

57 RESCUE (CANADA) June 1, 2004
PROGRESS REPORT (NUMBER 2)
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As the 60th anniversary of D-Day approaches it is important to bring you, our members and supporters, up to date on the progress to locate and recover RCAF Halifax LW170.

Our Halifax has a very special combat career because she was there on D-Day !

During the early hours of June 6, 1944 our RCAF Halifax LW170 of 424 Squadron joined a bomber force, some 900 strong, to destroy 10 German heavy gun coastal batteries along the Normandy beaches. These guns could have decimated the Allied invasion forces arriving later that momentous morning. One of our most enthusiastic supporters to find and recover Halifax LW170 is 57 Rescue (Canada) member Oliver Rheume of Ottawa, the actual tailgunner from this D-Day bombing mission flying in LW170. He remembers seeing the invasion fleet steaming into the beaches as he and his crew left the target area at first light in Halifax LW170. This historic aircraft went on to do a total of 28 combat operations, 19 of which were after the D-Day mission in support of the Allied invasion of France, so she is a very special warbird in Canadian and Allied combat history.

We are very proud of our Canadian forces who participated in D-Day. The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion was there with the very first Allied forces, the Juno beaches were taken by our men at great effort and sacrifice, and the Canadians made the greatest single advance inland on D-Day of all the Allied forces to storm the beaches of Normandy. Our airforces were there and contributed to the great success of the Allied forces on that momentous day.

The Royal Canadian Air Force was by wars end the 4th largest airforce in all of the free world. Leading the way, in the Canadian contribution to Allied victory, were the RCAF bomber squadrons and their gallant crews. The greatest symbol of all their efforts and sacrifice was epitomized by their aircraft they flew into battle and the Halifax, this Halifax LW170, becomes the greatest symbol of all. She symbolizes the efforts of not only the best of a generation of Canadian patriots but also those of our friends and neighbours of the United States and the United Kingdom.

On to business - These are the HALI-FACTS:

The website has been a great success getting out the message about the discovery and news of Halifax LW170. We have had over 3000 hits on the website, www.57rescuecanada.com, from all over the world. From this site alone we have got over 100 new members filling out the membership forms. I am swamped with the return reponses, and the email messages being sent out now will be the start of the official process of welcoming our new members to the Halifax family. Please remember that when you receive this update that we are counting on your response of support in the form of member fees and donations being sent in to the 57 Rescue (Canada) address. To all of you who have sent in money for memberships and donations for the project please be advised that these funds are being held in trust until the Charitable Tax status has been approved.

With regard to the Charitable Tax Status our tax lawyer has initiated the proceedings for this and has been pushing for a fast track handling of our application. Once this processing has been finalized we can approach those institutions, foundations, and corporations who will support such a historic project. I have great hopes for locating sponsors and backers for the project from such sources, and the Charitable Tax Status is the key to opening up those possibilities.

We have articles coming out later this month in Canadian publications such as Airforce magazine and Legion. I have been able to get the USAF newspaper, The Air Force Times, and also the USAF news radio

network to publicize the discovery of our Halifax. When I tell them about the 8000+ Americans who came to join the RCAF in those dark days at the start of World War 2 and the 700+ U.S. citizens who were killed-in-action in the RCAF they immediately pick up on the US connection to this historic project. These American airmen in the RCAF are virtually unknown by Canada and the U.S. and it is important they be given recognition for their effort and sacrifice along with their Canadian comrades. I have included on our website a master list of all Americans killed in the RCAF and also a special detailed list of those KIA while flying on the Halifax.

Included there is a new and very special tribute to Tom Withers, air-gunner KIA on a Canadian Halifax, from Roseland, Virginia. We have titled it "American patriot-Canadian warrior". Tom's own words are a great testimony to the sacrifice and efforts of our airmen. I hope you will appreciate the passages from his letters to home, shared by his little sister Flora Withers Ballard of Wintergreen, Virginia, a new 57 Rescue (Canada) member.

Bomber Command Association of the UK is allowing me to get the word out to their membership this month and I will be attending their AGM on June 19 to publicize the Halifax LW170 project. "Flypast" magazine in England has printed first word of the discovery of this historic Halifax LW170 in their latest issue, so support is building.

Speaking of support, two great initiatives by special members of 57 Rescue (Canada) have been started. The first is by John Neal of Calgary who was a bomb-aimer on Halifaxes with 419 Squadron RCAF. John has written a special book, "Bless You Brother Irvin" about his combat career, bailout, and evasion adventures. He has generously and at great expense finished preparations for the release of his book later this year with all proceeds of this special book going to the Halifax LW170 project. 57 Rescue (Canada) deeply appreciates his efforts to help finance this historic project.

Further to this, another great effort is on in the USA, (thanks to our press received in the U.S) to contribute to the locating and recovery of RCAF Halifax LW170. Reverend Bob Bluford of Richmond, Virginia, a USAF Liberator pilot, has pledged \$1000 for the Halifax recovery. Bob Bluford was a friend and neighbour of Mel Compton, the American pilot in 424 Squadron who flew LW170 in combat. Rev. Bluford wishes to honour Mel and his comrades in the RCAF by his donation and to issue a challenge to all his fellow Americans to pledge financial support, in the name of one of the hundreds of Americans killed-in-action in the RCAF, to help the Halifax Project succeed. This is a great idea and 57 Rescue (Canada) thanks our good neighbours to the south for their growing support.

Hot off the desk of RCAF veteran and Canadian Senator Joseph Day is a great letter of official support for the RCAF Halifax LW170 project, a copy of which is included in all our promotions for our historic project. I have given Senator Day a complete briefing of the project and he wishes to give full backing to this historic quest. His support in higher political and government circles will be invaluable to 57 Rescue (Canada) as we proceed in gathering federal and provincial funding for the project in the near future.

After two years of searching out all documents about the ditching and final resting place of LW170 we now believe we are within a (5 mile by 5 mile box) of where she lies. I have been working with Bob Kutzleb, a deep-sea aircraft search expert, of Syracuse, NY who was responsible for locating and retrieving aircraft for the US Navy for many years. (His company has recovered an F-14 Navy fighter from 9500 feet !). He is confident, after reviewing all the data we have collected on LW170, that she will be found by sonar. The all important evaluation and inspection of the airframe must be done and we must have video images of all this to begin the actual recovery.

I will close with a quote from a Halifax air-gunner's letter to home, in the USA, who was killed-in-action over Germany just a short time after he wrote this. This passage is from our home page Memorial Day tribute to Tom Withers and all his Allied comrades, entitled "American Patriot-Canadian Warrior".

To his Mother and Father on Jan 10,1941 from Toronto "... to say goodbye to you was not an easy thing for me to do. However, I believe you both will understand that I could not well do anything else since everything that I, as well as both of you, believe in is now in a very precarious position. My training, inclinations, and whatever abilities I may have seem best suited for the choice that I have made. And there is no question of serving Canada to the neglect of my mother country. He who serves Great Britain or any of its Dominions also serves the U.S. and vice versa. Our differences are in arbitrary boundary lines only."... Love Tom

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

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