



RCAF VIP TRANSPORTS

A Pictorial Essay



Royal Canadian Air Force VIP aircraft

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) maintains specialized aircraft to transport Canada's monarch, governor general, members of the Royal Family, prime minister, senior members of the Government of Canada, and other dignitaries. A small fleet of dedicated executive government transport aircraft are organized into two RCAF squadrons. Other RCAF combat and transport helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, chartered civilian aircraft, and occasionally scheduled commercial flights may also be used to meet Canada's VIP air transport requirements.

History

Although it wasn't in an RCAF aircraft, Canadian ace, William Barker, while serving with No. 139 Squadron, flew a Bristol F2 "Brisfit" fighter in Italy in August 1918 with his His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, as a passenger. The Prince of Wales, who was at the time attached to the British headquarters in Italy, took a keen interest in the activities of the Royal Air Force. He arranged for a flight over the front line in the gunner's seat of Barker's *Brisfit*. Since he wanted to see something of the disposition of enemy troops, they flew approximately 20 miles behind the front to Vittoria. They encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire on their return, but no Austrian fighters came up to challenge them. The Prince made a number of visits to No. 139 Squadron after that first trip. Barker would once again fly with the Prince of Wales in the post-war period in a Sopwith *Dove* aircraft, at Hounslow, Middlesex, in the United Kingdom in 1919.

Members of the Royal Family have been flying in the United Kingdom since two Westland Wapitis were delivered to the Royal Air Force's No. 24 Squadron at RAF Northolt in April 1928. Between the following year and 1935, Prince Edward, Prince of Wales, himself purchased 13 aircraft; he became the first member of the Royal Family to be a pilot and, when he ascended to the throne in 1936 as King Edward VIII, the King's Flight was formed as the world's first head of state aircraft unit.

The RCAF has maintained a variety of different types of aircraft in VIP configurations. These have included types such as the:

- Lockheed *Hudson* - Executive air transport in Canada can be traced to the wartime needs of RCAF in the 1940s. Sadly, the only VIP death in the history of the RCAF was Minister of National Defence (MND) Norman McLeod Rogers on 10 June 1940, near Newtonville, ON. Rogers had been elected to the Parliament in 1935 as the Member of Parliament for Kingston, Ontario, and he then served under Prime Minister MacKenzie King as his Minister of Labour until 1939. With the outbreak of war, however, Rogers was appointed to the key cabinet post of Minister of MND. On the morning of Monday, June 10th, 1940, the MND's schedule called for him to fly from Ottawa to Toronto in order to deliver a speech at the *Empire and Canadian Club* that evening. Consequently, the RCAF made a VIP aircraft and crew available for this activity. A Lockheed *Hudson*, serial #770, from the Communications Flight at RCAF Station *Rockcliffe* was assigned to the task. The Lockheed *Hudson* was, in fact, a military bomber version of Lockheed's Model 14-F62 airliner. It was powered by a pair of 1,100 horsepower radial engines. The RCAF began accepting *Hudsons* primarily for patrol and bomber use starting in March of 1940. In this case, however, the RCAF had reverted this particular *Hudson* back to its original passenger-carrying duties with the Communications Flight. For its day, the *Hudson* was one of the most modern and well-equipped aircraft then in service. On board the flight with the MND to Toronto was the pilot, Flying Officer John J. Cotter, age 26, and two RCAF crew-members; Aircraftman 1st Class Oscar D. Brownfield, age 27, and Aircraftman 1st Class James E. Nesbitt, age 33. Unfortunately, during the flight to Toronto, the weather deteriorated rapidly and, near the village Newtonville, Ontario, the aircraft was heard by ground witnesses to be circling in dense fog, perhaps looking for a suitable place to land. At approximately 12:15 pm local time, approximately 1.5 kilometres east of Newtonville, the *Hudson* crashed. The starboard wing apparently struck some trees while the aircraft was making a steep, 45-degree, banking turn. The *Hudson* then disintegrated upon impact and the wreckage was strewn about over roughly an acre of land. In an ironic coincidence, the bush where the aircraft came down was locally known as "Cotter's Woods". Quickly, people from the village and nearby farms ran to the rescue, but it was far too late. The fuel from the plane had started a number of small ground fires and the remains of the smashed RCAF bomber itself were also on fire. Near the aircraft wreckage, they found an unrecognizable body pinned between two trees. This turned out to be Norman Rogers. They also eventually found the badly burned bodies of Cotter, Brownfield and Nesbitt nearby. Prime Minister King took the death of Rogers extremely hard. He soon made an emotional public announcement in the House of Commons underlining that loss. Rogers was not only a key Cabinet minister and advisor but the two men had also been close personal friends.
- Lockheed *Lodestar* #567 - One of the RCAF's Lockheed Lodestars (originally operated by No. 165 (T) Sqn as of 12 Oct 1943) was later operated by No. 12 (Comm) Squadron at RCAF Station *Rockcliffe*, ON and was given a highly polished exterior while carrying an Air Marshall's pennant on nose. It carried the Chief of Air Staff from *Rockcliffe* on a western tour October 1946. When surplused in 1948, it was returned to Lockheed and later sold in the US as N68H.
- Consolidated *Liberator* - During the Second World War, RCAF Station *Rockcliffe* in Ottawa was home to 168 Squadron based in *Rockcliffe*, a special air transport group that was responsible for carrying mail back and forth between the troops serving overseas and home. This squadron of aircraft included converted B17 *Flying Fortress* bombers and later, B24 *Liberators*. On June 30, 1944, the *Rockcliffe* aerodrome received a special aircraft delivered from the United States Army Air Force with serial # 44-10583. Built at the Consolidated Convair B-24 factory in Fort Worth, Texas, this plane was immediately given a special designation: to become Prime Minister Mackenzie King's personal transport aircraft. The B-24 was quickly modified for the special purpose of transporting the Prime Minister of that time and other dignitaries around the world. Modifications to the bomber included fitting it with a comfortable VIP interior that accommodated 10 passengers and a special office for the PM and his secretary. Windows were installed along the each side of the fuselage as well as an extra side door. A galley kitchen and washroom were also installed in the Prime Minister's new aircraft. A special highly polished aluminum exterior finish and lightning bolt paint scheme was given to the PM's new plane and by August 30, this aircraft, nicknamed the "Silver Saloon", was ready for service. It was also one of the first RCAF aircraft to sport a newly-designed roundel on the fuselage featuring the "maple leaf" (which later became the official RCAF symbol) B-24 #574 was ready to transport the Prime Minister of Canada and his staff anywhere around the world. This new RCAF VIP aircraft was then used to transport Prime Minister Mackenzie King on a very special journey to San Francisco. In June of 1945, the Prime Minister and his staff flew from Ottawa to San Francisco to help organize the newly formed United Nations. Representatives from 50 countries met at the United Nations Conference on International Organization to draw up the United Nations Charter. The Charter was signed on the 26th of June 1945 by representatives of the 50 countries. RCAF #574 later carried the Governor General, The Earl of Athlone, and his family in March 1946, and then, The Viscount Alexander of Tunis to Winnipeg in September 1946. In 1947, it carried famed Canadian Army General, General H.D.G. Crerar, on tour of the far east, flying across the Pacific to Hawaii, Johnston Island, Kwajalein, Tokyo, and Nanking. The Prime Minister continued to use the plane as his VIP transport, but when Mackenzie King retired in 1948, his transport aircraft was flown from its home in Ottawa to RCAF Station *Trenton* where it was put into storage. Unused, and sitting in a Trenton hanger, the plane was finally sold as surplus to Chile in 1951. In Chile it was given a new paint scheme and operated under the Chilean designation "CC-CAN" with the "Air Chile" that operated there. Flying across Chilean skies for the better part of four years, the former PM's plane was soon to make its last flight. Landing at an airport in Santiago, Chile on February 21, 1955, the aircraft suffered a landing gear malfunction that resulted in it running off the runway. A salvage crew was brought in to assess and possibly repair the damaged aircraft. Sadly, the plane was deemed beyond economical repair, and was dragged off to sit idle in storage. Four years later the plane met its final fate when it was chopped up for scrap metal in 1959. Mackenzie King's Silver Saloon was no more, and Canada's first "Can Force One" disappeared into history.
- Douglas DC-3 - With the ubiquitous DC-3 or Dakota in wide-spread service in the post-war RCAF, it was inevitable that a small number of the type would be converted to VIP service. 412 Squadron had a number of VIP examples on strength. Similarly, various command formations (including No. 1 Air Division in Europe) had VIP Dakotas on strength.

- North American B-25 *Mitchell* - #5220, 5248 & 5215. #5220 was fitted with solid nose, highly polished finish, and VIP interior from 6 September 1956, at No. 6 Repair Depot at Trenton. Operated by No. 412 (T) Squadron from RCAF Station Uplands from 9 October 1956 until 1960. Destroyed during crash landing at Milwaukee, USA following a propeller run away on 19 April 1960. All 6 on board killed. This crash plus several other fatal B-25 crashes put an end to the type being used in the executive transport role.
- Canadair C-4 *North Star* - The RCAF's first post-war transport fleet was the Canadair-built C-4 *North Star*. At least one of these C-4 aircraft (#17518) was converted to VIP configuration.
- Canadair C-5 #10000 - C-5. The seventy-first and last of the famed Canadair *North Stars* to be built, was a special one-off VIP transport conversion built for the RCAF. It was a replacement aircraft for one *North Star* that had been loaned by the RCAF (17519) to TCA (as CF-TEL) and that had been lost in a crash in August 1948. Built in 1950, this specially modified version of a C-4, always designated simply as the C-5, incorporated a luxurious interior outfitted with all the amenities of home and office – divans/beds, thick carpeting, fully equipped galley, washrooms, desks, swivel chairs, table lamps and of course ashtrays. The C-5 was also insulated and pressurized for the eminent passenger's comfort. While it retained the graceful lines of the *North Star* it had one noticeable change in sight and sound. This was the replacement of the four tremendously noisy Rolls-Royce Merlins with quieter, and more powerful, Pratt & Whitney R-2800, Double Wasp, radial engines. Bearing RCAF serial number 17524 (renumbered as 10000 in 1951), it had its first flight on 15 May 1950 crewed by Canadair's test pilots Al Lilly and Bill Longhurst. The RCAF formally took it on strength on 20 July 1950 and it served until June 1966, as one of the premier VIP transports with No. 412 Transport (T) Squadron at Uplands, ON. During much of its fifteen-year career with 412 Squadron, the C-5 shared VIP duties with two new RCAF acquisitions, de Havilland *Comet* 1As serials #5301 and #5302 that arrived in 1953. With these aircraft, the RCAF became the first military air service in the world to fly long-range jet transports. When the RCAF *Comets* were grounded from 1954 to 1957 due to several British *Comet* accidents, and then finally retired from the RCAF in 1963, this reliable queen of the executive aircraft fleet continued to soldier on with VIP services and as a navigational trainer. Most of the political and titular leaders of the western world were carried by the prestigious C-5. Some of the names recorded on the C-5 manifest included Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh in 1951, Sir Winston Churchill, Sir Anthony Eden, Emperor Haile Selassie, the Netherlands Royal Family, Minister C. D. Howe and the Prime Ministers of Canada from 1950. Following its official retirement from RCAF service on 28 April 1966, this once stately VIP-class airliner was later sold and unceremoniously scrapped in the United States.
- de Havilland *Comet* - Two de Havilland *Comet* 1As serials #5301 and #5302 were first delivered in 1953. With these aircraft, the RCAF became the first military air service in the world to fly long-range jet transports. After a series of fatal crashes of several commercial *Comet* airliners in 1954, the RCAF *Comets* were grounded from 1954 to 1957 pending the crash investigations and subsequent mandatory safety modifications. After a return to service as Mk 1XB's, they finally retired from the RCAF in 1963 after becoming time expired.
- Sikorsky H-34 helicopter - While serving with No. 111 KU, H-34 #9631 was also fitted with steps, a new cabin door, and a plush interior for its role as a VIP transport, which included Princess Margaret's 1958 Canadian tour. This use of the H-34 for VIP transport was not a one time event. The H-34s often served as transports for VIPs such as the MND or CAS, etc. to places where conventional aircraft could not land. Another example of these occasions was Prime Minister Diefenbaker's tour of western Canada in 1959, when an H-34 flew the party to points between Gimli, MB, and Edson, AB.
- Canadair CL-66 / CC-109 *Cosmopolitan* - The Canadair CL-66 was a turboprop version of the civilian Convair CV-440 Metropolitan. The CC-109 *Cosmopolitan* or "Cosmo" in RCAF service became the standard VIP aircraft as well as replacing the Douglas Dakota and the North American B-25 *Mitchell* in light transport duties. The RCAF procured ten aircraft which were originally powered by the Napier Eland turboprop engine. The Eland not only proved to be unreliable, but also did not deliver the expected power, consequently, the RCAF instituted an engine upgrade in 1966-1967, installing Allison 501-D36 engines. After eight airframes had been re-engined, the company phased out further development work on the type, "orphaning" the remaining final two Eland examples, which were subsequently scrapped. No. 412 Squadron at CFB Ottawa (S), or "Uplands" flew the "Cosmo", from 1960 to 1994 as VIP transport. The Cosmo aircraft were also deployed to Europe for Canadian NATO contingent support as well as to the US in support of Canadian NORAD operations.
- Canadair CL-44 / CC-106 *Yukon* - With an RCAF requirement for a replacement for its C-54GM *North Star* fleets, Canadair began work on a long-range transport primarily intended to provide personnel and logistics support for Canadian Forces in Europe. In January 1957, Canadair received a contract for eight aircraft (later increased to 12). The RCAF designation for the new design was the CC-106 *Yukon*, while the company's civilian variant was known as the CL-44-6. In company jargon the CL-44 was simply "the Forty-Four." 412 Squadron maintained two CC-106 Yukons in VIP configuration; these were #106932 (16666), and #106929 (15555).
- Dassault Falcon 20 - 412 Squadron acquired seven Dassault Falcon 20 *Fanjets* to provide VIP executive transport for senior officials in the government. This French-made business jet, initially known as the Dassault-Breguet Mystère 20, it made its first flight on 4 May 1963 and was first introduced into CF service starting in 1970. The Falcons were later converted to Electronic Warfare variants for use by 414 (Electronic Warfare) Squadron in North Bay, ON
- Boeing 707-720C / CC-137 - All the RCAF's *Yukons* were retired from active service in March 1971 when replaced by five newly-acquired Boeing 707-320C's designated CC-137 in CF service. Because of the smaller number of airframes, a dedicated VIP configuration for one of the new aircraft was not practically possible. The airframes were, however, all initially reconfigurable with various VIP lounge / combi-passenger / freight combinations being possible. Two of the airframes were later converted into refuelling tankers further limiting their use.
- CL-600, 601, 604 / CC-144 *Challenger* - The Canadair (now Bombardier) *Challenger* became a dedicated VIP transport aircraft with the CF in the early 1980s, when 12 CL-600S *Challenger* business jets were purchased by the Governor General-in-Council from Canadair, for a variety of missions which were thereafter given the designations CC-144, CE-144, and CX-144. Two CL-600S /CC-144's were assigned to 412 Squadron for VIP duties and painted in the contemporary red and white livery of the Canadian Forces. Two 601 model *Challengers* were later added to the 412 Squadron fleet. The other CL-600S *Challengers* served with No. 414 "Black Knight" Squadron at CFB North Bay, ON in the electronic warfare role until July 1992, and with 434 "Blue Nose" Squadron at CFB Greenwood, NS until May 2000, when eight aircraft were either sold or retired, the remaining two being transferred to 412 Transport Squadron for executive transport and utility support, where their livery was changed to a dark blue. Two CL-600S aircraft were retired in favour of two *Challenger* 604s acquired in 2002. The remaining two CL-600S were retired in 2014 leaving just two 601 and two 604 *Challengers* in VIP service. Then the 601's were retired in favour of two new Model 650 *Challengers*.
- A-310-300 / CC-150 *Polaris*. - The CC-150 replaced the Boeing CC-137 as a strategic transport upon the retirement of the final CC-137s in 1995. A fleet of five Airbus aircraft were originally purchased by the airline Wardair as civilian airliners. The five were delivered between 1987-1988 and transferred to Canadian Airlines when the two airlines merged in 1989. They were subsequently purchased by the CF and converted for military use with the aircraft entering service between December 1992 and August 1993. Four of the five aircraft were converted to the combi-freighter standard with a reinforced floor and side opening cargo door. The fifth (#150001) was modified as a VIP transport aircraft for service as a government executive transport.

Present Arrangements

At times, the use of executive air transport has been a contentious issue. In 2002, the Governor General-in-Council, on the advice of then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, purchased an additional two Challenger jets for exclusive royal, viceregal, and ministerial transport. Use of these planes by ministers of the Crown came under heavy criticism, partly due to the high cost of operation (estimated at Cdn \$11,000 per hour) as well as raising questions over prioritization of other military aircraft procurement. Government ministers have typically explained that the use of the Challenger jets is necessary due to time constraints and/or security issues. Also, former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson had used a chartered aircraft to fly from Ottawa to her cottage in Muskoka, Ontario, and it was later revealed that the former Governor General Michaëlle Jean was flown to the Bahamas on a Canadian Forces Challenger. Both times, the press reports of these actions brought criticism towards the viceroys from some corners; however, the governor general's mode of transport was / is directed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

All dedicated VIP transport aircraft in the Canadian Forces are operated by 437 Transport Squadron and 412 Transport Squadron. Attendants on flights operated by these squadrons are select volunteers from various services in the Canadian Forces and serve in their posting for two or three years; they must undergo an intensive training period and additional security background checks prior to VIP transport duty.

The 437 Transport Squadron, based at CFB Trenton, operates five Airbus A310-300s, all designated as CC-150 *Polaris*; four are configured as normal airliners with cargo transport and aerial refuelling capability, while one, #150001, is operated in a VIP configuration. This latter aircraft, known officially as *Can Force One*, and referred to as the *Royal Flight* when carrying the Queen or another member of the Royal Family, has a galley, spartan bedroom (wall panels added to provide privacy with small bed and sofa), sitting room, office space, and a shower approximately the size of a small phone booth. The executive suite includes a satellite telephone, two computer work stations, and a small refrigerator, and at the rear portion of the aircraft is a normal passenger cabin, used to carry regular military passengers, members of the VIP party, or reporters. During the election campaign, former Prime Minister candidate Jean Chrétien criticized the use of this VIP aircraft by the government and dubbed the aircraft as the "The Flying Taj Mahal". The squadron's information officer described #150001's interior in 1997 as follows: "It's no more luxurious than a good motor home."

412 Transport Squadron, based at Macdonald-Cartier International Airport (formerly CFB Ottawa, and previously at CFB Uplands), is the only RCAF unit dedicated exclusively to executive transport and currently operates Canada's four Bombardier CC-144 *Challenger* 604 / 650 business jets in a VIP configuration.

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Acknowledgement

All photos in this pictorial essay are provided courtesy of the Canadian Forces and / or the Royal Canadian Air Force



**(THEN) LCOL W.
BARKER
& (THEN) PRINCE OF
WALES PREPARING FOR
A FLIGHT**



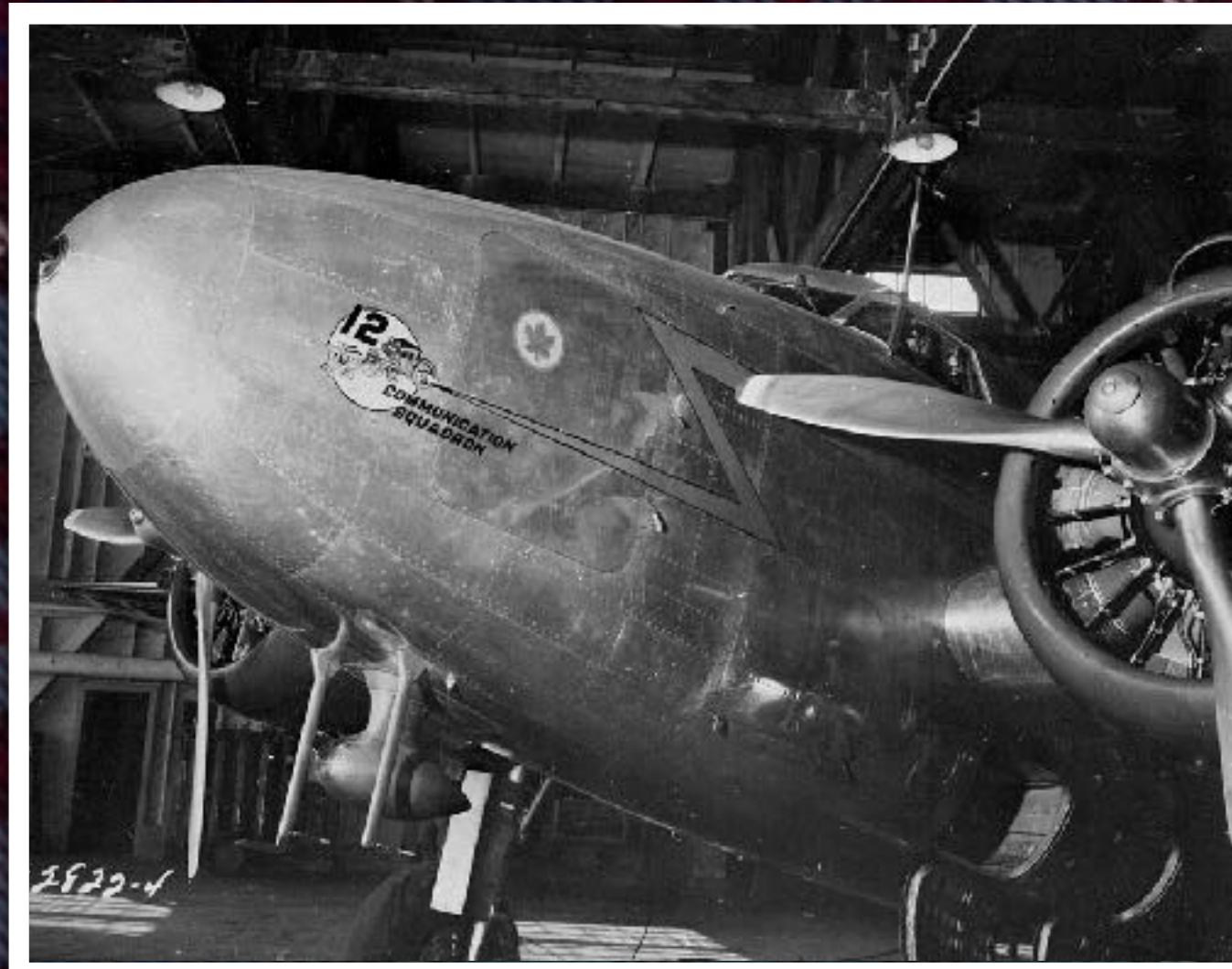
**WESTLAND WAPITI
#J.9095
PERSONAL A/C FOR
PRINCE OF WALES**



**LOCKHEED HUDSON
#759 & 770
1943-1948**



**LOCKHEED LODESTAR
#567
1943 -1948**





**CONSOLIDATED B-24 LIBERATOR
#574
1944 -1948**



**NORTH AMERICAN
B-25 MITCHELL
VARIOUS #'S
1956-1960**



**CANADAIR C-5
#10000
1950 - 1966**





**CANADAIR NORTH STAR
#17518
1951 -1962**



**CC-129 DOUGLAS
DAKOTA
VARIOUS #
VARIOUS DATES**





DE HAVILLAND
COMET
#5301 & 5302
1953 -1960





**SIKORSKY S-58
H-34 #9631
1955 -1961**





**CANADAIR CC-109
COSMOPOLITAN
VARIOUS #'S
1959 -1995**





**CANADAIR CC-106
YUKON
#16666 & 15555
1959 -1971**





DASSAULT CC-117
FALCON
VARIOUS #'S
1967 -1983



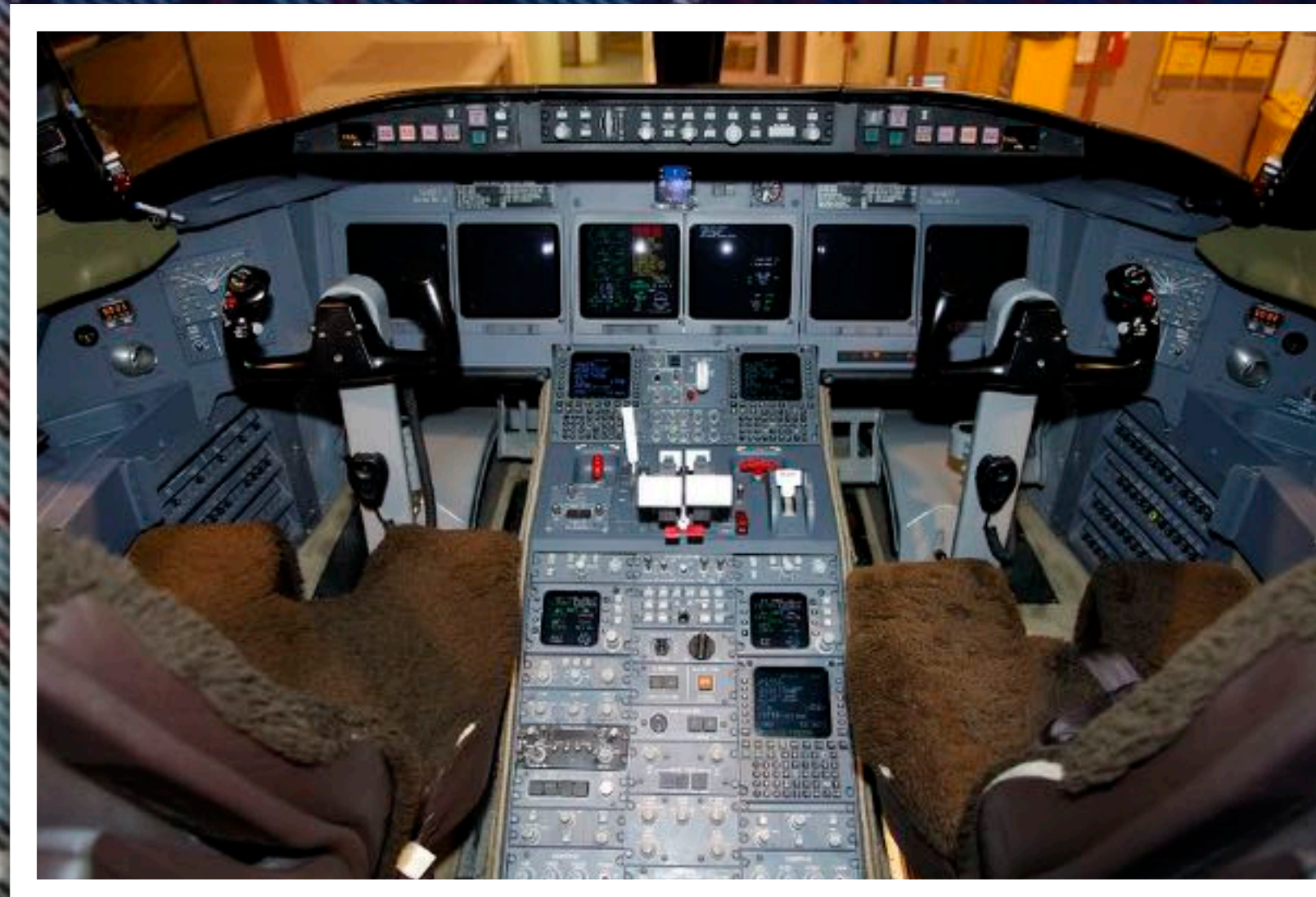


**BOEING CC-137
VARIOUS #'S
1970 -1996**



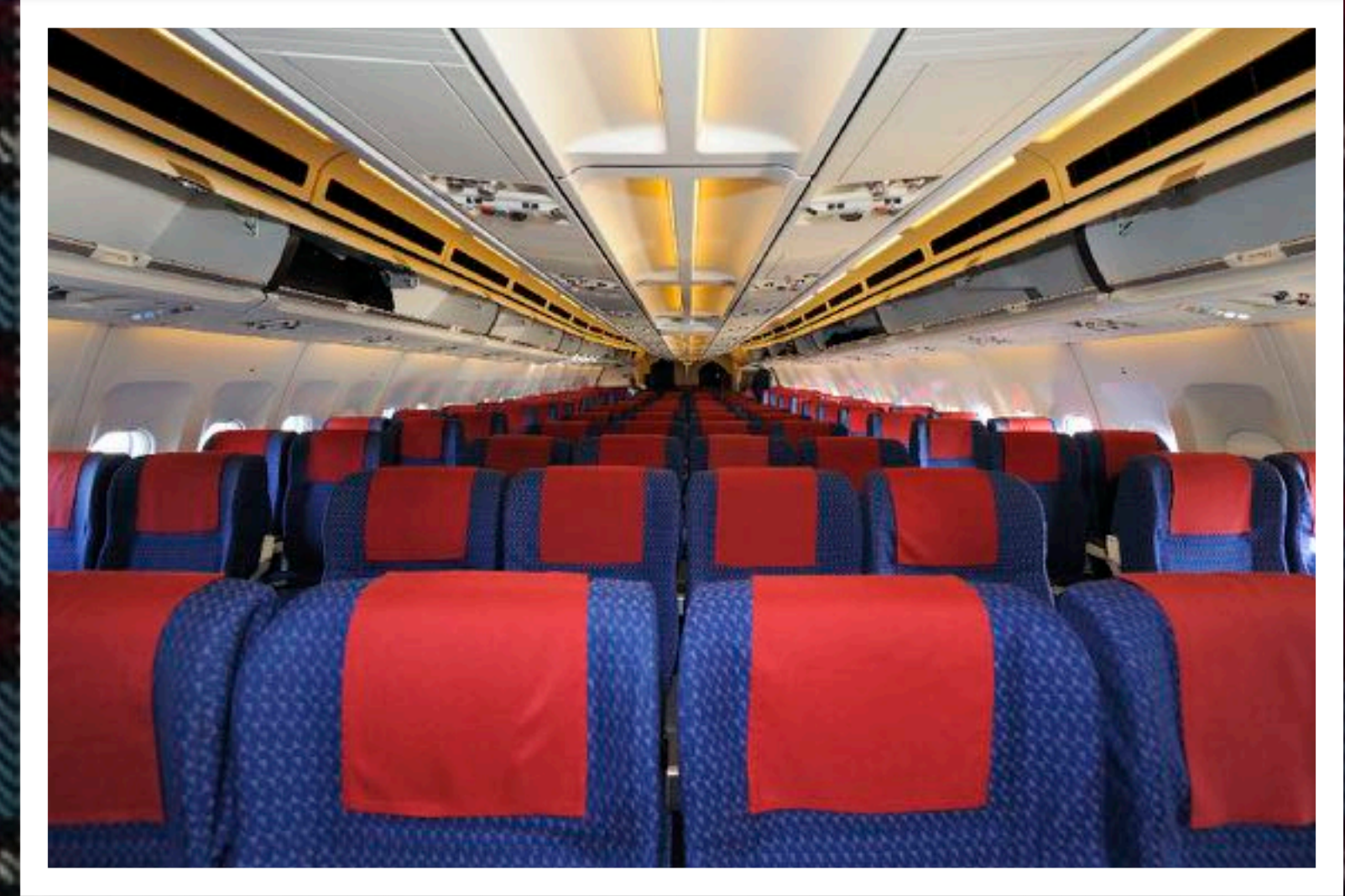
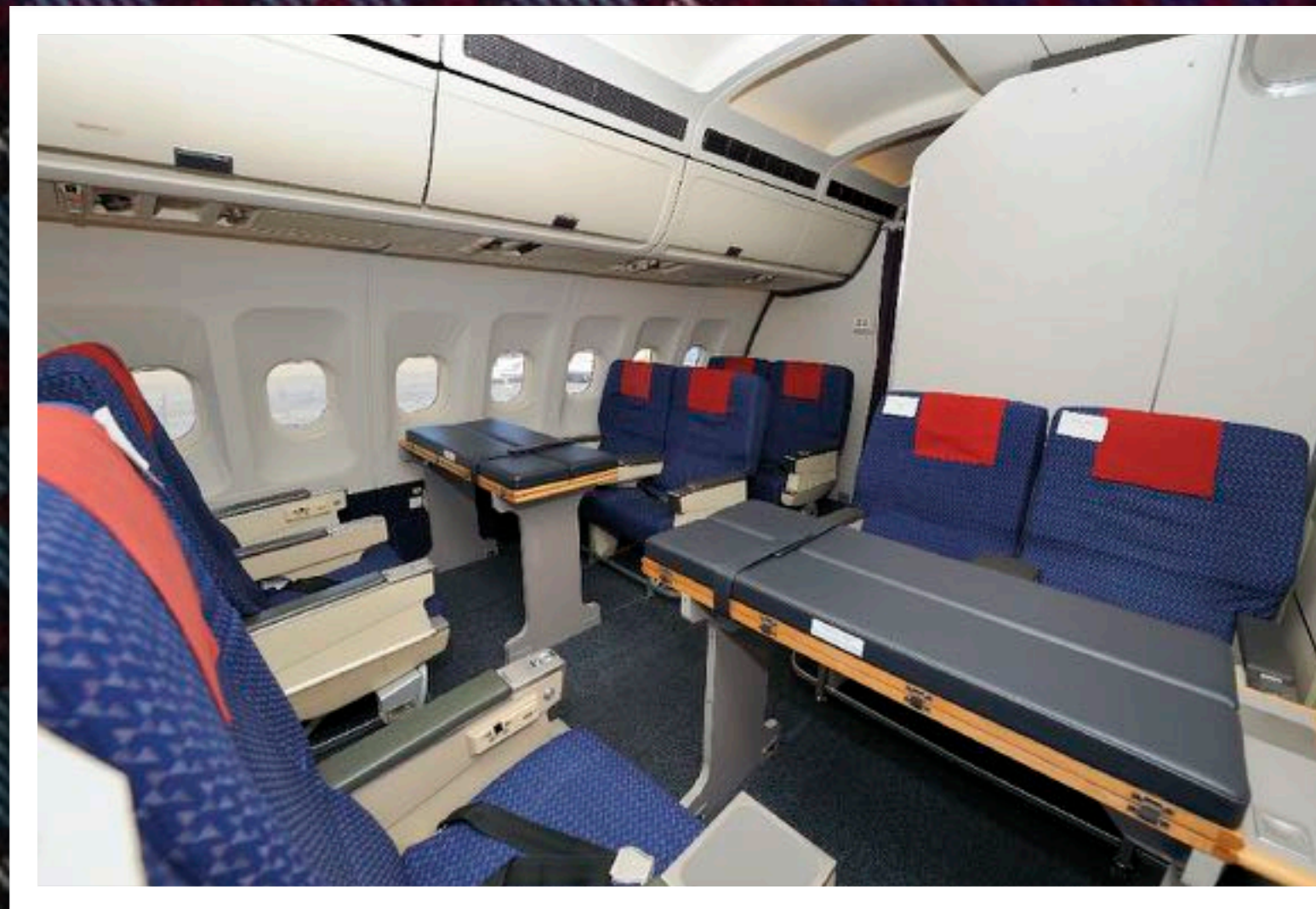


**CANADAIR /
BOMBARDIER CC-144
VARIOUS #'S
1983 -CURRENT**



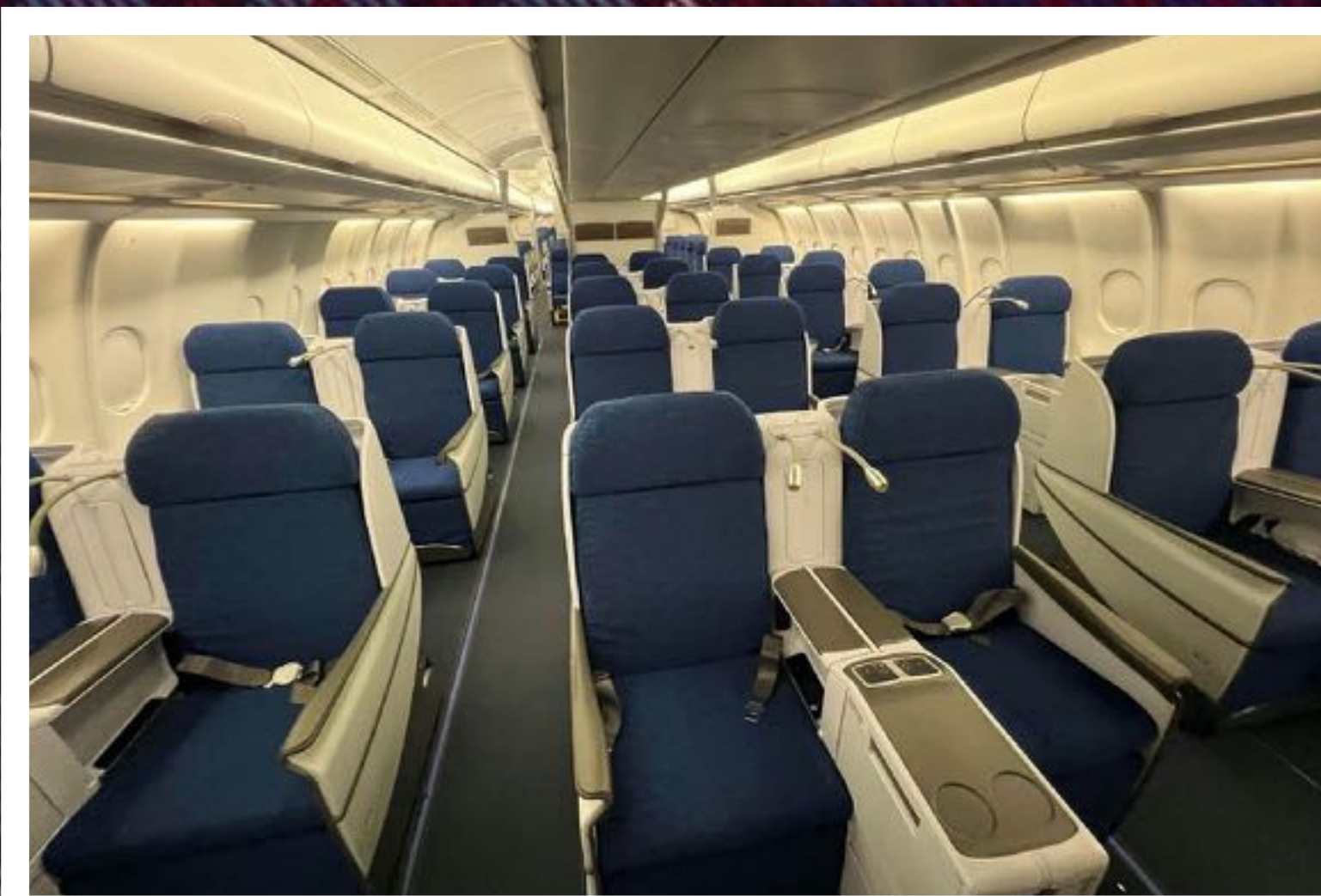
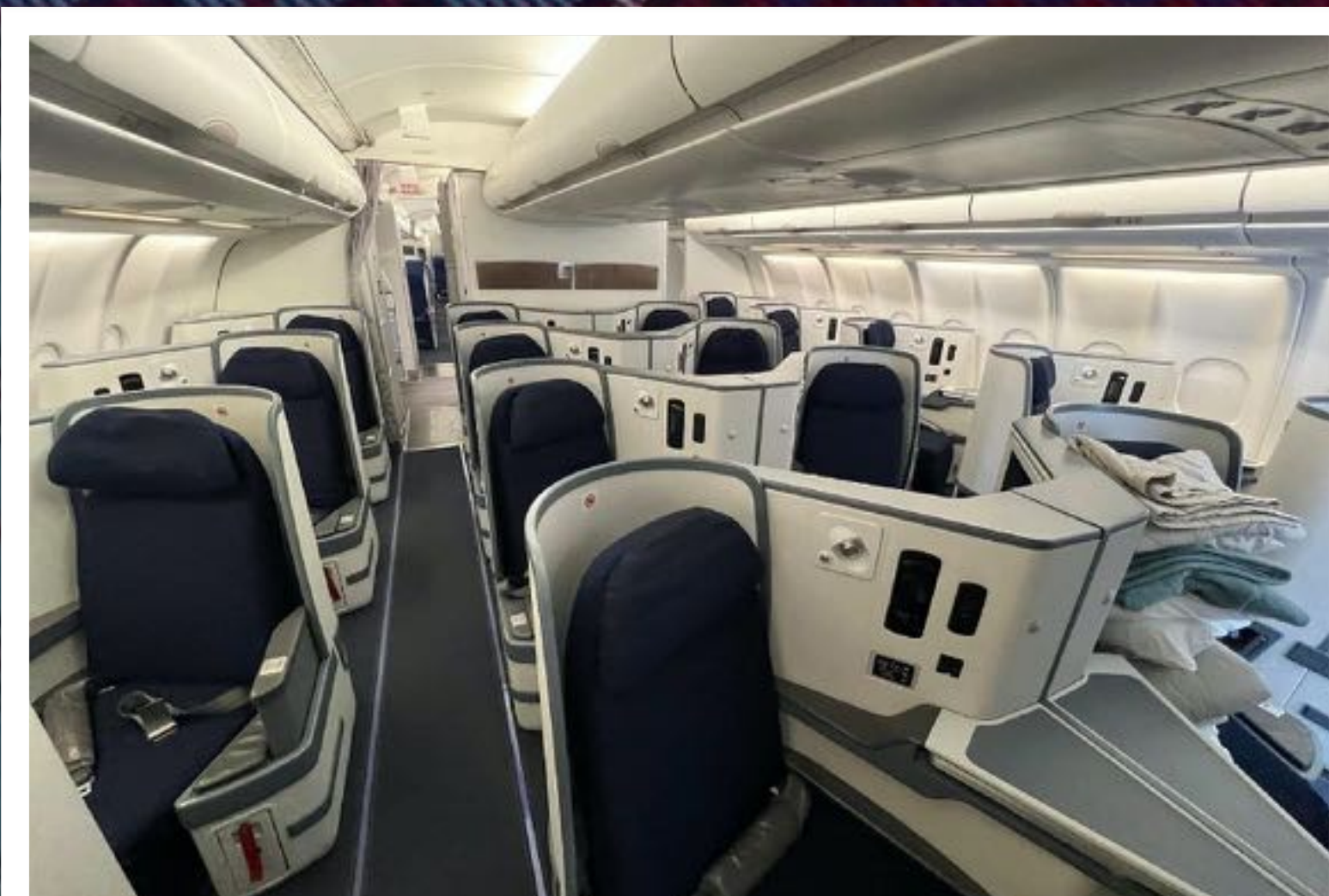


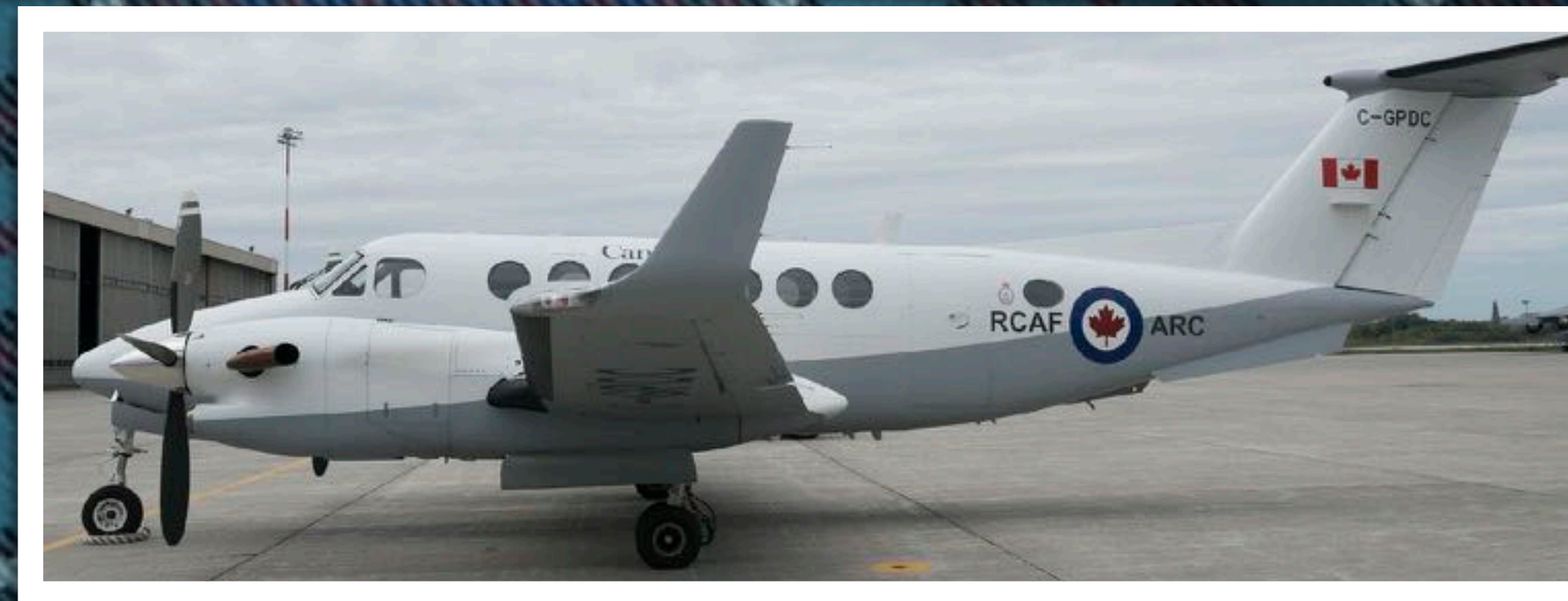
**AIRBUS A310
CC-150 POLARIS
#150001
1992 - CURRENT**





**AIRBUS A330-200
CC-330 HUSKY
#330002
ORIGINAL
CONFIGURATION**





**MISC (TEMPORARY) VIP
AIRCRAFT:**

**(L TO R) GRUMMAN GOOSE
CESSNA 182
BOEING CH-113 VOYAGEUR**

**DE HAVILLAND CC-132 DASH-7
DE HAVILLAND CC-142 DASH-8**

**BEECH SUPER KING AIR
LEONARDO CH-149 CORMORANT**