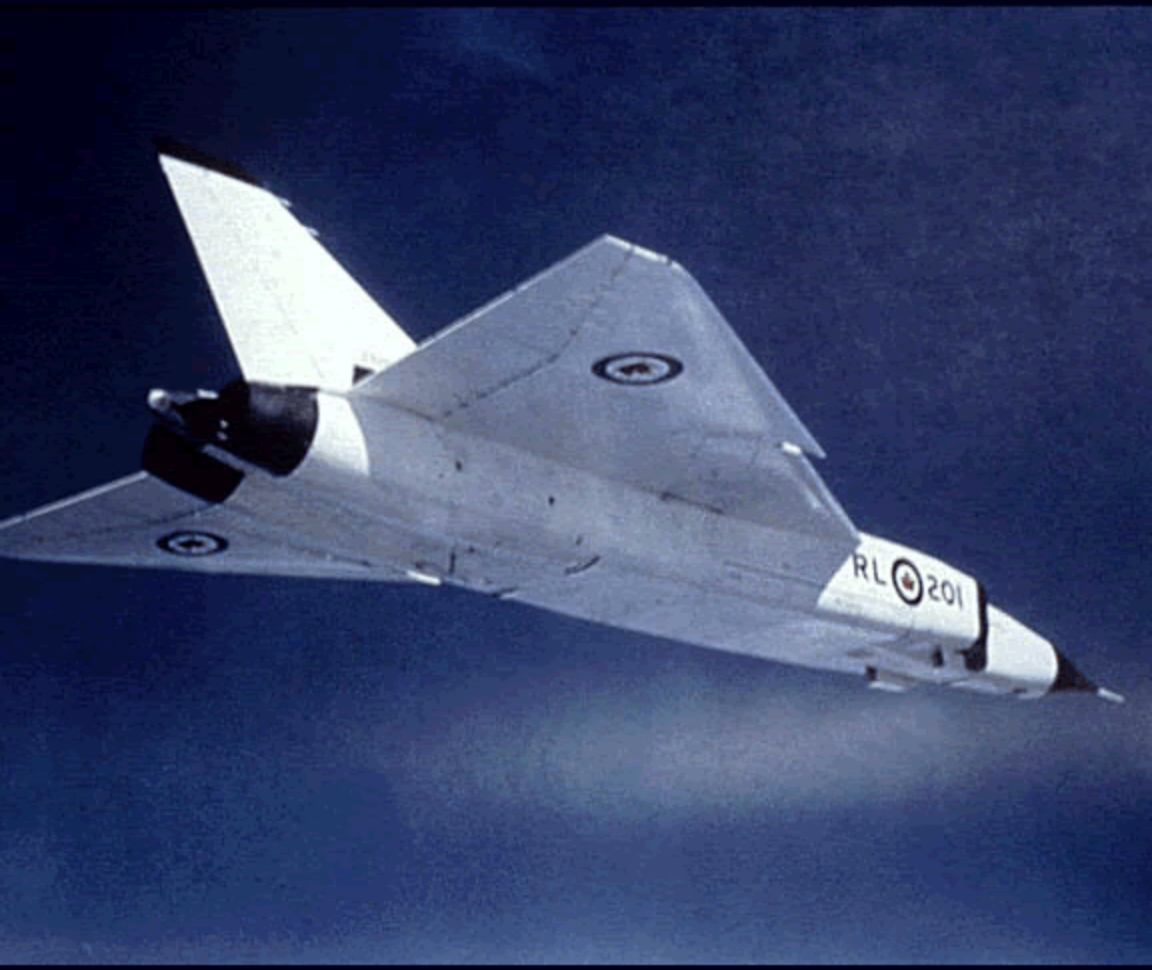
THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE ARROW



Daniel Wyatt

THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE ARROW

DANIEL WYATT

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Prologue

ENGLAND — SEPTEMBER 1940

"SANDBAG LEADER, THIS IS MAPLE TREE. BANDITS AT ANGELS ONE-FIVE, CROSSING COAST AT HASTINGS. VECTOR ONE-TEN AND BUSTER."

Squadron Leader Stanley Croft pressed the radio transmitter button. "SANDBAG LEADER HERE," he acknowledged. "WILL VECTOR ONE-TEN AND BUSTER." Then he took a quick look around at his RAF squadron. "SANDBAG LEADER HERE, CHAPS. MAKE SURE YOUR OXYGEN MASKS ARE ON AND FUNCTIONING. WE'RE CLIMBING UP TO ANGELS ONE-SEVEN."

Croft turned his Hurricane fighter squadron to starboard and commenced a full-throttle climb. When he reached seventeen thousand feet, he leveled off. The others were camped right on his tail.

"SECTION LEADERS, KEEP YOUR MATES UNDER CONTROL AND DON'T GET OVERANXIOUS," the squadron leader bellowed.

A veteran of the Battle of Britain since its inception only weeks before, Croft was the commanding officer

— the mother hen — of this Polish Air Force group. He was twenty-three years old, tall, handsome, unattached, and out for a good time. In the air, however, this Englishman with the cockney accent was a dedicated fighter pilot. He was serious. His country was at war. Back in July, he had commanded an RAF squadron with better-than-average success. His men had collected eleven kills. He had four of his own. Someone took note. Just three weeks ago, Croft had been sent over to lead these undisciplined ragtag Polish pilots, most of whom could not speak English.

From the start, he knew he had his work cut out for him.

* * * *

Leader of the Red Section, Pilot Officer Bogdan Kapolski flipped his goggles over his eyes and scanned the sky for German bandits. The sun shone brightly ahead through the canopy. The twenty-year-old Polish youngster — Danny to his mates — checked his rearview mirror on top of the windscreen, then blotted out the sun with his right thumb in order to check for enemy fighters. The Luftwaffe could be anywhere, maybe coming back from escorting a bombing run over England. If so, they'd be short of fuel and not wanting to fight. Easy prey.

"CLOSE IN NOW, CHAPS. TIGHTEN UP THAT FORMATION, BLUE LEADER. YOU'RE TOO RAGGED."

Croft shook his head. What a group these Poles were. Too wild even for Croft. They sure could drink. There was no way he'd take them on a binge to his favorite watering holes. They were too well known for wrecking a place. In the cockpit, they were an entirely different breed than the English and Commonwealth pilots. Many times they would streak after a lone German aircraft only to be caught by a typical Luftwaffe trick. Many more German fighters would be up above, ready to pounce on the fliers who were foolish enough to fall for the bait. The Poles were a constant headache to Croft. But he did appreciate their willingness to fight. Some English fighter pilots said that the Poles hated the Germans so much that they had forgotten how to be scared. Other English pilots thought the Poles were simply nuts.

That summer the rest of the free world had been glued to the newspapers and radios for news of Britain, the nation that stood gallantly alone across the English Channel from the Nazi war machine. Hitler had conquered continental Europe with little resistance and had now turned his rage on Britain. But the Germans would have to knock off the stubborn Royal Air Force before an invasion was feasible. All odds were against Britain, and as the battle progressed through the summer, it looked steadily worse for the English. The RAF commander in chief of Fighter Command, Air Marshall Hugh Dowding, had his back to the wall. The Germans had been buzzing over like swarms of hornets.

Worse, Dowding couldn't replace his downed pilots fast enough. And British war factories couldn't build Spitfire and Hurricane fighters to keep up with the frightening demand. Even US ambassador to Britain, Joe Kennedy, had predicted that Hitler would occupy London by the middle of August. Well, August had come and gone and no sign of Hitler. But he was still knocking at the door.

The Brits were a stubborn lot and their resolve stiffened all the more as the summer of 1940 wore on. They refused to cave in. However, they did have one distinct and formidable weapon at their disposal. Radio Direction Finding. Those close to the scene called it radar. It was radar masts that dotted the Channel coastline near Dover, easily seen by the Germans through binoculars from the French coast on a clear day, twenty miles away. And it was these masts that detected enemy aircraft almost as soon as they hit the English Channel waters.

* * * *

Kapolski, one of the few English-speaking squadron pilots, repeated Croft's last order to the red section. "PRZYCIAG LEPIEG!" he blurted into his radio transmitter. "PRZYCIAG LEPIEG!"

Kapolski glanced across and back to starboard, just in time to see Andrzej Zebrowski in his beat-up Hurricane pull in close, so close that Kapolski could actually count the rivets on his friend's machine. Zebrowski's fighter

was covered with patches hastily plastered on after too many point-blank fights with German bandits. After one skirmish, a week before, Zebrowski counted twenty-one cannon and machine gun holes on his fuselage alone, and another fifteen on the wings. Still he flew it home in one piece.

Zebrowski gave his leader the thumbs-up sign. They both smiled as Zebrowski pushed his goggles in place. The others pulled in too. Radkiewicz, Mikolajczyk, Zankowski. They were dog-tired after answering to scramble after scramble that week. But they were alert, ready to shoot down Krauts on a moment's notice on their fourth scramble today.

"SAMOLOTY OD PORTU," cried one of the Poles over the R/T.

Croft studied the sky. "WHAT'S HE SAYING, RED LEADER?"

"SPITFIRES OFF PORT, SANDBAG," Kapolski answered his CO. "THEY MUST BE THE SPITS OUT OF DUXTON."

"GOOD. PERFECT VISIBILITY NOW, CHAPS, SO KEEP YOUR PEEPERS OPEN." Croft flipped his goggles down over his eyes.

Kapolski suddenly broke in. “KRAUTS AT TWO O’CLOCK, SANDBAG LEADER! TALLY HO!” Then in Polish he added, “OPOIADAC SOBIE.”

Croft sensed what the Poles were up to. They had tried this before. “HOLD YOUR SECTIONS, LEADERS, UNTIL WE ARE ON TOP OF THEM. DON’T GO CRAZY NOW. TURN YOUR GUNSIGHTS ON. HOW MANY ARE THEY? I WANT A COUNT!”

But there was no response. As Croft glanced to both sides of his fighter he saw he had been talking to himself. Where were the rest of the pilots? Even the Spitfires from Duxton were gone. He looked frantically in front, below, then behind. They were nowhere to be found. As he glanced down off his starboard wing he saw to his utter horror that every squadron pilot, including the Spitfire boys, were diving in 180-degree turns to attack from behind approximately forty Heinkel bombers escorted by a dozen Messerschmitt 109 fighters. At least the Spitfire pilots positioned themselves into small orderly groups, line astern. The Poles were all over the place.

“Stupid sods!” Croft screamed. “They’re going to be the death of me yet!” He punched his R/T. “MAPLE TREE, THIS IS SANDBAG. WE SEE THE BANDITS. TALLYHO.”

Two thousand feet below, the 109s scattered to avoid the diving Hurricanes and Spitfires. The Heinkel

bombers opened up with their machine guns. Kapolski instructed his section to go in and pick a fighter target because after a few minutes of aerial combat the Messerschmitt 109s would shed precious fuel and be unable to complete their escort operation. The fighters would be forced to fly back to France, leaving the bombers alone and vulnerable.

Kapolski saw a 109 bank right and dive for a cloudbank. He followed right on his tail, even though he knew that a 109 could easily outdive a Hurricane. From three hundred yards away he fired a short burst that went wild, then he heaved back on the column. The 109 leveled off and continued turning starboard. On a hunch, Kapolski banked right, making it appear as though the German had given him the slip. Once the 109 disappeared into the clouds, Kapolski broke to port and gradually tightened his turn, quickly feeling the G-forces building up against his body as he completed a full 360-degree cycle. Suddenly, the 109 burst out of the cloudbank, only five hundred yards away! Kapolski's hunch had paid off. Now it was a game of aerial chicken. Who would break away first?

Kapolski picked out the yellow hub on the Messerschmitt's prop as the two fighters headed towards each other at a six-hundred-mile-per-hour rate of closure. Then, at a distance of 150 yards, the 109 climbed, leaving his entire underbelly as a target. Kapolski climbed quickly, his right hand gripped so solidly to the stick that his fingers were hurting inside his glove. He

lined up the German in his sight and jabbed the firing button on his joystick steady for a three-second burst. His aircraft shook violently as his machine guns tore away at the German's starboard wing and bottom fuselage in a neat, perfect line, a total of thirteen pounds of lethal RAF .303s at a rate of eighty rounds per second. In an instant, a black cloud of smoke began to pour off the enemy aircraft. The smell of cordite stung the air inside Kapolski's cockpit as he broke away to port and down, the German thundering overtop. Partway through his turn, Kapolski looked through the Perspex and saw the Messerschmitt 109 spiraling to earth in a slow spin.

Kapolski steered his Hurricane into a slow, lazy turn. There was no chute. He felt no sympathy for the pilot as he watched the 109 careen into an open field near a winding creek. One less Kraut pilot was how he saw it. This made kill number five for Bogdan Kapolski. He was an ace.

Chatter on the R/T snapped Kapolski to attention.

"PULL AWAY, YOU GOT ONE ON YOUR TAIL!"

"I WILL. BACK ME UP."

"STRZELAG, STRZELAG!"

“WHAT ARE YOU CLODS SAYING! SPEAK ENGLISH, YOU GUYS! SANDBAG LEADER TO RED LEADER, WHERE ARE YOU?”

Kapolski pushed his mask closer to his face. “I READ YOU, SANDBAG. THIS IS RED LEADER.”

“THE BANDITS ARE GETTING AWAY OVER THE CHANNEL. LET’S GO GET A PIECE OF THE BOMBERS, SHALL WE.”

“SANDBAG LEADER, THIS IS RED LEADER. I JUST GOT A 109 AND HE PLOWED A FARMER’S FIELD!”

“GOOD SHOOTING, ACE. NOW GET THE HELL BACK TO THE REST OF THE PACK. LET’S GET THE BOMBERS. THERE’S NO FIGHTER SUPPORT.”

“WHERE ARE YOU?”

“NORTH OF EASTBOURNE AND HEADING THREE-FOUR-ZERO.”

“I READ YOU, SANDBAG.”

Kapolski banked his fighter and looked out the port side, his shoulder harness and safety belt pressed to his already sore and tired bones. He saw the Channel and the bombers in the distance. He pulled the column back and climbed steadily through the thin cloud layer that had blanketed the southern coast.

The hunt wasn't over yet.

* * * *

TINIAN, MARIANA ISLANDS — MAY 24, 1945

The stern voice of the aircraft commander, Captain Edmund Schult, crackled over the intercom. "COMMANDER TO CREW, START UP IN FIVE SECONDS."

Schult ordered the flight engineer to start number one engine. The left outboard engine cranked and sputtered, sending out an enormous quantity of flame and white smoke through its exhaust stacks. Once it was running smoothly, the left inboard started on Schult's order and it too performed the same way before running smoothly. Then the other two engines fired and soon all four 2,200-horsepower Wright R-3350-23 Duplex Cyclone 18-cylinder radials with two exhaust-driven turbochargers on each hummed an even beat. Nine thousand horsepower in total buzzed the inside of the fuselage.

Captain Schult's aircraft, nicknamed *Billy Bee*, moved out and followed the slow line of other B-29 Superfortresses rolling past the 462nd Bomb Group area to Runway Baker. One by one the huge bombers took off, fully loaded with bombs, ammo and high-octane fuel. Schult pointed his seventy-ton monster east and waited for the preceding bomber to take to the air, then he and

his pilot, Walter Price, and the other crew members, ran through the final part of their checklist.

"TURRETS IN PROPER POSITION?"

"CHECK."

"BOMB BAY DOORS?"

"CLOSED."

"FLIGHT CONTROLS?"

"CHECK."

"TRIM TABS?"

"NEUTRAL."

"HYDRAULIC SYSTEM?"

"PRESSURES RIGHTUP."

"VACUUM?"

"CHECK."

"SERVO SWITCHES?"

"OFF."

Schult powered up the engines. "WING FLAPS TWENTY-FIVE DEGREES?"

Price answered quickly. “WING FLAPS TWENTY-FIVE.”

“HOW DOES THAT CHECK OUT, GUNNERS?”

The two blister gunners saw that the flaps were in the proper takeoff position. “OK, COMMANDER,” a voice answered.

“EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT HERE,” replied the other gunner.

“ENGINEER, HOW DOES YOUR PANEL LOOK?”

“WE’RE HEATING UP A BIT ON ALL FOURS, BUT WHAT ELSE IS NEW?”

“ANY DANGER?”

“NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY.”

“HOW’S THE REST OF YOU GUYS? ANYTHING TO REPORT?”

“NO, SIR,” came the response one at a time from throughout the airplane.

“WINDOWS AND HATCHES CLOSED?”

“CHECK.”

“RIGHT ON, COMMANDER.”

The bomber ahead of them was nearing the far end of the runway now and taking to the air. Captain Schult got the clearance from West Field tower. “OK, THIS IS IT,” he announced to the crew.

He gunned the throttles.

Billy Bee leaped forward and barreled down the runway, the G-forces pressing the crew to their seats.

* * * *

Forty minutes after he had begun the preflight check, Captain Schult and his crew were airborne over the ocean on a heading of 337 degrees, 620 miles from Iwo Jima. Saipan was below them now. Their airspeed was 180 knots, their altitude 4,700 feet. They were in the center of three rows of B-29 Superfortress bombers, over 500 airplanes that stretched out over several hundred miles, all carrying payloads of 10,000 pounds of lethal incendiaries and on a course for Tokyo.

Schult hit the intercom. “COMMANDER TO GUNNERS. YOU CAN TEST YOUR GUNS.”

In the gunners’ compartment in the center of the B-29’s fuselage sat Ben Spencer, a red-haired, six-foot, twenty-one-year-old Canadian war correspondent for the *Vancouver Daily News*.

He rested on his flight jacket on the floor, his back against the bulkhead that led towards the radar room,

busy writing, taking notes of what he had seen and heard up to this point. The pressurized cabin was warm, but he was heavily dressed with a survival vest, food rations, a first-aid kit, and a drinking-water package strapped beneath his brown overalls. A parachute pack, a flak suit, and one-man life preserver were strung on top of everything else. He also wore a canteen, a .45 automatic pistol in a leather holster, and GI boots. All this in case the bomber was shot down. There were three gunners in the same compartment: a short, stocky left blister-gunner named Albert Booth; a skinny, prematurely balding right blister-gunner named Chester Wilkins; and seated above Spencer in the fire control position was the drawling Southerner, Fred Goodman, who always wore his sleeves rolled back to expose his large biceps.

Spencer glanced around at the crew, all about his age. Except for Schult, who was somewhere around thirty, this was a young man's war, he thought. As the aircraft droned on in the bomber stream, the writer had trouble staying awake.

* * * *

"COMMANDER TO CREW. SEARCHLIGHTS AHEAD. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR FIGHTERS AND BAKAS."

Spencer jolted awake and knelt over the left blister. Night had fallen and the gunners' compartment was dark except for a dim light at each gun position. Booth,

Wilkins and Goodman scrambled to their seats. Goodman, high above the others, stuck his head into the astrodome and eyed northward. To his amazement, the sky glowed with hellish-orange flames. Tokyo was already burning, a brilliance reflecting off the silver fuselages of the other bombers.

"Hold on Spencer. This is it," Booth said to the writer, the two beside each other at the window.

The Japanese coastline was now directly below them. Their IP of the bomb run — Mt. Fuji — was coming up ahead. Schult noted the snow-covered peak and banked the aircraft. Two minutes later, Spencer witnessed the first bomber stream casualty as a B-29 was spotlighted in a hail of searchlights and blasted out of the sky by anti-aircraft fire below. The bomber dove down in a crumpled, flaming mess and exploded soon after.

Spencer swallowed hard. This was no picnic. He saw the smoke clouds. Good Lord, they were higher than the planes. And what was that smell? It was like... pork. Barbecued pork. It had to be the stench of burning bodies, thousands of them. The *Billy Bee* was actually close enough to smell the bodies nine thousand feet below.

"ALL BOMBS GONE," the bombardier announced over the intercom.

Then, without warning, the aircraft leaped violently to its port side, sending Spencer and Wilkins sprawling to the deck with a thud. The aircraft started to shake and every loose piece of equipment, paper and K-ration food flew about the compartment.

"We're caught in the turbulence!" Goodman cried to Spencer and the gunners below. "Hang on!"

The next forty seconds seemed like minutes. Even a roller-coaster ride wasn't like this. Spencer felt sick to his stomach and gulped heavily to keep his K-rations down. He succeeded until the great bomber took a sharp dive. It was then that he tossed the entire contents of his stomach all over his flight boots. With a jerk the aircraft climbed again. When would it end? The machine continued to jitter and shake, nose up. Suddenly, there was an eerie calm. Searchlights and some exploding shrapnel were still filling the sky, but the rough ride was finally over. Schult banked the aircraft to starboard. Once again he was in control.

They all heard the loud bang, followed by a series of smaller bangs that wouldn't let up. Schult sent the radio operator to investigate. He found the bomb bay doors knocked off their hinges, probably from the firestorm turbulence. No sooner had this damage been reported than the *Billy Bee* was rocked by another explosion, this one a tremendous flaming burst of enemy flak off port.

“CAPTAIN, NAV HERE,” called the navigator. “THE PORT WING HAS A BIG OL’ HOLE IN IT, AND THERE’S FUEL POURING FROM HER.”

“KEEP AN EYE ON IT.”

“YES, SIR.”

The flight engineer broke in. “CAPTAIN, IT DON’T LOOK GOOD. WE GOT LEAKS IN TWO TANKS. DRAINING BAD. I THINK EVEN ANY EMERGENCY LANDING ON IWO JIMA IS OUT OF THE QUESTION. WE WON’T MAKE IT.”

“I GUESS WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO HIT THE SILK.”

“SEEMS SO.”

Captain Schult took a deep breath. He knew the drill because he’d been through it enough times. “COMMANDER TO CREW, WE’RE OUT OVER THE WATER NOW. SIX THOUSAND FEET. WE WILL HAVE TO ABORT. WE WILL MAKE A DISTRESS CALL TO AIR-SEA RESCUE. FORGET THE LIFE RAFTS. I DON’T WANT TO TAKE A CHANCE PLUNKING THIS BIRD DOWN IN THE DARK. SO, CHECK YOUR PARACHUTE PACKS AND MAE WESTS. WAIT FOR THE ALARM. ONCE YOU BAIL OUT AND ARE FREE OF THE AIRCRAFT, PULL THE CORD RIGHT AWAY. WE’RE TOO CLOSE TO THE WATER FOR THE USUAL TEN-COUNT. MAKE LOTS OF NOISE ONCE

YOU HIT THE WATER SO THAT WE CAN BE FOUND. BOOTH?"

"YES, SIR, CAPTAIN."

"FILL OUR STOWAWAY IN ON WHAT HE HAS TO DO."

"YES, SIR."

Booth pushed the microphone away from his face and quickly ran through the operating procedures of Spencer's parachute pack.

"Don't worry," he said finally to the writer. "Just jump and pull the ring here," he pointed, "once you're free of the door." Then he smiled. "Guess you never expected this to happen, did yuh?"

Spencer swallowed hard. "Hell, no!"

"Something you can tell your kids one day. Are you all right?" Booth asked.

"Just a little sick."

"OK, CREW, TO THE EXITS. GO!"

The alarm rang throughout the bomber. Spencer watched the three gunners whip their headsets off. As he made his way to the aft section with the gunners and the radar operator, he was astonished to see the result

of the blast — several holes about the size of quart cans punched clear through the fuselage and out the other side. The rushing slipstream produced such a racket that it was difficult to speak.

The five of them stood by the door.

“OK,” Goodman yelled. “Albert, you first!”

“Right!”

Booth pulled on the door handle and it flew open, ripping off the hinges. He waved and jumped through without hesitation. Next went Wilkins, then the radar operator. Only Spencer and Goodman remained.

“Don’t worry!” Goodman shouted at the correspondent. “You’ll be all right. Once you hit the water, detach the chute. Your Mae West will keep you afloat. And make lots of noise so the sub can find you in the dark. OK?”

Spencer nodded. “You bet.”

“Have a good trip.” Then Goodman pushed Spencer out the door.

Chapter one

MALTON, ONTARIO — TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 1958, 0947 HOURS (EST)

A crowd of thousands gathered outside the Avro hangar at Malton Airport near Toronto, waiting anxiously for the corporation's pet project — Avro's new multimillion-dollar fighter-interceptor — to make its maiden flight.

They watched breathlessly as the test pilot manned the articulate controls of the CF-105 Avro Arrow. This day had not come fast enough for those on the tarmac; the Avro management, the designers, the assembly line technicians, the ground crew, the live TV and radio audience, and the Royal Canadian Air Force. Even Canada's neighbor to the South was interested. Following the Arrow's rollout on October 4, 1957, the American-based magazine *Aviation Week* had printed:

> The fighter makes Canada a serious contender for the top military aircraft of the next several years. The Arrow's power, weight and general design leave little doubt of its performance potential.
> Important features of the present version of the CF-105 include 1) afterburner takeoff weight of about sixty thousand with Iroquois engines; 2) maximum takeoff weight of about sixty thousand pounds; 3) area-ruled fuselage; and 4) very thin wings with conical leading edges and blunt trailing edges.

As far as ceiling is concerned, Fred T. Smye, president of Avro, has stated that the Arrow will be able to intercept and destroy aircraft flying at seventy-five thousand feet. There was no explanation as to the altitude in a zoom climb, or whether the Arrow actually had to reach seventy-five thousand feet for its missile armament to destroy the hostile aircraft, but it does give some indication of the Arrow's altitude capability.

A week earlier, the first Arrow flight had been canceled by Avro due to a hydraulic leak. But all systems were go today when a voice over the plant PA system had invited all nonessential personnel to drop their work, grab their coats, and catch the maiden flight. The plant emptied in minutes. Someone on the assembly line jokingly quipped that if the unfinished Arrows could get up and walk, they'd be out on the tarmac too.

* * * *

Lance Tiemans had been employed by Avro as an aeronautical technician for the past three years. The twenty-eight-year-old liked his job and was proud of his connection with the Arrow. The pay could have been better, but all in all he was enjoying life as a bachelor, in a field right up his alley. From the time he was ten years old Tiemans had dreamed of flying fighter aircraft. It was 1940. The Canadian daily newspapers were full of the daring exploits of British and Canadian fighter pilots engaged in the Battle of Britain. Douglas Bader and Robert Tuck and others. Tiemans had wished he was there with them, flying Spitfires or Hurricanes.

His dream, however, had not unfolded exactly as he had planned, but it was still close enough. Today was the maiden flight of Canada's first supersonic all-weather fighter-interceptor, an aircraft he had toiled on. He knew every inch of the Arrow's engines. The Arrow wasn't just Avro's aircraft or the country's aircraft. It was his. As Tiemans stood proudly on the tarmac with the other members of his working staff, tears came to his eyes. Happy tears.

As he and the thousands of onlookers sighed, the pilot slowly taxied to the south end of Runway 32. It was the longest runway at Malton and had recently been extended to eleven thousand feet just to accommodate the Arrow. All eyes were on the delta-winged CF-105 Arrow Mark I as the pilot waited for clearance from the tower.

Tiemans smirked. The lines of the all-Canadian-built Arrow were beautiful. The front of her came to a fine point, reaching far beyond the pilot in the clamshell canopy. The swept-back wings on a fifty-foot span seemed to envelope the aft section and, indeed, dominate the entire aircraft. The nose sat up slightly in a distinctive fashion. Damn, she was built to go! Just twenty-five years earlier many pilots were flying prop-driven biplanes in combat roles. Now Canadian aeronautical technology was on the threshold of constructing a fighter that neither the Americans nor the Soviets could beat. Britain's top World War II fighter, the Supermarine Spitfire, would tuck nicely into

the aft section of the Arrow, while the Avro Lancaster, Britain's best bomber during the same war, was eight feet shorter than this aircraft waiting to jolt loose and thunder down Runway 32. *Impressive. Elegant. Stupendous. Awesome.* What words could properly describe Canada's new supersonic fighter that stood a graceful seventy-seven feet in length and an overpowering twenty-one feet high? What words indeed? Tiemans couldn't think of the one word that fit better than the others. *So why try.*

The jet fighter chase planes — a CF-100 Canuck and an F-86 Sabre — were already in the air and set to monitor and record the Arrow's maiden flight. With the approaching chase planes as the signal, the test pilot let go of the Arrow's brakes and started to roll. Three thousand feet down the strip he lifted the nose gear off. The crowd held it's breath as one. Then with a roar from the dual Pratt & Whitney J75 engines, the Arrow was airborne in one smooth, graceful motion. The crowd cheered.

A large smile broke across the face of Lance Tiemans. His deep-set eyes, bloodshot from staying up most of the night with his male drinking companions, watched the aircraft soar into the distance, closely followed by the chase planes. Tiemans stole a glance at the other members of his crew. They were all beaming like kids with a new toy — a $300 million toy.

As he pulled up the collar on his long, leather coat, Tiemans brought to mind the proud day of October 4, 1957, when the Arrow was first exhibited to the world. The crowd of twelve thousand people — Avro workers, the press, and certain dignitaries — had been stunned, completely spellbound by their first sight of the fighter rolling out on the tarmac. From the podium, Canada's defense minister had put it in the proper perspective.

"This event today marks another milestone, the production of the first Canadian supersonic airplane. I am sure that the historian of tomorrow will regard this event as being truly significant in the annals of Canadian aviation.

"The supersonic era of flight is just beginning. Many of today's aircraft are regularly breaking the sound barrier, but this is done at the extreme peak of their performance. Supersonic flight is still not a routine matter. Present aircraft travel at these exceptionally fast speeds for only a relatively short period of time.

"The Avro Arrow, however, had been designed from the outset to operate supersonically throughout as much of its mission as is deemed necessary..."

Tiemans shook his head, remembering. Too bad Avro had gotten second billing that October afternoon. The Russians picked the same day to launch *Sputnik I*, the world's first space satellite. It could circle the earth once every ninety-five minutes at a speed of 18,000

miles per hour. Some said the space age had begun. Others were saying we didn't need manned interceptors like the Arrow anymore.

The trio of planes flew over the Avro plant several times at different altitudes, at the same time communicating with each other and the Malton tower. After thirty-five minutes of aerial testing, the Arrow pilot obtained clearance from the tower to land. On his approach to Runway 32 at 180 knots, he dropped the landing gear in full view of the crowd. The tires screeched as they contacted the concrete and smoke streamed off the rubber. Then the parachute popped to slow the machine to a crawl. The Arrow taxied up to the Avro hangar. When the pilot shut down the engines and climbed from the cockpit, the jubilant crowd descended upon him. Someone from Tiemans' crew hoisted the pilot on his shoulders. Flashbulbs popped. It was a great day. Tiemans was still grinning when a tall, chubby, red-haired man in his thirties stepped in front of him.

"Good morning," said the man. "I'm Ben Spencer from the *Tribune*."

Tiemans recognized the name right off. "You're the one who's written a few columns on the Arrow."

"That's right."

“Well, what do you think of the grand lady? Mind you, you can’t tell too much from a thirty-minute flight at eleven thousand feet.”

“Quite the bird,” Spencer answered. “I once read somewhere that if an airplane looks good then it performs good too. Isn’t that right?”

“Maybe.”

“Anyway, you’re the pilot’s crew chief, are you not?”

Tiemans nodded. “Yes, I am.”

The man removed a camera from beneath his great-coat. “Do you suppose I can position the pilot and your crew together for a private snapshot?”

Tiemans shrugged. “It’s possible. Sure. Let’s go.”

* * * *

WASHINGTON, DC — 1038 HOURS (EST)

The President of the United States took the phonecall in the Oval Office from his CIA contact. “How was your trip to Nevada?” he asked.

“Enlightening, to say the least. But that’s not why I called, sir. The damn Canadians did it. The Arrow’s in the air.”

“They actually got that far?”

“Yes, sir. And she landed without a hitch. She’s for real.”

“What about this Spencer fellow?”

“He’s innocent enough. Just an enthusiast of the program.”

The president sighed. “He writes a daily column, does he?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Who for?”

“The *Toronto Tribune*.”

“In that case, I want the *Tribune* on my desk bright and early every morning. Got that?”

“Consider it done, sir.”

* * * *

OTTAWA, ONTARIO — 1042 HOURS (EST)

That morning, the Prime Minister of Canada and his finance minister were discussing the upcoming federal election in the prime minister’s office in the Center Block of the Parliament Buildings in the nation’s capital, when the news came through about the Arrow. They

discussed it briefly, then the prime minister quickly changed the subject back to where he wanted it.

"Only a few more days, Alex," the prime minister said, cheerfully. "Tomorrow I'll hit southern Ontario, Toronto and Hamilton. Thursday, Windsor. We're going to get that majority this time around. Just how big remains to be seen. The big blue Tory machine is on the move. Look out, Liberals!" The prime minister leaned back in his chair and laughed out loud, his voice echoing in the chamber. His finance minister, Alex Kralick, seated to the left of the prime minister's desk, looked pleased.

The prime minister was at an age when most other men would have considered retirement. But this tall, former criminal lawyer from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, with the curly white hair, had the vigor of a man half his age. He was out to change Canada, perhaps the world, and nothing was going to stop him. He was expecting a solid mandate from his people to move Canada kicking and screaming into the 1960s and perhaps take his morals with them. He hated drinking, smoking and swearing. The Conservative party was indeed on a roll. Only last year they had been elected to the Canadian parliament, breezing past the Liberals with a small lead. For the first time in over twenty years the Conservatives were in power. But for the prime minister that was not enough. He badly wanted a substantial majority. With an election only days away, Gallup Polls predicted a Tory majority victory.

The desk intercom buzzed.

The prime minister pressed a button. “I told you I wasn’t to be disturbed.”

“I know that, sir,” his secretary answered. “But the President is on line one.”

“Which president? You mean Avro?”

“No, sir. The President of the United States.”

The prime minister and Kralick shot a glance at each other.

“I’ll leave.” Kralick stood and withdrew out the door.

“Sir, he’s waiting.”

“I’ll get it,” the prime minister informed his secretary.

“Yes, sir.”

The Canadian leader reached for the receiver. “Mr. President.”

“Good morning, Mr. Prime Minister.”

“And a good morning to you. How’s the weather in Washington?”

“A little on the chilly side, I’m afraid. But they say spring is just around the corner.” The president paused.

“I know you must be busy, so I’ll be brief. How’s the campaign coming along these days?”

“The Gallup says we’re going to win. Big.”

“Congratulations. I hope you get the majority you’re after.”

“Thank you.”

“Now, how’s that pretty little supersonic fighter?”

The prime minister cleared his throat. “It flew for the first time today.”

“So I’ve heard. How does it look for the future?”

“We will evaluate it once we receive our majority. Preliminary reports state that it’s costing our taxpayers a fortune.”

The president chuckled over the line. “I heard that, too. However, that aircraft has possibilities.”

“Are you interested in her?”

“Possibly. Keep in touch. Goodbye, Mr. Prime Minister.”

“Goodbye, Mr. President.”

The prime minister hung up the receiver. What was that about, he wondered.

Chapter two

RCAF STATION DIXON, ALBERTA — 0851 HOURS (1051 EST)

From a vantage point outside an operational hangar, Flight Lieutenant Bogdan Kapolski watched the CF-100 fighter-interceptors from B-Flight practicing circuits and bumps. The top-notch group could touch and go with precision. A cold wind whistled downM F

ing.

Kapolski was not himself, not since his wife and son had died three months earlier in a bus accident in Quebec. He still hadn't recovered from the experience. Mary was a pretty English woman, three years younger than him. They met in England in 1940 during the

* * * *

Two thousand feet across the base, Flying Officer James Scott pushed forward on the throttles of his Avro CF-100 Canuck Mark IVB, the G-forces pushing him and his navigator, Flying Officer Jacques Savard, firmly into their seats. Once they reached a clump of trees a few hundred yards beyond the strip, Scott banked the aircraft to port with the other aircraft in the circuit.

Scott came from a service family steamed in air force tradition. His father held a high-up desk job with 6 Group, the Canadian bomber group in England during World War II. Scott's grandfather was a World War I fighter pilot who flew with Billy Bishop. Born in 1936 in Winnipeg, the blonde-haired, unmarried, ambitious, sometimes loud and cocky Scott was a stark contrast to his twenty-four-year-old navigator. Savard was a mild, soft-spoken, dark-haired Frenchman from Montreal who never smoked, drank or cheated on his wife. Nevertheless, these two CF-100 officers worked as a well-coordinated twosome for the past year with more than two hundred hours together.

Leveling out, Scott and Savard looked over the port wing and saw the Dixon base — the runways, hangars, tower, parked CF-100s, one other Canuck about to take off and one more about to land. It was a never-ending circle of activity. Scott banked again to port to line up with the runway on final approach. He hoped to make a

smoother landing this time than the last one, where he had dropped down a little too rough for his liking.

* * * *

SOVIET EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, DC — 1250 HOURS (EST)

Alexander Miskin had been inside the filing room for too long, he feared. He had every right to be in there alone, of course, due to his line of work. But still he wanted to stay above suspicion. If he was gone any longer, someone would come looking for him. They wouldn't be too happy had they caught him stealing top secret Soviet Air Force photos and telexes. It took Miskin under one minute to find the files he came searching for. The day before he had moved them from his usual spot in the back of one of the metal cabinets, third drawer down. Now they were in the middle, top drawer. He opened the files and stuffed various telex messages and photos under his shirt. Then with trembling hands he fixed his black tie and gray plaid sports jacket.

Miskin walked to the door, his heart pounding. He glanced back at several pictures on the wall of Soviet government officials. If they only knew what he was up to. Opening the door seemed to make his heart pound louder and faster. He could feel cold perspiration dripping down from his armpits. He walked the long gray corridor that smelled of fresh oil-based paint, his

shoes clicking on the hardwood floors. When he turned right to take the flight of stairs leading to the lobby, a fellow desk clerk, coming briskly up the stairs, glanced at him casually. Miskin turned his head to smile, but could barely move his lips. He had never been so terrified in his life.

Only a few feet more now. That last door, the giant oak one, seemed like a mile away. His hand reached out, grasped the solid brass door knob and clumsily turned it. A rush of chilly outside air met him. He closed the door, took one quick look up and down the street, then made his way down the concrete steps and past several bushes that lined the walkway. He turned right at the gate, ignoring the two Soviet guards as best he could.

Twenty-third Street, otherwise known as Embassy Row, was busy with the usual twelve o'clock rush hour traffic. The sun shone brightly through the pollution. The temperature had to be around forty-five-degrees. Under similar circumstances he would've slipped his overcoat on. But not now. The coat would make him far too warm, and he'd sweat all the more. Besides, it might have aroused suspicion had he gone for his coat when many of his fellow embassy workers had already left for lunch at the nearby K Street restaurants without theirs.

As he walked, the events of the past few years whirled through his head. He was actually turning on his own country, Mother Russia, the Union of Soviet

Socialist Republics. Alexander Miskin first arrived in America as a Russian embassy clerk. He quickly found that the United States was a country to be reckoned with. Its industrial output and ingenuity in the heat of wartime proved this to Miskin time and time again. But more importantly, this country also contained a people of generosity and moral standards. Sure, every American was out to make a buck. But there was none of that stab-in-the-back tension, where you didn't know if your next-door neighbor was an NKVD agent or not.

Miskin kept his feelings for America hidden when he returned to Russia in the fall of 1945 to work as a cipher clerk at Moscow Center, the Communist intelligence headquarters. He didn't even tell his wife how he felt. It was a good thing they didn't have any children. Children were squealers.

Then came another Washington embassy posting in 1957. He would be a communications aid to the Russian Air Force attaché, a man who had been sent to this position from his lofty post as chief of the Soviet Air Force, following a sex scandal with the daughter of a Politburo official.

Now, at the age of forty-seven, Miskin felt the physical and mental strain of Communism. In the past, a number of comrades couldn't take the pressure anymore, always being watched, and no matter what they did for their superiors it would never be good enough. Losing face, it was called. Some just cracked up.

When this occurred, it was the end of the line for the poor souls. Miskin was determined that it wouldn't happen to him.

Miskin walked several hundred feet and stopped suddenly in the midst of a crowd of window-shoppers. Then he quickly stepped into the narrow walkway between two stores. He waited, carefully eyeing each pedestrian passing by. Convinced that no one from the embassy had followed him, he darted out from his hiding place and set out once again in the same direction as before. After five minutes Miskin stopped at a red traffic light. As he waited impatiently for the light to change, he spotted his contact's car in the alleyway to his right. The dark-green 1958 Cadillac had tinted windows and the license plate W-164. The light changed and the car moved up the alley, out of sight. Miskin followed it. Before he got alongside the car, the back passenger door swung open. Miskin climbed inside and closed out the world with a pull on the door handle.

Behind the wheel was a young man in his twenties, wearing a light brown suit. He glanced over at Miskin once, then straight ahead towards the dead end of the alley. In the back seat, across from Miskin, sat the CIA agent who Miskin knew only as Harwell. He too was well dressed. Expensive suit and tie.

"Were you followed?" Harwell asked, his voice terse.

“No.”

“Good. What did you find out since our last meeting?”

Miskin cleared his throat and spoke in articulate English. “My country is going full-steam in building the long-range MiG Skyjacker fighter. Hundreds of them. And, yes, it can hit Mach 2. Perhaps more.”

“How do you know?”

“I have the papers.” The Russian took the crumpled telex messages from beneath his white shirt. “I could only snatch them and run. They’re in code of course, but I know what they are. I have copies of photos, too.”

“Let’s have them.”

Miskin handed the evidence over without the least bit of guilt.

Harwell flipped through the sheets. “These photos, are they for real?”

“Yes, they are. Moscow has been putting the pressure on to build at least three hundred by next summer.”

“Three hundred!”

“That’s correct.”

“Do you think they can do it?”

“Yes, I do. Thousands are working on the project. But they’re encountering some problems. It’s such a sophisticated aircraft. They need to take their time on the new airborne radar and fire control system. Both are second to none.”

“Where’s it being built?” the agent asked.

“Inside eastern Siberia, approximately five hundred miles west of Sapporo, Japan.”

“Really.”

“Look,” Miskin pleaded. “Feeding you with such information is very risky. I’ve been gone too long already. If anything else comes along, I’ll call you.”

The American nodded. “Right. Are these the only copies?”

“No. They’re a duplicate set that I made and had stuffed away.”

“Then they’re mine?”

“Yes. Do what you wish with the information. Show it to your president if you like. I must go. I’m supposed to be out for lunch. After an hour someone will come looking for me. Good-bye.”

The agent looked ahead, through the windshield, then turned to the Russian. “Thanks for everything.”

Miskin left. It was drizzling now. He walked further up the alley, another hundred feet or so, to the back of the Lily, a deli that served sandwiches, fresh vegetables, and homemade pies for the bargain hunter. The waitresses knew him there, and he'd get fast service. He'd grab a quick corned beef on rye and still be back at the embassy on time. Before he stepped through the door, he took one last glance at the Cadillac in the alley and wondered what Harwell was going to do. Would he go to the president? He damn well better.

That's the end of the sampler. We hope you enjoyed it. If you would like to find out what happens next, you can buy the complete Mushroom eBook edition from the usual online bookshops or through www.mushroom-ebooks.com.

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About the author

Historical fiction author Daniel Wyatt is Canadian, born and raised on the prairies of Saskatchewan. He now resides with his wife and two children in Burlington, Ontario, thirty miles outside Toronto.

His first published work was a set of first-person stories from World War II allied air force veterans called *Two Wings and a Prayer* by Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ontario, Canada in 1984. This was followed up in 1986 by *Maximum Effort* with the same publisher. In 1990, Wyatt made the switch to historical fiction with *The Last Flight of the Arrow*, a techno-thriller set during the Cold War years of the late 1950's. Originally published by Random House of Canada, it sold 20,000 copies in paperback form. The *Mary Jane Mission* came out two years later, also by Random House. "The Falcon File" series, consisting of *The Fuerhermaster*, *The Filberg Consortium* and *Foo Fighters* was published as an ebook original by Mushroom eBooks, and in paperback as *The Falcon File* by Bladud Books in 2007. Wyatt's other published works include aviation magazine articles in Canada and the United States.

A big baseball fan, Wyatt enjoys collecting Detroit Tigers memorabilia.

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