

On Claxton's Lap

Magazine Cover Picture Shows Secret Jet Model

Defense Minister Claxton let the security cat out of the bag yesterday. His action came in the form of a photograph showing in scale model the still secret Avro XC-100 all-weather fighter.

The picture, taken three weeks ago in his Ottawa office, appeared on the front page of Saturday Night, weekly news magazine published in Toronto.

Although all details on the new aircraft are still highly classified by the RCAF, the minister was portrayed with the model held in both hands and resting on his lap. The fighter is now nearing the test flight stage at the Malton plant of Avro Canada, Ltd.

Little more than a year ago, on Nov. 1, 1948, the New York trade journal Aviation Week precipitated threats of prosecution when it published an inside page drawing of what it described as the XC-100.

At that time Air Marshal W. A. Curtis, the RCAF's chief of staff, and Commissioner S. T. Wood of the RCMP said the person who provided the information was liable to prosecution under the Official Secrets Act.

Suspicion centred on a British aviation writer who had visited Avro several weeks before the drawing and an accompanying article appeared. He was back in Britain by the time the storm broke.

As to the Claxton model, officials of Avro said last night that the machine would remain secret until it takes to the air, probably some time before the year's end.

Walter Deisher, vice-president and general manager, could offer no explanation. "If there's an old model around," he said, "I don't know about it."

Information was so restricted that there was not a photograph in the world showing the XC-100. "I only know of one model," he said, "and it's locked up in the company safe."

"I had some prominent people in my office just the other day and I wasn't able to show it to them."

The fighter is under close wraps at the Malton plant. Only persons with special permission from the RCAF are permitted to inspect it.

John Yocom, managing editor of Saturday Night, said the cover picture was taken three weeks ago by Capital Press, an Ottawa firm of professional photographers. It was taken at Saturday Night's specific request.

"We didn't know what the model showed," he said. "We asked the photographer to use some aircraft model as a prop, to increase interest in the picture. After it appeared we heard rumors that it was the Avro plane."

Saturday Night made no mention in its caption material of the model. The picture was selected as an introductory illustration to a story on Canada's air defense. "It was just another picture," Mr. Yocom said.

In the same issue, ironically, was a statement by Wilfrid Eggleston in the Capital Comment column:

"It is an offense under the Official Secrets Act to disclose information intended or likely to be of value to a possible or apprehended enemy."

"Much of the value of defensive weapons lies in the extent to which any possible enemy can be kept from knowing much about them."

A Defense Department official doubted whether the picture constituted any breach of national security.

"What is security at one time," he said, "is not security at another." Since the XC-100 was nearly ready to be flown, its security classification was being continually downgraded.

The model displayed by Mr. Claxton, he said, was borrowed from Air Vice-Marshal A. L. James, the RCAF's member for technical serv-

ices. It was loaned for purposes of the picture.

When the XC-100 makes its appearance, he said, it may not bear much resemblance to the model. Continual redesign and modification had changed the fighter's appearance since the time the model was made.

He cited the Spitfire and Vampire fighters. In their early stages of development all pictures and information were prohibited. As they came into production the security was lessened.

The RCAF spokesman said he had been told by Air Vice-Marshal James that the model did definitely not portray the XC-100 in its final, preproduction form.

Powered by two turbo-jet engines, the fighter is expected to fly 675 miles an hour. Its tentative armament is said to be four cannon.



—Saturday Night (Capital Press Photo).

Still-secret Avro fighter is shown in scale model by Defense Minister Claxton. This picture, taken in the minister's Ottawa office three weeks ago, appeared first on the cover of Saturday Night. The fighter, being developed at Malton for the RCAF, is still classified as a military secret.