

Water Bomber Visionary Honoured in B.C.

By Adwen Welsie, Epoch Times Victoria Staff
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Back in the late 1950s, after British Columbia was badly hit by a series of large forest fires, lumber companies decided they needed bigger water bombers than the Otters, Beavers and Avengers in use at the time.

The only snag was that big flying boats were going out of vogue by then, and most had been sold for scrap. However, when pilot Dan McIvor heard that the U.S. Navy planned to sell its huge Martin Mars flying boats, which had been used during World War 11, he immediately set about obtaining them.

Although the Navy had sold their remaining four Martin Mars by the time McIvor found a buyer, the new owner, who had bought them for scrap, agreed to sell them to a consortium of B.C. forest companies—among them McIvor's employer McMillan Bloedel—for the remarkably generous sum of \$100,000.

The aircraft were flown to B.C. in 1959, where they were converted and pressed into service as water bombers in the early 1960s.

With a 200 feet wingspan, the world's largest flying tankers can scoop up and hold 27,276 litres of water, which can be dropped from either the bottom or the side. They can also hold 2,216 litres of fire retardant foam concentrate.

As father of the flying boat water bomber concept, McIvor's vision for the Martin Mars changed the course of Canada's fire-fighting strategy. To salute that, and his

years of service as a volunteer firefighter with Richmond Fire-Rescue, artist Karen Lorena Parker recently donated one of her works to the fire hall.

Although McIvor died in 2005, Parker knew him personally as she hails from McIvor's home town of Burkeville, B.C. The striking 3'x 6' acrylic on canvas depicts the infamous 2003 Kelowna forest fires, featuring a Martin Mars water bomber in the sky above.

"The Fire Hall is a big part of our community in Burkeville," says Parker "I knew Dan for some time—he was an amazing person."

McIvor's daughter, Mary-Anne Forman, says that her father loved airplanes as much as he loved being a volunteer firefighter, and his enquiring mind and his perseverance meant he could turn his hand to anything.

"He could make the best fudge; he made me a kilt; he could knit socks. There wasn't a day went by when my dad didn't learn some new things because he was always wondering, and that's why he was so good at anticipating, dreaming and accomplishing the Mars."

The "Big Four" Martin Mars were built in the 1940s and named the Marianas Mars, the Philippine Mars, the Hawaii Mars, and the Caroline Mars. After they arrived in Canada, the Caroline Mars was used for training while the Marianas Mars was being converted into a water bomber.

The Marianas Mars crashed during firefighting operations in June 1961, killing the pilot and three crewmen. Just over a year



Dan McIvor and his wife, Isobel. McIvor's idea to use the Martin Mars as water bombers changed the course of Canada's forest firefighting strategy.

later, the Caroline Mars was damaged beyond repair by Hurricane Freida while tied up on a taxi-way in Victoria.

The Philippine Mars and the Hawaii Mars were quickly converted and took on their new role as water bombers in 1963. They remain in service today, operating from Sproat Lake in Port Alberni, B.C. McIvor, a fighter pilot in World War 11, was awarded the Order of Canada in 2003.

The Coulson Group, which bought the water bombers from TimberWest Forest in April of this year, intends to market the planes as a fire fighting tool around the world, said a report in the Vancouver Sun. They were offered to Greece to combat the recent fires there but the deal fell through.

Forman says McIvor was "a very unusual man, and it takes somebody like that to accomplish great things."

"My dad never ever got discouraged, or gave up, or said something couldn't be done."