

Reference code: GB165-0635

Title: Neville Baker Collection

Name of creator: Baker, Neville (b.1924)

Dates of creation of material: 9 Mar 2014

Level of description: Fonds

Extent: 112 minutes (3 VOB files)

Biographical history: Baker, Neville (b.1924)

Neville Baker, born 21 Jul 1924, was brought up in Brighton. When called up in 1944, and although originally a sea cadet, he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) and was sent to South Africa to learn to fly. He stayed on in the RAF, flying Dakota DC3 in North Africa and Palestine before being posted to Ceylon as a flying instructor. By now having converted to helicopters, he also served on secondment with the Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force and in the UK as a Search and Rescue pilot. He retired from the RAF and went under contract to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) in 1970, as a Squadron Leader, to lead the introduction of helicopters into the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in what became 3 Squadron. Initially simply four light Agusta Bell 206s, followed in 1971 by the first batch of eight AB 205s (the ideally-suited Huey) – giving SAF invaluable capabilities of operational flexibility in dominating larger areas, through troop insertion, resupply, and casualty evacuation. At this stage, all the pilots were necessarily expatriates but Neville's approach was entirely pragmatic, ensuring a spread of experience and backgrounds to underpin the building of an entirely new unit facing the particular challenges and uncertainties of operating in Dhofar. 3 Squadron was involved in every facet of military action over the next five years, earning the later tribute from General Akehurst that "Without the helicopters the war might be going on yet – I always claimed these pilots to be the most skilful in the world at that time". Neville led from the front and played his part in many of the high and low moments during the Dhofar War, including the Battle of Mirbat in July 1972. After four years in command, he was promoted and posted to a different appointment in the north; but, importantly, he also went briefly back to 3 Squadron to fill a gap during the build-up to the final crucial operations. He left SOAF in 1978. Flying was his life, and his time with 3 Squadron the pinnacle of it.

Scope and content: Oral history video interview of Wing Commander Neville Baker in conversation with Fiona Warton for the project 'Reflections on the Oman Insurgency 1965-

1975 and its renaissance.' The interview covers Neville Baker's service in the Sultan of Oman's Air Force 1970-1978, especially his time as Squadron Leader of 3 Squadron and the introduction of helicopters into the Sultan's Armed Forces. The interview is 1 hour 51 minutes 54 seconds in length.

Access conditions: Open

Language of material: English

Physical Condition: A computer is necessary to view the material. Access in the reading room is via the digital collections computer.

Conditions governing reproduction: Copyright in the interview belongs to Fiona Warton. Permission is required from Fiona Warton for copies of the videos and for quotation in publication. Permission is not required for quotation in unpublished material (such as student essays, dissertations and theses) providing the source is acknowledged.

Immediate source of acquisition: Received as a gift from Fiona Warton on the 23 Feb 2017 as part of the project 'Reflections on the Oman Insurgency 1965-1975 and its renaissance'

Related Units of Description:

In MEC Archive

The MEC Archive has many collections relating to Oman's military history in 1970s. Please consult the Guide to Collections relating to Oman for further information.

Finding aids: In Guide; Handlist

Archivist's note: Fonds level description created by Debbie Usher on 22 Feb 2018 and revised 16 Mar 2018. Biographical history supplied by Fiona Warton and Neville Baker. The fonds level extent is rounded up to the nearest minute.