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Glacier Girl en route to UK



AS THIS ISSUE went to press Lockheed P-38F Lightning *Glacier Girl* and newly-restored North American P-51D Mustang *Miss Velma*, above, were at Middlesboro, Kentucky, on their epic transatlantic flight from California to Duxford via Greenland and Iceland for the

Flying Legends show on July 7–8. They had departed Chino, California, on June 17, accompanied by a Pilatus PC-12 support aircraft.

■ Come to *Aeroplane's* stand near Duxford's control tower at the show, and enter our competition to win a Harvard flight.

Brussels historic under threat

CONCERNS THAT aircraft in the Belgian Royal Army Museum's world-class aircraft collection will suffer serious damage while the museum building is renovated have resulted in an online petition. Before work on the grand Palais du Cinquantenaire in Brussels gets under way, most of the aircraft will be moved into

storage. Over the past few years many aircraft have been moved from the Palais to Vissenaken, 25 miles east of Brussels, for "storage" in four dilapidated hangars, which are also reported to suffer from a lack of security. Some of the wooden and fabric aircraft at Vissenaken have deteriorated to a point where the museum

is unlikely to commission their future restoration. The prospect of the museum's World War One aircraft, and its de Havilland Mosquito NF.30, Percival Gull IV and Hawker Hurricane, going to Vissenaken will fill enthusiasts with dread. The petition is at: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/BAM2007/?e>.



ABOVE The remains of Miles Messenger G-AKIS. Before being moved into storage, this aircraft was intact. FAR LEFT Percival Prentice VS613. LEFT A Bücker Bestmann and Percival Proctor IV NP171.

Observer's Notes

Comment and analysis on a wide range of aircraft preservation issues, with JAMES KIGHTLY



This month James has been looking more deeply into the alarming plight of aircraft in the Brussels-based *Musée Royal de l'Armée* collection, which was highlighted in our newspapers last month. The situation is nothing short of scandalous — but *Aeroplane* readers can help

■ THIS MONTH WE look at a disgraceful failure of museum management. The closer I look, the worse the news gets. The collection in question is one of the world's finest, with a significant international selection of aircraft in an historic building in the centre of a modern European city. But the museum is neglected and facing desecration by the very people whose job it is to protect it. This particular management catastrophe is taking place in Brussels, home of European Union bureaucracy. What's the fuss about?

The building in which Belgium's *Musée Royal de l'Armée* (Royal Army Museum) houses its aircraft is a magnificent iron structure, similar to London's much-missed 19th Century Crystal Palace — but it is in sore need of refurbishment. The aircraft are to be removed while the hall is rebuilt. And that's where it all starts to come unglued, literally.

The collection includes one of the world's pre-eminent groups of restored, unrestored and under-restoration aircraft from the Great War. Many of these are unique; all are rare and fragile, and it is unwise to move all of them, given their frailty. It is also completely unnecessary to do so, as other museums have found in similar circumstances.

As well as two Spitfires and a Hurricane, there is a (unique) restored Mosquito NF.30, one of four surviving Battles and a Bolingbroke. One MiG-23 *Flogger* survives, the second example having apparently been wrecked in store. There is an unrivalled international collection of 1950s jets, as well as a selection of important transport types, such as a Caravelle, "Ju 52/3m", Fairchild Boxcar, Oxford and an Otter with Arctic pedigree. Even more rare are Percival, Miles and Stampe types of major importance, part of an impressive collection of light and recreational aircraft.

The second shocking decision is that the aircraft are to be moved into a bunch of unsecured, windblown hangars with leaky roofs, puddles, and damp. It is clear from previous moves that this is where aircraft are dismantled and dumped on the floor without any attempt at proper storage. Already a wooden Miles Messenger has been wrecked

(see *News*, August *Aeroplane*), and several military jets damaged beyond repair — quite an impressive negative achievement. The idea of sending numerous priceless fabric-and-wood aircraft to this graveyard is horrifying.

Most of the museum's activity is undertaken by museum volunteers — yet officials regularly deny volunteers information, input or direction over the collection. Some aircraft have already been removed, resulting in damage illustrating that those responsible cannot be trusted. Only by the stealthy good deeds of the museum's volunteers have several aircraft even been brought under cover. Distressed by the management's intransigence, the volunteers set up an online petition, which has already brought pressure to bear on the museum's management.

However, I have yet to receive a response from the museum's executive, despite repeated requests. I would be delighted to be shown to be utterly wrong, but I'm not holding my breath. The only communiqué issued by the museum management is a terse attempt to obscure rather than illuminate, and treats the concerns of the volunteers with arrogance and contempt. Without a public commitment, we don't even know what the initial project parameters are.

The final bizarre revelation is a suggestion that the collection should be re-established as a tribute solely to Belgian aviation. That might seem sensible, but given the world-class variety of the collection, this bright idea compares to clearing the British Museum of everything that is not Anglo-Saxon.

For us non-Belgians, just because it's not near "home" isn't a good reason to ignore this travesty. It is already clear that the more international interest is shown, the more chance there is that a proper museum level approach can be adopted, rather than a programmed trashing of irreplaceable technical history. So please — sign the petition (online at www.ipetitions.com/petition/BAM2007/?e), or write to the museum requesting some explanation and proper action. Your input will make a difference. **A**

RIGHT A view of the remarkable but decaying *Palais du Cinquantenaire* in Brussels with the priceless aircraft collection in place. Due to the museum management's secrecy and incompetence, this could become a major disaster zone.

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