

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) David L. Fromow

INTERVIEWER: J.R. Digger MacDougall

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 23 January 2004

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Transcription of Interview Number 31D 4 FROMOW

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) David L. Fromow

Interviewed 23 January 2004

By J.R. Digger MacDougall

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program Interview with David Fromow, recorded on Friday, the 23rd of January, 2004, at Manotick, Ontario. Interviewed by J.R. Digger MacDougall. Tape 1, Side 1.

FROMOW: OK?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Give your name, please.

FROMOW: My name is David Lloyd Fromow.

INTERVIEWER: Spell your last name.

FROMOW: F-R-O-M-O-W.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. We were just starting a conversation here, David. You were telling me about how you got enrolled into the Forces, and the early beginnings of your career. I wonder if you would just go ahead with that, and continue.

FROMOW: Yes. I was always interested in joining the Forces. I ended up, after I finished high school, in the Bank of Commerce in Simcoe, Ontario. So, I joined the 25th Norfolk Field Brigade—that is, you know, they were running courses at night, and I joined up there and subsequently got a Second Lieutenant [tape skip].

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

FROMOW: 1938. And I went into—I got leave from the bank and I went to a summer school in Petawawa, and became a glorified Second Lieutenant. That was in October '38.

INTERVIEWER: And what was the next step in your career?

FROMOW: The next step was, I went to the Canadian Artillery Centre, Field and Anti-Tank, in July 1940.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of training did you do there?

FROMOW: That's where I re-qualified as a Second Lieutenant, Artillery, Mobile, and then was posted to the Holding Unit of Number 1 Canadian Artillery on December 1940. In February '41, I was posted to the 2 Canadian Artillery Holding Unit in the U.K. After that, I had several appointments, and ended up in February 1941, with the 4th Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery. Several years later, if you may remember or recall that we waited a long

time in England before we went into France—about three or four years. And, I ended up, during that time, I was posted to the 4th Field Regiment in February '41 in the UK

Then I was posted to the Headquarters, Royal Canadian Artillery, 2 Canadian Corps, as a Staff Learner, in November '43. Subsequent to that, in March 1944, I was posted to the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, Royal Canadian Artillery Headquarters. We went to Northwest Europe in July of '44. I was with the Royal Canadian Artillery, in the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, at that time. In July '44, at that time the Cabinet in Canada decided that they should have Air OP—Army officers flying light aircraft for the observation of artillery fire. I was posted on that course after I experienced a friendly fire in France, and went to the Headquarters of the Royal Canadian Artillery, 2 Canadian Corps, as a Staff Learner in November '43.

The following March I was posted in the UK, the Headquarters Royal Canadian Artillery, 4th Canadian Armoured Division. We went to Northwest Europe in July of 1944, and in August of that year I was posted back to the UK on an Air OP course. I remember the Brigadier saying that we experienced friendly fire from the ground point of view where I got caught one day in my armoured car. And he said he thought we should go back and learn what it's like from the air.

So, I was posted then to go to the Air OP course in August '44. In July '45 I was posted--as a Captain qualified Air OP pilot--to 664 Air OP Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force, Army component, Royal Canadian Artillery. This is getting very detailed, but if you...[tape skip].

The next month, I was posted to 666 Air OP course. I was posted in September '45—and of course, the war had finished by that time—I was posted to the Historical Section in the UK. And in December '47, I became part of Colonel Stacey's branch of the general staff—the Historical Section in Canada.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in the UK, what type of aircraft were you flying?

FROMOW: Well, we did our ab initio training on a Tiger Moth, of course, and then we were on Austers.

INTERVIEWER: And what sort of aircraft were they to fly?

FROMOW: The Auster?

INTERVIEWER: And the Tiger Moth.

FROMOW: Oh, the Tiger Moth—it was a very sensitive aircraft. I like to fly aircraft. I like to take a hold of the control column and move it around. And, of course, the old ball in the instrument panel would go right up one way or the other. So, I had to discipline myself quite a bit in flying the Tiger Moth. We took off at sixty-five miles per hour and then we came in at that speed.

INTERVIEWER: How about the Auster?

FROMOW: The Auster—yes. At 22 EFTS—Elementary Flying Training School—in RAF, in England, we first soloed in the Tiger and then we converted onto the Austers.

...

INTERVIEWER: David, would you describe the handling characteristics of the Auster, and what the instrument panel would have contained, in the Auster?

FROMOW: In the Auster. This is the L-19, but--the Auster. Here's a picture of it.

INTERVIEWER: I see. It was very simple, then?

FROMOW: It was very simple.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about handling the Auster?

FROMOW: Oh, the Auster was quite a reasonable aircraft to fly. It didn't have the power that we got subsequently with the L-19. The L-19, with the additional power — you had enough power there that you could throw it around a bit. But the Auster was a -- and of course, the L-19 was a—the skin was aluminum, and the Austers that we had were canvas with dope.

INTERVIEWER: Was the Auster an easy aircraft to fly?

FROMOW: Yes, it was. I think we got up to the Mark VII Auster and it had sufficient—it had flaps, and it had slots at the front, so it had some slow flying capability. For example, I had an Auster once that stalled at thirty-five miles an hour, and you can appreciate this. This is what we needed—a high wing airplane that we could get upstairs, [while] we're looking to the ground. Everybody said, "Well, why didn't you have a [garbled]?" We trained on Chipmunks for low wing. But we're supposed to go up to—it's six hundred feet, I think, you increase the visibility over a ground OP by about sixty percent. Hence, we could get upstairs and take a target on, and do it.

We'd land in the gun lines—any old field or anything. It performed quite well. You could stagger in, for example. Oh, you'd find a small field, and a field you wanted to land in there, because the guns were down in that area. So, you'd sort of put the flaps down. You'd pull the stick back, and you kept the balance there, and you began to sink at a very slow rate. This was important, because I know very often when you're sort of trying to get in, to land by the guns, and you're getting in—you've got trees here, and the guns are over here, and there's a very limited field to land in. So, you stagger in like this and you'd look over your shoulder like this until you finally saw the tree line. You're just on the edge of it. Then, you sort of push the stick forward, slam the throttle on, and whoof!

INTERVIEWER: Flared out?

FROMOW: Flare out! A flare from about—well, if you go up in Petawawa, you get sixty foot pine trees out there. So, a flare from sixty feet. So, the Auster—I didn't mind the Auster. A lot of the guys were.... She didn't have the power, of course, which later—we're talking, now, about the days when we had L-19s, and all the pilots liked so much better, the L-19. But the Auster—it was canvas—doped canvas. The point with the L-19—you know, I

did a landing in a rough field one day, and tore the aluminum cover of the L-19, which was aluminum clad—that airplane. So, I decided, “Well, I think I can fly this. I think it will stay airborne.” And they were very good at staying airborne under dire circumstances. So, I flew it back to base. That put that machine out. But if had been an Auster—canvas—for that, we would take along some canvas and, with a little bit of dope, we could slap it on, and [inaudible] it, because it was a canvas covered steel frame, which was quite rugged.

INTERVIEWER: So, it was easy to repair, then?

FROMOW: It was very easy to repair. It had bungee cords—not hydraulic—for landing.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

FROMOW: See? So, it was a simple airplane.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of duties would you have performed, as an Air OP pilot then, in Europe?

FROMOW: What sort of missions?

INTERVIEWER: Duties.

FROMOW: Duties?

INTERVIEWER: What sort of duties, as an Air OP pilot, would you have done?

FROMOW: Well, I was in a later course, and I got over there, and the war stopped as soon as we got there. We used to say, “Well, we’ve scared the Germans silly.” Gosh, because I knew never what our course number was. So therefore, we became glorified taxi drivers. We flew all over Europe, as a matter of fact. One guy drew an assignment where he flew all—and this is after the war—he flew really on almost every country that was involved in the war. He went away for about three months. He took along an “erk” with him—that is to say, a repairman—technician.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. And did you have an opportunity to do that as well?

FROMOW: No. No. When I joined my squadron, I was stationed in 664 Squadron.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: And we flew out of Appeldoorn...

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: In Holland, but we were glorified taxi drivers because when my squadron got to Europe it was just at the end of the war. Some guys would get the odd buckshot from some irate farmer who was sorry the Germans hadn’t won, and put some shot into their machines. But I never experienced anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: So, when you returned to Canada then, from overseas, what was your first posting?

FROMOW: Well, my first posting was to the Historical Section, in the Canadian Military Headquarters, in the U.K. Then, I came back to the--the Artillery said, "You're wasting your time there. We want you back." So, I then was sent to the Canadian School of Artillery, and I ended up in the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre, attached to the Royal Canadian School of Artillery, because by this time I had become a pilot. Then I went off to Staff College, and all the sort of things everybody goes off on.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what did you do at the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre, and when was that?

FROMOW: I was at the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre, Army Component Cadet[?] School—that would be '49—1949, September. Then, we were attached, because we were gunners, ... to the Army component, and posted to Shilo, where we then serviced the Artillery Training Centre—the training school there.

INTERVIEWER: Now, when you say you serviced the Artillery Training School, what specific job would you have done as a pilot, let's say?

FROMOW: Well, later on, we'd engage targets. We would [do] demonstrations. The boss thought it would be a good idea if we would try and take night shoots, so we wound up at night. And they gave targets at night. And you know, if there was a reasonable sort of moon, we could see the target, so we could engage it. There was no problem. We also were taxi drivers for courses.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: You see, Artillery officers were on courses, or on observation of fire courses they had. We were stationed in Shilo, at the time. We would take these chaps up and fly around and say, "This is what it's like. This is what we see. Do you want to have a go at it?" And, that sort of work. And then, of course, the taxi drivers--if the Senior Officers wanted to go to Winnipeg, or they wanted to do this, [or] they wanted to do that, they used us.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the exciting things, let's say, of that time, in the Army, for a pilot?

FROMOW: Well, as an Air OP pilot, we went, with the RAF [RCAF?], to get our flying qualifications. And we flew the normal circuit heights at all the airports and so on, which is a thousand feet. But once we broke away from that, twenty feet above obstacles was our height. We were low flying all the time. In those days, the whole of southern England was a low flying area to us. So, you could fly along under a bridge, or you could do what ever you want.

One of the great things we had at that time because, you know, they were rationed in England. You couldn't get eggs [and bacon?] in the mess. So, our instructors took us out, and introduced us to some farms—nice farms—with challenging runways. The runway, of course, was up to the farmer's house, to the door. And then, we got some very good short

landing experience there. We'd go and land on the designated farm that we were allotted, and taxi up to the farmer wife's kitchen door. Then she'd come out and yell to us, "Two eggs, twenty five shillings each." We'd buy eggs.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: Take them back, and have them in the mess—this was a great treat. There were some very fascinating places to try and land it, you know. And that was very good training.

INTERVIEWER: It seems that you were able to do just about anything you wanted.

FROMOW: Just about.

INTERVIEWER: There was no flight safety, or air traffic control, or anything to worry about?

FROMOW: No. We could do pretty well what we wanted. When we were at flying school, in Cambridge—delightful place to be in flying school—ab initio flying—we didn't have any communications—ground to air. So, we'd just climb out at sixty-five knots, and go around and fly the circuit. We did have a gadget that the--it was a grass field. We had a coloured gadget that was green, amber, red. You'd fly on that, with those colours. There was no communications, and it was quite a fascinating sort of thing. You're in the air. You had no communications with the control tower—the airfield -- which at times, was very, very trying.

As a matter of fact, we lost two good Canadian Artillery officers that way. They were on downwind leg, with the Tiger Moths—that was Tiger Moths then—Burke [?] was lower, and Pickett [?] was above him in the circuit. Burke was going down to land. Pickett turned, and his exhaust tanks cut open the gas tank on Burke's airplane. The tank on those Tigers was between the upper airfoil.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: OK? And it ripped them open. So, I remember twenty pilots going down into the ground, sort of thing. We did a wide berth and came in and landed very quickly, to find out what was going on. But, the Air Force were very, very strict on discipline. "Get back in there, and go up in the air."

INTERVIEWER: They wanted you flying again right away.

FROMOW: Fly right away. So, that was a good discipline, but it was a tragic [muffled]. There were two Canadian officers that went in—Captains Pickett and Burke. I'll never forget that day.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to move back to Canada, if I may, back to Rivers. Now, you were there in '49. You were also working at Shilo. Were you flying the Auster at the time?

FROMOW: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What other aircraft would you have flown at Rivers?

FROMOW: At Rivers? The Air Force were pretty stingy [and] said, “You guys are Army pilots. You can’t fly our airplanes,” sort of thing. However, as they got to know us a little better, they got special authority from Moose Jaw--they had a Headquarters in Moose Jaw—whereby we could fly dual, anyway, with Harvards, Beechcraft—those two, mainly. Dakotas—they sort of stuck you in, as this co-pilot on a Dakota, and then all the airmen would go back into the car compartment, or back into the seat, and you’d just carry on. So, we hadn’t got the feel of the Dakota very well. Nut we didn’t fly it solo, or we didn’t fly it as Captain of the aircraft with the Air OP Service.

We were fighting -- the 5th Corps was in Italy at the time, and so, the British squadrons provided coverage. And then, finally, the brass in the Commons—the Government—decided we should have our own. These things are here to stay, sort of idea. So, then they began selecting people that were from the field, so to speak, now.

INTERVIEWER: They had to be Artillery officers first, though?

FROMOW: They had to be Artillery—just Artillery. So, I started flying in November 1944. Now, prior to that, I was with 4th Armoured Division, in France. My eldest daughter organized a trip for us.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes.

FROMOW: Last year. And we went back to Normandy, and found the old road to cover--you know, visit--places where I fought. And it was really quite a....

INTERVIEWER: I would imagine.

FROMOW: ...quite a thing. And, of course, we got mixed up with some of the Legion Halls down there, you know, and they were so thrilled. “You’re the first Canadian that has been here.”

INTERVIEWER: Is that right?!

FROMOW: But I started flying on the 2nd of November 1944. So, just prior to that, I experienced friendly fire, and got shaken up a bit in my scout car. So, the General said, “Look it. You got shaken up pretty badly on that thing. Fortunately, you’re still here.” I think we lost something like a hundred and sixty-two Canadians. As a matter of fact, ... I had been sent back to Artillery Brigade Headquarters, and the General Brigadier said, “OK. You’re a liaison officer—an LO, "G" Liaison Officer.” You understand what the ‘G’ is?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: And so, he said, “Dave, you go over to the Polish Armoured Div.” I was a Captain. The other Captain—I can’t remember his name. I hadn’t met him before. He was a Lieutenant. He said, “Now, let me see there.” And Ernie Holgarth—he’s got the 23rd Field Regiment, down in the front lines—is having trouble. So, he changed his mind. He said,

“Dave, you go down to see Ernie Holgarth, over on the 23rd Field.” And so, on that, he said, “You go over to the Polish Armour camp,” which we did.

Well, as I was on my way down, to the 23rd Field—we were just south of Caen, in France—I looked up at the sky, and said, “There’s something wrong here.” I said to my driver, “Stop.” Because I could see these Flying Forts coming over, and I could see these sparkling bombs coming down on at me and I go, “They’re going to go right over us!” So, I yelled at him to, “Get out of here.” He stalled, and we got out of there, very, very fast indeed. We got shaken up a bit, but nothing....

INTERVIEWER: But there were...

FROMOW: Nothing

INTERVIEWER: But Canadians were killed.

FROMOW: Nothing that close.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. How long were you at Rivers, in all? You were saying that you were there in '49.

FROMOW: I must have been posted to Rivers, in 1950. I was at the Light Aircraft School in 1950. [tape skip]

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever an instructor there?

FROMOW: No. No. They had the instructors -- actually mostly Air Force—Kesner—he was an Air Force officer. [tape skip] And I had qualified in England, as an Air OP pilot.

INTERVIEWER: [tape skip] Were all the instructors Air Force, then, at Rivers?

FROMOW: Yes. The Air Force pretty well handled -- the Air Training Command at RCAF. You had the three services, you know, at that time.

INTERVIEWER: [tape skip] Did you fly anywhere else, other than Rivers or Shilo?

FROMOW: Yes, I flew in Holland.

INTERVIEWER: After the War?

FROMOW: After the War. We got there—I remember all the guys were very upset, because the war stopped just as we were posted to the Continent. But then, we all placated ourselves by saying, “Well, we didn’t get a crack at Jerry, but think of all the people that are going to-- their lives are being saved, and that’s all that really matters.”

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: But you know, I figured I’m going through this rather arduous sort of years of training. We would have liked to have had a crack at them.

INTERVIEWER: How were you treated as an Army pilot, in an Air Force environment?

FROMOW: Well, the same as if you had ever been stationed in a gunner location, and you're Armoured. You know, you got -- your boots squeaked all the time. Very good. The three Services—you know, there was a camaraderie there. We didn't hate the next guy's guts, because he was Air Force, for Pete's sake.

INTERVIEWER: Did we still have NCO pilots at the time?

FROMOW: No.

INTERVIEWER: They were all commissioned officers, at that time, were they?

FROMOW: Yes, because at some stage of the game, I had the training flight at Rivers. Yes, and all the Army pilots came to my outfit.

INTERVIEWER: You actually commanded the training flight?

FROMOW: Yes. I was OC Training Flight.

INTERVIEWER: What would your establishment have been, with respect to pilots, aircraft?

FROMOW: Well, it was the aircraft that the Army was flying. That would have been '45.

INTERVIEWER: You flew Auster IVs, at Rivers?

FROMOW: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, OK. And how many of those would you have had in the training flight?

FROMOW: Those were in Rivers. I guess I was posted to the Air OP Light Aircraft School in September '49.

INTERVIEWER: Did you fly right up until the end of your military career?

FROMOW: Where was I when I retired?

INTERVIEWER: Probably in Ottawa.

FROMOW: I ended up in Ottawa—yes. It's coming back, slowly. You see, I had Staff College, and I did a tour with the School of Land/Air Warfare, in Old Sarum, in England. Then, when I came back from there, I was posted to Rivers, as an instructor.

INTERVIEWER: So, when you were at the School of Land/Air Warfare, in England, what were you doing there?

FROMOW: Look at this—peeled back a bit. That was the RAF School. I remember that

because we had the boss was an Air Commodore RAF, and he was blind in one eye. Impressed us all because he flew quite well.

INTERVIEWER: And were you an instructor there?

FROMOW: I wasn't an instructor. I was an instructor in the ground school.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, OK.

FROMOW: Not the flying school. That's right. I instructed GLOs—Ground Liaison Officers.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of training did they receive in those days?

FROMOW: Well, these are all Army Officers, you know, and so, ... ground liaison officers are posted to Air Force Headquarters and units and so forth, to act as a go-between, in the Army and the Air Force units. So, you get a batch of young chaps—maybe Captains, Majors—Italians; NATO, of course. And so, we had Chipmunks at that school. We just flew these guys. They weren't pilots, but they were going to become ground liaison officers. So, this is strictly speaking. We lectured on the organization of the Air Force, and the Tactical Air Force where they probably were destined to be posted—to the areas of Tactical Air Forces in Europe, and so forth. These were all British officers, for the most part—British NATO types. I remember having a lot of Germans there, Italians and so forth, at Old Sarum in England—that was the London School of Land/Air Warfare, RAF.

INTERVIEWER: Now when you left the School of Land/Air Warfare in the U.K., you came back to Rivers as an instructor.

FROMOW: I came back to Rivers, I was OC Training Flight. That was under RCAF auspices. They ran Rivers.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: And so, I was in the Air Training Wing, as OC of this Training Flight. We weren't training these guys to fly. They were not pilots, but they were all Corps—Army, Air Force, Navy. This was really the academic part of their career, so they could then fit in and become ground liaison officers, and posted to Air Force and Army units, and Navy units. These chaps--we trained them to interface with the other services.

INTERVIEWER: So, you got a chance to do some flying at that time, as well?

FROMOW: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now did we have such a thing as continuation flying, back then?

FROMOW: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: It existed then, did it?

FROMOW: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What were the benefits of continuation flying, for you?

FROMOW: Well, when I was at Rivers -- let's see, here's my Rivers—I flew the L-19s, the H-13s, the choppers—because I had a chopper flight in my Light Aircraft School. I was a CO of a Light Aircraft School, under the Air Training Wing. There, I flew L-19s, H-13s. You know, if there was an Air Force airplane came along--I flew a couple of flights in an Otter, but that was just for fun.

INTERVIEWER: What was the best aircraft you ever flew, and why?

FROMOW: Harvards. The L-19 was ultimately the aircraft that we flew for observation of fire. It ended up; we all liked the L-19, and it--for our job. High wing monoplane. Obviously, you're going up, and you're looking down there, at the ground. You're not trying to look out there. And it was very responsive. It was a Cessna product—the L-19--if I remember correctly.

INTERVIEWER: What civilian flying clubs would you have flown at during your career?

FROMOW: To get hours [muffled] at the Ottawa Flying Club.

INTERVIEWER: You flew here.

FROMOW: I flew here.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever fly at the Brandon Flying Club?

FROMOW: Not really. Not really, because I was CO of the Light Aircraft School, in Rivers.

INTERVIEWER: But you did get a chance to fly with the Ottawa Flying Club, here?

FROMOW: I did here. I did continuation flying.

INTERVIEWER: What aircraft would you have flown there? So, you flew the Taylor?

FROMOW: The Taylorcraft. And of course, the Auster was a derivative, I think, of the Taylorcraft. The British took it over for that role, and they played around with it, you know. I flew helicopters, as well, because I was a CO of the helicopter--I had a helicopter unit in my unit out west.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. I'm just going to finish the tape off here.

Interview with David Fromow. End of Side 1.

END OF SIDE ONE

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

INTERVIEWER: David, you were talking about the types of aircraft that you flew in Ottawa, at the Ottawa Flying Club. You mentioned the Taylorcraft. What were the other aircraft that you flew?

FROMOW: In Ottawa?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: Let's see. That would be [muffled]. I guess just the Taylorcraft with a Continental 65 engine. [tape skip] When I was CO of the Light Aircraft School in Rivers, I insisted all my instructors, anyway[muffled?], get qualified on the Harvard, and that really set the RCAF back on their heels. So they finally--the Group Captain who was CO of Rivers got onto people in Ottawa, here, and said, "Look it. These guys are flying all the time, and I'll vouch for them." So, he got special dispensation, I think, as I recall, and so, we were allowed to fly the others, like the Harvard, -- got a blank here -- the Taylorcraft Continental, the Fleet Canuck--these are the airplanes I have flown.

The Anson—that was in England because the British checked me out on the Anson, on a day that there was a lot of stratus cloud. And the Wing Commander said, "Let's go upstairs and we'll get you checked out on the Anson." We went up, and landed on the top of the clouds, and then, they sent me down to Transport Command, in RAF, and they were the people that checked me out, on the Anson, on the twins. So, I knew it was a legitimate thing.

So, the DH82A; Auster IIIs; Auster Vs, VI; Auster VIIs; Cessnas; Aeroncas; Fleet Canuck; Taylorcraft; Belanca[?]; Piper Tri Pacer; Dakota; Beether[?]; Sikorsky S-55; L-19A; Cessna 140; Bell Helicopter—Harvard, again; Hiller Hornet—oh, that was an interesting thing. The Hiller Hornet had ram jet engines on the rotor tips—the rotor strap--and that was down in the States. That was really quite an exciting thing because we got it up to a hundred and fifty miles an hour, which is quite a thing for rotary wing aircraft. Bell helicopter; the Harvard; the Hiller Hornet--ram jet; H-21; H-34...

INTERVIEWER: How did you get your qualification on helicopters?

FROMOW: Well, at Rivers, the Light Aircraft School had the BHTU. BHTU is Basic Helicopter Training Unit. So, I had that outfit under my command. So, being the CO of the outfit, I had to fly them all. So, that's where I got my qualification on the choppers.

INTERVIEWER: And did you do a lot of solo flying in choppers?

FROMOW: Yes, quite a bit. I had them have an airplane sitting out in front of the hangar, first thing in the morning each day.

INTERVIEWER: You must have been one of the first Army pilots to qualify on helicopters, then?

FROMOW: Well, I was in the right place. I don't know. The helicopters were under old Barton. He was an Air Force Flight Lieutenant, and he was the OC of the helicopter unit in Rivers. Since he came under me, I told him to teach me how to fly them. So he did. He was a very nice chap. [tape skip] were very good. The RCAF were sticky. Anything I'd try to do, they'd get on to Moose jaw, to their Training Command Headquarters, at that time. But, the British said, "Go ahead. You're a pilot." And I flew the Ansons there. The Anson was a funny thing. It had these—you know the old fashioned switches for lights, yet they were white—what were they—white porcelain sort of thing they used to make.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes.

FROMOW: They had those in the old Anson that I used to fly.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of missions would you have flown in the Anson?

FROMOW: Well, missions—the job I had didn't require me to fly Ansons. It was just something I wanted to do. But here—the Anson 228, cross-country--Lineham and return—this is in the U.K.—ATC flying--Chipmunks, Ansons. [tape skip] Well, they really just, you know, if I was available, they'd give me a flight--one hour, three fifty, two thirty, two thirty, one twenty-five. Well, normally, the Air Force RAF were good guys for slipping over to their units on the Continent. So, they thought, "Well, Dave. We're putting you in as the Captain of the aircraft. OK? So, you're responsible." I said, "Yes, well, that's fine."

So, we flew over to one of the British bases on the Continent, and they would give me free liquor. And the Anson, you could have a -- the lining inside these button, on sort of thing. So, they'd unbutton that, fill it up with liquor, and they'd take these big tea—like thermos bottles they had—about yea high, and about that wide. They'd take those, and they'd put them in full of coffee by the door, when they passed through the Customs, leaving Britain. Then going back, they'd land, and the Customs Officer would come up, and he'd say, "Oh yes. You've got the old coffee urn still there." And he would look at them, but they were full of liquor.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about your flying experiences? What would stick out in your mind about your flying experiences?

FROMOW: You mean the scary things?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, the scary things.

FROMOW: There isn't any.

INTERVIEWER: Scary things.

FROMOW: Well, I think that I did my first night solo—yes, my first night solo was the scariest. I think I put this in this book. They wanted it [muffled]. But, you will appreciate we had no electronics in the airplane. They were just like Very pistols. Red: stop. Green: OK, carry on with the manoeuvre you're on. And white—I said, "What's white for?" "Go away! Go away!" I said, "What do you mean—go away?" I remember being very depressed getting ready for my first night solo.

So, I got a big map of Cambridge. It was Cambridge [inaudible]. And I remember plotting all the aerodromes around—the war was still on, eh. We were very impressed because one of the RAF fighter pilots—he had done a night sortie into France, and he had stumbled across a German airfield where they were flying Dorniers out. So, he joined his circuit, and shot a couple down, and came back. So, that impressed me very much, what could happen to you, at night. The smokestacks on these airplanes, you know, the exhaust tank—they stood out—the kind of airplanes—you could see them for miles.

So, on my first night solo, I got disoriented. And so, what do I do? I remember I debated that up in the air. What should I do? I thought, “Here’s Cambridge. The North Sea is out there, so I won’t fly east. If I fly north, I’ll be over land, at least.” So, I rationalized like that. I went up to about nearly eight thousand feet, you know, so I had lots of room. I had a parachute. I was sitting on it. I didn’t want to have to use it though. You know, you roll over, and you kind of take off the straps, and fall. That’s what you’re supposed to do. And I’d never done that, so I didn’t want to find out, in the middle of the night.

So, I flew around and my head was going in circles, like this—I was looking for something—and I saw a white light, way down there, and I did about a three hundred and sixty degrees steep turn, like that. [inaudible] And I managed to latch onto this white light. I hadn’t a clue where it was going, and I suppose really, my old compass was spinning anyway, by the time I got around. I tracked it. When I got over nearer, I found out that it was one of the aircraft that was flying from the base in Cambridge [garbled].

So, I said, “Well, fine. Now, I’ll switch back in this case.” I oriented my aircraft and I changed the directions around, so I’d roughly get into position where I’d be on the glide path to land. And you know what happened? I steep turned. I looked down, and there’s the glide path—red, orange, green. I’m home. So, I flew down it, to find out where I was. I actually did land another time. I landed another airplane and didn’t have a clue where I was. It was in north London.

INTERVIEWER: How long had you been lost this time?

FROMOW: Well, you know, I had been—that time—maybe an hour or so.

INTERVIEWER: So, that wasn’t too bad.

FROMOW: That was on fuel—on the fuel. You look at the fuel. What you do, is you sort of get a decent height so that, if you’re going to have to abandon the aircraft, you can do that. But I did land one night in London. I saw some indicators that indicated that I would be safe to land there. It was a Mosquito aerodrome, and the runway had a slight curve up, and I did a giant ‘crack the whip’ landing. The whole wing went down on a Tiger Moth. I thought I’d torn the wing off.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever experience any emergency situations when you were flying? Any loss of power? Any engine failures, or anything like that?

FROMOW: No.

INTERVIEWER: Nothing like that happened to you...

FROMOW: No, nothing.

INTERVIEWER: ...with all the flying that you did?

FROMOW: Yes. In the L-19s, a few times, I got nervous, because after flying for sometime, I always watched my oil temperature.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you do that?

FROMOW: Well, we were flying for a while. You're burning oil. You get to the point where you might have to sort of -- the prop might stop on you.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes.

FROMOW: You're always watching the oil temperature. ... The way the instruments were laid out on the panel of these aircraft, you don't look at any instrument. You're just looking straight ahead. But I'm telling you that the standard position for this instrument over here—the RPM, or the oil temperature, or whatever it is—across the face of the instrument panel. If one of them goes off when it shouldn't, you know. It's amazing when you look at it. Just generally, looking at the landscape of the instrument, you knew that.

INTERVIEWER: You must have had a lot of experience in flying VIPs around. Did you fly generals and politicians or anything?

FROMOW: Yes, I flew a general in a Chipmunk, which is a low wing aircraft, from Rivers to Winnipeg. And it was kind of a rough trip, bouncing around. I began to feel sort of sickish. What transpired is, I got to Winnipeg all right, and I landed. This chap was in the rear cockpit. And you know, senior brass wore red bands there, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: And scrambled eggs like that—gallant fellow that he was. He's sitting there. He had been sick in his hat!

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see—yes! And that's what was causing you a bit of nausea?

FROMOW: Yes. Well, I found that I could get a bit of nausea alright, if I was sitting in the rear cockpit, and I'm looking around like that, and the pilot is flying and he does something, and suddenly, I'm whipped over into a different direction entirely, I'd get a bit of nausea. The beauty in a chopper, you never run into that sort of problem.

INTERVIEWER: No, I guess not.

FROMOW: No, it's carving the air up for you.

INTERVIEWER: [tape skip] How did Rivers get the helicopters? Where did they come from? How did they get them? Were you there when they arrived, for the first time?

FROMOW: No, I was there shortly after, but....

INTERVIEWER: Perhaps, David, you could tell us about the book you wrote.

FROMOW: This book?

INTERVIEWER: The book you're looking at now.

FROMOW: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What prompted you to write this book?

FROMOW: Well, I was asked to write it. Let me see. I seemed to have been on the ground floor everywhere, when this whole thing started. So, I was the Director of Land/Air Warfare, in Army Headquarters. I was Director of Army Aviation. While I qualified, I was in squadrons, and my training was in England, and on the continent. So, you know, I was one of the few guys that sort of managed to be all over the lot where Army Aviation, in its infancy, was getting started. I guess that is why some of the pilots got in touch with me and said, "Well, come on. You've been through the whole ball of wax. Write the book for us. We would like something like that." So, I said, "So would I kind of like it." Because I fought tooth and nail with the Air Force over the years, you know, and they didn't like us flying at all.

INTERVIEWER: And the book is called Canada's Flying Gunners?

FROMOW: Yes. That's it. So, it took a long time. I managed to get some pictures in it. I think it's all right. You know, it's not a bad—I didn't want to produce something that we were going to have to mimeograph.

INTERVIEWER: It's a very worthwhile book. I've spoken with many people who have read it, and they said you've really captured the basis of Army Aviation, in its infancy and in its Artillery days.

FROMOW: I'm glad to hear that it's serving some purpose. I heard that they were satisfied.

INTERVIEWER: It definitely is. Definitely is.

FROMOW: You write something like this, and you put it out and of course, I'm the severest critic of this book you could run into. And I worried that I could have done a better job, you know, naturally. But however, it went to press, and the gunners were quite happy about it, and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Did it take about---someone listening to this tape, a hundred years from now—they're listening to this tape, and they're listening to your voice, and they understand you've written this book. What would you want those individuals to know about the early days of Army Aviation, in Canada?

FROMOW: Going back to square one, of course, in producing these books and these sorts of things, I have dealt with Army Aviation in the First World War, you know. And this was very nice. But Aviation today has been an incredible explosion since those days—1918, 14-18 or, so on and so forth. But, so, a hundred years from now, somebody will have landed on Mars, I guess. They've landed on the moon. And this is nickel and diming it.

INTERVIEWER: But what would you want them to remember about the flying that you did?

FROMOW: You know, well, even the Air Force, they—we used to kid each other, all the time, in [a] good natured way, and say... They got a groundhog and they put some leaves on it, and dressed it up, and brought it over to where the pilot crew was and [inaudible]. This was all good natured sort of stuff. It would be very difficult to really hazard a guess of what they might think of it, because of the incredible progress it's making, and the speed of things. But...

INTERVIEWER: It had to have its beginnings somewhere, and it seems like a lot of it had to do with you.

FROMOW: Well, I appreciate--you wrap yourself up in an airfoil, with all gimmicks and gadgets, and so on. I mean I'm sure these guys don't really—couldn't imagine what it's like with just a few instruments. On a dark night, you've got no communication with the world. So, you know, the first guys off to the race, they have got some incredible experiences that can't be repeated. Also, I haven't got two or three thousand dollars flying. It was all Army flying. My sorties—I stayed in the Air Force when we were [muffled] at each other. On the whole, our sorties are less than an hour. If you're doing an air shoot, even in battle—that's twenty minutes. You couldn't survive in that atmosphere.

Secondly, you missed all the fun of low flying. We were allowed to fly in England—southern England was a low flying area. We could fly at twenty-five feet, and that's where it's fun. That's where it's fun. The training the RAF gave us, in CATO--concealed approach and take off--where you hid behind everything there was when you're sneaking into your landing strip—ALG---Air Landing Ground, or whatever it is. I had many airmen say, "Jeez. That's pretty dangerous sort of stuff, flying down there. Didn't you ever come close to hitting something?" Well, a few chaps did.

Even at Cambridge, when we were at Cambridge, at Elementary Flying Training School, Pickle and Birke—two Canadian Artillery Captains. That day, they were doing their circuits and bumps and they ran into each other.

INTERVIEWER: Were they both killed?

FROMOW: Both killed.

INTERVIEWER: Both killed.

FROMOW: Both killed. Both gunners. Generally speaking, when I was at Rivers, the Air Force chaps—I really don't really know whether they envied this--the low level flying we were doing, but they were after all the fun of it, you know, excitement. But we all had to do our, qualify on aerobatics and all that kind of stuff—you'd go up to eight thousand feet. The

only one I didn't like, in a Tiger Moth, was this thing called the "Dive of Death." You climbed up to eight thousand feet, with an instructor, because this was early in your flying training. And he would then put the Tiger Moth into a dive. He'd cut the engine, put the nose down, and actually, you sat there, like this.

He's in the front cockpit. You're in the back cockpit. You're sitting in there like this, and his head is down here, and this thing is going up. And, of course, it's a stretch skin fabric—the Tiger Moth—with wires and stuff, and the noise it made. The propeller is stopped dead [muffled] and what he's doing [is] he's going to start the engine, because there's a flick starter. And what he'd do; he'd say, "Now here we go. Are you ready?" "Yes." We're at eight thousand feet. He would stir the—the First World War pilots, now they used to stir this stick. A little bit of balancing, really. The fore and aft and the lateral movements—the airplane was stirring the stick. He's sticking it. You're going down and the wind blowing through the struts, and so on, and so forth, banging against the canvas side of the airplane. It was...

INTERVIEWER: What a scary experience!

FROMOW: That was the worst thing, really, they were demonstrating to us. We weren't allowed to try it. But you're getting an idea of what is involved and experience it and that's it. Don't play around with it, because something can happen quite easily. The other thing is when you're starting the engine, of course, you waggle the wing because it's a kick-starter, and you kick it. You get into a position and your engine quits, you can't bring all the fuel, or whatever, and you're going to have to make a go of it. Adjust your pull out—gentle, slowly. Take your time. Kill the speed. Otherwise, you're going to turn the lights out. [inaudible] And you've got no communications. It's at night. It's still worse than ever because you don't know where you're going to—well, you have to decide.

You decide at maybe five or six thousand feet, "I'm going to bail out." You take off your straps and roll them over, buckle on your harness. You're sitting on your parachute. You can't get up, or you'd fall out. And then, you wonder where you are. Am I going to land off? But it's quite exciting.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it sounds like you had an awful lot of fun when you were flying.

FROMOW: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: You really enjoyed it.

FROMOW: I really did.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: You'd get up there, and you'd do a steep turn, and you just misjudge it and it flips over, and you're in an inverted spin.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: If you're spinning like this, your blood is drained into your head. If you ever tried to lift your hands off when you're into that, it's very difficult. But if you got it inverted, your blood is going down to your feet. You red out.

INTERVIEWER: And you can't -- you probably lose consciousness then?

FROMOW: Well, you would. We were told, "Don't get into a red out." So, you know, there's all those exciting things involved in these things. Some chaps—I remember one chap doing his initial solo landing. He had a little trouble with the rise—"How high am I?"

[Interruption: Mrs. Fromow indicates croissants in kitchen, is thanked.]

FROMOW: In retrospect, nowadays, you've got communications to ground. You've got electronics in the airplane. It's simple really. You take all these things for granted now. I'm sure that we experienced some many thrilling moments that we didn't have—we'd get lost at night, like I did. I just circled around, while I tried to figure out what to do. I remember the debate. I still think about it. I can visualize and re-experience it—the thoughts that went through my mind. Well, the first thing I had to do, is I can't just sit here and wonder, "What should I do? I've got to make some quick decisions." The North Sea is on my right—east. I've been heading north, up England. And that's all I've got, because you couldn't see anything. It was just like the blackouts.

INTERVIEWER: But you did have a compass in the plane?

FROMOW: Oh, yes. You have a compass down here, in between your feet.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Yes. That was in the Tiger Moth?

FROMOW: The Tiger Moth—yes.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I had no idea the compass was down there.

FROMOW: Yes, that's where it was. The one we had in England, and it didn't have a canopy on it—not the English one.

INTERVIEWER: OK. So, the instruments must have been quite rudimentary as well.

FROMOW: They were. They were. They had an air speed indicator. They had a turning/banking needle. And [long pause, tape skip] the fuel was in the tank just over your head. Gravity.

INTERVIEWER: Gravity fed.

FROMOW: Gravity feed.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FROMOW: I don't think it was measured somehow, so it couldn't have had a fuel indicator. But a turning/banking--an artificial horizon, of course, would be absolutely essential. And

I'm just wondering whether you could set the compass direction, which was down there between your feet, if you couldn't get down there and take a look at it. I think we had another thing we just sort of set—an instrument for direction.

INTERVIEWER: A directional indicator?

FROMOW: Yes, I think we had one of those. There was an instrument measuring the temperature of the oil. That's about it. It was pretty thin.

INTERVIEWER: Speaking of oil temperature, did you do much flying in the winter?

FROMOW: Yes. I remember one of my guys, when we were at Rivers--this is a great emergency. One of the pilots—his family went down to North Dakota—they went down there in the wintertime—the middle of the winter--and they had an accident. His wife and child were killed. He was banged up. He was driving. The authorities wired through to Rivers, and Bill Sullivan—he was an Infantry -- Princess Pats.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

FROMOW: Anyway, Bill was the Senior Officer at Rivers, Army, so he got on the blower with me, and said, "Dave. I've got a tricky job for you, Dave." "What's that?" "You're to fly to Grand Forks, in North Dakota, and clean up the mess down there incurred in this circumstance." So, I decided, "Well, OK." So, I took one of my chaps with me, and said, "We'll fly down there, and you can bring the airplane back. I don't know how long I'm going to be down there for." That was a very lonely thing, because we had shackles on the wings, where we could carry a survival kit. It was the middle of winter—December, January--I think it was. So, I didn't relish the idea of the flying down there. But we didn't have any difficulty. At least the air was fairly smooth.

Well, do you want to have a wash up?

INTERVIEWER: Well, what I'll do is I'll just close the tape here. I'm going to say that—when I find my script here.

Interview with David Fromow, on 23 January 2004. Interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS.