

## Easter Provincial Airways – The missing part of the story

The history of Eastern Provincial Airways is pretty well known. EPA began operations in 1949 from Torbay near St. John's, Newfoundland. Services offered, like those of early Maritime Central Airways, were typical of “bush flying” operations of that era. It included flying hunters, mail or light cargo, doing ice patrols and forest fire spotting and of course ambulance work.

The standard story is that the company was founded with a Norseman aircraft by Eric Blackwood, a Royal Canadian Air Force veteran from World War II.. He was helped along in his venture by St. John's businessman C.A. Crosbie in partnership with likeminded chums, namely Phil Lewis, Edgar Hickman, Charlie Bell, F.M. O’Leary and Bernard Parsons.

EPA in the 1940s flew out of both Torbay and Gander, but in 1953 the company moved its main base of operations to Gander in order to escape the fog of St. John’s. In Gander, EPA’s operations were based on Deadmans Pond and the “round-top hanger”, hangar 20, which was the first ever built pre-war, in what was then known as Newfoundland Airport. EPA later moved to the Hanger 21-22 complex as its fleet became modernized and it took on the shape of a competitive airline.

By 1963, it had grown to the point that it bought its regional competitor, Maritime Central, which, strangely enough, had started out eight years earlier than EPA, in 1941.

In 1984, EPA had entered into an agreement with Canadian Pacific, which lacked a network east of Montréal. Shortly afterwards, CP bought out EPA and by 1986 EPA was no more.

Below is an EPA matchbox cover, probably from the late 1970s, before smoking was frowned upon:



Over the years, EPA has used a number of different types of airplane (maybe too many say some, but that is another story).

Some of the main aircraft used were : small float aircraft such as Norseman and Otter, a Lockheed 10 Electra,

versions of the DC-3, DC-4, Canso, Beech 18, Sikorski choppers, Handley Page Dart Herald, Hawker Siddley HS-748, ATL-98 Carvair (also known, among other things, as The Blob or Lumbering Lizzie) and of course the Boeing 737.

To be better see how EPA progressed, some of these airplanes are shown below:



“The Blob”



Otter



EASTERN PROVINCIAL AIRWAYS  
"DART HERALD"



737

The obvious question is “so what’s new?”

We know that Eric Blackwood was a former RCAF navigator - which in those days, right after the war, came a dollar a dozen. But what happened that he decided to call upon Ches Crosbie in the first place to buy a Norseman and start up an airline.

In 1946 he formed Newfoundland Aero Sales and Services Inc. with James McLoughlin and Ren Goobie. This organization, despite its grandiose name, owned one single airplane, a Republic Seabee with the registration VO-ABG. Bought on 13 October 1946, it was used for what could best be called “utility work”. As can be seen from the photos below, a Seabee is a cute little beast, but more suited for flying Mom, Dad, a child and a teddy bear than doing any serious work.

A Norseman on the other hand was a bush pilot’s dream, tough and able to carry a pretty large load.

The table below shows some of the major differences:

	<b>Seabee</b>	<b>Norseman</b>
<b>Range</b>	520 miles	1150 miles
<b>Empty wt (lbs)</b>	2190	4680
<b>Take-off wt</b>	3150	7400
<b>Capacity cargo + crew</b>	+/- 1000 lbs	+/- 2700 lbs
<b>Total pers</b>	3	10

Newfoundland Aero Sales and Service, along with the Seabee, was eventually sold to Maritime Central Airways (those fellows again!) in 1949.

The Seabee is shown below in a poor quality black and white photo, believed to be most probably on the shore of Deadmans Pond:



In the next hand-coloured photo, the Seabee is shown in Gander in front of Hangar 20, near the Administration Bldg.

This photo was provided by the late Fred Smeaton who indicated that the colour scheme is not exact.



So the start of EPA originated in the ambition of a 24-year old who, with the means available, started a first aviation company. Realizing that the airplane that he had been able to buy was not really suited to the task, he was smart enough to change course, the sign of an experienced navigator!

And given that the Norseman he needed cost more than he could afford, his wartime experience would naturally have led him to seek out partners to complete the team.

And EPA was born.