CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: Deanna Brasseur

INTERVIEWER: Amber Lloydlangston

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Deanna M. Brasseur

Interviewed 23 January, 2007

By Amber Lloydlangston

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program. Interview with Deanna Brasseur. Recorded on 23 January, 2007 at Ottawa, Ontario. Interviewed by Amber Lloydlangston. Tape 1, Side 1.

BRASSEUR: Major Deanna Marie Brasseur. B-R-A-S-S-E-U-R.

INTERVIEWER: We have both signed the legal release, is that right?

BRASSEUR: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER: May I ask you to provide some brief biographical data please?

BRASSEUR: Certainly. I was born the 9th of September, 1953 at St. Joseph's hospital in Pembroke, Ontario. Briefly, I was raised across Canada as a dependent child of a working air force officer. Graduated from high school in 1971, joined the military in 1972 as a private Administration Clerk. I completed basic recruit training, basic administration training. Did a short posting to 14 Dental Unit Detachment in Winnipeg. In 1973 until accepted for commissioning under the Officer Candidate Training Plan. Completed officer training December of 1973.

Commenced Air Weapons Controller training in 1974. I worked as an Air Weapons Controller both at 22nd NORAD Region Headquarters North Bay, Ontario and 23rd NORAD Region Headquarters Duluth, Minnesota up until 1979 when I became a candidate for the Study of Woman in Non-Traditional Environments and Roles and commenced pilot training in November of '79. Graduated Wings at Moose Jaw 2CFFTS Friday February the 13th 1981. Continued serving at Moose Jaw as a Flight Instructor until 1985. A year-long French course in Ottawa and a posting to Base Flight, Cold Lake to fly T-33s in December of 1986. Advised in the spring of 1987 I was accepted for a follow on training to fighters.

So, commenced the CF-5 Basic Fighter Pilot Training Course in June of 1988. Graduated December of '88, started F-18 OTU in January of '89, graduating in June of '89. Followed on to assume the Plans Officer position at 416 Squadron at Cold Lake. In August of 1990 I was posted National Defence Headquarters to the Directorate of Flight Safety where I served until I took early retirement on, officially, the 10th of March 1994.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me what motivated you to join the military?

BRASSEUR: Yes, and there were several factors. My father was Commanding Officer of 43rd Radio Squadron Penhold, Alberta when I graduated high school and I had a summer employment at the base, lifeguard, instructing at the pool. So a significant number of my peer group were young airmen. So we had lots of hours drinking coke and listening to the juke box in the base cafeteria. So I got to hear all of their stories and it sounded like something very interesting to do. I was anxious to leave home and spread my fledgling wings, so to speak, get on with my independent life. My father, in the spring of 1972, had encouraged me to apply for the Regular Officers' Training Plan. I had enrolled at Red Deer College and was completing my first year of university. And he certainly felt this would be a good way to get ahead, to complete a degree, to get some discipline in my life, which I think he thought I needed at the time, and come out with a career.

So there were a number of things. I was accepted – I did make application – was accepted for officers' training and I wanted Physical Education and Recreation, which was not open to women at the time. They advised me that I could apply for nursing or pharmacy and I said, "No, thank you very much." However, after the summer of 1972 was complete, I was very anxious to leave home and went to training centre and applied for entry into the armed forces and both my parents and the recruiting officer said, "As a Private?" [laughs] I said, "Yes". And that's where it started. I was enrolled and off I went to basic training in September, actually October the 13th. Friday we arrived in Cornwallis.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe your first year of service and explain how this year shaped your future choices?

BRASSEUR: Certainly. One of the elements that I neglected to mention was I was fairly heavily romantically involved with a young airman when I – and he was accepted for the Officer Candidate Training Plan. And in my traditional way of thinking, at the age of eighteen, I thought well, if I went and joined the military then I would – for six months – then I would get a really good appreciation of what my husband was doing so I could better support him and be a good wife. So, it was with that in mind that I went off to basic training in Cornwallis. I really enjoyed the routine. I enjoyed the job. I enjoyed the women, the trainers, the whole concept of working for a living and serving my country. And when I came home at Christmas, we got engaged and back I went for basic Admin Clerk training. At the time, the military's emphasis was on non-fraternization between officers and NCOs. And I was a private and he was going to be an officer cadet. And he reminded me of that. So I probably broke off the engagement and said, "I think I like the military well enough to stay here, as opposed to take my release and become," what I thought I was going to become, which was housewife with a couple of kids and living "the dream". As a matter of fact, I guess I got to live my own dream.

When I got to Winnipeg, I was one of two of the first two Administration Clerks assigned to dental units in the Canadian Forces. After two weeks I found that I was fairly bored. I was working with a real time manual typewriter, Underwood, probably World War II issued, and pulling four dentists' files – patient files – each day in the morning, probably

six each and putting them away at the end of the day. And checking the mail twice a day and writing the routine order input for the base for people to come in for dental checks. And I sort of thought, twenty years down the road, that this was not what I wanted to be in my life. And at the moment, the one morning I woke up and the news had said that the RCMP was hiring and finally opening up to women. And I thought, "Oh, great, maybe they'll take me because I just finished a tough training program and theirs can't be that much more challenging". So I phoned home to my father and said, "I'm thinking of quitting." And he probably encouraged me to seek challenge through the military – I had already invested six months – why not apply for my commission under the Officer Candidate Training Plan. Because he was aware of the date of submission and program and stuff. And I said to him, "Gee, dad, I've only been in four months." And he said, "What can they say? You know, they can say 'no' and then…" So, I made an application and I was accepted as a – to become an – Air Weapons Controller. And that launched the next, well, almost thirty-five years.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after you completed the Officer Training Program and before you trained as a pilot?

BRASSEUR: OK. I spent three months in Chatham, New Brunswick on operational, what they call, on the job training. It's basically a holding pattern. I got to visit St. Margaret's Radar Station where they had the backup intercept control for NORAD Region – 22nd NORAD Region – because that's where I was going as an Air Weapons Controller. And I started training in April of '74, graduated in July of '74, and started on BRAVO crew – it was CHARLIE crew back then – working in The Hole in North Bay, the underground complex, as an Air Weapons Controller.

So for the first year I was employed, actively so, as an Air Weapons Controller. And we controlled the CF-101 Aircraft in the air intercept role in defence of Canada and US under the NORAD Agreement. I upgraded to – well, I took on the Weapons Training Officer's Program at the time, secondary duty on crew. I was the Strategic Early Warning Officer for exercise purposes for a while. And after three years I was posted to 23rd NORAD Region on exchange with the United States Air Force in Duluth, Minnesota where I was Primary Weapons Director in charge of CHARLIE crew down there for a year. I attended the Advanced Instructor Weapons School in Tyndall, Florida, which was rare for a Canadian to be assigned to that school from the States. We only ever got one position a year from North Bay so…

However, at the time the American Air Force was transitioning to AWACs – Airborne Warning and Control platform – and they were taking most of their experienced controllers for that program so it left spaces for others. Once I finished the Instructor Weapons Course, I came back to 23rd NORAD Region and was put in charge of the division's continuation training program for a year, and it was from that position that I was accepted for SWINTER trials.

INTERVIEWER: What were the duties of an Air Weapons Controller?

BRASSEUR: Right, the duties of an Air Weapons Controller. In brief, the NORAD set up, at the time when I became involved, there was a chain of radar stations across Canada that fed information, via landlines, into the Hole of North Bay where the data – raw radar data – would be converted to a digital picture that we as controllers – there was four teams of Air Weapons Controllers. Five controlled scopes per team plus a weapons director console, where controllers, assisted by technicians – Air Defence Technicians – would be assigned an area. Maybe you were working in the Atlantic Region with the CF-101 416 Squadron that was based in Chatham – and your area of responsibility was to defend the East Coast, OK? So, the weapons director would assign aircraft to you as a controller and you and your technician might have one, two or three, depending on your qualifications, send them out to the pre-fixed or pre-determined combat air control position in anticipation of the potential inbound hostile or unknown traffic. And you would commit the 101. In other words, assign the 101 against a target that came up, using computer generated tactical intercept solution and conduct an air-to-air intercept against that particular target. Determine whether it was friendly, whether it was not friendly, in other words, hostile or could be in the days of rules for entering the Canadian Air Defence Identification Zone.

Aircraft entering in speeds of – with ground speeds – in excess of one-hundred and eighty knots needed to be on a flight plan and we'd go down and sometimes small little light, fairly speedy little privately owned aircraft would have possibly filed a flight plan. However the winds were stronger than anticipated and didn't think that the ground speeds got me going faster, so we'd go down there and say – and when it's filed in the North, we didn't have always - they had to file sometimes an itinerary. I'm going from here to here to here to here and there was no radio or telephone communication available and every once in a while something would pop up and we'd go up and identify and say, "Oh it's just a little Cessna. It's OK." When we played, when we practiced and trained for the Cold War scenarios, we had live exercises where a target force, in the "early days" when I joined which was later in Air Weapons –1974. I saw exercises where we had actually seventy-five live target aircraft in the airspace, planned to attack North America. And our responsibility was to defend North America with our two 101 squadrons, one based in Bagotville with twenty CF-101s and one based in Chatham.

So they were, what I like to think of as, the glory days for me. They were still hot on the days of when the Cold War was still fairly active and we were still playing for real. I actually remember one evening when I got called back into work for the midnight shift, having already worked the evening shift. And flight followed the two aircraft to Goose Bay where – actually to Gander – where they were forward deployed because we had received some intelligence that potentially the Russians were flying under toward Cuba. And every time we got that information we knew there was a possibility that they would test Canadian Air Defence systems. And certainly enough, that night they did. And we went out there and we intercepted them and their pilots waved at our pilots who waved back and we took pictures and they, after penetrating our identification zone, headed out towards the en-route to continue to Cuba. And that was done continuously on a regular basis. That's how we played cat and mouse in those days.

INTERVIEWER: What inspired you to train as a pilot when the Canadian Forces launched the SWINTER trials?

BRASSEUR: Well, in fact, I was somewhat motivated to train as pilot before that time. When I was an Air Weapons Controller in North Bay, Captain Nora Bottomley, who was also another female Weapons Controller – I was on CHARLIE crew and Nora was on BRAVO crew. And I heard via the rumour mill that Nora was taking a private pilot's training. And I went in a rather, I suppose, competitive fashion. I thought, "Wow, I never even thought of that but if Nora can do it then I can probably do it." And it was when I went to Duluth, Minnesota I was coming off a midnight shift and just back off the Instructor Weapons School course when I was speaking with my senior director and telling him that – he said, "So now what are your goals?" And I said, "Well", I said, "I had planned to take my private flying license." And he said, "Really?" And I said, "Well, yes, of course, you know." He said, "OK, good. When the shift is over let's go to the hanger and get started." And I went, "I beg your pardon?" And as it turned out, he was an American pilot who was working a ground job in the Air Weapons Controller business and he instructed at the local aerospace flying club in Duluth. So that's how we got going and away we went and ten hours later I did my solo flight. And during that process came the announcement that the Canadian Forces was considering the study of Women in Non-Traditional Environments and Roles and I said, "Right! Volunteer for that!" So I did.

INTERVIEWER: Could you elaborate on the fact that they asked for volunteers?

BRASSEUR: Yes. The Study of Women in Non-Traditional Environments and Roles was not just an air force study. It was air force, army, navy and remote postings. Prior to that study, women were not allowed to go to isolated postings. In other words, Alert or the DEW Line, the Northern Warning System. We're not – we're always third line support in the army. We weren't allowed in the field. Women weren't allowed on the ship. So there was a study of the air force to allow women to become pilots, navigators and flight engineers. There was a study in the army to allow women to serve in the 4 Combat Support Battalion – I think it was, Field Ambulance – 4 Field Ambulance in Europe. In the navy, the women served on the CORMARANT – was a mine buoy tender I believe, Halifax Tender Ship, and women were allowed to go to Alert for the first time. And the study was intended for five years. For the most part, each study had a plan. There was plan to have, over five years, twenty women pilots participate in the study after which time I think they would determine whether or not the program would be successful and, if so, whether they would allow us to be employed. Because initially on the first cadre of women graduating from flying training, we were told that we could be assigned to the Reserve Support Units to fly the Otters and to base flights for search and rescue roles. And we were not supposed to be allowed to be instructors, first tour, which I fought and won. And we had Hercs assigned to Captain Leah Mosher and Buffaloes assigned to Captain Nora Bottomley. So we all got our first choice, after which point I think – it's a personal opinion – I think the military did not anticipate that we would be successful. Once we were successful it was a matter of, "Oh, my goodness, they are

successful. What do we do with them? Well, give them their first choice." And we got our choices. And then it was, "Well, gee, we really have to have a study."

So subsequent to that, for a significant portion of the women following us in training, they were posted to Hercs in Trenton so that they could have a "study group" per se. Until they diverted to employ, I think it was Inge Plug – Captain Inge Plug became our first helicopter pilot. And in 1985 that trial program was supposed to be wrapped up and it was not. And I was assigned to the Gender Task Force that the military put together to respond to Parliament in 1986 – the spring of 1986 – to answer to Parliament on the way ahead for women in the military. And at which point is when we wrapped up the SWINTER trials. So that's basically how it went.

INTERVIEWER: Could you describe your pilot training, please?

BRASSEUR: Sure [laughs]. We arrived in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, I think it was November the 8th, 1979. There were forty-four of us on course, forty men and four women to train on the MUSKETEER which was to take us towards the end of January was our time frame. It was about, I think, twenty-seven hours the course syllabus at the time for basic pilot training. It was more of a selection process, weeding out those who could and those who could not learn to fly in accordance with the way the military taught flying, and the rate at which you needed to learn to make it economically viable. And demonstrate that you had the aptitude to work in an environment as dynamic as military flying environment. At the time there was about a sixty-five percent success rate so we lost thirty-five percent of our course, which included one of our starting females. And we graduated towards the end of January, 1980. We went to Winnipeg for high altitude indoctrination course where we took the theory of – the physiology that affected pilots. Because we were now moving from the low level environment to the jet environment in Moose Jaw. Did our ride in the parabolic chamber and then we went on to Moose – no, then we went on to Comox – well, first of all to Edmonton for the land survival training phase, out in the bush at Jarvis Lake – no, it was – what was the name of that place? Just outside of Edmonton, anyway – Jasper – that we used to do our training. So they dumped you in the woods for you know, ten days. You did a group phase, then you did a two-man phase, then you did the four day single-man phase – person phase, I guess now.

Then when we got done with that we went out to Comox to do the sea survival phase where we took all of the training involved with ejecting and ending up in the ocean, climbing in your dingy and getting out of your gear etcetera, etcetera. Before we ended up back in Moose Jaw, about the 20th of March, 1980, to start our basic jet pilot training or the advanced – at that time it was called Advanced Pilot Training. We did all phases at the time. We did the clear hood, the instrument, low level navigation, night formation, advanced clear hood and advanced instrument flying. So we graduated with, what we called, two green ticket standards, to instrument standards. Two hundred hours was the syllabus and we finished – we graduated, our Wings Parade was Friday, February the 13th, 1981.

The training consisted of – the first three weeks, I think, we were full time ground school to learn the aircraft operating instructions and the safety and the aerodrome and the air space, etcetera, etcetera. Then we went on a half and half rotational bases. This week we'd be mornings ground school, afternoon flying. Next week we'd reverse. And that went on until towards the last two or three months of the training program. You were finished with your ground school. Now was just left to finish your flying.

So it was, on a day to day basis, it was always challenging. There was always something you needed to be working on whether you were preparing for a next day's flight, whether you were preparing for an exam, there was always something to be done. And, at least, I would say pretty much almost on average, you had once a week, for that year, a major event to plan for. Whether it might have been a flying test, it might have been a ground school test. And so you were always under pressure to perform. And at any one of those points, you know, as you watch others on other courses or some people on your courses start to fall by the way-side, you know, the pressure. Self induced of course, but increases the awareness that "Whoa", you know, I've come this far and every day you get further toward your goal. But then again, some days it looks like it gets further away from you, depending on where you're at. It was a challenging trying period.

It was especially so, I think, probably for the first three women as we got together and discussed from time to time. On a daily basis, you would run into somebody who would say, "I've never met a woman pilot before." "Oh, you're one of those." "Oh, I've heard about you." The fellows on our course didn't necessarily share all of the information that they got, whether it was, "Here's some intelligence on an exam." "Oh, by the way, we're having a party." "This is what the dress of the day is." Etcetera, etcetera. So there were always challenges melding and mixing. Part of the challenge came with every juncture whether it was aircrew selection in Toronto, to Portage, to land survival, to sea survival, to Moose Jaw. At each one of those locations a press conference was convened. The women were hauled out of whatever was happening. We had to interview with the press. We'd be in the paper the next day. There was, I think, some jealousy and created some animosity between the guys like, "If it's supposed to be normal, how come you're so special?" You know. "Why are we being singled out when we're supposed to be part of a group?" "Why don't they interview the guys?" And we had no control over that. We couldn't say, "No, we're not doing a press conference." Until the end [laughs] actually, seven years later when we graduated – when we were in – the first two women in fighter training, Captain Jane Foster and I, they wanted to do an interview.

We started our CF-18 training in January and in March they wanted to do a press conference. And we told the commanding officer, our 410 squadron, who at the time was Lieutenant Colonel Denis Roberts, we told him, "No, we're not doing it and you can't force us to speak. You can bring all the Press people you want in but we are not going to talk." Because think about this. How is it going to look in the middle of the F-18 Operational Training Unit Course, you have two CF-18 potential female pilots who are doing the training and doing this and this and this and at the end, in three months, they may not have graduated? You can't undo what you've Pressed about [laughs]. So we said, "We're not talking. We're not talking until we graduate. And when we graduate we

will only talk if you include the guys." So I have the video footage from TV that shows the press conference of the two of us girls, plus two guys selected from our course. And we did it together, as a team, finally. But that was at our – the women's – insistence. And the guys were good, they played along. They said, "Yah, this is right. This is the way it's supposed to be if everything is supposed to be equal." So there you go.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe the aircraft you trained on?

BRASSEUR: Certainly. The Musketeer was pretty standard normal Beechcraft aircraft, fixed gear, low wing. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was – it took a lot of beating from a lot of students learning how to fly. So was very sturdy and it served its purpose well. We went on from Moose Jaw we trained on a Canadair-built CT-114 Tutor aircraft which I personally loved flying. I flew for sixteen hundred and fifty hours with or without students, left seat and right seat. Tanked and untanked. Single engine, very, very good aircraft. Same aircraft that the Snowbirds are flying today. We – I used to get up to ninety-five aircraft parked on the line, every day on the ramp for us to do flying training. We had about a hundred and twenty-eight, or so, instructors at the school. We were bringing in, at the time, every – seven courses a year with thirty-two students maximum, quite possible, on each course training pilots for the Canadian Forces. And we would graduate about a hundred and sixty – between a hundred and sixty-five and a hundred and eighty – a year. There was an awful lot of flying going on. We'd start at seven in the morning on average, launch five aircraft every fifteen minutes with an instructor and student. And that would go, you know, through three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. If necessary, we – sometimes, if we were behind on the big X board, the X representing each trip a student is required to take – we would fly weekends.

The airplane itself I thoroughly enjoyed. It was steam driven instrumentation as opposed to today's digital. It was analogue. Very reliable and absolutely could still be a reliable trainer today. So I thoroughly enjoyed the Tutor. It was an excellent aircraft.

From there I went on to fly the T-33 which I thoroughly enjoyed flying 'cause the first one I got into the back seat had had the manufacturer's date, the year of my birth. So it was manufactured in 1953. And I thought, "Wow! This is like flying a piece of history." You know. I enjoyed it. It was older technology, 1950's than the Canadair, so in order to fly the – it was generally agreed that in order to fly the T-Bird well, you had to have good hands and feet. It wasn't hard to fly, but to fly it to the numbers, to the actual point of the needle, exactly on the altitude you wanted to fly, you had to pay attention and you had to work the airplane controls to keep it there. Because you couldn't put it on auto-pilot, you know, and it wasn't new technology. But it was a terrific airplane, totally reliable. The engine – I never had an engine quit in a T-Bird, and very few did. And you could go everywhere in North America with it, which we did through all kinds of weather, which we did. It had great endurance, good altitude. It was an excellent platform for playing targets for F-18 air intercepts. It still, I think, to this day in the history of aviation and making airplanes, is one of the smallest ever radar reflector type airframes that was ever made. And so it was fun to play with the F-18s because they couldn't find us, most of the time.

And so, the 101s had a challenge themselves. Now, the T-Bird was a great airplane. The F-5 I enjoyed to an extent. It didn't have very big wings so it was more – a far more critical airframe than any other aircraft I've flown to date. The final approach speed coming around to turn to landing was a hundred and ninety-five knots, which is very fast for an approach speed. And nose position was everything for maintaining your airspeed. If you were flying against an opponent and you pulled five or six G and made a left climbing turn forty-five degrees, your airspeed of two-hundred knots would bleed off in a heartbeat. So it was good for, as a lead-in trainer for the F-18. It was challenging, certainly enough challenging to fly and go fast and you definitely knew you were transitioning into the fighter world because speeds are very, very critical. Didn't have a lot of gas. You didn't get to have fun for very long but it was an effective trainer as a lead-in to the F-18.

The F-18 was the most – certainly the most – mentally challenging aircraft because in the F-18 it's not hard to fly well. The aircraft is easy to fly. You're more of a systems manager, or systems operator, and there's just such a volume of systems to learn on it. That was the challenge: to get ahead of the aircraft in thinking. So, six months in the F-18 were really challenging. And I've heard people who – male pilots as well – they'd say, "You're not really comfortable with the airplane 'til you're done your first tour and you've gone through all of the areas that we used to go through." The low level flying, the air intercept, air to ground bombing, you name it. You know, you didn't do each phase every day so you'd do low level, qualify in the squadron – everybody would qualify to do guns, rockets and bombs, then you'd move into an air-to-air phase. So maybe now in the next three months you're in the air-to-air phase. Well, what about your air to ground stuff? Well, that was three months ago and I spent the whole next time learning the air-to-air stuff. Then maybe you'd go into an air refuelling phase. Then maybe you'd go into an air-to-air combat phase. And now it's been a year and you're back to air-to-ground. It's like, "Oh, what did I do last year this time?" So, once you'd gone through a number of cycles of that, then you got very, very comfortable with the airplane. Otherwise, you were always just a split second behind until you got to that level which makes the flying always very challenging. You know, until you get to – you don't have a lot of time to get complacent 'cause you're always learning. You're always on the edge of your learning curve.

So that was – that's the extent of my type aircraft – types I flew. I really enjoyed all of them and, to be quite honest, my favourite was the T-Bird.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any – ever any – trouble with women fitting into equipment?

BRASSEUR: To my knowledge, no. I'd heard rumours that the flight suits may not have fit in the manner in which most women would like their clothes to fit. We didn't have custom fit flight suits. There were sufficient flight suit sizes in the supply stores that you could probably find one that would serve its purpose. Helmets were always custom fit, helmet and mask. The cockpits themselves, the initial minimum physiological

standard set for women during the SWINTER trials were navigator – were male navigator – standards. Minimum five foot four in height, minimum hundred and thirty pounds, OK. And that was for, the hundred and thirty pounds was a weight requirement for ejection seat criteria and the five foot four was for rudder pedal reach and cockpit seating height, etcetera. So initially we had to meet those standards. If you were too short, you didn't get to become pilot or navigator. As some of the guys were too tall, they couldn't fly some kinds of airplanes. I personally am not aware that there was any aircraft or aircrew life support equipment or uniform issues that prevented any woman from ever having a successful career in the military.

INTERVIEWER: What challenges did you face in your training?

BRASSEUR: In my training. Okay, let's talk about in – as a woman going through the training program for pilot training on the first group of women going through – part of the challenge was the feeling of being in that fishbowl. Everybody was watching every move, every step, every word out of your mouth. The focus – you felt like you were under a magnifying glass. And, of course, you wanted to do well and not be the person who sunk the program for all the young girls who might want to go through the program. So there was that pressure, perceived, real or otherwise, I don't know. There was that – was a challenge, always. Yah that was always in the back of your mind. And if you ever forgot it, you were reminded on a daily basis. You'd run into somebody who said, "Oh, I've never met a female pilot before." "You're one of the first – oh, you're one of those." So that was fine. And once you're first, you're first at everything that follows. So the first didn't go away from anything.

On a personal level the biggest challenge, I think probably I had was getting in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba when the instructor stood up and said, "Right, let's have a review of the law of physics." And my jaw fell off the end of my desk going, "What do you mean review of the law of physics. I never took physics a day in my life – HELLO! And we're doing a review and this is a requirement for pilot training." My first thought was, "Man, I'm out of here. I failed, there's no way." Well, fortunately for me I had a bit of attitude that, "OK, this is going to be a bit of a challenge, so how do you get yourself around it?" And I got one of the young fellows who was an instructor in Portage to basically tutor me at night for weather related physics stuff, aerodynamic related physics stuff. I'd say, "You need to explain this to me 'cause I had never had physics." And fortunately for me personally, my asset was that I had a very high mechanical aptitude. So I could take the physics theory and turn into the mechanical picture in my mind to be able to understand it. And that's how I got though that. But, I still laugh about that – review of the law of physics – HELLO! [laughs]. That was my biggest challenge.

And probably the other biggest challenge was testitis. When it came to tests, fear of failure, and so your performance was always less than optimum. It was always enough to pass but that was a frustrating – but that's a self-induced thing that a lot of people deal with. So I managed to pass. That was a good thing [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Deanne Brasseur, end of side one.

END OF TAPE, 1 SIDE 1

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum, Oral History Program. Interview with Deanna Brasseur. Tape 1, side 2.

Did the men exhibit any inappropriate behaviour during your training?

BRASSEUR: Yes. There were a number of incidents that occurred throughout my entire career. Towards the end, I have to admit that today's Canadian Forces is entirely different than the one I enrolled into. Inappropriate behaviour, because we were the first group of women in training, traditionally in the male training, single gender only training environment. Often, I think, as mini breaks in a briefing or a lecture or a training session they would pop up a slide of a naked woman or in a suggestive or seductive pose or whatever. And the guys would all laugh, "Ha–ha–ha–ha." Well, when we first came through the program, those slides had not yet been vetted. Whether that was a conscious thing or unconscious thing or just an oversight, that was fine. So you always presented an embarrassing or an awkward kind of moment for everybody in the room and the instructor would go, "Oops", and click the slide. And you'd go, "Well, I don't know if that's an honest oops or if that's a…"

During your F-18 training we had an Australian exchange officer. There was a hotel in Cold Lake that Wednesday nights was a strippers' night. So strippers from Edmonton would go up to the hotel and all the guys, whoever wanted to go from the base, would go. And one particular afternoon, two of the gentlemen off of my course and I were in the students' break lounge while the instructor was putting some stuff on the boards and he was asking the young guys if they were going to the strip club that night. And explaining to them last week's performance in very descriptive detail. And certainly it was very uncomfortable, and out of my own peripheral vision I could sense that the two young guys off my course were also uncomfortable but. And I got an impression that the instructor was looking for a rise from me. And the position you're put in is, if I say something the standard reply at the time was, "If you can't handle the heat, get out of the kitchen." So, in other words, "Hey, this is a man's world. If you want to belong, belong. If you don't want to belong, get out of here." And, well, I'm not going to give him that satisfaction. But then if you don't say something, then do you – are you a push over, are you weak, are you a... Is it consensus by that comment? And you know, you just – you just – have to tell yourself, find inside some internal centre of strength that says, "You know what, I'm a bigger person for not biting, you know, on this." And so you just sort of let it go.

Occasionally, you may find some supportive individuals that would come up to you and say, later, maybe next day, maybe five minutes from now, maybe a week from now, "You know what so and so said to you last week? I didn't agree with them. I thought that was bad." I said, well, like, "Why didn't you say that at the time it was going on? Say, you know, this is inappropriate behaviour. I don't think this is acceptable." But a lot of the guys, because of this, I don't know, peer pressure or group morale cohesiveness.

Nobody would stand up in public and say, "Hey, wow, not on." It was just more popular to kind of laugh and watch our reaction.

Those moments were really awkward. Occasionally, it would get even more awkward. I – one afternoon in Cold Lake at the officer's mess there was a visiting commanding officer, who was drunk, and when I went to the bar to buy a beer I could hear him off to the side with some of the young pilots saying, "Oh, those look like nice buns." Referring to, I suppose, my post derriere. And one of the young guys saying, "Oh, how do you know they're fresh?" He says, "I don't know. I could check." And next thing I know I have this guy's hands grab one cheek of my butt. And I just, at the moment I just sort of froze and thought, "OK, don't pay any attention." And then the guys at the table laughed, then they said something else, he said "Well, I better check again." And then he did it again and I was in the process of turning a hundred and eighty degrees with a clenched right hand and was going to drive the sucker right in the nose. And as I turned through that motion, my unit commanding officer, my old T-33 flight commander, Gord Welsby, was standing there and his eyes were as big as saucers 'cause he knew me well enough that he knew what was coming. And I thought, when our gazes locked up, I thought, "You know what, yah? If I followed through with that action, it would have been me on charge for striking a senior officer."

I didn't, fortunately. And the discussion I had with Major Welsby at the time was, he said, "Dee, he's drunk" I said, "Drunkenness is not an excuse." I said, "First thing Monday morning I'm filing a harassment charge against him." And Gord said, "It's not going to go anywhere." I said, "I guarantee it will go to the Chief of Defence Staff and the Prime Minister if I need to, 'cause I will not stop." After seventeen years of taking this stuff, I've decided no longer, okay? 'Cause now I'm sort of bullet proof. I figure, you know, "I've accomplished everything I want to accomplish in my career and I don't need to put up with this anymore." So it's funny 'cause I got to work Monday morning at eight o'clock sharp the phone rang. And this ex – this CO – had returned to his unit and had been staying with my flight commander. They were friends. And I think Gord had the weekend to convince him that if he didn't want the trouble to hit the fan then he should call me. And I give him credit. 'Cause when he called me, he had the weekend to sober up and think about it and realize that probably it was not an idle threat, that I was likely going to follow though with it. And in his position as commanding officer of a training unit that was training young women and had young female instructors that maybe it was time for him to change his attitude. And his apology on the phone was sincere enough and explicative enough and appreciative enough that I felt it was acceptable so I didn't go ahead.

But, so things have absolutely definitely changed. Processes are in place now for dealing with that kind of behaviour. Training includes gender issues and it's a totally different world. Much, much more friendly and accepting then it used to be. But there was more than enough issues to have to deal with on a daily basis or on a regular basis. It was a challenge.

INTERVIEWER: Could you describe your training to become an Aircraft Accident Investigator, please?

BRASSEUR: Absolutely. We – I was one of three Canadians to attend the course in Cranfield, England, at the Cranfield, I believe, Aeronautical Institute of Technology. At the time, in the spring of 1990, it was *the* course in the world to take for accident investigators. So we had twenty-six students on course from nineteen different countries around the world, civilian aviation accident investigators as well as military. Western countries as well as Asia and third world countries were represented. And we were there for ten weeks. I think I was probably the first women accident investigator to attend the course, which was novel for the British and novel for the other students who were not Canadian on our course. And to the point that one of the gentlemen from Uganda, at our graduation ceremony at which I wore my dress and heels, had to have his picture taken with me so that he could go home and show his friends in Uganda that he had attended this course with the first Canadian female fighter pilot. So that was interesting.

We – the British at the time and probably still – have a significant bank of experience in accident investigation. And I, for one, thoroughly enjoyed the content of the course. The instruction was from unquestionable expertise. We had a Saudi General on our course and his Captain, executive assistant. And the interesting thing there was in the dining room. I never got to sit beside them and it never really dawned on me until later in the course, and every time we'd walk back and forth to class I'd see the two of them together and I'd say, "Hello," or "Good morning," or "Good afternoon," or whatever. And I'd never get a response. And I thought, "That's really strange. Like, how come these guys aren't friendly?" Until one day I found the Captain all by himself and I said, "Hi". And he stopped. And he said, "Hi". And we were walking to the dining hall and he sat with me for lunch and he was explaining that, in his culture, men don't talk to women like that. There are no women pilots in the Saudi Air Force and the young Captain had taken his university education in the United States so he was quite comfortable with women in the working force [laughs]. But his General was not. So he'd probably – and if his General knew that I was talking to, he was talking to me – and telling me this he'd probably be in trouble. So I promised him I wouldn't say anything and I also told him that I wouldn't stop saying hello to his General [laughs]. That was pretty – that was a fun encounter from that flight safety training program.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe your work as Aircraft Accident Investigator?

BRASSEUR: Sure. I was employed at the Directorate of Flight Safety here at National Defence Headquarters. I was the Cell Supervisor for jet – all jet aircraft. This includes the fighters and the training jet aircraft for accident investigation and incident investigation. So everything that happens in the world of flying that brings safety or practices into question is submitted as a report and dealt with. And the thinking behind that is to prevent accidents and unnecessary loss of resources and personnel. And so that's what I did at headquarters on a daily basis.

On a rare occasion, and for me that was three fatal aircraft accidents. One, I was assigned as President of the Board of Inquiry while I was still Plans Officer at 416 Squadron, first ever CF-18 crash in the north out of Inuvik in January of 1990. I investigated as the President of the Board of Inquiry. Then, as an accident investigator with DFS, I investigated a fatal CF-5 crash with two – so it was lost, and a German accident in Goose Bay of an F-4 with two Germans aircrew lost.

And that consists basically of – the accident happens. The Directorate of Flight Safety receives a call. We pack our bags and our accident investigation equipment and head out to the accident site. We advise the Board of Inquiry, the members. Normally there's an aircrew member, a technical member, a medical member and another member. And you go through the absolute details of the whole accident right down to what the pilot might have had for breakfast. And all the maintenance practices, the maintenance logs, the aircraft etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And you attempt to determine what the cause of the accident was so that you can prevent the next one and disseminate lessons learned. And that's, you know, trucking through the accident, trucking through the wreckage, plotting each piece, you know, where did this end up. Determining whether the aircraft went in upside down, right side up, tail first, nose first. What speeds they were doing, what the aircrew might have been doing prior to, during, what was the cause of the accident. That was – we used to agree as accident investigators – it might sound a bit strange to say, well, that was the fun part of the job. That was the actual hands-on doing that. That was that investigative try and figure out what happened. The writing of the accident reports back in the office was kind of boring staff work. So the most fun part was the part you hoped never had to happen very often. But when you got to do it, you were doing it. It was the real thing.

I went to assist a German accident investigation crew on a F-4 crash in Goose Bay, Labrador in the spring of 1993. And, again, that was quite unique from the standpoint that, one, I was a female pilot which the Germans had none in their air force. Two, I was a female fighter pilot which was another unique aspect. I was an accident investigator and, of course, all three of those squares they had never had exposure to before. And I was speaking to their head accident investigator and telling their German fighter crew what my theory was that caused the accident. And they didn't necessarily agree with me, initially. The accident happened in April and overnight from my first arrival on base and speaking with the Germans on tracking the accident site, it had snowed about three inches of snow. And so the next day the Germans said, "Pack your bags and we're going home and we're going to come back later in the year when the snow had melted." And I said, "Well, wait a minute. I just did this accident, you know, two years ago in the Arctic and I know how you do this." So I organized, through the base operations officer in Goose Bay, the ground search and rescue crew and made a plan to investigate the accident site to give the Germans stuff to go home with. Well, they were on their German Air Force 707 that was taking troops back to Germany, the investigators were on, their luggage was on and one base ops officer in Goose Bay spoke to the German General [laughs]. The German General – the plane was engine started OK, and ready to taxi to go home to Germany. And the German General stopped the aircraft and had the accident

investigators get off. However their luggage didn't get off [laughs] and the plane headed to Germany.

And so I had a little meeting with the German guys, who weren't particularly thrilled at that point. But we started out the next day and when we were finished, at the end of the day, we had everything they needed to go home on Friday. So from a Wednesday to a Friday, they couldn't believe it. And we were sharing a beer in the mess and their accident investigator – Chief Accident Investigator – wouldn't tell me when the plane was taking off because he didn't want – there was a joke – they didn't want me to get them to stay home for – stay in Goose Bay for the weekend. But one of the young engineering officers thought that it would be OK if the German Air Force had female pilots, as long as they were capable and qualified, but that the Major was not yet prepared to change his opinion. And subsequent to that, I received a really nice picture of myself with the German investigators and they presented with an honorary German Directorate of Flight Safety arm band and he said, "Thank you very much for your assistance." In fact, my initial assessment as the reason for the cause of the accident was correct. And I thought, "Wow, that's really nice." So it said a lot that it was an acknowledgment of professional competency which was really nice. So, yah, I enjoyed my time at NDFS a lot. It was good.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe the working relationships on your bases?

BRASSEUR: Certainly. From a big picture, general perspective, by the time that we were the first women to go through pilot training, there were a number of women on bases as appose to when I first joined the military. In some cases, it was not uncommon for you to be the only female on a base. By the time we went through pilot training, there were more than just one female on base, there was more than just one. So as a female you had relationships with other females on base and often times they were very inquisitive and curious as to, "How's it going with the guys?" 'Cause they had relationship with pilots and now there were women as pilots. So we're women relating to women and also relating as pilots and that was pretty interesting. And generally, ninety-nine point nine percent of the time, I can't remember when not, they were very supportive, of course. "Yeh, way to go," encouraging.

The NCMs or the non commissioned members were also, it was almost like "Oh, we have an idol now." But they were on – involved in the operational side. They were technicians, engine technicians and electrical technicians. They were working on the airplanes with fellow technicians, male, and male pilots. Now they have somewhat of a representative to herald their, you know, to have as their hero 'cause now we had women as pilots. So often the young ground crew were very supportive of you as a female pilot. So that was neat, that was nice to see. Like with most relationships, it's people to people. You know, people have pre-conceived attitudes and notions and ideas and as we all have had those kinds of things that we change over a lifetime, through exposure, through experience, through working together and recognizing each others' competencies and capabilities, whatever preconceptions go by the way-side. And you develop a new relationship that works and you go ahead with it, so. I never found, I never ran up against

an obstruction that prevented me from doing my job or made my job unbearable. There was always a way to work something out. I enjoyed it. For me, in some ways, I took it as a challenge from an educational perspective. Here is somebody who doesn't yet know, and so I'll assist them to learn. And that's the way I did it. So it worked really well.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe the bases from which you flew?

BRASSEUR: Yes. The first base was Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Portage had been a long time training area. The basic flying training bases in Canada were established in either the war years, or just after the war years in the fifties because of their weather – desireable weather. Most number of best flying days that you can get in training. So Portage was one of those bases on the prairie. I suppose, you know, it was flat so there wasn't too many things you could run into. Small base, not a large establishment. We had everything we needed. We had a swimming pool, recreation centre, hockey. The flight line was adequate to have us. We had a common room for all the students to gather. We had briefing rooms, an ops center, enough airplanes to fly and the training area was great – was located close to the base. As with a lot of training, you know, whose primary purpose is training, everybody is involved so everybody is very supportive. You don't have any competition between an operation side and a training side. So it was a great first exposure to flying training.

On to Moose Jaw, was basically the same. Moose Jaw was all flying training. We didn't have an operational side. And much the same, we had four flights in Moose Jaw that belonged to 2 Canadian Forces Flying Training School, so APACHES, BANDITS, COBRAS and DRAGONS. Even number of instructors, by and large across, even number distribution of students. Inter-flight competition, friendly, maintaining, you know, your place on the X board. Each flight had a mascot, per se. You had Bandit Boy which was a ceramic pilot figure. Dragon's Head, Liz Burners which was a bearded lizard. And you know, from time to time, one flight would raid another in the off hours and turn it upside down and then steal the mascot and then there would be the exchange of mascots at some official function. So there was good morale, good camaraderie, serious working training base and, again, excellent support. All of the facilities that we needed. Two runways, as I said we had – we were the busiest airport in Canada in those days. The most number of aircraft movements of any airport in Canada. Air traffic control was excellent. You were kind of in the middle of nowhere. For a lot of people's reference, if they came from some of the larger city centres, Moose Jaw was a smaller little city. Regina was close, forty-fifty minutes away and it was a bigger version of Moose Jaw, at the time.

When I first arrived in Moose Jaw, Wednesday afternoon business was still closed for a break in the week. And in the mall – you know, you didn't have late night shopping or… So it was good, it was interesting. The downtown business core, there was a great working relationship between businesses downtown and the base. A lot of military – Canadian Forces military pilots have wives who were born in Moose Jaw [laughs]. Yah, it was good.

Cold Lake had been around from the fifties in the middle of nowhere. If you like hunting and fishing, it was a good posting. But with most military bases that I grew up on, that was small radar stations in the middle of nowhere or isolated military communities that were located where they were for operational reasons. You know, life was what you made it and you had – it was a small community. And everybody knew everybody. Everybody got involved in stuff, whether it was social events, working events. You always had a working relationship with the nearby town, Grand Centre in Cold Lake. And it was very close because oftentimes the towns had either grew up around or you were co-located with. You were the bread and butter for income, for shopping, for everything that – you had to have that close working relationship whether it was base sports teams, playing local sports team. Whether it was business supporting base or base supporting businesses. And, by and large, I've always found that the relationships were very friendly – good solid working relationships with the community. Because many of the military members were volunteers on community organizations; Cub Scouts, Brownies, Girl Guides, you know, social support nets. So it was great. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

You have that same set-up in Ottawa. It's just not as visible and you're not as close because everybody lives in either CFB, quote Orleans or Kanata, or so you're very spread out in where you live as military members. And although the air force mess is downtown Ottawa, you know, at the end of a working day generally most people want to go home. So it's not the same as being a community in and of yourself. You're a community within a much larger city so that same sense of cooperation is not as apparent as it is. Although I know it still exists because in talking with my fellow military members everybody is still doing the same thing they did on bases, Girl Scouts, you know, Brownies, collecting for the March of Dimes, you name it. So everywhere you go is where you make it, basically.

INTERVIEWER: Could you discuss how you came to be an instructor and then your work as an instructor?

BRASSEUR: OK. My – as with anybody, I'm sure you do – when you choose a career field you have, if you don't have one you choose it, you eventually fall into some sort of goal or target or what you measure as your success or what it is you want to do. Becoming a pilot is one thing; what you want to fly is another. And my goal, or my background, came out of air defence, came out of jets, came out of fighters. And for me personally, that's where I wanted to go. I wanted to go and stay in jets, go fast, do loops, do rolls, do challenging flying. That was my perception of a challenge. When we initially got started on the SWINTER trials, women – we received the notice – the letter – when we were in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba on the Musketeers, as to what we were going to be allowed to fly. That did not include instructing on jets or any jet posting. It did not include the Hercules squadrons, it included the Reserve Support Squadrons on single Otters, it included Buffaloes at base rescue flights and that was essentially it, so very limited. When I went through – as I was going through training – of course people would ask, you know, "What do you want? If you graduate, what would you like to fly?" And I'd say, "When I graduate I want to stay instructing." Because I had asked one of

my previous unit COs in Duluth, Minnesota, who was a jet pilot, you know, "How do I do this? How do I get to go on fighters?" He said, "You want to stay in jets." He said, "So, if you're asked, you want to instruct in Moose Jaw because the best way to become the best pilot you can become is to learn the basics very, very well. And the best way to learn the basics very, very well of anything is to have to teach it, OK? And you get a lot of hours in a hurry, so you gain a lot of experience and you get exposed to a lot of different flying." I said, "Great." So all the way through the next fourteen months of training, when I was ever asked, whether it was the course director or flight commander or the visiting General, what I wanted to fly I told them I wanted to stay instructing.

And some of my reasoning for that was, if you're having a trial program and you anticipate over the next five years twenty women coming through here and a hundred and sixty-five men a year, would it not be wise to have a female instructor? One, so that the young guys coming through pilot training can see someone doing the job capable and competent as a female and; two, what about for those twenty women or the extra fifteen or whatever in addition to us?[They] would have somebody to turn to for advice if they needed it, you know. Or if you want advice from a female perspective, there's somebody there to give it to you. And I guess I must have got somebody's ear because when it came graduation and the assignment of instructors, there was seven instructor positions for our course, in the posting big plot, and six guys got it and me. And I said, "Yeh" 'cause that's exactly what I wanted to do.

We did instructor weapons. We took our flying instructor school – was then – used to be in Winnipeg – was moved to Moose Jaw. So we did our flying instructors' training in Moose Jaw and then went to our flights to instruct. And you got assigned a flight just on a random basis, who needed an instructor as you came out of flying instructor school. So I went to, initially, to Dragon Flight. And you were always assigned – you started out as a C-class instructor. As you gained experience you were upgraded – you did your ride in the stride [?] and then you got B-class, then A-category instructor, which meant you could do more challenging cases. If there were students that were having challenges, you worked with those. We always – normally we were assigned a basic student, a student who was starting flying training and a more advanced student. Because as an instructor the work load – that would make your work load less as opposed to always instructing basic students. You normally flew – we were scheduled to fly twice a day, weather permitting. And after a year on the flight line, you normally would get a posting or a move to the ground training school where you would either instruct academics, maybe be a simulator operator, possibly.

I wanted to be a course director. So I became a course director which is like mother hen for a course of students. You follow them for a year until they graduate. And from that I became Senior Course Director and then I went back to the flight line as a Deputy Flight Commander. So you flew less as a course director, maybe one trip a day 'cause you had administrative work to do. And then also as a Deputy Flight Commander you didn't fly quite as often. You had staff, administrative students, instructors and other jobs to do with. So I enjoyed my whole time in Moose Jaw. It was a great experience. We had excellent instructors. We had – it was always busy, busy, busy. You were busy from six

in the morning 'til six in the evening. And oftentimes I'd look through the door and see my flight commander and say, "Sir, what are we doing here and there's nobody out there?" [laughs] Because there was more work than hours in the day to get done. So I thoroughly enjoyed that part of my flying training. Instructing, to me, is – it's important because you're laying the basics for somebody's life. If you get the, well – if you teach them well, they will fly well, you know. I enjoyed it, thoroughly enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: What dangers did you face?

BRASSEUR: There were a few, there were a few. Of course when you fly, you know, there's always room to go – for things to go wrong. The aircraft can break. I had a few of those. Nothing like life-threatening serious. OK, the – I did one trip from Colorado Springs to Moose Jaw without heat in the cockpit. And that made it very cold in the winter. Sometimes, you know, you have the hydraulic light and you go, "Well it's…" Often times it's a micro switch that's not functioning properly. The system is functioning properly but you get a warning, but you have to treat it like it's a real warning. It always gets your heartbeat up and your adrenalin flowing.

One night when I was night flying, actually it was – I remember it very, very well as if it was yesterday, September the 7th, 1983. It was two days from my 30th birthday when I was flying with a student and we were in the circuit and a gull flew in our engine and it destroyed the engine. So there we were, five miles from the base, a thousand feet above the ground with no engine. And fortunately for me that night it was about training that we practiced, practiced, practiced, practiced so when it happens, whatever happens, you will respond almost instinctively. And I guess some of my instinctive responses were enough to get me back to the airport because we just had enough air speed altitude and some common sense in there to get to the end of the runway with no engine. It was the first time it was ever done at night because it was something we didn't – we practiced forced landings every day. But it was a prohibitive manoeuvre at night because it's too dangerous to try and judge altitude distance, glide ratio at night, plus you can't see for other airplanes. And when I transmitted my 'mayday' everybody cleared out the circuits. So I knew I had – if I could get to the airport, it was mine. I didn't have to worry about anything getting us down.

That worked out very well. I received Directorate of Flight Safety Good Show Award for that. It's basically, you know, "Thanks for saving the Queen of resource and duty above and beyond the call of…" The flight safety – I spent, the next day I spent an hour and a half with the flight safety officer explaining to him my every thought. I was thinking, "Gee, Clancy." Major Clancy showed up and I said, "I don't understand. What is this? Why are we going through this grilling over and over and over?" And what I thought here and what I thought here. And he says, "Dee, like, eighty-five percent of the people I know would have left that airplane – like, ejected." And I went, "Oh, oh." He said, "And I want to be sure that your thinking process was right. That you weren't not ejected because you're a female student – female instructor – and you were afraid to. Or you were afraid what the instructors might say." You know, I'm going, "Man, I didn't have time to consider any of that. I was like get your butt down, you know, the best way you

knew how and here's my thinking process." And when I was all done he said, "Exceptional, you know, well done." And he submitted that for the Good Show Award and it was, which is like a plaque, which is like a stamp of…

The interesting part of that was – that was a Wednesday night – I flew the next night and I was most comfortable when I knew I was within reach of the base, and then Friday night I went to TGIF to celebrate my birthday. And the interesting part of that whole thing that happened to me was the other hundred and twenty-seven instructors in the school looked at me differently now. Before that I was just a, "Oh, yah, Dee's over there in Dragon Flight." After that incident it was like every pilot's question in the back of their mind was, "If something critical goes wrong, will I handle it well?" You know, "Will I survive? Will I make the right decisions? Will I get the airplane down, or..." You know, and until you do it, you don't know if you will. When you do it, I can attest to you know you did it. But just because you did it today doesn't mean you'll do it tomorrow. But if you haven't yet done it, it's still one of those things you have yet to experience. So those people who experienced it, you come to them and you – the guys were saying, "Oh, you know, like I heard you had an interesting flight night the other night." And you just smile and go, "Yep." And you wait. And they go, "Well eh, like what happened?" And you go, "Oh, a bird flew in the engine." "Gee, must have been scary." "Yah, yah. It got my heartbeat going." [laughs]. So you knew they would – you just were elevated to a different perspective and almost like, "Gee, man, she did that. I don't know if I could." So, all of a sudden, there's no more, "I'm better than her." Or it's like, "Oh, wow." So that's kind of neat. That was a really kind of neat thing. It kind of added all the validity to who you were and what you were doing. That was fun.

But you know, lots of things go wrong in airplanes. And I lost radios going into Toronto. International – going into Toronto International Airport in a T-33 Single pilot – I was going in to pick up another pilot – lost radios and I lost nav-aids. And to boot, the weather was forecast to be good, when I arrived at Toronto was not good and I was in and out of intermittent snow squalls. So I'm trying to find the Toronto International Airport. I'm flight planed in there, no radios, no navigation aids and I have to descend to low cloud, below my flight plan altitude because like I stay out of cloud. And you keep transmitting and every once in a while I'd get a break of something on the radios from air traffic and I go, "Well, I don't know." I passed the airport and I thought, "Hey, there's an airport." I went, "Wait a minute. That's not the International. Yah, but it's an airport. It's probably Downsview." So do you – you know, questions. "Do I go in that airport? Do I continue? What do I do?" Well, you go to the airport that you're intended to land in. If you can find it, great. If you can't find it, you know, there's a procedure. And I thought, "Well, if I get to where I think the airport's supposed to be and I don't find it, I'll do a right ninety, a right ninety or I'll do a triangle to where I think the beacon is. Come back and make one more pass at it." That's all the gas I had. "If I can't find it, I'll point the airplane out over Lake Ontario and bail out." So I had a plan. Fortunately, I got a transmission. Wolf 1-5-0 was my call -sign. And I got 1-5 and I went, "Okay, that's got to be for me." And then there was static and then there was, "2.5". That's all I heard. And I went, help me to gauge my eyeballs to where I'm looking on the ground and I went, "OK, that's got to be Toronto air traffic, 2.5 miles". And the airport was twenty

degrees to my left at two and half miles. I found it. Went in [laughs] the fire trucks and emergency are all on the runway with their lights going and stuff and I landed.

That was probably the most nerve racking experience I ever had. Because it's like – you're all by yourself. There's nobody there to help you. There's nobody there to answer your question. So you go in, it's getting night time, it's getting dusky, it's five o'clock. You can't find the airport. What do you do if you can't find the airport? And now it's like, "Oh my God. What happens if I, like, go around again and try again and miss and the plane's going out into the lake and I'm going into the lake and then there's going to be that press and everything else." I'm going. "Ooh." Anyway, there's nothing I can do. There's something wrong with the radio.

So I picked up my pilot. We went to start the airplane to go to Thunder Bay and home, it didn't work. North Bay had to come down, fix us. They thought they fixed us. We took off. The next day going into Thunder Bay we lose radios again. So it wasn't me [laughs]. It was the airplane that… At that point, he was in the front seat, I was in the back and back seat radios worked. But when you're all by yourself in the front seat you can't get in the back to try an alternate solution.

So there were some scary times but, by and large, ninety-nine or ninety-eight percent of flying is total boredom and routine stuff. And it's that two percent that you're absolutely totally terrified that if you survive it's a very exciting job [laughs].

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Deanna Brasseur. End of Side 2.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

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

Can you speak to your work toward gender integration?

BRASSEUR: Yes, I was – in the spring of 1986 I was pulled off the French course, the year long French course that I was taking, to become the Air Force representative with the Director General at National Defence Headquarters. It was established as the Charter Task Force on Human Rights. And it was the military's response to the government as to the way ahead for employment of women in the Canadian Forces in addition to a number of other questions. There were five questions that we needed to address. One was the employment of women in the Canadian Forces. There was the question of homosexuality. There was a question of compulsory retirement age. There was a question of marital status. And the other one, it escapes me and it matters not. But we had – we were given – six months to prepare a report – a response – for the Department of National Defence to the government to be submitted on 1 October, '86. And so we researched all over the world. NATO countries, Western countries, third world countries. We approached Russia, so that we got a broad base perspective what all different country's policies were in all these different areas and came up with a response –

produced a response – and proposed a way ahead for the government and the military. We wrapped up the SWINTER trials. So we concluded them with reports and recommendations.

One of my most memorable moments was drafting the message for the Chief of Defence Staffs' signature, who was Paul Manson at the time, officially ending the SWINTER trials and officially opening the Pilot Flight Engineer and Navigator Classifications to women for future employment. The Charter Task Force was somewhat directed by higher headquarters that our conclusions in our report were to reflect a conscious approach to the way ahead. So we ended up recommending further trial programs. Therefore the Combat Related Employment of Women office was created so that – and to a certain extent I agree, somewhat – that we cannot afford to jeopardize the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces by experimenting with social programs. So proceed consciously. And they started with the combat re-employment of women where women now were in combat occupations with the army, the navy and the air force. So therefore that's how I got into the Fighter Pilot Training Program. And that worked well. I mean, in hindsight we can say, "Well, of course. I mean, women are capable." Those who are capable and competent do and those who don't generally don't join. You know, if you don't want to be an infanteer, then don't join the military. That applies to – that's a none-gender thing. So that was great.

When I retired in 1994, I was asked to be the only ex-military member of the Minister of National Defence Advisory Board on Gender Integration in Canadian Forces. There were four civilian members. We visited military bases and basically took the temperature and the cultural way ahead for – since – the recommendations came out from – for combat re-employment of women, what lingering systemic barriers may be there, to careers for women in the military. In other words, a general male officer or an air officer, in general, will go through an operational tour or staff tour, an operational tour. Well, if women were previously precluded from operational tours, you couldn't fill that square on your way to the next promotion. So how do we mediate and moderate and ensure that's going to be equitable ahead.

So in 1998 the Canadian Forces Ombudsman's Office was established or mandated for the establishment – and the Ombudsman saw that he needed a requirement to form an advisory board for.. So I was on the Canadian Forces Ombudsman's Advisory committee for two or three years until 2001 – I believe, 2002 – which was again addressing issues, systemic issues, not just gender based issues in the Canadian Forces. Currently back in the Reserves, I am the military Co-Chair of Defence Women's Advisory Organization. And our role is to advise senior leadership on systemic barriers or barriers to employment, successful employment of women in the Canadian Forces in the Department of National Defence. So I continue working on those issues, if there are any remaining.

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel this work has accomplished?

BRASSEUR: Well I guess – I suppose – in hindsight – in retrospect – it has accomplished everything [laughs]. You know, when you plough the furrow in the field anybody who comes after you it's easier, OK?. So from when I joined the military in 1972, when we had just – Commission on the Status of Women had just concluded in 1971 and had recommended, you know, women be allowed entry to military colleges. That the ceiling of fifteen hundred women only be lifted and we were only fifteen hundred women in the military. Now we're eight, ten thousand women in the military. We had Finance, Admin, Supply, PERI – physical education recreation instructor – not a direct entry trade, a cross trade – cross training trade – Dental Assistant, Medical Assistant. There were a few others. To now there is no classification closed to women in the military. I mean it's a – I used to say to people that – I would say never in the space of a historic time, over the twenty-five years that I'd been involved in the military, will we ever again see as much sociological change in an organization such as the military. It just can't be duplicated. You know, from no rights to all rights, basically so… As much as it was hard to till the first furrow –cut the trail, you know – I can look back on it and see other women coming along behind me who have no experience of the challenges that we had to deal with and I go, "Yeh". You know, they're having more fun doing it and it's easier for them. So yah, it was worth it. All that hard work and effort was worth it. And you can see success and it's always nice when you can measure it.

INTERVIEWER: Was the fact that your being a woman have an impact on the development of your career?

BRASSEUR: No. I – they say that in the military you are your own career manager and I think that evidence speaks for itself [laughs] – end of that conversation!

INTERVIEWER: How has your career in the military affected your subsequent career or personal life?

BRASSEUR: Well, it has certainly given me the – my life has been very interesting, very challenging, very rewarding. My military career was, in my personal opinion, a hundred percent successful and when I retired from the military I started my own personal business in motivational speaking, which has been very successful. I'm not number one billboard in the world but I speak to all groups and across all walks of life and generally to a standing ovation. Because I come from – I am grass roots speaking to grass roots. And there but for the grace of God go I, here is how I did what I did. Here are some of the lessons I learned along the way and the only difference between me here sharing these with you there is you have not yet. And so if I can share anything with you to assist you on your own personal journey, then I will. And it works really well and I enjoy doing it and people enjoy hearing it. So my military career led to my second career which led me back into the military [laughs]. Because at the time we went through a lot of downsizing and a lot of challenges. Once 9/11 occurred, I knew that I still had lots to contribute so I'll go back in as a Reservist and give them what I can when I'm not on the road speaking. So I've thoroughly enjoyed almost five years now back in the Reserves, working on a part time basis, assisting and sharing my experience and knowledge that I

gained, because we're a bit short sometimes in some areas on experience and personnel. So it's been great.

INTERVIEWER: So what lessons did you learn in the military then?

BRASSEUR: I formed a message in the framework of the word goal. G stands for God-given gifts and abilities, which we all have. And if you don't believe in God as a higher power, and if you don't believe in a higher power, it's your gene pool – G for genes. We are each given our own little personal package of potential which is totally unlimited and it's up to you to explore that. O is for obstacles which are really opportunities in disguise. So for each obstacle that comes into your life you look at it and say, "OK, where's the lesson? Where's the learning. I go over, around, through, under, but there's something here for me." So welcome the obstacles. A is for attitude. An "I can be", positive attitude is how you approach things. There's no "can't" in my vocabulary. It's find a way. Where there's a will, there's a way. Where there's no will, there's no way. L is limitations. We all have them. Once you acknowledge them, they go away, OK?. S is success. And if – so, in a nutshell, if you take your God-given gifts and abilities to overcome obstacles and turn them into opportunities, using a "can-do" attitude within your limitations, you're guaranteed a hundred percent success.

INTERVIEWER: What advice would you give, or have you given, to other young women or young people who wish to join the military, or to undertake some other form of so called non-traditional employment?

BRASSEUR: I have, over the course of years, had a lot of opportunity to address young people. And that's anybody younger than me [laughs]. That's anywhere from having my nephew, who is seven years old, ask me to come and talk to his grade one class, and by the time I was done I had three – so I had seventy seven-year olds to speak to – to a thousand high school students, to universities, to specific science and technology events, women in trade technology events. Because – for every salary client I do with my business, I offer in location if you have a high school you want me to talk to. Because the word has to get out and school system doesn't have the money to pay, always. So that's my give-back policy. Because you can't afford the knowledge doesn't mean you can't get it.

So I tell the kids, basically in the same outline I just presented you about goals, and I contextualize it for their life's experience. I say, you know, "Your parents say, you know, you have to get good marks because you have to go to university." And they go, "Oh, yah, yah" "Or college, or something." "Oh, yah, yah." So when I tell them, "Listen, you know, I'm here to tell you, you don't have to. So you can go home and tell your mom and dad that Major Brasseur said you don't have to." I said, "I'll tell you what you have to do is you have to commit to life-long learning. You can do that on the job, you can do that as apprenticeship, you can do that through co-op, you can do it through university, you can do it through college, you can do it through self study. You must do life-long learning." That's the message. You're never going to amount to anything if you don't do this. My dad said, "You'll never have a successful career if you don't get a

university degree." I still hear "with no university degree" and my career's been, I think, very successful. And I've learned an awful lot. I probably have a PhD from the school of hard knocks.

So, I tell the kids, "You decide what it is you want to be. You decide what you need to get there and then you just do. You just work hard and you get there. And you don't stop until you get there. And if you need some help, you ask until you get the help you need. If you stop asking, you won't get the help. If you never stop asking, you'll get what you want. OK, so if you want to come in the military, you go for it. I started as a private typist. I ended up flying CF-18s. Where else in any company are you aware of you can start off at a janitorial level and become the CEO? Unlimited opportunity and the door is wide open. You decide where you want it to go. That's it. It's plain and simple. You decide. Nobody else decides for you what you're going to be in life, how successful, how not successful, how much money, you decide. It's your choice. So if you want a career in the military, I'd say go for it. Young men and young women, you will gain head and shoulders in advance of your peers and your friends and your relatives and everybody else the knowledge about team work, self discipline, responsibility, working together with together with others, how to plan, how to be successful. You don't get that kind of experience in any other organization, whether it's a governmental department or whether it's a police department, whether it's a provincial department. Nowhere will get you the same experience that you get in the military. And you can go to pretty fun places [laughs] and do some pretty fun things like loops and rolls in an F-18. So there." That's what I tell everybody. I do. I just say, "Hey, if you want it, go for it. If it's for you, great. If it's not, get out, do something else. Don't stop until you find that you're doing what you love doing and somebody is paying you to do it. Now you've found your passion in life." That's what it's all about.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Deanna Brasseur on the 23 of January 2007. Interview ends.

TANSCRIPT ENDS