
Wirraway Aircraft

Location

LICOLA ROAD GLENMAGGIE, WELLINGTON SHIRE

Municipality

WELLINGTON SHIRE

Level of significance

-

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8222-0010

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Hermes Number 125370

Property Number

Physical Description 1

Wheel and undercarriage leg displayed to public at the dam (weir wall).

Port wing recovered and restored at Australian Aircraft Restoration Group (Moorabbin Air Museum)

A20 CAC Wirraway Registration A20-404.

TECHNICAL DATA:

(A20-CAC Wirraway)

DESCRIPTION: Two seat general purpose monoplane, of all metal stressed-skin construction.

POWER PLANT: One 600 hp (Pratt and Whitney licence) Wasp - nine cylinder air-cooled radial engine.

DIMENSIONS: Span, 43 ft; length, 29 ft; height 12 ft 3 ins.

WEIGHTS: Empty, 3,980 lb; loaded, 6,450 lb.

PERFORMANCE: Max speed, 220 mph at 8,600 ft. Rate of climb 1,950 ft/min. Range 510 miles. Ceiling 23,000 ft.

ARMAMENT: Twin synchronized 0.303 guns mounted above fuselage, and one manually operated rear cockpit 0.303 gun. Light bomb load carried externally beneath wings.

Veterans Description for Public

The Wirraway Aircraft Registration A20-404 was on a training mission on 14th March 1942 from East Sale, piloted by Sgt Noel Edmund Giddings aged 25, when it crashed into the lake. Giddings' body was recovered on the 18th March 1942. In 1967 during a drought the wreck became exposed and the engine was retrieved by the Heyfield community (present location unknown). The wheel and undercarriage leg are displayed to public at the dam (weir wall). The port wing was recovered and restored at Australian Aircraft Restoration Group (Moorabbin Air Museum) A20 CAC Wirraway Registration A20-404. The technical data of the aircraft is as follows:

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History of the Wirraway Aircraft

In 1936, Wg Cdr L.J. Wackett led a mission abroad to select a general purpose aircraft for manufacture by the newly-formed Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC). The mission unanimously recommended the North American NA-33, and plans were made to produce a modified version to be known as the Wirraway (aboriginal for challenge). Whilst the CAC buildings were being erected at Fishermen's Bend, two aircraft were shipped from America for evaluation and the first, a fixed undercarriage NA-16 which overseas became known as the Yale, arrived in mid 1937 and was transferred from CAC to the RAAF on February 2 1938. The second aircraft, a NA-33, arrived late in 1937 and was taken on charge at No 1 AD from CAC on November 8 1938. For some time, these two aircraft remained un-numbered, but later became A20-1 and A20-2 respectively. In June 1940 the two aircraft were transferred to the Engineering School as instructional airframes.

Subsequent to RAAF selection, the NA-33 was ordered by other air forces and it became known as the Texan in America and the Harvard throughout the Empire. The Australian Wirraway version was modified for operations, and the NA-33 single wing-gun was replaced by twin synchronised guns in blast troughs above the fuselage, plus a flexible gun in the rear cockpit. Camera and radio installations were introduced, and the wing and tail units were redesigned and strengthened for dive-bombing in later variants only.

The first Wirraway, A20-3, was test flown by Flt. Lt Boss Walker on March 27, 1939, and the first three RAAF Wirraways were accepted in July 1939. By December 1940, seven aircraft were being delivered weekly, and by September 1941, 45 Wirraways per month were coming off the production line. The initial orders for 620 aircraft were completed by June 1942, but limited production continued until 1946 when the 755th Wirraway, A20-757, was delivered. CAC designations for Wirraway orders included CA-1, -3, -5, -7, -8, -9, -10 (a bomber version which was cancelled), -10A (dive bomber), and -16. The designation CA-20 covered the conversion of Wirraways for the RAN.

In 1940/41, camouflaged Wirraways were deployed to forward bases in Malaya (No 21 Sqn) Rabaul (No 24 Sqn), and Darwin (No 12 Sqn). On January 6 1942, Flt Lt B. Anderson, of No 24 Sqn became the first RAAF pilot to engage in air-to-air combat in the South-West Pacific, when his Wirraway intercepted a Kawanisi (Mavis) flying-

boat over Rabaul. Two weeks later, on January 20, 1942, the Rabaul Wirraways achieved immortal fame when eight aircraft, including A20-177, piloted by Sgt W Hewett, courageously engaged a force of over 100 Japanese fighters and bombers. Although hopelessly outclassed by enemy aircraft, the Wirraway remained in the front line as a stop-gap fighter, and on December 26 1942 Wirraway history was made when Plt. Off J. Archer, in A20-103, succeeded in shooting down a Zero near Gona. Wirraways served mainly with Nos 4, 5, 12, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25, 54, 60, 78, 82, 85 and 87 Sqdns, although most squadrons had Wirraways on strength at one time or another. In addition, the aircraft was used extensively for the Empire Air Training Scheme, and many Australian fighter pilots learnt their trade in the Wirraway. The Wirraway continued to serve as a trainer and communications aircraft until 1959 and of interest is the fact that a Wirraway was used in 1947/48 by No 81 Wing whilst on duty with the BCOF in Japan.

Today, Wirraways can be found at Bull Creek, WA, the Australian War Memorial, Moorabbin Air Museum and the RAAF Museum and several more are under restoration. These examples are on hand to remind us of the first Australian mass-produced aircraft - a tribute, in one respect, to Sir Lawrence Wackett who had the foresight and ingenuity to provide Australia with an efficient aircraft in a time of need.

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