

Flight



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NEWFOUNDLAND'S FLYING BOAT FESTIVAL

OVER 400 GATHER AT HISTORIC SEA PLANE BASE

BY LAUREN NAGEL

While most of us would settle for a single witness to our best landings, one seaplane crew was welcomed by an adoring crowd upon their arrival in Botwood, Newfoundland and Labrador this past August. Few outside this community are aware of the Flying Boat Festival that takes place in Botwood each summer, with fun activities planned for an entire long weekend. The festivities celebrate the flying boats that created the initial phase of commercial transatlantic aviation, an industry that put Botwood on the map back in 1937. This town harbours a rich piece of Canadian aviation history, though an actual flying boat had, until this year, not landed there in years.

Botwood became an important centre for military and aviation activity in the 1930s, in addition to its role as a shipping port. Its importance grew significantly when, in 1933, Charles and Anne Lindbergh stopped in Botwood in their Lockheed Sirius floatplane and declared it an ideal location as a terminus for transatlantic flights. On July 6, 1937, this vision became fact as Pan American's Clipper III seaplane (a Sikorsky 42) departed Botwood for Foynes, Ireland at the same time as British Imperial Airways' Caledonia (a Short Empire) departed from Ireland on the opposite route.

With the successful arrival of both aircraft, transatlantic commercial flight in airplanes over the North Atlantic was born. This success was followed by more transatlantic passenger flights in 1939, including the introduction of Pan American's luxurious Boeing 314 Yankee Clipper, which made it more appealing to the adventurous and well-heeled traveller. Botwood remained an important base during the Second



World War as any passengers travelling to or from North America did so via the seaplane port. After 1945, the use of flying boats declined as land planes became more popular, though the town still memorializes them with the Flying Boat Museum and Festival.

Many years later, in 2019, one crew brought a flying boat back to the festival: cross-Canada Veebee explorers Euclid Benoit (pilot), Doug Tudor (co-pilot), Jan Benoit (safety officer) and Joan Hutchins (morale officer).

On August 5 the Flying Boat Festival was at its peak, culminating with the holiday Monday celebrating Botwood Day. The Veebee crew made a point to arrive on this day, approaching the town while communicating with their on-the-ground contacts: a local pilot and an air traffic controller on leave from the military. They performed a low fly-by of the port area where hundreds of festi-

▲ Euclid's Veebee (a Republic Seabee decertified and re-registered as a homebuilt) on Botwood's slipway.

val goers waved and cheered them on. They then landed on the water near the festival area, water-taxed toward the slipway, lowered their wheels and taxied up the slipway where around 400 people were gathered. Throughout the entire arrival the crowd was energetic and excited to see the first flying boat arrival in years.

"It was a great day and evening with the festivities continuing well into the wee hours, well after we had retired," said pilot Euclid. Before leaving the port, they let dozens of excited children take turns sitting in the cockpit and having photos taken with their families.

The residents and visitors to the Botwood Flying Boat Festival proved that they, too, were All For Flight! 🛩️