

Fate of Avro Arrow

questioned

MONTREAL (CP) — A member of John Diefenbaker's cabinet has rattled decades of conventional thinking on the fate of the revolutionary Avro Arrow jet by asserting cabinet never ordered the planes destroyed and that the U.S. actually offered to help salvage the program.

Peter Sevigny, associate defence minister in Diefenbaker's government from 1959 to 1963, said in a recent interview that it was Crawford Gordon, the mercurial boss at A.V. Roe, the Arrow's manufacturer, who ordered all 37 planes and the blueprints destroyed.

And furthermore, Sevigny said, the Americans were in favor of continuing production of the CF-105, as the Arrow was known, and offered to

finance its construction to equip RCAF squadrons after the Diefenbaker government cancelled the program because of its rising cost.



SEVIGNY

The Americans have long been accused of instigating the Arrow's demise. But Sevigny, now 80 years old and a lecturer at Concordia University in Montreal, said cabinet categorically refused the American offer.

"The U.S., perhaps in an effort to prevent any disruption in the Canadian economy, offered to pay for the construction of the Arrow," Sevigny said. "Canada replied it didn't need anyone's charity."

Sevigny insists the destruction order did not come from the Tories.

"We wanted to put those planes in storage and keep at least one model. There was no reason for eliminating the plans.

"The orders were in fact to suspend production, keep the project on ice and keep the blueprints for ulterior events, just in case."

Sevigny claimed that Gordon, in a fit of rage, ordered all blueprints and planes destroyed — out of spite and anger toward the Diefenbaker government for cancelling the project.

"Gordon took it upon himself to destroy the thing because he thought Diefenbaker's government should have listened to him and was to blame. He loathed Diefenbaker and was unable, as were many others, to reason with him."

Defence Minister George Pearkes could hardly believe or understand Gordon's actions, said Sevigny.

"Pearkes was deeply distressed by the affair and he told me: 'It's a horrible mistake and we're going to pay for that. Why would I give the order to scrap these planes? Why? I wouldn't have done something as foolish as this and I didn't,' he said.

"It was done by this madman, this bounder, Crawford Gordon," Pearkes said, according to Sevigny.

Pearkes apparently advised Diefenbaker to call a news conference to blow the whistle on Gordon's impulsive decision, but the need for secrecy and Diefenbaker's paranoid tendencies killed that plan.