

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

BRISTOL SYCAMORE HR.14 XJ918/8190M

MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 84/A/1168

- 56 Built by Bristol Aircraft Co. at Filton, Somerset to contract No.11899. Constructors number 13414. One of 80 HR.14s delivered to the RAF, serial batch XJ895 -8, 915 - 919.
- 21 Dec 56 Awaiting collection.
- 11 Jan 57 No.20 Maintenance Unit, RAF Aston Down , Glos. (Aircraft Storage Unit).
- 15 May 57 To No.275 Squadron, Fighter Command at RAF Thornaby, Yorks. In 1953 this became the RAF's first helicopter search and rescue squadron in Great Britain, with detachments at Leuchars, North Coates, Horsham St.Faith and Chivenor with a full complement of 15 Sycamores in six Flights by the end of the year. From Jul 57 the Flights were at Leuchars, Acklington, Leconfield, Chivenor, Coltishall and Aldergrove. Typical duties included rescuing civilian bathers and covering military aircraft in difficulty.
- 9 Oct 57 Squadron moved to RAF Leconfield, Yorks, still providing SAR cover for the North East coast.
- May 58 Coastal Command assumed responsibility for all Search and Rescue Flights.
- 21 Apr 59 No.20 MU, RAF Aston Down.
- 31 Jul 59 Loaned to A&AEE, Boscombe Down, Wilts.
- 59 Transferred to Far East Air Force, Malaya.
- Sycamores in Malaya had been involved in a number of crashes which occurred as a result of tail or main rotor blade problems; a batch of new blades had to be test flown in Malaya by the crew of which one was Mr. Collins as shown in his logbook held at the Royal Air Force Museum Cosford.
- 19 Sep 59 Blade trials - five short flights in Kuala Lumpur area, Malaya.
- 29 Sep 59 5 ½ hour return flight, Kuala Lumpur - Changi - Kuala Lumpur.
- 5 Oct 59 Blade tests at Kuala Lumpur.
- 12-14 Oct 59 Vibration schedule tests at Kuala Lumpur. Regular pilot at this time was F/L Peckowski. Blade tests satisfactorily completed.

- 15 Oct 59 HQ Far East Air Force, serving with the Kuala Lumpur Station Flight.
- Oct 59 The Collins logbook records flights by XJ918 from Kuala Lumpur to the RAAF base at Butterworth and several other destinations averaging 2 hours duration.
- Nov 59 Further flights in the Kuala Lumpur - Butterworth - Changi area including a further vibration test
- Dec 59 Operations continued, including cross country flights and flights to Butterworth. F/L Geddes was another regular pilot at this time.
- 17 Mar 60 RAF Seletar Station Flight, Singapore.
- Mar 60 Fitting of modified rotor blades permitted the progressive resumption of Sycamore operations in Malaya between Mar and Jul 60.
- 10 Jun 60 110 Squadron, Butterworth, Malaya operating jungle patrols, mainly in the rugged country in the north of Malaya close to the Thai border. Initially during the last months of the Malayan Emergency,
- (Operation Firedog) which officially ended Aug 60 along with the Commonwealth response, although sporadic Malay communist terrorist attacks continued. Other duties included aero medical flights, troop lifts - including Australians and New Zealanders - and communications flights to jungle forts, known as Fort Express.
- Dec 62 From this date until Sep 63 , from a strength of 13 helicopters, three No.110 Squadron Sycamores operated in the Sultanate of Brunei campaign in Borneo (400 miles east of Singapore) and to deter any aggressive moves against the Malaysian Federation , including incursions, by Indonesia during the ‘confrontation’ period from April 1963. The Brunei revolt of Dec 62 was mopped up within four months, and was almost immediately followed by the Indonesian Confrontation from April 1963 which lasted until August 1966.
- 17 Jan 64 RAF Seletar, Singapore became the No.110 Squadron base.
- Oct 64 No 110 Squadron re-equipped with Whirlwinds, resulting in the withdrawal of the Sycamore from front - line service.
- XJ918 was retained as the personal transport of the AOC, Far East Air Force with maintenance by No.110 Squadron, along with XL821 which on 30 May 67 became the last Sycamore to fly with the Far East Air Force.
- 20 May 65 No.389 MU, Seletar .
- 8 Jun 65 Shipped to UK.
- 20 Jul 65 No. 15 MU, RAF Wroughton, Wilts.
- 5 Feb 68 No.5 MU, RAF Kemble, Glos.

- 11 Apr 68 Metropolitan Communications Squadron, RAF Northolt, with five Sycamores being operated by the unit by mid 1968.
- 13 Feb 69 To the newly formed No.32 Squadron , Air Support Command (Renamed from MCS), continuing in the communications role at Northolt.
- 3 Aug 71 Photographed hangared at Northolt - Photo Air Pictorial Sep 71 p.328. Carried a blue/white colour scheme and VIP transport fit.
- 20 Dec 71 To No 2 School of Technical Training, RAF Cosford, Salop as a training and show airframe. The last four Sycamores - XG504, XG544, XJ918 and XL829 - were officially retired from regular RAF service that month and replaced by Westland Whirlwind HAR.10s as certain critical components reached their fatigue life.
- However, a temporary shortage of spare Whirlwinds meant that No.32 Squadron actually continued to operate two Sycamores - the last in the RAF - until 11 August 1972 when XG544 was finally retired.
- Dec 71 Allotted instructional serial 8190M.
- c.83 Transferred to the Aerospace Museum Cosford. Remains on public display.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

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