

SKYLINE S

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NORTH AMERICAN TRAINER ASSOCIATION

NORTH AMERICAN AVIATION HISTORY

Every T-28 has a Story, this one is about the Makasi T-28s

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This summer, more T-28 Trojans will be on the ramp at Air Venture Oshkosh than ever before and maybe, ever again, so you won't want to miss it! Their clear, shiny and oil free exteriors may hide the story behind how these few T-28s survived to still be flying, almost 70 years since they first left the North American Factory. When they left the factory they all looked pretty much identical, the T-28A's in silver and each T-28B and T-28C Trojan left the NAA Columbus plant in their bright chrome yellow with black lettering. Today they carry many different authentic military color schemes that the T-28s wore over their many decades of military service. The T-28s are so shiny and oil free, they conceal the decades of mishandling by new military student pilots and some hide the damage suffered from being in combat. But each Trojan that will be on the Oshkosh ramp found someone willing to secure, restore, maintain and care for it. Each has a story to tell. Some of those stories will be told at "Warbirds in Review" sessions during Air Venture that will featuring the T-28 and its many roles: as a trainer, a combat fighter, a Reno Racer and an airshow aircraft.



U.S.A.F. T-28A and training. Note two bladed propeller.

Of all the surviving warbirds in America, very few, (except T-28s) were ever actually flown in combat. Most warbirds served stateside until somehow, they escaped the boneyard scrappers and were saved. However, even though the T-28 started service life as a trainer, many of the surviving T-28s have real combat experience and their logbooks are full of repairs of bullet holes and battle damage. Especially the T-28Ds and T-28F Fennecs.



All big engine T-28B and T-28Cs left NAA in their chrome yellow paint scheme



Starting as USAF T-28A trainers, the French bought, re-engined and armed them to use in the Algerian Conflict.

All the T-28Fs have combat experience. They started as USAF T-28A trainers, but after retirement, in 1959, the French bought 148 of them, then re-engined and armed them to use in the Algerian Conflict. In 1962, the French resold their Fennecs to Nicaragua (to replace their 20 aging Swedish P-51s), and to Morocco and Argentina. Those nations would resell them to other South and Central American countries and so on. Over the years Fennecs saw a lot of combat. The last T-28 used in combat occurred in the 1989 Philippine coup attempt. Early big engine T-28 restorers secured these foreign owned Fennecs and combat T-28s because those stateside were still being used by the Navy.

In addition to the Fennecs, several T-28As, B and Cs were turned into combat T-28Ds, D-5, D-10s and AT-28s models that were used in Vietnam and the CIA led Secret Wars in Laos. They were flown by USAF, Air America, the Ravens, Hmong and other pilots. But lesser known, maybe because their pilots were forbidden by the CIA to mention their service for 30 years, was the CIA war against the communist rebels in the Congo. The CIA had trained Cuban pilots for the Cuban Bay of Pigs Invasion. That invasion didn't go too well, but the Cuban pilots were still ready and willing to fight communists anywhere in the world. The CIA needed them in the Congo.



Look Ma, no tail hook! Tail hooks were removed, and cowl strakes were added to allow spin recovery with armaments on combat T-28Cs.

The Cubans initially flew worn out T-6 Texans in the Congo, but they badly needed a better fighter. So urgent was that need, that rather than wait for T-28As that were being converted to T-28Ds, the CIA took T-28Cs out of Navy inventory that had just completed their IRAN (Inspect and Repair As Necessary) needed after years of Naval students' carrier landings. They were armed with six hardpoints, the tail hooks removed, and shipped inside C-133 Cargomasters and C-124 Globemasters to the Congo.

The Cubans, armed with T-28s, quickly turned the tide of the war in the Congo. Their unit took on the name MAKASI (brave and fearless) and the logo of a Bull. (Makasi also just happened to be the name and logo of the local Congo beer.)



Left: CIA T-28Cs delivered by C-124 Globemaster to the Congo



Right: Makasi name and logo

The CIA planned to have 12 operational T-28s in the Congo. The first 6 T-28Cs arrived in May of 1964. The following September 6 more arrived. The CIA-trained Cuban pilots flew them. The enemy, Communist rebels, were aided by Castro led Cubans and local Simba rebels. The Simbas were cannibals and over the years of conflict, three shot down Makasi pilots were captured and cannibalized by the Simbas. It was a strange time, CIA-supported Cubans fighting Castro-supported Cubans in a remote African Country.



Maintenance for Makasi T-28s was primitive

While the Makasi T-28s and their pilots were very effective turning the tide against the rebels and freeing many towns and pushing the rebels back, their losses were high. In addition to fierce ground fire and ground launched rockets, the landing fields were short and primitive. T-28 maintenance and part support was spotty. Yet they the Makasi carried on for 11 years. Many of the new replacement pilots for the Makasi had little, if any, training in T-28s, so training itself also led to aircraft losses. After 1967 some pilots were not from Cuba. The CIA kept sending more replacement T-28s.



T-28 Parts Support was spotty so damaged T-28s were salvaged

In addition to the original 12 T-28Cs delivered in 1964, over the years, 15 more T-28s were sent to the Congo. Most were T-28Cs but also T-28Bs turned into T-28D-5s and a couple AT-28s Nomads were sent. Before the Secret War in Congo ended in 1967, 27 T-28s had been sent to the Congo. However, seldom were more than 8 T-28s operation at any given time, often just 6.

It is interesting to review the logs of those Congo based T-28s. Four flipped over either on landing or take off, killing two pilots. The original 6 T-28Cs sent to the Congo still had their narrow Navy nosewheels installed that would dig into the unpaved strips. Even with the bigger nose wheels, the strips were a challenge for the nose heavy T-28s.



Top: Gear down off-field forced landings often resulted in aircraft flipping. This pilot only had minor arm injuries.



Bottom: Makasi pilots

After 1967 the war was declared over. The T-28s were turned over to the new Congo (Zaire) government and flown mostly by mercenaries. By September of 1975 of the 27 T-28s delivered to the Congo, only 8 remained salvageable, only 5 could be made airworthy without a significant rebuild. Of those 5, 3 had seen a LOT of combat. One was T-28C, Bu No 140516, that was in the first group of 6 delivered in May of 1964, 2 in the following September T-28Cs group, 140576 and 140255. Of the 27 T-28s sent to the Congo, these 3 originals from the first year of combat and only 2 others were the only T-28s that were still airworthy.



Makasi T-28s awaiting the next mission



Makasi T-28s in the Congo

In 1975 the Congo's government, headed by dictator Mobutu, purchased MB326s - small Italian jet fighters, having no further use for the battle worn T-28s. The T-28s were put up for sale as "lots of 3000 pounds of aluminum" by a Defense Agency in Wiesbaden, Germany. The winning bids for the 5 sort-of-flyable T-28s was Euroworld LTD of London headed by Ted White in September 29, 1975. They paid \$1,135.80 for 4 T-28Cs and \$1,512.90 for the 1 T-28 D5.



140576 being refueled in Africa on its recovery trip to the U.K.

White had partnered with Dr. William Nelson of El Paso Texas to secure the deal. Nelson knew that big engine T-28s in civilian hands were extremely rare and would be highly prized. (The Navy would go on using T-28s for another 7

years and then let them sit for many years in the boneyard before starting to trade and release them to civilians. One of the Congo Makasi retrieved T-28cs would later be traded even up for an current airworthy P-51 Mustang!) Ted and Dr. Nelson developed a plan to go and retrieve the 5 T-28s that had been sitting for 3 years. Ted, with four other pilots, would "simply" make them airworthy and fly them over 7000 miles from the Congo to the U.K. They would then hop them across the Northern Atlantic to the U.S.

From their base in the Congo they would cross the jungle heading west to the South Atlantic African coast, then turn north and follow the coastline north, eventually crossing 14 countries until they arrived in England. The plan was for 1 T-28 to remain in England as payment to Ted White for his efforts. The other 4 would have ferry tanks installed and head across the Atlantic to be restored and sold in the US for a huge profit. The plan sounded simple, but in reality, it wasn't.



Top: Photo of T-28 576 in the Congo
Bottom: At EAA Oshkosh taken 50 years later

By pure determination after over many months of hard work they did manage to get the 5 T-28s running. The Nav coms were inop in most of the T-28s. That really didn't matter, there were few Nav aids in the jungle anyway. They would just remain VFR heading west across the jungle until they hit the African Southern Atlantic coast. Unfortunately, the T-28 does not have long legs, and they would have to stop for fuel and oil at least 13 times before reaching the U.K. Many of the countries they landed in immediately confiscated all 5 of the combat ready T-28 aircraft. The 5 combat Trojans represented a bigger Air Force than most of these countries possessed! Often the pilots were also detained. Telegrams were sent to London and Texas, please send more bail and government officials bribe money! With governmental delays and mechanical problems; the flight to the UK took several weeks. One T-28 crashed in Africa.

Another, 140289, crash landed in France. 140289's fuselage would be later be salvaged and is displayed at the Norfolk and Suffolk museum in the U.K. where it remains on display to this day. The remaining 3 T-28s finally landed at Biggin Hill, England in December of 1977.



140289 crashed during the ferry flight to the U.K. in France and is on display in the a U.K. outdoor Museum

In May 1978 after further engine and airframe work, 140576 was the first Makasi T-28C to be flown across the Atlantic to the U.S. After that harrowing experience it was decided it would be better to take apart the remaining 2 T-28s (140516 and 140255) and ship them in cargo containers to the US.

140516, after restoration and flying a few years became inactive and is now owned by Duane Doyle in Livermore, California.

140255 is flown often and owned by Greg Spatz and Steve Walenz of southern Florida. 255 is like many T-28s that has been reunited with some of their original pilots from long ago. Miami is the home of many former Congo Makasi Cuban pilots. Some of these Makasi pilots and their families have been reunited with their former 516 T-28 fighter that they had last seen over 50 years ago, half way around the world in Africa!

140576 after restoration passed through various hands and has been flown by a couple out of Milwaukee

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for the last 16 years. It is part of the 6 ship Trojan Thunder formation aerobatic team. Its logs are typical of the Makasi T28s. After leaving the North American factory in Columbus, Ohio it spent 9 years being a Navy carrier landing trainer. After it had accumulated over 2,000 carrier landings it was sent for an IRAN overhaul. The CIA had armed it in 1964, having sent it to the Congo inside a C-124 Cargomaster. While in the Congo it flew combat missions for 1800 hours over the next 11 years. March 19, 1965 was a particularly bad day for 140576. Its logs read: Bullet hole through nose wheel door R/H, pilots cockpit floor, green sun shield and canopy. And the log goes on to list 7 more bullet holes in the right and left wings. It was repaired and returned to service. It was one of the three that returned to the US and was initially restored by John Ellis of Kalamazoo, MI.



Some traditions never change. Newly Checked out Makasi T-28 Trojan Pilot gets splashed.

the Boneyard in 1982. It was eventually purchased by a private party, who has recently resold it.

Last Spring, at the Punta Gorda, NATA Formation Clinic, Makasi T-28C 140255 and 140576, both having shared a ride inside a C-124 Globemaster to the Congo in 1964, made many combat sorties together and somehow beat the odds to make the long trip from the Congo to the U.K. and finally back to the U.S., were again joined in formation flights. But this time no one was shooting at them.

Unfortunately, as most T-28s have traded hands over the years, many of their original log records and stories have been lost. But each T-28 has a story. T-28 owners know they are just the keepers of their Trojans until someday they will turn it over to a new owner to be its caretaker. It is important to help honor the pilots and the maintainers of the past, to try to include the T-28's story before that story is forever lost. What is your T-28's Story?



T-28 Bu. No 140516 and 140576 while in Belgium Congo, both would beat the odds and be returned to the U.S. and are flying today.

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There is a 4th Makasi T-28C that returned from the Congo to the U.S. We assume it was one of the 3 damaged T-28s that were left in the Congo in 1977 that needed major repairs. It is owned by Trainer Services of Virginia Beach, VA.

Ted White of the U.K., who was to be able to retain a Makasi T-28 for his services, discovered the U.K. government would not allow him to keep it because the Makasi T-28Cs were still militarized and the U.K. insisted it must be returned to the U.S. to be demilitarized.



T-28C 140575 in private lot next to Davis-Monthan Boneyard, was always a Navy Trainer, the plane on the line right behind it was 140576 which was sent to Congo and flies today in airshows across the U.S.

Every T-28 has a story. The owners of 140576 were in disbelief in 2010 when they found T-28C 140575, that was made on the assembly line just before their 140576, was sitting in a private storage lot adjoining the Davis-Monthan boneyard. While 576 was flown by trained Navy pilots, been sent to the Congo, and had been shot up, it was returned and restored in the US and was very active today. 575 had always faithfully served as a Navy Carrier Trainer in Florida and Texas until finally being retired and sent to



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