



WHIDBEY ISLAND CATALINA

PLANS ARE UNDERWAY TO MOVE THIS RARE ARTIFACT INDOORS
BY JAMES FARMER



The Catalina in outdoor storage, minus engines, as N5582V at Palm Springs, California, on 14 April 1968. (M. O'Leary)

The seaplane base operated from 1942 through 1965. And though a handsome boat marina has long since replaced the once bustling military establishment, the original seaplane launch ramp is still very much in evidence.

As for BuNo 33968, it has a long civilian history of some consequence and if it were not for a tragic 1985 accident, this aircraft would now be on display in Israel. This PBV was one of a 100 Catalinas that formed Contract NXa13595 issued on 11 October 1942. Its military service included use by VP-43 and while serving with this squadron the plane was involved in an incident on 4 November 1943. While on patrol near Adak, Alaska, the port engine failed but the starboard propeller was feathered by mis-

take, causing a hard arrival on the ocean service. The Catalina was completely overhauled and then transferred to the US Coast Guard with whom it served until being retired from service. It was put up for surplus sale and was one of a number of PBVs purchased by Thomas Kendall for his Catalina Limited, located at LaVerne, California. The aircraft was given the civil registration N5582V. The plane went through several owners, apparently being little flown, until it wound up with an outfit by the name of Diversified Drilling Muds who parked the amphibian at Lewiston, Montana, in the early 1980s.

At the time, the Israeli Air Force Museum was in search of several significant aircraft including a Catalina and a Flying Fortress. The registration of our subject aircraft had been changed to N84857 (at one point, the Canadian



The Catalina as seen today. It is obvious that this rare artifact needs to be indoors. *Air Classics* readers can help with donations of any size. A monumental effort was undertaken to repair the damaged Catalina

Original blister turrets will be installed, along with other original items, once the plane is put indoors. (J. Farmer)



Driving south through the heart of Washington State's Whidbey Island and into the town of Oak Harbor on Pioneer, a very pleasant surprise awaits the aviation enthusiast in the form of Consolidated PBV-5A Catalina BuNo 33968. This handsomely presented aircraft is standing on its gear just off to the right of the little city's main thoroughfare.

The rare amphibian is in the midst of a restoration to museum static standards by the PBV-Naval Air Museum, whose headquarters and public displays reside on the opposite side of Pioneer from their prized PBV. The museum honors Whidbey Island's former seaplane base, which was in constant operation less than a mile away from the museum.

Sad sight of the Catalina after going off the runway at Lewiston. The pilot was killed when the cockpit area failed and folded — a common defect of the design. (Wayne Arnst)



registration C-GVTF had been assigned but not taken up). Ownership was now with Ben Kalka of Oakland, California, and he had purchased the plane with the express purpose of getting it to Israel. Condition of the plane was relatively good and the plan was to get the aircraft airworthy, fly it to Miami for installation of avionics, and then on to Tel Aviv.

On 9 May 1985, N84857 was being taxied for takeoff when the brakes failed and the plane went off the end of the runway and down a gully. The hull folded in around the cockpit, killing the pilot, and injuring the other two on board. After this happened, the Israelis pulled out of the deal. However, work went on to repair the aircraft but in 1999 a tornado hit Lewiston and did a bit more damage to the plane.

The fuselage of an unidentified ex-Royal Canadian Air Force Canso was used to obtain the nose section, which

was grafted to the damaged N84857. During 2000, it was moved to Skagit County Regional Airport in Washington where intensive repair work was done by Sound Aircraft Repair.

In 2010, the PBV was acquired by the PBV Memorial Foundation, Oak Harbor, Washington, and on 29 July of that year it was transported by air to NAS Whidbey Island by a Chinook from Columbia Helicopters. Today, the aircraft makes a proud exhibit but it is outside in less than ideal weather. Efforts are also underway to find a new property for the museum on which to build a structure to display the Catalina and get it out of the harsh environment. The PBV-Naval Air Museum is located at 270 SE Pioneer Way, Oak Harbor, Washington. Website is pbymf.org or call 360-240-9500. Donations to protect this rare aircraft are welcome.