



A20 Wirraway Trainer, Fighter

The story of what is arguably Australia's most famous aircraft began in February 1936 when a technical mission consisting of Cdr. Wackett and Sqd. Leaders Harrison and Murphy visited European and U.S. aircraft manufacturers to investigate aircraft production, and to determine the basic features for an aircraft to be produced in Australia. Later that year, on Oct. 17, Commonwealth Aircraft Corp. (CAC) was formed to ensure that Australia had the indigenous capability to produce aircraft for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

CAC concluded that the aircraft that best represented what the technical commission had recommended was the NA-16 monoplane trainer — known as the BT-9 and BC-1 in the U.S. Army Air Corps and as the Yale in the Royal Air Force — built by Boeing heritage company North American Aviation. North American produced two prototype airplanes, designated NA-32 and NA-33, that were then shipped to Australia for evaluation. The NA-33 design was selected and modified into a combat aircraft with the addition

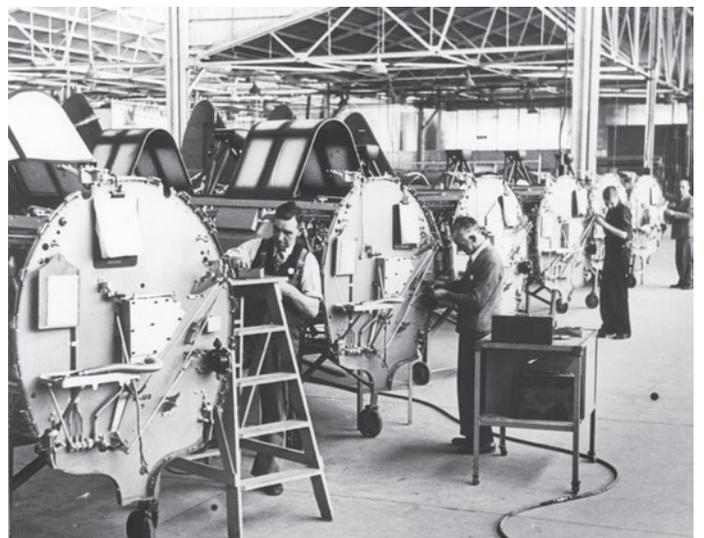
of machine guns and strengthened wings to carry additional bomb racks. The airplane was given the aboriginal name "Wirraway" meaning "Challenge."

In June 1938, CAC was awarded an initial order for 40 Wirraways, and on March 27, 1939, Flt. Lt. H. "Boss" Walker took the first CAC-manufactured Wirraway (A20-3) up on its first flight from Fishermans Bend. Deliveries to the RAAF began in July 1939. By September 1941, CAC was manufacturing 45 Wirraways per month and had built 620 by June 1942. Production continued until 1946 when the last of 755 was delivered.

The Wirraway served as a frontline combat aircraft in the first year of the Pacific War, notably supporting operations in Malaya and over Rabaul, where eight Wirraway pilots courageously intercepted more than 100 attacking Japanese planes on Jan. 20, 1942. Greatly outclassed by Japanese fighters, the Wirraway did serve successfully in Army co-operation missions during the New Guinea campaign and made Wirraway history over Gona, New Guinea, on Dec. 26, 1942, when Pilot Officer J. Archer shot down a Zeke fighter during the Battle of Buna-Gona. By mid-1943, the "Wirra" had been replaced in frontline service by the Boomerang, but continued serving as a trainer with both the RAAF and the Royal Australian Navy until 1959.

TECHNICAL DATA: A20 Wirraway

Power plant	600-horsepower CAC-manufactured Pratt & Whitney Wasp nine-cylinder air-cooled radial engine
Span	13.10m (43 feet)
Length	8.48m (27 feet, 10 inches)
Height	2.66m (8 feet, 9 inches)
Empty weight	1,811kg (3,980 pounds)
Loaded weight	12,991kg (6,595 pounds)
Maximum speed	354kph (220 mph)
Range	1,158km (720 miles)
Service ceiling	7,010m (23,000 feet)
Armament	Two fixed, forward-firing 0.303-inch machine guns in the cowl, one rear-facing 0.303-inch gun on a flexible mount



Aus War Memorial Photo - 90257115. Fishermen's Bend, Vic. 1939-12-21. An assembly line showing partly constructed Wirraway aircraft and tradesmen working on fireproof bulkheads at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation Factory. Conflict: 1939-1945.