

RAYMOND CANON is a freelance writer for Wings.

Jan Zurakowski climbed aboard the Avro Arrow RL-201 for its first flight at 9:51 pm on March 25, 1958, from Toronto's Malton Airport. He is seen here on landing. (credit: Toronto Aerospace Museum Collection)



Kremlin's loss was our gain Ex-refugee flew the Avro Arrow

Janusz 'Jan' Zurakowski graduated from flying obsolete aircraft for the Polish Air Force to occupying a seat at the forefront of Canadian aviation. By the time he died on February 9, Zurakowski had already joined with the likes of John A.D. McCurdy, Billy Bishop and Wilfred R. 'Wop' May as one of Canada's outstanding aviators.

Born in Russia in 1914 to Polish parents, Zurakowski never had the chance to get to know his birthplace. His parents escaped the excesses of the Bolshevik revolution in 1921 by returning to Poland. At age 20 he joined the Polish Air Force, flying against the

better-equipped Luftwaffe in the early days of the Second World War.

Following the fall of Poland, Zurakowski escaped to England where he joined the RAF in time for the Battle of Britain. He destroyed three German aircraft before being shot down himself. In 1942 he became the commanding officer of a Polish fighter squadron within the RAF.

His flying skills caught the attention of the Gloster Aviation Company, builder of Britain's first jet fighter, the twin-engine Meteor. As a Meteor test pilot, Zurakowski set a round-trip air speed record between London and

Copenhagen, and developed a risky manoeuvre known as the Zurabatic Cartwheel. The cartwheel was first intended to demonstrate what would happen if the Meteor lost an engine during a full-power vertical climb. In 1951, Zurakowski stunned audiences by performing the Zurabatic Cartwheel at the Farnborough Air Show.

In 1952, Zurakowski left England to become chief development pilot for A.V. Roe Canada, testing the CF-100, the first Canadian designed and built fighter to be produced in quantity for the RCAF. Not content with just testing the airplane,

Zurakowski put it through previously unthinkable manoeuvres including breaking the sound barrier – the first Canadian airplane to do so.

On March 25, 1958, Zurakowski again made Canadian aviation history as test pilot of the CF-105 Avro Arrow. Abruptly scrapped by the government in 1959 for financial reasons, the Arrow represents the finest and saddest moment in Canadian aviation history. Jan Zurakowski retired from aviation shortly after the cancellation, later opening up a tourist lodge with his wife Anna in Barry's Bay, Ontario.

The Toronto Aerospace Museum plans to unveil a full-size replica of the Avro Arrow at its Downsview location later this year.