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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWER: J. R. Digger MacDougall

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Stan Cote

Interviewed 17 December, 2003

By J. R. Digger MacDougall

COTE: My name is Stanley William Cote, C o t e.

INTERVIEWER: Would you start off by giving us a bit of your background? Perhaps let us know where you came from and the beginnings of your military career?

COTE: I lived in a place called Settler, Alberta, which is about 50 miles east of Red Deer. I went to high school there. There was a squadron, B Squadron of the King's Own Calgary Regiment. In January of '47, I joined the regiment as a trooper and spent three years, or four years, with the Calgarys, going from trooper to lieutenant. I attended several courses in Wainwright, summer and winter training in Wainwright. Then in 1951, the Korean War began.

The Government organized what was called a Panda Squadron, which was initially to take troops from special force to go to Korea. In the west, they went to several different units, the Calgarys, the BCDs, the BCRs. Each regiment would send -- was supposed to send a troop -- a tank troop, of trained people. We gathered at Calgary, then went on to Wainwright for summer training. When we were there, we were joined by about four or five hundred men from Ontario, the Governor Generals Foot Guard, the Horse Guards. Then, for some reason, the Panda Squadron sort of went by the wayside. We were absorbed into the Strathconas.

I had joined the Strathconas, or the Panda Squadron, as a trooper. Because of my background and training, I was promoted to sergeant that same day, the first day. Went on for training for a couple of years, was selected for A Squadron, the Strathconas, and went to Korea. Spent a year in Korea, I come back, was posted to the Armoured Corps School. Spent a period of time there as an instructor in the wireless wing. Then I was selected to be commissioned, from the ranks, for the regular force. Proceeded on in '55 to the COTC Method B course. Was commissioned as a second lieutenant in '55. Posted to the RCDs. Once I got to the RCDs, I was a troop officer. In the spring of '76, or '56, I applied to return to the Straths, as I had been away from them long enough that I figured I could go back. The director of armour approved it. Went back to the Strathconas.

Took a number of courses with the Strathconas. Posted to the school on a couple of short postings as instructor. Then I took the ground liaison course in February of '78 ('58). In '57, or '58, was posted to the Navy, as a ground liaison officer. Spent three years with

the Navy, doing many different jobs with the, on the aircraft carrier Bonaventure, at Shearwater, down in the Caribbean as a fleet bombardment officer, on the destroyers, on the frigates, in Bermuda. And out in Rivers, training the Banshee pilots in close air support.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, how did you get interested in flying?

COTE: During my time with the Navy, I was involved with the aircraft. I would have flown off the carrier with helicopters and the tracker. When I was ashore in Shearwater, I was search master for Nova Scotia and was involved in several searches where I was allotted a helicopter. Through my association with that, I got interested in flying. Actually, when I got back to Calgary, the first thing I did was start my own -- was going to take a private flying lesson with the club that we had there in Lincoln Fields.

INTERVIEWER: What type of aircrew selection did you go through?

COTE: I'd applied for it and got word that I was to go to Centralia to where the RCAF had their selection board. So I got on a train and off to Centralia. Arrived there and it was a series of interviews and a session in the Link Trainer, mainly to see whether you got sick or not, I think. And then that was it. Then about two or three days there, and back to Calgary. Then I got word, not too long after that, that I was to start primary flying in Centralia in November of '62. OK.

In November of '62, I arrived for pilot training. There were six officers in our class. And the RCAF was responsible for the first days of the flying. We did 90 hours on the Chipmunk and, it seemed at the time, an awful lot of ground school. A lot of it involved high level stuff and stuff like that, which we found out later we never used. I soloed after 11 hours and completed my primary flying certificate in March of '63.

Then I was posted to Rivers and our next phase was the Light Aircraft Pilot Course, taken on the Cessna L-19. By April, I was in Rivers. I soloed after seven hours. Finished the course up in June. By this time I had a grand total of 200 hours on fixed wings. I was awarded my Army Flying Wings on the twelfth of July, 1963. Did some local flying for a couple of weeks. Then started our helicopter training on the Hiller-12E, in August of '63. I soloed after 12 hours and I finished the course on the twenty-ninth of October with 63 hours on the chopper.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, was your training in fixed wing and helicopter adequate for future employment that you had with the Army?

COTE: I think the Chipmunk training was -- we found afterwards -- was basically an Air Force course. So therefore, there was a lot of high-level type of things that we never did get involved with. So, from that point of view, we got through it but it was a bit of a bind. The L-19 -- again I'm not sure in hindsight, whether we couldn't have just as well of went on to helicopters right away. Although, in my course, there was a couple of

Artillery people and, of course, they went on to L-19s after they had the helicopter training too.

But one of the things that I found that was not just evident then but later on, sometimes in the Army way of doing things clashed with the Air Force way of doing things. They were very rigid in their requirements for paperwork and things like that, which is great under the conditions that they were working out of. You work out of a hangar and you fly out and you fly back. We found out later when we were flying in Germany, when you're working out of the back of a truck and you're gone for two weeks with a couple of mechanics and a barrel of fuel, that the Air Force regulations -- some of them that we had to follow -- we had to hedge a little bit. Because it wasn't just possible to sign out for everything that happened with the airplane, and happened with the paperwork and so on. Because there was a pilot, an observer and two mechanics and you were gone for two or three weeks, away from your base. You didn't have the backup that the Air Force had with a hangar and all their maintenance people.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, what happened after you finished flying training on the Hiller?

COTE: OK. I finished in October of -- and went back to Calgary in November. I was posted to B Squadron and was appointed acting squadron commander. In January, I had occasion to take part in continuation flying, which was a -- pilots could get the Government to pay for private flying, so many hours a year. Went out to the Calgary Flying Club and got checked out on a Piper PA-28. I used to get a few hours in a month.

In February, I was informed that I was going to be posted to Germany, to the Recce Squadron. So I had to go to Rivers to take the Advanced Tactical Helicopters course. I started that in March and finished it in May '64. By then I had about 260 fixed wing hours and 200 helo hours. Back to Calgary to clear the regiment. In June of '64, went to Trenton and flew to Germany. Arrived in Fort Chambly, outside of Soest, where I joined the Fort Garry Reconnaissance Squadron. Fortunately, we didn't have to rebadge in those days. I remained a Strathcona.

The squadron had three scout car troops and one helicopter troop. The helo troop had six Hillers, seven pilots, six sergeant-observers and twenty men to provide the maintenance, radio repair and fuel support and bits and pieces for the squadron or for the troop. We had a small hangar and a landing pad, which was a parking lot, in Fort Chambly. I started flying in June and spent the remainder of the year training on exercises. By the end of that year, I had added about another hundred flying hours.

In Germany, most of our flying during training and exercise was what was called nap-of-the-earth flying. It was flying very close to the ground. We called it skids-in-the-grass -- so that the helicopter would not be visible at any distance because our main job was reconnaissance. A sneak-and-peek, if you like. We weren't armed or had any sort of armament on the chopper. So, as far as we were concerned, the helicopter was not a helicopter. It was a scout car with wings. That's basically what it was. We flew it,

normally, very low to the ground, away from ridge lines, around woods, under power lines, under telephone lines, under bridges and sneak-and-peek, hover and observe. We'd normally work in pairs and quite often with the scout cars. We were in radio communication with them. If we were in a heavy wooded area, we'd check the outside and the cars would check the inside. On more open ground, we'd proceed and check out and the cars would follow us.

Nap was very demanding flying. You had to be on top of it at all times. The Hiller was a very basic helicopter. You had to have both hands on the controls and both feet on it. So there was no time to -- you couldn't take your hands off the controls, even at 50 or 60 feet. So we had to stay sharp. And so normally, we flew nap all the time, even if we were going from point A to point B, we normally did nap, simply to keep sharp.

The normal crew was a pilot and a sergeant-observer. The sergeant watched the flanks and did the map reading and worked the radios, leaving the pilot free to fly. However, the pilot had to make the decisions and had to be aware of everything that was going on. So your flying, in effect, becomes instinctive. You could, by the pitch of the motor and the rotors -- because you had a twist grip for your throttle. If you over torqued the engine, you had to change the rotors. So the maintenance mechanics weren't too happy so you had to be darned careful that you didn't over torque. And, of course, if you didn't have enough torque, you would fall out of the sky. But all of that becomes instinctive after not too long.

As an interesting aside, we were visited by some 104 pilots up from the south of Germany, Baden and places like that. And they were noted for their low flying. However, they came up to visit us and we took them out low flying in the choppers. And we scared the crap out of them. The guy I was with said, "Let me out of here, let me out of here." He wanted to get out of the chopper after five minutes.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, my understanding is you were -- you reported, actually -- as the helicopter troop, directly to the command CO, if you want, of the reconnaissance squadron. What type of missions did you fly?

COTE: Our missions, there was -- while normal training, if we were training with the scout cars, we would come under the squadron commander. But the Recce Squadron was under the brigade commander's authority. And as such, any time a helicopter was required for any task, we could be detached. And so, the majority of our time, we were out, quite often, in one helicopter doing a job with either the infantry battalions, the engineers or the artillery. We had the SSM Battery over there at that time.

While our squadron exercises were three or four times a year, we spent a lot of time, three times, or four times, as much time away in the field as our squadron did because we were working with individual infantry battalions, doing tasks for them or the engineer regiment. We'd be doing tasks for them or the SSM Battery.

Different tasks that we had was with the infantry -- we'd stay with the brigade, with the infantry commander. We'd take him out on recess, drop some of his patrols in areas behind enemy lines so we could sneak in. I'm remembering we only had -- it was a three-person helicopter so we'd have to leave our observer behind and put two infantrymen in and sneak in, drop them off and fly back. That was quite common.

Other tasks were for the engineers. For instance, they would have to do a river recce. Well, for the engineers to do a normal river recce would be just take three or four jeeps, two or three men per jeep, and go along and check out a river over a 20 or 30 mile length. Finding roads down to them, checking the banks, the bottom of the rivers, finding fords, etc. We developed methods where we could do a river recce, with one engineer officer, in two or three hours that would have taken 20 men in four or five jeeps all day to do. And of course, they were very happy with that.

We would --one of the methods was to strap a pole to the side of the skid and with measurements on it. We'd sit down, hover right above the water. The engineer officer would move the pole down and measure the depth of the river, so they didn't have to wade in, etc, which they'd have to do as a ground party.

Another task, which was a major one that I took part in, was with the Surface-to-Surface Missile Battery. They had to -- we moved a little bit or their area of responsibility had moved, so they had to recce, do a reconnaissance, for firing positions, main and alternate, of the brigade surface-to-surface missile plan. So we went up into the area and spent about three weeks -- sorry two weeks -- recceing positions to set up for the initial firing and the alternate firing. So as soon as they fired, they'd move to an alternate site. Now this included looking at roads, because these were pretty large machines, their missiles and that. Finding roads that would fit, that would move into these positions, alternate roads, ways they could get out if they come under counter fire, where they could go. So this was a very demanding task for the engineers. We took their time that it involved, cut it by weeks and weeks, to do their reassessment of all their firing positions.

INTERVIEWER: When you were under -- or when you doing all this work in the field, were you under canvass? Were you able to fly back to base? How did that work?

COTE: No. We lived out in the field ourselves. In Germany, at that time, we could land or do anything, anywhere we wanted. If we wanted a cup of coffee, we'd land beside a gasthof. Go in and have a cup of coffee and come out. There was no restrictions to us, at all. We didn't file flight plans. There was no control over it. We never talked to anybody other than the people we were working with.

So we lived in a tent. As a matter of fact, we were very lucky. The Army gave us nothing. I had to buy my own tent. They issued a temperate sleeping bag and, of course, a temperate sleeping bag wasn't all that good in the snow in Germany. So I had to buy the outer for my sleeping bag.

Our rations were Brit rations, which I don't think were the same ones that I had eaten in Korea. We normally bought all our own rations. Even our, if I remember rightly, our flying gloves we had to scrounge from the Air Force because the Army wouldn't give us anything. So all in all, at that time, the Army support for the aviation -- they just figured that we were Army people, therefore you lived like the Army did, never mind that. Which we didn't mind except that the Army people had tents and they had cooks and everything else and we didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, where did your flying take you? Were you limited to the local area or did you fly to other countries or to southern Germany?

COTE: Our main area was northern Germany, from Soest up to Essen, along up to the Sennelager area. That was our area of operations because that was where the brigade was responsible for. So most of our flying was in that area.

In my case, I had -- the squadron was tasked to, by DVA, to assist the Directorate of Veterans Affairs to take photos of all the war cemeteries in Germany, Belgium, Holland and France. In May of '65, I was selected to provide a helicopter to the DVA representatives. They hired a commercial photographer to take photos. They wanted ground and air photos. So we went, we flew in to Belgium and Holland at various bases. Met up with the DVA party and we set up a camera to take air photos in the chopper. Proceeded to take air photos of the Bergen-op-Zoom, Menin, all of those First and Second World War air photos in Belgium and Holland. We finished up Belgium and Holland in the area of Menin and there was a little airfield there. We stayed there, waiting for permission to go into France. We spent about four or five days there, waiting. For some reason, the French decided they didn't want us, so we weren't allowed in to France. The photographers contract was running out so we went back to Germany, to Soest and he went home. So that finished off that particular photo session.

I flew down a couple of times, when the Air Force was kicked out of France and went in to southern Germany. The initial move, the transport company from Soest was doing what we called the Red Ball Express. So we used to fly their mail, spare parts and stuff down to them in southern Germany, to deliver them when they were in Baden. So we did a bit of flying down there but that was not our normal area of. But we flew right up to the East German border. Maybe a few times, a little bit over it, but only at night when nobody was looking, hopefully.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do a lot of night flying?

COTE: We had quite a bit of night flying. We had minimums. I don't remember what it was at the time. But, for instance, we'd have what we'd call the bug-outs, where everybody had to go to battle positions. In the middle of the night, they'd call you up and you'd run out, get in your chopper and you'd fly out to dispersal point. So we flew at night. Now, remembering that the Hiller had no instrument capability whatsoever, so it had to be VFR. So if it happened to be a night that was snowy or foggy or something, then we were down.

But we normally flew in pretty well any weather that was in Germany. I can remember quite a few times hitting fog banks. My observer would get out and he would walk ahead of the chopper. I would watch him and we would work across the fields. You'd get to maybe a telephone pole or something you couldn't get under. You'd hover up, turn around, hover down so you had the pole in sight at all times and carry on until you run out of the bad weather or the fog or whatever happened. That was quite normal. We flew, I guess according to Air Force regulations, many times when we shouldn't have but we had to get the job done. And that was our primary purpose of being there.

INTERVIEWER: So you flew in all types of flying conditions and even under the limits at times?

COTE: Oh, yeah. At many times, at what I guess today -- well today very definitely, but we... But remember, we didn't have limits, per se, in Army aviation because we didn't talk to anybody. There was no air controller or anybody like that directing us or we were responsible for. We were responsible for ourselves and you communicated with the troops you were working with or the cars you were working with and that was it.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of communications equipment were you equipped with?

COTE: Just basic radios. There was nothing sophisticated about it in those days. And the radios quite often broke down. There was even -- I can remember times when we were out somewhere and we needed something and the chopper was down, even trying to phone back to Chambly was an exercise in itself. Because remember, in those days, there were very few phones in Germany. And for civilians, where we lived in PMQs you didn't have a phone. Adjutants, certain people would have phones, but the peons didn't have phones. There was just -- and the Germans didn't have phones either.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, it appears that things were really basic for you and the way you operated in Germany, while you were flying in, actually, a flying unit in the Reconnaissance Squadron. How was maintenance handled?

COTE: We had about -- in our troop, we had 20 men that were attached to us full-time. They were full part of the troop. All Air Force people. They were the radio mechanics, airframe mechanics, engines and so on. In the local RCEME organization, there was an aviation detachment that did our -- it'd be like our second and third line. Our mechanics did first line. Anything, engine changes, things like that, would go to the second and third line, which was the aviation detachment of the local RCEME squadron. Then that was up until we moved.

Finally they built us a helipad, just outside of Fort Chambly, which had a hangar and had a thousand foot strip for L-19s. We had a RCEME workshop aviation section attached to us. So we were in one end of the hangar and then the aviation detachment had the other end. Our maintenance, then, was a little closer together, in that when we were at base they did most of the work. But of course, once we were out in the field, then our own people had to do whatever was required. It worked pretty good. Our people, our

mechanics, got organized before very long to live in the field. When they first came, they didn't like it. But once they got used to it, they found it was OK.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of individuals did you fly? Like, were they commanding officers? What were the ranks of individuals that you flew?

COTE: Normally, in our normal mission, it was just the observer and the pilot. But we flew many other tasks. The brigade commander, although the Brigade had two choppers so normally they didn't get involved with us. When we were out with the battalions or with the engineers or the artillery, we'd fly their COs and Ops officers around various the places. Basically, it was just our own people unless we were on exercise. That was about it.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, how would you compare Canadian flying equipment, let's say, with that of other NATO forces? Did you have an opportunity to do any liaison work with any of the other NATO forces?

COTE: Not too much liaison. I dropped in on a German aviation battalion one time and was just overwhelmed by the equipment they had. But, remembering that they had all brand new equipment because they had lost everything, while we were still using -- a lot of our stuff was still Second World War, in some cases, material. From that point of view, it was a real eye opener.

The Brits had, with the exception of the Skeeter, which there wasn't too many around, their choppers were better than ours. And of course, the Americans were in to the Sikorski, the Hueys -- they and the Hueys and the OH-13s. So they had more advanced -- although even that Huey that was over in Germany was not comparable to the, you know, the twin Huey that we got later on. It was far in advance. You could do some basic instrument flying with the Huey which, of course, we didn't. You know, other than the turn and bank indicator. That's all we had.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a lot of opportunity to see this equipment over there, of other Armies?

COTE: I took over the, as officer commanding the troop, in January of '67. With our Centennial coming up in '67, I decided that I would see if I could organize a fly-in breakfast which out in the Western part of Canada is quite common for little airports to have fly-in breakfasts. So we, after getting permission from Brigade, etc, we organized a fly-in breakfast at our -- by now we were in to our new heliport outside of Fort Chambly.

We had over 200 military guests arrive in more than 80 aircraft, in 15 different types. They included: the Sikorski, seven of them; a Wessex; an Alouette-2, 24 of them; three Bristol Sycamores; 11 Augusta-Bell Sues; 13 Skeeters; two Scouts; three Huey-Bs; three OH13-Hs. And then we had four Beavers, three Cessnas, two Otters, four Dorniers and two Piper Cub fixed wings. So it was a real breakfast.

We had a typical -- the aircraft would land and we got an old German wagon. Put a canvas on top to make it look like a covered wagon. Hitched it to a jeep and as the pilots got out of their chopper or fixed wing, this covered wagon would pull up and we would take them over to the hangar.

In the hangar we had, in one corner of it, we got a movie of, that we acquired of, was it air photos or? An air-something from Canada. I'm not sure what it was called, but it was from one end of the country to the other, taken from the air. And we continually showed that. We had a big breakfast with all the normal Canadian efforts that went in to the breakfast. We went through 90 pounds of bacon, 700 pancakes, 60 dozen of eggs, six gallons of beans and 20 gallons of coffee.

Well, you can imagine. Brigadier Amy, who was the brigade commander, flew in and exchanged visits with a lot of the people. We had some air control on this, simply to organize them as they come in. We got some air controllers from the Brits in Gutersloh. They thought it was the greatest thing since canned beer, coming down to something like this. Of course, assisting in this was the transport company from Soest, who helped us, the signal squadron and then the aircraft platoon of the RCEME, plus the Brigade Air OP troop, which was the artillery thing. They helped out. Then the air traffic control officers, from Gutersloh.

So that was, and of course, the result of that was that we received many invitations back from aviation units that had visited us, to come and visit them. Now, unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to take part in that because I left in the summer. But, as I understand from speaking to guys that were there and even later on down in the brigade, when they moved to Baden, they had one down there. I never did hear the exact details of it except that I know that they had a fly-in breakfast down there one year.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, what was your next posting and what did you do in that job?

COTE: In July, I was posted from Germany to Ottawa. I came home in July. I went on leave then reported into NDHQ for September, '67. I went, initially, as a staff officer in the helicopter section of the Directorate of Land Forces Operational Requirements Air, called DLFORA. I spent the rest of that year getting familiar with the NDHQ routine, which in those days was an effort in itself, and their procedures. Being fresh from the field, I initially looked after the Hiller requirements and any problems that they had in Germany.

Then in February '68, integration took place. So instead of the Land, Air and Sea and Sub, we became elements of the Canadian Forces. We adopted a common rank structure and a common green uniform. Our Directorate changed its name to the Directorate of Equipment Requirements Air and we had six officers. One of them was a US exchange officer who had served a tour in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot, and two sergeants. We were responsible for all helicopters in the Forces except the few Search and Rescue that the Air Force had and the Navy helicopters because the Navy did not call them

helicopters, they called them a weapons system. So never mention the word helicopter to the Navy guys.

Our main job was to look after the requirement of all the staffing etc, that was required for all these choppers. But our main concern became, very quickly, that the choppers we had were running out of their life expectancy. So our main concern, actually for the next three years, was the procurement of new helicopters for the Canadian Forces. What we required was the light observation helicopter -- the LOH -- the utility tactical transport helicopter -- the UTTH -- and the heavy lift helicopter. So we had to decide what were the best machines for our needs, come up with the numbers required, who was going to build them and then, of course, the funding, maintenance facilities, where they would be located, pilots to be trained, etc, etc. Then we had to convince our masters of all of this.

Another part of our job was, I spent three weeks in London on the NATO Military Air Standardization, MAS meeting, as a member of the helicopter subcommittee. This was a case where NATO pilots -- we were part of the transport committee and we had a subcommittee for helicopters. We got together as pilots from all the NATO countries trying to standardize procedures. This was particular in Germany, or in Europe, at the time because of the NATO requirements. So, radio procedures, maintenance procedures, fuelling procedures -- all of this -- the more we could be standardized, the easier it would be for us to drop into bases other than our own and get what we required.

During the summer of '68, we had demonstrations by the various helicopter companies, which was the LOH, the light observation. [There] was the Hiller 1100, the Bell Jet Ranger and Hueys OH6A, which was at that time used by the US in Vietnam. We managed to get a contract for 12 Bell single-engine utility helicopters, called the CUH-1H, to get us into the turbine area, because the choppers we had before were rotary engines. We needed to get in to the turbine because that was what was coming on. So not only from the pilots, but the training for mechanics, etc. In October of '68, I went with a group of pilots and crew chiefs to the Bell plant in Fort Worth, Texas.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Stan Cote, end of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Stan, you were saying that you had to go to Texas. Would you just continue on with that please?

COTE: Yeah. We went down to the Bell plant in Fort Worth, Texas and we brought back 12 Hueys to Petawawa. They were going to be used there as -- to start the training for both pilots and mechanics on turbines. In that year, in October, I went to an Army Aviation Association Conference in Washington, DC, with our American exchange officer. And picked up a lot of good points from the Americans there because that was their premier Army aviation organization in the States.

We tried, because of our requirements, we tried to work as much as possible through Larry's contacts. We got a lot of good information from the Americans on the helicopters. Because they were developing new techniques, procedures in Vietnam and, rather than have to wait through the back door type of thing, we got it practically as soon as these things come out. So it was a great help to us. In November, I went to another.

We also had, along with the NATO Standardization, we had another Air Standardization Coordinating Committee, ASCC Working Party 44, which was the States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It was not the NATO one. I was, again, on the helicopter subcommittee on there. We went to New Zealand. I spent two weeks there, again on standardization procedures, as far as they were concerned to our working group. Then back home.

In '69, most of our staff work was on procuring our new helicopter fleet and where to locate them. Initially, the Army plan had been to allocate two helicopters per infantry battalion, six for each Recce squadron, four for Artillery Air OP flight and two in each Brigade Headquarters. That was the LOH, light observation. The utility helicopters were to go to the brigades and the heavy lift helicopters would go to the Service Corps because, as far as we were concerned, the heavy lift were just big trucks. The UTTH were middle-sized trucks and the LOHs were scout cars or jeeps.

Then integration had taken hold and the Air Force had started disbanding fighter squadrons and thus were losing pilot positions. So in the early days, when they had shown little interest in helicopters, suddenly they became aircraft. They figured, well, we can form these into squadrons and keep our pilot positions. So the land element lost their helicopters and the air element acquired five squadrons that would support the land element.

INTERVIEWER: So what was happening here was that you were making a transition from the air element to support the land element basically. What was going on?

COTE: One of the things we had to do was figure out where we were going to put these helicopters, once we got them. Our initial numbers we were hoping for was sort of around 75 LOHs, 50 UTTHs and 12 or so of the heavies. But we had to put these things somewhere because they were now going to be squadrons. Where initially, they would have went out just to the bases where they were to be located, now we had a much bigger organization, both pilot and maintenance wise, and support wise. So we had to have a location that would basically require new hangarage, new maintenance facilities, etc. We spent most of August and part of September, flying around the country, to Quebec City, Fredericton, Petawawa, Calgary, Edmonton, looking for possible sites to build facilities for the new squadrons. The end result, of course, was that Gagetown, Valcartier, Petawawa and Edmonton were selected for the helicopter squadrons, and Ottawa and Edmonton for the two maintenance squadrons.

INTERVIEWER: So, once you had completed the finding and selecting and establishing the sites for the air squadrons, was there any sort of change in equipment that occurred at this time?

COTE: Well, one of the things that we looked at was the utility helicopter, twin versus single. The Americans had done a study proving that the single was superior or better than the twin. The reason -- it was a bit slanted because they wanted a whole bunch of helicopters right now and there was no twin on the market. So they, I guess, slanted the study to the way they wanted it, which was normal.

But our section head, who was Lieutenant Colonel Crosbie at the time, decided that our UTTHs should have twin engines. There was no twin-engine chopper in production at the time. A couple of companies had them on the drawing board, but there was nothing flying. I had a friend, an ex-pilot, who was working for United Aircraft in Montreal, and had run across them somewhere. And in passing, he mentioned that they were developing a twin-engine pack for the Beaver. I remembered that so we got together and we visited United. We urged them to get together with Bell to see if they could come up with something. Anyway, over the next couple of years, they mated the twin pack with the Huey airframe and come up with the twin Huey, which we called the CUH-1N.

INTERVIEWER: So you saw the development of the twin Huey helicopter. What was next in your own career?

COTE: One of the things. Because we were looking at the Bell OH-58A helicopter, I went down to Rucker on a three-week course to get converted on to the Bell. Rucker was the main training base for the helicopters in the US. There was choppers of every shape, size, from the little Bells to the great big sky-cranes, etc, flying every direction, nonstop, day and night. So that was a good eye opener for us to look at this and in our bits and piece time, to look at the maintenance facilities, stuff like that, because this was something we would have to look at down the line.

I then went -- I got back home in early '70. I went to Petawawa on a three week Base Rescue course on the 1H, which was that single engine that we'd bought a few years before. As a refresher course, because I was supposed to be -- I was going to be posted to a flying position in June. Then in May of that year, of '70, or sorry, '71, we hosted the Aviation Equipment Conference in Ottawa at the Ottawa Conference Centre, which was quite a feather in our cap. We had aviation people from all over the world, Army aviation, come here and we hosted them in the Conference Centre.

With our new helicopters come in to service, we ended up with 72 Light Observation, 50 Utilities, and 12 Chinooks. The helicopter squadrons had been numbered with 408 Squadron in Edmonton, 427 Squadron in Petawawa, 430 Squadron -- which was a French squadron, in Valcartier. 403 Training Squadron that had been in Petawawa was moved to Gagetown and the two Aircraft Forward Maintenance Squadrons, AFMSs, were formed, one in Edmonton and one in Ottawa.

I was posted to 2AFMS in Uplands Airbase as a maintenance test pilot. Initially we were with the 450 Squadron, which was the heavy lift squadron in Ottawa. Then we were moved to our own hangar at Hangar 11 in Uplands. Then I was back in Ottawa, back in Petawawa, for the transition course for the twin in August. By that time I had reached 1500 hours helicopter. In September, started flying as a maintenance test pilot at 2AFMS.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, you mentioned 2AFMS. What did that stand for?

COTE: 2AFMS was, and 1AFMS in Edmonton, were the second and third line maintenance squadrons for all the helicopters. Edmonton looked after 408 Squadron, and Ottawa here, in 2AFMS, we looked after all of the remaining helicopters in the east. The squadron had a strength of about 200. Most of the personnel were from the Air Force, with a couple from the Navy and a few from the Army. We were to operate as a Land Aviation Maintenance Unit, so we had to be trained in field operations. A little different from the Air Force side of the house.

Being the only Army officer in the unit, I inherited the squadron operations job, fortunately. I was responsible for ensuring that the squadron personnel were trained and organized to operate as a field unit. With the Air and Naval personnel, this meant starting from square one. Learn to live in the field, winter and summer. Weapons and range training. We had our own B Vehicles, so we had to qualify everyone as a driver. Our maintenance function was to provide third line maintenance to all the squadrons, in Petawawa, Valcartier, Gagetown and 450 Squadron. All aircraft had to have a periodic maintenance inspection cycle. Every so many flying hours, it would be returned to a third line maintenance facility, where it would be taken apart, checked and put back together. At certain checks, life items would be replaced. Our job, as pilots, were to first, ground run the aircraft for about an hour and then flight test it, following a checklist, to ensure that all the systems worked.

INTERVIEWER: So you were in an actual flying position at 2AFMS. What were your specific duties?

COTE: Well, my main duty was a maintenance test pilot. As such, I was responsible, along with another pilot that was also then later posted in to me, to ground run the aircraft initially, for about an hour, to make sure that all the systems worked. When the ground run was successful, then we'd go on about a roughly three-quarter of an hour test flight where you'd test all the components.

This was literally a twenty-four hour a day job because we had. If I did a test flight in the afternoon and the aircraft came back snagged for some reason, the mechanics would keep working on it. So I might get a call at nine, ten, eleven o'clock at night, at home, saying we're ready for a ground run. So I would go in, ground run the aircraft. If it was serviceable -- you can't test fly at night but once it was serviceable ground run wise -- then we'd fly it first thing in the morning. Because quite often the squadron was hurting

for aircraft or there was an exercise coming up or for many reasons. So we worked basically, if required, on a seven-twenty four basis. That was my primary job.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned snagged. What does that mean?

COTE: A snag is a, a radio doesn't work, there's a -- you come back and there's a hump in the aircraft. You can feel a little hump, hump, hump, hump. It's a little bit out of track, what we called, we'd snag it. So you'd write it down. The mechanics go back, they might have to track the rotor, re-track the rotor or replace the radio or... So anything that would not -- that would make the aircraft not serviceable was called a snag.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, while you were in this maintenance squadron, what type of aircraft did you test and what test procedures did you go through?

COTE: After we did the ground one, which was a matter of making sure that all the guages worked, were in the proper range, that the radios worked, that the aircraft, at this stage, seemed ready to fly. You'd do a hover check. You'd pull her up into the hover and sit there. You'd rock the rotor back and forth. You'd bounce it up and down in the air a little bit, make sure that everything seemed solid -- you didn't want to bounce in the air at a thousand feet and fall out of the sky -- and basically that everything felt OK. You didn't have any strange feelings in the controls or in your rudder pedals, that you felt you were ready to fly.

When you do a test flight, you take off and, in our case, we flew outside the Ottawa area. You had a checklist and you'd go through and do various things. You'd check, first of all, that the aircraft flew smoothly. We had one problem that quite often arose. It was what we called pedal buzz. You'd feel a vibration in your pedal. Well, there was a procedure where you had to land, move a bolt, change it around a little bit in the tail rotor and the pedal buzz would go away. So you'd make sure that you didn't have this. You'd rock the aircraft again. Now you're at a thousand feet. You're in the air. You do turns. We had a procedure we called topping where you pulled up at full power to see that your ranges were, all your gauges were right and where they should be, that you had fuel flow. Now remember, in the Huey, you had two engines so you had to have them matching -- one gauge wasn't different from the other one, which sometimes happened. The single engine was a little easier, the Kiowa. But it was basically just to make sure that the aircraft had no unusual vibrations or everything worked. The radios worked, the direction finder worked. That you were ready to take that aircraft, give it to a squadron and say, go fly, operational.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the Kiowa helicopter. How did you get your qualification on that aircraft?

COTE: Initially, the Kiowa, that's what I went to Rucker for, was to get my check out on the Kiowa. Then the twin, I got the conversion course, at Petawawa.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, what other responsibilities did 2AFMS have?

COTE: 2AFMS was tasked to provide helicopter maintenance support to helicopters deployed to Norway as part of the NATO Northern Flank development or deployment. So, for preparation for this, we had to practice deployments to a field location, learn to live in the snow and to. While we couldn't practice carrying out actual maintenance on the helicopter as such, we had to have a tent or cover so that we could put a chopper underneath it and simulate changing engines, changing rotors or what have you. We actually sent a detachment over to Norway and did a deployment there. I didn't go because there was no requirement for a pilot to go on that. But my maintenance people went and then they slept out and provided the support the choppers needed.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, so as part of the 2 Aircraft Forward Maintenance Squadron, you were involved with NATO. Were there other duties that you did locally here as well?

COTE: Yeah. We had many tasks here. Quite often for visiting VIPs arriving at the airport, we would be asked to provide security, air security on the routes that they were taking into town. Queen Elizabeth, King Hussein, Dr. Kissinger, the Prince, Princess Anne, you name it. We had pretty well flown all of those. I remember, I think it was King Hussein, there was some report that Carlos, the master terrorist, was possibly going to try and shoot down King Hussein's aircraft. So we had to do an extra security patrol on the outskirts of the airport to make sure that there wasn't someone out there with a handheld, shoulder mounted missile of some sort. That was the type the thing we did.

We also, quite often, two or three times during the summer, we would do cadet familiarization flights. We'd go out to Cornwall, Trenton, various towns around the Ottawa Valley. Spend three or four hours flying the local cadets squadrons. We also had, of course, every once in a while we'd get inspections by various generals so this meant that we had to keep our drill up. I, again, as the only Army guy in the squadron, I was always in charge of the drill and make sure that the drill went off properly.

We were tasked, as part of the Base Defense Force so I had to make sure our people were trained in that sort of duties. I got some instructors in from the infantry in Petawawa because I knew people out there. They come in and they give us instruction on the Base Defense duties. You've seen them where everybody lined up with a shield and they pound a stick on the shield and yell and holler. We had to do all that sort of thing. That was part of one of our Base duties.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, how would you summarize your posting to 2AFMS?

COTE: Well, it was interesting, to say the least. Because I was -- being the only Army officer, I was, and we were now in effect, an Army support unit -- I was, got the job of doing all the Army type things. So I was the training officer, the Ops officer, besides being a test pilot. One of the things I had to do for this deployment to Norway was, I had to write the squadron Standard Operations Procedures, SOPs. This is a document that states everything that must happen when this group of people go from point A to point B,

including every nut and bolt that has to be taken to make sure that the aircraft, if something happens on the other end, they have the piece to fix it. I remember this particular one. It took me about 40 hours. That's just me doing the writing. I had all my mechanics out drawing up the lists. So this was pretty extensive, because it had never been done before. And remember, this was the days before computers.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

COTE: So everything was written out by hand then typed up in X number of copies. It wasn't quite as easy as it would be today.

INTERVIEWER: You must have amassed quite a few flying hours while you were at the test or the AFMS?

COTE: Yeah. Like in '73, as a squadron, we put 124 aircraft through periodic inspections and 41 aircraft with what we called major snags, which required the full ground run, test flight, that type of thing. During the year, I flew 333 hours on the twin Huey and 110 hours on the LOH. My total, by that time, was up to 2300 hours on helicopters. In 1974, we put 129 aircraft through periodic inspections and I had flown 220 hours on the twin Huey and 80 hours on the Kiowa. In 1975, we carried out 41 inspections on the Kiowa, 62 on the twin Huey and six on the MTHs. I actually got into a helicopter over 450 times and flew 350 hours. So that was just the flying portion of it.

Now my other duties took up three times as much as that. And, as I say, quite often it was weekends, nights. There was no time, other than when you go on a couple weeks leave, that you weren't on duty. You were literally seven-twenty four. Called in on Sunday because an aircraft had something wrong with it from one of the squadrons, come in and we would deal with it.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, you've had a phenomenal career in the Army, as a trooper, as an officer, in Army aviation, you've been in Korea, you've been with the Royal Canadian Navy. What was your most memorable flying experience?

COTE: I've had many terrifying flights. I remember one up in the mountains of Germany when we were flying up a valley and suddenly run into clouds. Of course, the Hiller had no instruments and a terrifying moment until I done a 360 and got out. An engine failure as I was taking off in a field in Germany, fortunately, about two feet off the ground. An accident where a mechanic pulled a bolt out of the tail rotor drive and severed the drive and the aircraft crashed on its side and burnt up.

But I think that the thing that I sort of remember the most is every time I looked at the Gatineaus in the fall, of the fall colours. I used take, to sneak out with a, for an hour with a Kiowa, which was this small helicopter, a LOH. Fly up and down the valleys of the Gatineau with my skids in the tops of the trees. And that, to me, is what I love most about flying. It's just on my own, doing that sort of thing rather than some of the terrifying things that happened during the course of my flying.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, you were an Army pilot that had to work inside an Air Force environment for a long period of time. What was that like?

COTE: Initially it was, for the Army pilots, as the initial, the original Army pilots, it was a bit restrictive because we were used to, particularly after Germany where we had no rules or regulations. You know, you done the job. The helicopter was not a helicopter, it was a vehicle. It was a scout car. So we used the vehicle as it was required to do the job. That was with the Recce troop. Once they become aviation battalions or squadrons, and the Air Force mentality and procedures come in to view, I think the Army side of it was kind of forgotten.

I know Army people who have told me that they were most unhappy when the helicopters were taken away from the Army, from the land element, and put into the air element. Because what they wanted was a vehicle. The CO wanted to do a recce, he wanted to do it now. Jump in the thing, go out, check something. One of his platoon commanders wanted something, do it now. But once the squadron got organized, it happened for a little while but then the procedures took over.

There was a great big board on the wall and a whole bunch of checkmarks had to be made, of night flying, nav training one, two, three, four auto-rotations and so on. All these little boxes had to be checked in all the time and all the pilot's names were there. So consequently, the CO would call up and, "Can I get a helicopter?" "Well, we don't really have one now. Maybe in a couple of hours." And of course, that only happened about twice and the CO would say, "OK, fine," and write you off.

I knew a lot of Army people who had come to that conclusion. That they were no longer Army aviation and because of the requirements, which in some cases were safety and some cases were a little overboard, so even the crew rest in some cases. Pilots, we bent it a little bit in Germany, if the job was required to be done. But once to you got into an Air Force regime, this couldn't happen anymore. You flew eight hours and then you had to have so many hours crew rest. Never mind what the tactical requirement was. The war could, or in the case of exercises...

Let's face it, the Army's life and blood is exercises. They do put a lot of planning into it. And it means a lot to them. If they want some vehicles to do something, to transport a company, to transport some people, they want it now. Not saying, "Well, our pilot's on crew rest. They're not available right now." You only ask once or twice and then that's it. You say, "OK, you can go home now. You're really no value to us. You're taking up our resources and we're not getting anything back from you. So we'd just as soon not have anything to do with you."

But that was policy-wise. People-wise, it was a different matter. Generally speaking, we were accepted. Initially, we weren't accepted as pilots by the Air Force themselves until we got to know the people. Once we got to know the people, well then, that was different. Or once they started to fly with us.

But in the hierarchy of the Air Force, they, I think, tended to look down a little bit on the Army pilots. Now, that's not unusual. The Air Force in those days, and it may still be, was jet pilot mentality. And if you weren't a jet pilot, even in the Air Force, you were sort of a third class citizen. They run it and they run it their way. Once we got working with the people, our mechanics were great. In the AFMS there, one of the things that I noticed is that we were always used to working. The Air Force had this, to me, funny idea that if you worked from past quitting time -- and one of the night duties we had -- that you got time off the next day. Well, to me, that was a bit strange. However, I got used to it, like many other things I got used to.

But people wise, the individual mechanics, the individual officers, we got along great. And I don't think. Later on, our Army pilots commanded tactical helicopter squadrons, rescue squadrons and any then -- gradually, if there was some bias there to start with, it was overcome.

INTERVIEWER: Stan, I'd like you to think of somebody listening to this tape, perhaps a hundred years from now. What message would you like to leave them about your personal experiences in Army aviation?

COTE: I started, I wasn't in the first steps of Army aviation. But I was, pretty well, not too far down the line -- with basically first generation helicopters. We see a lot today of the Americans, in particular people of my vintage with the Vietnam War, with the helicopters and the mass of attack operations they had -- to a certain extent in the Gulf Wars with the Apaches and all these other ones. It makes you wonder, you know, that we had these basic machines that I guess you could say was the Model T, you know, of aircraft. I think most people have seen the MASH stories with the Bell helicopters with the casualty stretchers on the side. Well, we had similar stretchers that we could put on the Hiller and sometimes we would carry people with those.

I guess it was just the start of something that was new to us, was coming on the world. The Americans were a little further ahead of us but we were not far behind. So it was, to me, enjoyable being part of that. Meeting a lot of people that were excited about where the helicopters were going. We weren't always right but I think, generally speaking, we got to where we would like to be and can only go on in the future.

INTERVIEWER: Stan Cote, thank you so much for your insights and your opinions. You've provided us an excellent background of your career in Army aviation and I thank you on behalf of the project for that. Interview with Stan Cote, of 17 December 2003. Interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS

