

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

DE HAVILLAND CHIPMUNK T.Mk.10 WP962/9278M
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER X002-3448

- 1952 Built by De Havilland at Broughton, Chester to contract 6/Acft/6449/CB5 (a) as one of a batch of 145 Chipmunk T.10 aircraft delivered May 52 - Apr 53 from Hatfield and Chester. Serials batch WP772 - WP988. Constructors number C1-0809; Fuselage number DHB.f.722. One of 740 Chipmunk T.10 aircraft delivered to the RAF between November 1949 and October 1953.
- 31 Dec 52 Awaiting collection.
- 6 Jan 53 No. 10 Maintenance Unit, RAF Hullavington, Wilts.
- 25 Apr 53 To RAF Odiham, Hants for the Coronation Review held 15th July - WP962 was one of the large crescent of statically displayed training aircraft.
- 20 Jul 53 Returned to No. 10 MU.
- 9 Nov 54 662 Squadron - an Auster AOP.6 unit based at RAF Colerne, Wilts
- 18 Feb 57 61 Group Communications Flight.
- 16 Mar 57 Two flights – one of 45 minutes (with Flt Lt Howard), the other 30 minutes – by Peter H R Johnston (letter on Chipmunk file) whilst with the University of London Air Squadron. The second was only his second solo flight.
- 2 Apr 57 Officially transferred to University of London Air Squadron at White Waltham, near Maidenhead, Berks.
- 13 Sep 57 No 10 Maintenance Unit.
- 29 Oct 59 Army Air Corps
- 2 Aug 61 No. 27 MU, RAF Shawbury, Salop.
- 24 May 62 RAF Aston Down, Glos - an outstation of No. 5 MU, RAF Kemble.

- 18 Jun 62 To No.3 Air Experience Flight, Filton, Bristol, providing flying experience for ATC cadets. Code 'O'. See painting by Wilf Hardy - The Chipmunk in RAF Service (028374).
Pooled with the Bristol University Air Squadron also based at Filton. Initially brought in to replace WK516, which had force - landed; served continuously with the unit for 30 years.
- 27 Mar 69 Damaged - Cat.3R. Repaired on site.
- 29 Apr 69 Returned to 3 AEF charge, with regular overhauls by Marshals from November 1979.
- 29 Jul 83 Loaned to RAF Henlow; returned to 3 AEF off loan 12 Aug 83.
- 15 May 86 To Slingsby for overhaul, completed 28 Aug 86.
- Jun 89 No.3 AEF moved to RAF Hullavington, Wilts.
- 92 To No. 5 Air Experience Flight, Cambridge Airport as one of 8 Chipmunks on strength, parent unit Cambridge University Air Squadron. Code letter 'C'.
- 12 Jan 96 Final regular service flight; then grounded at Cambridge until 10 May 96.
- 31 Mar 96 Final Chipmunk Air Cadet sortie flown by WP920 of No.5 AEF; all air experience flying now carried out on the Bulldog in conjunction with the University Air Squadrons. (The Army Air Corps Chipmunks retired in March 1997).
- 95/96 RAF planned an expeditionary flight to establish a route for light aircraft from Europe to North America via Russia - Operation Northern Circle - using a pair of AEF Chipmunks.

The Chipmunk was chosen because of its reliability and ability to operate with the minimum of ground support.

WP962 (Lead Aircraft) and WP833 each given a 24 gallon overload fuel tank in the rear cockpit, giving it a still air 500+ mile range, designed by British Aerospace and constructed by Hunting Aviation. Navigation equipment - a Garmin GNC250 GPS and IFF transponder, plus electric start for the engine to replace the cartridge start, and new Airpath compass also fitted. The glider towing equipment was removed to make room for the fuel tank, the modifications being carried out during May 1996.

The integration of the new 'avionics suite' was by Marshall Aerospace, giving the RAF the most up to date Chipmunks anywhere.

The planned east - west route was 14,197 miles (22,847 KM) with the longest sector (5,367 miles/8,637KM) over Russia from Moscow to Nome in Alaska with transits over Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Canada, USA, Greenland and Iceland and Scotland.

A 'package' of air support included an RAF Jetstream, an AN-2 of the Russian National Aero Club and a DH Buffalo of the Canadian armed forces.

Other sponsors included British Telecom, British Aerospace and Breitling Watches. It was intended, if successful, to publish an established route for future light aircraft flights across Russia.

- Jul 96 Training flights, followed by transit from Cambridge to Fairford, Glos. Photo at this time - British Aviation Review Sep 1996 p.922.
- 21 Jul 96 Team departed the Royal International Air Tattoo display at Fairford to begin the tour. (replacing the originally intended departure date from the PFA rally at Cranfield of 6 July 96). First leg to RAF Manston, Kent. Led by Sq. Leader Ced Hughes. Intended to return to the UK in time for the Farnborough display on September 2nd.
- In the event the team flew via Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the Ukraine, Moscow, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Germany back to England. There were stopovers at RAF Laarbruch, Berlin-Tegel, Warsaw (3 days due to poor weather), Jasionka, Kiev, Moscow-Sheremetyevo, Pskov, Vilnius, and Munster. Forest fires in central Siberia held the aircraft up at Moscow International Airport for two weeks (Photo - RAF News 4 Oct 96 p.12) and it was decided to cut short the intended round the world flight and return to the UK via the Baltic states, Poland and Germany in order to make the scheduled Farnborough appearance.
- 13 Aug 96 Departed Moscow on the return leg, via Vilnius, Warsaw and Berlin. In 10 days the aircraft flew some 4,000 miles, returning home to Cambridge. See full account by Sqn Ldr Cowan in Pilot Dec 96. WP962 was flown alternately by Sqn Ldr J A (Tony) Cowan and Flt Lt. D H T (David) McKenna. Photo - RAF News 4 Oct 96 p.1. Photo of WP962 prior to departure - Flypast Sep 96 p.23.

- Sep 96 Displayed at Farnborough as intended; returned to Cambridge 9 Sep 96 and flown until 6 October 1996.
- c.Oct 96 Temporarily stored at RAF Newton, Notts. following the long distance flight.
- 9 May 97 Flown RAF Newton to Cambridge Airport by Squadron Leader J. A. (Tony) Cowan RAF.
- 19 May 97 Flown from Newton to RAF Cranwell, Lincs.
- 20 May 97 Departed RAF College Cranwell on record breaking flight, the first RAF long-distance expeditionary flight since the round the world Piper Cherokee flight in 1978.

The team of four pilots and one engineer was led by Squadron Leader Cowan, who did most of the flying of WP962, plus some in the BN-2 support aircraft. Reached Munster, Germany after 4 hours 35 minutes flying time.

Chipmunks WP962 and WP833 and their chartered Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander support aircraft completed Exercise Northern Venture - a repeat attempt at a circumnavigation of the Northern Hemisphere through London from London City Airport, the official start point, flying east across the Baltic States and Russia to the Bering Strait, hence across Alaska and Canada to cross the North Atlantic via Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands; the flight lasted 64 days and covered 16,259 miles, visiting 62 airfields en route. Full details and illustrations in 'Chipmunks Around the World' (Cowan - X001-1801) This was the first non-Russian air force to fly across Russia from coast to coast, successfully charting an air route for general navigation from Europe to North America across Russia, and allowing its comparison with the existing route across the North Atlantic, Greenland and Canada. They were also the first Western light aircraft to fly in Russia east of the Ural mountains.

- 18 July 97 From Kinloss to the Royal International Air Tattoo at Fairford, via RAF Leuchars.
- 21 Jul 97 Departed Fairford; Returned to RAFC Cranwell.
- 28 Jul 97 Returned to Cambridge, where the aircraft was flown 26 November 1997.
- 4 Feb 98 Final flight, Cambridge - Newton for storage. Flight time one hour. Total flying hours 13775.55, 24813 landings.

- 2 Dec 98 Final engine run; engine inhibited.
- 5 May 00 By road from RAF Newton (where it had been dismantled for transport two days earlier) to RAFM Hendon on initial three year loan from the RAF/MoD. Dummy GPS equipment now fitted. Photo on display; Flypast February 2001 p.20.
- 16 May 00 Issued RAF Maintenance serial 9287M.

The Northern Venture Flight Authorisation Log, Two Form 700s and other technical documentation held by DoRIS.

The RAFM collection also includes Chipmunk WP912 at RAFM Cosford; this is the aircraft on which the Duke of Edinburgh learned to fly in 1952.

Sister Northern Venture Chipmunks WP833 and WZ872 were finally auctioned in 1999, WP833 joining the UK civil register as G-BZDU in June 2000. It was then sold in March 2010 to a British purchaser living in Southern California, where it scheduled to be re-registered as N918HF in July 2010, retaining its 'Round the World' markings for historical purposes. WZ872 became G-BZGB.

With thanks to Richard G. Wilsher, owner of WP833 for information supplied.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

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