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Trobiand Islands, Kiriwina

04.2 Air Sea Rescue

In May 1943 Sergeant Bernie Bashford (65244) was posted to the Trobiand Islands off the east coast of New Guinea as Coxswain on 04.2, a 48 foot vessel, equipped with an Operating Table, and powered by two Chrysler 8 Royal engines swinging twin 18"x24" props giving a speed of 22 knots.

Constructed by bulldozers and paved with coral the air strip could function in all weathers. Aircraft used Kiriwina strip for staffing and bombing raids on Japanese Bases and Units throughout the region.

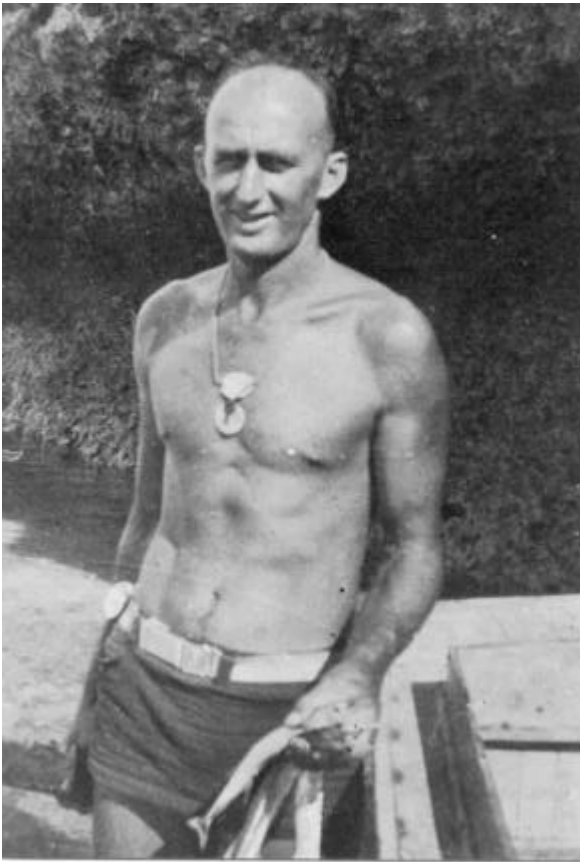
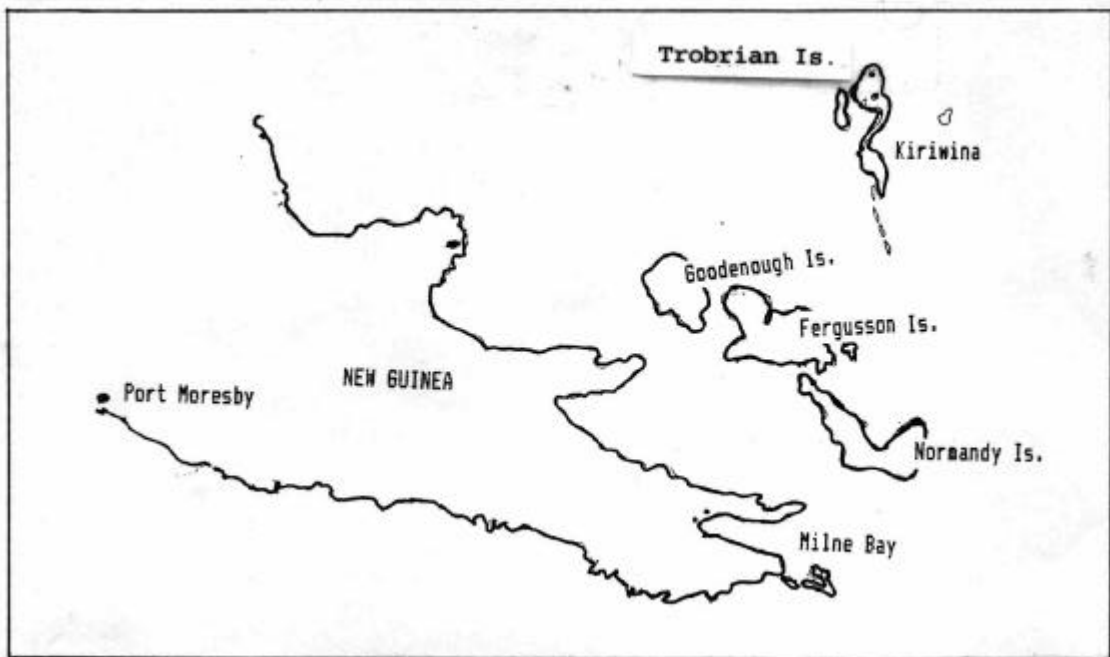
04.2 used anchorages at Losuia in the south and Sid at the north end of the Island to give a lee shore mooring during seasonal prevailing winds.

Americans provided all rations but the Air Sea Rescue Boat Crew slept and had their meals on board for they never knew when they might be called upon in an emergency. The nearest "wet section" (Marine Section) was located on Goodenough Island some 70 miles away.

When aircraft went on raids the 04.2 took up position some 70 miles out in the area the returning aircraft were likely to come. On four occasions Bernie's Crew rescued ditched Liberator Crews, two of which had come down on coral atolls. These aircraft suffered a great deal of structural damage for the coral ripped open the fuselage often causing injuries to the Crew members. One Gunner was found injured some 300 yards away. Often the ditched crews covered themselves with a parachute silk as protection against the sun. The approach of the Air Sea Rescue Boat no doubt was a very welcome sight to the aircraft Crews for it was not only the elements that could cause worry but the ever present danger of strafing by Japanese aircraft.

While 04.2 Crew were on duty in the Trobians some 100 raids were launched, many strafing and bombing raids by No.22 Squadron Bostons had been carried out before they arrived. Air Sea Rescue Crews were periodically rotated after a Tour of Duty. Mitchells , Lightnings and Kittyhawks also operated from Kiriwina.

Radio communications between the Base Station and the boat was done using the "Foxo" code as well as radio telephone between the ASR Boat and aircraft. RAAF Wirraway aircraft often assisted in finding down crews by buzzing the ASR Boat then flying in the direction of the ditched aircraft. Survivors were taken onboard and according to sustained injuries were treated while being rushed back to the Base Hospital.



Sergeant Bernie Bashford (later, Warrant Officer) & his Crew on the Air Sea Rescue Boat 04.2 played an important role from Kiriwana, in the Trobriand Island Group.

The fish in his left hand would hardly qualify for a record.

(Bernie Bashford)



The mode of dress for the Crew did not usually include shirts, but then little was known about skin cancer.
(Bernie Bashford)



In 1943 two RAAF Officers on Kiriwina prevailed on Bernie to take them on a fishing trip (no details of the haul is available) but the recreational outing was enjoyed.
(Bernie Bashford)



The neatly laid out gardens of the ANGAU Headquarters on Kiriwina. Japanese aircraft often passed over these islands on their way to bomb the Allied Bases on the east coast of New Guinea. (Kevin Quinn)

A.N.G.A.U.

Australian New Guinea Administration Unit



Albino children on Kiriwana had very little vision through their pink eyes.
(Kevin Quinn)



The Kiriwina native people differed greatly from those on the mainland of New Guinea. These girls were from the village of Cobalulu, near the RAAF Base.
(Kevin Quinn)

The ocean in these waters was also hazardous to ASR Boats because of hidden reefs and floating debris so the Crew had to keep a sharp lookout. Continued servicing and maintenance of the boat was imperative to keep her in first class condition for the Crews' lives could be also in danger when so far off shore in a war zone.

Coxswain, Bernie Brashford, had by December 1943, spent a great deal of time on boats of the Marine Section in the New Guinea region so he was posted south. A flight to Milne Bay, then to Port Moresby for a short stop over before commencing the long flight down the east coast of Queensland. Flying at a low height provided passengers with a spectacular view of the changing coast line features.

After a leave with his Wife and family Bernie was again sent to the RAAF Marine Section in Rose Bay, Sydney, where he took charge of an O8., boat, 38 foot long, and set sail for RAAF Evans Head, North NSW, where he was to take charge of the Marine Section there. On his arrival at the jetty at Evans Head (a Gunnery and Bombing Training School) he was met by a FLTLT, who enquired, "SGT Bashford?"

"Yes!" replied Bernie as he supervised the mooring.

"Goodday and goodbye, there's an aircraft waiting on the strip to take you back to RAAF Rathmines!"

RAAF Headquarters was always unpredictable in matters of personal postings.

In due course Bernie reported to Rathmines to complete a 1st Class Coxswain Course that would take four months of solid and complex study. All forms of navigation, celestial navigation, swinging a compass, detailed chart work, current and tide manuals formed a major element. Passing of this course allowed a person to command a vessel of 100 tons any where in the World.

Course Participants

Bernie Bashford
Bob Ord
Alex Orchard

Cliff Searle
"Tubby" Kavanagh
Jack Condie

Ralph Ramage
Cyril Stone
plus three others

All these men had a considerable amount of Marine Section experience in many war zones.

Because these N.C.O. Course Members (known as "Sprogs") were visiting Rathmines for training, they were not permitted to use the Base Sergeants Mess. A very long, humorous poem was composed about this injustice.

An occasional "flip" in a Catalina was a high light of the four month stay at Rathmines. After a short Pre-embarkation Leave with his family Bernie journeyed to Brisbane to take command of O3.1, a Torpedo Recovery Boat.

03.1 Torpedo Recovery Boat

	Sergeant Bernie Bashford	Skipper
SGT.	Brian Peters	2nd Class Coxswain
SGT.	John Burnie	Wireless Operator
	Tom Tucker	Fitter
	Lloyd Jones	Fitter
	Jack Hextell	Motor Boat Crew

03.1 was sailed up the coast of Queensland inside the Great Barrier Reef direct to Horn Island at the top of Cape York. There the Crew was quarantined because of cases of small pox so they spent some time shooting wild pigs on Prince of Wales Island. They then caught the suckers and handed them to the Mess on Horn Island. Their presence was soon put to good use for a RAAF Ventura ditched and the Crew managed to get ashore on a tiny island. The following morning 03.1 had located the downed Crew and took them on board and returned to Horn Island.

On to RAAF Darwin

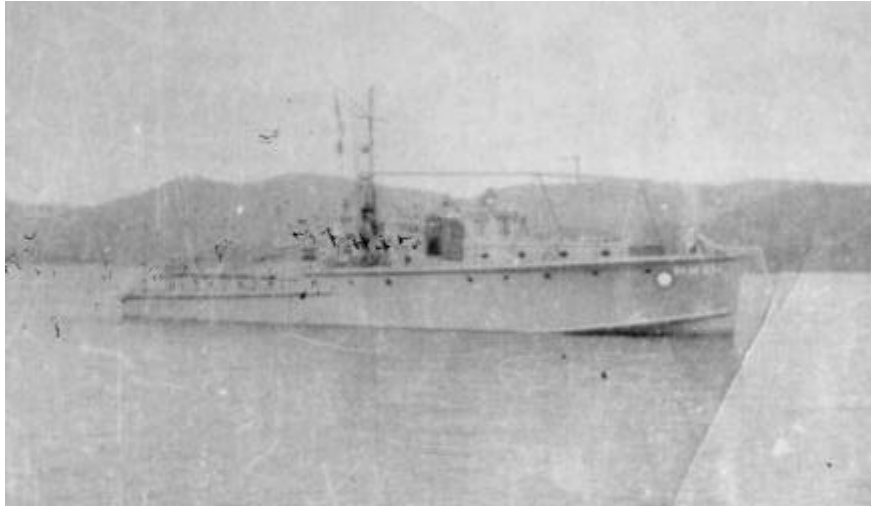
With 400 gallons of aviation petrol in the boat's fuel tanks together with 12 drums, each holding 44 gallons, safely stowed and lashed to the guardrails, 03.1 set sail for the long trip to Wessel Island. Land fall after 355 nautical miles was some 9 miles south of the destination. Spot on navigation by dead reckoning allowing for the tides and currents. From there they left for Millingimbi Marine Section, on the Northern Territory coast, and while there, called on the Mission.

When refuelling was completed they set out for RAAF Darwin another 400 mile trip.

Darwin

Darwin was located where tides of up to 27 foot would be experienced and combined together with the speed in which the current ebbed and flowed demanded very special skills in boat handling. Monsoonal weather, with electrical storms and rough seas could also be quite hostile. Crocodiles were every where in these tropical waters along with deadly stone fish and the highly dangerous Portuguese Man-o-war jelly fish.

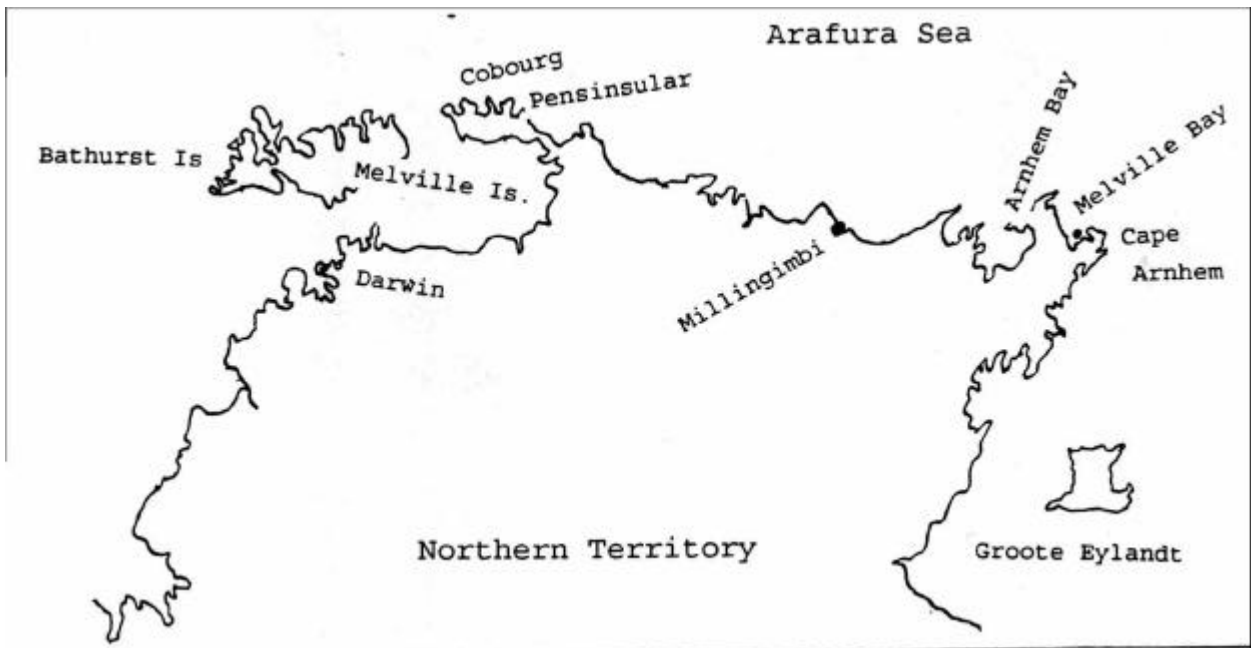
03.1 Torpedo Recovery Boat could carry 8 tons of stores, supplies and general freight to the off shore Bases and Missions on Bathurst Island and Melville Island. Peron Island RAAF Radar Unit was also on a regular delivery. Other occasions they delivered supplies to the RAAF Radar Station located on Cape Don. In this region there a great number of RAAF Radar Units that had to be regularly supplied with supplies and replacement personnel.



Bernie Bashford's next posting had him in charge of 03.1, a Torpedo Recovery Boat, bound for RAAF Darwin in the Northern Territory during September 1944. (Bernie Bashford)



AS Skipper and Coxswain on 03.1 Bernie took the wheel on the way to the off shore islands from Darwin. (Bernie Basford)



A considerable amount of essential cargo could be stowed on O3.1 and carried to secret RAAF Radar Bases located on islands in the region of Darwin. (B.Bashford)

Melville Bay



Bernie's banishment to Melville Bay as Skipper on 02.4 turned out to be a most pleasurable posting. With awnings flying on a speeding Air Sea Rescue Boat was a complete contrast to the years of active duty in the Marine Section. (B.Bashford)



Melville Bay was a very important Flying Boat Base and being Skipper on an A.S.R. Boat was a goal of every Coxswain in the Marine Section. (B.Bashford)



The whole range of Marine Section Boats needed on a Catalina Base were also there, as well as Landing Barges and Dumb Barges, for all the supplies arriving by cargo ships had to be brought ashore. There was also a large airfield located inland that had to be supplied. (B.Bashford)



When the war ended the Catalina Crews of Melville Bay were kept busy ferrying Prisoners of War back to Australia. Bernie other Coxswains of the M.S. would bring these POW men ashore for a brief period before continuing their flight. (B. Bashford)

Shank Bay was a very "hush-hush" location for when 03.1 called there they were surprised to see many Junks, Sampans and other native boats from distant islands. From this Base Australian Commando Personnel, with trained native men, sailed suitable vessels to Timor and other Dutch East Indies islands (now Indonesia). There they moved behind the Japanese Forces and reported important information and supplied forces already there.

Routine voyages were made to the far Melville Bay OBU and the RAAF Marine Section and calling into Croker Island, North and South Gouldburn Islands and the Mission Stations on Echo Island.

With all these destinations 03.1 and her Crew was kept extremely busy but on one occasion when Bernie returned to Darwin the C.O. admonished him for being too long on a trip. Bernie's explanation that bad weather for a week had delayed them was not accepted by the CO who retorted:

"There has been no bad weather!"

Annoyed at this remark Bernie blurted out:

" You must have had your bloody window closed!"

This out burst resulted in Bernie being exiled to Melville Bay on 02.4. There Bernie claimed it was the best posting he ever had and enjoyed the whole episode. He remained at Melville until VP Day was declared when he was ordered to return with 02.4 to Darwin.

While sitting in the Mess in Darwin waiting for a replacement Coxswain, Bernie was approached by a stranger, who, in being greeted by Bernie, blurted out:

"I'm a 2nd Class Coxswain to join 02.4 Bashford's boat, whom I've been told is an old bastard!"

"That the nicest thing I've ever heard about me!" was Bernie's reply, "but you wouldn't be recommended for the Diplomatic Corps".

After Warrant Officer Bernie Bashford had shown the young bloke the ropes, and found him to be a competent Coxswain, left Darwin for Cairns in a Catalina. His flight south was a fitting trip to end his RAAF Career before an Honourable Discharge from the Royal Australian Air Force.

Bernie Bashford made an outstanding contribution in the RAAF Marine Section, and during the war years he held responsible positions, not only to his Crews, but to the Air Crews he rescued.

015.Ketch "Una V"

Sergeant Clifford Searle, 37291, (later W.O.) was posted to the RAAF Marine Section Williamtown in Port Phillip Bay in July 1943. His first assignment was to collect one of the new RAAF 60 foot Invasion Barges from the Ford Factory in Geelong and deliver back to the Marine Section. Once there it would have final checks and additional equipment and facilities installed.

"Una V" had recently arrived from Tasmania, where for many years she had operated as a Lobster Fishing Ketch. She was very old and required a great deal of fitting out before being put to work for the RAAF. "Una V" was 60 feet in length with a beam of 25 feet and rigged as a Ketch. Her hold had 3/4 inch holes drilled through the hull of the lobster holding tank, to allow a continuous flow of sea water to circulate. All these holes had to be filled with wooden plugs then the hull repainted. This would then provide a new hold for carrying cargo. A new engine also had to be installed, new hatch covers and new steering fitted with an extra wheel located outside the wheel house.

Cliff was sent to complete a Diesel Engine Course and joined George Arnold, Dennis Newton, Keith Webb, Jock Mc Donald, Max Dawson, Les Hockey, Arthur Bennet, and Phil Parker, who were all to do the same course.

Cliff's return to "Una V" happened to fall on his birthday but the day following was to test the new, 55 HP Gardener Diesel engine and equipment. Members of the Air Board came aboard for the trials and have photographs taken. A clearance from the W.T.U. arrived so supplies were loaded together with fifty drums of cement and the vessel made ready for departure.

"Una V" Crew

Skipper	Flight Lieutenant Frank (Bully) Hayes
Coxswain	SGT Cliff Searle
Engineer	Corporal Dennis Newton
M.B.C.	Snow Williams (Motor Boat Crew)

Departure from Williamtown was on 1 September 1943 and they soon ran into heavy fog, followed by strong winds and rain, which blew out the old mainsail yet they averaged 7 Knots. On Tuesday 7 September the ship was tied up in Rose Bay in Sydney. There, new water tanks were installed and filled and a new mainsail ordered. On 14 September with the new mainsail fitted they left Sydney Harbour bound for Port Moresby.

The voyage up the NSW coast was marred by engine trouble so they anchored near Smokey Cape until the Light House Keeper, whom they had signalled by Aldis Lamp, sent a fishing boat out to tow them into Coffs Harbour. Anchored there while waiting for engine parts to be delivered. Dennis Newton then discovered the oil pressure was faulty.



015.09 "UNA" was a large cargo carrying Ketch of the Marine Section with SGT Cliff Searle as Skipper. In December of 1943 Cliff was anchored in Porlock Harbour waiting to take on cargo. (Cliff Searle)



While in Milne Bay Cliff was able to meet up with his Army brother, Jim, who was able to spend the day aboard "UnaV". (Cliff Searle)

Three weeks had gone by before they were able to set sail but their first night at sea was very rough and wet but they only used sail. Eight days later a Light House Keeper signalled by Aldis light, informing Dennis the Engineer that his Father had died so he was put ashore to attend the funeral.

In Gladstone they had more engine trouble but this was rectified and a week later Dennis returned so "Una V" once more departed. After crossing the Tropic of Capricorn on 8 November they continued on, arriving in Townsville four days later. When the drums of cement were unloaded a new cargo for RAAF Radar Units located off Milne Bay were stored in the holds.

17 November George Arnold, Skipper, brought in the Marine Section Ketch "Teleta" after a very rough trip and having sighted a submarine off Cape Morton. "Teleta's Crew comprised of Warren Shick, Engineer, Tom Dayhew, Eric Farmer, and two ANGU natives known as Joe and Medo. Keith Webb also arrived to take "Wyella" to Darwin.



With "Una V" and "Myrtle Burgess" in port together the two Marine Section Warrant Officers compared voyages and places they had visited as well as experiences. With Phil Parker ("Myrtle Burgess") and Cliff is Artamo, the Cook, in Oro Bay.

20 November there was a change in Skippers with Bully Haynes leaving and returning south and SGT Harold Noisiter from Port Moresby to take over command of "Una V" for the run to Port Moresby. Their arrival was on 2 December and three days later Cliff Searle assumed command of "Una V".

"Una Crew"

Skipper	Sergeant Cliff Searle
First Mate	Harry White,
Dennis Newton	Engineer
MBC	Snow Williams.
MBC	Billy Jones
Wireless Opp.	Eric Farmer

Assorted cargo was loaded for Milne Bay together with seven passengers, who went as deck cargo, and the boat left that day, 5 December. Next day they were well off the coast of New Guinea being tossed about like a cork in a violent storm with all the passengers violently sea sick. Entering Milne Bay the day following and its calm waters revived the passengers. Here Cliff had the pleasure of meeting his brother, Jim, a member of the AIF Transport Division.

Along side the Marine Section wharf was the sunken "Anshun" which had been attacked by a Japanese Destroyer as well as blowing up the Marine Section Crash Boat and killing the Coxswain Jim Geapen. The Fitter, Paddy May, swam ashore to East Cape with a broken leg where he was looked after by the Natives, and carried back to the Marine Section.

At last on 9 December the "Una V" left with a cargo for the RAAF Radar Unit on Goodenough Island followed by a trip to Lae with supplies. While in these reef strewn waters Cliff always had a New Guinea native up the mast spotting for reefs and "nigger heads" when making landfall.

After Cliff Searle was posted from UNA V, Coxswain Bob Manning took over command with Harry White as First Mate. Harry would remain in the Crew for the following 12 months. For some time Una V would continue to operate out of Milne Bay supplying the secret RAAF Radar Units on off shore islands and mainland New Guinea. Later she transferred her operations to Noemfoor Island and continued in her role of supplying Bases. On one occasion Una V and her Crew were involved in rescuing a group of Indian Servicemen who had suffered greatly under the Japanese guards in a P.O.W. camp. These men had some how escaped and were given shelter by native villagers. Harry believes the river, where they sailed at high tide to reach the village, was on the Island of Roemberpon.

Harry White was posted back to Australia shortly afterwards but Una V would continue serving the Bases and small Units right up until the end of hostilities.

From this time onwards "Una V" was full time transporting supplies, equipment and personnel to Radar Bases on off shore islands, and Bases all along the east and north coast of New Guinea with



Cliff's new posting was to deliver 02.1 from Milne Bay up the east coast of New Guinea then onto Madang where this photograph was taken after dropping anchor. (C. Searle)



02.2 arriving in the harbour of Noemfoor Island. C. Searle)

different Skippers and Crews. Warrant Officer Bob Manning was one of the Skippers.

Cliff Searle went on to take charge of a number of RAAF Marine Section Boats like 02.1, and take 02.2 to Moratai, the longest open sea trip of any small RAAF boat.

"Una V"

This 100 year old ship had given sterling service to the RAAF during her time in the New Guinea waters, but when the war ended she was sold at a disposal sale. For many years she operated as an Island Trader vessel then taken over by a group of Native New Guinea men and renamed "The Blue Seagull". During a cyclone she was sunk off Kar Kar Island with a loss of all hands.

02.1 Air Sea Rescue Boat

Warrant Officer Cliff Searle was flown into the Marine Section in Milne Bay to take command of 02.1, an Air Sea Rescue Boat, 48 feet long and a beam of 14 feet wide. Powered by three Chrysler, 8 cylinder petrol engines, and loaded with full fuel tanks and supplies, set sail up the East coast of New Guinea.

Crew consisted of Skipper Cliff Searl, Engineer, two MBC and a Wireless Operator. After refueling at Buna they pushed on to Lae to take on more fuel for these petrol motors consumed a great deal. Next port was Saidor where they anchored for the night then pushed on to Madang arriving on 2 June 1944. This made 02.1 the first small ship to enter this port after it was taken from the Japanese.

Shortly afterwards Cliff received orders to return to Saidor where they were directed to Sieo Harbour to take in tow 16.01 "Endeavour" a 56 foot launch, which had been stranded there for three weeks. The Skipper was W.O. Phil Parker, George Lockyer MBC, and Engineer Warren Shick. The tow ended back in Madang where Phil Parker was flown home suffering greatly with Malaria.

So ended Cliff's short period in charge of 02.1 for with kit bag and gear he then boarded one of the new RAAF steel constructed Cargo Ships commanded by W.O. Dave Miller of the Marine Section. Cliff's destination was the Island of Noemfoor where he was to be Skipper of 02.2.

02.2 Air Sea Rescue Boat

Soon after stepping ashore at Noemfoor Island the C.O. explained to Cliff how returning aircraft Crews had reported seeing a man waving a towel from a beach in the vicinity of a Japanese airstrip at Manokwari. It was thought the person might be one of their Pilots, who had crash landed there, so he wanted Cliff to take 02.2 and carry out a rescue.

Cliff immediately had a scrambling net taken on board, guns and rifles checked, and fuel tanks topped up for the long trip of 190 miles.

Crew of 02.2

Skipper	Cliff "Cisco" Searle
MBC	Bill Hoey
Engineer	Dennis Newton
Wireless Operator	Eric Farmer

Radio Code name "Cats Eyes"

Officer Passengers: Doctor, Met. Officer, Interpreter, and an Intelligence Officer made quite a load for a boat 45 foot long. Neither life jackets nor dinghy was carried!

Being directed to arrive at the beach some 95 miles away 02.2 departed and made the journey in pitch darkness steering by a P8 Compass with only the light of the luminous dials showing. Right on time, and on course, landfall was made just off the sandy beach and to the surprise of everyone on board, a figure waving a towel, appeared on shore. With a steep shelving beach Cliff eased right up to the figure standing in the shallows. With the scrambling net draped over the bow, and onboard helping hands, the man was quickly brought on board, and with the motors going astern, quickly departed.

The Interpreter immediately informed Cliff that there were seven more men waiting a short distance away along the beach. Overhead the air cover planes were strafing the air strip and buildings, while out to sea a Catalina was standing by. In quick time the remaining seven were hauled on board and, with full power, 02.2 took off for Base. From a safe distance off shore cruising speed was resumed for the long trip. It was then that Cliff discovered that those, who had been rescued were escaped POW Indonesians all covered in sores and very ill.

Some time later a drifting Japanese landing barge was spotted directly ahead so cautiously Cliff approached and on coming along side found no one onboard. Like pir aces of old the "prize" was taken in tow back to Noemfoor for it was found to be in good condition.



As L.A.C. Cliff Searle (June 1940) he had been on 02.2, this same vessel, when it under went trials after delivery from the Builders. Now as W.O. He took over as Skipper. (C.Searle)



W.O. Cliff Searle (2nd from left) arriving back on Noemfoor Island just having rescued these emaciated Javanese ex prisoners of the Japanese, from a beach near the Japanese Base of Manokwari. (C.Searle)



Warrant officer Cliff (Cisco) Searle with a shipmate.
(C. Searle)



02.2 Crew.
L to R Bill Hoey,
MBC, Denis
Newton,
Engineer, Eric
Farmer, WOP,
Cliff Searle.
They operated
from the Islands
of Biak and
Noemfoor.
(C.Searle)

On arrival back at Base a welcoming Committee of RAAF and American Officers, who were no doubt waiting on the jetty fully expecting a completely different group. After explanations and congratulations the Interpreter conveyed the grateful thanks from the rescued to the Skipper and Crew of 02.2. The sick men were soon conveyed to the Hospital on the Base.

Every one involved in this risky exercise had quiet satisfaction in their accomplishment as well as their safe return.

02.2 Off to Morotai

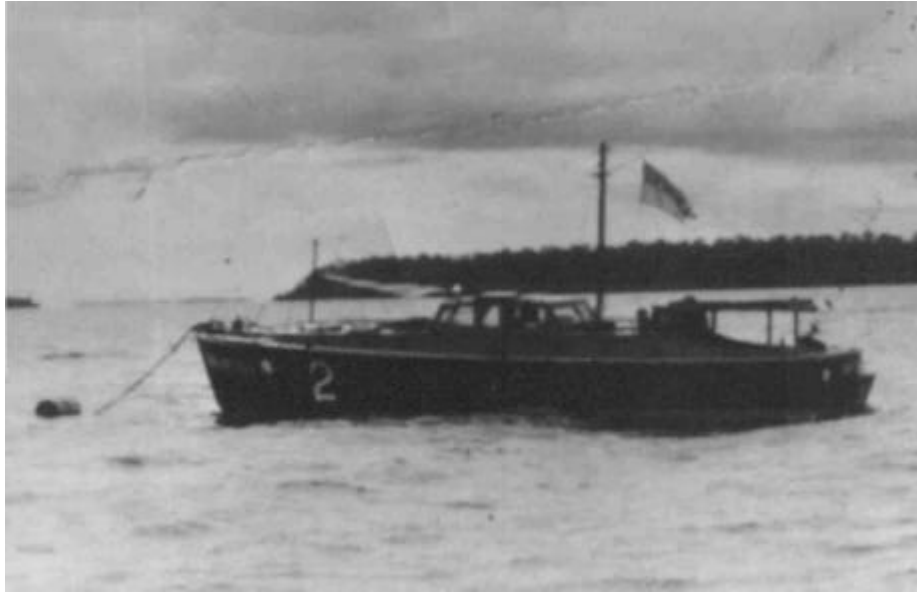
(Radio Call sign, "Cats Eyes")

Now being Skipper of 02.2, Cliff was reminded of the time, as an LAC, he had sailed on this same boat when it underwent speed trials after delivery from the Builders, Evans Deakin of Brisbane. The then Crew comprised of Lester Cribb, Skipper, Keith Webb, Jim Payton, Keith Robinson, Charlie Poshley and Paul Heesh. All these men played a very important role in the Marine Section during the war.

With the same Crew on 02.2, WO Cliff Searle departed Noemfoor for RAAF Base Morotai, the longest open sea journey for a relatively small RAAF vessel, (400 miles) thus creating some what of a record. The two 44 gallons of fuel securely tied down in the aft cockpit would be used to top up the inboard tanks while crossing the Equator. Halfway the engines were stopped and the high octane fuel was transferred to the boat's tanks. It was only later that Cliff remembered that the kerosene refrigerator, with its naked flame had not been extinguished during the refueling. One Marine Section Boat had been blown up and completely destroyed in a similar incident. This transit voyage took some 20 hours averaging 14.5 knots and only Asia Atoll was sighted.

Landfall was deliberately 10 miles east of Morotai because the Japanese were still occupying part of Morotai and Halmahera Island to the South. 02.2 finally dropped her anchor off the American Base and so became the first RAAF Marine Section Boat to take up duties there.

Soon after this arrival Cliff heard that the Military Police (M.P.s) intended searching his Boat so the Crew set to work tying fishing line to each bottle of Whisky, Brandy and Gin and lowered them over the bow. Each line was attached to the anchor bollard then the anchor line re-tied to cover the fishing line. The MPs duly came aboard and made a careful search and discovered no illegal imports. The bottle was recovered but their final use was not revealed!



02.2 just after arriving in Morotai in 1944 thus completing the first longest open sea voyage of a Marine Section Boat. (C.Searle)



02.8 now used as a Tourist Boat has been meticulously restored and thus prolonging its life. It is a sister boat to 02.1 delivered by Cliff in the post war period. (C.Searle)

02.2 operated out of Morotai to Ternate in the Halmahera taking supplies and picking up various RAAF and AIF personnel and returning them back to the Base at Morotai. Some of these trips to Ternate were made under the cover of darkness.

The RAAF Marine Section operated under the control of OBU No.60 and while there they were able to utilize the American floating dry dock to replace the propeller shafts bearings.

Morotai was like a floating aircraft carrier for there were Spitfires, Liberators, Mitchells, Lightnings, Bostons, which were replaced by Beaufighters, Douglas Transports, and part of the US 13th Air Force. On Pito Strip alone there were some 77 aircraft.

Later a RAN 920 Series Air Boat, commanded by Lt. Alex McLean, with a crew of eight, including two RAAF Wireless Air Gunners (WAG), was also involved in Air Sea Rescue work because of the large number of aircraft movements before and after the Borneo invasion.

Cessation of the War.

At the cessation of the War Sergeant John Roxbrough assumed command of 02.2 allowing Cliff to return to Australia aboard a Flying Fortress. After a period of leave Cliff took over the Marine Section at Port Stephens.

Although the war had ended the Marine Section would continue to operate well into the post war period.

Having entered the RAAF in June 1941, Warrant Officer Cliff Searle remained on active duty until January 1946 when he was finally Discharged.

After the war 02.1, 02.2 and 02.3 were all sold at one of the many Disposal Sales conducted all over Australia and the Islands to the North. Every type of equipment, supplies, ships, aircraft, infact, everything needed to support fighting forces in a war was sold.

Post War Delivery

Cliff had one very pleasant duty to perform during the post war period when he was asked to deliver 02.1 from Rose Bay to Surfers Paradise. What recollections must have come flooding back to Cliff as he made this delivery passage up the East Coast of New South Wales. Perhaps a most pleasurable finale to his years of sailing a great range of RAAF Marine Section Vessels.

S.S."Wanaka"

The "Wanaka" was built by Alexander Stephens & Sons Ltd of Lint House, Glasgow and handed over to the owners on 23 February 1938 and set sail for New Zealand three days later via the Panama Canal.

In 1942 the Australian Government took over the "Wanaka" for service with the RAAF but manned by the New Zealand Union Shipping Company Officers. Australian Merchant Service seamen, RAN Gunners, RAAF Medical Attendants, Wireless Operators, Storekeepers and Mess Stewards.

"Wanaka" became a familiar sight in northern waters Bases, and on her arrival, was always welcome, for she carried personal letters from home, along with fresh meat, and vegetables in her refrigerators. General cargo, equipment and personnel on postings was also carried. Life was hazardous for this ship, having been bombed in Port Moresby and Darwin but thankfully suffered only minor bomb splinter damage.

Captain John Dawson was in Command and FLGOFF A.B. Sharland was O.C. (Officer in Charge of Troops).

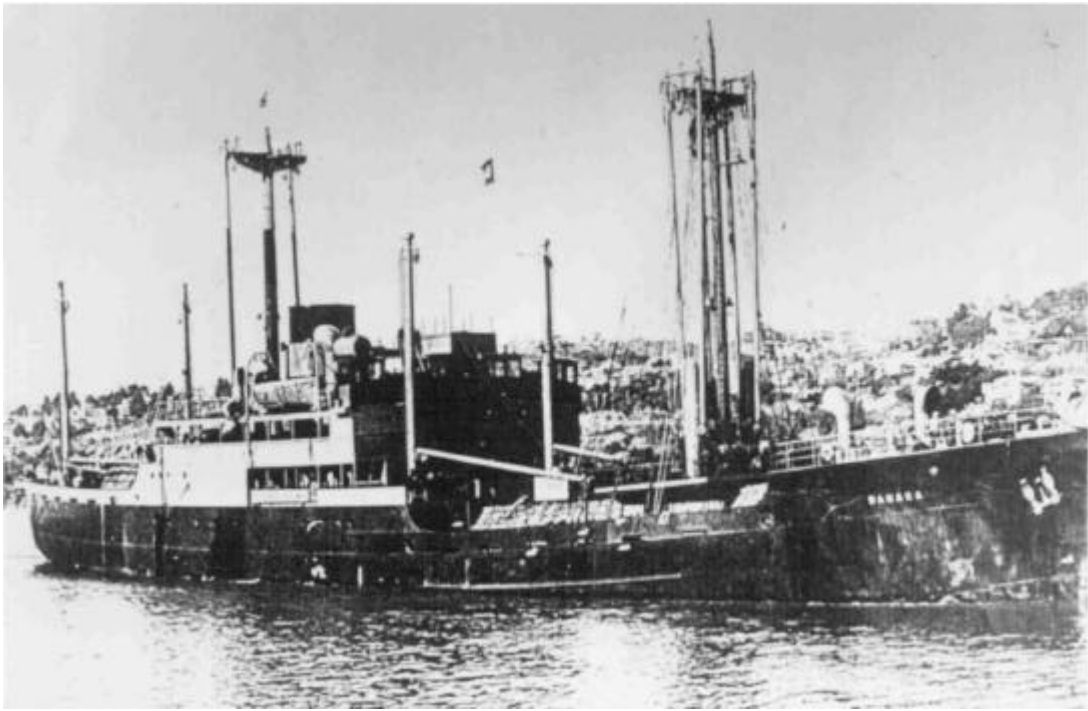
On 23 March 1942 "Wanaka" in Gavatu with the usual cargo along with 1000 drums of aviation fuel, while on deck was the new Crash Boat for the Marine Section. In no time the Crash Boat was operating with the steady arrival of Catalina and Sunderland flying boats. On 5 May 1942 a Japanese float plane attacked the new Crash Boat and completely destroyed it just before the Japanese invaded and occupied the Base.

"Wanaka" made a return voyage south down the Great Barrier Reef when she encountered winds of 130 MPH on 15 December 1943. She was driven onto Eden Reef shortly after midnight and capsized on to her side throwing ten Crew Member overboard. When the winds abated a search over two days failed to find nine of the bodies.

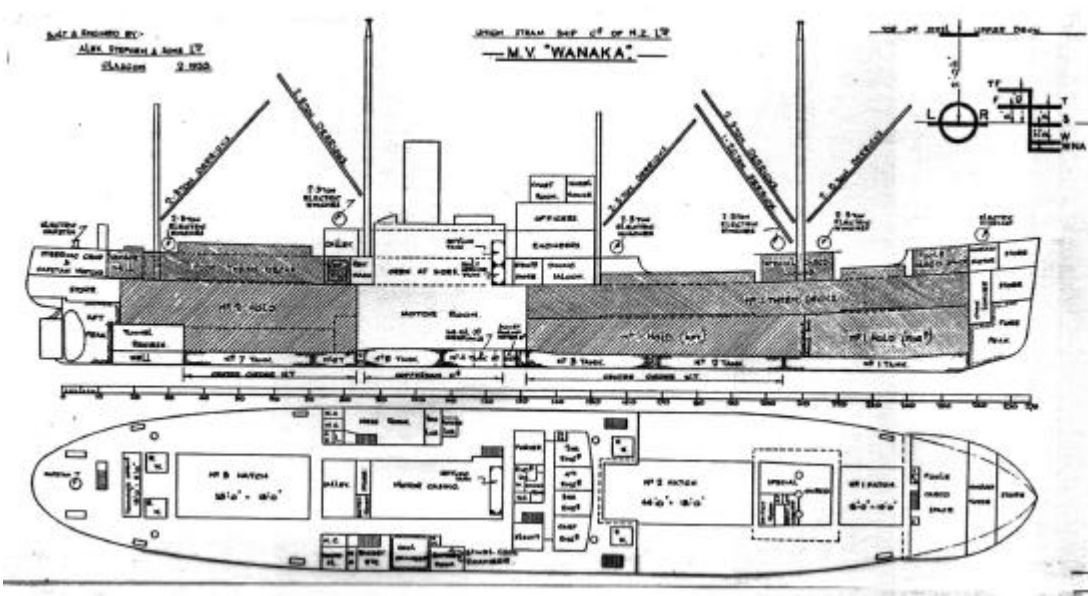
Word of the wreck reached the Commonwealth Marine Salvage Board and Captain J.P. Williams was soon there to assess the possibility of salvaging the "Wanaka". Although the ship was on her side it was believed she could be saved so a call was made for a salvage crew from the Sydney water front but there was no response.

WGCDR E.C. Buttfield, C.O. of No.1 Transportation & Movements Office called for RAAF volunteers with sea going experience. Fourteen men were selected, and with necessary gear, supplies, ropes and navigation equipment were flown to the site of the ship in a Martin Mariner flying boat. Tons of sand and coral had to be removed along with all kinds of debris and rotting foods as well as many tons of stone ballast that had shifted. One hundred tons of bagged sand was placed on the port deck to try to level the ship and temporary hull repairs were made.

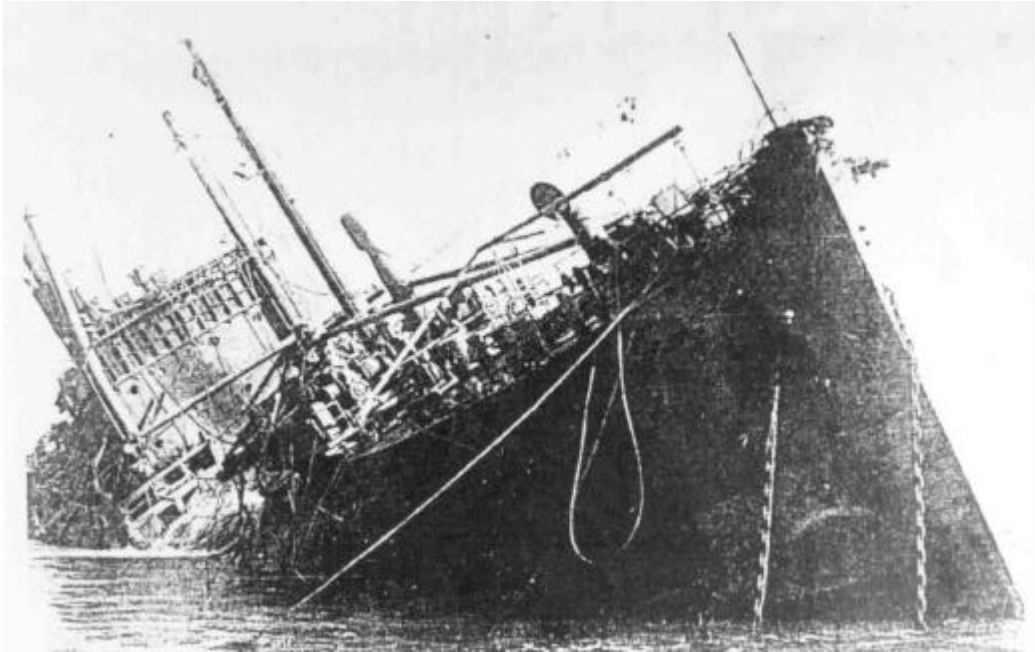
M.V. "Wanaka"



The MV "Wanaka" played a very important role in supplying essential equipment, personnel and food to RAAF Units throughout the islands and ports.
(New Zealand Union Shipping)

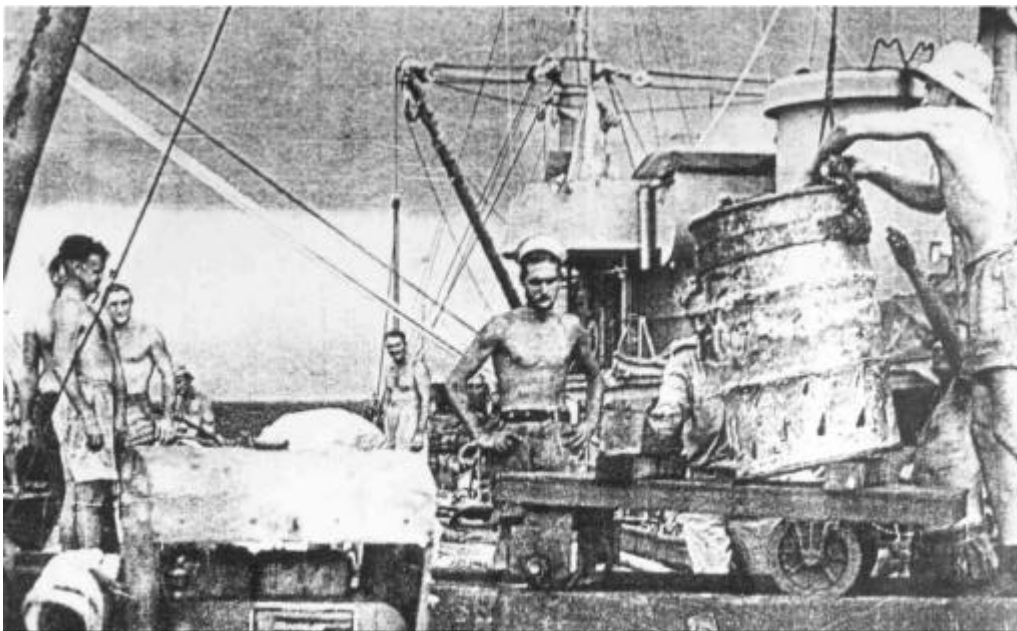


The large cargo carrying capacity made "Wanaka" a very important ship during those desperate days after the Japanese invasion of the islands closest to the Australian mainland.
(New Zealand Union Shipping)



A call to the Sydney waterfront for a salvage crew brought no response so WGCDR E.C. Buttfield called for RAAF volunteers.

(N.Z. Union Shipping).



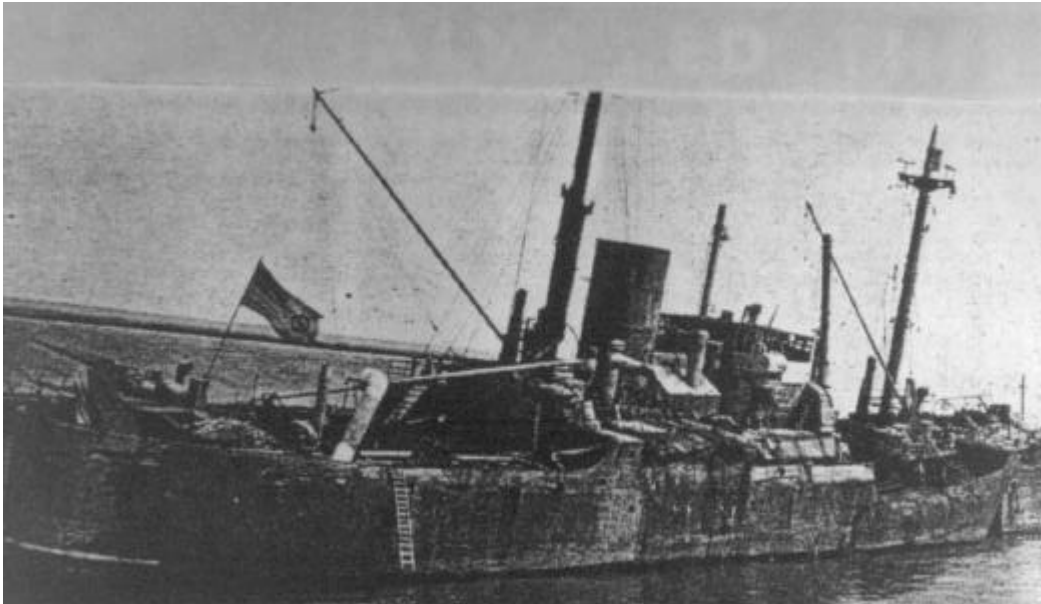
RAAF Volunteers had an enormous task in removing a great deal of sand, coral and debris so that repairs could be made before towing could commence.

(N.Z. Union Shipping)

Radio Operators had to rig emergency alarm bells from the battered bridge to the Crews' quarters as well as field telephones to the stern steering position. With the "Wanaka" undertow the Volunteers had to hand steer the ship with orders coming from the Bridge. To keep the ship undertow in a sea way took a great deal of hard and tiring work.

Finally the "Wanaka" sailed through the Sydney Heads, with a pronounced list, dirty, and rusty but proudly flying the RAAF Ensign. A valuable piece of shipping had been successfully salvaged through the efforts of the Volunteers and the skilled salvage personnel. Repairs were made and "Wanaka" resumed supplying duties with the RAAF until in 1946 was handed back to the Owners. So began another era for the Union Shipping Company plying between Sydney and Hobart. Later the ship was re-sold on a number of occasions and in each case had a name change until broken up in Taiwan in 1968.

M.V. "Wanaka's" Sydney Arrival



Finally MV "Wanaka" was towed through Sydney Harbour, with the RAAF Ensign flying, in a battered and rusty condition. She went on to be repaired & returned to supplying RAAF Units for the rest of the war.

(N.Z. Union Shipping)

RAAF Townsville Marine Section

Flight Sergeant Guy Moody (later SQNLDR) and Corporal Chidgey sought an interview with FLYOFF Matt Doolan to seek his assistance in a proposal they had formulated. They considered in a bid to save Air Crew lives they could increase the speed of their 08.12 Crash Boat if they could get hold of two engines that were in store in Sydney (bush telegraph had provided the information). Their boat was too slow to respond to an emergency involving their Squadron Catalinas then on patrols in the Coral Sea Battle.

Matt Doolan was a Stores Officer but considered the proposition commendable and should be implemented so he went immediately to see a certain SQNLDR, who shall remain nameless. On entering the office Matt was aware that a Group Captain was already there seated but when he explained the situation he was rudely interrupted:

"Doolan! Don't you know there is a war on."

Matt was about to leave at this reception but retorted:

"Yes I know there is a war otherwise I would be in my Office in General Motors in Port Melbourne instead of being in this office being insulted and berated by you in front of this Senior Officer."

"Get out of my office!" was the SQNLDR's command.

When Matt reached the door he spun around and blurted out; "I'll get those two bloody Chrysler Royal Marine Engines if it is the last thing I do in the Air Force!" then shot through.

That night Matt went to the Mess to have a drink and he was aware that his Commanding Officer, WGCDR Hampshire and the visiting GPCAPT were together. The CO beckoned Matt over to join him and said: "I believe you had a run in with our erstwhile Friend!"

"He's no bloody friend of mine!" retorted Matt.

"By the way Matt, meet GPCAPT Caldwell (Killer)."

Caldwell said to Matt, "If you had spoken to me like you did to the SQNLDR I would have had you Court-martialled."

"Sir, would you have spoken to me in front of a Senior Officer in the way I was spoken to?" replied Matt.

The reply was an emphatic no. "He was totally out of order and I admire you for what you said."

"He's an obstructionist, Matt!" was the C.O's remark. "We will take it up with the AOC, AIRCDRE Cobby tomorrow."



The floating pontoon at Townsville was where the Marine Section Boats were moored and refuelled. (Norm Greaves)



From the Marine Section Control Tower all boat and flying boat aircraft movements could be controlled and monitored. A RAN ML 1028 was here heading out on patrol. (Doug Kirby)



08.38 Crash Boat was a sister boat to 08.12 that figured in the new motors incident in Townsville.
(D. Kirby)



Left is 08.38, with Crew, together with 08.37 with a few of the local Townsville children.
(D. Kirby)

Next morning Matt and the CO reported to the AOC's Office at 10am and at the appointed time the CO pushed Matt into the Office and he himself remained outside.

After Matt outlined the proposal the AOC replied:

"That's a perfectly reasonable request."

"Sir," said Matt, "there's an Empire Flying Boat leaving Rose Bay at 6.30 tomorrow morning so if the No.2 Stores could get the motors there they would be here tomorrow night."

With that information the AOC picked up his telephone and spoke to Sydney and ordered the motors, the propellers and tail shafts to be delivered immediately and no excuses.

Two weeks later Matt happened to be passing by the SQNLDR's Office and was summoned in.

"Doolan, after a lot of work I have been able to influence the powers to be to get those motors allotted to No.41 Squadron and they should arrive in a month.

This was the last straw to Matt, who then retorted:

"SQNLDR, you remember I said I would get those motors, well you had bugger all to do with it, and for your information, AIRCDRE Cobby, the Commanding Officer and I were on the Crash Boat 08.12 during its speed trials along the breakwater last Sunday morning when it did 28 knots in both directions!"

Flight Sergeant Guy Moody later received a Commission and rose in rank in RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne.

Martin Mariner Motors Episode

FLGOFF Matt Dillon had two Martin Mariner Flying Boats unserviceable because each had a motor that needed replacing but the Central RAAF Stores had none. Matt approached his C.O. and asked what he was going to do about this problem.

"What can you do about it Matt?" was the CO's retort.

"Are you busy after lunch, Sir?" "I know a fellow at the Aitkenvale American Stores Depot," was Matt's reply.

That afternoon Matt and the CO went in the Staff Car to the US Depot and the first sign that confronted them in letters 3 feet high was:

**REQUEST NO PERSON IN THIS ESTABLISHMENT IS AUTHORIZED TO SAY
"NO" TO A LEGITIMATE.**



02.3 Rescue Launch waiting to be taken on the Townsville Marine Section slip.
(D.Kirby)



“Swanny” in 011.105 Work Boat coming into Roos Creek, Townsville.
(D. Kirby)

"Hello Matt, what are you doing here?" asked the friend when Matt and the CO were ushered into an office.

"Looking for a bit of help, I've two Martin Mariner aircraft requiring two motors and the RAAF Stores have none." was Matt's explanation.

With that the Officer picked up his telephone and spoke to some one. "I want two Mariner Motors and props. delivered to No.41 Squadron this afternoon!"

When Matt and the CO left the building the CO exclaimed: "I'll be buggered Matt, \$20,000 just like that and you cannot get two bob's worth out of Our Mob.

RAAF Base Garbut, Townsville, was also a pre-embarkation Depot for personnel being posted to the tropics. There they were briefed on personal health precautions, had inoculations, informed about diseases they were to combat, security, self defence and further weapon training prior to being posted. These men usually learnt of their final destination after arriving in New Guinea or Northern Australia, such was the security operating in those days.

The Port of Townsville was an important convoy assembly point for ships taking vital supplies into the war zone as well as troops involved in invading places like Lae in New Guinea. U.S. General Heavy had himself taken by a RAAF Air Sea Rescue Boat from Oro Bay on the East coast of New Guinea to a position off Lae so that he could personally inspect the coast where his troops would make their landing.

From Townsville Catalina aircraft departed on their long patrols especially during the period known as the Coral Sea Battle. Flying boats would also land and depart from this Base because of the presence of the Marine Section located there. Many visits by these flying boats was in personnel movements as well as urgent supplies and equipment going North. Martin Mariner Transport aircraft staged through this Base.

Townsville played a most important role throughout the conflict with the Japanese.

Australia's Secret No.1.Flying Boat Repair Base

RAAF Lake Boga

With RAAF Rathmines vulnerable to possible attack by the Japanese it was decided to construct a FBRB in the most unlikely location. Lake Boga, a fresh water lake, some 188 miles inland from Melbourne.

Cliff Searle, of the Marine Section was posted there and well recalls how the personnel paraded each morning in the main street outside the Royal Hotel. The Advance Party had arrived in Swan Hill on 2 July 1942 and was billeted in this hotel until quarters were constructed in a design to represent a country town. Within a few months the barracks and supporting facilities were completed and the Base fully operational.

Many of the RAAF Personnel were young WAAAF on their first posting and to some of the Marine Section, who had already experienced operational duties against the Japanese, these young women looked extremely young, as they were.

Sailing dinghys had arrived at Lake Boga from RAAF Point Cook, and the WAAAF officer, Sheila Patrick asked Cliff Searle to have the Marine Section teach the girls to sail as a recreational activity. This close contact in the confines of a sailing dinghy was a not an unwelcome duty. On occasions the girls had to be "rescued" by the Marine Section Boats because of dust storms or heavy westerlies.

With the constant arrival and departure of all the types of flying boats and sea planes used by the RAAF, the Marine Section was kept busy. Duty Crews live in an old farm house on the edge of the slipway and to be close to their large Motor Boat.

Major overhauls to Catalina, Sunderland, Mariners, Dorniers and Kingfisher Seaplanes was done at Lake Boga by both members of the RAAF and the WAAAF as was the case on many Bases. From 1942 onward No.1 Flying Boat Repair Depot at Lake Boga made an enormous contribution to the war effort, for through the expertise of the Ground Staff and the back up of the Support Services, there must have been hundreds of aircraft returned to the Squadrons operating against the Japanese.

Members of the Marine Section usually moved on to Operational Bases, as did Cliff Searle, for he was posted to Melbourne as Coxswain on the large sailing Ketch, 015. "UNA V" that played an important role in New Guinea waters carrying need supplies, personnel and equipment to many RAAF isolated Units and Bases.



RAAF Base Lake Boga, located some 300km North West of Melbourne was probably the most important but isolated Seaplane & Flying Boat Repair Base in the RAAF.
(Moyna J. Sands)



Members of the Marine Section at the secret Lake Boga Flying Boat Repair Base in Victoria. A great number of flying boats were fully repaired and major overhauls completed before they returned to operational Squadrons.
(Kitch Williams)

No.1 Bombing & Gunnery School

RAAF Evans Head

Up until WW2 Evans Head was a grassed area designated as an Emergency Landing Ground and from there RAAF aircraft carried out training exercises. Evans Head was at that time a small fishing town but would suddenly change with the arrival of a great number of RAAF personnel and later followed by an influx of WAAAF.

It was during 1940 that the Base at Evans Head was created to provide the facilities to give the practical training to Observers (later known as Navigators), Wireless Air Gunners and Air Gunners under the Empire Air Training Scheme. In a short time some 1000 Personnel, Instructors and Air Crew Trainees were operating from this Base. Gunnery Ranges were located from the shoreline out to sea, and the Bombing Ranges were along the shoreline.

Each month saw the new arrival of another Course of Air Crew Trainees and the departure of the Graduating Course with their newly attached Wing.

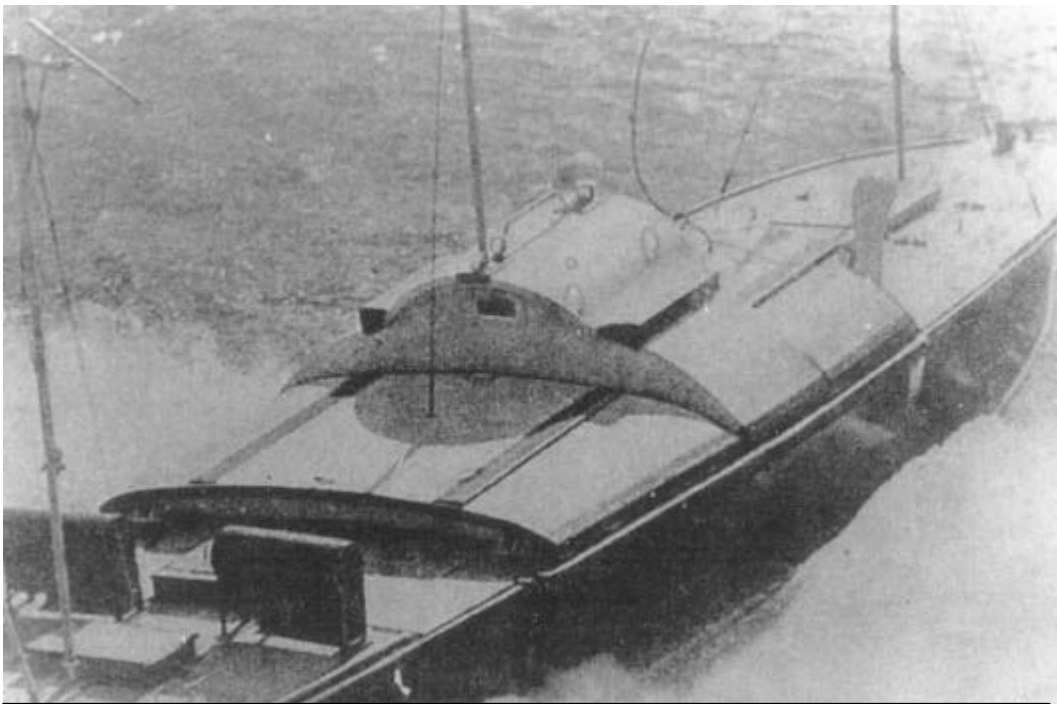
The RAAF marine Section provided an essential service during all the continuous flying periods for there was the ever present possibility of flying accidents. The Marine Section was situated on the Evans Head River and maintenance facilities and slip way meant all the different Types of Boats could be kept in first class condition and ready for any emergency.

An Armoured Target Boat was a hazardous occupation for the Marine Section Crews. Sergeant Lester Cribb was in Charge and others at the time were Paul Heesh, Ted Feish, Charlie Poshley, "Bluey" Salmon and Cliff Searle. The arrival of 02.2 Air Sea Rescue Boat was well and truly tested on the Richmond River by the Marine Section before commencing duties. In later years this Boat would be operating around New Guinea and later Skippered by W.O. Cliff Searle, who would sail her to Morotai. W.O. Lester Cribb would also Skipper 03.13 Air Sea Rescue Boat from Port Moresby, up the east coast and north coast of New Guinea.

Even today the Evans Head Bombing Range is still used by the RAAF Bases of Amberley and William Town by the F111 and F/A aircraft.



RAAF Base Evans Head, Marine Section was located on the Evans River, a short distance to the Pacific Ocean. It was here that Air Gunners & Navigators carried out their Bombing & Gunnery training. (Jean Haughton-James)



The Armoured Target Boat Crew had no side view in this top heavy boat so it must have been a relief for the Crew when bombing ceased.

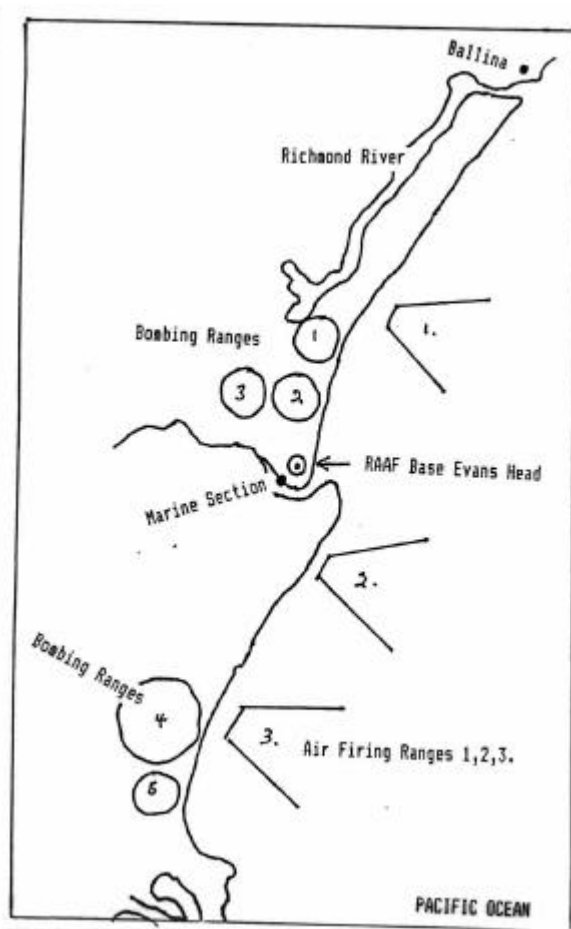
(Jean Haughton-James)



Pen moorings provided for the Marine Section range of boats at Evans Head. (Jean Haughton-James)



"Nancy Lee" a small sloop of Evans Head Marine Section. (Jean Haughton-James)



Bombing and Gunnery Ranges were located along the coast at RAAF Base Evans Head.



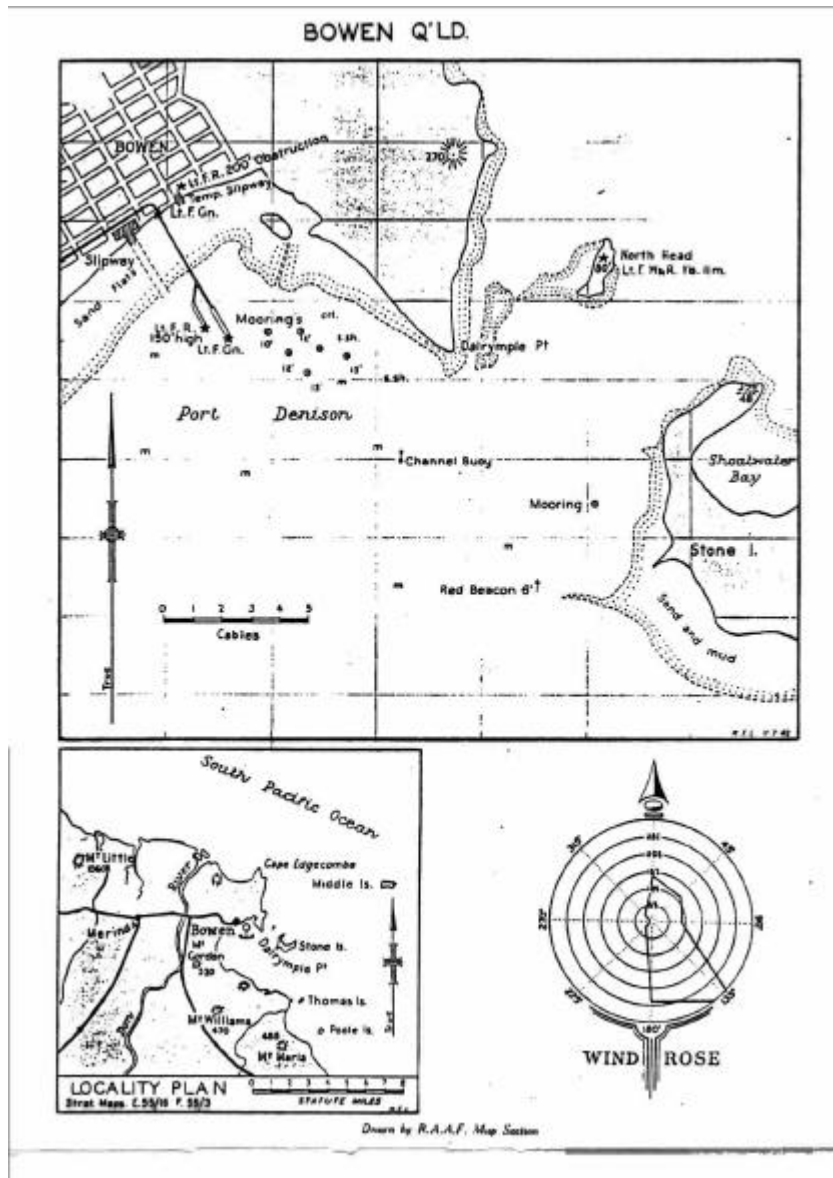
Fairy Battle aircraft were used by both Air gunners and Observer/ Navigator Trainees for their final training segment before receiving their Wings. (M. Murray)



02.2 Air Sea Rescue Boat being fitted out at Patons Slipway, Evans Head by Charlie Paslie, in June 1940. (Cliff Searle)



02.2 during trials (June 1940) on the Richmond River with Coxswain Lester Cribb, Keith Webb, Jim Payton and Cliff Searle. The exhaustive testing was carried out & this boat was still operating 5 years later in far away Morotai, with Cliff Searle as Skipper. (Cliff Searle)



RAAF Base Bowen

The RAAF Marine Section, located at Bowen in Queensland played an important role during the Catalina offensive against the Japanese Forces after they occupied many bases in the Solomon Islands.

Gradually a very important servicing and repair facility for flying boats was created and expanded at Bowen.

Pilots flying Martin Mariner flying Boats often utilized Bowen to gain experience at night flying circuits and landings.

Flying Boats would also use Bowen as a staging Base on there way north to New Guinea and northern Australia.



Arrival of the Dutch Dornier Flying Boats gave the RAAF an added Flying Boat Transport & Air Sea Rescue capability. With engines mounted high above water these aircraft were capable of landing in rough water. The small lower wing like structure allowed rescued personnel to be hauled onto it. (Keith Roberts)



Delivery from America in 1943 of the new & very large Martin Mariners gave the RAAF another Transport & Air Sea Rescue capability. They carried personnel, vital equipment and supplies throughout the war zones without any defensive armament.

(Keith Roberts)

Other RAAF Flying Boats

Dornier Flying Boats that were taken over by the RAAF had been in service with the Dutch East Indies Navy since they were built in Germany during 1937. They were used in the evacuation of Dutch civilians and Service Personnel to Australia in 1942 and then offered to the Australian Government.

These flying boats had, had considerable use so they required some maintenance before commencing flying duties with the RAAF. FLTLT Keith Roberts completed his conversion on Dorniers A49-3, with Captain, SQDLDR Mather AFC, in January 1944 at RAAF Rathmines. They flew to Townsville then onto Milne Bay and operated along the coast of New Guinea in an Air Sea Rescue role. Two Pilots, one Navigator and one Rigger comprised the Crew with the Pilots making radio communications their responsibility. Keith well remembers that sandwiches were carried on their patrols, but when the Rigger handed them to the Pilots they often had traces of engine oil.

The small, lower "stub wing" on the Dornier acted as a stabiliser on the water but also was ideally placed when coming onboard, or if a retrieving some one in the water or from a dinghy. Engines were very high, which was an advantage during take off and landing. The fuselage being quite small there was very little space for cargo.

The Dorniers of No.41 Squadron were only in operations for a few months before being replaced by the newly arrived replacements.

Martin Mariners, a twin engine aircraft, that the United States Services used in a variety of roles, was selected by the RAAF in the Transport role. Twelve of these Transport aircraft duly arrived and formed No.41 Squadron. They carried a great number of Service Personnel, equipment and supplies from any where in the Eastern States to Port Moresby, Milne Bay and all along the Southern, Eastern and Northern coast line of New Guinea.

Keith Roberts recalled the assistance given to the Australian Army by air lifting Commandoes and other Army Sections into the interior regions of New Guinea and landing on lakes and winding tropical rivers. This was hazardous exercise for rivers were known to have floating logs and debris. Retrieval of these clandestine groups at the conclusion of a patrol would save the men an enormous amount of time, especially when that factor was of the essence.

Very little has been recorded about the enormous contribution made by both the RAAF Crews and their Martin Mariner Transports. The hull was extremely strong as was proved when a Mariner was forced down in a storm off the Queensland coast.



Keith Roberts was the Pilot of this Martin Mariner “Jacquinot- Jane” throughout this region. Forty plus passengers

Were usually carried as well as luggage etc but it has been reported that the Australian Army did once load 85 fully equipped paratroopers on board a Martin Mariner. (Keith Roberts)



The immense size of the hull can be seen behind this group of Mariner Pilots and Navigators. Keith Roberts is third from the left. (Keith Roberts)

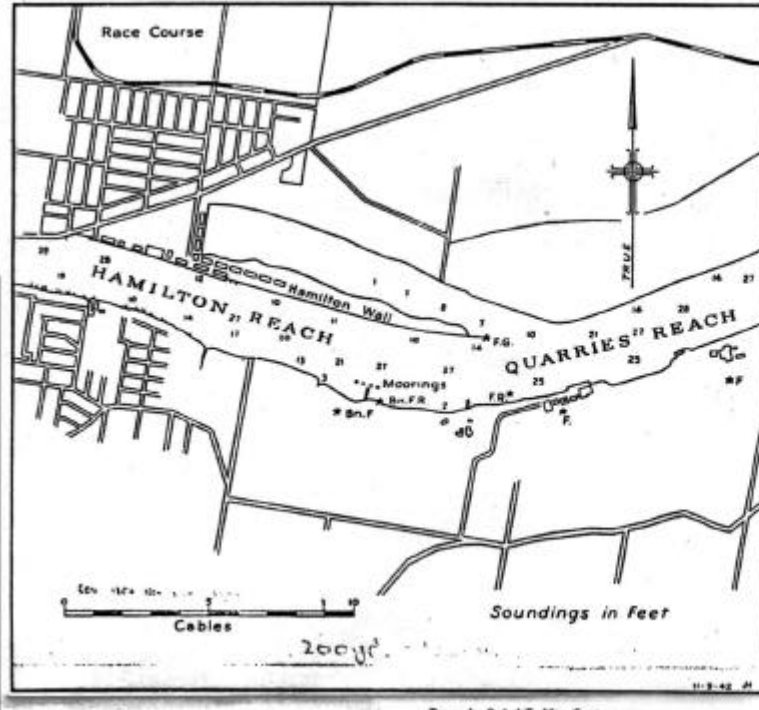


Madang was one of the few Bases where a Mariner could safely come along side a jetty. (Stewart White)



Although only a very short jetty the Martin Mariner could unload/load its cargo and passengers just a short distance from the shore. (S. White, Pilot)

165
Brisbane
Capital of Queensland



Mariners formatting after departing RAAF Base Cairns. Their gull shaped wings gave the engines necessary clearance above water when landing in rough sea conditions during Air sea Rescues. (S.White)

RAAF Marine Section boats and Crews operated where ever the Martin Mariners operated, to provide the refueling, and movement of Air Crews, passengers and equipment. A very important role they carried out was clearing the take off path of any floating material, then being on hand during the crucial period, when engines at full power and the aircraft up on its step about to leave the water. Accidents had occurred previously so it was reassuring to Air Crews to have Crash boats close at hand, and often the Marine Section Crews would race along side the departing aircraft. After landing the crash boat would accompany the taxing flying boat in case of some emergency, as was the case on the Brisbane River.

Mariner emergency landing.

On the night of 15 August 1944 a fully laden Mariner made a normal take off down the Brisbane River and after climbing away turned over the City of Brisbane. Suddenly, without warning, there was an engine failure, and smoke began pouring from the engine.

Being low over the City created an extra burden on the Captain FLTLT Roberts, who with skilful flying and a great deal of luck on his side, completed a single engine circuit and landing back on the Brisbane River.

Marine Section Crash Boats were immediately on the scene to take the aircraft under tow to a mooring while all other boats quickly moved the thirty passengers to the wharf while Ground Staff clambered up onto the very high wing to smother the engine with fire extinguisher material.

Both the Service Passengers and the Flight Crew were greatly relieved to be safely back on shore because of the flying skill of both Pilots and the efficient manner the Marine Section Personnel answered this highly dangerous situation.

The Mariner was delayed on the Brisbane River for ten days while the defective engine was repaired and flight tested before carrying on to RAAF Base Cairns.

Flight Sergeant Stewart E. White was the Co-Pilot on this aircraft and continued flying with No. 41 Squadron for the next year. He was then posted to No.114 Air Sea Rescue Flight still flying Martin Mariners. Individual Mariners and their Crews, although based in Cairns, would spend some two weeks at strategically located Marine Section Bases where there were the facilities that included RAAF Ground Staff Personnel for servicing.

While temporary located at Merauke, on the south coast of Dutch New Guinea, Stewart's aircraft rescued a Kitty Hawk Pilot, who had crash landed his aircraft on beach in a very dangerous location with the ever present danger of crocodiles. The downed Pilot had to paddle his rubber dinghy out to the waiting Martin Mariner, regardless of the danger, but highly motivated for that aircraft was his passage to safety.



One little known facet carried out by Martin Mariner Crews was the landing of Australian Army Personnel in clandestine operations on remote New Guinea rivers. Great skill was required by the Pilots because of the possible danger of floating trees and sand banks or mud banks. Often the Mariners had to return to pick up these troops because of tactical reasons.

(K. Roberts)



Sunderland Flying Boats.

Five A18- Short Empire Flying Boats were "impressed" for active service in the RAAF and were given the role of reconnaissance until the arrival of the Lockheed Hudsons. The "Empires were flown by No.11, No.13, No.20, No.33, and No.41 Squadrons.

A26 Short Sunderland Flying Boats developed from the "C" Class Empire Flying Boats and the RAAF ordered nine. They were delivered in September 1939 and manned by Australian Crews, but remained in England because of the outbreak of WW2.

In 1944 six Sunderlands were obtained for service in the Pacific and they combined with six Martin Mariners to form No.40 Squadron. These aircraft operated from Port Moresby in a Transport role carrying Personnel, freight and supplies. The Sunderlands remained in Service until 1947.

Supermarine Seagull MkV were flown by RAAF Pilots from the Royal Australian Navy ships during the 1930's and during WW2. These aircraft had wings that could be folded backwards.

Thirty seven Supermarine Walrus were delivered to the RAAF between November 1939 and January 1944. It was a three seat amphibian and was used as an Air Sea Rescue Aircraft, Reconnaissance and Communication. One occasionally delivered mail from Cairns to Karumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Eighteen Vought Sikorsky Kingfisher Seaplanes were brought to Australia and assembled at RAAF Rathmines and entered service in 1942. They were flown by No.107 Squadron and operated as a reconnaissance aircraft with one large main float, and could also land on an airfield being equipped as an amphibian. These aircraft left the RAAF in 1953.



Marine Section Boats operated at all Bases and supplied all the services required by Martine Mariner Flying Boats. The Crash Boat Crews like to race along side the Mariners during take off....just in case of an emergency.
(K.Roberts)



A Transport Martin Mariner, similar to this one, was heading south down the east coast of Queensland in a violent storm, when, without warning, the starboard engine feathered itself. Further complications made it necessary for the captain of the Mariner, FLTLT Noel Mc Knight, to make an emergency landing in the storm south of Bundaberg.
(K.Roberts)

Martin Mariner Flying Boat

Ditches in Storm

In December 1945, enroute from New Guinea, a RAAF Martin Mariner Transport Flying Boat, while passing through a violent storm, and, without warning, the starboard propeller feathered it self. The aircraft, fully loaded with Service Personnel passengers and luggage, was unable to maintain height so the Captain, FLTLT Noel McKnight was forced to land on the ocean during the storm.

All on board took up ditching positions while the Skipper made a single engine approach and carried out a landing in open sea in very rough conditions. He put the Mariner down quite close to the shore near the town of Woodgate. It was about 11am on Wednesday 19 December 1945. The aircraft's anchor was let go with plenty of line, which for a while, held but gradually the twin engine flying boat began to drift out to sea after the anchor line broke. The gale force winds were constant with mountainous sea crashing into the enormous hull.

All the passengers were relieved to be down safely but the raging seas gave some degree of apprehension yet there was no panic. Sea sickness was suffered by some but the aircraft Captain's presence amongst them gave assurance that everything was ok and the authorities ashore was aware of their situation.

A RAAF Marine Section Air Sea Rescue launch from Bundaberg set out as soon as the call was received. For many hours the ASR vessel pressed on through the very strong winds and raging seas in poor visibility until after six hours was forced to return to Bundaburg.

At 0200 hours on the Thursday the ASR launch with the Crew of Warrant Officer B.Peters, the Coxswain, and Leading Aircraftsmen J. Dobbs and R. Luben with a Radio Operator from the aerodrome, FLTLT Sweetser, set out again. Conditions had improved marginally but by 0630 hours they reached the Mariner.

The Martin Mariner had a large, but very strong hull, which in these trying conditions, was fully tested. With the starboard engine running and trailing the aircraft drouges some degree of combating drift had assisted in stopping the aircraft from being swept far out to sea.

Finally the ASR launch arrived at the scene but getting close enough to get a line to the Mariner took a great deal of seamanship. Eventually a towrope was made fast and with the assistance of a following wind the long tow commenced.

At last the Burnett Heads were reached then suddenly the towrope snapped and another replaced and it too broke.



On several occasions during the 40 mile tow the rope broke, and it was only through skilful seamanship by both the boat & Aircraft Crews that the tow continued. Once in the Burnett River the towrope had again to be changed to tow the aircraft by the **tail**.
 (Pilot, Noel McKnight)



Captain of the Mariner, FLTLT N. McKnight, far left, W.O. G.J. Beaton, W.O. L.V.Ellis, W.O. W.R.McLean, FLGOFF A.F. Stratford, FLGOFF D.A.Harris, LAC R.G. Mitchell. Finally ashore in Bundaberg the Crew & passengers could relax after a very harrowing experience.

(FLTLT Noel McKnight)

The next time the towline was attached to the tail of the Mariner, but how that was done still remains a mystery.

With the cockpit now facing the wind and the relatively smooth waters of the Burnett River the passengers welcomed the sudden calmness as the ASR launch pressed on slowly up the river. By now word had circled the township of Bundaburg and people lined the river to watch this great flying boat being towed backwards, with some of the passengers perched up on the large wings.

By the time Bundaberg wharf was reached at 1400 hours a huge crowd had assembled. With the Mariner finally moored the Crew and passenger were ferried ashore and ushered up to tables of sandwiches and hot drinks. This was the first hot meal since 0300 hours the previous day.

Marine Section Rescue Crew

The tow was some forty miles in length and had taken about seven and a half hours. The Crew of the RAAF Marine Section ASR launch must have been completely exhausted for they had had very little opportunity for any rest during the previous twenty four hours. Very little mention appeared in all the newspaper reports about the Marine Section Crew who magnificently performed their Duty in not only saving a huge aeroplane but the lives of FLTLT Noel McKnight's Crew and the lives of some thirty men and women passengers.

Bundaberg had members of the Dutch Air Force stationed there and they hosted the Mariner Crew as well as arranging transport for the passengers going south.

Martin Mariner A70-10 had the malfunctioning electrical feathering gear made serviceable, and finally departed Bundaberg on the 25 December for the long and final journey to RAAF Lake Boga in Victoria. For both the Crew and Service passengers this harrowing experience would last a lifetime.

The Martin Mariner Crew

N.McKnight	FLTLT	Captain
G.J.Beaton	WO	Co-Pilot
L.V.Ellis	WO	Engineer
W.R.McLean	WO	Radio Operator
A.F.Stratford	FLGOFF	Navigator
D.A.Harris	FLGOFF	Navigator
R.C.Mitchell	LAC	Rigger