

Following the North Star story in NetLetter nr 1463, there is one story left to relate and concerns CF-TFM - However, the North Star story held one final twist. All but one of the aircraft left in the UK were scrapped, but one example achieved a level of notoriety that has barely been matched since. CF-TFM in store at Coventry until November 1963, when it was announced that the North Star was one of four aircraft destined for operation in Liberia and had been sold to a gentleman named Mr D. Woolley. Her Merlin engines were run again, and on November 22 she was flown to Newcastle for further maintenance prior to heading south for Africa. However, no other North Stars joined CF-TFM at Newcastle, and eventually as a result of a high Court order on October 1, 1964 the airport authority auctioned off the old North Star.

As a result in February 1965 she was registered HP-925 and in rather mysterious circumstances departed from Newcastle on February 9, 1965 bound for "Limburg" Airport, presumably Maastricht.

The last John Gaul's North Stars, this aircraft would continue to generate much speculation until disappearing in darkest Africa eighteen months later. By that stage, John Gaul and his associates had no involvement in the aircraft and although ownership of the airframe could never be confirmed, it was a long way from Gaul's office in Mayfair.

The wandering North Star generated comment wherever it went and no airport owner really wanted it on its tarmac.

It seems that the aircraft underwent some form of maintenance in Holland, but by late 1965 it had been impounded at Rotterdam Airport. There were rumours concerning the likely purpose of the North Star, with a seasoned American flyer named Lucien Pickett implicated in a plan to fly arms to Algeria. Then a Swiss-American named Heinrich Heuer claimed he wanted to start an airline in the African State of Burundi using the North Star.

Eventually, it was with help from the Burundian Government that persuaded the Dutch authorities to release the aircraft and allow American Frank Warton to fly it out of Rotterdam on a 'test flight' to Frankfurt. Permission was granted, and on December 19, 1965 the aircraft departed. However, instead of tracking east to Germany, Warton headed south for a small airport at Albenga in northern Italy. He announced plans to start services in 1966 shipping flowers from Italy to West Germany, but this was really a cover for the carriage of a rather more sinister cargo.

A large quantity of machine-guns and rifles destined for Port Harcourt in Nigeria were stored in an old naval warehouse in Holland, but the accompanying paperwork only gave authority for this shipment to be imported into the UK. A deception would now take place that became worldwide news and gave newspaper readers the sort of story they normally read in novels.

Warton and his colleagues had spent many months tinkering with the North Star at Albenga, but the authorities had become very uncomfortable with the presence of the aircraft. The Panamanian registration had long since been washed off by the rain, and instead a fake Italian registration of I-ACOA had been applied to the aircraft. On the evening of October 8, 1966, Henry 'Hank' Warton and 'Chuck' Pollock flew the North Star from Albenga to Rotterdam. The shipment of arms was loaded aboard the North Star, and with papers permitting the import of these items into the UK, the Dutch authorities could do little to stop the loading of the aircraft. However, when one of the loaders carelessly dropped a crate of machine-guns onto the tarmac at Rotterdam, Chuck Pollock decided he wanted no further part in the operation. It was reported that an Italian pilot named Nicola Manca also walked away from the aircraft at this time. But whatever the identity of the co-pilot, his place in the cockpit was taken by Orvis Nelson, a charismatic aviator of impeccable pedigree who had founded Transocean Air Lines in 1946 and who had latterly been flying Panamanian-registered DC-4s and Commandos on United Nations work in Africa.

Presumably it is no more than a coincidence that the North Star had earlier sported a Panamanian registration. Early on the afternoon of October 9, North Star 'I-ACOA' departed from Rotterdam with its cargo safely aboard bound for Birmingham (Elmdon) Airport, a destination more far removed from a gun runner's itinerary than you could find. For an hour or so, the flight proceeded according to the flight plan, passing abeam the Clacton VOR on Red One at 15:56. The aircraft even tracked into the Birmingham Control Zone and made contact with the approach controller. But then suddenly the script changed dramatically. Warton announced that his company - the fictitious Silver Line Airways - had instructed him to divert to Palma. And so the mysterious North Star turned around and set course for the Mediterranean, never to be seen in Europe again. After refuelling in Palma, the North Star flew on to Hassi Messaoud in Algeria, where the aircraft touched down on October 10. The aircraft took off from Hassi Messaoud at 07:44 on the morning of October 11 bound for Fort Lamy in Chad, close to both the Nigerian and Cameroon borders. However, it seems that the ill-fated aircraft became lost, and with fuel running low, the North Star crash-landed in a flat area alongside a river near Garoua in Cameroon. All four crew members aboard the North Star survived the crash, and were charged by

the Cameroon Government with transporting without authority, illegally flying through Cameroon airspace, and operating an aircraft without the necessary flight documentation. Both Warton and Nelson received month long jail sentences, and fines of \$800 and \$400 respectively.

Mystery resident at Newcastle (Woolsington) Airport following her arrival there from Coventry on November 22, 1963, Canadair North Star CF-TFM took up Panamanian marks as HP-925 before departing to Holland on February 9 1965. She is seen here at Newcastle in company with a Tyne Tees Airways DC-3. (Ian MacFarlane)

(cf-tfm.jpg)