

HALIFAX RISING

Hastings parts from Malta to help make possible ambitious reconstruction project

As briefly reported last month, Karl Kjarsgaard's organisation HP57 Rescue (Canada) has successfully imported the remains of two Handley Page Hastings transports into Canada. This is an exciting development, as the Hastings' wings are nearly identical to those of the type's sister, the Halifax. The parts recovery makes the recreation of not just one, but hopefully two Handley Page Halifax bombers a distinct possibility.

Karl has the pedigree to make this happen, having been the driving force behind the recovery of Halifax NA337 from a Norwegian fjord in 1995 and its subsequent restoration at the National Air Force Museum of Canada in Trenton, Ontario.

This story begins a couple of years ago, when Karl spotted an advertisement in a British magazine noting the discovery of Hastings wing parts in a long-dormant

scrapyard on Malta. He had already planned to visit the country to pay tribute to a recently deceased friend, Canadian fighter pilot W. C. 'Bud' Connell, a veteran of the Malta campaign in 1942. Kjarsgaard wanted to see for himself the land from which Connell had flown and fought, and to present a copy of the pilot's logbook to the Malta Aviation Museum. He met with Ray Polidano, the museum director, and discovered that 'Bud' Connell had flown three sorties in the museum's Hurricane II Z3055. They then got to talking about the scrapyard with the Hastings components. Ray was well aware of the yard, and had approached the owner's son (the scrap dealer himself was long dead) on several occasions, but was always rebuffed, like most visitors. However, Karl is a very persuasive man. Being from Canada made his approach less complicated, because the Maltese remember well how many Canadians had risen to defend their island nation in its darkest hour.

To gain access, Ray Polidano enlisted the help of George Said, a maritime lawyer and president of the Malta Historic Vehicle



Mario Zammit of the MHVT with the cockpit from Hastings WJ325 as recovered from the scrapyard. HP57 Rescue (Canada)

Trust. The most amazing sight greeted Karl and Ray when they entered the yard. Beneath all of the discarded junk and tangle of trees and plants lay the mortal remains of two former RAF Hastings: a C4, WJ325, and a C2, WJ328. As a VIP transport, WJ325 had a fairly quiet career, whereas WJ328 flew cargo missions with No 70 Squadron during the 1956 Suez Crisis. The two aircraft were retired at RAF Luqa in April 1968 and a scrap dealer hauled their remains away later that year. He disposed of the fuselages (except the cockpits), but died before smelting the rest. The all-important centre sections and undercarriage survived, and remained more or less untouched in his moribund yard for the past 40 years.

George Said negotiated with the scrapyard owner's heirs on behalf of HP57 Rescue (Canada) to obtain the Hastings parts at a fair price. HP57 Rescue received a generous donation from Clint Cawsey to fund the Maltese mission. Even so, shipping the parts as they were was prohibitively expensive. The centre sections needed disassembly

so they could fit into a standard shipping container. The Malta Historic Vehicle Trust arranged for a storage yard to temporarily house the parts while its personnel, ably led by the tireless Mario Zammit, unbolted the wing sections into manageable parts and cleaned away 40-plus years of dust and grime. Mario also built sturdy wooden trusses to house the engines.

Arranging the parts so they would all fit within the shipping container took a good deal of effort, but Mario managed to get everything but the two cockpit sections inside. It was a tight squeeze, though; so tight, in fact, that only 4in of space remained unfilled when they closed the doors.

The two Hastings cockpit sections remain at the Malta Aviation Museum. Karl donated the cockpit from WJ325 to the museum in appreciation of its assistance, but WJ328 is still available for sale or trade. All proceeds will of course go straight into the Halifax project.

Not one to sit idly while the Hastings parts were being readied for shipment from Malta,

A view of the Malta scrapyard when it was first opened to the Canadians. HP57 Rescue (Canada)



Kjarsgaard opened talks with Sprung Instant Structures Ltd (SIS) to see if it could manufacture new wing spar caps. Jim Avery, the company vice-president, was only too happy to help. A member of the Sprung family had served in Bomber Command during the war, and this connection immediately opened up a co-operative atmosphere. SIS created a die for the spar extrusion using original Halifax blueprints. Its foundry in Utah manufactured enough of the metal beam for two-and-a-half aircraft, and SIS covered virtually all of the costs. The newly-manufactured spar caps arrived in Karl's home town of Nanton, Alberta in early August. They should be on their way to Ottawa by the time these words are read.

Two Hercules engines and a set of Hastings undercarriages have already made the journey in the opposite direction, courtesy of Mullen Trucking. The parts form the centrepiece of a Halifax display at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in Nanton, waiting for the time when they will become part of an actual Halifax. The BCMC board has lent strong support to HP57 Rescue's efforts and will work closely with the group once the Halifax build gets under way.

The Canada Aviation & Space Museum is storing the Hastings sections at present. A team of engineers will evaluate the



Karl Kjarsgaard at the MHVT compound in Malta in June 2011. All the main wing boxes and centre spar sections are lined up after weeks of disassembly to fit in a shipping container bound for Canada. HP57 Rescue (Canada)

components to assess what structure can be used in a rebuild, and what will serve as a pattern only. George Roskopf, the man responsible for restoring NA337's wings, lives near Ottawa and will organise the Hastings wings' reconstruction. Karl is looking for a workshop in the Ottawa area to set up this phase of the restoration, and is in talks with the Canada Aviation & Space Museum.

In addition to the wing structures HP57 Rescue continues to look for parts. A rear turret has already been obtained, and someone found who owns nose glazing in good condition. One organisation has also offered a ready-to-bolt-on Hastings starboard outer wing panel. Karl has located an

equivalent, though less well-preserved, section for the port wing.

Karl hopes to continue the sonar search for the sunken remains of Halifax LW170 in the Irish Sea. He is waiting for a privately-owned research vessel he's used in the past to enter a mission near LW170's most likely seabed location. His team can then 'piggy-back' a day of sounding onto that project at minimal cost. LW170 will probably have suffered considerable corrosion, but some of its remains should be intact enough for a static restoration, or at least as pattern material. Recovering the Halifax will be no mean feat, but HP57 Rescue will undoubtedly find the required

support. Karl is also exploring the possibility of locating a crashed Halifax in South America, as well as another in a former French colony.

The eventual goal is to rebuild a Halifax to ground-running condition with Bristol Hercules engines for the Bomber Command Museum of Canada, in similar fashion to the museum's Lancaster X FM159. The second Halifax project is for sale/trade. Karl is hoping someone will see the sense of joining forces so both wing spars can be restored simultaneously, making the job easier and cheaper for both parties. Please visit 57rescuecanada.com for further details on how you can help.

Richard Mallory Allnut

The lorry from Mullen Trucking with the Hastings gear and engines aboard arrives at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in Nanton, Alberta on 17 August. HP57 Rescue (Canada)

