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1. [With the RAAF at Gove : Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, 1943-1945 / editor: Peter Callaghan](#)
Callaghan, Peter

1. [With the Catalinas at Melville Bay / edited by Peter Fooks](#)
Fooks, Peter

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FOOKS, Peter. ed. *With the Catalinas at Melville Bay*. 27p., illus. Nhulunbuy, N.T.: Yirrkala Community School Literature Production Centre, 1985. ISBN: 0864090390.

Memories of this far-flung Australian Base. A second edition appeared in 1986.

RAAF Museum Point Cook

Formed in the Northern Territory in June 1944, No 42 Squadron was soon deployed to New Guinea. Operating from Melville Bay, the unit's Catalinas flew reconnaissance and escort missions. However, by the end of the year, the squadron's role was concentrated on mine-laying operations. The squadron's highly successful mine-laying campaign soon sealed off most of the Celebes from coast-hugging Japanese vessels.

In October 1944, a No 42 Squadron Catalina damaged by anti-aircraft fire made a forced landing south of Japanese-occupied Celebes. Flying through enemy-held territory, a No 41 Squadron Catalina, accompanied by a B-24 Liberator, rescued the crew before destroying the downed Catalina to prevent its capture. A journey of nearly 2,500 kilometres through enemy airspace, this mission ranks as one of the epic sea rescues of the Pacific theatre.

No 42 Squadron's mine-laying operations continued until the end of hostilities. Following the war, the Catalinas assisted in the repatriation of POWs and other personnel until November 1945, when the squadron was disbanded.

No. 42 Squadron was formed at [Darwin](#) in Australia's Northern Territory on 1 June 1944.^[2] In early July the squadron's 50 personnel moved to Melville Bay aboard [USS John Owen](#), arriving there on the 11th of the month. During July No. 42 Squadron was expanded to a strength of 300 personnel, and it received its [PBV Catalina](#) flying boats and further personnel in August. The unit conducted its first operation on 27 August when three Catalinas flew patrols searching for shipping.^[2]

During 1944 RAAF Catalinas based in [northern Australia](#) conducted a highly successful minelaying campaign against Japanese shipping in the NEI which formed part of the [North Western Area Campaign](#). In order to expand this campaign Air Vice Marshal [William Bostock](#), the commander of [RAAF Command](#), ordered that the Catalina-equipped [No. 20](#), [No. 42](#) and [No. 43 Squadrons](#) be assigned solely to minelaying under the command of [No. 76 Wing](#).^[3]

No. 42 Squadron commenced minelaying operations in September 1944. During this month it laid mines off [Celebes](#) and suffered its first loss on 23 September when a Catalina made a forced landing in Japanese-controlled territory; the aircraft's crew were later rescued by a No. 43 Squadron Catalina.^[2] The squadron focused on laying mines off [Makassar](#) and [Pare Pare Bay](#) in Celebes during October, and lost two aircraft to Japanese anti-aircraft guns.^{[4][5]} In November a detachment of aircraft was deployed to [Morotai](#) in the NEI, which had been [captured by Allied forces](#) in mid-September, from where they flew minelaying operations against [Brunei Bay](#), [Tarakan](#), [Sandakan](#) and the [Balabac Straits](#).^[4] Later in 1944 seven No. 42 Squadron Catalinas were deployed to [Leyte](#) in the [Philippines](#) from where they mined [Manila Bay](#) on the night of 14/15 December.^[4]

In January and February 1945 No. 42 Squadron and the other units of No. 76 Wing focused on laying mines off [Surabaya](#) and the [Laoet Straits](#).^{[4][6]} One of the squadron's Catalinas was forced to make an emergency sea landing on 14 January after being damaged by Japanese anti-aircraft fire, but its crew was rescued by an aircraft from No. 43 Squadron.^[4] From March to May detachments of No. 42 Squadron aircraft laid mines off the coast of southern [China](#) and [Formosa](#) as part of a No. 76 Wing offensive in this area; these operations were conducted from [Jinamoc Seaplane Base](#) in [Leyte Gulf](#) with the aircraft refueling at [Lingayen Gulf](#) in [Luzon](#) while en route to their targets.^{[4][7]} During June No. 42 Squadron aircraft flying from Jinamoc Island via a refueling base which had been established at [Brunei Bay](#) laid mines off [Sumatra](#) while some of its other Catalinas mined Surabaya.^[8] Following this, the squadron's aircraft were mainly used to conduct harassment raids on Japanese air bases in south-west Celebes, though they also attacked shipping in the [Flores Sea](#) and [Banda Sea](#).^[8] No. 42 Squadron assisted in the repatriation of Australian [prisoners of war](#) from [Manila](#) and other Australian personnel from [Labuan](#) following the [Japanese surrender](#).^[8] The squadron also conducted several reconnaissance flights over Japanese-occupied islands. No. 42 Squadron was disbanded at Melville Bay on 30 November 1945.^[9] During its existence it conducted 396 operational sorties, during which its aircraft dropped 549 tons of mines and 17 tons of bombs. The squadron also flew 6,330 hours of transport and courier flights. During these operations it lost very few aircraft.^[8]