

memorial commemorates all of the RAAF members killed in South Australia during WWII.

While there were a handful of RAAF operational accidents that resulted in fatalities, most of the deaths occurred as a result of training operations at the EATS bases. Some 88% of the flying deaths occurred in the period 1941-1943 (the peak of training operations). During 1941-42 the need for aircrew was at its most acute and some of the courses were rushed or were run in training schools not fully completed. Later, most of the courses were lengthened and instructors were more experienced. With the training at a higher standard, the accident rate decreased.

Most of the accidents involved Avro Ansons, but, given the huge amount of training hours being flown—probably in excess of 100,000 hours per annum in South Australia at the peak of operations—the accident rate is understandable. Another contributing factor to the accident rate was the use of target towing Fairey Battle TT aircraft at the Port Pirie bombing and gunnery school. Five of these aircraft were involved in fatal accidents, and their use was discontinued at the end of 1943.

Generally, the standard of training was very good. In 1942, the performance of RAAF aircrews compared very favourably to their American counterparts of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF). This was particularly true for instrument and night flying and navigation.

However, the EATS had been designed with reference to late 1930s Royal Air Force (RAF) training doctrines and, from 1942 onwards, these began to look decidedly dated. For example, pilots trained on twin-engine Avro Ansons at No. 6 Service Flying Training School at Mallala were expected to be ready for operations although the docile and forgiving Ansons were only powered by 340 horsepower Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah engines. When, in 1942, the USAAF requested RAAF co-pilots for various squadrons short of crews, among the aircraft involved were Martin B-26 Marauders with 1,850 horsepower engines! Not surprisingly, the Americans found the RAAF pilots wanting.

Such problems often reflected the fast pace of aviation technological development since the late

1930s and it became apparent the EATS graduates needed extensive additional training prior to joining frontline squadrons. Part of the solution was the formation of Operational Training Units. These included No. 2 Operational Training Unit which specialised in fighter tactics and was briefly based at Port Pirie in early 1942. Eventually this background of technological development led to wholesale changes in the EATS program from late 1943. For example, the bombing and gunnery school at Port Pirie was closed and the unit redesignated as a navigation school.

The quick construction and commissioning of the EATS schools in 1940-41 was a remarkable achievement for the RAAF which had only been a very small organisation in the 1930s. However, after the end of the war in August 1945, the demise of the RAAF in South Australia was just as fast. All of the bases had been closed by mid-1946 with only a few caretaker staff remaining to oversee the disposal of remaining aircraft and equipment. Essentially, the RAAF quickly reverted to its pre-war status of non-existence in South Australia. Probably for that reason more than others, the role of the RAAF in the state during WWII has been largely forgotten and poorly recorded.

However, this status proved very short-lived as, from the late 1940s, RAAF Mallala re-opened and a new era of operations commenced largely connected with British-Australian weapons trials at Woomera. Following the construction of the Edinburgh base in the 1950s, the RAAF has maintained an important presence in South Australia ever since.

Peter Ingman  
Adelaide  
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