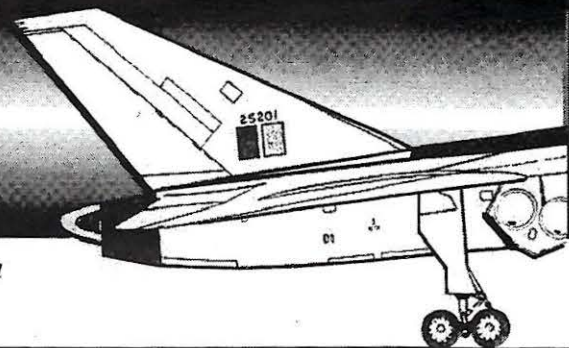


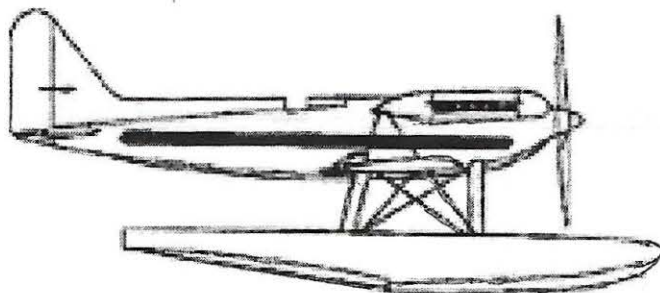
# Pre-Flight

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*Supermarine S.6B, 1931 Schneider Trophy  
407.5 mph - Merlin 2300 hp -*

## The Start Of It

by

**Gerry Barbour**

The spring of the year 1937 was a momentous time for the graduating class of the Penetanguishene High School, in a little town situated on the shores of Georgian Bay in the Province of Ontario in the Dominion of Canada. Penetanguishene; a lovely sounding name meaning "the place of the white rolling sands" in Native American language. A mill town back then, the beautiful land-locked harbour choked with log booms. Three sawmills busily turning the rape of the surrounding forests into useable products, the sawdust incinerators glowing night and day, the mill-owners gladly absorbing those useful youngsters fresh out of school and who were now eager to make their mark in the world.

Total disillusionment awaited us. Me in particular. The wages? The magnificent sum of a dollar a day. One dollar for ten hours of labour. Six dollars for six days work with four dollars earmarked for room and board, (once employed and a wage earner, the family matriarch demanded her cut. "No free lunches anymore, my son. Furthermore, a dollar has to be placed in the bank to teach you the value of money.") The remaining dollar went for fun things, like girls and theatre tickets. That single dollar had to be stretched until the reigning British Monarch, whose picture graced our paper currency, squealed loudly and begged for mercy.



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## From the President

My message this month comes as an insert to this Pre-Flight. With October being a very busy month for the President, I have asked the Editor for a little more space to advise of two important events I had the pleasure to attend.

As this is the final Pre-Flight for the year, I would like to take this opportunity to wish each and every one a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Frank

## The Start of It ( continued )

A year of that kind of living left me discontented. Would I be happy making that princely sum from now until better times surfaced? Undoubtedly that would be far in the future. Canada and the United States, in fact a major part of the world, was caught fast in the grip of the Great Depression. The majority of men in that town supported a wife and family on twelve dollars a week. Who was I to grumble? Still, sitting down and surveying life in general and myself in particular the only conclusion upon which to draw was the cold hard fact that I was relatively unskilled. My education was limited, Grade 12 in today's parlance and I only got through "by the skin of my teeth." That would be guaranteed to make any prospective employer click his heels with glee, happy to have this highly educated young lad numbered among his ever-growing list of youngsters eager to supply the needed muscle for his enterprise. Oh sure!

**Education?** It is so necessary in the world of today. But back then it somehow didn't seem too important, computers and high tech equipment being far down the road. What was required back then was muscle to do hard manual labour, those being the only jobs available. Still, I did give education some thought, but would have to journey to the neighbouring town of Midland to pick up the necessary credits if I wished to go on to college. College? That was a dream. It would require money and lots of it. Student loans were non-existent in those days. If a student, or his parents, couldn't ante-up for tuition fees, that was it. He or she had to look elsewhere for a means of supplying the necessities of life.

**Money?** Very few people had passable amounts of the stuff in 1935. I could count the number of people who DIDN'T live from payday to payday, on the fingers of one hand. A few people did have skills. The town boasted several doctors, a lawyer, a dentist, a chartered accountant. Still, they didn't make that much of the "long green" either. A visit to the doctor cost a dollar. I sought the advice of my high school principal and he was brutally frank. "My boy, if you wish to better your lot in life you must develop a number of skills which a prospective employer may utilize. Keep an open mind, anticipate the product need for the future and be ready to step forward and offer your services to the highest bidder." Those small sentences ignited a spark. I would make something of myself come hell or high water.

**Reviewing** my scholastic achievements, I came up empty. I wasn't a scholar. Barring a few subjects, such as Ancient History, literature and the Arts, I struggled.



## **The Start of It ... cont'd.**

Therefore, if I wished to move upward in a monetary way, I would have to get by on personality and the ability to think and use my hands. I would have to establish myself in some industry which was likely to grow and whose products were needed; an industry in which I could learn and hone whatever skills were needed for advancement. I was positive there was no chance of getting ahead where I was. I knew friends who had managed to get a year of college and had to drop out for lack of funds and were now working at jobs for which they were over-qualified, but were glad to have work. As I was to discover during all of my life, fate took a hand.

**An avid reader** of the daily newspaper, actually a neighbour's newspaper, a chap who could afford the five cent purchase price, I borrowed it every day and read it cover to cover. Foreign affairs always were of special interest and an article by a well-known correspondent of the Toronto Star on assignment in Europe was eye-catching. Reporting on the civil war raging in Spain he mentioned the battles being waged in the skies over that country. Both sides were using aircraft from various manufacturers. The Republicans, according to the journalist, used a Russian-built airplane, the Polikarpov 1-16, while the opposing forces, the Nationalists under General Franco, were using a variety of aircraft, most of which were manufactured in Germany and piloted by German airmen. That was surprising and certainly very odd.

**Were these** flyers mercenaries? If so, how could the Spanish afford to purchase so many different types of aircraft for these men to fly and pay the flyers as well? A country embroiled in civil war was certain to have its coffers depleted. Subsequent articles by this newsman revealed that the flyers and machines were sent by Germany to serve in what was known as The Condor Legion. Germany? Why was Germany interfering in another country's civil war? The reporter went on to describe and give designation numbers to these German-made aircraft. The Hinkle HE-51, a biplane with a fixed undercarriage and wheel spats. The Hinkle HE-111, a twin-engine bomber, and a single engine fighter, the Messerschmitt ME-109.

**He even** described their colour scheme, a combination of brown, grey and green, but without the distinctive Iron Cross which marked the aircraft used by Germany in the Great War of 1914-1918. These aircraft were totally unfamiliar. I knew the Sopwith Camel, the Spad, the Nieuport, all Great War airplanes. I knew the names of famous Canadians who served with the Royal Air Force in that war. Bishop, Barker, Brown, Collishaw and "Wop" May to name just a few. What was going on here?

Was Germany using the Spanish civil war to train airmen under actual combat conditions? Were the aircraft being assessed for speed and manoeuvrability in aerial combat? For what purpose? Surely this well-known newsman must be ill-informed. He probably sat in a neighbourhood bar, quaffed a few cold beers and relied on gossip for his copy. Even if he was correct how could Germany produce such advanced aircraft? My schooling had made me aware of the Treaty of Versailles which forbade Germany the production of aircraft for military use. However, the articles kept appearing and it was apparent they were indeed, based on truth.

**So, what** had happened? Were the Germans re-arming in spite of any and all treaties! I couldn't comprehend the likelihood of that ever happening. There were men in the town that were minus an arm or leg and some were still coughing from the effects of gas attacks suffered in the war of 1914-1918, the war that was supposed to end all wars. Only a madman would dream of starting another war, a war which would most certainly involve my country, Canada.

**Days** went by, and then the reporter turned up inside Germany, his articles becoming even more disturbing. He described the seething discontent of the German people, still rankling over their defeat in the war of 1914-1918. How a man named Adolph Hitler, an insignificant little "paper hanger", according to the reporter, had risen to power at the head of what he termed "the Nazi Party." A man dedicated to returning Germany to her proper place as a political and military force in world affairs and who had the uncommon ability to ignite patriotic fervour in the breast of all who heard him speak. The reporter called him "a fiery orator." I did recall seeing newsreel pictures of the 1936 Olympics with a flamboyant little man standing on a podium with his right arm outstretched spouting his theories of a "master race" while huge crowds roared "Seig Heil". I had dismissed him as a little pouter pigeon, was amused at his appearance and his funny little moustache. However, he did look smart in his uniform, medals galore; the Iron Cross prominently displayed. I was to find how very wrong I was, as were some highly placed political and military men.

**Quite** by chance, in the coloured section of the Sunday Star, I saw a picture of an aeroplane being readied for the Schneider Cup race, an event in which Britain, France and Italy participated. Built by Vickers-Supermarine of England she was a sleek streamlined beauty and something in my head went "click". That picture sparked a life long love affair with aeroplanes. Right there and then, I decided that building aircraft and flying them would be my vocation in life. It was that quick. But how to get started? Who built aircraft in Canada?



## The Start of It ... cont'd.

Good man that he was, my high school teacher took time out from his flower gardening to listen, nod his head sagely and shortly advised me that DeHavilland Aircraft Company located just North of Toronto was in the business of producing airplanes specifically designed for flying men and materials into Canada's far North..Terrific! I would write and ask for employment and be on my way. DeHavilland would be happy to employ and train a young, high-spirited lad who would be an asset to their company. Letter number one went off, expertly handled by Canada's Royal Mail. I begrudged the two-cent postage. Nothing, no response. Letters two and three went off. Still no response. Letter number four brought a very brusque reply. "DeHavilland only hires experienced workers."

**That** was a blow. How could I, or anyone for that matter, gain experience without being hired? That didn't make any sense. Undaunted, I determined to gain the necessary experience. There must be, there had to be, somewhere in Canada an institution that presented a worthwhile training course in aeronautics. Wherever it was situated, I would present myself, find employment, however menial, study and graduate with the necessary wherewithal to see me down the road to prosperity. I found my teacher down on his knees deep in conversation with his geraniums. I could hear him plainly. "My little friends, I have fertilized you and your roots are in good soil, now grow."

**I knew** this man for a strict disciplinarian. Nobody "slacked-off" in his class. If I was one of those geraniums, I would put out big time and bloom my head off to avoid being dug up and deposited on the compost heap. I cleared my throat to attract his attention. Without turning, he said. "You again? What now?" Informed of my problem, he nodded, laid down his gardening implements with a sigh, made a few phone calls and came up with the following. "The Central Technical School situated on Harbord Street in the City of Toronto has a splendid course on all phases of aeronautics. All that is required is the equivalent of a grade 12 education." I was elated. I had just enough education, He was elated. I would shortly be out of his hair, or rather his flower garden. He had the last word. He dryly said. "My boy, if you had pursued your scholastic endeavours with the same zeal which you are now displaying in your efforts to become a figure in the world of aeronautics, I've no doubt you would have been an "A" student instead of a mediocre one. Kindly do not step on my begonias on your way out." The previous year my parents had ripped up their roots and gone to live in Toronto in order to assist my elder brother who had designs on an academic career. I made them aware of my intention to pursue a career in aviation,

Would they arrange a meeting with the Head of the Aeronautical Section of C.T.S., explain my ambitions, give the gentleman my scholastic record, assure him I would work diligently, be a model student and would he kindly add my name to the list of student-to-be, thanks very much? Weeks passed with no word. I resigned myself to another year of drudgery in the mill. A letter arrived on C.T.S. stationery. I was accepted for the 1937 Fall semester. I was in! I was on my way to a satisfying career in aviation. However, to attend Central Technical School, I would have to live in Toronto proper, otherwise there would be tuition fees of some magnitude. I wondered if my parents "digs" had space for another student, a non-paying one at that. I was aware they had settled in a small second floor apartment in an old house near the University of Toronto.

No matter. If there wasn't room, I would make out. I'd hire out to some landlord, shovel snow, stoke the furnace, bed down in the basement, that sort of thing. In the meantime, I embarked on a penny-pinching routine that would have earned a nod of approval from Ebenezer Scrooge. I took on extra work. Mowed lawns, ran errands, delivered newspapers and handbills, groceries ... anything to make a dollar. Scratch that! Make it two-bits. An acre of grass mowed for a quarter. The time was rapidly approaching when I would have to up anchor and leave for the big wicked city, leave my friends, leave the baseball team for whom I played when I could spare the time, rip up my roots, prepare for a new beginning, leave my dog.

Leave my dog??? Never! Absolutely not! No,no,no! That brought me up short. Exhilarated as I was at the prospect of a complete new life, I had never given a thought to Mac, my collie dog. Mac was mine. We grew up together and nothing but death would ever separate us. If Mac wasn't welcome, I would forego my schooling, keep my lousy job until old age took my pal and then I would cast about for the means to a fuller better life. Any person who has had the good fortune to own a truly great dog can relate to my feelings. Painting such a bleak picture of the "dirty thirties" might cause one to wonder how it was possible for me to keep a dog.

## Members Matter

*By the time you receive this PreFlight, I will be on my way to Florida for a well-earned rest. On my return in April, I will begin to process the 2011 memberships, tax receipts and gift requests for donations. My best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.*

*Mike*