

Final chapter on Avro Arrow yet to be written

By Peter Fyfe
Staff Reporter

The cancellation of the Avro Arrow is perhaps the greatest tragedy in the history of Canada's aerospace industry. Even to aviation and military buffs, the demise of Canada's last supersonic military aircraft was a great misfortune.

After researching the plane that nobody has seen fly in almost 40 years, engineer Peter Zuring says there are enough parts left today to reassemble the 1959 plane.

Back in February of that year, production of the twin-engine, delta-winged aircraft was halted by the Government of Canada. After cost overruns of millions of dollars and hundreds of othering by the federal government, the final order came putting thousands of Avro employees out of work. One of those affected was test pilot Jan Zurekowski, who now lives in Barry's Bay.

For many years afterward, it was thought that all the completed planes and partially built airframes, along with parts, drawings, test models and photographs had all been destroyed.

Over the years, however, a few bits and pieces of the plane surfaced, judged by eye-opening photographic evidence provided by Zuring, the National Research Council, the National Aviation Museum, and other sites hold many more pieces of the Arrow which were purposely forgotten about. These include complete engines, wings, and several wooden crates that held many smaller parts.

As well, there is equally valuable documentation needed to build new components from scratch, including plans, drawings, engineering reports, repair manuals, testing data, and over 700 mechanical volumes and 10,000 detailed photographs.

Book in the works

The significance of the Arrow is that in 1959 it had the potential to fly faster and higher than today's Canadian military planes.

What killed the plan, however, were cost and time overruns (the company kept working to make the plane even better, without telling the air force), concerns over the level of security surrounding the project, competition for hard-ware dollars between the

army, navy and air force, and the changing enemy threat (the launching of Sputnik and the development of laser ICBMs) made the military believe jet interceptors were obsolete.

A book Zuring is writing for Scottish publishers will feature previously unpublished photographs of the plane that has become a symbol for national pride. The book will prove the Arrow was very much a product of its day (by comparing it, and its engines, with the technology of its day) although a leader of the era. Zuring will also tell the stories of people he calls the heroes of the Arrow, stories of people seeking drawings away wrapped around their legs, or hiding aircraft parts in their basements.

He will also document the myth of "the one that got away."

The paper trail Zuring has retrieved includes documentation of the process that brought about the demise of the Arrow. "We got snafu on Defence that makes him less of a basket case than he has been portrayed."

"The Department of Defence Protection was involved. The Canadian Assets Disposal Corporation was involved, everything about cancellation was in there."

Although the key thing for Zuring was restoring the technical data on the Arrow, along the way he found other documents of interest to historians that, "dramatically demonstrates that the military was the culprit. They decided to cut it off, they can be blamed."

For example, minutes from a meeting of the Cabinet and Defence Committee (the



Author Peter Zuring with Janusz Zurekowski at the former test pilot's resort near Barry's Bay.

PHOTO: Peter Fyfe

Minister of National Defence and the military Chiefs of Staff, show that the political cost of cancelling the Arrow was known, though it only resulted in delaying its final demise for another year.

Chance meeting with Zurekowski

After waiting for ten years as a chemical engineer in the petroleum industry, Zuring made his own splash in Montreal developing the first plastic hockey skate and the innovative Tuck skate. According to him, after initial resistance and within 2 years "we changed 5 million pairs of skates."

More than a decade later on February 12th, 1996 Zuring met Jan Zurekowski during a

National Aviation Museum. Zurekowski was the chief test pilot for Avro Aircraft Ltd. during the development of the Arrow. He is the man whom Zuring describes as the "conscience of the Arrow". He will tell anyone how hard the Avro employees worked on the plane they all believed in, such as on Christmas Eve, 1957. It was about three in the morning that day when Zurekowski completed the first testing trial of the plane.

Due in part to such examples of a robust work force, Canada's economy led all others in the world. "Three shifts worked on the plane around the clock. It was essential to have a good plane. Now people don't realize that so much."

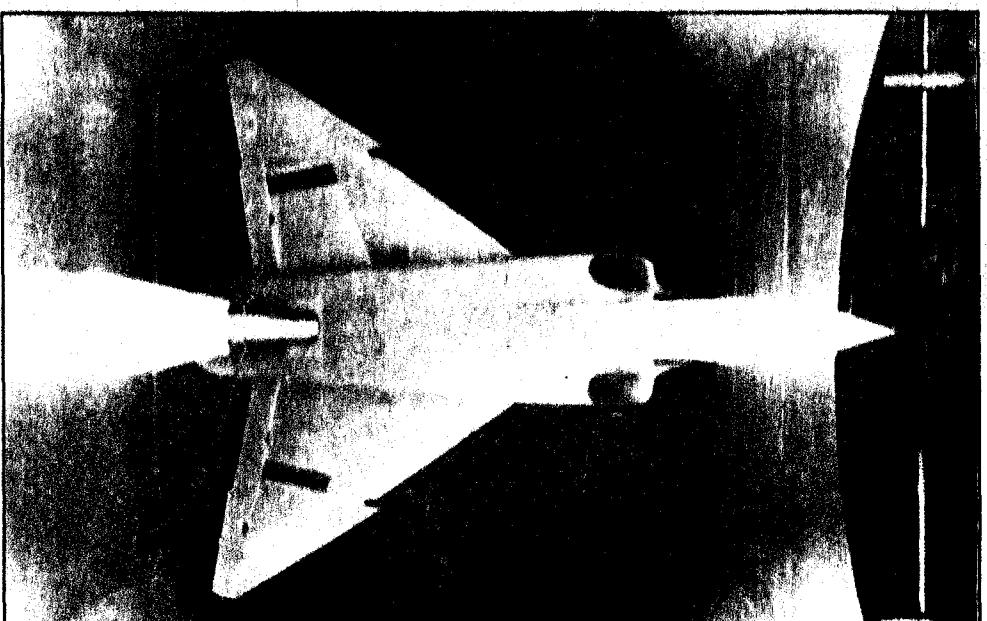
"To some extent, the gov-

ernment wanted it [the Arrow] forgotten," says Zurekowski, who believes that Canadians paid a price as a result. "Until that time, Canadians believed the 20th Century belonged to them, but soon they stopped trying to lead."

After the Arrow was cancelled, thousands of skilled workers lost their jobs. It took the industry twenty years to recover in Canada. Now it is the third largest civilian aircraft producer in the world.

Zurekowski, who looks forward to seeing an Arrow assembled, agrees that the decision to cancel the Arrow shows that Canadians sometimes "go to the edge and pull back. If Zuring succeeds with his project, which he estimates will cost eight to ten million dollars over five years, then perhaps Canadians will have returned to the edge, ready to go beyond once more.

"This will be a national project, a source of pride that Canadians can point to."



Previously unpublished photographs of an Arrow model in the wind tunnel, and an early wooden mock-up of the aircraft's front section.