

SPREADING THE WORD

AMBASSADOR II — A FORTRESS FOR GOD — BY HOWARD CARTER

A bitter wind was blowing across the ramp at the Springfield Municipal Airport in Missouri during December 1949. However, the hearts and souls of the dozens of people that had gathered to see the latest instrument in spreading the word of God were filled with warmth and joy. In front of them was a gleaming B-17G Flying Fortress with a bright red forward fuselage that had been

purchased by the Assemblies of God USA, which was part of the world's largest Pentecostal denomination, and this was their second surplus WWII military aircraft to be used in spreading the word of God to remote and far-flung areas of the world.

The first aircraft was a Curtiss C-46 Commando registered N5925V. It was actually one of two C-46s purchased for \$5000 each by Noel Perkin, the foreign missions secretary of Assemblies of God. Perkin was forward-looking and he knew that aircraft

would be needed after WWII in order to get the organization up and running

following the disastrous effects of the war and he realized something like the C-46 would be ideal for hauling both people and cargo to remote parts of the world where commercial flights were not readily available. USAAF 44-77858 was converted to civilian use at a cost of \$20,000 while the other C-46 was held for spares. N5925V could carry 40 passengers or be quickly reconfigured to carry a smaller number of passengers and a variety of cargo loads.

On 12 August 1948, C-46 N5925V named *Ambassador* lumbered out of Springfield on the start of a 19,080-mile trek to Africa. On board were 14 people including four crew and a disassembled Republic SeaBee that would be delivered to a missionary in Liberia. On the way back, and



Curtiss C-46 *Ambassador* served the Assemblies long and well on several epic flights to Africa and India. It was eventually sold to Varig in Brazil.

with the SeaBee gone, the passenger load increased to 37 but the plane had to follow the northern route due to the C-46's range limitations. Headwinds and higher than anticipated fuel consumption led to some spooky moments on the return flight over the Atlantic but the C-46 touched down safely at Springfield on 3 September where crew and passengers were treated to a warm welcome. Missionary leader George Carmichael stated, "The heavens have become a highway linking the mission fields of the world."

However, the captain for that epic first flight did not quite fit in with the outfit's Christian ideals and this led to the hiring of Capt. Herman Revis, a US Navy WWII veteran who became a committed Christian after his military duty. Except for that epic first trip, Revis would captain all *Ambassador* flights. His first flight for Assemblies was not

without interest for the

groundcrew forgot to connect an additional auxiliary fuel tank and this was only noticed when attempts were made to fill the tank immediately prior to departure. With that problem fixed, then the C-46 began its trip and eventually touched down at

Trinidad where it ran off the wet runway into thick mud. It took some effort to get the plane out of the mud, cleaned off, and readied for the next leg.

Departing Brazil, both of the C-46's Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engines began to cut in and out while heading to Dakar. This caused the Commando to lose 7000 feet in altitude while the flight engineer attempted to alter fuel flow and restart the motors. The C-46 dropped to 2000 feet above the sea and



Loading a SeaBee N6761K aboard *Ambassador*. As can be seen, it was a tight fit.



The Fort after executive conversion and operating as *San Miguel*.

Revis yelled for everyone to prepare to ditch but one R-2800 began to bark back to life and Revis began a slow climb back to cruising altitude.

The captain turned the Commando back to Brazil and a safe landing was made but since the passengers did not have proper reentry papers they were forced to sit in the cabin as the tropical heat began to make the interior like a furnace. Finally, they were allowed



Attractively finished *Ambassador II* is presented to followers at the Springfield Municipal Airport in Missouri. The small terminal, typical of the time period, is of interest.