When the decision was being made in the 1960s on the elusive "Dakota replacement", it was not an easy choice; the aircraft which best measured up came from the rugged lineage of the de Havilland Aircraft of Canada (DHC) stable. The RAAF was already familiar with the DHC Beaver and Otter, and the short take-off and landing (STOL) field performance of the Caribou was ideal for a transport for Army support work.

The Caribou is a twin-engined light tactical transport with rear-opening ramp doors to allow rapid loading and unloading. The prototype first flew on 30 July 1958. Eighteen aircraft were ordered for the RAAF in May 1963 and the first aircraft, A4-134, was handed over at the DHC plant at Downsview, near Toronto, Canada, on 25 February 1964. Three aircraft were then ferried by No 38 Squadron crews 25,700 km (16,000 miles) to Australia, via the Atlantic, Europe and Indian Ocean, arriving at Richmond on 22 April. The initial 18 aircraft were serialled with scattered numbers between A4-134 and A4-210.

In July 1964, three aircraft on ferry from Canada were diverted from Butterworth, Malaysia, to deploy with the increasing Australian involvement in South Vietnam. The RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) was formed on 20 July and these three aircraft were flown to Vung Tau, to be joined by a further three in August. In 1965 a seventh aircraft was added and in June 1966 RTFV became No 35 Squadron. During nearly eight years of operations in Vietnam, the Caribou, which used the call-sign 'Wallaby' (with No 35 Squadron becoming known as "Wallaby Airlines"), carried over 600,000 passengers.

The first RAAF Caribou was lost on 1 July 1964 when A4-134 was written off in a heavy landing at Nowra Naval Air Station. The following November a further seven aircraft were ordered to replace this loss and the six deployed to Vietnam. These Caribou were delivered in 1966, with scrambled serials between A4-225 and A4-236.

Australia's Caribou detachment in Vietnam began winding down in June 1971, and the last aircraft arrived back at Richmond on 26 February 1972. Meanwhile, since 1965, a flight from No 38 Squadron had been operating from Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, providing transport support for the PNG Defence Force. Until their withdrawal in 1975, the crews of the three Caribou of the detachment flew nearly 27,000 hours.

A final four Caribou were delivered over the 1968–71 period, serialled between A4-264 and A4-299, and with these aircraft the RAAF supported survey operations in Indonesia in addition to various United Nations and Red Cross commitments. From March 1975 to November 1978 a white No 38 Squadron Caribou in United Nations markings operated with the UN Military Observer Group in India-Pakistan (UNMOGIP). Duties entailed resupply and remanning observation posts to monitor the cease-fire line in the North-West Frontier. During the fighting in Timor in 1975, Caribou aircraft of No 35 Squadron, in Red Cross markings, flew daily mercy missions from Darwin carrying supplies to refugees in East Timor.

One of the Caribou's great virtues is its capability to operate from relatively crude dirt strips that cannot be used by other military transports. This light 'footprint' has been lacking in any of the Caribou's competitors or successors. The aircraft has been used by the RAAF for flare-dropping missions, medical evacuation, search and rescue and paratroop training exercises, but the main task is the airlift of troops, civilians, supplies, ammunition, mail and food.

On 1 July 1976, No 35 Squadron relocated to RAAF Townsville from Richmond, and formed a composite unit with Iroquois helicopters in support of the Army in north Queensland. When the Iroquois later transferred to the Army, Nos 35 and 38 Squadrons formed No 84 Wing of the Operational Support Group. Until 1988, two Caribou served at Butterworth with Transport Support Flight, and later No 79 Squadron, supporting Mirage operations and the deployed Army infantry company, as well as duties for the embassies in the region. Detachments from No 38 Squadron provided search and rescue and local transport requirements for Darwin and Pearce, as well as supporting Army units with training exercises. An ongoing requirement for No 38 Squadron is the support of the Parachute Training School at HMAS *Albatross* at Nowra.

On 30 May 1991 the Minister for Defence announced the Caribou fleet would be reduced from 21 to 14 aircraft, and A4-164 was the first withdrawn from service in November 1992. Aircraft withdrawn from service will be stored at Amberley to provide a source of spares for the fleet.

In December 1992, No 38 Squadron moved to Amberley and continues to operate the venerable Caribou in support of the Australian Army. The unit was the training unit for maintenance personnel and aircrews for both Nos 35 and 38 Squadrons until the amalgamation of the four separate Caribou operating facilities in 2000, with the Caribou now solely operated by No 38 Squadron. In addition, No 38 Squadron Detachment B operates Caribous from RAAF Base Townsville.

**TECHNICAL DATA: de Havilland Canada DHC-4 Caribou**

**DESCRIPTION:**

Light tactical transport with two flight crew capable of carrying 32 troops.

**POWER PLANT:**

Two 1450hp Pratt & Whitney R2000 Twin Wasp radials.

**DIMENSIONS:**

Wingspan 29.15 m (95 ft 7 in); length 22.13 m (72 ft 7 in); height 9.68 m (31 ft 9 in).

**WEIGHTS:**

Empty 8233 kg (18 260 lb); max 12 927kg (28 500 lb).

**PERFORMANCE:**

Max speed 348km/h (188 kt); economical cruise 293km/h (158 kt); range (max fuel and cargo) 2100km (1135 nm).