

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN WARPLANE HERITAGE MUSEUM | AUGUST 2016

FLIGHTLINES



**A TRIBUTE
TO LADY
ORCHID**

**DOWN BUT
NOT OUT
LYSANDER WILL
BE BACK**

**LONG HISTORY
OF SERVICE
DAKOTA'S
MEMORABLE LIFE**

PHOTO: ERIC DUMIGAN



Black decals were applied over the usual markings and for a more authentic look, Lance Russwurm painted the Lady Orchid nose art on. Lance was also responsible for replicating the Hot Gen artwork on the B-25 Mitchell.

LANCASTER FLIES AS LADY ORCHID FOR 2016 SEASON



Over the past few years, we have honoured famous Canadian Lancaster bombers by adding their markings and nose art to our Lancaster FM213, known as KB726 or VeRA. This summer, it has been painted in the temporary markings of Lady Orchid, Lancaster KB895, WL-O. It will be flown as a tribute to the many brave Canadian and Albertans who served in Bomber Command in the Second World War and to Calgary Ron Jenkins who served our country in time of need with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

In 1952, with only 10.5 hours of flying on the airframe, our Lancaster FM213 was heavily damaged when the undercarriage collapsed at Trenton, Ontario during a ferry flight. The aircraft was almost considered unsalvageable. By then, all the remaining serviceable Lancasters that were left in Canada had been converted to various new configurations or had long since been scrapped.

Luckily, a replacement centre section was located on a farm in Penhold, Alberta, from Lancaster KB895, known as Lady Orchid. The government quickly contacted a salvage crew that was dispatched to Penhold to remove Lady Orchid's centre section. After repairs were completed, Lancaster FM213 could be considered a hybrid of sorts — part FM213 and part KB895 and Lady Orchid would now be allowed to render one more service to her country.

PHOTO: ERIC DUMIGAN; PHOTOS BY DEREK MICKELOFF (3X)

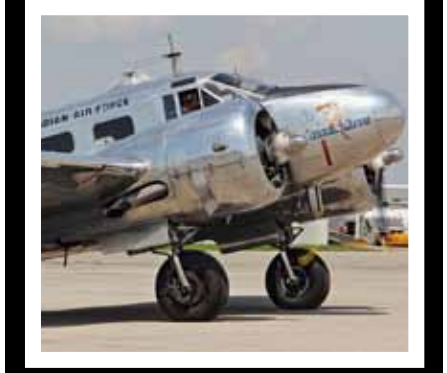


LYSANDER ACCIDENT



On June 18th, while on a local flight, our Westland Lysander (RCAF #2363, C-GCWL) experienced engine difficulty and the pilot executed an off airport landing in Cayuga. The pilot, Rick Rickards, and his crew were uninjured. The Lysander suffered damage and was recovered back to the Museum the next day. It may take a bit of time, but our Lizzie will be repaired and return to the skies once again.

PHOTOS BY DEREK MICKELOFF (3X)



BCATP FLY-IN
On May 28th, we hosted our annual British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Fly-In event. The ramp was a sea of yellow with aircraft from our collection as well as visitors. The event is being moved into August for 2017 and will include a mass flypast of BCATP trainers.

Researching our Dakota

FZ692 DURING WORLD WAR TWO | BY KEITH CLIFFORD



Any aircraft that manage to survive seventy plus years and remain airworthy are remarkable in their own right. The aircraft that make up the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum are even more so as they are associated with the rich and varied history of Canada's military air forces. Each aircraft has its own story to tell. Many of them have served in both war and peace and contributed to Canada's rich military heritage. Only one aircraft in the collection has actually flown on wartime combat missions. Others were either produced too late in World War Two to see action

or they were relegated to a no less important training role here in Canada.

Our Douglas Dakota Mk III, C-GRSB, is a relative newcomer to the museum having been delivered on the 22nd of May, 2014 by Andy Dobson and Bill Craig. A gift from the federal government, she arrived with a multitude of spares and three filing cabinets full of documentation including 24 aircraft journey logs outlining her flying career as C-GRSB. There was however no information from World War Two and her subsequent career with the Royal Canadian Air Force. There is some basic detail on the internet and the RAF Battle Of Britain Memorial Flight have perhaps the most

detailed information as their Dakota Mk IV ZA947 is currently painted to resemble how our Dakota appeared in July 1944 when she was attached to 233 Sqn RAF. In this article they confirm that our Dakota, RAF serial FZ692, is indeed a combat veteran of the airborne operation over Normandy. She was also known by the unique nick name, "Kwicherbichen". She subsequently went on to serve with 437 Sqn RCAF. That was about as much detail that we had on her wartime service. The search begins...

FZ692 began her life some time in 1943 when she left the assembly line at the Douglas Aircraft Company plant in Oklahoma City, OK. The exact date of manu-

facture is unknown. We do know that she is manufacturer's serial number 12295 and she was built as a C-47A-5DK and assigned the U.S. Army Air Forces serial number 42-92489. She was produced under AAF contract W535AC28405. In 1944 she became one of over 1,900 Lend Lease Dakotas supplied to the RAF and taken on strength in February.

She was assigned to 233 Sqn RAF at Blakehill Farm in Wiltshire, England. 233 Sqn had previously flown Lockheed Hudsons with Coastal Command out of Gibraltar. In February 1944, the squadron began training on Dakotas in the transport role which included airborne drops of

troops and supplies and towing gliders. In the build up to Normandy the squadron was extremely busy with training. In order for the story to be told in any degree of detail it was necessary to acquire entries of the Operations Record Books for both 233 and 437 Sqn's during the time of FZ692's service. Jim vanDyk managed to obtain several of these and this author acquired the rest. Together they form a pretty good history of the crews and aircraft that flew every operation as well as many pertinent details of those trips.

One of the first things that became evident was that Flying Officer K.M. Dober flew the aircraft more than any other 233

Sqn pilot. It is rumoured that the name Kwicherbichen was painted on the aircraft by her ground servicing crew in response to many complaints by her pilot. It's conceivable that pilot may very well have been F/O Dober!

233 Sqn's ORB begins with the squadrons first operation on the night of the 5th and 6th of June 1944. The squadron was part of Operation Tonga, the mission to deliver the 6th British Airborne Division into Normandy. FZ692 was part of a group of thirty 233 Sqn aircraft. Six aircraft were assigned to tow Airspeed Horsa gliders. The remaining 24 Dakotas dropped paratroops. Based on the symbols painted on

ARCHIVAL PHOTOS: PETE PORTER (8X)



Pete Porter gets reacquainted with FZ692 in its current livery as a federal government aircraft.

the side of FZ692 it's likely that she was part of the second group. As well her take off time is within the larger group of aircraft. F/O Dober did not fly her on that first Normandy mission. The crew that night was captained by Warrant Officer JSR McRae, RCAF from Agassiz, BC. Flight Sergeant S Delarmere, RAF was the 2nd pilot, W/O WA Milne, RAF was navigator and the wireless operator was W/O SC Davidson, RAF. They took off from Blakehill Farm at 2316 on the 5th of June and flew a multi leg journey to the drop zone near Touffreville. Much light flak was encountered along the French coast near LeHavre, Fecamp, and Cabourg as well as further inland in the Caen area. After dropping members of the 6th British Airborne Division near the river Orne, FZ692 followed a route back home via Ypreville-Biville, Eletot, and then across the Channel to Littlehampton and landing at Blakehill farm on 0324 on the 6th of June. The crew had been aloft for four hours and eight minutes. Two squadron Dakotas failed to return.

On the following night, 6th and 7th of June, FZ692 flew another airborne operation. This time F/O Dober's crew in FZ692 were part of 24 squadron Dakota's that executed a second mission as part of Operation Tonga. This time they dropped ammunition to British paratroops in the area of the Orne river. Intense flak was encountered 1-2 miles away from the French coast and believed to be friendly fire. No squadron aircraft were lost.

FZ692 flew three more operational trips in June. On the 21st and 22nd she delivered 500 lb bombs to the RAF fighter bomber wing at airfield B.2 and brought back wounded to the UK. Symbols on the side of the aircraft reflected these sorties. On the 29th she flew personnel of a Forward Staging Unit into the airfield at B.6. F/O Dober flew all of these trips.

In July FZ692 continued the pattern of flying supplies into France and evacuating casualties back to the UK. In August she did the same thing except that from the 27th to the 30th she flew on a major air lift of food into Paris. In September she

flew four more trips with 233 Sqn. Her last trip was on the 13th when the commanding officer, Wing Commander A.J Green in FZ692, led 11 aircraft on two lifts of ammunition from Blakehill Farm to airfield B.58. In all, FZ692 flew 16 operational trips with 233 Sqn in the period from June to September 1944. From then she was taken on strength by the RCAF.

The first operational trip by FZ692 with 437 Squadron was on the 22nd of September 1944. In the interim Operation Market Garden at Arnhem occurred between the 17th to the 21st of September. Both 233 and 437 squadrons were involved but no mention of FZ692. A book published on Arnhem lists FZ692 having been flown by F/O Charles Cressman RCAF of 271 Sqn at Down Ampney on the 18th. Cressman's crew towed a Horsa glider. Afterwards Cressman and his crew were posted to 437 Sqn where tragically their crew was in a Dakota lost to enemy action on the 21st of September. A subsequent examination of 271 Sqn's ORB revealed that FZ592, another Dakota, had been flown by F/O Cressman on the 17th and the entry for the 18th while looking like FZ692 was a typographical error. This was confirmed by Dutch Arnhem airborne historian Arie-Jan vanHees. FZ692 did not participate in Operation Market which was the airborne forces part of Market Garden.

437 Squadron was the first RCAF transport unit formed overseas. The first operational trip for 437 was 14 Dakotas towing Horsa gliders as part of Operation Market on the 17th of September. On the 18th six Dakotas towed Horsa gliders on the second day of Market. On the 21st, 10 Dakotas attempted a resupply drop in the Arnhem area and five aircraft failed to return due to enemy action including Cressman's crew. It would be the heaviest day of loss for 437 during the war. The next day, FZ692 flew her first operational trip with 437 carrying 4,200 lbs of petrol to airfield B.55. She next flew on the 25th of the month where she flew VIP's out of Northolt to several airfields in France and then back to Northolt. These VIP's included Air Vice Marshal Pidcock of the RAF and Barnes Wallis of Vickers.

FZ692 was flown by a variety of crews while at 437 Sqn including the commanding officer, Wing Commander John A. Sproule DFC. She continued to fly personnel and

supplies to the continent. Cargo varied from mail, to ammunition, to pierced steel planking for runway construction, fuels of various types and aircraft spares. On many of the return trips FZ692 transported casualties and later prisoners of war. Initially these were Commonwealth POW's and later included Russian and French ones as well. The signatures found inside FZ692 today may very well be from casualties and repatriated POWs.

Most crews flew five lifts or trips a week. FZ692 flew into airfields in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Continuing her mission of re-supplying the British and Canadian forces, she carried many diverse items such as drop tanks to the fighter bomber wings based on mainland Europe. In March 1945 the squadron started moving Horsa gliders to its base and conducting refresher training in glider operations for her crews all the while continuing air transport operations. These preparations culminated in the second major airborne operation for the squadron, Operation Varsity, the Rhine crossing.

FZ692 was part of a group of twenty four 437 Sqn Dakotas that flew to RAF Birch assigned to tow Horsa gliders in the biggest airborne operation of World War 2. The object of mission was to deliver the gliders to a landing zone located east of the Rhine river and north of the town of Wesel. Crewing FZ692 was captain F/O J. "Jack" Wells, second pilot F/O W.H. "Pete" Porter, navigator F/O F.G. "Fred" Svendsen and wireless operator F/S Ed Chinsky. They took off from Birch with their glider at 0721 on the 24th of March. The Horsa had 5 members of the Royal Ulster Rifles, a jeep and a six pounder anti-tank gun. All aircraft reached the landing zone and successfully released their gliders in very thick haze. Returning crews reported moderate, medium and heavy flak over the landing zone, the rope dropping area and the Diersfordter-Wald but it was mostly inaccurate. Four aircraft were very slightly damaged and all crews returned safe with no casualties. The weather encountered over the entire route was excellent except for the dust and smoke encountered over the landing zone. The squadron carried on to land at airfield B.75, Nivelles, Belgium, for refueling and debriefing. F/O Wells crew landed at 1142. They were aloft for four hours

and twenty one minutes. A subsequent planned airborne re-supply mission was not required.

I had the great privilege to meet W.H. "Pete" Porter in May 2016. He was a very spry 93 year old. He flew FZ692 several times including the Operation Varsity glider towing mission. He remembers that they picked up their glider at the very end of the runway. The Horsas were attached to the Dakota by a rope. They ran the throttles up and released the brakes and began a slow acceleration down the 6,000 foot runway at Birch. The overrun past the runway to a distance of one mile and a width of 200 feet was cleared of trees. Pete recalls that they used up almost all of the runway getting airborne and the aircraft was very slow in climbing and they used the cleared overrun to good advantage. Once aloft the best speed they could manage with the glider was 95 mph and this put them

437 Squadron was the first RCAF transport squadron formed overseas

behind a good part of the squadron. They were later reaching the landing zone. They released their glider and immediately dropped their towrope. They observed another unit's Dakota being shot down. They exited the area at 1,500 feet and found themselves amongst a squadron of Stirlings at 1,000 feet AGL. The Stirlings took the heat from the anti-aircraft forces on the ground and Jack Wells and his crew dove down to ground level and built up some speed to leave the battle area. They landed in Nivelles, Belgium with the rest of 437's aircraft. They all survived the war but sadly Pete is the last one of his crew still alive. Pete ended up serving as the Honourary Colonel for 437 Squadron from April 2003 to June 2009. He continues as the president of the 437 Squadron Association.

As the war against Germany was drawing to a close, 437 squadron became busier. On the seventh of May, 1945 the squadron moved from the UK to Nivelles, Belgium. The unit witnessed V-E

Day in Brussels. The following month the squadron moved to Evere near Brussels. FZ692 transported supplies and repatriated POWs during this time including Commonwealth, Russian and French POWs. She also flew 50 Russian displaced persons out of Germany. In July 437 Sqn opened a detachment in Oslo, Norway but FZ692 continued to operate from Brussels. In August and September FZ692 did a lot of trips within Belgium and Germany while later in October she was temporarily based at Gatow airport in Berlin. In November she made several trips out of RAF Odiham and in December 1945 the squadron operated with detachments in Odiham and Brussels.

1946 saw FZ692 continue to operate from Brussels. Many daily return trips were flown between three or four destinations. February, March, April and May saw FZ692 based in Odiham, Croydon, Hamburg and Brussels. She flew to destinations in Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. At the end of May she was in Odiham where the squadron began preparing to come home to Canada.

Ten 437 Squadron Dakotas left Odiham in June 1946 for the "fly-back" to Canada. FZ692 left on the 15th at 0900 with two other Dakotas. The crew on the flight back to Canada were, captain Flight Lieutenant F.V. Pilon, 2nd pilot Flight Lieutenant C.A. Pickett, navigator Flying Officer R.F. Hiltz and wireless operator Pilot Officer E.D.N. Allingham. They had four passengers aboard. The following day seven more Dakotas departed Odiham at 0900. This was the last entry for the Operations Record Book of 437 Squadron RCAF.

FZ692 flew 208 operational trips with 437 Sqn and 16 with 233 Sqn for a total of 224. She ended up flying hundreds of individual legs between airfields in Europe. FZ692 participated in two major airborne operations, Normandy and the Rhine Crossing. She carried 298 casualties to medical aid and repatriated 456 prisoners of war. She carried over 5,100 passengers to destinations around Europe. She carried over two hundred tons of freight (414,368 lbs). Hundreds of other Dakotas would have had similar careers. They were an integral part of the Allied victory. This however is the story of one combat veteran. ■

TOP PHOTO: KOOL SHOTS

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