

## **Shearwater Aviation Museum: Birthplace of Canadian Maritime Military Aviation Heritage**

Visitors to the Shearwater Aviation Museum ([www.shearwateraviationmuseum.ca](http://www.shearwateraviationmuseum.ca)) at 12 Wing CFB Shearwater will be impressed with a colourful and growing collection of aircraft and artifacts depicting Canadian maritime military aviation from 1918 to the present. I was fortunate to visit the SAM, a CAHS Museum Member, and enjoyed a very positive meeting with SAM Curator Christine Hines. Established in 1978, SAM has 15 aircraft on display or undergoing restoration in addition to an excellent art gallery, a library and archives, informative exhibits and other assets. SAM celebrated Shearwater's 100th Anniversary as an air base in 2018. It is one of the oldest military airfields in Canada, second only to CFB Borden established in 1916. The 'Shearwater 100' celebration included many rewarding activities. ([Find an excellent report here](#)) by CAHS Ottawa Chapter member Don MacNeil, published by the Museum.

As a Centennial project, SAM officially opened the new Shearwater Aviation Memorial Park, displaying a Sikorsky CH-124 Sea King, a Grumman TBM Avenger and a Canadair CT-133 Silver Star. The rugged Avenger, RCN 85861, was forced to ditch in Bedford Basin in 1953 and lay submerged until 1972, when it was raised by base technicians. It served as a gate guardian, but sustained severe deterioration and was moved indoors to one of the 12 Wing hangars. It is now displayed outdoors because of space limitations. A second Avenger, that had been flown as a water bomber in New Brunswick, was acquired from Forest Protection Ltd. of Fredericton by the Museum Foundation in 2012. The last of the FPL fleet, it was flown to the museum and refinished in the attractive two-tone grey RCN scheme. It is now a valued part of the indoor exhibits of museum quality aircraft. Two Sea Kings that were officially inducted in 2018 are among the highlights. One of the two airframes, Serial Number 4001, was the first of four Sea Kings built at Sikorsky's Stratford, Connecticut plant for the RCN. It has been beautifully restored to RCN configuration circa 1963. The second airframe, CF12431, is presented in RCAF configuration, giving the museum a pair of bookends to tell the 55-year story of the versatile Sea King.

Two Grumman/de Havilland Canada CS2F/CP-121 Trackers are on display. Tracker number 1501, in RCN colours, is especially noteworthy as the first Tracker built for the RCN. It actually started as a U.S. Navy Grumman-built S2F-1 purchased by DHC to verify the production jigs and tooling supplied by Grumman. The only American Tracker acquired by the RCN, it flew in various test and engineering roles as serial number X-500 and was re-serialised as 1501 in 1956. Tracker number 1557, still in airworthy condition, represents the

CS2F Trackers that were modified and redesignated as CP-121 maritime reconnaissance aircraft with integration of the Armed Forces in 1968 and the subsequent demise of HMCS Bonaventure.

Fairey Swordfish, serial number HS469 (civil registration C-GRCN), is proudly on display. Withdrawn from RCN service in 1946, this aircraft languished in a farmer's field in Ontario for many years. It was restored in the early 1980s by naval aviation enthusiasts in the Toronto area. After more than 13 years of painstaking work, HS469 flew in April 1994 to Shearwater and was donated to SAM. A McDonnell F2H-3 Banshee is another attention-getter. Among the remaining 11 Banshees struck from the RCN inventory in 1962, this aircraft had been displayed at the entrance to the base until 2000, when it was refurbished by 12 Air Maintenance Squadron for exhibit at the museum. The distinctive nature of the collection is represented by a Piasecki HUP-3 Retriever, acquired in 2002 from the Museum of Flight in Langley, B.C. and replicated as the RCN's first HUP-3, serial number 51-16621. Vintage helicopter enthusiasts will also be impressed with a Sikorsky HO4S Horse, serial number 55885. Delivered to Shearwater in 1955, this helicopter was involved in at least seven rescue mission saving upwards of 20 lives. Most notably, No. 885 was instrumental in saving survivors from a Flying Tiger Super Constellation, carrying 76 American military personnel and family members, which ditched in the North Atlantic.

Two Canadair CT-133 Silver Stars are on display. The first, serial number 133038, is finished in RCN markings typical of the paint scheme of T-birds flown by the Navy in the 1950s and 1960s. The second, serial 133618, is displayed outdoors in low-visibility camouflage grey representing T-birds last flown from Shearwater by Air Command's 434 Squadron in 1994. A Harvard, derived from Harvard serial number 2777 as flown by the RCN in the 1950s, also makes an attractive exhibit. Harvard 2777 was restored from a deteriorated condition and with parts from other Harvards was refurbished as a VC 924 (HMCS Tecumseh) naval air reserve squadron aircraft with "930-NAVY" markings. The museum's restoration projects are fascinating. They include a Beech Expeditor, once stationed at Shearwater, acquired by SAM from a parachute club in Valcourt, Quebec, in 2015, and a Fairey Firefly, PP462, that was among the first of 29 Firefly FR 1's taken on strength by the RCN in 1946 and 1947. In 1950, it was one of nine FR 1's sold to Ethiopia. It languished in the desert until 1993 when its long journey to Shearwater began after a diplomatic agreement with Ethiopia.

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Photos displayed are courtesy of former Chapter President and current member, David MacLellan and as noted.