

Landing with No Main Landing Gear

Many years ago, (Sept 1968) Caribou A4-233 landed on its nose wheel and ramp door. The aircraft had just come out of the hangar after a D (major) service and unbeknown to one and all, the rods that close the left-hand under-carriage doors when the gear is retracted had been put back together the wrong way around, the outboard one had been put on the inboard side and vice versa.

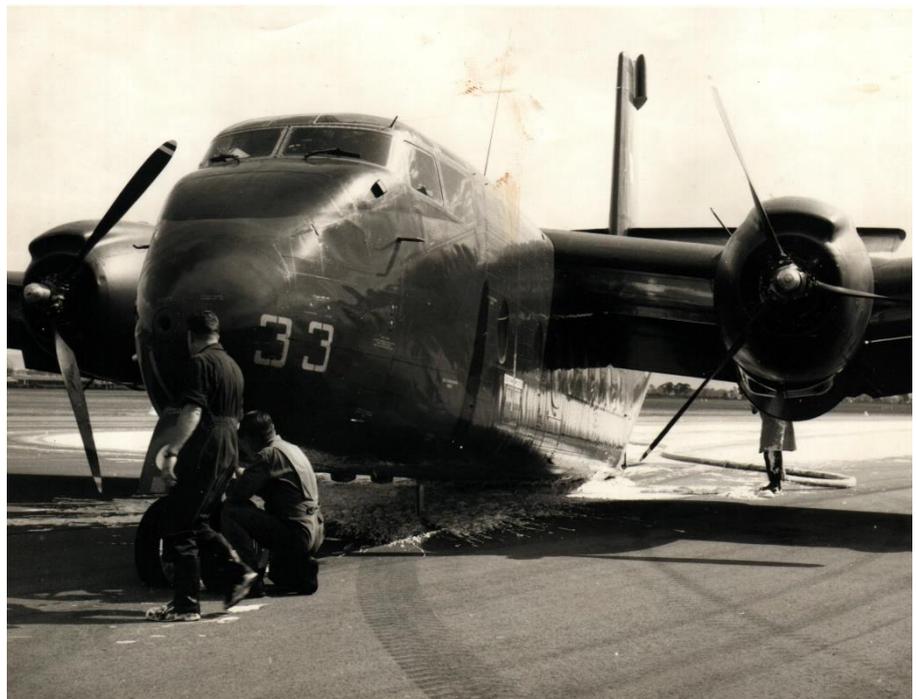
The aircraft left Richmond on its proving flight with enough fuel for about 5 hours flight and with Bob "Father" May at the controls. Down the back were a bunch of blokes, all of whom had worked on the aircraft, RAAF rule number 1, you fix it, you fly in it.

When the gear went up the strut got all tangled in the rods and thereafter refused to either go right up or come back down again which was a bit of a problem for the crew and a helluva problem for the blokes down the back.

After much jiggling and jaggling trying to get the gear loose, all on board finally came to the realisation that when Father eventually put the aircraft back on the ground at Richmond, a normal landing it was not going to be.

Now the Caribou was a pretty basic sort of aeroplane and although it was good at a lot of things, one thing it couldn't do was jettison fuel. Rule number 1 for aircrew is to always have as much fuel on board as you can, the only exception to the rule being when you were about to crash or belly land the aeroplane. The exception to rule number 1 is there because the more fuel you have on board when you crash usually means the bigger the fire afterwards – pretty basic really. So, if you can't jettison fuel, the only way to get rid of it is to use it up, so all on board had a wonderful sightseeing trip all around Sydney at about 2000ft, all having a go at flying the old girl which was in Auto-Rich and after a couple of hours, with the needles at 9.00 o'clock, it was time to bring her home.

Father had of course let Richmond ATC know of his predicament and they in turn had flicked the problem straight to the fireys. With Father and his team inbound, it was time for Doug Bower, now RAAFA Queensland State President and his crew to get to work. Out came the big red trucks and they laid a foam path from the piano keys on 10 to about half way down



the runway and as the word had spread, practically everyone on base was out on the tarmac waiting for the big event.



You can get the nose wheel down in the Caribou by blowing a compressed air bottle, which they did and to save the belly of the aircraft as much as possible, Father lowered the ramp door and then set the aircraft up for a landing. As they crossed the fence, all engines were stopped, props were feathered and the aircraft was put down on its nose wheel. Father held it up as long as lift would allow and eventually the rear dropped and the Caribou made a copy-book two point landing.

As soon as the roll stopped, all on board left the aeroplane as though there was a keg on in one of the hangars, it was actually quite funny to see though those on board would not have seen the funny side at all. Thankfully there were no injuries, except Doug slipped in the foam and skinned his knee.

Apart from the poor old Framie who stuffed up the doors, the whole episode was handled in a very professional and expert manner. Bob, called Father because he was a bit older than most other pilots, was very experienced and due to his handling of the aircraft, it suffered only minimal damage and after replacing the ramp door, a VHF/UHF antenna that had about 3 inches shaved off its exterior from rubbing against the ground and after some new rods were fitted to the undercarriage doors, it was flying again practically next day. And when you look at the photo of the aircraft after it had come to a stop, you can see how well the fireys judged the length of the foam path, the aircraft came to a stop right at its end.

Sadly, this aircraft which was later attached to a flight of 3 aircraft in Port Moresby, was on a flight from Lae back to Moresby when it crashed, killing 25 of the 29 people on board, most of whom were kids.

Footnote: If this ever happens to you, remove one of the troop seat top back poles, remove a side window and push the bottom of the outside gear door. It works.



How to belly land a King Air.

Sometimes when you (being the pilot) select Down on that gear lever you get hit with a great bunch of silence, absolutely nothing happens – you keep looking at those lights trying to will them to go green but they steadfastly refuse and after you've hit the “press to test” a few hundred times you finally accept that fact there's really nothing wrong with the lights and you're actually going to have to belly land this aircraft. You've practiced it many times but it always seemed to be one of those things that happened to other blokes – it would never happen to you.

A few years ago it did happen to a bloke in the US who was flying a Beech King Air – and if you want to see how it should be done, click the centre of the pic below.

<https://youtu.be/ohtoifa5bNM>