

## **Flying Into History: The Pilots of the AVRO Arrow**

By Matthew Wilkinson

Dates through 2007 into 2009 mark a series of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries for the legendary AVRO Arrow. October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007, marked the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Roll-out of the AVRO Arrow; March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, marked the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Flight; and looking ahead, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the cancellation of the CF-105 AVRO Arrow program. All of these anniversaries commemorate significant milestones in the story of this famed Canadian aircraft, and we will continue looking at different aspects of its remarkable story in the Heritage News.

This article will explore some of the lesser noted parts, or rather people, of the story: the pilots. The AVRO Arrow was flown by four pilots, and a fifth pilot was involved in the program. This article then is a brief introduction to the five men who sat in the cockpit and at the controls of the Arrow and flew this aircraft into Canadian history.

Perhaps the best known pilot who was involved with the AVRO Arrow program was Janusz (Jan) Zurakowski. Jan was born in Ryzawka, Russia, to Polish parents on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Jan, who was nicknamed “Zura”, was renowned for his aeronautical skills and his extensive career as a test pilot. He was also a decorated aviator, fighting for Poland and the United Kingdom during World War II. In 1952, he immigrated to Canada and began a career as the lead development pilot for A.V. Roe Canada. Flying the CF-100 on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1952, Jan broke the sound barrier and became the first person to exceed the speed of sound in a straight wing jet aircraft. During the 1950s, Jan also flew as an aerobatic display pilot, with spectacular results. In 1958, Jan was chosen as the chief development test pilot for the CF-105 Avro Arrow program. Jan was at the controls of the Arrow’s first test flight in RL-201 on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1958. He was also at the controls of RL-202 and RL-203 for their maiden flights, on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1958 and September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1958 respectively. In total, Jan flew 23 hours and 45 minutes in the Arrows. Jan retired from test flying later in 1958, and in 1973 was inducted into Canada’s Aviation Hall of Fame for his outstanding contributions to Canadian aviation. Jan died at his home in Barry’s Bay, Ontario, on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004. In October of 2007, the City of Mississauga named a recreational trail in his honour.

The pilot who had the most flying time in the Arrow program was Wladyslaw “Spud” Potocki. Spud was born in Poland in 1919. He served with the Polish Air Force, and later escaped from Poland during the World War II. He then joined the Polish Squadrons of the RAF, along with his countryman, Jan Zurakowski. After the war, Spud graduated from the British Empire Test Pilot School and found employment with A.V. Roe Canada. His first flight with the Arrow took place on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1958, in RL-201. After Zurakowski’s retirement, Spud became the chief test pilot for the Arrow program. He piloted RL-204 and RL-205 on their maiden flights, on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1958 and January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1959 respectively. Potocki also has the distinction of being at the controls of the last Arrow to fly, when he piloted RL-201 on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1959, one day before the official cancellation. In total, Spud flew 34 hours and 35 minutes in the Arrows. Potocki was also involved with the short-lived “Avrocar” program. Following the cancellation of the program, he joined North American Rockwell as a test pilot. His flying career ended when an accident, unrelated to flying, claimed his vision in one eye. He then retired, and together with his wife operated a motel business in Columbia, Ohio, where he died in 1996 at the age of 77.

A third pilot to fly the Arrow was Peter Roland Cope. Peter was born on December 7, 1921, in Croydon, England. His formative years were spent in the shadow of London’s largest airport, perhaps inspiring his career goals in aviation. In 1941 Peter enlisted in the RAF, and he was sent to the United States for his training. Peter completed his training in May of 1942. He then served as a fighter pilot and reconnaissance photographer during the remainder of World War II, flying

North American P-51s, Hawker Tempests, de Havilland Mosquitoes, and a variety of other planes. In 1949, Peter resigned from the RAF and became a test pilot with Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft. During his career, Peter reportedly flew 103 different types of aircraft. On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1950 Peter was inducted into the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators of the British Empire. Peter was hired as a test pilot by A.V. Roe Canada in 1951, following the tragic deaths of Bill Waterton and Bruce Warren, test pilots in the XC-100 program who were killed in a crash. Peter became a test pilot with the CF-100 AVRO "Canuck", and became one of the key participants in making modifications to the aircraft that would lead to its success. In addition to his work with the CF-100, Peter also became involved with the CF-105 Arrow, and recalled the most exciting flight of his career was his first flight in the Arrow, which took place on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1958, in RL-202. In connection with both the CF-100 and CF-105 programs, Peter was heavily involved with the testing of weapons systems throughout the 1950s. He was also the only pilot to land an Arrow away from the Malton Airport, when he landed RL-204 at Trenton on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1959. Peter flew a total of five times in the Arrows, in RL-202, RL-203 and RL-204. He amassed 5 hours and 25 minutes of flying time in the Arrows. In a CBC documentary on the Arrow, Peter commented that "it was a phenomenal performing aircraft; our performance boys thought we might get Mach 1.6 out of it yet we flew it to nearly Mach 2. With the Iroquois engine we were talking about a 2.3 or 2.4 Mach number potential. There wasn't a single plane flying at the time that could come anywhere near to touching that aeroplane. Boy, the day I saw them take the torches to those planes was the nearest I've come to shedding a tear over an aeroplane." After the Arrow cancellation he joined Boeing in Seattle, Washington. Peter retired in 1986 and lived in Washington State, after an outstanding career in aviation. He passed away in April of 2005.

The fourth, last, and only Canadian-born pilot to fly the AVRO Arrow was Flight Lieutenant Jack Woodman from the RCAF. Jack was born on May 14, 1925, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. After graduating high school Jack joined the RCAF, where he was trained as an aerial gunner, and later served as an aerial gunner in World War II. During the war he completed 23 combat missions in Halifax and Lancaster bombers. After the war, Jack attended the University of Saskatchewan, and later rejoined the RCAF in the pilot training program. He became Canada's representative to the Empire Test Pilot's School in England, where he tested a variety of aircraft, including the Vampire, Lancaster, Otter and Chipmunk. Jack also flew the CF-100 in 1955 at the Paris Air Show. He has the distinction of being the only active military pilot to fly the Arrow. Woodman flew six times in the Arrows, for a total of 6 hours and 45 minutes of flying time. After the cancellation of the program, Jack was transferred by the RCAF to California in 1960, where he worked as the project pilot for Lockheed (formerly the Loughheed Aircraft Manufacturing Company). Jack passed away from cancer on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Following his death, he was inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.

The fifth pilot who was associated with Arrow program was Lorne Ursel. Lorne never had the opportunity to fly in the Arrow. He taxied in the Arrow twice, and was first recalled because of a mechanical problem, and the second time was recalled due to the cancellation of the program. The legend is that Lorne was in the process of taxiing down the runway on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1959, when notice of the cancellation was received by A.V. Roe. Lorne was immediately recalled and his flight plans cancelled. Lorne never did get the opportunity to fly the Arrow.

Despite the cancellation of the CF-105 program, it was these pilots who played an instrumental role in introducing Canadians and the world to the AVRO Arrow, and stretching the wings of this remarkable aircraft, if even for a short period of time.

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