

DISAPPEARED EN ROUTE

THIS LITTLE-KNOWN DE HAVILLAND MOSQUITO WAS SOLD SURPLUS WITH JUST A FEW FLYING HOURS. ORIGINALLY INTENDED FOR THE BENDIX TROPHY RACE, THE BOMBER WOUND UP BEING ILLEGALLY SOLD TO ISRAEL

BY NORM MALAYNEY



De Havilland Canada built approximately 1133 Mosquitoes (figures slightly vary depending on source) at its Downsview, Ontario, factory. Factory test pilots are seen with the 1000th example.



Advertisement from General Motors who constructed the wooden fuselages and landing gear components at the nearby Oshawa plant.

Today, the immediate post-war records held by the CAA/FAA are fragmented at best. One surviving record card is for de Havilland Mosquito B Mk. 25 registered NX60648. It shows that the aircraft was initially owned in the United States by one Howard F. Knipp of Maryland. The serials for the plane's two Rolls-Royce Merlin engines were also listed

— V345316 and V345294. When the Canadian government sold off surplus warplanes at the end of the war, the engine serial numbers were listed on the bill of sale. These engine serials directly matched to the RCAF record card for Mosquito RCAF KA996.

This particular Mosquito (c/n 897) was built at the de Havilland Aircraft of Canada facility in Downsview, Toronto,

and was taken on strength by the Royal Canadian Air Force on 5 April 1945. The aircraft was then delivered to No. 1 Air Command on 18 October of that year. On 4 June 1946, it was assigned to No. 9 Training Group prior to being struck off strength. It would appear that, as with many of these aircraft produced very late in the war, the Mosquito never became operational and its flight time

was to different locations for storage.

Surplus to requirements, the "wooden wonder" was taken over by the War Assets Corporation on 18 June 1946 and offered for sale. Again, records are vague but it appears the plane was sold to Siple Aircraft Ltd. of Dorval, Quebec (or possibly to the Babb Co. [Canada], also of Dorval). At the time, used aircraft dealer Charlie Babb was operating a thriving business selling ex-military aircraft (sometimes illegally) and he had a Canadian base as well as

his main headquarters at Grand Central Air Terminal in Glendale, California, to handle the large amounts of surplus sales. Through a complex system of paper transfers, Babb was known to be supplying aircraft to Israel against various American and international laws prohibiting such sales.

Siple Aircraft was formed by Wallace Siple and his cousin Donald to take advantage of the bargains being offered with ex-military aircraft. Siple began buying and then reselling

many of these planes. Siple purchased the RCAF's fleet of 22 Supermarine Stranraer flying boats at a bargain price and then began selling the certificated aircraft for \$25,000 each. The company also handled Lockheed Electras and Lodestars, Cessna T-50s, Beech Model 18s, and Mosquitos. The company also converted surplus aircraft for cargo and executive use.

A number of the aircraft handled by Siple were destroyed or damaged in accidents. Wallace Siple, his wife, and

De Havilland Mosquito B Mk. 25 NX60648 on the ramp at either Burbank Airport or Grand Central Air Terminal in approximately 1950. As can be seen, the plane was in good shape. It had only flown a few hours in Royal Canadian Air Force service with most of that time accrued flying between storage depots. (Doug Fisher Collection)