



SITREP

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION NSW - NEWS AND VIEWS

I Love the Smell of Napalm in the Morning!

From Ken Mitchell DFC, DFC (US), AM (US); Vietnam FAC

This is an(other) excerpt from Ken's autobiography and describes the role of RAAF Forward Air Controllers (FAC) attached to the USAF supporting the US Army in Vietnam, 1969-70.

The Michelin rubber plantation covered a large area on the northern border of our AO. The plantation was used as a staging area by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and it was not unusual to be shot at while flying past there. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to return fire at that time because the US Government had to pay the plantation owners so much for every tree damaged! (Another stupid political restriction) The brigade commander decided that if we couldn't get to the NVA in the rubber, we would do the next best thing and build a fire support base (FSB) on the south-eastern corner of the plantation, with the expectation that the NVA would not tolerate a FSB so close to their perimeter. It was estimated that we had three days to set up and prepare for the inevitable attack.

Construction started immediately, with CH-47 Chinooks lifting in the bulldozers and UH-1 Iroquois bringing in the infantry. The Chinooks returned the following day with a battery of 105mm howitzers consisting of six guns. The construction team spotted NVA reconnaissance parties up trees in the distance gathering information on the new facility. On the third day, the base was completed and named FSB Oran, after one of the 1st Division's battle sites in North Africa during WWII. The infantry and artillery were in position, waiting like bait on a hook for the NVA.

I was awakened early on the morning of the fourth day, 18 March. The brigade commander invited me to join his fire support team as the duty forward air controller (FAC) on his command and control chopper. FSB Oran was about to come under attack. We got airborne and tuned into the command frequency just in time to hear the FSB commander broadcast 'All stations be advised FSB Oran is under heavy ground attack



From: <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/vietnam-war-weapons-the-AC-47-gunship/>

from three sides. Request assistance.' Artillery from supporting FSBs was already pounding the ground outside the perimeter when we arrived over the battle in the C&C ship. In very quick succession, 'Moonshine' (DC-3 flareship) and 'Spooky' (DC-3/AC-47 gunship) arrived, followed by Cobra gunships. Our FAC was also on station and air strikes were on the way. The battle was

fierce, with tracers arcing into the FSB and the 105s returning fire at point blank range. The latter were firing flechette rounds, which comprised thousands of nail-sized steel arrows and had devastating on troops in the open. Large white golf balls – actually rounds fired from enemy 12.7mm/50 calibre weapons – were flashing past our C&C ship and other slow-movers from the FSB.

A Cobra gunship which had been hit called 'Mayday' before crash-landing onto a road to the east of the FSB. Another chopper went with him and rescued the crew from the dirt track. The Spooky gunship was hosing the perimeter of the FSB with his mini guns, with deadly effect on the attackers. At this time, the FSB commander radioed that he was running out of 105 ammunition and requested resupply. Moonshine had turned the night into day around the FSB with his flare runs. Out of the darkness loomed a Chinook with a slung load of 105 ammo, with explosions all around him and tracers flying every which way. The pilot went into a hover and dropped his load of ammo on top of the guns. The Chinook took hits but did not go down. The 105s started firing at point blank range again.



From historynet.com: **Packed with rockets and a chin-turret minigun, a shark-mouthed Bell AH-1 Cobra**, Getty Images

The brigade commander ordered the insertion of two ready reserve companies to the north of the FSB to act as a blocking force. After consultation between the brigade commander, myself and the airborne FAC, the TACAIR was used to lay down ordnance (snake eye bombs, napalm and cannon) on the southern perimeter so that the FSB was ringed with firepower. At this stage we flew to a nearby base and conducted an 'engine on' refuel. We were back in the battle within twenty minutes. The exchange of fire was still fierce but many of the enemy 12.7 AAA positions had been

silenced. An awesome sight was watching a Cobra gunship flying down the tracer path of 12.7 AAA, firing his own rockets and guns and finally silencing the enemy emplacement.

The battle raged until just before dawn when the NVA began their withdrawal. At this stage the brigade commander ordered a return to Lai Khe. We were to refuel and land back at the FSB as soon as possible. We touched down in the middle of the FSB and were greeted by the base commander. He was in great spirits; the FSB was a mess and the strong smell of gunpowder and napalm hung in the morning mist that covered the area (I love the smell of napalm in the morning!). While infantry casualties had been light, the artillery officer and a number of gunners had been killed and one 105 gun had been destroyed. This was a remarkable outcome considering the ferocity of the attack.

The FSB commander had also narrowly escaped death, showing us an unexploded mortar bomb sticking out of the top of his bunker. I told him to buy a lottery ticket and he offered me an AK-47 assault rifle, still covered in blood, as a souvenir. The NVA had suffered horrendous casualties, something like 150 to 200 killed and many more wounded. As usual, the wounded were taken away during the withdrawal, but many dead bodies had been left behind on the battlefield. After this action, the Michelin rubber plantation was a quieter and safer place over which to fly!



37SQN Continues its Enduring Legacy with the C-130 Hercules

From Col Coyne – 37SQN Association

No 37 (Transport) Squadron was officially established at RAAF Station Laverton, Victoria, on 16 July 1943. The unit's creation was a strategic response to the demands of the Second World War, focusing on providing essential airlift capabilities for Australian forces. Initially the unit flew the Lockheed C-60 Lodestar, commencing an association with the aircraft company that endures through to this current day with 37SQN now flying the Lockheed Martin C-130J-30 Hercules.

The squadron's core responsibility was to transport troops and equipment, supporting the Australian war effort during WWII. Its operations were centred mainly within Australia, ensuring that personnel and materiel could be rapidly and efficiently moved as required.



Cape York, Qld. C. 1944-08. Lockheed Lodestar Aircraft of No. 37 Squadron RAAF at Higgins Field

In addition to serving within Australian borders, No 37 Squadron extended its airlift operations to Australia's near northern neighbours, specifically the Dutch East Indies, now known as Indonesia. This regional engagement was critical for supporting Allied operations in the broader Pacific theatre. World War II in the Pacific officially concluded on 2 September 1945 and 37SQN was disbanded on 24 February 1948.



Douglas DC-3 Dakota (Defence Imagery)

After WWII the Australian Air Force's main transport aircraft was the DC-3 Dakota with a vintage going back to 1935. In 1957 the Australian Government decided on a replacement for the venerable DC-3 Dakota, signing a contract for 12 Lockheed C-130A Turboprop Hercules Transport aircraft. Australia was the first

international customer to operate the C-130 Hercules. The arrival of the first C-130A Hercules at RAAF Base Richmond 13 December 1958 marked a significant milestone for the Royal Australian Air Force, setting the stage for a remarkable period of operational continuity, as Air Force has continued to operate the C-130 Hercules for 68 years and counting.

The Enduring Legacy of the C-130 Hercules in Australian Air Force Operations

In the early 1960s, Australian military forces were again involved in war-like operations in South East Asia with Konfrontasi between Indonesia and Malaya, plus the war in Vietnam and the C-130 fleet of 12 aircraft was not sufficient to sustain the requirement of operations. On 9 February 1965, the Government signed a contract for an additional 12 Hercules, being the C-130E model, with 37SQN being re-established on 21 February 1966 at RAAF Base Richmond to operate the new Hercules fleet.

The introduction of the first C-130A Hercules to the Air Force in 1958 marked the beginning of a long and enduring relationship with this versatile aircraft. One could not have envisioned with

the arrival of the first C-130A in 1958, that the Air Force would be still operating the mighty C-130 Hercules 68 years later. Remarkably, the C-130 Hercules continues to play a pivotal role in the Air Force's transport operations. The ongoing commitment to this aircraft is demonstrated by plans to begin replacing the current fleet of 12 C-130J-30 Hercules with 20 new C-130J Hercules starting in early 2028. With a through life expectancy of 30 years, these latest Hercules will see Air Force celebrate a century of C-130 operations in 2058, and as Buzz Lightyear once stated, 'to infinity and beyond' is a fitting description of the Australian Air Force's fleet of the now venerable C-130 Hercules.

Finally, on 22 August 2026 the No 37 Squadron [RAAF] Association will host an event at the Royal Hotel Richmond NSW to celebrate the squadron's 60 Years of C-130 Operations combined with the unit surpassing 500,000 C-130 flight hours without loss of an airframe. The event is open to anyone who has been associated with Aussie Air

Force C-130 operations, irrespective of rank, category or mustering. Bookings can be made via our TryBooking site at: <https://www.trybooking.com/DJQSE>



How Many C-130 Hercules Aircraft Were Built?

By Aaron Spray, first published in Simple Flying, 28 May 2026 (Edited for SITREP)

The Lockheed C-130 Hercules has been 'the' tactical transport aircraft of the United States Air Force and many of its allies and partners for decades. Today, it is found in service with everything from the US Coast Guard to the Royal New Zealand Air Force, medevacating patients from Antarctica.

This versatile aircraft has been utilized by multiple service branches and adapted for a wide range of missions, including

serving as a gunship, weather monitor, and electronic warfare platform. It is safe to say the C-130 has withstood the test of time, but how many C-130 family aircraft have been produced?



Credit: Shutterstock

The Lockheed C-130 Hercules first entered service with the United States military in 1956. It was then purchased by many militaries around the world, with the number rising to around 60 countries. The Hercules proved a very adaptable platform, being developed into over 40 variants. Today, it is used for medevac, cargo transport, aerial refuelling, maritime patrol, aerial firefighting, a gunship, and various other roles.

Production of the original Lockheed C-130 Hercules was succeeded by the updated Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules. In 1995, Lockheed merged with Martin Marietta to form Lockheed Martin. The updated C-130J is called the Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules. The Super Hercules entered service in 1996, and Lockheed handed over the final older C-130H to Japan in 1997. By 2024, Lockheed Martin had delivered over 540 C-130Js to 26 operators in 22 different countries. The Super Hercules has surpassed three million flight hours.

In 2024, *The War Zone* reported that by the time production of the original C-130 models came to an end, 2,271 'legacy' Hercules had been built. The final legacy C-130 model was the C-130H. While many of these legacy C-130s remain operational around the world, many have been retired. The successor, the Super Hercules, has replaced many of these early models. Currently, the US Air Force has 153 older C-130Hs in service alongside 157 new C-130J Super Hercules. For its part, the US Coast Guard lists 18 older HC-130H models in service, alongside nine HC-130J Super Hercules.



Lockheed C-130J Super Hercules
Credit Shutterstock

In July 2024, Australian Aviation reported that Australia announced its plan to purchase 20 new C-130J Hercules for the Royal Australian Air Force to replace and expand its existing fleet of 12 C-130J-30 Super Hercules, which were received between 1999 and 2001. The first of these aircraft is expected in late 2027.

The Super Hercules increased the maximum allowable payload from 42,000 lbs to 44,000 lbs. At maximum normal payload, the C-130J increased its range to 1,800 nautical miles from 1,050 nautical miles for the C-130H (1,700 nautical miles for the C-130J-30). It has a max takeoff weight of 164,000 lbs, compared with the C-130H's 155,000 lbs. The Super Hercules' improvements included being re-engined with Rolls-Royce AE 2100D3 turboprops, an increase in propeller blades from four to six, and other improvements.

Increased Hercules Competition

While the Super Hercules is a great tactical airlifter, it is also facing competition in the export market. One of the new direct competitors is Brazil's Embraer C-390 Millennium. The C-390 is a jet-engined medium military transport that first entered service in 2019. It



Brazilian Embraer C-390 Millennium

Credit: Shutterstock

has now been ordered by nine countries, with around 47 units ordered.

Another competitor is the European Airbus A400M Atlas, a larger strategic and tactical airlifter. The A400M is sized between the C-130J and C-17. The RAF was the launch customer of the Super Hercules but retired them after receiving its A400Ms. Japan's Kawasaki C-2 entered service in 2016 and offers another alternative to the Super Hercules, although it has so far failed to attract orders outside of Japan. While Ukraine and Russia don't really export military transports anymore, China's lineup of military transports (like the Shaanxi Y-9) may be an alternative for some countries.

The Super Hercules appears to be set to remain in production for years to come, although its possible production numbers will never again be as high as they once were. While Lockheed Martin continues to attract more orders from countries around the world, the largest customer has always been the United States military. Lockheed is now in the process of reducing its annual output of the C-130J from 30 to 24 units. However, at the height of the program, Lockheed built over 100 C-130 Hercules every year. The peak year was 1957, when it built a record 140 units. This reduction is partly due to the United States Air Force approaching the end of its purchases of the Super Hercules for the National Guard and Reserve Units.

The final Lockheed Martin MC-130J Commando II was delivered in January 2025 to the US Air Force, while the final AC-130J was delivered in November 2022. Still, the US Air Force continues to order new-build C-130Js through congressional adds. Apart from two prototypes, all Hercules have been built at Lockheed's Marietta factory in Georgia, although this could change with future units being assembled in India. The Super Hercules is also attracting interest from previously unimaginable places. In 2024, Reuters reported the US was offering the Super Hercules to Vietnam, although the number of aircraft being considered was not disclosed. The move is a sign of how the two former enemies have put their differences behind them and how Vietnam has moved on from purchasing Russian equipment, while being reluctant to purchase Chinese equipment.



The world's longest continuously produced military aircraft

Credit: Shutterstock

Counting its Super Hercules successor, the Hercules is now the longest-continuously produced military aircraft in history. In 2024, the Hercules marked 70 years of continuous production. While the Hercules entered service in 1956, it first flew in 1954. Since then, the rugged aircraft

has been just about everywhere and has done just about everything. With production set to continue into the 2030s, it seems the Hercules will boast a production run spanning 80 or so years. The aircraft regularly flies to both poles and has routinely landed or airdropped military supplies in hotspots like Afghanistan and Vietnam. Lockheed Martin boasts that *"the C-130 has the longest, continuous military aircraft production run in history and one of the top three longest, continuous aircraft production lines of any type."*

The Hercules is capable of operating from rough, dirt strips in hostile areas. It fulfills a wide range of missions in both war and peace. Even so, its inability to take off vertically was one of the major motivations behind the development of the tiltrotor CV-22 Osprey following the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981. However, in the future, the Air Force may look for a more diverse set of transport options, from aircraft with V/STOL capabilities to even a military variant of SpaceX's Starship.

The Outlook for the C-130J

In the future, large aircraft operating from runways are seen as vulnerable, leading the US Air Force to consider runway-independent alternatives. The Air Force currently has the Runway Independent Mobility/Next Generation Intra-theatre Airlift (NGIA) program.

India has a requirement to purchase up to 80 medium transport aircraft, and Lockheed Martin is negotiating for some or all of those to be its Super Hercules planes that are built in India. Various countries around the world are still placing orders for the Super Hercules, and Lockheed Martin is expecting production to run into the 2030s.

In 2024, The War Zone quoted Nicholas Smythe, Director of International Air Mobility Business Development at Lockheed Martin, as stating that he had seen C-130J production rates as low as 12 per year and rates as high as 36 per year. He stated that the facility was then tooled to produce 36 a year, while adding that in 2024, the production rate was 20 a year. It is unclear how many more Super Hercules will be delivered, although it is unlikely that it will ever approach the more than 2,200 original Hercules.



The Fastest Man on Water

From Christopher Beazley

How Mr Ken Warby, with the assistance of RAAF Engine apprentices, became the fastest man on water in the 'Spirit of Australia' at Blowering Dam on 8 Oct 1978.

During my long RAAF career, one of my postings was to the RAAF School of Technical Training (RAAFSTT) at Wagga Wagga NSW from 1977-81. I was an aeronautical engineering teacher and my primary teaching subject was Aero Engines. Some of the Engine Trade apprentices played a pivotal part in Mr Ken Warby gaining his water speed record in his home-



built hydroplane 'Spirit of Australia', though after the event, very little publicity was given to the RAAF Apprentice team.

When Ken decided to attempt his world speed run on Blowering Dam NSW, he approached the RAAF to store the boat and to get technical

support at RAAF Wagga. It was put to our engine apprentices to volunteer for the project (under supervision) and to do so in their spare time; (they gave up their weekends and after-hours free time). A team was selected and with enthusiasm, they surveyed the boat. For a high-speed record attempt the boat was a disaster! In the steering system, Ken had used bent rusty nails as split pins in the controls and the rudder was not even aerodynamically shaped, thus creating lots of drag, and a myriad of other faults were discovered. All were corrected by the apprentice team.

Ken has purchased a Westinghouse J-34 powerplant at a disposal auction and had stored it for years in his backyard under a piece of old carpet. It was exposed to the weather and it was badly corroded, so the RAAF Team supervisors 'acquired' some RAAF parts and exchanged them with Ken's to get the engine to a semi-serviceable condition; in that it would actually start and run. On his first high speed run on Blowering Dam, poor Ken almost lost his head and helmet into the jet engine air intake, as he sat directly in front of the engine. The apprentices fitted a fibreglass split intake that wrapped around his torso, resolving that problem. Another engine issue was that there were no cooling louvres in the cowling and the engine was overheating. A channel duct was constructed and positioned just forward of the vertical control stabiliser above the engine cowling. This assisted his afterburner to give it extra air for combustion and thrust.

During that first run, the boat was creating too much drag; there was no aerodynamic windscreen to deflect the airflow around Ken and the rudder was too deep in the water. Consequently, Ken, while at the dam site, borrowed some acetylene gear and cut off about four inches of rudder, then put the boat into the water for another run. The drag was now worse because Ken did not clean the gas axe 'dags' off the rudder, or even file an aerofoil shape around

the cut. He was a real cowboy when it came to his own safety and it's a wonder that he wasn't killed on the next test run.

Ken's engine and afterburner could not produce the rated thrust due to its poor condition, so another Westinghouse J-34 engine was 'acquired' from our RAAF training



aids and the apprentices overhauled it to the point that the power rating of 3,500 lbs of thrust could be reached without the afterburner. Thus, with the reduced weight from removing the afterburner and with less fuel needed as a result, Ken was able to reach his world speed record goal. On the 8th October 1978, Ken Warby in the jet powered '*Spirit of Australia*' hydro-plane, became the fastest man on water at Blowering Dam NSW, breaking the 300-mph barrier on water and survived! His actual speed was recorded as 275.97 knots (511.1km/h, or 317.58mph). His peak speed in opposite runs along the course reached approximately 555.10km/h (345mph) as measured by a radar gun, and Ken's record of 317.6mph (511.11km/h) still stands!

The only acknowledgement of the RAAF help was a 'RAAFSTT' sticker on the nose and tail and a 'Red Rat' on the vertical stabiliser, until Ken received more sponsorship and these symbols disappeared. The Westinghouse J-34 engines were originally mounted on the RAAF Neptune Maritime Patrol aircraft and fuelled with aviation gasoline (AVGAS 115/145 octane, purple colour) the same fuel that powered the two Wright R-3350-32W Turbo-Compound, 18-cylinder radial piston engines on the Neptune aircraft, which delivered up to 3,500 horsepower. (The J-34 engines provided the necessary power for takeoff, climb and landing, with the jets set at idle during the landing approach so that in the event of a go-around, they could be advanced to full power).

This fuel is different to normal AVTUR jet fuel and it gave Ken the edge in getting his record. 'The Spirit' is now mounted on the wall in the entry foyer of the National Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour, Sydney.



The Teabag Incident

From Phil Frawley

After graduation from pilot courses, back in the seventies, it was something of a tradition for the course and instructors to embark on a camp at Rottnest Island, staying in the Army Barracks there. As part of the camp and to justify the excursion, survival exercises were programmed for all, to satisfy annual requirements at the time.

One such exercise was wet water winching from the SAR helicopter. A Navy workboat was used to get all participants, including instructors, out on the water where the helicopter would then winch each course member up into the helicopter and once three or four were on board they would be deposited back at the barracks. One member of our course was a former GCI controller (Radar Intercept controller); he was a Flight Lieutenant and knew most of the ex-fighter pilot

instructors well. Anyway, this course member believed that his familiarity with the staff instructors meant that he wouldn't have to take part in the winching exercise and so he tried to avoid having to go through it. The staff instructors however, decided there would be no way he was going to miss out on the experience.



Australian War Memorial

P05104.045

The instructors grabbed the member and stripped him naked and threw him overboard. Feeling a bit sorry for him, they threw him a Mae West life preserver which he managed to put on and inflate. The helicopter arrived on scene to winch this last member undergoing the exercise and thus complete the days mission. As the member was extracted from the water the crewman operating the winch discovered that the 'victim' was naked and relayed this to the pilots. Instead of winching him aboard they left him dangling below the helicopter, this was known as 'tea bagging'.

At this point it should be noted that once in the winching harness and wearing a Mae West, you are unable to look down at all and so there was no way of knowing what was happening. Additionally, helicopter pilots at the time were, shall we say, somewhat adventurous individuals. And so, the victim was transported to the Rottnest Island jetty, where a ferry was disembarking passengers, and he was dropped down in amongst the unwitting tourists then picked up again without him touching the ground. This was repeated a couple of times at the jetty much to the bemusement of the crowd. Following this the helicopter crew decided that the customers at the local beer garden should also be given some light entertainment and the victim was dangled amongst them as well.

Once the helicopter crew decided that enough was enough, they then transported the victim back to the barracks for drop off which should have been all well and good, except the local school bus had arrived at the barracks to let the children watch the helicopter operations, only to see a naked man get dropped off and run inside. The news of this spread very fast and the press were intent on publishing the story as quickly as they could. The hierarchy of 2FTS and RAAF Base Pearce worked exceptionally hard and fast to prevent the story from going public and reaching Canberra. Many careers might have ended at this point had the story gotten out, but it didn't and all those involved must have certainly given a big sigh of relief.



Head Cold = Don't Fly!

From Ken Mitchell DFC, DFC (US), AM (US); Vietnam FAC

One memorable sortie I recall was a night radar intercept mission. Although I had a slight cold, I elected to fly the sortie. We got airborne and immediately went instrument flight rules (IFR); we were flying through a thunderstorm. I remember the buffeting, lightning, thunder and hail on the canopy. The cockpit also lit up with St Elmo's fire. It was so bright I flew with my sun visor down. We were taking a buffeting with the turbulence but still managing to lock onto the target and fire simulated missiles.



Toward the end of the sortie, I had this sensation where my inner ears were telling my brain that I was upside down, but looking at my instruments, I was the right way up. I believed and flew my instruments but I found my body was trying to compensate the brain messages by jamming itself into the right rear of the cockpit. We eventually recovered to Butterworth via a radar GCA and I had no further problems.

The moral of this story is never fly with a cold!



ANZAC - Rotary Wing Aviation Unit (RWAU) 1982-86 at El Gorah

From Chris Beazley

An interesting read from 40 years ago. Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) Sinai.

From *Col Purchase* at 5 Squadron RAAF [Facebook]: "For those who want a copy of the booklet, I've included a link to a shared folder:" [Sharing Files to Anyone]

(<https://1drv.ms/.../lgD6vLHu2QSySlirt--DbibvAXxLtRVfFH...>)

There are four sections of this booklet in .PDF format.



Australia's Greatest Fighter Ace Killed during Night Intercept

27 May 1918

From SQNLDR (Ret'd) AJ "Jimbo" Stewart: 41 Wing Honorary Historian

I may have joined before the Dead Sea first reported sick, and when Centurion was a rank, not a tank – but contrary to popular belief, I did NOT provide GCI support to Pontius the Pilot! But I'll tell you, his dad was an absolute pain in the arse to control.

Flight Commander Robert Little, DSO & Bar, DSC & Bar, Croix de Guerre, was a Melbourne-born Australian who had joined the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). He served with 8 Squadron RNAS, which successively operated the Sopwith Pup, the Sopwith Triplane and the Sopwith Camel.

Little went on to become one of the highest-scoring fighter pilots in the RNAS, and Australia's highest-scoring 'Fighter 'Ace' of all time, with a score of 47 aerial victories – 24 of these victories were achieved with 8 Squadron, RNAS whilst flying Sopwith Triplanes. Following a break from operations, Little returned to the Western Front in March 1918 (having declined a desk job) and joined 3 Squadron RNAS (which on 1 April 1918 became 203 Squadron, Royal Air Force), once again flying Sopwith Camels.

On 27 May 1918, Little received reports of German 'Gotha' bombers in the vicinity of his airfield (Ezil le Hamel – near Dunkirk) which were about to cross the French coast on their way to bomb targets in England. As this was a moonlit evening, Little took off to intercept the raiders. However, as he closed on one of the bombers, his aircraft was caught in a search-light beam, and he was subsequently hit by bullets which passed through both his thighs. He crash-landed in a field near Noeux-les-Mines, and bled to death before he was discovered the following morning by a passing Gendarme. Little was initially buried in a French cemetery at Noeux; after the War, however, his remains were re-buried in the



**Flight Commander Robert A. Little DSO*, DSC*,
Croix de Guerre**



**Robert Little's Sopwith Triplane – the type in which
he scored over 50% of his kills**



Wayvans British Cemetery, in the Pas de Calais.

Little's Canadian Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel (formerly Wing Commander, RNAS) Ray Collishaw, convened an inquiry into the incident; it was unable, however, to determine whether Little was killed by gunfire from the 'Gotha' or by friendly fire from the ground. Robert Little left a widow, Vera (nee Field) and a one-year-old son, Alec. He remains Australia's all-time 'Ace of Aces', our highest-scoring fighter pilot, with a tally of 47 aerial victories.

Surface-to-Air Missile Detachment forms at Lee Point, Darwin

12 June 1965

From SQNLDR (Ret'd) AJ "Jimbo" Stewart: 41 Wing Honorary Historian

I may have joined before the Dead Sea first reported sick, and when Centurion was a rank, not a tank – but contrary to popular belief, I did NOT provide GCI support to Pontius the Pilot! But I'll tell you, his dad was an absolute pain in the arse to control.

As a precaution against possible Indonesian hostile activity against Darwin, 30 Squadron Detachment A was formed at Lee Point, Darwin to supplement the fighters and Army gun defences. The detachment was equipped with a complement of Bristol 'Bloodhound' Mk 1 Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM), a surveillance radar and Target Illuminating (TI) radars.



The 30 Squadron Detachment 'A' site was located immediately adjacent to the northern edge of the No 2 Control and Reporting Unit (2 CRU) complex. Coordination assets, comprising radar displays and communications facilities (including 'hot line') were installed in the 2 CRU Operations Room, ensuring that the SAM Detachment was fully integrated within the Darwin Area Air Defence capability.

Note the revetments around the 2 CRU assets, which were a passive defence measure against any possible escalation of activities in Indonesia's Confrontation ('Konfrontasi') of Malaysia (which was backed by the UK, New Zealand, and eventually, by Australia.



First-ever Employment of an AEW Aircraft on Operations

19 May 1942

From SQNLDR (Ret'd) AJ "Jimbo" Stewart: 41 Wing Honorary Historian

I may have joined before the Dead Sea first reported sick, and when Centurion was a rank, not a tank – but contrary to popular belief, I did NOT provide GCI support to Pontius the Pilot! But I'll tell you, his dad was an absolute pain in the arse to control.

On the night of 19-20 May 1942, Vickers Wellington B Mk 1C R1629 was launched under the command of Group Captain Jack Rutledge to conduct a search in Norwegian waters for the German heavy cruiser *LUTZOW*.

R1629 was equipped with a rotating Yagi-type radar antenna on top of the mid-fuselage. Unfortunately, the ground clutter created by the high sides of the Norwegian fiords militated against the efforts of Group Captain Rutledge and his crew to locate their target.



Vickers Wellington B Mk 1C (R1629), the world's first operational AEW aircraft



Clearly before the advent of Fraud Waste and Abuse programs

From Chris Beazley, lifted from the 'Lost Wagga Wagga' FB Page

Hundreds of aircraft marked for disposal at the Wagga RAAF Base in 1948. Most of the aircraft are lined up on, what would become, the base golf course alongside the Sturt Highway. At the centre/top is the base entrance, opposite Forest Hill Public School.

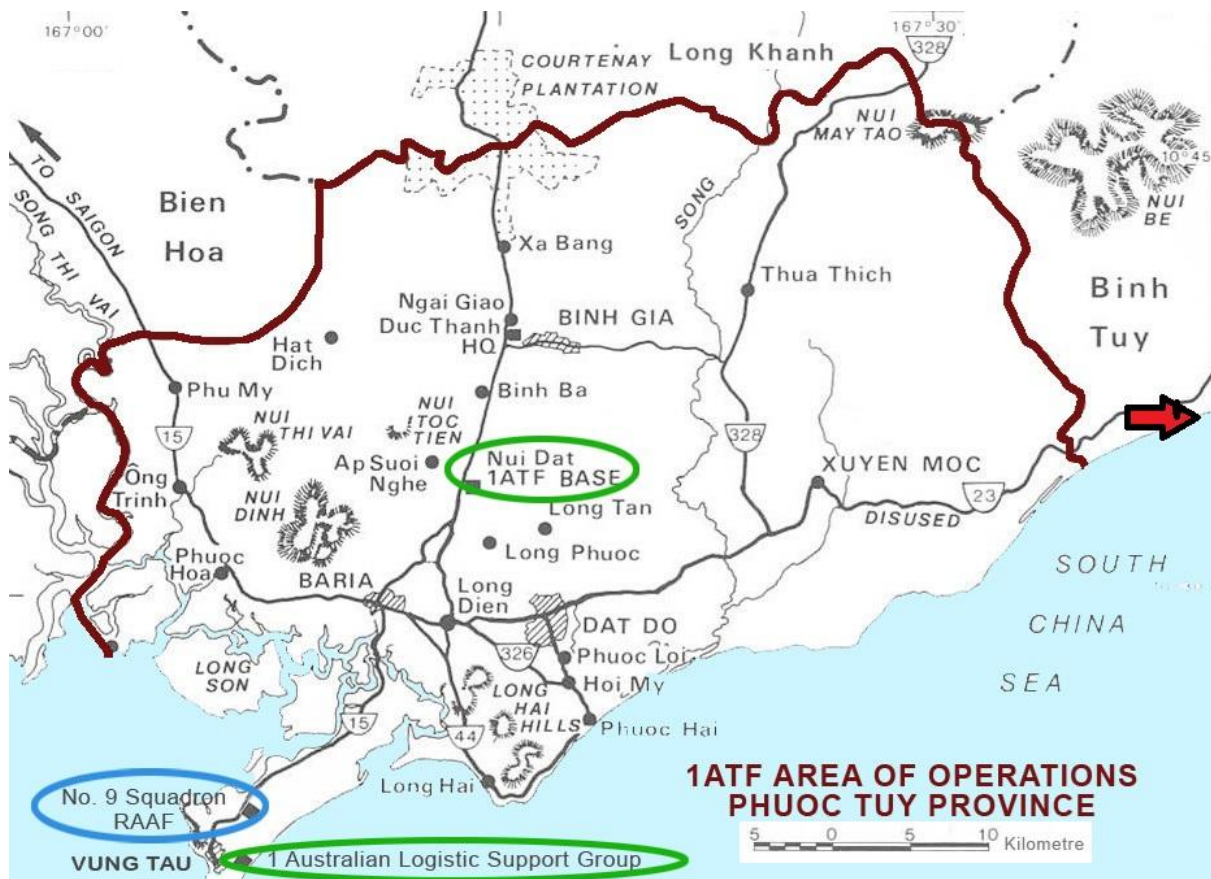
Most of the aircraft in the photo are Beaufort and Beaufighters. Some of the planes only had 4 hours in their logbook and were flown there from the factory when the war ended. Some of the aircraft were sold to local farmers for two pounds each, who bought them for the fuel in them; the tanks were almost full. The aircraft were then discarded on their farms. The remaining aircraft were broken down onsite and smelted for the aluminium. Such a waste!



US Navy 'DASH' Shoot Down, 21May69

From Brian Dirou DFC, Wing Commander RAAF (Ret'd)

On 21May69, Bushrangers 71 & 72 were tasked to support a US Navy operation beyond 1ATF Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR), up along the coast past the Mao Tao Mountains in Binh Tuy/Ham Tan Province. A USN destroyer had been operating a highly classified DASH drone helicopter which the enemy had downed. The warship had put a ground party ashore to attempt recovery of some components but they were ambushed and had to withdraw back to the ship with casualties.



The DASH QH-50 originated in 1961, intended as a Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopter (DASH), capable of carrying homing torpedoes or nuclear depth charges. See: http://www.gyrodynehelicopters.com/dash_history.htm



Beginning in January 1965, the US Navy started flying reconnaissance 'SNOOPY' missions from selected destroyers. This involved modifying the QH-50 system by the installation of real-time video and film cameras for reconnaissance and surveillance. Also installed was a telemetry system so remote pilots could monitor their actions upon the aircraft and a transponder for radar tracking of the drone.

By the time the Bushrangers arrived on the scene, there were no allied forces ashore but the warship was stern on to the beach, perhaps within 30 metres of the shoreline and maybe even aground. We were able to establish communications with the ship but they only offered limited information regarding possible location of the downed drone helo.

There was a vegetated area a few hundred metres wide paralleling the shoreline that adjoined a relatively clear inland area where the little chopper was presumed to have crashed. I cannot recall time of day although the sun was not high in the sky, that being a search consideration. We began a creeping line ahead search along the axis of the clear terrain area paralleling the coast, perhaps between 500 and 1000 AGL for best search effect.

The enemy commander had thus far had a good day knocking down the little drone and then ambushing the shore party. I punted that he would not be foolish enough to engage helo gunships and risk severe retribution.



A short time after beginning this methodical search, 2 x US Marine Corps OV-10 'Black Pony' aircraft (their callword) from Vung Tau appeared on the scene and after establishing comms, I briefed them on what we were doing. They began searching in similar fashion, but perhaps 500 feet or so above our height.

After turning toward the coast on a leg of the search, we heard the following transmission: ***'If this goddamn Aussie chopper does not get out of my way, I'm going to shoot him down.'***

Oh really! (An unspoken thought).



The Black Pony leader then passed us a bit higher and when we had turned on to the next leg of our search, he was heading to cross just ahead of us at co-altitude so I called for: *'Miniguns Armed'*, but no response; then more assertively: ***'MINIGUNS ARMED!'*** and a hand slowly selected the switches.

The OV-10 Flight Leader had positioned himself perfectly as a target for a beam attack. As he came into range at about 400 metres I gently cranked on bank and

began tracking him with the gunsight through about 70 degrees of turn until he or his No. 2 must

have realized what was happening because in the blink of an eye, they just vanished, without any radio calls.

Sometimes, actions speak louder than words!

'Miniguns Safe'

We reversed our line of advance for the creeping line ahead search and with the sun behind us, soon found the remains of the little drone spread in small bits over about 100 metres. This was reported to the warship and we then departed the scene of action.

During my first visit to Vung Tau township after arrival in country early March 1968, somebody took me to the USMC 'Black Pony' outfit club in Vung Tau. I think we only had one beer and left, unimpressed at bigheads who were pretty derogatory toward Australians.

I did not record the outlined incident and never heard any mention of same from officialdom.



Australia's CAC Boomerang Fighter A46-54 Flies Again After 81 Years

This article was originally written by John Parker (March 23, 2026) for Warbirds Online's Facebook page and is republished by Vintage Aviation News as part of an ongoing cooperative arrangement between the two websites.

The CAC Boomerang A46-54 has flown again for the first time in 81 years, following a decades-long restoration led by Greg Batts. The historic World War II fighter, built in Australia and once destined for scrap, has now returned to the skies, marking a major milestone in the preservation of the country's aviation heritage.



CAC Boomerang A46-54 takes to the air at Toowoomba Qld.

Photo by John Parker

On March 15, one of Australia's most historically significant wartime aircraft returned to the air. The CAC Boomerang A46-54, an example of the only fighter aircraft designed and built in Australia during the Second World War, has flown again for the first time in 81 years. The aircraft completed its long-awaited return to flight at Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport in Queensland, marking the culmination of decades of restoration work led by Greg Batts of Combat Aircraft Constructions, based at Archerfield near Brisbane. For the small but dedicated community preserving Australia's aviation heritage, the moment represented far more than a successful test flight. It was the realization of a restoration effort that had been underway for more than four decades.



Scott Taberner awaits clearance for take off in CAC Boomerang A46-54.

Photo by John Parker

The Final Steps to Flight

The last phase of preparation for A46-54 took place at the Aerotec Qld engineering facility in Toowoomba, where the aircraft was moved in September 2022 for final assembly, inspections, and flight test preparation. As is often the case with historic aircraft restorations approaching completion, the final push toward flight involved an extensive series of inspections, paperwork approvals, and system testing. A number of technical issues emerged during this stage and required careful resolution before the aircraft could be cleared to fly. In the weeks leading up to the flight, engineers completed a series of engine runs and systems checks that ultimately confirmed the aircraft was ready to begin its flight test program.

Test pilot Scott Taberner arrived several days before the flight and carried out taxi trials and familiarization work with the aircraft alongside Batts and the Aerotec engineering team led by Wayne Milburn. The weather initially threatened to delay the event. Strong winds across the airfield raised doubts about whether conditions would be suitable for a first flight. As the morning progressed, however, the winds eased enough for the team to proceed. Following final

checks, Taberner taxied the Boomerang to the runway and lifted off smoothly, returning the aircraft to the skies for the first time since the Second World War. The initial flight lasted approximately 40 minutes, during which the aircraft completed a series of basic manoeuvres and systems checks, performed ten circuits of the airfield, and concluded with a low pass before returning safely to land. Scott was very happy with the test flight and commented on the smooth performance of the Boomerang. He went on to say that the aircraft handled extremely well and its “hands-off” flying was neutral and the best he had encountered in a Boomerang. When he came back to the hangar, his comment to Greg and Wayne was, “*It’s beautiful, don’t touch a thing*”. A46-54 has now completed several hours of flight testing, and its performance has proven to be above expectations.



Scott Taberner gives the official post-flight thumbs-up approval - the smile says it all.

Photo by John Parker

A Restoration Spanning Decades

The return of A46-54 to the air represents the culmination of an extraordinary restoration journey that began when Greg Batts acquired the remains of the aircraft in 1984. At the time, little remained of the once-proud fighter beyond surviving structural elements. Over the following decades, Batts gradually rebuilt the aircraft at his workshop in Archerfield, developing a reputation as one of the world’s foremost specialists in the restoration of CAC Boomerangs. The aircraft slowly evolved from scattered remnants into a fully rebuilt airframe, constructed as faithfully as possible to its original wartime configuration. Wherever possible, original components were incorporated into the restoration. The aircraft is powered by a Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation license-built Pratt & Whitney R-1830 Twin Wasp 14-cylinder radial engine, producing approximately 1,200 horsepower.

Other components required more creative solutions. The outer wing panels, for example, were manufactured entirely from scratch, while the wing centre section was adapted from similar

components used on the North American Harvard trainer. The Harvard and the CAC Wirraway, Australia's wartime trainer, share design lineage that made such adaptations possible. The result is a superbly executed restoration of CAC CA-12 Boomerang A46-54, showcasing Greg Batts' decades of dedication and his meticulous commitment to preserving the aircraft's original wartime appearance and authentic structure.

Australia's Wartime Fighter

The CAC Boomerang holds a unique place in aviation history. Designed during the early months of the Pacific War, it was developed as an emergency measure to provide Australia with a domestically produced fighter in case Allied aircraft supplies became unavailable. Although the Boomerang was not intended to compete directly with high-performance enemy fighters, it proved highly effective in army cooperation, reconnaissance, and close support roles, particularly in the rugged environments of the South West Pacific. A total of 250 Boomerangs were built between 1942 and 1945.



Boomerang A46-54 features distinctive Wizard of Aussie Koala nose art.
Photo by John Parker



CAC Boomerang A46-54 is underway at Toowoomba Qld.
Photo by John Parker

Aircraft A46-54 was constructed by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Melbourne and first flew in March 1943. During its wartime career, the aircraft served with No. 83 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air

Force, operating from Strathpine in Queensland. Historical records reveal several interesting episodes in the aircraft's service life. In August 1943, the aircraft was scrambled to intercept what was believed to be a Japanese aircraft reported over Moreton Bay, while in June 1945, it participated in a naval cooperation exercise simulating an attack on HMS Wakeful. Like many wartime aircraft, A46-54 survived the war only to be placed into storage and eventually to be sold for scrap in 1955.

Saved From the Scrap Heap

The aircraft's survival was largely due to the recovery of fuselage remains that eventually passed into the hands of collectors and restorers. Those remains ultimately came into the possession of Greg Batts, who began the long process of reconstructing the aircraft into a complete airworthy machine. Greg is a highly respected restorer of warbirds, but his name is especially linked with the CAC Boomerang, the first Australian-designed and Australian-built fighter aircraft. Today, the aircraft carries the Australian civil registration VH-MHB, and the Boomerang is expected to be based at Caboolture, Queensland, where it will participate in airshows and aviation events around Australia.



The team who made it happen L- R Greg Batts, Wayne Milburn, Lynette Zuccoli, Greg Wright, Peter Brooke, Tim Berry and Scott Taberner.

Photo by John Parker

A Major Achievement for Australian Aviation Heritage

The successful return of A46-54 to flight represents an important moment for the preservation of Australia's aviation history. Only a small number of CAC Boomerangs survive today, and even fewer have been restored to flying condition. With the successful completion of its first flights, A46-54 now joins that select group, once again representing the aircraft that symbolized Australia's wartime ingenuity and determination. For Greg Batts and the many people who have supported the project over the years, seeing the Boomerang lift into the Queensland sky again was the culmination of a lifetime's work. After more than eight decades, CAC Boomerang A46-54 is flying once again.

For more about Warbirds Online Australia, visit www.warbirdsonline.com.au.



ANZAC Strike Wing's Daring Hunt Remembered

From www.defence.gov.au/news-events, 12 March 2026, By Flying Officer Casie Scott



The image used on the front cover of the ANZAC Strike Wing book by John Quaife.

Flying at wave-top height in all weather and under heavy fire, the crews of 455 (RAAF) Squadron and 489 (RNZAF) Squadron formed one of the Second World War's most daring maritime strike forces – and they paid a devastating price. Between December 1943 and May 1945, 87 young men were lost as the two squadrons flew together as a strike wing under Royal Air Force (RAF) Coastal Command in the fight against German shipping across the North Sea.

That story of courage, comradeship and relentless operational tempo has been brought together in *ANZAC Strike Wing: Operations in the North Sea with RAF Coastal Command*, the 12th title in the Australian Air Campaign Series published by History and Heritage – Air Force (HH-AF). Drawing on newly digitised archives, operational records and eyewitness accounts, the book by retired Air Vice-Marshal John Quaife chronicles the exhilaration and chaos of low-level strike warfare and the human bonds forged in one of the war's most dangerous arenas.

The project has its origins in a conversation with then Director-General HH-AF Air Commodore John Meier, who suggested the author take on the story while he was finalising an earlier work. Air Vice-Marshal Quaife's exposure to the Strike Wing deepened through his role with the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal and Ken Wright's application related to Beaufighter pilot James Hakewill and his navigator Fred Sides – a story that first appeared in the earlier book and would become one thread in this larger narrative.

While the Battle of Britain and Bomber Command's campaign dominate popular memory, Coastal Command's anti-shipping war remains less visible to many readers. The author notes that these operations were often out of the public eye, peaked later in the war, and were conducted on a different scale to the bomber offensive – all factors that helped keep the campaign in the shadows despite its strategic impact.

What made the Strike Wing's work uniquely perilous was the combination of tactics, proximity and timing. Coastal Command's strike wings flew aggressive, massed attacks, using aircraft such

as Beaufighters and Mosquitos to smash convoys protected by concentrated ship-borne defences. In a typical ship strike, 'flak-busting' aircraft attacked at close range with cannon and rockets to suppress anti-aircraft fire, creating a narrow window for torpedo aircraft to deliver the decisive blow. Within the ANZAC Strike Wing, 455 Squadron performed the flak-busting role while 489 Squadron launched torpedoes. This was a partnership that demanded precision, discipline and extraordinary nerve under fire.

The book also highlights that the Strike Wing concept did not emerge fully formed. Early attempts were costly, prompting a deliberate period of work-up training and tactics development before the approach proved effective. RAF narrative documents prepared by the Air Historical Branch after the war capture that methodical evolution, including the development of aircraft, weapons and massed attack tactics. Beyond operational detail, *ANZAC Strike Wing* centres on the people and what 'ANZAC spirit' looked like far from home in a harsh, unfamiliar theatre. The author follows two crews in particular, showing how ordinary young men from vastly different backgrounds shouldered relentless danger and loss without fanfare.

Commanding Officer 489 Squadron Wing Commander Derek Hammond said: 'They were cheerful, generous and brave; we shall remember them with gratitude and affection.' In the book's introduction, Air Commodore Pete Robinson draws a direct line from the Strike Wing's experience to contemporary air power, noting that while tools have changed, the underlying truths remain: maritime strike is dynamic, complex and dependent on skilled, cohesive aviators operating in demanding environments.

With *ANZAC Strike Wing*, Air Vice-Marshal Quaife hopes modern readers take away a clear message: the service and sacrifice on which today's air forces are built should never be forgotten, and can only be honoured by telling these stories honestly and without embellishment. *ANZAC Strike Wing* can be purchased from Big Sky Publishing: www.bigskypublishing.com.au/anzac-strike-wing/



Nothing but Blue

From Ron Haack

I did many of the first flights on the RAAF F/A-18 Hornets as they were assembled at Avalon, Victoria. Production/acceptance test flying is very much like post maintenance test flying and just involves operating the aircraft to its flight envelope boundaries and checking correct



function of the engine/airframe, comm/nav, integral sensors (radar)/ weapon system integration and human/machine interface (HMI) systems throughout the flight and at specific flight conditions within the envelope.

A Hornet first flight, typically focused on engine/airframe behaviour and following some basic checks at 10,000 ft required a level acceleration at the notional tropopause (36,000 ft), in full afterburner to maximum Mach

number. The Hornet had a simple intake with limited management of the intake flow and pressure field (fixed, porous splitter plate and a boundary layer vent). Consequently, as Mach No increased, air would compress in front of the intakes and due to the drag rise, limit maximum possible Mach No to about Mach 1.7, depending on atmospheric temperature. The Electric Engine Control (EEC) system incorporated an engine rotation speed lock up (hold engine speed at max non-afterburning revs – dry power) at airframe speeds of Mach 1.32 and above to avoid engine compressor stall on wind-down from dry power if the throttles were retarded. After dwelling at max Mach for a minute or two the procedure was to zoom to 50,000 ft while maintaining above Mach 1.32, then close each throttle in turn to ensure the engine did not decelerate below max dry RPM.

On one such flight, after checking lock-up for each engine, I went back to full afterburner and passing about 57,000 ft rolled inverted to arrest the rate of climb and return to 50,000 ft for the next set of checks (throttle slams - idle to full A/B at 200 knots indicated air speed or KAIS). I thought I might see the void of space again but even as I topped out at 78,000 ft the atmosphere remained bright azure blue. Flight parameters at the apex were supersonic at Mach 1.15 and about 150 KIAS.



Frank was practicing his golf swing in his front yard one sunny afternoon when he took a mighty swing and accidentally sent the ball straight through his neighbor's living room window. Realizing what he'd done, he hurried over and rang the doorbell several times. After no answer, he slowly opened the door and stepped inside.

The living room was a mess—glass everywhere, a lamp knocked over, and on the couch sat a large man wearing a colorful turban. Startled, Frank asked, "Uh... who are you?" The man calmly replied, "I am a genie. You have just freed me from that lamp."

Frank blinked in disbelief and said, "Wait... does that mean I get three wishes?" The genie shook his head and said, "Since you freed me by accident, you get two wishes... and I get one." Frank thought for a moment and said, "Alright then, I want to be the greatest golfer who ever lived."

The genie nodded and snapped his fingers. "Granted," he said. "Now your wife may make the second wish." Frank called his wife over, and she didn't hesitate. "I'd like a million dollars every week for the rest of my life," she said with a smile.

"Done," said the genie. Then he cleared his throat and said, "Now it's my turn. I've been stuck in that lamp for many years, and I've been very lonely. I'd like to spend one romantic day with your wife." Frank was shocked, but the genie reminded them about the weekly million dollars.

After some awkward discussion, Frank reluctantly agreed and left them to it. The next day, after everything was over, the genie leaned back and asked Frank's wife, "By the way, how old is your husband?" She replied, "He's forty-five."

The genie chuckled and shook his head. "Forty-five?" he said. "And he still believes in genies?"



Lake Boga – No. 1 RAAF Flying Boat Repair Depot (FBRD)

*Edited from the article in the NSW Sunderland Newsletter, June 2026, Story and photos by Prue Anthony
Prue thanks the staff of the wonderful museum located in some of the remaining buildings of the facility, and also the author Brett Freeman for the information she gleaned from his book "Lake Boga at War" (1995).*

Lake Boga is 10 miles from Swan Hill on the Murray River and was chosen for its circular Lshape, being three kilometres in diameter, making it easy to land from any direction despite the wind, and especially suitable as it is freshwater. It was also a long distance from the coast and any prying Japanese eyes! In December 1941 Lake Boga and adjacent Swan Hill had populations of 220 and 4800 respectively. Suddenly these two towns found themselves hosting nearly one thousand RAAF and WAAAF personnel, plus visiting air crews from the RAAF, the US Navy and Army Air Forces and the Dutch, past members of the Netherlands East Indies Naval Air Service.

Sir Richard Kingsland (10 Squadron) in the forward to "Lake Boga at War" states 'The aircraft serviced at Lake Boga were flown by those who performed incredible feats in the face of Japanese aggression. The flying boats carried...loads well beyond their designated range and load capacity, and often well beyond the time they were due for major maintenance. Their engines were hammered as they roared on override power settings to get off the water in their overladen state. They alighted in rough waters in the open sea in gallant rescues of ditched Allied aircrew, testing to near destruction the flying boats' thin hulls.



Current Lake Boga silo art, juxtaposing the two types of birds commonly seen above the lake, along with Scotty Allan, the Depot's longest serving Commanding Officer and test pilot. The muralist is Tim Bowtell.

The feats performed by these aircraft could not have been achieved without the vital network of professional care afforded by the personnel at the Flying Boat Depots, who, having provided primary maintenance, later accepted the aircraft back, bent, shot up and worn, and then made them as good as new, in some ways better than new. High standards of performance were achieved by skilled Bogafobians as they came to be called. Links were forged from Lake Boga to Allied operational bases through the Pacific. And this team work also involved the people of Lake Boga and Swan Hill districts who were generous hosts to the men and women of the RAAF and WAAAF, as well as visiting American and Dutch forces.'

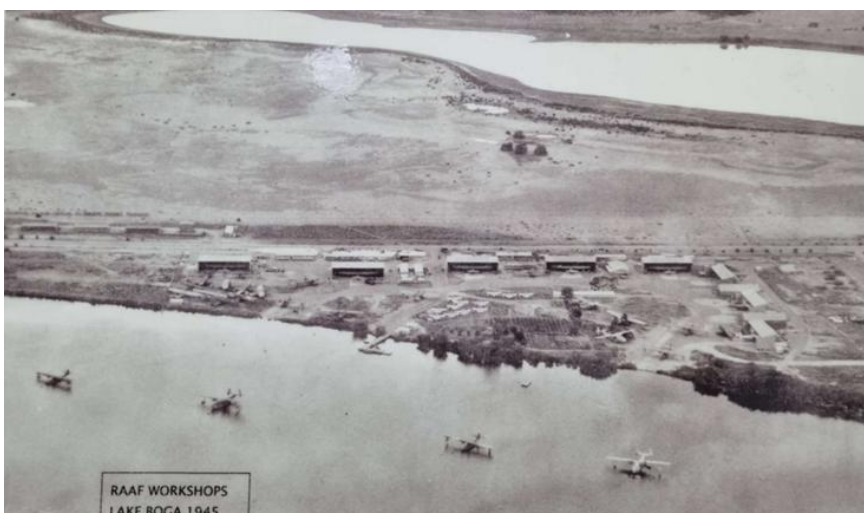
The war-time story starts with the visit to Australia by 'Guba2' built by Consolidated Aircraft Corporation of San Diego, California, flown by Dr Harry Archbold, model PBY-2 'PB' was an abbreviation of Patrol Bomber, the 'Y' being the US Government's identifying letter allocated to Consolidated Aircraft Corp, while the '2' indicated the model sequence. While in Melbourne, an instrument overhaul was carried out by Aust National Airways technicians while one of the Pratt and Whitney engines was overhauled by Commonwealth Aircraft Corp engineers. It was



rumoured that the Government was interested in the purchase of similar aircraft for the RAAF, and that officers had inspected her. On May 29th, 1939, The Sun advised "DEFENCE ORDER FOR FLYING BOATS ANNOUNCED". Short Sunderland flying boats would be flown from Britain, to be based at Rathmines on Lake Macquarie, north of Sydney, and some at a proposed base at Port Moresby. RAAF Officers would go to the UK for training and fly some of them home. Rathmines had been chosen in 1938 as the site for a flying boat base, and personnel from there together with those training in the UK would form 10 Squadron RAAF in July 1939. Then, on September 3rd, Prime Minister Menzies announced that Australians were at war, with the first contingent of AIF troops leaving Swan Hill on December 1st.

The RAAF took delivery of their first PB-Y Catalina flying boat from the USA, flying into Sydney on 2nd February 1940. (The name 'Catalina' came with the 5th model in the sequence.) The Cat landed gracefully onto the Rose Bay waters at the Qantas Empire Airways (QEA) flying boat terminal following a flying time of 60 hours 16 minutes during its seven-day ferry flight from the US. The aircraft was fitted with extra fuel tanks and departed San Diego 25th January 1940 alighting at Hawaii after 22 hours 5 minutes flight time for final hand over and arrived at Rose Bay with civilian registration VH-AFA and flown on to Rathmines.

In June 1940 the Commonwealth Government approved purchase of seven PB-Y-5 Catalina flying boats for \$US156,105 each, including 20% spare airframe parts. In September a further eleven were approved, with great sensitivity surrounding the delivery as the US was not at war and



could not be seen to be supplying military support. Hence it was agreed that QEA crews would ferry initial deliveries of Catalinas across the Pacific – with some RAAF personnel wearing civilian clothes on some flights.

As the war progressed, with Japanese attacks on Darwin and Broome, the earlier suggestions of Lake Boga as a potential site for a flying boat base were re-assessed with a

trip to Lake Boga and nearby Kangaroo Lake. After a plethora of letters and signals labelled 'SECRET', on the 28th April the Department of Air advised that while the establishment of a Lake Boga Flying Boat Repair Depot would proceed, plans to incorporate a RAAF and NEI Training Flight had been deferred. The document set out the strength of 29 Officers, 82 Sergeants and 719 Airmen, including WAAAF personnel of 3 Officers, 1 Sergeant and 108 ACW. This also required the upgrading of the Swan Hill aerodrome.

It was at Rathmines that the No.1 Flying Boat Repair Depot was first formed on 16th June with 24 personnel prior to its relocation to Lake Boga. June 18 saw the arrival of the first RAAF officers to take up duties and by July 2 an advance party of 30 had arrived. While the

Depot was still in construction phase, airmen took up residence in the Royal Hotel, Swan Hill. The first Catalina arrived on 12 July with stores and equipment from Rathmines. Construction of the hangars had begun, of an open fronted grandstand type with a cantilevered canopy, eight of the steel framed hangars were erected 120 feet wide by 58 feet deep, the roof ridge rising to 35 feet high above the concrete floor.

In his book, Brett Freeman writes "Darwin had just sustained its 25th bombing raid when Lake Boga received its first Catalina for maintenance and repair, the flying boat alighting at 1700 hours on 5th August. Having circled the lake and flown in descending legs, RAAF Catalina A24-17 came in gracefully on final approach, down to a copybook alighting. With props still spinning, canvas funnel shaped drogues were cast out of the blisters, arresting the flying boats forward motion as a crew member sprang from the bow hatch releasing the mooring cable from the external anchor locker. With engines cut, seconds later, the Catalina was securely moored up to a large rubber buoy. The day was nearly done as Marine Section personnel motored out in the Depot's temporary launch bringing the crew ashore.



Catalina pulled tail-first onto land.



The WAAAFs played many important roles at The Depot

This weary war bird had arrived in Australia in October 1941 and since January 1942, this flying boat had been flown relentlessly in operations against the Japanese by Nos. 11 and 20 squadrons. Late January and February, out of Port Moresby and flown by P/O Alan 'Snowy' Norman, it had bombed Rabaul on three nights. Norman again flew this Catalina 8th March when shadowing the Japanese Task Force headed for Lae and Salamaua." The aircraft was attacked and had its battery blown away, another day flown by F/Sgt

Bill Miller, was fired upon when they sighted five-armed merchant vessels. Another operation of 19 hours 20 minutes flying time involved sighting a major Japanese naval force headed for the Coral Sea, then bombing raids on Gavutu and Tulagi...on the home leg of the arduous journey they were suddenly strafed from above by a US Marine Corps F4F-3 Wild Cat Fighter. The pilot had not recognised the RAAF red, white and blue roundel, and attacked. "The Cat held his fire until recognition was established, but A24-17 had been hit during each of three diving attacks ... so that both fuel tanks were holed, the port aileron shot away, the hull holed in seven or eight places. After this incident, the red centres were removed from the roundels of all RAAF aircraft serving in the Pacific and replaced by a blue circle surrounding a white centre." After temporary repairs they flew back to Bowen, bombing Tulagi en route, then it was flown to Lake Boga for thorough restoration!

And so began the long list of flying boats and seaplanes that visited lake Boga over the next few years, along with their crews, Aussie, US and Dutch, who mostly enjoyed some down time while work was being done. After six months the unit strength stood at 758 personnel, and the short cut between the Camp and Depot had been worn by cyclists! Life was tough at Lake Boga despite the social and sporting activities, and the cinema on two nights a week. 1942 had only half their annual rainfall and 1943 continued to be dry. Huge red dust storms from the cleared Mallee would engulf the station, and despite pleading letters to Melbourne to enclose the open hangars the response was negative, and staff took up the habit of covering a fresh cup of tea with the saucer to protect it from grit.



Visible in museum the Catalina wing tip mechanism brings them down to become floats

Engineering work on so many different aircraft meant that they had to be constantly on alert when testing Catalinas from three allied nations. "Most fuel gauges in RAAF Cats were calibrated in imperial gallons, US PBYS in US gallons, while some Dutch fuel gauges were read in litres." Mental agility required! Brand new Catalinas were flown in from San Diego (some from other factories) and modified to meet RAAF needs, and painted black, to become BLACK CATS for their night time raids. Later Depot personnel undertook the specialised task of converting amphibious PBY 5A Catalinas back to waterborne only aircraft, to enhance their range, performance and load carrying capacity. They had their side and bow wheels removed plus all hydraulic gear, reverting the bow to a flush seal with duralium sheeting. This procedure consumed an average of 1500 man hours and reduced aircraft weight by as many pounds and gave an improved internal layout.

During 1945 the pace of work slowed and after war's end the lake became a floating

storage area for aircraft and the hardstand was stacked with the amphibious models. "In over five years of Depot life, with more than 1050 flying boat arrivals and departures with an estimated 800 test flights, plus associated aerial stunting, no aircraft met with mishap. This circumstance must surely place No.1 FBRD in a unique status among RAAF annals." The final page of the RAAF Unit's History Sheet concludes: "During the life of the station, it turned out a

large volume of work under very exacting conditions. Lake Boga itself is an ideal stretch of water for Catalinas, and even the largest flying boats could land without fear of trouble. And so another Unit which played a large part in the 1939-45 war passes. Sgd W. Symons S/Ldr, CO, CMU 12/11/47.”



Floats extended for water landing.



Floats retracted for flight

Of the 3,272 Catalinas manufactured in the US and Canada, there are still around 20 that are airworthy. Those left at Boga were sold and cut up to be used for sheds, caravans, fences, melted into ingots or even turned into houseboats!



Autonomous Aircraft Boost Logistics Reach

From www.defence.gov.au/news-events, 4 May 2026, By Flight Lieutenant Natasha Silver

Air Force’s Jericho Disruptive Innovation (JDI) team is making headway on autonomous aerial logistics systems to support agile operations and foster national resilience in Defence capacity. “By taking on routine logistics missions, autonomous aircraft will free up our aviators and crewed platforms for the tasks only people can do – particularly in demanding or contested conditions,” Wing Commander Joyce said.

Deputy Director Disruptive Experimentation Wing Commander Keirin Joyce said Jericho was leading the development of these technologies to ensure Air Force is ready for the future. To address the vast distances of Australia’s north, JDI is prototyping JabX – an uncrewed aerial system (UAS) based on the Jabiru 400 airframe – through Project Camel Train. Developed with Brisbane-based RFDesign, JabX



Deputy Director Disruptive Experimentation Wing Commander Keirin Joyce with a JabX, an uncrewed aerial system developed by RFDesign and Jericho Disruptive Innovation.

features robust avionics and an advanced graphical user interface for mission oversight. Through the establishment of dedicated UAS flight corridors, Camel Train aims to link remote airfields and coastal bases into a precision delivery network. "By automating cargo movement across the north, we strengthen our logistics tail," Wing Commander Joyce said. "It ensures dispersed teams – from littoral operators to personnel at remote airbases – remain supported without over-tasking our crewed transport fleet."

For autonomous logistics to become a reality, these robotic aircraft must be able to navigate crowded or contested airspace as safely as a human pilot. This is the mission of Project Arena. Partnering with Sydney-based company Mission Systems, JDI is developing Boobook-DAA, a compact detect-and-avoid radar. Boobook-DAA functions as the aircraft's 'eyes', replicating a pilot's ability to detect and avoid other airspace users. The radar is designed to detect other aircraft in the sky, day and night, out to at least 7km. Together, the technical advances of projects Camel Train and Arena will allow aviators to focus on mission command and complex decision-making, rather than routine tasks.

