

Douglas R5D-3/4 "Skymaster"



Historical Information:

The Coast Guard acquired fifteen Douglas R5D's, the Navy's version of the famous DC-4 (the Army Air Force's/Air Force's designation was C-54). This aircraft was the backbone of the effort to save Berlin during the Soviet blockade of that city between 1948 and 1949. Apparently one of the R5D's acquired by the Coast Guard from the Air Force still had coal dust in the cabin area.

The first six aircraft were acquired in 1945 and were used for transport duties, logistical support, search and rescue operations, duty with the International Ice Patrol, electronic tests (LORAN testing--these were EC-54U aircraft), and photographic mapping flights (RC-54V aircraft). Nine were acquired from the Navy while the other six were acquired from the Air Force. They remained in service up to 1962 although one R5D stayed on the Coast Guard's inventory until 1965.

These aircraft were stationed at air stations Elizabeth City, Barbers Point, and San Francisco. At least three were detailed to the International Ice Patrol and flew out of Argentina. These aircraft replaced the Boeing PB-1's that had pioneered the use of aircraft to survey the iceberg fields, supplementing the use of cutters that had sailed on the Patrol since its inception in 1912. The R5D's first patrol began during the 1958 ice season. These aircraft took part in a number of experiments, including the use of Thermite bombs to melt icebergs. They also led the way with a new high visibility paint scheme, consisting of fluorescent orange, white and black, that was adopted by the Coast Guard in the 1950's. The R5D's were last used on the International Ice Patrol during the 1962 season and were then replaced with the new Lockheed HC-130 B Hercules aircraft.



Douglas R5D-3, CG#2487; no caption; Photo No. 01-30-51 (04); 30 January 1951; photographer unknown; photo taken on tarmac at AIRSTA Elizabeth City.



Douglas R5D-3; "A U.S. Coast Guard R5D-3 ice observation plane flies out of Argentia, Nfld., toward the open seas to hunt icebergs off the Grand Banks during the 1959 International Ice Patrol. The plane wears a new easily visible paint scheme of white, bright orange, and black trim. R5D planes replace PB-1G planes in 1958 for Ice Patrol. R5D's were last used on the 1962 Ice Patrol. The newer HC-130B planes were used thereafter."; Photo No. CPI-07-17-59 (36); 17 July 1959; photographer unknown.



Douglas R5D-3; "OFF TO HEAT AN ICEBERG: A 1,000-pound thermite bomb enclosing a cluster of small bomblets, each capable of burning at a temperature of 4,300 degrees Fahrenheit, rides under the wing of a Coast Guard UF-2G amphibian plane toward an iceberg target in the foggy Grand Banks region of Newfoundland. The temperature of one bomblet equals half the sun's surface temperature. This bomb was one of twenty cluster bomb of thermite and petroleum types air-dropped on selected icebergs during heat destruction tests made by the International Ice Patrol force in June, at the height of the 1959 heavy ice season. Above the bomb carrier is a large passenger type Coast Guard R5D plane, one of three used on regular ice observation flights out of Argentia, Nfld. The more modern R5Ds this year replaced old World War II B-17 bomber type planer with plexiglass noses where ice observation instruments and carries a crew of about seven. Ice is observed from many windows. Averaging 6 to 8 hour ice observation flights, the R5D patrols an area of about 14,000 square miles in the Grand Banks region. The R5D plane here wears one of the new paint schemes currently being tested for easy air visibility by the U.S. Coast Guard on its various planes. In place of the dull silver gray and orange trim formerly used, the new dress is made of glowing fluorescent colors--orange nose, wing tips, tail and body strip with black edgings, and main body in brilliant white."; Photo No. 5854; 17 July 1959; photographer unknown.



Douglas R5D-3, CG#5614; no caption; Photo No. 18474; 16 May 1961, photo by Robert Klein; photo taken on tarmac at AIRSTA Elizabeth City.



Douglas R5D-3, CG#2486; "Crew of R5D aircraft, standing left to right: Edwin D. Hawbecker (USC&GS), unknown, Marshall K. Phillips (USCG), Dan S. Meginley (USCG), Kelly E. Taggart (USC&GS), R.A. Chilco (USCG). Kneeling left to right: Robert S. Barger (USCG), Carl D. Hollingsworth (USCG), S.S. Mazza (USCG), D.C. Lopez (USCG), R.C. Hiner (USCG)."; Photo No. APL 222; date unknown; photo by Jim Hardwick.



Douglas R5D; no caption/date/photo number; photographer unknown.

Sources:

Gordon Swanborough & Peter M. Bowers. *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990-third edition), pp. 190-191.

Arthur Percy, *U.S. Coast Guard Aircraft Since 1916* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 176-180.

