

Britain's Test Pilots

No. 9

CAPT. JOSEPH SUMMERS,
O.B.E.,

CHIEF TEST PILOT OF THE
AIRCRAFT SECTION OF VICKERS-
ARMSTRONGS LTD.



"Flight" photograph

FOR the number of years he has been flying, Summers (who rejoices in the affectionate but quite unjustified soubriquet of "Mutt") has spent an exceptional percentage as a test pilot. As a young man of 21 he was granted a short-service commission in the R.A.F. and learnt to fly on Avro 504s and Sopwith Snipes at No. 2 F.T.S., which was then stationed at Duxford. His training was interrupted by six months' hospital treatment for throat trouble, but he eventually passed out at Digby in 1924 and was posted to No. 29 Fighter Squadron, which was then being reformed after being disbanded at the close of the 1914-18 war.

No. 29 had Snipes and later Gloster Grebes. This was the squadron which carried as its distinguishing marking the XXX on its fuselages and wings to denote its potency.

"Mutt" must have been, even in those days, quite an exceptional pilot because, after only six months with a squadron, he was posted to Martlesham Heath as a test pilot. He was one of only two short-service officers to have this distinction. At Martlesham he served in the single-seater flight under Flt. Lt. Sorley (now Air Marshal Sir Ralph Sorley, K.C.B., O.B.E., D.S.C., D.F.C., Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Technical Training Command, and Member of the Air Council) and helped to put the Gamecock, Bulldog, Hornbill and Avenger through their paces.

In spinning tests the Bulldog nearly forced him to make his first parachute jump. After vain attempts to stop the spin, Summers decided to jump and got hold of the handholds, which were provided in the wing centre-section, to

pull himself up out of the cockpit. His body in the slipstream acted as a control surface. It altered the airflow over the tail and affected the trim of the aircraft in such a manner as to make it cease autorotation immediately. Flying once more on an even keel the jump became unnecessary, but no more spins were done on that flight. An extra 18 inches of fuselage were found sufficient to cure the trouble.

Another unusual experience which he had at Martlesham occurred while he was flying the Hawker Hawfinch. In those days military aircraft were put into a more or less vertical dive until they reached their terminal velocity. It was a rather brutal manner of testing the controls at maximum speed, and also the strength of the aircraft. To-day this test is unnecessary because the speed limit imposed by the Mach number can be attained in level flight. While the Hawfinch was at its T.V., the top decking of the fuselage collapsed and over-tightened the Sutton harness, which came through a slot at the back of the pilot's seat. Until he managed to get out of the dive, Summers was jammed hard against the seat back, and scarcely able to move. After this incident he never used shoulder straps again—he only uses those over the thighs—and this saved his life on a later occasion.

While still at Martlesham he was loaned to Blackburns and Avros to test and demonstrate their aircraft abroad. For Blackburns he tested the float seaplanes produced in their Greek factory, and for Avros he demonstrated the Avenger in the Balkans.

In 1929, "Tiny" Schofield, then chief test pilot of



The 235 h.p. Lynx engined Vickers Vireo of 1928/29. It had many modern features, being an all-metal, cantilever monoplane with guns in the wings.

Vickers picture