

## **A Forgotten Anniversary of the AVRO Arrow**

By Matthew Wilkinson

2007 marks a somewhat forgotten 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Mississauga: On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957, A.V. Roe of Canada officially unveiled the first CF-105, better known as the AVRO Arrow. Designed and built in Malton (now within modern Mississauga), this supersonic jet interceptor was designed to seek and destroy enemy threats in northern North America. With its first test flight on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1958, the Arrow was quickly recognized as the most powerful and sophisticated jet interceptor aircraft in the world. Aviation historians today consider the Arrow to have been 20 years ahead of its time. The development and subsequent test flights of Arrow was one of the greatest accomplishments in the history of Canadian aviation, and a source of National pride and optimism.

The story of the Arrow began in 1952, when the Royal Canadian Air Force looked to develop a new jet fighter / interceptor capable of extremely high level performance with advanced weapons and flight control systems which could also function in all weather conditions. The RCAF turned to A.V. Roe of Canada. A.V. Roe produced the CF-100 (“Canuck”) fighter, Canada’s first all-weather jet interceptor. The CF-100 served the RCAF until the 1980s.

In 1953, the CF-105 Supersonic Interceptor project began, and the formal production and prototype testing began in 1954. Dubbed the “Arrow”, ultimately five jets soared the skies above Mississauga (RL-201, 202, 203, 204 & 205). These five Mark I Arrows powered by Pratt & Whitney J75 engines, were the only Arrows to fly. By early 1959, the first Mark II Arrow, RL-206, was nearing completion and was to be fitted with the more powerful Orenda PS-13 “Iroquois” engine. Had it flown, RL-206 was expected to have broken the world flight speed and altitude records; but it never had the chance.

On Friday, February 20, 1959, Prime Minister Diefenbaker announced the cancellation of the AVRO Arrow program. Amidst rumours and ominous news warnings which cited escalating production costs, the federal government ordered that all traces of the program – planes, parts and plans – be destroyed. The day became known as “Black Friday”. In the days and weeks after the cancellation, the five flying Arrows were unceremoniously cut into scrap, and the nearly finished RL-206 and all in-production Arrows were dismantled. It is estimated that over 50,000 people lost their jobs as a result of layoffs and plant closures.

50 years after the first rollout of the Arrow, conspiracy stories abound: what was the real reason behind the cancellation, and did one “get away” to fly another day? Despite the belief that one Arrow escaped destruction and lies hidden today, pictures show the five flying Arrows and the sixth almost-completed Arrow being destroyed – and parts from all six survive in museums today. But like any good mystery, the story of the Arrow continues to intrigue us. Late in 2006, the Toronto Aerospace Museum unveiled a non-flying replica of Arrow RL-203 for all to see in its glory. The Canadian pride that was embodied in the AVRO Arrow lives on. For more information on Mississauga’s heritage, please contact Heritage Mississauga: [www.heritagemississauga.com](http://www.heritagemississauga.com)