

AVIATECA's Fairchild C-82s

written by Mario Overall | March 22, 2018



The use of Fairchild C-82 "Packet" aircraft by the Guatemalan airline AVIATECA is part of a period in that nation's aviation history that has been seldom discussed or written about.

It all began when the government of Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas issued a new regulation for oil exploration and exploitation in the country through Decree 345, dated July 7, 1955. This resulted in 29 consortia, mainly American, applying for exploration licenses in the departments of El Petén and Izabal.

Exploration work began in mid-1957 by the company ESSO and the consortium formed by Atlantic Oil and NAMCO Mining, opening an interesting market niche for AVIATECA. The oil companies required cheap air cargo transportation to move their machinery and equipment to various exploration sites.

At that time, the only aircraft in AVIATECA's inventory capable of carrying substantial loads were two Curtiss C-46 "Commando" transports that had been acquired between May and August 1956. However, the consortium formed by Standard Oil and Ohio Oil had been operating C-82 cargo airplanes with relative success in the jungles of Perú, where they supported oil extraction operations. The unique feature of these aircraft, with two rear fuselage doors, greatly facilitated the loading and unloading process using a ramp, allowing the transport of vehicles and heavy equipment such as pipes and tractors.

Based on this experience, AVIATECA began the process of acquiring a used C-82 in the United States, which arrived in the country in November 1957 and was assigned the registration TG-ATA. Unfortunately, the use of this aircraft was short-lived. On February 6, 1958, less than three months after its arrival, it experienced an engine failure shortly after takeoff from La Aurora Airport, forcing it to make an emergency landing in an empty plot of land where the "Centroamérica" neighborhood in Zone 7 of the capital city now stands. The aircraft

suffered significant damage to its structure as it collided directly with a police guard booth. Naturally, the plane was declared a total loss.



Fairchild C-82A "TG-AYA" undergoing repairs following an emergency landing at Puerto Barrios, Izabal, on December 3, 1958. In the foreground, one of the Guatemalan Air Force's AT-6Ds is taxiing for take off. (Photo: Photographic Archive of the Guatemalan Air Force.)

By mid-1958, Ohio Oil Co. began oil exploration in the Chinajá region in El Petén and at an area near La Libertad, Huehuetenango. For this purpose, the company decided to bring two of its C-82 aircraft from Peru and loan them to AVIATECA to provide cargo transportation services. These planes arrived in early November 1958 and were registered as TG-AVA and TG-AYA.

However, bad luck struck shortly after their arrival. TG-AVA crashed during landing at the San Francisco La Montaña airfield in La Libertad, Huehuetenango, apparently due to brake system issues. On that occasion, the aircraft veered off the runway and collided with a parked tractor, causing a fire that destroyed a significant part of the airplane. This occurred on November 11, 1958.

The following month, on December 3, TG-AYA made an emergency landing at the Puerto Barrios runway after the landing gear failed to extend. The plane sustained considerable damage, but after several weeks of hard work by AVIATECA mechanics, it was able to take to the air again.

A fourth C-82 was brought to the country by Ohio Oil in December to replace the TG-AVA that had crashed in Huehuetenango. This aircraft, also loaned to AVIATECA, arrived in mid-December 1958 and was registered as TG-AXA.

Meanwhile, AVIATECA began exploring better alternatives to the C-82, and that's how they acquired a rare Northrop C-125A "Raider" tri-motor in January 1959. This aircraft, registered as TG-DAH-84, also had rear doors and a ramp to facilitate loading and unloading. However,

the aircraft had limited use due to its complexity and, most importantly, its poor performance. Consequently, it ended up abandoned in a corner of La Aurora Airport and was later dismantled.



*Northrop C-125A "Raider" operated by AVIATECA with Guatemalan registration TG-DAH-84
(Photo: Gary G. Kuhn)*

Meanwhile, the two remaining C-82 aircraft in service with the airline became true workhorses, flying regular routes to El Petén, Huehuetenango, and Izabal, usually fully loaded. The demand was such that AVIATECA was compelled to acquire a fifth C-82, which arrived in the country in June 1959 and was registered as TG-AZA.

Despite the discovery of several high-quality oil fields in the Chinajá area of El Petén, the regular flights of the C-82 to the oil fields came to an end by the close of 1959. This decline in activity was a result of bureaucratic obstacles and technical issues faced by Ohio Oil and other oil companies operating in the country.

By early 1960, oil exploration activity had practically come to a halt, and AVIATECA had no choice but to start disposing of its C-82 aircraft as there was no longer a market for them. Ironically, the first to leave for Peru was the last one to have arrived: the TG-AZA. This happened in the second week of March 1960. A few days later, the TG-AXA departed for the United States, where it is likely that it was dismantled. The last one to depart was the TG-AYA, which left the country in the first week of March 1961 after being used to transport machinery and equipment from Ohio Oil's exploration areas. Its final destination was the United States, where it was registered as N74810.

Fairchild C-82 "Packet" operated by AVIATECA

Type	C/N	TG Reg.	Arrival	Prev. ID	Comments
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C-82A-1-FA	10006	TG-ATA	Nov. 1957	44-22962 N75398	Crashed on Feb. 6, 1958 at Guatemala City.
C-82A-FA	10202	TG-AVA	Nov. 1958	45-57832 N2054A HP-219 OB-RAA-439 NX54211 OB-RAA-439 OB-WAF-439 OB-UAB-439	Crashed on Nov. 11 1958 at San Francisco La Montaña, La Libertad, Huehuetenango
C-82A-25-FA	10078	TG-AXA	Dec. 1958	44-23034 N5118B	Guatemalan Registration cancelled in March 1960.
C-82A-FA	10150	TG-AYA	Nov. 1958	45-57780 NX54210 HP-220 OB-TAI-438 OB-WAE-438 OB-UAA-438	Guatemalan Registration cancelled in March 1960. Returned to the U.S. as N74810.
C-82A-20-FA	10069	TG-AZA	Jun. 1959	44-23025 N5119B	Guatemalan Registration cancelled in March 1960. Went to Peru as OB-UAE-528.

Special thanks to John Davis and Tony Beales, both from [Air Britain](#), for providing a significant amount of information about these forgotten aircraft of AVIATECA. A big thank you also goes to Rolando Overall -my uncle- for enriching the anecdotal part of this article, especially regarding the accident involving the TG-ATA, and last but not least, to Alex Ortiz for the impressive restoration work he made on the photograph showing the C-82 TG-AYA at Puerto Barrios.