

DON ROGERS (1916-2006)

Avro Arrow pilot modest even after breaking records

Program's cancellation couldn't stop flyboy from pursuing his passion

The Canadian Press
TORONTO

The man who oversaw flight operations for the revolutionary but ill-fated Avro Arrow has died.

A memorial service will be held Thursday in Toronto for Don Rogers, who died of cancer last week at the age of 89.

After the death last year of Arrow test pilot Peter Cope, Rogers became the last surviving test pilot for the company. Formerly Avro's chief test pilot, he went on to become director of flight operations, overseeing Cope and three other pilots involved in the day-to-day testing of the Arrow.

The group's contributions to aviation and Canadian heritage should not be taken lightly, said Andrew Hibbert, president of Arrow Recovery Canada.

"All we ever talk about now is astronauts and people like that, but these were the astronauts of their day," Hibbert said. "They were the most advanced and well-trained pilots in the world at that time."

In addition to being a well-respected pilot, Rogers — who died July 19 at his home in Toronto — was very caring and "a gentleman's gentleman," said his son Raymond, 65.

"He was very old-school, he really was," Raymond said. "He was an absolute gentleman. He was quiet, he was unassuming, he was extremely modest about what he's done and accomplished in his career."

In addition to Raymond, who wasn't a pilot but worked in aviation for 36 years, Rogers had two other children: Connie Mount, 58, and Stephen, who died in a car accident about 30 years ago.

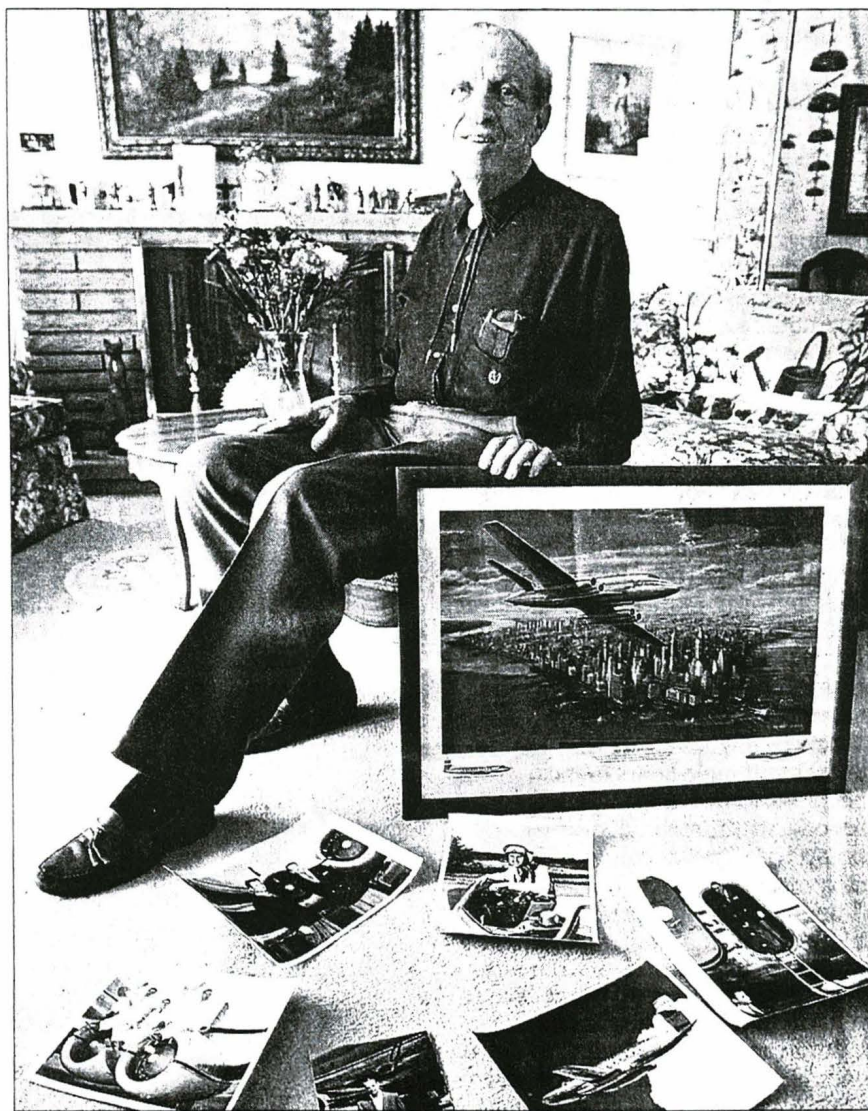
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"(The Arrow) was light-years ahead of its time," said Hibbert. "When it was built in the '50s it probably was one of the most advanced aircraft in the world."

After losing his job at Avro, Rogers went on to work for de Havilland as a test pilot.

He never lost his zeal for aviation and



NATIONAL POST, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE, FILE

Avro Arrow test pilot Don Rogers at his Etobicoke home in February 2005

he later travelled across the county with his wife, June, sharing his Avro experiences with historians and enthusiasts.

The pilot's lifelong love affair with flying began at the Hamilton Aero Club, where he earned his pilot's licence in 1936 at the age of 20. Flying was his passion, his son said.

"I think he liked the feel of it more than anything else, quite honestly," Raymond said.

"He just absolutely loved the physical aspect of it, there's no doubt about it."

On February 20, 1959, then prime minister John Diefenbaker announced in the House of Commons that the Arrow program would be cancelled, leading to massive layoffs, and what one expert described as an aerospace brain

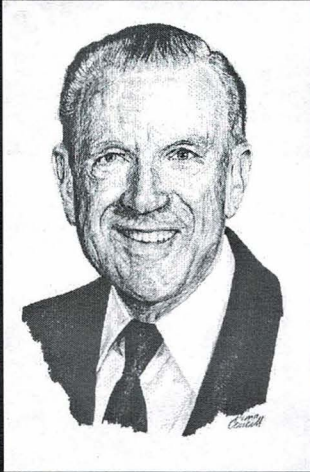
drain to the United States.

Frank Harvey, president of the Aerospace Heritage Foundation of Canada, said many of Avro's top engineers and other employees moved to the U.S. to work for NASA and were "instrumental" in the successful 1969 effort to put a man on the moon. Money was the reason cited for the cancellation of the Arrow program, but many critics say it would have eventually paid off in the end.

"I think Canada could have saved a lot of money in the long run," said Harvey.

"We lost a great deal as far as the aerospace technology and that didn't really pick up until 25 or 30 years later, until Canadair started producing the Challenger jets."

P A S S A G E S



Don Rogers 1916-2006

Roger's career in aviation, like so many of his fellow Members of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, was interesting and varied. He began flying in the mid-thirties, and went on to become chief test pilot at Avro Canada, reaching speeds of more than 500 miles per hour in the Avro Jetliner in the mid-fifties. In the sixties and seventies he test flew and demonstrated the slow-flying STOL aircraft at de Havilland Canada.

He was inducted by The Hall with the following citation:

"His exceptional abilities as a test and demonstration pilot and his talents in training pilots to STOL technology have been of lasting benefit to the Canadian aviation industry and to the nation of Canada."

Don passed away at his home on July 16, 2006.

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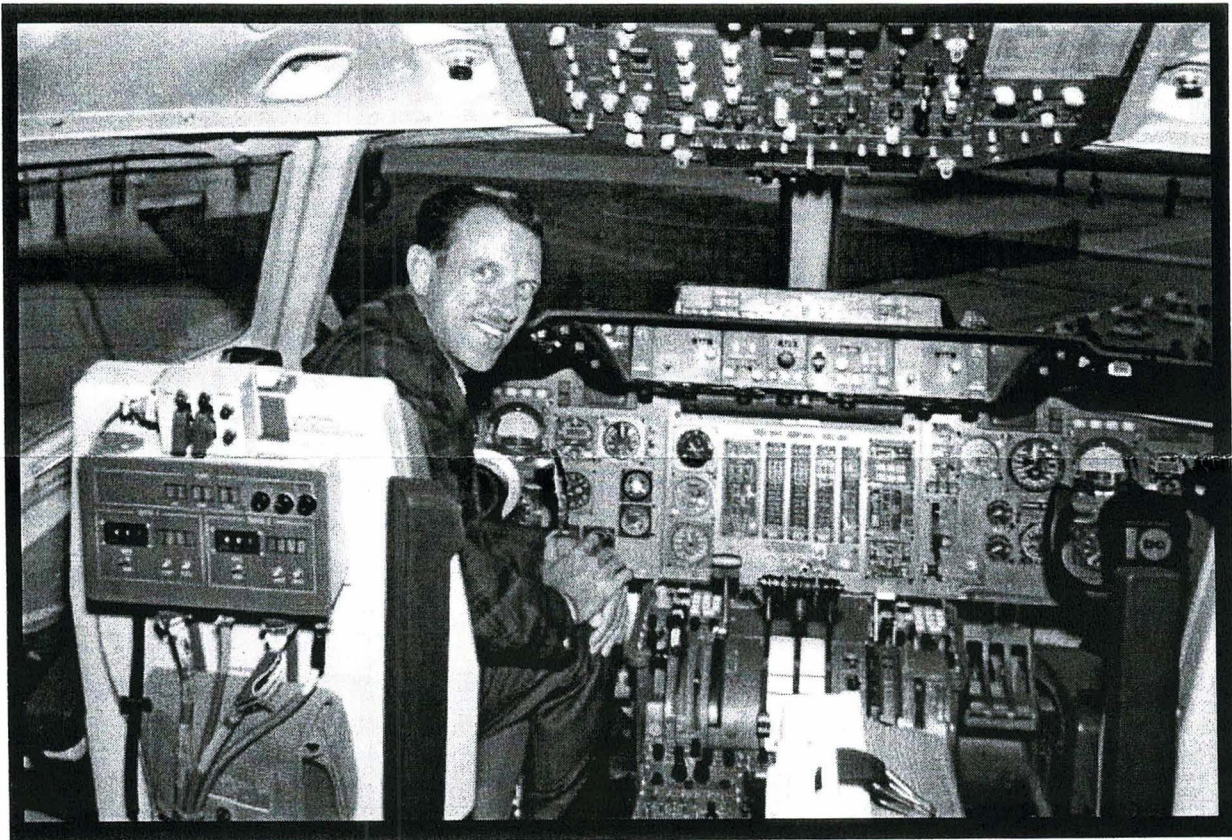
Do you know of a person who should be nominated for induction into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame?

There are many deserving people out there who have made lasting contributions to aviation in Canada and we'd like to know about them.

We need your Help!

To nominate a person for induction into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, please contact The Hall for nomination forms and criteria.

IN MEMORIUM



Donald Howard Rogers
November 26, 1916 - July 19, 2006

Beloved husband for 66 years of June. Loving father of Raymond, Stephen (deceased), and Constance. Grandfather of Anthony, Kelly, Trevor, Catherine and Scott.

Don Rogers enjoyed a lifelong career in Canadian aviation starting in 1935. He worked as a Flight Instructor at the Hamilton Aero Club and at Mount Hope, then as a Test Pilot for Avro Aircraft and finally as a Test Demonstration, and Delivery Pilot for DeHavilland.

In recognition of his years of testing and demonstrating the Avro Jetliner and many other Canadian designed and built aircrafts throughout the world, Don was awarded the Trans Canada McKee Trophy in 1983. In June of 1998 he was inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame and in December of 1998 was admitted as a fellow of the Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute.

A Memorial service was held on July 27th, at St. James Islington United Church, located at 400 Burnhamthorpe Road. Funeral Arrangements were entrusted to the Scott Funeral Home "West Toronto Chapel".

Obituaries

DON ROGERS, AVIATOR 1916-2006

The chief test pilot for A.V. Roe was the last of his breed, a brotherhood of fliers who helped set Canada on the leading edge of aviation technology. For all that, he was no swashbuckler — and proud of it

BY PETER CHENEY, TORONTO

As a test pilot, Don Rogers had known plenty of colleagues who died on the job. One was flying a new aircraft that came apart within sight of the airport. Another was trapped inside a fighter that went down in flames. But Mr. Rogers himself was fated to survive — and was killed by cancer, not by an airplane.

Mr. Rogers was the last remaining member of a brotherhood that defined a Canadian Golden Age. As chief test pilot for the A.V. Roe company, Mr. Rogers lived with risk, and helped create iconic aircraft that once set Canada on aviation's leading edge.

The contributions of test pilots to aviation and Canadian heritage should not be taken lightly, says Andrew Hibbert, president of Arrow Recovery Canada.

"All we ever talk about now is astronauts and people like that, but these were the astronauts of their day," Mr. Hibbert said. "They were the most advanced and well-trained pilots in the world at that time."

In his own way, Mr. Rogers also personified a particular brand of Canadian gentility — he was a "gentleman's gentleman."

"He was very old-school," said his son Raymond, 65. "He was quiet, he was unassuming, he was extremely modest about what he's done and accomplished."

Mr. Rogers was no swashbuckler, and had no time for those who regarded test-pilots as heroes. He said his success wasn't based on skill or nerve. Instead, he chalked it up to being "in the right place at the right time."

He was defined by flight. He grew up in Hamilton, Ont., during a time when pilots enjoyed celebrity status, and new aircraft designs captivated the public. He learned to fly at the Hamilton Aero Club and got his pilot's in 1936. It was also where he found love of a different kind. In 1940 he married June, the sweet-heart he had met there.

As war loomed in the late 1930s, he took an instructor's course with the Royal Canadian Air Force and later became assistant chief flying instructor at an RCAF school in Mount Hope, Ont. In 1942, he transferred to the National Steel Car plant and tested military aircraft that would be shipped to Europe for the war effort. His logbook soon read like an airplane buff's wish list — he flew Lysanders, Avro Ansons, Lancaster bombers, and B-25 Mitchell bombers. Mr. Rogers also flew two transatlantic ferry flights, now routine, but then a



Modest to a fault, Don Rogers believed his success wasn't based on skill or nerve. Rather, it was because he was 'in the right place at the right time.' Among the most famous aircraft he piloted was the supersonic Avro Arrow, below, which first rolled out of its hangar on Oct. 4, 1957.



HAROLD ROBINSON/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

genuine adventure when radial piston engines leaked so much oil they had to be topped up after every flight.

His reputation as a cool and gifted pilot landed him a job at A.V. Roe, a Toronto company that would describe a tragic arc — it became shining symbol of Canadian enterprise, only to crash and burn thanks to a combination of political machination and corporate myopia. Mr. Rogers arrived at the company in 1945, just as it prepared to enter a period of unparalleled inventiveness and energy.

Mr. Rogers' position was chief test pilot. Although the title conjured up images of Errol Flynn in a white scarf, Mr. Rogers was modest about his role: "Daredevil stunts of our Hollywood and Sunday supplement counterparts have distorted the picture most people have of my profession," he once said. "Although I have always found test flying to be interesting and stimulating, I have yet to jump out of a burning plane into the arms of a beautiful woman — worse luck."

The A.V. Roe plant was a vast manufacturing plant with a huge engineering department that was

drawing up plans for such amazing projects as the C-102 Jetliner, a jet-powered airliner designed to hit speeds of to 800 km/h — almost three times faster than the propeller-driven airliners of the time. The Jetliner flew for the first time in 1949, with hundreds of cheering A.V. Roe lining the runway. Mr. Rogers took over the testing on the Jetliner's 16th flight, and soon discovered the first major gremlin when the landing gear refused to extend. (An engineer flying with Mr. Rogers broke a rib trying to get the wheels down with an emergency handle.) The airport manager urged him to ditch the Jetliner in Lake Ontario, but Mr. Rogers was bent on saving the airplane, and made a belly landing on the runway.

The problem was quickly traced to an easily fixed design flaw. Mr. Rogers minimized the drama of the wheels-up landing: "... there was no problem at all as far as we were concerned," he said.

Over the next two years, Mr. Rogers broke speed records in the Jetliner and made the first international air-mail flight in a jet transport when he flew mail from

Toronto to New York. Included in the cargo was a peace pipe that the mayor of Toronto told Mr. Rogers and flight engineer Bill Baker to deliver to the mayor of New York. "I didn't know which one of us was supposed to puff on the thing to keep it going," Mr. Rogers said. "I think Bill lighted it just before we landed."

In 1951, Mr. Rogers demonstrated the Jetliner to the American military and several U.S. airlines — interest in the jetliner was soaring. Then politics got in the way and Ottawa ordered Avro to stop working on the Jetliner and concentrate on getting the new CF-100 jet fighter and the Orenda jet engine into production so they could be used in the Korean war.

A.V. Roe executives put the project on the backburner, against the objections of Mr. Rogers, who believed the company was poised to dominate a new market. There was only one other jet airliner in the world (the DeHavilland Comet, which flew 13 days before the C-102, but was cursed by a design flaw that caused a series of crashes). The Jetliner was ready almost a decade before the Boeing 707, which would define the age of jet travel.

But instead of continuing with the Jetliner, Avro shifted its focus to keep Ottawa happy — and missed the jet market, in a move that might be compared to Bill Gates deciding to get out of the software business in the mid-1970s. "I personally feel that the company made a very bad decision at that point," Mr. Rogers said later.

Even so, the Jetliner exerted a powerful mystique. In 1952, Mr. Rogers was asked to fly the airplane to California at the request of Howard Hughes, who wanted to use it to develop new equipment. Mr. Rogers soon found himself drawn into the world of the brilliant and eccentric tycoon.

Although he was supposed to stay only 10 days, Mr. Rogers was soon placed on retainer by Mr. Hughes, who wanted him available at all times. Mr. Hughes flew in Mr. Rogers's wife and children, then rented them a luxurious former ambassador's residence in nearby Coldwater Canyon that had a swimming pool and fruit trees.

Mr. Hughes had the Jetliner moved to a guarded compound, along with several other treasured aircraft. Mr. Rogers would wait for weeks at a time, then find himself summoned for a flying session with Mr. Hughes.

Although he was an excellent pilot, the tycoon had a distinctive quirk — "complete and utter disregard" for air traffic control in one of the most congested airspaces in the world. When Mr. Rogers asked him about his flight plan and other the proximity of other aircraft as they climbed up through the fog and smog of Los Angeles, Mr. Hughes replied: "Don't worry about that."

When Hollywood released the Hughes biopic *The Aviator* in 2005, Mr. Rogers was asked whether the movie corresponded with reality. Mr. Rogers said that the billionaire's eccentricities had been heightened in the film. "I had met and flown with a most outstanding man who was an expert pilot," he said, "and had seen something of a way of life much different than that to which I was accustomed."

From the mid-fifties onward, Mr. Rogers lived through a devastating decline at A.V. Roe. In 1956, the company decreed that the Jetliner be scrapped. Mr. Rogers stayed away from the hangar while the work went on: "I can't imagine anything more unpleasant than seeing an airplane that you have lived with for seven years and enjoyed flying — a really beautiful machine — being cut up with saws, axes and hammers, with pieces falling on the hangar floor," he said. "... it was a heart-rending experience."

Just three years later, the Diefenbaker government ordered the cancellation of the Arrow, a supersonic fighter that many saw as the apogee of Canadian technical achievement. Like the Jetliner, the Arrows were cut up for scrap.

The CF-100 jet fighter, one of its staple products, was discontinued the same year, and the company's aerial mojo was gone. Mr. Rogers became head of the company's new marine division, supervising the construction of aluminum boat hulls. Although he made the best of it, pointing out that the cockpit of a boat was far less cramped than that of the CF-100 jet he once test flew, Mr. Rogers still longed to fly, and rented private aircraft at a local flying club.

In 1962, A.V. Avro's British parent company was purchased by Hawker-Siddeley, which closed the Toronto plant. The facility was later operated by other aircraft companies, including Boeing, but was demolished in 2005.

"I'm horrified to see the place going down," Mr. Rogers said. "It did a good job."

Donald Rogers was born on Nov. 26, 1916, in Hamilton, Ont. He died of cancer on July 19, 2006, in Toronto. He was 89. He is survived by June, his wife of 66 years, and by his son Raymond and his daughter Connie. He was predeceased by his son Stephen.

With files from Canadian Press

Nation loses Avro flight leader

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ARROW RECOVERY
CANADA

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