THE KOREAN WAR 1950

A Tour of Operations by P3 Milton J Cottee
No 77 Fighter Squadron RAAF

Milt Cottee, Eric Douglas, Max Garroway and "Nobby" Noble

During July 1950 No 77 Squadron was preparing to relocate from Japan to Australia and I was expecting to be reassigned to another Squadron. Our Mustangs had had their last flights in Japan and we pilots were assisting in packing everything for shipment. Someone thought it would be a good idea to have a break up party.

What a party it was on the evening of Saturday 24 July 1950 - '*Come as you were if you were shipwrecked*'. The Saturday evening party went on until the next morning and there were more than the usual sore heads around on that fateful Sunday. This was the day when the North Koreans rolled across the 38th parallel into South Korea with heavy armour, achieving almost complete surprise to the South Koreans. The CO's wife, Vernon, was at the party, having just arrived on the weekly Qantas Skymaster with two children to join husband Wing Commander Lou Spence. Ella, my lovely new bride, was to arrive on the next Qantas weekly service.

At 1100 hrs on that Sunday morning Ray Trebilco, as duty NCO, lazily answered an insistent telephone. An American Captain at 5th Air Force Headquarters at Itazuke, Japan told him of the North Korean hostilities and their violation of the 38th parallel advising that the call was a general alert for all forces. We were under the operational control of the USAF 5th Air Force. At first Ray thought that some partygoer had made the call as a joke and took no action. The first call was soon followed by another seeking to know how soon the Squadron could be considered to be operationally ready for action. Soon the base was a hive of activity.

I was in the base photographic section darkroom developing and printing some photographs of the party just over. When I emerged into daylight I soon learned that the Squadron had been placed on immediate alert and all aircraft were being armed and prepared for flight. I quickly went down to the flight line and pitched in with many others to pre-flight and arm the aircraft which had been

assigned to me months before and in which I had thought I had made my last nostalgic flight. Mustang A68-775 was the only one having streamlined aluminium covers which I had made and fitted neatly over the six machine gun muzzles. These were decorated with small RAAF roundels and were the only personalised markings which I applied to my aircraft in view of existing orders barring more distinctive markings. *(A68-775 Milt's pride and joy was destroyed when Stan Williamson crash landed on 9 August 1950 after having the Mustang damaged by flak. Williamson was fortunately uninjured)*

We were already trained and qualified to do our own pre-flight inspections which involved many checks including engine oil, fuel and coolant levels. Arming our own guns was another matter. Soon long lengths of .50 inch calibre machine gun ammunition belts appeared from the armament section and we carefully fed these into the six gun ammunition bins. Gun barrels were given a pull through and all particular parts of the Browning guns inspected and lubricated.

Some aircraft needed to have their guns and the reflector gyro gun-sights harmonised. With the aircraft in the flying attitude we would fit special mirrors to look down the gun barrels allowing them to be aligned on a small marker at 300 yards distant. The gun-sight was then aligned on a similar marker a few feet below the gun barrel marker. All rounds were then expected to fire through the gun-sight aim point plus or minus a small margin.

Graham Strout AWM

Briefings were attended and we started to rapidly learn of the types of possible enemy aircraft which we would likely encounter. North Korea had about 200 Russian Yaks which were much inferior to our Mustangs. Maps were issued and soon Korea became more than just another peninsula to our north west. I had already been paired off with Graham Strout as his No 2 and I hung on his every word of advice. Tactically we used sections of four aircraft as a basic element. Each section was further divided into two sub-sections numbered 1 and 2; 3 and 4. The section leader was always No 1 with his No 2. The sub-leader was No 3 with his No 4.

Korea was divided across the centre by the 38th parallel. North Korea was under a belligerent communist regime whilst South Korea was redeveloping under the influences and aid of the USA.

Korea had been under ruthless Japanese domination since an invasion in 1904. Under repressive Japanese occupation Korean modernisation had not progressed much beyond a subsistence economy.

Spud Spurgeon - AWM

In November 1943 a US State Department sub-committee expressed views that when the Soviets entered the Far East war, they might seize the opportunity to include Korea in their sphere of influence. This was not addressed again until 10 August 1945, barely 24 hours after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki near the end of WW2. A proposal was made to Russia, then sweeping through Manchuria, that they proceed no further than the 38th parallel across Korea. The Russians agreed to this proposal thus setting the basis for the division of Korea into North and South. The Japanese had some POW camps in Korea. Group Captain C H *Spud* Spurgeon, later to be the first F111C Project Manager, was liberated from one of these camps by the Russians.

The Russians had stopped at the 38th parallel during August and on 8 September 1945 a fourteen man US team landed at Inchon near Seoul to occupy Korea south of the 38th parallel. During the next few weeks units of the US XXIV Corps spread out to occupy all of South Korea. There followed bids for political power on the part of factions from which Dr Syngman Rhee emerged, with US assistance, to become President.

In the North Kim Il Sung had been firmly installed by the Russians as President. He fostered strong ambitions to unify the country under communist rule, gradually building up armed forces in preparation for an assault on the South. Evidence points to the fact that Russia did not instigate but sanctioned the attack in June 1950.

During the first half of 1950 the North Korean army doubled in size. It numbered 170,000 troops with 15 infantry and 3 armoured divisions. Russia supplied its main heavy weapons - 258 Russian T-34-85 tanks and 200 Yak propeller driven fighter planes without which there would have been no aggression. South Korea had no tanks or military planes except a few trainer Harvard T6s.

The ROK army of 98,000, like the National Police of 45,000, was armed chiefly with rifles and carbines. Its eight infantry divisions were hollow shells incapable of moving fast or resisting armoured columns.

At 0400 on June 25 1950, a rainy Sunday morning, General Chai Ung Chai's Communist divisions struck into South Korea using six invasion routes spearheaded by the T-34 tanks armed with their 85mm cannons and 2 7.62mm machine guns. These 32 ton tanks could not be effectively countered by any of the ground forces for several months.

In this atmosphere I felt there was now little chance of Ella making it to Iwakuni and became most disappointed with this development whilst at the same time feeling the adrenaline effects as I contemplated air to air combat and the thoughts of coming under enemy fire.

Base security was tightened and we considered the prospect of enemy air attack. We were certainly well within range of North Korean aircraft. The Australian army set up a few anti-aircraft emplacements around the airfield.

Nothing happened further for us that day. Nor the next, nor the next.

The map of Korea, in the operations room, showed a general movement of the bomb-line to the south as the South Korean army and some US units retreated before an overwhelming force. We learned that we could not be committed to operations with the 5th Air Force until our Government in Canberra agreed. So days went by, with us maintaining an alert status, as we thirsted for detailed news of the growing conflict and of the air war in particular.

I heard somehow that no one had thought to stop Ella from leaving Sydney and suddenly she was on her way. Air Commodore Charlesworth was on the same aircraft. He was taking over as the Senior RAAF Commander on General Robertson's army staff Headquarters. On departure from Darwin he expressed great surprise when he learned that Ella had not been prevented from travelling into a war zone. The next stop-over was Manilla. Ella overslept in the luxurious Manilla Hotel, had to be 'rescued' and consequently delayed the aircraft departure for Iwakuni.

Late on the afternoon of Thursday 29th July I was elated, yet apprehensive, when I saw that Qantas DC4 on final approach to Iwakuni. Then there she was in the doorway of the aircraft and then coming down the stairs towards me.

At the house I carried Ella across the threshold and we explored the place together. I had made a request to the local base radio station to play an appropriate pop song. Either deliberately or by accident the announcer played the flip side which was *You May Not be an Angel.*

It was on the 2nd July, the following Sunday morning, at 3.30 am when the phone awakened us. Ivan Pretty, manning the operations room, said, "Milt, the Squadron has been committed and you are off on the first mission. A jeep will be around to pick you up in 45 minutes. All you need is your flying suit. Sorry to have to wake you up so early but take-off is to be at 0500 hrs." Wide awake now we held each other very close for a while. Then emotions were overtaken by multiple thoughts aimed at preparing me for the impending launch of a well armed Mustang heavy with extra fuel tanks into a dark night.

In the operations room we were briefed on the mission. USAF C47/DC3s were being used to evacuate American civilians out of Taejon, an airfield in the centre of South Korea. Enemy Yaks had been active in the area and we were to give fighter cover to the C47s and the Taejon airfield.

We still wore our locally made white flying suits and I thought they were very inappropriate for wartime operations. We wore no insignia and if captured could have been mistaken for civilians. What's more our cotton flying suits afforded negative protection against a cockpit fire and would be useless following a bail out situation.

Ray Trebilco AWM

I also thought about how quickly things can change. Here are we, Ray Trebilco and I, two would be test pilots, sent to a fighter squadron to get some Mustang fighter experience. Well it looked as though that was becoming quite an understatement.

With a strange mix of fear, arising from some under-confidence with my ability to mix it in an air to air situation, and wondering just what Ella might be doing and thinking right now, and can I remember where those light switches are in the cockpit, we collected our paraphernalia and my parachute having the serial number 8888. I found my way to Mustang No 709, disappointed that it was not 775, the one that I had specially befriended. I had flown 709 only once before in my 70 odd hours flying with the Squadron. A recently issued bulky .38 revolver was now to be worn in a holster under my left arm with my bulky Mae West floatation gear over the top. This was not very comfortable and made the ribs sore after a while. Maps were scarce and those we used were not expected to be very accurate. Our Mustangs had no navigational aids but by now we knew where to find Korea.

It was still pitch dark at 4.45 am as we coaxed those Packard Merlins into throaty life, awakening all on the base to the fact that we were now entering a war. I had some help finding the navigation light switch, with its three positions, dim, bright and off. I didn't realise that I had selected dim instead of bright. This would make it awfully hard for Flight Lieutenant Tom Murphy as No 3 to follow me as we took off and climbed out of Iwakuni through several layers of cloud. On top of the cloud it was starting to get light and we picked each other up in the gloom. I was sticking close behind my No 1, the flight leader Graham Strout. Flight Lieutenant Brick Bradford No 4 had trouble with his radio and returned to Iwakuni.

The three of us spread into battle formation, about 1000 feet apart, and climbed up to 7000ft. Apart from our main fuel tanks, we had two drop tanks and a full fuselage tank. The Mustang was

unstable in pitch with a full fuselage tank of 75 gallons just behind the cockpit. We used the fuel out of the 100 gallon drop tanks first, in case we had to drop them. This resulted in a fairly long period of wrestling our aircraft along with them wanting to either pitch-up or pitch-down at the slightest disturbance.

Out over the Sea of Japan 40 minutes later we picked up the coast of Korea in the far distance. As we approached closer, we tried to pick up features to match on our maps. These didn't seem to match with our intended track very well so I left all that to Graham Strout. Tom Murphy surged ahead as we neared the coast and we didn't realise his intention until he became the first Australian pilot to enter Korean airspace.

As we crossed that unfamiliar coastline I reached down and turned on my master armament and gun switch and adjusted the gun sight controls wondering whether I was soon to be initiated with the term experienced.

We crossed a big river which should have been the Nacktong and descended towards where Taejon should have been. Graham Strout was making lots of calls on the assigned radio frequency trying to make contact with and the C47s. But there was no response.

We remained in battle formation so as to cover each other's tails and kept our eyes well peeled for other aircraft. Having reached the estimated area for Taejon, I was still unable to find any landmark which would match my map. The others were having the same problem. We manoeuvred a bit and eventually came across an airfield with a couple of hangars. There was absolutely nothing moving on or near the airfield and we continued to look around the local area for some 15 minutes. Drop tanks were now empty and we were ready to drop these at the first indication of any enemy aircraft in the vicinity.

Some relief came as fuel from the fuselage tank was used up and the stability of the aircraft slowly returned to normal. Eventually our rendezvous timing had been well exceeded and we headed back for Iwakuni, with our drop tanks in place and with some feelings of frustration. It had all been to no avail. On landing we were met by the rest of the Squadron pilots all wanting to know whether we had met up with any of the enemy and, "What happened?"

Four days later on 6 July I spent an unexpected overnight at Taejon. It was nothing like the airfield we had circled fruitlessly on that early July morning. I never did see that particular airfield again even though I kept a good look out for it. Didn't even hear whether the C47s had been to Taejon either.

My second mission was two days later on 4 July. We were top cover fighter escort for B26 Invaders, forming the 3rd Bombardment Wing, which had just moved in with us at our base at Iwakuni. It was a large formation of B26s and we went all the way to Seoul where they bombed the bridges over the Hann River. There was some ineffectual flack directed mainly at the B26s and no enemy aircraft came up to threaten the B26s. The Yaks had mostly been effectively eliminated before we entered the war but intelligence continued reporting some Yak activity.

The bomb releases by the B26s afforded me my first close observation of the American method of bombing from a close formation of aircraft. All aircraft dropped everything on a call from the bombardier in the lead aircraft. I didn't think it was very sensible to use this technique in trying to hit bridges over the Hann River but it was a way to keep a sizeable formation together. A lot of bombs splattered around the target and it was hard to see if there were any worthwhile hits.

The third mission on 6 July was a classic. We started out as a four aircraft formation with Graham Strout leading but he had to abort. Flying Officer Ken McLeod our number 3 took over and P2 Les Reading and I headed for Korea with full tanks, 6 rockets and as always full guns bins containing 2040 rounds. The inner guns in each wing had 230 more rounds than the outers. We always stopped firing when we got down to two guns, keeping those 400 odd rounds for self defence.

Checking in through the newly established Joint Operation Centre, call sign "Mellow", on our 4 channel VHF radio, we were assigned to a Mosquito control aircraft wanting aircraft to strike a bridge to hold up a T34 tank column advancing south along the main Seoul/Taejon highway at Pyeongtaek. We thought we would not be very effective against a bridge but we were the only aircraft he could get.

We did not know at the time that earlier that day two sections of four Mustangs led by our CO, Wing Commander Lou Spence and Flight Lieutenant Bay Adams, had strafed a train near Pyeongtaek, believing the train to be North Korean. It was a terrible blunder. The train was carrying reinforcements for the small US force trying to delay the advancing tanks. Fortunately the 77 Squadron Mustangs concentrated on destroying the train and the casualties amongst the US Army soldiers were light.

Soon after contacting the Mosquito aircraft - they were not yet called Forward Air Controllers (FACs) - Ken McLeod had us check our fuel state. We were close to bingo, a fuel state where we had only enough to get us back to base. Ken advised on the radio that we would only have a short time on target before having to return to base. Still about 15 miles from the target the Mosquito pilot suddenly called to us in a very agitated voice saying, "Little Friends come hubba hubba I am being attacked." (Little Friends were what the Bomber crews called their escorting Mustangs towards the end of WW2 and Hubba Hubba is Hurry Hurry in Japanese) He couldn't identify the attacking aircraft and continued to call for help. We all fire-walled the throttles and rapidly ate up the distance between us. I turned on the master armament switch and set up the guns and gun-sight for air to air. I even fired off a few rounds to make sure all was good and ready.

My aircraft was a little faster than the others or maybe I had more RPM selected and hence more power. Speed kept increasing up towards 350 knots and soon I could make out the Mosquito aircraft and then another unidentified type flying away down a valley as though to escape. I was closest to this aircraft and called my intention to engage. It didn't take long to close the gap for an almost dead line astern attack. I concentrated on centring the small dot of the gyro gun-sight on the target. The aircraft rapidly grew in size and I knew that with no deflection I could hardly miss. Just a few more seconds to close the range - and then I started to make out some features. A two seater with the person in the rear seat obviously having seen me and causing the pilot to try some evasive manoeuvres. One of these was a violent yaw to the right so that I could see markings on the right rear fuselage.

Instantly I recognised the markings as South Korean. My thoughts "No red star here". Maybe it was a North Korean in South Korean markings. No firing now - but watch out he may try to shoot at me as I overshoot him - so don't give him a chance - overtake him to the right and get a good look followed by a tight left half barrel roll to slow down and keep him in sight from above. If he is quick however he may still be able to get a few shots off in my direction. Try to tell the others. I went to press my transmit button in the end of the throttle twist grip with my left thumb, only to find, to my dismay, that there was no button where it should have been!

By now I was alongside, with an overtaking speed of about 200 Knots and I recognised it as a T6 - Harvard, like the Wirraways I had trained on. Still suspicious, I pulled away as the pilot of the

Harvard vigorously rocked his wings. I then heard Les Reading call up and say with relish, "Milt's missed him he's mine."

And now I could look back and see Les lining up on the Harvard. How could I quickly tell him not to fire. I looked into the end of the throttle handle and saw that there were two contacts sitting there, where the little plastic push button used to be. I could see this on the floor of the cockpit but I couldn't reach it. I needed something to push those contacts together - but what. My fingers were too big. A pencil, which I always kept handy, served the purpose and I heard the radio click as it went to transmit.

"Les don't shoot - it's South Korean - Don't shoot."

A split second later and that South Korean Harvard would have been a fireball.

Whilst Ken McLeod kept station above and to the rear of the Harvard, Les and I came back for a closer look, coming up on each side of the stranger. The poor fellow in the back was waving his arms in recognition as much as his canopy would allow and even the pilot in front was waving one hand in supplication. I waved back and confirmed him as South Korean.

Ken called us back into battle formation and we headed back towards where we had first seen the Mosquito aircraft, berating the pilot more than somewhat for calling an enemy attack. Seems it had come at him out of the sun and given him a hell of a fright. They both had thought the other was an enemy.

Now we were past our bingo fuel and still had a target to attack. Ken conferred with the Mosquito saying we could land at Pusan or Pohang if we had to. The FAC said, "Aussies you have to hit that bridge down there and watch out for the tank column approaching it from the north. All friendlies have now crossed the bridge but they are being hard pressed by the tanks."

Putting aside our predicament over fuel and a place to land we looked over the area. As we approached the bridge we could see the lead T34 tanks slowly moving down the road. Muzzle flashes from machine guns indicated they were firing at us. A few rounds from us and the tank column stopped, presumably to give them a better platform from which to fire back at us. These were the tanks that had just routed Task Force Smith near Anseong, 12 miles to the north, the first US army attempt to slow the advance. We did not know that beneath us at Pyeongtaek the remnants of that brave task force of 406 men under Lt Col Smith were straggling south as best they could. They had quickly found that their anti-tank weapons had been almost ineffectual against the T34 tanks. It was some time before we were to learn that we could easily knock out those tanks by firing our guns into the engine compartment behind the gun turret.

We soon assessed the best attacking direction on the bridge and made three runs firing two rockets on each pass. We hit the bridge a few times, with the tanks firing at us each time we came within range. The bridge was not knocked down but may have been severely weakened by our rockets with their 60 pound heads. Having each expended six rockets, our next concern was to find a place to land. It was already late in the afternoon and darkness was only 20/30 minutes away.

To our surprise the Mosquito pilot called to invite us back to his airfield which turned out to be Taejon. He said it should be long enough for Mustangs and some fuel would be available. Ken opted for Taejon and we did lazy S turns over the Cessna as we escorted him back to Taejon. On going to Taejon tower frequency we soon found that it was coming home to roost time.

Light aircraft were converging on Taejon from all directions and already dusk was well advanced. A look down on Taejon showed a jumble of parked aircraft concentrated around a gravel strip. We were slotted into a long final with about eight aircraft ahead and others joining in behind. Through the deepening gloom I could see the other two Mustangs ahead picked out by their tail lights and I touched down with three aircraft ahead still rolling on the strip. Hard braking stopped me from over running Les, who was also braking. Then into the first gap on my right and I was able to move clear by about 100 feet, where I ended up with my higher wings overlapping those of the smaller aircraft. I closed down and breathed a big sigh of relief.

But the adventure had hardly begun. I safetied the guns and closed up the cockpit. By now it was already dark. How was I to find the others?

I had seen Les park on the other side of the strip. So I ran across between landing aircraft and found him still with his aircraft some 5 minutes later. We had no idea where Ken was positioned so we tried a few cooees. And they worked. A few answering cooees and we were soon together.

We were wearing our white flying suits, now dyed dirt green, and our big .38s were in holsters strapped under our left arms. Wearing no headgear, we must have looked a strange trio amongst many US Army and Airforce types all mixed up with South Koreans. Officers were trying to keep some semblance of order but had long since lost out. It appeared quite chaotic to us as orders were bandied around and people scurried in all directions. We learned of the general direction of a HQ and kept asking for the communication centre, having as our first priority the sending of a message to Iwakuni.

Eventually we found the communication centre which was a large tent sprouting some antennae. Teleprinters chattered busily in the background. A Captain running the place was obviously snowed under as we tried to get his attention. Eventually his curiosity got the better of him. What were three Aussie pilots doing at Taejon. He didn't even know Australia was in the war. But when it came to trying to get a message out he laughed and said he could only take operational immediate messages to do with imminent operations. He classified our message as routine and told us to try again tomorrow. He even warned us that, unless the retreating friendlies could delay the tanks we had seen, that those tanks may even over-run us during the next 10 hours or so.

We resolved to be out of there as soon as possible after first light in the morning. But would that be soon enough? Our next priority became food. Eventually we found a busy field kitchen in full swing and, without any 'eating irons', found some empty tin cans in which we were able to collect some bits and pieces. We ate using our fingers.

There were the sounds of heavy artillery in the distance and flashes on the northern horizon. I had to wonder just what must be in store for the troops milling around us in some sort of organised pandemonium. It was now quite dark. There was no attempt to blackout the area. Rather, every available light was on and flood lighting lit up maintenance and work areas. Electric generators droned away in many places. We were wide open to enemy air attack.

When we asked where we might be able to sleep during the night, most just shrugged and said any place you can. Someone suggested the houses, which USAF dependants had just moved out of, and pointed out their general direction. After a while wandering around we came across a street of houses. We peered inside several of these to find them crowded with troops, just lying down on every available area of floor space. Choosing one house, we picked our way into the darkened rooms and waited for our eyes to become accustomed to the dark, eventually finding enough space

to lie down amidst many others already in occupation.

I was soon asleep lying on the bare boards with my Mae West as a pillow. After a fitful sleep I wakened to the dawn and wondered for a while just where on earth I could be. Then I was incredulous to hear the voice of the person next to me talking to someone else nearby. He was not Ken or Les and yet he had an Australian accent. I could make out that he was wearing a RAAF khaki uniform which was somewhat the worse for wear and he wore the rank of Squadron Leader.

I said, "G'day Aussie. Isn't this a strange place for you to be?" He was equally incredulous and we rapidly exchanged stories. He was Squadron Leader R J *Dubbo* Rankin, member of a United Nations observer team which had been in Seoul when the North Koreans attacked. With him was army Major F Stuart Peach, they were now part of the retreating forces. Soon Ken and Les joined us outside the house and we spent about 15 minutes discussing the general situation. During this time *Dubbo* gave Ken a list of things he wanted from the RAAF at Iwakuni. Mostly these were items of clothing. I heard later that somehow his requests were met and somewhere further south in Korea he was able to change into fresh uniforms.

Meanwhile we had other things on our minds, such as fuel for our aircraft and a return to Iwakuni. After wandering around for some time we eventually found our individual aircraft and then homed in on a tanker marked 100 octane. Some persuasive talking by Ken produced a promise that the tanker driver would provide us with enough fuel to fly to Iwakuni, after he had made a trip to the airfield tank farm to fill up. While waiting for him to return we carefully looked over our aircraft.

I found a shrapnel hole in the front of the fin of my aircraft. Whatever had made the hole was still inside the fin and I figured it could stay there for one more flight. It turned out to be a piece of shrapnel from one of my own rockets.

Eventually the tanker driver doled out to each of us some of his precious fuel and we discussed just how we were going to coordinate our engine starts and get together for take-off. Many Mosquito aircraft were already taking off for their busy day and congestion was easing on the ground. There were a few Goony Birds here and there but we were the only fighters. Our RAAF markings made us very conspicuous and many pictures were taken by those with cameras.

We three started up at a prearranged time and soon we were able to talk to each other on radio and then to airfield control. Soon we were up and away and setting course for Iwakuni. It was just after 0730 hrs.

As soon as we could raise Iwakuni tower on the radio we advised our ETA with three and soon the whole base knew we were no longer missing.

Ken McLeod's wife was also at Iwakuni and Les Reading was unmarried. His next-of-kin in Victoria had already been notified that he was missing in action. The CO had called on Ella and offered reassurances explaining that there were difficulties in communications between Korea and Japan due to the rapidly changing battle conditions.

What a long debriefing awaited us. And then home to quite a welcome.

The damage to my aircraft's tail fin was caused by a bit of shrapnel from one of the rockets which had hit the bridge at Pyeongtaek.

Three days later on 10 July I was up early again for a busy day. Out of Iwakuni with two 500 pound

bombs, a check in to the Joint Operations Centre and a bridge was knocked down by the bombs.

The next mission saw my first landing on a pierced steel planking (PSP) emergency runway. At Taegu we joined a single queue of aircraft being refuelled and rearmed. We had to stay with our aircraft to move a few times in the queue to be eventually armed with refilled gun bins and 5 inch American rockets. There was only one team of refuellers/rearmers available. The 5 inch rockets were very different to our British style rockets. Having 5 inch motors they were much faster at 2300 fps than the three inch motor's 1300 fps at burnout. But they only had 5 inch warheads, so much smaller than our 60 pound heads. Some of these 5 inch rockets had special armour piercing heads employing a shaped charge, used for penetrating thick armour. The special rockets were only loaded if there was an intention to engage the enemy tanks.

Between missions at Taegu I was nominated to be included in a photograph to be taken with the 75 year old South Korean President, Dr Syngman Rhee. The Government had been withdrawn to Taegu from Seoul soon after the invasion began and the President must have been looking for some publicity. So I met the President and shook hands before being included in a group photograph with a USAF and South Korean pilot. I wanted to but never did see a copy of the photograph. Perhaps it will emerge from the archives eventually.

Then off we went on another mission with the special tank busting rockets looking for enemy heavy armour - T34 tanks. We soon found some of these hiding in an orchard. A tank I hit side on with a rocket exploded and burned. Then found some trucks and hacked into these using the guns. Only two of about 6 I attacked burned. All six were no doubt now useless but we were now only able to claim as destroyed those which burned.

Then back to Taegu for fuel followed by a flight back to Iwakuni in the late afternoon. A long day's work with 7 ½ hours of flying.

By the end of July I had completed 8 missions and flown 34 hours. And the North Koreans just kept up a rapid advance down the length of the Korean Peninsula while the UN forces gathered their strengths.

There were dismal times. Our first loss was my section leader and our OIC flying – Squadron Leader Graham Strout. He was lost the day we flew back to Iwakuni after our overnight at Taejon. Then soon after P4 Bill Harrop crash landed in occupied territory. He was seen moving around on the ground then disappeared. Soon after we lost our popular CO – Wing Commander Lou Spence. He was attacking ground targets and crashed into the target area. The real cause of the crash remains unknown. Unsuccessful rescue attempts were made to recover Bill Harrop. Following the cease fire it was determined that he fought his captors until his ammunition ran out, was briefly a POW and then executed.

A new CO arrived a week or so later. Wing Commander Dick Cresswell who was a former wartime CO of 77 Squadron.
Bay Adams had now selected me as his No 2, after the loss of Graham Strout. I took this to be quite a compliment and went through a steep learning curve with Bay. He was more aggressive than most and looked after his sections very well. In turn, I took pains to cause him least concern and always protected his tail to the best of my ability. Early in the war we were always on the look out for hostile aircraft and flew our mutual protection battle formations with constant expectations of rear quarter attacks.

Later we relaxed somewhat about protecting our rear as all enemy aircraft activities ceased with the

North Korean aircraft having been completely wiped out either in the air or on the ground. I had taken part in this effort only briefly when I helped with the strafing of two Yak aircraft found on an enemy airfield.

Our relaxation over protecting our rear changed dramatically later when we were occasionally attacked by the USAF F80 Shooting Stars. Initially apart from one other USAF Mustang Squadron we were the only prop driven fighters in the action and somehow the USAF jet pilots thought anything with a propeller was fair game. Fortunately we always picked up the F80 attacks on our formations and called tight breaks as they came within firing range in time to cause them to miss with their firing passes. Some of the radio calls Bay made to these F80s are unrepeatable. They were too fast for us to do any effective reverse break on to their tails and we just had to be continually alert. This and the summer heat added to extreme physical demands.

On one occasion when flying in battle formation from Korea to Iwakuni, and whilst droning along at about 10000 ft over the sea, I dropped off to sleep. Trimmed a little nose down, the aircraft dropped down out of the formation and the speed built up. The change in noise wakened me with a start and I was surprised to see the rest of my flight about 2000 ft above. I sneaked back into the formation before anyone else noticed my little excursion.

During August 1950 we continued to initially operate out of Iwakuni and to use Taegu for turn-arounds during the day. Streams of 2 engine C119 packet transports flew supplies into Taegu from Japan and the PSP strip was hard pressed to handle the traffic. Sections were always being replaced. After rain mud would squelch up over the PSP and our aircraft would lose their gleam. We retained the red white and blue roundels on our propeller spinners. The CO's aircraft was distinctive with a full red spinner.

The Mustangs performed very well and their reputation as an outstanding ground attack aircraft increased. But the cockpit became too hot for comfort during low level operations in the Korean summer. There was a hot air duct for cockpit heating just behind the heat exchanger underneath the mid-section. I suspected that the cockpit ventilation controls did not entirely block off the hot air. During a wait in the Taegu queue I picked up an empty American beer can and found it fitted neatly into the hot air duct. Next mission I was much more comfortable with the beer can installed. I had to be careful to only install the can on missions which were only low level. The beer can became part of my survival kit.

By August we had our pilot strength increased with a few newcomers from Australia. One of these was Lyall Klaffer. He was, like Ray Trebilco, also a former member of my No 1 post-war pilot training course and keen to get into the fray. As he came bounding down the steps out of the Qantas DC4 he said, "OK fellows where is the war?" He did not yet know that we had already lost three pilots including our CO and his question was left unanswered.

We now had enough pilots to enable us to fly every other day. This was some relief as the ground attack missions were physically demanding with most flying being at low level requiring continuous attention to ground fire, navigation, bingo fuel states and mutual protection.

Often during our lay days I would enjoy inviting to the house a few of the newly arrived pilots for some relaxation and some 'line shooting'. They grew to appreciate the companionship of Ella who turned out to be a wonderful hostess under the circumstances. Having Japanese 'house-girls' always available was a bonus. Ella and her identical twin sister back in Australia had studied palmistry as a hobby. It was not long before all wanted to have their palms read. I can remember her consternation when she began her readings. Ken Royal was one of her favourites and she became most upset on

seeing the shortness of his lifeline. It was the same for a few others who also did not survive. Coincidence perhaps but upsetting nevertheless.

Prolonged bursts of machine gun firing overheated our gun barrels. We soon found that, with the next live round being in the breach ready to fire, a state was soon reached where these rounds would become over-heated and cook off at random. Early in the process of learning this, I was line astern to Bay Adams, climbing up after a long firing pass when all six guns cooked off in rapid succession. I felt sure that one or more of these would have hit Bay's aircraft and was most relieved to learn later that none had. I refrained from telling Bay about this until many years later.

The gun-sight fitted to our aircraft was an early model gyro-reflector sight which would automatically provide target lead in a turn by swinging a dot in a ranging circle ahead of the line of flight of the target. The pilot had to set a selector knob on a scale of wingspan for the target and then use a throttle twist grip to vary the size of the adjustable ranging circle to fit closely around the target. This process provided a rough range solution which was then used to process the sight's gyroscopic mirror to set the aiming lead on the target.

For rocketry, bombing and air to ground gunnery we used the sight in a fixed condition which presented a fixed cross to signify the harmonisation point for the guns. It was not until I returned to Australia that I learned that the Mustangs there were fitted with improved gun-sights which provided the aiming solution during rocketry. It remains a mystery to me why we continued to use the early model gun-sights in combat. Anyway after having fired off many rockets I found that I could sense the feel of my aircraft, quickly assess range to target and the dive angle to instinctively calculate gravity drop and fire off a fairly accurate missile even when allowing for cross wind effects.

An unusual incident would occasionally occur during gun firing. We carried successive rounds in the belts of ammunition of ball, incendiary, tracer, armour piercing and explosive. Sometimes one of the incendiary or tracer rounds would explode some 100 feet in front of the aircraft to form an almost perfect smoke ring. Whenever this happened I instinctively ducked, as this smoke ring seemed about to smash into the cockpit.

Smoke rings of other kinds were also ingrained in memory. For some time the North Koreans' advance was being held around a southern perimeter which passed about ten miles north of Taegu. Many of our ground attacks were directed towards protection of this vital airfield which the North badly wanted to put out of action.

Just north of the bomb line near Taegu were a few short railway tunnels. At night the North Koreans would use these tunnels to hide troops and trucks loaded with supplies. We were assigned to attempt to make the tunnel entrances collapse using our rockets with their big 60 pound naval shell like heads. We found that the best attack could be made by flying just above the railway tracks approaching the tunnel entrance. A little pull-up to allow for gravity drop just before release of the rocket was required followed by a very hard pull to clear the hill above the tunnel entrance. This could be followed by a half roll to give one a view of the rocket explosion. Using this technique about 1 in 4 rockets could be made to enter the tunnel. The resulting effects of the explosion of the rocket inside the tunnel was initially unexpected. There would be a whoosh of smoke out of the far end of the tunnel and a giant smoke ring would then come flying out of the near end.

After a couple of these we soon began a competition to blow the biggest and best smoke ring. For anyone or anything inside the tunnels it must have been decidedly unhealthy. The North Koreans soon stopped using those tunnels.

Other puffs of smoke were more ominous. These were from anti-aircraft flak. I was never briefed on the finer points of flak until after a mission which took us over the harbour of Wonsan. Suddenly there were black puffs appearing about 5,000 ft above us. Bay Adams called flak and told us to start weaving. He was already doing this quite vigorously and I started to do the same. However I was intrigued that the flak continued to burst well above us, so my weaving dropped off.

During the debriefing after the mission Bay tore strips off me about my attempts at weaving. I exclaimed that the flak was way off target and nowhere near me. With raised eyebrows he said softly and with great effect, "Is that the first time you have flown through self-destroying 40 mm ?" It now dawned on me that the AA must have been passing close to me and that the proximity fuses may have come awfully close to finding me. Perhaps if I had been weaving more vigorously I may have flown closer to one of those nasty things.

As our war of interdiction developed we took on a close interest in a particular wooden trestle railway bridge across a ravine. Having knocked down this bridge early in the war we took the occasional opportunity to look at the attempts being made to rebuild it. About half way through its rebuild we went in and knocked it down again. Flight lieutenant Jack Murray and I, armed with rockets and guns, went in to have a look again, sometime later. This time they were waiting for us. After spotting the partially rebuilt bridge I saw two big black puffs of flak appear just behind Jack's aircraft. Soon after I felt the double thump from two bursts close to me. I recall a feeling of profound anger as I saw flashes from sandbagged gun emplacements near the bridge. Being in a good position to roll immediately into a dive at one of the two AA-Anti Aircraft- guns I brought my six 50 cals to bear and opened up with a long hosing burst. Meanwhile I selected rockets in salvo at minimum interval timing and flew in to the optimum launch range still firing my guns. Little figures were running in all directions around the AA gun I had targeted as six rockets followed in close succession from my wings. Then followed a hard pull up and half roll to see the effects.

A few of the sandbags could still be seen but the gun had disappeared. As I rolled upright I spotted Jack diving on the remaining gun emplacement. Muzzle flashes showed that those on the ground had recovered from the surprise of my attack and were firing back, so I flew into position for a strafing dive in support. But this wasn't necessary. Jack's rockets streaked in onto the second gun emplacement and its ammunition went off with a huge smoking burst which reached up to engulf his aircraft. I was relieved to see him fly out of the smoke.

All signs of ground fire had now stopped. We were able to look over the partially rebuilt bridge without further interruption. Our report stated that the bridge would not need further attention for a while. Two weeks later, a couple of well placed 500 pound bombs delivered by one of the Squadron's Mustangs during a 60 degree dive knocked the bridge down again.

Ground fire was the cause of most of our losses and damage so was always of concern. Small calibre ground fire was ineffective whilst we were above about 1000 feet. It was whilst strafing and firing rockets that we were most vulnerable. It was then also that we were able to see the muzzle flashes of ground fire. Without muzzle flashes there was no other indication to enable us to know that we were being fired at. That is, unless one took a hit. Even then it would have to be a hit which could be felt or which had damaging effect.

Army troops, having observed our operations from the ground, would always say to us that there would be no way that they would expose themselves to such intensity of fire and how could we do it? They did not realise of course that we could not hear and could only see a little of the firing directed at us.

The ground fire caused us to adopt supportive tactics when attacking ground targets. We avoided attacking a target singly, always using a minimum element of two aircraft, usually the number 1 and his number 2 in loose line astern. With four aircraft we always tried for a tight pattern to share out the ground fire. I was always conscious of being a prospective target but the rapidity with which the scene was always changing and the requirement for a continuous process of decision making resulted in there being no time to dwell on the prospects of being hit. We also felt that we were being most effective in assisting our buddies on the ground. To us, they seemed to be in a far worse predicament.

The second time my aircraft was damaged was somewhat dramatic. Somewhere near the intense fighting in the Waegwan area our ground forces needed all the support we could muster. Another small bridge suffered from my attack from bombs which I dropped in a shallow dive at an unsafe height above the target. Soon after release I had rolled to the left to try to observe the accuracy of my release when right before my eyes the top of the left wing opened up to form a jagged hole about the size of a dinner plate. This hole was about 5 feet out from the fuselage just in front of where the left main wheel folds into the wing.

My immediate concern was that I had been targeted by ground fire so I called to say I had been hit but was OK for now. The aircraft continued to perform but I now had doubts about internal wing damage and damage to the undercarriage. Bay Adams ordered me to immediately head for Taegu whilst the rest of the flight completed the interdiction mission.

I lowered the undercarriage as soon as I was close to Taegu and was relieved to feel it clunk into down lock and to see a green indicator light in confirmation. But I could not see the wheel so called a landing emergency and on my first approach gently touched the wheels briefly on the runway. Those on the ground had a fairly close look and advised that I had a hole in the wing forward of the wheel well. The eventual landing was uneventful.

During the next hour I found a USAF airman with a well-stocked tool kit. I borrowed a hammer, some aircraft fabric and dope. Looking through the entry and exit hole I was able to see that the only internal damage was to the air pressurisation lines only employed when carrying drop tanks. There was no other significant damage. I proceeded to use the hammer to flatten down the jagged edges of the hole on the top of the wing, patched some fabric over the holes and I had what I considered to be a usable aircraft again.

I was then able to re-join my flight in the turnaround queue where I was refuelled and rearmed for the next mission. My red doped fabric patches stayed on until I arrived back at Iwakuni. A few days later and the aircraft had been expertly fitted with metal patches.

We always dropped little 11 pound practice bombs during training from a 60 degree dive from about 7000 ft above the target. Release would be immediately preceded by a quick pull though a small angle of about 2 degrees at about 2500 ft. This would be followed by a hard pull-out at about 5g to avoid shrapnel from the bomb bursts. This technique resulted in optimum accuracy. With real 500 pound bombs we seldom had the opportunity of adopting the total training delivery method but we grew to recognise and utilise portions of the method to achieve fairly good accuracy. Experience allowed one to predict the bombs trajectory taking into account numerous factors involved.

No one ever told me I should not release heavy bombs singly and this lack of knowledge came close to writing me off. My target was a camouflaged stationary T34 tank. There was negligible ground

fire in the area . Using a text book training pattern I climbed to 7000 ft above the target, approached it by running it along the usual row of rivets in the left wing and rolled into what should have been a perfect 60 degree dive. But I had misjudged somehow and the dive turned out to be more vertical than 60 degrees.

This was not for me so I pulled out of the initial dive with the bombs still in place. This was a bit of a struggle for the Mustang but next time round found I myself with the right dive angle. Thinking that I may as well have a second try at the target if I missed this time I selected the right bomb only for release. Everything was fine until I started the pull-out after release. That unbalanced aircraft tried to go everywhere but where I wanted . The harder I pulled the more it wanted to roll left and go sideways. The ground was coming uncomfortably close when the bomb I had released went off with a more than the usual thump under me. For a while I thought I wasn't going to make it and could not release my two hands from the stick to jettison the bomb causing all the trouble.

Skimming the ground in the bucking aircraft I was able to coax it into a climb but soon found that as speed reduced I could not hold level with full left stick and trim. The residual stick force was very heavy and my minimum speed was about 190 knots. I wasn't offered another attack on the tank as the Mosquito controller reported the tank to be smoking and lying on its side in the bomb crater. It was quite a relief to shortly release that other bomb on another target, this time from level flight.

On another occasion Bay Adams was leading four of us into Taegu when the tower called us to orbit for a while to provide time for a "dead dog" to be removed from the runway. We each had visions of an aircraft having landed wheels up and wondered about this new bit of American language usage.

After a while Bay called to say we were getting low on fuel and how long would we have to hold. The answer made us roar with laughter. The American voice said, "No problems Dropkick flight. We have a jeep picking up the dog now so we are all clear for you to join on initial. Call at one mile out." The poor dog had strayed on to the runway and been hit by a landing aircraft.

Chatter on the radio was always full of interest, often humorous, sometimes dramatic, sometimes tragic. One could usually make out the essential elements of a situation by a few remarks. Occasionally there would be a gross misunderstanding. A classic example involved one of our pilots named Meggs. He was in a section of Meteors flying top fighter cover one day when he dropped too far behind. The section leader just called up and said "Pull up Meggs". Sections all over the sky pulled up in all directions.

We spent much time waiting in that queue at Taegu with the ever present sound of not so distant gunfire to the north and west. Intelligence briefs received at Iwakuni indicated a firm resolve to hang on to Taegu and to the small perimeter into which we had been pushed. I was most impressed with the continuing supply of munitions and fuel available.

Without complete air superiority of the area we would have been very vulnerable. The situation was desperate and the Nacktong River line was difficult to hold. Anything which moved on the NW side of that river was fair game. We realised that we were having a huge effect on the outcome of the war and ceased caring about the occasional hit from ground fire.

One day at Taegu my attention was drawn to unusual sounds coming from the PSP runway. I turned in time to see a landing C119 Packet transport completing its landing roll with both of its tail booms broken so that the whole tail section was dragging on the PSP. Someone who had observed

the landing said it was a normal landing with the booms breaking just after touchdown. I watched with interest over the next couple of weeks as a team made repairs and then one day it was gone.

The weapons we used were occasionally experimental. The napalm tanks were to the design of our normal drop tanks but having an additional filler hole. Both filler holes would be fitted with exploder burster firing units after the tanks were filled with napalm. This was petrol converted to jelly by the addition of naphthalene. These drop tanks had priming fuses which would be fitted with safety wires so that the tanks could be dropped in a safetied condition. A proportion of these tanks would burst their contents on a target and not ignite. We found that a burst of gunfire into the target would soon fix that.

Many of the bombs we used from US sources were filled with a newly advanced explosive called Tritonol which was reputed to be almost three times as powerful to the same weight bombs used in WW2. To convert these into anti-personnel bombs they would often be fitted with the nose fuse having a worn out barrel of a 50 cal machine gun welded in place. From the cockpit we could only see the gun barrels projecting forward of the wings giving an impression that we were carrying extra gun packs. The gun barrels struck the ground first causing the bomb to explode above ground similar to a proximity fuse.

During those early days the front line (our bomb line) kept moving back and forth but mostly south until the ground forces were pushed into a small perimeter with Taegu as its northernmost point. We concentrated on close support to troops on the ground and interdiction of enemy supply lines. The bomb line in close encounter areas would be marked out by large coloured strips on the ground. The colours would change periodically to deny their use by an advancing enemy. The line would often be overrun. We learned to take extraordinary care to avoid hitting friendlies if directed to attack anything on the wrong side of the bomb line. It was always unnerving to have to hit US Army vehicles which had been lost to the enemy during their advances.

Camouflage was rarely used initially so trucks and tanks were easy to find. Later enemy losses became so high that movement stopped during daylight with trucks and tanks being hidden off roads under trees. Tanks would be driven through the sides of houses for cover. Most of these however were easy for us to find as no attempts were made to cover the tell-tale ground tracks. Tank tracks ending in a house meant only one thing and the task of destroying the tank made much easier by burning the house. The incendiary rounds in our ammunition simplified this task.

Later camouflage improved and even extended to camouflaging nothing to look like something. But the amateurish approach to this often astounded us. I saw tanks and trucks looking like haystacks on roads. I saw a gunboat at anchor near Wonsan harbour covered by branches of trees.

With a fluid bomb-line, mistakes were easy to make. Flying around looking for targets one day we were in the vicinity of a substantial steel girder bridge still standing over the Nacktong River at Chilgok. This was in enemy hands and I spotted a vehicle crossing it. Intent on getting the vehicle I dropped my two 500 pound bombs, thinking that I may even destroy the bridge as well as the vehicle. Jim Flemming, our section leader, had not told us that he had been advised that this bridge was off limits. I received a blast on the radio and was thankful that I missed the bridge. Later at the debriefing I learned that the bridge was to become important in forthcoming counter attacks and for use during the advances by our own forces.

On 25 June 2010 I had another close association with that bridge over the Nacktong River. During a revisit to South Korea my party of Veterans was actually driven in a coach under the eastern approaches of that bridge which has survived to this day even if it is now not in use. Perhaps my

bombs had weakened it. It did support all of our flags at the approaches to yet another huge function in our honour on the immediate banks of the Nacktong River at Chilgok. It was there that we were draped in flowers and made to make a hand print in soft clay as a contribution to the commencement of an enormous Peace Park/Memorial along the banks of the Nacktong River.

A similar off limits situation arose later when we were doing a low level recce around the North Korean capital Pyongyang. I spotted a large electric substation containing three big transformers. Thinking these would be a prize target I soon caused some fireworks followed by thick black smoke coming from these transformers. Some days later the Squadron was advised through the intelligence channels that such targets were off limits. The electric grid system was wanted for use by our own side, following our later advances.

August 1950 was a busy month. I flew 18 missions flying 52 hours.

Flying log book entries for August 1950 are significant for the Nacktong River Battle.

Aug 6	A68-737	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	3.15	Strafed, Rockets buildings NE Chinju
Aug 6	A68-737	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	1.50	Targets of opportunity Andong area. 1 x loaded truck
Aug 6	A68 -737	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	1.35	Targets close Daegu then to Japan
Aug 8	A68-739	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.10	Troops & supplies Waegwan area
Aug 8	A68-739	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.00	Tanks Vehicles Waegwan Area
Aug 10	A68-720	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.10	Railway tunnel contents Waegwan Area
Aug 10	A68-720	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	1.30	Hillside troops & villages 3 miles N Waegwan
Aug 13	A68-799	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	3.00	Targets Chinju area
Aug 13	A68-799	2 x Napalm	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.30	Valley E Chinju destroyed village 2 x trucks
Aug 13	A68-799	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	1.05	Waegwan area then Japan
Aug 14	A68-772	2 x 260pnd	frag rockets guns	3.15	2 trucks near Pongamni
Aug 19	A68-737	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.25	Destroyed 2 field guns in village
Aug 19	A68-737	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	1.40	Close support Nacktong front. Troops. Newsreel.
Aug 19	A68-737	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.25	Destroyed gun position on ridge. Strafed supplies.
Aug 24	A68-726			1.10	Iwakuni to Daegu
Aug 24	A68-726	6 x Anti Tank Rockets, Guns		3.50	Recce Hamhung area. 2 locos, 1 truck
Aug 24	A68-726			0.55	Daegu - Japan
Aug 28	A68-753	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	3.20	Destroyed tank Waegwan. Troops in village.
Aug 30	A68-796			1.15	Japan to Daegu
Aug 30	A68-796	2 x 500pnd	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.40	Seoul Area Bombed bridge. 4 x trucks
Aug 31	A68-796	2 x Napalm	6 rockets 0.50cal	3.00	Close support ridge NW Masan. Hit flack gun.
Aug 31	A68-796	2 x 500pnds	6 rockets 0.50cal	2.00	Strike & recce Andong to Yongdok
Sep 2	A68-806	2 x 260pnd	frag rockets guns	2.20	Strafed & bombed troops W Daegu
Sep 6	A68-726	6 rockets 0.50cal		1.10	Close support.

Similar missions supported the Nacktong River Battle through to October 11.

POHANG, KOREA
USAF 35TH FIGHTER GROUP
11 October 1950

On 11 October my section had taken off from Iwakuni with napalm to complete a mission and then land at Pohang to stay. Pohang is east of Taegu on the coast. The enemy had over-run Pohang and had not long before withdrawn following the Inchon landing. Whilst occupied, Pohang had become the place to drop off any unexpended ordnance after a mission. The town had been completely obliterated. The airfield nearby was just a bare 5000 feet concrete strip. No building remained.

Dave Hitchins

When we landed Dave Hitchins and his crew was there with "his" Goony Bird pushing tents and supplies out on to the ground. He flew away as soon as his aircraft was empty on a return flight to Iwakuni. A few airmen had been dropped off to attend to our aircraft for the next day's missions. It was about 4 pm and here we were on a bare strip with a pile of tents and odds and ends lying on the wet ground. Fortunately it had stopped raining and we selected our tent sites. By nightfall we had a few partially erected.

On the other side of the strip the 35th USAF Fighter Bomber Group, also equipped with Mustangs, had also started to move. They were somewhat more organised and we used their messing and many other facilities.

We were now integrated into the USAF's 5th Air Force with the 35th Group which was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Dale from North Carolina. The 35th had been in Australia and New Guinea during the Pacific war. Several pilots, including Dale, had taken part in the Pacific campaigns so we had a very solid affinity.

Our CO, Wing Commander Dick Cresswell had extensive WW2 experience and close associations with the Americans. Consequently, we were quickly welded into close cooperative operations.

As it became dark on that 11th day of October our thoughts turned to food. We didn't know yet where this would come from until a truck came by to pick us up. We were soon on our way across to the 35th's mess tents. This was my second experience after Taejon at eating with the Americans. I enjoyed hamburgers and sweet corn and coffee in a tin mug. Then back to our side of the strip, looked for a couple of blankets and stretched out on a ground sheet under a tent fly.

Next morning we took off to give close support to troops in the Kaesong area. On take off with a heavy load we soon found that the runway had a drainage depression just short of our lift-off distance. It happened to be just at the point where the accelerating Mustang had its tail well up but not quite ready to fly. We were projected into the air coming out of the depression and I could sense that I may be able to just keep the aircraft in the air. With the stick well back, the wings clawed at the air and just made it. Others flopped back on to the runway, bouncing a few more times before finally staying airborne.

On 14 October our section of four led by Flight Lieutenant Fred Barnes was assigned to provide close support to Australian troops advancing into the village of Namchonjom. On arrival in the area we could see the Australian force advancing along a road about two miles from the village. The road went straight through rice paddy fields which were partly flooded with water. Enemy fire was coming from the village and the ground controller was soon asking us to subdue this fire. We had napalm and guns and proceeded to drop our napalm on gun positions near the village. Following Fred out of his napalm run I was intrigued to see that Fred had a napalm tank hang-up under his left wing.

These hang-ups occasionally happened with the Japanese manufactured drop tanks we used. The two suspension lugs used to hang the tanks on the bomb racks had been made with slightly incorrect dimensions with the lugs a fraction too close together. This caused the tanks to sometimes jam on the bomb release unit. To get a positive release it became our practice to give the stick a hard sharp pull back at the moment of pressing the release button on the top of the stick.

Fred had done this but this tank was reluctant to come off. Another practice was for us to climb away from a target towards our own lines whenever possible. So I watched as Fred climbed up over our own troops. As he reached about 3000 ft and approaching our own troops that tank came off. I watched in fearful apprehension as the tank of napalm tumbled end over end towards them, to land with a great burst of flame in a paddy field about 200 yards off the road. Fred's apologies to the ground controller were short as we carried on with strafing the enemy in the village. It was satisfying to see those Aussie troops occupy the village with the enemy retreating.

We flew often in direct support of troops on the ground. Mostly we were able to talk by radio to a ground controller who would direct our efforts for maximum effect. Once whilst firing into enemy positions across a ravine, we received a call from the ground controller to make our attacks from another direction. He had just been hit on the back of his helmet by one of our cartridge cases. We had given little thought to the fact that our cartridge cases and links were being ejected overboard during gun firing.

On 20 October 1950 I flew a mission out of Pohang and landed at Kimpo near Seoul about 30 minutes after dark. I recall touching down and rolling over a rough part of runway knowing that the roughness was a filled in bomb crater, quite probably one I had earlier caused when I dropped two bombs on that same runway. We had also napalmed and strafed the Kimpo terminal building during successive missions. Now we found ourselves in the strange situation where we had to spend the night in that burned and beaten up terminal building.

The next day we were to give close support to one of the largest para-drops of the war in the Sukchong/Sunchon area south of Pyongyang. The troops were members of the 187th Airborne Regiment, understood to have been the first US Army troops deployed from the US in support of the Korean war. The Japanese gave them the nickname RAKKASANs on their arrival in Japan. I think a rakkasan is a Japanese umbrella.

We were up at first light and there scattered over every available parking space were C82/C119 Packets and C47 Goony Birds loading up with para-troopers and equipment. I took a few photographs before climbing into my fully armed Mustang wondering about the apprehension of all those brave men. I wanted so much to be as effective as possible in helping them.

We watched from our cockpits as streams of these aircraft took off and formed up into huge formations. After they had all taken off, it was our turn and our twelve Mustangs took off to catch up with the transports.

We took up top cover positions above the huge formations. Soon they were disgorging thousands of parachutes on the selected drop zones. Airborne air controllers were already in position to direct our close support. We were soon hard at work suppressing sporadic ground fire from enemy troops. Often we found ourselves dodging around parachutes and giving encouraging waves to those descending. The enemy ground fire was short lived as we took every opportunity to pick off machine gun positions. The para-troopers could be seen getting organised on the ground. Varied colours of parachutes were spread all over the ground like mushrooms. I was elated to have been

able to provide direct covering fire for the descending troopers some of whose lives may have been preserved as a result. Complete surprise seemed to have been achieved and this force did much to cut off large sections of the enemy as it was attempting to escape the trap that the Inchon landing turned out to be.

All of our 12 aircraft recovered to Pohang, some with minor hits from ground fire. We then busied ourselves with preparations for further missions in support of the Rakkasans the next day.

Our missions out of Pohang then started to extend up towards the Chinese border where once again targets became very numerous. I found 6 self-propelled guns in a railway marshalling yard and helped to turn these into piles of junk. I had previously put two napalm tanks through the side of a four storied building near these marshalling yards. The resultant fire inside this building was spectacular as flames poured out of all its windows in one giant conflagration.

Three missions during October were longer than four hours. The longest was 5 ½ hours which is a long time to be strapped into a small cockpit sitting on a bulge in the parachute seat pack containing an emergency oxygen bottle.

By the end of October I had completed a tour which was then nominally 50 missions. Flight time was 150 hours and I now knew the Mustang thoroughly. I returned to Iwakuni and during November flew several maintenance test flights and delivered one rejuvenated Mustang to Pohang. My last flight out of Pohang was in a B26 Invader which had landed at Pohang with a rough engine. It was based at Iwakuni and I hitched a ride back to Iwakuni. The rough engine decided to go rough again half way down the strip at Pohang and the pilot aborted the take off with heavy braking to prevent us from running off the end. Some high powered ground running and the roughness seemed to go. Another try at take off and this time we became airborne before the roughness returned. No backfires this time and the pilot decided to take it back to Iwakuni. That flight as a passenger seemed to be more hectic than many of my Mustang missions.

I did not fly again in Japan or Korea and with a few others, who had completed tours, we were given some recuperation leave whilst awaiting a posting back to Australia.

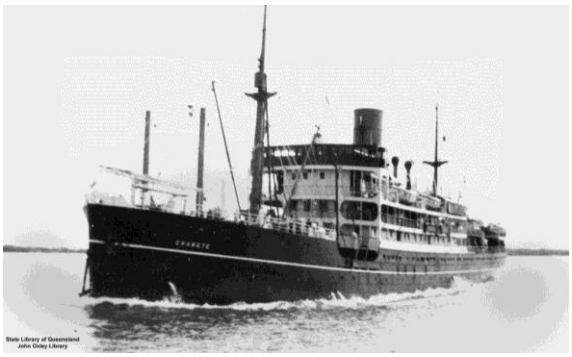
Most of us having wives in Japan had opted to return to Australia by ship and had to wait several weeks for the *SS Changte* to arrive at Kure. Ella and I went off to Tokyo by train and then by bus to Kawana. Kawana was/is a luxury hotel and boasted a superb golf course. It is situated around the southern end of Tokyo bay. We had a delightful week at Kawana winding down and trying to forget that my compatriots were still living and some dying in Korea.

On our return to Iwakuni I learned that I had been posted to East Sale Victoria to do a Flying Instructor's Course. I wondered how this fitted into the six month squadron to squadron experience that had been previously arranged to set me up to be a test pilot.

I was now a Pilot 3 wearing two stars in my rank badge. I had a total of 522 hours on four types of aircraft, another couple of campaign medals, an American Air Medal and a Mention in Dispatches. Belated approval was given in 1998 for the receipt of the South Korean Presidential Unit Citation made to No 77 Squadron nearly 50 years previously.

At some time Ella had been reclassified as my dependant instead of my house guest so I was not now required to pay her fares and expenses. I never learned when I had stopped living with my house guest.

A week later and we were back at Iwakuni packing up to join the *SS Changte* at Kure. We, with others, travelled by army barge from Iwakuni to Kure to board the ship which was still being loaded with big crates containing Mustang engines for major overhaul at Lidcombe in Sydney. Some of those engines had served me very well.



There was limited passenger accommodation on the *Changte*, a small cargo liner of about 5000 tons. It had two classes and we, in second class, were assigned to male and female cabins having three births in each. We left Kure late November with four weeks of shipboard life ahead. First to Kobe for a couple of days then a week or so to Hong Kong.

I had plenty of time to ruminate on what could yet be in store for me in Australia's peace-time Air Force following WW2 and now the Korean War. I was soon to lose two of my closest personal friends, Don Armit and Ron Mitchell, who were to be posted shortly to 77 Squadron. Nor did I know that my younger brother Keith would also eventually fly out of Kimpo with 77 Squadron soon to be re-equipped with British Meteor 8 aircraft.

Don Armit's Meteor was shot down by a Mig over reoccupied North Korea and is still listed as MIA. Ron Mitchell was No 3 in a section of 4 Meteors led by Dick Wittman No 1 recovering to Kimpo from a mission. Dick's No 2 was an RAF pilot attached to No 77 Squadron. The 4 aircraft were in a close V formation - 2 1 3 4 - approaching Kimpo and had been cleared to line up on 'Initial' to overfly the runway in the landing direction before breaking apart in a landing circuit. Dick called 'Echelon Right Go'. This was to rearrange the formation into 1 3 4 2. Unfortunately the RAF method of rearranging that formation was to go 1 2 3 4 with 3 and 4 moving out to make room for No 2 to fit in beside his No 1. Not so for the RAAF so 3 and 4 did not move. RAF pilot No 2 dropped down to pass under No 1 all the while with vision locked onto his No 1 expecting to find empty space still occupied by Ron No 3. No 2 then pulled up to collide with the under-surface of No 3, resulting in enough damage to cause the Meteor to spin into the ground. The pilot did not eject. The presumption is that Ron Mitchell was physically incapacitated by the collision as his aircraft went into a shallow terminal dive and he did not respond to numerous calls to eject. His remains are being very well revered and cared for in an Australian portion of the large UN cemetery in Pusan.

During 2010 the South Korean Army Academy invited a few survivors of each country forming the UN forces who were involved in the battles to hold the Nacktong River Line for a revisit to Korea. I was the sole Australian with my son Ronald as Carer. We were surprised at the level of gratitude shown by every South Korean we met and somewhat embarrassed to be continually hailed as heroes. Every South Korean seemed to know how close it came to losing their freedom if we had not won the battle of the Nacktong River.

A second revisit to South Korea arranged by our own Department of Veterans Affairs was no less significant.Perhaps some time soon I will have the opportunity to visit again and see what has been done with the hand prints we made in clay at Chilgock for the Peace Memorial beside that Nacktong River

Remarkably throughout my tour of operations over Korea I had never heard of the term "Rules of Engagement" nor had I ever received any advice on how to act for the best as a potential Prisoner of War. Nor had I ever had any advice on air to air fighting tactics. I expect that these omissions were the result of the frenzy of WW2 air operations during which very little emphasis was placed on attending to such shortcomings.