

"Spirit of Ostra Brama" (Gate of Dawn)

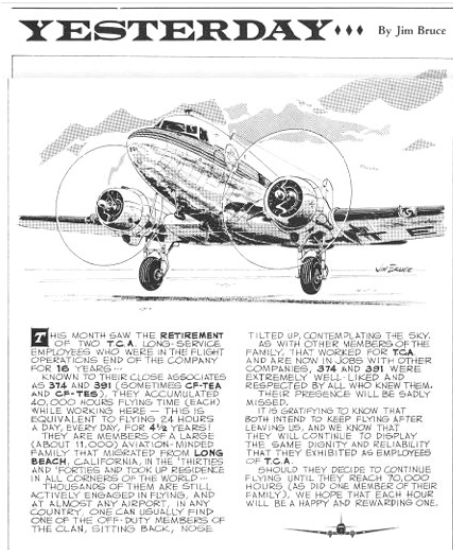
A Brief Story about Douglas DC-3, 11906, C-47A-1-DK, CF-TES

by Robert W. Arnold

This article contains a wee bit of information on a particular DC-3, that many might not know about, before its delivery to Trans-Canada Air Lines.

The idea for this article came to me when a caricature sketch was sent to me from Terry Baker, referring to the retirement of two DC-3's from the TCA fleet. My long time friend Jim Bruce produced the article and artwork, which appeared in a 1963 issue of *Between Ourselves*. One DC-3 in particular caught my attention.

The aircraft I refer to in this story, is a Trans-Canada Air Lines Douglas DC-3P that wore Fleet No. 91, (later 391), and registered as CF-TES.



CF-TES was one of thirty, newly acquired military transport versions of the DC-3 that were soberly painted in the duller of paints upon their arrival in Canada and bearing only a distant resemblance to what was once a sleek and glistening aircraft that so many were familiar with in the day. These rather drab looking aircraft were destined for the conversion shops at Canadair's Cartierville plant, located just outside of Montreal, and would soon be part of a striking fleet of shiny new DC-3's for Trans-Canada Air Lines. CF-TES, however, during its wartime career had a unique, yet hidden history all its own, mostly invisible and not easily found in most of today's DC-3 history books.

Wartime DC-3, Serial 11906, C-47-1-DK, FL-547.

DC-3, 11906 came off the Douglas Aircraft Corp assembly line in Oklahoma City as Skytrain 42-92139 and was delivered to the US Air Force on September 10, 1943.

On January 24, 1944, as part of the United States Lend-Lease programme, the aircraft was transferred to the RAF as Dakota Mk. III, FL547.

From July to September 1944, FL547 flew under the command of pilot Jazefa Tyszko with an all-Polish flight crew. During this time, the aircraft carried normal RAF markings, except for the addition of the two square red and white Polish Air Force insignia that were located on both sides of the fuselage just above and a bit behind both left and right cockpit side windows while the title, *"Spirit of Ostra Brama"* was hand painted in white on the port side of the already olive drab nose section of the aircraft. For those who may not know, *"Ostra Brama"* translated means *"Gate of Dawn"*.

Post War, DC-3, 11906, C-47-1-DK, FL-547.

Now that the war was over, there was a rather large surplus of Douglas DC-3 aircraft available, and the airlines were looking forward to modernizing their fleets.

In 1945, Trans-Canada Air Lines (TCA) began to purchase some of the surplus DC-3's. The thirty, very drab looking aircraft chosen by the airline were flown to Canadair's Cartierville's plant for conversion to twenty-one passenger luxury airliners. The sixty plus engines and spares for these aircraft were shipped to the Winnipeg facility for overhaul.

Included in the purchase, were three DC-3's equipped with the Curtiss-Wright Cyclone series engines, while the remaining twenty-seven DC-3's had the Pratt & Whitney 1830 series engines. Knowing the additional cost of operating two DC-3's that were powered differently, while operating on very similar routes, was not a practical way of doing things in the airline business, so the decision was made to sell off the three DC-3's equipped with the Wright Cyclones, and by 1948 these aircraft were now operating with other airlines. The remaining twenty-seven DC-3's continued through the conversion process and were placed in service as part of the airline's new fleet.



DC-3, Serial 11906, C-47-1-DK, CF-TES.

DC-3, 11906, CF-TES continued operating for the airline from January 1947 through to early 1963 when it was retired from Trans-Canada Air Lines and went to TransAir Ltd of Winnipeg on April 13, 1963. In June 1967, CF-TES was acquired by LambAir for a short time while

remained in TransAir livery.

It seems the aircraft ended its flying career as a parts aircraft for LambAir, while languishing around Winnipeg's airport property with the port side landing gear and other parts missing.

A couple years later, in 1970, the aircraft found its way to the Western Canada Aviation Museum (WCAM) and was stored for many years on Keith Olson's farm near Selkirk Manitoba. Keith was one of the Founding Members of the WCAM.



In the meantime, CF-TES remained on the Olson farm as part of the museum's inventory till about 2002, when a special interest group from CFB Greenwood N.S. took notice with plans to make it a display aircraft. It was then moved from the farm near Selkirk to CFB Winnipeg for storage till arrangements could be made for transport to Greenwood.



For reasons unknown, the plans to move CF-TES to CFB Greenwood fell through. The aircraft sat in storage at CFB Winnipeg for a several more years, and in October 2016, after discovering some of the aircraft's history, Gord Crossley, 17 Wing's Heritage Officer, arranged for its protection and preservation by the "Ghost Squadron," a group of volunteers on the base involved in aircraft and artifact restoration. It was discovered that DC-3,

11906, CF-TES had a uniquely hidden history not known by many. With some research, Crossley found that CF-TES had a portion of its flying career with the Polish Air Force during the Second World War.

With this new found information, a decision was made to have the fuselage, along with the tail fin and the two outer wing panels moved to the Ghost Squadron's storage compound for protection and so work could begin to properly preserve this piece of aviation history. Also, during this time, a group from the Polish Air Force in Poland heard about the existence of the aircraft. Interest began to grow.



In June 2017, several Ghost Squadron volunteers began work by power-washing the years of built-up dirt from the outer surface of the fuselage in preparation for painting the fuselage. The plan was not to paint the entire fuselage, but only areas where any markings of importance would be placed. This included the areas at the rear of the fuselage on both

sides, where the roundels and FL547 would be applied while preserving the original CF-TES lettering. The complete nose section to about three feet aft the cockpit side vent windows would be painted in olive drab. This would allow for the proper placement of the two red and white Polish Ensigns on each side and the white lettering of "Spirit of Ostra Brama" placed on the port side of the nose, exactly as it was in 1944.

By the end of October 2017, all the markings except for the roundel on the port side of the



fuselage were completed. The weather had become a bit too cold to properly apply any of the remaining paint. With winter now here, the fuselage remained inside the Ghost Squadron's compound till March 2018, when a crane, flat deck and a group of helpers from CFB Winnipeg arrived and began preparing the fuselage for lifting. After



some logistics were sorted out, mostly because a small shed in the way, it wasn't long before



the wings and fuselage made their way between the shed and main buildings, and carefully loaded and strapped down on the flat deck trailer for transported to their new location inside Hangar 10 at CFB Winnipeg.

The fuselage was the first to arrive at Hangar 10 followed shortly by the two wing panels and tail fin. As can be seen in the photo, the under-wing registration is still very much intact after all these years.

With the fuselage now safely stored inside Hangar 10, on March 7, 2019 a small group of Ghost Squadron volunteers gathered to complete the painting of any remaining unfinished markings including the half-completed roundel on the port side.



On March 8, 2019, a rather large crowd, including dignitaries from the Canadian Polish Congress, gathered inside Hangar 10 at CFB Winnipeg to take part in the re-patriotization ceremonies of FL547 (CF-TES).



FL547 (CF-TES) was loaded onto an Antonov AN-124 and returned to Polish soil the following day.

Included are a few photos showing parts of the ceremonies along with a group photo showing some of the dignitaries and volunteers from Ghost Squadron.

Also included is a photo provided by the Canadian Polish Congress as they prepare to

load the DC-3 onto the AN-124 for its lengthy journey back to Poland for further preservation.



Photo Credits.

CF-TES in Trans-Canada Air Lines livery provided by Larry Milberry.

The group photo along with the loading of FL547, (CF-TES) onto the AN-124, were provided by the Canadian Polish Congress.

All other photos, credited to the author.