

It Was Not All Work!

Up until now my writing concentrated on the serious side of the aviation industry in an effort to pass on a few lessons learned from my career. With this article I will talk about the lighter side of the aviation industry by passing on some of the more amusing and odder occurrences. Perhaps the reader will take away a lesson or two from these incidents or at the very least, a smile.

The Air Force

After failing to get a decent job in the civilian world, I enrolled in the army's officer candidate program and reported for work on a Tuesday in Regina, Saskatchewan. The officer in charge vented his anger with me for being late. He said the MPs and RCMP were out looking for me as I was to report on the Monday. I showed him my travel orders which reflected Tuesday and the Tuesday date. He said it was my fault even though the army made a mistake on the order. I said 'shove' the army and left the office. This led to tough farm work for about 2 months at which point I decided to sign up with the RCAF. It was off to Manning Depot in Toronto for aptitude tests. Due to an eye issue I could not become a pilot so I was offered a choice between military police, electronics, fitter or rigger. Thanks to reading the *Popular Science Magazine*, I knew electronics was an up and coming field. With the testing over, I was told under no circumstances should I be in administration. Amusing to me now, as the second half of my career years were spent in management and administration

The electronics training took place in Clinton, Ontario, for a year after which I was off to Borden, Ontario, for tools and aircraft training. Being young and thinking I knew everything, I wondered why the RCAF would send me, a kid who grew up in the bush country and worked on farms, to study hand tools. It surprised me to learn a lot of things my dad and uncles never taught me especially about the safety aspects of using tools. Growing up we used to cut fire wood using a big circular saw mounted on front of a tractor with no guards at all. It gives me the shudders to think of that now.

Next it was off to Cold Lake, Alberta, for the CF-104 Starfighter course. This was serious business as next we were to go to Europe and fortunately, I was one of those selected to go. I recall one guy on the basic electricity course who stuck a heavy gage wire into a socket and sprayed molten copper all over the shop. He was immediately sent off to cook's school. I too received my first 550-volt electric shock on that course which taught me to be more cautious.

A friend and I flew a remote control aircraft into a barracks window and received punishment detail; cutting grass around all the base fire hydrants with hand scissors. Not fun. I recall the 104 course as being hard work and not too many shenanigans went on as we didn't have the time and were 200 miles from any city. I passed the course with very good marks and the next stop was Europe. We arrived between Christmas and New Year's Day in Marville, France. It is quite an interesting place as it was a German airfield in both of the big wars. During WW I it was

obviously behind German lines which ran through nearby Verdun. A buddy and I found a big German artillery shell, picked it up and for a time used it for a door stop in our barracks room. At one point I began to worry about it and asked an armaments system tech to check it out. It was high explosive and poison gas, diameter about 150 mm, a big shell. We quickly returned it to the battlefield and hid it. If we had been caught it would have meant more extra duty. As my retired marine friend says, "There is no vaccine for dumb ass!"

When I reported for duty I was assigned a flight line job out at the line hangar servicing 441 and 439 Squadron aircraft. I think we had about sixty 104 aircraft. There were also a few Bristol 170 Freighters and a few DC-3s for transportation uses. So I reported to the Corporal in charge and he says, 'Beebe, you're going on a refuelling crew.' I said, 'No, there must be some mistake. I am a highly trained electronics tech and want to fix airplanes, not refuel them!' He said, 'Do as I tell you. Get your gear stowed and report to Leading Aircraftsman so-and so.' Having no choice in the matter, I followed his orders. I soon realized how clever the Corporal was because over the next three months I was scared of being driven over, blown away, burned by jet exhaust, squished by speed brakes, cut by leading edges or just mangled by all that moving equipment. Lesson=Learn forever.

My four years in Europe, two in France and two at Lahr, Germany were not all work. We had a lively airmen's club scene where we used to hang out when not touring or working. There was lots of activity and sharing the base with French Air Force who flew Mirage 3's was quite an experience. One time, I watched as a French sergeant pilot filled up liquid oxygen tanks while he smoked a cigarette!

One not so funny incident took place in the hangar while working on an CF-104. I was sitting in the cockpit working on some instruments with my legs hanging down out of the aircraft where the bottom hatch had been removed. The hatch was used for access to the ejection seat and the cockpit instruments. The F-104 had been designed with a downward ejecting seat. The idea was to avoid the high T-Tail when ejecting. However, by ejecting downward at low level meant that you ejected into the ground or you were so low that your parachute was ineffective. One of my so called friends reached up, and as a prank he triggered the seat up/down switch and the seat started to move upwards. I thought I was dead. I thought that the seat was ejecting me into the hangar roof. I had a few choice words for him after my adrenaline returned to normal.

Well my European tour of four years came to an end and I was transferred back to Cold Lake, Alberta. The days of tagging aircraft from many different air forces and countries came to an end. The variety of aircraft that we dealt with was amazing as most countries still flew locally made aircraft. In Cold Lake there was just Canadian and American aircraft, as we flew mostly American designed craft. We were an army support squadron so the army showed up every so often from their winter warfare training. On one occasion some fellows got drunk and smashed up our club. It was around that time I decided to switch to civil aviation. Army and air force life had lost its allure for me and additionally, it did not pay well. Lesson=Travel expands you.

The Air Carriers

Life took off fast in my first air carrier job. No longer having the logistical support of an air force it was learn fast and survive on your own. All the techs and managers were very helpful but it was a steep learning curve. There was a lot of fun as well as there were a few practical jokers around. One day at shift end I ran into the lunch room, grabbed my lunch bucket, and nearly dislocated my arm. One of those practical jokers had riveted my tin lunch bucket to the table!

Some of those pranks today would be considered not politically correct or worse. I recall some of the guys telling a very attractive flight attendant about the golden rivet in the front cargo compartment. She must have crawled around in her mini skirt for fifteen minutes looking for the one golden rivet put into each aircraft. Try that today and you will probably get sent on sensitivity training.

I found that in the airline business we did not have as much time to 'play' around as we did in military service. In civilian work there was always aircraft to work on. In the service, once all aircraft were launched you had an hour or so to play around. I do recall a couple of incidents we thought funny until we realized all the damage that was done. Once on a prop aircraft doing a run-up, someone was going to show us how to fix the mag drop by running the engine to high power. Unfortunately, he did not check how close behind us some light aircraft were and rolled one across the ramp. It looked amusing at the time but rebuilding it was not so much fun. The second incident was running up a 747 and watching the big ice chunks flying behind it; again no one noticed that the ice chunks were flying over the blast fence onto cars.

There was an active Interline club in Toronto so there were plenty of parties and dances. There was always great fun with lots of door prizes like a weekend in Hong Kong or an all inclusive week in Jamaica courtesy of one of the airlines. I worked on some aircraft from the Caribbean but was always worried about bugs or snakes being in the walls or elsewhere. I know I am a little paranoid but some were found. This is a hazard for maintenance techs I guess but something that no one ever told me about in basic training. One event that I and some fellow techs found comical was when our boss granted us all two days off with pay because we had worked so much overtime. This overtime had already been paid out. But instead of taking his generous offer of two days off with pay we all went to work on a DC-4 inspection in another hangar, being greedy I guess. Anyway our boss found out and he was a little annoyed to say the least. He was trying to be a good boss and we all messed up. Lesson=no good deed goes unpunished.

Another favorite trick we had was to be the first to meet the arriving aircraft, especially those from Florida. As soon as the passengers had deplaned, we locked the doors and refused to let groomers on saying that we had to do an engine run. Why do that? So we could grab the lobster from first class and have a delightful working man's meal. Unfortunately, Food Inspection Canada screwed that all up by insisting all food be incinerated for health reasons. None of us ever got sick, and the aircraft leftovers fed a lot of techs and pilots. I brought home

so many steaks that even my dog got tired of eating steak! Being first on the aircraft had other benefits like finding extra booze bottles. If a passenger was over their customs limit, they would leave the extra bottle in the overhead bins or hat racks as we called them then. A lot of pornographic magazines were found there as well. Those were claimed by the single guys; I was married so I took the booze.

While I was working at the Toronto base, my crew mate and I had to fix some galley problems on an aircraft from Montreal that was passing through Toronto. We heard the stewardesses who were speaking French talking about how stupid the techs from Toronto were. They assumed everyone in Toronto only spoke English I guess. My teammate spoke several languages fluently including French and I had a very good understanding of the language and spoke it marginally. We let them carry on and then told them in French how we fixed the snag. You never saw two more embarrassed looking faces; hopefully they learned a lesson.

Government Work

My first government job was working for the Ontario Government Department of Transport in vehicle safety system research. You may wonder why they hired AMEs or aircraft technicians. AMEs are one of the few trades that study and work on all systems. When you think about it, other trades tend to concentrate on a specific area. An example is heating and air conditioning techs do just that, while aviation techs do that and electronics, hydraulics and so on. We had a lot of interesting work on truck safety, fuel economy, seat belts and such. There was a lot of technical work regarding accidents and I was also taught to be a test car driver for highway surface testing. I missed the field of aviation so when the test work section was reorganized I applied to Transport Canada and was accepted.

So now I was working for the Feds as an inspector. In a previous article I revealed how, as a new inspector, I embarrassed myself by grounding an aircraft that had no engines installed. It was not funny at the time but now I can chuckle about it. Lesson=Failure is good.

I found Transport Canada (TC) basically a fun place to work. When I first arrived there in 1975 it was mostly staffed with ex-military pilots and AMEs/Techs. There was the usual joking between the service types as some were from the navy, the army and a mix from civilian careers. The air force types predominated.

At one headquarters meeting the discussion was on the moth insect breakout in the forests of Ontario. We did not have enough spray planes available in Canada and were discussing the idea that we may have to bring in American aircraft. The issue was that the American aircraft were type certificated at a higher gross weight than the Canadian models. Now you recall that DeHavilland had an aircraft called the Fox Moth from the 1920s, a biplane. So all of the Chiefs (our title then) were gathered in the boardroom when the boss asked what are my options to issue the restricted flight authorities. I said, 'Bring them in, the air is the same on both sides of the border, they won't crash.' He nodded then went to the person next to me who was the Chief, Flight-Test. He had momentarily nodded off having probably just flown in the evening

before from Europe. The boss asked the same question. My colleague woke up with a start and said, 'What? Are we now type certifying the Fox Moth?' My boss replied, 'No, we are talking about the Gipsy Moths eating all the tree leaves not certifying the Fox Moth!'

A colleague and friend of mine was working for me and I made him acting chief while I was away. When I returned to the office there was a little firestorm raging with finance. The acting chief had authorized a \$50,000 print job which back around 1985 was a lot of money. The print job was for AME logbooks that the apprentice AMEs used and Transport sold the logbooks on a cost recovery basis to them. I had not planned for that expenditure in my budget but the acting chief hadn't checked it out. Lesson=you can't always control your delegates.

Another time a new government minister arrived in Ottawa who held the belief that Canada would be better off if managers, both private and government, let employees enjoy sports on paid time. In some countries this practice is quite common. So one director thought he would trial the idea and organized a sports afternoon for his staff. Well the local paper got hold of it, published a story and all hell broke loose; government employees getting time off for sports? The program ended that week. Lesson=You aren't always right following seniors advise.

On another occasion I returned from a trip and entered my office. Alone in the office I was startled by the crackling sound of a voice bidding me a good day. I looked around only to find hanging on the wall a plaque with a moving, talking fish. My staff had a good laugh and I never did find out who hung the fish. Staff can be hilarious. I attended a manager's training session dealing with time management. They taught us to block off a certain time of the day to deal with our email and for reading documents. They also advised us to notify our staff that when your office door is closed it is your blocked time and please do not disturb. So I told my staff what I was doing and they all nodded. About two weeks into the practice, which seemed to be working, I opened my door. To my amusement there was a sign posted on my door which read, 'Do Not Disturb, The Boss is Sleeping.' That was the end of that experiment. Lesson=be careful what you take away from a management seminar and implement in your own environment.

My boss supported me attending seminars and workshops in order to enhance my knowledge on key areas associated with my job. I attended one in Vancouver on financial management systems. I oversaw a large budget and as finances are not normally part of the basic maintenance technical syllabus, I felt this seminar would answer some of my questions. I was sitting beside a lady who was from a financial firm. A while into the seminar I asked her, 'Who dreams all this stuff up?' She replied that there are thousands of people sitting around at universities inventing changes to perfectly good systems. This reinforced my boss's advice, go to the seminars but be careful what changes you make in your own office. I wish I had had that advice before I tried my 'quiet hour' routine.

I call this the Mexican ambassador's incident. I arrived at the ambassador's embassy building for the party and soon met a very well dressed man who looked very important. In government circles in a national capital the social games are quite different than those played in smaller

towns and cities. The first order of business with someone who greets you is to find out what position you hold, what is your background, which schools you attended, etc. The first test is to see if you might be in a position to help them in some way; the second is to see what your social ranking is. Saskatchewan, where I come from, follows a very egalitarian type of life style so this was all very strange to me. But one learns how to survive. A cardinal rule at these functions is to know who you're speaking with and to whom they are connected, otherwise saying the wrong thing can cause you much grief. So I was careful and asked a few leading questions of this well dressed gentleman. He looked like he could be a senior public servant, a general, certainly he was someone of importance. It turned out he was the Mexican ambassador's driver. Nothing wrong with that, it was how he got into all the parties around town with no questions asked. The basic rule at these gatherings, which I never followed, was to quickly move on to the next person once you learn that the person you are conversing with is of no use to you. The driver was pleasant so we had a nice conversation. Lesson=never judge a book or person by their cover.

Gerry, my wife, always wanted me to be well dressed and my clothes nicely coordinated. The days that I was well dressed the women in my office teased that Gerry must have chosen my clothes and if I was not so well coordinated, that I had dressed myself. Back in the seventies, I had a secretary once tell me that my blue checked jacket did not match my yellow striped pants. Sad. But I digress. Anyway, Gerry had given me a very expensive tie. There was a large shredder in my office for destroying classified documents and was used frequently. On the top of the shredding machine there are the 'no signs' (red circle with a slash through it) cautioning the user to be careful of getting a tie, fingers, long hair, etc. too close to the electric eye! I had a few documents to shred and as I leaned over the shredder the tip of my tie triggered the electric eye and pulled me down towards the shredder by my tie. Yikes! Luckily, as my chin neared the machine I was able to hit the on-off rocker switch on the top of the shredder. I called for help as now I was stuck! So what did my obliging staff do? Grab a digital camera and proceed to take pictures of me and my shredded tie. The pictures were soon all over Transport Canada. Now, here I was out the cost of the new tie so what does this thrifty public servant do? I consulted the Treasury Board regulations and discovered they would pay for any clothing damaged at work. So I wrote a report and submitted it to finance and got reimbursed for my tie. Lesson=heed the signs of danger!

One day as I was sitting in my office dealing with some paperwork a staff member came in and said, 'Sir, there is a lady on the telephone with a concern that helicopter pilots are watching her in her house while she is nude. She wants to lay a complaint with you.' I took the call from the highly distressed woman who, in her opinion, helicopter pilots had an instrument to allow them to see through her walls and watch her while she was naked. I thought, 'what next?' but continued to politely listen to her grievance. When she was finished, I suggested to her that the solution to the problem might be to cover her interior walls with some aluminum foil. We never did hear from the lady again.

The final anecdote that I will share concerns the day the engineering chief and a couple of engineers brought a visitor to my office. He was a well-dressed individual who was concerned with how to put Santa Claus back into Christmas. His idea was to have a jet powered sleigh led by eight reindeer fly over the city! He sat down and opened a large suitcase and in it was a model of a jet powered sleigh! With as much sincerity as I could muster, I respectfully listened to his demonstration. When he had finished laying out his proposal I asked, 'What happens if one of the reindeer poops? Will it not be sucked into the engines and possibly cause a problem?' His answer was to place collection bags on the reindeer just as they do with horses during a parade. He had answers for several other questions as well. Finally, his time was up with me so with a silent chuckle I assigned the project to the engineers. I had taken pictures of the man's venture so I could refer the file to headquarters! They were not impressed but did appreciate the break from their daily routine.

It wasn't all work.