

reasons for selection of these sites, including the assumption rainfall would be sufficient to maintain year-round grass cover on the airfields, which were simple “paddock” style landing areas without sealed runways. Also important was the availability of railways to bring in bulk supplies, including fuel, and nearby towns with ready infrastructure including power, water mains and a sewerage system. Finally, the towns needed to have a sufficient scale of existing businesses, such as bakeries, grocers and butchers, that could supply fresh food to the bases.

In addition to the sites mentioned above, a non-flying school was setup at Victor Harbor and a large training facility for personnel to staff these bases was established in central Adelaide. In September 1941, the Minister for Air quoted the following budgets for RAAF training bases in South Australia:

Adelaide	£11,000
Mallala	£233,000
Mount Gambier	£204,000
Parafield	£85,000
Port Pirie	£341,000
Victor Harbor	£70,000

The total amount of expenditure listed above was £944,000, a very significant sum for the time. Indeed, some of the projects were the biggest ever construction schemes undertaken in the regional districts. The bases at Mallala, Port Pirie and Mount Gambier were large with each intended to house more than a thousand personnel. Port Pirie was by far the most expensive of the South Australian locations given the adjacent bombing and gunnery range.

The EATS training schools dominated RAAF activity in South Australia during the war. In excess of 5,500 aircrew trainees graduated from No. 4 Initial Training School at Victor Harbor, but, because many of these attended other schools in South Australia, it is not possible to estimate the actual number of aircrew trained in South Australia. However, the number that graduated from other individual courses subsequent to initial training was approximately 12,500.

In addition, almost 22,000 (non-flying) trainees graduated from No. 4 School of Technical Training in Adelaide, most of whom would staff

the new bases. Also important from 1942 were members of the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) who often provided 10-15% of personnel at each base. Some 2,600 members of the WAAAF were trained at Victor Harbor.

Adding the (male) graduates from No. 4 Initial Training School and No. 4 School of Technical Training gives a total of some 27,500,¹ the vast majority of whom would have been South Australian. This is a very significant number in a small state that recorded a male population of only 290,000 in the 1933 census.

During WWII regular RAAF activity also increased in South Australia, but the state had the least operational activity of any mainland state. This was mostly because of geography; South Australia was remote from the frontlines of the Pacific War which brushed across northern Australia. Neither was South Australia significantly impacted by maritime operations (although reserve squadrons conducted coastal patrols). Also, South Australia had not been a historic location for RAAF operations and there was no aviation industry based in the state.

Nevertheless, urgent plans for home defence in early 1942 included a string of air bases to be built around Adelaide. Ultimately, only one of these bases was completed, at Gawler, where two RAAF operational squadrons were briefly based in 1943. That same year, a transport unit, No. 34 Squadron, began two years of busy operations from Parafield. Some British and American air units also used the facilities at Parafield and Gawler in 1944-45.

The Appendices list 147 members of the RAAF who died in South Australia during WWII, among them are 86 killed in flying accidents. Various localised memorials, often at or near crash sites, commemorate some of these men. Most recently, in September 2020, a memorial to a 1943 Anson crash was unveiled in Loxton. However, at the time of writing, no single

¹ The total number of male RAAF enlistments by No. 5 Recruiting Centre in Adelaide during WWII was 20,049. This is probably the best estimate of overall wartime South Australian RAAF enlistments, although some South Australians will have enlisted elsewhere and some from interstate will have enlisted in Adelaide. The large number of graduates from No. 4 School of Technical Training (approximately 22,000) is probably explained by individuals doing multiple courses and/or students attending from interstate.