THE HISTORY OF BEAUFORT GLIDING CLUB INCORPORATED

BY

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On the 8th October 1942 thirty five employees of the Beaufort Division of the Department of Aircraft Production (D.A.P.) at it's facility at Fishermean's Bend agreed to form a Glider Club to be called the Beaufort Glider Club.

Within one month of hectic committee and general meetings membership had increased to one hundred and three members having paid a joining fee of three guineas, in current language, six dollars and thirty cents.

The R.A.A.F. liaison officer at the D.A.P. was an initial instigator for formation of a gliding club and undertook the design of a two-seater glider for construction by the club. At the time he held the rank of Flight Sergeant, by the end of November 1942 he held the rank of Flight Lieutenant and by January 1943 was Squadron Leader Henderson.

Because of the number of club members it was decided that four two-seater gliders should be constructed, however as construction commenced membership declined rapidly.

It may now seem unusual that during war time employees of what was considered to be an essential industry were permitted and even encouraged to build in their own time and in the Government Factory, aircraft for their own pleasure and benefit.

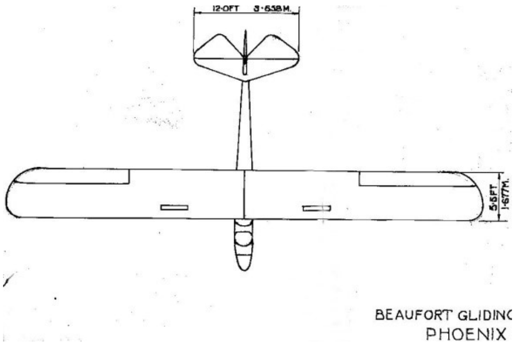
By April 1943 optimistic forecasts that at least one aircraft would be ready for flight in the Spring (no year mentioned). By May 1943 it was decided to concentrate on completing one glider as by this time it was beginning to appear that this would be all the current membership could operate.

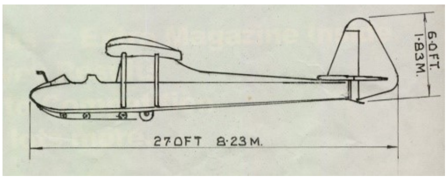
Work progressed through 1944 and by July the major components were in a fairly advanced stage at which time Squadron Leader Henderson was posted to Sydney. This led to the discovery that there were no drawings or details of how to finish construction and further that Squadron Leader Henderson was not an Engineer as had been generally assumed but an Industrial Chemist and that his aircraft design knowledge had been largely gleaned from a pre-war book entitled " How to build and fly sailplanes" by C.H. Latimer Needham.

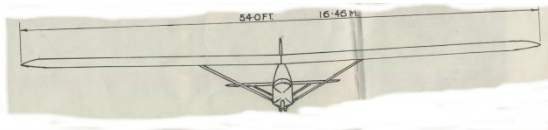
The new R.A.A.F. Liaison Officer Squadron Leader Frank Rowe undertook to assist as much as possible with design but admitted that his pre war Air Force experience was on aircraft maintenance side.

In August 1944 a sixteen year old aeromodeller was invited to see a real glider being build and had the temerity to ask if a weighing had been carried out as in his opinion it seemed the aircraft centre of gravity would be to far aft. This caused some consternation such that at the next work session weighing apparatus was on hand and in due course the prediction was confirmed. However the intervening week had not been wasted in idleness; it had been estimated that the wing centre section weight would be about three times the weight for area of the expected glider's wing loading. By eliminating the centre section and adopting a saw horse type support structure the four post bird cage structure originally proposed in which the instructor would be imprisoned, could be eliminated. The wing could then be positioned six inches further aft(150mm for those of a later generation) then by placing both occupants forward of the wings the centre of gravity could be located in the required position.

With the instructor no longer located under the wing it would be feasible to fit a wheeled undercarriage as it was considered it would otherwise require a team of super humans to move the glider on the ground on its planned skid, and for good measure increase the span of each aileron by four feet (1.2m).







Surprisingly all these suggestions plus some further ones were accepted and adopted which resulted in the final configuration which was successfully test flown on 8th December 1946.

The initial test flight was carried out with Geoff Richardson as pilot and John Wallis as ballast. This flight consisted of a winch launch to about 150 feet altitude and taking hands off and allowing the glider to glide back to the ground at which it was declared “she’s right”. The second flight was with Bill Iggulden as pilot and John Wallis again as ballast; this was a winch launch to about 1000 feet followed by a sedate circuit and landing.

The third flight was with Jack Iggulden as pilot and Doug Lyon as ballast and was winch launched to about 1000 feet and as Jack indicated “We are over water” (and there was a small pond below) so we will try a stall turn”, which was carried out with flair and then followed by a gentle circuit and landing.

This proved to be the final flight for the day as on the next launch attempt the winch cable broke as the knots in the cable had been abraded excessively on the Fisherman’s Bend Runway.

The next outing a few weeks later was at Dromana operating off two adjoining paddocks just south of Arthurs Seat. This was the site of the Victorian Motorless Flight Group’s first club excursion where the Beaufort Club was invited to join them. The first flight of the Beaufort two-seater was the continuation of the aborted fourth flight at Fisherman’s Bend with Jack Iggulden as pilot and Len Travers as front seat ballast.

As Jack headed out over Port Philip Bay Len felt he had a lot to learn as he thought there was no way they would make it back to land; he was almost correct.

Skimming over the sandy beach the glider impacted with the bank of a small creek which ran into the bay and fence post and a tea tree with the result of bent struts, two wing leading edge panels damaged, top longeron of the fuselage fractured in the rear cockpit area as well as slight damage to the tailplane leading edge.

Most members of the V.M.F.G. offered there sympathy as they were convinced Beaufort's first Christmas / New year's gliding was over but Beaufort Bod's were made of sterner stuff; several members were sent of back to Melbourne to collect tools and materials while the rest rigged up tarpaulins to make an open air workshop and by working night and day under the light of a kerosene pressure lamps had their aircraft flying again in forty eight hours.

After Dromana there was no flying for another twelve months as construction of a winch was undertaken and a search made for a site were gliding operations could be carried out . Eventually permission was gained to operate from Sir Richard Casey's private airfield at Berwick.

The winch was not completed until almost the end of the 1946/47 Christmas / New year holiday period so little flying was done but on Australia Day weekend the first flight encountered a thermal and despite Bill Iggulden's scepticism he was persuaded to give it a go. After a few turns about 300 feet height gain had been achieved before losing the thermal but on flying upwind a second thermal was encountered and cloudbase at just over 4000 feet was reached which was claimed as an Australian Two Seater Gliding Height Record.

After all the remarks which had been made such as the winch having greater chance of flying, and complete unreality that it could be soared it was considered that the Beaufort Two Seater had risen like a Phoenix from the ashes of all the scorn heaped on it and thereafter was called the "Phoenix".

On the same day as the above flight The Gliding Club of Victoria"s (GCV) "Merlin" was soared to a lesser height which was hoped to be claimed as a record but was pipped at the post.

On the following Australia Day weekend the Phoenix was soared to 4750 feet and on the same day the GCV's Merlin was soared to just over the 4050 feet of the previously claimed record. On the following Easter the Phoenix reached 7000 feet altitude in the only thermal encountered for the four days.

Initially flying was only carried out over long weekends as the glider had to be trailered from and to Melbourne until the V.M.F.G. acquired an old wooden farm building which was transported to Berwick airfield and converted into a hangar in which accommodation for Phoenix was generously offered and accepted.

In the meantime the Beaufort Building Club embarked on construction of a building incorporating a small bunk house but as post war shortages of all sorts of building materials and a similar shortage of finances among members sweat of brow had to serve as substitute for cash.

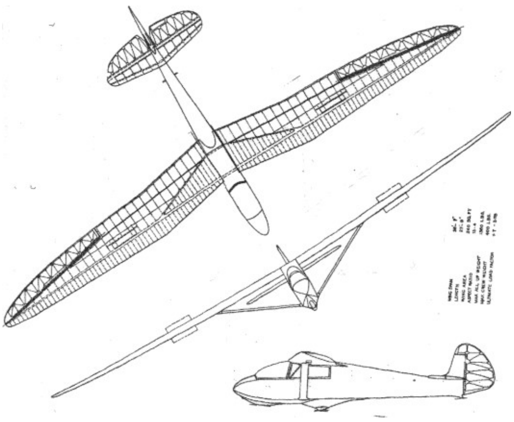
By the time most members had soloed it was decided a single seat glider of higher performance was required. There was nothing much available to fill the bill in the required performance or in an attainable price range. Of designs for which plans were available the

Schneider Grunau Baby 2 was considered to lack ruggedness and the Olympia a bit to advanced and complex so it was decided to design a glider to suit the requirements.

The basic design proposed by D. Lyon was accepted and some materials for manufacture of two gliders purchased, one for the club and one for D. Lyon but before design was complete or any construction commenced. The Phoenix was destroyed in an accident fatal to the front seat pilot which occurred on 4Th January 1951.

Whereas it would have been possible to rebuild Phoenix the extent of such a project and the known deficiencies of its design was such and the need for a two seat glider it was decided to adopt the aerodynamic design of the proposed single seater and modify it for a two seater.

This was the origin of Zephyrus but circumstances such as the influence of the Phoenix crash on some members, a lessening of enthusiasm for building, and matrimony resulted in the project dwindling to a near stop before picking up momentum.



Zephyrus was eventually completed and test flown on 9th November 1967 and as is said the rest is history.
Since then building has been limited to trailer construction and recently to hangar construction. The single seater glider project was not proceeded, it may be due to materials purchased were all used on Zephyrus, no other explanation for the lack of enthusiasm for the project is forthcoming.

Despite the tribulations the Club has survived for more than 59 years and with luck will reach it's 60th anniversary on 8th October 2002 making it one of the longest surviving Gliding Clubs in Australia behind the Gliding Club of Victoria and ahead of the Victorian Motorless Flight Group and Geelong Gliding Club.

Some might consider this a worthy achievement.