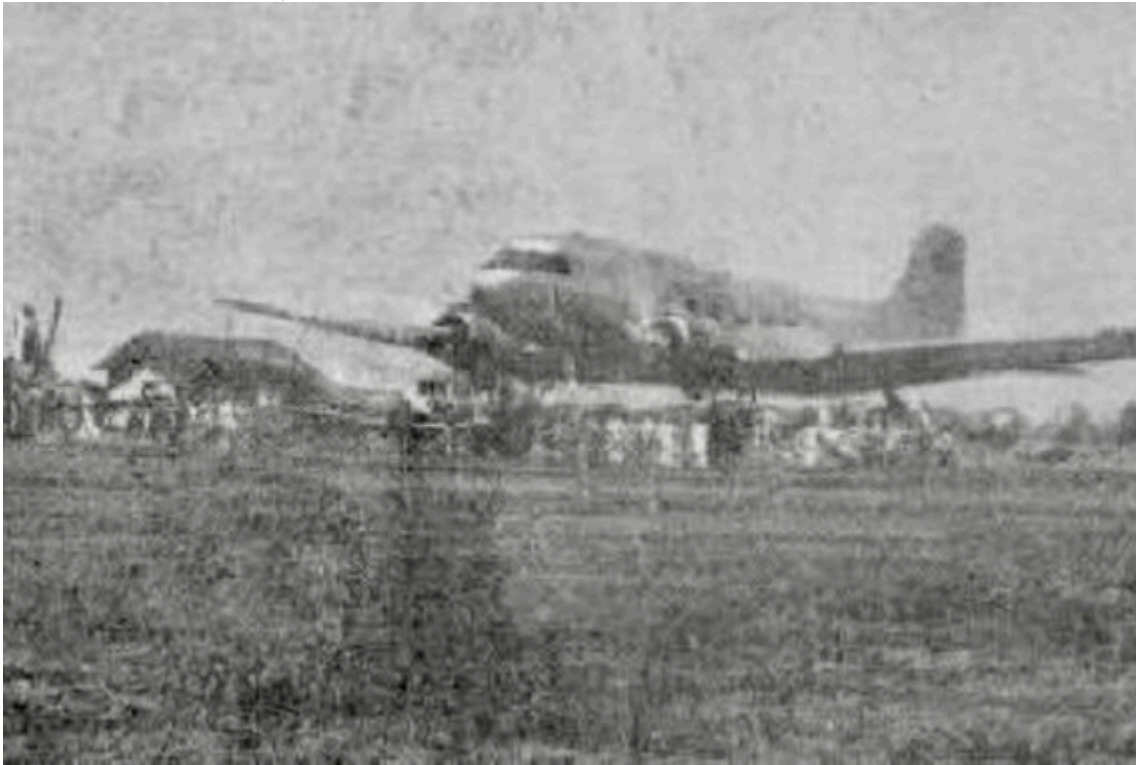


One Lucky Moth

written by Fabián Capecchi | October 31, 2024



On the night of May 23, 1946, the thunderous noise of engines startled the sleep of Aruba's inhabitants. A large airplane was flying over the island, but the pitch-dark night made it impossible to see it. The plane appeared to be in trouble, as it kept circling over the island. Aboard the aircraft, one of the first Venezuelan Douglas C-47s recently acquired by Línea Aeropostal Venezolana (LAV), was Canadian pilot Delford Kenney, a Royal Canadian Air Force veteran with 14 combat missions over Berlin, who in the midst of darkness couldn't find the KLM Hato Field airport, as he believed he was over Curaçao.

The plane was practically out of fuel, due to bad weather that had delayed its flight from Miami to Maiquetía carrying spare parts and tires. The truth was that the pilot didn't know the route well, as he had been discharged from the RCAF just two weeks earlier and had been hired by Línea Aeropostal Venezolana less than a week ago to fly the plane to Venezuela where he would work as an instructor. The refinery's lights had attracted him like a moth to a flame.

Without wasting time, the Lago refinery workers mobilized to help the plane, aligning between 50 and 70 automobiles in the only place where the great metal bird could land, the tiny dirt runway of Aruba's aeroclub "Vuijst Field." It was a tiny runway, much too short, that ended in a deep cliff, but there was no option – either land there or fall into the sea.

Captain Kenney saw how the car headlights were positioned to allow him to see just a narrow strip of land that ended in absolute darkness. With great skill acquired during the war, the pilot put his plane down at the beginning of the runway and managed to stop right at the edge of the cliff – a few more meters and it would have fallen off the cliff into the sea. Without a doubt, that night God was his copilot.

This account was based on an old newspaper clipping from the Aruba ESSO News, from LAGO OIL & Transport Co., published by my good friend from Aruba, Jerry Casius.