

Victorian Heritage Database Report
FORMER BALLARAT RAAF BASE



Location:

1 AIRPORT ACCESS ROAD MITCHELL PARK, Ballarat City

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H2113

Listing Authority: VHR

Heritage Overlay Number: HO190**Statement of Significance:**

What is significant?

The former Ballarat Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base on the site of the present Ballarat Aerodrome, seven kilometres northwest of Ballarat city centre was constructed in 1940 at the outset of the Second World War as a training school for Wireless Air Gunners under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS).

The Scheme was established by the British with Canada, Australia and New Zealand to rapidly train air crews for the British Bomber Command to fight the then far superior German Air Force. Under EATS which operated from 1939-1945 the RAAF was committed to training 28,000 aircrew over three years including navigators, wireless operators, air gunners and pilots, equating to around 900 aircrew every four weeks. To achieve this the RAAF embarked on a rapid and extensive program, establishing a network of twenty-eight EATS schools in eastern Australia by the end of 1941, each specialising in specific skill sets required of air crew members. The former Ballarat RAAF Base was Australia's No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School (WAGS), the first of three WAGS created under the Scheme and the only one in Victoria. Gunnery training was undertaken at Bombing and Gunnery Schools such as Sale.

By 1941 there were nearly 800 personnel on the former Ballarat RAAF Base and by the end of March 1942 a total of 1238 air men had been trained in the operation of radio equipment using Avro Anson and Wackett Trainer aircraft. Australia's alliance with the USA had a brief impact on the Ballarat base in 1942 when the ground echelon of a USAAF heavy bomber squadron camped for two months in the field to the south of the main accommodation area of the base.

A radar training wing was established at the Ballarat RAAF Base in 1945. The RAAF's No.7 Operational Training Unit, which was based at RAAF Tocumwal, stationed some of its Liberator bombers at the Ballarat base for a period for radar training of its aircrews.

Basic training for wireless operators ceased in May 1945 by which time 5025 trainees has been through the school. The Wireless Air Gunners School was formally disbanded in January 1946. The RAAF continued to operate the aerodrome until 1961 when it became the property of the Ballarat Council. The Ballarat Aerodrome continues to operate as a civil airport and the surviving Second World War structures on the site provide accommodation for a large number of community organisations including an aviation museum.

The extant Second World War structures associated with the WAGS are primarily 'P-Type Huts' and Bellman Hangars, neither of which were originally intended to be permanent structures, having been prefabricated and erected on military sites throughout Australia in response to the sudden and urgent need for semi-permanent accommodation for service personnel and aircraft hangars at the beginning of the Second World War. The P-Type Huts, consisting of simple rectilinear timber-framed structures with corrugated-iron clad gabled roof could be easily modified as required for particular functions. By 1941 approximately 160 standard P-Type Huts had been erected on the Ballarat site in two distinct functional precincts. In the northern aerodrome precinct around fifteen huts, of which twelve survive, were arranged on the outside of a group of two closely spaced pairs of Bellman hangars. Bellman hangars had been designed in Britain immediately prior to the Second World War to provide a fast, economical solution to the need for aircraft facilities. The surrounding P-Type Huts were used for equipment and clothing storage, maintenance and administrative functions associated with the operation of the aircraft. At the centre of the base was the administrative, domestic and teaching precinct where over 140 huts were erected in rows, singly or in combination with connecting roofs to create larger buildings. They were

adapted for various uses including sleeping quarters, recreation rooms and messes, lecture halls, radio huts, stores, offices, workshops and ablution blocks. Thirty-three huts remain in the central precinct. These include the former Officers' and Sergeants' Messes, sleeping quarters, the Headquarters, the maintenance and transport depot, stores, the gymnasium and several ablution blocks.

Other remaining fabric associated with the Second World War includes an elevated water tower, the foundations of demolished P-Type Huts, foundations of the Signalling circle, and foundations associated with radar equipment. Landscape features associated with the former Ballarat RAAF Base include the road and runway layout, the playing fields and parade ground with its border of Monterey Cypress which separates the aerodrome precinct to the north from the domestic and administrative precinct.

How is it significant?

The former Ballarat RAAF Base is of historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The former Ballarat RAAF Base is of historical significance for its ability to demonstrate the importance of military aviation to the defence of Australia and its Allies during the Second World War, the first conflict in which aircraft played a major role in combat for the Australian military.

The former Ballarat RAAF Base is of historical significance for its association with the technical training aspects of the wartime development and operation of the RAAF. The former Ballarat RAAF Base is a good representative example of the bases constructed to train aircrew under the Empire Air Training Scheme which included a contingent suite of temporary and semi temporary buildings that in their layout and surviving Second World War fabric reflect both the training and domestic functions of the bases and the hierarchical nature of the military and domestic life on the Second World War bases. This is clearly reflected in the planning of the two main building precincts of the former Ballarat RAAF Base - the aerodrome itself with the large prefabricated Bellman hangars and workshop huts, and the domestic and administrative precinct of standard P-Type Huts.

The Ballarat RAAF Base is of historical significance as the first of only three Wireless Air Gunnery Schools established nationally under the Scheme and the only such school in Victoria. It is also the most intact of the surviving Victorian Empire Air Training Scheme training schools.

Heritage Study / Consultant	
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	BALLARAT CITY
Other names	
Hermes number	14247
Property number	

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online