



Update by **Halifax 57 Rescue (Canada)**
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Halifax Sweden Project UPDATE

As we enter this week of Remembrance across our lands I would like to share with you special memories I have known from the past 25 years of friendship with one of my heroes, Ian Thomson - RCAF Halifax pilot of 427 Lion Squadron.

Very sadly Ian passed away in May 2018 after failing health and it struck me harder than ever before, because we two had a bond that came from the "Halifax experience" and our shared favourite aircraft, the "Hali". Ian was a constant supporter and donor for years to the Halifax Projects of Halifax 57 Rescue.

I have been saving these memories for the right time and now is best time for all of you to know what Ian and his crew did for all of us. The "Thomson crew" flew, fought, and almost died several times in their beloved Halifax, before they finished their combat tour after 34 hair-raising combat trips in 1944 - 1945. No wonder Ian's nickname was "Lucky".

I would like to take you a very personal journey with me as we share Ian's most special memories and images, some he shared with me late in the night at past bomber crew reunions, when he opened up to me because "he knew that I knew" what he had gone through! Now I can share with you as I say my final goodbye to Ian during this week.

Ian joined the RCAF in mid -1941 after finishing high school in Winnipeg. He did all his training in Canada and received his pilots wings in mid -1942 but was not sent overseas until September 1943. Maybe this helped save his life in combat as he flew a lot in

1942 in Canada and was not a sprog - rookie pilot when he went overseas.

See the very first 2 photos of Ian taken from bomber crew photos, as he started flying combat with 427 Squadron at Leeming, Yorkshire in 1944.

In fact Ian's roots lay in Scotland for his family hailed from there before emigrating to Canada before the war and his family, including his Grandmother still lived in the north of Scotland.

The crew of 7 men would now fly and live or die together as a team. So here they are.

Pilot - Ian C. Thompson, Winnipeg
Navigator - J.R. Jim Metcalfe, Sheep Rock, Manitoba
Bombaimer - J.J. Jack Murphy Toronto
Mid-upper gunner - Howard Howie Anson Atlee, North Vancouver
Rear - gunner - John G. Monty Montgomery, Winnipeg
Wireless Operator - J. R. Roach, unknown
Flight Engineer - RAF John Somers Evans, Hamilton, Scotland

See the photo of the entire Thomson crew in front of their favourite Halifax "JANE" of 427 squadron sporting 40 bombing mission symbols and a DFC ribbon symbol, meaning someone on 427 Squadron had received a DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) award while flying JANE. The Thomson crew flew JANE (5) times during their 34 combat trips!

Also included here is a photo of a re-creation of JANE of 427 Squadron done on real Halifax aluminium skin of Halifax NA337, Halifax skin saved by yours truly from the stunning restoration of Halifax NA337 at the National Air force Museum in Trenton, Ontario and painted by nose-art expert Clarence Simonsen, which really brings her to life for you.

Remember, the core personnel of Halifax 57 Rescue, were the main people to have recovered Halifax NA337 from 740 feet of water in Norwegian Lake Mjosa in 1995, to be brought to RCAF Trenton and restored from 1997 - 2005.

So as the Thomson crew launched into their combat tour they knew full well, just by watching the crews who did NOT come back from combat trips, that there was about a 50% chance they would be killed and 70% chance they would NOT finish their combat tour. (only 30% of all bomber crews finished their 30+ combat trips !)

During the summer and fall of '44 it boggles the mind of what the Thomson crew endured:

At least 5 times they lost 1 of their 4 engines and flew their Halifax home.

3 times they had their Halifax pneumatic air system shot out which meant no wheel brakes for landing.

Another time they had their rudder controls shot away and had NO rudders operating for flight or landing

Another time Nazi anti-aircraft fire blew one complete cylinder off their 14 cylinder Bristol Hercules engine, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the engine, which continued to run all the way back to England. (bless you Mr. Bristol !)

The closest calls of all were 2 near-miss collisions with 2 other Halifaxes when they were inbound to their targets.

The closest of these 2 were when a Halifax appeared out of the darkness on Ian's left side, just feet away, on a collision course. Ian pulled up to the right and the other Halifax pilot pulled up to the left, but it was so close that Ian figured they should have hit

each other but somehow did not. When they got back to base that night they inspected their Halifax for damage. The only thing they could find was the wingtip light bulb on the extreme tip of the left wing was broken, where the 2 Halifaxes had touched in mid-air for an instant!

Then there was the time, while on a Halifax navigation exercise for the Thomson crew, just after their last turning point in north England, Ian called the navigator and said "give me a course to my Granny's house in Scotland".

Being a proper RCAF colonial crew, with high dis-regard for the King's regulations, they proceeded direct to Granny's house and proceeded to beat the shit out of the old homestead with a Halifax at full bore at low level. Relatives said that when Ian made his first pass "unannounced" in this mode of "stealth" that the dishes on the wall actually came off said wall, with Granny running out into the yard waving her apron yelling, " it's Ian, it's Ian".

If you would like to hear it from the man himself, there is a great veteran's website called "The Memory Project" with an actual voice recording of Ian Thomson talking about his "Lucky" life and what happened on the combat tour of his bomber crew. Just click on this blue link below and see his words and hear his humble but proud voice, by clicking down below on "Listen to this story":

<http://www.thememoryproject.com/stories/71:ian-c.-thomson/>

So, on that special day in Nov. 2005 when the only and first Halifax to be saved and restored for Canada was to be dedicated in Trenton it was my honour and pleasure to take my friend Ian Thomson to her and give him a complete private tour inside and out of NA337. So I wanted to share those images of Ian visiting his old aluminium sword of Freedom, the Halifax. The first time in a Halifax for Ian in 60 years, since he left England to come home!

Thanks to my friend Ian Foster, founder of Halifax 57 Rescue, who captured these poignant photos and moments of this unique reunion of a man and his aircraft. The photos are in the sequence they actually happened.

See Ian Thomson the proud Halifax warrior as he arrived for his special tour. Then next see the smile of Ian as he steps into a Halifax after so long.

See next his expression as he is remembering those walks up to the "office of his youth".

Then see the thoughts on his face when holding the Halifax throttles after so many years. And finally see the thumbs-up from the cockpit window of a man who has returned to the place where he fought his war.

Now, you need to understand that because Ian Thomson "knew that I knew" what he had gone through, he shared with me some years earlier, at a reunion, when we were talking late into the night, of a special moment in his combat tour that was seared into his heart and mind, and which has now become my memory too.

That other (second occasion) when he nearly had a mid-air, Ian had a warning from his mid-upper gunner there was a Halifax coming in on an angle to their path that looked like a collision course. Ian saw the Halifax and chopped his throttles to drop back out of the way of the other Halifax as it sidled over towards him. As if in slow motion, the Halifax passed just a few scant feet in front of Ian's cockpit, so close he could almost reach out and touch it.

And as the tail of the other Halifax cleared in front of him and he opened up his throttles again, Ian saw the rear gunner of the other Halifax and their eyes met and locked, they were that close. Then suddenly the rear gunner lifted his hand off his guns and

gave Ian a big thumbs-up greeting as they headed into the target. Ian responded with hearty thumbs-up back and slowly the two bomber pulled away from each other.

But that was not what Ian had carried with him for so many years, and which he was telling me now. What bothered him deeply was the fact that as the other Halifax pulled away just a couple of minutes later, while watching the other bomber just ahead, that bomber received a direct hit from anti-aircraft shells and blew up right in front of him, with Ian's Halifax flying through the smoke and wreckage of a bomber that once held 7 men!

Then just lately when I saw this 1944 Halifax rear-gunner painting done by Denis Abrams at the Australian War Memorial I was taken back once more to that intense moment with Ian just a few years ago. Now I could see what he saw. TAIL GUNNER

To this day I can still hear Ian's voice and the lasting effect it had on him from 50 years ago. I cannot remember what I said when Ian told me all this but I have hung on to that special time with him when he would consider sharing it with me. I hope I was able to listen well and that it helped him in some way. That was all I could do.

So now that Ian has gone to his reward, we must carry on and do our best for him and his Bomber Boys. We are going to do our best and this means by saving Halifaxes!

Goodbye Ian old friend, Blue skies and tailwinds forever. I will miss ye.

In the years to come when people want to know who were the Bomber Command aircrew, what were their experiences, and which aircraft did they fly for our Freedom, we will be able to say we did our bit to uphold their honour, excellence, and sacrifice.

Remember them! ----- WE LEAVE NO HALIFAX BEHIND!

Sincerely, Karl Kjarsgaard - Project Manager
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