

First test pilot of Avro Arrow dies at 89

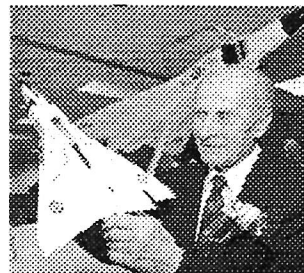
Jan Zurakowski

Canadian Press

Wednesday, February 11, 2004

BARRY'S BAY, Ont. -- Janusz Zurakowski, the first test pilot of the revolutionary Avro Arrow aircraft, has died at age 89 more than four decades after the legendary plane's inaugural flight and its controversial cancellation soon after.

Zurakowski died Monday evening in this eastern Ontario town in Renfrew County's Madawaska Valley after a two-year battle with leukemia, his family said Tuesday.



Jan Zurakowski in 1998. (CP / Sal Sacco)

George Zurakowski, the eldest of the late pilot's two sons, said his father served as an inspiration to budding flyers.

"I think he served as an inspiration and continues to serve as an inspiration to young people, especially (those) who looked up to him and who are thinking perhaps of becoming pilots themselves and read about some of his exploits," said Zurakowski, 54, from the small tourist lodge built by the family 43 years ago.

CREDIT: (CP / Sal Sacco)

A decorated Polish-born ace aviator, Zurakowski fought for Poland in the Second World War, and like many other Polish airmen escaped to continue the fight from England before he put down roots in Canada.

In 1952, Zurakowski - already a legend and hero in Poland for having damaged a Dornier 17 over Poland after the Nazis attacked on Sept. 1, 1939 - was recruited by Avro Aircraft company as a test pilot for the Arrow, Canada's first supersonic jet. He eventually moved his family to the region of Kaszuby in northern Ontario.

The Arrow was conceived to protect Canada during the height of the Cold War in the 1950s, when the Soviets had introduced new long-range bombers capable of flying over the North Pole to attack North America. It was intended to replace the Avro Canada CF-100 Canuck as a supersonic all-weather receptor.

A short and unassuming man, Zurakowski climbed aboard the Avro Arrow RL-201 for its first flight at 9:51 p.m. on March 25, 1958, at Toronto Malton Airport under hazy sunshine.

Zurakowski pushed the jet to 1,600 kilometres an hour on its seventh flight and tests indicated the Arrow, with its twin Iroquois engines, could become the world's most advanced interceptor.

But soaring costs and the development of competing missile technology prompted Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker to cancel the 10-year-old project in 1959, leading the aircraft company A.V. Roe to lay off 14,000 employees while the government ordered all plans and prototypes destroyed.

Zurakowski's widow, Anna, said Tuesday that calls were pouring in to the family home from across Canada, notably from members of the Canadian aviation industry and military.

In an interview with the Belleville Intelligencer, she said her husband held a special place in aviation

5612

history, from his start flying gliders in the mid-1930s with the Polish flying academy and into the Second World War when he was shot down during the Battle of Britain.

After several confirmed kills against the German Luftwaffe, Zurakowski was honoured with the Cross of Valour. Following the war, the celebrated fly-boy was posted to Britain's top test-pilot school and he embarked on a career of testing planes for some of the world's biggest manufacturers.

"Jan tested over 100 planes," said Anna Zurakowski, 82. "The Arrow was the last one he tested."

Zurakowski retired before the Arrow project was cancelled by the government, she said, adding that her husband remained bitter about the cancellation for numerous years.

"Any time he was reminded about these things, he became angry, yes," she said. "When someone talked to him about the Arrow, he became frustrated because it wasn't just about the plane."

"This was a very big asset for Canada. He was sad the day the program was stopped. Canada was trying to lead the aircraft industry. He believed Canada could do it, that it wasn't some dream."

In July 2003, Barry's Bay honoured Zurakowski by dedicating a park - featuring a small-scale prototype of the Avro Arrow - to their longtime resident.

Zurakowski is also survived by son Mark, 52, and five grandchildren.

Funeral services for Zurakowski are planned for Thursday at Hedwig Church in Barry's Bay.

A biography by Winnipeg author Bill Zuk entitled Janusz Zurakowski, Legend in the Skies, is set to be released this spring.

© Copyright 2004 The Canadian Press

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2004 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#) All rights reserved.
Optimized for browser versions 4.0 and higher.

canada.com

