

# Arrow shame rekindled

A sense of shame has been slowly rising in me over the Avro Arrow. The fighter plane was cancelled, then almost obliterated by the Diefenbaker government 20 years ago last February. My shame deepened after reading the new paperback by E.K. Shaw, *There Never Was an Arrow*. The book is published by Steel Rail Educational Publishing of Toronto.

Back in 1958, when I was an MP, I sat in the cockpit of the first finished CF 105 (Arrow) on the tarmac at Malton. I was thrilled by its lines and the excitement in those who built it. Yet, when the fighter project ran into trouble with the government, when there was an orchestrated campaign against putting it into production through the fall and winter (before the axe fell on Feb. 20, 1959) I never spoke out for it. Not that it would have made any difference. I was only one MP in a tiny caucus of eight and less than a year before Diefenbaker had run up the staggering total of 207 Conservative MPs in the '58 election. For a time few dared to tilt with the great man.

But one does well to judge oneself in retrospect. I wasn't there for the Arrow. My excuse then looks silly now. It was one of the reasons put forward by the defence minister of the time, George Pearkes. He asserted again and again that the manned fighter was obsolete in the new age of intercontinental missiles. I bought that.

Of course, those of you aware that we're about to buy new fighter planes this next quarter which are not much ahead of the Arrow in performance can have a laugh at Pearkes and me and many others. The new planes will cost us three to four times what would have faced the government in '59 in footing the bill for making those production Arrows in Canada (including its Orenda engines). The crushing point is that if the Arrow was made obsolete by the missiles, what about these F-16s or F-18s 20 years later?

Shaw's book prompted me to read back the parliamentary record of 20 years ago. In this year when debate over Petro-Can and its future has raged for months it seems almost unfathomable that Parliament took the Arrow cancellation so meekly. One day's debate, without a vote! Much kaffuffle over 14,000 jobs lost! Much piety over the high costs! Lester Pearson took it lying down, insisting again and again that he couldn't quarrel with the merits of the decision because the government, NATO and Norad (our allies) must have had sensible reasons to kill the plane and plant. My leader of the time, Hazen Argue, railed away about the workers.

Pearkes and Diefenbaker moved from their talk of the manned fighter to pride in their own perspicacity in arranging to buy Bomarc missiles to meet the manned bomber threat. What an ironic laugh that choice became three years later. The issue of arming the Bomarc with nuclear warheads (to make them useful) split the Chief's cabinet and set in train his downfall. Any satisfaction over such kismet fades when one reviews what we blew when we junked the Arrow.

The Shaw book is a good review. Perhaps she is too bitter. Perhaps she credits the Chief with too much malice against both the Arrow and Crawford Gordon, Avro's boss, and a protege of one of Dief's hates, C.D. Howe.

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What she is particularly good on is the story of the creation of an expert, high technology in Toronto which first built the Lancaster bomber then the first North American jetliner, and the CF 100 fighter. Her story of the development of the fine Iroquois and Orenda engines makes the point even better than does the tale of our increasing skills at airframe construction. What a failure of backing! What a weaseling away in national self-confidence.

One of the more recent, hind-sight criticisms of the Arrow is that its development went slowly and the product, at the time of decision, was indifferent in performance and unable to match the fighter standards of our allies, particularly the Americans. Shaw satisfies me that this is a prejudiced, uninformed critique. Indeed, the gist of her comparisons with other aircraft and with the unfortunate Bomarc makes the contrary point. The Arrow has a genuine lead over other aircraft at the time, just as the cancelled Avro jet airliner in 1949 had had a seven-year lead on the first American jetliner (The Boeing 707).

There are several morals to her story. At the time she was an aviation engineering technologist with Avro. Although in her 50s she was so exercised at what she saw as faint-hearted, daunted Canadianism that she went back to university to study economics and political science. Why? She was baffled by the decision. She sought to understand it. She worked in Africa for a time, examining developing countries to see how they rose to the challenge of being distinctive.

Her grim conclusion, "... the establishment in Canada, with which all governments are willing to collaborate, is less concerned about the future of Canada as a country than about the security of their investments and their positions of power. If these can best be served by strengthening their American contacts and letting them take over the country, so be it."

Killing the Arrow has made us, seemingly forever, the clients of the U.S. aircraft industry.

"Our so-called elite," says Shaw, "including many of our academics, tell us that 'nationalism' is a childish and naive luxury that we should outgrow. ... 'ownership isn't important' as long as we are given jobs."

She says: "In concentrating on the constitution in its search for national unity, the government has missed the point. National unity? Under what flag?"

The Americans in 1959 had every reason to be delighted with the killing of the Arrow and the end of Avro in Canada. "But the Americans alone could not have done it; it had to be done by Canadians."

Yes, ma'am, and most of us let it happen without even a whimper.