

Obituary

Arrow Knell Tolled

By JOHN GILLIES

This is an obituary—an obituary marking the demise of Canada's sole entry into the era of supersonic flight.

The Avro Arrow, dealt a fatal blow Feb. 20 by the Federal Government's cancellation of the Arrow contract, died yesterday on a concrete flight apron at Malton Airport, within a few hundred yards of where it was born.

The last of the five airworthy Arrows was disposed of, its sleek, supersonic skin blackened by a welder's cutting torch. The remains, tubing, wiring and sections of tail and wing surfaces, were waiting to be loaded on a truck and removed for disposal as scrap metal.

No other aircraft in the history of Canadian aviation captured the public imagination and interest as did the Arrow. From the time the first word leaked out that Avro Aircraft Ltd. had on its drawing boards a delta-wing supersonic fighter, interest ran high.

Speculation ended on Oct. 4, 1957, when hangar doors were opened and the 32-ton white giant was towed on to the same concrete apron where yesterday it lay a small pile of metal, all that remained of the \$400,000,000 project. After its unveiling to civil and military leaders, five months of ground testing were made before the plane was taken aloft on its maiden flight.

In the early morning of March 25, 1958, Jan Zurakowski, Avro's chief experimental pilot, taxied the Arrow on to Malton Airport's runway No. 32. Word had been out for several days that the Arrow was soon to fly, and hundreds of spectators went to the airport to watch the plane try its wings.

A rise in the ground blocked the view of the south end of runway 32. For many minutes the whine of the twin Pratt and Whitney J-75 engines filled the air as Mr. Zurakowski ran through a final, preflight check. Suddenly a great cloud of black smoke denoted takeoff, and the Arrow roared over the rise in the runway and leaped into the air, climbing away at a fantastic angle.

Later, as it passed over the field, its delta shape was reminiscent of the paper gliders made by small boys.

As flight testing progressed, it was evident the achievement ranked Canada as a major name in the field of aircraft design and development. Performance statements announced first that the Arrow had broken the sound barrier during level flight and then later while climbing.

But the tests were not without disappointment. Twice the great machine lay wounded on the grass bordering runway 32, the result of brake and landing gear problems. In the second crash, the plane had just completed a successful speed test during which W. J. (Spud) Potocki attained 1,300 mph.

Mr. Potocki was one of the four pilots who hold the distinction of having flown the Arrow. Mr. Zurakowski nursed it from the drawing board into the air and through its early testing. Peter Cope and Mr. Potocki then took over the flight testing program. To Filt.-Ltd. Jack Woodman went the distinction of being the only service pilot ever to fly the Arrow, and the RCAF's Trenton airdrome is the only airport other than Malton that an Arrow ever landed.

Performance of the Arrow lead Avro officials to predict that when equipped with its own Iroquois engines the machine would easily capture the world's air speed record, but the Arrow never flew with the Iroquois engines.

Its death knell was heard faintly last September when it was announced in the House of Commons that the Arrow program was to be reviewed before orders for 34 of the aircraft were placed. Five months later the announcement cancelling the Arrow stunned the country.

The RL-206, which was to be the first Arrow equipped with Iroquois engines, never left the assembly line. On orders from the defense production department it and a dozen other Arrows in various stages of assembly fell before the cutting torch along with the jigs that held them.

In the Commons, Paul Hellyer, opposition defense critic, fought in vain to save the five airworthy Arrows. His pleas that they be used for supersonic test purposes for an attempt on the world airspeed record failed. The cutting torches began their job.

And one by one, the five aircraft, which a few short months ago were the pride of the Canadian aviation industry, disappeared into piles of scrap.

The end came yesterday with a fate similar to that of an earlier Avro project, the Jetliner. Both vanished beneath the flames of cutting torches, their full potential unknown.