



TEXAN FROM HAITI

SAVING THE LAST NORTH AMERICAN T-6G FLOWN BY THE HAITIAN AVIATION CORPS
BY LARRY JOHNSON

Seeing the photo of the derelict Cessna O-2 in Haiti on Page 8 of the September *Air Classics* brought back a flood of memories. I started flying Curtiss C-46 Commandos for Air Haiti during August of 1976. Most of our flights were to Port-au-Prince (PAP) in Haiti from Miami. We quite often had several hours in PAP while we waited for the Commando that we were flying to be unloaded and reloaded for the next flight. During these down times, some of the other pilots drove me around looking at the sights in PAP. One place we drove past was the Haitian Avia-

tion Corps base. We couldn't get into the base but I could see some of the airplanes from outside of the fence. One of these was a North American T-6 that belonged to the Haitian Aviation Corps and that caught my interest.

Founded in 1942 with aircraft supplied from the USA, the main mission for the Haitian Aviation Corps was communication and transportation. The unit was headquartered at Bowen Field, a former US Marine Corps base, but operational readiness was basically quite limited. In the early 1950s, the Duvalier government

acquired a small number of P-51D Mustangs to perhaps counter the neighboring Dominican Republic but, like most of the other aircraft the HAC acquired, they went downhill very quickly. Other aircraft purchased included T-28 Fennecs, Cessna O-2s, SIAI-Marchetti S-211s and SF-260s but these machines were also quickly sold off after limited usage. Today, with the country near collapse, the HAC has ceased to exist.

Time went by and when I drove past the base over the years, I saw the AT-6 parked in the same spot. Then, in 1982, I



Larry's regular "ride" at the time — Air Haiti Curtiss C-46 Commando.

learned that their HAC was going to auction off several of their airplanes including the AT-6. I mentioned this to some friends and three of us decided to place a bid on the Texan. It was a sealed bid so we just waited to the auction date to get the results. As it turned out, our bid won.

Now, since I was the only one of the three that was in Haiti quite often, it was up to me to retrieve the plane. Plus, I had an A&P license. I was finally allowed onto the base to get a look at the plane and it turned out to be a T-6G. The G model was a remanufactured Texan and featured a lot of improvements. The aircraft was mostly intact, just neglected. It was missing a battery and an oil cooler but it was extremely hard to get permission to get onto the base and work on the Texan.

I had to get an interpreter to speak with the Haitian military people and there were always guards that followed me around. My interpreter was Baz, a Haitian that was the head mechanic from Air Haiti but he didn't always have to time to go to the base with me due to working his regular job with Air Haiti.

Also, I was limited to when I could go and work on the Texan. I finally got an oil cooler and a new battery installed and it became paramount to get the plane off of the base to PAP airport so that I could work on it any time I was in Haiti. I got the R-1340 running but the engine-driven fuel pump wasn't functioning so the only way I could run it was by using the wobble pump.

I decided to fly it off the base so I got the chief pilot of Air Haiti to sit in the rear seat and use the wobble pump and I



It was obvious the Texan had not flown in some time but it appeared to be in good condition. Getting access to the military base was difficult.



By the time the author found the Texan, Haiti's small force of P-51Ds had disappeared but most would find their way back to the USA.

This is how the author first spotted the T-6G — neglected and parked in the same area for several years without moving.