

Saving the Mosquito from years of neglect

BY PETER VACHER, FOR THE CALGARY HERALD MARCH 25, 2010

The fate of the de Havilland Mosquito has aroused much emotion, as Richard de Boer's March 22 column, Losing the Mosquito would sting, shows, but I hope that cooler heads may prevail.

Six years ago I visited the Calgary Aerospace Museum and was sad to find two unloved aircraft lying in damp conditions scattered in sheds and containers at the museum, downtown in a leaking building and with engines stored in a barn on a farm outside the city. The CEO of the museum bemoaned the fact that there were few skills to continue the restoration, which had been started in a small way over several years, of the Hurricane; and no funds and certainly no skills to restore the Mosquito.

Having myself just completed the total rebuild of the only Hurricane still flying which fought in the Battle of Britain, I saw an immediate need to save the two airplanes from further deterioration.

(Contrary to Richard de Boer's allegations, much of the restoration work on my Hurricane was done by me personally, leaving the critical work to be done by professionals.) I also realized the historical importance of both aircraft.

The Calgary Hurricane is a real piece of Canadian heritage, having been built at the Canadian Car and Foundry Company at Fort William, Ontario by its workforce of 4,500 (half of them women) under the leadership of its legendary Chief Engineer, Elsie MacGill. A little known fact is that upon its completion off the production line, Hurricane 5389 was first sent to No. 4 Training Command at Calgary -- a truly local piece of history. I propose restoring it to taxiable condition for the Museum and to bear the cost myself.

On the other hand, the Mosquito at the Aerospace Museum in Calgary has a substantial British heritage, serving initially with the Royal Air Force as a B-35 bomber and subsequently modified to PR 35 photo reconnaissance, serving with 58 PR Squadron out of Benson in Oxfordshire.

Mosquitoes were built in the U.K., Canada and Australia. There are five Mosquitoes in Canada. Two of these were built in Canada and therefore have Canadian heritage. The Aerospace Museum's example was built in the U.K. at Christchurch in Dorset. Having served with the Royal Air Force for seven years, being sold off to a mapping company in Canada can hardly credit it with a Canadian heritage. No B Mk. 35s nor PR Mk. 35s were used by Canadians in the Second World War, nor afterwards. No such aircraft were ever taken on charge by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).

It has long been established that vintage aircraft move around the world between operators, collectors and museums. The last flying Mosquito was purchased by Kermit Weeks in Florida from The Fighter Collection at Duxford in the U.K. No objection was raised as it was more important for the artifact to be

conserved rather than where.

Many British aircraft now reside in North America whilst many North American machines are flying in the U.K. Canadian built Tiger Moths and Chipmunks are to be found all over the world. And the Calgary Mosquito was not even built in Canada.

With all due respect, Richard de Boer has known of these aircraft for more than 25 years and has done nothing to preserve them until my offer to rescue them both.

I reaffirm my intention to initially paint the Mosquito in Spartan livery and to bring it to Canada for a flying season. If de Boer thinks that it is naive to believe that promise, then he underestimates me.

My offer still stands to restore the Hurricane for the Museum and to make an endowment of \$1 million. In return the 'City of Calgary' Mosquito will be saved for aviation enthusiasts in Europe and North America to enjoy. And it will not cost the Calgary taxpayers a penny.

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