CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW CONTROL NUMBER 31D 2 FOTHERINGHAM

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES BRANT FOTHERINGHAM

INTERVIEWER: GLENN COOK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 26 NOVEMBER 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: VICTORIA, BC

TRANSCRIBED BY: TANYA HALLEY

Transcription of Interview Number 31D 2 Fotheringham

James Brant Fotheringham

Interviewed 26 November 2001

By Glenn Cook

INTERVIEWER: This is a Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with James Brant Fotheringham, recorded on the 26th November 2001 in Victoria, British Columbia. The interview is being conducted by Glenn Cook. This is tape one, side one.

James Brant Fotheringham was affectionately known by his colleagues as "Pop". His last name is spelled FOTHERINGHAM. He served 35 years with the Royal Canadian Navy. As part of a distinguished career, Pop Fotheringham joined HMCS BONAVENTURE in 1957 as the first Commander Air of a Canadian angle deck carrier. This position is the most prestigious and senior position for an aviation officer on a Canadian carrier. He joins me today to discuss this period of his career and more specifically the teething pains and successes in this window of Canadian carrier aviation.

Pop, I think the listeners would like to hear a little about your history with the Royal Canadian Navy and perhaps you could take ten or fifteen minutes to give us a brief biography before we address some of the issues associated with the early days in BONAVENTURE?

FOTHERINGHAM: Fine. I was born in Brantford, Ontario and raised in Brantford until the age of nine, when we moved to Toronto. My interests, oddly enough, had been very much slanted towards aviation. I was familiar with aircraft being flown by the RAF during those years – the 1930's. However, there was never any doubt in my mind when it came time to join up, which happened after Dunkirk when I felt that it was quite obvious that the government needed my assistance. It would be the Navy that I would join because I had been brought up very close to the water, had done a lot of sailing at the RCYC in Toronto and so on. I joined as an Ordinary Seaman in June of 1940 and subsequently trained as a signalman. In April of 1941, I was commissioned as an acting probationary temporary Sub-Lieutenant and sent out to Royal Roads for the course at Royal Roads. This was an unexpected development although it was not uncommon, particularly among signalmen. It seemed that signalmen were – I don't whether they were supposed to have more intelligence or whether they had, in the course of their instruction, learned things that were more pertinent for officer use.

During my time at Royal Roads, I ran across a fellow signalman. He was considerably senior to me as a signalman and his name was Jim Hunter. And Jim had, as a signalman, earlier applied for transfer to the Fleet Air Arm. While he was at Royal Roads, his request for transfer to Fleet Air Arm-- to the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm -- was approved. When informed me that he was now a Sub-Lieutenant, not a signalman, they continued

with this and Jim went off to the Fleet Air Arm. This certainly tweaked my interest to know that there was a possibility of combining my interest in aviation with the Navy; however, that was dormant for some time.

I was sent to Charlottetown Naval Division as the training officer. Subsequently I went to sea in one of the converted yachts. From being in that position, I used to apply quite regularly for transfer to the Fleet Air Arm and was always informed that there was a shortage of executive officers and I couldn't be spared. While in my yacht, I was sent to HMS CAMPOBELLO, a Royal Navy Western Isles trawler which had been built in Collingwood and came down through the lakes and through the river very late in the season, and suffered hull damage in transit to Halifax. The Captain of CAMPOBELLO was an RNVR Lieutenant and his chances of getting his damaged vessel docked in Halifax in 1943 were next to zero. He was finally told that his ship was seaworthy and get on with it and get back to the UK. We were about seven days out of Newfie, subsequently in the most incredible storm I have ever witnessed – and I have since been through the China Sea in very bad storm[s] – but, this was a lulu in March of 1943 in the North Atlantic. CAMPOBELLO quietly opened up and sank We were exactly halfway between Newfoundland and Ireland. We were rescued by a Belgian corvette GODESHA. Incidentally, I was the only Canadian aboard CAMPOBELLO and subsequently the only Canadian in GODESHA. It was a bad crossing. The corvette had a compliment of 65. We were 35 from CAMPOBELLO. We had no casualties in getting aboard CAMPOBELLO and we arrived in Scotland with 265 souls aboard having rescued a number of sailors from torpedoed ships. It was a bad crossing.

I came back to Canada subsequently in HMCS SKEENA for passage and got back to Halifax and eventually was sent to HMCS SHAWINIGAN on the western local escort. It was while in SHAWINIGAN, a little bit less than a year later, when headquarters called for volunteers to form a Fleet Air Arm -- a Canadian Fleet Air Arm -- and they were looking for volunteers. I persuaded the Captain of SHAWINIGAN to send a message; I remember the wording quite clearly said, "In view of this officer's many previous applications, it is requested that he receive special consideration." Well, I was navigating SHAWINIGAN at this time and when I appeared before the Fleet Air Arm selection board, having been trained as a signalman and navigator, they said, "Well you're an observer. We don't need to do anything with you. You're an observer." "Oh, no, no, I'm not. I'm coming here for pilot training." And this was subsequently approved.

I went through the normal mill. St Eugene for elementary – well, Belleville for ITS initially, which was quite interesting. By now, I'm a Lieutenant and ITS was filled with young AC2s, who were absolutely mad keen from an academic view. It was very difficult being a Lieutenant to make sure that I was at the very least, a little bit above the standard that the AC2's were achieving. So, it was struggle. My training at St Eugene and subsequently at Kingston found a similar type of problem. My instructors were invariably Pilot Officers, or Flying Officers and I was a Lieutenant. I was having daily interchanges with Squadron Leaders and Flight Lieutenants in the Mess which were beyond the capability of the naval airmen who were undergoing training. And this created some interesting incidents that I don't think we need to go into here.

I finished my training and went off to the UK in Christmas of 1944. I started training in the UK, first of all in Scotland, and subsequently did an instrument course on OXFORDs and then went to Yeovilton for the fighter OTU on Chance Vought CORSAIRs. That was a big step from a HARVARD to a CORSAIR and, of course, there was no such thing as dual CORSAIR so the first flight was something I wouldn't easily forget. We ended up having done all the training required for this operational training unit doing carrier qualifications in HMCS SMITER in the Firth of Forth. And this happened, oddly enough, right over VE Day. I remember in the Wardroom, we had to volunteer not to imbibe on that occasion so that we would be able to do training the next day in HMS SMITER.

It was then a period of leave in the UK prior to being sent to Australia. And this was an interesting trip because we flew there in one of the Empire Class Flying Boats, a civil version of the Sunderland, from Southampton to Karachi in what was then India. I particularly enjoyed this, because for some reason or other, I had always been attracted to the Sunderland, to flying boats generally, and really enjoyed that trip. We had stops in Sicily, Cairo, in Lake Habanyia, which is just west of Bagdad, to Bahrain and finally to Karachi. In Karachi, we switched after a week or so to Dakotas and flew onto Ceylon. They had a very advanced OTU in Ceylon where they had quite high casualty rates. They were doing really very advanced things at that OTU in preparation for the Pacific Fleet. I didn't do the course. I did a jungle course in Ceylon and was subsequently flown to Australia to join 1845 Corsair Squadron in Mawra, Australia. We were due to embark the first week of September in 1945 and it was a very fortunate thing that that didn't come about.

After the war ended in August of 1945, the Admiral very quickly came out with a message saying that all Dominion personnel were to be returned to their home dominion by the most direct route at the earliest possible date. So, I left the squadron and spent some very considerable and enjoyable time in Sydney, awaiting a ship. There were always ships available going "home" which meant through the Suez, and I said, "Read the message – the most direct route from Sydney to where I go is Sydney to Vancouver." "Oh, it may be some time before we have a ship to Vancouver." "Well, I'm prepared to wait." And so I waited and I think it was not until November that I got home, having had a most enjoyable stay in Australia.

At that time, I was planning to get out and go to university. I had, in fact, selected either UBC or UMB because I was interested in forestry, but the Navy were putting on a fair amount of pressure on aviators to stay because of their decision to get into the carrier business and have aviation. So, I put aside those ideas, and I stayed on.

The first thing I had to do was to go to the UK to convert to British types, which were FIREFLYs. I came back and joined 825 Squadron and we left in WARRIOR in about October of 1946 for the West Coast. HMCS WARRIOR lacked any central heating as the Brits would say. It was my understanding that WARRIOR was being sent to the west coast because of this fact – no heating. I have heard subsequently that part of the

intention was that we would maintain two aircraft carriers and that WARRIOR would be on the West coast and the next one would be on the East coast. So, I don't know for sure which of those stories was the correct one.

It's interesting that WARRIOR was not a big ship, really, in terms of the US Navy or even in terms of the Royal Navy, being a light fleet carrier. But going through the Panama Canal, we had to remove a number of sponsons which overhung, they were overhanging from the flight deck. This was required in order to get through the canal. We had no outstanding interesting events during that passage and we disembarked the aircraft at Pat Bay for the period the ship was in Esquimalt.

INTERVIEWER: A question! Who was the Captain at that time? Would that be Captain Houghton?

FOTHERINGHAM: Frank Houghton was the Captain, yes. He was relieved during that time by – sorry, it'll come to me. Yes, Frank Houghton was the Captain. We lost our Squadron Commander while at Pat Bay during a very unfortunate accident. A pilot had requested to get to Vancouver for the weekend and "Tatts" Tattersall, who was the aircraft captain, said he would fly him over. It was not a good day and they encountered a snow squall. I don't know quite what happened, but we never found the aircraft despite very intensive searches subsequent to that accident. This was an interesting point of view from my perspective. Dick Bartlett was the Senior Pilot of the squadron and he naturally took over; however, Dick playing squash at HMCS Naden, either broke an ankle or he did something that incapacitated him, which left me as the Senior Pilot for the return passage to Halifax. I'm sure that this resulted in subsequent developments.

When we got back to Halifax about March, 1946 we decided that we were going to do night deck landings. None of us had ever done night deck landings before. We had two LSOs at the time, Jim Hunter, whom I have mentioned before and – goodness, I'm having trouble with names – it'll come to me. This other fellow who now lives in Oakville – I can picture him – Ted Davis had been an LSO at night before. Jim Hunter had never done any night batting. We went down to Bermuda and disembarked the squadron at Kindley Field and worked up for our night deck landings which were done. I don't remember how many aircraft we lost – but I do remember Commander (Air) coming out to the flight deck and spied me, despite the darkness, and said, "How many more aircraft have you got in that hangar? Get them up here." Because we were breaking a fair number of aircraft. Ted was doing most of the batting, but the idea was to train Jim Hunter as an LSO as well. I was selected, having already done four night deck landings, to the do the next four, with Jim as an LSO. And that was interesting, I think, probably for both of us.

Subsequently getting back to the Royal Canadian Naval air section at RCAF Dartmouth, as it was known then. I was given command of a new FIREFLY squadron which was formed as 826 Squadron. That lasted for some months until we were more or less in a group working with 883 Squadron, a SEAFIRE squadron. The CO of that squadron Bob

Monks was killed in a rather tragic accident. They moved me from the FIREFLY squadron to the SEAFIRE squadron. This was in 1948.

I had appointments, in fact, prior to those squadron dates. I had been the Director of Air Personnel in Ottawa and subsequent to that date I had another tour in Ottawa and came back as the Air Group Commander of the 31st Support Air Group in 1952. In April of 1953, I was sent to the Royal Military College as a Naval staff officer and that was a very interesting tour. During my time in Ottawa, particularly in personnel, I was aware of various possible appointments that might be suitable for the future. One that particularly interested me was the Royal Air Force Flying College at Mamby in England, which was a course to which the Royal Canadian Air Force annually sent a candidate. However, that didn't deter me. I applied for that course, I guess, more than once. And sure enough, in April of 1953, they decided -- I guess, the RCAF didn't have a person ready to go to Mamby for the course that year. I managed to get the appointment. Someone wisely decided that I hadn't enough heavy twin engine flying time. I had flown Beechcraft EXPEDITERs and Avro ANSONs and OXFORDs and things, but nothing that would be referred to as a heavy twin. So, the RCAF got me out to Saskatoon to do an instrument course on MITCHELLs, which I thoroughly enjoyed and found very valuable when I got to Mamby.

At Mamby, we were flying Gloster METEORs for fighter sections of this course. The Royal Air Force Flying College was a staff college with flying superimposed. During strategic studies, we flew the CANBERRA. For support and those types studies, we were using the METEORs. So, I believe I'm the only Canadian Naval officer to have done that course. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Flying a CANBERRA in those days was quite fascinating and I don't believe that when I started the course there was an aircraft who could intercept a CANBERRA at altitude. We used to do what we called a cruise climb technique so that we flew at constant thrust and as we burned fuel, we climbed about 1,500 feet an hour, or something like that. I remember coming back from a flight to North Africa and crossing over the channel, we were at 48,500 feet. Now, prior to that time, as I say, there wasn't anything that could intercept us at that height, but the RAF had just introduced the Hawker HUNTER. In fact, we were supposed to have HUNTERs on the course as opposed to the METEORs, but they didn't come through in time. But on that particular occasion over London, this HUNTER pulled up on my port wing and sat there for a bit and then took off ahead of me. So, the RAF was certainly able at that time. But I was always fascinated. We used to file meticulous flight plans and I thought at 48,500 feet, I don't think I'm going to run into too much traffic up here. But flying the CANBERRA was a great experience.

On the completion of that course, which ended in December, I was a Lieutenant Commander and the promotion list didn't come out until the 1st of January. There was discussion as to my possibly going to HMCS BONAVENTURE which was being built in Belfast at the time. I was in a bit of a quandary. I had to get out of Lincolnshire and look for a place to live. I had no appointment to go to and I thought it's either liable to be London or Portsmouth, so we managed to find a house halfway between the two and sure

enough, on the 1st of January, I was on the promotion list. I was subsequently appointed as Commander (Air) of HMCS BONAVENTURE and to standby until completion.

During that standby period, I flew regularly from the Naval Air Station at Ford in the south of England and we flew VAMPIREs and SEA HAWKs. I also managed to get deck landing qualified in HMCS BULWARK in SEA HAWKs. So, it was very convenient. Ford wasn't that far away from where I was living. However, I subsequently moved to Belfast, by myself, living with Peter Berry and Gordon Franks. At this time BONAVENTURE was getting nearer and nearer to completion. We sent the commissioning crew over well in advance and they were accommodated at RAF Bishop's Court in a little place called Portadown, south of Belfast. I was in charge of the ship's company that was based there.

They usually talk about the troubles in Ireland as commencing in 1970, but there were troubles at that time in the 1950s, to the extent that we used to put a diver down regularly to survey the bottom of BONAVENTURE and so on. We were moving the commissioning date – or preparing for the commissioning date -- and we used to send an armed guard from Portadown in a bus -- the sailors with their rifles and so on -- up to Belfast. And this was a great concern to the Royal Ulster constabulary. They were afraid that we were going to be hijacked part way on this trip and be disarmed by the IRA. So, there were some interesting aspects to it at that time, and while as I say there were not referred to as part of the troubles, there were certainly a number of things going on that were not overly pleasant and which did affect the arrangements for the commissioning of HMCS BONAVENTURE.

When we finally commissioned, I as Commander (Air), was determined to exercise my prerogative to be the first to fly aboard. Subsequently, as the SEA HAWK was the only aircraft that I was qualified in for deck landing, I managed to make those arrangements. BONAVENTURE embarked an RN aircrew group who were going to conduct the flying trials. They agreed with this plan of mine. On the day in question, it was a bad day. It was raining. The ceiling wasn't that bad but the visibility, I suppose, was slightly reduced. BONAVENTURE had sailed from Portsmouth and was in the channel. When I joined the circuit the ship was only doing about 12 knots and I started to do circuits. The Commander who was running the flying trials said that my entry speed was too high and because the wires had never been pulled, he wasn't prepared to take a chance on that. I pleaded with the ship to see if they could possibly do a little better than 12 knots. But Captain Bruce could spy ships on the horizon ahead and he wasn't about to increase his speed under those conditions. So, all I managed to do was a number of touch and goes and went back to Ford and they started on with the flying trials. I came out in the SEA HAWK later in the day and did get aboard. This has been interpreted as me making the first landing in BONAVENTURE and it's only partly true, because one would assume that this would have been an arrested landing, which is not the case.

However, there followed my time in HMCS BONAVENTURE as Commander (Air). I should mention that I have omitted one very significant aspect of this – not omitted, but what came subsequently was to me was of very great joy. I was given command of

HMCS ST LAURENT on the West Coast from 1960 to 1962. I regard those as two fabulous years that I had during my services. Subsequent to that, I went back to Naval Headquarters again in various administrative positions -- Director of Naval Aviation, and subsequent to unification, as Director Naval Aircraft Requirements.

There have been a lot of stories told about the time of unification. They used to say that when you went off to lunch, you would tell your secretary, if your boss called, to be sure to find out who he was because nobody knew what the organization was. On one occasion, I was appointed as Director of Force Evaluation. Commodore Charles was my boss. And this Force Evaluation – I'm not exactly sure what the terms of reference were, but sounded like a good title. There was a problem because on one day, my in basket got filled with a bunch of files and it turned out these were all army files because DFE in the army was Dependents, Furniture and Effects. And so, I guess, as DFE, they thought I was going to do something with these files.

Another rather interesting thing that might be worth mentioning here. In the Navy, we had a procedure at Naval Headquarters that all correspondence was signed by a civil servant who was the Naval Secretary. And this was an unknown to any of the recipients, as a civilian. And you knew by the file number on the letter who was the real originator, but no service officer got to sign these letters. It was signed by a civilian. In the RCAF on the other hand, it was the Director concerned who signed the correspondence to outlying units and various headquarters and so on. At one time, in order to give some significance to unification, I got an appointment as Director of Transport and Rescue Readiness. Again, the terms of reference were a little vague to me. However, I was sending correspondence – I think it was Diamond who was running Transport Command in Trenton at the time – and I used to write letters to him about how to/what to do with his transport aircraft and so on. And these were signed J.B. Fotheringham, Director of Transport and Rescue, Readiness, which I found very embarrassing because I had encountered Diamond and I didn't imagine that he was appreciating being told what to do by me. However, that was the way it was done.

I escaped from that and was sent back to HMCS Shearwater as Base Commander in 1967 and so was the Base Commander in Shearwater when unification actually took place in 1968. Admiral O'Brien was there on one occasion when we, in fact, buried the Navy outside the Wardroom at Shearwater during 1968. This was also a period when BONAVENTURE's demise had been decided upon. I should mention, for possible future use in aircraft aboard BONAVENTURE, we did flying trials off Boston with an A4 SKYHAWK, piloted by US Navy personnel. We succeeded in doing launches and recoveries of an A4 in BONAVENTURE. I went down and was aboard BONAVENTURE for these trials. It was perhaps not quite as practical as the BANSHEE, which we'll get into later, was not really very practical either in the beginning when we were thinking about it. The A4 would have been impossible to launch at anywhere near full armament, certainly in no wind conditions with BONAVENTURE's maximum speed. But the A4 was a viable operation.

This was quite significant because at that time the RCAF was doing a detailed study of aircraft to replace their current fighter. The study group, of which I was a member, was to look at seven different aircraft to determine what would be a suitable candidate for the Air Force. The A4 was among the seven. One of the aircraft among the seven was the Northrop F5. The Northrop Company said that they could provide a hooked version of the F5 if that aircraft had been selected. However, when we examined the requirement, it was evident that the F5 didn't come anywhere near meeting a number of the requirements for a replacement RCAF fighter aircraft. So we didn't, in fact, study the F5. We studied the other aircraft. We were naturally prejudiced towards the A4 because it could operate from BONAVENTURE, albeit with certain restrictions.

The RCAF however, considered the SKYHAWK to be obsolete, or certainly obsolescence at that time, which was rather strange because the A4 SKYHAWK subsequently performed throughout the Vietnam war in the 1970s in a very a distinguished manner. In any case, the study was put forward and I guess if you could have a copy of that study today, it might be worth something because the aircraft that was subsequently selected was the Northrop FREEDOM FIGHTER, the F5, which we hadn't even looked at for a number of financial reasons. So the original study disappeared. I doubt that a copy of that study exists at all today.

After my period – we've been jumping around here a bit – but after my tour as base Commander of CFB Shearwater in 1970, I was sent down to SACLANT in Norfolk – a NATO appointment. I was not displeased at being able to get out of the fray which developed subsequent to unification. I was therefore not bothered with any unification problems. One little incident I might mentioned is that I was wearing Naval wings on my uniform – my naval uniforms and on my green uniforms as well while in Norfolk. On a visit of the Chief of the Defence Staff, who shall remain nameless I was quite severely admonished for wearing Naval wings on this uniform as opposed to the unification pilot's wings which I had to change to. I retired in 1976 in Norfolk.

I was called back in to the service subsequently because one of my jobs at SACLANT had been to arrange an international conferences which were held at the Naval College in Annapolis. One conference was slated for very soon after I left the job and my relief did not feel happy about taking on that commitment. So I was brought back in on a temporary basis to conduct those arrangements. These were quite interesting. To give you an example, we had visits, by primarily, Ministers of National Defence from all the NATO countries, Chiefs of Naval Staff and so on. They were arranged according to their rank for various events, social and official. I was responsible for doing all this. For example, we wouldn't put two people side by side where their nations were having conflicts -- and NATO and these things had to be considered. On this one occasion, we had a fellow come from Lisbon, a Naval Captain. I put him fairly well back in the seating plan with various other Captains. When the Portuguese National Representative came down from Washington to have a look at this, he was horrified. This Naval Captain from Lisbon was a member – I would incorrectly say the Revolutionary Committee, but there was some very high level committee in Portugal and this Naval Captain certainly was not to be regarded as an ordinary Naval Captain. He was very high in the hierarchy of

developments in Portugal. So, this Naval Captain had to be up with Ministers and what not.

That, I think, would bring to a close my Naval career.

INTERVIEWER: Pop, I think it's very important that the listener understand some of the cleavages that existed between the traditional navy and the operation of aircraft from ships at sea. I was wondering perhaps if you would give us a bit of a feeling for that because you experienced it in very early years?

FOTHERINGHAM: Yes, indeed. It had been the practice in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) to have officers trained and serve with the Royal Navy. This was done primarily in capital ships: battle ships and cruisers but as far as I know, it never happened in aircraft carriers. There were no RCN officers as part of that program that served in carriers that I'm aware of. This meant that when we got involved with carriers in 1943 with HMS NABOB and HMS PUNCHER. These ships were manned by Canadian personnel with Royal Navy forming the air element of the carrier, and persisted for some time thereafter. There were Canadians in command positions in these carriers who had no carrier experience whatsoever. In fact, from 1943 until about 1956, for 13 years we operated aircraft carriers with Commanding Officers who had never served in an aircraft carrier previously. The other aspect of this was that the RCN training of their permanent force officers prewar had, as I said, been carried out very much along RN lines with RN courses and RN appointments and so we were really a miniature Royal Navy. This resulted in there being quite a difference between the permanent force and the reserve forces. It was evident during the war. The Navy very naturally put their permanent force officers in the destroyer, where the volunteer officers were primarily serving in Corvettes. This was not a rule and there were many exceptions, but the tendency was that the destroyers were manned by regular force permanent force people as opposed to the corvettes. There was a difference in the customs and behaviors in these two classes of ships. And that was evident for some considerable time.

INTERVIEWER: This is the end of tape one, side one.

INTERVIEWER: This is the start of tape one, side two.

FOTHERINGHAM: There were similar differences that came up when Naval Aviation was formed. We had had a number of Canadians who served with the Fleet Air Arm during the war, the group of which I was a member. I mentioned this earlier when they called for volunteers to form a Canadian Naval Aviation from among serving Naval officers. At the end of the war, there appeared to be no Pacific commitment for the RCAF and consequently with the end of the war in Europe, there was no operational experience ahead for RCAF officers. There was, however, a requirement in the Royal Navy because they anticipated a long Pacific war and were building a number of aircraft carriers to cope with this. So, a large number of RCAF numbers joined the RNVR to fly for the Navy in what was going to be this long Pacific war. Now, the majority of these RCAF people, a great many of them, had been instructors in Canada, and had amassed a

good many hours and a lot of air experience. Whereas, I suspect, the operational Air Force officers in Europe at the time had had enough and were quite ready to go home. A great majority who took advantage of this requirement in RNVR were officers who came from Canada, from flying training establishments largely.

When Naval Aviation was formed, or began to become active as a specific unit in the post war period, we therefore had, in the ships, this RN trained attitude which formed the command structure in the carrier, with the former RCNVR forming the large part of the officer complement of the ship at the lower ranks. Within aviation we had these two different groups – one with operational Naval experience during the war. Those like myself who got into Naval Aviation too late for operational experience, plus this RCAF contingent – experienced aviators who wanted to fly and were not in my view all that interested in Naval tradition and Naval background and so. They wanted to fly and had an opportunity to fly and that was it. The Navy was faced with a bit of a quandary as things developed as to who was going to be – you might say – favoured in these arrangements. Very beneficial to me, the Navy decided in favour of people with a Naval background.

So I found myself in a very strange position being a Squadron Commander with only a few hundred flying hours and having officers in my squadron who had two and three times as many flying hours as I had. I don't know. I was not really conscious of there being open resentment, but it was quite natural that people felt that this was a flying business. Why aren't the experienced aviators the ones who got the job? Well, as I said, the Navy fell back on Naval tradition and seniority and so on and that was the way it panned out. Now, I don't want to be blowing my horn. I felt that I had been very fortunate and perhaps blessed with something or other that let me fly airplanes. I would dispute the fact that any of these characters who had two or three times the flying hours more than I did were making a better carrier pilot than I made. In fact, it soon became evident that I had a certain facility for getting on and off a carrier's deck. I would point out at this time that in my career, I deck landed six different types of fixed wing aircraft in five different aircraft carriers. And in my career, I never scratched an airplane. I think that's a pretty enviable record that I would defy any of these people with many more hours than I to beat.

So, we had these different tensions within the carrier operation. One of the most prevalent ones was among the Commanding Officers who had not only little knowledge of carrier operations but not very much knowledge of flying. There are a number of examples that I could mention.. Although the Commanding Officers that we had were very fine officers and they were generally very popular with the ship's company and with the officer complement, there must have been among them a feeling of wishing that they had more aviation in their background.

To jump around a little bit chronologically -- in HMCS BONAVENTURE, for example, as Commander (Air), there were occasions when we embarked a senior officer. Commodore Brock was the senior officer embarked on the carrier. There were a number of occasions when I felt that the weather was such that we should recall the aircraft. After

consultations with the meteorological officer I would go to the compass platform and have a discussion with the Captain about recalling the aircraft and describe the met situation. I'm not sure that the Captain was really understanding of things like dew point and so on. At the end of this discussion, which took several minutes to try to persuade him, he would get on the blower to the senior officer, to Commodore Brock, and say, "Fotheringham thinks we ought to recall the aircraft." And Brock would say, "Send Fotheringham to me." Thereby, ensued another ten minutes or fifteen minutes of conversation to try to get approval to bring the aircraft back. By this time, I was in a fair state of nerves. This situation I didn't very much care for.

It's terrible to admit that Peter Berry, who was my Operations Officer in the ship and I worked out a system which I'm not proud of, but I use this to illustrate the kind of expedient we got to. Commodore Brock was very keen on radio silence. He wanted the exercises we were involved in to be conducted in complete radio silence. Peter Berry and I would brief the aircrew prior to their departure from the ship to, as soon as they got into the aircraft, to turn on their BONAVENTURE beacon. The beacon, of course, was silent at the time, but they were to have their beacon receivers on, volume turned up. The procedure was that when I went to have these discussions first with the Captain, and subsequently with COMFLT, I would go through the Ops room and tell Peter to turn on the beacon. And the minute they heard the beacon, this was a recall from me and they would start back. I was never caught out at this when, mysteriously, after these conversations, we got approval to recover. "Oh well, they're not that far away at all. We're all set to go here." But having to resort to that kind of suberterfuge, was not, as I say, something that I was proud of, but something that I felt was necessary under the circumstances. And this was primarily the result of the difference in backgrounds.

Now, I hasten to add that this was not 100% prevalent. I should mention here that when Captain Landymore was the ships' Captain when placed in exactly the same situation as Commodore Brock as the senior officer, I would go and have this conversation with Captain Landymore. It didn't take him much convincing. If I said I thought they ought to come back, he didn't need a whole list of meteorological reasons and other reasons, sea state and so on to agree with me. He would get on the blower to the Commodore saying, "I have recalled the aircraft --out." And that was the end of the conversation. So, I'm not trying to tar all of these individuals with the same brush, but there were these differences that kept coming to light and did have significance.

The other aspect was that some of these conversations with similar problems were going on in Ottawa with decisions over replacement aircraft and so on. It's fairly well known that – and the time-frame for this, I'm not exactly certain of but, I think probably in the 1950s when we were offered 50 HELLCATS from the US Navy with a backup of spares. The HELLCAT was really out of first line service at that time. But it would have certainly have served our purposes ideally. In fact, I believe, that when there was some question as to whether this was going to go through or not, I think, they upped the ante to 100 aircraft. The prices for these aircraft – I've heard a number of figures. I don't suppose any of them are really valid, so it didn't get quite to those sort of terms. But, I think we were talking 10,000 dollars for a HELLCAT, something in that range.

The Royal Navy, during those years, was still providing senior officers for aviation appointments in RCN Headquarters, and we felt – some of us felt – that they were having a session with the board of trade in the UK before they came, because they came quite naturally with the intent on seeing the Canadian Navy stay British. This came up over the acquisition of RN SEAFIREs and we didn't, in fact, get the HELLCAT deal and we had to go with SEAFIREs instead. Now, this had in fact a – I was going to say a beneficial outcome, but I'm not sure that's entirely true. When the SEA FURY came into service with the Royal Navy -- in the very early days of the SEA FURY -- it was quite evident that the SEA FURY was a very remarkable aircraft and certainly vastly superior to a thing like a HELLCAT. And more comparable, although having flown both, I would go with the FURY over the CORSAIR, but they were more comparable than the FURY and the HELLCAT for example. I think because of the failed arrangements with the HELLCAT, it was perhaps realized at that time that this had perhaps been a mistake. The Royal Navy or the Admiralty allowed us to get in very early on in the SEA FURY program and this was quite exciting because the SEA FURY was very definitely a first line aircraft and we were getting it hot off the press, so to speak. However, there were problems associated with that because the FURY, in particular the Bristol Centaurus engine had a number of teething problems and we ended up with a SEA FURY in a number of fields (locations) between Halifax and Ottawa and Ottawa and Rivers, Manitoba. So, as I say, it was a mixed blessing.

INTERVIEWER: I'm not sure that I should intervene at this time, but I think the listener might like to know that the SEA FURY was not designed as a Naval aircraft originally.

FOTHERINGHAM: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what it was designed for?

FOTHERINGHAM: Well, it was an outcome of the Hawker TYPHOON. It was an outcome from the RAF TYPHOON which I presume was meant to be primarily a ground support aircraft. This, of course, had been characteristic of British Naval aircraft from the beginning in that British Naval aircraft (*were often derivatives of RAF aircraft – ed)*– well, we have to go back and remember that the Fleet Air Arm came into being only in 1937,very shortly before the war. Prior to that it had been an element of the Royal Air Force. So, the Navy had not been favoured by up-to-date designs by British aircraft manufacturers.

The situation was entirely different in the US because the US Navy had [a] well-formed relationship with industry and they were getting aircraft that were specifically designed for Naval operations and were much better suited for it. I mentioned the CORSAIR. That was an interesting example because initially the CORSAIR was not entirely to the US Navy's liking as a carrier aircraft because it was used primarily to man Marine squadrons, primarily operating from ashore. The Royal Navy, perhaps because of that, were able to get in on the production of CORSAIRs during the war. There many aspects -- and I deck landed one of the earlier versions of the CORSAIR, which had cowl flaps

that one thought were put there specifically so that you couldn't see the LSO or the deck on the approach. However, they found the CORSAIR was a better carrier aircraft than a thing like a SEAFIRE, a SPITFIRE that had a hook attached to it. There was no doubt about that. The CORSAIR was better. Therefore, the Royal Navy were operating CORSAIRs from the carrier, from the earliest days of acquiring CORSAIRs. I'm not sure of the mechanics, but there were changes made in the CORSAIRs. They developed a "no bounce" oleo and various other minor changes to the CORSAIR that made it a much better carrier aircraft. Somewhere along the line, the US Navy decided the CORSAIR was a great carrier aircraft and they used them in very large numbers in carriers subsequently. But I think, had the British element not been part of that development, I don't know whether it would have happened that soon with the US Navy. But because of the difference in the carrier aircraft and the mentality behind the design of aircraft for Naval purposes and so on, [it[resulted in the adoption of USN aircraft being superior to British types. I would reiterate again that, in my personal opinion, I think, the FURY was a better aircraft and the better -- although I did many more deck landings with the SEA FURY than with a CORSAIR -- but I think the FURY would have been my choice between the two aircraft. But there were these differences that carried on.

One of the interesting aspects that resulted from this -- and I'm sure that one of your later interviewees will be able to give you far more detail on this was the Landing signals officer (LSO). The signals given by the Landing Signals Officer to an aircraft approaching the deck of a carrier were exactly 100% 180 degrees out of the phase with the US Navy. The Royal Navy LSOs told you what to do. They issued you an order, get down and go up, get down, etc. Whereas the US Navy said, you're too low, you're too high. So, it was a 180 degree change and that had in part largely to do with the characteristics of the aircraft on the "cut" arriving on the deck. I have thought about this recently, and I wondered to what extent perhaps the wing loading may have contributed to this. For example, I'm sure that the wing loading of a SEA FIRE was very much less than the wing loading of a CORSAIR. So, the techniques, particularly at that moment of approaching the deck, two or three knots above the stall and having a cut, in a CORSAIR the tendency was that it wasn't going anywhere after that cut. Whereas a SEA FIRE would have made a great glider and many ended up in the barrier as a result. So, there were these basic differences.

Now, I would hasten to mention that the Royal Navy was not a hind leg in this carrier development business. They came out with ideas, which changed the whole concept of carrier operation by the design of an angled deck, a steam catapult and a mirror landing aid, all of which were adopted in one form or another by the US Navy and, as I say, virtually revolutionized carrier operation and we can go into some of the details of that...

INTERVIEWER: I wonder if I can just interrupt at this point, because when we started this section, we discussed the cleavages between the traditional -- I suppose, Navy -- side of the house versus the requirements of the air side. To your knowledge, was the work-around, which you undertook thereby looking after the safety of the aircrew, prevalent with other Commander (Air)s in later years?

FOTHERINGHAM: I think that it definitely did. I should mention that prior to my experience, for example, in WARRIOR, we had a Royal Navy Commander (Flying). The organization changed in about 1955. Up until that time in both WARRIOR and MAGNIFICENT, we had a Commander Flying with a Lieutenant Commander -- with a Commander (Ops) as well. So there were two individuals at the Commander's rank. Now, I'm certain that with that kind of an organization, the inexperienced carrier person -- who was certainly entitled to be in Command of a capital ship -- was dealing with two very experienced RN officers and would have been much quicker to take the advice of those two experienced RN officers as opposed to taking the advice of someone who had always been in a much lower echelon and is now in some fairly exalted position and trying to tell me my job, sort of thing. I have an idea that that may have been an aspect of this. I'm not aware – I've never discussed this really with other people in that position, but I suspect that was the case because my predecessors were RN -- very experienced RN aviators. Not always the best by any means. They didn't necessarily send us the best. But at least they were "long in the tooth" in aviation and would have had created a much different impression on an inexperienced carrier Commanding Officer than would have been the case that I described with me with the Commanding Officer. So, I think that probably would account for quite a difference.

To go back to these developments in carrier operations, WARRIOR was a very conventional aircraft carrier in its day, with a hydraulic catapult and barriers. The landing routine was that the aircraft landed on, the barrier was dropped, the aircraft taxied forward of the barrier, the barrier went up and we were ready to receive the next aircraft.

INTERVIEWER: Did you take that aircraft and put it down the forward elevator or did you deck park it up forward?

FOTHERINGHAM: You would deck park it up forward. I think it would have been unusual to operate the forward lift while we were recovering aircraft. So, that we could get a fair large number aboard at the forward end of the flight deck, forward of the barrier. I can't think of an occasion when we would have recovered, except perhaps the last aircraft. If he went into the barrier, it didn't matter because there wasn't anybody following him. But, by and large, there was room in the deck park forward so that the landing went on without moving aircraft to the hangar below.

The removal from aircraft from the barrier -- we had a mobile crane and we had a very experienced flight deck crew and it was remarkable how quickly they could clean up a mess if an aircraft went into a sponson. One of your interviewees can give you a good description of that if you'd like it. We were able to clear the deck to get ready to recover other aircraft quite quickly. And we did experience barrier crashes; they were fairly common and many times didn't create that much of a problem. The propeller was damaged, of course, but no serious damage to the aircraft.

We, on one occasion, in Jamaica -- in Kingston, Jamaica, in harbour -- we launched aircraft. I think probably we were still at anchor. If we weren't at anchor, we were just raising the anchor at the time and we launched aircraft from the hydraulic catapult while

the ship was in harbour. The performance of the aircraft -- this was a FIRE FLY -- and the performance of the aircraft was such that we were able to do that. I'm not sure what the end speed was on that hydraulic catapult. I haven't got that information in my head, if it was ever there. But that kind of thing was practical. I did mention that we had to take sponsons off going through the canal with WARRIOR. But, WARRIOR, as far as all of us were concerned, was a perfectly normal carrier operation. We weren't thinking of it – there was nothing better in that class of ship that would have been available to us, so we had the best that was available.

INTERVIEWER: I think the basic problem was that WARRIOR was designed for the Pacific theatre and didn't have any (cold weather) insulation.

FOTHERINGHAM: Right, yes, yes. And I mentioned that in connection with bringing it out here to the West Coast. MAGNIFICENT was virtually a repeat of WARRIOR, slightly different, but basically the same configuration as regards to catapult and barrier. But by this time, we were operating higher performance aircraft, the SEA FURY and the AVENGER from WARRIOR.

I only experienced that briefly. I was a Group Commander of what was the Support Air Group (SAG) and we used to embark for brief periods just to carrier qualify everybody. I flew both the AVENGER and the SEA FURY aboard MAGNIFICENT, which was only a slightly different operation from what FIREFLYs had been.

Now, the operation of SEAFIREs, [as] I mentioned -- we had problems with the SEAFIRE. We had supercharger gear slippage and one thing or another. The decision was made on the trip out west not to embark the SEAFIREs because of these problems although SEAFIREs did fly, in fact, from the carrier.

I might mention at this time that these problems vis a vis RN, RCN were not just limited to the carrier. We also had the Commander (Flying) at the Air Station was an RN officer and on one occasion, it had been decided between headquarters and people at the Air Station that we would form an aerobatic team to perform at the Canadian National Exhibition. I was in personnel at the time in Ottawa at headquarters and we compiled a number of individuals that we thought would be well suited to perform this display team. It was my understanding -- I knew that the Commander (Flying) who was an RN officer at the Air Station at the time, was not in favour of this operation at all. In fact, he was quite opposed. So, I was instrumental in Ottawa as Director Air Personnel to send the direction for the formation of this aerobatic team to the Flag Officer as opposed to Shearwater. The Air Station came very much under the Flag Officer and I thought, "We'll tell the Flag Officer to do this and this will be the end of it. Shearwater won't have an opportunity to say not only no, but hell no".

Well, this had an interesting kickback because it was some time later -- I'm probably talking just a very few weeks -- I was called down to see the Chief of Naval Personnel one Admiral Creery. And he sat me down in his office and he started to go over the history of Naval Aviation in the RCN and how the decision had been made that we had

rely on loan officers from the Royal Navy because we lacked Canadian experience at those levels and so on. And therefore we had these loan officers in responsible positions and that there were some people opposing this policy and "You, Fotheringham are one of them!" And so I guess the Commander (Flying) had got to CNP and I was guilty of having opposed this policy of RN officers by making this direction. Well, I guess, guilty, but I couldn't immediately connect these two things at the time, because it was sometime later when Admiral Creery got at me. But he certainly made it quite clear that I was not supporting this business of RN officers on loan.

To get back to the carrier, the other incident that happened at the time of MAGNIFICENT was the changeover in the procedures for bringing the aircraft aboard. The FURY was more like an American carrier aircraft than a SEAFIRE, for sure and AVENGERS -- which of course was a standard US Navy aircraft – a very stalwart one. So those changes were made from British to American. There was always in Naval Aviation a (USN) element, because a number of the Naval Aviators even those with wartime service, had been trained by the US Navy. The Royal Navy did a lot of their training with the US Navy, so there was a very pro-US Navy element in Naval Aviation. Some of those people were in responsible positions. And there again, we had conflict with those RCN officers, with one exception: Horatio Nelson Lay had been an early advocate of Naval Aviation and carrier aviation and he had gleaned a lot of his background from US Navy sources. And Lay was very much pro-US Navy and very much pro-carrier.

I don't know that it's fair to mention an incident. One individual, I had better not mention any names here – one of the RN officers on loan in a senior position in headquarters who had made this decision not to go with the HELLCAT deal, but to go with the SEA FIRE deal, was an RN exchange officer. Admiral Lay, was an Admiral subsequently and I was back in headquarters again. I explained this situation to Admiral Lay indicating what had happened. This RN officer had only recently retired and had decided to stay on in Canada. Admiral Lay said, "If I catch that fellow in Naval Headquarters, we're going to hold him here." He was really quite adamant that this had resulted from this difference from RN and what Admiral Lay perceived as best for Canadian Naval Aviation. So there were all these tensions running through the whole time, to a very minor extent now with the RCAF background among aircrew as opposed to the RN/RCN background, and between RN loan officers and Canadian officers and so on. And I'm afraid that this relationship of reliance on RN officers in key positions in Naval Aviation went on longer than really was necessary, although it did mean giving experience to – well, people like myself who were comparatively inexperienced in Naval Air background compared to the RN officers. But, after all this was the Canadian Navy and you know at some point we had to get on with being Canadian…

INTERVIEWER: Well, apart from these undercurrents, when I flew from BONAVENTURE, all of the procedures and all of the aircraft were American.

FOTHERINGHAM: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Is that your perception?

FOTHERINGHAM: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So, the BONAVENTURE activity from a pure pilot perspective was really quite straight forward because it followed the American model. Did this cause any grief at all – this change from MAGNIFICENT to BONAVENTURE with the hardware and the procedures having matured to the point where they were very much like the Americans?

FOTHERINGHAM: I think it did very considerably. By this time, we had had a fair amount of Canadian experience and, in fact, Canadian experience which really -- almost as a national characteristic. Certainly because of some of these Air Force people that I had referred to before, we had a lot of good thinking, capable people in aviation and had developed a lot of our own procedures. And I wouldn't say that there was a light fleet carrier in the Royal Navy that could have equaled our performance. Therefore, we were beginning to stand on our own. When these changes came to a USN concept, I think, they came very much easier. For the first -- from 1945 until, I guess, (Captain) Fraser Harris *(a Naval Aviator pilot-ed)* took command of the carrier in the late 1950s. But for the intervening years, we had RCN officers who had no carrier background and no aviation experience. But even after Fraser Harris we got back to RCN non-aviator type for a bit, and in fact, for a long way through to the likes of Bruce and Landymore in BONAVENTURE -- but there was this very much of an RN attitude and background which took a bit of time to change. I think the performance, the things that we achieved in the carrier business all through that period were all quite phenomenal considering the great inexperience of the Canadian air element. Now, mind you, we had people who had RN wartime service in aviation. But comparatively few. So we were doing very well on our own, but we had people at the senior level who were able to influence major decisions until a bit later on. But certainly, with the advent of BONAVENTURE, these attitudes had changed very considerably, although the incidents that I mentioned with the first Captain of BONAVENTURE and the first CANCOMFLT would not really indicate this. So we still had these struggles going on.

But professionally from the point of aviators, we were in a class alone, there's no doubt in my mind at all. We could stick it with any carrier and in fact there were many occasions where during joint operations with the RN and the USN, that they packed up flying before we did. So, we were experts in what we were doing and we were doing a damn good job.

INTERVIEWER: Pop, as a youngster on the carrier, we could recognize that we were extremely successful in doing a good job. I wonder if you could give us some examples of the kinds of things that we did and on the other hand some of the problems that you encountered as Commander (Air) at the time?

FOTHERINGHAM: Well, I think there's no doubt that we had a very high degree of professionalism among the aircrew. They were not only very capable of doing what they

were asked to do, but were always at the cutting edge and prepared to do more. I think this was shown to be true in exercises with both the US Navy and the Royal Navy who may have thought that our activities were harem-scarem Canadian. But from a professional point of view, we were certainly their equal if not their betters. This was clearly demonstrated on a number of occasions when we were doing things that the Americans would have thought were not very practical from such a small ship.

We had a number of successes and unfortunately a few failures, but we were very definitely at the cutting edge in Naval Aviation doing the operations we were doing from such a comparatively small ship. There were differences of opinion as to what we should be doing. There was a feeling that pressures were on -- possibly financial pressures, of which I wasn't entirely aware -- but there were pressures on to demonstrate that the carrier was earning its keep and entitled to be maintained as part of what was a dwindling naval force in view of financial constraints. This may have led us to do things that perhaps exceeded what might normally have been expected of us. But there was no doubt about it, we were a band of professionals. I'm talking about the people who were flying at the time. I don't mean to be including myself because I was a decision maker, not an operator.

But we were capable of doing quite amazing things in the eyes of the US Navy. For example, with the aircraft we had from such a small ship, the Americans had invariably thought that this was not really a practical operation, but we demonstrated over and over again that we were capable of doing a very good operational job. There were times when minor – well, I guess they weren't minor difficulties. We had arrester wire problems on one occasion. We had made a decision as far as the ship's company – myself, LCdr. (Flying) and the Captain decided -- we could live with. We were certainly on the cutting edge, if not beyond, as far as the aircrew were concerned. There were problems that arose as a result of this. But, we did feel that we were under pressure because it was necessary that we demonstrate that BONAVENTURE was worth the portion of the navy that was required to keep BONAVENTURE in service.

There were financial pressures on the navy and there were -- not that I was entirely aware of them-- but I could readily imagine there were two schools of thought as to whether we should continue to pour what would be considered by many an inordinate part of our resources into naval aviation rather than into what was more traditional for the RCN in an escort type of Navy rather than having a the carrier element. We were, I think, pretty much aware of these pressures during the early days – and perhaps during the whole life of BONAVENTURE. But, certainly during the time I was in the ship. The first period of the operation of BONAVENTURE, we were aware of these pressures and I think that there's no doubt that we demonstrated that we were able to live up to, if not exceed, what might have readily been expected of us.

INTERVIEWER: This is the J.B. Fotheringham interview. This is the end of tape one, side two.

INTERVIEWER: This is the J.B. Fotheringham interview. This is tape two, side one. Pop, I wonder if we could continue along in that theme concerning pressures that existed on senior naval officers at that time with respect to producing more, if you like, with less from the carrier?

FOTHERINGHAM: BONAVENTURE was an entirely different beast from MAGNIFICENT. We were able to incorporate three very major aspects into the carrier. The first was the steam catapult. The second was the Mirror Landing Aid and the major one, of course, was the angled deck. These were major changes in carrier operation and allowed us to do things with BONAVENTURE that would have been entirely impossible with either WARRIOR or MAGNIFICENT. So, we're in to a whole new era of carrier operation. This allowed us to greatly enhance our operation with regard to the sea state conditions under which we operated.

However, there were other ramifications in that we were now operating a twin engine TRACKER aircraft -- very much larger -- from the carrier. And in fact, it would be interesting to make note, and I think my memory serves me correctly, that an aircraft -- TRACKER -- landing, I think, as little as seven feet off the center line would have struck the island. We were only able to park six TRACKERs forward of the barrier and these six TRACKER positions had to be filled before we could begin to recover the BANSHEEs. Now this was entirely the opposite of normal carrier operations where the jets, because of fuel restrictions and so on, would recovered first, followed by the piston engine aircraft. We hadn't that luxury in BONAVENTURE because, if we didn't get those six TRACKERs up forward of the barrier first, we couldn't accommodate, we couldn't recover all the aircraft. So we had to resort to very unusual carrier operation activities in order to operate the carrier.

INTERVIEWER: I don't mean to interrupt, but you're talking about where the traditional barrier could be. Because at that time, they didn't raise barriers on the angled deck.

FOTHERINGHAM: No, that's quite true.

INTERVIEWER: I just wanted to clarify that.

FOTHERINGHAM: No, that's quite true. I'm referring to the clearance of the angled deck from the deck park of the aircraft forward of the barrier. So, we were actually operating what might have been considered beyond reasonable limits by, for example, the US Navy who operated much larger carriers and were not faced with these similar kinds of restrictions. There's no doubt in my mind that we were, in all of these operations, very much at the cutting edge. The TRACKER was a very large aircraft to operate from a carrier, particularly, such a small carrier. Higher performance BANSHEEs, we were always very much at the cutting edge. I think, to give you an example, if we were required to launch BANSHEEs in no-wind conditions, the BANSHEE -- and I believe probably without any external – certainly without any external – load and without perhaps even internal ammunition, we would launch in no wind conditions with just

BONAVENTURE's self-produced airspeed across the deck. We were launching the BANSHEE at about five point two lateral acceleration and the BANSHEE, I believe, was stressed to something like five point five. So we were right on the limits of operations. I never flew a BANSHEE under those – I never flew a BANSHEE – but certainly not under those kinds of restrictions. So we were very much at the limit in virtually everything we did . I think that a number of conventional American aviators would have privately described us as a little bit loose in the head for carrying on those kinds of operations. We did it with great success. There was a time when the whole of Naval Aviation, I guess, was being questioned. I was not entirely conscious of this in the position I was in at the time. But we were, as I say, very much at the cutting edge and the view was whether it was worthwhile to persist in those kinds of operations. But we did it with success.

We had a number of very unfortunate failures because we were very much right at the top of the curve. I think, perhaps, it was not entirely unexpected that we had to pay for those kinds of operations. Difficulties did arise because we were very much right at the top edge of the capability of the things that we were doing. We had very little room for error and fortunately the quality of the aircrew that were involved at the time, could live with very little error being allowed. We had tragedies, but as I say we were operating very much close to the limit. I think that we knew that we had to in aviation -- we had to demonstrate that kind of capability in order to survive.

There were pressures -- not that I was entirely aware of them -- but there was always, I think, a background feeling that aviation was taking a very big hunk of a small budget and was this really worthwhile. At one stage in BONAVENTURE's operation, a degree of operation was virtually set at being a minimum which we should be able to maintain in order to make the retention of the carrier a viable operation. This level was set pretty high and it was very difficult. To the credit of everybody who was involved, we were able to maintain that as long as we did. We were under constant pressure to demonstrate this kind of ability. We were doing so to demonstrate to non-aviation background officers that we were capable of doing things. I think to an aviation trained senior officer, this would have been quite a different aspect to the whole thing. But we had to demonstrate these capabilities to people who had no aviation background and who had nothing by which really to measure what we were doing.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose it's psychological, but did you ever get the feeling that this lack of background by the carrier Captains in the earlier years, left them feeling as if they were not part of the operation, simply because they couldn't talk to you on equal terms?

FOTHERINGHAM: Because my time in the carriers was at a fairly senior level, I was fortunate to be able to have conversations with the Commanding Officers of the carriers that were not available to the average run of aircrew. I had great respect for these officers because I had served in the sea going side of the thing and they were people to be respected. They had my respect and I think they were doing their best to try to understand. Now for someone who has gone through everything that is involved in pilot training to get to be a carrier pilot, to deal with someone who has absolutely no

experience whatsoever, there is bound to be tremendous gap. And there was a tremendous gap. This was one of the things with which we had to contend in the aviation business.

INTERVIEWER: One other interviewee mentioned the tremendous difference between the ship's routine – watch on, watch off - and the fact that the aircrew had to operate against the deck cycle and how this often was in conflict. Did you every resolve any of those issues at all?

FOTHERINGHAM: Well, these issues were constantly with us and, I think, certainly by the time of BONAVENTURE, we had found a way of dealing with most of those because we had experienced them previously. But, these certainly did cause a lot of problems. Things like 'Up Spirits', for example, for the ship's company which happened at a fixed time of the day certainly didn't match the flying program. So other arrangements had to be made and these were found to be very tedious by those who had to make the arrangements. There was little give and take in some of those kinds of areas because the working routines of the air department and the rest of the ship were so very different. And these invariably caused – well, I suppose 'friction' could be used. But there were always little complications because of the air routine as opposed to the ship's company routine which was very much on traditional lines. Again, we were very new to the carrier business. If you had been in a Navy that operated carrier twenty years or so, these things would have been overcome. But, in our case, the ship's company, and I refer to the non-aviation part of the ship's company, had never had any opportunity to experience these variations in routine were required by the nature of flying operations. So there were always little problems that came up.

INTERVIEWER: It always strikes me that being a Commander (Air) was almost a political act. On the one hand, you had to deal with the Captain and CANCOMFLT, which were the senior people. On the other hand, you had your own peers to deal with, Commander (E), Commander (L), Commander (Surgeon). And then you had the Squadron Commanders to deal with and all of this was a bit of a balancing act. Is that the way you saw it?

FOTHERINGHAM: Very much so, very much so and it's interesting that you mention the technical commanders. You mention Commander (E), Commander (L) and so on; they were much more understanding of the problems that we were contending with in that specific area than were some of the others. So I wouldn't want you to feel that it was the Captain versus all the rest. We did have support within the heads of department's levels in the technical branches and so on, which did ease the problem. But there was always this conflict that arose, primarily because none of those other people had ever had the opportunity to have carrier experience. The operation of a carrier is entirely different from the operation of a capital ship that does not involve flying operations. So there were always this pulling and hauling that sometimes was understood by some more readily than others.

But as far as the Commanding Officers were concerned, I think, having Command of the carrier would have been viewed as a very important career appointment in the eyes of the Commanding Officer. He would feel that it was necessary to make his name while in such an appointment. Therefore there was constant pressure on the aviation side to conform what was visualized as the way the ship should operate that didn't necessarily meet the best situation with regard to aviation. When we had technical failures in the ship, there was a feeling of whether we should be able to carry on in the face of these failures. I'm thinking specifically of problems with arrester wires -- where we had an occasion where we lost a certain ability as far as arrester wires were concerned -- whether we should carry on or wait until those could be rectified.

INTERVIEWER: Now, with respect to the arrester wires, I understand as I recall, there were seven wires originally and they took the seventh one out because the nose of the airplane was almost over the side of the angle deck at the other end. That made six and each one of those were two wires.

FOTHERINGHAM: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: They went around twice.

FOTHERINGHAM: It went around twice.

INTERVIEWER: If you lost one, you lost two.

FOTHERINGHAM: You lost two. Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And I think at one point we were down to two wires, as I recall.

FOTHERINGHAM: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: …In the fall of 1958. But even that is not a major risk.

FOTHERINGHAM: No, it was not.

INTERVIEWER: The aircraft could go around and make another approach.

FOTHERINGHAM: That's right, that's right. The landing technique with the angled deck was quite different from what had been conventional in a straight deck carrier. I had mentioned, I think, the change in the signals of the LSO, which did a hundred and eighty degree change in the way the LSO operated. Now, we had a mirror, but we also had a LSO as a backup. The mirror was a tremendous aid in the operation of aircraft on to the deck. It was a very great help. I mean, we couldn't conceivably have operated TRACKER and BANSHEEs from a non-angled deck carrier. It would have been quite impractical. So these changes brought about a very significant change in the operational capability of the carrier.

And I think that I mentioned that in the case of BONAVENTURE operating a piston aircraft with a jet aircraft, because of the fuel problems -- the fuel consumption problems with jet aircraft -- it would be very logical to recover -- in fact, necessary virtually to recover the jet aircraft first. We couldn't do that in BONAVENTURE if we were flying both piston engine and jet aircraft. The configuration of the ship was such that we had to recover TRACKERs before the jets because of the space available on the carrier deck forward. We were able to get six TRACKERs into the deck park forward and still have the flight deck, the landing area, useable to the full extent of its capability. So this resulted in recovering piston engine aircraft ahead of the fighters. The US Navy would have considered this asinine. But we had to live with those kinds of things, which I think demonstrates an aspect of the capability that our flight deck people and certainly the aviation people, with which they had to contend, and the things we were able to do, I'm sure were the envy of many RN and USN carriers that were much larger and not contending with the kind of problems we had. I think we were at the very top of carrier flying capability.

INTERVIEWER: I have another question for you. If I can ask you to put on your ship's Captain hat. You're on a destroyer, looking at this carrier. The carrier always has to turn in the wind to recover the aircraft and you're in one of these destroyers. How do you cope when the carrier is always maneuvering and you're required to keep station? Could you kind of give us a picture.

FOTHERINGHAM: Well, in fact, I could because -- I would go to a later period in my career. I had command of HMCS ST LAURENT on the West Coast and spent a period of time operating with a US Navy carrier. I should point out that there were quite basic differences in the operation of carriers. Our carriers were commanded by executive officers, non-aviation officers primarily. The US Navy had a pilot in command of the carrier and to my view, many of the USN pilots commanding carriers had no concept of the operation of their escorts. I, on one occasion, got into a pretty heated discussion, not only with a Captain of a carrier but with an Admiral. Being an aviator and commanding a destroyer at the time, to try to point out to them that they really hadn't much concept of what -- because I think that there own "black shoes" *(purely sea officers-ed)* were intimidated by the ranks of the carrier people and possibly this discussion never came up. But I told one US Navy Admiral, I said, "If you think you're getting any assistance whatsoever from the destroyers that you've got chasing around the ocean after all your alterations of course, you're wrong. You're not getting any help at all."

In ST LAURENT, I had spent a number of hours at 25 knots, dashing from one position to another as the carrier continually altered course, without any regard whatsoever for whether the screen was performing a reasonable function or not. I think this was one of the differences. A very marked difference between USN operations and Canadian operations. In the Canadian carrier, the Captain had only recently been in that destroyer chasing the carrier around and so was very much aware of all those implications. I think probably I would not have been able to make the same criticism of the operation of the carrier, had I been escorting a Canadian carrier then when escorting an American carrier. So, there were a lot of these differences. I felt very fortunate that I was able to – because

of my executive, non-aviation background, was able to be much more sensitive of these differences of view and how people were thinking about specific operations of the carrier.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any thing else that you'd like to say about the carrier and the successes and problems? I would also like to hear your views 40 years after the fact concerning what you thought of the carrier, it's impact and your own major role in it.

FOTHERINGHAM: Well, I think that our operation in the carriers was considerably handicapped by a number of things that we discussed. We really had no experience to fall back on as far as the aviation aspects were concerned. We had a number of people who had wartime carrier experience, but they were at a junior level. So we were feeling our way and felt under pressure almost constantly in order to demonstrate that we were earning our pay, that we were worth keeping as a part of the navy. I think we demonstrated an incredible capability with regard to those problems of always being supervised by experienced executive officers who had little or no aviation experience, who certainly had the best interests of the Navy at heart and were perhaps having a bit of a turmoil themselves as to what the value of naval aviation was to the Navy. There's no doubt in my mind that it was an essential component.

I very much regret the fact that that hasn't persisted. It is a costly element. There's no two ways about it. But, I think the developments in the world and the US Navy and the Royal Navy have clearly demonstrated that carriers are certainly a vital element of the navy. Now, perhaps not of a navy Canada requires, but I think it's a great shame that we have lost all that experience that was very difficult to gain. We lost a very unfortunate and a very large number of people gaining that experience. I think it's left perhaps an unhappy view in the eyes of those who were involved because it was so costly to gain all that experience and have it dwindled away and be of no use at the present time. It was characterized by a number of very capable people and I feel quite keenly the loss of that aspect of aviation. From my own perspective, having started out in the non-air side of the Navy and having been fortunate enough to get a fair amount of experience in the non-air side of the navy interspersed with my aviation experience. I think that it's very sad that the Canadian Navy has had to perforce give up what they demonstrated we could do in an excellent fashion that was not necessarily the envy, but certainly gained the respect of, both the Royal Navy and US Navy with whom we operated on many occasions. I'm sure that we gained a great deal of respect for what we were able to do with what we had.

INTERVIEWER: On behalf of the War Museum, Pop, I would like to thank you very, very much for spending time with us and sharing your views and thoughts this morning. This is the end of the J.B. Fotheringham interview. This is the end of tape two, side one.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS