



THE FIGHTIN' 79TH

NEPTUNE DRAGON MARKET GARDEN REPULSE VARSITY
MEMBURY AIRFIELD AAF-466



NIGHT-FRIGHT

C-47A SKYTRAIN 42-100521

79th TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON

436th TROOP CARRIER GROUP

11' 6" DIA. PROPELLER
HAMILTON HYDROMATIC
FULL FEATHERING

PRATT AND WHITNEY R-1830
14 CYL. 1200 H.P. ENGINE

5° DIHEDRAL

AXLE

16" CLEARANCE



Welcome to the Night Fright C-47 Restoration Project



Ben Cox
Heritage Air Services
Restoration Manager



Charlie Walker
Owner
Project Manager



Neil Jones
Historian
Configuration manager

Welcome to the restoration of Douglas C-47 Skytrain 42-100521 formerly of the 79th Troop Carrier Squadron, 436th Troop Carrier Group that flew with the USAAF from Membury airfield (Station 466) during WW2.

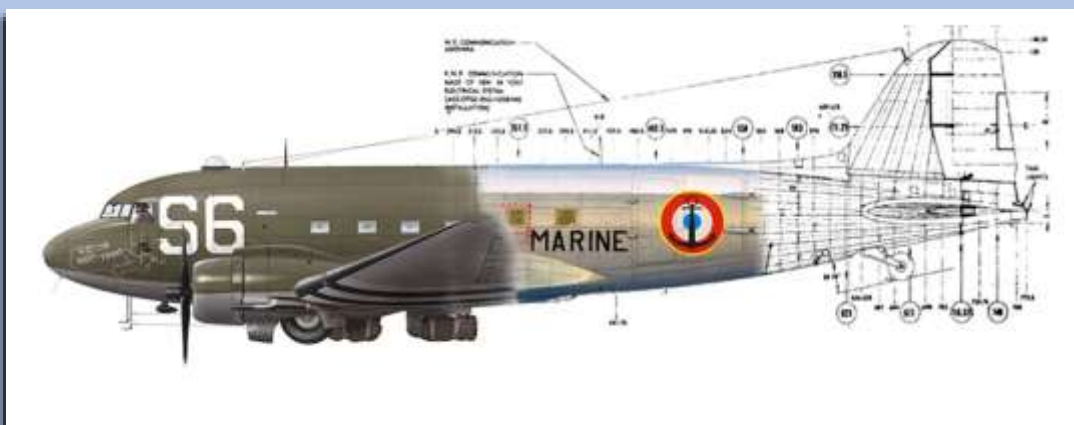
The aircraft christened “Night Fright” took part in all the Airborne missions in Europe during the war, dropping paratroopers, towing gliders, evacuating wounded and flying tons of much needed supplies to the front line.

Following the end of World War II, she flew with a number of commercial operators before being purchased by the French Navy where she was used in a training role for maritime patrols. She was eventually retired from French military service and flown back to the USA where she flew with various companies as a cargo hauler.

Her restoration not only back to flight but to wartime configuration will make Night Fright one of the greatest warbirds flying in the world. Once completed, the aircraft will be a flying memorial where our goal is to ensure that the past events of World War II are always remembered and that the heroes who fought for our liberation are never forgotten.



Capt. William Watson stands proudly in front of his C-47, 42-100521 Night Fright.



Having purchased a large section of what was Membury airfield for their logistics company, Philip Walker and son, Charlie Walker were impressed with the wartime history of the old airfield, and therefore wanted to somehow honour the location and men who flew from there. They decided the best way to do this would be to search for a C-47 that had flown from Membury airfield during the war, and bring it back to its wartime home.



Membury Airfield
(USAAF Station AAF-466 August 1944)

Following an extensive worldwide search, Night Fright was found in Arkansas, USA, and she was eventually purchased in 2012. After a lengthy dismantling process, Night Fright was shipped back to England in 2017. The process of restoring her back to flight has begun in earnest with Charlie Walker project managing the restoration of Night Fright. Charlie is a C-47 type rated pilot and will be one of the pilots who will fly Night Fright.



C-47 Night Fright as discovered at the scrapyard in Arkansas. She was months away from being scrapped.

D-Day

'Night Fright' flew as Chalk No 20 in the first of two serials that took-off from Membury at 2300 hours on the 5th June 1944, carrying elements of the 101st Airborne Division and arrived over the DZ 'A' near Saint-Germain-de-Varreville at 0108hrs on 6th June 1944. The crew consisted of Pilot; William Watson, Co-pilot; James Hardt, Radio Operator; Robert McKnight, Navigator; Arthur E. Thornton and Crew Chief; Owen Voss.

Upon reaching the western coast of the Cherbourg peninsula, low cloud made staying in tight formation difficult especially with German anti-aircraft fire becoming heavier the closer they got to the DZ. The navigators the lead aircraft directed the pilots and they successfully dropped the paratroopers mostly over DZ 'A'.



Co-Pilot 2nd Lt James Hardt points to the damage where a 20mm round entered the navigators compartment. The resultant repair remains on Night Fright .



A paratrooper from the 101st Airborne Division boards a C-47 on D-Day.

After a less eventful return flight, the Group's aircraft all returned to Membury by 0353hrs. Night Fright and her crew had survived their first combat mission.

15 hours later on the evening of 6th June 1944, Night Fright and the 436th Troop Carrier Group would return over the skies of Normandy as part of Serial 32 of Mission Elmira towing Horsa Gliders full of men and equipment from the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division.

The Germans were ready for them and Night Fright sustained approximately 100 hits but made it safely back to Membury.

The restoration

In December 2012, C-47 N308SF was discovered in a scrapyard at Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. After having its wartime history confirmed with help from local historians, it was clear that this C-47 was 42-100521 and had flown from Membury Airfield with the 436th Troop Carrier Group. The aircraft was purchased by Philip & Charlie Walker and was flown from Walnut Ridge, to Punta Gorda Florida where the wings were removed to allow for road transportation to Shell Creek, Florida for restoration to commence.

In late 2016, due to the distances and differing time zones, the decision was made to disassemble Night Fright and to ship her to the UK so that management of the restoration could be better accomplished. Once back in England, restoration commenced led by Ben Cox of Heritage Air Services and his team of C-47 Dakota experts.



A full structural survey of the major components revealed significant corrosion throughout. Following 12 months of either repairs or replacement in accordance with the Douglas aircraft document set, Night Fright is now one of the most structurally sound C-47's in the world. The same process has been carried out on all sub-systems with an unsurpassed level of attention to detail.



A sample of the intergranular corrosion found on Night Fright. The corrosion found highlights the hard life she has had amassing 50,000 flight hours, the majority of it was hauling freight.

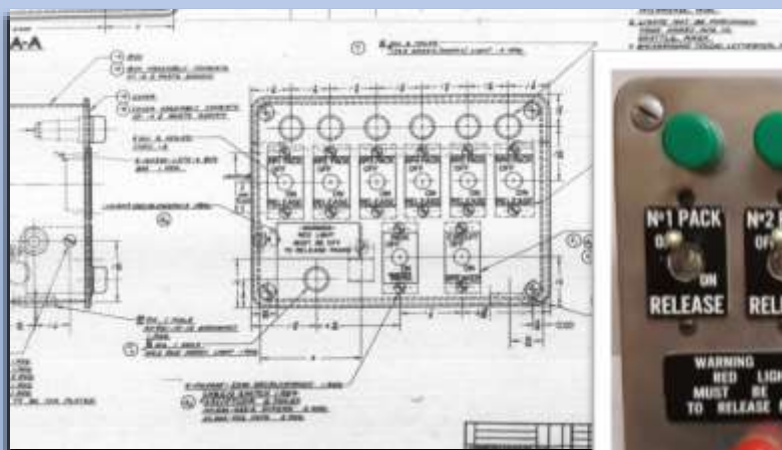
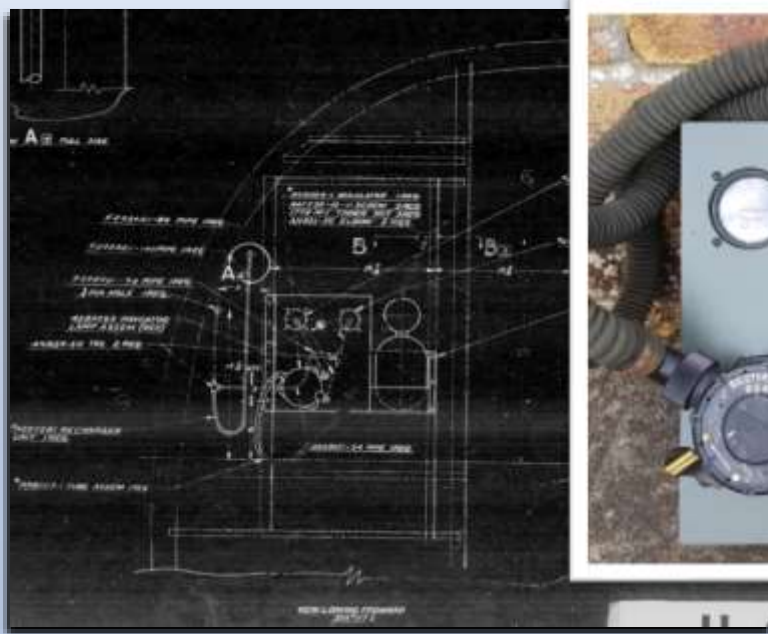






Wartime Configuration

The decision was made early on that Night Fright needed to be returned to wartime configuration to really tell the story of her wartime past. When the aircraft returned to civilian life following the end of WWII, all of the military components, mounts and brackets were removed. Night Fright's wartime configuration has been painstakingly researched by historian and Royal Air Force engineer Neil Jones. With the aid of the original Douglas drawings he has project managed the fabrication of components and all of the support brackets which holds the wartime equipment in position. He has singlehandedly sourced close to 90% of the equipment which would have been installed in a wartime C-47. These range from radio and navigational equipment to bulkheads and onboard cargo handling equipment.



Progress and Expected Completion

The restoration is nearing its final chapter with completion and return to flight expected in the Summer of 2021. Two distinct phases of work remain, the installation of all major systems and sub-systems, namely, fuel, oil, hydraulics and electrics. Running alongside the completion and testing of these major systems is the detailing and historical work.

The aim is for Night Fright to be the most authentic C-47 flying in the world, when you step on board Night Fright it's our aim to transport you back in time to the 6th June 1944. Work to source all of the original wartime equipment that would have been installed in Night Fright has all but been completed, led by Neil. Both Neil and Charlie have travelled the globe in search of the last few remaining parts. The culmination of all of this hard work will see these extremely rare items installed in Night Fright along with the aircraft once again wearing the olive drab and invasion stripes of her WW2 paint scheme.



Media Coverage

Throughout the restoration, we have been very fortunate to receive a huge amount of press and media coverage about the project; most notably being featured in two major TV documentaries:

In June 2019 “Guy Martin’s D-Day Landing” was broadcast on Channel 4. The show was the culmination of over 18 months hard work where it followed Guy helping the Night Fright team as we attempted to complete the restoration in time for the 75th Anniversary of D-Day. Approximately 2 million people watched the show when it aired.

In March 2020 “Warbird Workshop” was broadcast on Yesterday TV. The six part series followed six restoration teams in the UK battling to save historic aircraft and return them to the skies. Night Fright featured in episode 2 of the series where the production crew followed the team, not only in Coventry and Membury, but also to Canada as we searched for vital components during the biggest freeze Canada had seen in recent memory.

Members of the Night Fright team are regulars on local BBC TV News Channels and Radio Stations as well as making numerous appearances on various podcasts and in national and international aviation and related magazines and publications. We have a number of exciting media projects in the pipeline where Night Fright will again feature on TV and progress of the restoration continues to be reported on by local radio stations.



