THE HIGH FLIGHT
in partnership with EFHA and AOF

CODENAME: "LANDSEAIRE"
Hollywood's glamorous flying yachts

Sink U-342!
Deadly waters off the coast of Iceland

BOEING OF CANADA
Sea Island’s contribution to the war effort
U-Boat Hunter, Photo Reconnaissance Aircraft, Transport Plane, Firefighter, Flying studio for the French TV channel TF1 on “Operation Okavango”... This Catalina has performed almost all the missions she was designed for, and then adapted for...

...the slowest airplane, the fastest ship...
About 3,300 were built; today only about fifteen of them are still flying. This one is, most definitely, the most representative as well as the most mythical of them.

T he aircraft that would eventually become "9767" for the RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force) was born from an American father and a Canadian mother. When Boeing of Canada set their new plant on Sea Island, Vancouver, in 1942, to build the already famous Catalina under licence, Consolidated sent all parts and equipments needed for the first 55 aircraft from San Diego... American parts, Canadian workers...

Of all the amphibious aircraft which left Sea Island, "9767" is the only survivor still flying, and the last of the Boeing flying boats!

Almost a year after VE-Day, in April 1946, n° 9767 was acquired by Canadian Pacific Airlines and then registered CF-CRR. During its fourteen years of service with CPAL, it flew as a passenger and freight aircraft with fleet numbers 233 and 933. It’s during that time that she was stripped of all her military equipment, shortened nose, armaments and camouflage painting, in exchange for a red, blue and silver livery.

Just before being disposed of by Canadian Pacific Airlines, on 23 April 1959, CF-CRR suffered substantial damage in a crosswind water landing at Terrace, BC, and as a result, the Canso had to divert to the nearby land airport and make a nosewheel-up landing... the first in a long series!

Several Canadian airline owners took over the Canso, such as Northland Airlines, Midwest Airlines and Ilford Riverton Airways, before its acquisition by Avalon Aviation after its conversion into a water bomber. The beginning of a new war for this survivor of the battle of the Atlantic!

January 24th, 1944. The Royal Canadian Air force’s 142nd BB Squadron (Bomber Reconnaissance) and their brand-new Cansos had just been affected to Reykjavik, Iceland. The Canadian crews were having their first taste of war, U-boat hunting, and the rigors of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Flying Officer Thomas Charles Cooke is flying Canso A “9767”, code “S” (Sugar) on a anti-submarine patrol on April 17th 1944, when his crew detect the wake of a sub.

U-boat 342, type VIIc, is cruising on the surface at 65 degrees and 23 minutes latitude north, and 29 degrees and 20 minutes longitude west. She left Bergen on April 3rd, heading towards its first operational patrol area, somewhere in the Atlantic. Cooke immediately decides to attack, but this great opportunity is also very dangerous... The German machine guns open fire at 3,000 yards (2,744 meters), forcing Cooke to take evasive action and reposition 9767 in order to get the best possible angle of attack.At 1,200 yards (1,097 meters), the Canso’s twin nose- turret machine guns strafe the submarine’s deck and kiosk, silencing its AAC defenses.

Cooke is now directly starboard from U-342, and launches three 200-pound depth charges (90 kg) that fall on each side of the sub. The closest hits on starboard, the other two on port... and all three torpex charges detonate in succession, raising columns of white foam that are neatly captured by the cameras documenting the attack. 9767’s crew then observe the submarine disappearing slowly under the water.

Cooke attempts two more passes and tries to use his last two charges. He won’t be able to launch them... but it doesn’t matter for Oblt. Albert Hossenfelder and his crew of 50 aboard U-342. Nine minutes after the initial attack, a field of debris emerges from the murky depths, accompanied by a continuous flow of bubbles and oil smears.

Three hours later, the oil slick covers an area 600 yards long and 250 yards wide (549 x 229 m) and one and a half hour later, it’s reaching 3,000 x 600 yards (2,744 x 549 m)... leaving no doubt about the fate of the ship and her crew.

Cooke was honored with the Distinguished Flying Cross DFC for this flawless victory, that opens the tally of the 142nd BB Squadron. Cooke always insisted this distinction should also reward his crew: F/L. Wiskin, F/O B.F. Hunter, F/O P.P. Ficek, WO G.R. McMacken, FS E.N.C. Tilander, Sgt. E.S. Hill, Sgt. T.E. Hoosen and the RAF observer, FS E.A. Johnson.

In 1946, Thomas Cooke started a 37-year long career with the Ontario Provincial Air Service, raising through the ranks to eventually end up its director for 11 years. He contributed to the development of aviation equipment and procedures, and most notably aerial fire fighting, a direct contribution that helped make Canada one of the leading experts in the use of airplanes for forest monitoring and management. A kind of operations where his old 9767, renamed CF-CRR, excelled for several decades. He is one of the founding members of "The Ontario Bushplane Heritage and Forest Fire Educational Center".

As a water bomber, C-FCRR carried the hull code “1” and later, “791”. During fire-fighting operations, accidents happen and C-FCRR was involved in two of note. The first was at Sylvan Lake, Alberta, on 27 May 1978, when it sustained serious damage after stalling onto the water whilst carrying out water pick-up training. The crew managed to beach the aircraft before it sank. The outer section of the starboard wing was destroyed in this incident and replaced with an unused wartime component… complete with original RCAF roundels!

The second accident took place on May 30th, 1981, when the left-hand nosewheel door tore off during a water pick-up on Complex Lake, NWT. The aircraft nosed down and sank, but was once again salvaged to fly another day! A series of pretty fearful moments… but quite the good “karma”: Every time, she survived, shaking off each ordeal and counting one by one the nine lives commonly attributed to… Cats!

Initially based at Red Deer, Alberta, “CRR” was transferred to Parry Sound, Ontario in 1977 and stayed there in long-term storage when Avalon ceased operations during the late 1980s. During her time in storage, several purchase attempts were made to preserve it, because of its wartime history. However, all failed, until the winter of 1994 when the Dijon-based Canadian Air Legend acquired it. In the spring of 1995, C-FCRR left Canada to France.

Upon arrival, the amphibian was fully overhauled at Dinard by “LAB” (now Sabena Technics). Her blisters were replaced on the aft hull by Tom Reilly of Kissimmee, Florida and other maintenance work was carried out by Mark Edwards under the supervision of Canadian engineers. She was then awarded a “Public Transport” certification (the only Catalina in the world with this distinction), before flying to Toulouse, where it was resprayed by “Aerospatiale” in a grey and blue scheme for her new mission.

In October 1995, she took off as a flying TV studio for “Operation Okavango”, which took place in Africa.
In the first years after World War II, hundreds of planes are demilitarized and sold as surplus, a boon for young companies in search of new markets and opportunities. Southern California Aircraft Corporation, headed by Glenn E. Odekirk and based in Ontario (California) focused its activities on the most successful flying boat of all time: the Catalina.

And if reconditioning for military use makes the majority of his orders, SoCal also offers a variety of options and transformations that convert the Catalina into a freighter or even a flying yacht!

First, all models have their nose-turret taken out before their bow is completely remodeled. This operation gives the SoCal Catalina an unmistakable profile, without a doubt, the most beautiful of all! The cockpit is also redesigned, according to Type Certificate TC-785, to allow operation by two pilots. All the wires and commands formerly operated by the mechanic in the central pylon are redirected to the cockpit. The trademark blisters are replaced on starboard with an “integral” plexiglas bubble and on the port side, with a modified version that allows easy access when the plane is on the water. An “airstairs” door is created under the tail, like on the Caravelle or the Boeing 727. The tail is equipped with a horn balanced rudder, a distinctive feature of this new version.

Multiple options include a variable number of seats (up to 22), a restroom, a fully equipped kitchenette, a lounge-solarium, radio-telephones, air conditioning, precious woods, carpets... and the possibility of mounting one or two dinghies under the wings, that can double as external luggage pods! As a result, for the sum of 260,000 US dollars (of the day), you could leave the shop with more than a Catalina... A "Landseaire". A clever contraction of Land, Sea and Air... Three fundamental elements for the Consolidated flying-boat.
AirVenture Ltd did the last phase of maintenance and Alain Maire became her new “skipper”, launching the U.S. certification process. The plan was to fly N9767 from Orly to her new home, and on December 22nd 2010, the amphibious Phoenix took to the skies once more...

To achieve this feat, extensive maintenance was provided by French, Canadians and Americans engineers (Jim VanDyk, Peter Houghton and Patrice Sublemontier) and the many volunteers of AirFrance Industries. They gave 9767 a new engine, overhauled propellers, upgraded avionics system, overhauled hydraulics, new control cables, and a lot more... Almost all parts of 9767 have been checked, and replaced when necessary. The end result is a work of art and a living testimony of the mechanics’ talent. The only task left was to find a crew, which would have members from all over Europe: Belgium with Yves Cartilier, The Netherlands with Chris Goezinne, and France with Philippe Jay and Loïc Blaise. An international team...“fantastic but hard to drive...a tower of Babel with a 104 ft wingspan in Alain’s own words!}

She was then taken back to Le Bourget and flown south again, ready for her next adventure: a transatlantic flight to Chile and Brazil via West Africa! This epic flight was to commemorate the Aéropostale mail flights flown by Jean Mermoz between France and Dakar, Senegal in the 1930s. The Catalina left Toulouse on 14 October, and by 28 November 1998, C-FCRR had arrived in Santiago of Chile, with a follow up flight to Brazil on the 3rd of December. After a few months’ rest, C-FCRR then flew up north and spent some time at Oshawa, Ontario for some maintenance before leaving on 8 June 1999, crossing the Northern Atlantic via Reykjavik and Shannon, and landing at Dinard in Brittany. A few weeks later, she was busy flying as an aerial camera platform for the total eclipse of the sun on August 11.

At last, “9767” is reunited with the only elements on earth suitable for her: sky and water!