

JANUSZ ZURAKOWSKI

Avro Arrow test pilot

Janusz Zurakowski piloted the most potent, enduring story in Canadian aviation and then, heart-broken, was grounded by political betrayal for the next 45 years.

The celebrated test pilot of the Avro Arrow, Zurakowski, 89, died at his home near Barry's Bay, Ont., where he spent the second half of his life as a backwoods tourist operator and boat designer.

He was remembered as a humble man who could make airplanes do the unthinkable.

"This is a pilot like no other," said his biographer, Winnipeg writer Bill Zuk, who has just completed a 280-page manuscript on the legendary fighter pilot. "His favourite trick when he landed was to fly across the runway upside down, engage his landing gear straight up, then as he approached the ground, he would roll the airplane and touch it down.

"No one ever flew like that."

His flight achievements are legion; for here was a pilot who trained as an engineer but understood the needs of builders. He would test close to 60 new models in his flying career.

In 1952, Zurakowski was the first pilot to fly a Canadian-designed aircraft — the CF-100 — faster than the speed of sound. In March 1958, after five years of development, he was the first pilot to test the CF-105, better known as the Arrow.

It was considered the epitome of Canadian engineering. Seventy-seven feet long, 50 feet between wing tips, it was designed as an interceptor to travel at Mach 2, or twice the speed of sound. When he landed at Malton, Ont., after the maiden 35-minute flight, 10,000 people cheered. A national figure was born.

But it was not to be. About to be outfitted with a better engine, the entire project was cancelled by the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker on Feb. 20, 1959 and the six prototypes were destroyed.

"The Avro Arrow was the high point of my career. Once the cancellation of the Arrow took place, I decided to make a change," Zurakowski said in a 1989 interview. "I would have lost my identity as a Canadian test pilot if I'd gone to the



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Jan Zurakowski was the chief test pilot for the Avro Arrow in the 1950s.

United States. I spent 25 years in my career and reached a high level, but I felt there was no more use."

In the ensuing 45 years, the Avro legend spawned a series of books, television programs, rumours and conspiracy theories.

Only last summer, a commemorative park, which includes a quarter-scale model of the Arrow, was unveiled in Barry's Bay to honour the Zurakowski contribution.

"At the time, it was an incredible blow," said Zuk.

"It was the fastest, highest flyer, the epitome of technology. It would have been the aircraft everyone was talking about," he added. "Now it's the story of the one that got away."

Zurakowski was born on Sept. 12, 1914 at Ryzawka, Russia and moved to Poland seven years later. He was interested in aviation from an early age, winning a 1929 national competition for building model airplanes.

He joined the Polish Air Force in 1934,

and fought during the Second World War. He later escaped to England, which meant leaving Anna, his future wife, behind. The couple later had two boys, George and Mark.

He then flew for the Royal Air Force and fought in the Battle of Britain. He received two Polish medals for his wartime services, which included twice bailing out of a burning fighter.

Eventually, the couple came to Canada, where Zurakowski worked for A. V. Roe Canada, which was trying to develop military aircraft for the post-war age.

Their answer was the Arrow. Designed to operate at 70,000 feet, it could climb at 38,450 feet a minute and could travel as fast as today's CF-18s.

When the Arrow was cancelled, Zurakowski had lucrative offers to work in the U.S. but turned them down to set up Kartuzy Lodge on Kamaniskeg Lake west of Ottawa.

CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

AS I SAID AT THE MEETING, AS A MACHINIST WORKING FOR AVRO (1953) AND LATER FOR GLADDING'S MACHINE SHOP 17 SHEARD AVE. BRAMPTON, ONTARIO I DID DO SOME (A VERY LITTLE) WORK ON THE ARROW I ALSO WITNESSED IT FLYING. ONE OCTOBER DAY IN 1957 WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE