



THE CATALINA FLYING MEMORIAL LTD

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Flying Boat Exhibition at Museum of Sydney

I think Matthew Holle did a great job in portraying the Golden Age of Aviation at the Museum of Sydney.

Whilst we had probably about half a dozen Sunderlands and Sandringhams at Rose Bay the RAAF operated some 170 Catalinas and lost some 330 airmen.

There are still a few original Catalina skippers and aircrew left but unfortunately like Squadron Leader Bruce Daymond who left us last Friday they are quickly disappearing.

Typical of some Catalina operations was that of Bruce Daymond's award of the DSO and the DFC. This occasion is recorded as follows:-

CLOAK AND DAGGER CATALINAS

Now that most of the restrictions imposed for security purposes have been lifted more is being heard of the activities of the "cloak-and-dagger" men in all services.

Something has already been told, however, of the aircrews; engaged in dropping specially selected troops behind the Japanese lines in Burma. In Madras there was based hush-hush squadron of Catalinas, No. 628 Special Duties Squadron, R.A.F. The job of these web-footed types was to put in or pick up our agents and to keep them supplied with stores.

The flying-boat work entailed landings at night without a flare path in bays, rivers, harbours and even the open sea, hundreds of miles behind the enemy lines.

The trips were of long duration, a minimum of twenty hours. The longest recorded was one of thirty-eight hours. They were necessitated by the great distance to be covered across the Bay of Bengal from Indian and Cingalese bases.

Operations began again in September when Flight-Lieutenant Bruce Daymond of Sydney

with Flight-Lieutenant Jack O'Meara of Swan Hill (Victoria) set out to do a daylight reconnaissance of Davis Island near Victoria Point on the Burma coast. If found suitable, agents and stores were to be landed.

Flying around a headland, they came across a beach just covered with Japs. Feeling after these two unexpected encounters with the enemy that the secrecy of the trip was about nil, the aircraft made off to Chance Island some forty miles south.

From the air the possible landing area looked terrifying. Coral reefs appeared to be right at the surface of the crystal clear water. After a hasty survey and remaining undetected the aircraft landed just at dusk.

The agents were put ashore and contact was kept with them with a walkie-talkie set. Sitting on the water in an aircraft with its engines dead behind the enemy lines for two hours produced a feeling that has to be experienced to be believed. It is a feeling at one and the same time of intense excitement and helplessness.

From Madras Flight-Lieutenant Daymond began his marathon in which he flew just on a hundred hours in seven days, approximately thirty-three of which were spent over enemy controlled waters and territory.

An immediate signal had come in from a party of agents to say there had been a lot of enemy air reconnaissance of their island and that now an enemy submarine had come into the bay. From all indications a search party was being put ashore to capture them. They would try and avoid the Japs till an aircraft could arrive.

When the signal arrived Flight-Lieutenant Daymond and his crew were sleeping off the effects of their three trips in four days in which some seventy hours had been done. He was ordered to get the agents back at all costs. The information they had gathered was vitally important and it had to reach headquarters.

On reaching the target the aircraft was flying at fifty feet. A flashlight signal was received from the ground giving the all clear for landing. The agents stated afterwards that the submarine had gone away that afternoon. All stood by for the landing, but while on the down-wind leg, the bow turret gunner called up on the "intercom." to say that the submarine was in the middle of the bay.

The aircraft came in low over the submarine, touched down and taxied on the step down moon in a whirl of spray, almost reaching flying speed in doing so.

Engines had to be cut and the anchor thrown out, otherwise the agents in their rubber dinghies could not have come alongside against the slipstream.

They, incidentally, were unaware that the submarine had returned. A certain amount of exhortation from the aircrew let them know the facts of the case. Never have rubber dinghies moved faster.

Fortunately the down-moon position helped to prevent the exact location of the aircraft from being discovered.

As the submarine moved in to do its worst, the agents-were unceremoniously dragged aboard. There was no time to load their equipment; this was cast adrift in the dinghies. The anchor cable was slashed with an axe.

The engines, those wonderful Pratt and Whitney's started without a splutter. A down-wind takeoff straight over the submarine again, a turn, flat on the water, behind the Cliff face and the aircraft was safely away.

These, then, are some of the incidents in the life of the cloak-and-dagger boys. Lord Louis Mountbatten on a visit to the squadron stated that he regarded each flight as equivalent in importance to a whole bombing raid, a bouquet which was greatly appreciated by the squadron.

Bruce Daymond's exploits are typical of hundreds of others which are only now being told by Robert Cleworth in his book *The Fabulous Catalina*.

P W Dulhunty OAM

Director

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