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S02779

James Ernest Parsons as an aircraft armaments fitter, Fleet Air Arm, HMAS *Sydney*, Korea 1951-1952, interviewed by Colonel David Chinn MBE (Ret'd)

Recorded
at: Canberra, ACT
on: 20 June 2002
by: Lenny Preston, AWM Staff

Description

Jim Parsons talks about his recruitment in Western Australian 1949; the trip to HMAS Flinders for basic training; ordnance training at HMAS Albatross, Nowra; his posting to No. 805 Squadron, then 20th Carrier Air Group (CAG) deployed on HMAS *Sydney*; the formation of the *Sydney* CAG; the armament capabilities of the Sea Fury and the Firefly; his role in the Air Engineering Department and his daily routine; the aircrews' working up routine for deployment to Korean waters; his family's reaction to the deployment; the *Sydney*'s operational and replenishment and maintenance routine; the inadequacy of cold-weather kit; the hardships suffered by defensive gun crews; aircraft gun cleaning and gun changing; ammunition handling and gun loading; the perils of hung-up rockets on landing aircraft; landing on a carrier without an angled deck and the use of barriers; preparing and arming aircraft for flight; crew accommodation; his experiences during Typhoon *Ruth*; seasickness; an operation off the Korean east coast involving the battleship USN *New Jersey;* the *Sydney'*s defensive screen; pilot casualties and rescues; The *Sydney'*s senior officers; HMS Glory: the *Sydney'*s proficiency at launching aircraft; sporting opportunities; the RN members of the ship's complement; the USN *Yorktown*; two crew members that impressed him; being ashore in Japan; relations with Japanese civilians; Christmas 1951; leaving the *Sydney* CAG and joining No. 808 Squadron, and an overview of the Korean War and his part in it.

Transcribed by: C.L. Soames, February 2003

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Identification: This is an interview with Jim Parsons; it is conducted by David Chinn on 20 June 2002 at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered are the experiences of Naval Airman Parsons at 805 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, on *HMAS Sydney*, in Korean waters in 1951-1952.

Jim Parsons was born in Serpentine, Western Australia, on 10 August 1931. He was educated at Serpentine State School in Western Australia. His significant postings as an armourer were with 805 Sea Fury Squadron, The Fleet Air Arm, *HMAS Sydney*, Korea; *HMAS Vengeance*; *HMAS Melbourne*, including the Strategic Reserve Deployments; 816 Gannet Squadron - anti-submarine squadron; and he was Chief Petty Officer, Explosives and Bombardment, at the Beecroft Ranges. He is now retired.

Jim, thanks ever so much for coming in and giving us your valuable time for your reminiscences. I think we'll get some really interesting material from what you've been talking about in introduction, and the topics we've got listed.

First of all, could you give us your service background and experience as well as training which led to you getting deployed to the Korean War?

I joined the navy because I always wanted to join the navy. As soon as I turned seventeen I saw a commercial in the newspaper for navy strike pilots - and I had no idea what a navy strike pilot was, but they were the only trade that were taken at seventeen. So I rushed up and applied. The guy asked me a couple of questions; he said, 'Well, you can't be a strike pilot, but you can be any one of these, including naval airman.' That sounded alright to me, so I said, 'Okay, I'll be a naval airman', and duly went through the process. In January 1949 I got called up to sign up, et cetera, et cetera. and the recruiting officer said, 'How old are you?' and I said, 'I'm seventeen.' He said, 'Yeah, and how many months?' - 'Five months' - he said, 'Well, you can't join the navy until you are seventeen and six months; we'll call you up next month', so away I went. On 10 February 1949 I got called up, signed up, and away we went.

The transport costs was pretty interesting because they still had troop trains in those days, and so they kitted us out with a couple of blankets, a couple of plates, knife, fork and spoon, and a mug, and took us to East Perth Railway Junction and chucked us on this troop train. And that was quite an experience as well because it was a proper troop train, manned entirely by, and transported only, troops. It was in the charge of an army officer - rank I don't know, I can't remember now - and away we went.

And the troop train took us to Port Augusta - I won't go into too much detail on the troop train because - it was very interesting - and then we caught an ordinary train, arrived at Flinders - I can't remember the date. Did our recruit training at Flinders, which is the normal seamanship type training that every recruit did - this sounds a bit like a [Mack Sennit] comedy, the whole business actually, because when we had finished our recruit training it was in the midst of the 1949 coal strike and there were no trains running. Some of us managed to get to *Albatross* - half our class got to *Albatross* - which is the air station at Nowra - and some of us didn't, some of us got hauled off into unloading coal and all sorts of things like that. But anyway, I was one of the fortunate ones who didn't have to get involved in the coal and arrived at *Albatross* in due course. There we did a six weeks' naval airman introductory type training where we had a few days instruction on every trade in the Fleet Air Arm. I decided then that I was going to be an ordnance mechanic, and so I was duly selected.

Not many people volunteered for ordnance, for some reason or other - I'm not too sure why - and so anybody that volunteered got the course, and there were a few pressed men. So, after a period of time, I joined the third ordnance course to be trained at *Albatross* and duly passed and got through, and worked around the air station in various - of the ordnance workshop - there was a gun-cleaning shop. I can't think of any others just at the moment because I spent my early time in the gun-cleaning shop.

Then I was posted to 805 Squadron of the 20th Carrier Air Group, which was then deployed on *Sydney* doing an eastern states, capital city, tour. When we got to Adelaide we were advised that it had been decided that the ship was going to go to Korea, and the ship had to return immediately to Sydney, and did, and the Air Group was off-loaded at Jervis Bay and returned to *Albatross*.

At *Albatross* there were two seagoing carrier air groups at the time, the 21st and the 20th - and 805 was part of the 20th. It was undecided who was going to go to Korea. We on the 20th CAG were convinced we were going, and so we commenced a very intensive work-up and training period that was geared mainly to armament. For some strange reason, in peacetime, squadron commanders don't concentrate very much on armament - which is the whole reason for the aircraft; without armament there is no need to have the aircraft really - and this was very intense. And the 21st CAG also began this intensive training period; they were also expecting to go with *Sydney*.

But anyway, in due course, the hammer fell and it was decided that 805 Squadron from 20th CAG would be combined with 21st CAG and be renamed the *Sydney* Air Group. So *Sydney* Air Group would have three squadrons, two Sea Fury squadrons of twelve aircraft, I think it was, and one Firefly squadron.

Now, it may be appropriate here to describe the actual armament of these aircraft. The Sea Furys had four - well, both types of aircraft had four 20 millimetre [Hispano] heavy machine guns. Each gun was loaded with about 125 rounds of ammunition. And they could also carry bombs and 3-inch rockets - bombs up to 1,000 pounds - two bombs on each aircraft up to 1,000 pounds - but they couldn't carry both, they could carry only one or the other - carry guns and rockets, or guns and bombs. And so there we were, this was the intensive program that we were on.

Then I threw my hand up for ...

> So this is the first topic, so we are still looking at your training.

Yes.

> Thanks for that, Jim, that's a very good background. When you entered the service in Korea, having been born in 1931, you were just twenty years of age, I guess, weren't you?

Yes.

> If my mathematics is correct.
>
> Topic 2 was about other RAN vessels you served in before Korea, and of course, from what you've said, you went straight to Korea - your first vessel was *HMAS Sydney*.

Could you talk about, in Topic 3, what your role in the Air Engineering Department was on *Sydney*?

My role was strictly aircraft maintenance, and because of the ... well, I won't ...

We used to do all of the aircraft ordnance inspections, like before flights, routine inspections, detailed that, and we were also responsible for correct loading and installation of all of the armaments.

Were you involved in test firing the weapons?

We were, but we didn't do much of that. The weapons we got were serviced in workshops in the establishment itself. When they come back it was presupposed that they had all been tested, whatever tests were required had been done. We didn't do any of that, apart from simple tests on the aircraft to make sure they were working before we loaded ammunition, that sort of thing. We did no test firings, nothing of that nature.

So that was your role in the Air Engineering Department?

Air Engineering Department, yes.

Topic 4 was: Could you describe the daily routine of the Air Engineering Department on *Sydney*? How did they run?

Are we talking about now, on the daily basis, or when we were actually in Korea?

I guess it's really on the daily basis in Korea on *Sydney*.

Shall we stop again for minute?

(break in interview)

Normal routine was ordinary daylight routine. We went to work eight o'clock. As I said, we had this intensive work-up program. Of course, in those days they only flew in daylight, there was no night flying like there is nowadays. We go to work, do the daily inspections, get the aircraft down the line, load the ammunition, they'd go off in multi-aircraft sorties out to the bombing range; come back, reload, away they'd go. They may do this all day. Other days there wouldn't be an armoured program, they would be doing navigation type exercises. We'd get the aircraft prepped up and away they'd go, without ammunition, and just wait until they came back. There were other ongoing aircraft maintenance tasks to be done in between aircraft flying periods, and that's the sort of thing we did. We were only weapons maintainers and that's what we did, maintain weapon systems, did inspections, et cetera, et cetera, that type of thing.

And because there was no night flying it was a daily routine.

It was strictly a daylight thing, yes.

Topic 5: How well-prepared was the RAN for its role in Korea, and what was the work-up period like for *HMAS Sydney*? Could you talk about that?

Well, once we'd done this intensive work-up period ashore - and part of that work-up period ashore was also the pilots had to requalify for deck landings. After they'd been off the ship for a period of time, they all had to requalify. So they started off doing dummy landings on the airfield itself. They had a marked-out dummy deck, and they'd do their proper - brought in by the landing safety officer - that was the old bat man in those days. One they were satisfied there they'd go to the ship and do what we called 'touch and goes'. The bat man would bring them in, touch, and they'd take straight off - no arrested landing at all until the qualifying officer was satisfied that they could get on okay. And when he was satisfied there they'd do a series of arrested landings and launches.

In the early days they were free take-offs. That is, they'd take off under their own power, no catapult or anything of that nature. Once they were satisfied there they were finished, then the Air Group was embarked and they'd continue these intensive programs. They were doing armament programs from the ship because they'd have to get used to taking off with these heavy weights, and what not - and navigation exercises, all this type of thing - and that was our work-up, and it seemed to be pretty good.

I was pretty junior so I don't know what was good and what was bad. It was good if they landed and got off, and it was bad if they didn't.

The work-up, I gather, was done up in Queensland, off Harvey Bay, wasn't it?

I can't remember whether we actually did then, but we used to, yes. Most of our work-up periods were always done up in Harvey Bay area, and that was lovely because we used to see the whales, and all sorts of things - this was the days before organised whale watching, we had the benefit twenty years before anybody else.

And there was a range there where the aircraft could engage targets?

No. We used to drag a splash target behind the ship - never used the live bombs, or anything like that, or live rocket heads, but used to fire at the splash target, and rocket the splash target, and practice bombing the splash target. I don't know that they could do it now.

A lot of safety things these days.

Topic 6: As a member of the Australian Defence Force you were simply expected to pack your kit and proceed to Korean waters. What did you know and think of the conflict so soon after World War II? How much did you know about it?

I always read the newspapers, I was well aware of what the conflict was all about. I'm a believer - and I still believe it - in the 'domino theory' that communism was going to overtake the world, and I thought it was a good thing to be there. Apart from that, I thought it was a good thing because it tested me as an individual, and that's what I wanted, that's why I joined the navy, I wanted to see what sort of a man I was.

I think most people do that, people who join up do that, it's a real proof.

Topic 7: How well briefed were you, and the members of your group, on the tactical and political situation in Korea? Did you understand why you were there, did the navy

ensure that you were well briefed on it?

I don't think they did, as a conscious briefing. As I said, I was convinced, in my mind, that I knew what it was all about, and I thought we had a right to be there, and we should be there - not so much to say we were a great defender of world democracy, or anything like that, but, as I said, I was a believer in the 'domino theory' and I was absolutely certain that we would be overtaken by communism, and we should defend - stop them - simple as that.

Did you have a feeling for what your mates thought? Did the blokes with you think similarly?

I don't know what they thought about the political situation - most had the same thought that it was an exciting experience, or going to be an exciting experience, whether they thought it was going to be a test of their manhood, or anything like I did, I don't know. We were all cheerful, nobody that I know of had any regrets or reservations about going, it was just a great adventure.

Especially being on an aircraft carrier, the sort of operations you get involved in really give you a good healthy feeling - strong feeling - of adventure.

Topic 8: What was your family's reaction to you going to a war zone? and how much communicaton did you have - letters and so on?

Yeah, well, we went on leave; before we actually embarked on the *Sydney* we went on sort of - before the Air Group went on to the *Sydney* - we went on embarkation leave. I think my mum was a little bit sort of worried about what might happen, but not the fact of my going there, I don't think; she was a bit concerned about the consequences. But communication - mail was okay and the rest of it. She never expressed any concern that I shouldn't go, she agreed - I don't know whether she agreed with what my political views were, but the rest of my family couldn't have cared less.

Was there any navy tradition in your family?

No. Most of my grandfathers were in the army, in fact. In fact, I'm the first generation Australian, both my parents were born in England, they migrated in the '20s - didn't know each other in England - and my grandfather served in World War I in the British Army. One spent his whole life in Burma because he was too old for front line when he joined - it's a story I'll tell you later.

Topic 9: What was your initial reaction to the environment in Korea - the operational environment? How did you adjust to the climate? Did anyone in particular help you during that time, getting into the war zone? Was anyone of particular assistance to you?

No, nobody of particular assistance. The ship was our home, wherever the ship was we were, it didn't make any difference. The people on the shore bases were different, but the ship was our home, it was where we were, it was our family.

But the climate was a big odd. When we first got up there - must have been the end of September, I suppose - it was very hot, we were walking around in shorts and no shirt, and the like - that was in Japan - which we will probably come to later - and then, of course, it got very, very cold. The preparation for that: there was no preparation really, the ship just went there and

we were there, and that was it.

> So you had a fairly quick transition from a summer in September, the cold weather coming in November, I guess.

Yeah, it was.

> From your recollection, what were the logistic arrangements when the ship was operating, in terms of fuel, ammunition, and food, and mail? Was under-way replenishment carried out?

Yes. Well, Kure was our home base, it was just like Sydney was our home base here; Kure was our home base when we were there. We went out on stations, I recall, for about ten days, and halfway through we replenished from a resupply vessel, exchanged mail and all that sort of stuff. After the ten days we used to go back to Sasebo, which was a bit closer, for a very short period - only two or three days - and then go out, do another ten days and replenish, as I recall. I can't actually remember a replenishment during that period, but we must have done. Then we'd go back to Kure for a long stay for maintenance. Mail, and replenishment and all that, it was very well organised, it was quite good.

> Over those periods of ten days, and so on, obviously the ship carried enough adequate material, and so on, to keep things going ...

Yes, oh, yes.

> ... and replenishing at those times, which also gave you a break from the intense operations you were involved in, I guess.

Yes.

> How well was the ship's company clothed and equipped to cope with cold weather, out on the decks, and so on? and what effect did the cold have on your working and living conditions?

The actual preparation for the cold weather was very poorly thought out, most of us thought. We were equipped with (an) additional two pair of long thick socks - knee-high socks - a woollen cardigan, a woollen balaclava, and a woollen scarf, and a pair of sheepskin mitten type things - they had a thumb and an index finger, and then three fingers, sheepskin with the wool on the inside. And then they gave us ridiculous greatcoats - I don't know how you'd actually describe these. They were a padded oilskin thing, but they were so rigid that they were like a sail. If you wore these things in the wind you could be blown over the ship's side. It was the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen, and I don't know where they got them from - and a sort of fur-lined cap, like the Russian soldier's cap, and that was good, and that was about the extent of it.

But most of us extemporised and got what we liked. Most of us finished up with an oilskin suit, and oilskin coat, and oilskin trousers. That kept the wind out and whatever (inaudible).

I've got an idea they issued us with two pairs of long johns too, but I never, ever wore them, and I can't really remember whether they did or they didn't. But that was the extent of ...

And there was no special diet, or anything, for the cold weather on that trip. On the second trip period they did much better.

> When you mentioned the two-piece suit that the guys got, in lieu of the great oilskin, did they have to buy that themselves?

No, no - they were the sort of oilskins that the boat crews used to wear, a pair of oilskin trousers and an oilskin coat, and we pulled those out. As I said, we extemporised.

What I did, this scarf was a stocking net type scarf - you know that type of thing - I got two - I can't remember where I got the second one from - but I sewed them together, end by end, and turned one end inside out, which I used to pull over my head and wind the rest around and around my face, so I've got these pair of eyes ...

> Must have been cold.

Oh, it was bitterly cold.

As a matter of interest, we used to have soldiers on board, towards the end of the trip, for R&R (rest and recreation) - don't ask me why they want to do that. They reckoned that the cold on the flight deck during flying operations was colder than they existed on shore. The difference was, of course, that the mess decks were always warm on the ship, keeping in mind these ships were all designed for British arctic conditions, so they were well heated, and you are only up there during the period that you need to be there, and you can duck down and get warm drinks, and warm conditions, and get off your gear. They reckoned it was colder than (on shore), but as I said, it was only a period of launchings and landings at this stage.

> Then, I suppose, on the land there's more chance of protection from trees, and shrubs, and terrain, whereas at sea the deck is exposed to wind all the way through.

Well, it is, but that was terribly exposed, and terribly bitter cold on the shore for the poor beggars there.

> Was there much icing on the ship's deck to make things difficult in moving around and handle the aircraft?

No, no icing - we had a few snowstorms that made things difficult, but as far as actual icing on the deck, very little because the water is coming up on the ship all the time.

> The aircraft would tend not to be iced up.

No.

> The guns wouldn't be iced up, and so on.

No.

Talking of the guns, they were the people that I really felt sorry for because when we were on station they used to have to go to what they called - we'd go to damage-control level, or readiness level, which meant that defence gun crews were closed up all the time. That meant

there was a limited number of guns actually manned, with a limited crew, but these poor beggars were there for four watches - four-hour watches - twenty-four hours a day. We used to get up there and ... They were the people that I really felt for.

You could freeze up in four hours pretty easily, no matter what you had on.

They couldn't move too far from the guns. They could move out of the sponson and into the weather deck, but they had to be there so that they could get the gun going on seconds' notice.

What was the aircraft maintenance like on operations, with the routine you had? - it would change from being on shore.

Yeah.

Would you talk about the aircraft maintenance plot you worked when on operations?

When we got to the operations area - when we actually got to Korea - we set up an actual maintenance routine where ...

To go back a little bit. The Air Group had its own organisation, and the ship had its own air component, and the people on the ship manned the workshops and maintained them, and the air department explosive areas and that, but they didn't have enough staff to support the whole operation. So when we got operational 805 and 808 - that was the other Sea Fury squadron - were combined for practical purposes, so that it was just one mass. The troops, the aircraft, were all combined - the Fireflys operated as a separate unit - but armourers from each of those had to go and support the ship's operations.

For example, we had a gun-cleaning and inspection workshop, and those fellows were the real troglodytes, they were down the bowels of the ship and they did nothing for the whole period they were there but strip, clean, inspect, reassemble guns; that's all they did for the whole trip.

Now, these guns we are talking about had to be changed after firing 500 rounds, that's a normal servicing routine. And if you remember rightly, I said each gun, on both types of aircraft, carried about 125 rounds. So after every four sorties they would have fired 500 rounds, and so the guns had to be changed. We'll get back to that a bit later.

We also had some of our squadron troops with the ship's gunnery department, providing ammunition to the flight deck. That was their job. The ship's job was to provide the ammunition to the flight deck, and from there the squadron people took over and went from there. We had a small party that did nothing but gun changes, and they'd do these in between flying operations. While we were rearming, they'd be doing a gun change, and they got very quick.

We had another party that serviced the belt-feed mechanisms (BFM), and filled them for us. I don't know whether you understand what the belt-feed mechanism is. It's a sort of a magazine, it drags ammunition from the ammunition tank and feeds it into the gun, and away it goes.

And then, of course, we had the line servicing party, which I was a part of. We were in teams of two, and our job was to load the aircraft with ammunition before they took off, and then between flights, when they landed, we'd clear out the guns, take off the empty BFMs, and all that, any unfired ammunition, reload, and get them all ready again for the next round. That was

our organisation in those teams.

With the ammunition being fired, that was ejected from the aircraft?

The empty cases were all - the empty cases and links were ejected, but sometimes they didn't fire all the ammunition, sometimes they'd get gun stoppages, and there would be ammunition left over - all these type of things, these all had to be cleared.

Did you have any tricky situations during this?

Yes. These rockets - on the Sea Furys there were six rocket launchers, and they used to be in two tiers - I've got a photograph I can show you what they look like. Now, they just slide onto hooks and slides, and they are held on by an eighth-inch copper wire, so that when the rocket is fired the thrust from the rocket shears the copper wire and away it goes.

Now, that's fine if they shoot them all, but when they land and they've got rockets held up - which happened from time to time - the sudden deceleration of the aircraft, and the weight of the rocket - it's got a 60 pound head, and a 10 pound motor - 70 pounds - would overcome the shear wire and the rockets would hurtle up the flight deck. You can imagine.

The way we operate; as soon as the first aircraft landed, we'd jump on it - it was up forward of the barriers - we might need to explain a little bit about the arrester gear in a minute. You are working on them, and we could have as many as seven or twelve aircraft up there - and you've got to look over your shoulder when everyone leaves to see ...

They used to give us a bit of a warning that the aeroplane landing might have hung-up rockets, but you had to keep an eye on them because these things would hurtle up, and they used to fly up, hit the front chocks, and would leap about thirty feet into the air and dive into the water. But if you were up there when these things went ripping past ...

They overcome this to a certain extent by getting the seamen to weave a rope net - strong rope net, very fine mesh - and they hung it between the lowest stanchions of the barrier, and this arrested most of the rockets for the most part.

And while you were up there again - it never happened on the operation in Korea - sometimes you'd get a bad landing and the aircraft would jump over the barrier and land into the deck park. And that has happened, but it didn't happen up there, but a few barriers occurred. But the point is, you know that this has happened, and you always keep one eye behind you because the aircraft always (inaudible). It was all exciting stuff.

Could you tell us about the arrester and barrier system then - explain that? You said you'd talk about that.

The old carriers in those days were what they used to call 'straight through', that is that they landed from the back end and went straight through to the front end, not like the modern carriers where the angled deck is out the side. There were ten or twelve arrester hooks, and in case they missed an arrester hook, they had three barriers - tall barriers - just abreast of the 'island'[1]. And

[1] A carrier's superstructure on the starboard side of the deck.

so the batsman brought them in, and if, for some reason, they missed the arrester wire, they just crashed into the barrier. That was it, there were no second chances that they'd take off, or anything like that. It happened occasionally, for any number of reasons - the ship moved suddenly in one direction or the other, or the pilot didn't respond to the landing safety officer in a timely manner, or, as happened on one occasion and almost created murder, the guy who was responsible for telling the landing safety officer that the hook flaps and wheels were down, missed the hook and he came in without the hook at all.

Straight into the barrier?

Yeah - he was a well experienced pilot, he zapped out of his aircraft and was going to create mayhem for the landing safety officer and his crew.

So it was up to the landing safety officer to let the pilot know ...

He was the batsman.

... that the wheels are down - if your wheels are not down, or your arrester hook is not down, he's supposed to let the pilot know?

Well, what actually happens is that there is the landing safety officer on his platform, and he had blokes who were called the 'looker' and the 'talker', but I can't remember which one was which. Now, one of these fellows had his binoculars on the aeroplane as he (the pilot) made his down-wind leg, and he was supposed to report to the landing safety officer, 'Hooks down! Wheels down! Flaps down!' and the other guy - 'looker' or 'talker' - keeps an eye on the flight deck to make sure all is clear up there, like the other aircraft are clear of the barriers, the barriers are up, and there's nothing fouling the landing area, and he keeps the safety officer informed.

Now, the safety officer has to keep his eyes on the aeroplane, and he has to rely on these two guys to keep telling him what's happening. On this occasion the guy that was responsible didn't tell him that the pilot didn't have his hook down.

Fundamental for a carrier.

Yeah.

Some tight moments. And the barriers are the ones you've mentioned, where the sailors would weave these smaller net type things to pick up any of the rockets which came off and were hurtling down the deck?

Yes. Well, the barriers were fairly high off the ground - they would be eight to ten feet, I suppose - so it grabs the aeroplane. Well, the rockets used to skim along the flight deck so this barrier was low, between the most forward barrier and level with the flight deck - it could be up three feet. It was quite a feat to make the net because it was handmade, it was a real skill.

I suppose the aircraft going into the barrier would do some damage to the prop and perhaps engine damage as well, by the sudden shock of the engine coming to a stop under pressure.

Yes. I've got a couple of pictures of that if you are interested.

Did you have any close shaves yourself with aircraft coming in?

Not me, no.

You kept a good weather eye out each way.

Oh, yeah, you keep an eye out. We didn't have any serious accidents of that nature, but they did occur from time to time. In fact, on a previous cruise one jumped over and landed on the back of a Firefly with the crew still in it, and the propeller chopped the observer's cockpit out. But that wasn't on that Korean thing.

Things to keep in mind though if anything goes wrong.

Oh, yeah, well you had to keep all these things in the back of your mind.

Topic 13 mentioned your employment as the armaments fitter aircraft - or as you mentioned, naval armaments - during the operations. As you said, you were on the line.

Yes.

You role was the line the whole time, was it?

Yes. We were in a team of two, and each of these teams had to work well together. In fact, my first partner and I didn't get on so we were changed. We'd get - I'll start from an early bit.

The ship used to go to action stations at dawn and dusk, but that didn't affect us because we had to prepare our aircraft for a dawn take-off, so we were there before action stations - and flying didn't usually finish until pretty close to dark, and so that didn't affect us either. But anyway, first thing in the morning we'd be up.

We used to load the aircraft the night before - as soon as they landed, in fact, the previous night, the aircraft would be loaded and the flight deck would be spotted ready for the dawn take-off. But we had to prepare before flight and get them all ready. We had barriers on the back on the rockets which were loaded on the flight deck overnight, and because of radio emanations we had to have radiation barriers, we had to remove radiation barriers, get the aircraft covers off - which wasn't an armament job, but everybody bogged in and did this to get ready.

What time were you up in the morning to carry out this before-flight procedure?

As the daylight varied, so we did - we were up before daylight. I can't remember who got us out of bed before daylight though, that's the amazing thing, but we were, we had to be up there before daylight, and we were up there before dawn action stations.

Would you have breakfast before that or would you have breakfast after you got the aircraft off?

Breakfast didn't change, breakfast was from seven till half past seven, or whatever it was. But the two teams had to work together so that we could organise this.

We'd get the first aircraft off, and then as soon as they were launched the deck would be - I'll start again in what the routine was.

We used to launch five serials of Sea Furys, consisting of five strike aircraft and two combat air patrols. The combat air patrols only carried 20 mil ammo, they didn't carry rockets or anything. The other aircraft - the strike aircraft - carried rockets and ammunition - that was the Sea Furys - and they used to take three serials of Fireflys, armed with ammunition - three serials of five Fireflys, armed with ammunition, bombs mostly.

Sea Furys took off first, then the Fireflys, and as soon as they were off the deck was re-spotted with the second serial of Sea Furys - the Fireflys only did each alternate serial - so we would have to get these armed. As I said, they were armed, but those in the hangar, the second serial, weren't armed with rockets - the guns were loaded all the time, but those in the hangars had the belt-feed mechanisms lifted so that they couldn't be fired - which was an exciting thing, which we will come to later. They'd be up, be spotted, the belt-feed mechanisms fitted, and all these sort of things, and we'd load the rockets.

Now, everybody bogged in to load the rockets because it required two men on a rocket. As I said, they had 60 pound warheads and a rocket motor weighing somewhere round about 10 pounds. Now, one bloke could carry a rocket, but he couldn't fit it - you had two to fit them, so we used to work in teams like that. But everybody jumped in to do that, load the rockets and get them ready for the next launch.

Now, if this exercise coincided with breakfast, one of the team would go to breakfast, have breakfast as quickly as you could, get back, the other team would then go down and have breakfast. We did this with all the meals.

There would probably be a bit of a break in this period because the second serial had to be launched before the first serial landed - if you can understand, that's the way the operations went - so away they went. Then the first serial would land after the second serial had taken off, and as soon as the first aircraft landed - you are up on that deck park we were talking about earlier - and the team would start the reload, and so we'd go on. In the case of the first serial we would have five Furys up there.

The combat air patrol never fired because they had nothing to do - do you understand what a combat air patrol is?

Yes.

That's the air defence against intruding aircraft. Since that never occurred we'd get that aircraft to turn around - they work - it was all very hard work because everything is heavy in the way of armament. You get a belt feed mechanism, weights - what, ten pounds probably - and twenty-five rounds of ammunition in that, and there is half a pound per round, is twelve pounds - you are carrying twelve. The belt-feed workshop was on Deck 4 - Deck 2 - and the flight deck is Deck 1 - so we had three decks - sorry. I know we had to go up two decks and had to carry two of these things - well, four of them - and this thing; it was hard work. Ammunition came up in boxes of fifties - fifty rounds - you had to lug it all around the ship. It was all interesting stuff.

There are a number of things you had to keep control of. You had to keep control of the aircraft panels. Remember, we are rearming while landing is going on, so the ship is heading into wind -

you had to have about twenty-five knots of wind over the flight deck - you've got these panels off the aircraft that you've got to keep one foot on so they don't blow away, very (inaudible), and all sorts of things like that. It was all interesting stuff, it was good.

> You had to keep your wits about you all the way through, for your safety and the aircrafts' safety too.

Yeah, keep your mind on the job all the time.

> So the days' flying finished at last light?

At last light.

> Did you get many aircraft coming in right on last light?

No, no, they mostly came in in daylight, but once they were down we had our job to do, like rearm, ready for the next day, get them re-spotted, and all that sort of thing.

> I can see why after every ten days you'd be getting back for a break to replenish as well as get a break from the routine.

Yeah.

> Because you'd be working, I suppose, till seven or eight at night, or longer.

In summer we were; in winter, of course, the days closed in and are much shorter, but it just got more intense because the time was compressed.

> I guess you slept well at night because of the intense work and the heavy work during the day.

Yeah.

> Were you sleeping in hammocks or in bunks?

Hammocks there. That was quite interesting because we were on a wartime complement, the ship was very crowded, and the mess decks couldn't accommodate everybody in the mess deck. So you had to go and scout around the ship and find somewhere to hang your hammock. There was a protocol. Once you'd established your hammock's slinging port, that was yours, nobody would take it away from you. I got very fortunate - it was the same with lockers, they couldn't accommodate the lockers in the mess deck, and my locker was in - it was in one of the cafeterias anyway, but I'm not too sure whether it was the forward or aft one - I think it was the aft cafeteria. Because, when we started off, it was very hot, a lot of people were sleeping out on the weather decks and up on the forecastle, and the like. So I got a hammock slung right next to my locker. Even though it was hot in there, the cafeteria, during the tropics, I knew it was going to be cold up there, so I grabbed a place that was going to be comfy. Even the (inaudible) was a bit (inaudible).

> Was it an advantage being near the cafeteria in terms of any extra food?

No, no, no advantage there. It was just a space where my clothes locker was and where I slept. I didn't live there or anything like that, I went up to the mess deck.

You picked that well.

Could you tell us about the effects of Typhoon Ruth and aircraft? I think you had about three or four aircraft that had to be pushed overboard when they were losing fuel.

We were Sasebo when we were advised of the typhoon and we put to sea, about midday. We didn't really hit the full force of the typhoon until suppertime, round about six o'clock. I remember it pretty well because I'm prone to seasickness - always was in heavy sea - and I took to my hammock. It must have been after six because you are not allowed to sling your hammock before then.

So I'm in my hammock, swinging around - and the tables must have been bolted down, although I don't remember, but the benches were free flowing. The first lieutenant, who was the damage control officer, he had to come and secure all the benches. Directly below the aft cafeteria, where I'm sure I was, there's a small arms magazine where the Bofors ammunition and the 20 mil ammunition - this is leading to the story. The ammunition is brought from there into the cafeteria, and then dispersed out. On the port side there is an ammunition hoist, goes from 4 Deck to 2 Deck, and it was just a straight trunking, and it had a cruet type box, if you like, that was hoisted up by winch and brought the ammunition up.

But anyway, when we encountered the full force of the typhoon, the hatch on 2 Deck, for this trunking, had been left open. Now, whether it was one of those type of doors that didn't have to be shut, or not, I don't know, but anyway, water started pouring through the weather deck, down the trunking, into the cafeteria, and before they got the hatch shut they had about six inches of water in the cafeteria. And free-flowing water like that is incredibly dangerous in a ship because it buffets from side to side makes the ship very unstable.

Now, again, first lieutenant - because that deck is above the waterline there were no fixed pumps, so the first lieutenant had to organise his emergency crew - damage control crew - and portable pumps. But in the meantime he had these poor beggars trying to bucket the water out, to get it out - and I'm in my hammock - 'Don't get me out! Don't get me out!' He must have known what the story was as I was too bloody crook to be of any use anyway.

They eventually got it dry; when they got the portable pumps in it took no time to pump it out. But anyhow, it was quite an exciting period. We virtually weathered the storm overnight. Of course, in the hammock I went to sleep, woke up in the morning, the sea is nice and calm, then we went back into Sasebo.

But as I say, we had one aircraft washed overboard - completely, lost - and three aircraft undercarriages collapsed, but they didn't go overboard. The problem is, once an aircraft collapses the lashings holding it down become loose and the aeroplane is allowed to move, and they broke free of the lashings. But the three aircraft were badly damaged and unrepairable on the ship. I don't know whether they were repairable or not, but we didn't push them overboard, no, they were swapped over.

There was a British aircraft carrier up there - the *Ocean*, I think it was - was a repair ship. Anything that we couldn't repair went to *Ocean*, and we drew new aircraft. I suppose there was

a financial arrangement, I don't know, but to me it was just a matter of one-for-one exchange. In later life I realised it doesn't work quite like that. So our three aircraft alighted off.

> I gather, in Ruth, because of the aircraft undercarriages collapsing, and therefore the aircraft were moving a lot more, some of the fuel tanks were ruptured and you were getting AVGAS which spread around the ship in that area.

I don't recall anything like that. It's unlikely, I would think, because the tanks are internal - they did have external tanks and used them occasionally, but not very often; most of them were internal. But it's quite possible (although) I would think the water would wash it away quickly enough.

> I gather there were small electrical fires occurring in the ship too which caused a bit of concern.

There probably was, but again, as I said, I didn't know. I can't remember, I've no doubt I would have been told. Well, there was a stage when I wished the ship would sink.

> Were many of the fellows affected by seasickness?

There was a percentage, yes, (though) they managed to carry on. You do occasionally find there are those that are so affected by seasickness that they can't go to sea. In fact, in those days they used to be discharged.

> I suppose, really, you can't have people at sea being seasick ...

No.

> ... on operations.

I was never actually incapacitated by seasickness; I would go and have a bleah! over the side, or somewhere, and get on with the job I was doing, or go out and have a bit of a sniff of fresh air, if I was down in the workshops, or anything like that.

> Did it help being on deck as opposed to being below deck?

Oh, yes.

> If you are above deck you've got some perception of the horizon and all that sort of stuff.

You get the fresh air too. You've no idea how stale the air is in these ships, especially in the cold weather because everything is closed, ventilations are not working.

> You are keeping the warmth inside so there is no seepage of fresh air.

Yes.

> Can you recollect any significant operations the ship was involved in, and any good stories about that?

Actually, the most significant of all. We used to operate on the west coast of Korea. The Sea Furys used to attack pretty soft targets because they were committed with guns and rockets, and the Fireflys used to attack harder targets with bombs.

Like bridges.

Like bridges, and tunnels, and emplacements. They used to do a bit of spotting for ship bombardments. I didn't know it at the time, and I'm not even sure now, that they used to do some spotting for the *New Jersey*.

But anyway, the significant occasion was that we had to go around to the east coast and I thought it was to support a landing - a military landing - although later reading suggests that may not have been the case.

Anyway, we were on the (inaudible) with *New Jersey* and sailed around there, for two or three days it was. And you've no idea of the size of these things, you've got to see them to believe the size of these huge guns - we were quite close enough to get the impression they were absolutely enormous.

These were what, 15 inch guns?

Be something around there, but I'm not too sure what she had. But anyway, the day before we were to take up station we encountered this fleet of rocket-launching barges - you know the type you've seen in World War I? - and the horizon was covered with them, as far as you could see, there must have been thousands of them. We just sailed through them and away.

***

The morning of the actual action - *New Jersey* had departed from us the day before, but the morning we were up there, as I said, before dawn, the sky lit up like lightning, a huge lightning storm over the horizon, these great booms came, just like a thunderstorm on the horizon. It was terrible, but it was magnificent, the sight of these ...

Now, I don't know whether it was just *New Jersey*'s guns, or whether it was rockets, or what it was, but it was there - and these booms. Then we never saw *New Jersey* again and we went back to the west coast, that was it.

Quite an experience.

It was, it was really something.

Otherwise the operations, really, were the aircraft operations against the different targets they had on shore?

The ground targets, yeah. We were never threatened at all - they did have a submarine scare one time, but even at the time they said it was unlikely, however one of our screening destroyers had got a radar ping, and we just went the other way and that was it.

How many destroyers would you have as escort for *Sydney*?

In the early part we had the usual screen of four, but that very quickly reduced to two, and the ships got smaller. The only two that I can ever remember - and don't ask me why I should remember these two in particular - they were two Canadian frigates, the *Athabascan* and the *Cayuga* but I can't remember the name of any other ship in the screen. We finished up with two of those very old little American DEs (destroyer/escorts) for the most part, that was our screen.

Did any of the Fireflys fly anti-submarine cover?

No.

Just the combat air patrol over the top?

Yes, that's the only ... apart from our destroyer screen, that was it. We did no other anti-submarine screening.

We discovered there were three fatal casualties on *Sydney*. Do you remember what they were about and any results or effects of those?

I don't know the right order, but Sub-lieutenant Coleman was wingman on the combat air parol. There are a couple of stories about what happened: they flew into a cloud and when they flew out he was gone; or they were banking, and he was on the outside of the bank and was gone. And that was it, no nothing, he just disappeared, it was very sad.

And Sub-lieutenant Sinclair was one of the others. His aircraft was hit and he had to bail out, and he was struck by the tailplane of the aircraft. And of course, he didn't open his parachute and he just crash landed. His body was recovered and brought back, and we had a funeral on the ship.

But Lieutenant Clarkson - there's a couple of variations of his, but the effects are the same. He was in an attack. The one (story) that we heard on the ship was that he was hit and just flew straight into the ground. Whether he was shot and killed in his aircraft, or whether his controls were shattered, I don't know. And another one is that his aircraft blew up in midair. I would prefer to believe that he flew into the ground because I don't think the Koreans had anything that would have exploded his aircraft.

They were the three casualties that we lost; they were all pretty sad. But sort of on the same line. I know it's a terrible thing to say, but we were fairly accustomed to aircrew dying in crashes because they happened in training and all sorts of things like that.

In *Albatross* it would happen, I guess, wouldn't it?

Yeah - there was not a lot that happened - but the people we really worried about - or I worried about, I felt concern for - were those that were downed and survived - like people that bailed out or crash-landed and survived, and the rescue of those. That was always a worrying moment.

There is always the famous McMillan/Hancock affair where the Firefly was brought down and was being actually attacked by Korean ground troops. These guys in the Firefly, aided by aircraft, held them off and an American helicopter had a daring dash in. The young aircrewmen leapt out with guns blazing from the hip, and they plucked these airmen out and brought them

back.

(inaudible) rescued from the Han River mud bank was another - I don't know a great deal about the story of that, but it would be interesting to try and find out.

> You said earlier, before we started the interview, you believed the *Warramunga* did the rescue.

I think that's the ship that plucked him out. He was on a mud bank, they sent a boat in and plucked him out.

> As you say, once they are dead that's it, but it's the guys who are on the ground are the worry.

Yeah.

> What was the (one) where the pilot was brought back to the ship? Was he given a burial at sea?

Sinclair, yes. They didn't bring people home in those days. He was a Western Australian too, a little Bankstown ... His wife and my mum were in Pinjarra Hospital at the same time, when he was killed. It was a bit sad, yes.

> Especially the ladies at home, they'd really feel it.

> Topic 17 is a pretty broad one: Circumstances of the operational environment put some strain on the ship's company - weather, enemy activity, patrolling commitments, casualties and others - but what was the main threat that you saw on the ship? Was it enemy aircraft, surface craft, mines or submarines?

Well, there was no threat, no threat to the ship at all.

> You said earlier.

The Koreans had no submarines. There was always in the back of my mind that the Russians might do it, but nobody really believed that the Russians would get involved in that. If a submarine had attacked the ship it would have had to have been Russian, there was nobody else - it is unlikely that anybody else would have done that. The Americans had control of the air so there was no real threat there. There was a possible threat to aircraft over Korea, but that never occurred. And mines; we were well out of any sort of area where it was economic to mine.

> You wouldn't mine in open sea, you'd mine in estuaries, I suppose.

We never, ever felt threatened, apart from, as I said, that minor submarine contact, if you like. That was about the only thing that increased the heart rate a little bit for a moment or two.

> At least you could concentrate on the aircraft operations and handle the ship's movement at sea.

Yeah.

Any comments you have on the performance of the ship as a fighting unit, the leadership of the various people, morale, discipline, training and so on, and also your thoughts on Captain Harries who was the ship's captain?

We'll start with Captain Harries because it has been rumoured that he went to pieces a bit during the Typhoon, but I don't believe that because Captain Harries went on to become a rear admiral, and he was appointed a FOCAF[2] and a FOCEA[3] on due occasion. So if there had been any doubt about his ability he wouldn't have got those positions.

But he was sort of, at my level, a god who lived up in the bridge, and he was a pretty benign god come to think of it because he didn't bother the troops, he wasn't a strict disciplinarian, but he made us dress in correct rig - but he didn't have to, I suppose, because his executive officer was 'Vat' Smith who became Australia's first admiral. He was a ...

I've heard about 'Vat' Smith and his ...

He was a martinet actually.

He was round the ship all the time, wasn't he?

Yeah. I think he was a bit mad because I encountered 'Vat' on a couple of occasions.

But anyway, the morale, I thought, was good. You get the odd punch-up now and again, but that's just blokes being blokes - young blokes being blokes. We were all good.

What else did you say on that?

Other things like leadership, morale, discipline - well, you've mentioned morale, you've mentioned discipline, I think. There was no training carried on during the operations period?

No, no.

Concentrating on ops the whole time?

It was a whole operation exercise, you got on-the-job training. I thought we finished up an excellent unit, and in fact, the last day of operations - in some of the histories there's a bit of a contradiction - we set a record for light-fleet launches. We launched eighty-nine aircraft in a single day, and this was in midwinter.

When the *Glory* came back - of course, they were in summer, they did 122 - and then, whoever was in charge said, 'That's enough competition, we won't do that any more, there is no setting of records.' On the last day of operations there was a flat-out effort, we were launching them as fast as we could turn them around, just to do this, to be a bit smarter than everybody else, instead of

[2] Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Fleet.

[3] Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Area.

sticking to our regular schedules.

The *Sydney* was an escort carrier; was the *Glory* also a similar escort carrier?

Yeah, it was similar.

One catapult?

One catapult, yeah - there was only room for one catapult.

I should have mentioned that earlier. When I said early in the piece we were doing free take-offs, we were until we got up there; but because we had so many aeroplanes the space was limited, so all our launches in Korea were catapult. And they got pretty good at that, I think they got down to thirty-eight seconds between each launch. Now, that's pretty quick going. I know it was significantly less than a minute, but they were well organised, well skilled crew, they can get them off - keeping in mind that they had to plug in the rockets before they let them off. We used to do that on the second aircraft - one on the catapult - the place where we used to plug in - but they used to bring the second aircraft up adjacent to the island, pointing out the port side, and plug the rockets in then, then put them on the catapult. So this was done, he was already to shoot off as soon as he got on the catapult.

I talked to Bill Rourke who was the flight-deck engineer - I Interviewed him about a week or two back - and he was telling us about this very fast turn-around. But he said because of the conditions up there in winter, they had to operate the catapult throughout the night, even when though there was no aircraft, so it would work by daylight.

Yeah, so it wouldn't freeze up. I forgot about that, that used to aggravate the troops because there were mess decks directly under the flight deck, and the shuttle going backwards and forwards periodically aggravated people.

That would cheer you up.

But you got used to it.

Once you get used to one noise going. Sometimes, when you are used to a noise, when there is no noise it's a bit unsettling.

Yeah. To give you an idea how you get used to noise - this is some time later, in a mess that I was in on the *Melbourne*. The anchor chain tunnel used to run right through our mess, down into the bowels of the ship, and I could sleep through the anchor boom drop. Now, you keep in mind this big chain, bashing its way up this tube, and I could sleep through that.

Tell you how hard you were working too, I guess, sleeping through that.

Well, on the *Melbourne* I was (inaudible) then, I have to admit there was no hard work, it was strictly supervising, no work at all - go to work at eight o'clock, come out at four, and that was the end of the day.

It's how you adjust, I think, that's the main point.

I was just saying, adjust to noise.

Any stories about the commander, 'Vat' Smith?

He was the executive officer.

Any stories you've got about his walking around the ship?

Oh, not especially.

Any stories about people being caught out?

I can't think of any - I can think of a few funny stories after the *Sydney*, but I don't know whether you are interested in those.

I am mainly after *Sydney* really. I've heard that story about him, he was the one who really got around the ship ...

Oh, yes.

... whereas Harries was the ship's captain, he sort of maintained the overall picture.

Well, the executive officer is responsible for the ship's husbandry, that is, the cleanliness, all those day-to-day operations within the ship. That's the executive officer's job, and that was 'Vat' Smith's job. He used to wander around the ship and he'd stir you up like ...

He'd leave notes wouldn't he, I'm told, somewhere? He'd leave notes for people if they weren't there.

I'm not surprised - I would be surprised if he didn't. In wartime everything has got to be stowed away, you can't have loose equipment laying around because of flooding and loose equipment blocking drain holes, and things like that. He was very strict on that. He hated to see clothing or things not stowed properly. He was a bit of a martinet on clothing in the normal circumstance, but in our actual operations he was probably too busy with other things anyway to bother too much there.

It's interesting hearing your story, and it all complements what you hear from the other people, aircrew and other people on - not aircrew - interesting stuff.

Aircrew would be close contact with them because they were all commissioned officers.

You mentioned earlier the ship's deck systems - the catapult, the arrester wires, and barrier, and the lifts. Are there any interesting stories about the working of these things? You've mentioned some about the barriers and the rockets, but the lifts? The lifts, I'm told, were used for volleyball.

Lift wells - we played volleyball in the lift wells, with the lift down, and you got walls around three sides, and they are up two decks - so that's, I don't know, twenty feet, thereabouts - not quite twenty feet. Used to play volleyball in there. We used to have weights in there and things like that - the muscle (inaudible) to play with, and all sorts of things in there. But it was pretty

restricted because of the number of aircraft, you can't have volleyballs bashing around among aircraft. We used to play volleyball in the lift well - I can't actually remember whether we did or we didn't, but I'd be surprised if we didn't - we did have deck hockey on the flight deck, yeah - I was thinking of other athletic things. We used to have little athletics on the flight deck, like races around and around the flight deck, and things like that. Because there were so many ships (I have been on) I can't remember whether we actually did that on *Sydney* - probably didn't in the later stages of the cruise because it was so jolly cold. Anyway, volleyball and deck hockey were the main sports played on the ship.

Keep you fit.

And, of course, they played organised sport ashore. We always had Aussie Rules and rugby teams, and soccer teams, things like that, and play competitions with teams from other ships and shore depots, and units shore.

When you were back in Japan?

Kure was the home base of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, and as I understand, when we got there, the Australian Army were the only ground forces left. The British, the Indian, and the New Zealand ground forces had gone, but there were still ships there - there were a number of British ships there - they had cruisers, and we had destroyers and the like. They used to play competitive sport with them.

Talking of Royal Navy and so on, I gather that the *Sydney* had a reasonable RN or Royal Navy component.

Yes.

How many RN fellows were working in your area?

Well, the 21st CAG, I would say, was probably eighty per cent British loan. When we went over - 805 and the additional postings - were mostly very young people, like myself, very junior people. We didn't have a very strong senior NCO corps at that time because the only ones we had were ...

(break in interview)

The senior NCOs we had were changeovers from other elements of the RAN. The Chief of the flight-deck party had been a seaman-gunner, and he switched over - don't ask me why he chose to switch over, but he did - the PO (petty officer) was a Brit - and I would say certainly more than fifty per cent of the flight deck crew, among the armourers, were British.

How were the working relationships with them?

Good, we always got on well with the ...

So you couldn't tell who was Royal Navy and who was RAN?

Until they opened their mouth. We got on well, extra well. Of course, like in any group of men, there were those that were misfits and hard to get on with - I knew one or two of those, the most

notorious was a Brit, but that's not because he was British, that's just because he was who he was.

> I suppose you got a few soccer players from the Brit side too, to make up the teams when you were on shore.

Yes.

> Did you have any idea of how the *Sydney* performed compared with other allied units, like other carriers and so on? I know you talked about the number of deck landings you got in your post, and *Glory*, and so on.

I can't. We used to operate with the American aircraft carrier *Yorktown* so that there was one carrier on station all the time. But apart from the first time we arrived in Japan we never saw it again because they operated out of Yokosuka or [Koseka], or however they try to pronounce it. That's where our first port of call was, and while we were there *Yorktown* came in; but we never saw them, we could make no comparisons. But we seemed to do pretty well.

We used to come back and get pilots' reports. Initially that was a bit disturbing; They used to come back and say how many bullock carts they shot up, and you thinking of this poor little Chinaman sitting on a bullock cart and the bullock being shot up. But once we got indoctrinated to the principle that this was the major source of supply, then you got used to it. It was a bit sort of unnerving at first, a bit of a giggle.

> I suppose the *Yorktown* was a fleet carrier, a big carrier; it was a big fleet carrier, I suppose, wasn't it?

No, no, it was one of the American smaller carriers, support carriers. During the war it had been one of the major fleet carriers, yeah, but by then it was ...

> Gave the name to a smaller ship.

> Was there any member of the ship's company, or the Air Group, that had some great influence on you during the deployment? Who was the outstanding character that you remember on *Sydney*?

Well, the outstanding character had to be our PO, he was a big fat Englishman. In fact, he was supposed to have been described by Captain Harries as resembling a fat, happy, pregnant woman. He was always smiling, he was always cheerful, he was never difficult to get on with. He probably influenced me more than anybody, how to control men and work with men, and that.

But the Air Group Commander, Lieutenant Commander Mike Fell - he was an Englishman, he finished up an admiral as well, I might add. He was probably the most impressive figure, he was a very debonair character - long hair that was always combed back, and he always used to wear a silk scarf under his flying suit, and he was a gentleman. He'd been the CO of 20th CAG as well, he was the CO of 805 Squadron as well because the CO always came from one of the squadrons. He was an impressive man, I always kept an eye out to what he was doing. I was glad to see that he made an admiral - rear admiral - he may have made higher than that. Anyway, he was a very impressive man.

Some people like that stand out, don't they? - and your petty officer too. They are the ones you can learn so many lessons from.

Tubby Wright, yes.

But they are gentle lessons, they are not forceful, nasty lessons.

No, no. He got on, he controlled all these guys - he had a big party to look after - the chief sort of was there - he was a nice fellow, old Len, I served with him many times after that - he was a pretty sad figure actually, in the finish, but that's beside the point. 'Old Tubby' was there, always cheerful, always happy, always got things done, people would do anything for him virtually.

That's the best leadership though, isn't it?

Yeah, it was. He went back, did his two years, and went back.

Topic 22: Have you any thoughts on the experience of having these protracted periods of action stations, or lesser states of readiness? What sort of wind-down activities did you have after these - beer issues? - you wouldn't have barbeques on board ship.

No, no. No wind-down, it was just a day's work.

The wind-down really was when you were back in Japan for the replenishment and that type of thing.

Yes. You know, we'd finish the day, go down and scrub up, go to bed, get up next morning. There was no wind-down, it was just a normal day's work - it was a busy, heavy day's work, it's probably the hardest I've worked in my life, but it was just a day's work. There were no tensions, no nothing, we just did what we had to do and got it done.

I can't say for these poor beggars who were on the defence gun crews, or the ship's boat crews that were there in the weather.

When you got back to Japan, once all the work had been done on the ship to get it ready for the next sortie, or the next operation, then the ship's company would be stood down and they'd go on leave for a couple of days?

No, no. While we were up there, there was no overnight leave at all; leave expired at eleven o'clock. When we were in harbour it was just a normal day's work. We did get leave from four till eleven and go ashore, if we wanted to. There wasn't much to do because the devastation of these Japanese ports was something to behold, it was absolutely incredible. And Kure particularly because Kure had been the big Japanese naval port and dockyard - but all of the dockyards, totally destroyed. I only remember one multi-story building - it was only two or three stories high, and that had been taken over by BCOF and was a recreation building for the troops - Anzac House it was called, it was run by a Kiwi woman as well. But the rest was total devastation. There must have been shops and things like that, because we did shopping.

But a lot of the damage from the war hadn't been repaired.

No, no, there was no repair at all. I don't even think they'd started repair work. I can't remember a great deal about Sasebo because we were only there for a couple of days and we went out, but the streets were badly damaged, there were no paved streets. As you'd expect, in a city, they were all sort of pretty much dirt and that, and a lot of the places just had canvas covers, things like that - the bit that we saw because we were only there for seven hours, you can't get to travel too much, and there was not much public transport anyway.

A friend of mine actually took the train to Hiroshima - which he wasn't supposed to do, it was still out of bounds. You could get to a place called Hiro on the weekends. On the weekends we had leave from midday till eleven and that gave you a bit of time, but I never tried to go anywhere, it was too difficult to get anywhere. It was permissible to travel to Hiro, but that was about the only place we could.

> Was there any reaction of the Japanese to you people being there at the time? Were they still smarting after the war?

No, not overtly, although on one occasion I had cause to upset a person - I won't go into the details. It was a momentary thing, but I got the impression, from the look of her face, that I upset her - absolute hatred, that she absolutely despised us and hated us. Keep in mind that we were still the victors at that time and the place was occupied, and we rather despised the Japanese generally for what had happened during the war - unjustly now, I accept all of that, but this was then, we were young men. But I'll never forget the look on this person's face that gave me ... I remember the circumstances vividly because of the reaction that it evinced, but there was no outward display of hatred. There was no sort of assaults on the troops, the only assaults that occurred were Europeans on Europeans. They didn't even try to rob us, they were the most honest people I've ever encountered - you could leave anything laying around. We used to have working parties on the ship and they didn't even try to steal anything on the ship, nothing was stolen - food wasn't stolen. Food must have been still scarce.

I have some misgivings now about how we actually treated them, not that we treated them harshly, there was no violence or anything like that - there was no beating up of Japanese or anything - but with the disdain, if you like, not the way we treated them. Anyway, as I say, we were young men, we were the victors.

> You go with it.

> Topic 23: Did you get leave at Christmas '51 in Japan?

No.

> You didn't?

No, we only had the leave that I've mentioned earlier. The public back home supported us. We all got food parcels - little food parcels - that were publicly donated. I can't remember whether we got one - there was no issues of alcohol to the troops on the ship ever in those days - but we got - I'm not sure whether it was one or two bottles of beer from some source, and a bottle of stout - and why we got a bottle of stout, I don't know, but we did.

But getting back to the food parcels; for some reason or other there was an organisation in South Australia that used to send an occasional food parcel, and I got on their list for some reason or

another, and I used to get occasionally a little parcel like that with bickies and tinned fruit, things like that in it. I'm not too sure why they sent us food parcels, they must have thought that in Japan food would be short, or something, but it wasn't.

But the thing that I do remember about Christmas that time was the Davis Cup was played - Frank Sedgeman and [Ken] Mcgregor I think, was his partner, won the Davis Cup that year, first time for years.

> Highlight of Christmas, I guess, was it?

Highlight of Christmas.

> Was there any sort of Christmas activity actually performed on the ship, like someone dressing up as Santa Clause?

No, nothing like that. We mustered up and collected our bottle of beer, and bottle of stout, or whatever it was. The Christmas fare was the same as it was any other time of the season. I always remember, we always had York ham for Christmas - and I don't know what York ham is.

> You didn't follow the army custom of having the officers serve the sailors on board ship at a Christmas dinner? - because you were on operations, I guess.

Well, we were in harbour, we were in Kure for Christmas. It's a bit impractical actually on the ship because of the way the ship is arranged. There is not enough space for everybody to sit down at the same time. By the time the first guy who's served, he's finished his meal before the last guy gets served as a rule, so there's a sort of rotational system.

> So you couldn't work that system, no.

I don't think so. Probably heresy, but I don't think naval officers would enter into that sort of arrangement, they are not as close to the troops as army officers are.

> I guess not, no. And even the ship's structure, the build of the ship doesn't lend itself to it, as you said. And you work at different systems of discipline and activity, operations and so on, don't you?

Yeah. Well, aircraft carriers; I can't speak for smaller ships. I believe they get a bit close on the smaller ships, but because of the ship's structure and organisation, it's just not a practical thing.

> Topic 24, which is the last one listed, asks you if there are any particular recollections of interest, or controversy, or sensitivity, that you'd like to bring up and talk about?

No, not really.

> Any stories that you haven't covered so far that you have stored away?

Not about that, nothing that I want to talk about here. There's a couple of things that I would rather I hadn't done, and things like that. As you get older you think of how insensitive you were - unthinking, uncaring. There are things like that that don't actually distress me, but I think it wasn't very nice.

And you went on the second deployment of *Sydney* to Korea?

No.

What was it like coming home?

Oh, well, that was pretty interesting actually because we came back via Hong Kong and Singapore, and we were supposed to pick up Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, rendezvous with the *Gothic*, somewhere near Ceylon, when they were making their 1952 visit. But if you remember rightly, the King died while the ship was in South Africa, so we got back early and we came back via Fremantle. I went off the ship on leave in Fremantle and the ship came back, and the CAG disembarked in Jervis Bay, and the *Sydney* went on to Sydney. I went back when my leave expired and everything was done, the CAG gear was all unpacked and stowed.

We got more harsh treatment from the old ship's company of the *Albatross* - 'Oh, the heroes have returned', and all this sort of nonsense.

Two Korean War medals, that would stir them a bit, I suppose.

Yeah, they made us feel a bit sort of - no welcoming committee, just set out to embarrass us as much as they could.

How did you find adjusting back to life on *Albatross* after the time you had in Korea - a bit of an anticlimax, was it?

It was sort of because I was posted, pretty much straight off, off the CAG, back to *Albatross*. I was there for a short while and then I went to 808 Squadron - the CAG had been disbanded entirely, they were individual squadrons from then on, we never, ever had a Carrier Air Group as such. While the squadron still went back to ship, they went as squadrons rather than as CAG. And so I went from there to 808 Squadron, and that's how I came to come on the *Vengeance*.

808 was Sea Fury?

Sea Fury squadron, yes - 808 went to the *Vengeance* ultimately and I was attached to that ship, but taken off very quickly, and that was it.

So what's your overall impression of you time in Korea, and in the Korean waters, and so on? It would be a very valuable experience, I guess, at the age you were and with the help you had?

It was, it was a valuable experience. I reiterate what I said earlier, I thought we were doing a useful purpose, we were servicing a useful purpose, I thought we were standing up for the world against this oppressive regime, if you like. We weren't really fighting the Koreans, we were fighting the Russians, that's what it amounted to, pure and simple. We were stopping Russian influence; that's the way I looked at it, and I still believe it. I might be branded whatever they want - I believe it.

I think most of us serving in the armed forces at that time believed the same thing, that you were doing something worthwhile, it was relevant.

Yeah, I thought it was. And, of course, it was a personal experience; I'd been there and done that, and while I can't say I was really tested in the warfare situation, I'd been there. And as I understand it, warfare is mostly plain hard work and not too much excitement, but I don't know, I've never been shot at so I don't know.

It's ninety-five per cent boredom and five per cent absolute ...

Oh, we were never bored, I can tell you that.

From what you've told me, the ship's routine, it really was a hard posting, but, I guess, a very rewarding one from the point of view of your career - a great start.

It was - it was hard work - it was plain hard work. I lost a lot of weight just through hard work. We all came back fit, and any fat we had we mostly lost - probably armourers anyway because they used to say that armourers only needed muscle and no brains, because everything is heavy and you've got to lift it.

So if you've got no other thoughts, Jim, we might finish on that note.

Alright.

Thank you ever so much for coming in and giving us these valuable experiences that you've had.

I'm pleased you asked me.

And the detailed stories you got into, it puts different flavours on things which make it so much more interesting for people to listen to and to read too when it is transcribed.

I'd be interested to know how you got my name though.

It was a list of people - did you go back to Korea?

No, I've never been back.

I forget how it came up, but it's one of quite a string of people who were non-aircrew which we were able to track through, and we are working through those. I forget how it came up. It's now on a consolidated list, showing your name among others. What the origin was, I'm not sure, but it's very valuable to get all sides of the story because when you think of the carrier, *Sydney*, well, you want not only aircrew. The same with the air force; we are not just after the aircrew, but we want the ground crew side, that kept the aircraft going, and so on. Very valuable.

Well, Jim, thanks ever so much.

I'm delighted you asked me.

Glad you came along.

Interesting exercise, I enjoyed it.

Great.

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