

Consolidated 28-5A - 'Canso A' Aircraft - In Service with CPAL 1946-1960

From 1946 to 1960, Canadian Pacific Air Lines, Ltd., of Vancouver, BC owned and operated four 'war-surplus' Consolidated 'Canso A' twin-engine amphibian aircraft. The 'Canso A' aircraft were similar to the PB5Y-5A 'Catalina', but were built in Canada in 1943 under licence from Consolidated Aviation of the United States; two aircraft by Boeing Aircraft at Sea Island, Vancouver, BC – one by Canadian Vickers at St. Hubert, QC, and one by Canadian Vickers, at Cartierville, QC.



All four 'Canso' aircraft had flown operational anti-submarine patrols with RCAF Squadrons of Eastern Air Command, from 1943 to 1945. Two of the aircraft, RCAF Serial Nos. 9767 (CF-CRR), and 9837 (CF-CRP) had been assigned to RCAF Squadron No.162 (BR) based at Reykjavik, Iceland – and on temporary assignment at Wick, Scotland during the war. Although No.162 had operated from Overseas Bases, it was never included in the RCAF '400' Overseas Squadron list; remaining a part of Eastern Air Command (HWE) all during the Second World War.

No. 162 Squadron aircraft and crews were successful in sinking five German U-Boats, and shared in the sinking of a sixth submarine. On April 17, 1944 – F/O Thomas C. Cooke and Crew of No.162 (BR) Squadron RCAF, flying in Canso 9767 –Code "S", operating from Reykjavik, Iceland; sank German Submarine U-342 at 60.23N 29.20W in the North Atlantic with three depth charges



Canso A – CF-CRR – Seven Islands QC (YZV) – 1947 - (photo by Bert Huneault)

Canso 'A' – RCAF No. 9767 entered service with CPAL in 1946 – with Registration CF-CRR, and is *the only Canadian built and registered civil transport aircraft, to have seen combat during the Second World War, and to have destroyed an enemy U-Boat.*

The four 'Canso A' aircraft that CPAL bought from Canadian War Assets in 1946 were all converted to a commercial configuration by Aircraft Industries, of Montreal, QC. The nose gun turret was faired over, and fuselage 'blisters' removed and replaced with sliding panels as passenger entry doors. All four aircraft were delivered to CPAL in a 'light grey' over-all paint.

Canadian Pacific Air Lines operated three of the 'Canso' aircraft - CF-CRP, CF-CRQ, and CF-CRR, in its *Quebec District* - from Seven Islands to Knob Lake, Labrador – and along the St. Lawrence River - from 1946 until 1954. The Company bought the war-surplus 'Canso's' for the express purpose of flying personnel and materiel in support of the Knob Lake Iron Ore project, then underway in Labrador. The 'Canso' provided 'heavy lift' air transport for the project, operating from lakes in the area in summer, and on the same lakes – frozen over – in winter. The 'Canso' was the ideal aircraft for the job



*CPAL Canso CF-CRR
Knob Lake, Labrador,
1947 – (photo by Bert
Huneault)*

One of the CPAL 'Canso A' aircraft, CF-CRQ - was 'written-off' in an accident at Osisko Lake, QC – near Rouyn-Noranda, QC, on June 9th, 1949. A photo of CF-CRQ, in the book "Consolidated Catalina – Peacetime Record", by David Legg – shows that aircraft in the same over-all configuration as the other three 'Canso's' of CPAL prior to 1949



*Canso CF-CRR – Lake Menihek, QC July
1947View forward from passenger door –
(photo by Bert Huneault)*

'Canso A' CF-CRV was flown to The Pas, MB in 1947 to operate a scheduled (summer only) service to Schist Lake, at Flin Flon, MB

During the first seven years of my career with CPAL, from 1948 to

1955 – I was involved in the operation of three of the CPAL 'Canso' aircraft – CF-CRV, CF-CRP, and CF-CRR. This is my story about those three airplanes; and about some of the people who maintained and flew them.



*CPAL Canso CF-CRV – The Pas, MB – 1948 (original colour scheme no blisters)
(author on passenger steps)*

In 1948/49, CPAL operated 'Canso A' CF-CRV – on wheels from the runway at The Pas, MB – to Schist Lake at Flin Flon, MB, six days a week. In August of 1948 I was Relief Radio Operator/Agent at The Pas, MB, where the 'Canso' was based, and operating on wheels from the runway at that airport. I was responsible for all air-ground and point-to-point radio communications; for ticket sales; loading and unloading cargo, baggage, and mail; and preparing the Weight & Balance manifest for the aircraft.

And, for several weeks in the summers of 1948 and 1949, I was Relief Radio Operator at Flin Flon, MB, where the 'Canso' operated on the waters of 'Schist Lake', just south of the town.

On one memorable occasion that summer, the retractable, starboard wing-float of CF-CRV was damaged on hitting the "T" dock at the float-plane base on Schist Lake. The CPAL Agent at Flin Flon, Bill Nordick - and me, desperately attempted to pry the float over the dock with a thick plank, but the plank broke and the float struck the dock with considerable force - and sent both of us flying into the lake.



CF-CRV & author, The Pas, MB – 1948.

The Air Engineer onboard the 'Canso' – Al Yates - had gone up the 'pylon' of the aircraft, and out to the end of the port wing – to help lift the starboard float out of the water – but he too was thrown off the wing into the water!

After he got fished out of the lake and managed to dry himself off, he was able to temporarily repair the damage to the starboard float supports, and the 'Canso' was ferried to Winnipeg for full repairs. That was the end of the Canso operation from The Pas to Flin Flon.



Float-plane dock at Schist Lake, Flin Flon, MB – 1949. The starboard float of CF-CRV struck this dock on the right hand side of this photo, as the Canso moved from right to left, along the top of the "T" shaped dock. (Fairchild CF-MAI, unknown operator)

The accident was the result of a cross-wind that forced the starboard wing down; and perhaps excessive speed as the aircraft approached the top of the

"T" dock.

It was my first experience of an aircraft accident as an employee of CPAL, and the most serious accident in which I was ever involved. There were no injuries, other than to the damage to the dignity of the three of us that had ended up 'in the drink', and the embarrassment of the pilot of the aircraft.

In the summer of 1949 a runway/landing strip was built at Flin Flon, MB, and the service between The Pas and Flin Flon was flown by Avro Anson Mk.V aircraft. In 1949, the 'Canso' operation between The Pas and Flin Flon, MB was terminated. Canso A' CF-CRV, was overhauled, and given and a new colour scheme at the Canadian Pacific Air Lines maintenance base at Winnipeg, MB.



The dramatic new look was a white fuselage top; a broad red band from nose to tail, and the lower fuselage and hull, a royal blue. The colours are shown in a CPAL Calendar painting of the early 1980's.

New, stylized fuselage 'blisters' were installed and upgraded passenger seating in the interior of the airplane. The aircraft then flew to Prince Rupert, BC in 1949, to initiate daily scheduled passenger, mail, and cargo service to Sandspit Airport, BC, on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Four years later, in 1953, CF-CRV crashed while landing on the waters of Prince Rupert harbour. The aircraft 'porpoised', and the nose section broke-off as the aircraft smashed back into the water. The accident resulted in fatalities; one passenger and a CPAL Stewardess lost their lives.

After CF-CRV was written-off in the accident in 1953, CPAL transferred 'Canso A' CF-CRP from the Quebec District to Prince Rupert, BC. That aircraft arrived at Prince Rupert in the Standard CPAL colour scheme of all-white fuselage top, light gray lower hull, and three red 'speed' lines along the fuselage, from nose to tail.

*Canso CF-CRP – 1955.
F/O. Bill Green (photo by Nina Youngman)*



In February of 1955, I was assigned temporarily as Radio Operator/Dispatcher with CPAL at Prince Rupert, BC. After several weeks of Operational and Meteorological training in Vancouver, I flew to Sandspit on the daily scheduled CPAL Douglas DC-4, and then from Sandspit airport to Prince Rupert on Canso CF-CRP. For seven months I was responsible for co-coordinating and monitoring the six-day-a-week 'Canso' operation from Prince Rupert, to Sandspit, BC.

Stdss. Nina Youngman Canso CF-CRP Prince Rupert, BC/ - 1955

The CPAL 'Canso' operation at Prince Rupert utilized the former RCAF facility at Seal Cove, on the eastern end of Prince Rupert Harbour. The Company occupied the former RCAF hangar at the base; with passenger and operations functions taking place in the 'lean-to' of the hangar.



A concrete ramp in front of the hangar led to a gently-sloping ramp, down which the 'Canso' taxied – on its three-wheeled undercarriage, into the water. The wheels were retracted once the aircraft was floating. On return from Sandspit the undercarriage was lowered after landing, and the 'Canso' – with a good thrust of power – moved up the sloping ramp to the hangar.

Prior to every departure and arrival of the 'Canso', a Company employee ran a motor launch (*The Aleron*) up-and-down the take-off/landing path on the harbour – to check for 'dead-heads' – floating logs, in the water. On one occasion in 1958, Don McIntosh, a Maintenance Apprentice at Prince Rupert, found what he thought was a large log floating in the harbour. He tried to snag it with a 'Peavey pole', and a large *Sea Lion* reared up and gave him quite a shock. The animal was larger than the *Aleron* launch!

Don McIntosh also tells the story of using the launch to lead the 'Canso' through the channels of Metlakatla pass, on the north end of Digby Island - and through Prince Rupert harbour to Seal Cove. Captain Ken Kirk had landed the 'Canso' *outside* in the open sea, because of fog in the harbour. Don called it the "*longest ever Canso taxiing trip*". A unique "*Follow Me*" operation.

There were no Department of Transport Aviation Services facilities at Prince Rupert in 1955-1959. Aviation Weather observations, and periodic Synoptic observations were made by the CPAL Dispatcher, and sent out on a D.O.T teletype in the CPAL office. The only electronic Aid to Navigation available for the CPAL 'Canso' operation at YPR in 1955 was a non-directional beacon, located on a hill at the centre of Digby Island. The NDB had been installed by the RCAF in 1943, and in 1955 was serviced by the CPAL Dispatcher.



Captain Ken Kirk – YPR 1955 + Canso CF-CRR + F/O Bill Green – YPR 1955

In 1955 the 'Canso' Captain was Ken Kirk, with First Officers Bill Green and John Funk (now Sparks) – all of whom became Senior Captains, flying DC-8 and Boeing 747 aircraft. The Base engineer was Al Yates, who had done such a great job of repairing the wing-tip float on CF-CRV, at Flin Flon, MB in 1949. In 1955 Prince Rupert was a very 'junior' CPAL base, and all of us based there were in our mid '20's.

The Stewardess at Prince Rupert that summer was Nina Youngman, who had a long, and highly successful airline career, and who retired at mandatory age from Canadian Air Lines International, ca, 1995. On Nina's retirement, she was interviewed by Peter Gzowski, a well-known CBC radio personality; who talked to her about her career with CPAL, and Canadian Air Lines International.



Stewardess Nina Youngman & Canso
CF-CRP – Prince Rupert, BC - 1955

I listened to the interview on CBC radio, and then wrote to Peter Gzowski, thanking him for honouring Nina on her retirement; for she is indeed a great person, and was an outstanding Flight Attendant.

In July, 1955 Nina won a bid for a Flight Attendant position at Vancouver, and left Prince Rupert. A tradition in Prince Rupert involved the wooden statue of an Indian that stood near the CNR station." *It was said that the arm of the statue, that held a war-axe, would fall down if a virgin ever left Prince Rupert*". When we knew that Nina was leaving we teased her mercilessly about this tradition. I related this to Peter Gzowski, and he had Nina on CBC radio again to tell her of my letter. She was gracious, and amused – and told Gzowski what a great group of young friends we had been at Prince Rupert in that 'Canso' era.



By 1954 a runway had been constructed at Knob Lake, Labrador, and the need for a large amphibian aircraft on the Iron Ore project had significantly diminished. 'Canso A' CF-CRR was flown from the *Quebec District* to Vancouver in 1954.

An overhaul and configuration change were carried out to bring the aircraft to the same standard as had been applied to CF-CRV. The colour scheme was non-standard for CPAL aircraft, and unique to those two 'Canso A' airplanes. In 1955, both CF-CRP and CF-CRR were based at Prince Rupert for the operation to Sandspit, BC.

That summer of 1955, the employees of a shipping company serving Prince Rupert went on strike, and for a number of weeks the once-a-day 'Canso' operation to Sandspit was augmented with additional flights to bring in perishable foods, such as milk, meat, fruit, etc., - sometimes as many as three return trips a day. It was a challenge to all concerned, particularly for the Flight Crew with long hours; and for the Base Engineer and Maintenance Learner, who managed to keep the airplanes fully serviceable.

On another occasion that summer, a chartered Curtiss C-46 cargo aircraft, flying from Alaska to Seattle with a full load of 'King Crab', had an engine failure en-route and landed at Sandspit. The cargo was of course quite perishable, and the American crew of the C-46 attempted to sell as much of the 'Crab' cargo locally as they could. The Flight Crew of the CPAL Canso operation managed to buy a large amount of the fresh 'Crab', and brought it back to Prince Rupert over a couple of days – where the CPAL Agent marketed it locally at a nice profit to the Company!

That was a busy summer. I left Prince Rupert in August of 1955 – on Canso CF-CRR, for a new assignment as a CPAL Flight Dispatcher at Winnipeg, MB, and never saw any of the CPAL Canso aircraft again.



*CPAL Operations Staff – Seal Cove Base, Prince Rupert, BC – January 1957
Don McIntosh, F/O Don Clarke, Stdss. Helen Philips, Engineer Al Yates, Capt. Ken Kirk, Jim Strang
(Canso CF-CRP at front and CF-CRR in the rear of the hangar) – Photo by Don McIntosh.*

'Canso' CF-CRP was sold by CPAL to Trans-Labrador Airways, of Newfoundland, In May of 1957. The only 'Canso' remaining on CPAL inventory after 1957 was CF-CRR (the *Sub Killer*), based at Prince Rupert, BC.

Captain Dennis Baxendale replaced Captain Ken Kirk as 'Canso' Captain at Prince Rupert in September of 1958; F/O L.G. Denman arrived in April of 1959, and those two pilots flew the final scheduled flight of the 'Canso A' aircraft for CPAL, from Sandspit to Prince Rupert, BC, in the autumn of 1959.



*CPAL Operations Staff - at Prince Rupert, BC – 1959 - with Canso A – CF-CRR
(photo courtesy Capt. Dennis Baxendale – at left-rear in photo))*

Clare Ash, a newly hired CPAL Passenger Agent was assigned to Prince Rupert, BC in March of 1959. Clare relates an incident that led to the termination of the 'Canso' aircraft operations in Canadian Pacific Air Lines service.

“Captain Dennis Baxendale and crew – flying CF-CRR from Sandspit to Prince Rupert on a scheduled flight in the autumn of 1959, had an indication that the nose-wheel cover doors were not completely closed. Capt. Baxendale did several low-passes over the Seal Cove Base, so that ground observers could try to determine the status of the nose undercarriage doors. There was no conclusive visual evidence that the doors were firmly closed, and Capt. Baxendale elected to divert, and land on wheels on the runway at Terrace, BC”.

The nose undercarriage door snag was repaired, and CF-CRR was ferried to Vancouver for further inspection. CPAL then decided to close the Prince Rupert 'Canso' Base, and for a period of some months passengers were transferred between Prince Rupert and Terrace by road taxi vehicles.

Not long after the end of the 'Canso' operation, the Canadian Department of Transport completed the construction of a runway on the west side of Digby Island, and CPAL resumed scheduled service to Prince Rupert in 1960 with wheeled aircraft.

Captain Dennis Baxendale and F/O Denman flew 'Canso' CF-CRR from Vancouver, BC to Edmonton, B in December 1959, and CPAL sold the aircraft in 1960, to Northland Airways of Winnipeg, MB - the last 'Canso' in Company service.

Those four 'Canso A' aircraft had served the Royal Canadian Air Force during three war years on anti-submarine patrols; and then flown for Canadian Pacific Airlines on charter and scheduled services in Quebec, Northern Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia from 1946 to 1959; operating in 'open sea' conditions in the North Atlantic Ocean, and into small lakes in Canada's northland. Those four sturdy 'Canso A' aircraft of CPAL provided reliable air transport to many remote Canadian communities, for almost fourteen years.

William J. Cameron - Okotoks, AB - March 21, 2010

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Photos: - with permissions and Thanks.

Bert Huneault

Nina Morrison

Captain Dennis Baxendale

Don McIntosh

North Atlantic Aviation Museum, Gander, NL





Sketch map of Prince Rupert city and harbour – looking north. - 1955

Canso A - CF-CRP was sold by CPAL to Trans-Labrador Airline, of Newfoundland on May 9, 1957, then served from 1960 to 1973 with Eastern Provincial Airways of Halifax, NS, and from 1979 to 1990 as a 'Water Bomber' with Government of Newfoundland Air services. The aircraft is now on static display at the North Atlantic Aviation Museum in Gander, NL.





CF-CRR - As a 'Water Bomber' – Avalon Aviation.- Parry Sound, ON - 1985
This is the former RCAF Canso 9767 of No. 162 Squadron RCAF – That sank German U-Boat U-342
Re-registered ca. 1980 as C-FCRR.



C-FCRR – RCAF 9767 – in derelict condition ca. 1994. Parry Sound, ON
Photos: By Bert Huneault, who had been an 18 year old Radio Operator for CPAL in 1947

Canso A, CF-CRR (re-registered, C-FCRR) was sold in 1995 to a French pilot, Franklin Devaux. It was restored to flying condition, and became quite a famous aircraft. (Note: the fuselage side 'blisters' were re-installed on the aircraft). *The Canadian registry of C-FCRR was retained until 2005.*

The Canso was featured in a television series called "Okavango", and in 1997 was flown on an extensive tour of Africa. – In 1998 C-FCRR was placed on display as the centre-piece of an air show in 'Place d' la Concorde' in Paris, and in October of 1998 – in the early colours of Air France - the aircraft flew over 13,000 km, to South America, via Dakar and Natal, returning to France via Canada (for C of A renewal) in 1999.

In January of 2002, the aircraft was stored at an airport near Paris, France and has not flown since that date. *The Canadian registry of C-FCRR was cancelled in Oct. 2005.*



C-FCRR in colours of 'Okavango' – an African Nature TV series in France



Canso A – (former C-FCRR) in storage at a Paris, France airport