

Lumbering Catalina touches down in NT

BEN LANGFORD

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THE Catalina may fly with the all grace of an orange-footed scrub fowl but the versatile flying boat holds a special place in many people's hearts.

A 1946 Catalina, one of the few still operational in the world, touched down in Darwin last night after an epic 17-day flight from Portugal.

Pilot Jim Hazelton, 77, said it was a thrill to see the Territory coast as he flew the leg from Denpasar, Indonesia.

"It's not really a lovely aeroplane to fly," he said.

"It's heavy and sluggish but I think you would expect that if you look at the design of it."

But, with its long range, deep-V hull and folding floats on the wings, the Catalina's versatility made it an enduring favourite.

After a rest in Darwin, Mr Hazelton and five other crew including his nephew Geoff will fly the plane to its new home in a museum at Port Macquarie, NSW.

Along the way it will stop at former Catalina bases along the east coast.

"I admire the guys who flew them in WWII," Mr Hazelton said.

"That's what this is about - it's a memorial to those who flew them.

"A lot of guys didn't make it back and that's why we did it."

Squadrons of Catalinas were based at Doctors Gully and East Point in Darwin, and at Nhulunbuy, during World War 2.



COMING HOME: The Catalina breaks through the clouds on its way back into Darwin.

Pictures: NICK WELSH



Jim Hazelton at the controls



Touch down NT