

**Date of Auction: 19th September 2013**

**Sold for £43,000**

**Estimate: £15,000 - £20,000**

*Sold by Order of the Recipient's Direct Descendants*

*'Only those with an adventurous turn of mind would have wished to be on that flight. With extra tankage the Otter had a range, in still air, of 1,600 miles. From South Ice to Scott Base on the Ross Sea was 1,450 miles. It is true that a landing at the Pole would have been possible - if the weather was suitable - but once past there the outlook would have been bleak if a forced landing was necessary ... the experience, to put it mildly, would have been unpleasant.'*

*Polar Flight*, by Basil Clarke, refers.

*'As they circled the base, more American aircraft - Dakotas and Otters - came up to meet them and described exuberant circuits of welcome. The Otter went down, with the two American planes flying slightly ahead on either side to guide it in. Then, almost from ground level, whilst it triumphantly touched down, the escorting aircraft roared upwards to join their compatriots in the air - much to the chagrin of all the enthusiastic photographers now borne out of range!*

*After a flight of exactly eleven hours and 1,430 statute miles, our little single-engined aircraft had made it. As the party clambered stiffly out they were engulfed by a friendly crowd of Americans and New Zealanders, for everyone in McMurdo Sound was there to greet them. Ed Hillary, who had himself only just flown back from the Pole, led the congratulations, and there was a special welcome from John Claydon and Bill Cranfield, the two New Zealand pilots, who could perhaps best appreciate the problems of their flight.'*

Sir Vivian Fuchs' describes the triumphant arrival of Squadron Leader John Lewis after his record breaking trans-Antarctic flight in January 1958 (*Antarctic Adventure* refers).

**The well-documented and excessively rare post-war A.F.C. and record polar flight Bar group of eight awarded to Group Captain J. H. Lewis, Royal Air Force, a Battle of Britain veteran who lent valuable service as Senior Pilot of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition under Sir Vivian Fuchs in 1957-58 and made the first ever Antarctic crossing by a single-engined aircraft - achievements permanently commemorated by the subsequent naming of the Lewis Chain on the west side of Gordon Glacier**

AIR FORCE CROSS, E.II.R., with Second Award Bar, the reverse of the Cross officially dated '1954' and the reverse of the Bar officially dated '1958', with its *Royal Mint* case of issue; 1939-45 STAR, clasp, Battle of Britain; AIR CREW EUROPE STAR; AFRICA STAR, clasp, North Africa 1942-43; DEFENCE AND WAR MEDALS 1939-45; GENERAL SERVICE 1918-62, 1 clasp, Palestine 1945-48, M.I.D. oak leaf (Fit. Lt. J. H. Lewis, R.A.F.); POLAR MEDAL 1904, silver, 1 clasp, Antarctic 1957-58 (S./Leader John Harding Lewis, A.F.C.), with its *Royal Mint* case of issue, mounted as worn, together with ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'S MEDAL FOR THE TRANS-ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1955-58, bronze, NEW YORK

EXPLORER'S CLUB MEMBERSHIP MEDAL, gilt metal, the reverse inscribed, 'Sqn. Ldr. J. H. Lewis, R.A.F.', and FRENCH MILITARY MISSION OF LIAISON, POTSDAM MEDAL, bronze, the reverse inscribed, 'Gp. Cpt. J. H. Lewis, 1970-72', *generally very fine or better (11)* £15000-20000

#### Footnote

A.F.C. *London Gazette* 10 June 1954.

Bar to A.F.C. *London Gazette* 12 June 1958.

John Harding Lewis, who was born in May 1922, was educated at Warwick School, and enlisted in the Royal Air Force as an Aircraftman in February 1940.

#### *Night fighter - the Battle of Britain and beyond*

Qualifying as an Observer on 1 October 1940, following an appointment in No. 604 Squadron at Middle Wallop, he was advanced to Sergeant and posted to No. 25 Squadron, a Blenheim unit operating out of Martlesham Heath, on the same date, with whom he flew two sorties before the end of the Battle of Britain. Shortly thereafter, the Squadron was re-equipped with Beaufighters, and Lewis completed several more sorties before the year's end.

Having then teamed up with a New Zealander, Pilot Officer Michael Herrick, D.F.C., in the new year, he flew another 30 or so sorties in the period leading up to August 1941, among them a combat with a Ju. 88 on the night of 7-8 April 1941, the latter being claimed as damaged, and another inconclusive dogfight with an He. III on the night of 17 May. He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer.

Herrick having moved to pastures new, Lewis himself was posted to No. 1451 Flight at Hunsdon in November 1941, where he teamed up with Squadron Leader Watson and flew numerous searchlight co-operation missions in American Havocs, an unenviable experience even though the arrival of this night fighter variant of the Boston had originally been greeted with some optimism. However, as described by Peter Townsend in *Duel in the Dark*, it did not live up to expectations, the replacement of the nose compartment with heavy radar equipment and a dozen machine-guns causing the aircraft to be slow and tricky to handle, while the later Turbinlite version with a searchlight fitted in place of the nose compartment made an excellent target for enemy gunners. Moreover, as Townsend wrote: 'The tips of the propeller blades whirled round within a few inches of the pilot's ears. Climbing into an aeroplane cockpit was one thing; getting out - in a hurry - was quite another problem. I did not fancy the prospect of baling out of a Havoc.'

One imagines, therefore, it was with some relief that Lewis discovered he was to be posted to No. 255 Squadron - a Beaufighter unit - in April 1942, where he teamed up with Squadron Leader Eliot, following which the unit was ordered to North Africa. Here, then, the commencement of further operational flying, particularly in January 1943, when Eliot and Lewis completed a flurry of night and dawn patrols - including the pursuit of two enemy aircraft in the Bone area on the 9th, a pursuit curtailed by heavy flak ('Very close' according to Lewis' flying log book).

Ordered home in July 1943, he attended a Navigation Leader's Course and made a successful application for pilot training. Duly qualifying out in Canada, and having gained advancement to Flight Lieutenant, he returned to the U.K. in March 1945 and served as an Instructor.

#### *Active service in Palestine - A.F.C.*

Granted a permanent commission after the War, Lewis joined Transport Command, in which capacity he led the Levant Communications Flight in Palestine up until the evacuation in 1948, a period in which he flew many V.I.Ps, among them King Abdullah of Jordan and Glubb Pasha.

Having then served as a Flying Instructor at Cranwell, he was seconded to the Falkland Islands Government in 1949, where he helped set up the Government Air Service - and met Vivian Fuchs for the first time, the latter being on the strength of the Islands' Dependencies Survey.

Advanced to Squadron Leader, he was awarded the A.F.C. for his services as a Squadron Commander at the Central Flying School at Cranwell in 1951-54, and was serving at the M.O.D. when selected to lead the R.A.F. party accompanying the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition under Fuchs and his deputy Sir Edmund Hillary.

### *Polar Pilot*

As the expedition's senior pilot, Lewis was responsible for the purchase of suitable aircraft and spares from Canada and New Zealand, and the selection of the final Air Support Party prior to accompanying the advance party of eight men to Shackleton Base in the *Theron* in November 1955.

And soon after Fuchs departed in the *Theron*, the forward party were given a harsh introduction reminder to the dangers of life in Antarctica. Noel Barber, a journalist who accompanied the expedition, takes up the story in *White Desert*:

'When Fuchs sailed away, what a moment that must have been for the eight men against the ice! They set about building a temporary shelter by reassembling the crate of a Sno-Cat as their living room, while using four double-skinned tents for sleeping, two to a tent. Once the Sno-Cat room was up, the party started to erect the wall sections of their main hut. Then another blizzard struck this featureless extremity of the Weddell Sea ice shelf. The main hut or what was built of it vanished overnight under drifts of snow twenty feet deep. The Sno-Cat hut miraculously withstood the tempest, but then, as the men came out of their tents to see what they could save from the ruins, the sea ice broke up, and in one despairing moment the eight men saw almost all their stores carried away to sea. All their coal, almost all their paraffin for heating, two huts, a tractor all vanished to sea. The eight men with winter already upon them were left with food, four tents, and the crate twenty feet by eight feet and seven feet high.

There was nothing that anybody could do for them, no hope of reaching them until the following November. The walls and the ceiling of the crate were covered with frost, the ventilators were blocked, and sometimes the air inside was so heavy with carbon dioxide that the men could not even light matches. They suffered from violent headaches and vomiting. The thermometer went down to minus 64 degrees, and the wind up to 75 knots. Blaidock estimated that the eight men shovelled more than 120 tons of snow by hand out of the one building they were able slowly to erect in these primitive conditions.'

Returning to the U.K. to make final arrangements for his part in the expedition in March 1956, Lewis was re-embarked for Shackleton Base in the *Magga Dan* in November 1956 and, after wintering at the base, lent valuable services in running the air survey, in addition to acting in close support of the expedition party on the ice in November 1957-March 1958, a period encompassing his trail-blazing single-engined aircraft crossing of the continent in January 1958. First, however, from Noel Barber's *White Desert*, a glimpse of the perilous nature of flying in such climes:

'As Dufek wrote in his book *Operation Deep Freeze*, the ice-covered continent of Antarctica has the worst flying weather in the world. Its dangers are obvious as obvious as the dangers of children crossing the street. There are always dangers in flying, but if you develop engine trouble in a big modern aircraft, you have three more motors to carry you along, you have alternative airfields for emergency landings, you have, above all, radio communication and modern aids like radar and weather data. Almost all this is lacking in polar flights and, above all, most of the aircraft are old ... And once aloft there was always the possibility (as I was to see for myself more than once) that both the point of departure and arrival would be completely hidden by whiteouts.

This question of Antarctic weather is the one factor which is most difficult to explain to people who cannot imagine its sudden bursts of savagery, nor its effect on machines (more than men) when the temperature is lower than minus fifty degrees.'

And furthermore:

'Already two Globemasters and two helicopters had crashed. So had an Otter, while the ancient Dakotas were being forced down on the ice regularly. In my three months in Antarctica, I was four

times involved in forced landings, though luckily with no dire results. Almost always it was the weather that let us down, switching at a moments notice from the meteorological forecast into storm.'

Notwithstanding such obvious dangers, and as described in *White Desert*, it was Lewis' aerial reconnaissance that assisted Fuch's in selecting his final route, a fuel depot having been established for him at South Ice Base. And the value of his presence was never more felt when two scientists became stranded in appalling weather in the same vicinity. *White Desert* takes up the story:

'A hut was established at South Ice, and it was decided to leave three men there to occupy it for the Antarctic winter. Here again near-disaster almost overtook the expedition before it had really started. Two of the men wintering at South Ice, Blaiklock and Stephenson, were lost for twelve days in a blizzard while doing scientific work in temperatures down to minus 52 degrees, near South Ice. For eleven days the weather was so bad that no flying was possible, but on the twelfth Fuchs flew out in a high wind with Lewis and, ten miles from South Ice, in a sudden miraculous break in the blizzard, discovered the two men. The plane managed to land near the men and picked them up. They were suffering from frostbite, and their rations had almost gone. The Otter plane flew on to South Ice and landed, according to Dr. Fuchs, 'in high drift, visibility of 66 yards, surface invisible'. Fuchs flew back to Shackleton and the three scientists were left at South Ice until October, while Fuchs and his colleagues at Shackleton prepared for the winter, overhauling gear, sledges, and vehicles for the following Antarctic summer.'

#### *Record flight - first attempt*

*White Desert* continues:

'As Hillary moved forward [to the South Pole], another drama was being enacted, one which, because of the more dramatic dash by Hillary, never really received the public praise which was its due. This was the flight from South Ice to Scott Base by Squadron Leader John Lewis, in a single-engined Otter aircraft, a remarkable achievement.

The Otter, with Lewis as its top-hatted [actually bowler hatted] pilot, was Fuchs support plane at South Ice, and once Fuchs was past South Ice, and safely on the way to the Pole, there was no point in leaving this light plane behind. It was agreed, therefore, that Lewis should try to make Scott Base. This was a great flight, for the Otter was not heavily enough powered to land at the Pole altitude and ever hope to take off again. John Lewis had to go the whole way alone in steadily worsening weather as the winter approached.

On December 30 [1957], as Hillary reported his latest position, with the added information, 'The weather is still fine but the cloud is increasing and temperatures are much colder', John Lewis called us up. With Fuchs now between South Ice and the Pole, he felt he could fly on. His radio could not possibly call Scott Base, so we laid on a meteorological report for him that covered him from the Pole to Scott. The weather at the Pole was fair, not perfect as I saw it so often, but good enough for flying. Lewis would not land, but he would fly overhead and we would talk to him on the radio.

This historic flight doomed to failure on the first attempt started at half past ten in the morning (coming from the other side of Antarctica, Lewis was flying in daytime, and so would have the same benefits from the sun as Hillary had by moving at night). At first all went well. The tiny aircraft made excellent progress on his flight of 1,280 air miles from South Ice to Scott; while two Otter aircraft attached to McMurdo planned to go out and meet him on the Ross Ice Shelf and escort him to base. But by one o'clock, he was in serious trouble. By 2 p.m., when he should have passed the Pole, the aircraft was building up rim ice in thick cloud which was unbroken to 15,000 feet. The machine began to lose height.

Pitifully, everywhere else along his track the weather was fine, with only scattered cloud and no turbulence or ice, and fine weather down the Beardmore to the Ross Ice Shelf. But suddenly the capricious weather at the South Pole had closed in, and the Otter could not make the added height to get above the clouds heavy with ice. At 2 p.m. John Lewis decided to turn back to South Ice. He landed there at half past five in the evening.

This had an unforeseen consequence, one that utterly bewildered Admiral Dufek and his senior officers, so used to the careful preparations and abundant supplies with which all American sorties were planned. By making this abortive flight, Lewis had used up seven hours' worth of aviation fuel. When he returned to South Ice, he then discovered he didn't have enough fuel at the Depot to make a fresh attempt at the flight. There was extra fuel at Shackleton, but Lewis could not fly to Shackleton to fetch it, because the load would be so heavy. He would have had to make several trips merely to build up sufficient stock at South Ice to try again. It seemed crazy, as Dufek said, to leave such a small store of fuel at South Ice. However, the Americans helped, and willingly agreed to ferry some fuel and drop it at South Ice for Lewis, who was to make the attempt, this time successfully, later on.'

#### *Record Flight - second A.F.C.*

*White Desert* continues:

'During the unfortunate differences of opinion [between Fuchs and Hillary], there was one bright spot, for John Lewis, of the R.A.F., finally managed to get his Otter plane to Scott Base. He had, as I have recounted, tried once before but had been forced to return to South Ice owing to bad weather. Now he achieved his ambition, a remarkable one, unhappily almost unnoticed during the flurry of undiplomatic exchanges between the better-known characters of the expedition. It was the first single-engined aircraft to cross the Antarctic continent.

While John was waiting at South Ice in bad weather for the Americans to fly in fuel, there was one small hut almost covered with snow. He and his crew of three, Flight Lieutenant Gordon Haslop, a New Zealander, and Sergeants Peter Weston and Ellis Williams of Britain, had to live in the hut for a week. The gasoline arrived. The Americans flew in five loads of fuel from Ellsworth Base in a Dakota. Then Lewis had to sit out the same whiteouts that were slowing up Bunny Fuchs on the trail.

On January 6, the weather cleared, and at 11.52 a.m. the party of four set off from South Ice. Two hours later, they dipped their wings over Dr. Fuchs, on the trail below. They saw the South Pole Station, though ice crystals formed a bad haze at 4.28 p.m., and flew directly over the station. This time the weather was good all the way. Lewis told me that though there was cloud over the Pole plateau, he was always able to get above it, and the leg down the Beardmore Glacier was made in wonderful weather, with the winds helping the tiny single-engined aircraft all the way home. He landed at Scott Base at 10.49 p.m. in vivid sunlight, having taken 10 hours 57 minutes for the 1,250 miles air distance from South Ice. His remarkable flight received almost no public acclaim, but as *The Times* said, 'It was a brave journey; and it stands among the many brave journeys which now interlace Antarctica.'

He was awarded the A.F.C. and Polar Medal, the latter distinction being presented to him at the same investiture at which Vivian Fuchs received his knighthood.

#### *The latter days*

Advanced to Wing Commander in January 1960, he was appointed to the command of No. 511 Squadron in the following year, a long-range Transport Command unit, in which capacity he undertook another notable polar flight in a Britannia September 1962 - in a period of 36 hours, his aircraft passed over the North Pole twice.

Having been promoted to Group Captain, he served as a Senior Personnel Officer in the Far East in 1965-66 and his final appointment, prior to being placed on the Retired List in 1972, was as Deputy Chief of the British Commanders-in-Chief Mission to the C.-in-C. Russian Forces in East Germany.

Lewis, who afterwards worked for British Aerospace and 'enriched so many lives by his sense of humour, sensitivity, mischief, love of nature and of life itself', died in February 1990.

**TO BE SOLD WITH THE RECIPIENT'S FLYING LOG BOOKS AND AN IMPORTANT ARCHIVE OF ANTARCTIC INTEREST, INCLUDING:**

(i) The recipient's Flying Log Books (6), comprising R.A.F. Observer's and Air Gunner's (Form 1767) Type, covering the period October 1940 to December 1943, with opening endorsement to 'With 604,

Middle Wallop, June, July, August, September 1940' - thus 67.45 hours by day and 24.15 hours by night, carried forward; Royal Canadian Air Force Pilot's Flying Log Book, covering the period December 1943 to February 1948; R.A.F. Pilot's Flying Log Book (Form 414) Type, covering the period March 1948 to December 1953; R.A.F. Pilot's Flying Log Book (Form 414) Type, covering the period May 1954 to August 1962, and another similar, covering the period July 1956 to March 1957 - thus assorted flights in Otter aircraft in the Falklands and South Antarctica; and R.A.F. Pilot's Flying Log Book (Form 414) Type, covering the period June 1962 to February 1970.

(ii) A file The recipient's Navigation Flight Plans and Gyro Log for his record flight on 6 January 1958, and his hand written account of the flight, 10pp.; together with a series of typewritten reports on the Otter aircraft and a letter regarding radio equipment.

(iii) A file containing a selection of specially made Antarctic plotting charts (16), as created and used by Lewis in 1955-58, together with a quantity of related maps.

(iv) A file containing a mass of official messages and cables, the whole relating to the Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-58, and undoubtedly some of them of importance in terms of the expedition's history.

(v) The recipient's diary for the period November 1956 to May 1958, a somewhat sporadic and modest record, but nonetheless a hitherto unseen and unpublished one, his entry for the record flight on 6 January 1958 noting that his mother was jumped by the B.B.C. and assorted journalists, having to 'push the *Daily Mail* out the door.'

(vi) Crossing of the Antarctic Circle Certificate, dated 27 December 1956, aboard the *Magga Dan*.

(vii) A file containing what would appear to be the recipient's notes and illustrations for his official report to the Air Ministry on returning from Antarctica, with many interesting inserts.

(viii) A file and scrapbook containing a mass of newspaper cuttings relevant to the Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-58, together with telegrams and expedition newsletters.

(ix) A file containing a mass of photographs relevant to the Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-58 (at least 100 images), many of the larger format examples with fire damage to outer edges, but nonetheless a fascinating archive.

(x) The recipient's copy of *The English Hymnal*, the front cover with gilt inscription, 'The Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-58', and the title page with ink inscription 'Sqn. Ldr. John Lewis, R.A.F., Presented to the Expedition by Mr. Quenten Riley, Oct. 1955'.

(xi) A file containing a series of invitations and programmes, the majority relating to the Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-58, including a menu for dinner held at Brown's Hotel in London on 2 November 1955, sponsored by B.P., with several autographs, and a related programme; and invitations to three further dinners held in honour of the participants at Skinner's Hall on 15 May 1958, with related programme, at Lancaster House on 19 May 1958, and at Mansion House by the Lord Mayor on 22 May.

(xii) Files of documentation appertaining to the Antarctic Club, The British Antarctic Survey Club, including copies of assorted Newsletters, and The Arctic Club - the latter in connection with his appearance as a guest Speaker at Cambridge in December 1982.

(xiii) The recipient's copy of *Antarctic Adventure*, by Sir Vivian Fuchs, together with *Polar Flight*, by Basil Clarke, and *Men and Wings*, by "Sandy" Powell, with presentation inscription to Lewis; and *The Antarctic Pilot* (Fourth Edition, 1974), with related correspondence and typescript of Lewis' input inserted in front cover.

(xiv) A file containing information relevant to the recipient's time with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, including his journal, large format, with handwritten entries from the period September 1949 to May 1950.

(xv) A file entitled 'personal correspondence', with a wide ranging content, including letters from Sir Vivian Fuchs through to his official R.A.F. letter of retirement.

**TOGETHER WITH:**

(i) Miscellaneous items from the recipient's time in Antarctica, including his pocket knife, a wooden box with weights, and a relatively weathered White Ensign.

(ii) Assorted embroidered uniform "Wings" (5), and his Group Captain's epaulettes.

(iii) A wall plaque commemorating the 'British Commanders-in-Chief Mission to the Soviet Forces in Germany'.