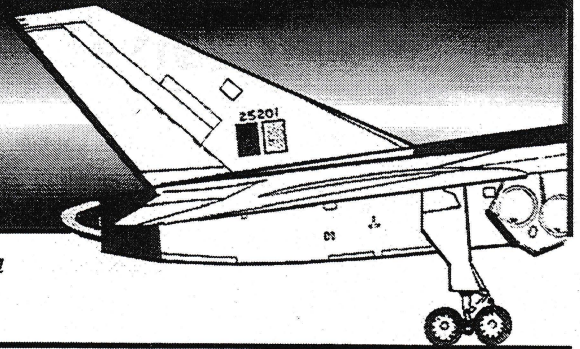


Pre-Flight



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"Mr. X"

by

Gerry Barbour

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As the years swiftly go by, names of former Avroites appear less frequently in news and obit items. Interestingly, the report is generally favourable, if not downright laudatory. Small wonder, for the workers of many ilks and talents became better people as the result of being part of the well-known Avro company and its pristine product, the Arrow. It is bittersweet in so many ways, to witness their departure into the mists of memory and time. Gerry Barbour tells us of one such person, with an inegmatic name of Mr. X.

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It may be difficult to comprehend how one man could feel so strongly about an airplane, an inert object composed of different types of metals, rubber, flying controls and the other assorted items that made up this wonderful flying machine. It is simply a matter of deep involvement, a love of objects that move through the air. To realize, we, at Avro were on the threshold of greatness was exhilarating. To have it rudely snatched away was devastating.

The loss of the Arrow contract was bad enough, but to have the aircraft butchered right before my eyes? I was unable to cope with that. Is my attempt to salvage RL-204 in question? That the plan to steal a whopping big airplane is merely a figment of my imagination? You have my word on it for whatever that's worth.

The removal of the Arrow and its subsequent storage was planned in minute detail. While light language has been used to describe my floundering about in the darkness of the tarmac, tripping over sections of those Arrows, my intent never wavered. I was deadly serious. I would have put the snatch on RL-204 regardless of the consequences of that act.

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From the President

We are quickly approaching the end of another year, the 19th of our Foundation. The year has been a rather sad one, with the loss of a Board member, James Harvey, and several of the our longtime members.

I sincerely extend to you and yours, on behalf of the Board members, a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Frank

Mr. "Ex"...

I can give you the whereabouts of Mr. X. He will swear to it, just as on the following day, I swore at him and threatened physical abuse for throwing the well-known monkey wrench into my well-oiled plan. Check it out with him. He retired shortly after that fiasco, and now resides in the town of Meaford on the shores of the sparkling waters of Nottawasaga Bay, an arm of Georgian Bay in Ontario, Canada.

Born on Manitoulin Island, the home of the Great Spirit of the Ojibwa Nation where his father doctored the local inhabitants, Mr. X. had formed a nodding acquaintance with the language and customs of that section of the First Nations of Canada. Unfortunately, his many years of association with the kindly white man led to the loss of his language skills, except of course, or the nasty words, which as we all know are likely the first words ever learned in any language. Those remain in one's vocabulary forever. He taught me one word, or rather a series of words that I have run together and liberally used throughout this book. You know it as "sonofabitch".

After my abortive attempt at purloining RL-204, I had accused him of undermining my plan. He had vehemently denied it, of course, but his attempt at subterfuge fell on deaf ears. It was easy to con him. I merely mentioned that I had threatened Al with physical violence and Al, being the "un-robust" type, had confessed all. I had done no such thing, but was delighted when Mr. X. turned a violent shade of pink, flushed with embarrassment. With the game over, there was no point in belabouring the point. Let sleeping dogs lie. Besides, he was a good friend, and we can't have too many of those.

Mr. X. positively assured me he was going to build a one-man steamboat and sail over to my jetty. I told him if I ever saw him approaching under that pall of black smoke those steamboats belch, I would unlimber my trusty old 38-55 muzzle loader and put a few shells below his waterline. Sink him and his goddamned steamboat down to Davy Jones' locker. Undoubtedly, his interference in the heist of the Arrow saved me from a great deal of unwanted publicity, most likely some time in the calabozo.

Certainly, if I had pulled it off, the trail would have been followed, the torched padlock on the rolling gate, the cutout section of the airport fence, tire tracks (the Arrow weighed sixty thousand pounds, give or



take a few) all leading to Clare's farm and the aircraft retrieved. My friend Clare would've had to leap on Star Nib and gallop off into the sunset, just as described in lurid tales of the "Wild West." While ever the consummate liar, I would never stand idly by and see a friend suffer an indignity because of my intense desire to save the life of RL-204. I would have confessed all.

As the perpetrator of this caper, the mantle of notoriety would have descended heavily on my shoulders. The public defender, appointed by the Crown in my defense, would have become famous. The trial would have lasted forever. The generated publicity would have been enormous. Pictures taken showing me, chains on the ankles, handcuffed, John Diefenbaker standing over me pointing an accusing finger, the whole ball of wax. We could plead guilty, of course, by reason of insanity, and that was perilously close to the mark. I would have gained some measure of fame; forever known as the man who attempted the heist of an Avro Arrow. But to be locked up in the loony bin, perhaps forever? No thanks!

Still, supposing, just supposing I had found RL-204 intact and had hitched her up and trundled her, oh so quietly, down to the rolling gate and torched the padlock. Put the pedal to the metal and zipped down the runway. It would have been a walk in the park, a piece of cake. It was only a whoop and a holler to the west fence. Torching it would be no problem. I would be through it in .jig-lime. A short run to Clare's farm and RL-204 would be sitting among the friendly farm animals, and they wouldn't tell. Toss a few bales of straw over the Arrow and back to Avro. Through the rolling gate, park the mule and make a quiet exit bidding the gate guard a cheery goodnight as I passed. It had rained heavily later that night, a real deluge. It would have washed out all traces of the heist. All tracks. Gone! Obliterated!

Sure! There would be an explosion of rage in the morning when it became known that RL-204 had been snaffled, much wailing and gnashing of teeth, a check of night-time personnel, dusting for fingerprints on the padlock, the mule and AI's cutting equipment. The whole shmeer. Fingerprints? Sure! Mine were on file in the databank in Ottawa, courtesy of the Royal Canadian Navy. They would find mine along with hundreds of others. I had run the mule and used the torch plenty of times. So what if they fingered me after finding I had been in the plant late that previous evening. Let 'em prove I was the thief in the night. Innocent until proven guilty. Right? I would deny everything.

No! No! No! Though guilty as all get out.

The uproar when RL-204 went missing would be significant! Magnificent!

John Diefenbaker? I could see him thrashing around in his office, waving his arms, dewlaps quivering, venting his rage on anybody and everybody. Calling on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to find the mastermind behind the successful heist of that Arrow. "Stolen right from under my nose, by God. Find him! Find the thief! Anybody that clever should be part of my team, lead me to another term in office. Find him, no matter the cost."

Someday, far down the road of life, when it was judged safe to do so, the Arrow would surface-poke her nose out of that dusty straw. I had no qualms about Clare getting cold feet. He was a tough one. He might be surprised at the size of the Arrow. I had positively assured him it was just a little old airplane. He'd have tossed a few more bales of hay or straw over her and that would be that. "Come and get your goddamned airplane, whenever."

I would hitch her to my trusty truck and deposit the old girl at the local police station, by night of course, with a note plastered on her ass. "I stole this here "airplane" in 1959. I'm givin' it back 'cause I ain't had no sleep in forty-two years 'cause of my guilty conshuns. A friend says it should go to an Air Museum in Mount Hope, wherever the hell that is.

Joe Green listening. Joe's name was a happy thought. That'd put a spoke in his wheel, the slippery sonofabitch. I could see the Mounties trying to track him down. Not a chance. That would be one time the Mounties DIDN'T get their man.

I would be comfortable with that arrangement. I knew those dedicated people at Mount Hope would take care of my Arrow. A good nosing down, a lick of paint here and there, and it's roll out time baby, in the new millennium, the year 2001.

Would John D. arise from the dead? Raise a stink... pointing a shaky finger....demanding his orders be carried out? "Torch that Arrow. It was the direct cause of my defeat in the next election." "Sorry John, the Canadian people won't stand for any nonsense like that-this time. That airplane is part of their heritage. Go back to sleep, old boy." It would have been wonderful.

"Ex-Avroites" from around the globe would gather at Mount Hope to view the Arrow. "See those wings"?

"Mr. Ex ..." cont'd

I built 'em 'way back in 1959. Take a good look, Lad, you'll never see her like again." Zura, Peter Cope, Spud, Stan Haswell, Lorne Ursel, all the Avro test pilots, maybe even Bill Waterton, if he could be pried away from his nest in the west, would pay her a visit, comment on how well she was looking. "Imagine a forty-two year old airplane looking like a youngster." Why, Zura's wife, Anna, might let him fly her-one more time.

Just suppose! But cold hard logic puts an end to supposing. RL-204 is probably pots and pans by now. Imagine, titanium pots and pans, or maybe golf clubs. I recently saw a young man swat a golf ball three hundred yards. Could he have been using a club made from RL-204? Just imagine what would have happened if I'd been able to swipe that Arrow. It would have been great. The heist of the century.

After all that time there is still a lingering regret that I was unable to pull it off. That interfering, ogwissemah - debahwannindezo - pazhig - noozhasim, Mr. X!

Re: "... the Air Museum"

The museum Gerry mentions is the Canadian Warplane Museum, right next to the John Munro International Airport, up on the "mountain" in the Town of Mount Hope. Yes, it's south of the city of Hamilton. The museum not only has static displays, but is a flying museum.

Besides flying WW II trainer aircraft, it also has flying twin aircraft. It is also the home of the only flying and "working" Lancaster bomber, dedicated to P/O Andrew Mynarski, VC. The Avro Arrow would have been welcome, but with some apprehension.

For those of our members from afar, the museum has two excellent scale models of the Arrow on display, along with photographs of the construction of the aircraft in various stages of completion.

A full-scale replica of the Arrow can be seen at the Aerospace Museum, north Toronto, situated at the former RCAF base Downsview. It is superb, all aluminium and steel, bright and shiny and yes, quite majestic. People who see it can only look on in awe. Many say, "It's beautiful." Of course!

If anyone is in the GTA Toronto area, try to visit the Toronto Aerospace Museum. It can be reached by public transportation and is well worth the effort. It also has some excellent static displays. Like all museums, it has an excellent store with aircraft books, memorabilia, and the like. Even souvenir T-shirts!

Members Matter

Gerry Barbour Series

First of all, I would like to thanks those of you who have taken the time to write us about the Gerry Barbour series. It does bring back the spirit of the times and many memories. Well, Gerry has kindly agreed to continue with a much longer "dissertation" on the very broad topic of "Boats". I am sure you will be intrigued with this pleasant presentation. Your continuing comments are always appreciated. I assure you I will answer each one as quickly as time permits.

The Museum Park in Barry's Bay

Do you know there is a Janusz Jurakowski Park in Barry's Bay, Ontario. From what I can find out, the nice people concerned with its operation are presently in an ongoing planning and maintenance process regarding its future as a museum. We wish them luck!

Renewals 2009

The end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 are quickly approaching. One of our Board membes, David Sotzek has been updating our forms, letterhead and membership.

We, the Board, are trying to revise the renewal/donation form to make it easier to fill out. Once that is done, we will test it with a few of our members. We will still use the older forms for 2009, which will be included in the January-February and March-April issues of Pre-Flight.

For those members who are puzzled as to why they have received a renewal form when they have already paid, here is the explanation. It is time-consuming to do a double mailing than try to separate those who have paid up. For those who are not sure of their membership number, it is on the top, left-hand corner of your address label. The year of renewal is on the top, right hand corner.

I will be going away again for February and March. The plastic renewal cards will be processed as quickly as possible on my return.



Nicholas Doran, Membership