

TALE OF A TIGER

By Ron Stamm

Here's one for you ex RAAF people.

During the 70's and 80's I was part owner of a DH82 Tiger Moth A17-624 alias VH-TIG.

This aircraft actually served in 2 Air Forces during WW2 , the Netherlands East Indies Air Force and the RAAF. This machine was built at Bankstown in 1941 [one of 1085] and was one of 62 sent to Batavia [now Djarkata]Indonesia a few months later. It was registered with the NEI Air Force as PK_VVT and used as a trainer.

However as the Japanese drew near it was dismantled and shipped back to Australia where it was registered by the RAAF as A17-624 and used as a trainer at No 1 EFTS Parafield , 11EFTS Benalla ,No 1 Air Depot Laverton , No 5 Air Depot Forest Hill , No 3 Air Observers School Port Pirie , No 6 Service Flying Training School Mallala finally being discharged from service and put into storage in 1946 and held there until 1948 where it was sold for one hundred and fifty pounds. After having a few owners it was finally purchased by us and flown to Goulburn in the late 70's.

It was sold again in the mid 80's where it was completely dismantled and restored , and is now hangared in Goulburn.

The DH82a Tiger Moth is a biplane and is of wooden construction with the exception of the fuselage which is tubular steel. The wings and fuselage have an outer covering of Cotton fabric now Dacron which is doped to shrink it then painted. It is a basic trainer which lacked all the luxuries of other aircraft at the time e.g. No Flaps , No Brakes , No Radio , No Self Starter , No Dir Gyro. The only Nav aid was a Magnetic Compass , No weather protection. The method of communicating between student and instructor was by means of a Gosport Tube tin cans in the ear pieces of a leather helmet which are fed by plastic tubing plugged into the dash board – talking is done through a funnel shaped cup on the Dash.

It is a two seater aircraft with dual controls; joystick and rudder controls in both cockpits, instruments and other other controls are also duplicated.

Steering on the ground is by means of a tailskid with stops on it causing the rudder to be moved when the pedals are used.

Seating is of the bucket type [aluminium] so that a parachute which is used as a cushion can be worn . The safety harness is of the Sutton type with quick release buckle in the middle.

Following are some figures on the De Havilland Tiger Moth.

Number Built 8280 Entry into Service 1932
Power Plant Gypsy Major 130HP Height 8' 9
Wingspan 29'4
Weight Empty 506kg
Range 302m 486km Max Speed 104MPH
Service Ceiling 13600ft Armament : Could be adapted to carry 8x20lb bombs on wing racks

Flying the Tiger Moth :

Starting the Tiger Moth is a complicated affair as there is no electrics . First the wheels are chocked then the fuel turned on from the gravity feed tank [standard motor fuel] and the throttle set to idle , magneto switches are off , then the following sequence is followed.

1. The carby is primed by use of a plunger. [same as your lawnmower]
2. The propeller is swung on four compression strokes [to suck the fuel in]
3. Magneto switches are then thumbed on and the prop given one pull on compression hopefully the engine will fire.

If the pilot is by himself then he must do all this on his own , but if there is somebody else to assist then he will be strapped in and all he has to do is flick the magneto switches on the call of 'contact ' and then wave " chocks away '

Taxiing is difficult because of the restricted vision forward due to the angle and length of the nose so the head must be turned from side to side.

Take off is achieved by placing the stick forward to raise the tail then at 55knots pulling the stick back to unstick then climb away. When the desired altitude is reached turns may be made by moving the stick L or R and balancing the turns with rudder. [A turn is balanced when when the Turn and Bank Indicator has the bubble in the centre] . A constant eye on the bubble eliminates any slipping or skidding Modern aircraft do not require as much rudder input as the DH82 to balance the turn. All types of arial work can be done with this aeroplane as it is fully aerobatic.

The aircraft in the air is very responsive and will do whatever is required of it, rolls ,steep turns , loops etc. For example a spin can be entered by pulling back on the stick to stall the aircraft then using L or R rudder to induce the spin. Recovery is using opposite rudder to the rotation of the spin then pulling out of the subsequent dive. It also can be flown at low speeds at reduced power due to the opening of the wing slats which lower the stall speed.

Landing is very straightforward but because of the absence of flaps excess height may be lost by side slipping . This is achieved by crossing the controls eg. L aileron with R rudder this causes the aircraft to approach the runway slightly sideways. The approach on finals is at 55 knots and when close to the ground you feel for touchdown. The tail must be kept up for as long as possible for a " wheeler landing " as control is easier and vision forward over the nose acceptable.

Protection against the cold whilst flying this open cockpit aircraft is achieved by the wearing of overalls and jacket , leather helmet , goggles , scarf and leather gloves. Canadian versions however had a sliding canopy as an option.

This historical machine A17-624 or VH-TIG was an excellent aircraft to fly.

