

# The search for Gander's lost B24 Bomber

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Shipwreck Preservation Society  
of Newfoundland & Labrador Inc.

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## Project Description

During the fall of 2012 while researching Newfoundland shipwreck data I became aware of Lisa M Daly's survey of land based aircraft crashes surrounding Gander Airport. This led me to wondering about underwater aircraft crash sites around Newfoundland.

Using a variety of research sources such as Internet data and Gander Airport Historical Society sources, I was able to identify some possible underwater crash sites with historical significance.

1932 Bellanca crash at Darby's Harbour Placentia Bay

USA bomber crash on Colinet Island

B24 RCAF crash in Gander Lake

As a result of correspondence with Lisa Daly, Darrell Hillier, Dave Hebbard, Michael Deal and Nelson Sherren I decided to concentrate my efforts on locating the Gander Lake B24 crash site.

## Project Rationale

The B24 was produced from 1940 to 1945 for a total quantity of 18482 aircraft. Today there are only three left worldwide that are airworthy and only 10 that are partial and considered static displays.

The RCAF Bomber Reconnaissance squadron #10 based out of Gander Airport played an important role in neutralizing the German Uboat threat in the North Atlantic and location of this B24 would be an important event in Newfoundland's wartime aviation history.

### Crash Details:

Aircraft was on a night flying exercise from Gander Airport Sept.4, 1943. Port outside engine failed on takeoff and aircraft performed three barrel rolls and crashed into Gander Lake one minute later.

Wreckage is 200 yards from shore at 138 feet of depth. Of the four crew members only one body was recovered.

## Objectives

I have completed the majority of the paperwork and Internet research into the aircraft and crew members. I have a copy of the actual crash report investigation which includes many details, pictures, maintenance records with engine serial numbers and 17 eyewitness accounts.

My objective is to do a surface search using a rigid inflatable boat equipped with sonar/ video equipment to pinpoint the exact location and depth of the wreck. I have been in contact with officials from the Town of Gander and received an official permit from them to conduct research activities in and on Gander Lake. I also have full support from the Gander Airport Historical Society.

## Definition of Survey area

The area of interest has been narrowed down to the North side of Gander Lake adjacent to the Town of Gander pumphouse. Using the official crash report complemented by local knowledge from Town of Gander officials, it is

estimated that the aircraft lies about 200 yards offshore at a depth of 138 ft.



## Site Background

Gander Lake is located directly south of the town of Gander in central Newfoundland. It measures 52 km long by 5.6 km at its widest point. It is the third largest lake in Newfoundland and has a maximum depth of 1095 feet as confirmed by a 2007 DFO plankton survey. The water remains very cold for most parts of the year and is darkly colored due to excessive tannin content.

The sides of the lake are sharply sloped, dropping to 900 plus feet within 80 feet of the shore line to a maximum depth of 1095 ft.

The north shoreline has seen numerous activities during the history of Gander. There were two military boathouses with wharf infrastructure built during the wars years. There were also facilities present when Gander Lake was being used as an alternate landing to Botwood during the early years of flying boat passenger service from Europe.

## Aircraft Description

The aircraft, Liberator GR MK V s/n 589 Code D was one of twenty four B24 Liberator Heavy Bombers that was stationed at Gander for use by Bomber Reconnaissance squadron #10. Their main purpose was to fly anti U Boat patrols off the east coast of Canada to protect the marine convoys heading to Europe.

BR#10 squadron was credited with 22 U Boat attacks and three sinkings.

The serial number records are intact for this aircraft:  
Ex USAF s/n 42-40447, Ex RAF s/n BZ725 to RCAF s/n 589

Specs on this aircraft:

Max crew 11

Wingspan 110 ft

Length 67 ft 8 in

Height 18 ft

Weight 55000 pounds

Engines 4 X Pratt & Whitney R-1830

14 cylinder turbocharged 1200 horsepower each

Armament:

6 X .50 cal M2 Browning machine guns

Top and Belly machine gun turrets

Forward machine guns

Aft machine gun turret

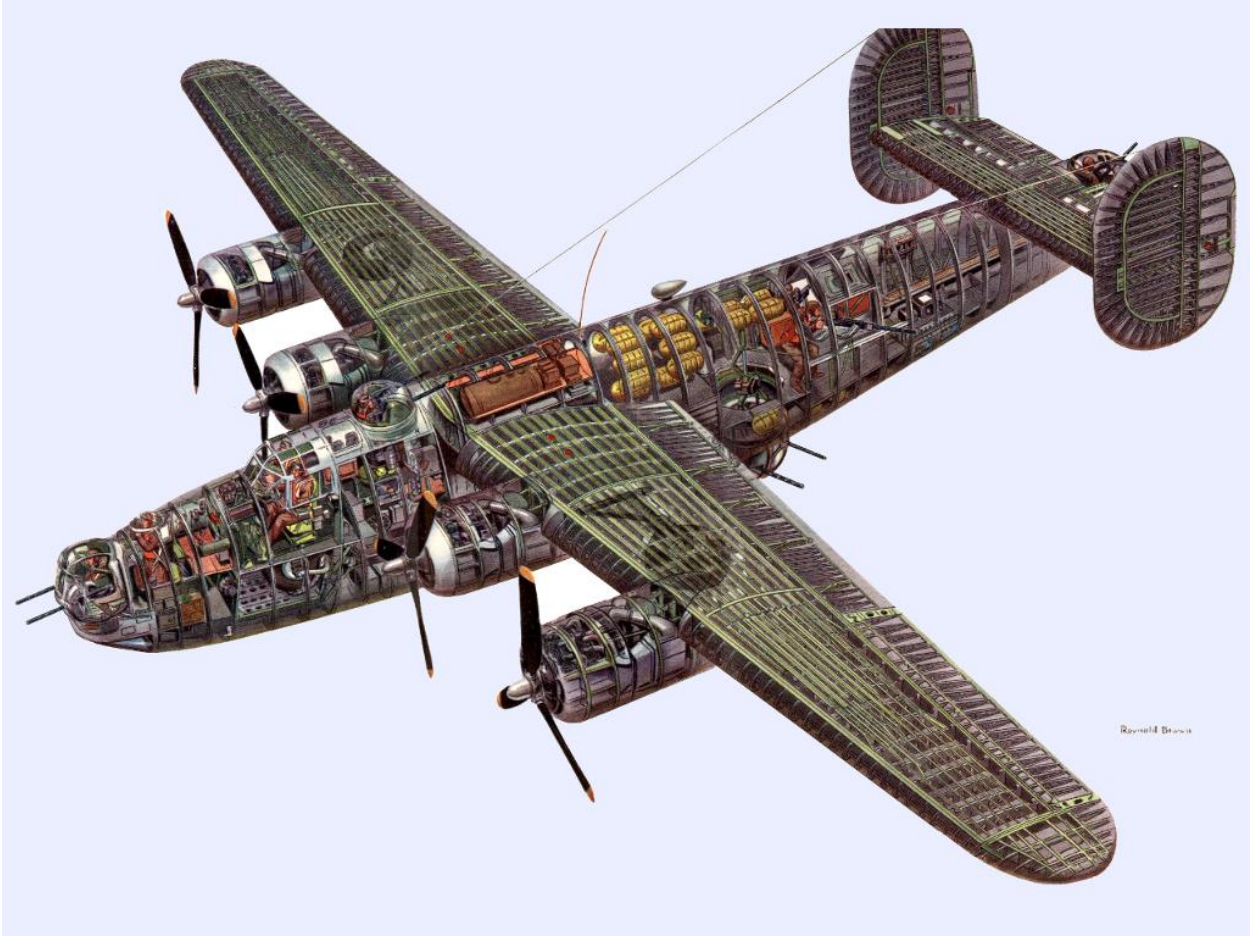
side machine guns

Bomb payload 8800 lbs

( s/n 589 was not carrying any bombs at time of crash)

This aircraft was equipped with experimental ASV surface detection radar which was instrumental in turning the tide against the U Boat threat





Reynold Brown

## Methodology

Field work was performed during the summer of 2014 and consisted of several completed surface search patterns.

Using a 19 ft Zodiac RIB equipped with dual echosounders and GPS, an area of the north shore of Gander Lake covering the estimated location of the crash was explored. Also an underwater video camera was lowered to several locations to aid in identifying possible targets.

Equipment list:

Furuno FCV620 echosounder 50/200 Khz

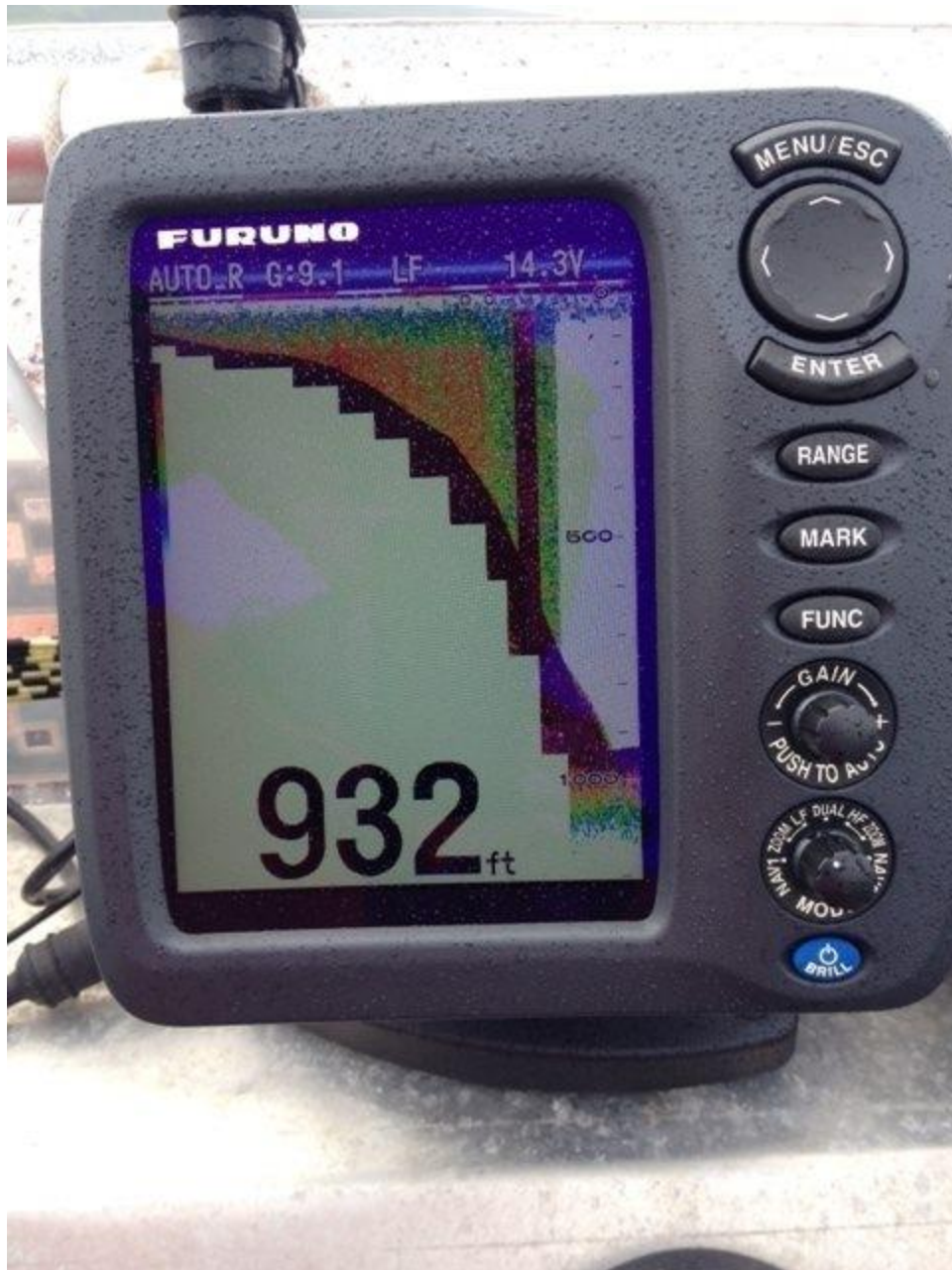
Lowrance GPS/Plotter/Sounder 50/200 Khz

Deep Blue Pro underwater camera

19 inch color monitor

iTorch underwater dive lights





## Project Outcomes

Several underwater targets were located but deficient underwater lighting hampered identification.

## Recommendations

Continued searching is required using improved sonar/underwater imaging equipment.

## Acknowledgments/ References

Lisa M Daley: A survey of WW2 crash sites in and around Gander, NL

Lisa M Daley: Aviation Archaeology of WW2 Gander RCAF 1943 Official crash report for B24 sn B589

Gander Airport Historical Society

Ocean Quest Adventures

Town of Gander Engineering Dept

Various military historical websites

DFO 2007 Gander Lake Plankton survey: MF O'Connell and A. Walsh

"The Plankton and Profundal Benthic Macro invertebrates of Gander Lake NL"