

Secrets of CATALINA BAY



The Catalina flying boat is one of the most distinctive aircraft ever. It's time we knew more about The Catalina flying boats and paid respect to the magnificent men in their flying machines.

It is only now that many of the Catalina stories are being told, thanks to a dedicated band of people who are working hard to create a lasting memorial to those magnificent flying machines and the brave men who crewed them.

Much has been written and told about the 'Dam Busters', Lancasters which dropped bombs to breach the wall of the large dams in Germany, but Lake Macquarie's secret Rathmines-based Catalina operations during World War II were far more arduous and dangerous and numerous than these.



A Catalina taking off from 30111 Rathmines NSW

They were extremely important in the Pacific Theatre, doing in some respects for Australia what the Spitfire did for Britain.

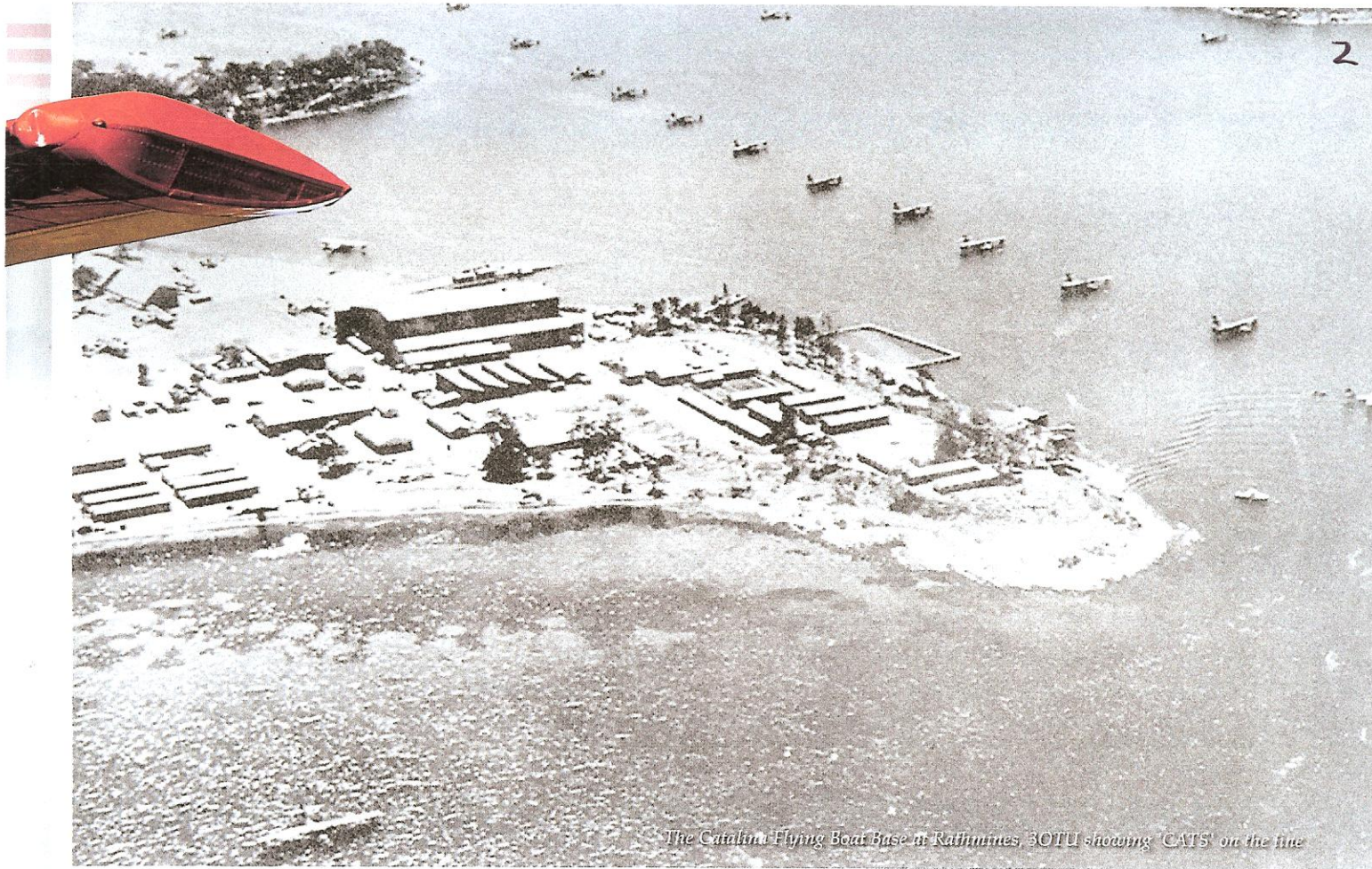
There are many people, such as members of the The Catalina Flying Memorial Ltd., and the Rathmines Catalina Festival Committee, who have a dream that the Catalina will become the centrepiece of a proposed Rathmines Museum, and will operate off the waters of Lake Macquarie, as its sisters did 65 years ago.

Philip Dulhunty OAM, member of the Catalina Association and Chairman of the Seaplane Pilots Association, located a brightly painted red and white wartime Catalina named "Manutara", after the bird of the same name, (the frigate bird) in Portugal, having been used as a fire-fighting machine.

With the help of Neville and Gaby Kennard and supporters, funds were raised for its purchase and refurbishment for a ferry-flight back to Australia. Some generous supporters contributed financially to acquire the aircraft, as the fuel bill alone was \$75,000 to bring it home to Australia late last year.

Due to CASA restrictions, the plane was unable to land at Rathmines, however, it did kiss the waters of Catalina Bay briefly en route to its present home at Bankstown Airport, where volunteers lovingly work on its restoration.

Already the Newcastle, Rathmines, Lake Macquarie community is showing great support and enthusiasm for this project. It will be unique in Australia, perhaps in the world – a Catalina housed and operating from a historic base on



The Catalina Flying Boat Base at Rathmines, 30TU showing 'CATS' on the line

a waterway that is ideally suited for this purpose and in a community some of whom can still remember the sights and sounds and stories of the wartime Cats.

The former lakeside airbase was acquired by Lake Macquarie City Council in 1962 and is now state heritage-listed and for the last two years has been part of the Rathmines Park shore renamed as Catalina Bay.

It was the Rathmines Progress Association who prompted the bay in Rathmines Park to be renamed Catalina Bay, recognising the significant role played there in the defence of Australia in WW11.

Three years ago, the Rathmines Memorial Bowling Club and Rathmines Progress Association held the inaugural Catalina Festival with a vision to raise funds to create a lasting legacy to the Catalina on its original base. The event is held annually on the fourth weekend of October.

A festival committee organises the family and water-orientated weekend of events including a ball to raise funds towards the costly project.

The event grows every year, with an attendance of more than 9000 spectators, with this year's highlight being a flypast of flying boats and floatplanes from the Seaplane Pilots Association of Australia to mark the 70th anniversary of the formation of the 10th and 11th Squadron of the RAAF.

Also participating were fly-pasts by Tiger Moths and a WW11-era Avenger torpedo bomber, as well as joy flights by Sydney Harbour seaplanes.

Emphasising the significance of the event, a parade through Rathmines Park and a memorial service and laying wreaths dedicated to the men and women who served at Rathmines were held.

At the beginning of the Pacific War in 1941, Rathmines was developed to accommodate the growing fleet of Catalina Flying Boats and their crews.

Some 168 Cats were brought into Australia during the course of the war, and at Rathmines there were some hundreds of crews and thousands of personnel, trained, accommodated and operating from this base from 1941 to 1945.

The Rathmines base has now been heritage-listed by the NSW Government and an application has been made to have the RAAF base at Rathmines placed on the national heritage list. It is hoped that this listing will lead to Government funding to assist in the replica construction of a WWII hangar to be utilised to house a working Catalina and memorabilia.

During WW11, the Cats were painted black or dull grey to be invisible as they penetrated low and slow on their missions behind enemy lines.



The part played by Rathmines and the Catalina flying boats is only now starting to be told, as due to the nature of the missions, many of the experiences were never recorded and have been left untold.



They were no match for the fast, manoeuvrable Japanese Zero fighters and their firepower, so the Cats had to be difficult to spot.

The part played by Rathmines and the Catalina flying boats is only now starting to be told, as due to the nature of the missions, many of the experiences were never recorded and have been left untold.

During the Pacific War the Catalina flying boats flew highly

secret missions between April 1943 and March 1945, a critical period after Midway. Lost in history by the term 'Allied', these Australian (RAAF) Cats were the only aircraft engaged in some of the most arduous and dangerous long-range missions behind enemy lines of World War II, many lasting in excess of 20 hours.

They carried newly developed, sophisticated mines into almost every Japanese-held harbour of importance and by laying precision mines in the approaches forced the enemy's transports out to become the prey of US Submarines and easier targets for US Bombers.

Their task was to block and neutralise the Japanese oil and mineral supplies needed to prosecute their war, and they were very successful. They were the only flying boats to do this task and were arguably the most efficient and successful RAAF squadrons in WWII.

The Catalina was slow and cumbersome and poorly armed. It had to rely upon stealth by arriving over its target at night and at low altitude. That's why it was painted dull black (and known as the 'Black Cats'). It dropped its mine load with a splash - no explosion, and tried to escape before enemy fighters could become airborne, as obviously it was no match for the Japanese fighters! However, by flying low and slow in the hours of darkness, often no higher than 200 feet, the pilots attempted to avoid detection by the enemy's radar and fighters.



The Catalina is presently being restored
supported by the museum at Harkness A

The mines they dropped were of a special design - shaped like torpedoes, and were carried under the wings of the Catalina. They could be preset to explode after the passing of a number of ships; sometimes the first ship, sometimes the fourth or even seventh. Mostly, the Japanese didn't know they were there or how they got there. The secrecy of their operations was paramount to their success. A considerable number of Catalinas and their crews were lost, a total of 32 Cats and 330 airmen.

The Aussie Catalina-laid mines did more damage to enemy shipping than all the aerial bombing and torpedoing and became a vital part of MacArthur's hop-stepping tactics all the way to Okinawa. Even if they didn't sink any ships, they could tie up whole fleets of vessels in ports for more than a week, waiting for mine sweepers to clear the entrances.

Before McArthur returned to Manila in December 1944, he organised 25 Australian Catalinas to mine the harbour, which tied up the whole Japanese fleet so he could safely step ashore.

Mine laying was not the only dangerous mission conducted by our Catalinas. Practically every operation was beyond and behind enemy lines and they didn't just fly over every

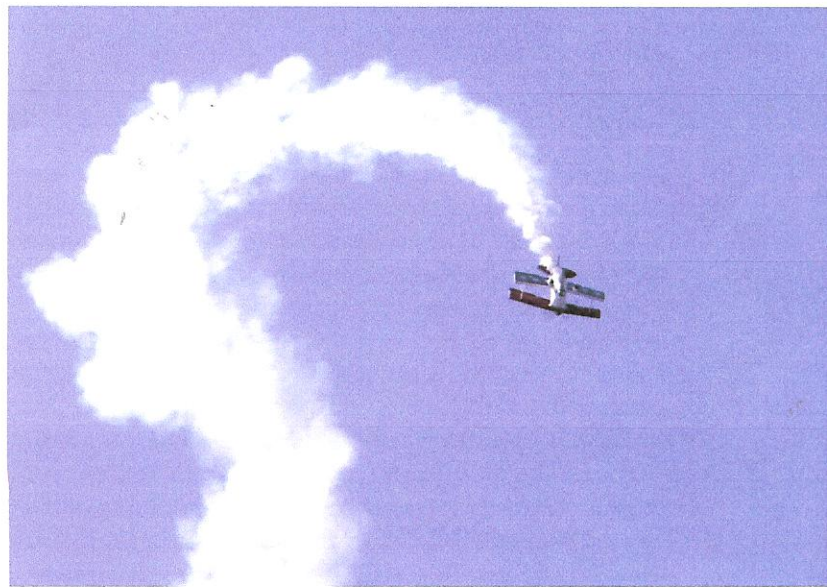
Without in any way detracting from the great work of the other branches of the RAAF's fighters and bombers, the Catalinas undoubtedly did for Australia what the Spitfires did for England - but in great secrecy.

Catalina flying boats were manufactured by the Consolidated Aircraft Company. Most US Navy-operated Cats were amphibians equipped with wheel landing gear retracting into their floating hulls. They also had heavy armour plating protecting the crew from fighter attack. Without modification they were not capable of making the long-distance (18-24 hour) flights carrying such heavy loads as the Australian Catalinas.





The Catalina Festival's vision is to raise funds to create a lasting legacy to the Catalina on its original base. The event is held annually on the fourth weekend of October.



To gain the required range and endurance, the RAAF stripped their Cats of armour protection and the self-sealing material from their fuel tanks to reduce weight and increase fuel capacity.

The RAAF were highly regarded by the USA as "airmen who got more out of the Catalina than our boys ever imagined possible." With the increased range obtained with these modifications, the RAAF Catalinas were able to carry the heavy mine loads and travel the distances to the Japanese harbours in the North Pacific and the China Sea.

Most of the work of removing all the armour plating and the retractable wheel undercarriages was carried out at the Rathmines

Catalina base on Lake Macquarie or at Lake Boga near Swan Hill in Victoria. Rathmines, known as No 3 OTU (Operational Training Unit), was the main training base for all Catalina crews and the modified "castrated" CATS flew from there to jumping-off places further north where the mines were fitted.

The current home of the acquired Catalina is Bankstown Airport, which hosted the Sydney Aviation Model Show recently over the weekend of 14th and 15th November, 2009. As part of this event, the Catalina Flying Memorial Ltd taxied their VH-CAT from its present tie-down position to a place on the tarmac allowing access to visitors.

For a small fee, visitors were invited to climb aboard and sit in



the pilot's seat. The group sold copies of author Bob Cleworth's "Cats at War" and "The Fabulous Catalina", as well as some DVDs and other merchandise.

All proceeds will help fund the work required to obtain an Australian Certificate of Airworthiness for the aircraft. The achievement of this key milestone will mark a significant contribution to the return of the Catalina to Australian skies and seas.

State and Federal politicians of Lake Macquarie have been asked to support the committee's endeavours to source the significant funding required to construct a hangar and meet ongoing costs needed for the plane's operation and maintenance.

There is no doubt that on completion the Catalina Museum will become a major tourist attraction for the Hunter Region.

All that is needed is a generous benefactor to come forward to make it happen sooner than later.

State Member for Lake Macquarie, Greg Piper, informed State Parliament that the Rathmines Catalina Festival has huge potential to grow and will be important in raising funds for the return of VH-CAT as a significant event in bringing the local community together.

"There are countless people who deserve great thanks for keeping alive the memory of the Rathmines RAAF Base and those who served there," he concluded.