

Lockheed C-56D (L-1808) Lodestar

C/N 2035

Lodestar means “Guiding Star” or specifically Polaris. This Lockheed transport was aptly named as it pointed the way to the future of America’s air transport development and saw service with Air France, British Overseas Airways, Pan American Airlines, Charguers Reunis, South African Airways and Mid-Continent Airways.

Our Lodestar was one of 29 ordered by South African Airways in 1940. Due to the outbreak of World War Two these aircraft went immediately to the South African Air Force. c/n 2035 received the name “Piet Retief,” the name of an 1820s South African Voortrekker leader and received s/n ZS-ASU.

Taking advantage of the aircraft’s dependability, load capacity, range and maneuverability, the South African Air Force assigned this aircraft to SAAF No. 5 Wing as s/n 1373, and with the addition of wing mounted bomb racks began coastal patrol.

“Piet Retief” was now a warbird and contributed reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrol during The Battle of Madagascar (5 May – 6 November 1942) which was a British campaign to capture the Vichy French-controlled Island Madagascar during World War II. The seizure of the island by the British was to deny Madagascar's ports to the Imperial Japanese Navy and to prevent the loss or impairment of the Allied shipping routes to India, Australia, and Southeast Asia. It began with Operation Ironclad, the seizure of the port of Diego-Suarez (now Antsiranana) near the northern tip of the island, on 5 May 1942.

The campaign continued in a “deadlock” with the Vichy French troops for several months yet with subsequent British, Operation Stream Line Jane, the phased capture of the remaining portions of Madagascar was completed. It had been observed that the French had held out longer against the Allies in Madagascar in 1942 than they had against the Germans in France in 1940.

Our Lodestar flew into Castle Air Museum from Wyoming where it had served as a fire bomber. It is painted in its South African Air Force colors and is one of three remaining from the SAAF.