

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

AUSTER C.4 ANTARCTIC (T.7) WE600/7602M
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 1989/0305/A

Built by Auster Aircraft Co. at Rearsby, Leics. to contract 6/Acft /3934.
The Auster T.7 was the two -seat dual -control variant of the Auster
A.O.P.6, 77 being built for the RAF, serial batches VX926 - 29, 934 - 36
and WE534 - 572, 587 - 616.

- 24 May 51 Awaiting Collection from Rearsby.
- 25 May 51 No.20 Maintenance Unit, RAF Aston Down, Glos (Aircraft Storage Unit).
Delivered in glossy silver overall colour scheme with training yellow
fuselage and wing bands, Matt black anti-glare top panel and black
lettering.
- 19-21 Jul 51 Displayed at Daily Express 50 Years of Flying Exhibition at RAF Hendon.
- 1 Aug 51 No.663 Air Observation Post (A.O.P.) Squadron at RAF Hooton Park,
Cheshire, joining the Auster A.O.P.6 aircraft operated by the Squadron,
which was a Territorial Army Unit and each weekend Royal Artillery
personnel came to train, using the aircraft to 'spot' for their artillery. Each
squadron consisted of several detached Flights, each with five Austers.
Since the army lacked aircraft maintenance personnel, RAF personnel
undertook that work. In the 1952-4 period the unit's CO, recalled former
663 Squadron National Serviceman Joe Lowe, was a Major Sturgeon, and
WE600 was basically his aircraft, hence retaining its silver doped scheme
whereas the rest of the unit's aircraft were camouflaged, though it was still
used in exercises, using suitable fields as temporary landing grounds.
- Sep 52 Noted at Hooton Park with code letter 'L'.
- Mar 53 Involved in Field Exercises at Sennybridge
- 19 Sep 53 Appeared at Battle of Britain display at Hooton Park; pilot Captain Yates.

To No.1964 AOP Flight, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, based Yeadon,
Yorkshire – part of No 664 Squadron.
- 11 Jul 54 Damaged in flying accident. Cat 4R damage. During an evening solo
training flight, having taken off from Bembridge the Army Sergeant pilot,

Sgt W.H. Wastell was landing some 8 miles from Guildford, Surrey 30 minutes later. As he neared the end of the landing run the aircraft ran into a soft depression and nosed over, slightly injuring the pilot.

- 13 Jul 54 Removed from crash site.
- 8 Sep 54 To Auster Aircraft Co. at Rearsby for repair.
- 23 Dec 54 Repairs complete.
- 26 Jan 55 To No.9 MU, RAF Cosford, Salop (Aircraft Storage Unit).
- 8 Jul 55 To Auster Aircraft Co. for modifications - conversion to a C.4 (Auster Antarctic) for use in Dr., later Sir, Vivian Fuch's 1956 Joint Commonwealth (U.K./N.Z./Australian/South African) Trans-Antarctic Expedition. One of two T.7 aircraft used for reconnaissance by the expedition, the other being WE563 for the RNZAF (as NZ1707), operated from Scott Base by Sir Edmund Hilary's Ross Sea Party. Painted overall bright orange for high visibility. Photo of one of the aircraft being worked on at Rearsby - Flight 14 Oct 55 p.606. The aircraft structure was lightened due to the need to fit floats and extensive radio equipment. An extra belly tank was fitted along with larger tail surfaces and SARAH air-sea rescue beacon.
- Oct 55 Modification and testing (on wheels) completed by Auster at Rearsby.
- Nov 55 Sailed for the Shackleton base, Antarctic via Montevideo and the Falkland Islands on the new Danish sealer M.V. Theron. The RAF supported the Austers with pilots and maintenance crew
- Feb 56 Fitted with floats (which were interchangeable with skis) for ice reconnaissance flights. Photos - Air Pictorial Apr 56 p.122; Flight 16 Mar 56 p.287, both taken at Husvik Harbour, South Georgia.; Aeroplane Monthly Sep 77 p.462.
- 18 Apr 56 Repaired on site by No. 71 MU following return to the UK.
- 8 May 56 Repairs complete.
- 9 Aug 56 Special fitment by No.49 MU
- 16 Oct 56 Work completed.

- Nov 56 Main Trans -Antarctic Expedition commenced. Auster used for the support role - communications and personnel transport alongside a DH (Canada) Otter as the main workhorse.
- 20 Sep57 Following preparation under a tent after winter storage outside, Departed Shackleton Base, Antarctica flown by a New Zealander, F/L Gordon. M. Haslop with Dr. Allan. F. Rogers and medical supplies for Lt. Col. R. Smart who was ill at Halley Bay but owing to high winds the aircraft was forced down on an ice shelf. The crew dug an ice shelter using the canvas engine cover as roofing.
- 30 Sep 57 Found by the expedition's DHC Otter, refueled and flown to Halley Bay.
- 28 Oct 57 During a take - off in the Shackleton range with F/L Haslop and D.G. Stratton on board the aircraft failed to gain flying speed and the take-off was aborted. The aircraft ran up the steep wall of a windscoop during which the tail ski jammed in a small meltwater crack and was torn off. The aircraft was picketed out awaiting arrival of spares in the DHC Otter.
- 9 Dec 57 Flown to Halley Bay for shipment to the UK aboard the 'M.V. Tottan'.
- 26 Mar 58 To No.19 MU, RAF St Athan ex Antarctica. Withdrawn from use.
- 10 Jun 58 In to store at No.19 MU, RAF St. Athan.
- 17 Mar 59 Allocated instructional serial 7602M.
- 14 Apr 59 To No 71 MU RAF Bicester and retained for exhibition purposes with the RAF Exhibition Flight then based at Bicester.
- c. Oct 64 To RAF Colerne, Wilts by this date.
- 68 Repainted in trainer yellow, replacing the Antarctic orange colour scheme.
- 14 Jun 68 Following fabric work at RAF Hullavington and movement by road to RAF Abingdon on 26 March 1968, displayed at RAF 50th Anniversary Royal Review at RAF Abingdon, Oxon. Photos - Air Britain Digest Jul 68 p.191; Air Extra No.13 p.35; Wrecks and Relics – The Album p.58 (colour).
- c. Jul 68 To RAF Gaydon, Warwicks for storage following the Abingdon display. Shown at the RAF Gaydon Battle of Britain Open Day Sep 68, and also at RAF Ternhill, Salop around this time.

- c.72 Following the closure of RAF Gaydon, to RAF Finningley, North Yorks. - kept with the Station aircraft collection.
- Feb 77 RAF Swinderby, Lincs. for storage. Surveyed with a view to restoration to flying condition at this time (Nov 77).
- May 79 RAF St. Athan
- Feb 89 To Aerospace Museum, RAF Cosford, Salop.
- 96 Refurbished at the Aerospace Museum, where it remains on display. Photos - Air Britain News Dec 2000 p.1807; International Auster Club News November 2003 pp.20-21; Flypast February 2007 p.65.
- 2007 Further refurbishment by RAFM technicians at the MBCC Cosford, including rear fuselage fabric and cockpit door repairs, and repaint into original overall yellow paint scheme, of which evidence was found during the refurbishment.

Sister Auster Antarctic WE563/NZ1707 survives with the RNZAF Museum collection at RNZAF Base Wigram.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

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