

Royal Australian Air Force



“MARINE SECTION”

the

Forgotten Era

of

MEN & VESSELS

Leslie R. Jubbs

Over View of:

Royal Australian Air Force

MARINE SECTION
the
Forgotten Era
of
Men & Vessels

WAR Comes to AUSTRALIA

Soon after the devastating Japanese air raid on Pearl Harbour, where the American Naval Fleet was severely damaged or sunk, and the Army Air Force's aircraft and facilities were also destroyed. A very similar devastating bombing raid was made on Darwin, the Capital of the Northern Territory (Australia) occurred in February 1942 by a Japanese Aircraft Carrier Task Force and some land based Bombers. There was a distinct possibility that an invasion of Australia was imminent. The superior Japanese forces had invaded New Guinea, established a mighty base in Rabaul and occupied all the islands off Australia's eastern coast, to as far south as Guadalcanal.

What must been one of the best kept secrets during the war against the Japanese was the very significant roll played by the Men of the Marine Section and their vessels.

Rapid expansion of the Marine Section was a priority because of Lend lease Flying Boats and land base aircraft coming from the United States. Privately owned Boats were taken over by the RAAF, and the construction of a wide variety of boats to meet the requirements of Flying boats and remote Bases commenced.

Refuelling Barges, Air Sea Rescue Boats, Bomb Scows, Work Boats, were a priority, while Torpedo Recovery Boats, Landing Barges, and a great variety of Transport Boats also had to be constructed. Many other privately owned boats were taken over by the Air Force.

Large sailing ships, like three masted Schooners, Ketches, Pearling Luggers and Sloops, from another era, were refitted with new engines, rigging and sails were brought into service for the RAAF Marine Section.

Young men from within the Air Force, but a great many from civilian occupations commenced training to man the boats and ships as they came available.

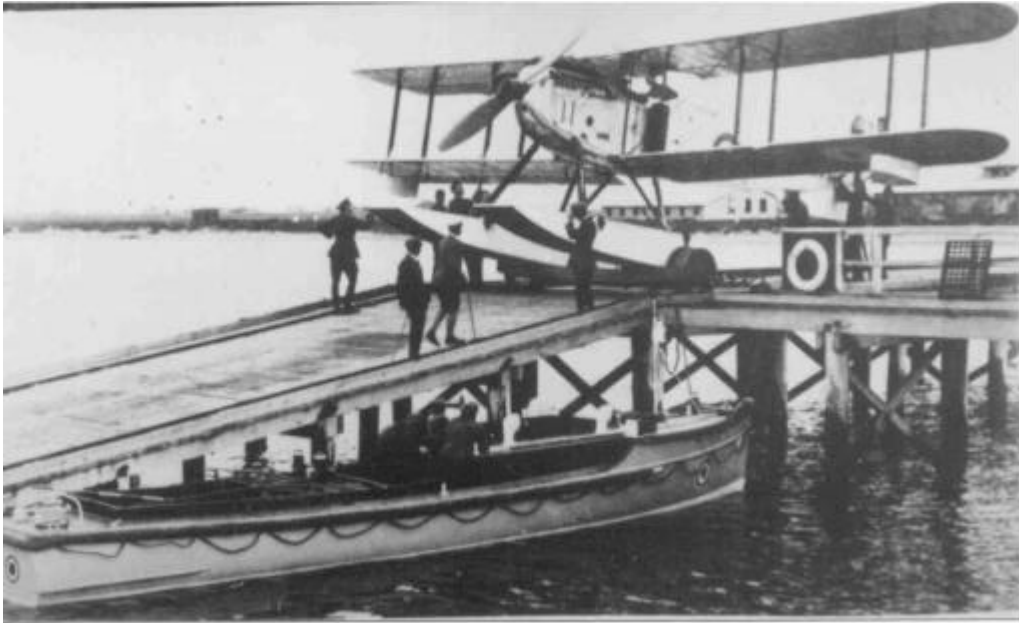
This electronic form of the book was converted from the original published book, and differs in one respect, with the photographs that originally appeared on the left page in the published form, now appears on the page following the text.

The book presents an overview of the great diversity of roles played by this select band of then young men, their vessels, the large Flying boat Bases along with remote and isolated places in northern Australia, New Guinea, other islands to far away Borneo.

Primarily the objective of this electronic version is for this story be available to any one, Schools and Libraries, so that future generations may discover what young Australian men did as their contribution to the war effort when threat of invasion was very real. The RAAF Marine Service continued in the post war period up until Disbandment in 1962 having commenced in the 1920's.

There is no restriction on down loading onto your Hard Disk and then copying on to a Compact Disk (C.D.) and making duplicates for others. There are No fees involved.

Regards Leslie R. Jubbs, Author, 2001. Australia.
E-Mail: lesjubbs@inet.net.au



The Royal Australian Air Force MARINE SECTION had a very long association with flying in Australia as shown in this photograph.

In 1921 this Fairey 111 D (ANA3) Seaplane is about to be launched from the long jetty at RAAF Base Point Cook, while the Marine Section Crash Boat, with engine running, stands by. (Point Cook RAAF Museum)

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Leslie R. Jubbs

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Foreword

A chance remark made by Mr Alf Wilson (an ex Marine Section and post war Permanent Warrant Officer) at a Re-Union in May 1995 introduced me to the “MARINE SECTION” and a facet of the Royal Australian Air Force that I was quite unaware.

As a nineteen year, newly Graduated Pilot, I was posted to the United Kingdom so had no contact with the operations against the Japanese during WW2. Many ex RAAF Personnel, who were involved in the war in the Pacific or to the north West Region also had no recollection of the wide ranging roles and activities of the Marine Section.

Extensive enquiries failed to locate any books written about the Marine Section so started my search to discover the details that could give me an understanding of the role played by the Personnel and their vessels during WW2.

This account is the result of my findings, but it only reflects a small example of what essentially was duplicated in many Bases, and small, isolated Units of the Royal Australian Air Force "Marine Section" in the 1930's, during WW2, and the post-war period up to the disbandment.

Please note:

The Rank abbreviations used in this book differ greatly to those used during WW2

References & Acknowledgements

Janet Beck of the RAAF Historical Information Services, Canberra, and Stephen J.M.Locke for his comprehensive list of the boats used by the Marine Section.

David Wilson Executive Officer, RAAF Records & Information Support Services, Canberra.

Monica Walsh, Curator Research & Historical, Point Cook Museum.

The following Books:

"Australian & New Zealand Warships, 1914-1945"

"Australian & New Zealand Since 1946" by
Ross Gillett.

"Black Cats" compiled by A.E.Minty

"Catalina Chronicle" by David Vincent.

"With the Catalinas at Melville Bay" by Peter Fooks

"Catalina, Neptune and Orion" by Stewart Wilson.

"Catalina Squadrons, First & Furthest" by Jack Riddell

"Wings At War: RAAF at Evans Head" compiled by Jean Haughton-
James & Sheila Manley.

"RAAF Rathmines" by John Newton.

"Radar Pictorial" Bks 1 & 2 Simmonds, Fenton M.and Smith Norm.

"Pot Shot Profile" by Eric McNabb

"Traders Under Sail" The Cutters, Ketches & Schooners of South
Australia by Captain James Gillespie.

"Cocos - Keeling Islands" by Pauline Bunce.

"Flying Boat Bases and Alighting Areas, Australia" RAAF Publication
No. 697, 1946.(Phil McCulloch)

Marine Section Contributors

Bashford Bernie	Bentley Dave
Searle Cliff	Hewett Jim
Doolan Matt	Goodwin Tom
McNabb Eric	O'Brien Frank
Scully Tom	Searle Cliff
Ryan Peter	Sweetman Bob
Williams H."Titch"	Wilson Alf
Kirkby Doug	Hummerstone Mrs for (Ted)
Bentley Dave	Harvey Bill
Sue Jack	Blower Reg
Couch Mrs for (Jack)	Greaves Norm
Sontay Bob	White Harry
Mc Graw Ron	

AIRCDRE A.D. Garrison (Retired)
AIRCDRE P.G. "Knobby" Lings, from Mrs Stella Lings.
GPCAPT C.A. (Ric) Bourne (Retired)
GPCAPT Athol G.H. Wearne DSO. DFC. (Retired)

RAAF Association V.J.(Vic) Ferry DFC JP State President
Riddle Jack ex Flight Engineer
RAAF Williams Central Photographic Establishment
RAAFA Heritage Museum, Bull Creek WA, Clarke Al Curator
RAAFA Heritage Museum, Bullcreek, WA, Fletcher Ted. Librarian
Peet Lindsay, Historian.
Buscombe Les A. "Wings" Editor, WA.
Fenton Maurie, ex RAAF Radar and Author.
Blackshall Keith, ex RAAF Radar.
Sewell Ray ex RAAF Radar
White Stuart.E. ex Martin Mariner Pilot
Mc Knight Noel ex Martin Mariner Pilot
Roberts Keith ex Martin Mariner Pilot
Larsen Elton ex Catalina Pilot
Chaplain A.H. Funnell No.5 Air Field Construction Squadron, Island of Noemfoor.
Merchant Navy Captain Simmons, was 16 year old Deck Hand on the "MacDuhi"
when it was sunk in Port Moresby.
Tony Larard for his Marine Section Father.
Tyrrell Vic, Observer Corps & Sea Scout.
Mrs Ann Mann, Sea Scout Historian.
McCarthy Charles, "Warana" Skipper, DCA Cocus Island.
McCulloch Phil, DCA & DCA Historian
Dawson Frank DCA Engineer
Davies Vaughn H. DCA
Thompson Jim R. DCA
Low Gordon, AIF Water Transport
Murray Walter, AIF Ordinance
Banks David, AIF
Hay John E. RAAF Meteorologist, Cocus Island.
Campbell Bob
W.A. Catalina Club Members.
Larsen Elton, Pilot
Hamilton Don Armourer
Buzzard Brian Wireless Air Gunner
Watson Don, Pilot

Foster Margaret, Manager, WA School of Art & Design.
Todhunter Brett, Lecturer in Graphics, pre Press, made all the scanned Bromides
of photographs used.

To those who provided assistance, guidance and encouragement, and whose names may
not appear, go my sincere thanks.

Royal Australian Air Force
"Marine Section"

Vessel Types

During WW2 against the Japanese the RAAF operated and manned a very great number of boats. Some had been "acquired" by requisition from owners, while the vast majority had to be built in Australia to meet the expanding needs of Flying Boat Squadrons, small Marine Section Units, and Supply vessels.

Type	Description
01.	Armoured Target Launch, 40 feet long, three 100hp Meadow engines, 20knots. Later towed targets on a long cable.
02.	Rescue Launches, 46 feet long, Chrysler Royal engines, 17 knots. Some were armed with machine guns.
Note:	The 02. "Air Boats" ASR 63 feet, 33 knots would later be allocated this Type number.
03.	Torpedo Recovery Launch, 60 feet, with three Chrysler Royal Marine engines giving 12 knots. Also used as A.S.R.
04	Refueling Barge, 2600 gallons
05	Refueling Barges powered by Ford V Eight engines, 38 feet long. 1500 gallons.
06	Motor Lighters, 122 feet, 350 ton displacement, 2 Diesel engines, 9 knots
Note:	Large Ketches (06.11 "Yalata", 06.9 "Betty Joan") and large Schooners (06.8 "Wynana" and 06.10 "Ena") would be re-numbered from the 015 Type.
07	Small Cabin Launch Tender & General Work Boat
08	Crash Boat, 38 feet, Chrysler Royal 8 engine 20 knots. Also used to lay flare paths and accompany flying boats during take off and landings.
09.	Aircraft maintenance Scows, 33 foot long.
010	Bomb Scows, open hull, 32 feet, Chapman 10hp engine or Grey Sea Scout
011	Open Hull Work Boat to ferry Air Crews, as tugs, with a 6 Cylinder Chrysler engine 25 foot long.

012	Whaler 27-foot long, no engine
013	Pulling Dinghy
014	Sailing Dinghy
015	Cargo Vessels 56 feet, Gray Marine Diesel 180hp, 8 knots. Used as inter island cargo boats. Had two masts and sails.
016	Supply Craft 60/80 foot with Gardner Diesel
017	Work Boat for General Duties, 40 feet, had Diesel or Petrol engine.
018	Powered Landing Barge, 60 feet, Gray Marine or Ford V 8 engines
019	Small Lighter with a loading Derrick, also a Dumb Barge which had to be towed
020	Fire Boat.
021	Refrigerator Freezer Barge

One large requisitioned ship, the S.S."Wanaka") was used for carrying stores, equipment and personnel. Perhaps there may have been others.

RAAF Marine Section

Musterings

Skipper	Officer or Warrant Officer
Navigator	Officer or Warrant Officer
Coxswain	Flight Sergeants, Sergeants and some Leading Air Craftsmen
Motor Boat Crew	AC1, LAC, Corporal
Fitter M.B.C.	Warrant and below (Marine Craft Fitters or Engineers)
Shipwrights	Some on large Ketches, Schooners but mainly in Base Workshops.
Painters	Attached to Marine Section Bases

Marine Section Bases

There were some Officers-in-Charge but often N.C.O.'s.

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RAAF Marine Section Point Cook

With Pilot training at RAAF Point Cook it was necessary to have rescue boats on stand-by whenever land based aircraft were flying, or for the period in which seaplanes operated from the Base.

Seaplanes and Flying Boats of the RAAF

The Royal Australian Air Force had a long association with seaplanes and flying boats, and therefore, had to have suitable boats and crews to serve these water born aircraft.

Six Fairey 111D seaplanes entered the RAAF in 1921 for reconnaissance duties and remained in service until 1928.

Two Supermarine Southampton Mk 1 arrived in Australia in 1928 and continued up to 1939 as a coastal reconnaissance Flight at RAAF Point Cook.

Twenty four Supermarine Seagull Mk 3 aircraft were flown by RAAF Pilots aboard RAN Ships from 1926 to 1935. The Mk 5 Seagulls followed from 1935 for the RAN.

Twenty seven Walrus (Seagull Mk 5), with fixed wings, entered the RAAF from 1939 as Air Sea Rescue amphibian aircraft and remained in the Service until 1947.

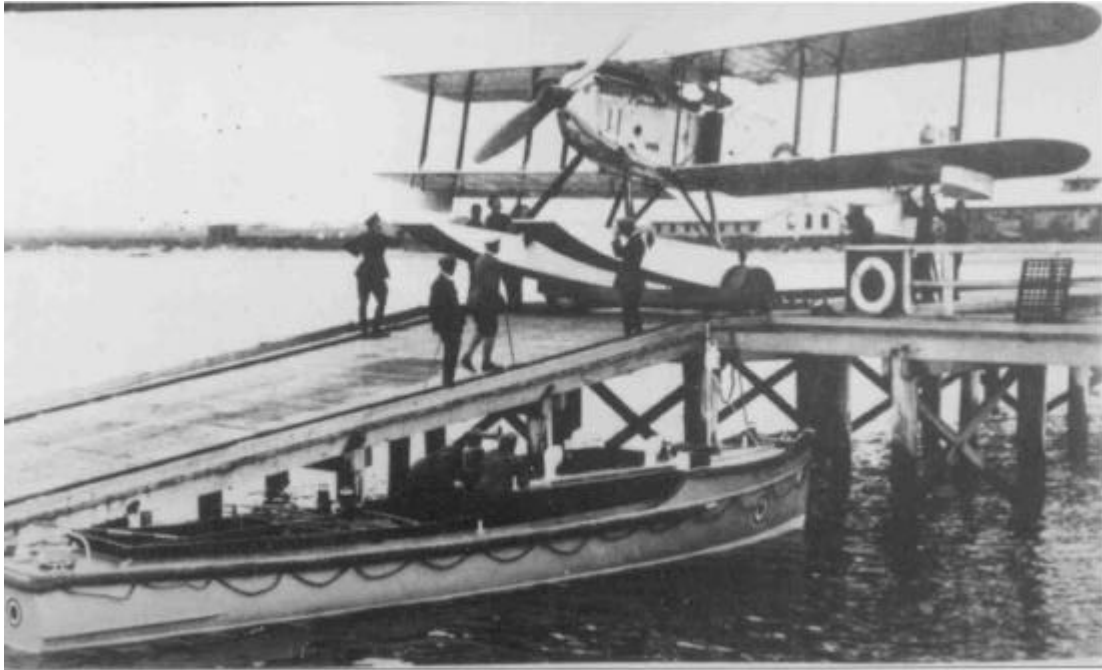
Consolidated Catalina aircraft entered the RAAF in 1940 and continued until 1952. Some 168 of these long range reconnaissance aircraft were on strength and carried out many roles during WW2.

Six Dornier DO24K, three engine flying boats entered the RAAF in April 1942 having been built in Germany in 1937 for the Dutch forces operating in their Territories. RAAF Pilots and Crews operated these aircraft initially as No.40 Squadron then later as No.41 Squadron in an Air Sea Rescue and Transport roles.

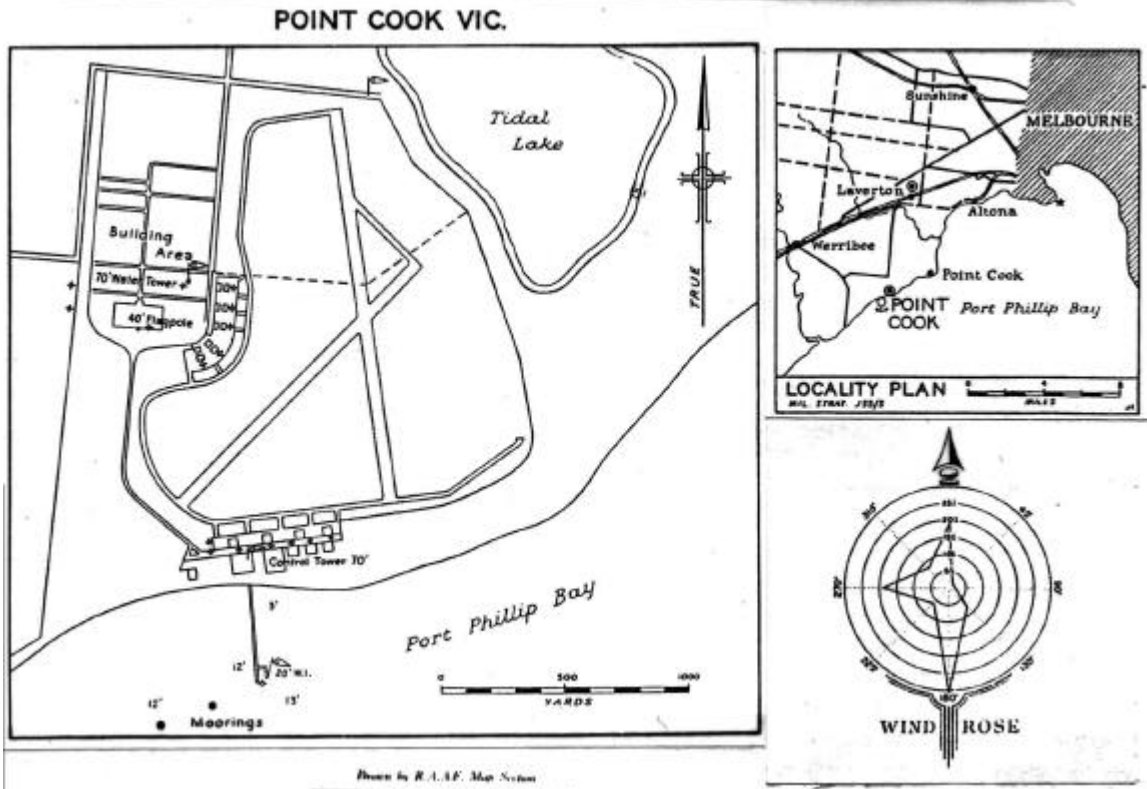
Eighteen Vought Sikorsky Kingfisher seaplanes entered the RAAF in 1942 and continued up until 1953. They were used as a reconnaissance seaplane with No.107 Squadron.

Twelve Martin Mariner Flying Boats, twin engine, entered the RAAF in 1943 and remained in service until 1946. They operated as a Transport Squadron but on a number of occasions they carried Commando Troops and landed them on rivers in New Guinea. In March 1944 was the only time two Mariners landed on Matilda Bay (Perth).

When the war in Europe ended six Short Sunderland Mk111 entered the RAAF and with six Martin Mariner formed No.41 Squadron operating as a Transport Squadron..



With the creation of the RAAF in 1921 saw the provision for a Marine Section that was soon operating from RAAF Base Point Cook. Trainee Pilots were introduced to marine knowledge. Eg: knots, currents, winds, etc for some Pilots would fly sea planes from Royal Australian Navy Ships.



During the 1930's the RAAF provided trained Pilots for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) as well as the amphibian "Seagull" and Ground Crews. Initial flying training from RAAF Richmond with landings on Sydney Harbour required rescue boats to be on hand in case of emergency. Whether the Air Force or the Navy provided the boats and crews is not known.

The "Seagull" aircraft had wings that could be folded for storage on a ship but the same aircraft, later known as the "Walrus" had fixed wings. The Walrus would also play a very important role in Air Sea Rescue.

Advance Operation Bases

The war in Europe had just commenced when No.11 RAAF Flying Boat Squadron was formed and it departed for Port Moresby in September 1939. While there the Squadron carried out extensive reconnaissance to locate possible future Advance Operation Bases, locations for Coast Watchers and Communication Networks. Rabaul's A.O.B. was made operational in 1940 followed by Tulagi, Vila, Noumea and refueling facilities were established at Kavieng, Gizo, Vanikoro and Lorengau.

Their aircraft comprised of two four engine "C" Class flying boats and two Seagull Mk5 amphibian aircraft. With the arrival of Catalina aircraft in Australia from United States of America, RAAF Rathmines Seaplane Training Unit was established and the first course commenced in early 1941.

To serve these flying boats, and expanding squadrons, the training of men for the Marine Service and the procurement of a range of specialised boats had to be created.

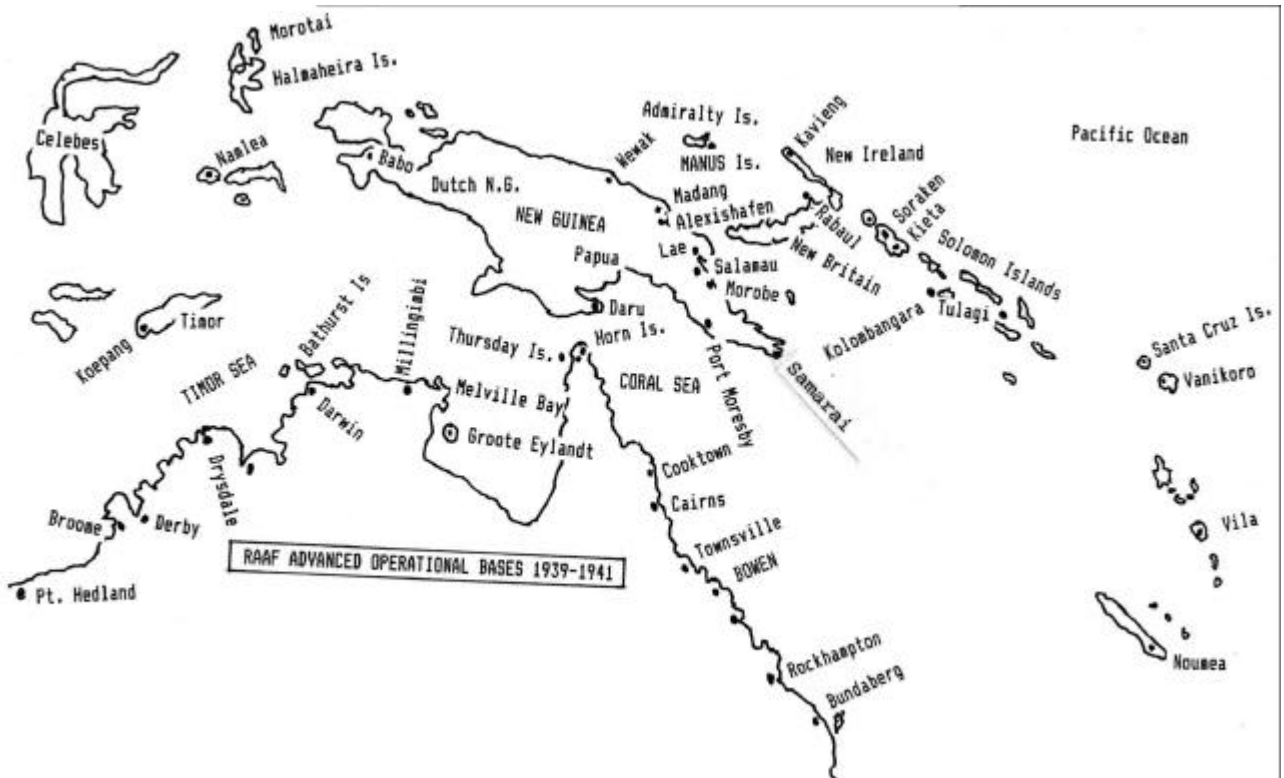
War with Japan

At the outbreak of war soon found the AOB at Rabaul trying to combat the vastly superior Zero with Wirraway aircraft. In a short period of time the RAAF had to evacuate Rabaul and all the other Bases. The expansion of the Marine Service commenced so as to meet the many and varied roles it would ultimately carry out until over 2000 personnel and hundreds of vessels comprised this little known Unit.

What follows in this book is a small selection of the RAAF Marine Section Units that operated within Australia and the islands to our northern waters. Some would even consist of only one Air Sea Rescue boat such as the Oro Bay Unit, other small Units like at West Bay, had a variety of Vessels, then came the large Catalina and Martin Mariner flying boat Bases, and not forgetting the very large Ketches and Schooners operating as independent Units.

This then is my endeavour to acknowledge the existence of the young men of that era, and the boats they operated.

Advance Operational Bases 1939 - 1941



Escape from Tanambogo Island

British Solomon Islands

LAC Cliff Searle (37291) (later Warrant Officer) arrived at the Marine Section Tanambogo early in January 1942. A short distance away, and joined by a causeway, was Gavutu Island owned by Lever Brothers. There they loaded copra from their own large jetty.

The Advanced Operation Base (AOB) for flying boats at Tulagi provided accommodation, food, anchorage, Wireless Telegraphy, and the important Marine Section facilities. Refuelling Barges, Crash Boats, Bomb Scows and Work Boats all manned by skilled personnel so very necessary for the efficient operation of the Base.

Arrival of the MV "Wanaka" (29 March 1942) along side the Gavatu Wharf brought a brand new Crash Boat for the Marine Section along with 1000 drums of aviation fuel and the usual assortment of general supplies.

With the fall of the AOB at Rabaul on 22 January 1942 the personnel at Tanambogo and Gavutu carried on with duties but no doubt with some concern as to when the Japanese would arrive.

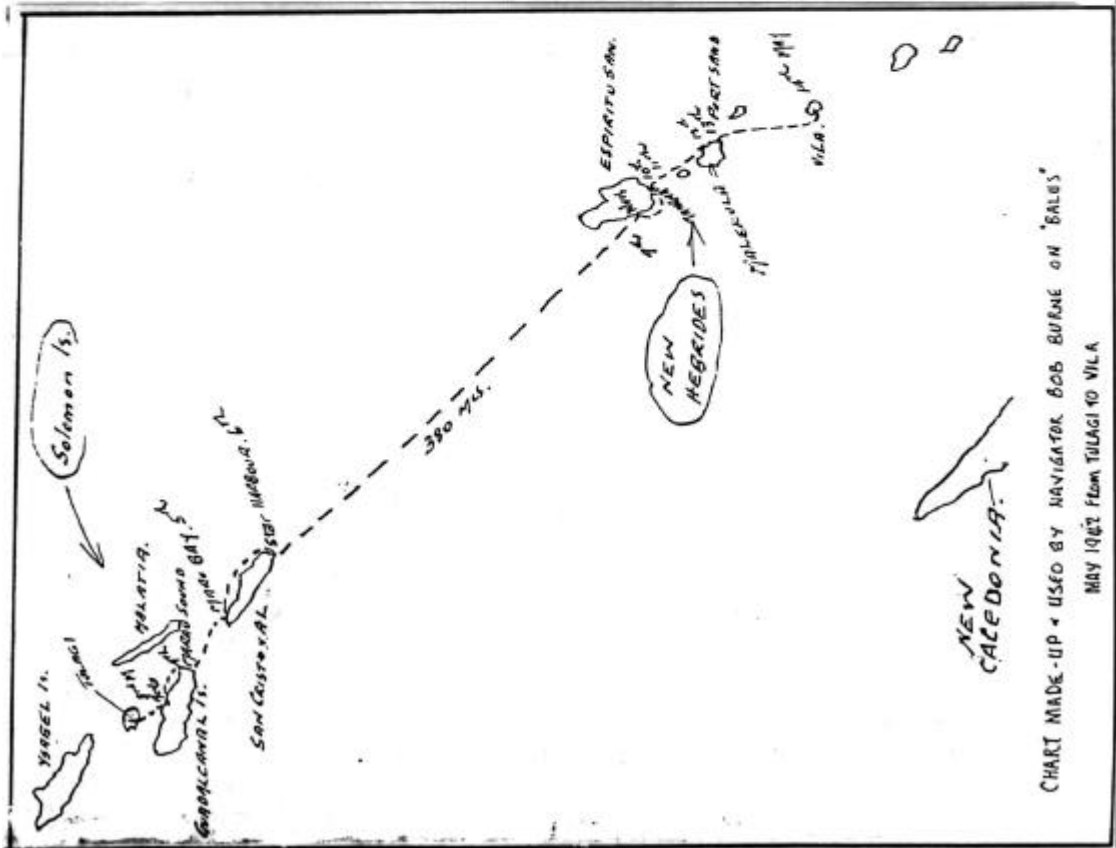
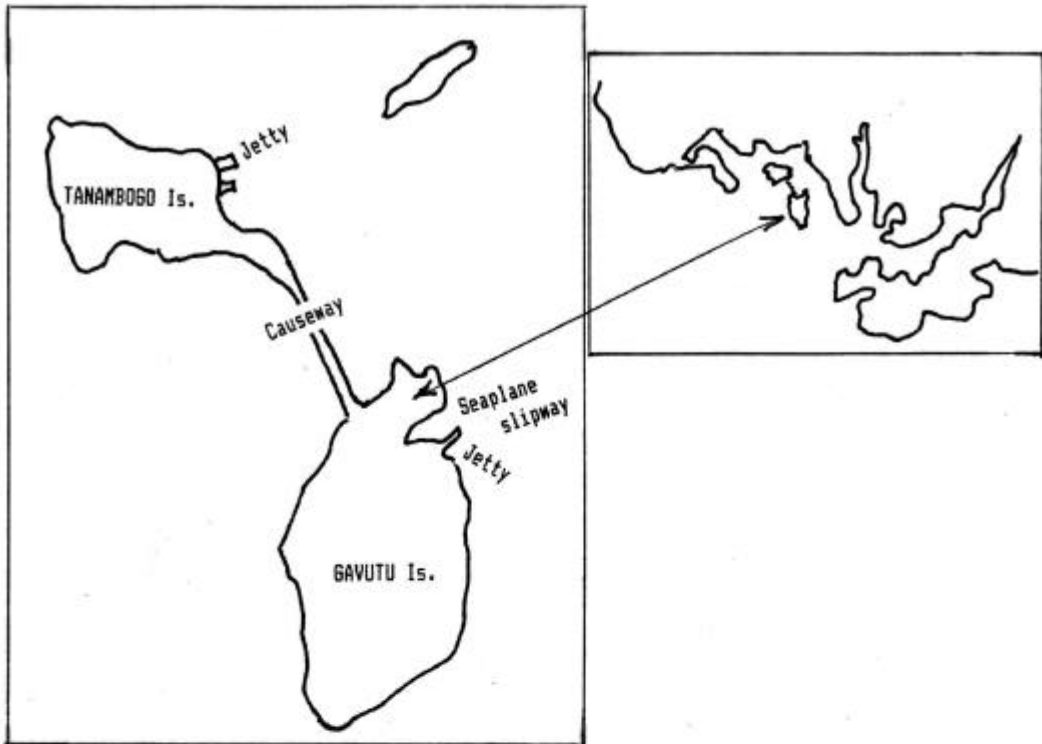
From 14 February the Japanese commenced surveillance and regular bombing attacks on the Base. Plans were drawn up and the "Balus" the evacuation boat was prepared with fuel and supplies. During this period the Cats had to be maintained by the Ground Crews and the Marine Section attended to their areas of responsibility of carrying aircraft Crews to and from the Base as well as clearing debris from flight take off and landing paths.

Cliff had to take much needed supplies to the O.P.I. Wireless Station at Savo some forty miles to the south so he departed during the night of 23 March. His return trip was just in time to be back at his Unit for the night arrival of a Catalina. During this period Cliff carried fuel to Halava and camouflaged it as an emergency supply.

Japanese dropped a great number of bombs during this period destroying all the Marine Section quarters and personal equipment and littering the small island with craters. By this time the Marine Section consisted of only three members but three replacements arrived from Port Moresby on 26 April.

Coral Sea Battle

On 1 May 1942 was the time the RAAF became involved and the Catalina Crews played an important role over the following eight days as did the Ground Crews and the Marine Section. Japanese ships were reported to be approaching the AOB so Cliff topped up the Catalinas with petrol, said goodbye to the Crews and they in turn wished him good luck.



Bob Burne's hand drawn map used to navigate "Balus" with RAAF Personnel to Vila. (J. Riddell)



Catalina Flying Boats on Rabaul Harbour Advance Operational Base in September 1941. No indication to the looming war with Japan. (J. Riddell)



The "Betty Jane" Fuel Barge operated at the AOB Gavutu up until scuttled before the RAAF evacuation. (C. Searle)



RAAF "Escapers" from Tulagi & Taranboga Islands safely on board SS "Manoora" bound for Sydney, 25.5.42. Cliff Searle (3rd) from left middle row.
(Cliff Searle)

A Post Card souvenir of the voyage to Sydney



On Saturday 2 May it was decided to leave the AOB and take the Refuelling Barge, "Betty Jane" and other personnel to Halava. They had just reached there at 0630 when the Japanese began dropping bombs. A Japanese float plane attacked and destroyed the new Crash Boat with cannons. Keith Robinson and a Peter (a local native) both dived overboard and swam ashore. Cliff returned to the AOB on the Bomb Scow to collect the Commanding Officer and four remaining wireless operators and set fire to all buildings and equipment. With the help of an Army chap they blew up the bomb dump then the Refuelling Barge with its 1700 gallons of fuel. Before boarding the "Balus", a Lugger, the Bomb Scow was scuttled then they departed at 0200 hours on Monday 4 May 1942 bound for Aola.

"Balus" was completely covered with mangrove branches and their travelling was done at night and hid by day in nearby islands. Fortunately they were able to catch plenty of fish, which Mr Taggart demonstrated how they should be cooked. Fruits were also collected from the island jungles in which they hid during the day. "Balus" was crammed with thirty RAAF, twenty Army and a Crew of six natives but could only make six knots. Charles Bird was the Skipper, Mr Stackpole was the Government Dispenser and one native woman "Gara".

Japanese aircraft were frequently seen but no attack was made on the "Balus" by the time they finally reached Vila, in the New Hebrides, on 14 May 1942. There they were given a great welcome by both the American and Australian Army, Navy and Air Force.

A RAAF Navigator PLTOFF Alfred (Bob) Burne was asked to navigate the "Balus" because the Skipper had no experience of sailing out of sight of land. Marine Section personnel would steer the Lugger under direction of the Skipper. The only navigation aid was a school atlas from which Bob drew a chart for the journey. The longest section was 380 miles of open sea.

Cliff Searle returned to Sydney and after some leave returned to the RAAF Marine Section.



Roman Catholic Missionary
Father Wall on Tulagi in the
Solomon Islands to look after
the welfare of the Islanders.
He survived the Japanese
occupation.

(Cliff Searle)



Guadalcanal youngsters in 1942.

(Cliff Searle)

Papua New Guinea

Port Moresby

In 1939, No.11 Flying Boat Squadron was formed and then posted to Port Moresby in September 1939 to carry out survey work for suitable landing sites in the region. The Squadron was equipped with two, four engine "C" Class Flying Boats and two Seagull, Mk5 amphibians.

Marine Section boats, Crews and facilities would have been in place before the arrival of No.11 Squadron

From the time the Japanese forces landed in Papua, Port Moresby, because of its strategic location, would expand rapidly in defence capability, but also as the most important distribution base for supplies, equipment and personnel for the three Services.

"Moresby" as it was known by, came under attack by Japanese aircraft and by April 1942, thirty two air raids had been launched. The assault on the Port by the Japanese Army was not only stopped by the Australian Army at Kokoda, but also their invasion at Milne Bay was achieved by the combined efforts of the Army and RAAF.

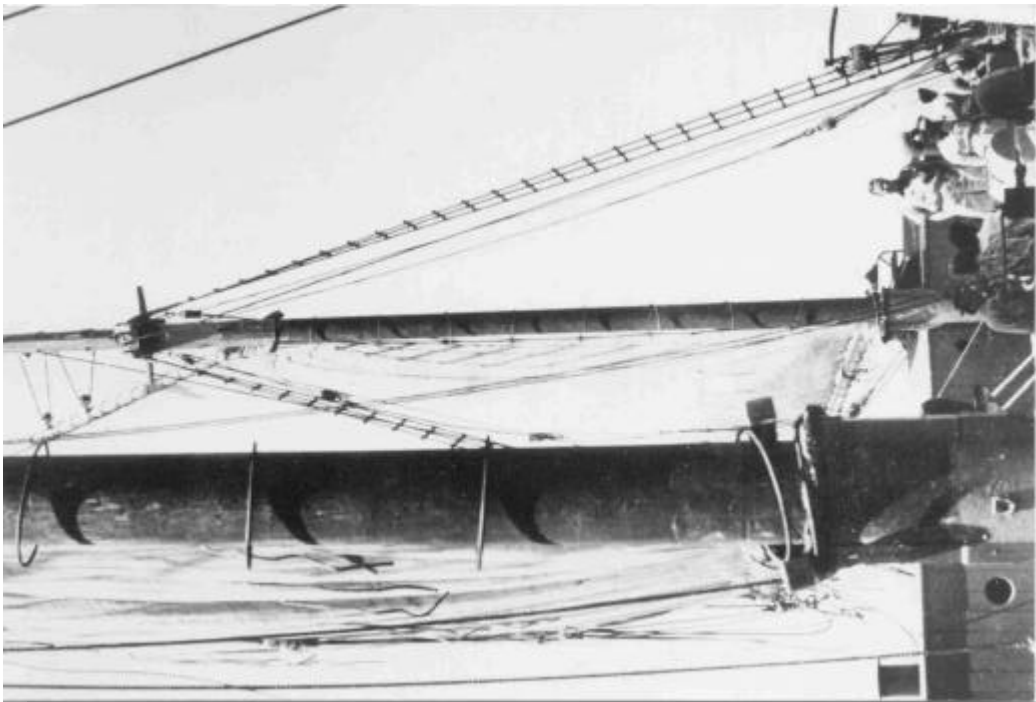
From this period onward the importance of the RAAF Marine Section's role in Port Moresby would expand. Luggers, inter-island trading ships would initially provide the means to carry essential freight until suitable types of vessels could be taken over from private owners, and the implementation of a comprehensive ship building industry established, or expanded in Australia.

Training of personnel to man these vessels was an urgent priority, so a call for volunteers from within the RAAF was made. RAAF Rathmines on Lake Macquarie became the training establishment for boat handling and operation, while Technical Schools provided the initial training in engines.

In June 1942 a young 16-year-old deck hand on the ship "Mac Duhi" reflected on his good fortune by being rescued by the quick and "bloody" brave action taken by the Marine Section. His ship was on a voyage from Thursday Island carrying supplies and troops and as they entered Moresby a Japanese bombing raid commenced. One bomb hit the MV "Mac Duhi" killing a number of men. That evening the ship was unloaded and made ready to depart the following morning. They had just got under way when another bombing raid started and the "Mac Duhi" was hit by five bombs and began to sink. Life boats were lowered but they began to sink in the shark and crocodile infested waters. Crash boats and other assorted Marine Section craft, ignoring the dropping bombs, raced out to rescue the sea-men. For ten days the Army provided an empty house for the Crew of the MV "Mac Duhi" and cases of "bully beef", while a RAAF Guard in the Marine Section took Bruce Symonds, the 16 year old deck hand and ship's machine gunner, fitting him out in clothing and personal gear and fed him the RAAF Mess.



The S.S. "Mac Dhui" was bombed and sunk by Japanese bombers in Port Moresby Harbour on 17.6. 42. Sixteen year old Deck Hand, Bruce Symond (later Captain) was saved by the "bloody" brave Marine Section , who pulled him from the sea infested crocodiles during the bombing. (B.Simpson)



Large sailing vessels were delivered to Port Moresby where large powerful new marine motors were installed by the Marine Section Personnel.



A great number of local people were employed by the RAAF Marine Section in Port Moresby to carry out many and varied duties. (Jim Hewett)



Marine Section Crews manned large sailing vessels equipped with powerful Diesel motors. Base Workshops completely fitted out a variety of boats for their long voyages away from Base. (B. Simpson)



FLGOFF Henry “Skinny” Giles was the Officer Commanding Port Moresby Marine Section seen here gazing across a large assembly of newly arrived boats waiting to be fitted out.
(Jim Hewett)



One area of the Marine Section in Port Moresby was where modifications and fitting out of newly “acquired” boats. (J.Hewett)



Expansion of the Marine Section capability in 1942 is clearly evident by the construction of facilities in the fore ground. (J. Hewett)



Marine Section Office is being enlarged to cater with the developing work load that was generated by the entry of the Japanese assault on New Guinea.



It was in a Port Moresby Crash Boat that the Crew of MV "MacDhui" was rescued from not only dropping bombs, but also sharks and crocodiles. (J.Hewett)



Pearling Luggers and other Ketches arrived in Port Moresby and Darwin to have new motors fitted so that they were not completely dependent on the winds. (J.Hewett)

Bruce Symond went on to become a Captain in the Merchant Marine due to the "bloody, brave buggers" of the Port Moresby RAAF Marine Section.

Extensive work shops and slipways were gradually built to cater for the increasing role played by the Personnel of the RAAF Marine Section. Probably all the "acquired" vessels from owners, and newly constructed boats for the Marine Section, left the Cape York region making Port Moresby their first port. New arriving RAAF Personnel would be given their first posting to the Marine Section Bases or small Units after they spent some time working in the Moresby Base. It appears that RAAF personnel were not told of their ultimate destination when leaving Embarkation Depots in Australia.



A Marine Section Boat on the slipway in Port Moresby, 12.10.42. Claude Shaw, Col Fountain and Jack Angula were hard at work completing the antifouling. (Cliff Searle)

RAAF Marine Section Workshops

Large, and diverse repair workshops had to be established and manned by Marine Section Personnel skilled in a great range of technical and practical jobs. Before these workshops could operate they first had to be built by these same RAAF men. Often a saw mill had to be established to provide the basic building materials using the timber in the locality. Power plants had to be installed to drive all the power operated tools and equipment so essential in operating a workshop. Engines to drive a wide variety of RAAF boats had to have periodic overhauls along with the engines that powered the lifting and lighting gear on boats. The enormous range of skills needed to operate these workshops could not be listed here for they were extensive.

Such workshops operated in Darwin, and especially in Port Moresby, and then at Milne Bay, when the Japanese were defeated there. As the Japanese were pushed back along the East Coast of New Guinea and later along the North Coast more workshop facilities had to be established to cater not only for the Sailing Vessels but for the newly built large motor vessels of the Marine Section.

Marine Section Maintenance Personnel often showed great ingenuity in tackling difficult jobs. On one occasion in Milne Bay, a large barge that had been left on a reef was salvaged by these men. A new engine had to be installed but as no large slipway was available to install the propeller shaft that was five feet under water. A diving mask was fashioned using a Government issue gas mask allowed the men to work under water.

The Marine Section 106-foot Schooner "Ena" needed to replace a 65-foot Mizzen mast because of dry rot. Fortunately the RAAF Maintenance Workshop men found a local "stick" that was 6 feet short. This did not deter the riggers and shipwrights for they set about altering the rigging and all the fittings so that the "Ena" could go on with her essential role of delivering supplies and equipment to the Units that depended upon her services.

Other unique sailing vessels operated by the RAAF Marine Section was the 152 foot Schooner "Waimara" and the 100-foot Ketch "Betty Joan" along with a host of Luggers.

Throughout the war these large sailing vessels continued to operate and their arrival at RAAF Units was a welcome sight for they often represented contact with families and friends by way of mail. When the war finally ended it was often these same Ketches and Schooners that transported the RAAF Radar Units back to the ports where their homeward journey to Australia commenced.



The Marine Section Crew Room was a place for the men, who manned the variety of boats could get together with the Base Personnel. (R. Mc Craw)



FLGOFF Henry Norman "Skinny" Giles & FLGOFF Joe Cassell were in charge of the Marine Section in Port Moresby.



One of the very large Schooners of the Marine Section , under going a major refit to prepare her for long voyages, often in tropical storms and high humidity causing excessive wear on sails and rigging.



RAAF Schooner on return passage to Port Moresby, the distribution centre for equipment, supplies and personnel (J.Hewett)



M.S. Refuelling Barges played an essential role, especially in a combat region. Great skill and care had to be exercised for this potentially dangerous work. The Sunderland Flying Boat was staging through with wounded onboard.
(Ron McCraw)



M.S.Boats had to be in first class condition and their Crews vigilant and ready for any emergency.
(Abe Smith)

RAAF Base Rathmines

Lake Macquarie

RAAF Base Rathmines became the largest Flying Boat Base in Australia where Conversion Training for Air Crews, destined to man the Flying Boat and Seaplane Squadrons was carried out. An essential facet of a Flying Boat Squadron was the Marine Section and Rathmines was where their training was done.

In 1936 the Director of Staff Duties at RAAF H.Q. Melbourne instructed WGCDR L.V. Lachal to investigate and recommend a site for a flying boat base in the Newcastle region.

Finally the area known locally as Rathmines , on Lake Macquarie was recommended. In August 1939 a party of four left RAAF Richmond in a tender bound for Rathmines. This Advance Party consisted of Warrant Officer W.B.Bartlett, Sergeant S. Haggerty (Fitter), Corporal J.Fuller (Clerk), and Sergeant K.Lord (Driver). WGCDR Hewitt flew in by Seagull. The following month local cottages were rented as living quarters for one Barracks Officer and 28 other ranks thus creating the nucleus for Rathmines.

Gradually the number of personnel increased as wooden framed buildings were constructed. WGCDR Hewitt was posted to Rose Bay and FLTLT S.A.C. Campbell took over Command.

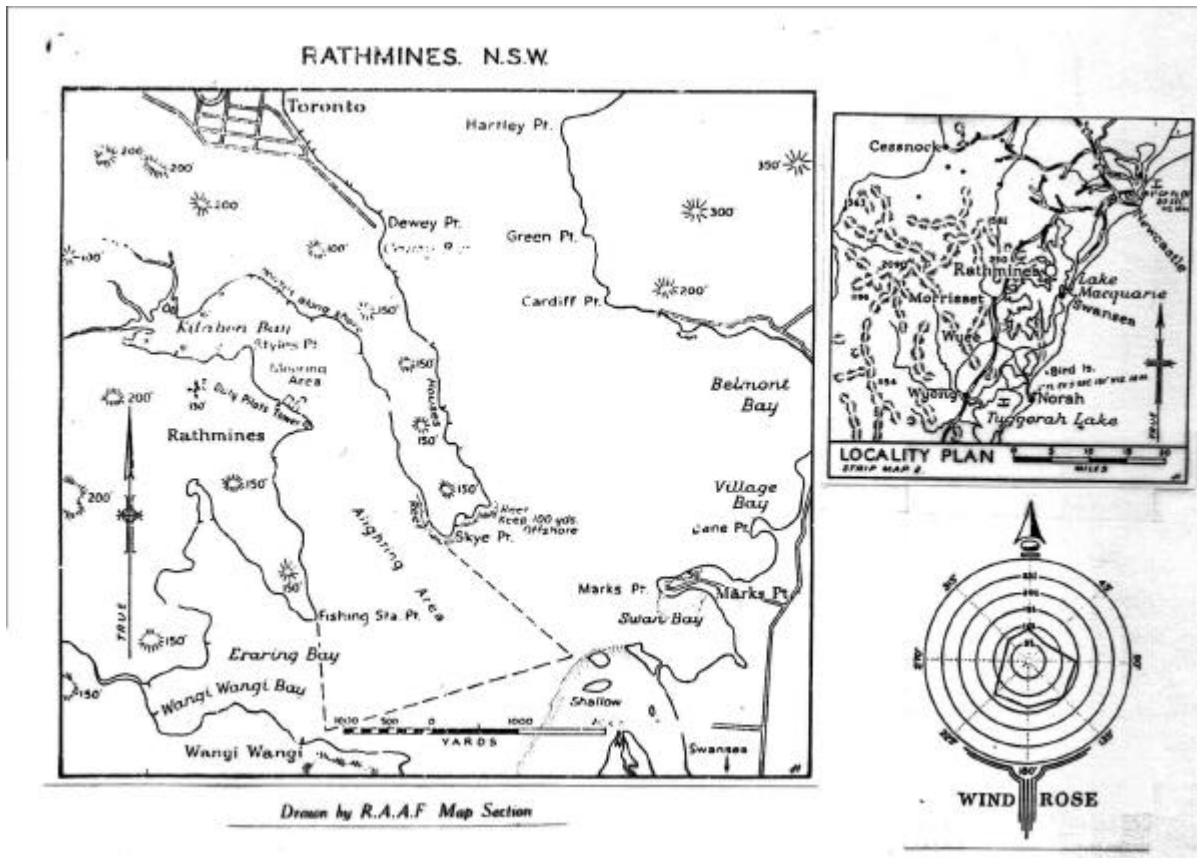
Seaplane Training Flight under the Command of SQNLDR D.A. Connelly arrived 2 March 1940, from Point Cook, to commence training of Pilots and Crews.

A new wooden slipway was commenced in 1940 and was finally completed twelve months later. Two concrete slipways came into use in 1943.

7 December 1942 No. 3 Operational Training Unit was formed.

The first boat to operate at Rathmines was a 21-foot power vessel for carrying crews and supplies. A Refuelling Barge, originally a Sydney ferry, was given the Number 32.

Midway through 1942 the Base was fully operational with complete overhauls being carried out. Seagulls were being supplied to the R.A.N. while Catalina and Sikorsky Seaplanes carried out patrols off the coast of NSW. Training had also commenced for Marine Section Personnel.



RAAF Base Rathmines provided the training for all M.S. Personnel as well as Operational Training for all Air Crews converting to Flying Boats & Sea Planes.
(N.Greaves)



A variety of Flying Boats & Sea Planes are undergoing servicing and maintenance in the hangars and on the hard stand.



All the Support Services were located on this very important Base.

(J.Riddell)

Arrival of Catalinas

Australia desperately required flying boats because the Sunderlands ordered would remain in the United Kingdom so the United States of America was approached. The first Catalina flown from San Diego by QANTAS Captain Lester Brain, Navigator Gordon Taylor, Radio Officer A.S.Patterson, and Flight Engineer D.Wright, arrived in Rose Bay during January 1941. Captain G.H."Scottie" Allan, Warrant Officers G.M.Bemrose and W.Richmond came as passengers while Captain O.D.Denny joined as Co-Pilot in Honolulu.

On delivery by QANTAS to Rathmines this new Catalina was given the number official RAAF Number A24-1. This aircraft operated throughout the war until late in 1945 crashed at East Arm on a delivery mission of medical supplies. Throughout the war Catalinas were used in many and varied roles.

QANTAS would deliver nineteen "Cats" from U.S. A. and Captain Lester Brain also ferried the last one on 23 October 1941. From then onwards RAAF Crews ferried the remainder a total of 168 aircraft to Rathmines. Air Crews were converted to Catalinas at No.3 Operational Training Unit and then were posted to one of the four Squadrons. These were No.11, No.20, No.42, No.43 as well as the Air Sea Rescue Flights No.111 and No. 112.

Martin Mariner

Twelve of these twin engine, large American Flying Boats were ferried to Rathmines in late 1943 and operated in a Transport role carrying personnel and supplies and equipment. Air Crews completed their conversion to this type at Rathmines.

Dornier, Kingfisher and Seagull Aircraft

At Rathmines Crews for these aircraft were also converted to these types.

Marine Section

Personnel often referred to themselves as belonging to the "Wet Section" or Air Force sailors because some wore an Anchor badge (unofficial) above their badge of rank. Many hundreds of men received their training at Rathmines in how to perform a very important role in a flying boat Squadron by operating a host of different types of vessels.

Marine Section Motor Boat Crews had to be trained in Navigation, Seamanship, Signals, Boat Handling, Life Saving and Technicalities of Weather. These men also operated, serviced, and maintained their own vessels whether in small isolated Units at Operational Base Units (OBU), like Millingimbi (NT) or single Air Sea Rescue boats attached to American Bases, eg Oro Bay in 1942.



An old type Refuelling Barge used in training boat handling and refuelling techniques.
(J. Hewett)



Some of the Marine Section Boats clustered near the old farmhouse used by the Duty Crews.
(J. Hewett)

range of special skills used by Marine Section Personnel, who worked in the Marine Section Base Workshops in Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Darwin and Cairns.

Marine Section Graduation

Marine Section Motor Boat Crews on completion of the Course at Rathmines were classified in a variety of Mustering. Some were classified as First Class or Second Class Coxswains and would be in charge of a Boat, others were Motor Boat Crew, while those classified as Fitters went off to Technical Colleges or Schools for further training in handling and maintaining a variety of engines used on vessels. These included Diesel, high octane petrol, kerosene, as well as Electrical Generators and deck motors. Fitters also were known as Engineers.

On arrival at a posting a Marine Section Graduate could find himself on a Refueling Barge, a Bomb Scow, Crash Boat, Work Boat, Landing Barge, Dumb Barge, Air Sea Rescue Boat, or Fire Tender Boat. All these boats required special skills and each Crew Member had a special responsibility. In very isolated Units they operated as a team usually under the control of a Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) but the ability to "get along & fit in" was an attribute that was very important, for these men lived as a close knit group for months and months.

Marine Section Personnel operating in OBU Units were responsible bringing ashore from anchored Supply Ships every conceivable kind of supplies needed to keep the Base functioning, along with vast amounts of aviation fuel to supply staging Flying Boats and Bombers. Initially the Marine Section had to bring ashore all the heavy construction equipment needed to build an air field by the RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons, such as was done at RAAF Truscott in the Kimberley of WA.

Large three masted Schooners, two masted Ketches and Luggers were crewed by men of the Marine Section, who sailed these great sailing vessel around Northern Australia, New Guinea and off shore islands, taking supplies, materials and equipment to RAAF Units. Complete RAAF Radar Units were also transported to Bays and off shore islands with some close to Japanese forces.

Many RAAF Air Sea Rescue Boats were operating throughout the war zones.

Warrant Officer Bernie Bashford readily recalls one of the Navigation Instructors at Rathmines, Captain Richmond, was a four ring Merchant Navy Captain as a "Wizard" and expected all his Student Coxswains to be as competent.

FLTLT Richmond went on to be Skipper of the RAAF Marine Vessel, 06.9 "Betty Joan" that operated in New Guinea. Captain Richmond was well known in Sydney for there he was the founder of "Richmond Navigational School."



An important part of training of Motor Boat Crews was in the handling of sailing boats, for it also created an awareness of the effect of winds and currents on a boat.

(J.Riddell)



In 1941 this group of MBC Trainees had their first encounter in the handling of a sailing Navy Whaler. L to R. Ron Short, Nev Ernst, Jack Perret, Clarie Masters, Jack Riddell, Ron Anderson Frank Chetwyn- Jones, Fred Domkin.

(J. Riddell)

O.B.E. Medal Winner

Corporal S. Cummings was awarded the British Empire Medal for his expertise in salvaging a number of aircraft that crashed at Rathmines.

These men of the "Marine Section, who made an essential contribution to the war effort, received their initial training and later advanced Coxswain training at RAAF Rathmines. Their personal skills were honed in the field of experience.

Aircraft Crashes

A Seagull aircraft crashed in Lake Macquarie killing the Pilot, FLGOFF Pickering. Corporal Cummings salvaged this aircraft.

During 1943 three Sikorsky Kingfisher sea planes of No.107 Squadron crashed while on patrol and on gunnery exercises.

Only one Catalina (A24-39) crashed while landing at Broken Bay on a training exercise, killing all the Crew.

Another Seagull crashed in 1943 after a drogue towing exercise. A hatch could not be closed in time after an sudden engine failure. The aircraft landed safely then sank to the bottom of Lake Macquarie. Corporal Cummings also salvaged this aircraft.



The Control Tower personnel maintained control of all aircraft and boat movements on this very busy Rathmines Base on Lake Macquarie.(N. Greaves