

## Cranberry Swamp yields relic

Usually only duck hunters go into Cranberry Swamp at the foot of Little Lake, Ontario. But at 2 a.m. on June 26 last year, Bob Griffith, a retired contractor, was tramping through the mud and undergrowth on a different kind of hunt. Griffith raises prize sheep and a stray dog had chased two of them into the swamp.

During the search, Griffith's eye caught a round object which, in the moonlight, looked like an old boiler, possibly from a sawmill. At close range he found it was made of wood. He thought it might be a boat or part of a *Mosquito*, the famous wooden airplane, neither of which belonged in a swamp.

The next day Griffith phoned the Canadian Armed Forces base at Trenton and reported finding "either a boat or a plane". The military, police and game wardens routinely pass on tips of possible aircraft wreckage to Transport Canada's accident investigation branch. This time the report was made to the duty inspector in Toronto, Gordon McSwain, who made arrangements for transportation to the site.

### Patches of red

At first glance the remnants did look like a boat — an ark, in fact, but metal struts inside quickly convinced McSwain and Charles Batchelor that they were looking at the hull of a seaplane, most likely a *Vedette*. Patches of red paint on the keel suggested the owner. Red was used for the lower part of the hull of air force



Two of the treasure hunters, Gordon McSwain, Transport Canada investigator (left), and Bob Bradford, National Museum of Science and Technology.

planes before the Second World War.

Back in Toronto, McSwain phoned Bob Bradford of the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. Bradford, an expert on old planes, eagerly pieced together the story on this one — a Vickers *Vedette G-CYWO*, an air force plane that crashed on September 23, 1937.

On that day, 40 years ago, flying officer Michael Doyle was on a cross-country training flight from the seaplane and navigation school at Trenton when the fuel pump broke. He steered the single engine plane toward the nearest open water — Little Lake — and came down in Cranberry Swamp. Doyle, second pilot H.A. Walker, and navigator J.L.

Bevan were unhurt. The plane was beyond repair, though, and the air force took anything they could haul away, including the engine, instruments and ailerons.

### "Vedette" story

The *Vedette* was a real flying machine of the "silk-scarf" era. The pilots sat side by side in a double cockpit, and the observer or photographer perched alone in the nose. The observer didn't have a proper seat. He either stood or he brought along a wooden box and cushion. Furthermore, he wasn't tied in like the pilots who attached themselves to the floor with cables hooked to their parachute harnesses. There's the story of the pilot who was flying a few feet above a lake behind a flock of ducks when the ducks suddenly reversed direction. The pilot instinctively lowered his head forcing the controls forward. The *Vedette* bounced off the water with a jolt that sent the observer flying into the lake.

In all, 61 *Vedettes* were built at Vickers' Longueuil, Quebec, plant in the 1920s. They were lighter than most flying boats of that era and, because of their double wings, could take off in six seconds, a good time for seaplanes of that vintage. Top speed was about 128 km/h.

As the *Vedettes* wore out they were retired in the areas where they were last flown. By the early 1940s, the plane had become extinct.

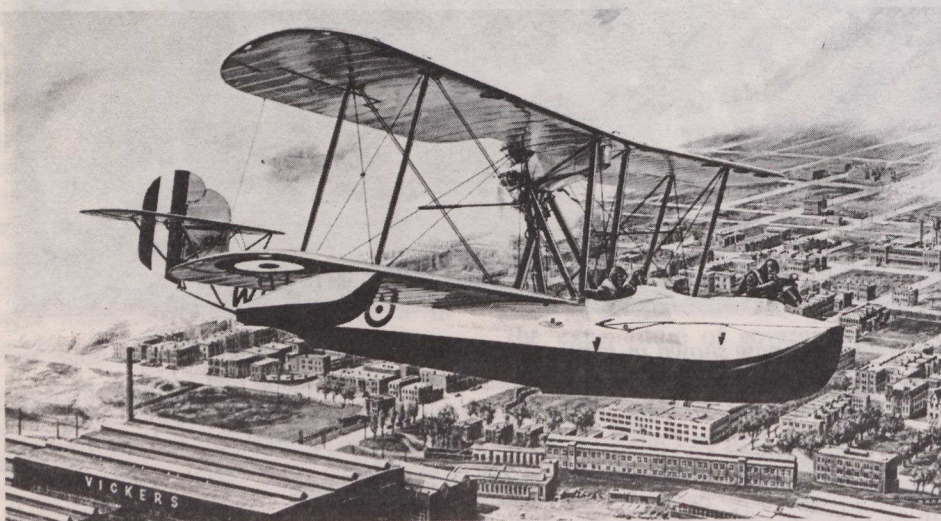
McSwain took Bradford into the swamp to make a "positive identification". Then a crew from the museum slipped cedar poles under the hull and gently skidded it to dry ground where they crated it. A National Defence helicopter lifted the crate to Trenton airport, and a truck brought it to the museum in Ottawa.

### Precious piece

The hull is the only artifact of the *Vedette*, a Canadian-designed and built seaplane. No other evidence exists, except yellowed photographs and the recollections of pilots and others who remember it.

One day a reconstructed *Vedette* may be on display in a Canadian museum, its hull carefully modelled from the one found in Cranberry Swamp.

"It seems that nobody's interested until they're all gone," says McSwain, who helped plug a gap in Canadian aviation history.



The Vickers plant at Longueuil, Quebec, produced 61 Vedette flying boats, the last of which was flown in the 1940s. The cameraman in the front cockpit had to get along without a seat or a windscreen.