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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: John A. Dicker

INTERVIEWER: J.R. Digger MacDougall

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Transcription of Interview Number: 31D 4 DICKER, JA**John A. Dicker****Interviewed 22 January, 2004****by J.R. Digger MacDougall**

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with John Dicker recorded on 22 January 2004 at Ottawa, Ontario. Interviewed by J.R. Digger MacDougall. Tape one, side one.

DICKER: My name is John Dicker.

INTERVIEWER: John why don't you start off by giving us some of your early military background, where and when you enrolled, where you brought up that sort of thing?

DICKER: I was born in North Bay Ontario in 1941. Didn't particularly come from a military family directly, except I did have relatives who had served during the war etc. So that got me very interested in the military and, as most young people do, they get interested in cadet corps. I joined the Army Cadet Corps and the Air Cadets in North Bay at the same time. It got very interesting because when we had a joint parade I had to show in two places wearing different uniforms. I was in cadets for about five years in North Bay. That took me up to high school graduation, grade 13. I made a decision to join the Canadian Army just like most people to do get out of the house, get out of town after high school, do something different.

I applied for enrolment in the Officer Candidate Program, which it was at time, in 1959. I was accepted into that program to commence training in September 1960. That's how it all started. My choice of corps was the Royal Canadian Corp of Signals because I was an active HAM radio operator at that time, followed by the Armoured Corps and then the Infantry. We didn't know which corps we were going to be assigned to until after first phase training. Which for potential Signal Corps officers training was done in Camp Borden at the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps School, Officer and NCO training squadron. It wasn't until about a week before we graduated from that particular phase that we were told where we were going to be going. I was lucky enough to be accepted into the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and subsequently posted to the Royal Canadian School of Signals in Kingston for the rest of my officer training. That's how things got started.

INTERVIEWER: How soon was it, then, that you got into flying?

DICKER: It was during phase three or four at the School of Signals that our class was visited by the Deputy Director of Signals from Ottawa. He stood up in front of the class and asked if there was anybody in the class who would be interested in becoming a pilot in the Signals Corps. Well, you can imagine the reaction of these thirty some odd students. Thirty hands shot up in the air. Anyway, all the names were taken of all the people who were interested. That was the last thing that was heard about that particular subject until January 1962. It was at that time that I was in my first field posting at 2 Signal Squadron in Petawawa, serving with a very young Lieutenant MacDougall at the time. That we heard that two Signal officers

had been selected to go to Centralia to undergo the pre aircrew selection procedure etc. This other gentleman Lieutenant Malcolm Hellick [?] and I drove from Petawawa over to Centralia in February 1962 for the aircrew selection process.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what you went through in that selection process?

DICKER: Yes I do. First of all we met up with a whole bunch of other potential pilot trainees they're Service Corps, Armoured Corps etc.. I don't remember their names at this time. We certainly did the barrage of tests that they give to potential pilots. One of the ones that I remember in particular was sitting in a room with a tape recorder and a head set and they read a sequence of numbers to you. They were just basic numbers but you were to add the number you were just hearing to the number you heard just before that and give the answer at the same time. Remembering the number that was being asked you now. This had to go on for a period of about two or three minutes. That certainly taxed one's grey matter. I was told by one fellow was the way to do that was to do every second one. I tried every one and I guess I must have passed because I was eventually approved for air crew training.

The other thing we did was the Link trainer. I think everyone did the Link trainer where they put you in this little simulated aircraft and did all kinds of things, talked to you through a headset and told you turn, climb and descend, so on and so forth. That was the aptitude side of it from a flying point of view. The rest of it was just medical stuff -- vision, hearing and so on and so forth. Then we drove back to Petawawa and it wasn't until March that I received a posting from Petawawa to the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre at Rivers, ostensibly to undergo pilot training on a course that would be coming up very soon. I landed in Rivers in April 1962. I was posted to the Air Support Signal Troop, which was a small troop of signallers at Rivers that was tasked with providing all ground and air communications for the Canadian Army as a matter of fact. It was there that I sat for several months before any sign of any aircrew training popped up.

When it did pop up, I was asked to report to my OC's office, who was then a pilot himself, a Lieutenant Colonel Bob Cross, a Patricia. He informed me I would not be going on flying training because the troop required a signals officer more that it required a pilot. That was devastating to a young second lieutenant who, at least I thought, was posted to Rivers for flying training. I walked away very sad. But one thing that Cross did say was that, "If your corps will provide a replacement for you while you are away on your one year flying course, then you can go." That message was sent to Ottawa. Ottawa came back with a message that "Dicker would proceed on flying training in August 1962 as planned and that a replacement, parachute trained, would be forthcoming very soon." Sure enough a message did come in posting a Signal Corps officer into the troop which allowed me to go off and do my flying training at Centralia, in August 1962.

INTERVIEWER: John, you then get posted to Centralia to start your flying training. As recall you were a young army officer. What was it like for a young army officer to be going into an air force environment in August 1962?

DICKER: Well, if memory serves, it was all a very, very new experience for me having not having served in an Air Force environment before. At the time the Air Force were training their new officers just the same as our corps schools were training us. Although we were billeted in a separate H hut at Centralia we were hobknobbing with the young air force officers, officer cadets who were under training. But I was a second lieutenant and I met up

with my fellow course mates at Centralia in 1962, the most senior of which was a captain. There were a couple of captains -- Bill Marshall, Canadian Guards; Jack Lovell, artillery; a couple of lieutenants and the rest of us were young, wet behind the ears second lieutenants who hadn't really done that much in the army in the way of field postings.

As I mentioned, I went to Petawawa in January 1962 and left in April '62. So that was my short exposure to the field in Petawawa. Then back to Rivers, of course, for more work until the flying training in Centralia. But to answer your question, I found myself in a world where it was study, study, study. It was a course that was obviously going to set your career pattern if you passed it so there was no real levity there. It was hard work. I think everybody on our course realized that. There were one or two who were exceptions and didn't study quite as hard as others. However, in my personal case I dedicated myself to the course and had some interesting times during the course. I almost did not make it. I'm not sure if you want me to elaborate on that?

I guess we all did our first solo work after nine to eleven hours. I was no exception there. I had a very good instructor right from the very beginning, a chap by the name of Flying Officer Vern Peppered who had just come to Centralia off a CF-100 tour overseas. He was full of experience and he was a good person to fly with initially because he was very understanding and easy to get along with. However, I soloed and had a very interesting experience during my first solo. I don't know if you want me to go into that at all?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, please do.

DICKER: Anyway we're sort of lapsing into war stories. But I found it kind of interesting. I had done OK up to the solo point. The way they did it was they took you out for a trip and flew around for an hour or so. You knew you were around solo time but you never knew when the instructor was going to say, 'OK, it's time for you to go by yourself.' Anyway, we did an hour's worth of flying in the training area and then we taxied back into the ramp. Vern told me not to shut the aircraft down and he got out, did up his harnesses in the back seat and said, 'I want you to take the aircraft up for one circuit, land it, and bring it back in and shut it down.' So that was the signal that I was going for my first solo.

Away we went. We taxied out and did the run-up, the usual procedure. Clearance for take-off, took off. Everything was normal. Did a textbook circuit. Came around on a base leg turn final and I was high. I could tell I was high on final. I decided I was gonna land this aircraft come hell or high water because it was my first solo and I wasn't going to go around again and suffer the embarrassment. I could just imagine my instructor. The instructors go up to the control tower when one of their students was soloing and watch with the controller up there. I could imagine what was going through Vern's mind when he saw me doing my final approach. I think I was still at circuit height halfway down the runway on final. Anyway, I did land the aircraft. It was not a bad landing except that I was very rapidly running out of runway. I could see the end of the runway coming up very quickly and I wasn't quite sure what to do. I didn't want to ground loop. I didn't want to go over on my back. In the Chipmunk you had a handbrake that you applied very gently in cooperation with your rudders. I started to apply the handbrake and as the end of the runway was coming up very, very quickly. I managed to skid the aircraft around 180 degrees to the left. I ended up in a cloud of dust just off to the left hand side of the runway pointing 180 degrees to the runway heading.

The tower came up on the radio, and I can't remember the number of the aircraft, but they asked me if I was OK. The aircraft was still running and I said, 'Tower, I'm fine.' They said, 'OK, taxi back onto the runway and bring it in and shut it down.' I knew right off the bat that lady luck was looking down on me because the normal procedure would be to have the aircraft shut down and the crash trucks despatched. But the controller, who was a long in the tooth fellow, knew that it was my first solo and if I'd been put through that particular procedure, I'd probably would have lost my confidence and never really soloed again. I take my hat off to the quality of the air force instructors at Centralia when I look back on that one particular embarrassing incident.

INTERVIEWER: John, that was a fabulous experience that you had. What sort of training did you do in the Chipmunk at Centralia?

DICKER: Let me dry the palms of my hands off here from that last story that I just told because it brings back so many vivid memories. Our training consisted mainly of upper air work, up near Goderich and so on -- and a lot of navigation. We were given particular nav routes by number -- nav 1, nav 2, nav 3, type of thing. Some would be dual, some would be solo. Then we would come back and do upper air work which involved full aerobatics, loops, spins, etc., etc. The instructors would show us what a flick roll was because we weren't supposed to do that because it was bad for the aircraft. We were shown what these things were.

Then we would come back to the circuit and do several circuits. Different types of landing -- short field landing, flapless, full flap, etc., etc. Certainly one of the most challenging parts of our training was solo navs. They wouldn't be that far. However, you could get lost. The weather at Centralia during that time of year being very close to, I guess it's Lake Erie, was very unpredictable. We did have a couple of students who I can remember in particular who got caught in snow squalls and didn't come back based on their ETA. I remember one fellow on our course, Lieutenant Mayome [?], Patricia, was out on a nav and he was an hour overdue. Matter of fact we were all in the mess drinking Coke, as we did in those days, and it was quite a relief to hear the sound of that Chipmunk engine coming in about 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Those were the sorts of things that went through our minds when we went on our solo navs. I know on one dual nav I went on a trip down to Sarnia, down towards that area, which was kind of unique because it was a high traffic area and we would only be allowed to do that with an instructor. I remember I missed my turning point and the instructor allowed me to continue. We were just about to enter American air space when he asked me if I had any idea where I was. I had to admit at that point that, no, I didn't. He said, "Well, you're just about over Detroit so you'd better do a left turn and come back into Canada." That's the sort of training that we did.

INTERVIEWER: Did the army pilots go through exactly the same sort of training that the air force pilots did, in your recollection?

DICKER: To my recollection, yes, they did.

INTERVIEWER: And did you do formation flying?

DICKER: No.

INTERVIEWER: Aerobatics?

DICKER: No. We did no formation flying as part of the curriculum except when we were out in the training area and a couple of the instructors met up they would show us a little bit of what formation flying was really like. They would tuck right in to the point where you figured you were going to touch for sure.

There was one thing that I wanted to mention back in a previous section about the instructors that we had in our particular flight and the conflicts that could arise between an instructor and a student. I mentioned that I had a superb instructor for the first part of my training up to solo. The practice was to change your instructor part way through your training, just in case your instructor was missing some of your bad points or good points or whatever. It was about the 20 hour point out of a 60 hour course that I got another instructor, a young Flying Officer who I didn't like from the very beginning. And I won't go into the details but you just have those gut feelings about people. I never flew well for him. He yelled at you, he poked you and you were rattled enough when you were learning new techniques in the air. It got to the point where I was getting very, very bad debriefings. I could sense that if I'd kept flying this way that I wasn't going to be on the course for very much longer.

I made a command decision as a young second lieutenant who had never been in a position like this before to ask for an instructor change because I harkened back to my first instructor who I thought was the best in the books. Anyway, I had to see the flight commander, Johnny Johnson, and had a long chat with him and he understood. I received an instructor change and from that point on everything went extremely well. I ended up with a decent rating. Passed all the clear hood tests with the exception of the final nav test. I had to do a certification -- I think we called them certifications, if I'm not mistaken. If you were particularly weak in one aspect of a particular aspect of the training -- whether it be navigation, simulated instrument flying which we used to do under the hood -- they would take you up with another instructor just to confirm that you are OK. All went well with this new instructor except that I had to do a minor certification on the nav. I passed that and graduated with great joy.

INTERVIEWER: So, John, you graduated and you got posted to Rivers. What happened then?

DICKER: Well, in January 1962 we started our light aircraft pilot course at the Army Aviation Tactical Training School, AATTS. That course was to last from January through to wings parade in April 1963. We started off by doing the usual sort of thing -- learning the aircraft functioning systems and so on and so forth. We would not be allowed to fly this thing unless we could figure out all the temperatures and so on. That was done it was quite an interesting experience getting into an L-19 for the first time. It was a tail dragger, the same as a Chipmunk except that you were sitting up very high. In those days, '63, we were using parachutes. I'm not sure what we had under our bottoms. We were sitting up very high in the front and the visibility was excellent. We didn't have this long nose to look over. I think everybody on this course had the same reaction to the L-19. It was an absolutely superb aircraft to fly. We were delighted with that aspect of it.

We were taken up to solo time in very short order. I think most us soloed in seven or eight hours. Then we'd be taken out for a pre-solo check by some real long in the tooth fellows that

were on the strength of the school at the time. These guys had been around. They had flown everything from Austers to you name it. We were very, very fortunate. Plus, we had as instructors a lot of people who were air force retirees. So we had the benefit of an army officer who had air force flying training in his background. I don't know whether this was the same in all the courses, but our course certainly had some very, very highly qualified instructors.

Away we went. It was in the dead of winter in Rivers. It was very cold. I think that is an understatement. Most of our flying was done in extremely cold weather conditions and that made the performance of the L-19 even more pronounced. That aircraft was a very high performance aircraft given its degrees of flap and 234, whatever it was, brake horse power engine. But it was a very high performance aircraft in those temperatures. In some ways, I'm very pleased that we did our training in that weather because it made our short field work much less risky. Not that we were worried about that. But the aircraft would take off in a very short take off run, as opposed to during the summer when it was quite hot you could have a very serious problems getting off some of the little field strips in the valley just south of Rivers.

INTERVIEWER: So how did your flying training differ at the Army Aviation Tactical Training School, AATTS, in L19s than what you took in your 120 hour course, let say, at Centralia and Chipmunks?

DICKER: Well, the flying was different in that we were being training in army type flying -- this is the way I saw it anyway -- which involved a lot of tactical type subjects that we weren't doing in Centralia. Centralia was the primary flying school to teach us the rudiments of flying. We were using those newly learned fundamentals in the L-19, as well as the additional requirements of army flying which would involve short field work, formation flying, things like bundle drops, line laying. I don't want to get into all the different things that we were actually taught but it involved a lot of flying close to the ground. The short field work was particularly exciting, and demanding. We also did upper air work to keep our hand in with chandelles and steep turns and spins and so on. But we were being taught more along the lines of what an army pilot would do in the field as opposed to just flying a basic aircraft and learning how to take off and land and turn.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned bundle dropping. As I recall there were other drops that we did. We dropped messages. There was even cable laying with L-19s.

DICKER: Yes, there was indeed. That was a very interesting aspect of the training. The bundle drops were always exciting because you had to load these things yourself. They were pretty hefty bundles. Although the wings had the capacity to take four bundles, I think we only put one under each wing for training purposes. But that was very, very, very interesting. Little parachutes attached to the bundles and they would assess you on how close you came to dropping them to where you were supposed.

The wire laying was something very dear to my heart, being a Signals Corps officer. We had spools or drums of WD1 signal cable. It was quite interesting you would connect two of these up to one of the racks on one side. You had to make sure you had the pay out end connected to the standing end of the other bundle. If you didn't get them connected up quite right you ended up feeling an awful tug on one wing when you got the point where one had emptied and the other one was to continue. This was one aspect of army flying that I particularly

enjoyed. And I could see the benefits in this one because it saved a lot of time if you could aerial lay line as opposed to having to lay it by a truck, following all the routes and so on in the training area.

Another interesting part of our training was aerial photography. We did this both solo and we did it mutual. It was not done very often solo because you had to take both hands off the controls and take a picture out the side window. So we normally carried another student with us. The cameras were hand held. There was a handle on both sides. They were the K20 cameras and we had another one that started with an F. Anyway, the K20 was the most used one of them all. We would be sent out on a particular trip to photograph a particular intersection or location. The photographic evidence of your navigation ability was going to be there in hard copy. You couldn't, perhaps, do what you might have done if you weren't taking pictures. If you went out on a nav trip and you had to go to point A and you could say you went to point A and maybe you were never there, but the instructor would never know. But in the case of the photo exercises, we had to take a picture of our turning point. These photographs were developed by the photo unit right at Rivers. They welcomed that sort of thing because it was part of their bread and butter. Photographs would be back very quickly, almost in time for your debriefing by your instructor after your particular mission. So that was a very, very interesting aspect of flying at Rivers.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have to parachute or take any training in parachute work?

DICKER: As it pertained to the army flying courses, no. We were probably told how to land if we had to jump. We certainly were briefed on how to jettison the door on the aircraft and get out of the aircraft. Disconnect your headset so you don't break your neck and stuff like that. But we were never given much by way of actual parachute training. In retrospect, it probably would not have been a bad idea. But to the best of my limited knowledge, I do not know of any pilots other than the one in Korea -- Liston, the artillery pilot -- who actually jumped out of a light aircraft. He jumped out an Auster because the aircraft had been shot up. But I do not know of any pilots during my time in the army who had to actually jump out of a light aircraft like an L-19.

INTERVIEWER: John, you mentioned short field take-offs and landings in the L-19. Could you describe some of that training and your experiences in it?

DICKER: Well, the training area just south of Rivers had several small strips. I can't remember exactly the length. They weren't very long, 200-300 feet. These fields were used - - depending on which way the wind was blowing at that particular time, you would go to either field strip alpha, bravo, charlie whatever. They were designated that way. They were very neatly set up. They were designed so that you could do a concealed approach to the various -- some fields weren't quite as good as others for that particular aspect of your training. But there was one field in particular that was sitting on the top of a hill. You could do an approach to this particular strip by flying down a bit of a valley just south of the strip and the up a ravine. There were several ravines you could turn up to approach this strip. You had to be very aware of your navigation at that time because if you misidentified a ravine and you popped up to land, there would be nothing there.

In my particular case, I was pretty successful most of the time. But I remember vividly one time with an old artillery instructor in the back seat, Norm Ramsey by name. We were doing a tactical approach to this particular strip and I had the ravine picked perfectly. You have to

be set up just perfectly so that when you pop up to level of this field, you've got your flaps down, your power set, and you have to be at the right attitude otherwise you are not going to be able to land that airplane and stop it before the end of the strip comes up .

Anyway, I did everything perfectly and as I popped up to land, we discovered that the cows in the farmer's field had decided to take over this particular strip, this particular day. So we had to do an abort. That is very interesting because it is a rapid application of power. Flaps up carefully because you are coming in with about 60 degrees of flaps and at a very dangerous attitude. As I said, you have to be at that attitude or else you won't get stopped at the end of the runway. So that story always stuck in my mind. Norm just chuckled and we went around. The cows had dispersed by the time we did the second approach. Mind you, they left their calling cards all over the runway. That was just about as interesting as hitting the cows.

INTERVIEWER: So, John, you finished your Army Aviation Tactical Flying School training course. What did you do next?

DICKER: We graduated in April '63, received our wings. Those of us who were designated to go on to basic helicopter training stayed at Rivers. Others who did not have that in their flying plan -- artillery, for example -- went directly from wings graduation to their units to fly actively with the Air OP and so on. In my particular case, I stayed at Rivers for two reasons. One, I was going to continue on with basic helicopter training in a few weeks plus the fact that I was still on strength -- going to be back on strength -- of the signal troop. That suited me just fine. I enjoyed Rivers.

Just as an aside, Rivers was in my opinion the cross roads of the world, insofar as the Canadian Forces were concerned. Because it was the joint air training centre, you were going to meet people from all three services throughout your time there that would put you in good stead for the rest of your military service. Without a word of a lie, there wasn't a place I could go to after I left Rivers where I didn't bump into somebody, and the common thread was Rivers. Again as an aside, I spent four years there from '62 to '66.

But going back to basic helicopter training. Those of us who had been selected for basic helicopter training started that one-month course very shortly after the light aircraft pilots course and subsequently graduated with that particular qualification which in the army days was called PH .

INTERVIEWER: John, what was your first trip like in a helicopter? You've just come off flying L-19s and Chipmunks. What was it like to now be in a helicopter?

DICKER: In a word, it was terrifying. There was no way that I could figure out how you could keep this helicopter in a hover. I think that is the basic challenge to anybody who is converting from fixed wing to rotary wing. How do you keep this helicopter straight while going up and down while you are in a hover? The familiarization that we all took in a helicopter was probably was one of the highlights of anybody's flying career. Because we could not figure out how the instructors had mastered this machine that was so unstable.

It eventually came around. We ended being able to hover that aircraft just as well as the instructors by the end of that course. One of the ways that we learned was to be taken out to a farmer's field. Land in front of a fence post in a farm yard. Bring the aircraft into a hover and just stay in front of that post. I don't many how many dozens of hours were spent in that

particular configuration. But we learned how to hover. We certainly needed it for those of us who went on to advanced tactical helicopter course. But the basic helicopter course was primarily the rotary wing equivalent of the training that we did in Centralia on the Chipmunk. We were taught the basics of rotary wing flying, given practical training in all the types of work that you could do in a helicopter. We did not do anything like flying in formation. We didn't do very much tactical -- quick stops etc, etc. That was going to be covered in a follow-on course for those who were lucky enough to take the advanced training.

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe the advanced helicopter training course then?

DICKER: It was a much longer course. The instructors on the advanced helicopter course were all army pilots, whereas the instructors in the basic helicopter course were all air force pilots. The training was very tactical in nature. We did a lot of very low flying and a lot of tactical work. The course was about two months long in recollection, and we did everything you could possibly do with that helicopter in a tactical environment. Part of the training was done in Shilo with the artillery. We fired the guns, we did cooperation work with the Armoured Corps. We did just about everything you could possibly imagine with that machine.

A wonderful machine that Hiller was. A very high powered engine, very difficult to fly. A lot of people would say it was easy to fly but it was a piston engine machine. The synchronisation of the engine rpm and the rotor rpm had to be done manually to a large degree with your throttle. I think it required an awful lot more ability to fly that machine than a turbo helicopter.

One thing I will mention about the tactical course: in my case I did not complete the course because the course was cancelled half way through as a result of several incidents and finally one accident that almost took the lives of the two pilots. One of the aspects of the training was very low level flying and you had to be very aware of cables -- hydro cables, telephone cables and what have you. Wire strikes were a very, very important thing from a flying safety point of view. Unfortunately, one of our flights was a mutual flight. They struck some hydro wires running across the road, crashed the helicopter into the ground and the helicopter caught fire. Nobody got killed but one gentleman was very seriously burned. That caused NDHQ to take a serious look at this type of training for people who didn't necessarily need that type of training for the next job they were going into. So that was the end to the advanced helicopter tactical course as a normal follow on to BHTU for folks like myself in the Signal Corps, Service Corps and so on. It was a course that was going to be run as required for folks like the Armoured Corps and perhaps the Artillery who were starting to get, weregoing to get helicopters in their Air OP flights and would be using them tactically like the Armoured Corps. For somebody in the Signal Corps to qualify on the advanced army helicopter tactical helicopter course, it was becoming a thing of the past.

INTERVIEWER: John, did you go directly on to the advanced helicopter training course?

DICKER: No. I didn't. There was a period of about a month to six weeks before that particular course was starting. We were sitting at Rivers without any real gainful employment. In my case, I was very fortunate to be asked if I wanted to go to Wainwright, Alberta, to participate in the summer concentration as part of a small ad hoc helicopter flight that was being put together at Rivers to participate with the brigade in Wainwright. I went out with some very experienced pilots from Rivers, bearing in mind that I had only received my

basic helicopter training at that point. But I was quite capable of flying the machine.

But while we were there we were exposed to a lot of very interesting things. As a young Signal Corps officer, one of the things that I had always wanted to do -- and this was something they used as a reason for Signal Corps officers flying in the first place -- was to participate in the laying out of a brigade headquarters for a brigade headquarters move to a new location. It was normally the responsibility of the 2IC of the brigade signal squadron to do that. He would normally go out with a member of brigade headquarters in a jeep or a vehicle of some sort and lay out the new headquarters. Well, I was asked as a helicopter pilot if I would fly this particular mission with a representative from the brigade headquarters for the next brigade headquarters move. I found that extremely interesting because I had been trained in what to look for in the new site for the headquarters because they were obviously interested in communications and so on. I did that and I was able to contribute not only as a pilot but as a Signal Corps officer doing one of its primary functions in the tactical operation of a brigade. I am very thankful that I was able to spend three or four weeks out in Wainwright, Alberta, doing what I was doing with a small ad hoc helicopter flight.

INTERVIEWER: John, your course was cancelled. What did you do after the advanced helicopter training course was cancelled?

DICKER: Well, I was up for posting like everybody on the course I had grown very fond of Rivers, Manitoba, for the reasons that I previously stated. I would have liked very much to stay at Rivers as the officer commanding the air support signal unit or air support signal troop because it was a unique Signals job in the entire Canadian Army and the Signal Corps. It was only one troop of its kind. As I mentioned previously, there was an officer already in commanding the troop, the fellow that had come out to take my place while I was sent on flying training. As it turned out, lady luck was again looking down on me. This officer had decided to upgrade his academic qualifications about the time that the tactical helicopter course had been cancelled. He was going off to the University of Manitoba to carry on with his education and that freed up the position as OC Air Support Signals. The Director of Signals was very glad to post me back into the troop as the OC where I stayed for the next three years.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with John Dicker, end of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History program interview with John Dicker, tape one, side two.

John, you were mentioning about your posting to the Air Support Signals Troop at Rivers, Manitoba. Will you continue please?

DICKER: I was very fortunate to be able to slip back into the slot in the troop that I had originally occupied when I was initially posted to Rivers back in April 1962. The time is now around June 1963, might be a little bit later. Concentration etc. is pretty well wrapped up as far as the participation of this little ad hoc helicopter flight was concerned. I'm back in Rivers now for the tactical course. The tactical course proceeds, is cancelled half way through, and now I'm back in the chair as OC air support signals.

I was now officially on continuation flying which meant I was getting x number of dollars for maintaining my proficiency by flying x number of hours a month. That was just fine with me because being located in Rivers there was always aircraft available to do your hours as opposed to the other chaps who were posted away to other types of jobs and had to do their continuation flying with a civilian flying club. I had the best of both worlds at Rivers, in my opinion. I was doing a Signals job. I was commanding. I was commanding a unique Signals formation in the Canadian Army and as well I had full access to both the fixed and rotary wing aircraft at Rivers.

I have a rather interesting incident to tell as part of the continuation flying, if I could just continue with that. It was the 5th of June 1963.

INTERVIEWER: You remember the date well.

DICKER: Yes, and I am not looking at notes. Anyway, it was a very simple mission. I was to go down to Winnipeg to the facility in Winnipeg that did the overhaul on various aircraft components and bring back some overhauled Hiller helicopter parts to be installed at Rivers by our techs. Can't remember the name of the outfit in Winnipeg that did the overhauling. However, straightforward mission to fly an L-19 down, pick up the parts and come home. It was a beautiful summer day. I took a RCEME craftsman with me. He did the signing of the paperwork and what have you at the facility in Winnipeg. We took off, landed in Winnipeg, taxied over to the facility, picked up the parts, had lunch and then planned to come back to Rivers. That's when the problems started because I had to start the aircraft using certain procedures and taxi from the repair facility back over to Winnipeg flight planning. That involved another shut down while I went in and flight planned. After I'd flight planned I came back out and started up the aircraft again. All these start ups were done in accordance with a certain procedure. You started the aircraft on the fullest tank and then you switched to another tank and so on and so forth. I'm leading up to a fuel management problem here, one of the contributing factors which you can think back to when I give you the final story.

We took off after flight planning. Just after PXing through the control zone at Portage la Prairie, the engine coughed. I looked at the fuel pressure gauge. The fuel pressure gauge was flickering. So I put on the fuel pump and naturally the engine caught again so I heaved a great sigh of relief as we motored on. We were not at a very high altitude -- probably about 1,000-1,200 feet above ground level. Not all that high but low enough. Anyway, the fuel pump did its bit and the engine coughed and quit. I managed to get a call out to the Portage tower. I did not send out an SOS or anything like that. I just told them I was having engine problems and I was probably going to have to do a forced landing around my location which I gave them exactly. I did exactly that. I set the aircraft up for a forced landing and I landed in a farmer's field. Unfortunately, there was a small fence that was just below the grass level which I did not see. At the end of my landing roll my front struts caught the fence and skewed the aircraft slightly and it came to settle on one of the fence posts and it put a little hole through the horizontal stabilizer. But other than that, when the dust settled everything was fine. It was at that point that I realized that I still had one full gas tank. So the aircraft landed safely. We both walked away from it but extremely embarrassed. You could have flown the aircraft out but that wasn't the case. They sent a flatbed down from Rivers. Took the aircraft apart and took 709 back to Rivers put it back together and it was flying right until the end of its day.

The point I wanted to mention was that there was a flaw, in my opinion. This came out in the hearings I had with Colonel Stewart, the deputy commander of Rivers, a very long in the

tooth, experienced Air OP pilot. The flying I was doing on fixed wing followed -- it was the second flight that I had done after coming off rotary wing. The helicopters we were flying had an 'on-off' switch for the fuel tank. They had one fuel tank in the Hiller and it was a sliding switch that was either on or off. When you had an engine failure in a helicopter, the last thing on your mind was switching fuel tanks. Although it had been drilled to us in the L-19 that when you have an engine failure the first thing you do is that you throttle back. You select the other fuel tank, put the fuel pump on and you push the throttle up. If I had done that in my case I would have flown back to Rivers and nothing would have been said of it. However, I was not thinking fuel at the time because I had just come off extensive helicopter training. When that engine quit my main concern was getting my passenger, myself and the aircraft down without any injury or damage. I failed in not damaging the aircraft. But it was classified as an incident and I suffered a great blow to my ego as the interviewer will attest to and we will leave it at that. But there was a flaw in the training and anybody going on to fixed wing after rotary wing, it should have been emphasized that fuel is again a paramount concern.

INTERVIEWER: John, what types of flying did you do while you were OC of air support signals troop in Rivers?

DICKER: It was continuation flying, per se. But the continuation flying that I was able to do was not the run of the mill stuff that you would do at a civilian flying club if you rented a Cessna 150 or a Cessna 182 and went out and bored holes in the sky. Because Rivers was the Joint Air Training Centre they ran courses continuously for forward air controller, ground liaison officer, air transport officers etc. There was always a requirement for some light aircraft participation in these courses, particularly the FAC courses. Whenever they ran short of pilots at the tactical training school they cast about Rivers. And I was sitting there, current, ready to go at any point. I was asked many, many times to participate in these small operational flying jobs. I call them jobs because it wasn't really continuation. But it was a very, very exciting way to build up your hours. Many flights were done in the Shilo training areas in participation with the air force and their FAC courses and so on.

One of the jobs that I had was a ferry type job. We would ferry the T-33 pilots from the tactical fighter flight in Rivers down to the training area in Shilo so they could see exactly what was going on at ground level with the close cooperation of the FACs and the T-33s that were doing the strikes. So that was always a very interesting aspect because none of these had ever flown in L-19s before and they were constantly amazed at the short field capabilities down in K area of Shilo.

The other interesting aspect at Rivers as far as FACing and courses were concerned was when the navy came out from SHEARWATER with their Banshees. This is going back in the '63 time period. They came to do their live firing down in Shilo using their Banshees and the 20 mm canon and so on. They always had somebody down in the training area observing the results and so on. It was often my job to ferry the pilots back and forth from Shilo and get their first comments on what exactly had expired on that day's training. I think a lot of experience was gained just listening to these people and also giving them an opportunity to fly in an army aircraft.

Another interesting thing I did during my tenure as Officer Commanding the air support signal troop was to go to Gagetown again. This was another year -- 1964 I believe -- to go to Gagetown with another ad hoc helicopter flight that had been put together at Rivers to fly

with 3 Brigade during the summer concentration. Basically, it was the same sort of work I had done in Wainwright the year before. But, as luck would have it, a problem with the helicopters arose. They found filings in the fuel filters and they couldn't determine where the filings were coming from. They grounded the entire fleet for the rest of the summer and I only succeed in getting in 20 hours or so with that ad hoc flight in Gagetown. It was an experience. It was a different type of training area than Wainwright. All of this was adding up to very interesting background flying to somebody who should have really only been doing civilian flying at a civilian flying club.

I wanted to mention a very challenging time. It was the summer of 1965. C Squadron of the 8th Canadian Hussars in Petawawa, the recce squadron, were working up for their tour of duty in Germany and they required the assistance of a helicopter flight to practice the tactics, etc. It was decided that six helicopters would be despatched from Rivers. Actually they were taken apart and flown down and reassembled at Ottawa and flown up to Petawawa. But six helicopters were taken from Rivers down to Petawawa in the summer of '65 to fly with C Squadron 8CH -- Jerry Martin's squadron.

The pilots that manned this particular flight were a cross-section of people who were available during the summer. Some very experienced Armoured Corps pilots -- Dudley, Terry Jones of the Service Corps, and one John Dicker. I was very fortunate. But before I was allowed to go and fly with this flight, I had to pass an advanced army tactical helicopter course which they had cranked up to make sure that everybody was qualified. Harking back to my original course which was cancelled halfway through because of accidents, etc, I was fortunate enough to be given another full tactical helicopter course which qualified me to go to Petawawa to fly with the Armoured Corps, which I did. I flew for one month in Petawawa. Flew 100 hours which may not sound like very much by today's standards but when you're flying a single-engine helicopter like the Hiller, most of it tactical flying, 100 hours is a considerable number of hours.

One of the things that was a highlight of that particular period was that, before I could fly with the squadron, they insisted that I spend one week with them in the field, in the scout cars. So I was deposited in Doug Bland's troop and became a scout car commander for a week. It doesn't sound like a very much time but for a young Signals Officer doing the tactics on the ground with a very experienced armoured recce squadron, I learned the basics of that particular bit of army tactics very, very well. Then I was allowed to fly the helicopter doing the tactical helicopter stuff with the scout cars from then until the end of the summer. That was very, very interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Why did we do continuation flying in the army and what advantages were there for the army and or yourself?

DICKER: I think the canned answer is to keep your hand in so if you ever were called back on flying duties, it would take minimum amount of time to get you back up to at least basic flying standard. Personally, in the case of a Signal Corps officer, it was very, very unlikely -- remember, we were post unification now -- it was very unlikely that a Signal Corps officer would ever get posted to a tactical flying unit. I must admit that I questioned the necessity of having folks like myself on continuation flying. In the case of the Artillery they had to post pilots to desk jobs etc over their career. But they were destined to go on to flying duties no doubt. It was for those chaps that I thought that continuation flying was the most useful. They didn't want to discriminate between Corps and what have you because I would think

that there would be an awful lot of desk pounding and what have you by the various heads of Corps that their pilots were being discriminated against and so on. But that is what I think the continuation program was all about. Of course, dollars were a big factor.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what you got paid?

DICKER: Yes \$125 a month.

INTERVIEWER: That was extra.

DICKER: That was extra. That had jumped from something like \$60 or \$80 a month just before I had gone on flying training. But \$125 was the flying pay. I believe the jump pay was \$30 a month. One thing I wasn't too amused with in commanding the signals troop at Rivers, it was an annotated jump position. And the commandant sent out a memo -- which I wish I had a copy of today -- to everybody at Rivers who is filling an authorized position saying that, "If you do not take the jump course, you will be posted." I wanted to take the jump course but I didn't think it was a great idea. Because if you were getting \$125 a month for flying an aircraft, jumped out of an aircraft, broke your leg, lost your flying status, and would only be able to carry on as a paratrooper for \$30 a month, it didn't make much sense. Anyway, that's an aside.

INTERVIEWER: Now, John, I understand that you did some additional flying when you got posted from Rivers. What was that?

DICKER: Yes, I got posted from Rivers in April '66 to headquarters UNFICYP in Cyprus. It turned out the Army Air Corps were flying a flight of Austers in Cyprus. There was other smaller aircraft also being flown -- the Sioux, the Wessex and so on. But it was a flight of Austers and this fascinated me because the Auster was always an aircraft that we had been brought up hearing about but had never really seen or ever had an opportunity to fly in because they were long out of the service in the Canadian Army. There were about six Austers in the small Army Air Corps flight in Cyprus. They were used primarily to do the aerial delivery service, the daily delivering of mail to about six locations around the island. They would take off from Nicosia with the mail bags and drop from the mail at the deployed units throughout the island -- from Dekalia to Trutis, over Mount Trutis to Kyrenia, Limassol, on back to Nicosia.

I was very fortunate in being allowed to accompany the pilots on several of their daily runs delivering these mail bags. Some interesting times were experienced during that because there was still hostilities down in the south part of the island and the Austers did come under attack. One time I was in one of the Austers when we were greeted by some locals and pelted with rocks, stones, while we were sitting with the engine idling waiting for the British NCO to come and pick up the mail bag. The pilot at this particular time was in a rather foul mood, as you can imagine, having rocks thrown at your skin covered aircraft. He turned the aircraft around with the tail pointing towards the crowd with full brakes on and opened the throttle with full brakes on and they dispersed very quickly. But it was quite an exciting time because a rock would do serious damage to an Auster in those days.

The Auster was a very interesting aircraft. By the way, these still had the old cartridge starters in them. I found this quite interesting. Plus, I also did several flights in the Sioux aircraft, the Bell helicopter. Although I was not, I repeat I was not, on continuation flying at

the time. They had ceased continuation flying for people posted to the Middle East at that point.

Just before that, anybody who was filling a position in a UN establishment in Cyprus, or an area similar to that, was allowed to do continuation flying at a civilian flying club. In the case of Cyprus that was Beirut. One of the things you had to do before you were posted to Cyprus was to go to DOT and get a civilian flying licence. With that licence you would be able to continue on your continuation flying. Again, in the case of Cyprus at the Beirut Flying Club. You would actually be flown from Cyprus by Caribou over to Beirut, do your continuation flying and be flown back to Cyprus. But I missed out on that, unfortunately. It was stopped just before I got there.

INTERVIEWER: John, where does your flying career take you next?

DICKER: Well, if you can call it a flying career, my next flying took place after I left Cyprus. I was posted back to the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals on staff and immediately applied for continuation flying and was approved. I did two years worth of continuation flying at the Kingston Flying Club, basically meeting the minimum number of hours required for your aircrew pay, which was still about the same amount as I originally mentioned. Basically, boring holes in the sky around the Kingston area entertaining friends and so on. It was both entertaining and financially rewarding because as a young lieutenant, soon to be a captain, that extra \$125 a month made a big difference.

While I was at the School I was becoming increasingly disenchanted with being an instructor. A very necessary part of army life but nevertheless, after you had flown for so many years doing challenging jobs like the one I had in Rivers, the fact that I was sitting behind a desk for eight hours a day instructing Group 1 radio operators was not very exciting. I applied to go back flying.

We're now talking April-May-June 1967. I really started to put on the pressure and said, "If you don't send me back on flying, I'm going to request that I be transferred to the Air Force." The Commandant of the School nearly had a heart attack, not because he was worried about losing me to the Air Force but the fact that somebody in the army would ever want to be a member of the Air Force.

As it turned out, I was selected for further aircrew training. At that point in time, the next thing down the pipeline for somebody like myself was to become multi-engined qualified and instrument rated so that I could go on and perform a role in what was rapidly approaching as being a pilot's branch, as opposed to a strictly army pilot's type domain. Anyway, the bottom line is that I was sent off to Portage la Prairie in June 1968 to undertake the multi-engine conversion course and instrument rating course at Portage la Prairie. That was a three month course and it was a very, very challenging course, one that I thought I'd never, ever be on. I'd always looked at the Expediter with awe and wondered how anybody could fly an aircraft with two such big engines. It proved to be a very good course. I passed without any difficulty. I was the only qualified pilot on my course. The rest of the members of my course were Air Force retreads -- former RO navs who had come down from Gimli after doing their Tutor basic training. And officer cadets in the Air Force who were going through for their advanced flying training but it still hadn't ended in their wings parade yet. I was the only pilot, per se, who had qualified as a pilot on my course and I was the only army officer.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of flying did you do on that course?

DICKER: The multi-engine aspect of it was learning how to fly the Expediter. We did everything that you could do with the Expediter. Long-range navigation, short field landings, single-engine work, which was all pretty interesting stuff for somebody who had only flown a single-engine in the first place. I always remember with fond memories whenever they cut an engine on you on an Expediter, all you had to do was trim the aircraft up for loss of that particular engine and then fly it on one engine using one throttle. That was like flying an L-19. I remember always getting exceptional remarks and comments about how well I did on single-engine flying and of course, up to that point in my flying career, it was all single-engine anyway. That's just a bit of a light aside.

After learning how to fly the Expediter, we seriously started flying instruments. That ended up in the qualification of a "green ticket" which was one short of your white ticket which could only be gained if you amassed a certain number of hours flying instruments. We graduated in October 1968 out of Portage la Prairie with a multi-engine qualification and an instrument rating to the green ticket standard.

INTERVIEWER: Then what happened in your flying career, John, now that you're instrument qualified and multi-engine qualified?

DICKER: Well, they obviously weren't going to post me back to the School of Signals as an instructor. I was given a choice. I was to be posted. I was married by this time. I'd been married about four months previous to being posted out to Portage. The location of my posting was paramount to me in getting settled in your married life, etc. I had two choices. For my background and the training I had just received, I had the choice of going on to the OTU in Shearwater or Greenwood on the Argus or being posted to 412 Squadron at Uplands to fly the Cessna 182s.

By that time they had consolidated all the 182s, the army VIP aircraft, into a flight under the command of 412 Squadron in Ottawa. The flight was basically to do liaison duties flying VIPs around, here, there and everywhere, within the capabilities of that light aircraft. I opted for the posting to 412 Squadron for two reasons. One, it was in Ottawa which wasn't all that far from Kingston and therefore, from a domestic point of view, it wouldn't be too much turmoil for the family. Secondly, I had already flown this aircraft before. I had flown the Cessna 182. We had one in Rivers, 727, which was used by all of us just for variety in flying. I felt more comfortable. So I opted for the 412 Squadron posting. I'll never forget the CO of 3 AFS at Portage at the time, Colonel Ron Fowen [?], said, "You're making a mistake, boy." He said, "You should have taken Argus because it's a much more challenging type of flying and you'll be flying for an awful lot longer than flying these little VIP aircraft." I heard him and I carried on with my original choice and ended up being posted to 412 Squadron at Uplands in October 1968.

INTERVIEWER: So what kind of flying did you do in the Cessna 182 in Ottawa?

DICKER: As I just mentioned, it was a liaison type flying. The flight was a separate flight within the squadron. There was a Cosmo flight, a Falcon flight and the Cessna flight. We were tasked to do the short-haul work that would have been cost prohibitive to use a bigger aircraft on. For example, if somebody in Mobile Command wanted to come up to Ottawa -- a VIP, let's say -- wanted to come up to Ottawa for a conference and then fly back the same

night because of his duties, they'd despatch one of the Cessnas down to St. Hubert, pick up the individual, fly him up to Ottawa. Then the pilot would wait around all day long to fly the VIP back. It could be 8:00, 9:00, 10:00 at night -- didn't matter, whenever. We were sitting there waiting for him to come back to Uplands so we could fly him back to St. Hubert. Then back to Ottawa for the end of the mission. This went on for several months. During that time we did a lot of flying in marginal weather conditions in the Cessna 182 in my opinion. Now it's always the pilot's decision whether you go or not, but you can only not go so many times and then they start to look at you funny. I know that in a couple of cases on some local flying -- they were actually scheduled flights to Trenton and back, sort of thing -- I encountered some very heavy icing and bad weather conditions etc. and barely made it, in a couple of instances, to my destination. The long and the short of it is that after several months of this flying, I became very uncomfortable in the air.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean by marginal conditions?

DICKER: I'm talking about flying into weather that would normally not be a concern to an aircraft like the Expediter or the Cosmo or the Falcon etc. because they're equipped to fly in this weather. The Cessna 182 did not have de-icing equipment and, when you started to accumulate ice, it just built up to the point where you were going to fall out of the sky. Now, they tried very various things while I was on the squadron to correct this problem, or to assist in getting rid of ice. They put solutions on the leading edge of the wings. They covered the windscreen with this solution etc. and it worked marginally but nothing like it should. We were tasked to fly in some very strange parts of the country. I think at one time tasked to go from Ottawa up to North Bay to pick up a couple of chaps to fly them up to Rouyn for a conference and then back to North Bay and back to Ottawa. Which required an O-dark-30 takeoff from Ottawa and then up into the wilds of northern Ontario in marginal conditions in the wintertime. This is the sort of thing I'm referring to. It started to eat away at me to the point where I started to experience, in my mind, anyway, nervousness in the air.

INTERVIEWER: Did this affect your flying career then, John?

DICKER: Well, it certainly did. I always attribute this to the blackest day in my flying career when I decided that if I kept flying with this attitude that I was going to kill myself and perhaps if I had a passenger that particular time, I was going to kill him or her also. I decided that it was time to put an end to it. It was not enjoyable anymore in the least. I grounded myself. Now, that's not to say that I refused to fly. I just simply grounded myself because I felt I was more of a danger than I was an asset. Fortunately for me -- of course, this came as a great shock to the rest of the squadron because this was unheard of. I had to follow the normal procedures. In a case like this -- there was orders pertaining to this where an officer does do this. Then he's grounded and he's boarded, interviewed by a group of senior officers, sent away for a psychological evaluation, etc., etc. I did all that. I passed. I was deemed to be of sound mind and had made a rational decision. I was allowed to keep my log book and keep my pilot's wings which is, to anybody who's been in the flying game, probably the best news that you could ever get.

INTERVIEWER: So this was a medical board?

DICKER: It was a medical board. Actually, they did a board to find out the circumstances surrounding my reasoning for grounding myself. But as part of that main board, you had a sub-board which was down at DCIAM in Toronto that decided whether or not there was

something in your psychological makeup that contributed to this. You know, “When did you stop beating your mother? Did you ever have a fight with your sister?” and all this sort of stuff. Anyway, it was deemed that I was of sound mind and sent back. I guess the most difficult period that I’ve ever experienced in the army was waiting for the final decision of that board.

INTERVIEWER: And when that came, that was the end of your flying career?

DICKER: That was the end of my official flying career. I stayed on strength at 412 Squadron, pending the outcome of the board which took about a month. But they put me in as the squadron adjutant. As an army officer who had been trained in administration, I had an extremely good time during that month even though I was sitting on pins and needles. I made a significant contribution to the squadron on the administrative side as well as the flying side.

I just have to say this in closing. I remember the farewell party that was held, the mugging out party that was held by the squadron for those who were departing on posting. I had managed to secure another job in the Ottawa area in the Communications Branch. I was very fortunate. It was a no-move sort of thing. I just sort of slid into a job that I had been very familiar with before. Anyway, I was certainly mugged out in fine fashion by the members of 412 Squadron who did not consider the action I had taken as being a blight on my career. They admired what I had done. I remember the CO in particular, when he actually said good-bye to me, saying that had more members of the flying fraternity taken the action, or had the guts to take the action that I did, notwithstanding the consequences, they would be alive today. I departed feeling somewhat sad but I was alive. I hadn’t killed anybody. I think I had contributed to the army flying world significantly enough to justify the amount of money they had spent training me.

INTERVIEWER: John, would you describe the handling characteristics, instruments and equipment of the Cessna 182 that you used in the VIP flight?

DICKER: Well, it was semi-equipped for full IFR. I think that is a good way of putting it. It wasn’t fully equipped like the Expediter. The Expediter had instrumentation that you just couldn’t accommodate in a small aircraft like the 182. We did have ILS. We had TACAN, a few other odds and sods. But the main problem with the 182, as I mentioned earlier, it was not capable of sustaining flight in icing conditions. When you got into icing conditions, in full cloud, this was not special VFR or anything like that. This was IFR in its truest sense. You were totally encompassed by cloud. You had to have every navigation system known to be able to fly safely. When you start accumulating ice etc. and you have to get down and find your destination or your alternate, you needed an aircraft that was better equipped. A lot of the older pilots would say, “Oh, you should fly by the seat of your pants. Don’t worry about it. You are going to be alright.” I often considered that to be foolhardy, especially considering the cargo we were carrying. I wasn’t worried so much about myself I was worried more about the people that we were carrying and the very distinct possibility of killing everybody on board.

I think, in part, my feelings are backed up by the history of the losses we’ve had in the Canadian Forces of the 182. I think we lost three of the six or seven 182s that we had initially purchased to fellows crashing in bad weather conditions. As a matter of fact, I know from having done research that these fellows were not equipped to fly in IFR. They ran into bad weather and the aircraft was lost as well as their lives. I don’t know whether this played a

contributing part to my ultimate decision to cease flying but I'm sure it was a fact. I harken back to Colonel Fowens comments about flying on the Argus. I'm sure if had gone on to the Argus I would have continued flying for the rest of my military service. But I would have been wearing a light blue uniform because at the point of my flying cessation we had just unified. Anybody who was going to a flying unit was going as a member of the pilot's branch as opposed to an army officer going to an air force billet.

INTERVIEWER: Just in saying that, that's a fabulous legacy to leave to anyone who is listening to this tape in the future. I'd like you to think about your entire flying career and one last question I would put to you is: what message would you like to leave to somebody who might be listening to this tape in the future? What message would you like to leave them about army aviation. What it meant to Canada? What it meant to the Canadian Forces? And what it meant to you?

DICKER: Well that's a rather big question to end up with, Digger. But certainly at the onset I wasn't able to see the full scope or advantages to becoming an army pilot because it was a glamorous aspect of your training that anybody would given their right arm to participate in -- to wear those light blue wings. It wasn't until after I got to Rivers and started participating in tactical flying with members of the other corps who were going to be doing this as their bread and butter -- actually doing the work that was being done by the artillery with artillery officers who had done it in the field but who were back as instructors -- it wasn't until then that I appreciated the full impact of army aviation on the role of the Canadian Army. Truly, without qualified army pilots doing what they were doing in their assigned role we would not have had very effective army in the field.

As far as the rest of it is concerned, I think things from my personal point of view started -- there was obviously a great requirement in the Canadian Forces for pilots. But flying lost its romance for me when unification occurred in 1968. And I'm not sure if that was a contributing factor in my deciding to leave or just coincident that my personal decision happened when unification took place. I look back on it. It was a very profound experience and one that put me in good stead for every job that I went on to in the Canadian Army once I ceased flying. My flying experience in the army contributed significantly to the performance of my duties for the rest of my 34 years in the armed forces.

INTERVIEWER: I'm glad you said that because the question I was thinking of asking you next was: "how did your flying, training and experience contribute to the rest of your career?" and you answered that very well. John, I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Canadian War Museum Oral History Project for this interview.

Interview with John Dicker on 22 January 2004 interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS