

# PLAN TO SALVAGE HALIFAX BOMBER WILL HONOR AMERICAN CREWS

by **Robert F. Dorr**

Off the Hebrides Islands near the northwest corner of Scotland, a four-engined Halifax bomber lies under 5,000 feet of water, where it ditched during a weather patrol on August 10, 1945.

This particular Halifax flew 28 combat missions in World War II, with several Royal Canadian Air Force crews. On one bombing mission to Germany, it was piloted by the late Archie M. "Mel" Compton (1916-1989), of Richmond, Va., one of 8,800 Americans who joined the RCAF before the United States entered the war.

Today, Compton's widow, Betty, and several other people are supporting a plan to raise the Halifax from the ocean's depths and restore it for museum display. Although 6,178 Halifaxes were manufactured during the war years, not a single fully intact example exists today.

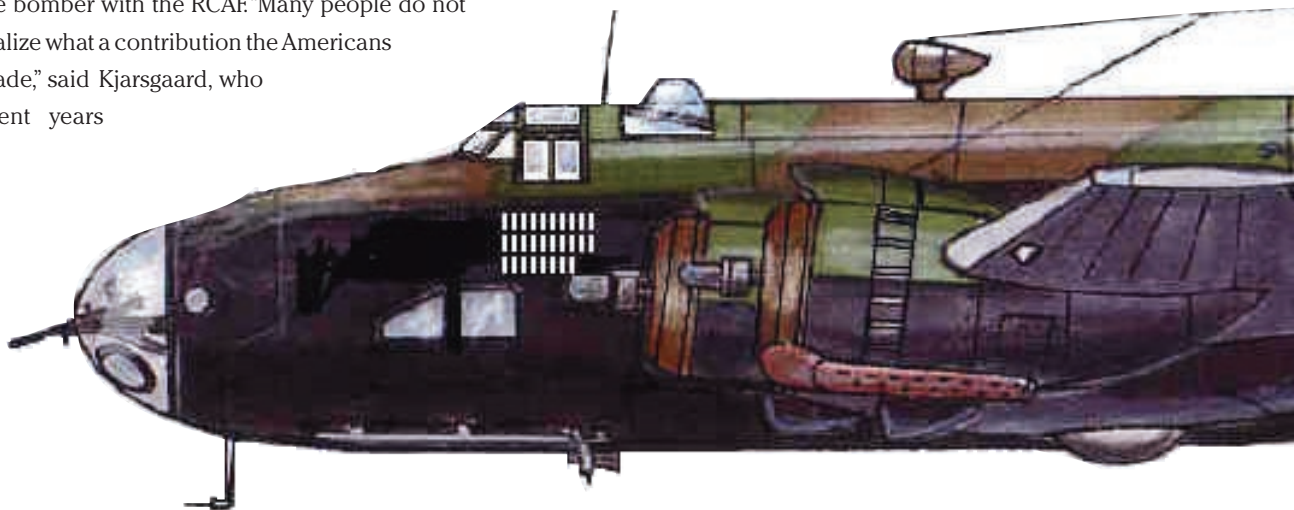
The driving force behind the hoped-for salvage effort is Karl Kjarsgaard, a Canadian airline pilot who was never in the military but who said he is "driven" by a desire to honor Halifax crews, especially the Americans who flew the bomber with the RCAF. "Many people do not realize what a contribution the Americans made," said Kjarsgaard, who spent years

researching Canadian and British archives and provided the statistics used here.

Kjarsgaard has talked to underwater salvage experts and is seeking backing for a retrieval effort. Initial support for the project has come from an unlikely source, an American veteran who had nothing to do with the RCAF.

Rev. Bob Bluford, 85, also of Richmond, flew B-24 Liberators with the U.S. Army Air Forces, the predecessor of today's Air Force. In later years, Bluford was the pastor of Compton's church. Both men left the AAF in 1945 as first lieutenants, but Bluford never served in the Canadian forces and Compton initially refused an offer to transfer to America's air arm.

When the United States entered the war in 1941, Americans in the RCAF were given a chance to transfer to U.S. forces. Compton and about 5,000 others chose to remain in the RCAF. Among the 700 Americans killed in combat flying RCAF combat missions, 132 lost



their lives in Halifax bombers.

“They were the long-range sword,” said Kjarsgaard. “In the early days, when the army and navy weren’t yet ready for offensive operations, air force bomber crews were striking at the heart of Germany.”

Canadian Halifax squadrons were integrated into Britain’s Royal Air Force and made up about 20 per cent of the units operated by RAF Bomber Command. Some Americans and Canadians also served in British squadrons. Under an arrangement to share responsibility, Bomber Command’s Halifax, Stirling and Lancaster bombers attacked Germany by night, while U.S. Liberators and B-17 Flying Fortresses struck on daylight missions.

Bluford said he wants to issue “a challenge” to his fellow Americans, especially U.S. veterans. “I want us to support this Halifax underwater salvage project,” said Bluford. “I’m not a wealthy man but I’m writing a check for a thousand dollars to encourage other veterans to support this underwater salvage project.”

Kjarsgaard has formed a group he calls “57 Rescue” (the Halifax was known as the “Model 57” in the in-house parlance of its manufacturer, Handley Page).

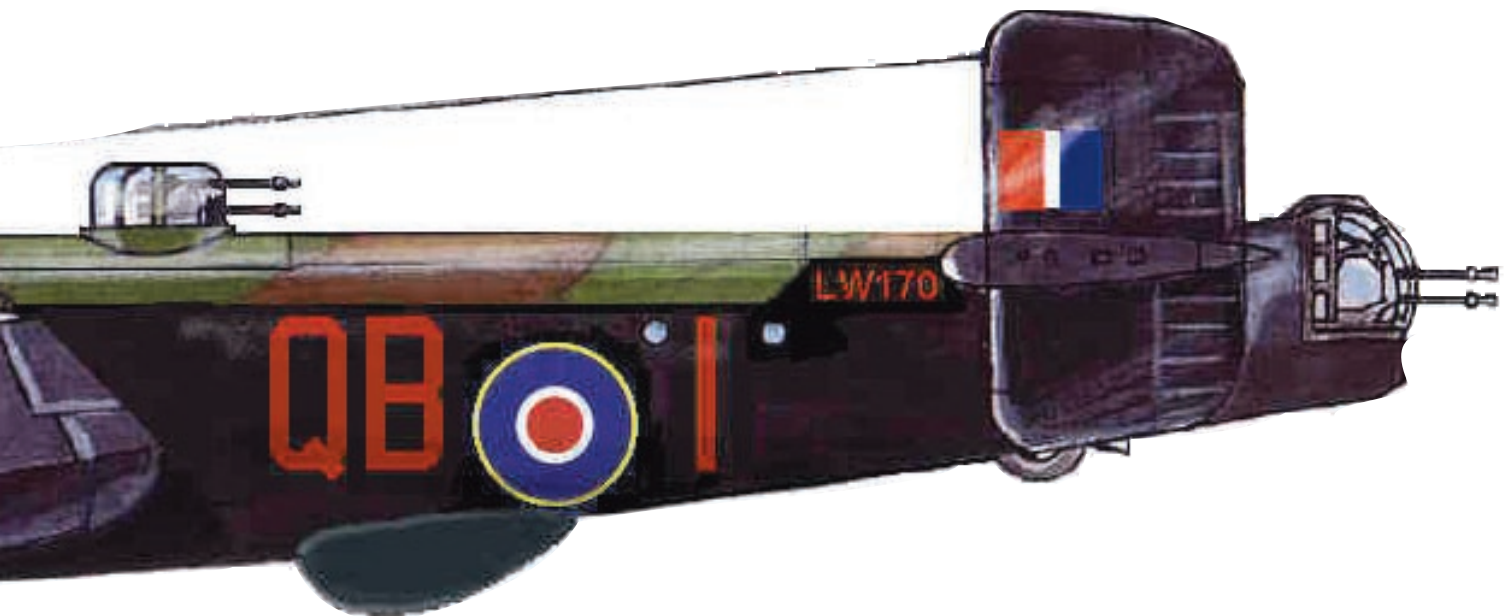
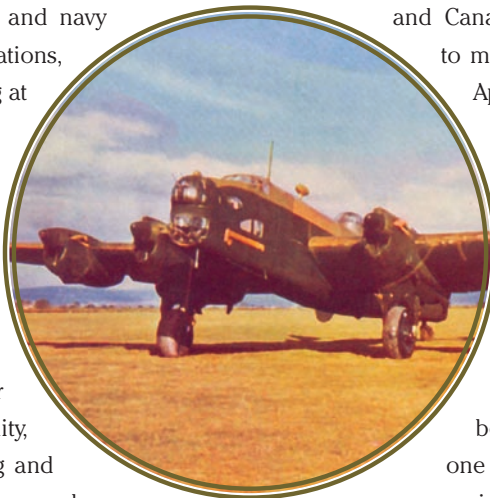
He maintains a web site at [www.57rescuecanada.com](http://www.57rescuecanada.com).

Kjarsgaard hopes to make it possible for American and Canadian supporters of the project to make tax-deductible donations. In April, he held discussions with an underwater salvage company that may be able to bring the Halifax to the surface.

Virginia native Compton remained in the RCAF long enough to complete his combat duty, which included flying a Halifax over the Normandy beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944. On one mission, his bomber sustained a near miss from flak and dropped 10,000 feet in minutes before Compton regained control.

Late in the war, Compton accepted a second offer to transfer to U.S. forces and served as a Liberator instructor in an American unit.

Many of the Americans who flew Halifaxes in Canadian units never made the transfer to their own country’s air force. Still, Kjarsgaard, Betty Compton, and Bluford believe that many U.S. veterans will be interested in their efforts to salvage a bomber that has enormous historical value.



## PLAN TO SALVAGE HALIFAX BOMBER CONTINUES...



### DITCHING OF LW170

In August 1945 while on weather patrol, the aging Halifax bomber LW170 sprung a fuel leak, and while trying to return to base was forced to ditch off the Hebrides Islands west of Ireland. The Halifax floated for 7 hours while the crew was rescued from their dinghy nearby. Late that afternoon LW170, one of the last RCAF combat Halifax's to have survived the war and the scrap yard, sank gently out of sight into the deep. This photo was taken while the Halifax still floated on the surface. With the knowledge of the exact coordinates, 57 Rescue Canada is confident that a recovery is possible.

### **LW170 PROPOSAL: AVIATION TREASURE FOR CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES**

There are important times in the history of a country that form the foundation of a proud nation. The courageous actions and sacrifices of the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War Two, especially in Allied Bomber Command, form a unique part of Canada's great history.

Of all of the aircraft the RCAF flew into combat there is one special heavy-bomber that stands out from all the rest, the Handley Page Halifax. Our aircrews of the RCAF flew over 70% of their missions in the Halifax and used over 1,230 Halifax aircraft from 1942 to 1945. Although there are 2 remaining Halifax aircraft, of the 6,100 built, not one combat RCAF Halifax is known to exist from this total Canadian group of 1,230 Halifax's.

For decades the United States and Canada have been the best of friends and neighbors. We have supported each other in peacetime and the war years to protect the freedoms given to us by the vision, labor, and sacrifice of our forefathers. World War Two was one of the most important times of cooperation and mutual support between the United States and Canada that our nations have ever seen.

The aircraft, Halifax LW170 of the RCAF, is the ultimate symbol of those cooperative bonds between our proud nations and the following information confirms this.

During the early and dark years of World War Two, before Pearl Harbor, our American brothers and sisters recognized the critical needs of Canada and her military. In an unprecedented move over 8,800 U.S. citizens signed up with the RCAF to help fight for our freedom. When the United States entered the war many of these patriots chose to transfer to their own Air Force and continue the fight for Allied victory. However, thousands of the Americans stayed on with the RCAF to the end, wishing to support total victory with the loyalty and allegiance to their Canadian comrades. There can be no finer reminder and tribute to the spirit of Americans and Canadians, together in a cause, than this.

It has now come to light, after researching the entire Honor Roll of RCAF combat bomber crews, that over 700 Americans were killed in action while serving in the RCAF! The majority of these men, who paid the ultimate sacrifice, were all volunteers and chose to stay on with the Canadians. They knew the odds were only 1 in 4 of finishing their combat tour but they stayed to the end. The majority of these fine young men were flying on the Halifax, and Halifax LW170 is one of those flown by an American for Canada.

Halifax LW170 has an unusual combat history in the RCAF. From May to August 1944 this aircraft did 28 combat missions to Germany and France during the critical days preceding and during D-Day. In fact, this Halifax participated in the bombing and destruction of the German heavy guns, which threatened the entire Allied invasion fleet, on the historic morning of June 6, 1944. (Later that month, on June 24, LW170 was flown to bomb a V-1 launch site by Flight Lieutenant Archie Compton DFC, of Mechanicsville, Virginia, U.S.A.) Finally, due for major maintenance in August

1944, LW170 was replaced by other Halifax's and consigned to repairs, or at worst, the scrap yard. Fate intervened and this Halifax was repaired to be handed over to a weather patrol squadron where it soldiered on until just after the end of the war in 1945.

In August 1945 while on weather patrol, this aging bomber sprung a fuel leak and, while trying to return to base was forced to ditch off the Hebrides Islands west of Ireland. In the ensuing search and rescue operations the Halifax floated for 7 hours while the crew was rescued from their dinghy nearby. Late that afternoon LW170, one of the last RCAF combat Halifax's to have survived the war and the scrap yard, sank gently out of sight into the deep.

For the past year, after having made this amazing discovery about LW170, this writer has spent hundreds of hours retracing and investigating the final hours of this historic aircraft. Knowing from experience and first hand knowledge that it is technically possible to search, find, and recover this aircraft the quest to bring LW170 home to Canada has become the goal of myself and my supporters. Our efforts are international in scope in the gathering of data on LW170 and her resting place.

My group of 57 Rescue Canada, dedicated to preserving the Halifax and its international heritage, proposes to raise the financial support, through corporate and public sponsorship, to find and recover Halifax LW170. We propose that upon recovery, LW170 would be located in the Bomber Command museum at Nanton, Alberta, in Western Canada to honor those RCAF veterans who flew her. We further propose that this aircraft would become a special memorial to the virtually unknown American airmen of the RCAF who flew, fought, and died for Canadian freedom on behalf of the United States.

The planning for the search and recovery of LW170 has been initiated. The special sonar's needed to locate the aircraft are available and job estimates are being tendered from several companies. The technology to lift an intact Halifax has already been pioneered and constructed as the lifting device used in Norway on the British Halifax is the exact tool for the recovery of LW170. The experience gained in the Norway and Belgium recoveries will be invaluable to the success of the recovery of LW170. Vision and intestinal fortitude of our dedicated project team will be keys, along with sufficient funding from corporate, public, and private sources, to make this be the recovery of the decade.

We will "press on regardless..." to final success.

## PROJECT 57 RESCUE BUDGET

Phase 1 2004 Sonar Survey and Locate the aircraft:  
Research Vessel - "Professor Logachev" - chartered by 57  
Rescue (Canada) for 8 days to do 30 kHz and 100 kHz  
sonar survey of area where LW170 should be found:

\$10,000 / day (Euro) \$80,000 Canadian  
equivalent at 1.627/1.00 exchange rate (Cdn)  
= \$130,160

CCRA Charitable tax status application -  
57 Rescue (Canada) = \$1,750

Planning, Transport, Project Manager Expenses  
= \$5,000

Total Costs Phase I - Location (Cdn)  
**\$136,910**

If you want to participate in this worthy cause,  
the following options are available:

1. Take out a 57 Rescue Canada membership (\$20.00 Cdn. Charitable receipt on demand).
2. Make a larger donation.
3. Volunteer to help; we could use researchers, strategists, strong & willing arms.

Or you can contact directly:

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Sarsfield, Ontario K0A 3E0 Canada

Email: 57rescuecanada@rogers.com

**[www.57rescuecanada.com](http://www.57rescuecanada.com)**