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Avro Arrow shot down by creative accounting

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

While I don't know just what inspired Reg Saretsky to write the March 30 column "Avro's end overshadowed revival of Forces," I feel compelled to challenge his somewhat unique view of Canadian history by commenting on some of the content of his article.

He repeats the myth of the Arrow costing \$12 million a copy. That government figure included the cost of building the entire production plant, which at the time of the contract was to be spread over the cost of building 600 Arrows, then 300, then 100, then 37, then just 11.

These were government decisions that impacted development costs. Avro would not have built an entire plant for just 11 aircraft.

Industry studies suggest the fledgling Avro was more efficient at aircraft production than its more seasoned U.S. competitors.

Had Avro been allowed to build the air-

At the time of the Arrow cancellation, Canadian Forces Norad commander Gen.

Selmon was reprimanded for publicly repeating the Norad position that they saw a need for manned interceptors into the foreseeable future.

Canada was at the time building F-86 day fighters to protect against Russian bombers that would presumably come by night.

Some 10 years later, George Pearkes would admit in an interview that Canada was left utterly defenceless for 2½ years at the height of the Cold War, because the Arrow was cancelled and the Bomarc missile never worked.

Not to mention that the Bomarc missile depended solely on carrying a nuclear warhead, something Canada would not accept.

The U.S. had abandoned the unproven Bomarc even as Canada ordered theirs — the U.S. continued to build them at Canada's request.

Having cancelled the Arrow, Canada chose not to acquire replacement aircraft until 1961 because the federal govern-

craft they were contracted for in 1954 it would have been in service before the 1959 cancellation.

Cost overruns were a result of an ever-changing government requirements for the aircraft: As late as January 1959, Avro was attempting 27 major structural changes to accommodate the U.S. nuclear tipped Genie missile, even though Canada had not

approved the use of nuclear weapons.

The RCAF itself admitted during the course of this late revision attempt, that the nuclear tipped Genie missiles had no better kill probability than the Hughes Falcon system the plane was designed for — but ordered Avro to continue anyway.

At the time of cancellation, Avro had secured an agreement with the Americans to arm at their expense every Arrow Canada built and Avro offered to complete the 37 aircraft already started for \$3.5 million each, based on it using the U.S. Hughes Falcon missile system it had been designed for.

The government chose to cancel the project on the eve of it becoming economically viable as it was generally conceded by the industry of the day that you could build 500 production aircraft for the same cost of the first 22 development aircraft.

Avro had 37 aircraft underway on a fully operational production line that had produced the first test aircraft.

ment had told the Canadian public that manned interceptors were obsolete.

But the U.S. Voodoo they subsequently chose was designed to carry the same nuclear Genie missile Canada would not accept.

Indeed, the best reason for later building

the F-104 was to give it, and Canada, a nuclear strike

capability, but Canada

would not approve the nuclear weaponry necessary to give it that advantage until 1963 and then revoked the approval by 1968.

Meanwhile, HMCS Bonaventure was a British Majestic-class aircraft carrier left unfinished at the end of the Second World War, and transferred to Canada in 1952.

Completed at unknown cost, it wasn't commissioned until 1957, and served until 1966 before undergoing a \$12-million, 18-month refit. It came out of dry-dock to be immediately decommissioned in 1968, and scrapped in Taiwan in 1970.

The Canada-U.S. Production Sharing Agreement never came to fruition.

The U.S. did not trust Canadian industry to safeguard western military technology, a situation that apparently continues to this day.

Those with interest in this are invited to the Avro Museum at <http://www.avro-museum.ca/avro/timeline>.

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