

The following photograph and story first appeared in *Simply Hell Let Loose, Stories of Australians at War* Published by the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 2002 reprinted 2003.



During the early desperate days of the Korean War, we were carrying out a ground interdiction role from a PSP strip at Taegu, with the front line no more than five miles (8km) away. The North Koreans were resupplying by train during the night, avoiding daylight air attacks by running the trains into the mountain tunnels until nightfall.

Our intelligence quickly became aware of this tactic and constant efforts were made to seal both ends of the tunnels, hopefully with the trains still inside. At the briefing on one such mission we were told that the expected enemy flak would be 'light to non-existent'.

Heartened by this, I confidently settled into my rocket dive, re-trimmed the aircraft, put the 'pipper' on the tunnel entrance and prepared for a nice easy 'shoot'.

Suddenly the side of the mountain seemed to erupt ... streams of tracer poured up ... lazily at first, then with frightening rapidity, flicking over both wings and around the fuselage. All thoughts of an accurate strike disappeared (frightful admission), I was only concerned as to how the hell I was going to get out of this situation. During a pilot's operational life, events occur which not only cause instant fear but trigger a mental response which, on later reflection, can only be described as crass stupidity.

Being human, the tendency is to banish both the fear and the response into the deepest recesses of the mind, revealing them to no one, especially the 'stupidity' bit. Only after many years can the mind be persuaded to give up its darkest secrets to public scrutiny. In psychiatric circles it is known as the 'what the hell' syndrome.

Now comes the stupid part.

Although the flak was intensifying by the second, I had not been hit. Displaying a remarkable capacity for self-deception (based on illogical thinking) I convinced myself that I must be in some sort of 'safety cone' and all that was necessary to ensure my survival was to continue along the existing flight path, without deviation, and all would be well - so I did and it was. The principle of exquisite, masterly inactivity carried out to perfection.

Releasing my rocket load at approximately the right height, I hauled back on the stick, tightened the sphincter, slipped over the mountain top and headed for home - unscathed.

Over the years I have frequently thought about this mission and my feelings during it. I am grateful that the episode went largely unobserved, by people on our side anyway. Another set of eyes may have seen it differently - you know the sort of thing, 'complete disregard for own safety ... relentlessly attacked the target through a storm of ...' etc.

It would have been humiliating, having to say to the Monarch at the Investiture, 'I'm sorry, Ma'am, I cannot accept this ... it didn't happen that way at all.'

Having read the above you will readily understand my reluctance in bringing the matter forward. Never, in the whole history of aerial warfare has such a saga of poltroonery and irrational behaviour been brought to the attention of one's peers. I'll try to do better in the next war.