

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

RCN SERIES-PART I  
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HMCS BONAVENTURE  
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KEN ANNETT

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY SERIES. PART IINTRODUCTION

Since it was formed, and during the great World Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, the Royal Canadian Navy chose Gaspesian names for several of its commissioned ships. In so doing the RCN followed a tradition of the Royal Navy. Readers may recall the GASPE' OF YESTERDAY article, "BURN THE GASPEE ! " recounting the dramatic attack by Rhode Islanders on the Royal Navy ship, HMS GASPEE, in Narrangansett Bay, R.I. in June, 1772. (Ref. SPEC, June 11, 1991.) Over time, other Royal Navy ships bore the name, GASPE.

The present ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY SERIES proposes to recall a number of RCN ships with Gaspesian names. The series will include:

<u>NAME OF SHIP</u>	<u>CLASS</u>
HMCS GASPE (I)	MINESWEEPER-BAY CLASS
HMCS GASPE (II)	MINESWEEPER-BAY CLASS
HMCS CHALEUR (I)	MINESWEEPER-BAY CLASS
HMCS CHALEUR (II)	MINESWEEPER-BAY CLASS
HMCS BONAVENTURE	FLEET AIRCRAFT CARRIER
HMCS MATANE	FRIGATE-RIVER CLASS
HMCS MATAPEDIA	CORVETTE
HMCS MONT JOLI	AUXILIARY-EXAMINATION VESSEL
HMCS RESTIGOUCHE (I)	DESTROYER-RIVER CLASS
HMCS RESTIGOUCHE (II)	DESTROYER ESCORT
HMCS MAGDALEN	A/S TRAWLER
HMCS MICMAC	DESTROYER-TRIBAL CLASS





Panorama of Percé Village

BONAVENTURE

ISLAND

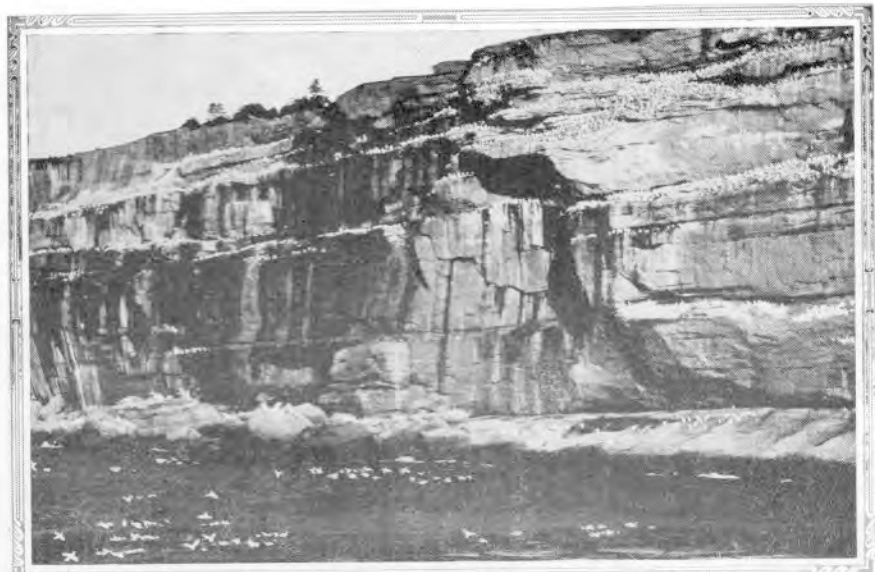
IN

RELATION TO

PERCÉ ROCK AND

VILLAGE OF PERCÉ

VADM MAINGUY, CNS,  
 CHOSE THE NAME OF  
 BONAVENTURE. THE  
 IDEA OF THE ISLAND  
 BEING A BIRD SANCTUARY,  
 MUCH AS AN AIRCRAFT  
 CARRIER WAS, APPEALED TO HIM.



Gannet ledges on Bonaventure Island



Bald rocks and scrubby woods

HMCS BONAVENTURE

light fleet aircraft carrier

builders: Harland and Wolff  
 laid down: 27 Nov. 1943  
 launched: 27 Feb. 1945  
 completed: 17 Jan. 1957  
 displacement: 16,000 tons  
 dimensions: 704by112by80feet, draught 25'  
 guns: 8-3 inch (twin mounts), 8-40mm, 4 salute  
 aircraft: 34  
 machinery: Parsons single reduction geared  
 turbines. 2 shafts.  
 S.H.P.: 42,000-24.5 kts.  
 boilers: 4 Admiralty 3-drum type. Steam  
 pressure at engines: 350lb/sq.in.  
 complement: 1,370 (war)

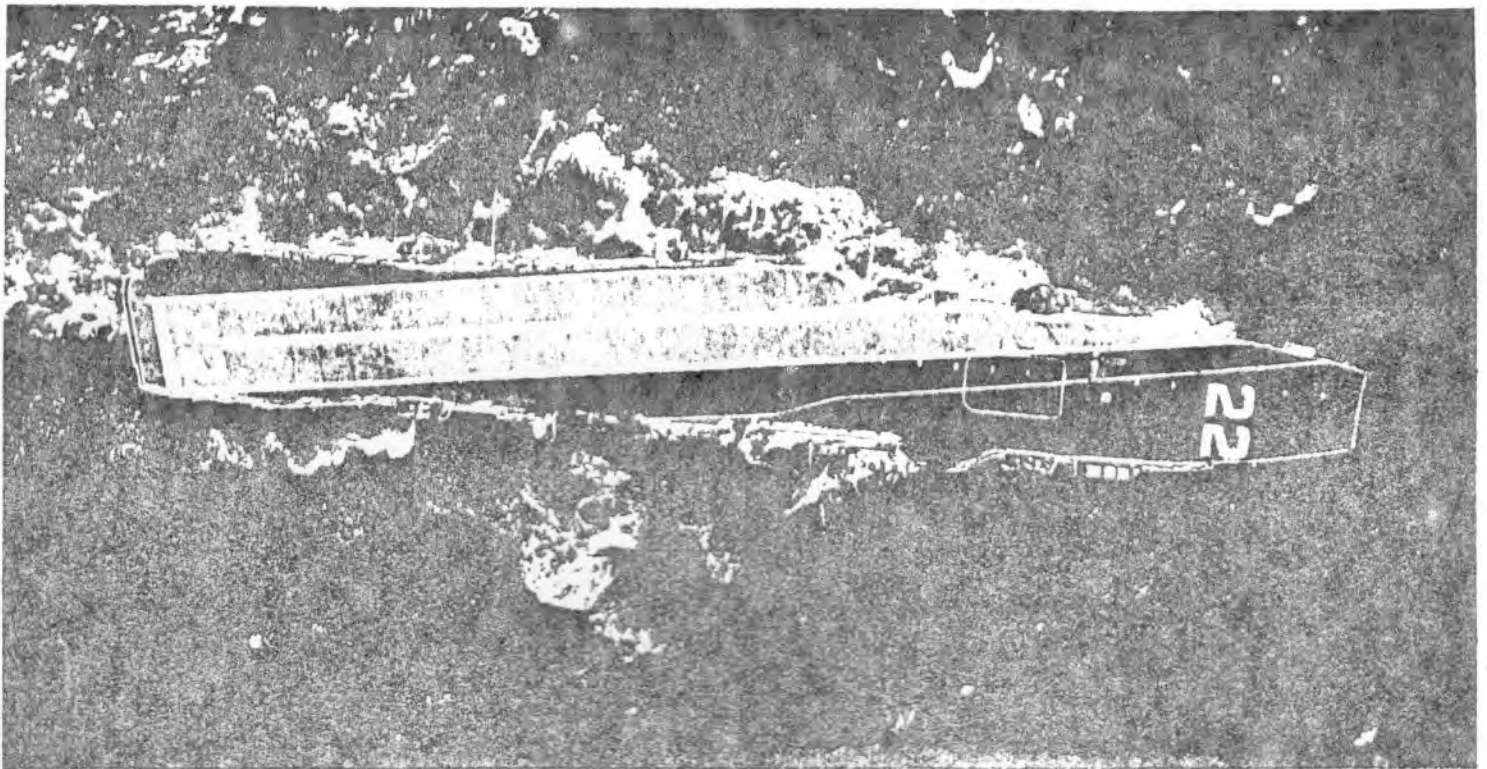
Arrangements were made in 1952 for the purchase by Canada of a suspended sister ship, Powerful from Great Britain for completion to replace the Magnificent. The Powerful, was redesigned by Harland and Wolff Ltd. Belfast, to handle jet aircraft: the modification included the strengthening of the flight deck and elevators and improvements in the deck arrester gear, and the British steam catapult, capable of launching jet and heavy aircraft of types. The Powerful was suspended in May 1946, but construction was resumed in July 1952, and she was re-named Bonaventure.



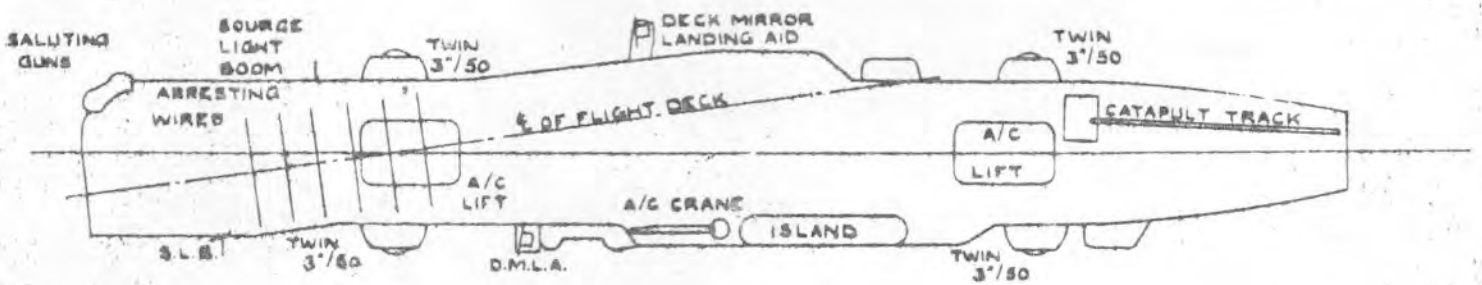
*Bonaventure, 1968*

# FLIGHT DECKS OF 'BONNIE' AND 'MAGGIE'

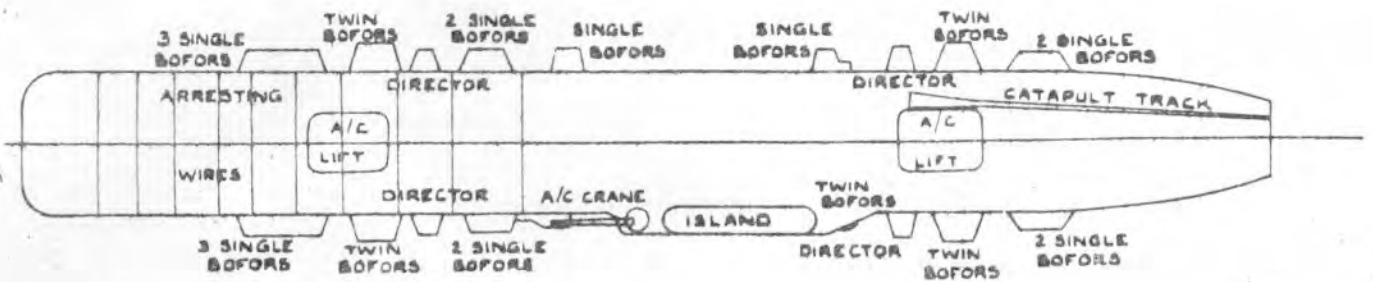
Diagrams Show Effect of Jet Era on Carrier Design



FLIGHT DECK SKETCH COMPARISON



HMS BONAVENTURE



HMS MAGNIFICENT

Proceedings July 1954

## H. M. C. S. BONAVENTURE

IT WAS IN THE EARLY MORNING OF WEDNESDAY JUNE 19<sup>TH</sup> 1957 THAT THE BONAVENTURE STEAMED DOWN BELFAST LOUGH ON HER VOYAGE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC TO HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA WHICH WAS TO BE HER NEW HOME BASE.

HER COMPLETION WAS AN OCCASION OF GREAT REJOICING FOR SHE WAS CANADA'S "OWN" AND THE PRIDE OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY.

NOW WITH THE ADDITION OF THE NEW CARRIER, CANADIAN NAVAL AVIATION HAD DEFINITELY COME OF AGE:

LAI D DOWN BY HARLAND & WOLFF, BELFAST IN 1943 THE CARRIER THEN CALLED H.M.S. POWERFUL HAD STAYED UNCOMPLETED AFTER HER LAUNCHING IN 1946 UNTIL AGREEMENT WAS MADE WITH THE BRITISH ADMIRALTY TO BUY AND COMPLETE HER.

OTTAWA REVEALED THAT THE CARRIER BE RENAMED THE BONAVENTURE A NAME TAKEN FROM A SMALL ISLAND IN THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE NAMED BY JACQUES CARTIER IN 1534.

AFTER A CONTROVERSIAL REFIT IN THE 60'S, H. M. C. S. BONAVENTURE RECEIVED HER FINAL SALUTE IN BEDFORD BASIN FROM ONE OF HER TRACKER AIRCRAFT AND WAS THEN WITHDRAWN FROM SERVICE.

THE 20,000 TON VESSEL WAS DECOMMISSIONED ON APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>, 1970 AND SOLD TO A JAPANESE FIRM FOR SCRAP. THIS ENDED CANADIAN NAVAL AVIATION AT SEA AND TURNED A PAGE OF NAVAL HISTORY.

CAPT. I. B. FORTHERINGHAM, COMMANDING OFFICER OF C.F.B. SHEARWATER SET A PERSONAL RECORD THAT DAY, WHEN HE BECAME THE LAST PILOT TO FLY A FIXED WING AIRCRAFT OFF THE CARRIER. HE WAS ALSO THE FIRST TO LAND ON HER DECKS IN 1957.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF HMCS BONAVENTURE

The Light Fleet Aircraft Carrier, HMCS Bonaventure, was laid down as HMS Powerful in November 1943 in the yards at Belfast of the shipbuilding firm of Harland and Wolff and launched there on 25 February 1946. In May work was stopped on her. The Royal Canadian Navy needed a replacement for HMCS Magnificent and obtained approval from the Cabinet to purchase the still-unfinished ship. The British Admiralty placed a contract with the builders for the completion of the ship on Canada's behalf. Work was then resumed on her and she was commissioned finally in the Royal Canadian Navy on 21 January 1957. The name of the carrier was taken from a small island off the Gaspé Peninsula in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, known as Ile Bonaventure.

Before she could cross the Atlantic, there were months of trials and tests for the ship. She finally sailed for passage on 19 June. Fog and a crowd of well-wishers awaited her at Halifax.

The years that followed Bonaventure's arrival at her home base were occupied with exercising in company with other ships and with the training of men, those activities that are the principal ones for the larger ships in peacetime. While she manoeuvred with squadrons of destroyers, flying off and receiving back her aircraft, a destroyer escort steamed on her quarter, alert to hasten to the rescue of its occupants should an aircraft crash into the sea on landing or take-off.



As well as with Canadian ships, she shared exercises with US and British ships and with those of other NATO countries. This activity took her many times to Bermuda and Caribbean waters, as well as to the United States, Britain and the Mediterranean.

It was while crossing the Atlantic in company with the First Canadian Escort Squadron to take part in a NATO exercise that, on 23 September 1962, she and HMCS Athabaskan (as plane guard) were ordered to detach and proceed to a point 500 miles off the Irish coast. There, due to engine failure, a Super-Constellation aircraft, belonging to the American Flying Tiger Airlines, had been forced down with 76 persons aboard.

The scene of the disaster was 320 miles away. From first light on the 24th, Bonaventure kept her aircraft in the air, combing the surface of the ocean for signs of survivors. At noon, they intercepted the Swiss SS Celerina. At about 0330, she had picked up forty-eight survivors from a raft. Four of them were badly injured and were transferred by helicopter to Bonaventure where they could receive medical attention. Although the aircraft aboard the carrier searched systematically for many hours, no more survivors were found.

Of a different nature was Bonaventure's chief operation of 1964. In Cyprus that year, the ancient conflict between Greek and Turkish residents reached a crisis. To ensure that it did not develop into open warfare, the United Nations formed a peacekeeping force to which Canada was invited to contribute troops and supplies. In order

to convey them to the Mediterranean, Bonaventure was ordered home from Gibraltar where she was taking part in NATO exercises. This was on 7 March and she reached Halifax on the 13th. She was scarcely secured to a jetty when work began loading her with vehicles, stores, ammunition and Tracker aircraft. On the 18th troops came aboard and she sailed for Famagusta, Cyprus, where she came to anchor on the 30th. After the stores and troops had been landed and the ship's company had been granted a day of relaxation in the port, the aircraft carrier with attendant destroyer escorts left for Malta and Gibraltar, to each of which she made short visits, and then crossed the ocean to Norfolk, Virginia, to begin a series of tests with Douglas Skyhawk aircraft.

HMCS Bonaventure remained an active and useful member of the fleet until her paying off on 3 July 1970. She was put up for sale and a broker bought her and resold her to the firm of Mitsui of Japan. This company entered into partnership with Tung-Cheng Iron and Steel Works in the southern Taiwan port of Kaohsiung, for the purpose of scrapping the carrier. In October 1971, a spokesman for the Taiwan company reported that about 40% of the ship had been broken up and that completion of the work could be expected in another two months.

Directorate of History  
National Defence Headquarters  
Ottawa, 3 July 1974

# Bonnie, her crew made a name for themselves

By Robert Gordon  
Staff Reporter

On the Belfast, Ireland waterfront on this date in 1957, HMCS Bonaventure was commissioned in the Royal Canadian Navy, giving the navy a fixed-wing aircraft capability which would come to a controversial and untimely end in 1970.

The Bonnie, as she was affectionately called by her sailors, replaced HMCS Magnificent, on loan to Canada from the Royal Navy, making her the first and only Canadian-owned aircraft carrier.

"It was a happy time. Morale was good during the commissioning ceremony in the hangar," said Bob Dube, one of the original "deck apes" on Bonaventure who was flown over from Canada to put her through trials and sail her back to her new home port of Halifax.

Until her wings were clipped in 1970, Banshee fighter jets, tracker anti-submarine aircraft and helicopters made thousands of landings on the 700-foot-long flight deck with the large 22 painted on the stern.

"We made a name for ourselves in the operation of that ship. . . . She and the crew got continual praise from other navies," said Vice-Admiral Harry Porter (ret.), master of Bonaventure in 1965-66.

But living conditions for the 1,350 officers and men working aboard Bonaventure "were spartan to say the least," Admiral Porter said.

During long southern cruises, her metal flight deck would heat the uninsulated quarters below to a sweltering temperature. The sailors were jammed into messes tighter than a tin of sardines

and the clang of aircraft landing on the deck rattled throughout the ship 24 hours a day.

"In my mess there were 80 men sleeping in bunks arranged in four tiers," Mr. Dube said.

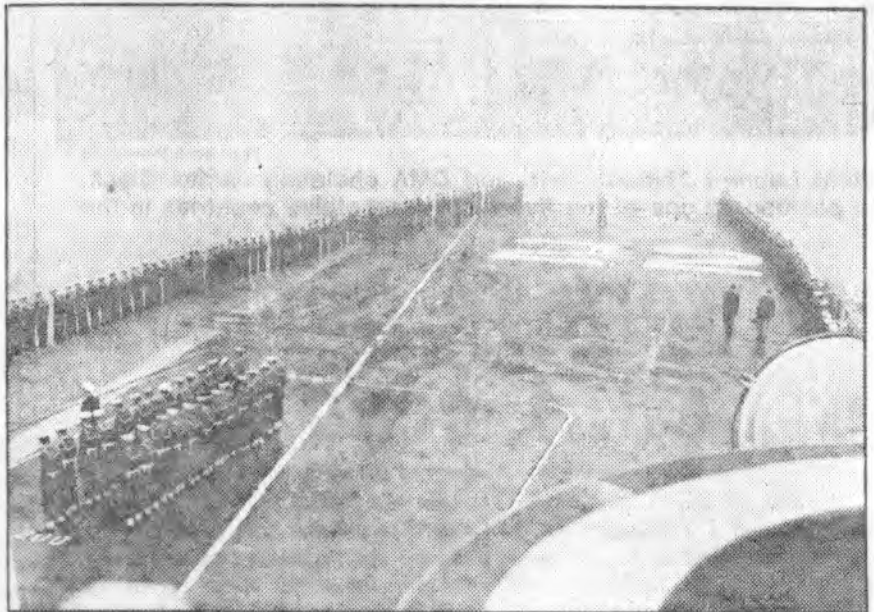
The Bonnie met an untimely death in 1970 just after a controversial \$13-million refit. Government funding cutbacks forced the navy to scrap something and it seemed better to get rid of Bonaventure than half a dozen destroyers.

"There was 13 years of life left in her when she was scrapped. Scrapping the Bonaventure was, well, pretty well, the death knell for fixed wing aviation in the navy," Admiral Porter said.

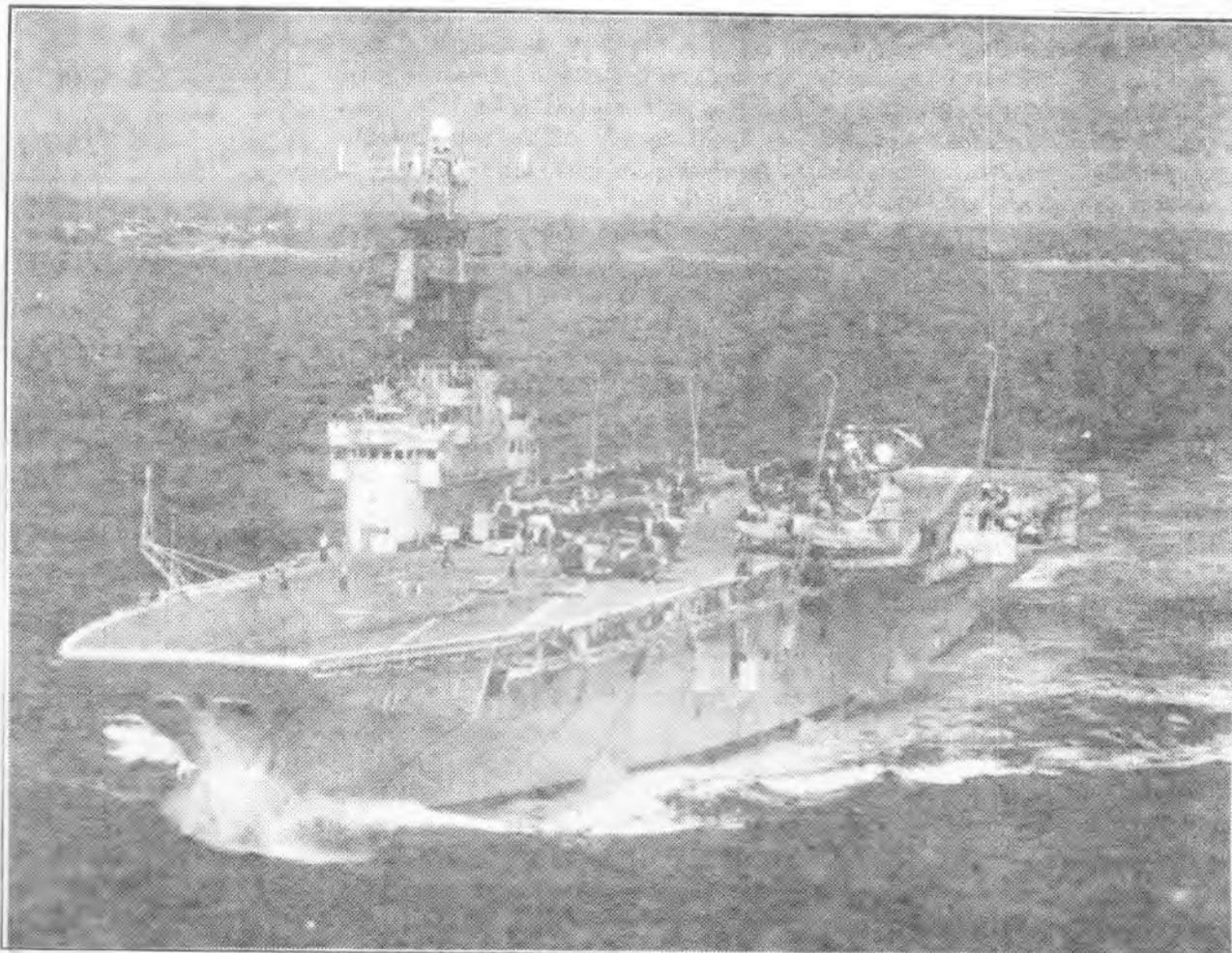
But there was still one party left before Bonaventure was stripped of salvageable gear and towed from Halifax to a breakers yard in Taiwan. A message was sent to all armed forces bases across Canada inviting anyone who had served on the vessel to a farewell party.

"They flew me and my wife free of charge from British Columbia for the party," said Clare Christie, who served aboard Bonaventure as a leading seaman.

Memories of the Bonaventure are still strong in the navy and there is a standing joke that Bonaventure is still around; in the form of razor blades and Japanese cars made from the hull of the 20,000-ton ship.



# Memories of a Lady



by Suzanne Lajoie, A/BInfo

She was called HMS Powerful, her keel laid down in 1943, and she was a British designed aircraft carrier. For most of us, this description does not fit HMCS Bonaventure, the first carrier to be owned by Canada and the last to sail for this country. She was launched in 1945 but was not commissioned until January 17, 1957 in Belfast, Ireland. It had been determined in 1946 that Canada required a replacement for HMCS Magnificent and the Canadian Navy obtained approval from Cabinet to purchase Powerful. The British Admiralty then placed a contract with the builders for the completion of the ship on Canada's behalf. Her new name "Bonaventure" was chosen by VAdm Mainguy for Ile Bonaventure, a small island off the Gaspé Peninsula, a bird sanctuary in fact, just as the carrier would be a sanctuary for the "birds" of the Fleet Air Arm.

She arrived in Halifax on June 26, 1957, carrying on deck an experimental hydrofoil craft that was a predecessor to HMCS Bras D'Or. Until her demise 20 years ago, Banshee fighter jets, Tracker anti-submarine aircraft, and helicopters made thousands of landings on the 700 foot long flight deck with the large 22 painted on the stern. The flight operations were of such high calibre that she and the crew received continual praise from other navies with which she operated.

However, her crew quarters were anything but comfortable by today's standards. When she was sailing in the south, her metal flight deck would heat the uninsulated living quarters to a sweltering temperature. The messes were tightly packed with human bodies and the noise of aircraft landing reverberated throughout the ship 24 hours a day. But somehow, amidst all of the discomfort, when a former crew member talks about the ship, the overwhelming sense you receive is of pride in a ship that did her job well and regret that her life could not have been extended.

She also showed that she was able to be of great use in peace as well as war when she conducted rescue efforts such as on September 23, 1962, when she and Athabaskan were called to the aid of a civilian Super-Constellation aircraft with 76 persons aboard which had been forced down 500 miles off the Irish coast. Although 320 miles away from the disaster, Bonaventure kept her aircraft in the air from first light of day until well into the 25th of September. A Swiss ship had picked up 48 survivors from a raft but the aircraft were unable to locate any others although searching systematically for many hours. Those who had been rescued were transferred to the "Bonnie" for medical attention.

In 1964 Bonaventure was involved in peacekeeping in Cyprus. She was removed from NATO exercises near Gibraltar to steam to Halifax, load vehicles, stores, ammunition, Tracker aircraft and troops and transport them to Cyprus.

Bonaventure was not without her mishaps but one in particular, though complicated had a happy ending. One early black morning, the "Bonnie" was endeavouring to recover six Trackers. As the first one landed, the left undercarriage went over the side and broke its back, throwing its contents, including crew, into the sea. As a destroyer always accompanied the carrier in case of just such an accident, it should have been fairly easy to save the men but the bow of the whaler that was being lowered from the ship went down into the ocean while the stern stayed up, resulting in the crew of the whaler joining the aircrew in the sea. The destroyer proceeded to throw heaving lines to the whaler crew but these were sucked up into the intakes and the circulating water pumps, rendering the destroyer immobile. In addition to all this, there were still five Trackers in the air. The Commanding Officer then circled the destroyer five times. With each circle, one Tracker was recovered, and the men in the water were rescued by the destroyer's second whaler.

Bonaventure survived storms at sea, thousands of planes landing on her decks, and the multitude of different surprises that the North Atlantic can offer. But she could not survive man and his decisions. After what was to have been a mid-life refit, carried out from 1966 to 1967 and which cost \$11 million, she was paid off July 1, 1970 and sold for scrap. Shortly before her demise, a message was sent to all armed forces bases across Canada inviting anyone who had served on the "Bonnie" to a farewell party. A good farewell, perhaps, but one with much sadness. Memories of her are still strong.

I have heard it said that you could still be shaving with a razor blade or driving a car made from the hull of the 20,000 ton ship.

# BONNIE'S STORM

Plagued by rough weather during their operations with NATO forces in European waters last fall, the five warships of the RCN task force looked forward to smooth sailing on their homeward passage in early December. That their hopes were shattered is now well known. The *Bonaventure* and her four attendant destroyer escorts, the *Algonquin*, *Iroquois*, *Sioux* and *Athabaskan*, reached Halifax in Mid-December, all reporting damage of varying degrees of severity. In the case of the destroyer escorts, the damage was mostly to deck fittings, although some gear was swept overboard. The *Bonaventure*, offering a bigger target, suffered heavier damage. An officer in the *Iroquois* received internal injuries and was placed in hospital in the Azores. Five persons in the *Bonaventure* were superficially injured. The villain of the story was a furious storm which wandered from its predicted path. The following account of the storm and what the *Bonaventure* had to contend with while it raged was written by the aircraft carrier's weather officer, Lt.-Cdr. R. M. Morgan.

NATO EXERCISES and her visit to the United Kingdom ended, HMCS *Bonaventure* slipped from Middle Slip Jetty, Portsmouth, on December 3 and proceeded to sea. For those on board, this was the most-anxiously awaited part of the cruise, because we were on our way back to Halifax for Christmas with many surprises for our families loaded on board. There were presents for the kids, frilly things and jewellery for the wife, and bargains for the house. Every inch of available space had something securely stowed away in it—a toy car here, a chest of china there, and, in the officers' flat, an antique grandfather's clock which competed on the hour with the ship's bell. At one juncture an enthusiastic home builder who wanted space for a dining-room suite, suggested that perhaps we could do with one less aircraft on board.

Everyone was looking forward to better weather and a few good flying days on the return journey. We had experienced high winds and heavy seas off Northern Ireland during the previous month, and flying had been impossible most of the time. A number of our pilots had been forced to savour the austerity of service accommodation at diversion airfields in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England, and were hoping for good flying weather, at least near the Azores.

However, the departure did not augur well. Outside the Nab Tower a stiff wind was already blowing and weather was only marginal when we began to take on aircraft. Heavy thunderclouds almost covered the sky, and the visibility was down to two miles in rain at times. The last aircraft was safely on board by 1600, but not a minute too

soon, for the wind was now up to gale force from the west as *Bonnie* turned down the Channel on the homeward leg.

The morning of the 4th dawned brightly. The wind had moderated to 25-30 knots and remained that way throughout the day, but the swell, which had been generating during the past few days, was too heavy for flying operations. The helicopter was launched off Ushant to land one of the ship's company for compassionate reasons, but this was accomplished only by getting in the lee of one of the islands inshore. During the night of the 4th and the forenoon of the 5th, good headway was made across the Bay of Biscay although a heavy westerly swell was still running.

Early Saturday morning, December 5, a small storm was developing in the Gulf Stream to the east of Nova Scotia. It was expected to move rapidly across the Atlantic at 50 knots in an east-northeasterly direction, and then curve northeastwards and pass up the west coast of Ireland. By the time it reached the eastern Atlantic, the *Bonaventure* was expected to be well to the southwest of Finisterre, and so the storm was not considered too great a threat to the ship. Until early evening, the storm behaved as expected. The wind had begun to freshen again, and a gale was forecast as the centre followed its expected path to the north of the ship. Later, on Saturday evening, radio reception deteriorated to an almost complete blackout and no reliable information on the location of the centre could be obtained for the next 12 hours.

On Sunday, December 6, the storm struck with such damaging power and severity that all on board will ever remember it as "the day of the big storm". By early morning, the Met. man had received enough information to pinpoint the storm again, and he discovered that the path was now easterly and that the storm centre would pass into the northern half of the Bay of Biscay, about 200 miles to the north of the ship. A severe gale was expected with winds gusting to 65 knots during the forenoon and continuing during the day. This forecast had scarcely been made when the wind gained velocity and within an

hour had reached hurricane force, with gigantic waves building up. By 0900 the visibility was reduced to one-half-mile in blowing spray, with frequent gusts of over 70 knots. At 1000 the wind had reached its maximum with the passage of the cold front, and an average steady wind of 68 knots was recorded. However, there were frequent gusts of probably 80-85 knots, and it is estimated that the maximum was 90 knots. This is only conjecture, though for the wind-speed recorders on board are not capable of reading above 70 knots. During the forenoon, the waves reached an average height of over 5 feet, and some of the larger ones, shown in the photographs, rose to more than 6 feet.

Throughout the height of the storm the ship behaved remarkably well. She was headed into the seas and rode most of the waves with little trouble. However, the occasional wave out of phase was very dangerous as it swept down the starboard side and across the flight deck. One solid jet of water struck the port mirror and twisted it into a grotesque shape as though it were made of tin foil. Another crashed into the starboard mirror sponson, tearing the welded seams open and buckling the steel bracket supports. When the shivering "old lady" dragged her length over another wave, it was the end for the stern catwalk, and the largest wave of all, probably about 65 feet, came green over the compass platform and stove in the window on the starboard side. The most dangerous period occurred when the forward lift opened up and the hangars began to flood. The free-surface water which began to build up on this large expanse of deck might have threatened the stability of the ship but for the prompt action of the Damage Control Department.

Morale remained high throughout this difficult time. Every possible action to mitigate the damaging and dangerous effect of the storm was speedily executed. Water pouring into the forward messes caused discomfort and soaked personal gear, but all was borne with good humour, and the wits provided many laughs. Mealtime became adven-

ture time. It is to the credit of the galley staffs that hot meals were delivered to the recipients. However, there was many a slip between the plate and the lip.

To the chagrin of a number of letter writers, the mail office was flooded and about 400 outgoing letters were reduced to pulp and were bailed out in a bucket. Fortunately, there was no incoming mail in the office at the time. Looking at the loss percentage-wise, it was not great, considering that about 30,000 letters had passed through the mail office during the cruise.

The heavy seas continued until Monday morning. During this period the bow was pounded mercilessly, plates being stove in and the cable locker flooded. On the morning of the 7th, however, the storm began to subside and it was possible to increase speed and run away southwestward from the heavy-weather area. By this time, the centre of the storm was moving northward into the British Channel giving rise to severe weather in United Kingdom coastal waters. There were ships in distress in the Straits of Dover and the Pentland Firth. According to the radio, a number of crack ocean liners, including the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *United States*, were hove to. The French weather ship located about 80 miles to the north of *Bonaventure* during the height of the storm, reported winds of 100 knots and seas of 60 feet.

It had been a very unusual storm, both in its track and wind-intensity, and an unusually severe one, even for the notorious Bay of Biscay. For many of the ship's complement, it was the worst weather they had ever experienced, and doubtless everyone hopes it will remain a record.

The following data indicates the unusual severity of the storm:

Duration of winds of Force 8 or over: 1500/5th-2200/7th;

Duration of Force 12 (Hurricane Force): 1000/6th-1500/6th;