

LOOPS AND LANDINGS

Inspired by John Kingsford-Smith

Don Delaney's Lancasters - Part 7.

Having delivered the Duke of Gloucester, and his entourage, safely home to England, on January 23, 1947, nothing more could be asked of that historic aeroplane; *Endeavour*. And nothing much more was asked of her. Two years earlier, on Friday, March 16, 1945, The Melbourne *Argus* reported: "The Endeavour, giant York plane which will be used by the Duke of Gloucester while in Australia, arrived at Laverton aerodrome yesterday morning. Throughout the day it remained there in dignified grandeur, its huge silvery outline gleaming in the bright sunshine, seeming much larger than a Liberator and other bombers nearby. The Royal coat of arms on each side of its nose gave the aircraft added distinction." (Note the correction to October's L&L where the coat of arms was described as Australian). By the time it was announced that the Duke would be leaving to return home, there were reports that he had given *Endeavour* to the people of Australia. This seemed to reflect the expectation of many Australians, who had been touched by *Endeavour*, that she would be preserved. However, after returning to England she was handed back to the Air Ministry, and allocated to No 24 Sqn RAF on January 6, 1948. In March, 1952, she was withdrawn from service, and stored at RAF 12 MU, at Kirkbride, Cumbria. On July 9, 1954, she was sold to newly formed Aviation Jersey Limited, a company set up to provide technical services, and spare parts to small local, and overseas based, airlines. Having reached the end of her useful life, *Endeavour* was broken up for scrap. This fate is in contrast to that of the first official Prime Ministerial aircraft. The C-47 Dakota, A65-114, was delivered to the RAAF in June, 1945. She was used by Ben Chifley, Robert Menzies and Governor-General Sir William Slim, and is now preserved at the South Australian Aviation Museum. The American contemporary of *Endeavour* was the first official Presidential aircraft, a C-54 Skymaster, dubbed the *Sacred Cow*. She was delivered to the USAAF in June, 1944, for the personal use of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. *Sacred Cow* is now preserved at the USAF Museum in Dayton, Ohio. All later series of Presidential aircraft, known as *Air Force One*, have gone to museums on retirement. The Americans have a special affection for their Presidential aircraft: "Famous airplanes - The Wright Flyers, the *Spirit of St Louis*, and *Enola Gay* - have long been part of the American story. But no plane has ever been remembered in the way we have come to regard *Air Force One*. Like the Washington Monument, and other symbols of America that we have come to know so well, it evokes our history."

The last thing the Duke of Gloucester did, after being greeted by the official welcoming party at Heathrow on January 23, 1947, was to thank the crew, standing stiffly to attention, in the bitter cold, beneath the wing of *Endeavour*. During the following days, the crew were the guests of the Duke at many functions in London. Later, after the Duchess of Gloucester returned on March 20, Don Delaney, Stan Nichol and Roy French spent three days as the guests of the Gloucesters at their country home, Barnwell Manor. Don Delaney was posted to RAAF Overseas Headquarters, and when his time enjoying Royal hospitality was over he was put back to work. He was given the title of Staff Casualty Officer with the job of investigating the files of missing RAAF personnel. He worked in co-operation with the RAF Missing Research and Enquiry Service with units based all over Europe. The MRES was able to account for two thirds of the missing personnel, and those found were reinterred in Commonwealth War Grave Commission cemeteries. The circumstances of the death of one Australian airman was fixed in Don Delaney's memory. From May 22-29 he attended a Military Court at HQ 5 Division in Brunswick, Germany. The court heard charges of murder against four German nationals, involving the deaths of two members of the crew of a No 57 Sqn RAF Lancaster I, PD264, shot down over Edhausen, Germany, on December 6, 1944. Three of the crew bailed out and landed safely, but W Op/Air Gnr: Flt Sgt Neil McGladrigan RAAF, and Flt Eng: Sgt John Scott RAF, were later murdered. (I might have known my namesake if my ancestors had remained in Scotland). Three of the four Germans charged were found guilty. The fourth accused, Otto Koch, a conscripted member of the Gendarmerie, was actually defended by Don Delaney because he had refused to be involved with the shooting of Neil McGladrigan. Otto Koch became involved because he later helped bury the body.

In preparation for his return to Australia, Don Delaney was next sent up to the head office of Rolls-Royce at Nightingale Road, Derby, to attend the latest course given by the company on jet engines. The Avon was the first axial flow jet engine designed by Rolls Royce, and the first engine run of the Avon had been conducted on March 25, 1947. Don's arrival could not have been better timed, as Rolls-Royce transitioned to the manufacture of jet engines. He found himself at the beginning of the jet powered future of aviation. Paradoxically, his next posting was to A. V. Roe & Co Ltd at Woodford to attend a course on the Avro York, and the Avro Tudor; aircraft that were, even then, not assessed as likely to be part of aviation's future. Nonetheless, Don was eager to return to Woodford to meet again the people who had been so welcoming to him during his time there in April and May, 1943. In particular he remembered the kindness of Roy Dobson, Roy Chadwick, Sandy Jack, Bill Thorn and Jim Orrell. When Don arrived at Avro in 1947, the company was producing two versions of their new airliner; the Tudor I for BOAC's transatlantic service, and the Tudor II for operation on the post-war British Commonwealth routes operated by BOAC, Qantas and South African Airways. By the time Don returned to Woodford, BOAC had already rejected the Tudor I, and Qantas had rejected the Tudor II.

While Don Delaney was stationed at Woodford, Avro was yet to complete the certification flying of the Tudor II. The prototype, G-AGSU, was in the company's experimental workshop undergoing modification to its flight control system, and the fitting of a new enlarged fin and rudder. All was being made ready for G-AGSU's return to the air on the morning of August 23, 1947. The importance of this test flight was evidenced by the inclusion of the Managing Director, Sir Roy Dobson, and the Chief Designer, Roy Chadwick, as members of the crew. The pilot was Don Delaney's friend Bill Thorn. In recognition of the significance of the flight a small crowd had gathered at Woodford aerodrome to wish the crew every success. It was an event that Don Delaney would not have missed, and he was there to shake hands with the crew before take off. Sir Roy Dobson was called off G-AGSU, just before the engines were started, to answer an urgent telephone call, and was not able to return to the aircraft before it taxied out to the end of the runway. Don Delaney watched in awe as the giant airliner gathered speed down the runway and took to the air; then with horror as G-AGSU rose to about 60-80 ft, banked to starboard, stalled, and crashed into a wooded area off the end of the runway. Four of the six people on board died in the accident, including Roy Chadwick, and the pilot Jim Thorn. New aileron control cables were fitted to G-AGSU during the night shift preceding the flight. Under some pressure to complete the work before the test flight, the airframe fitter responsible had connected the new cables in reverse.

As the winter of 1947 approached, Don Delaney's time in England was coming to an end. The airforce booked him a passage on the Orient Line's *S. S. Orion*, sailing for Australia in October. Having already circumnavigated the world by air, he looked forward to completing his circumnavigation by sea. He had sailed from Sydney on June 13, 1941, onboard *HMT Awatea*, under the command of Captain Davey, the father of Jack Davey, Australia's star of radio at the time. Don arrived at Vancouver in early July, and then enjoyed a scenic train journey across Canada to the Halifax Embarkation Depot in Nova Scotia on the Atlantic coast. There Don boarded a troop ship that had just arrived from the Middle East carrying Italian prisoners of war, who had been consigned to the bottom hold of the vessel. Because all the ship's cabins were full when Don, with three hundred fellow Australian ground crew airmen, boarded the ship they were accommodated in the same bottom hold recently vacated by the POWs. The problem was that there hadn't been time to clean the hold, and to make matters worse, on the loading deck above, there were bags of rotten potatoes which had liquified, dripping a foul black substance onto the airmen below. The Australians walked off the ship in protest. The RAAF liaison officer in Canada, Air Vice Marshal S. J. Goble CBE, DSO, DSC, threatened to return the men to Australia as deserters. Sanity prevailed, and the men were dispatched on an armed merchant cruiser, *HMS Ausonia*, which escorted the convoy as far as Iceland. From there, Don Delaney completed his journey to Liverpool, England, onboard *HTM Leopoldville*. While the passage onboard *HMS Ausonia* had put Don at added risk, it is noted that *HMT Awatea* and *HTM Leopoldville* were both sunk by enemy action later in the war. The last leg of Don Delaney's voyage around the world by sea was on the *S. S. Orion*, sailing in peace, taking him home to his wife and family for Christmas, 1947...**John Scott.**