The DC-3 a Brief Introduction.

In the early 1930's, Boeing introduced their newest and most advanced Airliner, the Boeing 247. It was a low-wing, twin-engined monoplane, which could carry about twelve passengers in relative comfort, and at speeds of over 150 mph.

American Airlines (AA) wanted an aircraft that would out-perform the Boeing 247, carry more passengers further, and at reduced operating costs. A further requirement of A.A.'s was that the aircraft should be able to climb after take-off after losing one engine, which was unheard of in those early days of twin-engined aeroplanes. A.A. thus specified a three-engined layout, similar to the Ford Tri-motor.

Douglas Aircraft Corporation put their best designers to work, and what evolved was the prototype DC-1. It surprised American Airlines in that it met all their requirements, but with only two engines. Following soon after, the DC-2 expanded on the concept, and far surpassed the Boeing 247 in terms of range, speed, passenger comfort and operating costs.

Douglas then brought out the Douglas Sleeper Transport, or DST, which evolved into the 21-seater DC-3, in 1935. This aircraft was powered by two Wright Cyclone engines, could carry 21 or more passengers, depending on configuration, at over 150 mph in absolute safety and comfort. The Dakota, as this aircraft was to become known, was the first commercial transport aircraft capable of making a profit from carrying passengers only. Most aeroplanes of it's vintage were being subsidised by the carriage of mail and freight, whilst air-travel was only for the daring and the affluent.

With war clouds looming on the horizon, the C-47 was developed from the DC-3, powered by two Pratt and Whitney radial engines and with an enlarged cargo door and strengthened fuselage, she went to war, where, along with the Jeep and the Bazooka, General Patton announced it to be one of the major contributors to the victory in the second world war.

After the division of Germany and the partition of Berlin, the Dakota once again showed it's worth during the Berlin Airlift, where at one stage at Tempelehof Airport, there was an aircraft landing or taking off every thirty seconds.

After the war, several start-up airlines failed, not through lack of trying by it's war-surplus Dak's and their war-surplus crews, but mainly through lack of business acumen, and the poor economic climate.

However, some did survive, and many of today's modern airlines saw their first routes served by DC-3s. Numerous years later the old lady can still be seen operating into airports alongside jets that will be obsolete after 10 years. In fact the DC-3 has replaced many of the aircraft that were specifically designed to replace her.

The chorus of the Gooney Bird song, a wonderful tribute to the DC-3, says it all:

THEY PATCH HER UP WITH MASKING TAPE,
WITH PAPER CLIPS AND STRINGS,
AND STILL SHE FLIES, SHE NEVER DIES.
METHUSELAH WITH WINGS.