

Taylorcraft -Auster Mk1 -LB312 (G-AHXE)



The first Airborne Observation Post (AOP) Squadron (Sqn) No. 651, was formed at Old Sarum Salisbury on 1st August 1941. It was still part of the Royal Air Force (RAF) at the time but all of the pilots, drivers and signallers came from the [Royal Artillery](#). The RAF supplied the Adjutant, Engineer Officer and technicians. 651 Sqn is therefore the premier [Army Air Corps](#) Sqn.

The Sqn's first aircraft were an assortment of Taylorcraft Plus Cs and Ds, three Piper Cubs and a Stinson Voyager. Later that year the Sqn was re-equipped with a version of the Plus D which was manufactured by Taylorcraft in Britain and renamed the Auster 1.

On the 11th of August 1941, twelve months after formation, the Sqn moved to a satellite field at Kildale Dumfries. It was to here on 24th September 1942, that the Historic Army Aircraft Flight (HAAF) Auster Mk1, LB312, was delivered. At this remote Scottish airfield, she joined 'C' flight and was flown by Major Warburton Croix-de-Guerre and Major Neathercote, who was to succeed Major Bazeley as Commanding Officer of the Sqn. Unfortunately, LB312's career with 651 was cut short on 2nd October 1942 when it was damaged tipping onto its nose during a landing. It was later transported to Auster at Rearsby for repair.

653 Sqn was the next operator of LB312 from 31st December 1942 until 24th April 1943, when she was allotted to 43 Operational Training Unit (OUT) at Old Sarum where she served as a trainer for AOP courses 5 to 23 until 6th October 1944. After a period with 3 Tactical Exercise Unit (TEU) at Aston Down, LB312 spent 10 months with 234 Sqn. In 1946 she was 'demobbed', and acquired the civil registration G-AHXE. The aircraft changed hands many times between various flying clubs and private owners, but all were based in the south of England. In 2021 LB312 made the short flight from its base at Netheravon to Middle Wallop to join the HAAF fleet.

- **Construction Number:** 171.
- **Army Role-** Two-seat Airborne Observation Post (AOP).
- **Engine Manufacturer and Model:** Blackburn Cirrus Minor I (90hp) - 4 cylinder inverted.
- **Span:** 36' (11m) Length: 22'10" (7m)
- **Speed:** Cruise 80mph, Max 119mph.
- **Ceiling:** 13500ft
- **Range:** 230 miles (2.45hrs) with 10 gals
- **All Up Weight:** 1400lbs (635kg)

AIRCRAFT HISTORICAL TIMELINE - 1942 - Built at Taylorcraft, Rearsby Leicestershire

24/9/1942 - To 651 Sqn at a satellite field at Kidsdale (12 miles south of Wigtown), Dumfries, Scotland.

23/10/1942 – Cat B (FA) when Capt P.J.Wells RA undershot a landing at Kidsdale, struck a boundary fence wire which caused the a/c to tip onto its nose. (RAF Form 1180).

30/10/1942 - To 63 Maintenance Unit (MU), Carlisle and Struck Off Charge (SOC)-(RAF Form 78).

9/11/1942 - 63MU transported the damaged aircraft to Rearsby. Repairs completed and awaiting collection on 19/12/1942. 31/12/1942 – To 653 Sqn Peshurst. 24/4/1943 - To 43 OTU Old Sarum when 653 reequipped with Auster MkIII.

1/8/1944 - Declared Cat B but reason/cause not given on Form 78. Usually (Flying accident FA) or (Ground accident GA). The aircraft must have been transported to Rearsby for repairs which had been completed by 30-9-44 when it was air tested by G.Derbyshire (info from pilot's log book).

6/10/1944 – To 3 TEU Aston Down, The TEU acted as a Typhoon and Mustang conversion unit so, presumably, LB312 was used for comms? 12/4/1945 – To 234 Squadron, who operated Mustang IVs and disbanded 1/9/45. May 1945 – Peterhead. July 1945 – Dyce. July 1945 – Bentwaters. Aug 1945 – Hawkinge.

19/2/1946 – To Auster for major inspection /repair but order cancelled and 1/3/46 sent to 5 MU Kemble for Sale (RAF Form 78).

CIVIL REGISTERED AS G-AHXE (Certificate of Registration 10425)

9/7/1946 – Cinque Ports Flying Club Ltd Lympne. 24/7/1946 – To Hunting Flying Clubs Ltd Luton. Certificate of Airworthiness (CoA) Issued 18/10/1946. 1/10/1947 – Registered to Cinque Ports Flying Club Ltd Lympne.

1/4/1949 – Registered to Alexander Stuart MacKenzie-Law, Bexhill on 4/8/1949

7/12/1949 – Registered to Grp Cpt Richard Argus McMurtie, Southampton (RAF Cardington) 29/12/1949.

21/1/1952 - Registered to Geoffrey Melvill Jones, Hunxton Cambs 25/1/1952. CoA lapsed 29/8/1952

30/5/1956 – Registered to The Wiltshire School of Flying Ltd Thruxton 1/6/1956. CoA renewed 30/5/1956.

4/7/1958 – Registered to Herbert William Upshall, Ipswich on 11/7/1958

10/8/1959 – Registered to Frank Ernest Waller, Colchester (based Ipswich) on 18/8/1959.

12/3/1966 – Registered to Joseph Eric Stevenson, Colchester (based Ipswich) on 25/4/1966. CoA Lapsed 5/11/1972. 12/11/1972 – Damaged at Maltings farm, Lexden, Essex.

17/1/1973 – Registered to Antony Marven Sutton, Colchester (based at Luxton) on 1/2/1973. CoA 2/11/1973 based at Horsea Island, Portsmouth.

4/7/1974 – Registered to David John Pratt of International Auster Pilot Club, Brighton (based Shoreham) on 17/7/1974. CoA Lapsed 1/11/1974.

17/12/1974 – Registered to Jennifer Mary Charlton Potheary, Kirdford, Sussex (based Shoreham). Permit issued 14/7/1977 at Old Sarum on loan to Museum of Army Flying, painted as LB312. Permit lapsed 7/7/1982, renewed 13/8/1984 based at Shoreham.

June 1994 – Painted in D-Day Stripes as HH982, later reverted to LB312. Permit lapsed 26/5/1995. Stored at Bibberne Farm, Stalbridge. Permit renewed 15/7/1997 at Old Sarum, then Netheravon. Permit Lapsed 16/7/2008. Renewed 17/7/2010 Old Sarum. Permit Lapsed 16/7/2017 Reg. cancelled by CAA 22/1/2019.

2021 – Joined the Historic Army Aircraft Flight, Middle Wallop.