

Support & Communications Aircraft



Anson C.12 PH759 of Church Fenton Station Flight, July 1957. Overall silver scheme with white top, dark blue cheat line and station lettering. (Raymond Rayner)

The operation of RAF fighter squadrons involved the employment of additional aircraft to those that formed their main equipment, and the principal types used in these ancillary, but important, support duties during the first half of the 1950s are summarised below.

Squadrons

Squadrons needed dual-controlled aircraft for several purposes including the means to assess the flying abilities of newly-arrived pilots, and to periodically evaluate pilots' instrument flying capabilities and award them an appropriate instrument rating, as well as some lesser duties such as providing a platform to keep them in frequent flying practice, namely continuation flying, when the squadron's available primary aircraft were fully utilised on operational tasks.

Normally each operational squadron was issued with at least one such dual-controlled aircraft and because there were no 'twin stick' versions of some types of fighter, including the Spitfire, Tempest, Hornet, and (initially) the Vampire, other dual types had to be employed. Thus the Harvard T.2 trainer was used by Spitfire and Tempest squadrons and for a while by RAuxAF squadrons even after they had re-equipped with Meteor or Vampire jets. Hornet

and Mosquito NF.36 squadrons used the Mosquito T.3 trainer, and the Meteor T.7 was used not only by Meteor squadrons but those with Vampires or Venoms until the introduction of the dual-controlled Vampire T.11 from 1952 onwards, and even then the Meteor T.7 remained in use with the ten Auxiliary Vampire squadrons. The Vampire T.11 was later issued to Sabre, Swift, and Hunter squadrons for dual work because by then the T.11 had superseded the Meteor as the RAF's standard advanced trainer.

Because of its ubiquitous use with Meteor day fighter, fighter reconnaissance, and night fighter squadrons, a full listing of their T.7s is included at the end of this chapter.

Station Flights

Most RAF fighter stations had a Station Flight comprising a small number of aircraft kept for various tasks, mostly associated with communications, typically including Meteor T.7s and/or Vampire T.11s, Ansons or Oxfords, and sometimes a Chipmunk, Prentice, or Harvard. Additionally examples of the main fighter type(s) used by the resident operational squadrons would also be maintained by the Station Flight for the use of the Station Commander, the Wing Commander Flying (Wing Leader), and sometimes the senior Sector or Group officers if the airfield was near



Harvard T.2 FX432/R of 500 Sqn in full unit markings, with red individual letter on the engine cowling.



Harvard T.2 KF193 LA-C of 607 Sqn at Ouston. (Eric Taylor)