

THE IBERIAN MOSQUITO

by Norman Malayney

The following is a story of a de Havilland Mosquito aircraft having a brief involvement with the USA. (From an unpublished copyright [Library of Congress] manuscript on civil registered Mosquito aircraft.)

CIVIL AVIATION IN SPAIN IS WELL KNOWN FOR INTERESTING airplanes including vintage and pre-World War II types. Also, the Spanish Air Force operated until the 1960-1970 period aircraft of German design but of local manufacture.

Because of conflicting political persuasions, aircraft of British manufacture were comparatively rare and comprised mainly sporting aircraft acquired prior to the Spanish Civil War, and civil airliners purchased during the 1950s period. With this background, the appearance of a *Mosquito* Mk 35 on the Spanish Civil Register may be regarded as an event worthy of note.

This aircraft, s/n TK652, c/n 983267, a Mk 35 model, was manufactured by the de Havilland Aircraft Co. Ltd. at their Hatfield plant for the RAF in early 1946 being ready for acceptance on 9 April 1946. Delivery to the RAF took place on 18 April 1946 when the aircraft was ferried to 38 Maintenance Unit (MU) at Llandow in South Wales. Here it was officially accepted and placed in storage because *Mosquito* aircraft were in limited service with the RAF in England and Germany.

In 1948, the entire RAF *Mosquito* fleet in storage or in current use was subjected to Special Technical Instructions and subsequently modifications with regard to the glued joints in the aircraft's main structure. This aircraft was dispatched to Marshalls Flying School at Cambridge for such work on 27 June 1948. Upon completion it returned to the RAF at 15 MU, Wroughton, on 11 June 1948. It remained in storage until late 1951 when it was allocated to RAF Hems- well where the 1st Bomber Wing, operating with *Mos-*



qui tots, resided. It is not known if the aircraft was delivered here because, on 19 October 1951, it found itself at 27 MU at Shawbury for another extended period of storage. The aircraft was noted to be there as of July 1952.

On 11 January 1955, TK652 was declared obsolete and the official record card lists the sale to Derby Aviation, but this fact is an over-simplification of what really transpired. The aircraft was purchased from the British Air Ministry by the Aviation Division of R.K. Dundas Ltd. of London, a well-

The *Mosquito* aircraft at Derby Aviation, Burnaston Airport, England, in July 1955 being refurbished. The aircraft has the Spanish ferry registration EC-WKH applied to the aircraft. (Photo by Walter Wright)



known aircraft broker, for and on behalf of Sr. Rodolfo Bay Wright and sold to him on 10 July 1955 for 500 pounds. It had completed only 16 hours and 10 minutes flying time in RAF service (via A. Roach).

The *Mosquito* was transferred to Derby Aviation at Burnaston Aerodrome for conversion to civil standards. It carried temporary Spanish registration EC-WKH in small lettering on the fin. Military equipment was removed and general servicing was carried out. The aircraft was painted all-over

silver with Spanish national markings around the outer wings just inboard of the tips and a broad band across the fin and rudder.

The Spanish provisional registration certificate with registration EC-WKH was issued for the ferry flight from England to Barajas, Madrid, Spain, where it was flown under special license. After landings at Barajas /Madrid Airport on 30 July 1955, it adopted the permanent Spanish Civil Registration EC-AKH which was painted in large letters on the fuselage.



Taken in England during the flight to the USA. Shows the Mossie having wing slipper tanks added.
(John Pennington)

John Pennington (on the left) with glasses standing with other British aircraft workers in England prior to departure for the USA.
(John Pennington)

The *Mosquito* in front of the Derby Aviation hangar at Burnaston Airport, England, in July 1955 prior to being ferried to Spain. It carries the Spanish ferry registration EC-WKH. Once reaching Spain it became EC-AKH.
(Waiter Wright Photo)



The original purpose of acquiring the aircraft was to demonstrate the Rolls-Royce *Merlin* engines to government agencies in Spain. A large number were still available in new condition in England. It is not known what project would have used the engines.

Rodolfo Bay Wright also indicated to the Spanish Airworthiness Authorities his intention to prepare the aircraft for an around-the-world flight and requested documentation to cover this request. But this event did not take place.

"I was at the time an airline captain flying for Iberia," recalls Rodolfo Bay Wright, "and having spare time, I wanted to develop a small business related to air transport. My aim was to carry live lobsters from Villa Cisneros, in the then Spanish Sahara to mainland Spain and to Palma de Mallorca in the Balearic Islands of Spain. The bomb compartment was utilized to transport this cargo. I made my first trip from Villa Cisneros to Palma carrying a large load of live lobsters, flying at 15,000 to 17,000 feet to obtain higher speed, thus making the trip as short as possible. When we delivered the lobsters to the purchaser, they all seemed to be dead, so he was not too happy. But when they were placed

in the water, nearly all of them survived—they had been hibernating!

"After this not very successful trip, I tried to find a buyer for the equipment and a friend of mine suggested to take the plane to the USA and find a buyer there."

During this period an American company, Minnesota Airmotive, had been operating in Spain and was involved in the development of a twin-engine executive aircraft called the Halcon. It was originally designed and built by CASA—Construcciones Aeronauticas S.A.—in Madrid for military use. This project required a continuous need for instruments, electronics, hydraulic components, etc., to be imported from the USA. This company also purchased, prior to the commencement of this project, 10 Lockheed *Lodestars*, from the Spanish government. These required re-equipping with new engines, propellers and numerous other components imported from the United States.

Wynne Cronje, general manager of this project, recalls the following: "At first we operated a Douglas A-26, N587, to ferry the parts we needed, from Minneapolis to Madrid, Spain. The investment in the aircraft was considerable and the cost of operations was high. And, so when the *Mosquito* became available for \$10,000 (U.S. dollars) which was inexpensive, and because it could easily be modified for transatlantic operations, I decided this aircraft should replace the A-26. The *Mosquito* was actually owned and paid for by Mr. Jose Myjorgad who was a director of the Banco Exterior and it was from him that I purchased the aircraft at the end of April 1957."

No record of change of ownership appears in the official documents held by the Spanish Airworthiness Authority. It may well be the aircraft was used as an "asset" and transferred to the Banco Exterior for a few years after this event. Rodolfo Bay Wright formed his own air charter operation to support an oil exploration survey in the then Spanish Sahara.

Wynne Cronje continues his account: "Although the aircraft was actually Minnesota Airmotive property, it was recommended by the Spanish Civil Air that the Spanish registration be left in effect. The *Lodestars*, which we purchased, were located at Leon, in northern Spain, which was and still is a Spanish Air Force base. We also had business dealings in Palma de Mallorca; with a Spanish registration on the aircraft, this made for easier movement around the country.

"We had no further plans for the *Mosquito* other than to transport parts and components, back and forth between the United States and Spain. Our plans also included legally



importing the *Mosquito* into the United States and then perhaps offering it for sale to companies involved in aerial survey, mapping or whatever.

"I flew the *Mosquito* around Spain, making numerous short flights to Leon and Palma. This was done largely to ensure all systems in the aircraft were operating properly prior to the transatlantic flight to Minneapolis.

"We departed Madrid on 15 June 1957 for Bilboa where we cleared customs and refueled. The flight to London was uneventful. The only anxious moment was when the fuel valve refused to budge at first when we attempted to switch from the auxiliary tanks to the main fuel tanks and the engines 'conked out' for a short period. However, we were at 12,000 feet and within a couple of thousand feet were able to successfully switch to the main tanks and continued on our way with no further problems.

"After clearing customs at London, we continued on to Derby Aviation where we planned to have long-range tanks installed. But after our arrival, we learned they were not available. We were instructed to drive to a supply depot south of London to obtain the tanks. The car we rented was small and of course these fuel tanks were quite large. So, we experienced some difficulty transporting them back to Derby Aviation.

"Pressed for time, we traveled all night, and on the way back had a rather amusing incident in a small village. John Pennington (who had accompanied me) drove the wrong way down a one-way street. We were stopped by a 'Bobby' at three or four o'clock in the morning. The 'Bobby' was very

indignant but very proper and asked Pennington where he thought he was going—and didn't he know he was driving the wrong way down a one-way street? Pennington came back with a remark something like, 'I'm only going in one direction.' The 'Bobby' didn't appreciate this at all. We almost wound up in the police station. He allowed us, however, to turn around and continue on our way.

"Eventually, we arrived back at Derby Aviation at Burnaston and delivered the tanks and accessories to the mechanics. After the tanks were fitted, we left Derby for Prestwick, Scotland, where we started the transatlantic flight on 23 June 1957.

"We refueled at Keflavik, Iceland, and then flew on to Goose Bay, Newfoundland. As we passed Greenland we ran into foul weather comprising sleet and freezing rain—even though it was June. After attempting to fly below the clouds we later found better conditions flying above 16,000 feet. Though without oxygen and because it was very cold at this altitude, it was nevertheless our best chance. Our only nav-aid at this time was an ADF which was somewhat erratic. We did have HF radio communication with ships that were stationed between Greenland and Newfoundland. It was just shortly after we passed such a ship that we broke into good weather and continued on our way without any further problems.

"We normally flew our *Lodestars* directly from Goose Bay to Minneapolis but for some reason, this time we ended up in Ottawa. The flight from Ottawa to Minneapolis was quite normal.



"Within a day or so, after arrival in Minneapolis, we began stripping the aeroplane and overhauling the various systems and installed survival radio and new navigational equipment. The aircraft was completely repainted; also compartments were constructed in the bomb bay area to carry spare parts and equipment."

The aircraft was painted overall blue with white upper surfaces of fuselage from the canopy framing to a point just above the tailplane top surface. The wing tips were painted white to about four feet in from each tip with the Spanish national colors (red/yellow/red) superimposed on it. These colors also appeared on either side of the rudder near to, but below, the top. The registration letters were in white approximately one-foot high on both sides of the fuselage. The leading edge of the wings, tailplane and fin were painted black. The perspex nose was overpainted but the side window left clear. The propellers were highly polished aluminum and the spinners were painted white.

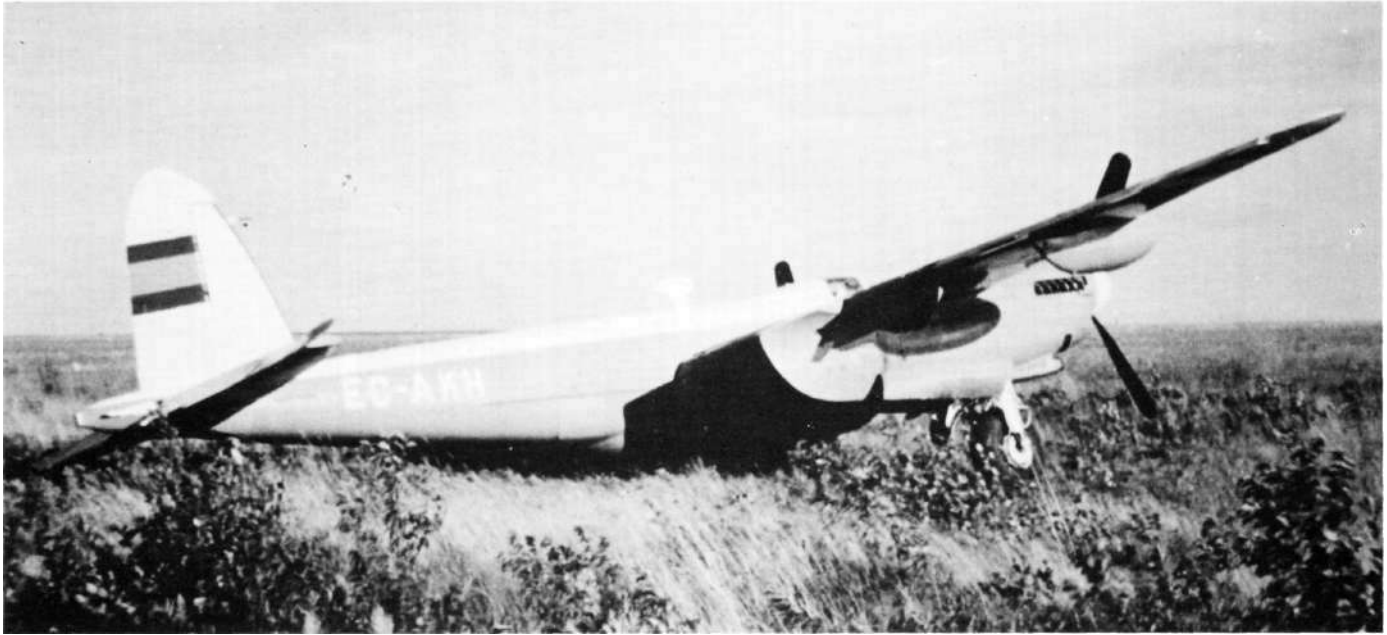
Because *Mosquito* was foreign registered, it was only allowed to stay in the USA for 90 days before a renewal of permit was required. Otherwise the aircraft would have to be registered in the USA. To avoid this, the aircraft was to be flown to Kenora, Ontario, Canada, on 23 August 1957, for the purpose of renewing the permit.

Wynne Cronje was to fly the aircraft and continues with his narrative: "When it came time to fly to Kenora in order to renew the 90-day permit, I checked the brakes on the runway prior to leaving Minneapolis, and they appeared to be fully serviceable.

"Kenora had, as far as we knew, a runway of some 4,000 feet in length which was plenty under the circumstances. When we checked the weather in Kenora, there was no mention of the fact there was runway reconstruction in progress and we were not aware of anything of this nature until we arrived there. On our way to Kenora, we were above an overcast but the weather was good with a visibility of 10 miles.

"It was not until we were in the landing pattern that the tower advised us that construction work was being performed at the approach end of the runway. The first 1,000 feet were unusable, but that still left some 3,000 feet which would be quite adequate for our landing. With men working on the runway I made a steeper approach than I normally would.

"I landed at 1730 hours GMT (1230 hours CST) without any problems and allowed the *Mosquito* to roll until the tail started to drop. But then, when I applied the brakes near the end of the runway, we had nothing—no brakes at all. We were too far down to take off again, and there were some aircraft parked on the runway sides. My only option was to



EC-AKH in Minneapolis, MN, in July/August 1957 prior to its flight to Kenora, Ontario, Canada. Note the aircraft has been repainted as described in the narrative. (Photo via Steve Hudak)

EC-AKH at the crash scene, Kenora, Ontario, Canada. The aircraft was stripped of equipment and engines and buried beneath a runway extension being built at the time of the crash. (WCAM 13229)

Crash scene of EC-AKH at Kenora, Ontario, Canada. Note the left undercarriage leg has been wiped out and wing spar cracked.



attempt to ground loop the aircraft—but I was without brakes.

"I was forced to guide the aircraft between two parked aircraft and the left wheel unfortunately sank into a soft spot. The left wheel dropped into a hole (ditch) of some sorts, and tore the undercarriage from its mounts; the wing tip dug into the ground and the aircraft spun around, cracking the front spar of the left wing. [The Canadian Department of Transport strangely decided the damage was not substantial enough to warrant a formal investigation; so none was carried out except for formally taking details of the incident.]

"I had several mechanics flown in from Minneapolis to examine the aircraft, after which we decided that repairs would be too costly.

"The aircraft hull was insured for \$10,000, the same amount that we paid for it. After consulting with our people in Minneapolis we decided to remove all electronic equipment not damaged and anything else of value. Minnesota Airmotive was paid by the insurance company, and it is my understanding the engines and remaining propeller, control surfaces and other landing gear that was not damaged, plus small components were sold to someone in Canada (Spartan?)."

Postscript—This writer traveled to Kenora on several occasions to determine the final disposition of the airframe. I located a watchman who provided me with the address in

southern Ontario of the former airport manager. When I telephoned this gentleman, he informed me that at the time the runway was being extended. He believes the *Mosquito*, located off the end that was being extended, was covered with stone and gravel and buried under the construction of the runway extension.

Wynne Cronje retired as North American manager of Spantax Airlines. In a recent conversation, John Cunningham recalled the memories of a "fishy smell" from the bomb bay area noticeable during the transatlantic flight. Perhaps one of those lobsters was still on board! •

REFERENCES

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3. Rudolfo Bay Wright, Spantax Airlines, Madrid, Spain; personal correspondence.
4. Wynne Cronje and John Pennington, St. Paul, MN; personal correspondence. The writer may be contacted at the following address: Norman Malayney; 42 Curtis Street; Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B OG2.