

THE CARIBOU AIRCRAFT

In the early 1960s the RAAF identified a need to find a replacement aircraft for the aging DC3 Dakota which had been in service since the Second World War. A new type of aircraft was selected, one that was manufactured by the De Havilland Aircraft Company of Canada and called the 'Caribou'. The Caribou was not the prettiest, or the fastest or the most comfortable aircraft to fly in but they were very reliable, versatile and rugged. The advantage of this aircraft over others was that it had STOL capabilities (meaning short take-off and landing) and could operate from short unprepared airfields (like dirt or grass) This STOL ability meant that at maximum weight the Caribou could take off in just 220 metres (or 725 feet) and land in 205 metres (or 670 feet) The short landing roll was made possible by large flaps (full length of the wing) disc brakes and propellers (the same as this one here at the Memorial) that could go into reverse pitch on landing and provide reverse thrust to slow the aircraft.

The aircraft had a crew of 3 and was very versatile in the type of roles it could carry out. It could carry 32 passengers or up to 6000 pounds of freight, 26 fully equipped paratroopers, 22 medical evacuation patients, carry out supply dropping of equipment or LAPES (low altitude parachute extraction system) This is where the aircraft is flown one to two metres above the ground with its wheels down and at the designated delivery point a parachute is deployed out the back of the aircraft. The parachute then pulls the load out and it drops the one or two metres onto the ground. This is a fast and accurate way of delivering equipment to troops in the field.

The RAAF purchased 29 examples of the Caribou from 1964 to 1971. The first 6 had arrived at RAAF Base Richmond by May 1964 and the next batch of 6 left Toronto in July for Australia. However, when they reached Butterworth Air Force Base in Malaya the crews were told not to proceed to Darwin but to turn left and go to Saigon as the Australian Government had committed the 6 aircraft to the Vietnam

2

War. It wasn't until the end of the conflict in 1972 that the aircraft finally made it to Australia.

The Caribou was ideally suited to the Vietnam type of operations flying into short unprepared airfields in support of forward outposts. We carried anything – passengers, mail, ammunition, drums of fuel and even livestock – poultry, pigs and cattle. Cows were a problem if not in crates as they were hard to restrain and often got loose in the cargo compartment. This obviously made it difficult for the pilot to trim the aircraft with cattle wandering around the cabin and sometimes even into cockpit to have a look around. The only load I ever refused to take was a request to carry an elephant from A to B. Cows were a big enough problem on board, but an elephant would be just too big and difficult to handle.

The RAAF Caribou's operated throughout South Vietnam and were known as Wallaby Airlines from the aircraft call sign that was adopted on arrival. The Squadron was highly respected by all allied forces for their efficiency and reliability in all operations and tasks they were assigned. In fact the Americans were so impressed with our performance that they sent efficiency experts to the squadron to study our maintenance and operating procedures. However it was just through the dedication and willingness of all ground crew to work hard and quite often long hours when necessary to service the aircraft and of the aircrew to always fly the aircraft with a full load when possible.

Over the 8 years the aircraft operated in Vietnam, the squadron flew 81,000 sorties totalling 44,000 hours on combat support, carrying 680,000 passengers and 46 million kilograms of freight. And the statistic I like to quote the most is that even though we only flew 1.4% of the total transport missions, we carried 7-8 % of total freight airlifted. This was an outstanding effort from all who served on the aircraft during the war. The Caribous were the first RAAF unit into Vietnam & the last Squadron to leave.

From 1965 to 1975 we also had 3 Caribous based in Port Moresby supporting the PNG Defence Force and carrying out civil aid work throughout PNG. Again the aircraft was ideally suited to this type of operations flying into short unprepared airstrips in mountainous terrain. Unfortunately, on the 28 August 1972, a Caribou crashed near Wau in the central highlands with the loss of 25 lives. This highlighted the dangers and challenges involved in flying in PNG where crews are confronted on a daily basis with bad weather, high mountain ranges and very little in the way of navigation aids.

Besides operating throughout Australia the Caribou has also been involved in numerous overseas missions. We had an aircraft operating for the UN on Peacekeeping duties in Kashmir and Pakistan for 3 years during the mid 1970's and other aircraft supported the Army over several years in re-mapping all the land mass from New Guinea to Sumatra. In August 1975 an aircraft was despatched to Darwin to fly Red Cross personnel and equipment to East Timor during the civil war that was occurring there at the time and also to evacuate Australian citizens and refugees back to Australia. On their last sortie on the 4 September the aircraft was hijacked by East Timorese military personnel who feared for their lives and wanted to leave the country. The un-armed crew, when confronted by soldiers brandishing guns and hand grenades, had little choice but to concede to their demands. The aircraft was grossly overloaded with twice as many passengers as it was designed to carry but managed to arrive safely in Darwin. This was, and still is, the only time a RAAF aircraft has ever been hijacked. That particular aircraft (A4-140) is now at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. More recently the aircraft were involved in Peacekeeping duties in the Solomon Islands and again in East Timor following their independence from Indonesia.

Sadly, time caught up with the old girl and after 45 years of faithful service the Caribou fleet was retired in November 2009. Yes, it wasn't pretty, it wasn't fast but everyone who serviced or flew the aircraft thoroughly enjoyed the experience and admired the capabilities and versatility that it possessed.

JOHN MC DONALD

Stuart Bradley

Stuart Bradley joined the RAAF in 1962, as an Apprentice electrical fitter, aged 15. On graduation he was posted to No. 38 Transport Squadron which was being re-equipped with the new DeHavilland Caribou.

He was posted to the RAAF Transport Flight Viet Nam in June, 1965, aged 18, and served for 8 months as was the length of service at that time.

During this time he picked up some conversational Vietnamese, and had the opportunity to see church and missionary work in his spare time.

He returned to no 38 Squadron at RAAF Richmond, where he again worked on the Caribou, including a 3 month detachment to Papua New Guinea in 1966.

So moved by what he saw in Viet Nam, Stuart wanted to return as a missionary, but had the hurdle of a 15 year contract with the RAAF.

With the escalation of the Viet Nam war, and the desire of the RAAF to have many gain experience in a theatre of war, Stuart reasoned that he would have Buckley's hope of getting back for a second tour.

He applied for the Vietnamese Language Course at RAAF Language School Point Cook, and was accepted for no 7 Vietnamese Language Course.

Upon graduation, he remustered to linguist, and after being on staff for 18 months was posted back to Viet Nam, to no 1 RAAF Operational Support Unit, Vung Tau. And interpreter, mainly liaising between the Vietnamese employees and the RAAF in any matter that arose, literally from birth to death. He served for one year only, disappointed he could not have extended his service there.

Stuart returned to Point Cook as be NCO I/C of the Language Laboratory, from where he applied for a discharge to attend Bible College in preparation to return to Viet Nam as a missionary.

God has a sense of humour, and instead of Stuart going to 'Viet Nam, the Vietnamese came to Australia, and for 11 years he and his wife, Lucy assisted the Vietnamese community in harmonious resettlement, for which he was awarded the Queensland Migrant service Award by the State Government.

Ordained tot the Baptist ministry, Stuart has pastored the Vietnamese community, Kingaroy Baptist Church, and a Brisbane congregation, before working with a missionary organisation in mobilising and member care.

He has been an Area Representative for the Viet Nam Veterans Counselling Service, and Padre to the RSL in both Kingaroy and Tamborine Mountain.

Stuart & Lucy retired and now live at Forest Lake..

JOHN,

FURTHER TO OUR CONVERSATION ON WED 20 SEP RELATING TO THE 'OPS - CRASH LANDING OF A4-233. YOU ARE CORRECT THAT THIS HAPPENED FOLLOWING A 'D' SERVICING, HOWEVER THERE WAS AN STI (SPECIAL TECHNICAL INSPECTION) ISSUED PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF THE 'D' SERV WHICH CALLED FOR AN INSPECTION OF THE TWO RODS CONNECTING THE UNDERCARRIAGE DOORS TO THE MLG.

UNFORTUNATELY THE RODS ARE A DIFFERENT LENGTH & WHILST THE STI COVERED THE REMOVAL, INSPECTION (CRACK DETECTION FROM MEMORY) & REFITMENT IT DID NOT COVER 'A RETRACTION TEST', NOR DID IT SPECIFY THAT THE RODS WERE OF DIFFERENT LENGTH, NOR LH & RH.

UNFORTUNATELY THE RODS WERE INCORRECTLY FITTED CAUSING AN OVER LOCK OF THE DOORS.

THE RESULT BEING A VERY SMOOTH LANDING BY FLG OFF MAY.

ANOTHER MISHAP YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE OF INVOLVED A4-299 FOLLOWING

A MAJOR SERVICING CARRIED OUT BY HAWKER de
HAVILLAND (E' SERVICING). A CLECKO OR SKIN
PIN (YOU CAN CORRECT THE SPELLING AS I'M
ASSURED YOU HAVE COME ACROSS THEM), SOME
HOW BECAME LODGED IN THE MILG STRUT.
EVERY THING WAS GOING WELL ON THE TEST
FLIGHT UNTIL THE U/C WAS SELECTED DOWN,
TWO GREENS, ONE RED. THE AIRCRAFT WAS
DIVERTED TO RICHMOND (IN FAVOUR OF LANDING
AT BANKSTOWN) WHERE THE AIRCRAFT LANDED.
THE LANDING WAS OK & THE U/C REMAINED
OK, THAT IS UNTIL THE ENGINES WERE SHUT
DOWN, WITH NO HYDRAULIC PRESSURE THE
~~THE~~ PORT U/C FOLDED (DONT ~~KNOW~~ KNOW WHY
THE U/C PINS WERE ^{NOT} INSERTED). THE O'HAUL
MANAGER FROM DHS WAS REFUSED ENTRY
ONTO THE BASE. THE AIRCRAFT WAS RECOVERED
BY 38 SQN PERSONNEL. I'M AFRAID THIS IS
THE BEST PHOTO COPY I CAN PROVIDE, THINGS
WERE A BIT SENSITIVE.

IF YOU REQUIRE ANY FURTHER INFO PLS
ADVISE.

KIND REGARDS

DOIN.