

INTRODUCTION

This book tells the story of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation Boomerang, Australia's only locally designed and built fighter aircraft. The Boomerang has the further distinction of being the *sole* Australian-designed and produced aircraft to see combat, making it a vitally important part of Australia's military aviation history. It is thus surprising that no standalone publication dedicated to the Boomerang has been released, including aspects such as why it was needed, its development and production, operational use by the Royal Australian Air Force and accounts of pilots who fought and died flying it. This book is intended to fill that gap.

The book is based on contemporary first-hand records and the insights they provide. These records reveal the conflicting views put to Australia's War Cabinet in early 1942 about whether the Boomerang should be rushed into production to help Australia survive what was viewed as an existential crisis. The reasons why the War Cabinet subsequently approved additional orders for an aircraft no longer wanted by the RAAF are also examined.

The Boomerang's operational career is outlined, including its successful transformation from undistinguished interceptor fighter to successful army cooperation aircraft. The flexibility and skill of the RAAF pilots and groundcrew responsible for this transformation are highlighted, as are the dangers faced by Boomerang pilots.

By providing a clear understanding of the Boomerang's origins, production and operational career the book will draw a balanced assessment of the Boomerang's successes and failures.

I focus specifically on the Boomerang and do not examine the development of higher-powered, higher-performance derivatives of the original aircraft. These developments are of great technical interest but ultimately produced no aircraft that flew operationally in World War Two.

Interestingly, the rushed development of the Boomerang illustrates the difficulties and risks associated with procuring military equipment. Although the Boomerang saw active service in the middle of the previous century, it provides lessons in military equipment acquisition that are relevant in today's world of rising international tensions.

In telling the Boomerang's story I have depended largely on primary records held by the National Archives of Australia. These include documents from the Australian Government's War Cabinet, the Royal Australian Air Force and the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation.

The Boomerang took to the air decades ago during WWII. None of the active participants in the story, whether politicians and industrialists at the highest decision-making levels