VX165 finished in the Bomber Command No.1 scheme of glossy Medium Sea Grey and black.

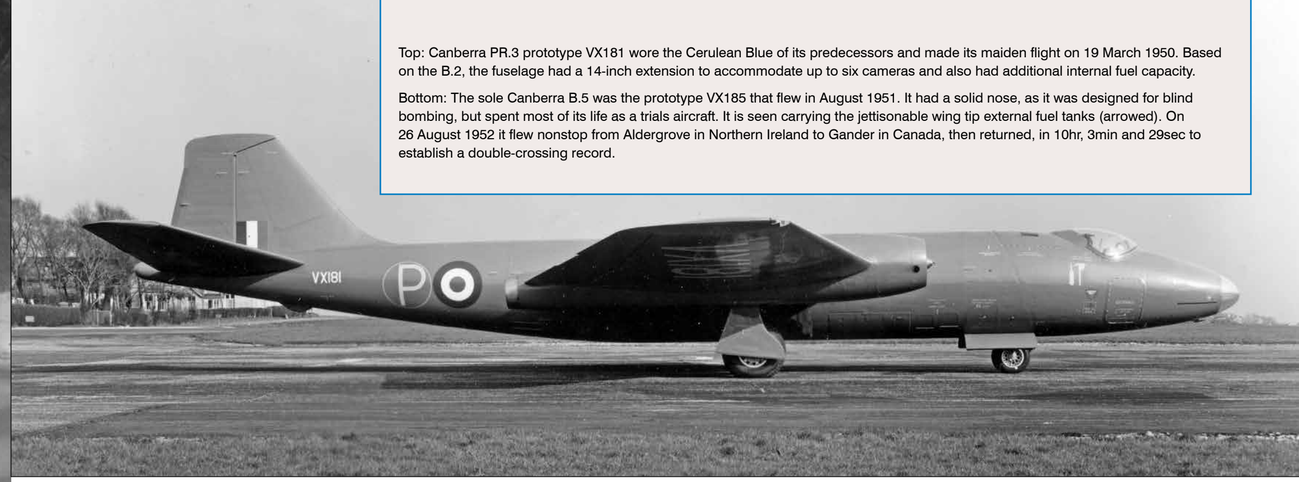
Because of delays in perfecting the Radar bombing system, it was decided to create a more conventional version with a bomb-aimer as a third crew member and a glazed nose (arrowed) for an ordinary optical bomb-sight. Four pre-production aircraft were then ordered to specification B.5/47: VX165 and VX169 were prototypes for the Canberra B.2, but confusingly given the SBAC suffix A.2!. VX165 flew on 23 April 1950. VX181 became prototype for the Canberra PR.3 and VX185 became the sole B.5 prototype.

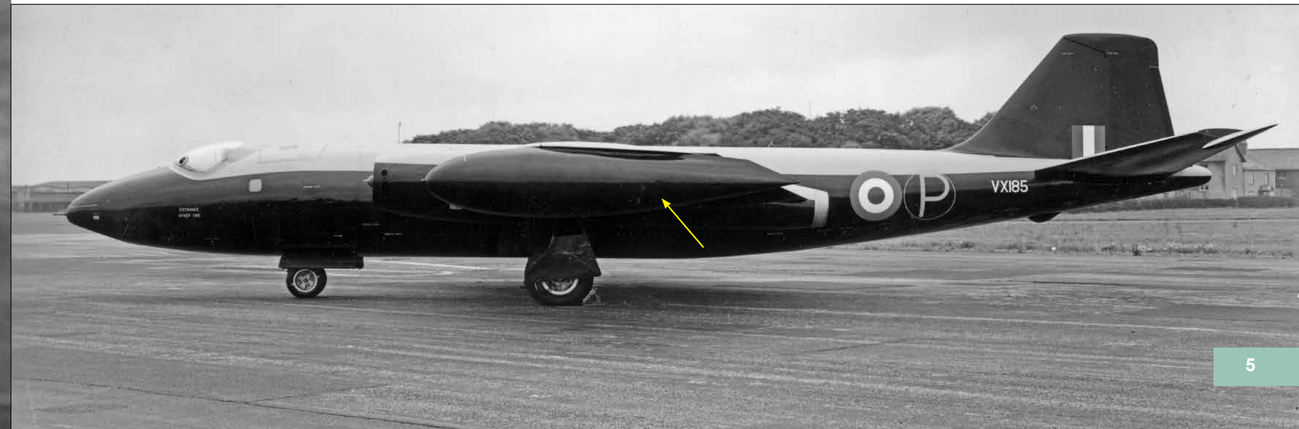
The first production batch of 70 B.2s were in the serial range WD929-WD966, WD980-WD999 and WE111-WE122. WD929 first flew on 8 October 1950.



Top: Canberra PR.3 prototype VX181 wore the Cerulean Blue of its predecessors and made its maiden flight on 19 March 1950. Based on the B.2, the fuselage had a 14-inch extension to accommodate up to six cameras and also had additional internal fuel capacity.

Bottom: The sole Canberra B.5 was the prototype VX185 that flew in August 1951. It had a solid nose, as it was designed for blind bombing, but spent most of its life as a trials aircraft. It is seen carrying the jettisonable wing tip external fuel tanks (arrowed). On 26 August 1952 it flew nonstop from Aldergrove in Northern Ireland to Gander in Canada, then returned, in 10hr, 3min and 29sec to establish a double-crossing record.





Four significant aircraft in the Canberra development programme at Warton in 1952, left-right: T.4 prototype WN467, B.5 VX185, the first production PR.3 WE135 and the second B.2 prototype VX169. The yellow 'trainer' bands around the wing and fuselage of WN467 (arrowed) are readily apparent, but less obvious is the yellow fin and rudder (see pages 44 and 45). Further down, B.5 VX185 has a nose art commemorating its record-breaking Atlantic flights.

The van proudly displays 'The English Electric Company - Preston' on its side.



PRODUCTION & TESTING

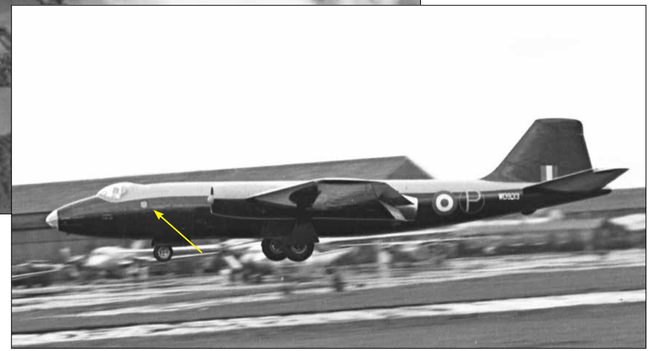
Below: At RAF Biggin Hill on Friday 19 January 1951 the Rt Hon Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, performed the official naming ceremony of the Canberra, after the Australian Capital. The aircraft was the first production example of the B.2 WD929.

Left: Canberra B.2 WD930, the second production aircraft, shows off its paces and offers a good view of the size and position of the underwing serials. The glossy paint scheme is also evident. It spent its life on development work with the Handling Squadron. On 10 May 1951 it was flown to Binbrook where the pilot gave a lecture to 101 Squadron that was shortly to re-equip with the new aircraft.

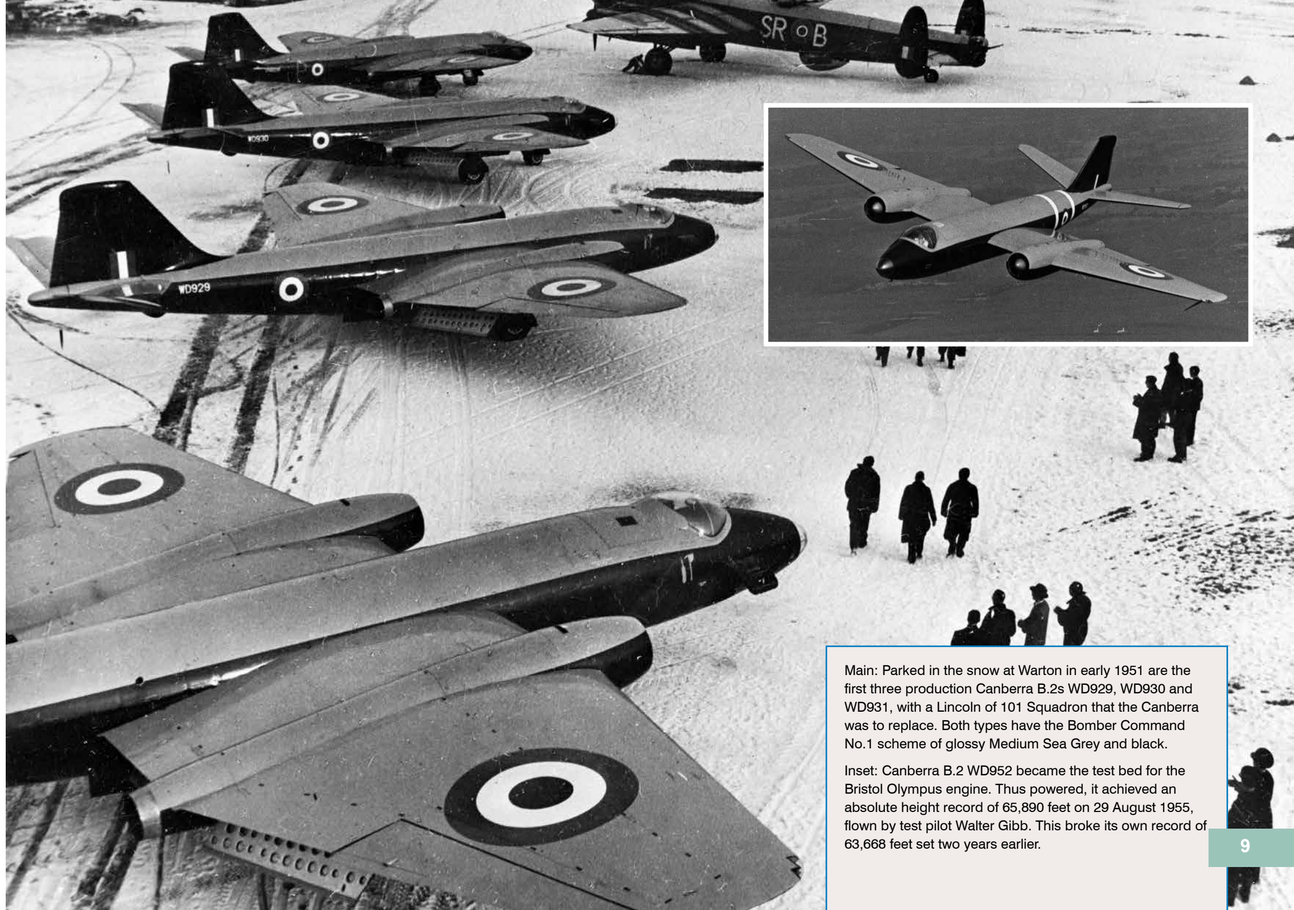


Left: This superb study clearly illustrates the Canberra's supremely clean lines, enhanced by the handsome colour scheme. This is B.2 WD933 that saw no RAF service as it was transferred to Vickers Armstrong for Sapphire engine development, evidenced by the size of the cones containing the starter cartridges (A). The small windows (B) above the two navigators' seats are clear. The pilots are wearing conventional flying helmets as 'bone dome' helmets had yet to be introduced.





Right: With flaps down WD933 is about to touch down at Prestwick after an engine test flight. The small window (arrowed) on the left side was all the navigator had until crawling down into the nose!



Main: Parked in the snow at Warton in early 1951 are the first three production Canberra B.2s WD929, WD930 and WD931, with a Lincoln of 101 Squadron that the Canberra was to replace. Both types have the Bomber Command No.1 scheme of glossy Medium Sea Grey and black.

Inset: Canberra B.2 WD952 became the test bed for the Bristol Olympus engine. Thus powered, it achieved an absolute height record of 65,890 feet on 29 August 1955, flown by test pilot Walter Gibb. This broke its own record of 63,668 feet set two years earlier.





Main & inset right: The absolute world height record was further extended to 70,310 feet on 28 August 1957 by Canberra B.2 WK163. It was fitted with an auxiliary Napier Double Scorpion rocket motor in the bomb bay (A). Normal power was used to 44,000 feet before initiating the rocket motor to provide the additional boost. The rocket's thrust can be seen (arrowed) in the main photo.

Inset left: Canberra B.2 WH734 was transferred to Flight Refuelling Ltd on 31 July 1954 where it was fitted with a hose-drum unit in the bomb bay for 'probe and drogue' refuelling trials. Here it is refuelling Lightning F.1A XM169 of the A&AEE on 1 September 1961.

Some of the 60 Canberra B.2s (WH853-WH925) built by Short Bros & Harland Ltd in Belfast between November 1952 and October 1954. Most, like WH881 and WH878, carry the large fuselage serials but for some reason WH876 has the smaller style (arrowed).

BOMBER COMMAND

Below: The first Bomber Command Canberra squadron was No.101 based at Binbrook. Its first Canberra B.2, WD936, was delivered on 25 May 1951. The following month this smart line-up was presented when it had reached full strength. The aircraft are in the handsome Bomber Command No.1 scheme. The first three are WD948, WD936 and WD943.

Right: WP514 was one of two built to replace WD939 and WD983 that were diverted to the RAAF and joined 101 Squadron. WP514 later went to 73 Squadron and was destroyed with three other Canberras in an attack on RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus, by EOKA guerrillas in November 1957.





After the initial production batch, Canberra B.2s were delivered in a new scheme named Bomber Command No.2: Medium Sea Grey and Light Slate Grey camouflage with PRU Blue undersides. In this formation, taken on 10 September 1952, WF916 of 50 Squadron leads WD955 of 101 Squadron that is still in the No.1 scheme. All wear the small serials that from March 1952 were markedly increased in size on new deliveries.