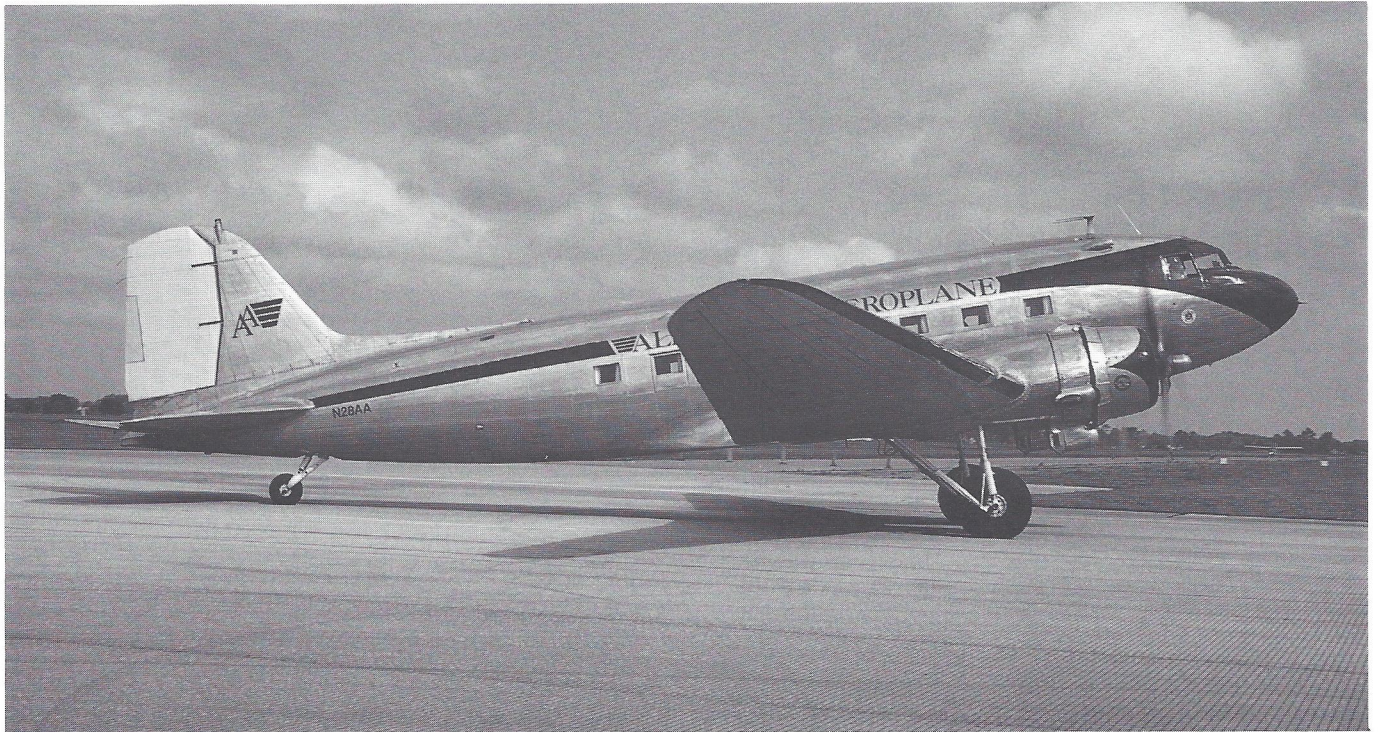


A DAY IN THE COMPANY OF A GRACIOUS LADY



How to spend \$1,295 in a day and get good value for your money! RALPH M PETERSEN provides an insight into a service with a difference marketed by Alexander Promotions

The Alexander Aeroplane DC-3 has become a familiar sight at several American aviation events, including Oshkosh, during recent years, and her immaculate condition always singles her out as being rather special. Ralph Pettersen was recently able to savour the thrill of flying aboard this grand old lady, and the following is an account of his enjoyable experience aloft in an aircraft that pioneered many of Braniff's early routes.

THE LADY

Alexander Promotions, a company owned by Ron Alexander of Alexander Aeroplane fame, bases DC-3 N28AA at the Griffin-Spalding County Airport in Griffin, Georgia. This aircraft, a DC-3A (c/n 2239) was completed in December 1939 and delivered new, as part of a second batch of aircraft to Braniff Airways, as NC25666 in June 1940. In April 1953 she went to Houston-based Trans Texas Airways, with whom she worked until 1968 serving on their very extensive scheduled passenger services which linked numerous towns and cities in Texas and neighbouring states. From Memphis, Tennessee, and Jackson, Mississippi, the Trans Texas DC-3s flew services to Little Rock, Alexandria, Dallas, Shreveport, New Orleans, Beaumont, Houston and San Antonio, with numerous stops at other smaller airports en-route. A second network encompassed such destinations as El Dorado, Fort Worth, Mission, McAllen, San Angelo and El Paso. At its peak this grand fleet totalled twenty five aircraft, and following her replacement by Convair twins in 1968, N25666 went on to serve with a variety of small airlines over the next ten years including Tradewinds Airmotive, Air Mid Atlantic, Air New England, Cryderman Air Service and Century Airlines.

In June 1978 she was sold to Provincetown Boston Airlines (PBA) and re-registered N139PB. She was based in Boston, Maine, and Naples, Florida, during her tenure with PBA. She later flew with Eastern Express, a commuter service for Eastern Airlines, until Eastern's demise in 1990. In 1991 she was advertised for sale in 'Trade-A-Plane', and Ron Alexander, President of Alexander Airplane Company purchased her from Starflite of Miami, Florida. On July 18 1991 she

HEADING PHOTOGRAPH: *The immaculate Alexander Aeroplane DC-3 N28AA is becoming an increasingly popular visitor to many North American air shows.* (Graham Robson)

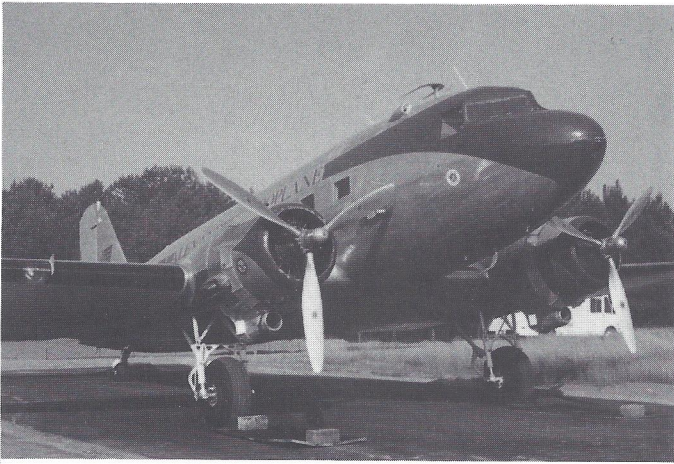
RIGHT: *Alexander Aeroplane's DC-3 during earlier service with Trans Texas Airways as N25666.* (MAP)

was flown to her new home base at Griffin-Spalding Airport. Since then, new instruments and avionics have been added together with new washroom fixtures, curtains and carpets, and she is currently equipped with sixteen seats. In 1992 she was painted with the current blue trim colour scheme and, with the exception of the painting, all restoration work is being performed by the employees of Alexander Aeroplane.

In May 1994 Ron had to make some hard choices regarding the future of the aircraft when cracks were found in the centre section spar and the aircraft was grounded. After much soul searching and analysis it was decided that the old girl was worth saving and the decision was taken to ferry her to Canada for the necessary repair work to be carried out. Six weeks later she was flown back to Griffin just in time for her trip to the annual EAA Oshkosh air show. Ron is very fortunate to have Academy Airlines, a long time operator of DC-3s, located on the same field at Griffin. Academy has provided, and continues to provide, invaluable support in the restoration and operation of this aircraft. In total, this remarkable lady has over 80,700 flying hours in her log book and is still going strong.

Since her acquisition by Alexander she has been a regular at US air shows such as the annual Lakeland 'Sun-and-Fun' and Oshkosh fly-ins. At the 1995 'Sun-and-Fun' show she ferried the Thunderbirds demonstration team between the show and McDill AFB. She has been flown by some famous pilots including Chuck Yeager who, for the past three years at Oshkosh, has flown youngsters as part of the EAA's Young Eagles programme. She is also used quite regularly for the "Nostalgia Flight" programme, in which the author was lucky enough to participate. She currently flies about one hundred hours annually, and at this modest pace Ron plans on keeping her for many years to come.





N28AA parked at Griffin-Spalding Airport awaiting the big day!

THE NOSTALGIA FLIGHT PROGRAMME

I first became aware of Alexander Aeroplane's "Nostalgia Flight" programme while thumbing through their parts catalogue. Seemed like a fun thing to do, but the \$1,295 price tag seemed a little high for my means. However, during the next year or so I read more about these flights and decided that this would make an ideal birthday present for myself. I contacted Alexander Promotions, talked with Denise Mote, and the date was set for June 17 1995. Along with directions to Griffin, I was sent a copy of Alexander's DC-3 operations manual for study prior to the flight.

Denise had given me instructions to meet my instructor pilot, Bill Mercure at the aircraft at Griffin-Spalding County Airport at nine o'clock in the morning. Not wishing to be late, I arrived at the airport with a few minutes in hand and was surprised by the number of 'propliners' populating this small airport. This single runway (3,300 x 75 feet) airport was host to no fewer than two ATL-98 Carvairs, two Beech 18s and eight DC-3s of various vintage and differing liveries. More about this fascinating little airport later on.

Bill arrived punctually at nine o'clock, and we introduced ourselves. Bill is a captain for Delta Airlines, for whom he has worked for 27 years and today flies Boeing 757s and 767s. Prior to joining Delta, he flew DC-3s and Martinliners for two years during the mid-sixties for Southern Airways. He told me that, at the ripe old age of twenty with Southern paying him \$375 a month, he thought that he had died and gone to heaven. He couldn't buy a drink in a bar, but was entrusted with the lives of twenty or more fare-paying passengers! Bill's dad, at the age of 89, is still flying and his son, who's twenty first birthday was the day of our flight, is primed and ready to follow in Bill's footsteps.

The first chore of the day involved the pre-flight inspection of the DC-3. In her polished aluminium finish, she is truly an impressive sight. Removing gust-locks, checking engine oil (20 gallons per engine) and fuel levels, and checking the overall airworthiness of the aircraft consumes much more time than the Bonanzas and Aztecs I'm normally used to flying. Once these checks have been completed, we made our

Ralph and Bill checking the oil level on the right engine.

(All photos Ralph Pettersen unless stated)



way to the cockpit. Since N28AA is a true DC-3 airliner, she doesn't have a cargo door and we entered via the port side airstairs. The instrument panel, for the most part, has been updated with contemporary radios and instruments, and I was familiar with most of the items. The overhead switches, cowl flap controls, flap and landing gear actuator handles were 1940's vintage, with the flap and landing gear actuator handles looking like something out of a steam locomotive. Engine start-up involved turning the master, ignition, and booster switches on, setting the mixture controls to idle cut-off and cracking open the throttles. With the right hand, the rocker switch was positioned to the right engine and the starter switch was engaged. After counting nine blades the mixture control was set to auto-rich with the left hand and the engine came to life. Oil pressure was carefully monitored after start-up, and the procedure was then repeated with the left engine. Needless to say, each engine start-up resulted in much white smoke and seemingly strange engine noises. Once the engines were warmed up, we started on the adventure.

Taxying a DC-3 was quite a challenge, and was hopefully something that I would get better at. Griffin's taxiways are narrow for a DC-3, and Bill reminded me on numerous occasions not to knock down any signs or run over any lights. We made it safely to the end of runway 14 and completed a standard engine run-up including both propeller and magneto checks. Everything checked out fine and it was time to go flying. This involved lining up the aircraft on the runway, locking the tailwheel, setting the friction locks on the throttles, and increasing power to 2,700 rpm and 48" of manifold pressure. After that, my job was to keep her pointed straight down the runway until we reached 84 knots (V1/V2). At that point I relaxed forward control pressure and she flew off the runway. From my vantage point in the cockpit, it seemed like the nose was pointed straight down into the runway, but Bill assured me that this was necessary to keep the aircraft on the ground until we reached V1/V2, and it was time to fly.



DC-3 N28AA alias N25666 awaiting Air New England passengers at La Guardia, New York, in July 1972.

We headed for Callaway Airport at LaGrange, Georgia, which has two generous runways, the longest being 5,600 feet in length. On the way to LaGrange I executed some steep turns, undertook slow flight handling, gear and flap extensions and retractions, and a stall. Other than the "big airplane" feel, it flew just like every other general aviation aircraft that I have ever flown. It was definitely not as "heavy" on the controls as the Martin 4-0-4 that I had flown in 1992.

At LaGrange, which is a wide open airport with little traffic, we shot five or six touch-and-go landings, and two full stop landings. You would figure that we would cause quite a stir but, with the exception of a few corporate pilots who wanted to see the inside of the aircraft, everyone pretty much took our presence in their stride. Parked on the far side of the airport was another ATL-98 Carvair being worked on. This aircraft is reportedly being prepared for cargo work in Alaska, and appeared to be close to making that trip. Interesting to note that with probably less than half a dozen Carvairs remaining in the world today, three viable examples exist less than fifty miles apart.

The flight home to Griffin was uneventful, but the landing on its 3,300 foot long runway was somewhat exciting for this fledgling DC-3 pilot. With Bill's expert guidance I kept the airspeed steady at 85 knots, the power up, and aimed for the runway's numbers. When it was all over, we had landed and stopped well short of the runway end and I was starting to feel like I was getting the hang of flying this old lady. As we were taxiing back to our parking spot, I reflected on what a great day it had been and how lucky I had been to be able to fly such an historic airliner. It is a day that I will cherish for a long time to come.

GRIFFIN'S VARIED RESIDENTS

Griffin-Spalding Airport is located about 25 miles south east of Atlanta and, for a small airport, has many interesting aircraft. An



"Animal Crackers", DC-3 N130D, sports a lively colour scheme and is flown regularly from Griffin.

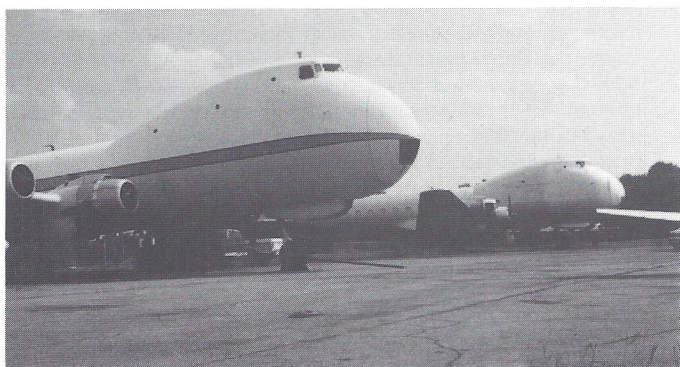
aircraft salvage yard is sited on the northwest corner of the airport, with many contemporary aircraft stored in various states of disassembly. On the south side of the airport sit a row of British Aerospace Jet Provost T.5A jet trainers ready for restoration and delivery to new civilian owners. As mentioned earlier, of real interest to me was the large number of 'proliners' located on the field. In addition to the Alexander DC-3, there were seven DC-3s parked at the airport together with the two Carvairs and a pair of Beech 18s.

The two ATL-98 Carvairs, N83FA and N89FA, are owned by Academy Airlines and were parked on their ramp located on the southeast part of the airport. N89FA is painted in a white and yellow colour scheme, and N83FA sports a rather faded silver and blue livery dating back to her days based at Southend with British Air Ferries. Both were essentially complete, and Bill stated that N83FA is flown on a fairly regular basis, and although N89FA has not flown for some time she is being prepared to go back into service. Due to the modest 3,300' runway at Griffin, flight operations with these large aircraft involve taxiing the aircraft to the very end of the runway to ensure that every inch of precious runway is available for use during the take-off run. I was told that watching the Carvairs take off provides quite a show for the locals.

The seven DC-3s include a number of interesting aircraft. N173RD was formerly C-FGXW and was responsible for the famous 'Odyssey 86' round the world flight reported in "Proliner" issue 28. In addition to its Odyssey markings, it has small Lance Toland Associates markings on the nose. Lance Toland is an insurance and aircraft broker who is responsible for the sale of the Jet Provost jet trainers parked on the airfield.

Across the field from the Odyssey DC-3 is a group of six more DC-3s and two Beech 18s. The latter are complete, with one being registered N2AP and the other unmarked. The first DC-3, painted in Academy Airlines livery, is N133D and she was the sixth DC-3/DST built, having been delivered to American Airlines as NC16005 in July 1936. Sadly she is engineless, but otherwise complete. N143D is parked with only one engine, but also seems to be otherwise complete. Parked alongside is N130D, which sports a very unusual paint scheme. Instead of having a traditional cheat line, her cheat line consists of a mural of wild animals including a gorilla, kangaroo, camel, giraffe and several others. This aircraft flies regularly, is appropriately named "Animal Crackers", and is used as a back-up by Alexander if their own DC-3 is not available. DC-3 N232GB is the next aircraft, and looks to be in basic ex-military colours. It is complete and appears airworthy. N99FS (c/n 12425) presents a very handsome spectacle in her olive drab paint scheme with World War Two D-Day invasion markings. Something looked rather familiar about this aircraft, and I realised that

Carvairs N83FA and N89FA (nearest the camera) parked on the edge of the Academy Airlines ramp at Griffin.



Academy Airlines DC-3 N143D parked at Griffin on June 17 with only her starboard engine remaining.

she was the support aircraft used by the Greenland Expedition Society to recover the P-38 Lightning from the Greenland icecap in 1992. I had photographed her during the 1992 Oshkosh Show when she sported a very smart red and yellow colour scheme and skis. The last DC-3 was a derelict former FAA aircraft registered N47. She was essentially stripped, and seems destined to become someone's beer can!

Southern hospitality being what it is, Denise kindly invited us to the Alexander Aeroplane annual picnic at a private airstrip called Brook Bridge located a few miles from Griffin. In addition to much fine food and drink, free rides in vintage airplanes were for the asking, and I had the pleasure of riding in a 1928 Stearman airmail biplane. What a finish to a great day! The flight back to Washington, DC by ValuJet DC-9-30 was truly anticlimatic - and an hour late to boot!

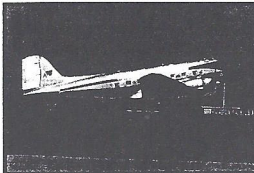
Alexander Aeroplane's pristine DC-3 N28AA is available for "nostalgia flights" year round. The cost is \$1,295, and Denise can be contacted at Alexander Promotions on (404) 229-5979.

Still sporting her now faded red and white 'Odyssey 86' livery and the name "Spirit of Vancouver", DC-3 N173RD is a recent arrival at Griffin and is seen on June 17.



A Day to Remember

Our "Day in a DC-3" Nostalgia Program



Fly Captain in a '40s Braniff DC-3

The program includes ground school, pre-flight inspection, and choice of 1.5 or 2 hours of left-seat, logbook flying time. You also receive an authentic manual, 2 t-shirts, a 5x7 photo and certificate, suitable for framing, stating you flew captain on a Braniff Airways DC-3.

Call for details and information packet

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