

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

DE HAVILLAND MOSQUITO B.35 TA639/7806M
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER: 67/A/595

- 1945 Constructed by de Havilland's at Hatfield to contract No.555 for 80 Mosquito B.35 aircraft, serial numbers TA617-8, TA633-70, TA685-724, delivered 29 Mar 45 - 16 Jul 45. Merlin 113/114 engines.
- 13 Apr 45 To No.27 MU Shawbury, Salop for storage.
- 19 May 52 Taken out of store and sent to Brooklands Aviation Ltd, Sywell, Northants for conversion to Target Tug standard as a Mosquito T135 - one of those aircraft fitted with the under fuselage mounted ML type G wind-driven target winch. (Photo: Mosquito Crash Log).
- 30 Sep 52 Work completed.
- 17 Oct 52 To station flight, RAF Ballykelly, Londonderry, Northern Ireland -sharing the airfield with two Shackleton squadrons.
- 05 Dec 52 To RAF Aldergrove Station Flight, Antrim, Northern Ireland. Shared the base with Shackletons and, as more likely 'customers', No.502 Squadrons' Vampires.
- 11 Jun 54 Pilot's logbook of Fg Off David L Rolston (X002-6233) records 15-minute air-air firing sortie.
- 17 Jun 54 Rolston logbook records 1.10hr air-air firing sortie.
- 8 Jul 54 Rolston logbook records one-hour circuits and local flight.
- 25 Aug 54 Rolston logbook records one hour circuits, landings, and local flying flight.
- 8 Sep 54 Rolston logbook records 1.05hr fighter affiliation flight.
- 22 Sep 54 Rolston logbook records half-hour drogue streaming flight.
- 16 Dec 54 To No.38 MU Llandow for storage.
- 10 Jan 57 To No.27 MU Shawbury for further storage.
- 21 Apr 58 Last major inspection - had flown only 105.55 hours since new. This and other details taken from the aircraft's Form 700s - 13 of them - covering the period 23 Sep 59 - 23 Jan 67 held by DoRIS Ref.B3216. Also under this reference are engine and propeller history cards and other servicing documents for TA639.
- 24 Sep 59 Flown by Flt Lt. Curtis, made 55 minute Flight on delivery to No.3 Civilian Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit (CAACU) at Exeter Airport. This civilian manned but Air Ministry equipped unit exercised the guns for all three services from Portland to Cardigan Bay, and further afield during big exercises the Mosquitos' 4½-5 hour endurance taking them as far as

Scotland. TA639 carried the fuselage code `55' with the unit. Photo: `Guardian' newspaper 16 Jun 89. Painted silver overall, yellow/black target-tug stripes were worn on the wing undersides.

05 Nov 59 Piloted by Harry Ellis, Chief pilot of No.3 CAACU, with Pete Howland as his winch operator ('TTO') TA639 made a two hour flight to the Army's School of Anti-Aircraft Artillery at Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, flying a low-level drogue towing sortie.

The unit also provided local support for the Naval Gunnery School at HMS Cambridge, near Plymouth and for ships at sea needing both visual and radar gunnery practice, both towing drogues and making mock low-level attacks.

8 Jun 60 Displayed at Air Show at Exeter Airport Photos - The De Havilland Mosquito A Comprehensive guide for The Modeller (Franks) p.41; Aviation World Spring 2007 p.37.

Oct 62 Originally intended as withdrawal date for the units' Mosquitoes, with replacement by Meteor TT20 aircraft, but full conversion postponed.

Thursday

09 May 63 Took part in `official last fly-past' by Mosquitos at Exeter, but suffered port engine failure at end of the flight, causing a hurried landing after 50 minutes flying. At the end the unit had two Mosquito T.3 and seven TT35 aircraft still airworthy, of which T3. TW117 and B35s, RS709, RS712, TA634, TA639 and TA719 took part in the final display.

20 May 63 Following engine repairs, given 25 minute test flight at Exeter.

21 May 63 Target-towing buffer and tail guards removed.

30 May 63 Formally transferred from strength of No.3 CAACU to Central Flying School, Little Rissington, Glos, as a flying display aircraft.

31 May 63 Formally struck off RAF charge. Had flown 547.35 hours (315 landings) since new.

06 Jun 63 Made a 45 minute flight to its new base at Little Rissington where it was kept airworthy although nominally allocated maintenance serial 7806M on 6th May 63. Remaining TT equipment was removed and the aircraft given a grey/green camouflage colour scheme, with silver undersides.

Jun 63 Loaned to Mirisch Films Ltd for production of the film `633 Squadron' at RAF Bovingdon, Herts, as one of five airworthy and three taxiable Mosquitoes, all ex-No.3 CAACU, used in the film.

15 Jul 63 Flew to Bovingdon via Dishforth for filming, flown by CFS Commandant Air Commodore Bird-Wilson. Given the fictitious serial HJ682 and codes HT-B on 20th July, and modified to look like a Mosquito FBV1 by having the nose perspex painted over and possibly dummy machine guns fitted.

Late July 63 Filming began around the Bovingdon Area. Photo of TA639 as `HJ682' - `Warbirds Worldwide' 29 and 34 p.26. When filming moved to the Scottish Lochs, based at Inverness, the RAF would not allow TA639 to be used since the flying there was considered too dangerous. TA639 was

used extensively for filming up to mid September, being at Tern Hill 14 Sep 63 (FlyPast Oct 63 - Photo). Further photos in 1963, camouflaged as TA634; De Havilland Mosquito (Bowman 1998) p.157; Aviation News October 2004; Little Rissington – The CFS Years (Bagshaw et al) pp.142 and 161 (Colour 1966 view with ‘Property of the RAF Museum’ painted on the nose).

After filming was complete TA639 returned to Little Rissington for personal/display use by the Commandant, Air Commodore Bird-Wilson, and made one display flight over the Mosquito Museum at Salisbury Hall. By Dec 1964 TA639 had flown 588.05 hours - 391 landings.

- 18 Sep 65 Photographed at RAF Tern Hill, Shropshire (Photo: British Museum Aircraft). This was the aircraft's Penultimate Flight.
- 03 Oct 65 Final flight - 1 hour 20 minutes; Royal Observer Corps Day display at RAF Stradishall, flown by Flt Lt C. Kirkham. Total flying hours 607.10/415 landings. The next major servicing was due at 705.55 hours.
- 19 Nov 65 Engines ground-run.
- 23 Nov 65 Engines inhibited. At this stage, further flying was not ruled out.
- 17 Mar 66 Given a glued joint inspection, the results of which ended its flying career. A loose minute of 4 April 1967 gives fascinating insights into this and the operation of the aircraft at Little Rissington:

‘May I first submit to you that the aircraft concerned has not remained in the reported condition or been precluded from becoming fit to fly due to lack of determination on the part of myself or anyone else in engineering wing may I point out that the Mosquito is Category 5 as a historical aircraft for museum use and is not authorised to fly this fact is known to HQ Flying Training Command where concern has been expressed on several occasions Wing Commander Wahaftig expressed the view that it was in some ways dangerous, certainly illegal and quite unfair to any person in engineering wing to be asked to sign documents enabling the Mosquito to be flown under existing arrangements. Broadly speaking and prior to this, HQ FTC had intimated that if the aircraft were ever flown then they did not want to hear about it I shudder to think of a Board of Inquiry in the case of an accident involving this aircraft’

The March 1966 inspection confirmed that the glued joints had deteriorated since the last inspection 4 months previously and that other joints would go if the aircraft was taxied or flown. Repairs would take 6 months, it was estimated - wing joints were loose, dry and flaky. ‘Rectification is beyond unit ability and capacity to repair and is considered completely uneconomical’.

This recommendation was adhered to and the aircraft grounded permanently.

The 2006 Book ‘RAF Little Rissington; The Central Flying School Years’ (Bagshaw et al) records that the glue deterioration was engineered by Ground Engineering Wing staff anxious to avoid the burden of another aircraft to maintain. They placed it in Little Rissington’s only heated hangar, with the tail carefully positioned under a canvas hot air duct, with the desired effect of glue failure and loss of structural integrity. Photo at Little Rissington, 1965 – Bagshaw et al p.281.

- 05 Jul 67 Transferred to RAF Museum Collection after Maintenance Command refused to carry out repair to flying condition.
- 9-10 Aug 67 Transferred by road by No.71 MU from Little Rissington to the RAFM store at RAF Henlow.

- Oct 67 The two inhibited Merlins that had seemingly been retained at Little Rissington as spares engines for this aircraft, a Merlin 113 and Merlin 114, followed the Mosquito to Henlow as 67/E/731-732; they are both presently on loan to the Derby Branch of the Rolls Royce Heritage Trust.
- 14 Jun 68 Displayed at RAF Abingdon for the RAF's 50th anniversary display. Photo - Air Britain Digest July 1968 p.194.
- Sep 68 Displayed with other historic aircraft on Horseguards Parade, London during Battle of Britain week. Photo - Mosquito Survivors (Howe) p.105.
- Sep 69 Moved to storage at RAF Cosford by this date, possibly after the Horseguards display. By the 1970s TA639 was part of the regional collection of aircraft at the Cosford Aerospace Museum, still in its mid-late 1960s applied camouflage scheme.
- 1988 Repainted at Cosford in the colours and markings of the Mosquito XX of No.627 Squadron, AZ-E, in which Wing Commander Guy Gibson was killed on a pathfinder sortie 19/20 Sep 1944. It remains on display at Cosford. Photos; Aircraft Illustrated March 1991 p.145; Supplement to Aeroplane April 2001 p.13.

Several Mosquito B/TT35s are preserved, including fellow Hatfield batch members TA634 at the former Mosquito Aircraft Museum, now the De Havilland Aircraft Heritage Centre at London Colney, and TA719 at the IWMS' Duxford base.

TEXT - ANDREW SIMPSON