
Department of Aircraft Production (Bristol) Beaufighter, Mk 21, A8-328



B7177 DAP Bristol
Beaufighter

Location

Moorabbin Air Museum, Second Avenue,, MOORABBIN AIRPORT VIC 3194 - Property No B7177

Municipality

KINGSTON CITY

Level of significance

National

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 19, 2008

What is significant? During the Second World War, seven squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) flew a total of 583 Beaufighters in a variety of marks (models) and operational roles in defending Britain and Australia against German and Japanese aggressors respectively. Two squadrons operated solely in the United Kingdom from the early days of the war, while the other five became progressively involved in the Pacific conflict as the war became increasingly global. A total of 5928 of these aircraft were built in Britain and Australia during the war, but only ten remain in the world today. Australia built 365 of these aircraft as the Mark 21 version. Beaufighter A8-328, which dates from August 1945, is one of six Australian-built survivors world-wide from the RAAF's wartime fleet, but only one of two that remain intact in this country.

How is it significant? This two-seat, twin-engined Mark 21 Beaufighter, which was used as a fighter/bomber/torpedo-carrier aircraft by the wartime RAAF, is of historic, scientific and social significance at the

national level.

Why is it significant?

Historic

The Beaufighter reflects the ultimate defensive strength of the Royal Australian Air Force during the Second World War, which at the height of its commitments operated these aircraft in seven front line squadrons in Britain, Australia, and from Australian island bases in the south-west Pacific. The Beaufighter was the principal fighter aircraft in service with the RAAF at this particular time; the A8-323 is one of only two remaining in this country from a former fleet of nearly 600. It was a fast, robust, highly effective multi-role combat aircraft that could be readily assembled from materials to hand with a minimum of adaptation. As a natural extension of the Beaufort on the production lines, the Beaufighter permitted a smooth changeover in output from one to the other in both Britain and Australia, so maintaining the momentum of supplies at a critical point mid-war when the balance between the opposing forces was beginning to shift.

The twin-engined Beaufighter was to Australia what its contemporary, the de Havilland Mosquito, was to Britain. It played a major war-winning role. Together with the RAAF's B-24 Liberator bomber fleet, the Beaufighters were instrumental in deterring an invasion force of 50,000 Japanese troops in Timor. The Beaufighter represents Australia's self-sufficiency, independence and willingness to stand alone in the face of adversity. The A8-328 is thus an historic aircraft of national significance, a rare icon in the history of Australia's military aviation heritage and development.

From a State perspective it is particularly significant in being representative of the many Beaufighters that were fabricated and/or built in Victoria. Like the recently-classified B-24 Liberator bomber undergoing restoration at Werribee, this particular Beaufighter is a monument to our nation's military resolve to resist the might of a would-be invader during our darkest hours.

Scientific

The Beaufighter represents a notable advance in the development of aviation technology in being the first example of an aircraft built from scratch to meet an urgent need, using components designed for other aircraft. It was thus quickly designed and readily built. Once operational the aircraft became instrumental in aircraft development generally, such were its capabilities, especially with regard to airborne radar development in its night-fighter role, and as a platform for delivering torpedoes and rockets. It was the only Australian aircraft in wartime service to employ the relatively quiet Hercules XVIII sleeve-valve engines, which facilitated attacks on enemy targets with little warning at times before ground radar became effective and more easily deployable - hence the nickname 'Whispering Death', as the Japanese came to regard it. In operational succession it was an immediate precursor to the Australian-built, twin-jet English Electric Canberra as used by the RAAF. This also was a multi-role combat aircraft, a post-war replacement for the Beaufighter, which saw service in Vietnam with the RAAF and with the USAF as the American-built B-57.

Social

Many RAAF personnel serviced and flew these aircraft from British and Australian bases during the Second World War. Many others flew them as early volunteer members of Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF). Australian veterans therefore spent a considerable part of their younger lives in association with this aircraft during World War 2. Many Australian Beaufighter crew gave their lives in the defence of this country, and in the defence and subsequent liberation of Europe. Of the 583 Beaufighters in service with Australian squadrons, at least 118 aircraft or 20% of their numbers and most of their crews, were lost in the course of operations in the European and south-west Pacific theatres, largely as a result of enemy action.

This aircraft also meant much to many others who, though not serving in the RAAF, nevertheless devoted an important part of their lives to the Beaufighter, notably the multitude of workers - the majority of whom were female - in production plants, on Department of Aircraft Production (D.A.P.) assembly lines, or as employees of the numerous sub-contractors. Whereas the RAAF's B-24 Liberator bombers were built entirely in America, the Beaufighter became a locally-made product which employed thousands in Australia at the height of the war effort. Though its engines were always imported from Britain, most of the aircraft's many other components, from the aero-dynamically-balanced ailerons to the Z-section transverse frames, were manufactured all over Australia, to be brought together in varying degrees of completeness for final assembly at either D.A.P. Fisherman's Bend in Melbourne, or D.A.P. Mascot in Sydney. The number of people so engaged is incalculable, but the sum of their combined efforts in the latter part of the war was the production of an aircraft that went a considerable way in saving this country from invasion, in liberating others, and pursuing the enemy towards ultimate defeat.

Classified: 09/12/2002

Other Names Whispering Death,

Hermes Number 65982

Property Number

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