

NAVAL WIRRAWAYS

In anticipation of Sea Fury deliveries in 1949, the RAN required an advanced trainer at Nowra, and four Wirraways were delivered over 1948-49. Six more aircraft were delivered to Nowra from 2AD at Richmond on 30 SEP 1952. The following year a further six were required, “to replace unsuitable aircraft previously issued”.⁸⁴ A further aircraft in the third batch (A20-18) was issued to the RAN in OCT 1953 and in naval store at Randwick was deemed “not suitable” and replaced in NOV 1953 by A20-225. Wirraways were initially operated by HMAS *Albatross* Station Flight, and by 723SQN from 1952, and 724SQN from 1955.⁸⁵ (725SQN did not form until 1958, after Wirraways retired.) One Wirraway crashed in naval service, and the remainder were withdrawn from service by 1957, replaced by Vampires.



One of the first four Wirraways delivered in 1949 with Station Flight, with ‘W’ tail code

RAAF Surplus Wirraways to the RAN				
Batch	No. of Aircraft	Dates	Serials	Remarks
1948-49	4	NOV 1948 – SEP 1949	A20-139, 141, 145, 176	Coded between 901 - 904
1952	6	2AD to Nowra 30 SEP 1952	A20-28, 133, 168, 238, 469, 752	Coded NW/900-series, and NW/971-972
1953	6	Tocumwal to Nowra 30 NOV 1953	A20-209, 211, 214, 225, 250, 490	A20-18 rejected by Navy, replaced by A20-225

As the Wirraways were inherited straight from the RAAF, the combination with Navy markings did vary. The designation CA-20 is incorrectly related to Navy reconditioned Wirraway airframes for service at Nowra.⁸⁶ All RAN Wirraways were surplus, and passed directly from storage at the RAAF’s 1AD Det ‘B’ at Tocumwal, or 2AD at Richmond – so they did not pass through CAC for rework. Indeed in the case of A20-18, its condition was unsuitable for RAN acceptance and, with five other aircraft stored with 2AD Richmond, was subsequently sold as scrap in AUG 1954.⁸⁷



A20-469 delivered in SEP 1952, with unusual black markings, was later coded NW/902

Naval Wirraway Units

From 1949, until being withdrawn in 1957, the Wirraways were flown by three units at HMAS *Albatross*, Nowra.

- **Station Flight**, initially inducted the Wirraways, as the second-line squadrons had not yet formed.
- **723SQN** was the first second-line unit formed in APR 1952, and by the end of the year flew two Wirraways.
- **724SQN** formed in JUN 1955 for fixed-wing conversions, and had Wirraways for that role. When 723SQN decommissioned in OCT 1956, its Wirraways passed to 724SQN.

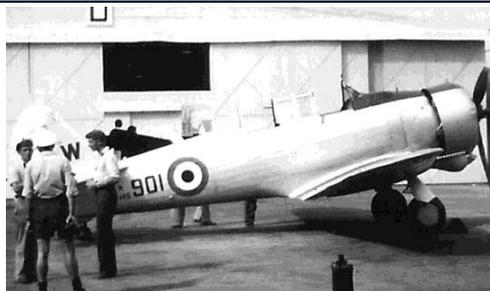
A third RAN training unit, 725SQN formed in JAN 1958, by which time the Wirraway had been withdrawn.

Naval Wirraways – Changing Code Numbers

The code numbers of the RAN FAA's aircraft was basically in line with the Royal Navy. From when the RAN FAA was formed in 1948, the 3-digit fuselage code was carried over from the RN system, this denoting the aircraft's function: communications aircraft used '800-series' codes, and Station Flights used '900' codes. The RAN continued to use a fairly similar system, but changing to '900' codes for all second line units in 1955, and then in 1958 the whole of naval aviation adopted '800' codes for all units.⁸⁸

- **901-905 (1949-1956):** The Station Flight Wirraways carried side numbers 901 to 904 over 1949-1952. When 723SQN formed in 1952, at least two Wirraways were transferred from Station Flight and retained their '900-series' codes, then more aircraft increased codes up to at least '905'. But in true Naval tradition, there was much changing of aircraft codes: A20-145 carried at different times 'W/901' and 'NW/904' (when it crashed in JUN 1953); while '902' was carried by both A20-139 and A20-469; and '904' was carried by A20-141, A20-145 (when it crashed JUN 1953), then by A20-28. When 723SQN disbanded in OCT 1956, the Wirraways were transferred to 724SQN. [In addition, '900' and '901' codes had also been carried by the early Navy Dakotas on 723SQN; and the first 723SQN Sycamores were marked upwards from '906', and then re-used vacant codes.]
- **971-972 (1955-1957):** When 724SQN formed in 1955 for all fixed-wing conversions, at least two Wirraways were passed over, and coded '971' (A20-752) and '972' (A20-168). 723SQN then disbanded in OCT 1956, and their Wirraways were transferred to 724SQN, but as the Navy was on the verge of withdrawing Wirraways, it is doubted that these aircraft were then actually re-coded. [In addition, from 1956 724SQN took on strength Sea Fury '972', and Gannets '973' to '975'.]

THE FIRST NAVAL WIRRAWAYS



901

A20-145 coded W/901 with Station Flight



902

A20-139 W/902 with Station FLT; later **A20-469** NW/902



903

Code W/903 was probably **A20-176**

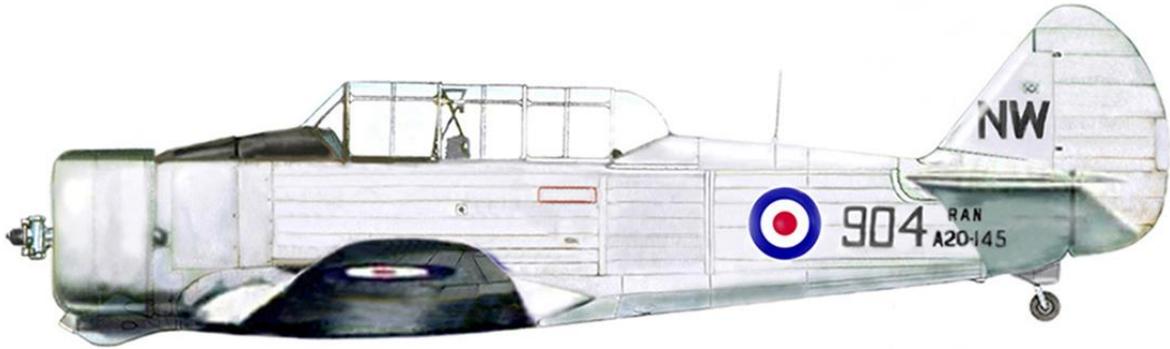


904

The first '904' was probably **A20-141**
A20-145 was NW/904 in 1953; here **A20-28** is NW/904

The original code numbers shown here on 901/902/903 were 12" (30.48cm) high; these were changed to a larger font over about 1954 to 18" (45.72cm) high. The early tail identifier for Nowra was "W", changed to "NW" c1952.

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Crash of A20-145 NW/904 near Nowra on 18 JUN 1953 – code 904 and NW 12" high, serial numbers 4" high⁸⁹



Naval Disposals

Other Wirraway airframes were issued to the RAN ex 2AD Richmond for spares use and subsequently deemed unsuitable. They were held by 2AD and the RAN Depot Randwick before disposal: A20-18, 73, 190, 412, 567 and 579 were sold to Wilmor Aviation on 15 JUL 1954 (see CDC Disposal Form 1 below).

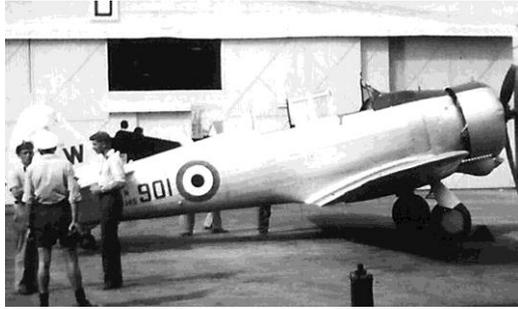
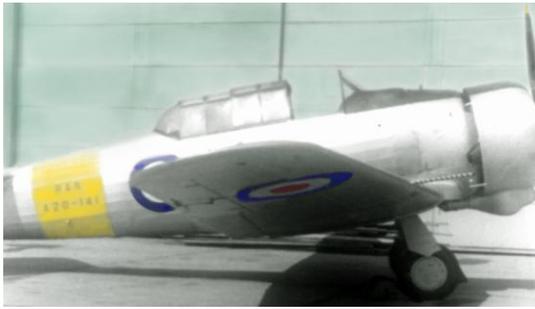
Wilmor Aviation Services Pty Ltd, Sydney: This aviation parts supply business was formed as a partnership between Sydney stockbroker flying enthusiast Joseph Palmer and experienced aircraft engineer Walter Morley. An associate company was Wilmor Aviation Co. Among other military disposals aircraft acquired by Wilmor were several RAAF Mustangs, one being retained as VH-WAS for Wilmor Aviation Services, and flown from Bankstown until 1961.⁹⁰

Lund Aviation Inc of New York: Bought the 15 remaining ex-Navy Wirraways in 1957; two engines to Phelan Aircraft Materials Company of North Hollywood.⁹¹ Both Lund Aviation and Phelan Aircraft had also been bidders in the RAAF 1957 tender T4/630/3644 for 57 Wirraway engines and propellers disposed under TOC List 10/57.



A Nowra hangar, 903/NW possibly A20-176 (left); A20-490, 3SQN Canberra 1951-52, before 1953 transfer to Navy

NAVAL WIRRAWAYS



Station Flight Wirraways, half-size 4" serials: **A20-141** marked on a trainer band; and **A20-145** coded '901' c1950



A20-28 NW/904, **A20-469 NW/902** (probably yellow cowls) **723SQN** c1954-56, **723SQN** decommissioned 1956



724 SQN with 970-codes reformed JUN 1955, so these are c1955-57 – **A20-752 NW/971** and **A20-168 NW/972**



A20-752 with no roundel – probably at the changeover of markings to show the larger **NAVY** and serial number