

Avro Arrow's end overshadowed revival of Forces

REG SARETSKY

On March 25, 1958, the first prototype Avro Arrow left the runway on borrowed time. Eleven months later, the Avro Arrow program died and the prototypes were destroyed. The Arrow controversy then soared into its 50-year flight of fancy.

While promoters of the Avro Arrow focus on the aircraft as a technological breakthrough and its cancellation as the loss of the national dream, Defence Minister George Pearkes and Prime Minister John Diefenbaker made a far-sighted decision that revived Canada's Armed Forces.

Pearkes immigrated to Alberta at 18 to homestead north-west of Calgary along the Clearwater River. He joined the NWMP at 21, and as comman-

der of the Calgary military district during the lean interwar years, he honed his talent for efficiently using scarce resources. Wounded and decorated (he was awarded the Victoria Cross), he advanced to command the Canadian Armed Forces Europe in 1941.



Reg Saretsky

Pearkes became defence minister in 1957 and inherited a public fear of the Soviet nuclear bomber threat.

This fear had triggered a rapid expansion of Canada's strategic radar net (the Distant Early Warning, Pine Tree and Mid Canada lines). The RCAF acquired both a massive domestic air infrastructure, and

an indigenous long-range interceptor, the CF-100.

Thus, the RCAF became accustomed to the so-called replacement syndrome — the desire for the best supersonic interceptors, within a familiar mission envelope.

The Avro Arrow climbed rapidly to more than 50,000 feet, accelerated to Mach 2, then fired four unguided nuclear missiles designed to destroy Soviet bombers within about 10 kilometres of each explosion. The price paid for the Arrow's performance was a short range of 640 kilometres.

And they were expensive. Each Arrow cost \$12 million, eight times as much as the late 1950s average for supersonic interceptors.

Meanwhile the Canadian Navy, sailing triple-expansion steam engine frigates at the end

of their useful lives, faced off against Soviet nuclear submarines. The 18-knot frigates were floating ducks.

Pearkes foresaw five major threats to Canada's peace.

■ Nuclear missiles were unstoppable and required deterrence.

■ The Soviet submarine force off the east coast was growing.

■ The long-range Soviet maritime air force had new stand-off weapons.

■ Defending Europe against a Soviet bloc land invasion, hinged on convoy escort to England.

■ The bomber-gap threat was rated fifth, and the Arrow was expendable.

By astute bargaining, Pearkes obtained almost new supersonic interceptors, with triple the Arrow's range, for \$750,000 each, plus the takeover of all

Canadian DEW line radar sites built and operated by the U.S. The supersonic Voodoo covered both continental defence and the surveillance of Soviet long-range aircraft.

The displaced Avro workers were soon rehired by Canadair to produce new CF-104 Starfighters at a savings of nine Starfighters for each Arrow. These Starfighters countered the threat of a Soviet nuclear and land attack in Europe.

Each of the eight Arrows cancelled paid for one new gas-turbine destroyer to counter the Soviet submarines.

A new Canadian specialty, submarine hunting, formed around the light carrier Bonaventure and the new high-speed destroyers. During the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, a renewed Canadian fleet secured the

North Atlantic convoy routes.

Pearkes, the retired career army officer, fostered a clear vision of Canada's military future. He negotiated both NORAD (North American Air Defence) and the Defence Production Sharing Agreements, restored Arctic sovereignty over the DEW line and succeeded in meeting the new threats on a very limited budget.

The wonderful, but ruinously expensive Arrow vanished.

As they said in frontier homesteads, "Better a steak on an earthenware plate than an onion on a platter of gold."

Pearkes and Diefenbaker, both Prairie homesteaders, brought home the steak.

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