

# 47 years later, it's still Arrow dynamic

---

JEFF GRAY > QUEEN'S PARK REPORTER

TORONTO

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 9, 2006

This article was published more than 18 years ago. Some information may no longer be current.

The Avro Arrow, the made-in-Canada supersonic jet fighter controversially grounded by prime minister John Diefenbaker in 1959, has lived on as a national myth of greatness lost.

But yesterday, the myth came to life for more than 2,000 people who flocked to see the Arrow -- actually a 24-metre, full-size replica of it -- unveiled to gleam in the summer-like sunlight outside the Toronto Aerospace Museum.

Located in an old airplane factory at Downsview Park in the city's northwest, the little-known museum's exacting replica of the legendary plane took 140 volunteers eight years to make by hand, with the help of corporate sponsors and donations. It had to be reconstructed using mostly second-hand documents, as most of the original designs and five test models were mysteriously ordered destroyed.

Hundreds of people --many of them self-confessed "Arrowheads" or semi-obsessive fans of the doomed aircraft --crowded around the mock jet yesterday. Gawking at the aircraft, which was designed to defend the Arctic from a Soviet nuclear attack, they hoisted children into hatches from underneath, marvelled at the intricate landing gear and stroked the smooth underside of the delta wingspan.

Museum officials expect similar numbers today.

Many of the mostly male crowd who came to see the aircraft believe it was not just Mr. Diefenbaker who killed the project for its cost, which was in the hundreds of

story goes, could not stand competition from a superior jet in the hands of even a close Cold War ally.

"I have seen it, as a small boy, fly over my house," remembered 62-year-old Alex Chaszewski of Oshawa, who was 12 when the Arrow was flight tested near Toronto. "... When you hear engines like that, it sure gets your attention."

Asked why he thought the government killed the plane, believed to be the fastest on Earth at the time, he replied: "The big boys put pressure on Ottawa."

He said his computer's screensaver for the past 15 years has been a picture of the Arrow landing at Canadian Forces Base Trenton. "It was beautiful. They had ladders against it and the fuel lines hooked up to it, and the snowbank behind it."

Standing back from the crowd was Dean Halaj, 31, dressed in a khaki flight suit, with a *Top Gun* pin on his lapel and a patch commemorating the birth and death dates of the Avro Arrow on his chest. Taking in the model plane through his aviator shades, he said he grew up in Malton, near what is now Pearson International Airport, where the Arrow was tested.

He, too, blames the United States and remarked that many who worked for the manufacturer, A. V. Roe, later went on to work at the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

"If history was a little different ... we could have had our own space centre here," said Mr. Halaj, who is studying to be a police officer.

Ted Hodges, 53, came from Belleville, about two hours east of Toronto, just to see the unveiling.

"I'm a fanatic," he said, reminiscing about hearing sonic booms overhead as a boy, something he only realized years later had been made by the Arrow.

As his daughter Michelle, 20, who has a model Arrow in her room, snapped pictures, he blamed the airplane's demise on partisan bickering. "It's politics. It was a Liberal initiative. When the Conservatives were elected with a majority government, they canned it. They destroyed everything."

A thin man with white hair and wrinkled skin interrupted. "They didn't destroy everything," he said. "I took some of the drawings home."

He was Ralph Marsh, 74, a draftsman for the cockpit and the needle-like nose cone of the plane. He said he defied orders and took home copies of his plans when the project was killed in 1959.

He has since donated the smuggled plans, about a dozen drawings in all, to the museum.

Mr. Marsh, like many who worked on the Arrow, left Canada. He flew in from San Jose, Calif., just to see the reborn jet. "I'm absolutely delighted with the replica," he said.

In addition to the full-size replica, museum-goers watched a two-metre-long remote control replica Avro Arrow fly overhead.

The little plane, which lets out a leaf-blower buzz instead of sonic booms, is the pride and joy of hobbyist Bernie Lehman. Its fuselage was autographed by the Arrow's chief designer, James Floyd, who attended a museum gala for the larger replica last week.

Mr. Lehman, 64, who runs a trucking company, said one of his Scarborough neighbours was actually a test pilot on the Arrow project, but ended up working as a janitor after the plane was killed.

He said he saw his remote-control version as a tribute to those who worked on the aircraft. "As long as my Arrow is flying, we'll keep the dream alive."

At yesterday's ceremony, local MP and Liberal Party leadership candidate Ken Dryden addressed the crowd, saying the Arrow was a symbol of Canadian achievement and a plane with a "storied history."

The full-size replica project was spearheaded by the museum's volunteer chief executive officer, Claude Sherwood, 68, who was a draftsman for the Arrow.