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Air North: the DC-3 / C-47 Era

by Murray Lundberg

Arctic & Northern Aviation - Photos and History

Click on each photo to greatly enlarge it. The ones not shot by the author are scanned from original transparencies which are in the author's collection.

Air North was founded on February 1, 1977 by Joseph Sparfaring and Tom Wood. The company initially operated a charter service, primarily in support of the mining industry. Air North commenced operations with a single Cessna 206, C-GLJZ, and over the next decade operated on wheels, floats, and skis with many aircraft types including Cessna 150, 172, 185, 206 and 337s, de Havilland Beavers, Otters, and Caribou, a Britten Norman Islander, Beech 19 and 80s, a Fairchild Husky, and Douglas DC-3s and DC-4s. Scheduled services within the Yukon and between the Yukon and Alaska were started in the mid 1980s and in 1996 the company began to replace its piston-powered fleet with turboprops.


"The beginning of the end" for the DC-3 fleet was September 23, 1996. That was the day that the first of two newly-acquired Hawker Siddeley HS 748 turboprops (C-FYDU and C-FYDV) flew Air North's Whitehorse - Dawson City - Old Crow route for the first time. An article in the Yukon News on October 9th described the many advantages of the Hawkers over the DC-3s - flying speed and altitudes as well as comfort, and from a pilot's perspective, the HS 748 is a great plane to fly.

When the Hawkers went into service, Joe Sparfaring said that Air North would probably sell 3 of their 4 DC-3s, keeping one for "work that is best done with a DC-3" - mainly flights to rough mining strips. On May 6, 1998, though, a large photo on the front page of the Whitehorse Star led to a Page 2 headline that reported: "Last DC-3 soars off into history". In that article, Joe Sparfaring looked back to Air North's purchase of their first two DC-3s in 1975, and noted a couple of their more significant contracts with those aircraft, flying equipment into the Windy Crags copper mine in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and flying smoke-jumpers to forest fires for many years.

Sparfaring said that the first of the DC-3s was sold in the Fall of 1997, and 2 more in April 1998, at prices around \$150,000 each. The first aircraft went to a Colorado group who bought it as a toy. They're going to use it to travel to and from and haul their motorcycles around. The second went to service a courier contract between El Paso, Texas, and Mexico, and the third was bought by a group of historic-aircraft enthusiasts from Washington State.


In February 2001, Air North reported that they were looking at starting jet service to Alberta and/or British Columbia, and on June 1, 2002, they began scheduled service between the Yukon and Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver with two Boeing 737-200 jets they had purchased (C-FALB and C-GNAU). Air North's fleet has since then grown and modernized with newer series Boeing 737 aircraft as well as more Hawker Siddeley 748 turboprops. A complete list of the company's aircraft, and photos of their 3 main aircraft paint schemes, can be seen at ["Air North Aircraft - Registry History"](#).

The aircraft histories that follow have been assembled from many sources, each supplying a fragment of information. They are not complete, and there are inconsistencies, but it will give readers some idea of what happened in the long lives of these aerial workhorses.



CF-CUG: Serial #9891 was built by Douglas at Long Beach, California in 1943 as a C-47A-40-DL Skytrain. It initially had the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) number 42-24029. By 1964, it was CF-CUG, working for Canadian Pacific Airlines. In the 1970s, it was operated by Eldorado Aviation of Edmonton, Alberta, carrying passengers and freight for the Eldorado Mining and Smelting Company. It was purchased by Air North in 1980, and was operated with the name and tail art "Lady Lou". Sold in 1998, it is now owned by Princess Corp of Fairport, Alabama, registered as N8891A. In August 2012, it was disassembled, and is now being used for filming the TV series "Arctic Air".


The top photo was shot by an unknown photographer in Dawson City, Yukon (YDA) in October 1991, the lower one by the author at Dawson in July 1992.



CF-FML: Serial #12075 was built by Douglas at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1944 as a C-47A-10-DK Skytrain. It was delivered to the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) on February 5, 1944, with the number 42-92651. It was transferred to the Royal Air Force (RAF) as a Lend-Lease Dakota III K3440, arriving on February 28, 1944, then was assigned to No. 233 Sqdn at Bakenhill Farm, Wilton, on March 5, 1944. This squadron carried out casualty evacuation flights from Normandy and supplied 37 aircraf to the Arnhem airdrop during the first two days, followed by 30 re-supply missions, losing three Dakotas in the process. (Arthur Pearcy: "Douglas DC-3 Survivors") The plane was transferred to No. 1338 Transport Conversion Unit based at Welford, Berkshire, on August 26, 1945. Four months later it went to No. 1382 TCU at Wymondley, Leicestershire. On June 26, 1946 the plane went into storage with No. 22 Maintenance Unit at Silsoh in Cumberland.


It was purchased by Canadair Ltd on July 17, 1946, who brought it to Canada. Registered as CF-GHL, a Douglas DC3C-S1C3G, it was then delivered to Montyone Mines of Toronto, Ontario. On January 31, 1951 the plane was acquired by Algoma Steel Corp of Sault Ste Marie, Ontario. It was owned by Ontario Central Airlines for a few years prior to 1953, Nunair-Central Airlines from 1953-1968, Nunair-Northern Airlines 1968-1969 and Air Manitoba from 1969-1993. On May 17, 1986, the aircraft fell through the ice while landing at Nejanintin Lake in Manitoba - it was recovered, repaired and put back into service. It was purchased by Air North in May 1994, and they sold it in 1998. On July 20, 2000, while being operated by Allied Air Freight as N454A, it crashed shortly after take-off from Nassau International Airport, New Providence Island, Bahamas, killing both pilots.

The photo was shot by the author at Whitehorse in June 1995.



CF-FMA: Serial #13070 was built by Douglas at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1942 as a C-47A-20-DK Skytrain. It initially had the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) number 42-93186. It went to civil registry as NC28740, then N88740, came to Canada as CF-AMA, a DC3C-S1C30. It was owned by Quester Surveys until 1982 as CF-FMA, and Scundair from 1982-1988. It was purchased by Air North in August 1988. Air North operated it with the name and tail art "Yukon Musher". Sold in 1998, it's now owned by Fly One in Las Cruces, New Mexico, registered as N844TH. It was at Falcon Field in Mesa, Arizona in July 2010, but the last photo I've seen of the plane, taken in September 2012, shows it missing the rudder.

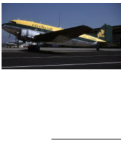
The photo was shot by David F. Brown in April 1998. The location is unknown, but it appears to have been taken during the delivery flight to the southwestern United States.



CF-OWW: Serial #12207 was built by Douglas at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1942 as a C-47A-20-DK Skytrain. It initially had the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) number 42-92484. It was transferred to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAR) as Dakota IIIU 27075, later renumbered 960. Registered as CF-OWW, a Douglas DC3C-S1C3G, it was purchased by Air North in September 1982, and was operated with the name and tail art "Yukon Sourdough". Air North sold the plane in September 1988. In 2001, it was restored by the EAA in a hangar at Oshkosh, Wisconsin - it was on display at the Oshkosh Air Show in 2001 and 2002 (see the [restoration photo album](#)). It is currently owned by Blue Ridge Piedmont & Chesapeake Airways in Delaware, registered as N583DC.

See a 4½-minute video of CF-OWW being loaded and taking off at Fairbanks in June 1994 at [Youtube](#).

Neither the location nor photographer are recorded on the original slide that was scanned for this listing.



C-GZOF: Serial #20833 was built by Douglas at Long Beach, California in 1944 as a C-47B-1-DL Skytrain. It initially had the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) number 43-16367. It went to civil registry with an unknown owner as N87650. It was registered in Canada as C-GZOF, a DC3C-S1C3G. It was purchased by Air North in May 1986, and operated with the name and tail art "Klondike Explorer".

In 1993, the aircraft was leased by Wagista Air (WAG Air) for a 2-year period. On August 19, 1995, it lifted off from Runway 08 at Vancouver, for a flight back to the Yukon. Following an overspeed on engine number 2, the pilot attempted to return to Runway 30, but crashed into a dyke along the Fraser River. The Air North mechanic, Lorenzo Roberti, was able to shove both WAG Air pilots, captain Brad Whitman and co-pilot Al Bandera, through a side window of the cockpit, getting badly burned in the process. Captain Whitman died of his injuries 8 days later in hospital, and the aircraft was destroyed. Read the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) [crash report](#).

The photo was shot by an unknown photographer at Vancouver in September 1993.