

BRISTOL BULLDOG (A12)

RAAF Serial No	Disposal or Otherwise	Date
A12-1	Converted to Instructional No 1, 15/4/40 - later converted to components	
-2	Involved in major crash at Richmond 22/4/38 - approved for airframe as write off and engine to spare parts	28-9-38
-3	Converted to Instructional No 2, 15/4/40 - later converted to components	
-4	Crashed No 1 F13, Point Cook 15/5/30 - approved for airframe as write off and engine to spare parts	18-6-30
-5	Force landed at Templestowe 3/7/35 - approved for conversion to components	1-10-35
-6	Converted to Instructional No 3, 15/4/40 - later converted to components	
-7	Crashed at Mt Wallace, near Bacchus Marsh 14/12/36 No 1 (F/B) Squadron. Approved for conversion to components	19-1-37
-8	Crashed into sea near Point Cook No 21 (City of Melbourne) Squadron. Write off.	23-3-37

Acknowledge:- Historical Section, Department of Air, CANBERRA ACT

FSGT Gardiner;

My apologies - evidently NO Status Cards were kept for "First" Series aircraft, and, even though Bulldogs were "A12" in the First and Second Series, RAAF Historical does not have Cards. Hope the above and attached are useful.

David Wilson

25 August 1986.

A12 Bristol Bulldog General information on the Bulldogs including details of training, forced landing on Nullabor Plain and spin recovery procedures. Author's name not clear.

BRISTOL BULLDOGS IN THE RAAF.

During the years between 1921 and 1929, the only single seat aircraft in use were three Sopwith Pups and some SE5a aircraft. The decision to replace them was made in 1928 and the aircraft selected was the Bristol Bulldog Mk.II with the unsupercharged Mercury engine.

The first of these aircraft arrived toward the end of 1929 and a new unit, Fighter Squadron, was formed, under the command of Squadron Leader J.H. Summers, a former RFC pilot, who had had much experience on Camel aircraft in WWI. As far as my memory will go, the other pilots were, F/Lt F. Scherger, who became the Chief of RAAF, Flying Officers W. Rae, C. Henry, R. Simms and several others whose names elude me.

Apart from training in S.S. fighter tactics, a lot of time was spent in demonstrations at pageants around Australia and in cooperation with the Army during their annual exercises. Another activity was introduced when the Meteorological Department asked for a daily flight to 16000 feet to record wet and dry temperatures every two thousand feet, cloud formations, etc. This introduced some interesting aspects of the skills of the pilots. At that time the only blind flying instruments were a bubble and compass. Some months later a bank and turn indicator was installed, but it proved so inaccurate as to be dangerous. In about 1932 the Reid and Sigrist bank and turn replaced it and once the pilot got used to its peculiarities, it was used with confidence. No radio was carried as the sets available at that time were quite useless. Oxygen was not considered necessary. It was amazing that in the nine years from 1930 to 1939, the flights were done on about 330 days of each year and during this time there was only one crash. The pilot, F/O E. Read, got caught out in low cloud and in flying down a valley, hit a tree and remained trapped in the wreck for 32 hours, with two broken legs and a badly cut face. He scraped rain drops off the fabric to quench his thirst and kept notes of his ordeal on a pad. Believe it or not, he was flying again within a year and during the war was awarded the AFC.

The Bulldogs were considered almost sacrosanct and a pilot had to be of a BI instructor rating before being allowed to pilot one, but toward the end of their time the novelty had worn off and any pilot who wanted to try, could have a go. In spite of this there were only two fatal crashes. In the first one, the pilot dived into the water while doing gunnery and the second was caused by overconfidence, when the pilot misjudged his height when doing low aerobatics. Another aircraft was lost when the pilot attempted an outside loop. Instead of starting from a stalled position, ~~it becoming inverted as quickly as possible,~~ he positioned the nose down & was almost a terminal velocity, when he tried to push ~~the nose up from~~
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nose up from the inverted position, the wings collapsed. He managed to bail out safely, so becoming the first RAAF member of the Caterpillar Club.

As part of the training, several long cross country flights took place annually. Point Cook to Perth involved refuelling every two hours and as petrol stocks in those days were held in four gallon tins and had to be poured through a chamois filter, it does not require much imagination to understand the problems of the pilot. All pilots were trained in minor maintenance, ie, cleaning plugs, oil filters etc. Members of other Air Forces do not realise the problems we of the RAAF had in organising cross country flights. I recall on one flight, I rang the postmaster at an intermediate refuelling stop to enquire the state of the weather and was told it was "OK". We ran into heavy rain and low cloud, but managed to locate the paddock and on registering a rather forceful complaint as to the inaccuracy of the forecast, we were told that as he knew where the paddock was and as we had used it before, he couldn't see what our problem was.

Operating from country paddocks usually produced clouds of dust and the local fuel suppliers seemed to have no regard for the damage that dust could do to an engine. To quote an incident which happened to myself. Three of us were going to Perth and on the way, we put on a show at Moonta operating in a cloud of red dust. Next refuelling was at Whyalla in similar conditions and then on to Ceduna, again in a red cloud. Next stop was Cook, a small siding on the Trans-Continental railway. About half way, I noticed that the oil pressure was slowly dropping, but considerable latitude was allowed in the Mercury engine. However, the temperature did not rise, but when the pressure had dropped to 15 pounds, I began to worry, so I cut the corner and headed directly for the rail, which was only about 20 miles away, whereas Cook was some 60 miles. Just as I reached the line, I got a whiff of very hot metal and the engine seized solid. I was flying at 5000 feet and saw an old dry salt pan close to the line. Here I should say that the Nullabor Plain is covered with limestone rocks and small clumps of salt bush, none of which would be conducive to a smooth landing. So I made a very careful approach onto the salt pan and finished the landing on the very edge, which fortunately had a slight rising edge. I removed the cowl and took out the oil filter, which was so clogged with dust that it was almost sucked flat. Then it hit me as to why the temperature had not risen, as no oil was passing over the temperature bulb, it did not register until the last few seconds.

An hour or so later, one of the Hawker Demons who were accompanying us came looking for me and landed on the strip which I had cleared for it. I tied the Bulldog down and returned to Cook in the Demon. I rang Point Cook that night, told them the story and another Bulldog was on the way the next day, also a new engine and fitter were on the next train. I left for Perth in the replacement aircraft and the Bulldog was pushed over to the line by a gang of enthusiastic railway fitters and brought to Cook, where the new engine was installed.

The serviceability of the Bulldogs was remarkable. I know of only two other forced landings, one caused by a broken connecting rod and the other by ice forming on the breather pipe for the fuel tanks.

About this time the Army developed a craze for night displays, so naturally we got roped in to add to the excitement. Wing tip flares were installed and the Vickers guns adjusted to fire blank cartridges. At the appropriate time, the aircraft would be picked up by searchlights and we would dive into the arena, madly firing the guns. Naturally one of the Bulldogs would be shot down, so a flare would be ignited and the Bulldog would disappear in flames(?), saving the other flare for landing back at Point Cook.

When HRH the Duke of Gloucester came to Australia to greet the winner of the air race, England to Australia, three of us were detailed to provide an air escort and to participate in pageants in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. It was a very busy time as every time HRH appeared we had to be in the air to escort his retinue.

So much for the odd story of the Bulldog. It was a delight to fly, easy to land and in fact could be landed in a shorter run than a Gipsy Moth, a sideslipping turn into wind, a bit of a wag tail to wash off any surplus speed and it would sit down on three points. Cross winds of up to twenty miles per hour could be coped with easily. As a firing platform it was very stable. We did not have drogue targets at that time, but firing onto a ground target six feet square, an average of 75% hits was common. By the time WW2 broke out, the four remaining Bulldogs were relegated to the schools of technical training and used for teaching skills in metal rigging. I had my last flight in a Bulldog on 3rd October 1938, making a total of 511 hours and felt as though I had lost an old friend and as a matter of interest, it was the same aircraft in which I had my first flight on 25 May 1931.

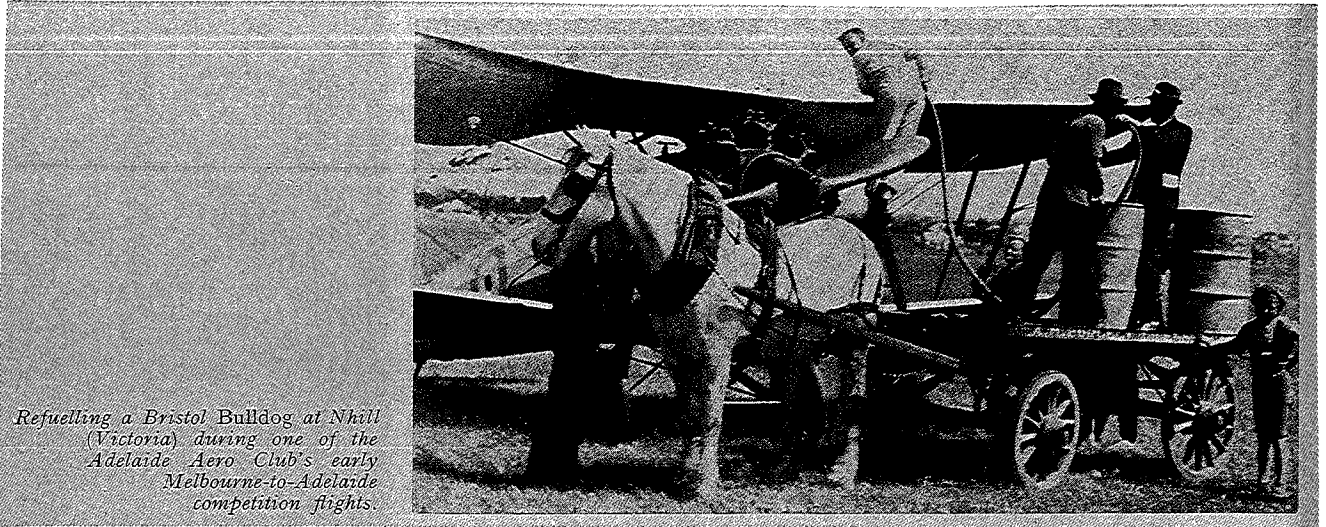
BULLDOGS

After having written the very brief story of the small part I played while the Bulldogs were in service with the RAAF, I realised that I had left out one rather important bit of information, ie, the problems in spin recovery.

The Bulldog was easy to put into a spin from either a straight stall or from misuse of controls. However, the recovery was quite different and for that matter, quite frightening, when compared with that of the other aircraft in service which I had flown.

Having entered the spin, which was sometimes flattish and sometimes would develop into a nose down position, with a high rate of rotation. In either case, when anti-spin action was taken, nothing would happen for probably three or more turns. Sometimes a burst of engine would speed up recovery, but no matter what the pilot did, it would take three or more turns to recover. All this was rather alarming after flying Wapitis, Moths of various types & Hawker Demons. I believe that several Dual Bulldogs were produced and I heard that in one case, it refused to recover from the spin and the crew were forced to abandon ship.

The problem was caused by the very short fuselage and small rudder and pilots were advised never to do more than two turns of a spin as the slow recovery was not so apparent in the early stages. Similar types like the Gladiator did not suffer from this slow recovery.



*Refuelling a Bristol Bulldog at Nhill
(Victoria) during one of the
Adelaide Aero Club's early
Melbourne-to-Adelaide
competition flights.*

THIS AGE OF OIL R 48 (1960)

A12' being refuelled by from horse-drawn cart at Nhill, undated