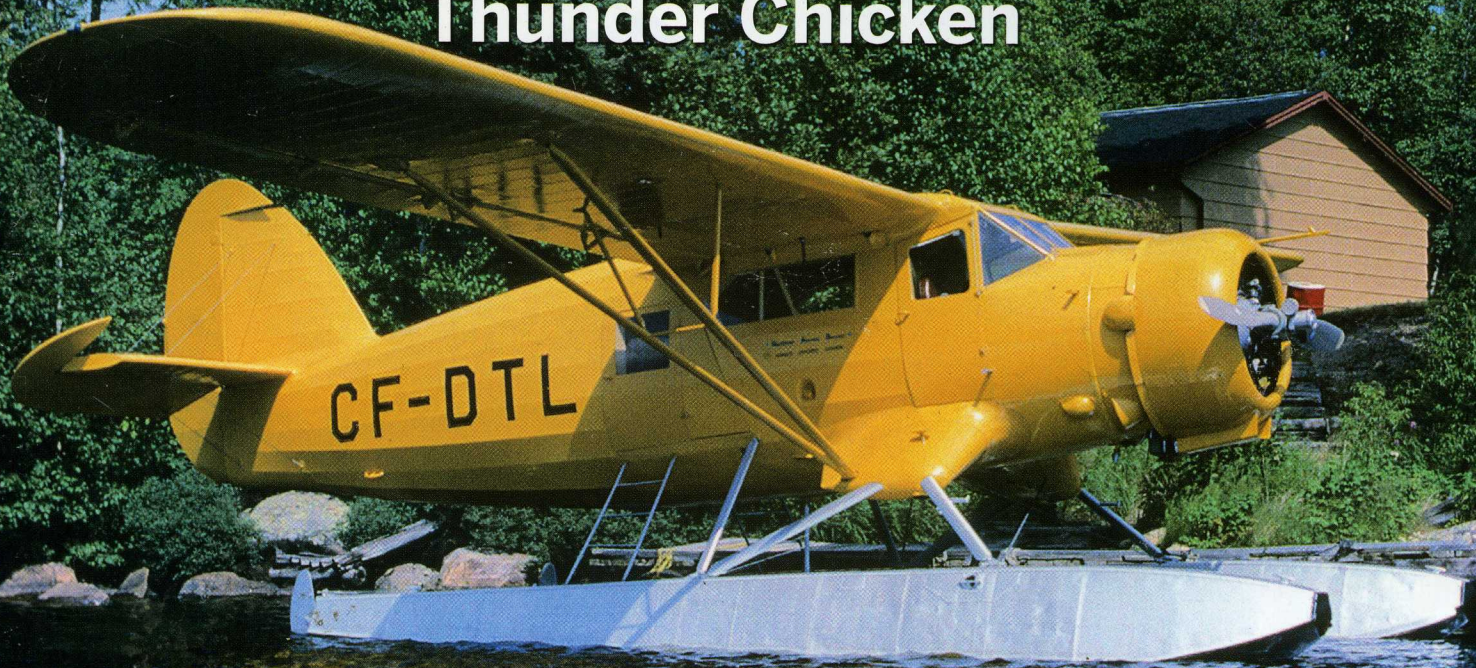


Nose Art + Wheel-Ski Shuffle + Remembering H. M. Pasmore

CANADIAN Aviator

Noorduyn Norseman

Red Lake Honours the
Thunder Chicken



Life-Saving Chutes
Ex-Pats Abroad

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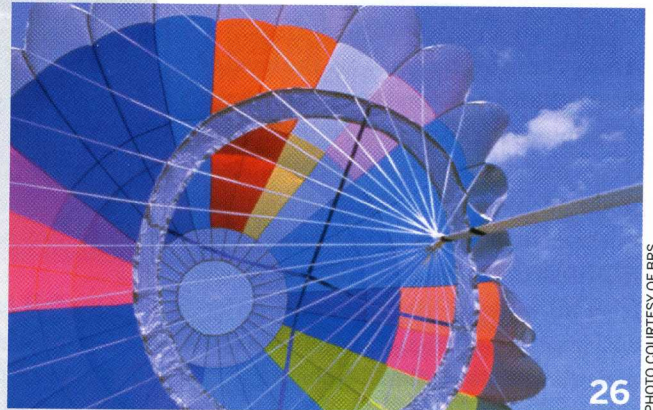


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NEAL MURNI PHOTO

On the cover:

Norseman Mark IV CF-DTL, kept in pristine shape by Gord and Eleanor Hughes of Northland Aircraft Service, Ignace ON. Photo by Rich Hulina.



DOUG FISHER PHOTO

A Nose for Art



Story by Michelle Greysen

Thanks to a dedicated few, aircraft nose art is recognised as a reflection of the wartime culture among airmen and survives as a lasting tribute to those who served.

At the close of the Second World War, most surviving Canadian bomber aircraft were mothballed in various surplus aircraft graveyards around England. While awaiting repatriation in the spring of 1945, a Canadian RCAF officer, F/L Harold H. Lindsay, began exploring these airplane junkyards and decided much of the Canadian aircraft nose art on these warplanes should be recorded and saved.

Lindsay documented the artwork with a total of 71 photos from two different sites, of which 62 depicted Canadian-flown Halifax bombers. He then oversaw a salvage operation, having panels cut from 17 different Halifax aircraft to be returned to Canada. Combined, these 17 bombers flew more



PHOTO BY DOUG FISHER

than 700 operations during the war, manned by 2,100 RCAF airmen from 300 different crews.

Until recently this rare collection of painted nose panels sat in storage,

unknown for decades. But this past spring 13 of the original works went on display for the first time at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

According to Clarence Simonsen, a renowned aircraft nose artist and historian, the prescient, single-handed effort by Lindsay was significant not only in helping to preserve RCAF history and the art itself, but also in honouring the vast number of Canadians lost in the air war.

As Simonsen correctly points out, had it not been for the recovery efforts of Harold Lindsay in 1945, the remnants of this historic military art form would have been turned into scrap metal and lost from memory, preserved only in a handful of black and white snapshots.

Cartoons and symbols known as nose art often decorated military aircraft during the Second World War. Nose art images ranged from symbols of bombs and swastikas to well-known cartoon characters and pin-up girls. Although a great number of aircraft were decorated in this way, only a few examples survive. These panels would have become scrap metal had it not been for RCAF Flight Lieutenant Harold H. Lindsay (right). While waiting to be repatriated he decided to explore an aircraft junkyard in England. He saw nose art on many Halifax bombers and suggested that a number of examples be cut and shipped back to Canada where they are now kept at the Canada War Museum in Ottawa.



Boys, Bombs and Bimbos

When most people think of Second World War aircraft nose art, puerile images of breathless babes painted just below the cockpit generally come to mind. Fair enough. But while some were a tad racy, several surviving examples reveal the popular culture among Canada's airmen at the time. And some of the paintings show genuine talent.

The history of military artists spans all countries and all wars. Ever since warriors began decorating their clubs, shields, helmets, ships and even themselves, the need to personalize and connect to one's tools of war has become part of the human experience. Decorating military aircraft is a natural part of that tradition, going back to the First and Second World Wars and through to Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm and the present.

Arguably, the heyday of nose art was the Second World War. Artistic themes then were varied and included everything from benign Disney characters to ominous dragons, skeletons and devils. In other cases, airmen chose to decorate their aircraft with the names of family and loved ones, or even favourite animals. But without question, the most popular subject of nose art during the war was women. Specifically, suggestive and scantily clad nymphs.

In the 1930s, Esquire magazine introduced North America to George Petty's pin-up art, and his "Petty Girls" soon became pop-culture icons. For large numbers of young airmen stationed overseas, far from the reproving eyes of home, these pin-up girls were sources of inspiration, if not perspiration.

The psychological impact and reasoning behind aircraft nose art can certainly be argued from every angle, right down to Freudian suggestions of the unconscious association between male sexuality and flying. But whatever the reasoning, there is no denying the positive effect painting such female forms on warplanes had on morale and camaraderie, not to mention its function in helping fend off the dehumanizing realities of war.

Many of the artists were enlisted men who painted aircraft for enjoyment or, in some cases, for cash or liquor. Often, suit-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

able water-based, or even rarer oil-based, paint was hard to come by, so many artists had to improvise. (Some reports include artists using mud to temporarily paint on clothes to appease visiting brass.) Even today many enlisted men use chalk, sprayed with Scotchguard for protection, to send a message to the enemy.

Familiar Surroundings

With rare exceptions, such as Harold Lindsay's one-man preservation effort, only a handful of original nose art examples survive from the Second World War. The largest original collection in the world—featuring 33 nose-art panels—sits in the American Airpower Heritage Museum's new 6,000-square-foot gallery located at the Commemorative Air Force Headquarters in Midland, Texas. The second largest collection, hangs in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

Then there is the impressive collection hanging in a small rural museum in Nanton, Alberta. Here, at the Nanton Lancaster Society Air Museum, hang more than 25 beautifully recreated pieces. This impressive collection is the work of Clarence Simonsen, a local artist specializing in military aircraft nose art.

Known to many as "Mr. Nose Art," he has spent the past 40 years researching and recreating Second World War aircraft fuselage art. In addition to the pieces he has done for the Nanton Museum, he has also authored two highly acclaimed books on nose art and was recently invited to speak on the subject at the Smithsonian Institute. To be sure, his passion for this peculiar art form is fuelled by a commitment to military history and a dedication to save and recreate the popular folk art of war as a tribute to those who served.

How Simonsen came to devote much of his life to nose art is a story in itself. Growing up as an only farm kid in the small rural town of Acme, Alberta, in the late 1940s and early '50s, the highlight of his week each Saturday was when he would head six miles into town with his hard-earned allowance in hand to buy a comic book—either Superman or the various war comics prevalent at the time.

Fascinated by the illustrations, Simonsen taught himself to draw and soon showed a natural talent. Doodling on anything and everything, he trudged his way though his early school years. During

class time he sketched in his head, rushing in the door when he got home to put it all on paper.

When he was 16 years old Simonsen was allowed to purchase his first Playboy magazine. Today he jokes that it changed his life, but not in the way most teenaged boys would imagine. For Simonsen the September 1960 issue featuring "Paint-a-Playmate" was a life-altering experience. As titillating as the project was, he was fascinated to discover that many such images were the same as those plastered on the aircraft in his war comics.

After graduating from high school, Simonsen wanted to become a policeman, but was disappointed to learn he had to be 21 to do so. One of his schoolteachers, Ralph McCall, suggested he "see the world" and join the army to become a mili-

tary policeman. Simonsen followed that advice, and in 1965 found himself turning 21 as a military policeman attached to a Canadian United Nations peacekeeping force on the island of Cyprus. He continued doodling in his spare time, and comrades often asked for his work to hang in personal lockers or on mess walls. It was while serving in Cyprus that he began to see the power of art and cartooning in day-to-day military life.

Eventually, Simonsen was called on to do larger projects, drawing wall murals in barracks and in the mess halls. Mostly, he created familiar life-size images from home, such as hockey players, the Calgary Stampede and scenes from Canadian football. The images sparked many a conversation among Canadian service men and women cut off from everyday life at



PHOTO BY KYLE WHITEHEAD

Clarence Simonsen seated in the Lancaster cockpit mock-up in the Nanton Air Museum, which he painted to represent Lancaster KB864, Sugar's Blues, of 428 Squadron. In front is Tom Walton, who painted the artwork on the original aircraft, some 54 years earlier.

Sugar's Blues was originally painted on Lancaster XKB864, NA-S, of 428 Squadron, by Sgt. Tom Walton. The inspiration for this piece was the Esquire pin-up girl painted by Alberto Vargas in the January 1945 issue of the magazine. The bomb tally indicates the aircraft had completed 21 successful operational bombing missions.

This particular cockpit mock-up was constructed for the 1992 film *Map of the Human Heart*. During filming it was placed on motion stands so it could be moved and rotated for visual effect.

Wartime Nose-Art Kept Alive

Left: This B-25 Mitchell was repainted in the colors of the famed "Tondelayo" of the 354th Bombardment Group.

Below left: "Briefing Time" B25J - N9456Z owned by Mid Atlantic Air Museum and photographed at Thunder Over Michigan Air Show at Willow Run Missouri in 2004.

Below: "Photo Fanny" B25J - N3675G owned by Ed Maloney /The Air Museum and photographed at the Planes of Fame Airshow in Chino, California in 2005. Used for numerous movie shoots including Pearl Harbor and Forever Young.



PHOTO BY DOUG FISHER

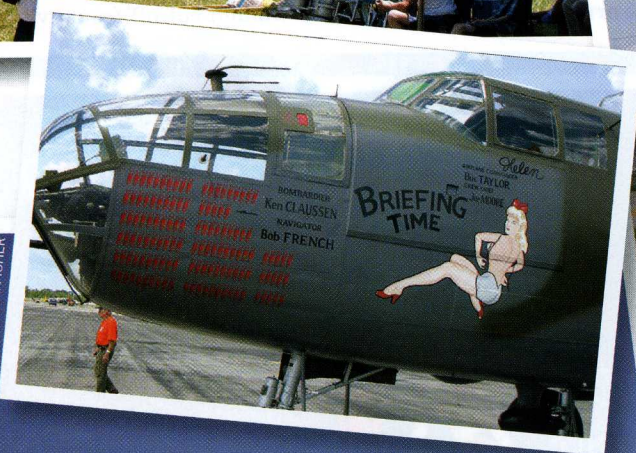


PHOTO BY DOUG FISHER



PHOTO BY MARK WATT

Heavenly Body B25J - N8195H owned by Mike Pupich photographed at Reno 2004. This B-25J remained stateside and was never used overseas during World War II, but did remain in service as a TB-25J multi-engine advance trainer for military pilots until 1958. In 1969 it was purchased by Filmways Inc. and flown to Tallmantz Aviation at Orange County, California, for the Paramount movie, "Catch-22" and was one of eighteen B-25 aircraft used in that film.

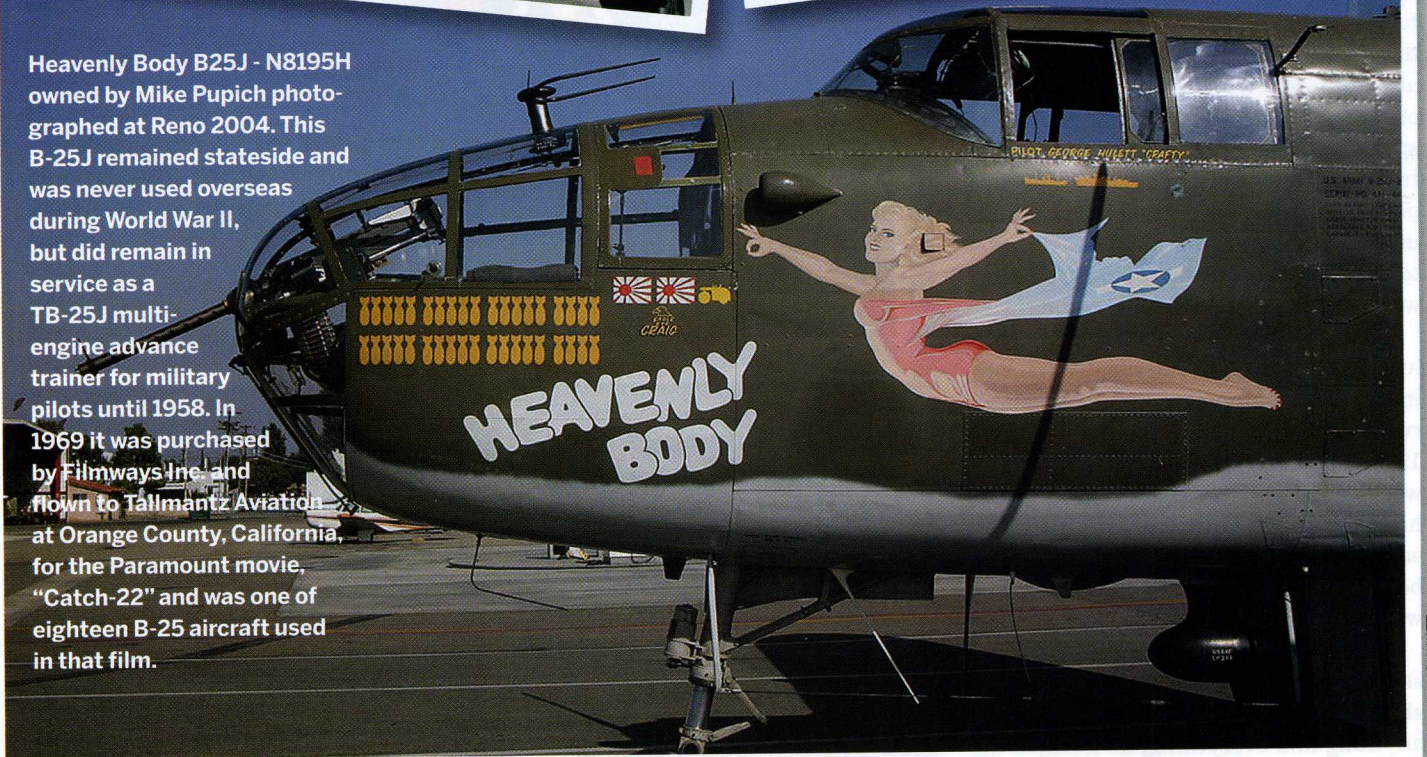


PHOTO BY MARK WATT

home. In its own way the art itself became an escape. Many came just to watch the young MP paint.

Simonsen soon grew to appreciate that he had talent as an artist. More importantly, he realized the role of visual storytelling. He learned firsthand that art can be a cultural connection; the familiar images of home he painted on the walls helped sustain weary soldiers amid the mayhem all around them.

A year after returning home from his UN peacekeeping tour in Cyprus, Simonsen joined the Toronto police force and became a member at a local Legion. Here he came to know several wartime veterans, many of them former RCAF aircrew.

In listening to their stories, he tried to grasp the psychological effect of living in barracks and mess halls when hundreds of men might not return after a bombing raid. Reflecting on these accounts, he wondered how aircraft nose art might have played a small but important role for aircrew trying to escape the chaos surrounding them. He soon realized that personalizing an aircraft not only tied the crew to the airplane, but could also connect its members with



PHOTO BY KYLE WHITEHEAD

home, while often adding a sense of gallows humour to the job.

Simonsen started researching the subject of nose art in what would become a lifelong project. Four decades later he shows no sign of slowing down. To date, he has recreated more than 500 nose art works in tribute. Interestingly, all have been painted on original skins salvaged from wartime bombers. Indeed, the bulk of these aluminum skins come from a retrieved Halifax Bomber, NA337, which ditched in Norway in 1944 and was recovered for restoration in 1996. (*See Canadian Aviator Volume 15 Number 2.*)

Each work of nose art Simonsen creates is heavily researched before any

paint starts to fly. Getting the smallest of details right is important, especially since many of the finished works are donated to air force squadrons or individual veterans in tribute.

In July of 2004 Simonsen was invited to speak at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., on the subject of "Aircraft Nose Art of World War II." While there he presented a nose art replica panel of Nuts For Nazis (Halifax Mk. III, serial number NR271), which paid tribute to the 704 American airmen killed during the war while wearing the uniform of the RCAF. This particular panel is now on display in the Smithsonian collection.

To be sure, Simonsen's recreated works of nose art provide veterans with a tangible and emotional connection to their war service, but, just as important, the works also help tether the service of so many to those generations too young to remember.

In either case, the simple enjoyment of this art form and the intrigue of the military history associated with it is reason enough to explore and appreciate the subject in greater detail.

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