

# Comment

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## Avro story more myth than reality

Nearly 40 years after its sudden demise, the potent mythology of the Canadian-designed Avro Arrow supersonic fighter is flying higher than ever in the national psyche, fuelled in its latest incarnation by a CBC television mini-series running tonight and Monday.

The myth, of course, is that the elegant, delta-shaped plane and its potent, though untested, Iroquois engine, were years ahead of American and other competition in design and capability and constituted the crown jewel of Canadian post-war technological



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pro prowess. And that the daring project, on the cusp of proving to the world Canada's superior achievement, was abruptly terminated by the bumbling, petty Tory prime minister of the day, John Diefenbaker. The Chief, wracked by indecision and conflict-

ing pressures, did the deed, possessing no interest in Ontario's industrial and technology base, no courage to stand up to American military-industrial interests that wanted Canada to buy U.S. products, and no vision for an independent Canadian economic future.

Thus, the alleged devastating consequences of the Feb. 20, 1959, cancellation of the Arrow program: 14,000 skilled engineers, technicians and production personnel sent packing from the Toronto-based A. V. Roe Co. on a single day — many into the eagerly waiting arms of U.S. and British aerospace companies.

Ontario forever lost its world-beating aerospace industry and all sorts of potential industrial spinoffs and drifted

into U.S.-dominated branch-plant industrialization and eventual continental integration.

The gaping hole left at the centre of Ontario's military-industrial complex was all the more barren because the government not only cancelled the Arrow program without anything to put in its place, but viciously ordered annihilation of the six completed Arrow planes along with all engines, parts, blueprints and design data.

Not a shred of anything remained after the expenditure of nearly \$1 billion over seven years.

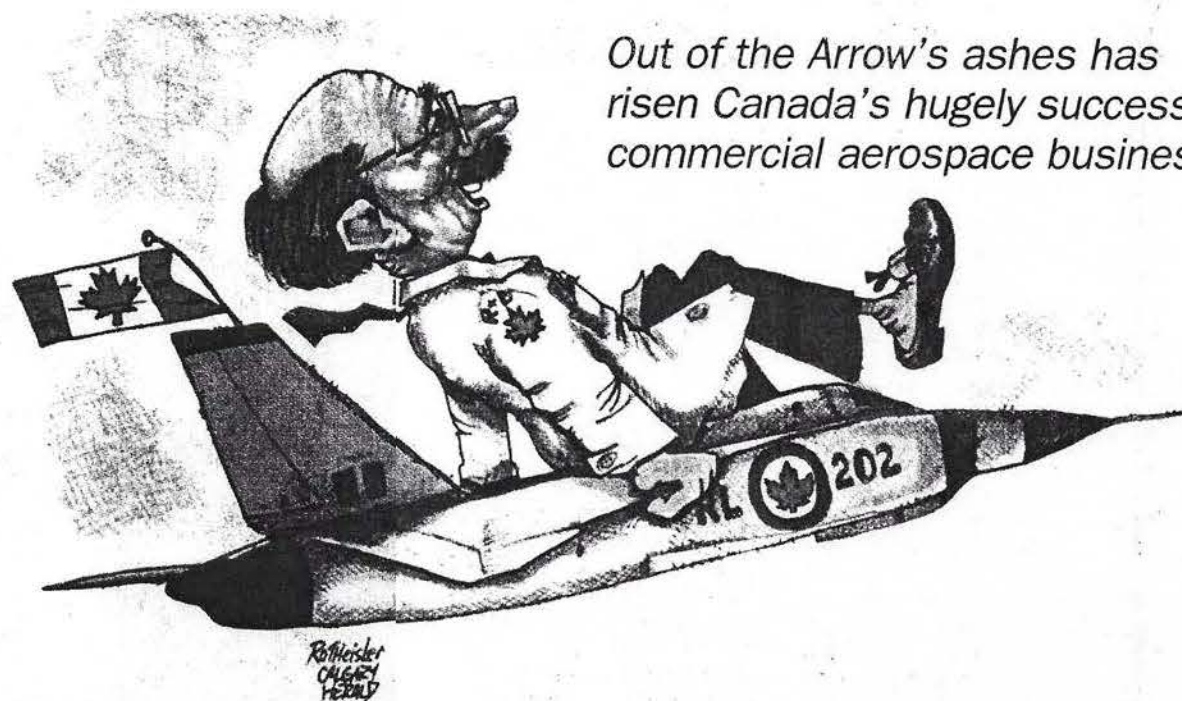
The Arrow's partisans believed the brutal purge was the manifestation of Dief's paranoid determination to wipe out any public reminder of his hugely

controversial and, in Ontario, potentially politically suicidal decision.

That's the myth: fascinating, macabre, romantic and poignant. But in its telling of history, it is hopelessly one-sided. Worse, it propagates another more dangerous myth about Canada's subsequent failure-tinged economic development and industrial strength that is simply wrong.

Remember, out of the ashes of the Arrow — whose termination was the last shudder of Canada's artificially over-sized, Second World War-driven defence industry — grew not only the U.S. space program but Canada's hugely successful commercial aerospace business, now the sixth-largest in the world and rising. Companies like Canadair, de Havilland and Pratt &

*Out of the Arrow's ashes has risen Canada's hugely successful commercial aerospace business*



was, in all probability, an inevitable, if nasty, piece of business awaiting whichever party had taken office in 1958. Why?

With the RCAF's hugely ambitious specifications and the decision to develop all three key parts at home — airframe, engine and fire-control system — the project was extravagantly ambitious for the Canadian company undertaking it. Despite remarkable technological breakthroughs, as costs mounted and threatened to swamp the nation's entire military budget, the army and navy turned against it, followed reluctantly by top air force brass, who realized the country could barely afford a single squadron. And with the advent of intercontinental ballistic missiles, the requirement for jet interceptors looked smaller.

The shrinking Canadian defence market meant foreign sales of the Arrow were crucial, but as a matter of doctrine the U.S. and Britain built their own, and other countries like to buy cheap.

The pre-production planes were destroyed by Dief. Out of vindictiveness? Or because of Cold War security measures insisted on by the U.S. and Britain, which had loaned specialists to the project and had proprietary technology they wanted to protect?

In the end, the Arrow's death pulled Canada out of integrated weapons system development and pushed the aerospace sector to a civilian future.

Yes, tragically, a lot of top engineers bailed out of Canada — but even if the Arrow had succeeded, what would they have done as an encore, and could Canada have afforded it?

Today, neither Britain, France nor Germany can afford to build its own fighter jets. Canada saw the writing on the wall 30 years early.

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Whitney today constitute the world's most successful integrated design, development, manufacturing and service cluster for small aircraft airframes and engines. CAE is a world leader in aviation-simulator systems.

This \$12-billion, export-driven industry, employing more than 50,000 people and producing world-class, Canadian-designed-and-built products is a big success story, not least because it has managed to flourish in a world of military-financed, heavily subsidized and often government-owned rivals.

What's ironic is that many of the people who bemoan the loss of the Arrow criticize what modest government R&D assistance and export financing help Ottawa provides the modern Canadian industry.

Killing the Arrow, in truth more a weapons-system than just a fighter jet,