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# Camaraderie, Morale and Material Culture

## Reflections on the Nose Art of No.6 Group Royal Canadian Air Force

Caitlin McWilliams

The practice of decorating and naming instruments of war predates recorded history, and has evolved as both a ritual of personalization to boost the morale of the owner of the weapon, and as a tactical device to show defiance towards the enemy. In aviation culture, the Second World War era is widely regarded as the “Golden Age” of military nose art. Popular memory recalls American fighters with menacing “shark-mouths” or bombers showcasing busty pin-up gals done up in bright colours with flirty faces and showing plenty of leg. Nose art was more than just flying ladies, however, and it was not the exclusive preserve of the American and the equally well publicized British air forces. It was vigorously embraced by young airmen in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) as well. A range of Canadian aircraft artwork has survived, particularly from bombers of No.6 (RCAF) Group.

This article will examine the significance of nose art for both Canadian airmen and Canadian civilians on the home front. It will argue that nose art was one way Canadian airmen asserted a distinctive identity within the massive Allied bombing offensive in Europe, and that the striking images, with their national and often specifically regional symbolism,

**Abstract: During the Second World War air and ground crews emblazoned the noses of their aircraft with colourful figures, sayings and insignia. This ritual personalized the machines and boosted morale. The squadrons of No.6 Group Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) embraced this practice and painted a wide-range of images and designs on their aircraft. This article combines photographs of the artwork with veterans’ memories to examine nose art’s significance to airmen, particularly in expressing national identity and links with hometowns and the many communities that “adopted” an overseas bomber squadron.**

helped the public back home to relate to the air war as Canada’s own.

Despite the popularity of nose art among aviation enthusiasts, no scholarly study has examined the practice of nose art in the RCAF. Instead it has occupied a specialist niche among vintage aircraft enthusiasts and model airplane hobbyists, whose interests have focused on the vital tasks of preserving and recording that art work, rather than analyzing its significance in Canadian military and cultural history. This paper draws heavily on photographs, the only record of much of the aircraft art. Many of the photographs are informal and unofficial, and for this reason give a fuller sense of the

significance of the art to the airmen. Moreover, the photographs were often produced to accompany war diaries of units, or reproduced to illustrate memoirs and unit histories, whose content provides further context for a understanding of why aircrew decorated their bombers. This study particularly builds on the work of Clarence Simonsen. Simonsen has spent over 40 years researching the nose art of No.6 Group and paints replica nose art on original warbird skin.<sup>1</sup> Through interviews with veterans and their families, he has taken the first steps to relating photos of nose art with stories that illuminate its origin and inspiration. His work provides a catalogue of nose art images, and of the many fewer examples of decorated fuselage panels that still exist. Stephen M. Fochuck has published a photographic history of Canadian nose art, a work broader in scope but more selective in detail than Simonsen’s that covers the whole of the RCAF in all theatres during the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

This article is based on over 500 photographs of original and replica nose art that have been gathered from various sources, including the Simonsen and Fochuck books, and organized by squadron and design so that patterns can more readily be identified. Nose art showcasing pin-



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**"Hellzapoppin," a Canadian Halifax III from No.426 Squadron with an impressive mission count. The name comes from a stage show and movie that were popular during the war.**

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**A Canadian Halifax crew pose with their  
“Sweetie.”**

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Photo courtesy David L. Bashow

up girls and other risqué subjects are most prominent, followed by designs which feature Walt Disney characters. These are also leading motifs in other air forces.<sup>3</sup> More interestingly, many of the designs signal ties to Canada, sometimes through national symbols but also in more subtle ways. This very prevalent Canadian imagery is the focus of the present paper.

The practice of decorating aircraft began in the early days of powered flight, but it was only during the Battle of Britain in 1940 that such individual designs were officially permitted by the RAF. Officials were not enamoured of the practice, but in realizing the value to morale for these crews whose chances of returning home were about 50/50, they decided that the only way to control it was to authorize it.<sup>4</sup> Designs were only permitted on the fuselage under the pilot's position and the artwork could be no larger than 100 cm squared. For the Canadians serving in RAF squadrons, only small "maple leaf" or "Canada" markings were officially permitted on airplanes and had to follow the

strict size rules.<sup>5</sup> Yet as Canadians gained a more prominent role in the strategic bombing campaign over Germany, regulations concerning the designs and their size fell by the wayside. Indeed, nose art was a movement created and perpetuated by the airmen themselves.

Personalisation of aircraft became more and more common as the usefulness of the practice in contributing to enhanced morale gained greater, if unofficial, recognition. As the fortunes of war ebbed and flowed, the quantity and quality of the artwork applied to RAF and RCAF aircraft reflected these changes. During times of pressure, much of the artwork was small and constrained, but as the certainty of ultimate victory grew, the artwork became larger and much more exuberant.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to 1943, the majority of RCAF members who went overseas served as individuals in British units. Canada's major contribution to the air war was the British

Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP), signed in Ottawa by the Canadian, British, Australian and New Zealand governments in December 1939. Air crew from across the Commonwealth trained in Canada, and Canadian graduates – who ultimately constituted 72,835 of the 131,553 air crew trained under the scheme – were placed at the "disposal" of the British Air Ministry for service in British units. Right from the beginning, however, senior Canadian air officers were keenly aware that this mixing of Canadian personnel into the RAF, although necessary for rapid expansion of the Commonwealth air effort, would do little for the growth of the RCAF as a national institution. Thus, under the air training plan agreement, distinctive RCAF squadrons were to be formed in Britain from Canadian graduates. In the words of Air Vice-Marshal G.C. Croil, Chief of the Air Staff in 1938-40, "if they [Canadian graduates] can serve in Canadian squadrons they will bring credit to Canada as a nation, and build up *tradition* for the RCAF and their squadrons."<sup>7</sup> These Canadian squadrons were to be organized by the British Air Ministry and paid for by Britain, in compensation for the heavy costs Canada was bearing for the air training plan.

For good reasons the British were slow to organize RCAF units, and the ones established tended to be fighter squadrons, the smallest units whose single engine aircraft had only one crewman, the pilot. Squadrons for multi-engine aircraft, by contrast, were much larger and more complex organizations. Each crew comprised four or more personnel, each with specialist training for his particular duties, and it was a formidable administrative challenge to select Canadians from the various speciality

training streams to build these crews. As early as 1941, when the first large groups of Canadian graduates from the BCATP began flying operations in Britain, the Canadian government pressed for the more prompt creation of large RCAF squadrons.

The policy of "Canadianization" stepped into higher gear in late 1941 with the dispatch to Britain of a senior, highly experienced officer, Air Vice-Marshal Harold Edwards. His appointment to the newly upgraded position air officer in chief, RCAF Overseas, signalled the determination of the government to bring together the RCAF aircrew into Canadian units. As Edwards investigated the situation in Britain, he became alarmed at the extent to which RCAF aircrew were being lost to the RCAF, not just in administrative terms, but also in terms of their professional allegiance and development. In February 1942, Edwards reported that most RCAF personnel experienced a sort of "complete mental change when they cross the Atlantic," not least because they were often welcomed into British units as quirky overseas cousins, with a kindly but unprofessional tolerance for poor discipline that was the antithesis of the RCAF's standards.<sup>8</sup> Edwards fully shared the impatience of C.G. Power, the intense nationalist who had become Canada's air minister in 1940. As Power describes in his memoirs, "we in Canada were being constantly harassed by parents and relatives, inquiring about the welfare, whereabouts, and sometimes the fate, of Canadian boys...Inquiries made through Canadian RAF headquarters in England, on the insistence of parents in Canada, were more often than not, after much delay, met with incomplete and sometimes

unsatisfactory replies."<sup>9</sup> Edwards became increasingly concerned that these problems were affecting the welfare of Canadians serving in RAF units.

The things that may destroy that boy when he goes into combat, and cannot foresee the outcome, are the things which can readily be adjusted, but only by Canadians.

They involve dollars and cents instead of pounds and shillings – dollars and cents going home to a wife or mother, or being saved for marriage. They involve Canadian methods of promotion and discipline...They involve spiritual solace.

We can solve these problems if we know where he is, if he is among enough of his own countrymen to make his presence as a Canadian known to Canadian headquarters.<sup>10</sup>

Power resolved that the solution to these issues, among others, would be found in "the identification with Canada of its graduates from the Air Training Plan by forming them

into Canadian groups or units."<sup>11</sup> Edwards wholeheartedly agreed. "To have a unified Canadian Air Force Overseas with Canadian control and, of course, complete co-operation," he argued, "is, to my mind, our only and final objective, if for no other reason than to meet the demand of national pride."<sup>12</sup>

With continued pressure from the Canadian government, and Edwards' persistent lobbying, the British Air Ministry came to understand the intertwined threads of Canadianization: Canada's need and determination as a sovereign nation to have its own air force, and the more subtle requirement to cultivate the allegiance of Canadian aircrew serving overseas to that national air force. In the words of a circular sent by the British air staff to all RAF commands in February 1943:

Canada is a Dominion and as such is no less entitled to a separate and autonomous Air Force than is the United Kingdom...The recognition by Canada of this need for unity has, however, placed upon us the responsibility of maintaining and encouraging the *esprit de corps* of that part of the RCAF which became



CFJIC PMR 71-551

**A line of No.428 Squadron Lancasters all displaying nose art. The aircraft nearest the camera portrays "Miss Lace" a beautiful woman from the *Male Call* comic strip.**

part of the Imperial Air Forces in the United Kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

Unstated, but fundamental, was the need to consolidate Canada's air effort overseas so that the population at home could more fully understand and support that huge undertaking; popular support was the bedrock of Canada's largely volunteer war effort. This challenge was all the greater because the RCAF, as a national institution, did not have much tradition to draw on, or rather it was the wrong tradition. The air combat history most Canadians knew was the feats by Canadian fighter aces of the First World War who had served in the British air services. The RCAF had been established in 1924, but as a branch of the Canadian army, and had not become a fully independent armed service until 1938.

The ultimate aim of Canadianization was to gather Canadian aircrew into RCAF squadrons and to group those squadrons into a large and prominent RCAF formation. This was achieved with the establishment of No.6 Group (RCAF) within Bomber Command on 1 January 1943. All the squadrons under command, 14 by the end of 1943, had official heraldic insignia and mottos which evoked a connection to Canada. Security regulations prohibited the publication in the popular media of squadron numbers, but each Canadian unit could be easily recognized by unofficial nicknames that could be reported, which was important because all of the squadrons had official community sponsors in Canada. On many of the aircraft, large artworks featured Canadian symbols, or devices that referenced the city or region that sponsored the squadron.

No.6 Group flew 40,822 sorties by end of the war and dropped 126,122 tonnes of bombs in the

strategic bombing campaign against Germany and occupied Europe. Five airmen were killed for every aircraft lost, and by the end of the war the group lost 25 percent of its flying personnel through combat and accidents.<sup>14</sup> In his work *The Flyer*, British historian Martin Francis explains how an analysis of bomber crews "tells us something about how the individual human personality accommodated itself to an age of catastrophe."<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the aerial combat of the First World War, the new reality was that the pilot was just one component of a team. As historian Jonathan Vance put it: "During the First World War, much of the air war's appeal to the imagination lay in the face that it allowed for the expression of individualism. By the Second World War, however, the individual had been subordinated to the collective, and the air war expressed unity, co-operation and solidarity."<sup>16</sup> Bomber crews needed to work together if they hoped to survive a mission, let alone an entire tour of 30 operations. This encouraged "small-unit cohesiveness" of trust, dependence, and friendship.<sup>17</sup> Historian David Bashow asserts that this was a

foundation for morale as "individual airmen greatly resented being torn away from their crews once a tour of operations was underway. Crew bonding was an extremely cohesive force on the bomber squadrons."<sup>18</sup> Bashow also contends that "this loyalty, and the strength [aircrew] derived from these loyalties, is a major reason why most of them were able to prevail in the face of such daunting adversity."<sup>19</sup> Flight Lieutenant Leslie McCaig, a veteran of No.426 Squadron, declared that "there is something decidedly comfortable about bomber work – with others willing to share your fate."<sup>20</sup> These bonds included the ground crewmen who "developed fierce loyalties to their squadrons and bases, and most particularly, to the aircrews and aircraft to which they were assigned."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, several of the most prominent Canadian nose artists were ground crewmen. Nose art was a tangible product of this camaraderie that, as a prominent, visible symbol also helped to reinforce the sense of shared purpose. Airmen were notoriously superstitious, and nose art became part a distinct "bomber culture" of good luck charms and rituals, the emblazoned designs linking the entire crew with their aircraft. This was part of a collective mentality formed between the airmen founded on common interest in survival through teamwork and perseverance. Although artwork was specific to a particular aircraft, the imagery evoked larger bonds, national themes being prominent among them. Thus, the prevalence of nose art in No.6 Group suggests the growth of Canadian identity



Canadian War Museum (CWM) 19460010-001

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**"Willie Wolf" was painted on the nose of a No.408 Squadron Halifax and shows a distinct RCAF identity with a "Canada" patch prominent on his shoulder.**

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The maple leaf as a symbol of Canada was often used to mark RCAF aircraft.

within this large and important formation, an identity that included links with sponsoring communities back home.

### RCAF Motifs

Several pieces of nose art highlight symbols of Canada's own air force. One example is EQ-W "Willie the Wolf" of No.408 Squadron. Groups of airmen on leave searching for British ladies were often compared to a pack of wolves. The airmen took this comparison as a compliment and wolf figures became a common feature of RAF and RCAF nose art. There are three panels in the Canadian War Museum's collection which feature the most popular "Willie the Wolf" design, one being that of a single wolf decked out in an RCAF uniform. Inspiration for this design came from the mascot of TruVal, a department store brand of sports shirt: a cartoon fox wearing spectacles. The image was inverted to face forward – with a sly countenance – clothed in an RCAF uniform, with a white aviator's scarf, airman's bag, and "Canada" patch on the shoulder, ensuring there was no confusion as to identity of the fox and crew.

In other pieces of nose art the RCAF/RAF motto "Per Ardua Ad Astra" ("Through Adversity to the Stars"), became "Per Flak Ad

Nausium," (or "Through Flak Until You're Sick of It"). Halifax VR-R of No.419 Squadron bore this word play. Though the top half depicted a mermaid in the style of a 1943 Vargas calendar pinup, the bottom was based on an idea developed by the entire crew and then painted by ground crew member Corporal John McGregor.<sup>22</sup>

### National Motifs

The maple leaf symbol is very prevalent in Canadian nose art, a popular marking for mission tallies and as a background to other symbols. EQ-Z "Zombie" of No.408 Squadron and KW-B "Bang On" of No.425 Squadron are examples of pieces that used maple leaves as symbols indicating the number of operations the aircraft had completed.<sup>23</sup>

Oftentimes the markings were fairly subtle or plain, indicating that nose art did not have to be extravagant to be symbolic. National sentiment is reflected in pieces as simple as "Victory" and "Vagabond." QO-C "Miss Canada" of No.432 Squadron carried a simple design, italicized letters beside fourteen maple leaves, representing the aircraft's mission tally. An RCAF insignia features prominently and was a popular marking on Canadian aircraft. A modestly sized printed name and a

small rendition of the George Petty "Petty Girl design," "Bashful" from *Esquire* magazine's March 1941 edition, leans against the "M." In a more stylish sense, "Miss Canada" implies a connection to home tinged with flirtation, yet, the maple leaves and name make the implication unmistakable. Interestingly, her crew was a mix of Canadian, British and American members.

A No.432 Squadron Halifax, QO-C, bore the name "Canada Kid." Its nose art depicted a tough diaper-clad infant in a gangster-like, "stick 'em up" pose, with a pistol in one hand and a lollipop in the other. Each sortie was recorded by a candy sucker – an orange one for a night raid and a white one for a daylight raid. The name "Canada Kid" was likely chosen to represent the age of the crew who no doubt recognized their youth but saw themselves as the best of the best. "Canada Kid" is Canada personified: "the cream of the crop," *Canada's* own kids.

In the case of the striking design on Halifax QB-B of No.424 Squadron, "Bambi," the cartoon was the crew's choice, but the prominent "Canada" script that appears in an official photograph was not. Overruling the desire of the crew for a pin-up design, 21-year-old second pilot Jack Dundas proudly chose the artwork feeling "they needed something different



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on their aeroplane and dainty little Bambi, bloody great Halifax, what a great contrast!"<sup>24</sup> He asked ground crew member and artist Matthew Ferguson to paint the image from a children's paintbook cover. The crew adored it and Dundas notes: "The art always attracted a lot of attention, especially when we were diverted to an American 8th Air Force airfield."<sup>25</sup> A comparison of photos, however, reveals that between the aircraft's 19th and 30th mission the word "Canada" was added to the design. Jack Dundas recalls that a film crew did this in chalk while filming a publicity movie called "Frontline Artists." It was an unwritten rule that you did not alter someone else's nose art and Jack says this act angered both the crew and Ferguson. Though at first glance it would seem the crew had amended the design as a patriotic gesture, reflections from Bambi's veterans reveal that "Canada" was added as an outsider's public relations gimmick.

### Regional Identification

The existence of designs which feature a connection to particular localities at home reveals how airmen overseas became personally invested in their aircraft and employed nose art to display their roots.

At times the regional motif is not obvious. For example, VR-O

"Medicine Hat" of No.419 "Moose" Squadron was inspired by a member of the aircrew. Jack McIntosh of the unit recalls that "we had flown six operations before the crew decided it was time to give our Halifax a name and some type of nose art painting. I was asked to pick a name and selected my home city in Alberta, Medicine Hat."<sup>26</sup> One of their ground crew chose the Goofy design and the crew loved it. McIntosh was able to incorporate his hometown into a pun in a comical but bomber-specific piece of nose art. The painting included a colourful rendition of the Walt Disney character Goofy dropping bombs: "the thinking was that each time the aircraft flew, the enemy was receiving more 'medicine' from the 'hat.'"<sup>27</sup> What resulted was an image that was personal to McIntosh and had meaning for his crew.



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### Squadron Motifs

On 3 November, 1943, an article appeared in the *Hamilton Spectator* with the headline "Names, Not Numbers, Mean Plenty to Canadian Airmen," and the subtitle "Moose, Bluenose, Iroquois Are Among Famous Bomber Squadrons."<sup>28</sup> The article was written for the Canadian Press by Squadron Leader T.C. McCall of No.424 "Tiger" Squadron. McCall's piece described the positive effect the crew-led nicknaming of squadrons had on squadron morale: "around airfields of the Canadian bomber group names have come to mean something, and many squadrons now operating have acquired nomenclature for themselves other than the dry, official combination of numbers."<sup>29</sup> The nicknaming of squadrons, as well as the selection of unique squadron symbols, quickly came to "mean something" to the airmen of No.6 Group. This sentiment is reflected in nose art which incorporated squadron symbols and nicknames.<sup>30</sup>

The badge of No.419 "Moose" Squadron features an attacking moose as well as the motto "Beware of the Moose." The formidable animal is a recognizable Canadian symbol. Coincidentally, the squadron's commander, Wing Commander J. "Moose" Fulton, held the same



nickname.<sup>31</sup> For these reasons the squadron often used the moose in nose art as a distinguishing design. VR-W, one of the squadron's Canadian-built Lancasters, featured a stencilled moose emblem painted in black and white on a yellow circle. This particular aircraft was the hundredth Lancaster built at Victory Aircraft in Malton, Ontario. Since No.419 Squadron was the only squadron to complete more sorties in Lancasters than Halifaxes the factory workers painted a moose on both sides of the nose before it left the factory. The crew was honoured by the gesture and flew 29 operations together in the aircraft.<sup>32</sup>

No.419's moose was not the only animal chosen to represent Canada's overseas flying forces. In fact, animals were so prevalent that Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris labelled the RCAF Overseas the "flying menagerie."<sup>33</sup> A piece from the French-Canadian No.425 "Alouette" Squadron, for example, shows a bird with extended wings, an elegant exaggeration of the squadron's skylark insignia. This tail motif appeared only on No.425's Mk.X Lancasters and none flew in combat. No.420 "Snowy Owl" Squadron Lancasters had as tail art an image of the night-hunting Canadian bird dropping a single bomb, mimicking the pose of the owl featured on the squadron's badge. In contrast to the tail art of "Alouette" Squadron, all "Snowy Owl" Lancasters featured this design on their tails and all flew in combat.

The bestiary of squadron symbols became synonymous with

the Canadians. Although many of the animals were native to Canada, this was not always the case. The ferocious big cat on Lancaster EQ-L of No.427 "Lion" Squadron roars out the unofficial motto of Bomber Command: "Press on!" The lion reflects the squadron's heraldry, but "The Linton Lion" also refers to Linton in Yorkshire, one of eleven No.6 Group stations, and the crew's home base. Thus the "Linton Lion" represented both the Canadian squadron and the bit of English turf that the crew staked out as their wartime home.<sup>34</sup>

Aircraft of No.424 Squadron bore tiger nose art even before the squadron received its official "Tiger" nickname. The "A-Train" design was painted by nose artist Matthew Ferguson and featured a white, black, and yellow tiger head against a maple leaf background. It appeared on several No.424 aircraft before being re-done on Halifax QB-A, pictured on the next page, after the squadron was officially adopted by the city of Hamilton, Ontario in May 1944. The nickname was a reference to the city's rugby team. The image of the tiger head eventually became the centerpiece of the official squadron badge.

### Adopted Squadrons

By war's end, every squadron had been "adopted" by a Canadian city or town, organization or association. It developed as a national undertaking, rousing the interest of Canadians in their nation's wartime efforts and its resulting emergence



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Aircraft from No.425 "Alouette" Squadron display the unit's symbol and motto.

on the world stage as a leader in aviation. In addition, the naming and adopting of squadrons allowed the average Canadian to understand the air war more intimately by following the feats of particular Canadian units by their readily recognizable nicknames. Artwork that references sponsoring communities attests to the function of nose art in forging bonds between combat units overseas and the population at home.

Examples survive of nose art for every squadron that references their sponsor. The City of Kingsville, Ontario adopted No.408 "Goose"

Squadron, and Lancaster EQ-G was named "Miss Kingsville." This aircraft carried graphic tributes to several elements that contributed to the identity of the squadron. "Miss Kingsville" was written on the nose alongside an elaborate painting of No.408's crest. Though wartime regulations forbid official squadron emblems to be visible on the outside of the aeroplane, there is evidence which suggests that this aircraft was operational while bearing this easily recognizable symbol. Underneath the crest is a tour tally featuring miniature bombs. Above "Miss Kingsville," is

an RCAF roundel, and at the brink of the nose the identification "G for George" was turned into "G for Goose," a nod to the squadron's Canadian mascot. According to a local account, John "Wild Goose Jack" Miner, owner of the Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary in Kingsville, Ontario, heard that No.408's crest featured a Canadian goose. He rallied the city of Kingsville to adopt the squadron, and as a personal gesture, he sent overseas a handful of Canadian geese to mark the occasion. In her livery representing the "Home of the Wild Goose," "Miss Kingsville" became the squadron flagship.<sup>35</sup> In the case of No.432 "Leaside" Squadron, adopted by Leaside, Ontario, aircraft QO-L's "Leaside Lulu" shows how artists were both patriotic and scandalous. She was painted by Sergeant Thomas E. Dunn of the squadron.

One of the most spectacular, detailed pieces of nose art was on Halifax KW-Q "Q for Quebec" of No.425 "Alouette" Squadron. No.425 was the first French-

**No.424 "Tiger" Squadron was adopted by the city of Hamilton, Ontario. "A-Train" was inspired by this connection and features an image of a tiger set against a maple leaf background.**

CFJIC PL29630



Canadian squadron formed in the RCAF. This piece is an obvious ode to both the province which the squadron represented and the city which adopted the squadron. The picturesque Quebec landscape is surrounded by maple leaves, just like official RCAF badges. It is a fusion of RCAF culture, and pride in French-Canada. The original piece of nose art was saved from the scrapyards of post-war England and is displayed at the Canadian War Museum.

At war's end, heavy bombers were the focus of much media attention. One hundred and sixty Canadian-built Lancasters returned to air bases across Canada, many carrying the nose art and nicknames they had borne on operations. Ghost Squadron's "P for Panic" came home to an article published by the *Globe and Mail* describing the magnificent artwork painted on her nose:

If there's a more decorated bomber in the Royal Canadian Air Force than "P for Panic" it would be worth seeing... Above "P's" four big motors the cowlings bear the names of each engine. There's "Peculiar, Pitiful, Passionate, and Pathetic."... On the bomb doors are the names of the ground crew who kept P for Panic in tip top shape. There are also scores of pencilled greetings from England. On the side... seven rows of 10 small bombs each...Souvenirs of P for Panic's 72 missions over Germany.<sup>36</sup>



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Soon, others like "Fearless Fox," "Georgie's Blues," "Bluenose Outlaw," "Hellapoppin'," "Exotic Angel," "Lil' Abner," "Gallopin' Gael," "Picadilly Princess," and "Pugwash" returned home.<sup>37</sup> Canadians were anxious to see their decorated aircraft. A large program began in August 1945 as six Lancaster bombers took 42



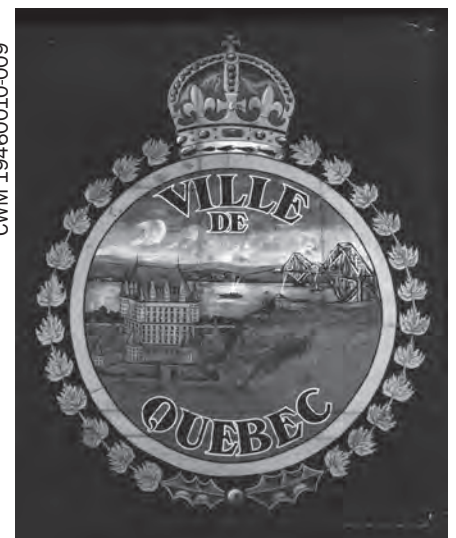
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**Above: "Miss Kingsville" belonged to No.408 "Goose" Squadron which was adopted by Kingsville, Ontario following the urging of John Miner who owned a bird sanctuary in that community.**

**Below left: "Leaside Lulu" is named to honour Leaside, Ontario which adopted No.432 Squadron.**

**Below right: The francophone No.425 Squadron honoured its French-Canadian heritage by naming one of its aircraft "Ville de Quebec." The original panel, held by the Canadian War Museum is shown.**

men from Nos.425, 434, 419, 405, 408, and 420 Squadrons to tour the regions which had adopted them.<sup>38</sup> Newspapers followed their journeys. No.420 Squadron's "D for Dog" made headlines travelling the province with stops in Windsor, London, Trenton, and Toronto.<sup>39</sup> London,



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Ontario adopted this squadron and regional newspapers had written about "D for Dog" regularly. When the aircraft returned to Canada, the *Globe and Mail* publicized the aircraft's arrival in Southwestern Ontario: "Canadians have read stories about and seen many pictures of D for Dog. Now they will be able to take a close look."<sup>40</sup>

The RCAF squadrons formed in Britain, and, especially, the bomber group, marked an important step in the RCAF's transition from a junior partner in the British led Commonwealth air effort to a national air force. To this day, the squadrons of Canada's air force bear the 400-series numbers allocated by the RAF to the RCAF squadrons created in Britain during the war. The units, moreover, perpetuate the battle honours, heraldic badges, official mottoes, and unofficial nicknames of the wartime squadrons. The nose art, however, has not aged as well. Besides 14 decorated fuselage panels from Halifax bombers on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario, the artwork examined in this study does not survive in its original form. Replicas have been created using photos as a guide, but the photos – and the memories of airmen – are the only direct link to the originals. By its nature, nose art is adaptable and accommodating, there when airmen need it but gone as soon as the conflict is finished. Valuable as it was for boosting morale in perilous times, the art was ultimately ephemeral and temporary. Nevertheless, just as the naming of squadrons "meant something" to the Canadian crews of No.6 Group, the Canadian connotations imbued in their nose art reveals this practice "meant something" to them as well. In the words of Jack McIntosh of No.419 "Moose" squadron who named the bomber "Medicine Hat" in honour to his hometown: "the name and nose art made it feel she was 'our'

aircraft and would always bring us home."<sup>41</sup>

### Notes

The author would like to thank Clarence Simonsen for his guidance with this topic. He has been extremely generous both with his time and stories about Canadian and British nose art. His knowledge has made my research unpredictable, but far more enjoyable.

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3. See Simonsen, pp.14-18 for more on Walt Disney nose art.
4. David Bashow, *No Prouder Place: Canadians and the Bomber Command Experience 1939-1945* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2005), p.211.
5. Simonsen, p.14.
6. Ibid.
7. C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments: The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1970), p.253.
8. As quoted in William S. Carter, *Anglo-Canadian Wartime Relations, 1939-1945* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), p.116.
9. Charles Power and Norman Ward, *A Party Politician: The Memoirs of Chubby Power* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1966), p.226.
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11. Ibid., p.223.
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