



South Australian Aviation Museum
66 Lipson Street, Port Adelaide, S.A. 5015
Ph: 08 8240 1230

FAIREY BATTLE N2188 FROM PORT PIRIE TO MILDURA – PART 1 **From a talk given by Nigel Daw (May 2021)**

AIRCRAFT TYPE AND USE

The Fairey Battle was a British single-engine light bomber that was designed and manufactured by the Fairey Aviation Company. It was developed during the mid-1930s for the Royal Air Force as a monoplane successor to the Hawker Hart biplane. A requirement of the prospective aircraft was to be capable of carrying 1,000 pounds (450 kg) of bombs over a distance of 1,000 miles (1,600 km) while flying at a speed of 200 mph (320 km/h). The type made its first flight in June 1937 and production continued until 1940 when over 2,000 had been built.

The Battle was powered by the same high-performance Rolls-Royce Merlin piston engine that powered various contemporary British fighters like the Hawker Hurricane and Supermarine Spitfire. The Battle was much heavier, with its three-man crew and bomb load. Though a great improvement over the aircraft that preceded it, the Battle was relatively slow and limited in range. With only two .303 (7.7 mm) machine guns as defensive armament, it was found to be highly vulnerable to enemy fighters and anti-aircraft fire.

A twin engine version had been offered but was not taken up.



1202 FAIREY BATTLE, PORT PIRIE WWI
(PHOTO via SAAM)



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The Fairey Battle was used on operations early in the Second World War. During the "Phoney War" the type achieved the distinction of scoring the first aerial victory of an RAF aircraft in the conflict. In May 1940, the Battles of the Advanced Air Striking Force suffered many losses, frequently in excess of 50 per cent of aircraft sorties per mission. By the end of 1940 the type had been relegated to training units at home. Due to the high number of Battles built, more than two thousand, many of them were subsequently made available for training aircraft in other parts of the world of what was then the British Empire.

Australia played a major part in the Empire Air Training Scheme and large numbers of aircraft were needed in the training schools. As far as Australia was concerned many of these were sent from the UK and re-assembled here. To support the training schools 367 Battles were despatched down under but two were lost in transit. Approximately 100 were target tugs and the rest trainers. Battles in Australia were used primarily by the three Bombing and Gunnery Schools created at Evans Head NSW (No 1 BAGS), Port Pirie (No 2 BAGS) and East Sale (No 3 BAGS). Whilst not used in action, they would have been part of the reserve force had there been a Japanese invasion of Australia in 1942 but, fortunately that was unnecessary.

N2188 AND ITS STORY IN SERVICE

Battle N2188 was one of 189 of the Mk I version built by Fairey Aviation at its Stockport factory in Greater Manchester and was delivered to the RAF in the first half of 1939. It saw some RAF service in an Operational Training Unit but was later crated up for dispatch to Australia, arriving by ship at Geelong on 27 June 1941. It was on the way to Port Pirie (No. 2 BAGS) by the end of August and received there on 8 September. In August 1942 N2188 force landed in the sea off Port Pirie with no injuries but it was recovered and returned to service.

However, its luck ran out as on 7th May 1943 another force-landing was made, coming down near Port Davis, south-west of Port Pirie, and right on the coast and among mangroves, wiping off the undercarriage in the process. The airframe record card states that the cause of loss was a glycol leak, but the pilot at the time, Charles Sadler, later explained that "... the cause ... was a broken connecting rod which cut through the sump causing oil etc to cover the windscreen and [resultant] loss of power". There were three trainees on board with Sadler, named in his log book as Reed, Seymour and Sharples, but again there were no injuries. The aircraft, however, was no longer considered suitable for restoration to service and this time it was decided to convert it to components, that is, take whatever could be removed from the aircraft for spare parts and abandon the rest.



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THE SEARCH FOR N2188 AND ITS RECOVERY

Move forward almost thirty years to 1973 and in the course of a visit to the Port Pirie area by Pearce Dunn from the Warbirds Aviation Museum at Mildura, Victoria, who was looking primarily for Anson "bits", parts of Fairey Battles, probably dumped at the end of the war, were found in some of the larger tidal creeks plus stories were heard of crashed Fairey Battles both at sea and perhaps on land. David Vincent from Adelaide, assisting Pearce at the time, became interested and by chance the name of one of the crashed Battle pilots – one who survived that is – was volunteered by former 2 BAGS instructor Alf Whittle. This was Charles Sadler, who David located later that year. Mr Sadler was most interested to learn that someone was trying to locate his aircraft and painted an optimistic picture of how he remembered it. He told David. "The aircraft's airframe was still intact except for the undercarriage which was wiped off on impact. Certain small pieces were salvaged by ground staff who went to the site by crash launch, but what they took I do not know".

It was the result of Mr Sadler's comments that David wrote to the Port Pirie Air Force Association's Jeff Finlay, also then the Port Pirie Aerodrome's groundsman, hoping to enlist the assistance of learned 5 locals. That was in early 1974. Finlay wrote back advising that he had followed up a few leads and that "it would appear there is definitely an aircraft there", in closing stating that he had "a mate on the local paper" and would see if he could "get a story on the search published". The local paper, The Recorder, did indeed take the story up, going to the trouble of searching the area by the coast by light aircraft. Here the remains of the lost Battle, subsequently confirmed as being N2188, were quickly spotted from the air in a small clearing on the seaward side of the high tide waterline, surrounded by mangroves. The newspaper's editor, Greg Walker, and photographer later rode to the crash site by motorcycle through the saltbush and tidal creeks and photographed the remains, clearly very incomplete, at close hand. This was on 11 March 1974. Soon a message came back to David Vincent; "well we found it, what are you going to do now".

However, where were the remains/ A trip to the area by four enthusiasts in a Renault R10 towing a twenty-foot trailer failed to find any trace of N2188.



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*N2188 FAIREY BATTLE – Mangroves west of Port Pirie, 11 March 1974
(PHOTO via SAAM)*

On Saturday 8 June 1974 a small group from Adelaide and Port Pirie met at the local aerodrome and then travelled to Port Davis. This was followed by a long walk across mud flats and creeks and checking the 'X's on the map until the final 'X' site. Through some mangroves brought us to the remains of the Battle N2188. As the area back from where we had come was very wet it was decided to leave the recovery until after the summer of 1974/75.

Meanwhile the group undertook Avro Anson Farm Hunts from late June 1974 until the end of October. This covered South Australia from the southern tip of Yorke Peninsula to Quorn, the Riverland to Cape Jervis but that is another story.

The first big effort was made on the Easter Weekend 28 – 31 March 1975 with a keen group making their way to the Battle site with the aim of clearing the general area of mangroves and starting on the 6 disassembly. Permission to cut down the mangroves had been sought by a letter sent to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and approval was received.



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*N2188 28 March, 1975
(PHOTO N K Daw)*



*N2188 30 March, 1975
(PHOTO N K Daw)*



*From Left: NIGEL DAW, KEVIN GOGLER and DAVID VINCENT
(PHOTO via SAAM)*

On the Adelaide Cup Weekend 17 – 19 May 1975 the task started with the towing of a pontoon from Port Davis behind a boat with all the heavy gear to the Battle site. The equipment included many boards for use as levers to lift the wings from the mud. The upper panels had to be removed from the wings to enable thirty years of mud to be removed – this was a hard slog. Then the wing was lifted onto boards to rest above the mud. To and



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from the site each day was via boat from Port Davis and then rest on the pontoon when the tide came in and be collected by the boat early in the evening.

The next attempt at the recovery was the Anzac Weekend 24 to 26 April 1976 started well as we could drive out to the Battle in a Volkswagen but there were times at various creeks some manhandling was required. The pontoon was assembled, and the starboard wing was lifted on and secured for shipment 7 out on the next tide. The fuselage section was then lifted through the mangroves for placing on the trailer behind the Volkswagen and shipment out. All these two pieces were then stored at the Port Pirie Aerodrome.



*N2188 WING WEST OF PT PIRIE 25 April, 1976
(N K DAW)*



*D VINCENT 25 April 19 76
(N K DAW)*

On 7 May 1976 another trip to Port Pirie but with a thirty-foot trailer in tow and the fuselage, centre section and starboard wing were transported to Mildura the following day. At the time there was no South Australian Aviation Museum and the Warbirds Aviation Museum was the closest and one of the most active museums in the country; little surprise that's where the remains of N2188 finished up.

The final attempt to remove the remainder of the Battle was on the weekend of 25 – 26 September 1976 when the port wing was placed on the pontoon ready for shipment out but that was not to occur until Steve Nitschke's group visited the site in the 1980's and recovered the final piece.



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FAIREY BATTLE N2188 FROM PORT PIRIE TO MILDURA – PART 2 **From a talk given by David Byrne (May 2021)**

Fairey Battle – Parts Acquisition OR The Great Fairey Battle Treasure Hunt

The Fairey Battle project was acquired from Stephen Nitschke in exchange for the Winjeel. This exchange included the Merlin engine that was originally from a Fairey Battle.

The Fairey Battle had been passed to Pearce Dunn at Mildura Warbirds Museum by the Mangrove mob who salvaged it in 1974. In August 1996 Stephen found 10 cockpit sections in the swamps around Port Pirie and used these to build the Cockpit section- firewall and engine bearers. This was where SAAM commenced work.



It was more than obvious there were a lot of parts missing and that a worldwide search would be required to try and assemble as many original parts as possible to assist the restoration. The most likely countries to find parts was where most Fairey Battles had been used. This was in the following countries.

- UK
- Canada
- Australia - SA- Victoria -Evans Head
- Belgium
- Iceland- RAF Wrecks
- South Africa

Sources of Battle Information

To spread the word, we needed parts we used the following methods:

- An International Transport Conference
- Australian Aviation Museums Network
- International Magazine Articles
- National Magazine Articles
- Visitors to the Museum
- Facebook
- Exchanges



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The result has been the addition of many parts that have contributed to the restoration. These parts were needed as the original plans are incomplete and often difficult to read. Over the past 30 years we have been fortunate to gather parts from all over the world. Most people have donated the parts to us as they know we are a non-profit group and they are keen to help the project succeed.

The list and photos that follow indicate the parts and origin of them.



*Prop and Hub
Casino Airport Lounge c.1998
Prop Counterweights – Mildura Warbirds Museum*



*Wings – RAF Museum – UK
Arrived Port Adelaide 2000*



Flap
Belgium 2001



Engine cowling
Belgium 2001



Radiator Cowling
Belgium 2021



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Cockpit Canopy
Canada 2000



Flap
Northern NSW



Fin
Guy Black UK



Cockpit Hydraulic Controls
Victoria



Wheels
UK 1999



Instruments
Traded/swapped and restored by
Jim Rogers



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Elevator
Geelong, Victoria



Rear Fuselage
UK – exchange for Huck Starter- Guy Black



Rear Gunner Cockpit Canopy
UK – 2020



RR Merlin
Darwin 2015
Exhausts from Port Pirie tidal mangroves

There are still Battle parts out there.
SO - Keep looking.
The Treasure hunt is not over yet!
The more original parts the more complete and authentic the restoration becomes.