

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

SHORT SUNDERLAND V ML824  
MUSEUM ACCESSION NO.71/A/1408

00 Jun 44 Launched at Shorts Factory at Queen's Island, Belfast as a Mk.III Sunderland. Part of contract No.2227.

30 Jun 44 Taken on RAF charge.

06 Jul 44 At Makers (Short Bros and Harland, Belfast) for conversion to Mk.V standard.

06 Nov 44 To No.57 MU, Wig Bay.

09 Feb 45 At Calshot.

11 Feb 45 Joined No.201 Squadron at Castle Archdale, Northern Ireland, as the first Mk.V Sunderland in the Squadron Allocated codes NS-Z.

ML824 made 11 operational flights with No.201 Squadron, totalling 127 hours 20 minutes, comprising ten anti U-Boat patrols and one convoy patrol.

09 Mar 45 Anti U-Boat patrol - 9½ hours. Returned early due to threatening weather.

11 Mar 45 Anti U-Boat patrol, Cardigan Bay area. Patrolled area littered with flotsam. 13-hour patrol, taking off at 07.30 - Pilot F/L Buzzard. See Navigator's logbook of PO David Midgley - Microfilm held on DoRIS, Ref. MF10123/20.

13 Mar 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. Numerous radar contacts on fishing vessels, wreckage and buoys. (13¾ hours).

15 Mar 45 Convoy escort, South Western Approaches. Sighted empty ships life raft. 11¼ hours. See Midgley log book. - took off at 03.10. Pilot F/L Buzzard.

29 Mar 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. Uneventful, 13¼ hours.

31 Mar 45 Anti U-Boat patrol, curtailed by bad weather, 1½ hours.

02 Apr 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. Dropped two depth charges on a fresh oil slick - no visible results. 13½ hours.

04 Apr 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. Dropped markers on trail of Blueish smoke (position of). Radar contact lost. 13 hours.

08 Apr 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. Uneventful. 13½hours.

- 10 Apr 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. Dropped marker on sea mine. 13.05 hours. See Air Gunner's Logbook of Warrant Officer H. Harwood, Microfilmed as X002-5518/003. Pilots W/C Barret and W/O Symons; 'Homed Navy onto Floating Mine'.
- 12 Apr 45 Anti U-Boat patrol. ASV became unserviceable and aircraft recalled to base. 9-hour patrol.
- 17 Apr 45 Transferred to No.330 (Norwegian) Squadron at Sullom Voe, Shetland Islands, initially as aircraft 'Z'.
- 18 Apr 45 First flight - training - with new Squadron.
- 19 Apr 45 Transport flight, Castle Archdale - Sullom Voe, Shetland Islands.
- 23 Apr 45 Training Flights (two).
- 24 Apr 45 Anti-Submarine patrol. Only fishing boats sighted. 12-hour patrol.
- 26 Apr 45 Anti-Submarine patrol. Sighted unidentified twin engined dark camouflaged aircraft at 12 miles distance, which turned sharply away into cloud and was not seen again. Sighted mine. 10-hour patrol.
- 27 Apr 45 Anti-Submarine patrol. Convoy sighted. 10¼ hours.
- 01 May 45 Anti-Submarine patrol. Fishing vessels sighted and investigated. 12-hour patrol.
- 02 May 45 Transport flight Sullom Voe - Woodhaven, followed by training flight.
- 03 May 45 Training flights (two).
- 04 May 45 Transport flight Alness - Sullom Voe - Alness.
- 05-12 May 45 Routine Inspection; aircraft beached and NS-Z codes replaced with WH-T.
- 12 May 45 Air test.
- 13 May 45 European war now over. Last operational flight - anti-submarine patrol - by now U-Boats at sea should have been heading back to base flying a surrender flag. Sighted armed trawler. 6 hours. By this time the aircraft had changed from 'Z' to 'T'. Colour profile of aircraft as WH-T as seen at Fornebu, Oslo in May 1945; Warpaint series No. 25 Short Sunderland (Tony Butler) p.17. Norwegian flag carried on nose. See also Osprey Combat aircraft 19 Sunderland Squadrons of World War 2 (John Lake) p.47. Served alongside Sunderland III ML814, also now preserved (with Kermit Weeks in Florida)
- 16 May 45 Last recorded flights with No.330 Squadron - transport Sullom Voe - Woodhouse - Sullom Voe.

No. 330 Squadron moved from Sullom Voe between 10 and 14 June

1945, going to their new Norwegian base at Sola outside Stavanger on the west coast of Norway. As part of No 129 Wing RAF, the unit operated in the transport role, flying a six days a week service from Stavanger via Bergen to Trondheim, occasionally extended to Skattora seaplane station near Tromso in Northern Norway. To increase the Sunderland's load carrying capacity, the dorsal turret was removed. See photo of ML824 in mid-June 1945 before removal of the turret – Flypast July 2009 p.77.

- 01 Jul 45 Letter from Bjorn Hafsten in July 2009 Flypast states that on this date the aircraft suffered an in-flight fire in the port outer engine, so the aircraft had to be left behind at Skattora.
- 01 Sep 45 Hafsten letter records that after a fairing was made to replace the written-off engine the aircraft was flown on three engines from Tromso to Calshot, and presumably then ferried to Alness.
- 19 Sep 45 Struck-off-charge but retained in store at Alness, Invergordon.
- 19 May 48 Flown from Alness to Wig Bay by Flt Lt W G Abel. '824 was the last flying boat at Alness, having become unserviceable when the base closed down.
- 20 May 48 Officially taken on charge at No.57 MU Wig Bay, Stranraer. Many other Sunderlands - and Catalinas and a single Mariner - stored at Wig Bay at this time. '824 was readied for possible use in the Berlin airlift, but was not used.
- 00 Aug 49 Re-engined with P&W R-1830-900 twin Wasps, replacing the previous R-1830-65 engines.
- 25 Aug 50 Received at Short Brothers and Harland from Wig Bay for reconditioning. Airframe hours on receipt 306.10.
- c.Sep 51 Overhauled by Short Bros and Harland, Belfast.
- 01 Oct 51 Work completed.
- 26 Oct 51 To Pembroke Dock - one of 14 Sunderlands transferred to the French in 1951 from RAF stocks under the Western Union Defence Programme. The Aeronavale eventually operated 19 Sunderlands in all.
- 28 Oct 51 To French base at Brest for service with Aeronavale. Served mainly in West Africa, at Dakar, Senegal, with Flotilles F7, 12S, 27F and 50s, as 7F-14, 12S-3, 27F-14 and latterly as 50.S-9. Retained RAF serial and white c/s. See French and UK 700s, DoRIS reference UA195/196.
- 00 Mar 52 Photographed at Bizerte in Aeronavale service (see file letter by J W T Duffield).
- 06 Mar 56 Returned to UK for overhaul by Shorts at Belfast.
- 02 Oct 56 Test flight from Short Bros and Harland.
- 03 Oct 56 Overhaul completed. Aircraft returned to Dakar for further service with

escadrille 12/S at this stage. Total flying time then 1,698 hours 50 minutes.

05 Oct 56

Returned to French Navy charge; Three Sunderlands operated from Dakar until late 1960, then redeployed to France.

By 1959, Sunderlands still flew with the RAF, French and RNZAF in Military service. The last RAF Sunderland flight, by 205/209 Squadron Mk.V ML797/P took place on 20 May 1959 at Seletar, Singapore. Coastal Command hoped to fly '797 back to the UK for museum preservation, though as a 1981 letter from P B Gower, NCO at Seletar in 1959 records: "(I) clearly recall the last serviceable Sunderland being given a complete overhaul, the intention being that it would be flown back to the UK and placed in a museum.

Whilst being taken from the hangar to the water it unfortunately slipped off the beaching gear turntable at the rear and became a write-off, the whole rear fuselage just forward of the tailplane being badly distorted".

See also Aviation News 29 Jan-11 Feb 82 p.16 and Aeroplane Sept 04.

DP198 and ML797, the last two RAF Sunderlands, were struck off charge at Changi on 30 June 1959 and scrapped at the base. In April 1970 the Anchor and section of fuselage skin carrying the serial number of this aircraft were offered to the RAFM by 205 Squadron at Changi prior to disbandment, but do not seem to have been delivered. Photo of the aircraft on the dump at Seletar, minus serial - Flypast April 2001 p.71.

When it became clear that the RAF could not preserve a Sunderland, with the lack of staging facilities and estimated cost of flying one back to the UK also being a problem, Peter M Thomas of Pantgwyn, Cardigan, Poultry Farmer and aviation enthusiast launched a £15,000 public appeal to buy a Sunderland from the RNZAF and have it flown home. The scheme failed due to technical and financial problems. It was then discovered that the Aeronavale still operated three Sunderlands from Toulon (they did not retire the last two until 30 Jan 1962; one of the last pair ML796 is now preserved by the IWM at Duxford after use as a night club/bar in L Baule, France, moving to Duxford in 1976). (Peter Thomas went on to found the Skyfame Museum at Staverton).

The French received a letter from Mr Thomas favourably, and the Short Sunderland Trust was duly set up. The French presented a Sunderland - ML824 - to this body in March 1961, free of charge.

ML824 had last flown in French service 8 Dec 60 with a test flight 20 Mar 61.

23 Feb 61

Originally proposed homecoming date for the Sunderland, postponed at the request of the French due to the possibility of bad weather.

24 Mar 61

The Donated Sunderland ML824, made its final flight from Lanveoc-Poulloc, near Brest, that Friday to Pembroke Dock, where a display site had been leased for it in the dockyard adjacent to a motor museum.

As a precaution due to its age the French authorities decided not to route

the Sunderland over any land for her last journey from Brest Naval Base. Flown by a French crew, skippered by Capitaine Henri Luthereau. Leaving Brest at 9am, she rendezvoused with two No.201 Squadron Shackletons from her old squadron over the Scilly Islands and flew on via St Davids and Pembroke. For her last flight '824 was fully fuelled in case bad weather forced a return to Brest - in the event she landed at Pembroke Dock with 800 gallons/3,029 litres of fuel still in the tanks. The two St Mawgan based Shackletons, WR975/0-201 and WR980 P-102 then escorted the Sunderland to Pembroke Dock as a gesture of courtesy, where the three aircraft circled the Dock before the Sunderland touched down at 11.36am, watched by large crowds. The aircraft carried its final French codes 50.S.9. The last landing brought to an end a total of 2,900 flying hours for the aircraft. (For some details see Sunderland Trust Files, DoRIS Ref.AC72/33, Boxes 1-5).

Photos: Airfix Magazine May 61 p.550; 'The Growler' Spring 96 p.16-20; Royal Air Force Flying Review Apr 1961 p.3; Flypast August 2005 p.30 and May 2009 pp.80-81; Shackleton Guardian of the Sea Lanes (Franks) p.32.

25 Mar 61 Aircraft hauled from the water for the last time - photos: Airfix Magazine May 61 p.550 - 551, followed by Saturday formal presentation ceremony, when the aircraft was handed over to Mr Oswald Short, President of the Sunderland Trust, by her last skipper, Capitaine de Fregate Henri Luthereau, station commander at Lanveoc Poulmic nr Brest, where the aircraft had been based.

The RAF provided an honour guard of 50 men, five of whom collapsed during the hour of speeches! Photo Flight 06 April 1961 p.458.

After arrival, the Sunderland was initially housed in an empty hangar and scrubbed and cleaned of salt, the French markings removed and the wartime 201 squadron markings re-applied, as 'A-Z'. Photo: Airfix Magazine May 61 p.550 Photo on show still in French markings - Flight 2 Nov 1961 p.692; Royal Air Force Flying Review Dec.61 p.3.

27 Mar 61 Aircraft de-fuelled and tanks purged. Photo in 1961, ashore on beaching trolley and in French markings; Flypast May 2009 p.80.

02 Jun 62 Aircraft moved to her leased site, on open display in a corner of the Dockyard-the former RAF station playing field. Opened to the public on a regular basis, 2.30-6pm, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 1 June - 30 September inclusive - admission to lower deck only 1 shilling - 6d for children. Aircraft cared for by the secretary of the Sunderland Trust, the late Sqn Ldr F E Godfrey. 10,000 visitors to the aircraft in its first display season. Photo - Flight International 9 Aug 1962 p.215. Colour photo around this time - Aeroplane August 2003 p.27. See also Flypast July 2004 p.70 and May 2009 p.82.

1964 Aircraft exterior repainted by hand. Again visited by some 10,000 people.

1965 Aircraft refitted with de-activated machine-guns and cannon. (10.303 Brownings, 1.50 Browning; 2 Hispano-Suiza Cannon - the aircraft had arrived unarmed.

Mar/Apr 65 Fabric on control surfaces rotting so control surfaces removed and

covered in metal at a local garage. (The control surfaces were re-covered by an RAF team in 1974). The 1965 work was undertaken by a small team from Short Bros and Harland.

- 1967 Sunderland visited by 20,000 people.
- 22 Jan 68 Letter to John Tanner of the RAFM from Sqn Ldr Godfrey. Sunderland Trust secretary, suggesting that the Museum should approach the Trust's Trustees over acquiring the Sunderland.
- 05 Mar 68 Meeting of Sunderland Trust Trustees agreed to handover the aircraft to the RAFM, and wrote to Dermot Boyle, Chairman of the Museum's Trustees, the following day.
- The handover was accelerated by the retirement as Trust secretary of Sqn Ldr Godfrey and the lack of a successor. Sqn Ldr Godfrey died December 1969, aged 74.
- 12 Sep 68 On-site inspection by party from 71 MU, Bicester. Negotiations with the Charity Commissioners over transfer of the Trust's assets and transport problems delayed the originally hoped for early move to Hendon of the aircraft. Photo at this time – Wrecks and Relics – The Album p.53.
- 11 Jan 71 All Trust assets and 'chattels', including the Sunderland itself, formally transferred to Trustees of the RAFM.
- Mar 71 Lease on site occupied by Sunderland due to expire, prompting action to move the aircraft. It could not be made airworthy, so surface transport was necessary.
- The aircraft was moved back into an empty hangar at Pembroke Dock for partial dismantling by a party from the Salvage and Transportation Flight of No. 71 MU, beginning 13 Jan 1971-this task alone took four days due to very tight clearances. Smaller sections - engines, floats, rear fuselage and tail, went direct to Hendon by road, as did the wings, via the Brecon Beacons and temporary storage at RAF Northolt. Sailing on Wednesday, 10 March, the main hull section was transported by Royal Corps of Transport landing craft HMAV Aachen to Samuel Williams' Thames Terminal, Dagenham, docking on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March, then laid sideways on a trailer for road transport to Hendon, demolishing a set of traffic lights at Colindale en-route! Photos: Aeroplane Monthly Aug 95 p.65; Air Pictorial Jun 1971 p.212. See archive report on file by S/Ldr Cheeseman on the dismantling and move.
- 21 Mar 71 Sunderland hull and wings arrived at Hendon and unloaded the following day. Some erection of airframe under way by 31 March. Stored, partly dismantled, in the Grahame-White hangar, at the mercy of the pigeons occupying that building, despite a covering of old parachutes.
- Sep 76 Teams from RAF St Athan and RAF Abingdon began task of reassembly, cleaning and repainting of the aircraft in the Grahame-White hangar. Anti corrosion treatment was applied, skin repairs made around the keel, and

perspex windows replaced. Photos on completion - RAF News week ending Nov 20 1976 p.2; Air Pictorial Nov 77 p.445.

- 26-27 Oct 76 Fully repainted aircraft towed across from Grahame-White hangar 300 yards to position in front of Museum now occupied by Spitfire/Hurricane replicas. The actual move was carried out by men of Royal Engineers 39 Engineer Regiment (Airfields) from Waterbeach, Cambridge. Photos on display - Aircraft Illustrated Jun 77 p.232 (colour); PAM News No18 (1977) p.398; Warpaint Series No.25 Short Sunderland - Centre spread plans page; Wrecks and Relics – The Album p.53; Flypast May 2009 p.84.
- 1978 Moved into new Battle of Britain Museum for internal display. The aircraft has remained there ever since. Photo – Flypast May 2009 pp.78-79.
- 1981 Beaching trolley refurbished by Southampton Group after loan for use with their Sandringham, now preserved in the Southampton Hall of Aviation.
- 1982 Volunteer work on tackling corrosion in bottom of hull - floor taken up and removed for treatment.
- 1993 Beaching gear removed - heavily corroded - and replaced by purpose made steel cradle. Work underway on interior to facilitate public access.
- Apr 95 Lower deck opened for public viewing. Photos: FlyPast Nov 96 p.51; May 2009 pp.80-81, 83, 84.

**TEXT - ANDREW SIMPSON**

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