



UTILITY WARBIRD

Cessna's LC-126

BY BUDD DAVISSON PHOTOS COURTESY OF EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION

Here's a question for *Flight Journal* readers: How many are familiar with the Korean War-era Cessna LC-126? Let's have a show of hands. Hmm. Not many. If we rephrased that question as "How many are familiar with the Cessna 195?" we'd see lots of hands. This is interesting considering that they are the same airplane—sort of. The LC-126 is a 195 wearing fatigues, but being military, it is still very much its own airplane.

The Cessna 190/195 Businessliner was a natural for the military to put to work in their Air Rescue operations in the 1950s.



As the Korean War got underway, both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Air Force (USAF), while super busy fighting bad guys in quilted coveralls in the snow, still had other parts of the world to look after. And they were in need of a utility airplane that could operate in a lot of different environments while carrying a good load at a decent speed. They didn't have to look far because the Cessna 195 Businessliner had all the attributes they were looking for.

Introduced in 1947, the Cessna 195 is viewed today as a marvelous anachronism: It was produced long after flat motors had almost totally overtaken round ones (Twin Beeches, notwithstanding). Having a round motor up front and a tailwheel out back hearkened back to the golden age just prior to World War II. Only its amazingly graceful lines, however, came from that period. Its airframe benefited from aviation's huge structural design leap forward that was forced upon it during WW II. Everything about the airplane was state-of-the-art aluminum design including its



Left and above: The readily identifiable Air Rescue markings are intended to make the airplane highly visible in any environment.

The military came up with an increasing list of modifications to make sure the airplane, no matter where it was positioned or what task it was given, was equipped to accomplish it.

The left-side door was available from the factory only on 195s equipped for floats, where it was useful for docking. On the LC-126, it was also an emergency-egress hatch.



strutless, cantilevered wings. Roughly 500 of the 1,180 195s produced are still flying.

With its spacious cabin (two widely separated front seats and three across in the back) and a wide-opening door coupled with its ability to hang Jacobs motors up front that could go as high as 300hp, the 195 was practically made for military duty: a go-anywhere, carry-anything, cover-ground-quickly aerial deuce-and-a-half truck.

Using the 195 as a basis, the military came up with an increasing list of modifications to make sure the airplane, no matter where it was positioned or what task it was given, was equipped to accomplish it.

John Barron, of Barron Aviation in Perry, Missouri, is considered the purveyor of all things 195. His family's LC-126C is the subject of this Gallery.

Barron says, "During the Korean War period, there were a total of 83 LC-126 aircraft produced. Fifteen LC-126A models were purchased by the military in 1949 and delivered in 1950. Five LC-126B models were purchased in 1951, and 63 LC-126C models were purchased in 1952. These airplanes were used for a large variety of 'workhorse' duties and training. Each aircraft was delivered to the military with Edo 3430 floats and skis in addition to the standard landing gear. The original skis supplied with the airplanes didn't have sufficient 'floatation' for the 8-foot-deep snows encountered in the Arctic regions and had to be enlarged.

"The 'A' models were very much standard Cessna 195 models, with a left-side emergency escape door added, single-side extended baggage compartment,



Top: The lines of the 195/LC-126 are Art Deco design at its best. This aircraft was restored by Barron Aviation, the nation's 195 experts. **Left:** All LC-126s had a right-side cargo hatch, but the LC-126C's was larger and could accommodate two litter cases with the back seat removed. **Above:** The aircraft seated three in the back seat and two up front.

float attach kit, exterior steps and grab handles for wing top access, specified radio gear, jettisonable main cabin door, auxiliary vertical seaplane fins, and aircraft lift rings.

"The 'B' model was the same except for the addition of a heater cover over the top of the heater in the cabin, Goodyear crosswind gear, and radio equipment.

"The LC-126C models were the most modified of all, with all the previously mentioned items plus accommodations for single- or dual-stretcher installations and an extended cabin/baggage area with a large cargo door. It had a dual-light tall cone (white and yellow), parachute-pack seats, and snap-on cushioned upholstery with snap-over seat covers. Along with that came the lift rings, zinc chromate primer inside and out, and the seaplane

(escape) door on the left side of the fuselage.

"The aircraft worked well on floats but was not a strong performer when getting 'unstuck' from the water. There is not enough aileron to 'walk' it out, so most commonly, it's abruptly rotated at 50 to 60mph, then accelerated in ground effect before climbing out. The airplane is also reputed to have an extremely high rotation rate in a spin with floats—something I don't plan on trying."

Some of the most exciting noncombat military aviation stories come out of the USAF 10th Air Rescue Group based in Alaska, which flew the LC-126 through the 1950s and into the '60s. There, the enemy was the weather, the distances, and the topography. Considering the challenges, it's a miracle any LC-126 has survived. \ddagger