



REMEMBRANCE AND *REVISION*

One man's crusade to recover a historic Halifax bomber aircraft By Ted Barris

**Canada's wartime history
was rewritten 13 years ago
this autumn.**

Not a lot of it. But three Canadian air crewmen listed as missing in action became war dead with names and a story Sept. 6, 1997. That day, an off-duty airline pilot led a salvage expedition at the crash site of a Second World War bomber, near Geraardsbergen, Belgium. Shot down the night of May 9, 1944, Halifax bomber LW682 took all eight crewmen to their deaths. German troops quickly removed five of the bodies before the Halifax vanished into the mud, it seemed, forever.

But when the families of the three MIA Canadian Halifax bomber crewmen approached Karl Kjarsgaard, an Air Canada pilot and recognized military aircraft retrieval expert half a century later, he agreed to investigate. He secured a grant from Canada's Heritage Minister and encouraged civilian and government groups to co-operate on the retrieval. Then he watched as the Belgians drained the swamp down 20 feet to allow the dig.

"It was one of the most moving moments of my life," Kjarsgaard said.

With Belgian coroners supervising

and streaming their work on the Internet, the excavation team unearthed bone fragments and personal belongings of the three Canadian crewmen entombed in the Halifax for 53 years. In the mangled aluminum that had been the mid-upper gunner's turret, for example, they found Pilot Officer Jack Summerhayes's remains and a wallet.

"I was standing there in gumboots in the swamp," Kjarsgaard remembered. "I got on the phone to Canada ... and I got to say to Summerhayes's son, 'Doug, we just found your dad.'"

History is always being rewritten. New science, renewed interest and revisited research will often add to or change the understood truths of the past. Kjarsgaard, 59, leads a group of aviation buffs who are not only intent on rewriting Canada's wartime aviation history but also driven to waken a nation to its lamentable memory gap. The Halifax 57 Rescue (Canada) group (www.57rescuecanada.com) proclaims, indeed proselytizes, its belief that the Handley Page Halifax bomber was Canada's most important wartime bombing weapon. In the darkest days of the Second World War, Kjarsgaard claims, many of the 6,178 Handley Page Halifaxes and their crews "fought

to hell and back" against the Nazi occupation of Europe while Allied navies and armies barely held their own against Hitler's Fortress Europe.

"More than 70 per cent of all Canadian aircrew operations were done in Halifax bombers while sustaining worse than six per cent losses ... that's three times the naval losses and twice the army losses," he said. "Halifax crews knew the odds were against them. All they had to do was look in their mess [and see] guys were missing after every night's operations. They knew that three or four missions from now, they weren't going to be having breakfast there either. And they still went!"

According to Kjarsgaard, the Canadian experience in the Second World War is the Halifax bomber. Although a "Hally" was not the first real bomber he ever saw. On a winter vacation trip to California in 1963, Karl did something he'd never done before: the 12-year-old yelled at his father. "Stop the car!" Karl shouted. His dad, at the wheel of the family station wagon south of Calgary, pulled off the highway during a blizzard in the town of Nanton. Kjarsgaard Sr. stopped in front of an abandoned Lancaster bomber sitting near the Nanton town hall. Karl leaped from the ►



Professional pilot Karl Kjarsgaard has only dreamed of seeing a real Halifax bomber instrument panel (like this replica). Fate may suddenly have delivered him that dream come true.



car and traipsed through the snow for a better look.

For the boy from Moose Jaw, Sask., it proved a seminal moment. He'd only seen wartime bombers in movies and in his Jell-O "Famous Aircraft of the World" plastic coin collection; he ate so much gelatin that he accumulated all 200 coins. But nowhere in the 200 was there mention of the plane that had carried nearly three-quarters of Allied bomber crews in the Second World War. Nor, he learned, was there an intact "Hally" to be found.

"This is a hidden gem, the most important airplane in the history of Canadian military aviation," he said. "But there was not one to be seen"

As a young man, Kjarsgaard pursued a career in aviation. During the 1960s, the Canadian air force was downsizing, so he co-piloted float planes along the Pacific Coast, then bush planes into the Arctic and, by the 1980s, he was piloting Air Canada jets. He accumulated thousands of hours in the cockpits of contemporary aircraft but, in his spare time, he never stopped gathering the stories of Halifax bomber crew veterans. Around 1990, in an Ottawa museum, Kjarsgaard spotted a neglected piece of metal sheathing that displayed the nose art from a Halifax that had flown with RCAF 432 Squadron in Bomber Command. He borrowed the chunk of metal — depicting an avenging angel — and asked to speak to the 432 Squadron's dinner at the annual Allied Air Forces Reunion in Toronto. When he pulled the Halifax nose art out of a cardboard box, Kjarsgaard was approached by Leo Loppe, a former RCAF bomber pilot.

"That looks just like the nose art from

Avenging Angel," Loppe said.

"Leo, that *is* *Avenging Angel*," Kjarsgaard told him as he watched the veteran's eyes light up.

Loppe turned the metal sheet over to verify Kjarsgaard's claim, spotted its rivets on the reverse and shouted to his former wartime navigator George Ewing, "George! George! It's the *Angel*!"

Kjarsgaard spent hours listening to Loppe, Ewing and scores of other former air crewmen, trying to discover if any Halifax bombers still existed. No, they told him. They'd all been cut up for scrap after the war. During one of his Air Canada layovers in Britain, Kjarsgaard travelled to the Yorkshire Air Museum to look at the centre fuselage section of a former Halifax. He signed up with Ian Foster's U.K.-based Halifax 57 Rescue group, who'd spent years tracking down landing gear, instruments, wing and tail sections (each Halifax part is labelled with the manufacturer's number 57). He never stopped dreaming: if he could just find one Hally intact, bring it back to Canada and make the whole nation sit up and take notice, then Canadians could never deny his contention.

"If you know of a certain type of sword that warriors wielded for your freedom," he said, "then you need to honour a sample of that sword. That's why, for me, it's Halifaxes ... Canada is hockey, the maple leaf and, oh, what's the other symbol of Canada? The Handley-Page Halifax."

In the fall of 1994, Kjarsgaard met two Norwegian electric plant employees — Tore Marsoe and Rolf Liberg — who shared a secret. The lifelong friends knew the whereabouts of a preserved but sunken Halifax bomber. When they witnessed Kjarsgaard's impassioned determination to retrieve a Hally for Canada, the two Norwegians revealed its location — 740 feet below the sur-

face of Norwegian Lake Mjosa. Negotiations followed. Canadian bomber vets and their friends raised more than \$300,000 to finance the aircraft's rescue. On Sept. 11, 1995, then the world's most complete Halifax bomber emerged from the deep; by December, its various pieces lay splayed across the floor of a hangar at CFB Trenton, Ont., where the restoration began.

"The aircraft [in] Lake Mjosa was a British Halifax flown by a British crew. It had no Canadian history to it," Kjarsgaard said. "But beggars can't be choosers when it comes to a rare airplane."

In 2004, Kjarsgaard made the most startling discovery of his Halifax quest to date. Perusing a book by British author Peter Rackliff about bombers used for weather reconnaissance after the war, he spotted the photograph of a Halifax bomber floating in the Atlantic off the coast of Ireland. The Hally had serial numbers — LW170 — indicating that it had been flown by Canadian bomber crews. Kjarsgaard learned that it had completed 29 successful bombing operations during the war (including D-Day) but that its post-war meteorological crew had run out of fuel and ditched the Halifax at sea in 1945. It took him six weeks at the British archives, but he found shipping records of an ocean freighter that had rushed to the ditched aircraft after the crew had been rescued.

"The Halifax did the deep six right in front of them," Kjarsgaard said. "So they marked down the latitude and longitude ... I was so taken that this could be a Canadian Halifax that had survived, albeit it sank in deep water, but it did go down in one piece."

Kjarsgaard sensed the Holy Grail was within his grasp. He had a picture. He had LW170's flight log. He had pinpointed within three kilometres the bomber's ► *Continued on page 125*



British manufacturer Handley Page built 6,178
Halifaxes. During the Second World War, Canadian
bomber crews flew 1,200 of them in operations
over Europe. By war's end, all "Hallies" were
scrapped and nearly erased from history

REMEMBRANCE AND REVISION

► Continued from page 74

resting place in 5,000 feet of water. All he needed was backing. Experience told him he faced a salvage that would dwarf the Norway dive. Deep-sea sonar imaging vessels — normally doing oil exploration or ocean floor topography — can cost \$40,000 to \$50,000 a day. But experience also convinced him that he needed veterans, Canadian civilians, government and industry leaders to help procure a deep-sea image of LW170 and then accumulate the funds to bring home “the most historic combat aircraft in Canadian aviation history.”

In 2009, the Halifax 57 Rescue (Canada) group commissioned a painting of LW170 in its heyday. With 500 prints of the painting in hand, Kjarsgaard flew 10,000 miles in two weeks to meet with 11 surviving Canadian air crewmen who’d all served aboard the former RCAF 424 Squadron bomber. Each veteran, including pilot Russell Earl, had vivid memories of his war-time aircraft, then designated QB-I. On his first operational flight — June 7, 1944 — Earl and his new Halifax and crew were diverted away from Normandy targets to a U-boat harbour on the coast of France. QB-I, then completed a “gardening” operation, dropping parachuted mines to block the U-boat shipping lanes.

“One U-boat got through the mines we laid and was sunk by a British frigate,” Earl said, “but three of the other four subs were damaged so badly by the mines they had to retreat.”

Earl flew 10 more operations at the controls of QB-I against industrial sites in Germany and V1 and V2 rocket sites in France. He completed 35 missions in all and received the Distinguished Flying Cross for meritorious service. Flying Officer Earl loved the Hallies for their power and speed.

“Like going from a Chevrolet to a Cadillac,” Earl said.

When Kjarsgaard visited Earl in Estevan, Sask., the veteran was wheelchair-bound from a stroke. It took two days, but Earl signed all 500 prints while

prodding Kjarsgaard.

“When are you going to get my airplane? ... I just hope I live long enough to see her in Canada,” he said.

As he approaches his retirement from Air Canada in January, Kjarsgaard has moved to Nanton, Alta., to be closer to his family and his avocation. In addition to his Halifax 57 Rescue duties, he’s become a director of the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in Nanton, promoting its prized aircraft collection, including that Lancaster bomber he first saw back in 1963. Last summer, as hundreds of aviation aficionados gathered at the museum, Kjarsgaard led some visitors to its recently unveiled memorial wall; the black granite monument displays the names of 10,000 Canadians killed in Bomber Command service between 1939 and 1945. He pointed out the names Fred Roach, Wilbur Bentz and Jack Summerhayes, the three Canadian airmen recovered in Belgium, whose names are still inscribed on England’s historic Runnymede Memorial as “missing in action.” He reflected on what he and his Halifax 57 Rescue team have accomplished.

“There’s satisfaction in knowing that the Runnymede Memorial is incorrect now,” he said. “And we corrected it.”

Kjarsgaard wears his Canadian pride on his sleeve. He’s convinced if volunteer salvagers from Canada can rewrite the history on the Runnymede Memorial in England, then the sky’s the limit. And that sky includes resurrecting and patriating Halifax bomber LW170 (QB-I) to its rightful place — the national Bomber Command Museum at Nanton. Kjarsgaard’s rationale for this titanic expedition is simple.

“If you were an American and you knew there were no B-17s left, and you knew the *Memphis Belle* was sitting deep underwater, what would you do? You’d go get it.

“If you were a Canadian and you knew where the only Halifax — of all the 1,200 Halifaxes Canadians flew — was sitting deep underwater, the only one to have survived the scrapyard, what would you do? You’d have to say ‘Let’s go get it!’ ” ■



VITALITY: SUE TALKS SEX (P 34)

LoveHoney lovehoney.co.uk. **Lelo** lelo.com. **Big Teaze Toys** bigteazetoy.com. **Vibratex** vibratex.com, comeasyouare.com. **Fukuoku** 9000 lovecraftsexshop.com. **Head Honcho** distinctivetoys.net, comeasyouare.com. **Lovecraft** lovecraftsexshop.com.

ATTITUDE: VIEWPOINT (P 42) Donna

Karan Collection Holt Renfrew, holtrenfrew.com, donnakaran.com. **Timex** The Bay, hbc.com, timex.ca or call (800) 263-0981. **My Tagalong** mytagalongs.com. **Canada Goose** Holt Renfrew, holtrenfrew.com. **Teva** teva.com. **Marni Karir Fashion Eyewear**, karireyewear.com, marni-international.com.

ATTITUDE: BEAUTY (P 44) Branche

branchebeautysleep.com. **Giorgio Armani** Holt Renfrew, holtrenfrew.com. **NARS** The Bay, hbc.com, narscosmetics.com. **Burberry Beauty** The Bay, hbc.com. **Vichy** Drugstores nationwide, vichy.ca. **SwissTEC** Exclusively at physicians' offices. **RoC** Drugstores nationwide, rocskincare.ca.

ATTITUDE: GROOMING (P 46) Narciso

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ATTITUDE: THE BEAUTY OF AGING

(P 52) **Hugo Boss** Holt Renfrew, hugoboss.com. **Red Valentino** Holt Renfrew, redvalentino.com. **Ralph Lauren** The Bay, ralphlauren.com. **3.1 Phillip Lim** Holt Renfrew, 31philliplim.com. **Nada** The Bay, nadadesigns.com. **Lafayette 148** Holt Renfrew, lafayette148.com.

LIVING: NEWS (P 104) East Coast Culinary

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ANSWERS TO BRAIN GAME (P 24) ENROBE

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