

Look at any account of US Catalinas during the Second World War and, sooner or later, you will come across mention of the floating bases known as Seaplane Tenders. However, until now you would have been hard-pushed to find out a great deal about them and the way they supported seaplane ops. This omission has now been corrected by Cdr David D Bruhn, USN (Ret'd) who has written *Eyes of the Fleet – the US Navy's Seaplane Tenders and Patrol Aircraft in World War II*, published by Heritage Books, ISBN 978-0-7884-5707-4. This is a comprehensive, 517- page soft back packed with text, official and first-hand accounts, battle descriptions and numerous appendices. Until now, this reviewer knew very little on the subject and it is great to know that I now have a single point of reference. That said, the author points out certain limitations, namely that the book concentrates on the war in the Pacific and less so on the American and European Theatres. However, Europe is not ignored and two chapters look at ops in French Morocco and Normandy, albeit with no relevance to Catalinas. The index is rather hard work but this is not a reflection upon the author; rather the result of it being so comprehensive. For example, the Catalina is eventually found under “United States - military aircraft – Consolidated – PBV”. The search is rewarded however with a few dozen references.

Knowing that the *Langley* was a Catalina seaplane tender I looked it up in the index and found numerous references to it. I now know that it was numbered AV-3 (AV being the acronym for Seaplane Tender) and was the ex-Navy Collier Number 3, having been built at Mare Island Navy Yard, Vallejo, California. It was commissioned on April 7th, 1913 and was lost to enemy aircraft attack on February 27th, 1942. Searching the text reveals much more and starts with the *Langley* at the outset of the war (for the USA) in December 1941 when it was attached to Patrol Wing Ten which also included 28 PBV-4 Catalinas of Patrol Squadron VP-101. Thereafter, the history of this one craft can be followed until its demise during the defence of Java, the only PW-10 seaplane tender to be lost to enemy action. The action during which the *Langley* was sunk is described at length. In between Pearl Harbor and its loss, there are plenty of references to Catalina ops so this makes for an excellent addition to previously published text on the subject. And that is just one tender!

Cdr Bruhn has previously published a number of other books on US Navy and wartime vessels but this latest will be of particular relevance to those with a serious interest in wartime seaplane operations.....