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**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

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**INTERVIEWEE: C. Keith Bisset**

**INTERVIEWER: J. R. Digger MacDougall**

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**Transcription of Interview Number 31D 4 BISSET****Mr. C. K. Bisset****Interviewed 20 January, 2004****By J. R. Digger MacDougall**

BISSET: My name is Charles Keith Bisset. I go by the name of Keith, normally, Bisset, B i s s e t.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, perhaps you could start off by giving us some information about yourself, where you were born and something about your military service, right up until your retirement.

BISSET: I was born in Brantford, Ontario in 1924. I went to public school in Brantford and I went to high school in Brantford. I left high school when I was eighteen and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force on my eighteenth birthday. I was selected for aircrew training. And on the nineteenth of January '43, I reported to Brandon Manning Depot. I spent twelve weeks in Brandon Manning Depot doing normal Air Force basic training. I was selected for pilot training at that time.

But because I had not quite finished high school, I was sent to a high school in Vancouver, British Columbia after finishing Manning Depot. From there, I went to Initial Training School in Saskatoon. And after graduating from ITS, as we called it, I did a couple of months at a Bombing and Gunnery School at Dewfall, Saskatchewan. In the spring of '43, I eventually wound up at 15 Elementary Flying Training School in Regina, where I started my flying career on Cornell aircraft. I completed the elementary flying course. At that time, the British Air Training Plan was starting to slow down. So I was sent up to Grande Prairie, Alberta, on useful employment as they referred to it in those days. After four months up there, I wound up in Vulcan, Alberta, at 19 Service Flying Training School flying Avro Ansons.

In late 1944 and early 1945, at that time, the war was really starting to wind down. There was a large surplus of aircrew in Europe. We were no longer required. So at that time, I left the Air Force and transferred over to the Army. As an anecdote to that, one of the courses at Vulcan was made up of New Zealanders who had come to Canada. They had spent four months on Northwest staging route. These chaps were all pilots. They went to Vulcan. They were given one ride each in an Avro Anson. Then the whole course was shipped back to Australia and New Zealand.

The war was still on, so I did my basic training in the Army. Then I went to A35, the Canadian Parachute Training Center. Qualified as a parachute jumper at that time, in late '45 I guess it was. Early '46, we did a lot of demonstration parachute drops across Canada. I remember particularly, an air show in Toronto which I think was the first air show in Canada after World War II. We had three aircraft, three Dakotas, and we did a mass jump in Toronto. At the same time, I went for a ride in an American Waco CG4A Glider. It was just being experimented with at that time.

After that, I went back to Shiloh, to A35. In November of '46, the commanding officer sent me to Ground General School of the United States Army in Fort Riley, Kansas, where I learned to become an air photo interpreter.

On return to Canada in late February, I started to settle down. My wife was expecting a baby. I'd been away all the time. I was home for two weeks. She had the baby. We lived in a tarpaper shack which was referred to as Emergency Married Quarters in Camp Shilo. We spent most of the winter -- people lived in these converted barracks -- spent most of the winter shoveling coal and trying to keep our families from freezing to death. In April, 1947 -- I'd been promoted to corporal by this time -- the commanding officer, Major George Flint, who was the commanding officer of A35, called me in one morning, along with several other chaps, and said, "How would you chaps like to fly again?" We said, "Oh, that'd be great." We were all ex-Air Force but unfortunately we were in the Army. This was at ten o'clock in the morning. He said, "Go home and pack your kits. You'll be on a train at 13:30 this afternoon, on your way to England to take a glider pilot's course." Needless to say, we were all quite thrilled about that.

And so, after traveling across Canada, crossing the Atlantic on the AQUITANIA which was the last four-funneled liner on the Atlantic, we wound up in England. After a couple of weeks familiarization, that sort of thing, we eventually wound up at #3 Glider Training School, Royal Air Force.

INTERVIEWER: What aircraft did you fly there?

BISSET: We'll get in to that. We were flying the Hotspur glider. It had originally been -- #3 Glider Training School, in fact, Royal Air Force was at Wellsbourne, Monfort in Warwickshire. We started out right away on the Hotspur glider. The Hotspur was about -- it would carry seven men. It was originally designed with the idea of using it in commando operations. But it was kind of bulky and so it was relegated to a training aircraft. It was not a bad airplane to handle. It had a speed grip control column. You sat right up in the nose of it, ahead of the wings, something similar to many of the modern jets nowadays where you sit well forward. It was a lot of fun flying it. It was towed by a Miles Master aircraft.

We also had some original De Havilland Tiger Moths, DH82As and, in addition to flying the Hotspur glider and being towed around behind the Miles Master, we did continuation flying and cross country navigation in the Tiger Moths.

Now with me at Wellsbourne was: Captain Grace, Royal Canadian Artillery who, in fact, was already an AOP pilot; Warrant Officer Bill Nichols who'd been a flight lieutenant in Burma; a Sergeant King who had been flying Swordfish in the Navy; Sergeant Flack who had also graduated as a Air Force pilot; Lieutenant Gunton who later became commanding officer of the PPCLI, and he had also been a pilot in the Air Force; and myself. That particular group, we were selected because we had all been ex-Air Force people.

In addition to our group there were another group of about six or eight NCOs. They went to Ringway, I believe it was. They took the elementary flying course that was standard to the RAF and to the RCAF. So in order to -- before you could even get in to the Glider Training School, you had to complete the Wartime Education Elementary Flying Training Schedule. After that particular exercise....

We were at Glider Training School for about four months, five months. It was very interesting. We had all sorts of routine exercises. We started up with the normal circuit where the tug would fly up to 2,000 feet. You would release the glider, hit the downwind leg at about 1,500, then do a normal circuit the same as you would in a powered airplane. We also did night flying.

I had my first aircraft accident when I was coming in to land one night. We landed on a flare pad. We never landed on the runways. We always landed on flare pads. And a flare pad, at that time, consisted of about eight gooseneck flares set out in the middle of the airfield, about 100 feet apart. Very short really.

And this night I was just rounding out to touch down on the flare pad and I hit something with my port undercarriage. The port undercarriage immediately disappeared with half the wing. I found myself sliding across the ground towards a control caravan. I stopped about ten feet short of it. Needless to say, there was great consternation. My instructor pulled me out of the aircraft, immediately marched me over to another airplane. He said, "Climb in. Do it again but this time don't hit anything." The aircraft was actually charged up for flying control. I had hit a post that was about the size of a telephone post and about 15 feet high. Normally it had a red obstruction light on it. The light had burnt out and flying control hadn't bothered replacing it. So it all ended reasonably well but it was an interesting adventure.

One thing of interest is, we didn't -- the average circuit -- the average flight in the gliders, other than navigation flights and some exercises, took about 10 to 15 minutes. So we would put in four or five flights an hour. And in glider training it was more important to do landings and take offs than it was to accumulate flying time. We didn't do any formation flying at Initial Glider Training School.

After we had finished Glider Training School, we then went on to Heavy Glider Conversion Unit. Now Heavy Glider Conversion Unit was the equivalent to the RAF Operational Training School -- Operational Training Units.

And here we converted on to the Horsa II airplane, or glider. It was a plywood machine. It was capable of carrying 30 armed troops or a jeep and a field gun. It weighed about 8,000 pounds. You could carry a maximum permissible payload of 7,000 pounds. So, all in all, it weighed about 15,000 pounds, seven and a half tons. We used to fly these things around. It was a terrible machine on the controls. It was very heavy. To do a bank, you would put the wing down and wait for it to get to the position. Then you cranked it all the way back to center to hold it.

We flew these both night and day. We did all sorts of interesting exercises. We did cross-country flying in them. Everything was geared toward the type of airborne operation that was done during World War II. It was a very interesting time there. I have quite happy memories of flying there at night -- on fall nights, flying above cloud with a beautiful moon shining down and great big four-engine Halifax up a head of us, towing us along and keeping position. And it was really quite a wonderful experience to fly that thing, at night particularly.

We managed to get through Heavy Glider Conversion Unit without any serious accidents. Heavy Glider Conversion Unit, in fact, was at North Luffenham, in Leicestershire which was -- later became -- the first Canadian airfield after World War II in England. I also returned to North Luffenham, much, much later in my career.

INTERVIEWER: How would you spell that?

BISSET: Let me find it here. North Luffenham. It was Royal Air Force Station, #21 Heavy Glider Conversion Unit, Rutland, England. Rutland, at that time of course, was the smallest county in England. It has now disappeared as part of Leicester.

They had this huge airplane that weighed about seven and a half tons. One of the exercises, as a matter of fact one of our graduation exercises, which was rather spectacular -- We had a 200 yard square in the middle of the airfield. We had a formation of three of these huge Horsa gliders. They were in the heavy load condition. By heavy load, we didn't have troops. In order to simulate the weight of the troops, they would lash a bunch of concrete blocks in the back of the machine. We would climb up to 2,000 feet on this exercise, in formation, three aircraft towed by three Halifax Hawk 5s. We would come up to the edge of the airfield, to what was called the perimeter track on our airfield. It was a track that went around and connected all the ends of the runways. As we crossed over the perimeter track, the three gliders would all cast off, as we used to say, all at once. We would pull these airplanes, in formation, up in to a semi-stall, put down full flaps, 60 degrees, rotate the nose and you were pointing down at a 60 degree angle toward this 200 yard square. And we managed to put all three gliders, in formation, in to the 100 yard square. As heavy as the airplane was, when you used the flaps -- it had flaps like barn doors -- they also acted as air brakes. During that descent from 2,000 feet to the ground, the airspeed did not build up over 90 knots. It held -- once you got it banked and stuck down, the nose stuck down -- it held steadily at 90 knots.

It was a very interesting exercise and it was referred to as a Balboa, named after the famous Italian aviator who did early flying in the 1930's. He flew formations across the Atlantic.

We also, I believe I mentioned here, that we also did night flying. We didn't do any power flying at Heavy Glider Conversion Unit. We just stuck strictly to the Horsas. If you wanted a change and you weren't flying the glider yourself, you could always get a ride in the Halifax 5 which had huge plastic noses and were wonderful aircraft to see English countryside from.

After graduating from Heavy Glider Conversion Unit, in November of 1947, I was posted back to A35 which at that time had moved from Camp Shilo to Rivers, Manitoba and was then called the Joint Air School. At the Joint Air School, when we arrived we didn't have any gliders initially. After sitting on our thumbs for a while, there was a contract signed for us to do continuation flying at the Brandon Flying Club.

Now the Brandon Flying Club, on this particular contract, continued to supply Elementary Flying Training School syllabus to the Army pilots for some years. But ours was the first contract with that club and it enabled the club to buy airplanes, get itself organized and became a very, very effective flying club. As a matter of fact, I was there two or three years ago. They now have a magnificent museum that's devoted strictly to training aircraft from the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

At the flying club, we had a former squadron leader, called Mr. McGill. He was chief instructor and club president. We also had a Mr. H. P. Clark who -- in fact, both these gentlemen were ex-Air Force officers. We had a variety of different airplanes. We had the Aronca AC1 Champion. We had a couple of Cornells. We had the Canadian version of the De Havilland Tiger Moth, which was much more comfortable than the English version. The English version had been an open cockpit with a tail-skid and no brakes, original or very, very slight brakes. Whereas the DH82Cs, the Canadian version, had a tail wheel, good brakes and it had a coupe top covering the cockpits for inclement weather and, particularly, for flying in the wintertime. Part of our exercise there was to convert to skis. All these aircraft, except the Cornell, flew on skis during the winter. So we were all qualified on skis.

Eventually we started to get the Waco CG4A, an American glider, at Rivers. It was attached to 1112 T Flight, under Squadron Leader Denison. All of its Dakotas had been out in Burma and belonged to the Canucks Unlimited Squadrons out there. It was pretty good fun, flying at Rivers. Of course, by that time we were all qualified as pilots and we served a number of functions at Rivers.

I said that Rivers, of course, was the Joint Air School. That meant that we had all three services represented there, Army, Navy and Air Force. It was a wonderful concept. It got better and better. It eventually closed in 1961, I believe it was. About half way through there, it was renamed the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre. It was a marvelous place if you were interested in airplanes. They developed, in addition to

several different types of flying schools, they also had a very large ground school. They trained -- cross-trained -- Air Force and Army officers as air staff officers. Air staff officers, of course, are people who work in rather major headquarters at the Division /Corps level. And in some cases, if they're forward air controllers, they work with forward troops to control air strikes in support of tactical air operations.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, how were you trained as a pilot? How did that happen and where?

BISSET: Initially, I was trained by the Air Force at Elementary Flying Training School in Regina. I joined the Air Force as a pilot.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

BISSET: Then the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan folded up. I transferred to the Army. And then I trained in England on gliders. I flew as a staff pilot at Rivers for four or five years until 1951, when I commissioned. At that time, I was commissioned in the Intelligence Corps and practiced the other part of my career, which was as a Military Air Photo Interpreter. That was an extremely interesting job and, in fact, paralleling my flying career, made life really interesting for me. After I was commissioned, I left the glider flying.

Oh, I might mention, while I was at Rivers, we also did continuation with 444 AOP Squadron. We did our powered flying continuation so we were still qualified on the gliders that we had and we were still qualified on the light aircraft that we had. In my logbook I have De Havilland Chipmunks, 1801, 1802 and 1803. These were the first three Chipmunks that were produced in Canada. They were used for Army training with 444 AOP Squadron. They were the British type Chipmunk with a sliding canopy rather than the bubble type that they later used for Air Force training. I'm rather proud of this, to have flown those first three, all three of them at one time or another.

INTERVIEWER: So, they were manufactured at De Havilland?

BISSET: At De Havilland in Toronto.

INTERVIEWER: In Toronto, where Downsview now sits.

BISSET: In Downsview, where.... The first time I saw those was at the air show that I mentioned earlier. The aircraft we saw that day was the prototype of the Chipmunk. It didn't even have air service markings on it.

A little technical note about the Chipmunk. When we flew One, Two and Three, we flew them a little faster than they were flown.... The maximum permissible speed was a little higher but that was because the aircraft was new at that time.

INTERVIEWER: And were you doing all kinds of flying in the Chipmunks, such as aerobatics?

BISSET: Oh yes, aerobatics, the whole gamut. Cross-countries, aerobatics, spins galore. Rolled off the top beautifully. It was good fun. It was a very, very light aircraft on the controls, easy to fly. A nice all round airplane. At that time, for a while, 444 Squadron was also flying Auster 5s, I think they were. Yes. Auster 5s.

The type of work that we did on the gliders, as I said, there were a number of schools at Rivers. There were two flying schools. There was the Tactical Air Support School, which flew fighter aircraft. At that time, initially at Rivers, they were Mustangs. There was the AOP School, which in fact was 444 AOP Squadron. They flew their Austers and controlled live artillery shoots over Shilo which was about 50 miles away.

INTERVIEWER: And did they fly out of Rivers?

BISSET: They flew out of Rivers. Eventually, of course, they put their own airstrip in at Camp Shilo. They flew in to support air artillery training. Now the other type of military training was transport support training. One of the things that we did with our gliders, rather than tying up the Dakotas all the time because they were also used for parachute dropping as well as glider training, was we would take soldiers who had never been in the air before and give them familiarization flights in our gliders.

The Waco, or Hadrian as it was later known by the British, was a really good airplane. It could carry 15 fully armed troops or it could carry a jeep and four men or it could carry a six pounder anti-tank gun and its crew. We had a variety of exercises that we used to do. I took part in an operation called Operation Eagle, which was the largest peacetime exercise up to that date. In August of 1949, and we flew three, four gliders, I guess, from Rivers to Edmonton to Grande Prairie, Alberta. At Grande Prairie, there was a huge number of aircraft assembled on the airfield. At Grande Prairie, the Princess Patricias did the first battalion parachute jump in Canada on Operation Eagle.

We had -- I was in one glider. I was flying with Captain Grace and we alternated between captain and copilot. We had a jeep and four men in our glider. Then in the glider that went along with us, there was a small vehicle trailer with a generator and a number of radios on it. That was the property of an organization known as the Air Support Signals Unit. They supplied ground to air communications between the ground forces and the troops, and the aircraft up above. It was a very interesting operation.

We landed in a wheat field just outside of Fort St. John. The paratroops dropped in first. We came screeching in to the wheat field in our canvass covered gliders. Captain Grace, myself and I don't know who was flying the other glider. It may have been Lieutenant Gunton and another corporal. We stayed in the wheat field with our gliders for two days, with two days field rations and a bottle of gin which was supplied by the captain. It was very interesting to get out of that field and to get on to the airfield at Fort St. John. We had to take the wings off of both gliders and tow them through various wheat fields



until we got them on to the airfield. It was an interesting sidelight to this Operation Eagle. It was a very sort of exciting operation. We flew operationally from Edmonton up to Grande Prairie. It was in August.

I remember taking off out of Edmonton at five o'clock in the morning because the operation was going to take place over Fort St. John at seven. We were -- the Dakota was heavily loaded and we were heavily loaded. I guess the runway wasn't that long. It was the old Municipal Air Field. I can remember just getting barely in to the air to get over the fence. And a way up a head, I saw a huge smoke stack ahead of me. We didn't go over the smoke stack. We went past the smoke stack. The smoke stack belonged to Edmonton General Hospital. A bit of a touch and go situation but eventually we got out over the Saskatchewan River valley where we were able to get a little more height and we made it all the way up to Grande Prairie without any incidents, without further incidents. But it was a hairy take off.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first flying tour, then, after all of this happened at Rivers?

BISSET: My first flying tour was at Rivers as a staff pilot.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Well, how long were you there then?

BISSET: I was there from 1947 until 1951, when I was commissioned.

INTERVIEWER: So you were flying as an NCO then?

BISSET: I was flying as a sergeant pilot. As a matter of fact, I was flying as a corporal pilot for a while. When I went to England, they made us all acting sergeants because the chaps that we were flying with were from the Glider Pilot Regiment. They were all sergeants so they made us acting sergeants. Then, when we came back to Canada, they dropped us back down to corporals, which was a bit of a -- you know, we were still qualified as captains of that particular aircraft, night and day and authorized to carry 30 or 40 troops around. So it was a bit punch, but we did get flying pay, of course.

I think what had happened there is, we really didn't have any establishment for glider pilots in the Canadian Army. They sent us over on speculation. I believe the reason that we were sent was because in 1946 and '47, the big, heavy transport helicopters had not yet been developed.

The glider, contrary to what a lot of people believe -- if you look at the landing zones in Market Garden for instance, you'll see the British gliders were all broken in two. They didn't crash. When they landed operationally, they had an explosive charge to get the men out in a hurry. The pilot, as he was -- the glider was -- running along the ground, hit a button and blew the tail off the back of the Horsa. As a result, all these airplanes, photographs of them split in two, say, "Oh, look at all those crashes." They weren't crashed. That was done on purpose. And that's something that a lot of people really

don't know about. And they actually blew the tail off and the troops run out the back end. Now if they had a vehicle, you could also open the nose and it had a vehicle ramp so you could drive the vehicle out the front of the airplane. With the nose of the Horsa, it swung to the side. On the American Waco glider, it swung upward. If it had a jeep, for instance, the jeep -- the end of the jeep -- was attached to a cable and as the jeep drove forward, that would pull the nose up. The nose would then lock in place and the jeep went out underneath.

There was one exercise that we did, or several exercises, that were interesting. One was a double tow where we tied, towed, two gliders with one tug aircraft. That was a bit dicey. One, both of the tow ropes were hooked up to a single release device. One tow rope was about 20 feet longer than the other. We always flew in echelon starboard, with the front glider leading and the other glider slightly behind it, flying in a very, very close formation. It was a bit touchy at times. Over the prairies in the summer when you've got thermal conditions, and if you were flying along at a thousand feet, it got pretty rough and a bit touchy.

The idea of flying echelon starboard, of course, was the rear glider always had the front glider fully in sight at all times. And it might fly two or three feet above it but most of the time it was a normal formation flight. And of course, when you were released, the front glider would go left and the rear glider would go right. You never turned the same way.

I had one other interesting experience at Rivers. This one comes under "those magnificent men and their flying machines" bit. It was comical. I was flying one day. I had 13 men in the back of the aircraft. We got up to about 200 feet on takeoff and the rope broke, which happened occasionally on gliders. We immediately did our emergency drill. And the orders for, if you're around the airfield and you had any trouble and the rope broke or that sort of thing, you were to fire a red very flare.

So I was flying with a chap by the name of Richards and he said, "Oh, rope broke. Keith, fire the flare." So we had a very pistol port at the very top of the Waco glider. In the meantime, he was putting it into a turn. And I dutifully fired the flare. It shot out of the aircraft. Fortunately, we were landing on nice, flat prairie. Well, instead of going straight up, the flare went straight out and then dropped on to the dry grass on the prairie and set the prairie on fire.

Control tower -- in the meantime, we did have a very rudimentary radio thing we contacted the tug with. And the tug said we were off and they saw the flare go up and they saw us go down. I think we went down behind the only hill there was at Rivers. The glider disappeared. The control tower -- and all of a sudden this great huge cloud of smoke come up. They said, "My God, it's on fire!" Well, it wasn't really on fire but it almost caught fire. I, forthwith after we stopped rolling, I bailed the 13 or 14 troops out. They took off their battle dress jackets and their clothes and proceeded to try and put the prairie fire out. But eventually we were rescued by the crash tender who sprayed water over it. But it was rather amusing. I mean, when you look at it afterwards.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you entered photo interpretation as a commissioned officer from the time you left Rivers.

BISSET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: When did you actually get back into flying after that?

BISSET: This is a long tale. After I went into photo interpretation, I came to NDHQ for indoctrination into the Canadian Intelligence Corps. And at that time -- that would be 1952 -- we were reforming the 1 Canadian Division under General Rockingham. Divisional Headquarters were at Petawawa. I worked with another chap, with two NCOs, and we formed the Divisional Air Photo Interpretation Section.

But because we had air photography, we had to -- the section -- in order to get the quickest results, had to be on an airfield. The closest airfield to Petawawa, at that time, was Rockcliffe with 408 Photographic Squadron. 408 Squadron was, in fact, a long-range reconnaissance squadron. Its main task at that time was the mapping of northern Canada. It would send detachments to places in northern Canada every summer and they would spend time doing survey photography to make maps with.

They were also -- as a side issue, they were used to support operations in the field. It's rather a stretch of the imagination to use a Lancaster bomber in a tactical support role as a photographic aircraft. But for some reason or other, because it had all the photographic equipment, they figured, well, we only need one squadron so 408 can do both. I then spent about two years with 408 Squadron at Rockcliffe. Had a wonderful time. We were flying Lancasters out of Rockcliffe Airport.

INTERVIEWER: And did you actually fly?

BISSET: I was not legally on flying but we had a number of aircraft. We had Dakas. We had a practice flight there. Our Air Photo Interpretation Section was on the airfield. I used to go flying with a Flight Lieutenant Whitman who used to fly Beechcraft Expediter. I also flew on a number of exercises with 408 Squadron. We used the De Havilland Otter at that time. So in fact, although I wasn't authorized to fly, I did have quite a bit of flying time on the De Havilland Otter. I flew with a wonderful old pilot by the name of Bounce Weir who had, and still has, a marvelous reputation as a bush pilot in northern Canada. One of our real true aviation pioneers. So that was a very exciting time.

And after a couple of years, where I did Gagetown every summer, I did a lot camera work. I was not only photo interpreter, they used me as an aerial photographer. I flew a large number of missions on aerial photography. I was attached to Major Dave Francis, AOP Flight. I think it must be #1, I guess, in those days. I wasn't actually on flying but I was doing camera work and that sort of thing.

Then, after my tour in Rockcliffe, I was posted back to Rivers, Manitoba. This time as an instructor in the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School (JAPIS) at Rivers which had an international reputation. We had NATO students come from all the NATO countries to learn how to do photo interpretation. We had a photo interpretation officer's course that was eight months long, for strategic interpretation. And then we used to run an interpretation course for NCOs and other officers, and it was 12 weeks long. It was very detailed and comprehensive course. They did a lot of really hard work on that course in the 12 weeks they were there.

But during that time, of course, I was not actually on flying duties. But I was posted to, instead of Gagetown, I went to Wainwright for a couple of summer exercises. While I was at Wainwright, I would have the Photo Interpretation Section [for] which I had two vehicles. One for developing and one for interpretation and a couple of corporals and a sergeant. I was attached to #2 AOP Flight, at that time. It was commanded by Major Joe Listin who was the other Canadian aviator who was a prisoner of war in Korea. But there's not much said about him. While I was out in the field, of course, by this time the AOP Squadrons or Flights had the L-19. And I look at my log and I must have done -- in one summer I did probably over a hundred photographic missions, doing tactical air photography with the AOP Flight.

INTERVIEWER: So were you actually flying as a pilot?

BISSET: Not legally, I wasn't, but because I had wings and Major Listin knew me, I sat in as duty pilot. I got a lot of back seat time. I enjoyed it very much. It was really fine. That was in 1957. We're up to 1957 now, still at Rivers. Oh, I guess this was my third tour there. No. That was the second tour.

After I came back, I did my job in the -- all winter -- as an instructor in the Air Photo Interpretation School. Of course, being an old pilot, I would often go for rides in any airplane that was available. That parachute school was still going. I ignored that. I decided -- I got to be pretty friendly with the light aircraft guys. By this time they all knew me very, very well. So I applied to go back on flying status. I had gone over to the AOP. I think it was the Light Aircraft School by this time. The 444 Squadron had disappeared. It had become the Light Aircraft School. So there was an arrangement that -- I guess I conned somebody into or maybe I had the assistance of Major... Major Buzz Borland was the commanding officer of the school at that time. Fine officer. The guys in the #2 AOP Flight had, we had stretched the regulations a bit on flying during my times at Wainwright.

## END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Keith, I'm rather intrigued about the fact that you were a NCO flying gliders. And one question we have not asked of anyone up to this point in time in these series of interviews is what would the relationships be like between the NCO pilots -- you

were a corporal and a sergeant -- and the officer pilots. And how did you, sort of, get along and how did the chain of command work?

BISSET: The officers, of course, were on the ground. They were our flight commanders and that sort of thing. The relationship there was exactly the same as it is in any other Army unit between officers and NCOs. However, once we were in the air the relationship was a little bit different. And if a NCO was flying in the left hand seat, regardless of the rank of whoever was flying in the right hand seat, the NCO was captain of the aircraft, same as he would be on normal military airplane. It was a good experience.

I never had any officer try to pull rank on me or that sort of thing. We were both getting paid to do a job. We did it to the best of our ability. We had, of course, there was a great deal of camaraderie between us. My experiences were very, very good. I enjoyed it. I never had any problems what so ever with it. Occasionally, we would have an officer, either Army or Air Force, do a check ride with us. The rules were exactly the same for everyone.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, as I recall, the camera that I used and took training on, was the K-20. Is that that camera that you used?

BISSET: Yes. When I was at Camp Wainwright with #2 AOP Flight, I was the photographic officer on the flight. My duties were not only to run the Air Photo Interpretation Section, but also to manage the Photographic Section. I put in quite a, many, many flights taking air photography myself. I was using a K-20 camera which was quite a heavy chunk of material to stick out a window and hold in the slipstream.

INTERVIEWER: You hand held it?

BISSET: We hand held it. I remember, we had a request to photograph all the major intersections in Wainwright, from all four directions, wherever there was a crossroad. That was an operation that took us about a week to accomplish. It was good fun. I forget the focal length of the camera. I think it was about six inches. We were flying around at about 200 feet.

We also, after we had taken photographs, if there was any exercise, we supported all the units that were there that summer. We would then process the film, print the photographs. I would make the necessary annotations on them. We'd put them in a little package with some streamers on it. Climb in the L-19, fly over and air drop the photographs to the people on the ground.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, you also did trials on the Land camera. What was that all about?

BISSET: The Land camera was a Polaroid camera with a built in development system. You took a photograph, pushed a couple of buttons and out came a finished photograph.

There was a bunch of people that thought that might be a great thing in the air. You could take a bunch of pictures in the air and drop the print to whoever needed it on the ground. Now the camera that we used for that was, we took the back off a commercial Polaroid camera and put it on to the back of the K-20. In fact, we'd fly around. My first introduction to that was when I was on 408 Squadron at Rockcliffe. It was in the middle of winter and it was real good fun sticking my head out into the slipstream in 20 below zero. It was much better -- we used it also experimentally in Camp Gagetown on several occasions. Two years running. It worked all right but the problem was, when you took -- the format of the picture was so small, you really didn't get a negative. You sort of had to interpret in the air. The information that you were able to get from it was not really worth the effort. So the idea was eventually dropped.

INTERVIEWER: So after you finished flying at Wainwright, you went back to Rivers. You had to re-qualify?

BISSET: Well, I -- there was some doubt about that. The way this worked was, I had spoken to the Flight Aircraft School Commanding Officer, Major Buzz Borland. He managed to send a message to Ottawa saying I was at Rivers. I was a former glider pilot, former pilot and recommended or requested that I be put on the Light Aircraft Course. Well, this is what is now known as the Advanced Course at the school itself. Prior to that, I think the Army pilots were, some of them were trained on contract, still at Brandon, Manitoba. This was still before they started the training at Centralia. A message came back authorizing to give me ten hours flying assessment test. So I reported to the Light Aircraft School. Flight Lieutenant Nels Gesner was the chief flying instructor at the school. Major Borland was the commander. Nels took me out on familiarization, on type test.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sorry for the interruption. Please continue.

BISSET: OK. Anyway, Flight Lieutenant Nels Gesner was the Chief Flying Instructor. He was aware of this test I was supposed to be on. So he took me out for familiarization on type, on the L-19 -- Cessna L-19, which as far as I'm concerned, is one of the most wonderful light aircraft that was ever built.

To make a long story short, he took me out one day. Then he signed me out solo the next day. He signed me out solo again the next day. This went on for several days. I said to him, "Hey Nels, you know, I've only got ten hours on this test and we're using them up pretty fast. When are you going to give me the flying test?" He said, "Oh, I gave it to you the first day we went out. You passed." So with that, I finished off the ten hours.

I had to wait for a couple of weeks until the new course came in. I joined the new course. This was actually not a re-qualification. It was a refresher course on power flying. There were a number of other students. They were short of instructors. So all that summer, from May until August, I flew L-19s at Rivers. I covered the whole sequence of the whole course. I covered a lot of things that weren't on the course. Quite often, they'd be short of an instructor so they wouldn't bother giving me any dual. They'd just sign me

out on an airplane and let me go and do all my glorious things. I did all sorts of things. I had some friends -- of course, I was a commissioned officer at this time -- I had friends with all the other pilots on the station. The Tactical Air Support School were flying T-33s by this time.

I was climbing -- I wanted to see how far I could drive a L-19 up to on a nice clear summer day. And I got up to about 17,000 feet. A friend of mine, all of a sudden, went past in a T-Bird. Of course, he went by very quickly. He suddenly turned around and came back and did a big circle around me at that altitude. When he landed, he said, "What were you doing up there?" I said, "Oh, it was just a nice day." So I started to let down. The let down was very, very slow so I finally put it into a spin. I think I did 12 turns before I pulled it out, in order to get down a little faster. I also enjoyed night flying there. It was a real gem. It was almost like having your own private airplane for the summer. Needless to say, I re-qualified after a very, very enjoyable summer added to my military career, my flying career.

Then, of course, the next thing I know, instead of going to a flying unit, I was called in. I was told that I was posted to the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre of the Royal Air Force in Brampton, England. I was the Canadian exchange officer at this very, very high-level intelligence organization.

INTERVIEWER: Where was that located in England?

BISSET: In Brampton-Hunting. It was just outside the town of Huntington, so, Cambridgeshire. Lovely place to be posted. So I was the Canadian exchange officer at JARIC. I was involved in very close tactical support and strategic support of the NATO forces in Europe. We had a lot of airplanes that were flying covert missions in the air corridors that went into Berlin, at that time. We also had airplanes that flew up and down the borders -- right from the Baltic down to the Mediterranean -- of the Warsaw Pact powers. I was technically there on a training mission. I never had a day's training in my life. All the work I did there was operational intelligence for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. I would like to get the NATO medal because I was in direct support for NATO at that time but, unfortunately, all my records show is that I was on a training program when actually I was directly involved. There are some aspects of that program, even today, that are still classified so I cannot discuss it too much.

But it led to real interesting jobs. When I had finished in England, I came back to Canada. I instructed photo interpretation. And I was made the civil defense instruction officer. At that time we were all hot on civil defense. The Provincial Warning Centres were being dug all over the place. I was at the School of Intelligence and it was my job to plan re-entry for the exercises for the city of Toronto and stuff like that. It was rather disillusioning after some of the other things I had done.

Eventually, I was posted back to Rivers for a third term at the Joint Air Photo. Oh, no, I went to -- 408 Squadron had moved from Rockcliffe, at this time. I was posted back to 408 Squadron as one of the squadron's intelligence officers. They were flying T-33s.

Once again, I was not officially on flying but the commanding officer, Commander McKay, was very hot that all of his officers should have flying experience. There was no great problem whatsoever, so while I was there, I managed to put in about 50 or 60 hours in the back seat of a T-Bird.

During that time we trained forward air controllers for the Canadian Army. That included doing live bombing and gunnery at Shilo and also taking the forward air controllers over to Shilo, putting them on the ground and letting them use the aircraft to control live fire of artillery. Of course, as an instructor intelligence officer on the squadron, I also had to qualify as a forward air controller myself. And having done air shoots in a L-19 on my course, that was not difficult and we did very well. Enjoyed that very much.

Rivers, Manitoba was my last military posting, last operational posting. I was then posted back to National Defense Headquarters where I became involved in very high-level strategic intelligence. When I got out of the Army, I became a civilian officer. I finished my career with the Director General of Military Intelligence as a strategic intelligence analyst, specializing in the long-range aviation of the Soviet Air Forces, which is long-range aviation of the equivalent of Strategic Air Command. So, in fact, I was as operationally involved in the Cold War as anybody else even though I was only a civilian officer in Ottawa.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, I'd like to take you back to the glider flying that occurred in Canada immediately after the war. How did Canada get into glider flying? What did we have in the way of gliders and describe a glider unit in Canada because this was obviously the basis of, then Army aviation, outside of what was happening in the artillery.

BISSET: One of the -- I'll trace this from actually World War II. Actually, in Canada we had a Canadian squadron leader whose name was, I believe, Squadron Leader Gobey. He just died recently. He and another officer actually flew a Waco Hadrian glider across the Atlantic, from Rockcliffe to Prestwick. They staged through Goose Bay, Greenland, Iceland, Prestwick. And they actually staged this glider. That was my, sort of, remembering the first serious part.

The next serious part was in 1946. We had two gliders -- two that I know of anyway -- because they were at the Toronto Air Show. I actually had a flight in one at that time. I believe that we picked them up or started glider flying in Canada because the heavy troop-carrying helicopter had not been developed yet. Gliders were a good way to get troops around the country. As we've shown, as I've said previously, in part in Operation Eagle they considered the gliders were very, very good for northern areas.

One point I didn't cover was an exercise called Glider Pickup. This is where a glider is put on the ground, loaded, the tow rope was strung out in front of it with a big loop on the front end. The loop was fastened to two 12 foot bamboo poles by spring clips. They made a nice big loop. The top of it was 12 feet off the ground. A Dakota would come in



full throttle. It lowered a boom. The boom hung down about six feet under the airplane. It was a guide for a winch that had steel cable on it. The Dakota would roar across the field. The boom would catch the loop on the snatch station and pull the glider in to the air. The theory was this would be great for re-supply in the Arctic where you could land the glider, then pick it up without the aircraft landing.

I was fully qualified as a pickup pilot, as they called it. We used to refer to those as 4G take-offs. The reason for that was, in the glider you would accelerate from zero to 110 knots in about a split second. We had a nice fresh fall of snow one morning. We decided -- a very light snow and we were practicing glider pick-ups. So we decided we would measure how far the glider went before it actually became airborne. We marked, put a mark in the snow opposite the center of the wheels. The glider was picked up. We measured the wheel marks in the snow and it came out to ten feet, eight inches. That's how long it took, the distance to get the glider airborne.

INTERVIEWER: Must have been severe whiplash for anybody.

BISSET: Oh yes, indeed. You strapped yourself down well. You were pushed right back in to the seat and you did, in fact, pull about 4G on that take-off. It was very interesting. It was a bit of a dicey operation. The tow ropes had a weak link in them that would break at 14,000 pounds breaking strain. So you had to hit it just right with both the tug aircraft and the Dakota.

Now, after the Dakota snatched the glider and got it into the air, they paid out a steel cable. So, in fact, instead of having the normal 120 feet of tow rope, you would also have a couple of hundred feet of steel cable out in front of you. So the first thing is, you got into the air, put the nose down, get up to flying speed then you gradually climbed up behind the Dakota, which was the tow aircraft. And if anything had gone wrong, there was an explosive device that would cut the cable. So if anything had gone wrong, there you were in the glider with a couple of hundred feet of steel cable above you about to come snapping back at you. So it had its moments.

But we had -- in Rivers -- we had at any given time anywhere between seven and nine gliders on the squadron. It was actually 17... 1112 T Flight. The Dakota pilots were excellent. We had a really good rapport. Every once in a while they'd be short a Dakota pilot and fighter pilots would fly as the second pilot on the Dakotas, which was all sorts of good fun.

INTERVIEWER: You've been talking about the Dakota aircraft. This was the DC-3?

BISSET: The DC-3.

INTERVIEWER: And it was also used for para jumping?

BISSET: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And cargo?

BISSET: And cargo. There was one exercise that the glider pilots were involved in. And one of our Dakota aircraft was on a re-supply run up north, I think to Baker Lake. On its way south, they got lost. But I think they took a wrong leg of a radio range or a radio beacon or something. They wound up on an iceberg in the middle of Hudson's Bay. They were identified. The aircraft landed without injuries. They did a forced landing on this ice burg. It was a wheels up landing. The aircraft was pretty badly damaged. The point was how to get these chaps off of the iceberg.

We actually flew two of the gliders to Fort Churchill. They were winterized. It was a terrible trip, flying a glider in forty below zero. I wasn't booked on it but my friends were. We landed at Fort Churchill. It had taken about four days to put all this rescue equipment together. But by the time we got to Fort Churchill, there was a civilian by the name of Ingle Britson who was a bush pilot flying out of Churchill and he had managed to fly his Norseman out to this iceberg. He took off two people at a time in his Norseman. It was right at the end of the range of the Norseman itself. So he managed to land it and he made four trips out to rescue the people. Two days later, they went out to look for the Dakota, the iceberg had split up and the Dakota had disappeared. It was one exercise.

I would mention in passing -- people say, well, those aircraft were pretty flimsy. Did you ever have any serious accidents? We only had -- in the time that I was flying gliders from 1947 to 1951, we trained probably another 25 glider pilots at Rivers. In all that, we only had one flying accident. A number of people were injured but no one was killed. The glider had a deceleration parachute on it. This was -- accident was with a RCAF instructor and student glider pilot. Neither one of them really understood the operation of the deceleration parachute. The aircraft was on final. We used to practice this. I have a number of entries in my logbook about deceleration parachute landings. I never had any problem with it at all. But these people did.

The problem was that when you used that parachute, it was used to slow the aircraft down and increase your angle of landing tremendously, so you're coming down at about a 60-degree angle. The idea was that after you got down to within sort of the last 100 feet, you let the parachute go. They didn't. As a result, when they flared they didn't go any place except into the end of the runway. And there were six or eight people injured in that. They were all flown to Winnipeg to Deer Lodge Hospital. Some were invalidated out of the service as a result of that accident.

But in all that time, I flew probably -- I carried some 1,000 to 1,500 troops myself and the rest of the squadrons were doing this. So we probably made, probably went through 20,000 men in various types of training, air indoctrination. And other than that accident, we never had a problem.

We did have a couple of forced landings as a result of bad weather. I remember coming back from Gimli on one exercise where we had four gliders. We had each one full of

troops. There was a miscommunication with the control tower. The control towers -- the Dakotas asked for the ground wind and the ground wind came back at 58 miles an hour. Somehow or other it got translated to 15 miles an hour. That's the message that we got in the aircraft. As soon as we separated from the Dakota, of course, we all wound up in the wheat fields short of the airfield. But we had no injuries and we were able to recover all the airplanes.

INTERVIEWER: In all the glider flying that you did, what were the aircraft that towed you? You mentioned the Halifax in World War II.

BISSET: Yep. In England, at Glider Training School, that first place that I went to, we were towed by a Miles Master, which looks like an overgrown Harvard. It originally had been built as a dive-bomber but didn't work out so they used it as a glider tug and training aircraft. It was a good aircraft. It had a big Bristol Hercules engine in it. Quite a powerful airplane. At North Luffenham, when we were there, they were using Halifax 5s to tow them. And in Canada, the only aircraft we ever used was the DC-3 Dakota.

INTERVIEWER: There were troops in the DC-3s, while you were being towed? Did that happen simultaneously?

BISSET: Not necessarily. No.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, you were actually in Rivers, or when you moved to Rivers when the transition occurred from the Brandon Flying School and you moved into Rivers. Do you want to describe that period of time?

BISSET: Yes. When I came back from England, I had left my wife and daughter in A35 in Shilo. A35 was the old Canadian Parachute Training Centre. By the time I got back, the operations had moved from A35 to Rivers. But we still had a number of people on staff at Rivers who had Emergency Married Quarters in Shilo. This was just at the conversion period from World War II to regular peacetime. There was not very much housing so we left our wives and families in Shilo, in these horrible Emergency Married Quarters. We had a forty-passenger bus. And we rode back and forth on that bus for two years in all sorts of weather, every day, 50 miles from gate to gate, living in the Emergency Quarters in Shilo and working in Rivers.

We had quite a few adventures on the bus alone, as you can well imagine, in the wintertime. One of the things we used to do, while I was on the staff at Rivers, was occasionally we would get on board a Dakota and we would fly from Rivers to Shilo and we would do a parachute drop to go home that night. It was completely legal because everybody that lived on the base at Shilo and worked at Rivers were all qualified parachute jumpers. They had to do so many jumps a year just to maintain their qualifications. We thought this was a great lark, being able to fly home and do a parachute drop into your backyard.

This was the conditions that the troops had to put up with right after the war. I think, in many cases, the real heroes of this were the wives and children living under these horrible conditions. Tar paper huts, literally, that had been designed for summer quarters. They were living together but the war was over and people wanted to get their lives started again.

Rivers was, at that time, a very colourful station. We had a lot of people from World War II on the station. We had -- being a NCO, I was particularly used to the fact that we had two Regimental Sergeant Majors. One was a very colourful gentleman by the name of Mickey Austin, who had been the youngest sergeant major in World War II, I believe. The other was a very famous Air Force sergeant major by the name of Jimmy Blondell. So if you were an NCO and you were walking around with your hands in your pocket, you immediately faced double jeopardy with two RSMs.

Equally, they had some really fine officers. I can remember one in particular, Major Dick Medlin, who was the chief ground instructor at the ground school. And he won a DSO in Normandy as a platoon commander. He was with the Royal Canadian Regiment or the Queen's Own, I'm not sure which it was. He eventually wound up in the RCR and a parachute jumper as well. He was trapped in Normandy and he saw this huge German advance coming toward his position. So he called down artillery fire and eventually -- that one incident, he was taking on the whole German Army in his platoon position. And it wound up with one of the biggest artillery shoots that ever took place in World War II. And it stopped the German advance. And here's one lone infantry platoon commander that knew what to do, did it when he was supposed to, and got a DSO for it. One really fine gentleman. It was a pleasure knowing some of these people.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of aircraft would you have seen in the inventory at Rivers during this transitional time frame? And let me add, that were being flown by Army pilots.

BISSET: Army pilots? The aircraft we saw were Auster 5s and 6s, I guess, Chipmunks, the beginning of the helicopter age, helicopter transition, the L-19. Those were the ones that the Army pilots were flying legally.

Being pilots and being friends of other pilots, they often went for tours in other planes. At Rivers itself, the variety of airplanes at that base was absolutely fantastic. We had our own parachute airplanes. We had new airplanes stage through there. We had the demonstration flights by the North Star. We eventually got a North Star of our own. They moved from Dakotas to big Fairchild Flying Boxcar. We had airplanes come from all over. The Handley Page Hastings from England came over. We saw demonstration jets from time to time, when the Mustangs were converting to Vampires. We never actually had Vampires at Rivers. We had Harvards for continuation training for service pilots. All sorts of experimental airplanes turned up there. I keep forgetting -- there was a big, I've forgotten the name of it now -- it had two great big booms on it and it was solid inside. We used these for experimental parachute jumping, air dropping.

In addition to parachute jumping itself, we also had an Airborne Air Supply School. It had -- it used to train Army loadmasters to throw stuff out of airplanes. The ground school had a Tactical Air Support School and a Transport Air Support School. And it had an air staff component where we trained officers from both the Army and the Air Force to staff Joint Operation Control Centres. So it -- in addition, we also had the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School, the Parachute School.

It was a very, very active flying base. Everyone there got along extremely well, in the three Armed Forces. The morale was great. It was an isolated station. Morale was great. We used to get traveling concert parties there occasionally.

At Rivers, because it had long runways, on a number of occasions in the late fifties we had civilian aircraft diverted into Rivers from Winnipeg. This was when the passenger airliners or passenger air companies were starting to fly aircraft over the pole from Europe. They would take off in Europe and fly over the pole to Toronto, Chicago and the Midwest. They would stop and refuel in Winnipeg. And on a number of occasions -- I remember one night when I was orderly officer, I had five civilian aircraft parked on the runway. We would take the passengers and divide them up between the various messes and put them up as best we could. We would open the bars for them. We would feed them. The companies were very, very good to the ground crew who looked after them. Of course, all the real tough work was done by the ground crew out in the cold weather looking after these. The various companies -- we had Pan Am, Air Canada, Air France. It looked like an international airport rather than a military base on occasion. The companies were most grateful for our services. The guys that really paid off, were to the ground crew that worked so hard servicing the aircraft in such cold weather. And Rivers was a cold, cold base.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder now, if we could just ask you to recall, perhaps the greatest contribution that you feel that you made to Army aviation or that Army aviation made to you?

BISSET: Well, it taught me -- first of all, I had always wanted to be a pilot. When the war folded up, I was one of the 40,000 aircrew out of work. So, first of all, I was able to get back on flying. It tied in with my other specialty which was aerial photography and the interpretation of aerial photography. It was a part of life that was exciting. I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed the flying. I enjoyed the camaraderie of the people who were in the flying units. And I think over all, it gave me a better concept -- later on when I became a staff officer, I had a much better concept of what air-ground cooperation was all about. I do think, today, we have the combined Armed Forces.

And one of the best examples I ever saw of service cooperation and combined operations was at Rivers. I think it was a crime to close that station down because now we're having to re-learn this stuff all over again. And it wasn't just a station that was looking back at World War II. They were constantly attempting to develop new doctrine there. It was one of our finest bases. The staff were absolutely terrific. Army, Navy and Air Force got along well together. We flew each other's airplanes. I think that Canada, the Canadian

Armed Forces are the poorer now for having closed that particular base because of the experience that you, that people could get there, because of the type of people that staffed it. We had a lot of very, very good, fine people there.

INTERVIEWER: Keith, would you just describe the construction of the gliders that you flew?

BISSET: OK. Fine. The British Hotspur glider, which was the first one that we flew, was all plywood. It was not a particularly pretty looking machine but it flew quite well. As a matter of fact, on a really hot day, if you could get over a round about with a good thermal coming off it, you could almost soar the thing. So you could get an extra 25 minutes out of it, out of a normal circuit. It was good fun to fly. But both the wings and the fuselage were plywood. They were very, very strong. Rigid undercarriage, not retractable. It flew like any other airplane. The one thing that I liked about it, what the fun thing was, that you sat right up in the nose, well ahead of the wings. You could see the tug airplane. It sort of had, what later became a bubble canopy type thing on it.

It was not uncomfortable. It had standard aircraft instruments except engine instruments. It had the full flying panel, airspeed indicator, rate climb indicator, the compass, altimeter, bank and turn indicator, a standard flying panel with the exception of engine instruments. It was quite easy to fly whereas the bigger glider, the Horsa, it was a huge airplane, actually. It had a wingspan of probably about 90 feet, 90 to 100 feet. It was made of plywood. Both the wings and the fuselage were plywood. In fact, one of them broke loose from its tug during the invasion and landed in the English Channel. All the troops on board got out, climbed out and it floated in the Channel. It had these huge plywood wings. Imagine 20 fully armed troops sitting on the top of it. This thing was in the English Channel. A destroyer took them all off and this thing was still floating. It became a menace to navigation so the Navy had to go and break it up with gunfire.

Now the Waco, the American Waco was a much different machine. It was made of aluminum tube construction and fabric covered. But the wings of the Waco were plywood but the fuselage was straight fabric. It was sort of -- you got a false sense of security in it. I never knew what the troops thought about it but it was like flying a tent, really. But it had a very strong floor in it to carry heavy loads, of course.

It was -- the Hadrian, was a very nice airplane to fly. Very delicate on the controls. Good controls. Trim, trim elevators, aerolons and rudders, they were on it. It was a pretty good airplane. And it had, once again, full flying panel with the exception of engine, gyro horizon, bank and turn indicators, altimeter, air speed indicator. The Waco did not have flaps. It had spoilers, so if you wanted to come down in a hurry, you pulled the spoiler up and broke the airflow over the wing and you came down much faster.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you occasionally flew in the tug aircraft. Did you ever have an opportunity to take power aircraft pilots into gliders and allow them to fly second seat?

BISSET: Oh yes. Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Describe one of those experiences.

BISSET: "Are you going to fly this airplane?" "Yep." "Not with me in it, you're not." No. There was -- actually, most of the tug aircraft captains on the 1112 Flight or the 1112 Squadron, virtually nearly all the captains and pilots, first and second, were checked out at one time or another on the Waco gliders. In fact, we had, at various times, Air Force officers would actually act as the, what you'd call the equivalent to an instrument check pilot on a squadron today. At various times, they were actually part of the glider flight, rather than the other squadron. One of the most famous guys -- a guy by the name of Pete St. Louis who was one of the original Otter pilots -- he did a big rescue in South America with an Otter one time -- he was actually one of our glider pilots.

INTERVIEWER: But it must have been quite harrowing for some of these powered aircraft pilots, to fly gliders without any engines in them?

BISSET: Oh yeah. I'm sure it was. It's the same-- when I was working in the joint Air Photo Interpretation School, we had a Navy lieutenant and an Air Force flight lieutenant, who were both instructors. And they were flying T-33s for continuation training. I was out flying out of one of our short field strips south of Rivers one day. We had a number of little airstrips that were in the fields and along the river -- Assiniboine River, that sort of thing -- where we would go away from the airfield and practice on these little strips that were carved out of the bush. The -- particularly the Air Force pilot came out one day and took a look at our L-19 operation. I said, "Do you want to go for a ride?" He looked at the airstrip and he looked at the airplane and he said, "Are we going to take off out of here?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You're not going to take off with me in it." Which he was used to flying in high-speed aircraft and that sort of thing. By the same token, I used to fly in the back seat of his airplane so, it worked out very well. All in all, it was a very interesting experience.

It was an interim experience. I make this point: the reason that we had these gliders, it was the interim period between the end of World War II and beginning of the troop carrying helicopters. While I was at Rivers, we got some of the first helicopters out there. They were flying with the Tactical Air Support School. Some of them were flown by Army pilots, some of them were flown by Air Force pilots. And the first helicopters we got were the original Sikorsky which would carry three people at the most, I think, and the little Bell helicopter. They were the first two helicopters we had at Rivers. They were strictly helicopter training.

It wasn't until much later on, when the transport helicopter was being developed. The gliders were strictly an interim vehicle for tactics, if you will, air-ground tactics, during that period in time. And in fact, the glider regiment -- the Glider Pilot Regiment -- had proved itself in the invasion of Europe and in the crossing of the Rhine.

INTERVIEWER: That is absolutely excellent. Keith. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the outstanding interview you've given us, in particular in describing the role of the glider pilot in Canada's Army aviation. Thank you very much.

BISSET: It's a real pleasure. A lot of people were not even aware that we existed. But I feel, that when it came to indoctrination of ground troops and training military ... contributed a lot to airborne flight training in Canada.

**TRANSCRIPT ENDS**