LIGHT AIRCRAFT
IN KOREA

The Work of the Liaison and Air O.P. Flights
with the British Commonwealth Division

IT is not generally realized that, since the latter part of 1951, British light aircraft have been carrying out important duties in Korea, both during the fighting and since. The units concerned are No. 1913 Light Liaison Flight, R.A.F., and No. 1903 Independent Air Observation Post Flight, R.A.F. These flights, which are equipped with Austers, are based on an airstrip which was constructed for them by Canadian Army Engineers prior to their arrival in Korea.

No. 1913 Light Liaison Flight, commanded by Capt. H. R. H. F. Irwin, D.F.C., was formed at Middle Wallop, near Andover; after training in Wales, it arrived in Korea in October 1951. The flight is equipped with Mk 6 and 7 Austers flown by officers seconded to the Glider Pilot Regiment, and by sergeant pilots of that regiment. The rest of the personnel is made up of R.A.F. men, who maintain and service the aircraft, and of Army M.T. drivers, wireless operators, etc.

A light liaison flight has three main tasks—(1) short-range forward-area communication flying; (2) casualty-evacuation; and (3) air-despatch letter service duties. Subsidiary roles are reconnaissance and light supply dropping. The Austers, having a carrying capacity for only one passenger in addition to the pilot, are restricted in some of their tasks—principally in casualty evacuation—but are admirable machines otherwise. The light liaison flight are somewhat envious of their American counterpart in Korea, who use the D.H.C. Beaver Mk 1 for liaison work. The Beaver can carry five passengers in addition to the pilot, or it can be adapted to carry two stretchers and one attendant.

During the fighting the light liaison flight made a dawn sortie and reconnaissance flight every day. Under the present truce conditions the unit provides a transport service to all United Nations airstrips in Korea, utilizing a duration of three hours (safe) and a speed of 80 kt.

In passing, an excellent example of the value of light supply dropping in war was shown when Sgt. J. W. Hutchings, D.F.M., dropped Mae Wests to a stranded patrol in a flooded forward area. For this action, Sgt. Hutchings, who is no longer in Korea, was mentioned in dispatches.

No. 1903 Independent Air Observation Post Flight is at present commanded by Maj. C. J. B. Jarrett, M.C., D.F.C., Royal Artillery. Its history is unusually interesting. It was originally one of the flights of No. 656 Air O.P. Squadron, which was formed at Bury St. Edmunds in January 1943, and saw service in India, Burma, Java and then in Malaya where it operated against the bandits for 18 months. The unit moved to Hong Kong after the Amethyst incident in June 1948 and then became an independent flight. On formation of the First Commonwealth Division Artillery in June 1951 the flight was posted to Korea.

The pilots of the Mk 6 Austers are officers of the Royal Artillery, and include one from the Royal Australian Artillery and one from the Royal Canadian Artillery. The non-fighting staff is composed of R.A.F. and Army personnel, the latter being members of the Royal Artillery.

The task of an Air O.P. flight in war is to provide the “eyes”