

The **DC-3** arrived at **Tri Air Corp.**, a newly established repair station in St. Croix, in 1970. In seeking to trace the history of this specific aircraft, available information is limited to a



photograph and brief remarks from Charlie Freehling, then Vice President of Tri Air Corp. Although the photo does not reveal the aircraft's tail number, Mr. Freehling indicated that it was French and destined for travel down-island. Based on these details, it is probable that the aircraft in question is:

**C-47B-35** built in 1944 by Douglas at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA, and delivered to the United States Army Air Force with s/n **44-76950**. (msn 16534/33282)



In May 1945, the aircraft was transferred to the Royal Air Force with registration **KN628**, designated as a Dakota III, and subsequently served as Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's personal transport.



Photos from the Netherlands National Archives



Field Marshal **Bernard Law Montgomery**, 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein (November 17, 1887 – March 24, 1976), nicknamed "Monty", was a senior British Army officer who served in the First World War, the Irish War of Independence and the Second World War.

Transferred to Derby Aviation / **Derby Airways** on February 18, 1956, with registration **G-AOGZ**

The airline dates back to 1938, when Captain Roy Harben established Air Schools Limited as a school for training pilots of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Harben had been approached by the Derby Corporation to run a new aerodrome under construction near Burnaston, which was planned to eventually become an airport. Sir Kingsley Wood, the Secretary of State for Air, officially opened the aerodrome as Derby Municipal Airport on 17 June 1939. Military flying training continued at the airport throughout the war.

Air Schools Limited formed a parent company, **Derby Aviation** Limited, in 1946, and Harben died the following year of a heart attack. His wife remained the controlling shareholder of the business and asked E. W. Phillips, who had been involved in running the flying school with Captain Harben, to become the new managing director. The new parent company also incorporated **Wolverhampton Aviation**, based at Pendeford, which offered *ad hoc* charter and freight flights with de Havilland Dragon Rapides, as well as aircraft maintenance and brokerage.

By 1953, Derby Aviation ceased flight training due to acquiring licenses for scheduled passenger service between Burnaston,



Photo credit Peter Fitzmaurice



Photo credit H John Black

Wolverhampton, and Jersey. These routes necessitated customs stops at Birmingham's Elmdon Airport. The initial flight was launched on July 18, 1953, with a Dragon Rapide; subsequently, Wolverhampton Aviation merged into Derby Aviation, and, in 1955, the company purchased its first Douglas DC-3, repurposed from military transport. On October 1, 1964, after acquiring Mercury Airlines, operations shifted to East Midlands Airport and the business was renamed **British Midland Airways (BMA)**.

Scottish Aviation Ltd performed maintenance for **Strathair**, possessing the aircraft from February 27 to March 16, 1969—an interval likely indicative of title transfer rather than operational use. Scottish Aviation originated in 1935 through British Everest Flight Group pilots. Its subsidiary, Scottish Airlines, operated two C-47s until ceasing operations in 1960, transferring assets to Dan Air.

Next, the aircraft was registered to **Englert Aviation** in Miami on March 17, 1969, as **N4849**. Frank Englert, noted in international aviation circles for buying and selling transport aircraft, began his aviation career with a solo flight in 1939, served as a B-29 pilot during World War II, and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the U.S. Air Force. Englert



Photo credit Dave Welch



Photo credit Dave Welch



Photo credit Barry Freind



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sold the aircraft in 1970 to JP Le Coannet of Guadeloupe, a French Caribbean island.

**JP Le Coannet** had the aircraft ferried from Miami to St. Croix, where Tri Air Corp (FAA repair station) conducted inspection, repairs, and re-registration as **F-OGDZ**. Operations were based out of Pointe à Pitre Airport in Guadeloupe, primarily offering tour flights for several years before transitioning to Air Guadeloupe in 1978.



On November 30, 1982, the aircraft joined Societe Guadeloupe Air Cargo at Pointe à Pitre, remaining until the civil registration **F-OGDZ** was canceled on September 5, 1983.

In 1983, F-OGDZ is shown sitting on the ramp in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. For the next several years, the operation of this aircraft is in question. There is no record of registration change or approved operations, but it was mentioned that unapproved ops may have been conducted. I believe it was purchased to be one of the 70 aircraft being converted to turbine and was waiting its place.

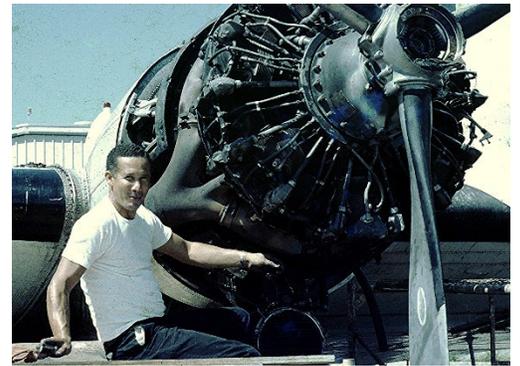


Photo credit Charlie Freehling



Photo credit Jan Makkus

**Basler Turbo Conversions, LLC** at Wittman Regional Airport in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Basler specializes in modernizing vintage piston-powered Douglas DC-3s into turbine-powered BT-67s: this process replaces engines with Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6A-67R turboprops, extends the fuselage, and upgrades the airframe for diverse missions such as cargo and surveying.

During 1990, the subject aircraft was converted to a BT-67 (DC-3TP), serial number 003, equipped with FLIR and machine guns for drug interdiction missions, before assignment to the **Fuerza Aerea Salvadore** (Salvadoran Air Force) as **FAS-116**.

While serving as FAS-116, the Basler Turbo Dakota (msn 16534/33282) sustained major damage following a runway excursion during takeoff for a paratrooper mission at San Salvador-Ilopango International Airport on **October 22, 2019**. The incident resulted in the collapse of the main landing gear and significant structural harm; the aircraft belonged to Grupo de Transporte, Primera Brigada Aérea.



Photo credit Wim Sonneveld



Photo credit Paul Seymour



Photo credit Aviation Safety Network



Photo credit Aviation Safety Network



Photo credit Aviation Safety Network

This event marked the conclusion of the operational tenure of this DC-3 / C-47, closing a remarkable chapter in aviation history after 75 years of global service spanning multiple airlines and roles since its original construction to support World War II efforts.

Posted to Antilles Air Boats website as part of a brief article to go along with images/slides from Charlie Freehling regarding Tri Air Corp repair station 1970.

<https://www.antillesairboats.com/>

Photos have been reviewed for copyright/ permission and given credit as requested. If there is any question to this posting, please contact me at [tom@antillesairboats.com](mailto:tom@antillesairboats.com) Thank you again for your assistance.

