

BIGGIN HILL

Historic Aircraft Centre
RNZAF Ohakea
New Zealand



August 2024

The Biggin Hill Historic Aircraft Centre

The Biggin Hill facility at RNZAF Ohakea has two hangars housing a mixture of airworthy and static examples of iconic military aircraft. Each of the hangars has an 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 Biggin Hill hangar name comes from the RAF station Biggin Hill, a prominent 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 squadron (341 *Alsace* led by René Mouchotte) along with the New Zealand Spitfire Squadron (485 led by Johnny Checketts). The Palikulo hangar is named after the RNZAF's main support and servicing base during WW2 on the island of Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu.

The aircraft at the Biggin Hill facility are 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 airworthy aircraft use the aerodrome facilities at Ohakea under an agreement with the New Zealand Defence Force 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 over 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 built in September 1944 serving 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 Feilding Aerodrome and its first post restoration flight was March 18th 2009. It is painted in the markings 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 North American P-51D Mustang

The P51 Mustang was originally designed for the Royal Air Force and first flew in 1940 with the Alison V12 engine. It was later re-engined with the Rolls Royce Merlin which gave it greatly improved performance. The Mustang had exceptionally long range performance which made it an ideal choice to escort the bombers on raids deep into occupied Europe and in the Pacific.

The RNZAF received 30 Mustangs in 1945 from the United States as part of the planned replacement of the Corsair fighter aircraft. It was intended that the RNZAF receive a total of 370 Mustangs, however this did not eventuate as the War ended before they could be put into service.

The aircraft were placed in storage until 1951, when they were issued to the four squadrons of the Territorial Air Force (TAF) – Otago, Canterbury, Wellington and Auckland. The majority were withdrawn from service in 1955, with most being sold for scrap in 1958.

Our aircraft, NZ2423 is the last surviving RNZAF P-51D in New Zealand. It was stored in a barn in Mapua near Nelson until moving to Ohakea in 2020 for restoration. Previously serving with No 2 TAF squadron at Ohakea before finishing its days with 42 Squadron at Ohakea. NZ2423 made the last operational RNZAF Mustang flight in May 1957 when it was flown to Woodbourne for long term storage before being sold for scrap in 1958.



1945 Grumman TBM-3E 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 AT-6 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 AT-6 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 until 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.



1970 Bell Iroquois

on loan from the Air Force Museum of New Zealand

The Bell UH-1 Iroquois is one of the world's most iconic helicopters, famous for its extensive role in the Vietnam War and distinctive sound. The Iroquois was developed by Bell Helicopter Corporation in response to a request from the United States Army for a medical evacuation and general utility helicopter. The prototype first flew on 20 October 1956 and the "Huey" entered production in 1959.



The RNZAF's first five Iroquois were delivered brand- new in 1966, and attached to No. 3 Squadron, based at Hobsonville (later, Ohakea). A further nine aircraft were received in 1970. While none of the RNZAF's Iroquois served in Vietnam, 16 New Zealand pilots from No. 3 Squadron were attached to No. 9 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) between 1967 and 1971, flying Iroquois in assault, troop transport, resupply and casualty evacuation operations in South Vietnam. The RNZAF Iroquois fleet served 49 years, in a wide range of roles that included search and rescue, Army and Police co-operation, peacekeeping and disaster relief.

1970 Bell Sioux

on loan from the RNZAF



Perhaps best recognised as the helicopter that featured in the popular Korean War-based television series 'M*A*S*H', the Sioux was the first rotary-wing aircraft to enter military service in New Zealand.

The Bell 47 Sioux was developed in the United States in 1947 as a light utility/ observation helicopter. Six Bell 47G-3B-1 aircraft were purchased for the RNZAF

in 1965, and allocated to No. 3 (Battlefield Support) Squadron at Hobsonville during December 1965 and January 1966. Seven Bell 47G-3B-2 aircraft followed in 1970.

The Sioux was used for light observation and liaison tasks for the Army, and was originally flown by both RNZAF and New Zealand Army Air Corps pilots. Throughout its service life it was also the RNZAF's primary helicopter training aircraft, and it has the dubious honour of having suffered the highest percentage of loss of any RNZAF aircraft in peacetime – eight were written off in accidents.

1953 De Havilland Devon

on loan from the Air Force Museum of New Zealand

The British-made de Havilland Devon first flew on 25th September 1945 and was designed by the same team that produced the Mosquito and Comet. The Devon was the RNZAF's primary navigation and multi engine trainer for nearly 30 years.



It was the De Havilland company's first post war aircraft design and was highly successful with over 540 built. In the civil world it was used in a number of countries as a feeder airliner.

The Devon was the military variant of the highly successful civilian airliner, the de Havilland Dove, which had been developed immediately after World War Two. 127 Devons were produced

The RNZAF operated a fleet of 30 Devons between 1952 and 1980, primarily for navigation and signals training at Wigram. A small number were based at Ohakea for use on general transport and VIP duties, and multi-engine conversion training.

1940 De Havilland Tiger Moth

on loan from the RNZAF



One of the most well-known training aircraft of all time, the de Havilland Tiger Moth was the only RNZAF aircraft to be built in a New Zealand factory during World War Two.

The Tiger Moth was designed in the early 1930s by renowned British aeronautical engineer Geoffrey de Havilland, and went on to become one of the most numerous training aircraft for British

and Commonwealth pilots. With war on the horizon, the de Havilland Aircraft Company established a factory at Rongotai in Wellington in 1939, to meet the demand for Tiger Moth trainers.

The RNZAF operated 335 Tiger Moths between 1939 and 1956. 102 were written off in accidents during the War, and another 190 were sold off from 1946 to 1949. The remainder were retained for miscellaneous training and communications duties. A small number of RNZAF Tiger Moths were used for fire patrols in the Central North Island during the summer months of the late 1940s.

1991 Aermacchi MB339

displayed on behalf of the Wairarapa Flying Tigers

The MB-339 was developed during the 1970s in response to a request from the Italian Air Force for a replacement jet trainer. A derivation of its predecessor, the MB-326, the prototype first flew on 12 August 1976, and the first aircraft entered production soon after.

The RNZAF acquired 18 Aermacchi MB-339CBs in 1990, with deliveries beginning in 1991. All 18 aircraft were operated by No. 14 Squadron RNZAF at Ohakea.

The MB-339, or 'Macchi' as it became known in the RNZAF, provided RNZAF pilots with the advanced flying training component of their 'wings' course. The Macchi also had a second-line attack capability when equipped with 12.7mm gun packs, bombs and rockets. With the disbandment of the RNZAF's Air Combat Force in 2001, the Aermacchi was retired and put into storage at Ohakea. The majority of the fleet was sold in 2012, with the remainder going to aviation museums around New Zealand.



Royal New Zealand Air Force



The Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) is the air arm of the New Zealand Defence Force. It was formed from New Zealand components of the British Royal Air Force, becoming an independent force in 1923, although many RNZAF aircrew continued to serve in the Royal Air Force until the end of the 1940s. The RNZAF fought with distinction in World War II, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Gulf War plus various United Nations peacekeeping missions. From a 1945 peak of over 1,000 combat aircraft the RNZAF has shrunk to a strength of around 50 aircraft in 2023, focusing on maritime patrol, helicopter operations and transport duties in support of New Zealand's national interests.

The RNZAF motto is the same as that of the Royal Air Force, *Per ardua ad astra*, meaning "Through adversity to the stars." The RNZAF operates from three bases - Whenuapai (home to the C130 Hercules, Seasprite helicopters and B757), Woodbourne (home to officer training, trade training and heavy maintenance) and Ohakea. The modern RNZAF shares a number of facilities and services with the Army and Navy through Defence Shared Services.

The role of the RNZAF is focused on helicopters, transport and maritime surveillance. 2012 brought into service the A109 Light Utility Helicopter, the larger NH90 and 2015 the Beechcraft Texan II trainer. In 2023, the Boeing P8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft entered service and in 2024 the first of the C130J Hercules fleet will arrive.



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 Texans of the Pilot Training Squadron and the Central Flying School, The Beech B350 King Airs of 42 Squadron, the A109 and NH90 helicopters of the 3 Squadron and the P8 Poseidon aircraft of 5 Squadron.

The flying at Ohakea is supported by a number of technical support and trade related units.

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. 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, maritime patrol and a variety of other functions.



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