

# CO's war van recovered by local man

By MAGGIE HANNAH  
Herald Special

A piece of Canada's history will be restored and the dream of the nation's only commanding general will be fulfilled by the Canadian Military Historical Society.

Bill Gregg, who is restoring a number of World War II Canadian military vehicles on his farm, purchased a derelict caravan purported to be the living quarters used by Lt. General H.D.G. (Harry) Crerar, Canada's only commanding general during World War II.

This week, the authenticity of the find was proved.

Tom MacDonald, then a sergeant and now a member of the Canadian Privy Council Office staff in Ottawa was Lt. Gen. Crerar's batman for four years. He packed the caravan in Holland in 1945 for shipment to Canada and has not seen it since he removed some personal possessions from it in Ottawa soon after it arrived.

Mr. MacDonald and Dr. Gregg compared notes on the location of various items in the caravan and were amazed to discover that it had apparently sat unopened from 1945 until Dr. Gregg purchased it in February.

Discovered by word of mouth, the caravan was sitting at the back of a junk yard near Tillsonburg. The yard owner purchased it around 1948, to the best of his recollection for \$50, in hopes of selling it as living quarters for migrant workers in the area's tobacco fields. No one ever bought it and he let it sit forgotten at the back of his property.

The caravan which is vaguely reminiscent of delivery vans of that era was mounted on a truck. It was panelled in oak and divided into two sections by a sliding door. Mr. MacDonald said.

The outer room was the general's office with a built-in desk, closet for coats and three chairs, two for visitors and a swivel office chair for the general. The inner room contained a sink, built-in closet and dresser, assorted cupboards and storage areas and a bunk with a horse-hair mattress.

The roof has rotted through; the mattress is partially chewed away; and the wood panels have lost their varnish and become warped, but strange items, such as the portable shower have survived intact. It can and will be restored, Dr. Gregg said.

Since it is so significant in Canadian military history, it is Dr. Gregg's feeling that the restoration should be done through some sort of subscription rather than by the society. Details on restoration are still to be worked out, he said.

General Crerar had a sense of history and wanted his caravan, the truck on which it was mounted, his field office and an additional caravan used to accommodate guests brought to Canada at the end of the war, Mr. MacDonald said. The general wanted them taken on tour in Canada, then preserved in a museum for the Canadian people.

He had the caravan and field office sent to Wolseley barracks in London, Ontario, but soon after the general left they were sold for scrap. The general was deeply hurt about this, Mr. MacDonald said. The truck, a Diamond T, also disappeared.

The caravan was especially built for the general after he returned to London, England, from Italy. During his stay in Italy he had been using a British caravan which was a left-over as were all the pieces of equipment given to Canadians there, Mr. MacDonald said. The thing leaked and was totally unsatisfactory.

When Gen. Crerar got to London the new caravan was especially made for him and he refused other accommodations in the field even when they were available, just because he liked his caravan so much.

During their four years together, Mr. MacDonald and the general became very close and their friendship continued after the war. While the general heard information funnelled to him by his advisors, Mr. MacDonald talked to the enlisted men and passed on their opinions and comments to him. When Mr. MacDonald wanted a transfer at one point because he wasn't getting on well with the general's personal assistant, the general refused to part with his "right arm".

Mr. MacDonald and the general's confidential clerk, Ray Renault, shared a tent through much of the war. They started out using a lean-to tent attached to the caravan, but Mr. MacDonald

developed a cough that disturbed the general's sleep and they moved to a separate tent after that.

As a batman, Mr. MacDonald was expected to care for the general's clothes and see that he always looked smart. After four years together, they were very close and the general wrote Mrs. MacDonald regularly to keep her informed of her husband's situation.

Mr. MacDonald said he enlisted as a driver because he had flat feet. The Canadian army had few vehicles at that time, so he took over the care of seven or eight young officers at Camp Petawawa. He was very disappointed to discover that he wouldn't get overseas with his friends because of his flat feet when he was suddenly chosen as the general's batman. He went overseas with the general and stayed with him until his return at the end of the war.

Mr. MacDonald went to the military defense office after the war and wound up as the steward on the military's railway car. Mrs. Lester Pearson asked him to take over as chief steward at 24 Sussex Drive, a post he retained until 1977. He will retire in November.

The caravan was equipped with a portable shower and the general used it twice a day, good and hot at night and icy cold in the morning.

It was also Mr. MacDonald's job to set up the separate tent in which the latrine was placed. The general was fussy that there be a good view from the tent door and Mr. MacDonald said it became a standing joke in camp, the difficulty he had in selecting the proper view from the latrine when the camp was moved. At the end of the war, he was presented with a new toilet seat by some of his comrades as a souvenir of his trials with the latrine.

## Losing ground - property rights slipping away?

By JILL DAVIS  
Herald Special  
Private property rights - are they diminishing?  
According to Peter Mason, director-at-large for the Ontario Real Estate Association, (OREA) property rights in this province are slowly but surely slipping out of the grasp of the public.  
In a speech at the 25th anniversary evening of the Brampton Real Estate Board Thursday Mr. Mason said there may not be any private property rights in the future to worry about.  
"In recent years we at the association have become increasingly concerned over rapidly diminishing property rights in this province."  
"So concerned that we published a book last year, 'Losing Ground', to study this issue and suggest recommendations to governments."  
In his address Mr. Mason used the Niagara Escarpment as an example of restrictions on property rights.  
"Along the Niagara Escarpment, naturalists and conservationists were concerned about the environment and protection of a very beautiful part of the province," he said.  
"But in their zeal for protection of one perceived right, they have consistently trampled over the rights of others."  
Mr. Mason said that through the years people have worked towards an economic security which includes the rights to deal with one's property as one sees fit.  
The 36-year-old president of Peter L. Mason Ltd., believes that property rights involve the selling of property in whole or in part, the right to lease it or mortgage it, to renovate it or even leave it to one's own heirs.  
"We in the real estate industry deal closely with the public and with the land," said Mr. Mason.

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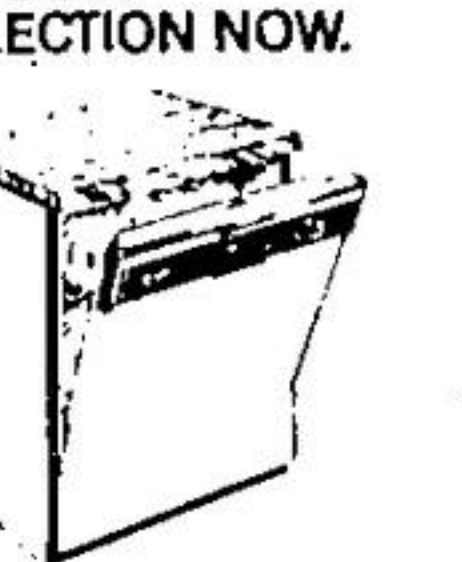
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