

NOTES ARE TO BE INDICATED AS BLACK HOLES.

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The Arrow: What might have been

I agree with much of what you said in your editorial of Jan. 18 (The Legacy Of The Avro Arrow). It was not an unreasonable decision, in the light of the then prevailing circumstances, for the Diefenbaker government to cancel the Arrow program. The fact that it was a cost-plus contract (encouraging profligacy on the part of the company), and the character and personality of Crawford Gordon were no doubt contributing factors. The act of wanton destruction with which the termination was accomplished was however unconscionable and quite beyond understanding. I was peripherally involved in the program, and some technical reports of mine on the wing aerodynamics went up in smoke along with the rest.

Notwithstanding the reasonableness of the cancellation, Canadians should be aware of what was lost, of what might have been.

You point out that the Arrow was a weapon, and question whether Canada should be producing warplanes at all. It would be marvellous if the world were at peace, if no weapons were needed by anyone. Alas, that is not the case. Our own air force uses fighter planes, and so do those of our allies. What weight shall we give to the moral argument that says we should not produce that which we, and our allies, use? Not much.

After the Arrow was cancelled, Canada

spent a lot of money on the utterly useless U.S. Bomarc missiles, and subsequently further large sums on U.S. fighter airplanes for the RCAF. Neither of these costs would have been incurred, of course, if the Arrow had gone ahead. If those funds were added to the direct cost of cancelling the Arrow contracts, and to the large indirect costs caused by the loss of thousands of jobs, the economics of the cancellation would look quite different. Moreover, history has taught us that the notion that fighter airplanes were made obsolete by missiles proved to be just plain wrong, even though it was not unreasonable to believe in 1959.

The Arrow was a state-of-the-art airplane, arguably better than any other fighter plane in the world, in 1957. Had the development continued, with all the evolution that has occurred in the past 40 years in aerodynamics, in structures and materials, in computers, and in control systems, what a superb airplane its successors might be today! Yes, indeed, sales to our allies would have been needed, and, with co-operative joint programs, might well have been realized.

It should also be remembered that, prior to the Arrow, Avro Canada designed and built a jet transport airplane (the C102), the first in North America, and almost simultaneous with the British Comet, which was the first in the world. This airplane, too, was successfully

test flown, and with normal development would undoubtedly have been a serious contender for commercial airline use — decades before the more recent successes of Canadair/Bombardier in this field. Unfortunately, the Avro Jetliner project could not be pursued by the then young company because of the need to concentrate on production of the Avro-designed CF-100 fighter for the RCAF. Could not a successful producer of Arrows and its successors not also have become a leading player in the commercial aviation sector?

In short — what might have been is a great Canadian airplane company, a company to compete with Boeing and Douglas, designing and building state-of-the-art military and civil airplanes. No doubt this company would have been involved with others in joint international ventures as is now the trend in this industry. It would have employed thousands of skilled Canadian workers; it would have stimulated much research and development in Canadian university and government laboratories, as well as in peripheral Canadian industries.

An unrealistic Canadian pipe dream, or an opportunity lost? We'll never know now, will we?

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