A Douglas Aircraft Company Retrospective
Part 1
by Earl See

The contribution of Douglas Aircraft Company to American and world aviation is well known. The company's accomplishments are legendary and this series of articles attempts to reveal the inner workings of a company that was in the vanguard of developing commercial, military and research aircraft.

The following excerpts are taken from an internal Douglas Co. management newsletter following WWII. The reprinting of these brief in-house company announcements provide insight into the internal operations of Douglas as they transitioned from the demands of war to a postwar environment, and how they met the technological challenges of the future.

These reminiscences display that outstanding aircraft are the result of dedicated personnel operating collectively in a highly technical, innovative and competitive business environment.

Excerpts from the *Douglas Digest* newsletter
dated February 1948

EXACT STATUS OF THE DC-9[1] — No decision to build yet. Plans are still in the making as revealed by a letter dispatched to prospective customers from vice president-domestic sales. It says Company is aware of crying need for a transport to serve small fields and feeder operations as well as trunk lines. It must carry passengers, mail, express and cargo at modern speeds, economically and safely, as logical successor to DC-3. Proposed DC-9 offers "as simple and straightforward an airplane as possible. Includes modern communications, fire prevention, surface anti-icing, greatly improved comfort, terminally conditioned air and wall panels, cabin pressurization, plus high performance."

Company is discussing project with airlines, pilots, maintenance and service experts, armed forces and public. And conducting intensive research on world conditions and markets. Do they warrant full development of the DC-9 now? Decision will come with answers.

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COMPETITIVE BIDS BY DOUGLAS FOR A TRAINER AND A BOMBER, both slick designs, are already submitted to Air Forces. Decision on the trainer is expected in March, bomber later.

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EL SEGUNDO'S NAVY AD-1 SKYRAIDER met every strength requirement of specifications, passed all simulated landing tests and carrier qualifications tests with "flying" colors. Then it went to sea for Fleet operations assigned to newly formed squadrons. Carrier landings really must be something! Even the AD-1 got skin wrinkles from the ordeal.

Happily, the problem is not unique. All manufacturers of Navy aircraft fall victim, only sometimes much worse, to unpredictable strength moments not required by contract. Skyraiders are responding to face lifting with alacrity while filing the experience under painful progress in the increasingly complicated aeronautical world.

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D-558 SKYSTREAK. #3 airplane, continues final performance demonstration flights with test pilot Gene May. Meanwhile, National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics received first two Skystreaks last October and November. NACA pilots fly them in the great scientific research program for which they were built. Eminent scientists predict that D-558, product of El Segundo plant, will contribute some of the most valuable data ever revealed for the advancement of aircraft development.

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SEVEN C-74s AT LONG BEACH are getting new engines, P&W's latest Major Wasp R4360-49 in place of -27, and other modifications. -49 increases take-off horsepower to about 3,250. New performance figures not available yet. Following completion, remaining five airplanes in operation by ATC's Atlantic Division and Wright Field will be routed through. Incidentally, ATC has logged an average of over 450 hours on these largest cargo and troop carriers - and feels no pain on their performance.

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BUILDING SPARE PARTS for DC-3s and -4s keeps the rest of Long Beach's 2,200 employees busy. With nearly 3,000 in constant, active operation throughout the world and several thousand more ready, able and willing at a moment's notice, spares

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1 Editor's Note: The DC-9 mentioned here was not the DC-9 twin-jet we are all familiar with. This was an earlier DC-9 project, so designated because Douglas was already working on the DC-8 Skybus (*AAHS Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 3, Fall 2009) - another project that did not make it past the drawing boards.

have been produced at rate of over $300,000 per month since last April and will very nearly approach same schedule during 1948.

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FIRST DC-6 WITH MANDATORY CHANGES began flight tests some days ago as previously reported. Second and third airplanes containing added desirable fixes are now similarly being tested. When CAA approves mandatory items, momentarily expected, the world will be told through the press.

Don't forget, the CAA never officially grounded DC-6s. They were voluntarily withdrawn from service by the operators and Douglas. Hence, CAA regulations forego all the detailed red tape of re-certification. Same approval required as on any other type of modification to civil transport.

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RETURN OF THE DC-6 TO SCHEDULED SERVICE in March and April will be loudly proclaimed. Each airline will plug its own route cities. Some operators will advertise nationally, as well. Douglas shares in these costs on a percentage basis. In addition, our own newspaper ads will feature resumption of service. Saturday Evening Post series will continue consumer appeal, stressing that "If it's a DC-6, it's Douglas."

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DOUGLAS AIRPLANE SPEED RECORDS made during 1946-1947 were inscribed on official certificates and awarded to the Company by National Aeronautics Association at a banquet in Washington, last December 17. Here they are:

XA-26F — 1,000 Kilometer Speed Record: 410.431 mph, Dayton, Ohio. Date: 6-20-46
Pilot: Lt. Col. T.P. Gerrity, USAF

DC-6 — From Municipal Airport, Long Beach, to La Guardia Field, N.Y. Date: 3-29-47
Elapsed Time: 6 hrs. 47 min. 13 sec.
Distance: 2453.807 miles
Average Speed: 361.548 mph.
Pilot: Capt. W. E. Larned, United Air lines

DC-6 — From Drew Field, Fla., to 36th Street Airport, Miami Date: 6-3-47
Elapsed Time: 39 min. 13 sec.
Distance: 204.429 miles
Average Speed: 312.769 mph.
Pilot: G. T. Baker, National Airlines

DC-6 — From Clover Field, Santa Monica, to Drew Field, Fla. Date: 6-3-47
Elapsed Time: 6 hrs. 05 min. 10 sec.
Distance: 2,157 miles
Average Speed: 354.413 mph.
Pilot: G. T. Baker, National Airlines

A-26 — From Lockheed Air Terminal to Stapleton Airport, Denver Date: 6-20-47
Elapsed Time: 2 hrs. 16 min. 58 sec.
Distance: 836 miles
Average Speed: 360.949 mph.
Pilot: Dianna Cyrus

D-558 — 3 Kilometer Course Record, at Muroc Army Air Base Date: 8-20-47
Average Speed: 640.743 mph
Pilot: Commander Turner F. Caldwell, USN

D-558 — 3 Kilometer Course Record, at Muroc Army Air Base Date: 8-25-47
Average Speed: 650.769 mph
Pilot: Major Marion E. Carl, U. S. Marine Corps