

Police Aviation - a chronology



Flight January 1914

1914 Miami, Florida, USA police use Curtiss F type seaplane to capture escapee on ship to Barbados. A New York City patrolman undertakes training in an attempt to become the first police pilot.

1915 In the USA the Coast Guard undertake trials with a Curtiss F-boat.

1916 San Francisco Police Dept operate a Martin Tractor Trainer on Aerial Patrolling.

1917 The US Coast Guard undertakes further trials with a Curtiss R6L. These last into the following year.

1918 New York City, USA police start to form a volunteer air section with Great War vintage USN flying boats. [November]

1919 New York air section receives its first flying boat aircraft [April]. The police in Atlantic City, Wyoming claim a first use of an aircraft spot for suspect in a car. The police in Dayton, Ohio claim the first instance of transportation of a prisoner

by air [May]. The recently defeated German and Austrian nations set up and use police air wings based on war surplus aircraft [August]

1920 In Brazil the police in Sao Paulo order nine Curtiss aircraft [January]. Using a range of aircraft loaned by the US Navy, the Coast Guard commences coastal patrols. The Allies veto the German and Austrian operations under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles in fear that it is a means of operating a clandestine military air arm. Following an arson attack in Chattanooga, Tennessee, an aircraft is used to carry dogs to search [November]. Unsubstantiated stories claim a first use of an aircraft on behalf of the Metropolitan Police at the Derby Day meeting, Epsom Racecourse [June]. Another further article in "The Times" has a similar effect to the first [October].

1921 A highly colourful news report in the Paris edition of the New York Herald claims that a aerial police chase occurred in Winnipeg, Canada [January]. The UK Government sanctions the use of war surplus airships R33 and R36 on police traffic duties as major public events [June and July]

1923 The police in London arrange for the use of a radio equipped Vickers Vulcan airliner to cover the traffic duties around the annual Derby Day Race meeting at Epsom [June].



'Aeroplane Monthly'

1924 The Epsom Race meeting traffic is watched over by police in a tethered observation balloon. [June].

1926 The US Coast Guard commences operations with its own aircraft fleet [October]. In England a Blackpool, Lancashire, police officer uses an airline to transport himself to collect a prisoner from the Isle of Man, a UK first.

1927 In Queensland, Australia, the police use an early QANTAS DH50 aircraft to transport a search team in a successful pursuit of criminals [December].

1928 A Philadelphia Police patrolman is under training for flight duties [March]. An aircraft is used to support search efforts in Southern Manitoba, Canada [August].

1929 The Los Angeles Police create a part time unit using the aircraft of citizens, In New York City the eleven year old voluntary unit is replaced by the first known full time Air Service Division with its own aircraft [24 October].

1930 The New York ASD, employing full time officers, becomes operational with four aircraft [28 March]. Argentina reported using aircraft [October]. In the UK Marconi of Chelmsford continues trials with early facsimile [FAX] system equipment. A demonstration aircraft overflying Croydon successfully transmitted a clear image to Chelmsford [18 September].

1931 Panama set up police air unit. A small aircraft manufacturer, Redwing Aircraft, approaches Scotland Yard proposing the formation of a flying club for police. Although initially rejected, this matter re-emerges periodically over the next six years.

1932 In Australia, the New South Wales police use a Moth aircraft on an unsuccessful crime search.

The London police renew flying over the traffic jamming the roads approaching the annual Derby Day at Epsom. On this occasion they try the use of a Cierva Autogyro, probably the first use of any rotary wing type on police duties in the world [June]. The police in Leicestershire employ a Moth aircraft in chasing and capturing suspects fleeing from a burglary, the first such crime search related event in the UK [18 June]. The Royal Air Force [RAF] supplies a 2 Squadron Atlas aircraft to spot traffic flows for the Metropolitan Police near the annual Hendon Air Show.

1933 The Metropolitan Police use another autogyro at the Derby Races [May]. The RAF supplies an aircraft for the Hendon air display [June]. The Surrey Constabulary uses a hired Puss Moth aircraft to undertake road patrol trials. Later a Moth aircraft is used in a similar role over traffic approaching the Ascot

Race meeting [14 June]. The definitive Cierva C30 is demonstrated to police [November].

1934 In England Liverpool City and Southport police forces undertake training in aeronautics at Speke [February onwards]. Metropolitan continues use of the autogyro with the introduction of the C30 model to the Derby Day duties [June]. Leicester use a Fox Moth for Marconi R/T trials [July]. It is claimed that PC Joseph Lock of the Glamorgan Constabulary is the first operational UK police officer pilot at a "Means Test March". Extended autogyro trials in London result in the aircraft being kept with 24 Squadron at Hendon [August].

1935 France undertakes brief experiments with autogyro aircraft. In a series of highly publicised events, the Nazi regime in Germany commences the incorporation of some police air units into a new Luftwaffe. In Scotland the police in Glasgow are reported to have used an autogyro at a football international [April]. The Metropolitan Police use another autogyro over the Cup Final at Wembley Stadium. [April] Leicester Air Safety Day is a means whereby police can be introduced to aircraft and air legislation [May]. The volunteer air section of the Reigate Borough police force is created [August]



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1937

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1936 The Royal Canadian Mounted Police operate an aircraft trial using a de Havilland DH90 Dragon aircraft. In England the Metropolitan Police use the Cierva Autogyro at the Cup Final [G-ACUT] and another, that assigned to the Reigate Borough unit, for operations over the Derby Day traffic [June]. The Metropolitan Police hold an air safety day at Heston.

1937 Following the aircraft trial in the previous year, the RCMP forms an air support unit and purchases four Dragon aircraft.

1938 The RCMP take delivery of its first float equipped aircraft, a Noordyn Norseman. Faced with a chronic lack of finance and elderly aircraft, New York City disbands their air support unit. The Austrian police air unit is incorporated by the Nazi German regime. The Lancashire constabulary uses a Leopard Moth to undertake traffic and security duty with the King and Queen on a Royal Visit [May].

1939 New York City reforms its air support unit after a cash injection [July].



New York City

The police in Philadelphia loan a Kellett KD-1 autogyro to undertake traffic control flights during the Army-Navy games. In the UK police flying is reduced to the undertaking of Home Security flights to check on blackout measures across sections of England. Flights over London [9th and 11th. November] and Liverpool [10th. November]

1943 The US Coast Guard trial helicopters.

1946 The police in New South Wales, Australia, introduce a war surplus Avro Anson trainer to operations. In England the Norfolk Constabulary use a Sikorsky S-51 helicopter in a manhunt for a gang. The aircraft goes on to a body search in south London for the Metropolitan Police. Lancashire Constabulary uses a military Auster to cover traffic at the first post-war Grand National Race Meeting [March].

1947 On June 15 a Westland Helicopters operated Sikorsky S51 was flown on the first known police fugitive search over Norfolk in England. The pilot on that first mission was Alan Bristow, later famous for formin Bristow Helicopters. First known operational use of a helicopter to fight a forest fire took place in California [5th. August]

1948 The Czech Government pass on a war surplus Avia VR-3 helicopter to the police for use. The vintage type only survived in use for a year. The New York City Police introduce the first efficient helicopter, a Bell 47D, to police operations. The formation of the Kenya Police Reserve Air Wing. The Falkland Islands Government Air Service [FIGAS] commences operations with an Auster aircraft available for the use of all official bodies on the islands.

1949 In England Auster aircraft demonstrate the Tannoy version of a compact airborne public address [later Skyshout] system. Lancashire Constabulary uses a Miles Gemini to cover traffic at the Grand National Race Meeting [March]. Aircraft use continues each year at this venue; the same aircraft is also used at the re-opening of the Blackpool Illuminations [September].

1950 The NSW police in Australia withdraw its Anson aircraft without replacement [31st. August].

1953 French Gendarmerie undertakes trials with Hiller helicopters. The Siamese [later Thai] Border Police acquire a fleet of Hiller helicopters.

1954 In South Africa the first policemen to fly and locate a criminal from the air used a Tiger Moth [February]. Lancashire Constabulary uses an Army Bristol Sycamore helicopter to cover traffic at the Grand National Race Meeting. This one-off helicopter use is the first pre-planned operational use of the helicopter in the UK [March].

1955 The police in Austria purchase a number of light aircraft to reform a police air unit. The Federal Border Guard in Germany forms a helicopter unit. The French Gendarmerie forms a helicopter unit with law enforcement duties. All UK police forces are obliged to start up use of Civil Defence War Duties Air Observer courses making use of a combination of University Air Squadrons and the Army Air Corps. The Home Office sign a contract with British European Airways Helicopters to provide long-term helicopter support to police in the Civil Defence role [August].

1956 Pye Television of Cambridge and Bristol Aircraft demonstrate a miniature heli-tele equipment to the military and police at Bristol and Cambridge [January and September]. Lancashire Constabulary uses a Civil Defence helicopter to cover traffic at the Grand National Race Meeting [March]. Civil Defence helicopters visit a number of police services to undertake CD and police duty trials. The units were Cheshire, Glamorgan, Liverpool, Metropolitan, Nottingham, Southampton, Stafford, West Riding, Worcestershire [May and June].

Buckinghamshire start using a hired DH Hornet aircraft to cover traffic at major events.

1957 The Metropolitan Police start regular traffic reporting flying using three Auster light aircraft operating from Denham, Croydon and Stapleford.



[IPAR file](#)

1958 The Government in Hong Kong takes delivery of the first of two Westland Widgeon helicopters for police and other duties.

1959 The Japan National Police Agency commence use of helicopters for investigation, rescue and surveillance.

1963 The police in Spain start using Agusta-Bell helicopters on traffic control duties [August]. Jamaica Police AW formed [July]

1964 Sweden form police air support unit. In England Lancashire, Cheshire and Staffordshire co-operate on a motorway policing trial using an Agusta-Bell 47J helicopter over the M6 motorway [March-June].

1965 The Bahrain State Police form an air wing with helicopters

1966 In the light of the 1965 Watts Rioting, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept., co-operates with the Hughes helicopter manufacturer to launch a helicopter patrol programme over the Lakewood district called "Operation Sky Knight" [March]

1967 The Tokyo Fire Department Aviation Team is formed using a Sud Alouette III [April] In a UK first, Lancashire Constabulary hire two [Brantly] helicopters on the same day to cover traffic attending a number of football

matches in the county [January]. UK police, including Essex, Hampshire Kent, Surrey, Thames Valley, Wiltshire and Metropolitan, are loaned three or four military helicopters in a series of aid to the civil power trials affecting a number of police forces [March to August]. A further trial, Aerial Peeler I, is launched in London [November and December].



John Bamford

1968 The Police in Uganda take delivery of the Westland Scout. Continuing the Aerial Peeler series, UK police are loaned three to four military helicopters and fixed wing types in a series of aid to the civil power trials affecting a number of police forces in England, Scotland and Wales [January - August]. Special Branch oversees similar operations designed to protect water supplies from terrorism in the Welsh border regions.

1970 The Metropolitan Police [London] inaugurate its "Emergency" helicopter use scheme with an area search looking for missing children in North East London. The force continues and evolves helicopter use from this point on. [April]

1972 450 people are lifted to safety from the roof of a 31 storey Andreus Building in Sao Paulo, Brazil [February] Malta forms its Police AW [July]

1973 After the blaze was detected by a passing civil helicopter on traffic patrol, 500 people were rescued from the roof of the 40 storey high Avianca Building in Bogota, Colombia. In a further incident in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 100 were rescued from the 25-storey Joelma Building. Following these fires the Brazilian Government decreed that in future new building's should have roofs strong enough to support helicopters.

1974 The Middle East state of Qatar form a police air unit with dedicated

Gazelle helicopters to replace a pair of Westland Whirlwind's used on security [November]. An engineer working for Westinghouse in Canada, J Noxon Leavitt bought the rights to the WESSCAM sensor turret and left to set up a new company ISTECH [Inertial Stabilisation Technology] Ltd., based itself in Hamilton, Ontario to develop it. One change was to alter the equipment name to WESSCAM. In an associated move the British Army commence the development of "heli-tele" for use in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

1976 The air section of the Royal Oman Police, constituted in 1975, forms operationally. Sudan forms a Police Air Wing [July].



Bell Helicopter Textron

1978 Qatar Police Westland Lynx enters service. In the west of England Devon & Cornwall have £10,000 budget to cover summer weekends with helicopter. The first full use of a fixed system of the Marconi 'Heli-Tele' by civil police is carried using an Alouette G-AWAP over the West London Notting Hill Carnival [August].

1979 Portland, Oregon, USA based FLIR Systems Inc [FSI] first developed a commercial TI system as a hand held unit. This equipment was used by the California Dept. of Forestry to image forest fires. They soon mounted the hand held unit in a pod on a plane, effectively pre-empting the first Series 1000 [August]. To the west of London the Thames Valley Police undertake a 6-week trial in support of anti-CND operations around Greenham Common USAF Base. Hampshire Police commence fixed wing operations.

1980 A user on the Pacific Northwest of the USA used a TI unit on a fixed wing single engine aircraft. Among other things it was used to image the Mount St. Helen's volcano eruption. To achieve the necessary coolness to the image sensor they had to pour liquid nitrogen into the system while airborne. The first police owned aircraft in Britain is a Bell 222 delivered to the Metropolitan Police in London.

1981 The first FSI TI system was sold into law enforcement; the purchaser was the Texas Dept. of Law Enforcement. The first Series 1000 unit, a simple unit offering pan and tilt, was produced in 1981 and entered service with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Dept in California.

1982 US Park Police JetRanger rescues survivors from the Potomac River air crash [January]. UK: During the visit of the Pope to the UK a number of forces hire air cover. Warwickshire and Greater Manchester share the services of Helicopter Hire's BO105 and Alouette to provide daylight and TI "Heli-Tele" coverage backed up by a BBC "Good Year" airship. Strathclyde operate a Gazelle [May-June].

1988 Jordan creates Police Air Wing.

1990 Cyprus Police ASU formed [June].

1992 The Belgian Gendarmerie/Rijkswacht is taken out of the military service and becomes a civil police force [January].



Collier CSO FL

1994 As part of the "Peace Dividend" associated with the break up of the Warsaw Pact, the US Government announces a large programme of defence aircraft disposal to government agencies, many go to law enforcement groups.

1995 A failure of Japanese emergency services to react to the January 17, earthquake in Kobe results in a major shake-up in helicopter resources. The earthquake was at a magnitude of 7.2 and killed over 6,000 as 270,000 building's crumbled. Palestine Police formed [May]. Greece forms civil police ASU.

1997 The police in Eire form their first ASU with a PBN Defender 4000 and Eurocopter AS355N operated by the army [July/August].



G Hossli

1998 PACE [Police Aviation Conference Europe] formed. Norway trial an AS350.