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Author's Note

Like many veterans of many wars, I have seldom told of my combat/overseas experiences and encounters. I did write a novel, *Rainbow, No End,* www.trafford.com/05-0346, which contains some events that occurred when I served in Korea and Japan in 1953. However, most of that story is a blend of real and imaginary happenings.

The following 8 books of short stories relate some of the more memorable occurrences that I experienced during my 52 years as an aviator.

I have started with the first dozen from Vietnam, because one night in early 2006 I got an inexplicable urge to write something about that disturbed time. So I sat at the keyboard and jotted down Story #1, 'The MP and the VC'. On each of the following dozen nights, a new story poured out. So that was the beginning of this return to the memories, some bad but most good, of my flying life. I have completed 52 stories (not yet completed), one for each of those years. I hope you enjoy!

Please refer to the **glossary** after the end as you come across terms requiring explanation. These are indicated by the use of *italics*. It also contains some anecdotal material.

If you are unaccustomed to military or aviation terminology, you might find it advantageous to **read through the glossary first**.

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Book 02

FIGHTER FLURRIES

by

Lloyd Knight

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Dedicated to
the staff and graduates of
No 2 Operational Training Unit
(now No 2 Operational Conversion Unit)

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Fighter Short Stories

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Foreword

I enlisted in the RAAF as Trainee Aircrew on 1st October 1951. I was 19 (going on 16!), and was placed on No8 Course (post war). We commenced the 18 months course at No 1 Flying Training School, Point Cook, VIC. This was the home of the RAAF since its inauguration in 1921. The first 3 months were all ground school.

Because of the high demand for aircrew, owing to the escalation of the Korean War, the courses were reduced to 12 months. So in January 1952, we transferred to the newly formed No 1 Initial Training School at RAAF Base Archerfield, QLD.

Here we underwent eleven hours of dual training in the de Havilland DH82, Tiger Moth. This was termed Flight Grading and the purpose was to select those candidates most suitable for pilot, navigator, or signaler training. At the end of this two months course, I was selected for pilot training, and moved to the also new, No 1 Basic Flying Training School at the re-activated RAAF Base at Uranquinty, NSW, near Wagga Wagga. We spent the next four months learning to fly in Tiger Moth and Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC), Wirraway aircraft.

Then it was back to Point Cook and the renamed No 1 Applied Flying Training School. Here we added armament training to our curriculum, with gunnery and bombing sorties. Also, formation flying, more advanced navigation, instrument and night flying were added to the agenda.

I graduated at the end November 1952 and was posted directly onto No 7 Course, Operational Training Unit, at RAAF Base Williamtown, NSW. During the next, approximately 3 months, we trained to be fighter pilots in North American (Manufacturer) F51 Mustangs and de Havilland Vampire jets. No 76 Squadron and No 2 OCU now conduct this training.

As with the other stories in this publication, I was personally involved in each account, and nobody else is identified by name.

If you are unaccustomed to military or aviation terminology, you might find it advantageous to **read through the glossary first**.

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1

The Beach Looked Flat

The first flight of my fighter conversion was a dual check ride in a Wirraway. The instructor had me demonstrate how well I could throw the machine around with a few aerobatics. This included some hairy manoeuvres I had not experienced before. The most memorable of those was; while in normal cruising flight, he told me to apply full left rudder and pull the stick (control column) hard back in my gut. I told him I had never seen such an exercise and he just replied, 'Do it!' So I did. The aircraft entered what I could only describe as a rapid horizontal spin. I recovered, wings level after one 360-degree roll. I thought the machine would break up. He said, 'Well done, you just completed a flick roll, you'll do, go back to base.'

Back in the circuit I was asked to demonstrate my landing expertise with a glide approach (no power) with a flapless landing. A short field take-off and landing followed this. I was now considered ready for the Mustang. Hooray!

Now, many post World War 2 pilots, including some young guys today, would give their right arm to fly a Mustang. Figuratively speaking of course. You certainly would have great difficulty flying one with only a left arm. I've always considered myself very privileged to have been able to fly this magnificent machine in its latter days of service.

There were no two-place Mustangs, so after a short session of taxiing around with an instructor standing on the wing giving a bit of coaching, you launched on your first flight. Wow! What a boot in the back the big Merlin engine gave you on take-off. That first flight of about an hour was awe-inspiring.

The next day, I took-off on my second flight. That was the 21st of December. I climbed to about ten thousand feet out over the ocean and proceeded to complete some aerobatic practice. I had only been airborne about ten minutes when things suddenly got a little quieter. The engine had quit! I entered a glide and turned toward the land. Then I put out a Mayday call and went through the engine failure drills. I couldn't get it fired up again.

An instructor, who was airborne in a Vampire, started running through some extra checks with me and we established that the engine was not going to start again. So I was faced with deciding between three options. I could bail out, a very dangerous action in a 'Stang. I could ditch in the ocean, also not recommended, because the big air scoop under the belly would make the aircraft

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nose under very abruptly. Or, I could try to glide to the shore for a 'dead-stick' landing. I chose the latter course, with the concurrence of the instructor, who was now heading toward my position.

As I crossed the coast, I was down to about a thousand feet (300metres) and there was nothing but sand dunes within my glide range. I made a circling turn onto a final approach, and lined up with the waters edge where the sand is firmest. I jettisoned the canopy and completed my checks to make a wheels-up landing.

I straightened up at about four hundred feet and I saw that, because of the high tide, the beach at the water's edge was a high bank, angled at about 45 degrees. This was certainly no good for landing, so I moved left to land inshore about fifty yards.

It was around noon, so there were no shadows. The high, wavelike dunes did not show up until the aircraft was about one hundred feet up. As the aircraft lost speed I lifted over about two of these humps, and it slammed down on the next one. I hit my head on the gun-sight and was knocked out.

When I came to, I believe it was after about ten minutes; I looked out to see utter devastation. The engine and prop were, 'over there', the battery was lying all by itself, and both wings were bent up with fuel running out of the split tanks. I couldn't see out of my right eye and there was blood running down the right side of my face. Apart from my heavy breathing, the only sound was the Vampire circling overhead. I learned later that the instructor had reported finding my aircraft, 'Extensively damaged with no signs of life.'

As I climbed out, I saw that the fuselage was broken nearly in half behind the cockpit, which was the only intact part left. Says a lot for North American's designers who built the strongest section around the pilot. A strong smell of gasoline pervaded the whole space around me, so I got well away in case she blew.

I took the signalling mirror from my *May West* and studied my eye. It looked as though it was gone, and there was this bloody eyelid hanging over the eye socket. That really frightened me. The bleeding had stopped.

Then I did what was probably a silly thing. I went to the water's edge, wet my handkerchief, and dabbed the blood away from my eye. Seawater would not be efficacious in the treatment of wounds. Anyway, with some of the gore removed, I could see. Great! My eye was intact, but the lid was practically torn off.

The instructor started buzzing low over me toward the inland. This is a signal meaning, 'Proceed in this direction.' I thought this unusual because I had always been taught to stay with the aircraft. So I set off across the dunes. In my condition and on a hot summer's midday, I was not feeling very happy.

After I had gone a few hundred yards, he started to buzz the opposite way.

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'Good grief!' I thought and headed back to the aircraft.

What had happened was this. The *MO*, who was on leave, was just going out the gate at the Base when the crash alarm sounded. He got on the phone at the guardhouse and called the control tower. They gave him all the details. He had his little black bag (and his young son) on board, so told them he would head off to help. I don't know how he managed to navigate to the vicinity, but he did, and the instructor was buzzing over me to show the doc' where I was. When he realised I was following his signal he reversed direction, buzzing over the MO.

The Vampire returned to base after about an hour, probably low on fuel.

As I waited to be rescued, I saw this scruffy looking, and rather bedraggled by now person, stomping across the sand toward me. I thought it must have been a local farmer. I hadn't noticed his bag, so when he greeted me and tried to have a look at my eye, I pushed him away. He realised that, with his four-days five o'clock shadow, he didn't look much like an air force medico, so he introduced himself and proceeded to look after me. He was an RAF exchange officer who later in the day sewed my eyelid back on. He did a magnificent job, certainly as good as any plastic surgeon could do.

After about another hour, a jeep with my flight commander driving came along the beach and took me back to base. The doc' had decided to hike back across the dunes to where he'd left his son, who was probably getting a bit anxious by then. A memory that stands out about the trip back in the jeep was this. I'd always seen in those war movies where they recover a downed aviator, or rescue some poor wounded soldier, the first thing they did was light, and offer him, a cigarette. I felt most disappointed that I had to ask for one.

The investigation found that after I was knocked out by the initial impact on top of a dune, the left wing had dropped and the aircraft completed a cartwheel. That explained the extensive damage. The poor old bird was later dragged up the beach to the Morna Point gunnery range and became just another target. It was a rather ignominious end for a fine flying machine.

I received no admonishment for the episode. In hindsight I can see that I was remiss in at least one thing. Part of the pre-aerobatic checks requires that the area used be within gliding distance of a suitable forced landing field. I was in the designated aerobatic training area, but I should have been closer to the coast.

Apart from the facial damage, my only other injury was the bruising from my shoulder harness. When I got back into an aircraft, with the straps pulled tight, as they had been when I pranged, I tried stretching my head toward the gun sight as hard as I could. I couldn't get within a foot of it. So that shows how much force had been applied to my neck and head, and the shoulder straps.

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I went home to Sydney on sick leave for a week that included Christmas, and then I was back to finish my training. Naturally my Mum pampered me something stupid.

When the photo of my wreck was posted in the 'prang' gallery in the OTU Flight Hut, it was captioned:

'The Beach Looked Flat'.

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Swedish Vampire similar to the Australian Mk 31

2

Mach Moments

Let's get a little technical for a moment. Most people would have heard of the term **'Mach Number'**. It is simply the ratio of the speed of an object, to the speed of sound in the surrounding medium. For example, an aircraft moving twice as fast as the speed of sound is said to be traveling at Mach 2. The jet fighters I flew in the early fifties are termed 'subsonic'. They could only reach a speed of about eighty percent of the speed of sound, eg. Mach .78. That's about 515 Knots or 950 Km per hour at sea level in standard conditions. Even though the aircraft is flying at less than the speed of sound, supersonic airflow is being produced over the wing, and other 'thicker' parts of the aircraft. This creates shock waves producing unusual compression of the air around the machine, with detrimental outcomes. Beyond that speed the aircraft becomes uncontrollable and could break up. This maximum speed is called '**Critical Mach Number**' or Mach Crit. Those aircraft could only achieve that speed in a dive.

Jet conversion training was quite an adventure because, like the Mustang, there were no two place Vampires at Willy. You couldn't even taxi around with an instructor on the wing, as with the 'Stang. The wing was too far back. So it was a case of 'get in and go!'

What a great experience! My three previous types, Tiger Moth, Wirraway and Mustang all had tail wheels, with a big engine and prop in front. Now, suddenly, the engine is behind, and the bird has a nose wheel. So you're level on

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the runway and have unrestricted forward vision. Also there were no nasty torque effects, just pure thrust. And when you zoomed up and away, it was so quiet, and so fast.

Normally, pilots being introduced to 'Mach' flight would undergo some dual training. As I mentioned, we didn't have that luxury. So the Mach demonstrations were achieved with the candidate diving the aircraft to its Critical Mach Number with an instructor flying in formation as wingman, and coaching the new boy through the procedure.

The RAAF single place Vampires were built in Australia. The original Rolls Royce 'Goblin' engine that produced about 3,500 pounds of thrust, was replaced with the more powerful RR 'Nene' unit of 4,500 pounds plus, thrust. The original air intakes were too small to ingest sufficient air for the larger engine. So the aircraft were modified with two air scoops, mounted on the top of the fuselage behind the cockpit. We called them 'Elephant Ears'. These appendages produced some weird control effects when flying near Critical Mach.

I now need to mention another technical term, **'Mach Tuck'**. Mach tuck is an aerodynamic effect, whereby the nose of an aircraft tends to pitch downwards as the airflow around the wing reaches speeds close to Mach 1. Note that the aircraft itself can be traveling significantly below Mach 1, and still experience this outcome. Put simply, this is caused by the centre of lift on the wing moving back, away from the centre of gravity. This produces a *couple* causing the nose to drop.

In addition to that undesirable effect, the Elephant Ears produced an even more frightening result. They caused the shock wave forming on the tailplane, to move the centre of lift on that surface back onto the elevator, pushing it up. This caused the control column to move back toward the pilot, even though the nose continued to drop. This was almost like a reversal of control effect. The elevator was rendered completely useless, and the only way to recover was to slow down to a lower Mach number. So the drill then was, to reduce power and deploy the speed brakes. All a bit scary! Especially as we all knew that not long before, a pair of aircraft, student and instructor, had not recovered from one of these dives. They made a couple of big holes in the terrain.

A later modification placed the Elephant Ears on the underside of the aircraft. The outcome of this change was that at Mach Crit, the nose pitched up and the aircraft virtually flew itself out of the dive, and to a lesser speed.

This was much more friendly.

The next story also contains some 'hairy' aspects of the unknown, in regard to 'Mach flight'.

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3

Coffin Corner?

Back in the early fifties, I don't think anyone knew much about 'Coffin Corner'. The term hadn't been coined yet. By definition, the **Coffin Corner** or Q-Corner is a dangerous portion of the flight envelope that must be carefully approached by high altitude, high subsonic speed aircraft, such as the Lockheed U2 'Spy Plane', or in my case, the Vampire. The term is used to describe operations at high altitudes where low indicated airspeeds (near *stall speed*) yield high true airspeeds (Mach number).

As mentioned in the previous story, an aircraft must not exceed its Mach limit. Exceeding the Mach limit can cause Mach Tuck, high speed upset, loss of control and structural failure.

At high altitudes the low-density air is less capable of supporting the weight of the aircraft, so the *stall speed*, as expressed in true airspeed, increases. The resulting high *angle of attack* causes flow separation and buffet. Turning maneuvers at these altitudes increase the angle of attack and result in stability deterioration with a decrease in control effectiveness.

At some limiting altitude these speeds converge, and the aircraft cannot be flown, as a slight pitch down will cause the Mach limit to be exceeded, while a slight pitch up will cause an aircraft stall with a subsequent pitch down. The meeting of these two speeds is Coffin Corner.

Near the corner, the relationship of stall speed to Mach limit narrows to a point where sudden increases in angle of attack, roll rates and/or disturbances (eg air turbulence) cause the limits of the airspeed envelope to be exceeded.

Jet jockeys may think that a Vampire would not have a performance high enough to reach the 'Corner' parameters, as does a U2. But read on.

No 2 OTU operated two versions of the Vampire, the Mark 30, which had rounded wingtips and the Mark 31. The Mark 31 modification replaced the rounded tips with square ones. This made the aircraft more maneuverable in roll. It also increased the stall speed and wingtip drag.

Early in my Vampire conversion I was tasked to fly a high-level navigation exercise. I was briefed to climb initially to 35,000 feet and then, as the aircraft became lighter with fuel burn-off, allow it to climb. Today, this is termed cruise-climb technique. I don't remember any upper limit being specified. In those days there was no other traffic to worry about. I had full under-wing auxiliary fuel tanks, and the aircraft was a Mark 31.

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I was well into the cruise-climb portion of the flight in clear blue skies and admiring the view. I had never flown anywhere near this height. I encountered some intermittent mild turbulence, that I now know was Clear Air Turbulence (CAT). Something else we didn't know about at the time. It can be rather nasty. I saw my indicated airspeed getting quite low, and the Mach meter was exceeding M.73.

The aircraft started to buffet and pitch down. It felt like a low speed stall. I gently eased the stick forward and the buffeting ceased. As the speed increased a little, the buffeting started again and the Mach number was up around M.76. I eased off the power a little, but the buffeting increased and the ailerons, which control roll, felt quite ineffective.

Suddenly, the right wing dropped, the nose pitched down and the aircraft entered a violent spin. I took normal spin recovery action and got it under control again after about two and a half turns, during which the aircraft became almost inverted. I'd lost thousands of feet in altitude; I cannot now remember how much.

My heart was pounding as I set the machine into normal level flight. As I looked around to re-orientate myself I noticed something was missing. There should have been a silver, bullet-nosed shape protruding forward from under each wing. The wing tanks were gone! They had ripped their mountings right out of the wings. Then I noticed all these rows of little black dots on the top of each wing. They were popped rivets, or maybe the filler over the rivets.

I declared a Mayday, gingerly turned the bird toward its nest, and headed at modest speed back for a safe landing at Willy.

Extensive debriefing followed. At first, my interrogators found my story a little far-fetched. Then one of the instructors said he had experienced exactly the same conditions on a similar flight, but he hadn't entered a spin. The unit issued a new instruction precluding the '31s from high-level exercises. I think we also got some extra briefing from the 'Met Man' about high-level turbulence.

So again, no black marks. I'm glad I didn't have to pay for the repairs.

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4

Spanner in the Works

You may recall that in 'The Whisky Flask' in 'Nam Notes, I talked about 'loose objects' posing a serious risk to safe aviation. This anecdote follows that theme.

About the middle of my Vampire conversion, I was programmed for a 'pairs' formation practice. Two 'convertees' launched on an hour's flight, taking turns to lead and follow while practicing take-offs, changing position and rejoining the traffic pattern.

I was number two for the first take-off. I completed my pre-take-off checks, including checking full and free movement of the flight controls. Then we taxied onto the runway, stopping momentarily where the leader gave the hand signals for 'spool-up' and 'release brakes'.

We accelerated down the 09 runway, which happened to be the shortest one. As my leader's nose wheel lifted off, I eased the stick back to follow suit. The nose did not lift. I seemed to have reached the full back stick position.

Then, as number one became airborne, my nose wheel came free. I was too far down the runway to stop short of running off the end, and across a busy road. The bird felt as though it was about to become airborne, so I gave it full throttle and lifted off, skimming over a couple of cars on the road.

I was well below number one and overtaking him. I called 'breaking off' and advised him, and the tower, that I had an elevator restriction.

I think I climbed up to about 3,000 feet and waited for an instructor to get to the tower to talk me through the problem. I had normal control at the now higher speed.

An instructor came on the radio and firstly, instructed me ensure that no loose objects were on the cockpit floor, near the elevator control cable drive wheel. This exposed 'pulley' wheel on the left side rotated when the stick was moved forward and back. The cable controlled the elevator on the tailplane to adjust the aircraft's nose attitude, and therefore, the airspeed. There were no hydraulic powered flight controls on this bird.

I confirmed that all looked OK and that the fuel cap spanner, the most likely loose object, was properly stowed in its clip on the bulkhead behind the left side of my seat.

Then he got me to put the wheels down and try various combinations of flap, speed brakes and airspeed to see if I could fly it at a safe landing speed. If I couldn't get it back to below, I think it was about 150 knots, then I'd have to fly to a safe area and 'bang out', i.e. Eject.

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With his verbal help I managed to get it down to that speed with a small amount of back stick remaining to round out on landing. Then I came roaring down final at well above the normal landing speed. I drove it onto the end of the runway and held the stick forward so that it wouldn't fly off again. It took the entire available runway length to bring the bird to a stop.

I turned of onto the taxiway and looked down at the cockpit floor to see a fuel cap spanner that had moved out from under the pulley wheel. I now had full and free stick movement again. I looked back and assured myself that there was a spanner correctly stowed on the bulkhead.

Some bright spark had dropped another one in there and it had not been visible during the pre-flight inspection. I don't know if they ever found out who the culprit was, but he was surely in my 'bad books'. When I stopped momentarily on the runway before take-off, it had moved to its restricting position, and been pushed back again when I moved the stick to full forward after landing.

So far, I have been talking about apparently negative aspects of flying fighters. Well, the title does refer to 'Flurries'. It's not as dangerous an occupation as it may first appear. Operating high performance aircraft is a very fulfilling and exciting experience, and the odd bit of risk just adds to that excitement.

I passed my fighter conversion course, and went home for about a week's pre-embarkation leave. Then, early in March '53, much to the concern of my Mum, off I went to war. I was 20, (going on 16). My father had been killed in an air force bomber crash in 1939, so she didn't really want me to go.

About six of us flew out to Japan on a Qantas charter filled with army guys. The aircraft was a Douglas DC4 and it took three days to make the journey, via Labuan, North Borneo and Hong Kong, to Iwakuni, on the main island of Honshu. That trip in itself was my exciting introduction to world travel.

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Book 03

KOREAN CAPERS

by

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Dedicated to
the members of
No 77 Squadron, RAAF
Kimpo (K14), South Korea

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Korean Short Stories

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Foreword

The RAAF No 91 (Composite) Wing was based at Iwakuni, Japan, on the main island of Honshu. This was a US Naval Air Base, situated on the western coast of the Inland Sea. 91 Wing was the main support group for RAAF operations in South Korea. No 77 (Interceptor Fighter) Squadron was part of the Wing. It was here that I completed my conversion onto the British, Mark 8 Gloucester Meteor in March 1953. After about 15 hours, including training in rocket attacks, I joined the rest of the Squadron at Kimpo (K14), not far from the capital of South Korea, Seoul.

We were based on the western side of the field with the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing of the 5th Air Force, USAF. They operated, North American B26, Invaders (Blackbirds), Lockheed F80, Shooting Stars, plus various other aircraft. They provided our messing and other domestic support.

On the eastern side, was the 4th Fighter Wing with their F86, North American Sabres. Their main mission was flying fighter patrols in 'Mig Alley', along the Yalu River that formed the border between North Korea and Chinese Manchuria. This was where they did battle with the Russian built Mig 15s, denying them entry into North Korean airspace. Chinese and North Koreans piloted the Migs. Rumour had it that Russian pilots also took part in some of these battles.

I conducted an East Coast and a West Coast area *recce* with an experienced leader, to learn the lay of the land. Then it was, 'Into the fray!'

As with the other stories in this publication, I was personally involved in each account, and except for my friends mentioned in Story No 5, nobody else is identified by name.

If you are unaccustomed to military or aviation terminology, you might find it advantageous to **read through the glossary first**.

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1

The Big Bang

I suppose the 'loudest' mission of the 45 that I flew over North Korea, was the 28th. That was a rocket projectile (R/P) strike on rail-marshalling yards north of Chinnampo, on the west coast, and our main type of mission in 1953. We flew quite low on these attacks, and were susceptible to machine gun, and even small arms fire, if an enemy got in a lucky shot.

I was flying the twelfth aircraft over the target in the sixteen-ship formation. As was the *SOP*, I switched off the pressurisation as I rolled into the attack at fifteen thousand feet, and lined up on my section of the target area. It was a small group of huts in the southeastern corner that intelligence had assessed as a troop concentration. As I steadied the graticule of the gyro-gun sight over the centre of the huts, I could just make out the small green-clad figures running from them. Interspersed among the green, there were several dressed in white. I knew that these would be civilians, or maybe even family, accompanying the soldiers.

This was the first mission where the lead aircraft in each section of four was fitted with double rocket rails. These allowed the aircraft to carry sixteen high explosive rockets, double the normal payload. As my section leader's *barrage* erupted in the centre of the target, I released my eight rockets with their napalm heads. This should accurately deliver a forty-gallon fireball, right into the middle of the shattered buildings, completing their destruction, and probably causing death and horrible injuries to those who had not yet fled the target area.

I had heard stories that some pilots deliberately miss-aimed their napalm in similar circumstances, where they thought civilians were in the target area. That would be a difficult decision to make because, ostensibly, it would be a dereliction of duty to take such action. I had never felt any compulsion to do that. I did suffer nightmares about some of those attacks for many years afterwards.

I had just pulled out of the attack dive when 'BANG!' the canopy imploded in a thousand pieces. Momentarily stunned, I could hear above the roar of the airstream, a small, distant voice yelling something like, 'Blue Four are you OK?' As I shook my head to clear my foggy vision, I saw a large hill ahead of me. I realised that if I had been 'out' for a few moments longer, the Meteor would have speared straight into it.

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Blood trickled down my forehead and into my eyes. My goggles were gone. The turbulent air behind the windscreen tossed my head around and blasted my eyeballs. I had to squint to keep the wind and cockpit dust out of them. As I set the aircraft in the climb I could see the rest of the aircraft, except for my element leader, were getting away from me. The extra drag caused by the shattered canopy was holding me back.

Blue Three, who was now shepherding me, advised the mission leader of my plight. Somebody suggested over the radio, to jettison what was left of the canopy.

The leader immediately came back saying to NOT do that because it would probably hit the tail. He told me to jettison the ventral (belly) tank. That would be empty by now. I did this and was able to catch up. It was a cold, noisy trip back to the home plate.

The issued, World War 2 type, leather helmet offered little protection, but I only suffered minor cuts and scratches. Later on I scrounged a 'bone dome', modern helmet, from the yanks.

Even though I was not seriously wounded, I was admitted to the USAF base hospital for overnight observation. I remember this cute young American nurse telling me, 'Man! You'll get a Purple Heart for this one.' I told her that our air force didn't issue purple hearts. So she gave me a big kiss on the forehead and said that she was sorry that she couldn't offer any greater reward.

Not that I wanted any such recognition. I remember the experience of one of my USAF friends, a 4th Fighter Wing jet-jockey. He came back one day, all shot-up after a stoush in 'Mig Alley'. He banged out just north of Kimpo after his Sabre jet lost most of its hydraulic fluid and all of its fuel. Initially he had thought to put it down on a straight stretch of sand in the Han River. But when he turned onto his final approach, he could see that the area was too small.

By the time he pulled the lever on his ejection seat, he was too low. The 'chute deployed a moment before he landed. He rolled up in a ball and broke both his legs and one arm and dislocated his other shoulder. He spent three weeks in the base hospital before they shipped him Stateside. Would you believe a guy in that situation could contract a STD? Sounds like one for Ripley! Well, it happened. Some polluted little ward aid had rewarded our warrior by climbing on top and banging him while he was in full traction.

I should mention that the reason that we de-pressurised before entering the dive was to prevent explosive decompression if we suffered a hit in the canopy. My incident, and an earlier one, caused the squadron to adopt the practice of leaving the cockpit pressurisation on during attacks, to prevent this type of implosion. The mechanics of the situation are that, with the canopy sealed and in a steep dive, the outside air pressure increases more rapidly than on the inside. This is the reverse of the normal pressurised mode.

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Our second-most common type of operation was the armed reconnaissance and interdiction of the main routes. The aim of these patrols was to seek targets of opportunity in the form of convoys or freight trains, denying the enemy the use of their means of communication toward the front line.

A section of four Meteors was split into pairs; one element at ten thousand feet, the other flying cover at twelve thousand. On some of those missions we ran into reasonably accurate anti-aircraft fire. The radar-ranged flack bursts would occur at the level of each pair. These deadly black puffs usually trailed behind the aircraft as the gunners set their aim, which luckily wasn't as precise as the radar ranging. As soon as the first burst occurred, the pilots would call it and break away, climbing to disrupt the aim, and the height measurement of the radar. I don't recall that we ever lost any aircraft during this type of mission.

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2

Pull Up! Pull Up!

There's an old air force saying that, 'There are two types of pilot, those who have landed with their wheels up, and those who are going to.' Well, I reckoned that I belonged to the first group because of my forced landing in Book 2, 'The Beach Looked Flat'. On this mission I learned that you could still belong to the second group if you tried hard enough.

One day, during our twelve-aircraft mission's departure from Kimpo, the tower put out a general broadcast that one of the Meteors had lost a wheel on take-off. So on our way out we all inspected each other's undersides, and all reported that all wheel doors appeared closed and normal. So the mission continued as planned.

We returned to the circuit after a reasonably hectic attack, low on fuel, and all wondering who had lost a wheel. Each section of four aircraft flew around the circuit, remaining in formation as we checked each other's landing gear. It was discovered that one of the Meteors had shed a tyre tread, like those big trucks do. The pilot was able to make a gentle, and safe, landing on the bald tyre.

I was in the last section and we were getting very short of fuel. I remembered one my mate's experience when he was last to land after a long mission. He ran out of fuel on final approach and put it down, rather seriously, in the underrun. The aircraft was severely damaged and he was injured. The pressure continued to build.

I don't remember to this day, pulling the wheels up after all the inspecting, and forgetting to put them down again. I turned final and was trying to see if I had three greens. With the bright summer sun shining on the instrument panel, I couldn't tell if the lights were green, or out. Of course, if I'd looked at the gear lever I would have seen that it was still in the up position.

Aerodrome control position a mobile control vehicle, callsign 'Mobile', at the approach end of the runway specifically to look out for such events. Actually they are not that uncommon, even in less hectic circumstances.

As I was trying to see if the undercarriage lights were green, the American voice on the radio called, 'Meteor on final, pull-up'. This was an abbreviation for, 'Pull up and go around'. The phraseology is foreign to Australian pilots. We just say 'go around'. So I didn't realise that the call was meant for me. Understand here that we are talking about a rapid succession of events.

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He called again with a slightly frantic tone, 'Meteor, pull up, you have no wheels', and he fired some red Verey flares. Finally the penny dropped. No way was I going around, I'd probably run out of fuel. I slammed the lever down, and sweated on the lights. They came up three greens at about a hundred feet or less and I was home and hosed. Phew!!

Naturally I came in for some ribbing when I got back to the flight hut de-briefing. I was certainly very thankful for the guy in mobile, even if he did speak a 'foreign language'.

You would expect that I would learn a valuable lesson from that incident. In hindsight, I believe that some little corner of my mind was conditioned to do that again, twice.

But you'll have to read on to learn about those foibles.

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3

Air Raids

One night I was walking from the USAF Officer's Club, back to my tent when the air-raid sirens started screaming. The lights went out! In the dark I fell into the storm-water drain beside the dirt road leading to our squadron area. Suddenly, all hell broke loose in the night sky above as the anti-aircraft guns opened up.

I found myself lying in about four inches of sump oil, a legacy from the Air Service Squadron which, late at night, sprayed the stuff on the base's roads to keep down the dust for a couple of days. I knew that the black, stinking oil would ruin my khakis, but I had more urgent matters to worry about. If I didn't get back to the billet area and into my assigned trench soon, I would be up before the CO in the morning. Failing to be at one's post while the unit was under attack would be considered a serious matter.

The intruder was 'Bed-check Charlie', an old, Russian PO-2 biplane. The Chinese pilot had come in at low-level, under the radar and would, if following his previous practice, fly around the base about a mile outside the perimeter. He would repeat this for the next four or five nights. As soon as the alarm was raised, almost everyone on the base would go to the trenches, where they would spend most of the next four or five hours. The tactic tended to be very disruptive to everyone's sleep patterns. It was a very effective, and low-cost form of harassment.

This form of attack was a copy of the technique used by the Russians against the German army during WWII.

Of course the base defences swung into action and put on a display to rival the 4th of July. The ack ack never managed to shoot down these interlopers. Every so often they would fly over the airfield and drop a few mortar shells, just to ensure that everyone was still dutifully spending the night in the trenches. From these vantage points all could enjoy the splendid exhibition of red, green and white tracer, interspersed with bright flashes of exploding projectiles from larger ordnance. The noise, the 'pyrotechnic' display, and smell of burning cordite made for quite an impressive, even exciting show. In the long run though, it was one experience all could well do without.

After a couple of nights of this harassment the CO's instruction was something like: 'When the air-raid sirens start their wailing, stay in your cot and try to get some sleep. If the bombs start to fall, rush to your trench.'

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One night one of the lads in the squadron lines reckoned he had a bead on the intruder and cooked off a magazine of .303 rounds from his rifle, in the general direction of the aircraft. All he got for his drunken initiative was a reprimand from the old man the next day.

They tried everything to get those b...s; F86 Sabres and Navy Panther jet fighters. The jets were too fast and kept overshooting the target aircraft. They even sent a radar-equipped C47 Dakota transport plane up to ten thousand feet to shadow 'ole bed-check'. When the Dak was over the enemy, he'd drop a myriad of parachute flares in a vain attempt to illuminate the biplane for the gunners below. It's a wonder they never brought down the 'gooney bird' instead. Nothing seemed to work! However, they finally shot down a couple of them, with the radar equipped, night-fighter version of the F4U, Chance Vought Corsair. These were slower, piston-engine aircraft. At the lower closing speeds, the US marine pilots were able to show their sharp-shooting skills to better advantage.

The base came under a few of these attacks while I was there.

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4

Friendly Fire

My only involvement in this event was as a bystander, and a member of the squadron involved. I have included it to show how a string of mistakes and mishaps, and plain bad luck can lead to a nasty outcome.

I was sitting outside my tent reading one afternoon when a very loud, short burst of machine gun fire accompanied by explosions, startled me. Screaming, ricocheting rounds seemed to pass right over my head. One of the senior pilots came running by calling, 'That was 20mm, it came from our lines'. A few of us headed toward the tarmac area.

What had happened was that one of the Meteors in the maintenance shelter, had fired twelve high explosive rounds, three from each of its four Hispano 20mm cannons.

Some time later, after the military police, ambulance and fire trucks had departed we were advised as to what had happened. I'll describe as best I can remember, the effect and the cause of this event.

About half of the rounds exploded as they hit the corrugated iron, back wall of the three-sided 'shed'. No one was injured at this point. The rest of them passed through the wall, and about three of those struck a vacant sealed parking area, ricocheting over our tent lines. Two more hit the corner of a hut reducing a table inside to matchwood.

The last round missed the corner of the building. It passed through the wall of the next hut, exploding on the back of a chair that was occupied by an American airman, killing him instantly. He was the only person in the building.

This was a horrific outcome, especially as the airman had only a couple of days left before heading home at the end of his tour of duty.

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The string of errors leading to this accident was something like this: -

- The last three rounds of each cannon's ammunition belt had been left in the belt feed mechanism, and the breechblocks were still in the rear (cocked) position. The guns had not been cleared after the last mission.
- The aircraft was on jacks so the 'weight on wheels' armament safety switch was closed.
- The electrical circuits were live and the master switch on, to facilitate maintenance.
- The safety catch on the control column 'trigger' was off.
- A fitter was standing on the pilot's seat working on the back of the ejection seat. He reached around to push the stick out of his way, and squeezed the trigger.

This was a classic breakdown of safety precautions that I'm sure would interest Professor James *Reason* (see glossary).

Naturally, relations between we Aussies and the Yanks were somewhat strained for a while.

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5

Seoul Buddies

In November 2001, I had the honour to return to South Korea, at the invitation of the Chief of Staff, ROKAF, Gen Yi-Ok Su. We were told that there were supposed to be 18 ex-RAAF and about 50 USAF veterans. Well, only three ex No 77 Sqn pilots accompanied by two of our wives and three USAF types and one daughter came. Just nine of us! We still keep in touch, although Gavin Collins, who was on my pilot's course, and Geoff Collins have passed on. I still keep in touch with Mary. And we have visited the yanks.

It was right after 9/11, so the impression that our Korean hosts had was that this was the reason so few turned out. Anyway, we had a ball for six wonderful days being hosted full time by a colonel, a major and a delightful young lady tour guide. Of course there was also a string of interpreters, baggage handlers and aides to augment our entourage. They treated us like royalty. Many times we were told that if the UN had not come in 1950, they would be just like North Korea is today.

Bonnie and I arrived at the magnificent Incheon airport one day after the remainder of the group. We were met by a young air force officer in civvies, and escorted straight through immigration and customs. The colonel, the major, our guide and an interpreter met us on the main concourse, where I had a garland of flowers placed around my neck and Bonnie was presented with a bouquet. I felt a bit if a git, walking through the busy terminal so bedecked. I found out several days later, the significance of the flowers. Then we were led to a rather posh VIP lounge where a semi-official welcoming ceremony was conducted. The colonel, who apparently had no English, sat opposite us and delivered a lengthy address, which was interpreted by a young officer. The explanation was almost unnecessary as the friendly, smiling officer bade us welcome and explained how grateful his nation was for the assistance of the UN in saving their country from being overrun. I felt quite humbled by this as I remembered how I was just a twenty-year-old sergeant in 1953 and didn't feel that I deserved such an accolade. I did recognise though, that I was representing my squadron, my country, and indeed, the UN. It was very moving. There was a funny incident when the colonel said something that was obviously about me, and all of his attendants laughed. I guess I showed a little discomfiture, until the guide said, 'He thinks you look like Paul Newman.' They all laughed again and so did I, because that's what my mother often told me when I was young.

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We were then driven into the city, past Kimpo airfield, where I had been based. We settled into a comfortable hotel not far out of the CBD. Next day we all were taken on a grand tour of the capital. What a difference 50 years, and a free democracy, can make. When I saw Seoul in 1953 it was largely wrecked and I think the tallest building was about 6 stories. Now, it was a magnificent, modern metropolis of shiny skyscrapers, new cars, and bustling crowds. I remember seeing a convoy of twelve beautiful black stretched limousines. They were Hyundis.

The nine of us were hosted to a magnificent 'dining in' at the Hilton on top of a hill overlooking the city. The air force had taken over the kitchen and the meal, service etc. was all ROKAF. The food was western style, and delicious. There were many speeches, presentations of plaques and gifts and all had a great time. The President of the Korean Veterans Association, a retired army general, presented we veterans with a special medal. It was all very remarkable.

We visited various historical sites, restaurants, and the DMZ over the next couple of days. Then we were flown in a C130H, with a planeload of ROKAF vets to the fighter base at Kangnung on the east coast. That night some of us attended a wonderful concert and fire-works display and the next day a big parade at the base.

There was a drill demonstration by three squads of 60 airmen doing USMC type rifle drill, with fixed bayonets that was equal to the marine standard. Then there was a flying display by their equivalent to the 'Roulettes' in Korean designed and built jet trainers. They could have taught our guys a couple of new tricks also.

At the end of this display two of the aircraft taxied in from each side of the reviewing area and angle parked in front of the stand where the dignitaries, about 50 ROKAF vets and we nine were seated. As the two young pilots climbed down from their aircraft, two young women in traditional dress approached them and placed a wreath of brightly coloured flowers around their necks. Then the Chief of Staff explained that during the war, when a pilot returned from his hundredth mission, this was how he was greeted.

Then a long line of jeeps stopped in front of the stand and about forty older men boarded them in pairs, standing in the back and holding a purpose installed rail for support. These were the 'Hundred Mission Men'. Geoff Collins (RAAF) and Bill Soltis (USAF), our UN hundred mission men, manned the front jeep. This jeep flew our national flags. They were then driven past the drill squads and received a general salute.

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They disembarked in front and lined up for photographs. THEN, from each side of the stand a troupe of older women in traditional dress proceeded out to the men and placed garlands of flowers around their necks, as the General explained that these were mainly the same women who had done that, 50 years earlier. Talk about accolades and tears! Mary Collins and Bill's daughter, Linda, looked very proud. Linda virtually forced her dad to come because he was a bit frail. He was a P38 Lightning pilot in WW2 and flew Mustangs in Korea.

The other two Americans, Jim Davis and Sam Collier were young ATCs based at Kangnung and were shipped down to Pusan just before the Chinese overran the base. Their officers and senior non-coms were executed. So they had a very special reason to return to that place. It was interesting watching them briefing the current staff about the base's history during those hectic times.

We flew back to Seoul in the Herc the next day. Because I had told the Colonel that I flew over 2000 hours in Hercs, I was invited up on the flight deck. One of the young pilots, who was a little confused by the chronology of it all, asked me if I flew AC130s (Armed Cargo) gunships during the war. I explained that, no, I flew Gloucester Meteors and the C130s didn't come along until about three years after the armistice. I was surprised to learn that he did know what a Meteor was. I explained to him that the USAF did in fact fly AC130s and AC47, Dakota gunships during the Vietnam War.

Back in Seoul we attended a commemorative service for the Korean veterans on their memorial day, Saturday 10th November. Sunday 11th was a free day. So, because it was our 'Armistice Day' and the Americans' 'Veterans Day', we all went to the magnificent war memorial/museum. There, in the UN gallery where all the names of the fallen from the 21 nations who came to the aid of the Koreans are engraved, we held our own little commemorative observance.

Then we said farewell to our wonderful hosts and made our separate ways home. I will always hold vivid and fond memories of that return to Korea, and hold dear to my heart the friendships we made with our Seoul Buddies.

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Glossary

2IC – Second in Command.
Aerofoil – Any surface, such as a wing or tailplane, designed to produce lift by its passage through the air.
Air Commodore – Air Force rank equivalent to Brigadier (One Star)
Aircraft – People often equate the term 'aircraft', with 'aeroplane'. Aeroplanes, helicopters, balloons etc are all types of 'aircraft'.
Aldis Lamp - Visual signalling (communication) device. It could flash red, white or green light-beams and also send Morse code messages.
Angle of Attack – The angle at which an aerofoil presents itself to the passing airflow.
ANZAC – Australian and New Zealand Army Corps - WW1. The term is still applied to troops of both forces.
APC – Armoured Personnel Carrier.
ARVN – Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South)
ATC – Air Traffic Control.
Autorotation – Procedure that allows a helicopter to glide to a possible safe landing.
ASAP – As Soon As Possible.
Bell 205 – Civilian version of the Military, Bell UH1, 'Huey'.
Black box – Generic term for secret, or electronic aircraft equipment. Also describes a Flight Data Recorder or Cockpit Voice Recorder (which are actually coloured red or orange).
CAP – Covering Air Patrol to locate the downed crew, guide rescuers and provide protection. Also, Combat Air Patrol,
Centurion – Remarkable British tank that served with the Australian Army from 1952 to 1977. It was used in both the Korean War (though not by Australia) and the Vietnam War.
Click – Military slang for kilometre, derived from an artillery term.
CO – Commanding Officer
Coms – Communications.
Couple - A system of two equal forces that are parallel and in opposite directions.
DMZ – Demilitarised Zone.

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Dustoff - Is the acronym for the motto of the US Army Medical Corps: '**D**edicated **U**nhesitating **S**ervice **T**o **O**ur **F**ighting **F**orces'. The term was used to describe a helicopter operation that provided the 'MedEvac' of wounded troops. In 1969, these missions were normally flown by the **US Army 45th Medical Company** that had units based at Long Binh and Vung Tau, as well as Nui Dat. They did a magnificent job.

EPIRB – Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon.

ETD – Estimated Time of Departure.

Gas Up – Colloquial term (US) for refuelling. Hueys burn Aviation Turbine Kerosene JET A1 (old military desig. JP4), although they may use other petroleum fuels as alternatives.

Goose Neck – Name given to a kerosene flare (lamp) that had a 2.5 cm cylindrical wick protruding from the top.

GPS – Global Positioning System, satellite navigation system.

Groups – Slang term derived from signals terminology. Groups of letters being words. Usually reserved for strong criticism.

Guard – Guard frequency. Universal emergency radio channel monitored by ATC, 243 MHz.

Helo – Colloquial (affectionate) term for a helicopter.

Howitzer – 105 mm artillery piece used by Australian and New Zealand armies.

HQ – Headquarters

IFF – Military version of a *transponder*. Acronym for Identification, Friend or Foe, dating back to WW2.

ILS – Instrument Landing System. Method of guiding aircraft to the runway threshold, when landing in conditions of low cloud/precipitation/poor visibility.

Knot – Nautical mile per hour.

Land Clearing – Armoured bulldozers cleared long tracts of land to deny the enemy hidden transit through the jungle. These were usually covered by artillery, and patrolled. Sometimes they were also mined

May West – WW2 expression used to describe the fairly bulky life jackets worn by sailors and airmen. They were named for a buxom American actress of that era.

MedEvac – The medical evacuation of wounded troops. Some civilian applications use the spelling, Medivac.

Miles – In normal navigation, aircraft use nautical miles (NM). 1 NM equals 1.85 Km.

MO – Medical Officer.

MP – Military Police. RAAF equivalent is SP, Service Police.

NVA – North Vietnamese Army (Regular)

Orderly Officer (OO) – Duty officer responsible for out of hours and off-base matters.

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POW or **PW** – Prisoner of war.
PSP – Perforated Steel Planking. Interlocking steel plates used to construct tactical runways and landing areas. I have landed C130s on this type of runway; it's great stuff dating back to WW2.
Pull Pitch – Helicopter control term - to initiate lift off.
RAAF – Royal Australian Air Force.
RAF – Royal Air Force.
Reason Model – Dr James Reason, of Manchester University, presents an accident causation model, which contains layers (defences) that should mitigate the results of an unsafe act. In aviation, there are usually four or five layers, each with possible flaws. If flaws in each layer 'line up', then you have an accident.
Recce or **Recon** – Reconnaissance mission.
RNZAF – Royal New Zealand Air Force.
RPG – Rocket Propelled Grenade (launcher). Hand-held, shoulder-launched, antitank weapon capable of firing an unguided rocket containing an explosive warhead.
SAR – Search And Rescue.
SAS – Special Air Services (Australian and New Zealand).
Scrip – Common name for US Military Payment Certificate, MPC.
Slicks – Army slang term for the lightly armed helicopters used to insert combat troops into battle areas. They were called slicks because of their relatively smooth sides, compared to gun-ships. Another explanation is that, often no seats were fitted and the expression referred to the unbroken floor line, which facilitated rapid egress/access.
SOP – Standard Operating Procedure.
Stall Speed – The speed that a wing or other *aerofoil* surface loses most of its lift producing capability, and below which, level flight cannot be sustained.
Starboard – Aviators use this nautical term for right side. Left is Port.
Tankie – Nickname for an armoured (tank or *APC*) crewmember.
Thumbs Up – Visual signal, usually with one thumb, to indicate that all is OK. Not to be confused with a rude sign in some cultures.
Transponder – Aircraft device that transmits ATC information when interrogated by the controller.
USAF – United States Air Force.
VC – Viet Cong. Peoples Liberation Armed Forces (Communist) in South Vietnam.
Walk Around – Supplementary pre-flight inspection between flights. This is not as thorough as the Daily Inspection conducted before the first flight of the day.
WRAAF – Women's Royal Australian Air Force. Made redundant in 1977.

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About the author

Lloyd Duncan Knight

I was born in Sydney, Australia in 1932. Leaving high school at a pre-matriculation level, I joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1951. My flying career spanned an unbroken period to my retirement in 2003. It comprised three approximately equal phases, as an air force pilot, commercial pilot and examiner of airmen.

In addition to an operational tour as a fighter pilot in Korea, I also served in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot. During more than two thousand hours flying Hercules, C130A transport planes, I also made many flights to Saigon, Vung Tau and RAAF bases in Thailand and Malaysia. I accrued more that five thousand hours in aeroplanes and eleven thousand hours in helicopters.

Previous publications are; a home study course in Instrument Flying, (1980), and a novel, *Rainbow, No End*, (2005) http://www.trafford.com/05-0346.

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