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"Our workmen did it. We walked in there and took them apart. We used saws -- you couldn't use torches because it was too dangerous. The fixtures in the plant were torched; the aircraft were sawed. And we paid \$ 300,000 for the works.... We put them on trailers and took them down to the smelters where every one was smelted down. Nobody could purchase the material from us because we

These photos were taken from a helicopter chartered by the Montreal Standard magazine when they got wind of the scrapping.

we were under security. They were watching us all the time. We had three or four men watching us and we had to do it as quickly as we could. War assets came and took the vital parts out of the aircraft, but when that was done they wanted them out in a hurry, scrapped and out. When we got to the smelter the weights had to coincide with delivery. No part escaped. In fact I had to guarantee that if any got out I was in trouble." Sam Lax - Lax Brothers Salvage, Hamilton

-- from page 275 of Greig Stewart's book "Shutting Down The National Dream."

The masses of newly-unemployed Avro workers had left the factory floor some two months before. On April 22 1959, a new crew moved their equipment onto the premises of the A.V. Roe company, and began a detailed and thorough destruction of all Arrow prototypes, the machines and tools used to construct them, and all plans and blueprints.

The seemingly wanton destruction has always stood out as the Arrow affair's most poignant feature. Like the martyr to his faithful followers, it could be said that the Arrow might never have transfixed the minds of Canadians in quite the same way had it not been so brutally obliterated.

The Usual Suspect

The rationale and circumstances behind the destruction has remained mysterious to this day. Though everyone knows that all the prototypes were cut up for scrap shortly after the project cancellation, (besides the legend that a single Arrow got away) a culprit is noticeably missing from many accounts. Traditionally the blame has rested on the shoulders of then-Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, but in recent years new evidence has made finger-pointing more complex.



Many still consider Diefenbaker to be the principal suspect in ordering the destruction of the Arrow aircraft. He denied it to his death.

The case against Dief has rested on a few scenarios. The highly influential CBC teledrama *The Arrow*, which took a great deal of license with the Arrow story, posited a guilty Diefenbaker working a hasty hatchet job to cover his tracks and leave no trace of the could-have-been glory he had struck down in its prime. The record shows no indication that photographs and films of the Arrow had been earmarked for destruction. Only plans, drawings and blueprints, which were of strategic value, were to be destroyed. Arrow, in any case, was [well-known to the Canadian public](#) at the time.

The Butler did it

Another culprit for the arc-welding atrocity got the spotlight in 1988 when Pierre Sevigny, associate defense minister in Diefenbaker's cabinet from 1958 to 1963, came forth to tell his version of the story to the Canadian press. The 80-year-old said he wanted to set the record straight and to clear Diefenbaker's name. He laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of Crawford Gordon, the mercurial, hard-drinking boss of A.V. Roe company, a bitter personal foe of the Diefenbaker's.

Gordon, who died impoverished in New York City in 1967 of cirrhosis of the liver, dropped out of the business world soon after the Arrow debacle. He was noted for his irascible temperament and the personal animosity he had for Diefenbaker (who was by many accounts no easy man to get along with either).

Gordon destroyed the Arrow, Sevigny suggested, for revenge. "That order did not come from the cabinet," Sevigny told the press. "Gordon took it upon himself to destroy the thing because he thought Diefenbaker's government should have listened to him and was to blame."

According to Sevigny, one man who saw the need to make Gordon's actions public was Defence Minister Gen. George Pearkes. Sevigny said Pearkes advised Diefenbaker to call a news conference regarding Gordon's decision, but the need for secrecy and Diefenbaker's paranoid tendencies persuaded the Prime Minister otherwise. Pearkes cringed, said Sevigny, when Diefenbaker refused to make Gordon's actions public and chose instead to hope the issue would go away. Sevigny quoted Pearkes: "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," Pearkes reportedly said. "It was done by this madman, this bounder, Crawford Gordon."

Was destroying the Arrow the kind of malicious act that a man who would fire 14,000 people could perform? Whether or not it was justifiable to send the workers home on the day of cancellation, the fact remains that the Arrow was military property. The government had already sunk hundreds of millions into it. It wasn't Gordon's possession to do with as he pleased -- he would have faced criminal charges for ordering its destruction.

The Paper Trail

Sevigny's remarks about Pearkes are rather odd when new information is factored into the story. The author of one of the latest books on the Arrow has painstakingly declassified scores of secret documents, including several that point the finger directly at Defence Minister George Pearkes and Air Marshall Hugh Campbell. Palmiro Campagna's book *Storms of Controversy* documents the events that made the mutilation of the completed and uncompleted Arrows an inevitable consequence of cancellation.

In early March, sometime after cancellation, the RCAF asked the Defense Research Board (DRB) if the National Aeronautics Establishment (NAE), an arm of the National Research Council (NRC), wouldn't have some use for the five finished aircraft. The NAE replied it would have no use for the aircraft; maintaining it would be too expensive; the Arrow had yet to prove its airworthiness which requires 1000 hours of flight, as compared to the 65 hours which the Arrow had clocked in; and that spare parts were unavailable (this was apparently not true).

(It is remembered here by Arrow historians that in 1954 the NAE had been a great critic of Avro and the aerodynamic feasibility of the Arrow program. The issue became contentious, and in the end, the Washington-based National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics was called in as an independent arbiter. They ruled in favor of Avro.)

This failed initiative was followed by a recommendation from Air Chief of Staff Hugh Campbell to Defence Minister George Pearkes suggesting options to scrap the Arrow. By early April, Pearkes

approved the scrapping. There is no evidence proving or disproving Diefenbaker's knowledge of the plans.

Throughout the scrapping process, it seems that the idea of saving a few of the planes for posterity was being tossed around. No one seemed to have picked up the ball, and the scrapping proceeded as planned. The question of coordinating the disposal of the Arrow had been turned over to a special Termination Group in early March, and now they sold the Arrows to a Hamilton-based scrap company who dismantled it under heavy supervision (read their account of it here). They paid the government some \$300,000 to reduce to scrap a project costing hundreds of millions.

[Arrow remnant-hunter Mike McAllister describes the mysterious circumstances surrounding the disposal of the Arrow and the Iroquois](#)

Why?

The decision to reduce the project to scrap was a result of military security concerns. In retrospect it may seem strange to destroy advanced technological secrets simply because a project has been delayed or cancelled, but a closer examination shows that the decision is pretty consistent with the rest of the affair. Cold War paranoia was a very real thing, and unless a sensitive piece of technology could be thoroughly protected, it couldn't just be left lying around. While the Arrow was clearly an advanced project, it seemed to have been conspicuously bereft of any friends who would be willing to spend the necessary sums on its maintenance. Its name, it appears, was mud.

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