

No 458 Squadron RAAF

No 458 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, was formed at Williamtown, New South Wales, on 10 July 1941. Formed under Article XV of the Empire Air Training Scheme, the squadron was destined for operations in Europe. In early August, the 37 airmen then in it sailed for the United Kingdom, where they joined further personnel from across the British Commonwealth being gathered at Holme-on-Spalding Moor. The squadron was equipped with Vickers Wellington medium bombers, and as part of 1 Group Bomber Command, commenced operations over German-occupied Europe on 20 October 1941. For the next three months the focus of the squadron's operations was the strategic bombing campaign against Germany.

In January 1942 the squadron was reallocated to Middle East Command. Its relocation was a chaotic affair. The air and ground crew were separated and the squadron's aircraft were commandeered for operations by other squadrons from Malta, where they had stopped on their way to Egypt. Finally arriving in the Middle East, the squadron's ground crew worked on the maintenance of bombers operated by the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force, while the air crew were attached to 37, 70, 104, 108, and 148 Squadrons RAF. 458 Squadron was not reunited until 1 September 1942.

Based at El Shallufa in Egypt, the squadron was re-equipped with Wellingtons and trained in the techniques employed to attack ships and submarines with both bombs and torpedoes. Henceforth, 458 Squadron's primary role was to seek out and attack enemy shipping in the Mediterranean Sea. In this role, its aircraft operated from airfields in Egypt, Malta, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Sardinia, Corsica, and Italy. The squadron also undertook conventional bombing tasks, most notably in support of the Allied invasion of southern France in August 1944.

458 Squadron relocated for the final time, to Gibraltar, on 26 January 1945. With the occupation of southern France, and the continuing progress of the Allied campaign in Italy, enemy submarines and surface vessels in the Mediterranean presented little threat. From Gibraltar, the squadron roamed out across the western Atlantic, escorting Allied convoys and searching for German submarines. The squadron was still carrying out these tasks when the war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945. It disbanded on 9 June 1945.



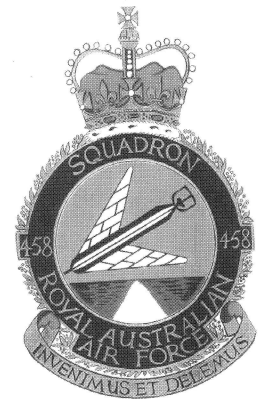
Squadron Crest:

Squadron Motto: INVENIMUS ET DELEMUS (We Find and Destroy)

Vickers Wellington

The twin-engine Wellington was the mainstay of Bomber Command until 1942, when the four-engine heavy bombers entered service. The Wellington prototype took to the air for the first time in June 1936 and production models entered service with the Royal Air Force in October 1938. By September 1939 Bomber Command had eight Wellington squadrons, which increased to 21 by the beginning of 1942. It was widely nicknamed the "Wimpey" after the character in the Popeye cartoon strip, J. Wellington Wimpey.

Wellingtons were the first bombers used to attack Germany in September 1939, but like all British bombers of the war they were lightly armed and suffered heavily from attacks by German fighters. In 1940 the Wellington squadrons were switched to night raids. The unique geodetic latticework construction of the Wellington made it particularly robust - able to sustain remarkable amounts of flak damage and yet still keep flying. The last Wellingtons were withdrawn from service over Germany and occupied Europe in 1943 but continued to serve in the Mediterranean theatre and over Burma until the end of the war. The Wellington proved a versatile aircraft and was also employed as a maritime patrol aircraft, a minelayer, and a transport. In all, 11,461 Wellingtons were built during the war, making it the numerous multi-engine aircraft produced by Britain.



Cover Story

Specifications:

Vickers Wellington Mk IV

Type:	Medium bomber
Entered service:	October 1938
Crew:	6
Wing span:	26.27 m
Length:	19.68 m
Weight (unladen):	8,417 kg
Ceiling:	5,486 m
Endurance:	Maximum range 3,621 km
Speed:	369 km/h
Armament:	6 x .303-in machine-guns, 2,041 kg of bombs

HOLME ON SPALDING MOOR

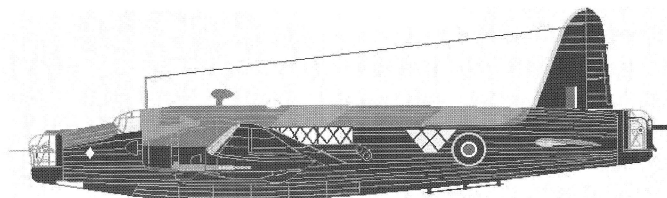
Six miles south-west of Market Weighton and a mile south of the village for which it was named, on the east side of the A614, this airfield was one of the early wartime bomber stations with hard runways. Construction began in the winter of 1940-41 with three concrete runways, a perimeter track and 36 hard standings laid by the following summer. The runways were extended from the original planned lengths before completion of the airfield, the main 12-30 ending up at 1,800 yards, 04-22 at 1,200 yards and 08-26 at 1,100 yards. A single Type J hangar was erected by the technical site, situated on the north-east side beside the public road, with two Type T2 added alongside in the later stages of construction. Bomb stores were off the northwest corner of the airfield. The dispersed camp sites to the north-east of the airfield catered for up to 1,941 males and 381 females.

Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, more frequently referred to as plain Holme, even in official documents, was first occupied by flying units in August 1941 with the arrival of No. 458 (RAAF) Squadron, which was being built up to fly Wellingtons in No 1 Group. The first offensive operations from Holme took place on the night of October 20/21 with ten Wellingtons attacking Antwerp. One aircraft was lost Sergeant Philip Crittenden being the first Australian serving in Bomber Command to be killed from a RAAF Squadron. Another Australian squadron, No. 460, established at Holme, began training at its satellite, Brighton, in November. Tentative plans to convert both units to the Halifax were never brought to fruition, No. 1 Group taking

to the Lancaster instead, No 458 Squadron's operational career in Bomber Command being terminated at the end of January 1942. After a few weeks spent re-equipping, No 458 was sent out to the Mediterranean theatre to meet an urgent requirement for anti-shiping operations. During its time at Holme, the squadron flew 65 sorties losing three aircraft.

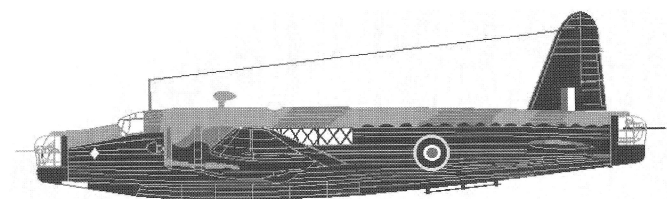
Most of the runway and perimeter track concrete has now been removed for hardcore and little evidence of the airfield remains.

No 458 Squadron



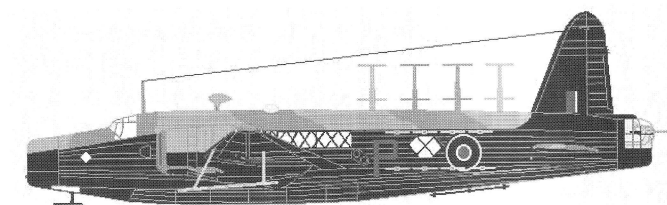
Wellington IV

Aug 1941 - Jan 1942



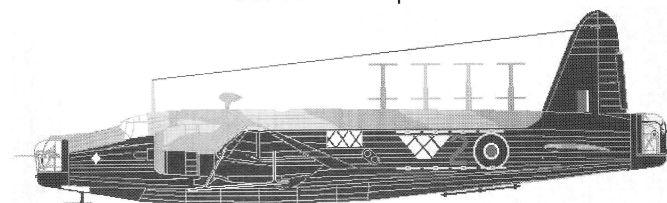
Wellington IC

Feb 1941 - Apr 1942, Oct 1942 - Nov 1942



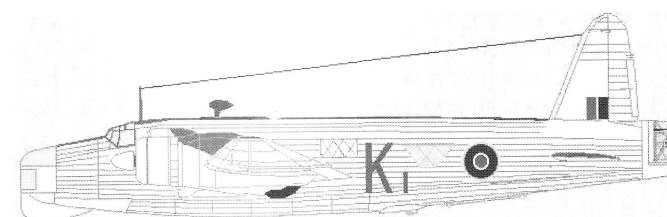
Wellington VIII

Oct 1942 - Sep 1943

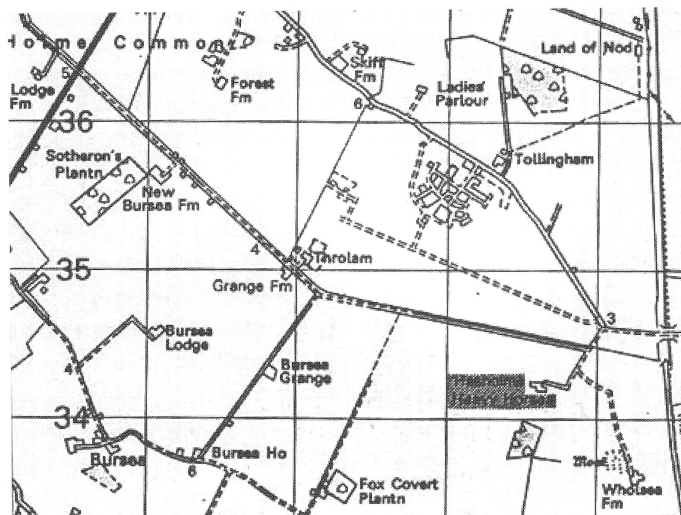


Wellington XIII

Jun 1943 - May 1944

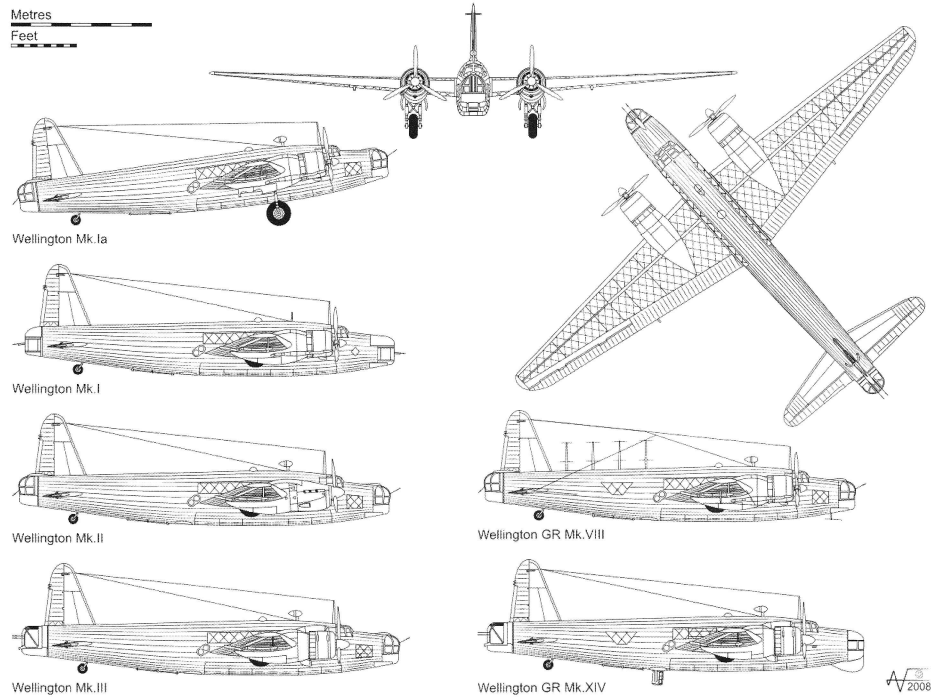


See p.28 for news on the presentation of the Official 458 Squadron Badge to Colin Fereday, and about the Saint Clement Danes Project.



Cover Story

Specifications (Wellington Mk IC)



Orthographic projection of the Wellington Mk Ia, with profile views of Mk I (Vickers turrets), Mk II (Merlin engines), Mk.III (Hercules engines, 4-gun tail turret), GR Mk VIII (maritime Mk Ic, metric radar) and GR Mk XIV (maritime Mk X, centimetric radar)

General characteristics

Crew: six

- **Length:** 64 ft 7 in (19.68 m)
- **Wingspan:** 86 ft 2 in (26.26 m)
- **Height:** 17 ft 6 in (5.33 m)
- **Wing area:** 840 ft² (78.04 m²)
- **Empty weight:** 18,556 lb (8,417 kg)
- **Max takeoff weight:** 28,500 lb (12,927 kg)
- **Engines:** 2× Bristol Pegasus Mk XVIII radial engines, 1,050 hp (783 kW) each

Performance

- **Maximum speed:** 235 mph (378 km/h)
- **Range:** 1,805 miles (2,905 km)
- **Service ceiling:** 18,000 ft (5,486 m)
- **Rate of climb:** 1,050 ft/min (320 m/min)
- **Wing loading:** 34 lb/ft² (168 kg/m²)

Armament

- **Guns:** 8x .303 Browning machine guns:
 - 2 in nose turret - 2 in tail turret
 - 2 in waist positions
- **Bombs:** 4,500 lb (2,041 kg) bombs