

HAWKER HUNTER FR.10 (OMAN) 853 (XF426)
RAF ACCESSION NUMBER X005-2763

Ordered as a Hunter Mk.6 to contract 6/Acft/9818 as part of a batch of 100 aircraft constructed by Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft at Baginton (Coventry) and delivered between June 1955 and October 1956. A total of 379 Hunter F.6s were supplied to the RAF, the largest number of any version.

30 Nov 55	Awaiting collection
11 May 56	Flown from Hawkers Dunsfold by Derek Parry.
1 Feb 57	No. 5 Maintenance Unit, RAF Kemble, Gloucs (Aircraft Storage Unit).
13 Aug 57	To Hawkers for Modifications, completed 13 February 1958
17 Feb 58	No.19 MU, RAF St Athan, Glamorgan (Aircraft Storage Unit).
17 Mar 58	To No.208 Squadron, (initially at Tangmere) for onwards transit to Middle East Air Force, at Nicosia, Cyprus code 'Y', along with squadron colours on the fuselage – sky blue and yellow horizontal stripes to signify the sky and sand, in honour of the squadron's history as a desert reconnaissance unit. (see letter on p.107 of February 2011 Flypast)
21 Mar 58	Squadron departed Tangmere for Nicosia.
Apr 58	No 208 Squadron moved to Akrotiri, Cyprus, with a detachment at Amman.
31 Mar 59	No 208 Squadron disbanded at Akrotiri. (Reformed as No. 142 Squadron, a Venom unit, at Embakasi, Kenya the following day)
14 Apr 59	To No 103 MU, RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus.
21 Aug 59	To No.19 MU, RAF St. Athan.
16 Nov 59	To Hawkers for conversion to FR.10 standard, with three nose-mounted cameras as a replacement for the Supermarine Swift and Meteor FR.9. A total of 33 Hunter F.6s were converted to FR. Mk.10 standard.
19 Apr 61	Conversion complete

- 21 Apr 61 To No.19 MU.
- 31 Mar 65 A&AEE, Boscombe Down, Wilts for F.85 camera trials until 21 April 1965.
- 21 Apr 65 On loan to Ministry of Aviation until 28 Feb 1967.
- 28 Feb 67 Returned from MoA loan at Boscombe Down to RAF.
- 7 Jun 67 Flown from Boscombe Down by Derek Parry.
- 20 Jun 67 No 2 Squadron, RAF Gutersloh, West Germany – one of only two RAF Squadrons to operate full complements of Hunter 10s (the other being No.4 Squadron)
- 21 Dec 67 No 229 Operational Conversion Unit; by 1968, flown with white spine and coded '12' on fin; photo Military Aircraft of the 1960s p.37.
- 22 Mar 72 Presented to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as 853; by June 1972 Jordan operated 35 single seat and three two-seat Hunters. These aircraft played no part in the 1973 Yom Kippur Syrian/Egyptian war with Israel, but remained on a defensive footing.

The Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) acquired Hawker Hunters from a variety of sources from the early 1970s; some were ex RAF FGA.9s, which had served with Gulf squadrons; others were the FGA.73s (reconditioned ex RAF, Belgian, and Dutch Mk.6s) transferred from Jordan, together with two T.66s and two FR.10s, of which the RAFM aircraft is one. This was from the original Jordanian total in 1972 of 35 single-seat and three T Mk 66B two-seat aircraft. Later, two T.67's were delivered to Oman from Kuwait.

- Mar 75 With the delivery of replacement F-104 and F-5A/B/E/5F aircraft, King Hussein of Jordan in turn presented all his 31 recently retired Hunters, (withdrawn from the three Royal Jordanian Air Force Hunter Squadrons the previous year), from various sources, to the Sultan of Oman, with delivery from this date, after attempts to transfer them to Rhodesia had failed.

Delivered from May 1975, these included F.Mk.6, FGA Mk.9, and FGA Mk.73 variants, and the three T.66Bs, two of which later operated alongside two T.67s donated to Oman by the Kuwaiti Air Force in 1980. Several retained their Jordanian serials, including the RAFM aircraft, 853.

After the cannibalisation of the F.6s for spares, eight F Mk 73s and two FR.10s plus a T.66B were activated, and from these various sources the SOAF (Renamed The Royal Air Force of Oman in 1990) managed to raise a single Hunter squadron, No.6 Squadron, based at the new airbase 'Midway' at Thumrait, (the SOAF's principal strike base) of some 15 airworthy Hunters, with others used for spares recovery and decoys; attached to this squadron, which became operational in August 1975, was the Hunter Conversion Flight. (recorded as just 12 operational Hunters by 1979, down from 14 in 1978) . The remaining aircraft were retained in storage as replacements and to provide spares for the operational aircraft.

Some of these aircraft were Hybrids, with components from ex-RAF FGA.9s married to parts of ex Royal Jordanian Air Force FGA Mk.73s.

Also included was this ex RAF FR.10, (XF426) which after service with the Khormaksar Strike Wing in Aden passed to Jordan as 'RJAF 853' in 1972 and in 1975 was one of a number of Hunters presented to Oman by Jordan. The two FR.10s were often used as Quick Reaction alert (QRA) aircraft.

Another of the small group of Omani FR.10s was formerly RAF XG168, SOAF 852, out of use by 1978. In service the Hunters were flown mainly by RAF Officers seconded to SOAF, with a small nucleus of British, New Zealand, Rhodesian and Jordanian 'contract' pilots also.

17 Oct 75

The SOAF began five weeks of intensive raids on Marxist guerrilla bases in South Yemen, from whence attacks had been launched into Omani territory particularly Dhofar province, the most westerly part of Oman, which borders South Yemen. These raids, by the Adoo ('Enemy') forces of the 'People's Front for the Liberation of the Arabian Gulf' (PFLOAG) continued until its defeat in December 1975, with contract (mainly British) Hunter pilots diving from 15,000 to 2,500 feet to release their 1000lb high-explosive bombs and 80mm SURA rockets; rockets were fired at slant range of 4,000 feet; one Hunter was damaged by a SA-7 shoulder-launched SAM. Targets attacked included vehicle depots, 30mm cannon attacks on supply convoys, supply dumps in caves, low-level skip-bombing of ammunition dumps, and an occasional airfield.

The Hunter's guns were also used very effectively in diving attacks. See article in *Aeroplane*, August 2011 pp.60 – 67. During this time the Omani forces were assisted by Royal Iranian ground and air forces operating from bases in Oman.

SOAF Hunters carried a variety of colour schemes, including a standard Grey/Green topsides with silver undersides camouflage scheme, and latterly operated in a low-visibility overall light and dark grey colour scheme. The overall dark grey low visibility scheme, the scheme now carried by the RAFM aircraft was only applied to retired display aircraft. SOAF aircraft carried a red fin flash. Later, after 1990, the RAFO fin flash was changed to blue. For a short time in 1976/77 to 1979 the Hunters carried the SOAF roundels in six positions, these not being painted on but were self-adhesive vinyl stickers.

- 1977 Supplementing of SOAF Hunters by the first of 12 Sepecat Jaguar International aircraft underway, though the Hunter continued in use as a strike aircraft; seven of them had a photo-recce capability, including 853; both the Jaguars and Hunters were armed with the AIM-9P Sidewinder missile for air defence and AN/ALE40 Flare and chaff countermeasures equipment. Ground attack weapons carried included 1,000lb high explosive bombs, BL-755 cluster bombs and unguided 80mm Hispano SURA rockets.
- 1987 853 fitted with new port wing supplied by British Aerospace, following storage at RAF Abingdon.
- Photo of 853 in SOAF service, in two-tone camouflage; *The Hawker Hunter* (McLelland) p.207.
- 1988 The Hunters were due for eventual replacement by eight Tornado F.3s. for air defence of the Straits of Hormuz.
- 1990 Sultan of Oman Air Force (SOAF) renamed Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) by Royal Decree. The fin flash then changed to a blue background.
- 23 Oct 93 Final flight, duration one hour five minutes, from Thumrait to Seeb; total flying hours 4130.55.
- Nov 93 Last Royal Air Force of Oman Hunters finally retired and distributed to various installations and airfields as gate guards.
- 1994 853 in use for ground instructional role with the Royal Air Force of Oman Trade Training Institute at Seeb (The RAFO's main base co-located at Muscat International Airport), and remained serviceable; latterly in store there.

- 1995-2000 Between 1995 and 2000, Hunter 853 was painted in National colours for display as part of the Sultanate's National Day Celebrations held on 18 November each year. The painting was completed at the RAFO Trade Training Institute (TTI) at Seeb.
- 6 Sep 03 Delivered to RAF Brize Norton by RAF C-17 aircraft following presentation to the RAF Museum by Air Vice Marshal (RAFO) Yahya bin Rasheed Al-Juma on behalf of the Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said al Said and refurbishment into the overall SOAF grey display colour scheme at Thumrait. No engine fitted. The fin flash is the current style worn by RAFO and not the style in use during XF426's career.
- 14 Oct 03 Delivered by road to RAFM by RAF ARTF. Photos following assembly – Flypast December 2003 p.15; Aeroplane January 2004 p.6; Wingspan International 20 p.12; Wrecks and Relics 19th and 21st Editions; Best of Breed (Walpole) p.207.
- 4 Oct 2010 Moved round to front of Museum for plinthed display, being raised and mounted the following day. Photo as displayed – Flypast December 2010 p.9.
- This is only complete example of this variant displayed in the UK, although the nose of one is fitted to F.6A 'XG168' at the City of Norwich Aviation Museum at Norwich Airport, and there is also the composite FR.10 'XJ714' (Complex composite of WT684, XF383, XM126, XG226, PH-NLH and ET-272) with the East Midlands Aeropark (ex Long Marston).

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON
(with details also kindly provided by David J. Griffin)

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