

**FRIDAY NIGHT
OLDIES**
BY DOUG FISHER

*GREAT KODACHROMES OF SURPLUS
MILITARY AIRCRAFT BEFORE THEY BECAME
MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR WARBIRDS*

Parked at a remote Bolivian airstrip, North American B-25J Mitchell CP-970 awaits its next flight. This little-known Mitchell was built as USAAF 44-28945 and was modified at North American to become the personal transport of Gen. Hap Arnold. This included the addition of sound-proofing, passenger seats, advanced radio communication, extra fuselage windows, and a nose cone that opened to allow the carriage of extra baggage. After the war, the B-25 saw numerous assignments as a VIP aircraft, serving as one of the last USAF Mitchells. With the fuselage top painted white and its aluminum polished, the B-25 made for a handsome aircraft and was often used by high-ranking officers. With the phase-out of the B-25 fleet in 1958, it was flown to Davis-Monthan AFB and placed in storage. It was quickly determined that the Mitchells would have no further value so the planes were auctioned off in a series of sales. Because of its VIP interior and the fact that it was kept in very good shape, the Mitchell was snapped up by none other than Wilson "Connie" Edwards — one of America's first, and most colorful, collectors of what would become known as Warbirds. Connie had no intention of using the Mitchell as a Warbird. Registered N3184G, he had the plane overhauled and the interior spruced up and then put it to work as an executive transport for his Edwards Petroleum Company. However, he did not keep the plane over long and on 5 October 1963, ownership passed to the Bendix Corporation where N3184G joined the company's small fleet of other B-25s. Unfortunately, we do not know for what purposes Bendix used the Mitchell but they kept it until March 1968 when the plane headed to Miami and the ownership of Santiago Perez's Double A Leasing. Again, we do not know how it was used but on 16 March 1972 the registration was cancelled and it was exported to Bolivia as CP-970 and began operating with Bolivian Airways. In the photo, the plane retains the majority of its Edwards paint scheme and actually looks quite smart. It appears a number of heavy-looking sacks were waiting on a primitive cart to be loaded into the rear fuselage through the drop-down door, which could not have been a fun job. In Bolivia, the historic aircraft had a short life, being destroyed in a crash on 7 June 1976.



Sadly, almost all of the hard-working Curtiss C-46 Commandos are now gone. Through the 1980s and 1990s, a fair number of these planes could still be found operating in Latin America, Canada, and Alaska but time and accidents have reduced their number to just a handful. Some of the last military C-46s were operated by the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force. C-46D USAAF 44-77889 was transferred to the Japanese in 1955 and got the serial 51-1122. The plane operated well into the 1970s when it was put into storage with others at Miho Air Base. On 28 July 1978, it was purchased by C.R. Everts and assigned the registration N54514 before beginning the long ferry flight through the Aleutian Islands chain to Fairbanks, Alaska. Overhauled and given an attractive paint scheme, the plane got nose art and the name *Maid In Japan*. Put to work in the far north, the Commando kept going until 29 October 2002 when it had an accident at Fairbanks International. Damage was heavy. The plane had just completed a maintenance flight after an engine overhaul and was taxiing to parking when the right main gear folded. It was decided to rebuild the veteran and a new airworthiness certificate was issued on 1 January 2013.



Minus its props, Curtiss C-46F-1-CU USAAF 44-78559/N77CC was photographed parked in Miami Airport's "Corrosion Corner" during the mid-1970s. Obtained by Slick Airways as N67934, the aircraft was used as a freighter until sold to American Air Export & Transport Company in 1957. By the late 1970s, the Commando was spotted disassembled and derelict at Miami. It is presumed the plane was scrapped.

