

The birth and death of a dream

By **ROBERTA NELSON**
Special to the Advocate

There was a time, Canadian fathers tell their sons, when a jet fighter like none before it — or since — flew at twice the speed of sound across Canadian skies.

The Avro Arrow, designed by Canadian engineers and built with Canadian technology, was an aeronautical marvel. Stunningly beautiful, the Arrow held the promise of a future in which Canada led the world in aviation technology.

When the Progressive Conservative government led by John G. Diefenbaker cancelled the Arrow project in February 1959, that dream died. With the project scrapped, the Arrow's team of designers and engineers left. Many of them went to the United States, where they made aviation history in America's space program and commercial aircraft corporations.

The story of the legendary plane and the people who made it airs Jan. 12 and 13, when CBC presents *The Arrow*, starring Dan Aykroyd as Avro's chairman, Crawford Gordon.

Aykroyd, 44, watched the television news coverage of the Arrow's test flights as a child growing up in Ottawa, where his parents worked for the government.

"I had a model of the Arrow," Aykroyd says. "All Canadian kids had a model of the Arrow. Of course, we all saw the thing fly, and there was the conversation at the dinner table over whether or not it should have been cancelled."

His interest in the Arrow was rekindled when he read Keith Ross Leckie's script for *The Arrow*, he says.

Aykroyd believes the legend of the Arrow is important — not for its reminder of what might have been, but for young Canadians who have yet to realize their own dreams.

"It's a lesson to those future entrepreneurs and scientists, technicians, artists, engineers, kids in commerce, in schools and universities, coming up now, who may have a dream of a product or an idea," he says.

"It's a lesson to them not to let politics and government policy dictate the

The Arrow

Sunday and Monday on CBC

ambitions of entrepreneurship and not to give in.

"Go for the dream, and get that product out on the assembly line, and show the world what Canadians are capable of," Aykroyd says.

One young Canadian who intends to heed that message is University of Waterloo senior R. Kyle Schmidt.

Schmidt, 23, is a mechanical engineering major whose lifelong interest in the Avro Arrow led him to create a Website about the plane on the Internet. Like Aykroyd, Schmidt learned of the Arrow as a child.

"I was probably in about Grade 4 or 5, about 10 years old," Schmidt says. "On the way to the family cottage in Haliburton (Ont.), they had a CF-100, a gate guardian, there. My father told me about that aircraft, and then its successor, the incredibly capable Avro Arrow."

He became fascinated with the Arrow and wondered how the government could have abandoned it.

"When I came to university, the Web was just growing up, and I just

thought to myself it would be kind of neat to make an Avro Arrow Web page," he says.

In the year and a half since the page has been on the Internet, Schmidt has received more than 700 e-mail messages from other Arrow enthusiasts.

"About every 10th e-mail says, 'Do you think there's still one out there?'"

The myth that one Arrow survived the government order to destroy the six completed planes has persisted for nearly 40 years.

Schmidt does not believe an intact Avro Arrow still exists.

He says an aerial photograph taken by the Toronto Star shows five planes being destroyed.

A sixth plane was almost completed, and its nose section is in the National Aviation Museum, Schmidt says. That leaves none.

Aykroyd says he heard the story of the surviving Arrow in high school.

"That's what I always heard as a kid, that there was one in North Bay in a farmer's garage, that it landed on a highway in North Bay, and it was dismantled there, and is under a pile of straw there." Aykroyd says. "Nice to believe, isn't it?"

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