



PHOTOS DARREN HARBAR - CARLO FERRARI

**L**ast July, while wearing an Olive Drab paint scheme with weathered effect detailing, Beech G18S N45CF made the journey from its home base at Bressaucourt, Switzerland, to the grass airfield at Old Warden, Bedfordshire. This was just a brief stopover before the aircraft's visit to the Royal International Air Tattoo at Fairford, Gloucestershire, where this twin-tailed classic has appeared

several times previously. The Pratt & Whitney-powered machine was flown by owner Carlo Ferrari and, under his ownership, has attracted the attention of both small screen and cinematic directors.

#### **Civilian and commercial**

The aircraft was built as construction number BA-466, a G18S 'Expeditor' in November 1959 by Beech at Wichita, Kansas;

in reality, too late to have worn an actual military Olive Drab livery as sported today. In fact, the aircraft has very much led a civilian existence, having been operated by Southern Airways as N9606R in Florida between 1963-66, before being owned by the Business Men's Assurance Company of America. Following a three-year stint with the latter in Kansas, the aircraft passed to Pegasus Transport

# LIGHTS CAMERA ACTION!

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A Switzerland-based Beech 18 has gained its own measure of fame through TV and big screen appearances. **Darren Harbar** joined this blossoming star in the air

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based in Cincinnati, Ohio, where it took up the registration N788MW. By 1976, the Beech had been sold again and adopted pale blue trim over a white fuselage, bedecked with the name Semo Airways across the window line. This Malden, Missouri-based operation employed the aircraft until 1984, when it moved to Springdale in Arkansas to be used by Northwest Air Cargo. A further change of

company meant the aircraft was registered to Younkin Air Service in 1988, before the Beech moved to Cape Central Airways at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in July that year. The aircraft remained in the USA until 1994 when it departed to Canada to join Central Pacific Outfitters/Bottenfields Winisk Air at Pickle Lake, Ontario, where it gained the Canadian registration C-GJKA. Remaining in Canada

until 2008, the Beech was to be found by Carlo Ferrari, who relocated the airframe to Europe.

Carlo was working as a member of Zurich Airport's management in the late 1990s, when a friend asked if he would be interested in flying his Beech 18. "The idea was to run a small but exclusive flight service with a classic airliner, and to fly the customers to interesting destinations such as Ticino and

ABOVE The fictitious American markings do not look out of place on this later mark of Beech 18, and give the aircraft a definite wartime feel.





ABOVE Flown by its owner, the Beech 18 closes in on the camera aircraft, showing its wonderful lines and twin radial engines for the exclusive 'FlyPast' photo sortie.

Valais, and around the Matterhorn [both Switzerland]," Carlo explained, adding: "The project did not even realise one single commercial flight, but during the training I fell in love with this aircraft type. Time passed and more than a decade later, I found an advertisement on the internet that offered a Beech G18S for sale in Canada. The 'Beech Fever' was suddenly very much rekindled and I just had to investigate. During countless evenings in the kitchen of my girlfriend, together we calculated all the possibilities and designed and discarded several business cases to utilise the aircraft. Finally, we decided it was a risk worth taking and to bring the Beech 18 to Europe from Canada.

"The flight from Quebec to Switzerland was what we declared as half a worldwide trip. When the second part is to take place, we have not yet decided," he added.

### Superhero debut

The Beech has made three main film appearances since Carlo has owned it, but it seems there is more to come in that line. Opportunities such as these do not simply appear from nowhere, but Carlo shared some interesting comments on how the film work materialised for his

Beech 18. First came Marvel's 2011 blockbuster *Captain America – The First Avenger*.

Carlo relayed how that particular appearance developed: "During a parajumper event [a charity parachuting event for a seriously injured paratrooper from the German Armed Forces], in Tannheim [Austria], my mobile phone rang several times. I could not answer the call during the climb to FL130 [13,000ft] because of the engine noise, and thus left the phone ringing in my pocket. Some additional flights later, the aircraft and I stood at the 'gas station' and again I could hear my mobile ringing from the cockpit. Again, I did not answer – this time because of the danger of explosion. When I finally got around to looking at my phone, I thought it must have been a misdial as the call number was from the UK. 'Who the heck tried to call me from England in July', I asked myself (at that time I had very few contacts there and they certainly did not want to talk to me at this time of the year, because the football season had not yet started!).

"After the last flight rotation, I finally found time to call the number and a friendly gentleman called Mike answered the phone

and told me he needed a sparkling polished Beech 18 for filming. Initially, I mistakenly understood it to be for something like a TV commercial and asked what kind of product it would be promoting? I even suggested that maybe it would be better to look for another Beech 18, because mine still had some of the paint on it from a movie shoot in Canada a few years before I bought it; at that time I didn't know exactly which movie, but I later found out it was *A Different Loyalty* starring Sharon Stone.

"Mike explained that he had already spoken to another owner, but he was not interested in such operations. I, however, found the idea very interesting and agreed spontaneously.

"Having not done this kind of thing before, I thought polishing the Beech and the actual filming would take place several weeks later. My experience in aircraft operations told me that it takes some time to plan a flight campaign (air routes, refuelling, overflight permits, insurance and adjustments), but Mike gave me a pretty challenging schedule. A former colleague provided a brand new hangar space at Basel-Mulhouse Airport for the polishing work, but the crew of Flying Colours based there did not



want me to damage the floor of the hangar – and decided that ‘outside use’ was more favourable. Over the following five days we had a team of five, working from the early hours until nine at night, stripping, painting and polishing the Beech.”

### Air-to-air shoots

Carlo continued: “Immediately after completing the polishing work at Basel-Mulhouse, I had to bring the aeroplane (with the painting crew on board), from there to Yverdon-les-Bains [in Switzerland’s Vaud canton], where we had an appointment with the film crew the next day. “For the next three days, accompanied by the camera helicopter, I flew into various previously selected recording areas in the Jura Mountains, the Vaud and Fribourg Alps, and in the region between Lake Geneva and Fribourg,



suffered a similar telephone-based misunderstanding to the one he’d had with *Captain America*. He explained: “I had just arrived at the office when the telephone rang – the displayed number obviously belonged to a caller from England once again. I immediately grabbed some documents for an upcoming aircraft fire extinguisher repair, which was being executed in the next few days within the UK. I was surprised, however, not to hear the voice of the person responsible for that work, but instead it was Mike who had called me about *Captain America*. His opening comment was, ‘is your Beech still flying? I need your plane next summer’, to which I responded, ‘of course, the Beech flies regularly – during winter times less, but it still flies.’”

Carlo detailed how the new job developed: “Initially, there was talk of about one week’s work and included in this was the targeted disfigurement of the *Captain America* film’s highly polished finish on my machine. Fortunately, I was able to co-ordinate the schedule around pre-arranged company meetings in my diary. A few days before the departure to Sardinia where filming would take place, in came the updated schedule, which revealed my Beech would be used for filming on

**ABOVE** Parked alongside the B-25 pair that also featured in ‘Catch 22’, the Beech receives its Olive Drab colour scheme on location in Sardinia.

**LEFT** A high level of polishing took place to prepare the Beech for its role in Marvel’s ‘Captain America’. This image clearly shows the mirror-like finish achieved at Basel-Mulhouse, after much hard work.

## “...the machine has attracted the attention of both small screen and cinematic directors”

Storyboards were presented during the daily morning briefing for us to see what was required on the flights. The inflight recordings of

the day were transmitted to the studios in the evening and, the morning after during the briefing, it was determined which settings had to be recorded again. A [special effects] blue screen was not an option so for the film shots inside the cabin, a mock-up was created with the help of photos. This enabled an easier illumination of the cabin and more precise navigation with the cameras in the studios.”

When it came to his aircraft’s involvement in last year’s *Catch-22* TV series, starring George Clooney and Hugh Laurie, Carlo



**ABOVE** Above the clouds en route to RAF Fairford for last year's Royal International Air Tattoo, where the Beech has become a regular attendee from its home base in Switzerland.

location for an entire month. Since I am the only pilot approved on the machine [insurance requirement], I had to try to reschedule all my work commitments to make it all possible.

"The filming took place on an airfield that had been shut down for decades and reactivated for a clearly defined period. Since neither maintenance nor repair work could be carried out there, I decided to take the most important spare parts and enough consumables with me to Sardinia. The aircraft should have been used, on one hand as a subject to be filmed, and on the other hand as a camera platform. Since it was not yet clear how many flights would be carried out as part of the project, the estimate of the consumables to be carried was very challenging. Thankfully, the Beech 18 offers a comparatively huge amount of space for the pilot, co-pilot, a trained mechanic and the ample materiel necessary.

"To the surprise of all, the wife of my co-pilot arrived at the airport on the morning of departure with several large suitcases and absolutely did not want to leave any luggage at home! Due to the

prevailing heat, I had to recalculate the route to Sardinia with less gasoline. In addition to the extra supplies for the aircraft (on the temporary airfield, there were no tools, engine oil, aircraft batteries or towing equipment or other spare parts) my partner's wheelchair is now also considered standard equipment.

"If more suitcases and bags are to be taken, special attention must also be paid to calculating take-off and landing distances. I had planned the shortest possible route with airports that have relatively short runways. The additional weight resulted in us getting close to the safety margin; we had to choose another flight route because of the fast-developing clouds/thunderstorms over the Alps."

### **Green Machine**

For *Catch-22*, the film crew wanted Carlo's aircraft painted in classic Olive Drab with United States Army Air Force markings. It was an enticing prospect, but inevitably it wasn't something that could be achieved quickly, as Carlo recalled: "The Beech 18 may well look like a small plane, but the painting takes two days to complete. Unfortunately,

the repainting team had not thought of the possibility that the high humidity greatly increases the drying phase. Thus, the painters were in severe distress and had to pull an additional night shift to get the job done.

"The temporary airfield at Venafiorita in Sardinia had no fuel facilities, so no Avgas was available and the fuel price at nearby Olbia [the nearest civilian airfield] was very high. It was the requirement of the film company to fly with the tanks as full as possible, to be able to fly for as long as possible after the repainting without a stopover.

"To take as much of the cheaper gasoline as possible to Olbia, we planned to land in Bastia in Corsica. Thanks to this airport's long runway, the plane could be filled up there. Thus, we had almost five flight hours with cheaper fuel (prices in France were much lower than in Italy at that time) for the project.

"When it came to the filming, I remember that for one scene in *Catch-22* the [aircraft] was put in front of the blue screen, and me and my co-pilot had to sit in the cockpit pretending to prepare for the subsequent flight. It was not





Even the best-laid plans can change, and Carlo said the demands of the film company were not always sympathetic to aircraft operations. "Hurry up! Venafiorita airfield will be closed today at 17:00!" Carlo was told, relaying it here as an example of production teams not

18, two B-25s, a DC-3, Ju-52, T-6 and a Messerschmitt Me 108 had gathered for the production. Most of the flights for the filming then took place in the greater region of Olbia, which was a fun but rather challenging experience."

The aircraft remained in



## "...it meant a hectic and sweaty day's work in the Sardinian midday heat"

very pleasant spending about three hours in the very hot cockpit, with outdoor temperatures of around 35°C. To make matters worse, we had to wear World War Two uniforms and leather jackets."

quite understanding the realities involved. He added: "The Beech 18 is no B-25. There's not much space to store things inside and the entire cabin interior was still in a corner of the hangar, because the aircraft was to be available as a filming platform backup when required. Unfortunately, there was no space for reinstallation work available in Olbia and access to the [maintenance] stand was very limited. For us it meant a hectic day's work in the Sardinian heat to get the aircraft back together and on to the filming location.

"On the apron of the temporary airfield, in addition to my Beech

the Olive Drab paint scheme after being used for *Catch-22*, because it was agreed with the film company to wait before conducting any polishing work to return the aircraft back to its shiny appearance. Rounding up his story for now, Carlo teased *FlyPast*: "At the moment I am not allowed to reveal more, but we are already working on yet another film project."

It seems Carlo and his beautiful Beech 18 will continue to be 'A List' celebrities in the warbird world and we look forward to discovering more about its next starring role – whatever that might be. **FP**

**ABOVE** The aircraft pictured alongside a large special effects blue screen, used to add various backgrounds for both ground and flying sequences in the 'Catch 22' filming.

**BELOW** This shot, taken by the aircraft's owner, shows the Beech on location for 'Captain America', along with one of the camera helicopters utilised for the movie's airborne sequences.

