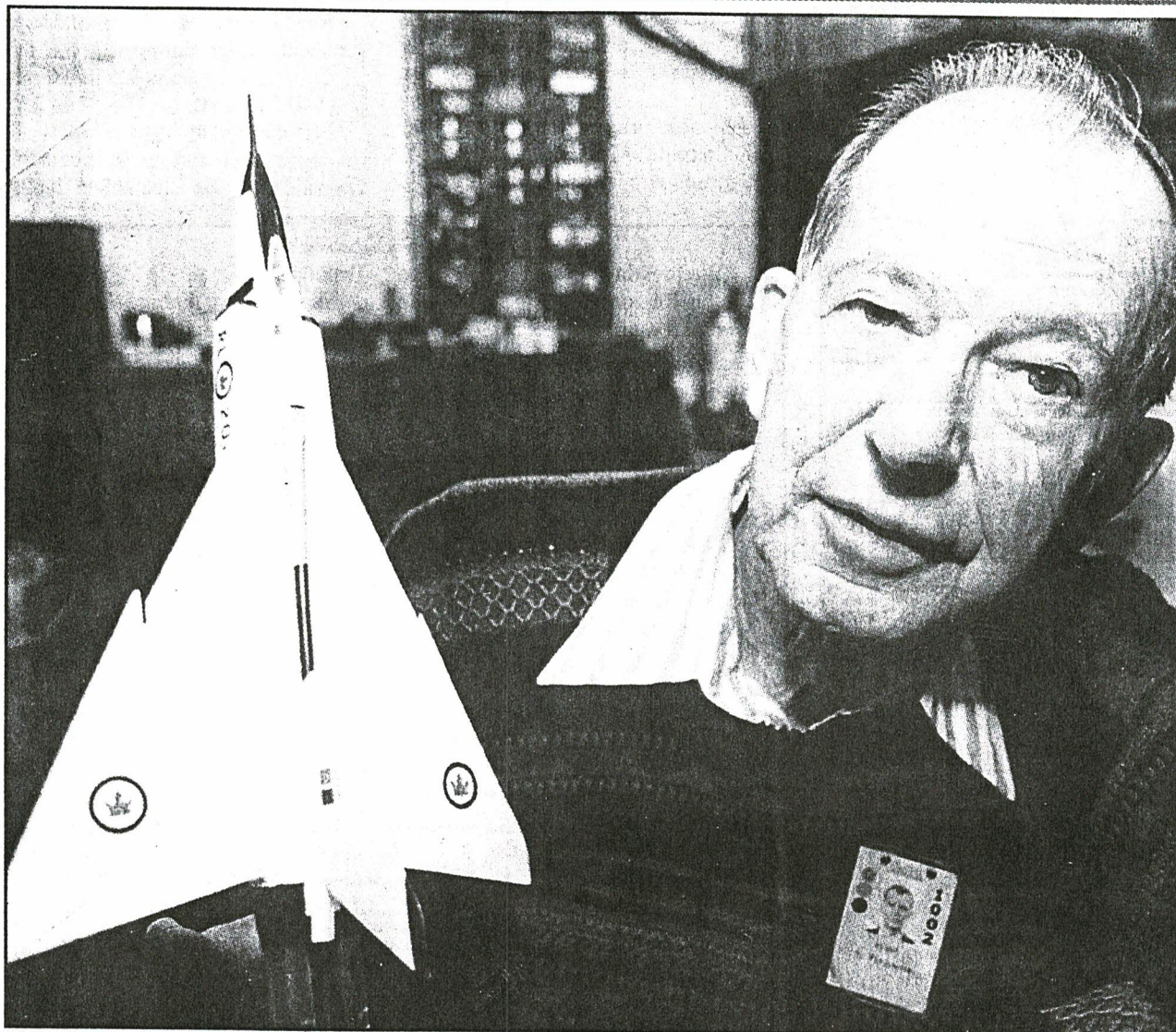


THE OAKVILLE BEAVER JAN 29/97



John Flippance and model of Avro Arrow: both he and his wife Jean, worked at the Avro plant and were layoff victims when the Diefenbaker government killed the plane's construction.

Photo by Peter McCusker

Remembering the ARROW

*For John Flippance and wife Jean,
aircraft's destruction was real tragedy*

By Karen Aiton
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Watching *The Arrow*, the highly publicized CBC TV-movie, brought it all back to local businessman John Flippance recently.

After nearly 40 years, he recalled, "The thing that hurt most, and hurts still, was seeing the aircraft destroyed. Many of our people had tears in their eyes. I felt like weeping too."

Both Flippance, 70, and his wife Joan were employed by Avro Aircraft in Malton at the time the Diefenbaker government axed the precocious, made-in-Canada, supersonic jet interceptor. Joan was a secretary in the office of RCAF Flight-Lieutenant Jack Woodman, and John was in the sales & service department as an electrical systems expert.

"There was something missing (in the CBC drama) that kind of bothered me," Flippance explained in a personal interview. "They missed the bigger picture."

The former Royal Navy man said the movie was "pretty fanciful. They got quite a few of the details wrong, but one thing they got right, it was a tragedy."

Fourteen thousand employees were fired on Black Friday - February 20, 1959 - suddenly and without warning.

"Some people never recovered from that," said the Oakville man.

The human cost of cancelling the Arrow program was astronomical, according to Flippance. Tens of thousands of jobs were lost in southern Ontario, and Avro Aircraft, a company with a proud record dating back to WWII when Lancaster bombers were produced for the war effort (under the Victory Aircraft marque), also never recovered.

The Avro story, which includes not only the Arrow, but the Jetliner, the CF-100 Canuck, and the Avro-car, is a fascinating episode in Canadian history.

"Canadian kids should know what happened," Flippance insisted. "They should know how advanced aviation technology was in this country."

With a crack team of engineers, scientists and technicians, and an enthusiastic, committed work force the company was advancing aviation technology with leaps and bounds.

"We had a sense we were working for a company with products that worked, that did the job. And we had a great feeling about the Arrow, especially after the first flight. Everything we heard about the aircraft was good," the electrician said.

"That scene in the movie that shows the first roll-out of the Arrow, that was quite accurate. I think everyone in the plant was given permission to watch, and there was tremendous excitement. For many people it was their first look, and it was an eye-opener all right, with the one large delta wing, revolutionary for its time."

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Flippance cannot forgive decision to scrap plane

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The retired businessman added, "The CF-100 was a good craft too, even if it did look a little antiquated compared with more modern jets like the Sabre. The Canuck was reliable, built to do a particular job, fly the Canadian north and protect us from Russian bombers."

The Avro Jetliner was also ahead of its time, according to the electronics expert, delivering mail, setting speed records at that time, and coveted by American millionaire Howard Hughes, who apparently knew a good thing when he saw it. The Avro-car was another innovation. Developed for the American army, the tank-like hovercraft had the look of a 'flying saucer.'

"We used to call it the world's best snow-blower," Flippance chuckled.

When the Arrow project was cancelled many engineers and scientists went back to England to work on the Concorde, and down to the States to work for NASA. It was clear the Conservative government of the day had no stomach for flight, the risks involved or the dollar cost.

"There was a cloud over everything after Black Friday," Flippance said, though he stayed on with the company until 1963 to help service CF-100s. In the early 1960s, however, he and his

old navy chum Sid Carr (who had been working for DeHavilland Aircraft), saw the writing on the wall and decided to go into business in Oakville selling and servicing television sets, radios, and stereos. They opened a store in Hopedale Mall in 1963.

It is possible to be philosophical about abandoning the Arrow project, but John Flippance can never forget, or forgive, the order to destroy the five completed aircraft, along with all the plans and blueprints.

He saw them breaking up the air-

planes on the tarmac by the experimental flight test hangar, cutting them into pieces beyond recognition. Sometimes driving home after work he saw the red trucks from Lax Brother's Salvage carting the pieces of scrap down 27 Highway to the Queen Elizabeth Way towards Hamilton.

"It was crazy," he said flatly. "It's the worst thing they could have done."

All that's left now are searing memories, a few books and videos, and a 'fan-ciful' CBC TV-movie.

It was a brief, shining moment in Canadian aviation history that came crashing down.