

Collingwood centenarian who worked on the Avro Arrow pays visit to its replica

104-year-old Gerald McCulloch brought his 1956 ID badge from Orenda Engines with him, just like he would have every day for work



[Erika Engel](#)

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Gerald McCulloch used to work around the real Avro Arrow in the 1950s, and was invited to visit the replica at the Edenvale Airport. He's 104 years old. Erika Engel / CollingwoodToday



Gerald McCulloch admires the wingspan of the Arrow replica. Erika Engel / CollingwoodToday

A 104-year-old Collingwood resident got a jet engine blast from his past at the Edenvale Airport this week.

Gerald McCulloch visited the Avro Arrow replica, and is one of the few people still living who could react with: "I've seen it before."

McCulloch worked for Orenda Engines Limited starting in 1951 – right around the time they started work on an engine for Canada's Avro Arrow project.

He was an inspector and a foreman at the factory on Derry Road in Malton.

"I was working to inspect fixtures and engine parts. They either passed or they'd get rejected," said McCulloch. "Part of my job was to reclaim parts that were rejected to see if they could be saved. If they couldn't be saved, they'd have to be melted down."

The replica at the Edenvale Airport is one of two in existence. It's now housed in one of the hangars on the property which serves as a museum.

[McCulloch](#) was invited to visit the museum on July 21 because of his work on the Orenda Iroquois engine, part of the overall Arrow project.



Gerald McCulloch tours the Edenvale Airport's Arrow museum. Erika Engel / CollingwoodToday



Gerald McCulloch with a replica Orenda engine. He worked for Orenda from 1951 to 1982, including on the Orenda Iroquois engine project for the Avro Arrow. Erika Engel / CollingwoodToday

The Arrow was created as an interceptor jet meant to be able to engage and destroy the long-range nuclear bombers being developed after the Second World War. It was Canada's first supersonic aircraft, built to break records.

The Arrow project was cancelled on Feb. 20, 1959, shortly before McCulloch was to have his lunch. The way he tells it, an announcement came over the PA at 11:45, just 15 minutes before a scheduled test flight, telling everyone at the factory to go home and not come back.

"We were doing what we would normally do that time of day ... we were getting ready for lunch," said McCulloch. "It's a pity it was ever cancelled."

He said many of the people working on the Arrow project scattered after its cancellation. The day became known as "Black Friday" for Canada's aviation industry.

"It was a bad time for a lot of people," recalled McCulloch.

A couple months later, however, McCulloch was called back to Orenda to continue work on the engine, whose development continued without the Arrow. He worked there until 1982.

"They threw me out! I retired," he said. "It's a shame, you go into the same building all those years and nobody takes any notice of you, then once you're out, you can't get back in again."

Even still, he kept his ID badge, which he used every morning to get entrance to the factory. The baby blue laminated card noted his birthday (Jan. 12, 1917) next to a 1956 photo of a half-smiling, blue-eyed Gerald McCulloch, employee number 41010.

Edenvale Airport volunteer Richard Coleman was a bit starstruck by McCulloch as the centenarian shuffled around the Arrow, pausing to remark on the wingspan and craning his neck to make sure there were two engines with after-burners at the back.

Coleman is a retired history teacher and a self-proclaimed Arrow buff.



In the background Gerald McCulloch talks with Avro buff Richard Coleman, who watched test flights of the supersonic plane when he was a child. Erika Engel / CollingwoodToday



This replica of the Avro Arrow was built by volunteers over ten years. It was being kept at Pearson airport before it was rehomed to Edenvale Airport where it's the main attraction for the aviation museum. Erika Engel / CollingwoodToday