

Pilot 'Spud' Potocki tested Avro Arrow

He flew it at top speed — and nearly came to grief

BY PETER CHENEY
STAFF REPORTER

Waldek "Spud" Potocki died the way every test pilot wants to — of old age.

Mr. Potocki, who became part of Canadian aviation history as a test pilot for the supersonic Avro Arrow fighter, died of pneumonia earlier this week. He was 77.

Mr. Potocki died in Ohio, where he had lived for a number of years with his wife after a long and colorful flying career.

During the 1950's, Mr. Potocki was part of the legendary Arrow program, which put Canada — for a brief moment — on the leading edge of the world aircraft industry.

Although it was regarded as the world's most advanced fighter at the time, the Arrow program was cancelled by the Conservative government headed by John Diefenbaker in February, 1959.

The cancellation put an end to what many saw as no less than a second National Dream.

The Arrow was a revolutionary aircraft that pushed the envelope of fighter design, with features that would later become standard elements of high-performance combat aircraft.

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Mr. Potocki flew the Arrow on some of its most demanding tests. On Nov. 11, 1958, he took the Arrow to Mach 1.9, a fantastically high speed for the time, only to encounter aerodynamic flutter that damaged the control system.

Although he had only limited control of the airplane, Mr. Potocki managed to land, but went off the runway when the landing gear broke. After the Arrow slid to a stop, Mr. Potocki calmly climbed out and walked down the wing.

Don Rogers, who was operations manager for Avro during the Arrow era, recalled Mr. Potocki as a great pilot and all-round professional.

"He was excellent. Excellent. A great pilot," said Rogers.

Mr. Potocki was born in Poland, but flew with the Royal Air Force in England during World War II. He was a graduate of the British Empire Test Pilot School, a renowned institution considered by many as the Oxford of the air.

Mr. Potocki's reputation landed him a job at Avro in Downsview. After the cancellation of the Arrow, he was lured to the United States by North American Rockwell, which hired him as a test pilot.

Mr. Potocki's flying career came to an end in the early 1970's after he lost

Obituary

an eye when a steel packing strap hit him in the face while he was undoing a package of lumber.

Mr. Potocki spent his last years in Columbus, Ohio, where he lived with his wife and operated a motel complex.

Mr. Potocki had lived in an institution for several years after being stricken with Alzheimer's disease.

Les Wilkinson, the author of a book called *Avro Arrow*, met Mr. Potocki many times while doing his research and had only praise for the renowned test pilot.

Wilkinson said Mr. Potocki and fellow test-pilot Janusz Zurakowski (known as "Zur") were both legends in the aircraft industry during their era.

"Spud was a brilliant, brilliant pilot. He and Zur were the best in the business, both of them."

Mr. Potocki leaves his wife, Margerie, and stepdaughter Gillian Thompson, who lives in Toronto.

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