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Karl Kjarsgaard

Aviator/Treasure Hunter

Resting on the Atlantic Ocean floor, more than 1,700 metres deep, is the renowned Handley Page Halifax LW170. In her day, the valiant Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) aircraft executed some 28 bombing missions, including significant prep missions for the D-Day invasions of Normandy in 1944. When the aircraft sprung a fuel leak while on post war patrols 200 kilometres northwest of Ireland in 1945, her crew was safely rescued, but the ill-fated aircraft was lost to the great sea.

Nearly seven decades later, thanks to modern day treasure hunter and aviator, Karl Kjarsgaard, the great bomber will see daylight again, as she is rescued and honoured with a new resting place in Nanton.

Kjarsgaard has a passion for preserving and honouring Canadian military history and our combat heroes. His detailed plan, to recover the Halifax LW170 bomber, has been on the radar of many supporters since his first successful raising of a British Halifax bomber in 1995. From 240 metres below the surface of Lake Mjosa in Norway, the Halifax NA33 now sits restored in the National Air Force Museum in Trenton, Ontario.

Following that successful raising, Kjarsgaard, as project manager in 1997, recovered a RCAF Halifax from a bog in Belgium with the purpose of providing a formal burial for the three airmen trapped in the unsalvageable wreckage.

A steadfast dedication to Canadian military history and this country's combat heroes now has Kjarsgaard well underway to his most significant recovery to date - that of the Halifax LW170. The Handley Page Halifax is a national symbol of the Canadian contribution to freedom. The RCAF flew more than 70 per cent of its WWII missions in Halifax bombers and the submerged LW170 is the only restorable combat Canadian Halifax in existence.

"This will be the only real McCoy for Canada – a true combat plane with Canadian history, Canadian crew and Canadian pride," said Kjarsgaard, founding director of Halifax 57 Rescue (Canada) dedicated to preserving the Halifax and its international heritage.

"We must know where we came from to know where we are going."

Photos taken at Bomber Command Museum of Canada, Nanton





In Kjarsgaard's view, bringing this significant artifact home to Canadian soil is paramount to all Canadians. "We must know where we came from to know where we are going," Kjarsgaard said. He also laments that history should be preserved and lessons learned – the losses of war need not be repeated.

Kjarsgaard never loses sight of honouring those who paid the greatest sacrifice with their lives with his dedication to raising the LW170. His mission is to create a monument to the Canadian soldier – past and future.

"Karl has enriched our museum by being a first class supporter and proponent of our goals and activities," said Dan Fox, past president of the museum. "Since he became a director of the Nanton Air Museum last April, he has aided us in our efforts by offering his opinions and advice based on his considerable experience in the aviation field."

The museum is a loyal supporter of the Halifax 57 Project with funds designated in support of Kjarsgaard and a future display of both the Lancaster and the Halifax bomber; a unique opportunity for the facility.

"Karl is a great patriotic Canadian and is not ashamed to show it. He has done more to promote the memory of wartime veterans than anyone I know," Fox said.

The future home for the celebrated Halifax LW170 is in the world-class Nanton Lancaster Society Air Museum, also home to the rare Lancaster Mk.10 FM159. The museum houses almost 40,000 sq. ft of hanger and display space of aviation history.

"In all of the adversity and complications of our quest for the Halifax Project, I have always tried to emulate and follow in the footsteps of my heroes of the RCAF and Bomber Command. Such great examples of courage, honour, excellence, and sacrifice in this giant Canadian sword of Freedom, the Halifax," Kjarsgaard said. "If these young men could weather such hardships for us, we must continue on no matter the cost or effort."

By Michelle Greysen
Winter 2009

FOLLOW UP

In the summer of 2011, Kjarsgaard came across an almost complete wing of a Halifax bomber and two complete Hercules engines for a Halifax, in a scrap yard on the island of Malta, just south of Italy. Kjarsgaard was thrilled to be able to acquire, disassemble and ship the parts back to Canada.

With the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in Nanton beginning its expansion to double in size within the next five years, this means there will be lots of room at the museum for the Halifax artifacts. ■