

ON CIVVIE STREET

Nicholas M Williams

Douglas C-74 Globemaster Civil Operations



HP-379, abandoned in Italy, was put on display at Turin. Seen here in 1966. (Jean Magendie)

UPON ARRIVING at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, the retired Douglas C-74 Globemasters were 'mothballed' simply by 'pickling' the fuel and hydraulic systems, and by covering all windows with a sun-reflective sealant. Over the following three years the Globemaster's fabric control surfaces deteriorated rapidly, but the dry Arizona heat retarded any substantial metal corrosion. (See, of course, *Bug-Eyed Monster* in AE60, the November-December 1995 issue for the story of the development of the C-74 and its military career.)

In the spring of 1959, the 11 C-74s were put up for bids as being surplus to the government's needs. Top bid received was from a Cleveland, Ohio, firm, Akros Dynamics, which bought the aircraft "for a Cuban party". The 'Cuban party' turned out to be no less than Fidel Castro, who reportedly expressed interest in buying four of the C-74s. Akros Dynamics hired Hamilton Aircraft to prepare one Globemaster, N8199H (42-65408) and fly it to Cuba for Castro's inspection.

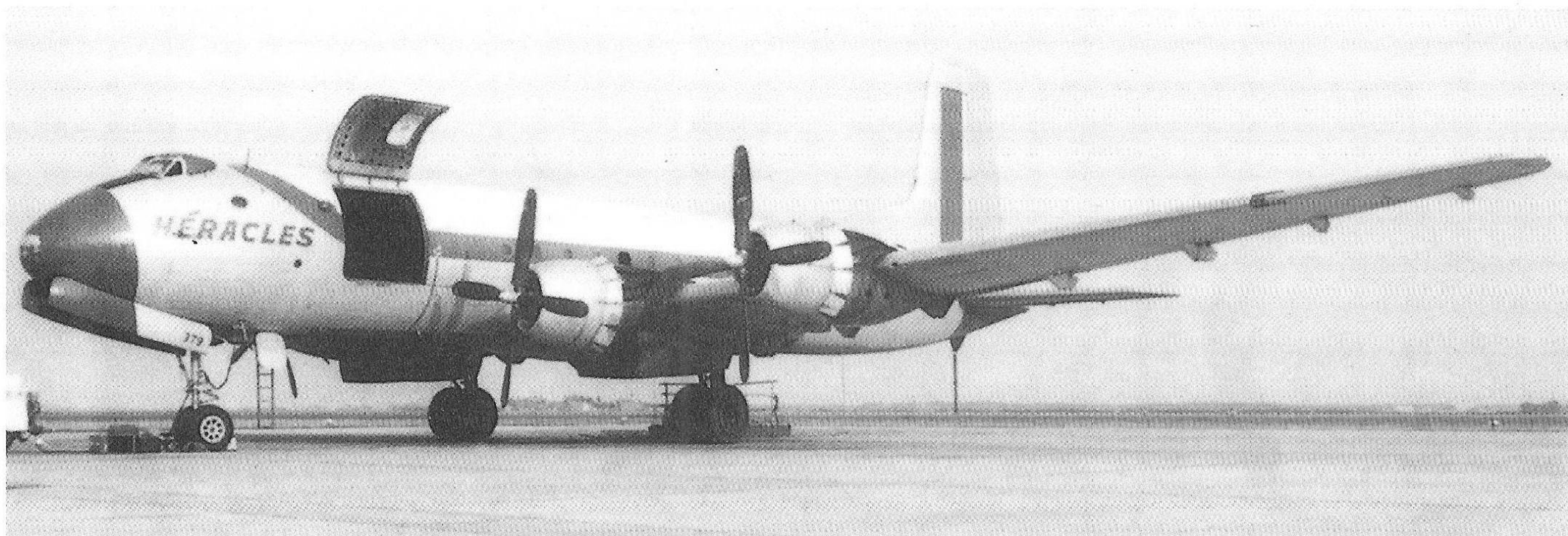
The C-74 was test flown on March 20, 1959, and departed the following day for Cuba with Ralph Johnson, formerly with United Airlines, as pilot, Lee Evans, co-pilot, flying right seat, and George Bosley, chief pilot for Hamilton, acting as flight engineer. A fourth crew member on the flight was GERAL B Juliani, vice president of Hamilton. Apparently, Castro considered Akros Dynamics \$400,000 asking price a little steep, for the aircraft returned a few days later unsold.



42-65412, was one of a fleet of four Globemasters reportedly owned by the Pan American Bank of Miami to be operated by Air Systems Inc. Registered as N3183G, was flown to Long Beach Municipal Airport, where it sat unattended until scrapped in late 1964. (William T Larkins)

Flag of Convenience

Two months later, this first civil C-74, N8199H, was seized by Federal agents in a gun-running plot of May 22, 1959. Ten men and a woman were arrested at Miami International Airport just minutes before they



HP-379, in August 1963 after completing a flight from Gatwick to Munich-Riem, awaiting another cargo bound for the Middle East. (Fred Guetschow)

were due to take-off aboard the C-74, which had been loaded with \$28,000 worth of rifles and ammunition. It was believed the group was involved in a counter-revolutionary attempt against Cuba, to be launched from the Dominican Republic. The Globemaster was stored at Miami from May 1959 until about September 1962, when it was sold and flown to Oakland, California. This aircraft and three additional C-74s were the only Globemasters to receive civil registrations. The remaining seven C-74s were put up for auction at Davis-Monthan AFB on April 17, 1962, under Invitations for Bids (IFB) 62-30. Many bids were received from across the country, but the average offer barely exceeded the Air Force's estimated scrap price, and no award was made for the sale. These seven C-74s were retained at Davis-Monthan until 1965, when they were sold for scrap and destroyed.

Once at Oakland, N8199H was reconditioned by Sierra Aviation Services for a new foreign charter freight carrier, *Aeronaves de Panama SA* (APSA), which was operated by Air Systems Inc. Shortly after the departure of N8199H for Panama, two additional Globemasters, N3181G (42-65409) and N3182G (42-65404) arrived at Oakland from Ontario Airport, California, where they had been stored for some time.

Heading both Air Systems and APSA was Orvis M Nelson, one of the most colourful men in the history of American aviation. A former Kelly Field graduate and United Air Lines pilot, Orvis formed Transocean Air Lines in 1946, building it into the world's largest contract air carrier. When government regulations and financial problems caused Transocean's collapse in the early 1960s, Nelson arranged financing for the APSA venture and began building another empire. Although the C-74s were in questionable shape, Air Systems had the aircraft reconditioned and painted in similar red and white fleet colours, with the name *Heracles* on their fuselages in large red letters. The C-74s were as follows:

Air System C-74s (Globemasters)		
Panamanian	US Civi	USAF
HP-367	N8199H	42-65408
HP-379	N3181G	42-65409
HP-385	N3182G	42-65404

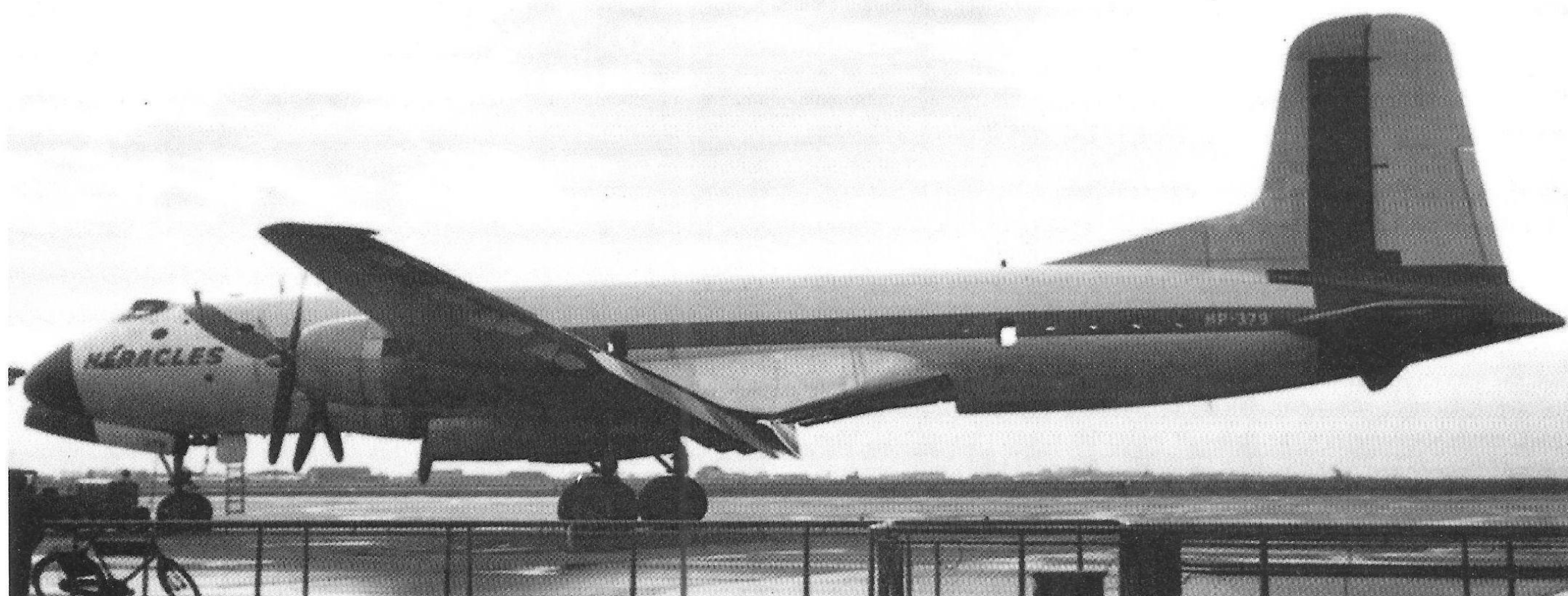
The Globemasters were registered in Panama as a 'flag of convenience' due to the time it would have required to gain Approved Type Certification for US operations, and due to the lower tax levels and registrations charges that existed in Panama. A fourth C-74, 42-65412, N3183G, reportedly operated by Air Systems Inc, and owned by the Pan American Bank of Miami, was flown to Long Beach Municipal Airport, where it sat until being dismantled late in 1964.

Europe Bound

By March 1963, all three Air Systems C-74s had been ferried to Europe to begin charter flights. With a few experienced ex-Transocean pilots and personnel, Orvis Nelson ran the APSA fleet as he had done in the early days of his former airline. No written routeing orders were



The first civil C-74, N8199H, at Miami after confiscation by Federal agents in a gun-running attempt. (Via Dick Phillips)



Another view of HP-379, this time at Copenhagen-Kastrup in December 1962, while ferrying cattle to the Middle East. Note the loading bay doors in the open position, immediately aft of the trailing edge. (Bo-Goren Lundkvist)



The ill-fated HP-385, awaiting cargo at the BOAC maintenance area at London-Heathrow, May 1963. (L G Vowles)

made, for example. Rather, each aircraft's flight crew made all decisions as to the route used, depending on the weather, cargo being carried, condition of the aircraft, and so forth. Flight clearances and arrangements for ground assistance were made in advance by contacting all stations en route where the Globemaster might conceivably land.

Maintenance was subcontracted to two Danish charter operators: Flying Enterprise and SAACO, both of Copenhagen. However, in the absence of any published maintenance of airworthiness requirements for the C-74, and with a shortage of skilled staff in Copenhagen, Air Systems planned to move their operations to Turin, Italy. As it was, most routine maintenance performed on APSA's Globemasters was done by the flight crews and Air Systems' Superintendent of Maintenance.


Most of Air System's charter work spanned all of Europe and Asia, transporting ships' parts to Europe, horses to Singapore, and cattle to the Middle East. A regular ferry service between Copenhagen and Teheran carried pedigree cattle, with calf, for the establishment of a national herd. For these flights, the floors of the Globemasters were covered with plywood and canvas, which in turn was covered with peat and hay. The cattle were tethered in up to eight rows, seven or eight to a row, with scaffold tubing separating each group.

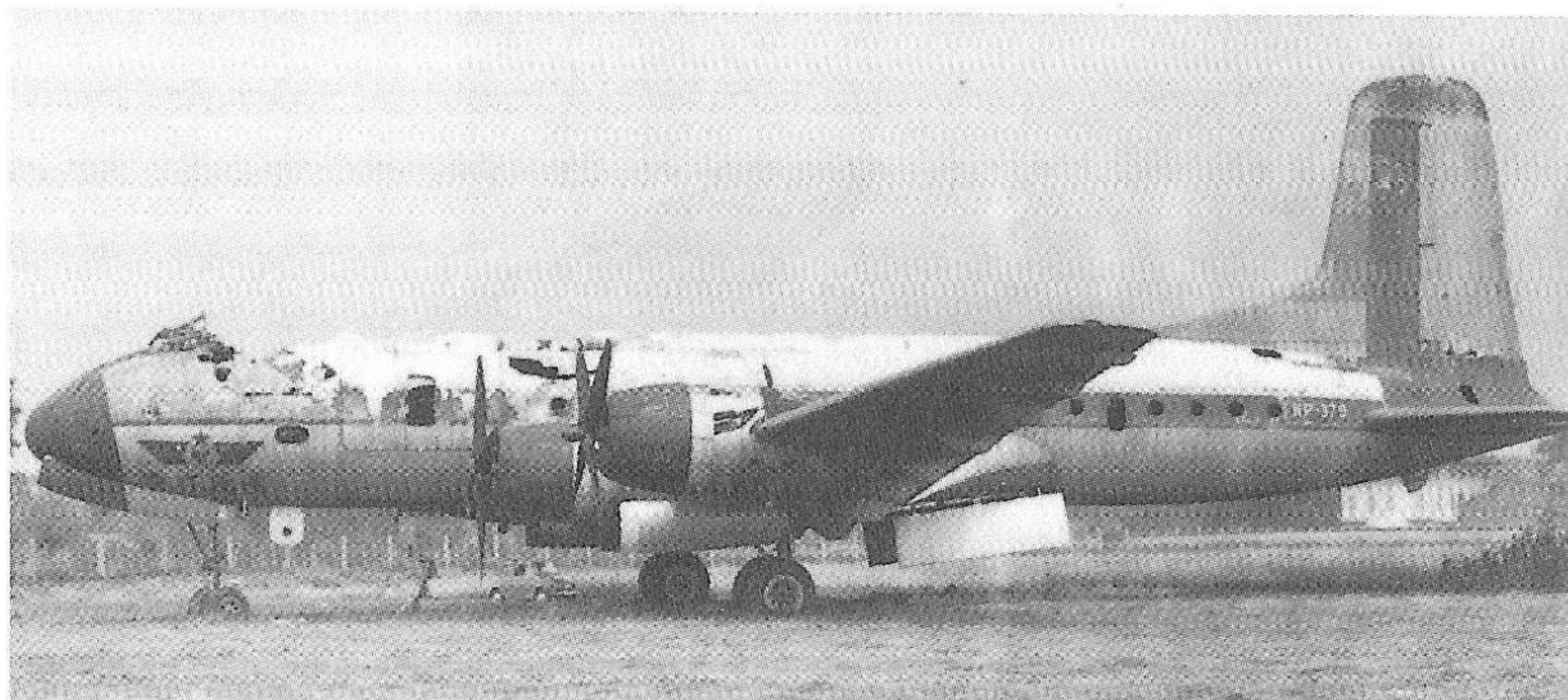
So it was on the night of October 9, 1963, when C-74 HP-385, landed at Marignane Airport, Marseilles, France, on a flight from Tirstrup, Denmark to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Aboard were a crew of four (all being American employees of Air Systems), two animal handlers, and a cargo of 56 pedigree pregnant Jersey cows and four bulls. After fuel and oil servicing, HP-385 departed Marignane at 0348 in the morning on a positioning flight to Dhahran. However, the Globemaster unaccountably overshot the turn-off point by some two miles. The aircraft then began a sharp turn, clearing a 700ft (213m) hill, but lost altitude and struck a limestone cliff, disintegrating completely.

The loss of HP-385 and its crew prompted authorities to suspend all APSA flights out of Copenhagen, and the airline, along with Air Systems, transferred operations to Turin. Eventually, Air Systems went out of business, its personnel reportedly escaping to London in a Douglas DC-7B to avoid payment of various airport fees.

HP-367, the gun-running aircraft again in trouble with the law, was abandoned by Air Systems at Malpensa Airport, Milan, Italy, finally being dismantled in August 1972.

HP-379 also was left derelict at Milan, but by late 1969 the aircraft had been moved to Turin's Caselle airport where it was painted in the fictitious colours of the Communist Chinese Civil Aviation Airlines Corporation for the film, *The Italian Job*. Once again derelict at Turin, the aircraft was put on display for some time, but was damaged by fire on June 11, 1970. During subsequent salvaging operations on September 24, the Globemaster suddenly exploded into flames, killing two workers, giving the Globemaster story a sad, ironic twist.

Were it only for the fact that the Douglas C-74 was a minor offshoot in a famous series of transport aircraft, or that the design was a little produced forerunner of the ubiquitous C-124 Globemaster II, the Globemaster might well deserve to be written off as an insignificant historical oddity. But the C-74s, though small in number, served the USAF admirably for a decade of reliable, record-setting performance, accumulating nearly 100,000 hours of accident-free service... truly a pacesetter among the postwar giants. 



HP-379, painted in the fictitious markings of the Communist Chinese Civil Aviation Airlines Corporation for the film 'The Italian Job'. The aircraft is shown shortly after having suffered a fire, days before being finally dismantled for scrap. (Stephen Piercey)