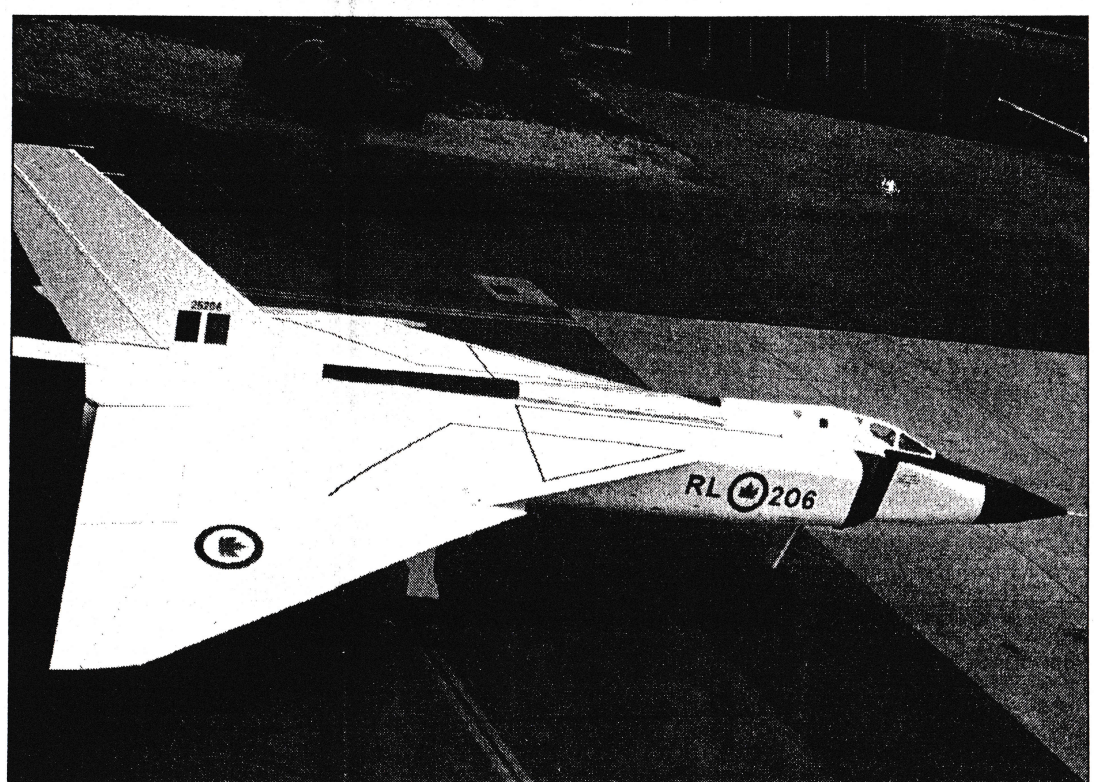




Pierre Sevigny, left, a minister in John Diefenbaker's government, says the cabinet did not order the Avro Arrow jets destroyed almost 40 years ago. (RYAN REMOIRZ/Canadian Press and CBC)

Arrow destroyed by builder, minister says

Former member of Diefenbaker's cabinet blames loss of Canadian plane and plans on mercurial manufacturer

BY JUSTIN KINGSLEY
Canadian Press

MONTREAL — A member of John Diefenbaker's cabinet has rattled decades of conventional thinking on the fate of the revolutionary Avro Arrow jet, asserting that cabinet never ordered the planes to be destroyed and that the United States actually offered to help salvage the program.

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

Furthermore, Mr. Sevigny said, the Americans were in favour 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.

The Americans have long been accused of instigating the Arrow's demise. But Mr. Sevigny, now 80 and a lecturer at Concordia University in Montreal, said the cabinet refused the U.S. 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," Mr. Sevigny said. "They were the only rich country in the world and were financing all the NATO countries. It caused an abominable friction and Canada replied it didn't need anyone's charity."

Mr. Sevigny served in the Second World War before he lost a leg, and was eventually promoted to colonel. He is an officer of the Order of Canada. He's also remembered for his affair with Gerda Munsinger, a German woman, from 1958 to 1961.

When the liaison became public in 1966, it caused a scandal, but subsequent investigations determined there was not a security risk, as the Liberals alleged at the time.

It has been almost 40 years since the Avro Arrow project was cancelled and the prototype planes destroyed. Mr. Sevigny's account of some of the circumstances are viewed as one of the last available sources of first-hand information on the matter. Other key members of the Diefenbaker cabinet have died, as has Mr. Gordon.

"What Mr. Sevigny says is important because the Americans are blamed in the myth," said military historian Russell Isinger, a researcher at the University of Saskatchewan who is co-writing a book on the Arrow.

"The Americans fell over themselves to support the program. But I'm not sure the story is as interesting [to some people] when there's no controversy. It's much more interesting when the Americans are involved."

But Ron Page, an aeronautical engineer who worked on the Arrow and was an RAF pilot at the end of the Second World War, said Mr. Diefenbaker

'The U.S., perhaps in an effort to prevent any disruption in the Canadian economy, offered to pay for the construction of the Arrow.'

was to blame, despite Mr. Sevigny's and Mr. Isinger's statements.

"The cancellation and the destruction are the same thing — you can't divorce one from the other," said Mr. Page, who co-wrote a leading technical book on the Arrow. "It's a moot point."

Designed as a defence against Russian bombers during the Cold War, the supersonic, twin-engine, delta-winged

Arrow was a source of great pride for Canadians. The airframe, engine, missile armament and electronic radar systems were to be products of Canadian minds and engineering.

With its cancellation came accounts that have become the Arrow myth and legend. But Mr. Sevigny's testimony is partly flawed, said Mr. Isinger.

National Defence files made public in the late 1980s indicated General George Pearkes, defence minister until 1960, and Air Marshal Hugh Campbell ordered the destruction of five of the planes and some blueprints. Mr. Sevigny would not necessarily have known these documents had existed, Mr. Isinger said.

Mr. Sevigny said he has not seen or heard of Defence files ordering the planes' destruction and insists the man responsible was Mr. Gordon.

Mr. Sevigny said that Mr. Gordon ordered the blueprints and planes destroyed — out of spite and anger toward the Diefenbaker government for cancelling the project.

Further proof that Mr. Gordon was capable of such an eruption, Mr. Sevigny added, is that when Mr. Diefenbaker announced the end of the Arrow in the Commons on Feb. 20, 1959, Mr.

Gordon immediately fired about 15,000 employees at his Toronto-area factory. For more than 30 years, amateur

historians and those closely attached to the project, dubbed Arrowheads, have contended that Mr. Diefenbaker was the instigator of the Arrow's demise. Military historians, on the other hand, have engaged Arrowheads in an academic dogfight, arguing that Mr. Diefenbaker was unjustly pegged as the scapegoat.

Some historians argue the cost of the program — more than \$1-billion — spelled its doom.

The failure of the Arrow, a program Mr. Diefenbaker inherited from the Liberals, had a lasting effect on him and his government.

Gen. Pearkes, a decorated war hero, could hardly believe or understand Mr. Gordon's actions, said Mr. Sevigny.

"Pearkes was deeply distressed by the affair and he told me when I joined the cabinet [in 1959]: 'It's a horrible mistake and we're going to pay for that. Why would I give the order to scrap these plans? Why? I wouldn't have done something as foolish as this and I didn't,'" he said.

Gen. Pearkes apparently advised Mr. Diefenbaker to call a news conference to explain Mr. Gordon's impulsive decision, but that did not happen.

and never resurfaced in the business world. He moved to New York, where he died in 1967 of a liver ailment at 52.

SP
se
—
las
sp
Ri

we
du
ne

tit
th
ch
tu

ci
iff
m
up

ex
th
tw
ki

pc
to
la

fo
of
st
T
—
ki
th

p
ki
th
h
r
w
th

ir
v
G
y
F

1
ti
C
fr

1
"i
T
w