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Kirribilli RSL Members visit VH-CAT (by Colin Cool)

The CFML was pleased to play host to members of the Kirribilli RSL Sub-Branch on Sunday 27 June 2010 when they came to pay a visit to VH-CAT at Bankstown.

Our visitors were first of all treated to a presentation by yours truly covering some general information on the Catalina aircraft including:

- the history of its development,
- its evolution from the XP3Y-1 through to the PBY6A,
- its performance (with particular emphasis on its long range and reliability)
- its specifications
- pioneering flights (including PG Taylor's proving flights from Perth to Ceylon (1939) and Rose Bay to Quintero Chile (1951)
- The "Double Sunrise" flights from Perth to Ceylon using Catalinas operated by Qantas from 1943 to 1945
- The use of 168 Catalinas by the RAAF during WW2.

The presentation concluded with a brief history of VH-CAT, then Bob Cleworth shared some of his vast wealth of knowledge on wartime Catalina operations. I must say that I was most impressed (or should that be *disturbed*) by Bob's knowledge of explosives!

It was then over to some relics from the WW2 era to speak for themselves – the first of these took the human form of CFML Membership Secretary WO Noel Lyon, ex-20 Squadron Wireless Operator/Air Gunner (WAG) who recounted some personal experiences from his war time operational career. The second took the mechanical form of VH-CAT herself, when our guests were set loose on the aircraft.

Our guests then reconvened at the CFML Clubhouse where their visit was capped off by a brief talk by Patricio Parrague, CFML volunteer and nephew of Roberto Parrague, one time owner of three Catalinas – one of these being VH-CAT, another is now the HARS Catalina based at Albion Park, VH-PBZ. The third Catalina is still owned by the Parrague family in Chile and is still flying. Patricio enlightened the group on his uncle's association with Catalinas, in particular VH-CAT.

The visit ended with the group expressing their thanks for our hospitality and efforts in furthering their education on the remarkable Catalina and the men that flew in her. Their appreciation was reiterated with a donation of \$200 from the Kirribilli RSL, for which we were very thankful.

Thanks also go to the following people who lent a hand to ensure our guests were well-looked after:

- Patricio Parrague, for his general assistance, as well as some 3-D photography and the supply of some morning tea and the information on his uncle
- Bob Cleworth, for his vast knowledge of Catalina wartime operations, supply of morning tea and playing Tea Lady (he performs the latter frighteningly well!)
- John Goldsborough, for his readying VH-CAT for inspection and securing her at the end.
- Noel Lyon, for sharing his experiences as well as his supply of photographs and general assistance



Three members of the Kirribilli RSL Sub-Branch flanked on the left by Colin Cool and on the right by (L-R) Bob Cleworth, Noel Lyon and John Goldsborough. They are seen here posing for a 3-D photograph being taken by Patricio Parrague.

Philip Dulhunty's interview with ABC Newcastle -28 June 2010

What follows are the (unedited) notes provided by Philip Dulhunty which formed the basis of an interview he gave to ABC Newcastle on 28 June 2010.

People don't recognize what an important role the Catalina Flying boats played in stopping the Japanese from invading Australia in 1942.

In fact the Catalina did for Australia what the Spitfire did for England.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, took Singapore and all of South East Asia, Philippines, Rabaul, Kokoda and most of New Guinea, there were no airports left for us to make any counter attacks. We had to rely on flying boats – Catalina's which could operate off the water and even the open sea.

We had over 168 Catalina's, nearly all, at one time or another operating at Rathmines on Lake Macquarie. This was the main training base and became one of the biggest seaplane bases in the world. The CATS were fitted out and equipped there, crews were trained before they flew on to Cairns, Darwin, Port Moresby to drop mines in the Japanese harbours to service the Coast Watches behind enemy lines, to rescue downed airmen. There are hundreds of stories told of these daring young men and their ordeals. Many did not come back! And hundreds were lost. Some of these tales are told in Robert Cleworth's books – *CATS at War* and *The Fabulous Catalina*.

Much has been written about the "Dambusters" in Europe. Our CATS and their crews did far more hazardous and difficult operations dropping mines in enemy held harbours - thousands of miles from base, at night in tropical conditions.

These majestic flying boats designed originally in 1935 are still flying today, as bushfire water bombers, coastguard patrols and private yachts – their original design has not been changed or improved in any way.

As an operating memorial to these men, these aircraft and to Rathmines, the Catalina Flying Memorial Ltd has acquired an operational CAT from the Sierra Mountains in Portugal where it was on fire fighting duty.

It is planned to erect a hangar/museum on the heritage listed RAAF base there and to operate adventure flights along our eastern coastline and at the same time serving as a voluntary service to the NSW Marine Rescue organisation, shark patrol, customs surveillance and general search and rescue in times of need.

All we need is MONEY – already we have raised some \$300,000 to purchase the aircraft, repair it and ferry it to Sydney. We need another \$200,000 to configure it to its original wartime role, paint it black (The Black CATS were painted black so they could not be seen at night by our enemy held targets).

Any donations over \$2 (tax deductible) would be appreciated and if some corporate organisation would sponsor us we are sure to be able to provide a wonderful source of PR and advertising.

From our Veterans

In our newsletter of May 2010, we featured an article on Catalina Operations during WWII by Louise Howden, the Editor of the Salisbury (Qld) Rotary Club. This article drew much interest from our Catalina veterans, so much so that a couple wrote to me either giving their personal perspective on the events described in that article, or to highlight other aspects of Catalina operations not often written about.

Mention is made in this article of 20 Squadron, of which CFML Membership Secretary 426123 WO Noel Lyon was a member. Noel wrote to me after having read that article correcting some of the detail provided as well as putting his own slant on the some of the events described in the article, and why not? After all, he was there!

Noel writes:

Previous newsletters have revealed a little of the WWII Mine-laying "Strikes" on harbours and shipping lanes (in the former East Indies and Philippines) used by Japanese Forces. My experience may add to or contradict some of those accounts.

Prior to MacArthur's return to Manilla we successfully mined the harbour on the night of the 14/15th of December, 1944. 25 RAAF "Black Cats" took part in that mission. I was not aware that 27 set out from Darwin, as stated in Louise Howden's article. Actually, one of those 25 acted specifically as a decoy by scattering "window" (aluminium foil) during the raid. Also on THAT night, U.S. Forces successfully invaded Mindoro Island, south of Luzon. Our pre-mission briefing stressed the need to keep clear of that area on our way to our target. Any aircraft straying too close would be "SHOT DOWN" without question.

In A24-84 (skipped by P/O Peter Bills) as 2nd WOAG (Wireless Operator Air Gunner), I was stationed at the Radar as we started our mine-laying approach. I could see (on screen) that the bay we were entering was three miles across. Manilla is nine! We very smartly did a "reverse" turn out of there and successfully completed our 'mine-drop' in Manilla Harbour.

Our navigator subsequently informed us that we had first started into the Jap Naval Base north of Manilla, Subic Bay. No opposition at either place!!! And the city lights were still on for some time while at least 23 RAAF Aircraft were flying into and out of the harbour at 200 or 400 feet!!!

Another interesting feature of that mission was the fact that those American mines were preset to automatically disarm one week later, before the planned invasion of Manilla.

Colin I may give you more, later. Regards, Noel.

Another letter came from 412180 FLTLT Gordon Priest (pilot), who wrote:

Dear Colin

The article by Louise Howden in the May Newsletter (Issue 5) was a good summary of Catalina operations during WWII. However, to complete the picture of the various roles of the aircraft, mention needs to be made of the trial dropping of torpedos against enemy shipping at night.

From memory, the aircraft were used for torpedo work on only three occasions. On the first it was reported that the torpedo hit the water and shot off at an angle. The second time, the aircraft was met with heavy gunfire and the captain was seriously injured. I am unaware whether any other crew member was injured. The third time was at Surabaya. The aircraft was shot down and there were no survivors.

I had the experience of dropping a dummy torpedo using a navy vessel* as the target. The instructions were that the torpedo had to be released about 400 yards from the ship while flying at 100 knots and 50 feet above the water. This experience made it very clear that this type of operation against enemy shipping would be extremely hazardous and I was not sorry it was discontinued after the Surabaya episode.

Yours faithfully

Gordon Priest

* The use of the term "vessel" here was my doing, not Gordon's. Gordon's letter was handwritten and he used a term here that appeared in parenthesis that I couldn't decipher. In any case, it was obviously some form of waterborne target. I hope my choice of a substitute here doesn't upset things too much! I did, however, attempt to find some clues as to what this elusive word might be by consulting various reference sources available to me at home. These included Bill Minty's *Black Cats* and Bob Cleworth's *Cats at War* and *The Fabulous Catalina*. Although my efforts were not met with any success, these references did make mention of the use of Catalinas for torpedo dropping, reinforcing everything Gordon said about it being thought about, tried then abandoned when it was decided, to quote Group Captain David Vernon, DSO, "that Catalinas were too vulnerable for torpedo work".

Colin Cool

PTO....

New Members/Donations

The Catalina Flying Memorial welcomes the following members to the Aussie Cat Club:

Life Members

Group Captain Paul Metzler
Graeme Russell

One year Members (Individual)

Keith Clark

One year Members (Family)

Tim Edwards & family

The CFML is extremely grateful for the following donations:

- Kirribilli RSL - \$200
- Carole Gibbens - \$50

A very big thank you to all of the above for their support!

Coming Events

ADF Air Show at RAAF Williamtown – 18 & 19 September 2010

RAAF Williamtown will be hosting the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Air Show over the weekend of 18 & 19 September 2010. Parking will be available from 7am, gates are open to the public at 8am. We understand that Protickets are looking after ticketing and the cost will be \$25.00 per adult.

The CFML will have a stand set up with a display of photographs as well as merchandise for sale. A great opportunity for a bit of fund raising and promotion of our project!

So please put this date in your calendar to ensure you don't miss out on this spectacular event. And while you're there, please make sure you visit our stand and say Hi to our hard-working volunteers.

2010 Catalina Festival – 23 October 2010

Here's another one for your calendar folks – the 2010 Catalina Festival.

Preparations have begun for the fourth annual Catalina Festival at Rathmines. This year's event will be held on Saturday 23 October 2010. The Festival will be held at the usual location at Rathmines.

More information will be provided as it comes to hand. Another great fund-raiser for our project!

News or comments

If you have any news or comments regarding the website, please forward to Colin Cool (colin.cool@jemena.com.au) or Jill Brandon (info@catalinaflying.org.au).