

BIGGIN HILL

Historic Aircraft Centre
RNZAF Ohakea
New Zealand



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The Biggin Hill Hangar

The Biggin Hill facility at RNZAF Ohakea was designed to house airworthy examples of iconic World War 2 combat aircraft. The facility has a main hangar area of 900m² and attached facilities of 80m². These facilities include an office, display room and storeroom. The open span design allows for aircraft up to 5m in height and has a clear access door system 26m wide. Display material highlights key aspects of the aircraft histories and the stories of prominent New Zealand airmen from WW2.

The name comes from the RAF station Biggin Hill, a well known Spitfire base during World War 2 and home of the Biggin Hill Wing. New Zealander Alan Deere commanded the Biggin Hill Wing in mid 1943 under Station Commander "Sailor" Malan when it consisted of one English (611 *West Lancashire* led by Jack Charles) and one Free French (341 *Alsace* led by Rene Mouchotte) along with the New Zealand Spitfire Squadron (485 led by Johnny Checketts). Today Biggin Hill is a busy corporate jet airport for London but once again is home to several privately owned Spitfires and a Hurricane.

The aircraft at the Biggin Hill hangar are all airworthy and intended to serve as a living memorial to all who have served their country in the air. The aircraft are flown for special occasions such as ANZAC Day and Battle of Britain Day and also appear at airshows around New Zealand. The aircraft are maintained in an airworthy state (with the exception of the Iroquois/Aermacchi) at all times and use the aerodrome facilities at Ohakea under an agreement with the NZDF and the RNZAF.



1944 Supermarine Spitfire Mk IX

Designed by RJ Mitchell, the Supermarine Spitfire first flew in 1936. Proven over the beaches of Dunkirk, it went on to become a key fighter in the Battle of Britain and maintained its position as a frontline fighter throughout WW2. It was used in a wide range of roles from fighter, bomber escort to photographic reconnaissance and in all 22,000 Spitfires were built. Early marks were powered by the Rolls Royce Merlin whilst later Spitfires used the Rolls Royce Griffon.

This aircraft is a Mk IX and was built in September 1944 and served in the final stages of the war with the Royal Air Force in northern Italy. After the war it served with the Italian Air Force before being sold to the Israeli Air Force. After three years in Israel it was refurbished and sold to the Burmese (Myanmar) Air Force for use in their border war with the Nationalist Chinese. Its final flight was in July 1956 and it then spent 26 years as a gate guardian at a Burmese Air Force Base.

In 1999 it was one of three wrecks sold to an American collector. Two of these went to the UK and in 2001 PV270 came to New Zealand for restoration. The restoration started in 2003 at Taonui Aerodrome and its first post restoration flight was March 18th 2009. It is painted in the marking of well-known New Zealand Battle of Britain Spitfire pilot, Alan Deere. The RNZAF never operated Spitfires but a large number of RNZAF trained pilots flew them in the Second World War with the Royal Air Force in Europe. There was even a special New Zealand squadron in the RAF, 485, that flew Spitfires and was largely staffed by New Zealanders.



1945 Grumman TBM Avenger

The Grumman Avenger was designed as a carrier based torpedo bomber for the United States Navy and first flew in August 1941. The Avenger at Biggin Hill was built in July 1945 and served in a training capacity at San Diego before post war moving around a number of US Navy bases including Pearl Harbour. It served with a number of US Navy units including carrier based operations. It was retired from the US Navy and sold surplus in 1954. It was converted into an insecticide spraying aircraft and used in forest protection operations in the US and Canada through to 1992 when it was converted back to full military configuration for the Old Flying Machine Company based at Duxford in the UK. After two years in the UK it was shipped to New Zealand for the Alpine Fighter Collection based at Wanaka and then on sold to an Australian collector in 1998.

It returned to New Zealand on a 3,200 km ferry flight via Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands in February 2012 in time for the Ohakea and Wanaka air shows. This Avenger has a continuous flying history since 1945.

The RNZAF operated 48 Grumman Avengers, mostly from Bougainville during the Pacific War. They operated as bombers with 30 and 31 Squadron against Japanese targets alongside other RNZAF units. After the war a few Avengers were based at Ohakea with 42 Squadron as target tugs and operated through to 1959. In 1948 a modified Avenger was used for aerial topdressing proving trials at Ohakea and then from Hood aerodrome at Masterton.



1942 North American Harvard

The North American Harvard was designed as an advanced trainer and first flew in 1935. It was designed with advanced features such as variable pitch propeller and retractable undercarriage to prepare the pilots of the US Navy and USAF for advanced fighters such as the P40 Kittyhawk and P51 Mustang. Known as the “pilot maker”, many thousands of trainee pilots learnt to treat the Harvard with respect given its ability to “bite” the unwary. Over 15,000 AT6 Harvards (or Texan as it was known in the US) were built. They continued to serve as frontline aircraft with many small air forces well after the war. The South African Air Force operated large numbers of Harvards right up to 1984.

The RNZAF operated Harvards from 1941 through to 1977. In WW2 they were used as an advanced trainer for pilots who had completed initial training on the Tiger Moth. This Harvard was built in 1942 and shipped directly to New Zealand for the RNZAF, NZ1037 was one of 212 Harvards used for pilot training throughout the war and right through to 1977. After WW2 Harvards were used for both ab initio and advanced pilot training as well as communications and other duties. The retirement of the RNZAF Harvards in 1977 provided surplus aircraft which became the basis of the Warbirds community in New Zealand and today around 14 Harvards remain airworthy in NZ.

This Harvard served at a number of RNZAF Bases and finished its days at Ohakea with 14 Squadron used as a FAC (Forward Air Control) aircraft for cooperation with the Army. It has maintained a continuous flying history since 1942.



Static Aircraft

AERMACCHI MB339 NZ6472



NZ6472 was built in 1992 and was one of 18 Aermacchis on strength with No.14 Squadron at Ohakea. It was one of the aircraft that took part in a farewell flyover of North Island towns on 11th December 2001. Retired from service 13th December 2001 when the RNZAF strike force was disbanded and gifted to

the Sport and Vintage Aviation Society of Masterton but has remained at Ohakea.

BELL IROQUOIS NZ3808



Delivered between July and October 1970 and operated by No. 3 Squadron RNZAF. The first RNZAF helicopter to be operated in Antarctica. NZ3808 was painted orange and operated from McMurdo Station from 29th October 1985 to 6th December 1985 flying 99.8 hours in the area. 3 Squadron operated NZ3808 in East Timor as

part of the United Nations INTERFET and later UNTAET units from 21st September 1999 to 10th December 2002. Each of the helicopters was required to display a UN identity code during this time. NZ3808 is known to have been allocated both UNO-060 and UNO-077 during service in the area. Retired from service May 2015 and retained by the Air Force Museum of New Zealand at Ohakea.



RNZAF Base Ohakea



RNZAF Ohakea (from the Maori “place of the birds”) is one of three Bases operated by the Royal New Zealand Air Force and is home to the Beechcraft Texan aircraft of 14 Squadron and the Central Flying School, the Beech B200 King Airs of 42 Squadron and the A109 and NH90 helicopters of the 3 Squadron. The base also is home to a number of technical support and trade related departments.

Construction of RNZAF Ohakea was begun in 1937 as a base to house the new Wellington bombers purchased by the Air Force. The outbreak of war in 1939 saw the decision to leave the bombers in the UK to form the basis of 75 (New Zealand) Squadron of the RAF. During WW2 Ohakea became a major training base equipped with a range of aircraft including P40s and Harvards. After the war it was the home to a number of units equipped with such aircraft as the Corsair, Avenger, Mosquito and DC3.

For many years it was the home of the RNZAF Air Combat Wing equipped with Vampires and Canberras initially and then Skyhawks, Strikemasters and Aermacchis until its disbandment in 2001. The Bell Iroquois helicopters were retired in 2015 after nearly fifty years of service. Today RNZAF Ohakea maintains its key role in the modern RNZAF as a training base and logistics hub as well as VIP flight operations, search and rescue and a variety of other functions.





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