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Captain Alexander Hughie Gordon LVO DFC RAN (Ret'd) on observer duties 817 Squadron Sydney Carrier Air Group, Korea 1951-1952, interviewed by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Ret'd)

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
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by: Lenny Preston, AWM Staff

Description

Alexander Gordon talks about: his enlisting in the RAAF in 1942 and his training as an observer [navigator/bomb aimer]; being sent to Burma in 1944 and flying transport operations in Dakotas there; flying Skymasters with No. 232 Squadron RAF from India and Ceylon [Sri Lanka] in 1945; being demobilized in 1946 and further education; enlisting in the RAN's Fleet Air Arm in 1949 as an observer; training as a naval officer and as a naval observer, including anti-submarine warfare; the differences between flying in a single-engined Firefly and multi-engined aircraft; the flying characteristics of the Firefly; working up for service in Korean waters; close cooperation with army liaison officers; the structure of the Sydney Carrier Air Group (CAG); senior officers in the Sydney CAG; carrier flying operations with Fireflies and [Sea] Furies; replacing Mk 6 Fireflies with Mk 5,which had guns; low-level bombing and navigation techniques; the high standard of training in the Sydney CAG; the use of delayed-action fused bombs; post-strike photography; anti-submarine patrols; the role of the Carrier-Borne Ground Liaison Officers (CBGLOs); secondary duty as the Group Compass Officer and compass-swinging; the *Sydney*'s captain, Darbo Harries and the commander, Brad Smith; limitations on flying imposed by winter weather; surviving Typhoon *Ruth*; the effective use of camouflage by the enemy; two memorable operations; some search and rescue operations; the exhilaration of attacking railway tunnels, and thoughts on single-seat fighters versus twin-seat fighters.

Transcribed by: C.L. Soames, February 2003

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Identification: This is an interview with Captain Alexander Hughie Gordon LVO DFC RAN (Ret'd); it is conducted by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Ret'd) on 14 June 2002 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered are the experiences of Captain Gordon as an observer, Fleet Air Arm, of *HMAS Sydney* in Korea in 1951-1952.

Captain Gordon was born in Perth on 17 May 1925 and was educated at Aquinas College, Perth, prior to the Second World War, and following the war, at the School of Mines in Kalgoorlie. During the Second World War he joined the RAAF in 1942, and after being trained in Australia, and further training in Canada, he served as navigator in the RAAF, moving through the United Kingdom to participate in the Burma Campaign.

Following the war he was discharged, but joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1949. He flew as an observer in Fairy Firefly aircraft from *HMAS Sydney* in the Korean War 1951-1952, for which service he was mentioned in dispatches. His later appointments, following attendance at the Royal Naval Staff College, included Deputy Director of Plans at Navy Headquarters; the Royal Visit, 1963, naval and maritime aspects; he was seconded to the Royal Malaysian Navy during his service; he was Deputy Director Naval Intelligence; the executive officer of *HMAS Cerberus*; and Captain *HMAS Penguin* prior to his retirement from the Royal Australian Navy in 1972.

His civilian career has included the appointment of Executive Director of the Australian Institute of Building, and generally has followed consultancies in the field of building and the construction industries.

Thanks very much indeed for coming in and giving us your time this morning for this interview. We look forward to your reminiscences and frank commentary on aspects on which you'd like to address.

In the topics now we look initially at your previous service background and experience, as well as training, which were preparation for entry to the Fleet Air Arm and the Korean War experience - and if you could also mention your age on entering the first period of operational service in the Second World War.

Well, the Empire Air Training Scheme, at the time that I joined, used to enlist, and then they would keep you on reserve until they called you up, generally about six months later. So I enlisted, or signed on the dotted line, in February of 1942, and was called up in October '42 at the age of seventeen - I put my age up two years when I signed on the dotted line, so being eighteen and ten months as it said on my ... I mean, I was sixteen and ten months, but by the time I was called up I was seventeen anyway.

I was trained in Australia at Victor Harbor, the initial training school there, in October 1942, then the Air Observer School at Mount Gambier, then Bombing and Gunnery School at Port Pirie, and the Astro-navigation School at Milne, and graduated as an observer - at that time they just changed the connotation from 'observer' to 'navigator/bomb aimer', however, we were always called observers in those days.

Then we embarked in August '43 from Sydney, proceeded to San Francisco in an American troopship, the *Mount Vernon*. There were about thirty observers, and we were sent up to Canada where we did a GR - general reconnaissance - school which was Coastal Command training at Prince Edward Island on the east coast of Canada. Two of us were taken from there to a Royal

Air Force OTU (operational training unit) at [Tabert] on Lockheed Hudsons - a Coastal Command, an extremely well run OTU, mainly designed around Coastal Command strike forces, but it was very good. [inaudible] I did three or four, I suppose, operational trips out doing anti-submarine patrols round Halifax.

Then we proceeded from Halifax in the *New Amsterdam*, another troopship, to the United Kingdom. I spent a little time in the United Kingdom and left here in about June '44 to go to the Middle East, arriving in India to do training in Dakotas, and then down to Burma at the start of August 1944, where we did ... [transport missions].

Two decisions were made about that time [which] affected us. One was really for the army to fight through the monsoon, and for us to fly through it. Because the Japanese were advancing in China, and the Americans withdrew their aircraft, Mountbatten and Slim found themselves with really insufficient aircraft to keep the 14th Army going - that's supply aircraft - so they just ... At that time we had to do 500 hours for an operational tour, they just doubled that - it started off as being double, but we got away with 750 hours, I think. Some people are known to have flown 200 hours in a month. Looking at my logbook for that time I flew an average of about 120 a month - or not an average, I'm sorry, the highest was about 120 a month. It consisted of supply dropping, bringing up troops and ammunition, and looking after long-range penetration patrols. Two things that stand out there, flying through the monsoon was not very pleasant, and the siege at Meiktila which was quite a serious event for a while - the British were very, very efficient.

But I guess the other thing that stands out in that period of time was that nobody really told you what was going on, except for the intelligence briefing you got each day before you flew. Intelligence briefings have their shortcoming too, as we all know.

After we came out of Burma in about April '45, three of us were sent to a long-range transport squadron - 232 Squadron - which operated out of India for a while, and then out of Ceylon. We used to go Ceylon, Cocos Island, Perth, Sydney, and return. You weren't allowed to deviate at all, so all navigation was done on astro and DR - dead reckoning - and it was some of the best work I've ever done.

This was flying in Dakotas, was it?

No, no, Skymasters - the King's flight had some and we had the others - I think we had five of them. They were to provide priority stuff, I suppose, for the British Pacific Fleet.

Then I was demobbed in, I think, March or April - I'll have to find that - I think it might be about March 1946. Went to the Kalgoorlie School of Mines and worked in the family business, and decided to join the navy in 1949 when they were looking for observers.

So in answer to your question - which I haven't answered, I suppose - the first time, if you could call it operational, outside of Halifax in the Atlantic - I was eighteen. When I got to flying in Burma I was nineteen, and I was discharged from the air force just before I was twenty-one, having attained the dizzy heights of flying officer by that time.

I joined the navy in August '49 in response to their appeal for some observers. I think they were after twelve - there were nine observers went in and one pilot. Prior to that they'd taken on a lot of ex-RAAF pilots and ex-Fleet Air Arm pilots - most of the ex-Fleet Air Arm were Brits with the odd New Zealanders, and one or two Australians. Some Australian pilots had ...

This is Topic 2, I guess, isn't it? Just so we know where we are heading to, I'll just introduce that.

Entry into Fleet Air Arm is Topic 2. Make comparisons, if you can, with the conditions of the previous service in the air force, and also any comparisons with navigator/observer techniques and disciplines - also you can mention the role of the Firefly observer, if you would please.

Well, as far as the observer in the navy was concerned, it's a very, very old trade. Original observers were naval officers - of course, the original pilots were navy - but in the period when the Royal Air Force was running or providing the pilots, and a lot of the ground crew, for the carriers - up until about 1938 or so - the observers were naval officers. I guess the whole idea in those days was finding the enemy fleet and bombardment spotting, and all these things - and navigation. So the role of the observer, I guess, in both the original Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Naval Air Service, and the Royal Air Force in the navy in those days, was the pilot was so busy flying the aircraft that somebody had to do the navigation and the bombardment spotting, and all the other things that went with using the aircraft in its initial role of intelligence gathering or reconnaissance.

When we went in to the navy we didn't go in a short-service commission, we went in as permanent naval forces. The navy required its permanent aircrew to be seamen officers or executive officers who sub-specialised in aviation. We had our sub-specialisation as aviators and they, hopefully, tried to turn us into seamen officers, which was excellent.

We went originally to *HMAS Cerberus*, Flinders Naval Depot, in Victoria where they gave us a sort of six-months introduction to all aspects of the navy.

That's a long course, six months.

Yeah. Approximately half of us - I think five of us, the junior ones - were sent to the United Kingdom to do the conversion courses to becoming a naval observer, and the older ones - four older chaps - were kept here and did their watch keeping time to become seamen officers back in Australia.

Those of us that went to the UK at that time did a course of approximately three months - three or four months - at the Air Signals School because we had to learn how to become efficient morse operators. I mean, most observers in those days could do twelve words a minute, but we had to become signallers, I suppose, as well, so you didn't get your flying pay until you could do twenty-six words a minute on the old key.

Were you using morse in the RAAF?

All observers were trained in morse, but not really to bash a key - you had to get up to twelve words a minute on the key - but mainly for the Aldis lamp and reading signals from ships, things like that.

Twenty-six words a minute, that's ...

You've got your finger out.

Yes, I can imagine.

But morse always came easy to me; it didn't go some people, but it always came easy to me, so I could read it if somebody was flashing at me with a lamp, or with a key. This is much later on, and it's digressing.

When I was doing my watch keeping time in the navy I used to amuse the captain because he was rather amused at these aviators standing on his bridge - he was really good about it, a lot of them weren't. It was a flagship and as such there was a lot of communication by lamp, and I used to read it before the signalman on the wing of the bridge, much to the Captain's amusement. However, that's a different story.

And then, after that, we were sent to the observer school - sorry, the signals school was at [HMS *Deedless*] which was down near Portsmouth - Lee-on-the-Solent [Sea Field Park]. We then went to St Merryn in Cornwall where we did our observer training. We did about three months there. I think the midshipmen who were going through at that time used to do about six months, whereas we, as trained observers, did about three months, learning to do it the navy way.

Well, it is a bit different. If you are used to bigger aircraft, and then you are suddenly put in the back seat of a Firefly with a chart board on your knee, and all sorts of noises, and the wireless going, and then looking after sonar buoys, and things like that, navigating with a chart board on your knee is a bit different.

Having been trained in Coastal Command, none of the things that we were doing were any different, but the environment was certainly (inaudible).

Then, after that ...

What was the role of the Firefly observer?

Basically the Firefly observer was navigator and a communicator - I mean, you had an HF (high frequency) wireless set, if you were a long way away from the ship - and an anti-submarine black-box operator. Anti-submarine warfare was his main task, I suppose, and navigation was necessary to get you there and back, and the bashing the key was just communication. So your main task was training as an anti-submarine operator.

Was there any role in direction of naval gunfire?

Not at that time. I'm sorry, other people obviously did those things, but what we were trained for was anti-submarine warfare.

After that I did some odd courses in - sorry, we went to Edmonton, which was the Joint Anti-submarine School, up there in Northern Ireland, and also the Naval Anti-submarine Air Warfare School where we did the whole of the anti-submarine course, concentrating a lot on sonar buoys in those days, and detecting submarines. We did a few courses, such as divisional courses, and damage control courses, and things, back in the United Kingdom, and came back to Australian.

Now, the differences - I think I started to mention - working in a single-engined aircraft in cramped conditions is vastly different to working in a bigger one - although some aircraft that I

was in, like the Hudson, you were sitting up in the nose and you had a big chart table to work on. In the Dakota you normally - well, we didn't carry two pilots, we carried a pilot and an observer, and two wireless operators and a gunner. It was sitting in the front seat, after you'd navigated to the general area, and then doing some very intensive map reading to get you to where you were going - which might only be a clearing twenty yards across in the jungle somewhere. In the Skymasters, well, of course, you had big table, big drift sight, and you used a lot of astro, which was impossible, of course, in a thing the size of a Firefly.

I mean, obviously the principles of navigation are the same, but a lot, of course, in the navy was done at low-level over the sea. One grew to understand what the wind was doing over the sea, and of course, the wind is the great factor in aircraft navigation, as you know.

Did you have any beacons on the ship which would guide you back?

Yes; now, the ships had YEYG beacons which sent out a morse code letter in whichever segment came back, but of course, in wartime it's not necessarily going to be on. I think we'll come to that a bit later on.

Topic 3: Introduction to the Firefly. Do you have any more on Topic 2?

The only thing, I never wanted to be a pilot in my initial training - in my initial training school there were 270 people and probably 269 of them wanted to be fighter pilots; but I didn't, I just wanted to be a navigator at that stage. So the sort of aircraft I was in, and its particular foibles, were not of much concern to me as long as the thing stayed up in the air, as it was supposed to.

The only thing about the Firefly that always strikes me is you could tell the old Firefly observer; in his flying suit the battery acid used to eat the flying suit away on both your legs because you sat with one foot either side of the battery.

That would keep you awake, I guess, anyway. But otherwise, from the point of view of landings and take-off on carrier, and so on, it was pretty conventional?

Yes. I did one RATOG (rocket-assisted take-off gear) take-off. When we came back to Australia I was sent straight to a carrier, the other chaps were sent to squadrons at Nowra. I was sent to the carrier and they were using RATOG in those days, occasionally, although I think that's one of the most terrifying aspects of one's life, to take off in a Firefly equipped with rocket-assisted take-off gear. It's a cloud of smoke [and derision] [inaudible].

[Pivotal] thrust, I should imagine. A catapult launch would be better, I guess, from what you've said.

Yes, well, the catapult in those days was hydraulic, not steam, and it gave you a terrific belt when you went off, and you didn't dare leave any thing loose lying around or you'd finish up with a ...

Foreign object.

The only other thing about the Firefly was, of course, compared with everything else it was incredibly slow. It could go, I think, about 300 ... no, we used to proceed to air speed about 180 or 200, but it could get up to about 250, I think. You'd have to ask some of the pilots, although

there's information available on how fast it could go. The type of aircraft didn't really intrigue me much, one way or the other.

> Topic 4: The aircrew daily routine when flying units were embarked. Was that a different world from being at Albatross?

Yes. If I can ...

> There was no flying at night, I gather, from talking to Digby Johns a couple of weeks back. There were no night operations?

No, not at that time, no.

When I first joined the carriers - this is before we went to Korea - we were doing such things as anti-submarine exercises, flight drills, navigation exercises, rocket projectile exercises. Then, in May '51, the government decided to sent the carrier to Korea so we came back and started to work up in Nowra - everybody got leave and then came back. After leave, which was about June, we started to work up in Nowra for the Korean War.

It changed a bit then; there was a lot of dummy dive-bombing and anti-submarine bombing, strafing exercises, cloud-flying navigation exercises, that sort of thing. Then you start to see the influence of the carrier-borne ground liaison officers, and you've got that, I think ...

> A bit later down.

... a bit later down. A lot of our training became connected with the army, and I think the goodwill that was built up between the army and the navy in those days lasted for many years - probably still is there.

> It is, yes.

See, we started to do a lot of low-level bombing, air-to-air gunnery, bombardment spotting - this is where the bombardment spotting started to become carrier borne. In those days, I'm sure, they were called carrier-borne army liaison officers - CBALs - and then they became CBGLOs (carrier-borne ground liaison officers), but at what stage I can't remember.

> Just use the old term that I recollect, being at Nowra, CBALs was the name - I didn't know what the abbreviation was.

Compass swinging, dive-bombing, low-level navigation exercises, group strikes, communications strafing - then we went to sea again in July of that year and started to do all these things at sea.

> I guess really your waking time in the morning was before first light, so that if you had sorties necessary at first light you'd get the maximum time of daylight.

Yes, we were pretty busy in those days.

Then, eventually - we did a lot of our work up around Hervey Bay, or out on some of the islands up there that you could use for dive-bombing, or bombing, rocket firing and strafing. You could

come inland and work with the army doing close air support, or bombardment spotting. Some of the bombardment spotting was obviously done down at Beecroft Range, but some was done with the army up in Queensland. An awful lot of our training at that time was conducted, really, by the CBGLOs. We used to spend hours doing bombardment spotting exercises, sitting down in the crew room with a great big canvas layout on the deck - with either Max Simkin, or Murray Eddy, or Mat [Gordon Hall] Hardcastle pointing out a spot and then us having to go through the whole routine - which was American, and I think they still use the same nomenclature. I know I've got a son who's a two-and-a-half[1] in the navy, and he seems to know what I'm talking about.

Did Max Simkin go to Korea with you?

Yes, Max did - I don't think Mat did, I'm not too sure - Max and Murray Eddy.

Max Simkin was later Director of Army Aviation.

That's right.

He was called 'The Blue Max' - he got his wings - he was called 'The Blue Max' after that.

Very, very nice chap.

Yeah, he really was.

Topic 5 - is there anything else you want to say on aircraft, the daily routine, when you were embarking? - this is, perhaps, towards the work-up when you were training.

It would be a long day, I guess.

Well, I think it's a subject we come on to. See, you not only flew, but you had lectures - it could be on escape and evasion, or these interminable bombardment spotting exercises which paid off, paid enormous dividends later on.

They were distinctive too, I guess.

Yes. A lot of work on close air support and what the army did. For instance, when we were at Nowra, during that part of the work-up, we used to go and visit the army and see what they were doing at Holsworthy, doing the things the army does - shouting and firing guns.

Good doing the service relationships.

Yes.

I think at the time the CBALs did their work, about eight of us did the helicopter course

[1] Lieutenant Commander - two standard gold rings on the sleeves or shoulder boards, with a narrower ring in between the standard rings.

at Nowra. Even to this day, at Anzac Day, at the Canberra Club, the navy and the army aviators get together there; very pleasant.

Topic 5: The work-up of *HMAS Sydney* for operational service in Korea, and how well the conduct of operations confirmed the effectiveness of the work-up. Do you have any recollections of the work-up of *Sydney*?

Yes. As I say, the work-up was done mainly off Hervey Bay in Queensland, out in those islands there, and then we'd come back in and anchor around Hervey Bay at night-time. These consisted, as I say, of low-level bombing, air-to-air gunnery - the bombardment spotting part of it was done down - or part of it was done - down of the Beecroft ranges at Jervis Bay - a bit of compass swinging, dive-bombing, low-level navigation, group strikes, strafing, navigation exercises, that sort of thing - and all the time, lectures, mainly to do with army cooperation, that type of thing. The work-up was good.

What impressed me most with 21st Carrier, which it was originally - and this is a point I want to make - the 21st Carrier Air Group was 808 Squadron Furies, 817 Squadron Fireflies - I'm talking about 817 Squadron. Now, that group, plus the Firefly squadron from the 20th Carrier Air Group - which was 805 Squadron - were amalgamated into what was called the Sydney Carrier Air Group. There is an awful lot of stuff around, including material from the War Memorial, which talks about the 20th Carrier Air Group being in Sydney. It wasn't the 20th Carrier Air Group in Korea, it was the Sydney Carrier Air Group.

I wonder whether the placards up on the Sea Fury are correct. I know Norman Lee raised this point with Ben Evans when Ben Evans interviewed him. He really emphasised this point about the Sydney Carrier Air Group representing an amalgamation of the squadrons from the two air groups.

Yes. So that's a point I've got to make somewhere. You see, the signature of the Air Group Commander - Air Group Commander Sydney CAG (Carrier Air Group) - and even as these stamps 'Sydney CAG'.

He was RN exchange?

Yes. Mike Fell was the Air Group Commander, he was a two-and-a-half; Lundberg was the Firefly CO; Appleby, 808 Squadron, was CO; and I think Jimmy Bowles, from memory, who was an ex-New Zealander, was the CO of 805 Squadron.

And the Commander Air was an RN officer.

Yes, the Commander Air was RN, the Operations Officer was RN, the Flight-deck Officer was RN. A lot of the group - artificers and that, in the Air Group itself - were ex-Royal Navy.

I gather in that work-up a number of aircraft with damage were written off. This would be one of the things you would expect in training for war anyway.

Yes.

You weren't involved in any of these crashes?

No, I personally wasn't - most people were - if you did about 100 deck landings without somebody going into the barrier, it was reckoned quite good. Occasionally somebody would go off the end, occasionally somebody wouldn't make it coming to the deck, but mainly, I think, that was in Furies - the odd Firefly it used to happen to. I do remember, at that stage, they did have quite a bit of problem with the hydraulic mechanisms in the Fury due to the tropics, but as I'm not a pilot that's out of my sphere. But they did, I remember somebody going in because his engine just gave up on him and he drowned in the sea.

The Fury had a much higher stalling speed than the Firefly, I guess.

Yes.

The size of the deck was, what, 200 metres - length of deck - there was a 600 foot runway, you had to land on that with a high-speed, sophisticated aircraft, the Fury. You'd be happier in a Firefly, I should imagine.

Yeah - of course, it was the axial deck in those days, it wasn't the angled deck, and you had the barriers across - it was commonplace, there are plenty of photographs of aircraft tangled up in the barriers. Again, I'm out of my sphere here, it's a pilot's business, but if they didn't get in the box correctly, as they were coming in to land, the hook bounced, or they were too high, and straight into the barrier. Well, of course, with the angled deck you could go around again.

Topic 6: The transit from Australia to Korean waters, including training. Any thoughts on that? Any experiences of that which were interesting?

I don't know whether you are aware, 817 Squadron, the Fireflies, in the 21st Carrier Air Group, we had Mk 6 Fireflies which didn't have guns, they had more sophisticated anti-submarine sonarbuoy gear - which was, of course, not much use if you are going to Korea. So we changed them, we exchanged those for Mk 5s which had the guns.

We took about half a dozen with us to Korea, and used them mainly, I think, for keeping the pilot's hand in - because, I think, they had to do a deck landing at least every ten days, or something, otherwise they had to go through it all again. We took pretty near a full compliment of Furies, but the Fireflies ...

Excuse me just a minute, I'm just looking for a book here. I think they only took about six or seven - have you seen that?

No, I haven't, no. I've seen those type of books, but not that one, no.

That contains a condensed version of the war diary of the whole of the Korean War - with Fireflies and ...

I'll get it from the staff library - 'Sea Fury, Firefly and Sea Venom'.

That's the best record of the Air Group that I have seen in Korea.

Stewart Wilson. Who is the publisher, by the way?

Published locally here.

We should be able to track that down pretty easily - I'd be amazed if we didn't have a copy of it - Commonwealth publication, RAN.

Published by Aerospace Publications.

1993.

PO Box 3105 Weston Creek.

That's handy, almost home.

So there was a bit of keeping the pilots hands in flying, a little bit of dummy dive-bombing and strafing on the way up, but nothing terribly serious.

I think on the way up we had some liaison with the patrol officers in New Guinea. In other words, old Sanders of the River, or whatever he was called up there, in New Guinea, would stand on his box and say, 'Now, you boys behave yourselves or I'll call on these aircraft.' They'd come roaring over, everybody from miles around, and they'd be good boys for the next few months.

That would help, use all the support you can get when you need it.

Yeah.

Topic 7: When you entered Korean waters you were twenty-six.

Yeah.

Date of birth against 1951. What was your initial reaction to the operational environment there? - I guess, climatic adjustment, it was getting into autumn when you got there. Was any one of particular assistance to you in that period of adjustment? - bearing in mind you were an experienced navigator and you'd been with the Fleet Air Arm for a while.

No. The training of naval aviators was extremely good. The work-up and the training that we did there for low-level bombing - low-level bombing, of course, was quite common to the anti-submarine people because the depth charges were dropped from about ...

Low level.

... low level. But we did a bit of this dive-bombing which was thought to be the answer in Korea. I don't know who thought that up, but dive-bombing in a Firefly is not my favourite sport, and I don't think it's the favourite sport of the pilots, particularly because it is apparently very, very hard to do from the pilot's point of view.

I keep on emphasising the training we received from the CBGLOs in bombardment spotting, and close air support, and all these things, which was excellent. So we were a very, very highly trained group when we got there which is a great feeling. You know, in World War II you'd get somewhere and you'd do your training and learn on the job more than anything. Most of the

people in the Air Group - about two-thirds of them anyway, I suppose - had served in World War II and it was a highly professional outfit, which is a great feeling, as you well know, going into action with a professional, highly-trained unit.

My flight commander at that time, he hadn't done much of this sort of business. He asked me one day my recommendations on how we would get to targets, and I told him what I thought.

See, we used to fly, basically, in flights of four, and you'd be given a target - it might be a gun emplacement, or railway bridges - as a squadron we were very, very good at railway bridges. Originally, and not for very long - I think the first couple of missions - we dive-bombed from about 8,000 feet and pulling out about 3,000 feet - bits and pieces started falling off the Firefly at that speed.

We soon found that bombs were straddling the targets and not hitting them, so we very smartly changed back to what everybody knew how to do, was bomb at low-level. By flying at an angle across the bridges, you'd hit the abutment and you eventually got that good, out of a flight of four - although sometimes the four of you would have to go in - you could do it with one aircraft.

> By the time the bomb had hit you were past the target anyway, you weren't getting that much blast from the ...

It was about - look, my memory says thirty-seven second delay - it could be twenty-seven second delay bombs we used. You'd go in pairs, or sometimes the four of you would go down - initially the four, one after the other, and so the fourth man had to go like hell to get through before thirty-seven seconds - or twenty-seven seconds, or whatever it was. But it was very efficient, so road, and rail bridges particularly, made a hell of a mess of. But, of course, the locals were all dragooned at night-time to come out and rebuild them with bamboo and all sorts of things like that, until we got a bit more cunning - and that comes into it later on.

But no, it was a pleasure, it really was a pleasure to serve with a professional group that knew what it was doing. It's a bit like the army; I gather the Yanks were really surprised when - was it the Gloucesters, the Brits, and the RAR (Royal Australian Regiment (battalions of)) - came up into action in Korea, how professional they were. Well, it's a great feeling, isn't it.

> Oh, it is.

You are not serving with enthusiastic amateurs.

> That's right, it's great for morale, you knew the whole team is going to respond, everyone is going to back you up, and people are cheerful about it, there's no worrying. From that point of view your transition into an operational environment had very little effect because you were with a very professional body of people.

That's correct, entirely correct.

> It's a great feeling, especially with people of your experience, with so many guys of World War II, that would have given largely that influence that gave this professionalism ...

I think so.

... and a great incentive to the ones that hadn't seen the war service.

Yeah. Well, you know, we only had some sub-lieutenants who hadn't been there before. I remember one of them - I think it might have been on our first mission - he couldn't get rid of one of his bombs - and of course, the last thing that an aircraft carrier wants back on board is somebody with a bomb hanging loose, which may drop off at any minute. So we hung around with him for a while - the carrier wouldn't have him back - trying to jiggle it off. He was sent into Kimpo, I think it was, via Seoul. By the time he'd landed the bomb had gone.

That was a relief.

Yes. But as a sub-lieutenant on his first mission, it was not the best.

If you suspected the bomb was still hung up you'd be doing a very gentle landing at Kimpo even.

That's right.

The barriers in a carrier in those days had nets under - little nets underneath the main net of the barrier - to catch any of what we used to call 'stores' - they were marine marker, or that sort of thing. I've seen them come off and go scuttling up the deck.

Again, sub-lieutenants was another one - it wasn't his fault - oh, I suppose it was really. We were doing a bridge at low-level - must have been shortly afterwards. The ground was frozen and if you didn't get the angle right, the bomb hit flat and ricocheted. Well, he dropped his bomb and nothing happened. People are looking round, and way over, about a mile away - couldn't have been a mile, say, half a mile away - there was this village, and there was the most enormous explosion you have ever seen. It must have been full of - as a lot of these villages were - full of ammunition and ordnance of some sort. And this bomb, when he released it, had ricocheted, and landed in this village and blown the whole countryside to smithereens.

That would have taught them a lesson, I guess.

Oh, yes.

Don't know where the bomb's going to land.

Yeah.

It shows you the Möhne Dam (Germany, Second World War), I suppose, the dropping of that mine.

So the task of the Firefly observer was - you mention particularly, navigation to and from target areas, and ground-target identification. Would that be accurate?

Yes. You see, if you were flying in a flight of four - which, generally speaking, you were, but not always, sometimes just a pair, but generally four - the flight commander's navigator would navigate to the target area. Again, some of them used to use that technique of going to a - on the

way in you'd fly a bit higher so you'd keep out of the range of rifle fire, and because one of the characteristics of that war was you had a firearm of some sort used to fire at the aircraft, and if you came down low you generally copped a bullet or two.

So above small arms fire, and go into some prominent geographical feature, then go down, map read your way to the target, and go down low and do your job, and come on out of it.

Now, the flight commander's navigator would be doing the navigating - you'd be running a check on it, obviously - but once you'd attacked a target you went on what was called 'armed reconnaissance' up a road between two areas where it was sort of targets of opportunity. It could be ox carts - that sounds funny, but ox carts carried ammunition and that stuff. Very little moved, in fact; if anything moved it got shot at. You'd see the classic one of the haystacks in the field with the tank tracks leading into them, that sort of thing - sometimes - I think occasionally you'd see a tank or troop concentrations, any more that a certain number of people.

I remember one day there - they must have been moving a battalion down - they used to move whole divisions down, and nobody would see them - of course, they'd travel at night and hole up during the day. This lot were wearing white snow uniforms, and they got into an area where most of the snow had melted, but there were big patches of white snow, and then patches of that brown earth. They'd come out into the brown area in their nice white uniforms. We had a time rounding them up.

But it was map reading, both to the last bit of the target and along the roads to whatever you roused up along the way.

Were you doing any engagement of targets using the ship's guns?

Oh, yeah, that was a separate matter altogether. In the Fireflies we didn't do much close air support - the Furies did a lot. We did bombardment spotting.

I think this is fairly well documented, the destroyers and frigates were not particularly good at pinpoint accuracy over the ranges that they had to go because they are out to sea and your target is not generally on the shore, it's inland somewhere. But the cruisers and battleships were terribly accurate.

Were they?

Yes.

Who would do that adjustment? Would the observer do the adjustment?

Yes, the observer did all of it - we had the old formula, you know, four times the time of flight of the shell squared is the height you had to be at. Shooting - not that I shot with the *New Jersey*, but some of our people did - I think the time of flight of the shells was eighty-four seconds, or something; that meant you had to be up around about thirty-odd thousand feet - a bit difficult.

Our targets used to vary - gun emplacements, troops, transports, barracks, railway tunnels - mainly railway bridges and road bridges because they used to, as I say, run out and repair these bridges at night-time, do them up with scaffolding and get something across, and then hide the trains in the tunnels during the day. So we used to give the tunnels a go, and then, since they

were cunning, we thought we'd be a bit cunning too. We used to mix up with our bombs twelve and twenty-four - I'm not sure about thirty-six - but twelve and twenty-four hour delays, and leave them in the mess of the bridge, and when they came out at night-time to fix that up ...

> I didn't realise you could put those sort of delays on - obviously for operational reasons like that.

Yes.

> Take your mind off repair work, wouldn't it?

Yes. It was rewarding occasionally if you were doing a tunnel, to see the steam coming out afterwards.

> I'll bet.

> We are on to Topic 9 - you've covered part of that - but was there any operational air photography that you did?

Oh, yes, I'm sorry.

***

After each strike - I've got a batch of these at home somewhere - there's photographs here of the sort of thing that we - that sort of thing. We'd done this bridge - I don't know which, it could have even been our flight, I'm not too sure. We had a Scottish flight commander and he'd go and do the job and come up - and we were 253 - and you'd hear this Scottish voice saying (with Scottish accent), 'Twenty-five-three, will you go down and take a photograph.' You'd stirred up the ants.

You'd go down, and we had these hand-held cameras - you know the big ones - and we'd take oblique photographs with them for target assessment.

> It would be stirring though, as you were going into anti-aircraft fire, especially when you stirred the hornets' nest.

Oh, well, look, don't get me wrong about the flak. Occasionally it was intense, but it's just that everybody who had something to shoot, well, if you got down low, they'd have at go at you.

There was a Pass near - Haeju, I think it was - the people used to like to fly along, instead of going up high they'd fly through the pass, but they soon learned not to do that when people got to know about them.

> Topic 10: Having mentioned the anti-submarine role, but I guess, from what I understand, there wasn't much in the way of submarine threat, from the carrier's point of view.

No, there wasn't, but, of course, the carrier operated within a screen, mainly - or some American ships, with Australian, or Canadian, or Dutch ships in the screen. We used to alternate with - see, when we weren't up there the American light carriers used to operate in the Yellow Sea –

Rendova is one of them, I can remember – they were manned by Marine National Guard squadrons.

Poor old Yanks, if you were on the reserve - which, I think, everybody who came back from World War II was - they didn't give you time to sell up your business or anything, they just said, 'Right, you – in.' These National Marine Guards, I had the pleasure of meeting them once when we were on leave together, they were great fellows.

I'm sorry - anti-submarine. I notice, in my logbook there, that I did about sixty sorties, which, I think, was about the average in the Firefly squadrons, probably - thirteen of those were anti-submarine - so the whole time during the day there would be a cap of Furies over the carrier, and there would be an anti-submarine aircraft going around, doing patrols ahead or around.

And that was the Mk 6 Firefly, was it?

No, Mk 5s.

Still Mk 5s, was it?

Yes.

So it was both armed for conventional weapons and could also do the anti-submarine role?

Yes.

So you really kept you hand in the anti-submarine, as well as the great range of work you were doing projected across the shore.

Anti-submarine patrols was as boring as old get-out, particularly in the sort of weather up there - the low, rainy clouds and mist - until the weather got very, very bad. You've seen those photographs of the *Sydney* covered in snow.

We talk later on about Typhoon Ruth - some of that comes out on Ruth later on. You've mentioned the cap over the carrier, or the carrier and its screen; did you have any encounters with enemy fighters, either North Korean or Chinese?

No, not me personally, no, no. Of course, the Furies used to go up into that area, they used to go a lot further north than we did - they used to go up around Pyongyang and up around that way - and also they operated further over with close air support for the army.

When we first got there we went to the west coast of Korea where we used to operate, roughly, about the 38th Parallel. We would operate into the area, I suppose you'd call it, north-west, around Chinnampo and inland from there - Haeju and those places.

No, the only time I ever saw jets they were American jets, and the first time we saw them it frightened the devil out of us because I hadn't seen an angry jet before. In those days they used to throw a lot of smoke - I thought, good God, who are they shooting at?

No, we didn't see any enemy aircraft, but I'm sure the Furies did.

I think Digby Johns indicated that, yes.

You've already mentioned Topic 12 - ground targets, including close air support - you've already mentioned that, I think. There was nothing more you wanted to say on that, was there?

No. Well, of course, the ...

That was 12.

... close air support for the army was done mainly by the Furies - I certainly didn't do any real close air support.

I was going to say we went to the west coast originally. We were only there a few days when everything was pulled around to the east coast, up around by Hamhung, up by the reservoirs. I gather the idea was to draw the Chinese and North Korean forces over that way, to think that there was another big amphibious landing taking place.

I think, at that stage, we flew about eighty-nine sorties a day, which was a bit of a record in those days - and quite a bit of bombardment spotting, and gun emplacements, that sort of thing, round there.

It was a varied task, but mainly - and I've made a notation in my logbook there somewhere, and I think other people mention it in books like this - that the best indication was that all railway bridges and road bridges in your area were destroyed. I noticed, as I've said, they'd come out and try and fix them out at night-time, and you'd do your best to knock them down, or make it difficult for them.

Did you want to take a break now?

No, I'm right.

Topic 13 was the functioning of the carrier borne ground liaison officers, or the older title you mentioned earlier. You talked a bit about that in the training, and the use and value they were; but from the operational point of view, any more thoughts on that?

Well, of course, they were the people who did all the assessment of the targets - they got the targets using usual procedures. You'd come back, you'd be debriefed down there by them, and talk about the targets and whether you'd thought you'd done it, and what you'd produced in your photographs. They were very, very good, although they ran the briefings and everything else. When you went for briefings in the morning you got your weather and your target information, and then detailed information from the army.

Had any of them done any mission themselves as observers, to get a feel for things? Of course, that implied they would be trained, to a similar degree, hopefully, that you guys were.

I think officially not, but I have an idea that Max Simpkin, and maybe Murray Eddy, got ... look, I wouldn't swear to it.

I always think when you've got people in the other service giving advice on your work, it would help if they also had the similar skills so they could think with your mind; but I guess they didn't need to.

Topic 14: Were you aware of any limitations of aircrew hours, as well as pilot and observer fatigue?

No. Of course, there was the famous Admiralty Fleet Order - the Royal Navy had Admiralty Fleet Orders, we had Commonwealth Naval Orders that came out from time to time - this one was called by the aircrew - they reckoned the title of it was, 'Let's not be beastly to aircrew'. I think it laid down the number of hours that operational aircrew should do, and the medical officer and everybody else was to keep an eye on them in case they got a bit fractious.

We used to be on patrol for about ten days, I think it was - ten days to a fortnight - you'd refuel and rearm halfway through it by the replenishment ships that came out - you'd spend a day refuelling and rearming. So every couple of weeks you got back into Sasebo or Kure - we used to prefer Kure because that was a BCOF (British Commonwealth Occupation Force) area - where you'd properly refuel, rearm, and do everything, and the aircrew would have a bit of a holiday.

It depended on what your other job was. You mentioned somewhere - you asked, but I don't think I answered you properly - what tasks the aircrew did when they weren't flying. Well, I was the Group compass officer. There's not much you can do about compasses on an operational setting in an aircraft carrier, but every time an aircraft landed heavily on the deck, or went into the barrier, it would be fixed up again, if possible, by the squadron personnel, but it was red-inked in the 700 (E/E 700 - aircraft serviceability and acceptance 'register') as US ('unserviceable') for compass. I used to do that; I'd keep an eye on all the compasses in the squadron, and if the Air Group Commander saw there were too many red-ink entries there, well something had to be done about it. And when you came in, for instance - we off-loaded all our aircraft at Iwakuni there once - or in Kure - took them by barges across to Iwakuni. Myself and another chap called Jack Hickson, and some squadron personnel, had to swing the whole forty aircraft.

So they were put onto barges, they weren't flown off? They were taken to barges, put onto hard ground, the compass swung there?

Yes.

So you were doing the four points of the compass?

No, you'd go through - I've got to go back in memory - but you'd go right through every sort of ten degrees when you are swinging them.

And check afterwards to make sure it was ...

Yeah, well, the compasses were called fluxgate compasses in those days, it was very much an electrical business too. Once you found your deviation in the compasses, to correct it you had to have your electricians with you.

Operating on the carrier, did that alter the compass? On a big chunk of metal like a carrier, was there much compass deviation because of that?

No, not really.

Once they were airborne it was okay anyway.

Yeah. The heavy landings, and particularly if somebody had been into a barrier, had their effects after a while.

It's a pretty boring game, swinging a compass.

Oh, it's a dreadful game. That was my job; some people would be the armaments officer of the squadron, some people would be stores officer of the squadron, and you had divisional work at the same time - you probably had a division of sailors to look after. So you were kept reasonably busy, but as I say, once you got into harbour ...

The captain was very, very good, he was one of the finest captains I've ever served with.

Harries.

Yes, [Darbo] Harries - very shy man who could bark quite loudly.

I gather he was the type of person to get right round the ship, paid a lot of attention and was seen all over the place, and the sailors got to know him well.

You are probably thinking more of the commander, Brad Smith - I don't know that he ever slept.

There is a famous story of the shipwright officer, had his little cuddy (office of desk) there. He'd get there in the morning and he'd find notes from the Commander, as he was called in those days - not so much the Executive Officer, he was just called the 'commander'. Brad Smith, who later became Admiral Smith, would leave a lot of notes for him - which was a good commander's job, you know, if he'd been a commander - in the ship or shore establishments you are around all the time, looking for things that are wrong, and you'd let the chippy (shipwright officer) know. He used to get furious at these notes - you know, 'Starboard aft ladder space is not ...' - so he'd get up earlier. He'd still find these notes, and he'd get up in the middle of the night and he'd still find them. That, of course, with a wartime complement, a large number of sailors, as gun crews. He used to grab them all and they weren't on the guns, particularly at night-time. He'd have half the ship sealed off, painting - chipping and painting half the ship. He used to do it all the night-time. He was a great commander, that ship was spotless - oh, gee, it was spotless for an operational carrier.

I've heard that from several other people.

Topic 15: What were the general limitations of weather, the sea state, that type of thing, on carrier operations, and, in the same context, the effect of Typhoon Ruth?

Well, you obviously had your clear days, but my memory - have you seen ...? - you have, but you may not have taken particular notice of it - there's a poster that the War Memorial has here of a Fury taking off from the *Sydney* in Korean waters.

I've seen that, yes.

That's my impression of most of it, it was dark and dismal, low cloud, and scud, and sea state probably about 3 or 4 - it could get worse. Anyhow, you obviously had your fine days as well. Flying over Korea at that time of year, it was misty and cloudy - it was clear, but occasionally you'd get banks of fog.

I remember, we were going around a town - it must have been on one of these armed reconnaissances, after we'd done a job somewhere - and there was a whole heap of North Korean soldiers standing still in the fog thinking that we couldn't see them. But the fog, or mist, was like a wall, and of course, flying round the edge of it, they were just inside it - looking up they probably couldn't see a thing, much to their dismay later.

Now, Typhoon Ruth. Of course, we were in Sasebo at the time, and we were taking on stores, and getting rid of damaged aircraft, and things like that, when the typhoon warning came out. Well, the Americans - Sasebo was a typhoon harbour, it had these big typhoon buoys in there - there were goodness knows how many - American ships, capital ships, carriers, and destroyers, and landing craft. They stayed there, but the British, in the good old British tradition - well, we were the senior ship - put to sea - dates back to the Penelope in Samoa, doesn't it? Anyway, we put to sea with any Australian ships that were there - I think there was an Australian destroyer and frigate, and Canadians, and Dutch, and British - we all left.

Well, of course, the typhoon changed - as always, it is the worst typhoon anyone has ever seen, but it was a very bad one apparently. It hit us - it changed course and got to where we were - and it hit us late afternoon, and through the night. I think the ship rolled about thirty-five degrees at times - I know the bob went off the screen.

I remember, we started to lose aircraft. With forty aircraft on board you can only fit about twenty-six down below - I'm not too sure of that figure, but it's about that many - and the rest were on deck. Although they were held down quite securely, just a tiny bit of motion eventually got them. I can remember seeing just the two wingtips still attached to the thing - the aircraft had gone. We lost a few over the side - there are plenty of photographs - you've seen them?

Yes, I have - they were fully fuelled.

Yeah, that was the problem. The fuel, of those that were smashed up on deck, the fuel started to go down the lift wells, and of course, the ventilation fans, there were fires starting - and water was coming in. It wasn't a very pleasant night.

There were some funny things, of course. I remember there were emergency parties, and getting up on the deck and trying to secure things. But we were sitting down in the wardroom - those old wardrooms are quite large with bench type seats around the bulkheads. The ship gave a sudden roll and it jerked. There was a chap sitting there, and honestly, he flew through the air, horizontal, from one side of the wardroom to the other, like a flying torpedo, to the chairs on the other side.

No, it did quite a bit of damage. I think it took us about two or three days to get her all fixed up.

I gather, from comments I've heard, that it would have been safer, as you were implying,

to stay in Sasebo Harbour rather than put to sea.

But again, you see, you've only got to get - I think one did get adrift, one of the big cranes there got adrift and started skimming around the harbour, not under control. There is not much you could do if you were anchored there, some poor ship.

Just duck, I suppose.

Topic 16: You views or experience of enemy countermeasures active, like fighter intercept - you mentioned that there were no encounters of enemy fighters - but anti-aircraft fire - you've mentioned small arms and some anti-aircraft flak, but also passive stuff like camouflage and forms of deception. Again, you've covered a number of those already, but anything else that comes to mind?

Of course, they were very, very good. As I say, they could move whole divisions down from the border and nobody would see them. It's only when they made a mistake, as I say, like coming out into brown coloured earth still wearing their white uniforms. Sometimes you'd see all these tracks going to haystacks, and there'd be something hidden in those - it could be anything from guns to tanks in them.

They'd sleep by the side of the road with mats over them - I'd call them monsoon ditches - in the ditches by the side of the road. Camouflage, very, very good. You'd fly along and you wouldn't see - first glance - you wouldn't see a thing on the North Korean side of the lines.

I mentioned somewhere - in a talk I gave to the Naval Historical Society - the odd occasion when we got near what I would call their trenches - the army - to see all the activity behind our lines, it made you shudder sometimes, because when I was in Burma you didn't see anything moving like that.

I guess our people were lulled into a false sense of security ...

Oh, yeah.

... on the basis that there was no enemy air-to-ground attack, made us pretty idle, I suppose.

It's a bit frighting to see it. I know we had air superiority and so that's what air superiority is about, enabling your own logistics to work, but it is frightening to see.

There's no incentive like being attacked from the air and then realising how important your camouflage is.

That's right.

Topic 17: Do you have any recollections of any significant operations? I guess really your operations were routine, as you say, a flight of two or four, they were the sort of standard sort of operations. There was no major operation that the carrier took part in?

No. I remember the visit up the east coast - Hungnam Reservoir - because that was pretty big business. They had the battleships up there - the *New Jersey* and lots of cruisers. They were

really belting the shore, it was pre-invasion bombardment which is intended, apparently, to convince the Chinese and North Koreans that that was what was coming. I think they moved a couple of divisions in there, which was the object of the exercise.

I remember another one on Chinnampo, strangely enough - it's funny how things stick in your memory. We came in and we seemed to slide down the side of a hill - there was sort of four bridges, I think, two railway and two road bridges, which had been badly damaged, but they were still working - and sliding down over there, coming down the hill at these. They'd obviously got the message about the same time as we did. You'd see them all running in their trenches, objecting to your presence. That stays in your memory for a while.

> I can imagine it does, yes.

> Topic 18: Have you got any thoughts and recollections of the losses of Fireflies and rescues of aircrew shot down?

Yes. Of course, the famous rescue was of Sub-lieutenant [McMillan] and Aircrewman Hancock. Their Firefly was shot down, and it was in the afternoon. Once anybody was shot down the whole of the air war sort of stopped and fighter aircraft came and ran a protective cap over them. Aircraft from the ship, and some RAAF Meteors, and further up, of course, the Americans, they sent a chopper off - we sent our chopper. Our helicopter was on loan from the Americans; we had an American chief and ensign, and two or three American sailors there as aircrewmen.

My recollection of it was that I think we'd just landed. The observer in the Firefly used to carry an Owen gun. This aircrew came bursting into our crew room - he was on the way to rescue McMillan and those, and he wanted an Owen gun. So I gave him the quickest course on an Owen gun you've ever seen. I said, 'Well, here's the magazine, you put it in there with the bullets facing that way, cock it and pull the trigger.'

They were very brave - you probably know the episode. The American chief, even though it was dark and he was ordered back to the ship - they reckon they couldn't stay there any longer - he went on and rescued them, and brought them back. He didn't come back to the ship, he went back to Kimpo.

Well, you know, I think there were about ten or eleven Furies shot down, and three Fireflies - there were a lot more hit - there seemed to be rescues going on. There was an American rescue plane called 'Dumbo' and another called 'The Jolly Green Giant' that would come and pick them up out of the water.

One of our blokes managed to land on one of these islands off North Korea which, fortunately, were inhabited by Major [Leopard] - he was a very famous character - an American Marine, I think, he used to run a whole lot of bandits around these areas, annoying people. He picked them up.

> Part of your training, of course, was escape, evasion and survival, wasn't it?

Yes.

> So you were pretty well prepared if you did go down. It was good for morale to know you could get the fighter cover and hopefully get rescued by chopper.

Yes. Well, of course, that was the big difference, as far as I was concerned - I suppose as far as everyone was concerned. In World War II, if you went down behind enemy lines, it was luck, you tried to get out the best way you could. But with the choppers it was great, that feeling, that all things being equal, they'd come and get you out. Over the sea part of it, they had these Grumman seaplane things which would come and get you, which was good.

Topic 20: What were the most stressful activities for aircrew in the conduct of carrier-borne operations?

Oh, being facetious, I suppose, landing on them.

I thought you'd say that, especially as observer, you had no control over the thing.

Observers were reputed to have prayer mats.

So it was really getting on your prayer mat that caused the damage to your flying suit, not the battery acid.

True. No, I don't think anything was more stressful than any other things.

What would you say, in your experience, was the most testing or trying experience you had as observer? Does one event stand out?

No ... I think one of the most exhilarating things that happened - we did several railway tunnels, but going up an enormous railway cutting to the tunnel - I mean, you can only see out either side and a certain degree forward. Pounding up to the tunnel seemed to be the most exhilarating thing.

I would imagine.

Not the tunnel, the cutting. Then you go up and watch it explode - a great puff of smoke comes out of the tunnel - because obviously they had sandbags and things in it. After a while steam coming out seems rewarding.

Quite an experience.

Topic 22: Could you just comment on what member of your squadron, or the Carrier Air Group, had most influence on you during your tour of duty? Failing that, who was the most outstanding personality in the Carrier Air Group?

Oh ... I thought about this one. An air group is like one big family in many ways, and I don't know that anyone is outstanding more than others. You know, for some strange reason you don't see all that much of the Air Group Commander or your CO, except maybe at a briefing. You see the people in your particular flight more than anything.

I think the most outstanding personalities were the captain, Darbo Harries - as I say, was a shy, very well educated man - he was the sort of man who used to read classical Greek in the bath, sort of thing. I think he'd been a cruiser captain in World War II. Both he and the commander, Brad Smith, were old pre-war navy - you knew Darbo was a captain. They were the most

outstanding personalities that I met.

You asked the question, in the air group; it was all one big family really, it was just like any other big family.

> Topic 23: Just broadly, are there any other recollections or observations on your tour of duty in *Sydney* in the Korean War?

No, only what I've said before. It was absolutely marvellous going into action with a highly trained and well trained professional outfit, and gee, that makes a difference, as you know.

> It's good for your confidence, it's good in any mission, you are going out knowing you are backed. Just this comfortable feeling that if anything is going to go wrong, it's not going to be much, and if it goes wrong there are people who are going to fix it.

That's right.

> That's the feeling you'd have, I guess.

It taught me a lesson in life, and for future reference to me: training, training, training, training.

> I've heard things said over the years, and you read them every now and again, that training has got to be tougher than what it's going to be anyway.

Oh, yeah.

> You get your good leaders who understand that and train that way.
>
> In Topic 24, what did you think of that letter to the editor of 'Aeroplane Monthly'?

Oh, well, I'm not qualified really to say, except this: the Brits, their share of bad staff work, and it's obvious, if you have a fighter, it's probably better to have one which is a single seat and not carrying the excess weight - they used to call us 'ballast'.

> That's not very nice.

Well, of course, in the Firefly - it's a twin seater aircraft - if there's nobody in that back seat when the pilot is flying it, they do put ballast weights.

> Put the C of G (centre of gravity) in the right place.

Firstly, the Firefly, I gather - I understand - was designed as a fighter, but remember, it was also designed as an all-weather fighter, reconnaissance, anti-submarine. Anti-submarine, for instance, you have to have two people, one to fly it and one to do all the tactical work. As an all-weather fighter you've got to have another person there, on the radar.

Look, that's in those days, I'm not too sure now if these highly technical single-seater fighters (need them), but in those days (they did). They still have some two-seater ones around.

Yes, the Firefly was very, very heavy - all Fairy aircraft were. As I once said, they were the

slowest operational aircraft in Korea. Some Canadian jumped up and said, 'Oh, no, there's something flew out from North Korea, tried to attack (inaudible).' But no, I'm not competent to say. It depends on what the Brits wanted in their staff requirement, but there were - maybe still are - a lot of duties that require two people in an aircraft.

I mean, for instance, when the RAN brought the Venoms here it was the only all-weather fighter in Australia - the RAAF didn't have an all-weather fighter for years after that. In those days that required two people.

Side-by-side seating.

Yeah. But I take his main point, that if you are going to have a fighter, it's probably better to have a single-seat one than a two-seat one.

Better performance for your survival.

Yeah - but it depends. Nowadays the technical envelope, I really don't know.

It was Norman Lee that suggested I get a copy of that to you and see what you thought about it. Thanks for that, that's very interesting. It was quite an interesting letter, I thought, the way he tackled it.

Yes, I can see his point.

Look - not for publication - I can tell you - because the Fairy Aviation Company might still be ...

Well, thanks ever so much for that very interesting interview, all the way through it, and getting the observer's viewpoint particularly, even if sometimes you were regarded as ballast. Both your experience and your anecdotes have been most enjoyable, and I do thank you on behalf of the War Memorial. Thank you for coming in.

Thank you very much indeed.

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