

Search and Rescue

In a country as large and sparsely populated as Canada, the rescue of people in remote areas is a particular challenge.

The national Search and Rescue organization responds to more than 9,000 distress calls a year. In an emergency, the movements of Canadian Forces aircraft and helicopters and Transport Canada's Coast Guard vessels are coordinated at four centres across Canada, in Halifax, N.S., Trenton, Ont., Edmonton, Alta., and Victoria, B.C.

One of the most spectacular SAR operations was the great MV *Prinsendam* rescue.

On October 4, 1980, the Dutch luxury liner caught fire off the coast of Alaska. It had 510 passengers aboard, many elderly.

The supertanker MV *Williamsburg*, which was nearby, responded immediately to the ship's distress signals and approached as close as it could.

That was not very close; and strong winds, high seas, low cloud ceilings and poor visibility made direct rescue efforts impossible.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Air Force and two Canadian flying units, the 442 Transport and Rescue Squadron and the 407

Maritime Patrol Squadron, from the Canadian Forces Base, Comox, British Columbia, had also responded. Among the first planes on the scene were Canadian Labrador helicopters and Buffalo transports from the 442 and an Argus patrol craft from the 407. The Argus acted as an overall coordinator and stood by to help rescue any rescuers who got into trouble.

Labrador 303 landed a medical team aboard the tanker and hoisted thirty-one survivors from a lifeboat and carried them to the *Williamsburg*. It then found another lifeboat lost in the fog and hoisted nine more before running low on fuel. After waiting until a Coast Guard cutter arrived, it went to Yakutat, Alaska, to refuel.

In all, helicopters carried fifty-nine other passengers to the Alaskan mainland.

The Buffalos of the 442 operated a shuttle service between shore bases and staging areas, carrying medics, firefighters, supplies, fresh helicopter crews and rescued passengers.

The *Williamsburg* docked at Valdez, Alaska, with the rescued passengers aboard.

The successful rescue ranks with all-time lifesaving feats, though the number rescued is not the greatest in which Canadian Forces have participated. Forty-two years ago HMCS *St. Laurent*, with Harry DeWolf in command, rescued 850 persons from the *Arandora*.

Short Haulers

The de Havilland Canada aircraft specialize in short hauls. Some of them also take off and land on surprisingly short runways.

Twin Otters

The technology for de Havilland Canada's STOL planes (short take-off and landing) was first developed in 1946. It was used to design economical and effective bush planes. The first, the Beaver, was followed by the Otter, the Caribou, and the Buffalo.

The 300 Twin Otter, DHC-6, is the most popular. Among other things it can land with skis or floats as well as wheels. It can use oversize low pressure tires to land on soft ground or rough, unprepared landing strips.

Beavers and Twin Otters, some more than thirty years old, are now flying in eighty different countries, as float planes on the Amazon, at ski resorts in the Alps, among the fiords of Norway, over the peaks of the Himalayas, as commuters in Texas, at oil rigs in Arabia and North Africa and a great many other places.

Both the Canadian Forces and the Alaska National Guard use Twin Otters for search and rescue missions and other humanitarian projects.



Dash 7 over Toronto.