

Maritime Central Airways

Maritime Central Airways was formed on 30 September, 1941, at Charlottetown, PEI. Carl Burke, a native of P.E.I, and Josiah Anderson, were the two founders. Mr. Anderson was killed during WW II while flying with Ferry Command.

Service commenced on 8 December 1941, operating a Barclay-Grow seaplane, Fairchild 24 and Boeing 247D providing service between Charlottetown, P.E.I. and Moncton, N.B. In January 1942, service was started from Charlottetown to the Magdalen Islands.

The U.S. government chartered the Barkley-Grow to search for a downed B-17 in December 1942. On 23 December 1942, while the Barkley-Grow was making a landing on the sea ice near Angmagssalik, Greenland, the plane broke through the ice. The pilots made their way to shore and were found six days later by a group of Inuit. After a few days recovering with the Inuit, the pilots were returned to a us Army base.

A DH-89A Rapide was added to the fleet in 1942.

The first Lockheed 10 Electra was added in 1943, three more purchased in 1945, and another bought in 1946. A Lockheed 12A was operated for four months in 1945 and two ex-Royal Canadian Air Force Cessna T-50 Cranes were added to the fleet in 1945.

The arrival of the first DC-3 in February 1946 allowed MCA to operate the first P.E.I. to N.S. flight. Two more DC-3s were added later the same year, raising the MCA fleet to one Rapide, four Lockheed 10 Electras, two Cessna Cranes and three DC-3s. More than thirty two thousand passengers were flown in 1946.

International service was begun by Maritime Central on 18 June 1948, with a flight from Sydney, Nova Scotia to the French Island of St. Pierre. The airline was kept busy with its other scheduled routes, plus charters for government officials, mail contracts, lobster hauling charters and ice patrols for the Federal Government in the late 1940s. A Canso was bought in 1948 only for its engines, but turned out to be in such good condition that it was refurbished and put into service. Two small Stinson aircraft were also purchased that year, but served only briefly.

The 1950s were another period of tremendous growth for MCA. A single Curtiss C-46 first saw service with Maritime Central in 1950, serving for only two years. An influx of six DC-3s in 1952 swelled the fleet size for this aircraft to eight, despite the loss of a DC-3 eighteen miles from Gaspé, Quebec on 22 March 1952. By 1953, MCA was the third largest carrier in Canada.

In April 1953, the airline opened service to Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island. Fred Briggs and Carl Burke bought 50% of Boreal Airways that year and formed Boreal Air Service. Boreal, later renamed Nordair, was kept separate from the main operations of Maritime Central. Boreal and Nordair and MCA had a close working relationship and several aircraft were exchanged between the two companies.

The building of the Distant Early Warning Line (DEW Line) in 1955, allowed rapid expansion of Maritime Central. They received the contracts to supply air transport to seventeen of the forty-two DEW Line sites. Four Avro Yorks, four Curtiss C-46s, two DC-4s and another DC-3 were added to the fleet to carry out this service.

Maritime Central's lone Bristol Freighter, obtained in 1953 from Associated Airways, crashed on 13 February 1956 while taking off from Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island, a vehicle on board shifted to the rear of the cabin, causing the aircraft to stall and crash from about one thousand feet.

The company began operating international charters in 1956 and purchased three more DC-4s to service these flights. During the Hungarian airlift of 1956, the airline made numerous flights to Europe, returning to Canada with refugees.

One international charter ended in tragedy on 11 August 1957, when a DC-4, returning from the United Kingdom, crashed near Issoudun, Quebec and all seventy-nine on board were killed. Also in 1957, MCA set-up Nordair as a subsidiary with operations based at Dorval in Montreal. Nordair, soon on its own from MCA, would go on to become a major Canadian regional carrier in its own right before being absorbed by Canadian Pacific Air Lines in the mid-eighties.

In 1958, MCA planned to purchase two DC-6As, but these aircraft were never delivered to the company. In June 1959 however, MCA became the second Canadian operator to fly the Vickers Viscount. The MCA aircraft was a series 800 Viscount, while the Viscounts flown by Trans Canada Airlines were Series 700 aircraft. The difference between these aircraft was that the series 800 had a 9'3" longer cabin, rectangular cabin doors (rather than the distinctive elliptical doors on the TCA aircraft) and increased engine power. The aircraft could cruise at 320 mph and carry up to seventy-one passengers. The MCA aircraft had removable bulkheads, permitting the passenger/freight ratio to be altered depending on the route being flown. This aircraft was flown throughout Newfoundland and the maritimes until sold in April 1962.

The DC-3 fleet was used extensively during the 1950s and right up until the merger in 1963. Three of these aircraft were written off in accidents during the period. The first, CF-BXZ, crashed ten miles northwest of Gaspé, Quebec on 22 March, 1955. The second accident occurred three years later, on 25 November 1955, at one of the DEW Line sites, (68.33N, 83.15W). The third accident

occurred on 15 April 1961, when DC-3, CF-FKQ, crashed at Moncton, New Brunswick. In all, sixteen DC-3s served with Maritime Central Airways, more than with any of the other regional airlines.

To replace the Viscount, two Dart Heralds were ordered for delivery in 1962. One plane, CF-MCK, was painted in full Maritime Central colours and used by Handley Page for a 12,000 mile demonstration tour in 1962. The two ordered planes were not purchased by MCA, but the Company did buy one Herald from Nordair, CF-NAF, in November 1962. This thirty-six to forty-four passenger aircraft stayed with the company only for a short time, being sold to Eastern Provincial just prior to the merger of the two companies in 1963.

The Maritime Central Airways fleet in 1963 consisted of the Herald, one DC-4, four DC-3s, four C-46s and two Beech 18s. One C-46 was lost in a hangar fire in Moncton in January of that year and another was sold to Nordair. A DC-3 was also sold to Nordair and one of the Beech 18s was sold.

It was realized that the Maritimes and Newfoundland could only support one regional airline, thus after long negotiations, the smaller Eastern Provincial Airways took over Maritime Central Airways in September, 1963. One DC-4, three DC-3s, two C-46s and a Beech 18 went to the new company, called Eastern Provincial Airways (1963) Ltd; thus ended the history of Maritime Central Airways.