



SANDI KRASOWSKI/THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Charlotte Holt looks through an autographed copy of the autobiography of Janusz Zurakowski, the Polish test pilot of the ill-fated Avro Arrow.

Death of Avro Arrow test pilot end of an era that almost was

I WAS SADDENED to see in your Feb. 11 issue, the death of Janusz Zurakowski, the Polish test pilot of the ill-fated Avro Arrow. It is indeed the final chapter of this fascinating story.

I was fortunate to receive a few months ago, an autographed copy of his biography. This man had a fascinating life, beginning with his experiences flying for Poland at the beginning of the Second World War. Escaping to join the RAF he, like so many Polish fliers, was dedicated to the goal of ridding the world of Nazi domination, and particularly of Poland's suffering under the German occupation.

Flying Spitfires in a Polish squadron, he was responsible for shooting down several enemy planes, and at times, had to bale out of his aircraft.

After the war, a number of Polish airmen came to live in Canada, and because Jan had been a test pilot in Britain, in April, 1952, the squadron leader was asked by A.V. Roe Canada to come to this country to test the newly-manufactured C 100 Mark 1, followed by Mark 2 and Mark 3. In the Mark 4, this 37-year-old test pilot broke the sound barrier on a Canadian-designed and -built jet.

On March 25, 1958, Jan made the first flight of the Avro Arrow CF 105, an advanced supersonic interceptor, at Malton, Ont. The 32-ton jet was airborne for 35 minutes at a height of 5,000 feet and at a speed of 250 knots. Jan made over 20 test flights in the Arrow and reached a speed of Mach 1.96, very close to the speed of sound.

This is what he said. "What Canada always needed was some success, some sort of glue which joins people together and makes them proud of being Canadian; if we don't have an idea connecting the souls and dreams of Canadians, we start to disintegrate. The

Arrow was that great idea and fantastic opportunity; we made one of the best planes in the history of aviation, well ahead of its time; in its looks and technological advancement and specifications, it reached forward into the space age.

"We were proud of this Canadian product, which was much better than any other interceptor in the world. There are few planes today that are better; Canadian forces fly Hornet F-18s, which are slower than the Arrow was in its development stages almost half a century ago.

"Can you imagine what kind of a plane Canadians would be flying today if the CF-105, Avro Canada and Orenda hadn't been destroyed? The plane was outstanding; people worked with a rare enthusiasm, and the future of Canada as a nation of space technologies was bright. Killing the Arrow was like killing the national soul. And who did it? Invaders? Enemies? Martians? No. Canadians dealt this fate to Canadians. John Diefenbaker's government made a short-sighted decision, which decades later proved to be absolutely wrong, in every respect."

On Feb. 20, 1959, the Avro Arrow was indeed cancelled by John Diefenbaker's Conservative government despite the enormous potential the design showed and

the reputation it gained in the aviation world of being one of the greatest and most beautiful jets in the world. Together with the engines, blueprints, models and photographs, every trace of the project was erased.

The Lancaster bomber, that illustrious aircraft which did so much to hasten the end of the last war, almost met the same fate. Of the hundreds built, (500 of them in Canada alone) only two capable of flying exist today. In 2001 I was fortunate to fly in the only Lanc in the world allowed to take up passengers. There are a few Stearmans left, and I am scheduled to fly in one this spring.

A very dear friend in Toronto a short time ago married a man named Tom Fijalkowski and through sheer coincidence I was told that his family was related to the Zurakowskis, who sponsored Tom's family to come from Argentina to Canada. They stayed with them for quite some time. As a matter of fact the Fijalkowskis attended Jan's funeral at Barry's Bay last week. It was a most moving service and it was evident that this man, who had an extraordinary life and accomplished so much, took the most pride in his family. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

A diary, written in Polish of Jan's life, is being translated into English and is to be published shortly. In this small autobiography which I have, written by Marek Kusiba (Adres Books) this Polish-Canadian test pilot said, "Governments and torches can destroy an aircraft but they cannot destroy hope and aspiration, and the majesty of the questing spirit. In the hearts of people, the dream lives on."

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