

The Korean Episode

Historical Anecdotes *77 Squadron RAAF In Korea 1950-1953*

Col King



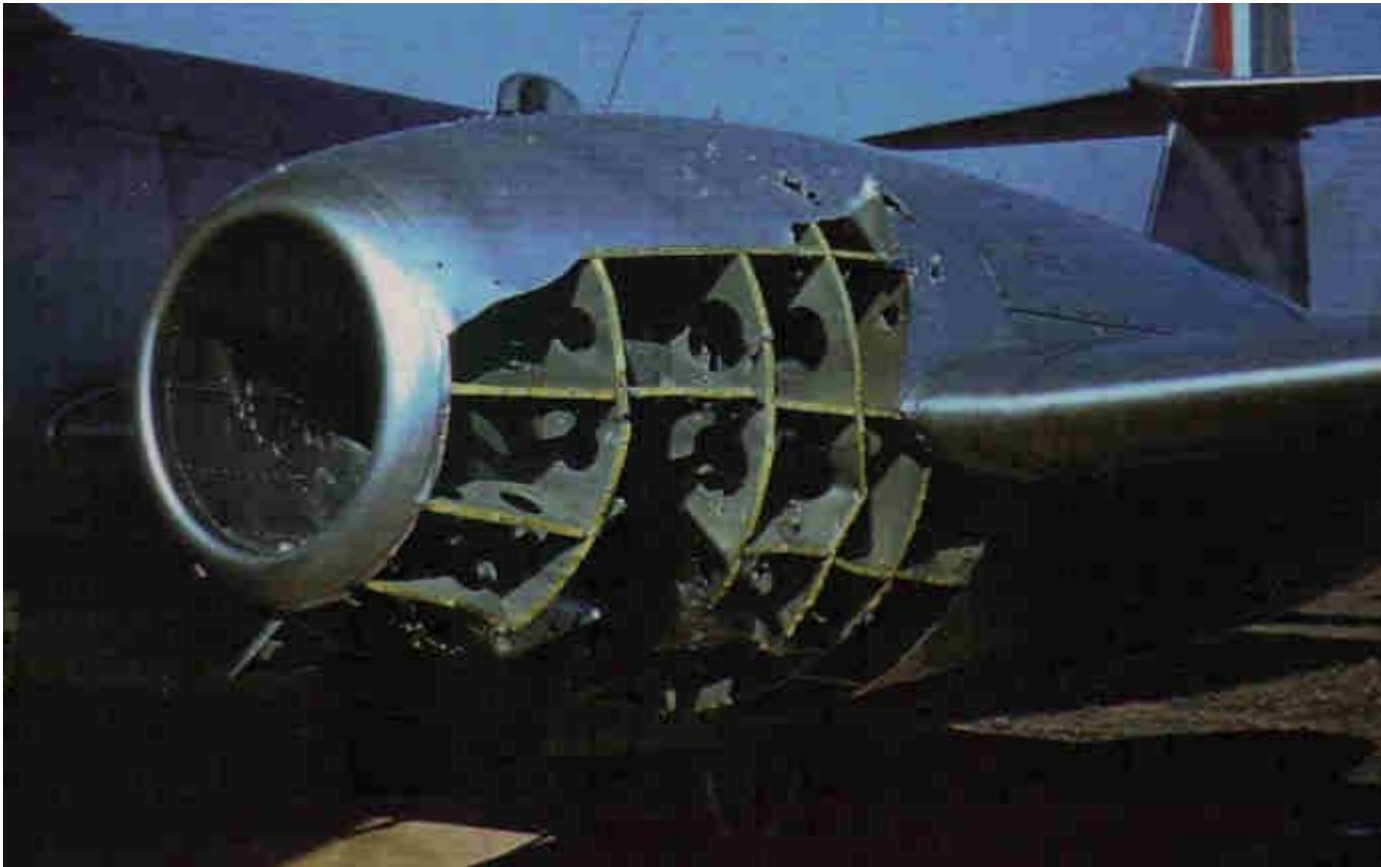
The Korean Episode

Historical

Anecdotes

77 Squadron RAAF In Korea 1950-1953

COLIN G KING — "Meteor"



Acknowledgements

I acknowledge with gratitude the many people who have contributed to this book in one way or another. I must give special thanks to my daughter Lynette and my sister Wendy for their unflagging support and valuable check-reading of material. Deserving of special mention is my nephew Robert Sandland, a highly proficient computer expert whose enormous support and many hours of tuition, proof-reading and ensuring technical correctness of the ePub presentation has enabled this publication to become a reality. Without his forensic research and technical assistance I would have been in trouble, especially at the start of this project..

Some use has been made of the excellent research material provided by Wikipedia, and occasional quotations from this source have been incorporated.

A number of ex-aircrew have provided their gripping stories of wartime experiences while also assisting with technical accuracy. The list is a long one and my memory is not equal to the task. However, prominent among the many contributors I wish to mention the following:

Ron Guthrie, Gordon Harvey, Don Pinkstone, Ken Godfrey, Wal Rivers, Jim Kichenside, Cec Sly, Keith Meggs, John Parker, Pat Melican and so many others.

Many of these servicemen received promotions and decorations for their service during The Korean episode and World War II. I salute them!

No doubt there are many others who served but have been inadvertently omitted from these records. I regret this and ask for their understanding.

Below: Tiger Moth cockpits — Where it All Started



Bibliography

Lion Over Korea	David Wilson
The Forgotten Few	Doug Hurst
Luck is no Accident	Col King
Escape From North Korea	Col King and Ron Guthrie
Wikipedia	Some Extracts



REPUBLIC OF KOREA

(Translation)
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

November 1, 1951

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION

The President of the Republic of Korea takes profound pleasure
in citing
for exceptionally meritorious service and heroism

No. 77 Squadron
ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

for the award of
THE PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION

This squadron entered the Korean war during the first week of North Korean aggression. Flying Mustang aircraft it earned the highest reputation for itself in giving close support to military operations for over eight months of the campaign, and it won the admiration and friendship of all units it supported.

It was then re-equipped with Meteor aircraft and has since continued its fine record in the new roles allotted to it with these more modern aircraft.

Its performance throughout merits the highest praise.

Syngman Rhee



Copyright ©

Copyright remains the property of the author and apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. All enquiries should be made to the author Col King at either of the following email addresses: colgking@gmail.com

ISBN:

List Of Figures

[Martin Baker Ejection Seat](#)

[Promises!](#)

[Places Of Horror](#)

[Typical RAF Mk-8 Meteor Fighter:](#)

[RAAF Base Point Cook \(Circa 1950\)](#)

[Tiger Moth Elementary Trainer](#)

[Barry's First Solo](#)

[Our Course Marching Through Melbourne](#)

[Korean Peninsula at Night](#)

["The Land of The Morning Calm"](#)

[Border Between North and South Korea](#)

[The United Nations to the Rescue](#)

[Seoul Railway Bridge Bombed](#)

[Mustang Maintenance](#)

[Mustang P-51D Fighter](#)

[Japanese Soldier Employed to Guard Our Camp](#)

[77 Squadron Mustangs at Iwakuni](#)

[Wing Commander Lou Spence — DFC and Bar](#)

[Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell](#)

[North Korean Russian T-34 Tanks](#)

[US Army Prepares To Evacuate Taejon](#)

[RAAF Mustang Flak Damage](#)

[The Precarious Pusan Perimeter — 1950](#)

[Saddle Ridge, Taegu — Pusan North Perimeter Territory](#)

[American Tank Near Nakdong River](#)

[UN Troops Guarding Naktong Valley](#)

[UN Troops Unload At Pusan](#)

[South Korean Troops At Pohang](#)

[Two North Korean T-34 Tanks Destroyed](#)

[HMAS Sydney At Anchor In Korean Waters](#)

[HMAS Sydney with Fireflies Off Korean Coast](#)

[US Troops Carrying Casualty](#)

[UN Aircraft Rocketing Enemy Train](#)

[USAF Douglas B-26 Bombers In Action Over Korean Targets](#)

[Korea 1950. \(Green, Pusan Perimeter\). \(Blue Arrow, Incheon\)](#)

[US Army General Douglas MacArthur](#)

[US Marines Land At Incheon](#)

[The Highly Successful Incheon Landing](#)

[General MacArthur Approaching Incheon Landing](#)

[1950 Battle Map P'ohang](#)

[77 Squadron Mustangs Escorting B-29 Bombers](#)

[Chinese 'Volunteers' Assembling](#)

[Chinese 'Volunteers' In Action](#)

[Chosin Reservoir](#)

[Chosin medical evacuation](#)

[Curtis C-46 Commando Transport](#)

[Desperate Winter Retreat](#)

[North Korean Civilians Escape to the South](#)

[USS Begor Observes Demolition of Hungnam Port](#)

[Gordon Harvey Attends Briefing \(Gordon is in Center\)](#)

[Mustang Cockpit](#)

[Emblem Of USAF Air Rescue Service](#)

[Sikorsky s-51 Rescue Helicopter](#)

["Texan" Spotter Aircraft](#)

[Cec Sly in cockpit](#)

[RAAF Mustangs In Japan](#)

[Two North American F-86 Sabres](#)

[Meteor Mk-8 Fighters](#)

[Martin Baker Ejection-seat](#)

[Hiroshima Devastation \(Viewed July 1946\)](#)

[The Horror of Hiroshima](#)

[Same View of Hiroshima Today](#)

[Cockpit Of Meteor Mk-8 Fighter](#)

[Iwakuni and Famous Kintai Bridge, Today](#)

[Wes Guy \(L\) and Eric Ramsay](#)

[Rolls Royce Nene Cut-away](#)

[Cockpit of a MiG-15](#)

[MiG-15 Russian High-altitude Jet Fighter](#)

[Wirraway Trainer](#)

[Navigation Flight Briefing, L-R, Outhwaite, Kichenside, Law, Cowper, King, McPhan, Robinson, and Instructor Pat Gallagher](#)

[Navy Trainee Forgot To Lock Flaps](#)

[Author Boarding Wirraway](#)

[Trophy Winners. L-R: Ian Cranston \(Sport\); \[KIA Korea\]. Ken Smith \(Total Aggregate\); \[KIA Korea\]. Col King \(Most Proficient Pilot\)](#)

[Max Holsworth briefs, L-R, Dick Robinson \(killed - Korea\), Ian Cranston \(killed - Korea\), Ken Smith \(Killed - Korea\), Max Outhwaite \(survived Korea\)](#)

[PILOT GRADUATES, 5 COURSE, L-R: \(Back\) Leon Gordon, Dick Glassey, Jim Codd, Jack Evans, Gordon Brown, Alan Wall, Stan Hyland, Col Roffe. \(Center\) Dick Robinson, Col King, Ken](#)

[McPhan, Ken Smith, S/Lt Gus Gray \(RAN\), Russ Law, Barry Ellis, Jim Kichenside, Tom Mansell, \(Front\) Ian Cranston, John Parker, Max Outhwaite, Ray Knight, Andy Stapleton](#)

[Archerfield, \(L-R\) Kichenside, Smith, King, Outhwaite](#)

[Author Celebrating Mustang Solo](#)

[Harry Brown-Gaylord's Prang](#)

[Merlin Cylinder Head after Glycol Loss](#)

[RAAF Canberra \(circa,1950\)](#)

[Adjusting Mustang Gyroscopic Gunsight](#)

[Mustang Fitters at work](#)

[Vampire. Early Model](#)

[Ice Protection of Meteor Tailplane](#)

[Kapyong Valley — South Korea](#)

[Australians Guard Kapyong Prisoners](#)

[S/Ldr Dick Cresswell Briefs Pilots](#)

[The MiGs' Happy Hunting Ground](#)

[Ron Guthrie Sets Out in his Unfortunate Meteor](#)

[Russian MiG-15 Fighter](#)

[Ron Guthrie as a Squadron Leader Many Years After the War](#)

[Russian MiG Pilot Kramarenko](#)

[The Squadron Which the Russians "Completely Shot Down"](#)

[Bruce Gogerly, First Squadron MiG Killer](#)

[Demise of a Russian MiG-15 Fighter](#)

[Vampire Jet Fighter Cockpit](#)

[Vampire Jet Fighter](#)

[Vampire Crash Landing](#)

[Vampire](#)

[Parachute Landing](#)

[Old Korean Man](#)

[North Korean Bridge under Repair](#)

[B-29 Super-fortress Bombing Yalu Bridge](#)

[Russian Pilots At Antung -- Ace Pilot Circled](#)

[Children at Play](#)

[Yakovlev-9 Russian Fighter](#)

[Douglas B-26 Bomber Cockpit](#)

[Underwater Bridge constructed by the Enemy](#)

[Haystack on an A-Frame](#)

[Jack Henderson Receives the Bronze Star Medal](#)

[Captain Farrar-Hockley, MC](#)

[Colonel Tom Harrison and Ron in America](#)

[Escape From Interrogation Center](#)

[Kindly Korean Couple](#)

[Korean Bay Boat](#)

[Escape Route](#)

[Escape Route \(4,5 ,6,7\) and The Long March](#)

[Typical Korean Oxcart](#)

[Lice Inspection](#)

[B-26 Bomber in Action](#)

[The Long March — North Korea 1951](#)

[Rugged Korean Countryside](#)

[Phil Zupp's Canopy](#)

[Phil Zupp](#)

[Dick Robinson — First 5 Course Death](#)

[Ayako-San, and Mickey-San \(sitting\)](#)

[Street Scene Iwakuni](#)

[Mk 7 Meteor Two-seater](#)

[Meteor Trainer \(Note Elongated Canopy\)](#)

[Meteor Mk-8 Fighter](#)

[Iwakuni Castle](#)

[Meteor at Kimpo](#)

[Wing Commander Susans Briefing](#)

[Tent Lines, 77 Squadron Kimpo](#)

[Pointie-Talkie Carried on Missions](#)

[Groundcrew Sheathing Tailplane](#)

[Groundcrew Sweeping Wing](#)

[Pat Melican, Diligent Groundcrew Corporal](#)

[Karl Marx — Communist Inspiration](#)

[Vance Drummond](#)

[Colonel Carne Carves Cross \(Re-enactment\)](#)

[Crew Jeep in the Morning](#)

[Meteor Pairs Take-off](#)

[L-R: Smithy, Pete Middleton, Bluey Philp](#)

[Air attack on a North Korean Supply Train](#)

[Meteor Rocketing Target](#)

[Controller at Air Traffic Radar Screen](#)

[Bob Strawbridge](#)

[Po-2 Being Readied For Flight](#)

[Russian Yak-18 Trainer](#)

[Meteor Ventral Tank. L — R, Zupp, Evans, King](#)

[Bill Bennet and his "Littlest Angel"](#)

[Han River at Seoul](#)

[Damaged Han River Bridge](#)

[Wes Guy](#)

[Typical Anti-aircraft Gun](#)

[Eric Ramsay \(R\) and Airman](#)

[Phil Hamilton-Foster](#)

[Lionel Cowper \(R\) with Smithy](#)

[South Korea And Japan](#)

[Room Girls Afford a Welcome](#)

[Jim Kichenside — Our Youngest Pilot](#)

[USAF Crash Tender](#)

[Armorers Prepare Rockets in Dismal Conditions](#)

[Meteor Armed For Rocket Attack](#)

[L to R, Drummond, Blight, Oborn](#)

[Ken Murray](#)

[Wal Rivers — DFC and Bar; US DFC; US Air Medal and Oak Leaf Clusters](#)

[James Townsend's Douglas Invader](#)

[L to R, Bill Simmonds, John Surman](#)

[L to R, Bill Simmonds, Don Robertson, Tony Armstrong, Geoff Lushey](#)

[Magnificent Kawana Leave Resort](#)

[Smithy and Caddies at Kawana](#)

[One of the Spectacular Kawana Golf links](#)

[Ray Fox \(L\) and Clive Marshall](#)

[Ken Smith in his Meteor](#)

[Tony Armstrong](#)

[L-R, Bill Bennet \(A Flight Cmdr\), Ron Susans \(77Sqn C/O\), Wal Rivers \(B Flight Cmdr\)](#)

[L to R, John Parker, Jack Evans, "Scotty" Caddan](#)

[Prisoners' Winter Clothing. \(Ron Guthrie Center in Both Pictures\)](#)

[Captain John "Rotorhead" Thornton](#)

[Pyoktong: Picturesque but Infinitely Evil](#)

[Turkish Commander Gen.Tahsin Yazici Receives Silver Star From US General Walker](#)

[Chinese Generals Leading People's Volunteer Army](#)

[British Lieut. Colonel J.P. Carne, VC, DSO, DSC \(US\)](#)

[Drummond \(Left\) And Thompson In Prison Garments](#)

[L-R: Jack Evans, John Parker, Bill Simmonds, Col King, Bruce Gogerly](#)

[Supply Dump Attack](#)

[Oelof Bergh Receives RAF Squadron Trophy](#)

[Ken Godfrey](#)

[Ken Godfrey — Engine Shot Out](#)

[F-80s — American Early Type Jet Fighters, Over Korea](#)

[George Hale](#)

[Col Roffe — 5 Course Transport Pilot](#)

[Douglas C-47 Transport](#)

[Cockpit C-47](#)

[Douglas B-26 Invader — Dropped Leaflets](#)

[North Korean Officers Observing Freedom Village](#)

[Freedom Village Ambulances Awaiting Freed Prisoners](#)

[De-Militarized-Zone Seen From The North](#)

[Ron is Welcomed Back, L-R, Bob MacIntosh and Jack Gorman](#)

[S/Ldr Neville McNamara Greets Five Returned POWs At Panmunjom. Back: L-R, Ron Guthrie, Oelof Bergh, Butch Hannon, Neville McNamara. Front: L-R, Vance Drummond, Bruce Thompson](#)

[Customline V8 1952-3](#)

[MiG Flown To Kimpo By Defector](#)

[Many Years Later — MiG and Sabre Take-off as a Pair](#)

[North Korean Prison Guards Who Gave Our Men Such Torture](#)

[Stalin — The Most Evil Dictator](#)

[Soviet Troops Liberate N Korea — 1945](#)

[Kim il Sung — 1946](#)

[Chairman Mao Zedong](#)

[Russian Sturmovik IL-2](#)

[Yakovlev 9 Russian Fighter](#)

[Russian T-34 Tank](#)

[Russian Flak Train As Supplied To N. Korea](#)

[B-29 Super-fortress](#)

[B-29 Super-fortress Flight Deck](#)

[B-29 Super-fortress Rear Pressurized Hull \(Crew Rest, 4 bunks\)](#)

[MiG Being Prepared For Flight](#)

[North Korean Monument To MiG Airmen](#)

[North Korea Topography](#)

[Yalu River At Sinuiju \(N Korea\) With Antung \(China\) across the River](#)

[Bombing Attack On Yalu Bridge At Sinuiju](#)

[North Korean Propaganda Flagpole — "peace Village" Near Panmunjom](#)

[The Demilitarized Zone Of Korea](#)

[Panmunjom DMZ Map](#)

[Rare Amur Leopard — Seeking Sanctuary in DMZ](#)

[Extremely Rare Korean Tiger](#)

[Red Crowned Crane](#)

[Aggressive Asian Black Bear \(Moon Bear Or White-Chested Bear\)](#)

[Freedom Village, Inside DMZ](#)

[South Entrance To 4th Infiltration Tunnel Dug By N Koreans](#)

[A South Korean Checkpoint at DMZ, From N Korean Side](#)

[A South Korean Guards View Border At Panmunjom](#)

[Beautiful Modern Seoul \(circa 2010\)](#)

[Kimpo Transformed — Now Gimpo International Airport](#)

[Incheon International Airport](#)

[General Macarthur — Architect Of Communist Defeat In Korea
Signs Japanese Surrender At End Of WW2](#)

Dedication

Dedicated to those who flew in defense of freedom, through the terrible war-torn skies of Korea.

Let us all rejoice in the knowledge that these efforts and sacrifices were not in vain.

*The wretched menace of Communism had been held at bay and
South Korea has prospered.*

*Those who fell
They bade no one a last farewell, or even said goodbye.
Their souls had left before we knew, and God alone knows why.
They would not ask for sorrow. They would not ask for tears.
But just to be remembered throughout the passing years.*

LEST WE FORGET!

Epigraph

*God and soldier we adore
At the brink of danger, not before.
Danger over and all things righted,
God is forgotten and the soldier slighted.
Francis Quarles, Emblems. 1635*

Foreword

The mental map of men in combat contains a, largely unacknowledged, graveyard area. The anticipation of tragedy is without protest but the reality inevitably inflicts inner pain. (Auth)

MiG Alley

RAAF – 77 Squadron Meteor Operations – North Korea, 1951 Ron Guthrie became the unwilling creator of a number of world records. He became the first RAAF pilot to escape from a jet fighter in combat – using the ejection seat. This was one of the highest ejections ever experienced – just below 39,000 feet. The speed of ejection was Mach .84 and his descent, taking almost 30 minutes were two other world records. His parachute was holed by enemy rifle fire as he neared the ground – but this was common, and certainly not a ‘record’ occurrence.

Silver trails of vapor in the placid morning sky define the passage of eight Meteor jet fighters along a patrol line adjacent to the Yalu River. This infamous segment of North Korean airspace, so frequently the playground of predatory Russian fighters, has earned the title of MiG Alley. In two flights of four, the RAAF fighters, well-spaced in battle formation, cruise at a steady 39,000 feet. Each pilot's head swivels as he seeks to cover his companions against intruders. The peaceful Korean sky endures its torment from the strident Banshee wailing of sixteen Derwent jet engines while the contrasting quiet of the cockpits is broken only by occasional business-like commands from the leader. **Ron Guthrie begins his account.**

Suddenly I am startled by white-hot tracers streaming over and under my left wing like glowing ping-pong balls. I throw my Meteor into a hard left-hand turn and press the mike button to call a 'break' to the others in my flight. Too late! I have been hit behind the cockpit and my radio is useless. I am only talking to myself as I call 'Anzac Item, break left tracers!' Now, two Russian MiG-15 jet fighters shoot past my nose and I instinctively turn back sharply to the right hoping to get one of them in my sights. Through the illuminated graticule of the gun-sight, I can see a red star on a silver fuselage and the pilot's head in the cockpit. I quickly adjust the gun-sight control to correct for a retreating target as my finger curls over the trigger of my four 20mm cannons. The guns rattle. I am gratified and excited as pieces fly off the enemy aircraft which now rolls to the inverted position and dives out of sight.

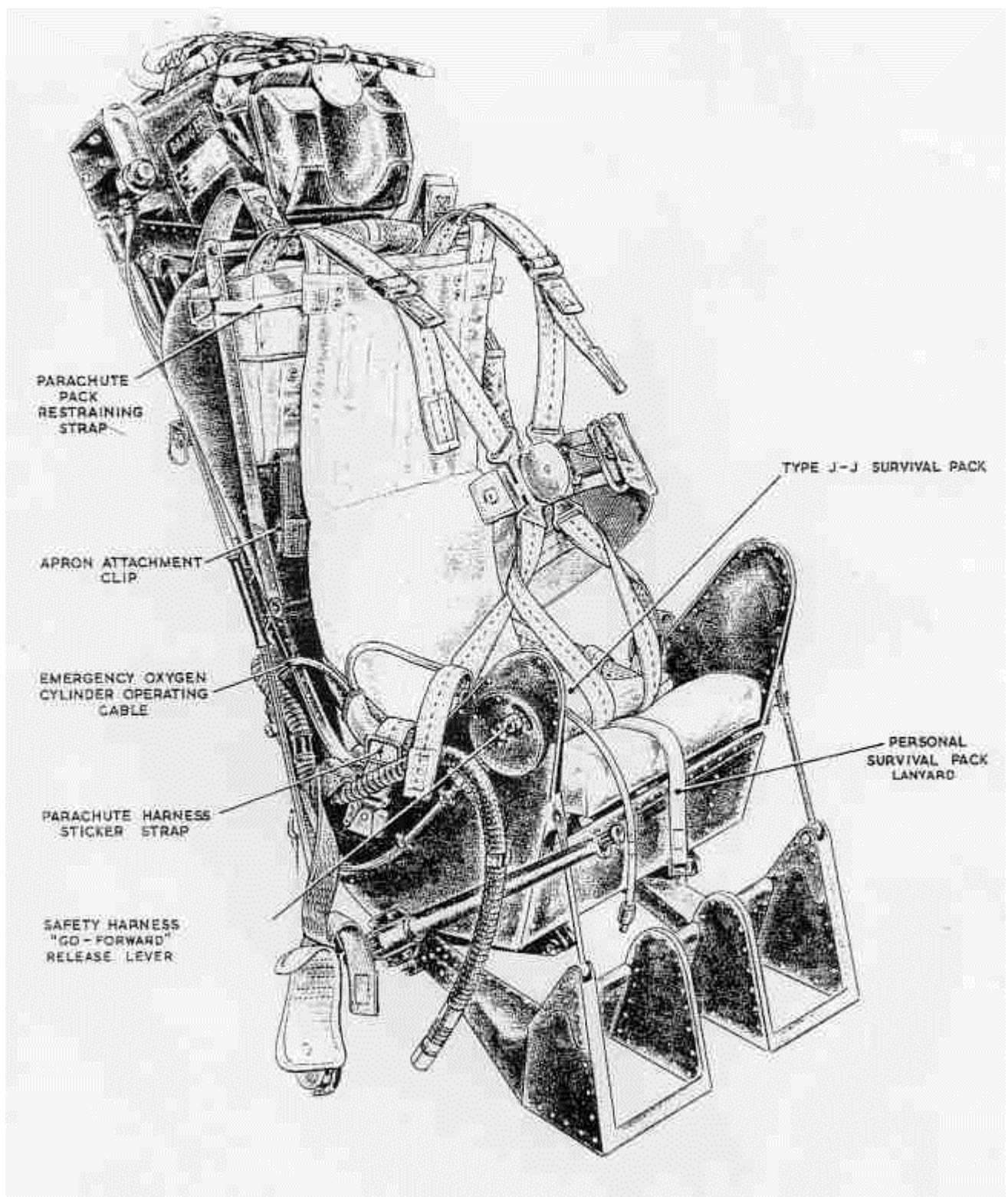
At this instant I feel as though a load of bricks has fallen onto the rear end of my aircraft, which now shakes convulsively. Explosive shells from another MiG have destroyed my Meteor's tail. My aircraft, at this stage merely an uncontrollable mass of 'MiG meat,' begins to snap roll repeatedly. In shock, I prepare to make my first exit in a Martin Baker ejection-seat, at this great height and over enemy territory! I realize my guns are still firing and release the trigger. The vibrating instrument panel catches my attention and two facts remain in my memory. The clock is reading six minutes past ten and the Mach meter, my gage of speed, registers 0.84. As the speed of the dive increases beyond eighty-four per cent of the speed of sound the aircraft shudders in compressibility. It continues to roll.

Ron urgently grasped and pulled the canopy jettison handle. In an instant, a gigantic roar announced that his private cocoon had become part of the frigid swirling air mass into which he was about to plunge. Taking a two-handed grip on the ejection-seat loop handle above his head, he waited for the aircraft to finish its roll and on reaching the upright position pulled firmly on the control in order to fire himself out of the cockpit. Nothing happened! Distressing thoughts added their burden to the

alarming cacophony of the 600 miles per hour air blast as he awaited the completion of another rotation. Surely the ejection-seat firing mechanism was not going to malfunction in this moment of desperate need. He repeated the process and was shocked as the mechanism failed once again! Then he discovered that his arms were being obstructed in their downward motion by the pistol holster under his right elbow and a Red Cross pack on his left side. Obviously this had to explain the dilemma. The third time around, with arms spread wide he made a final frantic effort. With altimeter needles unwinding below 39,000 feet a startling explosion gave Ron an immense thrust out of the cockpit. The experience seemed momentary as he now lost consciousness.

My awareness returns some seconds later but I have a light-headed feeling that this is not really happening. Perhaps it is lack of oxygen or maybe it is shock, however it all seems quite unreal, as in a half-dream. I tumble and sway until eventually the ejection-seat's little drogue parachute in full deployment steadies the descent. I can't breathe! This situation is quickly fixed by re-positioning the goggles away from my mouth and lifting the oxygen mask from where it has slipped to my throat. I am relieved to feel the portable oxygen puffing onto my face.

The sensation was odd as he just sat there strapped to the ejection-seat, feeling quite stationary and quite detached, secured to his mechanical throne in space with no apparent means of support and no indications of motion. He was in a New World that was only half-real. The complete lack of noise was quite uncanny in its contrast with the clamor which had so recently conditioned his senses. Gone were the sounds of combat, followed so rapidly by the ejection-seat explosion intermingled with the overwhelming roar of a 600 mph slipstream. Ron's personal segment of Korean sky, so recently a noisy battleground, was now a quiet and peaceful arena bereft of aircraft.



Martin Baker Ejection Seat

And so began Ron Guthrie's two-year-long endurance trial in the hands of sadistic captors. Seven pilots, of 77 Squadron suffered at the hands of these captors and their experiences make gripping and humbling reading. Many of these stories and the accounts of other such

unfortunate prisoners are detailed in this book. These experiences are contrasted with the more benign existence of those occupied in daily combat operations.

Two Years of Torment :

Shortly after landing in his parachute Ron is locked in a cage in the form of a packing case.

Thus begins my first brief period of miserable imprisonment. Shock is beginning to take effect. I am cold in my underwear and the well-ventilated slatted structure gives little protection from the wind as the day drags on. Hunger and thirst worry me. I am quite convinced there will be no decent POW treatment. Perhaps the troops are waiting for some senior officer to take charge. Will I then be shot?

Ron's next prison – a wet mine shaft – along with two Korean women prisoners.

After some fumbling with a lock, the creaky hinge functioned and I was propelled into the blackness of a damp and malodorous dungeon. It was virtually necessary to crawl and squeeze through this under-size aperture like an animal entering a cage.

Tied to a chair in the city square Ron is tormented by school children.

Once these young predators grasped the significance of my situation they enthusiastically complied with the guards' suggestions that they should spit on me and pull my nose. This game was happily played by increasing numbers of youngsters to the delight of a gathering crowd of adults, several of whom occasionally joined the ranks of the nose pullers.

In the city jail Ron endures weeks of ceaseless torment.

In this place of mental torture, 20 Asian men and boys sat in almost absolute motionless silence. Completely terrorized into obedience, these wretched prisoners in filthy rags, sat in two rows, backs to the door, with legs crossed, arms folded and heads and shoulders bowed as in contrition. Any accusation by the guards, true or false, was immediately followed by vicious disciplinary measures. Moving or speaking were particularly serious crimes. It was dangerous to draw attention to oneself in the slightest way as the guards sought outlets for their sadism. This dreadful regimen was in operation 17 hours per day. I was now one of them.

Again Ron is subjected to public exhibition and humiliation.

In this trussed-up state I am unceremoniously dumped on the pavement at a street corner amidst bustling pedestrians. This is my second dose of 'city-center humiliation' and it is not easy to take. Passing civilians, especially children, poke, kick and spit on me. Some use sticks to beat and poke my body. In a fit of utter despair and frustration I curse them all!

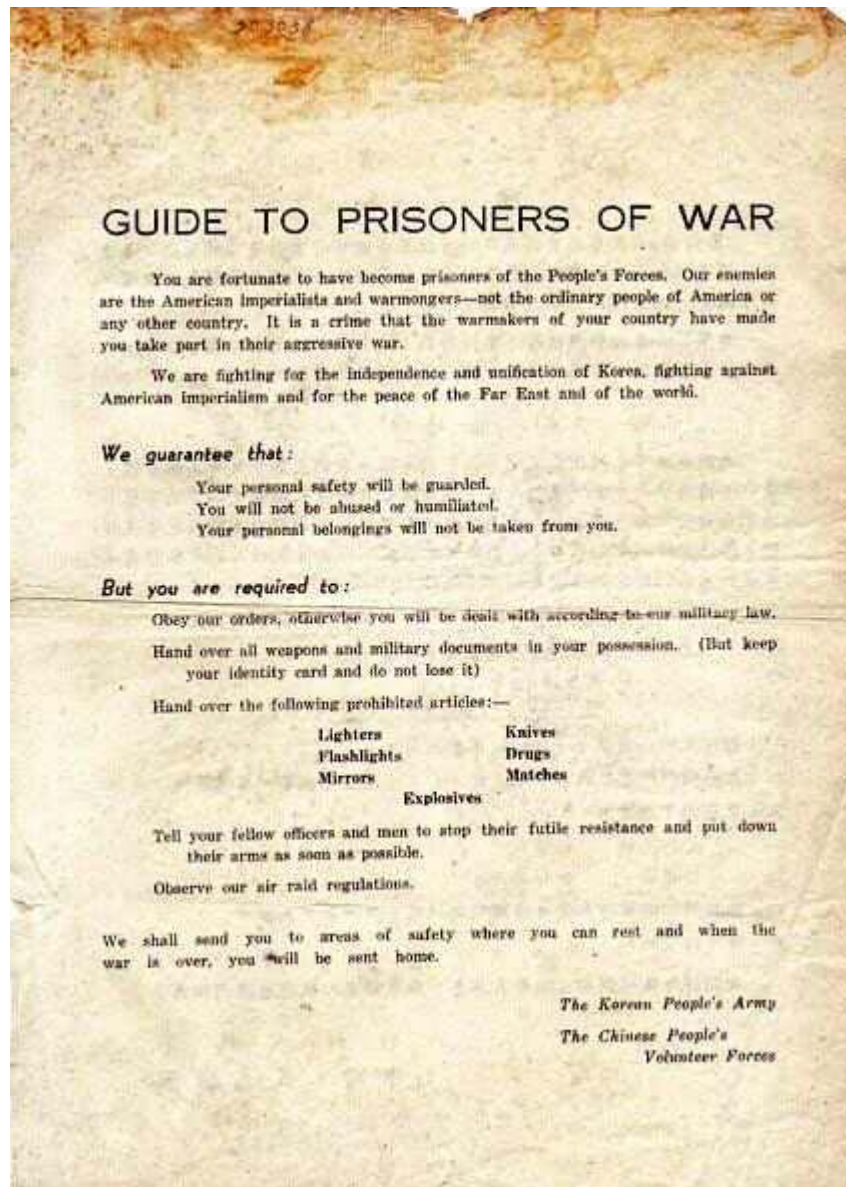
Failing to give information, Ron is ordered to dig his grave.

The English speaking guard quite nonchalantly orders me – "Dig hole – dig grave!" I am shocked as I realized fully what is about to happen. I simply refuse to cooperate and throw the spade down. I am struck brutally and fall to the ground.

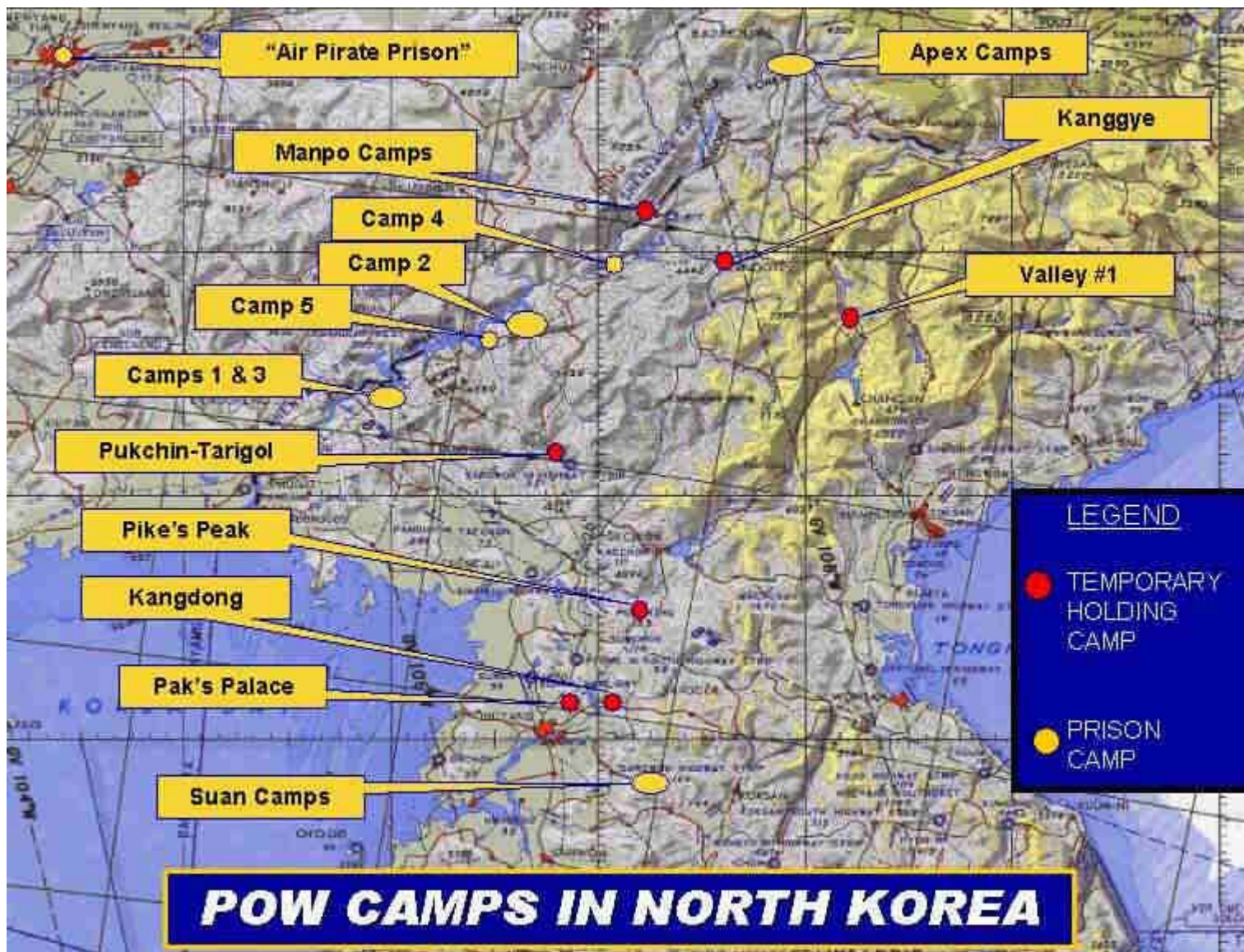
At the interrogation center the most vicious regime is implemented.

In the evenings, such delights as bailing out the officers' toilet hole was an added attraction. Sometimes, we were prevented from cleaning up after this disgusting chore which had to be accomplished using a small ladle and a leaky bucket.

Note: The above examples relate to just a few incidents of Ron's experiences during the first three months of his two years of imprisonment.



Promises!



Places Of Horror

Preface

The "Forgotten War" Recalled

No. 77 Squadron was formed at RAAF Base Pearce on 16 March 1942. Equipped with P-40 Kittyhawk aircraft the squadron was initially responsible for the defense of Perth. The squadron moved to Batchelor near Darwin in August, the first RAAF fighter squadron to be stationed in the area. The Squadron saw action defending Darwin from Japanese air raids and claimed its first 'kill' on 23 November 1942.

In February 1943 the squadron was deployed to Milne Bay in New Guinea. The Squadron flew escort and ground attack operations over New Guinea and the Solomon Islands until September 1944 when it moved to western New Guinea. The Squadron moved to Morotai in April 1945 and conducted ground attack missions over the Netherlands East Indies until June when it was redeployed to Labuan Island to support the Australian Army's operations in Borneo.

Following the Japanese surrender No. 77 Squadron was selected as part of Australia's contribution to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force and, after converting to P-51D Mustang fighters, arrived in Japan in February 1946. Occupation duties proved uneventful, and No. 77 Squadron was preparing to leave Japan for Australia when the Korean War broke out on June 25 1950.

No. 77 Squadron was committed to action over Korea as part of the United Nations forces, and flew its first ground attack sorties on 2 July 1950, making it the first non-United States UN unit to see action. No. 77 Squadron deployed to Korea in October to support the UN advance into North Korea but was withdrawn to Pusan in November in response to the Communist forces' counter-attack. The Squadron was withdrawn to Japan in April 1951 to re-equip with Gloster Meteor jet fighters and returned to action with these new aircraft in July. Following heavy losses from MiG-15 fighters No. 77 Squadron operated in the ground attack role from December 1951 until the end of the war; it remained in South Korea on garrison duties until returning to Australia in November 1954.

This book does not attempt to present a complete history of the involvement of the RAAF 77 Squadron in the Korean conflict of 1950-1953. It is a collection of anecdotes, brief personal items and illustrations, intended to supplement much that has already been touched upon in my previous books about this somewhat neglected subject. Throughout the decades since the cessation of major hostilities, the people of South Korea have prospered and taken a prominent place among peace-loving nations. They have consistently displayed their gratitude towards the many who answered the call to arms in their defense when the United Nations declared a "breach of the peace" after North Korea launched its unannounced attack on 25 June 1950. This was Stalinist inspired aggression in its typically dangerous form and it was most fortunate that this brutal despot had temporarily abandoned the United Nations and was unavailable to sabotage the UN commitment with his inevitable veto.

It is hoped this book will add to the knowledge and understanding of future generations who may take the time to read and ponder upon these events which took place when the world was fighting for the survival of democracy and freedom against the gigantic menace of Communism. Australia's 77 Squadron suffered grievous losses during those three years of intensive warfare. The squadron's average operational strength of all-volunteer fighter pilots was sometimes no more than 17 at a given time and replacements were often slow in arriving. Consequently many pilots did extensive tours and

the attrition rate resulted in the loss of total effective pilot strength several times in three years – apart from accidental deaths, inevitable in such a dangerous environment, there were 41 pilots killed in action (including six RAF), and seven taken prisoner (including one RAF). This book details, in prose and images, much about these dramatic and tragic events.

The Korean Episode also details, in précis format, many of the dreadful experiences of Ron Guthrie and other 77 Squadron pilots held prisoner in North Korea. Also featured here are the early flying exploits and years of RAAF training carried out by the author and his companions in preparation for the objective of becoming jet pilots with 77 Squadron. Intermingled, chronologically, the book also tells of the routine experiences of squadron pilots flying combat missions, and this is contrasted with the dreadful daily-existence of comrades in the POW camps.



Typical RAF Mk-8 Meteor Fighter:

*— 90 Of These Were Supplied To 77 Squadron RAAF For Service In Korea. 54 Were Destroyed —
A Few By MiGs — The Majority By Ground Fire.*

Note: Under-Belly 'Ventral Tank' — The Cause Of Many Deaths.

Chapter 1

Joining The RAAF

The First Step Of One Thousand miles

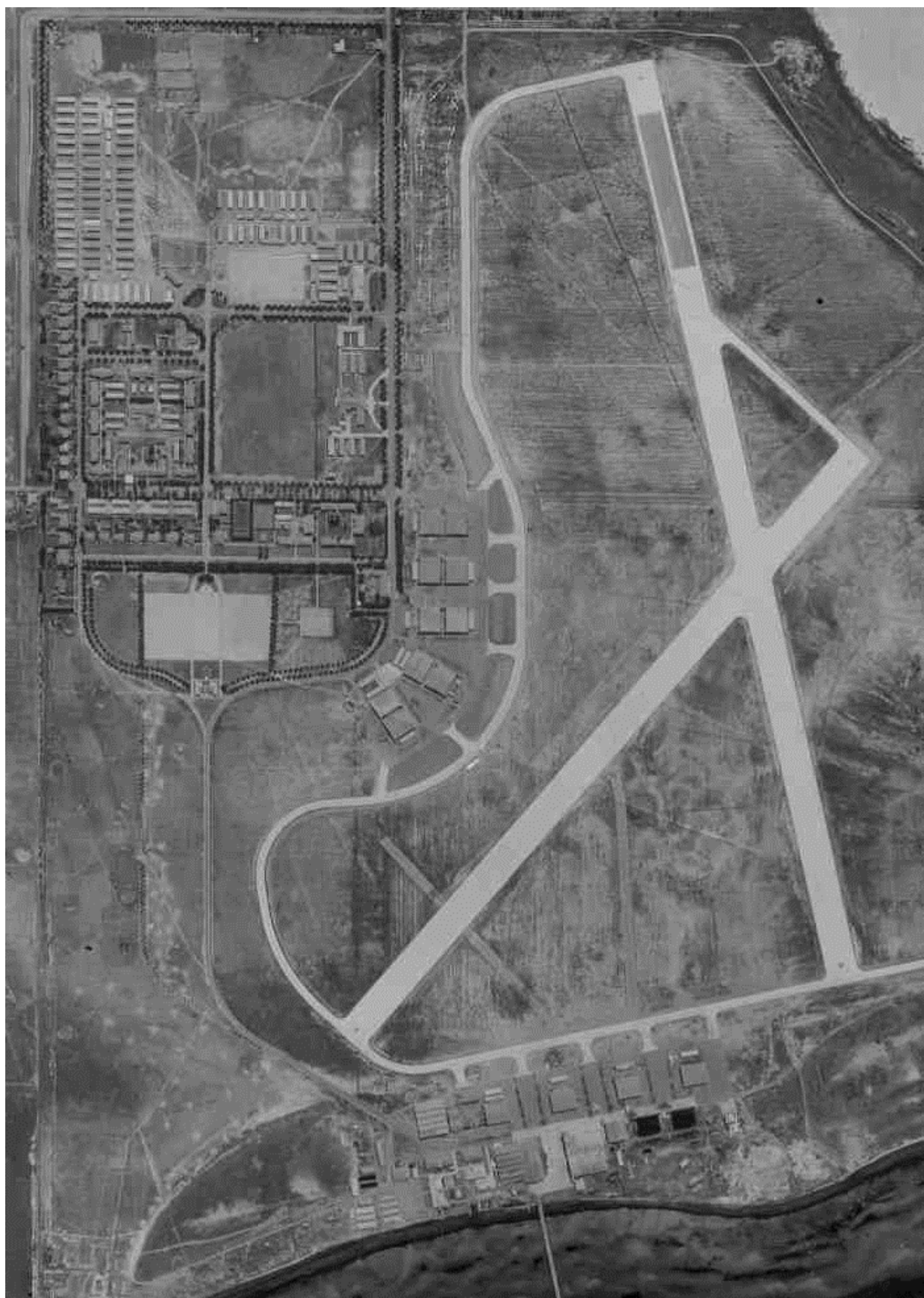
When half-way through my aircraft engineering apprenticeship at de-Havilland I discovered the RAAF was taking aircrew trainees and instantly applied, quite undaunted by lack of support from my employer, and the fact that the course I had applied for already had 1200 acceptable applicants. This utterly precipitous action typified my approach to achieving life's goal of becoming a fighter pilot. Fate was tempted but fate paid its rewards.

A Dangerous Obsession

At RAAF Base Bradfield Park, two days of searching examinations were conducted. Medicals of every specialty, IQ tests galore, aptitude trials and a number of face-to face interviews were the order of the day. The final Selection Board was interested in the matter of the apprenticeship. With regard to my release, they as good as said "Get on with it, as the course will soon be starting." Perhaps it was innate optimism, but there was a distinct feeling things were going well. This was gratifying as I had just learned there had been 1200 legitimate applications for the course. De-Havilland was not impressed about my desire to leave. The matter was placed under consideration but had to be put to some 'board' or other. The RAAF telegram arrived, "Selected Nr 4 Aircrew Course, depart in 10 days, notify acceptance." De-Havilland was sympathetic, but needed more time. "Perhaps you could go on the next course." So that was how I ended up on 5 Course. Naturally this was upsetting. It seemed as though too many people were not taking The Grand Plan seriously enough. It was mortifying to realize some of those fellows at Bradfield Park were now at Point Cook preparing to fly. However de-Havilland did see the light, and I was free to go now it was too late.

But they were right about one thing, there were later courses, one each six months. Another telegram came! There were no more tests, just an up-date medical, and then, off to Point Cook! It was undoubtedly an honor to be selected for an aircrew training course at this most important RAAF base.

Point Cook was purchased by the government in 1912 with the vision to form what would become the Australian Flying Corps. Due to the success of the AFC in the First World War, the AFC became a separate service, the Royal Australian Air Force. Point Cook remained the RAAF's only base until 1925 when RAAF Base Richmond and RAAF Base Laverton were also built. Point Cook is considered the birthplace and the spiritual home of the RAAF. It is also the airport at which the Royal Victorian Aero Club was established. It contains a memorial parade ground which was built in the 1920s, a site which was previously used by the AFC for drill training. Point Cook has distinguished itself as the oldest continuously operating military aerodrome in the world.



RAAF Base Point Cook (Circa 1950)

One of the first fellows encountered at Point Cook was Ken Smith. His room was nearby and we talked. Ken was from South Australia, so we had not met on the train. However we were destined to never be separated again by any of the many RAAF journeys and postings to follow, and we were to become good friends. It was soon evident that Ken was to be a proficient and popular trainee. At six feet three he towered over most. There were 80 of us on 5 Course, and most were hoping to be selected for pilot training. In the end result a lot were destined to become navigators or signalers. This was an eighteen months school, almost twice the length of wartime training. Discipline and fitness were emphasized, and it was a closed, 'DRY' camp on weekdays.

After five months of intensive physical and academic schooling the 75 who had survived this far were given eleven hours flying for assessment of piloting abilities. This was called 'Flight Grading'. Each candidate did six hours flying with an instructor, and then a thirty minutes test with examiner 'A'. Then he did four hours more with a different instructor followed by a thirty minutes test with examiner 'B'. There were only two examiners and they had a secret marking system, which standardized results quite effectively.

Flight Grading training and checking was all done in Tiger Moths, a tough little biplane reminiscent of planes one would see above the battlefields during the First World War. One aspect that was factored into the marking system, was previous flying experience. About one third of the candidates had some piloting hours varying from say 10 hours to about 120 hours. I was in mid range, with 45 hours. A few invested their meager pay packets at the local Aero-club during the five months pre-flying phase in what was probably a futile endeavor at 'chance enhancement.' It was found that some trainees would have been better off without the flying. It seemed that O&B influence was somewhat in evidence and the bad habits were hard to break.

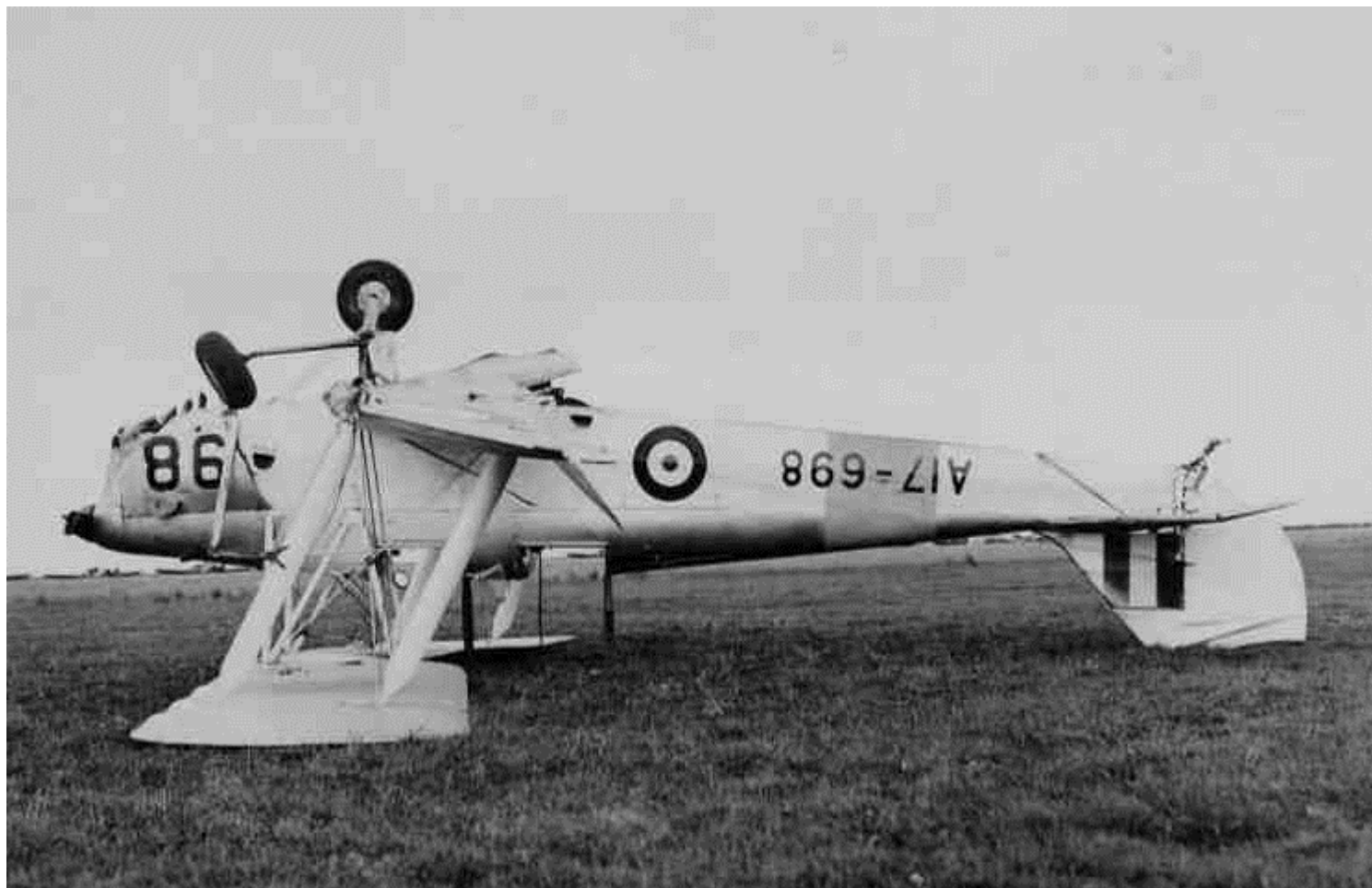


Tiger Moth Elementary Trainer

The RAAF started everyone off again 'from scratch,' as if they had never flown an aircraft. The training was excellent. In addition to the solid grounding in months of classroom lectures there were thorough briefings before and after each flight. The instructors were accomplished and helpful. Everyone received the same correct information. How refreshing! Two trainees from 'A flight' were

teamed under one instructor. That instructor would also have two pupils from 'B flight'. The two flights alternated week about between morning and afternoon flying, and classroom activities.

One unfortunate trainee, Barry Ellis, had engine failure on his first solo and landed in a paddock. In spite of a commendable landing the Tiger flipped over. Barry fell out on his head and then, inspired by the smell of leaking fuel, he established a record for the 100 meter sprint — still wearing his parachute. From there on his companions professed 'consideration' on the pretext that, "Barry was dropped on his head as a trainee pilot."



Barry's First Solo

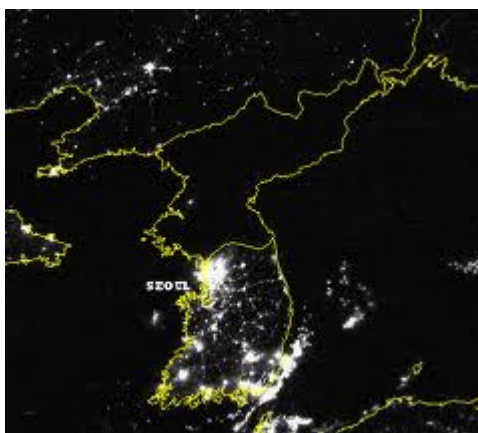
At the finish of flight grading 31 hopefuls began the twelve months full pilots' course to Wings standard. Most of the remainder went off to Navigation or Signals Schools. Of the 31 RAAF pilot trainees, we had one unfortunate fatality, and 21 eventually graduated with the coveted Wings brevet. We were sorry to be split up and there was sympathy for those who felt particular disappointment. There were lots of splendid fellows who started the course, and many of these later went on to become accomplished navigators and signalers. We caught up with many later in the squadrons.



Our Course Marching Through Melbourne

The Korean War Breaks Out

On 25 June 1950 a startling event occurred in far away Korea. North Korean Communist forces swept across the border of South Korea and proceeded to drive the South Koreans and their small contingent of unprepared American allies into a humiliating retreat. This event was to have the most profound effect on those of us under RAAF aircrew training although we found this rather obvious fact difficult to grasp at the time.



Korean Peninsula At Night

Our education officers were apt to tell us we could expect to find ourselves flying Mustangs in action in Korea and should prepare accordingly. They felt it appropriate to acquaint us with something of the history of the geo-political situation which had led to this conflict. From here on we all followed the situation.



The Land Of The Morning Calm"

At the end of World War II, the Japanese-occupied territory of Korea was divided between the USA and the USSR. This was brought about by a mistake of history, a mistake by the United States in allowing the USSR to enter the Pacific war during its last days and inviting the Russians to split with them the task of accepting the surrender of Japanese troops on the Korean peninsula. Thus a nation was divided in half by two opposing factions, neither of which had the right to do so. Tension began to build along the 38'th parallel, the Soviets resisting any attempts at reunification. An 'Iron Curtain' was effectively created between North and South. In 1948, the region south of the 38'th parallel became the *Republic of Korea*, under American sponsorship, while the Soviets guided the *Korean*

Peoples Democratic Republic in the North under their despotic North Korean puppet, Kim il Sung. Seldom has the word "democratic" been so misused.



Border Between North And South Korea

Each of these entities claimed the right to govern the whole peninsula, with the North regime becoming quite belligerent in pursuit of their goal. This most despotic regime was anything but democratic. A further catastrophic mistake was made by an American diplomat, Dean Acheson, who, in an important speech, inadvertently omitted Korea from a list of Asian nations which he proclaimed, "Would be defended against Communist aggressors." The North Korean despot Kim IL-sung and his mentor Joseph Stalin took this to constitute a 'green light.'

Whilst the North Koreans had a population barely half that of the South's 20 million, they nevertheless possessed, with the backing of Russia and China, a big military force and were preparing to use it. This included: some, 200,000 troops; 1000 artillery pieces; about 150 powerful Russian T34 tanks; 130 attack aircraft; and about 20 transport aircraft. The South and their American supporters were ill prepared in all respects and unaware of the imminent threat from the North.

After the South had rejected unpalatable ultimatums, the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA), without warning on 25 June 1950 launched massive attacks on the South, thus beginning the Korean War. This onslaught by 90,000 troops backed by many Russian manufactured tanks and aircraft, had the blessing and backing of Stalin. In three days the South Korean capital, Seoul, was captured and the forces defending the South were in full flight. The only worthwhile Allied force in the area, consisted of powerful naval contingent which controlled the surrounding waters — establishing an entire blockade of the Korean coast. This naval commitment produced an eventual bonus of considerable magnitude.

Almost immediately the United Nations, facing its first big test, declared this a 'breach of the peace.' Fortunately Stalin had invalidated himself with the United Nations (temporarily), just before this crisis and was not able to scuttle the decision with his inevitable 'Veto.' In order to resist this intolerable evil, 16 countries came together under the United Nations flag, many providing direct military assistance. In those days, with Stalin off the table, "The United Nations" provided an effective and reputable organization.



The United Nations To The Rescue

77 Squadron Enters The Fight

On 30 June 1950 the Australian Cabinet committed 77 Squadron RAAF and other elements of the occupation force, to the Korean war. Australia's 77 Squadron RAAF, at the time stationed at Iwakuni in Japan, had the distinction of being the first Commonwealth unit to participate in the conflict. The Australian Squadron was, in fact, the only fully-operational Mustang (long-range-fighter) squadron available for immediate service in the Far East. At the time, the Squadron was under the command of Wing Commander Lou Spence who had won a DFC flying Kittyhawks in the Middle East and a second DFC in the Pacific.

Iwakuni airfield, situated at the southern part of the island of Honshu on the shores of the beautiful Inland Sea of Japan, had been built originally as a training base for the Imperial Japanese Navy, and was used during WW2 for Kamikazi pilots. After the war, the RAAF Airfield Construction Squadron modernized the base and established good-quality hangars and domestic areas. Many dependable Japanese personnel, including aircraft mechanics, were employed in the efficient running of the base. Routine and deep-level aircraft maintenance was carried out on a regular basis, with the Japanese staff being heavily involved in all activities. Skilled Japanese tradesmen played a vital role, during the Korean conflict, as the pace of mechanical repair work accelerated.

In spite of the Squadron being in the very act of packing up to return to Australia with its propeller-driven Mustang fighters, things were immediately put in reverse and onto a wartime footing. This entailed many difficulties. Most of the armorers had already been sent home, so pilots helped the few remaining specialists belt the Mustang's 50 Caliber ammunition, pull-through, inspect and oil the Browning guns and carry out gun-sight harmonization.

Operating from their base at Iwakuni, taking off over the picturesque Inland Sea, 77 flew its first mission of the Korean War on 2 July 1950 and its first ground-attack sortie the next day. Using long range drop-tanks they were able to return to their home base after a lengthy period in transit and in action. This operational capability and the Squadron's fighting efficiency created an important aid to the Allied forces so desperately attempting to stem the Communist advance.



Seoul Railway Bridge Bombed

By late July 1950 NKPA forces had driven the South Korean and United Nations troops, American at this stage, into a pocket around the port of Pusan on the south-eastern tip of the peninsula. The Australian fighter Squadron became increasingly involved, with maximum effort being exerted in close support of ground forces. The Pusan perimeter was successfully defended.

During these months of 'see-saw' fighting, 77 Squadron's heavy operational flying load was facilitated by relocating to various bases in Korea, Pohang on 12 October 1950, and then to other bases further north. All of the Squadron's fighting was being carried out in the sturdy Mustang fighter of WWII fame.

P-51D Mustang

This was the aircraft being operated by our 77 Squadron in Korea. Most of us while training at Point Cook were longing to fly this famous fighter. (77 Squadron also operated four of the Australian built CA-18 Mustangs in Korea)

The Mustang with which 77 Squadron was equipped was a single-seat, low-wing, all-metal stressed-skin monoplane with a 37ft wingspan 32ft length and a maximum permissible weight of 11,600 pounds. It was powered by one Rolls-Royce (or Packard) Merlin engine of approximately 1490 H/P, spinning a four-bladed hydromatic air-screw of 11ft diameter. The aircraft was rated for a maximum speed of 437mph at 25,000ft, Climb 13 minutes to 30,000ft. Service ceiling 41,900ft. Drop-able external fuel tanks could be carried and these extended the range to between 1500 and 2000 nautical miles at reduced airspeed and power. In this particular version, three machine-guns 12.7mm caliber were fitted in each wing and other armaments could include: bombs, depth-charges, napalm tanks, or rockets. A Lag-Computing gyroscopic gun-sight assisted with shooting accuracy.

This aircraft had been a match for most enemy fighters during the Second World War. Distinctly similar to the Spitfire, it was just as deserving of fame as that elegant British fighter. The Mustang could out-range the Spitfire by a big margin and this was one of its greatest features. One of the most important procurement decisions of the 1939-45 war would surely be the September 1940 agreement between Rolls Royce and Packard, providing for that company to manufacture the Merlin engine under license.

The **North American Aviation P-51 Mustang** was an American long-range, single-seat fighter-bomber used during WWII and, the Korean War. The aircraft was conceived, designed and built by

North American Aviation in response to a specification issued directly to NAA by the British Purchasing Commission. The prototype NA-73X airframe was rolled out on 9 September 1940, 102 days after the contract was signed, and, with an engine installed, first flew on 26 October.

The Mustang was originally designed to use the Allison V-1710 engine, which had limited high-altitude performance. It was first flown operationally by the Royal Air Force tactical-reconnaissance aircraft and fighter-bomber (Mustang Mk I).

The addition of the Rolls-Royce Merlin to the P-51B/C model transformed the Mustang's performance at altitudes above 15,000 ft, giving it a performance that matched or bettered the majority of enemy fighters. The definitive version, the was powered by the Packard V-1650-7 Rolls-Royce Merlin 60 series two-stage two-speed supercharged engine, and armed with six 12.7mm Browning machine guns. Packard (RR) Merlins in the P-51B Mustang have the reputation of having saved the US Air force from defeat over Germany.



Mustang Maintenance

The Mustang produced certain problems for those who flew and maintained them during the campaign in Korea. Compared with jets, the vulnerable nature of the Merlin engine with its

extensive glycol coolant system, its tanks full of high octane fuel, in addition to other complexities common to piston-engine planes, made the aircraft considerably more at risk when encountering anti-aircraft fire. The slower speed (compared with jets) exacerbated this problem. The Mustang's machine guns, while very effective, lacked the punch of the Meteor's 20mm cannons. In the extremes of the Korean winter, the Mustang suffered from greater maintenance problems associated with very low temperatures than did jet aircraft in the same environment. Big men when dressed in winter flying and survival attire were sometimes incapable of functioning efficiently in the cramped cockpit. Some found it impossible and were forced to compromise or remain grounded. In spite of these difficulties, 77 Squadron's Mustangs managed to maintain effective operations through all seasons, however the eventual process of re-equipment with Jet aircraft removed or reduced some of these problems. Extensive Mustang operations continued until April 1951, however it was obvious that a better aircraft was required.



Mustang P-51D Fighter

Chapter 2

Operations from Iwakuni Base

Early Mustang Missions

Iwakuni, 30 kilometers south west of Hiroshima on the shores of the beautiful Inland Sea had been a training base for the Imperial Japanese Navy in WWII. During the post war occupation, modernization was carried out by the RAAF Airfield Construction Squadron. Aircraft maintenance, routine and deep-level, was carried out in the squadron facilities with the assistance of many skilled Japanese aircraft tradesmen. Amazingly, the Japanese seemed to have accepted their defeat and complied with their Emperor's decrees while displaying no evidence of animosity.



Japanese Soldier Employed To Guard Our Camp

In addition to being the wartime base for 77 Squadron Mustangs and its (two-Dakota) Communication Flight, Iwakuni became home for a newly-arrived USAF B-26 Invader Squadron of the Third Bombardment Group. After some misunderstandings, an excellent relationship developed between the Australians and Americans and this continued throughout their period of association.



77 Squadron Mustangs At Iwakuni

On 2 July 1950, 77 Squadron flew its first three operations. These were relatively long-range escort missions into North Korea and involved instrument flying and encounters with flak. The Mustangs did these return flights efficiently out of Iwakuni from which base they conducted their operational sorties for the next three months. On the second day of operations, and consistently thereafter, the major role of the squadron became ground attack using machine guns and rockets, fighting skills at which the pilots were quite adept. Soon, napalm tanks and 500 lb bombs became regular additions.

Lou Spence, the squadron commanding officer, led eight aircraft against 'targets of opportunity' on the 3rd of July. Unfortunately this apparently well planned and scrupulously checked target area had been wrongly assigned by the Americans and resulted in a catastrophic attack on friendly forces. The squadron was fully exonerated but the shock and shame lingered most painfully, particularly after so much adverse press reportage. As quickly as possible, improved systems of target and 'bomb-line' identification, marking of friendly vehicles, and use of airborne controllers was implemented by the Americans and continually refined as time went by. Soon, a Joint Operations Center was established in South Korea to coordinate all Allied air strikes.

Unfortunately the squadron lost its first pilot of the Korean war when Graham Strout crashed in the target area while leading a section of four, attacking railways on the east coast. His body was later retrieved and interred at Pusan. The pilots were becoming increasingly aware of the severity and efficiency of enemy anti-aircraft fire, and were refining attack methods in order to compensate. The RAAF, with its extremely limited resources, began planning and training programs in anticipation of losses and need for replacement of tour-expired fighter pilots and ground staff.

The time spent on Korean war operations varied at different stages, but for fighter pilots, 100 missions or six months was thought to be a reasonable yardstick. Initial planning revolved around this philosophy, however as time went by these limits were difficult to meet as the supply of trained fighter pilots failed to keep up with the attrition rate, mainly attributable to enemy ground fire. The need for maximizing the 77 Squadron war effort was recognized, as the Allied air forces were destined to determine the eventual outcome of this immense struggle.

The enemy was continuing to advance, aided by: the strength and surprise of their unannounced attack; the unprepared state of the Allied forces; and frequent grounding of our air forces during bouts of bad weather. Soon the important city of Taejon, about half-way between Seoul and Pusan, and temporary home to the government and military headquarters, fell to the Communists. Important facilities then relocated to Taegu, just south of the Naktong River thereby obtaining some degree of security within the Pusan perimeter, a small segment of the south-east corner of the peninsula which was successfully defended throughout. Soon 77 Squadron was making use of the precarious and somewhat primitive airstrip at Taegu for refueling, re-arming and as security improved in August, occasional night accommodation.

The pilots were flying five or six exacting missions per day from this temporary base. The area was under threat from enemy nocturnal infiltration into the actual airfield perimeter, requiring the Squadron to assist with early morning strafing attacks which were very close to home. Transport planes, including RAAF Dakotas, were being hit during operations in and out of Taegu. The next squadron loss occurred when Bill Harrop crash-landed his flak-damaged Mustang in enemy territory and although he appeared to be uninjured, the rescue helicopter arrived too late. Bill's body was located after our forces advanced north. The next day, Ross Coburn avoided disaster by bailing out over cloud when his engine seized due to loss of coolant. He was unhurt and returned to duty immediately

Death of the C/O — Wing Commander Spence

On 9 September 1950 the squadron suffered a stunning blow with the death of their commanding officer Lou Spence. On this day he led four Mustangs in an attack on storage facilities at Angang-ni, north of Pusan in South Korea, which had been recently captured by Communist forces. His aircraft failed to pull out of a steep dive at low altitude and was seen to crash into the center of the town, exploding on impact. His death came two weeks after Lieutenant General George Stratemeyer, commander of the (American) Far East Air Forces, made a surprise visit to the squadron base at Iwakuni, Japan, to present him with the medal of the American Legion of Merit; he was posthumously awarded a Bar to the Distinguished Flying Cross he had received in 1942 for service in the Western Desert.



Wing Commander Lou Spence — DFC And Bar

Arrival Of Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell

With the earlier death of Graham Strout the squadron was now without its two most senior men, and in urgent need of a strong and competent leader. Fortunately the ideal man was available and Dick Cresswell arrived immediately to take command of the squadron which he had led twice before. He was flying operationally from Iwakuni by 20 September 1950 and continued his policy of 'leading from the front' as well as implementing efficient organization.



Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell

Dick Cresswell learnt to fly before World War II - his mother piloted an aircraft in 1911 - and he became a noted flying instructor before converting to Kittyhawk fighters. Such was his capability that, astonishingly, at 21, he was chosen in 1942 to form the RAAF's now famed 77 Squadron in Perth. The RAAF base at Pearce was crowded so he took over a Perth golf course, joined two fairways to create a runway and used the clubhouse and nearby houses for accommodation. That airfield, still in use, is now called Guildford. Later, when he had to move his squadron to Darwin, he again took the initiative: knowing the RAAF supply system was overloaded and the base at Darwin overstretched he sent a team to Adelaide to buy everything from teapots and tents to a tonne of beer, and the trucks to carry it all north.

In Darwin, Cresswell shot down a Betty bomber but was later shot down while defending Milne Bay, New Guinea. Later he commanded a wing of Spitfires and, as the war progressed, served in and around New Guinea at places such as Noemfoor, Biak and Morotai. The future prime minister John Gorton was one of his pilots until Cresswell judged him battle-weary and sent him home after an unexplained flying accident. Cresswell finished the war as a wing commander but stayed in the postwar RAAF at the lower rank of squadron leader and continued to fly fighters. He was commanding a Mustang squadron in Melbourne when the Korean War began on June 25, 1950; seven days later 77 Squadron, then based in Iwakuni, Japan, joined the war, operating mostly ground attack sorties.

When the squadron commander, wing commander Lou Spence, was killed in early September, Cresswell was sent as his replacement. He arrived in September and six days later flew the first of 144 combat sorties in Korea. His impact was almost immediate. In the words of one veteran, the early casualties had "seriously lowered morale, but Dick Cresswell led from the front and soon had

the squadron on its feet again".

Progress Of The War In Korea The Critical Early Phase

The United States had sent ground forces to Korea with the goal of defeating the North Korean invaders and preventing the collapse of South Korea which seemed to be imminent. However, US forces had been steadily decreasing since the end of World War II, and at the time the closest force was the 24th Infantry Division of the Eighth United States Army, with its head-quartered in Japan. The division was under-strength, with old equipment. However this unready Infantry Division was ordered into South Korea. The enemy forces were continuing to advance, aided by: the strength and surprise of their unannounced attack; the unprepared state of the Allied forces; and frequent grounding of our air forces during bouts of bad weather.

In the east, the North Korean army, 90,000 men strong, had advanced into South Korea in six columns, catching the Republic of Korea Army by surprise and completely routing it. The smaller South Korean army suffered from widespread lack of organization and equipment, and was unprepared for war. Numerically superior, North Korean forces destroyed isolated resistance from the mere 38,000 South Korean soldiers on the front before moving steadily south. Most of South Korea's forces retreated in the face of this powerful advance. By June 28, the North Koreans had captured South Korea's capital of Seoul, forcing the government and its shattered forces to retreat further south.

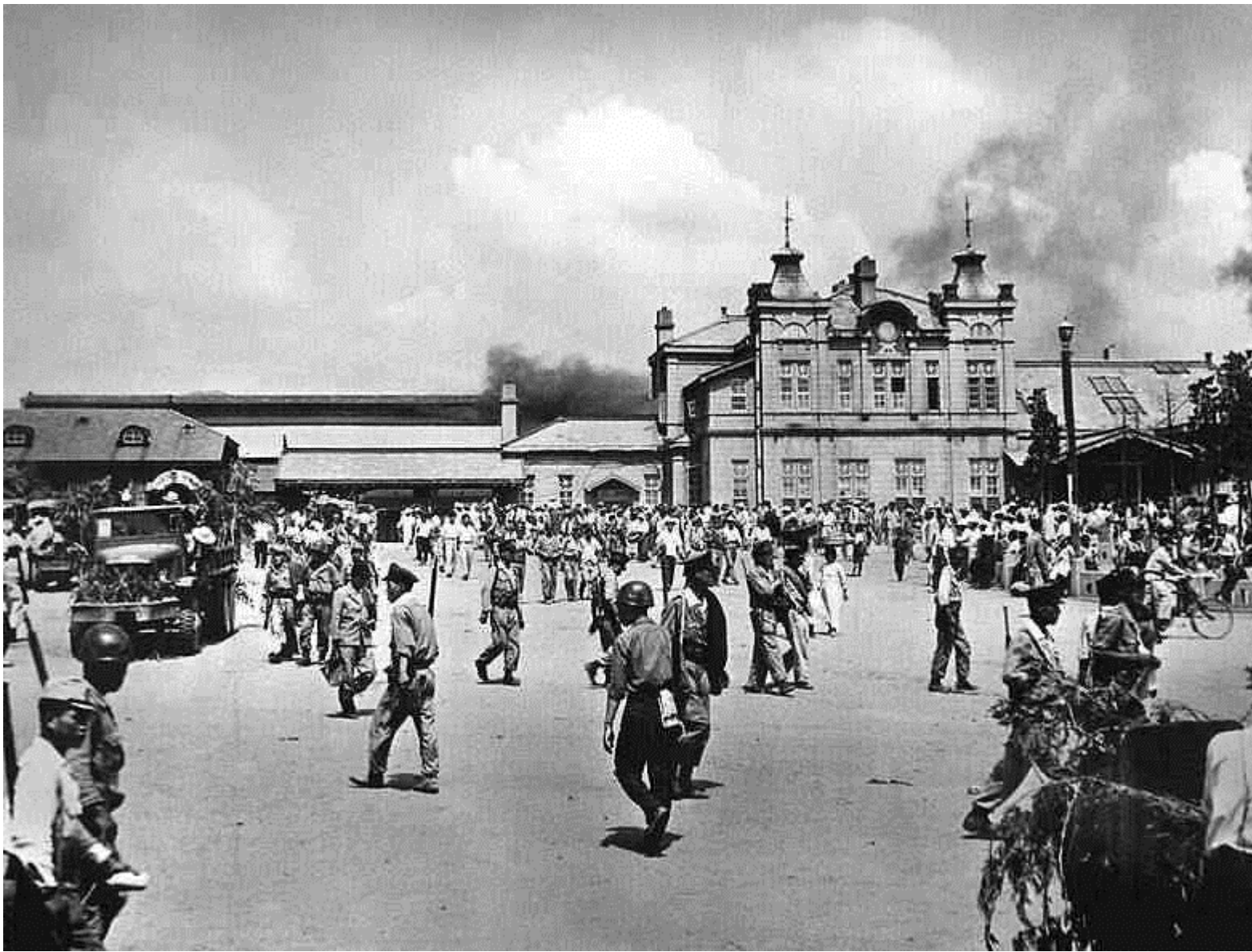
Though it was steadily pushed back, South Korean forces increased their resistance further south, hoping to delay North Korean units as much as possible. North and South Korean units sparred for control of several cities, inflicting heavy casualties on one another. The ROK Army defended Yongdok fiercely before being forced back, and managed to repel North Korean forces in the Battle of Andong.

The important city of Taejon, about half-way between Seoul and Pusan, and temporary home to the government and military headquarters, soon fell to the Communists. Important facilities then relocated to Taegu, just south of the Naktong River thereby obtaining some degree of security within the Pusan perimeter — a small segment of the south-east corner of the peninsula which was successfully defended throughout.



North Korean Russian T-34 Tanks

The 24th US Infantry Division was the first unit sent into Korea, ordered to take the initial brunt of the advance of the much larger North Korean units in order to buy time to allow reinforcements to arrive. Consequently the 24th was alone for several weeks attempting to delay the enemy and making time for the 7th Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division, 1st Cavalry Division, and other Eighth Army supporting units to join the fight. Elements of the 24th Infantry Division were badly defeated in the Battle of Osan on 5 July. This was the first battle between American and North Korean forces. For the first month the 24th Infantry Division soldiers were repeatedly defeated and forced south by the North Korean force's superior numbers and armaments. The regiments of the 24th Infantry Division were systematically pushed south in battles around Chochiwon, Chonan, and Pyongtaek. The 24th Infantry Division made a final stand in the Battle of Taejon, being almost completely destroyed as a unit, but gallantly delaying North Korean forces from advancing until July 20.



US Army Prepares To Evacuate Taejon

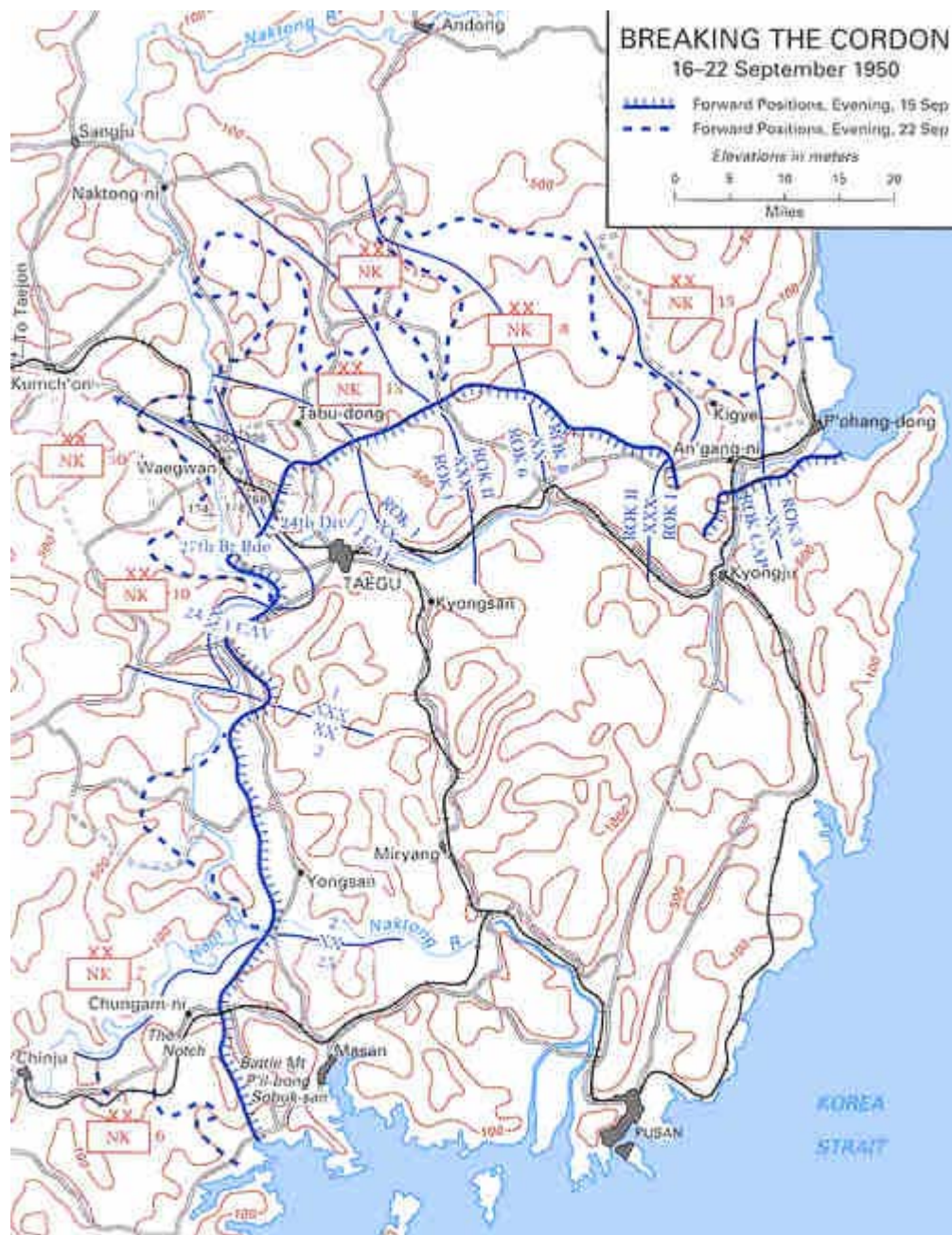
Having captured Taejon, North Korean forces began surrounding Pusan from all sides in an attempt to envelop the UN forces massing in the area. The North Korean 4th Infantry Division and the North Korean 6th Infantry Division advanced south in a wide maneuver. The two divisions were coordinating to envelop the UN's left flank and were extremely spread out. They advanced on UN positions, repeatedly pushing back US and South Korean forces. These North Korean forces were continually attacked by UN aircraft including Mustangs of Australia's 77 Squadron flying long sorties from Japan.



RAAF Mustang Flak Damage

Towards the west, US forces were pushed back repeatedly before finally halting the North Korean advance. Elements of the 3rd Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment, newly arrived in the country, were wiped out at Hadong in an ambush by North Koreans on July 27, leaving open a pass to the Pusan area. Soon after, Chinju to the west was taken, pushing back the 19th Infantry Regiment and leaving open further routes to the Pusan area.

US units were subsequently able to defeat and push back the North Koreans on the flank in the Battle of the Notch on August 2. Suffering mounting losses, the North Korean force on the west flank withdrew for several days to re-equip and receive reinforcements. This granted both sides several days of reprieve to prepare for the attack on the Pusan Perimeter.



The Precarious Pusan Perimeter — 1950

The unprepared UN forces, having been repeatedly defeated by the advancing force of, (probably less than) the original 90,000 North Korean Peoples' Army troops, were forced back to the "Pusan Perimeter", a 140-mile (230 km) defensive line around an area on the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula. With the exception of the Nakdong delta to the south, and the valley between Taegu and P'ohang-dong, the terrain is extremely rough and mountainous. North of P'ohang-dong along the South Korean line the terrain was especially treacherous, and movement in the region was extremely difficult.

Thus, the UN established the Pusan Perimeter in a location outlined by the Sea of Japan to the south and east, the Nakdong River to the west, and extremely mountainous terrain to the north, using the terrain as a natural defense. However the rough terrain also made communication difficult,

particularly for the South Korean forces in the P'ohang-dong area. Nevertheless the South Korean troops fought tenaciously to defend their country.



Saddle Ridge, Taegu — Pusan North Perimeter Territory

UN forces in this region also suffered from casualties related to the heat of the summer, as the Nakdong region has little vegetation or clean water. Korea suffered from a severe drought in the summer of 1950, receiving only 5 in (130 mm) of rain as opposed to the normal 20 in (510 mm) during the months of July and August. Combined with temperatures of 105 °F (41 °C), the hot and dry weather contributed to a large number of heat and exertion casualties, particularly for the unconditioned American forces

This was an extensive battle between relatively weak adversaries, lasting from early August 1950 until mid September of the same year. The UN fielded an army of 140,000 troops initially, with a steady buildup during the battle and in the months thereafter. This allied army had been forced to near-defeat prior to making a final desperate stand around the Pusan area. Such was the price of unpreparedness and complacency which had permeated the American nation.

The United Nations army at this stage consisted mostly of Republic of Korea Army, United States Army, and British army. These forces, sometimes relatively ill-equipped and inadequately trained repeatedly faced massive North Korean assaults at the Nakdong River and in the vicinity of the cities of Taegu, Masan and P'ohang. There were two major attacks in August and September however these were successfully repulsed by UN forces.

The United Nations forces were organized under the command of the United States Army. The Eighth United States Army served as the headquarters component for the UN forces, and was headquartered at Taegu. Under it were three weak US divisions; the 24th Infantry Division had been brought to the country early in July, while the 1st Cavalry Division and 25th Infantry Division arrived between July 14 and July 18. These forces occupied the western segment of the perimeter, along the Nakdong River.



American Tank Near Nakdong River

Soon 77 Squadron was making use of the precarious and somewhat primitive airstrip at Taegu for: refueling; re-arming; and as security improved in August; occasional night accommodation. The pilots were flying five or six exacting missions per day from this temporary base. The area was under threat from enemy nocturnal infiltration into the actual airfield perimeter, requiring the Squadron to assist with early morning strafing attacks which were quite close to home. Transport planes, including RAAF Dakotas, were being hit during operations in and out of Taegu.

The next squadron loss occurred when Bill Harrop crash-landed his flak-damaged Mustang in enemy territory and although he appeared to be uninjured, the rescue helicopter arrived too late. Bill's body was located after our forces advanced north. The next day, Ross Coburn avoided disaster by bailing out — over cloud — when his engine seized due to loss of coolant. He was unhurt and returned to duty immediately



UN Troops Guarding Nakdong Valley

The North Korean People's Army forces were organized into a mechanized combined arms force of ten divisions, originally numbering some 90,000 well-trained and well-equipped troops in July, with hundreds of T-34 Tanks. However, defensive actions by US and South Korean forces had delayed the North Koreans significantly in their invasion of South Korea, costing the North Korean's 58,000 of their troops and a large number of tanks.

In order to recoup these losses, the North Koreans had to rely on less experienced replacements and conscripts, many of whom had been taken from the conquered regions of South Korea and consequently were lacking in will to fight. During the course of the battle, the North Koreans raised a total of 13 infantry divisions and one armored division to fight at the Pusan Perimeter. North Korean troops had suffered supply shortages and immense losses, yet continually staged attacks on UN forces in an attempt to collapse the line.

However, the UN used the port of Pusan most effectively to eventually amass a huge quantity of troops, and equipment. Fortunately its naval and air forces were unchallenged by the North Koreans. Soon the Eighth Army's force of combat troops was roughly equal to North Korean forces attacking the region, with new UN units arriving everyday.



UN Troops Unload At Pusan

The Republic of Korea Army,(South Korea), a force of 58,000, was organized into two corps and five divisions; from east to west, ROK I Corps controlled the 8th Infantry Division and Capital Divisions, while the ROK II Corps controlled the 1st Division and 6th Infantry Division. A reconstituted ROK 3rd Division was placed under direct ROK Army control and fought fiercely against superior forces.

Morale among the UN units was low due to the large number of defeats incurred to that point in the war. US forces had suffered over 6,000 casualties over the past month, while the South Korean Army had lost a figure far in excess of that whilst bravely defending their country.



South Korean Troops fought fiercely At Pohang

Troop numbers for each side have been difficult to estimate in subsequent research. The North Korean army had around 70,000 combat troops committed to the Pusan Perimeter on August 5, with most of its divisions far under-strength. It likely had less than 3,000 personnel in mechanized units, and around 40 T-34 tanks at the front, due to extensive losses so far in the war.



Two North Korean T-34 Tanks Destroyed

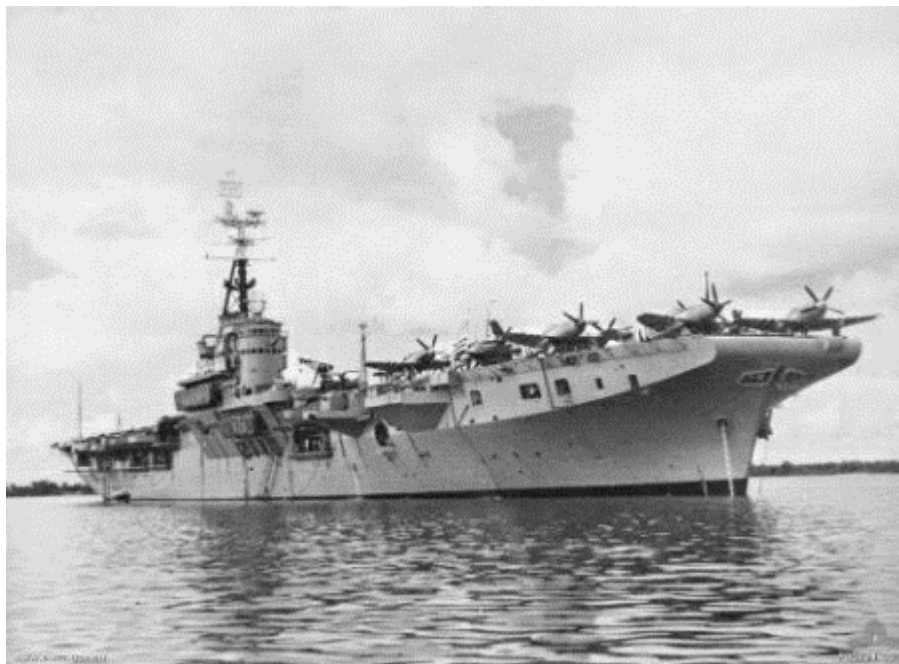
MacArthur reported 141,808 UN troops in Korea on August 4, of which 47,000 were in US ground combat units and 45,000 in South Korean combat units. Thus, by this stage, the UN ground combat force at last outnumbered the North Koreans 92,000 to 70,000. UN Forces had complete control of the air and sea throughout the fight as well, and US Air Force and US Navy elements provided support for the ground units throughout the battle virtually unopposed. Overall command of the naval force was taken by the US Seventh Fleet, and the bulk of the naval power provided was also from the US.

The United Kingdom also provided a small naval task force including an aircraft carrier and several cruisers. Eventually, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand provided ships as well. Several hundred fighter-bombers of the Fifth Air Force were positioned just off the coast and aboard the USS Valley Forge and the USS Philippine Sea. By the end of the battle the Eighth Army had more air support than General Omar Bradley's Twelfth United States Army Group in Europe during

World War II.

In March 1951, the Royal Australian Navy aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney was deployed to Korea while HMS Glory was refitted in Australia, to maintain a Commonwealth carrier presence. This was agreed to, and a 38-strong wartime CAG was formed on 14 May by incorporating the Sea Furies of 805 Squadron into the 21st CAG. Because RAN Fireflies were optimized for anti-submarine warfare, and consequently not fitted with cannon, cannon-equipped RN aircraft were loaned for the duration of Sydney's deployment.

After completing pre-departure exercises, during which several aircraft were destroyed in non-fatal, weather-induced deck crashes, HMAS Sydney and the destroyer HMAS Tobruk sailed for Korea on 31 August, 1951. While en route, the carrier's aircraft were used for a fly-past demonstration over Rabaul on 6 September, following civil unrest. On her arrival, Sydney became the first aircraft carrier owned by a Commonwealth dominion to see wartime service.



HMAS Sydney At Anchor In Korean Waters

Sydney was attached to the United States Navy (USN) Seventh Fleet and assigned to Task Element 95.11, which operated primarily off the western coast of Korea. The carrier was sent on nine or ten-day patrols in the operational area, with nine-day replenishment periods in Sasebo, Nagasaki or Kure, Hiroshima between each; to maintain coverage, Sydney alternated with a USN carrier (initially USS Rendova, then from December with USS Badoeng Strait). RAN aircraft were mainly used for air strikes against North Korean units and supply lines; secondary duties including reconnaissance, bombardment spotting, combat air patrols, and anti-submarine patrols.

During her deployment, the carrier operated an unarmed USN Sikorsky Dragonfly (designation UP28, which acquired the nickname "Uncle Peter") in the search-and-rescue and plane guard roles. This was the first helicopter to operate from an Australian warship, and the first USN equipment used by the RAN. The success of helicopter operations convinced the RAN to acquire three Bristol Sycamores; the first helicopter squadron in Australian military service.



HMAS Sydney with Fireflies Off Korean Coast

On July 1 1951, the US Far East Command directed the Eighth United States Army to assume responsibility for all logistical support of the United States and UN forces in Korea. including the ROK Army. Support for the American and South Korean armies came through the United States and Japan. The re-equipping of the ROK Army presented the UN forces with major logistical problems in July. The biggest challenge was a shortage of ammunition. Though logistics situations improved over time, ammunition was short for much of the war.

Consumption of supplies differed among the various units and a lack of a previously drafted plan forced UN logisticians to create a system on the fly. Subsistence for the UN troops in Korea was among the other logistical challenges confronting the UN in the early days of the war. There were no C rations in Korea and only a small reserve in Japan at the outbreak of the war. The Quartermaster General of the US Army immediately began moving all available C rations and 5-in-1 B rations from the United States to the Far East. Field rations at first were largely World War II K rations. Subsistence of the ROK troops was an equally important and difficult problem.

The majority of resupply by sea was conducted by cargo ships of the US Army and US Navy. The massive demand for ships forced the UN to charter private ships and bring ships out of the reserve fleet to augment the military vessels in service. The UN had a major advantage in its sea-lift operations in that the most developed port in Korea was Pusan which was at the southeastern tip of the peninsula. Pusan was the only port in South Korea that had dock facilities large enough to handle a sizable amount of cargo.

An emergency airlift of critically needed items began almost immediately from the United States to the Far East. The Military Air Transport Service (MATs), Pacific Division, expanded rapidly after the outbreak of the war. The consumption of aviation gasoline thanks to both combat and transport aircraft was so great in the early phase of the war, taxing the very limited supply available in the Far East, that it became one of the serious logistical problems.

From Pusan a good railroad system built by the Japanese and well ballasted with crushed rock and

river gravel extended northward. The railroads were the backbone of the UN transportation system in Korea. The 20,000 mi (32,000 km) of Korean vehicular roads were mainly of a secondary nature.



US Troops Carrying Casualty

The responsibility of the North Korean logistics was divided between the Ministry of National Defense (MND), led by Marshal Choe Yong Gun, and the NKPA Rear Service Department, commanded by General Choe Hong Kup. The MND was mainly responsible for railroad transportation and supply procurement, while the Rear Service Department was responsible for road transportation. The North Koreans relied on a logistical system which was very lean and substantially smaller than the United Nations' system. This logistics network was therefore capable of moving far fewer supplies, and this caused considerable difficulty for front-line troops. Based on the efficient Soviet model, this ground-based network relied primarily on railroads to transport supplies to the front while troops transported those items to the individual units on foot, trucks, or carts. This second effort, though more versatile, was also a substantial disadvantage because it was less efficient and often too slow to follow the moving front-line units.

In mid-July 1951 the UN Far East Air Force Bomber Command began a steady and increasing campaign against strategic North Korean logistics targets. The first of these targets was Wonsan on the east coast. Wonsan was important as a communications center that linked Vladivostok, Siberia, with North Korea by rail and sea. From it, rail lines ran to all the North Korean build-up centers. The great bulk of Russian supplies for North Korea in the early part of the war came in at Wonsan, and from the beginning it was considered a major military target.

By July 27 1951, the FEAF Bomber Command had a comprehensive rail interdiction plan ready. This plan sought to cut the flow of North Korean troops and material from North Korea to the combat area. Two cut points, the P'yong-yang railroad bridge and marshaling yards and the Hamhung bridge and Hamhung and Wonsan marshaling yards, would almost completely sever North Korea's rail logistics network. Destruction of the rail bridges over the Han near Seoul would cut rail communication to the Pusan Perimeter area. On July 28 the FEAF gave Bomber Command a list of targets in the rail interdiction program, and two days later a similar plan was ready for interdiction of highways.



UN Aircraft Rocketing Enemy Train

On August 4 1951, FEAF began B-29 interdiction attacks against all key bridges north of the 37th Parallel in Korea and, on August 15, light bombers and fighter-bombers joined in the interdiction campaign. North Korea's lack of large airstrips and aircraft meant it conducted only minimal air resupply, mostly critical items being imported from China. Other than this, however, aircraft played almost no role in North Korean logistics. The North Koreans were also not able to effectively use sea transport. Ports in Wonsan and Hungnam could be used for the transport of some troops and

supplies, but they remained far too underdeveloped to support any large-scale logistical movements, and the port of Incheon in the south was difficult to navigate with large numbers of ships due to extreme tides.

The supremacy of the Fifth Air Force in the skies over Korea forced the North Koreans in the first month of the war to resort to night movement of supplies to the battle area. They relied primarily on railroads to move supplies to the front, however a shortage of trucks posed the most serious problem of getting supplies from the trains to individual units, forcing them to rely on carts and pack animals. The North Korea Army was able to maintain transport to its front lines over long lines of communications despite heavy and constant air attacks. The United Nations air effort failed to halt military rail transport. Ammunition and motor fuel, which took precedence over all other types of supply, continued to arrive at the front, though in smaller amounts than before.

A major problem developed for the North Korean Army. At best there were rations for only one or two meals a day. Most units had to live at least partially off the South Korean populace, scavenging for food and supplies at night. By September 1 1951 the food situation was so bad in the North Korean Army at the front that most of the soldiers showed a loss of stamina with resulting impaired combat effectiveness.



USAF Douglas B-26 Bombers In Action Over Korean Targets

The inefficiency of its logistics remained a fatal weakness of the North Korean Army, costing it crucial defeats after an initial success with combat forces. The North Koreans' communications and supply were not capable of exploiting a breakthrough and of supporting a continuing attack in the face of massive air, armor, and artillery fire that could be concentrated against its troops at critical points.

On 15 September 1950 US General MacArthur launched a brilliant surprise Marine landing at Incheon, behind the enemy lines. This was a difficult port, but in spite of the vast mud flats due to a tide rise and fall of 30 feet, the landing was a great success. Following disruptions to the North Korean supply lines the disorganized enemy collapsed and retreated towards the Manchurian border in abject defeat.



Korea 1950. (Green, Pusan Perimeter). (Blue Arrow, Incheon)

With the successful Pusan Perimeter holding action, the victory at Incheon set in motion the moves which would shape the remainder of the war. MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, pushed by US leaders in Washington, decided to aggressively pursue the shattered North Korean People's Army into North Korea. The Eighth Army was ordered to advance as far north as possible to Manchuria and North Korea's border with China, with the primary objective of destroying what remained of the North Korean Army and the secondary objective of uniting all of Korea under Syngman Rhee.

This agitated China, which threatened that it would "not stand aside should the imperialists wantonly invade the territory of their neighbor." Warnings from other nations not to cross the 38th Parallel went unheeded and MacArthur began the offensive into the country when North Korea refused to surrender. This would eventually result in Chinese intervention once the UN troops reached the Yalu River, and what was originally known as the "Home By Christmas Offensive" turned into a war that would continue for another two-and-a-half years.



US Army General Douglas MacArthur

MacArthur Turns The Tables

Co-incident with the arrival of Cresswell in 77 Squadron, an armada of UN ships disgorged a 75,000 strong force (mainly the 10th Corps of the US Marines). This audacious and difficult attack on 15 September 1950, at Incheon to the west of Seoul took the enemy completely by surprise and resulted in an immediate reversal of the Communist fortunes as the Americans advanced on their supply lines.

The Battle of Incheon was an amphibious invasion and battle of the Korean War that resulted in a

decisive victory and strategic reversal in favor of the United Nations (UN). The operation involved some 75,000 troops and 261 naval vessels, and led to the recapture of the South Korean capital Seoul two weeks later.

The battle began on September 15, 1950, and ended September 19. Through a surprise amphibious assault far from the Pusan Perimeter that UN and South Korean forces were desperately defending, the largely undefended city of Incheon was secured after being bombed by UN forces. The battle ended a string of victories by the invading North Korean People's Army (NKPA). The subsequent UN recapture of Seoul partially severed NKPA's supply lines in South Korea.

The majority of United Nations ground forces involved were U.S. Marines, commanded by General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur was the driving force behind the operation, overcoming the strong misgivings of more cautious generals to a risky assault over extremely unfavorable terrain — mud flats and a 30 ft tide. He also had difficulties in obtaining and assembling such a force at a time when most available troops were desperately committed at the Pusan Perimeter.

South Korea was soon back in the hands of its owners as the desperate North Koreans, deprived of food and ammunition, faded away into the mountains. It is estimated that, of an invasion force of 90,000 North Koreans a mere 25,000 eventually returned to their own territory north of the 38'th parallel. Many of their conscripts were South Koreans, and undoubtedly these would have headed for their homes at the first opportunity.



Marines Land At Incheon



MacArthur Approaching Incheon

Chapter 3

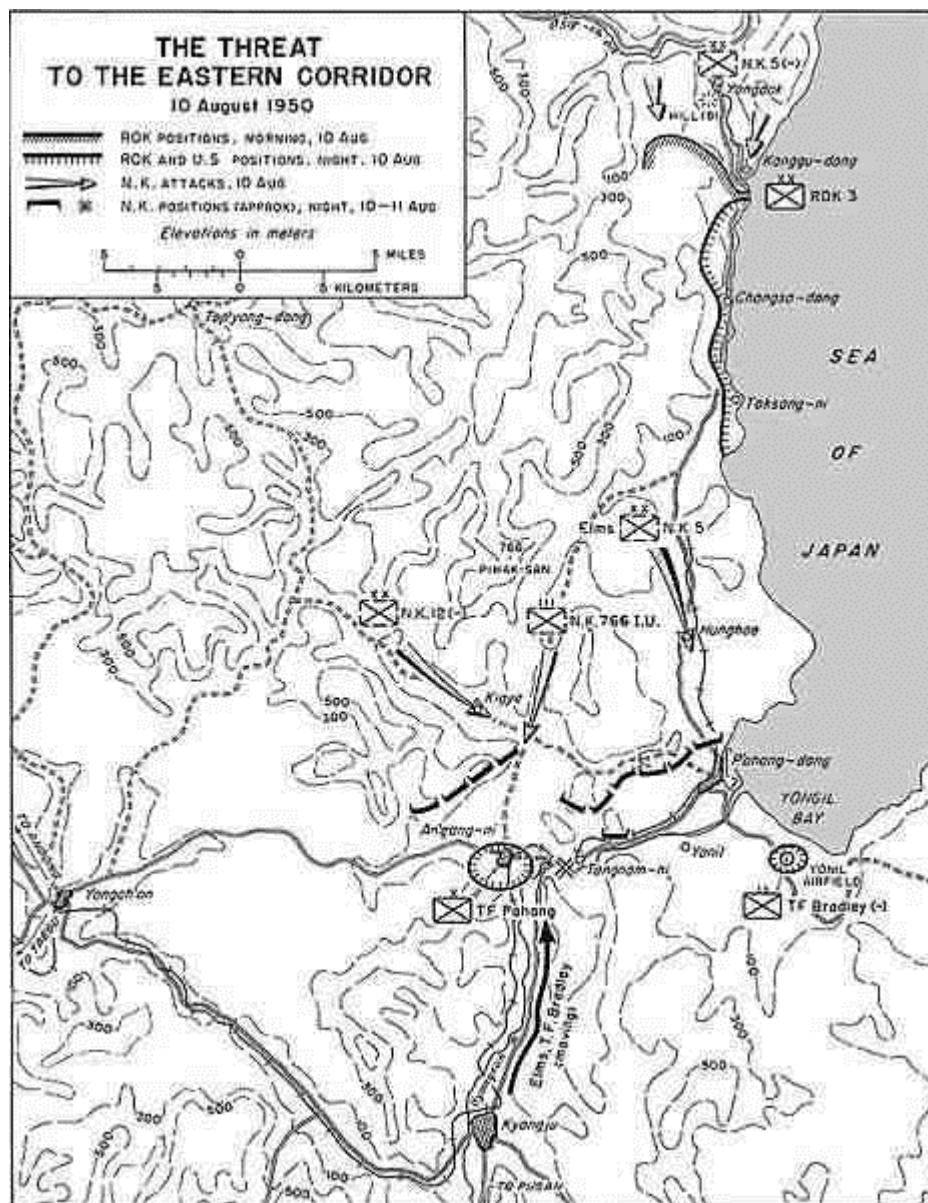
RAAF Operations From Bases in Korea

The Squadron Moves To Pohang

In October 1950, 77 Squadron moved to its first Korean base at Pohang in the southeast near the edge of the Pusan perimeter. This was a shambles.

Everyone lived under canvas surrounded by buildings destroyed by recent UN air attacks. There was no paving but an abundance of mud, and freezing conditions had arrived. While the old airstrip was a mere 1350 meters, at least it had been made of concrete — by the Japanese. The RAAF supply system proved totally inadequate. However, with the immense help of the American organization, the squadron survived and continued effective operations. Australian army troops were also inadequately provided with supplies including a complete lack of winter clothing. Again, the Americans instantly responded and RAAF Dakotas made rushed trips conveying these absolute necessities from US bases to the men of the Royal Australian Regiment — still fighting in their summer uniforms.

Tragedy struck when two 77 Squadron pilots died from burns as their tent caught fire on 14 November 1950. Flight Lieutenant C. Kirkpatrick passed away later that day and W.V. Gray lingered for six more days. An electrical short on old and defective wiring caused the conflagration which was accelerated by volatile paint on the tent. The men were unable to readily extricate themselves from their sleeping bags. The poor quality Australian equipment which was deemed to have caused this tragedy provoked Dick Cresswell to much anger which was heard in high places. Actions were taken to redress the deficiencies but the Americans were the ones who gave instant support and supply. Conditions became endurable although still quite elementary and sometimes primitive.



1950 Battle Map Pohang

The squadron continued vigorous ground attacks helping drive the enemy well north of the parallel and tightening the noose around the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, which was soon in UN hands. The Mustangs also participated in bomber escort and reconnaissance missions. Such were the consistent successes, that much credence was given to MacArthur's assertion that "Fighting is definitely coming to an end." "Home by Christmas" was the cry on many lips. But the Chinese Communists under their ruthless leader Mao Tse-tung had other ideas. After mounting a hate and dishonest propaganda campaign against the allies, they began, in secret, to move a huge army into Manchuria from where these troops infiltrated into North Korea. Mao was prepared to inflict immense loss of life on the Korean people and his own troops for as long as it took to exhaust the Americans. He sought, and received, Stalin's aid in the form of equipment and clandestine 'specialist' officers. This included hundreds of aircraft. The Chinese leader had, in fact, issued a warning through India that if UN forces pressed into North Korea a massive Chinese army would repel them. These threats were not taken seriously by the Allies initially because the Chinese and Russians made

their preparations in great secrecy.

On 26 October 1950, UN ROK troops entered Choson on the Yalu river. A quick end to the war was anticipated. However this was not to be, a fact brought home most disastrously, when at this very time, a battalion of ROK troops was wiped out by Chinese 'volunteers' just south of the Yalu. On 1 November, Russian MiG-15 jet fighters appeared over North Korea and were seen to be assembling in considerable numbers at Antung airfield, just across the Yalu in China. One week later the first jet air battle in history occurred when US F-80s and MiGs clashed near Sinuiju. The Americans downed one Russian without losses.

Throughout the grim conditions of one of the worst winters on record the Chinese walked and drove across the frozen Yalu bringing to Korea another most devastating phase of the war. Dick Cresswell briefed the pilots on the presence of MiGs but this menace did not restrict operations. Still flying from Pohang the squadron continued to brave the awful weather, the flak and the lurking MiGs in the north of Korea, sometimes dropping into Pyongyang for additional fuel.



77 Squadron Mustangs Escorting B-29 Bombers

The Desperate Fight At Hamhung — Nov. 1950

In mid November 1950, 77 Squadron Mustangs re-located to Yonpo airstrip outside Hamhung, from which base operations against the enemy were vigorously executed until the squadron was forced, by enemy encroachment, to withdraw to Pusan on 3rd December. This was a desperate phase of the war for all concerned, and a great test of operational skills for the squadron. Enemy activity came extremely close to the airstrip itself and personnel were under direct fire on occasions. Final evacuation from the area was a close call due to the rapid enemy advance. On departing Yonpo some of the Mustangs flew strike missions against the approaching Chinese before withdrawing to Pusan. This retreat was brought about by the sudden entry of 300,000 Chinese troops into the war and the consequent outflanking of UN forces.

In late October 1950, the Communist Chinese, who until this time had merely been supplying arms to North Korea, entered the war with a massive surprise onslaught out of the mountains of North

Korea after secretly crossing from Manchuria in a brilliantly executed move. Traveling by night and concealing their presence in the hills, these massive contingents prepared to strike. This set the scene for a disastrous winter retreat by the UN armies, including a large force of US marines who were surrounded in most inhospitable terrain.



Chinese 'Volunteers' Assembling

Although the UN forces were under American command, this army was officially a United Nations "police" force. In order to avoid an open war with the US and other UN members, China deployed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) under the name "volunteer army". The name was also an homage to the Korean Volunteer Army that had helped the Chinese Communists during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, and it managed to deceive the US intelligence about the size and nature of the Chinese forces that entered Korea. Technically speaking, the PVA was the PLA's North East Frontier Force (NEFF), with other PLA formations transferred under NEFF's command as the Korean War dragged on.

As the UN troops were driving towards the Yalu River bordering China, the Chinese, who worried that the UN forces would not stop at the Yalu River, warned Western leaders that such an action would not be tolerated. Many Western leaders, including General Douglas MacArthur, wanted to invade China. However, President Harry S. Truman and other leaders disagreed, and MacArthur was ordered to be very cautious when approaching the Chinese border. Eventually, MacArthur disregarded these concerns, arguing that since the North Korean troops were being supplied by bases in Manchuria/China, those supply depots should be bombed. However, for the most part, UN bombers remained out of northeastern China during the war. MacArthur refused to believe that the Chinese would really enter the war and ignored warnings from the Indian ambassador. Soon Chinese troops were openly swarming across the Yalu. In the winter months the shallow Yalu froze, providing a safe crossing for tanks and other heavy transport.

The CPVA soldier was reasonably well clothed, in keeping with the PLA's guerrilla origin and egalitarian attitudes. All ranks wore a cotton or woolen green or khaki shirt and trousers combination with leaders' uniforms being different in cut and with red piping and collar tabs. However, their rubber soled canvas shoes provide no protection against the cold and many soldiers' feet froze during the heavy winter rains. The general lightness of their cotton uniforms did not prevent the freezing to death of thousands of soldiers in the extreme cold which dropped to minus 50 degrees Celsius.



Chinese 'Volunteers' In Action

The nominal strength of a PLA division was 9,500 men, a regiment was near 3,000, and a battalion had about 850 men. However, many divisions were below strength while those divisions opposite Taiwan were above strength. There was also variation in organization and equipment as well as in the quantity and quality of equipment. Some of the PLA's equipment was from the Japanese Army or was captured from the Chinese Nationalists. Some Czechoslovakian equipment was purchased on the open market. During the initial offensive in the fall of 1950, great numbers of captured American weapons were also used due to the availability of ammunition and the increasing difficulty of resupply across the Yalu river due to U.N. air interdiction. In addition, the Chinese produced a domestic copy of the American Thompson sub-machine gun, many of which found their way into Korea. Later on, after the first year of the Korean War, the Soviet Union began sending arms and munitions, and the Chinese started to produce copies of some Soviet weapons, such as the PPSH-41, which they designated Type 50.

During November 1950, in order to support UN ground forces in the north east, Mustangs of 77 Squadron, under the brilliant command of Dick Cresswell positioned to Yongpo, frequently referred to as Hamhung due to proximity. Soon there developed a desperate struggle against the multitudes of Chinese sweeping down from the Yalu. The 1st US Marine Division from the 10th Corps was in particular trouble in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir when inundated by hordes of Chinese descending from their concealment.



Chosin Reservoir

The UN forces, greatly outnumbered, and frequently surrounded, eventually fought their way out to the evacuation port at Hungnam near Hamhung, but left behind many thousands of dead and missing.



Chosin Medical Evacuation

In spite of appalling weather and terrain, it became imperative to provide air support using all available Allied aircraft.



Curtis C-46 Commando Transport

At Hamhung our pilots were only 100 kilometers from the surrounded Marines and by late November 77 Squadron was participating in the herculean air support in this battle. Dick Cresswell even lead hazardous, but vital, night attacks when possible, to the obvious surprise and discomfort of

the exposed enemy. Pilots and ground crews lived and operated under extremely difficult and cold conditions but were forever aware of the much worse circumstances effecting the beleaguered Marines and Army men.



Desperate Winter Retreat

The situation was desperate and our men, realizing this, exerted tremendous efforts in the air and on ground servicing, in spite of the appalling weather and all other hardships. Eventually the Hamhung base was surrounded by the Communists, and all operations became increasingly hazardous, with aircraft, including transports, being damaged by ground fire during approach and take-off. By a valiant effort the defense of the area held long enough to effect successful evacuation of most who had made it to the area. 77 Squadron re-positioned on 3 December to Pusan on the southern end of the peninsula. In later times, veterans of this particular operation were heard to quip, "If you weren't at Hamhung, you were never there!"

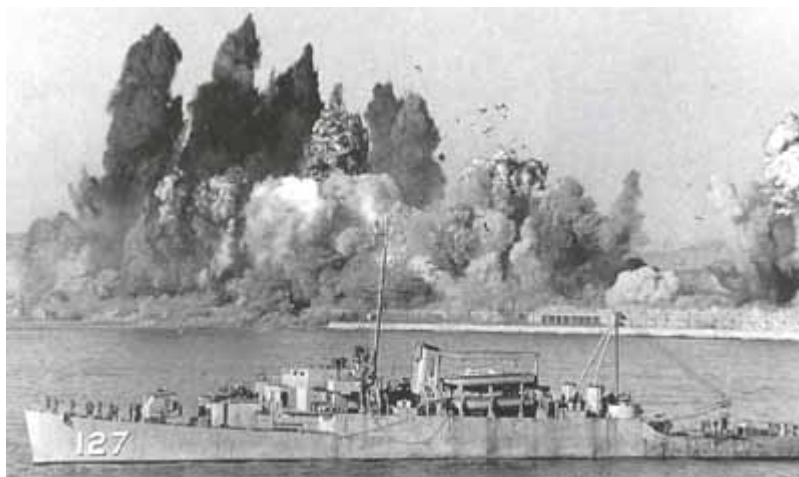
The morning after arriving at Pusan the Squadron was again heavily engaged in support of our hard-pressed armies in the north. Despite having changed bases three times in six weeks the Mustangs kept applying intense pressure upon the enemy at every opportunity allowed by the weather. Attacks were concentrated on enemy supply lines with bridges as vital targets. To this end, a section of four under command of Geoff Thornton was dispatched on 17 December to attack a railway bridge at Sonchon within 30 miles of the Manchurian border. Approaching from the sea and attacking out of the sun they left the bridge with two spans destroyed and tracks blown up by rocket fire.



North Korean Civilians Escape To The South

By 24 December 1950, all who could reach Hungnam or Hamhung had been evacuated by sea or air. More than 190 ships carried 105,000 troops, 98,000 Korean civilians fleeing from the Communists,

and several hundred thousand tons of supplies, mainly to Pusan on the southern tip of the peninsula. Aircrew flew through Christmas without a break.



USS Begor Observes Demolition Of Hungnam Port

The Squadron suffered more losses when Pilot Officer Don Ellis crashed and burned in his Mustang on 22 December 1950 and several weeks later Pilot Officer G.I. Stephens was killed in action over the Munsan-Sariwon Road. On the same day Warrant Officer R.O.L. Brackenrag successfully ditched his Mustang in Pusan harbor, the first RAAF pilot to have this experience in the aircraft type.

Flight Lieutenant Gordon Harvey

On 19 January 1951 Gordon Harvey's Mustang fighter was hit by ground fire while attacking a target in Pyongyang. Gordon then became the first Australian taken prisoner during the Korean War

Gordon begins his account: "There was an explosion in the engine. It may have been hit by small arms fire but there was no concussion, no thud or knock of a bullet striking home, only the explosion. The cockpit was full of oil and smoke and there was no power. I had to find a place to land quickly because it was impossible to gain enough altitude to bail out. There was just one chance, if the ice, on the frozen Taedong River below, was thick enough to withstand the weight."

Gordon Harvey's two wing-men saw the Mustang with its wheels up, slide on the ice, finally stopping, intact, on a small island. They saw Gordon running. **He again takes up the story:** "There was no immediate cover. In the distance on what I assumed to be high river banks, I could make out a few houses but little else. The only possible place to hide was what seemed to be a large brick building on a hill, possibly an island, a long way off. I set out for it across the ice. My progress seemed hopelessly slow, too slow. I was only half way across when they picked me up."

North Koreans pursued him across a frozen part of the river. Having no cover and with bullets ricocheting, he was forced to surrender and was hustled to a farmhouse and placed under guard. From time to time, he could hear low-flying aircraft, probably searching for him. The captors, proud of their catch, moved him from house to house for several days, on display. The soldiers had to protect Gordon from violence by angry civilians. During the next 12 weeks Harvey was moved about, undergoing periodic brutal interrogation. He had the misfortune to encounter both Pak and

Lee, the never-to-be-forgotten sadists who ran the notorious interrogation center known to victims as Pak's Palace.

For some months, Gordon was used as a laborer on night shift, conveying supplies around Pyongyang. The work was very hard, with food and conditions deplorable. In addition to the long hours of night work, he and the other prisoners endured hard physical labor during the day, digging revetments in order to conceal trucks. Other chores included carrying water from a well half a mile away and clearing raw sewage from overflowing toilets. Countless sessions of rigorous and brutal interrogation provided some variation on the general slave-labor theme.

Gordon formed the impression that UN intelligence was very inadequate, as he frequently encountered on night forays ripe pickings on the grossly jammed roads and in marshaling yards, most of which, though readily available for attack, were receiving scant attention from our aircraft. These chaotic target areas were extremely vulnerable yet seemed to remain largely undetected. Nevertheless, he did experience the attentions of rocket-firing American B-26 bombers on several nights during delivery jobs. One truck driver turned on his lights momentarily, probably to locate the narrow roadway between paddy fields. The alert bomber pilot struck! The driver lost control of the vehicle which lurched off the pathway and overturned. Perched on top of a load of firewood on the back of the truck were Gordon and his friend, an American pilot 'JB' Smith. Luckily they were thrown clear and escaped with bruises. On another occasion, when traveling by day in a truck, Gordon and all on board had a narrow escape. The vehicle was strafed and damaged by an American jet. Gordon and his companion, once again the F-80 pilot 'JB' Smith, were almost victims of 'friendly fire' from his own aircraft type. **JB recalls the event:**

"I remember that trip to Sinuiju very well. It was late winter or early spring. We were on a truck with about 15 or 20 civilians. It was jammed full of people and supplies including a drum of gasoline just behind the cab. We were in some pretty high hills winding our way up and getting pretty close to the top. We were probably 20 or 30 miles south of the Yalu. I think we spotted the flight of two F-80s heading north and not very high. They saw us and circled around low and out of sight. We started bailing out of the truck, both helping the women and children. Just as we cleared the vehicle, they popped over the ridge and opened up with their 50s. We were all taking cover behind small tree trunks. They made only one pass. When we got back to the truck we found a bullet hole in the gasoline drum and gas leaking out. A slug had taken out about half of the steering column just below the steering wheel. The driver continued nevertheless. When he came to the top of the pass and started down he was driving like a mad man. We had visions of the steering wheel coming off in his hands. We were lucky to survive and also lucky to receive a good meal that night. They lodged us in a kitchen under guard. We watched the cook drag a couple of frozen chickens out of a snow bank. The heads and feet and a few feathers were still intact but he just took a cleaver, chopped them up and dumped them in a pot of boiling water. Damn good soup!"

During April 1951 an escape was planned. In preparation, Harvey and two American companions. Major D.F. McGhee and Lieutenant R.W. Simpson stole and cooked several kilograms of food per man. They 'acquired' Korean water-bottles, a compass of dubious accuracy, knives, a few pieces of broken mirror and part of a Mae West jacket. McGhee also had a small map. They were dressed in North Korean padded suits and fur-lined hats. At 10pm on 28 April, a foggy night, the fugitives escaped. As a precaution they cut telephone lines. A sturdy Ulster man known as Spud Gibbons withdrew from the plan as his six feet four inches would be a give-away. However he provided an effective decoy in distracting the guards. It was later determined that the torture he suffered at the hands of Pak by way of 'pay-back' and to make him tell of the planned escape route was the worst, by

medical standards, suffered by any surviving POW in Korea. Spud told them nothing. They walked boldly through the dark and foggy streets of Pyongyang, successfully surviving no less than nine challenges by responding with indecipherable grunts and the word "Chungwa" meaning Chinese, while ambling nonchalantly on their way. They hid for the day on a hill overlooking the Taedong River.

Their plan was to walk, mainly at night, towards the coast, steal a boat and sail to the UN-held island of Ch'o-do. In three grueling days they made it to the Taedong estuary where the 12 miles-per-hour current would bear a vessel swiftly out to sea. All that was necessary was a boat. Then they found it! While hiding under a bridge, they watched with great interest as locals provisioned a small sampan with food, water and oars. The Koreans then departed leaving their unattended vessel a mere 150 feet from a band of desperate boat thieves. In the evening twilight, the current finally reversed direction and the gurgling, sucking waters tensioned the little vessel's moorings. Gordon Harvey walked boldly along the river bank, boarded the boat and raised the stern anchor. The other fugitives moved out of cover as Gordon prepared to hoist the bow anchor. At this precise moment a dozen Koreans marched down the path and began climbing into the boat. Harvey, keeping his head down in the dark, casually completed his task, dumped the anchor in the boat and walked slowly away. The precious vessel floated away downstream, in the general direction of Ch'o-do but carrying the wrong passengers. A critical matter of three minutes would have ensured success!

Two more days and nights of bitter frustration did not produce another boat. They decided to proceed south towards the front line. Walking boldly through the town of Kyomipo, they again survived several challenges. The going became very tough as they battled hunger, injured feet and anxiety. McGhee's feet were glued to his shoes with blood and broken blisters. Simpson suffered abominably from weakness. He had developed a craving for a steaming bowl of white rice.

The end came during the seventh morning on a river bank near a place called Sariwon, 60 miles from Pak's Palace and 15 miles from the front line. Simpson, in desperation, stripped to his shorts, donned McGhee's Mae West and despite protests from the others swam to a vessel on the opposite shore. Sitting on the bank in a semi-stupor the others failed to properly conceal themselves. In the meantime, the presence of westerners and Simpson's swim roused the attention of angry and excited locals. Men, women and youngsters armed with clubs and guns charged and overpowered the fugitives. Harvey was laid low by a fearsome blow to his skull. Simpson was dragged from the shallows unconscious. With the terrible prospect of being returned to Pak's Palace, they refused to give answers and consequently were placed in a pitch-black underground cave where political prisoners were being held in the most appalling conditions. In these tunnels, about two meters high, two meters wide and 10 meters long, prisoners sat shoulder to shoulder and were fed on two small millet balls a day.

The inmates endured a plague of lice which threatened to eat them alive. The revolting creatures produced an endless torment as they crawled over all parts of the body and through the hair as they sought sustenance from their unwilling hosts and laid eggs in seams and collars of clothing. The political prisoners, no doubt drawing on years of experience in dealing with this menace, attempted some degree of control by passing egg-infested clothing through their teeth which acted as mills. After about three days of this ordeal of lice, heat and stench the UN captives felt that their survival was at stake. Seeing no alternative, they confessed to the escape from Pak's Palace. Anything was preferable to suffocating in that stinking hellhole!

They were immediately marched back towards that dreadful establishment but on the way were

accommodated for one night in yet another revolting political-prisoner cave. This was the usual size, about two meters wide, less than two meters high and built in the shape of a 'T'. Political prisoners lined either side back to the end of the T and it was to this section, in the far reaches, that Gordon and his companions had to crawl. Bare light globes burned ceaselessly creating almost unbearable heat in their immediate vicinity. There was never anything left of the water or food by the time it reached their end of the passage. Wives and children of prisoners sat outside the frightful establishment adding their cries and wailing.

At Pak's Palace, the guards who had been on duty during their escape dealt with them most brutally. McGhee wrote of his excruciating experiences at the hands of Pak, spreadeagled with his hands tied to the rafters. When he returned to consciousness he was on the floor in a terrible state. Before passing out he heard Simpson shouting in agony and Harvey's strangled voice from down the hall, "Mister, you can go to hell!" The three prisoners were sentenced to 'The Hole,' a former vegetable pit dug in the side of a hill, two meters deep and only about one-meter square, shut off from all light by a reinforced door. This was their private hell for the next 26 excruciating days. After this extreme period of deprivation Gordon was down to half his normal weight.

On 23 June, the three unfortunates were moved to Pyoktong 'University' as this large POW camp was known. Pyoktong, a picturesque agricultural town, was encircled by wooded hills typifying the wild natural grandeur of North Korea and was adorned by an old temple on the slopes. Appearances belied the shocking reputation of this evil place. Two days later, to the great sorrow of his companions, Simpson died as a direct result of the consistent maltreatment. It is McGhee's contention that while many things contributed, it was probably something Simpson saw that principally caused his demise. When imprisoned in one of the political-prisoner caves the three escapees had witnessed the ultimate in brutality. The wife of a Korean prisoner, huddling close to his cell, was trying to breast feed her baby. The child's incessant cries annoyed the Korean jailer. In a fury he kicked the infant out of its mother's arms and then kicked it against the wall, silencing it forever. Then, while the distraught husband and the three escapees watched in horror the sergeant kicked the mother to death. Simpson never recovered from this. It was one more diabolical act than he could stand. He died two months later with the vacant '500-mile stare', the ominous, heedless gaze so readily recognizable as the precursor of death. He was still seeing that mother and child.

Brutal conditions were the regular fare at Pyoktong and Gordon endured this place of ill-repute for approximately four months. On 20 October 1951, Gordon was moved to the officer's establishment at Pin-chong-ni. It was here he and Ron Guthrie met and it was noteworthy that Gordon gave little detail of his ordeals. Ron was to learn more of Pak's Palace and the horrifying University from other 'graduates.'



Gordon Harvey Attends Briefing (Gordon Is In Center)

More Pilot Tragedies

On February 14 Flight Lieutenant K.C. Matthews and Sergeant S. Squires went missing and a couple of weeks later the same happened to Ken Royal. A particularly unfortunate event occurred when Sergeant Harry Strange bailed out of his aircraft over Wonsan. Two objects were seen leaving his cockpit. He had accidentally released his parachute straps, while undoing the seat harness thereby causing his parachute to separate from his body during bail out.

On 15 March 1951, after sustaining considerable flak damage, Keith Meggs had to belly land his Mustang at Kimpo airport even though he knew this was still in no-man's-land. Standing on the wing with his pistol at the ready he was relieved to find the approaching soldiers were South Koreans. Keith returned to flying immediately. On the same day Ron Howe, hit by ground fire, belly landed on an island in the Han River.

Cec Sly Bail-out Into Enemy Territory: Dramatic Helicopter Rescue

Less than a week later, on 20 March 1951, Keith Meggs helped with the rescue of his friend Cec Sly from a most precarious position in enemy territory. Cec, hit by flak, with his engine on fire and

smoke in the cockpit had no option but to bail-out over enemy lines and endure small-arms fire both during the descent and after landing. The Mustang cockpit, being fairly narrow, was not always easy for a bail out, some pilots merely released the canopy, unstrapped and inverted the aircraft.



Mustang Cockpit

It was a relatively low bail-out and the chute opened at about four hundred feet. Cec touched down about 50 meters from his crashed Mustang which was burning on a landscape strewn with patches of snow. Exploding ammunition from his aircraft guns caused Cec to vacate to a safe distance where he was then fired at by enemy troops who were located about 150 meters away in an orchard encampment. He hid behind a big rock and a small hillock but was still visible to Keith who now called in other aircraft and began strafing the enemy troop positions. Cec was close enough to the enemy soldiers to see they were young men in khaki uniforms, firing rifles and machine guns as they dashed between trenches in the orchard area.

As a result of Keith's radio calls, four 77 Squadron Mustangs led by Vic Cannon and four US Mustangs joined him in defending Cec against the encroaching enemy troops, and an American helicopter was called in. A dramatic battle ensued in what was to be recognized as one of the biggest rescues of the war. Soon there were 16 Mustangs circling and firing on the advancing enemy infantry, disrupting their efforts to locate and capture or kill the downed pilot. As the sections of four fighters expended their ammunition they were replaced by four more. In all, 28 Mustangs became involved and the enemy troops were largely kept at bay.



Emblem Of USAF Air Rescue Service

A helicopter accompanied by a T6 Texan control aircraft arrived after about 20 minutes. In response to signals from Cec the T6 called the chopper which descended to about 20 meters in the vicinity of the downed pilot. Unfortunately, after his aircraft was damaged by intense ground fire, the pilot, Captain Oz McKenzie, was forced to depart. The chopper was a 'write-off' as a result of the extreme flak damage. About one hour later a second Helicopter, piloted by Captain Lynden E. Thomasson arrived and was again led to Sly's position by the T6 spotter aircraft. Disregarding the ground fire which was still very menacing the chopper landed within ten yards of Cec who was able to break cover and scramble on board with the assistance of the crew. Cec advised the pilot to depart northward although this was away from home; he had learned where the enemy fire was coming from and this initial-climb path proved to be the most prudent. Cec had been on the ground, in enemy territory from approximately 8am until 10am.



Sikorsky H-5 Rescue Helicopter



Texan'Spotter Aircraft

Cec, having suffered internal injuries, spent some time in a first aid post at Suwon and later further hospitalization and recuperation in Pusan and Japan. While at Suwon he was placed on a stretcher next to one other airman who had been wounded during his rescue battle. This was 2nd Lieutenant Brown, observer in the T6 spotter plane which had run immense risks in locating and keeping track of Cec during the operation. Brown had been shot in the leg. Fortunately, no bones or arteries were hit and the airman recovered. Two weeks later Cec was flying again, and went on to volunteer for further operations on the Meteor jets.



Cec Sly In Cockpit

Mustang Operations Finish For 77 Squadron



RAAF Mustangs In Japan

On 6 April 1951 the Squadron flew its last Mustang sorties. In the first nine months of the Korean War they had flown over 11,000 hours during 3,872 sorties varying in length from as little as half an hour in the desperate battles of the Pusan Perimeter, to more than six hours when flying out of Japan. The average was about three hours in length. This was a great tribute to both the men who flew and to the ground support and maintenance staff who had also endured dangers and deplorable living conditions throughout much of the Squadron operations in Korea. On 17 April 1951 Roy Robson

was killed during a Mustang night cross country flight making him the 13'th squadron pilot killed or captured in the Korean War.

Chapter 4

The Squadron Equips With New Aircraft

Jet Fighters — A Quantum Leap

In early 1951 as the enemy introduced increasing numbers of MiG-15 jet fighters into North Korea, it became obvious that 77 Squadron should also re-equip with modern jet fighters. Unfortunately, the most desirable aircraft, the North American Sabre, could not be supplied due to high demands by the USAF.



Two North American F-86 Sabres

The first choice exhibited by the RAAF for a jet fighter to equip 77 Squadron was the North American F-86A Sabre. This was a new swept wing design similar in concept to the Russian MiG and generally expected to equal that aircraft in performance. However These North American jets were all required by the United States forces and, in fact, were in short supply.

The first swept-wing airplane in the U.S. fighter inventory, the F-86 scored consistent victories over Russian-built MiG fighters during the Korean War. All 39 United Nations jet aces won their laurels in Sabres. Four models of the craft (F-86A, E, F and H) were day fighters or fighter bombers, while the F-86D, K and L versions were all-weather interceptors.

Successive models of the daylight versions -- all designed to destroy hostile aircraft in flight or on the ground -- were equipped with more powerful engines and armament systems that ranged from bombs and rockets to machine guns and cannon. All are rated in the 650-mph class with a 600-mile combat radius and a service ceiling of over 45,000 feet. Various models of the Sabre held world's speed records for six consecutive years, setting five official records and winning several National Aircraft Show Bendix Trophies. In September 1948, an F-86A set the Sabre's first official world speed record of 570 mph. This mark was bettered in 1952 by an F-86D that flew at 698 mph. The "D" became the first model of a fighter to better its own record, in 1953, with a run of 715 mph.

The F-86E and subsequent models incorporated a unique control system, developed by North American, called the "all-flying tail." Where the F-86A contained a booster control system that called for the pilot to do part of the work of controlling the aircraft, the newer system added full power-operated control for better maneuverability at high speeds. An "artificial feel" was built into the aircraft's controls to give the pilot forces on the stick that were still conventional, but light enough for superior combat control.

From August 1951 to July 1953 Australia's 77 Squadron was attached to the 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing of the USAF based at Kimpo, Korea. The Americans were equipped with the F-86 Sabre during the Korean War and this unit was the top MiG-killing organization during the conflict. 77 Squadron RAAF shot down 3 MiGs (probably 6) for a loss of 5 Meteors. Aircraft damaged in air fighting were 9 Meteors and 6 MiGs.

Operational Units: 4th Fighter-Interceptor Group, (November 1950 – July 1953).

334th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron; 335th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron; 336th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron; RAAF No. 77 Squadron (attached August 1951 – July 1953)

The 4 FIW, moving from the United States, arrived in Japan in late November with its F-86 Sabres aboard aircraft carriers. The primary mission of the wing was air superiority, and the Sabre was capable of battling the Soviet-built MiG-15 on equal terms. From Johnson AB, Japan, detachments deployed in mid-December to bases in South Korea, rotating between South Korea and Japan through February 1951. Then, the 4 FIW moved in stages to Korea, with all elements rejoined by May 1951. The 4 FIW was the deadliest interceptor wing of the Korean War. Wing, group, and squadron personnel accounted for 516 air-to-air victories, representing more than half of the enemy aircraft for which USAF credits were awarded. The wing boasted twenty-five aces by the end of the war. US Marine and future astronaut John Glenn flew for a time with the 4th FIW. Glenn flew his second Korean combat tour on an inter-service exchange program with the United States Air Force, 4th Fighter Wing. He logged 27 missions in the faster F-86F Sabre, and shot down three MiG-15s near the Yalu River in the final days before the ceasefire.

The 4 FIW moved to Japan following the Korean armistice in 1953, then was inactivated in place on 8 December 1957.

As the Sabre was not available, it was decided the British twin-engine Gloster Meteor Mk-8 would be the best alternative for continued operations by 77 Squadron. Early plans to send several senior pilots to Britain for extensive meteor experience were abandoned and arrangements were made for RAF instructors to train pilots at Iwakuni. Additionally, two senior 77 Squadron pilots gained experience by training and doing sorties with the American 35th Fighter Group currently flying Lockheed F-80s in Korean combat operations. Dick Cresswell and Des Murphy acquired valuable experience during this phase and were able to pass on much vital information and develop appropriate techniques for squadron Meteor operations. A 13-man RAAF technical team under the command of Squadron Leader Leopold undertook training at the Gloster plant and several RAF Meteor units where they were given extensive and thorough tuition and experience. The Squadron was withdrawn to Iwakuni for re equipment on 6 April 1951 and four months later, after conversion training on the new jets, re-positioned to what was to become its permanent Korean War base at Kimpo, near Seoul.

This bitter and destructive war contained elements of air combat never before experienced, as jet

clashed with jet in the frigid North Korean skies. Some of us from No 5 Course, now training at Point Cook, were destined to become part of that jet-combat war.

Meteor Mk-8s For 77 Squadron

This robust fighter and its two-seat trainer version, the Mk 7, were the only aircraft operated by the Squadron during the remaining period of hostilities, which ended on 27 July 1953. For many 77 Squadron pilots the conversion from Mustangs to Meteors was their first operation of a jet aircraft. For some it was also their first twin-engine experience. It would be reasonable to say that most would have enjoyed the training as they encountered the almost silent, smooth and vastly superior performance. The Gloster Meteor Mk.8 single-seat Fighter and its two-seat trainer version, the Mk.7 were pressurized aircraft fitted with two Rolls-Royce Derwent jet engines, each developing 3600 pounds of thrust. Dimensions were approximately, 37ft wingspan, 45ft length and 13ft height. It was basically a 19,000 pounds and 600 mph aircraft with a service ceiling of 43,000 feet (although this was well above its useful operating height). The nominal range was 600 miles. The Meteor was armed with four 20mm cannons point-harmonized at 800 yards and eight or 16 rockets of various types could be fitted. The fighter was equipped with a Martin-Baker ejection seat but this facility was not available in the Mk.7. This deficiency made the trainer version a dangerous proposition for bailing out as the attempt could be expected to result in the pilots making damaging, or even fatal contact with the aircraft structure when trying to jump clear. The engines and air-frame were sturdy and capable of withstanding considerable punishment from the pilot and the enemy. 77 Squadron was equipped with 90 Meteors all told. Of these, 54 were destroyed during the Korean conflict, a few downed by MiGs but the majority shot down by anti-aircraft fire.



Meteor Mk-8 Fighters

The Martin Baker Ejection-seat Fitted To The Mk-8 Meteor

The purpose of the ejection seat is to enable a pilot to abandon a fast moving aircraft without the problems of undue delay and the likelihood of being hit by some part of the aircraft, a real hazard when jumping out in the old conventional manner. The difficulties of leaving the aircraft at high speed made the installation of an ejection seat an absolute necessity in jet fighters. The Martin Baker seat had the pilot's parachute incorporated as a backrest and his dinghy with flat rubber water bottle

was set in the base as a seat-cushion. A harness secured the pilot to his parachute and dinghy pack and other straps attached him to the seat. There were two footrests, two thigh guards, a headrest, and the whole installation was mounted on vertical rails. An ejection gun fired an explosive charge when the pilot pulled a handle located immediately above the headrest and this action simultaneously positioned a blind which protected the pilot's face against the high-speed air flow. At the same time the canopy was blown off, if it had not already been jettisoned by the pilot, and the seat and pilot were instantly fired, like a projectile, clear of the aircraft. Another gun, which released a drogue parachute stowed in a container behind the pilot's headrest, was then automatically fired by means of a static line attached to the cockpit and did not operate until the seat was well clear of the aircraft. The small drogue parachute served to slow and stabilize the seat, enabling the pilot, when ready, to release his straps thereby dropping the seat in order to make a normal parachute descent. The pilot's mask and emergency oxygen were attached to the parachute harness as a safeguard against high-altitude bail-outs.

Ron Guthrie unwittingly established a number of world records in using a meteor ejection-seat at an altitude in excess of 38,000 feet near the Yalu River in North Korea. At the time, this was a world record height for abandoning an aircraft. The parachute descent took almost half an hour, another world record. This was also the highest speed ejection at Mach 0.84. He was also the first pilot to use an ejection seat in a combat situation. Only five other pilots had previously used the Martin Baker ejection seat but subsequently literally thousands of pilots have been saved by this remarkably efficient device. Ron Guthrie experienced these numerous 'firsts' with the use of an ejection seat in combat.

It is interesting to note that he also had been involved, as a trainee pilot, in some development work with high 'G' force research. It was recognized that airmen were suffering from adverse blood draining, particularly from the cranium, during flight maneuvers involving high accelerations. Professor Cotton of Sydney University was delving into the design of a 'G Suit' for pilots. This wearing apparel, per medium of inflatable bladders installed at crucial points in the garment, was intended to bring pressure to bear at vital body points so as to hold the blood where it belonged. The bladders would pressurize and deflate according to detected forces. Members of Ron's pilot's course became volunteer 'guinea pigs' as they experienced the centrifuge at considerable rotational speeds in both the 'with and without' G Suit modes. It is Ron's impression that while the University experiment produced more sustained forces, the experience did not equal the tremendous, instant thrust of ejection. Ron felt that by doing the University tests he had contributed to the development of important equipment. Sadly, G Suits were not available to 77 Squadron during that vital era of MiG encounters. This deficiency was detrimental to our pilots' air-fighting capability and also to their vascular systems, as evidenced by the number who suffered associated health problems in later years.



Martin Baker Ejection-Seat

Meteor Conversion Training — Iwakuni, April 1951

Four Royal Air Force Meteor pilots led by Flight Lieutenant Max Scannell were posted to 77 Squadron to test-fly the aircraft and to convert the Australian pilots onto type. The first RAAF pilot to convert was Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell who had already completed a jet conversion course and a number of combat missions on the American F-80 Shooting Star with the USAF in January.

Ron Guthrie has given an account of his own experiences during that period.

When I heard that my application to join 77 Squadron had been approved, I was delighted. The prospect of some action in the war, a just cause in my opinion, was also reinforced by my desire to revisit Japan. My interest had been roused by a brief visit to Iwakuni in 1947 as a Dakota transport pilot. On that occasion, during the limited stopover time, I had done some sight seeing with a member of my crew, WO Alan Howie. We visited the sacred island of Miya Jima in the Inland Sea. I recall that the captain of a ferry said he was honored to have us on the bridge and even permitted us to steer the vessel towards the huge Torri Gates in the sea nearby. On the island, we were fascinated by a temple housing white horses, held to be sacred, because the Emperor rode a white horse. This was just 18 months after the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima, so curiosity led us to continue on to that city to see the ruins. The journey itself was interesting and pleasant. We traveled in a steam train which was fast, punctual and very clean indeed. Staff on the train continually swept up even the smallest piece of litter and at each station cleaners with rags were polishing the engine, carriages and all windows.



Hiroshima Devastation (Viewed July 1946)

We were stunned at the devastation of the once-proud city of Hiroshima. Standing on a bridge about a mile from the epicenter, the position immediately below the point of explosion at about 100 feet in the air, we saw a shocking relic. On the side wall of the bridge were etched clearly the images of people in the act of fleeing from the blast. At the central point there still remained the skeleton of a steel-domed building like a lonely sentinel among the rubble. As we gazed in awe, the scene was quiet, hushed as if in mourning for the tragic event.



The Horror Of Hiroshima

The atomic bombings of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan were conducted by the United States during the final stages of World War II in 1945. The two events are the only use of nuclear weapons in war to date.

Following a firebombing campaign that destroyed many Japanese cities, the Allies prepared for a costly invasion of Japan. The war in Europe ended when Nazi Germany signed its instrument of surrender on 8 May, but the Pacific War continued. Together with the United Kingdom and the Republic of China, the United States called for a surrender of Japan in the Potsdam Declaration on 26 July 1945, threatening Japan with "prompt and utter destruction". The Japanese government ignored this ultimatum. American airmen dropped Little Boy on the city of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, followed by Fat Man over Nagasaki on 9 August.

Within the first two to four months of the bombings, the acute effects killed 90,000–166,000 people in Hiroshima and 60,000–80,000 in Nagasaki, with roughly half of the deaths in each city occurring on the first day. The Hiroshima prefecture health department estimated that, of the people who died on the day of the explosion, 60% died from flash or flame burns, 30% from falling debris and 10% from other causes. During the following months, large numbers died from the effect of burns, radiation sickness, and other injuries, compounded by illness. In a US estimate of the total immediate and short term cause of death, 15–20% died from radiation sickness, 20–30% from burns, and 50–60% from other injuries, compounded by illness. In both cities, most of the dead were civilians, although Hiroshima had a sizeable garrison. This was an unimaginable tragedy for the Japanese nation.

On 15 August, six days after the bombing of Nagasaki, Japan announced its surrender to the Allies, signing the Instrument of Surrender on 2 September, officially ending World War II. The bombings led, in part, to post-war Japan's adopting Three Non-Nuclear Principles, forbidding the nation from nuclear armament. The role of the bombings in Japan's surrender, and the ethical justification for this method of ending the war, are two matters still being debated.

It seems obvious that, had the atomic bombs not been used the Japanese homeland would have been invaded. It is the opinion of military authorities of many persuasions that this would have most probably cost several hundred thousand Japanese lives and possibly just as many allied servicemen as well. This seems to be the most likely, though thoroughly unfortunate, conclusion. Undoubtedly,

the Japanese Military Clique were responsible for this tragedy, and so many other associated abominations. These evil men wished to continue the fight and were also posturing towards the employment of their ready store of weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological. The war finished just in time.



Same View Of Hiroshima Today

Ron continues: *When I came back to Japan to join 77 Squadron in April 1951, I was met by some old friends, Bill Middlemiss, Ron Mitchell and Alan Avery. As I was a Warrant Officer they took me to the Sergeant's Mess. I was allocated a room and a room-girl whom I would meet the next day. Our base at Iwakuni, located on the main island of Honshu, on the shores of the Inland Sea, had previously been a Japanese Naval/Air and flying-boat base and consequently boasted excellent quarters and facilities. It was quite impressive to see how well the Japanese had recovered in such a short time, enthusiastically accepting their reversal of role from WW II enemy to Korean War ally.*

I did not have long to wait for my first flight. Just 10 days after I had been practicing interceptions and dive-bombing in Vampires and Mustangs at Williamtown I found myself strapped to a Mustang at Iwakuni taking off for a high-level night exercise to familiarize myself with training airspace and local procedures. I was aware that a couple of weeks ago Sgt Roy Robson had been killed doing this exercise. Shortly after conversion training commenced, we lost our first Meteor when Sgt Dick Bessel ran out of fuel attempting radar-controlled approaches in bad weather. Dick managed to find a hole in the cloud over the Inland Sea. He ditched, inflated his dinghy and paddled ashore.

In early May 1951 an F-86A Sabre from the USAF was detached to Iwakuni to fly a series of performance comparisons between itself and the Meteor to help determine the role to which the Meteor was best suited, ground attack or interceptor. After two days of testing the Meteor had proved it had a superior rates of climb and turn, even though it was generally slower than the Sabre. Unfortunately, the Meteor had also shown one major deficiency in that it lacked maneuverability at high altitude. An argument erupted between the Australians and the Americans as to how the Meteor was to be employed, with Cresswell and Scannell arguing that although the Meteor had shortcomings, it should be used as an interceptor. After discussions with US 5th Air Force Headquarters, it was decided to try the Meteor as an interceptor and on 2 June the Squadron was ordered back to Korea. The move was delayed, however, due to the USAF insisting each Meteor be fitted with a radio compass before being allowed to fly in Korea. This essential piece of equipment

enabled the pilot to 'home' onto a radio beacon. Fondly referred to as the Bird Dog"— operations without this facility would have been folly indeed!

The next loss of a Meteor was quite startling. While standing on the flight line I heard a thump and looking up saw a parachute blossoming above. The aircraft it had parted from was a Meteor which was now circling, aimlessly and without a pilot, until it crashed into a nearby hill. Sgt Tom Stony and his parachute landed nearby. Tom's ejection seat had fired automatically. Investigation revealed that a lug which secured the seat firing mechanism had failed giving Tom a fright and an early experience of an ejection. Tom was particularly unimpressed with the fact that his Meteor not only threw him out but then proceeded to circle around him, five times, on one occasion coming within 20 feet! Although this exercise may have been expected to boost morale by demonstrating the efficiency of the seat, we sat with trepidation for sometime afterward.



Cockpit Of Meteor Mk-8 Fighter

After two rides in the trainer with F/Lt Max Scannell, I went solo in the fighter, a memorable event. I climbed rapidly to 41,000 feet, the highest I had ever been. My conversion program continued through June with high-level combat exercises, formation work and air-to-ground gunnery and rocketry, regrettably using as a target a beautiful little island in the Inland Sea. During training, a few of us were granted 10 days leave. Several of us took this break at Kawana, an Australian Army resort on Tokyo bay. Like a magnificent country club, this resort boasted all facilities including two golf courses. I took lessons. The caddies were teenage girls who took delight in teaching us, and out-driving us, which was not so difficult! Looking along the fairways we could see across Tokyo Bay and

dominating the whole area was Mount Fuji, or Fuji-san as the Japanese affectionately called it. With movies by night and golf by day the week was soon gone and I was back at Iwakuni finishing my conversion.



Iwakuni And Famous Kintai Bridge, Today

Training was finalized, and on 26 July 1951 I found myself, in company with another Meteor, winging our way across the Korea Strait heading for Kimpo near Seoul where our new base was under construction. Korea soon loomed large in my windscreen. Everything seemed gray and dismal as we crossed the coast, while further north the mountains seemed somber and forbidding. At Kimpo we joined the busy queue for landing and soon were rolling into the 77 Squadron parking area. Two burnt out wrecks by the runway threshold bore testimony to the highly active role Kimpo was playing in the busy air war. Being a mere 30 miles from the front line, it was the main airfield for operations and was used by most aircraft returning with battle emergencies or fuel shortage. The advance party welcomed us and helped us settle in to our very Spartan tent and makeshift surroundings in the mud and chaotic construction work.

During April, General Partridge of the 5th Air Force USAF visited The Squadron. After a brief familiarization flight in the two seat Meteor with Dick Cresswell the general flew and assessed the Meteor Mk 8 fighter. While acknowledging the shortcomings such as limited top speed and lack of high altitude performance, General Partridge determined that it was good enough to do battle in the air-to-air combat role. This decision was, of course, made in the absence of proper information about the talents of the Russian MiG-15.



Wes Guy (L) And Eric Ramsay

MiG-15

The MiG-15 was a specialized high altitude jet fighter with one powerful jet engine, swept back wings and a high horizontal tail-plane, a feature which assisted with differentiation from the American Sabre which answered a similar description, except for the low-set tail-plane.

Specifications of Significance: Max Speed: 668 miles per hour — Climb: 10,000 feet per minute — Ceiling: 51,000 feet — Range: 885 miles. The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 was a jet fighter developed for the USSR by Artem Mikoyan and Mikhail Gurevich. The MiG-15 was one of the first successful swept-wing jet fighters, and it achieved fame in the skies over Korea, where early in the war, it outclassed all straight-winged enemy fighters in most applications. The MiG-15 also served as the starting point for development of the more advanced MiG-17. The MiG-15 is believed to have been the most widely produced jet aircraft ever made, with over 12,000 built by the USSR. Licensed foreign production perhaps raised the total to over 18,000. The MiG-15 is often mentioned along with the North American F-86 Sabre as among the best fighter aircraft of the Korean War and in comparisons with fighters of other eras.

The MiG-15 was originally intended to intercept American bombers like the B-29. It was even evaluated in mock air-to-air combat trials with a captured U.S. B-29, as well as the later Soviet B-29 copy, the Tu-4 "Bull". To ensure the destruction of such large bombers, the MiG-15 carried cannons: two 23 mm with 80 rounds per gun and a single 37 mm with 40 rounds. These weapons provided tremendous punch in the interceptor role, but their limited rate of fire and relatively low velocity made it more difficult to score hits against small and maneuverable enemy jet fighters in air-to-air combat. The 23 mm and 37 mm also had radically different ballistics, and some United Nations pilots in Korea had the unnerving experience of 23 mm shells passing over them while the 37 mm shells flew under. The cannons were fitted into a simple pack that could be winched out of the bottom of the nose for servicing and reloading, allowing pre-prepared packs to be rapidly swapped out. (Some sources mistakenly claim the pack was added in later models.)

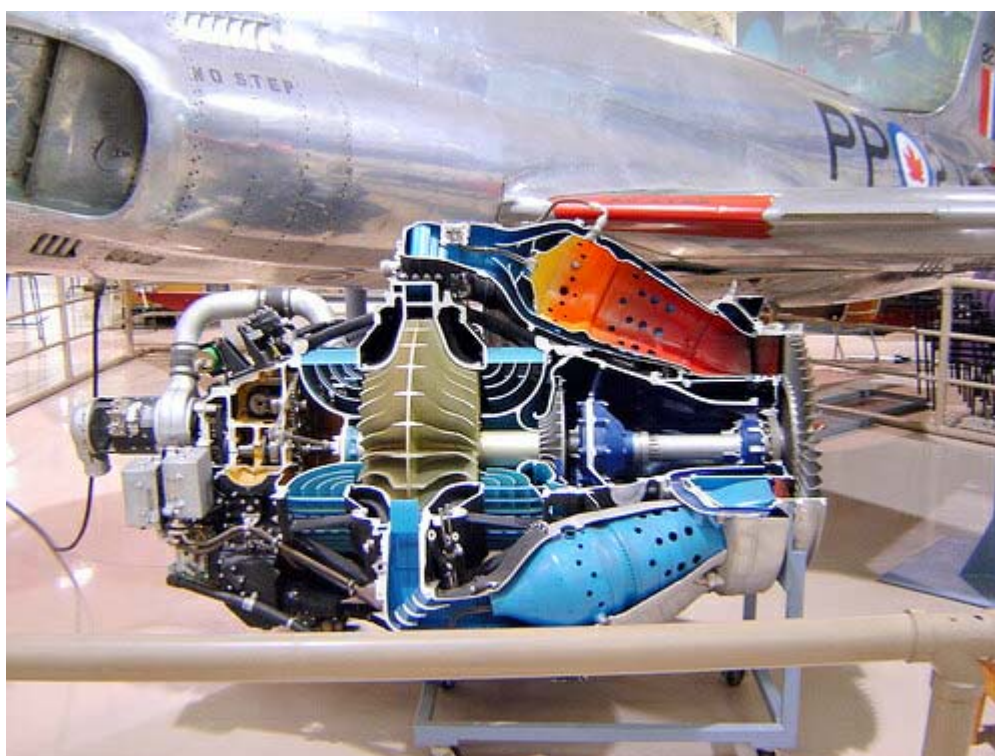
At the time of development of this and other Russian aircraft, in 1946, the Soviets were relying on

many German scientist and technologies and this was evident in the advanced swept-wing design and other excellent features. But the Germans failed to develop reliable turbojets with thrust exceeding 2,500 lb, thereby limiting the performance of Soviet jet aircraft. By 1946, Soviet designers were impressed by the Rolls-Royce Nene engine. British jet engines were superior to those of the Germans and all others. Soviet aviation minister Mikhail Khrunichev and aircraft designer A. S. Yakovlev suggested to Premier Joseph Stalin the USSR buy advanced jet engines from the British. Stalin is said to have replied, "What fool will sell us his secrets?" Little did he realize the devotion he had generated in the ideologically naive "fools" of the British Labour government.

However, no doubt sensing the adulatory mood of the British Labour Party, Stalin gave his consent to the proposal and a party consisting of Mikoyan, engine designer Vladimir Klimov, and others traveled to the United Kingdom to request the engines. To Stalin's amazement, the British Labour government and its pro-Soviet Minister of Trade, Sir Stafford Cripps, were more than willing to provide their admirable Communist friends with, not just the engines, but also, technical information and a license to manufacture the Rolls-Royce Nene and Derwent turbo-jets. Most probably this was accompanied by further gifts of state secrets.

The Soviets were already manifesting as dangerous opponents of the Western World. Our enemies received a completely gratuitous boost to their ability to wage war against us and the results were obvious during the Korean War. No doubt Stalin was stunned and delighted at the same time. Lenin, a perceptive man, had predicted, "Western fools will embrace my cause!"

The engine was reverse-engineered (ie copied), produced as the Klimov RD-45, and subsequently incorporated into the MiG-15. Rolls-Royce later attempted to claim £207 million in license fees, but to no avail. To take advantage of the new engine, the Council of Ministers ordered the Mikoyan OKB to build two prototypes for an advanced high-altitude daytime interceptor to defend against bombers. It was to have a top speed of 621 miles per hour and a range of 745 miles. And now the MiG had a splendid engine producing outstanding performance.



Rolls Royce Nene Cut-away

The MiG-15 was widely exported, with the People's Republic of China receiving MiG-15bis models in 1950. Chinese MiG-15s took part in the first jet-versus-jet dogfights during the Korean War. The swept-wing MiG-15 quickly proved superior to the first-generation, straight-wing jets of western air forces such as the F-80 and British Gloster Meteor, as well as piston-engine P-51 Mustangs and Vought F4U Corsairs with the MiG-15 of First Lieutenant Semyon Fyodorovich Khominich scoring the first jet-vs-jet victory in history when he bagged the F-80C of Frank Van Sickle, who died in the encounter (the USAF credits the loss to the action of the North Korean flak). Only the F-86 Sabre, with its highly trained pilots, was a match for the MiG. Meteors performed well against MiG's at lower altitudes, unless the MiG used its height advantage in attack and its outstanding climb capability in escape. This was usually the case.

An estimate during the period February to May 1952 stated that it was 'understood' the enemy had some 850 MiG-15 aircraft available to be rotated, as desired, for participation in the Korean air war. Of that total, the enemy operated, by rotation, some 350 MiGs from airfields at Antung, Fencheng, Takushan and Tatunku. It was felt that the provision of adequate numbers of proficient MiG pilots was posing a problem for the enemy. It was learned that most were Russians, however some Chinese pilots qualified as time went by and began to take a more active part by the end of 1951. The standard of MiG pilot battle performance varied a great deal, but given the vast tactical advantages of their location and the superiority of numbers and the MiG itself, it would appear, in the light of their combat losses, that the enemy fighter pilot standard was generally inadequate. This assessment in mid 1952 allowed that improved performance must be expected as their experience and training progressed.



Cockpit Of A MiG-15

Meteor Versus MiG — Appraisal

The MiG-15 used during the Korean War by the Communist forces was generally superior in

performance to the Meteor Mk.8 which was operated by 77 Squadron. This was particularly so at high altitudes, the levels at which most of the combat took place. While a Meteor had to be 'nursed' at heights of 40,000 feet or so, the MiG seemed to thrive at even greater altitudes. Added to this was the height advantage which the MiGs enjoyed by climbing to 50,000 feet or more over neutral Manchuria prior to diving down to engage UN aircraft. Another great advantage which the MiG displayed was its spectacular rate of climb. In this important area the Russian aircraft significantly outperformed the Meteor at all altitudes by as much as 3,000 ft/minute, an enormous advantage. The MiG's speed was much greater than the Meteor by approximately 70 miles per hour. The MiG's 37 mm cannon was a slow-firing but powerful weapon. This was backed up by a pair of 23mm cannons. Nevertheless, the concentrated firepower of the Meteor's four 20 mm cannons gave the British aircraft some advantage under certain circumstances. While the 37mm weapon was most effective against a huge bomber, it was not so useful against a smaller and more nimble target.

At altitudes of 20,000 feet and below the MiG lost some of its advantage. The Meteor could, at these levels give a good account of itself with regard to tight turning and diving. The MiG could encounter control difficulties in a high speed dive, a problem which did not afflict the Meteor. However, once again, if the MiG should climb the Meteor could not follow. Undoubtedly this British WWII jet fighter was outclassed in certain vital areas by the much more modern swept-wing designs such as the MiG-15 and the North American Sabre.



MiG-15 Russian High-Altitude Jet Fighter

Chapter 5

The "Reprobates" Graduation — Point Cook

At the end of July 1951, our Wings training did eventually end. All exams and flying tests were finally over. While we did not acknowledge our precarious future, this graduation took many of us one big step closer to the conflict in Korea

Reward For Diligence

For the final 12 months of our 18 months Wings Training Course we operated the well loved Wirraway, an aircraft already out of date for combat operations but an effective trainer nevertheless. This sturdy aircraft was a two-seat low-wing monoplane, mainly of metal construction, powered by a single-row 9 cylinder Wasp radial engine with a take-off power of 600 bhp. With a maximum weight of 6450 pounds the armaments included two or three .303 machine guns and 500 — 1000 pounds of bombs.

Australian aircraft designer Wing Commander Wackett was instrumental in having the "Wirraway", almost identical to the American "Harvard", produced in Australia. The North American NA-16-2K was the type selected for production under license at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation factory in Melbourne. With several detail and structural changes, such as provision for two forward-firing guns instead of the NA-16's one, and strengthened structure to allow dive-bombing operations, the first CA-1 Wirraway, RAAF serial A20-3, made its maiden flight on 27 March 1939. This aircraft was kept by CAC for testing for several months and the first two Wirraways delivered to the RAAF were A20-4 and A20-5, on 10 July 1939. By the outbreak of World War II the RAAF had received a total of six Wirraways. Forty CA-1 Wirraways were built before the CA-3 entered production. Although there were detail changes to the design, the change in designation had more to do with the next batch of Wirraways being built to a different government contract than any real difference between the two sub-types.

As its American "cousin" (both types having been derived from the NA-16) the T-6 did for many Allied Air Forces during WWII, the Wirraway served as one of the RAAF's main trainer types from 1939. The type made its last operational flight in 1959 after being gradually replaced by the new Winjeel trainer. Beside serving as a trainer aircraft they were also operated in combat roles, including as an emergency fighter. At the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 Wirraways equipped seven RAAF squadrons: Nos 4, 5, 12, 22, 23, 24 and 25.

A group of five Wirraways based at Kluang in Malaya for training purposes was pressed into combat against Japanese ground invasion forces; these were generally flown by New Zealanders with Australian observers, and had some successes.

On 6 January 1942, Wirraways of No. 24 Squadron attempted to intercept Japanese seaplanes flying over New Britain; only one managed to engage an enemy aircraft, marking the first air-to-air combat between RAAF and Japanese forces. Two weeks later, eight 24 Squadron Wirraways defended the city of Rabaul from over 100 Japanese attacking bombers and fighters, resulting in the destruction or severe damage of all but two of the Australian aircraft. On 12 December that year, Pilot Officer J. S. Archer shot down a Japanese A6M Zero aircraft after he spotted it 1000 feet (about 300 metres)

below him and dived on it, opening fire and sending the Zero hurtling into the sea. This was the only occasion that a Wirraway shot down another aircraft (and is one more than the total of aircraft shot down by its fighter offspring, the Boomerang). Fighter versions of the Wirraway operated over New Guinea for some time on ground attack and other Army co-operation tasks until other RAAF aircraft such as the Boomerang and American Curtiss P-40s were delivered to replace them.

Many front-line squadrons of the RAAF had at least one Wirraway attached to serve as a squadron 'hack', that is, an aircraft employed on errands such as visits to headquarters or other bases. At least one aircraft (formerly A20-527) flew as part of Headquarters Flight 5th Air Force in full United States Army Air Forces markings.



Wirraway Trainer

Soon we were engrossed in Advanced and Applied training phases with instrument and night flying added to an abundance of cross-country navigation, formation, fighter tactics, dive bombing and low flying accompanied in the classroom by advanced aerodynamics, jet engine theory, and astro-navigation.



Navigation Flight Briefing, L-R, Outhwaite, Kichenside, Law, Cowper, King, McPhan, Robinson, And Instructor Pat Gallagher

As a Course we had earned a formidable reputation in the eyes of some of the instructors, one going so far as to say, "Number five course members are a bunch of reprobates!". We rather fancied ourselves in this role and the name has stuck with the survivors of our small group. The title was refreshed many years later as we gathered at Tweed Heads for our Reprobate's Reunions. The final big event was our Wings Parade.



Navy Trainee Forgot To Lock Flaps

We 21 survivors of these rigorous flight tests and examinations were now to receive our reward, the much coveted RAAF pilot's wings. Imbued with the healthy pride of youthful fulfillment, we marched onto the Point Cook drill-square for the last time. We had faith in one another and in our own immortality. It remained now for the festivities to be enjoyed and we could then say farewell to Point Cook. The celebration was quite a party.



Author Boarding Wirraway

My good friend Ken Smith topped the course. I was pleased to see Ken with this honor, as I had run an extremely close second and was immensely satisfied with my consolation trophy. This was a fine big silver jug inscribed thus, "Most Proficient Pilot No 5 Course." All the work was worth it. The silver trophy sits on my office shelf today a reminder of a most elevating moment.



'Trophy Winners. L-R: Ian Cranston (Sport); [KIA Korea]. Ken Smith (Total Aggregate); [KIA Korea]. Col King (Most Proficient Pilot)

Ian Cranston received the award for "Most Outstanding Sportsman." I now look at a photograph of all three trophy-winners. Humbled and disconsolate in spite of that moment of supreme pride, I admonish myself, "Be grateful!" Ken and Ian were killed on Meteor operations in Korea. Both were only twenty three! And there were so many others as well!



Max Holsworth briefs, L-R, Dick Robinson (killed - Korea), Ian Cranston (killed - Korea), Ken Smith (Killed - Korea), Max Outhwaite (survived Korea)

Some people, particularly those who have never been in the services, push the idea that the Air Force

training is the 'easy way into flying' because it is 'all paid for.' A few months at Point Cook would revise the opinions of people who regard the RAAF as the easy way. They would realize the burden of finding money paled somewhat against the realities of ceaseless grind and discipline. The scrub rate of those who did not measure up was uncompromising, and competition was fierce. In addition to this, military training aircraft utilized modern equipment with retractable wheels, constant speed air-screws fitted to fairly powerful engines, radios, full instrument panels, flaps, brakes and many other refinements. Almost no Aero-club aircraft was equipped with even one of these complications in those days. In spite of all this, I could never forget the grind and frustration of those years of laboring on farms and at a stinking tannery in Botany, in order to do one hour of Aero-club training per month. I will always admire the tenacity of pilots who did it that particular 'hard' way, nevertheless they cannot compare it with the stress of the Point Cook system.



PILOT GRADUATES, 5 COURSE, L-R: (Back) Leon Gordon, Dick Glassey, Jim Codd, Jack Evans, Gordon Brown, Alan Wall, Stan Hyland, Col Roffe. (Center) Dick Robinson, Col King, Ken McPhan, Ken Smith, S/Lt Gus Gray (RAN), Russ Law, Barry Ellis, Jim Kichenside, Tom Mansell. (Front) Ian Cranston, John Parker, Max Outhwaite, Ray Knight, Andy Stapleton

Mustang Training — RAAF Base Archerfield, Queensland

As a result of capacity usage of the Operational Training Unit at Williamtown, five of us were sent to No 23 (City of Brisbane) Squadron at Archerfield for Mustang conversion training. My companions were Ken Smith, Jim Kichenside, Max Outhwaite, and Jack Evans. The remaining five of our fighter group had gone straight to Williamtown for their Mustang training. We contacted RAAF Base Archerfield from Brisbane station. They were certain we did not belong to them. "You fellows are obviously posted to Lincoln bombers. Call Amberley." Feeling highly indignant, we forcibly argued our case. Eventually the friendly voice of Flight Lieutenant Ken McAtee, one of our instructors at Point Cook, issued an invitation, "Come and spend the night here while the matter is sorted out."



Archerfield, (L-R) Kichenside, Smith, King, Outhwaite

Next morning, our legitimacy having been established, we find ourselves thoroughly embroiled in Mustang training under the expert guidance of the good Ken McAtee. The Mustang P51 fighter of WW2 fame is to be our basic fighter and ground attack trainer. This will lead up to the Vampire single engine jet fighter in preparation for our work weapon, the Meteor Mk8 twin-engine jet fighter, ground-attack machine with which 77 Squadron is now being equipped. As there is no dual trainer for the Mustang, McAtee prepares us for the experience, by the following program: Firstly we fly a

number of circuits in a Wirraway, executing zero-flap landings from the back seat. This produces some semblance of the speeds and 'blind' approach attitude of the Mustang. We regard the aircraft as somewhat 'blinding' to the pilot's forward view, due to the long sleek nose, with the big Merlin engine. After lectures, study and exams, we are tested by a thorough check in the cockpit. Flying is next!

It is my honor to be first to solo. Already late afternoon, the grass airfield shimmers in the Queensland sun. A gusty breeze ensures the take-off and landing will be towards the sun, a factor that is not considered significant by those in charge. With a head full of newly acquired knowledge and a swagger deemed essential to the occasion, I bound up and settle into the cockpit to execute pre-start preliminaries. The ever-suspicious Flight Lieutenant stands on the wing scrutinizing every move. When the boss is satisfied I start the great Merlin which belches and coughs as though objecting to this tentative amateur, then like the true thoroughbred, settles down to purr contentedly with mixture control moved to RUN. The engine is warm from earlier flights so I am spared the involved cold-engine ritual and soon begin a slow taxi to the take-off point. With canopy closed and secured and brakes on I run through the memory list:

ELEVATOR: 2 Deg. tail-heavy — RUDDER: 5 Deg. right (to comp. for slipstream) — AILERONS: Zero — MIXTURE: Run — PITCH: Full Fine — FUEL: Contents — BOOSTERS: On — FLAPS: Up — SUPERCHARGER: Auto — SPERRY: Uncaged-Synchronized — CARB. AIR: Unrammed-Filtered — RAD-SHTR: Auto — OIL-SHTR: Auto — HARNESS: Locked.

Take-off clearance is now obtained. This is the moment of truth! On line up into wind it becomes obvious that the sun is badly positioned. It is necessary to lean to the left to sight along the cowling because direct forward vision is almost eliminated by the massive Merlin. I recall being warned about the extensive throttle arc of movement causing a problem to beginners who sometimes become airborne at about two thirds power. Grasping the gyroscopic gun-sight grip to which the throttle is attached I determine to move it smoothly and fully forward so as to access the 58 inches of boost (manifold pressure) available for take-off. The sense of power and acceleration is inspiring. Right rudder is required to counter the massive corkscrew of air from the propeller. Suddenly the Mustang and I are airborne and as the wheels retract we rapidly generate the climb speed of 150 knots. With boost and RPM reduced to 42 inches and 2,600 I select Carburetor-Air to the RAM position and climb to 15,000 feet in the training area. The aircraft is a delight and everything operates and performs as advertised. The thrill is almost too special to describe. It is as though my whole life has been lived just for this moment. I am flying that fighter at last, and what a magnificent machine it is!

Turns, stalls in various configurations and a few aerobatics follow. By way of losing some altitude I experiment with a few turns of a spin. We lose about 1,000 feet in each auto-rotation. Some aircraft! Such exhilaration! Before becoming too smug I have to face the fact that a very interested and critical audience will shortly be assembled to watch the landing. A few practice circuits at altitude in the training area consolidate the procedures and checks. "No more excuses now, this is it!" Before joining the circuit I clear the engine by briefly increasing to almost maximum power. This warms the motor after low power descending and ensures instant and full response will be available if needed in a hurry.

Downwind, I set flaps to 20 degrees. Voice follows hands around the cockpit. "Auto, Auto Unrammed / Filtered, Brakes Off, Fuel OK, Booster On, Hydraulics OK, Gear Down and green lights, Mixture Run, Pitch Full Fine, Supercharger Auto." Then as we settle onto final, approach, "Flaps Full! Now just where is that ground?" The setting sun is there to torment as we cross the threshold at

100 knots. The ground has to be close, so "Off with the remaining power and let us settle gently!" Peering anxiously along the left cowling, as the nose gradually lifts into the great orb of the setting sun, there seems to be little concept of height, but we are sinking steadily! Suddenly, to my consternation the stick is fully back and now, we sink! The eventual and inevitable thud announces our positive arrival! At least we are spared the indignity of a bounce. On coming to a stop I remember to push the control stick forward to release the tail wheel for the 180 degrees turn to taxi back to my judge and jury. The reception is warm and enthusiastic. Ken McAtee adds to his congratulations a completely unnecessary piece of advice, "Perhaps you could bring it a bit closer to Mother Earth next time before stalling." We move to the bar and of course the drinks are on me. For a few hours at least, I am a more important and much more experienced pilot than my companions.



Author Celebrating Mustang Solo

No 3 Squadron, RAAF Base Fairbairn Canberra

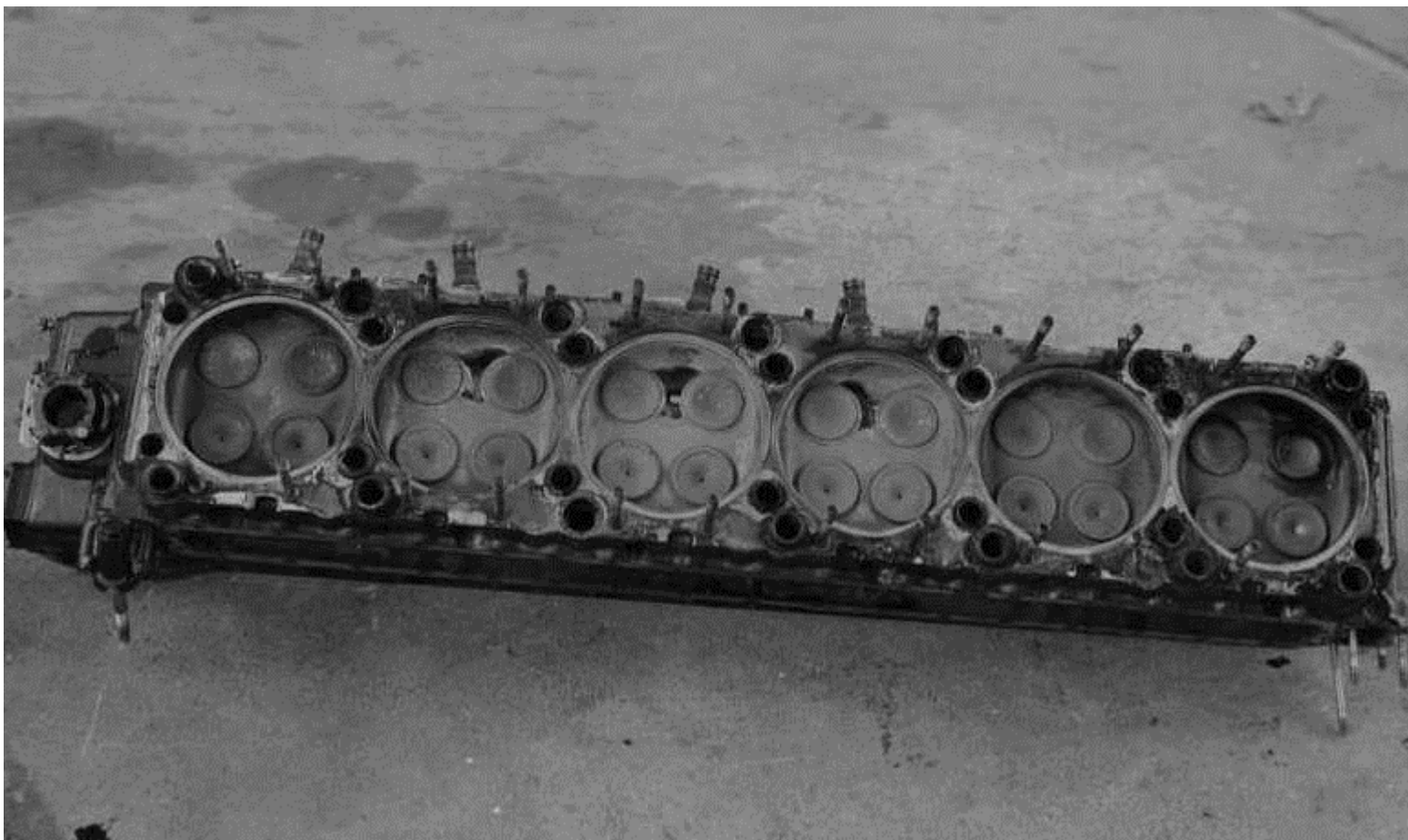
After a few weeks of elementary Mustang experience at Archerfield our group is posted to RAAF Base Fairbairn at Canberra for advanced Mustang training

Just after arriving at Canberra I had a box seat experience of another pilot's moment of anxiety. As I was idling my Mustang in the pre-take-off position waiting for clearance, the preceding Mustang encountered loss of glycol (engine coolant) just after lift-off. His streaming engine was obviously in big trouble as he declared "emergency" and attempted to position for landing on the nearest alternative runway. As his engine seized, he abandoned the attempt at making a tidy arrival, and dived towards the only available paddock. He was now coming directly towards me! As I hastily, and without clearance, entered the runway and accelerated across his path the Mustang hit the ground at about one hundred knots in a great cloud of dust and slewed to a stop about two hundred yards from my previous holding point. Miraculously the radio was still working and he gave us a cheerful call.



Harry Brown-Gaylord's Prang

This was to have been a two Mustang sortie and I was to follow Flight Lieutenant Harry Brown-Gaylord. Two aircraft had been made ready for flight. Harry chose the defective one and left me with a perfectly good aircraft, which I now used for an alternative. I then took off to the accompaniment of uncalled-for applause from Control. Harry Brown-Gaylord survived this accident but was killed by enemy ground-fire in North Korea on 27 February 1952.



Merlin Cylinder Head After Glycol Loss

When my Mustang emergency occurred it was not an engine problem, but it happened at night. We were flying circuits on the east-west runway at Canberra in a brisk westerly breeze. As I attempted to set the first notch of flap in preparation for landing, there was no response. Further selections confirmed the problem, no flaps! This was a bad moment and I hastened to convey some concern to the Control Tower along with my intentions, a landing without flaps. This was a serious matter, a zero-flap approach and touchdown at night! Landing a high performance aircraft without flaps is normally only done for experimental or training purposes, otherwise this would occur just as a matter of necessity. During daylight hours, while the operation requires precision and great care it would not necessarily be considered an emergency. By night, the term 'emergency' is readily coupled with the zero-flap landing, especially in types with poor forward vision as is the case with the Mustang. The high-speed, low profile approach, with nose-attitude higher than normal, produces multiple problems associated with control and reduced forward view.

The other pilots were all finished as there was a storm brewing. My situation was rapidly appraised by the officer in charge of night flying, Flight Lieutenant Bill Purssey. Hastily securing a jeep with a two-way radio, he positioned himself as close to the threshold as prudence would permit. Bill then required a practice approach under his critical eye. Losing sight of the runway was a problem and the hazards increased with the development of a stiffening breeze with increasing crosswind. Finally we developed a technique of approaching at a slightly oblique angle, and aligning with the runway lights in the last few seconds. This worked! The aircraft seemed to float until placed firmly on its wheels. It was not the smoothest landing I recall and the runway was just long enough. The storm waited

patiently until this exercise was complete, then vented its fury. I was grateful for the assistance and advice given by Bill Purssey. This excellent man was also killed by ground fire, at Chinampo, North Korea on 22 April 1952. I was there in the squadron at the time.

Next we were posted to Williamtown, for advanced jet fighter training. To Canberra, that scattered embryo of a future city, puzzling maze of half-finished constructions with its promise of an elegant outcome: it was goodbye for now!



RAAF Canberra (Circa,1950)

RAAF Base Williamtown — Fighter Operational Training Unit

Soon we arrive at the OTU, where we are to learn the real business of qualifying on jets. This will number us among the first few Australians to fly jets, and we are then destined to be part of the first group of pilots to operate jets in combat in the whole of the British Commonwealth. But first we must continue to use Mustangs, in completing the truly gutsy business of Applied Fighter Operational Training. We are immediately engrossed in that concentrated course while we live and laugh together, strengthening a bond which will last forever. There is little time, energy or desire for unhealthy competition. Respect is universal. Each member of the team is special to all the others, a man you can depend on! We know some of us will die, but of course "it won't be me!" We develop our alertness, instinct and intuition, along with the ability to scramble into the air, with unerring haste and create a business-like team in minutes.

The day after arrival, we are treated to a demonstration of RAAF bureaucracy at work. One peculiarity of the system, is the requirement to return your oxygen tube on obtaining clearance from

a station, and then receive a new issue of that essential item at the next base. The tube connects one's personal oxygen mask to the aircraft supply, so essential to flight. We go to stores for our tubes. "Sorry Sarge" says the casual stores Corporal, "76 Squadron gets issues on Tuesdays." Accepting this, as we are not flying until after lunch on Tuesday, we are back at the store next morning. "A flight or B flight?" asks the efficient Corporal. —"B flight."

"Well you'll have to come back this afternoon, only A flight in the mornings." Protests that we have to be airborne just after lunch, and that there is a war on, fall on deaf ears. We can see the coveted tubes on the shelves, and he has no other customers. However the good Corporal does have the power to exert his authority and he obviously believes that the RAAF would be an ideal institution if it were not for the planes and pilots. Higher authority eventually releases the urgently needed items amid protests about "Bending the rules." With our tubes installed, Mustang training now proceeds vigorously: gunnery, rocketry, advanced fighter and bomber encounters and cross-country exercises. Gunnery incorporates live firing on ground targets and towed air targets. We attack each other and Lincoln bombers using camera guns. Live rocketry is accomplished against stationary ground targets and against a 'splash target' towed by a naval vessel.

The first practice at high altitude fighting is a most enlightening experience due mainly to low air density providing weak dynamic pressure — so essential to flight. Dynamic pressure is dependent on air density and the actual speed of the airflow and if either is reduced, dynamic pressure and the flying capability of the aircraft both decrease. At altitudes such as 40,000 feet the Mustang has to be nursed all the time because these two vital elements are in poor supply. Therefore it is a careful balancing act to execute anything even approaching a rate one (3 degrees per second) turn at constant altitude. Such a turn requires just over 30 degrees of bank due to the true airspeed being about 240 knots. Maximum power is necessary if one should attempt the exercise, as this helps to maintain some measure of speed.

The so-called 'speed' showing on the indicator is probably about '120 knots IAS' but this is purely a true representation of dynamic pressure. For convenience and safety purposes, this indicator is fraudulently calibrated to read "indicated Air Speed", but with the 'speed' numbers being valid only at sea-level. The genuine speed,(rate-of-change-of-position), which must be used in navigation or in calculating rate or radius of turn, would be about 240 knots. This is the actual or True Airspeed, (i.e. the rate at which particles of air are passing). The poor dynamic air pressure availability, as represented by the 120 'knots IAS' brings the aircraft near to a stall. That is to say, because of the low air density at high altitude, the inadequate dynamic pressure is marginally capable of sustaining the gentlest turn, or perhaps even straight flight, at a constant height. This axiom will apply even at the maximum (true) speed which the aircraft can achieve at full power — in our example 240 knots.

This situation becomes more critical if bank is increased, because the inclined lift vector must now be extended as this provides the forces which both pull the aircraft around the turn, and also counterbalance the weight so that height can be maintained. Prior to increasing bank, the wings were already meeting the air at a critical angle in order to sustain flight in the low density air, and now, as the elevators produce an even higher 'angle of attack', the smooth airflow breaks away from the lifting surfaces, and turbulence begins. A '*STALL*' actually occurs when the air flowing over the lifting surfaces becomes turbulent and loses its lift-producing qualities. A fully stalled Mustang drops its nose and loses height, possibly in a spinning motion. When operating at maximum altitude, any attempt at a forceful maneuver in a Mustang, or similar aircraft, is to invite a stall, and possibly a spin with a height loss of about fifteen hundred feet per rotation. One such happening is sufficient to produce the gentlest touch.

A further impediment to efficiency, is the poor visibility or more correctly 'see-ability' at high altitude. Due to the lack of minute hygroscopic nuclei, which serve to reflect light in all directions, the surprising fact is that relatively close objects, such as your enemy aircraft, are simply harder to see at high altitude than at the same distance when down among the somewhat more polluted atmosphere, strange! It all has to do with lack of reflected light at altitude.

Mustang pilots took turns at towing a large target 'flag' for live ammunition air attacks by both Mustangs and Vampire jets. We, in fact, used a mesh screen about 30 feet long by 6 feet deep on 1,000 feet of tow-rope attached to a bracket extending below the right wing of a Mustang. Before take-off the screen and coiled rope were laid out on the airstrip behind the aircraft's wing. The Mustang would climb steeply in order to snatch the screen into the air. The tow aircraft, then cruising near the coast had the flag sitting vertically, 1,000 feet behind and about 100 feet below. Live ammunition attacks were then carried out by Mustangs and Vampires. To ascertain scores the tips of all bullets were dipped in paints of different colors and the screen was later examined for tell-tale marks. A delightful story was told by a friend who won a gunnery competition on the basis of a convincing preponderance of his color appearing on the screen. Years later he had a chance encounter with an armorer who had been involved in paint-dipping the bullets for this contest. After familiarity levels had been elevated by the alcoholic content of the occasion, our gun expert could contain himself no longer. He confessed, without a hint of remorse, that because he had an intense dislike for the pilot who was generally regarded as 'Top Gun,' he was determined that my colleague was to be the winner. He dipped a high proportion of Top Gun's bullets in my friend's color. Of course bets were laid!



Adjusting Mustang Gyroscopic Gunsight

I recall ordering one Vampire to cease attacks and return to base. This was the duty of the tow pilot if he detected tracer bullets passing too close. These were much too close! In fact this pilot had twice "Displayed great valor in pressing home his attacks with total disregard for safety, but not his own safety!" The culprit was later identified, the Wing Commander himself, working on another DFC! The Wing-Co got his own back on me later that day. When returning from another towing sortie I was a bit too low approaching the runway and the flag was torn to shreds. I had to answer to the Wing Commander for my sins and he did not accept a plea of "battle fatigue."

Some may recall with relish how a fluke salvo of rockets from a Mustang cause the "Fleet to retreat." Our practice on this occasion was being provided by HMAS Culgoa towing a splash target just off the coast. This small plank, towed at a healthy distance behind the ship, caused a visible wake. Like the Titanic it was "unsinkable". On an early sortie a chance salvo of my rockets was more accurate than normal and the target disappeared. It was quite sensational but it would be foolish to view this happening as anything more than extreme luck. There was no replacement. Acknowledging defeat, the Navy retired in good order. The Wing Commander, magnanimously accepting the breakdown to his training program, consoled himself "Showed the Navy how it done old boy." Lucky again!

Air-to-air gunnery, at high and medium altitude against Lincoln bombers, was another exciting

exercise. Of course we used camera guns. The Lincolns in spite of some evasive action, were sometimes 'shot down.' However, Lincoln Captains complained that some of our chaps were pressing in behind with too much enthusiasm and then bunting extremely close under the bomber. One culprit did admit to staring into the "ashen face of the rear gunner." The Lincoln crews were subjected to disquieting sensations of being 'lifted' by intrepid Mustangs sliding nonchalantly underneath. These pursuits were made in the form of a standard quarter attack. The fighter maneuvered into a position above and out to one side of his victim. Now he did a steep 'wing over' towards his enemy, leading to a 'curve of pursuit' into virtual line astern, opening fire some seconds before that final position and terminating with a dive underneath the bomber. We did not engage in head-on attacks so much favored by the Luftwaffe. Perhaps the Lincoln Captains had something to do with this decision.

It is my recollection that fighter flying involved a certain degree of intimacy. There is only one pilot in each cockpit however the cockpits are frequently close to one another. Pilots can often signal to each other by hand for operational purposes or just to make a meaningful gesture. If the other pilot's oxygen mask is hanging loose you can sometimes read his expressions. Pairs take-offs were executed with the wingtips very close indeed, and this pattern was carried through into close formation flying, including formation aerobatics. During 'Line-astern chasing' and aerobatics the following aircraft sat just behind and slightly below the leader. He now kept the leading plane in a constant position in his windscreen. This was all very cozy, however a slight loss of concentration could invite collision as one can well imagine. Sudden turbulence posed another threat.

On one occasion when Ken Smith and I were returning to land after giving Lincoln bombers a hard time over Williamtown, the wings of our Mustangs actually touched. During descent we had paired up and I was tucked in close to Ken's starboard wingtip. Our flight path took us about 1,500 yards behind a Lincoln which was climbing on its way back to Amberley, its home base. The four powerful Merlins were churning up a great volume of air. We imagined ourselves to be below and at a safe distance from the hazardous wake turbulence, of the bomber. There was a lesson in store. Suddenly we were no longer a 'matched pair' as invisible hands tore us apart. Our wingtips met momentarily and then we were flung in separate directions. No doubt it was fortunate we were not thrown together. Quite quickly, order was re-established and the exercise continued, now in close line astern. The wingtips were both slightly marked and vaguely dented. Most importantly we had learned something about the power and persistence of wake turbulence. We encountered this sort of turbulence from time to time but the effect of four Merlins at climb power was something out of the ordinary.

More cross-country navigation exercises were done at high level (30,000 feet), medium (15,000 feet), and low level (200 feet). Each required special techniques and map reading was different at each level. Low flying, formation aerobatics, line astern chasing, and more night flying brought us to the end of Mustang Phase. My logbook showed more than 92 hours on this wonderful fighter!



Mustang Fitters At Work

Our Jet Fighter Preparation Begins

At last we are to join the few who have a jet endorsement. This brings us into contact with many more of the veterans returned from 77 Squadron flying in Korea.

The Squadron in Korea, having re-equipped with the twin jet-engine Gloster Meteor Mk8 is now in air-to air combat against Russian MiG jets. We acquire details and some disturbing rumors about the superiority of the enemy aircraft. However, it is now certain that our small group at Williamtown is training specifically to join those Meteor pilots in the Korean skies, so it is now up to us to learn as much as we can about the arts of jet combat in the single engine Vampire jet fighter, as a prelude to final Meteor training. Our Vampires were built in Australia and were equipped with the newer and more powerful Rolls Royce Nene engines.

The **de Havilland DH.100 Vampire** was a British jet fighter flown by the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Following the Gloster Meteor, it was the second jet fighter to see service with

the RAF, although it arrived too late to see combat. The Vampire served with front line RAF squadrons until 1953 and continued in use as a trainer until 1966, although generally the RAF relegated the Vampire to advanced training roles in the mid-1950s and the type was generally out of RAF service by the end of the decade. The Vampire served with many air forces worldwide, setting a number of aviation records.

In the early stage of development the Vampire was considered a largely experimental design due to its unorthodox arrangement and the use of a single engine, unlike the Gloster Meteor which was already specified for production. The low power output of early British jet engines meant that only twin-engine aircraft designs were considered practical; but as more powerful engines were developed, particularly the Goblin, a single-engined jet fighter became more viable. De-Havilland were approached to produce an airframe, and their first design, the DH.99, was an all-metal, twin-boom tricycle undercarriage aircraft armed with four cannon. The use of a twin boom kept the jet pipe short which avoided the power loss of a long pipe needed in a conventional fuselage. The DH.99 was modified to a mixed wood and metal construction and the design was renumbered to DH.100 by November 1941.

Almost 3,300 Vampires were built, a quarter of them under license in other countries. The Vampire design was also developed into the de Havilland Venom a fighter-bomber as well as naval Sea Vampire variants. As we approached the end of the Mustang training phase we began to study this new machine and looked forward to the new and very different experiences in store.



Vampire

In crew-room banter we heard many names repeatedly — pilots we had never met — and some we never would. At last we were to join the few who had a jet endorsement. This brought us into contact with many more of the veterans returned from Korea and we learned more about the numerous losses which had already been inflicted upon that small group of volunteer fighter pilots. There was speculation that several were now prisoners of the North Koreans, a most unenviable situation. It was many months before confirmation was available, and even then the details remained extremely sketchy.

Operational Conditions To Be Anticipated For Jet Combat In Korea

As trainees for jet combat in Korea it was essential that we learn something of the flying conditions to be expected in that environment of such climatic extremes. There were many problems associated with extensive air operations during the Korean war. Jet operations in particular involved special complexities resulting from the high-speed, short-endurance factors implicit in flying this type of aircraft. Rugged terrain, bad weather, strong winds and the density of air traffic produced challenging situations to which the Squadron had to quickly adapt. The Korean landscape is typified by stark, barren hills with rice fields in the valleys and along rivers. Because these paddy fields constitute almost the only flat land, the majority of airfields were built in such areas. This meant that an airstrip was generally situated in the bottom of a bowl rimmed by rugged ground. This factor materially added to the problems associated with bad weather.



Ice Protection Of Meteor Tailplane

The best flying weather is in the winter when the frequent high-pressure systems over Manchuria produce bitterly cold clear air. The prevailing wind under these conditions is north-westerly at low altitudes and westerly at 30,000 feet and above. Wind strength is often 100 knots at 40,000 feet and may be as much as 180 knots. During summer, the general air flow is reversed and intense rainfalls accompany the passage of typhoons. In mid year there may be as many as 10 days per month of dense fog. There are consequently far fewer problem-free flying days in summer than in winter. The above factors indicate something about the significant effect which weather conditions were bound to have on flying operations during the Korean War. During that period pilots and controllers received inadequate assistance from radio and radar aids and the modern sophisticated navigation 'black boxes' which we are so used to today, had not even begun to appear. The combination of

problems associated with operating large formations of high-speed, short-endurance jets to and from exceptionally busy airfields was potentially hazardous in itself. Added to this was the absolute need to accurately locate and attack targets on a rugged landscape beset by rapid seasonal changes of texture. In the clear air of winter, the pilot was confronted by a heavy shroud of snow concealing his landmarks.

On the other hand, as the summer unveiled this terrain thereby easing the burden of map reading, the airman was frustrated by cloud, precipitation and excessive haze at lower altitudes. Additionally, the pilot was normally at the mercy of those relentless fuel gauges. The air mass through which these busy military aircraft flew suffered the normal vagaries of all weather phenomena: fog, cloud, precipitation, turbulence, storm cells, lightning, icing, strong winds and mountain waves at low levels. This confined block of airspace was cluttered with other aircraft, mainly friendly, but still constituting a significant collective hazard. Enemy air activity and anti-aircraft fire added the final touches to a long list of dangers confronting pilots.

The workloads being carried by operational controllers and particularly by air-traffic controllers were significantly complicated by the arrival of aircraft in battle-scarred condition, possibly hampered by damaged radios or even out of fuel. Emergencies were commonplace and jets often made successful landings after engine flame-out due to fuel exhaustion. While it was always the intention of pilots to arrive back in the circuit with a minimum of ten minutes fuel in tanks, a variety of factors could easily conspire to defeat this endeavor. Kimpo airfield averaged one successful wheels-down dead-engine landing per week. Pilots practiced the technique. Air traffic was particularly dense in the vicinity of airfields. Runway occupancy was high, with as many as six aircraft at a time in take-off mode. Landings at 15 seconds intervals typified the scene as squadrons returned from combat. The problems were many, yet there was a requirement to maintain a high level of air activity against the enemy in order to stem his advance. Meeting these demands placed pressures on all operational personnel, particularly aircrew.

Battle Of Kapyong — Australia's 3RAR Involvement

Chinese forces of the 118th Division attacked the Kapyong Valley in force in late April 1951 and pushed South Korean and New Zealand troops into retreat. Under heavy pressure, the Korean 6th Division broke, and the line collapsed. American and South Korean men poured through a gap under protective covering fire from Australian troops who were holding their section of the line despite heavy pressure. Australian troops from 3rd Royal Australian Regiment, and Canadian troops from Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry were ordered to halt this Chinese advance. The mission of the men of the 27th Commonwealth Brigade was to block the two approaches to Kapyong. In only a few hours, they managed to prepare defensive positions.



Kapyong Valley — South Korea

The Chinese 118th Division engaged their two forward battalions on 23 April. In the early part of the battle the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and the 16th Field Regiment of the Royal New Zealand Artillery were all but cut off. The resistance of forward positions, held by the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2 PPCLI), and 3RAR, permitted the 1st Battalion, Middlesex Regiment to withdraw. It moved into place to provide a reserve. The initial Chinese attack at Kapyong engaged 3 RAR on Hill 504. The Chinese then struck at the Canadian front. Wave after wave of massed Chinese troops kept up the attack throughout the night of 23 April. After a night of fierce fighting Major Bernard O'Dowd, Officer Commanding, A Company, 3 RAR, managed to get through on a radio phone to a general of the 1st U.S. Marine Division. The general was incredulous, thinking it was an enemy agent speaking. He told O'Dowd that they believed the unit no longer existed, that it had been wiped out the night before.

The Chinese had managed to infiltrate the brigade position by the morning of 23 April. The

Australians and Canadians were facing the whole of the Chinese 118th Division. Throughout 24 April the battle was unrelenting. It devolved, on both fronts, into hand-to-hand combat with bayonet charges. The Australians, facing encirclement, were ordered to make an orderly fall back to new defensive positions late in the day of 24 April. 2 PPCLI was completely surrounded. Captain Mills, in command of D Company, 2 PPCLI, was forced to call down artillery fire on his own positions on Hill 677 several times during the early morning hours of 25 April to avoid being overrun. It had to be resupplied by air drops during this desperate time. By dawn the Chinese attack on the Canadian position had abated, and in the afternoon of 25 April the road through to the Canadians had been cleared of Chinese, at which time the 2nd Battalion was relieved. The 16th Field Regiment, Royal New Zealand Artillery, also managed to withdraw and link up with the U.S. Army's 72nd Heavy Tank Battalion. These units provided close heavy gun support.

Unfortunately 77 Squadron RAAF was not able to give support in this desperate battle, as the squadron had temporarily ceased combat operations and was at the time fully occupied with Meteor conversion training in Japan. Though quite unavoidable, the absence of our Mustangs was most regrettable. During the battle an airstrike was called in to dislodge the surviving Chinese in front of D Company. However, the attack by two US Marine Corps F4U Corsairs was mistakenly directed at the Australians themselves after their positions had been wrongly marked by the spotter plane. Two Australians were killed and several badly burnt by napalm. The attack was broken off after the company second-in-command—Captain Michael Ryan—ran out under Chinese fire waving a marker panel. The company medical orderly—Private Ronald Dunque—was subsequently awarded the Military Medal for his efforts assisting the wounded despite his own injuries.

The Chinese quickly attempted to exploit the chaos, moving against D Company's long exposed eastern flank. 11 Platoon on the main ridge forward of the summit was subjected to a frontal assault; however, having been unaffected by the napalm, they were able to break up the Chinese attack and inflicted heavy casualties on them. In spite of these losses, further Chinese attempts to infiltrate the Australian positions continued into the afternoon.

Also, during the withdrawal of the Australians, four men from B Company, 3RAR, formed a rearguard to hold off any flanking attacks. The four Australians held off three waves of Chinese soldiers, killing at least 25 and wounding many more. After two days and two nights of fighting, the Australians had recaptured their positions, at the cost of 32 men killed and 53 wounded. For this contribution of stalling the Chinese advance, 3 RAR received a United States Distinguished Unit Citation. U.S. General James Van Fleet inspects members of 3 RAR after awarding a Presidential Unit Citation to the Battalion in December 1952.



Australians Guard Kapyong Prisoners

Despite their enormous advantage in numbers the Chinese troops had been badly outgunned. Their courage and tenacity could not overcome the well-trained, well-disciplined and well-armed Australians and Canadians. The battlefield was littered with the corpses of Chinese soldiers, a testament to the discipline and firepower of the defenders. For their brilliant conduct of this engagement, Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce Ferguson of Australia, and Lieutenant-Colonel James R. Stone of Canada were each awarded the Distinguished Service Order. For Stone, it was the second bar to the DSO he had first won during Operation Olive in Italy in 1944.

New Commanders lead 77 Squadron In Korea

Dick Cresswell leaves the Squadron in August 1951 — Gordon Steege takes command in August 1951 — Ron Susans takes command in December 1951



S/Ldr Dick Cresswell Briefs Pilots

Facing The Prospects Of Death Or Capture

I have written this brief prelude to a few gripping accounts about our companions who were unfortunate enough to endure long periods of extreme hardship and torture after being shot down over this most inhospitable place, The Land of The Morning Calm."

As the first streaks of dawn lighten the sky, a low-hanging mist may be seen in the valleys. Soon icy winds sweep across the mountains with snow storms in attendance. The vicious cold, that corrupted shroud of winter, has descended upon Korea. Occasional reluctant rays of sunshine stab through the bustling rolls of cumulus as the airmen brave the frigid atmosphere of this exceptionally busy air base, Kimpo, or K14 as it is officially called. Pilots hasten across the tarmac with mindless enthusiasm, willingly absorbing the toxic wastes from screaming exhaust pipes, with unprotected ears ringing in protest. These powerful engines fill the air with a piercing clamor, some unwinding, others starting to wail. The crisp morning air is frigid, and under the impetus of a stiff breeze it seems to penetrate flying suits as early morning snow, now converted to ice, crunches beneath combat boots.

Touched by the first rays of sun, and the efforts of diligent aircraft-cleaners, ice and snow cascade from the wings of the Meteors, these sturdy and trustworthy aircraft equipped with engines which will not betray a sound operator. Heavily-clad ground-crew carry out the defrosting process with brooms and scrapers. Windscreens and canopies are restored to polished clarity.

Before leaving to board his aircraft the leader has a few final words to new boys, "Don't follow too close when taxiing out. You'll pick up contamination from the preceding aircraft. Retract the gun-sight before take-off. Don't straggle in battle formation. Don't pump the throttles too much and be careful about jet-pipe temperatures at high altitude when applying thrust."

Soon they are airborne, the leader calls, "Blue section check in!" He receives three replies. Several minutes later, "Crossing the bomb line, check guns!" Sixteen 20mm canons bark a brief warning to the enemy. As the weather now displays its inhospitable nature with heavy snowfalls, landmarks disappear or re-shape themselves as if to impede map reading, and the once-familiar surroundings become part of a new country tormented by swirling blizzards. The world is locked in desolation by this all-encompassing white shroud.

Vapor trails have begun to ornament the atmosphere behind the speeding Meteors as they pierce the shredded wisps of cirrus floating peacefully in the North Korean sky. Reposing in misty haze, the countryside shrinks in definition as it expands across the border into the vastness of China. The Meteors are intruding into that infamous area known as MiG Alley, the hunting ground of those sneaky little Russian jet fighters with phenomenal high-altitude combat qualifications.

Some may think about their friends who have bailed out over this dangerous territory. "How many are now languishing in squalor and torment or possibly are dead? And here are we, enthroned in reasonable comfort, gazing down on that inhospitable scene. One must appreciate the tenure of a serviceable aircraft and an adequate supply of fuel, for when the job is done we will soon be home to safety and congenial companionship."

The 77 Squadron Korean War story has a plethora of good beginnings and satisfactory endings however all too often a sudden reversal of fortune assails an unfortunate pilot who has been selected

by fate to undergo a shocking and testing period of internment. It would be years before the true stories could be told.

Ron Guthrie became the unwilling creator of a number of world records. He was the first RAAF pilot to escape from a jet fighter in combat, using the ejection seat. This was also the highest ejection ever experienced, just below 39,000 feet. The speed of ejection, Mach.84 and his descent taking almost 30 minutes, were two other world records. His parachute was holed by enemy rifle fire as he neared the ground but this was certainly not a 'record' occurrence.

***The POW accounts which follow in this book are excerpts, presented in précis form, from
'Escape From North Korea' (Authors: Col King and Ron Guthrie)***

Chapter 6

The Perils Of MiG Alley

A Remarkable Ejection



The MiGs' Happy Hunting Ground

A fateful date emblazoned forever on Ron Guthrie's memory is 29 August 1951. Ron gives us a gripping account of his final flight in Meteor 721!

Silver trails of vapor in the placid morning sky define the passage of eight Meteor jet fighters along a patrol line adjacent to the Yalu River. This infamous segment of North Korean airspace, so frequently the playground of predatory Russian fighters, has earned the title of MiG Alley. In two flights of four, the RAAF fighters, well-spaced in battle formation, cruise at a steady 39,000 feet. Each pilot's head swivels as he seeks to cover his companions against intruders. The peaceful Korean sky endures its torment from the strident Banshee wailing of sixteen Derwent jet engines while the contrasting quiet of the cockpits is broken only by occasional business-like commands from the leader.

Five thousand feet below, the second flight of eight Meteors executes a parallel path against a background of deceptively peaceful Korean and Manchurian landscape, sweeping endlessly away to the north. Presiding watchfully over this orderly scenario, the sun's fiery orb glows in high elevation. Suddenly this great orange mass, as though conspiring against the Australian pilots, assumes a sinister visage. Disgorging from its massive furnace there slides an avalanche of silver spears, in pairs, belching 37mm and 23mm cannon shells with menacing accuracy.



Ron Guthrie Sets Out In His Unfortunate Meteor

Ron tells his story:

Suddenly I am startled by white-hot tracers streaming over and under my left wing like glowing ping-pong balls. I throw my Meteor into a hard left-hand turn and press the mike button to call a 'break' to the others in my flight. Too late! I have been hit behind the cockpit and my radio is useless. I am only talking to myself as I call 'Anzac Item, break left tracers!' Now, two Russian MiG-15 jet fighters shoot past my nose and I instinctively turn back sharply to the right hoping to get one of them in my sights. Through the illuminated graticule of the gun-sight, I can see a red star on a silver fuselage and the pilot's head in the cockpit. I quickly adjust the gun-sight control to correct for a retreating target as my finger curls over the trigger of my four 20mm cannons. The guns rattle. I am gratified and excited as pieces fly off the enemy aircraft which now rolls to the inverted position and dives out of sight.

At this very instant I feel as though a load of bricks has fallen onto the rear end of my aircraft, which now shakes convulsively. Explosive shells from another MiG have destroyed my Meteor's tail. My aircraft, at this stage merely an uncontrollable mass of 'MiG meat,' begins to snap roll repeatedly. In shock, I prepare to make my first exit in a Martin Baker ejection-seat, at this great height and over enemy territory! I realize my guns are still firing and release the trigger. The vibrating instrument panel catches my attention and two facts remain in my memory. The clock is reading six minutes past ten and the Mach meter, my gage of speed, registers 0.84. As the speed of the dive increases beyond eighty-four per cent of the speed of sound the aircraft shudders in compressibility. It continues to roll.

Ron urgently grasped and pulled the canopy jettison handle. In an instant, a gigantic roar announced that his private cocoon had become part of the frigid swirling air mass into which he was about to plunge. Taking a two-handed grip on the ejection-seat loop handle above his head, he waited for the aircraft to finish its roll and on reaching the upright position pulled firmly on the control in order to fire himself out of the cockpit. Nothing happened! Distressing thoughts added their burden to the alarming cacophony of the 600 miles per hour air blast as he awaited the completion of another rotation. Surely the ejection-seat firing mechanism was not going to malfunction in this moment of desperate need. He repeated the process and was shocked as the mechanism failed once again! Then

he discovered that his arms were being obstructed in their downward motion by the pistol holster under his right elbow and a Red Cross pack on his left side. Obviously this had to explain the dilemma. The third time around, with arms spread wide he made a final frantic effort. With altimeter needles unwinding below 39,000 feet a startling explosion gave Ron an immense thrust out of the cockpit. The experience seemed momentary as he now lost consciousness.

My awareness returns some seconds later but I have a light-headed feeling that this is not really happening. Perhaps it is lack of oxygen or maybe it is shock, however it all seems quite unreal, as in a half-dream. I tumble and sway until eventually the ejection-seat's little drogue parachute in full deployment steadies the descent. I can't breathe! This situation is quickly fixed by re-positioning the goggles away from my mouth and lifting the oxygen mask from where it has slipped to my throat. I am relieved to feel the portable oxygen puffing onto my face.

The sensation was odd as he just sat there strapped to the ejection-seat, feeling quite stationary and quite detached, secured to his mechanical throne in space with no apparent means of support and no indications of motion. He was in a New World that was only half-real. The complete lack of noise was quite uncanny in its contrast with the clamor which had so recently conditioned his senses. Gone were the sounds of combat, followed so rapidly by the ejection-seat explosion intermingled with the overwhelming roar of a 600mph slip stream. Ron's personal segment of Korean sky, so recently a noisy battleground, was now a quiet and peaceful arena bereft of aircraft.

The silent, almost motionless experience seemed to invite the frigid atmosphere to ravage and assault his body and mind. Ron knew the temperature would be less than minus 50°C but surprisingly he was not unduly disturbed by the cold in spite of being lightly dressed in nothing more than a normal cotton flying suit on top of summer underwear. Gradually beginning to think and take stock, he was forced to confront the shocking reality of this new situation. He had been suddenly re-born as a pilot without a plane, a man without a home, a human without his friends. The perils of this situation became more obvious with each minute. The only option acceptable to Ron, on first consideration, was the avoidance of capture by the North Koreans. He had learned too much from the intelligence officers, anything but that! From this great height he could possibly drift seawards during the long descent and survive for some time in his dinghy thereby creating the opportunity for a recovery effort by the Air/Sea Rescue aircraft. With this plan in mind he unlocked the ejection-seat harness and kicked. The seat and its small drogue chute fell away. Then a sharp pull on the ripcord handle produced a welcome jerk as the beautiful Irvin parachute, blossoming out above, stabilized Ron in a quiet and peaceful descent.

It then becomes apparent that the immensely forceful air flow as I left the cockpit has ripped the chamois gloves from my hands and the knee pockets off my flying suit. Missing contents include spare socks and pistol ammunition. Obviously I have been lucky with regard to the oxygen-mask and goggles, which have merely been displaced. No doubt this is one of the benefits of the ejection-seat head-protection blind which had been drawn down in front of my face during propulsion into that violent air flow. Looking down between my legs I am surprised to see another parachute. For a moment it seems I have company, perhaps another unfortunate member of my flight, or hopefully a MiG pilot. Then it becomes apparent this is my own ejection-seat, still under the control of its small drogue 'chute.

Endeavoring to guide himself towards an ocean landing, Ron pulled down on one side of the canopy shrouds in the hope of producing some directional control. This had the unexpected and quite alarming effect of spilling the 'chute into a collapsed and ineffectual condition. Suddenly he was in a

sickening descent with the parachute flapping above. Some anxious moments passed before the umbrella restored its shape and its life-preserving function. Vowing he would not try that again, Ron became resigned to abandoning the possibility of a sea voyage in the little inflatable rubber raft, now quite useless in its attachment to his harness. There would be no encounter with 'Dumbo', the US Air/Sea Rescue amphibian aircraft. Perhaps this had been a futile hope anyway, as he had no signaling beacon. The elements would decree the 'where and when' of touchdown on enemy soil.

Descending through the air seven miles above the countryside, my thoughts now turn to home. How will my mother bear the shocking news? Since her divorce she does not even have the support of a husband and the loss of my only sister Cecile during her honeymoon on the Lane Cove River in Sydney in 1945 will now come back to haunt my poor mother! I hope my squadron mates are all returning safely to Kimpo. There had been a lot of MiGs spearing through our formation during that sudden attack.

The Korean countryside far below looks more hostile with every minute of the descent. What will be waiting for me down there? I am probably too far north for any chance of a helicopter rescue. The thought of falling into the hands of North Koreans fills me with anxiety. Our intelligence briefings have been most discouraging



Russian MiG-15 Fighter

Squadron MiG Encounter — 29 August 1951

The battle in which Ron Guthrie was shot down requires amplification and it was many years before the full story could be told.

Note: Some of the following material regarding Russian MiG pilots and their reports has been obtained from With the Yanks in Korea (Volume One), 'an excellent book by Dennis Newton and Brian Cull, with the kind permission of the authors.

The first flight of Meteors took off just ahead of the second eight. This lower flight was detailed for close support of B-29 bombers attacking an important rail junction at Maejong Dong. This half squadron was lead by Des Murphy with Keith Meggs, Scotty Cadan, and Blue Colebrook making up the first 'finger four'. The second four, led by Max Scannell, included Les Reading, Dick Bessell and Bill Michelson. They did not encounter enemy aircraft. The other half of the squadron, led by Dick Wilson, departed Kimpo immediately after Murphy's eight were airborne. Assigned to 'top cover', this group included Neil Woodroffe, Cedric Thomas, Ken Blight, Blue Thornton, Don Armit, and Kev Foster with Ron Guthrie in the unenviable position of 'Tail end Charlie'. He was regularly assigned this difficult position as he had more jet experience than the others. This 'eight' would be operating at 39,000 feet, as a shield against the very high flying MiGs, while Murphy and his boys were to protect the bombers by patrolling some 5000 feet lower. This cruising altitude, having better air density, gave Murphy's section some added scope for performance and maneuver. Ron and his companions, however, were limited by their higher altitude. Flying was difficult enough without even considering the demands of combat. They were operating on the brink of both high-speed and low-speed buffet within a narrow performance 'envelope' available for battle activities. On the other hand, the aerodynamic margins greatly favored the swept-wing MiG-15s. These Russian aircraft were modern, specialized high-altitude fighters that were able to dive on the UN aircraft after having gained 50,000 feet or more over neutral Manchuria.

Dick Wilson and his pilots encountered a large formation of MiGs of the 303rd FAD led by Padpolkovnik Belostotskii of the 18th GuFAR. The MiGs were detailed to intercept a force of incoming B29s escorted by F86s. One section, comprising Kapt Lev Shchukin and St/Lt Asanovskiv, attacked four of the Sabres. They fired on one section but then, to avoid being counter-attacked by the other section, zoomed back into cloud cover. When they finally emerged from the clouds they found not Sabres but Meteors. S/Ldr Wilson and his section, F/Lt Cedric Thomas, F/Off Ken Blight and Sgt N Woodroffe, sighted six MiGs about 5000 feet above. Wilson led his Meteors around to the left while maintaining a careful watch for other enemy fighters. Two more MiGs were spotted below and he decided to attack them. Followed by his No2, Sgt Woodroffe, Wilson dived, but his companion suddenly went into a spin from which he did not recover before dropping 5000 feet. Unaware he was alone, Wilson continued his attack. His aircraft (A77-616) suddenly shuddered as it took hits. Another MiG on his tail was flown by Kapt Shchukin. Wilson broke away violently. Fortunately, his plight had been seen by the other two Meteor pilots, Thomas and Blight, who chased after his attacker. Shchukin and Asanovskiv zoomed their MiGs upwards and escaped into the upper levels of the clouds, leaving the Meteors in their wake. When they emerged again it was into an empty sky. There were no Meteors to be seen. Shchukin was awarded a 'kill', his fourth victory. When clear of the fight, S/Ldr Wilson had time to assess the damage to his aircraft. His port aileron had been shot away and there was a huge hole in the wing. It looked large enough for a man to fit through, such was the power of the MiGs 37mm cannon. He was also losing fuel, causing him to doubt his ability to reach home, although he was able to achieve this and land relatively safely. He had, however, certainly emerged second best from this first contact with the MiGs. Worse news was to come.

The second section of Meteors led by F/Off Geoff Thornton was also attacked by the MiGs. Thornton had spotted the Russian jets diving out of the sun and quickly called out a warning. The Meteors broke as the MiGs made a firing pass, Kapt Nikolai Babonin and his wingman St/Lt A. Svinitskii, also of the 18th GulFAR, selecting the aircraft (A77-721) flown by WO Ron Guthrie whose experience of the attack is vividly described earlier in this book. It is noteworthy that Ron's cannons knocked pieces off one MiG which plummeted earthwards just as his Meteor received its

fatal blow. Interestingly, another Meteor pilot reported afterward having seen, during this engagement, "A swept wing aircraft spinning down and smoking". (Ref Secret report 6/53, now declassified). Note also that the Russian pilots who claimed to have shot Ron down told him during his first interrogation that one MiG had been downed and it had "fallen to your guns", (Ref Secret report 6/53). An F86 pilot flying at a much lower altitude had seen an aircraft spiraling downwards with smoke pouring from behind. Other American pilots reported seeing a parachute. Since no MiGs had been claimed destroyed that morning, and no American aircraft lost, it was assumed that the burning aircraft was the missing Meteor and that Guthrie may have parachuted out behind enemy lines. Little consideration seems to have been given to the possibility that in addition to Ron's Meteor there may have been a MiG (ie the reported swept wing) also spiraling down and smoking. It would be many months before confirmation was received that Ron Guthrie was a prisoner in North Korea. None of the returning Meteor pilots had witnessed Ron's fate but gradually information started filtering back to Kimpo following the return of the Meteors.

The victory was awarded to Babonin, the former test pilot and member of the ill-fated Grupa N11 VVS. He related that he had opened fire from 300-400 yards and set one of Guthrie's engines on fire. Despite being badly damaged, the stricken Meteor managed to continue flying and it appeared to him that the pilot was trying to put up a fight, so he closed to within 100 yards to finish it off. However, Ron survived and continued his successful RAAF career.



Ron Guthrie As A Squadron Leader Many Years After The War

An inspection of S/Ldr Wilson's Meteor revealed that a lever on the aileron torque tube in the main spar had been practically shot away. A huge hole was torn in the skin of the aileron and the shrouding of this mechanism was peppered with shrapnel. A shell had gone through the rear fuselage aft of the IFF aerial and had ricocheted across the top of the radio compass set, peppered the center section rear bulkhead and punctured the rear compartment of the main fuel tank about 20 inches from the top of the tank. The Meteor was proving itself capable of withstanding considerable punishment.

Squadron MiG Encounter — 01 December 1951

Sergeants Vance Drummond and Bruce Thompson (Prisoners) Sergeant Don Armit (KIA)

Report By The Russians

According to an account written many years later by Lt-General Georgii Labov, commander of the 303'rd FAD, he was responsible for a plan to ambush and hopefully wipe out the Meteors of 77 Squadron. He felt that if this were successful it might result in serious political repercussions that would be felt not only in Australia but also in Britain and possibly the United States. Labov's reason for electing to concentrate on the Meteor squadron was political. In comparison to the massive US forces involved in the war, it was only one squadron among so many, but it was the only non-American United Nations unit operating jet fighters over Korea. There were, until now, only four UN squadrons employed exclusively as fighters, the 334'th, 335'th and 336'th FIS, all belonging to the 4'th FIW, and all flying Sabres and additionally the RAAF's 77 Squadron with its Meteors. All were operating from K-14, (Kimp'o) so the Australian squadron's presence was obvious and the Russians were well aware of the Meteor's inferior performance. On the morning of 1 December, two dozen MiGs of the 176'th GuFAR were prepared for action. Sixteen of the pilots, mostly from the 1'st Eskadrilya, had orders to attack Meteors. The other eight MiGs were to fly top cover in order to defend their compatriots against attacks by Sabres.

When it was time, the MiGs were led to the north by Podpolkovnik Vishnykov, where they cruised, waiting for the Meteors to arrive. Meanwhile at Kimp'o, dawn had broken on a fine, mild day. The month's first scheduled strike for 77 RAAF was to be a routine fighter sweep in the Sunchon area and was to be led by F/Lt Thornton, who had recently been promoted and now had more than 150 missions to his credit. Fourteen Meteors were prepared for the sweep, with F/Lts Scannell and Cadan leading the other two flights while F/Lt Hannan and Sgt Strawbridge were to act as airborne relay south of Pyongyang. Shortly after 1000 hrs the Meteors were at 19,000 feet over Sunchon when about 40 MiGs were sighted overhead, obviously about to attack. F/Lt Thornton watched the MiGs closely, waiting to call the break. A fast, confusing and violent battle followed. **Many years later Labov gave an account of the action:**

"Practically all the surviving Meteors — sixteen in all, came along behind the Americans. Vishnyakov's group rushed forward to meet the Meteors. By-passing the would-be Combat area. The Australians refusing combat, began going away one by one towards the sea and to the south but were barred by several pairs of MiGs. In this battle, 12 Meteors were brought down. The MiGs did not sustain any losses. As a result No 77 Squadron practically ceased to exist."

Russian accounts of this combat tell of two attacks, the first of which was the unexpected assault by Vishnyakov's group diving from above 30,000 feet, and the second was made as the Meteors were trying to withdraw, apparently by covering MiGs led by **Kapt Sergei Kramarenko, who recalled:**"My six aircraft were above the strike group, aft and on the left. Having the covering group in a common combat formation, we hoped to rendezvous with Sabres and, all of a sudden, we met with Meteors. This opponent, of course, was not dangerous.

"There were 16 of us and 24 of them, the whole squadron,(77 Sqn [ed]). In the first attack, my pair shot down two aircraft. The other pair struck with no success. In this hit-and-run and very dynamic battle, we shot down 16 Meteors and did not lose a single aircraft. What was the reason for such an unprecedented success, besides the advantage of the MiG-15 over the Meteor? A surprise! What fighter pilots always try for: We found ourselves in the ideal situation. Before a strike attack during a turn on target, the enemy offered the tails of the aircraft to us without knowing it. And we took advantage!"



Russian MiG Pilot Kramarenko

These recollections were made many years after the battle and this may account for the discrepancies in the stated numbers of aircraft, but at the time nine Meteors were claimed shot down by 176th GuFAR, six of them by 1st Eskadrilya, one each by Podpolkovnik Vishnyakov, Maj Serafin Subbotin, Kapt Petr Milaushkin, Kapt Aleksandr Vasko, and St/Lts A.F Golovachev and F.A. Zubakin. The 2nd Eskadrilya claimed three Meteors, two by Kapt Kramarenko and one by the leader of the second pair, St/Lt I.N. Guliy. It was believed to have been an outstanding accomplishment achieved at just the right time and of such proportion that it would counter any adverse impact on morale caused by the American success of a dozen Chinese aircraft shot down without loss just the day before. According to Russian records, the pilot of a Meteor which crashed near Gangen-ri was rescued from the sea, while the pilot of another that crashed near Ryonge was taken prisoner by Chinese forces. The remaining seven Meteors were recorded as having crashed near Cogen, Sagamen, Sung-genmen, Heng-gen, Don-senmen, Kodonmen and Kodon.



The Squadron Which The Russians Completely Shot Down''

77 Squadron Records For 01 December 1951 Are More Specific

In fact, three Meteors were lost on this day, not nine, twelve or sixteen as claimed by the various Russian reports. Sergeants Vance Drummond and Bruce Thompson ejected after being damaged by MiG gunfire and both were taken prisoner. F/Sgt Don Armit was missing after the attack by MiGs and was never accounted for, presumably killed in the engagement. During the course of the fight, Wal Rivers saw a Meteor with closed canopy and smoke streaming from its ventral tank. The aircraft exploded before his eyes. There was no parachute. For obvious reasons, Wal is convinced this was the demise of Don Armit.



Bruce Gogerly, First Squadron MiG Killer

In a very confusing battle, with perhaps as many as 40 MiGs, F/Off Bruce Gogerly was credited with one MiG and the Squadron jointly with a second. This was the Squadron's first success against enemy aircraft in Jet fighter operations.



Demise Of A Russian MiG-15 Fighter

With the arrival of a second USAF Sabre Wing to the area, it was apparent the role of the Meteor would soon be changed. The battle of 01 December 1951, with the loss of three Meteors, showed the superiority of the Russian fighter and indicated it would be foolish to continue using Meteors on fighter sweeps into Mig Alley. A song often sung in the Squadron at the time summed up the situation aptly, "All I want for Christmas is my wings swept back." Thus, in January 1952, 77 Squadron was assigned the role of 'area and airfield defense' for both Kimpo and Suwon air bases, leaving the Sabres to patrol over North Korea. During January, the Squadron also adopted the role of ground attack with cannons and rockets and it was in this field that the Meteor was able to make its effective and important impact in the Korean conflict. Of course we all still wished we were equipped with the Sabres, those swept-wing fighters being so effectively flown by the Americans. But these were in short supply.

Chapter 7

Williamtown, late 1951 — de Havilland Vampire Jet Training

Jets At Last

While Ron Guthrie and so many other unfortunates were undergoing the most stressful trials in North Korea, we continued our exciting adventures at the Jet OTU refusing to fully acknowledge the hazards awaiting us in The Land of the Morning Calm.

The Vampire training kept our minds fully occupied. Once again there was no dual trainer. So we did the usual study of the Vampire Pilots' Notes and cockpit checks. We were grateful for the months at Point Cook devoted to the study of jet engines and jet aerodynamics. On that course we had learned much about those products of genius which achieved flight by gulping tons of air and thrusting it rearwards as super-heated propulsive energy. The Vampire was a single-seat fighter with one Rolls Royce Nene jet engine. Main armaments were four 20mm Hispano cannons point-harmonized at 800 yards. All of this was located in a bulb-like wooden fuselage. The wings, twin booms and tail assembly were all metal. Eight rockets could be slung under the wings. Designed by de Havilland, this was the main aircraft on which I worked during my engineering apprenticeship at the D.H. factory. Some of these actual aircraft bore my handiwork, a fact that supposedly gave my comrades cause for concern.



Vampire Jet Fighter Cockpit

The Vampire was simple to fly compared with the Mustang but was more demanding to operate efficiently, a factor not readily understood by the uninitiated. We were warned that the undercarriage must be retracted promptly after lift-off before speed increase prevented the doors from locking. The aircraft proved to be 'slippery', with speeds and vertical rates vastly increased beyond our previous experience. Maneuverability was outstanding. It was possible, by pulling high acceleration forces to execute turns at exceptionally steep bank angles. These gut-wrenching exercises placed enormous stress on both pilot and machine. Operating without 'G' suits, which inflate to press on vital areas of

the pilot's body, we had to compensate by tightening stomach muscles. This inadequacy brought the pilot to the brink of 'black-out' in tight turns, as blood drained from the cranium. Realizing the enormous stress being experienced by the aircraft structure I could not avoid musing on the fact that, in constructing the Vampire, we attached these wings with three pins only. Sometimes it does not pay to know too much! Formation flying required greater anticipation and different thrust adjustment. Control of airspeed and descent path produced problems for those whose habits did not change readily. And we had a new device, an Air Brake. Jets are different!



Vampire Jet Fighter

The first solo was quite a thrill. It was a joyful, exhilarating experience and it is difficult to remember which impression was the most enthralling. The performance was so outstandingly superior to the Mustang and the smooth almost silent experience was hard to believe. Maneuverability was gratifying and aerobatics irresistible. Jim Kichenside will never forget his first solo, nor will others who were there. Jim's engine suffered a 'flame-out' at 25,000 feet over Forster. The fault which stopped the engine also prevented a restart. So Jim glided back to Williamtown and landed. It was a superb effort for a pilot with 300 hours, and a tribute to good pilot-selection and efficient training. We all assembled to see his arrival. Jim took the precaution of landing deep, no undershoots thanks! Maximum braking stopped him with a few yards to spare and everyone heaved a sigh of relief. Jim was flying again shortly after this incident as he was one of the team, and 'nothing must be a problem!' This would seem to be enough of this variation to single engine jet operations for one lifetime, however, he did a few repeats in later years. **Jim Kichenside describes them for us!**

"Williamtown (11 Oct 1955, Vampire MK 30, A79165). I was leading one of the students on a training exercise. Immediately after we became airborne my number two called "You are on fire." I didn't like the prospect of ejecting at that altitude, so I held until I thought there was sufficient airspeed (seconds only), shut down the engine and went for height. This was just sufficient for a 'tight' downwind and even tighter final, wheels down at last minute, and successful forced landing along my take-off path. There was no damage! Strangely on checking my logbook I had a similar incident two days later (13 Oct 1955), but not quite the same drama. My number two (and Ken Towner) reported fuel streaming just after lift-off. I shut down and had plenty of time for a forced landing along my take-off run."



RAAF Vampire Crash Landing

So there we have it, engines are nice to have but by no means essential! Engines of jet fighters occasionally stopped (flamed out) for no particular reason, as has already been indicated. Sometimes the motor would respond to the relight procedure and sometimes it would be stubborn and uncooperative. Adherence to the appropriate drill was obviously a sound idea under such circumstances. We were all trained to remember such emergency procedures, however it was considered good form to have the 'Pilots' Notes' handy as this was also a requirement. Sergeant Geoff Lushey recalls an event on 13 February 1952 with a flame-out of his (single-engine, single-seat) Vampire while engaged in Mach Run exercises. (compressibility / high-speed buffet). The engine stopped at 33,000 feet. There was plenty of time to consider the matter, as re-lighting was best attempted at lower altitudes (Below 15,000 feet for preference). While gliding down, Geoff searched his pockets for the drill book, to no avail. He had changed flying suits and the booklet now reposed in the other outfit back in the crew-room. Geoff had time, during the descent to ponder the fact that few pilots to date had been successful in attempting to relight the Nene engine. The missing book assumed a new level of appeal as he searched his memory for the precise procedure. The end result was something of an anti-climax, his memory worked, the drill worked, the engine worked. The memory requirement worked!

I can add a small anecdote here. During operations in Korea, one of the two Derwent Jet engines of my Meteor flamed-out as I snapped the throttles closed when rolling out of an exceptionally tight turn. The relight memory action was instantly successful and the mission continued. Of course the implications of having one engine out of action are not so bad in a twin engine fighter. In both cases the insistence on thoroughly memorizing emergency drills would appear to be justified.



Vampire

The mysteries of compressibility were explored mid-way through training as we did a few 'Mach runs.' This is a demonstration and exercise in handling the critical phase when some parts of the air flow over the air-frame actually reach the speed of sound. At this speed, air compresses and causes 'shock waves' which create a shuddering, or 'buffet,' of the aircraft and the condition is associated with critical alterations to the aerodynamic conditions affecting flight and control of flight. In the Vampire the 'Critical Mach,' or aircraft speed at first encountering buffet was approximately (Mach) .78; or in other words, 78% of the speed of sound. Speed of the air over certain curved areas of the structure had now hit the speed of sound. The curved surfaces had forced an acceleration, producing the additional 22% of airspeed in those areas, and from there, shock waves would now emanate. Buffet and control aberrations now began. Obviously, when buffet is encountered, immediate action is required to prevent total loss of control. The Vampire was equipped with 'Air Brakes' which created a lot of drag (braking effect) and these could be operated at any speed. On entering the Critical Mach condition the pilot would immediately deploy these drag producing devices while fully reducing engine thrust. The aircraft should immediately start to respond more normally to the flight controls and a gentle pull out of the dive would be accomplished in the normal manner. At least this is how it should work. Unfortunately there were a number of fatal dives in the Vampire resulting from inability to recover from this condition. **Wal Rivers describes these incidents.**

"At the Williamtown fighter OTU we learned that 77 Squadron was being converted to Meteors with which to attack MiGs at 35,000 feet over Korea. Bruce Gogerly and I, as senior instructors on the Vampire squadron, decided to do some high-altitude combat exercises to emulate such combat as the Meteors were likely to experience. We flew a finger four formation: Gogerly with Bruce Wilson as Nr2, and myself as Nr3 with Booth as Nr4. At 35,000 feet we split formation at 90 degrees separation between the two pairs, flew for one minute, and then turned 180 degrees. The object was to produce the experience the two pairs of high-speed fighters approaching each other at a 'right angle' and see if anyone could get in a hypothetical shot at the 'enemy.' Approaching with Booth on my port side I could not initially see the enemy Vampires. Then as I saw them I signaled Booth to position behind. I performed a slow, lazy barrel roll keeping the enemy in sight. Positioning behind Gogerly, I told him I was on his tail."

"At that moment Booth called in alarm that he was in a vertical dive and the control column was impossible to pull. It was solid. Bruce gave instant instructions in the hope of rectifying the situation but the diving Vampire did not respond. Booth's last call was, "The ground is coming up fast!" Bruce kept calling but there were no responses. In the meantime Gogerly's wing man, Wilson, had also gone 'off the air' and, amazingly, was not heard from again. According to the local newspapers, two men and a boy in a small boat about 100 meters off the shore saw an aircraft dive into the shoreline and another into the sea nearby. The boy said, 'Dad, I will never join the Airforce!' "

Another pilot who nearly 'went in' while doing a Vampire Mach Run at Williamtown reported that he deployed the air brakes, closed the throttle and eased the stick as briefed and, nothing happened. The aircraft continued to buffet and gradually adopted a near-vertical attitude. It descended at this high speed and in this uncontrollable condition with altimeter needles spinning crazily, vertical-speed indicator on the stops, and cabin pressure rapidly increasing. In this alarming manner the Vampire dropped from 30,000 feet to about 2,000 feet at which height control gradually returned. The pilot was eventually able to restore level flight at 1,200 feet above the ocean. This somewhat relieved pilot lived to report on the incident but six of our fellows did not. They went in! Fortunately no one on our course encountered the above problem. The aircraft mainly performed as advertised! This pleased me on several accounts. Firstly we all survived, as everyone learned a little more about jets and high-speed flight. Secondly I had a hand in making these aircraft and felt some proprietary interest. The Vampire was actually a delight to fly and was extremely maneuverable. We loved it! It is pleasing to note that eventually the Mach Run problems were corrected by a modification to the air-frame. The 'Elephant-Ears' air intakes were re-positioned from the top of the fuselage, where they had been disturbing the air flow, onto the underside. No further tragedies occurred!

The C/O of 75 Squadron (Vampires), Wing Commander Brian Eaton, had recently visited 77 Squadron in Korea and obtained inputs for our training. Among the more important revelations was the need for our air-to air gunnery to emphasize the technique of shooting at a retreating target. The MiGs would have about 100 knots speed advantage! This required developing the technique of operating our gyroscopic (lag-computing) gun sights in reverse. One would normally be closing fast from the rear of an opponent but in MiG encounters we should anticipate the opposite to apply. The gyroscopic gun sight was a big advance on the old reflector sight. It computed the deflection when firing against an evasive enemy and presented an image before the pilot's eyes as a graticule of reflected dots of light. The estimated wing span of the enemy was programmed into the computer before the attack. The pilot now coordinated his flight so the center dot of the graticule was held on the canopy of the enemy. Now with his left hand the pilot rotated the graticule control so as to ensure the outer dots of the graticule at all times encompassed the wing tips of the opponent. This control was attached to the throttle lever on the left side of the cockpit. Provided the pilot did this with

unerring accuracy his guns would always be aimed just the correct distance ahead of the enemy aircraft, in spite of variations to speed and/or rate of turn. Of course the exercise required coordination and quick reflexes. We had to learn to do this on a fast opponent who was becoming smaller with every second, requiring the graticule to be closed instead of opened. However, it was commonly said, "It is probably the only shot you will get at a MiG." Quite correct unfortunately!

Chapter 8

Descent Into Misery

Ron's Ordeal Begins

Again we follow the misfortunes of Ron Guthrie as he descends in his parachute from 38,000 feet to the inhospitable reception inevitably awaiting him in North Korea. He is creating a number of records.

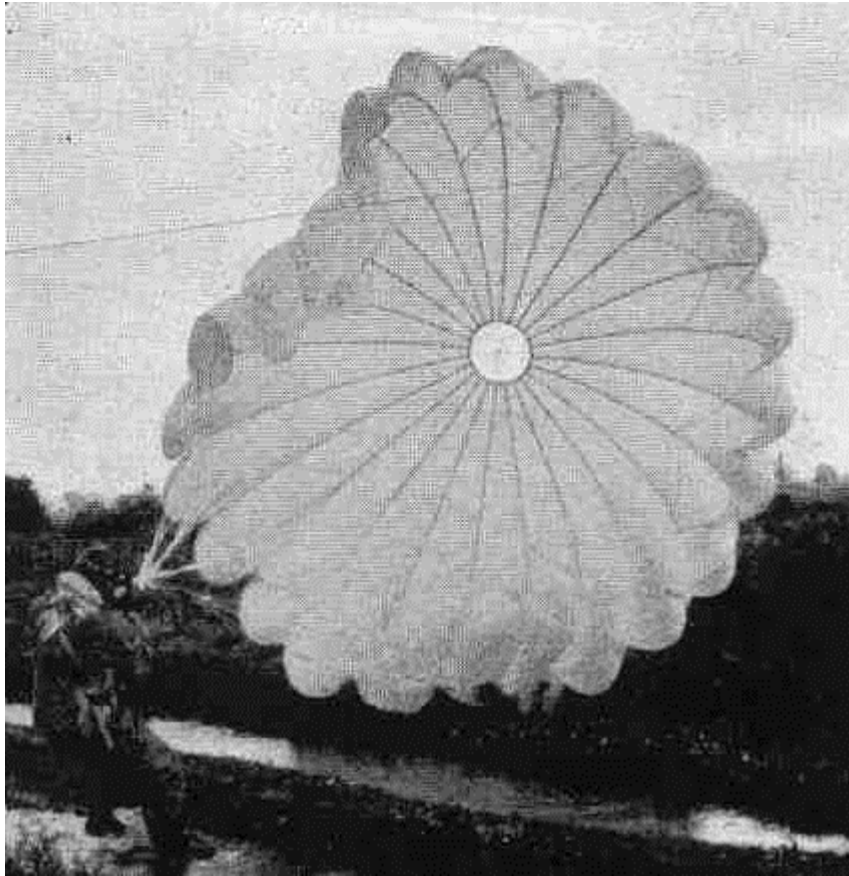
There is some momentary distraction in gazing overhead at the great silken canopy of the Irvin parachute and then casting eyes around the horizon. This unique experience, in spite of its hazards, is still able to offer some magnificent impressions to occupy the senses of this Meteor pilot during these last minutes of freedom. On this cloudless morning, the extreme visual clarity presents the observer with panoramic views of a curved earth, bound by exquisitely rounded horizons vanishing away to infinity in all directions. His eyes, at a glance, can take in the full 150-mile width of North Korea as well as the Sea of Japan shimmering and fading in its eastern extremities. The snaking pathway of the Yalu River in its entirety winds its way into the mountains of Manchuria. To the west, the Yellow Sea beckons, but due to the slight eastward drift of Ron's parachute, the sanctuary of this tantalizingly close ocean seems unattainable. He is dropping towards inevitable capture

Ron permits himself a few minutes of resentful consideration of the futile operational undertaking which has placed him in this predicament. Formidable aircraft though the Meteor had been when first in service, it is no competitor for the new Russian jets they are required to oppose. The MiG-15 has most of the advantages, being a specialized high-altitude, swept-wing fighters with higher speed and much greater rate of climb. Additionally, the enemy pilots are able to climb to heights well above Meteor operational capability while over neutral Manchuria before diving into the legitimate combat zone and pouncing from above.

Having the experience of being the first 77 Squadron MiG victim is a dubious honor but Ron is to subsequently meet others in the POW camps who have been similarly afflicted. They all have a healthy respect for the capabilities of the sneaky little Russian and wish they had been flying the North American Sabre, now being so successfully operated by the USAF. These bitter thoughts, so obviously unproductive, soon give way to apprehensions regarding his imminent encounter with enemy soldiers, an experience for which most airmen are ill-prepared. The emergency oxygen supply lasts to probably about 20,000 feet, below which height the ambient air is adequate. By now the topography is becoming clearer, with mountains, rivers and townships increasingly in focus. Ron would normally have experienced some pleasure at this unique experience, however the visual titillation is severely overshadowed by a sense of foreboding. Descending through the lower levels, such apprehension is reinforced by a terrible realization. **Ron Guthrie continues his account.**

I can hear strange sounds like fitttt-fitttt and look up at the canopy. Holes are appearing! Enemy troops are shooting and the bullets are zipping past very close! This is what we have been warned about at our briefings. In alarm, I attempt evasive action by pulling on the cords in order to swing myself from side to side. Again I spill the 'chute and have to stop pulling. This is a frightening experience as I am so near the ground but fortunately my 'chute quickly re-erects. At low levels the descent seems to accelerate and the last couple of hundred feet slip by rapidly. Descending towards a paddy field, for a moment it seems I am going to land on top of two women bending over their work.

In fact, my feet plant in the soft ground squarely between the two girls. I remain upright. The two ladies leap into the air in fright and run a short distance, then stop as they see there is no threat. I am still standing securely, with the spongy soil up to my ankles. As I un-strap, the smiling girls each take one of my hands and one says Russki da. Thinking quickly I repeat Russki da! They lead me away.



Parachute Landing

Then bullets start to fly! Ron's guardians abscond in fright. Seeking shelter by crawling behind a paddy wall he draws his 0.38 revolver. Conscious of the fact that this weapon has been supplied for such occasions, it seems a natural action to expend those six bullets in his personal defense. Perhaps he is not thinking clearly, but merely reacting instinctively. Ron has certainly been programmed by the intelligence officers to anticipate extreme and probably fatal treatment.

I can see three separate army patrols approaching. This frightening situation is brought home to me as the nearest soldier begins shooting from the hip as he runs. I flinch at the chatter of the 'burp gun' as bullets hit the ground nearby. They are obviously out to kill me! Perhaps I can take one of them with me! I reply with two revolver shots and the one who has been firing drops to his knees, bleeding profusely. Before there is any time for further firing I am seized from behind, the pistol is torn from my grasp and a teenage soldier runs around firing my gun into the air. All other shooting stops. I rise to my feet, surrounded!

Little interest or attention was displayed towards the soldier lying in the paddy a few yards away. They were all absorbed with their novel catch. A number of excited North Korean troops crowded around and proceeded to strip Ron of his Mae West and flying suit. Fortunately the excellent combat

boots did not appeal and remained on his feet. Perhaps the muddy condition of these most essential items saved them from the souvenir hunters. His RAAF watch disappeared along with a signet ring, a gift from his mother. His last glance at the watch showed the time to be ten to eleven. There was a party atmosphere among the soldiers as they bargained with each other over the spoils. When stripped to his underclothes Ron's arms were wired behind his back with telephone cable. In the custody of a diligent escort of six triumphant members of the North Korean Peoples Army the bewildered captive was marched off into a very uncertain but most threatening future. Communication was achieved by regular prods in the back and staccato commands.

As the initial shock of recent events settled down Ron began to take stock of his captors. They were young, short of stature and of peasant appearance. Their light khaki uniforms were unkempt and of poor quality. Each man carried an evil looking burp gun with spare magazines. Badges of rank were not in evidence and it was difficult to tell who was in charge. Their behavior was reasonable. He had been roughly manhandled but not physically assaulted. The effort of walking revealed to Ron that he had suffered some degree of back injury during the bailout. Undoubtedly, in the stress of the moment he had failed to observe all niceties of the ejection drill as he neglected to withdraw his feet from the rudder pedals in order to avoid leg-contact with the instrument panel. Fortunately, he was able to walk and had more pressing worries as the wired arms deprived him of some control of balance. Peasants and children stared at the procession and he felt the sting of their jeers.



Old Korean Man

The soldiers postured proudly as victors in their successful campaign against the 'Imperialist Lackey' the American war criminal. After half an hour of stumbling over rough dirt tracks, Ron and his eager captors arrived at a bombed out village, later identified as Kusong, an area of shocking devastation, the countryside war-ravaged with not one habitable building.

The solemn peasants went about their pathetic makeshift hovels with a general air of dignified

resignation. A prison was provided nevertheless, in the form of a packing case bolted to a wall. The hapless pilot was pushed and virtually squeezed through a small door which was then locked. This box could just accommodate him in the prone position. Ron had been delivered into the hands of a para-military group such as the 'Home Guard,' who were distinguished by uniforms with green epaulets. He wondered about the treatment which would now be meted out.

Thus begins my first brief period of miserable imprisonment. Shock is beginning to take effect. I am cold in my underwear and the well-ventilated structure gives little protection from the wind as the day drags on, and hunger and thirst worry me. I am quite convinced there will be no decent POW treatment. Perhaps the troops are waiting for some senior officer to take charge and then maybe I will be shot. There is no way of guessing how long this cramped packing case is to be my home but at least the wires have been removed from my arms, which I have now massaged back to life.

As the sun dipped below the rugged mountain peaks and Ron huddled in search of protection from the chilly wind, his situation improved briefly. He was allowed to struggle out of the cubby-hole and his flying suit was handed back. Quickly donning the coverall on top of his summer underwear, he began to feel less discomfort. Still no food or drink was offered. There was a feeling of relief when he was handed his rubber water bottle that had been part of the confiscated equipment. The thirst problem was alleviated for the moment and he carefully guarded that precious container, a most useful 'comforter'. With arms again wired, Ron was prodded into motion. Taken around a corner of the bombed building he was confronted by a disturbing spectacle — a large assembly of citizens attentively listening to a vigorous harangue by a senior officer of the Home Guard. A tremor of fear ran through Ron as he realized he was the chief exhibit and in fact the whole object of the gathering. The peasants jeered and shook fists as the officer stabbed his finger at the captive. One soldier, acting as interpreter, told this enemy pilot how bad he was in coming to Korea just to attack the people and destroy their homes. These remarks were relayed to the citizens who shouted with renewed vigor. The situation was ugly.

It was a great relief for Ron as he was whisked away from the volatile crowd by a party of guards and thrust into a small truck. They drove up the valley for several miles and stopped near a hut adjacent to a sinister looking hole in the side of a hill. Ron was soon to discover that this unattractive excavation, obviously a disused horizontal mine shaft, served as a prison. On dismounting, the guards supported the unsteady captive as he stumbled in the darkness. Proceeding about thirty feet into musty darkness, the captive was arraigned before a guard seated at a table. An oil lamp, producing more smoke than light, threw its yellow illumination over the depressing scene. He was filled with foreboding! The uniformed proprietor of this dismal domain displayed little interest as he rustled papers, scratched an entry and freed the prisoner's arms. With those formalities completed Ron was hustled into a branch tunnel, obviously cut from solid rock, glistening and occasionally dripping with moisture. Before moving into the passage he was interested and a trifle amused to see the officers examining his dinghy pack which had been brought from the truck. Somehow the compressed air bottle was released and the dinghy inflated with a hiss and a report. The ensuing panic provided Ron with his first moment of amusement since arriving in North Korea. The Australian pilot now discovered his new name was Mi-gook! which he later discovered meant American! Proceeding along the moist passageway they stopped before a small door at the base of a dividing wall. After some fumbling with a lock, the creaky hinge functioned and the hapless prisoner was propelled into the blackness of a damp and malodorous dungeon. It was virtually necessary to crawl and squeeze through this under-size aperture like an animal entering a cage.

As I begin to realize what is happening I am frozen in horror. A loud thud shuts me off from the

world! Although I can't see or hear anything definite, it feels as though there are other people in this hellhole and slowly, as my eyes became used to the faint illumination, shapes begin to form. Things gradually come into focus. I am imprisoned with two Korean women who are squatting in peasant fashion at the back of the cell where the roof curves down to the floor. No one is making a sound as I stand near the door watching these new companions. The women show no fear. Soon the older woman begins making repeated signals in an up and down movement of the flattened palm. I think she is telling me to sit, however I remain standing as the floor is wet. Then I realize she is inviting me to join them. What seems to mean 'sit down' is in fact a 'come here' signal. The hand movement undoubtedly is my first lesson in local sign language. We are friends.

In order to avoid the dampness, they were squatting on a wooden plank resting on the floor. The girl insisted Ron accompany them on this board. At last he was squatting, in the traditional Asian manner, a technique developed since living in the East. He became particularly conscious of the need for protection from the moisture as the young one then crouched with her back against the wall, pulled up her clothes and urinated. No wonder this vile enclosure smelt so putrid! The older woman began her communications by attempting to stretch the skin on the back of Ron's hand over one of her fingers but it was fairly taut and moved little. Then inducing him to try the same experiment with her hand she made the loose flesh roll completely over his finger. She had just demonstrated how they were in very poor condition due to starvation. Realizing that he had not eaten for 12 hours, Ron began to think about food and to wonder how his own physical state was likely to deteriorate. Attempting to identify himself as an Australian, Ron used the Japanese term Gorshu. They immediately named him Horju, which he was to learn, in time, to be the Korean equivalent word. Further employment of fragmented Japanese phrases along with elaborate sign language provided some useful exchanges.

They crouched in the damp cold darkness for an immeasurable and seemingly endless period of miserable discomfort. The polluted air clutched at Ron's lungs as he struggled for a few minutes of genuine relaxation. Even brief periods of sleep did not come easily as the physical discomforts were at times overshadowed by continuous concerns about the plans of his enemies. The monotony of this dreadful existence was occasionally eased by further attempts at communication with the women using Ron's limited Japanese and universal sign language. He laboriously deduced that the girls' crime had to do with the stealing of food. It occurred to Ron, *They must have been desperately hungry to have risked such vicious penalties.*"

After what seemed an eternity, the small hatch creaked open and a bowl of water and a tin containing a semblance of watery soup were abruptly thrust in the direction of the female prisoners. Ron was loudly summoned, "Mi-gook!" and roughly ushered out as a pair of armed guards propelled him towards a nearby building. His apprehension was mitigated by relief at breathing the clear night air, how sweet it seemed after the fetid atmosphere. He was presented with a bowl of crude cooked millet and squatting outside a building in the glow of window lighting he eagerly devoured this unappetizing food. When asked for eating tools the guards indicated that twigs should be broken off a nearby bush. From a tap he was able to drink and top-up the water bag, that precious item which was to be guarded so carefully. He was then pushed into a small room, reminiscent of the story Alice in Wonderland. The table and chairs looked as though they had been borrowed from the local kindergarten and the single naked light globe dangling dejectedly from its frayed lead practically hit Ron in the chest.

A photographer entered brandishing a large camera, and with absolutely no preparation, two flashes of the light occurred and the man was gone. Warrant Officer Ron Guthrie of the RAAF was now on

file. A high-ranking North Korean Army officer made a brusque entry flanked by two guards. The officer, a small man with a brutal face, seemed intent on intimidation and establishing his superiority as he drew a large pistol and waved it in the prisoner's face in a threatening manner while maintaining a constant barrage of abuse. Although the actual words were foreign, the body language, the pistol thrusts and the pacing around as he worked himself into a rage, conveyed a sinister meaning. This display of manliness eventually seemed to satisfy his needs, for quite abruptly he departed leaving Ron in the hands of the guards.

Almost immediately two young European men arrive. They are similarly dressed, however while one is fair the other is rather dark. They try to speak to me in Russian and soon interpreters are called in. A comedy then takes place with one man speaking Russian and Chinese and the other claiming Chinese, Korean and English. Each question causes an argument and after some angry words due to the great loss of face, they are both sent away in disgrace. Eventually an elderly man establishes some order. He is a local teacher and seems to manage fairly well in both Russian and English. He bangs the table and angrily accuses me of being An imperialist war-mongering American with a bad accent!"Although filled with indignation, I am not allowed to reply. I am advised that the two foreigners are fighter pilots who have volunteered to fight against the American aggressors in order to help the Korean people in their just struggle. There is no mention of their nationality. The two Russians claim to have shot me down. I am convinced when they mention details only known to someone who had been there, as they describe the action and find fault with several things about my aircraft and me. They do not approve of my flying suit and are even critical of the magnificent American combat boots. I am assured that strong disciplinary action would apply in their air force for the dirty condition of my pistol which is then produced in evidence. In summary, the Russians evaluate the Meteor poorly, however they feel the Sabre is on a par with the MiG. One of the men says he had been shot down by a Sabre. I am pleased, and probably show it. Finally, the two enemy pilots give some sensational information. They convey to me through the interpreter that one MiG had been downed during the engagement and it had fallen to my guns. This is quite a boost to my morale.

Ron did not bother to enlighten these scornful pilots on several of the issues they had raised. His regular flying suits were both being laundered when he was required for the fateful mission so he had donned an old WWII garment of the double-breasted button-up type. Nor was he able to tell them this tough suit would stand him in good stead throughout his imprisonment and had the advantage of no zipper, an item regularly stolen by North Koreans. He did not boast of the extremely hardy nature of the superb combat boots as the less publicity these vital items received the more chance there was of retaining them. There was no need to risk an argument about his pistol as he had used it 'in anger' against the Korean troops and it was subsequently in the hands of a jubilant young souvenir collector who had been last seen firing it. The two officers having established their superiority then demonstrated chivalry of the air by presenting Ron with some food, a small amount of bread, butter and sugar. As he had just eaten he thanked them and said he would have it later. They firmly insisted it was now or never as they obviously understood the Koreans. How right they were, for soon after their departure, the last morsels of the present were snatched away by the guards who seemed to resent Ron's favored treatment by the Russians.

In anguish I am now hustled back to the fearful dungeon. My spirits sink in the anger and worry surrounding this turn of events. I had allowed myself a few moments of optimism after receiving two meals and a gesture of chivalry during my brief hour of liberty but again I am jailed in unspeakable squalor with no idea of how long this is likely to last. My female companions again make room on their few square feet of dry board. The hours drag by! Occasionally the women talk despondently.

In that dark and oppressive hole in the ground, Ron passed the time thinking back over that recent disastrous mission. Undoubtedly he was fortunate to still be alive. The armor plating behind the Meteor seat had saved him from the MiG cannons when the tail assembly and radios were hit. At the time of ejection, had he remained unconscious for a few more seconds in that rarefied atmosphere, he would never have revived. He had been lucky again when the snipers merely holed his parachute and furthermore, the soldier shooting from the hip had missed his mark. There had been no retribution for Ron's accurate marksmanship in response. He realized moreover that his situation, relative to the female prisoners, held more promise as no doubt his captors would place value on an enemy pilot as a potential source of information, or a convert to their ideals. Perhaps he was fortunate after all!

By way of deflecting his mind from the realities of this dreadful dungeon, Ron mentally rehearsed the briefing on the morning of the 29th August 1951 and obtained some stimulation from the considerable memory test involved. He recalled that the lower flight of eight Meteors was detailed for close support of B-29 bombers attacking an important rail junction somewhere well to the north. This half squadron was lead by Des Murphy and included Ron's special pal, Blue Colebrook. Ron's own particular half of the Squadron assigned to 'top cover' was led by Dick Wilson and included Neil Woodroffe, Cedric Thomas, Ken Blight, Blue Thornton, Don Armit and Kev Foster with Ron in the unenviable position of Tail-end Charlie.

Ron mused on the fact that he had been assisted by the Rolls-Royce representative in the matter of increased engine power for his personal aircraft A77-721. Ron told this engineer, "The Meteor at high altitude performs like a bag of mud. For my particular job as Professional Tail-end Charlie I need more power!" Recognizing these special needs, this engineer had unofficially tuned Ron's Derwents for more revs and higher operating temperature. This was a considerable help in the complex battle-formation maneuvering. Regrettably, however, 721 had just returned from the workshops at Iwakuni and as it took off on the particular day when that extra power would be so vital, the engines had been restored to standard.

Ron also pondered, with some apprehension, the matter of future interrogations. Obviously there were sensitive facts which must never be revealed. There was the matter of 'Stovepipe', the code name for the high-flying Sabre spy-plane the Americans positioned in MiG Alley to watch aircraft movements on the airfield at Antung. Much more sensational was his knowledge of the spy with strong binoculars whom the Yanks had concealed on an island in the Yalu estuary, very close to the MiGs' airfield. This brave fellow reported in great detail and spoke directly to Stovepipe. He could actually identify the markings on MiG fuselages. When the Russian fighter leader was seen, the excited spy would inform the Sabre spy-plane that 'Casey Jones' was leading a squadron of MiGs into the air. This information would be instantly relayed back to our controller, 'Dentist,' located in his radar unit near our base, at Kimpo. Verbally encoded, the VHF radio message was simple, "Six trains leaving the station, Casey Jones at the throttle!" This warning was passed to our aircraft and our radar network.

I am going through a period of adjustment, and decide to try thinking about happier days. It becomes increasingly difficult to tell the passage of time. Guards bring an occasional bowl of water and some tasteless 'near soup,' otherwise we are left alone in our discomfort. It seems an eternity, but probably a further 24 hours pass before I am again taken outside of the fearful tunnel. Again I breathe the clear night air as I am given a bowl of millet and am allowed to wash my hands and face. Best of all is a clear sign that the dungeon ordeal is over, for the present at least, as I am ordered to climb into the back of a small van. My only companions, three slovenly Korean guards and one civilian, lie near

the tail-board and doze.

The vehicle lurched onto the road and it soon became clear to Ron that the driver was a man of questionable skills. The clutch and gearbox took a solid pounding as they negotiated an uncertain passage along the rutted winding track. As darkness fell, shielded headlamps cast a totally inadequate glow, thereby contributing to a sequence of near catastrophes. The heavy road traffic was testimony to the emphasis placed by the enemy on maximizing night travel in order to avoid our aircraft. After much jerky stopping and starting, while maneuvering among generally southbound vehicles, including many mule-drawn carts, the van finally completed its north-westerly journey a few hours after dark. They had arrived at a North Korean Air Force establishment outside Sinuiju. Ron was familiar with the name and it evoked feelings of tension as it was the twin of the infamous home of the MiGs, Antung! The cities were separated by the Yalu River, the border with China. Ushered into a large concrete building, he was permitted to sit on a bench in the drab waiting room. His guard took the only chair, tilted it against the wall and extracted a mouth organ from his pocket. The man's dismal music failed to alleviate Ron's feelings of discomfort and apprehension in these cheerless surroundings.

Eventually, after a couple of tedious hours, I was taken into an office for an interview with a senior office, a stocky vigorous man who seemed to be full of his own importance. He wore a much-decorated uniform and did not remove his brightly braided cap during the meeting. It was obvious that he spoke English but seemed to have trouble with my Australian accent and preferred to work through an interpreter. I suspected this to be an exercise in 'face-saving'. The general was a fanatical Communist. He asked 'Why you come Korea?' and did not like my honest answer, 'Because you invaded South Korea and the United Nations asked for our help!' He became quite angry! 'Why you listen and obey Wall Street warmongers? They bring war for make profit!' My response did not stop his onslaught. 'I don't know anything about this. I am not a politician but just an Air Force pilot. I go where I'm sent.' A political speech followed, containing much excited criticism of America and loud statements that his forces will undoubtedly win. 'American and imperialist lackeys all be pushed in sea!' The lecture was boring. Having satisfied himself that I had been suitably punished, the general calmed down and told me that I was lucky as I had been selected for re-education and especially fortunate as they were sending me into China for this training program. 'You now go Chungwah, learn truth!' With the painful interview concluded I was immediately hustled out to the waiting vehicle.



North Korean Bridge Under Repair

Darkness still inhibited progress as the truck proceeded towards China. A few additional passengers now lounged in the back of the vehicle and although Ron was unable to identify these ragged men or their reason for travel, they were obviously Koreans. The vehicle passed through the drab streets of Sinuiju, already rousing into bustling commercial activity. Ron's mind was preoccupied with the prospect of this assignment of re-education, and he felt little interest in this town or its inhabitants. As they arrived at a large bridge, obviously across the Yalu River to Antung, the truck slowed to a crawl. The structure was undergoing much repair work and in consequence was only partially effective as a roadway. Shrouded lighting illuminated the hive of construction activity with vehicles, cranes and laborers in urgent action. No doubt Ron was witnessing the results of American bombing and felt a small and perhaps unjustifiable sense of satisfaction. It had been his job to protect those huge bombers during their errands of destruction.

At the middle of the bridge, the Chinese border, the truck jerked to a stop and Ron was ordered out. He was handed over, like a commercial item, to a small group of Chinese officials. There was little interest displayed apart from ensuring he boarded the new conveyance and the inevitable paperwork was in order. A young Chinese guard with a burp gun lounged in the vehicle and grinned as he attempted some rather ineffectual English. He was warmly clad in a padded cotton uniform without insignia.



B-29 super-fortress Bombing Yalu Bridge

You Migua?"he asked, and I assumed he meant American or English as I had not yet learned the local terminology. No. Australian!"He looked blank so I repeat the conversation I had in the underground jail with the Korean women, Gorshu,"still blank, Horju."Ah,"he replied Audayleea!"This was the end of our rather stilted conversation and I reflected on the difficulties of picking up any local language when operating through three completely foreign countries, Japan, Korea and now China. On the other hand, it reminded me that the older generation of Koreans had some reasonable knowledge of the Japanese language, a fact which was to give me considerable help later on.

About half an hour later, as the sun was coming up, Ron was introduced to his new residence. Because he was traveling in a covered vehicle he was not able to learn much about his surroundings but soon realized this was a type of military training school on the outskirts of Antung, the twin city to Sinuiju. On leaving the truck his attention was instinctively taken by large numbers of jet fighters passing low overhead on approach and landing maneuvers. MiGs! This place was obviously close to the infamous Antung MiG air base. Ron had to grapple with the fact that he was now in a so-called 'neutral' country, China!

There is no question about my freedom, however, as I am immediately locked in a large cell by myself, solitary confinement! This cell reminds me of the monkey cages at Taronga Zoo, but now I am on the inside looking out and the jailers are the spectators. However to my satisfaction, the place is relatively clean and well ventilated and best of all there is a raised wooden platform covered by a straw mattress. I gratefully collapse onto this bed and enjoy my first decent sleep.

Brain Washing In China

Ron Guthrie's ordeal continued unbeknownst to those of us in more congenial surrounds. The appalling truth came out after the war.

It transpired that Ron was the only 'student' currently enrolled for re-education at this College of Knowledge. Life was peaceful in this brainwashing school. Quite palatable food was brought to the cell twice daily in a triple-tiered metal carry-container. Obviously the Chinese were out to win Ron's

confidence, hopeful of obtaining information and cooperation with the ultimate aim of converting him to the Communist cause. No doubt they were so dedicated to this doctrine as to believe any reasonable person would have to 'see the light' after a few weeks of re-education. The interrogations commenced immediately, occupying two hours each morning and a similar period after lunch. Treatment was soft initially. There were always two interrogators at each session, generally young females, but the chief was a man. At each session Ron was given a pack of Gold Wheel cigarettes. He did not tell them he was a non-smoker for they were providing valuable currency. He would smoke one immediately and then pocket the pack.

Ron found cigarettes to be useful barter items:

The interviews are initially quite friendly sessions. Apparently innocent questionnaires about past history and personal likes and dislikes are frequently used. Obviously they are trying to get any bit of data which could suggest a way of influencing me. The story I build for myself is mainly false and I quite enjoy stringing them along in this way. The ladies seem pleased at my willingness to talk about my past and to give details. I keep telling them the truth, I am a Warrant Officer and do not have any important military information. The questions, nevertheless, soon move more frequently in that direction. I am asked, Where do you get your fuel. The truthful answer comes easily this time, I have no idea. I am a pilot and only a Warrant Officer. I have never had anything to do with obtaining fuel! Unfortunately, this answer is not accepted and I am in their bad books. I am having more success with lies than with the truth. However, I have pleasure in replying to the next demand for top-secret military information. Where are the guns on your Meteor? Where do they fire from? Naturally I cannot pretend ignorance on such a technical matter. Some of our guns fire backwards, so as to shoot at any aircraft behind us! I have little hope that this will keep the MiGs off our tails, but enjoy explaining it to the young women nevertheless. The reaction is gratifying.

The girls became quite excited and took notes. This important information was obviously quite a coup. Ron realized, however, that once this particular intelligence reached its final destination, on the desk of Casey Jones, our mythical MiG Commander at Antung airfield, his credibility was likely to be tested. Casey, as the 'end-user' of such data was sure to be unimpressed. Encouraged nonetheless by Ron's willingness, the girls plied him with further questions. At the same time the endless political lectures continued. Interminable, mind-numbing discussions filled the hours. It was sometimes difficult for Ron to retain a respectful visage when confronted with such inanity. He was expected to sympathize with the downtrodden and starving workers in Australia and England whose flooded paddy-fields evoked no sympathy or help from callous capitalist bosses. His rebuttal of their fanciful stories generated angry reactions. The attempt to alter his values and loyalties was naive and in many respects quite juvenile. Lack of proper responses to their political pamphlets and Ron's unsatisfactory technical expositions begin to erode their friendship. Some of his military revelations were too bizarre even for these uninformed girls. He was severely warned. While Ron's reputation among the councilors was steadily deteriorating, he was enjoying unprecedented popularity with the guards as the cigarettes began working wonders. He was pronounced to be "Ding ho! and learned that the words "Nidi ding ho" meant "You are a good bloke!". Later he was appraised of the fact that "Nidi boo ho" had the reverse meaning. "Wadi" was substituted if one meant "I" and "Tadi" meant "That." Ron's store of useful words accumulated. All such benevolent attention resulted from the supply of cigarettes. Such was his Ding ho status that a sympathetic soldier even entered his cell one chilly night and covered him with an overcoat.



Russian Pilots At Antung — Ace Pilot Circled

Obviously, his future was in the hands of the interrogators as he was dependent on their good report for continued enrollment in this benevolent place. He was now 'skating on thin ice' and had already been threatened with expulsion. The specter of a return to the care of the North Korean military was spelled out. Continued failure to make progress engendered a final confrontation with the angry chief instructor. Such ingratitude and lack of perception had disappointed them and they were regretful that Ron had now condemned himself to the North Korean war environment. "Very sorry, you now go back Korea get punished!" With his reputation at an all-time low he was resoundingly denounced by his mentor as a "Super War Criminal." Unceremoniously packed up and dispatched to the center of the bridge he was signed for like a piece of merchandise. After a mere three weeks in 'neutral China', once again Ron Guthrie was owned by the North Koreans!

No doubt these callous army men have been told of my failings. As a totally uncooperative college 'drop out' I can expect no sympathy. They live up to all previously established standards of rough treatment and have a few additions to offer. In order to make the point quite clear about their attitude to course failures I am treated to a painful period of public humiliation. The truck drives to the center of Sinuiju. Here in the midday heat I am placed in the Village Square to be firmly tied to a chair and left for several hours on general display. This nasty development causes me much anger and discomfort, as I become the center of curiosity and ridicule for local citizens.

In front of Ron, on the edge of this public area, there was a high fence housing a pair of large gates. He had no idea what lay beyond, however an absurd idea occupied his mind. He managed to

visualize himself in the arena of a Roman amphitheater waiting tensely for the gates to open and allow fierce, hungry lions to charge at their helpless prey, tied to a chair. He had almost forgotten this fanciful notion when a bell chimed behind the wall. Gradually a shrill chattering sound emanating from the same area increased to a crescendo. The gates swung open. He just 'knew' his lions were about to bound forth! Suddenly there disgorged from behind those walls a charging 'pride of lions', in the form of a virtual avalanche of jubilant primary school children. Soon their attention was riveted on the absurd spectacle of a 'foreign devil' bound to a seat. Many stopped short, absorbed by this novel and entertaining discovery, their cries momentarily subdued. Others rushed forward and danced around the chair. Once these young predators grasped the significance of Ron's situation they enthusiastically complied with the guards' suggestions that they should spit on him and pull his nose. This game was happily played by increasing numbers of youngsters to the delight of a gathering crowd of adults, several of whom occasionally joined the ranks of nose pullers, possibly in celebration of their cultural notion that foreigners have big noses. Ron's major worry was the possibility of stone throwing. Inexplicably and mercifully this refinement did not develop and when his guards eventually tired of the proceedings he was released from the chair but still with hands tied. Everyone, including the guards, seemed to have been quite uplifted by the whole display of local superiority and triumph over the Foreign Devil. They continued to jeer at the Mi-gook.



Children At Play

There was no doubt as to the likely trend from here on as he faced an indefinite and probably lengthy period of incarceration. The comforts and peaceful life in the Re-education Center seemed like a distant and unreal dream. No wonder the Chinese had been perplexed at Ron's cavalier attitude towards their benevolence. His fears were well founded, for the next phase of imprisonment developed in a quite horrifying manner. Before he had time to obtain any stability after that humiliating ordeal he was swiftly and unceremoniously conveyed to his new quarters.

Chapter 9

Incarceration — Sinuiju And Pyongyang

Ron Meets Fellow Sufferers

During the short journey Ron was taunted by one of the guards who had sufficient English to permit his recital of the much-favored propaganda line: All American, come Korea to eat red apple and rape women!"

The truck passed through the gates of a brick-walled courtyard accommodating several ugly stone buildings with barred windows, apparently the local police headquarters and jail. Ron's spirits sank at the sight of this sinister establishment. What delights awaited him in this ghastly place? A most unpleasant looking police officer roughly ushered his unfortunate captive into the main passageway of a cell-block. As the heavy door clanged shut Ron felt a great surge of despair. This was supplemented by the onset of nausea as the warm polluted internal atmosphere took its toll. The stench of toilet and body odors was overpowering. A remarkable silence prevailed. Surely there were dozens of human beings incarcerated in this sinister establishment, the smells left no doubt. Yet there was not a sound, save an occasional muffled cough or splutter. He was untied and searched, and the precious water bottle was taken away. While this was going on he had a look around.

The hallway of this block had one small window to the outside, now covered in preparation for the night blackout. The other side of the passage had a number of grill doors at about chest height and above these ran a few lengthy barred windows. Ron was soon to become very familiar with the area behind one of these doors, his cell. This small room was about 20 feet long and eight feet wide, with a wooden floor and concrete walls. Just one small window, high in one corner was the token connection to the outside world. However this was also blacked out at night as a bright light dangling from the ceiling threw its irritating glare over the depressing scene 24 hours of every day. Beneath the window, a square hole in the floor served as the stinking toilet.

In this place of mental torture, 20 Asian men and boys sat in almost absolute motionless silence. Completely terrorized into obedience, these wretched prisoners in filthy rags, sat in two rows, backs to the door, with legs crossed, arms folded and heads and shoulders bowed as in contrition. Any accusation by the guards, true or false, was immediately followed by vicious disciplinary measures. Moving or speaking were particularly serious crimes. It was dangerous to draw attention to oneself in the slightest way as the guards sought outlets for their sadism. This dreadful regimen was in operation 17 hours per day. These poor wretches were enduring no ordinary imprisonment. In this ghastly place the human spirit was being subjected to a supreme test by an imaginative application of Asian penal servitude. Deprived of liberty, human dignity, health, cleanliness, adequate food and drink, companionship and many more requirements of the human spirit, they also had no indication of the likely duration of their misery.

Ron was now one of them!

I have to crouch to pass through the door. There is absolutely no reaction from the other inmates as I take my position in a space immediately adjacent to the stinking toilet. I learn in time that seniority

will eventually move me farther down the line as each newcomer does his introductory period alongside this revolting hole in the floor. With a feeling of absolute fear and horror, I adopt the position of 'living death' and steel myself into the discipline of silent, motionless conformity. How long can a man maintain this grotesque parody of living? The terrible regimen is simple. At 5am the contorted mass of bodies in uneasy rest on the floor responds collectively and instantly to a piercing whistle blast. Each individual virtually springs into his appointed place while adopting the established body shape. In seconds, all movement and all sound ceases. At daylight one man is ordered to climb onto the flimsy toilet lid and remove the skylight blackout panel. This is a cherished privilege as the activity and the glimpse of sky are precious. Several hours later a pitiful meal arrives. At the appointed moment the prisoners scramble into a seating circle and produce crude chopsticks from within their pathetic apparel. Each rapidly consumes his half bowl of millet, maize or kaoliang, the latter being made from sugar-cane tops. The utensils are gathered and the motionless regime is re-established.

At 5pm the final meal is consumed and at 10pm a sharp whistle scatters 20 bodies into a tangle on the floor. The lice now enjoy a social occasion as they move freely from host to host. Punishments for perceived, or contrived transgressions, are swift and brutal. On one occasion an innocent man accused of talking has his arm broken by a guard. For lesser infringements the guilty party is forced to stand with arms fully extended above his head until he collapses. The victim has to endure this torture without the slightest sign of sympathy or protest from any human being. All are completely controlled by terror and the fearful possibility of similar persecution. Visits to the toilet hole in the corner are allowed twice daily. Contact with other bodies during sleep ensures that a rapidly multiplying lice infestation adds to the torments. The desire to scratch and otherwise deal with this swarm of vermin is an endless temptation to that readily detectable breach of discipline, movement. The guards creep silently along the passageway. Prisoners are seated with backs to the door to ensure there is no warning of an approaching officer. The inhibition to any change of position is total. The hazard of dozing and falling sideways is a terrifying prospect, forever in mind. The tedious passage of time is a torture in itself, however there is endless scope for reflection. It is some small comfort for me to think that my mother and friends may believe my ability to survive in the wilds of North Korea to be better than average as a result of my years as a Boy Scout. At least I hope they will feel that way. It is difficult, nevertheless, to find any personal belief in this idea with regard to my present situation. Proficiency at living off the land is no help in Sinuiju jail.

The exercise of thinking back over life, particularly his service career, became the form of escape that possibly saved Ron from depression. Seeking solace in daydreaming, he became adept at transporting himself into past, generally happy, situations. Concentrating on these and some particular moments of triumph, he wiled away the endless hours. It was apparent that good fortune had accompanied Ron's daily existence in 26 years of life. He had only to review his RAAF career to bring to light a number of heart-warming triumphs: acceptance into the aircrew course, first solo, the graduation Wings Parade, that supreme reward of receiving the pilots' Wings. These were memories to support the human spirit! Then, there were the 'Close encounters of a frightening kind.' No doubt he had dipped deeply into his personal reservoir of Luck. One can siphon off just so much at a time. How long would it last? A break from extreme discomfort arrived once or twice weekly when six persons were taken outside briefly and allowed to run in pairs to a cold water tap to wash face and hands. These occasions were a valuable uplift to the spirit as lungs exhaled the fetid pollutant and expanded to fill with fresh outside air. Such precious moments also provided an opportunity for some de-lousing, however this was a losing battle as the creatures rapidly regained lost ground. During such excursions it was sometimes possible to achieve a few furtive snatches of conversation. On one of these visits Ron scooped up a handful of pebbles and managed to take them back into the

cell. These provided some diversion as he could feel their texture and with extreme care he could count them. It was important to be very wary, as this was a serious crime.

Mealtimes were brief but very special moments in the inmates' lives. On observing the ritual associated with these occasions, Ron began to see this prisoner group as something akin to a single organism possessed of an almost animal instinct, a special collective sensory perception which transcended the normal. The developed ability to act as one seemed to be equaled by an uncanny capacity for precognition. This was clearly evident during the crucial period, the lead up to the big event, mealtime. Long before Ron had any inkling of this meager offering, the prisoner group was alert, tense and making almost imperceptible head movements in the direction of the food supplier. Regularly, in total silence, this squad, or perhaps one should say this organism, would maintain its contagious tension for perhaps 10 minutes immediately prior to the arrival of food. They were never mistaken! At the climax, this disciplined entity would unwind like a tightly coiled spring and form a large circle with 'chopsticks' — probably twigs broken from bushes — at the ready.

Periodically prisoners would depart, to be immediately replaced by other unfortunates. As Ron's seniority increased, he eventually found himself close to the door where a better appreciation of guard proximity was possible. Coincidentally, he was positioned next to a Japanese who was prepared to run the terrible risk of whispered conversation. This was his only such experience while in the jail. They conversed in a mixture of English and Japanese, with some considerable difficulty as their conversational resources were limited by a mere smattering of each others' language and the absolute need to anticipate the approach of a guard. Probably because of his nationality, this Japanese citizen had been arrested while working as a traffic policeman in Pyongyang. In common with others in this jail he had not been tried, but had merely been incarcerated for an indefinite period. He believed the normal fate of inmates was to be taken away and shot or alternatively used as slave labor in the mines, an even worse fate! This prospect of eventual 'release' from Sinuiju did nothing for Ron's peace of mind. He felt that most of the prisoners must be existing without hope. While a great surge of despair overtook him on occasions, he could never completely abandon faith in eventual deliverance from this evil.

From this Japanese man he learned another startling fact. There were two white prisoners next door, "Two Mi-gook," he indicated the next cell. At a later date, after leaving the prison, Ron was to share many testing experiences with these two fellow sufferers, Major Tom Harrison USAF, and Captain Tony Farrar-Hockley of the British Gloucestershire Regiment. Tom was enduring his purgatory with the added terrible burden of a recently amputated and infected leg. Learning later of this incredibly brave man's courage was a humbling experience. Tony, an inveterate escape artist, was tasting the bitter fruits of his fourth failed attempt. At the time of their separation by the prison wall, they remained unaware of Ron's existence. After what must have been about three weeks, a very long three weeks indeed, almost unbelievably, Ron's luck suddenly changed. His current ordeal came to an abrupt end — a surprising and gratifying event.

One morning, as the eating bowls were gathered, a guard approaches me with what were probably his only words of English. They were the most beautiful words I had heard in a long time, 'Come, you go!' As I stepped into the corridor a sense of elation gripped me and I impulsively and very dangerously did something foolish. For the sake of any English speaking prisoners, and as a boost to my own spirits I sang out loudly, 'Ron Guthrie, Australian, leaving this chamber of horrors!' Miraculously the guards did nothing. Perhaps, as they were supposed to deliver me to some other place, they felt I was no longer their problem. It was with some additional relief that I received my water bag, which had been held since the first day. This was also a surprise as it was reasonable to

expect such a useful item to go the way of all of my other possessions.

While being escorted to a nearby truck, gorging himself on fresh air, Ron could not refrain from a last glance back at that evil abode, so recently his home among the forsaken. Those wretched souls he was leaving behind remained in his consciousness. This 'Legion of the lost', imprisoned for the merest trifle, probably on concocted evidence, without trial or knowledge of sentence, terrorized and enslaved, they were without hope. He hastened past a line of pathetic creatures, bowed and sorrowful, secured together with wire. They stumbled towards the cells, to their appointment with purgatory. On passing a tall pole in the courtyard Ron paused to stare thoughtfully at the flag of The "Peoples Democratic Republic of Korea" fluttering its proud proclamation to all. The guard prodded Ron towards a vehicle.

I am hustled into the truck, which promptly jerks into motion. Two guards now manhandle me roughly. They force my hands behind my neck and secure my wrists. The wires are now passed around my waist and my legs are pulled back forcibly with my ankles bound into this position. The truck grinds to a stop. In this trussed-up state I am unceremoniously dumped on the pavement at a street corner amid bustling pedestrians. This is my second dose of 'city-center humiliation' and it is not easy to take. Passing civilians, especially children, poke, kick and spit on me. Some use sticks to beat and poke my body. In a fit of utter despair and frustration I curse them all!

After at least an hour of this torture, the ordeal finally ended as Ron was jerked to his feet. In his exhausted and angry state he was at last given some relief when the bonds of the extremely uncomfortable truss were removed. Briefly he massaged legs and arms but almost immediately was restored to the normal hands-behind-the-back configuration. Prodded by guards, Ron was then unceremoniously marched along a route which led to a military base about five miles east of Sinuiju. He stumbled off through the afternoon crowds, again subjected to fist shaking and angry jeers. On the journey, this observant pilot studied with interest a number of heavy anti-aircraft guns accompanied by their radar trailers supporting dish antennae. These were manned by Europeans, possibly both men and women, certainly of non-Asian appearance. Ron assumed them to be Russians. They were dressed in civilian clothes, no doubt posing as volunteers.



Yakovlev-9 Russian Fighter

There were also a few Yak-9 aircraft camouflaged in reinforced pens. Ron could not help staring intently and he wondered at the nonchalance of the guards who seemed unconcerned at their prisoner's obvious concentration on these sensitive installations. They turned into a side road and passed through a boom gate as a sentry waved them on. Clearly this was a substantial military installation, instantly identifiable as an airfield with numerous camouflaged administrative buildings adjacent to noisy workshops. Ron's professional interest was cut short by the next downturn in his fortunes. To his anger and disgust he was deposited in a hole in the ground, his lodgings for the night! At least his bonds had been removed. The hole was deep and the ladder was taken away. Being accustomed to sleeping rough, Ron managed to endure this maltreatment and in spite of the cold moist air he dozed occasionally throughout the long night while sprawled on the dirt floor of this unsanitary pit.

In the morning I am brought to the surface, allowed to wash face and hands and they give me a reasonable breakfast. In spite of everything I begin to feel human again. After a while I am marched into an office where a number of senior Korean Air Force officers are waiting. One is so important looking he is probably the chief of the North Korean Air Force. He is a tall man of aristocratic bearing who speaks fairly good English. He demands information about our base and the Meteor. When I make no reply the General responds by smugly answering most of the questions himself. He obviously knows a great deal about us and is pleased to show off his knowledge. I am asked more detailed questions. I do not know many of the answers anyway and decline to reply to even the simplest queries. My refusal to answer is greeted immediately by attacks from one of the officers, some sort of intelligence chief no doubt. He strikes me hard on the head and upper body. Soon they grow tired of my lack of cooperation and I am hustled outside. The Intelligence officer barks orders to the guards. I stumble between two soldiers who propel me up a narrow path to a barren hillside and hand me a spade and a mattock. The English speaking guard quite nonchalantly orders me, Dig hole, dig grave! I am shocked as I realized fully what is about to happen. I simply refuse to cooperate and throw the spade down. I am struck brutally and fall to the ground. The chief guard then asks, You have last want? Want write letter? I recall our intelligence briefings and state that I have a wife and two children and my parents are divorced so I wish to write a couple of letters. The only truthful part of this is about my parents but it has the desired effect.

I am escorted back to an office and given a pen and some paper. As I start writing, the Intelligence chief re-enters the room and demands, You think again! You cooperate or die now! Our intelligence briefings assures us that at this stage we should divulge a little information, preferably creative. I begin to use my imagination. Some of the Meteor performance details I give are elementary and well known. Other information is quite phony and misleading. Some of the 'facts' are quite ridiculous but the General, who is now taking a great interest, is eventually satisfied. He remarks that the Meteor 'Must be bad aircraft.' By my efforts the Meteor is assigned a very 'Boo ho' status!

In spite of the apparent lack of knowledge about specific Meteor performance details the North Korean General was able to display most accurate information about Kimpo and 77 Squadron base in particular. Ron was shown a map of the base by the smug officer who proceeded to point out important areas such as ammunition storage depot, fuel supplies and all other sensitive points. Ron was shocked and alarmed. As a reward he was fed and allowed to sleep in the guard hut. This was a relief even though the bed was merely a bare floor. In the morning he was bundled onto a truck. He heard the word Pyongyang, so there was obviously quite a distance to go.

Pyongyang Interrogation Center

Another succession of terrible trials, inflicted upon the prisoners.

With much horn tooting and vigorous braking the driver negotiated a passage through the city streets. As each additional mile was put behind him Ron's sense of release from bondage gained strength. In spite of the inevitable apprehension about his captors' intentions he soon curled up on a bed of straw on the truck floor and joined the guards in what was probably his most recuperative sleep for weeks. They journeyed through the night and he availed himself of numerous opportunities for blissful oblivion. During waking moments Ron developed a new hobby, cracking lice eggs from the seams of his clothing — an endless task!

Suddenly, everyone was wakened by a jerky stop as the driver pulled off the highway and extinguished his lights. The surrounding hills were abruptly lit up by flares, dropping from UN reconnaissance aircraft. The flickering glow of these intrusive phosphorescent candles cast eerie shadows and dancing demons along the cliffs and valleys. Then, pandemonium among the Koreans and Chinese on the highway was accompanied by exploding bombs, an immense avalanche of gunfire and the roar of powerful Pratt and Whitneys, as B-26 night strafing bombers flashed overhead and like mythical griffins quickly vanished into the night. In a harrowing crescendo, the last visitor roared past, bestowing on the pathetic convoy his lethal gifts. Too late, red tracer bullets arcing in pursuit groped skywards from anti-aircraft guns along the highway, aimlessly barking their anger and frustration long after all engine sounds had faded. The results of the fliers' handiwork were all too plain and all too permanent. The road ahead was a chaotic shambles of burning vehicles. Explosions and screams rent the air. The flares, swaying gently below their small parachutes, flickered and expired one by one as they fell, permitting the scene of carnage to hide its terror and its shame in the darkness of the Korean night. Ron envied the freedom of those B-26 bomber pilots who were here in North Korea now, where he could almost reach out and touch them, but they would be home before daylight in their comfortable beds.



Douglas B-26 Bomber Cockpit

Mercifully, Ron's companions and vehicle were still intact and their driver, after laboriously extricating the truck from the melee, diverted from the Main Supply Route for safer passage via minor roads. The guards, now having regained some of their composure, spoke angrily among themselves. This renewed atmosphere of hostility added to their captive's feelings of physical and emotional discomfort. The going became rough. Between stops, the adventurous driver maintained a remarkable speed over ruts and potholes, bomb craters and half-repaired bridges. Soon Ron was covered with bruises from abrupt contact with the floor and sides of the vehicle while choking clouds of dust filled his lungs. Sometimes, progress was severely hampered by torrents of marching troops, their baggage transported by mules, ramshackle trucks and human pack bearers using 'A frames,' cluttering the roadway for miles. There was no traffic control.



Underwater Bridge Constructed By The Enemy

Ron's story continues:Occasional meals were available at what were possibly makeshift police stations along the route. At such times, the guards would order me down from the truck, *Horju, umsik muk oh.* 'I was generally given the same as the others and it was quite edible, except for the cold bean curd, which I could just force down. Flies were everywhere! Daylight travel was a spasmodic and tense experience. Every few miles Chinese sentries had been located on hilltops to warn about the approach of UN aircraft. A few shots fired into the air would generate a series of similar responses along the road. All vehicles would stop and if possible pull off to the side. Everyone would shout *Fiji Lay-lah*,"(aircraft coming) as they scattered into ditches. I was interested to note that squads of soldiers who braved the roadways during daylight carried their own crude personal camouflage. Each of these shabby and tattered men slung across his shoulder a bushy fir branch about 10 feet in length. At the cry *Fiji-Lay-lah*"the troops would scramble off the road in obvious alarm, erect their branches and produce an acceptable imitation of a fir tree forest. Peasant laborers struggled under 'A frame' carrying devices loaded to resemble consignments of hay for farming purposes. Beneath the camouflage, secured to the A frame were boxes of ammunition. As a pilot, I took quite a professional interest in these remarkable procedures.



Haystack On An A-Frame

When we go to ground I find that my guards still show a keen interest in me. They are taking no chances with a court martial. During daylight hours we spend much time hiding or abandoning our truck as F-51 Mustangs and F-80 jets display their skills. Busy flak gunners make plenty of noise, fortunately with little success it seems. One of our fighters passes so near to my ditch I feel that the pilot glances at me. Instinctively I wave, a truly forlorn gesture resulting from isolation and homesickness.

Rockets whooshed and exploded in a gigantic roar like a naval broadside, followed by the menacing rattle of the point fives. In an instant the 'friendlies' were gone, pursued by angry tracers arcing up from the guns. Damaged or burnt-out trucks littered the area. On the following night, several more trucks in the vicinity succumbed to UN air power among the usual noise and chaos. The bombers were admirably persistent and effective, however Ron's vehicle survived to complete the journey. In the early morning they disembarked at a village outside Pyongyang.

After a sparse meal and a brief waiting period, Ron was ordered by a police officer to accompany him in an escorted jeep which immediately jerked into gear and accelerated along a dusty road. As they bumped along, the forlorn prisoner wondered about the destination, the purpose, the likely reception. Would he now find companionship? Would this be a genuine POW camp with reasonable facilities? Ron made some calculations, this would be the first week in October. The air was becoming chilly, hopefully the new quarters would provide shelter and warmth.

The short journey brought them to a large Korean farm building on the edge of a village. On passing through large wooden gates manned by a North Korean soldier Ron guessed this was to be his new prison! The house was two rectangular buildings opposite one another, joined at the ends by high walls forming a courtyard which had a circular well at one end. The gates through building number one led into a tunnel-like entrance. The layout provided excellent security as all doors opened

internally. Ron was pushed into a dark and musty room with some straw and a few tattered mats on the floor. The smell was unmistakably animal and the place was rendered airless by a complete absence of windows. Nevertheless, at the moment of entering this untidy place, Ron experienced his most pleasant surprise since being captured. Lying on the floor was another prisoner, an American.

We had never met before but greeted one another like long lost comrades. It was a heart-warming moment! Hi! I'm Jack Henderson, USAF, are you one of our guys?"Yes, I guess you could say that, I'm Ron Guthrie RAAF, flying Meteors attached to your 4'th Fighter Wing!"The words came tumbling forth as we discussed family matters and recounted our details of service. Then we talked about our capture and imprisonment. A bond quickly developed.



Jack Henderson Receives The Bronze Star Medal

This freckled-faced young lieutenant had been shot down by flak while flying an F-80 jet fighter at about the same time as Ron had his unfortunate MiG encounter. While they were both obviously pilots in their flying suits, the thick beards were something of an incongruity. However, the customary warm comradeship among airmen created a bond as their stories unfolded. They talked enthusiastically for hours. The pleasure of such unburdening and the relief from isolation provided an enormous lift to severely oppressed spirits. Eventually they slept!

Imagine their pleasure when two more prisoners, Major Tom Harrison of the USAF and Captain Tony Farrar-Hockley of the Gloucestershire Regiment joined them the next day. They enjoyed instant comradeship and Tony asked Ron "Would you be the Horju from Sinuiju jail, the one who called out that he was leaving the Chamber of Horrors?" "None other!" The friendship was strengthened as they recalled those ghastly weeks, but managed nevertheless, to have a few laughs about those dreadful recollections.



Captain Farrar-Hockley, MC

One factor that put a damper on things was the concern they felt for Tom. His recently and inexpertly amputated leg was infected and perpetually troublesome. The thought of Tom having endured Sinuiju was appalling. His misfortunes and maltreatment since injuring himself during bale-out from his fighter made a terrible story.



Colonel Tom Harrison And Ron In America

Tom told us the following disturbing story: "My F-80 was hacked by flak over Chinju rail yards. The ejection-seat failed and I jumped. My right leg was hit by the tail-plane and smashed up quite a bit. I managed to open the 'chute but the next thing I recall was being in the hands of the North

Korean Army. They didn't like me! They threw me into a hole and gave me nothing, not even water. After five days, when I was almost finished, the Chinese found out. They figured I was worth saving as I held a bit of rank and might be useful so they took me to a dump they called a hospital. A Chinese, who I hope was a doctor, hacked off my leg. One hour afterward I had visitors, a team of interrogators. They demanded all the most sensitive military stuff and thought that in my weakened condition I would cough up. They kept it up for nine hours until I passed out. They were not pleased with my answers so I was left without medical treatment, not even a dressing. After a month of this the leg was badly infected. They wanted me to write letters home calling for an end to the war. They didn't get the letters so I didn't get any treatment!"

Ron, Tony, and Jack helped Tom where possible. This outstandingly brave man got along remarkably well with the aid of makeshift crutches and his indomitable spirit.

Tony Farrar-Hockley, as Adjutant of the Glosters was captured along with the remainder of his regiment at the Imjin River in April 1951. He had been through a rough time including four escapes and, of course, his stay in Sinuiju jail. An inveterate evader, Tony was nevertheless conscious of the need to look after Tom for whom escape was impossible. Tony's escape efforts were inspiring stories filled with tension and disappointments of great magnitude. On one bold attempt, after much bluff and initiative, he came virtually within sight of his goal only to fall into the hands of vicious opponents who, as always, took brutal revenge.

Farrar-Hockley told his companions in some detail, of the stand by the 29th Infantry Brigade at the Imjin River. The section of the UN line where this battle took place was defended primarily by British forces of the 29th Infantry Brigade which consisted of three British and one Belgian infantry battalions supported by tanks and artillery. Despite facing a numerically superior enemy, 29th Infantry Brigade held its positions for 3 days.

Ron and his companions were later to learn more about this valiant action: **Though minor in scale, the battle's ferocity caught the imagination of the world, especially the fate of the 1st Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment which was outnumbered and eventually surrounded by Chinese forces on Hill 235, a feature that became known as Gloster Hill. The stand of the Gloucestershire battalion together with other actions of 29th Brigade in the Battle of the Imjin River have become an important part of British military history and tradition**

When the units of 29th Infantry Brigade were ultimately forced to fall back, their actions in the Battle of the Imjin River together with those of other UN forces, for example in the Battle Of Kapyong (Australian and Canadian forces), had blunted the impetus of the Chinese offensive and allowed UN forces to retreat to prepared defensive positions north of Seoul, where the Chinese were halted.

This was not a POW camp. They had arrived at an important Interrogation center. It seemed the North Korean Army had thoughtfully staffed this establishment with a select bunch of sadistic fanatics. One would not require a university degree to see them as a group suffering individually and perhaps collectively from severe lack of self-esteem. They fairly screamed 'inferiority complex.' Obviously the captives, being 'Westerners,' were envied and hated as representatives of the world of plenty, the world of opportunity, of law and order and, in fact, of all things which they themselves coveted so greatly. The prisoners' presence, in fact their very existence, angered the Koreans. The captives were at the mercy of these sadists who reveled in this power. The official line held that the prisoners were all 'Warmongers and criminals.' As beneficiaries of the 'Lenient Policy,' allowing

them to live, they should be grateful.

The Commanding Officer, a lieutenant-colonel who spoke some English, assessed them as the worst category of war-criminals who, consequently, could not expect normal POW treatment. The supply of any food at all would be conditional on their working to the satisfaction of the guards, in other words beyond physical capabilities. "War criminal, no work, no eat," was one facet of their simple philosophy. Hard labor, constructing air-raid shelters for the officers, digging and removing earth and rocks, carrying water, timber and bricks long distances uphill from the village, these and other back-breaking tasks filled their days. If the air-raid shelter was completed in good time they were promised better rations. They build quickly but sabotaged the jobs. Their construction collapsed and the deal was off, no increased rations were forthcoming. In the evenings, such delights as bailing out the officers' toilet hole was an added attraction. Sometimes, they were prevented from cleaning up after this disgusting chore which had to be accomplished using a small ladle and a leaky bucket.

In repayment for this, those who worked extremely hard and endured the bashing were grudgingly provided with minimal food of poor nutritional value, boiled millet and extremely thin 'soup.' Tom, as a non-contributor to the daily work, and as a general non co-operator, was refused all food. They even threatened to deprive him of water. Attempts by the others to supply Tom with a proportion of their own meager rations were thwarted by vigilant guards whenever possible. This debilitating regime sapped the prisoners' strength and as they grew weaker, Tom, in spite of his remarkable constitution, also began to fade. Every morsel of edible matter was sought and eagerly consumed. They had to steal to survive. When working with the animals it was sometimes possible to filch a turnip-type vegetable, and this small item while unpalatable in the raw, did provide nourishment, particularly for Tom.

Ron describes a particularly vicious guard: Among our main tormentors was the officer who dealt mainly with us. We called him the Young Major, a conscientious sadist who enjoyed his job. He hated us bitterly and showed his spite at every opportunity. Apart from his specialty, latrine duty, he made consistent attacks against our human rights. One of the assistant persecutors was a particularly malicious young Korean guard who also took delight in making life difficult. We called him Horju as he so frequently used this name when addressing me in his loud and aggressive manner. This callous youth deprived us of our makeshift bedding, a few layers of hay which had been providing a small measure of protection from the cold hard floor. He sometimes deliberately prevented essential visits to the toilet, with embarrassing results. In his desperate need to display power, his sense of inferiority was plain to all. We loathed his pimply countenance and held him in utter contempt.

Interrogation took its toll. Quite puerile and inane attempts at converting these formidable men to the 'cause' were pathetically ineffectual. They earned no good reports! They were continually assured "You don't understand the problem, Comrade!" Failures in the area of military intelligence particularly infuriated the masters. In most cases the information requested was far beyond the level of service or political knowledge of the captives. "What are your most secret codes? How do they work? What are the duties of the general in charge of your airforce? Give us the full organization and methods of training your intelligence officers?" Obviously they had no answers, yet these unscrupulous despots mindlessly persevered and draconian penalties were freely assigned. Ron was poor at interrogations due to his Australian accent, and the Koreans had to sometimes use Jack Henderson to interpret. This proved to be a useful means of non-cooperation.

On two occasions they had brief contact with another prisoner who was so ill he resembled a walking skeleton. This poor young soldier had been systematically starved. In desperation, he had eventually

pretended to cooperate by supplying the interrogators with some information. He begged the others to do likewise. Speaking in the voice of an old man he told them of a companion who had died of starvation. "Don't resist them, they will slowly kill you!" His interrogator snapped at him, "Waste of time speaking with them!" and quickly took him away. Unfortunately, the poor wretch was right. He had survived thus far but realized his days were numbered. Any realistic appraisal of these starvation tactics must result in a similar conclusion, they will slowly kill you. The process of self-consummation was already in progress and would soon manifest as brittle bones, abscessing teeth and night blindness. As metabolism collapsed, dysentery, beriberi and a multitude of other diseases must inevitably follow.

The weather was deteriorating and clearly announcing the approach of winter. Already the nights were frigid in their unheated abode and the men were inadequately clad. Jack had nothing more than a thin nylon summer flying suit and threadbare underclothes, while Ron's strong cotton flying suit, although more substantial, could by no means cope with the decreasing temperature. They searched daily for any scraps of fabric which might reinforce the flimsy garments, taking care to hide such clandestine foraging from the likes of Horju. Their plight could be readily contrasted with that of the enemy soldiers, now warmly dressed in recently issued padded garments, a clear admission of the need. Yet, as non cooperatives the unfortunate prisoners did not receive anything to wear and there was nothing in prospect. Biting winds and freezing drizzle were already adding to the daily burdens. The Korean winter, that uncompromising enemy, could be expected to exhibit a Siberian quality and the thought filled them with dread. Obviously the world would soon be cloaked in a thick white shroud, swept by winds that cut like a knife. It became evident that the sum total of these circumstances would condemn the four men as soon as the cold developed in earnest. Escape seemed to be the only chance!

Tony, as our escape expert, tells us his plan. We trust him and agree, "If we could reach the coast, it's about 35 miles, we could get a boat and sail down the coast to Ch'o-do." This is an island about five miles off the mid-West Coast of North Korea. Remarkably, this piece of enemy property is firmly in United Nations hands, evidence of our supremacy in naval and air power. This will require a sea voyage of about 35 miles. Tony estimates the total escape route of approximately 70 miles, "Could probably be accomplished in five or six days." We are enthusiastic but the most worrying problem is the certain effect on poor Tom. We will have to leave him to the fury of the Koreans as he can't travel on crutches! Tom is positive we should go. In fact, as senior officer he makes it an order, "You must forget about me if you feel there is a chance of a getaway!" Tom is the most courageous and dutiful man. Tony feels that escape is essential; "Tom, we've decided to go tonight, no point in putting it off now the decision has been made!"

Tony had come by a few 'tools.' The collective evidence of his felonies amounted to a Schick razor blade, an old screwdriver and a rusty table knife. Unearthing his hidden collection of pitiful implements he explained "I'll try to cut a hole through the back wall of the room. I think it's constructed of nothing more substantial than straw-bonded clay reinforced with wattles, certainly hope so anyway." Wattles were thin slivers of timber from a prolific type of locally grown tree. On that particular night, unfortunately, the rather attentive guard Horju was on patrol just a few yards from the proposed place of penetration. Tony whispered his fears, "I'm not risking anything while he's outside, the slightest noise will bring him in here."

Eventually a somewhat less diligent sentry replaced this deputy-chief tormentor. Relieved, Tony began his tedious task while the others lay quietly under their mats, listening intently for any unusual activity among the Koreans, whose movements and conversations were generally audible. Their own

communications were subdued to the lowest level of murmuring. The need to eliminate noise and the restrictions imposed by primitive equipment resulted in excruciatingly slow progress. Finally Tony whispered his disappointing decision, "No more tonight! It'll take hours yet, so I better leave it now while my vandalism isn't too noticeable." In fact, in the full light of morning the desecration was all too obvious! Thoroughly alarmed by the vulnerability of Tony's handiwork they spent a tense and worrying day. The gaping, roughly manhole-sized excavation extending half way through the clay was impossible to disguise and they had no means of covering it. The wattles were laid bare! The best they could do was to have Tom spend the day propped up against the wall near the disfigured patch, a rather ineffectual camouflage. "I'll just lie here and lean my crutch across the hole." There was nothing else available. In trepidation Ron held his breath when the guard brought in their bowls of millet. The mutilation was clearly shouting at him, but miraculously he failed to notice. This was a good omen with respect to luck, however they were obviously going to need many repeat prescriptions of this commodity if the escape was to succeed.

During the following night Tony started early, as soon as Horju had completed his guard duty. In spite of the frigid atmosphere of the dormitory, he worked up a sweat while gnawing and chipping his way through layers of wattles and clay. After some slow progress, a further discouraging impediment was encountered. Again they listened to Tony's whispering, "Unfortunately I've encountered a solid post about three inches wide, buried among the wattles. This is going to take a lot more work."

Slight noises were heard as Tony worked harder and in our anxious state these seemed to echo through the building. Our attention switched from worrying about the digging sounds to listening for any sign of alarm from our jailers. The job was taking a great length of time and tension increased as we anxiously whispered our questions to Tony. Surely we were not going to be caught crawling through the hole right on daylight! After more concerted digging and cutting Tony's hand eventually emerged to freedom. "I'm through!" he hissed, greatly relieved, as he gradually increased the aperture to minimum requirements. The escape hole was ready! At this dramatic stage Ron was asleep but soon joined the others in a moment of silent celebration. Tony regretted the length of time taken to break out but concluded, "We still have several hours of darkness. We should be able to put a few important miles behind us."

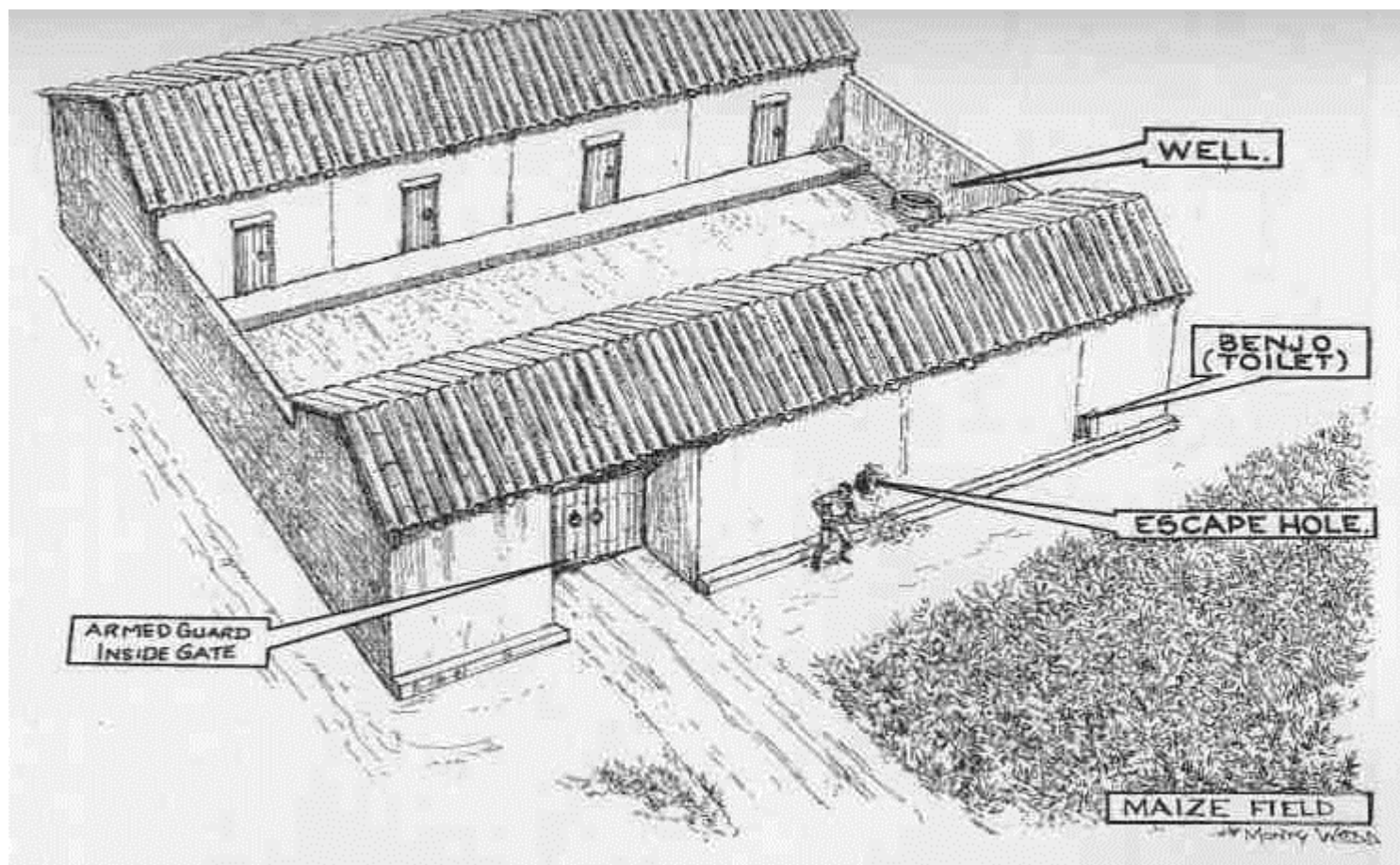
There was a moment of anguish as they took leave of Tom, with a final glance at his leg, a surge of guilt at abandonment of this heroic friend. He was cheerful and immensely brave as always, "Best of luck, don't worry about me." They assured Tom that if captured all would assert, "You knew nothing about our intention to escape, you were asleep the whole time." Tom was to stick to this story. Tony crawled out first gently lowering himself onto a wide ledge and to his consternation found himself on a shelf covered with bottles, an old stove and other items, all of which Tony quietly shifted.

***After Tony was out it was Ron's turn:**I followed next, just managing to squeeze through the narrow hole. When halfway through I lost my balance and as one arm swept the ledge for support I knocked a bottle. It fell to the track several feet below. A loud clang echoed through the building! In alarm I quickly pulled back and lay absolutely still in our room, hardly daring to breathe. One worrying question was on all of our minds. Had the guard heard? Suddenly, from just outside there came the familiar scraping noise of a bolt being withdrawn in the wooden gates. The horrible realization gripped us all. The sentry was about to enter. The alarm was about to be sounded. Soon the place would be alive with infuriated Koreans screaming and hitting us.*

Nothing happened for some moments. Ron was holding his breath. Mercifully, the next sound was

that of the bolt clanging back to its locked position. After a few tense seconds they were treated to yet another sound from the guard. He cleared his throat raucously and spat. The disgusting noise was, on this occasion, quite uplifting. The guard had changed his mind! A great feeling of relief swept over Ron as he lay silently for several minutes regaining some degree of composure. During the crisis Tony, in extreme apprehension, had taken refuge huddled up against a sleeping ox in a nearby field.

After about 10 minutes of absolute silence he crept back to the escape hole and called the others in a whisper. This time Ron worked his way through the aperture without mishap. Jack handed out his water bag and carefully followed through the narrow hole, wriggling and squirming with Ron's assistance. The air was cold but the sensation of freedom was invigorating. They conversed in staccato whispers like excited schoolboys. "Quickly! Over here!" They hid among stacks of corn stalks and waited apprehensively while Tony crept away to obtain warm garments he was determined to borrow from their hosts. This had been a sensational find. "We must get these, particularly for you Jack. You'll never survive in that flimsy nylon flying suit." Tony quietly crawled through a hole in the courtyard wall. There, sure enough, were the padded jacket and a pair of thick trousers where he has seen them when planning the escape. Laden with these precious items he returned, and Jack gratefully donned both life-saving garments. The words "thank you" could not properly express his gratitude. Tony put on a black raincoat discarded by Jack. Ron's strong cotton pilot's flying overall, while not very suitable, would have to suffice. They were now dressed for the freedom run. No alarm had sounded. After almost a month in this particular hell they had escaped from the infamous Pyongyang Interrogation Center! They were free!



Escape From Interrogation Center

Chapter 10

Escape At Last

A Brief Taste Of Freedom

Among the immediate thoughts and worries, Tom's situation was prominent. It was impossible to discard the feelings of guilt as they abandoned that sturdy, suffering soul to the inevitable consequences of their flight, the demonic temper of the Young Major.

Carefully they picked their way through the rough fields, skirting around villages and heading in a generally westerly direction. The initial goal was a hilltop several miles from the prison. The actual mileage, taking into consideration the diversions, climbs and descents, would be almost double the apparent distance. Intelligence officers had briefed them on the problems of escape in North Korea and had stressed the need to avoid traveling during the day. Their appearance, particularly their height, would quickly give them away. They could not hope to fit in with the local population. It was important to gain the objective, that wooded hilltop, while it was still dark. They stumbled on through the night.

They clawed their way up rocky inclines and slithered down frosty embankments. Rough paddy fields and little streams occasionally barred the way. Some water crossings were achieved by a careful balancing act over slippery logs or stepping-stones. Frequent conferences determined the next move. They were largely in Tony's hands in this respect, as his years of soldiering and familiarity with the local country was a great boon. He had also made four previous escape attempts with some initial degree of success. "If we keep up this pace we should make it to the top of that hill before dawn." Their trust in Tony's nimble and adaptable mind was total and they hoped the reverse was true. It was essential they should perform as a team.

They purloined a few diacons from garden fields and gratefully munched these distasteful turnip or radish-like vegetables in sure knowledge their strength was about to be placed under extreme test. Wearily they stumbled the last few yards through undergrowth, to greet the dawn securely ensconced in a hilltop hideaway. From this well-chosen vantage-point they enjoyed a crystal-clear view of the valley ahead and its surrounding heights. Under the first rays of a brilliant sun the Taedong River and its fertile flood-plain lay splendidly displayed for inspection. The next night's travel plan was mapped out and obstacles surrounding the inviting pathways were assessed. Again, this would obviously be a night of detouring around paddy fields, villages and terraced hillsides. After a few minutes of careful surveying Tony pointed his finger, "We should make the top of that ridge by tomorrow morning. Maybe we'll see the ocean. Let's hope so, anyway!" With these encouraging sentiments, they settled down for the day. Well concealed and fairly comfortable on a bed of brown and yellow leaves, they slept and regained some strength.

At dusk the scene ahead was surveyed as they scrambled down the rugged hillside. In spite of being preoccupied with escape they could not refrain from remarking on the pitiful devastation of the countryside. Typically, the trees had been generally stripped by the peasants for their urgent needs. Elsewhere, vast areas had been cleared of trees and ground cover, frequently by the doubly wasteful process of burning, a virtual massacre of nature's bounty. The slopes lay gashed with gully erosion in all directions. Primitive farming methods with no thought to the long term were in evidence around each populated center. But there were few alternatives in this harsh land of such climatic extremes.

The travelers agreed, "You can hardly blame them."

The next mountain range objective seems dauntingly distant and the escapees' capacity for negotiating this terrain is still in question. Undoubtedly they are undernourished and weak, yet the prospect of salvation drives them on! At the foot of the hill are a number of chestnut trees which they examine eagerly. Regrettably, these are already stripped. Suppressing this disappointment they move on, again detouring around rice fields and villages. The moon, occasionally peeping through patchy cloud, reveals outlines of hills with scattered hamlets and isolated huts along the way. Eventually a deep stream bars the pathway so they proceed along the bank looking for a crossing. The hazards of wet clothes, with the inevitability of freezing at the onset of early morning frost, steers them away from any thought of swimming or wading.

Ron adds to the dramatic story:

It was then we met our first human being since the start of this journey, a young civilian man who paused and stared as we passed by. Alarmed by this sudden meeting, we hurried on until out of his sight. Quickly back this way, hissed Tony as we followed him at a smart jog. We ran back a short distance, changed direction and took an unused path leading into some good bush cover. As we expected, the young man soon returned. He came slowly, searching carefully from side to side. We were well hidden and stayed absolutely still as he passed. After half an hour of tension and worry we quietly came out of the bushes, This way! Let's go!

Picking our way across small creeks and marshy ground, we were moving slowly along a raised paddy wall in single file with Tony in the lead when the moon in all its brilliance came out from behind a cloud. Suddenly feeling exposed we hurried towards lower ground. Unfortunately, we must have been sky-lined in the moonlight because seconds later we were startled by a sharp command, 'Cho!' and the sound of a rifle bolt being pushed home and locked. Instantly we were shocked at the sight of a sentry in front of us, clearly in view about 30 yards ahead. He was covering us with his rifle at the shoulder. Mortified by this dreadful sight, we froze. We were caught! Taking cover, we took stock of the situation. This had been a dreadful setback. Tony decided on the only sensible course of action. He would give himself up! However, exhibiting quick wits as always and realizing Jack and I were a few yards behind he urgently signaled us to duck down and hide. I grabbed Jack by the waist and slid to the ground by the paddy wall. In the meantime, Tony walked slowly towards the guard speaking continuously, using a normal tone of voice making imaginary Russian sounding phrases in order to distract his attention. This ploy worked!

As Tony was marched off by the Korean soldier Jack and I crouched down and backtracked cautiously but with all possible haste. Gripped by a feeling of despair we decided, We better skirt well away from this area. There might be more of them around. Though time consuming, this seemed the only prudent course. I remarked to Jack, You know this is the fifth time poor Tony has been recaptured after escaping from the North Koreans. Our concern for Tony, who would probably soon be in the hands of the thoroughly enraged Young Major, was mixed with worry at our own problems. We had lost our leader who had the whole plan in mind and knew about the countryside. The going will be even tougher from here on.

A maze of irrigation canal obstructions caused difficulty in remaining clear of water and mud. In consequence, the pattern of travel worsened and the prospect of reaching the hilltop before daylight faded. Soon, pre-dawn activity around the villages and paddys gave reminders to the fugitives of their dangerous degree of exposure. Sensitive to the likelihood of further close encounters they took

refuge in a clump of bushes and settled down for the day. As the morning mist cleared and they examined this hideout, it obviously left much to be desired, but there had been little else available. The brownish-yellow slopes wore a mantle of low shrubs interspersed among occasional broad-leaved trees, attractive enough but providing little cover. Through the peace of the early morning, the two airmen rested their exhausted bodies. In mid afternoon, dozing was interrupted by disturbing sounds. "There's someone coming!" Peeping out from the foliage Ron was dismayed to observe an elderly Korean peasant gathering firewood close to the hideout. He was moving directly towards the bushy outcrop obviously in anticipation of obtaining more sticks. They froze in alarm! When about 15 feet away the Korean saw them, stopped, dropped his bundle and just stood and stared. They certainly must have presented a grotesque sight with their unkempt beards and filthy tattered clothes. The old man looked frightened, perhaps he was about to flee and raise the alarm. Taking the only course possible Ron stood up, attempted a welcoming smile and assured him he was among friends. Ron's Japanese language lessons came to the rescue, "Tomodachi ne!"

To our great relief the kindly old man came to us. Dropping down into a squat he began to speak calmly in Korean. The next 15 minutes were spent in gradual communication of our identity and our needs. The usual mixture of languages, hand signs and facial expressions seemed to work. He became excited and pointed vigorously as he warned us of soldiers in the village about a mile away. Asking us to stay where we were he promised to return with food and directions. We decided to wait as the old man scuttled off down the path towards his house. Our general feeling was that he could be trusted, but we watched his direction of travel intently. If he heads for that village, we're off!" was Jack's verdict. I was in complete agreement. Happily, we saw the old peasant go straight to his little thatched cottage.



Kindly Korean Couple

The elderly Korean was as good as his word. Soon we were relieved to observe his ambling return up the hill. He carried a small bag. The generous old peasant took pleasure in presenting his gifts, squatting as he regaled us in high-pitched excited Korean. His expansive smile revealed almost toothless gums as he laid before us two eggs, some tobacco, a small piece of paper and two matches. To him this was quite a sacrifice, to us a virtual treasure-trove! Thanks were expressed warmly, Dooomo arigatoo gozaimasu." With his Japanese response Doo itashimashta!" and a final Sayonara" he bowed his way out of the enclosure. The old man, using expressive hand signals and body language

as he departed, advised us to move on immediately. Obviously it was important we should not be apprehended near his home with those items in hand. With this in mind we risked a brief excursion to another secluded bushy area. The prospect of a cooked meal inspired a further risky move. Jack you get a fire going, not too much smoke, and I'll clay-pack the eggs. 'This was a technique I had learned as a scout. Each egg soon became the size of a large orange. When the ashes were plentiful and red-hot, these constructions were placed among the hottest coals and we settled down in eager anticipation. Regrettably, just as they were ready for the feast Jack's 'orange' exploded with a loud pop and pieces of dried clay and egg flew everywhere. The remnants of this culinary disaster were painstakingly salvaged. Find every bit now! This is probably the best meal we're going to get!' It was worth the effort, as this was in fact the last for some days.

While waiting for darkness, we hid in a haystack. In this safe place and with the worst hunger pains satisfied, we talked about the meeting with our old Korean friend. This heart-warming incident had done a little towards restoring our faith in the 'ordinary citizen,' something we had not felt during our time in North Korea. When this mood had held us long enough, we returned to our 'fear and caution.' Perhaps this meeting would be the last act of kindness we would find.

As shadows lengthened, the sky clouded over and night came on hastily. Leaving the comfortable haystack with some reluctance the two fugitives again braved the hazards of the paddy fields and the possibility of recapture. Occasional drizzle compounded the discomforts and the problems of effective navigation. As the light rain cleared, reasonable progress was possible through a thicket of trees and shrubs on a hillside. Suddenly the stillness of the night was rent by a loud animal noise, a great flurry of flapping activity at Ron's feet. Startled, he reared up in fright! He had trodden on a dozing pheasant! The effects of this encounter took quite a toll on Ron's system. He sat on a rock, with head lowered and had to admit, "My nerves are shattered. In my pre-Korean days I would have laughed at the pheasant. I guess we're both tired and strained."

A vague brightening of the sky as the clouds thinned, emphasized the need to keep moving. Continuing along the ridge at the onset of daylight they practically stumbled into a row of disused military fortifications. In the trenches were dozens of paper leaflets, possibly dropped there earlier in the war in some attempt at propaganda. Ron did not bother to read these but as they were dry decided to use them to insulate his clothing by lining the arms and legs of his flying suit with handfuls of the paper. This served to keep him warmer and the padding made for comfort when lying down. Weak from exertion and hunger, they remained there for the day. In fact, it was obvious they were failing and could only expect to do a couple more days at this rate without substantial food. After nightfall, travel was slower.

During a moment of rest they were alerted and somewhat alarmed by a distant rhythmical clicking sound that grew louder as the source of the noise approached. The escapees securely hid themselves under a clump of bushes, intent on considering this disturbing mystery. As the noise slowly increased, certain distracting overtones were added to the clicking sounds. There was something frightening and almost sinister in the air. Soon it became clear they were hearing a steady accompanying sound, a deep and consistently repetitive beat. Then it was obvious, tramp, tramp, tramp thousands of marching feet bearing down on their hideout. Grateful for the cloud-covered darkness as the moon disappeared they froze in apprehension. To the amazed and fascinated eyes of the tense fugitives there was then presented the spectacle of a Chinese army on the move. For perhaps three-quarters of an hour, a procession of drab solemn-looking troops filed past, no more than 20 feet away. The source of the clicking was the beating together of two sticks by a 'rhythm-keeper.' Each squad had its own stick-clicker as well as its own large cooking pot slung on a pole

between two soldiers. Every one of these men marched briskly in a single-file formation through the occasionally moonlit environs, carrying a rifle or burp gun and two bandoleers crossed over the chest. The direction of march was south, reinforcements for the front line, no doubt. Such was the length of the column, Ron and Jack began to wonder if they would be in hiding all night. No doubt the Chinese would march until first light and then hide from attacking planes throughout the day. This disturbing event added considerably to the state of tension as it seemed likely that military personnel would be well represented in this enemy-infested area. Having given the marching soldiers plenty of time to leave the neighborhood they wriggled out of the bushes. With the approach of daylight and having identified a suitably high hill, they decided on a maximum effort towards this next day's hiding-place.

When the two fugitives did eventually stagger the last few paces to the top of that hill, they were greeted by a wonderful view — the west coast of North Korea. Morale soared as they both enthusiastically agreed, "We're going to make it." The vast expanse of the Yellow Sea, rippling in early-morning shadows, stretched away to the horizon. Directly down from the hill was a bay or harbor extending several miles in width. Between the headlands a small island shared the placid waters with several fishing boats. These vessels were small enough for the escapees' purposes, square rigged with just one sail. It was an inspiring sight! They decided: "Tonight, one of those boats is going to be ours!" Excitedly discussing the prospect of imminent deliverance, the lift to their spirits was like a magic tonic.

We were too excited and concerned about what was going on in the harbor to actually sleep much during that morning. Fatigue and depression seemed to fall from our shoulders at such a wonderful sight. The near shoreline, with its many reed beds and small inlets was obviously a mooring area for boats. We became interested in a small sailing vessel as it approached the shore and tied up to an isolated pier. We'll go for that one."Among the many hazards in our plan of action was the need to sail through the harbor and out to sea before daybreak. This would require much daylight walking, as we needed to be in our borrowed sailboat shortly after last light. We checked on each others' knowledge of sailing and were relieved to learn that we both had some experience with small boats. We were going to need it!

In trepidation they started the risky daylight journey from the secluded hilltop hideout in mid-afternoon. By carefully skirting around villages and keeping a consistent watch for pedestrians and farm coolies good progress was possible while remaining substantially undetected. There were moments of peril when paddy workers straightened up and stared. But they invariably lost interest. The two wary fugitives crept down to the harbor shore just on dusk. Fortunately this unattractive area of reed beds was deserted and it was possible to proceed unhampered along the water's edge in the likely direction of the fishing boat. The ship's stubby mast protruding from an isolated inlet proved to be a most useful marker and they soon reached this goal. Concealed in close proximity, lying in bushes, Ron and Jack watched for activity at the small landing place. Fortunately, the fisherman was there on his own, cleaning up the vessel. Presently, he came ashore with his arms full of nets and ambled away. The boat was theirs! Like the 'Pirates of Penzance,' 'with cat-like tread,' they felt their cautious way down to the water's edge. Examining this acquisition they found a typical little Korean fishing boat with one mast. It was rather small, perhaps 15 feet long and smelt abominably of fish and prawn matter, however, "It's now or never! Let's go!"



Korean Bay Boat

Without difficulty we cast off, Jack hoisted the sail and I sat at the blunt end holding a paddle which served as a rudder. A light offshore breeze slowly moved us in the right direction and soon we were slipping along nicely. With a feeling of elation we glanced back at the shoreline and exclaimed, We've escaped!

With the moon shrouded by cloud cover and no other sailing activity in evidence, passage of the little craft through the placid waters of the bay went unchallenged. The light wind sliding down from the hills filled the small square sail, producing a simple exercise in boat handling as Ron merely made slight adjustments to direction with gentle movements of the stern paddle. Jack anticipated, "It should take about two hours to get out to sea". The real sailing test would then begin. Confronted by the challenge of a sea journey, Ron and Jack took a closer look at their vessel. The question of seaworthiness occupied their minds. Although of sturdy construction, the boat was almost flat-bottomed and shallow. It handled as though there was very little keel and it definitely was not equipped with a centerboard. Ron and Jack began to doubt their new acquisition would be up to the task of transporting them to Ch'o-do as, on closer inspection, it looked like a vessel designed exclusively for local bay fishing! Within a couple of hours they would begin to find out. The primary accomplishment of obtaining a boat having been achieved, the matter of Ch'o-do began to occupy their minds.

Exactly where is this remarkable place? They know it is about five miles off the west coast and about 40 miles from their bay but there may be several other islands in the area and a mistake could be disastrous. A map would be handy! Is this important island still in UN hands? Ch'o-do, almost in the heart of enemy territory, has been captured and fortified by the UN as a most useful radar base. It is hardly likely the enemy could have reclaimed it during the past few months. UN naval and air supremacy should take care of that.

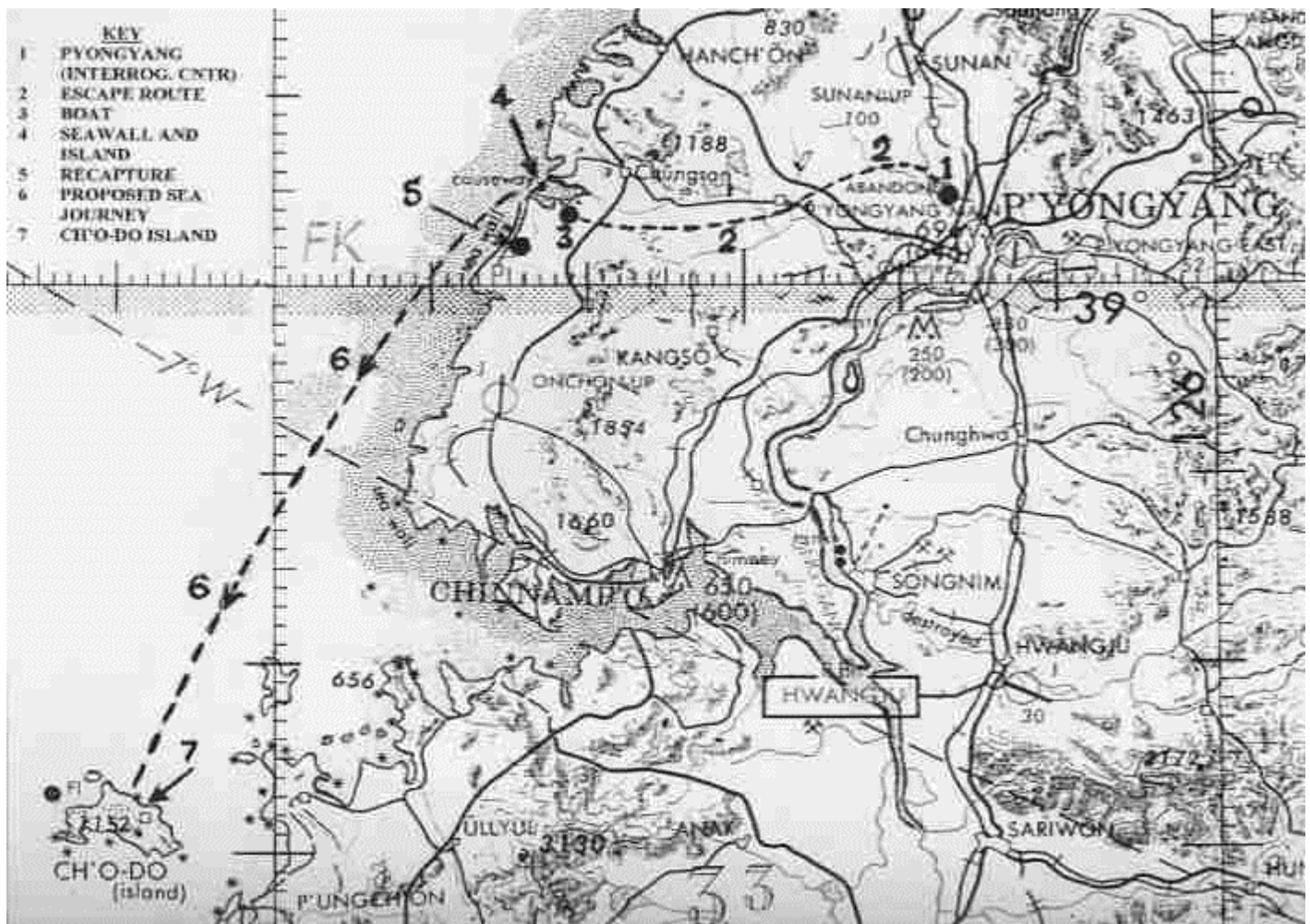
Ron decided, "I'll pass near the south headland. This'll be the shortest route." As this feature revealed itself in the gloom he adjusted the steering paddle to navigate a safe passage. Then to his consternation there loomed up ahead an obstruction which began to take the shape of a wall running through the water from island to headland. It was too late to maneuver in any direction, "Watch it,

were going to hit!" Jack lowered the sail as they slid onto rocks at the base of the wall. The boat was stuck fast and now swayed gently in the breeze. They both gazed in despair. The two dispirited fugitives abandoned the small craft and climbed onto the sea wall. This forbidding construction quite clearly extended from the south headland to the island. After scrambling along the rocks they explored the small island in the center of the bay mouth, finding it deserted and to their consternation they found the sea wall also extended fully from the island to the northern headland. The bay was totally cut off from the sea, a fact which had not been possible to determine from their mountain observation point. To compound all this they discovered, on the western side of the wall, vast areas of sandbanks. "The ocean is a mile away" said Jack. "Even if we had managed to get the boat past the wall, we could never have dragged it over those mud flats

Of course we were upset by this accident and decided to spend the rest of the night on the island, get some rest and think about our next move. We drained the last of my water-bag and I began a search for water, but there was none! The hunt for food was just as hopeless but I did find a few shellfish and oyster-like things and tried to cook them. For a pot we used a gourd shell but this rock-hard vessel failed the test. Using my last match from the old Korean peasant I lit a small fire. When heated, the bottom fell out of the gourd shell and I gave up. This is hopeless!"We studied our situation. The sea-wall extended to the south past the headland parallel to the coast as far as the eye could see and there was marshy ground inside the wall on the land side and mud flats towards the sea. Plans were laid. We'll walk down the coast towards Chinampo and hope to find a boat that can be sailed out to sea. If we keep close to the sea wall, on the ocean side, we won't be seen.'Now that I had time to think back on our futile voyage I could not help feeling guilty about the plight of the peasant fisherman as he arrived next morning to eke out a living only to discover the empty space at the end of his small jetty. But then again, with his local knowledge of the wind and weather and the help of his fellow fishermen he would soon recover the boat from where we had left it. I'm glad we didn't damage it."

After a few hours of tiresome walking we were alerted to the sounds of aircraft as several US Corsair fighters swooped down to attack a target nearby. We became excited and decided to try and attract their attention, If we can get them to see us and they realize who we are they may be able to send in a chopper!'After each strafing attack they flew a left-hand rectangular pattern around our position on the beach, at a height of about 800 feet. Quickly we gathered as many dark objects as possible, rocks, driftwood, seaweed and spelled out the word MAYDAY in big letters on the sand. We waved frantically. The aircraft flew a similar pattern again but with the same result, we were not seen. It was depressing to watch them heading off down the coast. If they had just seen our message, They could possibly send a copter up from Ch'o-do.'But it was not to be, in spite of our wishful thinking.

Disappointed, fatigued, hungry and particularly thirsty, Ron and Jack dragged their weary legs down the coast, at all times remaining well concealed behind the sea wall. Eventually, just as daylight was fading, Ron decided he desperately needed water and must seek out a village or farmhouse immediately. There was no alternative as he was at the point of collapse. "You stay here Jack and remain hidden or go on alone, I'm going over the wall. I've got to get water." Jack decided to come also. The two weary pilots cautiously climbed over the sea wall. Concerned about the loss of cover and worried about patrolling troops guarding the coast they quietly picked a passage across the sloppy marsh land. Suddenly Ron called a halt. "Trip wire!" he hissed, indicating an obvious trap for intruders. In the semi-darkness, the chord at ankle-height was barely visible and could not be fully traced but there was probably an alarm attached somewhere, or worse still, a grenade. With redoubled caution they both stepped clear of the wire, watchful and alert to this latest threat.



Escape Route

Recapture — Ron's Story Continues

***T**o our great dismay we were suddenly surrounded by enemy troops. They seemed to come from both sides at once, two patrols of Koreans. We were seized by excited soldiers who quickly produced pieces of telephone wire and tied our hands behind our backs amid a pantomime of shouting and threatening bayonets. We were marched briskly across the fore-shore and into the small village. This was the place where we had hoped to find sustenance, later identified as the village of Sam-ni. Now it was to be our temporary prison! Initially, we were taken to a small cottage, probably used as a type of guardhouse, where a sparsely furnished room with a soldier at the doors was to be our home for the night. We were allowed to drink and a simple meal was provided. This was a major event as we were almost in a state of collapse from thirst and hunger. Before settling down I had a frightening thought. What if they should search us and find the leaflets I have used as insulation?"I called the guard for a toilet visit 'benjo!' I was untied and escorted to a room where I got rid of the risky papers. I never heard anything more about this. So I was lucky. We spent an uneasy night sleeping on the bare dirt floor. The next morning, without even receiving a meal we were wired up, hands behind our backs and marched out of the village. Surprisingly, the leading guard spoke a fair bit of English. When we were a few miles out in the countryside this officer called a halt and with a dramatic*

flourish, produced a large pistol from his holster. This is it,"I thought. We are about to be shot."He raised the gun and turning slightly away from us fired two shots into a tree about 20 feet away. There were two deafening reports as bullets whined past our heads. As you see I aim good and if you try escape again you be shot."

Wearily the two dispirited pilots trudged on, hunger beginning to take its toll. They were relieved when a halt was called at a village for a sparse meal of rice and bean curd followed by a bowl of cabbage soup. For the undernourished pair this was a feast indeed. The march continued at a trying pace. The guards were in a hurry. Finally, in mid afternoon a Jeep-like vehicle arrived. Gratefully the worn-out prisoners climbed in and stretched their tired muscles. Any feelings of gratitude were soon dispelled by the obvious purpose of the journey. "Jack, you know where they're taking us, don't you!" There was no reply required as the answer was too obvious. They were going back to that fearful interrogation center from which they had so recently escaped. The vehicle rocked and rattled over primitive tracks, every turn of the wheels taking them closer to their judgment hour. On passing through the forbidding and all-too-familiar gates, a sense of despair gripped the returning fugitives. Roughly pulled from the transport they were pushed forcibly into the room next to the place in which they had spent their previous stay.

As we stepped inside I was momentarily blinded by the single electric light which hung at eye level and suddenly I was hit on the left cheek and knocked out. I don't know how long I was unconscious but when I did wake up I saw two of the Koreans were beating and kicking Jack as he lay on the floor. One of them had a small iron bar in his hand and I guessed this was what had knocked me out. The looks of excitement on the guards' faces indicated clearly that they were enjoying them-selves. Again they turned on me and the merciless bashing continued. I attempted to curl up into a ball for protection but discovered that having my hands wired behind made this almost impossible. I now received a bout of savage kicks and passed out. How long this ordeal continued is impossible to say. Eventually I came-to in a very sorry state, crouching in a corner, dazed and in great pain. The guards were talking and laughing loudly. Obviously this was a fine way to round off their day. When they had finished beating us they half-dragged, half-walked me into the next room where I was roughly dumped. Eventually I became conscious of someone gently touching me, a novel experience in these surroundings. As things came into focus I realized the hand I was feeling and the soothing voice belonged to Tom Harrison. I felt a great surge of relief that he was still alive and we were together again. In spite of my condition, the lift to my spirits was like a tonic. We talked! Tom had been through a bad time. Staring at us from the wall, like an accusing witness was our escape hole, now boarded up and re-sealed. We wondered what they were doing with Jack.

As anticipated, Tom had suffered grievously when the escape was discovered. Naturally, they did not accept the story that he was asleep and unaware of the episode and its associated preparatory plans. Six guards brutally attacked this defenseless one-legged man with fists and truncheons. They beat him senseless on several occasions and injured his ragged amputation. His good leg was also opened up from ankle to knee. To ensure the safety of the attackers, guards removed Tom's crutches and covered him with a pistol. As a result of this ill treatment, so recently added to his earlier extreme privations, he was in a weak and injured state. Ron was hurting all over from the beating and the pain of being wired up. He could not massage bruised areas or adopt less hurtful postures, however before morning through sheer exhaustion he managed to doze off briefly. At daylight some relief was available as a guard roughly removed the bonds and deposited a can of water and a small bowl of thin soup on the floor. Ron's immediate reaction was to massage his painful injuries. There was still no sign of Jack.

As soon as we had eaten, my wrists were again bound behind my back and Tom was treated likewise. Tom and I were then bundled into a jeep by two guards and we accelerated off in the general direction of Pyongyang. As we rounded a bend and the fearsome interrogation center disappeared, I hoped this was the last I would ever see of that ghastly place. Would we ever see Jack again?

The jeep proceeded through the northern outskirts of Pyongyang and continued to the east along deteriorating country roads. Again the guards seemed unaware of the interest their prisoners were taking in military matters, particularly the camouflaged anti-aircraft-gun pits along the way. They suffered agonies during this journey as their bruised bodies were tossed around without the support of hands with which to hold on. The driver, with total disregard for his passengers, maintained a remarkable speed over the rugged terrain. Seated between the guards, who were both wrapped in their warm winter coats, they shivered as the vigorous blast of the frigid morning air swept through the open vehicle. After about an hour, the jeep jerked to a stop at a small settlement, just a collection of huts near a broken-down mining complex. The presence of high wire fences and patrolling guards immediately caught sight of several inmates and to his satisfaction realized these were Europeans, probably American or British. In the little office they were confronted by two North Korean Army men who recorded details and released their bonds. In relief, they massaged arms as a guard pushed them into one of the huts.

On entering the building we were horrified. There were about thirty or forty prisoners who hardly looked up when we entered, as they were so frail and sick. They seemed to be in worse condition than I was and I guessed I must now have weighed no more than 100 pounds, 54 pounds lighter than when I was shot down. The prisoners lay on almost bare double-deck wooden bunks. One unfortunate fellow lying on a bottom bunk seemed to be wearing a cream jumper, but to my horror I discovered it was in fact khaki but was totally covered with lice. We soon learned the men were a mixture of US Army and Air Force, British Army and Marines and a few from the South African Air Force. There was one other Australian, Private Horrie Digger'Madden. As soon as I discovered there was a fellow countryman in the hut I went to his aid. Digger was very weak but managed to gasp out some horrifying details, I was captured last Anzac day. They took me to 'Pak's Palace.' I was given 'the treatment,' including rifle butts."

Pak's Palace was an infamous torture camp named after the sadistic commander who would forever feature in the nightmares of many POWs. Major Pak, a complete sadist, was given to the most perverse brutality. He and assistant Lee had set up their infamous Palace utilizing a bombed-out brick yard in a small valley north-east of Pyongyang. Horrie assured me it was not much better here as we also were also under the North Koreans. Digger was a mass of injuries and very sick. I wondered if he was going to last the night, however he was still with us next day and his bravery inspired us. Unfortunately, during the night the poor chap with the cream jumper died of maltreatment, malnutrition, dysentery and lice infestation. Ron learned that this miserable little camp, formerly a coal-mining settlement, was called Kangdong and had previously been known to unfortunate prisoners as 'The Caves.' In those times, the unsanitary mine shafts which ran horizontally into the hillsides were used to house captive United Nations troops. These ghastly tunnels, frequently drenched by run-off from underground streams, housed many sick and wounded, during the period from the beginning of the war in mid 1950, until the summer of 1951. The men sat in almost total darkness. There was no protection from the bitter cold or running water which permeated the environment. They were dressed in rags, without medical attention and had to exist on a totally inadequate morsel of food twice daily. More than 250 deaths occurred. It was frequently difficult to distinguish the dead from those still exhibiting a faint spark of life.

One particular story concerning The Caves that provided much inspiration centered around Terry, the last surviving platoon commander of A company of the Gloucestershire Regiment. Suffering from head wounds and a leg injury, Terry led his badly shot-up remnants in an excruciating march from the battle-field at Imjin to The Caves. They received no medical attention and many still wore original dressings, now filthy and ragged, on badly infected wounds. Terry and one of his senior NCOs, Sergeant Hoper, were lodged with a number of their men in a cave already crowded with South Koreans, themselves dying of starvation and disease. A subterranean stream ran through their cavern. As men began to die it was obvious they were faced with total annihilation. The Koreans, capitalizing on this situation, approached Terry. A North Korean army colonel put the following proposition: "If you realize the errors of your past and join the Peace Movement, we can take you to a proper camp where you will have good accommodation and food. Your wounds will be well attended to by a surgeon." The men rejected the offer, however Terry realizing the desperate situation made a hard decision. In order to save his men he ordered them to go to the camp and appear to cooperate while doing nothing. However, Terry, as an officer and graduate of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, clearly saw it as his duty to remain in The Caves. The men moved out but in spite of their entreaties Terry stayed. The North Korean colonel made attempts to entice Terry to join his men however this extremely brave and dutiful officer remained true to his code. He perished in this hell hole! In April 1951 Terry was awarded the George Cross.

There was another terrible story of one 'death' march of 700 prisoners from the front line to POW camps in the rear. Eighty-one were shot in the back of the head during the first 10 miles of the 200-mile trek. At the end, for various reasons, only 141 were still alive. These revelations made the present situation seem more bearable, although in all respects things were still at a deplorable standard. Although the caves were empty, the prisoners lived in dilapidated and drafty huts with the most basic facilities. In spite of the overcrowding, nights were uncomfortably cold. The food at Kangdong was very poor, consisting mainly of corn, kolian and diacon.

On the day after Ron's arrival a happy event occurred. A jeep arrived with two of the people he was most worried about, Tony and Jack. This was a great morale booster, the warmest of greetings accompanying a great sense of relief. However he now had to learn the horrifying details of their experiences since we had been separated. Tony had recently been through an extended period of extreme assault and torture. As an officer and an escapee he was seen as a particular troublemaker and a potential threat. If he should ever succeed in reaching United Nations lines, his reports of brutal maltreatment of prisoners would pose a problem for the Communists. After his capture, during the escape with Ron and Jack, he had almost succeeded in passing himself off as a Russian but was foiled by a Russian-speaking Korean. The unfortunate fugitive was roughly handled and immediately transported back to the infamous Interrogation Center to be dealt with by The Young Major. He refused to divulge details of the escape and the likely direction to be taken by Jack and Ron. He was careful to divert attention away from anything that might suggest use of a boat. The recalcitrant prisoner was transported to the Pyongyang police station for special attention. Here he had the opportunity to repeat his story before a number of high-ranking officers who finally decided he should be brought under their particular form of persuasion. This process was begun initially in a fully equipped torture room.

In his excellent book THE EDGE OF THE SWORD, written immediately after his repatriation, Anthony Farrar-Hockley tells of this Chamber of Horrors.

"My mind could not conceive the truth that my senses offered. We were all standing in a small square room, with cement-faced walls and a concrete floor. High above us, from a wooden ceiling, ropes

trailed from metal rings. There were two more such rings in the left hand wall. Under the right wall was a large barrel of water. One little chair, such as a child might use at kindergarten, was beside it; across its back lay more ropes, in a tangle. In the light of a single bright electric lamp that burned in the ceiling, I saw there were stains on the floor and walls that looked much like blood. As I stripped off my filthy, lousy shirt and jersey, I knew I was in a torture chamber."

As an overture, he was mercilessly bashed, kicked into a senseless condition and bound to the chair. The Young Major kicked him in the chest and the chair fell over. Then, as he lay on the floor, a towel was thrown over his head and repeatedly doused with ice-cold water scooped from a barrel in the corner. Rapidly, as the towel became saturated and was drawn tighter onto Tony's mouth and nostrils he began to suffocate. He passed out. Resuscitation was achieved by repeated applications of lighted cigarettes to his back. The smiling Young Major was enjoying himself. The questions were repeated with Tony gasping out the same answers, so the water treatment began all over again. After the third torture session the semi-conscious prisoner was dragged from the room. Barely able to walk, he was escorted between two police officers through the cold, overcast night to a concrete cell block very reminiscent of Sinuiju. He observed, to his horror, prisoners sitting in the same Sinuiju manner. This brought back ghastly recollections and a tremor of foreboding. **Tony's story continues.**

"Two warders took me down the long passage that led past the cells, opened a door at the end and guided me along an extension, by the light of an electric torch. Finally, almost at the end of the passage, we came to a dark cell. A push sent me to the floor, where my legs were bound and the knots on my wrists strengthened. Satisfied that I was securely roped, the warders departed. The metal rang as the door closed behind them and the key turned in the padlock. Their footsteps echoed as they withdrew along the passage. The door to the main passage closed; the last vestige of light disappeared. For the time being, my tormentors were content to leave me, if not in peace, at least alone. This was my 'home' for a week, except for visits to the torture chamber for repeat performances of the water treatment and other sadistic refinements. These took place on alternate days. In the meantime, semi-conscious, I lay in utter filth on the wet concrete floor. The lice had a party! Day and night, as I lay there, they wriggled across my flesh, setting up a considerable irritation wherever they feasted on my blood. Sometimes, it seemed as though my whole body was alive with millions of them eating my flesh away. It was impossible to remain in one position for more than a few minutes at a time: the discomfort became almost unbearable; my joints seemed to be on fire."

On the seventh day relief arrived, Captain Li, one of the interrogators came to his cell. "You are very lucky, tomorrow you are going to be shot!" Tony was eventually taken from the prison amid general pantomime suggesting preparations for an execution. To his astonishment he was reunited with Jack Henderson. It was natural to assume they both had a similar appointment. "Are you going to be shot too?" asked Tony. "Can't say," Jack replied, after thinking it over. It apparently had not crossed his mind. However, things did not turn out that way and soon they were enduring a tiresome march to a coal-mining town. Eventually they were taken in a jeep accompanied by The Young Major, now quite affable, as he nodded and smiled at the unresponsive prisoners. Soon they were delivered to Kangdong, into the company of Ron and Tom and so many other unfortunates. Jack had suffered further after he was separated from Ron. He had been made to kneel for hours with a heavy board held up by his arms behind his back, receiving a rain of heavy blows every time he moved.

But now the friends were all together at Kangdong, attempting to recover and Ron continues his story:

For a few days we all enjoyed the comradeship and relative peace of our new surroundings. We sat in the sun and talked while cracking lice eggs. I was fortunate to become friendly with a British Marine called James 'Happy' Day. He was also a Warrant Officer. Happy was in the crew of a landing craft which suffered a jammed rudder while on reconnaissance in the enemy port of Wonsan. After turning in ever-decreasing circles they ran ashore and were all captured. Happy arrived in prison camp wearing swimming trunks, a beret and boots. The Koreans did not supply any proper clothes. We remained dressed, just as when we were captured. We were unable to help Happy very much with the clothing problem and there was no point in appealing to the Koreans. Eventually, Happy inherited some pants and a shirt from a dying companion. The dead supplied our needs from time to time.

Then one morning, several days after my arrival we were assembled outside and greeted with some alarming news. 'All men now walk Yalu River, two hundred mile!' We were shocked and a general outcry was heard from the ranks. There was not one man present who could be considered fit for such a grueling effort, and many, like Tom, we believed could only hobble a few hundred yards without assistance. The very idea was appalling. Their health, their strength, their clothes and footwear were quite inadequate to even consider such an undertaking, and in winter! It was mid November 1951 and the long march was on!

Chapter 11

The Long March

Ron Tells Of An Impossible Ordeal

We stood in ragged lines as guards searched each man. Padded clothing which had been acquired was taken away in spite of angry protests. Airmen in particular were left to face the November winds and sleet in nothing more than summer flying suits. Night temperatures were already well below freezing and the march would take us farther north, to arrive in late November 1951.

At this stage I felt particularly grateful for my splendid American Combat Boots. Good footwear was rare and prized greatly by everyone. I was the envy of many as my boots were particularly suitable and in good condition. These strong and comfortable boots had ankle protectors in the form of a large flap of leather strongly buckled for maximum support. I knew that I must not take them off when sleeping if there were any Koreans around, as they would surely steal them. This would be a most important precaution during the march as we slept in villages. We were particularly angry when the guards stole all our warm garments. This had dire results for sick and weak men.



Escape Route (4,5,6,7) And The Long March

Early in the afternoon, in mid November 1951, the column of about 40 dispirited prisoners set out on the impossibly long trek. Eventually the rhythm of the march caught hold and weary legs began to move mechanically. The escorts were all officers, equipped with pistols and burp guns. Most prisoners carried a bag of foodstuff slung across the shoulder, provisions for the walk, mainly rice and Melki, little fish like white-bait. At the rear of the column came the 'Ambulance,' an ox-cart for the frail and wounded who were often too sick to keep going. Among these were the semi-conscious American named Harold and the Australian, Digger Madden, who resembled a skeleton with skin stretched over the surface. There were many others who fell from time to time as their injury, dysentery or beri-beri took its toll. Where possible, they too were put on the ox-cart and this sometimes required one of the sick men to walk for a while, hobbling along with the aid of others, frequently almost as weak themselves. Tom with his makeshift crutch sometimes found it necessary

to ride on the cart but gallant as always frequently gave up his place and hopped along on one leg, his crudely amputated stump still infected. A terrible physical and mental weariness gripped the column of bowed, sorrowful travelers as they stumbled mechanically along the endless pathway to an uncertain destination. Many collapsed and the ox-cart was always overloaded and lagging behind the column. Fatalities increased.



Typical Korean Oxcart

My walking companions were Jack Henderson and Happy Day. Happy, a soccer player, had a sport injury which caused his knee to throw out and lock. We would 'fix' him by clicking it back into place as he sat or lay down. Then we could continue on until it happened again. We received no assistance from the one and only medical orderly, a fat Chinese girl carrying a shoulder bag containing aspirin only. This was supposed to cure everything and keep us going. There was never enough aspirin. The objective of each day's march was to reach a suitable place where shelter could be obtained. As we left Kangdong, the first half day of walking brought us to a bombed out village which provided some accommodation of sorts in dilapidated barns and outhouses. The ox-cart caught up about an hour later. We opened the ration bags and ate sparingly as we knew this supply would have to last the distance. The devastation of the little towns and villages in this area was almost total, as a result of bombardment by our forces and those of the advancing enemy. The people were living in abject poverty in their mud hovels and holes in the ground. Spindly children frolicked in the ruins while others obediently sat at their mothers' knees enduring a head-lice egg-cracking session. This seemed to be the main method of lice control available to these sad-looking people.



Lice Inspection

On the first evening, as we crowded into filthy stables and sheds which had been commandeered for the night, we discovered that the guards were pilfering the precious supply of special foodstuff and selling it to the locals. The rations which were being carried had been allocated from better-than-normal prisoner food supplies as the authorities acknowledged the need to sustain us during this long and tiring trek. The guards, realizing the value of this special commodity, were selling it to the peasants and substituting inferior products. This was particularly serious with regard to the little fish as these contained nutrients essential to our survival, particularly in view of the paucity of the food supply in general and the most demanding journey. To cope with this dishonest act of sabotage we developed a way of stealing our own food supply. While marching along we would slip our hands into the bag of fish slung over the shoulder of the man ahead. The material of the bag was open weave and my fingers could be worked inside without too much trouble. Some of the precious food would be passed to the men nearby. I told the man carrying the bag and he did the same with the bag ahead. By continuously using this method we kept up our strength and did not suffer so much from the poor quality of the evening meals. The guards, on the other hand, ate sumptuously at wayside eating houses and took time out for a rest. On one particular stop, after they had disposed of our supplies, the guards organized a meal for us, a cornball and thin soup, which was supposed to be good because it contained some meat. When asked what sort of meat, a guard replied Woof, Woof. 'We 'wolfed' it down just the same, and believed we had discovered why there were no dogs in the villages. There was generally some humor around. On the way into this village we had passed several houses occupied by European white men dressed in pajamas and what looked like dressing gowns. Some came out into the front yard to watch us pass. Obviously they were Russians and this was a Rest Center. A few of our people called out Russki, 'but were met with silence and some of the Russians actually turned their backs.



B-26 Bomber In Action

One morning we were caught in the open by an American Shooting Star ground-attack fighter. Everyone scattered into cover and protection, however the plane ignored the party and proceeded to make effective rocket strikes, cutting a railway line in two places. Nights were sometimes disturbed by B-26 bombers creating havoc in nearby areas. Our lives were placed in jeopardy by both friend and foe.

The long trek was through country areas avoiding steep terrain and our ragged procession followed dirt roads bypassing large towns. Due to the season, paddy fields were fairly dry and uninteresting. The weather, though cold with occasional sleet showers, fortunately did not add the further burden of heavy rain or storms and snow held off until late in the journey. Water was a problem. Little was carried, local supplies were suspect and it was hazardous to drink from stagnant puddles contaminated by run-off from the paddy fields. The requirement was often solved by breaking off ice stalactites hanging from cliffs, as the column passed through cuttings. These provided reasonably pure water.

At one place we encountered a fast-flowing stream. The edges were frozen solid out to about two feet from the bank and the guards indicated that we were to wade across as there were no bridges in sight. I think it was the only time I envied those on the ox-cart. I took off my boots, slung them around my neck and followed the rest of the column into the freezing water, which came just above our knees. The shock of the extreme cold, the sharp stones under our bare feet, and the fast flow of the stream made this a hazardous task for weakened men. About two-thirds of the way across I began to go down. Luckily I was between Happy Day and Jack Henderson — they grabbed me and together we made it to the other bank. But for them I would have been dead! We were allowed to rest and wring out our clothes. It was a long time before I regained any feeling in my legs, which were completely numb. These particular few yards of our northward journey took a tremendous toll.



The Long March — North Korea 1951

Broken in body and severely tested in spirit, the little contingent of suffering men struggled on for what seemed an eternity. The march became a nightmare, as men grew weaker. Deaths occurred and the ox-cart became overloaded with the sick and those who had collapsed through fatigue. With the terrible physical exertion of the march, overtaxed muscles tightened and night cramps added to the problems of obtaining any rest. Feet suffered abominably and ragged strips from the clothing of the dead served to wrap and insulate boots and shoes, in some cases virtually securing the footwear against total disintegration. As always, the deceased supplied the needs of the living. Corpses were merely left by the track where they would soon freeze during the sub-zero nights, generating some unsavory reference to this callous practice as we felt our dead friends were being left to provide fertilizer for the soil. The slow speed of the ox-cart and its late arrival at the billeting destinations became a serious problem. This 'ambulance' full of sick and injured, was treated in a cavalier way, as

those guarding the cart would dawdle at their meals.

For the sick lying in the cart exposed to the wind or sleet during the day it was bad, but at night with the rapid drop in temperature, it was appalling. One Gloucestershire man named Harold died on the second day of the march, after lying for two hours in a ditch in the freezing night air, outside a house in which the guards were having a party. As a result of these lengthy rests the Koreans quite often missed their way in the dark, resulting in late arrivals. The escorts would sometimes leave the cart and its occupants while they searched for the main group. The results of these inefficiencies and neglect were devastating. The men were chilled to the bone and their condition rapidly deteriorated. As always, Tom was quite heroic in his selfless efforts on behalf of the sick and injured, on some occasions looking after as many as seven at one time. In spite of his painful amputation he ministered to others while ever his strength held out. Tom was an inspiration to all. Tony, whose vitality had been sapped by his recent ordeal in the Pyongyang torture chamber, soon could not walk as he became delirious with recurring bouts of fever. The journey was a nightmare and he was lucky to survive frequent episodes of freezing. This was a constant hazard for all as they endured the rapid cooling of the body on collapsing into blessed rest after the dreadful exertions of the trek. The greatest sufferers were those who lay for extended periods on the cart.

I remember one such night when Tony was brought in delirious, and Horrie Madden was with him. I helped put them on the floor where we attempted to thaw them out by any means available. They shivered uncontrollably. Horrie gasped a few words, I'm going to make it Ron. They won't be making fertilizer out of me!"We both recalled the first fellow we lost early in the march. He was near me during the night and several times I was wakened by him kicking against my body. Next morning he was dead. The guards merely dumped him on the ground.

Due to consumption of the food supplies the bags became lighter as the journey neared its end. It was also apparent the Lieutenant in charge had sold most of the remaining fish product on the black market. He received in repayment a considerable financial gain and some supplies of poor substitute food in the form of a few cabbage leaves, perhaps one leaf among 30 men! During the last days snowstorms occurred and progress slowed. The guards typically accommodated themselves in 'hotel' type places and dined to their satisfaction while the prisoners were dumped in any convenient corner and left to starve. In utter misery they huddled together in a desperate attempt to ward off some of the biting wind and moisture which inevitably invaded their makeshift abode. Again Tom came to the rescue with some emergency money given him by another American pilot. Scraps of food left over from hotel meals were purchased and some of the sick were able to consume a little cold rice and lukewarm soup. At dawn, alive but on the verge of collapse, the hapless travelers were ordered to their feet.



Rugged Korean Countryside

After about 10 days it was obvious we were getting close to our destination. Horrie Madden was in a bad way. I kept assuring him We're nearly there mate. You're going to make it. However one night they did not catch up and that was the last I saw of Horrie or the ox-cart. We were told they had gone to another location where there was a hospital, a thoroughly makeshift place as we later learned. Tony was still on the cart as he was quite delirious. Tom, having weakened badly, also went with Horrie and Tony. I wondered if I would ever see any of the ox-cart brigade again. In fact, while I did join up with Tom and Tony later, Horrie Madden never came back. Horrie died a few days after reaching the 'hospital.' I was gratified to be approached in 1955 by Air Force Headquarters to provide a testimonial about this heroic friend. Private Horrie Madden was posthumously awarded the George Cross.

On the last day of walking, the survivors were treated to a blessing in the form of truck transport. The exhausted men boarded and relaxed their weary bodies in the sheer bliss of feeling the last few miles roll away. On reaching the town of Pyoktong they received the first reasonable meal since departure. Here, they were billeted for one night while being allocated to their final camps. Ron found himself assigned to the officer-contingent destined for 'Camp 2' at Pin-chong-ni.

The Prison Camp

The very survival of so many members of this small contingent of exhausted prisoners was a triumph against the odds in this place they called **The Land of the Morning Calm** yet survive they did!

It is Thanksgiving Day, 26 November 1951, a most appropriate day, with sunny skies and a light breeze wafting down from the hills, when the surviving members of the marathon walk arrive in Camp 2 in the village of Pin-chong-ni. The little settlement is located in a small valley with steep

mountains all around. This is about four miles south of the Yalu River and 10 miles east of Pyoktong, a somewhat larger town on a southern inlet of that river. The Yalu River itself, 500 miles in length, originates in the 8,000 ft mountains to the far north east and although shallow for most of its length is studded with 200 islands, and becomes solid with ice in the winter temperatures of more than 50 degrees below zero.

The country around the prison camp is mountainous with ridges rising about 1500 feet above the valley and running like ribs to a backbone formed by the Yalu. The ridges converge on each other with increasing distance from the river until there is merely 1000 feet of flat terrain between them. Generally this level area contains a gravel road and a creek running through villages. All possible ground is terraced and cultivated and in the warm months produces crops of corn, sorghum, and soy beans. One of these villages is Pin-chong-ni, a place normally intended for about 150 people living in primitive mud-walled and thatched dwellings. The prison camp is the converted local school and is a more substantial building than the others as it is lined and has a tiled roof. While Ron and the rest of the weary march party are being processed at what is called Company Headquarters, it becomes obvious that Pin-chong-ni is completely staffed by Chinese. The Chinese Army, known as the Chinese Peoples Volunteers, has taken control of all United Nations prisoners. The camp holds more than 350 UN prisoners, all officers or non-commissioned officers, a mixture of Army, Navy and Air Force from the USA, UK, Australia, South Africa, Turkey, The Philippines and Puerto Rico.

Ron comments: *Unfortunately, these men were all strangers to me, so initially I stayed fairly close to my old friends from the march. At first we were all in need of as much rest as we could get. One of the American prisoners, learning of my nationality, told me of another Australian in the camp. I hastened to the location and was amazed to find Flight Lieutenant Gordon Harvey. We all thought he was probably dead as there had been no news of his whereabouts. Now here he was not well, but alive and functioning after having a very rough time since being shot down in his Mustang by ground fire near Pyongyang. He had been 'in the bag' since January 1951. I brought him up to date on Squadron news. Gordon's story of ill treatment and deprivation at the hands of the North Koreans was appalling. He said little about it at the time.*

The camp operated under what they termed 'The Lenient Policy.' This simply meant: 'Even though you are war criminals we will allow you to live because we are peace-loving. We will also give you the opportunity to change your ways and attitudes by studying Lenin and Marx. For this we will give you knowledge of the truth which these great men have spoken. You must cooperate and learn. We will help by teaching you each day. You have been duped by American Imperialists. You are tools of the reactionary warmongers, hirelings of the barbarous Rhee puppet-government. But you will be given a chance to change!' We were supposed to study and learn!

Chapter 12

Five Course Finishes Operational Training

Departure For Japan

Still unaware of the fate of many, we proceed overseas

On the last day at Williamtown I was given a final opportunity to fly the beloved Mustang. A low-level flight was authorized. Taking advantage of the loose nature of the instructions I soon found myself over my hometown, Cundletown, executing a few routine aerobatics and steep turns. Catching sight of my 'brother' Harvey Else outside his garage I realized something better was definitely called for. With full power applied and flight path sighted along the main street (The Pacific Highway) at an altitude which is still held to be classified information, the Mustang rolled gracefully to the inverted attitude. Reminding myself that the basic rule "pull the stick back and the houses get smaller" works in reverse when inverted, the control column was eased forward to effect an uneventful recovery just before Wal Levick's farm. Duty and honor thereby satisfied I returned to Williamtown with an ever-increasing feeling that this exercise had possibly not been very wise.

Before leaving for Korea I paid a visit to Cundletown. I was informed by my aunt that the locally based Police Sergeant, who lived next door, had been out of town on the day of my ill advised exploit. However, he had heard all about it and some people were not pleased, he was one of them. He had been at Wagga during the war and had first hand experience with several tragedies resulting from local RAAF 'beat-ups.' My aunt was assured that had he actually witnessed the indiscretion he would have reported in his official capacity. Foolish but lucky again!

Ken and I were then declared ready for Meteor conversion which would be done after our transfer to 77 Squadron at Iwakuni, Japan. Once again Ken Smith and I were fortunate enough to avoid separation as the two of us traveled together on a Qantas DC-4 regular service via Darwin, Labuan and Hong Kong. Ken and I were pleased to note we had never been separated by any posting since joining the RAAF and 77 Squadron would be our fifth unit. We had also spent some leave together. Fortunately we were the best of friends and now our big adventure together was about to begin!

More Pilot Losses In Korea — February 1952

Co-incident with our posting to Japan, Ken and I heard that Flight Lieutenant "Butch" Hannan had been shot down and presumably taken prisoner. Leading four Meteors on a strike he was seen to be streaming smoke, seemingly from his ventral tank. He headed home but when the fire spread he had to eject. He was seen on the ground and was soon lost in the snow-covered terrain. Butch returned from imprisonment after cessation of hostilities but was killed a few months later in his home town as a pillion rider on a motor cycle — a particularly regrettable event.

Wal Rivers who had accompanied Butch on this particularly hazardous venture finally spotted the parachute and as a result he made two subsequent flights to the area with no luck. Helicopters could not attempt a search as the flak defenses in this particular front-line area would render such an operation impossible, particularly as the downed pilot had not been located and was probably already in enemy hands. Ray Taylor and Phil Zupp had begun an immediate search at low altitude. During

these maneuvers Phil's canopy was shattered by ground fire and his goggles were buckled as the shell ricocheted around the cockpit, to finally lodge in the instrument panel. With his face bleeding quite profusely from fragments of Perspex and metal, Phil remained calm and returned to Kimpo. He was treated for his injuries by the Americans who subsequently awarded Phil the 'Purple Heart' decoration.



Phil Zupp's Canopy

At this point this small squadron had recorded 18 pilots killed, 5 taken prisoner, and now one wounded could be added.



Phil Zupp

Squadron average operational strength was generally about 20 pilots. Therefore, operations to date, had already wiped out full squadron strength. On arrival at Iwakuni Ken and I were further shocked to learn that one of our 5 Course boys had been killed at the very beginning of his tour. Dick Robinson was hit in the ventral and his aircraft was seen on fire and breaking up before exploding on a hillside. There was no sign of an ejection.



Dick Robinson — First 5 Course Death

Five Course Arrives In Japan — Early 1952

The Jewelled Spear

Legend has it that these beautiful islands rose from the ocean, at the downward thrust of a jeweled spear from the Floating Bridge of Heaven. Our immediate destination, Iwakuni, at the time an RAAF Air-Base, nestles on the south western tip of the mainland, against the water which separates it from Shikoku. Passing over the snow-topped mountains and densely cultivated valleys of Kyushu; we commenced our letdown over the picturesque islands and channels of the Inland Sea. This stretch of water washes the eastern boundary of our airfield.

Thirty-three flying hours after leaving Mascot the Qantas Skymaster touched Japanese soil. For a few minutes we gathered near the plane with coats turned up and hands in pockets to ward off the icy wind. In the distance, cloud-crested slopes merged into a background of snow-covered hills, from which came the winds of Iwakuni. Formerly a Japanese naval academy and airfield, Iwakuni Base was now a splendid asset to the allied air forces. It was from here that 77 squadron flew its first operational missions against the enemy in Korea. Now it was used by Allied civil and military transports, by our front-line squadron as a maintenance and training ground and also provided a good flying-boat base. The airstrip, hangars and administrative buildings were substantial, though some parts still bore shrapnel holes as grim evidence of American bombing during the latter months of WW2.

Labor, such a short commodity at home, was abundant here. Skilled Japanese aircraft technicians worked on our planes, while hundreds of little women attended to clerical and domestic work. These people were honest, industrious and cheerful. The comforts of Iwakuni made their first big impression as we stepped from the chilly tarmac to the cheery steam-heated atmosphere of our Mess. Try to imagine the polished floors and furnishings and a busy bar with uniformed Japanese drink-

waiters bustling around. Through the glass doors of the dining hall many little waitresses were busy around the tables. In fact the surfeit of waitresses was one of the surprising features. NCOs from all services of three nations found relaxation here every night. The intelligentsia undertook to explain the intricacies of colloquial Japanese in a few lessons. We learned, 'Boy-San,' 'Girl-San' and 'Mumma-San' were the polite methods of address, 'San' being added as a title of respect.

Living quarters were located in surprisingly comfortable two-story buildings. Every room was neat, with wardrobes full of spotlessly laundered clothes and shiny footwear. Someone vaguely explained this as the work of the 'room-girls.' Permanent residents each had a bedroom with one girl looking after two rooms. These girls who arrived early in the morning, polished, washed, ironed, mended and tidied everything. The girls were carefully vetted before being employed and were found to be of excellent character. We were severely warned that they must be treated with respect at all times and I believe this was observed by all as we did not want to lose the privilege of their services. The 'other ranks' had room boys and the threat of descent into a similar regime kept us in order. It was customary for the boys to provide their room-girl with a little closet space for her personal use, as she would spend nine or ten hours on the job. Ken and I, because we belonged in Korea, shared a room and one girl looked after things for us. On any occasion that we should return for a brief visit to Iwakuni both the room and the same room-girl would be available with everything in order. Furthermore our clothes were to travel to and from Korea for our girl to wash and keep in order, the first RAAF International Laundry Service!

Sleep was peaceful that first night despite the hissing and rattling of pipes which always accompanied the successful operation of the steam-heater. At about seven am there was a respectful knock at the door. A little 'Mumma-San,' perhaps fifty years old, entered and bowed. "Surely this is not our room girl!" There ensued the first of those intriguing conversations of jumbled English and Japanese clarified by much sign-language. She explained that her purpose was to introduce our Girl-San. As if at a cue, an attractive but shy little girl entered and bowed. Introductions followed, and we learned how to say "Ayako-San." Mumma-San then bowed herself out of the room leaving us in the diligent hands of this fine young girl. Ayako poured cups of tea, then commenced by polishing every shoe in the room while gathering clothes for the laundry. After breakfast the beds were like billiard tables, floor and furniture polished, and partly unpacked clothes neatly arranged. That evening two tidy piles of ironed clothes appeared. A vase of flowers, the first we had ever possessed in billets, was the next surprise. It was difficult to draw Ayako into conversation, although she certainly understood much that was said. Other room girls were quite talkative and exhibited considerable curiosity about the two new Boy-San. One girl in particular, Mickey-San, spoke and wrote some English and helped greatly with communication. Mickey wrote to us in Korea. Neat and tidy in themselves, the girls created a most pleasant atmosphere. When in Korea we still were to feel the value of room-girls as parcels of clean clothes arrived, generally accompanied by ambitious attempts at note writing. They also handled many little business transactions such as having films printed.



Ayako-San, And Mickey-San (Sitting)

Despite a strong effort to westernize Japan, the quaint legends and sacred mountains and the wooden shoes and kimonos of medieval days still existed side by side with the new influences. Through tales of Shinto folklore and the tranquil expressions of her artists, Japan maintained a background of quiet simplicity in contrast to the turbulent onrush of progress and noise, which had seized the surface of her everyday life. The Japanese city had become largely a copy of western technology. In remote areas the peasant's existence still closely resembled that of his ancestors while naturally enough the country towns took a middle course. Iwakuni was probably typical of the average town, while our base always inclined towards the up-to-date western society. Consequently on passing through the camp gates we seemed to step into another world. The population and other statistics of the local area were anybody's guess. It was absorbing to view the patchwork of paddy fields and narrow winding roads, bordered by miles of small shops and houses. We could hardly fail to notice one of the less endearing features of the environment. The smell, or more specifically the stench, was overpowering, and we were not heartened by the assurance, "You will come to enjoy it!" Fertilizer was supplied by human excrement, the product being transported to the paddy fields in 'honey carts.' These three-wheeler cycle arrangements were definitely to be avoided! We recalled with some apprehension that military personnel were forbidden to eat local farm vegetables.

The township extended along the banks of the river and in the vicinity of the railway line. In the main center near the railway station, the streets were reasonably wide and people walked on footpaths. This section, with its dance halls, hotels and bigger shops was by no means typical. Elsewhere, streets were a mere slab of concrete fifteen to twenty feet wide, bordered closely on each side by abrupt walls and shop fronts. These roads were busy. Pedestrians dodged bicycles which

swerved away from taxis, which themselves only deferred to buses and trucks. Having used roads as footpaths all their lives people had developed a certain alertness and well-timed reaction. A natural corollary was the driver's splendid sense of available space. All displayed surprising disregard for close shaves with fast moving vehicles. Collisions or minor accidents, were more likely to evoke amusement than consternation.



Street Scene Iwakuni

We Convert To The Gloster Meteor

This formidable fighter was our first twin-engine aircraft. The Gloster Meteor Mk 8 single-seat interceptor was pressurized and had two Rolls Royce Derwent Mk 8 jet engines, each with a thrust of 3,600 lb. It was basically a 19,000 pounds and 600 mph aircraft. Armaments included four 20mm cannons point-harmonized at 800 yards, and eight or eventually sixteen rockets of various types were often fitted. The engines and air-frame were sturdy and capable of withstanding considerable punishment. The Meteor was a steady gun platform. Safe and efficient operation, required the pilot to achieve: an alert, high speed and infallible execution of memorized checks and actions throughout the entire flight while navigating at high speed in a rugged and hostile environment, cluttered with other aircraft, both friend and foe. Smithy and I realized this standard had to be achieved as quickly

as possible as we were required in Korea.

The Meteor provided our first experience of an Ejection-Seat. The aircraft was quipped with the Martin-Baker Ejection-Seat which enabled the pilot to abandon rapidly at high speeds. Unlike the Mustang and Vampire conversions, we now had the luxury of a dual controlled trainer, the MK 7 Meteor. Differing in appearance, mainly because of the elongated canopy, it was unarmed and did not have Ejection Seats. The Martin-Baker facility in the MK 8 enabled the pilot to fire himself out of the plane with explosives that propel the complete seat into the air well clear of the aircraft. The lack of such provisions was reputed to make the MK 7 a pilot-killer in any attempted bail-out. This was to be tragically proven by two of our fellows just a few months later.



Mk 7 Meteor Two-Seater

Twin-engine handling, with engine-failure procedures, formed a big part of the MK 7 training. Flight Lieutenant Ray Taylor introduced us to the Mk 7 Meteor on circuits and landings initially. Then we executed Mach Runs at 35,000 feet. There was no problem with recovery from the compressibility experience which began to manifest at speeds above 86% of the speed of sound (Mach .86). With the closure of throttles and selection of air-brakes the Meteor behaved normally. Stalling characteristics were benign. However, at the operational weights we would be using in Korea, particularly when carrying a load of rockets under the wings, we could expect the stall speed to be high. Soon we were learning the techniques of engine-failure handling.



Meteor Trainer (Note Elongated Canopy)

Provided the pilot respected the need for at least 150 knots there was little to worry about when operating with one engine shut down provided the aircraft was at a light weight, but we were aware that when taking off at operational weights, with full fuel and armaments on board, the Meteor could not climb or even fly level with an engine out of operation. It would be essential to reduce weight immediately by any means available. To maintain balanced flight (no sideways slide) with one motor inoperative we must have at least 150 knots of indicated airspeed. This speed could not be sustained, with one engine out of action at maximum weight in level flight and of course climbing was absolutely out of the question. Consequently we realized that on virtually all of our take-offs in Korea 'our pants would be down.' Fortunately the Rolls Royce Derwent jet engines were very reliable.



Meteor Mk-8 Fighter

We were thrilled with the MK 7 Meteor but the real pleasures came with the solo operations of the MK 8, the fighter! A small island in the Inland Sea was set aside for live cannon and rocket practice. On one occasion after doing as much damage to this beautiful place as my rockets and cannons could create, I diverted a few miles, to sweep at low level, over the devastation of what had once been the proud city of Hiroshima, a dreadful wasteland, a terrible reminder of the inhumanity of war. On returning I said to Smithy, "You should take a look at what the Atomic Bomb did next time you are aloft". With no other comment except a meaningful look, Ken assured me, "Col I saw it this morning!" We both carried out six and forty-five minutes Meteor training. The need for pilots in Korea precluded spending more time, and it was felt that we had mastered the machine and operational techniques. Our stay in beautiful Japan was all too short!



Iwakuni Castle

Five Course Joins The Squadron At Kimpo — February 1952

The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve"

(Dr Albert Schweitzer)

On completion of our brief Meteor flying and operational training, amounting to six hours and forty minutes total, Ken and I were deemed ready for combat, a judgment no doubt influenced by the great shortage of operational pilots in Korea. We established battle-formation under the leadership of Flight Lieutenant Taylor, and bade farewell to the beautiful Japanese coastline as we headed off across the Korea Strait. Soon we were gazing down from our cruising level, seven miles above the snow-bound Korean countryside, proceeding directly to Kimpo, a few miles northwest of Seoul. It was of interest to muse on the fact that this important United Nations air base was itself, not so long ago, the target of our squadron's Mustangs before the enemy forces were pushed north. Known by the official code name K-14, Kimpo was the closest airfield to the North Korean battle-front, about 35 miles.

Here at last was the exciting introduction to our new home, this airport with the heaviest traffic in the world, with touchdown rates of one each fifteen seconds for prolonged periods. Take-off runway occupancy was frequently six aircraft at a time: two rotating into lift-off, two in mid-runway, and two just rolling. Wing-tips of the pairs were separated by about twenty feet. These were busy-period rates, and the place was almost always busy by day. Operations continued throughout the night. With battle-damaged aircraft making unusual arrivals or not quite reaching the runway and with occasional cases of fuel exhaustion during landing or taxi, there was no shortage of drama. The Thunder Jets provided particular entertainment. Too fast for a comfortable landing on this relatively

short runway, they would only make the effort when really low on fuel. They had a guaranteed audience.



Meteor At Kimpo

We arrived in a period of intense activity and had to fit into the pattern between gaggles of Sabers and Shooting Stars. As we were commanded to "Orbit and extend downwind", fuel gauges claimed anxious glances. Was someone trying to make a point about our insignificance in this world of battle-hardened airmen? With a distinct feeling of gratitude we touched down on the single 6,500 ft runway, recently occupied by snow-plows as they freed the surface of its burden, now represented as glistening white barricades along each side of the slippery landing strip. It goes without saying this was the home of noise, of screaming jets and throaty Merlins, distorting the atmosphere already thoroughly contaminated by their odious emissions. It was a place of intense activity and endless tragedy. Kimpo was also the home of numerous other operational flying units. Apart from the Fourth Fighter- interceptor Wing of the USAF, the elite group with their Sabre jet fighters, to which we were attached, there was also the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Unit, flying Douglas Invader twin-engine bombers. The 'Cotton Pickers' flew F80 Shooting Star fighters, and the Polka-Dots and the Republic of Korea both had Mustangs. There were occasional visitors such as the Thunder-Jets. Several huge B-29 bombers sat in one corner sporting 23mm and 37mm battle damage as grim evidence of MiG encounters.

Settling In

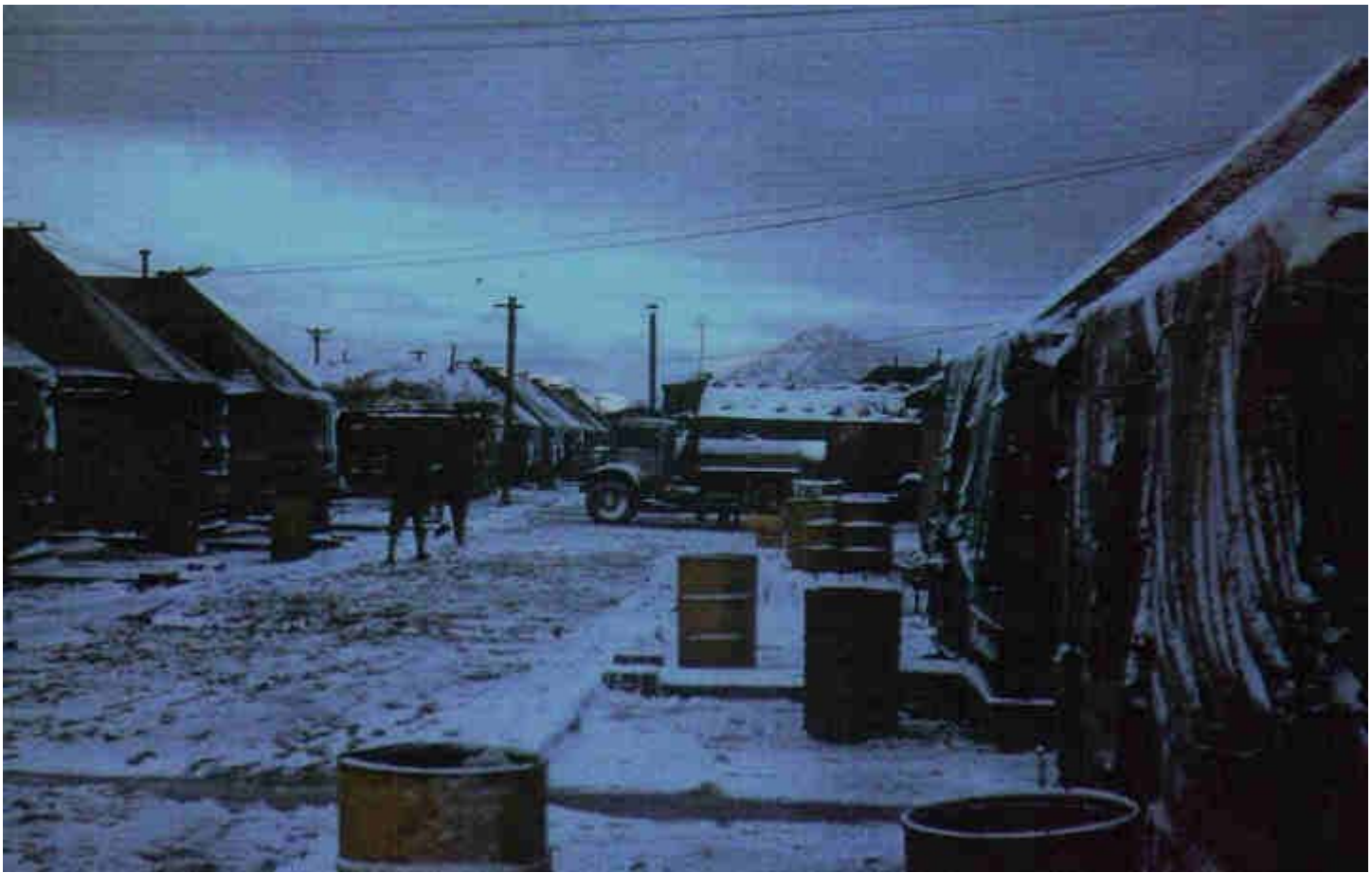
Ken and I were introduced to the Commanding Officer Wing Commander Ron Susans DFC and a number of other senior pilots, some of whom we had already met in Australia.



Wing Commander Susans Briefing

Many of our squadron pilots were Sergeants. The Yanks however did not have non-commissioned pilots and could not grasp the idea. Consequently all non-commissioned 77 Squadron pilots did not wear rank badges of any sort. We lingered in 'No rank land' merely sporting pilot's wings and name plates on our chests. At least we had names! Mine was potentially a little different, and provocative, the boldly emblazoned title 'COL KING.' Naturally Americans frequently approached with a respectful, "Say Colonel-etc." This was not hard to live with as it carried certain promotional overtones so conspicuously absent from the real life situation. Some Americans however, were amazed at "The age of the Colonel!" — 21.

The first night in Korea was different and exciting. With briefing and equipment matters completed we were welcomed to the Mess where we found an abundance of good-fellowship and fun. The CO gave some friendly advice. "You chaps are both flying in the morning. Ease up on the grog and get an early night. "Hope you sleep well in our Korean holiday resort!" Sleeping bags were supported on camp stretchers that we dragged into oil-heater proximity. Winter in Korea had a Siberian quality with biting winds and snowfalls. I made my first complaint, "What's all that racket with those motors. Don't they know what time it is?" An Old Hand quickly advised, "You better get used to it. They run those truck engines all night and the Merlins will start shortly on the flight lines. It stops the coolant from freezing." We did get used to it. In spite of such disturbances and weather excesses we soon became a comfortable and congenial household.



Tent Lines, 77 Squadron Kimpo

In our warm briefing room there was a large relief model of the whole of North Korea. We spent much well-used time intent on that model, memorizing the rugged landscape with its steep-sided valleys. Particular attention was paid to the snaking MSRs (Main Supply Routes), our main hunting grounds, for by now the squadron was heavily occupied with ground-attack. We were assured our projected Korean experience was capable of being a hazardous business, even without adding to the equation the ill intentions of our enemy.

The inevitable pre-operational briefing was lucid and to the point:

Lives are at stake when using this very busy airport. You will land off an echelon starboard approach, making the break at 4 seconds intervals from a circuit height of 1,200 feet. Land in close trail, about 15 seconds apart, alternately on the left and then on the right side of the runway. Judge your approach so you do not need to apply thrust increase on final as the chap following you may be thrown onto his back. It has happened! If you return with 'hang up' rockets, taxi clear, point in a safe direction and wait for armorers who will render the missiles harmless. Radio discipline — no chatter! No flying on an empty stomach. You will not skip breakfast. Wear your regulation gear in flight. String vest, warm underwear, thick Gabardine trousers, warm shirt and flying suit, American combat boots with snow shoes firmly laced over and revolver secure and of course the Mae West life-jacket!

We were lectured on escape and evasion and issued with a 'Pointie Talkie' — a list of supposedly

useful phrases in local languages, in case we felt the urge to communicate north of 'The Parallel'. I required one addition, "Please give me a smaller shovel."

R E S T R I C T E D
CHINESE POINTIE TALKIE

ENGLISH

ENGLISH PHONETIC

1. I am a friend.
2. Please help me.
3. I am -
 - a. thirsty
 - b. hungry
 - c. lost
 - d. sick
 - e. wounded
 - f. tired
4. Do you understand?
5. I do not understand.
6. Yes. No.
7. I have medicines.
8. I can treat illness.
9. I am an American.
10. Take me there.
11. I will reward you.
12. Draw a map.
13. How far is it?
14. I am a friend of China.
15. Please point in the direction.
16. Danger.
17. Town. Village.
18. East. South. West. North.
19. Thank you.
20. Good. Bad.
21. Today. Tomorrow.
22. Help!
23. Stop!
24. Where are the Americans?
25. Please hide me.
26. Where are they?
27. Do not tell anyone I am here.
28. Take me to a Chinese hospital.
29. Chinese soldier very good.
30. I am walking to the hospital.
31. PLEASE GIVE ME A
SMALLER SHOVEL!

1. Woh shuh pung yoh.
2. Ching nee bong woh.
3. Woh -
 - a. kuh
 - b. uh
 - c. tew liao
 - d. bing liao
 - e. shoh shong
 - f. lay liao
4. Nee dung mah?
5. Woh bu dung.
6. Shuh. Bu shuh.
7. Woh yoh yeow.
8. Woh whay kan bing.
9. Woh shuh May-goh-run.
10. Die woh dow nah bien.
11. Woh whay bao da nee.
12. Ching nee gay woh hwah dee-too.
13. Yoh doh yuan?
14. Woh shuh Chung-goh pung-yoh.
15. Ching nee chuhr fahng shiong.
16. Way shien.
17. Chun. Shiong-trun.
18. Dung. Nan. Shee. Bay.
19. Shieh-shieh.
20. How. Bu how.
21. Jin-tien. Min-tien.
22. Juo-ming!
23. Ting!
24. Nah lee yoh May-goh-run?
25. Ching nee tsong woh.
26. Tah mun tsi nah lee?
27. Nee bieh gow soo pong run woh tsi druh-lee.
28. Die woh dow Chung-goh e-yuan.
29. Chung-goh ping ding how.
30. Wch dow e-yuan chu.

1. 我是朋友
2. 請你幫我
3. 我 -
 - a. 渴
 - b. 餓
 - c. 丟了
 - d. 病了
 - e. 受傷
 - f. 累了
4. 你懂嗎?
5. 我不懂
6. 是. 不是
7. 我有藥
8. 我會看病
9. 我是美國人
10. 帶我到那邊
11. 我會報答你
12. 請你給我畫地圖
13. 有多遠?
14. 我是中國的朋友
15. 請你指方向
16. 危險
17. 城. 鄉村
18. 東. 南. 西. 北
19. 謝謝
20. 好. 不好
21. 今天. 明天
22. 救命!
23. 停!

R E S T R I C T E D

Pointie-Talkie Carried On Missions

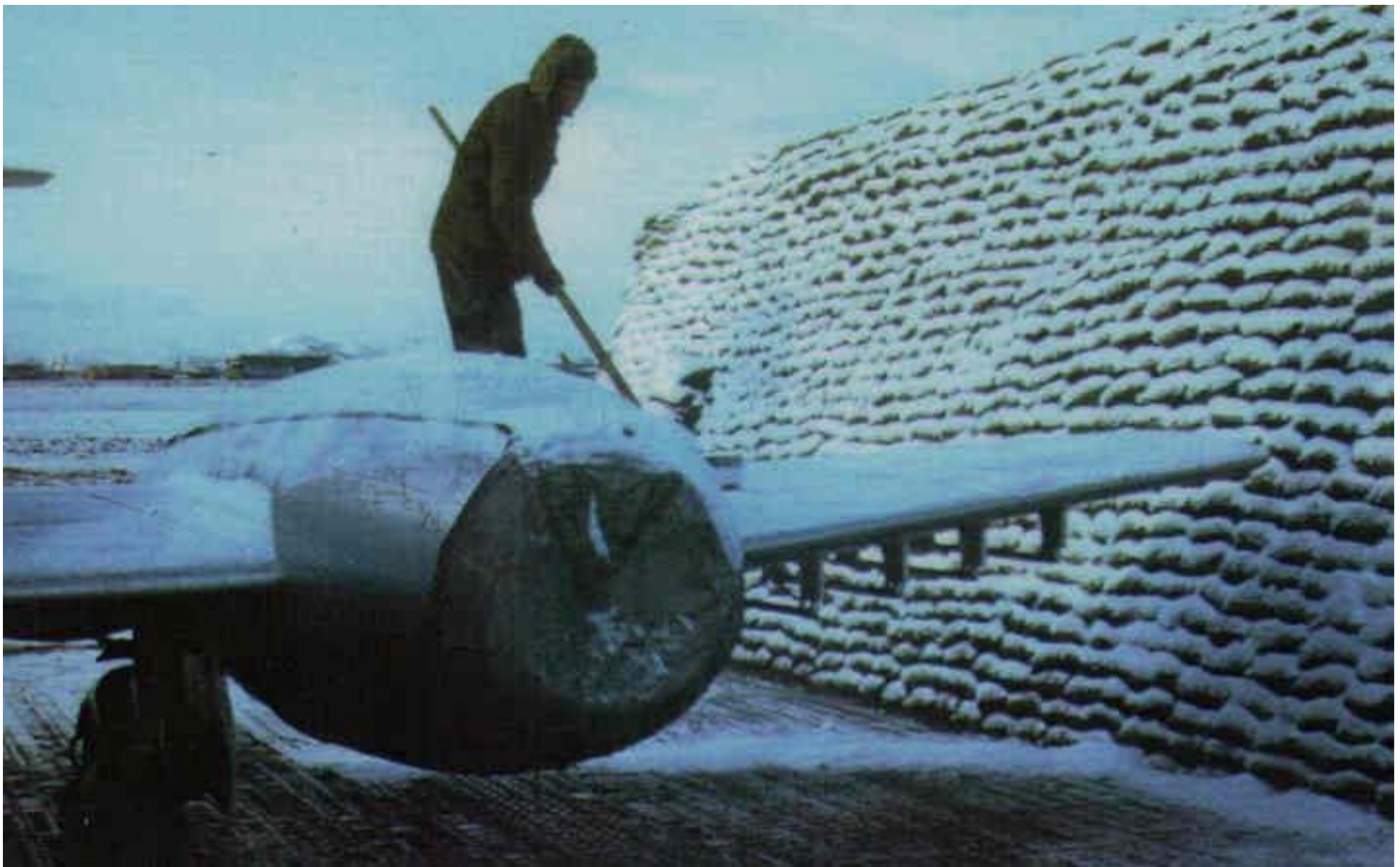
Most aircraft, including our Meteors, were left in the open protected from the hazards of shrapnel

and strafing by huge sandbag revetments. The airfield, ringed with heavily guarded barbed wire, was spotted with anti-aircraft gun pits. Kimpo air base where we lived was an 'Armed Camp'. It was surrounded by barbed wire and there were many gun emplacements. Armed guards roamed the perimeter. We heard the story supposedly authentic — one of the guards was caught asleep on duty. He received seven years in prison! We slept well, but we were not on guard duty! aircraft and equipment in these awful conditions. Aircraft were meticulously maintained and swept clear of snow and ice. Our Meteors, like prize animals living outside in the winter barnyard, were partially encased in canvas sheaths. Ground crews laboriously maneuvered these cumbersome envelopes onto sensitive surfaces to ward off the extreme effects of winter accretions.



Groundcrew Sheathing Tail-Plane

In spite of these precautions much sweeping and scraping was still required in producing ice-free operational readiness. We knew they had been there for hours, refueling, arming and removing ice to make sure our aircraft would be in good shape. In the early hours much equipment was frozen solid including the water in the emergency rubber bottle on top of the dinghy pack on which the pilot had to sit. Any aircraft surfaces which had not been effectively covered would be encrusted with ice and snow. Dealing with such problems, in these bitter conditions, added to the labors and the physical pain of the ground crews. No praise was too great for their efforts and their cheerful disposition. Some work was too intricate to be accomplished while wearing gloves, so frequent visits to the heater in the flight hut were necessary to prevent frostbite. Ground crew members were occasionally seen taking temporary shelter inside the engine intake cowl of a convenient Meteor.



Groundcrew Sweeping Wing

So we had arrived — new boys amid these experienced men! However, when compared with new fighter pilots of previous wars we were probably better trained and were flying a superior aircraft. We had confidence in ourselves and in our compatriots. Yet we were aware that we had not yet known a sufficiency of fear or awareness of hazard. We were tentative and apprehensive, as should be all beginners in warfare. Shortly after Ken and I had settled in and done a few missions, three more of our Five Course members arrived — Jack Evans, fondly known as "Lofty." Jim Kichenside and Max Outhwaite. Now all of those from our fighter course, nine in number, had arrived at Kimpo. Unfortunately we had already lost two: Dick Robinson and Ian Cranston, both victims of exploding ventral tanks. This left seven of the original fighter pilot section of the 'Reprobates' — but not for long!



Pat Melican, Diligent Ground-Crew Corporal

Chapter 13

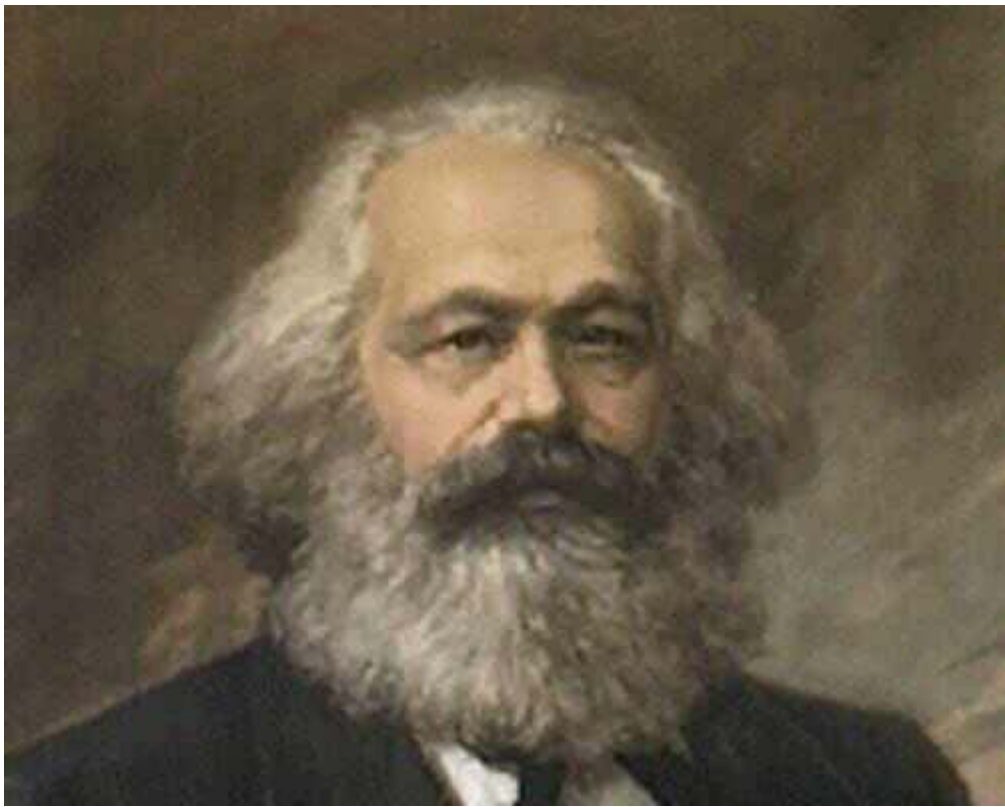
Life In The Prison Camp — Pin-Chong-Ni

Trials And Tedium

It seems appropriate to introduce some details of the miserable camp conditions endured by the prisoners — by way of comparison with our own relatively luxurious surrounds.

The prison compound was located in the northern side of the valley. It was a medium sized camp of about 7000 square feet surrounded by barbed wire and sentries. Bordering on the wire was an avenue of seven stately poplar trees, which the Padre called "The Seven Sentinels." The main building, rectangular in shape, was a former schoolhouse built by the Japanese. An adjoining area, about half the size of a soccer field, used for parades and exercise, had been a children's playground in better times. Around the perimeter were spaced: a cook-house, a bath-house and a toilet. On a slight rise overlooking the parade ground stood a barbershop and a small Korean house used as quarters by the Chinese political instructors. These elevated buildings were known as "Snob Hill". The main schoolhouse, accommodating about 300, was of timber and mud. It had a front entrance facing the parade ground with a corridor running lengthwise. Classrooms that opened into this passage provided POW accommodation with about 23 to each room. At the western end was one large room, 'The Library,' housing a collection of Communist newspapers such as The Daily Worker from England and the Shanghai News.

It was in this room that Chinese political teachers delivered indoctrination lectures so it was fitting that the walls should be festooned with portraits of the Communist leaders such as Lenin, Marx, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Kim Il Sung and a couple of Korean generals. These masters glared down at the inmates with apparent disapproval. Such propaganda lectures, occupying many hours of every day in addition to normal work details of carrying wood and water, were nevertheless central to a lifestyle clearly preferable to being under the heel of North Koreans.



Karl Marx — Communist Inspiration

The Camp Commander lived with his wife and small daughter in a well-guarded house at Headquarters, just outside the wire. This was Ding. To the prisoners this haughty Chinese officer had acquired the name "Snake-eyes." A well-dressed man who appeared to speak no English, Ding would saunter through the compound with a proud and impressive bearing. He was often accompanied by his interpreter, Wong, generally known as 'DP' or more specifically 'Dirty Picture,' because of his compulsion for acquiring girlie-pictures of dubious virtue. Wong spoke remarkably good idiomatic English. During daily political lectures, Snake-eyes regularly harangued his captive audience with three-hour speeches. These were delivered in Chinese and promptly translated by Wong in well under half the time. A theme popular with Ding and his associates was "The UN warmongers sabotage the Panmunjom peace-talks."

The camp was organized along military lines, comprising two companies of about 140 men divided into squads of about 20 each. Jack and Ron were assigned to the 2'nd Squad of the 1'st Company, billeted in the first room at the eastern end of the building. There was an area of about two square meters of floor space per man. The barber's shop and quarters on Snob Hill were of old-style mud-and-thatch construction and incorporated the wonderful feature of heated floors. This magic was achieved by establishing a sunken fire outside the buildings at one end with a flue tunnel running the length of the floor and ending in a chimney.

Ron describes the camp:

This was crude but effective. One time when I was isolated and placed in such a room, the floor was so hot I could not sit on it. It was because of the central heating and certain other attributes, the barbershop complex earned its name of Snob Hill! The barbers were selected and appointed from

among the earliest inmates when the camp was first formed. They were self-taught — one engineer, one marine and one airman, however by the time I arrived for my badly needed haircut and beard-trim they were quite proficient both at hair cutting and maintaining their own special empire. There was always a long list of prisoners waiting for haircuts because, like all barbershops, it was a center of cheerful repartee and a continuous source of news and rumors, mainly about the Peace Talks at Panmunjom. I was quick to join that queue at the first opportunity as my hair and beard were both thick and knotted I must have looked like the Wild Man from Borneo. No wonder they had used me in Sinuiju for demonstrations and for frightening small children. I had my haircut but learned nothing new about the negotiations.

By early December the winter began in earnest with temperatures down to minus 20C at night with much worse to come. Four pot-bellied stoves in the hallway outside the squad rooms were kept fueled by the wood which we carried in from China. At long last, through sheer necessity, we finally received warm clothing. For many this was the first issue of garments since their capture. Each man was given one blue cotton padded uniform, padded rubber-soled boots, padded cap and gloves, one blanket and a thin quilt-type 'comforter.' The rooms had a narrow aisle down the center with floor space for about a dozen men on each side. The floor was partly insulated against cold by rice-straw matting, the main walls being lined with narrow wood paneling to provide an air seal. Most slept on their comforter and piled all their clothing on top. When the wood ran out for the stove, which stood just outside the sliding door to each room, the doors would be closed to retain warmth. Comfort was now reliant on body heat. Later, in the depths of winter it was imperative to keep the fires alight.

The toilet was located at the far side of the parade ground. The facility consisted of a large rectangular pit with boards to provide seating, all housed within a thatched enclosure. On beholding this magnificent structure for the first time I suggested a social outing to Happy Day. Would you care to join me to check out this technical marvel?"To this he replied, No thanks, you go ahead, I've been five times today already."This was a harrowing trip in the freezing night atmosphere. Each morning the track across the parade ground was strewn with brown and orange stalagmites, silent testimony to the misfortunes of those who failed to make the distance during the night. In summertime flies from the toilet area were an absolute menace.

The bathhouse was another important facility. It contained two large concrete baths, poorly built and cracked. When Ron arrived these were under repair and it took some weeks before they were occasionally usable. The larger of the two was for bathing and the smaller for clean rinse water. Both were heated with the usual fire-under-the-floor method. Squads were allocated bath time on a once-per-week roster on the rare occasions when the complex was working. Under the same roof was the cook-house, an arrangement of primitive ovens made of stones and mud supporting huge cast-iron pots, all of which were frequently immersed in black smoke. About 14 prisoners lived here and toiled at the task of supplying 300 hungry men with something to eat. Prisoners collected their food by squads from the kitchen, in buckets or wooden boxes. In the squad room the 'bucket-man' for the day doled out the portions. Each squad had a bucket and a wash-pan with hot water being supplied from a gasoline drum over an open fire. Squad members queued for washing up. For laundry purposes there were two 50-gallon drums set into a walk-in. Heated by wood fires, these drums were effective for clothes washing. Because of this, prisoners claimed, "We've probably got the only louse-free area in North Korea!"

The daily routine was tiresome. At dawn, the camp was wakened by a loudspeaker blaring Soviet and Chinese revolutionary music, generally commencing with, "Arise ye prisoners of starvation; arise ye wretched of the earth". The prisoners found this most appropriate. By 7am they were on the

parade ground for roll call, known as "lole call" in the vernacular, to be followed by physical jerks or an escorted short walk. This early rise and period of exercise was followed by an exasperating wait of two and a half hours until breakfast. Next there was a period of political study, a lunch break without an y lunch, another period of brainwashing, an evening meal followed by further study in small groups, with lights extinguished at nine o'clock.

Simple though this may sound, in fact there was an all-pervading atmosphere of evil, the product of brutal political extremists controlling the lives of these captives. Disaster could strike at any moment, as a guard entering the hut might confront a particular prisoner. The menacing command would spit forth; "Pack your everything and come!" The victim could expect inhumane conditions or cruel tortures to follow. The sick and starving culprit was likely to be threatened; "No one knows you are here. If you resist us you will be dropped into a deep hole where you will stay forever, and your bones will rot. But never mind, the world will soon forget you!" Such realities and these terrible threats of random misfortune governed the existence of 300 tormented prisoners. In spite of this barbaric treatment, human dignity and good humor prevailed wherever possible.

POWs sought recreation at every opportunity. The air fighting between American Sabres and MiGs was a vital source of entertainment, particularly for pilots. We would lie on our backs and watched with excitement as the fighters wheeled overhead. The chatter of the fast-firing point fives of the Sabres was quite distinct as was the heavy pom pom of the MiGs' cannons. It became obvious and was a great source of joy to us that the Sabres were having their way, as so many MiGs spiraled in flames. The Chinese always identified a falling aircraft as another American, and celebrated.

Camp water was drawn from a stream or from wells, situated perilously close to the latrine. Fuel for the fires had to be transported 10 miles from Pyoktong where there was a dump of firewood, which had been ferried across the Yalu from China. The Koreans would not allow the Chinese to burn Korean timber although the gathering or felling of some dead wood was allowed on occasions. So the prisoners, in addition to carrying water, had to bring in loads of wood on 'A' frames strapped to their backs. As we trudged through snow and along slippery ice-bound roads on these transport details, we passed through little clusters of cottages which, in some cases, served as billets for the Chinese guards. Occasionally, we witnessed these illiterate peasant soldiers undergoing lectures, squatting or sitting in small groups clutching books or papers. They were probably learning to read. It was interesting to learn about the daily routine of the ordinary Chinese soldier. In the early morning they did weapon and marching drill. After breakfast there were lengthy indoctrination lectures from the political commissars. These sessions involved the use of blackboards, maps and diagrams and were always accompanied by vigorous singing. Self-criticism was an important element of the learning process.

For the prisoners, life tended to revolve around food, in winter just two meals a day. After being on particularly poor food for so long, Ron and Jack looked forward to their daily ration, plain and sparse though it was. Fortunately, the menu for the winter of 1951-52 improved with the introduction of rice and steamed bread buns, a change from diacons, cabbage and kaoliang. Once per month a pig supplemented the diet of 300 prisoners. This delicacy, served to flavor the soup and occasionally a piece of meat, hopefully without hair, would add to the body of the meal. Steamed bread was a luxury, being tasty and possessed of a gratifying toughness. When available, there was also a small portion of rice crust. This was the shell remaining in the cooking pot after all the rice had been served. Left to burn, it provided the grain for artificial coffee. There was nothing else to use for this purpose. Everything, including the water, was boiled thoroughly as an obvious safeguard against disease. The cooks were meticulous in this respect. There were two underground pits in the end of

the assembly area, used for vegetable storage in winter. They were nine-feet deep and 12-feet square. The top was covered and a ladder ran down. Here were stored the winter supplies of Chinese cabbage, diacons and vegetables. Periodically, groups of unfortunate prisoners were dispatched to the depths to sort out the rotting product, a most unpleasant job. Those who were assigned to the vegetable pit detail would often consume a diacon or two while working. This seemed to disguise the smell of the rotten cabbage.

In mid December 1951, two more Australians arrived — Vance Drummond and Bruce Thompson, both Sergeant pilots from my old 77 Squadron. They said: "We were hacked by about 40 MiGs on the first of December south-east of Pyongyang. There were only 12 of us but it was quite a scrap, I'm sure we got a few of them!" They were right about this, as two MiGs did fall to the Meteors' cannons. Flying Officer Bruce Gogerly was credited with a kill and the Squadron jointly with another. Unfortunately, in that same engagement Sergeant Don Armit was killed. These details however, remained unknown to the prisoners until after the war.



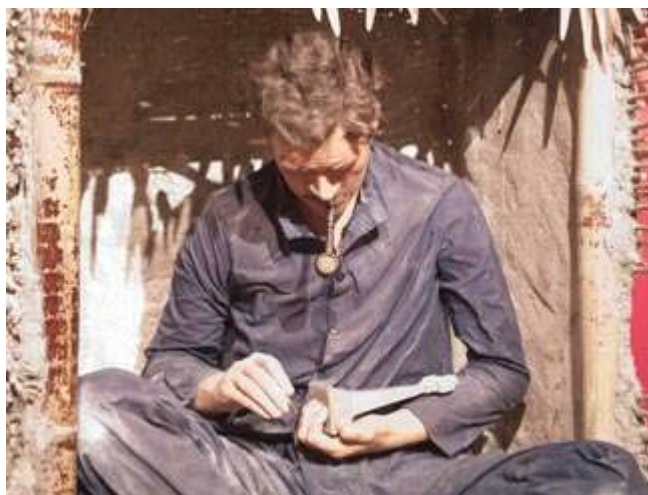
Vance Drummond

Vance told of being captured as he trekked from mountainous country where he had landed in his parachute. The enemy had followed his tracks in the snow and 45 minutes after landing he was a prisoner. He was held in a village about 30 miles from Pyongyang for six days of interrogation. Drummond and Thompson were transferred to Pin-chong-ni after about one week. They soon became fully occupied, along with everyone else, in the trying business of surviving the dreadful winter of 1951/52. At about this time, a small number of utterly exhausted American prisoners were admitted to the camp. They had been in North Korean hands since being captured in July 1950, just after the war commenced. Scraggy, clad in dirty rags, suffering from skin diseases and lice infestation they were in poor shape physically and their morale was at the lowest ebb. Only the strongest had survived their march north under 'The Tiger,' a fanatical North Korean Colonel. These haggard, brooding men gradually came back to life in their new surroundings. They were given sympathetic companionship, a tonic in itself!

Padre Davies established The Church of the Captivity, the worshipping community and Fellowship of

the Baptized within the prison camp. He was the only priest: Chaplain to the Church of the Captivity. Religious meetings were held in the lecture room, an unattractive area normally devoted to political lectures and 'Peoples' Trials' but there was no other place. They gathered every Sunday morning and on Wednesday evenings. The Padre visited the cooks every Monday evening in their quarters for prayers because they could not attend the public service.

In addition to church services, the Padre organized Confirmation groups, Bible study, choir practice and administration of Baptism. Despite Communist obstructions, 19 British and American officers were prepared for Confirmation. Six Americans were secretly baptized in the carpenter's shed. Here, after posting a lookout, the baptism would take place. Baptismal Certificates were issued on cigarette paper. Special items necessary for the observance of religious services were frequently refused or withheld. The men laboriously copied more than 40 little hymn-books held together at the spine with pieces of cast-off material sewn with infinite patience. Paper was in short supply so men donated from their precious supply of camp-issue cigarette paper. There were always plenty of volunteers for the work of manufacturing the hymn-books and assisting with the Padre's services. Colonel Carne made a remarkable contribution with his handiwork.



Colonel Carne Carves Cross (Re-enactment)

One special item of religious significance was a beautifully carved Celtic Cross made from local Korean stone. Colonel Carne, the indomitable Commanding Officer of the Gloucestershire Regiment, laboriously created this work of art using little more than two nails and a makeshift hammer. He spent countless days in the frigid December weather rubbing and smoothing his creation on the concrete steps of the barracks building. The cross became a symbol of patience, endurance and preservation of Christian faith. The cross now resides in the Gloucestershire cathedral.

The Chinese required three days notice of religious meetings. The full service had to be submitted word by word for their approval. Then, after as much disruption and alteration as could be inflicted, the final approval would be delayed until the last minute. Every prayer, every hymn, every Bible reading had to be laboriously written out and submitted to Headquarters for scrutinizing and assessment. At Christmas it was forbidden to organize a little shadow-mime play on the theme of Good King Wenceslass and the carol itself was struck out because this has a reactionary attitude to the working people. It is a story of feudal bourgeois philanthropy. In May the Roman Catholics asked permission to hold a special public prayer meeting for peace. This was forbidden. "It is not necessary. It is the American warmongers at Panmunjom who prevent peace. Your prayers do no

good. When the warmongers have a sincere attitude there will be peace." Every ridiculous objection was raised and the Padre had to indulge in lengthy and frustrating arguments in which he was repeatedly accused of, "False propaganda against the Peace Loving People!"

Finally the Padre was declared "A trouble maker and a bad man. You have deceived us. You are a cunning priest. Always you try to undermine the Camp Authority and slander our religious policy. You must be punished for your crimes. If you confess now you will get lenient punishment." He was required to indulge in puerile 'self criticism' but this did not satisfy his overlords. Padre Davies was delivered into the hands of Chinese guards who brusquely stripped him of various possessions, even a pencil stub and a piece of paper. His pocket New Testament was thrown spitefully to the ground. As the Padre bent to pick it up the guard kicked it away and adopted a menacing pose with his bayonet.

Jailed for Illegal religious activities the Padre was to experience The Peace Loving People's version of religious freedom with a vengeance. His filthy cell, six feet by four, polluted by oil, urine and a pile of well-worn gym shoes was to be his home for 17 long days and 17 nights. During this terrible period the Padre was occasionally able to give comfort to other prisoners in nearby cells by encouragement and prayer. Many were stalwarts of the Glorious Glosters who were a difficult crowd for the Chinese. These stout-hearted men had been treated abominably. Also suffering nearby were American officers. Their particular hell was a hole in the ground covered with logs, a disused air-raid shelter. Peeping from his cell Padre Davies occasionally saw a pitiful hand emerge from the depths and retrieve a food bowl. Later he observed an officer wearing American attire, haggard and moving feebly, being escorted to a latrine. On return, the trembling man could not bring himself to re-enter the dreaded pit but stood at the entrance gesticulating and protesting weakly. The guards shouted, virtually propelled him underground and then sealed off his hell-hole with the logs. In all probability these particular troglodytes were airmen refusing to confess to trumped-up charges of Germ warfare, a program of vicious propaganda currently in fashion. Despite the dreadful treatment suffered by the Padre he was charitable in giving credit for occasional acts of benevolence he encountered from the enemy.

At about this time there was a period of larceny. The school bell, or as the Chinese called it, "The Peoples' Bell" disappeared. It simply vanished overnight. As the bell's function was to summon everyone to roll call ("Loll Call") and to political lectures it seems someone had taken a disliking for that reason. The Chinese interrogated several internees whom they suspected of being reactionaries and therefore likely suspects. In an attempt to end the matter, one innocent suspect suggested they should look in the obvious places, the latrine or the trash pit. He was merely applying common sense, and sure enough the missing treasure turned up, buried in the trash. The Chinese now needed a culprit. The hapless informant, in spite of his pleas of innocence did one month of solitary, bad the best of times, but in the cold, quite terrible! Next the Peoples' Flagpole went missing. Everyone had a pretty good idea where it had gone as it was the middle of winter and wood was scarce. Fortunately, the pole had been located outside the compound and to accuse the prisoners would place too much unfavorable attention on the guards. The locals received the blame.

Chapter 14

Five Course Begins Operations At Kimpo

"The Reprobates" In Action

The first operational flight was usually an orientation and familiarization exercise. However, pilot shortage intervened and, on the day after arrival, I found myself 'thrown into the deep end.'

At the time, I had just over eight hours flying on Meteors — my only twin-engine experience, and this included the delivery flight from Japan. Flight Lieutenant Keith Martin hastily entered my tent in mid afternoon. "King your familiarization flight is off for the moment. You are coming with me right now. You are going to get your 'famil' the quick way. Grab your gear and hop into my jeep." This was a 'scramble' with one other aircraft and the demand produced, in me, a sudden moment of excitement as I jumped off the stretcher, rapidly securing gun-belt and jacket. We hastened out into the crisp winter air. As the jeep slithered along the snowbound pathway to our briefing room Keith explained, "Some 'bogies' on radar have got them worried and we're going to take a look!" We were being scrambled to intercept unidentified aircraft in the vicinity of Sing-ye. This was called a GCI, or Ground Controlled Interception. Our ground radar, being unable to ascertain the 'bona fides' of a flight of aircraft heading this way, would direct us and probably vector airborne flights as well, in order to obtain clarification. Obviously, everyone was sensitive to the possibility of a sneak attack as our base was close to the North Korean border. It was a normal expectation to be 'taken by the hand and shown the ropes' as promised, but now I was to be part of a businesslike team dispatched to do an urgent task. What other surprises lay in store?



Crew Jeep In The Morning

There is no difficulty in recalling the sensations. We hurry. The briefing is no more than a few shouted words as we clamber into life jackets and tighten bulky snow shoes to enclose our Combat boots. We quickly sign the maintenance release (E/E-77) and hasten to our Meteors. Ground crews help us strap in — a service I am not accustomed to. A harness secures the pilot to a parachute located in the back of the ejector-seat and an emergency pack (Dinghy and water container). These latter items form the pilot's seat cushion. The pilot is then strapped to the seat. From this moment, mind and hands keep pace with mumbled words. "Ejection seat safety pin removed from and stowed, Emergency Oxygen pin removed, Oxygen plugged and tested, Radio and Radio-Compass tested." Hands and thoughts flash around the cockpit checking and setting more than 30 more items. H/P, L/P,

Fuel Balance, Pneumatics, Rudder, Elevator, Battery, Air Brakes, Pressurization, Canopy, W/Screen heat, Flaps, U/Carriage, Jettison, Fuel, Lighting, U/C emerg, Oxy emerg, Hydraulics emerg, De-icer, Harness release. The list continues in rapid-fire actions and now there is the 'All Clear' from an engineer attending to the ground starter battery cart. The starter button for No 2 engine is pressed and held for two seconds. As rpm approach 1,000, I open the HP cock in the appropriate manner. No 1 engine follows and soon the whine of two more Derwents is added to all the others around our tarmac as they idle at a mere 3,500 rpm. Jet pipe temperature gauges register a comfortable 400 degrees as Canopy Operation check is completed. The Ground Engineer gives a cheerful wave as I open the throttles and move into line astern.

It has been snowing during the night and the perforated steel plating of the taxiway is slippery. We corner with care in spite of our hurry and proceed at a modest speed. It is important to taxi a sufficient distance behind the preceding Meteor to prevent his jet blast from throwing melted snow onto my windscreen and canopy where it would immediately freeze. Mumbled reassurances continue, A/H and Compass, Elevator one half-division nose-down, Flaps one third, (as briefed for this slippery runway), Pressurization Press, Gun-sight functioning and retracted, Windscreen De-mist both On. There is no engine warm-up procedure.



Meteor Pairs Take-Off

Cleared for immediate take-off we run to almost full power against the brakes and release on the leader's signal. I remain tucked in just behind his starboard wingtip. We rotate and lift-off in unison, breaking ground as if connected. A touch on the brake lever stops wheel rotation and the gear lever is raised. Wheels snap up and as speed increases I retract flap. Now having settled down, my scan around the horizon reaches new standards of diligence. Recent stories of MiG encounters and Meteor losses occupy my thoughts along with briefing information on the superiority of that remarkable Russian fighter. There is little time for looking down at the countryside. It is obvious nevertheless as we test cannons, we are now in hostile airspace.

It had all been so sudden. As anticipated there was no talk apart from essential commands. My leader kept track of our position by reference to map and ground — there were no other facilities. In order to attempt an interception we flew headings as directed by GCI radar. No enemy appeared. Eventually we went down to ground level seeking targets on the main roads. Some shots were fired and possibly Keith Martin had a feeling of satisfaction, however my only endeavor with the cannons had been the gun-test on departure. Perhaps was normal for a novice on his first sortie. The Bogies turned out to be Friendlies, undoubtedly something of an anti-climax. They were Republic of Korea Mustangs, failing to transmit their 'Friend or Foe' identification. Had these been MiGs this would have made a dramatic start to a long list of logbook entries. As it was, having spent time in enemy airspace, there was a feeling of being one of the veterans who had returned unscathed.



L-R: Smithy, Pete Middleton, Bluey Philp

Meteor Ground Attack Missions

It became apparent we would be committed to a high proportion of quite demanding ground attack missions during this war. The sturdy and stable Meteor aircraft with its two engines, the four 20mm canons, point-harmonized at 800 yards and its capacity to carry eight rockets, including napalm missiles, made it a formidable weapon.



Air attack On A North Korean Supply Train

Learning to execute attacks efficiently with the best chance of survival was a specialized business. The enemy had established a high density of efficient flak weapons of many varieties including those with radar prediction. This defensive screen was the mainstay of the enemy as they acknowledged loss of air superiority, and was considered to frequently exceed the density and efficiency of WWII small and medium anti-aircraft weaponry. 'Flak traps,' in the form of dummy vehicles produced special hazards. Pilots new to the contest were particularly at risk. One pilot on his first mission reported "having a go at a tank." He added to his identification the interesting note that he could see the tail-light blinking. This, in fact, was a machine gun ranging on his Meteor.

The enemy were experts at camouflage and deception. Troops disguised as peasants with ox-carts and 'A frame' carriers occasionally braved the roads and were not unknown to blow up when attacked. Additional hazards were encountered when heavily laden Meteors tended to 'squash' during dive-recovery — particularly dangerous in hilly terrain. If a Meteor was hit during low-level operations there were limited opportunities to gain altitude for an ejection which required about one thousand feet of ground clearance and even then necessitated efficient procedures. Climbing to this altitude may not be possible in a badly disabled aircraft. After the shock of ejection the pilot had to quickly release his seat straps, fall clear of the seat, and then pull the parachute ripcord.



Meteor Rocketing Target

The Controllers

Our efficient Ground Radar 'eyes' reside in a well-protected assembly of buildings on a knoll to the northeast of our runway. Here, protruding from buildings and sandbag revetments the rotating mesh antennae gathered vital data on the whereabouts of airborne friend and foe. The principal function here was Ground Controlled Interception. In the event of enemy aircraft appearing on the radar screen our fighters would be scrambled and directed into contact.

Ken Towner, and Bob Strawbridge, two of our Sergeant friends from Point Cook, volunteered to take us newcomers to Radar Hill on a tour of inspection and general education. Phil Zupp, another Sergeant friend from Point Cook and a resident of our tent, also availed himself of the opportunity. Arrangements were made and a short jeep ride soon had us at the parking lot for this facility. It was a short walk up a steep hill. A reluctant sun occasionally peeped through the busy scud cloud as we hastened in the blustery Siberian air with Parka hoods in place. We were expected and soon security passes adorning our jackets proclaimed our entitlement to information and hospitality. Both were generously provided by an articulate USAF Major. A veteran of Mustang fighters during WW2, he had some additional experience of MiG fighting over North Korea. Many of the radar operators in this efficient unit had similar backgrounds as a matter of policy. This knowledge gave us a good feeling that such understanding protection would ride with us in the cockpit per medium of these friendly transmissions, the voices of 'Dentist' 'Bromide' or 'Shirley.'

In the subdued lighting of the control center we viewed an array of radar sets, for the most part receiving attention from individual operators. These faintly glowing circular screens were referred to as PPIs, or Plan Position Indicators. On the round face of such an electronic marvel could be played out an air battle or a routine patrol. The little blips of light, representing aircraft in flight, progressed across the screen in response to the electronic activities of the big rotating grid antennae. I spent a few moments speculating upon the technical wizardry of mankind, in particular our ceaseless quest for improved capability to defeat an enemy.

We can now 'see' the opponent many miles away in any visibility. Our 'horsemen' may be directed in unerring pursuit and we may anticipate and frustrate his raiding parties. Our operators observe his advance or his return to sanctuary. In our own cockpits we rest secure in the presence of such guardianship. They do not confuse our passage with that of the enemy as we have our own distinctive 'shape' on the screen. A little control box alongside the pilot's right leg is referred to as IFF, short for "Identification Friend or Foe". By the press of a button I may change my screen image and this will enable me to move freely among many other 'blips' secure in the distinctive nature of a new persona. My 'Parrot' is now 'Squawking' a new number and will remain so until another button is pressed. In this manner we may respond to the radar man's demand for proof of identity.



Controller At Air Traffic Radar Screen

In the Main Operations Room was a large transparent screen on which the current scenario was plotted for the Senior Controller. Interestingly, behind this big board stood a busy officer whose mustering surely should have read, "Backwards Writer," for this is precisely how he spent his day. In order to avoid obstructing the screen he stood behind it and rapidly wielded a crayon, writing in reverse. This was an interesting and productive day. We were grateful to Ken Towner and Bob Strawbridge and to the Americans, as we added to our rapidly developing sense of belonging.



Bob Strawbridge

'Bedcheck Charlie' And Other Enemy Hazards

During mid 1951, the North Koreans began making occasional small nuisance night air-raids on targets in the northern part of South Korea, on and behind the front line. Departing from nondescript, unidentifiable 'airfields' just across the border, the courageous pilots flew a small number of elementary Russian Po-2 wood and fabric biplanes on these dangerous and mainly ineffectual sorties. The pilots attempted to scatter small bombs and grenades onto military target areas in the hope of causing damage, or at least creating alarm and sleep disruption. In the latter process they were at least moderately successful. and in the matter of real damage they also had some satisfaction. The intruders came to be known as "Bedcheck Charlies".



Po-2 Being Readied For Flight

These aircraft, with quiet low-powered engines, were elusive and hard to detect on radar or by visual sighting as they weaved around obstacles at low altitude and made unusually tight turns in order to avoiding detection or interception. The extremely low speed of operation was one of their greatest assets along with the noiseless approach and invisibility on radar. The disturbance and defensive activity generated at air-bases under attack was quite impressive as anti-aircraft gunners, so bereft of targets in the normal course of events, came to life with much excitement and noise. Search-lights and tracers swept the heavens, but the little intruder could be expected to do his puny business and rapidly disengage long before the guns stopped scattering their noisy and ineffectual shrapnel in the sky. One American cheerfully claimed, "These events are better than any 4th of July I have seen!"

Jet fighters could not intercept and shoot down Charlies due to the inability of the faster aircraft to get into position, and also the extreme agility of the target. In late 1951, in frustration, a slower-flying Corsair F4U-5N carrier fighter was borrowed from the US Navy. Having managed to get behind a Charlie, the attacking pilot, in order to fly slower, lowered flaps and landing gear but was still too fast. He collided with Charlie and both fell in flames.

In mid June 1953 Charlie activity increased, using as many as 15 small planes in these night raids. Some faster Yak-18s and La-11 fighters were employed in addition to the conventional Po-2s. Many attacks were launched against the South Korean capital and surrounds. Four Corsairs were brought into action, resulting in the destruction of at least four of the nuisance raiders. These raids, and the possibility of more vigorous attacks of this type, created a response by FEAF in unleashing a massive campaign of bombing North Korean airfields, which became one of the most successful air operations of the war.



Russian Yak-18 Trainer

Kimpo was precariously located a mere 35 miles south of the main battle line, a matter of some concern due to the plumb target which the massive base presented to an enemy keen on sneaky intrusion and surprise attacks by land or even by air. Emergency plans for evacuation of Kimpo were continually under review. The ground retreat plans were vague and somewhat pessimistic due to the inevitability of roads being choked with refugees. Because of there being not enough Meteors available to evacuate all pilots, some would possibly be called upon to drive RAAF trucks. To this end, those of us with current driver's licenses were checked out on these large vehicles and issued with Provisional RAAF Driver's certificates. I personally took little pride and even less comfort on becoming qualified and certified in this department. Never did my Meteor seem to be more desirable as a means of transport.

Occasional acts of sabotage were not unknown and the base was thoroughly guarded with this in mind. In February 1952 two incidents involving the Petrol and Oil Lubricant Dump resulted in the killing of five saboteurs. On occasions, men had been killed by infiltrators creeping into tents. We pilots always carried our service revolvers in our belt holster both in flight and on the ground. To mislay this weapon was a serious offense.

Night Strafing

One memorable action involved another flight with Bill Purssey. We took off in the late afternoon. Trucks had been located in a valley and were awaiting our attention. Bill briefed quickly. "I know just where to find them. The valley is about 35 miles north of Sinmak. Rest assured they'll be expecting us." We examined the topographical model in the briefing room while making final adjustments to flying gear including holstered revolvers. Hastening to the flight lines we soon had another four Derwent jet engines adding the screaming and fuming of their vigorous outpourings to the already overloaded Kimpo atmosphere. The efficiently coordinated departure routine assembled us on course. Then like two hungry predators, we charged towards our victims.

As we broke cloud, I found myself squinting into the sun in its low afternoon elevation behind the leader on whom I was positioning. I was almost blinded, but simply had to watch the other aircraft as it was imperative to keep station and protect his tail. Fortunately, among the gadgetry in my well stocked pockets, was a pair of substantial dark glasses. These produced a great sense of relief. The trucks were still there and indeed they were expecting us. It was so nearly dark below the clouds, and the valley was precipitous. We were about to fire 20mm cannons from gun platforms traveling at more than five hundred MPH. There were no rockets on this occasion. The logbook stirs vivid emotions.

As our first canon shells strike home the scene below is like an overturned ant-heap. Enemy troops are scurrying into the fields in all directions. A multitude of innocent looking blinking lights decorate nearby hillsides, fascinating, but menacing to our present activities. My inscription records, "Intense 20mm and small arms flak!" The official record indicates "Intense 37mm and 20mm flak, trucks began to disappear into caves on either side of the steep valley!" Explosions, vehicles on fire, smoke obscuring targets, more back at, no more than a wingspan distant. I confess to approaching self destruction on this occasion, hardly conducive to peace of mind!

"Don't come too low! Lots of explosion debris and ricochets!" calls Bill. "Now he tells me!" There is no chatter on the radio — essential instructions only, but I think to myself, "This is crazy stuff — night strafing in a valley!" We are intent on our job and our survival as dazzling lines of hot metal come punching out of the turmoil. There are probably eight or ten trucks in that valley. Our technique is to draw a bead on the target and give it a burst for one or two seconds rather than just strafing through the target area. A split second touch of the finger releases a roar of death-dealing thunder from the nose of my Meteor. Shells may be observed exploding on the hapless victims. Devastating! My logbook entry for 6 March — my personal logbook claim is: "Four trucks strafed, two burning!"

Fuel was being used extravagantly on these low level sorties so we disengaged and headed for base. We were both intact, if a trifle the worse for wear. It was a complete victory, however now it was really dark and I lacked night experience in these testing circumstances. In fact I had never flown a Meteor at night, so the trial was not yet over. I found the visibility poor, the cockpit lighting uncommonly dim and I experienced difficulty keeping station on my leader. Such problems were strange to me and for the first time I began to wonder if I was cut out for this work. Something was wrong! We entered the landing pattern and peeled off in succession in the approved manner. I was grateful for the light in the center of the tail crucifix of Bill's Meteor which was just a short distance ahead. It was not until on final approach, lining up for landing, that we again identified the dim runway flares for they were shrouded in the conventional war-area fashion. A vague pair of parallel lights rose steadily from the void to meet my wheels. I was perplexed, "What a dark night this is!"

With relief I shut down and joined Bill on the tarmac for an exciting discussion. He looked at me in astonishment. "Do you always fly at night with dark glasses on?" Thank goodness they did not bestow 'Clots Medals' in this squadron! In fact I must confess to a feeling of relief at having now identified the source of the handicap which had so limited my ability to focus on small targets at high speed while still avoiding terrain and the many other hazards. I had become so busy and excited by the job in hand, and had gradually accommodated the effect of the dark glasses. As a result they did not register in my consciousness. I had also become so absorbed as to skim below tree-top level and frighten myself into making certain acknowledgments and resolutions about the perils of over-exuberance. Interestingly, my next logbook entry for a night landing a couple of weeks later states "Misted windshield, a difficult landing." This resulted from a damaged air-conditioning system, which, providentially, did not coincide with the dark-glasses fiasco. That could have been embarrassing.

The Danger Of Ventral Tanks

Our Meteors were fitted with an extra fuel tank, called the ventral, which was attached under the belly and held 175 imperial gallons, a significant proportion of our total (595 gallons). This tank

could be instantly dropped by pulling a handle near the left side of the instrument panel. The ventral was something of a worry as there had been a number of tank explosions as a result of flak. Even an empty tank still held volatile vapor. These belly protuberances were vulnerable to flying debris and there had even been cases of 'scraping bottom' and suffering distortions due to excessively low pull-outs from strafing dives — dangerous stuff! These metal tanks were scarce and quite expensive attachment, therefore casual dropping was forbidden when entering air-to-air combat. Unfortunately this policy would automatically place the Meteor at a further disadvantage, however the shortage of tanks was a problem for the squadron. The USAF released their tanks on entering air fighting as an operational technique. Acknowledging the cost, the American pilots were known to say — this was "Like dropping a limousine." Once the Squadron became experienced in ground attack it soon became clear that to hang on to your ventral, once it was holed and streaming vapor, was extremely dangerous and cost the lives of a number of our pilots. Soon we began dropping these dangerous appendages at any sign of a hit.

The first death among the 'Reprobates' as we of 5 Course were called, was Dick Robinson who met his untimely end as a new 77 Squadron pilot on 16 February at Haeju, an important rail and road junction on the Main Supply Route. Dick was brought down by an exploding ventral. The next terrible example of a ventral tank fire and explosion on 9 March 1952 deprived us of another much-valued member of No 5 Course. Ian Cranston, winner of the award for 'Most outstanding Sportsman' on our graduation. Ian also did not have time to eject before the conflagration. F/Lt Wal Rivers was leading a rocket attack against heavily defended revetments about 30 miles north of The Holy Land (Kaesong). The flak was intense in this sensitive target area and soon Ian was seen to be on fire. In Wal's words, "Ian Cranston's aircraft passed me, quite close and totally in flames. A few seconds later it had passed my cockpit and exploded, probably on the ground." No ejection seat was seen.

On the first of April four of us were busily rocketing a stationary locomotive a few miles ESE of Haeju. Being such an important depot, so close to our base, the enemy had devoted themselves to the provision of abundant flak. Flight Lieutenant Keith Martin was leading and I was in number two position. Sergeant John Myers was Number Three with Ken Smith as his wing-man. According to my logbook two of the four Meteors were hit in the belly and the air resounded with warnings. "Red One you are streaming!" "Red Four (Smithy) you are streaming!" Two startled pilots pulled levers. Two ventral tanks plummeted earthwards. Fortunately we all returned on this occasion, a trifle more aware than ever, of ventral vulnerability! Keith Martin also brought home a cracked canopy.

The records show that the next day we were tormenting the same target. Under the leadership of Phil Hamilton-Foster, and in company with two other Sergeant pilots, Vic Oborn and Phil Zupp we helped produce impressive damage with rockets and gunfire. Five days later in this same area I was the one to take fright when informed, "Kinky your ventral is streaming." A split second later the tank and the Meteor parted company. It is a matter of opinion as to whether the tank exploded on ground contact or just before, as we were low in a strafing attack. It is also uncertain as to the source of the damage, flak, ricochet, or flying debris. We developed sensitivities, and the ventral was one!



Meteor Ventral Tank. L — R, Zupp, Evans, King

Successive Commanding Officers:

Wing Commander Ron Susans DFC, our Commanding Officer, left the squadron and returned to Australia on 26 March 1952 leaving the Squadron temporarily in the hands of Squadron Leader Bill Bennett until the arrival of the next C/O, Wing Commander J.R.'Congo' Kinninmont DFC and Bar. Kinninmont eventually turned over command to Wing Commander J.W. Hubble AFC on 20 January 1953 and the last commanding officer of the squadron during the active service in Korea, Wing Commander A.Hodges, 'Big Al' took up the appointment on June 5th 1953.



A Dickey Approach

The nature of our work precluded operations in poor general visibility. Sometimes the weather failed and the Communists had a respite from our daily attentions. On our side the only winners would have been the meteorologists who had prophesied these dismal conditions. Occasionally however, these same scientists were caught out by rapid developments.

On my first mission for the day of 13 June, as four aircraft returned to Kimpo, we managed to dead heat with a cloud layer that was so low we could not find any way into the circuit. A possible alternative airfield, Suwon, 45 miles southeast, was in the same predicament. The weather had turned fickle and abandoned its assigned characteristics. The gauntlet had been thrown, science was defeated and now the challenge was essentially ours. In fact this malicious cloud-bank had wiped out most airfields. Additionally, the 'Gremlins', seizing their opportunity, had conspired with the elements to ensure a maximization of our problems by rendering Ground Controlled Approach radar inoperative at this critical moment. We were homeless! The last resort ejecting and arriving by parachute, while practical enough, was not an appealing alternative! There was no time for lengthy considerations.

Our leader, Wes Guy who had experience with such situations and learning that the cloud base was about 200 feet, decided to take us home in line-astern, for landing into the northwest. He planned to accomplish this by descending below the cloud and stabilizing at minimum safe flying speed. We should achieve this condition at about 50 feet over the muddy waters of the Han River and about 20 track miles from our threshold. "Follow me down, two pairs, Line-astern. air-brakes now!"



Han River At Seoul, 1952

We dive past the edge of a solid layer of stratus. I am positioned about 500 feet behind the leader and his wing-man Sergeant Ken Janson. My Number Two, Ken Smith is tucked in neatly just behind my right wingtip. We curve around to the northwest while descending to skim the surface of the Han. Dropping below the river banks we turn away from the remains of an immense railway bridge, now collapsed and ungainly, with major span sections dangling in the swirling waters. We have slowed to 160 knots but still keep flaps retracted. Every drop of fuel is precious.



Damaged Han River Bridge

"Fuel state!" calls the leader. "Red Two, 80 gallons." "Red Three, 85." "Red Four, 75." "Operate Balance Cocks" comes the instruction. No doubt we would have already done this. Our leader is not the only one anxious about fuel. He has good reason, as it will take at least 60 gallons to land from here, with luck. By operating the Balance Valve we have made a connection between the two tanks to ensure each engine will receive an equal share of the small remaining quantity — that rapidly diminishing bank balance with no recourse to an overdraft.

At a point he recognizes, where the river widens and then narrows, Wes turns us south-west across the paddy fields. Sliding beneath the gloomy overcast we are now sandwiched between an obstacle course and its ragged blanket of mobile vapor. Perception of the world has compressed and life expectancy is dictated by the possibility of placing wheels on that runway while these turbines continue to spin. "Line-astern, one third flap, spread out, 1,000 feet behind each other, don't get too low, skim the cloud-base, there are wires around here! I'm aiming at a close right base for runway three two." The instructions are calm but distinct. I grasp the flap lever on the side of the instrument panel, select Down and re-position to Neutral as the gauge reads 'One Third'. We are still traveling at about 150 knots and there are hazards. Frayed tendrils of the ragged cloud base menace our flight-path, obscuring hills and wires. Fuel, already alarmingly low, is being expended recklessly at this low altitude. Each time the sweep-second hand completes a circuit of the clock face, I know that a further seven gallons from my precious reservoir of aviation kerosene has been discharged through the jet pipes as hot air and flame. However we do not have eyes or thoughts for fuel gauges as all eyes and thoughts belong outside the cockpit.

"Undercarriage Down. Check greens!" is our next command. I select Down on another lever on the left side of the instrument panel and am gratified, as always, when the three red lights eventually change to three greens. My wheels are down and locked. This is no time for an undercarriage emergency! With landing gear down, and one-third flap we now have the added problem of keeping clear of the turbulent wake from preceding aircraft as power increases. Swirling wing vortices and gusts of engine exhaust in combination create streams of tumbling air, twisting viciously towards following aircraft. Fortunately the troublesome crosswind displaces much of this menacing whirlpool away from our path. We must be close now!

Weaving for ground clearance, at times almost scraping bottom, we perform our perilous balancing act. Four pairs of eyes steal glimpses ahead for first sight of salvation, our windswept cloud-covered runway. "Watch out!, telegraph wires!" I am the alarmist this time and my concern is for Smithy, just behind. We lift over and then drop down again in order to squeeze between cloud and hillocks. The foggy vapor is now "Almost on the deck," as Smithy remarks later. Peasants at their labors in the soggy fields seem to duck their heads in alarm as we skim over cottage and farm.

Quite suddenly Wes locates the threshold. "I've got the field — spread out for landing!" We are out of position, and off profile and speed. This is one landing where the interval will definitely not be fifteen seconds. Five seconds is more likely! "Godfrey Section you are cleared to land!" Once again comes that encouraging welcome from an anxious controller. With air-brakes deployed well before the threshold we execute our ragged, skidding gyrations into last-second runway alignment. The gusty crosswind adds its share of drama as four Meteors make their untidy landfall. We are all down. I heave an immense sigh of relief. My engines may stop now, any time they please. It would be a pleasure to walk the rest of the way.

As we shut down engines on the tarmac excited ground personnel hasten to assist us from our cockpits, to stand with relief and gratitude on Terra Firma. "What kept you?" "Where's your note?" "Trying to break the endurance record mate!" Wes was quite casual when we gathered near his aircraft to thank him. Of course he shrugged it off. "All in the day's work!" But he knew we had been lucky!



Wes Guy

We were fortunate to have had an experienced leader, and Fate smiled kindly on us as it arranged sufficient space between the tattered cloud base and the undulating terrain, for us to crawl in on hands and knees. It may well have been one of our quartet who coined the saying, "Far better to be down here wishing you were up there, than up there wishing you were down here." We conversed quietly among ourselves on the way to the briefing room. The engineer responsible for refueling later told us, "All your tanks were near enough to what we call empty and Red Four was empty, don't know how his engines kept going, not another minute left."

No doubt we all felt that luck had been with us, however it was obligatory to make light of such incidents. After all, others probably felt they had bigger stories to tell that day! My log records for 13 June, 'Cloud-base 200 ft. Dicey approach!' I personally was most grateful that it did not happen a couple of weeks later, as I arrived back with a badly shot-out engine. It was not the sort of exercise that lends itself to flight on one motor. Almost an hour and a half elapsed before the squadron was airborne again as that menacing cloud dissipated.

An Engine Shot Out

By May, 1951, the Reds were rapidly improving their anti-aircraft defenses, with particular attention to the railroads which paralleled the west coast running from Seoul to Kaesong and Haeju, then north to Sariwon and Kyomipo, and westerly over to the port at Chinnampo, and the short stretch from there to Pyongyang, the battered capital of North Korea. The route north, to the Manchurian border to Anju, Sinnanju, Chongju, Sunchon and Sinuiju were heavily defended.

The Chinese were said to be forming groups specially trained for aircraft defenses. Each such battalion reportedly had 1200 highly-trained men to set up flak traps, decoy trucks, cables across canyons, dig-in big flak guns, some of which were radar-controlled, string lights along a road to simulate convoys, and even place parachutes in strategic locations so we would think a pilot had gone down, and we'd go in to search. By May 1951, they were reported to have 275 anti-aircraft gun emplacements along the railroad, and more than 600 automatically aimed, radar controlled, machine gun units. This was the enemy's answer to loss of air supremacy.

My logbook recorded two missions on this particular day. The first related to an attack made on a small convoy of military vehicles on the MSR. These trucks were heading south towards the town of Hwangju. As it transpired they carried heavy defensive armaments and were probably a Chinese Flak unit on the move, possibly intending to supplement the already formidable Ack Ack installations in this area. The logbook elaborates as follows: Road recce. Accurate automatic flak and MG. — Stbd engine shot out. — Claimed 1 truck. This laconic phraseology assigns a degree of relative insignificance to an event which should rate highly on any list of "Matters to remember."

The squadron had probably been alerted to the presence of these enemy vehicles by our intelligence officers, as a result of American interdiction operations during the night. On the off-chance that they would still be there our CO sent four of us out just as dawn was breaking. We fully expected the convoy to have done the disappearing act — they were experts at camouflage — but the trucks were there, stationary for some reason and they had their weapons ready. Our leader — Eric Ramsay alerts us. "There they are... follow me!" We adjust position, pull air-brakes briefly, ready our gun-sights and enter a shallow strafing run. Diving roughly in line-astern, I am number four as wing-man to Flying Officer Frayne. Suddenly the air ahead is pockmarked with black puffs — soft harmless looking powdery bursts. They carry heavy armament and are shooting in earnest today. No doubt this is fair enough. Somewhat unnecessarily the leader calls — "Flak!...Heavy Flak!" This redundant statement seems to somehow inspire the defenders to greater efforts, as streaks of tracer confirm their determination.

Through the reflector screen of the gun-sight, on steady setting for strafing, I can still see these benign looking puffs appearing in groups and then dissolving before my eyes. The two leading Meteors are pulling out of their attack runs. Gun-smoke and wing vapor add to the spectacular scene as my friends curve dangerously close to the valley walls. The view through the sloping solidity of

the bulletproof windscreen is now clear of Meteors so my right index finger dispatches a lethal consignment of explosives on a one-way journey. The harsh rattle of four spitting cannons begins somewhat out of range initially, but I am hoping to discourage those gunners. The target is growing — it begins to fill the reflector screen. The aiming cross settles on a truck, which bursts into flames.

Suddenly my Meteor shudders with an alarming jolt! It wants to slew sideways. Cockpit instruments are on the move. The aircraft is trying to say something – “I am hit!” As fear propels me into a tight climbing turn to the right I call. “This is Red four. I’m hit...engine out...turning for home!” Adrenaline taps that residue within me and converts it to instant action. The ventral tank is rapidly released. It may also have been hit by that diabolical barrage. The tank is heavy with fuel and I feel it go to join forces with our cannon shells on this ravaged landscape. We are not far from home and I do not need all that fuel. Much of it has been used already. I most certainly do not need all that weight.



Typical Anti-Aircraft Gun

The leader immediately takes charge — “Red Four are you OK?...Are you under control?...Red Three are you with him?” Eric received three affirmative replies. All was under control, so he and his wing-man continued with the job in hand. I then closed the fuel cocks and pump applicable to the dead engine, which immediately stopped streaming. Next, the fuel tank Balance Valve was actuated in order to interconnect both tanks. Now my good engine would have access to all remaining fuel. To

neglect this last item after having dropped the ventral would be an invitation to fuel starvation on my only power plant. On such vital details did our lives depend. Preoccupied now with the business of survival I headed back to base. Frayne, who had “lost” me initially now caught up and stooged protectively a few hundred yards away at a maddeningly slow 150 Knots as I struggled up to 3,000 feet.

Considering the operation of ancillary controls, I realized the one and only hydraulic pump obtained its impetus from the starboard motor and was therefore now inoperative. Accumulator residual pressure and a hand-pump would do the job. It would be wise to conserve that remaining hydraulic pressure by lowering the wheels via the emergency air system.

The flight back to base was slow but uneventful. At ten miles we changed to tower frequency — “Kimp tower, Red section...two aircraft...initial...Red Four has one engine out.” “Red section...call on the break...you have priority!” To guard against the hazards of a possible “Go round” in the event of any problem during the approach I maintained speed above the necessary 150 knots and delayed undercarriage until commencing descent from 1,200 feet circuit height. As the emergency air system T-handle was pulled the wheels dropped and locked into place. Flap selections operated normally via the remaining accumulator pressure. During the approach everything worked, except of course that silent starboard engine.

On crossing the threshold I refrained from using the air brakes as there was possibility of flak damage in this mechanism. After touchdown the nose-wheel settled gently and the landing roll took the aircraft comfortably onto the end taxiway. A Meteor could not taxi on one motor, so the tug brought me to the tarmac. Wes Guy was on hand to watch the arrival and welcome me home. It had, in fact, been a rather uneventful matter and did not create much of a stir in either the aircrew or the maintenance area. The aircraft was soon back in action and I was in the air again within a couple of hours.

On the next sortie on that same day I was flying my personal Meteor. I remarked to the ground crew Sergeant. — “Thank goodness 953 wasn’t on the program this morning...wouldn’t want anything to happen to it.” We had been informed of more trucks. Our section of four Meteors proceeded north with all speed as we acknowledged that a hasty camouflage operation could deprive us of the spoils. I must confess to a certain uneasiness at the prospect of confronting similar flak. The reality of the situation had been so recently demonstrated. We damaged a number of vehicles and received vigorous machine-gun responses from the Chinese proprietors.

Chapter 15

More Kimpo Combat Events

More Action — More Losses

My logbook recorded two missions on that particular day. The first related to an attack made on a small convoy of military vehicles on the MSR. These trucks were heading south towards the town of Hwangju.

As it transpired they carried heavy defensive armaments and were probably a Chinese Flak unit on the move, possibly intending to supplement the already formidable Ack Ack installations in this area. The logbook elaborates as follows: "Road recce. Accurate automatic flak and MG — Stbd engine shot out. Holes in wing. Claimed 1 truck." This laconic phraseology assigns a degree of relative insignificance to an event which should rate highly on any list of Matters to remember. The squadron had probably been alerted to the presence of these enemy vehicles by our intelligence officers, as a result of American interdiction operations during the night. On the off-chance that they would still be there our C/O sent four of us out just on first light. Flight Lieutenant Eric Ramsay was leading.



Eric Ramsay (R) And Airman

We expected the convoy to have done the disappearing act as they were experts at camouflage, but the trucks were there, stationary for some reason and they had their weapons ready. Our leader alerts us. "There they are, follow me!" We adjust position, ready our gun-sights and enter a shallow strafing run. Diving, fanned out in line-astern, I am number four as wing-man to Flying Officer Frayne. Suddenly the air ahead is pockmarked with black puffs soft harmless looking powdery bursts. They carry heavy armament and are shooting in earnest today. No doubt this is fair enough. Somewhat unnecessarily Eric calls, "Flak! Heavy Flak!" This redundant statement seems to somehow inspire the defenders to greater efforts, as streaks of tracer confirm their determination. Through the reflector screen of the gun-sight, on steady setting for strafing, I can still see these benign looking puffs appearing in groups and then dissolving before my eyes. The two leading Meteors are pulling out of their attacks. Gun-smoke and wing vapor add to the spectacle as my

friends curve dangerously close to the cliffs. The view through the sloping solidity of the bulletproof windscreen is now clear of Meteors so my index finger dispatches a lethal consignment of explosives on a one-way journey. The harsh rattle of four spitting cannons begins somewhat out of range, but I am hoping to discourage those gunners. The target is growing, it begins to fill the reflector screen. The aiming cross settles on a truck which bursts into flames.

Suddenly my Meteor shudders with an alarming jolt! It wants to slew sideways. Cockpit instruments are on the move. The aircraft is trying to say something, "I am hit!" As adrenaline propels me into a tight climbing turn to the right I call. This is Red four. "Starboard engine out, turning for home!" The ventral tank is rapidly released. It may also have been hit by that diabolical barrage. The tank is heavy with fuel and I feel it go to join forces with our cannon shells on this ravaged landscape. We are not far from home and I do not need all that fuel. Much of it has been used already. I certainly do not need all that weight. The leader immediately takes charge, "Red Four are you OK? Are you under control? Red Three are you with him?" Eric received three affirmative replies.

All was under control, so he and his wing-man continued with the job in hand. I then closed the fuel cocks and pump applicable to the dead engine, which immediately stopped streaming. Next, the fuel tank Balance Valve was actuated in order to interconnect both tanks. Now my good engine would have access to all remaining fuel. To neglect this last item after having dropped the ventral would be an invitation to fuel starvation on my only power plant. On such vital details did our lives depend. Preoccupied now with the business of survival I headed back to base. Frayne, who had lost me initially now caught up and stooged protectively a few hundred yards away at a maddeningly slow 150 Knots as I struggled up to 3,000 feet. He came alongside initially, tucked in on the right hand side and took a good look at the damage, "There are holes in the wing." "Thanks! I hope the wheels go down OK." This statement reminded me of the need to consider the operation of ancillary controls. The one and only hydraulic pump obtained its impetus from the starboard engine and was therefore now inoperative. Accumulator residual pressure and a hand-pump would do the job. I must conserve remaining hydraulic pressure by lowering the wheels via the emergency air system.

The flight back to base was slow but uneventful. At ten miles we changed to tower frequency, "Kimp tower, Red section, two aircraft on initial, Red Four has one engine out". "Red section, call on the break, you have priority!" To guard against the hazards of a possible 'Go round' in the event of any problem during the approach I maintained speed above the necessary 150 knots and delayed undercarriage until commencing descent from 1,200 feet circuit height. As the emergency air system T-handle was pulled the wheels dropped and locked into place. Flap selections operated normally via the remaining accumulator pressure. During the approach everything worked, except of course that silent starboard engine. On crossing the threshold I refrained from using the air brakes as there was evidence of flak damage in this mechanism. After touchdown the nose-wheel settled gently and the landing roll took the aircraft comfortably onto the end taxiway. A Meteor could not taxi on one motor, so a tug brought me to the tarmac.

On the next sortie on that same day I was flying my personal Meteor. I remarked to the ground crew Sergeant, "Thank goodness 953 wasn't on the program this morning, wouldn't want anything to happen to it. I glanced back at my stricken machine of the earlier flight. We had been informed of more trucks. Our section of four Meteors proceeded north with all speed as we acknowledged that a hasty camouflage operation could deprive us of the spoils. I must confess to a certain uneasiness at the prospect of confronting similar flak. The reality of the situation had been so recently demonstrated. We damaged a number of vehicles and received vigorous responses from the Chinese proprietors.

Brake Failure

Another Stroke of Luck Intervenes

Landing with a failed braking system, is a worthy entry in my log book for 30 March 1952. There is no warning of this embarrassing deficiency until after touchdown. I recall clearly landing into the northwest in a slight tailwind. Low cloud precludes an into-wind approach and I am number two following my leader Flying Officer Phil Hamilton-Foster in close trail at the usual 15 seconds interval. Memory serves me well here, just as though it were still happening.

As is customary I select full air-brake approaching the threshold and reduce to appropriate touchdown speed. This is a fairly short runway, particularly for landing with an 8 knot tailwind. Normally, braking commences as soon as the nose-wheel touches down and I am quite diligent on this occasion as this tailwind is significant. Dismayed, I realize the brakes are not doing the normal job. They are only partially effective. "These brakes cannot possibly stop me before the end of this runway!" There is a steep embankment at the end! Just ahead there is my leader, in a maddeningly slow taxi towards the turn-off. Urgently I press the transmit button on the number two throttle, "Blue One! My brakes have failed, get out of my way!" There is no reply but I detect some acceleration in his slowly moving aircraft as he leaves the runway a short distance ahead. For a brief space of time that Meteor seems to almost stop directly ahead as he turns to escape my rapidly approaching aircraft. Now it becomes apparent that my salvation depends on accurately navigating a path between two Sabres parked adjacent to the runway end. Frantic applications of rudder and brake slowly take effect. Two American Sabre pilots are now undoubtedly displaying a lively interest as I bear down on them and slip through this convenient space. Still traveling at speed the Meteor is now confronted by a sloping embankment ahead and just off the tarmac, an invitation to disaster. There is a sharp jolt as the Meteor leaves the hard-standing surface. "Where is this errant plane taking me now?" I have no further brake pressure! The embankment beckons! My aircraft seems powerless to resist this enticement to a disastrous plunge.

With immense relief I felt the Meteor jerk to an abrupt stop. I was sitting in a convenient pool of sticky mud that gripped the aircraft half way up to its axles. My conveyance was bogged on the edge of this menacing cliff, which had been thwarted by the products of a recent downpour. One engine cowl was ripped open along much of its surface. It transpired that the main retarding force resulted from this cowl encountering a jagged tethering spike. It was probably that which saved me. With relief I dismounted and paid respects to several rather relieved Sabre pilots.

These gentlemen joined me at our bar later that evening. They said they felt lucky. Likewise! It was interesting to observe the differences of national character displayed during this pleasant bar-room interlude. While the Americans dramatized the incident with much excited gesticulation, I succeeded in keeping the matter in low key. It was all in the day's work. We generally managed to 'Keep the hangar doors closed' while in the Mess.



Phil Hamilton-Foster

Lionel Cowper

On the afternoon of the brake failure episode I logged a distressing entry. "March 30, 1952, Lionel Cowper crashed and exploded on target! Lionel was a good friend who joined at Point Cook the same day as Smithy and all the others. Six of us were dispatched to attack military installations on the north west side of Haeju. Flying Officer Phil Hamilton-Foster was leading and I was in the Number Two position. Sergeant Ken "Black" Murray was leading Sergeant Lionel Cowper. Flight Lieutenant Keith Martin and Flight Sergeant "Blue" Colebrook made up the remainder. This town was fairly close, so we were soon on target with our rockets and guns. We did a great deal of damage to large warehouses. However, as was usual at this busy depot, the little black puffs and flickering lights were active.

I vividly recall a great sheet of flame tumbling across the countryside, the leader Phil Hamilton-Foster calling for a "Check-in" with no response from Blue Four, and a subdued return to base. Lionel! yet another one of our small band of No.5 Course friends was gone! We mourned privately as was the custom.



Lionel Cowper (R) With Smithy

An Iwakuni Delivery Flight

These flights were sought after and schemed for — a night in Japan!

The morning of 09 April was usefully employed by accompanying Peter Middleton to the MSR just near the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. We strafed camouflaged vehicles near the road and received plenty of response. On returning I was told I had won the jackpot, a night in Japan! This was a scheduled delivery of a damaged Meteor to the main repair facility at Iwakuni, with a planned return the next day delivering a replacement aircraft. I had already prepared a special travel map in hopes of being honored with such a treasured assignment. Sometimes fuel was a trifle tight on these deliveries and careful planning was advisable. Fuel remaining could be as little as 10 or 15 minutes. I departed Kimpo with a pleasant feeling. "I am an international traveler going places for an evening out."



South Korea And Japan

Descending into Iwakuni I thrilled to glimpses of the beautiful Inland Sea with its decorative display of small islands and beaches. My fuel gauges showed a generous 20 minutes remaining and just one simple letdown procedure stood between me and a much-favored destination. A calm voice from the Ground Controlled Approach (a radar-directed, low-visibility letdown) brought me down through clouds onto an accurate final descent. Japan again — great! The same room was there and so was smiling Ayako, bowing a welcome. It was something of a homecoming. Giggling room-girls gathered around excitedly asking for news of their particular charges. Ayako was attentive to all news of Smith-San and although unable to write English, she sent a verbal greeting. "Ayako speak, good luck for Smith-San!" She pronounced it "good ruck!" There was genuine sympathy at bad news. At the reports of deaths the girls expressed their sorrows collectively and with touching pathos. They spoiled us on these brief visits.



Room Girls Afford A Welcome

Luckily the return flight had to be aborted over the coast of Korea due to a couple of system failures on the aircraft and this meant another night in Japan. As always the Iwakuni experience was a joyous interlude. How barren and colorless were our days in Korea by comparison. What contrasts touched my senses when striding happily through the crowded streets, absorbing the vitality of every precious moment. The next day was taken up with a local flight, testing guns on a Meteor, which meant yet another night in Japan. Tough! Our Sergeant Engine Fitter raised an interesting point on my second day at Iwakuni. He approached me in the dining room. "Col, that Meteor you brought in yesterday had a couple of bullet holes in the left engine! Looked like point fives, and one had gone right through a flame tube." "Well the performance and engine parameters were normal on the way over!" This was further testimony to the sturdy nature of these motors. We were indeed fortunate to

be flying Meteors in this type of combat. The speed, the two reliable engines and the type of armament gave us the ability to avoid and/or withstand a lot of damage.

The next attempt at delivery of a replacement aircraft was successful. According to the logbook details, my radio compass, or Bird-dog as the Yanks would say, became defective during the flight. This required radar heading checks and assistance from Ground Controlled Approach. I was soon back at work.

Bill Purssey

On 20 April a rocket attack was mounted against troops at Chinampo. The report detailed the tragic loss of another friend, "Bill Purssey, hacked by ground fire." Once again, two ventrals were hit as the Meteors began strafing trucks. The leader, Squadron Leader Bennett dropped his ventral tank and noted that his elevator trim control had been shot off. In Bill Purssey's case the aircraft burst into flames and a wing fell off before he could jettison. He was observed to eject at low level (about 600 feet) but apparently without success. The Meteor plunged into the river but no parachute was seen. Bill Bennett made it home but without his troublesome ventral. He also brought home further flak damage to the port main-plane, with penetration of the main spar.

On this occasion Jim Kichenside was touched by the protective hand of Fate. When preparing to depart on that strike against Chinampo he was strapped up ready to go twice. On each occasion his aircraft was unserviceable and he was unable to proceed. Bill Purssey took his place in the formation. Bill, who had resigned his RAAF commission at the end of WWII studied medicine in Brisbane and did Citizen's Air Force flying with 23 Squadron at weekends. When the call went out for experienced pilots in Korea he re-enlisted in the permanent RAAF. Ken and I had good memories of Bill's instructing work during our sojourn with 3 Squadron in Canberra.



Jim Kichenside — Our Youngest Pilot

Wheel Disintegration

On 6 May 1952 my left tire and wheel quite unexpectedly disintegrated on touch-down! Smoke and debris poured fourth as the Meteor slewed to an ungainly stop with the left half of the aircraft

hanging out over the gravel, about half way down the runway. Remarkably, the fire brigade which attended all arrivals, had accelerated along behind and managed to dead heat with my final abrupt stop. Within seconds the left side of the aircraft, including much of the canopy was engulfed in foam. I made a hasty and slippery exit and was able to disappoint the ambulance personnel who were just seconds behind the fire-tender. I declined their services, but accepted a lift home to our tarmac. The whole operation exemplified the efficiency of Emergency Readiness which the Yanks had developed for our protection.



USAF Crash Tender

Rockets

We normally carried eight or sixteen high-explosive heads on our rocket strikes. These were fired in salvo and packed a tremendous punch — said to be like a broadside from a six-inch cruiser. Fortunately the armament section did an efficient job in ensuring the reliability of our weapons. Cannon stoppages were infrequent. Rockets were reliable although we did occasionally return with 'hang-ups' — those which refused to leave the wing racks when fired. These were a hazard and could add a touch of interest to the approach and landing. Firstly we could never trust these temperamental and uncooperative missiles that refused to budge when the button was pushed. Could these fickle devices change their minds at an inconvenient moment, for example on touchdown.



Armorers Prepare Rockets In Dismal Conditions

Significantly, the carriage of a non-symmetrical load, such as eight missiles under one wing only, did nothing to enhance the aerodynamic efficiency or physical balance of a Meteor. Such an aircraft would then be nursed around the landing pattern through an air mass considerably disturbed by the jet e-flux and vortices of preceding aircraft. Handling characteristics could be adversely effected. I make mention of this, as such a situation produced one of my major encounters with imminent oblivion. The USAF had been bombing the MSR bridge south of Sariwon for some time with questionable success. Someone at our headquarters suggested that our rockets could do the job. So, on mid morning 7 May Val Turner briefed John Surman, Wes Guy and myself for an attack on this special target. During the dive I made the appropriate touches on the firing button on top of the control column. All my right wing missiles responded. Several more pushes on the button failed to induce the left hand load to discharge. It was pleasing to observe that there were now three large holes in the bridge and virtually none of our salvos had gone astray. It was also gratifying to note we were all airworthy as we pulled up and away from the guns of Sariwon so anxiously bent on revenge.



Meteor Armed For Rocket Attack

Placing the R/P (Rocket Projectile) master switch to 'Safe', I was resigned to carrying these redundant items home. The Meteor trimmed out satisfactorily and the return flight was so ordinary I had begun to accept a sense of normalcy. I was number 4 in the landing pattern. By way of precaution, I would probably have carried a few more knots of airspeed while banking, and normal spacing of about 15 seconds between aircraft was probably being applied. I was aligning with the runway, no doubt using a bank angle of about 25 degrees. Suddenly the left wing dropped crazily towards the ground. I seemed to be almost vertical! The Meteor had taken matters into its own hands. Normal control responses were not in operation today and the world had adopted an alarming tilt. Full power and bags of aileron still left me for a dreadful moment, hanging on edge in one grand side-slip towards The Land Of The Morning Calm. A few more seconds and I would be making a dramatic exit. This exultant Demon would have its way! Recovery was almost as sudden as was the calamitous loss of control, but proximity to the terrain was alarming, perhaps 100 feet. At least I was breathing again and my world had regained its sense of balance. Commencing a controlled climb straight ahead I called tower in as steady a voice as I could muster. "Blue Four, going around!" "Blue Four report on base, maaan that was close!" He's telling me! This time I'll arrange more separation from preceding aircraft.

After landing I sat on the runway end and regained some degree of composure, while the armorers rendered the troublesome weapons Safe. In analysis, it was obvious the problem arose from landing behind a number of aircraft when the wind was straight down the runway, thereby causing all of the mechanical turbulence and Jet e-flux to drift straight back to my aircraft banking onto final. These powerful vortices, this invisible wave of distorted air, combining with the inefficient left wing air flow pattern, had taken control of my Meteor. It was a lesson!



L to R, Drummond, Blight, Oborn

Chapter 16

Ken Murray And Wal Rivers

Two Dedicated pilots

Ken "Black" Murray — Sensitive Business

There were lighter sides to life at Kimpo during the Korean war. When a pilot reached 100 missions, and many did, there was a party. The honored one was responsible for payment of the bill, a quaint local custom! All such pilots observed the traditional procedure of signing a bar-chit covering four cases of beer. Half went to the Airmens' Bar and the remainder to the Officers' Mess. The story was told of Ken Murray strapping into his Meteor to go off on his 100'th sortie. There was a squeal of brakes and the blare of a horn as the Bar Officer, one of the pilots, Flight Lieutenant Val Turner, stopped his jeep alongside the aircraft. Armed with the Mess invoice book, he urgently climbed up to the cockpit. "Ken, would you just sign for tonight's grog. Better get you to sign it now, you never know what might happen in this job!" "A bit rude, isn't it?" said Ken after signing. Val just grinned, "We look forward to your return but do take care, it can be dangerous out there!" Such businesslike sensitivity! Of course Ken did return from that mission and astonishingly he also returned safely from more than 200 additional sorties bringing his total to a record-breaking figure of three hundred and thirty three combat missions in the Korean war.



Ken Murray

Wal Rivers

Another Astounding RAAF Fighter Pilot

Wal Rivers also established an outstanding record of missions flown during the conflict. He accomplished the maximum number flown in any individual tour, Two hundred and forty six. His final total of three hundred and thirteen was just short of the record achieved by Ken Murray. Several pilots witnessed Wal being told by the C/O that he was to cease operations as his record of near-misses was becoming a general worry in high places. Wal left the room with little or no comment and his disappointment was obvious. Both Wal and Ken Murray survived the conflict in spite of their many close encounters with oblivion. Both of these men played an immense part in Squadron activities throughout the war and their names have become legendary.



Wal Rivers — DFC and Bar; US DFC; US Air Medal and Oak Leaf Clusters

Wal Tells a Few of His Stories!

"I was based at Iwakuni with 77 Squadron flying Mustangs. On the afternoon of April 17 1950, which was a couple of months before the Korean War, I was briefed to do formation flying with a new pilot. We were informed that naval fighters from the carrier HMS Triumph would be sharing the allocated flying area and we were ordered to not indulge in 'dog-fighting' fun, an ever-present temptation. Perhaps the navy pilots were not briefed accordingly. While in tight formation, at 8,000 feet in the training area we were suddenly 'attacked' by several Royal Naval fighters. It would have been reckless to instruct the trainee wing-man to engage his aircraft in close formation maneuvers so I instructed him to continue straight ahead and I would tackle the 'enemy.' Increasing power I turned rapidly towards the descending attackers, passing through their path in a climbing turn to port.

"There was no warning of the impending collision, except for a split second when I had a terrifying view of nothing but British naval camouflage paint filling my windscreen. There was a terrific bang and everything went black. In that instant I ducked and pulled the canopy release lever. At that very instant a vision of my mother appeared before me. I knew I was in mortal danger. My aircraft, severely damaged, was spiraling out of control. To survive it was imperative to exit the aircraft and use my parachute. The habits produced by often-practiced survival drills took over and I unconsciously disconnected oxygen, intercom and seat-harness. I then made several unsuccessful attempts to climb out. The air flow pressure and spiral forces combined to force me back into the seat. At last, using all the power my arms and legs could muster I was outside, sliding down the fuselage into contact with the tail-plane. With further exertion I wrenched free of the aircraft. The relief was indescribable. For a moment I considered delaying the parachute opening. However, on hearing the screaming of an aircraft engine, increasing in volume I felt the danger of a second collision and promptly pulled the ripcord. As the parachute opened my stricken Mustang passed just below me, in a spin, with one severed wing fluttering close behind.

"Just before hitting the water I released the parachute and was then able to inflate the dinghy. Apart from an aching foot I was unhurt and was able to board the dinghy. Fortunately there were Japanese fishing boats in the area and I was soon pulled aboard. A small Seagull Walrus flying boat from the Triumph taxied up and flew me to Iwakuni. I was checked out at the Base Hospital and returned to duty. I was now eligible for membership of both the 'Caterpillar Club' and the 'Goldfish Club' in recognition of the life-saving functions of the parachute and the dinghy. Some suggested I may also have qualified for the 'Fishing Boat Club' and the 'Walrus Club.' Bay Adams, our Flight Commander, who parachuted after a collision with 'Blue' Thornton over the island of Shikoku, had been awarded the Caterpillar badge one morning on parade. He persuaded me to make application, however the form was mislaid, possibly due to the administrative chaos of the Squadron packing up to return to Australia followed abruptly by a complete about-turn in order to engage in the Korean War.

"During this war I completed two fighter operational tours, accumulating 313 combat missions. While in Iwakuni and about to fly home I was approached by the new Administration Officer to say he had found my form for the Caterpillar badge lodged under a pile of books. He asked me to come over and complete the application. I answered 'Forget it!'"

Wal Rivers, Kimpo Korea — about March 1952!

"I never detailed the unusual particulars of this flight in my logbook, but it has remained a vivid memory and I speculate on what could have occurred. About one hour before briefing, I experienced a light-headed sensation. It passed, but I fronted the squadron Doctor. He recorded my temperature and made a few other checks and all was normal. I was cleared to fly

"Four of us were briefed to carry out a mission in the north west of Korea. After briefing I spoke to Bob, who was number three, expressing my concern, and told him that if a problem arose I would signal him to take leadership of the section. The sky was overcast and we climbed to about 20,000 feet, maintaining this altitude towards the target area. We approached an enormous cloud front and would be flying on instruments in a couple of minutes. I signaled Bob to assume leadership and I moved back to No3 position and my No2 now became No4.

"Upon entering cloud an astonishing sensation gripped me. I felt sure that my aircraft had rolled to the inverted position. I had made no control inputs, there was no pressure on my shoulder-straps, and no dirt was falling around me as would be expected if the floor were now the ceiling. The nose of the Meteor seemed to have rolled on a pinhead. It was a terrific strain maintaining close formation whilst seeming to be inverted, particularly as I sometimes felt that I was normal and the others were all inverted. On and on we flew until the intense concentration in this condition made me briefly consider breaking formation.

"Suddenly we burst into the clear and my aircraft seemed to execute a half roll, and flight became normal. I hand-signaled Bob Strawbridge and again took over the leadership. We completed our attack. When returning to base we had to penetrate another cloud mass so I handed over to Bob. Again I had this amazing sensation of rolling over, but this time I was much less disturbed by the situation.

"I estimated the flight times in these perceptions of inversion to be 30 minutes and later 10 minutes. As soon as possible I checked with the doctor who looked in my ears and immediately grounded me. After three days I was cleared to fly. Shortly afterward we received information about a Royal Air force pilot who, when formation flying in cloud, suddenly pulled up out of formation and was never seen again. I recalled other situations where pilots had disappeared while formation flying in cloud, or at night.

"Years later I read in a small book written by Oliver Roydhouse, and published in 2000, 'World's Best Trivia,' (page 10). 'The most common headphones issued to pilots create a humid environment in the ear canal that is ideal for breeding bacteria. Wearing such headphones for one hour will increase the number of bacteria in your ear by up to 700 times'."

Wal Rivers, Kimpo Korea — 9 March 1952:

"On this day our Operations Officer, Stan Bromhead briefed four Meteor pilots on a "hot" (well defended) target. I was leading the section which also included, Vic Oborn, John Myers and a new sergeant, Ian Cranston. We were briefed to assess the fire power of the target for a flight of 12 F-80 fighter-bombers, each armed with 2x500lb bombs, which were waiting to receive this information before taking off. There was a spotter plane in the vicinity, reporting abnormal ground activity as he prepared to mark the target with smoke. Flying in good visibility at 4000 feet, we located the spotter plane and his smoke. We dived on the target, releasing rockets. The flak was intense. One shell went through my port wing, leaving a big hole. I advised the others of the hit, cleared the target area briefly, and then as my aircraft was still under control I turned back in order to split up the flak. There was a thump. My number two called that I was streaming so I instantly dropped the ventral tank — a likely source of explosion.

"I was now confronted with the sight of a Meteor, totally inflamed inverted and breaking up. I

seemed to witness this in slow motion as the stricken aircraft hit the ground alongside and exploded in a huge fireball close to my starboard side, illuminating my cockpit in an orange glow. This was the newly arrived sergeant, Ian Cranston. We three survivors headed for home and heard the spotter pilot's anguished voice repeatedly saying "I'm sorry." I answered — "It's OK!" There were still no F-80s in the area. This was explained later when our C/O, W/C Ron Susans told me the F-80 attack had been canceled at the last minute. It seems, the spotter had reported: the loss of a Meteor, and the flak to be still very active, indicating the need to re-think the the F-80 sortie. An attack producing greater area saturation would no doubt be more effective."

Wal Rivers, Kimpo Korea — 7 May 1952

"I was leading four Meteors on a rocket strike against a target at Sariwon, in northwest Korea. As we attacked out of the sun, I could see enemy troops firing from gun positions near the target area. Immediately after my rocket release there was a terrific explosion behind the starboard side of the cockpit. A vision of my mother was before me and I realized I was in mortal danger. I slammed on port rudder, skidding sideways, hoping to confuse the gunners about my actual direction of travel. I released the ventral fuel tank as it was always considered a hazard once the aircraft had been hit. I flew low over damp paddy fields checking for any reflection of a fire, which would prompt me to climb and eject immediately. Fortunately there was no sign of fire and soon I was able to receive confirmation from Bob Strawbridge, who flew beside me, that there was no visible damage. Back at base I elected to land last in case some defect should cause a crash landing which could block the runway. I knew there had been some substantial damage somewhere in the aircraft.

"Inspection of my Meteor revealed: Three 40mm shells had hit the engine housings. One 40mm had blown a few inches off the tail plane. A 75/80mm shell had penetrated the starboard side of the aircraft, hit the underside of the lead platform supporting the two starboard 20mm cannons, and split this mechanism in two as it exploded. The remnants of the exploding shell then entered the cockpit. I was presented with the remains of this 'trophy' which had accompanied me home in the cockpit. One half was missing. It was eight inches long and the pointed head was flattened by one inch. It took two hands cupped together to measure the base. This was my 313th mission. The Commanding Officer told me I was finished, and would be going home.

"It is most interesting to note that shortly afterward, in Sydney, my mother revealed she had experienced a terrifying dream, seeing me in mortal danger. When the war finished one of the returning POWs, Vance Drummond, told me that, in a dream he had seen me being shot down and arriving in the POW camp. He told others, and they were disappointed when I did not arrive. After careful scrutiny it was discovered that both of these dreams occurred on the day of my final mission."

B-26 Bomber Flight

I became friendly with an American, Captain (later Major) James Brierton Townsend of the 67th Tactical Recon. Unit. In repayment for a ride in a two-seat Meteor the Major reciprocated by

providing a crew seat in his bomber, a Douglas B-26 Invader, on a lengthy night photo-reconnaissance mission on 11 April 1952. Memory is vague as to how approval was obtained for this mission, and doubts persist with regard to these arrangements. In fact it is likely the word 'approval' would be inappropriate. However I was made welcome by Jim and his crew as they helped me into the unfamiliar helmet and parachute. "You can be our Observer, we'll show you what's required." The subsequent briefing was adequate and articulate.

The B-26 Douglas 'Invader' was a medium sized high-wing aircraft with two radial engines which looked a little too large for the wings to which they were attached. This bomber was a development of the WW2 Boston and had been re-designated. It carried a crew of about four. This plane was equipped with cameras but I do not recall any armaments unless one considers flares to be in this category. Our mission was of four hours duration and involved photographing the night battles along the Main Supply Route. There were plenty of these, as the Communist armies and their supply vehicles preferred to travel under the veil of darkness, thereby minimizing meetings with interdiction aircraft such as Meteors. On that night we concentrated finally in the area of the North Korean capital, P'Yongyang.



James Townsend's Douglas Invader

The action along the MSR was dramatic. The route seemed to be lit up as one great night battle extending as far as we could see along the highway. Special night-strafting aircraft were at work amid a violent display of opposing fire. The flak was continuous and contained a proportion of tracer that criss-crossed around us. Vehicles exploded. Aircraft exploded. Bombs exploded and finally we were on hand for the grandest display of all, an ammunition dump disintegrated with much ceremony! Flares and searchlights indulged in competition for the Illumination Stakes as each combatant sought his enemy. These powerful beams fanned the heavens with seemingly random patterns of frantic scrutiny, seeking their tormentors. So busy were the gunners down there with their immediate problems, they were only occasionally moved to give our intrusive bomber some special attention. The B26 weaved violently as our pilot sought safe passage through this agitated air mass. Flak burst nearby like special effects in this grand fireworks exhibition. More flares went down. Our cameras clicked away. The flight reaped a harvest of pictures.

On return to Kimpo in the early hours we encountered thick cloud and were required to execute a Ground Controlled Approach. A few days later I received an invitation. "Come over and see the

photos." An interesting experience and a privilege had been mine! Next year I received an invitation to Major Townsend's wedding in Wichita Kansas.

Max "Blue" Colebrook

April 13 was a big day, four missions! We frequently did two and occasionally three, but four was exceptional. The first was a strafing attack along the MSR. We sought out hidden military targets and used up our ammunition on identified or suspect areas. Flak made clear its deadly intentions as usual, after all this was their Main Supply Route. The next two sorties were rocket strikes against known military installations in the vicinity of Haeju. As usual this 'Hot spot' lived up to its reputation. On this day Blue Colebrook went Missing. Flight Lieutenant Peter Middleton and Blue had been strafing a gun position. Middleton called Blue in alarm, "Your ventral is on fire!" "OK! I dropped it I'm heading home!" But there was no further contact. As soon as we refueled back at Kimpo I departed on my fourth mission for the day, in company with all available aircraft, in an attempt to locate the downed pilot. Had we been able to see Blue safely on the ground, there may have been some possibility of a helicopter rescue, with the Meteors flying a protecting circle. We searched anxiously in all likely areas regrettably without success. There was no further news of Blue.

Chapter 17

The Air War Continues

We start to become Old Hands"

MiG Victories (Point Cook Cadet Graduates)

On 4 May a MiG-15 succumbed to the guns of one of our Meteors. Flying Officer John Surman, a graduate of Cadet College, while flying with Ken Murray sent the MiG down in flames with a two second burst of 20mm shells. A few days later, on 8 May, Flying Officer Bill Simmonds was attacked by a MiG but managed to 'turn the tables' and get in an effective burst at 800 yards. This was good shooting, as the guns were harmonized at that range. The pilot ejected, so Bill had his definite kill.



L to R, Bill Simmonds, John Surman

Don Robertson

We all suffered another blow, and this was particularly hard on the boys from Cadet College Point Cook, when they learned about the death of Pilot Officer Don Robertson, their Sword Of Honor winner. His Meteor was hit by ground fire on a rocket attack and dived into the ground. On 15 May we were a section of four. Sergeant Ken "Black" Murray was leading his wing-man Don Robertson. Number three was Sergeant John Myers and I was 'Tail end Charlie', the man who so often 'Cops the flak'. Our target was a large military establishment near the town of Masan-Ni about 12 miles S/E of Sariwon. Each Meteor was armed with eight High Explosive rockets and our four Cannons. As we dived on our target the nasty little black puffs were there menacing our descent path. Quite early in the dive, well before normal rocket release height, Robertson's aircraft, which was ahead and below me, suddenly rolled to the right, simultaneously discharging its rockets. In anguish I watched the Meteor plummeting earthwards, waiting and desperately hoping to see an ejection seat. The aircraft

continued its lazy rolling motion terminating in a great ball of orange flame. There was no sign of an ejection-seat. We completed our task, destroying a large barracks building but this was no consolation at all as we continued home without Don. No finer young officer ever served!



L to R, Bill Simmonds, Don Robertson, Tony Armstrong, Geoff Lushey

Leave In Kawana

While Ron Guthrie and his friends were suffering severe hardships, Ken Smith and I were preparing for a week of golf at the commodious leave center at Kawana in Japan.

Battle damage and other contingencies continually eroded pilot numbers and aircraft availability. Pilot strength, often as low as seventeen, instead of the nominal twenty four, was evidence of the inability of the RAAF to maintain a supply of trained fighter pilot volunteers. Consequently it was reported in Australian newspapers that 77 Squadron pilots were doing too much; sometimes more than one hundred missions in a tour in contrast with the American standard tour of eighty, for similar combat. The officials, of course, stoutly denied this fundamentally true statement. It would appear that as a result, the squadron commander was ordered to immediately implement the one hundred-mission limit, or at least seem to do so. Ken Smith and I both qualified and were told that our 'Tour' was complete and we were being sent on leave to Japan. We were asked, in the same breath to volunteer for a 'second tour' a term usually reserved for pilots who had returned to Australia for a substantial period and had then volunteered again. Reference was made to pilot shortage and the poor replacement situation. Without even discussing the matter I agreed on the spot. Ken, naturally and without hesitation, concurred with my precipitous acceptance. This decision was to cost Ken his life and I have had a bad conscience ever since.

Gladly, once again Ken and I traveled together, this time in a RAAF DC-3 from the main Seoul city airport to 'our home' in Iwakuni. As the plodding old transport droned slowly southwards we relaxed and gazed with interest at the South Korean countryside. In our travels we had seen little of the war-torn South. So much of the land had been stripped of trees as the people desperately sought fuel and shelter in the severe climatic changes. After what seemed an eternity we descended over the sparkling beauty of the Inland Sea and our old Biscuit Bomber's wheels kissed the runway at Iwakuni on the morning of 16 May 1952. In our barracks we found a happy Ayako bowing and eagerly making us as comfortable as any honored guests could be. The girls gathered around and the newly employed giggled and marveled at Smithy's immense six feet three inches. The Iwakuni contrast with the stark Korean existence was a boost and we made the most of an evening in this

lively town before taking the train to Tokyo and our leave destination.



Magnificent Kawana Leave Resort

The experience at Kawana was quite uplifting: snow capped Fuji Yama, Tokyo bay, tranquil fishing villages, and perfect weather! It cost ten cents for eighteen holes of "golfu" including equipment and caddies. "To hell with the expense, let's have a game anyway!" My friend Pat Melican turned up for a week of leave, and while Pat was no golfer he joined me on a number of photographic expeditions to local villages. The relaxed companionship at Kawana was 'Just what the doctor ordered.'



Smithy And Caddies At Kawana

A case of suspected smallpox closed the camp while re-vaccinations were checked. No one could leave for one week. We resigned ourselves to another week of golf!



One Of The Spectacular Kawana Golf links

Appropriate notifications were sent to the squadron regarding our delayed return to Korea but in fine Service style the message did not arrive for a couple of weeks. The extra week gave us the pleasant company of two other 5 Course boys, Jim Kichenside and Max Outhwaite who arrived for their well-earned rest from battle. Another night in Tokyo, a brief train trip and one more joyous night at Iwakuni and we were back in the DC-3 gazing down on the desolate Korean countryside. On disembarking at Seoul airport two days after leaving Kawana we were met by stern-faced officers who informed us we had committed a serious offense. We were one week AWOL. The words "Desertion in the face of the enemy" were bandied around by those who fancied drama. In fact I believe we were placed under 'Open Arrest.'

The two culprits' cheerful amusement at the prospects of a firing squad was held to be in poor taste. We were paraded before the C/O with hats off. Eventually, after the hilarious preliminaries, during which we fought to hold back our mirth, we were allowed to explain. The C/O, having investigated the matter of the delayed signal, decided on a pardon. At least we guessed this was the case as we were back on strength immediately, instead of languishing in cells listening to the coffin-maker whistling as he plied his gruesome trade. Our exoneration was never formalized!

Five MiGs

On this morning I was escorting a new arrival, on his traditional 'Look around' over North Korea. The logbook tells me this was Flight Sergeant Ray Fox whom I recall as a pleasant fellow and a good pilot. Initially, in the pre-flight briefing we studied the relief model of North Korea and considered salient points on the intended route. We marked Ray's maps with flak danger areas and 'Minimum

Fuel Arcs'. These semi-circles were vital guidelines relating to 'Fuel quantity, time to start heading home!' Another most important area to mark clearly in red crayon was The Holy Land. "What is this Holy Land?" asked my new friend. I explained regarding this prohibited area, the substantial square mileage surrounding Kaesong where the Panmunjom Peace Talks were supposed to be 'in progress.'



Ray Fox (L) And Clive Marshall

Soon we were encased in our stifling cockpits, sitting on our emergency water supply that could now be described as 'hot water-bottles'. We longed for the relief of flight. In fact we were seized by the urgent desire to be aloft and escape this super-heated world, wrapped in its suffocating blanket of smog. With oxygen tubes connected and headphones plugged in we checked communication. "Red Two, this is Red One, how do you read?" "Red Two, five by five!" Engines started and checklist poems proceeded and we then trundled over steel taxi-ways to the edge of runway 14. A pair of American Sabres landed in close trail. "Godfrey Red Section cleared for take-off!" With aircraft held firmly alongside each other at the threshold of this rather short runway we gradually opened throttles to take-off RPM. Roll commenced on my signal. Small amounts of brake operation helped correct for the crosswind until 60 knots airspeed produced full rudder control. The hot runway asphalt, loose and sticky, gripped us as though to impede our desire for levitation. The atmosphere rippled in the mid-day thermals, as we finally lifted nose-wheels to break free from the shimmering surface of this sweltering world. A touch on the brakes stopped wheel rotation and undercarriage levers were selected. Six wheels snapped up and entered their housings as we rolled left onto track. We set engines at 14,100 rpm by a slight retardation of the throttles and accelerated to 300 knots. We were now spearing upward as altimeter needles rotated to the measure of 6,500 ft. per minute. Looking back and below, I noted how quickly our runway disappeared in this summer haze. As the air-conditioning and pressurization systems took effect the irritating odor of kerosene fumes left the cockpit. We regained composure in the cool of our rejuvenated atmosphere.

Now at 5,000 feet, released from the earth-bound murk, we began a new trial of suffering from intense glare off a rumpled layer of stratus. Soon we were efficiently established in battle formation, spaced several hundred yards apart for maximum ability to 'cover' each other against ill-intentioned strangers. "Bomb line passing below now, check cannons." Eight powerful weapons roared in response, as they spat forth about 30 lethal projectiles. We followed the established track along the Main Supply Route, dotted with peaceful villages enclosed in acres of soggy paddy-fields. I

introduced Ray to that much frequented resort, Haeju! He had already heard about certain places including this ill-tempered community and inquired, "Is this where Lionel Cowper went in?" "I'm afraid so and I was with him. They don't like us down there!"

We continued to the north past Chaeryong, Sariwon, Kyomipo and I pointed out, "Chinnampo near the coast where Bill Purssey bought it!" My eloquent 'Travel-talk' took much of our attention. The scene below was absorbing and Ray was interested to view the expanse of Pyongyang as we diverted towards Sinanju. Suddenly, just ahead and above there were swept-wing fighters, five of them my logbook announces. They passed directly over us, perhaps 3,000 feet above, speeding northwards. I was in shock! How did we miss them? They must be friendly Sabres, I told myself. Otherwise why didn't they attack? They must have seen us! This rationale did not appease my conscience nor quell my sensation of recent exposure to extreme danger. Those Sabres looked different! Ray had seen them now and asked, "Swept wings 11 o'clock high, what do you reckon?" He received his reply from a high pitched American voice, "Godfrey flight Pyongyang area heads up MiGs northbound!"

Now they tell us! They've passed over! "Keep a sharp lookout all around Ray. There may be more of them. Let's get under that cloud layer near the coast!" My reply did nothing to boost his confidence. Guilt assailed me. Why didn't I see them? I reprimand myself: poor example to a newcomer; too much sight-seeing; too much interest in the ground; too much informative chatter; but not enough looking out and around. In fact I had sinned! However, the Great Judge had decided on an acquittal this time, but surely I was placed on a good behavior bond! Now that a protective layer of stratus shielded us I felt more comfortable but also acknowledged that we had, 'Closed the gate after the horse'. For the remainder of the trip, glances at the ground were cursory and less frequent. From here on the flight became a demonstration of diligent 'sky-sweeping.'

Strangely I had lost my enthusiasm for proceeding much further north. As it transpired, low cloud ahead precluded effective map-reading, so just north of Sinanju and Anju we made a big sweeping turn for home. Remembering the familiarization trip with Bill Purssey I gradually descended for a closer look at the supply routes. We pursued a pair of small vehicles which disappeared as if by magic as we were positioning to attack. Ray understood as I advised, "There you see, they have learned to keep a look-out and are experts at hasty camouflage."

After landing I felt no desire to advertise our experience. My conscience was still troubled as we had in fact placed ourselves in an ideal position for the MiGs to score two more Meteors. They either did not see us, or for some reason were pre-occupied — perhaps with fuel gauges. Strange! Such encounters were rare.

Ken Smith

The theme of this book is 'Good luck and Good Fortune' so I will not dwell on the deaths of comrades. We lost many good friends. However one such occurrence, on 8 July 1952 must accompany this narrative in some detail.

A few hours after returning from that foolish escapade wherein I had offered myself and my wing-man as target practice for MiGs, I was briefed to join another foursome for what my logbook so nonchalantly announces as a 'Road Reconnaissance'. This was another way of saying we were going after vehicles foolish enough to attempt to use the highways or byways of our attack area. Ken Smith was designated as leader of this patrol. I was Number Three with Max Outhwaite as my wing-man.

Ken, Max and I were all 5 Course Reprobates. Smithy's wing-man was Pilot Officer Howard.

As Ken and I walked down to the briefing I confessed my ineptitude on the familiarization flight. I wished this kept confidential. "Kinky you almost familiarized yourself with the feel of 37 mm cannon shells up your tail!" Smithy smiled and there was understanding and friendship in his gaze. Such sympathetic rejoinders were essential to our anecdotal forays. This man was much valued as a companion. The briefing was a fairly simple matter. Ken and his wing-man would make the first low runs along the supply route with my section flying 'top cover' to watch for MiGs. Then we would change roles in order to produce approximately equal rates of fuel expenditure. Jets are thirsty at low altitude. The meteorological briefing explained our poor visibility in terms of a local inversion layer and made predictions of better things further north. We should have no excuses for failing to see and hit our targets.

A Jeep ran us to our Meteors. It was too hot to walk to the far end of the line of silver aircraft sitting in their huge sandbag revetments. The temperature had dropped a trifle but the horizon was barely in evidence as we were still wrapped in smog. I noted with dissatisfaction that once again my Meteor, number 953 was not available. It was nice to feel that personal touch when operating one's own aircraft. However, I regretted this ingratitude on finding my diligent ground-crew finalizing their pre-departure routine for that smart machine, A77-728. My steed was well shod and tidy and the canopy was receiving a thorough cleaning and polishing. The boys were determined that if I should miss seeing any MiGs, it will not be their fault. Smithy's last dig at me as our Jeep skidded to a stop at the revetments, "Col do you think you may spare the time to lookout for MiGs today? It would be a nice touch!" "Smithy, I am the worlds most diligent MiG scout and have a stiff neck to prove it." These remarks were lost on the others, no need to advertise one's failings. My last sight of Smithy was a glimpse from my cockpit, of that lanky figure cheerfully greeting his ground-crew as they assisted this immensely popular man into his Meteor. Soon with his helmet on and canopy closed, Ken became a voice on the radio, a leader giving instructions, a professional airman in his mobile office. Our personal lives had been put on hold until this job was done. We would have drinks and a meal together after the day's toil and perhaps visit one of the American Clubs.

Eight Rolls Royce engines screamed in unison. Ken called tower, "Godfrey Flight, four aircraft, taxi instructions!" "...Cleared taxi runway 14 and cleared for take-off!" Four busy pilots maneuvered in close company, each confronting the smoke and flames of exhaust pipes several yards ahead. Ken and his wing-man entered the runway and advanced throttles against the brakes. As they rolled, my pair joined their cloud of kerosene fumes and performed identical procedures. Soon, in neat formation, we were heading northwest at 300 knots.

Visibility improved as promised, however some scattered cloud kept us at 5,000 feet, a bit hard on the fuel consumption, but better for our hunting purposes. We found our victims, motor transport, on a minor roadway through rugged terrain exposing themselves to 20mm danger. "Trucks!" called Smithy with a note of excitement, "We're going down!" Max and I circled at 5,000 feet and watched. I knew Smithy would not miss as he entered his dive with Howard close behind.

What followed is still indelibly etched on my memory. I can still feel it happening. Tracer fire, with its deadly offering, streaks up from that military convoy. Suddenly I am startled and shocked into non-comprehension of what my senses are virtually shouting. An immense sheet of orange flame tumbles and sweeps across the hills and valleys. Then, still without understanding or acceptance, I hear Howard's anguished cry. "Smithy has gone in!" "No!" This is not happening! Smithy and I are going to travel home together to Australia. This is a non-negotiable item in our agreement with Fate!

Now, Reality re-appears and I am tormented by her reasonable and intelligent assurances. This has happened! Our fable of immortality has failed us! Personal confidence is now shaken to its unreasoning foundations. I must face the terrible facts. Smithy has just died, in an exploding, flaming union with the Korean hills. The Beak, the big-nosed man, who had won the hearts of so many, has left us, on permanent leave of absence. There will be no more trips around Japan together. We will not travel home to Australia together. The Powers will now have to look around for another candidate for Chief of Air Staff! There were many such grievings! We had to pretend life was still 'A merry bowl of cherries', but this was a facade.



Ken Smith In His Meteor

My next flight after losing Smithy was a four aircraft Armed Reconnaissance. I was leading two Sergeants, Tony Armstrong and Ken Janson and my Number Four was Flight Lieutenant Wes Guy. Undoubtedly Wes came along to see how I coped with leading after witnessing the demise of so many of my friends. Everyone knew how close I was to Smithy.



Tony Armstrong

Slim Haslope

A great privilege that came to some as we achieve seniority and a semblance of permanence, was the 'ownership' of a personal Meteor. When that day arrived I became the proud proprietor of Meteor Mk 8 A77-953. My signature on an official document bore testimony to this effect. There was no need to obtain 'Pink Slip' or a 'Green Slip' and I was not optimistic enough to approach anyone for Comprehensive Insurance. Nevertheless there was a sense of pride in ownership and I was possessive enough to wish to fly my aircraft whenever possible. I was planning some spectacular art-work with which to adorn the nose of this remarkable acquisition.

On a significant occasion on 5 August, a newly-arrived pilot, Flight Lieutenant "Slim" Haslope signed for my personal Meteor during the pre-departure routine for a strike. Slim was my Number Four on an eight aircraft rocket strike. I could easily have called him back as he was walking out to the flight lines after having appended his signature, but decided not to 'make a fuss' about mere territorial matters.

After take-off I called for the customary Check in. There were two immediate replies: "Blue Two!" "Blue Three!" — but nothing from Blue Four.

I called again, "Blue Four check in!" Now an American voice, tinged with an unmistakable note of anguish, transmitted from the control tower, "Sorry, Blue Four crashed on take-off!" My thoughts and feelings were in turmoil, Blue Four! Slim Haslope! 'Is he OK? Has he been killed?' There were no answers, just a job to be completed. 'After all this is a hazardous vocation and we accept the risks.' A glance over the left wing provided shocking confirmation. A pall of smoke wafted up from a

mound of silver wreckage near a small village nestling reluctantly in precarious and noisy proximity to the end of our runway. My aircraft, which Slim was flying, failed to remain airborne, crashed a short distance from the runway and caught fire. Slim was killed! I could and should have been the pilot of that ill-fated Meteor A77-953. Theories abounded amid conflicting evidence and possibly no one will ever know for certain exactly what took place on that fatal take-off. In a horrifying way Slim's luck had run out!



L-R, Bill Bennet (A Flight Cmdr), Ron Susans (77Sqn C/O), Wal Rivers (B Flight Cmdr)

Later that day I did an armed reconnaissance of four Meteors. My number Two was Flying Officer Cruikshank (RAF), Sergeant Jack Evens as Number Three had Flying Officer Berg (RAF) as wingman. We were pursuing four swept wing silver aircraft that disappeared heading north. These were probably MiGs according to our controller and as usual they could outrun us.



L to R, John Parker, Jack Evans, Scotty'Caddan

Chapter 18

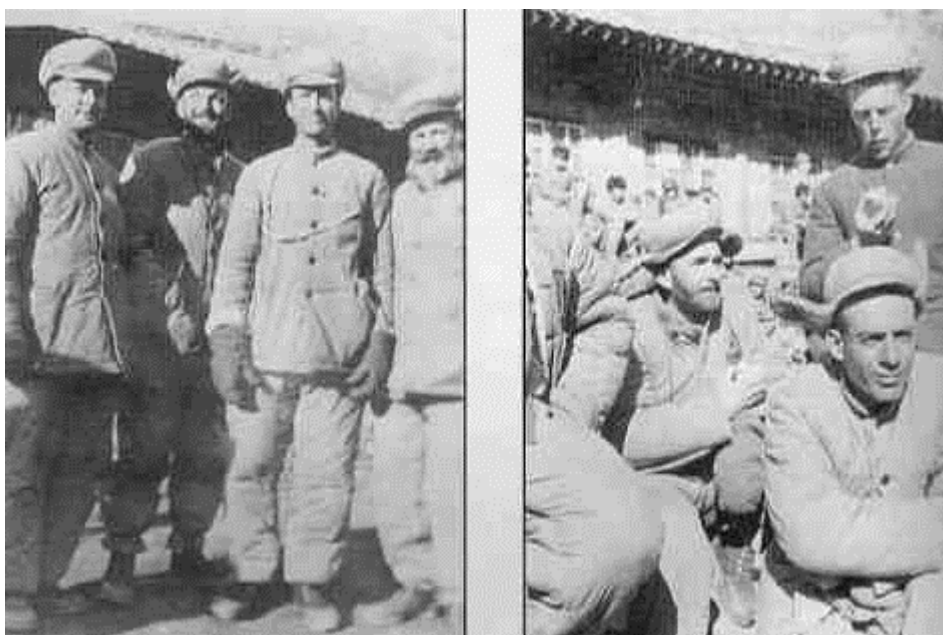
Endurance

The prisoners wait and hope for peace

The Misery Of Winter On The Yalu

As each year slowly expired in yet another brutal onslaught of snow, ice and biting winds, the toll on the human spirit mounted. The prisoners, languishing in the endless struggle for survival, had only themselves and their uninspiring captors for company and personal stimulation. Little mail, little news, the same old jokes and routines, the same subsistence rations and the same endless uncertainty generated the uncanny feeling that nothing really existed outside the barbed wire. When would it end! Winter in North Korea was harsh indeed, with temperatures of minus 50C during the nights. Clothing and bedding were inadequate and heating arrangements suffered from technical failings and especially from shortage of wood. Prisoners, fully dressed and draped with their flimsy quilts, crouched miserably around the small wood stoves, anxious for the comfort of sleep but desperate for adequate warmth.

In the combined onslaught of cold, poor nutrition and maltreatment almost everyone became ill from one malady or another. Hepatitis and pneumonia became more frequent additions to the list of severe ailments or causes of death. Each day brought its supplement to the trials of hunger, cold, cruelty and tragedy. Existence became one long parade of misfortune with the specter of death beckoning. The Yalu River froze in winter. The ice was so strong and solid the surface could be used to support railways. Huge armored tanks, trains and convoys of motor transport rumbled across the surface with confidence. At the change of seasons the same ice would provide a spectacle of explosive crumbling. The sounds were distinctly similar to loud artillery fire and on first being experienced raised alarm and expectation among the prisoners. In the combined onslaught of cold, poor nutrition and maltreatment almost everyone became ill from one malady or another. Hepatitis and pneumonia became more frequent additions to the list of severe ailments or causes of death. Each day brought its supplement to the trials of hunger, cold, cruelty and tragedy. Existence became one long parade of misfortune with the specter of death beckoning.



Prisoners' Winter Clothing. (Ron Guthrie Center In Both Pictures)

Ron comments:*If we stepped outside, the moist areas on our bodies would instantly freeze. A trip to the toilet was excruciating. My breath would cause moisture to settle onto my beard and mustache and these would freeze into stiff lumpy appendages. Gordon Harvey spoke of going outside momentarily to throw out a pail of water. In those few seconds his slightly wet hair froze into stiff spikes. After a brief trip out of doors we would always embrace the nearest heater, shivering uncontrollably.*

Undoubtedly I was fortunate to be an inmate of Camp 2 in late 1951 rather than languishing in some North Korean hell-hole during the previous winter. Conditions endured by unfortunate captives at that time were quite barbaric and I would probably have succumbed to one of the many life-destroying privations which killed thousands of UN prisoners during that ugly time. We learned about that horrifying period from 'Old Hands' who had managed to survive. Among these was a remarkable American nick-named Rotorhead.



Captain John Rotorhead'Thornton

Lieutenant John Rotorhead Thornton was one of the truly inspiring men encountered by Ron on his arrival at Pin-chong-ni. This US Naval officer had the dubious distinction of being the first helicopter pilot to be captured in Korea. On 31 March 1951, Thornton's chopper was downed by murderous ground fire during a daring operation deep inside enemy territory, while attempting to lift out members of a key intelligence team on the run from enemy troops who were in hot pursuit. In his outstanding book *Believed to be Alive*, **Rotor captures the terrifying drama of his encounter with intense machine-gun flack as he maneuvered for landing.**

"The world suddenly became engulfed in a loud clattering noise. The hull of my 'copter sounded as if it were in a mammoth hailstorm, pelted by gigantic stones of ice. Caught totally by surprise, I realized that I was flying through a murderous crossfire. Sounding like ball-peen hammers pounding on an empty boiler, the bullets tore through the copter, ripping holes in her thin flesh and tearing away entire chunks of sheet metal."

In spite of having suffered a broken rib during the crash, Rotor assisted others in boarding another chopper but refused to be evacuated himself while ever he could help ward off the enemy and facilitate the escape of additional vital men. As a result, this gallant American became committed to 29 months of brutal incarceration.

This was just at the end of winter 1950/51 and the nights were cold. Included among his terrible trials were a few weeks in the sinister Pak's Palace interrogation center cubicle measuring eight feet by six feet, squeezed in with five others as though they were sardines. The light glowed night and day. Guards made regular visits in order to disturb the prisoners just in case any were sleeping. Toilet visits were frequently refused and the men languished amid indescribable filth with myriad flies and lice for company. Interrogation and brainwashing sessions brought variation to the regime. For the non cooperative there were beatings, cigarette burns, nail pulling, teeth knocked out and bodies ruined with rifle butts. Rotor was subjected to the Black Room, in which there was absolutely no light, no latrine, no water, no food and little air. Again he was frequently bashed, bullied and threatened with a loaded pistol. His failure to cooperate earned him a spell in one of the Holes, a recently disused latrine pit. Here he languished in indescribable filth and agony for one night before being taken out, ostensibly for execution. Rotor considered himself leniently treated, others did marathons of 26 days in the Hole and some died there. Such was the price of non-cooperation. **Rotor, languishing in the revolting Hole, considers his position, knowing that in the Morning he will probably be shot.**

"I could not reconcile myself to caving in. I remembered the South Korean soldier they had shot for being kind to me and the other they brutally murdered the morning after my birthday. Most of all I remembered the young soldier they had used as a soccer ball and horribly killed as well. All of them died rather than yield. Still others lived and continued to fight back and pay the consequences. I could do no less."

Miraculously, Rotor survived Pak's Palace to find himself 'Out of the frying pan into the fire'. He was transferred to Pyoktong, the infamous interrogation center where so many perished. Here he endured four harrowing months before being moved to Pin-chong-ni in October 1951. Rotor and other survivors told Ron and his companions what they knew of the horrors of Pyoktong camp. Known as Pyoktong University,

It was in fact a high-powered interrogation center which in its heyday boasted a student body of about three and a half thousand prisoners. The death rate was appalling and the North Koreans and Chinese had not permitted any access or aid by the Red Cross. Wretched offenders were left for prolonged period in Arctic cold, cramped into an exposed concrete box to 'reconsider their errors.' In summer, a 'sweat box' served this same diabolical purpose. The privations and punishments for bad student performance ensured that 15 to 20 poor souls passed away each day. In winter these unfortunates merely served to enlarge the growing mound of frozen corpses on the hill, some two thousand by April 1951.



Pyoktong: Picturesque But Infinitely Evil

Hospital facilities in the Pyoktong area were generally quite farcical, an insult to the medical profession. Mud huts with rice-mat floor coverings were typical. With few exceptions, nurses and medical orderlies spat on the floor and hand washing was not a popular pastime. In the summer, blow flies in abundance spawned maggots and pestilence which compounded the miseries of the dying. Operations were abruptly carried out with the most primitive tools and without anesthetic. The death rate was continually very high. In despair some poor souls at Pyoktong simply gave up! The pattern of behavior was always the same. Loss of appetite was among the first obvious symptoms, quite clearly not normal in desperately hungry men. Food was refused and given to friends or simply not picked up in the first place. The individual would lose interest in everything and withdraw into himself. Then he settled down and curled up in his sleeping spot with blanket and coats pulled over. He would respond very little to kind words from concerned friends, mumbling that he was OK. In a few days he would be dead. Many were lost through this frightening process, which came to be known as 'Give-up-itis' or 'The 500-mile stare.'

There were two ways of combating this malady — both generally ineffective. The first method involved a consistent babying of the victim even to the extent of spoon-feeding as well as cleaning and massaging his body. Others would sacrifice their own comfort in order to keep the individual warm. Appeals to reason, reminders about the feelings of family and friends, all played a part in the attempted healing process. Constant companionship of this nature was provided by way of therapy until the man pulled through or simply died. The other system of treatment involved bullying the victim in a who cares if you want to kill yourself routine. Surprisingly, while both methods had a low

success rate, the aggressive approach was reputed to be the more appropriate. At least there were a few rescues through this technique.

There occurred many inspiring displays of bold resistance to these sadistic captors but none more remarkable than that carried out by the Turkish prisoners at Pyoktong. More than 300 Moslem soldiers of the UN Turkish Brigade had been captured and some were confined at the infamous Pyoktong interrogation camp during 1951. Most were wounded. To be captured in any other condition was anathema to most of these brave warriors. Rotor occasionally entertained his colleagues at Pin-chong-ni by recounting the following story. The interrogators were most anxious to force the Turks into collaboration, as this would be considered a great propaganda coup by the Chinese High Command. Consequently, these sturdy men were placed under enormous pressure in the hope that capitulation would result. Increased workload, reduced rations, the supply of pork, a forbidden meat for Moslems, and harassing head-counts every hour of every night were a few of the petty methods applied. They were mercilessly deprived of a good night's rest. Under the fearless leadership of their senior officer, Hamid Yuksel, a rebellion was planned against these profoundly hated despots. The first target would be that repugnant nocturnal head count. Yuksel had declared: "This night time harassment will cease!" Plans were laid! The regular 'nuisance head-check ritual' was carried out by a single guard with pistol and flashlight. He would enter by the only door to the completely darkened hut, cautiously walk down the aisle directing his light from side to side thereby disturbing the 50 resting men, then retrace his steps. On the decisive night he did not hear the door silently close. Quietly the Turks rose up, snatched the guard's pistol and light, switched the torch off and in the total darkness administered a savage assault to the Chinese soldier. Each man was afforded his moment of revenge as the object of their anger was kicked and punched the entire length of the building. Now thoroughly battered, unconscious and barely living, he was thrown in a crumpled heap on the parade-ground. In an instant whistles and bugles brought the camp to life. Machine guns and mortars were hastily set up as the entire guard sprang to action stations. A general assembly rapidly filled the quadrangle amid much shouting and slapping of rudely awakened prisoners.

The enraged Commandant, punching the air with vigorous gesticulations, loudly asserted: "A major crime has been committed against one of the Peace Loving People. The guilty ones will step forward now, or all of you will be punished severely!" No one moved. The parade remained silent, tense and expectant of dramatic developments. The waiting continued, broken only by further displays of mounting rage and loud demands for the culprits to do the "honorable thing" and save their comrades. The Turks stood defiant and motionless. Hours passed one, two, and three. Still there was no response to further dire threats and exhortations on the inevitability of mass executions. The other prisoners endured the ordeal in silent sympathy and admiration for their Turkish comrades. Finally the 'loss of face' factor prompted action. The Commandant walked slowly down the offending ranks and abruptly stabbed his finger at three men, picked entirely at random. Guards then forcibly pulled the selected three out of the line. As this happened, the complete Turkish Squad moved with them. The entire parade braced for the next move, electrified with tension and fearful anticipation. The nervous guards moved swiftly with jerky movements, adopting postures of extreme threat, stabbing their bayonets just inches from prisoners' faces. A low rumble emanated from the ranks of the enraged captives, a riot seemed inevitable.

Suddenly the Camp Commandant, no doubt after hasty moments of self-examination, came to a face saving decision. "We will not be duped into hurting these good people of Turkey. This is the result of a language problem, which explains such misunderstanding. We wish only to be friends with the Turkish nationalities who have been deceived by the UN and forced into fighting the Peace Loving Peoples." The Commandant paused and contemplated a peace offering. "Inspections of the Turkish

Company will stop. Further, in respect to the Moslem faith of these Turkish people, we will no longer give them pig to eat. From now on they will have chicken." By blaming the language barrier the Commandant had resolved the crisis with minimum loss of face. From here on, having established their territorial imperative, the Turks staked out their claim. Here, and wherever else they were held prisoner, would be sovereign ground, a part of Turkey, theirs by right of conquest. They were honored by all.



Turkish Commander Gen. Tahsin Yazici Receives Silver Star From US General Walker

Padre Davies spoke highly of these same Turkish soldiers.

"While at Pyoktong I spent one night and one morning billeted with the Turks. When they knew I was a chaplain, they showed me great kindness and helpfulness, treating me as one of the Prophets, giving me precedence in everything and waiting upon me hand and foot."

It is noteworthy that after the United States Turkey was the second nation to volunteer support for the UN in Korea. On 29 June 1950 the government of the Republic of Turkey replied to the United Nations Resolution 83 requesting military aid to South Korea, following the attack initiated by North Korea on 25 June. The cable stated: "Turkey is ready to meet his responsibilities." On 25 July 1950 the Turkish government decided to send a brigade of 5,000 troops comprising three infantry battalions, an artillery battalion and auxiliary units, to fight under UN Command against North Korea and subsequently the People's Republic of China.

Eventually, the Communists came to realize the wholesale destruction of UN prisoners by cold-blooded execution or mass neglect and starvation could weaken their position at the negotiating table. Live prisoners were valuable bargaining chips. Keeping prisoners 'just alive' became a more useful policy. The Communists seemed to be obsessed with the project of converting their captives to

the 'Cause' and went to great lengths in this largely futile undertaking. Many forms of pressure and persuasion were in vogue as they rather naively believed it possible to make wholesale changes to people's ideals. This was particularly the case with their misplaced confidence in winning the cooperation of 'minorities' or those whom they felt would bear some resentment towards Westerners — towards Americans in particular. Thus they tended to concentrate on captives such as Turks, Negro Americans, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos and Australians. Lower rank was an added attraction to the propagandists. In this regard they saw Ron Guthrie as worthy of special perseverance, however as a consistent course failure he disappointed them.

Rotor also spoke warmly of a particular black American soldier who bravely resisted the enticement to defection in spite of his wounds and in spite of much 'special attention'. "You will understand that you are very important to us as a member of an oppressed people," was their overture. Milford Stanley insisted that he was just another American serviceman but they persisted. "No, you are different, we know you Negroes were slaves and you are still slaves," the propaganda continued. Stanley objected, however the pressure was relentless. They felt that here they had a certain win for the cause. "We will give you all that the Whites have denied you. You are under the protection of the Peace Loving Peoples of the world. The good life can be yours if you will help us strike back at the oppressors. Food, clean clothes, medical treatment will all be yours." Stanley responded, "Yes, I am a Negro. It is true I'm a different color from the others. But I'm still an American and I don't need any special favors from you. You can treat me like the rest." "Very well," replied the interrogator. Stanley's determined loyalty was rewarded by a savage beating. His wounds remained untreated, the steel splinters festering in his body. Stanley was forced to bear a uniquely insidious burden throughout his captivity. This spoke volumes for the sincerity of the 'Peace Loving' and their 'desire to aid the oppressed races of the world.'



Chinese Generals Leading People's Volunteer Army

An inspiring tale was forthcoming about a British officer prisoner who had once been in the Royal Navy. On learning of his naval service, the interrogators pursued the man with unrelenting vigor. Seamen were rare and precious. A deal was offered. They promised to improve his deplorable conditions if he would reveal just one secret weapon system in the British naval arsenal. Pondering the proposition in apparent reluctance, the Englishman, steeped in guilt, agreed. "You are wise to cooperate," said the gratified interrogator, already savoring the praise and the feather in his cap. A bright future lay ahead. The British officer cleared his throat, pondered again and then in a faint voice strangled with emotion, began his betrayal. "I was on anti-submarine destroyers," he began, then paused, his voice trailing off. "Go on! Go on!" urged the Honsho. "We developed a foolproof system, but very secret." With lowered voice he slowly began his revelation. "We spread green paint across the surface of the sea." The interrogator began writing frantically, then raised his eyes and urged. "Yes, go on!" "You see, we realized that sooner or later the sub would raise its periscope." The Honsho was still perplexed. "Well they have to be able to see us, Old Boy, in order to aim their torpedo," said the Briton condescendingly. "And the paint would blind them!" concluded the interrogator.

"Hardly the point," said the officer, now warming to his subject. "You see, the paint was green, the same color as the sea and the submarine commander would think himself to be still quite deep in the

ocean and would order the vessel to continue rising." The interrogator continued his enthusiastic note taking. "The submarine would continue to be ordered Up and up and up! still believing he saw the green of sea water in his periscope." The writing continued, an ever-deepening frown developing on the Interrogator's forehead. "Have you got that so far?" asked the diligent traitor. The Honsho nodded, commencing his second page. "Finally, and to our satisfaction, the sub would break the surface and continue up into the sky," he paused for effect, "and then our anti-aircraft guns would open up and shoot the submarine down. Rather ingenious don't you think? But mark you, very, 'hush hush' and we really shouldn't be discussing it!" The interrogator stopped writing. His color changed as he rose to his feet spluttering incoherently. "Do you have any questions?" asked the British traitor in the friendly voice of a co-conspirator. To the roar of Chinese abuse and flailing fists the guards came running. The Englishman was dragged from the room. The deal was off.

The Pin-chong-ni camp headquarters staff consisted of the commander, Ding and his political leaders, called Honchos, Wong, Sun and Chen Chung Wei. They were supported by Company Commanders and their political staff. Two in particular were Zee and Tien. All spoke reasonable English, except Zee. He claimed to have been educated in Shanghai before the revolution. Some of our people maintained he probably learned his English in the pool halls when they heard some of his classics, such as "The Company Commander say you all gotta get outa yer goddam beds." Or perhaps at roll call, "Keeping still! Hey you on the end of the pipe!"

Ron continues:

Tien, on the other hand, was not as threatening but had a more sly approach. For some reason he used to home in on me. Maybe this was because he saw an Australian as a National Minority as he put it, and according to him, would be oppressed by the British and American heel of imperialism and particularly by Wall Street. Ron describes a typical incident. Tien would suddenly appear in the squad doorway and call out, Audayleea!" the Chinese attempt at Australia. Then he would lead me up the village road for about a mile and then return. He would do most of the talking and would ask me questions like What are you going to do for work when you get home?"My answer Hopefully stay in the Air Force and keep flying"would receive his comment Yes that is a good job in peacetime, but no good in wartime.'He asked such questions as, what education system did we have for the ordinary working class and how many years of schooling did I have. He wanted to know my religion, what property my family owned, my relatives' incomes and the names of any important friends. This would continue until he saw me back through the gate

One day, about 20 of us were called into a room containing desks and chairs. We were issued with pens and paper and ordered to write 30 pages about anything at all. The senior officer present, an American Major directed us to refuse. We just sat there. The Honsho became quite angry and decreed that we would have to remain there until we did our homework. After about eight hours the Major gave his approval provided we wrote nothing of military value. Some very large and well-spaced writing was handed in. However, we all passed, but missed out on the evening meal.

There were highly creative names for many of the prominent Honchos. Examples included those descriptive of appearance such as 'Snake-eyes', 'Smilin Jack', 'Pig-face', 'Scar-face', 'Tilt', 'Burly', and 'Quasimodo', so named after the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Then there were those relating more to behavior, 'Dirty Picture', 'Friendly', and 'The Hatchet-man.' The camp Commandant Ding had a close brush with death. A would-be assassin, a man in ordinary Korean clothes, approached Snake-eyes as he came out of his headquarters, pulled out a gun and took a shot at him. Ding took off, running towards the prison camp, through the west gate and into the compound, hatless with his long

black hair streaming in the wind. A gunman followed him, more shots! I was standing on the parade ground at the time quite consumed with curiosity. Guards swarmed towards the headquarters, there were a few more shots and the assailant was killed. We saw a limp body being carried. The Chinese maintained that the man was an enemy agent but we felt it more likely that he was a disgruntled Korean peasant. Anyway, Snake-eyes never seemed to be quite so composed or as autocratic after the event. It also helped our morale to know that the Korean and Chinese Brotherhood wasn't altogether cemented and harmonious. That night at roll call Tien offered an explanation, Deviationist adventurer try kill Commander. He now accounted for."In the classic tradition, we decided! All the assailant accomplished was to blow off part of Ding's finger but it was good to know that Snake-eyes had his troubles.

The Political Commissar was a fanatical Marxist who spoke reasonable English. This young Chinese, intense of manner and small of stature, was Comrade Sun. Typically, with the prisoners assembled in the lecture room, Sun would make his entrance, gaze disdainfully on the unruly student body and voice his high-pitched order "Keep silence!" The boring routine would commence. In spite of the most diligent efforts of Ding, Sun, Wong and all of the Honshos, the daily dose of compulsory political lectures did not seem to be having the desired effect on the prisoners, many of whom liked to 'play up' during these sessions. Guards were stationed around the room in an effort to maintain control but disruption was usually the order of the day. An American officer named Orville Tandy, of 'You on the end of the pipe' fame, was arrested. Orville had been carving chess pieces while sitting on the floor of the lecture room, hiding his activities behind the man in front. He was marched off for "Dirtying The Peoples' floor and not paying attention."

The tiresome indoctrination course required 'students' to answer examinations on matters designed to expand and assess their 'political self-consciousness.' Interrogation sessions frequently entailed the answering personal questionnaires. Many unsatisfactory answers were received, with recalcitrant pupils being called before Ding and required to recant. An American sergeant who asserted that the Reds were responsible for the war and refused to retract, was dealt with accordingly. An angry Ding, shouting through the assistance of his interpreter, "You are just a tool of the warmongers," sentenced him to 21 days solitary.

The helicopter pilot Rotorhead Thornton had other accomplishments besides flying. He could recite poetry. On one occasion the Hanchu Quasimodo called on Rotor to stand up and read from a book by Karl Marx 'The Decay of World Capitalism'. Rotorhead jumped to his feet and holding the book at eye level, gave the best recitation of CASEY AT THE BAT anyone had heard. When he reached the part: "There was no joy in Mudville for Casey had struck out" the classroom erupted to the applause and cheers of the captive audience. Quasimodo, puzzled, began thumbing through his copy of the revered document. Soon the enraged interrogator was shouting, "Thorn-ton what is this? Karl Marx did not write this Casey at Bat. You are inciting a riot. Be quiet!" Rotor was arrested and marched off to a stretch of solitary. Ron was told to read, but broadened his Australian accent and was not asked again.

The routine for those condemned to solitary was simple but harsh. After a body search the victim was placed in a bare cell or a hole in the ground, usually with little ventilation and no sleeping provisions. At dawn, or earlier, the guard on duty roused the prisoner, possibly with his bayonet. The culprit was then likely to be required to sit with legs crossed, without support from the wall, until well into the evening. Actual tenor of life depended greatly on the character of individual guards who changed every three hours and guard commanders who had six-hour periods of duty. There were those who left their charges alone and others who seemed to feel it their duty to make the

prisoner's life miserable. There was no question of exercise, talking or washing, from dawn to dusk.

In late January 1952, Colonel Carne, the indomitable leader of the incarcerated Glosters, was arrested and tried along with other delinquent officers, by 'The Peoples' Court' in the camp lecture room. Closely guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets they stood at attention while Snake-eyes and his eager assistants dealt with the trumped up 'confessions.' Lengthy sentences of solitary were pronounced and the guilty were then led away, all of them maintaining great self control and personal dignity under these particularly trying circumstances. Thus Colonel Carne began a miserable 19 months period of solitary confinement, with two paltry meals per day and just one threadbare blanket to ward off the minus 30C temperature in an unheated cell.

Carne fell into Chinese captivity after his 700-man battalion's astonishing resistance against an estimated 11,000 attackers was finally overcome. As the senior British officer among hundreds of prisoners kept in appalling conditions in camps in communist-held Korea, he was singled out for special treatment. While the other ranks were "re-educated" by the communist commissars at their camps, Carne was kept in solitary confinement.

According to documents held at the National Archives in Kew and not made public until 2006, when Carne was released in September 1953 he told Sir Esler Denning, the British ambassador in Tokyo, "an extraordinary story". "He says that on January 1952 and for nineteen months thereafter, he was kept in solitary confinement by Chinese communists and subjected to a softening-up process including the use of drugs, result of which was, as he put it, to make his brain like a sponge, capable of receiving any kind of information put into it," Sir Esler told the Foreign Office in a "top secret" category telegram.

The note, which was sent straight to Sir Winston Churchill, in his second term as Prime Minister, went on: "In March of this year, (i.e. about the time when the communists displayed a new interest in concluding an armistice) various thoughts were put in to his mind, and he remains convinced that he was meant to retain these and pass them on to Her Majesty's Government." The thoughts comprised a peace deal not just to end the war in Korea, but to reach a settlement covering the whole Pacific region. Sir Esler opined: "The whole thing might be pure fantasy except for the fact that Colonel Carne could hardly have invented it and does not strike one as that sort of person." The Foreign Office was skeptical about the plot, but suggested that perhaps its aim was to split Britain from its American ally.

This magnificent soldier consistently exhibited an outstanding role in leadership and courage. At the age of 45 years, and as a lieutenant Colonel commanding the 1st Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment of the British Army during the Korean War, the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC:

The Citation Stated:

"On 22/23 April 1951 near the Imjin River, Korea, Lieutenant Colonel Carne's battalion was heavily and incessantly engaged by vastly superior numbers of the enemy. Throughout this time Colonel Carne moved among the whole battalion under very heavy mortar and machine-gun fire, inspiring the utmost confidence and the will to resist among his troops. On two separate occasions, armed with rifle and grenades, he personally led assault parties which drove back the enemy and saved important situations. His courage, coolness and leadership was felt not only in his own battalion but throughout the whole brigade."



British Lieut. Colonel J.P. Carne, VC, DSO, DSC (US)

Towards the end of February 1952, an epidemic of influenza spread throughout the camp. Huts densely packed with men in generally poor health served to increase the problem. Soon a number of cases of pneumonia were diagnosed. Hospital facilities were primitive and most medical personnel unclean, incompetent and disinterested. The few American doctors, working miracles themselves, implored the Chinese medical staff to make more effort. Little was done. The bitterly cold weather compounded the effects of this scourge and many deaths occurred.

The Communists went to much trouble with their totally false propaganda. The filthy and grossly inefficient surgery was even used to 'prove' to the world how well prisoners were treated by the medical system. On one occasion an American was called to the hospital for 'surgery'. His injured limb had already healed, virtually unaided, however he was required to undergo 'treatment' while an official cameraman took a series of photos. To his amazement he was greeted in the tidied-up surgery by smiling doctors and nurses in spotless white gowns. Gleaming surgical instruments appeared. The

patient was examined by the concerned and interested medical team who posed outrageously for the camera. As soon as the photographer disappeared so did the white gowns, rubber gloves and other 'stage props.' The cameras also came out at Easter in order to prove religious tolerance and general benevolence of the regime. The camps were supplied with extra food such as peanuts and some boiled sweets. A small issue of Saki wine accompanied an equally sparse handout of cigarettes. **The photographers had a field day as Ron recalled.**

With the approach of Easter 1952 we were informed of the 'temporary' suspension of political lectures. This was supposed to be in order to devote the available time to cleaning up the camp as it had been decided that hygiene was in a poor state. To our great relief the lectures were never mentioned again. The camp optimists, and I was among these, believed things must have improved at the Peace Talks. In fact we learned later that a document tabled in the UN called the HANDLEY REPORT had denigrated the Communists for their appalling treatment of prisoners. It was this which brought about the meager improvement we were experiencing. With the cessation of political instruction sessions we sometimes substituted lectures or talks of our own. The predominantly American audiences occasionally required me to give talks about Australia. I was able to make a rough map and a few sketches of Australia and our unique flora and fauna using scraps of paper given to each prisoner for making cigarettes. The Americans' interest was always roused when I turned the map upside down and likened it to the United States. These talks always led to the Yanks becoming enthusiastic about visiting Australia. I would also vow to make a tour of America. Jack and I spent many hours planning the trips we would make, one in winter and one in summer. It was good to dream! Little did we realize at the time the validity of our plans. In 1980, I made my visit to the USA for an Ex-POW Reunion. I stayed with Jack in Spokane, Washington State. This great event was equaled by Jack's visit to Australia a few years later.

Tantalizing thoughts of escape occupied many minds. Some dreamed, others planned, while wiser heads counseled against the impossible. The distance, the hostile population, the different stature of the fugitive and the extreme shortage of food, all added up to a formidable impediment. At the approach of winter, the brutal cold blunted fertile imaginations and thwarted even the hardest escape enthusiasts. A daring and rather futile escape attempt was made by two of the Australian pilots, Vance Drummond and Bruce Thompson. They made their run in company with three Americans, Bond, Warner and Gibbons. By way of preparation they stole beans and rice and still had small quantities of their emergency rations as well as two compasses and a water bottle each. Dressed as North Koreans, they went through the fence at intervals commencing at 8.45pm on 11 April 1952. Nights were still quite cold but they believed it was a good time to go because security would be less rigid. They marched at a fast pace traveling all night. Initially, success attended their efforts and they made some encouraging progress during the first two nights. Unfortunately, on 13 April, while filling water bottles in a valley, they were captured by North Koreans. They had been attempting the impossible feat of escaping from the very north and their early apprehension was no surprise.



Drummond (Left) And Thompson In Prison Garments

Both Drummond and Thompson were beaten and otherwise punished and all were 'tried' before a military court. The courtroom was set up with the trappings of justice, with signs, in Chinese and English, such as 'Military Court,' 'Judge Advocate,' 'Clerk of Court,' The captives were charged with stealing food and breaking camp rules, but surprisingly they were not accused of attempting to escape. On asking for defending officers, they were told there was no defense as they had already admitted guilt. Warner was sentenced to six months jail and the others to one month each.

There were many indoor recreations such as Chess and these had beneficial effects on morale. Some remarkable Chess and card sets were manufactured by ingenious means and the Chinese later supplied regular issues of playing cards. Impromptu concerts were arranged. There were attempts at conducting classes in modern languages, literature, art and mathematics. All tuition was done from memory. Summer pastimes included American baseball, soccer, volleyball, net-ball and pacing around the compound in conversation or perhaps alone with ones' thoughts. American prisoners occasionally ran impromptu entertainment. Their success in this field inspired the British to try a pantomime. Anthony Farrar-Hockley described his attempt to meet some of the official requirements of the Chinese as he prepared for such a venture. Among other tiresome obligations was the need to detail and thoroughly explain every line of the script in discussion with the Chinese Political Officer in charge. Ever suspicious of subtle satire, not altogether without some justification, the authorities fiercely protected their Cause, their Culture and their Leaders. In his book Tony illustrates one encounter with Sulky Tien who on examining the humorous script declared "This is some plot against the Chinese Peoples' Volunteers. You must remove it from the drama!" Such petty interference was all part of the daily life and it added greatly to the frustrations experienced by those who sought to produce some light entertainment. Official paranoia was always in evidence and produced some genuine amusement.

As time progressed into 1952 it became obvious the camp was full and would not be receiving any new prisoners. This was disappointing because new prisoners were the source of news, particularly about the Peace Talks. There were six main points on the agenda at Panmunjom and progress or otherwise was always reflected in prisoner treatment or living conditions. As a point was settled

things improved and morale rose. The arrival of a batch of new prisoners was always an important event providing a vital link with the outside world. The news blackout and general oblivion of prison existence could experience a degree of resuscitation as eager men, hungry for any morsel of news, carried out their own compulsive and relentless interrogation. The Peace Talks, the war, sport, politics, the economy at home and the latest in entertainment were all hot subjects, for a brief moment connecting these deprived men with the real world. Newcomers with alert minds and good memories were embraced with enthusiasm, as they endeared themselves to all with the precious gift of a little piece of home. On the other hand, the uninformed and dull of wit could suffer ostracism, they had failed the test, failed to satisfy the men's cravings.

Prisoners occasionally concocted elaborate means of embarrassing the guards. These ventures not only broke the monotony but also produced a delicious perception of striking back at the enemy, the incessant tormentor. On one noteworthy occasion the early morning pre-muster bed check became the subject of a most successful act of prisoner revenge against the Honsho known as Gee-string. This particularly irritating imposition involved the very early morning arrival of a noisy guard, invading the personal space of sleeping prisoners in order to satisfy a pedantic head check requirement. The man would often lose count, resulting in further annoying disturbances. One particular squad of 25 prisoners decided on a disappearing act, by creating an illusion that would cost their Honsho dearly. On the appointed morning the men rose very early, gathered their few possessions and cleverly concealed themselves in any available nook and cranny throughout the building. The diligent Honsho, Gee-string, made his clattering entry, stared in disbelief at an empty ward and promptly panicked. Undoubtedly he had discovered a mass escape, a matter of the gravest consequences, but an opportunity now presented itself. As the man on the spot he was about to become a hero. Gee-string scampered out of the barracks shouting and arousing the whole camp. Amid a cacophony of bugles, whistles and high-pitched voices Gee hastened to the Commandant's quarters where he roused Ding and excitedly revealed his triumph. In the midst of all this pandemonium no one observed the 25 pranksters extricating themselves from cramped hiding places and slithering back into their assigned sleeping spots. They feigned sleep.

The exultant Gee, then scuttling back to the scene of the crime with the thoroughly alarmed Snake-eyes in tow, dramatically flung open the dormitory doors. Waving a flashlight in the act of again proclaiming his discovery and proudly pointing out the evidence, the bewildered Gee-string was confronted with an astounding revelation, he had made a mistake. Twenty-five sleepy men, rousing from their disturbed slumber gazed back inquiringly. "What do you mean by this?" demanded the angry Snake. Speaking in Chinese, his meaning nevertheless clear to all, he upbraided the hapless Honsho. "The entire camp, the whole town, the Guard Company, the Security Police and I have been wakened and alarmed because of your incompetence! You will pay for this!" Gee-string disappeared.

Ron heard Gee-string was sent back to China for 're-training':

In mid 1952 the Chinese decided they should build another prison camp to accommodate the overflow of captives. We believed there could also have been some pressure from the Peace Talks process, inclining them towards improving conditions. When the camp was ready, our number 2 Company became the occupants, about 180 British and American officers. They were moved without notice. Vance Drummond, Bruce Thompson and the others simply marched off to their new quarters. The unannounced departure was resented as it parted many friends without even an opportunity to wish them well. The Australian contingent felt particularly hard done by as we were only four in number, now two in each camp. However, the move gave us all a bit more space and this allowed for the construction of bunks made from solid pine timber. At last we were up off the floor. Squads were

then reduced in size and I found myself assigned to No 3 Squad in the second room. They were a good bunch of chaps.

June and July along the Yalu are typified by high humidity, billowing cloud and rainy weather as the summer monsoon adds to the prisoners' discomforts. Violent thunderstorms dominate the area as streams, rice-fields and roads are flooded thereby hindering all outdoor activities. For days no other manifestation of nature seems to exist. The rain most characteristic at this time, called the Plum Rain, is light of intensity but persistent. It takes its name from the coincidental arrival of the plum fruit, a fruit the prisoners never receive. Sub-tropical summer brought with it the problems of the thaw, as the earth gave up its deep-frozen filth. Over-full latrines, secure in the depth of winter, began to trickle and ooze their pestilent effluent in and around the camp area. The prisoners, fortunately under the direction of their own doctors, were detailed to construct new facilities and fill in the hazardous pits and ditches, breeding grounds for insects. One story that was current and believed to be true, told of another camp where the proximity of the toilet to the cook-house created such a fly problem during meal preparation that even the Chinese were moved to seek a solution. After some deliberation the supervisory personnel decreed that a high brick wall should be built between toilet and cooking facilities thereby denying access to the flies. The barrier was a failure as the troublesome insects turned out to be smarter than the Chinese.

Another form of cooperation which gave the prisoners considerable pain had to do with the arrival of dedicated English Communists who, by invitation of the North Korean government, made escorted visits to selected POW camps in order to provide 'evidence' for their wishful thinking about treatment and conditions. Such visitors included Mr Jack Gaster and Mrs Monica Felton, both of whom were taken on conducted and orchestrated tours culminating in their provision of propaganda for our enemies. Gaster, who certainly did not visit Camp 2 was quoted as saying: "The food I have seen our men eating would make a British housewife's mouth water." As 1952 progressed, the Communists began making repeated charges of bacteriological warfare against the UN forces. Sometimes when on work details which took them outside the camp, the prisoners would see other non-Asian captives like themselves, living in separate cottages and heavily guarded. It was learned later that they had all been charged with being involved in bacteriological warfare. The cost in manpower to guard prisoners in this way did not seem to concern prison authorities.

Mail was always a matter of great concern to prisoners. The receiving of mail seemed to be something of a lottery. Some were lucky and received a few letters in one month perhaps to be followed by an extensive drought. Others waited months of eager anticipation and disappointment. The Chinese blamed American bombing for the spasmodic issue of letters. They even supplied charred remains of mail as 'evidence', however close examination by clandestine means revealed, as usual, that mischief had been afoot with this most vital aspect of prison life. As suspected, cases of deliberate sabotage were discovered. Mail was also used as punishment and reward.

Finally Ron's big moment arrived:

I received two letters from my mother addressed to Flying Officer R. Guthrie, which indicated two things. At last people at home knew I was alive and it seemed that I had been promoted, unless my mother had made a mistake with my rank. I re-read every word, allowing my imagination to work full time. This was an emotional experience. The next day Tien came to my room and said 'Audayleea come!' He took me through the east gate to his office. Once inside he told me to sit down. This was unusual. As always, he seemed to have a half-smile on his sallow face. It sometimes seemed that Tien, in particular, was cunning enough to single out persons from what he considered to be minority

groups for special softening up attention. He indicated that we Australians were Colonials under the yolk of the British. He consequently hoped he would find 'easier mark.' for his propaganda. I consistently disappointed him!

You have received mail from home.' was his opening gambit. When I confirmed this he asked, 'Maybe then you can tell me why your government thinks so much of you as to promote you to become an officer while you are a prisoner of war?' Taken by surprise I could not think of any logical answer except to tell him that I had applied for promotion some time before and now this had caught up with me. He did not seem to accept this very well, saying that he believed this was unreasonable as I would not be productive as a prisoner. Why pay me all that extra money? Fortunately Tien left the matter there and had me escorted back to my room.

I found out later there had been a request passed by the United Nations negotiators to the Communists at Panmunjom that I be informed of my promotion and that I should now receive POW treatment befitting my new rank. Unfortunately this WWII thinking relating to dealings with the Germans was not valid in Korea. In fact, the higher the rank the more 'reactionary' one was considered to be. This partly explained why Colonel Carne, Commanding Officer of the Glosters and General Dean of the US Army spent most of their captivity in brutal solitary confinement.

In mid 1952 prisoners were allowed to send three letters per month but there was no guarantee of delivery. The Chinese continually blamed American bombing for the unreliability of mail in both directions. Everything was radically censored. When the prisoners received photos of their family standing before a shiny new limousine the Communists were quick to dismiss these as fictional propaganda. Ordinary soldiers could not possibly be as affluent as this. This was supposed to have an adverse effect on the Chinese and Koreans who saw the photos. Such pictures caused some unrest among the prisoners, particularly the swimsuit models! Our intelligence briefings strongly advised us, that in the event of capture we should always pose as coming from a working-class background and we should acquire a wife and several children. With this possibly fictional background we stood a chance of better treatment. When writing I had to remember to keep up this image, bearing in mind that liars need a good memory. My mother, in her replies also played the game and gave me news of my family. The lack of letters from my 'wife' would not present a problem as I could always assert that she was illiterate. No doubt this would please the Comrades.

Rotorhead was renowned, as were others, for skill at chicken stealing. This form of illegal diet-supplementation by pilfering the People's property carried severe penalties, however the rewards were also very high for hungry men. In warmer weather the local peasants allowed their birds to wander around just outside the camp, a bad mistake on behalf of the owners and the chickens. Using a long noose painstakingly made from shoelaces and string and adding some grain from the kitchen, Rotor would extend his trap through the fence near the laundry drums or some such structure that served as a shield from prying eyes. While a fellow conspirator kept watch, one of the People's chickens would be lured and then dragged through the fence to its certain death. With incredible speed the killing, plucking, cleaning and cooking would take place. In most cases, the chickens for these clandestine meals were generally underdone as we hastened to satisfy our hunger and also eliminate the dreadful evidence.

Sharing was an admirable feature of prison existence. Generosity and kindness to others was commonplace and in spite of the constant hunger and personal deprivation most POWs observed this unwritten code as a matter of course. Depending on, helping and respecting each other were factors central to the struggle for survival. Chicken thieves were among the greatest of benefactors. They

were invariably as popular as they were skilled, for their perilous efforts helped fill others' needs. In another remarkable display of initiative, a bold band of foragers enabled many of their pals to enjoy a brief variation to the monotonous diet. One of the People's pet rabbits was the subject of poachers clandestine activities on this occasion, culminating in the production of a delicious stew. The pet, a beautiful, well-fed and groomed animal with a slick, satin coat belonged to one of the guards who quite irresponsibly located its hutch within easy access of several hundred unprincipled rabbit-stew enthusiasts. Shortly after its arrival the hapless animal was surreptitiously re-located to the cook-house for processing. As a gesture of appreciation for the supply of this delicacy and to provide a memorial of his beloved pet the guard received the rabbit's ears. They were nailed to the guard-room floor just inside the door.

With the Olympic Games being held in Helsinki in 1952 the Chinese decided the prison camps should hold their own games. The senior officers among the prisoners at Camp No 2 debated the matter of prisoner participation. In spite of acknowledging the obvious propaganda value to the Communists they decided in favor of the games for the morale and communication value. As this was an 'officers-only' camp, the intermingling with other camps would provide an opportunity for helping the other ranks. Better food was sure to be a feature of the project. The Chinese, ever mindful of propaganda were bound to supply such luxuries as eggs, apples, sugar and tobacco. Ever aware of the opportunity for a little publicity the Chinese issued the prisoners with a memento of the occasion. This was a hardcover notebook in green color. On the front was a Picasso Peace Dove and the inscription "The Autumn meet of Camp of POWs in North Korea, compliments of the Chinese People's Volunteers." The senior American Air Force Lieutenant-Colonel was the leader of the group of participants and spectators from the camp. He returned on Thanksgiving Day with news and many messages from the men of other units. The event was a vast propaganda stunt with a large number of photographers taking advantage of the atmosphere and the vastly improved food available to all.

By way of relieving the depressive and boring prison existence, the inmates devised some unusual and rather eccentric means of entertainment. Among the British contingent there were several senior NCOs who had spent five years in POW camps in Germany after being captured at Dunkirk. They brought with them much POW expertise embodying techniques in survival, harassment of captors and means of relieving boredom. In the latter category was their notably successful implementation of 'Crazy Week,' a process which was guaranteed to produce much fun while inevitably disturbing the Chinese captors who were quite perplexed. During this week every internee was to 'go crazy.' Assignments were organized and allocated according to talent and calling. Pilots became jet aircraft and with arms outstretched and heads protruding they roared and swooped around the camp grounds occasionally exuding noisy bursts of gunfire at alarmed guards. Rotor, in recognition of his unique talent as a helicopter pilot fashioned a wooden propeller, which he attached on top of his cap. Then with head slightly lowered and by running at sufficient speed the propeller would spin in a gratifying manner. Rotor's masterpiece of Crazy Week technology was the acquisition of a make-believe Harley-Davidson motor bike. He roared around the camp in fine style to the bewilderment of the perplexed Chinese. All sound effects were complete and convincing. Rotor would don his propeller-beanie, kick out the parking stand, straddle the machine and stomp the starter. The extreme cold would require a number of kicks with re-priming actions until the great Harley would spring to life with a convincing 'Phoom! Phoom!' Rotor's motorcycle became a nuisance to the guards who insisted, "Motor bikes are forbidden on the camp." To Thornton's great distress the Harley was 'broken up' and dumped in a ditch by authorities determined to regain control of their environment. Rotor, playing it to the hilt, regularly visited the ditch and commiserated with his ill-fated motor bike. With proper piety he would remove his beanie, place it over his heart and mutter a benediction. In the end, his irksome captors even confiscated Rotor's propeller beanie, fearing perhaps that he

would spin the propeller fast enough to take-off out of the compound and escape.

Then there was the Baseball Game without a ball. When the 'ball' was struck by an equally invisible club, a prisoner on the sidelines cracked two sticks together and the batter took off. It was realistic even without a ball. The guard on the main gate followed the flight of the ball, his attention traveling in the direction of the players' eyes. He would be amazed when the batter was declared "Caught out!" Unfortunately, but quite predictably, Crazy Week was exposed as a subversive plot against the authorities. The chief players, especially the organizers, were rounded up and sentenced to solitary confinement. They were severely threatened with regard to repeat performances.

Occasionally, the Chinese captors indulged in uncharacteristic bouts of benevolence. Such was their display of goodwill on one particular occasion that the prisoners decided they were experiencing 'Be Kind to Prisoners of War Week.' No doubt the cameramen were well in evidence, in order to record for the world the generosity of the Communist Regime, as 'The Lenient Policy Rampant,' bestowed on the bewildered inmates such valuable and useful items as had never before been seen in the camp. Among the items received on this occasion were candles. This was not an insignificant donation. Candles meant light in the cells after dark, which brightened things a little and enlivened the evenings. They would serve as cigarette lighters, if anyone was lucky enough to have a cigarette. They would do well as flashlights thereby reducing the risk of midnight disappearances into the depths of the latrine pit. The next evidence of progress at the Peace Talks, in April 1953, was an agreement to exchange sick and wounded, a procedure code-named 'Operation Little Switch.' Elation at the prospect of seeing the wounded and ill going home turned to disappointment when a mere 600 actually departed, while the UN handed back nearly 10 times that number. Worse still was the fraudulent releasing, under this mutual agreement, of many cooperative prisoners who had sold out to the Communists. They were rewarded by early release and in their healthy state went home while many, who clearly fitted legitimately into the category for repatriation, were ignored.

Ron was angered by the treatment of his friend, Tom Harrison:

From our camp there was only one eligible starter, Tom Harrison, although there were probably also a few likely qualifiers in No 2 Camp. When the time came we cheered Tom on his way, however there was much disappointment shortly afterward. When allowed to view the list of exchanged prisoners we found that Tom's name was not included. It was learned that, before they would let him go, he was required to sign a statement testifying to good treatment while a POW. Tom refused to perjure himself in this way and as a consequence was then lodged in a local village jail. Tom had a home-made wooden leg skillfully crafted by a marine Major Gerry Fink. This leg had been hollowed out and used to convey written records of certain traitors among the POW population. It was hoped the evidence would lead to successful courts-martial however a 'stool pigeon blew the whistle' and Tom's leg was confiscated. There were threats that he may never be allowed home at all.

As we passed from the harsh winter conditions into spring, survival became a little easier, not so much due to improved food but by more benign temperatures. I was surprised at the rapid change of seasons from frozen ground and bare trees to soft soil and green shoots. The row of Poplars along our southern fence seemed to spring into life. We took these signs to indicate that better things were on the way. As the weather improved, an astonishing phenomenon occurred. The whole camp was alerted and alarmed by the sounds of nearby explosions, very loud and persistent, much like powerful gunfire. The ice was breaking on the surface of the Yalu! A new emphasis on camp hygiene by our captors was accompanied by a great show of improved medical attention. All prisoners were assembled for injection against several diseases. It was known that our names had been passed to

The United Nations at Panmunjom so our prisoner doctors approved of the shots. The dose consisted of a multi-colored fluid in a large syringe, thought by our medicos to be a combined vitamin injection. We all survived in spite of the predictions of camp pessimists who thought it could be an attempt at mass annihilation rather than mass inoculation.

There were several prisoner doctors in camp, most of whom had been captured in the winter of 1950 as a result of the great southward onslaught of the Chinese Volunteer Army. These highly qualified and diligent men were forbidden by the Chinese to practice their profession. Additionally, the International Red Cross was not recognized. In this manner the prisoners were deprived of much desperately needed attention. This was particularly disastrous during that first winter of the war. Of course, the doctors ignored these restrictions and made valiant efforts to operate secretly. They worked miracles setting broken bones, pulling abscessed teeth, removing tumors and even performing amputations and appendectomies. For 'medical instruments' a pathetic array of much-prized tools included such things as a broken scissors blade, a knife made from the steel arch of an old GI boot, a needle from a piece of wire and shredded nylon shoelace for thread. One of the prisoners crafted a crude but effective stethoscope and much ingenuity was evident in his provision of other 'medical equipment'. Undoubtedly without the heroic efforts of these doctors many more deaths and much more suffering would have been added to the great burden of this horrifying period of calculated inhumanity. I recall when several of these doctors operated on a friend of mine for a nasty complaint. They had to do it at night to avoid detection and the patient had to be held down by four of our strongest because there was no anesthetic. I think he was also thoroughly gagged as a further precaution. The operation was a success.

Chapter 19

More Kimpo Missions

Responsibility And Tragedy

As pilots gained local experience, they were used as section leaders (Four fighters). This applied to the Sergeant pilots also, as many performed well in leadership roles. After 100 sorties or more, some Sergeants led eight aircraft on combat missions.

We NCO pilots lived a peculiar dual existence at Kimpo, wearing no rank insignia, living, eating, and socializing with our own and American officers. We had left the days of innocence behind and no longer thought of ourselves by rank, but by experience, capability and self-assurance. Rank in itself would not put a pilot into the 'leader' role. Nor would the locally inexperienced officer expect or even desire such an assignment. New arrivals to the Squadron in Korea, while often having an impressive background in military flying, were generally lacking in certain specialized essentials which took time to develop. Frequently, as newcomers to jet flying, many had yet to gain adequate skills in navigating at high speeds over rugged terrain in marginal weather conditions. They had no experience with our exceptionally busy airfield or USAF procedures.

It was recognized by all, that the short endurance and high rate of fuel consumption of our Meteors coupled with the above-mentioned factors presented leadership problems to the newly-arrived officer. Our jet missions required of the leader a certainty of guiding a squadron of aircraft to some obscure map reference, mounting a successful attack and controlling the return and landing approach efficiently, all to be accomplished within the limited time dictated by those relentless fuel gauges. Detailed here are a number of operations of significance which I led during the month of August 1952 and it is stressed that other Sergeant pilots who had become very locally experienced 'enjoyed such privileges'. It is mainly to illustrate the role often played by NCOs that I include these examples. Other NCOs did similar duties.



L-R: Jack Evans, John Parker, Bill Simmonds, Col King, Bruce Gogerly

Memorable Rocket Strikes

The first was a rocket strike with 8 aircraft. Behind me were. F/Lt Doug Hurst, Sgt Jack Evans, F/O Holmes (RAF), F/Lt Ray Taylor, F/O Hoogland (RAF), Sgt Tony Armstrong, and F/Sgt Ray Fox. The designated target was about 20 miles south of Wonsan on the northeast coast. As we approached, it became obvious cloud had intervened and we could not attack in this area. So there was my dilemma! Sixty four rockets must be unleashed to some advantage, from eight meteors in a situation of rapidly diminishing fuel supply. Fortunately, in anticipation of this I had another target up my sleeve. On a previous excursion I had noticed railway facilities which seemed like a 'plumb' target. The location was so close to the border of our own territory that I at first assumed the rail-junction to be ours. This would explain the exposed nature of the assembled trucks and vehicles. Research with our Operations Officer and close analysis of the master map at our Operations Room clearly identified this as a legitimate target. Then two days later came the opportunity.

As we shaped up for the rocket dive, at least one of my followers loudly expressed his concern that we were attacking South Korea. He released his missiles along with all the others nevertheless. The target was just north of the small town of Ch'angdo-ri. We destroyed, or damaged eight rail trucks and a three-story building. Such transport was vital to the enemy in his struggle to bring supplies to the front. On the same afternoon, I took another eight Meteors on a rocket strike at a point almost exactly 30 miles east of that rain junction. As we passed by, I had the satisfaction of observing towers of smoke still rising from the railway yards. Evans, Taylor, Armstrong and Fox were there again, with the addition of Mellers, Ramsay, and Bergh. There were no casualties that day although some damage was incurred.

On the 9th of August I again had eight Meteors. There were four Officers and four NCOs. Local

experience varied greatly and some were relatively new arrivals. My wing-man was F/Sgt 'Dak' Ramsay. The highest ranking pilot was our new C/O W/Cdr Kinninmont DFC & BAR who flew in No 3 position with his wing-man, a new RAF officer F/Off Cruikshank. The second section of four was made up of Two officers and two NCOs. S/Ldr Ian Parker, F/Off Bergh (RAF), Sergeant Jim Kichenside and F/Sgt Ray Fox. The sortie was successful but results were difficult to observe as usual due to the great amount of smoke and dust at the target area after the discharge of so many powerful rockets. At de-briefing I clearly recall Squadron Leader Parker gazing at the Korea relief model with its three dimensional representation of the rugged terrain "Someone can tell me where we were, I was lost!" An honest man had spoken!

A few days later the team of King, Fox, Lushey and Hoogland (RAF) had a successful evening strike against a military camp area and vehicles.

Maximum Effort — Ammunition And Supply Dumps

On 13 August I had a big experience, leading the squadron maximum of 16 aircraft on a high-priority target. This was the limit to the number of Meteors the Squadron could deploy on any occasion and such events were rare. On the previous evening I was briefed by our C/O and Squadron Leader Ian Parker regarding two very important 16 aircraft sorties planned for the next day. Ian Parker was to lead these attacks and I was to be his wing-man as I was particularly well acquainted with the obscure target area, and he was a relative newcomer. This was the reason I, as a Sergeant Pilot, was consulted at the planning stage. Rank did not feature in these matters. When we assembled for briefing I discovered that a startling change had been implemented. Ian and the CO, after studying our North Korea relief model in earnest consultation, had decided that neither of them had adequate knowledge of this vital target area to guarantee a successful lead. Sixteen aircraft must not go astray! The C/O ordered me to lead the sortie. Ian Parker would then, "Probably try his hand at the afternoon session." This wise leadership decision exemplified the deference to local experience with total disregard for rank. A Sergeant knew the particular target location well, so he would lead! Squadron Leader Parker flew as my wing-man, a reversal of the original official schedule. No one considered 'loss of face', as such issues did not exist on these occasions.

Once again our CO W/Cdr Kinninmont DFC & BAR was numbered in the ranks. Additionally, there were seven other officers and a further six NCOs. We were going after extensive supply dumps and truck shelters, carefully concealed in a remote location. The small briefing room was rather crowded. Stan Bromhead, our Operations Officer, was on hand with weather reports and information about the enemy. The weather was good and enemy activity, as usual, quite menacing. Special Flak areas were noted. These particular danger spots, we meticulously marked on our maps. We were reminded that the enemy was particularly well equipped in this department. Intelligence personnel at Fifth Airforce Headquarters had offered the opinion "They will take a dim view of your activities at this particular location." I now briefed with the aid of the relief model. Pilots took notes and made a final effort to memorize salient features relative to our target. As always, on rocket strikes, we would be carrying eight high explosive rockets in addition to our four cannons and full fuel including ventral tanks. Our voices were in competition with the incessant cacophony intruding from the busy world outside.

After climbing into flying gear we proceeded to the flight hut to sign for our aircraft. We now walked or were driven along that area of perforated steel plating known as "the tarmac," without

feeling the slightest concern for our fragile senses which were under constant assault from the tormented ambient atmosphere. To communicate we had to shout and while breathing we ingested the product of those blatant jet engines. At the revetments as we jumped from the jeeps, the ground crews were standing by with battery carts plugged in. After a rapid external inspection with practiced eyes, I climbed aboard and strapped in. Cockpit checks were executed from memory with what may be described as 'a flash of hands,' but with full attention, as life depended on many of these forty items inspected and adjusted. We were aware our aircraft had been subjected to battle damage and repair. First the Starboard engine and then the Port gave forth the 'Banshee wailing'. The surrounding air was further burdened with an additional input of high-pitched ear-shattering noise, kerosene fumes, and flame from 32 jet exhausts.

Taxi and the associated checks were once again an example of rapid and accurate activity as we trundled and rattled our way over the perforated steel taxiway. Cockpits gradually polluted with the customary odor of burnt aviation fuel. Among these checks that we carried out was the ritual of raising and lowering the Gyroscopic Gun Sight which, in the firing position, was elevated to the middle of the bulletproof windscreen panel. After testing it was immediately lowered until required. My two Meteors entered and stopped on the runway. The aircraft strained against the brakes, as throttles advanced. All took off in pairs with wingtips about 15 to 20 feet apart, the pilots being thrust back in their seats as the aircraft accelerated rapidly, while holding station accurately. At 105 knots nose-wheels rose simultaneously as though flown by a single control. As the first two were rotating to lift-off the second pair was in mid-runway and the third pair just rolling. At these heavy operational weights one third flap permitted lift-off at 130 knots which was an adequate margin above the stall. Wheels retracted in unison as each duo broke ground.

An engine failure at this stage of flight would be extremely bad news. With full fuel and this load of armaments there could be only one direction of travel — down. A 'check-in' was obtained from the others and battle formation was established. We tested guns as the 'bomb Line' slid rapidly beneath our wings. Sixty four Cannons gave a thunderous warning to North Korea, "A squadron of Meteors is coming to curtail the capacity of your arrogant military leaders in their plans to invade and dominate the South." The countryside below looked serene and harmless.

Initially we climbed at 300 knots with 14,100 RPM, and at about 6,500 feet per minute. We could, if necessary, reach 40,000 feet in about 15 minutes. Normally we proceeded to our rocket attack area at half this altitude or less, depending on distance. Cloud cover and the need to locate ground features were big factors here. That day we settled for 15,000 feet, just below a carpet of strata-cumulus. Map reading took my attention. No radio or radar navigation aids assisted as I track crawled by visual navigation. It was my responsibility to find these few nondescript structures in this vast expanse of rugged territory. I must not fail to locate, descend, approach and mark with accuracy as we could not afford to have 16 Meteors orbiting aimlessly, looking for somewhere to unload their burden. This geographical challenge must be met and conquered. Approaching the target we began our descent, maneuvering for best angle and direction of rocket dive. Gun-sights were raised and with switches set for rocket firing, the dive began. Adrenaline flowed freely!

We hoped to achieve the advantage of surprise with 16 aircraft coming out of the sun. Nevertheless the little welcoming gestures soon developed as the enemy gunners divined our intentions. Tracer fire arched aggressively. Death's spittle cut a vicious swathe through our projected dive-path. Radio discipline was commendable. The following aircraft spread out to confuse ground fire and soon our missiles were being released from a height of about 1,200 feet in a 30 to 35 degree dive. We must not fire too early as the rocket motor had a mere 1.8 seconds burn time and an efficient path length of

800 yards as it accelerated to sonic speed. Accuracy was essential. The rocket projectiles seemed to depart from the wing racks in a leisurely fashion and leave an identifying trail of smoke as they rapidly speared towards the object of our attention. These eight warheads packed a tremendous punch — the equivalent of a broadside from a battery of six-inch naval guns. Salvo after salvo created havoc in one continuous barrage. Orbiting after a steep pullout from the rocket dive I observed the devastation. Amid the smoke and dust of 128 exploding warheads a startling movement took shape. A ripple, rapidly becoming an immense upheaval, erupted from the center of our target area. A gigantic explosion had just removed one small mountain from the map of Korea. On departure we looked back on a great pall of smoke rising thousands of feet above the target. We attempted to assess damage and note active gun positions. There was little remaining of the enemy facility. Supplies and ammunition would be scarce around those parts for a while.



Supply Dump Attack

Back at Kimpo we fitted into the traffic pattern, with some adjustment for other arriving flights, and landed in close trail. Dee-briefing followed. My logbook contains an attachment, officially commenting on these rocket attacks of August 1952. This states in part "On August 13 1952 Sergeant King led the squadron in a rocket attack against a vitally important enemy ammunition dump in rugged terrain in North Korea, despite fierce return of ground fire, the attack was successful and the target completely destroyed."

My next log entry that same day, detailed another attack involving 16 aircraft using Napalm rockets against an adjacent target. On this occasion Squadron Leader Ian Parker did in fact lead the squadron. He told me his lack of familiarity with the area was completely negated by homing onto the vast pall of smoke still rising from our attack earlier in the day. The Unit History Sheet reports, "It was observed that fires were still burning from the attack that morning."

Ivor Hele — Official War Artist

During the latter part of my stay the official war artist Ivor Hele visited the squadron and did some impressive art work. He did a number of pencil sketches and for some quite unknown reason asked me to pose for a life-size oil portrait. I believe he had attended a briefing I carried out for a 12 aircraft rocket strike. Some two hours later he was on hand to hear the de-briefing and then walked back to the Mess with me. He took this opportunity to suggest the portraiture. This took a number of

sittings. During the final afternoon a storm occurred and daylight deteriorated. Ivor packed up. He would not show me the result, as it was "not finished". However, imagine my surprise when fifteen years later, on a visit to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, there, large as life were the King features, at least as Hele saw them fifteen years ago. The curator of art had the good taste to conceal this particular exhibit in the archives most of the time.

My eloquent friend Pat Melican again contributes to the story by way of the following entertaining anecdote:

K*orea 1952*: For the second time in post war years, serving airmen were invited to apply for a commission. When the news was received at Kimpo it was accompanied by the not entirely unwelcome tidings that all applicants would be interviewed by the Group Captain commanding RAAF Base Iwakuni.

"Here was an indication that Air Board was again confirming its belief that among such airmen was a potential reservoir of candidates able to meet the stern and demanding criteria that would lead them to commissioned rank to the mutual benefit and satisfaction of all. Thus there was a ripple of interest among some of the troops and non-commissioned pilots; several of whom were not strangers to leading sections of eight and twelve Meteors, many of these being flown by their seniors in rank. There were also cresting waves of enthusiasm among a group of airmen who had been 'deported,' from Iwakuni and its many delights, to the 'Siberian atmosphere' of Kimpo with its complete absence of unrighteous temptations. These were the 'deadbeats,' many in the unredeemable category, who though always in strife were never embarrassed by those sorry catalogs of their sins, their Conduct Sheets. Theirs was the 'Vision Splendid' an all-expenses-paid overnight visit to the bright lights of Iwakuni and an inevitable rejection as 'Unsuitable for promotion beyond the rank of Leading Aircraftsman' by the Group Captain who always had the best interests of the Service at heart. The orderly room clerk told of how the Adjutant recoiled in horror when he saw that eight of these outcasts had applied.

"The previously notified order of events was changed suddenly and drastically. A signal was received from Iwakuni advising that the Group Captain would make a flying visit to the squadron and conduct interviews 'on site'. That was followed by an untidy scurrying of the deportees to the Orderly Room to withdraw their applications. The Adjutant, now visibly relieved, regained his composure. Dignity and decorum were now restored for the Grouper's visit."

Oelof Bergh

A rocket attack by 16 aircraft on 27 August was my final mission. Earlier that day I had engaged in a similar attack with 14 aircraft. The target for the last attack was a number of important military barracks and administration buildings to the southeast of Charryong, about 35 miles north of Haeju. The area was not particularly rugged nor was it heavily populated. As usual the establishment was well protected by flak.

One of our team was Flying Officer Oelof Bergh (RAF), a fairly recent recruit. Oelof, a South African, was on exchange duties with the squadron. We dived on the target in a north easterly direction through a fierce curtain of automatic gunfire. The little puffs were quite busy. After firing I

executed a blood-draining pull-up. During this maneuver the cry went out "Oelof is hit!" Back to my left there was a Meteor climbing steeply and trailing smoke. I continued gaining height, utilizing the speed from my dive. An ejection seat shot out of the Meteor. It seemed to project almost horizontally and then fall crazily in a tumbling motion. The seat came under control of its drogue parachute and continued to fall rapidly. At the speed of my circling Meteor it was difficult to keep track of Oelof. The enemy gunners were still firing although the Meteors had all pulled up and away. Fortunately Oelof's seat was falling some distance away from the target. I lost sight of my friend for a few anxious seconds while completing a descending turn but was then relieved to see a parachute change shape as it hit the ground near a small village. Oelof had arrived on North Korean soil and was presumably safe at this moment.

This was a moment of mixed emotion. Bad luck, now good luck had attended Oelof. What was next? I circled at low altitude and on the second or third run over the downed parachute felt reasonably sure I had seen a figure running from the area. Several more orbits were fruitless so I marked the position on my map and headed for home. I suddenly realize I am on my own but this is nothing compared with Oelof's predicament. He is now traveling by foot through the wilds of North Korea.

Now my fuel gauges become something of a distraction. I have been over-absorbed with the task of locating Oelof. That one essential requirement for attention, that one imperative, has been neglected and miscalculated, fuel! Approaching Kimpo I call, "Kimpo Godfrey Blue One on initial, low on fuel!" I pull the Balance Valve to interconnect the tanks and close the throttles once more in commencing a steady descent. The tower is handling a gaggle of Sabres, several of whom have troubles of their own. My fuel emergency is commonplace and will have to wait!

"Godfrey Blue One, orbit in present position, maintain 6,000!" — "Godfrey Blue One, orbiting 6,000, I say again, Fuel emergency!"

"Godfrey Blue One, you will have priority after orbit, descend now 5,000!" — "Godfrey Blue One, 5,000!"

Now those fuel gauges, like two resentful eyes, stare back at me accusingly. They are both reading almost 'Gage Zero!' The absurd possibility becomes a real consideration, I may have to execute a 'Dead Stick Landing'. This slightly jocular phrase, coined in the early days of flying, refers to the unhappy circumstance of landing with a stationary propeller. A thought crosses my mind, "How inappropriate for a jet to face a landing referred to as 'Dead Stick'. Now I recall that Jim Kichenside did just this on his first jet solo, a Vampire at Williamtown. At this thought, my fear of the prospect vanishes. Provided that at all times the relationship between height and distance-to-run is maintained in favor of a glide approach, the Dead Stick means of salvation is mine. The undercarriage can be blown down by pulling the handle operating its emergency bottle of pressurized air. Flaps and Air-brakes will function by normal selection through the hydraulic accumulator reservoir of pressure. If this supply becomes exhausted, then these ancillaries may still be operated via a hand-pump fitted with a telescopic handle, on the starboard side of my seat.

I was eventually given priority and executed a slippery circuit with eyes averted from those tell-tale gauges. After landing as I rolled onto the tarmac near my sandbag cubby-hole, one motor cut dead. The other did its job for a few more seconds and then followed suit. The engineer waving me ahead, by now quite frustrated, approached my cockpit. The problem was indicated. The last 200 yards to the revetments were accomplished with the aid of a tug. Final mission!

That evening the C/O briefed me to take a flight of four at first light to the target area and attempt to locate Oelof. If he were sighted we should call in a Chopper and attempt a rescue. The Meteors would then be required to discourage the enemy with their cannons during the helicopter operation. I was pleased to note the C/O either did not know, or did not want to know, about my cavalier approach to fuel management this afternoon. As instructed, four of us assembled at briefing one hour before first light next morning, all booted and spurred for the rescue. Unfortunately low cloud covered the whole area at about 200 feet and was known to blanket the target area as well, thereby making the exercise impossible. Our Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Kinninmont's anxiety about the downed pilot brought him to our briefing room in the early hours. We discussed the cloud situation with our Operations Officer, Stan Bromhead and made the regrettable, but inevitable decision to abandon the mission. The pity about this aborted rescue attempt, is that Oelof was in fact at large for about a week and would no doubt have welcomed a helicopter trip home. Had there not been that intrusive low cloud we may have picked up signals from the downed pilot, called in a Chopper and protected the helicopter with our cannons until the pick-up was complete. Oelof returned safely after a most unpleasant year as a prisoner of war.



Oelof Bergh Receives RAF Squadron Trophy

In discussing this fuel emergency with Geoff Lushey who was a Sergeant Pilot graduate of Point Cook serving with 77 Sqn at that time, he recalled a similar occurrence. Geoff was returning from a MiG baiting patrol at the Ya-lu River as wing-man to S/Ldr Bennett. He also had to be towed the last few hundred yards to the tarmac. Geoff, out of sheer curiosity, checked on the quantity of fuel put in

during the subsequent refueling operation, his own aircraft, 595 Gallons (Total capacity). S/Ldr Bennett's aircraft, 585 Gallons!

In general conversations with others who had experienced similar deprivation we concluded that engines are most desirable attachments, particularly in flight, and sufficient fuel to run them a most appealing commodity. We were in agreement that, "The only time you can have too much fuel is when you are on fire!

Al Avery

Another particularly tragic event occurred on 1 September when Pilot Officer Alan Avery was ferrying a two-seat Meteor MK-7 from Japan to Korea with our Engineering officer, Flight Lieutenant Johnston, as passenger. An accompanying Mk-8 Meteor was flown by Flying Officer R. 'Randy' Green. We did not have storm-warning radar in those days and the Meteors stumbled into a particularly violent thunderstorm on the coast of Japan. Both aircraft suffered damage and went out of control. Randy Green limped back to Iwakuni.

Alan and his passenger attempted to bail out. The MK-7 Meteor was not fitted with ejection seats and both men were presumably hit by the aircraft structure — a predictable occurrence with this type of two-seat trainer. Their bodies, with unopened parachutes were recovered on the west coast of Japan. Al was at the end of his tour!

Two Meteors Land On A Beach

On 2nd October 1952 Bill Hughes, Brian Howard, Jim Cruikshank and Ken Murray became involved with MiGs over Pyongyang. After one pass by the enemy fighters, Bill's wing-man told him "Your left engine is on fire." Bill shut it down. Murray also was hit on his port engine which he shut down while heading back to Kimpo. Bill and his two companions were now short of fuel and decided to head for the small island of Cho'do just off the North Korean coast. This was one of several small islands occupied and held by the Americans, which provided useful facilities although precariously close to the enemy coastline. The plan was to bail out at the island. Bill had a further problem as, due to a scrambled take-off because of a last minute aircraft change, he had failed to do up his parachute harness. So now, flying on one engine, scanning the sky for MiGs, and anticipating an ejection, he frantically accomplished the difficult task of securing these vital straps.

An American rescue aircraft 'Dumbo' which witnessed Cruikshank bail out near the island, saw two splashes, presumably the aircraft and the ejection seat. However Jim was never seen again. It was presumed that his body had hit some part of the aircraft when leaving the extremely cramped cockpit. In view of this, Hughes and Howard lost their enthusiasm for the ejection option. Most fortunately, at this point Bill received a call from a radio operator, call-sign 'Bloodstone', the identifier of another UN-held island further south. It was a personal friend of Bill who had recognized his voice and had a brilliant suggestion to make. Speaking about his island Paengyong-Do, he told a grateful Bill Hughes "We have 8,000 yards of hard sand, so come and land on the beach." The proposed landing strip was half-moon shaped with a shallow stream running across at about the mid point. The curved landing and the unobtrusive water course presented no problems and soon two Meteors were parked alongside one another with two most relieved pilots enjoying the

scene.

It transpired that Bill's engine was perfectly serviceable. A wing vapor cloud during a particularly tight turn had created a false alarm resulting in an unnecessary shut-down. Subsequently both aircraft were refueled from drums flown in by cargo aircraft and the two pilots, executing curved take-offs, returned to base on 3rd October.

Ken Godfrey — Describes His Extreme Flak Damage



Ken Godfrey

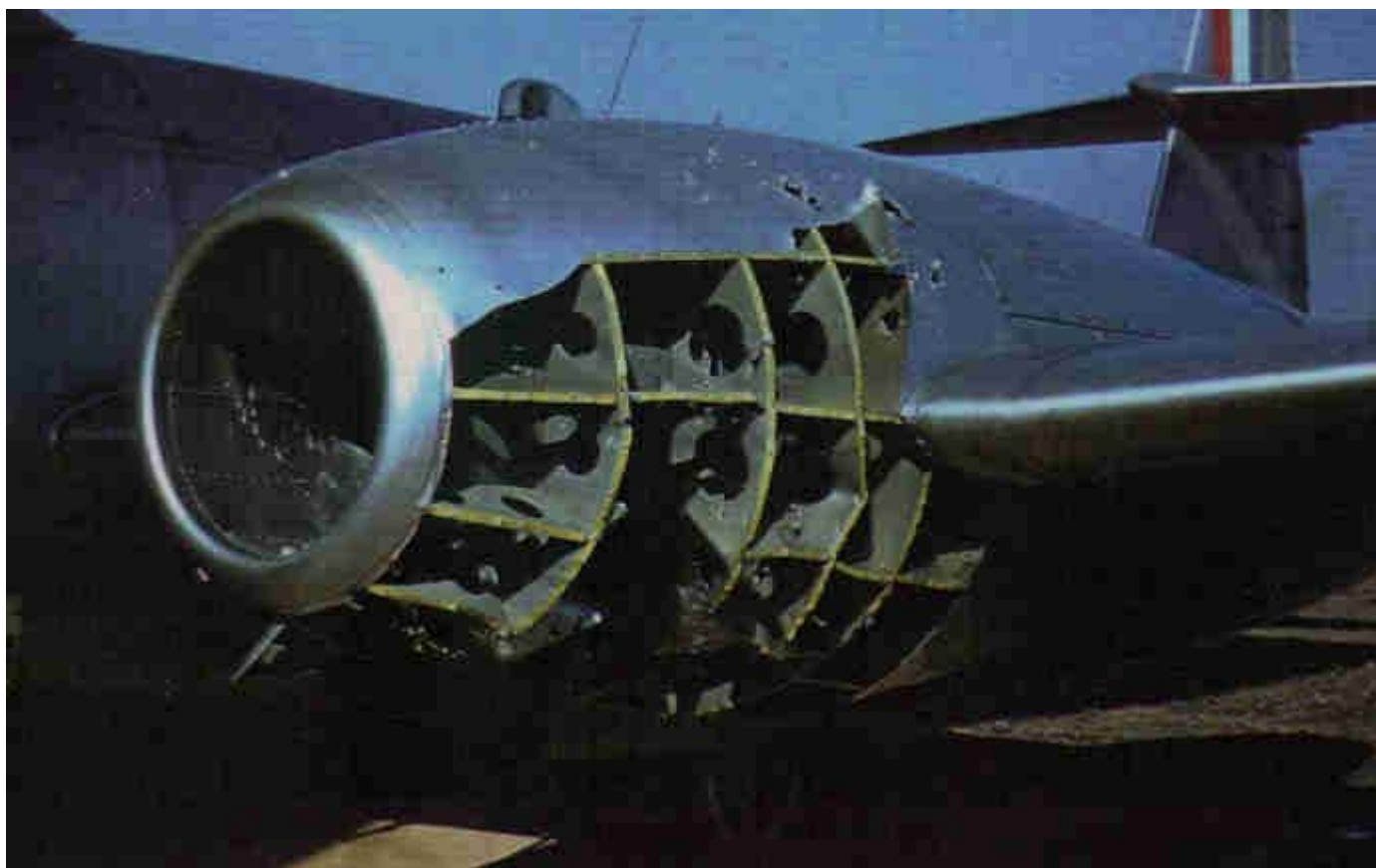
"In late 1952 I was based at Kimpo near Seoul as a member of No77 interceptor-fighter Squadron RAAF, flying the twin jet engine Meteor Mk8. We were using this out-dated British fighter mainly in the ground attack role, to which it was well suited, being a steady and robust aircraft armed with four 20mm cannons and eight rockets. On 29th November 1952 I was one of 12 Meteors assigned to carry out a rocket strike on a supply area at a position designated as CT7268 on our USAF operational maps of the North Korea war zone. The target was assessed by 'Intelligence' as "heavily defended". As we approached the target area the leader found it difficult to pinpoint the actual object requiring our attention because the ground was covered in a blanket of snow and ice. He was forced to carry out a full 360 degree orbit at about 10,000 feet. Unfortunately this probably served to alert the enemy gunners. During the turn I saw a few puffs of flak nearby and I felt apprehensive as we entered our rocket dive. I fired my rockets. As I pulled up from my dive, the flak increased and I heard the call "Drop ventrals!". This was a command to aircraft in the danger area of intense flak to jettison their belly tanks. These normally held 175 gallons of jet fuel but were by now probably empty. However, even in this condition, the residual vapors made the ventral a most vulnerable and hazardous appendage. They often exploded when hit and as a consequence Meteor pilots had a sensitivity, sometimes leading to the instinctive dropping of ventral tanks when encountering dangerous situations. I pulled the lever to jettison my ventral.

"Suddenly I was on a collision course with a ventral tank dropped by the aircraft ahead. To avoid this menacing obstacle I had to 'bunt' my Meteor by pushing the control column forward. At this moment I felt a severe thump on my left side and knew that I had been hit by heavy flak. In fact, one or more 37mm high-explosive shells had entered the port engine, tearing away most of the nose cowling of that motor. Not only did this deprive me of almost all power from the stricken port engine but the badly ripped and distorted cowling and surrounds introduced a great deal of retarding 'drag' on that

same side. The effect on directional control was astounding. I opened to full throttle and pulled up to gain as much height as possible. Using the speed gained in the rocket dive and what engine power was available I managed to climb a few thousand valuable feet. By this time the port engine was completely dead, and I was using full rudder and trim with some aileron in order to retain control. I was unable to assess the correct speed as my airspeed indicator was out of action, as was the altimeter, and worst of all my radio was dead. The loss of vital instruments, particularly the airspeed and altimeter indicators, made accurate flying much more difficult. For example, holding an airspeed above the optimum was an invitation to height loss, while a speed below the control requirement would cause loss of directional control requiring power reduction on my one good engine. This, in turn, was another way to ensure loss of valuable altitude. This dilemma was coupled with the added drag from the disturbed air flow around my severely damaged engine cowling. By experimentation I found that this extra drag required all my strength as I braced myself diagonally in order to hold full right rudder and it was necessary to also reduce power. Occasionally my right leg buckled under the constant strain.

"As I was about 130 miles from my base at Kimpo I was probably 100 miles behind enemy lines. I knew that to eject and use my parachute would mean probable death at the hands of the North Koreans. I decided to use all my skill and strength in order to make it back to base and in this endeavor I was helped by thinking of my wife and son back home. I gradually lost altitude. Approaching Kimpo I was down to less than 100 feet and did not relish the thought of making an approach to land under these circumstances. I believed the undercarriage would extend as the hydraulic pump was on the right engine. I would not be using flaps because of the probability of flak damage to the left flap. The brakes would be questionable because the left engine was required to build up brake pressure, so I would be relying on the stored brake accumulator pressure to stop a fast moving aircraft. The added complication of loss of my radio meant that, as I was arriving unannounced, I could find myself competing with others in the approach and landing area of this normally extremely busy airfield. It could become necessary for me to retract the undercarriage and place the aircraft on its belly on the grass adjacent to the runway. I was ready for this.

"With extremely good luck I had the runway to myself and managed to touch down on the very beginning of the strip, at what was no doubt an uncomfortably fast speed. The brake accumulator proved adequate to slow the Meteor sufficiently to allow a violent ground loop at the very end. Two Americans came out in a control-tower jeep. I was grateful for their assistance to climb down out of the cockpit as I was exhausted. One of them said, 'Hey Buddy, how the hell did you get this thing back?' "



Ken Godfrey — Engine Shot Out

Big Truck Convey — March 27 1953

On this day, Two Meteor pilots, Bob Turner and Dave Irlam, discovered the biggest assembly of vehicles ever encountered by 77 Squadron during the war. Surprisingly this line of about 140 trucks extended some five kilometers through a narrow ravine south of the east coast seaport of Wonsan. The two Meteors immediately trapped the entire convoy by the expedient of destroying several vehicles at each end of the line. Calling for support from Vin Hill's nearby Meteor section and eventually securing the assistance of US and other UN aircraft the Meteors had a most profitable day resulting in the destruction or damaging of at least 90 enemy vehicles. This type of target was well suited to the Meteor's four 20mm canons, point harmonized at 800 yards and fed with a mix of high explosive and armor piercing shells.

One Final Dogfight — Sgt Gorge Hale, March 27 1953

The last air battle between RAAF Meteors and Russian-built MiG-15 fighters occurred in the vicinity of Sariwon near Pyongyang in North Korea. This was a long way south of the Yalu River 'Mig Alley' area in which most of the air fighting usually took place. The RAAF aircraft, armed with rockets and their four 20mm canons, were en-route to a ground attack mission when they suddenly found themselves unexpectedly embroiled in a desperate fight against a number of MiGs.

Sergeant-pilot George Hale, a graduate of Nr 7 (post-war) Course Point Cook, in a remarkable feat of rapid and accurate flying, downed one MiG and seriously damaged a second, in diverting the MiG formation from their obvious intention to shoot down two unarmed American RF-80 reconnaissance jets. George's vigorous attack on the enemy fighters quite possibly saved his wing-man as well. Dave Irlam just made it back to base with 112 holes in his Meteor, caused by 23mm and 37mm canon shells. When George first saw the two RF-80s he was astounded to observe that they were tucked in to tight formation heading south at top speed several hundred feet below his own flight path. Close formation was an inadvisable technique while in enemy territory. The reason soon suggested itself when it was observed that a flight of MiGs were in pursuit of the unarmed Americans.

George and his wing-man were set-up for rocket firing and his Gyro-gun-sight was not set for air combat. Nevertheless in such an emergency, instant action was required in order to disrupt the MiG activities. As he dived in to attack he saw a second MiG behind the leader. Turning hard left his burst of Canon fire missed this enemy but another opportunity instantly presented itself as a third MiG was now coming beside him but too close abeam for an attack. George turned in, used a rapid touch of speed-brake in order to position behind the enemy and then fired. His shells knocked pieces off the MiG but it kept flying. By now George had jettisoned his ventral tank and finding himself behind a pair of MiGs, fired his rockets between them as an obviously advantageous method of getting rid of this further encumbrance to air fighting. This separated the two and as George began to chase the nearest one, another pair appeared on his left. He fired on one causing a massive white explosion, almost certainly a large quantity of fuel, but it kept flying. The two MiGs then exploited their famously superior performance and climbed steeply.

In the meantime Dave Irlam was hit hard by a MiG which he did not even see and was very fortunate to make it back to base with massive damage including a shattered engine and 112 holes from large caliber canon fire. George Hale was credited with one kill and one probable. The kill was confirmed after the war. The USAF RF-80 pilots Charles Abbey and Jim Schnider came to the 77 Squadron Mess each armed with a bottle of Scotch, looking for "The Aussie who saved our hides today!"



F-80s — American Early Type Jet Fighters, Over Korea

The C/O, John Hubble, ordered the removal of two MiG silhouettes which the ground crews had painted on the nose of George's aircraft. The boys had proudly done this without George's permission, but undoubtedly with his approval. There was some disappointment when this art work was painted over. An interesting point arose many years later when the aircraft (A77-851) was salvaged for installation at its present place of residence at the Warbirds Aviation Museum at Mildura, Victoria. The paint deteriorated sufficiently to reveal the MiG emblems, to the delight of many onlookers.



George Hale

77 Squadron Original Transport Unit

Beginning with a mere two DC-3 type planes which included General Robertson's VIP aircraft, the small Dakota flight was initially commanded by Dave Hitchins. This eventually grew to eight aircraft and became a squadron. In March 1953 No 30 Transport Unit became No 36 Transport Squadron, equipped with more C-47 Dakotas thus providing much-needed additions to the thoroughly stretched operation. Several 5 Course pilots served with this unit doing vital and demanding operational flying.

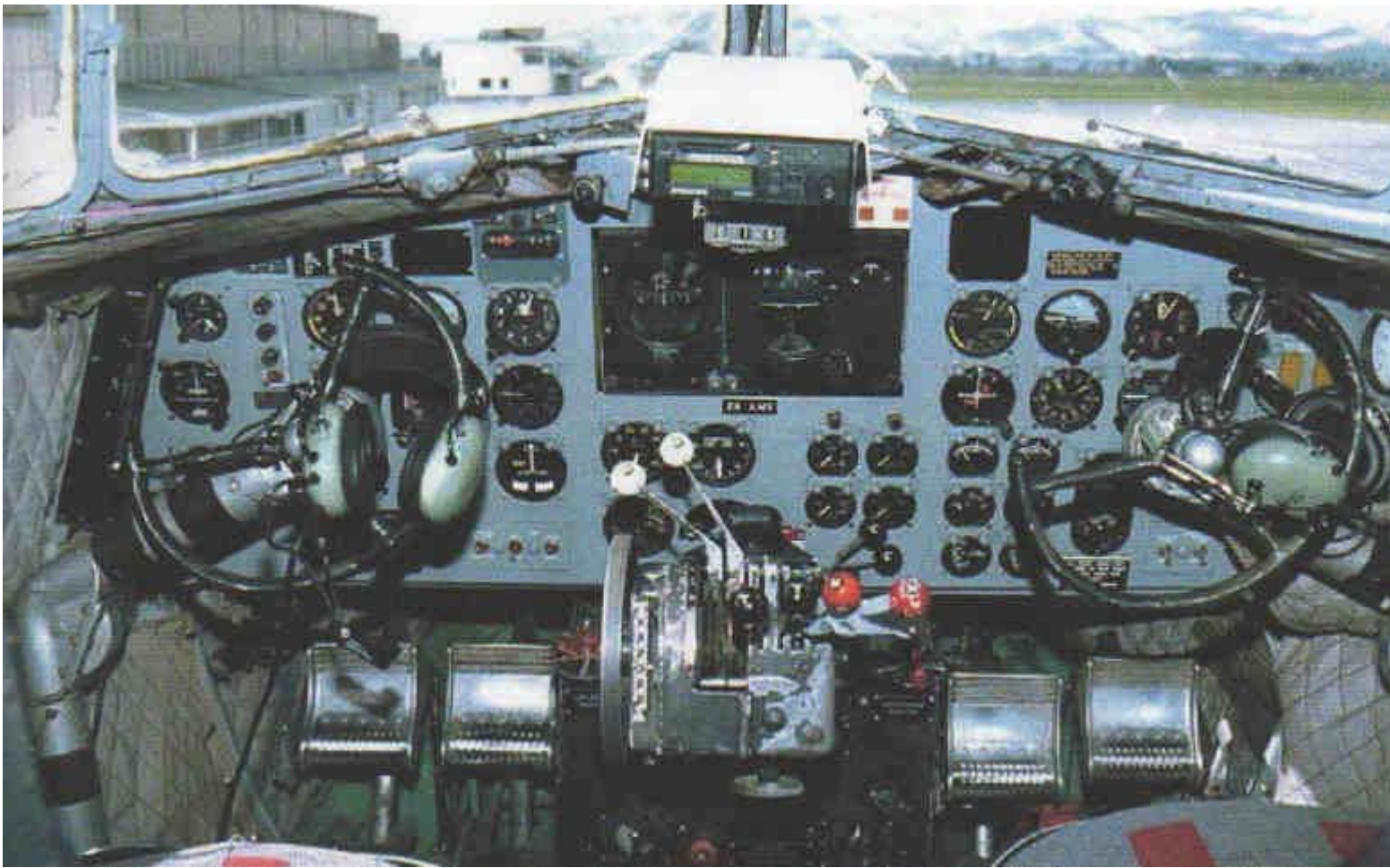


Col Roffe — 5 Course Transport Pilot

Throughout the war RAAF C-47s carried 100,000 passengers, 60,000 tonnes of freight, and at least 12,000 medical evacuees between Korea and Japan.



Douglas C-47 Transport



Cockpit C-47

Another Beach Landing — June 13 1953

Bill Monaghan, having had one engine shot out by 37mm fire at extreme operational range, headed down the west coast of North Korea hoping for either a helicopter rescue if he had to eject or even a possible landing on one of the small Allied-held islands. A US amphibian rescue aircraft began pacing below him offering welcome reassurance. However, having reached the Allied island of Paengyong-do, Bill managed a totally successful wheels-down landing on the long firm beach, to be greeted by US personnel placed there partly for such purposes. This was the same curved beach used as a runway by two squadron Meteors a few months earlier and while most unconventional it again proved a blessing. The C-47 which flew in a replacement engine and repair-crew took Bill home to base. Two days later Bill returned, did a successful beach takeoff and flew to Kimpo. This remarkable adventure illustrates the degree of organization and effective execution of procedures put in place by the USAF for such emergencies.

Chapter 20

Deliverance From Bondage

Always pathetically hopeful, there is keen observation of all aircraft movements. If the skies above are bereft of planes for several days, excitement mounts! Optimists predict the onset of 'Peace' as lack of air activity would be an obvious precursor. Longings and hopes are always crushed by the sudden appearance of long white condensation trails and the wheeling of jets above the compound.

Relief At Last

As 1953 moves on, a great weariness grips the compound. In the heat of the day, tired men do their chores and their duties, play Chess or cards and sit in the shade talking of home or silently indulging in nostalgic yearning for all those things which seem so far off in the past. They live on memories. At night, the bull-frogs in the paddy fields seem to understand as they roar a sympathetic chorus. Restless men seek mutual solace as they aimlessly pace the compound in the warm evening twilight. Everyone knows there is a chance of peace, a chance of release, yet they dare not think too much about it. Amid the cicadas endless screeching, the immense enticement of wishful thinking seduces every mind, yet there still remains the big question — when will it happen?

As the year progresses so do the Peace Talks at Panmunjom. We realize that we are not hearing the sounds of aircraft and being optimists many of us feel the war might be nearly over. We are briefed by our senior officers to not do anything which might jeopardize proceedings if peace is declared. After a few tense days of expectancy, we are assembled on the parade ground for an address by Commander Ding. We are eager and so, of course, are the Chinese cameramen.

Ding, bustling with an air of importance, confronts the assembly of expectant prisoners. At his side, attempting a similar stance is Wong, his interpreter for this momentous occasion. A dramatic and long-winded speech follows. This petty tyrant now laboriously reminds his captive audience, "How well the Peace Loving People have looked after you in pursuit of our Lenient Policy. The peace which you will now enjoy results from untiring efforts by the Communist Regime on behalf of all peoples of the world." Then Wong announces that the truce has been signed that morning, 27 July 1953 at 1100 hours. The cease-fire is to be effective from 2200 hours.

At this electrifying news a murmur ran through the crowd, an audible sigh erupted, however the troops quickly regained composure and a disciplined silence. Then, as the Chinese cameramen began their routine, the prisoners, as agreed beforehand, turned their backs on the proceedings and wandered nonchalantly back to the schoolhouse. They had decided to deprive their captors of any emotional display if the truce should be announced as they knew any jubilation would be portrayed as "Prisoners rejoicing at the news of the Peace Loving Peoples' victory over the Imperialist Warmongers."

The next morning, Padre Davies held a Service of Thanksgiving. He had a large attendance. The Padre then appealed to the Chinese for wine for a special Thanksgiving Holy Communion on the next Sunday. As usual, even at this stage, they were as obstructive as ever. Eventually the wine was forthcoming however Tien had his proviso: "You must write out in detail word for word the

Communion Service for the Commander's approval."

The Padre replied: *Tien, in that case we shall not have our service!"*

There was now a general atmosphere of sustained tension within the camp as it was difficult to accept the idea of inevitable deliverance from this evil place. The promise was there, but the track record of the Communist captors engendered a feeling of apprehension. These Chinese despots had all too often demonstrated their tricks and contradictions. Even the optimists hardly dared believe the peace plans would run smoothly now they were so tantalizingly close.

Ron continues his story:

On the evening of 27 July 1953, an American B-26 night bomber flew low over the camp dropping leaflets to inform of the truce. We learned there were day-by-day bulletins on Peking Radio detailing the exchange of prisoners at Panmunjom, describing the euphoric scenes as their own men secured release from the cruel Capitalists, in contrast with the reluctance of United Nations captives to leave the kind care of the Communists and return to the harsh reality of the Capitalist regime.



Douglas B-26 Invader — Dropped Leaflets

Soon there was an improvement in treatment of prisoners. Food quantity and quality increased greatly. Canned meats, fruit, eggs, and sweets became abundant along with bags containing sweet-smelling soaps, nail-clippers, razors, combs and cartons of the best Chinese cigarettes. Mail suddenly became abundant. No doubt these benefits had been readily available but withheld until the appropriate moment.

The Captors were trying to engender some belated 'goodwill', fatten up the men before release and

also beat the Red Cross to the punch with the other 'comforts' which would obviously be arriving soon in ever-increasing Red Cross packages. The anxious waiting became intense. We knew that anything could go wrong to deny our freedom between now and when we were to be exchanged. A few days later Tien came into our squad room and with his usual Audayleea come!"led me out to his office. He sat me down, an unusual courtesy, and then informed me that I was going on a trip to Pyoktong to be interviewed by representatives of the International Red Cross. Again I was convinced that the combined factors of 'Minority nationality' and lower rank had helped single me out for this privilege, which I did not want. What are you going to tell them?"he asked. That depends on what they ask me!"

Tien seemed to be quite uncomfortable as he carried on: "You must be careful about your answers otherwise your repatriation could be affected. You should also remember all the improvements we have made to your daily life, Improvements to your food and sleeping arrangements. Your freedom to play sport and to take exercise and our lenient attitude towards you when you have broken camp rules and regulations. And remember our good medical treatment."

My only comment was, I will remember!"I would also remember how recent all these improvements were and how some of our officers were still in confinement as a result of trumped-up charges and mostly because they just happened to be the senior officer at the time. At one stage we thought they may be getting down to the list as far as Captains or even Lieutenants as there were so many Colonels and Majors doing solitary. It did not pay to have too high a rank in the prison camp! I decided it was best to avoid an argument with Tien at this crucial stage. I really did not need this job of confronting the Red Cross right now.

I was taken in a truck with one other prisoner, an American Lieutenant, and Tien, to the interview at Pyoktong. The truck stopped at a group of buildings and we dismounted amid a crowd of uniformed Chinese. We were seated at a table covered with a white tablecloth and there facing us were three or four Westerners in civilian clothes, undoubtedly representatives of The International Red Cross. The situation was extremely tense and no hand-shaking or physical contact was permitted or possible because of the pre-arranged seating. Nevertheless, it transpired that the question was irrelevant, or that there was no time to conduct a long discussion. Correctly assessing the situation, these sympathetic European officials immediately put us at ease by asking only a few perfectly innocuous questions such as Have you been receiving mail?"However they displayed much body language and meaningful facial expressions indicating that we should take it easy and not worry as everything is going be all right.'Everyone felt relief as we were taken out and trucked back to our camp.

On return to quarters, the prisoners discovered Red Cross packages, withheld for use in the event of a truce, had been delivered at last. These much-appreciated gifts included, cigarettes, scented soaps, toilet gear, socks and sweets among other valuables. The men were wildly enthusiastic at the sight of American goodies, their first tangible contact with home. Just to touch and inhale the odors was a lift to the spirits. There were strong rumors that the exchange of prisoners was not far off. It was later revealed that the Red Cross request to inspect the camp was thwarted by the Chinese who asserted that the road had been washed out in the recent heavy rains and also they were moving the prisoners out early. No doubt the Red Cross would have been most unimpressed if they had viewed the living conditions.

On about 17 August an important and emotionally gripping event took place. The solitary confinement prisoners were returned to the normal camp. In spite of their ordeals and their emaciated condition these inspiring men made little complaint and immediately began valiant

attempts to again fit in with normal camp life.

Tony Farrar-Hockley describes the return of the most popular, Colonel Carne: Near the end of the room, I stopped for a second to look at the Colonel, before taking my place in a queue of men who were anxious to shake his hand. He was very thin; his face was drawn and his eyes tired. Seeing him there, I really began to believe for the first time the Chinese really did intend to release us. He had been in solitary confinement for nineteen months.

Now that repatriation of prisoners was well and truly an imminent prospect, Ding with the aid of his interpreter Wong and his other chiefs, made final attempts to obtain confessions or at least admissions. It was strongly implied the rejection of "Truth" was based on self-interest and not on intellectual honesty. The resistant officers were hoping for rewards at home from their Capitalist bosses. "You have sold yourselves, you are the proven enemies of the people", was the popular face-saving conclusion enabling Snake-eyes and his Honchos to cope with their propaganda failure, the captives slipping out of their clutches, unconverted to Communism. With his snake eyes smoldering and nostrils dilating, Ding warned they had not escaped the wrath of the "...ever-vigilant and mighty Chinese people", they need not imagine they would ever be safe. "We can follow you to the ends of the earth and punish you!" All the suffering inflicted on these recalcitrant 'students' had been in vain. They were going home with heads high and a contemptuous smile on their lips.

The great day dawned, 19 August, a line of Russian trucks assembled outside our camp. Bring all and load up! This was a moment of great jubilation as we eagerly packed our pitiful treasures and clambered onto the trucks, mainly new vehicles. After a considerable delay, we were gripped with disappointment and apprehension when ordered to dismount and return to our quarters. The official explanation was Big rain, road bad, all broken with water! In view of the recent torrential downpours we were inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt. In our own compound the mud and rock debris was inches deep. This rationale helped restore our confidence and the belief that we would soon be on our way.

On the following day we boarded the trucks and this time there was no problem. The first leg of our trip back to civilization had begun and we were pleased to see the last of our 'home' as it disappeared. Interestingly enough, we still had a couple of armed guards on each vehicle. It was difficult to read the expressions on their stolid faces but I wondered if they regretted that they were about to lose control over us. The power of such an assignment always seemed to boost their spirits as they inflicted their cruelties and petty restrictions. Who would they lord it over after we had gone? Along the road, through the little villages, the famous North Korean 'People' lined up to jeer and throw stones at the departing enemies whom they had been taught to hate so fervently. Many of the prisoners responded by throwing some of their recently acquired 'goodies' towards these poverty-stricken citizens. Packets of soap and cigarettes shower down from the trucks. The goodwill gestures failed to move these bitter people who seemed to be incensed at the 'escape' of the Mi-gooks. Even as the peasants scrambled to retrieve the donations the stone throwing and jeering continued. In other parts of the journey, the people waved quite cheerfully and responded to the gifts with gratitude. It seemed likely that the stone-throwers and fist-shakers were largely 'rent-a-crowd' assemblies organized by the authorities. We hoped this was the case, as we generally felt no animosity towards these common folk who were suffering such privations under this draconian regime. It was the North Korean Government which had invaded the south, thereby creating this hell-on-earth. Speculation was rife as to whether we would be traveling all the way by truck or merely journeying to the railway. The train won and soon we were being loaded aboard a line of stinking cattle trucks at a small town we assumed to be Mampo-gin. Then we were rattling south towards Pyongyang with the inscrutable

guards still on duty.

Ron was pleased to find himself traveling with many old friends from his squad including Jack Henderson, a Sabre pilot called Brad Irish and a couple of South African Mustang pilots, Mike Halley and Dennis Earp. They were not to even guess that Dennis would one day become General Earp, Chief of the South African Air Force. It was good to know that the indomitable Tom Harrison was now riding in the next boxcar. Presumably Gordon Harvey was also on board. Ron was to learn, after reaching home base, that on the same train were two other 77 Squadron prisoners whose Meteors had succumbed to enemy flak. These were Flight Lieutenant Butch Hannan and Sergeant Don Pinkstone. Ron was to meet them on arrival at Iwakuni and to learn of Flying Officer Oelof Bergh, an RAF pilot flying with 77 Squadron on exchange duties. Oelof was also probably on the train, returning from one year of imprisonment as a result of his ejection from a 77 Squadron Meteor; however Ron did not meet him at any time before or during his imprisonment. They finally met briefly at Panmunjom.

I began wondering about the pilots who had been serving in the Squadron at the time of my capture and for some inexplicable reason assumed most would still be there at Kimpo, an unrealistic thought based on wishful thinking and some form of mental 'time warp'. Of course, they were all long gone, either killed or time expired. I looked forward to meeting up with my particular friend, Max Colebrook who we always called Blue. I was later to learn a heart-rending story. Blue had completed his tour of 100 missions in Korea and returned to Australia. He took my mother to dinner in order to console her about my imprisonment. To me that was the act of a true friend! On taking her home he confided that because the RAAF was short of fighter pilots he had volunteered for a second tour. Blue said he felt This might help to get Ron and the others home a bit earlier."My mother could not talk him out of it. Blue returned to Korea and did a splendid job. Soon, he was shot down by ground fire and was not heard of again. Blue Colebrook was posthumously awarded the British Distinguished Flying Medal. I was crushed on learning this story! I dozed sitting up in the boxcar until morning when we were passing through more open country. Soon we rattled into Pyongyang. I hadn't been here before except by flying missions over the place at about 25,000 feet and was surprised at the state of devastation, it was much like Seoul, badly knocked about. Here we changed trains, were given a sparse meal and departed for Kaesong in the afternoon.

After three long days in the smelly cattle cars the unkempt cavalcade of weary men lurched to a stop at Kaesong one more step closer to deliverance. Again, trucks were employed to convey the prisoners, this time to a building which had probably once been a temple. An allocation of bedding and floor space completed the arrangements. Then, in these barren surroundings, the long wait began. A selected number of prisoners would be exchanged each day, the ratio being a peculiar imbalance of about eight Chinese or North Korean prisoners for each UN captive released. As they endured day after day of boredom and frustration, it became obvious there were no prepared facilities at this place for such a large contingent. There was a critical food shortage and as hunger debilitation increased, thoughts drifted back to the recent abundance at the old prison compound just before their departure. Some cigarettes became available and these helped assuage hunger pangs. Everyone realized that the Chinese had deliberately moved them to Kaesong well before the authorities were ready to begin processing, purely for the purpose of avoiding a Red Cross inspection of the lamentable quarters at Pin-chong-ni. They were billeted a mile or two from 'Home Base', where an abundance of good food, medicine, kindness and decency was waiting. Tension mounted while the feelings of, 'So near and yet so far' invaded every moment as the days dragged by. They could occasionally catch a tantalizing glimpse of American helicopters transporting freed men on the first infinitely gratifying leg of their homeward journey. The North Koreans were watching also, no

doubt with considerable displeasure.



North Korean Officers Observing Freedom Village

Finally, on the 2nd of September 1953 the long-awaited notification came. I was to be released the next day. As the great morning arrived I was up at dawn and did not eat because my imagination was running riot on the idea of what would be available in just a few hours. I was indulging in a favorite pastime of my American mates in Camp 2, the concocting of menus to be enjoyed after release. Go on, say it Aussie, stike'n aigs!"(stake and eggs) would be the chorus. They loved to hear the Australian accent. Of course I always assured them that we Aussies do not have an accent at all.



Ambulances Awaiting Returning Prisoners At Freedom Village

When my name was called, it was sweet music indeed, as though these cruel captors had decided to be kind to me at last. They even provided steps for us to mount the truck, an unheard-of luxury. As I sat in the vehicle with the other fortunates my next surprise occurred when Tien climbed in with us. He looked uncomfortable but I guessed he felt safe enough. The truck rolled off towards Panmunjom. We were now appalled to see, on the sides of the road, piles of good American boots and clothing that the returning enemy prisoners had cast off. No doubt this was a Communist ploy to satisfy the cameras as their men came home inadequately clad and had to be immediately issued with 'good Communist attire.' Probably they would receive nothing as substantial as the discards, sand-shoes instead of boots for example. I remember looking down at my splendid Combat Boots and feeling grateful for the service they had provided. If only boots could talk!



De-Militarized-Zone Seen From The North

We pulled up within sight of the helicopter pad and I remember thinking 'If anything goes wrong now I'll make a run for it!' Again steps were placed behind the truck. Tien quickly jumped out and that was the last I ever saw of him, thank goodness! As I placed my foot unsteadily on the steps I was immediately approached by two of the biggest American Military Policemen I had ever seen. These kind men took me gently under each arm, just as my legs buckled. They helped, almost carried, me down the steps and through a beautiful archway bearing the printed words WELCOME GATE TO FREEDOM. Tears rolled down my cheeks.

Chapter 21

The Joys And Relief Of Freedom

Returning From Hell

It is hard for Ron to fully grasp, but he is now in FREEDOM VILLAGE, a magnificent sight to his watering eyes, with the UN flag proudly overhead and smiling faces everywhere. Realizing he has almost forgotten how people can be joyful and excited, he stumbles unsteadily through an uproar of back-slapping and tearful embraces, taking those first heartening steps towards normalcy.

In the careful hands of consistently gentle staff, Ron's processing began: *I was taken to an American Mobile Surgical Hospital (MASH) and then to the British hospital BRITANNIA. There I was de-loused and all items of wearing apparel, including boots, were discarded in favor of temporary new attire. I was too emotionally distracted to even think of retaining those magnificent boots. I proceeded, in something of a daze, to a reception room where I was cordially greeted by a Four Star American General, Mark Clark and American Senator Knowlands. It didn't matter that I was Australian, for they were interested and grateful for my answers to their tactful questions. After the interview, I was delighted to encounter two old Squadron friends, Flight Lieutenant Pappy Gorman and Sergeant John McIntosh who had come to meet me. They were the only ones in the Squadron who had known me before I was shot down.*



Ron Is Welcomed Back, L-R, Bob MacIntosh And Jack Gorman

Soon we were speeding along the road to Kimpo in a Jeep, the lively conversation unfortunately centering around much bad news about squadron fatalities. In shock I heard the names of my best pals, Blue Colebrook, Don Armit, Al Avery. Fred Lawrenson and so many others. My elation at

arriving 'home' was subdued.



S/Ldr Neville McNamara Greets Five Returned POWs At Panmunjom. Back: L-R, Ron Guthrie, Oelof Bergh, Butch Hannon, Neville McNamara. Front: L-R, Vance Drummond, Bruce Thompson

At Kimpo we boarded a C47 Dakota bound for Iwakuni in Japan. On board were a number of repatriated army men and to my immense satisfaction and relief I then encountered Vance Drummond and Bruce Thompson. In the enthusiastic and heart-warming greetings which ensued, I had difficulty keeping emotions under control. This was VIP treatment, as the aircraft had been flown to Korea especially for our benefit. Some old friends in the crew took me up the front to have a bit of a 'drive'. It was a beautiful day with a clear sky, however I was definitely 'On Cloud Nine'. We landed and taxied to the parking area. As I stepped out the door of the Dakota I must have presented an odd sight dressed as I was in a Navy beret with RAAF officers, badge on it, jungle green shirt and pants, brown sand-shoes and to top it all off a fluorescent orange scarf around my neck. The others were wearing similarly creative attire. Nevertheless, standing at the bottom of the steps at attention and saluting was Station Commander Group Captain Dixie Chapman. We could not have received a more heart-warming welcome. Beyond the throng, now milling around the steps, standing in the background, was Reiko my room-girl. I gave her a cheerful salute and she waved back, enthusiastically pointing to the Sergeants' Mess where I would later find her. Fraternization was officially frowned upon at the Base, so we would have to wait.

The Group Captain accompanied us to the equipment store to be kitted-out and he would then buy us a beer. Waiting to meet us was Flight Lieutenant Gordon Harvey who, I was pleased to learn, had been repatriated a few days earlier. The Group Captain personally supervised our uniform issue as he poured those long-awaited drinks. He took care to keep the bottles out of sight while photos were taken. Fellow POW Gordon Harvey pinned on my pilot's wings and the O/C presented my Flying Officer slides thereby making the promotion official in the nicest possible way. I then had my first meal at the Officers' Mess, ordered a big steak but was only able to eat half of it. This was something of a relief as I already had two previous tragedies to cope with. Reiko had been room-girl for two pilots before she was assigned to me. Both had been killed flying Mustangs, one on a night-flying exercise and the other on a mission in Korea.

My next significant undertaking was an intelligence de-briefing at the Australian Army base at Kure. I was required to do many hours of recording answers to questions, recalling virtually everything I could about my time in captivity. It was an ordeal for many reasons, not the least of which was my total unfamiliarity with tape recorders. Hearing my own voice played back was quite a shock. It transpired as time went by that I would have to accommodate many new devices which had come into being, or been put into general use during the two years of my incarceration. In later years, I realized that the experience at Kure was one of many similar quantum leaps I would have to make as my world rapidly adjusted to biros, TVs, videos and big airline jets. For a while I seemed to be stuck in the mental 'time warp' of an Air Force run by pen and ink and pounds, shillings and pence.

While at Iwakuni, Ron was to make the acquaintance of two other 77 Squadron pilots who had both suffered imprisonment after their Meteors were shot down by ground fire in North Korea. He had never met them before in the service and did not know of their presence in POW camps. Now they were able to compare notes.

The first was Flight Lieutenant John T. Butch Hannan who had been shot down on 6 February 1952 by anti-aircraft fire, while carrying out a ground attack-mission. With his aircraft on fire and out of control, he ejected and parachuted safely onto a snow-covered hillside and into captivity in North Korea. Various aircraft searched for him but his silk parachute was lost in the white of the snow. He was then captured and lodged in 'annex three' to the main POW establishment at Pin-chong-ni. In this particular camp, Butch was isolated from and probably never came in contact with any of the other 77 Squadron prisoners. Butch was involved in several plans to escape, but his health had deteriorated and he was never able to participate.

The other was Sergeant Don W. Pinkstone who was shot down on 15 June 1953 near the village of Chodong-ni in the central front line area. He was flying in support of ground troops during a fierce battle. His Meteor was severely damaged and on fire. Being at what he considered a fairly low altitude for ejection, Don undid his safety harness before firing the ejection-seat. This ensured his instant separation from the seat after it shot out of the aircraft and permitted early opening of his parachute. He was fired on by ground troops during the last few hundred feet. Following a very brief descent, Don landed in open country. After fending off an approaching Korean with a few shots of his revolver he fired an orange smoke flare in the hope of attracting a rescue effort. He later learned that a rescue helicopter was in fact driven away by intense ground fire.

Captured by Chinese soldiers, Don spent the next eight nights traveling north by truck, securely bound and blindfolded. In Pyongyang, the soldiers playfully threw some parachute chords over an archway and seemed to be preparing for a public hanging. The prospective victim, while preparing to make a run for it was relieved when an officer barked an order and broke up the party. He was then interrogated by officers who understood no English. The interview was rather unproductive. Don was taken to the outskirts of Sinuiju and placed in a flea-infested cell to remain in almost pitch black solitary confinement for about six weeks. He was interrogated almost daily by interpreters with very poor English. They questioned his motives in fighting for the UN in Korea and harassed him about biological warfare. Don spoke quickly to the complete frustration of the Chinese. They told him he did not speak like an American or an Englishman. He was a problem!

Prior to release, Don Pinkstone was held at Pyoktong in a cell with two others. This was a place of ill repute where thousands of inmates had died during the war. He was the last Australian repatriated through Freedom Village on 6 September 1953.

Now that all six of the Australian 77 Squadron POWs were present at Iwakuni, it left only Oelof Bergh, the South African pilot on exchange duties from the RAF, to be accounted for. Ron had met Oelof briefly at Panmunjom after his release in early September 1953 but he was not in evidence at Iwakuni. Presumably he had already been welcomed by British authorities. Many years later Ron was to read, in Col King's book 'Luck Is No Accident,' the story of Oelof Bergh's arrival in North Korea by parachute. This is an eye-witness account by the author who was on the last sortie of his 160-mission tour.

Col King, in his book *Luck Is No Accident* described the action as follows:

We dived on the target through a curtain of automatic flak. After firing, I executed a blood-draining pull-up to the left. During this maneuver the cry went out "Oelof is hit!" Back to my left there was a Meteor climbing steeply and trailing smoke. I continued gaining height, utilizing the speed from my dive. An ejection-seat shot out of the Meteor. It seemed to project almost horizontally and then fall crazily in a tumbling motion. The seat came under control of its drogue parachute and continued to fall rapidly. At the speed of my circling Meteor it was difficult to keep track of Oelof. The enemy gunners were still firing although the Meteors had all pulled up and away. Fortunately Oelof's seat was falling some distance away from the target. I lost sight of my friend for a few anxious seconds while completing a descending turn but was then relieved to see a parachute change shape as it hit the ground near a small village.

After repatriation, Oelof reported that he had flown through a fierce barrage of flak. Shell fire shattered his starboard engine and part of the cockpit. The aircraft was almost on its back as the ejection seat propelled him into space and his parachute opened about 100 feet above the ground. Having landed near a Chinese army headquarters he sought shelter in nearby scrub while soldiers fanned out giving each bush a burst of fire. As he scurried up the hillside, Meteor aircraft circled low in search until forced to depart due to fuel shortage. The last of these Meteors to leave the downed pilot was flown by Col King who was on his final mission. The Meteors were replaced by a number of Corsair fighters which continued the search. Oelof achieved a remarkable feat in remaining at large for seven days while making his way steadily towards the coast. He was without food, not even an emergency pack and he drank from ditches. On the eighth night a startled Chinese sentry apprehended the exhausted fugitive.

Oelof's interrogation lasted three months, on the first day enduring an order to stand at attention for 12 hours. Having been assured he was not entitled to normal POW treatment as he was a war criminal, the hapless prisoner was threatened extensively with various dreadful deprivations including non-repatriation in the event of an armistice. He was put in a hole in the ground and roofed over. Apart from interrogation sessions, this was his home for a month. Unsatisfactory reports brought Oelof to the attention of the interrogation 'heavies', so he was marched up country to Pak's Palace. Here he spent an extremely bad two months before being finally removed to a special annex of the camp at Pin-chong-ni. Accused of a hostile attitude, he spent five more months in a hole. This RAF pilot had a bad time. **Note: For more information refer end of this chapter: *Desperate False Charges***

Ron was also to learn with relief that all his other friends and acquaintances from the camp had eventually been repatriated, Jack Henderson, Tony Farrar-Hockley, Padre Davies and Colonel Carne, among others, were now on their way home. He was particularly relieved to find that the one-legged Tom Harrison had made it home in spite of extreme Communist antipathy. It was also gratifying to hear later that this hero, whom Ron often referred to as "The bravest man I have ever known." was

awarded the United States Distinguished Service Medal.

Last on the list was Lieutenant John "Rotorhead" Thornton who was later to tell of his final day of captivity: *Finally, on 6 September 1953, the Communists yielded up their 'Bonus Repatriation Group' the one hundred and five of us they had held to the bitter end. We were the last group to be released. Yet there were 944 men still behind us. They never made it out. Sadly, these forgotten men joined the faceless ranks of thousands of German and Japanese POWs from WW II that Soviet and Asian Communists buried in slave-labor camps after years of untold anguish. Our joy at being repatriated was badly dampened knowing that other Americans would be denied that same joy and would rot in the God-forsaken North until they mercifully died. I climbed into a truck and was taken to Freedom Village. As we rode, I had my eyes on one of our indoctrinators, a Chinese named Sun, who was coming along for the ride. Not only had he been a major source of trouble but his presence on this happy occasion was irritating me. I resolved to choke the bastard the minute we got to Freedom Village. The truck ground to a halt and we prepared to disembark. I was almost wringing my hands together in bloodthirsty anticipation, waiting for my target and me to hit the ground. 'We're on my side of the lines now, you rotten little shit, I said to Sun in my mind'. Sun hopped out and, right on his heels, so did I, ready to rip his throat out. Landing on the ground, I almost fell over, then righting myself, looked one way and then the other. Where the hell did he get to that quick? I couldn't see him anywhere. Where are you, you little sonofabitch?"I growled aloud, straining my eyes to spot him in the crowd. It was no use. He was gone.*

Later I found out that the Americans at Freedom Village had anticipated the possible outbreak of spontaneous slugfests between the Communists and their former captives. There were a lot of scores to be settled. An MP had grabbed Sun, apparently in mid-air, and told him to go back where he came from on the double. In a somewhat threatening manner, he had asked Sun if he needed any help in this matter. Sun apparently didn't and promptly evaporated. The hell with him, I figured. I'm out now. As I walked down Freedom Way to Freedom Village, I was jubilant. The sensation was indescribable. The first GI I saw was an MP, his steel helmet shining brightly. He and everyone that I subsequently passed snapped a salute and gave a Welcome back'smile that brought tears to my eyes.

Rotor observed: *Headed northward, in the opposite direction, were repatriated Communists. Shouting slogans, they pulled off the GI clothing, underwear and boots that had been issued them. Clothing was strewn all along Freedom Way. 'Good riddance', I thought. The ingrates had been clothed, fed and medically treated as well as any American GI on the front lines. The UN had even imported two types of rice so they could have a choice between Occidental high-protein rice or Oriental high-carbohydrate rice so their diets could adjust. We starved at the hands of their countrymen while they got fat on our side. It was a fundamental comparison of the virtues and values that lay on either side of the lines as I looked at these healthy Communists crossing paths with us emaciated Americans. I fumed as I watched them and wished I could run over and plant the toe of my boot up their asses to help them move north a little quicker. But I eventually relented.*

Rotor was satisfied to be free at last, and would now forget his tormentors.

In spite of the pleasures of life as a free man, Ron was still plagued by bad dreams, in fact nightmares would be the proper word. Sometimes he would have to read for hours or go for a walk in order to settle down again. In contrast there was the great pleasure of greeting each day with the joyous realization associated with the instant "where am I?" of the waking moment. He was home in Iwakuni!

Ron Guthrie Tells Of His Homecoming

On 12 September 1953, our small contingent of Australian ex-POWs of 77 Squadron departed Japan on that much-anticipated flight home. I was accompanied by Gordon Harvey, Butch Hannan, Vance Drummond, Bruce Thompson and Don Pinkstone. We were all present and accounted for, quite a remarkable fact in view of the threats to our well-being and safety which had so consistently characterized all of our lives since we had joined the Squadron in Japan. A small crowd of friends had gathered at the steps of the Qantas Skymaster to see us off. The Group Captain was there and so was Reiko in the background with tears streaming down her cheeks. It was a tearful but cheerful farewell as they waved us on our way! On the relaxing flight home, we talked enthusiastically about our holiday options. We were entitled to plenty of leave. Butch Hannan suggested his hometown, Perth, but the cost factor intervened. The Gold Coast won! The Queensland Gold Coast was a fun destination, and this was just what we needed.

At Mascot, by arrangement, our group was last to leave the aircraft and we organized ourselves on the boarding steps for the benefit of press and newsreels. From this vantage point I caught sight of my mother, my father and a number of relatives lined up and waving behind the barricade. Before joining my relatives, however, there were more formalities to be completed. In the Qantas VIP lounge we were greeted by a senior RAAF officer who presented each of us with a letter from Air Vice Marshal Bladin, granting generous leave, one month, and more if required. Then at last I was joined by my parents and relatives, a truly emotional moment! A RAAF staff car eventually took us to my mother's place.

On the following day I was paid at the Area Finance Office. With 1750 pounds 'back pay' in the bank I was suddenly rich. I headed straight up William Street, that's where I would find a brand new car! The first place I entered was Hastings-Deering, the Ford agent, and as I stepped into the showroom, standing there in pride of place was a beautiful blue Anniversary model Customline V8. It was love at first sight! May I be of assistance, sir?"said the Sales Manager. Yes,"I said, You can! I'll take that one. 'I had always wanted to be able to do that. He hesitated before answering, while looking me over to decide if he was dealing with a deranged menace to society. Perhaps we had better go into the office and talk about it,"he suggested, probably wishing to be near a phone.



Customline V8 1952-3

Seated in the office, the manager told me the price would be 1648 pounds and could I tell him how much 'hire purchase loan' I would require. None, I'll be paying cash!"was my alarming reply. No doubt the man now knew he was dealing with a bank robber or a crackpot. Suddenly his face cleared as he exclaimed Don't I know you?"and then realized he had in fact seen my photo in the paper, with my mother at Mascot. From there on the business progressed in the most congenial atmosphere.

I picked up the car that afternoon, with the dealer supplying free registration, free insurance and a complimentary full tank of petrol. I was a big success the next day on meeting the other three, Gordon, Vance and Bruce as arranged, at Ushers Hotel in Castlereagh Street. I was able to park in the street right outside! Gordon had bought a Standard Vanguard V8. We happily planned a trip together to Surfers Paradise and the next week made the journey via the New England Highway.

At Coolangatta some time later, Vance and I decided to visit The Promenade to take in the sights. Just as we parked by the beach two beautiful girls came walking down the footpath towards the car. Luckily, I had a wind-up toy monkey on the dashboard of my car. His special trick when wound up, was cymbal-banging. Seeing the girls approaching I quickly wound him and let him go as the girls neared the front of the vehicle. The monkey performed flawlessly, the girls stopped and laughed, we talked and the ice was broken. They were nurses on holidays, staying at a nearby boarding house. The girl whom I befriended already had a date, however her friend Fay agreed to bring her sister.

When we returned to the girls' boarding house Fay was waiting for us, her sister would be down to join us soon. The house had a long flight of steps leading down to the footpath where we were

parked. Looking up, I saw a lovely girl just starting down the stairs. I must confess that I gaped as she made her way down. When she reached the last step Fay introduced us, Ron, this is my sister Beris!"I nearly tripped over my own feet, steering Beris into the front seat of the Customline. That was how I met my wife. We were married in Brisbane next January!

MiG Pilot Defects To Kimpo UN Air Base

A startling event took place on 21 September 1953, just a few weeks after the ceasefire in the Korean war. Personnel at the Kimpo Air Base were astonished to see a MiG land, taxi in and park alongside a row of Sabres. The pilot, Noh Kum-Sok, a North Korean national, had decided to defect. He took off from Kusong, near the area in the middle of MiG Alley where Ron Guthrie was shot down. He flew straight to Kimpo without being detected, a fact which possibly reflected on the low level of post-war defense security in operation.





MiG Flown To Kimpo By Defector

Approaching the UN airfield, the Korean pilot reduced speed, extended air-brakes, flaps and landing gear and waggled his wings in a friendly gesture. He also announced his presence by firing flares, Colored red, yellow green and white, in a spectacular display. Due to lack of radio contact and the execution of a largely unplanned approach, the MiG landed against the other traffic, several Sabres. Two fighters, deadly enemies, a Sabre and a MiG, touched down simultaneously on opposite ends of the runway and raced towards each other. No Kum-Sok stated afterward that he, "Desperately steered to the far right of the runway and closed my eyelids tight." Somehow this worked. On completing the landing he shouted to Himself, "I made it, I'm safe, I'm free!" He may well have added, "I'm rich!" Undoubtedly the reward for delivering such an aircraft would make it all worthwhile. Interestingly though, No Kum-Sok claimed no prior knowledge of the \$100,000 reward being offered. He said he merely wished to live in the West, but undoubtedly he would have found the reward money a nice little touch.

This MiG-15 was minutely inspected and flown by test pilots including Chuck Yeager. Yeager reported in his autobiography the MiG-15 had dangerous handling faults and claimed that during a visit to the USSR, Soviet pilots were incredulous he had dived it, this supposedly being dangerous. When this story got back to the Soviet pilots Yeager claimed to have talked to, they angrily denied it.

In fact, although the MiG-15 did have some handling quirks and could, in principle, exceed flight limits in a dive, its airbrakes opened automatically at the red line, preventing loss of control. Lieutenant No's aircraft is now displayed at the National Museum of the United States Air Force near Dayton, Ohio.



Many Years Later — MiG And Sabre Take-off As A Pair

Desperate False Charges Against UN Forces

As the war progressed the increasingly desperate Communists, seeing their prospects of victory fading away, began an altogether evil program of false accusations against the forces which were so effectively defeating them. Predominant among these awful fabrications was a most elaborate world-wide propaganda program accusing the UN forces of carrying out systematic biological and chemical warfare. As Adolf Hitler said, "If you are going to tell a lie, tell a big one!"

Captured UN troops and airmen were routinely targeted by utterly unscrupulous Chinese or North Korean specialist interrogation officers with the intention of assessment, brain-washing and application of outright pressure of the most extreme variety. In view of the many thousands of captives being 'processed' and the unlimited torture and psychological pressures regularly applied, it was inevitable a small number would succumb to the enemy's demands. Some of these were probably, already "convinced Communists", making them easy targets.

The extensive periods of deprivation and torture inflicted upon these unfortunates was hard to believe, being so at odds with anything experienced in any normal existence. Airmen were targeted in particular as they were so readily accused of "dropping contaminated material" on the "Peace loving people". No effort was spared by interrogators in attempting to extract "confessions". On the

few occasions when such utterly unbearable treatment achieved its purpose, these false statements were recorded and given maximum world-wide publicity. These totally false accusations met with enthusiastic acclaim and outrage among much, if not most, of the world's media which obligingly generated frenzied rioting in its wake.



North Korean Prison Guards Who Gave Our Men Such Torture

Years afterwards, historians researching archives of former Eastern Bloc countries revealed the accusations against the USAF had been elaborately constructed by Communist propaganda, with North Korea's secret police actually infecting North Korean prisoners with Cholera in order to further the, "Evidence of American germ warfare". Naturally these well-proven and most-obvious facts, clearing America's name, received little, if any, reportage in world media.

According to documents held at the National Archives in Kew and not made public until 2006, when British Army Colonel Carne, VC, DSO was released in September 1953 after brutal captivity in North Korea, he told Sir Esler Dening, the British ambassador in Tokyo, "an extraordinary story". "He says that on January 1952 and for nineteen months thereafter, he was kept in solitary confinement by Chinese communists and subjected to a softening-up process including the use of drugs, the result of which was, as he put it, to make his "brain like a sponge, capable of receiving any kind of information put into it," Sir Esler told the Foreign Office in a Top Secret category telegram.

Tex was resentful and contemptuous of this despicable program of hatred generation by the Communists and the media collaboration which compounded the offense. Tex also summarized by lamenting, "Unfortunately this is what we have come to expect, so there are no surprises here!

Undoubtedly this was a typically despicable piece of character assassination carried out with the utmost malice by a most oppressive aggressor-power, against those fighting in defense of freedom for South Korea, and the world in general. Much of the world media and so many fellow travelers, should hang their collective heads in shame for indulging in this outrageous misuse of their influence in supporting these tyrants."

Chapter 22

The Russian And Chinese Involvement Clandestine Help For North Korea

After the Soviet Union collapsed, it became known, what had long been suspected, that Stalin had been primarily responsible for persuading North Korea's leader, the despot Kim Il Sung, to attack South Korea. Soviet advisors and weapons had provided the wherewithal for this massive invasion on 25th June 1950. The Russian consignment included about 150 combat planes — including IL-2 Sturmoviks and various Yakovlevs — and large numbers of massive T-34 tanks. These were all outstanding machines of war. Russian 'volunteers' were involved in front-line activities, but carefully concealed.



Stalin — The Most Evil Dictator

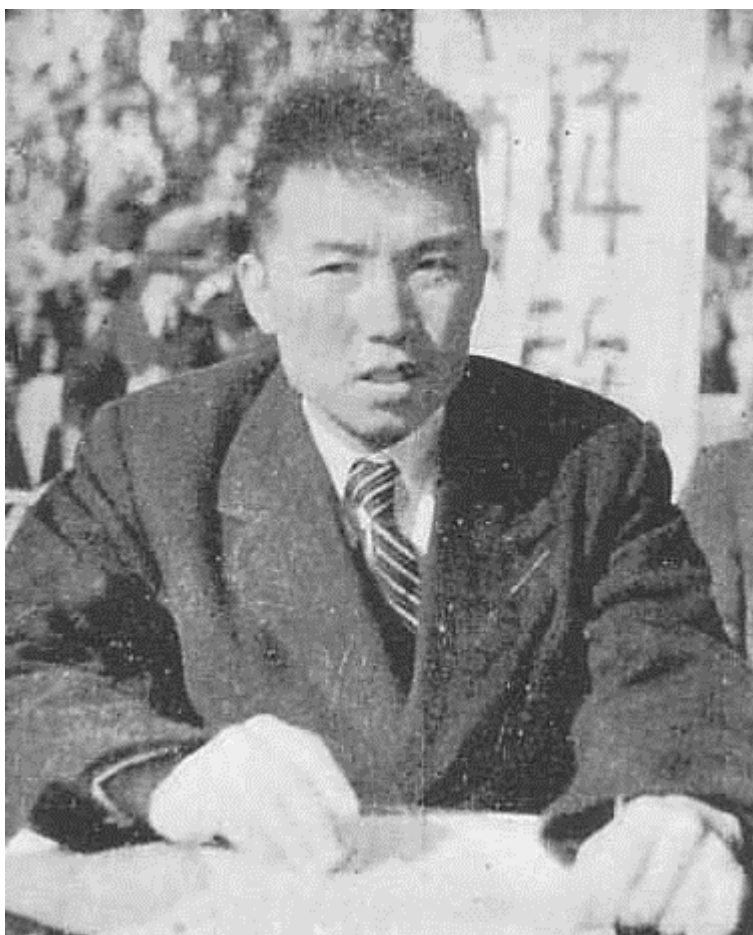
The Korean War was a conflict between the Republic of Korea (South Korea), supported by the United Nations, and the invading Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), supported by the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. It was primarily brought about by the political division of Korea through an agreement of the victorious Allies at the conclusion of the Pacific War at the end of World War II.

The Korean Peninsula had been ruled by the Empire of Japan from 1910 until the end of World War II. Following the surrender of the Empire of Japan in September 1945, American administrators divided the peninsula along the 38th parallel, with U.S. military forces occupying the southern half and Soviet military forces occupying the northern half. The Communist powers, under Stalin's urging, and strongly supported by China, always demanded unification of the whole peninsula under Communist domination. They would settle for nothing less, and primed North Korean leader Kim il Sung for this task.



Soviet Troops Liberate N Korea — 1945

Kim il Sung, a dedicated Korean Communist, had been in exile from his Japanese-occupied homeland for eight years. After expulsion of the Japanese by Russian occupation of North Korea, Kim returned, arriving back in Korea on 22 August 1945. In September the Soviets installed Kim as head of the Provisional People's Committee. He was not, at this time, the head of the Communist Party, whose headquarters were in Seoul in the US-occupied south. During his early years as leader, he assumed a position of influence largely due to the backing of the Korean population which was supportive of the fight which he had carried out against Japanese occupation.



Kim il Sung — 1946

Kim il Sung's tenure as leader of North Korea has often been described as autocratic, and he certainly established an all-pervasive cult of personality. From the mid-1960s, he promoted his self-developed 'Juche' variant of socialist organization, which, in 1972, replaced Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of the state. One of the intriguing figures of the twentieth century, Kim outlived Joseph Stalin by four decades, Mao Zedong by two, and remained in power during the terms of office of six South Korean presidents, seven Soviet leaders, ten U.S. presidents, fourteen UK Prime Ministers and twenty-one Japanese prime ministers.

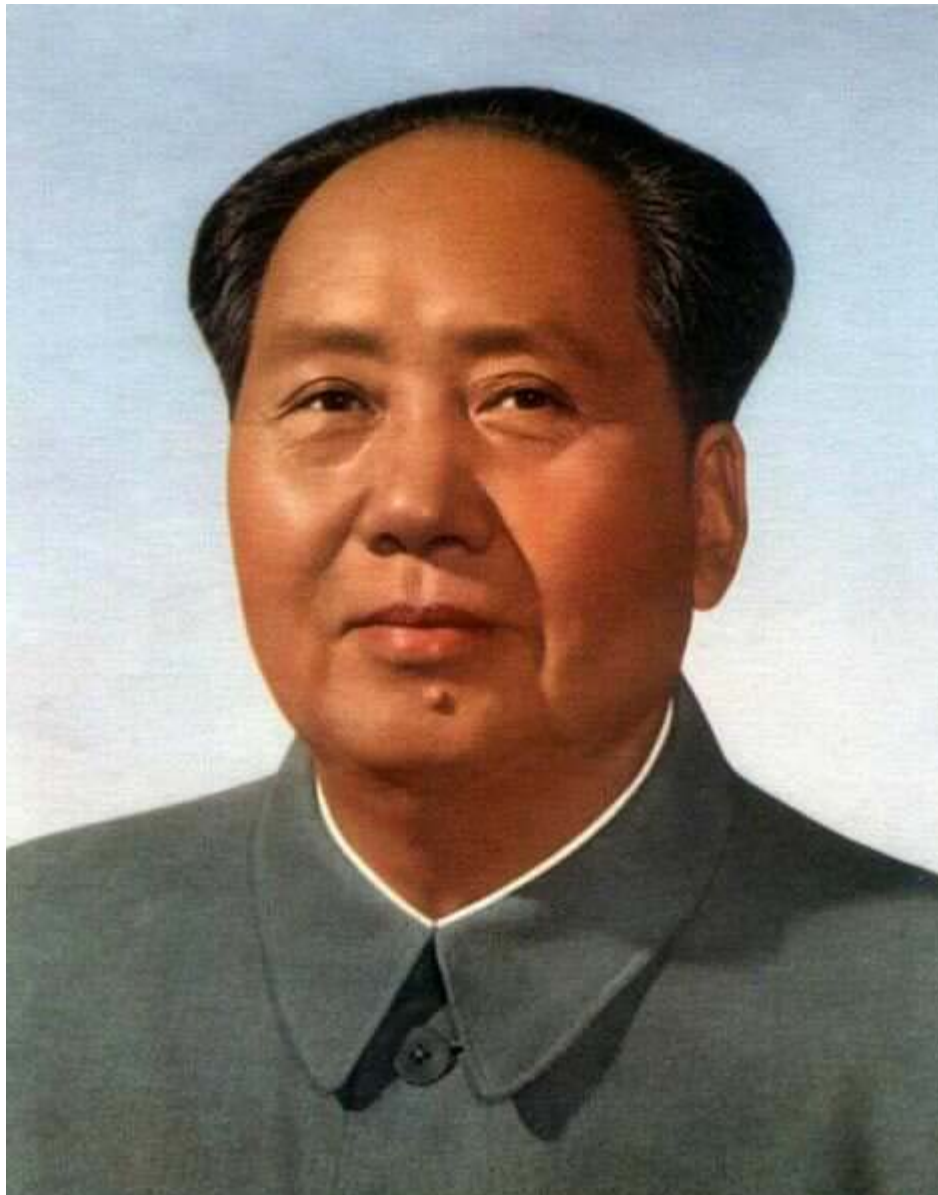
One of Kim's accomplishments was his establishment of a professional army, the Korean People's Army (KPA), aligned with the Communists and formed from a cadre of guerrillas and former soldiers who had gained combat experience in battles against the Japanese and later against Nationalist Chinese troops. From their ranks, using Soviet advisers and equipment, Kim constructed a large army skilled in infiltration tactics and in guerrilla warfare. Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 Joseph Stalin equipped the KPA with modern heavy tanks, trucks, artillery, and small arms. Kim also formed an air force, equipped at first with ex-Soviet propeller-driven fighter and attack aircraft. Later, North Korean pilot candidates were sent to the Soviet Union and China to train in MiG-15 jet aircraft at secret bases

Throughout 1949 and 1950 the Soviets continuously armed North Korea. After the Communist victory in China, ethnic Korean units in the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) were released to North Korea. The combat experienced veterans from China, the tanks, artillery and aircraft

supplied by the Soviets, and rigorous training increased North Korea's military superiority over the South.

In early 1950 American Secretary Of State, Dean Acheson, addressing the National Press Club, made a statement listing places which the US would defend against Communist aggression. He accidentally omitted South Korea. Some feel that Stalin took this as a 'green light'.

By the outbreak of the Korean War, Joseph Stalin had already equipped the KPA with modern tanks, trucks, artillery, and small arms (previously, the South Korean Army had nothing remotely comparable either in numbers of troops or equipment). In April 1950, Stalin gave Kim permission to invade the South under the condition that Mao would agree to send reinforcements if they became needed. To avoid a war with the Americans, Stalin made it clear that Soviet forces would not directly engage in combat. Kim met with Mao in May 1950. Mao was concerned that the Americans would intervene but agreed to support the North Korean invasion. The KPA was the primary instigator of the Korean War (called the "Fatherland Liberation War" in the North).



Chairman Mao Zedong

China desperately needed the economic and military aid promised by the Soviets. At that time, the Chinese were in the process of demobilizing half of the PLA's 5.6 million soldiers. However, Mao sent more ethnic Korean PLA veterans to Korea and promised to move an Army closer to the Korean border. Once Mao's commitment was secured, preparations for war accelerated. Soviet generals who had extensive combat experience in World War II were sent to the Soviet Advisory Group in North Korea. These generals completed plans for the invasion by May. The original plans were to start with a skirmish in the Ongjin peninsula on the west coast of Korea. The North Koreans would then launch a "counterattack" that would capture Seoul and encircle and destroy the South Korean army. The final stage would involve destroying South Korean remnants, "liberating" the rest of the South Korea and capturing the ports.

During the opening phases of the Korean War in 1950, the KPA did quickly drive South Korean forces south and captured Seoul, only to eventually lose 70,000 of their 100,000-strong army in the autumn after U.S. amphibious landings at the Battle of Incheon and the following drive to the Yalu River. The KPA subsequently played a secondary minor role to Chinese forces in the remainder of the conflict. By the time of the Armistice in 1953, the KPA had sustained 290,000 casualties and lost 90,000 men as POWs

American support for South Korea turned the tide of war against the North Koreans in spite of their earlier successes. After the American triumphant Incheon landing and the entry of Chinese 'volunteers' and particularly following the virtual destruction of the untrained North Korean Air Force by the USAF, Stalin felt obliged to help in some significant manner sending more tanks and aircraft.



Sturdy Russian Sturmovik IL-2

The Il-2 was a single-engine, propeller-driven, low-wing monoplane of mixed construction with a crew of two (one in early versions), specially designed for assault operations. Its most notable

feature was the inclusion of most effective armor in an airframe load-bearing scheme. Armor plates replaced the frame and paneling throughout the nacelle and middle part of the fuselage, and an armored hull made of riveted homogeneous armor steel secured the aircraft's engine, cockpit, water and oil radiators, and fuel tanks. The Il-2 was eventually produced in vast quantities, becoming the single most widely produced military aircraft in aviation history, but only 249 had been built by the time Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Russians called this "The Flying Tank!"



Yakovlev 9, Russian Fighter

The Yakovlev Yak-9 was a single-engine fighter aircraft used by the Soviet Union in World War II and after. Fundamentally a lighter development of the Yak-7 with the same armament, it arrived at the front at the end of 1942. The Yak-9 had a lowered rear fuselage decking and all-around vision canopy. Its lighter airframe gave the new fighter a flexibility that previous models had lacked. The pilots who flew it regarded its performance as comparable or better than that of the Messerschmidt Bf 109G and Focke-Wulf Fw 190A-3/A-4. The Yak-9 was the most mass-produced Soviet fighter of all time. It remained in production from 1942 to 1948, with 16,769 built (14,579 during the war). It was the first Soviet aircraft to shoot down a Messerschmidt Me 262 jet. It was used by North Korea in the Korean War.



Superb Russian T-34 Tank

The T-34 was a Soviet medium tank produced from 1940 to 1958. When it first appeared on the battlefield in 1941, German tank generals von Kleist and Guderian called it "the deadliest tank in the world." It has often been described as the most effective, efficient and influential design of World War II, although its armor and armament were surpassed by later tanks of the era. It was the mainstay of Soviet armored forces throughout World War II, and widely exported afterwards. It was the most-produced tank of the war, and the second most-produced tank of all time, after its successor, the T-54/55. In 1996, T-34 variants were still in service in at least 27 countries. This outstanding Soviet weapon, provided to North Korea in considerable numbers prior to 1950, gave the invaders a big advantage in their assault on South Korea.

One of the outstanding features of the T-34 was the Christie suspension, a suspension system developed by American engineer Walter Christie for his tank designs. It allowed considerably longer movement than conventional leaf spring systems then in common use, which allowed his tanks to have considerably greater cross-country speed. The most famous Christie-based tanks, the Soviet BT tank series and the T-34, used coil springs mounted vertically (on the BT) or at a slight angle from vertical (the T-34). The T-34 also had a wide track providing superior ground holding.

The T-34 was the most important weapon fielded by the Red Army in World War II. Sloping armor increased protection, the V-2 diesel engine used a less flammable fuel, the Christie suspension was fast on rough terrain, and wide tracks gave low ground pressure for good mobility in mud and snow, although reliability and manufacturing issues dogged the wartime production models. The 76.2 mm main armament remained effective to decreasing degrees through the end of the war; the improved 85 mm gun was among the world's best in early 1944, and ensured that the overall T-34 design would remain competitive with German designs. The T-34 continued to give the Soviet Army a critical advantage in the war, even after its technological advantages had been equaled and surpassed. The design and construction of the tank were continuously refined during the war to enhance effectiveness and decrease costs, allowing steadily greater numbers of T-34s to be fielded despite heavy losses.

Helping North Korea would be a careful process as Stalin did not want to risk a war against the USA. These despots probably recognized the degree to which America had become demobilized and

unprepared for any type of war activity. Perhaps though, they failed to grasp the level of resolve which the US was bound to bring to bear on such a threat as was being posed. In either case Stalin knew he must walk a fine line in helping his friend.



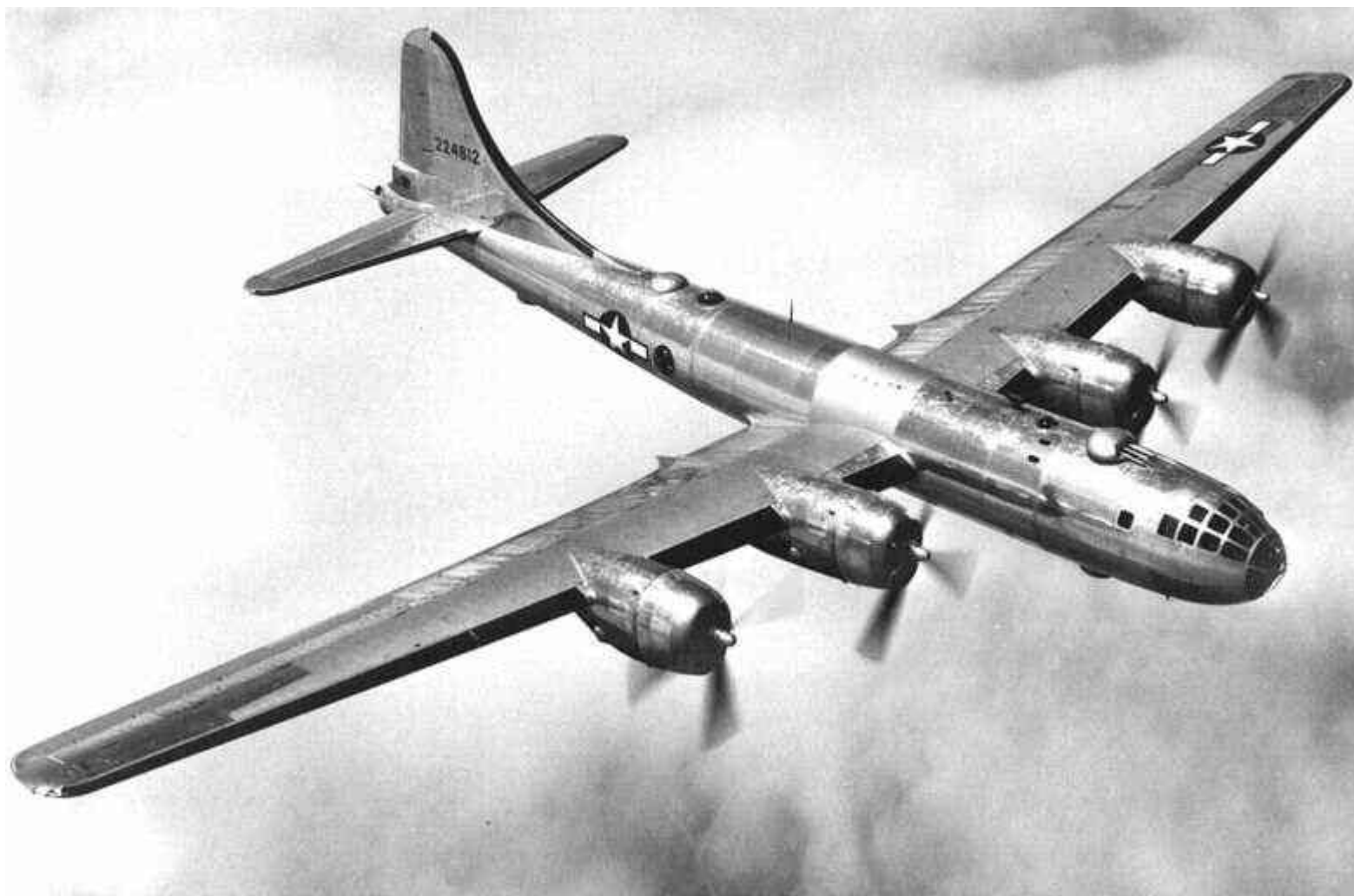
Russian Flak Train As Supplied To N. Korea

He ordered MiG fighter units into Manchuria, to operate under maximum secrecy and with two provisos. Firstly, Russian pilots were not allowed to operate south of a line between Pyongyang and Wonsan. Secondly they were not allowed to fly over the Yellow Sea — off the west coast — for fear of ditching pilots being picked up by American Air-Sea-Rescue units. As further precautions these airmen were to be declared as "volunteers". The bodies of any killed were buried in an old cemetery at Port Arthur in order to reduce the possibility of publicity at home in the USSR. Before entering combat the Russian pilots were given a short course in Chinese phraseology relating to air-operations. This turned out to be a complete failure as men under pressure reverted to their native tongue.

Before the War in Korea, in February 1950, Stalin had sent a fighter regiment into China. later in that year the Russian 151st Fighter Air Division, flying MiG-15 jets, entered the Korean War. In spite of the superiority of the MiG over all Allied aircraft, at that time, the Russian pilots were so inadequately trained, the UN pilots continually out-fought them. In December the Soviets were shocked by the arrival of the American Sabre, a fighter similar to the MiG-15 in performance but

flown by more-experienced and better-trained pilots.

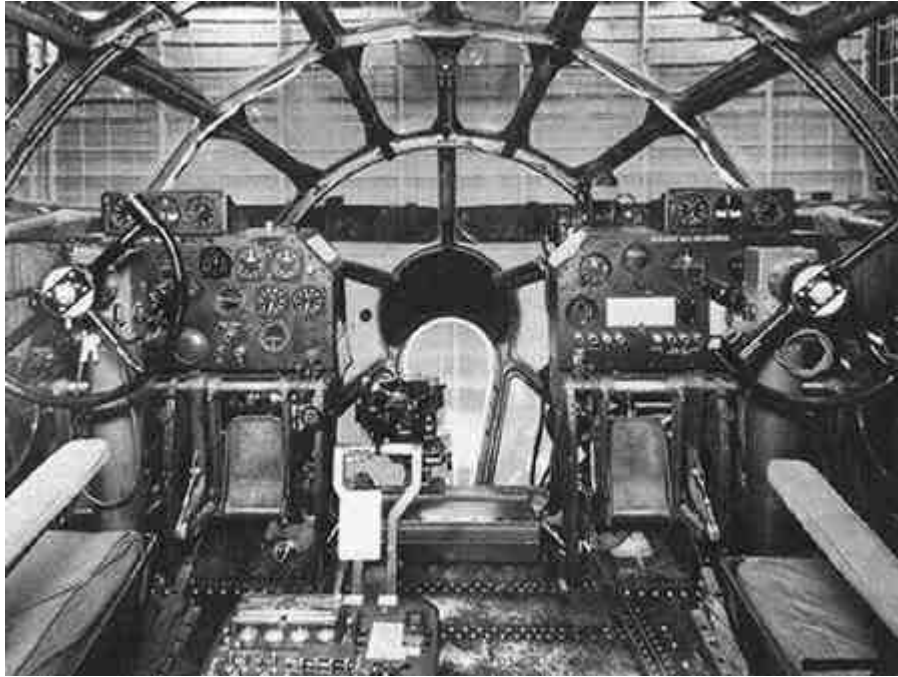
The MiGs advantage evaporated as the Sabre was equal in everything except rate-of-climb. The MiGs took heavy losses until the arrival of reinforcements, of superior quality, in April 1951. The MiGs' main mission was to destroy American bombers, particularly the huge Super-fortresses. The Sabres' main mission was to protect them against MiGs, likely to be encountered plunging down from 50,000 feet out of the sun, with cannons blazing.



B-29 Super-fortress

Two new Soviet Air Divisions arrived in Manchuria in March 1951. Both the 303rd and 324th Interceptor Air Divisions were manned by well-trained, handpicked pilots many of whom were WWII aces. These two divisions were retired out of combat in early 1952 by which time many of the Soviet pilots had flown more than 100 combat missions during their approximately twelve months tour. During that time these two divisions claimed 510 UN aircraft, however UN losses of aircraft in air-to-air fighting totaled 40 in that same period. The Soviets acknowledged losing 52 MiGs during that phase. The Russians 'claimed' a 10 to 1 kill ratio. Whilst both sides made excessive claims, the Soviets made an art form of these distortions. The replacement units which took over in early 1952 were not nearly as well trained or combat-ready against the American Sabres and their losses mounted. One MiG unit performed so badly it had to be pulled out of combat and replaced with an

earlier successful regiment.



B-29 Super-fortress Flight Deck

The B-29 Super-fortress was a four-engine propeller-driven heavy bomber designed by Boeing that was flown primarily by the United States toward the end of World War II and during the Korean War. It was one of the largest aircraft to see service in World War II and a very advanced bomber for its time, with features such as a pressurized cabin, an electronic fire-control system, and remote-controlled machine-gun turrets. The name "Super-fortress" was derived from that of its well-known predecessor, the B-17 Flying Fortress.

Though the B-29 was designed as a high-altitude daytime bomber, it was used extensively in low-altitude night-time incendiary bombing missions. It was the primary aircraft used in the American firebombing campaign against the Empire of Japan in the final months of World War II and was used to carry out the atomic bombings that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Battle of Namsi — Black Tuesday"

U.S. strategic bombers suffered severe losses during the week of 22–27 October 1951 while attempting to destroy the newly created North Korean aerodromes of Namsi, Taechon and Saamchan. For example, on 23 October, 56 MiG-15s attacked nine Super-fortresses escorted by 34 F-86s and 55 F-84Es. Soviet airmen shot down or damaged beyond repair eight B-29As and two F-84Es, losing only one MiG, and causing Americans to name that day "Black Tuesday". The top Soviet pilots in those battles were Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr P. Smorchkov and 1st Lieutenant Dmitriy A. Samoylov. The former shot down a Super-fortress on each of 22, 23 and 24 October. Samoylov added two F-86As to his tally on 24 October 1951, and on 27 October shot down two more aircraft: a B-29A and an F-84E.

Describing the battle for Namsi, one American crew member stated, "Some Soviet pilots closed to within 50 feet before unleashing withering barrages of 23-mm and 37-mm cannon shells. The tracers

that shot out of these huge weapons looked like flaming balls of AA fire — except they streaked across the sky horizontally instead of vertically", sometimes called "Horizontal Flak!"

One B-29 took the brunt of the cannon punishment on the right wing and right inboard engine with flames pouring from the cowlings as the Super-fortress staggered from the ordeal and fell out of formation. As MiG attacks continued more of the huge bombers turned away from the target area with several of those badly hit heading towards safe islands off the coast of North Korea. One severely damaged B-29 limped back to Kimpo and crash-landed but never flew again. Another arrived at Kimpo with six wounded on board. Many crew members bailed out, some landing in the Yellow Sea just off the West coast of North Korea where they encountered a brisk swell. A significant number of these parachuting aircrew were never accounted for. A few were proven to have been murdered after capture.

These losses among the heavy bombers forced the Far East Air Force to cancel the precision daylight attacks by the B-29s, and only undertake radar-directed night raids. As a result of the B-29s switching to night bombing the enemy deployed the 351st Air Regiment to Manchuria. This night-fighter force initially employed propeller-driven La-11 aircraft until February 1952, at which stage they converted to MiG-15s and obtained more success. Anatoli Karelin became a night-fighter ace by shooting down five Super-fortresses during his tour. During the last year of the war another night fighting regiment, the 535th FAR arrived.



B-29 Super-fortress Rear Pressurized Hull (Crew Rest, 4 bunks)

The Soviets claimed many more kills than were actually shot down. The USAF lost 34 B-29s during the Korean war 16 of which were shot down by enemy fighters, presumably MiGs. Flak accounted for four and a further 14 were lost for undefined reasons. On the other hand the Super-fortress gunners claimed 33 enemy fighters, 16 of which were MiGs with a further 17 'probables', and 11 damaged.

B-29 bombers made concentrated attacks on supply routes, especially bridges. The Koreans and Chinese developed astounding labor-intensive methods of reconstruction, requiring re-visits by the bombers. Bridges were hard to knock out permanently.

Note: The B-29 was first reported in action on June 5, 1944, attacking targets at Bangkok, and on June 15 the first raid was made on Japan from bases in China. Later, attacks on the Japanese mainland were stepped up, mainly from the Marianas and Guam, with forces up to 500 Super-

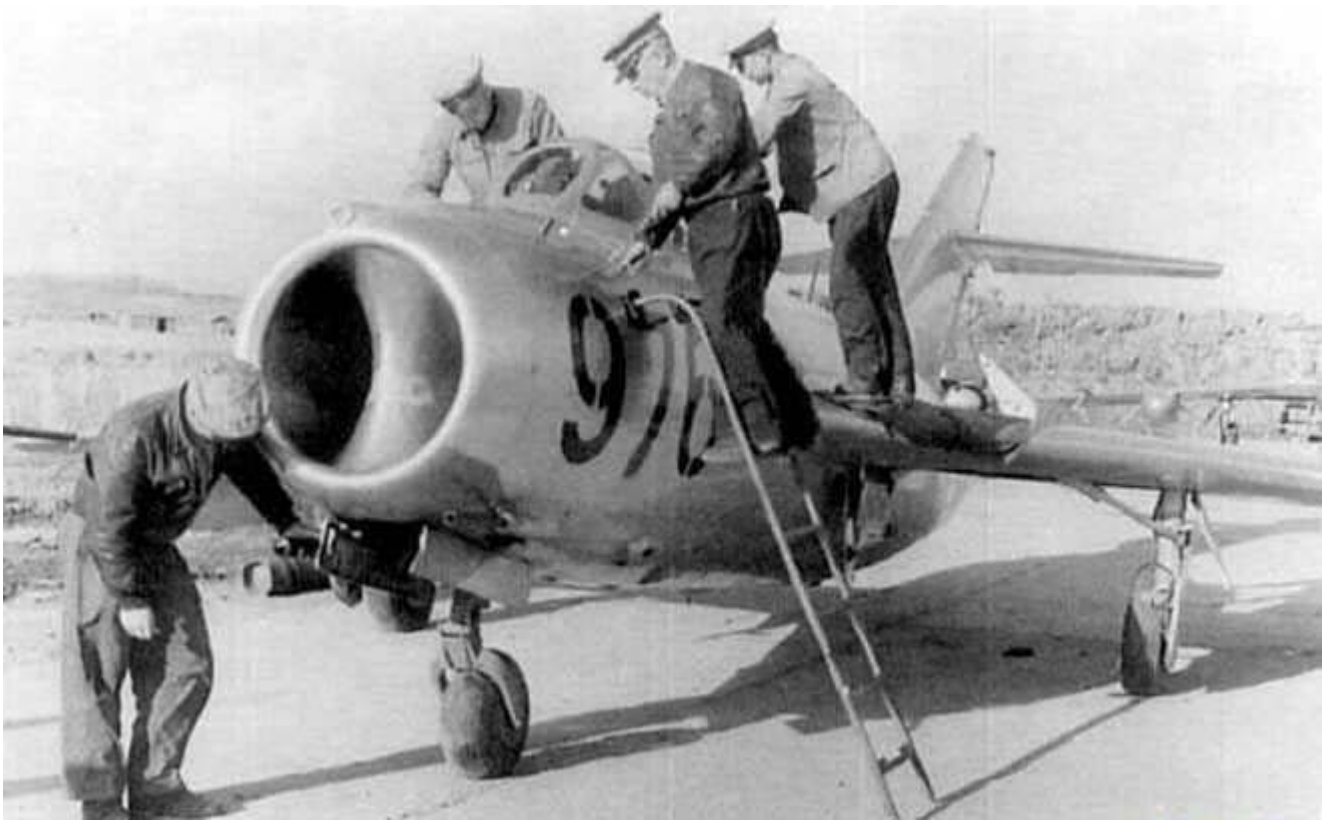
fortresses.

Soviet pilots in this war were highly motivated with a strong fear of failure and disgrace if found wanting. They were also aware their families would suffer retaliation if they should fall into enemy hands. Not a single Soviet pilot was taken prisoner during the Korean campaign. Many were sent home in disgrace after failing in the air. In a few cases entire units failed and were sent home. Occasional strong disputes occurred with pilots claiming the same kill. Again, severe disgrace could readily follow any definitive investigation.

The Soviets claimed 1,300 UN aircraft destroyed during the Korean War. Their figures also showed a loss of just 345 MiGs in combat and in operational accidents. After the war the American final re-assessment claimed 379 MiGs destroyed in air combat for a loss of 103 Sabres. These were final re-assessed figures and differed greatly from the wartime claims which are best ignored.

A source reporting on behalf of the Soviets has stated: "During the period from November 1950 to January 1952, no less than 40 Soviet MiG-15 pilots were credited as aces, with five or more victories. Soviet combat records show that the first pilot to claim his fifth aerial victory was Captain Stepan Ivanovich Naumenko on 24 December 1950. The honor falls to Captain Sergei Kramarenko, when on 29 July 1951, he scored his actual fifth victory. Approximately 16 out of those 40 pilots actually became aces, the most successful being Major Nikolay Sutyagin, credited with 22 victories, 13 of which were confirmed by the US; Colonel Yevgeny Pepelyaev with 19 claims, 15 confirmed victories; and Major Lev Shchukin – 17 credited, 11 verified."

It is clear the Mig leaders, enjoying the advantage of their neutral air-bases and the tactical benefits of an aircraft with superior altitude and climb performance were able to dictate the situation at least until the battle began. They could decide to fight or depart. The assistance of radar control from the ground also allowed the Migs, if desired, to dodge through the gaps in the F-86 formations.



MiG Being Prepared For Flight

It must be remembered the enemy had big tactical advantages in operating their MiGs from a number of airfields in neutral territory, just a few miles into Manchuria, very close to the air combat area. Having climbed to a most advantageous altitude, in excess of 50,000 feet over neutral Manchuria, the MiGs were ideally positioned to dive upon their prey, carry out a swift attack and rapidly make their escape back to nearby neutral territory where the Sabres dare not follow for fear of precipitating an international incident



North Korean Monument To MiG Airmen

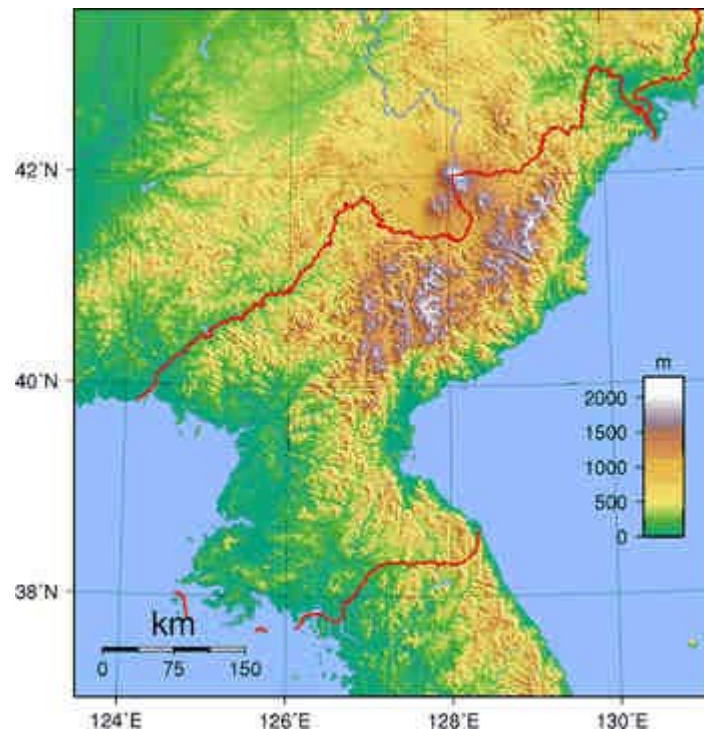
The Sabres, on the other hand, had hundreds of miles of traveling to make a round trip between this area, known as MiG Alley, and their home bases, thereby suffering a severe limitation to their available combat time as well as being placed under immense pressure when forced into prolonged combat. Skilful Sabre pilots developed techniques of dealing with drastically diminished fuel reserves. Some took advantage of tailwinds by shutting down their jet engine and re-lighting just before landing. Others, on occasions achieved successful landings after complete fuel starvation. These techniques were learned and practiced.

The Yalu River

This formidable river in northeastern Asia forms the northwestern boundary between North Korea and the Northeast region of China (Manchuria). In addition to serving as a political boundary, the

Yalu River constitutes a divide between Chinese and Korean cultures. It is known abroad by its Chinese name, Yalu, instead of by its Korean name, Amnok. The river is an important source of hydroelectric power is used for transportation (especially of lumber from the rich forests on its banks), and provides fish for the riverine populations.

The river's length is estimated to be about 800 km, draining an area of some 31,750 square km. The Yalu rises in Tian Lake, a body of water of indeterminate depth on top of Mount Baitou on the Chinese–North Korean border, at an elevation of about 9,000 feet. Winding southward and then meandering northwestward for some 130 km, the river reaches Linjiang, from which it flows southwestward for 320 km before emptying into Korea Bay. Throughout much of its course it flows through, deep valleys, between mountains ranging in height from 1,900 to 3,800 feet rising on either bank.



North Korea Topography

The upper part of the Yalu has rapid currents, many waterfalls, and sunken rocks. The middle part, which extends as far as Ch'osan contains deposits of alluvium making it shallow and preventing even timber rafts passing in the dry season. The lower part of the river has a slow current in which deposits of alluvium are greater and form a vast delta of many islands. The silting has increased since the mid-20th century and, whereas in 1910 ships of 1,000 tons could sail upstream to Sinŭiju — 500-ton ships can barely do so now.

The climate along the river's course is typically continental and characterized by freezing winters and warm summers. During the four winter months (November through February) with temperatures down to minus 55 degrees Celsius, the river becomes deeply frozen and thus closed to navigation. Because it is situated in mountain ranges and is not far from oceans, the river's basin receives fairly heavy precipitation, much of which occurs as rainfall during June, July, August, and September. The abundant rainfall waters rich forests of conifers as well as deciduous trees. The forests provide a sanctuary for wildlife, including wild boars, wolves, tigers, jaguars, bears, foxes, and such birds as

ptarmigans and pheasants. The river abounds in carp and eels.



Yalu River At Sinuiju (N Korea) With Antung (China) across the River

The Yalu river played an important political role in the Korean War (1950–53) as it constituted a foreboding and forbidden barrier between North Korea and Manchuria, China. The northwest corridor of The Yalu was like a line describing the very heart of North Korean war industry, and hydroelectric power production for all of North Korea and a major portion of Manchuria.

In 1952 The Yalu River was a strongly defended 130 mile gauntlet of numerous heavy anti-aircraft artillery gun positions, hundreds of concrete reinforced gun emplacements containing over 300 -85 MM, 88 MM, 90 MM, 105 MM, and up to 120 MM Radar Controlled Guns, manned by well trained Russian gun crews of the Soviet 10th Anti-aircraft Artillery & Searchlight Regiment. There were additionally over 368 very high powered radar controlled searchlights lining several miles of both sides of the River. The north side could not be legitimately violated or crossed, thus precluding any attack perpendicular to the river or parallel to the dam across the river, and thus also imposing very severe accuracy restrictions on flight path and drop zone of UN bombers attempting to limit supplies

to the North Korean aggressors. Much effort was put into attacking the Yalu bridge at Sinuiju, a difficult and exceptionally well defended target. Bomber crews could actually observe MiG fighters taking off from the nearby airfield at Antung, estimated to hold 300 of these menacing aircraft, knowing American fighters could not cross the Yalu to intercept or pursue the menacing Russians operating safely from this convenient sanctuary.



Bombing Attack On Yalu Bridge At Sinuiju

Prohibition to crossing the river into neutral territory, essentially "channeled" the bomb run to frequently paralleling the river, and this became a known and well established route for the bombers AND the enemy gun batteries and searchlights ... like a well lighted boulevard! The Chinese, North Koreans, and Russians had simply to fire at the obligatory course the B- 29s had to fly.

Truce Talks And POW Issues Korean Demilitarized Zone

The 38th parallel north—which divides the Korean Peninsula roughly in half—was the original

boundary between the United States and Soviet brief administration areas of Korea at the end of World War II. Upon the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, informally North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, informally South Korea) in 1948, it became a de facto international border and one of the most tense fronts in the Cold War.

Both the North and the South remained heavily dependent on their sponsor states from 1948 to the outbreak of the Korean War. The conflict, which claimed over three million lives and divided the Korean Peninsula along ideological lines, commenced on June 25, 1950, with a full-front DPRK invasion across the 38th parallel, and ended in 1953 after international intervention pushed the front of the war back to near the 38th parallel.

United Nations forces met with North Korean and Chinese officials at Panmunjom from 1951 to 1953 for truce talks. The main point of contention during the talks was the question surrounding the prisoners of war. Moreover, South Korea was uncompromising in its demand for a unified state. On June 8, 1953, an agreement to the POW problem was reached. A final agreement was reached on July 27, 1953. The United Nations Command, Chinese Peoples Liberation Army and North Korea Peoples Army agreed to an armistice ending the fighting and each side agreed to move their troops back 2,000 m (2,200 yards) from the front line.

The military commanders of the two sides signed the Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953. Representatives of the sixteen nations that had provided combat forces to the UNC signed the Joint Policy Declaration in New York City the same day. At 8:00 P.M., after two and a half years of negotiations, the guns finally fell silent in Korea.



North Korean Flagpole —Propaganda Village'Near Panmunjom, (A Hollywood Production)'

The most difficult matter to resolve, and one that deadlocked the talks for eighteen months, was Item 4, "Arrangements Relating to Prisoners of War." Both sides had initially assumed that all prisoners of war (POWs) would be exchanged at the conclusion of an armistice. However, among the prisoners held by the UNC were many former residents of South Korea who had been inducted into the KPA and subsequently captured by UN forces. The United States agreed with the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korean) government that these individuals should be allowed to return to their homes in the South. Many of the Chinese soldiers in the CPVA had originally been in the Nationalist Chinese army, and some of these were likely to prefer to go to Taiwan rather than being forced to return to the People's Republic of China (PRC, Communist China). By the time negotiations began on Item 4, the United States had concluded on both humanitarian and propaganda grounds that no prisoner should be forcibly repatriated against his will. The KPA/CPVA rejected this principle but might have been persuaded to accept some type of voluntary repatriation if most of the Chinese POWs had been willing to return to China.

When the UNC screened the prisoners in April 1952, however, only 70,000, including 5,100 Chinese, out of over 170,000 prisoners held by the UNC, indicated a desire for repatriation. The KPA/CPVA flatly refused to negotiate on the basis of this low figure.

Those prisoners who refused to return to their countries were allowed to live under a neutral supervising commission for three months. At the end of this time period, those who still refused repatriation would be released. Among those who refused repatriation were twenty two American and British POWs, all but two of whom chose to defect to the People's Republic of China.

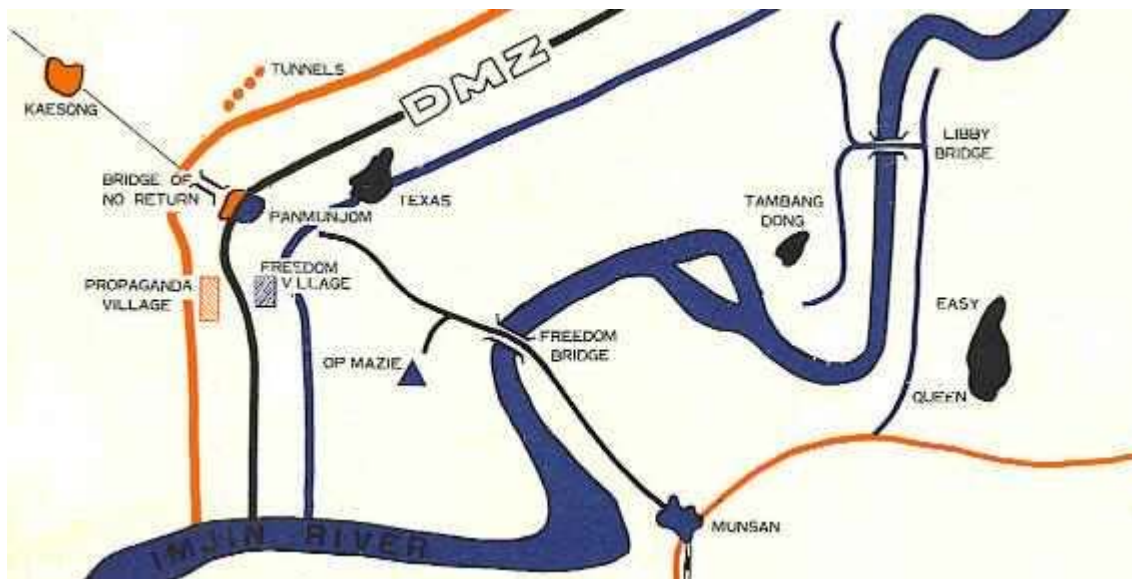
As part of the Korean Armistice Agreement between North Korea, the People's Republic of China, and the United Nations Command forces in 1953 a demilitarized zone was created along the armistice line, effectively dividing Korea into two separate countries, and indicates exactly where the front was when the agreement was signed. The Korean Demilitarized Zone is a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula that serves as a buffer zone between North and South Korea which runs along the 38th parallel north. The DMZ cuts the Korean Peninsula roughly in half, crossing the 38th parallel on an angle, with the west end of the DMZ lying south of the parallel and the east end lying north of it. It is 250 kilometers (160 miles) long, approximately 4 km (2.5 mi) wide.

Despite its name and although most troops and all heavy weapons were to be removed from the area, it has been heavily armed by both sides since the end of the fighting and is now the most heavily militarized border in the world. The Northern Limit Line, or NLL, is the de facto maritime boundary between North and South Korea in the Yellow Sea and the coastline and islands on both sides of the NLL are also heavily militarized.



The Demilitarized Zone Of Korea

Owing to this theoretical stalemate, and genuine hostility between the North and the South, large numbers of troops are still stationed along both sides of the line, each side guarding against potential aggression from the other side. The armistice agreement explains exactly how many military personnel and what kind of weapons are allowed in the DMZ. Soldiers from both sides may patrol inside the DMZ, but they may not cross the MDL (the black center-line). Sporadic outbreaks of violence due to North Korean hostilities killed over 500 South Korean soldiers and 50 U.S. soldiers along the DMZ between 1953 and 1999.



Panmunjom DMZ Map

Map provided by SP4 Martinez, BLV 1965

This map shows Kaesong where the Peace Talks originated and Panmunjom where peace was concluded in 1953. The area within the orange and blue lines is the Demilitarized Zone with the black center being the MDL (Military Demarcation Line). Note Freedom Village, populated by South Korean peasants, is within the DMZ. Propaganda Village is a mock Hollywood prop setup by North Korea to impress viewers. Observe that the limits of the military area between the Imjin River and the DMZ are as much as three miles to the Libby and Freedom, bridges, the only escape routes in case of invasion.

In the past half century, the Korean DMZ has been a deadly place for humans, making habitation impossible. Only around the village of Panmunjeom and more recently the Dong Bukbu Line on Korea's east coast have there been regular incursions by people. This natural isolation along the 155 miles (249 km) length of the DMZ has created an involuntary park which is now recognized as one of the most well-preserved areas of temperate habitat in the world. The endangered Amur Leopard may have found unlikely protection within the Korean DMZ.



Rare Amur Leopard — Seeking Sanctuary in DMZ

Several other endangered animal and plant species now exist among the heavily fortified fences, landmines and listening posts. These include the extremely rare red-crowned crane (a staple of Asian art), and the white-naped crane as well as, potentially, the extremely rare Korean tiger, and Asiatic black bear.



Extremely Rare Korean Tiger

Ecologists have identified some 2,900 plant species, 70 types of mammals and 320 kinds of birds within the narrow buffer zone. Additional surveys are now being conducted throughout the region.



Red Crowned Crane

The DMZ owes its varied biodiversity to its geography, which crosses mountains, prairies, swamps, lakes and tidal marshes. Environmentalists hope that the DMZ will be conserved as a wildlife refuge, with a well-developed set of objective and management plans vetted and in place.



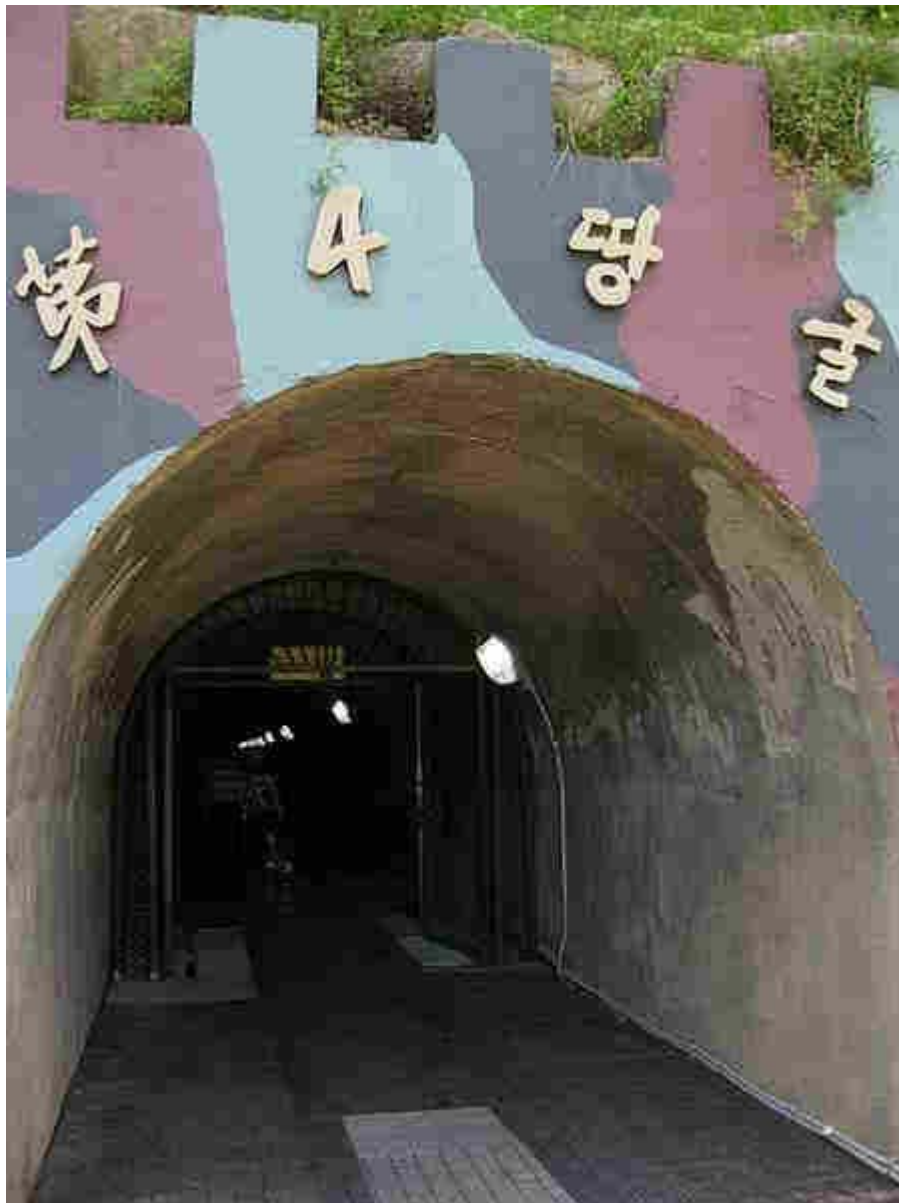
Aggressive Asian Black Bear (Moon Bear Or White-Chested Bear)

In 2005, CNN founder and media mogul, Ted Turner, on a visit to North Korea, said that he would financially support any plans to turn the DMZ into a peace park and a UN-protected World Heritage Site.



Freedom Village, Inside DMZ

Since November 15, 1974, the South has discovered that four tunnels crossing the DMZ have been dug by North Korea. This is indicated by the orientation of the blasting lines within each tunnel. Upon their discovery, North Korea claimed that the tunnels were for coal mining; however, no coal has been found in the tunnels, which are dug through granite, but some of the tunnel walls have been painted black to give the appearance of anthracite.



South Entrance To 4th Infiltration Tunnel Dug By N Koreans

The tunnels are believed to have been planned as a military invasion route by North Korea. Each shaft is large enough to permit the passage of an entire infantry division in one hour, though the tunnels are not wide enough for tanks or vehicles. All the tunnels run in a north-south direction and do not have branches. Following each discovery, engineering within the tunnels has become progressively more advanced. For example, the third tunnel sloped slightly upwards as it progressed southward, to prevent water stagnation. Today, visitors may visit the second, third and fourth tunnels through guided tours.

The first of the tunnels was discovered on November 20, 1974, by a South Korean Army patrol, noticing steam rising from the ground. The initial discovery was met with automatic fire from North Korean soldiers. Five days later, during a subsequent exploration of this tunnel, U.S. Navy Commander Robert M. Ballinger and ROK Marine Corps Major Kim Hah Chul were killed in the tunnel by a North Korean explosive device. The blast also wounded five Americans and one South

Korean from the United Nations Command. The tunnel, which was about 1.2 m (4 ft) high by 0.9 m (3 ft) wide, extended more than 1,000 m (1,100 yd) beyond the MDL into South Korea. The tunnel was reinforced with concrete slabs and had electric power and lighting. There were weapon storage and sleeping areas. A narrow gauge railway with carts had also been installed. Estimates based on the tunnel's size, suggest it would have allowed approximately 2,000 KPA soldiers (one regiment) to pass through it per hour.



A South Korean Checkpoint At DMZ, From N Korean Side

Tae Sung Dong and Kijong-dong were the only villages allowed by the armistice committee to remain within the boundaries of the DMZ. Residents of Tae Sung Dong are governed and protected by the United Nations Command and are generally required to spend at least 240 nights per year in the village to maintain their residency. In 2008, the village had a population of 218 people. The villagers of Tae Sung Dong are direct descendants of people who owned the land before the 1950–53 Korean War.



South Korean Guards View Border At Panmunjom

Seoul — Capital City Of The Country That Was Saved



Beautiful Modern Seoul (Circa 2010)

Seoul is the capital and largest metropolis of South Korea. A mega-city with a population of more than 10 million, it is the largest city proper in the OECD developed world. The Seoul Capital Area, which includes the surrounding Incheon metropolis and Gyeonggi province, is the world's second largest metropolitan area with over 25.6 million people, home to over half of South Koreans along with 632,000 international residents.

Situated on the Han River, Seoul's history stretches back more than 2,000 years when it was founded in 18 BC. It continued as the capital of Korea under the Joseon Dynasty and the Korean Empire. The Seoul metropolitan area contains four UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Changdeok Palace,

Hwaseong Fortress, Jongmyo Shrine and the Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty.

Seoul is surrounded by mountains, the tallest being Mt. Bukhan, the world's most visited national park. Modern landmarks holding Guinness World Records include Lotte World, the world's largest indoor theme park, Moonlight Rainbow Fountain, the world's longest bridge fountain and Times Square's CGV Starium, the world's largest cinema screen. The birthplace of K-pop and the Korean Wave, Seoul was voted the world's most wanted travel destination by Chinese, Japanese and Thai tourists for a third consecutive year in 2011 with over 10 million international visitors in 2012.

Today, Seoul is considered a leading and rapidly rising global city, resulting from an economic boom and growth known as the Miracle on the Han River which transformed it from the ashes of the Korean War to the world's fourth largest metropolitan economy with a GDP of US\$773.9 billion in 2012 after Tokyo, New York City and Los Angeles. A world leading technology hub, it boasts the world's sixth largest number of Fortune Global 500 multinationals such as Samsung, the world's largest technology company, as well as LG and Hyundai-Kia. Gangnam District forms the commercial center along with Central District and the financial center, Yeouido Island and technology hub Digital Media City. Ranked sixth in the Global Power City Index, the metropolis exerts a major influence among global affairs as one of the five leading hosts of global conferences. In 2012, Seoul's quality of life was found to be higher than New York City, London or Melbourne but slightly lower than Tokyo and Paris according to the United Nations.



Kimpo Transformed — Now Gimpo International Airport

AREX, spelled A'REX as a brand name, is a South Korean railway line that links Seoul with Gimpo Airport (previously Kimpo) and Incheon International Airport. The section between the two airports opened on March 23, 2007, the extension to Seoul Station opened December 29, 2010. The line was built and operated by a private company, but after financial difficulties, South Korean national rail operator Korail bought a majority stake. 'Express trains' have 272 comfortable seats with armrests in 2+2 configuration, overhead luggage shelves and additional luggage racks. Passenger compartments are separated from door areas and from transitions between cars by transparent sliding doors. 'Commuter trains' are similar to subway trains with seats along the walls and do not have overhead shelves, offering seating for 282 passengers and standing room for 630 passengers. There are no separating doors, transitions between cars are open. Both train types offer disabled seats and are equipped with LCD screens for passenger information, including flight arrivals and departures.

Seoul is connected via AREX to Incheon International Airport, on Wolmi-do Island, rated the

world's best airport for seven years in a row (2005-2012) by Airports Council International.



Incheon International Airport

Seoul has a very technologically advanced infrastructure. It has the world's highest fibre-optic broadband penetration, resulting in the world's fastest internet connections with speeds up to 1 Gbps. Seoul Station is the main terminal of the KTX high-speed rail and the Seoul Subway is the world's largest subway network by length. It is considered the world's best subway and is the world's only subway with all stations having automatic platform gates for safety along with 4G LTE, WiFi, DMB and WiBro. Seoul hosted the 1986 Asian Games, 1988 Summer Olympics, 2002 FIFA World Cup and the 2010 G-20 Seoul summit. A UNESCO City of Design, Seoul was named the 2010 World Design Capital.



*General MacArthur ——— Architect Of Communist Defeat In Korea
Signs Japanese Surrender At End Of WW2*