

# Not Once but Twice

by Barry Ingate

"I was a Loadmaster with the Caribous (38 Sqn at Richmond and RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam which became 35 Sqn). I arrived in Vietnam with the first three Caribous on 8th August 1964. My first flight in A4-173 was a test flight on 2nd September 1964, probably after it was serviced when it first arrived at Vung Tau, and my first operational sorties in it were on 11th September 1964 (4.35 hours hauling pax and freight from Saigon to a place called Ban Me Thout). I should point out that crews weren't assigned to a particular aircraft or that the same crews always flew together - we flew in any aircraft and with the crews mixing all the time (except when we operated from Nha Trang or Da Nang where we went for a week at a time, one crew and one aircraft).

We flew all types of missions - pax and freight, paratrooping, flares, supply drops, lolexing, casevac and medevac - whatever they thought we could do.

On 7th May 1965 I was assigned to A4-173 to do one of the two so-called milk runs. This one we did on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and involved hauling pax and freight (a lot of mail) around the delta, leaving Saigon and hopping from place to place (always the same places) and eventually arriving back at Saigon and then back to Vung Tau. We were on the return part of the mission and landed at a place called Ca Mau where we were told we had an additional run to do to a place called Hai Yen, not on our normal route and about as far south as you can go in the delta. The VC had hit the place the night before and killed quite a few people (Vietnamese) and they needed coffins.

So we loaded up with what I called D.I.Y. coffins (as they were mostly in pieces to be assembled later) and a few pax and headed south. Hai Yen had a short P.S.P. (Pierced Steel Planking) strip (about 900 feet I think) set in a vast area of rice paddy fields and mud. It was like landing on a small aircraft carrier, and, like an aircraft carrier, if you landed short you were in trouble. Unfortunately, at 1305 that's what happened and we tore the starboard main gear loose, came down on the starboard wing and bent it and the starboard prop. We eventually came to a grinding halt not quite fully off the strip and in the reeds and mud. No-one was hurt although the pilot was understandably pretty upset.

Anyway, I got the aircraft unloaded and secured as best I could while the pilots called base (there was a small U.S. Army post at Hai Yen) and arranged for U.S. Army choppers to lift us out. A crew of fitters was sent to Hai Yen to salvage the aircraft which they did under very trying conditions and on the 15th May 1965 Squadron Leader Harvey and I went there to fly it out. As I remember, the pilot had to maintain fairly hard left aileron to keep us straight and level and, after a

brief stop at Ca Mau, we finally got back to Vung Tau. I didn't fly in A4-173 anymore on that tour - I think it was still being worked on when I went home at the end of May 1965.

I returned to Vietnam at the end of January 1966 (a sucker for punishment?). On 15th August 1966 I was assigned to A4-173 to do a week in Da Nang. At Da Nang and Nha Trang we operated virtually exclusively with U.S. Special Forces servicing their "A" camps which were very close to the Laotian and Cambodian borders. On the 16th August 1966 we were flying pax and freight into Ba To, an "A" camp about an hour south-west (I think) from Da Nang. This area was very hilly and the strip (short and gravel) was cut into the side of one of the hills - only one way in and the opposite way out. The approach was along a deep valley and a starboard turn to line up. It was an "aircraft carrier" type of strip too, with the end of the runway dropping off steeply into the valley.

No landing short there either, but again, unfortunately, that's what happened at 1250 hours, this time knocking the port undercarriage back and bending the wing and prop on that side. This time we came to a halt near the entrance to the camp and in a mine field (luckily they were Claymores which don't explode on impact). Again no-one was hurt and I got the aircraft unloaded and secured while the pilots arranged transport.

I don't know how they got the aircraft out of there even though my logbook tells me that I did several trips into there over the next few days in another aircraft."

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**30th April 2003**