

Doreen Tuck

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NEWS

Resident recalls end of Avro Arrow

[Ian Holroyd](#)

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When Doreen Tuck recently heard on the radio that the anniversary of the Avro Arrow's cancellation was coming up, the memories began flooding back.

On Feb. 20, 1959, Tuck was working at Avro Canada when an announcement came over the public address system.

"We were all in there working and then all of a sudden at 2:30 (p.m.), we were all told to leave everything and we all had to move out," said the 73-year-old Burlington resident.

"And that was it."

On Tuesday (Feb. 12), Tuck sat at her dining room table with memorabilia from her time at Avro gathered on her crochet tablecloth.

She looked fondly at photographs of herself on the company's women's baseball team and the hockey team and also picked herself out of a sea of employees on the cover of *Canadian Aeronaut* magazine.

Avro Canada was the maker of the CF-105 Arrow (more commonly known as the Avro Arrow), an interceptor aircraft once thought to be the pinnacle of Canadian aviation achievement.



Prime Minister John Diefenbaker announced the cancellation of the project to the House of Commons on that fateful day in February, a day some refer to as Black Friday.

There has been much conjecture about the reasons for scrapping the Arrow but the official explanation was that defence funding would be used in other areas, such as intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Diefenbaker told the CBC at the time he knew 10,000 men and women would lose their jobs but canceling the Arrow was the "right thing to do."

Tuck said everyone at Avro was in shock when they heard the news. She recalled commuting back to Burlington from the Malton, Ont. plant that day in a car with five other Avro employees.

"We didn't know what to think or do," she said. "Is it really happening? And that was it. It was no more." But she still looks back on that time as a positive experience.

She said her dad, Jack Wilson, got her a job at Avro when she was 16 years old. Her father was a draftsman and had been working at the plant for 20 years when it closed.

The working environment was much different back then for women.

"I used to have to go through all the men and of course all the guys were whistling and carrying on," she said.

She explained that her job was, when someone asked her for something, she would go get it. She made \$35 a week.

Tuck said she remembers the Arrow's first flight, which took place on March 25, 1958. She said all the employees were invited outside to witness the historic event.

"Just to see it takeoff from the runway that day; it was just unbelievable, so sharp," she said. "When it took off, everybody was screaming and yelling.

"They were all working on it all those years to get there and of course the worst part was when they brought it to an end after all that."

Some of Tuck's fondest memories, she said, were playing sports for Avro.

She thought back to when Avro's women's hockey team played against Orenda, the makers of the Arrow's Iroquois engines, at Maple Leaf Gardens. She still brags to her husband that she played where the Maple Leafs play and he hasn't.

"How many good-looking women like us have been out there?" she asked with a smile.

When Tuck was asked if she felt like she was witnessing something important when she worked for Avro, she simply shrugged.

"I would just go in and do my job," she said.

After the closing of Avro, Tuck and her husband Ross raised a son and a daughter in Burlington and have been married for 55 years. They recently became great grandparents.

When asked why it was important to her to keep all the memorabilia from her days at Avro, she said, "Well, I was there when it happened."