

An **THE AVRO CF-105 ARROW HAS CELEBRATED THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FIRST FLIGHT. THIS CHARISMATIC, CONTROVERSIAL INTERCEPTOR WAS THE SUBJECT OF HOT POLITICAL DEBATE BETWEEN THE USA AND CANADA. ITS CANCELLATION CAUSED THE NEAR-COLLAPSE OF CANADA'S SUPERB AERONAUTICAL INDUSTRY. WE EXAMINE THE CF-105 AND ATTEMPT TO PLACE THE TYPE IN AN ACCURATE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

ARROW

Through the Heart

PART ONE

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Just three-days before the 50th anniversary of powered flight in Canada, the Prime Minister rose in the House of Commons in Ottawa and made a statement the effect of which was to dash the struggling Canadian military aircraft and engine industry from its proud position as temporary leader of the western world — perhaps the whole world — and relegate it, almost instantly, to the industrial minor leagues. When Prime Minister John George Diefenbaker announced the cancellation of the Avro CF-105 Arrow on Friday, 20 February 1959, he demolished in one brutally final stroke what another Member of Parliament publicly categorized as “the greatest single achievement in Canadian aviation history, and the greatest combined effort of design and development ever undertaken in this country.”

That member went on to say: “Not only that, I regret that this government did not have the courage to finish [Arrow] No. 6 and let it take the world’s speed record away from the Lockheed F-104 Starfighter. I think this is a matter which will cause regret to Canadians for decades to come — that when we had reached a stage where, in a few weeks of additional development and testing, this plane could have captured the world’s speed record for this country, the decision should have been made not only to stop work on the plane but to cut up the corpse and put it underground as soon as possible.”

These strong comments came from a political opponent; but many Conservatives in the House, and scores of thousands more across the country, shared Liberal Paul Hellyer’s indignation. The Arrow affair cut sharply across party lines.

John Diefenbaker had become Prime Minister through the interplay of the usual mix of political forces, coupled with an exhibition of tenacity, showmanship and ability on his own part. But able as he undoubtedly was in many ways, Diefenbaker showed marked weakness and vacillation in the formulation and implementation of National Defense policy, and in the related aspects of foreign policy. His government’s strangely skewed assessment of the Arrow situation, which seemed at times to reflect personality clashes and a studied hostility to the project more than the objectivity it purported to be founded upon, set in train a flood of criticism. In due course it also precipitated a series of dependent events, which were to cause serious and worsening political problems, ultimately resulting in the fall of the government. The self-destruction of the Diefenbaker administration over the

non-issue of nuclear warheads for Boeing Bomarc missiles was directly linked to the cancellation of the Arrow.

Like some nightmarish reversal of the standard Horatio Alger story, a reversal in which the climax saw multiplying misfortunes cascading upon the hero, the demise of the CF-105 Arrow produced a series of scenes that taxed credulity, even among the government’s staunchest supporters. Having just completed the spending of over 340 million dollars of the Canadian taxpayers’ money for the purpose of designing and building an interceptor aircraft to have performance unsurpassed anywhere in the world — and having been spectacularly successful in producing an aircraft carrying those prestigious credentials — here was the Prime Minister cancelling the six-year long program at the very moment it was about to reach fruition, seemingly not fully realizing what would shortly ensue. The 20 February cancellation announcement caused the discharge that very afternoon of approximately 14,000 skilled employees at the A.V. Roe Canada Limited’s plants in Malton, and the abrupt cessation of work for an estimated 15,000 other skilled tradesmen employed by the 2500 subcontractors and suppliers linked with A.V. Roe on this great project. Many of those subcontractors and suppliers, firms that had expanded to handle Avro Aircraft Limited’s growing requirements, were soon petitioned into bankruptcy.

As if that were not enough to have to answer for, the Minister of Defense Production, Raymond O’Hurley, had to rise in his place on 22 April to correct a misstatement he had inadvertently made the previous day and acknowledge that five almost fully completed Arrow aircraft were in fact being dismembered by workmen with acetylene torches at that very moment. And although he announced that “the five finished craft have not been touched” the fact was that the government’s incredible ineptitude in this phase of the affair was going to see those other five machines as well — superb aircraft in flying condition — torched into small pieces of industrial excreta in readiness for their consignment to a place of honor in a Hamilton junkyard.

This appalling act of vandalism, perpetrated on five finished and flyable aircraft that the Prime Minister had indicated were costing the tax-

The Avro Arrow was designed to repel an increasingly aggressive new generation of Soviet bombers. However, with the rapid development of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles the entire North American Air Defense system was being reexamined in order to ascertain what was the best way of protecting the USA and Canada.

