



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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June 2014

The bomber that became a gas station.



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CMHS Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

**Tuesday,
June 17th,
2014**

7:00 pm

At the
Petty Officers' Mess
HCMS Tecumseh

An this is how the story unfolds. Art Lacey, a businessman, in Milwaukie, Oregon, was at his own birthday party where he had a few beverages and then started bragging that he was going to put a B-17 on top of his gas station. A friend promptly told Art he was absolutely out of his mind and could never pull it off. Art bet the man \$5 he could do it and immediately ran with the idea. And so he turns to his friend Bob and says 'You got any money on you Bob?' And Bob says 'Yeah, how much do you need?' And Art says 'I need \$15,000.' And the guy had it on him,"

If it sounds surprising that someone back in 1947 would have that much cash on them, you have to realize what Portland was like back then. "The whole area was wide open. There was gambling, there was prostitution, and there was illegal booze. So Art got the money from his friend Bob and wasted no time on getting the ball rolling on his big plan. He was acquainted with this guy who was the head of a base (in Oklahoma) that had hundreds of bombers in storage. So he goes there and buys a B-17 The fellow running the base says 'now you go into town and you come out tomorrow, you and your co-pilot, and I'll have the plane ready for you.'

Great except Art had two problems with his plan. For one, he didn't have a co-pilot and more importantly, he didn't even know how to fly a B-17. But he was determined so he borrowed a mannequin from a seamstress, dressed it up and made it his 'co-pilot.' Then he hopped in the plane and made some practice runs on the runway with the manual in hand. He knew how to fly a single-engine aircraft and was a good pilot but he had never flown a four engine plane before. Art might have been able to fake his way through it if the plane's landing gear didn't malfunction. Some claim you need a co-pilot to lower it. He was trying to land back on the runway when he realized he was in trouble. He flew it around for a while but finally he realised that he had to bring it in. The landing was a failure as he skidded in and then crashed into another parked B-17.

Art wasn't hurt in the mishap but he did have to walk up to the base headquarters and admit that he really didn't know how to fly a B-17. Now the story goes that the guy running the base took pity on him. "He turned to his secretary and said 'Have you written up the bill of sale yet on that B-17?' And she said "No."

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CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The
CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

is a non-profit registered society
which fosters the study of the
military and the police, and the heritage of
Canada, the British Empire, and the world
as well as the preservation of military
artifacts and records.

The CMHS meets once every calendar month
at:

Petty Officers' Mess
HMCS Tecumseh
1820 - 24th Street SW
Calgary AB T2T 0G6

All are welcome to attend

Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on
Tuesday, June 17th, 2014
19:00 (7:00 pm)

At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

Members are reminded that an offering of foodstuffs for the Legion Food Bank is considered your unofficial entrance fee to our regular scheduled meetings.

The unofficial agenda of this meeting will be:

- Introduction of guests, Minutes of last meeting
- Correspondence, Membership report
- Treasurer's report, Old business / New business
- Break, Show & Tell

The President, David S would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.



Art Lacey and his B17

was a good enticement. And that is what they did. Fueled up they took off the next morning and flew to Palm Springs, California. They required more fuel but he didn't have the money left so he wrote a bad check for it and hoped to quickly covered it when he got. But by that time, Art Lacey was so far in debt there was really no turning back. After refueling in Palm Springs, they for Klamath Falls. They followed the Sierra Nevada Mountains until they hit a blinding snow-storm. They kept dropping in altitude, trying to get below the storm. Flying her by the seat of his pants, Lacey just missed crashing the plane broadside into a mountain, by inches. The story goes that they had no idea of where they were. During a break in the clouds, they finally spotted a small town. They buzzed that little town pretty closely. People were running out of their houses in nightgowns. The town folks were afraid they were going to land on Main Street, but the trio in the plane was just trying to read the road signs. After some frightening sweeps, they spotted a building with Fall River Mills painted on its top. They located it on their map and found they were almost 100 miles off their course. **Continued Page 4**

And he said 'Worst case of wind damage I've ever seen.' And then he sold him a second B-17. The one that Art ended up buying was in much better shape than the first one with under 50 hours of fly time. But he had already spent over \$13,000 on the B-17 that he had crashed and he didn't have much money left. Fortunately for Art, the guy took pity on him once again and sold him a second B-17 for just \$1,500.

This time, Art decided it probably wasn't a good idea for him to try to fly it alone, so he called his wife and had her send down two of his friends. One was the guy who had taught him to fly in the first place and the other one had been a crew chief on a B-17. And he told her to send them down with a case of whiskey. The whiskey was to be used to bribe the local fire department. Art didn't have any money left for gas and he wanted to use their fire truck pumps to siphon fuel out of the two crashed B-17s. Oklahoma was a dry state at the time and whiskey



Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting of the Calgary Military Historical Society

May 20, 2014

Meeting called to order by President David S. at 7:15 PM 19 members in attendance.

Minutes of previous meeting. Discussed and call for approval by Mikey C. Seconded by Bob McP.

Newsletter. Discussion of story

No Guests, No correspondence.

Membership.

Report by the noble Brian H. Membership totals 46 with new member signed up at gun show.

Treasures Report.

Listing of monies collected from book auctions, donations etc. Listing of expenditures. . Treasurer Mr. Brian H. reports the annual reports to the Provincial Gov't are due and will be submitted post haste. Acceptance of Treasures Report moved by Brian H. and seconded by Barry E. Approved

Old Business

-History Show took place and President admits that he missed it and can not give a report. Member Gary gives report . Excellent show and will be back next year. 128 different displays. Discussion on whether club will come up with a reward next year. -Barry E discuss society contribution. -Mike C. moves to fund some award. - Bob McP. Suggest plaque with our name on it. -David S. suggests alternate awards. -Mike to look into awards. - David S. tables ideas till next meeting and members to come up with costs. Motion by Mike C retired.

Barry E. report on recent Gun Show at Easter. Huge and approx. 900 tables, high attendance, most everyone happy.

New Business

Mike C. Book (British Battles and Medals) 4th edition 1971 Special bargain price. See Mike Bruce.—on set at Historical Minutes put on by CBC Show to be released this Fall

David S.—History Channel , Van Doo's in Afghanistan.

Alan —Warns of new rules coming by Revenue Canada concerning non profit organisations.

Break ,

Draw by ticket master and many happy winners.

Show and Tell

Gary—Liberty ship storey, Stories on uniforms of relatives.

Darrell—Bayonet Enfield, Sextant Astro Compass, badges from WW1 and Cold War kit.

Bob McP. Group of medal ribbons Bulgarian medals, Connecticut Nation Guard Medal.

Mike C. Sabre 1811 Germans sold to British Army. 1901 Duke and Duchess Metal to Boer War Veterans and Tribal Chiefs.

Bruce- Badges from the 60's. 1967 badge gold plated with blue enamel.

Barry— Welcome home medal Boer War , from Toronto. Royal Garrison Artillery Badge WW1 and Prewar.

Marty —Story on documentary “The War” on PBS.

James B.— 1920' autograph book from Wildbush Sask.

Marjory.-Family history WW1 Father in Law.

Al— story on Vietnam Vets.

David G.— WW2 practice bomb.

Bob McP. —Story on battle wounds.

David S Story on VD in Italy WW2, Badge from Gov. Gen. Bodyguard and rare slouch cap.

Before adjourning Pres. David S. reminds people to listen to people during Show and Tell and avoid whispering and gossiping with fellow members while a member is try to speak.

Adjourned Moved by Mike C. and Seconded by Barry.

Thank you member Floyd S. For this article on the bomber gas station

They picked up a railroad track and followed it all the way to Klamath Falls under the storm. Somehow, flying level with the tree-tops, they made it to Klamath Falls where the weather had cleared, gassed up (another bad check) and took off again. Once more they encountered a bad snow storm. When they couldn't pilot the shaking plane any higher over the storm, they dropped below it, bringing the plane home at 800 feet. They finally go to the Troutdale Airport and landed.

Next Problem. Just getting the plane across town to Milwaukie almost proved to be a tougher chore than flying it cross-country. The authorities weren't going to allow Lacey to move the plane from Troutdale to Milwaukie. Lacey's request for a permit to move the bomber went through the State Highway Department to then Governor Snell. They turned him down. Lacey finally just loaded it up on four trucks and moved it anyway.

After a harrowing trip in the night down a two lane highway, they made it. The B-17 made it to Milwaukie but it's hard to keep something that big a secret and it didn't take long for local officials to come after Art for not having permits.

The Oregon Journal, a local paper wrote an article saying something to the effect of 'local government tries to keep bomber from final resting place.' This was right after World War II, so patriotism was running pretty high. So they ended up fining him \$10 for doing what he shouldn't have done. And that is how the bomber got to Milwaukie and became a legendary land mark.



The Bomber stopped operating as a gas station in 1991 and has since been associated with the adjacent restaurant, where visitors can grab a "Bomber Burger" and a souvenir Bomber placemat. A serious restoration effort on the B-17G, aka "Lady Lacey" (after Art Lacey's British wife), began in 1996. Art Lacey died four years later in December 2000 at the age of 87. After over 65 years of weathering Oregon's climate and being pestered by birds and periodic vandalism, The Bomber is being dismantled. The plane will be moved to Aurora, Oregon where it is slated for an overhaul and plans are to put it on display there.

A total of 12,731 flying Fortresses were produced in the period 1935-1945. Approximately 4,750 B-17's were lost during combat missions. Today, there are approximately eleven intact examples of B-17s world wide.

