

Don Bussart

Article from: Tales from T.A.I.L. – Spring 2010 Tuscola Airport Improvement Ltd.

Have You Ever Wondered?

*What does a Real “Soldier of Fortune” look like?
Is this what you had in mind?*



This 24 year old pilot is preparing to fly his trusty C-46 over the “HUMP” to China, one more time. (1944)

And, NO, that is not a parachute harness over his left shoulder.

You may be surprised to know that this East Central Illinois pilot flew a variety of missions in the Far East and Southeast Asia, for 34 years. From the India-Burma-China “Hump”, to Korea, French Indochina, Indonesia, and Vietnam, including the fall of Saigon in 1975. *Are you Interested? See page 3.*

Visiting With A Living Legend

In our ongoing search for interesting local aviation stories, **Paul Palmgren** and I recently went on an excursion to the big city of Dudley, to visit with **Don and Kakuko Bussart** at their country home. "**Peggy Sue**" and I picked up Paul at his back door, and flew to Coles County Airport for lunch, then on over to Bussart's strip at Dudley. We were warmly received by Don and Kakuko, and made to feel quite at home. This trip was a dream come true for Paul, as he is an avid air racing fan, and now he got to visit with a living legend of air race history.

Captain Bussart flew a British Mosquito Mark 25 to a 4th place finish in the 1949 Bendix Trophy Race. The race started in California and finished at Cleveland, but Don was prepared to continue on East, in an attempt to set a new record time for a coast to coast flight. But he had to shut down one of the engines, because of a loss of oil pressure near North Platt, NE. That changed all his plans. Don feels that if he had not lost the engine, he would have won the race, **and** set a new coast to coast record time.



Above: Don Bussart with his Mosquito "Wooden Wonder", before the start of the 1949 Bendix Race.

During World War II, Donald Bussart flew as a Captain for the organization known as China National Aviation Corporation.

Capt. Bussart flew approximately 420 trips across the Himalayan Mountains in the China-Burma-India "**Hump**" Campaign.

Civil Air Transport was formed in 1946, to assist Nationalist China in its Civil War against the Communist regime of Mao Zedong.



After the defeat of the Chinese Nationalist forces, **CAT Airlines** helped to evacuate thousands of Chinese refugees to Taiwan in 1949. A year later CAT became a part of the **CIA**, and carried out many covert activities.

Captain Donald E. Bussart

The portrait on the left was painted in China in 1948, during Don's service with CNAC & CAT Airlines.

Throughout the **Korean War**, Don flew with CAT Airlines, bringing in supplies, and hauling out wounded troops.

In 1954, Bussart was officially notified that he was working for the CIA and had been for the last four years, but Don had pretty much figured that out already.

After Korea, the next assignment was to assist the French in its **Indochina War**. In May 1954, two CAT pilots were killed in action during the siege of Dien Bien Phu, therefore becoming the first American casualties of the upcoming **Vietnam War**.

In 1959 CAT was reorganized as **Air America**, and after a period of service in the **Indonesian Civil War**, Don was sent to **Vietnam**. He was stationed there right up to the fall of Saigon, in 1975. After a couple of nights on the roofs of nearby buildings, he was finally rescued and eventually taken to the Philippines. He and his new bride, returned to Illinois in 1978.

Don and Kakuko live in the old Bussart family farmhouse, near Dudley, IL, where Don's father lived, and where Don, was born. Captain Bussart has a rather extensive collection of rare and interesting airplanes stored in hangars on his private strip. Everything from a Howard DGA-15 to a Piper J-2 Cub.



Don and Paul are seen above, deeply engrossed in one of Don's many books on air racing. *(Paul is in 7th Heaven here!)*

In fact we all got so involved with air racing, Don's career with China National Aviation Corp. and CIA, and his large collection of memorabilia, that we never did make it out to the hangar to look at the airplanes. That simply means we will have to go back some day!



*Alas, all too soon it was time to say Goodbye, but we had
time to pose for a few parting photos of our visit.
Thanks, Don and Kakuko, for a Wonderful Afternoon!*