

CARIBOU: FIGHTER PLANE EXTRAORDINAIRE! (?)

The Caribou, as you recall, is a smallish cargo plane (sort of a pint sized C-130) designed to land on short runways. It was ideally suited to Vietnam because it could make a steep approach to a jungle airstrip, avoiding enemy gunfire until the latest possible moment. And, once down on that tiny runway, it was mercifully able to get back into the air again.

Flying out of Bien Hoa in August of '69, I found myself on a Caribou. We passengers were seated in jump seats along either side of the cargo bay. The day was hot, the air stifling, and I had my steel pot and flack vest on my knee. The trooper across from me had a puppy in his lap.

As the cabin temperature rose (no AC, remember?), the rear of the cargo bay was opened to provide a little ventilation. The air was hot, but the breeze felt good. I put my head back to catch a few z's. Just before dropping off to sleep I noticed the other passengers staring out the cargo hatch—and the crew chief looking very concerned. Even our pilot was peering down from



the flight deck to see what was going on. I looked back and there was another Caribou. Not way back, but close! *Very* close! So close I could easily see the expression on the pilot's face! It almost looked like he was trying to poke his nose into our cargo bay!

Now, even if Caribou pilots did this sort of thing as a diversion—just to break the monotony of flying—I didn't like the looks of what was going on! But, the fun

had just begun! As Caribou 2 closed in on the rear of our aircraft, our pilot took evasive action. Suddenly it felt like we were doing a wing over and dive, just like those World War II fighter planes do on television when they scream down out of the sun to take on a squadron of Japanese Zeros!

"Hey!" I thought to myself. "We're in a *Caribou*, not a P-38! There is no way we're going to survive this!" It seemed as though we plunged straight down for an eternity! I began to wonder how long the pain would last after impact. Then our pilot decided enough was enough, and pulled back on the stick. As my stomach was forced down into the seat, we pulled out of our dive and now it seemed we were climbing straight up! This madcap spirit of aviators was confined, I thought, to helicopter pilots and jet jockeys—not to the men who flew cargo planes! As did the dive, our climb seemed to go on forever.

When we reached the top, our pilot jammed the stick forward and suddenly we were weightless! My stomach found its way up into my throat, my steel pot and flack vest floated up off my knee,

and the puppy across from me found himself suspended in mid-air with a most incredulous look on his face!

As level flight was once again achieved and our equipment gathered up, each of us peered anxiously out the cargo hatch. Caribou 2 was gone. At least we couldn't see it anymore. Was that bandit just waiting up there in the sun for another opportunity to rouse us from our lethargy? Or had the evasive action of our heroic pilot done the job?

It was all great fun, but I wasn't sure I'd care to fly with *that* pilot again.

For him, though, I 'spect it was Just Another Day at The War.

*My times are in your hands;
deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.*

~ Psalm 31:15

Ty Dodge