

Documents show who ordered scrapping of Arrow

In Kathryn May's Feb. 1 report, "Dief didn't destroy Arrow," she reports that Pierre Seigny, associate minister of Defence in John Diefenbaker's cabinet, accused Crawford Gordon, CEO of AVRO Canada, of ordering the destruction of the existing aircraft and plans.

In a recently declassified memo from DND files, dated March 26, 1959, it is clear the option of destruction of the Arrows was suggested to the deputy minister by Air Marshall Hugh Campbell. He suggests declaring the aircraft as surplus or that "DDP (Department of Defence Production) can reduce it to scrap" and asks the deputy minister for his opinion on which option he wishes to follow.

On April 7, 1959 the DDP orders the destruction of the aircraft and on April 8 in a memo titled "Avro Cancellation — Disposal of Material," George Pearkes, minister of National Defence, writes: "The aircraft ... will be reduced to scrap." It is incredible to think that Mr. Seigny was not privy to these documents.

In addition, DND owned the aircraft, not AVRO. Mr. Gordon would not have had authority to destroy the aircraft.

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Answer the question

In 1992, I answered the question of who ordered the blowtorching of the Arrow, when I reproduced then newly declassified government records in my book on the subject. It was not John Diefenbaker or Crawford Gordon.

Shortly after the cancellation, the RCAF advised the National Aeronautical Establishment, an arm of NRC, that five aircraft and 14 engines could be made available for supersonic research.

On March 11, 1959, the RCAF received a reply that the NAE was not interested. Had they said yes, we would have Arrows today.

On March 13, 1959, Chief of the Air Staff Hugh Campbell wrote to Defence Minister George Pearkes and advised him of the NAE decision and added that with the minister's approval, the RCAF would take steps to dispose of the Arrow and engines.

On March 19, 1959, Pearkes wrote back to Campbell concurring.

On March 26, 1959, Campbell wrote to Pearkes recommending the Arrow and engines be reduced to scrap. Pearkes sent the letter to his deputy minister, asking for his comments.

Why would he need his DM's comments if he already had Dief's order in hand or if Gordon had already ordered the destruction?

On April 8 1959, Pearkes concurred with Campbell's recommendation to scrap.

Pearkes, replying on June 9, 1959 to a man in Brantford, Ont., who had asked that one Arrow be spared for posterity, wrote: "Although I sympathize with your desire to preserve the Arrow as an item of historical interest, I cannot grant your request for economic reasons. At the present time the completed aircraft are being stripped of equipment and will be scrapped in the near future. We will be able to salvage several hundred thousands of dollars."

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