

# **Beaufort Aircraft**

## **“An Unwanted Adventure”**

(5th November 1943)

A report written by:-

**Group Captain (Ret'd) Brian Walker DSO RAAF**

(At the time of the “Incident” described here-in the writer of this Report was Commanding Officer of No 5 OTU R.A.A.F. Station Bankstown NSW Australia)

# A Beaufort Incident

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While flying Beaufort A9-415 from Tocumwal to Bankstown on 5th November 1943 I sensed an irregular vibration in the control column when nearing the vicinity of Crookwell (NSW).

We were at about 8,000 feet above a light layer of scattered cumulus but seeing nothing to cause turbulence.

I called to one of the crew to check the tail plane as i suspected something may be working loose in the elevator control.

Almost before he could move, the control column began to rock back and forth quite violently, so I immediately reduced power and hauled back on the column with every ounce of strength I could muster.



The control column made a couple of more violent forward moves but then appeared to lock with a very heavy down force which was stable but I doubt whether I could have held it for any more than five minutes on my own as my bottom was off the seat through the strength exerted.

When the panic had subsided I realised the aircraft was fitted with dual controls so I called to Sgt Jaggs, a Wireless Air Observer who had applied for a flying course and informed him that” his Course was due to start forthwith” and got him into the empty co-Pilot’s seat. I then ordered all aboard to don parachutes.

With the help of Sgt Jaggs the situation was more manageable but it was still my intention to get the aircraft clear of the mountains, bail out the crew then roll the aircraft over and hope the heavy subsequent “nose-up” force would throw me out!

My Chief Ground Instructor, Flight Lieutenant Denis COWPER, who was on board then informed me that we had eleven passengers, including one, Pilot Officer POTTER, who had jumped aboard just prior to moving off the tarmac, and he did not have a parachute!

I remember the brief conversation with this young Gentleman:- “when did you come aboard POTTER”? “well sir”, said POTTER, “I asked Flight Lieutenant COWPER, and he said it would be alright, just before you moved off sir “.

“Well POTTER” I said, “you are going to look silly when we wave you good-bye”!

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POTTER was standing in a well just behind my right shoulder, a fair youth of no more than nineteen years but, I noticed a tear came from each eye after my last remark. At the same time my Chief Ground Instructor COWPER gave me a hard look and said:

“I think you can handle it sir”.

By now, it would be some ten minutes after the initial trouble - I had the speed back between 90 to 100 knots - power well reduced and the aircraft was descending about 100 to 200 feet per minute towards Bankstown. As the situation appeared stable as long as we kept that back pressure on the elevator it seemed reasonable to attempt a crash landing at Bankstown.

Of course there would be no gear or flaps as the pair of us could just hold the aircraft in the attitude described and it was reasoned that both gear and flaps could make the aircraft unstable again with subsequent even more nose-down trim. I did, just gently, feel the elevator trim wheel and it appeared locked, so I decided to leave it well as it was. Fear gives strength so I reasoned JAGGS and I could hold it long enough.

I remember saying to LACW PATTERSON, a loquacious orderly room W.A.A.A.F sitting behind within earshot “PATTERSON, I have never seen you so quiet “,and all I got was a sickly grin. She must have been extremely frightened. So was I, but far too busy to worry about it. Then I said to POTTER :

“we will have a go at a forced landing on Bankstown but if she lets go I’ll curse you all the way down”.

Well I do remember that approach on Bankstown. First I had to do up my own harness and had to yell and scream at JAGGS; “more back pressure”, as he tended to let the nose drop a trifle if I relaxed even for a moment as was necessary to arrange and tighten my own safety harness.

And now to that final approach.....!

I pointed the aircraft well to the North of where I knew the Bankstown aerodrome to lie and keeping the speed below about 100 knots, turned on final over Prospect reservoir just under 1000 feet and, with much more yelling at poor JAGGs, while taking even one hand off the column to adjust power, the pair of us managed to arrive at a couple of feet over the fence heading SE with fortunately no conflicting traffic.

To make sure I was as close to terrain as possible I waited till I could just feel the propellers starting to make contact then yelled for the last time: “Let her go” and the aircraft slid to rest on her belly. Both props came off but luckily did not penetrate the fuselage.

We all got out safely and I went immediately to the rear and as was suspected, found one elevator Trim Tab hanging loose, completely detached.

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From the start of the problem to the aircraft coming to rest would have been about 50 minutes - as far as I was concerned "50 minutes of concentrated fright"!! I then noticed that POTTER got out with a parachute harness on but Dennis COWPER was not wearing a harness. That man had some guts but he was a rugby Wallaby and some of them don't come any finer. He later said simply when queried:-

"I knew that you could handle it sir".

I can assure you that not until that aircraft came to rest, did the butterflies stop fluttering in my tummy!

I rang my Chief Flying Instructor, Squadron Leader Ross LITTLE, and told him of the accident. He offered to send another Beaufort to which I replied: "no way Ross, send a Beaufighter as they have an irreversible screwjack in the elevator trim, a much better and safer design"!

When I returned to my Unit the next day I was met by Corporal Blake who had signed the Beaufort out on the previous day and was a worried man.

He had a complete Beaufort elevator trim system laid out on a bench and invited me to inspect it for security which I did and certainly looked OK. He then went to the fork-end which would attach to the tab and spun it between his palms and the cable came adrift at the "Briese" control.

From memory it appeared this unit could look secure but in the very odd case, it could come undone with disastrous results. It was later modified but immediately made subject to special daily inspection.

So what do you think caused more than quite a number of Beauforts to dive unexpectedly into the ground?

I won't go into the politics surrounding this problem, but suffice it to state that Wing Commander Charles LEARMONTH, who was a friend, went into the water off the Western Australian coast some time after my episode. He was, at the time, leading a formation of three aircraft and the pilot of one of the formation, No 2 aircraft observed an elevator trim tab become loose and flap up and down causing the aircraft to dive, eventually into the sea with Charles exclaiming to the effect that something had gone amiss and he could not hold it. Of course, his aircraft was not fitted with dual controls. How lucky, or unlucky, can you be?

Signed:-

Brian R Walker DSO

Group Captain (Ret'd) RAAF

P.S. For the Record I believe that I am not only the first, but the only, pilot to have brought a Beaufort with this problem back and survived with all my crew.