

A46-249

RIGHT: Mrs Pam Hourigan in a Boomerang being restored by her husband, Richard.



# Return of the Boomerang

RESCUED from a rubbish dump, the last Australian Boomerang fighter plane built — Number 249 — is gradually being restored in Melbourne.

It's definitely a labor of love which has involved aircraft maintenance engineer Richard Hourigan for 20 years — half his 40 years lifetime.

During that time he has also helped to restore two Wirraway trainers, a Mustang fighter and another Boomerang, besides a Hudson bomber. All are of World War 2 vintage and all except the Hudson were Australian-built.

The Boomerang is of special interest in that some 40 years after the first emerged it remains the only fighter aircraft to be both designed and produced in numbers by Australians in Australia.

Unlike the Australian-made Mustang, Sabre and Mirage,

also fighters, it was not licensee manufactured.

Number 249, like all the other Boomerangs of various types, was a product of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fishermen's Bend, Melbourne.

It was delivered by C.A.C. to the Royal Australian Air Force at Laverton on February 1, 1945.

And although its total flying time was a mere two hours, 45 minutes it went straight into storage at Laverton and was never flown again. Later, its wings were removed and used for research testing. The fuselage was sold for scrap.

When Richard Hourigan came across it in 1961 it was a strip-

ped and almost unrecognisable metal framework abandoned behind a garage at Pomborneit, in the Western District.

The owner of the garage, a former member of a Boston bomber squadron, gave it to him.

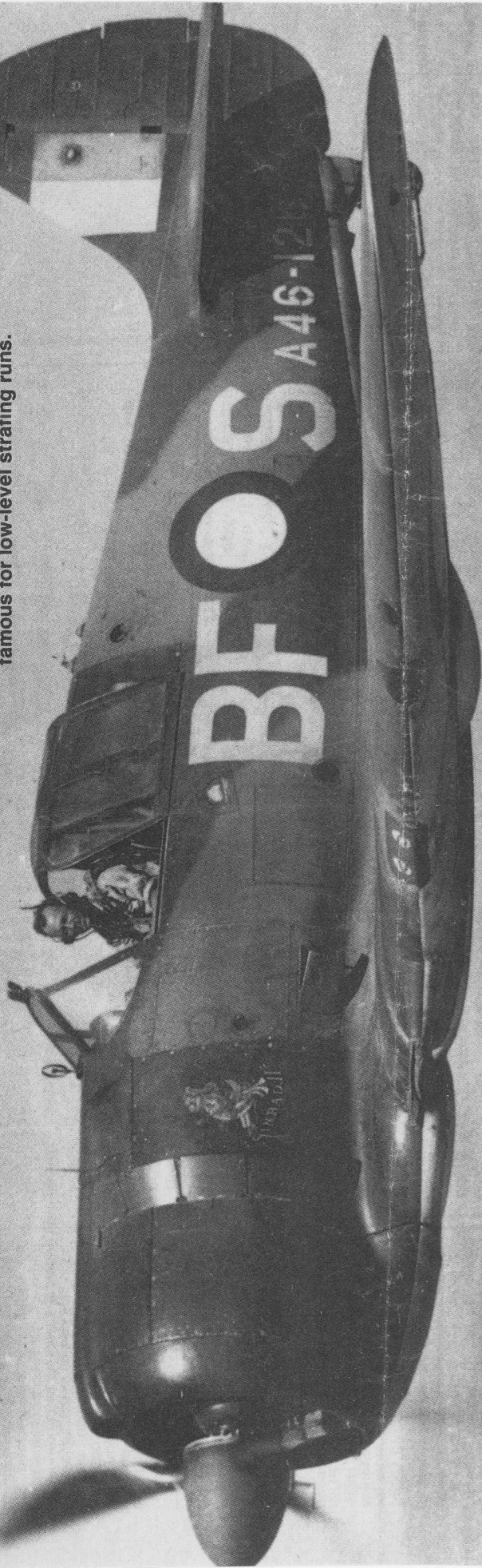
Another Boomerang is being rebuilt in Melbourne by Mr Ron Lee, a close colleague of Richard, and two others are undergoing restoration in Brisbane. None is ever likely to fly because of a lack of vital parts.

At best, Richard hopes to be able to taxi his restored plane.

The first Boomerang flew in May, 1942, and the first official order for the aircraft was placed only a few months earlier — in February, 1942. The effort involved in designing and building such a plane in that brief period was an extraordinary achievement for Australia's infant aircraft manufacturing industry.



★ A Boomerang of No. 5 Squadron over Mareeba (Q) in 1944 ... they were famous for low-level strafing runs.



# Boomerang to fly again

By ROB FOX

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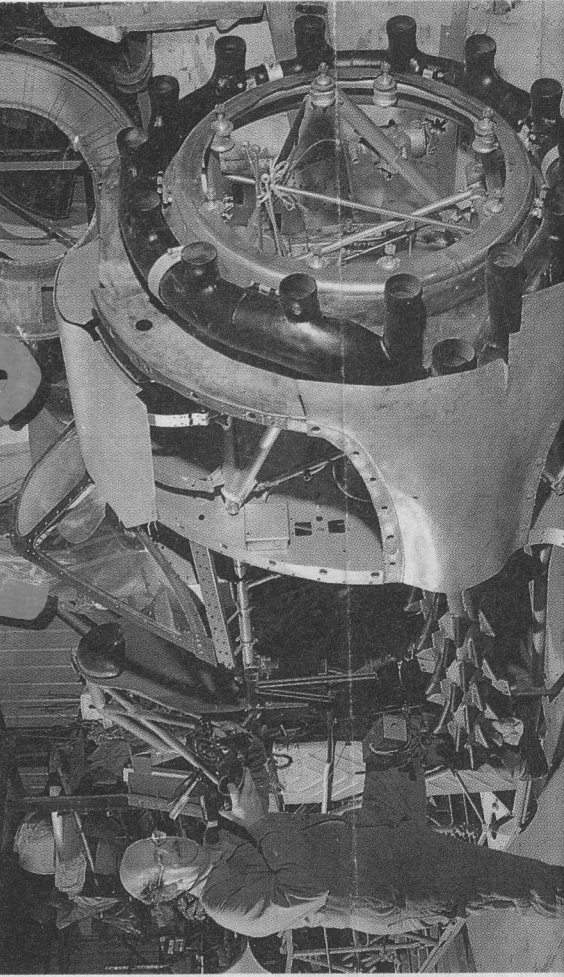
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Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation pilot Ken Frewin took to the air in the first Boomerang on May 29, 1942 — an incredible 16 weeks and three days after the design work began.

The ungainly Wirraway trainer became the backbone of the new fighter, which was given the most powerful engine available from locally-built Beaufort bombers. The Boomerangs had many Wirraway components, including tail assembly, undercarriage, centre section, a similar cockpit, wings and fuselage.

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With ingenuity, skill and the Aussie battler way of "making do with what was available", the Boomerang was hastily designed and built.

No prototype was made, but five were quickly created for immedi-

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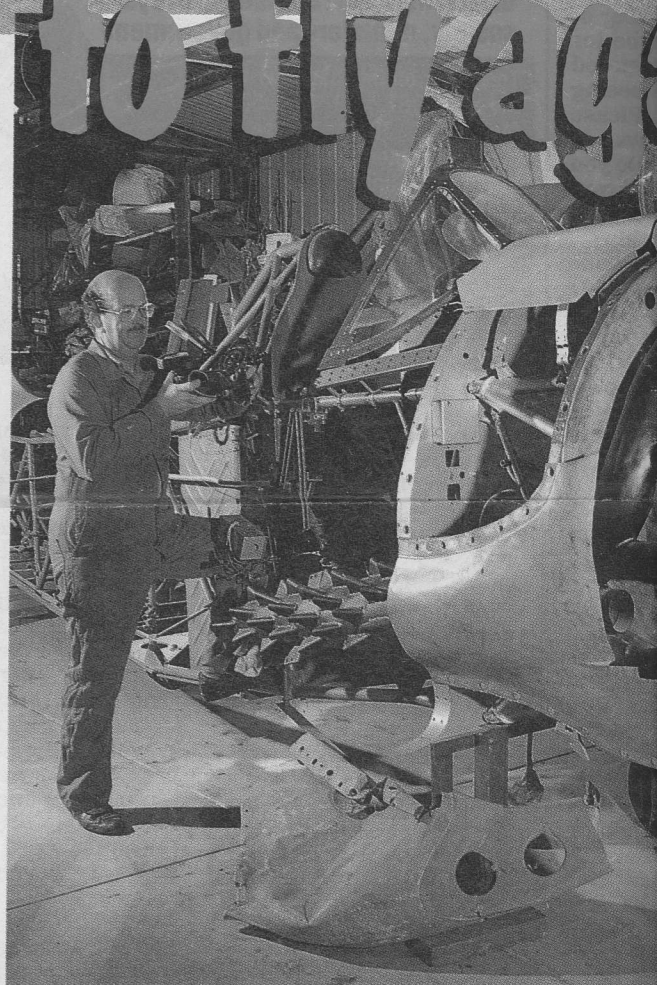
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The designers managed not only to create a high performance interceptor that could compete with the Japanese fighters, but also one that could be produced in great numbers, using current production techniques.

Four variants of the Boomerang were built before production ceased on February 1, 1945. All were fitted with Hispano cannons and four .303 calibre machine guns. Wing mounts allowed 8kg (20lb) smoke bombs to be carried.

The Boomerang exceeded design predictions. It was highly manoeuvrable with the ability to out-climb the Hurricane 1, Spitfire and Kittyhawk.

The aircraft first saw action with No 84 squadron based on Horn Island, Cape York, when two aircraft jumped two



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Japanese Betty Bombers on May 16, 1943.

But it was the low-level strafing of Japanese troops for which the Boomerangs became famous, often returning to base riddled with small arms fire and with jungle foliage caught up under the fuselage.

Only one Boomerang is preserved in the Australian War Memorial.

But now, thanks to a few enthusiasts, some are being cobbled together. Their rebirth is becoming as legendary as the machine itself.

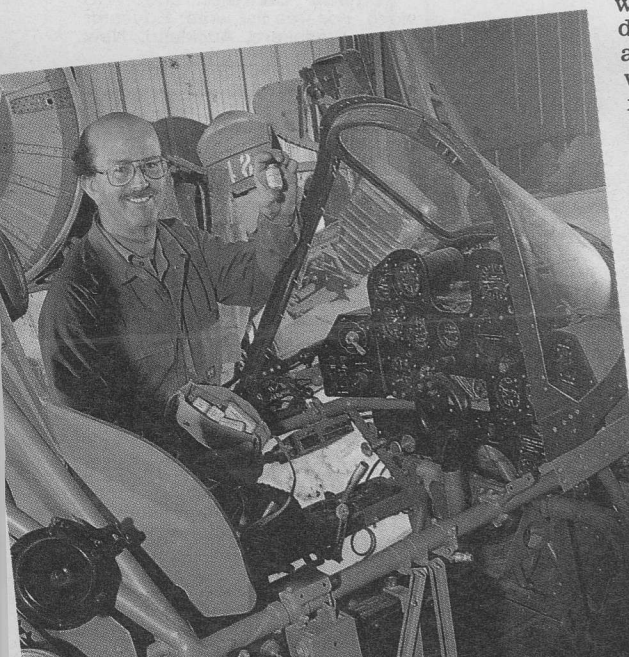
Two are taking shape in Queensland and two in Victoria.

Dick Hourigan, of Harkaway

(V), has been collecting "warbirds" is based on the fuselage of the last Boomerang was found on a Peninsula.

Helped by local Horn Island who had stripped a crate of cables and bolts salvage two wings that had lain there 18, 1943.

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(V), has been collecting pieces for 30 years. Dick, an aircraft electrical engineer, has retrieved pieces from Kalgoorlie to Princess Charlotte Bay on the Cape York Peninsula.

Helped by local fishermen on Horn Island who, over the years had stripped a crashed Boomerang of cables and bolts, he managed to salvage two wings from the wreck that had lain there since October 18, 1943.

Dick, who has restored two other "warbirds" is building a replica based on the fuselage of A46-249, the last Boomerang made, which was found on a junk heap at

