was then nominated to do a batsmans' course, to bad the aircraft on back onto the ship, and the last thing on earth I wanted to be was a batsman because you got up before dawn, you didn't get to your bunk till after dark, you are on the flight deck all day long in funnel smoke - and if you've ever felt funnel smoke from an old style warship it is so choking it is unreal - it's either that or massive wind if the ship is steaming into wind - cold, or hot. I persuaded Fred [Laner] - you may know of - that he'd make a better batsman than me - as it turned out - well, it's debatable. But anyway, I was then sent to sea to get a watch-keeping certificate and I was the first post-war trained aviator to get a watch-keeping certificate on HMAS Murchison which was the ship which I'd dropped the dinghy to - she picked up the US airman. And that launched me on a duel career of general service and aviation, and I alternated between the two. I ended up commanding two ships and two shore establishments. I was very fortunate, very fortunate, you can't do it nowadays, it's impossible, it's too specialised. But there you go.

> Well, thank you.

Thank you.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A - END OF INTERVIEW

08/01