

Tribute to the Catalina



By FLTLT Jaimie Abbott

IT WAS one of the most unique aircraft ever built and one which performed a vital role in Australia's defence during WWII, so it was only natural for thousands to turn out to pay tribute to the Catalina flying boat at the third annual Catalina Memorial Festival.

The event was held on October 24 at the former RAAF flying boat base at Rathmines, Lake Macquarie in NSW.

CO 11SQN WGCDR Phil Champion was the guest of honour at the anniversary parade at the base, which was the world's largest flying boat base during WWII. Now listed as a heritage site, volunteers plan to build a museum and Catalina flying boat memorial.

WGCDR Champion said it was an honour on the day to represent 11SQN, which operated Catalinas during the war.

"It was an opportunity to reflect on those who served and lost their lives during WWII," WGCDR Champion said.

"I really enjoyed listening to all the stories about days gone by from the war veterans who turned out for the ceremony."

11SQN Warrant Officer WOFF Darren Gray and Warrant Officer



Engineering WOFF Terry Kerr also represented the squadron. They were in demand, with those attending the parade keen to ask them many questions about what it was like to fly Australia's latest maritime patrol aircraft.

Earlier this year, 10 and 11SQNs celebrated their 70th anniversary, and the Rathmines Catalina Festival used the opportunity to commemorate this

event and publicly recognise the contribution these two squadrons have made to Australia's national security.

This year also marks the 70th anniversary of the Rathmines base.

The Catalina flying boats were the only aircraft to see service with the RAAF for the total wartime operations against Japan. Following WWII, Rathmines was used as a ground training base.

I look forward to doing all that I can to honour the memory of the brave men and women who operated, maintained and supported the Catalina squadrons of WWII.

– WGCDR Phil Champion

Following the event, WGCDR Champion accepted an invitation by the NSW Catalina Association to take up the position of Patron of the Association.

He said he was humbled to be asked.

"I feel very strongly about maintaining the link between 11SQN and our predecessors, as I am a strong believer that our shared history

defines who we are today," WGCDR Champion said. "I am also confident that it will ensure that our rich history is maintained well into the future.

"I look forward to doing all that I can to honour the memory of the brave men and women who operated, maintained and supported the Catalina squadrons of WWII and who served their nation with such distinction."



IN HONOUR: Above, Air Force Cadets parade the three Service Colours, while left, 11SQN CO WGCDR Phil Champion pays his respects with other guests at the Catalina anniversary parade at Rathmines. Photos: courtesy 11SQN