

*When once you have tasted flight
you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward
for there you have been and there you will always long to return*



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BROKEN DREAMS

THE STORY OF A UNIQUE DAKOTA
TOLD BY THE OLD LADY HERSELF

NARWAL

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Foreword

After having flown many aircraft types, new and old, I found myself at a Schiphol Airport hangar in the Netherlands early one Sunday morning. The hangar doors were wide open and my gaze fell upon a beautiful aircraft that stood there reflecting the sunlight. I knew what type of aircraft it was, as I had been ‘introduced’ to her at a young age. Whenever she would grace the skies over my house, I would climb onto the picnic table to keep her in view for as long as possible and not have the hedge obstruct my line of sight. Shortly after I would lose sight of her, the sound of her engines would follow suit and I was left hoping she would swing around and grace me with her presence once more.

A man next to me remarked - “wouldn’t you like to fly her?” - knowing I was an experienced pilot in flying historic airplanes. I could not believe my ears. Had I just been invited to join a select group of accomplished pilots who flew the only Dutch Douglas DC-3 “Dakota”?

The DC-3 is an iconic aircraft, designed in the mid-1930’s. This, all metal, airplane marks the birth of the present aviation industry which, until then, relied on airplanes made of wood and cloth. The DC-3 excelled in payload capacity and included a number of technical novelties still being used today; retractable landing gear, hydraulic systems and a split electrical system, so that one battery failure would not leave you powerless. Speaking of power; the two Pratt and Whitney radial engines with their huge Hamilton propellers gave the pilots 2400 horses to work with... an unprecedented amount of power back then.

The man who invited me to fly the DC-3 also became my instructor pilot. After a week of ground instruction, it was time to turn it into practice. She looked like a lovely old lady sitting there on the tarmac. I boarded her and closed the door behind me. She smelled like sandalwood with a hint of oil. During my first take-off roll I found out I was not dealing with a sweet old lady... but instead a fire-breathing dragon with an attitude to match. She went way too fast for me and I couldn’t keep up. I forgot all my carefully rehearsed sequences and procedures because I was in awe; I was flying a DC-3!

A DC-3, built in 1944 that had actually dropped paratroopers over the beaches of Normandy on the 6th of June 1944 while taking a German bullet that ripped through her belly and the astrodome that very same flight. I was flying a heroine, a World War veteran, an aviation icon in many ways. We have spent numerous hours together since and I love to fly the old lady - a lady with a very specific history.

Now, every DC-3 has a story to tell and the authors of this book researched the history of another such DC-3 extensively. The story of this particular DC-3 starts out similar to ‘my’ DC-3 but then she finds her own way through life and it all ends in a grand finale! Let this DC-3 tell you the story of her life and meet the people that shared her journey from cradle to grave.

Harry Haas
Captain Douglas DC-3 for DDA Classic Airlines



1. Airborne

All my yesterdays are becoming hazy in the archives of my mind. Some memories are so vague - almost as if they never happened. Others keep repeating themselves, like a scheduled flight returning to its point of origin. Like that one night. I was on my way to play a part in a musical. It was Friday the 13th. I should have known! I remember that night very well...

But let me start at the beginning. My life began in 1944, as one of a large extended family. I can still remember the exact moment I was born. I should probably say created, because technically I guess I wasn't really born. The world was in turmoil and we - the ladies of the sky - as I like to call us, were very much in demand.

At the outbreak of the war, just a few years earlier, armed forces needed to be rapidly strengthened and they badly needed a solid and reliable plane to haul both material and men. This resulted in me - a C-47 airplane - being born.

Originally a DC-3, I was converted into a military transport plane with a big cargo door, a reinforced floor and stronger landing gear.



Affectionately known as Skytrain, Gooney Bird or Dakota, I'm quite an elegant aircraft - even if I do say so myself - but, I admit, maybe a little butch under the skin. It's not for nothing they called me "old fatso" - the workhorse of the air. Now, normally a gal doesn't like to be called "fatso" but I didn't mind because I knew people meant it as a compliment. Anyway, my looks weren't that important - after all, there was a war to win!

So, let's get down to brass tacks, or should I say rivets, because that's what it was all about in my 'cradle'. Because the men were away fighting, it was up to the women to fill the void and to do their jobs. The government even went so far as to launch a major campaign to help recruit them to work in factories, which eventually led to over 300,000 airplanes being built by American women. Their capable hands showed the world that they could do the job just as well as their male counterparts.

In the Douglas factory, in Oklahoma City, where I was born (yeah, you can call me an 'Okie') it was no different. Those ladies sure could pop those rivets... pop, pop, pop... was all that could be heard all day long. The building was enormous, known locally as 'the mile-long building'. It was non-stop action there, 24-hours a day, with one shift slotting seamlessly into another. They hardly even took a break and ended up creating me and a huge number of my sisters in record fast time to get us ready to play our part in history. The girls who built me used to call me a 'ship', as a lot of pilots did later in life as well. I haven't thought about this in years, but it now suddenly springs to mind. Isn't it funny the little things you remember if you start digging through your past?

*All the day long, whether rain or shine
She's a part of the assembly line
She's making history, working for victory
Rosie, the riveter*

ROSIE THE RIVETER (Redd Evans / John Jacob Loeb)





The Douglas Aircraft Company wasn't only established in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City) but also in California (Santa Monica). The company was founded by Donald Wills Douglas in 1921. In 1967 the company merged with McDonnell Aircraft, which was taken over by Boeing in 1997.

So let me tell you a little more about those wonderful girls who helped create me. I say girls, because some of them were only out of high school when they showed up at the Douglas factory, hoping to get a job. For example, I can still remember June Cobb who started there the day after she received her diploma, at the tender age of eighteen. When she applied, she was hired on the spot. The same goes for Pauline Mackie, who had also just graduated from high school. She had seen the planes on the news and wanted to see one up close for herself. They were both so motivated and they certainly added their 'two cents' worth towards the war effort. These girls soon picked up a common nickname: 'Rosie the Riveter'. I think they actually liked it. It made them feel special... and they were! They became well known for what they did and they smiled and perked up when someone called them 'Rosie'.

June always joked that we had the same color at the end of a working day, when she would be covered in minute particles of metal and have olive-green paint basically ground into her skin - even though she was required to wear a long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, steel-toed boots and a bandana to cover her hair. June was a riveter and skinner who worked on my lower nose section. She used to work in teams of two.

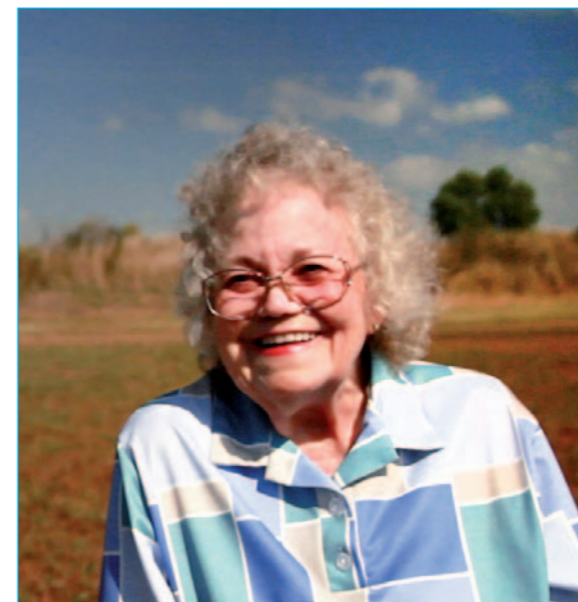


1. Airborne

"My team partner and I would clamp the skin to the ribs of the aircraft and mark where it had to be trimmed with tin cutters. We would file the edges of the skin smooth, reclamp it to the ribs, and drill holes in the skin to match up with the existing holes in the ribs. One of us would 'shoot' the rivets through the holes while the other would 'buck' the rivets from inside the plane. Bucking would flatten the end of the rivet, securing and tightening the skin to the frame of the plane. We would take turns at riveting and bucking, with the buckler seated on the floor inside the plane and the riveter perched on a ladder or scaffold outside the plane," June recalls.

Pauline, on the other hand, who worked in a different section of the building, could wear whatever she wanted and usually wore a skirt. She ended up riveting my wings and checking if my radio was working properly before they let me go.

I remember there being very few men there, mostly older men. The rest were all women. Bless their sweet little hearts... and hands. The "Rosies" were smaller than those boys fighting at the front and their hands were smaller too, so they could do all those pernickety jobs much more easily. Did you know that they also used what they now call 'small people' to work on me? Not many people know this, but they were excellent workers and did a wonderful job in helping to get us ready to fly the skies. That was always our dream, right from the start.



June Cobb



Pauline Mackie



The Douglas Aircraft Assembly Plant, in Oklahoma City, was founded in 1942 right next to an air material depot and employed nearly 24,000 people. Apart from building C-54 Skymaster cargo planes and A-26 Invader attack bombers, they produced more than 5,300 C-47 airplanes.



I, for one, couldn't wait until they wheeled me out of the factory because that meant that I was ready to fly. That day is lodged in my memory forever. June also still remembers it, like it was yesterday: "They would open those huge doors and the aircraft would be wheeled out, usually two at a time, and they would sit there looking absolutely beautiful. The next day when I came in to work they would be gone."

"When they went out the door," Pauline adds, "everyone would clap and holler. It meant another airplane was finished. I think they put a flag on it to show that it was ready for service. It made us all feel wonderful." Oh, wonderful it was indeed. They wanted us to be their wings and fly where they couldn't go themselves.

The 2,000th C-47 was signed by all the 'Rosies' who built it. What an amazing sight!



1. Airborne

I must say though, my life didn't start off too easy. The world was in the final throes of war when I left the Douglas factory.

June adds: "Everyone knew the end of the Second World War was very close at hand. I had just met my future husband, a newly-returned G.I. and I like to think that maybe he flew home from Germany in a C-47 that I helped to build."

I joined the American Air Force on April 24th 1945. Just six days later, Hitler committed suicide together with Eva Braun, after having been married for just one day. But I didn't know that then. All I knew, and could think about, was that I was going on a big trip. How excited I was! There I was, on my way to help liberate this far away place called Europe!

That very first flight - just to be in the air - was so magical. I was spellbound! Every nut and bolt in me felt alive!

I could see the roads from high above, spreading out like veins. I could see the fields in between, where farmers were busy working the land. Their tractors were leaving tracks in the earth, as if writing some sort of secret message. High in the sky, the wind spoke to me and the clouds kept me company. There seemed to be no passing of time. That space between departure and arrival was like that brief moment between inhaling and exhaling, in which time is of no importance and you are happy just to be alive.

I must say though, that I felt a bit uneasy when I began to see a big blue puddle coming towards me, which was getting bigger with every turn of my propeller. What was this, for heaven's sake? Before I knew it, the air was salty and there was blue everywhere. I looked up - blue in the sky. I looked down - ever changing shades of blue. I started to feel blue as well, as my mind started racing. Can I land on it if I have to? If not, will I disintegrate on impact? Or will I just sink to the bottom?

You have to understand, I had never even seen a river or a sea before, never mind an ocean. Nobody had prepared me for this but, sometimes, you just have to take the plunge! Well, not literally in this case but you know what I mean. So I just flew straight ahead. There wasn't anything else I could do. I was on a mission after all!

When I finally landed on French soil, I was trembling with excitement and ready for action. I wanted to make sure that our "boys"



would win and get home again safely. But, can you believe it, almost as soon as I'd arrived, I found out they'd managed to do the job without me.

The war was over!!

I was upset, I don't mind telling you. What a disappointment, a right kick in the teeth or up the behind, or whatever you want to call it, that was.

Now what, I asked myself? This is what I was built for. What was I supposed to do now? Turn around and just fly back home with my tail between my legs? Well, that wouldn't have been possible anyway, because my tail always stood tall and proud down my back... but you know what I mean, right? After all, a gal has her pride!

However, I needn't have worried. My sisters, who had gone before me, had witnessed the last convulsions of the Third Reich and had done the best they could to speed up its demise. They had more than proved themselves. The list of what they had done seemed endless: they had been used for transporting cargo, moving soldiers, towing gliders, as well as dropping paratroopers.

I guess the French must have been impressed with all their capabilities because I was soon drafted into the French Air Force - together with many of my sisters. This made me feel very honored but it also meant that I had to grow up fast and I quickly lost my innocence.

Return of prisoners-of-war at Le Bourget Airport, 1945.



1. Airborne

I kept myself busy, mainly transporting the many soldiers who had been wounded in battle. Some of these soldiers - who were really only boys - shared their heart-wrenching stories with me, while others were busy comparing their triumphs and tragedies.

There was this one boy who wanted to keep flying around forever because he no longer felt safe on the ground. Another one had no words, only tears, when he looked at what was left of his legs, and I particularly remember a young man with deep-set but grateful eyes who couldn't stop talking about his fiancée, who was waiting for him at home. I wanted to put them all under my wings and tell them everything was going to be alright. They'd been through so much and all they wanted now was a lift back home.

I was also asked to transport prisoners-of-war from the concentration camps back to France. Oh, how my heart went out to those poor souls when I saw them - all ragged and underweight and with a hollow, blank look on their exhausted faces. How cruel war is, I thought. Even though these boys may have had all their limbs still attached to their bodies, their minds had sometimes not fared as well. I could feel that their batteries were completely flat and so it was with great care and attention that I gladly brought them back to their loved ones.

The French Air Force certainly knew how to keep me occupied. I was practically run off my feet... or wheels, I should say. I wasn't missing home at all because it was such a rewarding time. It made me feel good and useful. I was helping out after all. I hadn't let down those sweet little girls who'd toiled day in and day out to make me and get me ready in time. This was living... and flying! Could it get any better than this?

But then, just four months after my arrival in France, my work stopped. My big and important role - working for the army - ended. My European dream proved to be a little different than expected. I was grounded, and all I could do was look up at the sky, wishing to be back up there.

I kept telling myself that I should be relieved that the war was over, and I was, because many of my sisters had not made it through. I certainly was aware that you could be in a much worse state after a war than before it, so at least I was spared that. But I so desperately wanted to fly. All I wanted was to be in the air again.

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