

Childhood memories help spark book

Author Greig Stewart's memories of the Avro Arrow go back to his

childhood in the Toronto district of Weston. "Most of the guys in the

neighborhood worked at Avro," he recalls. Prototypes of the versatile

airplane used to fly over the school he attended. Still, not a teenager at

the end of the 1950s, he remembers the excitement as the word began to spread that the Arrow was exceeding all expectations - Canada's first bold essay into Mach2 engineering was proving to be a triumph, the airframe and the Iroquois engines were at the cutting edge of new technology. Canada stood on the brink of leadership into a high tech future.

But, most of all he remembers the Friday afternoon when the Arrow project was "killed" and 14,548 workers were laid off. Stewart's father, an emigrant from Glasgow and a strong union man, helped mobilize the tight knit neighborhoods, collecting money to ease the financial calamity for the laid off.

Greig Stewart now lives on County Road 29 in Crossland, just outside Elmvale.

His interest in the Arrow, the background to the decision to kill it and the implications it had for Canadian industry, has never changed.

"I always waited," he said, "for the book to come out."

It never did so Stewart decided to write it himself. It wasn't what you could call a quick decision: as a graduate student at York University 13 years ago, he chose the Arrow affair as the subject for an MA dissertation in political economy. That was when, with the encouragement of Jim Laxer, who is now a professor at York, he did the bulk of the research which forms the basis of "Shutting Down the National Dream" published last December.

Three years later, with his thesis gathering dust, Stewart was hired by the CBC to help produce a program on the Arrow shut down, 20 years before. That took him across Canada as well as to Europe and the United States to interview some of the principals in the Arrow design team.

Men such as Fred Smye, former president of Avro who was living in Portugal and Jim Floyd, the designer of the Arrow and the C-102 Jetliner the world's second and North America's first jet propelled passenger plane.

When Stewart interviewed him Floyd, one of the titans of modern aircraft design, was working on the Concorde. Now Floyd is back in Canada, retired in Islington. He was one of many of the 150 people Stewart had interviewed whose enquiries, "when are you going to finish it?" finally drove him to complete the book.

The author's sympathy for the Arrow team is undisguised "Most of them are still alive," he says. "I finished it because of them."

In the process Stewart disposed of a lot of the "mythology surrounding the story." He believes the decision to cancel the project was inevitable.

"If the Liberals had been re-elected," he says,

"they would have cancelled it."

Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, long regarded as the villain of the piece, was simply ignorant of the importance of the project which involved, besides Avro itself, 650 Canadian suppliers.

Three years after the first Sputnik, armchair tacticians decided the day of the fighter plane was over and the future belonged to guided missiles. That was the view of some cabinet ministers, early subscribers to the myth that the Arrow's range was so limited that it would crash, its fuel tanks dry, after intercepting an "enemy" aircraft.

In fact, Stewart points out, technically the Arrow passed every test it faced, and some: at three-quarter throttle, with engines inferior to the Iroquois power plant, whose development was one of the central achievements of the Arrow project, it achieved 1.8 Mach, compared with the 1.5 Mach the CF-18 Canada's latest, U.S.-built, fighter reaches.

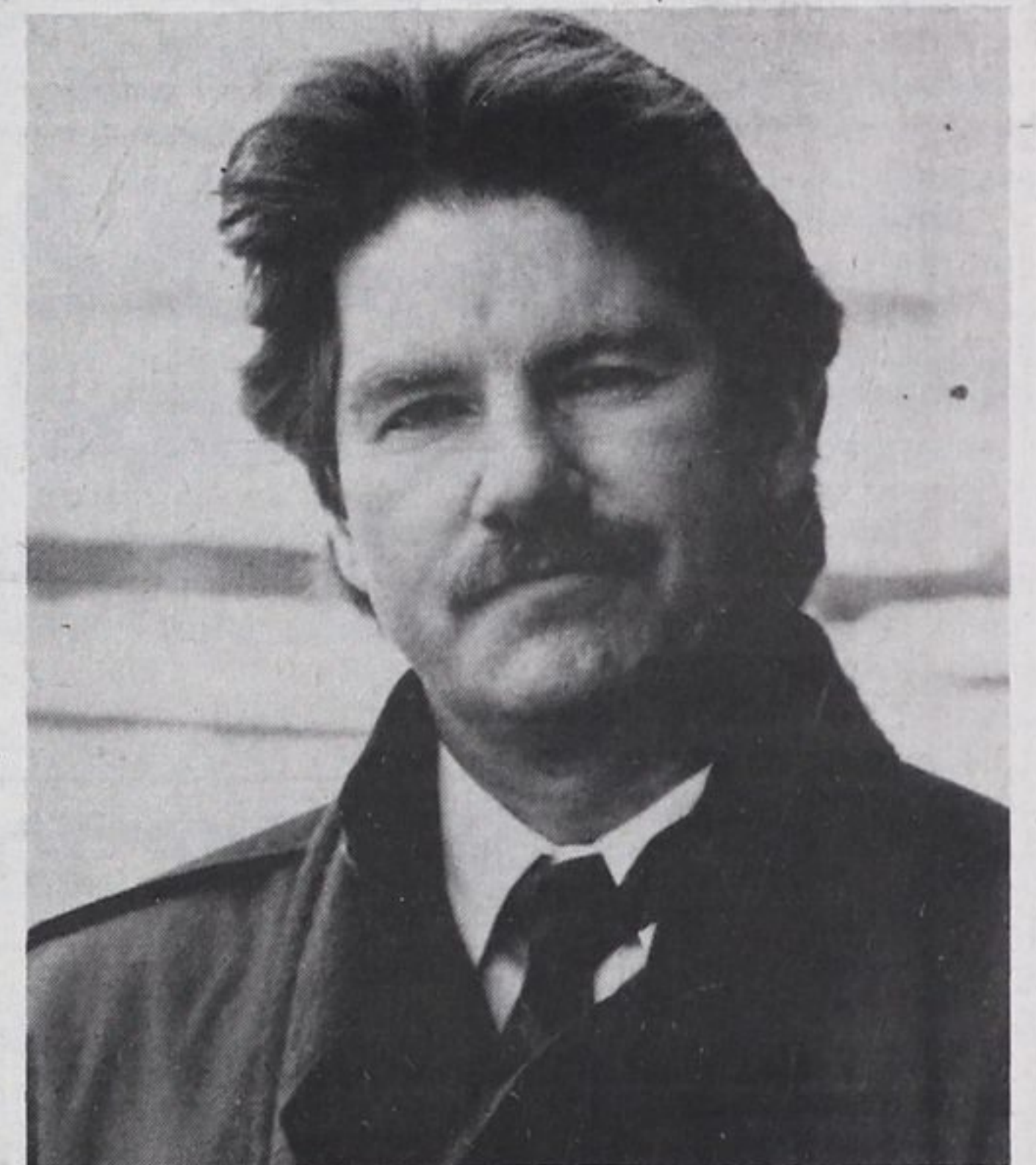
That success, he suggests, may have had something to do with the timing of the government's decision to close it down.

The sixth Arrow prototype was "within two weeks of taxiing trials" Jim Floyd told him. "It would have been even more embarrassing if the first Arrow to be fitted with Iroquois engines had been breaking speed records."

Avro itself must accept part of the blame for the shutdown, Stewart feels, because the company had become a monster which "would have collapsed under the weight of its own folly."

Arrogant and partisan though it was, however, Stewart has nothing but praise for its enlightened social and labor policies, it fought discrimination against minorities, employed the handicapped and morale, as evidenced by low absenteeism, was good.

The company decision to lay everyone off on the day of the decision was, says Stewart, an indication not of its labor relations record but of its



Greig Stewart

It soared to 75,000 feet, the CF-18 gets up to 50-60,000 feet. According to test pilot Jan Crawford Gordon had a famous feud, the maximum amount of embarrassment.

To the employees, the move was shattering, because on the brink of success they were reduced to unemployment. A generation later they still regret missing the chance to produce what they are convinced was a world beater.

The book has been a publishing success story and the publicity shy Ministry of Recreation and Tourism employee from Flos Township - "I work hard to keep my name out of the papers" - has become a regular on talk shows and interview programs. Bookstores have already sold two printings of the book, about 12,000 copies, at \$25.95.

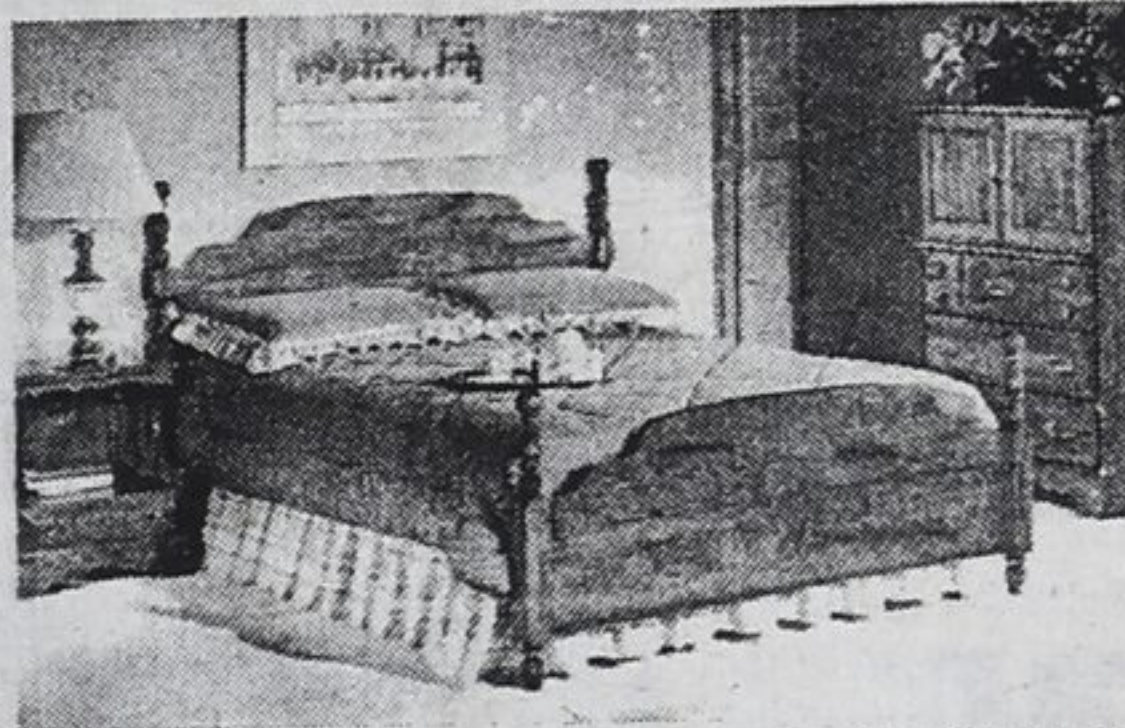
It took Stewart 18 months "on weekends" to complete the final draft of his book. He has "one or two ideas" about his next project but would like to see "Shutting Down the National Dream" turned into a movie.

And, says Stewart "the company did a very daring thing. It went straight into production. We couldn't develop our own rifle or tank," he recalls wryly, but the Arrow and the Iroquois engines were a magnificent success.

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