

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

CONSOLIDATED PBY-6A L-866/8466M
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 74/AF/789

08 Jul 43 200 P4Y-1 aircraft ordered from the planned Consolidated factory at New Orleans under US Navy Contract Noa.259. Not all built. Contract later amended to cover PBY-5A/6A Aircraft including those ordered under Navy Contract Noa.494, 12 Aug 43.

04 Apr 45 Completed at the new Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation (Convair) factory at New Orleans for delivery to the United States Navy as part of contract Noa.259; given the USN serial 63993. This aircraft was the 122nd PBY (and 62nd PBY-6A) built at the New Orleans factory, where 235 PBYs were built in total.

The prototype PBY-6A flew in January 1945. Consolidated built all 175 PBY-6A aircraft (PB - Patrol bombers; Y - Consolidated built; A - Amphibious) of which 52, including 63993 went to the US Navy; 75 to the United States Army Air Force and 48 to the Soviet Union under lend-lease. 63993 was the first of a batch of 107 aircraft, serials 63993-64099. The last US built Catalina - PBY-6A s/n 64107 for the US Navy was delivered 25 September 1945. Production PBY-6As carried a pear-shaped, pylon mounted radar radome immediately behind the pilot's cockpit and a twin .50 cal m/g ball turret in the nose and a taller fin.

28 Apr 45 Aircraft log book states `initial flight shakedown' - i.e. first flight, of 1.40 hours. The aircraft was probably delivered and operated in standard US Navy dark sea blue gloss colours with white lettering.

May 45 Awaiting delivery to US Navy.

04 May 45 Ferried from New Orleans to NAS Terminal Island, California by Ferry Unit VRF-4.

30 Jun 45 Ferried from Terminal Island to NAS San Diego, California.

01 Jul 45 On US Navy Charge - FAW 14, Pool (Transient Aircraft Unit, Fleet Air Wing 14, San Diego, California).

18 Jul 45 VPB (Fleet Patrol Bomber Unit) 100, Fleet Air Wing 8, NAS Alameda, California.

27 Jul 45 To FAW-2, NAS Pearl Harbour, Hawaii.

26 Aug 45 VPB 71. Logbook entry at this time, immediately after the Japanese surrender, records modification and `Prepared for ferry to forward area'.

- 09 Nov 45 - Still with VPB 71.
Feb 46
- 07 Nov 46 To Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for major overhaul.
- 25 Apr 47 To NAS Mustin, Philadelphia.
- 13 May 47 To Naval Air Station Willow Grove, Pa.

By 1948 only 5 PBYS served front-line in the US Navy fleet with a few more in reserve squadrons; they were quickly supplanted post war by Martin Mariner, Lockheed Neptune and Grumman Albatross aircraft in the patrol and Air-Sea Rescue (ASR) roles.

- 20 Jan 49 To Philadelphia
- Jan 50 To NAS Seattle
- 11 Oct 50 Overhaul at Seattle.
- 05 Nov 50 Ferried from NAS Seattle to NAS Norfolk, Virginia.
- 12 Feb 53 To NAS Norfolk, Virginia,
- 13 Oct 53 Stored at NAS Litchfield Park, 20 miles west of Phoenix, Arizona.
- 21 Nov 56 Purchased by Royal Danish Air Force.
- 03 Jan 57 Last USN PBY, a - 6A of Naval Air Reserve Training Unit at Atlanta, retired.
- 18 Mar 57 63993 was ferried to the Pan American workshops in New Orleans for overhaul for service with the Royal Danish Air Force having flown 1,636¼ hours in US Navy Service.

The RDAF began Catalina operations, initially an air survey of Greenland for preparation of accurate maps, in June 1947 with six ex Royal Canadian Air Force Canso As, numbered 82 851-856, supplemented in 1951 by two ex USN PBY-5As; by 1957 only four of these aircraft remained, and they were supplemented by eight ex USN PBY-6As, delivered to Esk (Squadron) 721 as 82-861-868, 63993 becoming RDAF 82-866, deliveries commencing 08 April 1957. The Danes used their Catalinas on SAR/maritime patrol/light transport duties in Denmark, the Baltic, Westgreenland, Eastgreenland, the North Atlantic and Arctic areas, the main base being at Vaerloese, near Copenhagen, with detachments at Aalborg, Skrydstrop and Sondrestrom. Difficulties with engine cooling delayed entry into Squadron service until 1958 -59.

- 18 Dec 57 Delivered to RDAF at Vaerloese by an American crew and modified by the Danish Air Force Air Material Command. Taken on Danish charge the following day.

15 Apr 58 Overhaul at Vaerloese.
 03 Jun 58 Released for service with Esk.721 at Vaerloese, where for some of its service at least it carried the radio call sign OVJBF.

Esk.721 was the RDAFs' transport unit, which by the 1960s also operated C-47 Dakotas (until 1982) and C-54 Skymasters. From 1959 the Catalinas operated from the base at Narssarsuag in Greenland as Airgroup West all year round until a hangar fire in November 1963, making sea landings in the summer. From 1963 the aircraft only operated from Greenland in the summer, and from Sondrestromfjord, which had hangar facilities, in the winter. The main duties of Airgroup west were liaison flights to Groennedal Naval Base, ice reconnaissance, transport and SAR. The normal crew of a Danish Catalina was eight - two pilots, two engineers, a navigator, radio operator and two observers, plus freight, e.g. food, coal or dog teams. By the 1960s the original R-1930-92 engines were replaced by R-1830-90Cs as used on the C-47 since these were easier to obtain and service. To simplify maintenance the same radar scanner and set as used on the C-54 was also adopted. All the Catalinas were re-skinned several times due to salt-water corrosion. By 1968 two of the PBY-6As had been destroyed in a hangar fire (862 and 864 in Nov 63), one (865) hit a mountain and one was crushed by ice.

L-857, grounded Oct 1967, is now preserved by Flyhistorisk Museum Sola, Norway in Royal Norwegian Air Force Markings.

The standard Danish Catalina colour scheme was beige grey fuselage and underwing surfaces with crimson upper wing surfaces for visibility on the ice, yellowish Dayglo on the nose, tail and floats and a large red/white Danish insignia on the fin/rudder. (See article 'Danish Cats' by Alan W Hall, Air Pictorial, Dec 1968).

As Airgroup East three Catalinas were generally based in Greenland in the summer, (April to September) two at Narssarsuag in the south and one from the gravel strips at Mestersvig and Station Nord. Water landings were commonplace. Atlantic and Arctic Sea operations were flown from Vagar on the Faro Islands and Keflavik Naval Air Station, Iceland. The Catalinas were known by civilian airport workers as 'Milcats' (short for Military Catalina Amphibian). Airgroup East duties included parachuting provisions and mail to isolated radio and weather stations, transport for scientific groups and checking on the position of ice floes in shipping areas, support for the Sirius Sledgepatrol (laying out of Depots etc.) and SAR.

22 Dec 58 Damaged when nose wheel collapsed at Vaerloese.

31 Dec 58 Repaired.

01 May 61 To Esk.722 as L-866, following re-numbering the previous year. Photo flying with Esk.722 - DAN MIL No.4 1975 p.244. On this date the Catalina Flight of ESK 721 transferred its eight PBY-6A aircraft (Nos 861 - 868) and two PBY-5A aircraft, nos. 853 & 857 to Esk 722. The Catalinas were deployed in two flights, at Vaerloese and Alborg with detachments to Skrydstrup also, and were used in the search and rescue role, replacing Percival Pembrokes. Twice each month L-866 and other Catalinas made the round trip of more than 4000 miles from Sanderstromfjord, Greenland to Vaerloese and back for servicing.

05 Sep 62 Damaged in Birdstrike at Vaerloese.

- 12 Apr 63 Another Birdstrike, at FSN Alborg.
- 22 Jul 63 Overhaul; Port outer wing exchanged with that from L-865.
- 01 Feb 66 Returned to Esk.721 The Catalinas had been replaced in the Search role by Sikorsky S-61A helicopters so the five survivors were returned to Esk.721 in the interests of engine standardisation. They were now mainly used for local training flights and as airborne radio relay stations.
- 01 Sep 68 Struck small iceberg during taxiing on sortie near Daneborg (HQ of the Sirius sledge patrol) on east coast of Greenland, receiving major damage to the nose section, and was beached near the isolated outpost of Danesborg, where a temporary repair was made four days later and the aircraft flown to Mestersuig for further attention, where a full repair was made the following month. Photo at this time - Air Pictorial Feb 69 p.56.
- 24 Jul 70 Starboard engine failure caused forced landing in Lista, Norway.
- 25 Jul 70 Final operational flight, from Lista to Vaerloese
- Jul 70 Grounded due to impending major overhaul being due and impending withdrawal of Catalinas from Danish service - stored in open at Vaerloese, having flown 3694 hours 55 minutes in RDAF service.
- 13 Nov 70 Final retirement of Catalina from RDAF service, farewell five-hour flight from Vaerloese by the three remaining airworthy aircraft, 861/3/8, making a farewell visit to Danish military airfields, all landing at Vaerloese at 15.30. 866 remained on charge but in open store. 861 (retired 13 Nov 70- Flypast December 2007 p.55) was retained for the Danish Technical Museum at Helsingor; 863/8 were sold to the Larkin Aircraft Corporation for further service in the USA June 1972; 863 suffered a fatal crash at Harlingen, Texas on 13 October 1984 when flying with the Confederate Air Force; 868 having crashed in August 1975.
- 31 Dec 70 Prepared for long - term storage.
- c.Jun 1972 866 sold to RAF Museum for a nominal sum.
- Aug 73 Overhaul commenced.
- 07 Nov 73 Initial test flight after overhaul for delivery by air to UK. During the 40-minute flight from Vaerloese at an altitude of 6000 feet approximately 40 square feet (12m²) of fabric was torn off the inner starboard wing trailing edge, and several stringers bent and broken. The aircraft was landed safely and repaired. Photos at Vaerloese - DAN MIL No.3 1974 p.154, and being washed on 10 October 1973 at www.flickr.com/photos/93747356@N00/401754667
- 13/21May 74 Test flights at Vaerloese after repair.

- 28 May 74 Calibration/Deviation flight from Vaerloese.
- 30 May 74 Final flight - 8.2-hour delivery from Vaerloese to station museum at RAF Colerne, Wilts, lasting seven hours, including one hour circling Salisbury Plain awaiting the scheduled arrival time.
Flown by experienced RDAF crew - Major Paul Ancker, CO of Esk.721 and six crew.
- Made several flypasts prior to landing and was officially welcomed by Chief of Staff of No.46 Group, AVM Nigel Hoad, and John Tanner, Director of The RAF Museum. In a short ceremony the aircraft and its logbooks were handed over to the RAFM by Colonel K Bendix of the RDAF. Final flying hours 5343.15. Photo of hand-over ceremony - RAF News week ending June 22nd 1974 p.5.
- 31 May 74 Electronic equipment removed from aircraft for return to Denmark for reuse.
- 30 Oct 75 Fuselage moved by road to Aerospace Museum Cosford by No.71 MU following dispersal of Colerne Museum collection prior to closure of the airfield due to defence cuts in March 1976; the wings and accessories followed 6 November.
- 13 Feb 76 Allocated instructional serial 8466M.

The aircraft has remained on display at Cosford ever since and has recently (c. 2005) been repainted by members of the Friends restoration team.

TEXT - ANDREW SIMPSON