

FRIDAY NIGHT OLDIES



BY DOUG FISHER

SURPLUS MILITARY AIRCRAFT WERE SUBJECTED TO NUMEROUS MODIFICATIONS AND COLOR SCHEMES PRIOR TO BECOMING VALUED — AND EXPENSIVE — COLLECTOR ITEMS. IN THIS SEGMENT, WE PRESENT A VARIETY OF UNSUAL AND INTERESTING AIRCRAFT



The Avro York was a sort of lashed together transport variant of the Lancaster bomber. York CF-HAS (ex-Royal Air Force MW290) was obtained surplus and flown to Canada where it was originally utilized by Spartan Air Services (used as an aerial mapping platform), Arctic Wings, and TransAir where it performed valuable service during the construction of the DEW Line. The plane quit flying in December 1962 and was stored at The Pas Airport in Manitoba. It lasted until July 1970 when it was destroyed in an arson fire. Supposedly, the rear fuselage was given to a preservation group while the landing gear went to the Canadian Warplane Heritage Lancaster restoration project. This was the source for Bob's Frankenfly engine and cowl.



To go along with the article on P-51K N66111 elsewhere in this issue, we present this photo of Lodestar N611N in a matching paint scheme. This aircraft was delivered to the USAAF as C-60A 42-56062. It was then supplied via Lend-Lease to the Royal New Zealand Air Force, becoming NZ3513 in 1943. The aircraft did not accrue much flying time and it was placed for surplus sale in 1946, becoming ZK-AJM. It was ferried to the USA in 1951 and became N4836V, which was soon changed to N611N with the name *San Francisco*. As can be seen, the Lodestar received an executive interior and this three-tone paint scheme. By 1983, it was sitting minus engines at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which was home to numerous drug-running propliners and other large piston aircraft that had been abandoned. The plane was probably scrapped during the late 1980s.

Regular readers of this department know that Bob Diemert came up with a series of weird and wonderful flying machines. Bob was one of the early members of the Warbird Movement and scoured the Canadian prairie for abandoned ex-military aircraft. He also ventured off-shore to find airframes and bring them back to his base at Carmen, Manitoba. One such machine was this Falrey Firefly that was often called Bob's "Frankenfly." Bob learned there were some surplus Fireflies for sale in Australia and this led to the purchase of Firefly TT Mk. 6 WD840 that had last served with the Royal Australian Navy. By 1965, the plane was put up for disposal. Operating surplus ex-military aircraft was frowned upon by the Australian government at that time. After going through several owners, Diemert purchased the plane on 18 March 1968 and made arrangements to have it shipped to Carmen — no easy task. He started work on the plane, which was missing some vital components such as cowling and engine. Bob found the abandoned remains of an Avro York freighter, removed an engine and cowl, and installed those on the Firefly. For individuals that knew little about the type, it looked okay. To those familiar with the Firefly, the new engine and cowl were somewhat jarring. Bob fitted out his prize with six to eight seats (we have not been able to find the exact number), applied an attractive civil scheme seen in the photo, and flew the creation numerous times. In 1974, he sold the plane to an American owner and the registration became N62174. We do not know if it flew much after the delivery flight but it picked up registrations N810J and N1840 as it passed between owners, most of whom were well-known in the Warbird Movement of the 1980s/1990s. Intensive restoration work started at Fort Collins, Colorado, but then the project was listed for sale with Platinum Fighter Sales. It was obtained by an owner in France but remains at Fort Collins under restoration.