



DAKOTAS DOWN UNDER

Australia's current Dakota population explosion described by GEOFF GOODALL

Recent months have seen a total of six Douglas DC-3s imported into Australia, with two more in prospect. This mass migration began when the Papua New Guinea Defence Force placed its fleet of four former RAAF C-47s up for disposal early in 1993 and the entire fleet was sold in Australia. These aircraft varied markedly in condition, depending upon how long they had been retired, parked in the open air in the harsh tropical New Guinea climate.

First to depart on its delivery flight south was P2-003, which ferried Port Moresby-Cairns on August 21 1993, later continuing south using tradeplate callsign "VH-PTE" to Moree, New South Wales, where its new owner Marty Taylor plans an ignominious fate as an attraction at his Stockyard Tavern Steak House in the town. P2-004, meanwhile, limped into Cairns on September 23, its pilot describing it as a "bucket of bolts" - after a month's stopover in Cairns and some maintenance, it headed south as tradeplate "VH-ATO" to new owner Dakota National Air in Sydney.

Next to depart from Papua New Guinea was P2-005, which cleared Australian customs at Cairns on October 12, and then departed two days later for Adelaide on behalf of Dick Lang's Desert Safaris. This aircraft replaced Lang's VH-PWN which had been sold to New Zealand earlier in 1993 and in a move to deceive 'propliner' enthusiasts and passengers alike, adopted the same registration. The original VH-PWN had a long history of Australian outback flying and

A "bucket of bolts" was how the pilot described P2-004 after arrival at Cairns on September 23 en-route to Sydney for Dakota National Air. (Paul Howard)



has even been immortalised in a popular folk song describing its days with Bush Pilots Airways operating between Cairns and Weipa :-

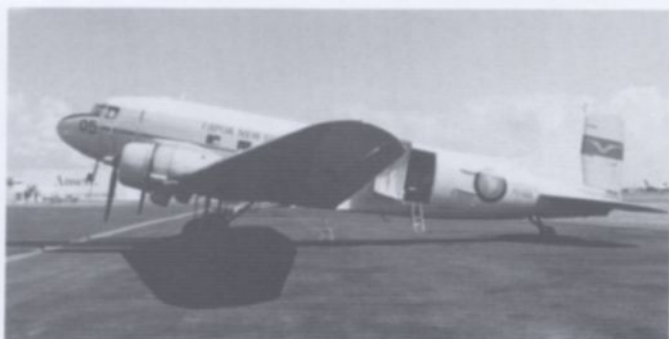
"Papa Whiskey November, from Weipa, the way to fly
She was in love with the pilot
He was in love with the sky."

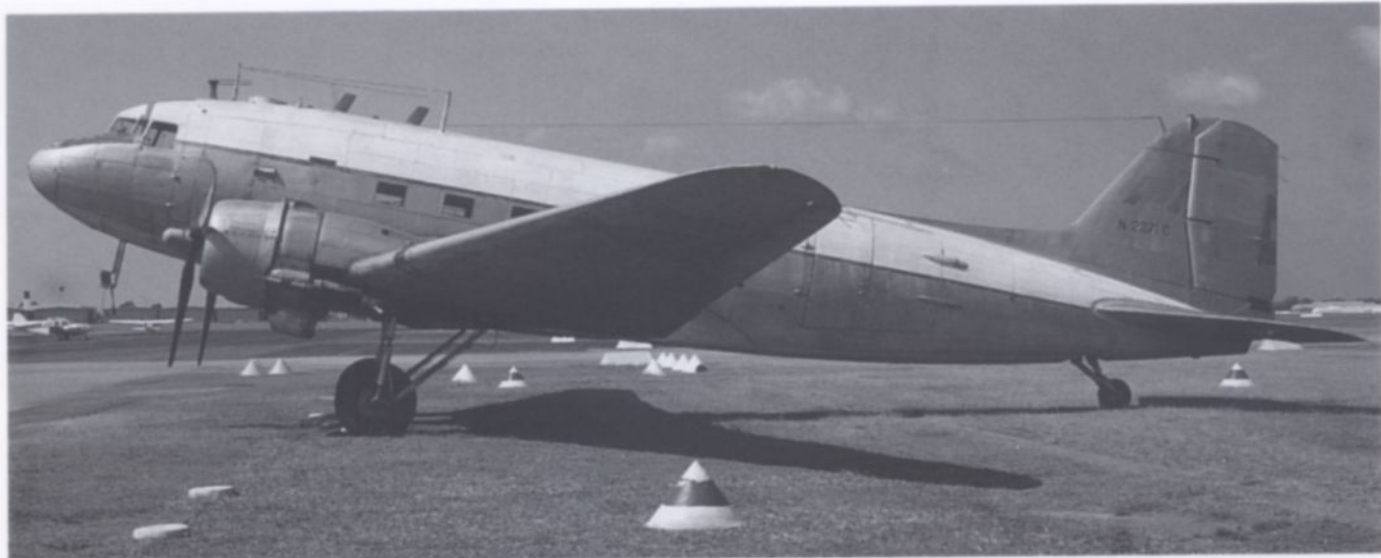
The final PNGDF C-47 P2-001 was ferried from Port Moresby to Cairns on December 20 1993 by veteran Australian round-engine pilot Jack Curtiss. This Dakota spent Christmas in tropical Cairns before Jack continued her delivery flight to new owner Dakota National Air in Sydney.

An unexpected arrival in October was another former RAAF Dakota returning home. A65-102 was sold to Geoff Leach of South Pacific Airmotive, Sydney, back in 1990. Following certification difficulties, the aircraft was registered N65388 in December of that year to an associate company named South Pacific Airmotive of Hollywood, California, and flown to Honolulu, departing Brisbane for the Pacific crossing in August 1991. After flying mainly parachuting operations from Honolulu International Airport, Geoff decided to bring the C-47 back to Australia to be based in Cairns to operate freight charters for DC-3 Queensland. The FAA gave N65388 a clean bill of health for the

HEADING PHOTOGRAPH: DC-3 N65388 of South Pacific Airmotive shown the day she arrived at Cairns from Honolulu. She now lives at Cairns flying as 'DC-3 Australia - South Pacific. (Geoff Goodall)

Former Papua New Guinea Defence Force C-47 P2-005 passing through Cairns on October 12 1993 displaying the registration VH-PWN. (Paul Howard)





DC-3 N2271C at Archerfield Aerodrome on November 9 shortly before entering the hangar for overhaul.

(Tony Arbon)

return ferry flight to Australia, and a 22-hour leg was planned from Pago Pago to Cairns. However, the Australian crew developed food poisoning en-route forcing them to drop into Port Vila in the Solomon Islands, continuing to Cairns on a mere 9-hour final sector!

The reformed DC-3 Queensland uses leased aircraft for charter work, N65388 in "DC-3 Queensland-South Pacific" titles for cargo work, and VH-MIN of Dakota Downunder (the former Splitters Creek Airlines) was flown up to Cairns on November 22 to take up residence for passenger tourist charters. Meanwhile, Geoff Leach's South Pacific Airmotive base their other DC-3 VH-EDC at Camden Airport near Sydney. Geoff has an interesting background, including colourful adventures in Central Africa for the CIA during the sixties as engineer and pilot on DC-4s with Seven Seas Airlines, prior to becoming Boeing 747 base engineer at Sydney for Pan Am and later Continental. He is now based at Gatwick, has a house in Hawaii while running South Pacific in Australia!

Even more startling than the delivery flights of the other DC-3s was the arrival at Brisbane's Archerfield Airport on November 6 of DC-3 N2271C on delivery from Thailand via Darwin and Charleville. This turned out to be the first of a trio of former Burmese Air Force Dakotas now owned by Bob Keys of Paradise Air, Palau, Philippines, destined for tourist work in Australia, under the novel name of Up Over Down Under Air Pty! The optimistic aim is to carry back-packer tourists between Brisbane and the outback and Queensland coastal resorts. The UODU brochure even announces Great Barrier Reef scenic flights from Cairns with Bob Keys' Grumman Goose RP-C864, which has been on

extended maintenance at Archerfield for the past year. The three DC-3s comprise - N2271C (c/n 25309 ex-UBAF 5714, UBT-714, G-ANZE, C-406, KG765 and 43-48048), N2271D (c/n 33174 ex-UBAF 5712, UBT-712, G-AOAL, F-OAQA, AP-ADA, KN559 and 44-76842) and N2270M (c/n 10239 ex-UBAF 5715, UBT-715, G-AODD, OD-AAO, LR-AAO, NC36412 and 42-24377).

These three aircraft were among a group of seven Union of Burma Air Force C-47s registered in July 1978 to the infamous South east Asian DC-3 dealer and operator Stan Booker, then trading as Nevada Airlines of Las Vegas, Nevada. This trio was sold in September 1984 to one Panido Veerathanongdech with a postal address at Sausalito, California, but the three aircraft are reported to have been involved in a United Nations rain-making programme and drifted into more colourful clandestine operations in Thailand and neighbouring countries until impounded by Thai police and stored. A change of ownership for the three was recorded in March 1991 to Harold J. Hansen of Seattle, Washington. N2271C itself narrowly avoided a planned sale to Spain by Century Air the following year, clearly preferring the wide open spaces of Australia.

As we close for press, N2271C had entered a hangar at Archerfield, and work had commenced on its Australian C of A inspection. The other two DC-3s were due to arrive shortly and UODU's Manager Gary Young predicted that they would commence passenger service in March 1994. Up Over Down Under Air's progress will be watched by Aussie 'propliner' fans with great interest.

A colourful sticker promoting 'Flying Lizard Tours' adorns the door of Dakota Downunder's DC-3 VH-MIN.

(Paul Howard)

