

The Dakotas at R.A.F Kabrit in the Canal Zone, carried out the transport duties for the Middle East and when an aircraft went on route a member of the ground crew went with it as part of the crew.

In June 1947, Dakota KN264 of 216 Sqdn. set off for Nairobi with the following crew. F/O H.D. Iliffe - Pilot, Sgt. G. Eliffe - 2nd Pilot, Sgt. Manston - Navigator, F/lt. Miller - Radio Operator, Cpl. F. Hart - Engineer. The aircraft was carrying ten passengers.

Two hours after leaving Juba in Southern Sudan for Eastleigh and flying at 12,000ft, a passenger knocked on the crew compartment door and said 'I think the starboard wing is on fire'!!! We could not see anything from the cockpit so we had a shufti from the fuselage window and sure enough we were on fire. The fire was outboard of the starboard engine nacelle with the flames coming over the joint between the outer plane and the centre section. The Pilot returned to the cockpit, feathered the engine and operated the fire extinguisher, but to no avail. He then told me to watch the fire and let him know if it goes out whilst he put the aircraft in a dive in attempt to blow it out. This did not work either.

Losing height as quickly as possible the Pilot decided he was unable to prolong the flight and made the decision to ditch the aircraft in a lake. May Day calls were sent out and passengers briefed in their crash positions. When we broke cloud the only clear patch to put down was an area of mainly swamp, the Pilot making a good wheels up landing and nobody was hurt. Kyoga lake/swamp was known to be infested with crocodiles!!!

The swamp put the fire out and then the aircraft started to sink. The Navigator threw out the dinghys, the first was a dud, it blew up and then collapsed. A good job we had three more. During that time I was passing the crews personal kit through the top hatch and along the top of the fuselage to the Co. Pilot who was putting it into the dinghys. We then got the passengers out but could not save anything else as it was all tied down. The aircraft took about six minutes to sink in 20ft of water.

Before we could move anywhere in the dinghys (have you tried to paddle them?) the local natives arrived in dug-out canoes. If it had not been for them I dont think we would have got very far. Some of the passengers transferred to the canoes and then the natives took us in tow. About an hour later we got to dry land and proceeded to the native village where we set up camp and rigged the emergency radio. "Joe" wound the generator for most of the day with no luck.

In the meantime one native was found who could speak english, he had a bicycle (no tyres or seat) and given a message he set off for the nearest habitation of any size in the area which was a Government Agriculture Experimental Station some miles away. Later in the day a truck came along the

track and took us all to Soroti, the nearest town. (where Idi Amin came from)  
We were put up for the night in various places. I and three others were placed in  
a Government rest house, kitted out and given a meal. Lancashire hot pot!!!

The next day a Dakota from Nairobi flew in to pick us up. The landing  
strip was just outside town and was so short we all had to cram into the crew  
compartment for take off to get weight forward. After that the five of us had a  
very good week in Nairobi before returning to Kabrit on the next scheduled flight.

That is how I became a member of the Goldfish Club.

