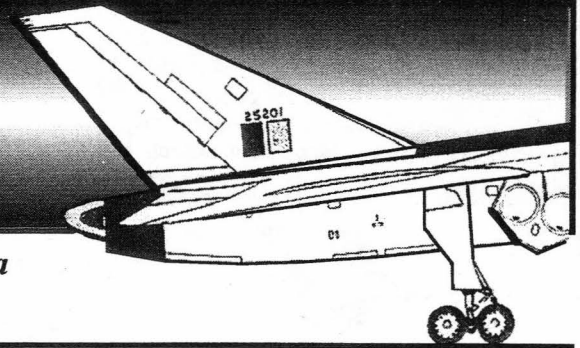


# Pre-Flight

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Geoff Grossmith

## My Life in Aviation: Part One

I was about 6 years old when I first fell in love. Oh I remember it to this day. I gazed with wonder and I couldn't believe anything could be so beautiful. There it was high in the sky floating like a giant swan reaching for the clouds. It was the first sight of what was to become the love of my life an airplane with two canoes hanging from the bottom! I realized later they were pontoons and the plane I was looking at was a seaplane. Anyway, it was a beautiful sight and this new love of airplanes has lasted all my life.

My dad realized my fascination and bought me my first model kit. I remember it was a solid scale model of a Super Marine S6B. The kit probably cost \$1.50, which was a lot of money in those days. I then graduated to flying models, powered by rubber bands which my brother would buy for me. I would carefully cut out the parts and glue them together and apply the special paper.

Now I was allowed to fly it for two weeks then he and his buddies would take over and fill it with firecrackers with a long fuse and watch it explode in flight and crash and burn. He always bought me another one but it was always tragic to see my beautiful plane come to such an inglorious end.

My very first plane ride was at Dufferin Field which is where Yorkdale Plaza is now. I peddled all the way from my house in Scarborough with my \$5.00 clutched in my sweaty hand. He was an "old time" pilot complete with leather helmet, goggles, white scarf and gloves. Unfortunately I climbed into the cockpit of the Biplane on the wrong side and burnt my hand on the hot exhaust pipe. Did my hand ever hurt! Never mind, I was too thrilled to worry about that.

When  
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I was so busy enjoying my experience of soaring over the farms and dirt roads and little people. My passion for planes and flying never waned. I enrolled in an aviation course at Central Technical High School in Toronto. It was the only high school that offered any course related to aviation. As I lived in Scarborough, I was not allowed to attend high school in Toronto. This did not stop me, nor did the distance, I had to ride my bicycle to school every day from my home in Scarborough. I simply applied under a false address and for 2 1/2 years studied aviation until I was discovered. They made my dad repay over \$700 to the school, which was almost the price of a house in those days.

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## From the President

Well, here we are at the start of a brand new year. I hope everyone enjoyed the festive season.

Regarding a previous article in *Pre-flight*, I received a letter from John Hiebert's brother Jack, thanking the AHFC for not forgetting John. Another letter was received from Jack Hadfield of Cowichan Bay BC, who expressed his feelings about the incident, along with items from the web, about the Martin-Baker ejection seats. Our thanks for their inputs.

This issue has another ex-Avro employee sharing some experiences of his time at Avro. We encourage former Avro and Orenda employees to follow this example. I am sure AHFC members would be interested to hear these memories of the exciting time in Canada's aviation history.

We have been asked to vacate our space at TAM by the end of 2005. Our artifacts and historical memorabilia will have to be placed in secure temporary storage.

*Frank*

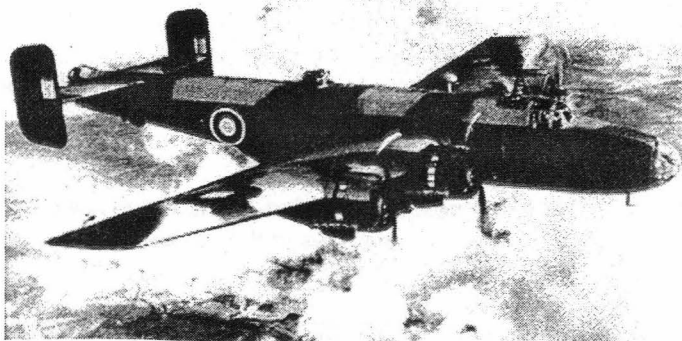
## My Life in Aviation, *cont'd*

Suddenly along came World War II. I tried to enlist in the Air Force for pilot training but they only took fellows with a University education. I ended up in the army for a short time while stationed in Alberta. It was here that I reapplied for pilot training but because I was desperate to get back to my family, I enrolled in a brand new training course for a position as a Flight Engineer which was held at the University of Toronto. For those of you who do not know what a Flight Engineer does, let me tell you, I believe he was the most important of all the aircrew including the pilot. The Flight Engineer essentially ran the aircraft, all the pilot had to do was steer it and sometimes not at all that well. This new position called Flight Engineer was created because the Air Force was losing too many airplanes. They found the planes were running out of fuel before they could get home. But with the correct propeller pitch and fuel mixture the aircraft would run more efficiently, use less fuel and fly farther. They needed someone that understood propeller pitch, air fuel mixture, hydraulics, instrumentation and know how to keep a damaged aircraft in the air. This was the Flight Engineer.

After completion of my training I was posted to what they called Bomber Command and stationed at different airforce bases throughout England. I flew in a British built aircraft called the Halifax which was a very reliable plane and could take a lot of punishment. I was very fortunate to have survived the war and I guess I have some good memories but mostly bad so that's enough said about that part of my flying days.

When the war ended in 1945, I returned home. In those days the government of Canada had programs that assisted war veterans in re-establishing themselves. I had a chance to use my war service "credits" and either apply them to the purchase of a home or I could use them to pay for an education.





*Halifax Mk. III*

### **My Life in Aviation, cont'd**

So I decided to go to university. The University of Toronto was filled, so I enrolled at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT), now the University of Alberta, that offered a course in aeronautics. This was a fabulous 4 year program that encompassed mechanical and electrical engineering, as well as strength of materials, aircraft design, aeronautics and drafting.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) not only paid for my university tuition but also provided an allowance of \$90.00 a month to live on, (rent, food and spending money). However, the Canadian government and the military, were trying to downsize the army, air force and navy. With more than 1,000,000 men and women in uniform from 1940 to 1945, fewer than 35,000 remained by 1948 and much of the excess military equipment including aircraft had to be disposed of. We were able to purchase a Fairchild Cornell 2 seater airplane from War Assets, the agency that was responsible for selling all the military equipment no longer needed.

The Fairchild Cornell 2 seater was a 150 HP single engine trainer aircraft built by Fleet Aircraft Industries of Fort Erie, Ontario. This American designed and Canadian built aircraft was used for elementary pilot training. They were produced in large numbers (1,642 in Canada) and were one of the various aircraft used to train the many allied men and women (131,000 in total, 72,000 Canadians) in Canada during the war under the British Commonwealth Air Training Program.

We bought our Fairchild Cornell for \$900 and with a "single flight" permit flew it from Saskatchewan where we purchased it, to our home airport in Alberta. Our Cornell needed some modifications to put it in good flying condition, which cost about \$300. We needed such things as a canopy and a heater. We flew for only one summer before we managed to crack it up.

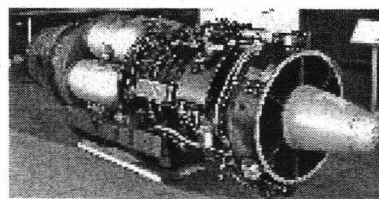
We blamed the accident on the airport control tower. The tower gave us a "clear for takeoff" but neglected to tell us about a very dangerous condition called a reverse ground wind. This caused our plane to "belly-flop" onto a farmer's field shortly after takeoff. No one was hurt in the accident, so I guess if you walk away it's a good landing. We had damaged a propeller, a wing tip and one oleo leg and with a total of about 25 hours of flying between us, we decided to repair and sell our Fairchild Cornell. It was getting too expensive to fly.

I graduated in 1949 from SAIT with my degree in aeronautics and decided to return to Ontario. Here, I would take my first job in the aircraft industry - with A.V. ROE Canada Ltd. and become involved in the design and development of Canada's first jet transport aircraft as well as the legendary AVRO ARROW jet fighter / interceptor.

After graduating, and with my degree in aeronautics, I returned to Toronto and was able to secure employment with A.V. Roe Canada. To really understand my situation at that time, you need to know that in the early 50s, A.V. Roe Canada with its Avro Aircraft and Orenda Jet Engine Divisions, almost set the aviation world on its ear. This Canadian company was on the absolute leading edge of aircraft design. It truly was the golden age of aviation in Canada. Canada had never before or since attempted to develop its very own jet engines or fighter aircraft and here I was in the middle of it. I had the opportunity to work with the world's best and brightest aviation engineers on the most advanced aircraft designs in the world.

I started working at the Orenda Jet Engine Division in the jet engine test cells. In my heart, however, I really wanted to work on the design of airframes and control systems. I was able to transfer to the Avro Aircraft Division in order to do this. It is interesting to note the company was located in the little town (!) of Malton, Ontario, in a building that is situated at the northeast corner of what is now known as Lester B. Pearson International Airport. (This building has been demolished.)

When I joined A.V. Roe, the company had been developing and was starting to produce the very successful Orenda Jet engine.



*Orenda II turbojet  
7,500 lb (2) Static Thrust (Dry)  
Powered CF-100 to 560 mph*



## My Life in Aviation, cont'd

This engine was designed to power the CF-100 fighter being built for the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and over 700 CF-100s would ultimately be produced. As well, the C-102 commercial Jetliner was also being developed and became the first commercial jetliner to fly in North America and almost the first in the world.

My first job at Avro Aircraft Division was doing detailed drawings on the air conditioning system for the C-102 Jetliner. During my time on the project, I was able to meet the famous American Multimillionaire Howard Hughes who was most interested in the C-102 and wanted to buy 50 of these great planes. This was not to be. The Korean War had broke out and the Canadian Government wanted all the company's effort put into the production of Canada's CF-100 Jet Fighter. The C-102 never made it into production and none were ever sold.



CF-100 Canuck

I was transferred to the CF-100 project and worked on the design of fuel systems and later became a Flight Test Engineer. Of all the flying I had done over the years, this flying was absolutely the most fascinating and exciting. To ride in an advanced jet fighter and to fly with some of the greatest test pilots in the world was more than I could ask for. My job was to set up instruments I would read during flight and then I would record the data. This was done at speeds and altitudes very few had experienced at that time. High altitude flying was amazing.

One flight I remember was with Canada's famous test pilot Jan Zurakowski. It was my job to ride in the back seat of the CF-100 and read 21 instruments while we flew to an altitude of 40,000 feet. When I suddenly smelled smoke and at the same time noticed my fingernails were turning blue, we decided to switch to

breathing pure oxygen and dump our cockpit pressure. With -60 degree F temperatures, we made a sudden drop from 40,000 feet to just 4,500 feet! My life flashed before my eyes in what seemed to me to take many minutes. My instruments told me it only took a few seconds." What a ride!

### End of Part One

In the next issue of Pre-Flight, Geoff will continue with his experiences in the 'all-weather' interceptor, the CF-100 'Canuck'

## Members Matter

With January, this is the time I get to say my piece. So to all you members in Canada and the USA and elsewhere, a Happy New Year - 2006! We made it! May you be blest with good health to get you from one day to the next. We just got through the Christmas Season, and heard the word 'joy' carolled, pixelled and printed. This then is my added wish to you - a 'goodly' helping of joy.

Like myself, the greater number of you are getting on in years. You have made your contributions - to the wellbeing of your families, your communities and, of course, to the country we call 'ours' - Canada.

Over the years, without fail, you have supported our Foundation. This, our President, Frank Harvey, has much appreciated. You have done so, not just financially, but with encouragement and suggestions, especially to me. I have enjoyed your phone calls and your short notes. Since I am responsible for Membership, these have meant so much to me. I know, I know - I have mentioned this before. But in my estimation, I couldn't mention it enough!

Thank you!

With the snow and blustery weather (and politics!), we have to be especially **careful** while driving and walking. Believe me, the Board members will be trudging very carefully through the snow, all bundled up, to head off to the monthly meetings at TAM. The **Directors** will have much to do, especially setting the general agenda for this year, month by month. It is up to them to seriously consider how to best achieve the **goals** of our Foundation. To collect important artifacts. To persistently document specific achievements of the people at Avro and Orenda, and especially to make sure that others know what they have contributed to aerospace in Canada.

Nicholas Doran  
Membership