



THE Dakota used to transport John Curtin's body to Perth for his funeral in 1945

## Dakota's fate hangs in balance

WHEN a head of state dies in office, the nation does its best to give a funeral with style.

So it was in July 1945 when Australia's Prime Minister, John Curtin, died after a heart attack. After lying in state and a service in Kings Hall, Parliament House, his body was placed on suitable transport for the journey to Perth, his home town.

The plane chosen was an RAAF Dakota. By coincidence, the Australian War Memorial has just discovered that the Dakota presented to it earlier this year is the same plane: A65-71.

Despite its 37 years, A65-71 has flown only 14,000 hours, one-fifth as much as some planes of its vintage. One reason could be that it collided with the mast of a coastal freighter off Newcastle, NSW, in May 1956.

This year, the Dakota was given to the war memorial and repainted in its battle colors: olive drab on top and grey underneath. It featured as "nostalgia value" in the air shows at Schofields, NSW, and the RAAF diamond jubilee show at Amberley, Queensland.

After surviving time and strife, the Dakota will finally

lose its wings this Sunday, but only temporarily. They will be removed while it is transported by road from the RAAF's Fairbairn base to the war memorial's storage hangar at Duntroon.

The fate of the Dakota has yet to be decided. It is too big to fit into the aeroplane "hall of fame" at the war memorial and no other suitable facilities exist.

Vintage plane buffs have suggested that it be mounted on a pylon outside the war memorial, like other military exhibits, so tourists could take their photos in front of it.

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# WORLD WAR II MARKINGS REVIVE OLD MEMORIES

by Robert Kendall Piper, Canberra Member 13760.

The RAAF's Dakota A65-71 has been repainted in its original WWII colour scheme for presentation to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. With olive drab topsides and grey undersurface the Gooney Bird has recently given some nostalgic flypasts at the Schofields and Amberley Airshows. New paintwork was carried out by the airforce's No. 2 Aircraft Depot at Richmond, N.S.W.

Received by 37 Squadron in February, 1945, this grand old lady has operated as far afield as the New Guinea islands and with 86 Wing on the courier run to Japan in 1947.

In May, 1956, the transport collided with the ship HEXHAM BANK's mast off Newcastle, N.S.W. The rear underside was torn open, spilling out oxygen bottles and the port engine knocked out of commission. Despite this extensive damage the plane limped to the Williamtown drome and made a safe landing. Many of the pilots flying the aircraft subsequent to that time claim the DC3 is subject to "unusual vibrations" which have never been satisfactorily eliminated, despite extensive investigations.

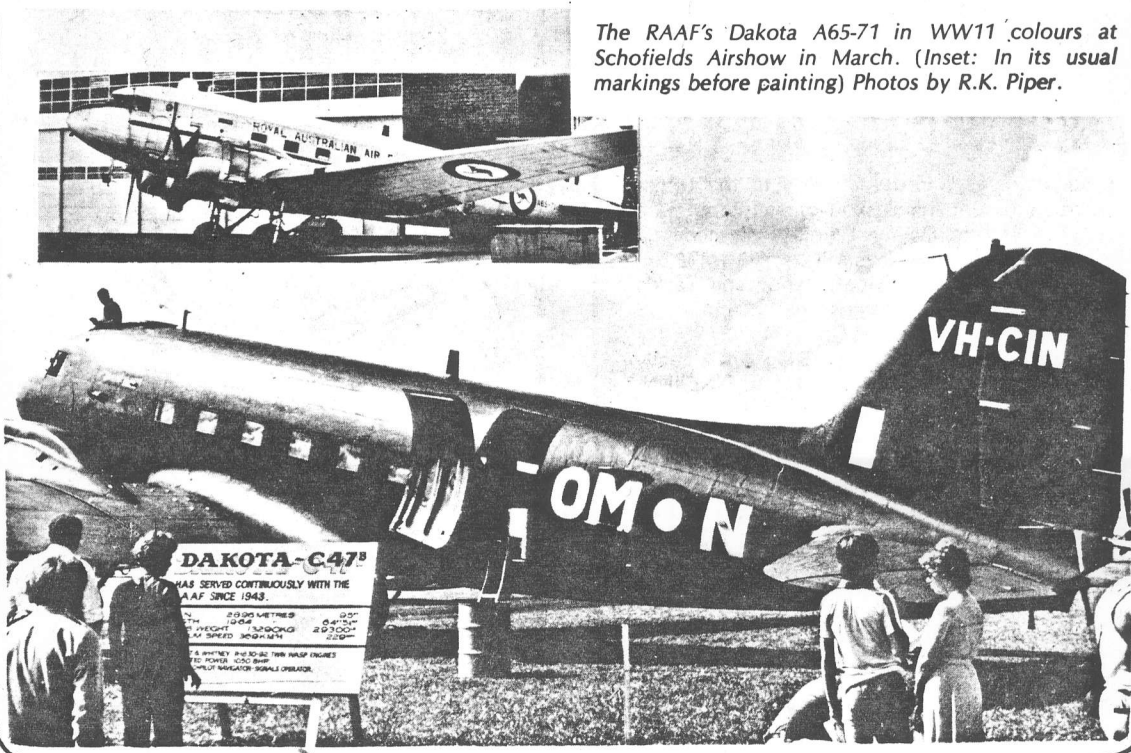
For the last ten years A65-71 has served with the RAAF at Butterworth Air Base in Malaysia as a general haul and maid of all work.

With total flying hours of less than 14,000 the Dakota is relatively new in terms of running time compared to many of her sisters which have accumulated five times this number.

For the enthusiasts A65-71 was a C47B model received new from the United States Army Air Force at Amberley (QLD.) on 19.2.45. Serial number with the USAAF was 43-49870. Compulsory civil registration in World War II for flights over the Australian mainland was VH-CIN. Code letters with 37 Squadron were OM-N, the former for the squadron and the latter designated to the aircraft.

This loyal old workhorse will shortly be brought to Canberra for official handing over to the War Memorial. Its outer wing tips will be removed and from there the plane will be towed, tail first, to the AWM's storage shed at Duntroon. There had been earlier discussion of mounting this historic Douglas DC3 on a pylon.

The RAAF's Dakota A65-71 in WW11 colours at Schofields Airshow in March. (Inset: In its usual markings before painting) Photos by R.K. Piper.



# Douglas C-47F A65-71/43-49870

Preserved by the Australian War Memorial at Canberra, Australia

Development of what was to become the Douglas DC-3 began in 1934, as a result of a request from American Airlines for a roomy and comfortable sleeper-service airliner. The new project started simply as a DC-2 with a larger fuselage, but it soon became an almost entirely new design, the DST (Douglas Sleeper Transport). Nevertheless it still bore a strong resemblance to its DC-2 predecessor. The first flight of the DST, on December 17, 1935, heralded a great and famous family of different versions, with a production total exceeding 13,000.

One version, the C-47B—of which the subject of this profile is an example—was given 1,200 h.p. Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp R-1830-90C engines with two-stage blowers, to suit it for high-altitude operations (its service ceiling was 26,400ft). The engine performance was considered disappointing, so most C-47Bs had their blowers removed and were modified to C-47D standard. They were then used for search and rescue, reconnaissance, staff transport and training. A total of 3,232 C-47Bs was built.

Aircraft 43-49870 (c/n 15686/27131) was built as a Douglas C-47B-20-DK at Oklahoma City in about mid-1944. The RAAF took delivery of the aircraft at Amberley, Queensland on February 19, 1945, and the following day it was issued to No 37 Squadron at Essendon in New South Wales. It was also during February 1945 that the airframe was painted with the distinctive radio-callsign VH-CIN and the squadron code letters OM-N.

A65-71 served with 37 Sqn for one year, during which it flew one of the thrice-weekly services to Broome (Western Australia), Darwin (Northern Territories) and Morotai Island, or one of the daily courier services to Parafield (South Australia), Mascot (New South Wales) and Archerfield.

The War Memorial's Dakota became the focus of national attention in July 1945 when it was selected to carry the body of Australia's wartime Prime Minister, John Curtin, back to Perth, Western Australia, for burial. The Dakota left Canberra, the Australian capital, accompanied by six Boomerang and six Kittyhawk fighter aircraft.

In January 1947 A65-71 commenced what later proved to be a very long association with No 86 Transport Wing. The aircraft

served almost continuously with this unit until 1963, when it was handed over to 2 Sqn. After the war the Dakota was used to ferry supplies to the BCOF forces in Japan, and in the early 1950s it flew in support of the Australian forces based in Korea.

In May 1956 the Dakota experienced the highlight of its 37-year flying career. The aircraft was flying a routine morning coastal patrol at an altitude of 60ft when it collided with the mast of a Sydney-bound collier. No-one was hurt in the incident, which left a 12ft tear along the underside of the Dakota's fuselage.

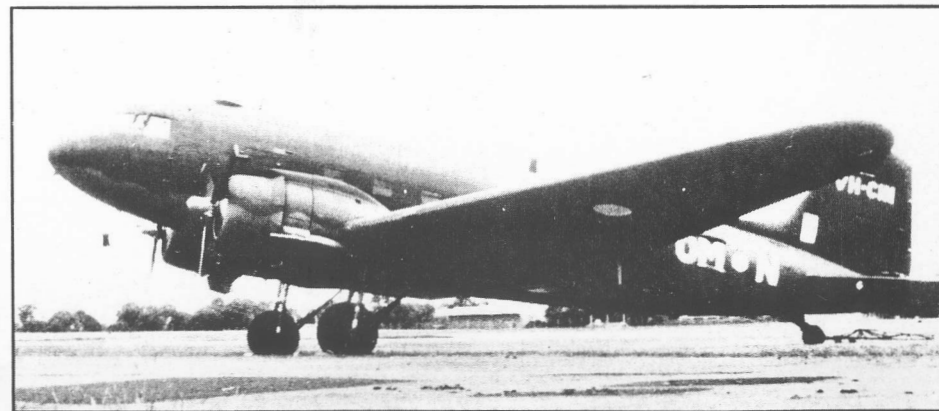
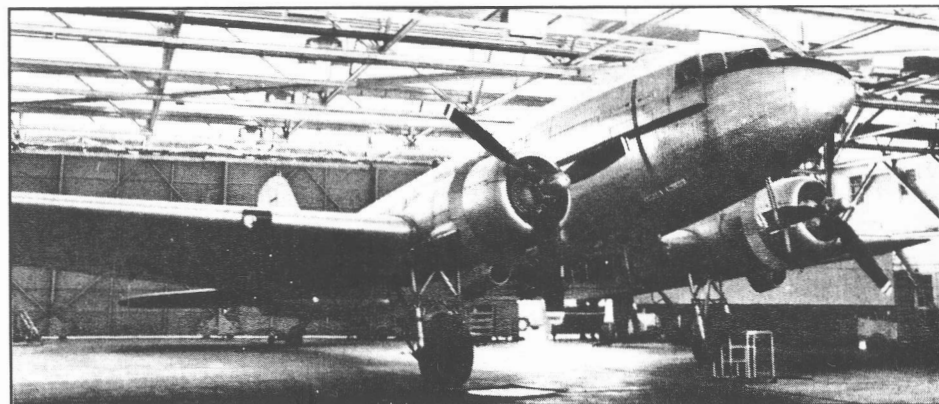
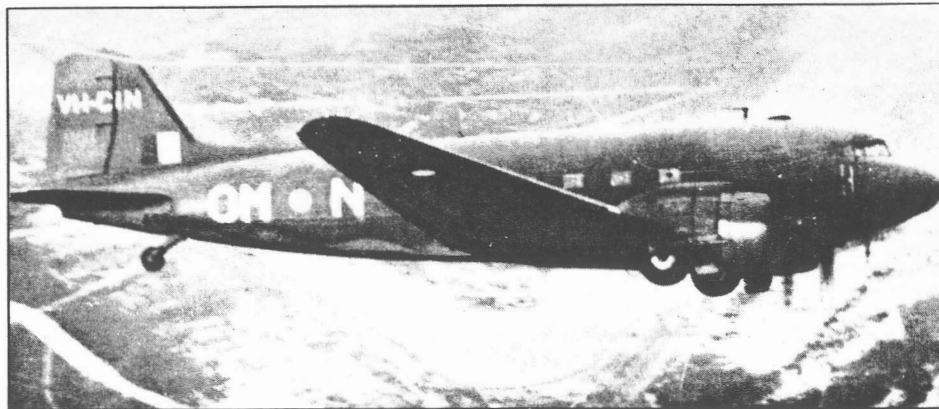
A65-71 received its last operational posting in 1974 when it was allocated to the Transport Support Flight based at Butterworth, Malaysia.

Although the Dakota was officially retired from RAAF service in July 1980, A65-71 was given a brief reprieve and repainted in the wartime colours of 37 Sqn. After appearances at both the Schofield and the RAAF Diamond Jubilee airshows early in 1981, the Dakota made its final touchdown at Canberra during September. It was rather fitting that the Dakota should pass from Australian military service in the year of the RAAF's Diamond Jubilee. A65-71 was one of four Dakotas still flying with the RAAF in 1981, and all of them have now been earmarked for preservation in Australia.

Early on the morning of Sunday, October 18, 1981, the aircraft (minus wings) was towed a short distance from the airport, to the Australian War Memorial's storage hangar in the grounds of the Royal Military College, Duntroon. The old Dakota now shares company with a D.H.9, a Messerschmitt Me 163 and a GAF Canberra, and will shortly be joined by a Meteor F.8.

War Memorial staff have now begun modifying the external airframe back to World War Two standard in the hope that, eventually, A65-71 will be the most authentic "Biscuit bomber" preserved in the world.

**Top right**, a rare flying shot of A65-71 taken towards the end of World War Two. **Middle**, A65-71 in the colours of the Transport Support Flight, Butterworth, Malaysia, shortly after its return to Australia. **Right**, A65-71 photographed in 1981 when it was repainted in the wartime colours of 37 Squadron.



# Vintage Dakota to visit tourist resort

A vintage RAAF Dakota will visit Yulara tomorrow afternoon.

The aircraft is scheduled to arrive at 1.45 pm and leave at 5.30 pm, and will be open for inspection by the public.

The Dakota was built in Oklahoma City, US, in mid-1944 and assigned to the RAAF in February 1945.

With No 37 Squadron it flew general cargo in Australia, and saw service in Papua New Guinea.

Its most notable flight was in July 1945 when it carried the body of Prime Minister John Curtin from Canberra to Perth for burial.

It saw action in the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency during the 1950s.

In May 1956 it struck the mast of the shop *Hexham Bank* off Newcastle and major damage was caused to the aircraft.

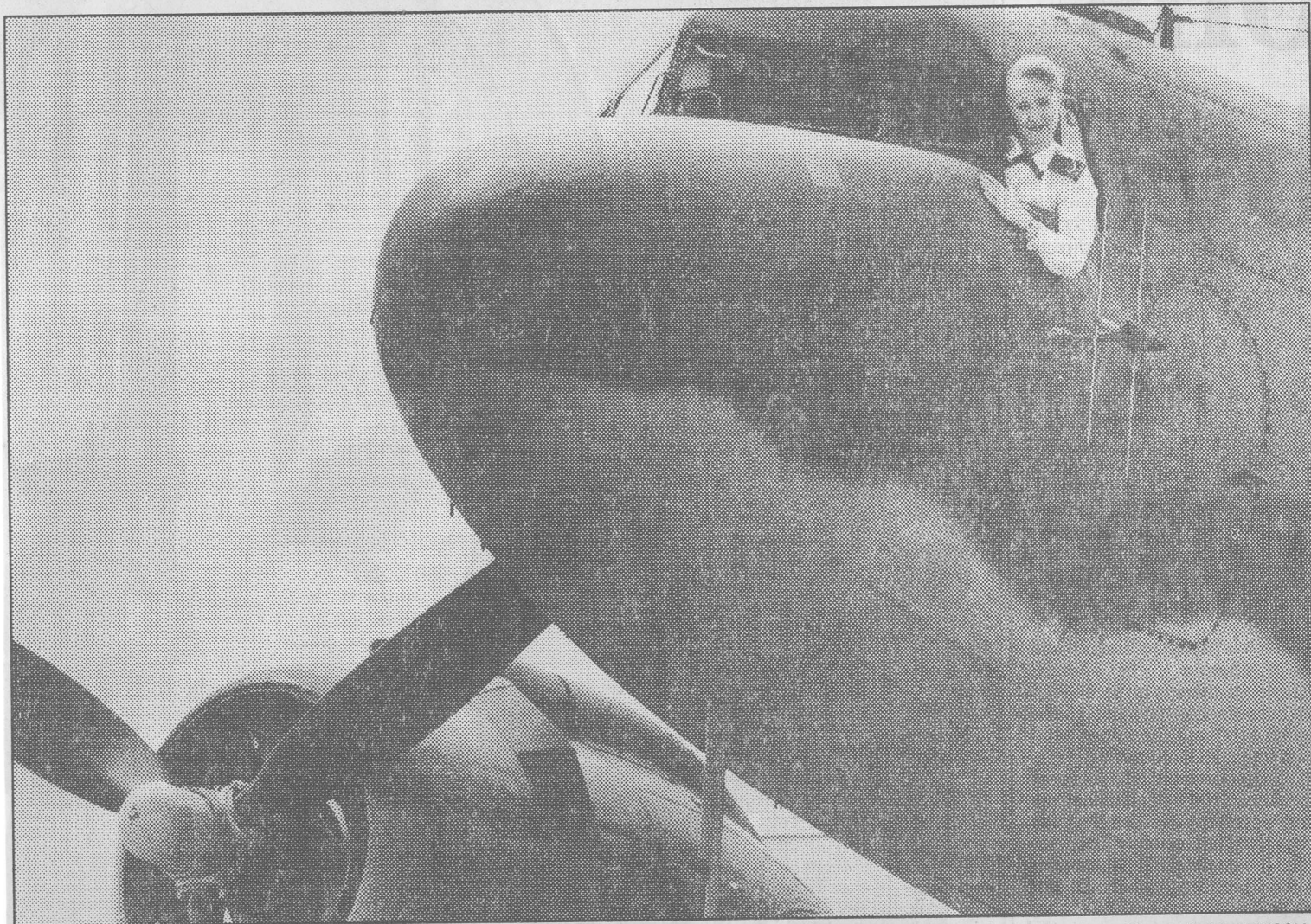
In time the aircraft is to be permanently preserved as a representative example of its type in a "technology hall" to be completed at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Until that time the aircraft will be operated by the RAAF in support of national aviation events and heritage activities.

CENTRALIAN ADVOCATE

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## Exhibit comes out of mothballs for joy riders



Picture: DEAN McNICOLL

The RAAF's entrant in the Queen of Canberra Quest, Leading Aircraftwoman Erica Pollini, leans out of the cockpit of the Australian War Memorial's 1947 Dakota, which gave champagne flights over Canberra at the weekend.

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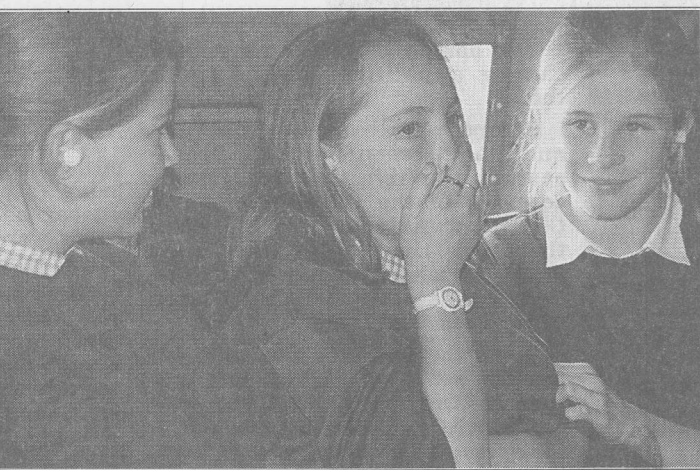
A65-71

# Bumpy ride in faithful old lady of the sky



Pictures: DEFENCE DEPARTMENT and GRAHAM TIDY

The veteran Dakota flies over Parliament House yesterday as Emily Brown, third from right, comforts an air-sick Emma Lynch, of Trinity Christian School.



By JANE CASTLES

It is 52-years old and served in World War II, the Korea and Vietnam wars and the Malayan Emergency. And it is still going strong.

Now enjoying retirement from defence duties, the former Royal Australian Air Force Dakota, A65-71, gave four special group flights over Canberra yesterday as part of the RAAF's 75th anniversary.

The C47 Dakota is, everyone says, the most reliable of aircraft, but that did not stop the ride being a bit bumpy. Okay for brief scenic

flights, the A65-71 probably would not be the most comfortable of planes for long distance travel: it makes a lot of noise and is not terribly smooth.

For Emma Lynch, 11, of Trinity Christian School, the ride was a bit too bumpy.

Emma enjoyed the opportunity to take to Canberra's skies, but by the end of the 20-minute flight she found herself reaching for a paper bag.

"Everytime it moved up and down I felt sick," she said, her colour returning once back on solid ground.

For Yvette Herbert the take-off made the ride worthwhile. The aerial view highlighted what "a very pretty place" Canberra was, she said.

Children from Marymead and teenage carers (from the Carers' Association of the ACT) were among the special guests on the old Dakota.

The A65-71 has a special place in history, having flown the body of prime minister John Curtin back to Perth in 1945. It will see out its days in the Australian War Memorial when facilities become available.

A65-71