KENNETH JORDET

WINGING OUT OF THE PAST

Man's dad shot the Arrow

IAN ROBERTSON

Ken Gillies handles the 14 film negatives with a reverence befitting their trusted legacy.

His father took the rare photos of Canada's first CF-105 supersonic jet interceptor — an Avro Arrow — and its team almost 59 years ago.

KEN GILLIES
"Great plane"

Two images show RL-201 collapsed after the landing gear failed on June 11, 1958, despite pilot Jan Zurakowski's instruments showing them properly engaged.

With the undercarriage repaired, the plane was flown four months later.

"It was a great plane, well ahead of its time," Gillies, 54, said.

The Burlington civil engineer and technician doesn't know how John Gillies got to photograph the damaged Arrow, but other photos indicate he was attending a media event.

His dad, who died in 2002, "never talked much about his work," Ken Gillies said.

After leaving school in Grade 10, his dad "walked into the Port Colborne newspaper office one day and they needed a sports reporter."

He learned to handle bulky film cameras and asked questions, his son said.

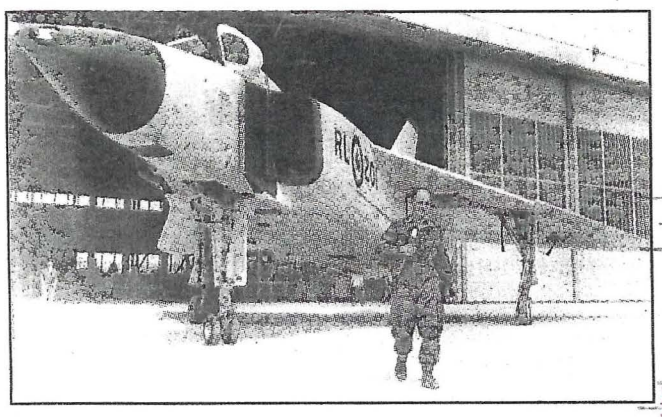
By the early 1960s, after freelancing, John Gillies became a *Globe and Mail* photographer, covering sports and other events, including the comings and goings of political figures, such as then-prime minister John Diefenbaker in 1963 — the year his Progressive Conservatives were defeated, largely over grounding the Arrow program five years earlier.

Gillies later did media work for former Ontario premier Bill Davis and Queen Elizabeth's 1970s royal tour.

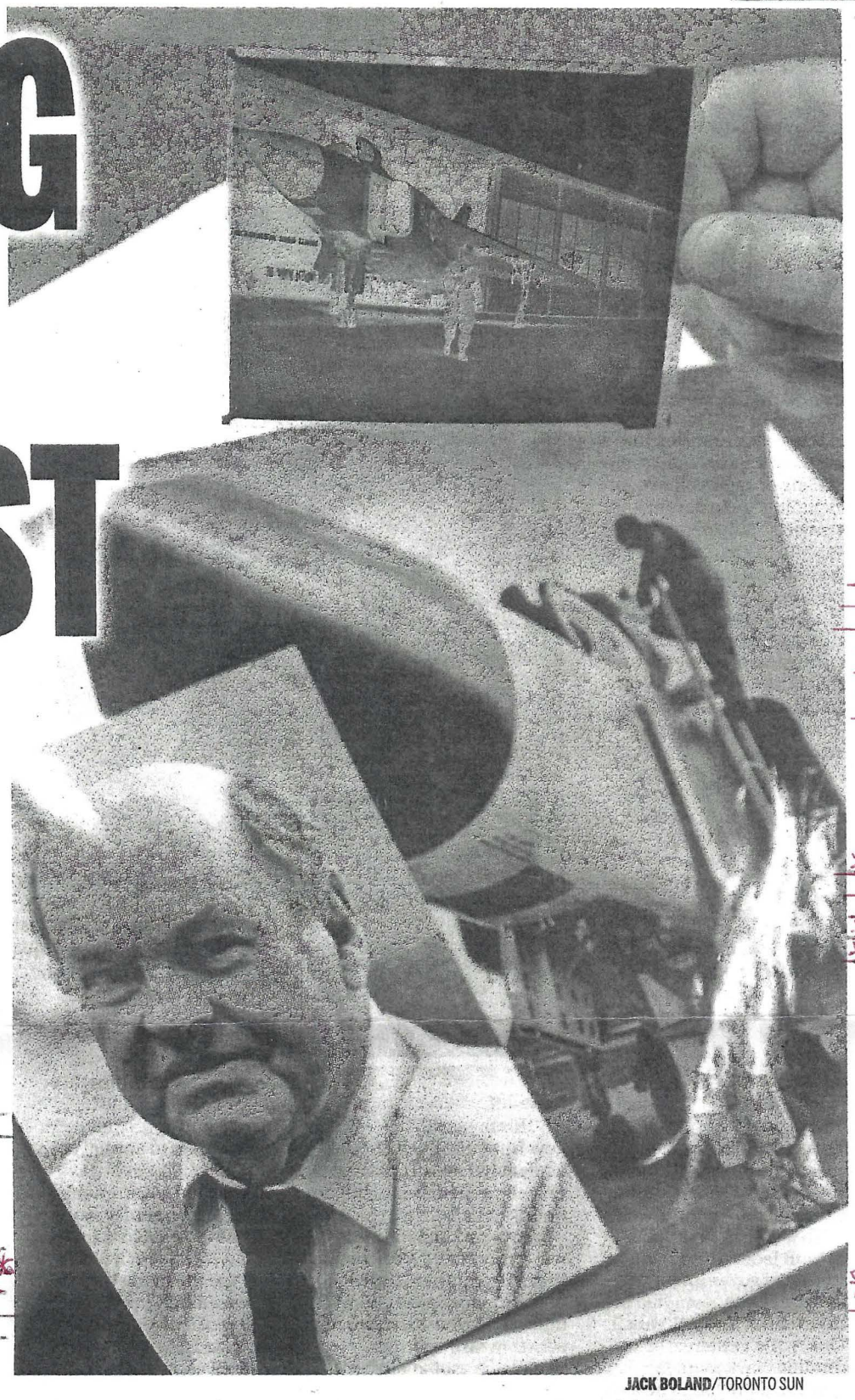
Ken Gillies' son took flying lessons, but "I ran out of money" and never got a pilot's licence.

He also considered selling the negatives in 2015 to cover some expenses but now hopes to provide prints to an aviation museum, "as long as they credit them to dad."

Carrying on their love of aircraft, he hopes some day to board North America's only flying Avro Lancaster at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton.



This photo, made from the negative shown above, is believed to show test pilot Wladyslaw 'Spud' Potocki outside a hangar.



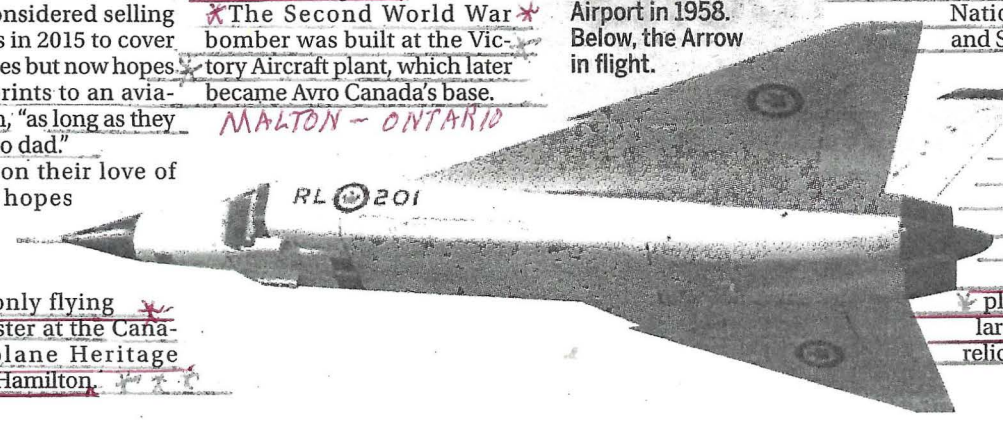
JACK BOLAND/TORONTO SUN

John Gillies took photos of an RL-201 Avro Arrow with a collapsed landing gear at Malton Airport in 1958. Below, the Arrow in flight.

It has one of the scrapped turbo-jet engines developed locally for the Arrows, which reportedly only flew with American engines.

The Second World War bomber was built at the Victory Aircraft plant, which later became Avro Canada's base.

MALTON - ONTARIO



Jobs and dreams died along with Arrow

For six years, taxpayers dreamed of our military getting what some still believe was a top made-in-Canada fighter plane. Others consider the cancelled Arrow project a costly nightmare.

A.V. Roe Canada Ltd. developed the delta-wing aircraft at present-day Pearson International Airport.

The Liberal government of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent gave the green light in 1953 to equip the Royal Canadian Air Force with interceptors capable of challenging invading Soviet bombers.

Five Arrows were ordered in '55 and the $27-million budget soared to $260 million.

The first one was shown publicly on Oct. 4, 1957.

On March 25, 1958, chief pilot Janusz Zurakowski took RL-201 on its inaugural flight.

"The CF-105 Arrow was a technical masterpiece at the forefront of aviation engineering," the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa notes.

Officials in the capital, however, came to believe the Soviet bomber threat "was diminishing and air defence could be better handled by unmanned Bomarc missiles."

Theories persist about American power-brokers pressuring the feds.

On "Black Friday" — Feb. 20, 1959 — then-prime minister John Diefenbaker announced the dream's demise.

Everything was ordered scrapped, including turbo-jet engines designed by a Malton firm but never reportedly fitted onto an Arrow.

BULL

More than 14,000 jobs were eliminated, but many of Avro's soon-recruited aerospace engineers helped the new National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and its U.S. contractors launch astronauts into space.

At the museum, the nose and cockpit of a nearly completed RL-206 is the largest-known Arrow relic.

– Ian Robertson

* I HAVE PICTURES OF A LANCASTER BOMBER WITH 2 OUTBOARD JET ENGINES, + 2 PROPELLER ENGINES.
I - HAROLD LESLIE WORKED AT AVRO AS A MACHINIST. I MACHINED PARTS TO STRENGTHEN THE WINGS OF 6 LANCASTER BOMBERS TO INSTALL 2 JET ENGINES. THEY WERE TO BE USED AS FLYING TEST BEDS FOR JET ENGINES. ONLY ONE-"1" LANCASTER WAS DONE.
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