Perth's Wartime Catalinas, 1942–1945: How the United States Navy and Qantas Catalina Flying Boats Protected Western Australia, Broke the Japanese Air Blockade, and Created a Post-War Legacy

Kevin Smythe

This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University

February 2022

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: Date

Monday 14 February 2022

.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Abstract

During the Second World War, the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas Empire Airways operated Catalina flying boats from the Swan River in Perth. The Catalinas were well known to local residents at the time but received little attention beyond Perth and Western Australia after the war ended. Historians who have researched these Catalina operations have focussed mainly on Qantas's Indian Ocean service, with a narrow emphasis on technical and aviation achievements, while the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10 has received modest attention at best.

This thesis analyses the deployment of Patrol Wing 10 to Perth in March 1942 and Qantas's initiatives to establish and then operate the Indian Ocean service, which restored the Australian section of the London to Sydney air link, beginning in July 1943. In order to reveal the story the thesis uses a large amount of primary source documentation, including unpublished United States Navy war diaries, Qantas archival information, original interviews with Perth residents, individual official and unofficial reports and records of American commanders and airmen, declassified governmental correspondence and additional records from the Australian War Memorial, National Library of Australia, and the Hudson Fysh collection. Many of these documents were also found in the initial search of Qantas's own archives, which are loose, but referenced by box numbers and file cabinet names. The thesis also poses three key questions, firstly to understand how American and Qantas Catalinas defied the Japanese threat, secondly to assess what impact the Catalina operators had on Perth's and Western Australia's society and, finally, to evaluate their post-war legacy.

The research revealed that Patrol Wing 10 created a defensive air-screen which discouraged and then negated encroachment by Japanese aircraft, surface vessels and submarines. It also revealed previously unpublished information on the greater role of the Americans including raids into Japanese-held territory from Perth, escorting Allied shipping, and pilot and crew training for Catalina personnel elsewhere in Australia.

By 1943 Japanese attacks on Western Australia ceased. The Americans' two-year deployment to Perth and Western Australia was found to have a marked social and cultural effect on Perth during 1942 to 1944, with an impact on locals' social relations, as well as business interactions in both Perth and Western Australian coastal towns where they were also based. The impact of militarily defying the Japanese and the effect of new cultural influences eventually yielded a new strategic defence partnership and post-war legacy. This was followed by the establishment of post-war local historical associations, ongoing American–Australian family relations, and permanent cultural commemorations including monuments, street names and geographical locations named in servicemen's honour.

Qantas's operations similarly played a pivotal role in breaking the Japanese air blockade on Australia's west coast. This outcome was achieved through the use of long-range Catalina aircraft to circumvent the blockade and fly directly from Perth to Lake Koggala in Ceylon. This arrangement enabled Qantas to remain commercially viable as an international airline when its other overseas services had ceased, due to the loss of routes and planes during wartime. Qantas's commercial motivations in resurrecting the Empire Air Mail Scheme are revealed as the key element in the airline's thinking at the time. Qantas was a much smaller operation than Patrol Wing 10 with only five planes in operation from Perth, but their rate of operational effort and physical presence also involved a strong interaction with locals and many staff were sourced from Perth

residents, including female staff. Qantas was a secret operation until August 1944, and this situation ensured that any interaction with civilian locals was initially limited. Like the Americans, Qantas's legacy involved the commemoration of its work through monuments, place names and even suburbs. The adoption of a new aircraft usage policy by Qantas postwar was another significant legacy that emerged and was maintained over many years by Qantas, a trend first adopted during the wartime Catalina period.

The purpose of this thesis is to share new and valuable research into Patrol Wing 10's and Qantas's roles during the Second World War. It concludes with the evaluation that Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas succeeded in their primary operational tasks of both defending Perth and Western Australia from ongoing Japanese aggression, and breaking the Japanese air blockade imposed after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Both Catalina entities made an indelible mark upon Perth and Western Australian society during the Second World War and left an enduring legacy still evident today through strategic and business links, the introduction of new airline procurement policies, international family relations, physical place names, and numerous monuments that commemorate the Catalinas that defied the Japanese and overflew the Indian Ocean.

.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Dr Per Henningsgaard throughout the research process. He kept things moving along and pointed out where the pathway was when any indecision arose and allowed me to focus on the key areas.

Thanks also to my father who drew my attention to Perth-based Second World War Catalinas a long time ago.

.

Note on Place and Individual Names

Throughout the thesis, place names and spellings used at the time have been retained in their original form. For example, ‘Tjilatjap’ remains in the spelling of the day. Contemporary spelling now used is ‘Cilacap’. Place names such as the Dutch East Indies have also been retained for historical accuracy. Indonesia is now the common term used for the former Dutch East Indies, now formally known as the Republic of Indonesia. Similarly, Ceylon has been used in its historical context, while the country is now officially know as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Wilmot Hudson Fysh has been cited as Hudson Fysh, as that was how he was professionally known and referred to.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer three questions that were developed from the history of Perth's and Western Australia's Catalina flying boats which operated from 1942 to 1945, during the Second World War. The three questions asked were:

> How did the Catalina flying boats of the United States Navy and Qantas Empire Airways contribute to defying the Japanese threat to Perth and Western Australia during the Second World War?
>
> What impact did the presence of the planes and their crews have on Perth during this period?
>
> What was the legacy for the United States Navy, Qantas, and Australia–United States relations that emerged from this period?

The thesis attempts to redress a perceived gap, identified in Perth's and Western Australia's Second World War history. An extensive literature review of this period was undertaken which led to the revelation of both new and supplemental material used within the research and analysis of the key questions. The search identified deficiencies of information on the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10 operations from March 1942 to September 1944. It also identified new and supplemental information on Qantas's Indian Ocean service, which flew from 1943 until 1945, with the flying boats finally destroyed in 1946. This important gap in the Perth and Western Australian Second World War period was deemed worthy of greater research and formed the basis for the literature research undertaken.

Literature Review

The Second World War was one of the most catastrophic events in world history. The war directly involved most of the global community, and to those not directly involved, it had a more than glancing impact. Covering a six-year period from 1939 to 1945 it had a devastating effect on people, countries and the ongoing international order well beyond 1945.

The review of literature underpinning the research questions assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the materials that intersect with those research questions. The review is a largely chronological overview, beginning with the lead-up to and commencement of the Pacific phase of the Second World War. It then focusses on the ongoing Pacific theatre and the Southwest Pacific area, including Australia's involvement in that zone. Additional elements of the research questions for which literature was sought, include the role of Qantas, the retreat of the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10 from Manila to Perth in March of 1942, and the impact of the Catalina crews and their support personnel's presence in Perth on the city's social culture.

While the main Japanese thrust on 7/8 December 1941 was against the United States Navy base at Pearl Harbour, the Japanese also attacked British forces in Malaya at Kota Bahru, Siamese forces on their southern border adjacent to Malaya, and other United States forces in the Philippines. By February 1942 Australia had been attacked

when Darwin was bombed and soon after other towns on the Western Australian coast, Broome and Wyndham amongst them. By March 1942 the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10, flying PBY-5 Catalinas, had landed in Perth and made its base on the Swan River at Pelican Point and immediately commenced operations patrolling the Western Australian coast and providing surveillance for local shipping operations. Patrol Wing 10 then quickly expanded its operations to establish three forward bases within the next year along the Western Australian coast.

By 1943 another Catalina base had been established in Perth. Qantas had commenced an operation flying long-range Catalina flying boats from Perth to Lake Koggala in Ceylon. This operation was established as a consequence of the fall of Singapore in February 1942 and the subsequent cessation of the Empire Air Mail Scheme route, which was Qantas's sole international commercially contractual operation and financial lifeline.

While a large volume of literature exists on the Second World War and the Pacific campaign, a smaller collection of detail exists about the Southwest Pacific theatre, particularly the operations of the United States Navy and Qantas's Catalinas which both operated from Perth. The literature review, with reference to the research questions, assesses arguments that explain the reasons for the commencement of the Second World War, the entry of the Japanese into it, and the Japanese operational actions that brought the war to Western Australia's doorstep. The review will also attempt to reveal the gaps between the literature reviewed and the questions posed in the research questions.

The starting point for this literature review is the Second World War and then by 1941, the entry of the Japanese into the war as an Axis power and their imminent threat to Western Australia in early 1942.

The Second World War, 1939–1942

Historians and other scholars have produced a large amount of published literature on the 1939–1942 period of the Second World War. For the purposes of this thesis, the Second World War can broadly be defined as one war with two geographically distinct theatres: the September 1939 European theatre and its ongoing operations until 1945; and then the December 1941 and onwards phase when the Pacific front was opened with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour and other locations until the Japanese surrendered in September of 1945.

The Second World War is generally marked by historians as beginning on 1 September 1939. Prominent scholars and experts on the Second World War such as Evan Mawdsley,[1] Antony Beevor,[2] Winston Churchill,[3] Max Hastings[4] and Martin Gilbert[5] cite this date as the beginning of the war when Germany invaded Poland. Previous actions such as Germany's intervention in the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland and the Japanese

---

[1] E. Mawdsley, *World War II: A New History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 87–109.

[2] A. Beevor, *The Second World War,* Oxford, Phoenix, 2014, pp. 35–48.

[3] W. Churchill, *The Second World War Volume 1: The Gathering Storm,* London, Cassell, 1948, p. 317.

[4] M. Hastings, *All Hell Let Loose,* London, Collins, 2011, pp. 16–44.

[5] M. Gilbert, *Second World War,* London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989.

war in China, which was already underway in the 1930s, foreshadowed the coming global conflagration that erupted in 1939. The Second World War began as a European war with its main initial protagonists Germany, France and the United Kingdom, along with respective Allied nations on both sides. As a consequence, historians have researched its origins and development in large numbers and with great depth.

Australia joined the war on 3 September 1939 when Prime Minister Robert Menzies broadcasted to the Australian nation that, as a consequence of Great Britain's declaration of war, Australia too was at war. On 3 September 1939 Menzies spoke to the nation that a new world war was underway and that Australia was involved.[6]

In addition to examining the war's European roots, eminent scholars such Mawdsley, Beevor, Hastings and Gilbert have followed similar structures in their respective works on the Second World War. They not only examine the European theatre but also undertake strong examinations of Japan's lead-up to war. Their views of the war, importantly, analyse Japanese aggression from the 1930s with its military involvement in China; they write about the rising nationalism in Japan, like that of Germany, and its will to ignore or defy the international order of the day.[7] As an example, Beevor describes the Japanese nationalistic development through the war in China, its aggressive patrols with neighbouring territories and its cultural attitudes that underpinned its combative policies.[8]

In addition, the strengths and weaknesses of the major belligerents are assessed including both the European and Asian actors, treating the Japanese as participants from the outset. For example, Beevor describes the European aggressors as having a period of preparation before launching war, as did the Japanese with military action in China pre–1941.[9] Analyses are conducted of Japan's political makeup at that time and the trade and military policies that were in place and which acted as indicators of their intent.[10] In addition to developing arguments for Germany's role in the war, thematic analyses make a strong case too for Japanese interventions. However, while intent is clearly analysed, the volume of material is imbalanced in considering both European and Pacific theatres, with some of the best known scholars of the Second World War focusing with greater weight on the European theatre.

While the Pacific theatre is analysed as a distinct theatre, these scholars' analyses remain both broad and strategic. They rarely consider the smaller sub-theatres that emerged during the war, including the Southwest Pacific theatre (and Indian Ocean area) where Perth is located. While the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies was a significant campaign and brought the security threat to Australia's doorstep, the aforementioned scholars, who have written some of the most definitive books about the Second World War, do not devote many pages to this development of the war period. This is reflected in the chapter headings where the bulk of analysis is devoted to the European theatre.

---

[6] J. King, *Great Moments in Australian History,* Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin, 2009, pp. 201–205.

[7] E. Mawdsley, op. cit.

[8] A. Beevor, op. cit., pp. 339–376.

[9] ibid.

[10] ibid., pp. 9–18.

In contrast to the above cited scholars, Beevor in his book assessing the Second World War, *The Second World War*,[11] goes beyond the mainstream approach provided by other scholars to provide an analysis from a different angle. His approach speaks to the reader from the viewpoint of the civilian, serviceman and military strategist. Beevor, a renowned Second World War historian, gives a more personal account of war. His work is presented chronologically beginning pre-1939 and provides a descriptive view of the factors that preceded the war. He begins his work by analysing the German build-up, the attack on Poland and the entry of the Italians into the war. Significantly, for the research question, Beevor also analyses the role of Japan beginning with its war in China in the 1930s. He provides a reasoned standpoint in his analysis of Japan's entry into the Pacific theatre in 1941 with its desire for resources, such as rubber and oil, and its impact on Australia through encroachment into the Dutch East Indies. Beevor also makes a strong case for Japanese nationalism as the starting point for its aggression and its drive for resources which eventually led it to Australia's doorstep in 1942 when it invaded the Dutch East Indies. However, of the two sections that cover the Pacific theatre, limited mention is made in the chapter headings and text of the smaller Southwest Pacific sub-theatre nor the Dutch East Indies area within the broader Pacific theatre. While the work is authoritative and conclusive, a clear gap exists in Beevor's work with regard to the Southwest Pacific theatre with no mention of the Western Australian coast, the inland and the actions that took place there.

A different, decision makers', view to the more scholarly historians is laid out by Churchill in his work *The Grand Alliance*[12], which he wrote in 1950 as an analytical reflection of his personal involvement in the war. The narrative takes a more personal approach to describing and analysing the Second World War. It's an insider's analysis.

Churchill, the British prime minster during the war and a person with great personal insight into decision-making of the time, focuses mainly on the European war and the early phases when the European forces fell back under German advances. However, he critically reveals the nature of the looming challenge with Japan and the British colonies in Asia. His view is indeed an insider's insight into operations and policy making. Australian forces were used in Britain's Asian colonies, and Churchill's descriptions of the policies and agreements behind the decision-making provides an important perspective into both defensive and offensive decision-making at the outset of the Pacific conflagration. Churchill's views provide some weight to the final decision-making that gave birth to Qantas's Indian Ocean operations in 1943 and fills some gaps in the intersection of Australia, Britain, and the United States relations in that mid-war period.[13]

While Europe remains Churchill's main focus, Asia seems a lesser concern to him and Australia just a source of military manpower for Britain's early urgent needs in North Africa and Europe, then later in Asia. Though an important contribution to literature on the Second World War, the focus on British defence means his work overlooks the greater Japanese build-up and threat to Australia.

Overall, the previously mentioned scholars provide a comprehensive overview of the Second World War's origins, major themes and theatres of action. The prime focus remains on the European situation while secondary importance is given to the newer

---

[11] ibid.

[12] W. Churchill, op. cit.

[13] ibid., pp. 528–624.

Pacific theatre which involved mainly American and Australian forces following the surrender of British and Dutch forces in early 1942, in Malaya, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. Nonetheless, a significant amount of detail is provided on the main areas of fighting in the Pacific including Pearl Harbour, New Guinea, the Philippines and the island chains' campaign by the Americans.

The main theme of the literature that emerges from the scholarly works considered is that commentators see the Second World War as a war with two distinct and unbalanced theatres in terms of analysis. While scholars have covered in detail the reasons for Japan's entry into the war, few have focused on their operations in the Southwest Pacific area.

The Pacific Theatre: An Overview

It has been recognised above that many scholars have comprehensively analysed the Second World War, including some aspects of the Pacific theatre. Of course there are many other scholars who have focussed their critical attention more specifically on the Second World War's Pacific theatre, rather than trying to analyse the entirety of the conflict. This area of operations includes the greater Pacific area and the zone in which the research questions are focussed, the Southwest Pacific area.

The Pacific theatre commenced in earnest when Japan struck the American naval base at Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, as well as several other locations across the Pacific.[14] This attack set in motion Japan's war with America, Australia, Britain, the Netherlands and independent Siam.

The sudden outbreak within the Second World War of the Pacific theatre effectively opened up a two-front World War with the European theatre underway since 1939. But the Pacific theatre had a long background prior to the 1941 attacks by Japan on the Americans and other territories in and around the Pacific. While Europe was at war, the Japanese had been fighting in China. This background is critical to analysing Japan's success in its early strikes and has been critically reviewed by numerous scholars including American naval historian Samuel Morison,[15] Ian Toll,[16] British historian John Costello,[17] Harry Gailey,[18] William Manchester,[19] and Australians Bob Wurth,[20] and Roland Perry.[21]

---

[14] Japan struck at several locations across 7–8 December 1941, including British led forces as it crossed the Gulf of Siam, Kota Bahru in northern Malaya, Pattani in southern Siam, Pearl Harbour, Manila and nearby areas in the Philippines

[15] S. Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific, 1931–April 1942,* London, Oxford, 1948, pp. 1–78.

[16] I. Toll, *The Pacific Crucible, New York,* Norton, 2012.

[17] J. Costello, *The Pacific War, 1941–1945,* New York*,* Harper Collins, 1982.

[18] H. Gailey, *The War in the Pacific,* Presidio, Novato, 1995.

[19] W. Manchester, *The American Caesar*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1978, pp. 1–175.

[20] B. Wurth, *The Battle for Australia*, Sydney, Pan MacMillan, 2013, pp.1–272.

[21] R. Perry, *Pacific 360º*, Sydney, Hatchette, 2012, pp. 3–91.

These scholars analyse American policy and naval power leading up to and during the early phases of the Pacific theatre. Moreover, they analyse in detail America's lack of preparedness leading up to the Pearl Harbour attack. While some scholars, including Beevor and Hastings, have taken their respective analyses from 1931, when Japan began to show signs of disengaging from the League of Nations and the developing world order, most begin their fuller analyses in late 1941 when Japan declared war on the Americans and Australia, amongst others.

Furthermore, the lead-up to 7 December 1941 is established and described by these writers who have identified the important themes such as: Japanese nationalism which supported rising militarism, discrete provocative incidents by the Japanese such as the sinking of the USS *Panay* in China, economic embargoes imposed upon Japan by western powers and the eventual Japanese resignation from the League of Nations, and its independent policy of imperialism. The background to the war with Japan's forces fighting in China is also addressed. It is argued by these scholars that the experience in China gave Japan a fast start in the Pacific and put the Americans and Allied nations on the back foot from the beginning. Morison illustrates Japan's high war-readiness state throughout his book with his descriptions of Japanese naval actions from 1931 onwards.[22]

The historians reiterate that the Japanese had national resolve, battle-hardened soldiers, strong air capability and a large blue-water navy with aircraft carriers and submarines in number in December 1941. The scholars address the first year of the Pacific theatre, extensively describing the onslaught which the Americans faced and the defeats that were inflicted upon them at Pearl Harbour, Wake Island and the Philippines, as well as British and Dutch reverses in their colonies including Hong Kong, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Portuguese Timor was also eventually to fall.

Japan's rapid advances illustrated the weakness and vulnerability of Allied defences and lack of preparedness. Moreover, the Pacific theatre itself was a huge area, which included vast distances and required extensive resources to patrol and manage. It was an invitation to capable maritime and air assets that could cover the vastness of the Pacific Ocean and the sub-theatres of the equally vast Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

Authors vividly illustrate the Japanese plan to strike isolated and thinly defended territories. Morison is prominent in pointing this out with his analysis of Japanese maritime advances and tactics.[23] The theme of geographic vastness and Japan's ability through its maritime assets is prominent in the literature. Military forces in territories once captured were shown to be hard to dislodge when Japanese forces were supplied by a large navy and defended by its air power. This tactic forced the Allies to develop long-range capabilities and strategies using aircraft carriers and flying boats as front-line resources. This development in the war is clearly relevant to the research questions' focus on Catalina flying boats.

In addition to the views presented by Western scholars, a Japanese author, Saburo Ienaga, in his intriguing work *The Pacific War 1941–1945,*[24] provides a unique Japanese

---

[22] S. Morison, op. cit.

[23] S. Morison, op. cit.

[24] S. Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1941–1945,* New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, pp. 57–229.

view of the war. His critique argues from a different perspective Japan's intent and implementation of its industrial-military power. While technological superiority was critical through means of movement by naval and army air assets, once occupied, ground had to be held and provisioned. Ienaga makes the case beyond the non-human details to analyse factors such as morale and local populations' responses when ground was taken, defended and held. Then, when the war turned against the Japanese, the isolation of forces and critical supply systems needed to maintain them was to become a liability as forces could be isolated, skirted or simply island hopped.

Additionally, isolated territories meant logistical problems. Campaigns such as the early American-British-Dutch-Australian[25] allied defence of the Dutch East Indies exemplified how isolated islands and dispersed forces were difficult to coordinate. This was a feature of the Pacific Islands' campaigns. General Douglas MacArthur's return to the Philippines campaign, the campaign which began in Australia and moved through New Guinea to the Philippines, is also analysed with authors pointing out the use of resources and decision-making employed by the Americans to straddle islands and seas. The Americans used a two-pronged Pacific strategy with MacArthur moving directly towards the Philippines while Admiral Chester Nimitz's naval and marine forces island-hopped their way directly towards Japan. All this while building forces for the invasion of Europe in 1944 and undertaking the North African and Italian campaigns in 1942 and 1943, respectively.

Territorial isolation quickly developed as a feature of the Pacific war. Strategic locations too were important. Technology and industrial strength was a driver of capability as nations, in order to take ground, faced a new dimension of war: the superiority of air and maritime capabilities over land forces, unlike in Europe. As Australia was both an isolated maritime nation and one which was strategically located, particularly where the American response was concerned, it was about to play a pivotal role in the nascent Pacific theatre. As the greater Pacific front developed, the focus was initially on the east and north coasts of Australia.

Despite the comprehensive coverage of the Pacific theatre in the scholarly literature, the omission of literature on the emerging west coast areas of Australia, once the Dutch East Indies fell, was identified as a gap. Australia's west coast was both an isolated area of the theatre and one strategically located with its port of Fremantle guarding that part of the Indian Ocean. Western Australia provided remoteness which afforded safety. The vast Indian Ocean and the threat from the Japanese in the archipelago of the Dutch East Indies emerged as an important defence issue as the war progressed but was found to be overlooked by many historians of the Pacific theatre. This is evidenced by the dearth of references found with the word Perth or Fremantle, referencing only the HMAS *Perth,* when it was sunk in the Sunda Strait, as an example. Similarly, Western Australia is not found in the indexes of the books reviewed including by key authors Morison, Toll, Costello, Gailey and Manchester.

As noted above, the Pacific theatre campaigns were fought over large distances and covered expansive maritime and air zones. The Pacific theatre demanded resource-intensive forces to be established and used. Strategic locations like Perth were invaluable for force location and buildup. Scholars have made the case for America's initial response

---

[25] Known as ABDA or ABDACOM, this arrangement was a collective military alliance (the American British Dutch Australia Command) that attempted to prevent the Japanese advance on the Dutch East Indies in 1942.

to Japanese aggression, its alliance with Australia, and its identification of immediate movement of resources to territories from which they could fight back. But, to the Americans, Australia was a launch-pad, a frontline base to take the fight back to the Japanese. While the main frontline areas were extensively covered, Pacific theatre scholars showed little interest in analysing the Indian Ocean and Australian west coast areas. This has resulted in a deficiency of anything more than superficial historical literature of American and Australian military operations in those areas.

Australia in the Southwest Pacific Area

The literature referenced above has established eminent scholars' general picture of the Pacific theatre. The sources reviewed provided an analysis of the main areas of conflict and the threat faced by Australia. While key areas were identified and analysed, it was also recognised that some other areas were overlooked, including Western Australia and the Indian Ocean zones.

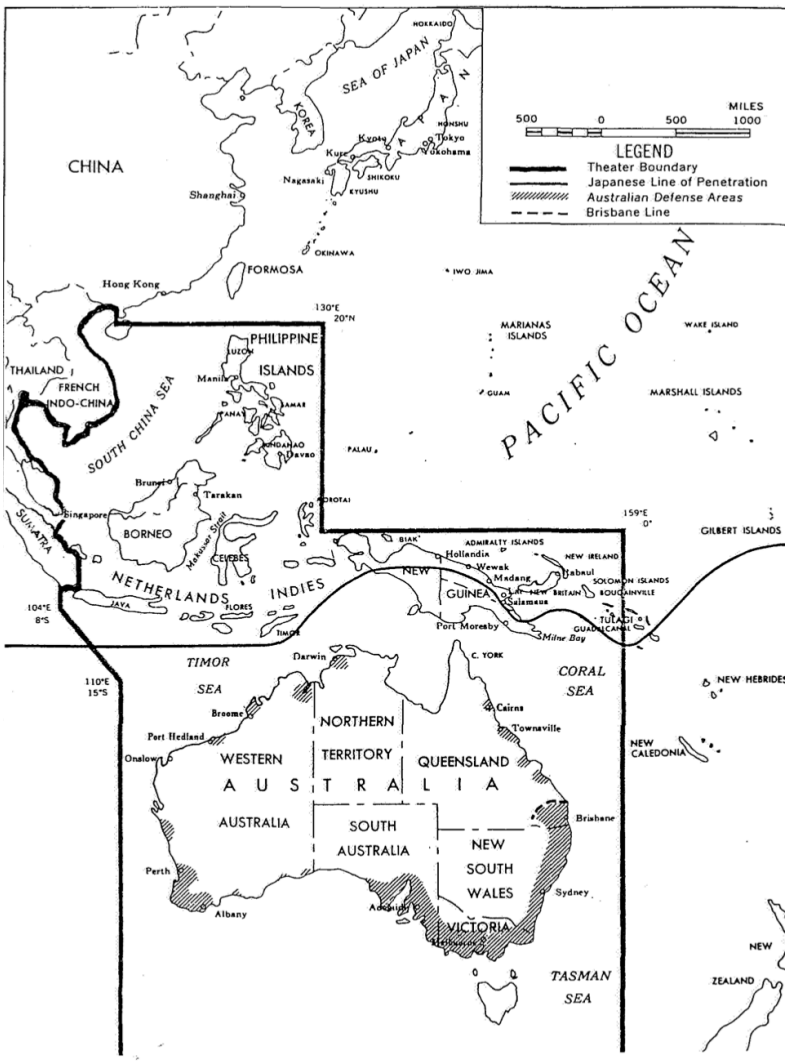

Figure 1.The Southwest Pacific area in 1942. The bold black line marks the boundaries of this Second World War theatre with the central line marking the approximate advance of Japanese forces.[26]

[26] N. Tunney, *Gateway To Victory,* Brisbane, Myla Graphics, 1991.

In December of 1941, the Americans prepared to fight back against the Japanese, while Australia prepared for the threat of invasion. On 8 December 1941, Australian Prime Minister John Curtin announced to Australians that the country was now at war with Japan. Curtin stipulated that although Australia was still at war in Europe, the Pacific front was a new war, a new theatre in which Australia was now under direct threat.[27] In response, Australia organised to defend itself and almost immediately put itself at America's disposal. On 27 December 1941 Prime Minister Curtin broadcast his 'turning point' speech as part of a New Year's message to the nation. Analysing the attack on the Americans at Pearl Harbour and the defeat of Australian forces in Malaya, Curtin commented, 'I'm not going to be the first Prime Minister to allow Australia to be invaded'.[28]

As historians have pointed out, Curtin knew that Australia was now facing a new and dangerous enemy, although the nation was still sending troops to the European war. This was a new theatre of war and it was Australia's own ground and the Americans, also at war with Japan, were now committed. King describes Curtin's reactions in his book where he mentions Curtin's response and decision to strike a new allegiance with the Americans.[29] Beaumont too provides detail on this 'turning point' moment where she explains the more complex interactions of Australia's relationship with Britain and now, under duress, with the Americans.[30]

The Pacific was America's and Australia's war. Beaumont illustrates this when she describes how Curtin and Blamey came to an agreement on command arrangements for both American and Australian forces in Australia while the relationship with Britain came to be estranged.[31] Beaumont writes, 'Australia had to rely on a major ally'.[32] That ally was America. Recalling the troops about to disembark for Britain, Curtin reinforced with action that it was now America to whom Australia looked, and he planned to invite the Americans to set up their operations in Australia. The New Year's speech was dramatically given on 27 December 1941. Australia, Curtin said, now looks to America and the Pacific theatre, for Australia was now in a life and death struggle for survival.[33] In his famous speech Curtin said, 'Australia now looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom'.[34]

Curtin's actions during the war have been closely analysed by leading Australian historians including John Edwards (*John Curtin's War*)[35] and Joan Beaumont (*Australia's*

---

[27] John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library (JCPML), Records of the Commonwealth of Australia, Digest of Decisions and Announcements and Important Speeches by the Prime Minister, No. 10, 1–16, December 1941, pp. 19–22, JCPML00110/15.

[28] J. King, op. cit., p. 201.

[29] ibid., pp. 201–205.

[30] J. Beaumont, *Australia's War 1939–45,* Sydney, Allen and Unwin, pp. 26–36.

[31] J. Beaumont, op. cit., pp. 34–35.

[32] ibid., p. 33.

[33] ibid., p. xvi.

[34] J. King, op. cit., p. 203.

[35] J. Edwards, *John Curtin's War,* Sydney, Penguin, 2017.

War, 1939–45) and are a prominent aspect of Australia's initial defensive response.[36] Edwards's and Beaumont's respective analyses reveal Curtin's personality and his determination to ally with the Americans, a decision which had significant implications for Western Australia with the arrival of American units in Perth and Fremantle in early 1942. Curtin, originally from Victoria, was a prime minister representing the seat of Fremantle, Western Australia, in the Federal parliament. The researchers reveal that Curtin's understanding of the threat to Australia's west was more immediate than that of his eastern states' counterparts at that stage of the war. While the focus of threat was on the main population centres in the east, by 15 February 1942 Singapore had fallen and by 19 February Darwin had been bombed with large losses of life. Broome and Wyndham in Western Australia were also bombed in early March 1942, illustrating clearly that war had come to Australia's northern and western flanks.

The literature reveals that scholars and historians of the Australian response have chiefly focussed, at the outset, on the immediate priorities of defence beginning with the alliance with the Americans. David Horner in his analysis of Australia's role in the Pacific theatre, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy, 1939–1945,*[37] and John McCarthy in his work, *Southwest Pacific Area First Year,*[38] establish arguments based on a survival-strategy style of policy. Beaumont too illustrates this reality and the initial steps of self-reliance through Curtin's clash with Churchill over troop movements through 'putting Australia first and (being) prepared to stand up to the inadequate British'.[39] The facts were clear: survive by any means and ally with the vastly more powerful Americans to do so. Australia had limited defence resources at the beginning of the war and had sought an alliance with the Americans as soon as it could.

This critical point in Australia's response is also widely covered by other historians reviewed. These scholars have documented such a pivotal point in national policy which would, in time, determine the disposition of Australian and American forces in Australia, including the western coast and Indian Ocean zones.[40] Curtin determined that Australia needed all the help it could get. He overrode his own military command to do so and appointed an American as commander of Australian defence forces, with the proviso that only he, Curtin, be consulted. American General MacArthur's role as commander was a move that Curtin made with little hesitation. It came on 3 April 1942, when MacArthur was appointed Supreme Commander of the Southwest Pacific area.[41] At the outset of the Pacific theatre, Australia was in a poor position militarily. Beaumont has described Australia's situation in 1941 as one where Australia was 'facing the demands of war with its defences woefully ill-equipped'.[42] The theme of American strength as a military force to aid Australia's poorly prepared forces at the time is a reoccurring thread within the literature.

---

[36] J. Beaumont, loc. cit.

[37] D. Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939–1945,* Sydney, Routledge, 1982, pp. 1–87.

[38] D. McCarthy, *Southwest Pacific Area First Year,* Canberra, Australia War Memorial, 1959.

[39] J. Beaumont, op. cit., p. 34.

[40] J. Robertson and J. McCarthy, *Australian War Strategy 1939–1945,* St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1986, pp. 303–304.

[41] ibid., pp. 303–304.

[42] J. Beaumont, op. cit., p. 3.

The literature also focusses on the areas through which the Japanese might approach Australia. Robertson in his book, *Australia at War, 1939–1945,* identifies the decision-making facing the Japanese as they contemplated invading Australia. He illustrates this by identifying logistical hurdles, noting that eleven army divisions[43] would be required to approach eastern Australia.[44] Other historians have raised the logistical realities as a theme that protected Australia in the early days of the war. Steven Bullard, in Peter Dean's anthology, *Australia 1942*, raises this spectre when he discusses Japan's designs on Australia, raising issues for the Japanese of internal dissension and other issues such as force size and makeup required to invade Australia.[45] Aside from the sheer size of force required, geographical isolation (the vast distances involved) and lack of preparedness by both Australia and Japan (to have forces available) emerged as common threads within the literature. Historians illustrate how Australia was unprepared, while Japan was overextended.

As the ructions in command continued, Japanese forces began attacking Australia's western and northern coast in early 1942. Darwin was bombed on 19 February 1942, only four days after the fall of the British garrison in Singapore. In Western Australia, Wyndham was bombed on 3 March 1942 as was the town of Broome further south.[46]

Authors including Dean, in his anthology, *Australia 1942,*[47] and Bob Wurth (*1942*)[48] have commenced their analyses of Australia's role in the Pacific theatre in 1942, the year in which Australia was first directly attacked, citing the themes above of isolation and unpreparedness. Wurth provides a chronological analysis of 1942, reviewing the lead-up to the war and critiquing planning and command arrangements that Australia undertook, factors which impinged upon the confusion that characterised early decision-making amongst Australian commanders.[49] Horner also illustrates this point in his book *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939–1945*.[50]

Noting Australia's physical indefensibility, with its vast open spaces and long coastline, Wurth stresses the impossibility of a complete coastal defence as Australia did not have sufficient resources to defend its complete coastline. In doing so he, along with the other scholars including Dean and Robertson, acknowledges the threat to the western coast but does not provide any further assessment of how the threat was responded to in 1942. This belief is evidenced through a review of the books' contents and index lists. However, Japanese activities in the Indian Ocean are acknowledged by these and other scholars. Wurth has provided acknowledgement of Japanese submarine activities in the Indian Ocean in his chapter, 'The boy who saw the Japanese'[51] which mentions many of

---

[43] A division is regarded as around 10,000 soldiers, as a rule, so around 110,000 soldiers would be required.

[44] J. Robertson, *Australia at War, 1939–1945,* Melbourne, Heinemann, 1981, pp. 102–103.

[45] P. Dean, *Australia 1942 In the Shadow of War,* Melbourne, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 129–133.

[46] K. Gomm, *Red Sun on the Kangaroo Paw,* Perth, Helvetica, 2010, p. 305.

[47] P. Dean, *Australia 1942*, op. cit.

[48] B. Wurth, *1942,* Sydney, MacMillan, 2008.

[49] ibid.

[50] D. Horner, op. cit.

[51] ibid., pp. 212–220.

the submarines, known as I-boats, that operated there. Tomlinson in his book, *The Most Dangerous Moment*, describes in detail Japanese warships passing north of Perth when they transited the Indian Ocean to attack British forces in Ceylon in early 1942.[52] Nevertheless, the scholars' main focus remains on the north, mainly Darwin, Kokoda and the northern coast of New Guinea, as well as naval actions including Australia's role in the Coral Sea and the Solomon Islands.

Other scholars have focused on more discrete areas to explain and analyse Australia's role in the Pacific theatre. Dean, in his anthology, *Australia 1942,* brings together the views of a number of historians. Authors in the book, including Horner, Albert Palazzo and Steven Bullard, amongst others*,* provide individual analyses using individual topic areas to explain how the theatre developed. Dean's book is relevant in that it follows the trend of historians who have identified the policy of ensuring Australia's defence first, before attacking the enemy, in reviewing Australia's position. However, a review of works published on the Southwest Pacific area shows scant mention of the western flank of the Southwest Pacific area and the actions and operations that took place there and around Perth, revealing a gap in the literature relevant to the research question.[53]

Nevertheless, as the war progressed into 1943, the battlefield was being reshaped as victories were recorded and Australian forces grew in size. Other factors too emerged that held back Australia's defence and prosecution of the war. Horner, who has contributed several works on Australia's Pacific theatre performance, illustrates in his book *Crisis of Command* how internal bickering affected command performance. His analysis is prescient, but like many others, focuses primarily on land operations and New Guinea in particular to illustrate this point. Nonetheless, Horner's work is invaluable in understanding the internecine command rivalries of Australia's wartime military leaders and setting the scene from 1942 to that of the progress made in 1943 as defensive strategies turned to offensive.[54]

The theme of offensive operations includes the growth in the MacArthur–Curtin relationship as well as America's plans for offensive operations in 1943 originating in Australia under MacArthur's command. This theme focuses on New Guinea and Australia's operations there involving army, air force and navy units with campaigns such as Milne Bay, Kokoda and the north coast at Wewak and other locations featuring prominently. Dean has taken up these themes in his book, *Australia 1943: The Liberation of New Guinea*.[55] His work is an edited anthology with contributions from various scholars with the most relevant contributions (from the research question's perspective) coming from Horner, Dean himself and Hiroyuki Shindo, a Japanese scholar. While focus is on the north, Dean and contributors look at the reactions of Australian leadership, the relationship with the Americans, and MacArthur in particular, and how Australia with America prosecuted the military effort in 1943.[56]

---

[52] M. Tomlinson, *The Most Dangerous Moment*, London, Kimber, 1976, pp. 53–90.

[53] P. Dean, *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War*, op. cit., pp. 124–139.

[54] D. Horner, *Crisis of Command Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat 1941–1943,* Canberra, Australian National University, 1978, pp. 32–101.

[55] P. Dean, *Australia 1943: The Liberation of New Guinea*, Melbourne, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 25–67.

[56] ibid.

By 1944 Australia's role in the Pacific was changing again as the Japanese were under intense pressure as MacArthur's forces approached the Philippines. Australian forces were now operating in the Dutch East Indies and operating from bases in nearby Australia using long-range aircraft and maritime assets as well as bases within recaptured areas of the Indies. These operations gave Australian leaders a world role as a leading player in the Pacific campaign. David Day covers some of these outcomes in *Reluctant Nation* where he describes 'Doc' Evatt's visit to London in mid-1943.[57]

In addition to the analyses mentioned above, some scholars have adopted even more specialised critiques of Australia's role in the Pacific. Some of these themes focus on Australia's western area of operations, but are set within the broader analyses of Australia operational strategy. One such scholar is Douglas Gillison who has researched peripheral areas of the Pacific theatre and analysed the situation with a focus on air power including operations in Western Australia. In his book, *The Royal Australian Air Force 1939–1942,*[58] he reviews operations that involved long-range and other air assets, assets that were used to take the fight back to the Japanese through long-range missions into enemy air space. Similarly, he highlights tactics such as patrolling isolated areas, including the western and southern coasts of Australia. His book provides a view seldom found in the more general studies of the Pacific theatre and Australia's role in it. Helson in his thesis, 'The Forgotten Air Force*',* also documents air operations in Western Australia during the Pacific campaign. Helson wrote that 'the air campaign conducted by the RAAF in the North-Western Area during the Second World War has been largely ignored by historians yet it contributed significantly to the outcome of the Pacific war.'[59] This literature is very important in probing air capabilities in an under-researched area of the greater Pacific theatre.

The concept of long-range air operations is also described by both Gillison and Helson. Gillison surveys in detail the disposition of Australian air assets in the Western Australian air zone. His work sets the scene for Australia's defence of the West coast and the response of combined Australian and American forces to threats offshore in the Dutch East Indies. His work describes general force disposition in the early days of December 1941 and into 1942. His analysis covers naval and ground assets' displacement and the recognition that it would be difficult to defend outlying locations such as Port Moresby and Rabaul in the Pacific if threatened by the Japanese. Historians observe that demands were quickly exceeding resources. The rapid Japanese advance in 1942 had exposed deficiencies in defence capabilities and with air, ground and naval assets deployed to help the British in Northern Africa and Europe, Australia was struggling to meet unexpected defence needs at that time.[60]

Most of Western Australia was militarily defined by the Royal Australian Air Force command as the Western Area with 14 Squadron and 25 Squadron deployed, based in Perth. Northwestern Australia fell under the Northern Area spanning the Indian Ocean across to the Coral Sea on the east.[61] 25 Squadron at Pearce had 18 Wirraway trainer

---

[57] D. Day, *Reluctant Nation,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 129–142.

[58] D. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939–1942*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1962, pp. 141–172.

[59] P. Helson, 'The Forgotten Air Force', MA Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1997, pp. 10–25.

[60] D. Gillison, op. cit., pp. 234–235.

[61] ibid., p. 237.

aircraft while 14 Squadron had 12 Hudson bombers also at Pearce air base in Perth.[62] Gillison's research identifies the shortcomings in air defence capability that existed in Western Australia. The air force was not well equipped as a fighting force and was very much in late 1941 and early 1942 a peace-time training operation lacking fighting capabilities, range and size.

A similar picture of lack of resources in 1942 is developed by Helson who has researched what he termed 'the forgotten air force'[63] in the Northwestern area. From there, Australia undertook operations into the Dutch East Indies as part of the advance by MacArthur's forces to draw out Japanese units, disrupt supply lines and maintain pressure upon the Japanese wherever they were. Helson, in a paper submitted for a Masters thesis, analyses the reasons for the forgotten air force existing and the type of operations mounted. These operations include the use of Catalina PBY-5s for bombing, patrolling and search and rescue from bases on the east coast of Australia and transit bases in the north of Western Australia.[64]

Aside from the literature developed by Gillison and Helson, who are two scholars to have researched material relevant to air operations in Western Australia during the Second World War, Robert Cleworth and John Linton have also produced research on Australian air operations. Their work researches Australian flying boats which are comprehensively overviewed in their book *RAAF Black Cats,* which describes and analyses the use of long-range Catalina flying boats and their missions using low-flying night time bombing and mine laying tactics. Cleworth and Linton's work highlights one of the critical roles of the Catalina in the war and the use of such an asset in the long-range over-water role that the Southwest Pacific area required. The exceptional long-range ability of the plane is described, as is its patrol and search and rescue capabilities. The Black Cats were Australian planes and flew from their home base in Rathmines, New South Wales, utilising Western Australian airfields to carry out their missions through the north west.[65]

Cleworth and Linton's work highlights the special performance characteristics of the Catalina and the role it played in Western Australia's and the Southwest theatre's contribution to the defence of Australia in the Pacific area. However, despite the lengthy and detailed coverage of actual air operations in the North, the authors do not cover the activities of the Catalinas that were based in the south of Western Australia, flown by Qantas and the United States Navy, respectively, from Perth. This is likely due to the book being about Royal Australian Air Force Catalinas only. The book's contents and index provide no information on Perth-based Catalinas.

Throughout the literature review it is evident that historians of Australia in the Southwest Pacific area focus ostensibly on the main operational areas of the war. Scholars concentrate on themes including Curtin's decision-making, defence through the alliance with the Americans, and a commitment to critical defence areas where threats were deemed imminent. Other themes such as command infighting and the eventual

---

[62] ibid., p. 238.

[63] Helson's paper was submitted as an MA dissertation 1997 at the University of New South Wales.

[64] P. Helson, op. cit.

[65] R. Cleworth and J. Linton, *RAAF Black Cats The Secret History of the Covert Catalina Mine-Laying Operations to Cripple Japan's War Machine,* Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2020.

movement north, as successes were achieved, are evident. As new tactics developed in the war, new streams of analysis such as long-range air capability and bombing tactics are recognised. Despite the many comprehensive and detailed analyses of Australia's role in the Southwest Pacific theatre of the Second World War, Gillison and Helson are the only scholars found to have undertaken detailed research of military air operations in the northwest operational area of Western Australia. Their studies highlighted the roles played by a small air force and the interaction of units in the north of the state. Air, maritime and land assets that gathered in large numbers in Western Australia's south, around Perth and Fremantle, in 1942 were not considered and constitute a gap in the overall literature that was found to exist on Australia's role in the Southwest Pacific theatre.

The Japanese Threat to Western Australia

While Australia confronted the challenges of the Pacific theatre following the declaration of war with Japan, the Japanese were preparing to invade the Dutch East Indies. Following the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 and the raid on Darwin on 19 February of that same year, attacks were also launched upon Western Australian towns and settlements. On 3 March 1942, the northern Western Australian transit point from Indonesia, the town of Broome was bombed. Also bombed on that day was the coastal town of Wyndham, further north than Broome and at the State's extreme northern border.

Japan attacked the Dutch East Indies soon after the fall of Singapore beginning with naval skirmishes including confrontations around the Javanese coast. The USS *Langley*, carrying aircraft and personnel from Perth, was sunk on 27 February 1942[66] and soon after HMAS *Perth* was also lost during the prolonged Battle of the Sunda Strait.[67] The ill-fated American-British-Dutch-Australian Command plan failed to halt the Japanese advance. On 5 March 1942 the Dutch announced the evacuation of Batavia, their colony's administrative capital. On that day 100,000 Dutch, British, American and Australian troops surrendered to the Japanese.[68]

During this period of fighting and as the Japanese threatened Australia's security, other Western Australian locations were attacked including Broome and Wyndham again.

---

[66] S. Morison, op. cit., pp. 359–363.

[67] M. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 303.

[68] M. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 306.

Location	Date
Broome	3 March 1942, 20 March 1942, 27 August 1942, 16 August 1943
Wyndham	3 March 1942, 23 March 1942
Derby	20 March 1942
Port Hedland	30 July 1942, 17 August 1942, 16 August 1943
Exmouth	20 May 1943, 21 May 1943, 22 May 1943, 16 September 1943
Onslow	15 September 1943
Kalumburu	27 September 1943
Port Gregory (north of Geraldton)	28 January 1943 (submarine shelling)

Figure 2. Japanese raids on Western Australia. The Japanese launched attacks on Western Australia most notably in 1942. Launch bases included Penfui in West Timor and Denpasar airfield in Bali to the west.[69]

Scholars including Morison, who writes specifically about naval operations against the Japanese, and Gilbert, whose research is more general in nature on the Second World War, have written about the key events affecting Western Australia's northwest that brought the war close to the Western Australian coast prior to the attacks cited above. Morison describes the positioning of American naval units as they scrambled in the face of the attacks on the Philippines in his chapter 'Events in the Indian Ocean, March to April 1942'.[70] He states that the Japanese did much of their damage at sea in this period of warfare, using capital ships and naval aircraft.[71] It was mainly naval aircraft that bombed Western Australia. Gilbert reveals detail on the Japanese approach towards Australia and writes that on Dutch Timor, as January 1942 came to an end, Australian naval units positioned to rescue Australian troops who had retreated under Japanese advances.[72] This evacuation is also mentioned by Sturma in *Fremantle's Submarines* when he cites USS *Searaven's* arrival in April 1942 to effect the rescue.[73] Morison also describes elements of this mission citing the departure from Darwin on 15 February 1942 in company with USS *Peary* and transports carrying American and Australian troops for Timor. Morison writes that USS *Houston* steamed out of Darwin Harbour in darkness and was soon challenged by an enemy flying boat as it headed to Timor.[74] The USS *Houston* was later to be sunk in the Battle of the Sunda Strait in company with HMAS *Perth*.

The raids on coastal towns highlighted the growing threat posed by naval ships and naval air forces, as the Dutch East Indies fell, which turned to attacks in early 1942. This

---

[69] K. Gomm, op. cit., p. 305.

[70] S. Morison, op. cit., p. 381.

[71] ibid., p. 384.

[72] M. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 297.

[73] M. Sturma, *Fremantle's Submarines*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2015, p. 23.

[74] S. Morison, op. cit., p. 314.

literature, while not focusing on Western Australia directly, reveals the looming presence of the Japanese. Their raids on Western Australia came as a result of their presence in Dutch East Indies and its peripheral defence area. Morison and Gilbert opine that this part of the Pacific theatre, the Southwest Pacific area was a highly active area militarily and the risk to the western coast was as serious as the other ongoing battles in which Australia was engaged in other areas of the country. That the Americans were involved was also important as it was the Americans who were now allied to Australia in the defence of its homeland. The Americans were about to commence their presence in Western Australia with the arrival in February of 1942 of the USS *Langley* and the American air element Patrol Wing 10 along with its accompanying tender vessels which had fled from the Philippines and then the Dutch East Indies to find protection in Perth. Dwight Messimer in his book, *In the Hands of Fate*, provides the story of the Wing's retreat and its arrival in Perth in 1942 but little more after the March arrival date.[75]

The threat to Western Australia turned to reality in the state's north with the attacks on the coastal towns. Historians including Mervyn Prime[76] and Ian Shaw[77] are historians who have written books and monographs on this period of the war, focusing on Broome. They have researched the raids on Broome and recognised the ongoing thread of unpreparedness, panic and inability to respond through logistical difficulties and remoteness. Broome and Wyndham were only regularly serviced by sea and air and, in 1942, both were very isolated locations with little support available. Broome was an important transit point from Java as the Dutch East Indies was evacuated and both Qantas and the United States Navy had aircraft operating through Broome on the day of the raid and lost planes during the attack on 3 March 1942. These scholars have provided valuable on-the-ground research which focuses on the panic and mayhem that took place and the vain efforts of the Australians and Americans to defend their positions and mount counter attacks as best they could in the circumstances.

To this point the literature reviewed has found that, among the sources that analysed the Japanese threat to Western Australia, most of these sources focus on the north of Western Australia where towns were attacked and from where Australian and American military forces counter attacked. The literature has identified the Northwest air force, the use of Broome as a refugee transit point and the attack there; however, the picture painted by these historians is that the south of Western Australia and Perth remained a safe haven of military activity.

Other historians have developed interpretations of the war-threat in Western Australia beyond the initial attacks and potential threat. They have brought a different perspective to the history and the size of the threat. In April 1942 a large Japanese naval force entered the Indian Ocean, passing north of Perth, on its way to attack British naval forces in Ceylon. Tomlinson in his book, *The Most Dangerous Moment*, recalls the passage of naval vessels via the Sunda Strait, well north of Perth and their return to join other Japanese forces during the later Battle for the Coral Sea.[78] Tomlinson, a British intelligence officer who served during the attack on Ceylon, comments on the danger of attacks from carrier-based bombers. He noted how they had attacked Darwin from a

---

[75] D. Messimer, *In the Hands of Fate*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1985, pp. 279–284.

[76] M. Prime, *Broome's One Day War,* Broome, Broome Historical Society, 2007.

[77] I. Shaw, *The Ghosts of Roebuck Bay*, Sydney, McMillan, 2014, pp. 37–121.

[78] M. Tomlinson, op. cit.

distance.[79] With Japans's navy in the Indian Ocean this same strategy could apply to Australia's western coast and the port of Fremantle (Perth), where Allied ships and submarines had fled in early 1942. The presence of a large Japanese naval flotilla in the Indian Ocean area was a first. Tomlinson's narrative raises the possibility of Perth's potential vulnerability, given the size of Allied naval forces now building in Perth at Fremantle Harbour, making it a potential target for Japanese forces.

In early 1942 following the fall of Singapore and the Dutch East Indies, Fremantle became an important naval base. Fremantle was the only deep water port on the Western Australian coast of any consequence. Dutch, British, and American submarines were based there. Lynne Cairns in her book on the Allied ships that harboured in Fremantle in 1942, *Secret Fleets,*[80] outlines the situation in 1942 regarding the rapid evacuation of the Dutch East Indies and the ongoing threat presented by Japanese forces on the Indian Ocean in 1942. Anthony Barker and Lisa Jackson address the Americans' social presence in Fremantle in *Fleeting Attraction*[81] and outline how the rapid arrival of Allied forces in Western Australia, mostly in Perth and Fremantle at this stage, affected local culture. They describe Perth as a 'threatened outpost', 'a modern version of the US cavalry'[82] facing the threat of a rampaging Japanese war machine but as yet with little ability to defend itself or emerge from its fort to ward off the enemy. Barker and Jackson highlight at a more personal level the nature of what the Japanese threat meant to Western Australia and Perth. They focus on the non-military impact of foreign sailors in Perth and Fremantle. Notwithstanding the direct attacks on its north, Perth was the state's capital where most people lived. It was remote from the east and had its own political and social culture. The authors comment on how remoteness was both its own blessing and danger. Allied forces had arrived and local residents felt reassured, but behind that was the recent bombing in the north and the threat of projected air power from naval forces, as had happened in Darwin and now Ceylon.

While this section of the literature reviewed focussed on the Japanese threat to Western Australia, it also covered the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies which positioned Japanese forces within striking range of Western Australia. The threat to Western Australia was realised when coastal towns were attacked on multiple occasions in 1942 and 1943. Scholars have focussed upon Japanese attacks in the north and analysing raids on coastal towns. Literature centred on Perth and Fremantle emerges when scholars reveal the social impact of American forces on Perth and Fremantle. Very little information, however, is revealed about the deployment and operations of the United States Navy air squadron, Patrol Wing 10, as well as Qantas's operations that were also based in Perth from July 1943. This outcome reveals a well-defined gap in the overall recorded history of this important period of Western Australia's Pacific theatre and Second World War history.

This gap identified appears as a result of the lack of attention paid to this aspect, the secondary support roles, of the Second World War. Not because the roles played are seen as being insignificant, but rather because of the scholarly obsession with focus on

---

[79] ibid., pp. 52–53.

[80] L. Cairns, *Secret Fleets*, Fremantle, Museum of Western Australia, 2011, pp. 38–65.

[81] A. Barker and L. Jackson, *Fleeting Attraction*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia, 1996, pp. 89–201.

[82] ibid., p. 28.

active conflict areas. The analyses of the combat areas come at the expense of other places that might have played a much less warlike role in the Pacific theatre but were, nevertheless, a significant strategic aspect of the Second World War picture.

The United States Navy in Perth, 1942–1944

The literature available on the United States Navy in Perth includes a small number of scholars who have written about the arrival and operational impact of the Navy, as well as the impact of the Americans on the culture of Perth and Western Australia.

The Americans came to Perth when the combined Allied force operating in the Dutch East Indies was disbanded and scattered naval units found shelter in Perth after a failed campaign to hold the Dutch East Indies from Japanese. The first American forces arrived as circumstances allowed; it was more a defensive retreat from the Philippines and Dutch East Indies than a planned sequence of events in early 1942. Fresh troops also soon arrived from homeland bases to establish a large American presence. The research on the American forces in Perth is described chronologically in this section as it describes those individual force elements, army and navy, that arrived in Western Australia. These assets were mainly naval, illustrated by the number of ships and submarines that came to Fremantle Harbour and the Patrol Wing Catalinas that flew to Pelican Point, Crawley, in Perth during March of 1942. Scholars including Dwight Messimer,[83] Tim Baldock[84] and Michael Sturma[85] have specialised in this history and developed material on the Americans's activities in Western Australia from early 1942 onwards. As previously mentioned, Cairns too has developed a history of American submarines in Fremantle in her book *Secret Fleets,* and revealed some of the activities of the United States Navy in Perth at that time.[86]

The published histories develop the theme of American forces as fundamentally individual and self-contained entities, not as a combined, integrated military force. This phenomenon was a result of the way military operations developed in Perth at the beginning of the war and the circumstances of that time. The authors have written about military units as separate forces focusing on their military strengths. Sturma's *Fremantle Submarines,* Cairns's *Secret Fleets* and Messimer's *In the Hands of Fate* concentrate not on combined American military power but rather as individual units operating on separate missions out of Perth and Fremantle. Messimer, as an example, covers only the air activities of Patrol Wing 10, flying from Perth, while the other scholars are heavily focused on the other maritime assets, the capital ships and submarines, operating out of Fremantle.

However, despite, Messimer's largely combat-related air operations account, the rest of the literature's dominant narrative of the Americans in Perth was found to be largely one of a story of the submarines and capital ships that operated out of Fremantle. Three books have been written about this (Sturma, Cairns and Baldock in his book

---

[83] D. Messimer, op. cit.

[84] T. Baldock, *Fortress Fremantle,* Fremantle, Baldock Family Trust, 2018.

[85] M. Sturma, op. cit.

[86] L. Cairns, op. cit.

Fortress Fremantle[87]). Baldock's work is a local history which concentrates on the impact on Fremantle and its population. The books covering ships and submarines recall major historical moments such as the departure of the USS *Langley* from Perth in late February 1942, which then sailed to its doom off the Javanese coast. USS *Langley* was actually an asset of Patrol Wing 10, one of its four tender vessels that were based in Fremantle Harbour from early 1942 until September 1944, but this is not recognised by the scholars who present the USS *Langley* as a fleet naval vessel.[88]

Meanwhile, Messimer, a Pacific war naval historian, has provided an account of Patrol Wing 10's retreat to Perth in his book *In the Hands of Fate The Story of Patrol Wing Ten, 8 December 1941–11 May 1942.* He uses a chronological approach in describing Patrol Wing 10's journey to Perth commencing in December 1941 when it began fighting the Japanese in Manila. His research begins with the attack on Manila in 1941 and the arrival of Patrol Wing 10 planes in Darwin and Broome *en route* to Perth. He then provides a chapter of just six pages on the Wing's time in Perth beginning with the landing of just three flying boats in March 1942.[89] Messimer also includes a chapter on 'Operation Flight Gridiron*'*, a rescue mission flown by Patrol Wing 10 Catalinas from Perth in April to May of 1942.[90] Messimer's two chapters cover the March 1942 to May 1942 period only.

In addition to the actual number of planes, ships and submarines, the American impact on Perth and Western Australia was felt also on the social scene and this is comprehensively documented in the literature. Given that the majority of personnel were based in and around Perth, this outcome touched on accomodation, business interactions, nightlife and social culture. Jenny Gregory in her book *On the Homefront* undertakes a detailed analysis of Western Australia and the Second World War and develops themes of local responses to the threat of war, the interaction with Americans and the aftermath of their impact including war brides, crimes and politics.[91] *Fleeting Attraction* covers similar issues with chapters such as 'The Quest for Comfort*'*, *'*The Racial Negative*'*, and 'Violent Fremantle', exemplifying the themes covered.[92]

However, despite the important and well-researched histories of the Americans in Perth during the 1942–1945 period, only Messimer has researched the role and activities of Patrol Wing 10 and its assets including the PBY-5 Catalinas, other utility aircraft of the Wing and the remaining three ocean-going tender vessels operating after the loss of the USS *Langley*. Messimer's work on Patrol Wing 10's time in Perth is succinct and represents the only published account of its time in Perth.

Nevertheless, despite the work of scholars on the Americans in Perth, they were not the only Catalina aircraft operators in town. Patrol Wing 10 had arrived in March of 1942 from the Philippines via the Dutch East Indies, Darwin and Exmouth, but by 1943 Qantas had also arrived in Perth with their own Catalinas. Qantas set up its operations adjacent

---

[87] T. Baldock, op. cit.

[88] A full account of the sinking of USS *Langley* can be found in Morison at page 359 The USS *Langley* was a converted aircraft carrier which was assigned as a flying boat tender to Patrol Wing 10.

[89] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 279.

[90] ibid., pp. 285–300.

[91] J. Gregory (ed.), *On the Homefront*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1996, pp. 119–129.

[92] A. Barker and L. Jackson, op. cit.

to the Americans at Pelican Point in the Perth suburb of Nedlands. Qantas and Patrol Wing 10 were friendly neighbours sharing, at times, facilities and camaraderie as well as having a strong impact on the city and the local culture of Perth. The work of scholars on the Americans in Perth neglects to explore the connections between these two entities.

While the literature reviewed revealed the operations of America's navy in Perth from 1942 until 1944, the prime focus was found to be on the capital ships and submarines based in Fremantle. Messimer's work contributed two short chapters on Patrol Wing 10 operations in Perth. This outcome illustrates the main literature focus to be on surface-ship maritime activities and highlights the lack of detail written on air operations. This revelation acknowledges a significant shortfall in the historical record of this period of the war in the Pacific theatre given that air operations over a vast Indian Ocean and long Western Australian coast were an important response to Australia's security at the outset of the war.

Qantas in Perth, 1943–1945

Despite Qantas's small physical presence in Perth beginning in 1943 - it had at most only five flying boats in its charge - there is a solid body of literature available on the operation flown from the quiet middle class suburb of Nedlands on the sandy banks of the Swan River. The literature ranges from books on the history of Qantas as an airline, books and journal articles on Perth as Qantas's host city at the time, and individual accounts from the airmen themselves who flew the flights across the Indian Ocean. Qantas's operation in Perth was an extraordinary achievement given the circumstances of wartime, the complete lack of physical resources available at the outset, and the competition for skilled pilots, crews and engineers during wartime and Australia's desperate defence to ward off the Japanese. That Qantas flew through Japanese-patrolled airspace during their flights, only adds merit to the achievement.

Regardless of the challenging circumstances at the time, historians have developed a strong picture of what took place using first hand information and other research material. Books such as Taylor's *The Sky Beyond*[93] sets the scene for what eventually became known as the Indian Ocean route, or more colloquially 'The Double Sunrise Flights', owing its name to the duration of flights and that crew experienced two sunrises from takeoff in Perth until landing at Lake Koggala, in Ceylon.[94] Taylor, in his book, describes how he conceived and flew a reserve route across the Indian Ocean in June 1939, should war commence and Australia lose its standing air routes to Asia, the Middle East and Europe which at that time were all via Singapore. This new route, pioneered by Taylor, became the example from which the 1943 Qantas route was conceived. Taylor, who had flown with Qantas to bring to Australia the air force Catalinas in 1941, had flown from Port Hedland on the Western Australian coast arriving in Mombasa, Kenya, after landing in the Cocos Islands, the Chagos Islands group (Diego Garcia), and the Seychelles, *en route*. Taylor flew in an early model Consolidated Catalina NC777, the *Guba*, the very same aircraft type (though not model) to be used by Qantas some four years later. Taylor returned safely from his epic journey and handed his report to Prime

---

[93] P. Taylor, *The Sky Beyond,* New York, Ballantyne, 1963, pp. 105–121.

[94] The name Double Sunrise was coined by the Qantas Catalina crews. Because the flight was so long in duration crews encountered two sunrises during each flight.

Minister Menzies on 2 September 1939, just one day before Australia entered the Second World War,[95] and just 4 years before his bold prediction would come true.

Several other aviation historians have developed the theme of Qantas's pioneering operations as an airline and their proclivity to open routes previously considered as unattractive. E. Bennet-Bremner,[96] John Gunn,[97] and W. Hudson Fysh[98] (Qantas's Managing Director during the war), have published books on Qantas's development as a company and airline, revealing the nature of the company built on a mail contract in 1920. Flying from Queensland to the Northern Territory in days when aircraft were a new commercial phenomenon, Qantas grew into an international airline flying a mail and passenger service from Sydney to London. The understanding that emerges from these historians' work is that Qantas was a commercial company, not a government entity, and it had to make profits. To do so, it had to take risks in developing and operating routes and in some cases, as was the case with many of its wartime flights, it had to fly through war zones to do so.

Qantas was an airline flown by veteran aviators. Fysh himself was a former First World War airman. He knew aviation, war and risk. The characteristic of leadership and risk is comprehensively explored by Jim Eames in his 2017 publication, *Courage in the Skies.*[99] Eames reveals several accounts of Qantas's risk strategy and determination to meet its objectives with accounts of incidents in high-risk war zones including the Japanese bombing of Darwin, Broome and in New Guinea where the airline lost aircraft, personnel and passengers. Qantas was in the thick of early Pacific theatre action and, by 1943, flying through Japanese-patrolled air space seemed a small risk compared to the front-line action it had experienced on its run to London via both the European and Pacific theatre operational areas.

Qantas flew the Indian Ocean service as a means of achieving its obligations under the Empire Air Mail Scheme which was the financial lifeblood of the airline up to the time of the Second World War.[100] When Singapore fell in February 1942 Qantas lost its ability to fly the route as Japan now controlled the north and western air approaches to Australia. Singapore was a major stop on the mail and passenger route where Qantas staff took over from Britain's Imperial Airways' crews. Qantas had already changed routes before 1942 to circumvent warlike areas as Japan invaded Malaya, but when Singapore fell in early 1942, the service ceased completely as no safe and financially acceptable alternative route could be found.

---

[95] P. Taylor, op. cit., p. 120.

[96] E. Bennet-Bremner, *Front-Line Airline,* Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1944, pp. 42–104.

[97] J. Gunn, *Challenging Horizons Qantas 1939–1954,* St Lucia, University of Queensland Press,1990, pp. 108–129.

[98] H. Fysh, *Qantas at War,* Corinda, Pictorial, 2009, pp. 183–193.

[99] J. Eames, *Courage in the Skies*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2017, pp. 258–281.

[100] Qantas joined the British conceived Empire Air Mail Scheme which began in 1934 using British supplied Empire Class Flying Boats flying the Sydney to London route.

The Empire mail scheme and Qantas's relationship has been analysed by Peter Ewers in his work 'A Gentlemen's Club in the Clouds'.[101] Ewers describes how the mail scheme and Qantas, as part of Imperial Airways' consortium, flew the giant Empire Class flying boat to cover the full length of the Sydney to London route. The route gave Qantas extensive over-water long-range experience, experience which was invaluable in Qantas's operation of the long-range and over-water service across the Indian Ocean from Perth to Lake Koggala, Ceylon, in 1943.

The Indian Ocean service commenced in July 1943, representing a break of 17 months in the route following the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Several Indian Ocean service operational accounts have been published and all lay out the terms of operation and the risks involved. Being operational accounts, these documents describe technical and practical circumstances and follow the themes of the familiarisation of a new aircraft type to be flown over an uncharted route with much work to be done in the areas of engineering, fuel and distance, and navigation. Three passengers were carried on the flights as well as five crew. This unique aspect of flying passengers through an enemy-patrolled air zone added one more dimension to a risky wartime flying operation. Authors such as Captain Lew Ambrose,[102] Avis Koenig,[103] and Captain Ian Lucas,[104] as well as the highly detailed document by Barry Pattison and Geoff Goodall,[105] together provide a large amount of information on the technical details of the Indian Ocean service and operations from its new Perth base. Arthur Leebold in his book, *Silent Victory,*[106] covers much of the same information with additional content about other aircraft types flown by Qantas on the route – the B-24 Liberator and the British Lancastrian aircraft.

Flying the Indian Ocean service were experienced pilots like Rex Senior. Senior compiled his own account of the service and in his monograph reveals human stories, encounters with Japanese war planes and the intricacies of the operation from a pilot's perspective.[107] Ambrose, another senior captain, has also written his story of the flights. Ambrose, like Senior, provides an insider's view of the operation and reveals many stories of incidents particular to the war, crew and management such as when the crew neglected to carry a compass onboard and had to turn back to Lake Koggala and recommence the flight. Ambrose also describes other issues such as the special meteorological knowledge required as planes crossed through the weather of the equatorial inter-tropical front during the flights.[108]

---

[101] P. Ewer, 'A Gentlemen's Club in the Clouds: Reassessing the Empire Air Mail Scheme, 1933–1939'*, The Journal of Transport History,* Volume 28,1, 2007.

[102] L. Ambrose, *A Brief Outline of Indian Ocean Operations,* Personal Monograph, Sydney, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder, 1945.

[103] A. Koenig, *Catalinas on the Swan River: Perth 1942–1945,* Personal Monograph, Word War Two files, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Archives, 1994.

[104] I. Lucas, *Qantas and the Indian Ocean*, Sir Norman Brearley Oration, Perth, 2001.

[105] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, *Qantas Empire Airways Indian Ocean Service, 1943–1946,* Sydney, Aviation Historical Society, 1979, pp. 1–64.

[106] A. Leebold, *Silent Victory*, Belconnen, Banner, 1995, pp. 1–88.

[107] R. Senior, *My Story of The Double Sunrise Flight*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Folder 1/1 MSS2112, Undated.

[108] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 14.

In summary, the literature reveals a strong background to the history of the flights, the role of the Empire mail service, technical details and crew recollections of the Indian Ocean service. It is invaluable literature but is heavily focussed on the flights themselves and the technical detail of aviation. However, what is not revealed is literature which describes the political and commercial decisions that were undertaken to establish the service. This information is critical to the approvals for establishment of the flights. Also not covered in the material reviewed is the involvement of the Americans and British to make available the PBY-5 Catalina flying boats for Qantas that were sourced during wartime for what was ostensibly a non-warlike, commercial operation. This lack of information is important to understanding the commencement of the Qantas service. These political and commercial decisions are not analysed in detail and represent a significant omission in the fuller picture of how and for what reasons Qantas operated the Indian Ocean service from 1943 to 1945.

Furthermore, there is little information presented about Qantas's relationship with the American navy base nearby at Pelican Point. While Qantas was not supposed to have contact with the Americans, in the early days of Qantas's operation, contact was made and important support was given including use of tools and refuelling facilities. The other omission in the literature is the lack of analysis of how Qantas's flights, like the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10, contributed to breaking what was effectively an air blockade, which was imposed by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore in February 1942 and, soon after, the occupation of the Dutch East Indies in early 1943. A blockade is generally regarded as an act which prevents movement of transport, people and movement through a defined zone with the aim of controlling that space to degrade any opposition force's movements. The term blockade is appropriate here, even though it was not really used within the context of air power at the time. The term had military and political currency as a naval strategy, mainly used for coastal ports, harbours and supply route blockades. For 1942–1945 the term is a new strategy for air power, but in this thesis the term blockade is used to match history with present day thinking.

The act by the Japanese in February of 1942, when they occupied Qantas's terminus in Singapore effectively cutting the air route from Sydney to London, blockading that flight corridor, demonstrated the imposition of an air blockade in practice. By later flying a new route around the periphery of the patrol zone at night, using planes with long-range tanks that only Qantas possessed, the airline effectively avoided the danger presented by Japanese air power over the Indian Ocean and thwarted the air blockade imposed. Similarly, the Americas were driven south from their initial bases in the Philippines, then from their new bases in the Dutch East Indies following their occupation by the Japanese in early 1943. Once these air bases were occupied, Japanese air power, in practical terms, imposed a no-fly air zone across the approaches to Perth and Western Australia, preventing movement from a northwesterly direction, effectively establishing a blockade of inbound air movements to Perth and Western Australia.

The research questions aim to redress the omissions cited within the literature and present the full story of Qantas's Indian Ocean route.

The Homefront Perth, 1942–1945

During wartime, Perth grew in population as the influx of foreign and Australian service personnel was underway with urgency. Around 5,000 servicemen had quickly arrived in the greater Perth area, supporting the bases now being established. Foremost among these bases was Fremantle Harbour, which supported up to 170 American,

British, Dutch and Australian ships and submarines.[109] Accomodation was at a premium and comfortable housing was keenly sought after. Perth's social scene and culture was also changing, providing challenges for both local citizens and authorities.

Despite the relatively remote location of Perth from the threats developing in the east of Australia, a number of historians, scholars and aviators outside of the specialised realm of military history have contributed important research to the body of literature that describes Perth and Western Australia during wartime. These researchers have revealed the impact of mainly American military culture on Perth from 1942 until 1944 when Patrol Wing 10 and maritime elements in Fremantle moved north as the Allies pushed back the Japanese and began their final preparations for the recapture of the Philippines and the eventual attacks upon Japan itself. Also mentioned, in the body of literature, though a smaller aspect of the period, was the impact of Qantas's operations which besides bringing in pilots and crews from other parts of Australia, employed a number of local staff who lived in their home city. Qantas also sought accomodation for its crews, engineers and support staff in Perth and this requirement, along with the demand brought by the Americans, impacted upon the city's ability to respond.

The greatest impact upon Perth was the influx of American service personnel. This history is widely covered by Gregory in her book, *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II.* Gregory provides accounts across diverse areas of impact including the chapter 'Yanks in Western Australia', accommodation pressures, food supply issues between locals and the Americans, internment camps for foreign nationals, and how the war impacted on Indigenous Australians.[110] While Gregory focusses on the broad realm of the war's impact, importantly she details the military impact of the arrival of the Americans who were found in the Perth's central city area at Crawley and surrounding suburbs such as Nedlands as well as the Fremantle-based sailors. Aside from the servicemen's military activities, a social scene quickly developed along with all the usual characteristics of a big city with well-paid single men mingling in society. Marriages, divorce issues, affairs and disputes arose as the Americans settled in to urban life in a large western city. Despite this important information being revealed, there is absent any analysis in Gregory's book of Patrol Wing 10 specifically and no mention made of Qantas's impact. This outcome is reflected in the contents and index lists of the book.

Baldock, Messimer and John Hammond in his book *Over-Sexed, Over-Paid and Over Here*[111] have also contributed analyses of the Americans' presence in Perth. The Americans were a combination of experienced fighting men, notably Patrol Wing 10 servicemen, who flew in from three months of combat as they were driven from their bases in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. Perth was a haven of calm and civility for them after the rigours of war. One officer stated, 'We have good water, lights and girls at hand. So it is heaven'.[112]

While veterans had arrived as part of the influx of Americans, other service personnel were in their first overseas wartime post as the American forces rapidly grew in

---

[109] T. Baldock, op. cit., p. 83.

[110] J. Gregory, op. cit.

[111] J. Hammond, *Over-Sexed, Over-Paid, & Over Here Americans in Australia, 1941–1945*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1981, p. 100.

[112] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 280.

size to fight the war. The primary theme of Americans overrunning Perth is also a prominent feature of Barker and Jackson's book *Fleeting Attraction* which describes the social relationships that quickly developed after early 1942 and the stresses that arose. Sturma in *Fremantle's Submarines* also highlights this theme of social tension during wartime. The research and analysis touches on matters within the broader social environment, covering areas including racial challenges with America's race-based servicemen policy which segregated personnel, as well as rules regarding local women and marriages to Americans, and violence around the bars and clubs of Fremantle in particular.[113] Hammond describes the arrival in Fremantle of Australian troops returning from the Middle East and the infamous 'Battle of Perth' which took place when Australian soldiers clashed with American servicemen over issues of women and social practices.[114] Focus in these publications was heavily on social interactions which, while revealing in itself, omitted precise identification of the activities of both Qantas and Patrol Wing 10 personnel. While Qantas was not mentioned at all in the literature on the homefront impact, the term 'Americans' was regarded as covering all United States servicemen in Perth and Fremantle during this period.

Overall, the literature describing and analysing the impact of foreign service personnel on Perth - mainly the Americans of Fremantle-based naval units and to a lesser extent those from Patrol Wing 10 - is documented and described at a practical level by a small range of researchers. Some of the literature is presented by academics which illustrates a professional recognition by scholars of the significance of the era for Perth and Western Australia. The social story of the time is comprehensive and vividly documented with a view towards the social culture that developed. Less information is revealed about Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas and their respective individual influences on Perth, and this represents an important gap in the literature. Collectively the authors aggregate American influence on Perth's social influence at this time without identifying individuals' service or units such as airborne, surface or sub-surface units. Nevertheless, despite such gaps identified, the literature provides a sound base for further research in this important Perth and Western Australian period during the Pacific theatre campaign.

History of the Catalina Flying Boat

The literature cited above reveals aspects of wartime Perth related to the presence of both Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas Catalinas. The key element in this history is the capability of the Catalina flying boat itself. This final section in this chapter reviews the characteristics of the PBY-5 Catalina flying boat, which was flown in large numbers during the Pacific theatre of the Second World War.

While the Second World War introduced the Catalina to the world as a long-range and multi-role aircraft, it was already a common sight in the international aviation industry. Known as the Catalina, the plane was officially named the PBY and came in series numbers, the Perth-based planes being of the PBY-5 series. The letters P, B and Y were given as the aircraft's aviation designation with PB indicating its nomenclature as a Patrol Bomber and Y signifying the production company, Consolidated Aircraft Company.[115] The aircraft was first developed for use by the United States Navy in the 1930s and was

---

[113] A. Barker and L. Jackson, op. cit.

[114] J. Hammond, loc. cit.

[115] A. Leebold, op. cit., p. 7.

produced by the Consolidated Aircraft Company, originally located in Buffalo, New York. As business grew, the company moved to San Diego in California in the mid-1930s where most of its wartime production took place. By the end of 1937 some 170 Catalina units in various series and configurations had been built and delivered to the navy.[116] Many more were to come as the war approached and eventually began.

The aircraft was designed as primarily a patrol aircraft but with attack capabilities. The plane was developed to meet a need identified by the Americans for an aircraft type that could patrol ahead of the fleet, over vast ocean stretches, acting as a form of radar to scout enemy movements and report back to the fleet commander.[117] The Catalina could operate from water and land bases with existing facilities or temporary maritime sites using tender vessels. By 1937, the Americans had established a number of Patrol Wings equipped with Catalinas and accompanying tender vessels that allowed the planes to land in remote places and be supported at that location for as long as required.

The literature review describing the Catalina PBY-5 as an aircraft, and more specifically as an American and Qantas wartime aircraft operating from Perth, includes the general publications available on the aircraft itself, as well as literature describing the configurations of the Perth-based planes of both users and why they were chosen to operate out of Perth. Literature on the production variant of the plane was found to emphasise the plane's long-range performance ability. This characteristic was a design requirement of all Catalinas. Examples of this characteristic have been highlighted by Messimer,[118] Louis Dorny,[119] and Stewart Wilson,[120] who have all published books which provide the basic Catalina specifications. These specifications are common to all Catalina models, including the PBY-5 which was the model operated from Perth by both users, the United States Navy and Qantas. Due to Perth's remote location as a base, the basic long-range specifications of the Catalina were required for achievement of missions.

While all PBY-5s were the same when they came off the production line, users were known to modify the flying boats depending on missions and requirements. In Perth, Patrol Wing 10 operated the Catalina as a military aircraft equipped with guns and bombs, while Qantas undertook operations as a purely commercial service, including passengers. An example of the American setup of the plane is found in Messimer's book *In the Hands of Fate,* which describes crew numbers, armament and mission planning.[121] Qantas, on the other hand, had a differently configured aircraft with passengers carried, no armament and the inclusion of long range fuel tanks. Hudson Fysh, General-Manager of Qantas during the Indian Ocean service period, describes the capabilities of these Qantas planes in his book *Qantas at War.* The alternative descriptions within the literature are a result of mission type with Patrol Wing 10 patrolling Western Australia's long coastline while Qantas flew from Perth to Ceylon carrying passengers and mail.

---

[116] L. Dorny, *US Navy PBY Catalina Units of The Pacific War,* Oxford, Osprey, 2007, p. 8.

[117] L. Dorny, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

[118] D. Messimer, op. cit.

[119] L. Dorny, loc. cit.

[120] S. Wilson, *Catalina, Neptune and Orion in Australian Service*, Weston Creek, Aerospace, 1991.

[121] D. Messimer, op. cit.

The Americans arrived in Perth a year ahead of the Qantas base being set up and, thus, established the long-range role of the Catalina for Perth-based missions. Dorny and Messimer, in their respective publications, offer additional explanations to those above of the mission and plane requirements. Both authors focus on range, performance and ability to operate as a multi-role aircraft including patrol, attack, and search and rescue capabilities. Dorny and Messimer also describe the Patrol Wing concept developed by the Americans and how the flying boats were integral to blue-water naval operations in the pre-radar era and became an invaluable tool for the development of naval tactics before and during the war.

However, while the Americans operated production-line military aircraft, Qantas operated the most modified of the Perth-based Catalinas. Fysh describes his company's use of the Catalina, which Qantas first encountered when it was contracted by the Australian government to fly 19 planes from Hawaii to Sydney as part of a delivery order for the Royal Australian Air Force. Fysh explains how this experience, and his recognition that the plane was capable of long-range performance, was instrumental in Qantas's later bid to obtain Catalinas to be used on its planned Indian Ocean service.[122] Fysh said that the air force delivery flights had 'gone without a hitch' and underscored the plane's valuable capabilities.[123] He also analyses the plane's technical specifications and provides additional assessment of its suitability for Qantas's needs in planning for the Indian Ocean service, using long-range fuel tanks to achieve this.[124]

Aside from the Perth-based Catalina operators, the Australian military also flew Catalinas within its own air force during the Pacific theatre campaigns, and their operations are analysed in detail by Cleworth and Linton in *RAAF Black Cats*.[125] These authors provide alternative operational perspectives of Catalina aviation in Australia, but also describe the durability and range that the aircraft provided. They also analyse the bombing missions carried out against the Japanese, operating from Australia's northwest area, far from their home bases. However, the air force Black Cats never ventured as far south as Perth.

Consistently, the theme of long-range capability arises within the literature and is regarded as fundamental to the Catalina story by authors. Aviators, as well as military historians, have highlighted this capability. These authors and contributors include Leebold[126] and other aviation researchers such as Pattison and Goodall[127] as well as Koenig.[128] Aviators who flew the planes, including Senior[129] and Ambrose, have also illustrated the long-range credentials of the plane.[130] Together they have published

---

[122] H. Fysh, op. cit., pp. 110–112.

[123] ibid., p. 111.

[124] ibid., pp. 187–188.

[125] R. Cleworth and J. Linton, op. cit.

[126] A. Leebold, op. cit. pp. 6–13.

[127] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., pp. 10–14.

[128] M. Koenig, op. cit.

[129] R. Senior, op. cit.

[130] ibid.

monographs and documents which reveal the Catalina's unique abilities including range, durability and flexibility as an airborne platform. The authors illustrate how the Catalina was the perfect aircraft for the time given its ability to operate from water, and had long-range ability allowing it to fly further than most other aircraft of the day and achieve up to, in Qantas's case, a 32-hour non-stop flight from Ceylon to Perth in 1943.

In reviewing the Catalina literature, a diverse set of researchers, ranging from published authors to aviators' personal monographs, have been identified as contributing to the understanding of the Catalina's capabilities as an aircraft as used by both Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas for mission-specific tasks. The basic performance and configuration characteristics of the Catalina are consistently documented through the general literature. However, while some information was found on the aircraft's makeup for its respective Perth-based operations, the majority of the research was found to have focused on the Catalina as a production-line aircraft recording its standard on-delivery capabilities. Only Fysh in *Qantas at War has* described and analysed the mission-critical modifications made to Qantas's Catalinas. The case for Patrol Wing 10's use of Catalinas in Perth is similarly deficient in detail with only Messimer's basic coverage on the United States Navy's use of the Catalinas as an armed-for-mission aircraft flying out of Perth and their other coastal bases. These deficiencies are seen as important omissions from the fuller history of Perth-based Catalinas and worthy of greater research.

Summary

The research questions asked how the United States Navy and Qantas contributed to oppose and overcome the Japanese blockade of Australia's west and northwest air routes. The questions also asked what impact the presence of Patrol Wing 10's and Qantas's operations, personnel and community activities had on Perth, concluding with asking what legacy was achieved during their respective deployments.

The literature review has identified a varying range of published research on the roles of the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10 and Australia's Qantas Empire Airways, which both operated from Perth during the Second World War. The focus of literature found is predominantly on the Indian Ocean flights of Qantas, with a far lesser amount of research material available on Patrol Wing 10's activities. The research on Qantas mainly describes and analyses flight operations with a strong emphasis on aviation performance and associated technical aspects of the flights. The small amount of Patrol Wing 10 literature was similarly inclined to a narrow base of flight and operational details only.

Despite the preponderance of operational information, large gaps exist where the research question is concerned. Little writing was found related to the lead question – that is, the planning and policies behind the breaking of the Japanese air blockade by the two aviation units. A similar paucity of writing was found about their impact on Perth. There was almost no analysis found of the legacy for Perth and for Australia–United States' relations identified as a result of the two aviation units' wartime activities.

These omissions from the full story of the Catalinas that operated from Perth during the Second World War illustrate the need for a more comprehensive account of this important history to be undertaken. Filling these gaps will result in an improved understanding of how the Japanese blockade was broken, what impact Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas operations and personnel had on Perth, and what legacy was achieved through their missions, operations and existence in Perth from 1942 to 1945 when the war ended.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Methods

This thesis is presented as a historical research document using archival and other primary source material as its basis. Historical research is a social scientific activity and can be used to investigate any empirical issue or phenomenon, with the intent, based on evidence uncovered, to produce verifiable conclusions. This thesis engages in military and social history also incorporating elements of political history.

Research design forms the basis of research investigation. It can be broadly defined as the method by which the researcher uses investigative tools to assist in the analysis of the research question. The research design also determines the data collection methods used that have the aim of eliciting evidence to help fulfil the requirements of the research question.

Design, therefore, is required to be systematic, balanced and constructed in a way that ensures only relevant data is collected and in a useable form. Furthermore, data must be collected against the research aims and with a practical evaluation system in place to accurately evaluate findings. The conclusion to this approach is the answer to the key research questions, thus it is planned that the conclusions, based on a reliable and valid research design, can be presented in a comprehensive and accurate manner.

Research design itself has several definitions of type which, can be established from its basic causal premises:

a. The application of the research study, itself categorised into type:

- Pure research, in which research methods are refined and developed to form the body of a particular research methodology (for example, a dedicated research instrument)
- Applied research, wherein the techniques, procedures and methods of research are applied to information collected for the purpose of answering a research question or hypothesis

b. The objectives of the research, defined as:

- Descriptive research in which social phenomena, problems and situations are classified and investigated
- Correlational research in which an attempt is made to establish a relationship or correlation between two or more aspects of a situation
- Explanatory research which attempts to understand why and how a relationship exists between phenomena
- Exploratory research which is carried out to determine whether or not an investigation can be carried out in a feasible manner

c. The type of information sought, in which research through discrete criteria contains the following elements:

- The purpose of the study

.

- How variables are measured
- How information is analysed
- Information type, through the objectives of purpose, variables and analysis, is undertaken using techniques defined as either qualitative or quantitative. In qualitative research the general purpose is intended to describe a situation or event whereas quantitative research uses quantitative or numerically derived measurement tools and other such techniques, which generally describe outcomes in numerical measurements' values[131]

The three types described above help to refine and identify the research design used, through the use of the specified research approaches. In this thesis, to carry out the research, written and aural information has been collected to study the questions posed. Based on the causal premises defined above, this technique therefore defines the study as one which uses an applied research method to answer the research questions.

The second research design element focuses on the research objectives, which attempt to understand how and why relationships exist between the collected phenomena. This thesis uses descriptive research which is defined as a process in which social phenomena, problems and situations are classified and investigated. The research material is a collection of archives, reports, diaries and interviews which describe actual phenomena which occurred and forms the basis of investigation to address the research questions.

The third element considered involves the types of information used, how the information is interpreted and what was its purpose in being collected. These forms of information were identified as being language based and therefore qualitative. No mathematical or other type of content was used, thus eliminating any quantitative aspects of the information.

The design, therefore, can be defined as qualitative in nature, one which utilises an applied research methodology and uses descriptive elements within its design. The type of information sought is categorised as descriptive, which underpins its role as fact-based evidence used to support the analysis of the research question.

Having outlined the framework of the research design, that schema can now be applied to the research question.

Sources

The sources used within the research are divided into two sections: primary sources including archival documents, field reports and interviews; and secondary sources including monographs and journals. Both categories apply equally, as circumstances allowed, to Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas, and follow a chronological order from 1942 when Patrol Wing 10 arrived in Perth until 1945 when the war ended and into early 1946 when the Qantas Catalinas were destroyed. Patrol Wing 10 sources are limited to the period from 1942 to 1944 when the Wing moved to the Admiralty Islands in New Guinea, while Qantas sources cover the period leading up to operations in Perth and then from 1943 when their Catalina flying boats arrived in Perth, through to early 1946 after the war ended and Qantas handed over the Catalinas for destruction.

---

[131] R. Kumar, *Research Methodology,* South Melbourne, Longman, 1996, pp. 9–10.

Primary sources are considered the most important and most prevalent sources used. These sources are predominantly archival with additional sources including first-hand accounts and interviews with individuals involved in actual operations and flying related activities.

The primary sources used fall into the following categories:

- Archival records from government departments and private organisations including:
    - The Australian War Memorial which contains an extensive collection of documents and government cables, reports and pictures pertinent Qantas
    - The National Archives of Australia which contains audio files of Qantas aviators as well as documents about Qantas's Indian Ocean flights
    - The National Library of Australia which contains Qantas aviators audio files
    - The Mitchell Library of New South Wales (Hudson Fysh Collection) which houses the most sizeable collection of Qantas documents including Fysh's personal reminiscences, government correspondence and reports
    - The Battye Library in Perth (Peet Collection) contains the Lindsay Peet Collection which was found to contain Patrol Wing 10 inventory lists and newspaper stories
    - The University of Western Australia, including University archives which revealed documents, pictures and anecdotes of the war period
    - Archival records contained in private holdings including:
        - Qantas's Records Collection Sydney which had a large collection of documents pictures and realia on Qantas
        - Fold 3 Database, an American digital source that contains primary source naval documentation on Patrol Wing 10, all of which is also found in the Naval History Command database from where it is digitised
        - Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach, Queensland where the Curator was consulted over Indian Ocean operations's history
        - The Royal Perth Yacht Club collection which has documents, artefacts and articles on Patrol Wing 10. The Club was the Wing's base while in Perth
        - Documents sourced from personal records
        - Unpublished documents including first-hand accounts, diaries and monographs. A number of individual documents were found across all collections with the most valuable being from aviators' own accounts of the Indian Ocean service for Qantas

and reminiscences from Patrol Wing 10 airmen covering their operations in Perth

- Personal interviews with local individuals who revealed personal accounts of the time (first-hand interviews) as well as other records and interviews held at the National Archives of Australia
- Information obtained through field visits to sites including:
  - Patrol Wing 10

    Philippines - Manila Bay, Subic Bay and Los Banos

    Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) - Ambon, Surabaya, Jakarta

    Western Australia - Pelican Point, Geraldton, Exmouth
  - Qantas

    Perth - Nedlands

    Sri Lanka (Ceylon) - Lake Koggala
  - Local Perth museums and libraries which provided access to local Perth histories, particularly Nedlands library where local residents were found, some of whom had recollections from the war era and the Catalinas that operated then on the Swan River

Secondary sources were also used and formed a valuable element within the fuller data collection methods used. These sources fall into the following categories:

- Books which provided detail on the Second World War, particularly Qantas
- Journals and other articles, including some historical and reflective articles in aviation magazines
- Newspaper sources including the Trove database which was found to contain numerous articles on wartime Perth

The secondary sources were invaluable documents in providing the background to the work performed by Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas. These sources have been covered within the literature review, and while being recognised as pre-existing material, nevertheless provide invaluable support material which was used to provide context to and underpin the many primary source documents that formed the basis of the primary research material.

The methodology identified in this chapter provides the structure on which the research material can be applied. The starting point for exploring this research material is the period leading up to Patrol Wing 10’s arrival in Perth in 1942.

Chapter 3: Background

When Singapore to the Japanese fell on 15 February 1942, Patrol Wing 10 was placed in a difficult situation as the Japanese were now poised to capture the Dutch East Indies. Similarly, Qantas was operationally impacted when it lost its prized Empire mail route, which had used Singapore as its terminus. This background chapter to the Catalina narrative serves as the pivotal moment that forced both Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas to soon either find themselves in Perth, or in the planning to initiate services from there. This moment is the beginning of the story that saw Catalina operators establish bases in Perth and mount operations that endured throughout the war.

The implications for both America's Patrol Wing 10 and Australia's Qantas Empire Airways were dire following the fall of Singapore. By mid-February 1942, Patrol Wing 10 resources were spread thinly across the Dutch East Indies, while Qantas was still flying an altered London–Sydney Empire Air Mail Scheme route. Both aviation entities had been forced to reconfigure their respective areas of operation under pressure of the advancing Japanese forces. Patrol Wing 10 was initially driven from its Cavite, Manila, base in the Philippines, while Qantas was forced to change its air route several times from its original path, to avoid the threat of Japanese air power, which had now extended its reach, as the Japanese advanced quickly down the Malay peninsula.

As a result, post 15 February 1942, Patrol Wing 10 was now redeploying its assets east to the city of Ambon in the Dutch East Indies, in the Moluccas Islands group, while continuing to press the Japanese in the nearby Makassar Straits. The American's had suffered heavy losses and morale was low after more than two months at war since the Philippines was attacked.[132] At the outbreak of hostilities on 8 December 1942, Patrol Wing 10 was equipped with 28 PBY-5 Catalinas and, in support, had ocean-going tender vessels, converted from their previous operational roles as battleships and an antiaircraft carrier of America's Asiatic Fleet, an old almost obsolete flotilla.[133] But the Catalinas were new and represented the cutting-edge of the navy's aviation technology at the time. The Catalinas operated as the eyes of the fleet in a pre-radar era which provided a long-range detection capability, as well as search and rescue and transport support.

Despite the advanced nature of the aircraft, their naval airpower was no match for the Japanese Mitsubishi A6-M Zero fighter. By mid-February of 1942 the Japanese had reached Singapore and were preparing for an invasion of the resource-rich areas of the Dutch East Indies. Patrol Wing 10 continued to fight a defensive operation, but it was a losing battle and losses were mounting as planes, ill-equipped for the fight, were being shot down or severely damaged. Personnel losses too were mounting and the Wing was ordered to various locations across the archipelago as operational needs dictated.

To sustain the Wing's operations, Dutch bases and the Wing's own small flotilla of tender vessels were used. Patrol Wing 10 operated with its tender vessels and used the pre-war resources including air bases and fuel dumps, built by the Dutch, who also flew Catalinas. But by 15 February when Singapore fell, the British loss had now given the Japanese the use of captured resources, including ports and airfields. The Japanese now had the reach to project air power into the Dutch East Indies and soon Patrol Wing 10's shrinking resources were to be again forced to move, this time to Australia, where they

---

[132] D. Messimer, op. cit., pp. 244–245.

[133] C. Van Vleet, 'South Pacific Saga: The Story of Patrol Wing Ten', *Naval Aviation News*, February, 1977, p. 33.

would eventually find sanctuary and from where they could mount offensive operations against the Japanese.

While Patrol Wing 10 was locked in a fighting war against the Japanese, Qantas was attempting to maintain their important air mail route which had its United Kingdom flights' terminus in Singapore and where Qantas took over the carriage of mail and passengers and flew on to Sydney. Since 1938 Qantas had flown the mail route from London to Sydney using the Short Empire Class flying boat. The Empire flying boat was designed and produced specifically for the Empire Air Mail Scheme service and flew on the Sydney to London route which was shared by the British company Imperial Aways and Qantas from 1938 onwards. The section flown by Imperial Airways from London terminated in Singapore where Qantas took over and flew on to Sydney. Despite Australia's initial complaints concerning the use of the Empire flying boat on the route and the cost of establishing new facilities, Australia eventually agreed and the use of the Empire flying boat became the means of delivery for the mail and passengers from 1938 onwards.[134]

Prior to the fall of Singapore in February 1942, Qantas had faced the threat of Japanese air power as it flew a route that was now controlled by the Japanese. It had changed route structure on several occasions from 1939 when Australia entered the Second World War, including Italy's entry in 1940 and the need to avoid war zones in and around the Mediterranean. When Japan entered the Pacific theatre in 1941, the danger its forces presented to Australian aircraft forced Qantas to again modify its Empire mail route. From December 1941 when Malaya was attacked and up to 15 February 1942 when Singapore fell, Qantas was forced to adjust its nearby flying routes to avoid the danger presented by Japanese air power.

More specifically, the threat faced by the extended reach of Japanese planes forced Qantas to operate to the west of the island of Sumatra and on to Batavia in Java, with a side route from there to Singapore to avoid the danger of flying close to the Malay peninsula where active operations where now underway.[135] Qantas knew the danger and had already suffered losses and near misses during the war. Ten Qantas staff were killed during the Second World War with another 21 listed as injured while serving with Qantas.[136] [137] Nevertheless, Singapore remained Qantas's Asian terminus and where it originally interacted with the incoming British flights. But as the frequent route changes had shown, Qantas was prepared to re-direct its flights if circumstances dictated.

While the Japanese threat mounted, in the background, Qantas General-Manager Hudson Fysh had long foreseen the impending danger for Qantas aircraft as war loomed in the Pacific. Using his extensive aviation background and experience, Fysh had proposed an Indian Ocean flight in July of 1941, using the very same plane that eventually came into service, the Catalina flying boat. Fysh identified the vulnerability of the Empire Class flying boat as both slow and of short range. The use of the long-range Catalina would provide the possibility of a lengthy Indian Ocean crossing using the Catalina's superior long-range capability. Fysh brought this possibility to the attention of the British

---

[134] P. Ewer, op. cit., pp. 80–81.

[135] J. Eames. op. cit., pp. 73–83.

[136] ibid., pp. 316–317.

[137] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 222.

Air Ministry but the proposal included the use of the Cocos Islands as a stopover. Cocos, however, was seen as indefensible at the time and the initiative subsequently lapsed.[138]

Fysh described the late 1941 period and the operation of his flying boats as running through 'danger areas'.[139] It was not only losses that Qantas endured but also many close misses including in December 1941 being shot-up while landing in Surabaya as jittery soldiers misidentified Qantas's landing signal. Further problems were encountered in January of 1942 when air raids from Padang in West Sumatra to Rangoon caused flights to be diverted or postponed.[140]

As February 1942 drew closer, the Japanese moved rapidly down the Malay Peninsula. Qantas was airlifting civilians out of Singapore as the city was besieged and soon to fall. On 2 February 1942 Qantas captain William (Bill) Crowther was heading to Singapore. Crowther, like other captains, planned a late afternoon arrival, knowing that the Japanese carried out raids mid-morning, then returned to their bases. He planned a quick loading and, when dark fell, an escape under cover of darkness. Flying over Sumatra where the Japanese had that day bombed Palembang, he considered turning back. He consulted his crew and they agreed to press on. Crowther arrived at dusk and Singapore seemed to be ablaze. Leaving the next day at dawn, his Empire Class flying boat was heavily laden as it ploughed through the dark waters of Singapore harbour lifting off and bound for Batavia, then Sydney. Crowther needed the personal help of the local aviation chief who, using the departmental launch, navigated a path between fish traps, small craft and other debris. It was a hazardous pathway and Crowther considered himself fortunate to lift off.[141] On 3 February 1942, Crowther flew the last Qantas flight out of Singapore. This last flight typified the close dangers and secrecy under which Qantas was forced to operate its flights in and out of Singapore prior to its impending fall.

The Japanese continued to attack and the city fell soon after. Qantas, as of 15 February 1942, was now without a connection to continue its Empire air service. Thus the service was effectively suspended and only a new route could ensure the continuation of the Empire Air Mail Scheme flights to and from London.

Meanwhile, while Singapore was falling to the Japanese, Patrol Wing 10 fought on in what was to become a vain attempt to forestall the looming Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies. By February of 1942, the Catalinas were now operating from the safer location of Ambon. Ambon was a location from which Dutch Catalinas also operated and was equipped with a natural harbour with suitable take-off and landing waters, protected on three sides. It had a small deep water harbour which was able to accommodate the ocean-going tender vessels that trailed the flying boats as they moved around the archipelago, and which enabled the Catalinas to operate and quickly respond to a fluid battle space at that time.

Ambon formed one part of a triangle of Catalina bases for the Wing in February 1942. Surabaya, on the eastern tip of Java, was the Dutch's main flying boat base. This location was an important operational base too for Patrol Wing 10. But Surabaya was subject to Japanese raids and moving east to Ambon as well as the use of Darwin, in

---

[138] H. Fysh, ibid., p. 128.

[139] ibid.

[140] ibid., p. 129.

[141] J. Eames, op. cit., pp. 100–101.

Australia, formed an operational triangle for the Wing's activities as the situation, in mid-February, developed quickly. When Ambon was soon overrun in February 1942, Darwin and Surabaya became the Wing's only operating bases to remain in use.[142]

Not only was Ambon made inoperable but so too, eventually, was Darwin which was raided and heavily damaged on 19 February 1942, only four days after Singapore fell. Patrol Wing 10 was in Darwin with flying boats as well one of its tenders when the Japanese struck. The USS *William B Preston* was in Darwin alongside three Catalinas which were on the water in Darwin Harbour, tendering the flying boats. As it happened, the ship's captain had gone ashore when the attack began. It was left to the ship's executive officer, a junior officer, Lieutenant Lester Wood, who took command and deftly steered the ship while under attack to open sea. To do so he had to cut the anchor chain and raise steam while sending his sailors to action stations to save the ship and escape the Japanese blitz that took a heavy toll on the city, harbour and population of Darwin.[143]

Patrol Wing 10 was now running out of safe harbours by late-February 1942 as the Japanese launched raids across the north and west of Australia. Darwin was now considered as an unsafe location as it was within the range of the Japanese planes and bombed on 19 February 1942. Broome too, which was attacked on 3 March 1942, was unsafe and ruled out as a future base for Patrol Wing 10, as it was forced further south to safer locations out of Japanese reach.

Also, while Patrol Wing 10 was involved in a fighting war, Qantas had ceased its international route operations once Singapore fell. Fortunately, Qantas had retained most of its fleet of Empire Class flying boats and was able to contribute to support wartime operations. But, more immediately was the role Qantas was about to play in support of evacuations from the Dutch East Indies from the small Javanese port of Tjilatjap.

Qantas, like Patrol Wing 10, had also been involved during the bombing of Darwin. Patrol Wing 10 lost two Catalinas there while Qantas, which had one plane on the water, managed to escape without damage. The flying boat *Camilla* was at anchor on Darwin Harbour that day and made a dramatic escape, unscathed due to the efforts of Qantas captains Crowther and Hussey.[144] The Darwin raid came just four days after the fall of Singapore where Crowther had earlier made Qantas's final flight from the harbour. But Qantas was still in the thick of the action and the Darwin bombing illustrated the ongoing front-line role of Qantas. Qantas was a sizeable operation and had 24 support staff in Darwin in February 1942.[145]

Qantas, in its wartime support operations, came under the direction of the Civil Aviation Department. The Department was headed by Arthur Brownlow (AB) Corbett[146] who had asked Qantas to operate shuttle services from the southern Javanese port of Tjilatjap to Broome in Western Australia, as part of the evacuation of civilian and military personnel from the Dutch East Indies. But it was not only the evacuation of people that was undertaken. Qantas was also flying-in equipment and supplies in a vain effort to

---

[142] H. Collingwood, 'Patrol Wing 10', *The Western Mail,* 23 September 1943.

[143] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 149.

[144] Crowther and Hussey were later to play leading roles on the Indian Ocean service.

[145] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 137.

[146] AB Corbett was to play a pivotal and obstructionist role in Qantas's efforts to commence the Indian Ocean service in 1943.

bolster defences as the Japanese closed in. For example, on 25 February 1942, Captain Denny flew 1,700 kilograms of machine guns into Tjilatjap. It was a dangerous and administratively difficult operation with Fysh noting that it was now a wartime operation which required special insurance through the offices of his British partners.[147] Broome to Tjilatjap was a 1,100- mile flight and extra fuel had to be carried for the journey. Having flown the Empire mail route since 1938, Qantas had pilots with extensive long-range and over-water experience and was well suited to undertake the tasks required. Broome's facilities were described as 'most primitive', but Qantas stuck to the job, even though landing in Broome required walking through mud, during low tide, and using a row boat to get to the long jetty.[148]

While Qantas persevered during the last two weeks of February with the shuttles from Java, the retreat of Patrol Wing 10 to Australia had begun. The Wing had already operated from Darwin as a base but with the raid by the Japanese on 19 February, Darwin was now seen as an unsuitable location for operations. Patrol Wing 10 was a large unit now operating almost independently from its original lead headquarters, the Asiatic Fleet, and required a location that was able to accomodate its Catalinas, four tender vessels and the small utility planes that it also operated. The Allied command in the Dutch East Indies was about to collapse and by 20 February it was clear that the British were about to pull out. The Americans' policy was less certain, but by late February some Patrol Wing 10 staff had already moved to Australia or were headed there. The remaining Catalinas were operating now from Surabaya where eight planes were patrolling. The Wing's full resources were scattered around the Dutch East Indies and Australia but were, bit by bit, consolidating and moving south to the harbour of Fremantle and the city of Perth in Western Australia.[149]

On 22 February 1942, the British announced they would leave the Allied command which left the Americans, who had chosen to stay, as the remaining ally to the Dutch. In Surabaya, Patrol Wing 10 was operational but with only two Catalinas available for patrols. USS *Childs* of the Wing was on its way to Australia with military and civilian personnel while at the same time other Catalinas had begun ferrying people to Derby and Broome. USS *William B Preston* was under orders to await the flights into Derby and then sail on to Fremantle. Unfortunately, the *Preston* was damaged entering Derby Harbour and was crippled with her propellors damaged when she struck a shoal. USS *Heron* was ordered to Derby to assist.[150]

Despite the deteriorating situation, Patrol Wing 10 operations out of Surabaya continued, but on 25 February the Wing suffered another loss. Two planes had set out on patrol from Surabaya, but one Catalina disappeared after being set upon by waiting Japanese fighters, with no trace found. The other plane returned safely to base. That same day, the Allied command was dissolved and the situation in the Dutch East Indies was now desperate. By 26 February USS *Heron* and USS *William B Preston* were ordered to depart for Perth, via Broome, to assist with personnel there arriving from Tjilatjap.[151]

---

[147] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 141.

[148] H. Fysh, ibid., p. 141.

[149] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 256.

[150] ibid., p. 256.

[151] ibid., pp. 261–263.

But more disaster was to strike when the Wing tender USS *Langley* was sunk by the Japanese on 27 of February 1942. Approaching the southern Javanese coast at night, Japanese submarines spotted her and attacked. She was hit and forced to steam in circles, dead in the water and listing before sinking. The USS *Langley* was the only tender to be lost by the Wing during the war.

While the situation was now desperate for Patrol Wing 10, Qantas maintained its operations, playing its role in assisting the war effort. Qantas continued to fly the shuttles from Tjilatjap to Broome. But Fysh had another more pressing problem on his hands, one of many during wartime, which was the cessation of the air mail route from Sydney to London following Singapore's loss. The airmail route was his company's financial lifeline and Qantas needed that contract to underwrite the company's profitability. But Fysh had already conceived of a plan. In July 1941, Fysh had suggested a six-plane Indian Ocean operation that could replace the short-range Empire flying boats.[152] Now after mid-February 1942 with the route inoperable, Fysh had his chance to press again for such a possibility.

In retrospect, Fysh's idea was not new. As mentioned, in 1939 the Indian Ocean had been flown by a Catalina. Peter Gordon (PG) Taylor, was an experienced overwater former Qantas pilot, using an NC 777 model Catalina, called the *Guba,* realised that Australia would benefit from a reserve air route should war come and air routes through Singapore be blockaded.[153] Fysh was aware of the flights but now in 1942 saw the value of more modern Catalinas. Fysh was also motivated by the idea that longer range planes were quicker and more efficient, meaning that more flights could be flown and more cargo and passengers be carried.

As February 1942 came to an end, Qantas was contemplating a restart of the mail service using an Indian Ocean crossing, but, apart from Taylor's flight, Qantas had no evidence with which to commence basic planning. New aircraft had come into the market, and Fysh had identified the Catalina PBY-5 as a suitable aircraft which could fly the long distance to a South Asian port but via Cocos, where a stop would be required. This plan was seen as unsuitable during wartime, based on the threat of Japanese interference. However, circumstances were about to change as Japan invaded the Dutch East Indies forcing Dutch Catalinas to evacuate and fly to Australia. The Dutch planes had relocated to Australia and were soon to be recalled to form a Dutch squadron in Ceylon. To achieve this outcome, the Dutch airmen had to fly their Catalinas across the Indian Ocean from Western Australia to Ceylon. In early March 1942 this was accomplished and Fysh had his example that Catalinas could fly non-stop from Western Australia to Ceylon.[154]

But it was Patrol Wing 10 that was under Japanese attack with its remaining three flying boats operating out of Surabaya in a last-ditch effort to play a role in the fast crumbling defence of the Dutch East Indies. As March began, orders came that the three remaining planes and all remaining crew were pulling out. Catalina P–10 was the first plane to prepare to go. Thirty-two personnel crammed into a plane that usually took seven crew. It was massively overloaded but managed to get away. Two hours after P–10's departure, plane P–46 got away, which was equally overloaded. Soon after the

---

[152] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 128.

[153] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 6.

[154] ibid., pp. 14–15.

departures of the two Catalinas, another plane P–5, on patrol, landed and took on board the last senior officers and departed for a scatter base nearby.[155]

Despite the initial success of the departures, tension remained high. The Japanese were nearby and the planes overloaded. It was night time and by the time dawn came, the planes would be far enough away to be out of Japanese fighter range. The main danger lay near to Surabaya and the nearby Japanese air bases. Back in Java, the Japanese were engaging Allied warships near Bali in the Badung Strait, and Japanese troops had come ashore at both ends of Java. It was time for any remaining Patrol Wing 10 staff to leave and that was what naval Capitan Frank Wagner, Commander of Patrol Wing 10, was doing. While the first two Catalinas to depart landed in Exmouth, Western Australia, the third plane, P–5, was now at a scatter base awaiting further orders, unknown to the Japanese. The scatter base nearby to Tjilatjap was one of the old Dutch bases established pre-war. The two Exmouth Catalinas now turned around and flew back to Tjilatjap when USS *Childs*, which was in Exmouth, received orders to send all available planes to conduct the final evacuation before personnel became stranded. The planes quickly returned to Tjilatjap to rescue the remaining personnel. On arrival the crews witnessed a crowded and confused situation. Fuel was still available and the Catalinas refuelled and took on personnel. In a seemingly light-hearted moment a Dutch officer dutifully ensured that all fuel was signed for. On a more serious note, the Dutch warned that a night take-off was 'suicidal'.[156] But there were no options. The planes prepared to take-off as quickly as they could, despite the danger, and immediately headed for Western Australia. But one plane failed to start so personnel were transferred to another plane still preparing to depart. No luggage was taken and every space was critical.[157]

As they headed for the safety of Western Australia, an on-board fire broke out. Fuel consumption was high due to the heavy load and tension was palpable. No smoking was allowed, and all safety precautions were in place as the heavily loaded planes flew on. The planes soon landed safely in Exmouth where the Wing tender USS *Childs* awaited. On arrival, senior staff determined that all assets would immediately decamp to Perth. USS *Childs,* along with the two Catalinas, quickly departed for Fremantle and Perth. The date was 3 March 1942, and unknown to Patrol Wing 10 staff, Broome, where two Wing Catalinas lay at anchor, was about to be bombed. With that attack and the retreat to Perth, any chance for Patrol Wing 10 to remain involved in ongoing operations was lost until a new and suitable base was established.[158]

By March 1942, Patrol Wing 10 completed its relocation to Perth. The relocation was carried out over several operations with, firstly, the USS *Langley* transporting personnel and utility planes to Fremantle from the Dutch East Indies, while USS *Heron, USS Childs* and the USS *William B Preston* steamed south from northwest ports which included Darwin, Derby, Broome and Exmouth. While Patrol Wing 10 had sustained minimal losses of its sea-going vessels, the Catalinas were now fewer in number after three months of air combat operations. At the beginning of the first week of March 1942, the few remaining operational Catalinas were still in Surabaya awaiting orders as the Dutch East Indies's defence faltered. In total, Patrol Wing 10 had lost 25 out of its initial

---

[155] D. Messimer, op. cit., pp. 270–271.

[156] ibid., p. 272.

[157] ibid., pp. 273–274.

[158] ibid., p. 275.

28 planes by 3 March 1942, planes which formed the complete Wing inventory when it was based in Cavite (Manila) at the outset of hostilities.[159]

By 7 March 1942 the 'Swan River Flying Club' in Perth, a name adopted by the Wing's crew given the leisurely surroundings crew now found themselves in, had become the new base for Patrol Wing 10. All elements of the Wing in Perth had now been joined by the remaining two planes (one was still to come) and the three remaining tenders, the USS *Childs*, *Heron* and *William B Preston*.[160]

During this period, Qantas too was experiencing the full force of the war as the first week of March dawned. Qantas was contracted to assist with refugee flights out of Tjilatjap to Broome. On 2 March 1942, Qantas was certain that Broome would soon be hit. The reason was that a Japanese reconnaissance plane had been sighted flying over the harbour at 1500 hours that day. This *modus operandi* had been used in Darwin a few weeks before and Qantas knew that a raid was now imminent. By 3 March there were sixteen flying boats moored in Broome Harbour. Two were Patrol Wing 10 Catalinas and one was a Qantas Empire Class flying boat. At 0920 the Japanese attacked. The Patrol Wing 10 boats were sunk as was the Qantas plane along with many more. Lew Ambrose of Qantas was one Qantas pilot there as it happened. Ambrose was later to become a senior pilot on the Indian Ocean service. Sixteen flying boats were sunk that day as the Japanese fled as quickly as they had struck.[161]

As a result, Qantas had now lost for the second time its international contract, and as the war intensified it was unlikely that it could be recovered. Qantas's brains-trust now turned to the dormant Empire mail route which had been, after all, its prime international route and the one which brought critical income to the company. Qantas had the pilots and it still had enough capable planes and the engineering staff to support any new flying initiatives that could be mustered.

The only hope of restarting international operations was the Empire mail connection with the British who were still flying to Karachi in British India. If Qantas could find a way to Karachi then the route could be re-started. Already things were in motion. Earlier in February of 1942, Viscount Walter Runciman, head of British Overseas Airways Corporation, had contacted Fysh about new Catalina operations which could be used to fly what was termed a reserve route to re-join the mail route via Karachi. The idea was to use Australian air force crews under British naval command. The planes would come from the British. This idea came from the previous discussions Fysh had with the British but had been shelved over the use of the Cocos Islands, which were considered vulnerable, thus the idea had been held in abeyance. But the plan now remerged with Runciman's support.[162]

The plan now was to re-start the service from 1 April 1942 using British Catalinas based in Ceylon. Qantas staff now stepped in to re-appreciate the plan. But Qantas Captains Lester Brain and Crowther, both experienced Qantas pilots, held the opinion that the Director-General of Aviation, AB Corbett, was not going to support the proposal. Corbett's view was discouraging and his attitude was widely known. But Brain and

---

[159] C. Van Vleet, op. cit., p. 32.

[160] D. Messimer., op. cit., p. 279.

[161] ibid., pp. 276–277.

[162] J. Gunn, op. cit., pp. 72–73.

Crowther were not discouraged and continued to study the problem. They reasoned that as it was 3,513 miles to be flown if flown directly from Ceylon to Perth in Western Australia, that could be done using either long-range tanks or a stopover at Cocos. Later in April of 1942 (27 April) Fysh approached Corbett who was again reluctant to encourage Qantas and support the proposal. He was adamant that the area proposed was unsafe for flying boats and that any prospect of obtaining the long-range plane was remote. Qantas Director Fergus McMaster considered Corbett's attitude was to be obstructionist. McMaster was keen to be involved and get the route up and running. He communicated with Air-Vice Marshall William Bostock, Chief of Staff to Allied Forces in the South-West Pacific, stressing Qantas's support and losses to war operations and emphasising the critical financial stress the company was now under due to its support of emergency wartime operations.[163]

Moreover, in this first week of March 1942 and due to the losses during the attack on Broome, Fysh urged his senior pilots to continue to plan a way forward. With the new support from Runciman, Fysh's own identification early on of the Catalina and now the calculations completed by Brain and Crowther, opportunities were developing to the point of possibility in early 1942. These outcomes were very encouraging for Qantas and portended possibilities once considered unfeasible.

In conclusion, by early March 1942, both Patrol Wing 10 and Qantas were in difficult positions, but with the possibility of better things to come. Patrol Wing 10 had its two barely operable Catalinas, while Qantas, despite not yet having any Catalinas, was already planning for the possibility of using Catalinas to operate across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon. Patrol Wing 10 had not only its two Catalinas but also the utility planes that could fly patrols close to the coast and short-range flights as well as its three tender vessels which were in Fremantle Harbour and able to support operations. Some battle-weary personnel were about to depart Australia for home on the USS *Mount Vernon*, to be repatriated and then replaced, and new Catalinas would soon arrive from Hawaii where Patrol Wing 2 was based. But Patrol Wing 10 was active and operating from day one in Perth. Qantas, however, was grounded and contemplated a grim future. But plans were underway and support from Allies was already being proposed. It was just matter of turning plans into reality. By 7 March 1942, while it was a moment of almost operational pause for both entities, it was also a starting point for both. The conceptualisation of the new Indian Ocean route, as well as another chapter in Patrol Wing 10's history as one of the United States Navy's most decorated aviation units during the Second World War, was about to begin.

[163] ibid., p. 73.

Chapter 4: 1942

By 7 March 1942, Patrol Wing 10 was operating from its new location in Perth. The Catalinas and the utility planes were now based on the Swan River, while the remaining three tenders were located nearby in Fremantle Harbour, where the Swan River entered the Indian Ocean. The new Catalina base was known as Pelican Point, at Crawley in suburban Perth. The base was sited within the Royal Perth Yacht Club precinct and made a perfect location with slipways, hangars, accommodation and messing facilities.

Patrol Wing 10's commander Captain Wagner had been one of the last of the Wing's personnel out of Java. He flew on the final Catalina from Surabaya to Exmouth where he boarded the USS *Childs* for Perth. On arrival there, Wagner immediately set to work establishing Patrol Wing 10 at its new site and coordinating with local Australian military authorities and civil organisations.

While Patrol Wing 10 was now rebuilding, Qantas was not to appear in Perth for another year. In early March 1942, Qantas was recovering from the Broome bombing and the loss of the Empire Class flying boats *Circe* and *Corinna*. *Corinna* was lost during the raid on Broome, and the *Circe* shot down *en route* from Tjilatjap, with all lives lost. For the time being, Qantas had to reorganise, recover and begin the job of planning to resurrect flying operations. Most importantly, it had to consider how to re-establish the mail route, via its only realistic option across the Indian Ocean. In March 1942 the plan was a possibility and had been discussed at high-level management by Qantas and the British. But, in March 1942, it was still yet to be a reality, and extensive scoping work was required before Fysh could present the idea to Australian and British aviation authorities as a feasible plan.

Patrol Wing 10, March–April 1942: Finding Its Feet in Perth

Patrol Wing 10 was the first Catalina operator to base itself in Perth during the war. From the initial inventory of 28 flying boats, the Wing now had just three surviving Catalinas, as well as its smaller utility planes and the three ocean-going tenders. But, the Catalinas were barely operational after the combat they had endured in the defence of the Dutch East Indies and only just able to still perform their duties. Of the sea-going tenders, all three remained in service but in need of immediate maintenance, with the USS *Childs* the best of them and still in basic operational service.[164]

In the early days of March, Patrol Wing 10's organisational composition remained as two distinct Catalina patrol squadrons. The squadrons it operated were known as VP–101 and VP–102. The Wing also had smaller single-seat auxiliary aircraft with its Utility Squadron 61 in the form of 10 single-engine aircraft which was comprised of three seaplane types: four Grumann Ducks, five Vought Kingfishers, and one Curtiss Seagull.[165]

Following the Wing's dramatic escape from the Dutch East Indies, the Wing's commander Captain Wagner described his men as 'the finest in the world'.[166] The retreat

---

[164] D. Messimer, op. cit., pp. 277–278.

[165] OS2U seaplanes were produced by Vought as a catapult launched plane, the J2F was also known as the Grumann Duck, and the SOC seaplane was a Curtiss ship-launched seaplane.

[166] W. Winslow, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1982, p. 47.

to Perth had tested their resolve in every possible way and had proven Wagner's confidence in his men, despite the huge aircraft loses. Wagner himself was also a man of resolve and integrity, staying in Surabaya until the last men of his men had been flown out.[167] Wagner's new responsibilities, in March 1942, heralded a complete transformation in operations for the Wing's structure, role and its personnel's daily life. Under new orders the Catalinas were now to undertake roles including convoy escort, anti-submarine patrol, bombing missions, search and rescue, flying training duties, mine laying, and general transport and cargo tasks.[168] Its roles in Perth were to be a dramatic change of operations from when the flying boats flew at 12,000 feet and could rarely top 85 knots. Then they were an easy target for anti-aircraft fire and enemy fighters.[169]

The change to almost peacetime operations at the new base meant pleasant surroundings, convivial local company and a break from warlike operations. Apart from the use of the Yacht Club premises, personnel quarters were also obtained at places such as the Nedlands Hotel and reckoned by pilot Lieutenant John Hyland as being as good as the Royal Perth Yacht Club itself,[170] where the majority of the Wing was located. Other pilots were accommodated in local houses, one of which was owned by a wealthy local lady in nearby King's Park.[171] The house had tennis courts and pleasant surrounds. 'The Bend in the Road' had a grass tennis court and one pilot, the aforementioned Hyland, being a tennis buff, enjoyed many hours playing on it.[172] Wing members awoke to civilised life again including running water, electric lights and, of course, social life. Comfortable accomodation and social relaxation were important during this early phase of operations. Accomodation of suitable standards was available and officers were billeted in local hotels and local suburban houses in the nearby suburbs. Once they had recovered from the rigours of active service, the officers realised that Perth even had pretty girls. One serviceman noted also that, 'we have good water, lights at hand. So, it is heaven'.[173] Duty was initially relaxed while spare parts and other materials were obtained to get the unit operational again.

Due to the poor state of aircraft, only one patrol per day in the first weeks of March was conducted by the one operational Catalina, while two utility planes conducted local anti-submarine sweeps over Fremantle Harbour and the Gage Roads sea lanes in the outer harbour area.[174]

---

[167] 'New Commander of US Planes', *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, 12 July 1944, p. 3 Available from: Trove, (accessed 2 December 2018).

[168] G. Munsdorf, 'Interview of Comdr Geo. T. Munsdorff Jr'., Air Information Division, Office of Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D.C., 6 September 1943, pp. 1–11, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 17 March 2018).

[169] W. Winslow, op. cit., p. 48.

[170] M. Sturma, op. cit., p. 47. This page provides reflection on the house and surroundings.

[171] Field research indicated the house to be at 4 Kings Park Avenue.

[172] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 279.

[173] ibid., p. 280.

[174] ibid., pp. 279–280.

In March the majority of aircrew recuperated while the engineering staff worked overtime. With planes in poor condition and few patrols being flown, the engineering staff went to Perth's machine shops, engineering facilities and even local garages to obtain any materials that could be used. Planes were repaired, made stronger and more robust. At this stage Patrol Wing 10 also began establishing forward bases in Geraldton and Exmouth, locations where crews could overstay and replenish when patrols were assigned. USS *Childs,* sailing south to Perth during this time, identified that Geraldton was an excellent base for seaplanes, with 'adequate and cooperative service and gassing from shore. Good sheltered anchorage. Good accommodations for personnel at flying school'.[175]

While the Pelican Point base took shape as the main operating base for Patrol Wing 10, the advance bases were being planned. As plans matured, Geraldton was to become known as Advance Base B (Baker), the first advance base established outside of Perth for Catalinas departing from Crawley. Other advance bases were soon to be added as a means to allow further penetration northward to support extended long-range patrolling. The advance bases established in March and April were Geraldton, Exmouth (D for Dog), and Heron Haven (E for Easy), which was a floating tender anchorage located in northern waters at Enderby Island, offshore from present day Karratha. An additional and often used unofficial base was Albany to the south of Perth. Albany, however, was not designated as a forward base.

The new patrolling sorties were known to Captain Wagner and his staff when he stepped ashore in Perth, having received a briefing from Vice-Admiral Glassford onboard the USS *Childs* in Exmouth. Immediately, on arrival in Perth, Wagner met with senior officers at Perth's Adelphi Hotel. Staff at the meeting also included British and Dutch personnel. They had arrived in Perth via an American army Lodestar bomber from Bandoeng in Java, as the city was being evacuated and while the navy Catalinas flew out from Tjilatjap in the first week of March. Lieutenant-General Ludolph Van Oyen, Chief of the Dutch East Indies Air Force, was also there as were other senior Dutch officers. Wagner soon visited local facilities including the local Pearce air base and other local aviation facilities in Perth in order to ascertain the quality of support available to the Wing. Wagner was impressed and stated that he found facilities very suitable to his needs.[176] Perth was to his liking and the situation augured well for his plans to revive Patrol Wing 10 and make it fit for service as quickly as he could.[177]

Also in attendance at the meeting was Vice-Admiral William Glassford (senior American naval officer in the Dutch East Indies) who foresaw the immediate need for close air support cover, as very little existed in Perth to protect American aircraft and naval vessels. Glassford made strenuous representations that fighter protection was urgently required for the Perth and Fremantle areas. The current Australian air force inventory in Perth was meagre, consisting of only a small number of Hudson bombers and Wirraway trainers.[178]

---

[175] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, March 7 1942, p. 8, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 17 March 2018).

[176] ibid.

[177] ibid.

[178] Hudsons were used as light bombers and coastal reconnaissance aircraft while Wirraways were an Australian developed and built trainer and general-purpose plane.

March had seen the base established as a military site and work routine build to an operational tempo. Although Perth was a well-protected location far from Japanese threats, it still needed first-line defensive weaponry. Stronger defence of the base was required and other weapons, aside from the squadron planes themselves, were needed. Air defensive batteries were soon located around the river's edge where armed operational sorties were now taking place.

Aside from the relative luxury of the local conditions, major institutions such as the University of Western Australia, by April, were already providing significant support. Located adjacent to the river and the Pelican Point facility at Crawley, the University of Western Australia became a secured site almost immediately. Quarters were built for sailors, colleges such as Saint George's were utilised for accommodation, and departments such as engineering were used in support of Wing requirements. Riley Oval became a parade ground, and even the roofs of Winthrop Hall (Hackett Buildings) were used as landing markers for incoming aircraft.[179]

The availability of the University's facilities was perhaps a coincidental factor in locating the base, but one of great use as it turned out. The natural and defensive factors were undoubtedly the major drivers of the base's location but the University of Western Australia with its open spaces, accommodation halls, engineering facilities and ability to become a separate and secure facility only added to the positive assessment of what Crawley offered compared to the previously considered locations such as Geraldton, Exmouth, Broome and Darwin as permanent bases.[180]

But while the arrival of the Americans was a surprise for University management, it was a ruder awakening for nearby locals. The Americans had brought the Second World War to Perth's doorstep and many residents suddenly realised how close the war was. Fremantle Harbour was full of military targets and the people of Perth were aware of what the Japanese had done to Darwin in pursuit of Allied shipping there. Air raid shelters were built and air raid drills became a part of everyday life. Waterside properties dropped in price due to their exposure to the potential of invading forces. But the Americans' presence, while a realistic reminder, was also a defensive security blanket that was greatly appreciated by Perth residents.[181]

Some local residents had close contact with the first Patrol Wing 10 planes to arrive. Vic Tyrell, a local teenager at the time, was on hand when the first two Catalinas arrived. Vic was a member of the Pelican Point Sea Scouts and was swimming in the river when the planes arrived. Tyrell said, 'I was swimming at the bay with my friends. The time was 11am and two dark outlines appeared on the horizon making their descent into the bay, finally landing about midstream and taxiing to mooring buoys that had been positioned there, some months before.'[182]

---

[179] *The Catalina Base,* http://www.web.uwa.edu.au/university/history/archive-collections/catalina-base, (accessed on 12 August 2018).

[180] ibid.

[181] J. Blaxill, 'Catalina Pride of Perth', unpublished manuscript, Royal Perth Yacht Club archives, p. 15, file number 9332.

[182] ibid.

Tyrell described his swim out to the plane and being hauled aboard by the crew through the blister compartment, who asked him if this was the Swan River.[183] Tyrell said that he flew in the Catalina and assisted the Americans in identifying shoals, reefs and shallow areas in the river.[184]

Aside from meeting the locals of Nedlands, the Wing had more immediate needs and in some case only local industry could supply the right solutions. One issue was that the muddy shore of the river at Pelican Point prevented the planes from being hauled ashore for servicing. Bill Stocker who ran Stocker's Engineering at 138 Wellington Street, Perth, was called in to help. Bill had been working on contract for the Army making Bren Gun Carriers and was able to help. His company built a mat of metal-linked chain over which planes could be dragged to the maintenance hard-stands, while displacing the weight and enabling the Catalinas to be hauled ashore. The other work at the engineering works was put aside and all hands were deployed to the process of making chain mats for the Americans, who the literature notes needed a constant supply of Coca-Cola while on duty.[185]

Still, while serious military work went on the Americans were quickly making their presence felt in Perth and its environs. Keith Shilling was a local who had joined the air force and was shot down and was back in Perth in 1942 recuperating. He recalled that 'the Yanks' were everywhere. Liberties were taken by some which brought the Americans to both locals' and the authorities' attention. Things not nailed down like telephones went missing.[186] Liberties were taken with local women and romances bloomed. Some violence occurred and fights broke out. Issues were often over romances and matters of personal relationships. But these situations were rare and in general Perth people were grateful for the strong military presence at time of threat and when the Japanese were in the ascendency militarily.[187]

During April Patrol Wing 10 patrols achieved their first search and rescue success with the rescue of a group of airmen who had set out in a small boat across the Indian Ocean from the Dutch East Indies. On 21 April 1942, a Catalina from Perth aided 12 British airmen who had evacuated Java and been adrift for 46 days in open sea. Patrol Wing 10's War Diary of 21 April 1942 records that:

> At 1550 Ensign Stevens, while on patrol in Sector 8, sighted one boat with men aboard, in latitude 21-18 S, longitude 115-37 E. Landed. Occupants were officers and men of the R.A.F., evacuees from Java, N.E.I who had been at sea for 46 days. All were in good health. 3 men were taken off and flown to USS Childs: remaining 9 preferred to continue by boat to Cossack, Port Roebourne, W.A.

---

[183] ibid.

[184] ibid.

[185] E. Fletcher, Handwritten note by E. Fletcher on Stockers Engineering Firm 1942, shared with author, 12 August 2015.

[186] D. Pedley, 'Catalina Comes Home to Matilda Bay', *The West Australian,* 24 August 2002, pp. 1–5.

[187] ibid.

The report recorded the men's names, listed as Royal Air Force, with ranks from Wing Commander to Sergeant.[188]

Qantas, March–April 1942: Response to the Loss of the Empire Route

As Patrol Wing 10 established its new base and began patrolling from Perth in March 1942, Qantas was still considering its options. Qantas knew that it had to find an alternative route to replace its Empire mail route around the conflict zone of the Dutch East Indies and Singapore, but in March 1942 it did not have suitable planes, a base, nor approval to fly.

Captains Brain and Crowther had been tasked by Fysh and continued to look at possibilities to develop a route across the Indian Ocean. Fysh's Catalina idea was the genesis of the new ideas and plans as well as encouragement from the British end. At this stage the Catalina was the only part of the idea that was recognised as feasible. The plane was in action and flying long distance over water with American, British, Dutch and Australian air forces. For Qantas, issues such as take-off locations, fuel states and payload were yet to be calculated. Landing sites too were unplanned. But figures were encouraging. Flying at an average speed of 115 knots and a maximum range of 36 hours and up to 4,000 miles, the data indicated to Qantas planners that the Catalina had the ability to do the job required. Even at 6,000 pounds overweight with extra fuel loads (29,000 up to 35,000 pounds gross weight) it could perform long-distance operations, as was being considered.[189]

Figures were promising at this early stage, but Fysh was discouraged by senior members in the Australian government, chiefly Air Minister Arthur Drakeford. Drakeford proffered his sentiments when he wrote to Fysh and said that while he appreciated Fysh's efforts to 'hammer away' at setting up an Indian Ocean service he was 'hammering at the door of an empty house'.[190] Fysh had been 'hammering away', as Drakeford called it, since 1940 when he wrote to Civil Aviation Director, AB Corbett, and gave him a plan (based on PG Taylor's flights) which had a flight path to Africa via Ceylon from Australia's western coast.[191] While Taylor had not landed in Ceylon, the capabilities proven by the Catalina and the location of a Royal Air Force Base at Lake Koggala, Ceylon, had placed Ceylon within Qantas's and Fysh's sights.

During March, Fysh's role was critical. His airmen were not of such stature to win this argument on facts and figures alone. Fysh himself, along with his chairman Fergus McMaster, had to win the support of government to progress the case. With McMaster as Chairman of Qantas, Fysh had acquired strong networks and a powerful reputation in Australian aviation circles. Fysh needed a plan with aircraft and a way to get mail and passengers to connect with the British flight that now stoped at Karachi in India. Britain's Imperial Airways had undergone management changes during the war and had become

---

[188] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, April 1942, p. 42, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 27 March 2018).

[189] R. Ritchie., interviewed by Amy McGrath, 1986, National Archives of Australia, Parkes, catalogue 9649, (accessed on 24 Jun 2018).

[190] A. Drakeford, official correspondence to H. Fysh, reference number *192/119/1227*, 3 July 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[191] H. Fysh, official correspondence to A. Corbett, *reference number HF/II/871,* 26 August 1940, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

British Overseas Airways Corporation. It remained in partnership with Qantas and supported the new route. But an unlikely source, General Archibald Wavell, Commander of the British High Command in India, now made presentations in support of a new route. The British had pressed for the route previously and, in early 1942, proposed a service but stipulated a refuelling stop in Cocos with the flight to use Royal Australian Air Force or Qantas crews. But the Cocos Islands were rejected as a stop as they were vulnerable to Japanese attack and could not be adequately defended. But when Wavell demanded the air link, British Overseas Airways Corporation and the British government supported the plan, which was eagerly taken up by Fysh and his senior planners, Captains Brain and Crowther, as a positive initiative, one which played directly into their hands.[192]

By April, Qantas had a developing plan and new allies to support it. Fysh had identified the Catalina, the British had encouraged a trans-Indian Ocean flight plan, and military support was evident through Wavell's initiative. It was now up to Brain and Crowther to make a feasible plan and for Fysh and McMaster to take it forward and win support at Australian government level. Qantas, at this early stage, planned to fly to Ceylon where two British bases existed, one at Lake Koggala near Gaulle on the west coast and another at China Bay, Trincomalee, on the east coast. Trincomalee, which was further from Perth than was Lake Koggala and was an open sea landing, was regarded as less than ideal.[193] Nevertheless, it was where the Dutch Catalinas flew from Western Australia in early 1942 and was an established base for Catalinas with all facilities. But the difference was that Qantas planned to fly overloaded Catalinas, and weight and fuel tolerances were critical in take-off and landing calculations, as well as overall distance.[194]

The operational planning, therefore, was critical to convincing the government that the flights could be undertaken. Qantas recognised that it could only operate where take-off and landing was possible all year round. Qantas had laid out a number of options but more work had to be done.[195] This analysis was largely a paper exercise, and a practical solution still had to be found. Which aircraft, what distance, how much payload and which departure and arrival locations based on actual conditions including airfields, water conditions if seaplane, and logistical conditions including supply and servicing availability at the chosen locations. These parts of the plan had to be accounted for.

The critical first factor was which plane was to be used. Plane type drove location. Plane type also drove payload and range. It was established early in the planning that the American B-24 bomber was unavailable, which left the Catalina as the only feasible option, which was perfect for the job. The British had proposed six Catalinas, under General Wavell's Command to commence on 1 April 1942, with reconnaissance being an added aspect of the plan, Qantas was told.[196] The fact that now the previous route had been broken, that the British had nominated Catalinas and that Fysh too saw the plane as the ideal solution all augered well as May and new possibilities dawned.

---

[192] G. Mumford, *What's in a Name*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1991, pp. 2–3, File MSS1455.

[193] A. Corbett, official correspondence to H. Fysh, 12 May 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[194] ibid.

[195] L. Ambrose, op. cit., *passim.*

[196] L. Brain and A. Corbett, Notes of Telephone Conversation (Regarding Communication and Indian Ocean Service), 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Patrol Wing 10, May–June 1942: Operation Flight Gridiron and New Planes Arrive

For Patrol Wing 10, April was highlighted by successes such as the rescue of the Royal Air Force personnel, but by May 1942, the Wing had completed its first operation into enemy territory. This operation codenamed 'Operation Flight Gridiron' was the first instance of effective push-back by the Catalinas against the Japanese who controlled the air space over much of the Indian Ocean between Australia, the Dutch East Indies and beyond. The operation demonstrated that Patrol Wing 10, as early as April 1942, had the capacity to penetrate enemy airspace, operate with relative impunity and send Allied air power deep within enemy territory. The flights showed that the blockade imposed by the Japanese upon Australia's west coast was able to be penetrated, even at this early stage of hostilities.

The operation began on 27 April 1942 when two Catalinas were assigned to fly deep into enemy territory to Corregidor in the Philippines, where the last American forces were holding out and near to collapse. American nurses and high-level personnel were to be flown out, with supplies flown in. The operation ran until 3 May 1942 and was designated as 'Operation Flight Gridiron', which commenced at Pelican Point, the home base of Patrol Wing 10. Perth's location put Corregidor within range, via two stopovers and the Catalina's long-distance capabilities. Operation Flight Gridiron involved flying two Catalinas from their Perth base to Corregidor with a stopover in Darwin and then Lake Lanao in the southern Philippines.[197] [198] The operation was a dangerous and risky mission. Ensign Thomas Pollock, a second officer during the mission, outlined the daring rescue in a personal account. By April 1942, Bataan had fallen and American forces were trapped on the rocky island of Corregidor in Manila Bay. Corregidor airfield and the army base at Del Monte in Mindanao, near Lake Lanao, were the only bases still held by the Americans. The army used two small planes to fly between the two locations. When one crashed and the other was shot down, the ability to evacuate personnel was lost Corregidor was isolated and the American personnel trapped, including the American commander General Douglas MacArthur and his family.[199]

Corregidor had an airfield but it was too small for B-17 or B-24 bombers. Submarines seemed the only means of escape and contact. But Allied Command in Melbourne, Australia, requested a seaplane be used to attempt a flight in and out. It was the only feasible option in the circumstances which could handle large passenger numbers. Patrol Wing 10 was called into action to supply Catalinas and crew. Lieutenant-Commander Edgar Neale was selected to lead the mission, sent to Perth and ordered to take charge of two Catalinas readied for the flight. The planes took off from Perth at 1000 hours, Monday 27 April 1942. They headed for Shark Bay 400 miles north of Perth. The tender USS *William B Preston* awaited and refuelled and resupplied the planes. Pollock noted that they dined well and recalled it was their last decent meal for about a week. It could have been their last supper given that they were about to fly two unarmed planes deep into enemy territory. Pollock flew with Neale in the lead plane and they headed for

---

[197] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, April 1942, p. 10, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 27 March 2018).

[198] T. Pollock, *Operation Flight Gridiron 27 April–3 May 1942*, (undated document passed from E. Fletcher 23 August 2015).

[199] L. Davis, 'Locating the Enemy at Sea A History of Fleet Air Wing 10 September 1939 to 1 June 1945', p. 10, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

Darwin. On approach to the township, the formation had forgotten to advise Darwin of their arrival and set off an air raid warning. The mission was almost over before it had started, as ground forces prepared to fire at the incoming planes. Defensive units were 'trigger happy' after the frequent Japanese raids, but the Patrol Wing 10 planes narrowly avoided disaster.[200]

The inbound flight was planned to take urgently needed cargo including medical supplies. In Darwin, the Americans loaded medicine, anti-aircraft fuses and radio repair parts. Passengers were to be the outbound cargo. Both planes carried seven crew each, as few as possible, but sufficient for the dangers to be faced. Lieutenant-Commander Neale commanded the lead plane while Lieutenant Junior-Grade Leroy Deede piloted plane number two.[201]

Neale assessed whether or not friendly forces still held the fuel cache area in Lake Lanao before the planes set off. Without return fuel it was a one-way trip or ditch in the ocean. The distance was 1,350 miles to the refuelling point and 500 miles more to Corregidor. Neale reported that the fuel was available and all was in order to go. At 1630 hours the planes departed, avoiding Penfui airbase on Timor where Japanese aircraft were based. To conserve fuel, a direct route was taken, using night flying and clouds to avoid detection. After crossing the neck of the Celebes, where Manado in the Dutch East Indies was brightly lit and where Japanese fighter planes patrolled, they passed Manado and were in safer territory heading to Mindanao in the Philippines.[202]

Approaching the target point in Mindanao at Lake Lanao, the airmen received the coded signal and prepared to land. Standard high-power landings were made given that it was pitch black and the water height was difficult to determine. Safe landings were made and the planes were met by a local outrigger canoe known as a Banca. The planes were then tailed (tail-in configuration for a quick means of escape) into shelters and covered with trees and other camouflaging. The Americans had pre-established a support group in this area and full support was given to the Patrol Wing 10 fliers and the invaluable planes. Any identification markings were carefully covered and all precautions were taken to ensure the seaplanes were as well hidden as possible.[203]

Before take-off the next day the aircraft were stripped bare, including blankets, oxygen gear and spare food and tools. Guns and ammunition were also removed. Only code books, navigation charts and emergency rations were retained. The expectation was that the planes would land in the sheltered part of the bay, stated Pollock. The location was east of the main island of Corregidor. But plans had changed and the landing site was now near adjacent Cabalo Island, which meant it was now an open-sea landing. Pollock assessed that this was a potentially dangerous landing, endangering both planes, crew and the mission itself.[204]

---

[200] T. Pollock, 'Operation–Flight Gridiron 27 April–3 May 1942', p. 2. (Unpublished document passed to author by E. Fletcher April 2015).

[201] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 30. Lieutenant Deede later died on duty as a result of an engine failure during take-off at a Sydney airfield flying a Douglas SBD Dauntless aircraft.

[202] T. Pollock, op. cit., p. 3.

[203] ibid., p. 4.

[204] ibid., p. 4.

Regardless, the two Patrol Wing 10 Catalinas took off for Manila. Navigation was proving difficult as the planes progressed with inclement weather closing in. Manila was blacked out, making final navigation to the destination even more difficult. Fortunately, a burning tanker illuminated Corregidor, and both planes used wind drift to estimate landing formations. Once on the sea-surface, minutes seemed hours. Rumour had it that the day was the Emperor's birthday. This resulted in less than normal reconnaissance by the Japanese and soon a small tender came alongside.

Precious cargo was unloaded on landing, but it was a tense situation on the open water, unprotected. Pollock's records recall his impatience on getting loaded and underway given the proximity of Japanese guns:

> I picked up a microphone and said, after station from Pilot - Get those old women aboard and let's get out of here - there is Jap artillery on both sides that can make us very unhappy. Bounds, my second pilot, came forward, got into his seat and replied, well, you were right about the women - we have 14 aboard. All women? Where's Commander Bridget? Don't worry he is aboard. How many people are aboard this plane? I can't be sure but there must be 30 - you can't walk from one end to the other.[205]

The passenger manifest showed plane number one carrying 24 passengers with plane two loaded with 30 on board. Things were cramped with three people in the bomber's compartment and another sitting between the two pilots with all passengers moving as far forward as possible. The weight forced both planes deep into the water making take-off difficult. Gradually the planes lifted and both were away. On the way Pollock's plane lost contact with Deede's plane after flying through clouds. Lake Lanao was the destination, and fortunately Deede re-emerged when Lanao was located.[206]

At Lake Lanao the planes had again to be covered and hidden away on the lake shoreline. In the vicinity was Del Monte airfield and Japanese reconnaissance planes were active there. At 1500 hours the next day, the planes were refuelled and ready to go. But tragedy struck as Pollock's plane drifted on to the beach and ran aground. Only one small boat was in attendance to haul it off. Things did not go well and the plane then struck a submerged reef and water began pouring in. Meanwhile, plane number two was in the air and circling above wondering what had happened. A signal lamp was used to communicate with the plane and it moved off and headed for Darwin. Meanwhile, plane number one was aground and now taking on water. Crew began bailing and pumping out water. Given that they were only 17 miles from Del Monte, a B-17 was called to evacuate the remaining passengers. But the damaged plane issue remained and crew continued to repair the plane as best they could.[207]

By 1600 hours, the flying boat was repaired and loaded with 10 passengers. However, some were left to be taken by the promised B-17. The Catalina took off and was on its way to Darwin with crew bailing frantically as water still remained within the plane. The journey was completed and the Catalina landed in Darwin the next morning, reported Pollock. They refuelled and took off immediately for Perth. They took the direct overland route to Perth and landed, where they performed a crude bounce landing, with Pollock

---

[205] ibid., pp. 5–6.

[206] ibid., p. 7.

[207] ibid., p. 10.

saying it was the worst landing of his life. It was 0130 hours. Later, news came through that no B-17 had arrived at Del Monte with the stranded passengers' fate unknown.[208]

Pollock reflected on the Corregidor take-off and wondered why the planes had not been attacked given that 3,000 shells per day were being landed on Corregidor. He reasoned that only divine providence could be the answer. Either that, or the celebrations for the Emperor's birthday![209] In any event they had completed their mission and arrived safely back at Pelican Point.

In June, three months after Patrol Wing 10 had begun operations from Pelican Point, the situation had improved greatly in terms of aircraft inventory for Patrol Wing 10. The Wing was now rebuilding and the last of the new Catalinas from Hawaii had arrived and were part of the Wing inventory. Commander George Munsdorf had led 12 new Catalinas to Perth from Hawaii using four sorties of three planes each. The planes arrived from May to June of 1942. With the arrival of the new aircraft, patrols were reinforced by June of 1942. With new Catalinas available, patrols north of Perth doubled from one to two sorties. Additional patrols were also mounted out of Albany with three Catalinas located there at the time.[210] Later in June, patrols were expanded in all sectors with some assistance from the Australians who were conducting patrols as well. Results for all patrols were reported as negative for the month of June. Bad weather was reported as affecting some patrol sectors as winter weather patterns set in.[211]

But as the war progressed, positive outcomes beyond the Wing's reach began to affect patrolling. The important battles of the Coral Sea and Midway had inflicted extensive damage on the Japanese and restricted their ability to function at will as they had done since the war's commencement. By the end of June 1942 things had changed as the enemy lacked the resources and reach it once had and patrol contacts were limited, though enemy planes remained within range off the Western Australian coast with bases in Java, Bali and Timor still a threat.

Patrol Wing 10 planes also continued sector patrols along the coast from Albany to north of Broome using the advance bases as well as tenders USS *Childs*, USS *Heron* and USS *William B Preston*. Some sectors were again relieved by the Australians using Hudson Bombers, where planes were available. But overall, responsibility and patrol performance belonged to Patrol Wing 10 throughout the first half of 1942. In addition, a new sector, sector 53 Southern Ocean coast (using a Wing Grumman utility plane), was added to the patrol plan. Sector 53 patrols now ventured as far southeast as Hopetoun in Western Australia using the Grumman Duck single seater. Sector 53 planes operated out of Albany for these patrols.[212]

---

[208] ibid., p. 11.

[209] ibid., p. 7.

[210] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 30 March 1942, p. 10, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 27 March 2018).

[211] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–30 June 1942, p. 10, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 23 March 2018).

[212] ibid.

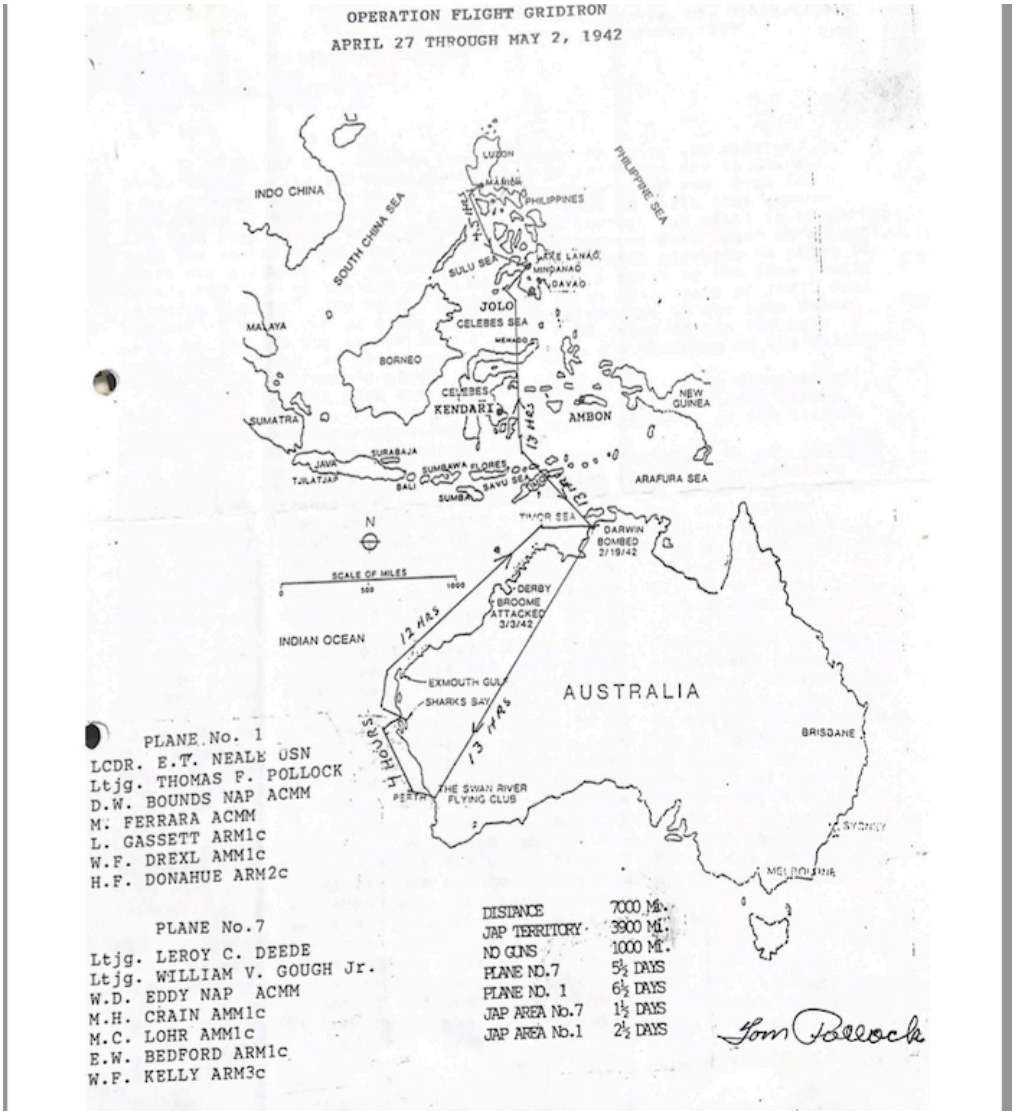

Figure 3. Flight path of Operation Flight Gridiron 27 April–2 May 1942,[213] showing Lieutenant Pollock's own record of the flight plan and lists all crew members for both planes.

Qantas, May–June 1942: Qantas's Indian Ocean Plan Develops

While Patrol Wing 10 remained actively involved in wartime operations, Qantas continued to plan their way back into the air. Captains Russell Tapp (who had taken over from Brain) and Crowther continued under Fysh's orders to develop a plan to get Qantas back into the air. Both were very experienced long-range pilots and believed it could be

[213] T. Pollock, 'Operation - Flight Gridiron 27 April–3 May 1942', p. 2. (Unpublished document passed to author by E. Fletcher April 2015). E. Fletcher is a published local aviation historian. The map contains personal notes from Pollock and shows the alternatives route flown to and from Darwin. Leebold has a similar map on page 38 of *Silent Victory,* with one route only to and from Perth.

done.[214] [215] Even though, by the end of May 1942, the Dutch had been forced out of their colony, their presence was to be an important factor in Indian Ocean Catalina flights, as they had formed 321 (Dutch) Squadron, Royal Air Force in Ceylon, and continued to fly the Indian Ocean route as circumstances allowed.

By May 1942, the Dutch flights and PG Taylor's original Guba flight earlier in 1939 provided a powerful argument for Fysh's team to press the case. With the British on their side, Qantas had an even stronger case. However, Fysh had a powerful enemy in AB Corbett. Fysh's correspondence with Corbett revealed the situation as the Department of Aviation saw it. Fysh corresponded several more times with Corbett in this period and received mixed but generally negative replies over lack of aircraft, a dangerous flight plan and a lack of higher Australian government support.[216]

Despite Qantas's enthusiasm for the plan, it had to be acknowledged that the Dutch had flown the route to China Bay using aircraft in military configuration, which meant they flew at normal Catalina gross weight and a full combat crew. But they also stopped in Cocos along the way for fuel. Qantas's plan was different as they would be using civilian aircraft, unarmed, and flown to carry a larger payload with fewer crew, but with passengers and mail and fly direct. In fact, the payload was planned to be at the maximum 35,000 pounds, higher than the Catalina rating of 29,000 pounds. Qantas had to assess fuel loads, wind factor and weather conditions. To do so, the aircraft had to be regraded as stripped and reduced to the bare bones but with extra fuel tanks added.[217] Qantas knew it had Catalina-capable pilots and crews which had Catalina experience when they flew air force planes to Australia from Hawaii during the earlier ferry flights. Other experience with over-water aviation was available from the Empire flying boat crews who were now grounded.

Despite encouragement from the British, at one stage Fysh offered to fund the route himself using Qantas resources, but this was not necessary as the British had updated plans developing. British Overseas Airways Corporation management (through Chairman Runciman) had decided that the route must be linked and the mail and other cargo carried to its destination. The Indian Ocean concept was the perfect solution to them. But while Qantas had no planes the British did. These British Catalinas were to be allocated as previously decided and become the five Qantas planes that would eventually fly the Indian Ocean route a year later.[218]

It remained a curious anomaly during this period that Qantas seemed to have little contact with the Americans with regard to Catalinas, aside from the Catalinas delivered for the air force, or any other planes. Fysh had been impressed with American aircraft when Qantas ferried the Australian air force planes to Australia. He had nominated the B-24 Liberator then as his preference for long-distance flights. But that was the end of any official contact. Australian aviation used British planes and Qantas itself used British

---

[214] 'Preliminary Outline of Possible Indian Ocean Operations Second Draft 30 June 1942', Qantas Empire Airways, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[215] ibid.

[216] A. Corbett, official correspondence to H. Fysh, op. cit.

[217] 'Preliminary Outline of Possible Indian Ocean Operations second Draft 30 June 1942', op. cit.

[218] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 4.

Empire Class flying boats and de Havilland planes before that. Australia was very much in synchronisation with British aviation industry as it was with its defence policies. But soon, and with war on its doorstep, Australia abandoned both its immediate defence links, as well as its support for British aviation, when Catalinas, and later B-24 Liberators, were flown by Qantas, much to Fysh's satisfaction.

By June, as Fysh pressed his case at departmental level, he was still bogged down in acrimonious correspondence with AB Corbett and the Department of Civil Aviation. To add more concern to the issue, a new spectre had arisen with the announcement of a policy by the Americans that they planned to dominate current commercial air routes. Qantas was facing imminent danger from the Americans who were busily taking over the main international routes and setting up for post-war domination. Fysh knew that Qantas needed current and post-war international routes to survive and be prepared for the time when commercial flights resumed normal operations.[219]

Thus, Fysh pressed on. The British were keen to get the mail to its destination and fulfil their contract, and Fysh had given them a plan through his senior pilots who had studied the Dutch routes and knew it could be done using Catalinas. McMaster wrote to Fysh on 11 June 1942 advising him that the British had replied and supported their plan, but wanted more details.[220] For Qantas there was only one option to be a wartime carrier with commercial international routes and that was to re-establish the Empire mail service. That route was the nearest point of departure from a suitable Australian airfield to the closest landfall in friendly territory such as Ceylon.

Given that the British flight from England was now terminating at Karachi, the gap was that terminal to a location in Australia using any means. Qantas staff had by June drawn up plans to assess the best approach. Their document entitled 'A Preliminary Outline of Indian Ocean Long-Range Operations', assessed prospective flight distances:

a. Port Hedland to Trincomalee, Ceylon (2,815 nautical miles)

b. Port Hedland to Bangalore, India (3,150 nautical miles)

c. Port Hedland to Diego Garcia, Indian Ocean (2,850 nautical miles)

d. Perth to Rodriquez, Indian Ocean (3,100 nautical miles)[221]

Port Hedland was a very basic airfield at the time and not comparable with Perth for future Catalina operations. However, at this stage of planning Liberators were still in Qantas's thoughts, but the allocation of Catalinas later settled arguments about locations and the need for suitable all-year-round water-borne landing sites.

Aircraft considered within the above flying ranges were the Catalina and the B-24 Liberator, both American aircraft. The prime focus was on the shorter route, which was the Ceylon connection with an additional land component to Karachi. Qantas assumed the southern Asian routes to be subject to possible Japanese air interdiction and thus warlike conditions. Distance and payload too were vital factors in the calculations.

---

[219] Qantas Empire Airways Limited, 'Post War Overseas Airlines as Affecting Australia', 1 November 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[220] F. McMaster to H. Fysh, official correspondence, 11 June 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[221] Qantas Empire Airways Limited, 'Post War Overseas Airlines Affecting Australia', op. cit., pp. 1–3.

Catalinas and Liberators were assessed as being similar in terms of payload and range, but with Liberators much faster. Trincomalee, listed in the estimations, was already a British flying boat base, and one which serviced Catalinas. The Liberator needed a 3,500 foot minimum runway and that feature was an impediment given existing airfields and availabilities. The Qantas document recognised Lend-Lease possibilities to obtain aircraft from the Americans (but as British-registered planes), but also the 'very great difficulties' in obtaining the necessary aircraft. Qantas pointed out that its fleet had been decimated with the loss of its Empire flying boats, including *Circe* and *Corinna*, and that this fact, Qantas's losses in war service, may somehow weigh in its favour. The report was dated 9 May 1942 and submitted in June, not long after the fall of Singapore and the loss of the Singapore–Sydney sector.[222]

But by June 1942 nothing had progressed and Fysh remained anxious as did his team. In large part, the situation had been resolved at policy level and soon after with the actual break in the route which brought the need for a response. It was now a matter of procuring aircraft, and Fysh directed Tapp and Crowther to tighten the plan, select the flight path and he, with McMaster, would work to secure the Catalinas and crews that they believed would do the job.

Patrol Wing 10, July–August 1942: Patrol Wing 10 Increases Escort and Patrol Operations' Tempo

Patrol Wing 10 continued its missions in July escorting ships and submarines around the Western Australian coast, patrolling sea lanes, undertaking search and rescue operations, carrying out bombing missions when directed, and undertaking training and utility work including target towing.[223] The rescue of the British airmen and the flights in the Philippines to rescue a large number of personnel boosted morale and had brought praise and acknowledgement to the Wing. By July 1942 Patrol Wing 10 was continuing its assigned tasks as the war progressed.

Wing diaries reveal the operational activities undertaken in July 1942. The Wing had devised patrols in sectors, both straight-line patrols point to point and return, as well as triangular patterns deeper out over the Indian Ocean. Wing tenders were situated at Fremantle as well as at forward bases with the USS *William B Preston* at Exmouth Gulf providing resupply for four Catalinas rotating there on patrol. USS *Childs* and USS *Heron* were operating out of Fremantle in July.

New Catalinas were still in transit from the east coast with three Catalinas on their way to Pelican Point landing in Laverton during transit. Wing log books reveal a pattern of Catalinas moving in both directions to and from Perth as new planes were sent to Perth with others travelling east for repair and servicing as Perth's facilities were limited to front-line, not deeper level, maintenance. On Sunday 12 July 1942 three planes arrived on time. One of the planes carried Rear-Admiral Carpenter from naval headquarters on the east coast who carried out an inspection of the base and personnel at 1120 hours that day.

Other activities were undertaken aside from patrolling. Gunnery training was practiced over the skies of Perth. The gunnery targets were towed by the utility squadron aircraft, in this case a Kingfisher. Crew changes were a part of the operations, and personnel were replaced and rotated to other units. On July 15 the Commanding Officer of the USS *Heron* was replaced as directed by Commander Southwest Pacific, located in

---

[222] ibid.

[223] G. Munsdorf, op cit., p. 6.

Brisbane. Lieutenant-Commander Munsdorf flew to Mareeba in north Queensland for bombing familiarisation practice with army land-based bombers. Additionally, two utility planes flew to Hopetoun in the state's south for patrol work in that sector.[224]

The remainder of July was made up of patrolling and shipping movements supplying and supporting the advance bases with ships USS *Willian B Preston*, USS *Heron* and USS *Childs* moving between Fremantle and Geraldton, Exmouth and Heron Haven. Utility planes too were active in non-patrol tasks with two Kingfisher planes assisting submarine staff conducting radar tests and aerial sightings of submarines, using evasion and escape tactics. All active patrols yielded negative results for the month. But on Thursday 30 July 1942, a squadron of Japanese aircraft attacked Port Hedland airfield. A Patrol Wing10 Catalina was on the water but was unharmed as the Japanese targeted only the airfield there.[225]

As the war progressed, Patrol Wing 10's operational activities continued to expand. In August 1942, Catalinas flew over Northam in Western Australia and conducted an aerial photographic exercise to test cameras and techniques. This type of activity emphasised the important training role played by the Wing. Patrol Wing 10 received many junior pilots from initial pilot training schools who needed operational preparation for front-line duties on subsequent postings to combat squadrons. Training included target practice, photo reconnaissance, strafing, bombing runs, mine laying and torpedo dropping techniques. These skills were basic requirements for a Catalina crew and part of the Wing's tasks was this type of pilot and crew training. Aside from the skills acquired, training also built capability within the Wing itself, and in its *de facto* role as Western Australia's air force, increased its immediate capability to deny any threat by the Japanese to Perth and the Western Australian coast in 1942.

Throughout the month, Catalinas were moving from Pelican Point to and from advance bases on regular patrol duty. No enemy contacts were recorded by Patrol Wing 10 early in the month. USS *William B Preston* was on station in Exmouth tending three planes at the base there. Near Albany, where Catalinas and utility planes were patrolling, two unidentified aircraft were sighted. Patrol Wing 10 planes were sent to investigate but clouds and height ensured that the slow-moving Catalinas were unable to identify the unknown planes.[226]

On 7 August, USS *Heron* became involved in an enemy contact. Operating near Geraldton and on its way to Exmouth, in tandem with two Australian Hudsons, an unidentified submarine was sighted and attacked. USS *Heron* had sighted a periscope and attempted to intercept, but the submarine submerged and no further contact was made. Two Patrol Wing 10 planes were despatched in support but no sightings were made. USS *Heron* subsequently continued on its mission to Exmouth without further action.[227]

Another enemy contact was made on 13 August. A plane patrolling sector 9, near Heron Haven, and close to the coast in the local coastal shipping lanes, sighted a

---

[224] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–31 July 1942, p. 21, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 March 2018).

[225] ibid., p. 29.

[226] Ibid., p. 6.

[227] ibid., p. 8.

submarine believed to be a Japanese I class submarine. The Catalina was armed with bombs but was unable to attack as the submarine quickly submerged and was unable to be relocated.[228]

Wing utility planes remained active in inner-harbour patrols also. Albany had large inner-harbour areas and was often used as a base for American shipping. It was an important port and was patrolled using Catalinas.

On 16 August 1942, Lieutenant-Commander Munsdorf returned from the east coast where he had been undergoing bombing training with army units in north Queensland.[229] Other Wing pilots were also being sent to locations outside of the normal patrol area. Lieutenant Edward Keller arrived in Darwin in August on a scouting and location suitability mission. Darwin had been bombed earlier in1942 but as the fortunes of war had shifted Darwin was now considered a usable base again, albeit on a turnaround basis for flying boats, with no long-term usage envisage. Patrol Wing 10 had lost two planes there when the Japanese bombed Darwin, but as current intelligence reported, Darwin was now deemed a suitable base for operations.[230]

Throughout the month of August no further contacts were made by Patrol Wing 10 planes. The Catalinas continued to ferry Admiral Arthur Carpenter from the Seventh Fleet to forward bases on more inspections, tenders maintained movements resupplying advance bases while patrol sectors remained constant with USS *Childs* ending the month at Exmouth with USS *William B Preston* and USS *Heron* back at Fremantle.[231]

August 1942 had been a busy month for Parol Wing 10 with enemy contacts, deployments to various parts of the state and regular patrols carried out, with Pelican Point forming the nucleus of operations. September was to bring even more high-tempo operations as the war progressed.

Qantas, July–August 1942: Qantas Undertakes Detailed Planning

By July 1942, Fysh was becoming desperate as Qantas's plans had effectively come to nothing. Despite British support no real progress had been made. Fysh consulted with Tapp and Crowther and decided to put pressure on the British and update the idea of an Indian Ocean crossing around the danger zones. The route was to be a landfall in Ceylon from a point in Western Australia. Fysh communicated with Runciman in London with whom he had already discussed the plan using Catalinas. Their proposal was a five Catalina unit, but that was scuttled by the issue of Cocos and the warlike dangers there. General Wavell's headquarters too had urged for a route to ensure that a reliable air route was available to and from Australia and that again favoured Qantas's initiative.[232]

Fysh still preferred the Liberator aircraft but these long-range bombers remained unavailable. Later in the Indian Ocean service history the Liberators would fly the route and be as frequent as the Catalinas in flight numbers. But in July 1942 it was the Catalina

---

[228] ibid., p. 14.

[229] ibid., p. 17.

[230] ibid., p. 21.

[231] ibid., p. 32.

[232] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 7.

that would have to do. Fysh's planning team had stressed that he should again approach AB Corbett, but he had already been rebuffed and saw no hope there. He now turned to the British for support, and Runciman was the man in whom he placed his trust.[233] Fysh believed that his planning team's expertise would be sufficient to enable the plan to be developed and finally accepted.[234] [235]

Fysh was now planning to visit England himself and meet directly with Runciman. Face-to-face discussions would bring the matter to a head, Fysh reasoned. Besides, Qantas was a commercial half partner with the British, and it seemed that Australian aviation authorities had abandoned him. Fysh had pilots, engineers and crews. He needed only planes to fill the missing piece in his plan and the British were to be his only solution.

Before Qantas conceived and submitted the plan, their most experienced pilots and navigators now looked at all angles so that a final, comprehensive plan could be developed. Qantas Chairman, Fergus McMaster, wrote to Fysh on 1 July 1942, alerting him to his meeting with Arthur Fadden (Leader of the Opposition) and Fadden's attendance at the Advisory War Council meeting that day. McMaster suggested that Fadden would speak with Prime Minister Curtin about the Qantas plan.[236] Meanwhile, Captains Tapp and Crowther were appointed to put together final plans. Both were very experienced long-range pilots and were tasked with considering how it could be done.[237]

Fysh planned to take Tapp and Crowther's plan to Runciman. Their idea involved the original Port Hedland to Trincomalee route but had been refined by Crowther to be Perth to Lake Koggala in Ceylon. Perth had reliable on-water conditions. Aside from Port Hedland, Exmouth too was considered. Weather at Exmouth (the same issue that Patrol Wing 10 had identified) was assessed as unsuitable for all-day, all-year-round operations as Exmouth was open sea, as was Trincomalee. Swan River and Lake Koggala were enclosed sites and, although Koggala was tight, it too operated British Catalinas and was a suitable location. The route was slightly shorter too, though the 500 miles was negligible in a practical sense.[238]

This was to be Fysh's plan that he would take to Runciman. The plan was to be the foundation stone of Qantas's contribution to breaking the threat imposed upon Australia's west coast by the Japanese. The notion to basically skirt the effective range of most Japanese war planes was simple but effective, and if long-range planes using additional fuel tanks could overfly the Indian Ocean it could be achieved; the plan would be effective and the Japanese intent thwarted.

Qantas was a commercial entity and each month was another month without income from its Empire mail route. By August 1942 it was now six months since the Singapore base had become unusable. Pressure had been exerted at government level

---

[233] ibid., p. 7.

[234] ibid., p. 1.

[235] J. Eames, op. cit., p. 259.

[236] F. McMaster to H. Fysh, official correspondence, 1 July 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[237] 'Preliminary Outline of Possible Indian Ocean Operations', op. cit.

[238] J. Eames, op. cit., p. 260.

and now Qantas was officially invited by the Australian government to investigate a means of re-establishing a new mail route. Qantas's plan was to become the Indian Ocean service flying from Perth to Lake Koggala using British support.[239] This remained unknown to the Australian government for the time being, awaiting Fysh's trip to England.

But the planning team had done its job and developed a workable plan. Qantas was prepared to fly the planes using their own crews, and Fysh was sure that the British had Catalinas obtained from the Americans using Lend-Lease provisions that would be made available to him. The British also had a base in Ceylon which operated Catalinas. Qantas, however, did not have a base in Perth, but the Swan River had been identified in the plan. This plan would be the final step in inaugurating a new Indian Ocean route.

Fysh believed that the proposed route was also valuable to the war effort and was described by the British as being 'of great military value'.[240] [241] The value of the mail system too was a high priority and since Singapore's capture by the Japanese was a great loss commercially, militarily and to national pride. Aside from the Empire mail, the value of transporting military correspondences was seen as being similarly high. Qantas indicated that the carriage of diplomatic mail between India and Australia, between the forces engaged in the war against Japan, would speed up by many weeks. In the words of a senior signals officer from Wavell's New Delhi headquarters, this service would completely alter the complexion of communications between themselves and Australian commands.[242]

The nexus of the military nature of the service, urged by Wavell and the will of Qantas to be a wartime participant, placed Qantas in danger, even though it was a commercial operator. This was not a new circumstance for Qantas, as prior to this period, Qantas had placed its Empire flying boats at the disposal of the government and had suffered casualties and the loss of planes, passengers and crew. The continuation of the Empire mail service was a continuation of this mentality of using the airline to assist Australia in wartime. Its actions again placed Qantas within the same military orbit as the Americans operating from Perth, defying the Japanese threat and being part of the fight. While not an armed service, it was planned to traverse a combat zone and was an aggressive and provocative enterprise aimed at testing and defying the Japanese threat to Perth and the west coast of Australia. Qantas's planned service was to be part of the fight to overcome Japanese restrictions and portray a sense of normality brought on by the war in the dark days of 1942. Although Parol Wing 10 and Qantas were yet to operate together in Perth, that time was not far away and the synergies would become apparent given their neighbouring bases on the Swan River. These wartime arrangements were recognised by Fysh early on, when he expressed that any operations 'were regarded as entirely as wartime expedients',[243] as he viewed the post-war resumption of wholly commercial flights as an entirely different matter.

---

[239] R. Senior, op. cit., p. 2.

[240] Qantas Empire Airways Limited, *No.4 - Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service*, 1943, op. cit., pp. 1–5.

[241] Wavell's Headquarters in India saw great value in the regular Indian Ocean Service, despite having Royal Air Force Catalinas available, a belief which Qantas encouraged in its planning.

[242] Qantas Empire Airways Limited, 'Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service', 29 September 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[243] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 184.

Fysh was encouraged too by Air Minister Drakeford who commented that no other air group had this capability, including the air force which was still training its crews in long-distance operations or had its crews still in Europe with the British.[244] Fysh was confident that he could succeed and prove it to the British. Runciman remained firm that the Indian Ocean route was the perfect solution. His British Catalinas were now to be allocated as the five Qantas planes that eventually flew the route.[245] Fysh was about to embark on his trip to England and in September 1942 he would begin the serious task of working with Runciman and the British, behind Corbett's back, to establish his revamped Catalina-operated new Empire mail route and the foundations for the beginning of the Indian Ocean service from Perth.

Patrol Wing 10, September–October 1942: Continued Enemy Contacts, More Inspections

In September 1942 Patrol Wing 10 continued its primary mission escorting coastal shipping and patrolling sectors along the Western Australian coast and out to sea. Its tactic of high-frequency forward area patrolling to dissuade Japanese planes from approaching Perth, or the Western Australian coast, was now well underway. In the background, bombing, reconnaissance, crew training, utility services including transport, strafing practice, reconnaissance and target towing were also being actively undertaken. The Wing tempo was rising each month as new planes arrived from the east coast bases and allowed expanded activities at Pelican Point and forward bases. Aside from new Catalinas arriving, flying boats continued to be internally re-assigned from Pelican Point to the three forward bases, to ensure that patrols were maintained in all sectors. In addition, tenders continued their travel to and from their primary base at Fremantle in support of Catalina patrols to ferry fuel and other logistics to secondary bases at Geraldton, Exmouth, and Heron Haven.

At the beginning of September USS *Childs* was stationed at Exmouth, on a short-term basis, tending to three Wing Catalinas operating sorties from there.[246] The location of Exmouth was a well-protected site, but subject to seasonal extremes. During field research into Patrol Wing 10 bases in Western Australia, which was conducted for this thesis, it was observed that the body of water in which the Catalinas landed, and tenders moored, was actually an open-sea site. But it was an excellent location for resupply operations where tenders could provide outer, sea-exposed, protection on one side of the plane with a coastal peninsula on the other. The tenders, when moored, provided stability for tendered Catalinas refuelling or on longer overnight stays. Exmouth also had a permanent fuel line for American submarines that victualled there, and this provided an additional asset used by the Wing.

Sensing a decline in Japanese air activity, the Wing was now patrolling in numbers from the northern bases. It was an act of intent to confront the Japanese and claim the areas as far north of Perth as was possible as Patrol Wing 10 protected zones. They aimed to turn the tables on notions of Japanese encroachment towards Perth and the

---

[244] A. Drakeford, to Defence Minister, official correspondence, 'Proposed Indian Ocean Service', 10 September 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[245] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 4.

[246] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 12 March 2018).

respective west coast sites which previously they had bombed, almost at will. Nine confirmed raids had been conducted during 1942 on Western Australia.[247] The plan paid off with September recorded as a passive month for patrols with planes reporting no enemy contacts. The aviation gateways to Perth were now protected by the Catalinas at Exmouth and further north from Heron Haven, near Karratha, and evidence showed that the Japanese were not prepared to now venture so far south as they had previously, when aerial bombings as far south as Exmouth had occurred into mid-1942.[248]

To ensure that the intensity of performance remained high, a staff visit was undertaken by Rear-Admiral Charles Lockwood, the senior American naval officer in Western Australia, flying to Exmouth and return on a Wing Catalina. Rear-Admiral Lockwood was conducting a review of the Wing's forward bases and had stopped also in Geraldton to inspect facilities there. Geraldton, like Exmouth was also observed for this thesis, and noted as being also an open water mooring, but protected by a long spit from incoming swells. Lockwood returned to Perth overnight following his inspections, satisfied that his men were combat ready and well equipped for their tasks.

But aside from the increasing frequency of northerly patrols and providing transport for staff visits, outcomes were not all as planned. One unplanned outcome was a minor incident with one of the Wing's utility planes when a Grumman Duck, an amphibian,[249] encountered a mechanical problem in early September 1942. The Wing was still patrolling in areas well south of Perth and had smaller utility planes and some Catalinas in operation along the Southern Ocean coast. One of the utility planes, on return from Albany escorting shipping there in and out of Albany Harbour, was forced to land at Bannister on Albany Highway, about 100 miles from Perth. The plane encountered a stiff headwind and ran out of fuel, short of its destination. It was a safe landing and soon Patrol Wing 10 despatched a plane to assist and arrange to get the aircraft back to Perth, while the pilot was retrieved and returned to base.[250]

As September progressed, patrols continued without further incident. At a higher administrative level, a new Commander of Aircraft Southwest Pacific assumed command. The new commander, Rear-Admiral Ralph Wood, was to be based at fleet headquarters in Brisbane and direct subordinate units like Patrol Wing 10 from there.[251] Soon after Rear-Admiral Wood's appointment, a staff group from Patrol Wing 10 was ordered to visit his headquarters and departed for Brisbane on Catalina number 15 to meet with the new commander. The visiting staff group was led by Rear-Admiral Lockwood, Commander

---

[247] K. Gomm, op. cit., p. 305.

[248] Exmouth was bombed again on 20 and 21 May 1943.

[249] The amphibian Catalinas were fitted with retracting wheels enabling both water and land based operations. Patrol Wing 10 Catalinas were water landings only.

[250] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 12 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[251] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 16 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

John Peterson, Commanding Officer of Patrol Wing 10, and other senior staff officers from the Wing.[252]

Despite the relative calm experienced during the early weeks of September, Catalinas were suddenly involved in action. On 21 September 1942, a Catalina flying from Geraldton patrolling far out into the Indian Ocean sighted and attacked a submarine which was caught on the surface. Two depth charges were released after the submarine failed to respond to a coded challenge. One depth charge failed to explode and the other missed its target. While the Catalina crew responded according to procedures and attacked the unidentified submarine, it was later revealed that a Dutch submarine from Fremantle was in the vicinity, as was the American submarine USS *Saury*. USS *Saury* was not attacked and the Dutch submarine, *K-12*, did not report any attack upon itself at that stage.[253] More contact followed the next day with a probable sighting recorded. Planes patrolled throughout the day but no further sightings were recorded. Despite the previous day's enthusiasm with the submarine contact, the attack was now identified by Patrol Wing 10 operations as the Dutch submarine.[254]

To add to the list of contacts, on 24 September a Catalina was attacked by a Japanese plane identified as a 'Baltimore' medium bomber.[255] This was the first incursion by Japanese aircraft for a number of weeks and suggested a probe by the Japanese to test American resolve in defending their Allies, the Australians. After firing upon each other the Japanese plane retreated in a northerly direction with no damage recorded by the Catalina.[256]

While the Wing was engaging in contact with the Japanese, back in Pelican Point on 27 September, Rear-Admiral Lockwood and party had returned from Brisbane where discussions took place over Wing operations with the new senior commander.[257] Lockwood was soon to brief the Wing on the results of the visit, the impact it was to have and changes about to take place, commencing in November, at Patrol Wing 10 .

To end the month, Catalinas were again in action. One depth charge was dropped on a submarine off the Exmouth patrol sector. However, again it turned out to be a friendly submarine, this time being USS *Snapper*, which the Catalina pilot believed did not issue a warning signal and quickly dived, raising further suspicion. USS *Snapper* later

---

[252] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 20 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[253] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 22 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[254] ibid.

[255] Allied intelligence used familiar word codenames for all Japanese aircraft rather than Japanese-originated insignia.

[256] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 24 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[257] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 27 February 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

reported that it fired a red smoke flare to identify itself, claiming that it was not acknowledged, but fortunately no damage or loss was recorded by USS *Snapper*.[258]

The trend of contacts was maintained with a 5 October contact with another Japanese bomber. The contact occurred off the Western Australia coast near Port Hedland. A Catalina patrolling sector nine there had a 32-minute contact with what was identified as a Mitsubishi twin engine Type 97 landline bomber, known as a 'Kate' by Allied intelligence. The plane was recorded as land-based but the Kate was also used as a carrier-based plane. Its origin at the time was unknown, land based or carrier based. It was reported that the enemy plane departed northward upon being seen and no action ensued. The Catalina then continued on patrol unharmed.[259]

As a precaution, the next day, Australian Hudson bombers patrolled with Patrol Wing 10 Catalinas as escorts. Patrols continued in all sectors but two days later another sighting occurred this time with a Japanese 'Betty' bomber sighted by Catalinas while patrolling in company with Hudsons. The location was again sector nine near Port Hedland, as it was two days prior. Contact was maintained for 37 minutes after which time the Betty bomber headed away to the north.[260] Routine patrols were maintained until mid-month without incident until a Japanese submarine was identified in sector nine (near Port Hedland). USS *Heron* and USS *William B Preston* stayed in northern waters stationed at Exmouth Gulf supporting patrols from there while in the south of the state, the Wing despatched planes to Albany as part of its response to wide area surveillance and operations.[261]

Patrol and contact activities remained quiet for the remainder of the month. Routine exchanges of flying boats occurred between Pelican Point and the advanced bases plus extra planes were again sent to Albany undertaking anti-submarine patrols based on routine intelligence reports there. Aside from the exchange of planes from Perth and the forward bases, Patrol Wing 10 also exchanged Catalinas with east coast bases. As an example, on 27 October 1942, three Patrol Wing 10 Catalinas departed for Sydney via Adelaide under orders from Commander Southwest Pacific Command.[262]

---

[258] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 28 September 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[259] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 5 October 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[260] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 7 October 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[261] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 13 October 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[262] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 27 October 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

Figure 4. Patrol Wing 10 forward bases in Western Australia. The Americans established forward operating bases beginning in 1942 with Exmouth as a focal point for northern operations.[263]

Qantas, September–October 1942: Stasis in Canberra While Fysh Considers His Options

By September things were becoming of concern for Qantas. Fysh's plans had not been acted upon and he faced challenges from his own government as well as a lack of movement from his partners, the British. Regardless, Fysh pressed on with his team. It remained Qantas's and Fysh's main aim to re-establish its prized Empire mail route. While Qantas's aviation planning continued to prove that a new route could be flown, the one important element of a lack of planes, however, could not be overlooked. The Empire route had flown mail, passengers and cargo, and Qantas considered that a replacement service needed to have the same capabilities. While the Empire flying boats were comparatively large flying boats, the proposed Catalinas were much smaller. Nevertheless, Qantas wanted to replicate the service as closely as they could and mail, passengers and cargo were planned to be carried. It would be a commercial service, not a military operation that Qantas envisaged, but it would be Qantas's flight which would coordinate with the British when the plan was finalised. Diplomatic mail too was expected to be carried with the expectations from General Wavell and his headquarters in India that saw the service as expedient to their needs to carry correspondence from Southeast Asia Command to the Southwest Pacific Command in Australia.[264] This could be achieved by

[263] Map background sourced from Google maps with base locations added by author.

[264] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 1.

using internal Australian air transport from Perth to the east after carriage on the Qantas service to Perth.

But despite Fysh's urging and constant correspondence, things had gone quiet in Canberra. Some of this may have been in response to a serious diplomatic *faux pas* committed by Fysh when he took it upon himself to urge the matter along. In his impatience, Fysh chose to correspond directly with the Governor-General, Lord Gowrie. Fysh had decided, in his frustration, to write directly to the Governor-General asking for his assistance in pressing for replacement aircraft and the opening up of an Indian Ocean route. In the letter he sought the Governor-General's assistance, mentioned his plans for the service and that representations to the Department of Civil Aviation would be very useful.[265]

Predictably, Fysh's initiative drew a terse reply. Corbett was furious when informed of Fysh's efforts to kick-start the Empire mail route using such an approach. Corbett was indignant and reminded Fysh of what had already been done at departmental level to assist. Fysh was contrite, but undiminished in terms of his enthusiasm to press on. At the same time McMaster had met with the Prime Minister but the meeting had proven unhelpful. Regardless, Fysh pressed on and by 2 September he had approached Sir Earl Page of the Advisory War Council, stressing that no air link existed between Australia and England across the Indian Ocean. An important point made by Fysh was that the Catalinas offered by the British were American planes used under the Lend-Lease act but the agreement within the lease precluded the planes from being used for purely commercial purposes. Fysh believed that this restriction could be overcome and that Qantas would not operate the flights on a solely commercial basis, thus obviating the strict requirements of use for American planes obtained under Lend-Lease arrangements.[266]

McMaster then encouraged Fysh to press on and perhaps avoid the negativeness of the bureaucratic situation he had experienced with Corbett. It was more useful to return to speaking with the British, McMaster counselled, as his partners in Britain remained keen to establish an Indian Ocean route. It seemed that the Australian government was busy with the war and had little time to consider a small commercial airline's concerns.

The Qantas situation was now coming to a head in October, as Fysh was unable to gain any conclusive support at Australian government level. Corbett remained intransigent, and as he had said, the possibility of obtaining flying boats remained remote, at least from the purely Australian perspective. Fysh focussed on the British plan and communicated with Runciman as the preferred way to solve the problem. He would make it a British problem not an Australian one. That way he could circumvent Corbett and Drakeford, and in any event Australia did not have spare capacity to make Catalinas available to a private organisation, regardless that Qantas had earlier put its own planes into war service and suffered significant losses.

Notwithstanding the lack of progress in Canberra, Fysh was still confident that his organisation, with Catalinas, could do the job. Though the timing of the British plan had lapsed, it was now October 1942 and the situation in the Indian Ocean had changed. Japan was now on the defensive and though Patrol Wing 10 was experiencing contacts with long-range Japanese patrols, the situation was now less threatening, following the

---

[265] J. Gunn, op. cit., p. 89.

[266] ibid., p. 91.

Battle of Midway where Japan suffered heavy losses, particularly its aircraft carriers with consequences for the manoeuvrability of its airborne assets. Fysh was now considering flying to England to meet with Runciman as a means of advancing the plan. Fysh wrote to Runciman on 20 October 1942 and set in motion the earlier British-initiated plan involving Catalinas which he said Qantas would support and operate.[267] Fysh was motivated by commercial as well as patriotic ideals. His own team felt that they could break the Japanese embargo on Perth and the west coast and prove that a trans-Indian Ocean flight would be the method to do so. He cited the earlier Catalina flights from Hawaii which his crews had undertaken and the extensive flying boat operations that Qantas had flown and maintained almost without fault from 1938 until 1942. Fysh's initiative and supporting argument set in motion the impending trip that he would have to make to finalise arrangements.[268]

Aside from his patriotic appeals, Fysh used the strong argument that the Americans were ready to take over any abandoned international routes and that the British and Australians needed to act with haste to position themselves for post-war industry. He called the Americans' initiative nothing less than rank commercial imperialism. The good news was that Runciman agreed and immediately invited Fysh to visit for consultations. Fysh conceded that the policy, but not practice, of the Australian government was to urgently reopen Empire services and give support to Qantas who it recognised had the expertise to operate the service.[269]

But in the meantime, Fysh needed to consult again with Fergus McMaster, gain his support and repair damaged relations with Corbett. This process was now underway with Runciman's cooperation while Fysh pressed on to gather support to plan and undertake the trip to meet Runciman in England as soon a possible.

Patrol Wing 10, November–December 1942: Patrol Wing 10 Becomes Fleet Air Wing 10

Soon after Rear-Admiral Lockwood and Commander Peterson returned from Brisbane and their visit to Fleet headquarters, they announced that Patrol Wing 10 had officially become Fleet Air Wing 10.[270] The new name not only represented the same unit that pre-existed, but the name also respected the growing stature of an aviation unit now with an expanded set of responsibilities to meet, beyond its patrolling priorities. But patrolling remained its main role and had extended further north as the year progressed. So had patrolling duties both south and southeast. Operational missions had been executed successfully and enemy contacts had been experienced in the intervening months. In addition, as evidence of the Wing's abilities, during the time from March to November, the Wing had not suffered any mishaps within its Catalina operations, utility planes nor tender vessels' operations.

The new organisational directive indicated that the Wing would be structured as a three-section naval aviation unit. It would now be called Fleet Air Wing 10, and be made

---

[267] J. Gunn, op. cit., p. 78.

[268] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 172.

[269] ibid.

[270] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 4 November 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

up of a headquarters squadron responsible for command decisions, with a subordinate Catalina patrol squadron which would be responsible for long-range patrolling and a third unit, a scouting squadron with utility planes, would have responsibility for harbour and in-shore patrols.[271]

In line with its new and more strategic name, November would see new and more complex challenges and opportunities for Fleet Air Wing 10. It would now more actively cast its developing influence upon the defence of the Western Australian coast as part of its contribution to the war effort. The month began with the operational focus on Exmouth-based patrols, with tenders USS *Heron* and USS *Childs* supporting operations from there. Meanwhile, USS *William B Preston* was on-station in Fremantle supporting Pelican Point operations.[272]

In November no contacts were made with Japanese planes nor submarines. This result indicated that the Wing was ascendent in its sectors with enemy approaches and activities curtailed. Patrol sectors remained constant with both coastal patrols in assigned sectors and the deep ocean patrols flown as triangular patterns out to sea and back to base. Exmouth was the main base for these northerly patrols further out to sea with a constant pattern of tenders coming and going in support. Three Catalinas were recorded as operating from Exmouth early in November, which the tenders serviced and assisted.[273]

Despite so far having a perfect record of safety with pilot and aircrew safety, tragedy was to strike when on 26 November a Catalina pilot, Lieutenant Charles Krogh, was killed. Krogh was returning from patrol to Exmouth where USS *William B Preston* was moored. On landing, he miscalculated and initiated a crash landing with the Catalina landing too close to the tender, resulting in contact and damaging the bomb-aiming window, located in the fuselage at the bottom of the plane. As a result the plane flooded and quickly sunk. Lieutenant Krogh suffered head wounds and drowned before recovery action could be undertaken. No other personnel were injured in the accident. On 27 November Catalina number P–9 flew to Exmouth to return Krogh's body to Perth for repatriation to the United States.[274] The loss of Lieutenant Krogh was a morale-depleting situation for Fleet Air Wing 10, but was not something that Wing personnel were unused to. During their retreat to Perth from the Philippines, many crew members had been killed, but this was the first loss since arriving at Pelican Point.

The remainder of time within November saw the turnaround of Catalinas to and from Exmouth, the basing of tenders there, and minor issues with Commander Peterson

---

[271] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 9 November 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[272] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 15 November 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[273] ibid.

[274] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 27–29 November 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

flying from Maylands, Perth's main airport at the time, to Geraldton in a Grumman Duck amphibian plane when mechanical problems delayed this journey.[275]

The change of title to Fleet Air Wing 10 represented the now enlarged operational fleet of Catalinas, which had continued to grow since the initial three arrived in March. The Wing had stepped-up in operational air movements too as it grew in number and increased patrols. Regular transfers of Catalinas from east coast bases ensured that the operational tempo could be maintained and expanded. Unit reports reflect the expanded patrol sectors, and latitude and longitude reports show that patrols were now going further north and further west, deeper into the Indian Ocean. At the same time, it was evident that Japanese patrols were becoming scarcer and that submarine contacts were fewer as 1942 progressed.[276] It now seemed that the Japanese threat to Perth was diminishing as the war progressed.

The Wing's reporting too had been upgraded. The basic factual reporting style under Patrol Wing 10 had shifted from one-page reports to multi-page reports which detailed aircraft dispositions, included engineering information and areas which included training activities such as target towing or strafing practice for new pilots based in Perth. Reports on advance bases and each of the three tenders also now featured as permanent parts of the unit daily and monthly report and gave a comprehensive view of all Wing operations and activities.

December's report typified the new flow of information. Each Catalina was numbered and reported on. Nineteen Catalinas were recorded as available, with most at Pelican Point but with Exmouth noted as becoming the most-used advance base. Activities cited included one plane being used to 'check-out a new squadron pilot',[277] while another was undertaking target practice while Catalinas were despatched to the east for deep-level maintenance. Two Catalinas were recorded as being at advance base Bravo, Geraldton, with other planes on patrol as assigned. The reports reveal the diverse nature of Fleet Wing 10's fuller operations as 1942 came to an end. Utility planes of Scouting Squadron were mainly flying from Maylands's airstrip carrying equipment and conducting inner harbour patrols over Fremantle. One Catalina was acting as a tow plane (towing aerial targets), another flew Commander Munsdorf to Exmouth, another on what was deemed a local flight, and yet another performing an engine run-in procedure. Perth's skies were busy and the Wing was on full display to the public at the end of 1942.

Maintenance too was an important part of running the Wing. The same report indicated that several planes were undergoing engine overhauls and landing-gear repairs. Field research, conducted for this thesis, noted that at the Royal Perth Yacht Club remnants of the maintenance equipment remain with a device still visible in the beaching area there which aided in gyroscopic and fuselage balance adjustments on site. Other remnants such as the winching ramp also remain as do several mooring buoys.[278] Pelican

---

[275] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 27–30 November 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[276] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–30 December 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[277] ibid.

[278] A gyroscopic alignment device used by the Americans can be seen within the beach at the Royal Perth Yacht Club foreshore directly in front of the clubhouse where a ramp once existed.

Point was able to undertake only first-line maintenance in Perth with local industry doing what they could to help. Other local facilities were used with the air force at Bullsbrook supporting the Wing's Catalinas with some maintenance requirements. But when deeper-level Catalina support was required, planes were sent east. One plane, 101–P–7, was sent to Rathmines in New South Wales in December for maintenance, where Australian Catalinas were located and maintained.

In another activity during the month, plane P–6 was undergoing salvage in Exmouth where it had crashed during the death of Lieutenant Krogh after his accident there.[279] The plane was unable to be repaired, but usable parts were salvaged, as all parts were considered as highly valuable, and if possible, recycled at Pelican Point or repaired by local industry in Perth for reuse.

December was marked by more benign patrols and the continued build-up of the Pelican Point base, while advance bases too were strengthened. Commanders Peterson and Munsdorf frequently inspected the three advance bases north to ensure combat readiness was maintained, should the Japanese strike, but no enemy action was forthcoming in December. While a lull in the threat was occurring, the Wing was able to send more planes to Rathmines for maintenance. The Wing was now developing a state of preparedness approaching full readiness after the ravages of early 1942. Despite the reduction in the enemy's presence, an alert was recorded on 8 December when Catalina 101–P–15 was sent on patrol from Geraldton after receiving information of a possible surprise attack. All gun stations were manned and the plane fully armed in case of confrontation. The alert turned out to be false and normal operations resumed.[280]

While no engagements with the Japanese were recorded, other incidents occurred and were mentioned, including one plane forced down at sea while on patrol west of Geraldton in open water. Another Catalina was despatched to assist, and both planes were able to return to base without serious mishap.[281]

Later in the month, on 17 December, a Dutch Catalina landed in Geraldton and overnighted there before proceeding to Perth and the east coast. The Dutch plane had flown from China Bay in Ceylon and was a part of a British Catalina squadron there. The Dutch reported no contacts *en route* which included passing Cocos Island, an area known to be patrolled by the Japanese. On 22 December the Dutch Catalina returned via Perth and Geraldton and flew back to Ceylon without reporting any unusual occurrences. The Dutch used the practice of night flying through enemy patrolled zones and overflew Cocos at night as a defensive measure.[282] This tactic was emulated by unarmed Qantas planes as a safety precaution when they flew the Indian Ocean route.

---

[279] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 2 December 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[280] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 6 December 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[281] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 13 December 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[282] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 17–22 December 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

At the end of the month, the Wing experienced yet another aircraft loss when on 29 December a utility plane flight crashed at Pearce air base in Perth, fortunately no injuries resulted. As planned, Catalina patrols carried on with no further contacts made during the month.[283]

The relatively low enemy contacts indicated that the Wing's policy of aggressive northern area patrolling was now having a detrimental effect on Japanese planning and operations. By late 1942 the build up of planes, maintenance arrangements and long-range patrolling out of Exmouth was impacting heavily on the decreasing rate of incidents experienced with the Japanese. Exmouth was a perfect base with fuelling facilities provided by the Americans themselves, initially established for submarine operations from there. The facility enabled greater frequency of operations and was a valuable asset to the Wing in the pursuit of extended patrolling along the coast and deeper into the Indian Ocean.

Qantas, November–December 1942: Fysh Prepares to Visit England

Things were now gathering speed so far as Qantas and Fysh were concerned. McMaster was at the time falling into poor health and McMaster told Fysh that Fysh would have to understand that McMasters's help was limited in assisting at this time, especially with the government and its pressing wartime priorities requiring McMaster's attention.[284] Fysh realised that the Australian end was closing off without McMaster's support in Canberra. It was bad enough having failed in his one independent initiative to subvert the Department of Civil Aviation's hurdles when he directly approached the Governor-General. He knew that as time passed more efforts with Canberra and the bureaucracy were futile. It was imperative, therefore, that he moved with urgency in encouraging the British, his partners, to act.

Fysh had written to Runciman and explained the process with Australian authorities of setting up his trip to England and meeting face-to-face to make his pitch. Fysh would make his argument stressing the consequences of the loss of the Empire route for Australia. Mail was the key factor for both companies' ledgers and the contract was critical to Qantas as, in the meantime, it was surviving financially on maintenance work, which fortunately was available in abundance. American and Australian forces were providing as much as Qantas could take.

Fysh identified that Qantas's purpose in establishing the Indian Ocean service revolved chiefly around three main factors:

a. The Empire mail service as a continued transport and communication system of Empire with its ability to carry diplomatic and military mail (thus meeting Wavell's needs and gaining his support)

b. Qantas's critical need to maintain its role as a functioning international air service and aviation business by continuing or developing new international air routes

---

[283] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 29 December 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 21 March 2018).

[284] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 77. McMaster had previously suffered from a heart attack and was in poor health.

c. Breaking the Japanese air blockade imposed on Qantas and the British through the loss of their Singapore terminus and contribute to national pride and wartime morale particularly in Perth where the threat was most closely felt[285]

British Overseas Airways Corporation[286] - and its predecessor Imperial Airways - had taken on the Empire mail scheme with a serious political and industrial intent and as a way to show its dominance of global air routes. It also aimed to demonstrate to the Empire's Dominions, possessions and other territories that Britannia could still rule the skies. For the two airlines, air-delivered mail was the perfect way to pioneer new routes, and at the same time utilise government contracts to pave the way.[287] These were powerful arguments in Fysh's favour.

However, Fysh recognised that the British were limited in their operations due to the war in Europe. As a consequence, the Empire service from London now terminated in Karachi, with no service beyond that point. Fysh assessed that the British, like Qantas, were not prepared to lose their Australian (and extended New Zealand) air route without a fight. He had gained this knowledge through his interactions with Runciman and was confident that his plan would be persuasive when they met.

Just over 12 months were to pass after the fall of Singapore and the visit to London by Qantas's General-Manager Fysh. The visit culminated in an agreement with his British partners, then with the British Air Ministry and Qantas, for the carriage of diplomatic mail, air-graph mail[288] and passengers from Lake Koggala in Ceylon to Qantas's Nedlands Marine Base in Perth. Qantas's plan was realistically conceived, being based on previous Dutch crossings of the Indian Ocean from Perth to Ceylon. The experience of the Dutch flights showed that the Japanese air blockade could be flouted using night flying as means of avoidance. The knowledge that a night crossing of the Japanese patrolled area was achievable without set-down in Cocos was recognised as a significant factor in the plan. It reinforced the belief that that Qantas too could undertake a reliable trans-Indian Ocean service beginning in 1943. The proposed plan could also circumvent the danger posed by the Japanese by flying west from Perth to a base in Ceylon to re-link Perth and Western Australia with the nation's British Allies and prove that the Japanese air blockade could be overcome.

---

[285] 'Preliminary Outline of Possible Indian Ocean Operations second Draft 30 June 1942', op. cit.

[286] 'Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service', 29 September 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[287] P. Ewer, op. cit., p. 75.

[288] Air-graph mail was a form of physical mail using microfiche which enabled much greater loads to be carried while reducing average weight.

Chapter 5: 1943

Fleet Air Wing 10, January–February 1943: Northern Patrols Intensify

Fleet Air Wing 10 entered a period of consolidation at the beginning of 1943. Over the past nine months, the Wing had expanded its gains by establishing long-range patrols, allocating resources to harbour surveillance and escorting shipping along the Western Australian coast. The Wing's efforts had provided a level of comfort to Perth residents as the patrols established a defensive screen, or no-fly zone, well into the State's north, far away from Perth.

The consolidation phase now saw intensified efforts in the primary tasks of patrolling, undertaking combat missions, training, providing military transport, and carrying out operational sorties as circumstances dictated. The next period in the Wing's evolution was characterised by fewer enemy contacts, particularly aircraft-to-aircraft contacts, and irregular submarine contacts. The reduced focus on airborne contacts enabled the Wing to concentrate more on training and the continued build-up, and integration of incoming Catalinas to reach the Wing's pre-war aircraft levels. This capability build-up was closely monitored by senior Wing staff inspections at Pelican Point and visits to forward bases, mainly to Exmouth which was also a supply and fuelling point for American submarines, often later referred to as Potshot.[289]

But despite the sense of order that existed through the Wing in early 1943, morale was dealt a blow when an aircraft emergency was experienced in Exmouth, where a Catalina was involved in a rough landing. The crash occurred on 23 January 1943 when a Wing Catalina departed Exmouth at 1000 hours with army personnel aboard. *En route* to Pelican Point, at 1414 hours, an engine fire occurred which forced the plane into an emergency landing north of Wreck Island, not far south of Geraldton. The emergency forced the Catalina to land on a nearby beach but with no personnel injured, though the plane was badly damaged. Pelican Point despatched a rescue plane and USS *William B Preston* was directed to render assistance. The Catalina arrived overhead reporting all personnel safe on the beach while the USS *William B Preston* was now redirected to maintain its previous course, as land transport would now undertake the evacuation of personnel. To comply with operating procedures, the situation was quickly investigated and a Catalina from Pelican Point flew to Exmouth with an investigation board, which returned the same day after completing its work. The board of investigation concluded that a mechanical fault was the cause of the incident.[290]

Apart from the primary mission of maritime patrolling, in the background, training was well underway and building, fulfilling the secondary role of Fleet Air Wing 10's broader mission. This arrangement required experienced management to ensure a balance in operations and training. New pilots and crews were yet to experience combat or the death of colleagues in service. The policy from higher command was that after sufficient training was completed, the newer pilots would be sent east to front-line units after qualifying in the Catalina skill-sets of patrol flying, night flying, target identification, bombing, mine laying and strafing. These were the basic pilot skills required for front-line duty to fly a Catalina in an operational theatre or front-line squadron. Non-pilot crew skills also were being raised to required operational standards with prime skills including

---

[289] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 23 January 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 25 March 2018).

[290] ibid.

machine gunning, loadmaster operations, bomb aiming, navigation and engineering knowledge. The American Catalina also carried a dedicated engineer who observed the twin-wasp engines through windows in the 'tower', within the high mounted parasol wings of the flying boat, where the engines could be observed in flight and were well away from water during take-off and landing.[291] The intensity of training was now building.

Although no enemy aircraft contact had so far been recorded in 1943, Fleet Air Wing 10 had several close encounters with possible Japanese submarines. As previously cited, submarine identification was often a difficult skill and several misidentifications had occurred, so-called friendly fire incidents. A Catalina patrolling in sector one, about 100 miles west of Exmouth, sighted a submarine and held contact for five minutes while the crew determined its identification. No accurate identification could be made so the submarine was listed as a probable enemy contact. No further contact was made with the submarine and the Catalina patrol continued without further recordings of any contact.[292]

But while the enemy's presence was now scarce in the patrol sectors, January brought another Catalina incident as Lieutenant William Ball crash-landed on the Swan at Pelican Point. The incident was assigned to pilot error, 'bad judgement',[293] stated the unit's logbook. January's weather was regarded as generally fine, and the river calm during Perth's summer weather patterns. The plane was severely damaged and recovered to the shore where local repairs were attempted.[294]

The trend of minimal contacts continued into February. No contacts were made by Catalinas but other operational activities ensured the Wing was heavily involved in operational tasking to the war effort. The major efforts again focussed on the Exmouth patrol sectors and the sectors now established far off the coast and into the Indian Ocean in search of enemy aircraft and submarines. The deeper patrolling both north and further west into the Indian Ocean indicated a slackening of Japanese probes towards Australia in those area, contacts which were occurring regularly in 1942 as the west coast was regularly bombed and strafed. The diminished threat allowed modified patrol sectors to be developed as well as other activities to take place such as the rate of training to be increased and assist the broader war effort around and outside of Perth.

With a slackening of operational patrolling intensity in 1943, submarine observation flights had now been introduced as a new training activity for the Wing and on 6 February a Catalina set out from Pelican Point as the first such activity. The activity became an actual search the next day as a submarine was sighted off the Perth coast. Pelican Point-based Catalinas were immediately able to respond and add reality to the training activity, giving valuable experience to recently arrived pilots from initial-entry flight training schools.[295] The situation highlighted the importance of sea surface patrol and observation techniques, one that was put into immediate practice. As aircraft sightings diminished,

---

[291] ibid.

[292] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 26 January 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[293] ibid.

[294] ibid.

[295] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 6–7 February 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 30 March 2018).

the pursuit of submarines became an equally important activity for Catalinas. In this case the submarine slipped away, as so many did, but its activity had been interrupted and to that degree of impact, the Catalinas had done their job.

Despite the excitement of new training activities and the seemingly diminished enemy threat, by 8 February 1943 Wing focus was again concentrated on safety and performance when a Catalina crashed on a beach near Exmouth. In a continued submarine patrol, a Catalina was attempting a night take-off, lost altitude and stalled, crashing into a nearby beach. No injuries were recorded and the fate of the plane also unrecorded.[296]

However, general operations were thrown into disarray when a cyclone struck the area around Geraldton. Depending on location along the Western Australian coast, weather was always considered when patrols were planned. Pelican Point in Perth had predictable mid-latitudes' weather patterns, seasonal and consistent, but further north was a different proposition, particularly from Exmouth and even further north where tropical cyclones were experienced. The cyclone was described as severe and no patrols were conducted from Geraldton on 13 February and the following day. Any planes out on patrol were ordered to Geraldton base, an open sea location protected by a long spit, for the duration. Similarly, tenders were ordered to port, depending on which location they were at.[297]

The occurrence of cyclones reinforced the wisdom of locating the Wing further south in Perth. Wing senior officers had judged that Exmouth and northern waters were problematic, mainly for the doubt over all-year-round operations, due to rough seas and weather patterns. The sea-state was affected by winds often whipped-up by cyclones which were prevalent in the north, during the local cyclone season. Perth was well away from the impact of the weather that could disrupt patrolling and prevent take-offs and landings. The extra flight-time from Perth was a small penalty but still allowed for transit north, and with Geraldton and Exmouth as forward bases, operations could be mounted and mostly sustained using the three bases, even when adverse weather interdicted.

Another feature of the Wing during February was the development of ongoing maintenance of Catalinas at Rathmines, the Australian air force Catalina base north of Sydney in New South Wales. Aside from the use of Rathmines, Kalgoorlie in Western Australia was also used as a maintenance facility to overhaul Catalina engines. This facility, 4 Aircraft Depot, was based in Kalgoorlie's twin-town of Boulder at the local racecourse, where the Depot was established. The facility was also later used by Qantas to overhaul and repair their identical Catalina twin-wasp radial engines, a common engine made by Pratt and Whitney and used in the ubiquitous and long-serving Douglas DC-3 aircraft.[298] To reach Boulder, rail was used to transport the engines back and forth from the inland and well-protected site, some 350 miles from Perth.

---

[296] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 8 February 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 30 March 2018).

[297] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 14 February 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[298] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–28 February 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

February was a month which saw the threat to Perth ably defended by the American Catalinas and tenders as sightings of the enemy showed a reduction to the threat of coastal bombings. However, the Japanese were applying pressure and Western Australia was far from secure. To prove the point, at month's end Catalina preparedness was tested again when Exmouth experienced an air raid warning and planes took to the sky. But no enemy planes were sighted and all Catalinas returned to base safely, reaffirming that the Wing's tactics had again shown that the skies above Perth and Western Australia were becoming safer with decreasing airborne contacts as the months progressed.[299]

Qantas, January–February 1943: Fysh Prepares to Take His Case to England

The planning of the flights that Fysh would include in his argument to take to Runciman was something that would have to meet strict aviation and political requirements. Breaking the Japanese blockade of Australia's western air approaches was both a military and political initiative and would have to be viable on both fronts to be approved as well as safe.

The military case was being established through Wavell's intervention, but the aviation practicality was still to be established, given the very long-distance flight considered. Qantas was planning to fly non-stop and do it with extra weight, more than any Catalina using this route before had attempted. These two factors, weight and duration, were beyond the scope of the earlier Dutch flights which had usually stopped at Cocos and had departed from Western Australia's north coast taking a shorter route with less weight to Trincomalee on Ceylon's east coast. Qantas would use Perth as its departure point, to Lake Koggala on the west coast and not Trincomalee.[300] Perth itself was further from Ceylon than was Exmouth in Western Australia's north, which was deemed as too rough for all-year-round Catalina operations. Internal planning reports from Qantas identified that Exmouth was unsuitable and moved the set-down location to Perth, which offered ideal conditions. The implications here were payload, duration and fuel. The longer distance meant more fuel and less payload, and payload was the mail, passengers and cargo weight, as well as being the reason behind the income stream to be derived from the flights.[301] This route was planned to avoid the reach of the Japanese threat posed by their air power capabilities and patrols around Cocos, while maintaining the option for Qantas having Cocos as an emergency stop, if required.

Captain Ambrose, another of Fysh's senior aviators, ensured that Fysh was well armed with the strongest arguments he could mount. Ambrose pointed out that it was imperative that the fundamental difference in long-range flight was understood in the plan. Fysh, as a pilot, understood this, but he had to convince the British, some of whom were not literate in such areas of flight planning. Captain Crowther pointed out that in long-range flight planning two types of long-range plans were possible. The first was known as maximum-range planning, which was assessed as total flight time to destination. The second type was one known as a cruising plan, which prioritised maximum endurance which is used to remain in the air as long as possible. Due to the

---

[299] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 21 February 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[300] The Dutch did achieve on one occasion a non-stop flight from Exmouth to Trincomalee, but this too was a shorter distance than the one to be flown by Qantas direct from Perth to Lake Koggala.

[301] A. Corbett, official correspondence to H. Fysh, op. cit.

danger of the Japanese threat, Qantas used a maximum-range planning scenario as their circumstances in flight had to ensure duration over range as the Indian Ocean crossing would be over open water, with only Cocos as the sole safety back-up should a landing be required. This was the plan with which Ambrose, Crowther and Tapp furnished Fysh, as he prepared to visit England and convince the British of the suitability of his plan.[302]

With planning approaching fruition, the organisation of the trip to Britain was now to be considered. It was wartime and no link to England from Australia existed other than the long route from the eastern seaboard of Australia. As Fysh prepared in early January 1943, he wrote to McMaster expressing his frustration at the lack of progress. His ire was aimed at the British when he said to McMaster, 'If a British Policy is not agreed soon, it seems to me it will take years to pick up the pieces, if ever'.[303] This outburst was in response to Runciman's earlier invitation to visit when Fysh formally approached McMaster to seek permission to travel to England and meet with Runciman directly. One of the administrative issues Fysh faced in wartime was his priority as a passenger. He had written to McMaster to discuss his situation given that, in wartime, passenger places would be at a premium and he would likely need McMaster to have the Prime Minister's blessing to secure a seat. Fysh told McMaster that he would only get a seat via America to England by Mr Curtin asking for it. He was right as, in the background, Corbett was again taking a different direction, and Fysh needed timely action to forestall any alternative aviation plans at government to disrupt his own plans.[304]

Fysh's nemesis Corbett was busy developing his own plans. The Corbett initiative involved proposals for mail distribution and post-war aviation policy. Both McMaster and Fysh dismissed the plan, but General Kenney, of the United States Army Air Force, praised the report. Predictably, the report favoured the American plan to scoop up post-war routes, and this meant Qantas would be left isolated when hostilities were over. Time was clearly against Qantas and it was imperative that Fysh press on and coordinate with the British to overcome Corbett's plan, which threatened Qantas's existence both immediately and post-war as an international airline.[305]

While the background administrative work was underway, Fysh maintained the pressure with the British as he prepared for his trip. Stressing to them that, although the Empire service as we know it had been cut, the Indian Ocean connection must be maintained at all costs.[306] He added that it had been easier to clarify things with the British but that the same did not apply to the Commonwealth government in Australia, having to deal with Corbett as the conduit with the government on aviation matters. Still, in his summary of pre-trip matters, Fysh stated that he was aware that things were in the hands of the Australian Prime Minister when it came to the Indian Ocean connection. To comfort Fysh, Edgar Johnson, Deputy Director of the Department of Civil Aviation, and a former First World War aviator, like Fysh, wrote to him wishing him well in his endeavours with the British. Fysh took this as a positive sign that his trip would eventuate and he

---

[302] L. Ambrose. op. cit., pp. 3–4.

[303] H. Fysh, official correspondence to F. McMaster, 4 January 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[304] J. Gunn, op. cit., p. 108.

[305] ibid.

[306] ibid., p. 113.

would get approval from the Prime Minister and he could sell his plan to the cooperative Runciman and then the other British entities.[307]

Fleet Air Wing 10, March–April 1943: Extended Patrols and Higher Training Priorities

March operations reflected those of February with only a few enemy contacts recorded. The evidence by now indicated that the Japanese air threat had largely abated and that the American Catalinas had established primacy in their patrol areas. It seemed that the Japanese in early 1943 had given up their air probes across the Indian Ocean towards Western Australia. Certainly within Fleet Air Wing 10's patrol sectors, which were now concentrated around Exmouth where one tender was in constant operation, this was the case. Weather now seemed to be the Wing's enemy with storm warnings grounding planes in Exmouth, but while bad weather interfered with aviation, submarines were free to move at will. The Catalinas that were in Exmouth and Heron Haven were ordered to return to Pelican Point and seek safety away from the storms.[308]

But, despite a dearth of Japanese planes spotted, enemy submarines were sighted on 8 March. However, on this occasion it was not a Catalina on patrol, as weather had forced them to shelter, but the USS *Childs* which was *en route* from Geraldton to Fremantle which sighted the enemy. The submarine was sighted just south of Geraldton and approximately 30 miles offshore. A Catalina was sent from Geraldton to search but, after three hours, the search was abandoned with no sighting made. The Catalina continued to patrol for the following two days but no further sighting was recorded.[309]

Again, weather prevented further patrols with all planes north of Geraldton sent south until weather improved. Two Catalinas were sent to Geraldton while three went to Pelican Point. At the same time a Dutch Catalina had arrived in the area and encountered the same rough weather. The Dutch Catalina was forced down near Point Cloates, about 80 miles south of Exmouth, where it lay in the sea alongside the beach there. The crashed-landed Dutch plane was tended by USS *William B Preston,* restarted and flown on to Geraldton where it stayed overnight.[310] On inspection, the Catalina was found to have run out of fuel after its long flight from Trincomalee in Ceylon.

The Dutch had flown the Exmouth to Trincomalee route previously, proving that soon Qantas, who would use their own Indian Ocean flight, could transit directly from Western Australia to Ceylon, but only with expert planning and with long-range fuel tanks.[311] The Dutch also showed the danger of the long-distance route when it came to

---

[307] ibid., pp. 115–116.

[308] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 5 March 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[309] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 8–9 March 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[310] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 14 March 1943, ((accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 March 2018).

[311] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 13 March 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 March 2018).

weather and fuel. In this case, while they had not reached their destination, they had survived, despite a crash into the open sea.

Later in the month another Dutch plane overnighted at Pelican Point where the Wing provided accomodation and refuelling. Pelican Point and Perth were showing themselves to be a versatile and valuable part of the Allied war effort supporting Allies such as the Dutch and providing fuel and accomodation for them at both Exmouth and Pelican Point.

Fleet Air Wing 10 was able to demonstrate its value to the greater war effort when in April it undertook another long-range mission. In a deployment where the Catalina's long-range capabilities were required, the Wing was ordered to send a Catalina to Chunking, China, to replace a Catalina on rotation there. Aside from the Corregidor flight, Chungking was the second long-distance deployment from Pelican Point undertaken by the Wing in support of Allied requirements and showed the versatility and importance of the unit.

By the end of April the Wing was extending patrols even deeper into the Indian Ocean in search of the enemy. But despite all precautions taken, a Catalina was lost on patrol some 200 miles out to sea off Carnarvon on the Western Australia coast.[312] Seven Catalinas were sent to search for it but no trace of the plane was found. There was no report of enemy aircraft in the area and its fate remains unknown, most likely an engine fire or set down on the sea and in an unrecoverable situation, unable to extract itself.[313]

For several months in early 1943 the Wing had not experienced an enemy aerial contact. The paucity of contacts allowed patrols to venture further north and deeper into the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, the benefits of decreased contacts and the relatively small amount of time spent on chasing down submarines allowed more time to be spent on other important tasks such as training. While the front-line role of the Wing was to deter enemy aggression and reduce any threat to Perth and the western coast of Australia, the secondary roles were also important, and through increasing its training capacity the Wing had the secondary impact of increasing the overall skill-sets across its resource base. The increased training time also benefited the east coast aviation units to whom the graduated pilots and crews were sent. Through this program, all Catalina operations were strengthened and the enemy threat to Perth further diminished.

Commander Munsdorf, who led the Wing in 1943, indicated that training undertaken was basically on-the-job style training with classrooms basically non-existent. The Wing, he reported, had initially tried to set-up a curriculum, install a classroom, show training films, give lectures and develop brochures on flying safety. But staff shortages prevented the provision of the specialist staff that the Wing needed to develop and implement formal training procedures. Even weather charts were difficult to obtain and it was felt that Perth was the end of the line when it came to logistics and supply. It certainly was physically the end of the line so far as transport went, as logistics were mostly sourced from the east coast and easily pilfered by other units along the way. The Wing, therefore, resorted to picking up its own items when Catalinas flew east for maintenance or exchange as well as scouring Perth for any available items. Formal training was

---

[312] Australian War Memorial, https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/underattack/end/navy. Accessed 21 August 2019.

[313] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 30–31 March 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

certainly inhibited but, regardless, the resourceful staff pressed on as best as they could in far away Perth.[314]

This response to a lack of formal training was more informal or on-the-job training. This was something with which pilots and crew were more at home. But it seemed that they didn't have much choice. Munsdorf reported that in special areas such as the new Norden bomb sight, which was used on the Catalina and taught about in training courses were also conducted for both Australian and New Zealand personnel, formal training was required. Wing personnel were sent to Rathmines Australian air force base for this training. It was later reported by the Americans that in patrolling, they easily sighted targets using the bomb sight, while Australian planes that patrolled with them had trouble in finding targets. It seemed that the Americans' impromptu training practices yielded better results than formal training and gave the Wing crews greater offensive skills in the circumstances. Field-level training following formal training became the *forte* of the Wing as it adapted to the Pelican Point situation of lack of specialist trainers by running practical drills and sequences, using the Catalina as the classroom guided by those crews which had received formal training classes. Using observation and oversight by the qualified and experienced pilots and crew, training in navigation, night flying, reconnaissance and other skill-sets were practiced locally over Perth skies. Initially, these skills were demonstrated over Pelican Point and environs and later, as additional planes and patrol crews became available, the planes themselves were used as flying classrooms.[315]

While patrolling remained the priority in early 1943, training remained an important and ongoing role of Fleet Air Wing 10 throughout its time in Perth. Professional development was as important as operations with one supporting the other in developing and maintaining competency and skills needed to prosecute their operations. The make-up of the Wing with Catalinas, utility planes and its tenders allowed multiple practice scenarios within a safe environment as well as during operational patrols as a follow-up. Patrols close to Perth, where least risk existed, were used when on-the-job airborne training was practiced.

These activities were on display above the skies of Perth and Western Australia on a regular basis. A comment from the time was published in a monograph of individual citizens' recollections of Catalinas on the Swan during wartime. Edna Daw, a Perth resident, attested to local sentiment about the Americans when she commented, no doubt reflecting the feelings of many other Perth residents, 'It was a time when things were fairly grim here. We were worried about the Japs moving down and those Catalinas started about that period. They were a very beautiful thing to see landing on the Swan'.[316] The Americans and their airborne activities reassured Perth's citizens that Fleet Air Wing 10 and its Catalinas were there to protect them.

Qantas, March–April 1943: Fysh Flies to London to Meet Runciman

By March 1943, Fysh's initiative to seek approval for his England trip had been successful. McMaster had achieved the granting of a seat via North America to Britain, and Fysh prepared to depart. He took with him the Indian Ocean route plan which Qantas

---

[314] G. Munsdorf, op. cit., p. 8.

[315] ibid., p. 9.

[316] B. Bunbury, *Rag, Sticks and Wire: Australians Taking to the Air*, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1994, p. 97.

had diligently developed since the loss of the route a year before. Crowther had taken the loss of the route personally after his final flight from Singapore in February 1942[317] [318] and was fully supported by Fysh who had maintained a dialogue with the British and had steadily established a closer relationship with Runciman who now headed British Overseas Airways Corporation, Qantas's partner in the Empire mail route.

On 16 March 1943, Fysh arrived at Amberley air force base in southeast Queensland and boarded an American B–24 Liberator for the long journey to England. The trip would last until August and, as he headed off, he left behind a physically declining McMaster, one of his original partners in establishing and building Qantas. McMaster was a key individual in promoting the company which was now almost out of the flying business and critically placed over the resumption of the Indian Ocean route. As the journey commenced, Fysh was now to experience his preferred Liberator long-range plane. He had suggested the plane as a suitable long-range replacement for Indian Ocean duties and now, at first hand, saw its capabilities as he island-hopped over the Pacific Ocean via Noumea, Canton Island, Honolulu and on to San Francisco.[319] But it was the Catalina that was the plane he had agreed would be used on the Indian Ocean route and was also the plane nominated by the British some months earlier. It was also the plane that Fysh himself would use to return home during the Indian Ocean crossing, some five months later.

But, in the meantime, Fysh was focussed not only on his own desperate situation, but also considered that of the British. His argument centred on the Japanese threat to Australia and the blockage of the western air route with Japanese air power spanning the former Dutch East Indies and far out into the Indian Ocean. He also appreciated that in early 1943 the British were face-to-face with the Germans across the Channel. He reflected that the British seemed taciturn at times, but conceded that they had their own concerns. Qantas was a small issue to them, but Fysh proposed to make his problem a British issue, which only they could solve. He noted that it was about obtaining an aircraft, but they, Qantas, 'just could not lay their hands on anything'.[320] The Catalina had been nominated, and as an American but British-flown aircraft, this was to be the eventual solution.

In preparation for the meeting, Fysh told Runciman that the policy of the Australian government was 'to give every assistance to the urgent reopening of the Empire services and to support participation by QEA[321], who had the necessary staff and experience'.[322] Despite Corbett's previous intransigence, McMaster's influence on Drakeford had succeeded, and Fysh confidently carried this message to Runciman. On his journey, Fysh found an American society that was keen to help and encourage his initiative, especially should he use American planes in place of the British Empire Class flying boats. Attitudes of anti-imperialism were prevalent as were those of the expectation of post-war American

---

[317] A. Leebold, op. cit., p. 26.

[318] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 11.

[319] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 172. Crowther also once warned Fysh that he had grave concerns that the Catalinas could operate successfully as he too favoured B-24 Liberators.

[320] ibid.

[321] Qantas Empire Airways was a private company and was known by that name until 1947 when it came under government control as just Qantas.

[322] H. Fysh, loc. cit.

aviation dominance. Fysh flew on to Montreal, then Prestwick in Scotland, and to an austere wartime England, where he commenced a four-and-a-half month stay.[323]

On 16 April Fysh had his first meeting with the British in Bristol. The British agreed that the re-opening of the route was of paramount importance and that the proposed service using Catalinas be seen as the first step in that process. Things were off to a good start and more encouraging news followed a week later when the British Director-General of Aviation informed Fysh that he saw the matter as already settled following the February 1943 agreement that Catalinas would be used with Qantas as the operating agent.[324] This was excellent news to Fysh but, still, Australia had to agree.

One hurdle foreseen by Fysh was the imminent resignations of Runciman and his chairman Clive Pearson. The issues were internal to the British but, so far as Fysh was concerned, apart from approval at the Australian end it was almost agreed. He hoped that McMaster was well enough to ensure that the agreement was not blocked by Corbett and Fysh trusted McMaster's finesse with Drakeford would pave the way. Fysh noted that the war had severely weakened British international commercial aviation, with a large loss of pilots and routes and internal change that threatened stability at a critical time. It was one more threat to his plan to procure the planes and commence the service as planned.

Runciman did not depart immediately from his post, and Fysh met with him to reaffirm arrangements. He was informed by Runciman that he, Runciman, and Pearson had demanded clear management guidelines for their airline, were rebuffed and as a point of principle resigned. But this was now 'water under the bridge' and Fysh forged ahead. Runciman brought important news which was that the planes would come from the military to the Air Ministry, via British Overseas Airways Corporation. Britain would pay but other arrangements would still have to be agreed to between Australia and Britain. Runciman also advised that Fysh should communicate with the caretaker chairman to reaffirm arrangements.[325] Fysh noted that, while many of the new people were eager and competent, a feature of their experience was a complete lack of aviation knowledge. Fysh realised he had the upper hand here as trust was a key factor and, so long as Fysh explained the aviation situation, the bureaucrats were happy to accept. This outcome was a complete contradiction to what he experienced in Australia with Corbett.[326]

But good news was close at hand and, on 22 April, while Fysh was in London, it was announced that the service was now approved and that the British would inform the Australian government that Qantas would act as the operating agent.[327] The British were in a state of war and nothing seemed certain. But Fysh need not have worried, as he himself would be traveling on his own Indian Ocean service when, in August 1943, he flew from London to Sydney using the Qantas Catalina, Indian Ocean leg, from Lake Koggala in Ceylon to Perth in Western Australia.

Fysh contacted McMaster who was still at work and arrangements were made at the Australian end. It seemed that the service was about to be inaugurated. In fact, by the time Fysh returned to Australia in August, the Indian Ocean service was up and running

---

[323] ibid., p. 173.

[324] ibid., p. 175.

[325] ibid., p. 176.

[326] ibid., pp. 176–177.

[327] J. Gunn, op. cit., p. 117.

and on its eighth return flight. Fysh's trip demonstrated the practicality of the service as well as its defiance of any Japanese air threat through that area, thus breaking the blockade that had existed since Singapore fell.

But between May 1943 and the service's commencement in July, much more work was to be done, including the establishing the new marine airbase in Perth from where flights would soon operate. Also needed was the creation of the Western Operations Division, which Captain Crowther would manage, the importation of crew and engineering staff, and the use of local workers and organisations that were essential to provide peripheral support and would have to be drawn from the local workforce and business community. The impact of Qantas on Perth was about to begin and, like the impact on the city by the Americans just over a year earlier, Qantas would establish a legacy well into the future.

Fleet Air Wing 10, May–July 1943: Operations Continue, Support from Local Entities and Social Attractions Impact

By May 1943, Fleet Air Wing 10 had been in Perth for just over a year. The Americans had arrived in March 1942 and by May 1943 had established themselves as semi-permanent residents and a new social influence on the local culture. With a large number of personnel living and working in and around the Pelican Point area, the impact of American servicemen was now a normal feature of life in Nedlands and the larger city area. Smaller numbers of Wing personnel also existed outside Perth, in Geraldton and Exmouth, where forward-base crews operated. In addition, tenders and planes came and went on a regular basis. The build-up of forces and the size of support required meant that local services were needed in areas of food logistics, entertainment and accomodation and, as a consequence, a small social scene sprang up as part of that.

But the main priority remained as mission performance and, across the broader time-span of May, June and July of 1943, operational patterns were maintained as the Wing continued to seek out the enemy and drive them back to their bases in the former Dutch East Indies.

To bolster its resources and ability to meet its targets, more Catalinas were needed and, on 3 June 1943, the Wing received new Catalinas to expand the operational squadrons. The planes came from the American Catalina base in Hawaii, where Fleet Air Wing 2 continued to supply Pelican Point with new and upgraded flying boats. The planes that joined the Wing in Perth came from Patrol Bombing Squadron 11, which had previously operated in New Guinea before reforming in San Diego, being equipped with the PBY-5 Catalina, then despatched back to the Pacific theatre, but this time to Pelican Point in Perth.[328]

The additional planes enabled intensified patrol work as well as the capability to plan and execute offensive operational sorties. As a result, in June 1943, the Wing was directed to prepare again to fly into enemy territory. Its previous mission, Operation Flight Gridiron, was a rescue mission but this one would be an attacking sortie. A year on from the previous mission, the Wing was ordered into action to attack the Japanese. Darwin was now available and close enough to Japanese forces in the former Dutch East Indies to launch an attack. For the Catalinas, Darwin was to be used as the operational arming base for its planes which flew unarmed from Perth for the mission and then on to the target.

---

[328] M. Koenig, op. cit., p. 10.

The raid was planned to take place on the Japanese base at Penfui in Timor. The date was set for 20 June 1943. For the raid, a formation of fully armed planes would have to be used. Six Catalinas departed Pelican Point bound for Darwin, then Penfui. Penfui had been used by the Japanese as a base to bomb targets such as Broome and Derby on the Western Australian coast with Japanese 'Betty' bombers deployed, using long-range tanks. The American Catalina attack was a follow-up to an earlier Australian raid on Penfui. Penfui remained as a constant threat to Western Australia, and even later in September 1943 an attack was launched from Penfui by the Japanese against Kalumburu Mission in northern Western Australia, at Drysdale River, during which several local civilians were killed.[329]

The raid on Penfui was described in the Wing War Diary as an enemy contact, officially an 'action with enemy' report. Conditions on the day were described as clear with unlimited visibility. The plan was to attack and bomb the Penfui aerodrome and deny the enemy, through disruption, of a place for hostile operations. Incendiary and demolition bombs were used to carry out the task, with a fully armed Catalina able to carry four bombs per plane, plus guns. The Japanese did not send up any aircraft with the Americans encountering only anti-aircraft fire, which was used by the Japanese to defend the base. The report stated that the attack lasted 40 minutes and was carried out by a six-plane formation, which immediately returned to base upon successful completion of the attack. No American casualties were sustained during the attack with all planes returning unscathed. The post-attack damage assessment recorded that the Catalinas achieved probable destruction of the anti-aircraft battery, as well as destruction of buildings and ground facilities (importantly the airfield). The raid was assessed as a complete success.[330]

For the Catalinas, one-dimensional style patrolling had now become both patrolling and attack formations and, into mid-1943, the mission profile of Fleet Air Wing 10 had changed. The change in tactics resulted in the last vestiges of Japanese air attacks on Western Australia being experienced and the almost complete absence of air-to-air contacts in patrol sectors. Within just over a year the Wing had secured its patrol sectors, attacked the Japanese in their own base and in doing so brought relief to the people of Perth and Western Australia from the omnipresent Japanese threat that they had endured since the outset of the war.

Although the Americans had succeeded in denying air space to the Japanese, they were not working in isolation and, in order to develop and sustain their efforts, they relied on local entities to assist them. Located nearby to Pelican Point base was the University of Western Australia, which became an integral part of the Catalina base, providing accomodation, facilities and technical support, amongst other benefits, to the Americans. The University features as a prominent institution in the story of the American Catalina base in Perth during the Second World War.

The University functioned as part of the base itself, had secured areas, personnel facilities within it and even took on some officers as students from the Wing. The relationship between the University and the Wing was close and provided facilities which were hard to find. The University also brought Americans into close contact with Perth

---

[329] L. Wiegand, unpublished manuscript, University of Western Australia Archives, Second World War File, 20 July 1943, p. 7.

[330] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 20 July 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 April 2018).

locals and established a sense of cooperation and mutual respect in the fight to defend Perth. Interactions between navy personnel and University staff led to new relationships, both collegial and personal. All facilities were considered and many used.

As a military unit, a parade ground was needed for the Wing and the main oval at the University, Riley Oval, was used for this purpose. On one occasion in 1943[331] the Wing paraded and a large crowd gathered including University staff, students and Perth civilians. During the parade several hundred officers and sailors turned out in full dress uniforms while medals and awards were presented. The presentations of medals and commendations were made for the many combat missions that the Wing had undertaken prior to its arrival in Perth. Medals were awarded to two sailors who had been part of General MacArthur's escape from Corregidor by patrol boat, then submarine, and finally by Catalina to safety, and eventually to Australia.

From the outset of its arrival in Perth, and as the war progressed, the University continued to play an important role in support of the Wing. By mid-1943, the University's Engineering Department was now well established and acted as an adjunct to the Wing's own engineering requirements, with some delicate mechanisms and equipment maintained and refurbished using departmental equipment.

To illustrate the degree of specialist support afforded to the Americans, on one occasion the Americans had run out of the required oil for the delicate Speedy bomb sight and help was sought. The University was asked if it could provide Singer sewing oil as a substitute and see if the delicate mechanism was able to work well enough using the lower grade oil. University staff went to work and by late the following morning it was ascertained that the Singer oil was capable of allowing the sights to work adequately. A late meal of sumptuous proportions was duly supplied as an offering of thanks.[332] The Americans often reciprocated in work tasks where a deficiency occurred, and examples of the Americans providing help to the University's staff were not uncommon. On one occasion a University staffer was copying maps for class. No such thing as a photo copying machine existed on campus and it was laborious work to make copies manually. The American Chief Petty Officer noticed and offered to help. Next morning 15 copies in large photographic size maps arrived on the staffer's desk, courtesy of the United States Navy.[333]

As time progressed in mid-1943, the cooperative intent continued across many areas within the University. Sometimes the Americans assisted and on other occasions the University reciprocated. For example, some University staff had access to the Officers' Mess and were amazed at the abundance of food on offer. While in other areas, the University established ladies' groups which were formed to offer social opportunities to the Americans. Students were enrolled with one officer, Lieutenant John Nelson, even attending University classes. Uniformed men were seen around the campus, and the University soon had fences erected to protect the more operational areas, such as engineering, within the campus.[334]

---

[331] This is an estimated date based on several sources including Wiegand, the Australian War Memorial and University of Western Australia archives. 1943 is confirmed, but not the month of the parade.

[332] C. Shervington, *University Voices: Traces from the Past*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia, 1987, pp. 43–44.

[333] ibid., p. 44.

[334] ibid., pp. 42–43.

The University also played a role in providing command buildings and accommodation for officers and sailors alike. Spare land saw tents and then permanent accomodation erected. Space was at a premium with even empty and vacant office spaces and quiet out of the way areas in buildings used for short-term accomodation. One sailor described the presence of Quonset huts that personnel used after initially sleeping in tents, and any available accommodation they could find. Some officers' quarters were established near to the campus, north of Stirling Highway on what is now Currie Hall. The University boat shed became the Wing's command headquarters, where planning and communications were carried out.[335] The actual boat shed is still there and was visited as part of field research for this thesis and functions as it did pre-war, as a boat shed for local rowing clubs.

Perth's public transport around the University was also heavily used by the Americans, during which more direct contact with Perth's population was experienced. Navy sailors, with no other forms of transport available, were known for using the local tram service outside the University that ran along Stirling Highway and then Mounts Bay Road from Nedlands to the city. Reports from the time indicate that the tram was a frequently used service, taking sailors to and from the city, with its bars and clubs well attended.[336] One recollection quoted was that the tram drivers ensured that American service personnel were always welcome onboard, no matter how large the number of other passengers on the tram at the time. Local transport services, from all directions, remained overcrowded and growing well into July of 1943, particularly the route that passed by the University. One lecturer recalls: 'I can remember after a late lecture or a late tutorial having to take a tram to Claremont in order to be able to get onto a tram which would take me to Perth, because by the time the trams reached the University stop they were so crammed that no self-respecting tram driver would stop to pick-up University people'.[337] The passenger load was driven by the large number of Americans in residence around the University precinct.

The American experience for the University was, nevertheless, challenging and required re-adjustment by staff and students alike. Archival documents indicate that, when 'air force' (actually the United States Navy) Catalinas arrived in Crawley, it was at a time when the University was expanding, something that came to halt when the war broke out and Perth was closer to the front-line than were Sydney or Melbourne. Initially, a greater sense of war permeated Perth in the year 1942 than was being felt in mid-1943, as the threat of war, even invasion, had diminished and the idea of the Japanese threat upon Perth was now far less felt. But University staff, nevertheless, continued to undertake air-raid precautions and practiced security awareness communications as part of their regimen.

The Americans rotated aircraft over their time in Perth, with University records quoting that there were about 60–70 Catalinas, overall, based at Crawley from 1942 to 1944.[338] This ensured a large personnel group remained in place and activities ongoing, day and night. The Catalinas started up every morning, refuelling at 4 am at the end of Crawley Avenue. Refuelling went on until 6 am. Some planes went out and returned at

---

[335] L. Wiegand, op. cit., p. 3.

[336] J. Gregory, op. cit., p. 125. Reference is made to American bars and facilities quickly established in Perth.

[337] C. Shervington, op. cit., pp. 42–43.

[338] ibid., pp. 43–44.

dusk, others did practice take-offs and landings. The Americans used Winthrop Hall as a landing marker and planes came down close to the building as they approached for landing. Inside the University, the noise was horrendous as low-flying twin-engine planes roared overhead, either on full power for take-off or using controlled power landings.[339]

Other local institutions also helped out. Aside from the help given to the Wing from institutions such as the University, lesser community groups such the 1st Pelican Point Sea Scouts helped the Americans with patrols and security watches. Their staff and members manned the Volunteer Air Observer Corps duties in an old lookout tower. Field research for this thesis reveals that the tower still stands at the end of Pelican Point as do some mooring buoys installed by the Americans.[340] Parents did day duty with boys from the Scout and Rover Troop, at dusk (after school). The Sea Scouts also provided a ferry service to and from the anchored seaplanes, patrolled the area to detect and clear debris, made camouflage nets and gave assistance to water police.[341]

The local institutions played an important part in the Wing's ability to operate. There was little doubt that the impact of the Americans at the University through residence, social activity and involvement with a number of departments was critical at the time. That impact grew as the war and requirements progressed into mid-1943, and Perth became a progressively safer haven from Japanese encroachment and residents' spirits lifted. The decreasing number of Japanese incursions south along the coast gave cause to less worrying times for Perth's residents. These were new times which could be enjoyed by both locals and the gregarious Americans, illustrated by the growth and level of entertainment on display within Perth's wartime social culture.[342]

The social impact which subsequently developed in Perth has been amply recorded, covering outcomes such as the growth in business at bars and clubs. Personal relationships blossomed too. Geraldton and Exmouth were also part of that social phenomenon and had small cadre staffs which rotated from Pelican Point in Perth, but permanent stays were rare in those locations. Some, however, stayed long enough to impact upon the local community in a personal way and romances and marriages ensued.[343]

One such situation arose with Lieutenant James Thanos, who was a Wing Catalina pilot, flying out of Geraldton. He met and married a local girl during his service there. Lieutenant Thanos was posted back to Texas in 1943 where he died in a training accident at Corpus Christi training base. His wife had accompanied him and was there at the time. His son Jim, who now lives in Perth, was born after the accident and never knew his father. Jim's mother returned to Geraldton but eventually moved to Perth where Jim was born in 1944.[344] The story of Lieutenant James Thanos and his family was one instance of how the Americans impacted at the personal level on the local population, even in the

---

[339] ibid., p. 43.

[340] Manager of Pelican Point Sea Scouts, interviewed by author, 21 August 2017.

[341] J. Blaxill, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

[342] A. Barker and L. Jackson, op. cit., pp. 78–80.

[343] J. Gregory, op. cit., p. 127.

[344] Jim Thanos, interviewed by author 12 August 2021. Jim's father was an American Catalina pilot based in Perth.

remote forward bases such as Geraldton and Exmouth, creating a lasting human legacy of the Americans' time in Perth and Western Australia.[345]

Romances continued to bloom and another serviceman, Lieutenant Louis Wiegand, who was posted to the Wing in 1943, became another American married to a local girl. After marriage he was allowed to live off-base in suburban Perth at a residence in Mount Lawley and even became a student at the University of Western Australia, like Lieutenant Nelson, during his stay in Perth. Wiegand was with another American unit nearby and had sought a posting to Fleet Air Wing 10 for personal reasons and his request was duly granted.[346] Many other male personnel found themselves in similar circumstances during the war, and a culture of social fraternisation between servicemen and locals quickly developed. The American wartime culture was more than just Fleet Air Wing 10 personnel, as many Americans also were posted to ships and submarines in nearby Fremantle. This era has been analysed by other historians and many instances of the Americans' social impact recorded.[347]

The social scene continued to grow and have an impact on Perth. With local men away, many women were attracted to social relations with American servicemen. One famous divorce case saw American Commander Eugene Thews accused of dalliances with a Perth serviceman's wife. The case went to the divorce courts and severely embarrassed the Americans.[348] Despite this awkward situation, Commander Thews was to become a part of the post-war American legacy and immortalised in Western Australia by having a street named after him in Exmouth, along with his commander, Admiral Lockwood.[349]

But by the end of July 1943, the situation in Perth was improving, including changes such as the formal recognition by the American authorities who were now willing to support their sailors' personal relationships. In 1943, 15 wives were transported to the United States, sailing there on a liberty ship via Queensland. One lady, Mrs Chandler, was a Perth wife who was involved in a personal relationship with an American serviceman; she able to depart and later return to Perth. On other occasions when a wedding, birthday or notable moment occurred, it resulted in an automatic dunking in Crawley Bay with all hands helping to create a festive occasion and push the threat of war to the back of locals' and servicemen's minds.[350]

The influx of many males into Perth was making a strong social impact. Having recovered from the rigours of war after a year in Perth, the men were beginning to feel that Perth was a regular Western city with a culture familiar to them, and their social habits reemerged and developed as a sense of normality returned. They began to become accustomed to Perth which had a civilised lifestyle, especially the longer-serving

---

[345] Jim Thanos's mother married an American serviceman and located with him to America where he died in an aircraft accident during the war.

[346] L. Wiegand, op. cit., p. 3–5.

[347] Both Sturma and Cairns have researched the impact of Fremantle submarines and the lifestyles of American sailors and officers in Western Australia.

[348] 'Gallery is Crowded for the Year's Swankiest Divorce', *The Mirror,* 22 May 1943. Available from: Trove (accessed 18 November 2018).

[349] Exmouth contains a number of streets which commemorate American sailors, officers and ships that served in the town during the Second World War.

[350] L. Wiegand, op. cit., p. 10.

sailors. To them it now became apparent that Perth was heaven after arduous front-line duty, one sailor commented.[351] Their social needs too were growing. Vehicles were immediately needed to not only transport personnel to and from their accommodation, but also to be used for what was euphemistically termed ‘logistical’ tasks. But they didn’t last long, as one unit report described: ‘Four Jeeps, two rolled by joyriders, one wrecked, one being used for dates’.[352] Local garages were doing a brisk business keeping the Americans’ cars on the road, and the cooperative spirit of Perth and the Americans was on full display. But it wasn’t always pleasant going as on occasions locals and Americans crossed paths, sometimes with violent results.[353]

Other social phenomena, aside from social relationships, developed as the Americans spread out beyond the bounds of Pelican Point, the University and Nedlands suburb. Accomodation beyond the Pelican Point precinct ensured that locals would come into contact with the Americans as time progressed.

When the Americans arrived in Perth, in large numbers and with many of senior rank, it was often by personal experience that local residents became aware of exactly who was amongst them. Officers came and went and after a year or more in town by mid-1943, civilians were still unused to high-ranking officers and the unusual lifestyles they lived. As an example of the interesting situations that developed, an American Admiral lived nearby to the base at Pelican Point and in early 1943 was promoted and replaced, his replacement arriving some months later.[354] No-one really had a clue what an Admiral looked like let alone what his rank insignia was. With approximately 1,200 personnel about the area, odd things were bound to happen. The Admiral had been placed in a large local residence, vacated by the outgoing Admiral, Lockwood. The house was known as ‘the bend in the road’, which in a search conducted for this thesis was found to be 4 Kings Park Avenue. Earlier in the war security was tight, but two ‘Oriental’ faces were seen ‘lurking’ about the house. Suspicions indicated that perhaps they could be Japanese spies. They were sighted next to the tennis court, observing the air-raid shelters that were recently built. It turned out that the ‘advance guard’ of the enemy was, in fact, two Filipino cooks, who served as part of the Admiral’s staff and came from the Philippines. In time, the cooks became very friendly with the neighbours and residents.[355]

Other notable residential accomodation was procured by the Americans, which further integrated them into the community. Around Pelican Point prominent locations included 72 The Avenue, Nedlands, 51 and 52 Birdwood Avenue, Dalkeith, and the nearby Nedlands Hotel. These locations were primarily officers’ residences. Sailors occupied quarters, as described, on the University campus and along Stirling Highway.[356] In some cases sailors and officers hired local rooms, and it was noted that often they paid exorbitant rates for their accommodation.[357]

---

[351] D. Messimer, op. cit., p. 279.

[352] ibid., p. 280.

[353] D. Pedley, op. cit., p. 3.

[354] L. Cairns, op. cit., p. 92.

[355] C. Shervington, op. cit., pp. 42–43.

[356] L. Cairns, op. cit., p. 139.

[357] J. Blaxill, op. cit., p. 12.

While Fleet Air Wing 10 now had the run of Perth, it was still patrolling and now engaging in serious offensive operations with the Japanese, including the Penfui attack. But, at the same time, and after a year or more in Perth, socially it was also now well integrated and very much at home. It was both pushing back the enemy, relieving Perth of the threat first imposed by the Japanese a year earlier, and now also socially impacting on the Perth culture.

But by mid-1943, the Americans were about to see the first proactive efforts of a new Catalina operator in town, Qantas. Together with the initially defensive and now offensive efforts put in place by the Americans, the added initiative now instigated by Qantas added to the notion that Perth was now relieved of the threat it once faced. With Qantas about to also defy the Japanese with their Indian Ocean flight, a new dimension was now to be added to the Catalina story. The history of Perth's dual Catalina operators was now about to begin in earnest.

Qantas, May–July 1943: The Indian Ocean Service from Approval to First Flight

Following the approval of the Indian Ocean service and towards the end of May 1943, Qantas's long-range Western Operations Division was established in Perth and headed initially by Captain Crowther. Crowther, who was a key architect of the Indian Ocean plan, had gone from planner to manager during the fulfilment of the Indian Ocean service initiative.

Although Fysh had negotiated the plan, in many ways it was Crowther's plan and he was not leaving anything to chance by becoming the inaugural manager to ensure its operational success. Crowther was firstly tasked with establishing a staff group and developing a base from which to operate the long-range flights to Ceylon, planned initially as once-weekly flights.[358] It was Crowther who had refused to give up on the break in the Empire route during the previous year. He was described as 'personally determined to plug the gap on the old route to England via India',[359] and it was Crowther who had pressed on with plans and ideas and, abetted initially by Lester Brain, approached Fysh and encouraged him to pursue this response. The culmination of the plan was to illustrate to all the world that the Japanese blockade of Australia's western coast was penetrable and that Qantas was leading that defiance, demonstrating its determination by undertaking the risk of a flight plan which took planes through Japanese-patrolled air space.

Crowther, now tasked with managing operations, was one of Qantas's most experienced long-range operations pilots. His *curriculum vitae* was lengthy and detailed, and included the long-range delivery flights of the Australian air force Catalinas from Honolulu, as well as former Empire flying boat operations, including his daring escape from Singapore as the Japanese forces were upon him and his passengers.[360]

The Western Division, under Crowther, characterised Qantas's approach to flying operations. Although the Nedlands facility was built on a 'wing and a prayer,' it was essentially a greenfield site. But, nothing was left to chance when it came to flying safety. Another Qantas senior pilot, Captain Ambrose described the diligence and detail applied to operations as 'a vast amount of work necessary to produce such a happy result, it is

---

[358] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 1.

[359] G. Mumford, op. cit., p. 2.

[360] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 11.

most important that we who are involved in air transportation as a business, should be familiar with every phase of such flights' preparation and execution'.[361]

Ambrose remarked, in his own monograph on the Indian Ocean service, that it was the company's prime objective to re-establish this link. Nearly 18 months were to pass after the fall of Singapore and before the Perth base was established. This followed a visit to London by Qantas's General-Manager Fysh, who negotiated an agreement with, firstly, British Overseas Airways Corporation, and then with the British Air Ministry, for the carriage of diplomatic mail, air-graph mail[362] and high-ranking passengers from Lake Koggala in Ceylon to Qantas's Nedlands Marine Base in Perth. Ambrose also revealed that the Indian Ocean service was expected to be an important link between the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia military Commands.[363] As referenced previously, Qantas's plan was realistically conceived being based on previous Dutch crossings of the Indian Ocean from Perth to Ceylon. The experience of the Dutch flights was recognised as a significant point in relation to the belief that Qantas too could fly across the Indian Ocean and make it a regular mail and passenger service that would seriously aid the Allied effort.

At the same time, it was important that the British-sourced, but American-made, Catalinas be proven as adequate to the task before the service could begin. To do so, in 1943, the British Air Ministry tasked 222 Group, Royal Air Force, Ceylon, to carry out a number of survey flights from Ceylon to Perth. The job was given to the Catalina squadrons from the British base at Lake Koggala, located south of Colombo near the city of Galle, in south-western Ceylon.[364]

The British survey flights soon commenced and on 3 May 1943 Wing Commander John Scott of the Royal Canadian Air Force departed from Lake Koggala, in Ceylon, arriving in Perth at 0845 the next day. This was the first of the proving flights that went off without incident and was a significant step in establishing the route. Significantly there was no contact with the Japanese.

The second flight was commanded by Wing Commander Thunder, and arrived in Perth on 13 May 1943. The inbound flight had gone well but, when the return leg was attempted, disaster struck. The flying boat was on its way to Lake Koggala when Squadron Leader Cowan, at the time the air force area navigation officer in Perth, received a signal that the departed aircraft was returning to Perth and requested navigational assistance. It transpired that the British navigator on board had made errors in route variations (a navigational feature required on the return journey) and had flown the Catalina many degrees off course, forcing the captain of the plane to abandon the journey and return to Perth. It was a serious and salutary example of just what could go wrong through inexperience. The incident proved Ambrose's earlier contention that, while the proving flights showed that the aircraft was capable of flying the distance, important factors other than aircraft reliability had to be closely planned and managed, lest disaster strike.[365]

---

[361] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 1.

[362] Air-graph was a form of transferring physical mail by using microfiche which enabled much greater loads to be carried while reducing average weight.

[363] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 1.

[364] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 17.

[365] A. Leebold, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

Five more survey flights were flown by the British, including the last proving flight, when Captain Tapp returned Squadron Leader P Rumbold's plane, *Altair Star*, and crew to Lake Koggala. That flight ended the assistance of the British. The return flight to Perth would become flight 1Q1, the official first flight of the Qantas Indian Ocean service,.[366]

In retrospect, the British survey flights proved little beyond what the Dutch had already shown over several crossings, which was that the Catalina was a suitable aircraft for the job. But, apart from reaffirming the capability of the Catalina, the proving flights enabled Qantas crew to fly the route and familiarise themselves with navigation, aircraft characteristics and the long duration of flights, which required disciplined crew management and attention to detail.

In retrospect, while the British flights were important, they only contributed marginally to the eventual Qantas-based flight planning which was shown to be extensive and well conceived. But two critical factors emerged for the plan to be a success all year round, and with the extra loads Qantas had planned. None of the previous aviators had flown overloaded aircraft over such a long distance, nor in all-year-round conditions across the equator. In technical terms, it was about year-round performance, and weight over distance over fuel was the critical calculation. Qantas knew that while the British flights proved that the aircraft could fly the distance, they did not carry the heavy overloads planned by Qantas, nor did they prove all-year-round capability, only landing and taking off in fair-weather conditions. Qantas knew that winter, tropical skies and unpredictable weather conditions across the equator would have a dramatic effect on both flight through the equatorial front, as well as take-off and landing when carrying extra fuel tanks and an overloaded plane, well above the recommended load levels.[367] They also had to get through the Japanese-controlled air space over Cocos at night and in secrecy with no radio contact that could alert the enemy to their activities. This was essential if Qantas was to break the embargo on Perth and defy the Japanese threat.

Flight 1Q1, the inaugural flight, landed at Nedlands on 11 July 1943 which was now to become the home of Qantas's Western Operations Division. Nedlands was regarded as the Indian Ocean service's flight point of origin for aviation operations and Perth's operational centre for Qantas. The initial service flown carried 52 pounds of mail reestablishing the broken communications route, once again reconnecting Australia with Britain. It was a victory for both Qantas and Perth and defied the Japanese blockade. It was a momentous day, even considering the Americans' achievements with their Perth-based Catalinas defying the enemy, in mid-1943.

But the inaugural Qantas flight itself was a bit rocky and has its own individual history. The original flight set out from Koggala on 7 July 1943 but was forced to return due to the absence of a sextant, which had been inadvertently left behind. The flight re-departed on 10 July. The flight time was 29 hours and 9 minutes, the log recorded, and 400 gallons of fuel was left in the tanks on arrival, which was a good safety margin should headwinds arise. A most satisfactory outcome and demonstrable evidence of Qantas's belief in the route and concept of breaking out from the Japanese-imposed separation from Britain using the new westerly outbound aviation route. The return flight to Lake Koggala, 2Q1, carried Captain Tapp and his crew and was marked in the flight log as 'Indian Ocean Air Mail'.[368]

---

[366] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

[367] L. Ambrose, op. cit., pp. 2–3.

[368] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

But it was in these early days a bare-bones operation, surrounded by suburban bush and houses with civilians nearby that things began. The Qantas Catalina base had an immediate impact on Perth, particularly the suburb of Nedlands. Nils Bluman, a child at the time who lived near the Nedlands foreshore, and who was interviewed during research for this thesis, recounted how the Catalinas came in low over the riverside houses, making a din and exciting the local children.[369] While the Americans were by now a regular feature of the locale, four new Qantas planes were now based in Nedlands and located in a new area unused by the Americans. This area was adjacent to local houses and separated from the University and the Americans themselves. Qantas's base was literally in the suburbs, but was close to the University, like the Americans, and nearby activities including traffic and pedestrian activities were visible to Qantas workers. A field visit to the site for this thesis revealed that the area still contains the original ramp on the shoreline with the houses still nearby, just 200 metres from the shoreline where Qantas was located. The interview with local resident, Nils Bluman, also indicated that the present house locations approximated those of the time when Qantas was there and the noise at times was deafening. Although the flights were apparently secret, everyone knew that Qantas had arrived and came and went to and from an undisclosed location.[370] The supposed secrecy was to become legendary and the basis of a legacy of intrigue at the time that extends to this day.

As an example of the modest situation that Qantas encountered, when Qantas's chief engineer Norm Roberts arrived in June 1943, he carried with him just 50 spark plugs. That, at the time, was the sum total of the facility's spares. The base had neither offices nor maintenance facilities at the outset. It had no ramp, fuelling nor other essential facilities. It was basically the Swan River, its shoreline and little else. But, it was a well-protected location on the Melville Water section of the Swan River, subject on occasion to the Fremantle Doctor, the local summer breeze, which could blow strongly at times. A long landing and take-off area was nearby, buoys established by the Americans were there, and as described previously, the American base was adjacent and more than convenient for a still-struggling Qantas operation.

The set-up of the base began under Qantas engineers Colin Sigley and Roberts in June 1943. They faced an enormous task, being presented with a vacant plot of land and no facilities. But luckily, or by clever foresight, just around Pelican Point at Crawley (also known as Matilda Bay) lay the base of the Americans' Fleet Air Wing 10. As a Catalina Wing it had all Catalina facilities including buoys, refuelling facilities, tools, workshops and even supporting seaborne tenders.[371]

The Americans' nearby location was fortuitous. It was in many ways, due to the cooperation of the Americans that Qantas was able to survive in the early days. Their help was critical in areas such as refuelling and turnaround maintenance, even tools. Base engineer Norm Roberts was able to establish such a good relationship with the Americans that many deficiencies were easily overcome.[372] At the other end at Lake Koggala, the British had facilities to service seaplanes, and this, to some extent, alleviated Qantas's risks in keeping the planes in the air until their own facilities could be established. The planning for maintenance and reliability of engines was critical in itself,

---

[369] N. Bluman, interviewed by author, 15 March 2018.

[370] ibid.

[371] R. Senior, op. cit., pp. 3–4.

[372] ibid.

with engines overhauled at prescribed intervals. Roberts and his team were able to remove and reinstall engines, but they needed the right equipment and facilities for overhaul. Nedlands base was deficient in such equipment and they relied heavily on their Catalina colleagues, the Americans, to assist.[373]

Qantas activities remained secret, in accordance with classified restrictions in force at the time, and eventually a fence was placed around the base. The base was set up with haste and fences came a little later, so the base activities and operation remained an open secret, but to the outside world it was a closed operation. But with mysterious-looking flying boats coming and going weekly, it was hard to miss that an airbase had been established in suburban Perth.

While Nedlands initially had no real slipping capability, planes were slipped in Koggala at the base there. Similar help came from the Americans who allowed Qantas to use river buoys placed on the Crawley Bay side. Qantas could haul the flying boats ashore from there. Fuelling was at first done on the American side at Crawley, and this caused much delay with priority going to American requirements. It was about two and a half miles each way from the Qantas base to the American base. Issues arose with gusty winds, winter water state and the overheating of engines, as extensive taxiing of a very overladen seaplane stressed engines while taxiing to take-off or back to the Qantas area. Later in 1943, an engineers' workshop was built and a small office established. By the middle of 1943, however, Qantas had a basic functioning base at Nedlands able to support its long-range flights.

Even today, during a visit to that site as part of research for this thesis, it was observed that no marina nor anchorage has been built at the former Qantas site. This outcome perhaps confirms the issues mentioned about winds and the open nature of the site. In comparison, on the American site a yacht club and private mornings exist in large numbers. Though the yacht club there pre-existed the arrival of the Americans, the northerly, or city-side site, of Pelican Point was a superior site for mooring and servicing. Qantas's arrival, one year later, drew value from a still acceptable Nedlands site while utilising proximity to the Americans for issues such as maintenance and fuelling.

Aside from engineering issues, special attention was given by pilots to the route and flight planning. Route planning was a navigational skill and highly specialised with several captains being navigation trained as well as having the specialist navigation officer on board. But weather was the other critical factor that was difficult to predict, and it would take a year of flying to establish the full extent of weather conditions. Weather, therefore, became a more known factor as flights progressed, and its predicability was a factor that could be planned for by pilots and navigators to determine flight planning as each flight was undertaken.[374]

By July 1943 Qantas had achieved both the opening of its Nedlands base as well as the inauguration of its first flight, 1Q1. Both outcomes were major initiatives that demonstrated Qantas's resolve to contribute to the war effort and bring reassurance to the people of Perth. Local residents were closely engaged with the supposed secret base, with some working there and others in nearby Nedlands, at first-hand, watching the

---

[373] N. Roberts, 'A Case for Engineers at the Double', Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder , pp. 1–3.

[374] L. Ambrose, interviewed by A. McGrath, National Library of Australia, Parkes, (https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-194811994/listen, accessed on 12 September 2018).

operation develop before their eyes and observing the sight of Catalinas coming and going.

The Indian Ocean flights had proven that the Japanese blockade could be beaten so long as a long-range partial night-time flight was used. Using radio silence and avoiding the use of a Cocos landing, Qantas was able to demonstrate that Perth was no longer isolated and was now reconnected with the British to carry mail and passengers. With two concerted blows, Qantas had defied the Japanese threat, as well as provided hope to Perth's people through the existence of the Indian Ocean service.

Fleet Air Wing 10, August–September 1943: Operations, Patrols and a Crash in a Perth Suburban Lake

In August 1943 the Wing continued to acquire additional Catalinas from Hawaii which further indicated its importance to military strategists in their plans for the defence of Western Australia and the people of Perth.[375] The occurrence of attacks by this time in late 1943 was greatly diminished, compared to the previous year, but, nevertheless, Fleet Air Wing 10 maintained its patrols and its attacks upon the enemy when contact was made.

The Wing had, by now, transformed itself from a defensive patrol force to become an aggressive military unit which aimed to seek out and engage the enemy. The Wing was now capable of threatening the Japanese from its isolated Pelican Point base where it could attack and retreat to safety knowing that the Japanese did not have the capability to strike back. While the Japanese possessed Kawanishi long-range flying boats (similar to the Catalina) and had previously used bombers to strike targets, any escort protection was beyond their capabilities and, by this stage of the war, only a major naval force could seriously threaten Perth.

To add to the potency of the Wing two riverine patrol boats had arrived in August and were now stationed at Pelican Point. The patrol boats were motor torpedo boats but capable of ocean-going service as well. The major role of the boats, however, was to assist the Catalinas when alighting from the Swan River. The river was at times very calm and smooth, and given the take-off characteristics of the Catalina with its smooth marine-shaped hull, a phenomenon known as 'sticking' occurred, whereby the hull was held to the water's surface as it sped along the water surface impeding take-off. The motor torpedo boats were used to 'unstick' the boats by moving ahead of the Catalina to create small waves, which allowed air under the hull, enabling efficient forward-thrust of the plane to ensure lift, to gain height and lift-off.[376]

But the motor torpedo boats were not simply to assist during take-off, rather an asset that had other uses aside from assisting the Catalinas to 'unstick'. These boats were combat-ready and capable of open-water performance. The Wing was now showing its all-round capabilities and well equipped with not only its Catalina fleet, but also its utility planes, its three ocean-going tenders and now, two additional open water motor torpedo boats. It was a multi-faceted force by August 1943 and still growing. The addition of the two new boats illustrated that the Americans' strategic plan continued to see Fleet

---

[375] G. Munsdorf, op. cit., p. 10.

[376] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1 August 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 April 2018).

Air Wing 10 as a formidable offensive unit and one that would continue to defend Perth and Western Australia through 1943 and into 1944.[377]

But, aside from increased size and capability, the strengthening of the Wing was also evidenced by the size of patrol formations and frequency of tender support. Additional Catalinas were rotated in from the eastern bases, to ensure a high rate of effort was maintained on patrols, as well as new patrol sectors flown. The new and well-maintained Catalinas were a far cry from the days when three battered Catalinas limped into Perth in far more desperate times. The diminishment of the desperate times was again illustrated by the reduced frequency of enemy contacts recorded in the Wing War Diary for August 1943. In fact, the Wing recorded no contacts at all for August 1943. However, this did not mean that the Wing sat idle, as aside from regular patrols, shipping escorts and expanded patrols were carried out to ensure maximum vigilance was maintained. As a result of the operational situation, and with an expanded asset base available, Allied shipping started to move with impunity later into 1943. As a consequence, the Wing now focussed more on shipping and escorting than patrolling for enemy aircraft, with the diminished expectation of enemy air-to-air contacts now part of operational planning.

However, regardless of the successes of expanded patrols and the implementation of a patrol-screen along the Western Australian coast and out into the Indian Ocean, the Wing suffered another aircraft loss, this time a utility plane and in an unexpected non-combat operational location. A Grumman Duck from the scouting group was involved in a target towing live-fire exercise over the Perth suburbs using Catalinas, when it was forced down by a mechanical issue and crash landed into Lake Monger, in suburban Perth.[378] A large crowd gathered and became one of the rare incidents in which Perth locals saw a Wing aircraft close up and in a compromised position. The plane was lodged into the mud of the lake, and a tractor was called to assist and evacuate the plane.[379]

During the Wing's stay in Perth, a number of aircraft losses occurred. Some were caused by mechanical issues while others were outcomes of operations and the dangerous circumstances the pilots often found themselves in. The majority of flying boats were lost at sea while on patrol, but some others occurred close to Pelican Point and, in this case, in full view of the Perth public.

On this occasion, the accident occurred on 8 September 1943, and was well-publicised at the time, when a Wing aircraft was forced to land in suburban Perth. The Grumman Duck, being a seaplane, chose a water landing which happened to be Lake Monger, or 'Mongers (sic) Lake', as was described by the Americans in their reporting.[380] As noted, the incident was reported in detail in both the *The West Australian* daily newspaper and the *Daily News,* Perth's afternoon paper. *The West* described the plane as narrowly missing suburban rooftops, as it executed an emergency landing, while brushing

---

[377] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 2 August 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[378] This incident was reported in the two Perth daily newspapers, *The West Australian* and the *Daily News*.

[379] 'Forced Landing a Lucky Escape Plane in Lake Monger', *The West Australian,* 12 August 1943. Available from: Trove (accessed 2 December 2018).

[380] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 8 August 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

tree tops as it came in. A large crowd soon gathered to experience the spectacle, it was reported, many of them bringing along local children to witness the spectacle. Residents reported that the plane overflew nearby Thomas Street and looked likely to fall short, but a last burst of power from the spluttering engine inched it towards the shoreline. The pilot was then able to guide the plane onto the lake's calm surface. The plane nestled in the reeds and an attempt to restart the engine was successful enabling the pilot to taxi the plane to an area clear of reeds, and its anchor dropped by roping the plane to the reeds to ensure it didn't drift back to the bank.[381]

The *Daily News* similarly reported that while the American plane landed safely, about two-thirds of the lake was clear of reeds and water hyacinths making the set-down a little easier. In the spirit of Allied collegiality, the *Daily News* made the point that these men were doing their job for 'our' protection and that it was good luck that it was daylight and the lake was clear of obstructions. This comment was published, coming from a letter to the editor, and was a very positive illustration of the high level of appreciation held by Perth locals who clearly valued the presence in wartime Perth of the American servicemen.[382] Following the incident, the plane was recovered and taken by truck to Pelican Point where it was to be repaired, but reported as being 'badly damaged'. The pilot was safely recovered also and soon returned to duty.[383]

Other incidents occurred in September with one of the new motor torpedo boats (USS *C-9489*) being sent to Busselton, south of Perth, where a Catalina was directed to search for a missing Australian Beaufort bomber, which itself was searching for a Japanese submarine in that patrol sector. The Beaufort could not be located, but the patrol boat remained in nearby Bunbury for several more days involved in the search.[384] Other Wing assets, tenders, were also active, but in other operational areas, with USS *Heron* sent to Brisbane to support operations there, while USS *William B Preston* was now stationed at Heron Haven base supplying fuel to patrol operations based from there.

Patrols were maintained in the northern zones from Heron Haven but weather was reported as poor and patrols were limited or cancelled. The Wing also supported fleet operations on the east coast, with Patrol Squadron 11 sent to Brisbane for an exchange of aircraft and return to base. In the meantime, back in Western Australia, a submarine was sighted 10 miles north of Rottnest Island near Perth and was pursued and attacked. Seven Catalinas joined in the search and depth charges were dropped.

Enemy contacts for August and September of 1943 illustrated a continuing diminishment of airborne contacts. This outcome showed that the Wing was continuing to secure air superiority within its patrol sectors. But the domination of the patrol zones had been abetted by the build-up of assets, which provided the Wing with all-round air and

---

[381] 'Forced Landing a Lucky Escape Plane in Lake Monger', op. cit.

[382] ibid.

[383] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 8–9 August 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[384] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 2 September 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

sea capabilities to carry out its core missions and, as a result, reassure Perth residents that the Japanese threat continued to decline.[385]

Qantas, August–September 1943: Joint Benefits Emerge and a Very Important Passenger Travels

By August 1943, the Indian Ocean service flights were now well under way. The flight sequence beginning with 1Q1 had now extended to reach flight 1Q5 with passengers, mail and cargo all being carried on a weekly basis.[386]

With both Qantas and the Americans in action at the same time, the combined weight of Perth-based Catalina operations during the war was now approaching its height. With the arrival of Qantas, Perth would now see a large number of Catalinas in the sky, coming and going from the city, giving the impression that Perth was a well armed and active wartime aviation facility, at least so far as Catalina operations were concerned.

The value of having two Catalina operators in Perth was about to pay benefits, as both operators combined assets to complete an important mission. Commencing in late July, an American Catalina flown by Lieutenant-Commander Bill Campbell headed for the USS *Childs*, which was anchored in Exmouth Gulf. The Catalina carried two Australian personnel destined for the Cocos Islands. The passengers stayed overnight onboard the USS *Childs* and then embarked on the American plane and headed towards Cocos.[387] The two passengers were a meteorologist and a station operator, both former school teachers. After about 12 hours of flying, the Catalina failed to find Cocos and realising that fuel was an issue, chose to return to Exmouth. To ensure a landing in Exmouth could be made, the pilot broke radio silence and was informed that a tailwind at 10,000 feet was strong and that he should make use of it, lest the flying boat have to ditch short of the Exmouth landing area. Accordingly, they jettisoned any excess baggage, even their guns.[388]

As it turned-out, the American Catalina barely made it, landing short of Exmouth and being towed in, tying up at the American-built wharf there. Later that day the two Australians were returned to Perth, again on an American Catalina. In a side note, Qantas Captain Ambrose later revealed that the Catalina landed one mile short of the coast at Exmouth and had to be towed in by a passing steamer. Forty-nine years later it was revealed that faulty charts caused the navigational errors and had put the Americans off their target by a wide 65 miles.[389]

Despite the Americans' travails, undaunted, Qantas came to the rescue and joint airborne cooperation saw its first operational benefit. In August 1943, Qantas, under Captain Tapp, flew the 'cargo' of two airmen to Lake Kogalla, where they rested, and then

---

[385] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–10 August 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[386] The Qantas 1Q/2Q system were the Perth to Lake Koggala inbound and outbound flight codes. The 1Q was the eastbound (Lake Koggala to Perth) code, while the 2Q was the westbound code. The numbers continued as flights progressed.

[387] R. Barrett, 'The Cocos Connection', unpublished manuscript, 1 September 1997, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder, pp. 1–2.

[388] ibid.

[389] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op cit., p. 29.

boarded a Qantas outbound flight, Koggala to Cocos. On 29 August 1943, at 6 pm, the two passengers flew under command of Captain Ambrose to Cocos, arriving just after dawn the next day.[390] The mission had been completed and its nature, involving both Qantas and the Americans, the ‘senior’ Catalina operators, fully illustrated the worth of two highly competent aviation squadrons being located in Perth. Qantas had succeeded where the Americans had faltered. But, regardless, the joint operation was not only a success, it enabled Qantas to repay the Americans. The two operators had proven that not only could the blockade of the Japanese be overcome, but also that their patrol zone be overflown, with relative ease, by both Catalina operators.

While the joint operation was a one-off task, Qantas was continuing to advance its case as a blockade-busting airline, as it continued to fly northwest, to skirt the Japanese presence and reach Ceylon. But now, as operations progressed, passenger loads took on a unique circumstance when late in August a special passenger boarded flight 1Q8 bound for Perth.

Qantas General-Manager, Hudson Fysh himself, boarded the Indian Ocean service in Koggala and on arrival in Perth made a first-hand visit to Qantas’s Nedlands Marine Base. Fysh was returning to Australia from his long trip to England, where the Indian Ocean service agreement was secured. He had been away from Australia for so long that not only had the Indian Ocean service been established, his own flight was, by now, the eighth crossing to Perth. The flight, coincidentally, was also the longest crossing ever recorded, of around 32 hours flight time. It was such a long flight because two things happened. Captain Tapp had trialled a new navigational method and, along the way, the flight encountered a strong head wind. These factors caused the slowness of the flight, but also ensured that the long-range fuel tanks were adequate, and proved their worth. Despite the concern of the duration of the flight, Fysh was so impressed with the crew’s work, his company’s efforts and of the flights themselves, he described the Indian Ocean route as Qantas’s most romantic and fascinating journey.[391]

Fysh observed a basic operation at Nedlands on his arrival, as September dawned. By this time, while flights were running safely, Qantas’s marine base set-up in Perth and support remained fragile. Nedlands station engineer Norm Roberts was continuing his good relationship with the Americans, and many deficiencies were easily overcome on a collegial basis.[392] Regardless, things were showing signs of visible improvement and in September an engineers' workshop was agreed to and a small office established. Until that time Qantas used their Ford utility vehicle as an ‘office’. By now Qantas had alleviated most of the basic concerns with fuel, on-site servicing and an administration office. By September 1943 Qantas had a simple but usable base at Nedlands underway, able to support its long-range flights and with servicing and maintenance requirements supported.

September flights continued without mishap and flights to 1Q12 were logged. Twelve flights had now been flown without incident and, much to Crowther's and Fysh’s satisfaction, flights proceeded as planned. But as flights progressed, it was clear that a cloud was appearing on the horizon. The Koggala to Karachi sector was proving to be an awkward gap in the desired system of continuous flights to London. The gap from

---

[390] ibid.

[391] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 183.

[392] R. Senior, op. cit., pp. 3–4.

Koggala was not provided for by Qantas nor the British, and with sensitive mail as well as important passengers in transit, a better solution was needed.

By the end of September it was becoming clear that an air link was urgently needed from Koggala to Karachi in India, where the British ended their outbound flights from Britain. By the end of September 1943, planning was now under way by Crowther and his team to provide an extension as soon as possible to link Koggala with the British in Karachi. The connection from Koggala to Karachi by air would fulfil the desire of Qantas and the British to once again provide a series of 'hops' from Sydney to London and to carry the Empire mail, as it had done prior to the outbreak of war.

Fleet Air Wing 10, October–December 1943: Additional Submarine Patrolling and Logistical Support Issues

The preceding months had seen the Wing establish dominance over Japanese aircraft penetrating that previously vulnerable airspace over Perth and Western Australia. Contacts were now recorded as low or negligible. As a result, attacks on the Western Australian coast had ceased by September 1943 with the Drysdale River air raid.[393] But, by October, and with additional flying boats available, more anti-submarine patrols were now being flown. These patrols were aimed at supporting Allied shipping on the open seas, now more numerous as Japanese maritime threats also diminished.

October was to be a busy time for the Wing. The month began with a Catalina flying Admiral Ralph Christie, senior naval officer in Western Australia, from Perth to Exmouth, to oversee submarine and aviation facilities there. At the same time more new Catalinas arrived from the east to bolster numbers at Pelican Point and support additional patrolling. The Wing was now furnished with expanded capabilities, and the operational tempo was about to step up.

The change in patrol priorities to an emphasis on maritime work ensured ample flying hours for the Catalinas and crews. But despite the new tasking, the Wing remained committed to its ongoing patrol work to ensure that no ground was given up. The Wing built further on its operational gains to maintain its dominance over their air space, which was not long before vulnerable to the Japanese.

To meet its new workload, and although Fleet Air Wing 10 was ostensibly a naval aviation Wing made up of flying boats, it now boasted five sea-going vessels, based in Perth. To display its versatility, the USS *C-9489* was sent to Jurien Bay, several hours' sailing time north of Perth, on patrol and support duties. The vessel remained *in situ* as a search and rescue asset to support patrolling Catalinas in that area. The vessel remained in the area even after no contacts were reported. The use of the boat was likely in response to the previous incident in Exmouth when a Catalina ditched in the ocean and was saved by a local steamer. The ocean-going motor torpedo boats now provided additional local support, should any search and rescue capability be required, as well as a visible sign to the public of the Wing's reach and interoperability.

Air patrols now spread as far as Darwin, where a Catalina was tasked to search for a lost Australian air force plane – also a Catalina – operating from a base in northern Western Australia. Eventually, seven Wing Catalinas were tasked for this operation with its

[393] K. Gomm, op. cit., p. 305.

bases at Exmouth and Heron Haven being used. While the Wing Catalinas searched in vain, no trace of the Australian plane was found.[394]

Meanwhile, the broader patrol situation continued with the Japanese being denied air space and no contacts recorded for November, indicating again that the Japanese had limited or ceased operations into the Wing's patrol zones.[395] This outcome enabled the Wing's coverage of Western Australia to continue to expand with limited threats likely. To assist the patrolling aircraft, the Wing was to again take on even more assets – planes which could be used to offset flying boats needed for operations. In November the Wing took charge of a new transport aircraft, an R4D-3, a navy version of the civilian DC-3 transport and passenger plane. The plane brought Captain Hopkins to Perth, as the new Deputy Commander of the Wing. The plane remained in Perth and was then used for personnel transport around Western Australia, relieving Catalinas for vital operational duties. Previously Catalinas had been used to quickly move personnel around the operational theatre, but the R4D-3 was now able to fulfil that role.[396]

The trend of operations, which was now intensifying in the northern areas, using Exmouth as the primary base, continued throughout November. This pattern illustrated again that Japanese air power was diminished to the point that it was unable to send patrols into the Indian Ocean at any degree of distance from their air bases in the former Dutch East Indies. Earlier in the war, Japanese had aircraft carrier availability and support to enable their aircraft to attain proximity and threaten the Western Australian coast. But the war had moved against them, and without a dedicated air force, naval priorities took precedence, with planes required in defensive fleet-protection roles. This lack of penetration by the Japanese into the Indian Ocean enabled the Americans and supporting Australian units to dominate the air space deep into the Indian Ocean and increase patrolling to ensure that not only Perth was well defended, but also coastal locations, situated well behind the now deep air-screen that had been developed. Also, the use of Exmouth as a prominent forward base illustrated this tactic of projected air power, as it provided extensive reach north and west, as well as providing fuelling for the submarine base at Exmouth. Along with Wing tenders, the arrangement provided a sustainable operational site for continuous operations deep into the Indian Ocean in pursuit of submarines and also raider vessels that used the expanses of the ocean for protection.

The expansion of the Wing's asset base, through November 1943, invoked the issue of Perth's and Western Australia's isolation. As the Wing grew in size and complexity, more reliance now fell on logistical support. Shipping was regarded as the best method of transport for long-distance support, with Wing tender vessels sometimes plying the seas east, as well as seaplanes themselves being able to fly to the Australian Catalina base at Rathmines. In addition, Number 4 Aircraft Depot, Royal Australian Air Force, in Boulder was now available, and engines could be sent and overhauled there.

---

394 War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 14 October 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

395 War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 15 October 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

396 War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 14–15 October 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

But Perth and Western Australia were still very isolated and maintaining a large force in an even larger operational theatre required constant supply and careful management oversight.

The issue of distance and logistical concerns was mentioned by Commander Munsdorf, a senior officer at the Wing, in an interview which he undertook for higher command. Commander Munsdorf mentioned a number of issues that had to be planned for and overcome. One major issue was rail transport. Australia's train-track gauges were not standardised, which meant that supplies from the other side of Australia had to be offloaded and reloaded as each state border was crossed and the rail gauge changed. It took four and a half weeks for freight to get from the eastern ports to Perth. Freight was guarded and given special priority because things disappeared along the way, with other units all in need. As an example, Munsdorf stated that one mail item, even while marked as a special delivery, took four and a half months to be delivered. Fortunately, the military had set up its own system, where they used the Catalinas and Wing vessels traveling east, and were able to bring back important items. This 'internal' system greatly expedited things.[397] These issues of supply were a constant constraint on operational performance and not overcome even by late 1943.

Other operational problems, aside from logistics, included weather, particularly in the northern zones around Exmouth and Heron Haven, where in year-ending months monsoonal weather affected flying. The further north the Wing flew, the more tropical the weather became. Other things were described as never having been thought of in planning, and as an impediment to aviation in a civilised country. Problems existed in areas such as voltage and electricity supply, a telephone system that did not always operate as the wire ran along fences, and sheep that could either eat the wire or destroy the fences.[398] There were few roads in the north and the roads that existed were impassable in the 'wet season' late in the year.

Munsdorf gives a glimpse into other challenges that interacted with the Perth culture of the day. He recorded that civilian support could be a problem as well as infrastructural issues. The issue he recalled involved a submarine under repair in Fremantle harbour in November of 1943. Civilian workers who were requested to work over the weekend to ready the submarine for operations refused to report to work on the weekend. When the navy used sailors to take up the work, a delegation of civilians arrived and threatened to cut the line holding the submarine on the slipway and let the boat slide into the water and sink. To resolve the matter, the Commanding Officer mounted the machine gun and invited the civilians to try. The situation was thus quickly resolved.[399]

As a result of the increased Wing inventory, the maintenance of air patrols, and the switch to maritime surface patrolling, the intensity of the Wing's proactive patrolling by December 1943 was reaching its peak. The Wing now contained a comprehensive inventory, well-established bases for air and maritime operations, and a large personnel complement. The proof of their success was that air contacts had ceased by the end of 1943, and similarly submarine contacts were low or negligible.

---

[397] G. Munsdorf, op. cit., p. 3.

[398] ibid.

[399] ibid., p. 4.

But the war was far from over, and while Perth was now well outside of the front-line action, for Fleet Air Wing 10, in 1944 more work was to be done in the defence of Perth and Western Australia.

Qantas, October–December 1943: Local Reaction to Qantas Personnel and the Indian Ocean Service Expands to Karachi

By October 1943 Qantas faced a number of issues following the relatively quick start-up of the Indian Ocean service. The base had been established and the flights were being flown. All was going to plan. But, aside from those two very important initiatives, other issues existed in the background which warranted attention.

The flights remained classified and personnel were not authorised to divulge the nature of their work. They travelled to work in 'civvies' and tried to keep a low profile, as best as they could given that the base itself was visible and noisy. The American base nearby gave cover for operations, with Catalinas coming and going, and a busy group of personnel moving about the Nedlands area.

But it was inevitable that locals would have reactions to new people in town. In an interview with Ian Peirce, son of Ivan Peirce, one of the early Qantas Catalina pilots, it was revealed that in October the pilots were staying in the Esplanade Hotel in Perth as temporary accommodation. Pilots sometimes walked to work or on some occasions caught the tram service that travelled along Mounts Bay Road and then walked along Hackett Drive to the Marine Base.[400] In addition to Peirce, one of the pilots staying at the Esplanade was Rex Senior. Senior was involved in an amusing situation which demonstrated the attitude of the local populace while, at the same time, illustrating the awkward circumstances of the so-called 'secret' flights. One day, while walking to the Qantas base, Senior stopped at a local store to buy some cigarettes. Senior was in civilian attire, as it was standard operating procedure to dress in civilian clothing to ensure that attention was not drawn to the nature of the task at hand. While purchasing the cigarettes, the vendor abruptly told Senior to 'go and join up' and that 'bludgers' were not served here. On another occasion, Senior recalled that he received a white feather, a symbol meant to signify cowardice, in the mail.[401]

The two incidents illustrated the awareness and attitude of the people of Perth to war service. The irony was that people of the local populace were so keen to play a role in things they had focused their scorn on the wrong target. But then again, the flights and business of crews and staff were officially secret, and this would remain so until later in August 1944. Then the people of Perth could hear Hudson Fysh's announcement about the nature of the flights and understand just what these 'bludgers' in their midst had been up to.

Aside from minor perturbations such as staff being abused, the flights proceeded unencumbered. But by November 1943 it was apparent that the weak link in the complete Sydney to London service was the inconvenient overland or unspecified air service gap between Lake Koggala and Korangi Creek, in Karachi. At the time Qantas's Perth outbound flight terminated in Koggala, while the British terminated their London flight at Karachi. Rex Senior states that passengers and freight were then transported overland to

---

[400] I. Peirce, son of Qantas Indian Ocean service pilot Ivan Peirce, interviewed by author, 5 October 2022.

[401] R. Senior, op. cit., p. 3.

Koggala, where the Qantas service then took them on to Perth.[402] The air-gap led to reports that delays had been experienced getting vital despatches and mail between the two points and a more efficient solution was needed to this oversight in earlier planning. Passengers, Empire mail, military mail, including Prisoner of War mail, and cargo were at risk through loose arrangements in this sector. As a consequence, it was proposed and agreed that the flights originating from Perth would be extended to Karachi. This change to plans was important to Qantas which now had its second international route and destination, with all costs being covered by the British.[403]

Karachi was not new territory for Qantas. The Empire flying boats running the former service since 1941 had flown the sector from Karachi to Sydney via Singapore. Captain Crowther, now managing the Indian Ocean service, had flown an Empire flying boat from Karachi to Sydney, landing on 4 November 1941 on the Rose Bay seaport.[404] Qantas had entered into an agreement to fly beyond Singapore due to shortages of British pilots at that time, thus under new arrangements the Qantas pilots had returned from air force duty to take up operations to fly the Singapore to Karachi sector.[405] This past experience now afforded the Qantas pilots and navigators with a familiar and often-experienced location to which they would again fly.

Karachi, more specifically Korangi Creek, was also a British flying boat base, similar in makeup to Lake Koggala in Ceylon, but bigger. It was a busy waterway with local craft and international planes utilising the harbour there. It was also the terminus for the Empire mail flights from London and made for a seamless connection with services there, as well as providing a service and supply point should unforeseen consequences occur for Qantas's planes and crews.

In addition, by November 1943, two more Catalinas had arrived in Perth and were ready for use, thus enabling Qantas to accede to the British request for the service.[406] Qantas itself, ever eager for more international routes, had reported that the slow overland trip for passengers from Koggala to Karachi had begun to create problems, so in November, the route was extended by 1,600 miles in total. Captain Crowther was the first captain to complete the trip.

The night of 4/5 November 1943 marked the date of the initial Karachi flight. The flight from Koggala to Karachi took 12 hours and 30 minutes, about half the average time for the Perth to Koggala route.[407] This flight also inaugurated a new schedule and crewing plan. The once weekly Perth to Koggala current service was now a three times a fortnight service, Perth to Koggala to Karachi and return. The flight was planned as a night flight, given the exigencies of the flight arrival time into Lake Koggala from Perth and, for security concerns, with the route flying close to Japanese-patrolled areas. The wait in Koggala (Qantas planned a morning arrival in Koggala after night flights based on the

---

[402] ibid., p. 20.

[403] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 184.

[404] 'First Round-Trip by Qantas from Sydney to Karachi', *The Argus,* 4 November 1941, p. 3. Available from: Trove (accessed 12 August 2018).

[405] 'RAAF Pilots to Qantas', *The Telegraph*, 24 October 1941. Available from: Trove (accessed 3 March 2018).

[406] G. Mumford, op. cit., p. 30.

[407] ibid., p. 30.

Cocos crossing procedure) enabled Qantas to service the incoming Catalina and then after a daytime servicing fly at night to Karachi for an early morning arrival. This schedule, allowed a crossover with loading procedures for Middle East and London-originated cargo and personnel.[408]

With regard to crews, the extended flight doubled the time away from Perth. Original crew planning (pre-Karachi extension) had crews resting at a location close to Koggala, the Closenberg Guesthouse, in the nearby city of Galle. The new plan had the inbound flight crew from Perth resting after the long overnight flight, while a fresh crew, already waiting in Koggala, now flew on to Karachi. The crew to Karachi flew back the following night from Karachi and rested at Koggala. Cargo was transferred and the crew that had flown the plane from Perth a few days earlier and awaiting in Koggala, then flew it back to Perth. This arrangement allowed for crews to be rested after their long flights. The aircraft went through to Karachi and returned to Koggala where they were serviced again before returning to Perth.[409] This schedule reduced the load on Qantas's humble Perth base and took full advantage of British aviation facilities available for servicing and maintenance support.

The average full trip was now about 80 hours flying, Perth to Koggala to Karachi and return. The plan was for each crew member to do one round trip per month resulting in about 900 hours flying per year. In reality, crews did much higher workloads due to sickness of individuals and other reasons. At a time when industrial workplace standards were almost unheard of, the crews averaged about 1,100 hours per year flying.[410] The total Perth to Karachi flight was logged as 4,970 miles and took 41 hours 40 minutes not including the layover in Koggala. The first flight in the new route left Karachi on the night of 4/5 November 1943 and reached Perth three days later on 9 November 1943.[411]

The extension of the Indian Ocean service to Karachi provided Qantas with not only greater flying hours and prestige, as an international airline, but also enabled it to claim that its wartime service from Perth was an airbridge. The link provided the way out from the embargo that was imposed on Perth following the fall of Singapore. Even with Fleet Air Wing 10's presence in Perth they had not been able to break out, as Qantas had done. The Americans were not aiming to break out, but to ensure that the Japanese did not break in, whereas Qantas had plans to flout the Japanese embargo and establish an independent route out of Perth, which had been achieved some five months earlier, and now extended. It had exceeded Fysh's original plans and was now seen as a proud achievement for the company.

By December 1943 the Karachi extension obviated the problems identified with the break in the air connection. Once again the British had supported Qantas with the provision of new planes and facilities. But it was the Qantas system, based in Perth, that provided the platform to re-establish the direct Australia to Britain service, a service which had been abruptly interrupted by the Japanese in 1942.

---

[408] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 5.

[409] ibid.

[410] ibid., p. 6.

[411] G. Mumford, op. cit., p. 39.

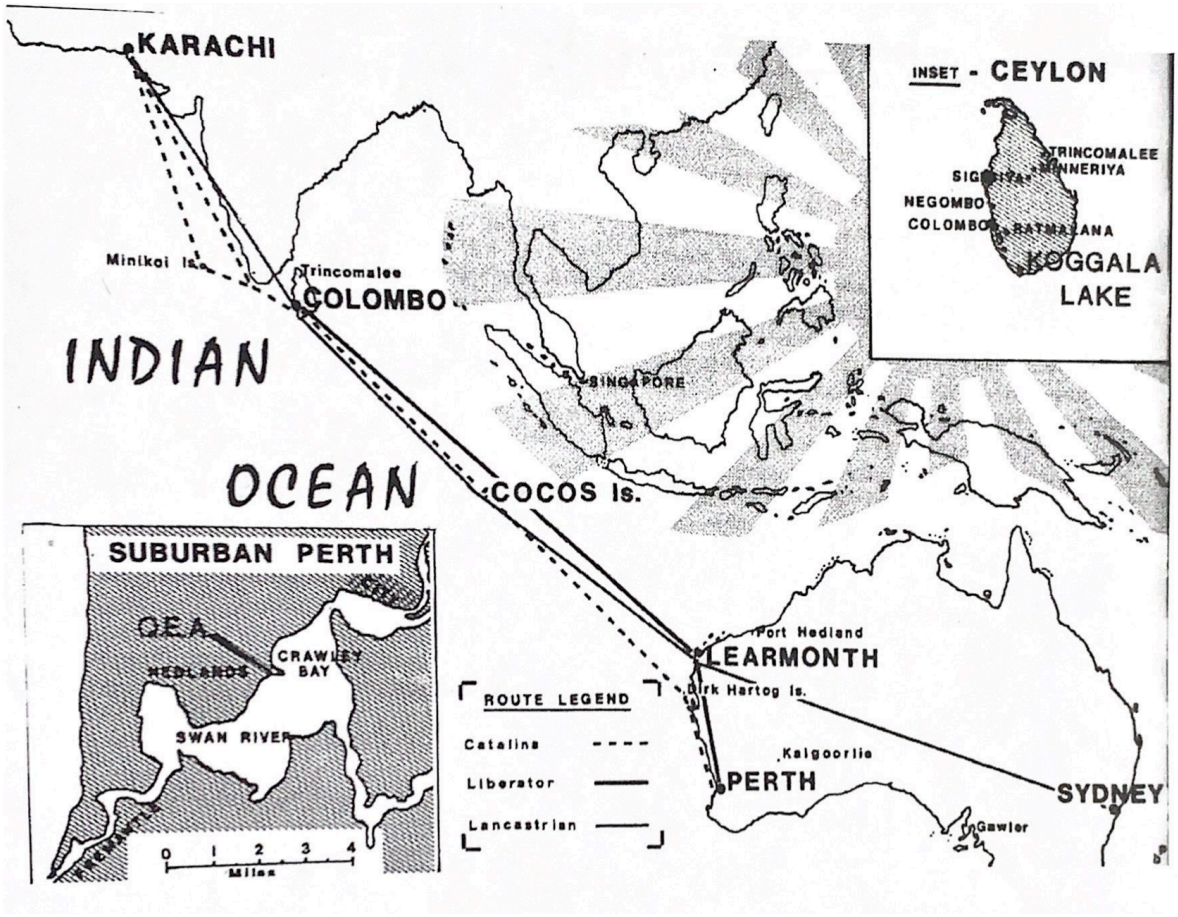

Figure 5. Qantas routes to Koggala and Karachi in 1943.[412] *Qantas eventually operated three aircraft types on the Indian Ocean service: Catalinas, Liberators and Lancastrians.*

[412] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 4.

Chapter 6: 1944

Fleet Air Wing 10, January–February 1944: The Japanese Threat Eases

1944 was to be Fleet Air Wing 10's last year in Perth after 30 months in location. It had arrived in March 1942, established an aviation base at Pelican Point, and set up three forward operating bases north of Perth. Its reach now extended deep into the Indian Ocean, and as far north as Darwin. By January 1944, it had defended Perth and Western Australia by securing its patrol area, evidence by reduced enemy contacts and the cessation of air raids on Australia's west coast.

But work was still to be done, regardless of the view that the war was now moving in the Allies' favour. The Wing's command headquarters on the east coast continued to shape operations within the Americans' strategic plan. That plan was the re-taking of the Philippines, from where the Americans had withdrawn after the Japanese entered the Second World War in late 1941.

At that time in the Philippines, the Wing had been a specialised fleet-support unit. The main mission then was patrolling and location of the enemy at sea. Patrolling remained their primary task in the defence of Perth and Western Australia. But as the fleet had been disbanded in the chaos that ensued after the Japanese attacks, updated tactics were quickly acquired as the Wing adapted to new circumstances. Nevertheless, Fleet Air Wing 10 maintained its small fleet of ocean-going tenders as a part of their ability to operate over distance as required in Western Australia. In addition, new patrol boats were acquired, and they remained intact as a naval air wing formation.

In January 1944 the Wing continued to expand its reach and capability. More Catalinas continued to arrive from eastern bases, and personnel deployments continued with junior pilots inbound, and trained pilots and crews outbound, to front-line bases in New Guinea and nearby Pacific theatres. The Wing's secondary training role continued to expand with patrolling able to be undertaken with relative freedom from enemy contacts around Western Australia. The now peaceful skies provided a perfect training environment for junior pilots and crew to practise defensive patrolling.[413]

Things were described as routine in early January with the Wing undertaking maintenance and servicing tasks at Pelican Point. Continued familiarisation flying-training, which largely took place over Perth skies, was also taking place. It was a public display, and incidents like the earlier Lake Monger crash highlighted the Wing's daily public interface with Perth's population. But the main job of patrolling was still taking place, and it was far away from Perth in the northerly and Indian Ocean sectors, from where any threat could still come.[414]

The Wing was still operating a number of patrols from Exmouth, and the addition of the R4D-3 transport plane was proving beneficial as it was used to fly from Perth to resupply the garrison there. The R4D-3 was a land plane and operated from Perth's new international airport at Guildford. The use of Guildford brought increased public attention

---

[413] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, September–December 1943, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018). The final months in 1943 showed nil or low contact reports.

[414] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–15 January 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

to the Wing's activities from Perth's populace. It indicated to the public that the Wing was more than just Swan River, and its small flotilla in Fremantle Harbour, but also a strategic asset that could respond using varied capabilities to support Perth and Western Australia in wartime. Apart from transporting American naval personnel, the new plane was also used to transport Australian military personnel moving north, where a large number of units operated, in addition to the Wing-operated forward bases themselves.[415]

Aside from additional training, January followed the same pattern as previous months. The month was characterised by movement of Catalinas north and return, rotations of planes, the use of the R4D-3 transport including Darwin visits, and anti-submarine escorts, in this case being flown from Carnarvon on the state's mid-north coast. At Pelican Point routine training flights using utility planes over the Perth skies continued.[416] January was again a 'no contact' month, in both air and sea patrol operations.

February war diary reports are relatively light on detail suggesting that perhaps operational focus too was now routine. However the Wing reported a Catalina searching for a midget-submarine in Gage Roads and Cockburn Sound areas. No sighting was reported.[417]

Aside from the search for the midget-submarine, once again patrol patterns indicated a concentration on patrols out of Exmouth and further north, with Heron Haven also being used with a permanent fuel tender now in place there. The tender was a French transport vessel which had been impounded and now repurposed to serve as a mobile fuel bowser. The ship was resupplied by USS *William B Preston* and USS *Heron* to ensure that fuel was constantly available at Heron Haven. In addition, Wing tenders were positioned there to supply maintenance support and accomodation, if required.[418]

February was another relatively quiet month, giving reason to believe that the Wing's role was now trending to being more benign. Training was active in Perth but search and rescue, close harbour patrolling and patrols south to Albany were now diminishing in priority as the war now seemed more distant than it was two years ago. General MacArthur's forces were now gaining dominance in the fight for New Guinea, and as Allied forces crept north, this impact was felt on Japanese plans. Fleet Air Wing 10 at this stage remained as a force patrolling its assigned western and northern areas, awaiting any need for its greater capabilities to be called upon. Perth itself was even further away from the front, and it seemed any threat to Perth and Fremantle Harbour was now extremely distant. Only once in the war had Perth been alerted to Japanese movements, when in April 1942 the Japanese Navy entered the Indian Ocean through the Sunda Strait, after HMAS *Perth* was sunk, and attacked the British in Ceylon at its bases

---

[415] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–15 January 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[416] ibid.

[417] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1 February 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

[418] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–28 February 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

there.[419] The raid was not aimed at Perth, but the fact that the Japanese had entered the Indian Ocean caused consternation, given Perth's modest defences at that time. The threat passed, as naval forces in Pacific Ocean battles drew Japanese ships and planes to that theatre, and ensured a quick retreat from the Indian Ocean with any threat to Perth avoided.

By 1944 it seemed that any similar threat was minimal, and patrol results and operational activities supported this view. But soon defensive forces were again to be called on and the Wing's readiness, developed since its arrival in Perth and up until January and February 1944, was yet again to prove the full capabilities of the Americans.

Qantas, January–February 1944: Cocos Bombing

By the beginning of 1944, the Indian Ocean service now included the new leg from Koggala to Karachi. The significance of this modification meant that the Empire route was now again fully linked by air, as a complete set of flights from Australia to England, fulfilling Qantas's plan to reopen the route as best as it could. The gap that had been created with an overland section from Koggala to Karachi, where the British had their terminus, had created a problem where passengers and mail and freight had to be redistributed by whatever means were available.

According to Qantas pilot Rex Senior, who flew the service, the passengers and cargo were, until the opening of the air extension, transported overland. Senior flew the second actual Karachi flight and many subsequent more. To him, the preceding arrangement was a disorganised situation, as Ceylon, where Koggala was located, was an island and no direct road-route was available. A range of local arrangements were used, and it was a relief when the gap was closed and the additional route inaugurated. The new segment added an additional 1,600 miles to the already long journey.[420]

By January 1944 the new route was now established and regarded as a vast improvement to the service. Flying a track along the west coast of India over the Arabian sea, the flight flew at dusk from Koggala and landed at Korangi Creek, Karachi, another British air force base, like Koggala. Korangi Creek was a busy area and local boats dotted the water, making landing a careful affair for reasons of safety and the danger of waterborne obstacles.[421]

Aside from the need for additional planes to operate the route, the Karachi extension also required additional crews to ensure safe flight operations were maintained. As previously described, crew planning involved flying to Koggala, rest several days and then fly the next plane back to Perth. At this stage in January 1944 the operation had sufficient Catalinas, all based in Perth at Qantas's Marine Base. But the new system was as much about availability of crews as it was about planes. The Catalinas had proven their reliability, but crew members were more fragile. The new system required two standby crews in each direction including rest in Kogalla, inbound and return, then the final flight home as outbound standby crew. This system ensured rest both ways after overnight flying and maximised awareness and crew and aircraft safety, a Qantas priority.[422] The only alternative option that Qantas had available for crewing this arrangement was more

---

[419] M. Tomlinson, op. cit.

[420] R. Senior, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

[421] ibid.

[422] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 5.

crew, but this option was not chosen and no problems were encountered with crews and plane performance.[423]

Accommodation and rest *en route* was important to the plan and had to be of high quality. Closenburg House was used (as before during pre-Karachi extension flights) near Koggala and now, in addition, the British forces' mess in Karachi where crew could rest. In Perth, crew lived in private quarters or commercial dwellings, in relative obscurity from the public as flights remained classified still in August 1944. Rest was important and the ability to use high-quality quarters while at overseas locations and have pleasant accomodation while in Perth (for example, Rex Senior by now had a house in Cottesloe) was essential for well-being and safety.

By February 1944 things were going smoothly for Qantas, and the Indian Ocean service with its new extension was well underway and overflying the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea without mishap. The flight plan remained as being direct to Koggala, with no stop planned at Cocos. However, in February 1944 Qantas was required to again land in Cocos, for the second time, and it was a dangerous moment that was encountered.

Qantas was tasked to stop at Cocos on 14 February 1944 to pick up a sick naval officer, dropped there by a passing ship. The flight was flown by Captain Tapp while Rex Senior flew as the navigator. It was an outbound flight from Perth and heading to Koggala as its destination. All was well as they left Perth for a 14-hour flight. The plan was to arrive in Cocos the next day at dawn, when weather was expected to be calm and the lagoon suitable for landing. Cocos lagoon was surrounded by a semi-circle of islands and regarded as a 'tight' landing, so daylight was the preferred safety option. The extra distance for the trip and additional take-off required fuel to be taken on-board while sitting on the Cocos lagoon. This procedure was risky and would put the plane in an exposed position should any eventuality arise. The plane departed and flew to Cocos as planned and successfully approached and landed on the lagoon. Unloading began and preparations to take the passenger on board commenced. Captain Tapp wanted to be prepared to depart as quickly as possible, should an eventually arise. He realised that in broad daylight and on the water his plane was completely exposed and in an enemy-patrolled area.[424]

Tapp's intuition was not unwarranted. Without warning, a sound was noticed and suddenly a plane appeared in the sky and overflew the lagoon. It was a Japanese Betty bomber and had clearly spotted the Catalina on the water. Unprepared for take-off, it was a 'sitting duck'. The bomber swept overhead and launched two bombs, while the Qantas crew dived for cover. Fortunately the bombs missed. The crew awaited a second attack but the plane did not return and flew on.[425]

Captain Tapp made this own report on the incident, and he is quoted in both Fysh's *Qantas at War* as well as Pattison and Goodall. Tapp was quoted by Fysh as saying that the Japanese plane had passed overhead then flown away, later returning to drop its bombs. The bombs were released from 15,000 feet, so high that the plane could not be seen.[426] Tapp, quoted in Pattison and Goodall, using Tapp's Qantas Empire

---

[423] ibid., p. 6.

[424] R. Senior, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

[425] ibid.

[426] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 191.

Airways report, indicated that the Japanese plane was identified as a Betty bomber but did not initially drop any bombs. Instead, Tapp wrote that the bomber flew straight over the Catalina with no guns fired and no bombs dropped, then climbed away as quickly as it could. Tapp stated that he felt the pilot was as startled as the Qantas crew were, but the plane circled the island and returned to then drop two bombs, which missed. No shots were fired and the Japanese plane flew away, not to be seen again. Tapp assumed that the Japanese plane's range must have been at its maximum and was unable to press any further attack, based on its bombs being exhausted and considerations for fuel and range.[427]

The Cocos incident was the only time that Qantas and the Japanese crossed paths on the Indian Ocean route. But the incident was proof of the threat that they posed to the Indian Ocean route and the wisdom of the planning put in place by Crowther concerning the Indian Ocean route plan from the outset. The initial planning stipulated that planes would leave Perth at early morning to enable a night crossing through the Japanese-patrolled area nearby Cocos. The schedule of the early morning departures and the secret classification of the flight gave rise to speculation that the purpose of the Qantas flights was secret military business. Logically, to Perth people the Qantas flights were believed to be secret flights and part of the war effort.

While the Cocos incident was indeed a dangerous moment for the Indian Ocean service, it was unknown to the general public at the time, and in the true nature of confidential operations, was only revealed later in the year when Hudson Fysh was able to announce the reason for Qantas's work on the service.

Fleet Air Wing 10, March–April 1944: Perth 'Threatened'

It was becoming increasingly evident by March 1944 that the immediate Japanese air threat to Perth had been overcome. In early 1944, enemy contacts were low and, of those recorded, only submarines had been sighted. But while the work of Fleet Air Wing 10 had been comprehensive and succeeded in discouraging the Japanese from attacking Australia, the threat to Perth was not yet extinguished, and military forces, including the Wing, were to be called to action in March 1944 in the defence of Perth.

In March 1944, an emergency alert was issued as Perth and the Western Australian coast were again imperilled. The threat replicated the moment when a Japanese flotilla had entered the Indian Ocean earlier in the war. In early 1944, Allied intelligence had identified that Japanese naval assets were likely to attack the prime targets of Perth and Fremantle. A redeployment of Japanese ships and planes was noted on 8 March 1944 when codebreakers detected Japanese plans to redeploy naval forces to harbours now occupied by the Japanese, in the former Dutch East Indies and closer to Perth. The emergency was not concluded until 20 March 1944 after all available forces including Fleet Air Wing 10 were involved.[428]

Military intelligence reported that a number of Japanese vessels were assembling in Singapore as a precursor to a raid into the Indian Ocean. All Allied units were placed on alert and reinforcements were despatched to Western Australia. The Wing immediately increased patrols with all planes in operation from Perth and the north, including their

---

[427] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

[428] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–31 March 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 March 2018).

bases at Exmouth and Heron Haven. The long-range capabilities of the Catalina were a valuable asset during this time as they were able to fly deep into the Indian Ocean to detect any forward scouts or unusual movements of a large naval force. Designed as the eyes of the fleet, the Catalina was well placed to detect ships up to 12 hours in advance of its own fleet or base. Darwin, Heron Haven, Exmouth and Pelican Point were bases from which Wing Catalinas could operate in support, if the situation quickly developed.[429]

Perth and its port of Fremantle was always a potential target throughout the war, as it harboured many Allied ships. The 1942 raid into the Indian Ocean, which was aimed at the large number of British maritime forces in Ceylon, was a similar occurrence that caused forces in Fremantle to feel that, on this occasion, they may be the target. Fremantle operated submarines and capital ships deep into Japanese-held territory, and was a valuable Allied strategic port and a constant threat to the Japanese.[430]

On this occasion in 1944, General MacArthur's headquarters assessed that the likely target was Fremantle. This assessment was based on the redeployment of Japanese ships from Truk in the Pacific. As part of the response, British and American assets were also redeployed to thwart any attempt by the Japanese to enter the Indian Ocean. If they did enter, it was assumed that Fremantle would be their target and that Fleet Air Wing 10 would be one of the first contact points, as their long-range patrolling would be one of the first air assets to make contact.[431]

Despite the intelligence and redeployment of forces, by 20 March the emergency was cancelled as no approach to the Indian Ocean by the Japanese had been detected. Wing Catalinas returned to normal patrolling and all associated units were stood down. But, regardless of the phantom emergency, the situation illustrated the critical role the Wing played in detecting and forestalling the threat of any Japanese advances to Perth and the coast in the north. The use of Catalinas as a first-level warning asset was shown through the patrols operated and the results obtained, which registered zero contacts in the circumstances. During this time, Catalinas operated in tandem with other American and Australian forces to demonstrate their ability to ensure a warning-level defence of Perth, and the important Fremantle base, let alone the Perth population and the Catalina base itself located there. Wing log books describe the rapid movement of planes north during this period, with 24-hour patrols being conducted and rapid turnaround activities from Pelican Point to forward bases.[432]

Following the drama of March 1944, April returned to relative normal, with all assets at bases but with increased ocean patrols as a precaution. The focus was now again on submarines, which remained a constant threat. Utility planes were prominent in patrolling Gage Roads and Fremantle Harbour approaches, while Catalinas swept sea lanes north and south of Perth. Should Japanese submarines mount any attacks, then

---

[429] ibid.

[430] L. Cairns, op. cit., p. 81.

[431] M. Sturma, op. cit., pp. 76–80. In a section titled 'Trouble in Paradise', Sturma describes the 'emergency' and the response by the Americans.

[432] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–31 March 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 April 2018).

submarine sweeps would limit them coming into firing range or, should they show the telltale periscope, Catalinas were ready to pounce with their torpedoes or bombs.[433]

The Wing was now using its plentiful armoury and aircraft inventory to employ swarming tactics as a way to suppress any potential for Japanese submarines to acquire firing positions on land or sea targets. Though the raid into the Indian Ocean did not eventuate, the value of Fremantle remained known and the threat of submarine attacks on the harbour's mouth remained the best-value target for the enemy. Once ships were clear of the harbour, it was much harder for submarines to locate and attack a ship, particularly if escorted by submarine-hunting Catalinas.

Aside from close escorts of shipping, the other major tactical change in April was the increased range of patrols which now went deeper into the Indian Ocean as any perceived threat diminished. Patrol sectors expanded in size, which meant more hours in the air per Catalina.

But it wasn't all work and the personnel of the Wing had the option of rest and relaxation when things were quiet. One Catalina, on 30 April 1944, flew to Nornalup Inlet south of Perth, near Walpole. Local information (via a news report) suggested that this was a rest and relaxation trip under command of Admiral Christie. The party was believed to have taken rest at a lodge in the area (Tinglewood) and landed on the inlet itself and stayed for several days, as part of a program of recreation and relaxation for Wing crews. It was a very visible reminder for the locals of the Americans in action and it stoked morale for those in the area who rarely saw any signs of the war, as well as improving the *esprit de corps* of the Americans who protected Western Australia at that time.[434]

But aside from some time off, April saw more maritime support patrols for submarines such as USS *Bowfin* and USS *Lapon,* and all ships leaving harbour. On 3 April 1944 a periscope was sighted and an anti-submarine patrol mounted. But things did not eventuate as planned, and the submarine slipped away. In another aircraft mishap, on 4 April, a Catalina foundered in the sea and sunk. All personnel were recovered and rescued by other Wing planes and ships in the vicinity. On 6 April 1944 an anti-submarine patrol for the Dutch submarine K-14 was conducted, and USS *Gunnel* was escorted by a utility plane from Pelican Point, illustrating once again the vigilance and comprehensiveness of Wing operations.[435]

But despite the gains being made in reduced air-to-air contacts, and a limited number of submarine sightings, the war seemed to be about to shift to a new phase as the Allies pushed the Japanese back on all fronts. The reduced contact numbers and the diminished threat to Perth meant that the Wing had capacity to make a stronger contribution to the greater war-effort. The emergency situation, in which the Japanese were thought to be entering the Indian Ocean, had not eventuated and was the last major threat to Perth during the war. With threats in Western Australia receding, the likelihood of Fleet Air Wing 10 being tasked for forward area duty was now growing in likelihood.

---

[433] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–15 April 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 26 April 2018).

[434] 'Rest and Recreation for Officers at Tinglewood Lodge'*, Walpole Nornalup and District Historical Society Incorporated Newsletter,* 1943–1957, pp. 4–1.

[435] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1 March–30 April 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 March 2018).

Figure 6. American Catalina on the water at Nornalup Inlet.[436] *The A*mericans *took rest and recreation, in this case, using their own flying boats, to travel to remote parts of the state.*

Qantas, March–April 1944: An Important Visitor and 100 Crossings Achieved

By March 1944 the Indian Ocean route was a well-established operation and had been flying for just under a year. The route had expanded, resulting in more hours being flown, and only one mishap of any consequence had occurred with the unexpected contact with the Japanese bomber in the Cocos lagoon. The brush with the enemy was a salient reminded that the area around Cocos was dangerous being patrolled by the Japanese, so the Qantas plan to overfly the area at night was a wise and safe precaution. Night time and clouds had always been the Catalinas' friend, and this tactic of defence by avoidance was well known to Catalina pilots, both the Americans operating out of Perth and the Qantas crews.[437]

But, while the planes flew on, other plans were being hatched by Qantas and the British. Lord Knollys, head of Qantas's partner, British Overseas Airway Corporation, visited Australia in March 1944 to discuss operations and future initiatives. Fysh and Knollys had a good relationship, developed when they had met during Fysh's visit to Britain in 1943. Knollys's visit to Australia illustrated the importance of Qantas's work and the now greater level of safety in the operating area. The flight path was considered basically as safe, though it still remained officially a secret operation. Fysh was effusive in his praise for Knollys and called him 'a great ambassador for England', who had done much to help start the Indian Ocean service.[438] During the visit, Knollys conferred with Fysh about a second service across the Indian Ocean, using Consolidated Liberators, Fysh's previously preferred aircraft for the route, which would cover the distance in about 17 hours, compared to the average 28 hours taken by the Catalinas. The Liberators would fly to Perth and commence operations in three months' time. Sixteen passengers could be taken, compared to three on the Catalinas, and increased payload including paper mail was also able to be carried, given the extra capacity of the Liberator.[439]

While the new plans were being settled, Qantas's value to Perth was not being overlooked. Apart from the Liberator service being approved, the importance of the earlier wartime efforts were underscored by the celebration of the 100th Indian Ocean service

---

[436] 'Rest and Recreation for Officers at Tinglewood Lodge', op. cit.

[437] R. Senior, op. cit., p. 6. Senior comments in his monograph that flights left Perth in the early morning to take advantage of a Cocos night crossing.

[438] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 201.

[439] ibid.

Catalina flight. The Catalina's ability to penetrate the defensive screen applied by the Japanese had been a complete success with the 100th flight achieved by 11 April 1944, when flight 1Q51 landed at 0330 hours, commanded by Captain Tapp, on the Swan River, at Qantas's Western Operations Division base. The flight was quicker than the average time, taking just 26 hours to fly from Lake Koggala to Perth. Western Operations Division manager Captain Crowther immediately dispatched a signal to Fysh in Sydney, commenting that the flights were 'undoubtedly unique' and the Division was now to set itself to achieve 100 more accident-free flights (which it would fulfil).[440]

Fysh was the first to reply to the good news with an immediate message to Crowther saying that 'in safety and efficiency it is a record unique in the world. Guard it well'.[441] Fysh also noted that all air and ground crews were worthy of praise for their dedication and effort to the service.[442]

The achievement attracted not only internal praise within Qantas and British circles, but also from a range of leading politicians, bureaucrats and other aviators. Doubtless, Fysh and Crowther wanted to publicise their still-secret service, and were frustrated at not being able to do so with the general public and their general aviation colleagues. But praise still came from many important sources, demonstrating the recognition from a small circle of people aware of the service. Qantas had fought hard to convince the government of its value and then fought even harder to develop a plan. From Perth, Qantas demonstrated that the Japanese threat could be thwarted if the right plan was implemented and the right plane chosen, with experienced and competent crews.

Qantas's partner, British Overseas Airways Corporation, despatched a message from its Chairman Viscount Knollys, who sent his congratulations on 20 April 1944. Knollys had flown on the Indian Ocean service and was also a proud partner with Qantas on the running of the service, making note not only of the high risk involved, but also the high standards that Qantas applied to its aviation operation and its important wartime contribution.[443] The Australian government also congratulated Qantas when Treasurer, and future Prime Minister, Ben Chifley sent a telegram to Fysh. Chifley called the Indian Ocean service 'a most useful service' and its running demonstrated the greatest credit on Fysh's organisation.[444] Similarly, wartime Minister for Information, Arthur Calwell, sent his congratulations on 1 May 1944.[445] The former Prime Minister, the nation's leader at the outset of the Second World War, Robert Menzies, also thanked Fysh for informing him of the successful completion of the 100th flight. Menzies commented that he regarded

---

[440] W. Crowther, official correspondence to H. Fysh, 13 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[441] H. Fysh, official correspondence to W. Crowther, 17 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[442] ibid.

[443] Lord Knollys, official correspondence to H. Fysh, 20 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[444] B. Chifley offical correspondence to H. Fysh, 3 May 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[445] A, Caldwell official correspondence to H. Fysh, 1 May 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Qantas's work as part of the war effort and that Qantas's pilots and crews were to be commended for their dedication and service.[446]

From outside of the very high-level government individuals and Qantas's inner circle, the most notable of responders was AB Corbett. At the outset, Corbett had strongly opposed the service and ensured that Fysh was made to jump over many hurdles in getting the Indian Ocean service up and running. The success of the flights was not only a victory in aviation terms for Fysh and Qantas, but also was one over Corbett and his obstructionist policies, which had sought to discourage the service at every turn.

An interesting note is that, as mentioned, the 100th flight occurred within the time frame during which the flights were still classified. As the date of the 100th flight approached, Fysh wrote to Crowther in Perth reminding him that that he, Crowther, would have to say the actual flight was from India. Fysh directed that Crowther would be required to message him first, mentioning certain facts only including the captain's name and the location of each flight. But he also said 'for security reasons you will probably have to state "one hundredth crossing", leaving out Indian Ocean'.[447]

While Qantas's achievement in successfully flying its 100th crossing of the Indian Ocean was its own story, in many ways, it was a shared effort. The assistance from the Americans was felt most heavily from the first flight less than a year earlier, though as time passed by Qantas was able to develop its own capabilities and conduct an independent operation.

To illustrate the weight of assistance provided and the almost impossibility of Qantas operating without the Americans' help, Qantas, in the early days, had to taxi their Catalinas upstream to the American base just to refuel. If this had not been possible, Qantas would have had to hand-pump fuel from drums, a lengthy and time-consuming task. Later Shell installed feeling lines on the loading ramp.[448] Crowther supported this general view of the value of the assistance, saying that much help was forthcoming from the Americans nearby.[449] The 100 flights were as much a joint effort as they were Qantas's victory.

In some areas, reliance on the Americans was not able to be accessed and Qantas expanded its own capabilities. By early 1944, a growing staff group required accommodation, and by April 1944, private premises were being hired. Pilots such as Ivan Peirce and Rex Senior, who were previously living in the Esplanade Hotel, now moved to private residences.[450] To ease burdens in wartime Perth, Qantas even established a policy of hiring locals, wherever it could, to ensure that extra accommodation and costs were not an issue that could disrupt operations.[451] To further reduce immediate staff needs and maintenance loads, external facilities outside of Perth such as the air force's 4 Aircraft Depot, located in Boulder, 300 miles east from Perth,

---

[446] R. Menzies, official correspondence to H. Fysh, 24 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[447] H. Fysh, official correspondence to W. Crowther, 4 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[448] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 21.

[449] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 10.

[450] R. Senior, op. cit., p. 3.

[451] ibid.

undertook engine overhauls with engines transported there via rail. The engines had to be carried on the Qantas utility car to the rail yard and returned over the same route.[452]

What had begun as a flight to transport mail and passengers and break the Japanese encroachment upon Perth and Western Australia, had now grown into a major flight hub from Perth to Koggala and then further to Karachi, where a direct link-up was made with the British. The spirit of the wartime with American assistance, and the input of Perth's population to support Qantas, was felt most in the short amount of time that it took to build and support their base and make it operational. Perth locals had provided business support and accommodation, social support to both groups and even made the Americans' much-loved hamburgers in the American style, to make them feel at home. Perth and the Americans were effectively in partnership with Qantas and together formed a collaboration that enabled the Indian Ocean service to function as smoothly as it did.

By April 1944, and despite the obstacles that Qantas faced, its Indian Ocean service had recorded 100 faultless flights in less than a year's operation. This was an outstanding feat of aviation and included a new record of the world's longest passenger flight. With Qantas, by this time in 1944, basically relying on its own resources, its ability to operate another 100 flights was soon to be proven.

Fleet Air Wing 10, May–June 1944: Taking the Fight to the Japanese

The early 1944 security scare reminded the armed forces in Perth and Western Australia that the war was still at their doorstep, and that combat readiness remained a high priority. Although the Americans had, by 1944, ensured that Japanese airpower had been driven from their operational and patrolling areas, the Wing was still part of a greater military theatre in which the Wing remained active. Commanded by General MacArthur, the combined Allied forces in Australia were now preparing for a final thrust towards his long-avowed target, the Philippines. Ironically for the Wing, this was their point of origin at the beginning of the war, which, by now, had seen them spend more than two years in Perth at Pelican Point. But the war raged on, and although Perth seemed now safe by May 1944, the Wing crews had more offensive long-range missions to undertake from Perth before they would depart their base, and temporary home, in Perth.

Perth and the Western Australian coast still remained a potential target for the Japanese by mid-1944, not from an air-based attack, due to distance, but from Japanese submarines. As the emergency had indicated, any surface-fleet based attack was unlikely, as defences were now strong and could be quickly mobilised along the coast. Fremantle still fielded a large submarine and surface fleet, which conducted operations into enemy territory far to the north, and for this reason alone it was a prime target. To further illustrate its value as a military target, it was a Fremantle-based submarine that alerted the Allies, in the previous month, to the potential Indian Ocean entry by Japanese maritime forces. The submarine, commanded by the son of American Admiral Chester Nimitz, was conducting an intelligence-gathering patrol when loitering near Singapore at the time.[453]

In response to the March 1944 emergency, the Wing increased Catalina anti-submarine patrols around Perth in an effort to ensure that no threat existed to Perth and its important military base at Fremantle. Patrol sectors in May 1944 were re-focussed on areas once abandoned. The Wing had been successful in pushing any approaching

---

[452] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 188.

[453] 'Expected Japanese Raid', *The West Australian,* 17 August 1945. Available from: Trove (accessed 14 October 2018.

Japanese planes out of the near coastal patrol zones, which had been threatened in 1942 and 1943 when the enemy had bombed airports and installations on the Western Australian coast. Sectors adjacent to Fremantle, and within the zones nearby, to the high-frequency shipping movement areas near Geraldton, Exmouth and Heron Haven, were also activated. The Wing's mission now was anti-submarine patrolling in these areas, and reports indicated that 'dawn to dusk patrols' were carried out throughout the month.[454]

In addition to patrolling and defending the west coast and Perth since 1942, the Wing was also regarded as an offensive asset. The previous Flight Gridiron mission was illustrative of that capacity, and again the attacking capability of the Catalina was to be employed. Long-range missions were a strength of the Catalina, so long as fighter protection or other tactical approaches, such as night cover, could be utilised on approach to the target. The best tactic for the slow and cumbersome Catalina was darkness or clouds, and only darkness could be relied upon when flying into enemy territory.

In June 1944, six Catalinas headed by Commander Munsdorff departed late at night to arrive in enemy territory by dawn – approaching in darkness but arriving in light, to ensue that their targets could be identified and attacked. At the Japanese-held Penfui airbase near Kupang in West Timor, Allied intelligence had identified the source of the bombers that the Wing had infrequently confronted in their operations, and also the likely source for Qantas's single enemy encounter at Cocos.[455]

The Catalinas flew from Perth via Darwin to prepare for the attack run to Penfui. The raid was successful, with the bomb-damage assessment reporting hits, and all planes returned safely with no casualties recorded. Only five planes were able to attack with one plane unable to join the attack due to engine troubles. The Catalinas returned to Darwin and then to home base at Pelican Point the next day.

The successful foray into enemy territory from Perth indicated that the Wing was now moving from a defensive patrolling formation to one of attack and aggression in its tactics. The enemy now knew that any thought of approaching Perth or the Australian west coast was no longer likely, and that Fleet Air Wing 10 had done its job patrolling, protecting and now attacking the Japanese to secure Perth and the adjacent coast. As an added element of proof of the Wing's defensive success, throughout June 1944, no enemy contacts were recorded other than the Penfui raid which was conducted successfully.[456]

Qantas, May–June 1944: One Year's Operation of the Indian Ocean Service

By May 1944, the Indian Ocean service was approaching nearly a year of faultless operations. Local engineering support continued to develop to lessen reliance on the Americans who were soon to depart, no further contact had been made with enemy aircraft, and the added Karachi sector was operating smoothly.

Things had gone to plan so far with the flights themselves, but some areas of organisation were still not settled. One area of concern was the passenger ticketing

---

[454] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 4 May 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 March 2018).

[455] G. Munsdorf, op. cit.

[456] 'Expected Japanese Raid', op. cit.

service. Passengers were an administrative burden, but they were also a source of income for Qantas, and a vital part of the commercial equation.

Qantas experienced difficulties up to mid-1944 when organising passenger lists, and eventually contracted an agent to book commercial passengers. McKillop's Stock Agents in Sydney was awarded the ticketing contract for bookings at the Australian end. But things remained haphazard with diplomatic posts overseas still allocating places for inbound-to-Australia passengers, both civilians and officials. When it came to passenger control and decision-making, government authorities still held sway. Within the passenger movement system, Qantas was required to advise Colombo (Air Priorities Board Southeast Asia in Ceylon) of the names of all passengers, destinations and level of priority. The same priorities and orders were applied from Karachi, should passengers board there. High-priority passengers were booked through the Australian High Commission, India, with civilians confirmed through the Indian Priorities Board, if moving on an easterly flight to Australia.[457]

The Department of Civil Aviation prescribed a number of regulations upon both Qantas and the passengers themselves, including declarations of passenger weight (critical for loadmaster calculations), baggage weight, justification of need, as well as the identification requirements and destination details.[458] The Department of Civil Aviation in Australia was responsible for flight scheduling, and coordinated air movements with Qantas, to establish the Perth to Koggala and Colombo (for Liberators) and Koggala and Colombo to Karachi flight schedules, which directly impacted upon seat allocation planning.

In this period of 1944 the priority of passengers was clarified by the Department of Civil Aviation with the following priorities:

a. High-priority passengers for whom delay in other connections may be caused

b. Passengers of such importance to the war effort on first available aircraft

c. Movements on duties with war-effort which necessitates movement by fastest possible means

d. Movements of personnel desirable by air but of lower priority

e. Movement desirable by air but not necessarily connected with war effort[459]

Civilian tickets were purchased with cash, with passengers being issued with a travel warrant or order. Travel detail was a closely guarded secret as flights were still classified in May 1944. Passengers were warned that travel plans, including route and timing, remained as confidential information, and were not to be divulged. The flights carried two types of passengers: fare paying and non-fare paying. Qantas immigration

---

[457] E. Johnston, official correspondence to A. Corbett, 'Addendum No. 2 Perth-Karachi-London Air Service', 25 May 1945, Hudson Fysh Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

[458] ibid.

[459] D. McVey, 'Memorandum for Department of External Affairs', 5 October 1944, National Australian Archives, Canberra, File A816.

and flight records show that, overall, 48 out of 858 passengers carried on the Catalina service were classified as non-fare paying, with 43 of the 48 being carried during the 1943/44 period.[460]

While the figures show the total passenger numbers carried, they suggest that, through the duration of the service, the majority of the passengers were likely not high-profile individuals, as the far-higher percentage of passengers were fare-paying. Similarly, the official Australian government immigration cards from later in 1944 and 1945 support the Qantas figures, with a high number of fare-paying passengers from civilian occupations being carried, or service personnel with lower rank onboard.[461] These figures directly contradict the general notion, asserted by other historians of this period such as Pattison and Goodall, Leebold, and Senior, that mostly 'VIP' or high-value personnel were given access to the Indian Ocean service.[462]

Senior says the reason for the service was to allow invariably 'VIPs' and diplomatic mail to be carried.[463] Leebold quotes that the majority were senior officers and 'highly ranked personnel' that were carried on the service.[464]

With ticketing arrangements now better organised and the mix of passengers identified, the in-flight experience was another factor that by mid-1944 was emerging as a known feature of operations. The flights were utilitarian, but food and drink was available, though limited in type and quantity, due mainly to weight restrictions. Advice on sleep was issued pre-flight, as was a warning that passengers should get as much pre-flight sleep as possible, as the journey was long and arduous. Clothing was instructed to be loose, and no restricting bands were to be worn. Warm clothing was to be used and a strict no-smoking warning was in force on the flight.[465]

Aside from the arrangements in place for ticketing, in-flight clothing, and the restrictions on food, the tension created by the front-line nature of the journey also was confronting to the passengers. A long flight in an uncomfortable military aircraft awaited them and danger was ever-present. On one occasion, on 20 May 1944, a flight was forced to set down in Geraldton as it approached the coast. Flight 1Q59 flew into Geraldton on one engine, after Captain McMaster made the decision to shut down an engine that had a cylinder-head oil leak and was losing pressure. The plane had flown on one engine for 800 miles over the Indian Ocean after the leak was noticed. Smoke was seen blowing from the engine and danger loomed, as no landing could be made until the coast was reached. The plane had flown for 28 hours and 27 minutes and carried two military officers, who were carrying important mail.[466]

---

[460] Qantas Catalina Flight Information, Flying Information Data Qantas Indian Ocean Service, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[461] National Archives of Australia, 'K269 8 March 1945, Qantas Catalina G-AGEL Incoming Passenger List', Bentley, Western Australia, sourced 15 November 2016.

[462] ibid.

[463] R. Senior, op. cit., p. 10.

[464] A. Leebold, op. cit., p. 60.

[465] R. McKillop and Company, official correspondence to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 14 August 1944, Hudson Fysh Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

[466] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 26.

At the time of the aircraft's previous service, both engines had been overhauled in Boulder, at the air force maintenance depot there, which was also used by the Americans for their own Twin Wasp Catalina engines. The engine problem that ensued was found to be a rare issue in the Catalina flights' story, with the Twin Wasp engines being known for their reliability. But, even so, constant vigilance and professional airmanship had averted a possible disaster. The plane remained in Geraldton for two days and, after repairs, was flown to Qantas's Nedlands Marine Base in Perth for overhaul and maintenance.[467] Norm Roberts, the Nedlands chief engineer, stated in his diary of Perth operations that a reconditioned part was the problem, and it was not an immediate shortcoming of Qantas's internal maintenance system.[468]

The engine problem underscored the critical nature of having only four Catalinas in Perth undertaking the flying load. To overcome that burden, by June 1944, Qantas acquired its fifth and final plane. The squadron at Nedlands now totalled five Catalinas, which were flying the route and further flouting the Japanese blockade. Qantas's risk profile was benefiting from the aggressive patrolling being carried out in 1944 by the Americans who had been hard at work pushing Japanese air power well away from Perth and the Western Australian coast, paving the way for safer skies so far as Qantas was concerned. Though the work done by the Americans was not planned to support Qantas, it was of immense benefit to Qantas's operations and had existed for over a year before Qantas operations began, and extended well into 1944.

Qantas's new plane, *Spica Star,* was a Catalina like the others, but it was a slightly different model. While the original four planes were American-built PBY-5 planes, *Spica Star* was a PB2B-1 model, built by Boeing in Canada. Unfortunately, it was to found to be less reliable than the Consolidated-built Catalinas, with fuel tank leakage issues reducing its usage.

But regardless of issues including ticketing administration, a rare engine problem, and the addition of a new, but problematic Catalina, Qantas continued to run a reliable service with a high passenger load achieved. Mail continued to be carried and, as mentioned, classified document couriers used the Indian Ocean service. Qantas was well on its way to 100 more successful flights, before one year of flying the route had elapsed.

---

[467] ibid.

[468] N. Roberts, 'Engineers at the Ready', unpublished document, handwritten account by Qantas's senior Perth-based engineer, p. 9, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

.

Figure 7. Qantas's Antares Star *on the water at Lake Koggala.*[469] *Lake Koggala was a tight take-off for Qantas and was used twice each leg for take-off and landing of the expanded service which commenced in November 1943.*

Fleet Air Wing 10, July–September 1944: The Wing Prepares to Depart Perth and Western Australian Bases

By July 1944, threats from Japanese planes had, for several months, diminished to the extent that no new contacts had been recorded. The Japanese air threat was now effectively over. Nevertheless, the Perth and Western Australian area was regarded as militarily active, and the Wing continued to operated its routine patrols, as it had done for the past two years, as part of the war effort.

But things were now changing fast as the war front changed, moving further north. Unsurprisingly, the Wing was directed to begin preparations for movement from Perth to operational areas further north. The withdrawal of all Wing elements would be complete by September as the movement of planes ships and personnel was a graduated and staged affair. Movement commenced on 17 July 1944, with routine patrols being discontinued, while the Wing began preparations to soon depart Perth and Western Australia. The planes began moving in groups, under their own power, while personnel went by ship and train across the nation to existing bases, or direct to the new operational area in Los Negros, in the Admiralty Islands, New Guinea.

Three planes departed immediately for Adelaide on 18 July 1944, with four sections of three planes each soon following within days. One plane crashed on takeoff and was badly damaged, the Wing's last incident in Western Australia. On 21 July, officers and enlisted personnel of the utility squadron started to move to forward areas, with the last section of tow-planes (the utility planes) departing Perth for Adelaide. On 28 July to 31 July 1944, ground training and maintenance ceased until the move to the new

[469] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 38.

operational area was completed.[470] July 1944 was the Wing's final fully operational month based at Pelican Point and the three forward bases it operated.

In July 1944, some operations remained active, with 52 flights conducted out of Perth, totalling 79.8 hours, averaging 13.3 hours per pilot per month. Unit records indicated that operations were now limited due to the latter part of July being used as preparation time for shipment of all aircraft and personnel to the Admiralty Islands.[471]

In August 1944 the final Wing personnel, made up of 76 men and eight officers, left Perth for New Guinea. These men represented the last of the Wing complement. Many travelled by train to Brisbane and Townsville, and some officers went by air. From Townsville they were transported by ship to forward areas. The Wing's utility squadron was outfitted with new aircraft with a vastly different complement from that which existed in Perth and suggestive of its new operational roles.[472] At roughly the same time, the Wing senior staff arrived at their Fleet headquarters in Brisbane. Fleet Wing Headquarters unit was now preparing to board the *SS Peter Lassen,* in transit to their new operational area. By 30 September, the *SS Peter Lassen* had arrived at its destination at Los Negros, New Guinea.[473]

Beginning with a dilapidated three-plane squadron in March of 1942, the Wing rotated approximately 70 planes through Pelican Point until their departure in 1944. In 1942, the Japanese advance was in the ascendant and Perth residents feared invasion, while the Western Australian coast was frequently bombed, with the last bombing occurring in September 1943, when a submarine shelled Port Gregory, near Onslow.[474] But since this time in mid-1943 and into 1944 the Japanese threat had been checked and eventually halted and Perth secured from the threat of aerial attack, though sub-surface vessels remained a threat with Fremantle still an important submarine and capital-ship base. The flight of the Japanese from the deeper Indian Ocean and coastal Western Australia enabled deeper patrolling into the Indian Ocean and greater northern patrolling from Exmouth and Heron Haven to apply even greater pressure on the Japanese. The result of this period of patrolling, and also attacks on the Japanese in their own bases, far from Perth and Western Australia, turned the area from a threatened defensive part of Australia into a safe and then offensive launchpad for the Allied fightback.

In retrospect, the two and half year stay in Perth had the effect of both securing Perth's flank and, at the same time, significantly impacting on Perth's culture, through the sudden arrival of the Americans in large numbers. Two years previously, there was virtually no naval, nor air force, defensive presence in Perth. At the same time, approximately 1,200 Wing servicemen and others from Fremantle-based units descended on Perth. Their effect was dramatic, with industry, local business, real estate and social culture all heavily impacted. Social change was prominent with nightclubs expanded in

---

[470] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, 1–31 July 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 April 2018).

[471] War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, Scouting Squadron 61, 1–31 August 1944, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com, 29 March 2018).

[472] ibid.

[473] ibid.

[474] K. Gomm, op. cit., p. 305.

capacity and number, and wives were found from amongst the local female population. Court cases occurred, and crime increased. Most of all, the local areas adjacent to the Pelican Point base, including the campus of the University of Western Australia, were most heavily impacted.

The departure of the Americans in late 1944 ended a dramatic period in Perth's history. The deepest impact was felt through the securing of Perth's wartime defences to protect Perth and Western Australia, and the considerable social and local economic impact the Americans had during that period. The historical, military, social and family links endure to this day. These areas of impact will be explored in more detail in the Legacy chapter of this thesis.

Qantas, July–August 1944: No Longer a Secret Flight and Passenger Profiles

By July 1944 the Japanese threat to Western Australia and Perth itself had largely dissipated. This reality was illustrated in operational terms through Qantas's Catalina neighbours, the Americans, leaving Perth to take up duties at Los Negros, in the Admiralty Islands, New Guinea. This move by the Americans was part of the advancing front-line, now moving into formerly dominated Japanese territory. As a consequence, Perth was no longer regarded as being under threat from the Japanese.

The graduated departure of the Americans, which began in July 1944, indicated to Qantas that their secret and dangerous route was, in all likelihood, now a safe aviation zone, and that the Japanese had neither the priority, nor the desire, to worry about them. But there was still risk so long as Japan was in the vicinity, and precautions still had to be maintained. Neither of the Americans commanding the Pacific theatre, General MacArthur nor Admiral Chester Nimitz, had indicated any major plans for replacement activities in the Indian Ocean, and were actually circumventing the theatre as they moved towards the Philippines and Japan, respectively. Qantas would now have to fend for itself, with no assistance for local base support in Perth, and no-one to challenge an enemy should it be inclined to fly within the Indian Ocean sector that Qantas was still traversing.

But Qantas had no inclination to change its operating plans, as its service was still running successfully after July 1944. Qantas flew the service from the beginning through the Indian Ocean sector, which was soon to be declared open, and no longer would Qantas be running a classified and secret flight. This declaration also had implications for Perth, as it emerged from wartime restrictions and deprivations. The departure of the Americans effectively announced to Perth that it was no longer at the front line of the war.

This was good news for Qantas which was, of course, flying as a commercial operation, and its operation was a business reality. Lessened risk meant increased certainty and that was always a good business strategy. But, despite reduced risk, the flights were still a significant contribution to breaking through the Japanese air blockade and providing a passenger and cargo bridge via the quickest means northwest, as Singapore still remained under enemy control, as were nearby Japanese bases in the former Dutch East Indies, such as Penfui and Surabaya. The older Singapore route would remain unavailable for at least another year. In the meantime, Qantas flew on and passengers and precious airmail and cargo were using the Indian Ocean route. As previously described, the route was now supplemented by B-24 Liberators, which were former bomber aircraft and built for heavy loads. The introduction of the Qantas

Liberators more than tripled the passenger, cargo and mail-load being moved on the route.[475]

To illustrate the freedom with which Qantas could now operate, in a Qantas press release of 5 August 1944, Fysh announced the formerly secret route, revealing that the Indian Ocean service was Australia's only air-link with Asia, and was considered a vital part of the Allied war transport system. Fysh also revealed that passengers were carried on the flights and were in the air for about 27 hours on average he said, with no radio communications allowed during flight due to Japanese patrols in the vicinity of the flight path, which crossed over the patrolled Cocos Islands.[476]

Fysh added that the Catalina aircraft, which were first used on this service, could now also be revealed to have been augmented by larger and faster land-based planes, B-24 Liberators, which Qantas had acquired from the Americans through their British partners. The Indian Ocean service was inaugurated by the British government, and supported by Qantas (reaffirmed during Knolly's earlier visit) against some internal opposition, to unite Australia with Britain through Perth, commented Fysh. It was, initially, a breakout plan that Qantas was keen to participate in, as a wartime initiative to demonstrate that Australia could not be blockaded by Japanese air power from Singapore and the former Dutch East Indies. Now the act of breaking through the Japanese-patrolled zone had been strengthened with additional planes.[477] [478]

Fysh stated that by this time in 1944 (August) more than 100 Catalina flights had been flown, and this had been previously acknowledged by senior government and aviation authorities.[479] Now, including a night in Perth, it was possible to get to Karachi in around 83 hours from Sydney, via Perth, to Koggala and then Karachi. Fysh added that each passenger who flew more than 24 hours in flight was awarded the certificate known as 'The Order of the Double Sunrise', to record their unique achievement.[480]

Fysh's announcement was quickly picked up by local press and the release featured through all major newspapers. The media release mentioned that flights had operated from 'north Australia' (not Perth) to Ceylon (not Lake Koggala) for more than a year. The service had been successfully operated without mishap, Fysh stressed.[481] But although the confidentiality of the flights no longer officially applied, Fysh still maintained the pretence of the flights' initial destination. There seemed little point in being too detailed; after all it was wartime and Qantas was still at risk from the Japanese and it seemed a wise precaution at the time.

---

[475] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 63. Statistics on total crossings of Catalinas, Liberators and Lancastrians, 1Q to 12Q flights, are available on this page.

[476] 'Indian Ocean Air Service', *The Mercury,* 5 August 1944, p. 20. Available from: Trove, (accessed 12 December 2018).

[477] H. Fysh, op. cit., 201.

[478] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 42.

[479] 'Indian Ocean Air Service', op. cit.

[480] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 190.

[481] 'Indian Ocean Air Service', op. cit.

Now, as the war moved in the Allies' favour, pre-war activities started to return as standard practice. One visible sign of a return to semi-normality was the reintroduction of the former regular paper mail system. This breakthrough came on 24 August 1944. Since the inception of the Indian Ocean service, mail had been carried as air-graph mail to reduce size, weight and payload. Normal mail service now resumed, and the introduction of Liberators flying the service, along with the Catalinas, enabled an increased distribution of loads to commence, thus enabling the weightier paper-mail to now be carried again.[482]

Aside from the benefit of carrying important Empire mail, passengers had been carried since the outset, Fysh noted. The passenger service was a small part of the benefits provided by the Indian Ocean service. The acknowledgement of the flights by Fysh in August also revealed the real value of passengers being carried. The carriage of three passengers was seemingly unnecessary, as the financial benefit was small, particularly as had been pointed out earlier, because a small percentage of passengers were non-revenue raising passengers. But, to add to the story of the Indian Ocean service, and as yet unrevealed, the carriage of passengers had another purpose aside from revenue. By carrying passengers Qantas ensured that they did not stand accused by the Americans of running a solely military operation and remained outside the stipulations of American war-time aviation policy. Qantas was already running Lend-Lease, American-sourced aircraft and did not want to be directed by military authorities. The carriage of passengers and general cargo by the Catalinas obviated any accusations that Qantas was a wartime military service and ensured that it stayed well outside of any military aviation policy dictates.[483] [484]

The announcement of the route also revealed that some high-level passengers were carried. But as previously cited, this claim remains contentious, based on research carried out for this thesis. Both high-profile people were carried, as claimed, as well as the majority, who were medium-ranking or civilian passengers with innocuous job titles.[485] High-profile passengers were certainly carried and one such passenger was Dame Edith Summerskill who travelled on the Indian Ocean service. She was pictured alighting in formal clothing from *Regal Star* on 31 July 1944 with Captain Furze after the flight landed in Perth. Another person of significance to use the service was Sir Keith Murdoch, noted media baron, who used the Indian Ocean service when returning from a trip to England. He was duly admitted to the Double Sunrise Club and spoke of the benefit of the trans-ocean flight he undertook. Sources such as Fysh and Senior quote passengers as being 'government officials and senior armed forces men, including a number of American Generals',[486] but the immigration records reveal that celebrities were in the minority, with the majority being generally unremarkable passengers.[487]

---

[482] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 201.

[483] A. Leebold, op. cit., pp. 60–61.

[484] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 162.

[485] The National Archives of Australia, Bentley Western Australia archive, revealed original passenger cards that listed passenger manifests for each Qantas Catalina under 'Indian Ocean service Catalinas 1944-1945' box.

[486] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 25.

[487] 'Australian Newspaper Proprietor Says England is Now Thinking Far Ahead', *Army News*, 26 July 1944. Available from: Trove, (accessed 18 July 2018).

The passenger manifests for mid-1944 also reveal that most passengers were low-ranked or middle-ranked personnel and civilians, some even from obscure origins with unusual job descriptions such as chemists or laboratory workers. Some flights were recorded as carrying no passengers at all.[488] It also seems unlikely that important persons and high-ranked officers would use a slow and uncomfortable commercial service. The Catalina had only three very uncomfortable seats, and was a plane with no air control for heat or cold. There was almost no food carried, and what there was, was cold with warm coffee as a beverage. Only rudimentary ablution arrangements existed. High-level military individuals of such status would likely have their own means of transport to move from Britain or nearby Southwest Asia using available military flights in Liberators or other Catalinas, or aircraft such as the American DC-3 equivalent, used around Western Australian by Fleet Air Wing 10 and by other internal Australian carriers. The Liberators were also being used beginning in mid-1944, and they afforded a quicker flight in greater comfort. With British Catalinas also in Ceylon at Lake Koggala and Trincomalee bases, senior officers also had access to dedicated military transport flights through a now-safe zone to reach Australia.

Yet, despite records and statements concerning passenger types and numbers, some conflict exists. Rex Senior, Catalina pilot, states that during the 271 trips flown, the Catalinas carried 860 passengers (which is contradicted by the official Qantas figure of 858). Either of these two figures would tell us that, given the total number of flights, approximately 3.17 passengers travelled on each of the Catalinas, which is clearly impossible. Furthermore, actual records from 1944 and 1945 show that some planes flew with fewer than three passengers. These figures underscore the issue of inaccuracy of some sources.[489] [490]

By late 1944, several air options were available to traverse the Indian Ocean: Qantas Catalinas, Qantas Liberators or military flights using available squadrons or the American Army transport system. As a likely consequence of greater availability and faster and more comfortable flights, the passenger lists identified in the research reveal a theme of mainly personnel of a lower rank and less important occupations carried on the Catalinas.[491]

By the end of August 1944, Qantas's Indian Ocean flights were revealed and out in the open for the public to see. Its flights were no longer a secret, nor was its Nedlands Marine Base. Staff members were now able to travel to work in uniform, free from acrimony. The declaration of the flights did not fundamentally alter any aspects of the operation, and caused no changes to routine. Perhaps it was, though, beneficial to pilots like Rex Senior and Ivan Peirce who could now walk tall in their Qantas uniforms as they strode to work, before flying across the Indian Ocean in service of both Qantas and their country, as a now known and proud part of the local war effort.

---

[488] National Archives of Australia, 'K269 8 March 1945, Qantas Catalina G-AGEL Incoming Passenger List', loc. cit..

[489] ibid.

[490] Flights such as the above March 1945 flight carried no passengers at all likely due to Liberator flights being used for passenger carriage at this stage of the war.

[491] A. Leebold, op. cit., pp. 66–67.

Qantas, September–December 1944: Qantas Flies Solo and *Spica Star* Reveals Herself

In September 1944, it was now 14 months since the Indian Ocean service commenced. One of the driving forces behind the inception of the service was the British and Australian military staff who saw the service as providing a link between regional commands. The service had worked in their favour with some high-level officers carried, but of eventual and greater importance was the military and diplomatic mail carried. By this time in late 1944, the service had been described by Qantas as being of 'great military value, has many quite unique characteristics, and it is a source of satisfaction to Qantas Empire Airways in having had a share in securing a commencement of operations, and in being entrusted with its operation'.[492]

It was further emphasised that the value of the mail carried was a high-priority service. Aside from the Empire mail, the value of transporting military correspondences, including Prisoner of War mail, was similarly highly valued. Qantas reported that the carriage of diplomatic mail between India and Australia – between the forces engaged in the war against Japan – had been sped up by many weeks. In the words of a senior signals officer from Wavell's New Delhi Headquarters, it 'has completely altered the complexion of communications between commands'.[493] This was a ringing endorsement for the success of the service as planned and executed.

In September 1944, Qantas was beginning to experience an issue with one of its planes, *Spica Star,* which arrived earlier in the year and increased the Catalina inventory to five. This Catalina was to become a maintenance issue for Qantas and was of limited use during its tenure. *Spica Star* was the last Catalina to come into service with Qantas. It was the odd one out in the fleet being the Canso, the Canadian-built Boeing version of the Catalina. The plane arrived a year after its contemporaries, and even in the end, when the Catalinas were destroyed, was still the odd one out, being sunk off the Sydney Harbour heads, with the other four sunk off Rottnest Island in Western Australia. *Spica Star* was also the exception in terms of mechanical and other issues. It was a PB2B-1, not a PBY-5. The four PBY-5s were all built by Consolidated in San Diego, further defining *Spica Star* as the odd plane out in the inventory.

Also, unlike the other four Catalinas, *Spica Star* was fully fitted-out in England prior to its departure, while the others had been fitted-out by Qantas at Rose Bay prior to delivery to Perth. *Spica Star* suffered from fuel leaks through late 1944, when she flew at her most frequent. The Catalina's wing was built to withstand the severe flexibility experienced during flight (it was a very long wing span of 104 feet), but the Boeing wing was constructed differently and the construction style caused leakage between seals, as the wing flexed in flight. The result was leakage of fuel from the wing tanks and a strong smell permeated the inside of the plane. *Spica Star* was flown from Perth in September 1944 to Rose Bay after only three round trips, Perth to Karachi, for work to repair the wings and the fuel leak problem. The wings were resealed in Sydney but, with Liberators now on the service, *Spica* Star remained as a reserve plane on return to Nedlands rather than a frontline asset.[494]

---

[492] Qantas Empire Airways Limited, *No. 4 - Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service*, op. cit., pp. 1–5.

[493] Qantas Empire Airways Limited, *No. 4 - Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service*, op. cit., p. 4.

[494] G. Mumford, op. cit., pp. 39–40.

But, regardless of its 'black sheep' status, *Spica Star* was to attain some level of notoriety in her life. To reveal the mystery of what Catalinas did, and how they operated, local media was now able to describe what went on inside the Qantas flying boats, and how they went about their work. In December 1944, Qantas invited a reporter from the local and main Perth newspaper, *The West Australian*, onboard for a familiarisation flight. The reporter's article was duly published in the newspaper early the following month.

Qantas offered that the reporter (*The West Australian's* aviation correspondent) undertake a short flight on *Spica Star* on the regular pre-flight test run to ensure that the plane was fully ready to fly on the long journey ahead. The test flight was a regular operation undertaken by each plane and crew prior to departure, and one with all passengers aboard. The crew monitored the respective stations on the plane and immediately had the pre-flight report assessed by engineers on landing and prior to departure, to ensure that the plane was in its best possible condition before take-off. As noted, crew and passengers were onboard for the flight, and while passengers had little to do except provide ballast, the crew were active at their stations monitoring all applicable instruments, fuselage and engines, and whatever had a functioning part of the plane, and checked for serviceability to ensure a successful flight. Individual reports were then submitted to the captain and engineers for consideration, and any maintenance undertaken before the flight was allowed to depart.[495]

The reporter produced a detailed report for publication in *The West Australian*. The key point made after the post-trial flight was that Qantas was always concerned with safety and that, given the rather precarious nature of the Indian Ocean flights, no detail was overlooked in preparing the plane and crew for the journey. While the correspondent flew onboard a Catalina, he stated that both plane types in service at this time, the Catalina and the Liberator, were tested in flight prior to final take-off and flight over the long and dangerous over-water route.[496]

The report was a 'first' and, when published, read as follows:

> Before each crossing of the Indian Ocean from Perth to Colombo, the planes, both Catalina flying boats and Liberator land planes, are tested in the air so that nothing on the long hop is left to chance. The flying crew rostered for the flight make the test and watch closely all the many instruments upon which they rely for safe voyage.
>
> When *Spica* the Boeing built Catalina in the service of Qantas Empire Airways was test flown in readiness for its departure for Colombo she carried a representative of '*The West Australian*'. The preliminaries and flight were a faithful replica of the actual departure. A full crew went aboard at the Crawley base with passengers and dummy mail bags. Blisters were closed, engines started and with Captain J. Ross in charge the flying boat taxied out on the broad waters of the Swan. A light breeze ruffles the sunny surface to conditions almost perfect for take-off. Spica nosed into the wind and soon was throwing up two creaming bow waves as her engines thrust her forward. The test flight had begun.

---

[495] Aviation Correspondent, 'Test Flight Spica Makes Ready'*, The West Australian,* 4 Jan 1945, p. 4. Available from: Trove, (accessed 17 September 2017).

[496] ibid.

> Captain, first and second officers, navigator, radio officer and flight engineer in systematic fashion began their check of the engines and flight controls and wrote their observations and readings in logs. Now that Spica was airborne the passengers were free to wander at large and to explore the mysteries forward and aft of the cabin.
>
> Fremantle passed speedily below the Catalina's wing and soon Rottnest was under her snub nose. First this engine then that were tried in solo effort. Captain Ross left the controls and made an inspection tour of his ship. Not long ago he was a first officer on the service having come to Qantas from R.A.A.F. Catalinas. His promotion was a fair recent reward for good service in his many Indian Ocean crossings.
>
> *Spica* swung back in a great sweep to the mainland, cast a shadow over Scarborough and in a minute or two was circling the marine base. A hail of water spattered the metal hull and its keel kissed the river and carved up a foaming wake.
>
> The test flight was over. It lasted only an hour. But in that time the skilled flying crew compiled reports for the engineers who will straighten out any troubles in the smooth running of the flying boat. *Spica* was ready to begin the first leg of the long flight to Karachi, a non-stop journey of more than 24 hours over the Indian Ocean to Colombo.[497] [498]

Following the flight it was with a new awareness that Perth's population understood the type of flying that crews and passengers undertook from their city during the war. The invitation to fly on *Spica Star* was a rare and newsworthy experience, and aside from delivering excellent public relations, it was also a good thing for the crew who had been compelled to maintain the secrecy of the flights.

By the end of 1944, Qantas was flying solo as the only Catalina operation in Perth. The operational experience could now not only be talked about, but was known for all of Perth to see. The effective Catalina fleet remained at four, with *Spica Star* in reserve. The other four Catalinas continued to fly the Perth to Koggala to Karachi and return route. With a now vastly reduced Japanese threat, and Qantas having demonstrated that the Japanese-imposed blockade could be thwarted, Perth seemed to have played its role in seeing-off the threat of wartime.

But the war was far from over, and while the front was now moving more deeply into Southeast Asia, still more was to be done. Qantas was operating both Catalinas and Liberators on the Indian Ocean service, and with paper-based Empire mail now reestablished and passenger space in demand, the ongoing and important work of the Indian Ocean service carried over into 1945.

---

[497] ibid.

[498] The author mentioned Colombo, but Lake Koggala was the actual destination.

Chapter 7: 1945

Qantas, January–March 1945: Another Cocos Landing and Issues of Aircraft Reliability

At the beginning of 1945, Qantas continued as the sole Catalina operator flying from Perth. Qantas had added to its Perth-based operations with the plane that Fysh had once preferred, the B-24 Liberator, also now flying to Colombo in Ceylon, but from Guildford, Perth's new international airport. By now, Qantas had developed a sizeable aviation group in Perth, in the form of aircraft, crew, logistics support and maintenance facilities. The Nedlands Western Operations Division Swan River base, Guildford Airport and also Shell House in Saint George's Terrace in the city were all now locations for Qantas operations.

The Americans had by now joined their own forces in the drive towards the Philippines, with their work done to protect Perth and the west coast from Japanese threats. But the Americans' impact carried over to Qantas's benefit, through the support systems left behind for Catalina operations in the form of local industry, Shell's fuel supply operations, and accommodation options nearby in Nedlands, all now available for Qantas to support its own operations. Despite these gains, Qantas was now running a more complex operation than when they commenced operations 18 months ago. The operations now included an additional Catalina flying boat within the fleet, the extended Karachi flight and the Liberators, on an additional Indian Ocean service, also carrying mail, passengers and cargo but in greater quantities. The complete Indian Ocean service was now a busy and sizeable operation for Qantas, and its demands for maintenance and administration were growing.

Along with operational growth was the issue of the Japanese threat which was now greatly diminished, if not extinguished, along the west coast. But the threat to the flights that originated in Perth remained deeper into the Indian Ocean, as Cocos was still within Japanese aviation reach and a danger to flights. Qantas, now with two aircraft types crossing through the danger zone, had to maintain constant vigilance in operations from a security standpoint, so they maintained the night-crossing strategy, which effectively ensured their invisibility through the Cocos transit.

Perth's citizens had long seen the Qantas Catalinas in the air, and when Hudson Fysh announced the official existence of the service, they had a greater understanding of the 'secret' flying boat base located at Nedlands. The report on *Spica Star's* flight, which was published in *The West Australian* in January 1945, gave people a glimpse into onboard activities and pre-flight workup on Indian Ocean flights. With the Americans no longer in Perth, when a Catalina was sighted, locals now knew it was a Qantas plane.

By February 1945, the Qantas Catalinas had flown more than 200 trans-Indian Ocean flights, and managed to maintain a near faultless maintenance record. However, fate was a factor beyond Qantas's control and trouble was soon to strike. Cocos was once again to become an invaluable asset in Qantas's planning, and it was with safety in mind and wise foresight that its location had been factored into the route.

One of the stipulations of Qantas's over-water plan was that Cocos was not to be included as a stopover. The bombing incident of 1944 at Cocos had proven the danger of any daylight activity, let alone a stop at Cocos, and highlighted the risk of daylight

overflight of Cocos. But by 1945 the flights were known publicly, and the threat of Japanese incursions had diminished. Nonetheless, Qantas still operated without plans to stop there, and flights continued to overfly the zone, following the same night-time pattern, as was the normal operating procedure. This was prudent as well as practical, as it ensured the flight plan remained uninterrupted and a continuous flight, Perth to Koggala.

But despite its flight plan, Qantas had already stopped twice at Cocos,[499] both at the behest of Allied support, and extraneous to Qantas's planned service. Qantas was aware of the danger in general terms, having reported sighting Japanese warplanes around Cocos, and were constantly aware of the danger when in the vicinity of Cocos. Captain Robert Ritchie on a flight from Lake Koggala stated that he once came into visual contact with a Japanese plane when five hours out of Koggala and on a trajectory to Cocos, and later Perth.[500] In support of Ritchie's report, one Japanese plane had been encountered at Cocos previously, but plane-to-plane sightings were rare, as the Qantas flight path avoided the eastern flank of the Japanese patrol zone, which was known to have Cocos as its maximum reach. The use of darkness also protected Qantas flying boats from visual encounters. The Japanese, in general, were known to use either Betty Bombers or Kawanishi H6K long-range flying boats to patrol that sector, with the Kawanishis having much further range than the standard Betty bombers and patrolling a much larger zone, similar to the capability of the Catalina.[501]

But, despite the risk of alighting at Cocos, on 29 January 1945 one more Catalina, *Rigel Star*, was to set down in Cocos. *Rigel Star's* visit was, unlike the previous two, due to a mechanical problem. The plane was flown by Captain Thomas and *en route* from Perth to Lake Koggala when an engine vibration was encountered. Being 15 hours out from Perth and about half-way through its journey, Captain Thomas chose to set the flying boat down on the Cocos Lagoon. *Rigel Star* was travelling in heavy rain and was forced to undertake the landing at night time, making it a dangerous situation for Captain Thomas. A night landing, over water, was a precarious procedure in normal circumstances, but with a loaded plane and darkness in a small lagoon area, it was a high-risk manoeuvre.

Regardless of the risk faced by Captain Thomas, Qantas had looked ahead and planned for such an eventuality, and they had developed a procedure for such a situation. The technique adopted was to use flame-floats dropped from the blister window of the plane, which would light a path to use as a reference point for the pilots when the plane turned and re-approached the landing zone. This technique was Qantas's own and was developed by Captain Crowther who envisaged such an emergency. Passing Cocos was a night-time component of the flight plan and, in this case, it was the only landing option available. Thus, if an emergency landing was required, it would have to be a night landing with poor visibility at best, let alone in rain. The technique was theoretical and had not been previously trialed by pilots. Crowther's technique to use the flares to create a glide

---

[499] Qantas landed at Cocos in 1943 and 1944 for operational purposes, once delivering two servicemen and once to fly a wounded sailor to receive medical assistance.

[500] R. Ritchie, interviewed by Amy McGrath, 1986 National Archives of Australia, Parkes, catalogue 9649, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-215191013/listen, (accessed on 24 Jun 2018).

[501] P. Helson, op. cit., p. 40. Helson also comments that it was known (by military intelligence) that by early 1942 the Japanese had established a force of 129 aircraft (63 Mitsubishi G4M Betty bombers, 48 Mitsubishi A6M fighters, and 18 four-engined flying boats) in the islands to the north of Australia. Qantas had encountered a Betty bomber in 1944 at Cocos.

path and then fly back into that path before the flares had dimmed, or dropped too far, was now employed for the first time by Captain Thomas, who executed it to perfection.[502]

Once the landing was completed, passengers went ashore and were accommodated by the island's owners, the Clunies-Ross family. Unable to fix the problem, Qantas flew a backup plane from Nedlands to Cocos, using *Antares Star,* three days later on 1 February 1945, undertaking a 14-hour flight to reach Cocos. Two engineers and a new magneto were brought to Cocos by Captain Ritchie and his crew. Passengers continued on using *Antares Star*, while *Rigel Star* was repaired. On take-off, *Antares Star* struck an object and was damaged, but repairs were effected in-flight. *Rigel Star* was flown back to Perth by Captain Ritchie several days later. In the finality of the incident, had Cocos not been factored in as an emergency location, *Rigel Star* may have been lost. Once again, careful planning had served Qantas well in keeping the Indian Ocean service running, and fatality free.[503]

The *Rigel Star* incident in January–February 1945 reaffirmed to Qantas's Managing Director, Hudson Fysh, the value of maintenance, aircraft reliability, safety and attention to detail, so far as flight operations were concerned. Fysh brooked no excuses when it came to the very highest standards in airmanship and technical reliability. His engineering officer Norm Roberts, at Nedlands, was responsible for those standards. Fysh and the Indian Ocean service relied upon Roberts and his largely local engineering staff, along with the air force in Boulder at the aircraft depot there, which overhauled the engines, to leave no stone unturned, in preparing and sending off Catalinas in their best condition.

To ensure that no-one was in any doubt about the required standards, in February of that year, Fysh wrote a stinging letter to his Manager of Western Operations, Crowther, rebuking him and his staff for the problem of engine troubles after the engine irregularity was reported. Under Qantas's arrangement with the air force to have engines overhauled at their Boulder workshops, Qantas used local rail to move the engines to and from the inland city. Fysh told his Perth-based manager that he should personally oversee the whole matter of engine troubles and, to that end, he despatched an investigative engineer from Sydney to Perth to look into matters.[504]

Fysh made several important points in his letter and his bluntness betrayed his anxiousness, and his assessment of the maintenance shortcomings, which he felt could lead to disaster. It was noted that the engines had run beyond overhaul time-frames, faulty maintenance was found and engine stress was discovered to be caused by overload as well as take-off and landing stresses. These stresses were due to excess overall weight and heat around the engines in Lake Koggala. Lake Koggala was a factor because of failed take-off attempts and the subsequent stress on engine cylinder heads which was exacerbated due to the short, but quick, Koggala take-offs from a smaller area than the Swan River.[505]

Reliability of flights was also heavily impacted by Qantas's two tropical destinations, Koggala and Karachi. Foremost was Koggala with its British base and tight take-off and landing arrangement. Qantas's initial destination was Lake Koggala in

---

[502] H. Fysh, op. cit., p. 192.

[503] G. Mumford, op. cit., pp. 51–52.

[504] H. Fysh, official correspondence to Manager Western Operations Division*,* 23 February 1945, Hudson Fysh Collection, Mitchell Library.

[505] ibid.

Ceylon, an important location because it was a fully operational British seaplane base and provided servicing facilities and, initially, crew-rest facilities. It had all the resources needed to service and supply a Catalina. Qantas had stationed a senior engineer at Lake Koggala throughout the duration of the service and, under the agreement with the British, had liberal use of facilities – the chief use being able to slip aircraft while there. However, engine overhauls were unable to be carried out there as the main facility for the British was in Bangalore, India.[506] But it was another backup in the system, like Cocos, should a breakdown occur.

Reliability remained the centrepiece of Qantas's operations, and Fysh was demanding towards his staff. Without 100 percent compliance at the mechanical level, and faultless performance by the crews, the service would not function on time, and timing was critical given the small complement of flying boats available. It was already a high-risk operation in wartime, and it required everything to work perfectly in order for it to succeed. The carriage of Empire mail, passengers, cargo and war correspondence from the British headquarters in India demanded no less.

By this time in 1945, after 18 months continuous operations, several themes had emerged that characterised Qantas's maintenance and support work. Firstly, Qantas was now operating without American support and had to ensure its own support systems were faultless. The generous American support was no longer available. The new support systems now led to increased local staffing and maintenance in Nedlands, as well as overhaul support at the air force's Boulder depot and the two British bases, Koggala and Karachi, which provided maintenance *en route*. The other factor was Cocos, which was an emergency set-down option and had already shown its worth within the plan.

Qantas had already used local support staff prior to the Americans' departure. With the situation in Perth in early 1945 seeing Qantas as the only Catalina operator, these circumstances required Qantas to progressively increase its personnel numbers. The vacuum created by the departure of the Americans required local industry to fill that gap, with Qantas's increased requirements based on an additional Catalina and the extended route to Karachi. Local staff employment was a policy progressively implemented by Qantas as a way of reducing costs and quickly expanding its staff base. Aside from crew and engineering staff, who came to Perth with Qantas in the early days, more support staff were hired and any specialised engineering staff keenly sought after. Qantas discovered that men with families, and some female staff as well, who were not prepared to move away from Perth provided subsidiary benefits, including the avoidance of the cost of housing and things such as cross-country removal expenses.[507]

The other personnel issue that was developing in the background was that Qantas's Liberators now operated from Guildford, and this requirement drew some Catalina-based staff away from Nedlands. Western Operations Division was now managing two groups of personnel, the Catalina group and the Liberator group, located far apart, in two suburban locations of Perth. But both were flying the Indian Ocean route carrying mail, passengers and cargo to Koggala (Catalinas) and Colombo (Liberators) and contributing to Qantas's mission to provide the wartime service that effectively overcame the Japanese intent to isolate Perth's air route to Britain.

---

[506] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 10.

[507] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 12.

Qantas, April–June 1945: Passenger Experiences

In April 1945, Qantas was nearing the completion of its trans-Indian Ocean flights, both Catalina and Liberator, as the war was close to ending, and when Singapore was recaptured, it was likely that the previous Empire route would be recommenced. In addition, a third Qantas service was now also in operation, using the British Lancastrian plane, another bomber aircraft, but modified for passenger and cargo service.

The Indian Ocean service was primarily conceived as a mail service and had been inaugurated to overcome the break in the pre-war, via-Singapore service, after Singapore fell in February 1942. But the service had now expanded as an overall service, with three types of planes crossing the Indian Ocean. But mail remained a priority for carriage and when it came to loading the planes, and captains very carefully weighed and oversaw loading and weight. The overall payload was strictly controlled, and passengers were definitely part of that equation. Take-off weight was 35,000 pounds, while payload was 1,000 pounds.[508] Passengers and cargo were limited to 1,000 pounds. Even the food hampers were carefully scrutinised when loading was taking place.[509]

But while its carriage of mail was the primary reason for reintroducing the service, Qantas remained essentially a passenger airline, not a general cargo carrier. Fysh cleverly ensured that passengers were on board as paying fares for a sound reason. This reason was the maintenance of Qantas's role as a passenger carrier, even though, in this case, mail and military correspondence were the prime reasons for re-establishing the service. As a business manager, post-war was always on Fysh's mind, as he had a business to run, and for that purpose Qantas needed to be seen as an international passenger service, which had been its business model until the war broke out.[510]

In light of the importance of passengers to Qantas's Indian Ocean service and its future business prospects, it is perhaps worthwhile to share the stories of some of the individuals that experienced the flights, as a record of the experiences they encountered on the Indian Ocean service.

Ivan Peirce, a pilot and first officer on the Indian Ocean service, flew 76 journeys and revealed one interesting passenger the crew carried in 1943. He recalls carrying a number of officers on the service, but a certain British officer was one he remembered in particular. The officer in question was a British submariner who carried the Victoria Cross medal. In 1943, the British had submarines operating out of Fremantle, as did the Dutch and, of course, the Americans. Fremantle was at that time a major naval base with capital ships and submarines in large numbers.[511]

Peirce remembered that the officer seemed to be making a number of trips on the Catalinas which Qantas flew. It turned out that he had a girlfriend in Perth and the crew laughingly thought he had 'pulled rank' to get in and out of Perth from Koggala, as much

---

[508] Payload is defined as the free weight component carried by the aircraft, in this case the total passenger and cargo weight able to be carried after all other weight has been accounted for.

[509] R. Senior, op. cit., pp. 7–10.

[510] L. Ambrose, op. cit., p. 24.

[511] 'Unarmed Cats Defy Might of Japanese', *Vetaffairs*, Issue 220, April 1995, p. 10 Available from: Trove (accessed January 2021).

as he could.[512] Given the comparative discomfort and duration of the flights, his need obviously overcame such discomfort, and the Indian Ocean service was adequate for the situation. Another prominent passenger that Peirce recalled was Charles Gardiner. Gardiner was later to become a prominent Perth figure as the Governor of Western Australia, and today a prominent hospital in Perth bears his name.

Another story that arose concerned one female passenger, who seemed to have a flight that encountered numerous problems. Eric Richards, a Qantas navigator, recalled the passenger, Alisa Pearn-Rowe, on the leg from Koggala to Karachi. She was on board when the plane experienced an engine failure and had to turn back to Lake Koggala. The engine was checked and repaired by the British at the base there. The plane took off and then in flight the engine failed again, and again they returned to Lake Koggala. The crew was now ready to again take-off, after more repairs had been made. The two male passengers refused to re-board and fly, but when the lady passenger spoke up and said she intended to re-board and continue, the males suddenly realised they had better get onboard or be left behind. It was one occasion where the crew certainly appreciated having a rare lady passenger on the flight, as her leadership neatly solved the impending ‘mutiny’ breaking out amongst the male passengers.[513]

While passenger conditions were cramped, and the flight arduous, one other area of discomfort was the issue of having internal fuel tanks fitted. The tanks were within the fuselage and positioned nearby to passengers and crew. The location of the tanks prohibited any thought of smoking, and constant oversight ensured that no spark or likelihood of friction was able to get near the tanks. There was also the risk of fuel fumes leaking and permeating the air to the discomfort of the passengers and crew. On one occasion this indeed did happen. Fumes were evident, and due to the alertness of the experienced crew that Qantas employed, the source was quickly sought out and attended to. This service was a westbound flight from Perth to Koggala, a 2Q series flight, when the First Officer uncovered the source of the problem. It turned out to be spillage, and the engineer admitted that he had erred with the transfer of fuel, when moving it between the reserve tank and the wing tank. Fuel was required to be hand-pumped from the extra inboard tanks, which were equivalent to a row of drums placed inside the plane, and hand pumping enabled movement of fuel from those tanks to the wing tanks, which then fed fuel to the engines mounted on them (the high-mounted parasol-style wings that the Catalinas carried).[514]

Stories were continuing to accumulate as the flight numbers progressed. Another passenger reacted to an extraordinary incident that occurred when he was travelling onboard as a military courier. This passenger was an American army courier, carrying classified documents on the flight. He was the sole passenger carried on that flight, and two fewer passengers allowed for payload to be added in terms of cargo and mail. On this particular flight, the navigator, ever vigilant on such a high-risk over-water flight, reported that ground speed had doubled. This could only mean one thing, and the captain was left to that likelihood, given his experience as a senior pilot, that the plane was in the grip of a storm. The captain reportedly had encountered this phenomenon once before when he was a de Havilland DH-86 pilot with Qantas. Ordering everything to be secured, and for all crew and the one passenger to strap in, he announced that the

---

[512] ibid.

[513] ibid.

[514] ibid.

plane was now in the grip of a violent tropical storm. Thus ensued a wild ride as the plane bucked and heaved for several hours as they rode out the worst of the weather. The first officer later recalled saying that ‘when we could see the ocean surface it looked like boiling milk’.[515]

The flight was recorded at the time as the fastest on record, which Qantas records indicate was 24 hours. The longest was over 32 hours so, as evidenced by the times recorded, flight times could vary to extremes, dependent upon weather conditions.[516] The discrepancy in quickest to slowest flights exemplifies just how unpredictable things could be across tropical and mid-latitudes weather. This reality of variable weather conditions was something constantly borne in mind when undertaking flight planning, particularly when heading west into headwinds or flying east with tailwinds.

Crews were keen to set records with which they could be associated. The speed record for a sub-24-hour flight was one such record. Both crews and passengers joined in on the fun. The chance to be part of a record helped to ‘speed up’ the long and arduous journey. Records show that three times the 24-hour record earlier established was broken, eventually at 23 hours and 55 minutes, but then at 23 hours and 50 minutes and 23 hours and 24 minutes. But the record could have been broken yet again, when on one occasion Captain Ambrose seemed to be heading for a quick touchdown on the Swan River at Nedlands. He had set off from Koggala minus his navigator, who had been struck down with illness. Ambrose was a capable navigator and chose to undertake the navigator duties himself for the trip. Several of the Qantas captains were cross-trained navigators and pilots, some having come from the older days of flying when a ‘jack of all trades’ pilot was normal practice. Ambrose was flying east, the fastest direction for the service, with usually a tail wind for a good part of the journey. Ambrose was required, as navigator, to plot the route, in accordance with standard flight-planning and navigation routines. Pilots often carried out navigational plotting during flight, while navigators rested for some sections of the long journey. Crews cross-assisted where they could.[517]

Astro navigation was used on the service, and during the flight Ambrose noted that things were going well, time-wise, and made an assessment for when landfall on the west coast of Australia would be spotted. But when the sun arose on the journey, no coast was evident. Ambrose was perplexed. He was tracking in a southeast direction, so he knew that the coast lay due east and altered course in that direction as a precaution. Soon land was sighted and all was well, and any emergency was avoided. A few hours later the plane arrived in Perth and all passengers and crews alighted. Ambrose was a perfectionist and wanted to know what had gone wrong. He was making good progress, he felt, and may have established a new speed record. He reviewed all his navigational plots and soon discovered the ‘mystery’. He discovered that he had made a rookie error. Ambrose found that he had used the Air Almanac navigators’ guide incorrectly and misread its date, which was a smudged and unclear figure. He was 14 days out in his use of the navigational data, thus the result that when dawn arose he was not exactly where he should have been.[518] Ambrose may have felt that he had embarrassed himself, but his

---

[515] ibid.

[516] Qantas Fact Sheet, ‘Catalina Statistics’, unreferenced document, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

[517] A. Leebold, op. cit., p. 63.

[518] ibid.

passengers were none the wiser and were duly despatched on arrival in Perth, along with the highly sought-after Double Sunrise certificate.

One more notable high-profile passenger who travelled on the Indian Ocean service was British Group Captain Frederick Winterbotham. Winterbotham was part of a secret intelligence team that worked on cracking the vaunted Enigma Code. He travelled to Australia on the Indian Ocean service to have discussions with Australian and American service chiefs. He commented on the Indian Ocean service as follows: 'The service between Colombo and Perth was one of the wonders of aviation in WW2. When I flew in the RFC in the first world war, a flight of four hours was considered to be fairly lengthy, yet there I was in a Qantas Catalina, on a flight of some 28 hours, qualifying for the Double Sunrise Certificate'.[519] [520]

The passengers, in a way, were part of the crew. Any ill-disciplined behaviour affected the plane and crew. Tasks had to be performed during flight, with which passengers could assist. One such task was the making of coffee and the distribution of meals – usually some previously cooked, but now cold, offering. With such a long flight and the consumption of liquids, a rudimentary toilet needed to be used and maintained. Its ineffective operation could spell disaster on such a long journey. Even high-profile passengers were known to help out during flight. One passenger was Dame Edith Summerskill, a British Member of Parliament. As it turned out, she enjoyed her unique experience flying as a Qantas passenger on the Indian Ocean service. She flew on the westbound service in July 1944 from Perth to Koggala wth Captain Furze and crew, and departed Nedlands on 31 July 1944. For this rare female passenger, Captain Crowther, Manager of the Western Operations Division, made a special effort to ensure her comfort and explain the arduousness of the trip with a personal briefing pre-flight. She assisted as best she could and was remembered as a popular passenger.[521]

Overall, 271 Catalina flights were flown during the period in which the flying boats operated, with an estimated 858 passengers carried.[522] However, like many of the figures quoted and recorded, a mathematical check reveals that information recorded is often best regarded as a set of approximations.[523] But despite the record keeping, issues of passengers and the inclusion of the passenger service, Qantas's service was 'not really a passenger service. The real business was the 51,600 kilograms of microfilm mail and 6,728 kilograms of freight, with a distance travelled of 956,630 miles or 1,539,546 kilometres'.[524] This assessment contradicts the general view established by many writers on this subject, one of 'secret' business, and illustrates that the focus remained on mail

---

[519] ibid.

[520] The reference to Colombo suggests that Winterbotham flew on a Qantas Liberator, but 28 hours and the reference to a double sunrise could only have been a Catalina.

[521] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 25.

[522] T. Harwood, 'Curators Blog: Qantas Double Sunrise', 12 August 2015, accessed 4 December 2019 at https://qfom.com.au/2015/08/12/qantas-double-sunrise/. Harwood quotes the 858 passenger or 3.17 per trip figure but also mentioned the 648 figure mentions as did Gunn in *Challenging Horizons,* which averages 2.79 per trip.

[523] A. Leebold, op. cit., p. 63.

[524] T. Harwood, loc. cit.

and the maintenance of the role Qantas played in the Empire Air Mail Scheme, in which Qantas had participated from 1938.

But the flights themselves and the experiences of the crew and passengers revealed more than a set of figures. The carriage of females, military personnel, and the exigencies of weather and aviation, all combined to illustrate a vivid set of circumstances and reveal much more about who was using the Indian Ocean service and why. The conditions were regarded as uncomfortable and those who flew on the Catalina knew that it was also a slow and risky journey through enemy-patrolled territory, and could last beyond 30 hours in flight. From British parliamentary members to intelligence officers and those developing long-distance personal relationships, a wide cast of individuals populated the service.

Of course, the Indian Ocean leg was but one part of a longer route which was effectively a Sydney to London mail and passenger service. Some people, like Fysh, as well as parliamentary member Summerskill, used this precise route for its full purpose, thus illustrating the worth of the service and the confidence placed in its operators, Qantas and their partners the British.

But soon the flights would cease as the war came to an end, normal practices would resume, and Singapore would re-open allowing the former Sydney to London route to be re-commenced.

Qantas, July 1945: The Last Flights

By July 1945 Qantas was informed that July would see the last flights of the Catalina Indian Ocean service. The Qantas Liberators were now doing the bulk of the work, with four crossings per week being conducted. The Liberators were land-based planes, and by this time had carried 2,000 passengers across the Indian Ocean. The flights from Guildford to Colombo now represented the immediate future of the service. The Catalinas were no longer needed and, as well, the Qantas Lancastrians were in service to further supplement passenger and cargo requirements.[525]

In July 1945, Qantas flew its last outbound and final inbound flights. These were the final journeys of the Catalina service and brought to an end a remarkable and daring chapter in Australia's aviation history. Not only had Qantas outflanked the obfuscatory actions of AB Corbett, in the very early days before flights were approved, but Fysh had sourced planes and support directly from the British. He then put in place a service that ran with very few logistical issues, starting with a greenfield site and achieving 271 flights without loss of life, through a war zone in which his crews outmanoeuvred and outwitted the Japanese. The flights showed that Perth was not isolated and that an aviation route to re-connect with the British and re-establish the Empire mail service was possible. It was, to paraphrase Fysh, indeed a magnificent achievement.

The final outbound flight to depart Perth was *Altair Star,* which departed on 12 July 1945 and returned on 18 July 1945. *Altair Star* was the very same plane that had inaugurated the service two years previously. The plane was flown by Captain PJR Shields. Two other Catalinas were in Koggala and were flown back to Qantas Marine Base in Perth, arriving on 24 July 1943, with four PBY-5 Catalinas now at Nedlands, while *Spica Star* remained in Sydney.

---

[525] A. Leebold, op. cit., pp. 70–73.

To celebrate the cessation of its service, Qantas held a celebration for crew and staff at the Esplanade Hotel in Perth. The celebration was in honour of the service, the personnel and their conjoint achievements in conducting a truly unique and important service to Perth's Second World War story.[526]

Postscript

While the success of the Catalina flights was being celebrated, and the Indian Ocean service Catalinas had flown their last flights, soon crew and personnel would move on to their new tasks. Some, like engineering staff and pilots, would take up duties at Guildford, working with Liberators still flying there to and from Colombo in Ceylon until Singapore reopened. Qantas had built up a sizeable staff group in Perth managing three aircraft types, and now, as the war was coming to an end, Qantas hoped to restart their commercial operations which had existed pre-war, and to do so needed its staff centralised at Guildford as the new Qantas main operating base in Perth.

But soon Singapore was to reopen and, on 8 October 1945, less than three months after the last Catalina flight ended, one of Qantas's Empire Flying Boats alighted on Singapore Harbour. The *Coriolanus* had survived the war, the only Qantas Empire Class flying boat to do so. On board was Captain Crowther, the former manager of Qantas's Western Operations Division in Perth, and the last Qantas pilot to fly out of Singapore in February 1942.[527]

Without doubt, the enormity of the wartime effort and the success of the Catalina-based Indian Ocean service had created a valuable historical narrative, one which was about to announce itself as a legacy of the wartime service. Both Qantas and Fleet Air Wing 10 had placed their respective stamps on Perth and Western Australia and had called their Indian Ocean operations their own.

While the Americans were now redeployed back to regular naval service, Qantas's Indian Ocean Catalina flights were about to initiate the legacy of their service with a postscript, in January 1946, with the story of the destruction of the Catalinas which flew on the service. That situation spawned a continued public awareness of the Catalinas and carried over to an even longer legacy that survives until this day.

---

[526] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 53.

[527] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., pp. 55–56.

Chapter 8: Legacy

Since the end of the Second World War, the legend of the Perth-based Catalinas has been maintained by an eclectic group of historians and militarists, thus creating a legacy for the United States Navy and Qantas, and in locations such as Perth and Exmouth. This legacy is apparent in the various monuments, street names and even films and podcasts that exist as an enduring representation of Perth's and Western Australia's broader Second World War history. Like the history itself, which is a living but ageing phenomenon, the Catalina period is best remembered by the older generations who experienced those times. But, unless the stories and reminiscences from those years are brought to the attention of younger generations, the legacy that has developed will also pass into history, like the Catalinas themselves, without the fanfare it deserves.

To honour the legend, already monuments have been erected, suburbs established and streets adorned with Catalina flying boat names, pilots' names and even the locations to which they flew. But while it is true that the history of both the Americans' and Qantas's endeavours has now long since passed into folklore, it is also true that the people of Perth, military historians and aviation enthusiasts have worked to maintain the Catalina mystique. Associations, public structures and a range of ever-expanding audio and visual publications are testimony to the history and its value to the people of Perth and Western Australia.

The legend of the Catalina flying boats has spawned a legacy, and not just one that is a uniquely Perth and Western Australian story, but one that spans generations, geography and time itself. Moreover, the legend now forms an additional story to that of the flying boats themselves that defended the people of Perth and Western Australia during the Second World War. Qantas's Indian Ocean flights and the Americans' Fleet Air Wing 10 missions now form the basis of a legacy that endures and continues to grow to this day and is synonymous with the unique backdrop to Perth's wartime culture.

These legacies are recognised in this thesis as two separate legacies, Qantas and the Americans, during which time the separate histories have emerged. Also, at the same time, a common legacy has emerged, often a result of the mists of time where memories fade and the Catalina history merges into one broader wartime reminiscence.

The Qantas Story and Resultant Legacy

Though Qantas was the second of the Catalina operators to commence flying from Perth during the Second World War, its legacy developed almost as soon as the war ended with its Catalinas remaining in Perth and into peacetime. Meanwhile, the Americans had left Perth in 1944 and continued in the war as forces moved north, finally returning to the Philippines from where they had come to Perth in 1942.

Following the final Catalina Indian Ocean flight of July 1945, and the end of the Second World War, Qantas was left with its Perth-based fleet of Catalina flying boats. Four of the flying boats were left sitting on the water in Perth at Qantas's former Marine Base, while one, *Spica Star*, remained in Sydney at Qantas's Rose Bay site after flying there for maintenance. All of the flying boats faced an uncertain future, and the provisions of the Lend-Lease contract hovered like the 'Sword of Damocles' above their metaphoric heads. But while the Catalinas' aviation future was uncertain, their legend was already assured due to the notoriety of the Indian Ocean flights – the Double Sunrise flights, as

they were often called – through wartime and the long and dangerous over-water crossings they flew. The existence and fame of that legendary story was assured, but now a new phase in their history was about to dawn. New revelations would soon emerge to provide the springboard for the legacy that would extend well beyond their role in the Second World War, and catapult the Catalinas' fame across generations of Perth's residents.

The Qantas Catalina legacy that emerged falls fundamentally into several broad categories and this chapter about the legacy of the Catalinas in Perth is divided into four sections. The first section describes the immediate aftermath of the war, followed by the dramatic story of the demolition of the Catalinas, which took place in 1946. Next is the recognition of the flights that gave rise to several aviation feats, including several 'firsts' achieved during the 271 flights. Finally, the historical curiosity which has developed and resulted in the immortalisation of the flying boats through the establishment of monuments, street names, and even suburbs, as well as the ongoing historical associations that work to preserve the memory of the Catalinas.

Figure 8. The Catalina plaque at Nedlands. The plaque recognises both American and Qantas Catalina operators. (Photo by author.)

The Immediate Aftermath

The flights were undoubtedly heroic and were part of a response that defied the Japanese encroachment on Perth in the early phase of the war. But the final phase of their life was yet another element of intrigue in the 'secret', and at times mysterious, story behind their flights – one that added even more lustre to their fame and more intrigue to the people of Perth. Once the planes were disposed of, new questions emerged as to what exactly took place and why.

At the end of the war, four Qantas Catalinas sat idle in Perth and one, *Spica Star,* was in Sydney. This period immediately following the war was a short interregnum before the next phase of the Catalinas' history was about to begin. But this phase was to occur in 1946, almost six months after the war ended and the Catalinas' last flights. The Catalinas awaited decisions over their fate and, as they had been acquired through the Lend-Lease program, special consideration had to be given, based on the contractual arrangements in place. The flying boats were leased to the British from the Americans and flown by the Australians.

Finally the Catalinas were returned to the British. Wing 300 of the Royal Air Force took charge of the flying boats.[528] The Catalinas then awaited a decision on their fate while lying at anchor then being brought ashore at Nedlands and Rose Bay and placed in storage condition on wheels and out of the corrosive salt water. The last act prior to the end of this phase was the decision which would determine their fate.

The Mystery of the Destruction of the Catalinas

The British had decided that the planes were to be destroyed in place and brought together a demolition team to do the job. But how that final act took place remained a mystery for many years. The local daily, *The West Australian,* carried a report on the sinking of the four flying boats that remained in Perth, but uncertainty swirled among the general public over the years.[529] *The West Australian* report was brief and revealed that the Catalinas had been disposed of at sea, but just what occurred was still a matter of contention, and aviation enthusiasts continued to search for the truth of exactly what happened.

The newspaper report left questions about how the Catalinas had been disposed of, particularly how they got out to sea, and where they were sunk. Had the Catalinas been towed out to sea, as stated by some historians, or flown to their graves or had something else happened? This uncertainty was researched by the Catalina Club of Western Australia in 1979 when it searched for a Catalina to display in a new museum near the former Nedlands Base site. Initially they looked for evidence of where the old flying boats had gone, knowing that they had been sunk off the coast, close to Rottnest Island near Perth.

It took several months before decisions were made about acquiring a Catalina for display. The Club had hopes that a plane could be raised from the seabed. But not much information was available concerning the demise of the flying boats. The uncertainty that

---

[528] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., p. 53.

[529] 'Destruction Off Rottnest Catalina Blown Up', *The West Australian*, 21 January 1946, p. 6. Available from: Trove, (accessed 18 October 2018).

promoted an air of intrigue can be traced back to Pattison and Goodall's monograph, entitled *Qantas Empire Airways (Western Operations Division) Indian Ocean Service 1943–1946*.[530] Not long after publication in 1979, the monograph's coverage of the demise of the Catalinas drew a critical response from former Qantas Aircraft Maintenance Manager in Perth, Ron Barrett.[531] Barrett declared that he was suspicious of the claims provided in the publication. The mystery of exactly how the Catalinas were taken out to sea and disposed was now 'revealed' and demanded a response.

Barrett wrote in his paper 'What Really Happened to the Double Sunrise Catalina at Crawley Bay WA' that, when the Catalina Club of Western Australia formed in 1979, focus fell on the whereabouts of the old flying boats. The Catalina Club was led by Ivan Peirce and others who sought to promote the history of both wartime Catalina operators. This curiosity led the Catalina Club to seek out a former air force sergeant, Arthur Jones, who lived in Western Australia and was part of the disposal team in 1946. Jones provided a recorded interview, which was later published by the Catalina Club, of exactly what had happened. What he revealed was not common knowledge at the time of the Catalinas' disposal and was largely unknown to the general public, because the original newspaper report described the final resting place, but not how they got there. That was the mystery that hung over the final movements of the Catalinas before they met their fate.

With reference to the interview content provided by Sergeant Jones, his testimony was well regarded at the time and later used in a report by the Western Australian Museum, published in 1999.[532] The Museum conducted an ocean dive to explore the state of the planes as they lay resting in the Indian Ocean off Perth's Rottnest Island. It is somewhat ironic that they now lay within the very same ocean that they had for so long defied.[533] The dive was encouraged by the Catalina Club of Western Australia, as part of their research into the possibility of refloating a Catalina and using it as the centrepiece for a museum to be built close to the old Nedlands Qantas site.

Jones's story of the fate of the Catalinas began while the Catalinas sat idle in Perth and Sydney at the conclusion of the war, while matters of the Catalinas' destiny was decided and a demolition team was being formed. By the time a decision was made 1946 had dawned. Four Catalinas remained in Perth, while *Spica Star,* was in Sydney at the time undergoing repairs.

But by January 1946, decisions were finalised, and things finally got underway. Although the British had carriage of the demolition process they used a team of Australian air force engineers, which was put together and set out for Perth.[534] Plans came together in an almost haphazard way. Sergeant Arthur Jones, at that time serving at the Australian Catalina base at Rathmines, New South Wales, was working there as a fitter and air

---

[530] B. Pattison and G. Goodall, op. cit., pp. 53–54.

[531] R. Barrett, 'What Really Happened to the Double Sunrise Catalina at Crawley Bay WA', op. cit.

[532] D. Garratt, 'Precise of the Wrecks in the Ship's Graveyard, Rottnest', Department of Maritime Archeology, Western Australian Museum, number 148, 1999.

[533] ibid.

[534] M. McCarthy, 'The Black Cats', Report into the Feasibility of Locating, Raising and Conserving One of the Four Catalina Flying Boats Scuttled off Rottnest Island in the Years 1945–1946', February 1977, Report - Department of Maritime Archaeology, WA Maritime Museum, Fremantle, No 125, pp. 22–24. Jones's report is contained within this document.

gunner. Around 3 January 1946, the base duty officer came to the Sergeants' Mess looking for airmen who were from Western Australia. Sergeant Jones, a Western Australian, wondered if he should volunteer – volunteering always being something that a serviceman sought to avoid. Nonetheless, he responded and raised his hand, thinking 'well at least he would be close to home' and it couldn't be that bad given the war had now ended and the danger had passed.[535]

He was told to report to the orderly room first thing next morning where he and fellow Western Australians were given their orders. Mystery hung in the air, just as it had when the first flights had commenced back in 1943. Little it seemed had changed. The job was to head to Perth for demolition work they were told. The men, as engineers, had skills in demolition and general weapons work. Two pilots were in the team, and the officer-in-charge said they had the job and should prepare to deploy. Jones recalled that they were all delighted as none had been home for such a long while, so it would be a bonus rather than sitting at Rathmines with no real purpose.[536]

The team was briefed that it was all 'hush-hush', a top-secret job, said the officer in charge. They knew it was a job where something was to be destroyed, but as to what, well that remained a mystery. They were told that, on arrival in Perth, the job would be explained in full, and upon completion of the task they would all return to Rathmines.[537] On 6 January 1946, they flew by air force Catalina to Rose Bay in Sydney, where *Spica Star* sat patiently awaiting its fate. They then boarded a general air force transport plane, and commenced the long journey to Perth by way of Melbourne, Parafield, Ceduna, Forrest, Kalgoorlie and finally arrived in Perth on the evening of 7 January 1946.[538]

Once in Perth the team went to Air Force House, located on Saint George's Terrace, which was then air force headquarters in Western Australia and where all the men had originally signed up as airmen and officers to fight the war as air force men. It was here that orders were given and the job fully explained. The task was to dispose of the four Catalinas that Qantas had flown on the Indian Ocean service from and to Perth. They were told that the government had an option to purchase the planes and that the cost at that time was £80,000 (Australian pounds) for each flying boat. This offer was not taken up by the Australian government which had many debts to deal with at war's end. Thus the planes' fate was effectively sealed.[539]

Strangely, though this was a 'secret' mission, the plan had sprung leaks. It was a bit like the 'secret' flights that Qantas flew in full view of the city of Perth in 1943 and 1944 until Hudson Fysh revealed the true nature of the flights. But in this case, it wasn't Hudson Fysh making the announcement to reveal the secret, but the local newspaper, *The West Australian*, which announced that a team had arrived in Perth to undertake disposal work on the four 'locals' that had endeared themselves to the Perth public over two and a half years, clattering in and out of the city each week. Their loss would not only bring to an end one of the last vestiges of the wartime era for the city, but would also be a

---

[535] ibid.

[536] ibid.

[537] ibid.

[538] ibid.

[539] ibid.

sad loss in general, given the valiant role they had played in Perth's wartime culture and the affection developed for them by the local populace.[540]

Soon after arrival in Perth, Jones recalled the planes being laid-up on the shore at Nedlands awaiting a decision, at the now-defunct Qantas Marine Base. The planes had been stored correctly and had wheels fitted to enable their dragging ashore, as Qantas had done using the ramp built two years before. It was about five months since they had been flown, so the first day was spent assessing their condition to fly. Two pilots were in the team and that was with a purpose as it was expected that the planes would be moved by being flown once more. By this time, the Qantas Marine Base had been closed and the staff all moved to Guildford where Qantas's Liberators still operated. The maintenance sheds remained, but no technicians were available, and that meant that the air force team had to rely on its own skills. It had access to support from Pearce air base, but it was fundamentally a self-contained group now at Nedlands.[541]

But, self-contained as they were, they lacked the key ingredient of an explosives demolition expert. Sergeant Jones and his team were accompanied by two more 'air force' officers, but this time they were British officers, from the Royal Air Force. In Perth, an officer described as 'a RAF bloke', who was to be an observer to ensure actions were made in compliance with Lend-Lease and that no 'souvenirs' were garnered, was present. But the most important man was described as another 'RAF Lieut' [sic] named Peter Ploughman, who was in fact a Navy demolition expert, not air force, who arrived with dynamite charges for the job.[542]

The first task was planned for 17 January 1946, and the team got underway preparing the planes as best they could. They worked on one plane and serviced it before attempting a start-up. They got it going without much trouble, so that augured well, with superstition always a hallmark of aviation and last flights. Hulls were checked and anything exterior and visible was checked to see if the planes could be flown and landed on water. The plan was to fly them out into the Indian Ocean, the very ocean that the planes had overflown for 271 journeys, and then sink them.[543]

Before final flight, a test flight had to be done for each flying boat, to ensure the plane was airworthy after being at rest for many months. On 16 January 1945, the two pilots, Flight Lieutenant Ted Withall, the aircraft Captain, and his first officer Flight Lieutenant Ted Hodgson, were ready to fly on the plane's penultimate flight.

The next day, on 17 January, it was time for *Antares Star,* the first plane to meet her fate. The previous day's test flight had proven her airworthiness, and all was ready to go. The boat crew was also in place on the water, to relay news of wind and wave conditions. The plane had to be landed in the open sea and this had the potential for some danger. It was important that the conditions be just right. An air force rescue boat had been

---

[540] ibid.

[541] ibid.

[542] ibid.

[543] ibid.

assigned to the task, and it had sailed out to Rottnest Island the previous evening awaiting the test flights of the Catalinas.[544]

Antares Star was pushed into the Swan River, and the crew went out in the rescue boat which had returned to Nedlands at this point in the operation. The plane was again taken on a two-hour test flight and then back to Nedlands. It was in fine condition for its last flight which was in the sea west of Rottnest Island off the coast of Perth. *Antares Star* was flown out to sea 13 miles off Rottnest where the rescue boat had now prepositioned. The crew alighted the flying boat by way of the rescue boat, leaving Ploughman, the demolition man, onboard to place his charges. He used a dinghy to manoeuvre alongside the blisters (the side hatches) and then loaded his charges into the plane.[545]

Ploughman placed other charges into the forward section, the pilots' flight deck, and connected the two charges. He then rowed 'like hell' on the open ocean water back to the rescue boat and waited for something to happen. The rescue boat stood off by about half a mile. Ploughman, who was shaking when hauled onboard the crash boat commented, 'By gees that was a bloody hairy sort of thing to do'. They waited and then a boom sounded out. Up went the rear then the front cutting the plane in half, and then it sank. A perfect demolition job had been completed and *Antares Star,* which had carried so many people, cargo and precious mail, was no more.[546]

Though the demolition mission was like the flights before them, the 'secret' didn't take long to get out. Having already announced that a team was in town to dispose of the trusty Catalinas, days after the destruction of *Antares Star,* the local daily, *The West Australian*, was quick off the mark in announcing the job was underway. On Monday 21 January, with the headline 'Destruction off Rottnest Catalina Blown Up', the paper announced to the people of Perth just what was going on.[547]

Contradicting the previously reported £80,000 price tag, *The West Australian* stated that the planes and more like them were estimated at £300,000 to £400,000 and were slated for demolition. This figure likely included all surplus aircraft post-war in Western Australia that was held under Lend-Lease arrangements. The report stated that one Catalina had been destroyed and three more were being readied for the same fate, transported to Rottnest and destroyed on the water and sent to the ships' graveyard deep below, already replete with many wrecks sunk there over the years.[548]

The newspaper now confirmed that the next plane to be sunk was *Rigel Star,* which was awaiting a fine weather forecast, as sea conditions dictated defined set-down parameters on the ocean and also allowed the demolition expert to go about his work in a stable environment, it said.[549] *The West Australian* also announced that each plane was to be sunk with all its fittings, including valuable radio and navigation equipment. Rubber dinghies and all other safety equipment were also aboard, and it was strictly prohibited

---

[544] ibid.

[545] ibid.

[546] ibid.

[547] 'Destruction Off Rottnest Catalina Blown Up', op. cit.

[548] M. McCarthy, loc cit.

[549] ibid.

that any parts be removed. It also noted that Catalinas were used for patrolling the Western Australian coast, though this task was not one undertaken by Qantas, but by the Americans' Patrol Wing 10 squadrons based in Perth. This minor error once again illustrates the common misunderstanding by civilians over just which Catalina entity did exactly what jobs during the war.[550]

The next task was the destruction of the second flying boat. That flying boat was *Rigel Star*, the third plane to join Qantas's complement on 21 July 1943, some three weeks before its now lost colleague the *Antares Star*. The demolition team followed the same arrangement as had been used for *Antares Star*. After preliminary checks to the fuselage and the starting of the motors, a two-hour test flight was again conducted. Sometimes these flights went north to Geraldton and on another occasion went south to Albany. The date set for *Rigel Star's* departure was 30 January 1946, about two weeks after *Antares Star* was sent to the bottom. The pilots flew the plane to the same location west of Rottnest, and Ploughman went about his work setting the charges.[551]

But unlike *Antares Star*, *Rigel Star* did not want to go. Ploughman had connected his charges from aft to forward, but when it went up, the pilots' cabin failed to blow. The plane was stricken in the water like a winged bird and could neither sink nor move. Ploughman had no back-up plan in such a contingency. But the captain of the air force crash boat was at the ready and produced three .303 rifles and 300 rounds of ammunition. He handed the weapons to the team members who began firing at the plane hoping to hit the 75-pound charge, still unexploded. After a number of rounds were discharged, one hit the mark and the dynamite ignited. A bullet had penetrated the charge and set it off. The plane blazed alight and settled back in the water then slowly sank to the bottom. Both *Rigel Star,* and the job, were now done.[552]

Having witnessed this unusual event of how a demolition could go wrong and the danger of being in the boat while charges were prepared on open water, the air force men wondered why the Navy did not simply fire upon the boats and just sink them. Safer and more efficient, they thought, and the false detonation had shown how it could easily go wrong, let alone the danger of being at sea and moving from a flying boat to a dinghy to the rescue launch while timed charges were activated.

Next was *Vega Star*. *Vega Star* was the second plane to be brought on service and was one of the original two that had been flown out by the British crews from Koggala. The plane was originally used by the British, flying from Poole in England to Lagos in Nigeria. The plane was flown to Koggala and handed over to Qantas and then to Rose Bay in Sydney for modification in mid-1943 before entering service with Qantas in Perth.[553]

---

[550] Qantas flew the Indian Ocean route only, while Patrol Wing 10, which arrived in March of 1942 and departed in September of 1944, provided wartime coastal surveillance and other defensive military measures.

[551] M. McCarthy, loc. cit.

[552] ibid.

[553] ibid.

Vega Star was disposed of 14 days[554] later on 14 February 1946. The reported sinking site of *Vega Star* was 13 miles off Rottnest, and it was a clear and fine day that she was despatched to 'Davy Jones's locker'. This time there were no hitches and *Vega Star* went without complaint after two and half years of sterling service with Qantas on the Indian Ocean service.

Nevertheless, and despite the efficiency of the work being carried out by the demolition crew, in his report, Jones noted that the crew deliberately took as much time as they could to finish the job. This was because servicemen and women were being demobilised after the war, so better string things out for as long as possible because a return to Rathmines awaited them and Perth was, after all, their home.[555]

Clearly it wasn't just all about the job at hand, the demolition of the Catalinas. In addition to the deliberate tactic to take as long as they could, some benefits like capital city allowance rate were being collected, a small bonus which sweetened the deal for the Western Australians on the team. Some members also utilised local accommodation with one serviceman staying at another's lodgings, which again was a useful benefit, as money was saved. After war service, it was seen as a luxury to have the benefits of home cooking and a peaceful domestic environment in which to rest and go about the job at hand, while still collecting allowances.[556]

Consequently, the job was stretched out as long as possible as the Western Australians began to see the benefits of being home. But only so much time could be taken as there was no reason why the flying boats could not be sunk quickly. Weather was the prevailing factor so far as the task was concerned. It was January, in the middle of Perth's summer, and generally in that season waters were placid and calm. The only prohibition was the local phenomenon know as the 'Fremantle Doctor', a local summer breeze that sprang up around midday. The breeze brought relief to Perth's suburbs on hot summer days as it roared down the Swan River to find its way to the city after noon most summer days. Known by locals as the 'sea breeze' or more colloquially 'the doctor', the wind whipped up choppy waters off the coast. The landing site for the Catalinas was off Rottnest Island, which was itself some 12 miles off the Perth coast where the Swan River met the Indian Ocean. So, the sinking site at the ships' graveyard was still further out and subject to winds, as there was no island protection to the western side and rough seas could develop around noon and later.[557]

As January wore on, the weather remained consistent as high pressure troughs moved over Perth at its 32° southern latitude and a typical summer weather pattern developed. So the team had plenty of time, weather-wise, and given it was post-war and the home comforts they enjoyed, they had no reason to rush.[558]

---

[554] Jones's report states that *Vega Star* was sunk nine days later but has been recorded here as 14 days based on the dates of the *Rige*l *Star* and then *Vega Star* sinkings. Jones's report also states 30 June but likely refers to 30 January

[555] M. McCarthy, loc. cit.

[556] ibid.

[557] ibid.

[558] ibid.

It was now time to deal with the last flying boat, *Altair Star.* Her date with destiny was scheduled for 24 February 1946. *Altair Star's* demise was symbolic as she was the leader of the pack, the original plane that flew the Indian Ocean service. She arrived at Nedlands on 7 July 1943 and was the last British test flight flown to Perth. But as her final flight date approached, stormy weather was impacting on Perth. Things had moved towards the end of the summer season, and at that time the low pressure brought over Perth strengthens as the seasons show signs of change and winds whip up, and air moves between pressure systems causing unstable weather as February comes to an end.[559]

But when *Altair Star* was ready to go, not only was weather now an issue, the usual test flight had to be conducted. The flying boat had lain idle for many months, and the hull needed to be checked by completing a water-landing on the Swan, prior to assessing its reliability for an ocean landing. This was the usual practice undertaken by the crew. An extended flight was to be undertaken to check the engines and flying surfaces and then a few water landings on the Swan to be sure that the hull was fit for sea landings. Now that the weather was becoming less reliable and the sea states were higher, it was very important that *Altair Star* was fit for a potentially heavy sea landing.[560]

However, another problem developed with pilot Ted Withell suffering malaria and unable fly. He was one of the two pilots allocated to the job, now with only one experienced pilot a solution was sought. Flight Lieutenant Bill Swan was brought in and took over Ted Withell's duties for the flight. Swan then flew the two-hour test flight and landed back at Crawley. All was in order and they decided to continue, despite the weather.[561]

After another take-off, they flew out to Rottnest and located the landing zone. As before, it was 13 miles off Rottnest and right above where the previous three had been sent. The crash boat was in place and the sea-state was acceptable for a sea landing. The Catalina swept over the site several times and Swan noted that the controls seemed unresponsive and quirky. But he forced the big plane down and landed on the open sea.[562]

The usual procedures were followed with the crash boat alongside to take off the crew with Ploughman left inside to set the charges and use his dinghy to escape before it went up. Ploughman recovered to the launch and waited. Boom up she went. But something had gone amiss. Somehow one of the charges had blown off the wing with its float attached, which caused it to float. A large piece of plane was now afloat and drifting away. The wing was now a hazard to shipping and had to be either retrieved or sunk somehow.[563]

One of the practices when sinking the other boats was that no debris should be left in the water which could cause a hazard to passing shipping. The site was some 13 miles

---

[559] ibid.

[560] ibid.

[561] ibid.

[562] ibid.

[563] ibid.

west of Rottnest and was not in a shipping lane, but flotsam could stray and drift into the nearby Gage Roads shipping channel, which led to and from the busy Fremantle harbour. It was essential that all debris be either sent to the bottom or collected by the launch. It was especially important that no sub-surface debris be left behind and to do so the launch made a sweep of the area looking for any submerged obstacles that may have come adrift when the flying boats were destroyed.[564] Another practice was the use of the launch overnight near Rottnest. The boat would go out to Rottnest and stay overnight looking for debris and keeping a watch on shipping as well as providing weather reports back to the team at Nedlands.

It was decided that two of the airmen had to go out in the dinghy and deal with it. It was a swell of about four feet and the dinghy used oars. It was a set of dangerous and awkward circumstance to be dealt with. It was described as a ‘hairy job’. The secret weapon to do the job was a set of tomahawks stored on the crash boat. The plan had not included such an unimagined situation, and axes were the best tools that could be mustered at the time. The two airmen reached the wing and secured it then began chopping. All was going well until one axe became jammed in the wing and was unable to be retrieved. There was an axe stuck in the wing attached to the dinghy and drifting in a choppy swell on open water.[565]

Luckily the axe had done the job and the wing began to sink. The launch captain ordered that the axe had to be retrieved, but it was too late. One small loss in the business of avoiding a reported £80,000 piece of inventory had gotten away. It was a small loss, in the circumstances.[566]

As the planes were being sunk, a close camaraderie had developed between the team. In true Australian style, Peter Ploughman, the Royal Navy demolition expert, was now being ‘ribbed’ on a daily basis. After *Altair Star’s* demolition, one of the crew joked saying to Ploughman, ‘What are all those grey hairs you have on your head?' His reply ‘was not fit for recording for a future generation to listen to’. Ploughman's job was stressful and made more difficult by having it be done in open water. As the air force men had previously opined, it was a wonder why they didn’t just use a navy gun to do the job from a distance. Under Lend-Lease the planes had to be destroyed in full, so dismantling was out of the question so the *coup de grace* was decided on using a sea burial, but a naval shot through the hull would have done the job and perhaps Ploughman could have avoided the grey hairs![567]

The sinking of *Altair Star* was the final chapter in the destruction of the four Catalinas that had been left in Perth when the last flight flew in from Koggala on 18 July 1945. The job had been done and now the team had to disperse and return to Rathmines Catalina Base in New South Wales. They flew back to Rathmines about 6 March 1946 on an air force Liberator to Sydney, taking just over nine hours in direct flight. On 8 March they then boarded a Catalina sent for them from Rathmines piloted by Squadron Leader Gray, plane A24-10, which flew them back to Rathmines on the central NSW coast, and the mission

---

[564] ibid.

[565] ibid.

[566] ibid.

[567] ibid.

of the demolition of the Perth Catalinas was now over.[568] As testimony to their impact, Hudson Fysh, who was never known to waste his words, was moved to say that 'the sinking of the Catalinas was indeed a dismal fate for these splendid boats which for two long years saw us through our most hazardous operation ever'.[569]

But while the Perth-based Catalinas had been dealt with one more Catalina was still in service, officially. That plane was the ugly duckling of the fleet, *Spica Star,* the Canadian-built flying boat which had arrived in May 1944 and was sitting at Rose Bay in Sydney where she had gone for repair work for a fuel leak and had not returned, as the war had concluded while she was in Sydney. The sinking of *Spica Star* was much less dramatic. In March of 1946 she too was disposed of by scuttling and was despatched off the Sydney heads and sent to the bottom. The sinking of *Spica Star* marked the end of the five Catalinas that had served so well and carried all those passengers on the 271 crossings from Perth to Lake Koggala and on to Karachi in those 'dark and hurrying'[570] days of the Second World War.

The mystery of the final days that surrounded the Catalina disappearance was revealed through the local Catalina Club-led research. The new information resolved the mystery of the final days of their eventual fate, adding even greater interest to their historical legacy through the procedures undertaken in the final days of the flying boats. But in addition to their obvious historical legacy, other legacies were created through unique achievements, or 'firsts', achieved during the flights themselves.

The 'Firsts'

The first of three 'firsts' was created in August of 1943 when flight 2Q1 alighted from Nedlands *en route* to Lake Koggala in Ceylon. While flown under wartime secrecy, and an unrecognised aviation achievement at the time, this flight represented the first international commercial passenger flight flown from Perth. At this time, Perth did not have an international airport, and it wasn't until 1944 that Guildford airport was opened and became Perth's international airport.[571] Qantas carried three *bona fide* commercial passengers per flight, unless seats were occupied by an offical government representative. In any case, the flight was registered as passengers, mail and cargo and was an international flight with immigration department documents issued.[572] International flights from the new Guildford aerodrome would begin in 1944, with Nedlands one year ahead, thus the Indian Ocean flight stands as an unrecognised historical achievement. There is little doubt, though no record actually recognises this, that the flight was Perth's first as an official international service, flown not from a traditional land airport, but from the glassy waters of the Swan River.

Another aviation first recorded during the conduct of the service was the flight from Lake Koggala to Perth, coincidentally flown in by Qantas's General-Manager Hudson Fysh, in 1943. Fysh was at the time returning to Australia following his trip to England to

---

[568] ibid.

[569] 'The Return of The Catalina', Bunker Media, 1995.

[570] Paraphrase of Menzies's Second World War diary title.

[571] T. McGrath, *In Western Skies,* Victoria Park, Hesperian, 2020, p. 268.

[572] Qantas passengers were recorded on 'Commonwealth of Australia Immigration Act' passenger cards.

establish the Indian Ocean service. He was a passenger on flight 1Q8 which flew for 32 hours and nine minutes to reach Perth. The flight departed Lake Koggala as the eighth out-bound service (thus 1Q8 flight number) and was flown by Captain Crowther. Fysh quotes some uncertainty in flight records with the commander's log recording 31 hours 45 minutes, then 31 hours and 50 minutes according to Qantas traffic administration, while Qantas Western Operations themselves record 32 hours and 9 minutes duration. No matter which figure is accurate, the flight is far in excess of any other modern aviation record for the longest passenger service for a commercial passenger flight. The record stands today and the legacy of such an achievement is an outstanding testimony to the skill of all crew and engineers. It is also a testimony to all 271 flights which averaged about 28 hours duration overall per flight.

The record flight itself was also exceptional for the weather conditions that influenced the duration. Crowther used a new navigational method for this flight and had Jim Cowan, Qantas's expert chief navigator, on board. The flight plan was then extended as they flew around a heavy storm and battled a 12-knot headwind before finally sighting the western coast of Australia and guaranteeing their safety.[573]

With two records already achieved within the history of the flight, another first was also to be established. The Indian Ocean flights also marked the birth of what was to become a trademarked and retained aviation name, the 'Kangaroo Service'. Used today as a brand name for Qantas's Sydney to London route, the name originated during the Indian Ocean service, coined by Crowther when he referred to the traditional aviation term of a 'hop' meaning a short flight from point to point.

Switch to American Aircraft

The use of Catalinas and Liberators on the Indian Ocean service was Qantas's first use of non-British aircraft. The Catalina had replaced the Empire flying boat and the Liberator was a new style plane for Qantas, given its size and range. Both planes allowed long-distance flying, whereas the Empires and de Havillands previously flown could only cover far-shorter distances, requiring frequent stops. The newer American planes gave reliability and long range and, as a long distance carrier, this was ideal for Qantas.

This aviation-related legacy from the Indian Ocean service and the policy ructions of wartime encouraged the switch by Qantas to American-sourced aircraft, post war. Prior to the war, Qantas, like most operators in the Australia aviation industry, used a fly-British-first policy. The Empire air mail scheme itself was based on the creation of the British designed and built Short Brothers Empire Class flying boat. This was more a policy decision than an aviation decision. Part of the mission of the mail scheme was to showcase British aircraft around the globe as the planes flew mail to all parts of the Empire. Qantas's partnership with the British participated in this policy. But the introduction of, firstly, the American Catalina and, later, the Liberator, by Qantas, changed all that. But while post-war the Empire flying boat returned to commercial skies, their days were numbered. In 1947 when Qantas was nationalised, the America Constellation was used and then, when the jet age arrived, the American-built Boeing 707 and later its 747 were the preferred aircraft.

From 1942, when British aircraft usage was still the Australian policy, changes were forced because of the war and availability of aircraft issues. By the mid-1940s American

---

[573] H. Fysh, op. cit., p.186.

planes were the only planes available and were now used by Qantas. That situation overlapped into post-war purchasing of now American aircraft. Yet another legacy of the Indian Ocean service had revealed itself.

Associations, Monuments and Names

While legacies had been recognised in aviation performance and innovation, a much later legacy was to emerge in the field of local aviation history. Around Perth a number of monuments and memorials have been erected to recount the storied history of the Qantas Catalinas. Four of these exist at Nedlands, with two on the former Nedlands Marine Base site at Abrahams Park and the Swan River foreshore, while two small plaques are to be found on the 'American side' on Matilda Bay. One is found under the rotunda on the grassed area off Hackett Drive, while the other is attached to the wall adjacent to the cafe there. Both Qantas monuments on the Nedlands side were placed in these locations as part of the failed efforts to establish a Catalina museum on the corner of Hackett Drive and Australia II Drive, undertaken by the Catalina Club of Western Australia. The centrepiece was to be a refurbished American Catalina now housed in the Bull Creek aviation museum in Perth.

A lesser-known memorial exists on Stirling Highway, Nedlands, opposite the Rose Garden and is located high up on a commemorative trolley bus lamp-pole as part of an historical collection of the era built by the Nedlands Council. But a very large and difficult to miss memorial in the name of an estate named Catalina Estate is to be found in the City of Joondalup near the suburb of Clarkson, north of Perth. The estate is replete with aircraft names of streets and roads such as *Vega Star* and *Altair Star* and place names including Koggala and Colombo (see Figure 9). The estate, a commercial enterprise, is a fitting tribute to the legacy of the famed Indian Ocean Catalinas and part of Perth's newer revival of the history of the planes for new generations to be inspired. To make the locations even more noteworthy is a children's playground complete with a Catalina plane on which new generations of Perth residents can play and climb about (see Figure 10).

While in the background monuments are raised and suburbs named, a dedicated group of historians and Catalina aficionados have worked to ensure the legacy is remembered and enhanced. The Catalina Club of Western Australia of the 1990s was the pinnacle of this revival. Headed at one time by Ivan Peirce, a former Qantas Catalina pilot, the association raised millions of dollars and was responsible for the Catalina on display at the museum in Bull Creek, in Perth. Working with luminaries such as professional golfer Greg Norman and then United States President Bill Clinton, the Catalina Club project found and purchased a destitute flying boat in Texas, which was transported to Perth by the United States Navy and was assembled at the former Midland Railways Workshops. It now resides as pride of place at the Air Force Association Bull Creek museum.

As noted above, the flying boat was planned to be the centrepiece of a Catalina museum to be located at Nedlands adjacent to the former Nedlands Marine Base. The project was never completed and the plane was sent to Bull Creek and has remained there ever since. The plane is a physical legacy of the history of both Qantas and American Catalinas in Perth, standing as testimony to the planes themselves, the men who flew them and the relationship with the people of Perth and Western Australia.

The Catalina Perth monuments exist as a tangible reminder of the Second World War and the role played by the Americans and then Qantas. The Nedlands-based monuments are appropriately placed near where the two operators were based during the

war. Passers-by and interested parties are reminded by these monuments and plaques of the contribution made by the crews and the planes themselves. But regardless, the monuments act as a physical reminder of the wartime and Perth's legacy of the Catalinas which flew from the Swan.

The American Legacy

The American aviators operated in Perth for around the same length of time as Qantas, but began a year before Qantas commenced operations. Their legacy is as profound today as that of Qantas. Based on the numerous memorials, published works and long-term relationships of a national, political and social dimension that have emerged since the war days, the American legacy is also multifaceted and interactive, through the country-to-country dynamic that has emerged.

As the initial operators of the Catalinas, the Americans claim the title of the first Catalina unit to arrive in defence of Perth and began the process of ensuring that the Japanese threat was diminished. The Americans' earlier presence in Perth, than that of Qantas, first established what was to become the legend of the Perth wartime Catalinas.

The American commitment totalled two and a half years and has been recognised in this thesis under three headings of the legacies of strategic relations, social-personal relations, and the legacies of societies, monuments and names.

Field research carried out for this thesis found evidence of these legacies through monuments, plaques, street names and even suburban names. The research also revealed the many personal stories that have resulted from family relationships with Australian and American families in contact across the globe.[574] These reminders of the war were established to honour the Americans, and showed the debt of gratitude displayed by generations of Perth and Western Australian people, to the Americans during the war.

[574] While the author presented lectures on wartime Catalinas senior citizens shared with the author many anecdotes and stories of the era as personal reminiscences or stories passed down from their parents or relatives.

Figure 9. Street signs at Clarkson suburb, Perth. Within the suburb is a Catalina estate replete with both American and Qantas Catalina names and references. (Photo by author.)

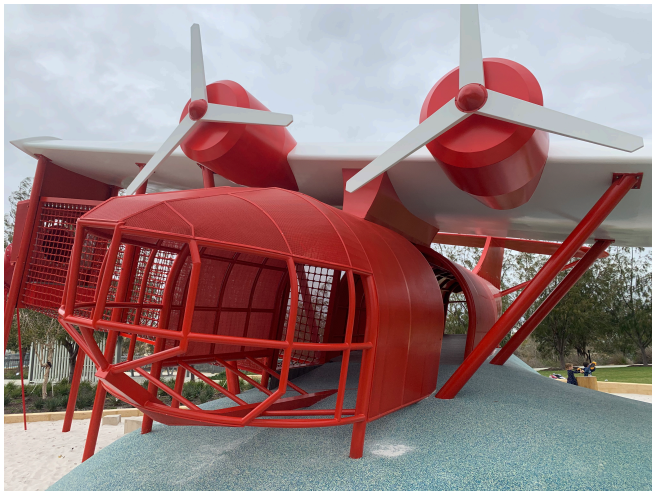

Figure 10. Catalina children's playground, Perth. Within the Perth suburb of Clarkson is a children's playground with a model Catalina aircraft. (Photo by author.)

Strategic Relations

Amongst the several dimensions of historical legacies, perhaps the most strategic is one of a larger, more political nature. The Americans, in the form of the Catalina Wing, can be considered to have played an early role in establishing a legacy of Australian and American military cooperation. In the 1950s this relationship was formalised through the ANZUS alliance, with Australia and America formalising their security relationship through a defence treaty.

Fleet Air Wing 10 was one of the earliest complete American units to find itself on Australian shores following Japanese entry and the development of the Pacific theatre. Their arrival in March 1942 was preceded by several visits to places like Broome, Darwin, Exmouth and even Perth in late 1941. These interventions foreshadowed the soon to be formally acknowledged Australian–American military cooperation.

When the ANZUS alliance formed much later in 1951, it illustrated the bonds inherent in a strategic nation-to-nation relationship. While the deployment of Fleet Air Wing 10 to Perth in early 1942 was a long way from 1951, the rapid deployment of the Wing to Perth was one of the earliest commitments to an Australian–American alliance in the war. The mutual security and links developed in the war were formalised much later, but endured far beyond the short period of time during which the Americans were resident in Perth and Australia.

Social and Personal

Another enduring legacy was beyond the security setting and became a cross-cultural phenomenon. The number of personal relationships and marriages which developed during the war added a new legacy to the nation-to-nation relationship now recognised. The marriages and the legacy of what were termed ‘war brides’ created an ongoing set of human relationships that endures to this day.

Perth locals like Avis Koenig and Leslie Thanos (previously mentioned) were two local ladies who met and married American pilots, and they went on to live long lives and have long and enduring relationships through their marriages. Their children and grandchildren survive and some live in Perth today.[575] The legacy that these ladies and others, many hundreds, who married Americans, developed is celebrated through mediums including folk music. The song ‘The Bridal Train’ by The Waifs is one such example of the musical legacy which tells the story of how the Americans sent a number of war brides from Perth to Sydney in 1944, where a ship awaited to carry them to America to reunite with their American husbands.

In one individual monograph by an American with links to wartime Perth, Perth’s women were described as especially welcoming to Americans with so many local men away in the war. Many marriages took place, until the Wing left Perth in September 1944. The author goes on to describe that some friction developed with local men and that Americans were well mannered and represented a new attraction to local women. Also mentioned is Lieutenant Thanos who was described as ‘handsome and popular’ and was then stationed in Geraldton, a Wing forward base, where he met his future wife Leslie.[576]

Societies, Monuments and Names

Perhaps the most obvious legacy of the Americans is the development of historical societies, public monuments, geographical place names, and suburban and local road names that celebrate the legend of the Catalinas and the Americans. The Catalina Club of Western Australian was a large organisation that existed and involved some previous Catalina crew members and worked to ensure both the American and Qantas legacies were upheld. The Association was at its peak in the 1990s and commissioned several major projects. The most prominent and the one with an enduring legacy was the project to build a museum on the site of the two operators’ bases, the site between the Americans’ Pelican Point base and Qantas’s Nedlands base.

As previously mentioned when discussing the Qantas legacy, the nearby Matilda Bay restaurant contains a magnificent collection of pictures of the Catalinas that were

---

[575] Jim Thanos, the son of Lieutenant James Thanos, lives in Perth today.

[576] A. Le Baron, letter to L. Thanos, shared with author, 12 August 2021.

once located nearby at the Royal Perth Yacht Club during the war. Other institutions too remember the Catalinas including the University of Western Australia which has an enduring historical legacy with the Americans who used many of its facilities and where accomodation quarters were erected. The University has an archival department with a collection of American wartime stories and records that celebrate the wartime history in several monographs printed.

Aside from the immediate geographical sites, a number of roads and areas also commemorate the Americans and maintain the legacy of their service to Perth and Western Australia. The opportunity to survey the coast introduced a new opportunity for the toughened crews of the Catalinas. With a touch of self-interest, the Americans named many places for themselves. These locations' names were originated by the Wing while sailing and flying over the Western Australian coast during the war. Existing charts were outdated and found to be from the 1850s to 1860s. In making new charts the Wing used names such as *Childs*, *Heron* and *Preston*, even naming an undersea ledge after Rear-Admiral Lockwood, the senior United States Navy officer in Western Australia at that time.[577] Lockwood Ledge, once an uncharted submarine ledge, which was struck by the USS *Preston*, was named after Admiral Lockwood (who had taken the helm at the time it was reported).[578] These charts were later taken up by the Royal Australian Navy and adopted as working charts.[579]

Finally, Exmouth, where the Wing and an American submarine fuelling point was located, has dedicated a number of local roads named in honour of the Americans. Lockwood Street and Preston Street are to be found there, as is Heron Way. Thew Street, named after Commander Thew, who came ashore with Admiral Lockwood, is also remembered. Thew was also memorable for the previously cited Perth divorce case and Lockwood as the resident of the house at 'the bend in the road' in Kings Park.

Recognising the Legacy

The efforts of both Catalina operators were aimed at defending Perth and, in the case of the Americans, greater Western Australia. In that role both operators achieved beyond expectations. Both Qantas and the Americans formed a legacy that endures until the present day. Whether it be the restored Catalina held in the Bull Creek Air Force museum, a friend with an American former pilot father, a drive along a suburban street or a casual reference to a suburban name, the Catalina legend lives on in the memories of Perth and Western Australia and its people.

These respective legacies endure today, united by the common link of the wartime and the Catalina flying boat. It is only fitting that new generations of Perth and Western Australian residents, through the various legacies identified, come to know the famous Catalinas and their role in defending and enriching Perth and Western Australia for its future residents.

---

[577] G. Munsdorf, op. cit., p. 5.

[578] 'Operation Potshot: Oil Search Recalls Incident of 1942', *The West Australian,* 3 June 1943, p. 3. Available from: Trove, (accessed 17 July 2018).

[579] ibid.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis has sought to answer three questions developed from the history of the Catalina flying boats that operated from Perth and Western Australia from 1942 to 1945, during the Second World War. The three questions asked were:

> How did the Catalina flying boats of the United States Navy and Qantas Empire Airways contribute to defying the Japanese threat to Perth and Western Australia during the Second World War?
>
> What impact did the presence of the planes and their crews have on Perth during this period?
>
> What was the legacy for the United States Navy, Qantas and Australia–United States relations that emerged from this period?

The thesis attempts to redress a gap which was identified in Perth's and Western Australia's Second World War history, following an extensive literature review of this period. The search revealed deficiencies of information on the United States Navy's Patrol Wing 10 operations from March 1942 to September 1944 and Qantas's Indian Ocean service. This important gap in the Perth and Western Australian Second World War period was deemed worthy of greater research.

Some technical and operational detail was found to exist on Qantas's Indian Ocean service. However, little analysis was identified on the preceding policies, commercial considerations (in particular the loss of income from the cessation of the Empire Air Mail Scheme), political manoeuvrings and international aviation issues. These elements of circumstance within the greater Qantas narrative were integral to the decisions that led to the establishment and operation of the Qantas Indian Ocean service. It was also identified that little information focused on the cooperative operations of both entities, Qantas and the United States Navy, which it was found had a substantial relationship in operational and engineering support activities.

While the published information on American operations was scant, the information sources found to describe the operations and impact of Qantas were more fulsome, but inclined to technical and flight-focussed detail. That information was useful as a scaffold for understanding Qantas operations, but it did not answer the key research questions of this thesis. This literature gap revealed on pre-Indian Ocean service decision-making was filled through the correspondences of the main decision-makers of the time. Other literature was found within texts, reports and diaries found in the Qantas archives. Interviews and recollections of personnel of the era were also used. Other interviews with local Perth residents who had memories of the times were also a valuable input to the Qantas Indian Ocean service story.

The literature deficiency was most evident for American operations. The literature search found that very little published information was available. These deficiencies were most prominent within the American Catalina literature, with only one publication of substance found. American military archives revealed that operational log books were available, and these documents became the main source of information to complete the chronology, which became the Wing's operational history, beginning in March 1942, when the first planes landed on the Swan River in Perth, and departed in September of 1944. The American operational logs were supplemented by other archival sources including the

official Wing history, commanders' reports, operational reports and personal accounts of the 1942 to 1944 period when the Wing was based in Perth and Western Australia. Amongst these documents were operational plans, airmen's reports on missions, peripheral occurrences which include the interactions with Perth institutions (such as the University of Western Australia), and the experience with the local population. This information was used to developed a broader picture than previously existed, of not only the operational impact of the Wing while it was in Western Australia, but also the impact the Americans had upon each locale in which they were based: Perth, Geraldton, Exmouth and 'Heron Haven' offshore near Karratha, in northwest Western Australia.

The literature review clearly established the deficiency of published information on Perth's Catalina period, acknowledging gaps for both United States Navy and Qantas histories of this period, 1942 to 1945 in Perth and Western Australia. This revelation enabled the research questions to be considered and formulated to reveal the history that emerged and which now can be summarised in turn.

How did the Catalina flying boats of the United States Navy and Qantas Empire Airways contribute to defying the Japanese threat to Perth and Western Australia during the Second World War?

Overall, this thesis has demonstrated that the Wing was a very important element in defying the Japanese who, in 1942, were rampaging across Southeast Asia and at Western Australia's doorstep. In early 1942 local defences were meagre and only 11 air force planes were available to patrol and defend the vast coastline of Western Australia. The arrival of the Catalinas meant long patrol capabilities were now available, and with the rapid establishment of forward bases in Geraldton, and then Exmouth, Catalinas could use their vast reach to confront any Japanese aggression approaching Western Australia and establish a defensive perimeter. But it took time, and during the 1942 and early 1943 period the Japanese continued to bomb targets in Western Australia. Until the establishment of the Wing's patrol sectors, the air space contiguous to Western Australia was virtually uncontested.

During its time in Western Australia, Patrol Wing 10, later Fleet Air Wing 10, became the *de facto* air force of Western Australia, patrolling from east of Albany to north of Port Hedland and deep in a westerly direction across the Indian Ocean. The Americans pursued enemy forces in the form of submarines and surface ships, as was well as Japanese aircraft, and quickly established a safe zone for Allied aircraft and shipping to manoeuvre. They defied any intrusion of Japanese aircraft, which by mid-1943, in a show of dominance, had ceased to attack Western Australia.

In addition to establishing an aerial defensive perimeter, the Americans also conducted missions deep into enemy territory with their April 1942 flight to Corregidor Island in the Philippines and, later in 1944, their raid on Penfui airfield in the Dutch East Indies. These missions illustrated the Wing's capability to not only defy the Japanese threat, but to take the attack to the enemy and turn Western Australia into not only a defensive stronghold, but also an attack base.

The research question explicitly asked how the Wing defied the Japanese threat to Perth and Western Australia, which was undertaken through the defensive screen established by the Wing and, as time progressed, their offensive operations aimed at diminishing any further potential for attacks on the west coast of Australia. These

operations were found to be insufficiently recognised by other scholars for their role in Australia's defence during the Second World War. The review of war logs and Wing history revealed the pattern of these defensive manoeuvres and the tactics applied which developed into offensive missions aimed at quelling any further attempts by the Japanese to attack the Wing's area of operations.

While the Americans operated as a combat squadron, Qantas played a different, though significant, role in defying the Japanese. Qantas arrived just over a year after Wing 10 had deployed and by July 1943 had flown their first flight from Perth. Qantas defied the Japanese blockade with that first flight, flying through Japanese-patrolled air space to show that Australia could be reunited by air with the British Empire, flying the westerly route over the Indian Ocean. Using the westerly flight path that they had developed, Qantas flanked the Japanese patrols, using night-flying tactics to avoid identification. Qantas even went further in defying the Japanese threat by extending their service from Lake Koggala, in Ceylon, to Korangi Creek, Karachi. This extended route now fully re-established the air link from Sydney to London, as it had been prior to the fall of Singapore in 1942.

During the Indian Ocean flights, on only one occasion was Qantas attacked by the Japanese while on an unscheduled stop at Cocos, when a Catalina was bombed by the Japanese but was able to escape successfully and continue its journey.

Overall, 271 Qantas Catalina flights were flown in just over a two-year period of the war. The flights had an enviable safety record, with few operational issues and all passengers carried safely from or to Perth throughout the war when flights ceased in August 1945.

The research question sought to explain how Qantas defied the Japanese threat to Perth and Western Australia, which was undertaken through Qantas Indian Ocean service which broke the Japanese's dominance of the approach and departure routes from Perth. This route was acknowledged by historians in technical terms but overlooked to some degree in how the service came to be established and for its significant role in Australia's defence during the Second World War and Perth's role in that era. This story has been told in this thesis – how and why it was established as well as the ongoing story of the flights that defied the Japanese offensive screen and, subsequent to that, the impact that Qantas had on Perth during its operational period in Perth.

What impact did the presence of the planes and their crews have on Perth during this period?

The impact of both entities on Perth and Western Australia during the wartime was found to be significant. The research revealed that by far the greatest impact felt by the people of Perth and Western Australia was from the Americans. The Americans arrived first, in large numbers and had a broad make-up of assets and personnel including several aircraft types, ocean-going ships and riverine craft. They were based in Perth as well as several other coastal locations and had a large maintenance support system. In contrast Qantas was a smaller operation. Qantas was based only in Perth, with a small five flying boat Catalina squadron, at its relatively low-key Nedlands Marine base operating under its 'secret' operational orders.

This thesis revealed that the Americans wasted no time in integrating themselves into Perth's social world. The results were constant people-to-people contacts, which led to the rapid expansion of nighttime and leisure activities. Marriages and divorces, influence on local cuisine and various law and order issues, including street violence, then followed. Americans were identified as being all over Perth and Western Australia – holidaying on farms, visiting new-found friends' family homes and even using Catalinas to fly personnel to the south coast for rest and recreation activities.

Accommodation was one area that the research revealed as having a major public impact. Hotels were booked out, and even homes were rented in prominent streets and areas. Senior officers as well as humble sailors needed decent accommodation. The University of Western Australia allowed barracks to be erected, and other University colleges too were used. Accommodation practices placed Americans amongst the population and this meant public transport was used. Americans were seen walking the streets and in shops, especially eateries, which now catered to American tastes.

The two-year period in which the Americans were in Perth had a major impact on Perth society. Approximately 1200 Wing personnel inhabited Perth over the two years, as well as country towns like Geraldton and Exmouth. The impact of such a large number of males was bound to have an impact on local social practices, let alone the practical implications stemming from accommodation and small business interactions. The period of American 'occupation' saw relationships of a personal nature quickly develop and become one of the most memorable aspects of the impact of the Americans' time in Perth and Western Australia.

Qantas's social impact on Perth was noticeably lesser than that of the Americans. Like the Americans, Qantas was a self-contained operation, though American help was valuable throughout. Qantas initially brought their own personnel to Perth, aircrew and engineering staff, but soon resorted to local hires as time progressed. Qantas was, until August 1944, an officially secret operation and this too tended to limit any social interactions with the public, as Qantas crews were supposed to be invisible to the local public at large. But regardless, issues arose, and occasions such as crew being taunted as 'civilian bludgers' at least showed that the pretence of secrecy of operations was working.

Qantas's impact on the public grew as the time passed and more so after their secret classification was lifted in August 1944 and as the main Qantas base for operations grew. The impact quickly developed in fields of employment (with women also employed in engineering support roles), local business supplies, and an increased visible impact. Catalina operations on the Swan at Nedlands were visible as well as the land-based planes now operating from Guildford airport, Perth's new international gateway.

The Second World War period resulted in a dramatic change in Perth's demeanour. The large influx of American servicemen and the less numerous, but eventually highly visible, Qantas's operation had brought new people and new cultural influences to Perth. But while the superficial changes were taking place, in the background Perth and Western Australia's population was comforted by the knowledge that two operational entities had arrived, during dark days, to not only defend them but to defy the enemy. They achieved this through conjoint operational and social impacts, and through their sheer presence on Perth's streets, on the river and in the air, re-established a sense of safety during a time of serious threat.

.

Although other historians such as Sturma, Cairns, Gregory and Baldock have written about this important era of the war in Perth and Western Australia, they have given greater attention to the military units which in large numbers occupied Fremantle. The Catalina operations which took place mainly in Perth have been somewhat overlooked by historians and are worthy of greater recognition within the fuller Second World War history in Western Australia.

What was the legacy for the United States Navy, Qantas and Australia–United States relations?

With the Catalina operators having established an area secure from Japanese threats, a sense of normality was returning to Perth and Western Australia. The emergence of social confidence encouraged change and was in many ways the genesis of the legacies that would emerge and be recognised post-war.

Post-war, with the revelation of the operational successes of the Catalina aircraft of the Wing and Qantas and the impact of the crews and personnel on Perth and Western Australia, this thesis has also revealed a legacy created by the two Catalina operators after the war.

Though Qantas was the second Catalina operator to arrive, in 1943, it was the first to establish the ongoing legacy of the wartime flights. Qantas flying boats remained in Perth at the end of the war, while American Catalinas had departed almost a year earlier. While it was noted that Perth's residents often confused the identity of the Catalinas, it was Qantas which, through its post-war activities, achieved initial notoriety in establishing an immediate historical relevance.

Post-war, the mystery of how the Qantas Catalinas were disposed of was solved through the diligent work of the Catalina Club of Western Australia. This mystery had existed since early 1946 when the Qantas flying boats had been sunk off the coast of Rottnest Island near Perth. The mystery of how the flying boats were delivered to their destruction site was revealed in the archival literature and supplemented by a report from the Catalina Club and the Maritime Museum of Western Australia. The literature revealed that the history included the flying of the Catalinas to Rottnest, and then their demolition by explosives on the sea-surface there.

The Catalina Club of Western Australia was a grouping of individuals who celebrated both Qantas and American Catalinas flown during the war, and it was these people who initially began formalising the legacy of the planes. By virtue of their efforts, several other legacies emerged over the years. Some legacies commemorate both operators while other instances were single-operator commemorations only.

In Perth memorials were raised near where both operators were based at Pelican Point and Nedlands. The Americans were also finally celebrated with a Catalina display at Bull Creek Aviation Museum in suburban Perth, with a fully rebuilt Catalina on display there with an historic information exhibition recalling the activities of the time.

But of equal interest was the legacy found in the coastal town of Exmouth in Western Australia. Exmouth commemorated the Americans with a number of street names in their honour throughout the town. From senior officers, such as Admiral Lockwood, to lower-ranking officers and vessels' names, American-named streets are to

.

be found in Exmouth. Similarly in Perth in the area of the Catalina Estate in suburban Clarkson, streets and parks bear Catalina names like *Antares Star* and *Spica Star* and a giant Catalina playground for children exists.

A final aspect of the legacy of the period was the emergence of Qantas as a true international airline, one which moved to a largely American inventory of long-distance aircraft. The Indian Ocean service had introduced American aircraft to Qantas service and that trend continued on into the post-war period. Another trend that continued was the strategic relationship of Australia and America as security partners – a new relationship brokered during the war, and a legacy that remains in force today.

Summary

The key search questions posed promoted research into how Catalinas of the American Wing and Australia's Qantas defied the Japanese threat that Perth and Western Australia faced from 1942 until the end of the war in 1945. This thesis revealed the considerable social impact that the Americans and Qantas had on Perth in the tense days of the war. Together, the defiance of the Japanese aerial blockade, and the effect upon Perth's society, produced a unique period of development for Perth and Western Australia's Second World War history, one which spawned an enduring legacy.

The three questions identified and the answers developed serve as a guide to this until now superficially researched area of important local history. The thesis's three key questions have sought to examine a crucial part of what is a much larger story that remains under-researched.

Of greatest interest is the American Catalina story which goes beyond Perth to its three forward bases and the towns and people involved. The size of the American unit itself contains many stories involving the remote forward bases and in particular Geraldton, where American personnel were based and interacted with locals, and Heron Haven, the remote fuelling anchorage. These are topics which alone are worthy of more research.

The Qantas Indian Ocean service story, once described by Hudson Fysh as one of his airline's most romantic adventures, has been documented mainly as a flight of epic proportions, but it is a story with much more to be researched. Amongst areas of further research, one area of worth would be the background stories of the local maintenance staff and the inclusion of female workers amongst them. Comment on this subject was not found in the literature surveyed and could provide a deeper understanding of labour shortages, available personnel issues and gender workplace policies during the war.

All of the above are worthy contenders to both memorialise and honour the magnificent wartime service of Perth's and Western Australia's Catalina operators of the Second World War. Further research in any or all of these areas would be a valuable outcome to build on the research presented in this thesis. This thesis complements the existing history available and serves as a pointer to further research into this unique and important aspect of Perth and Western Australia's Second World War history.

The Second World War represents a rich field of historical research and any new information which reveals valuable new insights is of great value to the broader community of knowledge. This thesis has striven to unearth new knowledge and as well to reinterpret some aspects of known knowledge, through the addition of supplemental

information to develop a more complete narrative. The intent to shed new light on an important period of Perth and Western Australian history moves the historical focus from an analysis of just direct military confrontations to a combined operational and social response, thus revealing a combined military and community path to wartime achievements.

.

Bibliography

Ambrose, L., *A Brief Outline of Indian Ocean Operations,* personal monograph, Sydney, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder, 1945.

Ambrose, L., interviewed by A. McGrath, National Library of Australia, Parkes, (https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-194811994/listen, accessed on 12 September 2018).

Australian War Memorial, https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/underattack/end/navy

'Australian Newspaper Proprietor Says England is Now Thinking Far Ahead', *Army News*, 26 July 1944. Available from: Trove, (accessed 18 July 2018).

Aviation Correspondent, 'Test Flight Spica Makes Ready'*, The West Australian,* 4 Jan 1945, p. 4. Available from: Trove, (accessed 17 September 2017).

Baldock, T., *Fortress Fremantle,* Fremantle, Baldock Family Trust, 2018.

Barker, A., and Jackson, L., *Fleeting Attraction A Social History of American Servicemen in Western Australia During the Second World War*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Nedlands, 1996.

Barrett, R., 'The Cocos Connection', unpublished manuscript, 1 September 1997, Qantas Archives, Sydney, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Barrett, R., 'What Really Happened to the Double Sunrise Catalina at Crawley Bay WA', 1 August 1997, unreferenced document given to the author by I. Peirce from Catalina Club of WA archives, Duranilin, Western Australia.

Beaumont, J., *Australia's War, 1939–45,* Sydney, Allen and Unwin.

Beevor, A., *The Second World War,* Oxford, Phoenix, 2014.

Bennet-Bremner, E., *Front-Line Airline,* Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1944.

Blaxill, J., 'Catalina Pride of Perth'*,* Unpublished Manuscript, Royal Perth Yacht Club Archives (file number 9332).

Bluman, N., interviewed by author, 15 March 2018.

Boyd, C., and Yoshida, A., *The Japanese Submarine Force and World War,* Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2012.

Brain, L., and Corbett, A., Notes of Telephone Conversation Regarding Communication and Indian Ocean Service, 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Bunbury, B., *Rag, Sticks and Wire: Australians Taking to the Air*, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1994.

Cairns, L., *Secret Fleets Fremantle's World War II Submarine Base*, Fremantle, Museum of Western Australia, 2011.

Caldwell, A., official correspondence to H. Fysh, 1 May 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

The Catalina Base, http://www.web.uwa.edu.au/university/history/archive-collections/catalina-base, (accessed on 12 August 2018).

Chifley, B., offical correspondence to Fysh, H., 3 May 1944, Qantas, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Churchill, W., *The Second World War The Gathering Storm, Volume 1,* London, Cassell, 1948.

Cleworth, R., and Linton, J., *RAAF Black Cats: The Secret History of the Covert Catalina Mine-Laying Operations to Cripple Japan's War Machine,* Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2020.

Collingwood, H., 'Patrol Wing 10', *The Western Mail*, 23 Sep 1943.

Corbett, A., official correspondence to H. Fysh, 12 May 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Costello, J., *The Pacific War, 1941–1945,* New York, Harper Collins, 1982.

Crowther, W., official correspondence to H. Fysh, 13 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Curtin, J., John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library (JCPML), Records of the Commonwealth of Australia, Digest of Decisions and Announcements and Important Speeches by the Prime Minister, No. 10, 1–16, December 1941.

Davis, L., 'Locating the Enemy at Sea A History of Fleet Air Wing 10 September 1939 to 1 June 1945, p. 10, accessed from Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com).

Day, D., *Reluctant Nation Australia and The Allied Defeat Of Japan 1942–45,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Dean, P., *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War,* Melbourne, Cambridge, 2013.

Dean, P., *Australia 1943: The Liberation of New Guinea*, Melbourne, Cambridge, 2014.

Department of Immigration records, 1944–1945, located at the National Australia Archives in Bentley, Western Australia.

'Destruction Off Rottnest Catalina Blown Up', *The West Australian*, 21 January 1946, p. 6. Available from: Trove, (accessed 18 October 2018).

Dorny, L., *US Navy PBY Catalina Units of The Pacific War,* Oxford, Osprey, 2007, p. 8.

.

Drakeford, A., official correspondence to Defence Minister, 'Proposed Indian Ocean Service', 10 September 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Drakeford, A., official correspondence to H. Fysh, reference number *192/119/1227*, 3 July 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Eames, J., *Courage in the Skies The Untold Story Qantas its Brave Men and Women and Their Extraordinary Role in World War II*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2017.

Edwards, J., *John Curtin's War,* Sydney, Penguin, 2017.

Ewer, P., 'A Gentlemen's Club in the Clouds: Reassessing the Empire Air Mail Scheme, 1933–1939', Brunswick, *The Journal of Transport History*, Volume 28, 1, 2007.

'Expected Japanese Raid', *The West Australian,* 17 August 1945. Available from: Trove, (accessed 14 October 2018.

'First Round-Trip by Qantas from Sydney to Karachi', *The Argus*, 4 November 1941. Available from: Trove (accessed 12 August 2018).

Fletcher, E., Handwritten note on Stockers Engineering Firm 1942, shared with author 12 August 2015.

'Forced Landing a Lucky Escape Plane in Lake Monger', *The West Australian,* 12 August 1943. Available from: Trove, (accessed 2 December 2018).

Fysh, H., official correspondence to A. Corbett, reference number HF/II/871, 26 August 1940, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Fysh, H., official correspondence to W. Crowther, 17 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Fysh, H., official correspondence to W. Crowther, 4 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Fysh, H., official correspondence to F. McMaster, 4 January 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Fysh, H., *Qantas at War,* Corinda, Pictorial, 2009.

Gailey, H., *The War in the Pacific,* Presidio, Novato, 1995.

'Gallery is Crowded for The Year's Swankiest Divorce', *The Mirror,* 22 May 1943. Available from: Trove, (accessed 18 November 2018).

Garratt, D., 'Precise of the Wrecks in the Ship's Graveyard, Rottnest', Department of Maritime Archeology, Western Australian Museum, number 148,1999.

Gilbert, M., *Second World War,* London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989.

.

Gillison, D., *Royal Australian Air Force, 1939–1942*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1962.

Gomm, K., *Red Sun On The Kangaroo Paw Japanese Air Raids and Attacks on Western Australia During World War II,* Perth, Helvetica, 2010.

Gregory, J., (ed.), *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1996.

Gunn, J., *Challenging Horizons: Qantas, 1939–1954,* St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1990.

Hammond, J., *Over-Sexed, Over-Paid & Over Here Americans in Australia 1941–1945*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1981.

Harwood, T., 'Curators Blog: Qantas Double Sunrise', Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach, 12 August 2015.

Hastings, M., *All Hell Let Loose,* London, Collins, 2011.

Helson, P., 'The Forgotten Air Force', MA Thesis, University of New South Wales, 2005.

Horner, D., *Crisis of Command Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat 1941–1943,* Canberra, Australian National University, 1978.

Horner, D., *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939–1945,* Sydney, Routledge, 1982.

Ienaga, S., *The Pacific War 1941–1945,* New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.

'Indian Ocean Air Service', *The Mercury,* 5 August 1944, p. 20. Available from: Trove, (accessed 12 December 2018).

Johnston, E., official correspondence to A. Corbett, 'Addendum No. 2 Perth-Karachi-London Air Service'*,* 25 May 1945, Hudson Fysh Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

King, J., *Great Moments in Australian History,* Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin, 2009.

Knollys, Lord, official correspondence to Fysh, H., 20 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Koenig, A., *Catalinas on the Swan River: Perth 1942–1945,* Personal Monograph, Word War Two files, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Archives, 1994.

Kumar, R., *Research Methodology,* South Melbourne, Longman, 1996.

Le Baron, A., Letter to L. Thanos, shared with author, 12 August 2021.

Leebold, A., *Silent Victory Breaking the Japanese Air Blockade Between Australia and Europe*, Belconnen, Banner, 1995.

.

Manchester, *W., The American Caesar*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1978.

Martin, A., and Hardy, P., *Dark and Hurrying Days: Menzies 1941 Diary*, National Library of Australia, Parkes, 1993.

Mawdsley, E., *World War II: A New History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Mawdsley, E., *December 1941: Twelve Days That Began a World War,* New Haven and London, Yale, 2012.

McCarthy, D., *Southwest Pacific Area First Year,* Canberra, Australia War Memorial, 1959.

McCarthy, M., 'The "Black Cats", Report into the Feasibility of Locating, Raising and Conserving One of the Four Catalina Flying Boats Scuttles off Rottnest Island in the Years 1945–1946', February 1977, Report - Department of Maritime Archaeology, WA Maritime Museum, Fremantle, No 125.

McGrath, T., *In Western Skies,* Victoria Park, Hesperian, 2020.

McKillop and Company, official correspondence to the Secretary Department of External Affairs*,* Canberra, 14 August 1944, Hudson Fysh Papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

McMaster, F. to Fysh, H., official correspondence, 11 June 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

McMaster, F. to H. Fysh, official correspondence, 1 July 1942, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

McVey, D., 'Memorandum for Department of External Affairs', 5 October 1944, National Australian Archives, Canberra, Canberra File A816.

Menzies, R., official correspondence to Fysh, H*.,* 24 April 1944, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Messimer, D., *In the Hands of Fate The Story of Patrol Wing Ten 8 December 1941–11 May 1942*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1985.

Morison, S., *The Rising Sun in the Pacific 1931–April 1942,* London, Oxford, 1948.

Mumford, G., *What's in a Name*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1991, File MSS1455

Munsdorf, G., 'Interview of Comdr Geo. T. Munsdorff Jr'., Air Information Division, Office of Chief Of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D.C., 6 September 1943. (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com).

National Archives of Australia, 'K269 8 March 1945', Qantas Catalina G-AGEL Incoming Passenger List', National Archives of Australia, Bentley, Western Australia.

'New Commander of US Planes', *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, 12 July 1944. Available from: Trove, (accessed 2 December 2018).

.

‘Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service’, 29 September 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

‘Operation Potshot: Oil Search Recalls Incident of 1942’, *The West Australian,* 3 June 1943, p. 3. Available from: Trove, (accessed 17 July 2018).

Pattison, B., and Goodall, G., *Qantas Empire Airways Indian Ocean Service, 1943–1946,* Sydney, Aviation Historical Society, 1979.
Pedley, D, ‘Catalina Comes Home to Matilda Bay’, *The West Australian,* 24 August 2002.

Perry, R., *Pacific 360º*, Sydney, Hatchette, 2012.

Peters, N., ‘The Broome Air Battle 3 March 1942’, in *Broome 3 March 1942 – 3 March 2012,* Canberra, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2013.

Pollock, T., ‘Operation - Flight Gridiron 27 April–3 May 1942’, p. 2. Unpublished document passed to author by E. Fletcher, April 2015.

‘Preliminary Outline of Possible Indian Ocean Operations Second Draft 30 June 1942’, Qantas Empire Airways, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Prime, M., *Broome’s One Day War The Story of the Japanese Raid on Broome on 3rd March 1942,* Broome, Broome Historical Society, 2007.

Qantas Catalina Flight Information, Flying Information Data Qantas Indian Ocean Service, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Qantas Empire Airways Limited, ‘Post War Overseas Airlines as Affecting Australia’, 1 November 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Qantas Empire Airways Limited, *‘No. 4* - Operation of the Indian Ocean Regular Air Service’, 29 September 1943, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Qantas Fact Sheet, ‘Catalina Statistics’, unreferenced document, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

‘RAAF Pilots to Qantas’, *The Telegraph*, 24 October 1941. Available from: Trove (accessed 3 March 2018).

'Rest and Recreation for Officers at Tinglewood Lodge’, Walpole Nornalup and District Historical Society Inc Newsletter, 1943–1957.

Ritchie, R., interviewed by Amy McGrath, 1986, National Archives of Australia, Parkes, catalogue 9649, (accessed on 24 Jun 2018).

.

Roberts, N., ‘Engineers at the Ready’, unpublished document handwritten by Qantas’s senior Perth-based engineer, Qantas Historical Archives Mascot, Indian Ocean Service File Cabinet, Indian Ocean Service Folder.

Robertson, J., *Australia at War, 1939–1945,* Melbourne, Heinemann, 1981.

Robertson, J., and McCarthy, J., *Australian War Strategy, 1939–1945,* St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1986.

Senior, R., *My Story of The Double Sunrise Flight*, Australian War Memorial, Folder 1/1 MSS2112, Undated.

Shaw, I., *The Ghosts of Roebuck Bay The 1942 Attack on Broome and its Tragic Aftermath*, Sydney, McMillan, 2014.

Shervington, C., *University Voices: Traces from the Past*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia, 1987.

Sturma, M., *Fremantle’s Submarines: How Allied Submariners and Western Australians Helped to Win the War in the Pacific*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2015.

Taylor, P., *The Sky Beyond,* New York, Ballantyne, 1963.

Taylor, P., ‘Trans Indian Ocean Survey’*, Flight,* June, 1939.

‘The Return of The Catalina’, Bunker Media, 1995.

Toll, I., *The Pacific Crucible,* New York, Norton, 2012.

Tomlinson, M., *The Most Dangerous Moment*, London, Kimber, 1976.

Tunney, N., *Gateway To Victory, Brisbane,* Myla Graphics, 1991.

‘Unarmed Cats Defy Might of Japanese’, *Vetaffairs*, Issue 220, April 1995, p. 10. Available from: Trove, (accessed January 2021).

Van Mook, H., *The Netherlands Indies and Japan: Their Relations, 1940–41,* London, Allen and Unwin, 1944.

Van Vleet, C., ‘South Pacific Saga: The Story of Parol Wing Ten’, *Naval Aviation News*, February 1977.

War Diary, Commander Aircraft and Asiatic Fleet and Commander Patrol Wing Ten, March 7 1942, (accessed Fold 3, digitised records from the US Naval History and Heritage Command Archives, https://www.fold3.com).

Wiegand, L., unpublished manuscript, University of Western Australia Archives, Second World War File, 20 July 1943.

Wilson, S., *Catalina, Neptune and Orion in Australian Service*, Weston Creek, Aerospace, 1991.

.

Winslow, W., *The Fleet The Gods Forgot: The Asiatic Fleet in World War II*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1982.

Wurth, B., *1942 Australia's Greatest Peril,* Sydney, MacMillan, 2008.

Wurth, B., *The Battle for Australia and its Leader Under Siege*, Sydney, Pan MacMillan, 2013.

.