

STARWEEK

TV Magazine

BLACK
FRIDAY
Feb. 20 / 1959
1959

Broken Arrow

Elwy Yost recalls the short life
of the Avro Arrow, killed by
Diefenbaker mythologized by a
nation and now resurrected
in a CBC miniseries

This series
shown on T.V.
Jan. 16 / 12 P / 13
1997

JANUARY 11 TO 18



THE RIGHT STUFF.
THE WRONG TIME.

It was a breakthrough in aviation.
It was shot down by politics and fear.

THE ARROW

BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF THE AVRO ARROW.

STARRING

DAN AYKROYD
SARA BOTSFORD
AIDAN DEVINE
RON WHITE

PART 1:

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 8PM

PART 2:

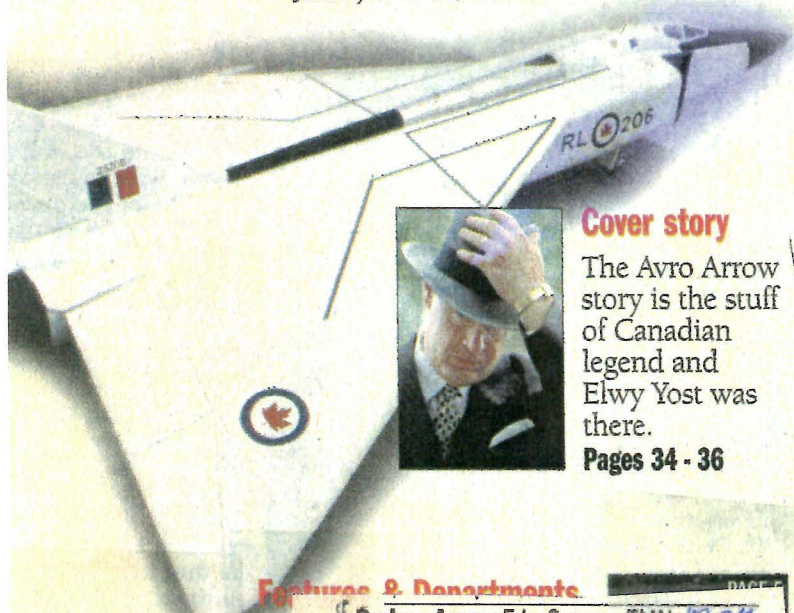
MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 8PM

CBC



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January 11 to 18, 1997



Cover story

The Avro Arrow story is the stuff of Canadian legend and Elwy Yost was there.

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Features & Departments

Broken Arrow Fri., 9 p.m., TMN 1997

Clint Eastwood in a musical? That was exactly the reaction of movie audiences when 1969's *Paint Your Wagon* ambled into view. It had been a blockbuster Broadway musical but Paramount erred badly in casting three non-singing leads (the other two: Lee Marvin and Jean Seberg). Director Joshua Logan had previously ruined *South Pacific* and *Camelot* on the screen and was the wrong choice — he preferred lavish production numbers to any kind of coherent plot line. The original story was jettisoned as outdated and a new one about a menage-a-trois substituted. The cinematography, sets and lavishness of the concept make this a must-see. Eastwood talked his two numbers in a soft voice and the critics liked him.

John Travolta was in the midst of another comeback when he made last year's *Broken Arrow*. Box office receipts were gratifying even if Travolta seems uncomfortable in an action oriented caper flick nobody took seriously. The script calls for Travolta cast against type as a meanie to steal and fly a Stealth bomber around the wilds of Utah while armed with a couple of nuclear warheads and a really bad attitude. Christian Slater is called in as the guy's former best buddy and a protege. Action ace John Woo

keeps things percolating with the big effects. But the movie is basically a warmed over retread of *Speed* which coincidentally was also written by Graham Yost (Elwy's son). Travolta plays the nasty as cute and cuddly and it's hard not to resist him he's so darned likeable. Slater basically has the Keanu Reeves part and Samantha Mathis has the Sandra Bullock role.

OPENING LINES

Making a myth of the Avro Arrow

BY JIM BAWDEN

On the surface the new two-part CBC-TV movie *The Arrow* is matter of fact: It's all about the building of an airplane. But check a little deeper: We're entering myth-making territory.

Americans have remade history in thousands of movies that turned Indians into evil incarnate, depicted the colonial British as bad guys, and created Abraham Lincoln in the shape of Henry Fonda.

Canada has lacked such unifying myths. Our heroes became imported American ones. The best Canadian TV could come up with was the grandiose epic *The National Dream* about the construction of the CNR — and that was some 20 years ago.

The Arrow (Sun. and Mon. at 8 p.m., chs. 5, 12) stars Dan Aykroyd, a Canadian who in true fashion moved to Hollywood years ago. He says in a CBC handout: "This is a great Canadian story about what we can do when we set our minds to it."

But it's uniquely Canadian because of its twists: Canadians persevere and triumph only to be stabbed in the back by those dastardly Americans. It's implied that the Arrow was better than anything being built in the U.S. and our supersonic fighter could even knock down a U2, a high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft the Americans were then using over Russia.

Now, the Americans have made any number of airplane movies extolling the U.S. way of life. Step aside, guys, it's time to give Canadians a chance.

There's everything here in the paint-by-numbers screenplay. The designers are portrayed as driven, slightly strange young men (with the added attraction of a female engineer who didn't exist in real life). There are the standard but rousing scenes of the engineers wondering if the darned thing will fly.

But the tension in the story comes not from the success in the air. The Avro Arrow was scrapped in 1959 by the newly elected Conservative government of John Diefenbaker, which claimed Canada could not afford such a project. Thus, Canada's third-largest corporate employer, the A.V. Roe company, died. With it, Canadian pretension to a chunk of the scientific future died, too.

In scope, this \$8 million production is as sleek and entertaining as anything Hollywood could put out. It's myth-making with its array of heroes and villains — but they are our myths. What happened to the Arrow is a metaphor for what has happened to Canada.

The deal is if you're a Canadian don't dream the big dreams. We can't afford them here. They're somehow un-Canadian.

Ironically, it took an imported star, Aykroyd, to make the project bankable — and there's something so Canadian about that.

Then there's the real star, the Arrow itself.

Was it the Edsel of the air? Or another Concorde, ahead of its time? We'll never know because Diefenbaker ordered the seven existing planes dismantled and refused to sell the technology to foreign governments.

In his refusal to share the vision, Diefenbaker was being Canadian in his own way, too.

Legend of Arrow NH
The Legend Of The Arrow Technological and emotional challenges attend the making of The Arrow. (R) 3275 3817

The Arrow (Part 1) (97) Dan Aykroyd, Ron White, Aidan Devine
The Arrow (Part 2) (97) Dan Aykroyd, Ron White, Aidan Devine



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new we were working on the cutting edge. There was tremendous pride and the atmosphere was totally supportive." Yost says that some time in 1958 rumors began spreading that all was not well and morale at the plant took a beating.

"Were we too closely tied to the Liberal government? I don't know. There was a new Tory government (led by John Diefenbaker) in power and not as indulgent. We started to struggle. There was a change in the atmosphere. You could sense it.

"Of course I had fun, too. One day a man came to me mumbling because pipes had been placed on the floor where he worked and his mouth had been open. He fell and his false teeth popped out and he had them all broken up in his hand. I got him new chompers but the insurance company told him to walk with his mouth closed from then on."

Yost remembers Feb. 20, 1959, the day the government ordered work on the Arrow project stopped — Black Friday.

"They got the mood right in the movie. What a day! I always heard Gordon deliberately let everybody go at once to embarrass Diefenbaker. It was a dramatic action. One day the hangar was abuzz with activity and the next day there was this odd stillness. I was kept on for several months servicing the problems of ex-employees.

"I walked back into the hangar the next day and you could smell the blow torches as they moved quickly to dismantle the seven Avros. That was Diefenbaker's order. We later heard that countries around the world were bidding for the Arrow technology but he (Dief) wouldn't listen.

"The story goes that after Diefenbaker met U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower he became convinced that missiles were the future and decided to scrap the Arrow. That was the story at the plant. There was



Nigel Bennett, Sara Botsford and Aidan Devine rejoice at a successful test of the Arrow jet

the wonderful yarn that one Avro got away, that somehow they had smuggled it out to a collector. I wish it were true.

"We set up a counselling service to get people jobs. I had been on several raiding parties to get engineers from firms in England and Ireland. Some of these people wanted to go home and Sir Roy Dobson, who was president of A.V. Roe in England, took all of them back.

"One of the chaps I hired got involved with NASA at Cape Canaveral and rose to wonderful heights — he was involved in the moon landing and got his technical education working on the Arrow. That isn't in the film."

Yost ponders what might have been had the government not pulled the plug on the Arrow.

"Who knows what might have hap-

pened had it lasted? We really believed in it and were told it was the best in the world. Of course it was expensive but the technology might have spun out into other areas. It was terrible villainy to destroy all the planes. I thought of Rome sacking Carthage. 'No plane must remain' was the government's motto."

Yost says there's delicious irony of a sort in CBC carrying the movie "because CBC is being chopped these days and it too is uniquely Canadian. I started at CBC in 1959 and wouldn't have got that opportunity if I'd still been with Avro. I became a high school teacher at Burnamthorpe Collegiate and Bernie Slade — later a playwright — put my name in for the CBC series *Live A Borrowed Life*. In 1964 I went into educational TV and then came



Aidan Devine as Arrow designer Jim Chamberlin, and above, Sara Botsford plays fictional engineer Kate O'Hara

What's the plane truth?



Dan Aykroyd plays Arrow project leader Crawford Gordon in *The Arrow* (Sun., Mon. at 8 p.m. on chs. 5, 12)

Elwy Yost, who was a timekeeper at Avro during the Arrow's development, recalls Black Friday, the day the government pulled the plug on the project



Elwy Yost, left, with Alan Jackson, maker of a full-size Arrow model and above, a file photo of the real Crawford Gordon

BY JIM BAWDEN

"Do I remember the first day they wheeled out the Avro Arrow?" chuckles Elwy Yost, TVOntario's *Man Of A Thousand Movies*.

"Do I! My boy, I was right there. I was looking after Mr. George Pearkes, the new minister of defence — that was my job, and I savored every moment."

Yost joined the A.V. Roe company in 1953 as a timekeeper. Born in Weston, educated at the University of Toronto, he'd worked for four years (1948 to 1952) in *The Star's* circulation department. "I met my wife Lila there, one morning in the old Stoodleigh's restaurant in the basement. She worked at *The Star*, too."

"In 1952 I left because I wanted to see how movies were made and we toured England and Europe. She modelled for a Yorkshire cloth company. I got work on the movie *Moulin Rouge* which kept me going for two months. Then we had to go home."

"My first job at Avro was as timekeeper, looking after all those cards which employees punch in every day. And there were 10,000 employees at the time. But after a while I lost interest."

After a summer back in theatre, Yost

returned to Avro in employee services.

"I was a counsellor dealing with the personal problems of the employees. There was a lot of counselling of marital problems. By then we had 13,000 employees out at Malton where we built the air frames; next door they built the engines."

Yost watched a preview tape of the CBC-TV movie *The Arrow* and pro-

nounced it "splendid." "I was there in the summer and met Dan Aykroyd, who plays Crawford Gordon Jr. He was the top boss and I saw him almost every day. He was a short man, completely bald, and I asked Dan if he was going to cut his hair and he said the bald patch was enough."

"The actors have been cast for acting skills. They don't resemble the real people very much. Chief engineer Jim Floyd had a moustache and was short: Nigel Bennett who plays him is tallish. Aidan Devine doesn't look much like designer Jim Chamberlin but he captures his essence — a love of discovery. Sarah Botsford's female engineer, Kate O'Hara, is not historical; it was very much a man's club that high up. But she's wonderful, she could have worked there at the time had they let her."

Although Yost wasn't involved in the design area, he was in a unique position to watch the development of the jet. "Practically every day I'd go to the assembly area and have to deal with an employee as he worked away at the craft. I'd even crawl into the plane to get to a mechanic while I straightened out his insurance claims. Stuff like that. So it was exciting to see the craft take shape. We all

A flight of fancy

Designer, chief test pilot say CBC drama contains more fantasy than fact

BY BOB REGULY

The two people who took the Avro Arrow from concept to the clouds are glad the CBC miniseries *The Arrow* is labelled "dramatic fiction" because they say it contains more fantasy than truth.

Both design chief Jim Floyd and chief test pilot Janusz Zurakowski think the exuberantly nationalistic show's anti-American theme unfair to the Yanks. They agree, however, that the pillorying of prime minister John Diefenbaker was richly deserved.

Zurakowski heaps particular scorn at the dumbing-down of how the plane was designed.

The jaunty, white-haired Floyd and the balding, courtly Zurakowski, both 82, were introduced to the studio audience at CBC's preview screening, last month.

Yet both get short shrift in the movie in favor of portraying aerodynamicist Jim Chamberlin as the design brain, and RCAF Flight-Lt. Jack Woodman as the test pilot hero. The two other protagonists are Avro boss Crawford Gordon and an invented character, Kate O'Hara, as a systems wizard.

Curiously, Waldek "Spud" Potocki, the company test pilot who took the Arrow to its highest speed, Mach 1.98 or twice the speed of sound, is never mentioned. Chamberlin, Woodman, Gordon and Potocki are dead — Potocki died Christmas week — and cannot dispute anything attributed to them. That leaves Floyd and Zurakowski who know the way it went down.

Zurakowski said he was never consulted in the preparation of the script. Floyd was, but took exception to the use of real names in fictional scenarios, according to



Avro Arrow design chief Jim Floyd photographed in the late '50s

Zurakowski.

When the preview ended, Floyd said he had many detailed criticisms but declined to speak "because I don't want to hurt many people tonight." Zurakowski was quietly reflective.

"It was a nice story of Jack Woodman," he said, "but it was completely fictional. It was up to the company pilots to bring the Arrow to a state of acceptance and then send it to the air force testing establishment. Never does a military pilot (as Woodman was) do the first flying of a new aircraft."

Zurakowski should know. A pilot with the Polish Air Force who flew Spitfires in the Battle of Britain, he went on to become chief test pilot of the first post-war jet fighter, Britain's Gloster Meteor, before being hired in 1952 to test Avro Canada's CF-100 Canuck and then the Arrow. He took the Arrow on its first test flight on March 25, 1958.

"The show got the technicalities wrong quite a bit," he said. He found the depic-

tions of the Arrow design steps — starting with kitchen-table origami — simply "absurd."

Ditto the claim that Chamberlin had come up with the breakthrough delta shape. That 60-degree delta wing as a supersonic ideal had been developed earlier by Britain's Hawker Siddeley, he said.

Chamberlin developing the Coke-bottle fuselage? Not so; that was old hat. Chamberlin curing the design flaw that hampered supersonic speeds by notching the wing of a model on a grinding machine? "Complete fantasy," Zurakowski said. The delta wing notch had been developed earlier by Gloster.

And Chamberlin, while brilliant, was No. 7 on the design team. "Chamberlin made a lot of errors in the CF-100 which gave us trouble," Zurakowski said.

Zurakowski said the Diefenbaker government's claim the plane had to be scrapped because the Americans wouldn't buy it was false. Nobody buys a new military aircraft until the host government's own air force adopts it, he said.

The U.S. may well have bought the Arrow in time, especially the Iroquois-engined model that was three weeks from testing when the program was cancelled in February, 1959.

It was, Zurakowski lamented, a lost opportunity for technological greatness from which Canadian industry — and national pride — never recovered.

➤ *Saturday Night At The Movies.*

"I think the movie alludes to Crawford's drinking and womanizing. I know he was a bit of a playboy but we kind of idolized him for that. When he died penniless in New York city it was something like a Greek tragedy. There

was a terrible price to be paid for being a Canadian.

"I thought the movie, while it was clearly drama, brought it all home to me. It brought it back to me with a bang: the waste of talent, the tragedy. It's a uniquely Canadian saga and I lived through it."