

THE GHOST OF KALIKAT CREEK

PROJECT WARBIRD HAS ACQUIRED WHAT HAS TO BE THE WORLD'S
LAST POTENTIALLY FLYABLE CONSOLIDATED LIBERATOR PROJECT

BY NICHOLAS A. VERONICO



Photographed during the 1953/1956 timeframe, Liberator AL557/N68735 displays its passenger modifications. Note that the bomb bay has been modified, passenger windows added, along with a two-door cargo hatch in the fuselage. The nose has also been modified into a cargo hold and the nose cone would swing open for easy access. Note the Morrison-Knudson logo, flag, and registration on the vertical stabilizer. (Nicholas A. Veronico Collection)



Eric Miller's Project Warbird has acquired ex-Royal Air Force Consolidated LB.30 Liberator serial AL557 that last saw military service in India during World War Two and also had an extremely extensive post-war civil career. Miller has moved the Liberator's aft fuselage and wings to his base at the Anderson Regional Airport in Anderson, South Carolina, while the nose section was delivered directly to Ray Moore's Hangar Thirteen, some 90 miles north at the Asheville Regional Airport in North Carolina. Here, Moore will build a fixture for the bomber's forward section, that

will eventually move to Project Warbird's facility where the restoration will take place. Project Warbird is offering its P-63A (42-70190) and BT-13 projects for sale to help fund the acquisition and beginning stages of the very complex restoration.

HUNTING SUBS AND FIGHTING THE JAPANESE

AL557 was part of a 139 aircraft order for LB.30 Liberators with RAF serials from AL503 to AL641. AL557 was delivered as an LB.30 Liberator Mk. II. The Liberator II was designed specifically for British requirements and did not have a

direct USAAF counterpart. The majority of Liberator IIs served with three Coastal Command and two Bomber Command squadrons and, unlike Lend-Lease aircraft, they did not also have USAAF serials. The Liberator II was the first variant of the design to be built with power turrets. A Frazer-Nash E. Mk. II turret was installed in the tail and a Boulton Paul A. Mk. IV turret was installed atop the fuselage just aft of the wing trailing edge. Each turret was equipped with four .303-caliber Browning-Colt machine guns. The tail turret initially had 2200-rounds but this was increased to

2500-rounds while the top turret had 600-rounds. Hand-held .303-inch guns were mounted in pairs at each waist position while a single similar weapon was mounted in the nose and in the belly position, bringing total defensive armament to 14 .303-caliber guns. The British liked the .303-caliber weapon because of its high rate of fire. However, *Luftwaffe* pilots, especially those flying the more heavily-armored Fw 190, called the .303 gun a "paint scratcher." Except for the prototype at San Diego, all turrets were installed in Britain after the bombers had arrived. The first Liberator II was AL503 and it was delivered to RAF representatives at Lindbergh Field on 2 June 1941. However, during an acceptance flight

the bomber crashed into San Diego Bay and all aboard were killed including chief test pilot William Wheatley. This caused an in-depth investigation and a delay of two months before the next Liberator II was delivered to the RAF in August 1941. AL557 was the 55th Liberator built and was delivered to the RAF on 13 October 1941.

The bomber was accepted at Dorval, outside of Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The Liberator II had a much longer nose than the Liberator I (which was basically a B-24A) and this would serve the type well as more equipment was added. The Hamilton Standard propellers of the Liberator I were replaced with Curtiss Electric

propellers. This Liberator II was flown from Dorval to Gander, Newfoundland, then on to Prestwick, Scotland. At Prestwick, the bomber was turned over to Scottish Aviation Limited on 23 November 1941, where it was brought into conformance for duty with RAF Coastal Command. From there, the Liberator went to No. 120 Squadron at Nutts Corner, Northern Ireland, where it may have seen combat against enemy shipping as part of Coastal Command. The plane was returned to No. 22 Maintenance Unit at Sillith, England, and back to No. 120 Squadron in July and August 1942, before being transferred to 1445 Flight at Lyneham. Here, the bomber was prepared for

The stripped remains of the Liberator at Kalikat Creek. The valuable Dash 94 engines and other components have been stripped from the airframe. (Milo Peltzer Collection)