

75th D-Day Invasion Commemoration; DAKs Over Normandy

By Jerri Bergen



That's All Brother was the lead paratrooper aircraft during the D-Day invasion. 75 years later she returned to lead a flight of DC-3s celebrating this event. (Photo by Gilles Auliard)

The 75th Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion of June 6, 1944 (or 'Liberation' as more commonly referred to among Europeans) marking the day also called the 'beginning of the end' of WWII, was celebrated in town centers, cities and villages all over Europe with parades and beer fests, military re-enactments and wreath laying ceremonies. The significance of this day and its importance to the freedom of the western world was uniquely commemorated this year with the participation of over two dozen DC-3/C-47/C-53 variants (called *Dakotas*, or shorter yet *Daks* in Europe, a variation on the acronym of the manufacturer, Douglas Aircraft Company Transport Aircraft), several of them having participated in the original invasion of 1944.

This effort, organized by a European group 'Daks Over Normandy' (www.daksovernormandy.org), had a goal to bring together at least two squadrons of Daks to fly over the Normandy beaches on June 6, 2019. Fifteen U.S.-based Daks successfully made the trip across the Atlantic from various origination points in the United States, and three in particular, all the way from Southern California, near AAHS headquarters. These and other participating Daks went on following the D-Day celebrations to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift with 'candy drops' of *Jelly Belly* jellybeans on an American airbase in Germany, before returning successfully home to a hero's welcome.

The California Daks, the *Flabob Express*, N103NA, of Flabob Airport, Riverside, the *Virginia Ann*, N62CC, of Chino Airport, and the Inland Empire Wing of the CAF's *D-Day Doll*, N45366, of Riverside Airport, all made the lengthy journey to be part of this once-ever commemoration of D-Day and the Berlin Airlift. The financial and personal resources committed by these aircraft owners and their supporters to make this a reality for the public is a remarkable testament to their passion for these aircraft and honoring the key role these aircraft and their crews played in the liberation of Europe.

The *Flabob Express* and *Virginia Ann*, both C-47s, and *D-Day Doll*, a C-53D, all played combat roles during the WWII; both *Virginia Ann* and *D-Day Doll* participated in the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944. *Virginia Ann* was ship #1 carrying the 61st Troop Carrier Group, paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne in the second invasion wave. *D-Day Doll* performed two glider towing missions that night, bringing reinforcements to the 101st Airborne inland from Utah Beach. *Flabob Express* did not fly on D-Day, but served several roles during the war, among other things as the personal transport for the British Royal Family and Winston Churchill (the aircraft histories are covered in the July 2019 issue of *Air & Space* magazine by Stephen Joiner).

The idea to stage another mass Dak fly-over of Normandy began at the 2014 Normandy commemoration where a group of Dutch history enthusiasts organized WWII era *round-canopy* parachute jumps as part of the celebration. A few Daks participated, including one from the United States *Placid Lassie*, owned by the Tunison Foundation and flown by Eric Zipkin of Connecticut. Peter Braun, head of the Round Canopy Parachuting Team set a goal to get two squadrons or more of Daks to participate in the 2019, 75th Anniversary of D-Day. In March 2016 at a Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Wing conference in Texas, the topic of flying Daks across the Atlantic to support the 75th Anniversary event was discussed. Members of the Inland Empire Wing brought the idea back to their board of directors for review, who unanimously agreed that the *Doll* should be part of the celebrations. The CAF organized a special 'D-Day Squadron' to support both the *D-Day Doll* and a C-47, N47TB, *That's All Brother* recently purchased by the CAF.

At a DC-3 fly-in at Flabob Airport in May of 2017, Andrew and Geraldine Dixon, of Dorset, England, representatives from the Daks Over Normandy organization, made a presentation to the DC-3 pilots and owners present, including Barry Fait of *Virginia Ann*, Jon Goldenbaum of *Flabob Express* and

members of the Inland Empire Wing, explaining how the mission would operate, and the preparations crews and aircraft would undergo to make such a journey. Also in attendance was Eric Zipkin, who provided his first hand experiences with the crossing of *Placid Lassie* in 2014. The three aircraft and their owners/crews made the commitment to go.

The trip was on!

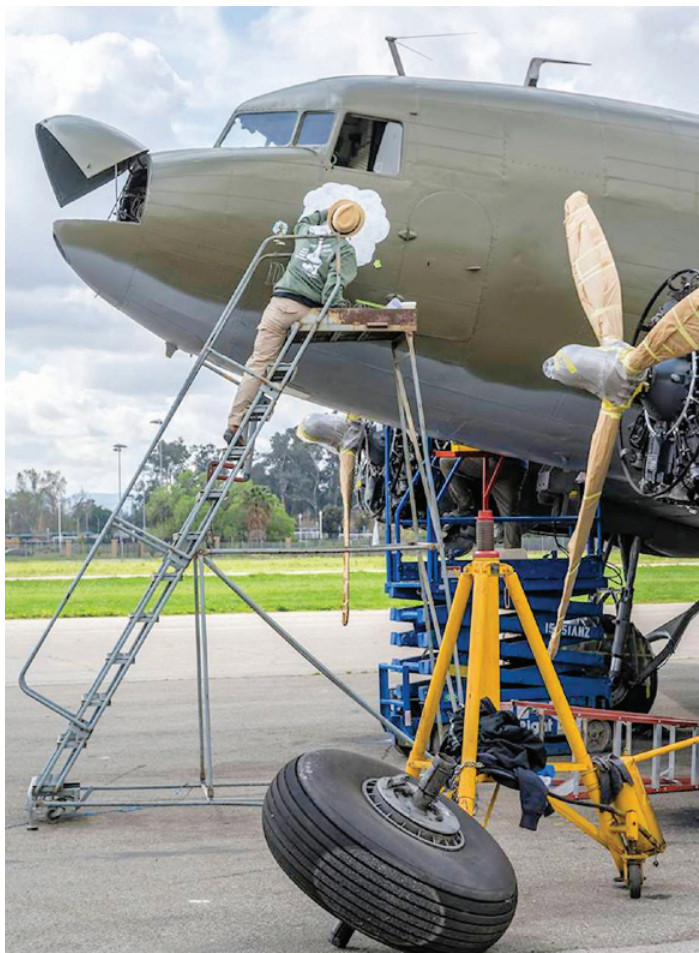
Preparations

The preparations needed for this trip were tremendous, in both time and funds to modernize and outfit the aircraft for this adventure. The three aircraft were scrupulously inspected and repaired or replaced when needed. The engines were overhauled and inspected for wear by the radial engine expert Joe Garcia of Garza Air (located at Flabob Airport). Each of the three aircraft required additional radio and avionics equipment installed to meet communication and navigation equipment requirements mandated by the FAA for overwater flights, and the *Doll* modernized several cockpit instruments, many that had been in the aircraft since WWII.

Spare parts were collected for each aircraft; generators, magnetos, wheel assemblies, props and other critical engine elements. The *Doll* was the only aircraft flying with Wright Cyclone 1820 engines (all the other participating Daks used the Pratt & Whitney 1830 versions) and thus carried a full set of spares. Survival equipment such as life rafts and survival suits were additional purchases required (for insurance purposes) for the trip, as well as \$30,000,000 liability insurance riders on their existing policies.

The preparations and upgrades necessary for each of the aircraft ranged from \$150,000-\$400,000. The *Flabob Express*' upgrades were funded by donations from sponsors. They included \$75,000 in dual Garmin GPS receivers, electronic flight displays, and two iPads for flight following information and additional weather information.

Logistics for stops along the route within the U.S. and across the Atlantic, at Goose Bay, Labrador, Narsarsuaq, Greenland, and Reykjavik, Iceland, needed advanced planning for fuel, accommodations and any necessary spares staging. Fuel had to be pre-purchased and staged ahead of time, as these airports normally would not have capacity to fuel 15 round-engined aircraft at once. This turned out to be one of the biggest logistic hurdles.



AAHS President Jerri Bergen applying the nose art to D-Day Doll. (Photo from Jerri Bergen)

The *Doll*'s updates were supported by individual donations, ranging from \$1 from children visiting the airplane at airshows, to \$25,000 donations from companies like NetJets and UPS. The CAF also provided some support for the *Doll* via the specially created D-Day Squadron unit that included *That's All Brother* from the Central Texas Wing.

Crews and supporters of the three participating Southern California Daks worked tirelessly, putting in thousands of hours of volunteer time to prepare each aircraft adequately; reviewing all electrical systems and wiring, checking and replacing cabling and actuators for flight controls, checking fuel systems and skins, etc. Both the *Flabob Express* and the *Doll* were completely repainted. The *Doll* got the designation 'CU' that she carried during the D-Day invasion of 1944, as well as a repaint

of her nose art.

The *Flabob Express* crew included brothers John, Bill and Bob ('Tym') Tymczyzym, retired airline pilots, as well as longtime vintage aircraft pilots Matt Walker, Joe Fisher, Brian Maisler and Jon Goldenbaum. Goldenbaum, as a DC-3 instructor, had provided many of the pilots on this historic flight with their DC-3 type ratings, including Barry Fait of *Virginia Ann* and Steve Rose of *D-Day Doll*. Additionally he helped train Hualdo Mendoza as a co-pilot, who performed as crew chief for the *Flabob Express*. (Hualdo's brother Nando operates 'Air Creations,' a vintage aircraft restoration company based at Flabob. Hualdo, who has traveled the world as Poly Fiber's head tech is also brother Nando's main assistant). Goldenbaum, who has 600 hours in the DC-3, and over 10,000 in a variety of military jet, transport and general aviation aircraft, has been instructing in aircraft for over 50 years. Tymczyzym brothers, retired airline pilots, had no time in the DC-3 type before this trip. The brothers had to get type rated in the DC-3 to help fly the many legs of this journey. Bob retired early from FedEx to support the *Express* on the two-month tour.

The crew of the *Virginia Ann* was quite a bit smaller, with Barry Fait and his son, Coleman, accompanying the ship the entire trip (both are pilots, with Coleman providing mechanical support). Other pilot crew members were brothers Tim and Chris Manzo, Tyler Delay and Jeff Bently (all American Airline



Several of the participating Daks flew up the Hudson River around New York City as part of the memorial events associated with the D-Day anniversary. (Photo from the author)

pilots in their real jobs) taking flying stints along the way. Barry, having just purchased the *Virginia Ann* in 2016, had plenty of tailwheel time (he also owns a Beech 18 and a Stearman) but spent additional time with Jon Goldenbaum a few years ago to get his type rating. Fait's family met him in Duxford and, like the supporters of *Flabob Express* engaged an aviation tour company to tour the D-Day celebration sites along the way.

The *Doll* was piloted primarily by Steve Rose, retired Navy P-3 Orion captain and retired United Airlines pilot, as well as a DC-3 check pilot. He was supported by pilots Bill Prosser, Dave Brothers and Tim Tarris, all experienced military and airline pilots. Three crew chiefs participated, Dave Milheich, Howie Ramshorn, and Mike Lindgren, splitting shifts across the U.S. and Europe. Eddie Bently and Greg Hernandez travelled as extra support crew for many of the flights domestically and in Europe. Edwards AFB test pilot Brandon Abel assisted in flights from Europe back across the Atlantic to the States.

The trip would take approximately 100 or more hours of flight time. Crew members took turns on different legs of the journey with some flying home after flying a leg and then meeting up with the plane again on a different leg. For insurance purposes, only essential crew flew the overwater portions, while supporters and family members were allowed to fly as passengers on overland routes.

Crew members had to take additional training: how to use new navigation systems, over-water survival training and formation training for those who had never flown formation before. Logistics to plan stops, arrange sleeping and transportation accommodations for the trip across the U.S. through to Glasgow Prestwick, Scotland, and from Scotland back to Southern California were the responsibility of each ship. The Daks Over Normandy organization was in charge of

logistics while the Daks were on European soil.

The three aircraft would take different routes to reach the east coast, but would meet up with other U.S.-based Daks in Connecticut to finish training before the overwater trip. The three aircraft had planned 'grip-and-grin' stops (to thank supporters) on their way to the east coast, and to participate in planned airshows along the way.

The Trip Over

The *Doll* had additional planned jumps at Grimes Field, Ohio, for example but the event was weathered out. It turned out well regardless. While in Ohio, they were contacted by the family of Lt. Al Pepper, a 97 year old C-47 pilot of WWII who had been following the progress of the *Doll*. The crew made a special flight from Grimes Field to Cleveland, Ohio, to allow Lt. Pepper to once again get time in a beloved Dak. Steve Rose, who piloted that leg remembers "you could just see him reliving those flights in his mind – his eyes were fixed on the horizon and his grip was firm on the yoke. I'm glad we gave him that chance to fly with us again." This would be a common sentiment with the crews of these aircraft for the next several weeks!

Under the general leadership of Eric Zipkin, all the U.S. based Daks, including the three Southern California birds met up at Oxford, Conn., in mid-May for specific flight training for the Atlantic crossing and other needed training courses.

Eric also set additional commemorative flights, including a fly-over on May 11 for the 80th Anniversary of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) in Frederick, Md., a fly-over of the Arlington National Cemetery and the Pentagon to mark the 75th anniversary of D-Day, and a formation flight up the Hudson River and around the Statue of Liberty

May 19, also in celebration of the D-Day anniversary. The uncontrolled flight space 'exclusion zone' mandated they stay at 2,000 feet on the way up, and below 1,300 feet on the way back. Barry Fait remembers, "You could see a lot of boats and small aircraft whizzing about taking pictures. The whole experience was amazing".

At Presque Isle, Maine, the busiest airport in the United States during WWII as U.S. aircraft passed through in transit for the European theater, the Southern California Daks congregated with the other dozen as their jump-off point for the Atlantic crossing.

The whole town turned out to support the Dak fleet, with school children getting the day off from school and townspeople touring the aircraft interiors. The crews were minor celebrities; they were interviewed by local and national television channels about the status of their journey. Tim Tarris, flying the *Doll* into Presque Isle, remembers turning off the runway and taxiing to the ramp, seeing the hundreds of people lining the parking area, he called the tower asking, "What are all these people doing here?" The tower replied, "They're here to see you."

From Presque Isle, the Daks had built in a 10-day window of flight time to allow for weather delays along the 2,200 mile route, which, if flown with all good weather, could be done in two days. The Daks began leaving Presque Isle, Maine, to Goose Bay, Canada a 590 mile flight, on May 19. The *Virginia Ann*, *Doll* and *Flabob Express* flew within a few miles of each other, arriving at Goose Bay in good weather. After an overnight stay (all over water flights were done VMC even though all had the required IMC equipment) individual aircraft began leaving for Narsarsuaq, Greenland – "Blue West One" of WWII fame. The California trio stayed in Goose Bay for three days, departing for Narsarsuaq, Greenland on May 22.



The crew Mike Lindgren, Tim Tarris, Dave Brothers, Steve Rose and Dave Mihelcic of D-Day Doll shortly after arriving in Scotland. (Photo from the author)

At Narsarsuaq fueling would be an issue. The airport had one 800 gallon fuel truck that required five hours to pump 700 gallons to each Dak, allowing only three aircraft per day to get fuel, while others had to wait. The pre-purchased fuel ran \$10.00 per gallon, and as the airport closed at dusk, fueling could only commence at night with an additional \$1,000 fee. Because of this, the Daks staged out of Goose Bay in flights of three. In spite of this and rain, *Doll*, *Virginia Ann* and *Express* were able to make an overnight turn around, departing Narsarsuaq for Reykjavik, Iceland with good weather conditions on May 23.

The landings at Reykjavik, Iceland, were picture-perfect, with no issues. The final overwater hop was from Reykjavik to Glasgow

Prestwick International Airport, Scotland, on May 24, where the 15 U.S. based Daks again met up to perform 50 hour inspections, and stow over water survival equipment that would not be needed until the flight home. The U.S. Dak contingent was required to loiter for two days, before they could fly into Duxford, England, their planned base of operations for the D-Day flights over Normandy. The Duxford Airfield was hosting another event and could not allow the Daks to arrive until May 27. The crews enjoyed Glasgow and Prestwick, visiting historic pubs and showing the aircraft to the many visitors that flooded the airport to see the Daks.

Staging in England

When all the Daks, 22 in total, assembled by June 3 at Duxford, the field was opened to the public to allow viewing of the aircraft. While at Duxford, the aircraft and their crews completed a compulsory 'in trail-formation' training flight requested by the CAA prior to the June 5 events. The public was treated to the regular take-offs and landings of the Daks;

Daks parked at Duxford, England, which was the staging point for the aircraft participating in the D-Day celebration. (Photo from the author)



huge camera lenses were evident everywhere.

Volunteer paratroopers from all over the world also began arriving at Duxford in preparation for the 300+ paratrooper jump scheduled for June 5. Specialized paratrooper enthusiasts such as the Norwegian Para Rangers, The Swedish Army Para Rangers, a U.S. smokejumpers team from Montana and numerous other individuals paid their own expenses for the opportunity to jump out of one of these Daks near the beaches of Normandy.

Due to poor weather conditions and little coordination between jumpers and aircraft crews, there wasn't a large-scale demonstration jump at Duxford prior to the June 5 jump in Normandy. Individual Daks however, did have some significant flying events. The *Doll* was given the opportunity to perform a fly-by for Col. D. Hamilton, one of the original Pathfinder pilots of D-Day. (Pathfinder pilots were the first wave of aircraft to fly the D-Day Invasion, dropping specialized paratroopers tasked with securing and setting up the drop zones for the bulk of the troops to come.)

Col. Dave Hamilton, a resident of Prescott, Ariz., had been invited to Duxford to witness this historic event, and revisit his original WWII airbase in England, now an abandoned field. The *Doll* performed several fly-bys for Colonel Hamilton, who sat atop a WWII army Jeep on the grownover field, almost 75 years to the day he took off to begin the momentous invasion effort, while being interviewed by news channels CNN and BBC.

The *Flabob Express* performed some scenic flights, while the *Virginia Ann* developed a flat right main landing tire. The spare tire assembly, having been left at Glasgow Prestwick, Scotland with the overwater survival equipment had to be retrieved via rental car. A 12-hour round trip drive by Barry and his wife Becky, retrieved the tire assembly, and replaced it before the big fly-over on June 5. On the days of June 4-5, Duxford Aerodrome opened the field for the public to come view the Daks on display. The crews of the Daks had the chance to meet thousands of admirers from all over Europe and the world who had come to help celebrate this momentous time in history.

D-Day Celebration

By 3 p.m. of June 5, the Daks were fueled and ready to fly in formation over the English Channel, and deliver 380 paratroopers into the beanfields near the small town of Sonnerville, Normandy. The *Doll* was placed #2 in the formation, behind *Placid Lassie* and near fellow CAF airplane *That's All Brother*. The *Virginia Ann* did not carry jumpers and flew in the rear of the formation.

The *Flabob Express*, during runup experienced carburetor problems. Three times the *Express*' engines settled, but on the taxi to the departure end of the field, the carburetor on the left engine faltered, and the *Express* returned to the ramp area. Another carburetor was fetched and installed, but the mass fly-over of the channel was already underway, and the *Express* flew instead to Shoreham on the south coast of England.



One of the U.S. Daks, Betsy Biscuit Bomber, arriving at Duxford. (Photo from the author)



Lt. Col. Hamilton observing a Dak fly-by from a Jeep on the now abandoned airfield that he and his troops launched from on D-Day. (Photo from the author)





Jumpers dressed in WWII gear prepare to load up at Duxford for the re-enactment jump on Normandy. (Photo by Steve Rose)



Some of the press contingent present at the Sonnerville drop zone, waiting to capture the re-enactment jump. (Photo from the author)



Placid Lassie and That's All Brother fly formation over Normandy – taken from D-Day Doll. (Photo from Gilles Auliard)

On June 5, while the Daks were preparing their round-canopy jumps, the U.S. Air Force deployed 18 C-130s, painted in invasion stripes especially for this event to drop nearly a 1,000 modern parachutists over the fields surrounding the town of Sonnerville, Normandy, to commemorate the event. By 5 p.m., the small village was overrun by thousands of onlookers that crowded the small lanes, market squares and bean fields while news vans from every major news channel waited with reporters and cameras ready to film the sight of parachutists once again filling the skies over Normandy. The C-130s and a French Airbus A-400M Atlas dropped the jumpers in 'sticks' of 10-30 out the rear cargo doors.

Tim Rice, a 97 year old paratrooper formerly of the 101st Airborne, made the jump again over Sonnerville with the crowds watching and cameras rolling. He jumped tandem this time, very near where he jumped in June 1944 at 22 years old, one of the first parachutists into the Normandy region, jumping in the pre-dawn hours of June 6 to secure routes inland from the Utah and Omaha beaches where Allied forces would soon land. His comment upon landing? "Let's do it again!"

The Daks, flying in-trail formation, dropped their 'sticks' of jumpers, 7-10 at a time, circled and then dropped the remainder of their load. They then proceeded to land at Carpiquet Airport, site of a key battle for regaining the region back from the Nazi occupation. Apparently, the drop zone near the town of Sonnerville was quite small, and a larger contingent of jumpers could not be dropped all at once, as many of them would land outside the designated drop zone. The onlookers on the ground clapped and cheered, while motorists stopped in the middle of the street and gazed at the nearby rain of round canopies into the green fields.

By this time the crews of the Daks got back to Carpiquet, they were exhausted. They'd been entertaining the public at the airshow in Duxford, circling for hours as complications with local authorities were ironed out, then finally landed at 10p.m., where they found rides to local hotels for a good night's sleep. The next day, June 6, the Daks were scheduled to perform a special fly-over of Utah Beach and the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach. The crews needed to be in the



That's All Brother drops the first stick of paratroopers over the Sonnerville drop zone. (Photo from Gilles Auliard)



The Normandy area was overrun by not only tourist and sightseers, but also numerous re-enactors supported by period military gear. (Photo from the author)



Daks lined up at Carpiquet preparing to takeoff for the fly-over of Utah Beach and the American Cemetery on June 6. (Photo by Steve Rose)

hangars at Carpiquet Airport at 6 a.m., to be briefed by the U.S. Presidential Security Detail. President Trump was to be attending the ceremonies at Omaha Beach, along with French President Macron. The presidential helicopter *Marine 1* would be staging its arrival at about 11 a.m. to Carpiquet, from which the President was motored to the cemetery.

This meant that all roads leading into Carpiquet were closed, and the Dak crews were required to remain inside the hangar (no leaving, no excuses!) for several hours, until Trump's motorcade had arrived and departed. With Trump finally gone after five hours of waiting, the Dak crews were allowed to go to their aircraft (minus breakfast and lunch) and prepare for the formation flight.

It WAS a formation flight to see though. *Doll* was #2, behind lead ship *Placid Lassie* and alongside fellow CAF airplane *That's All Brother*. A total of 13 aircraft flew up the coast from Utah Beach to the American Cemetery and along the beach, to the delight of the thousands of invited attendees who were present at the American Cemetery (other Daks were



Barry and Coleman Fait performing maintenance on the Virginia Ann. (Photo from the author)

available to participate but did not pass the security review).

The Daks made one pass over the cemetery, then continued their fly-by of all the beaches for another hour until it was clear for them to land back at Carpiquet. Several of the Daks made additional excursion flights from Carpiquet later that day.

June 7-8, Carpiquet Airport, like Duxford Aerodrome, had scheduled open house days for display and exhibit flights of the assembled Daks. Flyers were printed, tickets sold and radio stations announced the public display to be happening at Carpiquet. The event never materialized, however, as many



Daks lined up to get fuel at Carpiquet Airfield, France. (Photo from the author)



Lt. Col. Gail Halverson, the original “Candy Bomber,” salutes the Daks flying over Tempelhof airport – now closed. (Photo from the author)

thousands of unhappy attendees discovered, with no access to the parked Daks, no food vendors, programs or even toilets able to support large crowds. The whereabouts of the local event management were unknown, but the Dak crews did their best, opening up the aircraft for those who did get access to the inner field and taking up jumpers who were not able to gain access to one of the Daks on the June 5 jump. Again, the crews went without meals and went to bed late.

Fueling turned out to be another exercise in patience at Carpiquet. The airport fuel truck was deemed too heavy to cross the thick grass runways after a heavy rain, (where the Daks were parked), so the Daks, one-by-one, started up to taxi a quarter mile to the gas truck. A long queue of Daks formed, taking several hours to fuel all them. Barry and son Coleman also had to deal with a failing generator, which they replaced on the field while they awaited their turn for fuel. Many Daks, like *Miss Montana* and *Flabob Express* used the day to perform excursion flights over the Normandy beaches for supporters.

Following the D-Day Celebration

By June 9, the planned activities no longer required the aviation component and the Daks began independently moving to their next destination. For *Virginia Ann* and *Flabob Express*, it meant moving on to Wiesbaden in Germany, and the American Air Base there. The *Doll* was asked to do additional jumper flights, for paratroops who, after paying their way from across Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere to jump over Normandy, had no scheduled ships to jump from. The *Doll* and her crew performed several more flights, out of La Fiere and Lessay, Normandy, to pick up and drop jumpers. One jumper, in full WWII gear, including a replica Garand rifle, released from the static line in the *Doll* and got tangled up at the door, and as he was pulled back in by the French jumpmaster (a French jumpmaster was required for any jumps performed on French soil) and Dave Mihleich, crew chief on board. The jumper’s Garand rifle barrel ruptured the fuselage skin on the port side of the door, leaving a good sized gash. The jumper was untangled and safely jumped, and the *Doll* landed without incident, now with authentic combat scars.

The *Doll* and her weary crew finally left Carpiquet the evening of June 9 to join the other members of the now humorously nicknamed threesome, *Flabob Mafia*, at Wiesbaden Air Base, Germany, where they and several other Daks would perform a re-creation of the famous ‘Candy Bombing’ of 1948-49 Berlin Airlift, dropping candies over the captured city of Berlin. The City of Berlin denied the Daks permission to drop the candies on the city proper. The candy drop location was changed to the American-managed Wiesbaden Air Base instead.

Jon Goldenbaum, with support of Herm Rowland, owner of Jelly Belly Candies, and a supporter of the *Flabob Express*, had 10,000 individual hankies tied to small bags of Jelly Bellies, and distributed in boxes to several Daks, that would make the drop over the air base. To provide requested data about the candy drop to European authorities, Goldenbaum had an engineering study performed on the candies, and their aerodynamic qualities to ensure they wouldn’t pose a threat to the aircraft or anyone on the ground.

The day had been advertised widely in the area, and over 50,000 spectators showed up. Initially only a few hundred children were slated via lottery to pick up the candies dropped by the Daks. The spectators lining the small fence separating the crowds from the runway actually fell over, as thousands of children scrambled to race after the downed Jelly Bellies! In 20 minutes, all the candies had been collected and the youngsters herded off the field so the circling Daks could land.

Barry Fait even allowed one very lucky small German boy to fly on the *Virginia Ann* as she performed the candy drop. Tim Manzo, who was right seat during this flight remembers “I kept feeling this tap on my shoulder, several times, but we were busy keeping separation and the ride was pretty bumpy, so I just hollered ‘give me a minute’ and when I got a minute to turn around, the poor little guy was upchucking his lunch into a shirt”. The youngster did deplane safely, and got a handful of Jelly Bellies and a flight he probably will not forget!

A highlight of the Wiesbaden Candy Drop was an appearance by Lt. Col. Gail Halverson, 97, the original ‘Candy Bomber’ who dropped candies to the children of Berlin during

the 1948-49 Airlift from his C-46. Now a national hero in Germany, he signed autographs, and flew in the lead ship, *Placid Lassie*, for the Candy Drop, with *Flabob Express* in the #2 position. Halverson toured the inside of *Flabob Express* and spent the afternoon sharing stories with the crew.

The crews were amazed and humbled by the overwhelming response the Daks elicited at Wiesbaden and other stops in Germany. One crew member relates an experience he had with a tall, gaunt older man who came up to view the inside of one of the Daks. With some encouragement he asked a few questions about the aircraft. He suddenly spoke up, "I remember you, and your bombers". He went on. "You bombed my city. You dropped bombs on me and my sister, and we had to run and hide underground. You killed my parents. You tried to kill us." His eyes wandered over the aircraft and he said, "Then you saved us. You brought food to me and my sister. We were starving, and you saved our lives." He shook the crews' hands and left.

The *D-Day Doll* was scheduled to also participate in the Candy Drop, but, after landing at 9 p.m. on June 9, at Weisbaden, and taxiing to its hardstand area, the *Doll* suddenly shuddered side-to-side. She'd been hit — by a golf cart! The left rear horizontal stabilizer and a small portion of the vertical had been rammed by a golf cart driven by an employee of the airbase. As luck would have it, Jon Goldenbaum (who owns the aircraft paint and covering company Poly Fiber) contacted a product distributor in England, who was able to fly in some needed dope and fabric the next day, while the machine shop on base obligingly supported Hualdo, chief mechanic from *Flabob Express*, in his field-repair of the bent metal and fabric.

Following the drop, many of the aircraft went on to diverse destinations. On June 12, The *Doll* went to Nordholz, where she and the crew were invited to participate in the 70th Anniversary of Armed Forces Day. The *Flabob Express* and crew were invited to a private field in Germany for few days of rest with a separate engagement. The *Virginia Ann* went direct from Wiesbaden to the next Dak meetup point, Fossburg, Germany, where yet another German celebration of Germany's Armed Forces Day and the arrival of the Daks brought 30,000+ spectators to the field. At this stop, the Dak crews got full fuel and a needed rest.

The intent had been to use Fossburg as a staging point to do a commemorative flight over Berlin to commemorate the liberation of Berlin from the Russian embargo of 1948-49. The city of Berlin initially denied approval for a formation fly-over, but approval was finally granted for a peripheral flight of the city. On June 16, several Daks circled the city, which included a flight over the famous Brandenburg Gate, and Tempelhof



The Jelly Belly parachute "bomb" dropped during the re-enactment of the Berlin Airlift candy drops. (Photo from the author)

Field, now closed as an airfield, where most of the flights of the Berlin Airlift terminated.

Following the Berlin flyover, the *Flabob Express* landed at a small field in Schoenhagen, once a German military airfield, and now a controlled general aviation (GA) airport that housed an assortment of Pipers, Mooneys, Dassaults, and Bonanzas to name a few of the GA aircraft on the ramp. Also at Schoenhagen was C-41, N341A, *Hap-Penstance*, another U.S. Dak based in central California, operated by Golden Age Air Tours. Friends and supporters of the *Flabob Express*, parked their tour bus right on the ramp and spent a relaxing afternoon having a wine and cheese picnic lunch out of the cargo bays of the tour bus, while the *Flabob Express* provided rides for guests, friends, and even the very happy tour bus driver!

The *Doll*, and her crew, following the flight around Berlin finally found a few days to sightsee before they departed for the Paris Airshow, where she was both a static display and be part of the flying

show, from June 19-24, the crew had time to hit a few tourist spots and relax.

Steve Rose remembers the Paris Air show involved lots of pilot briefings, preparation and waiting for short, seven-minute flights in a very tightly controlled airspace. The crowds loved the *Doll* and other Daks that participated, where veterans of all ages came to thank the crew for their efforts to bring the aircraft to Europe. The *Doll* had brought some of its CAF-themed merchandise with them (shirts, caps and small toys) and they sold everything within hours, as attendees snapped up anything that had a C-47 on it.

The *Virginia Ann* and her crew were invited to Venice Lido Municipal field, in Venice, Italy, where they spent two days sharing the airplane with the public and enjoying the sights.

Coming Home

The Daks all individually retraced their route back to the States, per their own schedule. The *Flabob Express* left Germany after the Berlin flyover, and returned to Duxford, England, for fuel before flying to Glasgow Prestwick, Scotland, to retrieve their stowed overwater equipment. The *Express* left Scotland on June 18, and had an uneventful three day crossing of the Atlantic, returning to Goose Bay, Canada on June 20. From Goose Bay, the *Express* went to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, as did many of the D-Day Daks, where she remained static display for the EAA AirVenture, July 22-27. Her crew left her in Wisconsin, and returned to pick her up for the return flight home on July 30 after almost three months of traveling.

Barry had learned that the original radio operator of the *Virginia Ann* lived near RAF Barkston Heath, where the

Virginia Ann operated out of during the Normandy campaign. Attempts were made to connect with the gentleman and get the *Virginia Ann* nearby where he could visit. Sadly, he had passed away and, timing conflicts with the required 50 hour inspections meant that the *Virginia Ann* had to land further away at Bedford, England, where the licensed mechanics were available to perform the inspections. His daughter, however, was delighted to meet with the crew of the *Virginia Ann* and take a tour of the airplane that her father crewed so many years ago. On June 26, the *Virginia Ann*, landed at Glasgow Prestwick, Scotland, and similar to the *Flabob Express* made the overwater flight from Scotland to Goose Bay, Canada in just three days, landing on the Geneseo, N.Y. on June 29, where she would spend most of July before heading to AirVenture in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

The *Doll* also landed at Birmingham, England, after the Paris Air Show, on June 24. There they performed a 50-hour inspection. They moved to Glasgow Prestwick, Scotland, on the June 25, and left that same day for Reykjavik, Iceland, where they stayed overnight. Between Reykjavik and Narsarsuaq, they hit rain squalls and lowering conditions at Narsarsuaq, Greenland, (when they left, the forecast had been VFR and steady). With their gas reserves at 1.3 hours, they realized they might not be able to get into Narsarsuaq if the weather got any worse. After looking at alternatives, the only viable alternative was Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, about an hour away from Narsarsuaq. The weather did indeed get worse at Narsarsuaq, and the decision to divert was made. They wouldn't be able to do another diversion, Nuuk would have to do! The 3,000 ft runway from the air looked intimidating, remembers Steve Rose. "There's rocks on one side, and the water on the other side. We had a 5-7 knot tail wind and I said 'we're goin' in!'" The *Doll* landed without issue.

After pulling into the FBO, the attendant brightly asked if they wanted the Jet A fuel. After hearing that they'd require 100LL the attendant was dismayed, noting that if the *Doll* filled up, it would take all their 100LL supplies until August! The *Doll* took on 100 gallons, enough to get them back to Narsarsuaq, where they could get their pre-staged fuel and fly on to Goose Bay. Remember it was in Narsarsuaq that fueling was an issue on the way over. This time, the fuel gauge on the fuel truck was broken, requiring fueling to be done via 55 gallon drums. This turned out to be an advantage, as it actually went faster than the pump from the truck!

The *Doll* arrived in Goose Bay on June 28, in the evening, and flew into Albany, N.Y., via Presque Isle, Maine on



Crew and supporters of the Flabob Express had an opportunity to rest and relax at Schoenhagen airfield as the D-Day and other activities wound down. (Photo from the author)

June 29. From Albany, the *Doll* joined the *Flabob Express* at Oshkosh for EAA AirVenture. There the crew left her for static display, to return to fly her home to Riverside in early August.

Summary

By August 5, all the aircraft made it back to their home ports with a lifetime's worth of experiences to be shared with family and friends. The crews and aircraft were met with a hero's welcome, with hangars filled to overflowing with those who wanted to share in the stories brought home from overseas. The performance of crews and aircraft were beyond the expectations of even the most optimistic – no major mechanical issues, no safety issues, no international disputes and many new friends were made.

Ask anyone who participated in this enormous undertaking with their time, their funds, or a combination of both, they will tell you it was an honor – an honor to remember those brave individuals who fought and gave so much for a cause that meant freedom for us all, and an honor to again use these aircraft as they were designed to be used, over 70 years ago.

One crew member summed it up well when he said, "We in the U.S. didn't experience the effects of WWII like those people who had their houses burned, soldiers in their towns, and enemies in the streets. We can only be humbled to think young men and women went into that conflict with the thought to bringing freedom to a people they didn't even know, for a cause they believed in. We have to remember that."

And with this trip, at least there are some who will not forget. ➔