Service history and fate of each Bombay

Based on a list by Bruce Robertson for an article in the July 1964 issue of Air Pictorial magazine, updated with information from the Aviation Safety Network and other sources.

K3583 (prototype): Used extensively by Bristol Aeroplane Co. and the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment (A. & A.E.E.). Undercarriage collapsed when machine was taxiing to take-off near Chigwell after a forced landing on 4th February 1939. Airframe apparently stored for some years at Filton with the name “Josephine” on the nose.

L5808: To A. & A.E.E. late March 1939. Crashed on climbing test, 23rd August 1939 with 3 fatalities.

L5809: A. & A.E.E. for tests with modified elevators and trimmers in August 1939. Stored at Nos. 15 and 25 M.U.s. After short period in No. 271 Squadron, served in Middle East from March 1941. At on stage made an emergency landing in French Equatorial Africa and got bogged down. Crew rescued and the aircraft was later retrieved. Struck off charge in July 1944.

L5810: Built with dual pilot controls. It went for handling trials at the Central Flying School (C.F.S.), then to No. 216 Squadron in the Middle East. Served with 1 A.A.U. during April and May 1943, after which it was sent to BARU. It was written off in March 1944.

L5811: Built with dual pilot controls. Attached to No. 53 Squadron for army co-operation exercise, May 1939. Stored at No. 27 M.U. until flown out to No. 216 Squadron, December 1939. Shot down by German anti-aircraft fire on 23rd January 1942, at Msus, southeast of Benghazi. One fatality, the rest of the passengers and crew were taken prisoner, although many of them were badly wounded.

L5812: No. 24 M.U. Performance trials during 1939. Served in Middle East from May 1941 until struck off charge in January 1944.

L5813: Used for Army trooping trials at Odiham, June 1939. No. 27 M.U., No. 271 Squadron, May 1940. Crashed in France 11th May 1940, with the death of four of the twelve passengers.

L5814: No. 24 M.U., No. 271 Squadron, March 1940. Served in Middle East from April 1942 with 216 Squadron. Shot down and destroyed by German fighters on 7th August 1942 with the loss of 9 casualties being evacuated by stretcher and General Gott, newly appointed head of the 8th Army.

L5815: Bult with dual flying controls. No. 24 M.U. To No. 216 Squadron, September 1939. Hit escarpment while using searchlight to pick out road during night raid on Tobruk, 15th July 1940. Three crew members were killed and two were injured. Reports that this aircraft was on a supply run to Tobruk are erroneous, Tobruk was still under Italian control at the time.

L5816: Bult with dual flying controls. No. 24 Squadron, Then to No. 216 Squadron in the Middle East in October 1939. Missing from a raid on Benghazi, 19th October 1940, with the loss of the 5 crewmen.

L5817: No.24 M.U. September 1939; No. 10 F.T.S. December 1939.; Used by 271 Squadron from May 1940. It flew a load of barrage balloons to Le Havre on 27th May 1940. Crashed at Little Seabrook Farm, Ivinghoe, Bucks., in forced landing in poor visibility, 1st April 1941, after nearly 350 flying hours.

L5818: No. 10 F.T.S., ex-No. 24 M.U., September 1939. Scrapped after forced landing in fields during storm, five miles north-east of Stafford, 10th October 1939.

L5819: No. 24 M.U. Flown out to No. 216 Squadron, December 1939. Wrecked in forced landing at Alexandria after night raid on Tobruk. Both engines cut out short of the runway due to fuel starvation, 18th July 1940.

L5820: Flown to Middle East, ex-No. 24 M.U. in September 1939. Used by 216 Squadron then No 1 A.A.U from early in 1943. Destroyed in a storm at Bari in Italy on 11th February 1944.

L5821: Held in Nos. 27 and 24 M.U.s. to 216 Squadron in Middle East. Stalled and crashed on 17th December 1941 while on a training mission. Seven crewmen fatalities.

L5822: Held in Nos. 27 and 24 M.U.s. to 216 Squadron in Middle East. Crashed on approach to land at Heliopolis on 23rd September 1941. No report of casualties.

L5823: Held in Nos. 27 and 24 M.U.s. to 216 Squadron in Middle East. Swung on landing and crashed at Kano in Nigeria on 6th May 1941.

L5824: No. 24 M.U. Issued to No. 216 Squadron, November 1939. One of two Bombays (the other being L5835) badly damaged by German fighters just as they were coming in to land at a place called “Dier El Monas” on 24th July 1942. No casualties reported.

L5825: Bult with dual flying controls. No. 24 M.U. Issued to No. 216 Squadron, February 1940. Used by 1 A.A.U in July and August 1943. Passed on for use by the Iraq and Persia Communication Flights. Written off in Middle East on 28th July 1944.

L5826: No. 24 M.U. Served in No. 117 Squadron. Regarded as a “rogue” aircraft after a few unexplained losses of control. Stripped of engines and other equipment at Khartoum in Sudan. Airframe wrecked in a storm at Khartoum, 21st August1941.

L5827: No. 24 M.U. Served in Middle East from March 1941. In use by 1A.A.U. from February 1943 (the first Bombay used by 1 A.A.U.), it was damaged by a Spitfire Vb taxiing into it at San Francesco near Lentini in Sicily on 9th August 1943. But was repaired and returned to service. Returned to the RAF at El Aouina in Tunisia in April 1944 and “struck off charge” on 31st August 1944.

L5828: No. 24 M.U. No. 216 Squadron. Allocated to the Khartoum Communication Flight. Crashed at Dawala, twenty miles short of Kano in Nigeria, in bad weather, 20th November 1941. No casualties.

L5829: No. 24 M.U. Flown to Middle East where it crashed on 26th March 1941, but was repaired. Allocated to 1 A.A.U. sometime before June 1943. It carried on being used by 1 A.A.U. until being "struck off charge" in April 1944.

L5830: No. 24 M.U. No. 216 Squadron. Wrecked in take-off from Lagos when aircraft tipped on nose through a tyre-burst, 14th April 1941. Three of the five crewmen were killed.

L5831: Held in Nos. 23 and 27 M.U.s. Flown to Middle East, July 194. Used by 1A.A.U. from some time in 1943. Returned to the RAF at El Aouina in Tunisia in April 1944. Struck off charge on 31st August 1944.

L5832: Held in Nos. 23 and 27 M.U.s. No. 271 Squadron, April 1941. Flown to Middle East in May 1941. Used by the Khartoum Communication Flight. Damaged beyond repair while taxiing at Khartoum on 7th October 1942.

L5833: No. 23 M.U. No. 271 Squadron, March 1941. Flown to Middle East, June 1941. Used by 216 Squadron. Wrecked by enemy action, 25th September 1942 on the ground at Kufra Oasis in Southern Libya.

L5834: No. 23 M.U. Crashed in transit to Middle East by overshooting North Front, Gibraltar, 13th October 1941.

L5835: No. 23 M.U. Flown to Middle East in November 1941. Used by 216 Squadron. One of two Bombays (the other being L5824) badly damaged by German fighters just as they were coming into land at "Dier El Monas" on 24th July 1942. No casualties reported.

L5836: Held in Nos. 23 and 27 M.U.s. until modified by Bristol's for development work with a Ferry Training Unit, June 1942. Recorded as being on the strength of No 24 Squadron. No. 2 Squadron, September 1943. Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment, November 1942. Loaned to British Overseas Airways in August 1943 and scrapped soon afterwards.

L5837: No. 23 M.U. Lost in transit to the Middle East, a few minutes after take-off from Gibraltar, Engine failure caused it to crash into the sea Just off Gibraltar harbour. 6th July 1941. No report of casualties. The wreck is now a popular dive spot, although some sources claim the wreck is L5846, not L5837.

L5838: No. 23 M.U. Flown to Middle East September 1941. Wrecked while serving with No. 1 Australian Ambulance Unit (A.A.U.). Overran runway at Philippeville in Algeria on 27th July 1943. While most sources say it was written off after this accident, Bruce Robertson has it damaged beyond repair when a tyre burst on take off later that year, on 1st November.

L5839: No. 23 M.U. Flown to Middle East, September 1941 where it crashed on 18th August 1941, but repaired. Used by 1 A.A.U from some time in 1943. Aircraft repaired at San Francesco in September 1943. Carried on with 1 A.A.U until February 1944. Sources say it was struck off charge in April 1944.

L5840: No. 23 M.U. No. 271 Squadron, March 1941. Flown to Middle East, July 1941. Used by the Khartoum Communication Flight. Written off at Landing Ground 75 (LG75) South of Sidi Barrani in Egypt on 21st November 1941

L5841: No. 23 M.U. Flown to Middle East, June 1941. Crashed on service with No. 216 Squadron at Sedada when tyre burst causing undercarriage to collapse, 19th January 1943.

L5842: No. 23 M.U. Flown to Middle East early in 1941 and crashed on 27th May that year but carried on after repair. Used by 1AAU from early 1943, Returned to the RAF at El Aouina in Tunisia in April 1944. Struck off charge in August 1944.

L5843. Nos. 23 and 27 M.U.s. Flown to Middle East, August 1941. Used by 216 Squadron. Wrecked by enemy action, 25th September 1942 on the ground at Kufra Oasis in Southern Libya.

L5844: No. 23 M.U. Served in Middle East with No. 216 Squadron and No. 1 A.A.U. from early in 1943. One report say it was mistakenly damaged when targeted by "friendly fire" anti-aircraft fire when its red crosses were mistaken for German markings (this could be confusion with L5845). Written off after a tyre burst on take-off from San Francesco near Lentini in Sicily on 31st July 1943.

L5845: No. 23 M.U. Served in Middle East with No. 216 Squadron and Khartoum Communication Flight. Used by No. 1 A.A.U. from 29th June 1943. One source says it was damaged by "friendly" AA fire and returned to BARU for repair in July 1943 (this could be confusion with L5844). Struck off charge in April 1944.

L5846. Held in No. 23 M.U. While being ferried out to the Middle East, it crashed into sea due to fuel starvation close to Gibraltar, 26th November 1941. No casualties. The site of the wreck seems to be confused with that of L5837.

L5847: No. 24 M.U. Flown to Middle East May 1941 for use by 216 Sqdn. The aircraft had the name "Bermondsey" painted on. Taking part in the first SAS operation on the night of 16th/17th November 1941 to drop parachutists behind enemy lines. During a storm, the aircraft got lost and landed in the desert at night. An Italian stumbled upon the aircraft by accident and was taken prisoner. The following morning it found that the aircraft was next to a German airfield. Taking off, it was pursued by German fighters and shot down near the coast. It appears that three of those on board were killed; the rest were taken prisoner.

L5848: No. 24 M.U. Left England for Middle East, 7th May 1940. Lost on operations, 14th July 1940 with the death of all 5 crew members. Reports that this aircraft was shot down by a Luftwaffe night-fighter when trying to resupply Tobruk are erroneous as there was no Luftwaffe presence in the Western Desert at that time and Tobruk was still under Italian control on that date (it wasn't captured by the British until January 1941). It was more likely that the aircraft was undertaking a nighttime bombing raid on Tobruk.

L5849: To No. 24 M.U. from production in April 1940. Flown to Middle East next month and lost on a night raid of Tobruk on 27th August 1940, with all 5 crew fatalities.

L5850: No. 24 M.U. Flown io Middle East, May 1940, and crashed near Tobruk in Libya on 21st June 1940. Of the 5 crewmen on board, 4 were killed and one was taken prisoner by the Italians.

L5851: No. 24 M.U. Attached to R.A.F. Station, Debden, May 1940 then delivered to No. 271 Squadron. On 13th May 1940, on a supply trip to France, entered spin and cargo was ejected before pilot recovered. Modified by Bristol Aeroplane Co. Returned to No. 24 M.U. for preparation for Middle East flight made in November 1941. Lost in November 1943.

L5852: No. 24 M.U. No. 271 Squadron, May 1940. Hit hill at East Dean, Surrey, 17th June 1940, all 5 crewmen aboard killed, all belonging to No 24 Squadron.

L5853: No. 24 M.U. No. 271 Squadron, May1940. Crashed into a hill in poor visibility shortly after take-off on the 29th May1940 in an attempt to take much-needed anti-tank ammunition to France.

L5854: No. 24 M.U., No. 271 Squadron, May 1940. No 15 O.T.U., October 1940. Written off after hitting tree during demonstration to ground forces in U.K., 31st March 1941. – Note that some sources list the accident as happening at Heliopolis in Egypt.

L5855: No. 24 M.U. Held at Tangmere for No. 271 Squadron, May 1940. No. 15 O.T.U. No. 216 Squadron, November 1940. Tasked with taking fuel to an aircraft force-landed in the desert, 160 miles south of Wadi Halfa, it hit a rock in landing and had to be abandoned, 22nd April 1941.

L5856: No. 24 M.U., Ringway, January 1941, Flown to Middle East, April 1941. Wrecked, 1st November 1943.

L5857: Last production aircraft. Delivered to No. 24 M.U., 1st June 1940. Flown to Middle East, February 1941. Used by 216 Squadron. Wrecked by enemy action, 25th September 1942 on the ground at Kufra Oasis in Southern Libya.

1AAU – No 1 Australian Ambulance Unit.

BARU – BOAC Aircraft Repair Unit, at Heliopolis, Egypt.

10 FTS – No 10 Flight Training School, Tern Hill, Shropshire UK.

23 MU – No 23 Maintenance Unit, Aldergrove, Northern Ireland.

24 MU – No 24 Maintenance Unit, Tern Hill, Shropshire UK.

27 MU – No 27 Maintenance Unit, Shawbury, Shropshire UK

24 Squadron – The “Metropolitan Transport Squadron” based at Hendon and Northolt on the outskirts of London.

271 Squadron – Transport squadron based at Doncaster in the UK. Operated Bombays alongside HP Harrows and some impressed civilian airliners.

216 Squadron – The main operator of Bombays, based at Heliopolis in Egypt.

117 Squadron – Based in Sudan. Operated Bombays alongside various impressed civilian airliners.

More info on the Bombay at https://www.dingeraviation.net/bristol/bombay.html