

Rare old bomber finds buyer, destined for museum

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A rare World War II bomber pulled decades ago from the bottom of a South Carolina lake, then partially restored and placed for sale, has found a buyer.

The newly formed South Carolina Historic Aviation Foundation will pay Celebrate Freedom Foundation US\$15,000 for the B-25C Mitchell bomber that ditched in the lake during a 1944 training exercise, reports Reuters.

The plane is believed to be one of only three B-25C bombers still in existence, C. Cantzon Foster II, a Columbia lawyer and president of the S.C. Historic Aviation Foundation, said on

Tuesday. About 1,600 were built for the war by North American Aviation. "We think it's a wonderful thing," he said. "The plane has just got some tremendous historical significance."

The group plans to restore the 1929 Curtis-Wright hangar in Columbia, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, further restore the airplane and build a museum of South Carolina's aviation history, Foster said.

"To make this plane fly again will require more than \$1 million," said Foster, 37. "It is a big project. That's not including the hangar, which has a nostalgia that can't be equaled. Franklin Roosevelt, Charles Lindbergh, Jimmy Doolittle and Amelia Earhart all signed the hangar logbook.

In 1942, the army air base in Columbia was the home of the famous Doolittle's Raiders, pilots secretly trained and led by Lt. Col. James "Jimmy" Doolittle in the first retaliatory attack on Tokyo after Japan's December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

The B-25 has spent more than 20 years in warehouses and hangars since being pulled from Lake Greenwood in western South Carolina in the 1980s. It was flying low on a combat training mission over the lake on June 6, 1944, D-Day in Europe, when one of its propellers hit the water.

Daniel Rossman, who eventually reached the rank of lieutenant colonel but was a student pilot at the time, went down with it.

"I was in the left seat, the pilot's seat," Rossman, 87, said from his home in Roswell, Georgia, where he is retired from business and the Air Force Reserve.

"But I wasn't flying it when we ditched. Our lesson plan for that day was emergency procedures for the pilot, what happens if you can't get the gear down, if you can't get the flaps down, if you lose an engine.

"I was flying it until the instructor pilot decided to demonstrate what low-level flying was going to be like once we got into combat. That's how we wound up at about 4:30 in the afternoon coming down Lake Greenwood. It's hard to gauge your altitude over water. We were too low."

Five men on the plane swam to safety. Two were injured, including Rossman. He said his chin was cut and required 24 stitches, although he was more concerned about how much grief he and the others on board might get over the plane's loss.

Rossman said he went on to fly combat in the Pacific during the rest of the war. "I liked the B-25 very much," he said. "It was easy to fly. It was an airplane that had a reputation for bringing crews back. It would take a tremendous amount of damage."

"These aircraft are symbolic of the people who pioneered aviation and the people who fought in World War II. It's a symbol of their valor. It represents so much more than the plane itself," Foster of the S.C. Historic Aviation Foundation said.

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