

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: Alain Chouinard

INTERVIEWER: Stan Jaknunas

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Alain Chouinard

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By Stan Jaknunas

Canadian War Museum Oral History Program interview with Alain Chouinard on the 20th of November at Ottawa interviewed by Stan Jaknunas tape one side one.

CHOUINARD: My name is Alain Chouinard

INTERVIEWER: Thank you Alain. Today I will be talking to Alain Chouinard who was both a pilot and an airborne interceptor navigator in the Royal Canadian Air Force and Canadian Forces. Primarily Alain will be talking about his role and activities as an airborne interceptor navigator. Before we get into that detail, Alain, can you give us some appreciation of your pre-enrolment details -- where you were born, education that sort of thing.

CHOUINARD: I was born in a town called St. Laurent, Quebec which is now an integral part of the city of Montreal. I grew up there and I did attend public school from grades one through seven there. For my secondary [education] I went to, what was then known as a private college called College St. Laurent. The program there was classical studies it used to lead to an eight year program with a BA. Most people remember those years from '62 to '68. They were some what troubled in the sense that the government in Quebec decided to have a quiet revolution and a BA at College St. Laurent was not longer an acceptable degree so if you wanted a BA you had to go the University of Montreal. As a result my course was basically a transition course. The last two years there I took physics, chemistry and biology. It was really a beautiful blend with Greek and Latin and philosophy.

My motivation to join the air force was very personal in the sense that I grew up in a town, St. Laurent which was absolutely conducive to that, being close to Dorval airport and Canadair the manufacturer of airplanes. One airplane was very instrumental in producing this motivation. It was the CF-104 Starfighter. I saw each and every one of those before even CF pilots saw them. Actually the only guys that saw them before me was presumably the test pilots, I hope. Needless to say, a lot of my lectures at St. Laurent were interrupted by these 104s actually going actually right over the college.

So I was all fired up and my two idols, if you will, when I was a young boy (Antoine de St. Expurey) because he was both a prolific writer and a very good pilot I'm told. The other guy was Clarence Kelly Johnson the electrical engineer. My aim in life was actually become a test pilot with an aeronautical engineering degree because I wanted, later on when I was scared out of my wits I guess, to design my own airplanes. That is in a very large sense where I grew up.

I enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces, personally it has always been the RCAF in my mind, but I enrolled in Montreal officially on the 31st of August 1968. The selection process, because I decided to on the spur of the moment. I made my decision very late in one year in if I recall early June - late May '68. The college, as was I said earlier, was in a transition with these government programs being shoved aside and there were rumours that the college which

was owned and operated by the clergy at the time. A beautiful congregation dedicated to teaching. After, I guess, a hundred years the Quebec government decided these guys were no longer good enough. So I was a bit cheesed off with the way the program was managed and the school let along the fact that tuition fees were increasing every year. It's no big secret that I decided that I needed something that I could manage and at the time I was not very fortunate in that respect so I made sort of a split second decision one day to go to a recruiting centre. After one day a friend of mine - this is somewhat of an anecdote but he was fed up with me describing various airplanes overhead he said, "Bleepity bleep why don't you join the air force?". I thought that, "hey, what a lovely concept" so here I am at the recruiting centre.

The selection process itself it was two interviews, one of which was a very basic interview at the recruiting centre. I remember walking in there talking a mile a minute, and the Petty Officer said, with his beautiful old navy uniform, "Whoa, whoa, whoa hold your horses. You are not on a take off roll yet." The second interview was a very long interview I recall. I probably bored the recruiting officer to tears when I told him all I knew about [the] aviation world including DC-8s, 707s, Cessna 150s. You can't imagine, we spoke for an hour and a half, that's what I remember. The next (loss?) process was the PSU I guess in St. Jean.....

INTERVIEWER: Excuse me Alain PSU stands for ?

CHOUINARD: Personnel Selection Unit, or I at least that's what I'm presuming, because you went there for a week. ROTP candidates had to go through a college review board as well but in my year they started to go away from that. In a sense, the candidate was not interviewed by the board. They were interviewed by designated officers and you had everything under the sun. There was an officer there who questioned the fact that I "didn't have a girlfriend" at the time and I told him, well, it was because my studies were an absolute priority. In hindsight I thought I was a bit over bearing in that response. So that is how I came to join the forces.

I ended up choosing ROTP/CMR Regular Officer Training Plan CMR - College Militaire Royal at St. Jean. My first impression of the military even at the recruiting centre, I thought they were extremely well organized, well disciplined. It was quite refreshing for me. Having worked on odd summer jobs to see how some people pride themselves on being administrators but none of them could hold a candle to the recruiting centre in Montreal. When I went to CMR that's a whole kettle of fish all together. My father warned me, I guess to no avail, that these guys would yell at me and haze me and all that good stuff. I said, "Oh no I think you are exaggerating that's only in the movies." And sure enough when we got to CMR when we got yelled at, lined up and told to shut up and to button up our shirts. So that's how my career started.

INTERVIEWER: Alain could you give us a brief description of your life at College Militaire Royal?

CHOUINARD: Yes life at College Militaire Royal was very regimented as one can expect. If I recall the advertising in those days said "bring men, real men" type thing and today I understand this line has been changed, thank god. But now at CMR it was very regimented in a sense [that] you had all the engineering courses of a regular university plus other courses such as French literature, history, geography and they were compulsory. Unlike any other university if you decided one morning to skip a lecture that was not on at College Militaire Royal. As they say it was a parade type thing. So you got up usually fairly earlier in the morning -- 6:30 you didn't have a choice at CMR and [there] was announcement telling you

how to dress. What a surprise, as if we didn't know. By and large everything was structured. You were basically booked from 8:00 in the morning until 4:00 at night when these lectures ended. Also at one period during the week where you had drill on the parade square compulsory physical fitness and at 4:00 you had intramural sports. I believe [that sometimes you had] Friday off at 4:00, what a respite. We had at least 35 hours solid of courses a week basically and throughout there. The first three months you were not allowed to get out of the college. You were basically called, not officer cadet but recruit, and it sounded like you some kind of a left over from a concentration camp.

INTERVIEWER: At that time were you already selected to go aircrew?

CHOUINARD: Yes, basically the tentative selection process they tell you, you are selected as aircrew. To be further selected before your first summer training they send you to the aircrew selection centre in Toronto - Downsview. I think it's out of commission now. Anyway, that's where you went and you underwent a series of tests for about a week as well. Some of them were Link trainers you had to do basic manoeuvres. You had also very extensive test of academic standards and I found out after the fact that if you did well in maths and these other tests you were deemed good potential navigator. The way they selected in those days, Stan, is I found out way after the fact, but if you had both acceptable scores to be either a pilot or a nav but your nav score was somewhat higher, you were already selected as a nav because they wanted the quote unquote "the tough intellectual". At least that's what they told us. I know a lot of pilots, including myself, who would question that sometimes. But that's how they motivated me because I was very disgruntled when I found out in my first summer training. That's the main part of military the training, [it] was all done in the summer. If you will, the professional category if you were either a nav pilot or infantry officer was done in the summer.

So we went to these tests. So, of course, the summer for everybody regardless of where you came from back in those days was the Canadian Forces Officer Candidate School CFOCS - Chilliwack. Basically the course was phase one of the infantry officer course because it those years our chief of defence staff General Dextraze has said, "A real leader has to be an infantry officer, so all officers should have" In hindsight I can say now that was not bad a reason, but it sort of weeded out the bad apples in the lot. So I found out the long bush exercise that was to decide my fate in the military that indeed I had been selected. I remember being marched into the office of my CO, standing at attention and being told, "You have been selected as a navigator. Is that a yes or no?" We want to know now, type thing. He said, "Well look at it this way. We know you want to be a pilot but at least you will be flying". "Well I guess, Sir, that will be acceptable". He said, "What kind of an attitude is that?" He was an infantry Vandoos type so I should have said like a friend of mine who switched from the navy to infantry - "Oh, Sir, I want to be an infantry officer" but no, so I stuck with it and I was some what disappointed indeed....

The following year in '70 onwards we had summer air nav training and it was the same for everybody. The minute you leave Chilliwack -- oh that's the other thing I forgot -- the minute you step back on the college ground you had no option of getting out without paying so, in other words, the moment you marched in as an officer cadet first year at CMR, the very first day, that step costs you four years of service for general service officers or five years for aircrew officers. So I knew I was in the military for five years of military college plus five years for I was in for ten years at that point.

INTERVIEWER: But according to your sheet you became a pilot ultimately, did you not?

CHOUINARD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: When did that transition happen?

CHOUINARD: After I served one tour as an airborne intercept navigator.

INTERVIEWER: So we will get into that later then, okay.

CHOUINARD: Back to the saga here. CFANS - Canadian Forces Air Navigation School. It also houses other courses like aerospace system course but it's called (garbled ?). I believe. And it's located in beautiful Winnipeg in the international airport. Half of the airport is military, the other half civilian. Actually it's more like one third of it basically. So I went to Winnipeg for the summer of '70, '71, '72 and at the end when I graduated from RMC in '73 I did go to Winnipeg but much later in the summer and that will create some problem eventually.

The training itself at CFANS, some of it because it was over summer periods -- unfortunately some of it required overlap and it's very actually significant in the very first summer you know. It's a very slow progression. The other thing they use at CMR, also -- my squadron commander used to motivate me -- was the fact you will do well because you did well at CMR in academics. As you know, navigator is mostly academics which is true, unfortunately.

The other thing I want to say before I go back to the details of the training itself -- I don't know if you are interested in the topics. The last training when I graduated and I got my lieutenant commission in '73 we also, before the actual nav trainers started, we went to survival school, which is Canadian Forces Survival School located Edmonton at the time. That was a three week course. We had both bush survival and sea survival as well and it's ironic because in the last phase of the bush camp we [were] supposed to be eight days in the bush by ourselves but the temperature at the time near Goose Bay was so high. We went there [especially] because at the time we wanted to justify the existence of a camp that was before secret but is now public knowledge, I believe, because it's been broadcast at least in the Citizen. It used to be referred to as the fishing lodge but I can assure you we were not in a fishing camp. We were dumped by helicopter in the middle of the bush where we shared our tents and lean-tos with mosquitoes. But it was 104F. Even the instructors couldn't hack it. They decided to cut the eight day survival training into four days only. So I will never forget that -- very apropos.

The last phase of survival training was done in Comox, British Columbia. Beautiful setting and [I] remember this course very well with fond memories. As some of my fellow navigator trainees found out, one of which as a matter of fact decided during the bush phase, believe it or not, to go from nav training to infantry because his girlfriend was the daughter of a major in the Vandoos. It must have done very well for him because he is now a Major General, I understand. So, of course, after this was done, the survival training, we are all qualified. We came back and to our big disappointment because it was still summer they decided to delay the start of our course, or I should say the last phase of the navigator training. You will see in a while that causes some problems. So they gave us remedial tasks to do like putting binders

together -- books. Some of us decided that being RMC graduates and back in those days we had a high opinion of ourselves -- god knows why, I don't know why, but in hindsight --so we took special leave which was granted. So we started again in the summer, late August and we went into the last phase which was completed on the 23rd November '73. The courses in Winnipeg, especially the first summer, they were mostly academic. In fact I have a comment here in my notes 'very heavy in academics'. We learned all about navigation including the fabrication of maps, different characteristics of maps, the techniques and what have you. A lot theory that some of us felt they could have shrunk the course into a self study package basically.

INTERVIEWER: At that time it was just a generic nav? You weren't an AI?

CHOUINARD: No at that time it's strictly generic and that's a good question because the nav training was for long range navigation . So basically it was geared to long range transportation mode, over the ocean preferably. Meteorology was very big with us. They even bragged about us that we took it even in more depth than the pilots because the navs on the overseas flying. For pilots, as you know, it's more local area in some cases. I'm thinking of fighter pilots. They need their meteorology but not as in excruciating detail. And in fact meteorology was a bit of a nemesis for most people, some of those theories were. Flight planning, aerodynamics but not as much as pilots did, of course. We were told you learn aerodynamics so you can explain that to the young pilots to prepare them. Communications-- we even took Morse code some of us. One of my fellow students, a senior cadet in my year, I saw him one summer when he was graduated and I was just a summer student. He was so desperate. e was the last ones in the class to get the code. He threw the headset against the cubical and he threw the chair and the young, five foot two instructor said, "Relax, relax, Marcelle, relax". This guy is a six foot six football player, so you can imagine.

Celestial astronomy/celestial techniques we studied that in depth. As well I can interject a parentheses here because I am also a member of the order of engineers in Quebec and yesterday we had a visit at the Science and Technology [Museum] and I got a door prize and the door prize, believe it or not, was a celestial atlas. I wish I had that back then. It would have helped me greatly.

Officer development that was a regular complaint from ROTP students regardless of which college or university even. Very exaggerated in our view on the nav course, especially the first summer. You know we had lots of courses, affective writing, effective speaking, effective listening, effective reading and also we had have very intense physical fitness. The flying portion of the nav training --for the few summers because CMR was one year longer than the other course, presumably you went to CMR prep year because you didn't have what was then called senior matriculation. Although in my case experience proved that I could have easily gone to first year. But the recruiting officer asked me if I study one particular piece of Shakespeare literature and I said no but I studied Hamlet and King Lear. The guy said, "Nope, nope we want this one". So at the stroke of a pen he proved to me that part, that disappointed me a bit, that the pen is indeed mightier than the sword.

So the airplane we flew in was the DC-3 actually the proper name would be C-47 Dakota. It had one of the big radars underneath. At the time it was obsolete but it was good enough for nav. It's called a APS-33 radar, don't ask me what the acronym stands for, and it was huge. It was a huge antenna. It was sitting near the end of the fuselage underneath. Not all aircraft were complete with radar. Some of them were strictly transport Dakotas. They had bare bone

minimums for navigator training. The total flying time on Dakotas was 214 which included a cross country to Colorado Springs, very interesting trip.

INTERVIEWER: You had to plot the navigation for the trip?

CHOUINARD: No, not Colorado but the other trip. The training itself which is interesting for the nav training because the first summer --which would be '70 -- we had very little to do in the sense that, every time we were assigned a task we were either a first nav or a second nav. First nav, you were responsible to navigate from the point of departure which was not Winnipeg, by the way. The pilots were responsible to bring you from Winnipeg to a way point, say about 50 miles off Winnipeg which would give you enough time in the climb and what not to get ready. It was a very long triangle. You had a point A to a point B and between point B to point C which was very short, about 10 minute flight, you switch from one nav to the next so we were travelling usually in pairs. They tried to match it so that you were responsible for one trip to the first nav and the other trip the second nav. But the second was usually responsible to navigate from point C back to the departure point then as soon as he identified they point. For instance, to give you a good idea, Winnipeg we had all sorts of routes that were designated to by the first two digits of the heading. You had route 27 which was notorious for pilots because they loved it. You went all the way from just south of Winnipeg all the way to Big Muddy which was in the military flying area of Moose Jaw. Big Muddy was a favorite destination there. I believe there was Radcliffe also that comes to mind. The other one was three zero. Your were brought to Dolphin, Manitoba and then I believe you flew three zero, zero heading near Yorkton in Saskatchewan.

INTERVIEWER: What would happen if the navigator who was responsible for the first two legs of the trip made an error and then handed over that error to the navigator who was going to do the flying from point C to back to the base?

CHOUINARD: It never was that bad. Don't forget, there was two navigator students in the beginning and there was also an instructor navigator. When you had either the pilot or the co-pilot that came back and looked at your nav plot, you knew that was hint that things were not going as you were plotting on the map. I recall an incident where a friend of mine from CMR -- he never made it actually -- the pilot came about half way through the trip and he said, "Have you got any idea where we are?". So he took his sharp pencil and then, then he just circled the whole province of Manitoba. Needless to say, the pilot was not very impressed with him. He said, "I don't think I'm going to spend all that fuel looking for a place to go." But that was, by and large, the exception.

Also that was a good question you asked because as a second nav you are responsible to be at the ready position any time the first nav had a problem. The instructor could say, "Okay, you take over. We give you a TACAN point, restart from here and bring us back home. Or another one, or carry on the route bring us back home." It happened to me once where in the later phases, the later summer you ended up being only two student navs.

INTERVIEWER: Could you look outside of the airplane?

CHOUINARD: Yes. The techniques that were taught were basically the same as the pilot techniques in the sense that we use enabling objectives and performance objectives. In other words, they broke down your training into bits and pieces just like the old principle: crawl,

walk, run. I must admit the Forces, when it comes to training -- because I've seen both sides of the issue, pilots or navs, you know -- they really got down to a skill. Compared to civilian training for other stuff they are not as well planned out, if you will. If you study the study guide before you go on the trip it helps you understand why we are doing this and that.

The first mission as a nav needless to say it was like a symposium. I think you had five or six students with two instructors and basically what you are allowed to do is look out the window, try read out the map, basic, basic stuff. You don't really navigate. The first summer was basically a refresher. I've got my stats here. I think it's the first summer I flew. I only flew five trips, five hours each roughly, 5.3 or so and we only flew four missions in five trips. There is a lot of repetition there. And the techniques that were first used -- we used air plot which was not a very good way to navigate. You get your met briefing and you prepare your calculation on the climb. As I was saying, you figure out the average wind based on the met forecast. You know as well as I that it's not very reliable but you flew at usually between 5,000 to 10,000 roughly because it's an unpressurized airplane.

We flew what was called at first an air plot. You plot your true heading and then you go out the window and you have a dead reckoning and you figure you will be there. So it's good old watch map ground just like a pilot navigation at low level. So you figure you are going to be near by (garbled?) and you look out the window and you find out, "Oh, I'm in Bismark South Dakota", or whatever you know. Route 27 was notorious for that because one guy came up to me, another student nav and says, "Hey, Al, you should have seen those 106s. They are beautiful airplanes." Needless to say, for those who don't know airplanes, 106s are interceptors for NORAD.

INTERVIEWER: American type.

CHOUINARD: American type.

INTERVIEWER: So he was way off course.

CHOUINARD: The joke for navigator instructors is when the pilots are whistling on the intercom -- they had their own intercom, the pilots when they talked to each other they didn't want the nav to hear because they talk about stock options and stuff like that. Stuff that the nav doesn't want to hear. But, basically, when they start getting on the nav intercom or the main intercom and they start whistling Yankee Doodle, you knew that they were not comfortable with your navigation. We were either going to be violated or... Then they would start slowing down and checking the gear out and the flaps. The meanest pilot did that. I never saw that myself, but a friend of mine told me the poor 106 guy, of course, they just zoom by.

The question that might be interesting to the audience especially the World War II vets because they trained on the Dakotas I didn't know that. I found out when I became a pilot instructor later on in life that the MP that I was hosting in Moose Jaw was a World War II navigator and he commented to me he said "Ah you are too young to know. I trained on C-47." So I flashed the back of my collar and he said "Hey you've got nav wings." And I said, "Yes and I got my nav wings in 1973." He was just shocked.

The nav night flying was celestial and that was the toughest part. Near the end of the course they put more emphasis on the "pure" navigator technique. Where you navigated on a transverse Mercator map. I think it is, maybe I'm wrong but basically that map, Stan, had just

a very large feature -- the two lakes in Manitoba and that's about it. No towns nothing except Winnipeg, Regina. You know, the main stuff. It was like a black and white with an overlay of grid and, in fact, near the end we flew at night where you were allowed to use celestial navigation using stars which was really a nemesis for most people, including myself. You were allowed to back it up with radar but your main fixes had to be astro shots. And also we had to use grid navigation. You had to set your gyros so these routes they selected, the buggers. They were three zero route or the 31 or even one guy got route 36 if you can imagine. On a moonless night near the winter. In fact, that guy got a bit lost.

INTERVIEWER: Were you allowed to use any of the navigation aids, like tactical air navigation or automatic direction finding?

CHOUINARD: Automatic direction finding [but] only to get bearings but we were not to use these as mainstay. We used mostly sun shots moon shots, or the occasional moon shot. We were not allowed to use TACAN at all. We had a computer as well. There was a phase -- I keep forgetting which summer it was, I think it was the third summer -- We had what was called ground plot and it resembled a mouse. What we teach young pilots -- map, ground. Basically, you manage your track on the ground as opposed to start with a true heading and figure out your pin point and then second guess the wind and then reconfigure the navigation to fit your calculation. The joke with pilots was all navigators, they always tell you where they have been they can't tell you where you are going.

INTERVIEWER: When did you ultimately get you navigator wings?

CHOUINARD: 23rd November '73. Two months after they decided that navigators were to become GSOs - General Service Officer. If you recall there was a differential [in] pay between pilots and nav and navs and other general service officer like infantry, MARS. We were quite miffed by that. We had two classes of military college candidates and we all filed individual redresses of grievance. But we got a common response from the chief of staff at the time saying, "Tough luck you've known this for years that it was planned and all that. And we spent a lot of money training you guys, plus we gave you a university degree, so stop complaining and start navigating."

INTERVIEWER: Were all your classmates members from CMR Canadians or was there a mix of other nationalities?

CHOUINARD: No they were all Canadians. The minority were from university. I think two or three at the most. But most of the guys were either CMR, Royal Roads or RMC.

INTERVIEWER: What was the failure rate like?

CHOUINARD: At the time I would say less than ten percent. Most of the guys that would bail out would do so of their own will. They would remuster to another category, type thing.

INTERVIEWER: They would become infantry officers.

CHOUINARD: Infantry officers is one of them yes.

INTERVIEWER: Then become major generals.

CHOUINARD: Actually it's ironic because he was one of the better ones as well he was a very good navigator -- a very keen fellow.

INTERVIEWER: Alain what were your career options now that you've had your wings?

CHOUINARD: You had basically three options open to you. The one that was lending itself mostly to training you just received is transport which was I think the majority. The second one maritime air patrols – ARGUS, if you recall the big four engine reciprocating engines, maritime patrol. Also a small group of that could go Sea Kings. The third option was airborne intercepts. Nav school was a funny place. They didn't really teach any techniques that were used for airborne intercepts as I will be discussing later. The joke was the only thing you learned was to tune a radar. That's about it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have the option or was the option made for you?

CHOUINARD: Actually, you submitted your choices. In fact, not only did you ask for an option, you asked for a squadron. Myself, I was selected to go airborne intercept which just delighted me beyond belief because I figured next to being a pilot being an airborne interceptor was far better than just being [a] transport nav. Not only that I didn't want to navigate grid gyro over the ocean at night. I read the writing on the wall if you will. Also I was posted to 416 squadron in Chatham. Later on while I was [at] operational training unit, 410 squadron in Bagotville, there was a candidate at 425 that failed his course so I went to the 410 squadron CO and I basically snivelled to get a posting in Bagotville because my soon to be fiancée was living there, working on the base etcetera. So I like Bagotville better than Chatham and so they bought it.

INTERVIEWER: Alain what were your privileges as a cadet?

CHOUINARD: Very limited, especially the first summer. Basically, the same rules you had at the college applied at Winnipeg and Winnipeg prided itself to be more demanding in terms of officer development. They say, "We don't want you guys to march like slovenly pilots on the street. We want you to be gentlemen and officers."

INTERVIEWER: Could you get married and own a car?

CHOUINARD: Negative on both answers.

INTERVIEWER: Could you live outside the base?

CHOUINARD: No neither. The only time you could live off base was the last summer when you just had graduated because you were an officer then. But during summer training the same rules as the college applied. So live in, on base, which was nice because the accommodations were better in Winnipeg than they were other places. You had everything provided for you on base. So you lived on base there was no curfew at night though that was nice. You could go off base without signing in and off the register like you did at military college. You had a bit more freedom but not much.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Alain Chouinard end of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE TAPE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Canadian war museum oral history program interview with Alain Chouinard tape one side two. Alain you've just received your wings now and you are off to the operational training unit at 410 squadron. Could you tell us what happened there?

CHOUINARD: Before I got there I was posted, if you might recall, to 416 squadron in Chatham. When I got there I said to the good Major that was hosting me I said, "Sir, I have a major problem". He said, "What's that, Lieutenant?". So I explained to him that my gear, in anticipation of a course in December, had been sent to Bagotville. So he arranged for me to get spare gear – well, not him he was a nav -- but he gave me to a gentleman by the name of Dave Kinsman who flew with me in a T-bird. I was so impressed with the ride. I'll never forget this because that was the only trip I got out of Chatham but it motivated me, more than ever before, to become a pilot. Because I recall in that trip he showed me how to do a roll which I did as well and I did a loop as well. He said, "Well, you shouldn't have any problem in the VOODOO world".

So later I went to Bagotville. Got there in January and, of course, the first thing that comes to mind was I arrive there on Quebec air in the middle of snow storm. I was really impressed with the amount of snow they have in Bagotville. So in Bagotville the training was from January to mid June. So it's a good six months training divided into two parts, basic interceptor navigator and advanced. To give you an idea for the feel of the course, [it was] also very heavy on academics because the 101 is a far more sophisticated airplane than the DC-3, I hope so. We learned a lot about airborne intercept, navigation, using TACAN point to point. We were now immersed into all the techniques that the nav school forbid us to use to fudge our fixes or to cheat. I shouldn't say that but actually some of us did try to cheat and were caught. If I can go back to the nav training in Winnipeg, the toughest thing about nav training on DC-3s or C-47s is the fact that you have a permanent record with you flight. Because all your plots and your calculations have to be submitted into a brown envelope as soon as the aircraft lands. So in the case of a pilot trainee there is no way of saying "my loop wasn't that bad". It's more subjective whereas in the case of a nav it's objective - strictly objective.

In the case of the VOODOO training there was a lot of on the ground work before you went physically into a VOODOO. My first trip in a VOODOO was in February '74 and, if you recall, I started on January the 6th so there was a lot of ground training. The only trip I got in January was a T-33 famil[iarization] flight. Which to me was good because we went into a (unclear?). But the first actual trip on the CF-101 was February the 5th, a month later. So the intervening days before that, if you look at the end of my log book, there were all simulator training. In fact, the VOODOO training, for every hour of flight you had at least one point something. The ratio is quite impressive and I don't blame them because the operating cost of a VOODOO is tremendous. So you just learned the very basic stuff.

At first you learn to do sort of a collision course so that you eventually turn your VOODOO close to the rear of the target so that you have what is known as a visual identification pass - vis ident for short. We spend a lot of time converting collision into to trail to visual ident because that was the toughest part for us. Let alone the fact that you rotate on the VOODOO at 150 knots -- rotate the nose wheel -- when in fact on DC-3s we used to navigate at 150 true air speed. So needless to say I was way behind the airplane to start with. That was the toughest part the transition from Dakota to VOODOO.

INTERVIEWER: So things are happening a little bit more rapidly?

CHOUINARD: Everything. In fact, using the radar not to read the map on the ground but to use your radar. That's where I found out very early in the course that I had a problem because I didn't really learn to really tune the radar properly. I found out through an old navigator at 410. He was analyzing what I was telling him and he said, "It sounds to me like you've got too much gain and not enough of this." Eventually he gave me a briefing because I had a check ride at one point and then on that check ride I managed to tune the radar so well that I could even see the impression fence near the approach into the run way. In fact, I said to the pilot, "You can touch any time now" and soon as I said that I heard clunk as the wheels touch down so I felt very good. When there was a debrief with the squadron CO because I was "not doing so well". He said, "That's well done" I said, "Thank you Sir. It's because of that Major who gave me all that advice." So the Major turned to his boss and said, "I'm glad to see that I earned my pay."

INTERVIEWER: So did you have any other type of techniques other than trail?

CHOUINARD: Oh yes there were quite a few techniques. There was the front cut off, I forget the details of it, basically you were within 30 degrees...

INTERVIEWER: Head to head.

CHOUINARD: Head to head. You had the beam attack. The beam attack was not a very favoured one because it was more for the Clunk days. The beam attack was very hard to make where you basically tried to keep the airplane at the edge of your radar scope on a constant bearing and then you aim at a point in front of them. Because as you know now -- it's now public knowledge -- but the VOODOO was, what they called in those days nuclear capable. When in fact they should have said the only main weapons were nuclear because otherwise the airplane lost its significance if you didn't have nuclear weapons.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do this at all altitudes?

CHOUINARD: Yes the beam attack was mostly low level, as I recall, because low level was extremely hard to get the radar to acquire the target. What we did normally was we used a combination of the infrared, because I flew the second generation VOODOOs which had the better radar, and also infrared seeker head which would give you the leg up on the first generations -- big time.

INTERVIEWER: So what happened after your check rides so to speak?

CHOUINARD: That was one of the many check rides because I had another one in the simulator this time and I realized it was more than a check ride. It was a progress ride but I did pass that one with flying colours too. That's the story of my life. Even on nav training, I realized yesterday, it's a humbling experience, that I had a repeat mission. I looked in the Julian calendar and I flipped the dates and I realized it was a Saturday so obviously not a mission that was gift or a bonus because it was strictly a repeat. But throughout the nav course -- it the same as pilot course -- you've got certain objectives to reach and if you don't reach them you are either given a progress ride and then you go to a board and then your are cease training. But it didn't happen in my case. I came close, I must admit.

The training was very demanding in terms of the VOODOO because you had to keep what was called an air picture as well and we were not trained as navs. Well, we were trained as navs but it was more of a generic picture which was just strictly a navigation picture. In the VOODOO world, as you know, you are in a fighting environment so you have to keep track of where you are and -- but basically where the other guy is and what's the best geometry to effect the killing.

INTERVIEWER: Did you fly in cloud and at night?

CHOUINARD: Yes, all of the above. Because the name of the squadron I went into was the All Weather Fighter Squadron, so yes we did fly at night. In fact, most of the major exercises were done at night.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

CHOUINARD: Because you get most of the airlines are not flying at night, at least not as much. And you get better clearance to get a massive number of airplanes in the air and from every other airport North Bay, Goose Bay and all these areas so you can fly targets into the military flying area.

INTERVIEWER: So how long did the training last in Bagotville at 410 squadron?

CHOUINARD: It lasted six months. It started in January and finished in mid-June.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any idea of approximately how many hours you flew?

CHOUINARD: Yes I do have that somewhere. I believe it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of 110 hours I think.....

INTERVIEWER: With respect to your training on the VOODOO could you give us an idea of what the ratio of simulator to flying would be?

CHOUINARD: I would say quickly judging by my log book seeing that I got actually 75 hours on the VOODOO of flying and 25 [hours] on the T-33. For the VOODOO simulator it was one hour of simulator time for every 1.3 hours of flying time if not more because in the simulator if you didn't do as good as you should have they would not allow to progress. You would repeat the mission. So, in other words, by the time actually walked to the airplane you had flown the mission at least once in the simulator. So, basically, they didn't leave very much room [to] maneuver in terms of errors. I look at my log book and for '74 it's extremely heavy. Every flying time is proceeded by a simulator time (if not two missions?).

INTERVIEWER: Did you do any navigation, per say in the VOODOO?

CHOUINARD: Yes, as a navigator sometime you were doing TACAN point to points or you would do what is called an airborne interceptor radar approach. You would tune the radar to read the map you would lower the antenna and you would read the ground feature. The Saguenay Valley, as you probably know from experience, is very well defined. You have the St. Lawrence River in the east and then the beautiful fjord so you guide your pilot in a big down wind leg. You basically flew an approach on radar except that [instead of] him getting

your instructions from a ground radar, you as a navigator, would give him the suggested altitude he should be at, the decent rate. You guided him and then you lined him up about at least ten miles back, if I recall, or so. You line on up. There was this beautiful bay in Port Alfred and you lined up with the smoke stack or if you used the infrared to confirm you were indeed lined up against Port Alfred not Arvida as some navigator -- no name no pack drill -- did. Any way you did navigation, you could, easily.

INTERVIEWER: But on a day to day basis on a usual trip did the pilot do the navigation if you were flying...?

CHOUNARD: Most of the time 90 percent of the time the pilot would do it. He would only do it only if you were a new "sprog" nav and he would ask you to be checked out. Or he would query you and he played dumb. Occasionally, on 425 they were asking the senior pilots.... that's how they crew people on 425 now. The more experienced pilots with the younger nav that way the level expertise could reach a happy medium in the cockpit type thing.

INTERVIEWER: What was the consequence of failure if you didn't progress satisfactorily?

CHOUNARD: Cease training.

INTERVIEWER: No other option?

CHOUNARD: Well let's say for the sake of argument I could not have improved beyond my problems. Then I would have been sent [me] to another flying job. Depending on my record at nav school they would have probably either sent me transport or maritime.

INTERVIEWER: You had to fulfil your five year contract?

CHOUNARD: Oh, yes. Even if they decided you were not suitable to a be a good nav anywhere you would still have to serve your commitment period.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone fail on the course when you were there?

CHOUNARD: The nav course, no not on my course. That's the other thing too the ROTP courses...

INTERVIEWER: I'm referring to the 410.

CHOUNARD: Yes, we had one failure as well. He was not ROTP though he was a regular officer. He was a former radio operator and cross trained to navigator. He couldn't manage the pace at which things happened during intercepts. So he changed classifications completely. He went to Security.

INTERVIEWER: Alain, you have successfully completed your 410 training. What happens to you now?

CHOUNARD: As I said earlier, I switched my posting from 416 to 425 in Bagotville. When I arrived in Bagotville they put me into combat ready training which basically was two trips and

a check ride on the airplane. But before that it was preceded by two or three trips on the simulator to make sure you are up to scratch and then you are given a certificate, which I have over here. Certified combat ready 19th of July 1974.

INTERVIEWER: What did the trips consist of?

CHOUINARD: Basically the first trip was a visual identification trip. You roll into another VOODOO and you organize a collision course and then organize a sharp turn to line up on his tail and identify him as aircraft 101 006. Report that to NORAD, just like you did on training.

INTERVIEWER: Speaking of control, did you have any control from the ground at that time?

CHOUINARD: Yes, we were working in what was called the NORAD environment. It still exists today but it is in a somewhat different format. We use a system called SAGE -- Semi Automatic Ground Environment. That was NORAD -- North American Air Defence. Now it's called aerospace defence but it's the same thing. Basically the way it worked in a typical VOODOO mission -- any mission either training or actual operation -- you get your clearance to take off from the ground controller at Bagotville. Then you are passed on to the NORAD controller and he has control of you until he lines you up with a target and you decide with your radar that you are confident in your air picture. You've got the guy in your sights and you are ready to engage the target. The code at the time was "Judy" and that meant to the controller on the ground now that he would more or less use a monitoring approach and watch you doing things. He would only intervene if you.....

INTERVIEWER: You would control the intercept from that point on.

CHOUINARD: That's right. Once the navigator decreed a "Judy", the crew was in charge of the intercept.

INTERVIEWER: How did the NORAD controller control you?

CHOUINARD: They had access to all of the radars across North America. Basically coverage was extensive. You had Moisey, Mont Apica and all these radars.

INTERVIEWER: Was it just voice communication or were there any other forms of communication?

CHOUINARD: Well, the main thing was radio but you could do everything silently. You could have what you call a data link. What they were doing was using a UHF Ultra High Frequency. They would project a circle on your radar screen. That would show the general area where the target is supposed to be. So, technically, if you wanted to, yes, you could do it on your own. Of course you have to acknowledge that you've got the target anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Did they give you a heading and a profile to fly or an altitude?

CHOUINARD: Yes the data link. You know, they had the switch on the pilot side they could tell you what kind it was. They had five letters and it would show the pilot we were in pursuit or when we were stern or in cut off or supersonic or whatever. The pilot had an idea and the navigator would look on his radar. I believe we could look as far as sixty nautical miles which is at least 72 statute miles. I don't know what it is in kilometres but it's way more. So you

could look at the circle and bigger airplanes such as the B-52, for instance, would start showing up easily at sixty miles. If the guy was aggressive enough he would start jamming your radar. Then you knew he was definitely not simulating a friendly. He was a hostile.

INTERVIEWER: So you had two options then you could be controlled via voice communications or by.....

CHOUINARD: What was called then the data link but it was not what you have today. Today is far more sophisticated. In fact, at one point they had a problem with radios. They could use the data link antenna to act as a receiver as well. Also you could use the data link to select a frequency and it could act as a radio receiver. You would not transmit on the data link but you could receive instructions. Level five is the one level that I'm thinking of. You could see that on major scale exercises where they simulated maybe, probably, an electromagnetic pulse and all the communications were down. They would say, "midnight midnight midnight". That was the code word to tell that we've gone to level five which was no communication. And the guy would transmit raw radar information into the data link. So you would select that in your data link box and you had to use a blank map with meridian and parallels and plot his position just using the grid the references. That was quite challenging on the VOODOO. First, you had to plot him and then expect him when you say, "Okay I'm here." That was really going back to basic navigation.

INTERVIEWER: Can you recall what type of attack profiles you had?

CHOUINARD: Yes. As I said earlier, it was a frontal attack. You know, front cut off.

INTERVIEWER: That would be head to head?

CHOUINARD: Head to head with a bit of an offset and if you went beyond a certain offset they you would go into what was called a beam lead collision. You would put him on the side of your scope and he would come down. You know the theory of a collision. As you know, any pilot or visual reference when you've got something on the wind screen that keeps staying at the same reference angle but keeps increasing in size, you have a problem because you are going to meet somewhere.

INTERVIEWER: So you had the front, the beam and you had a tail component?

CHOUINARD: And a stern yes.

INTERVIEWER: Which weapons would select for what profile?

CHOUINARD: The front was always easy to figure out. It was primary weapons. Most of the time the preferred weapon was what we call the primaries. The GENIE rockets.

INTERVIEWER: Nuclear tipped rockets.

CHOUINARD: Nuclear tip rockets or back in those days we referred to them as 'high explosives'.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall what range you would fire at approximately?

CHOUINARD: Approximately on the front supersonic it would be close to 10 nautical miles, if I'm not mistaken. On the stern it would be roughly about five or six nautical miles. The break off was very important for the pilot. As a nav you were briefing your pilot and he would get also a steering circle and a target circle and the idea was, once you would get close, the computer would generate the time of flight parameters for the rocket to get ready. So it was important for the pilot to centre the dot, the steering circle and the target circle so that when he fired it would be all lined up. So the pilot was very busy as well. The nav's job was to describe how the attack was progressing and, if the geometry would change, to warn him.

INTERVIEWER: What happened if the parameters were not correct and you missed the target?

CHOUINARD: Then you would go into what was called a re attack but sometimes you get an 'A', too. The pilot would get an 'A' on his scope. I think the nav did.

INTERVIEWER: That was an abort?

CHOUINARD: An abort, yes. As soon as you would say re attack the pilot would know in advance what direction because you briefed him. If we re attack it's left and you would just go re attack left right away. But on supersonic attacks forget it unless you start turning while he is three miles or more than that ahead of you. To snap up and just shoot a bullet at him....

INTERVIEWER: So you couldn't catch him on a supersonic?

CHOUINARD: No, typically a 106 that I mentioned earlier that could fly at mach 2, forget it. We would call NORAD and say "irradiate mach no".

INTERVIEWER: When did you use your infrared missiles?

CHOUINARD: Mostly during low level. Because of the ground clutter you could not get a proper radar lock on [so] that the computer could get proper time of flight. So what we did was try to go low level. You had an oral tone that would tell you how good the source was and of course, being close the ground sometimes the danger is if you get an industrial smoke stack you can get a spurious input. But most of the time you had B scope type -- a line of an oscilloscope that would give you a peek once you reached a big IR source that was suitable and the seeker heads were almost lined up with your own the nose cone seeker head. The missile would then acquire the target.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall what the range of that missile would be approximately?

CHOUINARD: It seems to me that it's not very far. It's three to five miles I think.

INTERVIEWER: So could you just give us an appreciation of what a typical day was like on the squadron?

CHOUINARD: The way 425 squadron operated -- because we were co-located with 410, the training squadron, there was a problem in terms of -- well, not a problem. I guess the proper term would be a challenge. The two squadrons would organize a schedule. They would split the fleet. Either you fly mornings with one squadron and the other squadron fly mostly in the afternoon. The primary commitment because 425 was the NORAD squadron on that base. At

Bagotville you get first choice for what we called the five minute alert bird. The five minute were the ones that were always on standby ready to scramble. So these positions had to be manned. But back in '74 when I first started with the squadron we used to deploy to Val d'Or as well. So we used to ship four airplanes and these were the priorities. So they were shipped to Val d'Or. So the remaining fleet would be split between 410 and 425 as I just said earlier. One week 425 flies in the morning, the following week they fly in the afternoon. Or sometimes at night. During exercises, then exercise[s] become the commitment as well. So there was a lot of juggling there just for scheduling for the reader to understand and [have an] appreciation of the problem. Also 425 had a program whereby we had a three week cycle when we had three flights. Later on, it went down to two flights but basically there was a flight from which was selected QRA crews.....

INTERVIEWER: QRA is what?

CHOUNARD: Quick reaction area.

INTERVIEWER: These were the alert aircraft?

CHOUNARD: They were the alert aircraft with their own hangars their own shelters where you slept, you ate there and you played bridge. Except myself because I proved to be a very poor bridge player. But that's where you stood on alert. You couldn't go out of course. You had five minutes to get airborne as soon as the alert was sounded, not very long. Especially in the dead of winter when you [have to] put on your bunny suit and all that.

INTERVIEWER: How long would you spend in the alert mode?

CHOUNARD: 24 hours but that doesn't mean you couldn't fly training missions if NORAD approved. The senior director would approve your flight. Then you would fly regular off the line training as well, with the knowledge you could be diverted. These aircraft were armed with secondary missiles as well.

INTERVIEWER: So you didn't carry the nuclear weapons?

CHOUNARD: No never I've never seen in my career from '74 to '77 that I [ever] flew with nuclear weapons. I'll get to that later in exercise. So the typical day would be ,depending on if you were the alert flight, you would probably be scheduled for the QRA. So after you came out of the QRA you had a day off, type thing. Or you could be scheduled for the day to day training. The day to day training consisted of one or two flights depending on the schedule and the rest of the day was taken into what we call secondary duties. So we had a pretty good schedule when you think about. And if you were flown to the point where you reach a maximum hours for the day -- I believe it was eight hours on any given day -- so that's why when you were on alert, after two trips normally you would hope you wouldn't get a scramble because that might put you over the limit.

INTERVIEWER: The airplanes that went to Val d'Or to hold the alert -- how long did they stay there?

CHOUNARD: It depended on the schedule but mostly it was three to four days at a time. We sent four airplanes and four sets of crews. What we did was you alternated. One day you were the alert bird. The following day it was the other crew. You were regular training and we

always trained in Val d'Or. It was a beautiful location for us because we did a lot of training out of Val d'Or. As you may recall, in '75 it came to a grinding halt when the government shut down that operation. It was unfortunate because it was a 10,000 foot runway, one of the better runways in Canada and after we renovated the buildings. In the summer of '74 we rebuilt the runway in Bagotville so the squadron deployed en masse in Val d'Or - interesting summer.

INTERVIEWER: Alain, did you ever do any live firing of the weapons and could you tell us if there were other deployments other than Val d'Or?

CHOUINARD: Regrettably, I did not fire any live weapons although I understand [that] after I left the squadron in the late '70s and '80s they had exercises because they realized the 101 was on its last legs operationally. So they did allow some firing camps. But the only way you could have live firing, Stan, was if you were selected to the bi-annual competition with NORAD called William Tell in Florida. Other deployments? Yes, you easily have other deployments. North Bay was [a] very frequent one for exercises. Chatham to help on exercises. But the two other big ones were Goose Bay for training or Gander to go what we called "COLD SHAFT". COLD SHAFT was to preposition airplanes in two locations to visually identify Bear aircraft that were in transit from Russia to Cuba. That happened a few times on squadron. I was sent several times to Goose Bay but never came anywhere near close to a Bear aircraft. We used to joke on squadron to provide ourselves with solace that, 'They knew we were here so they won't come'.

INTERVIEWER: What was the intent in intercepting these Bear bombers?

CHOUINARD: The intent for us. That's interesting to because I met a guy at the Aviation Museum who used to be an engineer who later became an intelligence officer. He said we aircrew were interested in getting a Bear aircraft with a VOODOO shadowing it. The idea was to show the world that, "Hey somebody is into our airspace". But the intelligence community at large were interested in details of the aircraft like hard points for cruise missiles and new antennas and things like that. Things that would show the technology as opposed to the mere act of over flying the territory.

INTERVIEWER: On the exercise side you mentioned these were primarily at night. Could you give us an appreciation of what type of targets you had and what this entailed?

CHOUINARD: Oh my goodness you could have anything actually. You could have CF-100 which was the main electronic warfare aircraft in those days. They were flying in and out of North Bay and they flew all over North America. These guys were good. They were manned by ex 101s or ex CF-100 navigators so they knew all about air intercept. And the pilots were very good at turning the aircraft and while the navigator was extremely proficient at jamming your radar and we bless them all for that. The B-57 has -- well, EB-57 -- a British designed bomber that the Americans had that was a dedicated electronic warfare airplane. These guys, as well, could give you a run for your money. They could make you earn your pay in no time at all. But the target of choice, if the people doing exercise could organize it, was the B-52 because it could not only jam but it could fly high. It could really simulate a good target because it is a dedicated bomber, as you know. I remember a lot of trips. As I was perusing my log books, some of them I had but down, 'B-52, interesting trip'. Sometimes, if you were lucky, you could get also FB-111s, the AARDVARKS, the variable geometry fighter bombers. These guys, as well, were very good at giving you trouble because they were maneuverable, powerful and very fast.

INTERVIEWER: Could they out jam a 101?

CHOUINARD: If they wanted to they could easily...

INTERVIEWER: So you couldn't see it then at times?

CHOUINARD: Yes but they were also restricted as to what they could use. Don't forget the B-52s back in those days, they were under the ageis of Strategic Air Command. They were not allowed to use up to a level beyond certain threshold because of satellites. They could be spied upon as soon as you reveal your capabilities in peace time - well then it's real asset for the other side to know that a B-52 can do this and that. I do recall as a funny anecdote a friend of mine who was fed up with a B-52 giving him an easy time so he just decided to press that switch, the radio, and [I] guess he didn't think before he talked and he said, "SAC drinks milk". As soon as he did that he infuriated the electronic warfare officer because he started throwing all his jammers one after the other so much that all the regular air traffic radars were getting jammed as well. The guy in Bagotville said, "Aircraft on such and such a radial, stop buzzer, stop buzzer". Which was the code word saying uncle - we can't take any more. His radar went full of noise. Poof! And he burnt his radar because of that.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any other types of jamming other than electronic jamming?

CHOUINARD: There was the perennial aluminum foil that people discovered during World War II. Still around, very effective. They would use them for chaff. They would lay a corridor of bundles of these beautiful little things that you could lock on. The way you knew you were locked on is your overtake speed. Because that's another thing I think you could have on the radar. You had a dial as well. You could get out of the muff and look at the dial and see your overtake speed which matches your true airspeed. Then you know you are locked on to something that's stationary.

INTERVIEWER: So you could work around chaff then?

CHOUINARD: Oh, yes. An experienced nav would. On a frontal attack the trick is to lock on to the earliest target. In other the words, the first of the target because that was the airplane. In a stern approach you would lay our cursor way ahead of the aircraft so that when the aircraft walks into that cursor, you lock on to the aircraft not the chaff bundle. But that's when they've metres or devices that tell them if they have lock on, of course. They start playing nasty with you. They weaken your radar. The B-52s were very good for that.

INTERVIEWER: At this time was there a concept of crewing of navigator and pilot so that the navigator and pilot stayed together as a unit all the time?

CHOUINARD: No, the 425 was very adamant about that. If you look at my log book you will see a whole list of pilots. The reason being, they want to share the expertise and I guess they used the same system as the RAF used in the war. The idea is that when you get first on squadron they increase your level of expertise by putting you with older pilots. In fact I've got a beautiful anecdote about that later on, if you want. But they used senior pilots with junior navs and, in fact, we had a few cross trained navs that had become pilots. Normally these pilots are the ones that will get the junior nav because they will give them hints and what not. As a junior nav I tried to pull the wool over one guy's eyes and I found out quickly. The guy

said, "I see you are up to your old tricks again?" and oops. The crewing, other than the fact that you were separated into flights, occasionally you would have navigators or pilots that would say, "I would rather not fly with this guy or that guy for personal reasons." But no there was no definite crewing as such.

INTERVIEWER: Were any of the VOODOOs configured so that the navigators could fly or were they all configured that way?

CHOUINARD: Well there were some that were used for pilot training. They were called dual aircraft, 101F. Essentially, they have throttles in the back but you can't select the after burners and you've got a stick. So you could fly basically in the back. They've got rudder pedals and they've got the whole system for the nav as well.

INTERVIEWER: But these were limited in number you say?

CHOUINARD: Yes, we had seven or eight in Bagotville.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever fly one from the back seat?

CHOUINARD: Oh yes! very much so. When I found out that I was going to pilot training in December '75 the trick was for the scheduler to try as much as he could to schedule you with a former instructor pilot and a dual aircraft. In fact one of my fellow navs, he was a course mate all the way through from nav training way back at CMR and all that. He was notorious. He would also be the scheduler, so you can imagine guys [would] be afraid to be crude with him because they would say, "Oh there goes my proficiency. I'm flying with Tremblay again.". He would fly all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Alain, you mentioned in '75 you were selected for pilot training. Does that mean you went to pilot training or did you continue on as nav until the end of your tour?

CHOUINARD: No, unfortunately much to my disappointment I was to stay on squadron until '77 actually. But when I got selected for piloting training there was a back log of cross trainees. Apparently I was delayed until March '77 and I stayed with the squadron until then. So I did my full tour at 425.

INTERVIEWER: : Can you relate to use now some of your difficult flying challenges? What was most enjoyable what was more difficult regarding your flying?

CHOUINARD: Actually the greatest difficulty came in the electronic warfare environment. Fortunately, it also procured a most gratifying result. In one instance, I was lucky enough to be paired with a classmate of mine from RMC a pilot, John MacNamara, not to mention a name. We flew a mission on a big, top flight exercise. We had several types of exercises. But on one mission we ended up taking off a profile one climb which was afterburner all the way to 35,000 feet. We were cleared supersonic right on top of climb and within 14 minutes we had managed to shoot down a B-52 in the front who was spewing chaff like it was going out of style, and he was jamming and turning as well. We ended killing him in the front while we were supersonic, or simulated, of course. But as soon as we broke we were told to get back on heading and get a 106 that was on trail. The controller from NORAD had to order the B-52 to stop jamming and drop his chaff because he was, "You are dead". Basically the 106 was hiding in chaff, if you can imagine, cruising at mach 2. And we ended up getting him in front

as well. So we came back after 14 minutes. We were on an approach back to base after 14 minutes. All that was done from take off. That was the type of environment you could be in [in] a VOODOO.

Other challenges were, of course, to being the QRA and being scrambled in the middle of the night during your deep sleep at two o'clock in the morning. I remember waking up and saying, "What's going on? All the lights are coming on." The controllers on the ground were gentlemen enough to say, "Gentlemen, be prepared to scramble. Unknown in the system." You know waking up, getting to the fighting mode from the word go, getting dressed and getting into an airplane and getting to think fast is not as obvious as I thought. And I had a few of those live scrambles. One of which was, believe it or not a former VOODOO pilot who was flying a civilian Hercules aircraft out of James Bay and the same night he caused two air defence scrambles that guy.

INTERVIEWER: What do you do in that event?

CHOUINARD: We went but we were cancelled as we were about 50 miles away when the guy finally realized on the radio that something was going on. There was fighters approaching his position. He realized, 'Oh I forgot to file a flight plan' or a flight note or whatever.

INTERVIEWER: What is the normal procedure for an event like that?

CHOUINARD: It is to go and try to identify the guy in the front first. You go in as a pair. One aircraft rolls as a regular stern visual identification the other aircraft stays behind five or six miles in what is called the perch position. The idea is we train in case it might be a Bear. The idea is that a Bear has guns the same as a B-52 and if he decides to shoot you down, well, then your buddies will come right in. So they know when you are identified the adversary had two guys against him.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Alain Chouinard end of side two.

END OF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Alain Chouinard tape two, side one.

Alain, can you give us your thoughts on the operational tour itself. Was it a good experience or a bad experience for you?

CHOUINARD: I would say myself it's a very enjoyable experience. In fact, most aircrew in any shape or form will tell you that the first operational tour is usually very enjoyable because they try to give you as much experience as they can because that's where you build the rest of your career. But going back to airborne intercept, it really was my dream at the time when I was a nav and I was extremely happy. Happy with the location because of my personal background. I was happy with the fact that it was a very good squadron as well. We had a very good CO at the time I was there. In fact, he was a very personable person as well as a man's leader. We flew even [a] 16 plane formation under his leadership. At first pilots were extremely reluctant. They said, "What a 16 plane diamond formation? You got to be joking." He trained them in elements of four at first. Then he said, "Now the next trip we are going to merge two or three" and then eventually it worked out just perfect. The whole thing was full of surprises and challenges and I enjoyed it.

I realize too, ironically enough now in hindsight, when I found out I was selected for pilot training I became far more motivated in my job as a nav. I noticed, too, that my problems seemed to almost vanish overnight and I became one of the most experienced on the squadron and in fact, because I was posted away in '77, I had a chance of being selected for what was the called Call Shots -- a competition. That was the only time you were crewed, when you went to competitions. Then you were crewed with a pilot. The crew concept came only for exercises and big events like William Tell, Call Shots, best flights and all that. But on a day to day operation , no you flew [with other people to get more exposure to other pilots as well].

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall when the AI category sort of passed away into history?

CHOUINARD: Yes but I wasn't on squadron then. I wasn't on squadron then. I was instructing, as a pilot, believe it or not, in Moose Jaw. In fact, there were a few cross trainee navs that were there and they were happy to be crossed trained. Some of these guys went up to become F-18 pilots as a matter of fact. It was a very difficult time for a lot of these people, especially the people that served two or three tours, because now they had to go back to the main stream navigation which was requiring them to take a refresher course at the very least. And some of them didn't adapt very well either. A lot of them did adapt and they ended up going back to Hercules or Auroras and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel sad that the category sort of disappeared?

CHOUINARD: I did because I taught myself that if -- that's another general observation but even in a multiple target environment as well, when you go into a mixed bag of fighters in the same piece of sky an extra pair of eyes is always better. I've heard that from pilots at Cold Lake that have flown mostly single seat fighters and they said yes. Because when I left the squadron it was ironic they were starting then to introduce air combat manoeuvres to the VOODOO world and the VOODOO pilots. And they were always a bit leery, some of them, because of the pitch possibilities. As you know, the VOODOO was not an airplane that stalled like any other airplane. It started to dance out of control after a certain condition of flight had been reached and pilots were leery of that. Eventually, over the years they got over that so. As I left the squadron, I missed out on live firings and air combat manoeuvres.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there is any possibility that the category will come back in the future?

CHOUINARD: Maybe so, but not in Canada, I don't think. The way I see, it's going be hard to get a replacement fighter for the F-18 right now as we stand now. So that the chances of getting any other airborne intercepts again are slim.

INTERVIEWER: To your knowledge are any other countries employing AI types?

CHOUINARD: I believe, yes, in England where they have Tornados or F-15 Eagles. They are two seater aircraft. They are not quite the same role, the same aspect if you will, but yes the two seater and it's a good reason on the F-15E. I remember reading in Aviation Week and Space Technology the pilots were saying in a night, unfriendly environment you do need a second pair of eyes. Just a safety factor is there in my mind.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think all navigators should have an operational tour?

CHOUINARD: Most definitely, because I remember exchanging views with my friends from military colleges. The guys that were very, what I call, pointed classifications like aerospace engineering, communication electronics engineering. Some of these guys were lucky -- well depending on their point of view -- lucky not to get an operational tour because they went to NDHQ on projects right away. And one guy after a few years I remember him saying, "Alain, not getting an operational tour is very detrimental because it precludes you from learning the challenges [and] the duties of the field". In any category of employment in the military it's kind of anathema to them now in hindsight that you don't have an operational tour. I can't conceive of it unless the guy stays there to become an instructor. But the credibility factor is not very good when you do that in my mind..... Although for pilots we do have that. As you probably know, when you get your pilot wings a lot of young pipe liners end up staying as instructor because it [is] used as a stop gap measure to recuperate the second best guys to give them a chance later on to become fighter pilots. But in the nav trade I think, no it is definitely a must in my mind [to] have an operational tour.

INTERVIEWER: The AI navigators, when that trade ceased to exist, did that have any impact on their promotion potential?

CHOUINARD: Well, at that point I had left. I know a bunch of guys that have been AIs and have gone to other tours. In fact, a classmate of mine, he's is now a Lieutenant Colonel navigator. Heck we even have one guy on our navigator course he went to Hercules he is now a Major General, too. It's ironic because I met him last Saturday and he met the other infantry Major General and he keeps calling him a traitor every time he meets him. But no, I think it depends on personality. If you are a flexible type guy you should be and you ought to be. I think it's an age factor as well. If you are 40 or over as you know it's tougher to train because you memory is not as quick as it used to be. At least, that's what I'm finding out anyway as I have those senior moments, as my wife says.

INTERVIEWER: Well thank you very much for your candid comments Alain they were very interesting. Interview with Alain Chouinard on the 20th of November interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS