



The Nobelmen, from left: Gordon Jennings, Art Prosser, Ken Dunk and Tom Fraser.



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He was a member of a band, the Nobelmen, consisting of four employees at the Orenda Test Establishment. Ken Dunk played guitar, Tommy Fraser played piano, Gord Jennings played trumpet, and Art Prosser played percussion. They regularly performed at dances in Nobel which were attended by employees of both plants, allowing them to mix and strengthen the community spirit.

The Orenda Test Establishment, with 200 people, was represented by a union which also acted for the 14,000 employees at the Malton plant, explains Andy Milne of Parry Sound, who was a fitter-tester at the Orenda Test Establishment. The large union was able to ensure good wages for the employees. Meanwhile, across the road, employees at Canadian Industries Limited used the Orenda wages as a measuring stick to argue for a similar package. Subsequently, it was also good times for the business community of the entire Parry Sound area with big wage earners present and using the area services.

Having these operations in Nobel brought more than money. The Orenda Test Establishment brought great minds to the area – engineers and others who were present because of their expertise.

Ian MacDonald of Parry Sound, an instrument lab technician at the Orenda Test Establishment, and his wife Bonnie, recall that people came to work at Nobel from around the world, as well as from Malton.

“Seventy-five per cent of them that came up didn’t want to leave,” says Mr. MacDonald.

A leading name was that of Bill Kretschmer. Mr. MacDonald says Mr. Kretschmer was from Germany and worked on the V-I and V-II rockets which had been used against England during World War II. He brought his skills to the development of the Iroquois engine.

“He worked with them and he improved on the afterburner.” Mr. MacDonald believes that it was Mr. Kretschmer’s work that gave the Iroquois engine the potential to reach its maximum speeds.

“Bill Kretschmer was a good engineer,” says Mr. MacDonald. “There were a lot of other good engineers in there, John Armstrong himself, (the chief engineer), but Bill Kretschmer and the development of the afterburner put things on top.”

People were proud of their contribution to the project in Nobel. “The people that worked there, they had an awful lot of pride,” says Jim White of Orrville, an engineering assistant at the Orenda Test Establishment.

But such work does not come without sacrifice, and almost all of the

dozen or so people remaining in the area have experienced some degree of hearing loss.

“My work was far from dangerous,” says Mr. MacDonald. “Only once I really got caught out in the test cells. That could have been part of the cause of losing my hearing.”

Ken Dunk comments: “It was not too dangerous, but noisy. My teeth used to shake in my head because of the roar of the engine.”

Howard Dewar says the noise was 120 decibels plus. “The steam ejector would bring the atmospheric condition down to 30,000 to 35,000 feet and that was noisy.”

The people who worked there considered themselves a team. The end was abrupt and shocking. The reasoning remains clouded in mystery. On February 20, 1959, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker announced the Avro Arrow and Iroquois engine projects would be terminated immediately. Six Avro Arrows had been built, and the Iroquois engine had only five hours of end running left before it was ready to be installed, says Mr. Dewar. That never happened.

While the politics behind the scenes was starting to concern senior staff, there was no notice that the end was coming as swiftly as it did. Senior staff learned over the radio that the operations had been cancelled and had to call the head office to have the information confirmed. The employees in general did not anticipate that there was something wrong. The ending was swift and final.

“We went into work and they sent us home,” says Don Kingston of McKellar, who was a vibration technician at the Orenda Test Establishment.

“Guys were crying,” says Ken Dunk. “I can remember Kretschmer walking through.” Mr. Kretschmer told the employees as he passed them that their jobs were over. “He was so full of emotion, he never stopped.”

Others were called into the office and told. They were heads of families, many with young children at home.

“Our baby, the youngest, was born in February ’58. They closed in ’59,” recalls Howard Moore’s wife Zilpha. The family also included twins. “It was terrible,” says Mr. Moore.

Howard Dewar says his boss had tears in his eyes when he told him that his job was over.

The news that the operations were closed was on television at noon. By 4:15 that afternoon, the employees were out, says Dennis Baskey of Parry Sound, who was a detail draftsman in the engineer’s office at the Orenda Test Establishment.

Don Kingston says there were some who remained optimistic that a mistake had been made and it would