

History by Dennis McCaffrey

1960 – 2003

Dennis McCaffrey's Notes

In about May 1960 we had a meeting to find if there was enough interest to form a Gliding Club; about 12-13 turned up.

The Club was mainly made up of ex R.A.A.F. Pilots, Fitter 2E and Fitter 2A, as well as others.

To mention a few who come to mind:

Lindsay Richards, Spitfire Pilot, who was the instigator of the Club, created a lot of interest amongst the rest of us. He gained gliding experience one weekend at Kingaroy with Max Howland & Co. He was an excellent pilot and came back with enough experience to teach us.

Sam Johns, Lancaster Pilot also went to Kingaroy to gain experience and came back to join our initial instructors. Also an excellent Pilot with a lot of hours flying, Sam was shot down on one raid over Europe. I am not sure whether he was a P.O.W. or escaped.

Peter Paull, Lancaster Pilot, CO of a squadron; Peter chaired our original meeting to form a Gliding Club. Peter was a member of the Jondaryan Shire Council. He was also one of the Tug Pilots in the Tiger Moth days.

Jack Caisley, Mustang Pilot, saw service in the Desert, North Africa. Jack, who had a business at Lismore, was also one of our original instructors. He used to catch the Fokker, arrive at Oakey about 2:00pm-2:30pm, instruct for the weekend, and go back Monday - a very dedicated pilot.

Bert Kennett, power experience. Not sure whether he was in the R.A.A.F. He may have flown Wellingtons.

The Club was being formed so we decided to purchase a glider but as we had no money we decided to take out debentures. The cost of a short-wing Kookaburra was £1,327. Fortunately for us, the Lismore Club could not take up the money for a Kookaburra Mark 3, so we had the option to take it and we did.

Rex Teakle, Lindsay Richards and Murray Shannon headed south to Edmund Schneider's in Adelaide in Rex's big Pontiac to take delivery.

As we had an order in for a glider, we had to have a winch. Kingaroy had one so the same weekend Lindsay and Sam went up to Kingaroy for experience. Rex Teakle and Peter Walker also went up with paper, rulers and cameras to get some idea of how to construct a winch.

This winch was built in record time – Chevy motor fluid drive coupled to a drum with the cable on it. The only trouble was, when it changed ratio, it hesitated too long and ended up with quite a surge which was a bit scary for a while (we nearly got whiplash).

Winch made, glider sitting on trailer, nowhere to launch. We were offered a big paddock on Bell's property which we used from corner to corner. I was standing there looking on when Lindsay said to me "Hop in, let's try this thing out".

The first flight in Kookaburra GRL was 7 September 1960.

We operated in this paddock for two weekends. Also we had an application in for permission to operate on the Oakey Aerodrome, which we were granted on certain conditions. We were the first Gliding Club to be allowed access onto a registered aerodrome which had a service.

We were allowed half of the old army hut for our Clubhouse (which is our Bunkhouse now), was acquired for the price of moving. The centre section of our Clubhouse was the Terminal Building for Oakey Aerodrome.

As time went on, quite a few of us were going solo. Rex Teakle was first club trained to go solo followed by myself.

Single-seaters were our next step. Harry Schneider was producing a 13mt Arrow one piece wing. We put an order in for one. August 1963 - first Flight in ES59 GNH. Maurie Bradney and myself flew it at the Inverell Comps.

In the years of 1962 and 1963 our club agreed to train up to 6 (six) pupils to solo standard from Brisbane so they could start a club called "Brisbane Club". Its location was unknown at that time. Gatton was considered, as well as Toogoolawah and Beaudesert. The club finished up at Boonah. Al Thomas, A Gerber, Phil Wood, Brian Haseler, Fred Mitchell were some of the first members.

In the years of 1963 and 1964, a group of power pilots came down from Warwick for conversion to gliders so they could start a club at Massey Aerodrome, Warwick. The club was called Southern Downs Soaring Club. Jim Warner, Ted Stegal, Don Banks, John Best, I Watt were some of the first members there.

As our club was growing, one two-seater was not coping with growth; another two-seater was needed.

The word from down south was that ASW.K7 was very good - big and heavy to ground handle with a good performance, 27-1. We placed an order with Harry Schneider for £2,440, took delivery the first week in January 1966. It was packed in a big wooden box and delivered to Bellman hangar Oakey by Western Transport.

This aircraft was one of the best investments this club has ever made. After 32 years of great service it was bought for \$5,000 and sold for \$15,000. As I was C.F.I. at that time I had

the pleasure of test flying this lovely aircraft.

Twelve months later we purchased another single-seater - the M100 31.1. It was quite a good aircraft but not as good as the KA6.

In 1965 we had the choice of aerotow or winch with John Geddes Tiger Moth. Later on the club bought a Tiger Moth. In October 1970, the club took delivery of an ASW.15.

In 1972, a secondhand K7 GBI was purchased from Germany at a cost of \$3,700 including trailer.

After 12 (twelve) years of operations, had we purchased 6 (six) gliders plus 1 (one) tug.

In 1967 Army Aviation were relocating - to somewhere. As Reg Swartz was Minister of Aviation and Oakey was in his Electorate, guess where – Oakey. As we were not compatible with Army Aviation, so they said, we also had to relocate.

After many visits from Director General D.G.A., Mike Seymour, we would not give him a firm answer. He suggested Tipton wartime aerodrome or Pitsworth with plenty of help from his department, like hell, promises, promises!

A piece of land that was flat and not cultivated for enough length for a strip was very difficult to find. The club strip today is where I used to graze cattle. I offered it to the club to try and use. If it was satisfactory we were to come to some arrangement. Also we acquired 1½ acres from our neighbour, Jeff Lee, which has been since sold to Peter Taylor, and then we bought it from Peter.

Later on the club, looking for some security, wanted to buy a section of this area, so I sold 27 acres to the club: one of the few clubs in Australian to own its own land. Since then we have acquired a piece more, on the north-eastern side from Shane.

We had the two huts moved up from Oakey but had no hangar. Rigging and de-rigging every weekend got a bit of a workload, so we decided to take out an overdraft and build a hangar. With voluntary work we built up the site, quote from Norm Prouse for a 100' x 60' was \$6,700. Later on we sealed it with Colas. Now we have an extension on both sides which will house 9 (nine) more gliders.

We needed a workshop: all done voluntarily again. Con Weslin kindly donated 6 (six) I beams and we had to go to Brisbane to pick them up. Barry and two friends and myself had the loan of a Magna HiSet 1 Ton Utility. We were pulled up near the Esk turnoff by a Sergeant and female Constable, for crossing over from one lane to the other. They said we didn't use an indicator which carried an \$80 fine and for carrying 4 (four) people in the front. I told him we were doing the trip voluntarily for the club and he grunted and told us to be careful.

Some time in 1970 we purchase a K14 from John Moore, later on we sold it to the present owners, Ron Muir, Des Cramer and John Geddes. A very nice balanced glider with 31:1 glide

angle.

In 1972, the club purchased a second K7 GBI secondhand from Germany for either \$3,700 or \$3,900 with a trailer.

About 1970 to 1971 Hornets were the latest standard class. John Moore got the first one MR, which the club bought later from him. A few months later it took delivery of MK (\$10,800 Adelaide). I was the first in Australia to fly a 750K Triangle Standard Class. Also Shane won the Australian Nationals in this aircraft.

They were a very good easy aircraft to fly. The club bought AE Hornet and later purchased MV. The Grob 103, which we purchased from Peter Griffiths, for \$33,000 (I think) sometime in early 1980s.

Both K7s were sold off and replaced with the two Puchs. The Hornet was replaced with the LS7. Later the Astir Jeans was bought and now Ventus GH.

Over the years the club has been involved in buying and selling 18 (eighteen) aircraft.

Today we still retain 7 (seven) gliders plus 2 (two) tugs.

Dennis McCaffrey