

## The End of an Era for the Mighty Martin Mars



On Sunday, August 11, the mighty Hawaii Martin Mars conducted its last flight. Between 6,000 and 7,000 hours were spent preparing the aircraft to fly again on its final voyage. Pilots and engineers were brought out of retirement to fly it one more time. The red and white Martin Mars had its last fire fighting season in 2015. The huge water tanker fought fires in BC, and other provinces for more than half-a-century. The Martin Mars could dump more than 27,000 litres (6000 Imperial gallon) of water on a fire.

The Martin Mars was donated to the BC Aviation Museum in North Saanich, near Victoria, BC. The aircraft departed from Sproat Lake, outside Port Alberni at approximately 4:00 pm on Sunday, August 11, and flew to Patricia Bay. The Martin Mars made several flyovers of Port Alberni, Campbell River, Powell River, Courtenay, Nanaimo, Duncan, Ladysmith, and Crofton.

At Crofton, the Martin Mars was joined by the Canadian Forces Snowbirds, who came from the Abbotsford Air Show – and escorted the Martin Mars to its final landing.

Once the Martin Mars arrived in the Victoria area, around 6:00 pm, it flew past Victoria then found a landing spot in Patricia Bay.

Thousands of people watched this last flight depart from Sproat Lake to say goodbye. Thousands more watched from the shores of Patricia Bay, as well as in the water, as the Martin Mars landed.

The museum has been planning the move from Patricia Bay to its final resting place at the museum for quite some time. The aircraft will be pulled out of the water and hauled across West Saanich Road onto the airport lands. Fencing, light posts, and power lines had to be removed.

Beaching gear, or wheels, were attached to the aircraft while it was in the water, the following day, on Monday. On Wednesday, the Martin Mars was manoeuvred through the Patricia Bay breakwaters and slowly winched up a Canadian Coast Guard ramp onto the apron.

Between August 19 and 23, the Martin Mars will be lifted onto a heavy trailer. When airport operations have ceased for the night, the aircraft will be moved across the airport to be placed on a new concrete slab at its outdoor display location.

The grand opening of the exhibit is set for September 28.

## The History of the Aircraft

The Mars story began 86 years ago when the US Navy ordered a prototype for a large flying boat for patrol service from the Glenn L. Martin Company. The prototype made its first flight in mid-1942, but by then the Navy needed a large transport aircraft, and it was converted to that service. The performance of the prototype in its transport role was impressive and the Navy placed an order for 20 aircraft. But, in the closing days of the war, reduced that number to six.

The US Navy operated the Mars fleet until 1956, but lost two aircraft during that period. The four remaining were sold as scrap in 1959. At that time, several British Columbia forestry companies\* had established Forest Industries Flying Tankers (FIFT) to acquire and operate aerial forest fire suppression equipment. Dan McIvor, senior pilot for MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., foresaw the Mars airtanker potential and FIFT acquired the four aircraft and numerous spare parts.

The aircraft were converted to tankers by Fairey Aviation of Canada at Victoria International Airport and the first commenced service in 1960. Tragically, an aborted water drop resulted in the crash that claimed the lives of the four crew and destroyed Marianas Mars in 1961. Just over a year later in October 1962, the recently converted Caroline Mars was destroyed at the Victoria airport during Typhoon Freda.

The two-surviving aircraft, Hawaii Mars and Philippine Mars went on to fight over 4000 forest fires using their overwhelming 27,000 litre (6000 Imperial gallon) load capacity. For six decades the Vancouver Island based Mars aircraft were a reassuring and effective presence. When those four 2,400 hp Wright R3350-24WA engines turning 16-foot props were fired up, they always drew a crowd. The Philippine Mars, painted blue and white, was retired in 2012 and was recently sold to an aviation museum in Arizona.

While able to extinguish some fires with a single pass, the huge, radial engine aircraft require large lakes for loading and are at a disadvantage in mountainous terrain. The evolution of aviation and firefighting technology and techniques limited the deployment of the Mars, and after five decades of firefighting, Hawaii Mars was retired in 2015.



## **About Coulson Aviation**

Throughout the company's 60+ years, the mission has remained the same: to protect the world from forest fires. Our organizational capabilities allow our team to provide simultaneous aerial support across numerous continents. As a leading supplier to county, state, and federal governments worldwide, Coulson has focused its next-generation multi-mission fleet on sustainable, in-production aircraft. Working in partnership with OEMs and leveraging the latest technology allows Coulson to provide superior all-hazard response aircraft. Learn more about Coulson Aviation by visiting [coulsonaviation.com](https://coulsonaviation.com)