CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: Neil Betcher

INTERVIEWER: J.R. Digger MacDougall

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Neil Betcher

Interviewed 7 December 2004

By J.R. Digger MacDougall

INTERVIEWER: Neil, I'd just like to confirm. I'd like to start off by asking you to give me your name, and spell your surname please, and then we'll introduce the tape.

BETCHER: My name is Neil Betcher—B-E-T-C-H-E-R is my surname.

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program, Interview with Neil Betcher, recorded on the 7th of December [2004], in Ottawa. Interviewed by J.R. Digger MacDougall. Tape 1, Side 1.

Neil, thank you for allowing us to do this. I'd just like to confirm that you and I have both signed the Canadian War Museum Release. Is that correct?

BETCHER: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Would you start off by just giving me some background of your civilian and military life—perhaps a biography?

BETCHER: Well, I was born in Calgary in 1926 and I lived there with my family, of course, until 1937, when we moved to a farm that my father had bought. I stayed on the farm—I was eleven at that time, as a matter of fact. I stayed on the farm until I was nineteen, when I joined the Army.

I took my basic and advanced and specialist training at Camp Borden. Basic and advanced training was pretty well standard. The specialist training I took was on the medium machine gun. Subsequent to that, when the war ended, I was posted to Wetaskiwin in Alberta, which had been a basic training centre during the war and what they were using Wetaskiwin for, at that time, was just sort of a holding tank. I spent two weeks there. We weren't being released at that time. I spent two weeks there, and then I was posted to Wainwright—a private, all this time, mind you.

I got to Wainwright and the only job they had for me was in the fire hall—the firefighting detachment for the station. That was commanded by a staff sergeant in the engineers and we had one fire truck. There were four of us, in addition to the staff sergeant, and we worked one day on, one day off—deadly, deadly.

At that time, Wainwright was still a prisoner-of-war camp for officers—German, Italian, goodness knows what else. There was about fifteen hundred of them there. In addition to that, there were about three hundred other ranks who kept the place clean and did all the work and so on, so forth. I stayed there over the winter of 1946-47. Then—I just forget how it

happened, but I went from—I just forget now—I went from what I had been serving under and they put me into a different classification. I just forget the name of it, but that classification put me more or less into the Permanent Force if I wanted to. I didn't have to go into it, but I did.

Subsequent to that, I was posted to the PPCLI who were, at that time, in Shilo. We were there until 19—I was there until 1946, I believe it was, we moved to Calgary. I stayed with the PPCLI at Currie Barracks for—well, until 1948 when I left to go to Rivers to learn to fly—to learn to fly gliders. By that time, I had reached the rank of corporal and I volunteered to become a glider pilot, or at least take the training. From there on in, that was the last I ever saw of the infantry.

I took my basic flying training at the civilian flying club at Brandon and that was powered aircraft--Tiger Moths--the ones that were used for the training of a lot of pilots during war. Subsequent to qualifying there over the winter of—did I say '46? That was '48. I'm sorry. I made a mistake there. That training at Brandon took place from November 1948 until April, or something like that, in 1949, when we went to—those who qualified on the powered aircraft went to Rivers to learn to fly the gliders. I was flying gliders from 1949 up to October of 1953 when the gliders were taken out of service.

Subsequent to that, I went down to the Air Supply School which was also based at Rivers and took a course there—an instructor's course, actually. I was a sergeant at the time. I took the course for aerial delivery and became an instructor. I stayed there for—goodness, I forget how long—two or three years, I guess it was. We did all the heavy dropping from a C119 aircraft. We quite often jumped with the loads. I also took a course of parachute training and became a parachute training instructor. So, I was qualified to do all of those things.

Subsequent to that time at the Air Supply School, I was asked if I wanted to take a course at Fort Rucker in Alabama that would train me to become a mechanic on helicopters—specifically helicopters. I jumped at the chance. So, I spent four months in Fort Rucker on one of the best courses I've ever had—super, super instructors; all kinds of training aids. It couldn't have been done better.

When that course ended, we came back and I was still in Rivers—posted right back to Rivers. I was put into a job where I, and three or four other Army types who had gone through this course down in Alabama--same as I had--I was given those guys. We took over the maintenance of the two Bell helicopters they had there, plus I think it was four or five H5 helicopters. They were the Korean War vintage. While there, the Air Force filled us in with good instructors to teach us their way of doing things and using all of the reporting facilities--everything that had to be done with maintenance of those helicopters.

Up until 1961, I'd spent thirteen years at Rivers. I was posted to Wainwright again. I was the Transport Officer for Wainwright Camp, at the time, it was called. So, that was 1961. [Indistinct] 1962 there and was commissioned from the ranks in January 1963 and posted to Camp Borden—to Base Borden now, of course. I was posted there to the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps School where I was in the Training Wing. My time there was spent—in the summer time, mostly was training Officer Cadets who had finished or were still going to universities, and they were sent down there for summer training.

Then, in the following winter, I was training senior NCOs, corporals and drivers. That lasted until 1968 when I was promoted to Captain and posted to CFB Rockcliffe. Actually, it was still a camp, at that time. At Rockcliffe, my duty was—I was the Base Transport Officer. Actually, I don't… In 1972, I was promoted to Major and posted to NDHQ in DGT, where I spent the last eight years of my service. During the last eight years, I went to Egypt with UN duties in Egypt for six months. I was out of the Army in 1980—I think it was May—a month of my thirty-sixth year, when I got out of what I was doing.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to school and what education did you have when you enrolled?

BETCHER: Well, when I enrolled, I had grade nine. This is while I was in the Army. The courses that I took were mathematics, English and geography. I know I did a lot of that when I was in Wainwright. I had a lot of time there. And then, just simply from reading, from reading.

Before I was CFR, I had to pass an interview with—there was a group set up in Winnipeg, as a matter of fact. This is before I went to Wainwright. But I was sent into Winnipeg before this board, and it was a board of three officers. I sat in the middle with two of them behind me and one in front of me, and they were firing questions at me--coming from all directions. I felt that I handled myself very, very well, which I did. I found out eventually that I had. But they would not commission me at that time. They said I was too young. I had to be thirty five years of age. That's I think the age I was when I was CFR, when I was in Wainwright.

The education I had—basic education, school education was nine--grade nine. From grade—oh, I forget--grade five, I was, when we went to Calgary, or went from Calgary to the farm. To grade nine was in one room school houses—all grades—one to nine—in every one of those places. You know, we had pretty darn good teachers, too.

INTERVIEWER: Back to your basic flying training that you did at the Brandon Flying Club. What types of aircraft did you fly at that time?

BETCHER: Well, what we flew--what we were trained on, the bulk of the time, was the old Tiger Moths that we used for the air training plan that was going full steam ahead during the war, training pilots from all over the allied countries. We had—they trained pilots from Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Canada, as well, and I think various others there. I don't really remember right at the moment. But those were the aircraft that they trained them—their primary flying training was the Moth.

Training on dead reckoning navigation was done on a little aircraft called an Aeronca. You could walk faster than that thing, I'm sure. But at any rate, that's what we were trained in. We flew them very, very little. I don't think I put in more than four or five hours on them.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other aircraft that you flew on some sort of continuation flying or anything like that throughout your career?

BETCHER: No. When I finished flying those aircraft, I never flew another powered aircraft, except sometimes pilots, if I was with them, they'd give me a chance—just flew them--fly an

aircraft a bit. I remember one time I was up with a Navy pilot at Rivers. He was in a Harvard. We went down to the ranges at Camp Shilo that were used by the Artillery. We went down there specifically to look for a rack of bombs that had fallen off a Navy aircraft when they were doing gunnery practices one summer. We didn't find it, of course. It would have been a fluke if we had.

But because he knew me, this pilot, he took me up to a pretty high altitude and he started doing aerobatics. He asked—well, I flew the aircraft for a while, but I didn't do any aerobatics on it. He wanted me to do a loop, which I started and stalled it out at the top, upside down—scared the wits out of me. He recovered, of course, and that was the extent of my flying in the Harvard—never tried it again.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the dead reckoning experience that you had--about five hours in the Aeronca. What type of training did you go through in the Tiger Moth?

BETCHER: What kind of training? Well, it was like the basic. We started at the Brandon Flying Club. The first things we started with were classroom stuff—all the parts of the aircraft that were--well, all the names were put on them and their function, as well as the instrumentation and so on and so forth, and a briefing on what was going to be expected of us.

At that time, we were also teamed up with an instructor who was going to be with us from the start of the training until the end of it. But we started out flying under instruction. We flew in the front seat of those things—very, very uncomfortable. We were packed in there with winter clothes on and winter boots, sitting on parachutes, and there wasn't much room to move in there, and if there was any heat there, you sure—I never ever felt it.

But at any rate, that's what we learned--landing, taking off, turning, steep turns, other types of turns. Stalling—that was one thing we did quite a lot of—stalling and spinning and recovery, because that probably would be the most of a problem that we would get into was stalling the aircraft. When you stalled the Tiger Moth, it was like night following day. It stalled and spun. To get them out of that was quite simple, and we learned that. We did it repeatedly. But that was about the extent of it for the first part of the training.

Then we soloed. Holy smokes! I'd have to look back, if I even had one—a list of the programs that we went through. But we kept flying and picking up experience. I forget how many hours I had when I left there, when I finished. We were tested periodically by the Chief Instructor at Brandon—a Mr. Ed McGill. He was a wartime pilot. I think that he formed the Brandon Flying Club, but I'm not too sure about that. But he tested us occasionally and twice, during our training there, we were checked out by RCAF pilots, who were just seeing how we were making out. It was an RCAF pilot who gave us our final check when we finished the flying. But all we were doing, really, after soloing, was practicing—turning, climbing, descending, landing, take off—learning everything or practicing all the things that we'd been taught, in the very first part of it, up to…

INTERVIEWER: You were actually learning to fly during the wintertime.

BETCHER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: In Brandon, Manitoba, it must have been pretty cold. How was the aircraft equipped? How was the Tiger Moth equipped?

BETCHER: Well, it had [laughs], if we're talking about heat, if it had any heat in it, it was supposed to be that that could be funneled back off the engine. But as I—my experience was I felt very, very little of this. But we were dressed well, in the RCAF winter flying—I should say—boots and jackets and so on and so forth—very, very bulky in a small cockpit, and especially with the heavy boots we were wearing. It was not really that comfortable. But…

INTERVIEWER: What sort of instrumentation did you have?

BETCHER: Well, we had the air speed indicator, of course; the turn and bank indicator—you know, it's fifty years since I've done this—I kind of forget the names. But there's the turn and bank indicator and a compass, of course, and the sort of view that were climbing or descending and at what speed [and] at what rate—I just forget the name of that instrument.

INTERVIEWER: Altimeter? Altimeter?

BETCHER: Altimeter. Altimeter. Yes. Turn and bank was one that you had to rely on a lot, when you were doing any flying under the hood. I mean all of them were really essential at that time, but that's the one that kept you straight and level. The altimeter would show you whether you were gaining altitude or losing it and the compass would give you the bearing you were flying on.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you mentioned flying under the hood. What was that procedure all about?

BETCHER: Oh. Well, we were taught a little bit of instrument flying. It wasn't really stressed, but we had to learn certain things. The pilot—the man under instruction, sitting in the front seat of the aircraft—there was a hood in there that could be pulled over his area and all he could see would be the instruments in front of him. He could not see out. We were taught how to fly at it straight and level and make turns—steep turns [and] other types of turns—how to recover from a spin; how to stall when you're spinning; if you do spin, how to get out of it under the hood.

That was, I would think, I believe now to this day, that was the first time I ever got air sick. I got really sick because I was with the instructor I'd had, up to that time was Bert Clark. I couldn't see to do this manoeuvre very well, with him in the back. I tried it a half a dozen times and muffed it and I felt I was getting sick. I was getting really sick in the aircraft. We landed, right at lunch time. I guess he discussed my performance with the chief instructor and they decided to send me out with a different instructor. I went up with him after lunch and had no problems. I went through those things. I did it for him repeatedly and didn't have a problem after that. So, they passed me on that one.

INTERVIEWER: Now, did you go directly from flying—the Brandon Flying Club—onto gliders?

BETCHER: Yes. After we finished our powered flying, we were qualified to that extent. If we were in the RCAF, we then would have graduated to something else—a different type of

aircraft that had more—probably the Harvard. But at any rate, we were slated to be glider pilots, when we finished the powered flying at the Brandon Flying Club, we went to Rivers to start to learn flying the gliders.

INTERVIEWER: Just before we talk about gliders, how did your flying Tiger Moths and Aeron as prepare you for the glider flying that you were about to undertake?

BETCHER: Well, we were well prepared. We were well prepared. We could fly the Tiger Moth, and if you can—all the aircraft, to my knowledge, respond to the same controls. You have ailerons to, so on and so forth. You have basic instruments. If you can fly the Aeronca—no, I should say, the Tiger Moth—you were certainly going to be qualified to be trained as a glider pilot. That's in my view.

INTERVIEWER: So, what I'd like you to do now is describe the training that you underwent in learning how to fly the glider, and what type of equipment, in fact, were you flying?

BETCHER: Well, the first flight that I ever had in my life was in a glider in 1948 when I was posted from the PPCLI down to Rivers. Before our powered aircraft training started, they took us up in one flight in a glider. Well, that's the first time I'd ever been off the ground. When we started with these aircraft, after we finished the powered aircraft part, in the spring of 1949, we were trained to fly—we were taught to fly these by—we had two--actually just two instructors from the RCAF, whose name I forget at the moment. But at any rate, we were assigned to one of them and they taught us how to fly the glider.

The only things that were really different were how you get off the ground—how you get up to speed. You're towed behind, at that time, a C-47 aircraft at the end of a long rope, I think about two hundred feet long. When you gain enough speed to get off the ground with the glider, you get up off the runway above, and well behind, of course, the tug aircraft who was still on the ground. You maintained that position behind the tug aircraft throughout the flight, or you were supposed to do that. Sometimes we'd fool her up and go from being above the aircraft to down below, or instead of—just to try it—just work your way down through the prop wash. But we did do a lot of that. But that's what we started on first.

Then, after that, it's just a matter of staying behind the tug aircraft when it's making turns left or right, going up or down. It's quite simple, really. Every flight that we took with our instructors ended up we were on a downwind leg of the landing sequence. This is where we were starting to learn where to cast off the rope so that you could finish going though that pattern--flying down it, with a downwind course; then, the crosswind course; and then, the course where you turned on flying toward the area you were going to land on—in this case, the runways.

INTERVIEWER: Now what kind of aircraft did you fly as a glider student and as a glider pilot, and what type of tug aircraft were used to tow you?

BETCHER: Well, the glider was—it had various names. I think they were built in Waco, Texas. The name "Wacos" was used a lot, as I understand it, by the Americans. We used—the British name for it was "Hadrian". Its other designation was a CG4A. I'll just go get my—the bit of flying that we did up, until we were almost finished, was Hadrian. We called it a Hadrian.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

BETCHER: But it was a CG4A, actually.

INTERVIEWER: And what types of tug aircraft?

BETCHER: The tug aircraft were the C-47s—Dakotas, they called them.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the DC-3?

BETCHER: No. C-47.

INTERVIEWER: C-47.

BETCHER: C-47. Pretty sure. Just a second. A Dakota anyway. I know that. I'm sure it was a C-47. It had a device in the tail—built into the tail – where you plugged in the tow rope. We did that while we were learning to fly. The students who were sitting on the ground, waiting for their turn—they did the hooking up of the rope to the glider and to the tug aircraft. It was simple, mind you—quite simple. It was just a little plug—well, not so little—a very sturdy one, built into a contraption inside the tail of the tug aircraft and on the same thing, on the front of the glider itself.

INTERVIEWER: Describe the cockpit of the glider to me.

BETCHER: The cockpit? Well, the aircraft was flown by two people. There was two pilots. The first pilot sat on the left. The second pilot, obviously, on the right. We had basic instruments in them. They were compasses, turn and bank and the altimeters—what else? The controls were the same as you'd find for every airplane that ever flew other than helicopters were things that were a little different. But you had controls for climbing, descending, turning, flying straight and level, and things of that nature and just to keep the aircraft doing what you wanted it to do. Very easy to fly.

Once you cast off, I think we were down to—if I remember correctly—seventy or seventy-five kilometres—not kilometres, but I should say—what do they call it—knots. On tow, as I recall, we seldom exceeded a hundred knots, if we got up this high. I think the highest I ever got in speed was a hundred and fifteen knots. That started to get just a little too much. We just didn't fly them that fast. We were usually towed around the hundred knots, as I recall.

INTERVIEWER: And you glided at about seventy-five knots. Was that correct?

BETCHER: Yes. Seventy to seventy-five, if I remember correctly.

INTERVIEWER: Describe what would happen from the time—my guess is that the pilot of the glider released the tow rope—was that correct?

BETCHER: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What happens now after you release the tow rope? What—go through the experience that you would have as the pilot—a glider pilot.

BETCHER: OK. You're on tow, on the end of that rope, and you are looking for the spot in the air over the ground where you want to start to make your run in to land. So, first you drop the rope. There was a handle in front of the pilot—the glider pilot would pull on that handle and that would release the rope which dropped away and the tug took off by himself. Then, it was simply a matter of making the turns that were required once you went through the pattern for the last run in to the spot that you had selected for landing.

It's very, very basic. That's all we did. You could not pick up altitude with this glider. There was no way you were going to do that. There was no way that you were going to do that. Only one time in all of the years I flew those things that I hit a thermal strong enough to lift me up a bit, but that was only one time.

But they were a big machine. You could carry the two pilots and thirteen people--thirteen infantrymen with their basic equipment—or you could put a jeep in and with five people and their equipment, or you could put—we used to carry the six-pounder anti-tank gun with a crew and ammunition, or you could load it up simply with cargo and fly it that way. The normal flying weight for that aircraft during peacetime was eight thousand pounds—wartime, as I understand it, was nine thousand.

The one aircraft that we did modify for being used for winter exercises—it was over the eight thousand pound limit. But they permitted that because we had a lot of stuff to carry in it. What we carried in it—well, we had a heater that didn't work, to start with—a heavy old heater. And then, we had a very low frequency radio that came out of an old Corvette, believe it or not. There was one or two very high frequency radios built into it, and in addition to that, all of the gear that was required upon landing for getting set up. We had collapsible antennas and poles for putting them up. That's so we would put them up, just fit like—one part--just like a fishing rod. We put them up and ran a line behind--between them.

That low frequency radio was used in one winter exercise that I was on. It was used to provide communications from Port Chimo to Goose Bay. The very high frequency or high frequency radios were used to control what was going with the exercise itself. Usually the exercise was people who were hauled in, or infantry people who were dropped off—the parachutists. That was communication with them.

INTERVIEWER: What type of communication did you have between the glider and the tug aircraft?

BETCHER: We had no [laughs]—we didn't have any communication with them, except they would know we were still on their back there. But no—we flew in a certain pattern on the aircraft, which we learned the first day we started to fly these things—the station we had to stay or maintain while we were on the tow. If there was anything extraordinary going to be done, we had to be told that—briefed on that—before we took off. But even extraordinary things were treated with—were handled with the same kind of training that you'd had from day one. But we could not talk to the aircraft.

We did not have a radio. We did not have a telephone. Nothing. The only communications that we had was the tug pilot--I think there was only one circumstance the tug pilot could sort of—we called it 'waggle his wings' for—I just forget what that was for. There was nothing. There was nothing.

I remember once we got into a cloud. We were climbing over a range of high hills in Quebec in the winter. We climbed up enough and we went over. They got into a cloud that they didn't expect. We lost sight of the tug—two hundred; two hundred and fifty feet in front of us. Hey! Without being able to see him, you don't know what is going to happen. You have to fly, sort of using your instruments and hopefully, going to stay where you should be. But it's not sure that you're going to do that. I remember that was one time I was wondering just what was underneath us if I had to drop that rope, or if they dropped it, if they were in trouble.

INTERVIEWER: So, they also had the capacity to let the rope go, did they?

BETCHER: Yes, but they wouldn't do that, because that rope would whip back like a whip and wrap around the wings and the ailerons and would send us into the ground.

INTERVIEWER: And it was two hundred and seventy feet long?

BETCHER: Oh, it was about--I think about--it seems to me it was around two hundred to two hundred and fifty feet long.

INTERVIEWER: And it was nylon?

BETCHER: Yes. Nylon—about not quite an inch in diameter—about seven eighths of an inch. I still have a chunk of it I carry in my car for a tow rope, as a matter of fact.

INTERVIEWER: How about describing missions that you would have flown away from an airfield?

BETCHER: The only things that we ever did away from Rivers where we landed the aircraft were one time we went to an air show and landed the glider at Gimli, Manitoba. Then, we picked it up at Gimli. We did--the tug aircraft would come in. We had an apparatus set up that would permit the tug that was so equipped with a long broom with a hook on the end of it—would fly low, hook into our tow rope and drag us up off the ground in flight. I did twenty-one of those.

But most of the time that we were landing at other places was because of—it was an air show. That's about the size of it. We'd go in and land the aircraft--have it towed in--let people walk through it and see what it looked like, and so on and so forth. That was about the extent of it.

One time we landed where we had never expected to land. That was in February of 1952. This aircraft that was equipped in Ottawa for use on northern training exercises was still being tested before we went up to Goose Bay, and then, on to Fort Chimo. But the last test flight that we had on it was we got off the ground at Rockcliffe Airport, got up about—oh, I don't know—we must have been around three hundred feet. I looked back and I couldn't see

the ground. The weather closed in on us so quickly that we could not see the airport. We orbited. We orbited for—I don't know--must have been nearly an hour.

There was no way that they were going to take us down and drag us in when we couldn't see the runway. The pilot in the tug decided to take us to Montreal where it was clear. Now, we didn't know this. All we knew is we were going where he wanted us to go—we had to go. We got down to the international airport at Dorval. Well, there was an Air Force base there, too. But there we were. We went in. The signal was given to--this is the place you're going to land. We landed on one of those long, long runways at Dorval.

Well, they didn't understand it. Although I never ever talked to them, but from what I understand, the air traffic controllers weren't very happy about this. They couldn't very well say, "You're not going to land here." [laughs] But the Air Force base people who were there came out and got us quickly--got us off the runway and towed us in. I think they used some ropes wrapped around the structure of the wheels to tow us in.

We were there for two nights. The first night, the pilots—the co-pilot--I was the pilot of the aircraft that time. The co-pilot was sent back to Ottawa to get our clothing and our gear and bring it back to Montreal, because we were leaving from Montreal to go to Goose Bay, which was the next stop for this exercise. He did this.

We spent one more night, got everything ready to go, and the people –the signalers who were supposed to accompany us were brought up to Montreal from—where was that place? The signalers, who were supposed to be running this equipment during the exercise, were brought up from their base, joined us with all their gear, and when we were set, we took off.

We flew from Montreal. We flew directly to Goose Bay. It was a very long haul. I think it was well over seven hours that we were in the air—well over seven hours. It was pitch black when we got to Goose Bay. But there, we followed the procedure for what the tug was supposed to put us through. We went down. They dragged us over the runway first to show us, and then, got up and put us into the downwind leg of the approach. We dropped the rope there and landed there. They had the lights on by then. I was amazed when we landed and got out and had a look at where we were. The snow was deeper there on each side of the runway—half the height of the glider! [laughs] It was a lot of snow. But we were over seven hours on that haul. I remember that heater that we had.

Interview with Neil Betcher. End of Side 1.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program Interview with Neil Betcher. Tape 1, Side 2.

Neil, you were talking about the cold and the heater in the aircraft, and your trip to Goose Bay. Please continue.

BETCHER: Right. Well, that glider that we flew on these winter exercises—the one that we flew for winter exercises had been modified with—well, it had two radios in it. I think I

mentioned that before—two types of radios. It also had a heater that had been cannibalized from—what type was the aircraft that you said before?

INTERVIEWER: Dakota?

BETCHER: No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, the Northstar?

BETCHER: The Northstar. It had been cannibalized from a Northstar that had been grounded. Well, that heater lasted about the first half hour of the flight from Montreal and it stopped. I went back to have a look and see just what the heck was going on with it. Well, I found that there was two fuses that had blown. We had a few spares. I put them in, got it going again. It lasted another hour and the same thing happened. I think that happened two times and we were out of fuses.

I did what I never ever should have done, honestly. I look back on it and think, "How could I have been so stupid?" I took the fuses that had blown and I wrapped them with the silver paper that cigarettes used to come in, in those days, and stuck that in. But I was wary enough of, you know, what could happen that I stood there and watched for a few minutes. As soon as I--I don't think it lasted five minutes and I saw little bits of smoke coming up. So I pulled the fuses out and that was it. We had no more heat—not that we had very much, even when it was working.

So, we were on our own as far as that was concerned, but we did have our winter gear on—our heavy boots and parkas and so on and so forth, as did the signalers who were with us. So, it would have been nice to be able to talk to the crew—the tug crew. It would have been nice to have something warm there, but hey, those gliders were never built for this kind of stuff. They were built for one way trips in operations. Everything I've ever seen about these things and seen the landings that they made in the invasion of Europe in June of 1944 and then, the work that they were doing with them, and they flew them into an area. I think there was a movie made of that called *A Bridge Too Far*. But we did have some shots there of these gliders landing. Well, there was no way. I saw very few gliders there that still had their wings on them. They were all smashed up most of the time.

INTERVIEWER: Was this the longest trip that you ever took, the longest mission you ever flew?

BETCHER: That was the longest one way trip I ever took. But then, from Goose Bay to Fort Chimo. Just a minute--I can tell you here—just a sec. I almost got it right here. [shuffles papers] The trip to Fort Chimo, where we landed, was three hours. That was in the dead of night. We took off in the dead of night from Goose. As you know, at that time of the year, it's almost dark all the time. That was three hours. On the way home from Fort Chimo to Goose Bay, it was three hours and twenty. But the first flight going up to the exercise area, from Montreal to Goose Bay, was seven hours and twenty five minutes, if I'm not mistaken.

[Indistinct] a long one from Seven Islands, on the way back from Seven Islands, where we had to land, to Rockcliffe and that was four hours and fifteen. But those were exceptions, until the next year where we flew on another exercise up to Norman Wells--a winter exercise.

INTERVIEWER: Where was that? Where is Norman Wells?

BETCHER: Norman Wells is in the Northwest Territories alongside the—I believe it's the Athabasca River. Just a minute. I'll see if I can find it here. [shuffling papers] We flew the aircraft from a place we started, near Rockcliffe, when we came back in 1952 from Fort Chimo. I went down with another pilot and the tug crew and we took the aircraft out of the place it had been stored in. I just forget. I think it was at a place called Collins Bay. We took it out of there.

I remember that trick of getting the thing out of there, because the runway was very, very short and there were all high trees around it. I remember that when we pulled the glider out to where we were going to position it behind the deck, we were sitting way, way back, almost in the bushes when we took off. That was a fast, high powered take off and climb—quick, quick, quick. But at any rate, we flew it back from there. We stopped a couple of times en route. I think—I just forget the name of those towns up in Northern Ontario where we stopped. And we flew that back to Rivers and then, from Rivers, it was taken up to Edmonton.

Then, from Edmonton, it was taken up—we flew it up to Fort Nelson. It stayed there until the exercise started. We flew it then from Fort Nelson to the exercise area and for us, it was--our landing spot was a little lake, a few miles off to one side of the Athabasca River, I think. This little place--they managed to get a bulldozer into it that dozed all the rough snow that had accumulated on it during the winter. This again was in February. That's where we landed. We landed on this little lake and put up the antennas and so on, and it was just a rerun of what had happened the year before up at Fort Chimo.

INTERVIEWER: So, what was the purpose of these missions—these flying missions?

BETCHER: The flying missions—the purpose for us was getting the radio communications in—the communication from the exercise area, back to the people who were controlling it and the communications for the people who were right on the site to control the role of the infantry unit. It was the Royal 22nd who were on that first run up at Fort Chimo. The other one at Norman Wells—that was the PPCLI. Strangely enough, there was a big area close by where we landed and that was the landing zone or the drop zone for the parachutists.

After we got up there and got set up, we were out watching. When the aircraft carrying the paratroopers came over, we were out there watching what was going on. During, and at that time, a lot of the people who were high ranking officers who were controlling things or observing, were there with us.

The first time I ever saw this. The jumpers all came out of three aircraft but one didn't quite make it out. He got jammed in the door, and he was underneath the aircraft flopping up and down, hanging by his knee. The only thing that held him to the aircraft was the strap that was attached to his rifle which had jammed in the door. They were trying to figure out what they were going to do. They couldn't haul him in. He was too heavy. The only people that were left in the aircraft was the one pilot that they could use and there was an extra guy. I think he was a navigator. Those two people just couldn't handle it. They couldn't get him back in. They didn't know what to do.

It ended up, they finally decided what they would do is cut the rope that was holding him to the aircraft because the static line that attached to his parachute was still OK. That was still hooked up to the line in the aircraft. I'll remember to this day. They cut that. He dropped. His chute opened. I watched the rifle itself spiraling down and landing in the bush.

INTERVIEWER: Did he survive?

BETCHER: Oh, yes. He survived. He was not hurt. I heard afterwards that he had declined any further parachute jumping. The experience for him [was] terrifying.

INTERVIEWER: Well, speaking of frightening experiences, what would you describe as your most frightening experience in glider flying?

BETCHER: [laughs] Well, the one that I have to say I really was scared was when we finished that exercise at Norman Wells. We flew back and spent the night at Fort Nelson. The next morning, we were taking off at Fort Nelson to go back to Edmonton. It was gusty. It was windy. The runway that had to be used there, at the far end, where we had to climb over, was heavily wooded and high. Once you got off the tarmac, you had to start climbing quick--quick—at least that was my view.

We got off the ground and we started. Even before the tug aircraft was off the ground, we were being bounced around, just from the turbulence. He got off and started to climb very fast and we got up over these trees quite handily, but we were being whipped around and banged around so much by the turbulence that I actually got scared. I thought, "Well, if this rope breaks, or we have to cast off for some reason or other, I don't know where I can land because all the trees underneath us there were thick as a hair on a dog." And they were big. They were big. I shudder to think what the heck we could do. That's one of the things we always tried to keep in mind, in sight, was a place we could land if we had to—pick out the best one. But there was no best one there that I could see.

Well, we hung in there long enough to get out of there. Nothing was damaged and nobody was hurt, but I was really scared of that. I was afraid that if we had to cast off and trying to land in those trees was not a very…

INTERVIEWER: But you made it back alright?

BETCHER: Oh, yes. We made it back OK. No problem.

INTERVIEWER: And you lived to become an instructor, I understand, in gliders.

BETCHER: No. Well, I don't know that I was an instructor, but I know that I flew later on with some of the other pilots on a couple of courses that followed us to fly with them--these pilots who were under instruction. Yes. And we would fly with them. I didn't do a lot of that, but enough to know that they trusted us enough to act as instructors with these young fellows. But we were all young in those days. But to actually be classified as an instructor—no, I never ever was. We were used as people who were familiar with the aircraft, riding along with people who weren't. That's about the size of it.

We only had one accident with the glider in the five years that I was flying them and that was—just a minute—I think 1949. We were still at Rivers and still we'd passed the course. We were qualified to fly the gliders. Then, we went on to be trained to do the other special things that we were expected to be able to do--that was make landings over obstacles and get down quick. We used the spoilers for that and the arrestor chutes.

On one of these flights—to this day, I never ever did see what the investigation had said or it came up with. But they came in. It was sort of a drill that we followed. We knew where we were going to land. We'd picked that out. We would fly over that; it seemed to me, at around a thousand feet. You were pretty close to the spot you were supposed to land, when you dropped the rope. Now, all you could do was put the nose down, head for this area and use your spoilers and pull on the parachute or the arrestor chute, in the air, in flight.

The drill was drop the arrestor chute when you rounded out or trying to round out. You could leave the spoilers on or off. That was up to the pilot. But something happened that the arrestor chute was not dropped off, and they got down too low before they started to pull out of it and make a landing. They hit the runway with the nose of the glider. One of the wings came off and, I think, the floor fell out of it. Some people got hurt.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you when all this was going on?

BETCHER: I was down on the ground watching.

INTERVIEWER: You were watching—actually watching what was happening.

BETCHER: My turn was coming up doing that exercise because… Did I see—I can't remember a time, if ever, where two tugs and two gliders were being used at the same time to train people. I can't ever recall that happening. The only time I ever saw two gliders in the air together was when we were on double tow. The tug could handle two gliders—pull them up at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: And did you actually participate in one of those double tows?

BETCHER: Yes. I did.

INTERVIEWER: Describe that for us.

BETCHER: Well, when you do that, obviously, you've got two ropes hooked up to the tug. On take off, one of the gliders—I just forget if it's the right one or the left one—is on a shorter rope than the other one. But you stayed spread out behind the tug. You weren't directly behind him. You couldn't possibly be. And you were on a longer rope. I believe the drill was the one on the longer rope got off the ground first, and very shortly after that, a matter of seconds, the other one was supposed to get off the ground, and then, of course, the tug after that. Then, you would maintain that kind of a position in flight until it was time to drop off and land.

There was a drill for that, too. It was always the glider on the short rope that dropped off first. He dropped the rope first and got away from behind the aircraft—the tug. That permitted the pilot who was on the other side, on the long rope, to drop his rope. The reason

for that was, had the guy on the long rope dropped off first, there was always a chance that that rope could swing in behind the tug aircraft and maybe further, and interfere with the glider on the short rope. That's why he always got out of the way first. Never ever happened, mind you. But I did a few of those. I'd have to look back through my logbook to see how many. But we did enough to learn what to do and follow the drills.

INTERVIEWER: Neil, one question that comes to mind is what emergency procedures were you trained in, and what emergency procedures did you use, and under what conditions?

BETCHER: If we had to drop the rope—let's say the rope broke--well, the first thing you'd do is find a place to land. You'd never ever try to turn back to land where you took off. In a lot of cases, I guess, it happened where you're miles and miles and miles apart. But the first thing you do is pick out a spot to land on. That was something that was drilled into us all the time—when you're in the glider, you should always be picking out a spot if something happens, if you have to be dropped or the rope breaks or something else happens. You'd always have a spot that you think you could make and land on. Maybe you could mess up a farmer's wheat field and stuff like that, but we would do it if we had to.

The only other thing that we had a drill to do, and essentially was what I've just described, but we used to pick the gliders up off the ground with the tug aircraft in flight. That was a manoeuvre that--it was quite exciting, to say the least. The glider would from the time the hook that was attached to a broom on the aircraft that was equipped to pick you up—when that hook hit the rope that you were attached—that was attached to you—you left from a stationary position to going up to a hundred, a hundred and fifteen knots, in seconds. Just, bang! And you're off the ground and you're starting to climb immediately, because that's what the tug aircraft is doing, and you're trying to get up.

Well, these ropes, I think it is—well, they stretch. They stretch a lot. They're like elastic. There was always, when you got up—it seemed when you got up to almost the height of the aircraft that lifted you off the ground, there was a big loop in between you and the tug. You wanted to take that out. You didn't want that thing left to snap back again, because he's going faster than you are, or you're going slower than he is—same thing I guess. But he's under power and you're not.

So, the drill there was, and it was a common drill, you stuck the nose of the glider down and dived into this loop. You don't have to dive straight into it, but you accelerate your descent to get down to the bottom of that thing, so it doesn't start working like an elastic. Two times it happened, when I was in the glider, where a weak link in the rope that was on the glider end of it broke, while I was in the steep climb trying to catch up to the tug, right after takeoff. That rope broke—a weak link—as it should.

Well, all you do is get the nose down as quick as you can. Try not to stall. Well, you're not going to stall. But get from there to there and go straight ahead if you can. Don't try to turn around and get back. You're not going to make it. Go ahead. Try to pick out something that you know that's going to be about the best you can do and that's where you head for and do it. That's the procedure that we followed.

One time, we had a rope break. We'd been down on an exercise where we were hauling in an antitank gun and, I think, a jeep, in two gliders. Now, there's one case where we had two

tugs. But the first glider that I was in, we whipped down and landed and stopped in front of the area where the people who were observing this thing were sitting. The other aircraft came in a few seconds later and he was trying to get in close. His wing tipped, clicked mine—just touched it. He got that stopped.

But at any rate, after the exercise, we set up my glider to be picked up from the ground by an air traffic flight, because there was no place for him to land. This is in the fall when all the grass is dry, dry, dry and there was lots of it there at Shilo at that time. We were flying into the sun, to pick us up. We got up off the ground and I was in a fast climb up, when the rope broke.

My copilot, for some reason or other, thought, "Well, here's my chance to fire these very flares that we carry." We carried a gun stuck on the roof. He fired off two or three shells—emergencies. Do you know--every one of them started a grass fire! [laughs] We ended up landing and running out using our parkas to beat out the flames off of one that was close enough it was going to burn up the glider. [laughs] That happened. We let it sit there overnight and came down and tried it the next day and got it out of there.

INTERVIEWER: That was fairly standard, I think, even when the Artillery was firing out west, to start grass fires.

BETCHER: Yes. That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And there was a lot of putting out of...

BETCHER: Oh, it was easy. It was easy to start a fire.

INTERVIEWER: ….grass fires.

BETCHER: Yes. But down at Shilo, there was—normally, you know, it's such a big place. Usually there was no damage done. They have to fight the fire to put it out, of course.

INTERVIEWER: Neil, all the time you were flying, you were a corporal or a sergeant? Is that correct?

BETCHER: Well, we started as corporals and we finished the powered part of our training as corporals. During our training as glider pilots, all the corporals—five of us—were promoted to sergeant, just like that, on one day. Buddy Wagner [?]—he was one of the—he was the only pilot—he was the only private soldier we had on. I think he was promoted to corporal then, but I'm not sure. He should have been promoted to sergeant like the rest of us. But being promoted to sergeant, that was, in my view, about the biggest kick I ever got out of a promotion while I was in the Army—honestly. From corporal to sergeant, that was the finest one.

Well, the five of us went over to the mess at noon and we drank some booze—maybe a little more than we should have. We reported back for flying. At that time, Squadron Leader McVey was the commander of TSS Air. He called us in when we returned after lunch, and said, "I hear you have been in the mess celebrating. Is that true?" "Yes, it is, Sir." "Did you know you were supposed to be flying this afternoon?" "Yes, Sir."

He said, "You know. If you ever do that to me again, you guys, I'll have you busted to AC2s—or whatever they bust you to in the Army—and kick you right out of here." Then, he said, "Get out here. Go home. Don't come back until you're sober to fly. That will be tomorrow." But then I heard him laughing as we left. The thing I really remember about it is he said, "I'll bust you guys to AC2s, or whatever it is they bust you to in the Army."

INTERVIEWER: Well, when I recall my own flying experience, pilots were always somebody special, and I'm just wondering, were you ever treated as a special sort of Service NCO, at the time, because you were a pilot--a glider pilot?

BETCHER: No, I can't remember anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like to be living in Rivers, let's say, in those early years of CJATC—the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre? What was that like?

BETCHER: I thought it was great. I really enjoyed it. I have to say that I enjoyed the thirteen years there. My wife wasn't very happy about it. But at any rate, the thirteen years that I spent there—thirteen, or twelve, plus—I just forget which—I was always in jobs that I enjoyed—flying the gliders; learning to fly the powered aircraft first. Then, after the gliders--we were finished with them in '53--then I went to Air Supply School. That was all flying again. That was fun. I enjoyed that. I was a good instructor. I really did enjoy instructing. I felt that I was a darned good instructor, and I was. I still think that. [laughs]

Then, from there, I went down to the States to be trained as a helicopter maintenance man—as a--I think it was as a staff sergeant, I believe I went. I'd reached staff sergeant then—I can't remember. But I went down there for a four month course that I'll never forget. It was a super course.

From there, we came back to Rivers. I came back, along with several others. We started doing all the maintenance on the helicopters that were there. We had two Bells and there was four or five of those H5 Korean vintage helicopters. Now, all the work that we did was subject to supervision by aircraft people in the Air Force—RCAF—either flight sergeants or sergeants who were well qualified men. They helped us a lot.

We got nothing at Rivers but really, really a good reception by the RCAF. They always treated us with—as well as anybody could be treated. I have nothing but good things to say about that—nothing to say. It was the finest training they could to help us out—supplementary. No, it was great. I enjoyed doing the maintenance work, but something happened in 19… I'd have to look back, but at any rate, it was either '60 or '61.

I was there. I was a staff sergeant at the time. I had four or five people—Army people—and one Air Force guy who was tech—who was electrical instrument. Those guys worked for me. I was responsible for the maintenance of these aircraft, under the supervision of the Air Force people. I took their Group IV test--their senior supervisor test--and passed with flying colours on it—the Air Force one. So, they left me alone.

At this time, for some reason—well, I don't even—well, I know now, but—one day, who shows up at Rivers, down at the hangar, but about twelve or thirteen guys from RCEME—

warrant officers, staff sergeants, some sergeants. I don't know if there were any corporals. But they were brought in—just a surprise, I'll tell you. They were brought in and they are going to take over helicopter maintenance for the Army. In those days, the Army had some pretty big plans of what they were going to do with helicopters. Some of it materialized; some of it didn't.

But at any rate, these guys all showed up and they gave them to me and said, "Look. Keep these guys occupied until we figure out what we can do with them and what's going to happen to them." Well, I said, "What do you mean?" Well, the personnel who were supposed to be handling these people or had them brought in, were determining what was going to happen to them, told me to do what I could to get them accustomed to the Air Force way of maintaining and maintaining the records, maintaining the aircraft, maintaining the records and doing… I said, "OK. Fine. How much interference am I going to have if I do this?" "Well, none." I said, "Do I get any help?" "No, we don't have any help." I said, "You want me to set up a course to keep these guys out of trouble or keep them interested here, when there is nothing else for them to do." "Yes, essentially that's it." So, I said, "Fine. I'll do it." I sat down and I outlined a course for myself. [I] showed it to—I just forget what superior I reported to. He said, "That's fine. That's fine." He didn't know what was going on either, I don't think.

Then I set these guys down to help me where they could and to reading all the books. I was testing them; testing them; testing them. I was doing it my way. Nobody ever poked their nose in and said, "That shouldn't be done." Or, "You're not doing this. You should do something else." Everybody helped me by staying out of my way and I kind of enjoyed that. He looked over what I had been doing. He was quite happy with it. He said, "Well, I would like to know if you would transfer to RCEME." I said, "I'm not sure."

INTERVIEWER: So, you were saying that you were Service Corps at the time?

BETCHER: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And he was asking you if you wanted to transfer to RCEME.

BETCHER: That's right. He wanted me to transfer to RCEME, just based on what he'd seen that I was doing with the people that had been left there with me. But at any rate, I said, "Look. It's going to take a little thought." He says, "I don't have much time. I'm not going to be here. I've got to get out of here tomorrow." Well, I said, "Come over to my PMQ tonight, after dinner, and I'll give you an answer."

"But in the meantime," I said, "what I want you to do is to find out what the seniority is of every staff sergeant that's there. How do I know?" He came back that night. Every one of those guys had me outgunned for seniority--every one of them.

INTERVIEWER: There was no way you would have ever been promoted.

BETCHER: There was no way I would ever be promoted again, that I could see. So, when he came in, we talked, and I said, "No. I won't transfer. I won't willingly or voluntarily transfer."

INTERVIEWER: So, you stayed Service Corps throughout your entire flying career? Is that right?

BETCHER: I switched to Service Corps after the last—yes—after the last flying of the gliders was…. That was after October of 1953, when I went down to the Air Supply section. That was all Service Corps. So, when I found out I liked that, I transferred.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to just take you back in your flying experience in the gliders and ask about high level releases.

BETCHER: Oh.

INTERVIEWER: Would you describe the high level releases?

BETCHER: Yes. I think I did two of them, maybe three. I'd have to look in my log book, but I know I did two. What these—these were releasing the glider at an altitude previously selected. In this case here, the one we did was at ten thousand feet. That's as high as you could go without oxygen, according to RCAF regulations. The reason for doing this was apparently, we were told by the RCAF—nobody in the Army ever told us anything—but anyway, they said that was for taking people in gliders in operations on the ground, to drop them off a long ways away, and have them sort of sneak in, without tipping off your enemies with powered aircraft hauling these people in.

Well, I don't know if it was ever done or not. But at any rate, we were towed up to ten thousand feet. We made our bay[?]—I just forget how far out. We picked it out—myself and the other pilot, and with a little help from one of the RCAF people. I think he was a navigator. But we went over what the upper winds were from ground level, all the way up to ten thousand feet. Then, we figured out just what we had to do; how far we were going to have to come after we got off at ten thousand feet; how far out we had to be, without showing up over the airport and having to hold it there for maybe twenty minutes before we could get down.

So, we had to know all these things. Then, we plotted our position on the ground that we had to be over when we dropped the rope. It seems to me we were out—holy smokes—thirty miles seems to stick in my mind. But I hesitate to say that that's true. It was a heck of a long ways away. It was never that far away before, when we dropped the rope. But we glided in. We had no problem. We hit the button right when we should have and we didn't--we always had enough air to get to where we wanted to go. I did a couple of those. But I never ever did see—I couldn't convince myself that that was a manoeuvre that could be successful.

INTERVIEWER: What about low level releases? What…?

BETCHER: Low level releases—they were from two hundred and fifty feet above ground. That was the tug would tow you straight right into where they wanted you to land or where you were supposed to land. You were towed right in at speed. You dropped off when you thought, "OK. You can hit the button and not overshoot it, or not undershoot." As you can imagine and see, we dropped the rope. Then, pretty quickly after that, we'd better be on the ground. Bang. Bang. Bang. You're down. Because the idea of that was to get it done quickly.

INTERVIEWER: How about crosswind landings? Were any particular techniques utilized?

BETCHER: Just the ones you'd utilize in any aircraft. The rotary wing ones—I don't know—I guess probably they do. I have no experience flying those. But the other ones—the fixed wing—if you're landing, and you have to land in a crosswind, you have to be crabbing into the wind prior to touching down. A second or two before touching down, you'd better get yourself lined up for the spot that you want to land on. That's all. That was the same thing with the gliders. But I think it was easier done in a glider than it was in a powered aircraft.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel that you required power at any time? Were you ever in a situation where you thought it would be important to have power?

BETCHER: No. No. No. I remember landing on that the lake at Fort Norman. I sure didn't want to overshoot. That was—it was a big strip, I'll tell you. It was not very long. I didn't want to overshoot it. We came in at two hundred and fifty feet. I dropped the rope and I landed, I would say, maybe, forty feet shorter than the edge of the runway or the spot I wanted. It was frozen snow and it was rough. Bumpity, bumpity, bump. If I'd counted, "one, two three," and then dropped off, I would have been right on it. But that's the only time it would have been nice to be able to give it a kick in the butt.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you engaged in night flying and yet, you had no landing lights.

BETCHER: No.

INTERVIEWER: How did that work?

BETCHER: Oh, great, as long as you're landing where there's lights. Every time we landed, it was on the runway where the lights were and all we did was land in between those lines of light. But we never had to land, at any time, in the dark, on a runway that we didn't know, or a place that we didn't know, that was not lit. We took off in the dark, like the flight from Goose Bay to Fort Chimo. [It was] pitch black when we took off. But it was sort of daylight by the time we got there. That was all built into it. That's all. No, there are some things that we just didn't do or couldn't do.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like you to think about somebody listening to this tape, let's say, a hundred years from now. What would you want them to know about glider flying in the '50s, as it occurred in Canada? What would be important for them to know?

BETCHER: Well, for the military gliders, they should know probably how big they were and what they were capable of carrying, and the various types of them. The one I know--the only one--is the CG4A. I know of a few others that were bigger. Some were smaller. But they would want to know that. They'd want to know how--maybe how fast they could go—something like that—and what sort of training—they might, if they were really digging into it—what sort of training the pilots had to go through; how difficult or simple it was to fly.

In my view, right now, after having flown the Tiger Moth and then, comparing flying the glider, the glider is a simple machine. It's a simple contraption, believe me. It's not hard to

fly them. The thing with them is when you have to judge yourself where to drop the rope to get to a spot you picked out to land on, it takes a bit of training--maybe more than a bit. But that's something that we had to know.

I heard of things that happened during the War—whether it's true or not—that's the Second World War—whether it's true or not that gliders were dropped, not because they wanted to get off the rope, but they were dropped. They weren't being towed any more. The results, in some cases, were just disastrous, because they just were dropped off, you know, without having a chance to get down to land in a decent spot.

INTERVIEWER: You never had that happen to you though?

BETCHER: Never. Never. But you know I can understand that flying these things when somebody is shooting at you is a different thing than flying it the way we did. Safety was something that was considered very, very important all the time. You didn't take chances, at that time. You don't take chances. I can't believe that they didn't take chances when they were in actual operations—things that I have seen in movies and on documentaries—where these guys landed. Holy smokes! They didn't have a ghost of a chance of getting down safely—a lot of them.

INTERVIEWER: And yet, that is what you were trained for yourself?

BETCHER: We were trained to fly them, and hopefully, get down OK. But to get down OK, you have to have a reasonable chance of getting to, you know—unless you're going to hurt somebody, maybe including yourself or smashing up the glider—you have to have some sort of a reasonable chance to get down that way. If, after you're down OK and the wings fall off or get broken off—fine--but if you're running into all kinds of other things—obstacles—no, I can't see it.

INTERVIEWER: Neil, I want to thank you very much on behalf of the Canadian War Museum Oral History Project. Interview with Neil Betcher on 7 December 2004. Interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS