

LOST: UNSOLVED MYSTERIES OF CANADIAN AVIATION. By SHIRLEE SMITH MATHESON. Calgary, Alberta: Frontenac House Ltd., 2015. ISBN 978-1-927823-26-2. Rev. ed., b&w illus., notes and sources, aircraft and general indexes. Softbound. Cdn\$21.95.

A piloted aircraft's failure to arrive at its destination begins to accumulate the raw material for compelling and sometimes competing narratives the moment it is publicized. This collection of chronicles illustrates aviation's share of "unsolved mystery" lore and Canada's claim to a significant proportion of the genre, and it reminds us that eventual discovery of remains of an aircraft accident may raise new mysteries. Why did it wander off course? What became of its crew? Were search and rescue operations properly designed? Was any evidence removed from the scene of the crash before it was officially visited?

Among Matheson's accounts of purely Canadian incidents, the eighth of her nine chapters deals with Bashin' Bill Barilko. He disappeared with his pilot in August 1951, while returning from a James Bay fishing trip, just months after scoring the NHL Toronto Maple Leafs' winning goal in overtime of the deciding game of the Stanley Cup Play-offs in April (p. 164 – 165). Barilko's national fame recalls the death of U.S. comedian Will Rogers in a plane crash near Barrow, Alaska, in 1935. Rogers' death was confirmed by a ground observer the day it happened, but Barilko's fate remained unknown for 11 years after his disappearance. In May 1962, the remains of Barilko and his pilot were discovered in their Fairchild 24W, where it had hit a tree and burned. Since that time, rumours and intrigues, fueled by strange—even spooky—circumstances preceding and following this mishap, have proliferated.

Another mystery from 1951 is Johnny Bourassa's disappearance 18 May on a flight from Bathurst Inlet to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (NWT). Bourassa, the son of a riverboat pilot, grew up in Peace River, Alberta. He entered the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and became a multi-decorated WWII transport pilot in the European theatre. Johnny had departed Yellowknife carrying botanists to Bathurst Inlet in a Noorduyn Norseman. The botanists were to have flown farther north with another Yellowknife Air Service pilot in a smaller Bellanca Skyrocket 8 airplane. The Bellanca's battery had failed, so the two pilots exchanged aircraft and passengers. Flying solo, Johnny was to return the ailing Bellanca to Yellowknife, but he never arrived. Air searches, which involved the RCAF and 13 aircraft, lasted a month and concentrated on the most direct air route between Yellowknife and Bathurst. Bourassa's fellow bush pilots believed that widespread low clouds on 18 May might have challenged Johnny's visual familiarity with NWT geography. The Bellanca's compass was reportedly unreliable, and Johnny had left his navigation maps and some survival gear aboard the Norseman. Suspecting a navigational error, they urged the Air Force to search a 90° pie-shaped sector originating at Bathurst Inlet and centred on Yellowknife, extending south to a radius approximating the range of the fully fueled Bellanca.

In August, 118 days after Bourassa was declared overdue in Yellowknife, a U.S. Air Force B-17 searching for another missing aircraft reported Johnny's slightly damaged Bellanca on the rocky shore of Wholdaia Lake, 325 miles SE of Yellowknife (p. 113 – 114). Johnny had left a note in the Bellanca's cockpit five days after his forced wheel-landing on decaying spring lake ice. The note acknowledged and corrected his navigational error, advising searchers that Johnny intended to walk northwestward to Fort Reliance on the eastern shore of Great Slave Lake, a distance of 240 miles (which Bourassa estimated would take him 30 days). From the beached Bellanca, air and ground searchers picked up traces of Johnny's overland progress, but it faded some 50 miles in the correct direction for Fort Reliance. Fellow pilots believed that their recommended (but more costly) sector search could have found the Bellanca and rescued Johnny before he ran out of food.

Part of Chapter 7, "British Columbia's Missing in Action Files" (p. 176 – 180), deals with the international mystery of a U.S. Air Force B-36 bomber on a training flight from Eielson AFB in Alaska to southern California in 1950. After three of its six engines malfunctioned, the bomber lost altitude. As their airplane descended through an altitude of 3000 feet, at least 16 of 17 crewmen bailed out, 12 of whom were rescued from heavily forested Princess Royal Island, British Columbia, within a day. Still aloft, their crippled aircraft, supposedly flying on autopilot and headed southwest or seaward, was discovered nearly four years later to have turned inland, gained altitude and crashed at the 6000 ft level on Kispiox Mountain in British Columbia. Because this was the first loss of an aircraft known to be carrying some—perhaps not all—components of a nuclear bomb, suspicions were still legion on the 50th anniversary of its mishap. Matheson's narrative airs these suspicions, which were compounded by international tensions of the Cold War. For intercalibration of the historical accuracy of this account, it is instructive to compare it with Liefer's (2011:169 – 189) more detailed and extensively illustrated treatment of the same incident and its aftermath. The two authors do not contradict one another: Liefer addresses all the specific suspicions and mysteries raised here. Surprisingly, neither author cites the work of the other.

Matheson (p. 33 – 59) and Liefer (2011:11 – 36) also independently chronicle the pre-WWII Arctic disappearance of renowned Soviet aviator Sigismund Levanevsky and his five-man crew in their four-engine, long-range experimental DB-A aircraft, N-209. Soviet and U.S. monitors tracked radio transmissions from their transpolar flight from Moscow at least to 200 miles beyond the Pole toward Alaska. On 13 August 1937, the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., announced that N-209 was overdue in Fairbanks, Alaska, and engaged Vilhjalmur Stefansson, president of the Explorers' Club in New York City, to coordinate U.S. and Canadian search and rescue from North American airfields. Navigator and observer Sir Hubert Wilkins and pilots made the most extensive series of search flights coordinated by Stefansson, from mid-August 1937

until mid-March 1938. Soviet teams then continued searching the Eurasian side of the Pole, primarily from Rudolf Island, until the first anniversary of N-209's disappearance.

Stefansson (1938) summarized the information and experience (especially the benefits of sharing polar meteorological data and forecasts) that collaborative Soviet and North American search efforts of 1937–38 had generated. In each of eight decades since then, fresh clues, new search technologies, anniversaries, or perceived obligations to history have episodically inspired new analyses and searches for evidence of Levanevsky's fate. From 1987 to 2012, for example, this reviewer participated in several such episodes of field and archival research, collaborating with colleagues in Alaska, Canada, and the former Soviet Union. Conspiracy theorist Robert Morrison (1987) marked the 50th anniversary of Levanevsky's disappearance by self-publishing arguments that three Soviet transpolar flights in 1937 had been elaborate hoaxes staged by the Kremlin.

Matheson's accounts lend weight to hopes for more extensive studies: Arctic scholars would be well served by analyses of various search and rescue strategies and tactics, possibly emphasizing incidents north of 60°, and perhaps limited to disappearances of civilians in the 20th century. Such analyses ought to explore cost-benefit questions. Just as "collateral" damages are regretted during the conduct of war, "collateral" benefits accruing to society from search and rescue efforts should be celebrated. Even when a rescue fails, or searches fail to obtain fully conclusive results, collateral benefits honour the objects of search: Franklin's Third Expedition, crew members lost on the *Jeannette* Expedition, balloonist Andrée and his crew, victims of Nobile's *Italia* flight, Levanevsky and his crew, Barilko and his pilot, and Bourassa, among others.

Besides appealing to aviation and "unsolved mystery" enthusiasts, this book should delight historians seeking material for comparative international studies. Readers wondering how increasing use of unmanned aircraft will affect the future of this genre of narratives will also want a copy in their library.

REFERENCES

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