

Foreword

David Bruhn's *Turn into the Wind*, Volume I, describes the background to the introduction of the light fleet carrier into the US Navy in 1943/44 and the significant impact these carriers had during the advance by US forces across the Central Pacific toward Japan in the final years of the war. From Australia's perspective, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) did not become a carrier navy until the post war years and its major contribution in the Pacific was the provision of cruisers and destroyers to the United States 7th Fleet. The RAN was also involved in escorting the Royal Navy (RN) aircraft carriers of the British Pacific Fleet in 1945. Interestingly, it was the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) which played a key role from the Australian point of view and in this foreword, I will expand on the impact the RAAF made in support of the RAN, as well as its positive contribution to winning the war in the Pacific.

Australia and New Zealand made two very different and not generally well known, contributions, in supporting the RN during World War II. The Royal New Zealand Navy actively contributed to the RN's Fleet Air Arm. In that era the RAAF provided pilots for the RAN.

From the New Zealand perspective, a series of secondment schemes greatly expanded the New Zealand presence in the RN, generally. The rapid increase in the number of aircraft carriers in the RN during World War II created a great need for pilots and aircrew. In 1942 New Zealand was invited by the UK Government to recruit personnel to serve in the RN Fleet Air Arm under what was called 'Scheme F.' The initial intake consisted primarily of personnel who had volunteered to join the air force, but for whom there was not yet a place. Recruiting for Scheme F continued somewhat sporadically until June 1945.

Some 1,066 recruits left New Zealand under this scheme, of whom some 600 served as frontline pilots or observers, with a maximum of about 450 joining in May 1944. This number formed a significant proportion of the Fleet Air Arm and they saw action in many operations, from the attack on the German battleship *Tirpitz* in 1943 to the final attacks on Japan in 1945. Of the New Zealand personnel who saw service with the Fleet Air Arm, about 150 were lost and many awarded for their gallantry.

At the outbreak of World War II, the Admiralty accepted Australia's offer to provide personnel to serve with the RN under the 'Yachtsman Scheme.' Under this plan, some 500 yachtsmen and others

with previous sea experience, joined the RAN Volunteer Reserve (RANVR) and served in a variety of ships in the RN. Thirty-six were lost during the war and 72 were awarded gallantry medals including 30 Distinguished Service Crosses. However, none were involved with the RN Fleet Air Arm.

The RAAF was established as an Australian service in March 1921 on the explicit basis of maintaining the capability to support both the RAN and the Australian Army. From the naval aspect, the RAAF established a special Fleet Cooperation Unit to supply aircraft, pilots and maintainers. In 1923 it was decided to train RAN specialist navigator/observers and telegraphist/gunners.

Photo Foreword-1



Vickers Supermarine Seagull V (Walrus) A2-2 flying over a RAN ship, possibly the light cruiser HMAS *Perth*. (AWM)

In 1934 the RAAF ordered 24 Seagull V amphibious biplane reconnaissance aircraft, which were delivered during 1935-37 and operated by 5 Squadron (renamed 9 Squadron on 1 January 1939 and located at RAAF base Rathmines NSW). In accordance with pre-WW II Australian procedures, only the RAAF was permitted to operate service aircraft. Hence, the aircraft carried in the heavy cruisers HMA Ships *Australia* and *Canberra*, and the light cruisers HMA Ships *Hobart*, *Perth* and *Sydney*, were operated by the RAAF. Whilst the pilot and maintenance personnel (normally six men that also included a

photographer) were supplied by the RAAF, the observer (navigator) and telegraphist air gunner were naval personnel. The Seagull V was known colloquially throughout the RAN as the '*Pusser's Duck*.' Following the outbreak of war, aircraft were also embarked in the armed merchant cruisers HMA Ships *Manoora* and *Westralia*.

By the start of WWII, the RAN and RAAF had established procedures for using the Seagull V amphibians on the cruisers. Their roles included gunnery spotting, convoy escorting, anti-submarine patrols and reconnaissance. While the RAAF continued to provide aircraft, pilots and maintainers, the operational control of aircraft and airmen was under the control of the ship's Commanding Officer.

From 1940 onwards the Supermarine Walrus amphibian (a Seagull V with minor differences) was added to the inventory as attrition replacements for the Seagulls. Tough but slow, they could fly in most weather conditions, and were well suited to their various roles. Although the RAN made important gains with naval observers now included as aircrew, they still had no independent aviation branch or aircraft carrier and all aircraft were under RAAF control. Walrus aircraft serving in Australian warships saw extensive service during the war, with the RAAF servicing the RAN's aviation needs until 1944.

Throughout WWII up to five RAN observers served on exchange service with the RN Fleet Air Arm, the most notable being Lieutenant Victor AT Smith (later Admiral Sir Victor Smith). Smith attained his wings as an observer in 1937 after which he served first in the aircraft carriers HMS *Glorious* and *Ark Royal*, then heavy cruiser *Shropshire* and, in 1943, transferred to aircraft carrier *Tracker* during her deployment as escort for Atlantic and Russian convoys. When stationed at the British Air Station Sparrowhawk, Smith was responsible for an attack on the German battleship *Scharnhorst* for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). After surviving the sinking of the Australian cruiser HMAS *Canberra* during the battle of Savo Island, Smith went on to serve as the Air Planning Officer for the Normandy invasion in 1944. He subsequently developed the plan for the introduction of a Fleet Air Arm into the RAN.

HMS Golden Hind, the Royal Navy Barracks established in Sydney in early 1945 in support of the British Pacific Fleet (BPF), was also the headquarters of the Flag Officer Naval Air Stations (Australia) (FONAS Australia). FONAS had responsibility for all Fleet Air Arm related matters including the drafting of large numbers of personnel that were to pass through the Barracks on route to Air Stations in Australia and for the fleet carriers and support vessels. Three RAN officers qualified as Observer were attached to FONAS staff.

In March 1945 the RAN allocated its four N-class destroyers, HMA Ships *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Norman* and *Nepal* along with its two Q-class destroyers, HMA Ships *Quickmatch* and *Quiberon* to the BPF. In addition, eighteen of the Australian corvettes forming the 21st and 22nd Minesweeping Flotillas also served with the BPF. The destroyers were routinely employed on the carrier escort screens whilst the corvettes, with minimal minesweeping requirements, escorted the fleet train.

The Australian Squadron did not integrate with the BPF but remained part of the US 7th Fleet commanded by Vice Adm. Thomas Kinkaid, USN, in the South West Pacific Command, under General MacArthur, USA.

During World War II, 37,000 Australians were enlisted into the RAAF as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, a program designed to train RAAF pilots for eventual transfer into the Royal Air Force. The participation of Australia in it, along with Canada, New Zealand and Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe), made a substantial impact on the conduct of the air war in Europe and it remains a truly unique episode in the conduct of coalition warfare. The scheme was the RAAF's principal wartime activity up until the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941. Furthermore, it established within Australia the raise, train and sustain facilities, that enabled the provision of the training of pilots for deployment in the Pacific war. When the RAN Fleet Air Arm was established in 1947, twenty-four RAAF pilots joined the RAN which contributed to over half of the RAN's naval pilots in those early days.

EMPLOYMENT OF PBY CATALINAS FOR OFFENSIVE MINELAYING AND AIR-SEA RESCUE OPERATIONS

The Catalina flying boat was one of the most versatile aircraft of the Second World War and was operated by virtually every Allied nation in anti-submarine, air-sea rescue, patrol and minelaying/bombing roles. The RAAF operated more than 150 Catalinas and allocated four squadrons to undertake mine-laying operations from April 1943 until July 1945 in the southwest Pacific deep into Japanese-held waters. The allied mine-laying activity made a significant contribution to the war in the Pacific, with the RAAF laying 27-percent of the total of some 10,000 mines laid in the 'outer zone' of Operation Starvation, the aerial mining campaign against Japan.

Since these operations were mostly carried out at night, the aircraft involved were painted in dark colours and became known as 'Black Cats'. The long-ranging Black Cats with their motto 'First and furthest' became part of RAAF legend. In this role, the RAAF made a substantial contribution towards victory for the Allies in the Pacific war.

Photo Foreword-2



RAAF 'Black Cat' Catalina flying Boat. (AWM)

From 1944 to 1947, the RAAF operated five Air-Sea Rescue Flights in Northern Australia, New Guinea and Borneo. Equipped with Catalinas, these Units carried out search and rescue operations, rescuing downed Allied pilots and aircrews, including those assigned to carriers, and land based USAAF bombers striking Japan. These hazardous missions frequently subjected the aircraft and its crew to enemy fire.

AMPHIBIAN AIRCRAFT USEFULNESS DIMINISHED BY SUPERIOR CARRIER AIRCRAFT CAPABILITIES

Whilst the RAAF was very active in the Pacific war, the RAN aircraft on the cruisers were less so. When war was declared, the RAN's attention had turned to the threat of armed German raiders attacking Australia's shipping routes in the Indian Ocean. The cruisers did convoy escorts and searched for enemy raiders and merchant ships – making good use of their Seagull Vs. But as the war progressed, the need for the amphibians was reduced, as radar, aircraft-carrier and land-based aircraft took over. As the amphibians were vulnerable to damage and enemy attacks; together with the weight of the aircraft, catapults, crane, stores and fuel supplies, they became a liability. By February 1944 all Seagull/Walrus aircraft were removed from RAN ships.

During the war, the question of the RAN acquiring an aircraft carrier was raised with the Admiralty on several occasions, but nothing became of this owing to manpower shortages and funding issues.

As described in *Turn into the Wind* Volume I, the value of the aircraft carrier is amply demonstrated during the war in the Pacific and a fleet based around the carrier was seen as appropriate by the Australian defence planners for the RAN. Whilst the Australian defence establishment had accepted that the RAN's force structure should include aircraft carriers, the issue remained whether the RAN had the

ability to establish and manage naval air in Australia or whether the RAAF should perform the task. These issues are examined in Volume II of *Turn into the Wind*.

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