



PILATUS TURBO PORTER

History

The Pilatus PC-6 Turbo Porter was built in Switzerland and bought by the Australian Army to replace the Cessna 180. It first entered service in Australia in February 1968 and a year later headed for operational service in South Vietnam. This versatile aircraft had an outstanding Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL) performance allowing operation from areas previously only accessible by helicopter.

As the Australian Army's first turbine powered aircraft it had a variety of roles including reconnaissance, resupply and stores dropping, casualty extraction and target marking. It could be fitted with a range of role equipment such as stretchers, electronics for radio tracking and relay, airborne cameras, loud speakers, night flare dispensers, stores parachuting racks and hatches and rocket pods.

The Turbo Porter was an outstanding success in Army Aviation service and was flown in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, South Vietnam and Vanuatu. After 25 years of service, the Porter was retired in October 1992. The Turbo Porter is still flown in many countries and is particularly popular with parachuting clubs.

World Record Breaker

On August 1983, Major Dennis Coffey and Captain Steve Graham piloted an Army Porter aircraft on a non-stop flight from Carnarvon, WA, to Brisbane, earning them two world records:

- Distance in a straight line without landing, 3893.56km
- Speed over a recognized course, 275.14kph

A detailed study of ten years of meteorological information for altitudes between 14,500 and 30,000 feet (9.2km) showed the crew that the flight was feasible at high altitude. Tail winds of 35, 45 and 60 knots over three equal four - hour legs were needed, and August was selected as the most appropriate month for the flight.

The aircraft was modified to carry a greater supply of oxygen and a larger fuel load of approximately 2300lb (1045kg). A Lightweight Doppler Navigation System was installed instead of radios.

Outside air temperatures reached as low as - 41°C at 27,000ft (8.23km), and the crew found that their lunch of pre-packed sandwiches and 'hot' soup in a flask was frozen solid. Although the flight fell just 23 miles short of the intended touchdown point at Brisbane, it was hailed a success and secured the 2 world records.