

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

SUPERMARINE STRANRAER 920/CF-BXO
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 70/AF/645

- 1940 Built by Canadian Vickers at its St. Hubert, Montreal, Quebec Plant, using British equipment, and fitted with 810 hp Bristol Pegasus X engines as one of 40 Canadian built Stranraers delivered between 9 Nov 38 and 17 Nov 41. Given contractors number CV-209.
- 28 Nov 40 RCAF crew sent to Vickers to collect the Aircraft. Taken on strength of RCAF Eastern Air Command that day, as one of 3 Stranraers, 918-920 delivered Oct-Nov 40.
- 22 Dec 40 Delivered by rail freight to No.5 (Bomber Reconnaissance) Squadron, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, coded QN__ (Aircraft letter unknown). This may have been necessitated by frozen rivers making delivery by air impossible. Used on anti-submarine patrols on the east coast.
- 11 Jan 41 First (acceptance) flight after assembly - No.5 Squadron flew Stranraers until replaced by Cansos in Sep 41.
- 22 Jan 41 Logbooks (photocopied extracts on file) of Group Captain J.H. Roberts RCAF records 2.5-hour photographic flight with G/C Roberts as second pilot.
- 18 Feb 41 Roberts logbook records a two-hour duration practice bombing flight, with G/C Roberts as pilot.
- 24 Mar 41 Roberts logbook records 4.1 hour patrol flight.
- 9 Apr 41 Roberts logbook records 1.40 hour duration bombing practice flight.
- 24 Apr 41 Roberts logbook records 1.35 hour dual control practice flight.
- 1 May 41 Roberts logbook records 6.15 hour anti-submarine patrol.
- 5 May 41 Roberts logbook records 4-hour duration patrol flight.
- 3 Jun 41 Roberts logbook records 4.55 hour search and rescue flight to recover the bodies of the crew of a Hudson aircraft which had crashed at Sable Island, 250 miles east of Halifax, NS, after it had collided with a radio mast in zero visibility. This required an offshore landing and take-off in notoriously high seas, as 920 'bounced from wave-top to wave-top' as it took off back to Dartmouth.

- 6 Jun 41 Roberts logbook records 6.5 hour harbour entrance patrol.
- 1 Jul 41 G/C Robert's last Stranraer flight as the squadron converted to Catalinas – in 920, a 1.20-hour dual instruction flight.
- 10 Oct 41 Transferred to Patricia Bay, British Colombia, part of Western Air Command, RCAF and home of No.13 Operational Training Squadron TS (later No.3 Operational Training Unit from Nov 42). Here trainee aircrew practised bombing, night landings, seamanship and water handling. Eastern Air Command had replaced its Stranraers with Catalinas/Cansos in Sep 41, hence the transfer.
- 23 Jan 42 To Boeing Aircraft, Vancouver for major overhaul.
- 13 Jun 42 Overhaul complete - returned to Western Air Command.
- The flying logbook of Flying Officer George Seldon RCAF records a number of flights in 920 whilst serving with No.13 O.T.U at Patricia Bay.
- 3 Jul 42 Three separate flights - operational landings and take-offs.
- 8 Jul 42 Two flights - operational landings and take - offs.
- 13 Jul 42 Pilots logbook of F/Lt Robert George Hodge records 50 minute flight carrying passengers.
- 19 Jul 42 Two-hour flight passenger flight (Hodge LB) followed by one hour of circuits,
- 20 Jul 42 Circuits, 1.45 hours (Hodge LB)
- 25 Jul 42 Five separate flights - three operational take offs and landings and two passenger flights.
- 2 Aug 42 Practicing operational take-offs and landings, 15 minutes, Hodge LB, followed by a further one-hour flight of the same.
- 4 Aug 42 Operational flight practice – submarine search exercise – 1.55 hours, Hodge LB.
- 6 Aug 42 Practicing operational take-offs and landings, two flights, 85 and 35 minutes, Hodge LB.
- 15 Aug 42 Taildown exercise flight, 60 minutes, Hodge LB, followed by a second similar flight of one hour.

42-Apr 44 Served with No.7 (Bomber Reconnaissance) and No.9 (BR) Squadrons at Prince Rupert British Columbia and Bella Bella BC respectively. No.7 Squadron, coded LT from 1941-2 and FG from 1942 flew Stranraers between Feb 43 and Mar 44 on anti- submarine patrols and No.9 Squadron, coded KA and HJ, flew Stranraers between Dec 41 and Apr 44 on west coast anti-submarine patrols. Precise dates of service are unclear.

Oct 42 Log book of Fg Off W W R Kimmerley records local Flight (18th) Air Firing (29th) and Coast Patrol (26th) in 920 whilst with No.9 BR Squadron Bella Bella. The unit moved to Alliford Bay, British Columbia on a movement exercise 19 Nov 42 - 2 Dec 42.

Nov 42 Mr J K Campbell of Edmonton, Alberta, recalled a number of flights in 920 whilst serving with No.9 Squadron at this time including a number during the Alliford Bay detachment.

15 Nov 42 Patrol and low level bombing practice.

17 Nov 42 Patrol.

19 Nov 42 Bella Bella - Alliford Bay - Patrol.

21 Nov 42 Ferry to Burnaby Island.

21 Nov 42 Burnaby Island - Alliford Bay

22 Nov 42 Local (snow).

22 Nov 42 Local.

23 Nov 42 Ferry Prince Rupert (engine failure).

24 Nov 42 Test and local.

26 Nov 42 Patrol engine failure.

26 Nov 42 Test and bombing.

27 Nov 42 Search (Mr Jack Hansen) picked up 1 dead, 1 survivor.

27 Nov 42 Low Island - Alliford Bay.

05 Dec 42 Local and low level.

25 Dec 42 Coast crawl - search for mine.

28 Jan 43 Air firing.

- 08 Feb 43 Local.
- 16 Feb 43 Local.
- 08 Mar 43 Test flight.
- 16 Sep 43-
01 Feb 44 Under repair with Canadian Pacific Airlines, Vancouver, following Cat.B damage at Prince Rupert.
- 01 Feb 44 Returned to Western Air Command.
- 12 Apr 44 Into store at No.3 Repair Depot - stored reserve.
- 10 May 44 Sold to Labrador Mining and Exploration Co Ltd and registered CF-BXO as the prototype civil Stranraer conversion.
- (The last 16 Stranraers served with the RCAF operationally until Feb 45; 949 (later CF-BYM) was the last in service, withdrawn 20 Jan 46; the last stored RCAF Stranraer was sold for civil operation Oct 46).
- 24 May 44 920/CF-BXO given Certificate of Registration No.3072. From 1945, maintained and flown under contract to iron ore company Hollinger Inc; by Canadian Pacific Airlines, and based at Rapide Lake, flown by Johnnie Brown.
Used in Labrador and New Quebec, mainly for freighting men and materials from Sept Iles to bases at Sandgirt Lake and Iron Arm of Petitsikapau Lake, plus servicing field parties, although the small loading hatch restricted the size of materials that could be loaded. It was involved in several incidents including smashing a wing float. Photo at this time – Aviation in Canada (Milberry) p.69.
- 25 Sep 45 Suffered an in-flight engine failure. One cylinder blew through the engine cowling, necessitating a forced landing on Ashuanipi Lake, Labrador. Strong winds blew the Stranraer onto the rocky shore and holed the hull. The aircraft was beached and the engine repaired. See full account in 'Have a Banana' by Babe Woollett (028332) Chapter 28 pp.483-90 and photos pp. XV-XVI and CAHS Journal Fall 2000 p.98.
- 9-10 Oct 45 Repairs completed, and the aircraft was flown off the Lake back to Rapide Lake.
- 23 Apr 47 To E Lando, Vancouver, BC - acting as intermediary for Queen Charlotte Airlines Ltd.
- 28 May 47 Sold to Queen Charlotte Airlines Ltd, Fraser River, Sea Island Airport, CAHS Journal Spring 2007 p.21-at Sullivan Bay, BC, 28 April 1948No.5809. Carried up to 20 passengers and 3 crew - 2 pilots and a mechanic - plus 2000lb of freight in the former gun positions. Operated up the Pacific coast of British Columbia with a daily Stranraer 'bus' service to some 30 scattered settlements.

They were known as the 'ninety-mile an hour plane', as they took off, landed, climbed and cruised all at that same speed, taking off in as little as ninety metres of open water. Colour scheme overall aluminium with black and yellow trim, including yellow upper and lower wing tips. See Supermarine Walrus & Stranraer (Kightly/Wallsgrove) p.110

CF-BXO was one of 5 'strainer' or 'stranny' aircraft operated by QCA - 'Queer Collection of Aeroplanes' as it was known; the others were:

907/CF-BY1 Sep 47 - Jan 48 (Destroyed by Fire)

909/CF-BYL Jul 46 - 31 Aug 46

915/CF-BYJ Sep 46 - 24 Dec 49 (Damaged beyond repair)

949/CF-BYM Aug 49 - 1 Oct 57 (Flew into trees on take off; the penultimate Stranraer survivor).

Photos in service with QCA - the Aeroplane 10 Dec 48 p.734; FlyPast Feb 82 (1948 view at Sullivan Bay); Aeroplane Monthly Mar 74 p.574; Aeroplane April 2001 p.62; The Flying M Spring 2005 p.7; .Internal view dated 1952 in Museum file. See also account in West Coast Aviator Magazine Vol. 6 No.1 Sept-Oct 1996 PP.6-9.

There was a daily Mon-Sat Stranraer departure from Vancouver, departing at 08.30 and stopping at the Pulp and Paper Mill at Powell River, Minstrel Island, the fishing village at Alert Bay and the logging camp at Sullivan Bay, which doubled as a refuelling stop. Other landings were on demand at the captains' discretion.

A typical flight covered 14 stages and 500 miles in 8-9 hours flying time. CF-BXO herself was known as 'BOXO' to QCA staff.

- 28 Apr 48 Photographed at Sullivan Bay, BC (a major logging centre); On an all-day round trip from Vancouver, pilot Bill McLeod made 13 stops. CAHS Journal Spring 2007 p.21.
- 30 Apr 49 Suffered damage after hitting a submerged log during take off from Sea Island, Fraser River.
- Mar 50 Pegasus X engines replaced by Wright-Cyclone GR-1820-G.202GA engines - Pegasus spares were becoming hard to obtain. Also given Hamilton standard hydromatic propellers replacing the original wooden units, becoming a 'Super Stranraer'.
- 05 Mar 51 Forced landing with 15 passengers and 3 crew at Alert Bay. Johnston Strait - aircraft damaged. Photos of CF-BXO in 1952 -Propliner 11 p.32-34.
- 21 Feb 52 Lost a wingtip float when the aircraft hit a wave attempting to land at Sullivan Bay. The pilot managed to overshoot but found the ailerons jammed. He made a successful landing at Comox, Vancouver Island.
- 23 Feb 52 Withdrawn from use.
- 1953 CF-BXO appears to have made some unofficial flights following repairs.

Flights apparently included several charter flights of people and cargo to Spears Lake (NW territory) in support of a scientific drilling programme until again damaged in a taxiing accident in shallow water. Stored outside at Sea Island Airport. Photo in 1954 minus one engine - FlyPast Feb 82; Supermarine Walrus & Stranraer (Kightly/Wallsgrove) p.3.

- Jun 55 Queen Charlotte Airlines acquired by Pacific Western Airlines; QCA stock taken over included the two surviving Stranraers, CF-BXO and CF-BYM, and a large quantity of spares. Photo of BYM in Pacific Western markings - Aero Modeller Oct 59. Photo also Flight 16 Nov 1956 p.800.
- 15 Dec 58 Option to acquire by W K Slye of Vancouver not taken up. Photo in 1958 minus 1 engine - Propliner 11 p.36.
- 1959 Purchased by Stranraer Aerial Enterprises Ltd of Richmond, Vancouver for possible conversion to water bomber and general freighter. In the water bomber role it was planned to fit an external underwing tank each side giving a total capacity of 670 gallons.
- The consortium of about a dozen investors was led by Pacific Western Airlines DC3 pilot Mr Jim Lightbown, with Patrick Wilson, and TV news host Bob Fortune, Stu Philips and Jim Naylor. See Jim Lightbown's account in West Coast Aviator Magazine Volume 6 Number 1 September-October 1996 pp.10-12.
- The aircraft was in poor condition and the Canadian Department of Transport demanded that it be totally stripped and rebuilt. Photos at Vancouver c. mid 1960, minus outer wings; CAHS Journal Summer 2001 pp.57 and 72. The wings were stored at the side of an adjacent hangar.
- c. Nov 1961 Very early one morning, towed (under police escort for the section of route through the Deas Island Tunnel under the Fraser River) on its own beaching gear (with the tail on a flatbed truck) to Abbotsford Airport for rebuild in No.1 hangar by Aerovive Ltd over a 7-month period costing 40,000 Canadian dollars, including complete refrabricing of the wing and tail surfaces. Given new R1820-97 engines June 1962. Reportedly given DC3 door at some point to permit easier loading of bulky equipment, particularly 45 gallon fuel drums.
- Rebuild details in aircraft logbooks B1196-B1205, and handling instructions in UA Box 188. Photos at Abbotsford in later stages of rebuild, 22 April 1962 – CAHS Journal, Summer 2001 p.58-59.
- Sat 10 Jun 62 40-minute test flight, flown by former wartime Lancaster pilot Herman 'Slim' Knights, with Jim Lightbown as co-pilot and Al Frazier as Flight Engineer. Flew from Abbotsford Airport runway No.18 to the Fraser River at Sea Island - took off with the hull resting on a specially constructed detachable 4-wheel 'dolly' from which it lifted off when flying speed was reached. The dolly rolled to a stop at the end of the runway. In overall aluminium with red fuselage cheat line.

Photo on dolly – BC Aviator Aug/Sep 1993 p.12.

28 Jun 62 Certificated for civil operations with Certificate of Registration No.26996. Flew on three occasions Jun 62 (10th, 22nd and 29th). The cost of the rebuild was such that funds were not available to install fire bomber water tanks.

From 28 Jun operated for three months in the North West territories freighting for Ward Air of Yellowknife in connection with the geological Upper Mantle project. Flew on 14 days in Jul 62, 21 days in Aug 62 and 7 days in Sep 62 up to 14 Sep 62 (see Aircraft Log book B1201). Photo - Flight International 2 Jul 64 p.30; Flying Review International Jan 64 p.65.

Sep 62 Whilst taxiing sank again in shallow water at Seers Lake after a rock holed the hull. Beached, temporarily repaired and flown back to Vancouver 14 Sep. Photo as of 13 October 1962 at Vancouver airport – CAHS Journal Summer 2001 p.56. Colour photo same date – CAHS Journal Summer 2001, rear cover.

1963 Given winter overhaul; the aircraft was leased by Pacific Western Airlines for contract work in Northern Canada. Colour photo around this time - Aeroplane Monthly Oct 96 p.11.

09 May 63 Test flight after overhaul. Five more flights totalling 4-45 hours 15-23 May 63. Aircraft then grounded again. Photo at Vancouver Airport 29 September 1963 – CAHS Journal Summer 2001 p.72.

May 64 Overhauled and 50 hour check at Vancouver. Photo: Aeroplane Monthly Mar 74 p.574; Air Enthusiast Jul/Aug 1997 p.62.

18 May 64 First flight for 12 months - local - 8 other flights that month.

3/4 Jun 64 Two days flying totalling some 22 hours. Did one trip hauling 11,000 pounds of fish at this stage.

09 Jul 64 Test flight to renew Certificate of Airworthiness (day VFR conditions only within 10 miles of Vancouver Airport). Total 3½ hours flying time giving total of 3959.55 hours.

Grounded for a further two years. 10 minute ground runs Oct/Dec 64, Jan, Mar, Apr, Aug, Oct, Dec 65 and Jan, Mar, May 66.

Jul 65 Photos afloat at Vancouver - Aeroplane Monthly Mar 75 p.574; Propliner 11 p.36.

25 Jun 66 Flown again - 1 hour local test flight after a thorough cleaning and checking of the airframe.

Jul 66 Flown on a further five days (2nd 8th, 23rd 24th 31st).

- Aug 66 Flown on 5th, 11th and 12th of that month, mainly on local flights; had hoped to fly sightseeing trips during the Montreal Expo, and to test the feasibility, flew 'BXO up to Penticton and successfully sold rides off Skaha Lake.
- 13 Aug 66 Final flight - local flight earlier in day with 14 passengers followed by last flight with Jim Lightbrown at the controls - a 1½-hour flight touching down at 1730 hours, giving final total flying hours of 3979.00. Had logged 471 hours since Jun 62.
- Shortly afterwards the tailplane was damaged by a passing ship prior to beaching the aircraft for the last time.
- 24 Jun 67 Certificate of Airworthiness expired. By now the fabric covering of the wings and tailplanes had deteriorated and was unserviceable. Photo at this date – Great Aviation Collections of Britain (Ellis) p.173.
- Colour photo as of August 1967 – CAHS Flypast, Spring 2009 p.34. Also 'The Growler' (Shackleton Association) Spring 2018 p.13.
- Sep 67 Aircraft advertised for sale - by now owned by Richmond Savings Credit Union.
- 1969 Photo stored at Vancouver Airport - Photo: Flight International 10 Jul 69 p.52; Air Enthusiast Jul/Aug 1997 p.65; CAHS Journal Summer 1969 p.58.
- Jul 70 Purchased by RAF Museum from TV personality Bob Fortune of Fortune Films Ltd who had purchased the aircraft in 1967, and made a film about the Stranraer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, for whom he worked as a weatherman. He had hoped to get the aircraft flying again, supported by three other people in the owning syndicate including John Nailor.
- Whilst standing derelict at Vancouver the cockpit instruments were robbed from the aircraft.
- 4-20 Aug 70 Transported back to the UK in two RAF Short Belfast aircraft, XR367 and XR371 with a team from 71MU. The latter aircraft now being preserved itself at the Aerospace Museum, Cosford. Having been loaded into the aircraft on 4 August at Vancouver, the fuselage left Vancouver for Abbotsford in XR367 on 6 Aug, leaving Abbotsford for Montreal 10 August, arriving at Brize Norton at 06.20 on 12 Aug via Montreal and on to Gander on 11 August. Photos: Control Column Oct 70 p.152; Air Clues Nov 70 p.57; CAHS Journal Summer 2001 p.57; RAF News w/e 3 October 1970 p.10. Fuselage moved to RAFM store at Henlow by 71 MU 13 Aug. Photo at Henlow Air Enthusiast Jun 71 p.52.
- Belfast XR371 left Abbotsford with the wings and other parts 18 Aug,

arriving via the same route at Brize Norton 20 Aug, its load being taken to Henlow by 71 MU 21 Aug 70. Restored and repainted at Henlow, including recovering of the wings.

c. Oct 71

Moved from Henlow to Hendon by 71 MU, with assembly mostly completed by 4 February 1972 (see file correspondence from David Hughes). Retains American engines and civilian modifications to entry and loading doors and carries Canadian military markings as 920/QN_.

Photo: Aeroplane Monthly Mar 74 p.574.

Photos under assembly at Hendon - Control Column Feb 72 p.29; The Flying M Autumn 2008 p.15. Photos displayed at Hendon - Air Enthusiast Jul/Aug 1997 p.64; Aeroplane April 2001 pp.64-65; The Flying M Spring 2005 p.6.

The only other Stranraer survivor is 915/CF-BYJ, which crashed at Belize Inlet, north of Vancouver, BC on Christmas Eve 1949 whilst serving with Queen Charlotte Airlines. The Canadian Museum of Flight and Transportation, Surrey, BC recovered the rear fuselage, tail, wing and other parts from its crash site. Photos: FlyPast Sep 82 and May 84 p.24; March 2009 p.6; Aircraft illustrated March 2009 p.25. In late November 2008, the remains moved to the Shearwater Aviation Museum, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

TEXT - ANDREW SIMPSON