

The History of N443CB

Welcome to N443CB, an aircraft with a proud lineage and a wonderful, interesting history. N443CB is a DeHavilland Otter. Designed and produced by DeHavilland of Canada, the Otter is widely regarded, along with its smaller cousin the Beaver, as the world's quintessential bush plane.



N443CB at her new home in the Bahamas.

The DeHavilland Otter

The Otter first flew in December, 1951 and ever since it has faithfully served its operators, both civil and military, mostly in remote parts of the world. Designed as a large, rugged bush plane capable of operating on wheels, skis or floats, 446 Otters were built between 1951 and 1967. Otters were sold to 36 countries, in locations as diverse as India, Chile, and Ghana. The US Army was the largest customer, purchasing 200 Otters, where they were instrumental in mapping and survey work from Alaska all the way south to Chile, and also in northern Africa. Otters saw ten years of combat service in Vietnam. The Royal Canadian Air Force purchased 66 Otters, using them primarily in transport and search and rescue roles. Civilian Otters are still the mainstay of the bush world, particularly in Northern Canada, Alaska, and the Pacific Northwest coast, where they have made a legendary contribution to the development of those outback locations by hauling supplies, mail, and people. Otters were even used as retardant bombers to fight forest fires, carrying water in their floats. No other aircraft can provide the Otter's combination of cabin space, load carrying ability, and short take-off and landing performance together with its structural excellence and sound engineering.

N443CB

N443CB was the 387th Otter produced, delivered from DeHavilland's Downsview (near Toronto) production facility to the Royal Canadian Air Force on August 31, 1960. It was assigned to 401 Squadron at St. Hubert, Montreal on October, 1960, where it spent its military career.



9412 in its RCAF livery; Ottawa, August, 1981. Photo provided by Bernard Mac Namara.

Otter 9412 met with an accident on January 19th, 1962 while landing on the frozen Lake of Bays in the Muskoka Lakes area of Ontario. The mission was to land on the lake and set up camp as part of a winter survival training exercise. The pilot performed a touch-and-go on the snow-covered ice of the lake in order to test the surface conditions. He inspected the resulting tracks for half a mile, and then landed at another parallel position. However, as the Otter taxied towards the shore, it encountered thin ice and sank, with the wings resting on the ice and the fuselage full of water, which would later become ice when the temperature dropped. The crew made a rapid evacuation, without any injuries. It was retrieved from the lake and taken to DeHavilland's Downsview facility for repairs.

After nearly twenty years of service at St. Hubert, the plane was put up for disposal. It was one of a number of Otters sold at auction in September 1982, advertised for sale with a total airframe time of 6,333 hours. The purchaser was Silver Pine Air Services Ltd of Pine Falls, Manitoba at a price of \$60,000. It was flown to Pine Falls, and after overhaul and conversion to civilian configuration was registered C-GIIQ in December 1982. Four years later, the Otter was sold to Jackson Air Services Ltd of Flin Flon, Manitoba, where it reliably served the people of Northern Canada for many years as a sturdy, year-round bush plane.



C-GIIQ of Jackson Air Services at Calgary, Alberta, December, 1989. Photo provided by Karl Hayes.

C-GIIQ experienced three accidents with Jackson's. On December 16th, 1987, at its Flin Flon base, the Otter sank through the ice while taxiing for take off, the second dunking of its career. Repairs on this occasion cost \$12,000. Another incident was recorded on 24th January 1990 at Sylvia Lake, Manitoba. The pilot landed too close to the shoreline and the aircraft ran up onto land, causing minor damage to the left wing. A more serious accident befell C-GIIQ at Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan on March 11th, 1994. The Otter was departing from the ice strip at Sandy Bay. Because of the sticky snow conditions, the pilot taxied the aircraft beyond the normal take-off start position in order to provide a longer take-off run. However, the take-off run required was still too long to permit clearance over rising terrain in the departure path, and the aircraft struck the trees and crashed. The Otter decelerated in the trees and remained upright. The pilot and two passengers escaped without injury. Damage to the Otter was very substantial, however, and brought the aircraft's career with Jackson Air Services to an end. The wreck was brought to Kuby's Aircraft at Kenora, Ontario where it lay for eleven years.

Recon Air, of Geraldton, Ontario, purchased four Otters, including C-GIIQ, in October, 2005, with the intention of rebuilding them and offering them for sale in like-new condition.



October, 2005: C-GIIQ arrives in a Geraldton, Ontario snowstorm. It's the white aircraft on the left.

Charles Bethell, of Flamingo Cay, Bahamas, purchased C-GIIQ in March, 2007, and certificated it under US registration as N443CB, with a total airframe time of 12,845 hours. Recon Air's rebuild has created an aircraft that is superior to the already well-respected DeHavilland product of 47 years ago. Leather seating, wool carpeting, fresh-air ventilation, digital music intercom, bubble windows, and advanced soundproofing bring new levels of passenger comfort. Advanced avionics include radio- and satellite-based navigation, terrain awareness warning, and traffic avoidance technology. The 900 horsepower Honeywell-Garrett turboprop engine is vastly more powerful and reliable than the original lumbering piston engine. Brand-new amphibious floats provide the versatility of either land or water operation. Underneath the new paint, many parts, from wiring to fuselage skins, were replaced. The plane's legendary carrying capacity was increased by an additional 1,000 pounds by upgrading the wings and fuselage. Modern metals, paint, and corrosion-proofing assure that the plane will be flying for many more years. ***Welcome Aboard!***

Photos of N443CB undergoing its rebuild at Geraldton, Ontario:



December, 2006



June, 2007



October 19, 2007: Thirteen years after it last flew, N443CB is ready for its first flight test after rebuild.

Credit

N443CB's history is used with the permission of Karl Hayes, Crakaig, Killiney Hill Road, Killiney, County Dublin, Ireland. Karl's 900-page publication, "DeHavilland Canada, DHC-3 Otter, a History" provides a fascinating and comprehensive history of every Otter. CD's of the publication can be purchased by emailing Karl at karl.hayes@goregrimes.ie

