# *Through Korean Skies 7.5Gib*

# *Early Days Of "5 Course" Pilots*
# *77 Squadron RAAF In Korea 1950 – 1953*

**Col King**

**Flt/Lt Holdsworth briefs trainees at point Cook. L/R: Dick Robertson (killed in action in Korea), Ian Cranston (KIA Korea),**
**Ken Smith (KIA Korea), Max Outhwaite, (survived Korea)**

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

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

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

# *Through Korean Skies*

## Early Days Of 5 Course Pilots
## Flying With 77 Squadron RAAF In Korea
## 1950 – 1953


## COLIN G KING — “Meteor”


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# Dedication

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

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

## *LEST WE FORGET!*

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

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# Foreword

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

## MiG Alley

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

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

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

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

Ron urgently grasped and pulled the canopy jettison handle. In an instant, a gigantic roar announced that his private cocoon had become part of the frigid swirling air mass into

which he was about to plunge. Taking a two-handed grip on the ejection-seat loop handle above his head, he waited for the aircraft to finish its roll and on reaching the upright position pulled firmly on the control in order to fire himself out of the cockpit. Nothing happened!

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

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

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


***Figure 1: The MiGs' Happy Hunting Ground***

**And so began Ron Guthrie's two-year-long endurance trial in the hands of sadistic captors. Seven pilots, of 77 Squadron suffered at the hands of these captors and their experiences make gripping and humbling reading. Many of these stories and the accounts of other such unfortunate prisoners are detailed in this book. These experiences are contrasted with the more benign existence of those occupied in daily combat operations.**

## Two Years of Torment :

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

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

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

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

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

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

**In the city jail Ron endures weeks of ceaseless torment.**

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

**Again Ron is subjected to public exhibition and humiliation.**

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

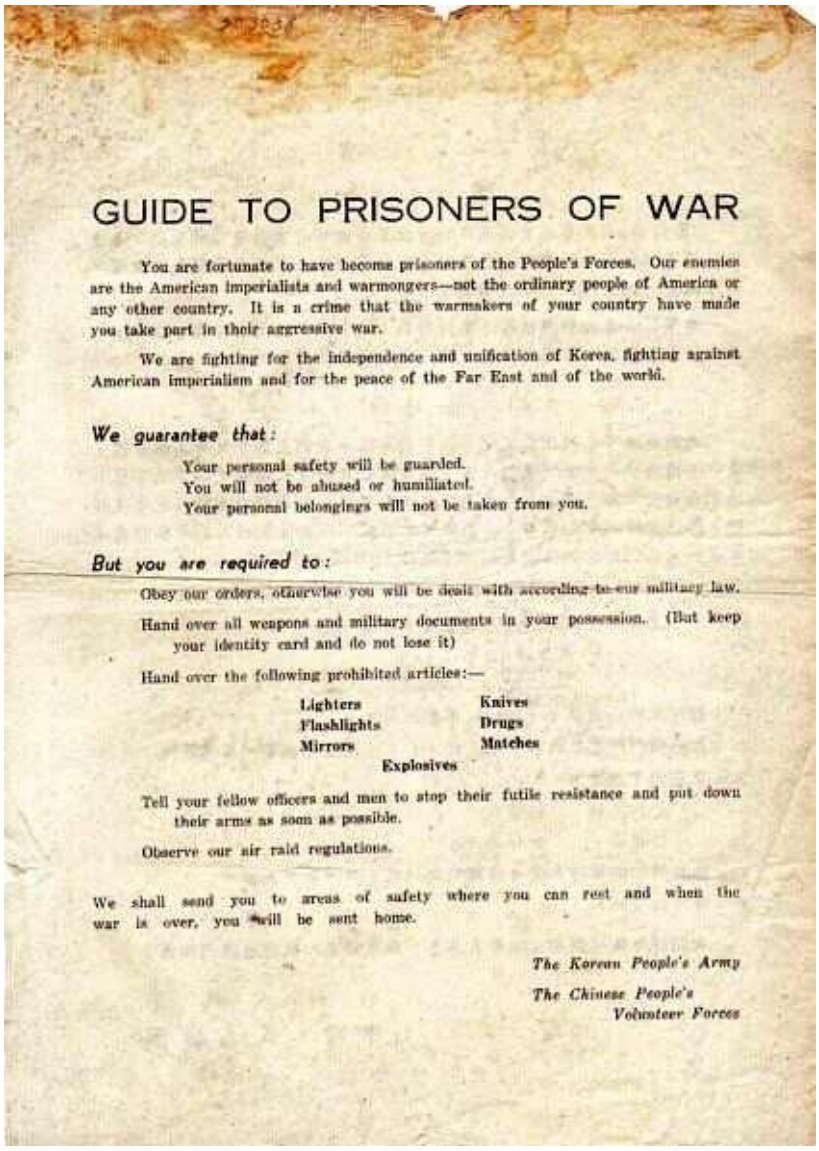
**Failing to give information, Ron is ordered to dig his grave.**

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

**At the interrogation center the most vicious regime is implemented.**

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

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



GUIDE TO PRISONERS OF WAR

You are fortunate to have become prisoners of the People's Forces. Our enemies are the American imperialists and warmongers—not the ordinary people of America or any other country. It is a crime that the warmakers of your country have made you take part in their aggressive war.

We are fighting for the independence and unification of Korea, fighting against American imperialism and for the peace of the Far East and of the world.

*We guarantee that:*

Your personal safety will be guarded.
You will not be abused or humiliated.
Your personal belongings will not be taken from you.

*But you are required to:*

Obey our orders, otherwise you will be dealt with according to our military law.

Hand over all weapons and military documents in your possession. (But keep your identity card and do not lose it)

Hand over the following prohibited articles:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Lighters | Knives |
| Flashlights | Drugs |
| Mirrors | Matches |
| Explosives | |

Tell your fellow officers and men to stop their futile resistance and put down their arms as soon as possible.

Observe our air raid regulations.

We shall send you to areas of safety where you can rest and when the war is over, you will be sent home.

*The Korean People's Army*
*The Chinese People's Volunteer Forces*

***Figure 2: Promises!***


*Figure 3: Places Of Horror*

# Preface

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

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

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

No. 77 Squadron was committed to action over Korea as part of the United Nations forces, and flew its first ground attack sorties on 2 July 1950, making it the first non-United States UN unit to see action. No. 77 Squadron deployed to Korea in October to support the UN advance into North Korea but was withdrawn to Pusan in November in response to the Communist forces' counter-attack.

The Squadron was withdrawn to Japan in April 1951 to re-equip with Gloster Meteor jet fighters and returned to action with these new aircraft in July. Following heavy losses from MiG-15 fighters No. 77 Squadron operated in the ground attack role from December 1951 until the end of the war; it remained in South Korea on garrison duties until returning to Australia in November 1954.

This book does not attempt to present a complete history of the involvement of the RAAF 77 Squadron in the Korean conflict of 1950-1953. It is a collection of anecdotes, brief personal items and illustrations, intended to supplement much that has already been touched upon in my previous books about this somewhat neglected subject.

Throughout the decades since the cessation of major hostilities, the people of South Korea have prospered and taken a prominent place amongst peace-loving nations. They have consistently displayed their gratitude towards the many who answered the call to arms in their defense when the United Nations declared a "breach of the peace" after North Korea launched its unannounced attack on 25 June 1950. This was Stalinist inspired aggression in its typically dangerous form.

It is hoped this book will add to the knowledge and understanding of future generations who may take the time to read and ponder upon these events which took place when the

world was fighting for the survival of democracy and freedom against the gigantic menace of Communism.

Australia's 77 Squadron suffered grievous losses during those three years of intensive warfare. The squadron's average operational strength of all-volunteer fighter pilots was sometimes no more than 17 at a given time and replacements were often slow in arriving. Consequently many pilots did extensive tours and the attrition rate resulted in the loss of effective pilot strength several times in three years – apart from accidents there were 41 pilots killed in action (including six RAF), seven taken prisoner (including one RAF). *Through Korean Skies* also details, in précis format, many of the dreadful experiences of Ron Guthrie and other six 77 Squadron pilots held prisoner in North Korea. Also featured here are the early flying exploits and years of RAAF training carried out by the author and his companions in preparation for the objective of becoming jet pilots with 77 Squadron. Intermingled, chronologically, the book also tells of the routine experiences of squadron pilots flying combat missions, and this is contrasted with the dreadful daily-existence of comrades in the POW camps.

The story reveals details of aircraft and equipment — ours and theirs — used in the conflict. It speaks well of our Mustangs and Meteor Mk-8s and explains our frustrations at being unable to acquire the fine North American Sabre with which our brother squadrons of the 4th Fighter-Interceptor wing of the USAF were equipped. 77 Squadron RAAF was part of that wing, under commanding officer Colonel Harrison R. Thyng and served proudly along-side these exceptionally fine pilots whilst at Kimpo (near Soeul) and more importantly in the hostile skies over North Korea.

***Figure 4: F-86 Sabres Of The USAF 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing To Which 77 Squadron RAAF (Meteors) Belonged In Korea***

# Chapter 1
# Joining The RAAF
## The First Step of One Thousand miles

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

## A Dangerous Obsession

**A**t RAAF Base Bradfield Park in Sydney, two days of searching examinations were conducted. Medicals of every specialty, IQ tests galore, aptitude trials and a number of face-to face interviews were the order of the day. The final Selection Board was interested in the matter of the apprenticeship. With regard to my release, they as good as said "Get on with it, as the course will soon be starting." Perhaps it was innate optimism, but there was a distinct feeling things were going well. This was gratifying as I had just learned there had been 1200 legitimate applications for the course.

De Havilland was not impressed about my desire to leave. The matter was placed under consideration but had to be put to some 'board' or other. The RAAF telegram arrived, "Selected Nr 4 Aircrew Course, depart in 10 days, notify acceptance. " De Havilland was sympathetic, but needed more time. "Perhaps you could go on the next course." So that was how I ended up on 5 Course. Naturally this was upsetting. It seemed as though too many people were not taking The Grand Plan seriously enough. It was mortifying to realize some of those fellows at Bradfield Park were now at Point Cook preparing to fly. However de Havilland did see the light. I was free to go now that it was too late. But they were right about one thing. There were later courses, one each six months. Another telegram came! There were no more tests, just an up-date medical, and then, off to Point Cook!

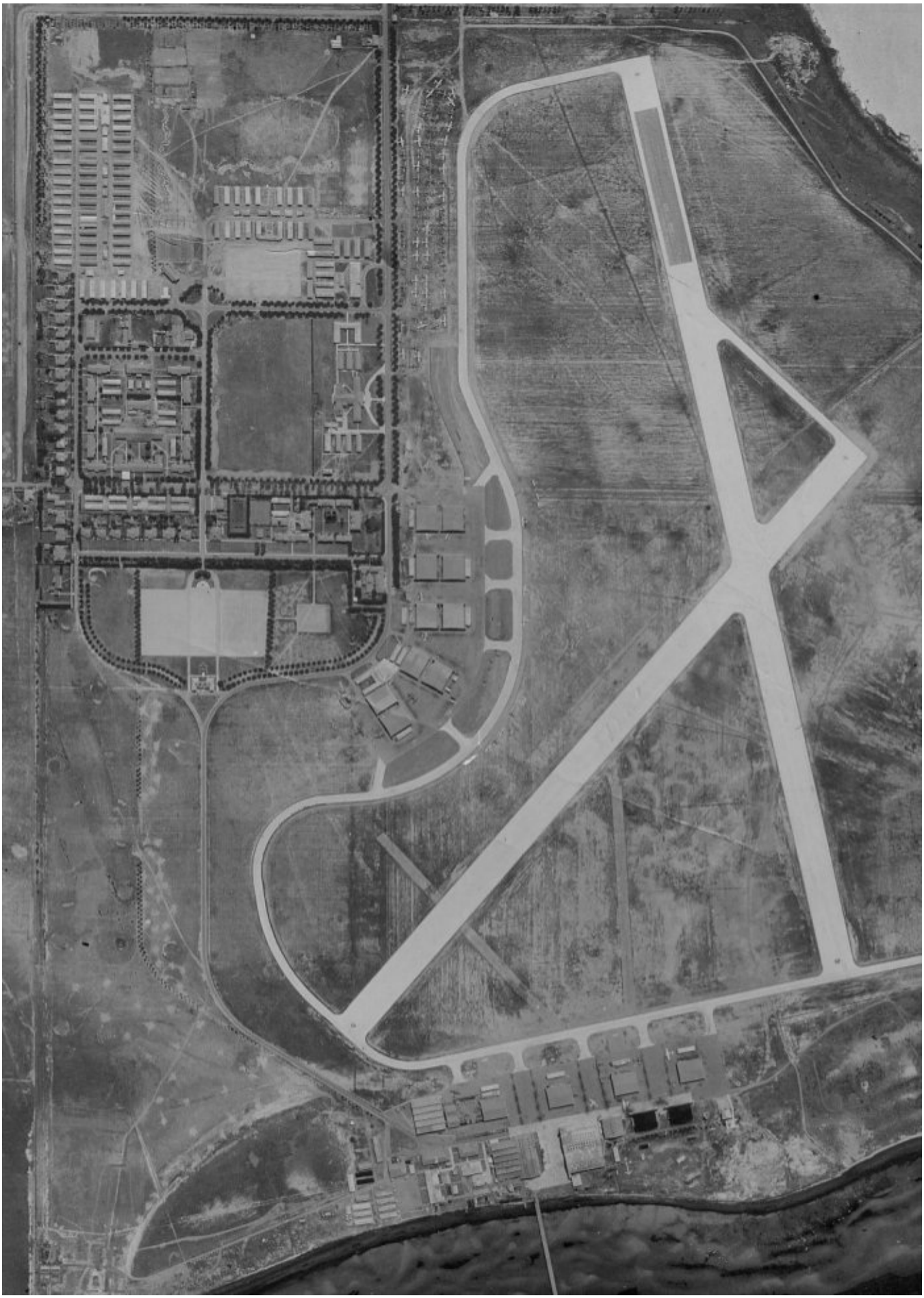


***Figure 5: RAAF Base Point Cook***

One of the first fellows encountered at Point Cook was Ken Smith. His room was nearby

and we talked. Ken was from South Australia, so we had not met on the train. However we were destined to never be separated again by any of the many RAAF journeys and postings to follow, and we were to become good friends. It was soon evident that Ken was to be a proficient and popular trainee. At six feet three he towered over most. There were 80 of us on 5 Course, and most were hoping to be selected for pilot training. In the end result a lot were destined to become navigators or signalers.

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

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


***Figure 6: Tiger Moth Elementary Trainer***

The RAAF started everyone off again 'from scratch,' as if they had never flown an aircraft. The training was excellent. In addition to the solid grounding in months of classroom lectures there were thorough briefings before and after each flight. The instructors were accomplished and helpful. Everyone received the same correct information. How refreshing! Two trainees from 'A flight' were teamed under one instructor. That instructor would also have two pupils from 'B flight'. The two flights alternated week about between morning and afternoon flying, and classroom activities.

One unfortunate trainee, Barry Ellis, had engine failure on his first solo and landed in a

paddock. In spite of a commendable landing the Tiger flipped over.

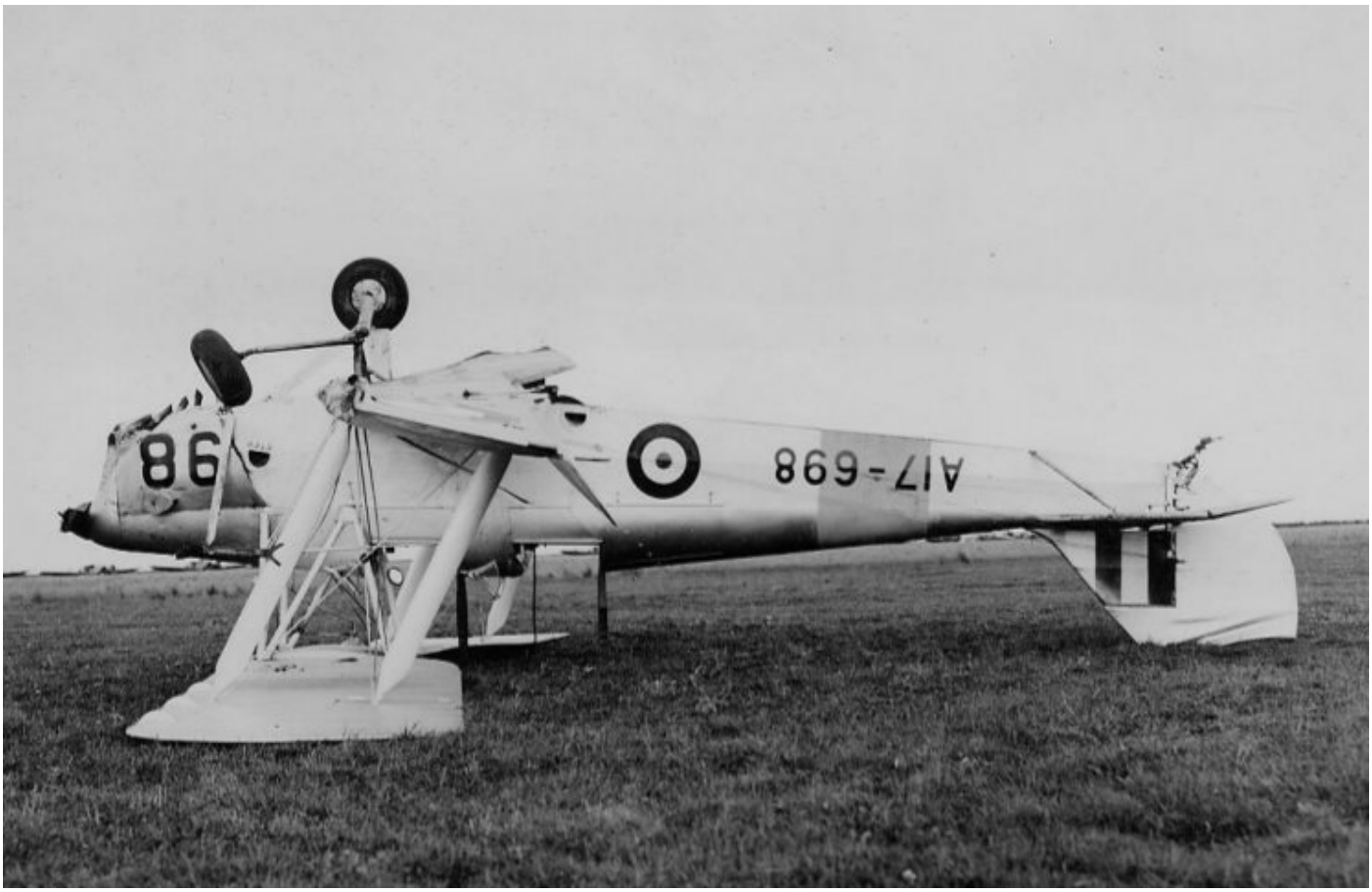



***Figure 7: Barry's First Solo***

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

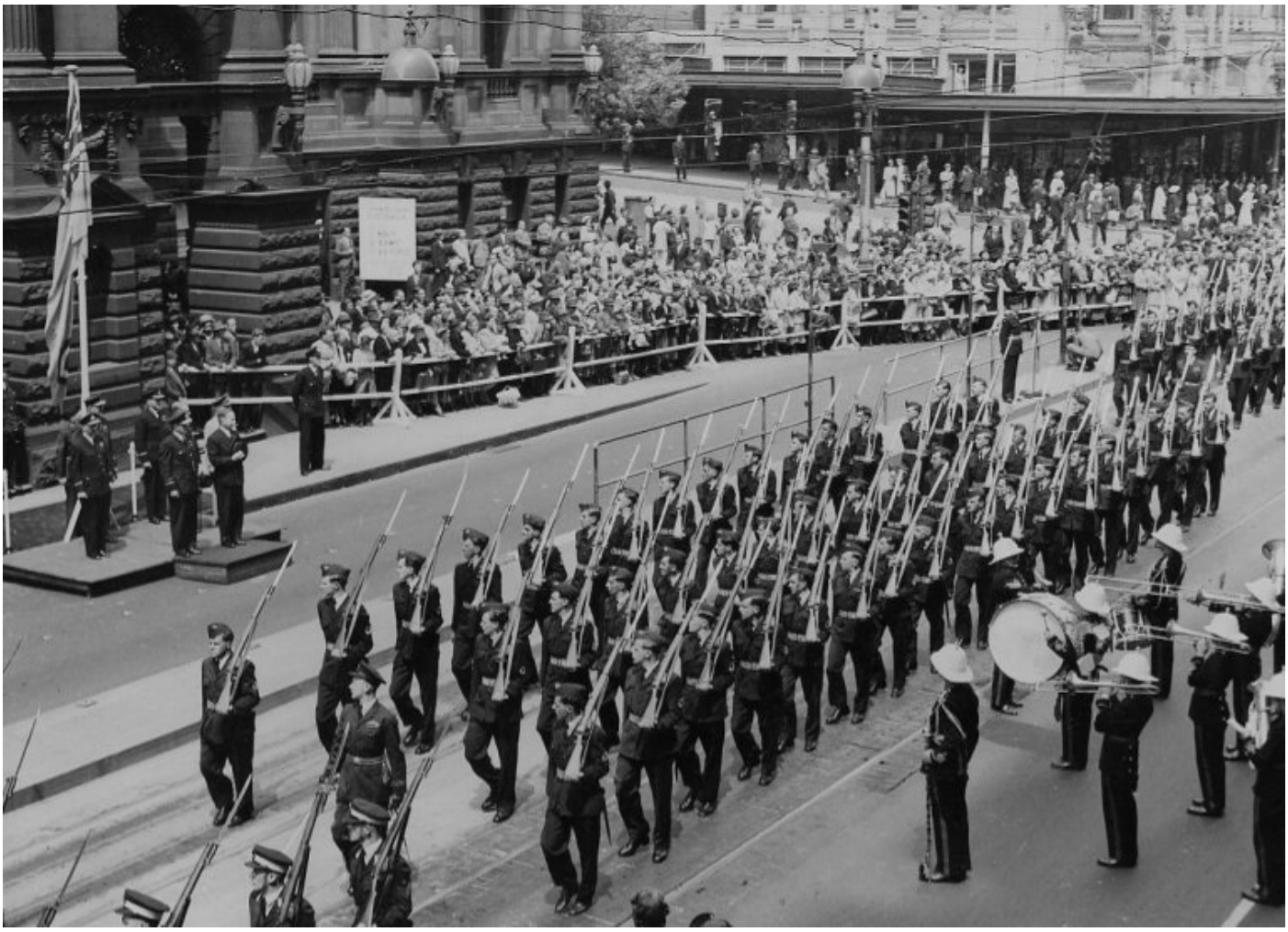


*Figure 8: Our Course Marching Through Melbourne*

## The Korean War Breaks Out

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

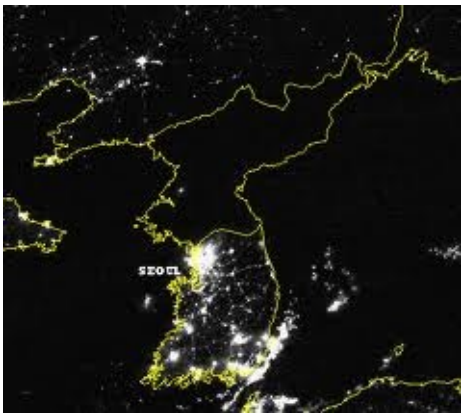



*Figure 9: Korean Peninsula At Night*

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

this conflict. From here on we all followed the situation.


***Figure 10: "The Land Of The Morning Calm"***

At the end of World War II, the Japanese-occupied territory of Korea was divided between the USA and the USSR. This was brought about by a mistake of history, a mistake by the United States in allowing the USSR to enter the Pacific war during its last days and inviting the Russians to split with them the task of accepting the surrender of Japanese troops on the Korean peninsula.

Thus a nation was divided in half by two opposing factions, neither of which had the right to do so. Tension began to build along the 38'th parallel, the Soviets resisting any attempts at reunification. An 'Iron Curtain' was effectively created between North and South. In 1948, the region south of the 38'th parallel became the *Republic of Korea*, under American sponsorship, while the Soviets guided the *Korean Peoples Democratic Republic* in the North under their despotic North Korean puppet, Kim il Sung. Seldom has the word "democratic" been so misused.


***Figure 11: Border Between North And South Korea***

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

On 25 June 1950, after the South had rejected unpalatable ultimatums, the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA), without warning, launched massive attacks on the South, thus beginning the Korean War. This onslaught of 90,000 troops backed by many Russian manufactured T34 tanks, and Russian aircraft, had the blessing and the backing of Stalin.

***Figure 12: Pathetic Refugees Flee From Invaders***

Two days later the United Nations declared this a 'breach of the peace.' Fortunately Stalin had invalidated himself with the United Nations (temporarily), just before this crisis and was not able to scuttle the decision with his inevitable 'Veto.' In order to resist this intolerable evil, 16 countries came together under the United Nations flag, many providing direct military assistance.

***Figure 13: The United Nations To The Rescue***

# 77 Squadron Enters the Fight

On 30 June 1950 the Australian Cabinet committed 77 Squadron RAAF and other elements of the occupation force, to the Korean war. Australia's 77 Squadron RAAF, at the time stationed at Iwakuni in Japan, had the distinction of being the first Commonwealth unit to participate in the conflict. At the time, the Squadron was under the command of Wing Commander Lou Spence who had won a DFC flying Kittyhawks in the Middle East and a second DFC in the Pacific.

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

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

***Figure 14: Seoul Railway Bridge Bombed***

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

successfully defended.

***Figure 15: UN Troops Defending Seoul***

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

# P-51D Mustang

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

The Mustang with which 77 Squadron was equipped was a single-seat, low-wing, all-metal stressed-skin monoplane with a 37ft wingspan 32ft length and a maximum permissible weight of 11,600 pounds. It was powered by one Rolls-Royce (or Packard) Merlin engine of approximately 1490 H/P, spinning a four-bladed hydromatic air-screw of 11ft diameter.

The aircraft was rated for a maximum speed of 437mph at 25,000ft, Climb 13 minutes to 30,000ft. Service ceiling 41,900ft. Drop-able external fuel tanks could be carried and these extended the range to between 1500 and 2000 nautical miles at reduced airspeed and power. In this particular version, three machine-guns of half-inch caliber were fitted in each wing and other armaments could include: bombs, depth-charges, napalm tanks, or rockets. A Lag-Computing gyroscopic gun-sight assisted with shooting accuracy. This aircraft had been a match for most enemy fighters during the Second World War.

Distinctly similar to the Spitfire, it was just as deserving of fame as that elegant British fighter. The Mustang could out-range the Spitfire by a big margin and this was one of its greatest features. One of the most important procurement decisions of the 1939-45 war would surely be the September 1940 agreement between Rolls Royce and Packard, providing for that company to manufacture the Merlin engine under license. Packard Merlins in the P-51B Mustang have the reputation of having saved the US Air force from defeat over Germany.


***Figure 16: Mustang Maintenance***

The Mustang produced certain problems for those who flew and maintained them during the campaign in Korea. Compared with jets, the vulnerable nature of the Merlin engine with its extensive glycol coolant system, its tanks full of high octane fuel, in addition to other complexities common to piston-engine planes, made the aircraft considerably more at risk when encountering anti-aircraft fire. The slower speed (compared with jets) exacerbated this problem. The Mustang's machine guns, while quite effective, lacked the punch of the Meteor's 20mm cannons. In the extremes of the Korean winter, the Mustang suffered from greater maintenance problems associated with very low temperatures than did jet aircraft in the same environment. Big men when dressed in winter flying and survival attire were sometimes incapable of functioning efficiently in the cramped cockpit. Some found it impossible and were forced to compromise or remain grounded.

In spite of these difficulties, 77 Squadron's Mustangs managed to maintain effective operations through all seasons, however the eventual process of re-equipment with Jet aircraft removed or reduced some of these problems. Extensive Mustang operations continued until April 1951, however it was obvious that a better aircraft was required.


***Figure 17: Mustang P-51D Fighter***

# Chapter 3
# Operating From Bases In Korea
## The Squadron Moves To Pohang

In October 1950, 77 Squadron moved to its first base at Pohang in the southeast near the edge of the Pusan perimeter. This was a shambles. Everyone lived under canvas surrounded by buildings destroyed by recent UN air attacks. There was no paving but an abundance of mud and freezing conditions had arrived. While the old airstrip was a mere 1350 meters it had fortunately been made of concrete by the Japanese. The RAAF supply system proved totally inadequate. However, with the immense help of the American organization, the squadron survived and continued effective operations.

Australian army troops were also inadequately provided with supplies including a complete lack of winter clothing. Again, the Americans instantly responded and RAAF Dakotas made rushed trips conveying these absolute necessities from US bases to the men of the Royal Australian Regiment still fighting in their summer uniforms.

Tragedy struck when two 77 Squadron pilots died from burns as their tent caught fire on 14 November 1950. Flight Lieutenant C. Kirkpatrick passed away later that day and W.V. Gray lingered for six more days. An electrical short on old and defective wiring caused the conflagration which was accelerated by volatile paint on the tent. The men were unable to readily extricate themselves from their sleeping bags.

The poor quality Australian equipment which was deemed to have caused this tragedy provoked Dick Cresswell to much anger which was heard in high places. Actions were taken to redress the deficiencies but the Americans were the ones who gave instant support and supply. Conditions became endurable although still quite elementary and sometimes primitive.

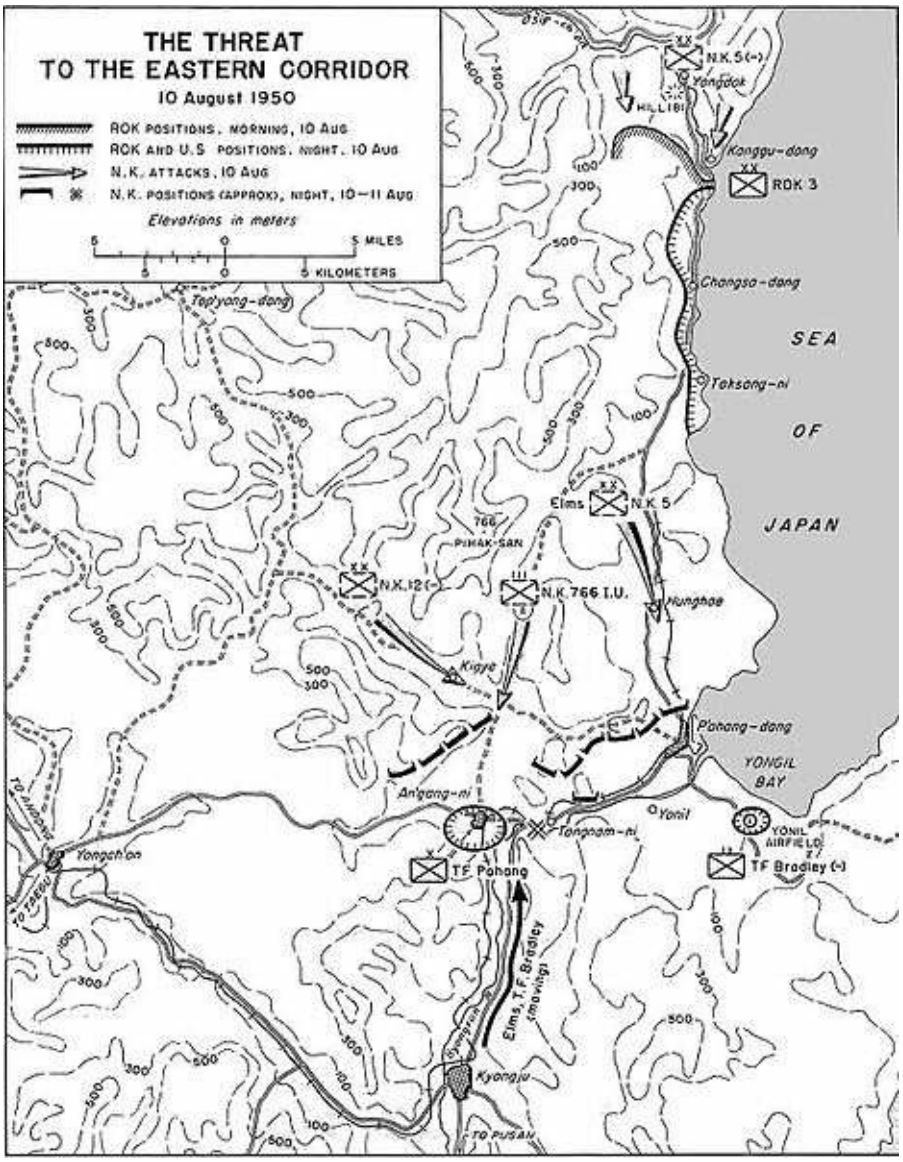



***Figure 42: 1950 Battle Map Pohang***

The squadron continued vigorous ground attacks helping drive the enemy well north of the parallel and tightening the noose around the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, which was soon in UN hands. The Mustangs also participated in bomber escort and reconnaissance missions. Such were the consistent successes, that much credence was given to MacArthur's assertion that "Fighting is definitely coming to an end." "Home by Christmas" was the cry on many lips.

But the Chinese Communists under their ruthless leader Mao Tse-tung had other ideas. After mounting a hate and dishonest propaganda campaign against the allies, they began, in secret, to move a huge army into Manchuria, and from there these troops infiltrated into North Korea.

Mao was prepared to inflict immense loss of life on the Korean people and his own troops for as long as it took to exhaust the Americans. He sought, and received, Stalin's aid in the form of equipment and clandestine 'specialist' officers. This included hundreds of aircraft. The Chinese leader had, in fact, issued a warning through India that if UN forces pressed into North Korea a massive Chinese army would repel them. These threats were not taken seriously by the Allies initially because the Chinese and Russians made their preparations in great secrecy.

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

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

***Figure 43: 77 Squadron Mustangs Escorting B-29 Bombers***

# The Desperate Fight At Hamhung

In late October 1950, the Communist Chinese, who until this time had merely been supplying arms to North Korea, entered the war with a massive surprise onslaught out of the mountains of North Korea after secretly crossing from Manchuria in a most effectively concealed infiltration maneuver.

***Figure 44: Chinese ‘Volunteers’ Assembling***

During November 1950, in order to support UN ground forces in the north east, Mustangs

of 77 Squadron, under the brilliant command of Dick Cresswell positioned to Yongpo, frequently referred to as Hamhung due to proximity. Soon there developed a desperate struggle against the multitudes of Chinese sweeping down from the Yalu.

***Figure 45: Chinese 'Volunteers' Cross The Yalu***

The 1'st US Marine Division from the 10'th Corps was in particular trouble in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir when inundated by hoards of Chinese descending from their concealment.

***Figure 46: Chosin Reservoir***

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

***Figure 47: Chosin Medical Evacuation***

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


***Figure 48: Curtis C-46 Commando Transport***

At Hamhung our pilots were only 100 kilometers from the surrounded Marines and by late November 77 Squadron was participating in the herculean air support in this battle. Dick Cresswell even lead hazardous, but vital, night attacks when possible, to the obvious surprise and discomfort of the exposed enemy. Pilots and ground crews lived and operated under extremely difficult and cold conditions but were forever aware of the much worse circumstances effecting the beleaguered Marines and Army men.

***Figure 49: Desperate Winter Retreat***

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

***Figure 50: US Marines Retreat From Chosin***

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

***Figure 51: North Korean Civilians Escape To The South***

By 24 December 1950, all who could reach Hungnam or Hamhung had been evacuated by sea or air. More than 190 ships carried 105,000 troops, 98,000 Korean civilians fleeing from the Communists, and several hundred thousand tons of supplies, mainly to Pusan on the southern tip of the peninsula. Aircrew flew through Christmas without a break.

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

# Flight Lieutenant Gordon Harvey

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

**G**ordon begins his account: *"There was an explosion in the engine. It may have been hit by small arms fire but there was no concussion, no thud or knock of a bullet striking home, only the explosion. The cockpit was full of oil and smoke and there was no power. I had to find a place to land quickly because it was impossible to gain enough altitude to bail out.*

*There was just one chance, if the ice, on the frozen Taedong River below, was thick enough to withstand the weight."*

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

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

For some months, Gordon was used as a laborer on night shift, conveying supplies around Pyongyang. The work was hard, with food and conditions deplorable. In addition to the long hours of night work, he and the other prisoners endured hard physical labor during the day, digging revetments in order to conceal trucks. Other chores included carrying water from a well half a mile away and clearing raw sewage from overflowing toilets. Countless sessions of rigorous and brutal interrogation provided some variation on the general slave-labor theme. Gordon formed the impression that UN intelligence was inadequate, as he frequently encountered on night forays ripe pickings on the grossly jammed roads and in marshaling yards, most of which, though readily available for attack, were receiving scant attention from our aircraft. These chaotic target areas were extremely vulnerable yet seemed to remain largely undetected.

Nevertheless, he did experience the attentions of rocket-firing American B-26 bombers on several nights during delivery jobs. One truck driver turned on his lights momentarily, probably to locate the narrow roadway between paddy fields. The alert bomber pilot struck! The driver lost control of the vehicle which lurched off the pathway and overturned. Perched on top of a load of firewood on the back of the truck were Gordon and his friend, an American pilot 'JB' Smith. Luckily they were thrown clear and escaped with bruises. On another occasion, when traveling by day in a truck, Gordon and all on board had a narrow escape. The vehicle was strafed and damaged by an American jet. Gordon and his companion, once again the F-80 pilot 'JB' Smith, were almost victims of 'friendly fire' from that very same aircraft type. **JB recalls the event:**

*"I remember that trip to Sinuiju very well. It was late winter or early spring. We were on a truck with about 15 or 20 civilians. It was jammed full of people and supplies including a drum of gasoline just behind the cab. We were in some pretty high hills winding our way up and getting pretty close to the top. We were probably 20 or 30 miles south of the Yalu. I think we spotted the flight of two F-80s heading north and not very high. They saw us and circled around low and out of sight. We started bailing out of the truck, both helping the*

*women and children. Just as we cleared the vehicle, they popped over the ridge and opened up with their 50s. We were all taking cover behind small tree trunks. They made only one pass. When we got back to the truck we found a bullet hole in the gasoline drum and gas leaking out. A slug had taken out about half of the steering column just below the steering wheel. The driver continued nevertheless. When he came to the top of the pass and started down he was driving like a mad man. We had visions of the steering wheel coming off in his hands. We were lucky to survive and also lucky to receive a good meal that night. They lodged us in a kitchen under guard. We watched the cook drag a couple of frozen chickens out of a snow bank. The heads and feet and a few feathers were still intact but he just took a cleaver, chopped them up and dumped them in a pot of boiling water. Damn good soup!"*

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

It was later determined that the torture he suffered at the hands of Pak by way of 'pay-back' and to make him tell of the planned escape route was the worst, by medical standards, suffered by any surviving POW in Korea. Spud told them nothing. They walked boldly through the dark and foggy streets of Pyongyang, successfully surviving no less than nine challenges by responding with indecipherable grunts and the word "Chungwa" meaning Chinese, while ambling nonchalantly on their way. They hid for the day on a hill overlooking the Taedong River.

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

Two more days and nights of bitter frustration did not produce another boat. They decided to proceed south towards the front line. Walking boldly through the town of Kyomipo,

they again survived several challenges. The going became very tough as they battled hunger, injured feet and anxiety. McGhee's feet were glued to his shoes with blood and broken blisters. Simpson suffered abominably from weakness. He had developed a craving for a steaming bowl of white rice. McGhee was later to write, "Only Harvey, the indestructible Aussie, showed no signs of wear and tear."

The end came during the seventh morning on a river bank near a place called Sariwon, 60 miles from Pak's Palace and 15 miles from the front line. Simpson, in desperation, stripped to his shorts, donned McGhee's Mae West and despite protests from the others swam to a vessel on the opposite shore. Sitting on the bank in a semi-stupor the others failed to properly conceal themselves. In the meantime, the presence of westerners and Simpson's swim roused the attention of angry and excited locals. Men, women and youngsters armed with clubs and guns charged and overpowered the fugitives. Harvey was laid low by a fearsome blow to his skull. Simpson was dragged from the shallows unconscious.

With the terrible prospect of being returned to Pak's Palace, they refused to give answers and consequently were placed in a pitch-black underground cave where political prisoners were being held in the most appalling conditions. In these tunnels, about two meters high, two meters wide and 10 meters long, prisoners sat shoulder to shoulder and were fed on two small millet balls a day.

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

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

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

door. This was their private hell for the next 26 excruciating days. After this extreme period of deprivation Gordon was down to half his normal weight.

On 23 June, the three unfortunates were moved to Pyoktong ‘University’ as this large POW camp was known. Pyoktong, a picturesque agricultural town, was encircled by wooded hills typifying the wild natural grandeur of North Korea and was adorned by an old temple on the slopes. Appearances belied the shocking reputation of this evil place. Two days later, to the great sorrow of his companions, Simpson died as a direct result of the consistent maltreatment.

It is McGhee’s contention that while many things contributed, it was probably something Simpson saw that principally caused his demise. When imprisoned in one of the political-prisoner caves the three escapees had witnessed the ultimate in brutality. The wife of a Korean prisoner, huddling close to his cell, was trying to breast feed her baby. The child’s incessant cries annoyed the Korean jailer. In a fury he kicked the infant out of its mother’s arms and then kicked it against the wall, silencing it forever. Then, while the distraught husband and the three escapees watched in horror the sergeant kicked the mother to death. Simpson never recovered from this. It was one more diabolical act than he could stand. He died two months later with the vacant ‘500-mile stare’, the ominous, heedless gaze so readily recognizable as the precursor of death. He was still seeing that mother and child.

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

***Figure 52: Gordon Harvey Attends Briefing (Gordon Is In Center)***

## *More Pilot Tragedies*

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

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

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

Less than a week later, on 20 March 1951, Keith Meggs helped with the rescue of his friend Cec Sly from a most precarious position in enemy territory. Cec, hit by flak, with his engine on fire and smoke in the cockpit had no option but to bail-out over enemy lines and endure small-arms fire both during the descent and after landing. The Mustang cockpit, being fairly narrow, was not always easy for a bail out, some pilots merely released the canopy, unstrapped and inverted the aircraft.

***Figure 53: Mustang Cockpit***

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

As a result of Keith's radio calls, four 77 Squadron Mustangs led by Vic Cannon and four

US Mustangs joined him in defending Cec against the encroaching enemy troops, and an American helicopter was called in. A dramatic battle ensued in what was to be recognized as one of the biggest rescues of the war. Soon there were 16 Mustangs circling and firing on the advancing enemy infantry, disrupting their efforts to locate and capture or kill the downed pilot. As the sections of four fighters expended their ammunition they were replaced by four more. In all, 28 Mustangs became involved and the enemy troops were largely kept at bay. A helicopter accompanied by a T6 Texan control aircraft arrived after about 20 minutes. In response to signals from Cec the T6 called the chopper which descended to about 20 meters in the vicinity of the downed pilot. Unfortunately, after his aircraft was damaged by intense ground fire, the pilot, Captain Oz McKenzie, was forced to depart. The chopper was a ‘write-off’ as a result of the extreme flak damage.


***Figure 54: Emblem Of USAF Air Rescue Service***

About one hour later a second Helicopter, piloted by Captain Lynden E. Thomasson arrived and was again led to Sly’s position by the T6 spotter aircraft. Disregarding the ground fire which was still quite menacing, the chopper landed within ten yards of Cec who was able to break cover and scramble on board with the assistance of the crew. Cec advised the pilot to depart northward although this was away from home; he had learned where the enemy fire was coming from and this initial-climb path proved to be the most prudent. Cec had been on the ground, in enemy territory from approximately 8am until

10am.

***Figure 55: Sikorsky H-5 Rescue Helicopter***

***Figure 56: Texan" Spotter Aircraft***

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

***Figure 57: Cec Sly In Cockpit***

# *Mustang Operations Finish for 77 Squadron*

On 6 April 1951 the Squadron flew its last Mustang sorties. In the first nine months of the Korean War they had flown over 11,000 hours during 3,872 sorties varying in length from as little as half an hour in the desperate battles of the Pusan Perimeter, to more than six hours when flying out of Japan. The average was about three hours in length. This was a great tribute to both the men who flew and to the ground support and maintenance staff who had also endured dangers and deplorable living conditions throughout much of the Squadron operations in Korea. On 17 April 1951 Roy Robson was killed during a Mustang night cross country flight making him the 13’th squadron pilot killed or captured in the Korean War.

# Chapter 2
# Operations from Iwakuni Base
## Early Mustang Missions

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

***Figure 18: Japanese Soldier Employed To Guard Our Camp***

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

***Figure 19: 77 Squadron Mustangs At Iwakuni***

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Death of the C/O — Wing Commander Spence

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

***Figure 20: Wing Commander Lou Spence — DFC And Bar***

## Arrival Of Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell

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

***Figure 21: Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell***

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

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

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

# Progress Of The War In Korea
# The Critical Early Phase

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

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

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

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


***Figure 22: North Korean Russian T-34 Tanks***

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

***Figure 23: US Army Prepares To Evacuate Taejon***

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

including Mustangs of Australia’s 77 Squadron flying long sorties from Japan.

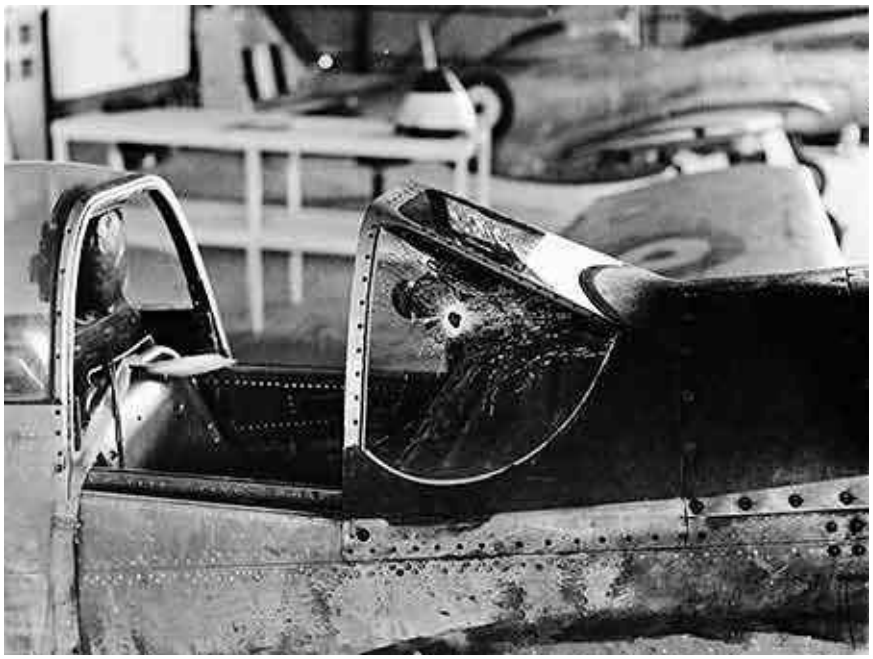


***Figure 24: RAAF Mustang Flak Damage***

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

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

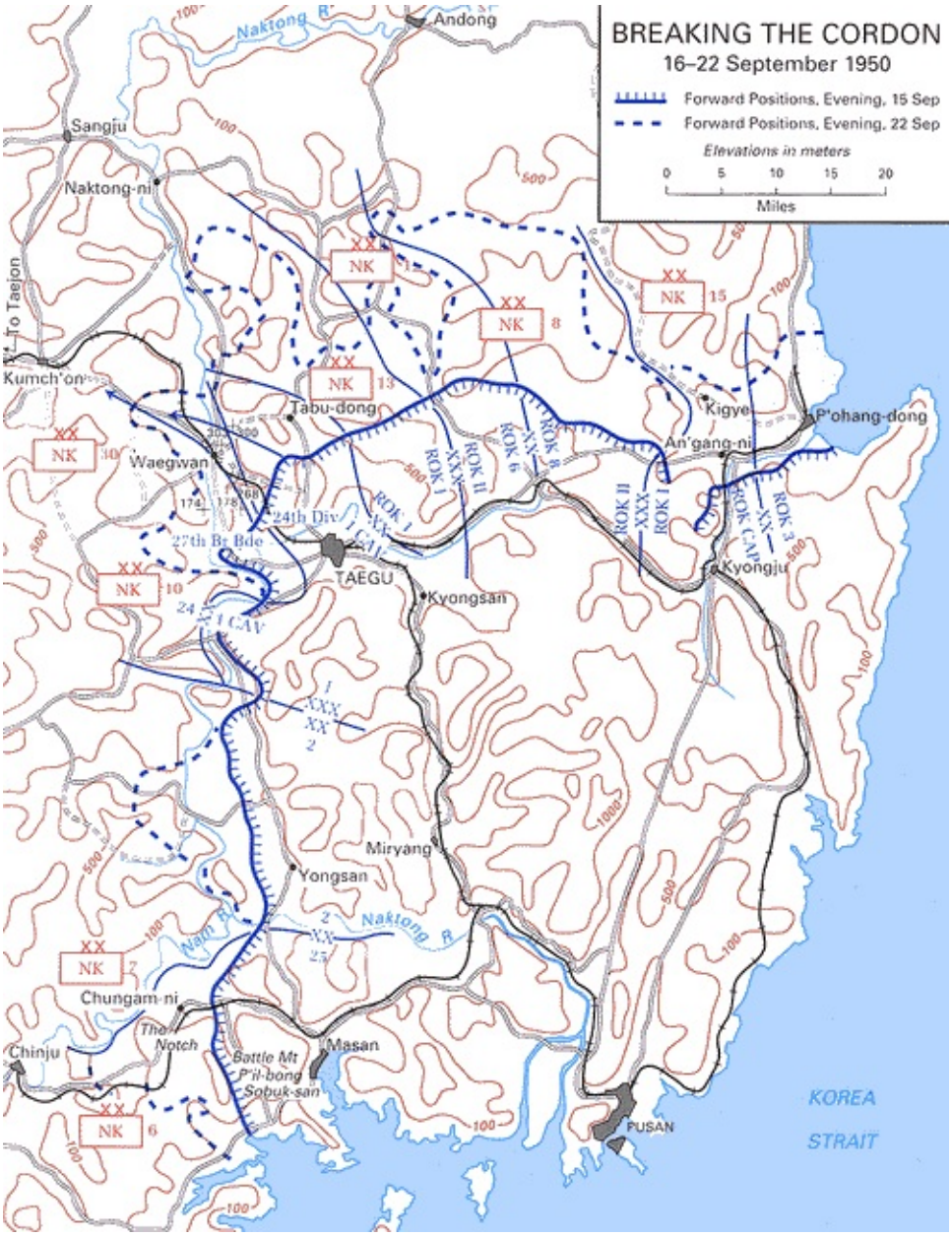



***Figure 25: The Precarious Pusan Perimeter — 1950***

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

Thus, the UN established the Pusan Perimeter in a location outlined by the Sea of Japan to the south and east, the Naktong River to the west, and extremely mountainous terrain to the north, using the terrain as a natural defense. However the rough terrain also made communication difficult, particularly for the South Korean forces in the P'ohang-dong area. Nevertheless the South Korean troops fought tenaciously to defend their country.

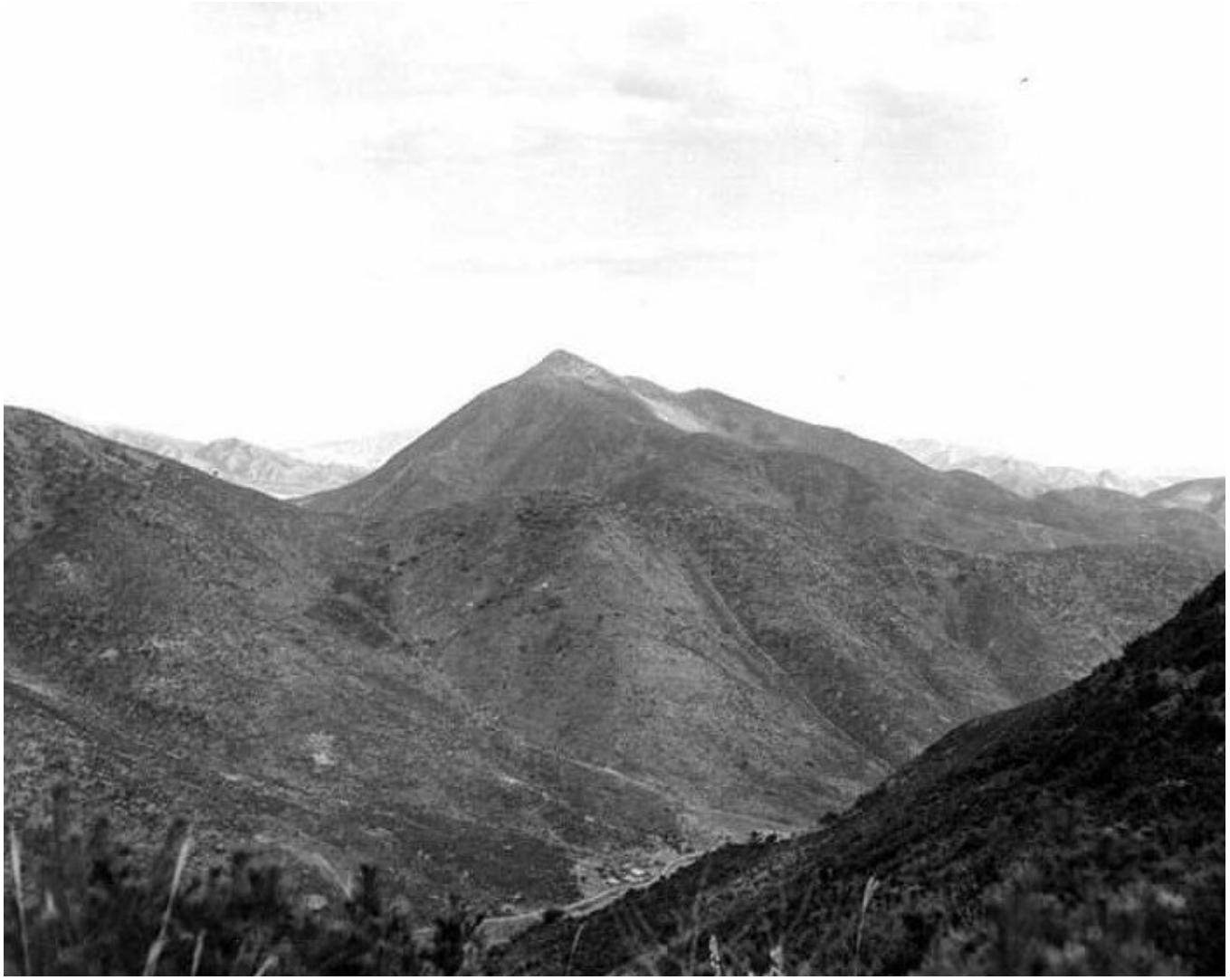


***Figure 26: Saddle Ridge, Taegu — Pusan North Perimeter Territory***

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

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

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

The United Nations forces were organized under the command of the United States Army. The Eighth United States Army served as the headquarters component for the UN forces,

and was headquartered at Taegu. Under it were three weak US divisions; the 24th Infantry Division had been brought to the country early in July, while the 1st Cavalry Division and 25th Infantry Division arrived between July 14 and July 18. These forces occupied the western segment of the perimeter, along the Naktong River.


***Figure 27: American Tank Near Naktong River***

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

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

***Figure 28: UN Troops Guarding Naktong Valley***

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

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

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

***Figure 29: UN Troops Unload At Pusan***

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

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

***Figure 30: South Korean Troops fought fiercely At Pohang***

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

***Figure 31: Two North Korean T-34 Tanks Destroyed***

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

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

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

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

***Figure 32: HMAS Sydney At Anchor In Korean Waters***

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

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

***Figure 33: HMAS Sydney with Fireflies Off Korean Coast***

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

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

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

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

From Pusan a good railroad system built by the Japanese and well ballasted with crushed rock and river gravel extended northward. The railroads were the backbone of the UN

transportation system in Korea. The 20,000 mi (32,000 km) of Korean vehicular roads were mainly of a secondary nature.

***Figure 34: US Troops Carrying Casualty***

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

In mid-July 1951 the UN Far East Air Force Bomber Command began a steady and increasing campaign against strategic North Korean logistics targets. The first of these targets was Wonsan on the east coast. Wonsan was important as a communications center that linked Vladivostok, Siberia, with North Korea by rail and sea. From it, rail lines ran to

all the North Korean build-up centers. The great bulk of Russian supplies for North Korea in the early part of the war came in at Wonsan, and from the beginning it was considered a major military target.

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

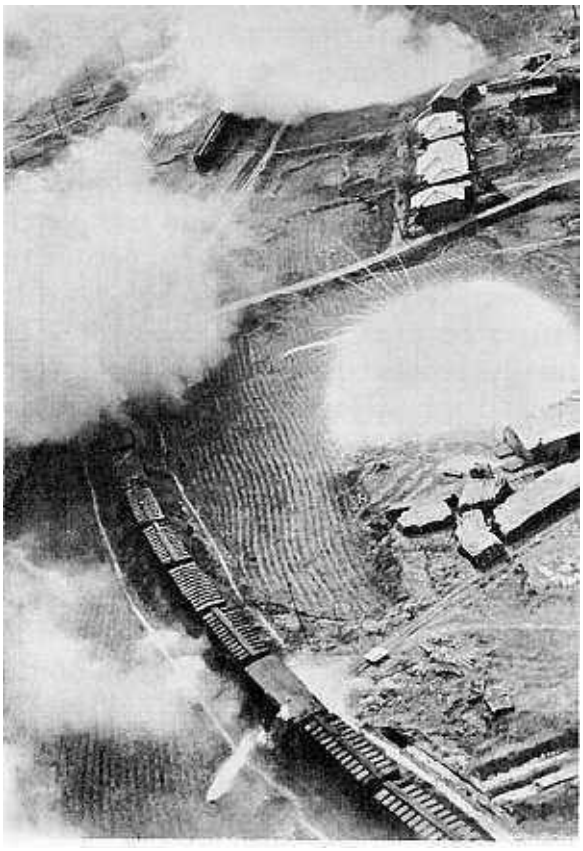


***Figure 35: UN Aircraft Rocketing Enemy Train***

On August 4 1951, FEAF began B-29 interdiction attacks against all key bridges north of the 37th Parallel in Korea and, on August 15, light bombers and fighter-bombers joined in the interdiction campaign. North Korea's lack of large airstrips and aircraft meant it conducted only minimal air resupply, mostly critical items being imported from China. Other than this, however, aircraft played almost no role in North Korean logistics. The North Koreans were also not able to effectively use sea transport. Ports in Wonsan and Hungnam could be used for the transport of some troops and supplies, but they remained far too underdeveloped to support any large-scale logistical movements, and the port of Incheon in the south was difficult to navigate with large numbers of ships due to extreme tides.

The supremacy of the Fifth Air Force in the skies over Korea forced the North Koreans in the first month of the war to resort to night movement of supplies to the battle area. They relied primarily on railroads to move supplies to the front, however a shortage of trucks

posed the most serious problem of getting supplies from the trains to individual units, forcing them to rely on carts and pack animals. The North Korea Army was able to maintain transport to its front lines over long lines of communications despite heavy and constant air attacks. The United Nations air effort failed to halt military rail transport. Ammunition and motor fuel, which took precedence over all other types of supply, continued to arrive at the front, though in smaller amounts than before.

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


***Figure 36: USAF Douglas B-26 Bombers In Action Over Korean Targets***

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

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

and retreated towards the Manchurian border in abject defeat.


***Figure 37: Korea 1950. (Green, Pusan Perimeter). (Blue Arrow, Incheon)***

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

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

***Figure 38: US Army General Douglas MacArthur***

## MacArthur Turns The Tables

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

The Battle of Incheon was an amphibious invasion and battle of the Korean War that resulted in a decisive victory and strategic reversal in favor of the United Nations (UN). The operation involved some 75,000 troops and 261 naval vessels, and led to the recapture of the South Korean capital Seoul two weeks later.

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

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

South Korea was soon back in the hands of its owners as the desperate North Koreans, deprived of food and ammunition, faded away into the mountains. It is estimated that, of

an invasion force of 90,000 North Koreans a mere 25,000 eventually returned to their own territory north of the 38'th parallel. Many of their conscripts were South Koreans, and undoubtedly these would have headed for their homes at the first opportunity.

***Figure 39: Marines Land At Incheon***

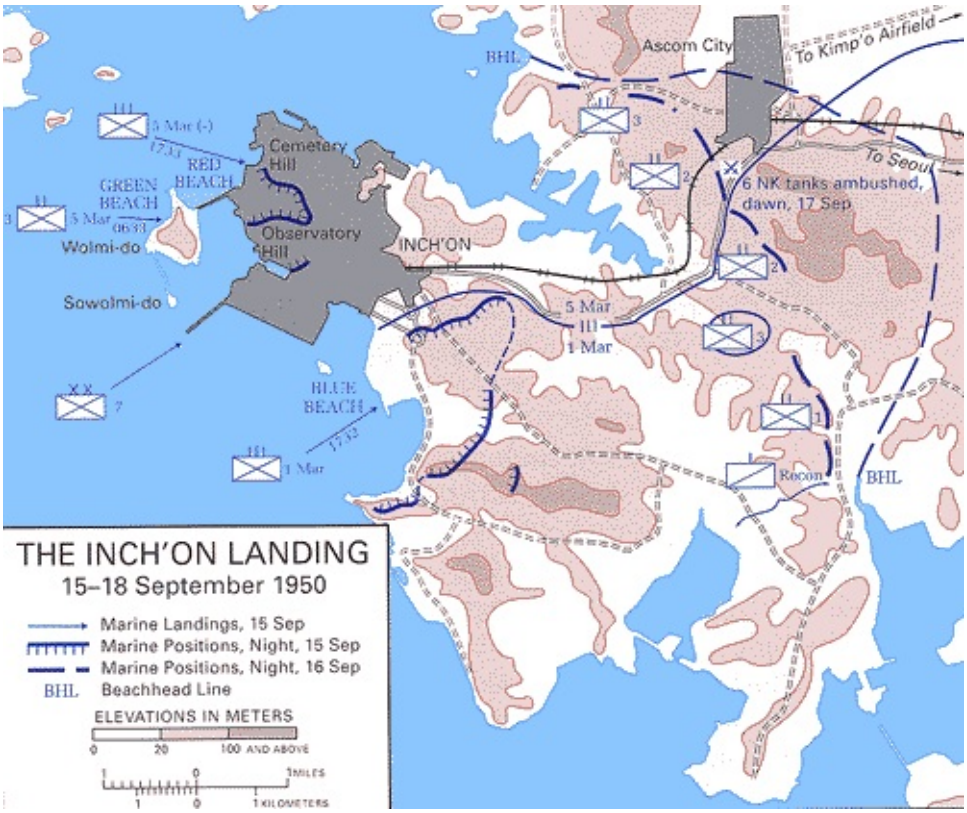


*Figure 40: The Most Successful Incheon Landing*

*Figure 41: MacArthur Approaching Incheon*

# Chapter 4
# The Squadron Equips with New Aircraft
## Jet Fighters — A Quantum Leap

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

***Figure 58: Two North American F-86 Sabres***

It was decided the British twin-engine Gloster Meteor Mk-8 would be the best available alternative for continued operations by 77 Squadron. Early plans to send several senior pilots to Britain for extensive meteor experience were abandoned and arrangements were made for RAF instructors to train pilots at Iwakuni.

Additionally, two senior 77 Squadron pilots gained experience by training and doing sorties with the American 35’th Fighter Group currently flying Lockheed F-80s in Korean combat operations. Dick Cresswell and Des Murphy acquired valuable experience during this phase and were able to pass on much vital information and develop appropriate techniques for squadron Meteor operations.

A 13-man RAAF technical team under the command of Squadron Leader Leopold undertook training at the Gloster plant in England, and also at several RAF Meteor units where they were given extensive and thorough tuition and experience.

The Squadron was withdrawn to Iwakuni for re equipment on 6 April 1951 and four months later, after conversion training on the new jets, re-positioned to what was to become its permanent Korean War base at Kimpo, near Seoul.

This formidable USAF air base was designated K-14. 77 Squadron was attached to the United States 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing under the command of Colonel Harrison R. Thyng, an F-86 fighter Ace credited with five MiG kills.

***Figure 59: Colonel Harrison R Thyng USAF, In His Sabre***

This bitter and destructive war contained elements of air combat never before experienced, as jet clashed with jet in the frigid North Korean skies. Some of us from No 5 Course, now training at Point Cook, were destined to become part of that jet-combat war.


***Figure 60: F-80s — American Early Type Jet Fighters, Over Korea***

## Meteor Mk-8s for 77 Squadron

This robust fighter and its two-seat trainer version, the Mk 7, were the only aircraft operated by the Squadron during the remaining period of hostilities, which ended on 27 July 1953. For many 77 Squadron pilots the conversion from Mustangs to Meteors was their first operation of a jet aircraft. For some it was also their first twin-engine experience. It would be reasonable to say that most would have enjoyed the training as they encountered the almost silent, smooth and vastly superior performance.

The Gloster Meteor Mk.8 single-seat Fighter and its two-seat trainer version, the Mk.7 were pressurized aircraft fitted with two Rolls-Royce Derwent jet engines, each developing 3600 pounds of thrust. Dimensions were approximately, 37ft wingspan, 45ft length and 13ft height. It was basically a 19,000 pounds and 600 mph aircraft with a

service ceiling of 43,000 feet (although this was well above its useful operating height). The nominal range was 600 miles. The Meteor was armed with four 20mm cannons point-harmonized at 800 yards and eight or 16 rockets of various types could be fitted.

The fighter was equipped with a Martin-Baker ejection seat but this facility was not available in the Mk.7. This deficiency made the trainer version a dangerous proposition for bailing out as the attempt could be expected to result in the pilots making damaging, or even fatal contact with the aircraft structure when trying to jump clear. The engines and air-frame were sturdy and capable of withstanding considerable punishment from the pilot and the enemy. 77 Squadron was equipped with 90 Meteors all told. Of these, 54 were destroyed during the Korean conflict, a few downed by MiGs but the majority shot down by anti-aircraft fire.

***Figure 61: Meteor Mk-8 Fighters***

# The Martin Baker Ejection-seat fitted to the Mk-8 Meteor

The purpose of the ejection seat is to enable a pilot to abandon a fast moving aircraft without the problems of undue delay and the likelihood of being hit by some part of the aircraft, a real hazard when jumping out in the old conventional manner. The difficulties of leaving the aircraft at high speed made the installation of an ejection seat an absolute necessity in jet fighters.

The Martin Baker seat had the pilot's parachute incorporated as a backrest and his dinghy with flat rubber water bottle was set in the base as a seat-cushion. A harness secured the pilot to his parachute and dinghy pack and other straps attached him to the seat. There were two footrests, two thigh guards, a headrest, and the whole installation was mounted on vertical rails. An ejection gun fired an explosive charge when the pilot pulled a handle located immediately above the headrest and this action simultaneously positioned a blind which protected the pilot's face against the high-speed air flow. At the same time the canopy was blown off, if it had not already been jettisoned by the pilot, and the seat and pilot were instantly fired, like a projectile, clear of the aircraft.

Another gun, which released a drogue parachute stowed in a container behind the pilot's headrest, was then automatically fired by means of a static line attached to the cockpit and did not operate until the seat was well clear of the aircraft. The small drogue parachute served to slow and stabilize the seat, enabling the pilot, when ready, to release his straps thereby dropping the seat in order to make a normal parachute descent. The pilot's mask and emergency oxygen were attached to the parachute harness as a safeguard against high-

altitude bail-outs.

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

It is interesting to note that he also had been involved, as a trainee pilot, in some development work with high ‘G’ force research. It was recognized that airmen were suffering from adverse blood draining, particularly from the cranium, during flight maneuvers involving high accelerations. Professor Cotton of Sydney University was delving into the design of a ‘G Suit’ for pilots. This wearing apparel, per medium of inflatable bladders installed at crucial points in the garment, was intended to bring pressure to bear at vital body points so as to hold the blood where it belonged. The bladders would pressurize and deflate according to detected forces.

Members of Ron’s pilot’s course became volunteer ‘guinea pigs’ as they experienced the centrifuge at considerable rotational speeds in both the ‘with and without’ G Suit modes. It is Ron’s impression that while the University experiment produced more sustained forces, the experience did not equal the tremendous, instant thrust of ejection. Ron felt that by doing the University tests he had contributed to the development of important equipment. Sadly, G Suits were not available to 77 Squadron during that vital era of MiG encounters. This deficiency was detrimental to our pilots’ air-fighting capability and also to their vascular systems, as evidenced by the number who suffered associated health problems in later years.

***Figure 62: Martin Baker Ejection Seat***

# Meteor Conversion Training — Iwakuni, April 1951

**F**our Royal Air Force Meteor pilots led by Flight Lieutenant Max Scannell were posted to

77 Squadron to test-fly the aircraft and to convert the Australian pilots onto type. The first RAAF pilot to convert was Squadron Leader Dick Cresswell who had already completed a jet conversion course and a number of combat missions on the American F-80 Shooting Star with the USAF in January. **Ron Guthrie has given an account of his own experiences during that period.**

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

***Figure 63: The Horror Of Hiroshima***

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

***Figure 64: Same View Of Hiroshima Today***

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

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

*"In early May 1951 an F-86A Sabre from the USAF was detached to Iwakuni to fly a series of performance comparisons between itself and the Meteor to help determine the role to which the Meteor was best suited, ground attack or interceptor. After two days of testing the Meteor had proved it had a superior rates of climb and turn, even though it was generally slower than the Sabre. Unfortunately, the Meteor had also shown one major deficiency in that it lacked maneuverability at high altitude. An argument erupted between the Australians and the Americans as to how the Meteor was to be employed, with Creswell and Scannell arguing that although the Meteor had shortcomings, it should be used as an interceptor.*

*After discussions with US 5th Air Force Headquarters, it was decided to try the Meteor as an interceptor and on 2 June the Squadron was ordered back to Korea. The move was delayed, however, due to the USAF insisting each Meteor be fitted with a radio compass before being allowed to fly in Korea. This essential piece of equipment enabled the pilot to 'home' onto a radio beacon. Fondly referred to as the "Bird Dog" — operations without this facility would have been folly indeed!"*

*"The next loss of a Meteor was quite startling. While standing on the flight line I heard a*

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

*"After two rides in the trainer with F/Lt Max Scannell, I went solo in the fighter, a memorable event. I climbed rapidly to 41,000 feet, the highest I had ever been. My conversion program continued through June with high-level combat exercises, formation work and air-to-ground gunnery and rocketry, regrettably using as a target a beautiful little island in the Inland Sea.*

*During training, a few of us were granted 10 days leave. Several of us took this break at Kawana, an Australian Army resort on Tokyo bay. Like a magnificent country club, this resort boasted all facilities including two golf courses. I took lessons. The caddies were teenage girls who took delight in teaching us, and out-driving us, which was not so difficult! Looking along the fairways we could see across Tokyo Bay and dominating the whole area was Mount Fuji, or Fuji-san as the Japanese affectionately called it. With movies by night and golf by day the week was soon gone and I was back at Iwakuni finishing my conversion."*

***Figure 65: Iwakuni And Famous Kintai Bridge, Today***

*"Training was finalized, and on 26 July 1951 I found myself, in company with another Meteor, winging our way across the Korea Strait heading for Kimpo near Seoul where our*

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

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

***Figure 66: Wes Guy (L) And Eric Ramsay***

# MiG-15

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

**Specifications of Significance:** Max Speed: 668 miles per hour — Climb:10,000 feet per minute — Ceiling: 51,000 feet — Range: 885 miles

**A**n estimate during the period February to May 1952 stated that it was 'understood' the enemy had some 850 MiG-15 aircraft available to be rotated, as desired, for participation in the Korean air war. Of that total, the enemy operated, by rotation, some 350 MiGs from airfields at Antung, Fencheng, Takushan and Tatunku. It was felt that the provision of adequate numbers of proficient MiG pilots was posing a problem for the enemy.

It was learned that most were Russians, however some Chinese pilots qualified as time went by and began to take a more active part by the end of 1951. The standard of MiG pilot battle performance varied a great deal, but given the vast tactical advantages of their

location and the superiority of numbers and the MiG itself, it would appear, in the light of their combat losses, that the enemy fighter pilot standard was generally inadequate. This assessment in mid 1952 allowed that improved performance must be expected as their experience and training progressed.

***Figure 67: Cockpit Of A MiG-15***

## Meteor Versus MiG — Appraisal

The MiG-15 used during the Korean War by the Communist forces was generally superior in performance to the Meteor Mk.8 which was operated by 77 Squadron. This was particularly so at high altitudes, the levels at which most of the combat took place. While a Meteor had to be 'nursed' at heights of 40,000 feet or so, the MiG seemed to thrive at even greater altitudes. Added to this was the height advantage which the MiGs enjoyed by climbing to 50,000 feet or more over neutral Manchuria prior to diving down to engage UN aircraft. Another great advantage which the MiG displayed was its spectacular rate of climb. In this important area the Russian aircraft significantly outperformed the Meteor at all altitudes by as much as 3,000 ft/minute, an enormous advantage. The MiG's speed was much greater than the Meteor by approximately 70 miles per hour. The MiG's 37 mm cannon was a slow-firing but powerful weapon. This was backed up by a pair of 23mm cannons. Nevertheless, the concentrated firepower of the Meteor's four 20 mm cannons gave the British aircraft some advantage under certain circumstances. While the 37mm weapon was most effective against a huge bomber, it was not so useful against a smaller and more nimble target.

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

***Figure 68: MiG-15 Russian High-Altitude Jet Fighter***

# Chapter 5
# The “Reprobates” Graduation — Point Cook

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

## Reward For Diligence

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

***Figure 69: Wirraway Trainer***

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

***Figure 70: Navigation Flight Briefing, L-R, Outhwaite, Kichenside, Law, Cowper, King, McPhan, Robinson, and Instructor Pat Gallagher***

As a Course we had earned a formidable reputation in the eyes of some of the instructors, one going so far as to say, “Number five course members are a bunch of reprobates!”. We rather fancied ourselves in this role and the name has stuck with the survivors of our small group. The title was refreshed many years later as we gathered at Tweed Heads for our Reprobate’s Reunions. The final big event was our Wings Parade. We 21 survivors of these rigorous flight tests and examinations were now to receive our reward, the much coveted RAAF pilot’s wings. Imbued with the healthy pride of youthful fulfillment, we

marched onto the Point Cook drill-square for the last time. We had faith in one another and in our own immortality. It remained now for the festivities to be enjoyed and we could then say farewell to Point Cook. The celebration was quite a party.

***Figure 71: Author Boarding Wirraway***

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

***Figure 72: Trophy Winners. L-R, Ian Cranston (Sport), Ken Smith (Total Aggregate), Col King (Most Proficient Pilot)***

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

***Figure 73: Max Holsworth Briefs, L-R, Dick Robinson (killed - Korea), Ian Cranston (killed - Korea), Ken Smith (Killed - Korea), Max Outhwaite (survived Korea)***

Some people, particularly those who have never been in the services, push the idea that the Air Force training is the ‘easy way into flying’ because it is ‘all paid for.’ A few months at Point Cook would revise the opinions of people who regard the RAAF as the easy way. They would realize the burden of finding money paled somewhat against the realities of ceaseless grind and discipline. The scrub rate of those who did not measure up was uncompromising, and competition was fierce. In addition to this, military training aircraft utilized modern equipment with retractable wheels, constant speed air-screws fitted to fairly powerful engines, radios, full instrument panels, flaps, brakes and many other

refinements. Almost no Aero-club aircraft was equipped with even one of these complications in those days. In spite of all this, I could never forget the grind and frustration of those years of laboring on farms and at a stinking tannery in Botany, in order to do one hour of Aero-club training per month. I will always admire the tenacity of pilots who did it that particular ‘hard’ way, nevertheless they cannot compare it with the stress of the Point Cook system.

***Figure 74: PILOT GRADUATES, 5 COURSE, L-R: (Back) Leon Gordon, Dick Glassey, Jim Codd, Jack Evans, Gordon Brown, Alan Wall, Stan Hyland, Col Roffe. (Center) Dick Robinson, Col King, Ken McPhan, Ken Smith, S/Lt Gus Gray (RAN), Russ Law, Barry Ellis, Jim Kichenside, Tom Mansell. (Front) Ian Cranston, John Parker, Max Outhwaite, Ray Knight, Andy Stapleton***

## Mustang Training — RAAF Base Archerfield, Queensland

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


***Figure 75: Archerfield, (L-R) Kichenside, Smith, King, Outhwaite***

Next morning, our legitimacy having been established, we find ourselves thoroughly embroiled in Mustang training under the expert guidance of the good Ken McAtee. The Mustang P51 fighter of WW2 fame is to be our basic fighter and ground attack trainer. This will lead up to the Vampire single engine jet fighter in preparation for our work weapon, the Meteor Mk8 twin-engine jet fighter, ground-attack machine with which 77 Squadron is now being equipped. As there is no dual trainer for the Mustang, McAtee prepares us for the experience, by the following program: Firstly we fly a number of circuits in a Wirraway, executing zero-flap landings from the back seat. This produces some semblance of the speeds and ‘blind’ approach attitude of the Mustang. We regard the aircraft as somewhat ‘blinding’ to the pilot’s forward view, due to the long sleek nose, with the big Merlin engine. After lectures, study and exams, we are tested by a thorough check in the cockpit. Flying is next!

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

ritual and soon begin a slow taxi to the take-off point. With canopy closed and secured and brakes on I run through the memory list:

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

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

Turns, stalls in various configurations and a few aerobatics follow. By way of losing some altitude I experiment with a few turns of a spin. We lose about 1,000 feet in each auto-rotation. Some aircraft! Such exhilaration! Before becoming too smug I have to face the fact that an interested and critical audience will shortly be assembled to watch the landing. A few practice circuits at altitude in the training area consolidate the procedures and checks. “No more excuses now, this is it!” Before joining the circuit I clear the engine by briefly increasing to almost maximum power. This warms the motor after low power descending and ensures instant and full response will be available if needed in a hurry. Downwind, I set flaps to 20 degrees. Voice follows hands around the cockpit. “Auto, Auto Un-rammed / Filtered, Brakes Off, Fuel OK, Booster On, Hydraulics OK, Gear Down and green lights, Mixture Run, Pitch Full Fine, Supercharger Auto.” Then as we settle onto final, approach, “Flaps Full! Now just where is that ground?” The setting sun is there to torment as we cross the threshold at 100 knots. The ground has to be close, so “Off with the remaining power and let us settle gently!” Peering anxiously along the left cowling, as the nose gradually lifts into the great orb of the setting sun, there seems to be little concept of height, but we are sinking steadily! Suddenly, to my consternation the stick is fully back and now, we sink! The eventual and inevitable thud announces our positive arrived! At least we are spared the indignity of a bounce. On coming to a stop I remember to push the control stick forward to release the tail wheel for the 180 degrees turn to taxi back to my judge and jury. The reception is warm and enthusiastic. Ken McAtee ads to his congratulations a completely unnecessary piece of advice, “Perhaps you could bring it a bit closer to Mother Earth next time before stalling.” We move to the bar and of course the drinks are on me. For a few hours at least, I am a more important and much more

experienced pilot than my companions.

***Figure 76: Author Celebrating Mustang Solo***

# No 3 Squadron, RAAF Base Fairbairn Canberra

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

***Figure 77: No:3 Squadron Mustangs***

**J**ust after arriving at Canberra I had a box seat experience of another pilot's moment of anxiety. As I was idling my Mustang in the pre-take-off position waiting for clearance, the

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


***Figure 78: Harry Brown-Gaylord’s Prang***

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

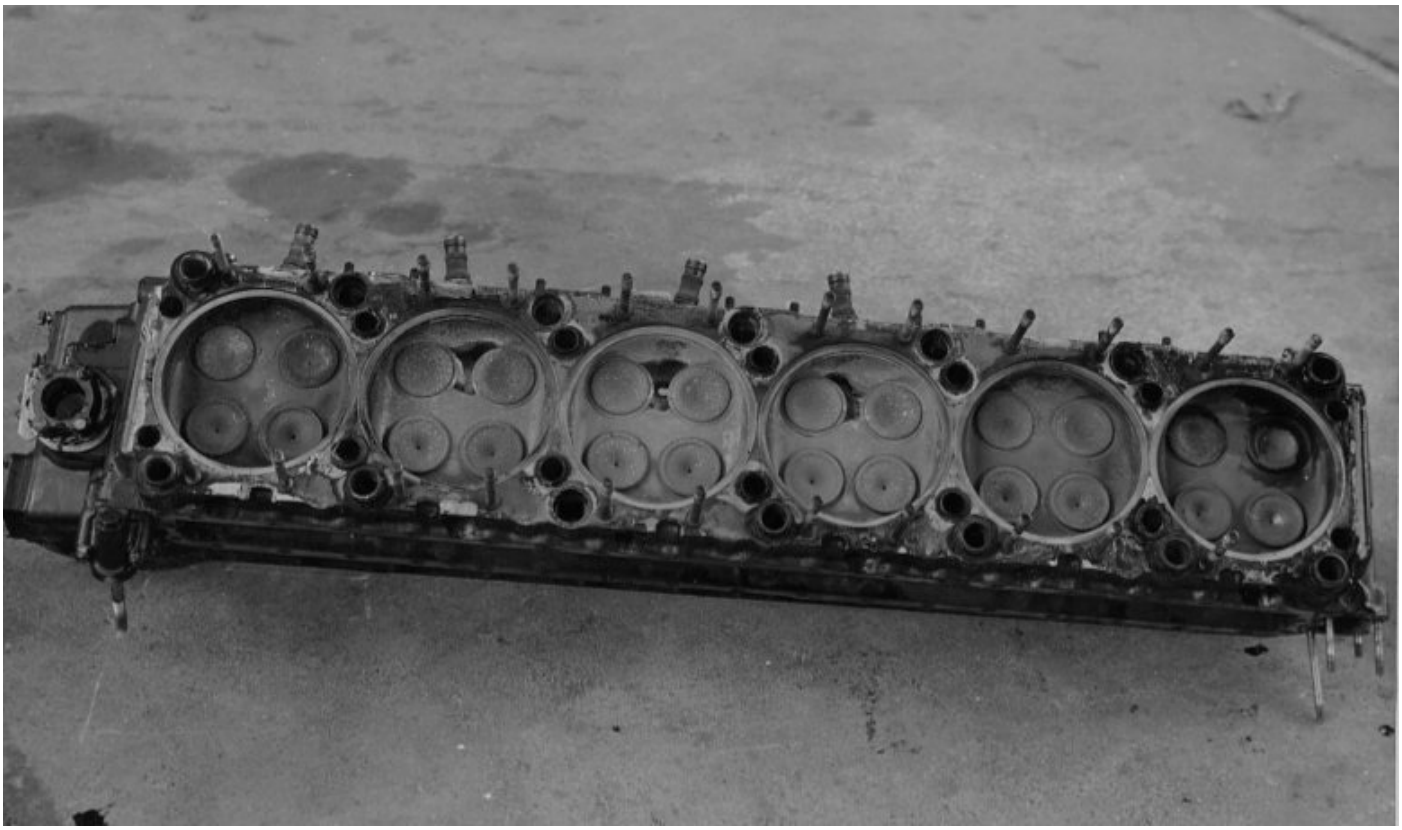


***Figure 79: Merlin Cylinder Head After Glycol Loss***

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

The other pilots were all finished as there was a storm brewing. My situation was rapidly appraised by the officer in charge of night flying, Flight Lieutenant Bill Purssey. Hastily securing a jeep with a two-way radio, he positioned himself as close to the threshold as prudence would permit. Bill then required a practice approach under his critical eye. Losing sight of the runway was a problem and the hazards increased with the development of a stiffening breeze with increasing crosswind. Finally we developed a technique of approaching at a slightly oblique angle, and aligning with the runway lights in the last few seconds. This worked! The aircraft seemed to float until placed firmly on its wheels. It was not the smoothest landing I recall and the runway was just long enough. The storm waited patiently until this exercise was complete, then vented its fury. I was grateful for the assistance and advice given by Bill Purssey. This fine officer was also killed by ground fire, at Chinampo, North Korea on 22 April 1952. I was there in the squadron at the time.

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

***Figure 80: RAAF Canberra (Circa,1950)***

# RAAF Base Williamtown — Fighter Operational Training Unit

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

The day after arrival, we are treated to a demonstration of RAAF bureaucracy at work. One peculiarity of the system, is the requirement to return your oxygen tube on obtaining clearance from a station, and then receive a new issue of that essential item at the next base. The tube connects one’s personal oxygen mask to the aircraft supply, so essential to flight. We go to stores for our tubes. “Sorry Sarge” says the casual stores Corporal, “76 Squadron gets issues on Tuesdays.” Accepting this, as we are not flying until after lunch on Tuesday, we are back at the store next morning. “A flight or B flight?” asks the efficient Corporal. “B flight.” “Well you’ll have to come back this afternoon, only A flight in the mornings.” Protests that we have to be airborne just after lunch, and that there is a

war on, fall on deaf ears. We can see the coveted tubes on the shelves, and he has no other customers. However the good Corporal does have the power to exert his authority and he obviously believes that the RAAF would be an ideal institution if it were not for the planes and pilots. Higher authority eventually releases the urgently needed items amid protests about “Bending the rules.”

Mustangs training proceeds vigorously, gunnery, rocketry, advanced fighter and bomber encounters and cross-country exercises. Gunnery incorporates live firing on ground targets and towed air targets. We attack each other and Lincoln bombers using camera guns. Live rocketry is accomplished against stationary ground targets and against a ‘splash target’ towed by a naval vessel. The first practice at high altitude fighting is a most enlightening experience due mainly to low air density providing a poor supply of dynamic pressure, so essential to flight. At 35.000 to 40,000 feet the Mustang has to be nursed all the time. It is a careful balancing act to execute anything even approaching a rate one (3 degrees per second) turn at constant altitude. Such a turn requires just over 30 degrees of bank due to the relatively high true airspeed. Maximum power is necessary. The ‘speed’ showing on the indicator is about 120 knots but this is purely a representation of dynamic pressure. The actual speed which must be used in calculations of rate and radius of turn is about 240 knots. This is the True Airspeed, the rate at which particles of air are passing. The poor dynamic air pressure availability, as represented by the 120 ‘knots IAS’ brings the aircraft near to a stall. That is to say the dynamic pressure is marginally capable of sustaining a turn at constant height. It becomes more so if bank increases because an increased lift force is now required to produce a higher rate of turn while still holding the aircraft at a constant height. The lift vector has to provide the forces which both pull the aircraft around the turn and also counterbalance the weight, so that height can be maintained. The wings are meeting the air at a critically high angle and soon turbulence begins as the smooth flow breaks away. A stall actually occurs when the air flow over the lifting surfaces becomes turbulent and loses its lift-producing qualities. A fully stalled Mustang loses height, possibly in a spinning motion. When operating at high altitude, any attempt at a forceful maneuver in a high performance fighter is to invite a spin, with a height loss of about fifteen hundred feet per rotation. One such happening is sufficient to produce a pilot with the gentlest touch. A further impediment to efficiency, is the poor visibility or more correctly ‘see-ability’ at high altitude. Due to the lack of minute hygroscopic nuclei, which serve to reflect light in all directions, the surprising fact is that relatively close objects, such as your enemy aircraft, are simply harder to see at high altitude than at the same distance when down among the somewhat more polluted atmosphere, strange! It all has to do with lack of reflected light at altitude.

Mustang pilots took turns at towing a large target ‘flag’ for live ammunition air attacks by both Mustangs and Vampire jets. We in fact used a mesh screen about 30 feet long by 6 feet deep on 1,000 feet of tow-rope attached to a bracket extending below the right wing of a Mustang. Before take-off the screen and coiled rope were laid out on the airstrip behind the aircraft’s wing. The Mustang would climb steeply in order to snatch the screen into the air. The tow aircraft, then cruising near the coast had the flag sitting vertically, 1,000 feet behind and about 100 feet below. Live ammunition attacks were then carried out by Mustangs and Vampires. To ascertain scores the tips of all bullets were dipped in paints of different colors and the screen was later examined for tell-tale marks. A

delightful story was told by a friend who won a gunnery competition on the basis of a convincing preponderance of his color appearing on the screen. Years later he had a chance encounter with an armorer who had been involved in paint-dipping the bullets for this contest. After familiarity levels had been elevated by the alcoholic content of the occasion, our gun expert could contain himself no longer. He confessed, without a hint of remorse, that because he had an intense dislike for the pilot who was generally regarded as 'Top Gun,' he was determined that my colleague was to be the winner. He dipped a high proportion of Top Gun's bullets in my friend's color. Of course bets were laid!


***Figure 81: Adjusting Mustang Gyroscopic Gunsight***

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

Some may recall with relish how a fluke salvo of rockets from a Mustang cause the "Fleet to retreat." Our practice on this occasion was being provided by HMAS Culgoa towing a splash target just off the coast. This small plank, towed at a healthy distance behind the ship, caused a visible wake. Like the Titanic it was "unsinkable". On an early sortie a chance salvo of my rockets was more accurate than normal and the target disappeared. It

was quite sensational but it would be foolish to view this happening as anything more than extreme luck. There was no replacement. Acknowledging defeat, the Navy retired in good order. The Wing Commander, magnanimously accepting the breakdown to his training program, consoled himself “Showed the Navy how it done old boy.” Lucky again!

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

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

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

More cross-country navigation exercises were done at high level (30,000 feet), medium (15,000 feet), and low level (200 feet). Each required special techniques and map reading was different at each level. Low flying, formation aerobatics, line astern chasing, and

more night flying brought us to the end of Mustang Phase. My logbook showed more than 92 hours on this wonderful fighter!

***Figure 82: Mustang Fitters At work***

# Our Jet Fighter Preparation Begins

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

The Squadron in Korea, having re-equipped with the twin jet-engine Gloster Meteor Mk8 is now in air-to air combat against Russian MiG jets. We acquire details and some disturbing rumors about the superiority of the enemy aircraft. However, it is now certain that our small group at Williamtown is training specifically to join those Meteor pilots in the Korean skies, so it is now up to us to learn as much as we can about the arts of jet combat in the single engine Vampire jet fighter, as a prelude to final Meteor training. In crew-room banter we hear many names repeatedly, pilots we have never met, and some we never will. At last we are to join the few who have a jet endorsement. This brings us into contact with many more of the veterans returned from Korea and we learn more about the numerous losses which have already been inflicted upon that small group of volunteer fighter pilots. There is speculation that several are now prisoners of the North Koreans, a most unenviable situation. It will be many months before confirmation is available, and even then the details remain extremely sketchy.

# Operational Conditions to be Anticipated for Jet Combat in Korea

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

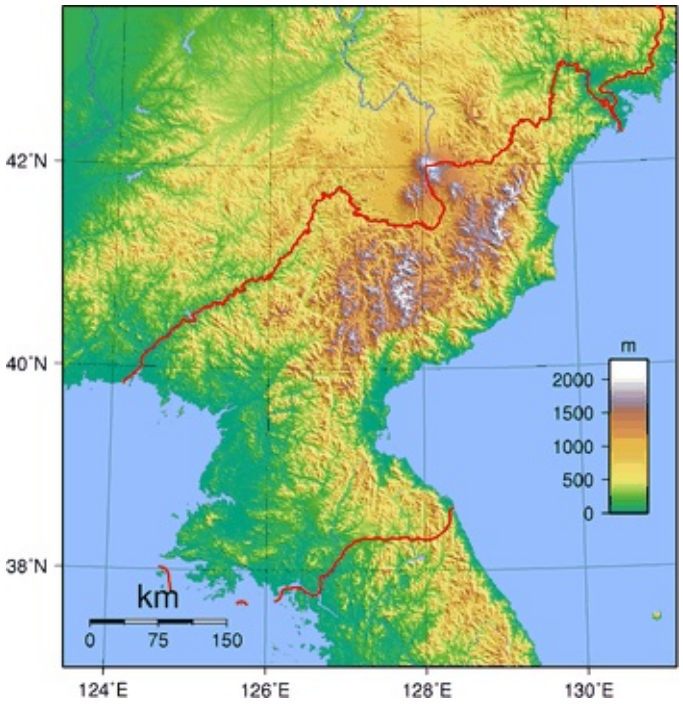



***Figure 83: North Korea Topography***

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

Added to this was the absolute need to accurately locate and attack targets on a rugged landscape beset by rapid seasonal changes of texture. In the clear air of winter, the pilot was confronted by a heavy shroud of snow concealing his landmarks. On the other hand, as the summer unveiled this terrain thereby easing the burden of map reading, the airman was frustrated by cloud, precipitation and excessive haze at lower altitudes. Additionally, the pilot was normally at the mercy of those relentless fuel gauges. The air mass through which these busy military aircraft flew suffered the normal vagaries of all weather phenomena: fog, cloud, precipitation, turbulence, storm cells, lightning, icing, strong winds and mountain waves at low levels. This confined block of airspace was cluttered with other aircraft, mainly friendly, but still constituting a significant collective hazard. Enemy air activity and anti-aircraft fire added the final touches to a long list of dangers confronting pilots.

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

## New Commanders lead 77 Squadron In Korea

**D**ick Cresswell leaves the Squadron in August 1951 — Gordon Steege takes command in August 1951 — Ron Susans takes command in December 1951

***Figure 84: S/Ldr Dick Cresswell Briefs Pilots***

## Facing The Prospects Of Death Or Capture

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

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


***Figure 85: Pilots Cross Tarmac At Kimpo***

Touched by the first rays of sun, and the efforts of diligent aircraft-cleaners, ice and snow cascade from the wings of the Meteors, these sturdy and trustworthy aircraft equipped with engines which will not betray a sound operator. Heavily-clad ground-crew carry out the defrosting process with brooms and scrapers. Large sponges and cleaning rags restore windscreens and canopies to polished clarity. Before leaving to board his aircraft the leader has a few final words to new boys, “Don’t follow too close when taxiing out. You’ll pick up contamination from the preceding aircraft. Retract the gun-sight before take-off. Don’t straggle in battle formation. Don’t pump the throttles too much and be careful about jet-pipe temperatures at high altitude when applying thrust.”

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

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

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

The 77 Squadron Korean War story has a plethora of good beginnings and satisfactory endings however all too often a very sudden reversal of fortune assails an unfortunate pilot who has been selected by fate to undergo a shocking and testing period of internment. It would be years before the true stories could be told.

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

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

# Chapter 6
# The Perils of MiG Alley
## A Remarkable Ejection


***Figure 86: The MiGs' Happy Hunting Ground***

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

Five thousand feet below, the second flight of eight Meteors executes a parallel path against a background of deceptively peaceful Korean and Manchurian landscape, sweeping endlessly away to the north. Presiding watchfully over this orderly scenario, the sun's fiery orb glows in high elevation. Suddenly this great orange mass, as though conspiring against the Australian pilots, assumes a sinister visage. Disgorging from its massive furnace there slides an avalanche of silver spears, in pairs, belching 37mm and 23mm cannon shells with menacing accuracy. A fateful date emblazoned forever on Ron Guthrie's memory is 29 August 1951, his final flight in Meteor 721!


***Figure 87: Ron Guthrie Sets Out In His Unfortunate Meteor***

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

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

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

Distressing thoughts added their burden to the alarming cacophony of the 600 miles per hour air blast as he awaited the completion of another rotation. Surely the ejection-seat firing mechanism was not going to malfunction in this moment of desperate need. He repeated the process and was shocked as the mechanism failed once again! Then he

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

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

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

The silent, almost motionless experience seemed to invite the frigid atmosphere to ravage and assault his body and mind. Ron knew the temperature would be less than minus 50°C but surprisingly he was not unduly disturbed by the cold in spite of being lightly dressed in nothing more than a normal cotton flying suit on top of summer underwear. Gradually beginning to think and take stock, he was forced to confront the shocking reality of this new situation. He had been suddenly re-born as a pilot without a plane, a man without a home, a human without his friends. The perils of this situation became more obvious with each minute. The only option acceptable to Ron, on first consideration, was the avoidance of capture by the North Koreans. He had learned too much from the intelligence officers, anything but that!

From this great height he could possibly drift seawards during the long descent and survive for some time in his dinghy thereby creating the opportunity for a recovery effort by the Air/Sea Rescue aircraft. With this plan in mind he unlocked the ejection-seat harness and kicked. The seat and its small drogue chute fell away. Then a sharp pull on the ripcord handle produced a welcome jerk as the beautiful Irvin parachute, blossoming out above, stabilized Ron in a quiet and peaceful descent.

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

*company, perhaps another unfortunate member of my flight, or hopefully a MiG pilot. Then it becomes apparent this is my own ejection-seat, still under the control of its small drogue 'chute."*

Endeavoring to guide himself towards an ocean landing, Ron pulled down on one side of the canopy shrouds in the hope of producing some directional control. This had the unexpected and quite alarming effect of spilling the 'chute into a collapsed and ineffectual condition. Suddenly he was in a sickening descent with the parachute flapping above. Some anxious moments passed before the umbrella restored its shape and its life-preserving function. Vowing he would not try that again, Ron became resigned to abandoning the possibility of a sea voyage in the little inflatable rubber raft, now quite useless in its attachment to his harness. There would be no encounter with 'Dumbo', the US Air/Sea Rescue amphibian aircraft. Perhaps this had been a futile hope anyway, as he had no signaling beacon. The elements would decree the 'where and when' of touchdown on enemy soil.

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

*"The Korean countryside far below looks more hostile with every minute of the descent. What will be waiting for me down there? I am probably too far north for any chance of a helicopter rescue. The thought of falling into the hands of North Koreans fills me with anxiety. Our intelligence briefings have been most discouraging in this regard. The Geneva Convention will mean nothing. Harsh treatment will be guaranteed. The possibility of being shot on sight by their military forces is a big worry."*


***Figure 88: Russian MiG-15 Fighter***

# Squadron MiG encounter — 29 August 1951

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

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

The first flight of Meteors took off just ahead of the second eight. This lower flight was detailed for close support of B-29 bombers attacking an important rail junction at Maejong Dong. This half squadron was lead by Des Murphy with Keith Meggs, Scotty Cadan, and Blue Colebrook making up the first 'finger four'. The second four, led by Max Scannell, included Les Reading, Dick Bessell and Bill Michelson. They did not encounter enemy aircraft.

The other half of the squadron, led by Dick Wilson, departed Kimpo immediately after Murphy's eight were airborne. Assigned to 'top cover', this group included Neil Woodroffe, Cedric Thomas, Ken Blight, Blue Thornton, Don Armit, and Kev Foster with Ron Guthrie in the unenviable position of 'Tail end Charlie'. He was regularly assigned this difficult position as he had more jet experience than the others. This 'eight' would be operating at 39,000 feet, as a shield against the very high flying MiGs, while Murphy and his boys were to protect the bombers by patrolling some 5000 feet lower.

This cruising altitude, having better air density, gave Murphy's section some added scope for performance and maneuver. Ron and his companions, however, were limited by their higher altitude. Flying was difficult enough without even considering the demands of combat. They were operating on the brink of both high-speed and low-speed buffet within a narrow performance 'envelope' available for battle activities. On the other hand, the aerodynamic margins greatly favored the swept-wing MiG-15s. These Russian aircraft were modern, specialized high-altitude fighters that were able to dive on the UN aircraft after having gained 50,000 feet or more over neutral Manchuria.

Dick Wilson and his pilots encountered a large formation of MiGs of the 303'rd FAD led by Padpolkovnik Belostotskii of the 18'th GuFAR. The MiGs were detailed to intercept a force of incoming B29s escorted by F86s. One section, comprising Kapt Lev Shchukin and St/Lt Asanovskiv, attacked four of the Sabres. They fired on one section but then, to avoid being counter-attacked by the other section, zoomed back into cloud cover.

When they finally emerged from the clouds they found not Sabres but Meteors. S/Ldr Wilson and his section, F/Lt Cedric Thomas, F/Off Ken Blight and Sgt N Woodroffe, sighted six MiGs about 5000 feet above. Wilson led his Meteors around to the left while maintaining a careful watch for other enemy fighters. Two more MiGs were spotted below and he decided to attack them. Followed by his No2, Sgt Woodroffe, Wilson dived, but his companion suddenly went into a spin from which he did not recover before dropping 5000 feet. Unaware he was alone, Wilson continued his attack. His aircraft (A77-616) suddenly shuddered as it took hits. Another MiG on his tail was flown by Kapt Shchukin. Wilson broke away violently. Fortunately, his plight had been seen by the other two Meteor pilots, Thomas and Blight, who chased after his attacker. Shchukin and Asanovskiv zoomed their MiGs upwards and escaped into the upper levels of the clouds, leaving the Meteors in

their wake. When they emerged again it was into an empty sky. There were no Meteors to be seen. Shchukin was awarded a ‘kill’, his fourth victory.

When clear of the fight, S/Ldr Wilson had time to assess the damage to his aircraft. His port aileron had been shot away and there was a huge hole in the wing. It looked large enough for a man to fit through, such was the power of the MiGs 37mm cannon. He was also losing fuel, causing him to doubt his ability to reach home, although he was able to achieve this and land relatively safely. He had, however, certainly emerged second best from this first contact with the MiGs. Worse news was to come.

The second section of Meteors led by F/Off Geoff Thornton was also attacked by the MiGs. Thornton had spotted the Russian jets diving out of the sun and quickly called out a warning. The Meteors broke as the MiGs made a firing pass, Kapt Nikolai Babonin and his wingman St/Lt A. Svinitskii, also of the 18’th GulFAR, selecting the aircraft (A77-721) flown by WO Ron Guthrie whose experience of the attack is vividly described earlier in this book.

It is noteworthy that Ron’s cannons knocked pieces off one MiG which plummeted earthwards just as his Meteor received its fatal blow. Interestingly, another Meteor pilot reported afterward having seen, during this engagement, “A swept wing aircraft spinning down and smoking”. (Ref Secret report 6/53, now declassified). Note also that the Russian pilots who claimed to have shot Ron down told him during his first interrogation that one MiG had been downed and it had “fallen to your guns”, (Ref Secret report6/53). An F86 pilot flying at a much lower altitude had seen an aircraft spiraling downwards with smoke pouring from behind. Other American pilots reported seeing a parachute. Since no MiGs had been claimed destroyed that morning, and no American aircraft lost, it was assumed that the burning aircraft was the missing Meteor and that Guthrie may have parachuted out behind enemy lines. Little consideration seems to have been given to the possibility that in addition to Ron’s Meteor there may have been a MiG (ie the reported swept wing) also spiraling down and smoking.

It would be many months before confirmation was received that Ron Guthrie was a prisoner in North Korea. None of the returning Meteor pilots had witnessed Ron’s fate but gradually information started filtering back to Kimpo following the return of the Meteors.

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

***Figure 89: Ron Guthrie As A Squadron Leader Many Years After The War***

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

# Squadron MiG Encounter — 01 December 1951

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

## Report by the Russians

According to an account written many years later by Lt-General Georgii Labov, commander of the 303'rd FAD, he was responsible for a plan to ambush and hopefully wipe out the Meteors of 77 Squadron. He felt that if this were successful it might result in serious political repercussions that would be felt not only in Australia but also in Britain and possibly the United States. Labov's reason for electing to concentrate on the Meteor squadron was political. In comparison to the massive US forces involved in the war, it was only one squadron among so many, but it was the only non-American United Nations unit

operating jet fighters over Korea. There were, until now, only four UN squadrons employed exclusively as fighters, the 334'th, 335'th and 336'th FIS, all belonging to the 4'th FIW, and all flying Sabres and additionally the RAAF's 77 Squadron with its Meteors. All were operating from K-14, (Kimpo) so the Australian squadron's presence was obvious and the Russians were well aware of the Meteor's inferior performance.

On the morning of 1 December, two dozen MiGs of the 176'th GuFAR were prepared for action. Sixteen of the pilots, mostly from the 1'st Esksdrilya, had orders to attack Meteors. The other eight MiGs were to fly top cover in order to defend their compatriots against attacks by Sabres. When it was time, the MiGs were led to the north by Podpolkovnik Vishnykov, where they cruised, waiting for the Meteors to arrive. Meanwhile at Kimpo, dawn had broken on a fine, mild day. The month's first scheduled strike for 77 RAAF was to be a routine fighter sweep in the Sunchon area and was to be led by F/Lt Thornton, who had recently been promoted and now had more than 150 missions to his credit. Fourteen Meteors were prepared for the sweep, with F/Lts Scannell and Cadan leading the other two flights while F/Lt Hannan and Sgt Strawbridge were to act as airborne relay south of Pyongyang. Shortly after 1000 hrs the Meteors were at 19,000 feet over Sunchon when about 40 MiGs were sighted overhead, obviously about to attack. F/Lt Thornton watched the MiGs closely, waiting to call the break. A fast, confusing and violent battle followed. Many years later Lobov gave an account of the action:

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

Russian accounts of this combat tell of two attacks, the first of which was the unexpected assault by Vishnyakov's group diving from above 30,000 feet, and the second was made as the Meteors were trying to withdraw, apparently by covering MiGs led by Kapt Sergei Kramarenko, who recalled: *"My six aircraft were above the strike group, aft and on the left. Having the covering group in a common combat formation, we hoped to rendezvous with Sabres and, all of a sudden, we met with Meteors. This opponent, of course, was not dangerous. There were 16 of us and 24 of them, the whole squadron. In the first attack, my pair shot down two aircraft. The other pair struck with no success. In this hit-and-run and very dynamic battle, we shot down 16 Meteors and did not lose a single aircraft. What was the reason for such an unprecedented success, besides the advantage of the MiG-15 over the Meteor? A surprise! What fighter pilots always try for: We found ourselves in the ideal situation. Before a strike attack during a turn on target, the enemy offered the tails of the aircraft to us without knowing it. And we took advantage!"*

***Figure 90: Russian MiG Pilot Kramarenko***

These recollections were made many years after the battle and this may account for the discrepancies in the stated numbers of aircraft, but at the time nine Meteors were claimed shot down by 176’th GuFAR, six of them by 1’st Eskadrilya, one each by Podpolkovnik Vishnyakov, Maj Serafin Subbotin, Kapt Petr Milaushkin, Kapt Aleksandr Vasko, and St/Lts A.F Golovachev and F.A. Zubakin. The 2’nd Eskadrilya claimed three Meteors, two by Kapt Kramarenko and one by the leader of the second pair, St/Lt I.N. Guliy. It was believed to have been an outstanding accomplishment achieved at just the right time and of such proportion that it would counter any adverse impact on morale caused by the American success of a dozen Chinese aircraft shot down without loss just the day before.

According to Russian records, the pilot of a Meteor which crashed near Gangen-ri was rescued from the sea, while the pilot of another that crashed near Ryonge was taken prisoner by Chinese forces. The remaining seven Meteors were recorded as having crashed near Cogen, Sagamen, Sung-genmen, Heng-gen, Don-senmen, Kodonmen and Kodon.

## 77 Squadron Records For 01 December 1951 Are More Specific

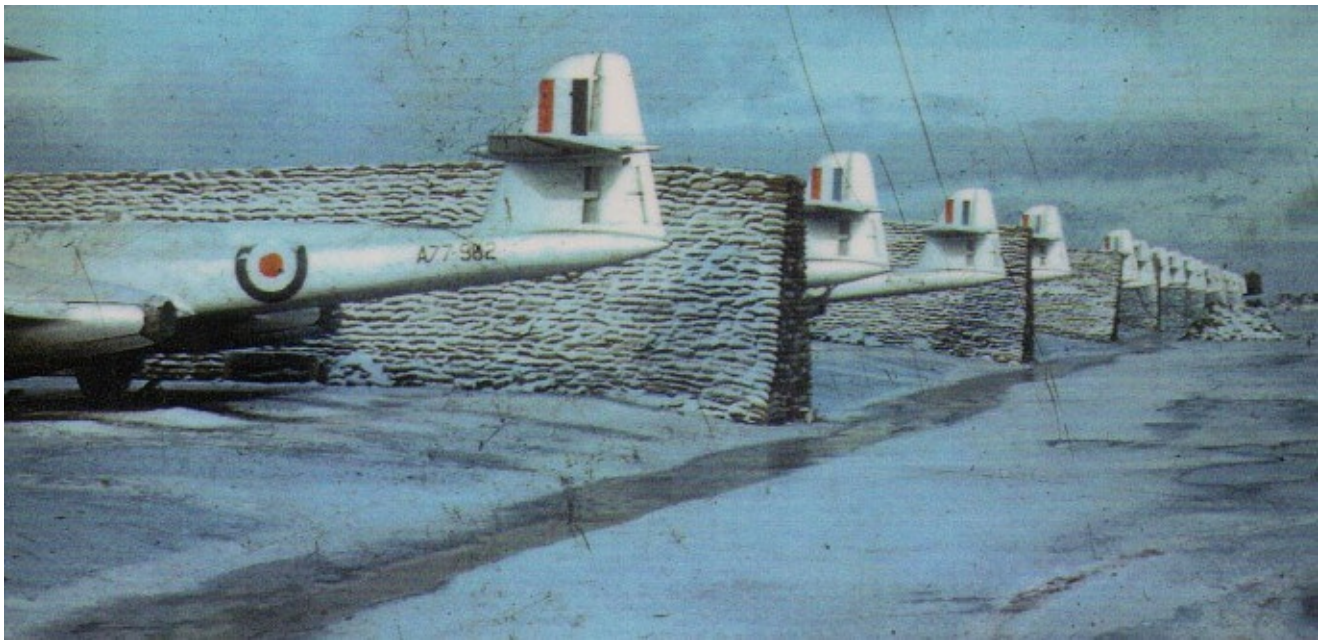


***Figure 91: The Squadron Which The Russians "Completely Shot Down"***

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

***Figure 92: Bruce Gogerly, First Squadron MiG Killer***

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

***Figure 93: Demise of A Russian MiG-15 Fighter***

With the arrival of a second USAF Sabre Wing to the area, it was apparent the role of the Meteor would soon be changed. The battle of 01 December 1951, with the loss of three Meteors, showed the superiority of the Russian fighter and indicated it would be foolish to continue using Meteors on fighter sweeps into Mig Alley.

A song often sung in the Squadron at the time summed up the situation aptly, "All I want for Christmas is my wings swept back." Thus, in January 1952, 77 Squadron was assigned the role of 'area and airfield defense' for both Kimpo and Suwon air bases, leaving the Sabres to patrol over North Korea. During January, the Squadron also adopted the role of ground attack with cannons and rockets and it was in this field that the Meteor was able to

make its effective and important impact in the Korean conflict. Of course we all still wished we were equipped with the Sabres, those swept-wing fighters being so effectively flown by the Americans. But these were in short supply.


***Figure 94: American Sabre Jet Fighters At Kimpo***

# Chapter 7
# Williamtown, late 1951 — de Havilland Vampire Jet Training

## Jets At Last

While Ron Guthrie and so many other unfortunates were undergoing the most stressful trials in North Korea, we continued our exciting adventures at the Jet OTU refusing to fully acknowledge the hazards awaiting us in The Land of the Morning Calm. The Vampire training kept our minds fully occupied. Once again there was no dual trainer. So we did the usual study of the Vampire Pilots' Notes and cockpit checks. We were grateful for the months at Point Cook devoted to the study of jet engines and jet aerodynamics. On that course we had learned much about those products of genius which achieved flight by gulping tons of air and thrusting it rearwards as super-heated propulsive energy.

The Vampire was a single-seat fighter with one Rolls Royce Nene jet engine. Main armaments were four 20mm Hispano cannons point-harmonized at 800 yards. All of this was located in a bulb-like wooden fuselage. The wings, twin booms and tail assembly were all metal. Eight rockets could be slung under the wings. Designed by de Havilland, this was the main aircraft on which I worked during my engineering apprenticeship at the D.H. factory. Some of these actual aircraft bore my handiwork, a fact that supposedly gave my comrades cause for concern.


***Figure 95: Vampire Jet Fighter Cockpit***

The Vampire was simple to fly compared with the Mustang but was harder to operate efficiently, a factor not readily understood by the uninitiated. We were warned that the undercarriage must be retracted promptly after lift-off before speed increase prevented the doors from locking. The aircraft proved to be quite ‘slippery’, with speeds and vertical rates vastly increased beyond our previous experience. Maneuverability was outstanding. It was possible, by pulling high acceleration forces to execute turns at exceptionally steep bank angles. These gut-wrenching exercises placed enormous stress on both pilot and machine. Operating without ‘G’ suits, which inflate to press on vital areas of the pilot’s body, we had to compensate by tightening stomach muscles. This inadequacy brought the pilot to the brink of ‘black-out’ in tight turns, as blood drained from the cranium. Realizing the enormous stress being experienced by the aircraft structure I could not avoid musing on the fact that, in constructing the Vampire, we attached these wings with three pins only. Sometimes it does not pay to know too much! Formation flying required greater anticipation and different thrust adjustment. Control of airspeed and descent path produced problems for those whose habits did not change readily. And we had a new device, an Air Brake. Jets are different!

***Figure 96: Vampire Jet Fighter***

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

This would seem to be enough of this variation to single engine jet operations for one lifetime, however, Jim did a few repeats in later years. He describes them for us:

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

So there we have it, engines are nice to have but by no means essential! Engines of jet fighters occasionally stopped (flamed out) for no particular reason, as has already been indicated. Sometimes the motor would respond to the relight procedure and sometimes it would be stubborn and uncooperative. Adherence to the appropriate drill was obviously a sound idea under such circumstances. We were all trained to remember such emergency procedures, however it was considered good form to have the 'Pilots' Notes' handy as this was also a requirement. Sergeant Geoff Lushey recalls an event on 13 February 1952 with a flameout of his (single-engine, single-seat) Vampire while engaged in Mach Run exercises. (compressibility / high-speed buffet). The engine stopped at 33,000 feet. There was plenty of time to consider the matter, as re-lighting was best attempted at lower altitudes (Below15,000 feet for preference). While gliding down, Geoff searched his pockets for the drill book, to no avail. He had changed flying suits and the booklet now

reposed in the other outfit back in the crew-room. Geoff had time, during the descent to ponder the fact that few pilots to date had been successful in attempting to relight the Nene engine. The missing book assumed a new level of appeal as he searched his memory for the precise procedure. The end result was something of an anti-climax, his memory worked, the drill worked, the engine worked. The memory requirement worked! I can add a small anecdote here. During operations in Korea, one of the two Derwent Jet engines of my Meteor flamed-out as I snapped the throttles closed when rolling out of an exceptionally tight turn. The relight memory action was instantly successful and the mission continued. Of course the implications of having one engine out of action are not so bad in a twin engine fighter. In both cases the insistence on thoroughly memorizing emergency drills would appear to be justified.

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

Unfortunately there were a number of fatal dives in the Vampire resulting from inability to recover from this condition. Wal Rivers has contributed an interesting account relating to such Vampire fatalities:

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

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

Another pilot who nearly 'went in' while doing a Vampire Mach Run at Williamtown reported that he deployed the air brakes, closed the throttle and eased the stick as briefed and, nothing happened. The aircraft continued to buffet and gradually adopted a near-vertical attitude. It descended at this high speed and in this uncontrollable condition with altimeter needles spinning crazily, vertical-speed indicator on the stops, and cabin pressure rapidly increasing. In this alarming manner the Vampire dropped from 30.000 feet to about 2,000 feet at which height control gradually returned. The pilot was eventually able to restore level flight at 1,200 feet above the ocean. This somewhat relieved pilot lived to report on the incident but six of our fellows did not. They went in! Fortunately no one on our course encountered the above problem. The aircraft mainly performed as advertised!

This pleased me on several accounts. Firstly we all survived, as everyone learned a little more about jets and high-speed flight. Secondly I had a hand in making these aircraft and felt some proprietary interest. The Vampire was actually a delight to fly and was extremely maneuverable. We loved it! It is pleasing to note that eventually the Mach Run problems were corrected by a modification to the air-frame. The 'Elephant-Ears' air intakes were re-positioned from the top of the fuselage, where they had been disturbing the air flow, onto the underside. No further tragedies occurred!

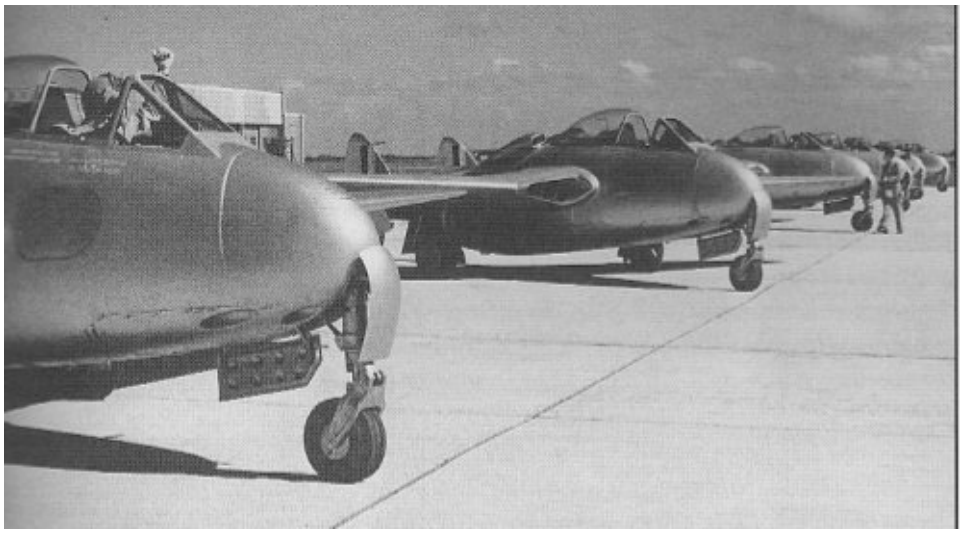


***Figure 97: Vampire lineup At Williamtown***

The C/O of 75 Squadron (Vampires), Wing Commander Brian Eaton had recently visited 77 Squadron in Korea and obtained inputs for our training. Among the more important revelations was the need for our air-to air gunnery to emphasize the technique of shooting at a retreating target. The MiGs would have about 100 knots speed advantage! This required developing the technique of operating our gyroscopic (lag-computing) gun sights in reverse. One would normally be closing fast from the rear of an opponent but in MiG

encounters we should anticipate the opposite to apply. The gyroscopic gun sight was a big advance on the old reflector sight. It computed the deflection when firing against an evasive enemy and presented an image before the pilot's eyes as a graticule of reflected dots of light.

Before the attack, the computer had to be programmed with the estimated wing span of the enemy. The pilot now coordinated his flight so the center dot of the graticule was held on the canopy of the enemy. Now with his left hand the pilot rotated the graticule control so as to ensure the outer dots of the graticule at all times encompassed the wing tips of the opponent. This control was attached to the throttle lever on the left side of the cockpit. Provided this was done with unerring accuracy his guns would always be aimed just the correct distance ahead of the enemy aircraft, in spite of variations to speed and/or rate of turn.

Of course the exercise required coordination and quick reflexes. We had to learn to do this on a fast opponent who was becoming smaller with every second, requiring the graticule to be closed instead of opened. However they said, "It is probably the only shot you will get at a MiG." Quite correct unfortunately!

# Chapter 8
# Five Course Finishes Operational Training

## Departure For Japan

***Still unaware of the fate of many, we proceed overseas***

On the last day at Williamtown I was given a final opportunity to fly the beloved Mustang. A low-level flight was authorized. Taking advantage of the loose nature of the instructions I soon found myself over my hometown, Cundletown, executing a few routine aerobatics and steep turns. Catching site of my 'brother' Harvey Else outside his garage I realized something better was definitely called for.

With full power applied and flight path sighted along the main street (The Pacific Highway) at an altitude which is still held to be classified information, the Mustang rolled gracefully to the inverted attitude. Reminding myself that the basic rule "pull the stick back and the houses get smaller" works in reverse when inverted, the control column was eased forward to effect an uneventful recovery just before Wal Levick's farm. Duty and honor thereby satisfied I returned to Williamtown with an ever-increasing feeling that this exercise had possibly not been advisable.

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

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

## More Pilot Losses In Korea — February 1952

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

cycle — a particularly regrettable event.

Wal Rivers who had accompanied Butch on this particularly hazardous venture finally spotted the parachute and as a result he made two subsequent flights to the area with no luck. Helicopters could not attempt a search as the flak defenses in this particular front-line area would render such an operation impossible, particularly as the downed pilot had not been located and was probably already in enemy hands. Ray Taylor and Phil Zupp had begun an immediate search at low altitude. During these maneuvers Phil's canopy was shattered by ground fire and his goggles were buckled as the shell ricocheted around the cockpit, to finally lodge in the instrument panel. With his face bleeding quite profusely from fragments of Perspex and metal, Phil remained calm and returned to Kimpo. He was treated for his injuries by the Americans who subsequently awarded Phil the 'Purple Heart 'decoration.


***Figure 98: Phil Zupp's Canopy***

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

***Figure 99: Phil Zupp***

Squadron average operational strength was generally about 17 to 20 pilots. Therefore, operations to date, had already wiped out full squadron strength. On arrival at Iwakuni Ken and I were further shocked to learn that one of our 5 Course boys had been killed at

the beginning of his tour. Dick Robinson was hit in the ventral and his aircraft was seen on fire and breaking up before exploding on a hillside. There was no sign of an ejection.


***Figure 100: Dick Robinson — First 5 Course Death***

# Five Course Arrives In Japan — Early 1952

***The Jewelled Spear***

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

Thirty-three flying hours after leaving Mascot the Qantas Skymaster touched Japanese soil. For a few minutes we gathered near the plane with coats turned up and hands in pockets to ward off the icy wind. In the distance, cloud-crested slopes merged into a background of snow-covered hills, from which came the winds of Iwakuni.

Formerly a Japanese naval academy and airfield, Iwakuni Base was now a splendid asset to the allied air forces. It was from here that 77 squadron flew its first operational missions against the enemy in Korea. Now it was used by Allied civil and military transports, by our front-line squadron as a maintenance and training ground and also provided a good flying-boat base. The airstrip, hangars and administrative buildings were substantial, though some parts still bore shrapnel holes as grim evidence of American bombing during the latter months of WW2.

Labor, such a short commodity at home, was abundant here. Skilled Japanese aircraft technicians worked on our planes, while hundreds of little women attended to clerical and domestic work. These people were honest, industrious and cheerful. The comforts of Iwakuni made their first big impression as we stepped from the chilly tarmac to the cheery

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

Living quarters were located in surprisingly comfortable two-story buildings. Every room was neat, with wardrobes full of spotlessly laundered clothes and shiny footwear. Someone vaguely explained this as the work of the 'room-girls.' Permanent residents each had a bedroom with one girl looking after two rooms. These girls who arrived early in the morning, polished, washed, ironed, mended and tidied everything. The girls were carefully vetted before being employed and were found to be of excellent character. We were severely warned that they must be treated with respect at all times and I believe this was observed by all as we did not want to lose the privilege of their services. The 'other ranks' had room boys and the threat of descent into a similar regime kept us in order.

It was customary for the boys to provide their room-girl with a little closet space for her personal use, as she would spend nine or ten hours on the job. Ken and I, because we belonged in Korea, shared a room and one girl looked after things for us. On any occasion that we should return for a brief visit to Iwakuni both the room and the same room-girl would be available with everything in order. Furthermore our clothes were to travel to and from Korea for our girl to wash and keep in order, the first *RAAF International Laundry Service!*

Sleep was peaceful that first night despite the hissing and rattling of pipes which always accompanied the successful operation of the steam-heater. At about seven am there was a respectful knock at the door. A little 'Mumma-San,' perhaps fifty years old, entered and bowed. "Surely this is not our room girl!" There ensued the first of those intriguing conversations of jumbled English and Japanese clarified by much sign-language. She explained that her purpose was to introduce our Girl-San. As if at a cue, an attractive but shy little girl entered and bowed. Introductions followed, and we learned how to say "Ayako-San." Mumma-San then bowed herself out of the room leaving us in the diligent hands of this fine young girl. Ayako poured cups of tea, then commenced by polishing every shoe in the room while gathering clothes for the laundry.

After breakfast the beds were like billiards tables, floor and furniture polished, and partly unpacked clothes neatly arranged. That evening two tidy piles of ironed clothes appeared. A vase of flowers, the first we had ever possessed in billets, was the next surprise. It was difficult to draw Ayako into conversation, although she certainly understood much that was said. Other room girls were quite talkative and exhibited considerable curiosity about the two new Boy-San. One girl in particular, Mickey-San, spoke and wrote some English and helped greatly with communication. Mickey wrote to us in Korea. Neat and tidy in themselves, the girls created a most pleasant atmosphere. When in Korea we still were to feel the value of room-girls as parcels of clean clothes arrived, generally accompanied by ambitious attempts at note writing. They also handled many little business transactions such as having films printed.

***Figure 101: Ayako-San, And Mickey-San (Sitting)***

Despite a strong effort to westernize Japan, the quaint legends and sacred mountains and the wooden shoes and kimonos of medieval days still existed side by side with the new influences. Through tales of Shinto folklore and the tranquil expressions of her artists, Japan maintained a background of quiet simplicity in contrast to the turbulent onrush of progress and noise, which had seized the surface of her everyday life. The Japanese city had become largely a copy of western technology. In remote areas the peasant's existence still closely resembled that of his ancestors while naturally enough the country towns took a middle course. Iwakuni was probably typical of the average town, while our base always inclined towards the up-to-date western society.

Consequently on passing through the camp gates we seemed to step into another world. The population and other statistics of the local area were anybody's guess. It was absorbing to view the patchwork of paddy fields and narrow winding roads, bordered by miles of small shops and houses. We could hardly fail to notice one of the less endearing features of the environment. The smell, or more specifically the stench, was overpowering, and we were not heartened by the assurance, "You will come to enjoy it!" Fertilizer was supplied by human excrement, the product being transported to the paddy fields in 'honey carts.' These three-wheeler cycle arrangements were definitely to be avoided! We recalled with some apprehension that military personnel were forbidden to eat local farm vegetables.

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

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

***Figure 102: Street Scene Iwakuni***

## We Convert To The Gloster Meteor

This formidable fighter was our first twin-engine aircraft. The Gloster Meteor Mk 8 single-seat interceptor was pressurized and had two Rolls Royce Derwent Mk 8 jet engines, each with a thrust of 3,600 lb. It was basically a 19.000 pounds and 600 mph aircraft. Armaments included four 20mm cannons point-harmonized at 800 yards, and eight or eventually sixteen rockets of various types were often fitted. The engines and air-frame were sturdy and capable of withstanding considerable punishment. The Meteor was a steady gun platform. Safe and efficient operation, required the pilot to achieve: an alert, high speed and infallible execution of memorized checks and actions throughout the entire flight while navigating at high speed in a rugged and hostile environment, cluttered with other aircraft, both friend and foe. Smithy and I realized this standard had to be achieved as quickly as possible as we were required in Korea.

The Meteor provided our first experience of an Ejection-Seat. The aircraft was quipped with the Martin-Baker Ejection-Seat which enabled the pilot to abandon rapidly at high

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

***Figure 103: Mk 7 Meteor Two-seater***

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

***Figure 104: Meteor Trainer (Note Elongated Canopy)***

Provided the pilot respected the need for at least 150 knots there was little to worry about when operating with one engine shut down provided the aircraft was at a light weight, but we were aware that when taking off at operational weights, with full fuel and armaments

on board, the Meteor could not climb or even fly level with an engine out of operation. It would be essential to reduce weight immediately by any means available. To maintain balanced flight (no sideways slide) with one motor inoperative we must have at least 150 knots of indicated airspeed. This speed could not be sustained, with one engine out of action at maximum weight in level flight and of course climbing was absolutely out of the question. Consequently we realized that on virtually all of our take-offs in Korea ‘our pants would be down.’ Fortunately the Rolls Royce Derwent jet engines were most reliable.

***Figure 105: Meteor Mk-8 Fighter***

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

# Five Course Joins The Squadron At Kimpo 1952

***“The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve”***
***(Dr Albert Schweitzer)***

On completion of our brief Meteor flying and operational training, Ken and I were deemed ready for combat, a judgment no doubt influenced by the great shortage of operational pilots in Korea. We established battle-formation under the leadership of Flight Lieutenant Taylor, and bade farewell to the beautiful Japanese coastline as we headed off across the Korea Strait. Soon we were gazing down from our cruising level, seven miles

above the snow-bound Korean countryside, proceeding directly to Kimpo, a few miles northwest of Seoul. It was of interest to muse on the fact that this important United Nations air base was itself, not so long ago, the target of our squadron's Mustangs before the enemy forces were pushed north. Known by the official code name K-14, Kimpo was the closest airfield to the North Korean battle-front, about 35 miles.


***Figure 106: Squadron Notice Board Kimpo***

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

***Figure 107: Meteor At Kimpo***

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

# Settling In

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

***Figure 108: Wing Commander Susans Briefing***

**M**any of our squadron pilots were Sergeants. The Yanks however did not have non-commissioned pilots and could not grasp the idea. Consequently all non-commissioned 77 Squadron pilots did not wear rank badges of any sort. We lingered in ‘No rank land’ merely sporting pilot’s wings and name plates on our chests. At least we had names! Mine

was potentially a little different, and provocative, the boldly emblazoned title ‘COL KING.’ Naturally Americans frequently approached with a respectful, “Say Colonel-etc.” This was not hard to live with as it carried certain promotional overtones so conspicuously absent from the real life situation. Some Americans however, were amazed at “The age of the Colonel!” — 21.

The seasons on the Korean peninsula were given to variety and extremes. In an average year one must expect to endure excesses of heat, cold, gales, violent storms, heavy snow and iced-up lakes and rivers, mud, slush, haze and dust-storms. These conditions did not lend themselves to tent living, yet there we were!

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

***Figure 109: Tent Lines, 77 Squadron Kimpo***

In our warm briefing room there was a large relief model of the whole of North Korea. We spent much well-used time intent on that model, memorizing the rugged landscape with its steep-sided valleys. Particular attention was paid to the snaking MSRs (Main Supply

Routes), our main hunting grounds, for by now the squadron was heavily occupied with ground-attack. The inevitable pre-operational briefing was lucid and to the point. We were assured our projected Korean experience was capable of being a hazardous business, even without adding to the equation the ill intentions of our enemy.

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

We were lectured on escape and evasion and issued with a 'Pointie Talkie' — a list of supposedly useful phrases in local languages, in case we felt the urge to communicate north of 'The Parallel'. I required one addition, "Please give me a smaller shovel."

RESTRICTED
CHINESE POINTIE TALKIE

| ENGLISH | ENGLISH PHONETIC | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. I am a friend. | 1. Woh shuh pung yoh. | 1. 我是朋友 |
| 2. Please help me. | 2. Ching nee bong woh. | 2. 請你幫我 |
| 3. I am - | 3. Woh - | 3. 我 - |
| a. thirsty | a. kuh | a. 渴 |
| b. hungry | b. uh | b. 餓 |
| c. lost | c. tew liao | c. 丟了 |
| d. sick | d. bing liao | d. 病了 |
| e. wounded | e. shoh shong | e. 受傷 |
| f. tired | f. lay liao | f. 累了 |
| 4. Do you understand? | 4. Nee dung mah? | 4. 你懂嗎? |
| 5. I do not understand. | 5. Woh bu dung. | 5. 我不懂. |
| 6. Yes. No. | 6. Shuh. Bu shuh. | 6. 是. 不是. |
| 7. I have medicines. | 7. Woh yoh yeow. | 7. 我有藥. |
| 8. I can treat illness. | 8. Woh whay kan bing. | 8. 我會看病. |
| 9. I am an American. | 9. Woh shuh May-goh-run. | 9. 我是美國人. |
| 10. Take me there. | 10. Die woh dow nah bien. | 10. 帶我到那邊. |
| 11. I will reward you. | 11. Woh whay bao da nee. | 11. 我會報答你. |
| 12. Draw a map. | 12. Ching nee gay woh hwah dee-too. | 12. 請你給我畫地圖. |
| 13. How far is it? | 13. Yoh doh yuan? | 13. 有多遠? |
| 14. I am a friend of China. | 14. Woh shuh Chung-goh pung-yoh. | 14. 我是中國的朋友. |
| 15. Please point in the direction. | 15. Ching nee chuhr fahng shiong. | 15. 請你指方向. |
| 16. Danger. | 16. Way shien. | 16. 危險. |
| 17. Town. Village. | 17. Chun. Shiong-trun. | 17. 城. 鄉村. |
| 18. East. South. West. North. | 18. Dung. Nan. Shee. Bay. | 18. 東. 南. 西. 北. |
| 19. Thank you. | 19. Shieh-shieh. | 19. 謝謝. |
| 20. Good. Bad. | 20. How. Bu how. | 20. 好. 不好. |
| 21. Today. Tomorrow. | 21. Jin-tien. Min-tien. | 21. 今天. 明天. |
| 22. Help! | 22. Juo-ming! | 22. 救命! |
| 23. Stop! | 23. Ting! | 23. 停! |
| 24. Where are the Americans? | 24. Nah lee yoh May-goh-run? | |
| 25. Please hide me. | 25. Ching nee tsong woh. | |
| 26. Where are they? | 26. Tah mun tsi nah lee? | |
| 27. Do not tell anyone I am here. | 27. Nee bieh gow soo pong run woh tsi druh-lee. | |
| 28. Take me to a Chinese hospital. | 28. Die woh dow Chung-goh e-yuan. | |
| 29. Chinese soldier very good. | 29. Chung-goh ping ding how. | |
| 30. I am walking to the hospital. | 30. Wch dow e-yuan chu. | |
| 31. PLEASE GIVE ME A SMALLER SHOVEL! | | |

RESTRICTED

***Figure 110: Pointie-Talkie Carried On Missions***

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

***Figure 111: Groundcrew Sheathing Tailplane***

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

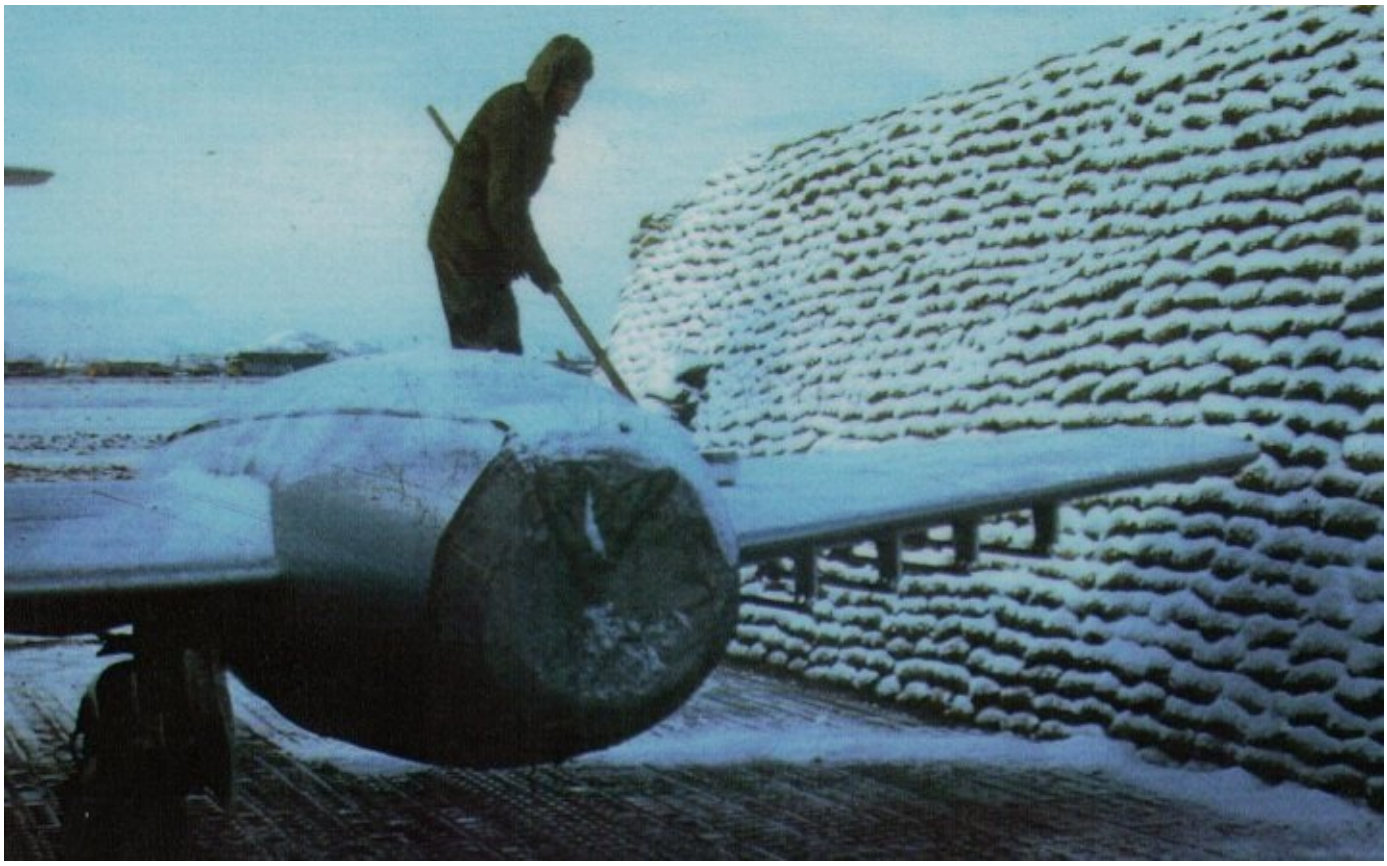


***Figure 112: Groundcrew Sweeping Wing***

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

***Figure 113: Pat Melican, Diligent Groundcrew Corporal***

# Chapter 9
# Five Course Begins Operations at Kimpo
## "The Reprobates" in Action

The first operational flight was usually an orientation and familiarization exercise. However, pilot shortage intervened and, on the day after arrival, I found myself 'thrown into the deep end.' At the time, I had just over eight hours flying on Meteors — my only twin-engine experience, and this included the delivery flight from Japan.

Flight Lieutenant Keith Martin hastily entered my tent in mid afternoon. "King your familiarization flight is off for the moment. You are coming with me right now. You are going to get your 'famil' the quick way. Grab your gear and hop into my jeep." This was a 'scramble' with one other aircraft and the demand produced, in me, a sudden moment of excitement as I jumped off the stretcher, rapidly securing gun-belt and jacket. We hastened out into the crisp winter air. As the jeep slithered along the snowbound pathway to our briefing room Keith explained, "Some 'bogies' on radar have got them worried and we're going to take a look!" We were being scrambled to intercept unidentified aircraft in the vicinity of Sing-ye. This was called a GCI, or Ground Controlled Interception. Our ground radar, being unable to ascertain the 'bona fides' of a flight of aircraft heading this way, would direct us and probably vector airborne flights as well, in order to obtain clarification. Obviously, everyone was sensitive to the possibility of a sneak attack as our base was close to the North Korean border.

It was a normal expectation to be 'taken by the hand and shown the ropes' as promised, but now I was to be part of a businesslike team dispatched to do an urgent task. What other surprises lay in store?

***Figure 114: Crew Jeep In The Morning***

There is no difficulty in recalling the sensations. We hurry. The briefing is no more than a few shouted words as we clamber into life jackets and tighten bulky snow shoes to enclose our Combat boots. We quickly sign the maintenance release (E/E-77) and hasten to our Meteors. Ground crews help us strap in — a service I am not accustomed to. A harness secures the pilot to a parachute located in the back of the ejector-seat and an emergency pack (Dinghy and water container). These latter items form the pilot's seat cushion. The pilot is then strapped to the seat.

From this moment, mind and hands keep pace with mumbled words. “Ejection seat safety pin removed from and stowed, Emergency Oxygen pin removed, Oxygen plugged and tested, Radio and Radio-Compass tested.” Hands and thoughts flash around the cockpit checking and setting more than 30 more items. H/P, L/P, Fuel Balance, Pneumatics, Rudder, Elevator, Battery, Air Brakes, Pressurization, Canopy, W/Screen heat, Flaps, U/Carriage, Jettison, Fuel, Lighting, U/C emerg, Oxy emerg, Hydraulics emerg, De-icer, Harness release. The list continues in rapid-fire actions and now there is the ‘All Clear’ from an engineer attending to the ground starter battery cart. The starter button for No 2 engine is pressed and held for two seconds. As rpm approach 1,000, I open the HP cock in the appropriate manner. No 1 engine follows and soon the whine of two more Derwents is added to all the others around our tarmac as they idle at a mere 3,500 rpm. Jet pipe temperature gages register a comfortable 400 degrees as Canopy Operation check is completed. The Ground Engineer gives a cheerful wave as I open the throttles and move into line astern.

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

***Figure 115: Meteor Pairs Take-off***

Cleared for immediate take-off we run to almost full power against the brakes and release on the leader’s signal. I remain tucked in just behind his starboard wingtip. We rotate and lift-off in unison, breaking ground as if connected. A touch on the brake lever stops wheel rotation and the gear lever is raised. Wheels snap up and as speed increases I retract flap. Now having settled down, my scan around the horizon reaches new standards of diligence. Recent stories of MiG encounters and Meteor losses occupy my thoughts along with

briefing information on the superiority of that remarkable Russian fighter. There is little time for looking down at the countryside. It is obvious nevertheless as we test cannons, we are now in hostile airspace.

It had all been so sudden. As anticipated there was no talk apart from essential commands. My leader kept track of our position by reference to map and ground — there were no other facilities. In order to attempt an interception we flew headings as directed by GCI radar. No enemy appeared.

Eventually we went down to ground level seeking targets on the main roads. Some shots were fired and possibly Keith Martin had a feeling of satisfaction, however my only endeavor with the cannons had been the gun-test on departure. Perhaps was normal for a novice on his first sortie. The Bogies turned out to be Friendlies, undoubtedly something of an anti-climax. They were Republic of Korea Mustangs, failing to transmit their ‘Friend or Foe’ identification. Had these been MiGs this would have made a dramatic start to a long list of logbook entries. As it was, having spent time in enemy airspace, there was a feeling of being one of the veterans who had returned unscathed.

***Figure 116: L-R: Smithy, Pete Middleton, Bluey Philp***

# Meteor Ground Attack Missions

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

***Figure 117: Air attack On A North Korean Supply Train***

Learning to execute attacks efficiently with the best chance of survival was a specialized business. The enemy had established a high density of efficient flak weapons of many varieties including those with radar prediction. This defensive screen was the mainstay of the enemy as they acknowledged loss of air superiority, and was considered to frequently exceed the density and efficiency of WWII small and medium anti-aircraft weaponry.

'Flak traps,' in the form of dummy vehicles produced special hazards. Pilots new to the contest were particularly at risk. One pilot on his first mission reported "having a go at a tank." He added to his identification the interesting note that he could see the tail-light blinking. This, in fact, was a machine gun ranging on his Meteor.

***Figure 118: Raid Against Wonsan Harbour***

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

***Figure 119: Meteor Rocketing Target***

# The Controllers

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

Ken Towner, and Bob Strawbridge, two of our Sergeant friends from Point Cook, volunteered to take us newcomers to Radar Hill on a tour of inspection and general education. Phil Zupp, another Sergeant friend from Point Cook and a resident of our tent, also availed himself of the opportunity. Arrangements were made and a short jeep ride soon had us at the parking lot for this facility. It was a short walk up a steep hill. A reluctant sun occasionally peeped through the busy scud cloud as we hastened in the blustery Siberian air with Parka hoods in place.

We were expected, and soon security passes adorning our jackets proclaimed our entitlement to information and hospitality. Both were generously provided by an articulate USAF Major. A veteran of Mustang fighters during WW2, he had some additional experience of MiG fighting over North Korea. Many of the radar operators in this efficient unit had similar backgrounds as a matter of policy. This knowledge gave us a good feeling that such understanding protection would ride with us in the cockpit per medium of these friendly transmissions, the voices of ‘Dentist’ ‘Bromide’ or ‘Shirley.’

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

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

***Figure 120: Controller At Air Traffic Radar Screen***

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

***Figure 121: Bob Strawbridge***

# ‘Bedcheck Charlie’ and other Enemy Hazards

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

***Figure 122: Po-2 Being Readied For Flight***

These aircraft, with quiet low-powered engines, were elusive and hard to detect on radar or by visual sighting as they weaved around obstacles at low altitude and made unusually tight turns in order to avoiding detection or interception. The extremely low speed of operation was one of their greatest assets along with the noiseless approach and invisibility on radar.

The disturbance and defensive activity generated at air-bases under attack was quite impressive as anti-aircraft gunners, so bereft of targets in the normal course of events, came to life with much excitement and noise. Search-lights and tracers swept the heavens, but the little intruder could be expected to do his puny business and rapidly disengage long before the guns stopped scattering their noisy and ineffectual shrapnel in the sky. One American cheerfully claimed, “These events are better than any 4th of July I have seen!”

Jet fighters could not intercept and shoot down Charlies due to the inability of the faster aircraft to get into position, and also the extreme agility of the target. In late 1951, in frustration, a slower-flying Corsair F4U-5N carrier fighter was borrowed from the US Navy. Having managed to get behind a Charlie, the attacking pilot, in order to fly slower,

lowered flaps and landing gear but was still too fast. He collided with Charlie and both fell in flames.

In mid June 1953 Charlie activity increased, using as many as 15 small planes in these night raids. Some faster Yak-18s and La-11 fighters were employed in addition to the conventional Po-2s. Many attacks were launched against the South Korean capital and surrounds.

Four Corsair naval fighters, with a capability for slow approach speeds, were brought into action, resulting in the destruction of at least four of the nuisance raiders. These raids, and the possibility of more vigorous attacks of this type, created a response by FEAF in unleashing a massive campaign of bombing North Korean airfields, which became one of the most successful air operations of the war. However, these little aircraft were capable of operating from small nondescript paddocks, so they still kept visiting us.

***Figure 123: Russian Yak-18 Trainer***

Kimpo was precariously located a mere 35 miles south of the main battle line, a matter of some concern due to the plumb target which the massive base presented to an enemy keen on sneaky intrusion and surprise attacks by land or even by air. Emergency plans for evacuation of Kimpo were continually under review. The ground retreat plans were vague and somewhat pessimistic due to the inevitability of roads being choked with refugees.

Because of there being not enough Meteors available to evacuate all pilots, some would possibly be called upon to drive RAAF trucks. To this end, those of us with current driver's licences were checked out on these large vehicles and issued with Provisional RAAF Driver's certificates. I personally took little pride and even less comfort on becoming qualified and certified in this department. Never did my Meteor seem to be more desirable as a means of transport.

Occasional acts of sabotage were not unknown and the base was thoroughly guarded with this in mind. In February 1952 two incidents involving the Petrol and Oil Lubricant Dump resulted in the killing of five saboteurs. On occasions, men had been killed by infiltrators creeping into tents. We pilots always carried our service revolvers in our belt holster both in flight and on the ground. To mislay this weapon was a serious offense. It was rumored that an American soldier, caught asleep on guard duty, was sentenced to seven years hard labor.

*Figure 124: F-86 Sabres Near Sandbag Revetments*

# Night Strafing

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

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

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

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

Fuel was being used extravagantly on these low level sorties so we disengaged and headed for base. We were both intact, if a trifle the worse for wear. It was a complete victory, however now it was really dark and I lacked night experience in these testing circumstances. In fact I had never flown a Meteor at night, so the trial was not yet over. I found the visibility surprisingly poor, the cockpit lighting uncommonly dim and I experienced difficulty keeping station on my leader. Such problems were strange to me and for the first time I began to wonder if I was cut out for this work. Something was

wrong! We entered the landing pattern and peeled off in succession in the approved manner. I was grateful for the light in the center of the tail crucifix of Bill's Meteor which was just a short distance ahead. It was not until on final approach, lining up for landing, that we again identified the dim runway flares for they were shrouded in the conventional war-area fashion. A vague pair of parallel lights rose steadily from the void to meet my wheels. I was perplexed, "What a dark night this is!"

With relief I shut down and joined Bill on the tarmac for an exciting discussion. He looked at me in astonishment. "Do you always fly at night with dark glasses on?" Thank goodness they did not bestow 'Clots Medals' in this squadron! In fact I must confess to a feeling of relief at having now identified the source of the handicap which had so limited my ability to focus on small targets at high speed while still avoiding terrain and the many other hazards.

I had become so busy and excited by the job in hand, and had gradually accommodated the effect of the dark glasses. As a result they did not register in my consciousness. I had also become so absorbed as to skim below tree-top level and frighten myself into making certain acknowledgments and resolutions about the perils of over-exuberance.

Interestingly, my next logbook entry for a night landing a couple of weeks later states "Misted windshield, a most difficult landing." This resulted from a damaged air-conditioning system, which, providentially, did not coincide with the dark-glasses fiasco. That could have been embarrassing.

## The Danger Of Ventral Tanks

Our Meteors were fitted with an extra fuel tank, called the ventral, which was attached under the belly and held 175 imperial gallons, a significant proportion of our total (595 gallons). This tank could be instantly dropped by pulling a handle near the left side of the instrument panel. The ventral was something of a worry as there had been a number of tank explosions as a result of flak. Even an empty tank still held volatile vapor. These belly protuberances were vulnerable to flying debris and there had even been cases of 'scraping bottom' and suffering distortions due to excessively low pull-outs from strafing dives — dangerous stuff!

These metal tanks were scarce and quite expensive attachment, therefore casual dropping was forbidden. Unfortunately this policy could automatically place the Meteor at a further disadvantage in air-to-air combat, however the shortage of tanks was a problem for the squadron. The USAF released their tanks on entering air fighting as an operational technique. Acknowledging the cost, the American pilots were known to say — this was "Like dropping a limousine." Once the Squadron became experienced in ground attack it soon became clear that to hang on to your ventral, once it was holed and streaming vapor, was extremely dangerous and cost the lives of a number of our pilots. Soon we began dropping these dangerous appendages at any sign of a hit.

The first death among the 'Reprobates' as we of 5 Course were called, was Dick Robinson who met his untimely end as a new 77 Squadron pilot on 16 February at Haeju, an important rail and road junction on the Main Supply Route. Dick was brought down by an exploding ventral.

The next terrible example of a ventral tank fire and explosion on 9 March 1952 deprived us of another much-valued member of No 5 Course. Ian Cranston, winner of the award for ‘Most outstanding Sportsman’ on our graduation. Ian also did not have time to eject before the conflagration. F/Lt Wal Rivers was leading a rocket attack against heavily defended revetments about 30 miles north of The Holy Land (Kaesong). The flak was intense in this sensitive target area and soon Ian was seen to be on fire. In Wal’s words, “Ian Cranston’s aircraft passed me, quite close and totally in flames. A few seconds later it had passed my cockpit and exploded, probably on the ground.” No ejection seat was seen.

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

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

***Figure 125: Meteor Ventral Tank. L — R, Zupp, Evans, King***

## Successive Commanding Officers:

**W**ing Commander Ron Susans DFC, our Commanding Officer, left the squadron and returned to Australia on 26 March 1952 leaving the Squadron temporarily in the hands of Squadron Leader Bill Bennett until the arrival of the next C/O, Wing Commander J.R.‘Congo’ Kinninmont DFC and Bar. Kinninmont eventually turned over command to

Wing Commander J.W. Hubble AFC on 20 January 1953 and the last commanding officer of the squadron during the active service in Korea, Wing Commander A.Hodges, ‘Big Al’ took up the appointment on June 5’th 1953.


***Figure 126: Bill Bennet And His “Littlest Angel”***

# A Dicey Approach

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

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

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

***Figure 127: Han River At Seoul***

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

***Figure 128: Damaged Han River Bridge***

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

At a point he recognizes, where the river widens and then narrows, Wes turns us south-west across the paddy fields. Sliding beneath the gloomy overcast we are now sandwiched between an obstacle course and its ragged blanket of mobile vapor. Perception of the world has compressed and life expectancy is dictated by the possibility of placing wheels on that runway while these turbines continue to spin.

“Line-astern, one third flap, spread out, 1,000 feet behind each other, don’t get too low,

skim the cloud-base, there are wires around here! I'm aiming at a close right base for runway three two." The instructions are calm but distinct. I grasp the flap lever on the side of the instrument panel, select Down and re-position to Neutral as the gauge reads 'One Third'. We are still traveling at about 150 knots and there are hazards. Frayed tendrils of the ragged cloud base menace our flight-path, obscuring hills and wires.

Fuel, already alarmingly low, is being expended recklessly at this low altitude. Each time the sweep-second hand completes a circuit of the clock face, I know that a further seven gallons from my precious reservoir of aviation kerosene has been discharged through the jet pipes as hot air and flame. However we do not have eyes or thoughts for fuel gauges as all eyes and thoughts belong outside the cockpit.

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

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

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

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

***Figure 129: Wes Guy***

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

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

***Figure 130: Seoul Street Scene (1952)***

## An engine shot out

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

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

Through the reflector screen of the gunsight, on steady setting for strafing, I can still see these benign looking puffs appearing in groups and then dissolving before my eyes. The two leading Meteors are pulling out of their attack runs. Gun-smoke and wing vapor add to the spectacular scene as my friends curve dangerously close to the valley walls. The view through the sloping solidity of the bulletproof windscreen is now clear of Meteors so my right index finger dispatches a lethal consignment of explosives on a one-way journey. The harsh rattle of four spitting cannons begins somewhat out of range initially, but I am hoping to discourage those gunners. The target is growing — it begins to fill the reflector screen. The aiming cross settles on a truck, which bursts into flames.

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

***Figure 131: Typical Anti-Aircraft Gun***

The leader immediately takes charge — “Red Four are you OK?…Are you under control? …Red Three are you with him?” Eric received three affirmative replies. All was under control, so he and his wingman continued with the job in hand. I then closed the fuel cocks and pump applicable to the dead engine, which immediately stopped streaming. Next, the fuel tank Balance Valve was actuated in order to interconnect both tanks. Now my good engine would have access to all remaining fuel. To neglect this last item after having dropped the ventral would be an invitation to fuel starvation on my only power plant. On such vital details did our lives depend.

Preoccupied now with the business of survival I headed back to base. Frayne, who had “lost” me initially now caught up and stooged protectively a few hundred yards away at a maddeningly slow 150 Knots as I struggled up to 3,000 feet.

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

The flight back to base was slow but uneventful. At ten miles we changed to tower frequency — “Kimpo tower, Red section…two aircraft…initial…Red Four has one engine out.”

“Red section…call on the break…you have priority!” To guard against the hazards of a possible ‘Go round’ in the event of any problem during the approach I maintained speed

above the necessary 150 knots and delayed undercarriage until commencing descent from 1,200 feet circuit height. As the emergency air system T-handle was pulled the wheels dropped and locked into place. Flap selections operated normally via the remaining accumulator pressure. During the approach everything worked, except of course that silent starboard engine.

On crossing the threshold I refrained from using the air brakes as there was a possibility of flak damage in this mechanism. After touchdown the nose-wheel settled gently and the landing roll took the aircraft comfortably onto the end taxiway. A Meteor could not taxi on one motor, so the tug brought me to the tarmac.

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

# Chapter 10
# More Kimpo Combat Events
## More Action — More Losses
## Brake Failure

***Another Stroke Of Luck Intervenes***

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

As is customary I select full air-brake approaching the threshold and reduce to appropriate touchdown speed. This is a fairly short runway, particularly for landing with an 8 knot tailwind. Normally, braking commences as soon as the nose-wheel touches down and I am quite diligent on this occasion as this tailwind is significant.

Dismayed, I realize the brakes are not doing the normal job. They are only partially effective. “These brakes cannot possibly stop me before the end of this runway!” There is a steep embankment at the end! Just ahead there is my leader, in a maddeningly slow taxi towards the turn-off. Urgently I press the transmit button on the number two throttle, “Blue One! My brakes have failed, get out of my way!” There is no reply but I detect some acceleration in his slowly moving aircraft as he leaves the runway a short distance ahead. For a brief space of time that Meteor seems to almost stop directly ahead as he turns to escape my rapidly approaching aircraft.

Now it becomes apparent that my salvation depends on accurately navigating a path between two Sabres parked adjacent to the runway end. Frantic applications of rudder and brake slowly take effect. Two American Sabre pilots are now undoubtedly displaying a lively interest as I bear down on them and slip through this convenient space. Still traveling at speed the Meteor is now confronted by a sloping embankment ahead and just off the tarmac, an invitation to disaster. There is a sharp jolt as the Meteor leaves the hard-standing surface. “Where is this errant plane taking me now?” I have no further brake pressure! The embankment beckons! My aircraft seems powerless to resist this enticement to a disastrous plunge.

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

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

***Figure 132: Phil Hamilton-Foster***

# Lionel Cowper

On the afternoon of the brake failure episode I logged a distressing entry. "March 30, 1952, Lionel Cowper crashed and exploded on target! Lionel was a good friend who joined at Point Cook the same day as Smithy and all the others. Six of us were dispatched to attack military installations on the north west side of Haeju. Flying Officer Phil Hamilton-Foster was leading and I was in the Number Two position. Sergeant Ken "Black" Murray was leading Sergeant Lionel Cowper. Flight Lieutenant Keith Martin and Flight Sergeant "Blue" Colebrook made up the remainder. This town was fairly close, so we were soon on target with our rockets and guns. We did a great deal of damage to large warehouses. However, as was usual at this busy depot, the little black puffs and flickering lights were active.

I vividly recall a great sheet of flame tumbling across the countryside, the leader Phil Hamilton-Foster calling for a "Check-in" with no response from Blue Four, and a subdued return to base. Lionel! yet another one of our small band of No.5 Course friends was gone! We mourned privately as was the custom.

***Figure 133: Lionel Cowper (R) With Smithy***

# An Iwakuni Delivery Flight

***These flights were sought after and schemed for — a night in Japan!***

The morning of 09 April was usefully employed by accompanying Peter Middleton to the MSR just near the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. We strafed camouflaged vehicles near the road and received plenty of response. On returning I was told I had won the jackpot, a night in Japan! This was a scheduled delivery of a damaged Meteor to the main repair facility at Iwakuni, with a planned return the next day delivering a replacement aircraft.

I had already prepared a special travel map in hopes of being honored with such a treasured assignment. Sometimes fuel was a trifle tight on these deliveries and careful planning was advisable. Fuel remaining could be as little as 10 or 15 minutes. I departed Kimpo with a pleasant feeling. “I am an international traveler going places for an evening out.”


***Figure 134: South Korea And Japan***

Descending into Iwakuni, it was thrilling to glimpse the beautiful Inland Sea with its decorative display of small islands and beaches. Fuel gages showed a generous 20 minutes remaining and just one simple letdown procedure stood between me and a much-favored destination. A calm voice from the Ground Controlled Approach (a radar-directed, low-visibility letdown) brought the Meteor down through clouds onto an accurate final descent. Japan again — great!

The same room was there and so was smiling Ayako, bowing a welcome. It was something of a homecoming. Giggling room-girls gathered around excitedly asking for news of their particular charges. Ayako was attentive to all news of Smith-San and although unable to write English, she sent a verbal greeting. “Ayako speak, good luck for Smith-San!” She pronounced it “good ruck!” There was genuine sympathy at bad news. At the reports of deaths the girls expressed their sorrows collectively and with touching pathos. They spoiled us on these brief visits.

***Figure 135: Room Girls Afford A Welcome***

Luckily the return flight had to be aborted over the coast of Korea due to a couple of system failures on the aircraft and this meant another night in Japan. As always the Iwakuni experience was a joyous interlude. How barren and colorless were our days in Korea by comparison. What contrasts touched my senses when striding happily through the crowded streets, absorbing the vitality of each precious moment. The next day was taken up with a local flight, testing guns on a Meteor, which meant yet another night in Japan. Tough!

Our Sergeant Engine Fitter raised an interesting point on my second day at Iwakuni. He approached me in the dining room. “Col, that Meteor you brought in yesterday had a couple of bullet holes in the left engine! Looked like point fives, and one had gone right through a flame tube.” “Well the performance and engine parameters were normal on the way over!” This was further testimony to the sturdy nature of these motors. We were indeed fortunate to be flying Meteors in this type of combat. The speed, the two reliable engines and the type of armament gave us the ability to avoid and/or withstand a lot of damage.

The next attempt at delivery of a replacement aircraft was successful. According to the logbook details, my radio compass, or Bird-dog as the Yanks would say, became defective during the flight. This required radar heading checks and assistance from Ground Controlled Approach. I was soon back at work.

## Bill Purssey

On 20 April a rocket attack was mounted against troops at Chinampo. The report detailed the tragic loss of another friend, “Bill Purssey, hacked by ground fire.” Once again, two ventrals were hit as the Meteors began strafing trucks. The leader, Squadron Leader Bennett dropped his ventral tank and noted that his elevator trim control had been shot off. In Bill Purssey’s case the aircraft burst into flames and a wing fell off before he could jettison. He was observed to eject at low level (about 600 feet) but apparently without success. The Meteor plunged into the river but no parachute was seen. Bill Bennett made it home but without his troublesome ventral. He also brought home further flak damage to the port main-plane, with penetration of the main spar.

On this occasion Jim Kichenside was touched by the protective hand of Fate. When preparing to depart on that strike against Chinampo he was strapped up ready to go twice. On each occasion his aircraft was unserviceable and he was unable to proceed. Bill Purssey took his place in the formation. Bill, who had resigned his RAAF commission at the end of WWII studied medicine in Brisbane and did Citizen’s Air Force flying with 23 Squadron at weekends. When the call went out for experienced pilots in Korea he re-enlisted in the permanent RAAF. Ken and I had good memories of Bill’s instructing work during our sojourn with 3 Squadron in Canberra.

***Figure 136: Jim Kichenside — Our Youngest Pilot***

## Wheel Disintegration

On 6 May 1952 my left tire and wheel quite unexpectedly disintegrated on touch-down! Smoke and debris poured fourth as the Meteor slewed to an ungainly stop with the left half of the aircraft hanging out over the gravel, about half way down the runway. Remarkably, the fire brigade which attended all arrivals, had accelerated along behind and managed to dead heat with my final abrupt stop. Within seconds the left side of the aircraft, including much of the canopy was engulfed in foam. I made a hasty and slippery exit and was able to disappoint the ambulance personnel who were just seconds behind the fire-tender.

I declined their services, but accepted a lift home to our tarmac. The whole operation

exemplified the efficiency of Emergency Readiness which the Yanks had developed for our protection.

***Figure 137: USAF Crash Tender***

## Rockets

We normally carried eight or sixteen high-explosive heads on our rocket strikes. These were fired in salvo and packed a tremendous punch — said to be like a broadside from a six-inch cruiser. Fortunately the armament section did an efficient job in ensuring the reliability of our weapons. Cannon stoppages were infrequent, in fact I never had such an experience, if firing several thousand 20 milimeter rounds. Rockets were reliable although we did occasionally return with ‘hang-ups’ — those which refused to leave the wing racks when fired. These were a hazard and could add a touch of interest to the approach and landing. Firstly we could never trust these temperamental and uncooperative missiles that refused to budge when the button was pushed. Could these fickle devices change their minds at an inconvenient moment, for example on touchdown.

***Figure 138: Armorers Prepare Rockets In Dismal Conditions***

Significantly, the carriage of a non-symmetrical load, such as eight missiles under one wing only, did nothing to enhance the aerodynamic efficiency or physical balance of a Meteor. Such an aircraft would then be nursed around the landing pattern through an air mass considerably disturbed by the jet e-flux and vortices of preceding aircraft. Handling characteristics could be adversely effected.

I make mention of this, as such a situation produced one of my major encounters with imminent oblivion. The USAF had been bombing the MSR bridge south of Sariwon for some time with questionable success. Someone at our headquarters suggested that our rockets could do the job. So, on mid morning 7 May Val Turner briefed John Surman, Wes Guy and myself for an attack on this special target. During the dive I made the appropriate touches on the firing button on top of the control column. All my right wing missiles responded. Several more pushes on the button failed to induce the left hand load to discharge.

It was pleasing to observe that there were now three large holes in the bridge and virtually none of our salvos had gone astray. It was also gratifying to note we were all airworthy as we pulled up and away from the guns of Sariwon so anxiously bent on revenge.

Placing the R/P (Rocket Projectile) master switch to ‘Safe’, I was resigned to carrying these redundant items home. The Meteor trimmed out satisfactorily and the return flight was so ordinary I had begun to accept a sense of normalcy. I was number 4 in the landing pattern. By way of precaution, I would probably have carried a few more knots of airspeed

while banking, and normal spacing of about 15 seconds between aircraft was probably being applied. I was aligning with the runway, no doubt using a bank angle of about 25 degrees.

Suddenly the left wing dropped crazily towards the ground. I seemed to be almost vertical! The Meteor had taken matters into its own hands. Normal control responses were not in operation today and the world had adopted an alarming tilt. Full power and bags of aileron still left me for a dreadful moment, hanging on edge in one grand side-slip towards The Land Of The Morning Calm. A few more seconds and I would be making a dramatic exit. This exultant Demon would have its way!

Recovery was almost as sudden as was the calamitous loss of control, but proximity to the terrain was alarming, perhaps 100 feet. At least I was breathing again and my world had regained its sense of balance. Commencing a controlled climb straight ahead I called tower in as steady a voice as I could muster. “Blue Four, going around!” “Blue Four report on base, maaan that was close!” He’s telling me! This time I’ll arrange more separation from preceding aircraft.

After landing I sat on the runway end and regained some degree of composure, while the armorers rendered the troublesome weapons Safe. In analysis, it was obvious the problem arose from landing behind a number of aircraft when the wind was straight down the runway, thereby causing all of the mechanical turbulence and Jet e-flux to drift straight back to my aircraft banking onto final. These powerful vortices, this invisible wave of distorted air, combining with the inefficient left wing air flow pattern, had taken control of my Meteor. It was a lesson!

***Figure 139: L to R, Drummond, Blight, Oborn***

# Chapter 11
# Ken Murray and Wal Rivers

***Two Dedicated pilots***

## Ken “Black” Murray — Sensitive Business

There were lighter sides to life at Kimpo during the Korean war. When a pilot reached 100 missions, and many did, there was a party. The honored one was responsible for payment of the bill, a quaint local custom! All such pilots observed the traditional procedure of signing a bar-chit covering four cases of beer. Half went to the Airmens’ Bar and the remainder to the Officers’ Mess. The story was told of Ken Murray strapping into his Meteor to go off on his 100’th sortie.

There was a squeal of brakes and the blare of a horn as the Bar Officer, one of the pilots, Flight Lieutenant Val Turner, stopped his jeep alongside the aircraft. Armed with the Mess invoice book, he urgently climbed up to the cockpit. “Ken, would you just sign for tonight’s grog. Better get you to sign it now, you never know what might happen in this job!” “A bit rude, isn’t it?” said Ken after signing. Val just grinned, “We look forward to your return but do take care, it can be dangerous out there!” Such businesslike sensitivity! Of course Ken did return from that mission and astonishingly he also returned safely from more than 200 additional sorties bringing his total to a record-breaking figure of 333 combat missions in the Korean war.

Ken Murray was highly decorated: DFC: AFC: DFM: U.S. Air Medal

***Figure 140: Ken Murray***

## Wal Rivers

**W**al Rivers also established an outstanding record of missions flown during the conflict. He accomplished the maximum number flown in any individual tour, 246. His final total of 313 was just short of the record 333 missions achieved by Ken Murray. Several pilots witnessed Wal being told by the C/O that he was to cease operations as his record of near-misses was becoming a general worry in high places. Wal left the room with little or no comment and his disappointment was obvious. Both Wal and Ken Murray survived the conflict in spite of their many close encounters with oblivion. Both of these men played an immense part in Squadron activities throughout the war and their names have become legendary.

WAL Rivers was highly decorated: DFC And Bar; U.S.A. DFC; U.S. Air Medal

***Figure 141: Wal Rivers***

## Wal Tells a Few of His Stories!

I was based at Iwakuni with 77 Squadron flying Mustangs. On the afternoon of April 17 1950, which was a couple of months before the Korean War, I was briefed to do formation flying with a new pilot. We were informed that naval fighters from the carrier HMS Triumph would be sharing the allocated flying area and we were ordered to not indulge in ‘dog-fighting’ fun, an ever-present temptation. Perhaps the navy pilots were not briefed

accordingly. While in tight formation, at 8,000 feet in the training area we were suddenly ‘attacked’ by several Royal Naval fighters. It would have been reckless to instruct the trainee wing-man to engage his aircraft in close formation maneuvers so I instructed him to continue straight ahead and I would tackle the ‘enemy.’ Increasing power I turned rapidly towards the descending attackers, passing through their path in a climbing turn to port.

There was no warning of the impending collision, except for a split second when I had a terrifying view of nothing but British naval camouflage paint filling my windscreen. There was a terrific bang and everything went black. In that instant I ducked and pulled the canopy release lever. At that very instant a vision of my mother appeared before me. I knew I was in mortal danger. My aircraft, severely damaged, was spiraling out of control. To survive it was imperative to exit the aircraft and use my parachute. The habits produced by often-practiced survival drills took over and I unconsciously disconnected oxygen, intercom and seat-harness. I then made several unsuccessful attempts to climb out. The air flow pressure and spiral forces combined to force me back into the seat. At last, using all the power my arms and legs could muster I was outside, sliding down the fuselage into contact with the tail-plane. With further exertion I wrenched free of the aircraft. The relief was indescribable. For a moment I considered delaying the parachute opening. However, on hearing the screaming of an aircraft engine, increasing in volume I felt the danger of a second collision and promptly pulled the ripcord. As the parachute opened my stricken Mustang passed just below me, in a spin, with one severed wing fluttering close behind.

Just before hitting the water I released the parachute and was then able to inflate the dinghy. Apart from an aching foot I was unhurt and was able to board the dinghy. Fortunately there were Japanese fishing boats in the area and I was soon pulled aboard. A small Seagull Walrus flying boat from the Triumph taxied up and flew me to Iwakuni. I was checked out at the Base Hospital and returned to duty. I was now eligible for membership of both the ‘Caterpillar Club’ and the ‘Goldfish Club’ in recognition of the life-saving functions of the parachute and the dinghy. Some suggested I may also have qualified for the ‘Fishing Boat Club’ and the ‘Walrus Club.’

Bay Adams, our Flight Commander, who parachuted after a collision with ‘Blue’ Thornton over the island of Shikoku, had been awarded the Caterpillar badge one morning on parade. He persuaded me to make application, however the form was mislaid, possibly due to the administrative chaos of the Squadron packing up to return to Australia followed abruptly by a complete about-turn in order to engage in the Korean War.

During this war I completed two fighter operational tours, accumulating 313 combat missions. While in Iwakuni and about to fly home I was approached by the new Administration Officer to say he had found my form for the Caterpillar badge lodged under a pile of books. He asked me to come over and complete the application. I answered “Forget it!”

## Wal Rivers, Kimpo Korea — about March 1952!

I never detailed the unusual particulars of this flight in my logbook, but it has remained a vivid memory and I speculate on what could have occurred. About one hour before briefing, I experienced a light-headed sensation. It passed, but I fronted the squadron

Doctor. He recorded my temperature and made a few other checks and all was normal. I was cleared to fly

Four of us were briefed to carry out a mission in the north west of Korea. After briefing I spoke to Bob, who was number three, expressing my concern, and told him that if a problem arose I would signal him to take leadership of the section. The sky was overcast and we climbed to about 20,000 feet, maintaining this altitude towards the target area. We approached an enormous cloud front and would be flying on instruments in a couple of minutes. I signaled Bob to assume leadership and I moved back to No3 position and my No2 now became No4.

Upon entering cloud an astonishing sensation gripped me. I felt sure that my aircraft had rolled to the inverted position. I had made no control inputs, there was no pressure on my shoulder-straps, and no dirt was falling around me as would be expected if the floor were now the ceiling. The nose of the Meteor seemed to have rolled on a pinhead. It was a terrific strain maintaining close formation whilst seeming to be inverted, particularly as I sometimes felt that I was normal and the others were all inverted. On and on we flew until the intense concentration in this condition made me briefly consider breaking formation.

Suddenly we burst into the clear and my aircraft seemed to execute a half roll, and flight became normal. I hand-signaled Bob Strawbridge and again took over the leadership. We completed our attack. When returning to base we had to penetrate another cloud mass so I handed over to Bob. Again I had this amazing sensation of rolling over, but this time I was much less disturbed by the situation.

I estimated the flight times in these perceptions of inversion to be 30 minutes and later 10 minutes. As soon as possible I checked with the doctor who looked in my ears and immediately grounded me. After three days I was cleared to fly. Shortly afterward we received information about a Royal Air force pilot who, when formation flying in cloud, suddenly pulled up out of formation and was never seen again. I recalled other situations where pilots had disappeared while formation flying in cloud, or at night.

Years later I read in a small book written by Oliver Roydhouse, and published in 2000, ‘World’s Best Trivia,’ (page 10). “The most common headphones issued to pilots create a humid environment in the ear canal that is ideal for breeding bacteria. Wearing such headphones for one hour will increase the number of bacteria in your ear by up to 700 times.”

## Wal Rivers, Kimpo Korea — 9 March 1952:

On this day our Operations Officer, Stan Bromhead briefed four Meteor pilots on a “hot” (well defended) target. I was leading the section which also included, Vic Oborn, John Myers and a new sergeant, Ian Cranston. We were briefed to assess the fire power of the target for a flight of 12 F-80 fighter-bombers, each armed with 2x500lb bombs, which were waiting to receive this information before taking off. There was a spotter plane in the vicinity, reporting abnormal ground activity as he prepared to mark the target with smoke. Flying in good visibility at 4000 feet, we located the spotter plane and his smoke. We dived on the target, releasing rockets. The flak was intense. One shell went through my port wing, leaving a big hole. I advised the others of the hit, cleared the target area briefly, and then as my aircraft was still under control I turned back in order to split up the flak.

There was a thump. My number two called that I was streaming so I instantly dropped the ventral tank — a likely source of explosion.

I was now confronted with the sight of a Meteor, totally inflamed inverted and breaking up. I seemed to witness this in slow motion as the stricken aircraft hit the ground alongside and exploded in a huge fireball close to my starboard side, illuminating my cockpit in an orange glow. This was the newly arrived sergeant, Ian Cranston. We three survivors headed for home and heard the spotter pilot's anguished voice repeatedly saying "I'm sorry." I answered — "It's OK!" There were still no F-80s in the area. This was explained later when our C/O, W/C Ron Susans told me the F-80 attack had been canceled at the last minute. It seems, the spotter had reported: the loss of a Meteor, and the flak to be still very active, indicating the need to re-think the F-80 sortie. An attack producing greater area saturation would no doubt be more effective.

### Wal Rivers, Kimpo Korea — 7 May 1952

I was leading four Meteors on a rocket strike against a target at Sariwon, in northwest Korea. As we attacked out of the sun, I could see enemy troops firing from gun positions near the target area. Immediately after my rocket release there was a terrific explosion behind the starboard side of the cockpit. A vision of my mother was before me and I realized I was in mortal danger. I slammed on port rudder, skidding sideways, hoping to confuse the gunners about my actual direction of travel. I released the ventral fuel tank as it was always considered a hazard once the aircraft had been hit. I flew low over damp paddy fields checking for any reflection of a fire, which would prompt me to climb and eject immediately. Fortunately there was no sign of fire and soon I was able to receive confirmation from Bob Strawbridge, who flew beside me, that there was no visible damage. Back at base I elected to land last in case some defect should cause a crash landing which could block the runway. I knew there had been some substantial damage somewhere in the aircraft.

Inspection of my Meteor revealed: Three 40mm shells had hit the engine housings. One 40mm had blown a few inches off the tail plane. A 75/80mm shell had penetrated the starboard side of the aircraft, hit the underside of the lead platform supporting the two starboard 20mm cannons, and split this mechanism in two as it exploded. The remnants of the exploding shell then entered the cockpit. I was presented with the remains of this 'trophy' which had accompanied me home in the cockpit. One half was missing. It was eight inches long and the pointed head was flattened by one inch. It took two hands cupped together to measure the base. This was my 313th mission. The Commanding Officer told me I was finished, and would be going home.

It is most interesting to note that shortly afterward, in Sydney, my mother revealed she had experienced a terrifying dream, seeing me in mortal danger. When the war finished one of the returning POWs, Vance Drummond, told me that, in a dream he had seen me being shot down and arriving in the POW camp. He told others, and they were disappointed when I did not arrive. After careful scrutiny it was discovered that both of these dreams occurred on the day of my final mission.

## B-26 Bomber Flight

I became friendly with an American, Captain (later Major) James Brierton Townsend of the 67'th Tactical Recon. Unit. In repayment for a ride in a two-seat Meteor the Major reciprocated by providing a crew seat in his bomber, a Douglas B-26 Invader, on a lengthy night photo-reconnaissance mission on 11 April 1952. Memory is vague as to how approval was obtained for this mission, and doubts persist with regard to these arrangements. In fact it is likely the word 'approval' would be inappropriate. However I was made welcome by Jim and his crew as they helped me into the unfamiliar helmet and parachute. "You can be our Observer, we'll show you what's required." The subsequent briefing was adequate and articulate.

The B-26 Douglas 'Invader' was a medium sized high-wing aircraft with two radial engines which looked a little too large for the wings to which they were attached. This bomber was a development of the WW2 Boston and had been re-designated. It carried a crew of about four. This plane was equipped with cameras but I do not recall any armaments unless one considers flares to be in this category. Our mission was of four hours duration and involved photographing the night battles along the Main Supply Route. There were plenty of these, as the Communist armies and their supply vehicles preferred to travel under the veil of darkness, thereby minimizing meetings with interdiction aircraft such as Meteors. On that night we concentrated finally in the area of the North Korean capital, P'Yongyang.

***Figure 142: James Townsend's Douglas Invader***

The action along the MSR was dramatic. The route seemed to be lit up as one great night battle extending as far as we could see along the highway. Special night-strafing aircraft were at work amid a violent display of opposing fire. The flak was continuous and contained a proportion of tracer that criss-crossed around us. Vehicles exploded. Aircraft exploded. Bombs exploded and finally we were on hand for the grandest display of all, an ammunition dump disintegrated with much ceremony! Flares and searchlights indulged in competition for the Illumination Stakes as each combatant sought his enemy. These powerful beams fanned the heavens with seemingly random patterns of frantic scrutiny, seeking their tormentors. So busy were the gunners down there with their immediate problems, they were only occasionally moved to give our intrusive bomber some special attention. The B26 weaved violently as our pilot sought safe passage through this agitated air mass. Flak burst nearby like special effects in this grand fireworks exhibition. More flares went down. Our cameras clicked away. The flight reaped a harvest of pictures.

On return to Kimpo in the early hours we encountered thick cloud and were required to execute a Ground Controlled Approach. A few days later I received an invitation. “Come over and see the photos.” An interesting experience and a privilege had been mine! Next year I received an invitation to Major Townsend’s wedding in Wichita Kansas.

## Max “blue” Colebrook

April 13 was a big day, four missions! We frequently did two and occasionally three, but four was exceptional. The first was a strafing attack along the MSR. We sought out hidden military targets and used up our ammunition on identified or suspect areas. Flak made clear its deadly intentions as usual, after all this was their Main Supply Route. The next two sorties were rocket strikes against known military installations in the vicinity of Haeju. As usual this ‘Hot spot’ lived up to its reputation. On this day Blue Colebrook went Missing. Flight Lieutenant Peter Middleton and Blue had been strafing a gun position. Middleton called Blue in alarm, “Your ventral is on fire!” “OK! I dropped it I’m heading home!” But there was no further contact. As soon as we refueled back at Kimpo I departed on my fourth mission for the day, in company with all available aircraft, in an attempt to locate the downed pilot. Had we been able to see Blue safely on the ground, there may have been some possibility of a helicopter rescue, with the Meteors flying a protecting circle. We searched anxiously in all likely areas regrettably without success. There was no further news of Blue.

***Figure 143: Magnificence Of Seoul In The Year 2010***

# Chapter12
# The Air War Continues

***We start to become "Old Hands"***

## MiG Victories (Point Cook Cadet Graduates)

On 4 May a MiG-15 succumbed to the guns of one of our Meteors. Flying Officer John Surman, a graduate of Cadet College, while flying with Ken Murray sent the MiG down in flames with a two second burst of 20mm shells. A few days later, on 8 May, Flying Officer Bill Simmonds was attacked by a MiG but managed to 'turn the tables' and get in an effective burst at 800 yards. This was good shooting, as the guns were harmonized at that range. The pilot ejected, so Bill had his definite kill.

***Figure 144: L to R, Bill Simmonds, John Surman***

## Don Robertson

We all suffered another blow, and this was particularly hard on the boys from Cadet College Point Cook, when they learned about the death of Pilot Officer Don Robertson, their Sword Of Honor winner. His Meteor was hit by ground fire on a rocket attack and dived into the ground.

On 15 May we were a section of four. Sergeant Ken "Black" Murray was leading his wing-man Don Robertson. Number three was Sergeant John Myers and I was 'Tail end Charlie', the man who so often 'Cops the flak'. Our target was a large military establishment near the town of Masan-Ni about 12 miles S/E of Sariwon. Each Meteor was armed with eight High Explosive rockets and our four Cannons. As we dived on our target the nasty little black puffs were there menacing our descent path.

Quite early in the dive, well before normal rocket release height, Robertson's aircraft, which was ahead and below me, suddenly rolled to the right, simultaneously discharging its rockets. In anguish I watched the Meteor plummeting earthwards, waiting and desperately hoping to see an ejection seat. The aircraft continued its lazy rolling motion terminating in a great ball of orange flame. There was no sign of an ejection-seat. We

completed our task, destroying a large barracks building but this was no consolation at all as we continued home without Don. No finer young officer ever served!

***Figure 145: L to R, Bill Simmonds, Don Robertson, Tony Armstrong, Geoff Lushey***

# Leave In Kawana

***While Ron Guthrie and his friends were suffering severe hardships, Ken Smith and I were preparing for a week of golf at the commodious leave center at Kawana in Japan.***

**B**attle damage and other contingencies continually eroded pilot numbers and aircraft availability. Pilot strength, often as low as seventeen, instead of the nominal twenty four, was evidence of the inability of the RAAF to maintain a supply of trained fighter pilot volunteers. Consequently it was reported in Australian newspapers that 77 Squadron pilots were doing too much; sometimes more than one hundred missions in a tour in contrast with the American standard tour of eighty, for similar combat. The officials, of course, stoutly denied this fundamentally true statement. It would appear that as a result, the squadron commander was ordered to immediately implement the one hundred-mission limit, or at least seem to do so.

Ken Smith and I both qualified and were told that our ‘Tour’ was complete and we were being sent on leave to Japan. We were asked, in the same breath to volunteer for a ‘second tour’ a term usually reserved for pilots who had returned to Australia for a substantial period and had then volunteered again. Reference was made to pilot shortage and the poor replacement situation. Without even discussing the matter I agreed on the spot. Ken, naturally and without hesitation, concurred with my precipitous acceptance. This decision was to cost Ken his life and I have had a bad conscience ever since.

***Figure 146: Kintai Bridge At Iwakuni***

Gladly, once again Ken and I traveled together, this time in a RAAF DC-3 from the main Seoul city airport to ‘our home’ in Iwakuni. As the plodding old transport droned slowly southwards we relaxed and gazed with interest at the South Korean countryside. In our travels we had seen little of the war-torn South. So much of the land had been stripped of trees as the people desperately sought fuel and shelter in the severe climatic changes.

After what seemed an eternity we descended over the sparkling beauty of the Inland Sea and our old Biscuit Bomber’s wheels kissed the runway at Iwakuni on the morning of 16 May 1952. In our barracks we found a happy Ayako bowing and eagerly making us as comfortable as any honored guests could be. The girls gathered around and the newly employed giggled and marveled at Smithy’s immense six feet three inches. The Iwakuni contrast with the stark Korean existence was a boost and we made the most of an evening in this lively town before taking the train to Tokyo and our leave destination.

***Figure 147: Magnificent Kawana Leave Resort***

quite uplifting: snow capped Fuji Yama, Tokyo bay, tranquil fishing villages, and perfect weather! It cost ten cents for eighteen holes of “golfu” including equipment and caddies. “To hell with the expense, let’s have a game anyway!” My friend Pat Melican turned up for a week of leave, and while Pat was no golfer he joined me on a number of photographic expeditions to local villages. The relaxed companionship at Kawana was ‘Just what the doctor ordered.’

***Figure 148: Smithy And Caddies At Kawana***

A case of suspected smallpox closed the camp while re-vaccinations were checked. No one could leave for one week. We resigned ourselves to another week of golf!

***Figure 149: One Of The Spectacular Kawana Golf links***

The extra week gave us the pleasant company of two other 5 Course boys, Jim Kichenside and Max Outhwaite who arrived for their well-earned rest from battle.

***Figure 150: "Head Downah King San"***

Appropriate notifications were sent to the squadron regarding our delayed return to Korea but in fine Service style the message did not arrive for a couple of weeks. Another night in Tokyo, a brief train trip and one more joyous night at Iwakuni and we were back in the DC-3 gazing down on the desolate Korean countryside. On disembarking at Seoul airport two days after leaving Kawana we were met by stern-faced officers who informed us we had committed a serious offense. We were one week AWOL. The words "Desertion in the face of the enemy" were bandied around by those who fancied drama. In fact I believe we were placed under 'Open Arrest.'

The two culprits' cheerful amusement at the prospects of a firing squad was held to be in poor taste. We were paraded before the C/O with hats off. Eventually, after the hilarious preliminaries, during which we fought to hold back our mirth, we were allowed to explain. The C/O, having investigated the matter of the delayed signal, decided on a pardon. At least we guessed this was the case as we were back on strength immediately, instead of languishing in cells listening to the coffin-maker whistling as he plied his gruesome trade. Our exoneration was never formalized!

## Five MiGs

On this morning I was escorting a new arrival, on his traditional 'Look around' over North Korea. The logbook tells me this was Flight Sergeant Ray Fox whom I recall as a pleasant fellow and a good pilot. Initially, in the pre-flight briefing we studied the relief model of North Korea and considered salient points on the intended route. We marked Ray's maps with flak danger areas and 'Minimum Fuel Arcs'. These semi-circles were vital guidelines relating to 'Fuel quantity, time to start heading home!' Another most important area to mark clearly in red crayon was The Holy Land. "What is this Holy Land?" asked my new friend. I explained regarding this prohibited area, the substantial square mileage surrounding Kaesong where the Panmunjom Peace Talks were supposed to be 'in progress.'

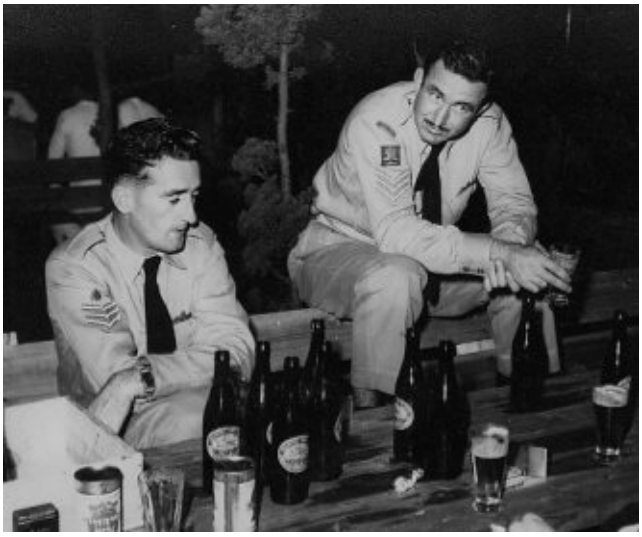


***Figure 151: Ray Fox (L) And Clive Marshall***

Soon we were encased in our stifling cockpits, sitting on our emergency water supply that could now be described as 'hot water-bottles'. We longed for the relief of flight. In fact we were seized by the urgent desire to be aloft and escape this super-heated world, wrapped in its suffocating blanket of smog. With oxygen tubes connected and headphones plugged in we checked communication. "Red Two, this is Red One, how do you read?" "Red Two, five by five!"

Engines started and checklist poems proceeded and we then trundled over steel taxiways to the edge of runway 14. A pair of American Sabres landed in close trail. "Godfrey Red Section cleared for take-off!" With aircraft held firmly alongside each other at the threshold of this rather short runway we gradually opened throttles to take-off RPM. Roll commenced on my signal. Small amounts of brake operation helped correct for the crosswind until 60 knots airspeed produced full rudder control. The hot runway asphalt,

loose and sticky, gripped us as though to impede our desire for levitation. The atmosphere rippled in the mid-day thermals, as we finally lifted nose-wheels to break free from the shimmering surface of this sweltering world. A touch on the brakes stopped wheel rotation and undercarriage levers were selected. Six wheels snapped up and entered their housings as we rolled left onto track. We set engines at 14,100 rpm by a slight retardation of the throttles and accelerated to 300 knots. We were now spearing upward as altimeter needles rotated to the measure of 6,500 ft. per minute. Looking back and below, I noted how quickly our runway disappeared in this summer haze. As the air-conditioning and pressurization systems took effect the irritating odor of kerosene fumes left the cockpit. We regained composure in the cool of our rejuvenated atmosphere.

Now at 5,000 feet, released from the earth-bound murk, we began a new trial of suffering from intense glare off a rumpled layer of stratus. Soon we were efficiently established in battle formation, spaced several hundred yards apart for maximum ability to ‘cover’ each other against ill-intentioned strangers. “Bomb line passing below now, check cannons.” Eight powerful weapons roared in response, as they spat forth about 30 lethal projectiles. We followed the established track along the Main Supply Route, dotted with peaceful villages enclosed in acres of soggy paddy-fields. I introduced Ray to that much frequented resort, Haeju! He had already heard about certain places including this ill-tempered community and inquired, “Is this where Lionel Cowper went in?” “I’m afraid so and I was with him. They don’t like us down there!”

We continued to the north past Chaeryong, Sariwon, Kyomipo and I pointed out, “Chinnampo near the coast where Bill Purssey bought it!” My eloquent ‘Travel-talk’ took much of our attention. The scene below was absorbing and Ray was interested to view the expanse of Pyongyang as we diverted towards Sinanju. Suddenly, just ahead and above there were swept-wing fighters, five of them my logbook announces. They passed directly over us, perhaps 3,000 feet above, speeding northwards. I was in shock! How did we miss them? They must be friendly Sabres, I told myself. Otherwise why didn’t they attack? They must have seen us! This rationale did not appease my conscience nor quell my sensation of recent exposure to extreme danger. Those Sabres looked different! Ray had seen them now and asked, “Swept wings 11 o’clock high, what do you reckon?” He received his reply from a high pitched American voice, “Godfrey flight Pyongyang area heads up MiGs northbound!”

Now they tell us! They’ve passed over! “Keep a sharp lookout all around Ray. There may be more of them. Let’s get under that cloud layer near the coast!” My reply did nothing to boost his confidence. Guilt assailed me. Why didn’t I see them? I reprimand myself: poor example to a newcomer; too much sight-seeing; too much interest in the ground; too much informative chatter; but not enough looking out and around. In fact I had sinned! However, the Great Judge had decided on an acquittal this time, but surely I was placed on a good behavior bond! Now that a protective layer of stratus shielded us I felt more comfortable but also acknowledged that we had, ‘Closed the gate after the horse’. For the remainder of the trip, glances at the ground were cursory and less frequent. From here on the flight became a demonstration of diligent ‘sky-sweeping.’

Strangely I had lost my enthusiasm for proceeding much further north. As it transpired, low cloud ahead precluded effective map-reading, so just north of Sinanju and Anju we

made a big sweeping turn for home. Remembering the familiarization trip with Bill Purssey I gradually descended for a closer look at the supply routes. We pursued a pair of small vehicles which disappeared as if by magic as we were positioning to attack. Ray understood as I advised, “There you see, they have learned to keep a look-out and are experts at hasty camouflage.”

After landing I felt no desire to advertise our experience. My conscience was still troubled as we had in fact placed ourselves in an ideal position for the MiGs to score two more Meteors. They either did not see us, or for some reason were pre-occupied — perhaps with fuel gages. Strange! Such encounters were rare.

## Ken Smith

***The theme of this book is ‘Good luck and Good Fortune’ so I will not dwell on the deaths of comrades. We lost many good friends. However one such occurrence, on 8 July 1952 must accompany this narrative in some detail.***

**A** few hours after returning from that foolish escapade wherein I had offered myself and my wing-man as target practice for MiGs, I was briefed to join another foursome for what my logbook so nonchalantly announces as a ‘Road Reconnaissance’. This was another way of saying we were going after vehicles foolish enough to attempt to use the highways or byways of our attack area. Ken Smith was designated as leader of this patrol. I was Number Three with Max Outhwaite as my wing-man. Ken, Max and I were all 5 Course Reprobates. Smithy’s wing-man was Pilot Officer Howard.

As Ken and I walked down to the briefing I confessed my ineptitude on the familiarization flight. I wished this kept confidential. “Kingy you almost familiarized yourself with the feel of 37 mm cannon shells up your tail!” Smithy smiled and there was understanding and friendship in his gaze. Such sympathetic rejoinders were essential to our anecdotal forays. This man was much valued as a companion. The briefing was a fairly simple matter. Ken and his wing-man would make the first low runs along the supply route with my section flying ‘top cover’ to watch for MiGs. Then we would change roles in order to produce approximately equal rates of fuel expenditure. Jets are thirsty at low altitude. The meteorological briefing explained our poor visibility in terms of a local inversion layer and made predictions of better things further north. We should have no excuses for failing to see and hit our targets.

A Jeep ran us to our Meteors. It was too hot to walk to the far end of the line of silver aircraft sitting in their huge sandbag revetments. The temperature had dropped a trifle but the horizon was barely in evidence as we were still wrapped in smog. I noted with dissatisfaction that once again my Meteor, number 953 was not available. It was nice to feel that personal touch when operating one’s own aircraft. However, I regretted this ingratitude on finding my diligent ground-crew finalizing their pre-departure routine for that smart machine, A77-728. My steed was well shod and tidy and the canopy was receiving a thorough cleaning and polishing. The boys were determined that if I should miss seeing any MiGs, it will not be their fault. Smithy’s last dig at me as our Jeep skidded to a stop at the revetments, “Col do you think you may spare the time to lookout for MiGs today? It would be a nice touch!” “Smithy, I am the worlds most diligent MiG scout and have a stiff neck to prove it.” These remarks were lost on the others, no need to advertise one’s failings.

My last sight of Smithy was a glimpse from my cockpit, of that lanky figure cheerfully greeting his ground-crew as they assisted this immensely popular man into his Meteor. Soon with his helmet on and canopy closed, Ken became a voice on the radio, a leader giving instructions, a professional airman in his mobile office. Our personal lives had been put on hold until this job was done. We would have drinks and a meal together after the day's toil and perhaps visit one of the American Clubs.

Eight Rolls Royce engines screamed in unison. Ken called tower, "Godfrey Flight, four aircraft, taxi instructions!" "…Cleared taxi runway 14 and cleared for take-off!" Four busy pilots maneuvered in close company, each confronting the smoke and flames of exhaust pipes several yards ahead. Ken and his wing-man entered the runway and advanced throttles against the brakes. As they rolled, my pair joined their cloud of kerosene fumes and performed identical procedures. Soon, in neat formation, we were heading northwest at 300 knots.

Visibility improved as promised, however some scattered cloud kept us at 5,000 feet, a bit hard on the fuel consumption, but better for our hunting purposes. We found our victims, motor transport, on a minor roadway through rugged terrain exposing themselves to 20mm danger. "Trucks!" called Smithy with a note of excitement, "We're going down!" Max and I circled at 5,000 feet and watched. I knew Smithy would not miss as he entered his dive with Howard close behind.

What followed is still indelibly etched on my memory. I can still feel it happening. Tracer fire, with its deadly offering, streaks up from that military convoy. Suddenly I am startled and shocked into non-comprehension of what my senses are virtually shouting. An immense sheet of orange flame tumbles and sweeps across the hills and valleys. Then, still without understanding or acceptance, I hear Howard's anguished cry. "Smithy has gone in!"

"No!" This is not happening! Smithy and I are going to travel home together to Australia. This is a non-negotiable item in our agreement with Fate! Now, Reality re-appears and I am tormented by her reasonable and intelligent assurances. This has happened! Our fable of immortality has failed us! Personal confidence is now shaken to its unreasoning foundations. I must face the terrible facts. Smithy has just died, in an exploding, flaming union with the Korean hills. The Beak, the big-nosed man, who had won the hearts of so many, has left us, on permanent leave of absence. There will be no more trips around Japan together. We will not travel home to Australia together. The Powers will now have to look around for another candidate for Chief of Air Staff! There were many such grievings! We had to pretend life was still 'A merry bowl of cherries', but this was a facade.

***Figure 152: Ken Smith In His Meteor***

My next flight after losing Smithy was a four aircraft Armed Reconnaissance. I was leading two Sergeants, Tony Armstrong and Ken Janson and my Number Four was Flight Lieutenant Wes Guy. Undoubtedly Wes came along to see how I coped with leading after witnessing the demise of so many of my friends. Everyone knew how close I was to Smithy.

***Figure 153: Tony Armstrong***

## Slim Haslope

**A** great privilege that came to some as we achieve seniority and a semblance of permanence, was the ‘ownership’ of a personal Meteor. When that day arrived I became the proud proprietor of Meteor Mk 8 A77-953. My signature on an official document bore testimony to this effect. There was no need to obtain ‘Pink Slip’ or a ‘Green Slip’ and I was not optimistic enough to approach anyone for Comprehensive Insurance. Nevertheless

there was a sense of pride in ownership and I was possessive enough to wish to fly my aircraft whenever possible. I was planning some spectacular art-work with which to adorn the nose of this remarkable acquisition.

On a significant occasion on 5 August, a newly-arrived pilot, Flight Lieutenant “Slim” Haslope signed for my personal Meteor during the pre-departure routine for a strike. Slim was my Number Four on an eight aircraft rocket strike. I could easily have called him back as he was walking out to the flight lines after having appended his signature, but decided not to ‘make a fuss’ about mere territorial matters.

After take-off I called for the customary Check in. There were two immediate replies: “Blue Two!” “Blue Three!” — but nothing from Blue Four.

I called again, “Blue Four check in!” Now an American voice, tinged with an unmistakable note of anguish, transmitted from the control tower, “Sorry, Blue Four crashed on take-off!” My thoughts and feelings were in turmoil, Blue Four! Slim Haslope! ‘Is he OK? Has he been killed?’ There were no answers, just a job to be completed. ‘After all this is a hazardous vocation and we accept the risks.’ A glance over the left wing provided shocking confirmation. A pall of smoke wafted up from a mound of silver wreckage near a small village nestling reluctantly in precarious and noisy proximity to the end of our runway. My aircraft, which Slim was flying, failed to remain airborne, crashed a short distance from the runway and caught fire. Slim was killed! I could and should have been the pilot of that ill-fated Meteor A77-953. Theories abounded amid conflicting evidence and possibly no one will ever know for certain exactly what took place on that fatal take-off. In a horrifying way Slim’s luck had run out!

***Figure 154: L-R, Bill Bennet (A Flight Cmdr), Ron Susans (77Sqn C/O), Wal Rivers (B Flight Cmdr)***

Later that day I did an armed reconnaissance of four Meteors. My number Two was Flying Officer Cruikshank (RAF), Sergeant Jack Evens as Number Three had Flying Officer Berg (RAF) as wing-man. We were pursuing four swept wing silver aircraft that disappeared heading north. These were probably MiGs according to our controller and as usual they could outrun us.

***Figure 155: L to R, John Parker, Jack Evans, “Scotty” Caddan***

# Chapter 13
# More Kimpo Missions
## Responsibility And Tragedy

As pilots gained local experience, they were used as section leaders (Four fighters). This applied to the Sergeant pilots also, as many performed well in leadership roles. After 100 sorties or more, some Sergeants led eight aircraft on combat missions. We NCO pilots lived a peculiar dual existence at Kimpo, wearing no rank insignia, living, eating, and socializing with our own and American officers. We had left the days of innocence behind and no longer thought of ourselves by rank, but by experience, capability and self-assurance.

Rank in itself would not put a pilot into the ‘leader’ role. Nor would the locally inexperienced officer expect or even desire such an assignment. New arrivals to the Squadron in Korea, while often having an impressive background in military flying, were generally lacking in certain specialized essentials which took time to develop. Frequently, as newcomers to jet flying, many had yet to gain adequate skills in navigating at high speeds over rugged terrain in marginal weather conditions. They had no experience with our exceptionally busy airfield or USAF procedures.

It was recognized by all, that the short endurance and high rate of fuel consumption of our Meteors coupled with the above-mentioned factors presented leadership problems to the newly-arrived officer. Our jet missions required of the leader a certainty of guiding a squadron of aircraft to some obscure map reference, mounting a successful attack and controlling the return and landing approach efficiently, all to be accomplished within the limited time dictated by those relentless fuel gages.

Detailed here are a number of operations of significance which I led during the month of August 1952 — purely as examples of NCO leadership in action — and it is stressed that other Sergeant pilots who had become locally experienced ‘enjoyed such privileges’. It is mainly to illustrate the role often played by NCOs that I include these examples. I served my ‘apprenticeship’ in the leader-role, well before August and other NCOs did similar duties.

***Figure 156: L-R: Jack Evans, John Parker, Bill Simmonds, Col King, Bruce Gogerly***

## Memorable Rocket Strikes


***Figure 157: Meteor Armed For Rocket Attack***

The first was a rocket strike with 8 aircraft. Behind me were. F/Lt Doug Hurst, Sgt Jack Evans, F/O Holmes (RAF), F/Lt Ray Taylor, F/O Hoogland (RAF), Sgt Tony Armstrong, and F/Sgt Ray Fox. The designated target was about 20 miles south of Wonsan on the northeast coast. As we approached, it became obvious cloud had intervened and we could not attack in this area. So there was the dilemma! Sixty four rockets must be unleashed to some advantage, from eight meteors in a situation of rapidly diminishing fuel supply.

Fortunately, in anticipation of this I had another target up my sleeve. On a previous excursion I had noticed railway facilities which seemed like a ‘plumb’ target. The location

was so close to the border of our own territory that I at first assumed the rail-junction to be ours. This would explain the exposed nature of the assembled trucks and vehicles. Research with our Operations Officer and close analysis of the master map at our Operations Room clearly identified this as a legitimate target. Immunity which this attractive target had enjoyed, probably derived from its extreme proximity to our territory. Then two days later came the opportunity, and the end of immunity for this rail junction.

As we shaped up for the rocket dive, at least one of my followers loudly expressed his concern that we were attacking South Korea. He released his missiles along with all the others nevertheless. The target was just north of the small town of Ch'angdo-ri. We destroyed, or damaged eight rail trucks and a three-story administrative building. Such transport was vital to the enemy in his struggle to bring supplies to the front.

On the same afternoon, I took another eight Meteors on a rocket strike at a point almost exactly 30 miles east of that rain junction. As we passed by, I had the satisfaction of observing towers of smoke still rising from the railway yards. Evans, Taylor, Armstrong and Fox were there again, with the addition of Mellers, Ramsay, and Bergh. There were no casualties that day although some damage was incurred.

On the 9th of August I again had eight Meteors. There were four Officers and four NCOs. Local experience varied greatly and some were relatively new arrivals. My wing-man was F/Sgt 'Dak' Ramsay. The highest ranking pilot was our new C/O W/Cdr Kinninmont DFC & BAR who flew in No 3 position with his wing-man, a new RAF officer F/Off Cruikshank. The second section of four was made up of Two officers and two NCOs. S/Ldr Ian Parker, F/Off Bergh (RAF), Sergeant Jim Kichenside and F/Sgt Ray Fox.

The sortie was successful but results were difficult to observe as usual due to the great amount of smoke and dust at the target area after the discharge of so many powerful rockets. At de-briefing I clearly recall Squadron Leader Parker gazing at the Korea relief model with its three dimensional representation of the rugged terrain "Someone can tell me where we were, I was lost!" An honest man had spoken!

A few days later the team of King, Fox, Lushey and Hoogland (RAF) had a successful evening strike against a military camp area and vehicles.

## Maximum Effort — Ammunition And Supply Dumps

On 13 August I had a big experience, leading the squadron maximum of 16 aircraft on a high-priority target. This was the limit to the number of Meteors the Squadron could deploy on any occasion and such events were rare. On the previous evening I was briefed by our C/O and Squadron Leader Ian Parker regarding two most important 16 aircraft sorties planned for the next day. Ian Parker was to lead these attacks and I was to be his wing-man as I was particularly well acquainted with the obscure target area, and he was a relative newcomer. This was the reason I, as a Sergeant Pilot, was consulted at the planning stage. Rank did not feature in these matters.

When we assembled for briefing I discovered that a startling change had been implemented. Ian and the CO, after studying our North Korea relief model in earnest consultation, had decided that neither of them had adequate knowledge of this vital target area to guarantee a successful lead. Sixteen aircraft must not go astray! The C/O ordered

me to lead the sortie. Ian Parker would then, “Probably try his hand at the afternoon session.” This wise leadership decision exemplified the deference to local experience with total disregard for rank. A Sergeant knew the particular target location well, so he would lead! Squadron Leader Parker flew as my wing-man, a reversal of the original official schedule. No one considered ‘loss of face’, as such issues did not exist on these occasions.

Once again our CO W/Cdr Kinninmont DFC & BAR was numbered in the ranks. Additionally, there were seven other officers and a further six NCOs. We were going after extensive supply dumps and truck shelters, carefully concealed in a remote location. The small briefing room was rather crowded. Stan Bromhead, our Operations Officer, was on hand with weather reports and information about the enemy. The weather was good and enemy activity, as usual, quite menacing. Special Flak areas were noted. These particular danger spots, we meticulously marked on our maps. We were reminded that the enemy was particularly well equipped in this department. Intelligence personnel at Fifth Air-force Headquarters had offered the opinion “They will take a dim view of your activities at this particular location.’ I now briefed with the aid of the relief model. Pilots took notes and made a final effort to memorize salient features relative to our target. As always, on rocket strikes, we would be carrying eight high explosive rockets in addition to our four cannons and full fuel including ventral tanks. Our voices were in competition with the incessant cacophony intruding from the busy world outside.

After climbing into flying gear we proceeded to the flight hut to sign for our aircraft. We now walked or were driven along that area of perforated steel plating known as “the tarmac,” without feeling the slightest concern for our fragile senses which were under constant assault from the tormented ambient atmosphere. To communicate we had to shout and while breathing we ingested the product of those blatant jet engines.

At the revetments as we jumped from the jeeps, the ground crews were standing by with battery carts plugged in. After a rapid external inspection with practiced eyes, I climbed aboard and strapped in. Cockpit checks were executed from memory with what may be described as ‘a flash of hands,’ but with full attention, as life depended on many of these forty items inspected and adjusted. We were aware our aircraft had been subjected to battle damage and repair. First the Starboard engine and then the Port gave forth the ‘Banshee wailing’. The surrounding air was further burdened with an additional input of high-pitched ear-shattering noise, kerosene fumes, and flame from 32 jet exhausts.

Taxi and the associated checks were once again an example of rapid and accurate activity as we trundled and rattled our way over the perforated steel taxiway. Cockpits gradually polluted with the customary odor of burnt aviation fuel. Among these checks that we carried out was the ritual of raising and lowering the Gyroscopic Gun Sight which, in the firing position, was elevated to the middle of the bulletproof windscreen panel. After testing it was immediately lowered until required.

My two Meteors entered and stopped on the runway. The aircraft strained against the brakes, as throttles advanced. All took off in pairs with wingtips about 15 to 20 feet apart, the pilots being thrust back in their seats as the aircraft accelerated rapidly, while holding station accurately. At 105 knots nose-wheels rose simultaneously as though flown by a single control. As the first two were rotating to lift-off the second pair was in mid-runway and the third pair just rolling. At these heavy operational weights one third flap permitted

lift-off at a modest margin above the stall. Wheels retracted in unison as each duo broke ground.

An engine failure at this stage of flight would be extremely bad news. With full fuel and this load of armaments there could be only one direction of travel — down. A ‘check-in’ was obtained from the others and battle formation was established. We tested guns as the ‘bomb Line’ slid rapidly beneath our wings. Sixty four Cannons gave a thunderous warning to North Korea, “A squadron of Meteors is coming to curtail the capacity of your arrogant military leaders in their plans to invade and dominate the South.” The countryside below looked serene and harmless.

Initially we climbed at 300 knots with 14,100 RPM, and at about 6,500 feet per minute. We could, if necessary, reach 40,000 feet in about 15 minutes. Normally we proceeded to our rocket attack area at half this altitude or less, depending on distance. Cloud cover and the need to locate ground features were big factors here. That day we settled for 15,000 feet, just below a carpet of strata-cumulus. Map reading took my attention. No radio or radar navigation aids assisted as I track crawled by visual navigation.

It was my responsibility to find these few nondescript structures in this vast expanse of rugged territory. I must not fail to locate, descend, approach and mark with accuracy as we could not afford to have 16 Meteors orbiting aimlessly, looking for somewhere to unload their burden. This geographical challenge must be met and conquered. Approaching the target we began our descent, maneuvering for best angle and direction of rocket dive. Gun-sights were raised and with switches set for rocket firing, the dive began. Adrenaline flowed freely!

We hoped to achieve the advantage of surprise with 16 aircraft coming out of the sun. Nevertheless the little welcoming gestures soon developed as the enemy gunners divined our intentions. Tracer fire arched aggressively. Death’s spittle cut a vicious swathe through our projected dive-path. Radio discipline was commendable. The following aircraft spread out to confuse ground fire and soon our missiles were being released from a height of about 1,200 feet in a 30 to 35 degree dive. We must not fire too early as the rocket motor had a mere 1.8 seconds burn time and an efficient path length of 800 yards as it accelerated to sonic speed. Accuracy was essential. The rocket projectiles seemed to depart from the wing racks in a leisurely fashion and leave an identifying trail of smoke as they rapidly speared towards the object of our attention. These eight warheads packed a tremendous punch — the equivalent of a broadside from a battery of six-inch naval guns. Salvo after salvo created havoc in one continuous barrage.

Orbiting after a steep pullout from the rocket dive I observed the devastation. Amid the smoke and dust of 128 exploding warheads a startling movement took shape. A ripple, rapidly becoming an immense upheaval, erupted from the center of our target area. A gigantic explosion had just removed one small mountain from the map of Korea. On departure we looked back on a great pall of smoke rising thousands of feet above the target. We attempted to assess damage and note active gun positions. There was little remaining of the enemy facility. Supplies and ammunition would be scarce around those parts for a while.

***Figure 158: Supply Dump Attack***

Back at Kimpo we fitted into the traffic pattern, with some adjustment for other arriving flights, and landed in close trail. De-briefing followed. My logbook contains an attachment, officially commenting on these rocket attacks of August 1952. This states in part “On August 13 1952 Sergeant King led the squadron in a rocket attack against a vitally important enemy ammunition dump in rugged terrain in North Korea, despite fierce return of ground fire, the attack was successful and the target completely destroyed.”

My next log entry that same day, detailed another attack involving 16 aircraft using Napalm rockets against an adjacent target. On this occasion Squadron Leader Ian Parker did in fact lead the squadron. He told me his lack of familiarity with the area was completely negated by homing onto the vast pall of smoke still rising from our attack earlier in the day. The Unit History Sheet reports, “It was observed that fires were still burning from the attack that morning.”

## Ivor Hele — Official War Artist

During the latter part of my stay the official war artist Ivor Hele visited the squadron and did some impressive art work. He did a number of pencil sketches and for some quite unknown reason asked me to pose for a life-size oil portrait. I believe he had attended a briefing I carried out for a 12 aircraft rocket strike. Some two hours later he was on hand to hear the de-briefing and then walked back to the Mess with me. He took this opportunity to suggest the portraiture. This took a number of sittings. During the final afternoon a storm occurred and daylight deteriorated. Ivor packed up. He would not show me the result, as it was “not finished”.

However, imagine my surprise when fifteen years later, on a visit to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, there, large as life were the King features, at least as Hele saw them fifteen years ago. The curator of art had the good taste to conceal this particular exhibit in the archives most of the time.

***Figure 159: Ivor Hele Snapshot***

My eloquent friend Pat Melican again contributes to the story by way of the following entertaining anecdote:

**Korea 1952:** For the second time in post war years, serving airmen were invited to apply for a commission. When the news was received at Kimpo it was accompanied by the not entirely unwelcome tidings that all applicants would be interviewed by the Group Captain commanding RAAF Base Iwakuni.

Here was an indication that Air Board was again confirming its belief that among such airmen was a potential reservoir of candidates able to meet the stern and demanding criteria that would lead them to commissioned rank to the mutual benefit and satisfaction of all. Thus there was a ripple of interest among some of the troops and non-commissioned pilots; several of whom were not strangers to leading sections of eight and twelve Meteors, many of these being flown by their seniors in rank.

There were also cresting waves of enthusiasm among a group of airmen who had been ‘deported,’ from Iwakuni and its many delights, to the ‘Siberian atmosphere’ of Kimpo with its complete absence of unrighteous temptations. These were the ‘deadbeats,’ many in the unredeemable category, who though always in strife were never embarrassed by those sorry catalogs of their sins, their Conduct Sheets. Theirs was the ‘Vision Splendid’ an all-expenses-paid overnight visit to the bright lights of Iwakuni and an inevitable rejection as ‘Unsuitable for promotion beyond the rank of Leading Aircraftsman’ by the Group Captain who always had the best interests of the Service at heart. The orderly room clerk told of how the Adjutant recoiled in horror when he saw that eight of these outcasts had applied

The previously notified order of events was changed suddenly and drastically. A signal was received from Iwakuni advising that the Group Captain would make a flying visit to the squadron and conduct interviews ‘on site’. That was followed by an untidy scurrying of the deportees to the Orderly Room to withdraw their applications. The Adjutant, now visibly relieved, regained his composure. Dignity and decorum were now restored for the Grouper’s visit.

## Oelof Bergh

**A** rocket attack by 16 aircraft on 27 August was my final mission. Earlier that day I had engaged in a similar attack with 14 aircraft. The target for the last attack was a number of important military barracks and administration buildings to the southeast of Charryong, about 35 miles north of Haeju. The area was not particularly rugged nor was it heavily populated. As usual the establishment was well protected by flak.

***Figure 160: Meteor Rocketing Target In North Korea***

One of our team was Flying Officer Oelof Bergh (RAF), a fairly recent recruit. Oelof, a South African, was on exchange duties with the squadron. We dived on the target in a north easterly direction through a fierce curtain of automatic gunfire. The little puffs were quite busy. After firing I executed a blood-draining pull-up. During this maneuver the cry went out “Oelof is hit!” Back to my left there was a Meteor climbing steeply and trailing smoke. I continued gaining height, utilizing the speed from the dive. An ejection seat shot out of the Meteor. It seemed to project almost horizontally and then fall crazily in a tumbling motion. The seat came under control of its drogue parachute and continued to fall rapidly.

At the speed of my circling Meteor it was difficult to keep track of Oelof. The enemy gunners were still firing although the Meteors had all pulled up and away. Fortunately Oelof’s seat was falling some distance away from the target. I lost sight of my friend for a few anxious seconds while completing a descending turn but was then relieved to see a parachute change shape as it hit the ground near a small village. Oelof had arrived on North Korean soil and was presumably alive at this moment.

This was a moment of mixed emotion. Bad luck, now good luck had attended Oelof. What was next? I circled at low altitude and on the second or third run over the downed parachute felt reasonably sure I had seen a figure running from the area. Several more orbits were fruitless so I marked the position on my map and headed for home. I suddenly realize I am on my own but this is nothing compared with Oelof’s predicament. He is now traveling by foot through the wilds of North Korea.

Now my fuel gages become something of a distraction. I have been over-absorbed with the task of locating Oelof. That one essential requirement for attention, that one imperative, has been neglected and miscalculated, fuel! Approaching Kimpo I call, “Kimpo Godfrey Blue One on initial, low on fuel!” I pull the Balance Valve to interconnect the tanks and close the throttles once more in commencing a steady descent. The tower is handling a gaggle of Sabres, several of whom have troubles of their own. My fuel emergency is commonplace and will have to wait!

“Godfrey Blue One, orbit in present position, maintain 6,000!” — “Godfrey Blue One, orbiting 6,000, I say again, Fuel emergency!”

“Godfrey Blue One, you will have priority after orbit, descend now 5,000!” — “Godfrey Blue One, 5,000!”

Now those fuel gages, like two resentful eyes, stare back at me accusingly. They are both reading almost ‘Gage Zero!’ The absurd possibility becomes a real consideration, I may have to execute a ‘Dead Stick Landing’. This slightly jocular phrase, coined in the early days of flying, refers to the unhappy circumstance of landing with a stationary propeller.

A thought crosses my mind, “How inappropriate for a jet to face a landing referred to as ‘Dead Stick’. Now I recall that Jim Kichenside did just this on his first jet solo, a Vampire at Williamtown. At this thought, my fear of the prospect vanishes. Provided that at all times the relationship between height and distance-to-run is maintained in favor of a glide approach, the Dead Stick means of salvation is mine. The undercarriage can be blown down by pulling the handle operating its emergency bottle of pressurized air. Flaps and Air-brakes will function by normal selection through the hydraulic accumulator reservoir of pressure. If this supply becomes exhausted, then these ancillaries may still be operated via a hand-pump fitted with a telescopic handle, on the starboard side of my seat.

I was eventually given priority and executed a slippery circuit with eyes averted from those tell-tale gages. After landing as I rolled onto the tarmac near my sandbag cubby-hole, one motor cut dead. The other did its job for a few more seconds and then followed suit. The engineer waving me ahead, by now quite frustrated, approached my cockpit. The problem was indicated. The last 200 yards to the revetments were accomplished with the aid of a tug. Final mission!

That evening the C/O briefed me to take a flight of four at first light to the target area and attempt to locate Oelof. If he were sighted we should call in a Chopper and attempt a rescue. The Meteors would then be required to discourage the enemy with our cannons during the helicopter operation. I was pleased to note the C/O either did not know, or did not want to know, about my cavalier approach to fuel management this afternoon.

As instructed, four of us assembled at briefing one hour before first light next morning, all booted and spurred for the rescue. The other three pilots were RAF — Oelof’s mates. Unfortunately low cloud covered the whole area at about 200 feet and was known to blanket the target area as well, thereby making the exercise impossible. Our Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Kinninmont’s anxiety about the downed pilot brought him to our briefing room in the early hours. We discussed the cloud situation with our Operations Officer, Stan Bromhead and made the regrettable, but inevitable decision to abandon the mission.

The pity about this aborted rescue attempt, is that Oelof was in fact at large for about a week and would no doubt have welcomed a helicopter trip home. Had there not been that intrusive low cloud we may have picked up signals from the downed pilot, called in a Chopper and protected the helicopter with our cannons until the pick-up was complete. Oelof returned safely after a most unpleasant year as a prisoner of war.

***Figure 161: Wing Commander Oelof Bergh Receives Gunnery Trophy For 93 Sqn RAF, 1961***

In discussing this fuel emergency with Geoff Lushey who was a Sergeant Pilot graduate of Point Cook serving with 77 Sqn at that time, he recalled a similar occurrence. Geoff was returning from a MiG baiting patrol at the Ya-lu River as wing-man to S/Ldr Bennett. He also had to be towed the last few hundred yards to the tarmac. Geoff, out of sheer curiosity, checked on the quantity of fuel put in during the subsequent refueling operation, his own aircraft, 595 Gallons (Total capacity). S/Ldr Bennett's aircraft, 585 Gallons!

In general conversations with others who had experienced similar deprivation we concluded that engines are most desirable attachments, particularly in flight, and sufficient fuel to run them a most appealing commodity. We were in agreement that, "The only time you can have too much fuel is when you are on fire!

***Figure 162: Korean Civilians Suffered Terribly***

# Al Avery

Another particularly tragic event occurred on 1 September when Pilot Officer Alan Avery was ferrying a two-seat Meteor MK-7 from Japan to Korea with our Engineering officer, Flight Lieutenant Johnston, as passenger. An accompanying Mk-8 Meteor was flown by Flying Officer R. 'Randy' Green. We did not have storm-warning radar in those days and the Meteors stumbled into a particularly violent thunderstorm on the coast of Japan. Both aircraft suffered damage and went out of control. Randy Green limped back to Iwakuni.

Alan and his passenger attempted to bail out. The MK-7 Meteor was not fitted with ejection seats and both men were presumably hit by the aircraft structure — a predictable occurrence with this type of two-seat trainer. Their bodies, with unopened parachutes were recovered on the west coast of Japan. Al was at the end of his tour!

## Two Meteors Land on a Beach

On 2'nd October 1952 Bill Hughes, Brian Howard, Jim Cruikshank and Ken Murray became involved with MiGs over Pyongyang. After one pass by the enemy fighters, Bill's wing-man told him "Your left engine is on fire." Bill shut it down. Murray also was hit on his port engine which he shut down while heading back to Kimpo. Bill and his two companions were now short of fuel and decided to head for the small island of Cho'do just off the North Korean coast. This was one of several small islands occupied and held by the Americans, which provided useful facilities although precariously close to the enemy coastline. The plan was to bail out at the island. Bill had a further problem as, due to a scrambled take-off because of a last minute aircraft change, he had failed to do up his parachute harness. So now, flying on one engine, scanning the sky for MiGs, and anticipating an ejection, he frantically accomplished the difficult task of securing these vital straps.

An American rescue aircraft 'Dumbo' which witnessed Cruikshank bail out near the island, saw two splashes, presumably the aircraft and the ejection seat. However Jim was never seen again. It was presumed that his body had hit some part of the aircraft when leaving the extremely cramped cockpit. In view of this, Hughes and Howard lost their enthusiasm for the ejection option.

Most fortunately, at this point Bill received a call from a radio operator, call-sign 'Bloodstone', the identifier of another UN-held island further south. It was a personal friend of Bill who had recognized his voice and had a brilliant suggestion to make. Speaking about his island Paengyong-Do, he told a grateful Bill Hughes "We have 8,000 yards of hard sand, so come and land on the beach." The proposed landing strip was half-moon shaped with a shallow stream running across at about the mid point. The curved landing and the unobtrusive water course presented no problems and soon two Meteors were parked alongside one another with two most relieved pilots enjoying the scene.

It transpired that Bill's engine was perfectly serviceable. A wing vapor cloud during a particularly tight turn had created a false alarm resulting in an unnecessary shut-down. Subsequently both aircraft were refueled from drums flown in by cargo aircraft and the two pilots, executing curved take-offs, returned to base on 3'rd October.

## Ken Godfrey — Extreme Flak Damage

***Figure 163: Ken Godfrey***

*"**I**n late 1952 I was based at Kimpo near Seoul as a member of No77 interceptor-fighter Squadron RAAF, flying the twin jet engine Meteor Mk8. We were using this out-dated British fighter mainly in the ground attack role, to which it was well suited, being a steady and robust aircraft armed with four 20mm cannons and eight rockets. On 29'th November 1952 I was one of 12 Meteors assigned to carry out a rocket strike on a supply area at a position designated as CT7268 on our USAF operational maps of the North Korea war zone. The target was assessed by 'Intelligence' as "heavily defended". As we approached the target area the leader found it difficult to pinpoint the actual object requiring our attention because the ground was covered in a blanket of snow and ice. He was forced to carry out a full 360 degree orbit at about 10,000 feet. Unfortunately this probably served to alert the enemy gunners. During the turn I saw a few puffs of flak nearby and I felt apprehensive as we entered our rocket dive. I fired my rockets. As I pulled up from my dive, the flak increased and I heard the call "Drop ventrals!". This was a command to aircraft in the danger area of intense flak to jettison their belly tanks. These normally held 175 gallons of jet fuel but were by now probably empty. However, even in this condition, the residual vapors made the ventral a most vulnerable and hazardous appendage. They often exploded when hit and as a consequence Meteor pilots had a sensitivity, sometimes leading to the instinctive dropping of ventral tanks when encountering dangerous situations. I pulled the lever to jettison my ventral."*

*"Suddenly I was on a collision course with a ventral tank dropped by the aircraft ahead. To avoid this menacing obstacle I had to 'bunt' my Meteor by pushing the control column forward. At this moment I felt a severe thump on my left side and knew that I had been hit by heavy flak. In fact, one or more 37mm high-explosive shells had entered the port engine, tearing away most of the nose cowling of that motor. Not only did this deprive me of almost all power from the stricken port engine but the badly ripped and distorted cowling and surrounds introduced a great deal of retarding 'drag' on that same side. The effect on directional control was astounding. I opened to full throttle and pulled up to gain as much height as possible. Using the speed gained in the rocket dive and what engine power was available I managed to climb a few thousand valuable feet. By this time the port engine was completely dead, and I was using full rudder and trim with some aileron in order to retain control. I was unable to assess the correct speed as my airspeed indicator was out of action, as was the altimeter, and worst of all my radio was dead. The loss of vital instruments, particularly the airspeed and altimeter indicators, made accurate*

*flying much more difficult. For example, holding an airspeed above the optimum was an invitation to height loss, while a speed below the control requirement would cause loss of directional control requiring power reduction on my one good engine. This, in turn, was another way to ensure loss of valuable altitude. This dilemma was coupled with the added drag from the disturbed air flow around my severely damaged engine cowling. By experimentation I found that this extra drag required all my strength as I braced myself diagonally in order to hold full right rudder and it was necessary to also reduce power. Occasionally my right leg buckled under the constant strain."*

*"As I was about 130 miles from my base at Kimpo I was probably 100 miles behind enemy lines. I knew that to eject and use my parachute would mean probable death at the hands of the North Koreans. I decided to use all my skill and strength in order to make it back to base and in this endeavor I was helped by thinking of my wife and son back home. I gradually lost altitude. Approaching Kimpo I was down to less than 100 feet and did not relish the thought of making an approach to land under these circumstances. I believed the undercarriage would extend as the hydraulic pump was on the right engine. I would not be using flaps because of the probability of flak damage to the left flap. The brakes would be questionable because the left engine was required to build up brake pressure, so I would be relying on the stored brake accumulator pressure to stop a fast moving aircraft. The added complication of loss of my radio meant that, as I was arriving unannounced, I could find myself competing with others in the approach and landing area of this normally extremely busy airfield. It could become necessary for me to retract the undercarriage and place the aircraft on its belly on the grass adjacent to the runway. I was ready for this."*

*"With extremely good luck I had the runway to myself and managed to touch down on the very beginning of the strip, at what was no doubt an uncomfortably fast speed. The brake accumulator proved adequate to slow the Meteor sufficiently to allow a violent ground loop at the end. Two Americans came out in a control-tower jeep. I was grateful for their assistance to climb down out of the cockpit as I was exhausted. One of them said, "Hey Buddy, how the hell did you get this thing back?"*

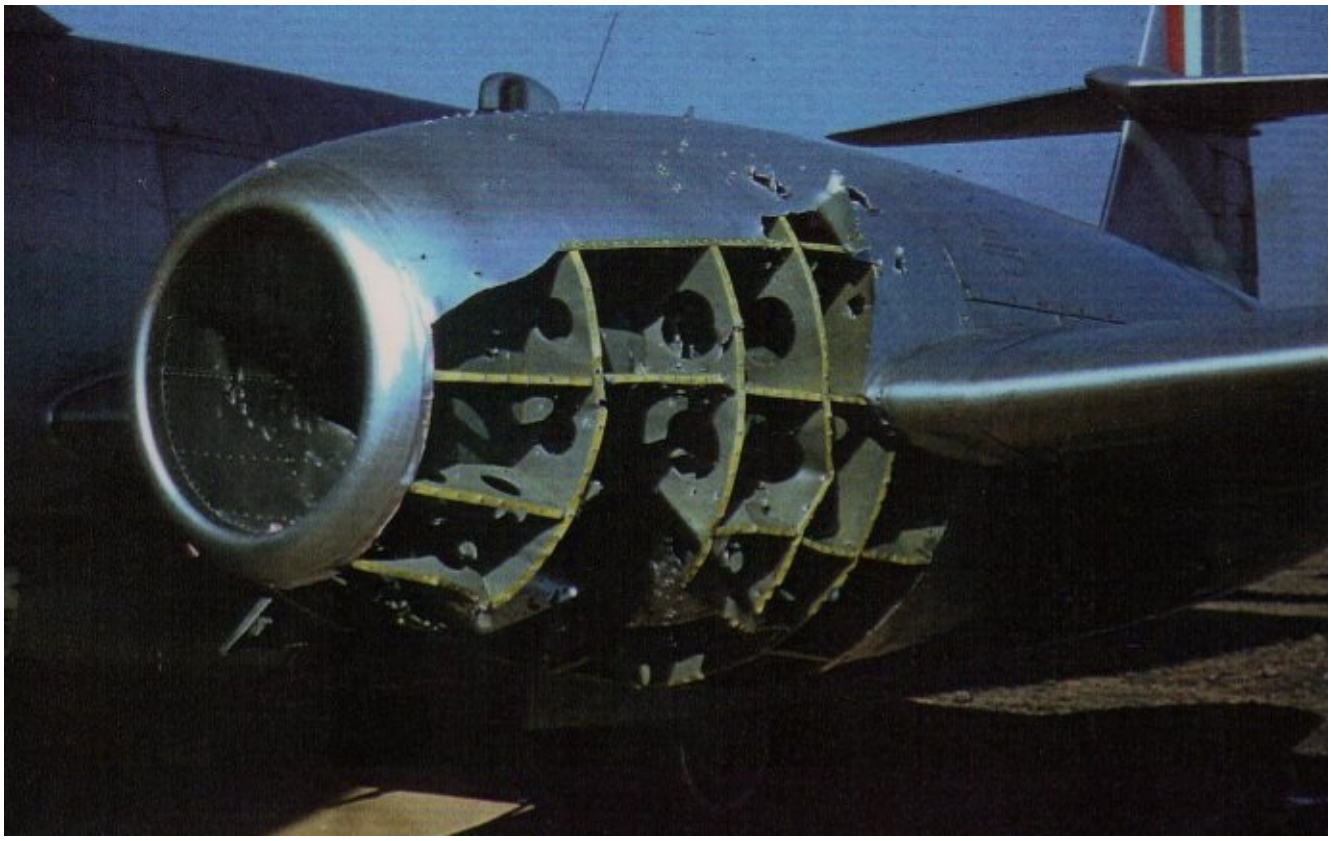


***Figure 164: Ken Godfrey — Engine Shot Out***

## Big Truck Convey — March 27 1953

On this day, Two Meteor pilots, Bob Turner and Dave Irlam, discovered the biggest assembly of vehicles ever encountered by 77 Squadron during the war. Surprisingly this line of about 140 trucks extended some five kilometers through a narrow ravine south of the east coast seaport of Wonsan. The two Meteors immediately trapped the entire convoy by the expedient of destroying several vehicles at each end of the line. Calling for support from Vin Hill's nearby Meteor section and eventually securing the assistance of US and other UN aircraft the Meteors had a most profitable day resulting in the destruction or damaging of at least 90 enemy vehicles. This type of target was well suited to the Meteor's four 20mm canons, point harmonized at 800 yards and fed with a mix of high explosive and armor piercing shells.

## One Final Dogfight — Sgt Gorge Hale, March 27 1953

***The last air battle between RAAF Meteors and Russian-built MiG-15 fighters occurred in the vicinity of Sariwon near Pyongyang in North Korea. This was a long way south of the Yalu River 'Mig Alley' area in which most of the air fighting usually took place. The RAAF aircraft, armed with rockets and their four 20mm canons, were en-route to a ground attack mission when they suddenly found themselves unexpectedly embroiled in a desperate fight against a number of MiGs.***

Sergeant-pilot George Hale, a graduate of Nr 7 (post-war) Course Point Cook, in a remarkable feat of rapid and accurate flying, downed one MiG and seriously damaged a second, in diverting the MiG formation from their obvious intention to shoot down two unarmed American RF-80 reconnaissance jets. George's vigorous attack on the enemy fighters quite possibly saved his wing-man as well. Dave Irlam just made it back to base with 112 holes in his Meteor, caused by 23mm and 37mm canon shells.

When George first saw the two RF-80s he was astounded to observe that they were tucked in to tight formation heading south at top speed several hundred feet below his own flight path. Close formation was an inadvisable technique while in enemy territory. The reason soon suggested itself when it was observed that a flight of MiGs were in pursuit of the unarmed Americans (photographic aircraft).

George and his wing-man were set-up for rocket firing and his Gyro-gun-sight was not set for air combat. Nevertheless in such an emergency, instant action was required in order to disrupt the MiG activities. As he dived in to attack he saw a second MiG behind the leader. Turning hard left his burst of Canon fire missed this enemy but another opportunity instantly presented itself as a third MiG was now coming beside him but too close abeam for an attack. George turned in, used a rapid touch of speed-brake in order to position behind the enemy and then fired. His shells knocked pieces off the MiG but it kept flying. By now George had jettisoned his ventral tank and finding himself behind a pair of MiGs, fired his rockets between them as an obviously advantageous method of getting rid of this further encumbrance to air fighting. This separated the two and as George began to chase the nearest one, another pair appeared on his left. He fired on one causing a massive white explosion, almost certainly a large quantity of fuel, but it kept flying. The two MiGs then exploited their famously superior performance and climbed steeply.

In the meantime Dave Irlam was hit hard by a MiG which he did not even see and was fortunate to make it back to base with massive damage including a shattered engine and 112 holes from large caliber canon fire. George Hale was credited with one kill and one probable. The kill was confirmed after the war. The USAF RF-80 pilots Charles Abbey and Jim Schnider came to the 77 Squadron Mess each armed with a bottle of Scotch, looking for “The Aussie who saved our hides today!”

***Figure 165: Shooting Star Silhouette***

The C/O, John Hubble, ordered the removal of two MiG silhouettes which the ground crews had painted on the nose of George’s aircraft. The boys had proudly done this without George’s permission, but undoubtedly with his approval. There was some

disappointment when this art work was painted over. An interesting point arose many years later when the aircraft (A77-851) was salvaged for installation at its present place of residence at the Warbirds Aviation Museum at Mildura, Victoria. The paint deteriorated sufficiently to reveal the MiG emblems, to the delight of many onlookers. Sadly, George, one of the finest of pilots, died in 2009 after a prolonged illness.

***Figure 166: George Hale***

# 77 Squadron Original Transport Unit

**B**eginning with a mere two DC-3 type planes which included General Robertson's VIP aircraft, the small Dakota flight was initially commanded by Dave Hitchins. This eventually grew to eight aircraft and became a squadron. In March 1953 No 30 Transport Unit became No 36 Transport Squadron, equipped with more C-47 Dakotas thus providing much-needed additions to the thoroughly stretched operation. Several 5 Course pilots served with this unit doing vital and demanding operational flying.

***Figure 167: Col Roffe — 5 Course Transport Pilot***

Throughout the war RAAF C-47s carried 100,000 passengers, 60,000 tonnes of freight, and at least 12,000 medical evacuees between Korea and Japan.

***Figure 168: Douglas C-47 Transport***

*Figure 169: Cockpit C-47*

## Another Beach Landing — June 13 1953

Bill Monaghan, having had one engine shot out by 37mm fire at extreme operational range, headed down the west coast of North Korea hoping for either a helicopter rescue if he had to eject or even a possible landing on one of the small Allied-held islands. A US amphibian rescue aircraft began pacing below him offering welcome reassurance.

However, having reached the Allied island of Paengyong-do, Bill managed a totally successful wheels-down landing on the long firm beach, to be greeted by US personnel placed there partly for such purposes. This was the same curved beach used as a runway by two squadron Meteors a few months earlier and while most unconventional it again proved a blessing. The C-47 which flew in a replacement engine and repair-crew took Bill home to base. Two days later Bill returned, did a successful beach takeoff and flew to Kimpo. This remarkable adventure illustrates the degree of organization and effective execution of procedures put in place by the USAF for such emergencies.


***Figure 170: Cockpit Meteor Mk-8 Fighter***

# Chapter 14
# The Russian And Chinese Involvement Clandestine Help For North Korea

***After the Soviet Union collapsed, it became known, what had long been suspected, that Stalin had been primarily responsible for persuading North Korea's leader, the despot Kim Il Sung, to attack South Korea. Soviet advisors and weapons had provided the wherewithal for this massive invasion on 25th June 1950. The Russian consignment included about 150 combat planes — including IL-2 Sturmoviks and various Yakovlevs — and large numbers of massive T-34 tanks. These were all outstanding machines of war. Russian 'volunteers' were involved in front-line activities, but carefully concealed.***

***Figure 171: Stalin — The Most Evil Dictator***

The Korean War was a conflict between the Republic of Korea (South Korea), supported by the United Nations, and the invading Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), supported by the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. It was primarily brought about by the political division of Korea through an agreement of the victorious Allies at the conclusion of the Pacific War at the end of World War II.

The Korean Peninsula had been ruled by the Empire of Japan from 1910 until the end of World War II. Following the surrender of the Empire of Japan in September 1945, American administrators divided the peninsula along the 38th parallel, with U.S. military forces occupying the southern half and Soviet military forces occupying the northern half. The Communist powers, under Stalin's urging, and strongly supported by China, always demanded unification of the whole peninsula under Communist domination. They would settle for nothing less, and primed North Korean leader Kim il Sung for this task.

***Figure 172: Soviet Troops Liberate N Korea — 1945***

Kim il Sung, a dedicated Korean Communist, had been in exile from his Japanese-occupied homeland for eight years. After expulsion of the Japanese by Russian occupation of North Korea, Kim returned, arriving back in Korea on 22 August 1945. In September the Soviets installed Kim as head of the Provisional People's Committee. He was not, at this time, the head of the Communist Party, whose headquarters were in Seoul in the US-occupied south. During his early years as leader, he assumed a position of influence largely due to the backing of the Korean population which was supportive of the fight which he had carried out against Japanese occupation.

***Figure 173: Kim il Sung — 1946***

Kim il Sung's tenure as leader of North Korea has often been described as autocratic, and he certainly established an all-pervasive cult of personality. From the mid-1960s, he promoted his self-developed 'Juche' variant of socialist organization, which, in 1972, replaced Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of the state. One of the intriguing figures of the twentieth century, Kim outlived Joseph Stalin by four decades, Mao Zedong by two, and remained in power during the terms of office of six South Korean presidents, seven Soviet leaders, ten U.S. presidents, fourteen UK Prime Ministers and twenty-one Japanese prime ministers.

One of Kim's accomplishments was his establishment of a professional army, the Korean People's Army (KPA), aligned with the Communists and formed from a cadre of guerrillas and former soldiers who had gained combat experience in battles against the Japanese and later against Nationalist Chinese troops. From their ranks, using Soviet advisers and equipment, Kim constructed a large army skilled in infiltration tactics and in guerrilla warfare. Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 Joseph Stalin equipped the KPA with modern heavy tanks, trucks, artillery, and small arms. Kim also formed an air force, equipped at first with ex-Soviet propeller-driven fighter and attack aircraft. Later, North Korean pilot candidates were sent to the Soviet Union and China to train in MiG-15 jet aircraft at secret bases

Throughout 1949 and 1950 the Soviets continuously armed North Korea. After the Communist victory in China, ethnic Korean units in the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) were released to North Korea. The combat experienced veterans from China, the tanks, artillery and aircraft supplied by the Soviets, and rigorous training increased North Korea's military superiority over the South. In early 1950 American Secretary Of State,

Dean Acheson, addressing the National Press Club, made a statement listing places which the US would defend against Communist aggression. He accidentally omitted South Korea. Some feel that Stalin took this as a ‘green light’.

By the outbreak of the Korean War, Joseph Stalin had already equipped the KPA with modern tanks, trucks, artillery, and small arms (previously, the South Korean Army had nothing remotely comparable either in numbers of troops or equipment). In April 1950, Stalin gave Kim permission to invade the South under the condition that Mao would agree to send reinforcements if they became needed. To avoid a war with the Americans, Stalin made it clear that Soviet forces would not directly engage in combat. Kim met with Mao in May 1950. Mao was concerned that the Americans would intervene but agreed to support the North Korean invasion. The KPA was the primary instigator of the Korean War (called the “Fatherland Liberation War” in the North).

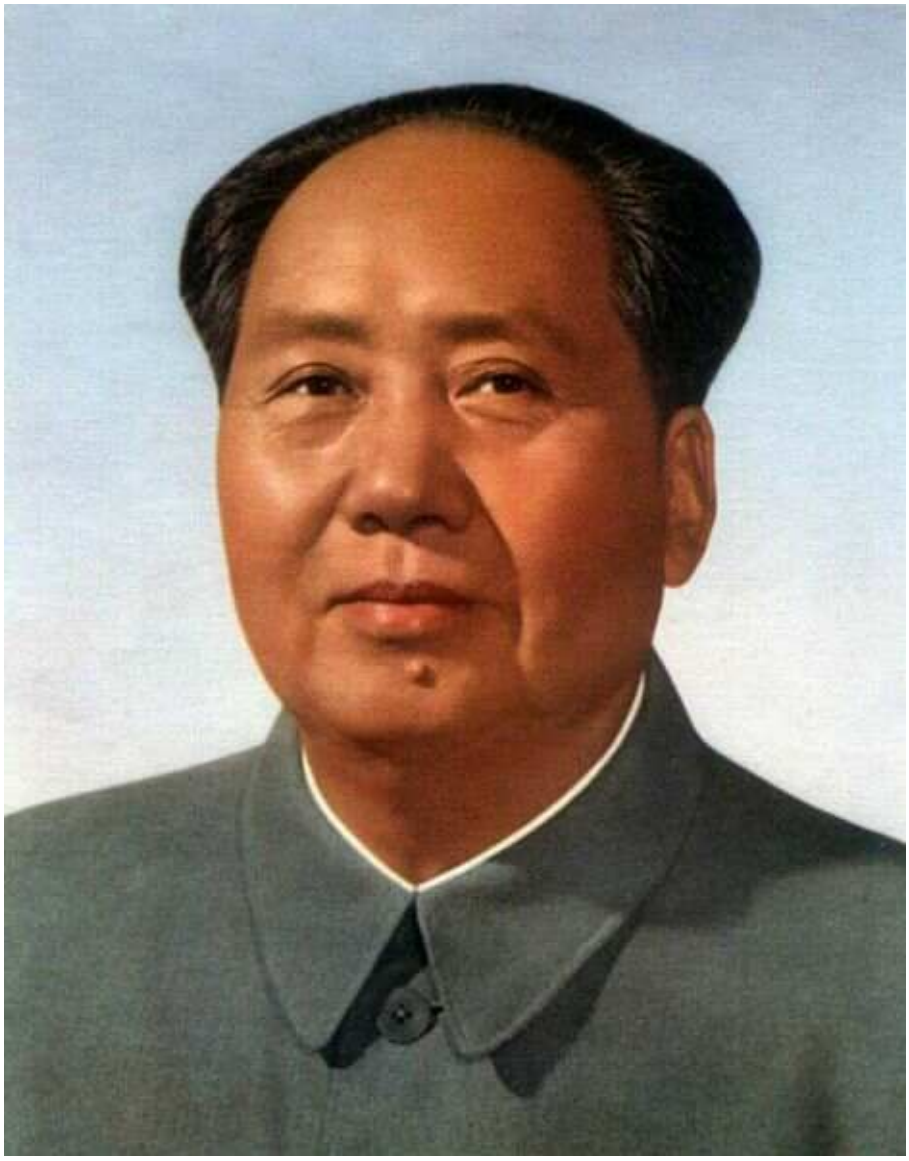


***Figure 174: Chairman Mao Zedong***

China desperately needed the economic and military aid promised by the Soviets. At that time, the Chinese were in the process of demobilizing half of the PLA’s 5.6 million soldiers. However, Mao sent more ethnic Korean PLA veterans to Korea and promised to move an Army closer to the Korean border. Once Mao’s commitment was secured, preparations for war accelerated. Soviet generals who had extensive combat experience in

World War II were sent to the Soviet Advisory Group in North Korea. These generals completed plans for the invasion by May. The original plans were to start with a skirmish in the Ongjin peninsula on the west coast of Korea. The North Koreans would then launch a “counterattack” that would capture Seoul and encircle and destroy the South Korean army. The final stage would involve destroying South Korean remnants, “liberating” the rest of the South Korea and capturing the ports.

During the opening phases of the Korean War in 1950, the KPA did quickly drive South Korean forces south and captured Seoul, only to eventually lose 70,000 of their 100,000-strong army in the autumn after U.S. amphibious landings at the Battle of Incheon and the following drive to the Yalu River. The KPA subsequently played a secondary minor role to Chinese forces in the remainder of the conflict. By the time of the Armistice in 1953, the KPA had sustained 290,000 casualties and lost 90,000 men as POWs

American support for South Korea turned the tide of war against the North Koreans in spite of their earlier successes. After the American triumphant Incheon landing and the entry of Chinese ‘volunteers’ and particularly following the virtual destruction of the untrained North Korean Air Force by the USAF, Stalin felt obliged to help in some significant manner sending more tanks and aircraft.

***Figure 175: Sturdy Russian Sturmovik IL-2***

The Il-2 was a single-engine, propeller-driven, low-wing monoplane of mixed construction with a crew of two (one in early versions), specially designed for assault operations. Its most notable feature was the inclusion of most effective armor in an airframe load-bearing scheme. Armor plates replaced the frame and paneling throughout the nacelle and middle part of the fuselage, and an armored hull made of riveted homogeneous armor steel secured the aircraft’s engine, cockpit, water and oil radiators, and fuel tanks. The Il-2 was eventually produced in vast quantities, becoming the single most widely produced military aircraft in aviation history, but only 249 had been built by the time Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Russians called this “The Flying Tank!”


***Figure 176: Yakovlev 9, Russian Fighter***

The Yakovlev Yak-9 was a single-engine fighter aircraft used by the Soviet Union in World War II and after. Fundamentally a lighter development of the Yak-7 with the same armament, it arrived at the front at the end of 1942. The Yak-9 had a lowered rear fuselage decking and all-around vision canopy. Its lighter airframe gave the new fighter a flexibility that previous models had lacked. The pilots who flew it regarded its performance as comparable or better than that of the Messerschmidt Bf 109G and Focke-Wulf Fw 190A-3/A-4. The Yak-9 was the most mass-produced Soviet fighter of all time. It remained in production from 1942 to 1948, with 16,769 built (14,579 during the war). It was the first Soviet aircraft to shoot down a Messerschmidt Me 262 jet. It was used by North Korea in the Korean War.

***Figure 177: Superb Russian T-34 Tank***

The T-34 was a Soviet medium tank produced from 1940 to 1958. When it first appeared on the battlefield in 1941, German tank generals von Kleist and Guderian called it “the deadliest tank in the world.” It has often been described as the most effective, efficient and

influential design of World War II, although its armor and armament were surpassed by later tanks of the era. It was the mainstay of Soviet armored forces throughout World War II, and widely exported afterwards. It was the most-produced tank of the war, and the second most-produced tank of all time, after its successor, the T-54/55. In 1996, T-34 variants were still in service in at least 27 countries. This outstanding Soviet weapon, provided to North Korea in considerable numbers prior to 1950, gave the invaders a big advantage in their assault on South Korea.

One of the outstanding features of the T-34 was the Christie suspension, a suspension system developed by American engineer Walter Christie for his tank designs. It allowed considerably longer movement than conventional leaf spring systems then in common use, which allowed his tanks to have considerably greater cross-country speed.The most famous Christie-based tanks, the Soviet BT tank series and the T-34, used coil springs mounted vertically (on the BT) or at a slight angle from vertical (the T-34). The T-34 also had a wide track providing superior ground holding.

The T-34 was the most important weapon fielded by the Red Army in World War II. Sloping armor increased protection, the V-2 diesel engine used a less flammable fuel, the Christie suspension was fast on rough terrain, and wide tracks gave low ground pressure for good mobility in mud and snow, although reliability and manufacturing issues dogged the wartime production models. The 76.2 mm main armament remained effective to decreasing degrees through the end of the war; the improved 85 mm gun was among the world’s best in early 1944, and ensured that the overall T-34 design would remain competitive with German designs. The T-34 continued to give the Soviet Army a critical advantage in the war, even after its technological advantages had been equaled and surpassed. The design and construction of the tank were continuously refined during the war to enhance effectiveness and decrease costs, allowing steadily greater numbers of T-34s to be fielded despite heavy losses.

Helping North Korea would be a careful process as Stalin did not want to risk a war against the USA. These despots probably recognized the degree to which America had become demobilized and unprepared for any type of war activity. Perhaps though, they failed to grasp the level of resolve which the US was bound to bring to bear on such a threat as was being posed. In either case Stalin knew he must walk a fine line in helping his friend.

***Figure 178: Russian Flak Train As Supplied To N. Korea***

He ordered MiG fighter units into Manchuria, to operate under maximum secrecy and with two provisos. Firstly, Russian pilots were not allowed to operate south of a line between Pyongyang and Wonsan. Secondly they were not allowed to fly over the Yellow Sea — off the west coast — for fear of ditching pilots being picked up by American Air-Sea-Rescue units. As further precautions these airmen were to be declared as “volunteers”. The bodies of any killed were buried in an old cemetery at Port Arthur in order to reduce the possibility of publicity at home in the USSR. Before entering combat the Russian pilots were given a short course in Chinese phraseology relating to air-operations. This turned out to be a complete failure as men under pressure reverted to their native tongue.

***Figure 179: Russian Pilots Antung***

Before the War in Korea, in February 1950, Stalin had sent a fighter regiment into China. later in that year the Russian 151st Fighter Air Division, flying MiG-15 jets, entered the Korean War. In spite of the superiority of the MiG over all Allied aircraft, at that time, the Russian pilots were so inadequately trained, the UN pilots continually out-fought them. In December the Soviets were shocked by the arrival of the American Sabre, a fighter similar to the MiG-15 in performance but flown by more-experienced and better-trained pilots.

The MiGs advantage evaporated as the Sabre was equal in everything except rate-of-climb. The MiGs took heavy loses until the arrival of reinforcements, of superior quality, in April 1951. The MiGs' main mission was to destroy American bombers, particularly the huge Super-fortresses. The Sabres' main mission was to protect them against MiGs, likely to be encountered plunging down from 50,000 feet out of the sun, with cannons blazing.

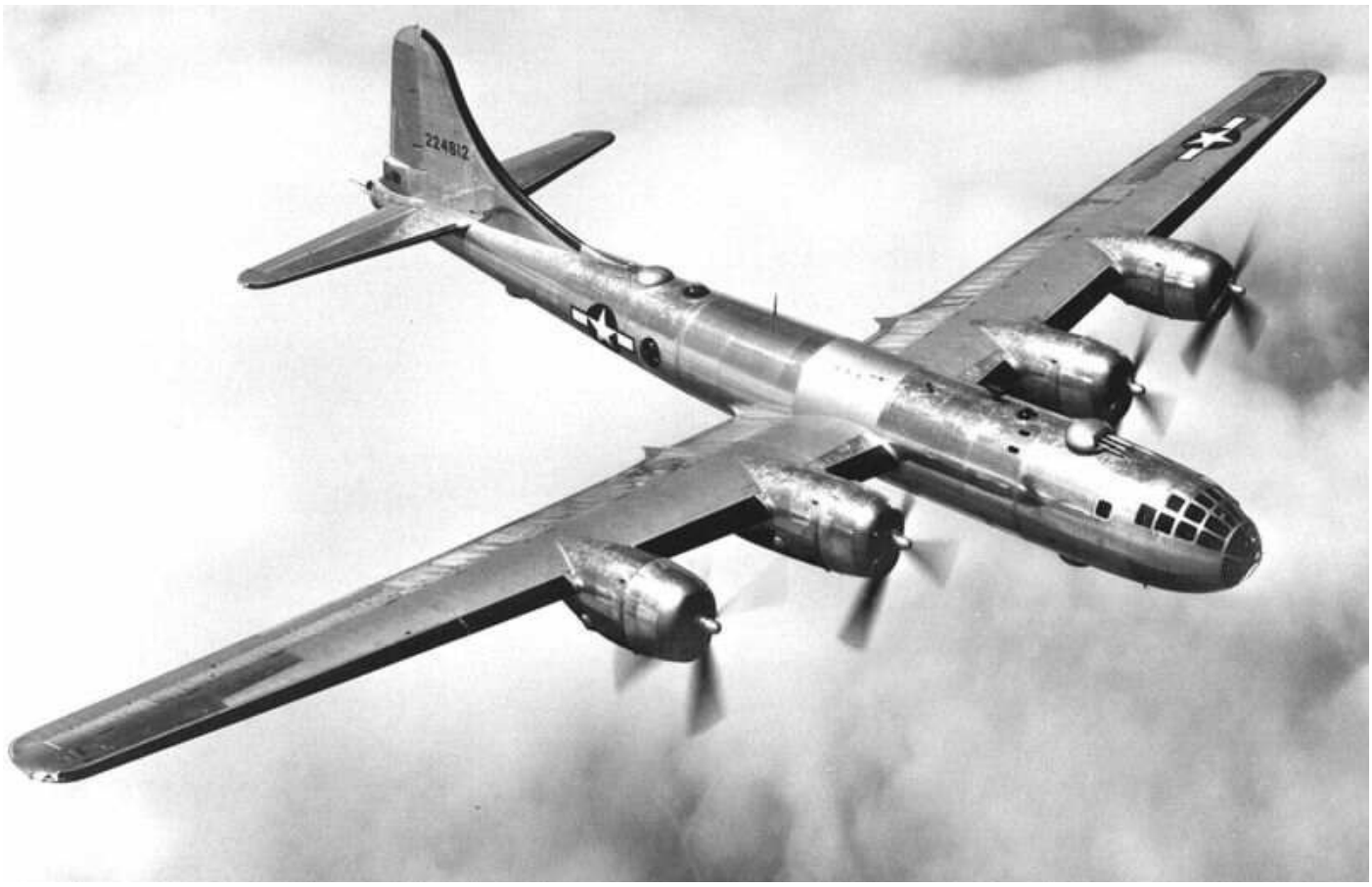


***Figure 180: B-29 Super-fortress***

Two new Soviet Air Divisions arrived in Manchuria in March 1951. Both the 303rd and 324th Interceptor Air Divisions were manned by well-trained, handpicked pilots many of whom were WWII aces. These two divisions were retired out of combat in early 1952 by which time many of the Soviet pilots had flown more than 100 combat missions during their approximately twelve months tour.

During that time these two divisions claimed 510 UN aircraft, however UN loses of aircraft in air-to-air fighting totaled 40 in that same period. The Soviets acknowledged losing 52 MiGs during that phase. The Russians ‘claimed’ a 10 to 1 kill ratio. Whilst both sides made excessive claims, the Soviets made an art form of these distortions. The replacement units which took over in early 1952 were not nearly as well trained or combat-ready against the American Sabres and their loses mounted. One MiG unit performed so badly it had to be pulled out of combat and replaced with an earlier successful regiment.

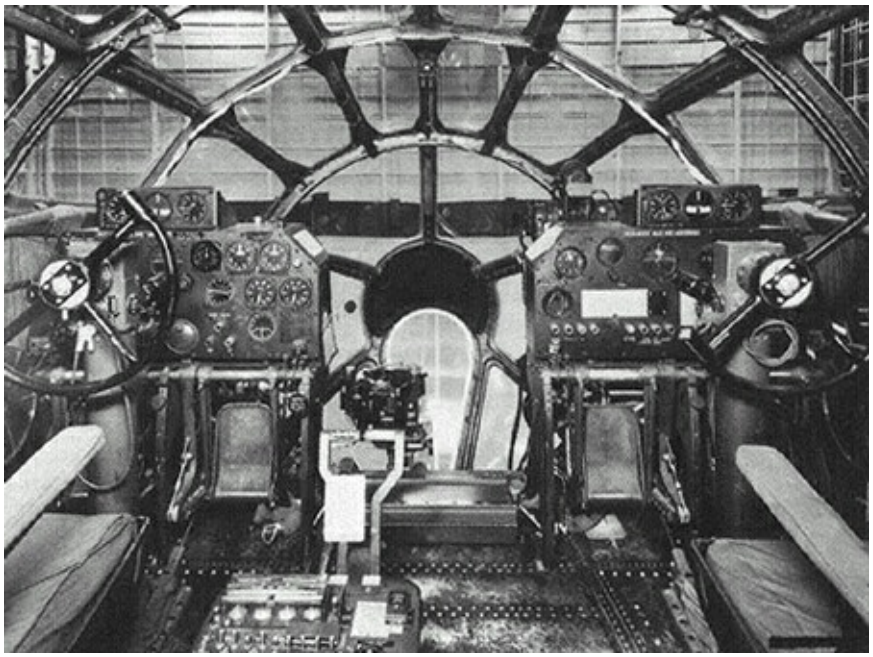


***Figure 181: B-29 Super-fortress Flight Deck***

The B-29 Super-fortress was a four-engine propeller-driven heavy bomber designed by Boeing that was flown primarily by the United States toward the end of World War II and during the Korean War. It was one of the largest aircraft to see service in World War II and a very advanced bomber for its time, with features such as a pressurized cabin, an electronic fire-control system, and remote-controlled machine-gun turrets.

The name “Super-fortress” was derived from that of its well-known predecessor, the B-17 Flying Fortress. Though the B-29 was designed as a high-altitude daytime bomber, it was used extensively in low-altitude night-time incendiary bombing missions. It was the primary aircraft used in the American firebombing campaign against the Empire of Japan in the final months of World War II and was used to carry out the atomic bombings that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**The Battle of Namsi — “Black Tuesday”**

U.S. strategic bombers suffered severe loses during the week of 22–27 October 1951 while attempting to destroy the newly created North Korean aerodromes of Namsi, Taechon and Saamchan. For example, on 23 October, 56 MiG-15s attacked nine Super-fortresses escorted by 34 F-86s and 55 F-84Es. Soviet airmen shot down or damaged beyond repair eight B-29As and two F-84Es, losing only one MiG, and causing Americans to name that day “Black Tuesday”. The top Soviet pilots in those battles were Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr P. Smorchkov and 1st Lieutenant Dmitriy A. Samoylov. The former shot down a Super-fortress on each of 22, 23 and 24 October. Samoylov added two F-86As to his tally on 24 October 1951, and on 27 October shot down two more aircraft: a B-29A and an F-84E.

Describing the battle for Namsi, one American crew member stated,“Some Soviet pilots closed to within 50 feet before unleashing withering barrages of 23-mm and 37-mm cannon shells. The tracers that shot out of these huge weapons looked like flaming balls of AA fire — except they streaked across the sky horizontally instead of vertically”, sometimes called “Horizontal Flak!”

One B-29 took the brunt of the cannon punishment on the right wing and right inboard engine with flames pouring from the cowling as the Super-fortress staggered from the ordeal and fell out of formation. As MiG attacks continued more of the huge bombers turned away from the target area with several of those badly hit heading towards safe islands off the coast of North Korea. One severely damaged B-29 limped back to Kimpo and crash-landed but never flew again. Another arrived at Kimpo with six wounded on board. Many crew members bailed out, some landing in the Yellow Sea just off the West coast of North Korea where they encountered a brisk swell. A significant number of these parachuting aircrew were never accounted for. A few were proven to have been murdered after capture.

These losses among the heavy bombers forced the Far East Air Force to cancel the precision daylight attacks by the B-29s, and only undertake radar-directed night raids. As a result of the B-29s switching to night bombing the enemy deployed the 351st Air Regiment to Manchuria. This night-fighter force initially employed propeller-driven La-11 aircraft until February 1952, at which stage they converted to MiG-15s and obtained more success. Anatoli Karelin became a night-fighter ace by shooting down five Super-fortresses during his tour. During the last year of the war another night fighting regiment, the 535th FAR arrived.

***Figure 182: B-29 Super-fortress Rear Pressurized Hull (Crew Rest, 4 bunks)***

The Soviets claimed many more kills than were actually shot down. The USAF lost 34 B-29s during the Korean war 16 of which were shot down by enemy fighters, presumably MiGs. Flak accounted for four and a further 14 were lost for undefined reasons. On the other hand the Super-fortress gunners claimed 33 enemy fighters, 16 of which were MiGs with a further 17 ‘probables’, and 11 damaged.

B-29 bombers made concentrated attacks on supply routes, especially bridges. The Koreans and Chinese developed astounding labor-intensive methods of reconstruction, requiring re-visits by the bombers. Bridges were hard to knock out permanently.

Note: The B-29 was first reported in action on June 5, 1944, attacking targets at Bangkok, and on June 15 the first raid was made on Japan from bases in China. Later, attacks on the Japanese mainland were stepped up, mainly from the Marianas and Guam, with forces up to 500 Super-fortresses.

Soviet pilots in this war were highly motivated with a strong fear of failure and disgrace if found wanting. They were also aware their families would suffer retaliation if they should fall into enemy hands. Not a single Soviet pilot was taken prisoner during the Korean campaign. Many were sent home in disgrace after failing in the air. In a few cases entire units failed and were sent home. Occasional strong disputes occurred with pilots claiming the same kill. Again, severe disgrace could readily follow any definitive investigation.

The Soviets claimed 1,300 UN aircraft destroyed during the Korean War. Their figures also showed a loss of just 345 MiGs in combat and in operational accidents. After the war the American final re-assessment claimed 379 MiGs destroyed in air combat for a loss of 103 Sabres. These were final re-assessed figures and differed greatly from the wartime claims which are best ignored.

A sourse reporting on behalf of the Soviets has stated: “During the period from November 1950 to January 1952, no less than 40 Soviet MiG-15 pilots were credited as aces, with five or more victories. Soviet combat records show that the first pilot to claim his fifth aerial victory was Captain Stepan Ivanovich Naumenko on 24 December 1950. The honor falls to Captain Sergei Kramarenko, when on 29 July 1951, he scored his actual fifth victory. Approximately 16 out of those 40 pilots actually became aces, the most successful being Major Nikolay Sutyagin, credited with 22 victories, 13 of which were confirmed by the US; Colonel Yevgeny Pepelyaev with 19 claims, 15 confirmed victories; and Major Lev Shchukin – 17 credited, 11 verified.”

It is clear the Mig leaders, enjoying the advantage of their neutral air-bases and the tactical benefits of an aircraft with superior altitude and climb performance were able to dictate the situation at least until the battle began. They could decide to fight or depart. The assistance of radar control from the ground also allowed the Migs, if desired, to dodge through the gaps in the F-86 formations.


***Figure 183: MiG Being Prepared For Flight***

It must be remembered the enemy had big tactical advantages in operating their MiGs from a number of airfields in neutral territory, just a few miles into Manchuria, very close to the air combat area. Having climbed to a most advantageous altitude, in excess of 50,000 feet over neutral Manchuria, the MiGs were ideally positioned to dive upon their prey, carry out a swift attack and rapidly make their escape back to nearby neutral territory where the Sabres dare not follow for fear of precipitating an international incident


***Figure 184: North Korean Monument To MiG Airmen***

The Sabres, on the other hand, had hundreds of miles of traveling to make a round trip between this area, known as MiG Alley, and their home bases, thereby suffering a severe limitation to their available combat time as well as being placed under immense pressure when forced into prolonged combat. Skilful Sabre pilots developed techniques of dealing with drastically diminished fuel reserves. Some took advantage of tailwinds by shutting down their jet engine and re-lighting just before landing. Others, on occasions achieved successful landings after complete fuel starvation. These techniques were learned and practiced.

## The Yalu River

This formidable river in northeastern Asia forms the northwestern boundary between North Korea and the Northeast region of China (Manchuria). In addition to serving as a political boundary, the Yalu River constitutes a divide between Chinese and Korean cultures. It is known abroad by its Chinese name, Yalu, instead of by its Korean name, Amnok. The river is an important source of hydroelectric power is used for transportation (especially of lumber from the rich forests on its banks), and provides fish for the riverine populations.

The river’s length is estimated to be about 800 km, draining an area of some 31,750 square km.The Yalu rises in Tian Lake, a body of water of indeterminate depth on top of Mount

Baitou on the Chinese–North Korean border, at an elevation of about 9,000 feet. Winding southward and then meandering northwestward for some 130 km, the river reaches Linjiang, from which it flows southwestward for 320 km before emptying into Korea Bay. Throughout much of its course it flows through, deep valleys, between mountains ranging in height from 1,900 to 3,800 feet rising on either bank.

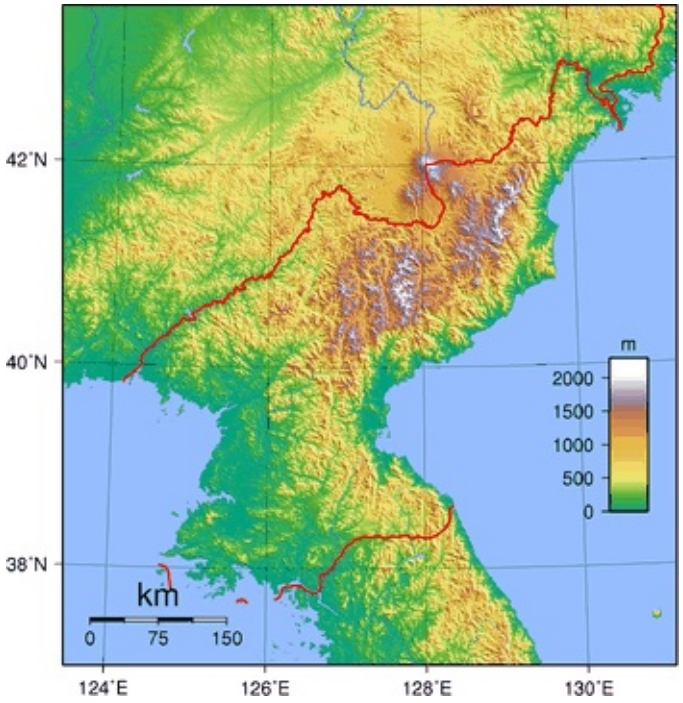



***Figure 185: North Korea Topography***

The upper part of the Yalu has rapid currents, many waterfalls, and sunken rocks. The middle part, which extends as far as Ch'osan contains deposits of alluvium making it shallow and preventing even timber rafts passing in the dry season. The lower part of the river has a slow current in which deposits of alluvium are greater and form a vast delta of many islands. The silting has increased since the mid-20th century and, whereas in 1910 ships of 1,000 tons could sail upstream to Sinŭiju — 500-ton ships can barely do so now.

The climate along the river's course is typically continental and characterized by freezing winters and warm summers. During the four winter months (November through February) with temperatures down to minus 55 degrees Celsius, the river becomes deeply frozen and thus closed to navigation. Because it is situated in mountain ranges and is not far from oceans, the river's basin receives fairly heavy precipitation, much of which occurs as rainfall during June, July, August, and September. The abundant rainfall waters rich forests of conifers as well as deciduous trees. The forests provide a sanctuary for wildlife, including wild boars, wolves, tigers, jaguars, bears, foxes, and such birds as ptarmigans and pheasants. The river abounds in carp and eels.


***Figure 186: Yalu River At Sinuiju (N Korea) With Antung (China) across the River***

The Yalu river played an important political role in the Korean War (1950–53) as it constituted a foreboding and forbidden barrier between North Korea and Manchuria, China. The northwest corridor of The Yalu was like a line describing the very heart of North Korean war industry, and hydroelectric power production for all of North Korea and a major portion of Manchuria.

In 1952 The Yalu River was a strongly defended 130 mile gauntlet of numerous heavy antiaircraft artillery gun positions, hundreds of concrete reinforced gun emplacements containing over 300 -85 MM, 88 MM, 90 MM, 105 MM , and up to 120 MM Radar Controlled Guns, manned by well trained Russian gun crews of the Soviet 10th Antiaircraft Artillery & Searchlight Regiment. There were additionally over 368 very high powered radar controlled searchlights lining several miles of both sides of the River. The north side could not be legitimately violated or crossed, thus precluding any attack perpendicular to the river or parallel to the dam across the river, and thus also imposing very severe accuracy restrictions on flight path and drop zone of UN bombers attempting to limit supplies to the North Korean aggressors. Much effort was put into attacking the Yalu bridge at Sinuiju, a difficult and exceptionally well defended target.

Bomber crews could actually observe MiG fighters taking off from the nearby airfield at Antung, estimated to hold 300 of these menacing aircraft, knowing American fighters could not cross the Yalu to intercept or pursue the menacing Russians operating safely

from this convenient sanctuary.

***Figure 187: Bombing Attack On Yalu Bridge At Sinuiju***

Prohibition to crossing the river into neutral territory, essentially “channeled” the bomb run to frequently paralleling the river, and this became a known and well established route for the bombers AND the enemy gun batteries and searchlights … like a well lighted boulevard! The Chinese, North Koreans, and Russians had simply to fire at the obligatory course the B- 29s had to fly.

## Truce Talks And POW Issues
## Korean Demilitarized Zone

The 38th parallel north—which divides the Korean Peninsula roughly in half—was the original boundary between the United States and Soviet brief administration areas of Korea at the end of World War II. Upon the creation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, informally North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, informally South Korea) in 1948, it became a de facto international border and one of the most tense fronts in the Cold War.

Both the North and the South remained heavily dependent on their sponsor states from 1948 to the outbreak of the Korean War. The conflict, which claimed over three million lives and divided the Korean Peninsula along ideological lines, commenced on June 25, 1950, with a full-front DPRK invasion across the 38th parallel, and ended in 1953 after

international intervention pushed the front of the war back to near the 38th parallel.

United Nations forces met with North Korean and Chinese officials at Panmunjom from 1951 to 1953 for truce talks. The main point of contention during the talks was the question surrounding the prisoners of war. Moreover, South Korea was uncompromising in its demand for a unified state. On June 8, 1953, an agreement to the POW problem was reached. A final agreement was reached on July 27, 1953. The United Nations Command, Chinese Peoples Liberation Army and North Korea Peoples Army agreed to an armistice ending the fighting and each side agreed to move their troops back 2,000 m (2,200 yards) from the front line.

The military commanders of the two sides signed the Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953. Representatives of the sixteen nations that had provided combat forces to the UNC signed the Joint Policy Declaration in New York City the same day. At 8:00 P.M., after two and a half years of negotiations, the guns finally fell silent in Korea.

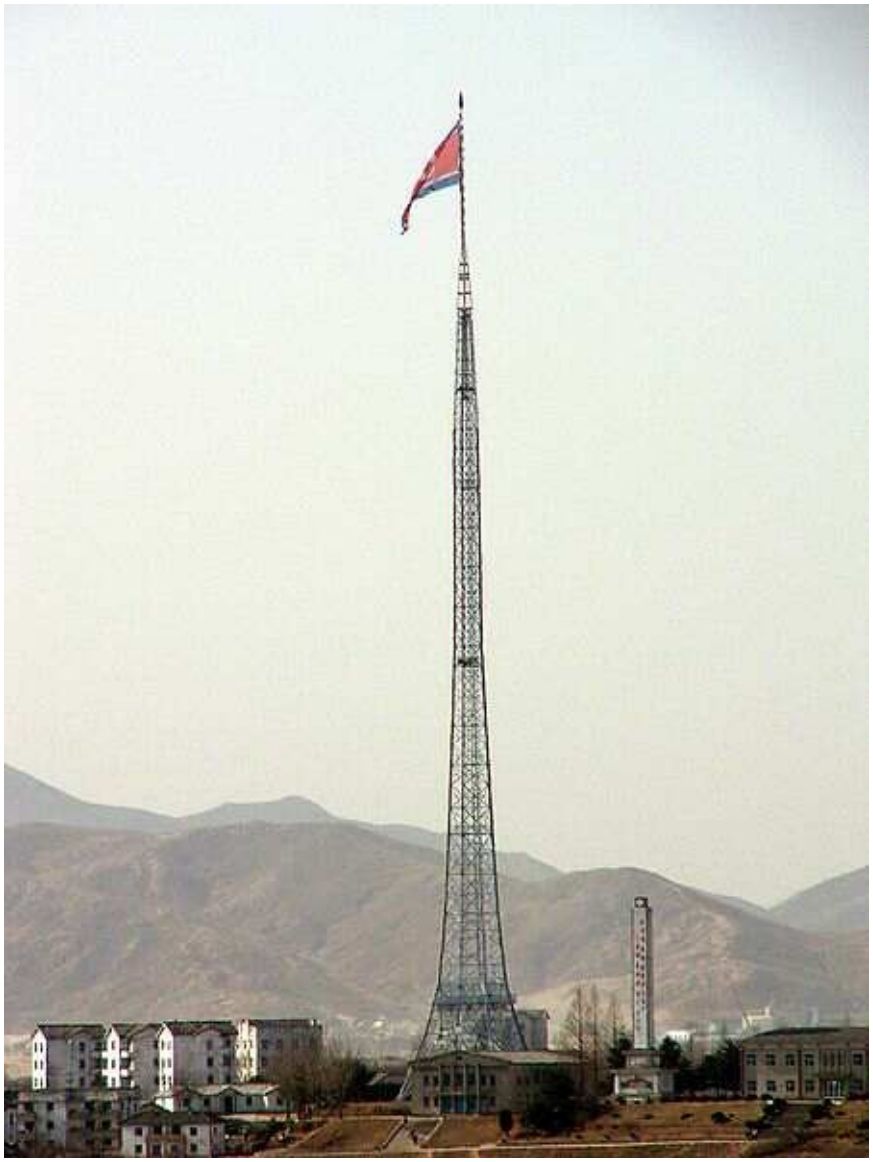


***Figure 188: North Korean Flagpole —"Propaganda Village" Near Panmunjom, (A "Holywood Production")***

The most difficult matter to resolve, and one that deadlocked the talks for eighteen months, was Item 4, "Arrangements Relating to Prisoners of War." Both sides had initially assumed that all prisoners of war (POWs) would be exchanged at the conclusion of an

armistice. However, among the prisoners held by the UNC were many former residents of South Korea who had been inducted into the KPA and subsequently captured by UN forces. The United States agreed with the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korean) government that these individuals should be allowed to return to their homes in the South. Many of the Chinese soldiers in the CPVA had originally been in the Nationalist Chinese army, and some of these were likely to prefer to go to Taiwan rather than being forced to return to the People's Republic of China (PRC, Communist China).

By the time negotiations began on Item 4, the United States had concluded on both humanitarian and propaganda grounds that no prisoner should be forcibly repatriated against his will. The KPA/CPVA rejected this principle but might have been persuaded to accept some type of voluntary repatriation if most of the Chinese POWs had been willing to return to China. When the UNC screened the prisoners in April 1952, however, only 70,000, including 5,100 Chinese, out of over 170,000 prisoners held by the UNC, indicated a desire for repatriation. The KPA/CPVA flatly refused to negotiate on the basis of this low figure.

Those prisoners who refused to return to their countries were allowed to live under a neutral supervising commission for three months. At the end of this time period, those who still refused repatriation would be released. Among those who refused repatriation were twenty two American and British POWs, all but two of whom chose to defect to the People's Republic of China.

***Figure 189: Panmunjom Ceasefire Building***

As part of the Korean Armistice Agreement between North Korea, the People's Republic of China, and the United Nations Command forces in 1953 a demilitarized zone was created along the armistice line, effectively dividing Korea into two separate countries, and indicates exactly where the front was when the agreement was signed.

The Korean Demilitarized Zone is a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula that serves as a buffer zone between North and South Korea which runs along the 38th parallel north. The DMZ cuts the Korean Peninsula roughly in half, crossing the 38th parallel on an angle, with the west end of the DMZ lying south of the parallel and the east end lying north of it. It is 250 kilometers (160 miles) long, approximately 4 km (2.5 mi) wide.

Despite its name and although most troops and all heavy weapons were to be removed from the area, it has been heavily armed by both sides since the end of the fighting and is now the most heavily militarized border in the world. The Northern Limit Line, or NLL, is the de facto maritime boundary between North and South Korea in the Yellow Sea and the coastline and islands on both sides of the NLL are also heavily militarized.


***Figure 190: The Demilitarized Zone Of Korea***

Owing to this theoretical stalemate, and genuine hostility between the North and the South, large numbers of troops are still stationed along both sides of the line, each side guarding against potential aggression from the other side. The armistice agreement explains exactly how many military personnel and what kind of weapons are allowed in the DMZ. Soldiers from both sides may patrol inside the DMZ, but they may not cross the MDL (the black center-line). Sporadic outbreaks of violence due to North Korean hostilities killed over 500 South Korean soldiers and 50 U.S. soldiers along the DMZ between 1953 and 1999.

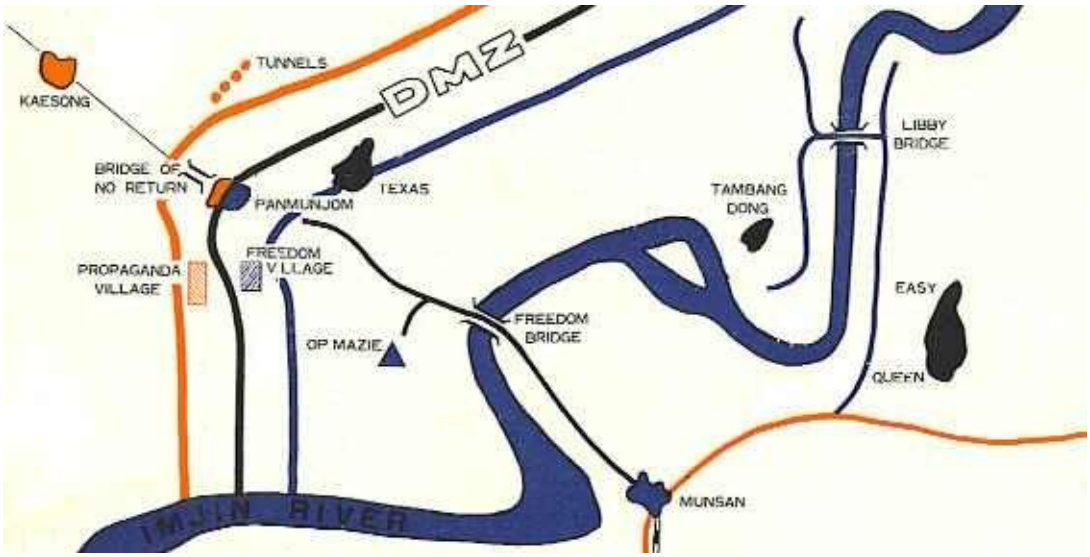



***Figure 191: Panmunjom DMZ Map***

Map provided by SP4 Martinez, BLV 1965

This map shows Kaesong where the Peace Talks originated and Panmunjom where peace was concluded in 1953. The area within the orange and blue lines is the Demilitarized Zone with the black center being the MDL (Military Demarcation Line). Note Freedom Village, populated by South Korean peasants, is within the DMZ. Propaganda Village is a mock Hollywood prop setup by North Korea to impress viewers. Observe that the limits of the military area between the Imjin River and the DMZ are as much as three miles to the Libby and Freedom, bridges, the only escape routes in case of invasion.

In the past half century, the Korean DMZ has been a deadly place for humans, making habitation impossible. Only around the village of Panmunjeom and more recently the Dong Bukbu Line on Korea’s east coast have there been regular incursions by people. This natural isolation along the 155 miles (249 km) length of the DMZ has created an involuntary park which is now recognized as one of the most well-preserved areas of temperate habitat in the world. The endangered Amur Leopard may have found unlikely protection within the Korean DMZ.

***Figure 192: Rare Amur Leopard — Seeking Sanctuary in DMZ***

Several other endangered animal and plant species now exist among the heavily fortified fences, landmines and listening posts. These include the extremely rare red-crowned crane (a staple of Asian art), and the white-naped crane as well as, potentially, the extremely rare Korean tiger,and Asiatic black bear.

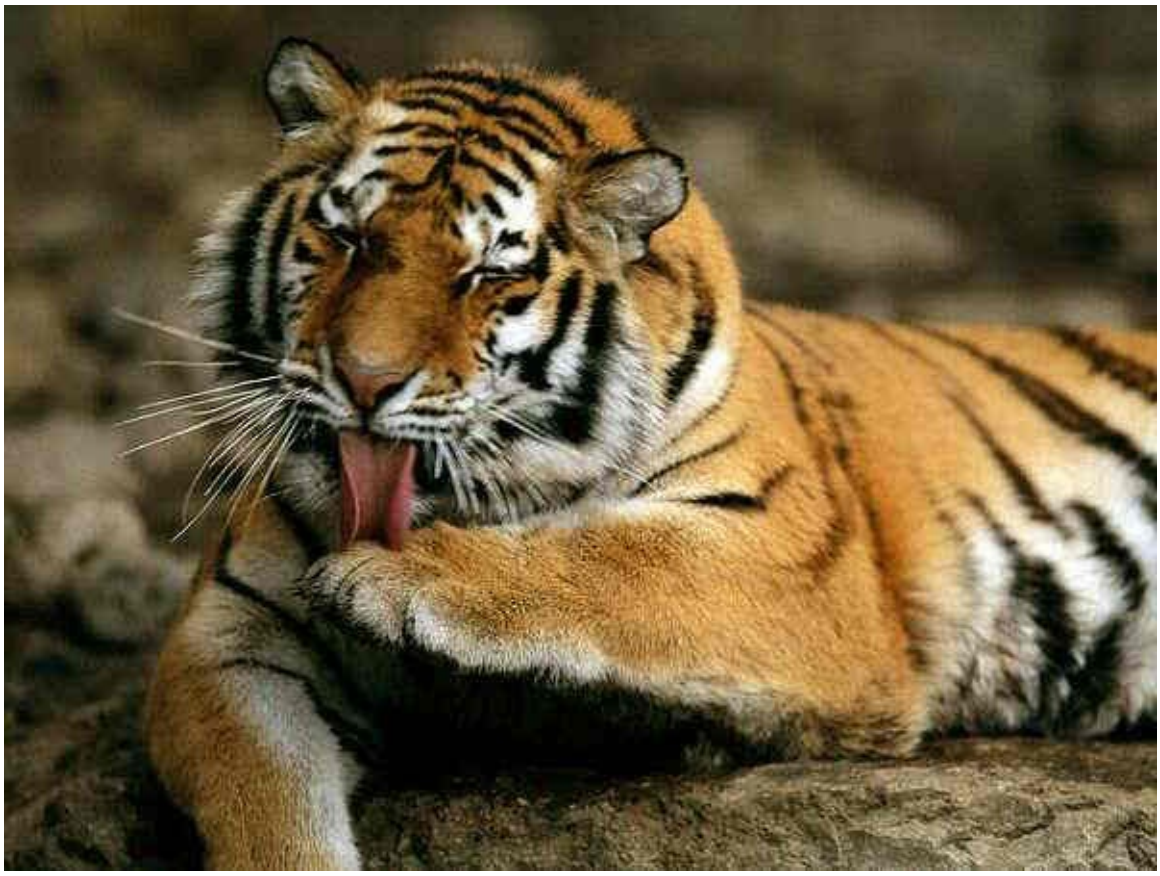


***Figure 193: Rare korean Tiger***

Ecologists have identified some 2,900 plant species, 70 types of mammals and 320 kinds

of birds within the narrow buffer zone. Additional surveys are now being conducted throughout the region.

***Figure 194: Red Crowned Crane***

The DMZ owes its varied biodiversity to its geography, which crosses mountains, prairies, swamps, lakes and tidal marshes. Environmentalists hope that the DMZ will be conserved as a wildlife refuge, with a well-developed set of objective and management plans vetted and in place.

***Figure 195: Aggressive Asian Black Bear (Moon Bear Or White-Chested Bear)***

In 2005, CNN founder and media mogul, Ted Turner, on a visit to North Korea, said that he would financially support any plans to turn the DMZ into a peace park and a UN-protected World Heritage Site.

***Figure 196: Freedom Village, Inside DMZ***

Since November 15, 1974, the South has discovered that four tunnels crossing the DMZ have been dug by North Korea. This is indicated by the orientation of the blasting lines within each tunnel. Upon their discovery, North Korea claimed that the tunnels were for coal mining; however, no coal has been found in the tunnels, which are dug through granite, but some of the tunnel walls have been painted black to give the appearance of anthracite.

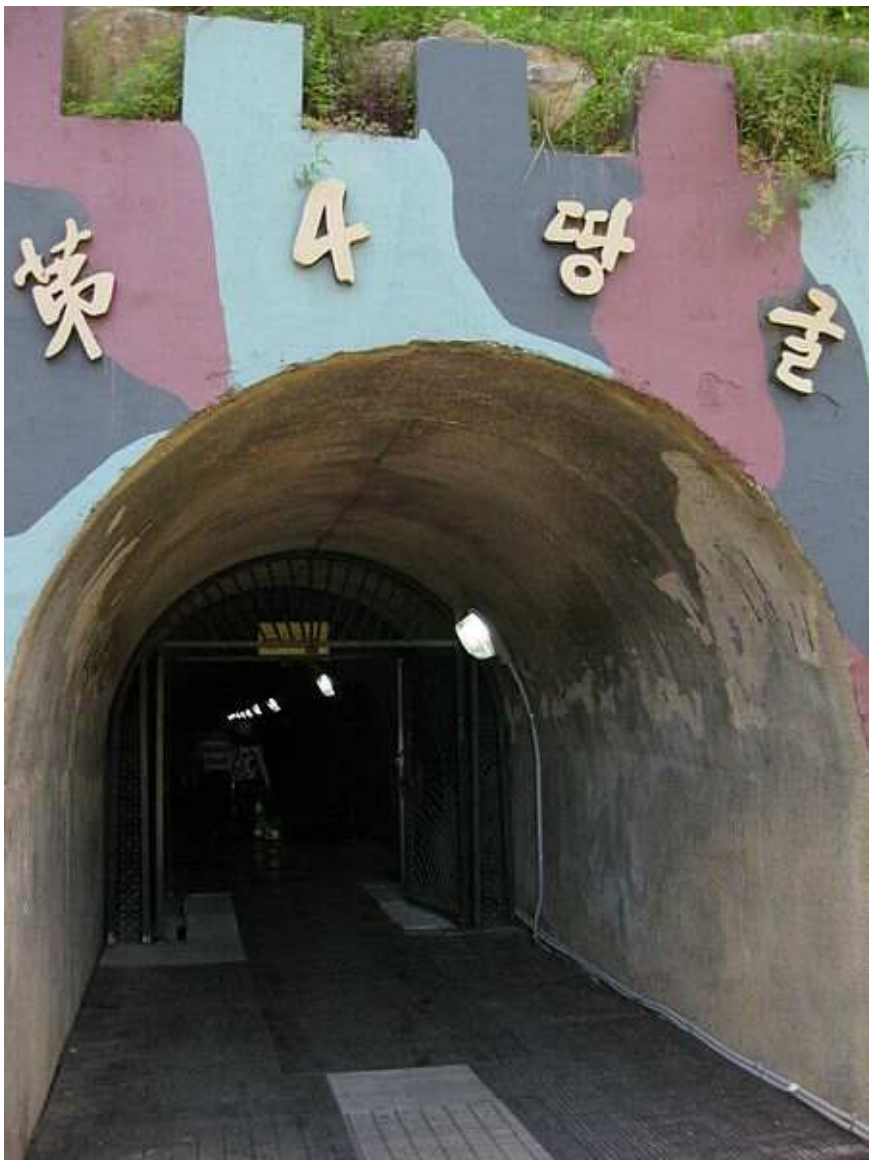



***Figure 197: South Entrance To 4th Infiltration Tunnel Dug By N Koreans***

The tunnels are believed to have been planned as a military invasion route by North Korea. Each shaft is large enough to permit the passage of an entire infantry division in one hour, though the tunnels are not wide enough for tanks or vehicles. All the tunnels run in a north-south direction and do not have branches. Following each discovery, engineering within the tunnels has become progressively more advanced. For example, the third tunnel sloped slightly upwards as it progressed southward, to prevent water stagnation. Today, visitors may visit the second, third and fourth tunnels through guided tours.

The first of the tunnels was discovered on November 20, 1974, by a South Korean Army patrol, noticing steam rising from the ground. The initial discovery was met with

automatic fire from North Korean soldiers. Five days later, during a subsequent exploration of this tunnel, U.S. Navy Commander Robert M. Ballinger and ROK Marine Corps Major Kim Hah Chul were killed in the tunnel by a North Korean explosive device. The blast also wounded five Americans and one South Korean from the United Nations Command. The tunnel, which was about 1.2 m (4 ft) high by 0.9 m (3 ft) wide, extended more than 1,000 m (1,100 yd) beyond the MDL into South Korea. The tunnel was reinforced with concrete slabs and had electric power and lighting. There were weapon storage and sleeping areas. A narrow gauge railway with carts had also been installed. Estimates based on the tunnel's size, suggest it would have allowed approximately 2,000 KPA soldiers (one regiment) to pass through it per hour.


***Figure 198: A South Korean Checkpoint At DMZ, From N Korean Side***

Tae Sung Dong and Kijong-dong were the only villages allowed by the armistice committee to remain within the boundaries of the DMZ. Residents of Tae Sung Dong are governed and protected by the United Nations Command and are generally required to spend at least 240 nights per year in the village to maintain their residency. In 2008, the village had a population of 218 people. The villagers of Tae Sung Dong are direct descendants of people who owned the land before the 1950–53 Korean War.

***Figure 199: Bridge Of No Return***

***Figure 200: South Korean Guards View Border At Panmunjom***

## *MiG Pilot Defects To Kimpo UN Air Base*

**A** startling event took place on 21 September 1953, just a few weeks after the ceasefire in the Korean war. Personnel at the Kimpo Air Base were astonished to see a MiG land, taxi in and park alongside a row of Sabres. The pilot, Noh Kum-Sok, a North Korean national, had decided to defect. He took off from Kusong, near the area in the middle of MiG Alley where Ron Guthrie was shot down. He flew straight to Kimpo without being detected, a fact which possibly reflected on the low level of post-war defense security in operation.


***Figure 201: MiG Flown To Kimpo By Defector***

Approaching the UN airfield, the Korean pilot reduced speed, extended air-brakes, flaps and landing gear and waggled his wings in a friendly gesture. He also announced his presence by firing flares, Colored red, yellow green and white, in a spectacular display. Due to lack of radio contact and the execution of a largely unplanned approach, the MiG landed against the other traffic, several Sabres. Two fighters, deadly enemies, a Sabre and a MiG, touched down simultaneously on opposite ends of the runway and raced towards each other. No Kum-Sok stated afterward that he, “Desperately steered to the far right of the runway and closed my eyelids tight.” Somehow this worked. On completing the landing he shouted to Himself, “I made it, I’m safe, I’m free!” He may well have added, “I’m rich!” Undoubtedly the reward for delivering such an aircraft would make it all worthwhile. Interestingly though, No Kum-Sok claimed no prior knowledge of the $100,000 reward being offered. He said he merely wished to live in the West, but undoubtedly he would have found the reward money a nice little touch.

This MiG-15 was minutely inspected and flown by test pilots including Chuck Yeager. Yeager reported in his autobiography the MiG-15 had dangerous handling faults and claimed that during a visit to the USSR, Soviet pilots were incredulous he had dived it, this supposedly being dangerous. When this story got back to the Soviet pilots Yeager claimed to have talked to, they angrily denied it. In fact, although the MiG-15 did have some handling quirks and could, in principle, exceed flight limits in a dive, its airbrakes opened automatically at the red line, preventing loss of control. Lieutenant No’s aircraft is now displayed at the National Museum of the United States Air Force near Dayton, Ohio.

***Figure 202: Many Years Later — MiG And Sabre Take-off As A Pair***

## Desperate False Charges Against UN Forces

As the war progressed the increasingly desperate Communists, seeing their prospects of victory fading away, began an altogether evil program of false accusations against the forces which were so effectively defeating them. Predominant among these awful fabrications was a most elaborate world-wide propaganda program accusing the UN forces of carrying out systematic biological and chemical warfare. As Adolf Hitler said, “If you are going to tell a lie, tell a big one!”

Captured UN troops and airmen were routinely targeted by utterly unscrupulous Chinese or North Korean specialist interrogation officers with the intention of assessment, brain-washing and application of outright pressure of the most extreme variety. In view of the many thousands of captives being ‘processed’ and the unlimited torture and psychological pressures regularly applied, it was inevitable a small number would succumb to the enemy’s demands. Some of these were probably, already”convinced Communists”, making them easy targets.

The extensive periods of deprivation and torture inflicted upon these unfortunates was hard to believe, being so at odds with anything experienced in any normal existence. Airmen were targeted in particular as they were so readily accused of “dropping contaminated material” on the “Peace loving people”. No effort was spared by interrogators in attempting to extract “confessions”. On the few occasions when such utterly unbearable treatment achieved its purpose, these false statements were recorded and given maximum world-wide publicity. These totally false accusations met with enthusiastic acclaim and outrage among much, if not most, of the world’s media which obligingly generated frenzied rioting in its wake.

***Figure 203: North Korean Prison Guards Who Gave Our Men Such Torture***

Years afterwards, historians researching archives of former Eastern Bloc countries revealed the accusations against the USAF had been elaborately constructed by Communist propaganda, with North Korea's secret police actually infecting North Korean prisoners with Cholera in order to further the, "Evidence of American germ warfare". Naturally these well-proven and most-obvious facts, clearing America's name, received little, if any, reportage in world media.

According to documents held at the National Archives in Kew and not made public until 2006, when British Army Colonel Carne, VC, DSO was released in September 1953 after brutal captivity in North Korea, he told Sir Esler Dening, the British ambassador in Tokyo, "an extraordinary story". "He says that on January 1952 and for nineteen months thereafter, he was kept in solitary confinement by Chinese communists and subjected to a softening-up process including the use of drugs, the result of which was, as he put it, to make his "brain like a sponge, capable of receiving any kind of information put into it," Sir Esler told the Foreign Office in a Top Secret category telegram.

Tex was resentful and contemptuous of this despicable program of hatred generation by the Communists and the media collaboration which compounded the offense. Tex also summarized by lamenting, "Unfortunately this is what we have come to expect, so there are no surprises here! Undoubtedly this was a typically despicable piece of character assassination carried out with the utmost malice by a most oppressive aggressor-power, against those fighting in defense of freedom for South Korea, and the world in general. Much of the world media and so many fellow travelers, should hang their collective heads in shame for indulging in this outrageous misuse of their influence in supporting these tyrants."

# Seoul — Capital City Of The Country That Was Saved

***Figure 204: Beautiful Modern Seoul (Circa 2010)***

Seoul is the capital and largest metropolis of South Korea. A mega-city with a population of more than 10 million, it is the largest city proper in the OECD developed world. The Seoul Capital Area, which includes the surrounding Incheon metropolis and Gyeonggi province, is the world's second largest metropolitan area with over 25.6 million people, home to over half of South Koreans along with 632,000 international residents.

Situated on the Han River, Seoul's history stretches back more than 2,000 years when it was founded in 18 BC. It continued as the capital of Korea under the Joseon Dynasty and the Korean Empire. The Seoul metropolitan area contains four UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Changdeok Palace, Hwaseong Fortress, Jongmyo Shrine and the Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty.

Seoul is surrounded by mountains, the tallest being Mt. Bukhan, the world's most visited national park. Modern landmarks holding Guinness World Records include Lotte World, the world's largest indoor theme park, Moonlight Rainbow Fountain, the world's longest bridge fountain and Times Square's CGV Starium, the world's largest cinema screen. The birthplace of K-pop and the Korean Wave, Seoul was voted the world's most wanted travel destination by Chinese, Japanese and Thai tourists for a third consecutive year in 2011 with over 10 million international visitors in 2012.

Today, Seoul is considered a leading and rapidly rising global city, resulting from an economic boom and growth known as the Miracle on the Han River which transformed it from the ashes of the Korean War to the world's fourth largest metropolitan economy with

a GDP of US$773.9 billion in 2012 after Tokyo, New York City and Los Angeles. A world leading technology hub, it boasts the world's sixth largest number of Fortune Global 500 multinationals such as Samsung, the world's largest technology company, as well as LG and Hyundai-Kia.

Gangnam District forms the commercial center along with Central District and the financial center, Yeoui Island and technology hub Digital Media City. Ranked sixth in the Global Power City Index, the metropolis exerts a major influence among global affairs as one of the five leading hosts of global conferences. In 2012, Seoul's quality of life was found to be higher than New York City, London or Melbourne but slightly lower than Tokyo and Paris according to the United Nations.


***Figure 205: Kimpo Transformed — Now Gimpo International Airport***

AREX, spelled A'REX as a brand name, is a South Korean railway line that links Seoul with Gimpo Airport (previously Kimpo)and Incheon International Airport. The section between the two airports opened on March 23, 2007, the extension to Seoul Station opened December 29, 2010. The line was built and operated by a private company, but after financial difficulties, South Korean national rail operator Korail bought a majority stake. 'Express trains' have 272 comfortable seats with armrests in 2+2 configuration, overhead luggage shelves and additional luggage racks. Passenger compartments are separated from door areas and from transitions between cars by transparent sliding doors.

'Commuter trains' are similar to subway trains with seats along the walls and do not have

overhead shelves, offering seating for 282 passengers and standing room for 630 passengers. There are no separating doors, transitions between cars are open. Both train types offer disabled seats and are equipped with LCD screens for passenger information,including flight arrivals and departures.

Seoul is connected via AREX to Incheon International Airport, on Wolmi-do Island, rated the world's best airport for seven years in a row (2005-2012) by Airports Council International.

***Figure 206: Incheon International Airport***

Seoul has a very technologically advanced infrastructure. It has the world's highest fibre-optic broadband penetration, resulting in the world's fastest internet connections with speeds up to 1 Gbps. Seoul Station is the main terminal of the KTX high-speed rail and the Seoul Subway is the world's largest subway network by length It is considered the world's best subway and is the world's only subway with all stations having automatic platform gates for safety along with 4G LTE, WiFi, DMB and WiBro. Seoul hosted the 1986 Asian Games, 1988 Summer Olympics, 2002 FIFA World Cup and the 2010 G-20 Seoul summit. A UNESCO City of Design, Seoul was named the 2010 World Design Capital.

***Figure 207: General Macarthur —— Architect Of Communist Defeat In Korea***

***Signs Japanese Surrender At End Of WW2***