

Right: The Lancaster Bomber awaiting restoration.

Below left to right: Museum memorabilia including uniforms and other items.

The Mosquito Bomber fuselage.

The Lancaster Bomber cockpit.

A World War II vintage International Truck.

Bottom: Conceptual drawing of the new Canadian Historical Military Museum.



“Through Adversity To The Stars”

The Royal Canadian Air Force Motto Signals High Hopes For Windsor

STORY/PHOTOGRAPHY BY DICK HILDEBRAND



The Windsor based Canadian Historical Aircraft Association is embarking on an incredible journey to keep alive the memories of war veterans who called this city their home and to provide a permanent home for a famous Windsor memorial: the Lancaster Bomber.

Plans have been prepared for construction of an ultramodern museum to not only house artifacts from two World Wars but to be what's called "a gateway to other museums, heritage organizations, community groups and resources that are in the community".

While the museum proposal is still unnamed, a significant portion of it will be dedicated to the memory of Flying Officer Robert Upcott, the Leamington native and Lancaster Bomber pilot who flew a successful test mission to the Duindigt Racetrack near The Hague in preparation for the Allied food drops in an operation which became known as "Operation Manna". The drops began in The Netherlands on April 29th, 1945, and saved the lives of millions of starving Dutch people in the final days of the Second World War. Bob Upcott, his crew and aircraft were nicknamed "Bad Penny". To this day, Windsor's Lancaster sports the "Bad Penny" logo in memory of those Good Samaritans who risked potential German gunfire as they dropped their precious cargo to the hungry masses on the ground below. Humanity won out. Not a single shot was heard. ▶

On civvy street, Bob Upcott, who settled in Windsor, worked for the city as Emergency Measures Organization Director. The community lost him on August 26th, 2001, at the age of 78. A children's book entitled "A Bad Penny Always Comes Back" has been written and published by CH2A member Doctor Glen Mitchell as a tribute to the children of The Netherlands who suffered hardships during the war, and to those who died during the winter of 1944-45. The book is also a salute to veterans and serves as a tool to educate current and future generations. It costs \$20, and part of the proceeds are directed to the Association for the proposed museum.

Windsor Life Magazine has received exclusive rights to publish the architectural drawings of this ambitious and aesthetically pleasing development. The blueprints, prepared by architect Joe Passa, were donated to the Association.

The 88,000 sq. ft. museum is of modular design consisting of three levels. It will cost an estimated \$20 million. It can be built in stages, depending on the availability of finances. Mike Beale, president of the Canadian Historical Aircraft Association, says the group's policy is "Cash only; no debt. No shovel will hit the dirt until the money's in the coffers." He's hoping to break ground within five years.

The main floor will feature a huge glass front facing west: the homeward bound direction of the planes as they returned from combat duty. A domed skylight will allow natural, ultra violet filtered light to illuminate the large open concept display floor, which is designed to permit movement of the aircraft in and out of the building as necessary.

Entrance to the museum will be through the gift shop, where visitors can buy aviation and military gifts and publications. During a visit, you'll also be able to grab a bite to eat in a licenced dining area. No details have been overlooked.

Classrooms which can be adapted for instruction or for games and which are designed for use by visiting schools and other special interest groups, will be located on the second level. Multi purpose rooms will be available for receptions, seminars and other community gatherings.

The upper level will feature an indoor outdoor observation area, providing visitors with unique vantage points to view the aircraft.

The museum will replace the existing facility which is bulging at the seams and lacks the environmental controls to properly care for its valuable collection.

Mike says the development is vitally important "in order to maximize the potential to honour veterans and to provide tourism, educational and economic development opportunities for the community."

The City of Windsor has already been approached about a possible location. This is a vacant pie-shaped tract of land on the west side of the Airport itself. It's large enough to accommodate frequent visitor aircraft fly-ins, the display of visiting planes and fundraising projects.

Over the years, the museum has amassed up to 2,000 artifacts through donation or purchase. These include the Lancaster Bomber and two of only 35 Canadian owned DeHavilland Chipmunk trainers, along with original uniforms, rare photos and a representation of an actual aircraft cockpit. There is so much more, including a library of over 1,000 books, periodicals and original newsletters. A new home for this invaluable collection of memorabilia is deemed a must (see pg. 51 of the May/June 2008 issue of WL magazine).

The Canadian Historical Aircraft Association is fully prepared to take on the money raising challenge. A number of events have already been held to get the ball rolling and more are planned for the coming months.

Presentations will be made to the three levels of government for possible funding, while the public will be kept informed through a series of advertising blitzes. Recently, two Dutch businessmen were so impressed with their tour of the existing facility that they've pledged an undisclosed amount of money to the Aircraft Association.

In the meantime, you're able to reserve a guided tour of the existing museum and its rich collection of war memories by calling Mike Beale at 519-735-4633. While there's no admission charge, donations are welcome and you're guaranteed to leave with a new understanding of what our friends and neighbours sacrificed for the freedoms we enjoy today.

The tenacity and dedication of CH2A members shows a determination that the new museum will one day be a reality and be recognized as one of the must see historical sites in Canada.

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