

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

BRISTOL BEAUFORT MK.VIII `DD931'/ 9131M (COMPOSITE)
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 1994/1345/A

Assembled from Australian built components; of the 2,175 Beauforts built, 700 were built in Australia from late 1941, 520 of them the Mk.VIII version between Nov 42 and Aug 44, numbered A9-181 to A9-700 and assembled from components built elsewhere at the Government Aircraft Factories at Fishermen's Bend (Victoria – odd numbered Beauforts) and Mascot (Sydney, New South Wales – all even numbered Beauforts). The last two RAAF Beauforts were retired on 1st October 1948. See Aeroplane May 2007 pp.70 – 73 for details of Australian built Beauforts.

- 1974 New Zealander Dr Charles `Bunny' Darby recovered several Beaufort wrecks, mainly Australian built, from the former Tadjji Airstrip, West Sepik District, Papua New Guinea. He salvaged five airframes and other components, together with remains of other aircraft types, on behalf of `Yesterdays Air Force' based at Chino, California. These remains later passed to David Tallichet's Military Aircraft Restoration Company, also based at Chino. Photos of Beaufort Wrecks at Tadjji in 1974 - Pacific Aircraft Wrecks and where to Find Them (Derby) p.4 24-25, 63, 64 (024105). In 1974 the remains of some 28 Beauforts were still at Tadjji. The remains recovered by Dr Derby were shipped out of Aitape by landing craft late in 1974. (Flypast May 1997 p.74).
- Oct 87 MOD approval given for exchange deal with Tim Routsis of Historic Flying Ltd to exchange two Gate Guard Spitfire Mk.XVI aircraft for a Beaufort and Kittyhawk (P40N) restored to Museum display condition, RW382 being the Spitfire exchanged for the Beaufort.
- Jul 88 Exchange deal confirmed.
- 1990 After an abortive restoration attempt parts of three Beaufort VIII airframes moved from Chino to the workshop of Bob Schneider's R J Aviation at Hawkins, Texas. Photos of the aircraft under restoration at Hawkins; Aeroplane Monthly Jan 92 p.6; Beaufort File p.165. The three airframes quoted to RAFM were A9-478; A9-561 and A9-574. The individual histories given below suggest that two of these identities may not be accurate since these aircraft were scrapped in Australia, although the airframe parts used come from New Guinea.
- A9-478 Ex-100 Squadron RAF; SOC and burnt at Finschafen, New Guinea, 6 Jun 46.
- A9-561 Crash-landed at East Sale, SE Australia 4 Sep 44.
- A9-574 Sold for scrap 17 Feb 53, Australia-one of the final disposals batch.

Hayward in the Beaufort file suggests that '561' may actually be A9-461, which crashed on landing at Tadjil 12 Nov 44. However, research undertaken in 2002 gives totally new identities;

Inspection in June 2002 showed that the wing section data plate in the starboard wheel well is marked CR591 14-9-43, and the stern frame below the starboard tailplane is marked SF478 20-7-43. The cockpit data plate is stamped FF559 4-9-43, and the rear fuselage plates RF557 26-10-43. Details received from the Beaufort Restoration Group in Australia July 2002 give the following 'tie-ins'

SF478 A9-478-later shipped to Chino.

RF557 A9- 559/QH-F

Reportedly the first RAAF bomber to cross the equator on a combat mission in the Pacific since the start of the Pacific War in 1941. To RAAF 24 Jan 44; 8 July 44 received by No 100 Squadron RAAF; 30 April 45 severely damaged-centre section 90%, rear fuselage 15% plus engine and undercarriage damage; 6 May 45 Issued to No 12 RSU ex 100 Squadron for conversion to components; 26 May 45 Approval given for conversion to components.

FF559 A9-557/ QH-L

A9-557 was reportedly previously RAF T9552. To RAAF 4 Jan 44; to 100 Sqn RAAF as QH-L at Tadjil July 1944.

(However, noted Australian historian John Chapman in March 2013, it should be noted that the Australian National Aviation Museum at Moorabbin Beaufort - is of a much earlier model - a Mk.V (A9-13) - which was initially delivered to the RAF in Australia as T9552 before becoming A9-13. They have various photos dating from WW2 which support that theory and accordingly it would seem improbable that the later Mk.VIII ever had any RAF serial - let alone such an early one as one in the T series)

In November 1944 the nose section had a major electrical fire in service, so ground staff put another cockpit (from A9-461) onto A9-557 and it flew with that nose until written off when it ran off the runway and crashed on landing at Tadjil 20 January 1945, shortly after returning to 100 Squadron earlier that month. A9-557 had flown 103 operational missions, and had a total of 126 hours 26 minutes, and was flown by 19 different crews. (the rear fuselage of '557 is under restoration for the Australian War Memorial, with the rest of the airframe given that identity; Centre-section CR-555 from A9-557 is also with the Australian War Memorial for their now-completed composite restoration) Photo of A9-557 in flight, 20 January 1945; The Beaufort File (Hayward) p.81. The aircraft crash landed upon return from this sortie to bomb Japanese fuel and ammunition dumps at Elimi near Wewak, with shell holes and a live bomb jammed in the bomb bay.

Beauforts at Tadjil operated in support of the infantry against Japanese forces, flying short duration bombing and ground attack sorties, plus supply dropping and anti-supply barge missions.

Photos taken by Charles Darby at the time show the state of the two aircraft at the time; A9-559/QH-F was a stripped fuselage minus the nose and tail sections; A9-557/QH-L was a wing/fuselage centre section and rear fuselage minus nose and tail.

The restoration included the fitting correct Pratt and Whitney R-1830 engines; few internal fittings were available. Wheels and instruments came from RAF Museum stocks.

- c. May 91 Shipped to Felixstowe Docks.

- Jun 91 Delivered dismantled, in primer, to RAFM RC&RC Cardington, Beds where it was painted. Photos painted at Cardington - Aeroplane Monthly Jan 92 p.9.

- 10 Dec 91 Arrived at RAF Museum for assembly. Photos assembled at Hendon - Aeroplane Monthly Supplement Oct 92; Focus Apr 92 p.13; Wrecks & Relics 13th edition. Additional cosmetic work done in situ at the RAFM.
 Photos on display - Aircraft Illustrated Jan 95 p.72; Aeroplane Monthly 1992 UK Aircraft Collections and Museums Guide p.20; Aeroplane May 2007 p.76.
 Interior cockpit view – The Flying M Yearbook 2005 p.16.

- Allotted RAF Maintenance serial 9131M.

- 3 Aug 98 One of a number of aircraft donated to the RAFM by the MoD.

- 2007 Ongoing programme of fitting missing internal components such as radio operator's and navigator's seats and flare tube.

Although assembled from Mk.VIII components the aircraft has had rudder profile and other changes including undercarriage doors to make it externally represent Mk.IIA aircraft DD931, delivered to the RAF 14 Jun 42, and issued to No.42 Squadron, whose colours it now wears, Aug 42. The original DD931 later served with No.5 (Middle East) Training Squadron and Malta based No.39 Squadron from 26 Oct 42 dropping mines and torpedoes to harass Rommel's Libyan supply lines. DD931 passed to Egypt 20 May 43 and was struck off charge by the RAF 1 Jan 44.

This is the only Beaufort preserved in Europe; at least four are undergoing restoration in Australia, including British-built T9552, plus composite restoration A9-557 displayed at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, and composite A9-141 under restoration, possibly to airworthy condition, and A9-152 with the Australian National Aviation Museum at Moorabbin, Victoria. Other examples were still in Chino until recently, from where the fuselage of A9-555 (with centre section ex A9-182) moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 2003 for the Bristol Heritage Collection. (Photo of 2 Beauforts at Chino 1989 - Beaufort File p.164).

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