

As Paul sees it...

BY PAUL JACKSON

I was prepared to be glued to the TV the night the CBC paraded out the first episode of its mini-series *The Arrow*.

After all, as a honorary commander in the Calgary-based Honorable Guard to the Museum of the Regiments, a honorary life member in the Royal Canadian Legion, and an honorary life member in the Ex-Air Gunners Association of Canada, I consider myself a great patriot.

And wasn't the Avro Arrow CF-105 the stuff of patriotism?

It surely was.

And even if one of my greatest friends, John Diefenbaker - whose photographs and letters line the walls of my den - killed the Avro Arrow I still wanted to see the show and get the inside story on the greatest fighter plane ever designed and built.

You see, I believed in the myth of the Avro Arrow, too. Finally, the CBC was doing something of relevance.

Only it wasn't.

What we got was just another round of third-rate half-fact, and half-fiction.

Incredibly, the CBC even went so far as to writing in a part for an utterly fictitious woman jet pilot!

A woman jet fighter pilot - blonde bombshell, too - in 1959?

Why this absurdity?

Because the CBC had to be politically correct.

So its mini-series wasn't correct at all.

There was even a spot in which President Dwight Eisenhower and Diefenbaker are sitting in a rowing boat in the middle of a lake fishing together. Their supposed conversation - and how could anyone ever know what happened out in the middle of a lake - had Eisenhower telling Dief the Arrow had to go. U.S. blackmail, no less.

The evil U.S. military-industrial complex.

To me, the CBC mini-series was just a load of junk, from start to finish.

I say that as someone who until the past month truly and intensely believed in the myth of the Arrow.

Not any more. I believe in the truth. The truth is that Diefenbaker didn't kill the Arrow because he was blackmailed by the U.S. or because it had originally been a Liberal government project. He killed it because of vast cost over-runs,

major design weaknesses, and the fact that no one other than the Royal Canadian Air Force wanted to buy it. He also listened to the best military experts in the world, who told him about the rise of Soviet rocketry, and explained why, as magnificent as the Arrow was, it was also obsolete.

Diefenbaker, the old soldier that he was, was tormented by his decision, and made it only reluctantly. He made it even though he was bullied by Avro's CEO, Crawford Gordon, a raving alcoholic and raving womanizer, played in the movie by Dan Ackroyd, who threatened all kinds of dire consequences if the project didn't continue.

Dief also killed the project even though many Progressive Conservative MPs begged him to keep it going. He actually went against the wishes of much of his own caucus, because he knew it was the right thing to do. Ontario Premier Leslie Frost - that great old man of conservatism - also tried to pressure Diefenbaker into putting the plane into full-scale production.

Frost promised all kinds of things to Diefenbaker, but Dief knew it would be irresponsible to repay Frost for political favors. (Unlike Jean Cretien's Liberal government which will pour billions of dollars of Canadian taxpayer's money into any useless project just to win votes).

Talking of liberals, a good number of Grit MPs had doubts about the Arrow from day one. Despite what you may hear today, the Liberals were not 100 percent behind the Arrow. Not at all. Biographies by or about Lester Pearson, Paul Martin Sr., Jack Pickersgill and C.D. Howe voice these doubts clearly.

Though 12,000 jobs were at stake, politicians on all sides of the Commons felt the jobs were too expensive to save. It just didn't make sense on any front - militarily, economically or politically.

Yes, the Avro Arrow was a beautiful plane. So is the Concorde. But the Concorde has lost billions, and so would the Arrow.

Still, we should have kept the prototypes. And used the Arrow at military flypasts all over the nation for years to come.

(Jackson is Associate Editor of the *Calgary Sun*, and one of Canada's most respected and controversial journalists.)

As Aviation News sees it...

All was not destroyed, cut or burned. We think that Bombardier somehow got the formula to whatever it is that blinds Liberal leaders to aviation's realities, and compels them to throw our money at pretty aeroplanes and blue skies like aviation playboys.

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