

Living history: local men who worked on the Avro Arrow meet for the first time to exchange stories (5 photos)

The Avro Arrow project was cancelled by the Canadian government in 1959, causing 14,000 workers to lose their jobs on a day referred to as Black Friday

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Ron Douglas and George Elliott, who are meeting for the first time, both worked on the famous Avro Arrow fighter jet project in the 1950s. The men exchanged stories of working on the doomed project at an informal meeting on Friday. Kenneth Armstrong/GuelphToday

Two former Avro employees who worked on the famed Avro Arrow fighter jet met for the first time Friday to socialize and exchange stories of the doomed project.



Ron Douglas and George Elliott, who are meeting for the first time, both worked on the famous Avro Arrow fighter jet project in the 1950s. Kenneth Armstrong/GuelphToday



George Elliott points to a photograph of the Avro Aircraft, Ltd. plant as it appeared when he worked there in the 1950s. Kenneth Armstrong/GuelphToday

Robert “George” Elliott and William “Ron” Douglas, both 92 years of age, each worked on the Avro Canada CF-105 Arrow project in different buildings of the company’s Malton, Ont. plant.

Elliott worked in the Orenda Engines building, while Douglas concentrated on the aircraft chassis on the ‘snag crew’ in another building that was part of the Avro Aircraft, Ltd. plant.

Asked to explain what the snag crew was, Douglas replied, “whatever went wrong, you went and fixed it.”

There were so many buildings within the plant, said Douglas, that his paycheque was sometimes short because he was listed as absent. He had to explain he was actually working on something in another building in the plant.

The Avro Arrow did make a number of test flights, but never with the Orenda PS.13 Iroquois engines Elliott was working on.

“You can’t make a plane and put an engine in it and get it certified. You have to certify them on their own — the engine has to be certified and the plane has to be before they were put together,” explained Elliott.

“They were just about to be put together when they closed it down,” he added.

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Elliott remembers that day clearly.

“Everybody lined up because the employment people were there taking your number and to say you were layed off,” recalled Elliott.

He said it was difficult for him to sleep the first few days after the mass layoff, which affected not only himself, but also his wife.

“I was thinking about it, thinking about all those people,” said Elliott, shaking his head in disbelief.

Because they lived in housing created for Avro workers, said Elliott, most of his neighbours also lost their jobs that day.

Elliott was eventually recalled to Avro to work on future projects.

“It was a good job, I enjoyed it. I was there 39 years,” he said.

The buildings where the men once worked on the Avro Arrow project were located in Malton, Ont.

Both men eventually settled in Guelph and were brought together Friday for an informal meeting at the Twin Towers on Speedvale, Ave.

A local health care worker met the men separately and arranged to bring them together after hearing each of them talking about having worked on the Arrow.

Douglas brought various books, flight logs and employee lists to the meeting, while Elliot brought a model of the flying saucer-like Avro Canada VZ-9 Avrocar.



George Elliott holds up a model of the Avro Canada VZ-9 Aerocar. A full-size working prototype was built for the U.S. Air Force, but the aircraft never went into full production. Kenneth Armstrong/GuelphToday



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A complete Iroquois engine and an original nose section of an Avro Arrow are housed at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa.

A full-size replica of the Arrow was built for a 1997 made-for-tv movie, but is not flyable.

A search this summer for models of the Arrow that were discarded in Lake Ontario during testing and the movie about the project prove the project still has the imagination of Canadians.

“It will never die, as far as I’m concerned,” said Douglas.