



# World War II Survivor

*Still Working  
to Preserve the Legacy*

by  
**Colonel Terry Yon, USA (Ret)**  
Public Relations Officer  
Valiant Air Command

This is the dramatic and amazingly true story of a World War II veteran who participated in some of the most important battles of the war. From the Normandy invasion to Cherbourg, to Arnhem, to Bastogne, to the Berlin Airlift and much more, this hero was there and saw it all -- over 65 years ago. Today, this venerable veteran of past battles continues to educate the public about military history and what it meant to not only serve in World War II, but to have been present, when so many sacrificed so much in the service of this Country and the freedoms that we hold dear.

Our Veteran's story begins in 1942 when "she" was born. I say "she" because our hero is an aircraft and that's how aircraft are often lovingly referred; but this is no ordinary aircraft. It is a Douglas C-47 Skytrain. When asked to name

the most significant weapons of World War II, General Dwight Eisenhower supposedly listed the atomic bomb, the jeep, the bazooka and the Douglas C-47. The C-47 purchased by the US Army Air Force was the military version of the civilian DC-3 airliner. The major differences were a bigger engine and reinforced floor in the passenger/cargo area, complete with tie down rings for securing cargo. The personnel door on the left side was made much larger to accommodate cargo loading. The main cargo door opened as a clamshell door. The door is large enough to accommodate a complete Jeep with trailer, or a 37MM anti-tank gun. The comfortable airline seating was also replaced with twenty-eight folding metal seats that were installed against the fuselage sides. Many C-47 aircraft had their tail cone removed and were fitted with a glider-tow-

ing hook, to facilitate towing troop carrying gliders like the Waco CG-4 used in the D-Day Invasion. As a supply plane, the C-47 could carry more than 6,000 pounds of cargo with a full fuel load. It could also hold a fully assembled jeep or a 37 mm cannon. As a troop transport, it carried 28 soldiers in full combat gear. As a medical airlift plane, it could accommodate 14 stretcher patients and three nurses. Seven basic versions were built, and the aircraft was given at least 22 designations. It was produced in greater quantities than any other World War II Army transport, and it continued to serve in both Korea and Vietnam. Ultimately, over 10,000 aircraft were made and served with some 90 different countries. Sadly, today there are fewer and fewer of these beautiful machines that can actually fly and show what they did so many years ago.



After supporting many battles during WWII and with the successful breaking of the Berlin Blockade our Aircraft tail number 42-100591 was no longer needed by the United States and in 1950 the Norwegian Air Force took delivery of her, as part of the lend-lease program. In 1956 she was transferred to the Royal Danish Air Force, where her duty assignment was to transport the Royal Family of Denmark. In 1982 with over 13,500 flying hours, the Royal Danish Air Force finally retired her.

This is where the Valiant Air Command (VAC) was truly honored to have the opportunity to offer such a valuable part of history a home. VAC members with the help of Royal Danish Air Force Pilots ferried her to the United States. During the latter part of the 80s and the 90s she visited many airshows and toured around the Nation as a flying museum; educating thousands about her battle heritage and of the legacy of those who sacrificed so much in the service of their country. Along the way she acquired her WWII type nose art and became known far and wide as The Valiant Air Command's

"TICO Belle;" after the Titusville/Cocoa airport where she is based.

Sadly, in 2001, returning from an airshow, her landing gear collapsed in a severe wind condition. This necessitated the replacement of the landing gear, both engines and propellers from sudden stoppage and extensive sheet metal and skin work. Because we are a volunteer organization, we knew such an undertaking would be a long, exhausting and expensive proposition and there was some initial concern over whether it would be worth the expense and effort. However, it was quickly decided that because of her history, battle heritage and the story behind her unbelievable survival, we owed it to all of us to restore her, so that she could continue educating present and future generations about all that she had seen and done. We are proud to say that in July of 2008, after the long effort by countless volunteers, her engines pumped to life for the first time in many years. As the smoke and sounds reverberated across the parking ramp, there were misty eyes in more than a couple of

the crowd that had gathered to watch her breathe once more. We are all looking forward to the day when once again aircraft 42-100591, The Tico Belle, will take her rightful place in vintage warbird formations, complete with Normandy invasion identification strips. We will be able to look up and truly imagine what it must have been like on that fateful June 6th, 1944, sixty-five years ago. A day when the freedom of a world hung in the balance as she made her way in the pre-dawn darkness towards the beaches of Normandy; part of one of the largest invasion armadas the world has ever seen.

Today, The "Tico Belle" is a proud representative of this hallowed era and can be seen at her home base at the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum.

The Valiant Air Command is a 501c3 Warbird museum located at:

6600 Tico Road  
Titusville, Florida 32780

321-268-1941  
[www.vacwarbirds.org](http://www.vacwarbirds.org)

