



HMCS BONAVENTURE

Canada had a small naval air service, the CNAS, only in the last months of the First World War. Royal Canadian Navy personnel manned two small British aircraft carriers during the Second World War, though it was not until after the war that the RCN acquired carriers of its own. The first was HMCS Warrior (1946-1948), the second Magnificent (1948-1957), and the third Bonaventure.

Laid down on 27 November 1943 and launched, only partly completed, on 27 February 1945, Bonaventure was taken over by Canada as a planned replacement for Magnificent in 1952. She was commissioned on 17 January 1957, and was to remain in RCN hands until paid off 13 1/2 years later.

During her career with the RCN, Bonaventure (or "Bonnie" as she was usually known), was involved primarily in flying training in support of the Navy's various roles. These included control of the North Atlantic and adjacent areas, tracking Russian submarines operating in considerable strength there, and supporting North Atlantic Treaty Organization commitments. Her jet fighters, until 1962, were designed to provide protection in the event of enemy air attack, while her Trackers and the helicopters assisted attendant destroyers and frigates in their anti-submarine searching and attack roles.



Canada's last specially-designed aircraft carrier HMCS Bonaventure under way. ND

Bonaventure ranged from the Arctic (1961) on a 5,200 mile voyage to assert Canadian sovereignty, to Buenos Aires (February 1966).

In 1961 she steamed 42,000 miles and was away from home port for 178 days. The ship lost her ageing Banshees in September, 1962. Despite pleas by the Naval Air Group for their replacement with USN fighter-bombers, nothing was decided, for in the sovereignty role fighters were not useful as anti-submarine aircraft. Thus the aircraft fit in 1963-64 became six new Sea King all-weather anti-submarine helicopters, one Sikorsky rescue helicopter ("Pedro"), and 13 twin-engined Trackers. During this time the ship's staff developed the standards for the "hot" refuelling of helicopters without having to shut down and restart them. Her closest approaches to active war service were in late October 1962, during the Cuban missile crisis when Bonaventure formed part of the fleet-at-sea patrol in the western Atlantic; and later in March of 1964 when called upon to transport Canadian Army peacekeeping elements to Cyprus.

She had a major four month refit in early 1963, to be followed by a long half-life refit at Davie Shipbuilding's yard at Lauzon, Quebec, from April 1966 to September 1967. This refit was designed to carry the ship well into the 1970s. It not only ran vastly over its initial estimate of \$8.0 million, to \$12.5 million, but took much longer than planned. Adding to the complexity and cost, the ship was kept in commission, with most of her crew retained on board or nearby. She left Lauzon for Halifax on 13 September 1967 for sea trials and re-working-up to efficiency by both the crew and the air detachment. At the end of January 1968 the Royal Canadian Navy as such ceased to exist upon unification of the armed forces. The ship's air squadrons then became the responsibility of Air Command for development and training and of Maritime Command for their operational use, a clumsy but workable arrangement.



A Sea King Helicopter prepares to land on Bonaventure's flight deck. ND



An F2H3 Banshee about to "trap" aboard **Bonaventure**. ND

On 3 April 1969 the government announced a "phased reduction in Canada's NATO commitments", a harbinger of the end of Naval Air in carriers, for attention was swinging to the somewhat cheaper operation of helicopters from destroyers. Saving money was the key, with major cuts in personnel, and **Bonaventure's** 1,350-man crew and her aircraft ate up a lot of both. In the summer of 1969 a planned docking in Saint John was cancelled in favour of a "self refit" alongside in Halifax. Then, via CBC radio, word reached the ship while on a NATO exercise in mid-Atlantic in September 1969 that **Bonaventure** was to be scrapped and her Tracker squadron disbanded. The ship's company was needed to man the new 280 Class helicopter-carrying destroyers just being laid down. So **Bonaventure** became the Navy's contribution to the defence cuts and the almost 50 per cent reduction in Canadian manpower contributed to NATO. The last operational flight was on 28 October 1969. In January 1970, **Bonaventure** carried a battalion of the Royal 22^e Régiment to Jamaica for a tropical training exercise. Three months later she was sent to northern Norway, to Narvik, to bring back Canadian troops from a NATO exercise when their planned transport was not available. This was her last service.

She was decommissioned at Halifax on 3 July 1970 and sold for scrap and broken up by the end of 1971.

Bibliography:

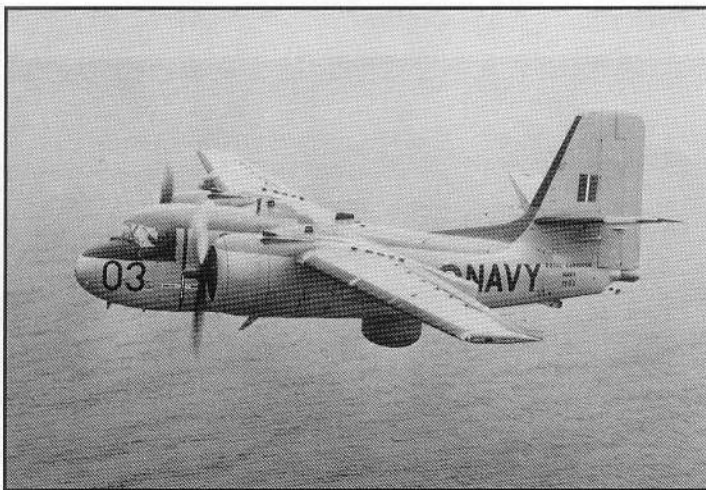
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SPECIFICATIONS:

Total length: 704 ft. overall (214.6 m)
 Total breadth: 80 ft. (24.5 m) at the hull,
 128 ft. (39 m) at flight deck level,
 flight deck: 107 1/2 ft. (32.8 m)
 Draught in water: 25 ft. (7.6 m). Flight deck height: 40 ft. (12.2 m).
 Displacement: 16,000 tons light, 19,920 tons full load.
 Armament: 4 x twin mountings, 3"- 50 cal. anti-aircraft guns,
 8x40 mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns.
 Machinery: Four boilers, feeding two Parsons turbines,
 two propeller shafts.
 41,368 shaft horsepower = 24 1/2 knots.
 3,200 tons of oil fuel = 12,000 nautical miles at 14
 kts.
 Also 8 generators for electric power.
 Complement: 1,370; 810 ship's company,
 560 air branch. Actual numbers varied considerably.
 Aircraft: 10 jet fighters (F2H3 "Banshee" until 1962), 10 or
 12 CS2F "Tracker" anti-submarine search and patrol
 aircraft; the former replaced by up to 10 helicopters
 (CHSS2/HS-50 "Sea King"), plus others such as the
 Sikorsky H04S rescue helicopter "Pedro".
 Equipment: 8° angled flight deck, mirror landing system
 (replaced by a Fresnel Lens Optical Landing System);
 6 arrestor wires, starting 70 ft. (21.3 m) from the aft
 round down; a BS-4 steam catapult launch system,
 with 112 ft. (34.1 m) stroke, driven by steam from
 the ship's boilers. 9 radio rooms; radar for
 navigation, air and sea detection, gunnery control
 and the Carrier Controlled Approach system to
 allow 0 visibility flying.

LIFETIME STATISTICS:

Steamed: 374,597 nautical miles (1957-1970)
 Catapult shots: 13,302
 Arrestor landings: 20,590



CS2F-1 Tracker anti-submarine patrol aircraft, one of the first
 of a hundred to be delivered. ND