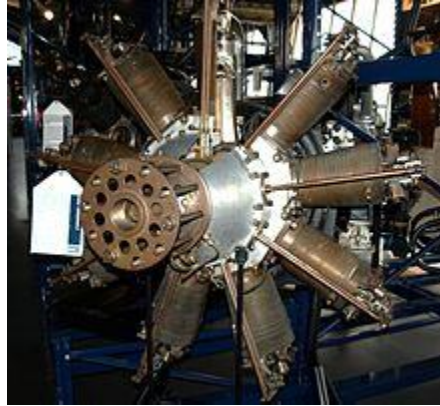


Block

by

Vixxy Fox



*The **ABC Dragonfly** (All British (Engine) Company) was a British radial engine developed towards the end of the First World War. It was expected to deliver excellent performance for the time and was ordered in very large numbers. It proved, however, to be extremely unreliable and was abandoned when its faults were unable to be corrected. Already 30 kg over its designed weight as built, Dragonfly was subject to severe overheating. It was referred to as the worst cooled aero engine ever made. The copper-plated cooling fins proved useless; the cylinder heads tended to glow a dull red at operational speeds, and in extreme cases caused heat damage and even charring to the propeller.*

Of 11,500 ordered, 1,147 engines were built, but only nine or ten actually flew.

“Flew is hardly the word I would have used,” Harding grouched. He was dressed in his mechanic’s garb; the same as he’d been wearing when he met his demise. He always read the plaque prior to his nightly stroll.

“I vas nefer much for flying,” Gunther muttered. “I vas...”

“A staunch believer in walking,” Harding finished for him. “You tell me that at almost every turn of the walk we walk, old friend.”

What was present of Gunther was dressed in the uniform of a WWI German Sergeant. He was a partial. That is to say, not all of him was present, because whatever it was he was attached to in the museum was also a partial. Since he was not totally present, his recollections were also limited. Mostly his usual statement was to the fact that he actually liked walking.

“This particular engine, and yes I know I have told you this before, was the one that killed me. It caught fire and I tried to throw a bucket of sand on it. In my haste I forgot there was a propeller attached to it.”

“One should not forget those things, Monsieur,” Francois called from above them. He was sitting in his aircraft’s cockpit again. “The propeller, above all, is a true killer.”

“Says the fellow who forgot to keep an eye open for the Bosche,” Harding called back in a good natured sort of way.

Gunther made a disapproving sound and the mechanic placed a hand on the one shoulder that was present. “No offense meant old boy. We all called each other names back then, didn’t we? I was called a ‘grease ball’ a ‘wrench’ and a ‘mech’ but never properly, ‘Air Service Mechanic’.”

“I liked to walk,” Gunther voiced.

“I know they called you Sergeant. That’s what your title was. If I am not mistaken, and I think I am not, you were a *Feldwebel*.”

“I think that I am not, therefore, I am not,” shouted a voice that Harding recognized as General Bolings. The general had wandered too close to the front lines and, refusing to remove his rank fittings, got potted by a sniper with sharp eyesight. His sword and pistol were present in a display case somewhere.

“So you found your sense of humor did you General?” the ASM called out. “Why not join us for a stroll? You can do it if you try. There is no one here living, so what difference will it make?”

“It’s against the bloody regulations!” Bolings countered.

“And who is to care, thees regulations you talk about, eh?” Francois added in argument. “I go where I want to go any time of the day or night. So long as I can see l’avion hanging aloft, I am fine.”

He floated gently down to the floor and stood next to the soldier and mechanic.

“I like to walk,” Gunther said.

“And I too am pleased we can have this bit of camaraderie, mon ami. I just wish we could move on, oui?”

There was the sound of a heavy object being pushed over the tile floor, and a display case juttred out onto the main walkway. At the other end was a British General dressed in early war garb, his ranking accoutrement shining brightly upon his collars. “You do know how heavy this case is?” he asked them. “Bloody hell I’m actually winded!”

They all laughed at his joke; the same joke he told every time he moved the case. It was one of the mysteries of the museum no one could ever figure out since he never once put the case back when he was done with his walk.

“So what shall we talk about this quiet evening?” Harding asked, beginning the ritual.

“I like to walk,” Gunther muttered.

The General gasped and said, “That’s a brilliant idea Sergeant. We should all attempt to escape this place and perhaps move on to our everlasting rest that we talked so much about when we were alive.”

“There’s no need to be sarcastic Reginald,” Harding scolded.” We all would like to escape, but until the light shines and we hear the clarion call, I am afraid we are stuck fast.”

“I have an idea, mon ami’s. Eet ees a sudden brain flash; something we have never thought about before.”

General Bolings harrumphed, and then said, “It’s been a hundred years now since we all expired, so to speak, and that’s one hundred years where not a day goes by that I have not thought and thought and thought about how to move on. I pray God you are not pulling my leg, so to speak, Francois.”

“No, no, no, no, I would not do that. Thees brain flash is simple. I go where ever my aircraft goes. Three years ago it was loaned to another museum and there I was. Then they sent it back here, and here I am again.”

“I like to walk.”

“Thank you Gunther,” the pilot acknowledged, “I am glad you are interested and so I shall go on. An airplane flies, does it not?”

There was a chorus of voices that all agreed. Harding was the first to realize there were more ghosts listening in than he’d ever expected ‘lived’ in the museum.

“Since I am stuck to it, if it were to fly out of the hangar doors here, I could set my course for the rising sun and perhaps find my way to heaven.”

“I vas nefer much for flying,” Gunther muttered.

“That might be true,” Francois told his friend, “But if it would get you out, I would gladly take you with me.”

“Explain,” the General instructed.

“But of course. An airplane is designed to carry things. If your sword and pistol were in the cockpit with me, Reginald, you would come as well. A ghost weighs nothing, and most of what we are attached to equally weighs little.”

“Speak for yourself,” Harding told him, “I’m attached to an engine block weighing God knows how much, so how is it you would transport such a thing?”

“I would use it to power my avion.”

For a moment they all stopped walking and looked upward at the Frenchman’s aircraft. It was firmly tied to the ceiling and did not appear to be going anywhere to soon. To all of their credits, they did not laugh. As disappointed as they actually were, neither did they cry. Harding opened his mouth to speak kind words to the pilot but was interrupted by the sound of something bouncing. It started in the far reaches of the museum and slowly came towards them. A few minutes later, a pair of buttocks sat upon the floor in front of them.

“Hello Stinky Butt, how are you doing this evening?” the General asked jovially.

“I like to walk,” Gunther said pointedly.

“Yes, yes,” Reginald admitted with a sigh, “I do apologize Private O’Donnel. The use of such a nick name was quite uncalled for.”

The buttocks farted an acceptance to the apology and then squeaked out a smaller one that raised everyone’s eyebrows. It wasn’t the Private’s fault. He was killed by an exploding artillery shell that contained mustard gas.

“And what makes you so sure it will work?” Harding asked.

There was an acrid stench then that might have curled the hair in the nose of a warm body, but to everyone present it spoke the impossible word of ‘can’t’ and changed it to ‘can’. In that moment, a plan was born and for the first time in one hundred years, the lost souls of the museum felt hope.

The next day, the staff of the museum had several complaints of a foul stench emanating from somewhere out in the museum proper. This continued for better than a week before the curators were able to isolate the smell to the Ponnier L.1 hanging from the ceiling. Fearing there was something dead laying within the airplanes framework, the restoration crew was quickly called out and the aircraft lowered. Once down it was rolled to a place in front of the old hangar doors and the doors opened so things could be aired out. Once there the kite looking craft had been gone over with a fine toothed comb and nothing found. They were going to roll it back again for a lift back to its place when a voice spoke into the head technician’s ear. “I v’as nefer much for flying.” He turned to it, but there was no one there. Instead, he found himself looking at a puddle of oil under the L. 1’s engine.

‘Odd,’ he remarked, ‘I could swear we left the engine block empty.’

It was quickly decided there was no time like the present to make things right. Bringing in their equipment, the cowl and propeller were removed. In short order the engine was off and placed upon a stand. By then, the head curator came out and informed the crew it was time to close for the night, and that was that.

No sooner than the lights were out and there came an oddity of noises from all over the museum. There came moans and groans, bumps and the movement of old stones. Within moments the little aircraft was surrounded by shadowy figures and soft glowing orbs, all of them ecstatic that the plan worked, and each had played a role in some small way. Private O’Donnel, of course, played the largest part in causing noses to plug and eyes to water. The air conditioning, too, had stopped working at a crucial moment when the head curator was entertaining in her office. On her desk the telephone directory was already opened to the appropriate number of the restoration crew chief, while on the aircraft itself the engine was deliberately made to leak.

“Air Service Mechanic Harding,” Francois called out.

“Here, sir,” he responded from the far side of the aircraft.

“Can you make your engine run?”

“With some elbow grease and a little bit of a miracle, I suppose I can; but how is it to be hung?”

Without word... without all the moans and groans that are so thought to accompany such apparitions, the entire museum populace moved as a group to the statically displayed Dragonfly. The securing bolts and their nuts, not having been tampered with in years and years, noiselessly fell from the stand and the released engine floated over to the aircraft where it took the place of the original.

Tools then floated from within the nooks and crannies of the museum. From the time they left where they’d been on display to the time they arrived at the aircraft, all rust and other manner of dirt and corrosion were gone. In short order Harding was tightening the final bolt on the propeller hub, and with a tug, pulled the engine through to the sound and feel as if it had just been overhauled.

“I believe we are ready to run,” the mechanic told the pilot.

“There is but one problem left then, mon ami; zee gas tank is so dry that if it was the read end of a horse, it would fart dust.”

Private O’Donnel, whose buttocks were perched upon the front combing of the cockpit let out a very loud report and everyone laughed.

“Did someone say gasoline?” General Bolings called out to them. He appeared from within the museum carrying two five gallon jerry cans. “I pinched these from the gardener’s shed,” he told them, and an immediate cheer resounded from all the spirits that had gathered to witness the impossible. Walking to the L. 1, the army officer passed the cans up to François one at a time. With equal care, the pilot poured the fuel into the gas tank and then secured the cap.

“I believe we are ready,” the ghost declared. “All of you must now find that thing you are attached to and bring it here for transport.”

“I shall help Private O’Donnel,” General Bolings declared.

“And I shall help Sergeant Gunther,” Harding agreed.

All in all, there were no less than 50 spirits ready to ride the French pilot’s aircraft. When the articles they were attached to were all placed aboard, François yelled out, “We are ready! Air Service Mechanic Harding, will you please pull the prop through. When you think the engine is ready, you will tell me and I will switch the magneto on. One last pull on the prop then and we shall be off, eh?”

Harding, acting in his capacity of mechanic, went to the front of the aircraft, and asking if the magneto switch was off, pulled the engine through three full rotations. General Bolings knelt next to the wheels and readied to pull out the chocks.

“CONTACT!” François yelled out after switching the magneto to ‘on’.

The ASM, raising one leg in the air and sharply pulled the prop through, never realizing he was able to do so when he hadn’t been able to touch anything for the last hundred years. The engine started with a roar and the General quickly pulled away the wooden chocks.

“COME NOW AND GET IN!” François yelled at the pair. “WE ARE LEAVING TO PARADICE!”

Bolings waved a hand. “YOU GO NOW FRANCOIS, I WILL STAY TO CLOSE THE DOORS AND CLEAN UP OUR MESS!”

The aircraft, having no brakes, was already beginning to roll. “HARDING!” the pilot yelled as he began pulling away from the pair. “YOU MUST COME!”

“I WILL STAY WITH THE GENERAL! IT’S NOT FAIR THAT HE WILL BE ALONE!”

The pilot waved and turned back to the task at hand, which was getting his avion airborne. “Into the night sky and fly until the morning sun comes up,” he told his steed. “It has been too long since we have done this, old friend. Let us now find out if there is any merit to my crazy notion, eh?”

The General and the Air Service Mechanic stood, watching the glow of the engine's exhaust disappear into the darkness of the night.

"There was no need for you to stay," Bolings told his friend.

"Perhaps there was not, but somehow I could not see leaving a comrade behind. I saw you did not put your sword and pistol aboard."

"It is a small craft. There was not further room. If I had added the weight Francois might have crashed trying to take off. I put them back in their case. And that, of course, brings me to you. There was no need for you to stay ASM."

Harding smiled, "We've walked many a mile together, sir. I think I would miss our walks."

The General placed a hand upon his friend's shoulder and smiled too. "Enjoy paradise Air Service Mechanic Harding. I am honored to be considered your friend. Until we meet again, eh?"

"Sir?"

"Your engine is on Francois' aircraft. I'm afraid you have no choice but to go with it."

The following morning, the restoration crew found the Ponnier L.1 right where they'd left it. Oddly, the engine they'd removed was still sitting in its cradle, while there was a totally different engine mounted on the airframe. The head technician, reaching a hand out to this engine, found it to still be warm.

In the stillness of the museum, the Head Curator's voice was heard to say, "Oh my... General Boling's display case has been moved again. You there, by the airplane, would you be so kind as to move it back into place?"