

PATHFINDER



AIR POWER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE BULLETIN

Issue 7, September 2004

BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL

During World War II, thousands of young Australians joined the RAAF and served with squadrons in the Royal Air Force in the United Kingdom. The vast majority served in Bomber Command.

The strategic bombing offensive carried out by Bomber Command in Europe played a significant role in the Allied victory over the Axis powers, Germany and Italy. Bomber Command gave Britain the capacity to strike directly at industrial centres and other strategic points, inflicting devastating damage to the enemy's war-making capacity. Although these heavily defended targets were attacked predominantly under cover of darkness, the Bomber Command crews suffered fearsome losses. At the peak of the bombing campaign, up to 1000 heavy bombers would attack on any one night, but up to ten per cent of aircraft and crews could fail to return from such operations.

So high was attrition during 1943-44 that crews had less than a 50 per cent chance of surviving a 'tour' of 30 operations. The men of the RAAF who fought with Bomber Command amounted to fewer than two per cent of all Australians who enlisted in World War II, yet the 3486 who died accounted for almost 20 per cent of all Australian deaths in combat. Many others were wounded. The RAAF's most distinguished heavy bomber unit, No 460 Squadron, alone lost 1018 aircrew—meaning that, in effect, the entire squadron was wiped out five times over.

Australian airmen flew in every major operation. Most of the aircrews who trained under the Empire Air Training Scheme in Australia and Canada were posted to Bomber Command. There were five main RAAF squadrons: No 460 Squadron (flying Wellingtons, then Lancasters), Nos 463 and 467 Squadrons (Lancasters), and Nos 462 and 466 Squadrons (Halifaxes). Other squadrons were also part of Bomber Command for a time, including Nos 455 (Hampdens), 458 (Wellingtons) and 464 (Venturas).

Many of the Australians in Bomber Command logged up tens of thousands of operations and sorties in non-

RAAF units. Two such men were awarded the Victoria Cross after performing outstanding acts of courage. They were: Flight Sergeant Rawdon Middleton, who in November 1942 lost his life captaining a crippled Stirling bomber of No 149 Squadron, RAF, all the way back to England from a raid on Turin, Italy; and Wing Commander Hughie Edwards, who had completed pilot training at Point Cook in 1936 before transferring to the RAF, and in July 1941 led a near-suicide mission by Blenheim light-bombers of No 105 Squadron against the German port of Bremen.



The idea for a memorial to the RAAF personnel who served with Bomber Command dates back to the early 1990s. However, it was not until 1997 that a formal process was commenced which resulted in the development of a design. An advisory committee representing the Bomber Command Association and the Australian War Memorial was established, and a design brief was developed. In September 1998, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs made an initial pledge of \$100,000 to support the development and construction of a suitable memorial. This funding allowed a design competition to proceed in 1999.

The advisory committee unanimously recommended that a design proposal by the noted New Zealand sculptor, Neil Dawson, be adopted for the memorial. Mr Dawson's design was selected because of its aesthetic and artistic merit, the cost effectiveness of

the construction and installation of the sculpture, the suitability of the siting in the Memorial's grounds and a reasonable length of time for completion.

The design and development of the memorial has been approved by the Australian War Memorial Council and the RAAF Association. 'In principle' approval also has been given by the National Capital Authority. The total cost of the project, covering design, fabrication, transport and installation is in the order of \$550,000. To date, donations totalling over \$500,000 have been received, including \$250,000 provided by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

The Bomber Command Memorial will be a very dramatic sculpture, located prominently in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial. It will be one of the first commemorative elements encountered by most visitors as they walk from their cars to the main entrance to the Memorial. It will also be illuminated at night, and very visible from the major traffic routes that pass the Australian War Memorial.

Neil Dawson's design for the Bomber Command Memorial commemorates the service and sacrifice of those who served as aircrew and also the dedicated work of the ground support personnel. Specifically, the design incorporates:

- a symbolised searchlight beam comprising a perforated stainless steel column, 16 metres high with a circumference of 90 centimetres at the base, expanding to 1.2 metres at the top;
- representations of the air and ground crew as silhouetted figures in uniform, in the form of a 2 metre high screen wall;
- a frosted glass plate at the base of the searchlight beam with brass stencils of seven of the aircraft flown by Bomber Command—Halifax, Wellington, Lancaster, Mosquito, Stirling, Blenheim and Whitely; and
- paving and a granite element surrounding the base of the sculpture, incorporating an engraved reflective text outlining the memorial's commemorative purpose.



The Bomber Command Memorial is to be fabricated in New Zealand, where the sculptor, Neil Dawson, lives and works. It is anticipated that the perforated stainless steel column will be manufactured as one piece and then transported to Australia. Work on the sculpture has already started and current plans are for it to be dedicated and unveiled in May 2005. Confirmation of the actual date and details of the dedication ceremony will be publicised by the RAAF Association and the Australian War Memorial closer to the date.

No single group of Australians from any service did more to help win World War II than the men who fought in Bomber Command.

- Dr Alan Stephens, 2001

'Pathfinder' is a fortnightly bulletin from the Air Power Development Centre. Its title is a tribute to the Pathfinder Force which operated within RAF Bomber Command from August 1942. The original Pathfinders were an elite navigational group with the role of preceding each raid and accurately lighting up the target area with incendiary fires to permit visual bombing by the main force. The first commander was Group Captain (later Air Vice-Marshal) D.C.T. Bennett, a Queenslander who trained with the RAAF in 1930-31 before transferring to the RAF, and many other Australians also flew with the force.

The emblem we have adopted is 'Fiery Mo', the unofficial insignia carried on No. 6 Squadron's Hudson aircraft in New Guinea during 1943.



Air Power Development Centre
Level 3, 205 Anketell Street
TUGGERANONG ACT 2900

Ph: 02 6266 1355 Fax: 02 6266 1041
Email: airpower@defence.gov.au
Web: www.raf.gov.au/airpower

