



Summary of Wartime History of Flt Lt. Ian Stuart Smith, 408413

Ian Stuart Smith, the only child of Roy Sharrington Smith and Isabel Vera Stuart, was born in Launceston Tasmania on June 29, 1923. When WWII broke out, Ian was still attending school. With the death of the Principal's son, an RAAF pilot, in the skies over Malta in the early stages of the war, he was determined, along with many of his mates to join the RAAF. On April 25, 1942, after completing one year of an engineering degree at the University of Tasmania, he joined the RAAF, No 1 ITS (Initial training School) at Somers, Victoria.

After the three months on the ground in the RAAF, LAC Smith was sent to No 7 EFTS (Elementary Flying Training School) at Western Junction, Launceston. On the 7th August 1942 he took his first flight in a D.H. 82 (Tiger Moth) and sixteen days later, with 9 hours 55 minutes logged, he took his first solo.

Destined for multi-engine aircraft, from elementary flight school, LAC Smith arrived at No 1 SFTS Point Cook, Victoria on the 24 October, 1942, and commenced training on the Airspeed Oxford. After completing over 119 hours on the Oxford, P/O Smith graduated in February, 1943 and was posted to GRS Cressy, Victoria to further his navigation training, in an Anson.

With his advanced training in navigation and multi-engine aircraft now complete, P/O Smith arrived at 3 OTU (Operational Training Unit) Rathmines on the 25th of April, 1943, to undertake conversion training to the PBY-5 Catalina. Over the following eight weeks, and some 94 hours flying later, he completed the course, attaining "the required standard" of a Catalina 2nd pilot.

20 Squadron (16 July 1943 10 February 1944)

Following one week's leave, and now with the rank of Flying Officer, Ian Smith had a grand total of 283 hours 40 mins flying experience, when he was posted on the 16 July, 1943, as a "G.D. Pilot" (2nd pilot) to 20 Squadron, Cairns. As 2nd pilot to captain F/O Mills, he shared the role with Sgt. Schulz or Sgt. Black. F/Lt Allison later took over as captain from October 8 for the second half of Ian's tour with 20 Squadron, with his final two operations captained by F/Lt Cowan.

F/O Smith's first operation was a convoy escort on the 17th July followed by several reconnaissance flights or 'Milk runs' to Area "O" or 'M' and Milne Bay. Then followed a mix of operations with the first strike operation (to Sorong) on August 30, 1943. Overall F/O Smith completed 30 operations in 20 Squadron, including 9 strike and attacks, 11 convoy, 6 reconnaissance, and 4 supply.

Strike and attack missions involved either, or both, mine-laying and bombing / strafing attacks. Sorties to Sorong, Fak Fak, Manowari, and Amboina were staged from Groote Eylandt with return to Cairns via Horn Island for refuelling. Macassar and

Kendrai, both mining targets, were reached via Darwin. Kavieng was the only strike, or strike and attack, target directly staged from Cairns.

The four supply operations were all staged from Port Moresby to either Lake Yemis, Sepik -Yellow River junction, or Murray Lake to deliver supplies and to position, or relocate, AIF personnel behind enemy lines. These flights were extremely dangerous as the flights were done during the day returning to Port Moresby in the late afternoon/evening. On the 5th September 1943, they were most certainly observed by advancing Japanese on the ground as they dropped off 2 AIF personnel and supplies at Lake Yanis. Within two hours of their departure the lake was occupied by the Japanese and the two AIF killed.

During his seven months in 20 Squadron, F/O Smith flew fourteen different PBV-5 Catalina aircraft with most of his time and nine operations in A24-54. His Record of Operational Tour shows that by February 1944, he had completed 30 operational sorties, with a total of over 687 hours; 260 of these were flown at night. Ian was assessed as an “above average G.R.F.A 2nd Pilot and was considered suitable for “Catalina Captain”.

Between tours

During a break between operational tours, F/O Smith was attached to the 3rd Ferry detachment between 10 February and 25 March 1944. In order to take delivery of a new Catalina for the RAAF, from the San Diego aircraft factories in the USA, F/O Smith flew from Amberley to San Francisco via Nandi Canton Island, and Hawaii in a Liberator. Acting as second pilot to Flt/Lt Cowan, they flew the PBV-5 USN 48348 from San Diego to Lake Boga, Victoria.

Returning to 3 OTU at Rathmines, in May 1944, F/O Smith began his training to captain a Catalina. On the 13th July, after 181 hours 40 mins on the Catalina conversion course No 23, F/O Smith was assessed by the commanding officer as having “attained the required standard” to be a “Captain F.B. pilot” and subsequently promoted to F/Lt.

43 Squadron, (14 August, 1944 – 14 May, 1945)

After two weeks leave F/Lt Smith was posted to 43 Squadron, Doctors Gully, Darwin on the 14th August, 1944, where he served for 9 months until the 14th May 1945.

Operational sorties from Darwin were similar to those he performed previously in 20 Squadron, from Cairns, but involved considerably longer missions to South East Asia, as the Allies were advancing northwards. In all, he completed 22 mine-laying sorties to places such as Tioro Strait (2 missions), Boetoeng, Laut Strait - SE Borneo (3), Prabalings - Java, Tarakan - North Borneo, Kendrai, Macassar (2), G Selatan - South Borneo (2), Manila Bay - Phillipines, Soeraeaja Strait(3), Sebuku Island - Borneo. Amoy – China and Hainan Strait - South China (2).

In addition to strike missions, F/Lt Smith flew two Air Sea Rescue (ASR) Patrols one to South Timor to recover crews from stranded Beauforts, and another Darwin-Lombok-West Bay-Darwin to provide cover for Liberators.

Whilst in 43 Squadron, F/Lt Smith flew a total of 642 hours, 322 of those were at night. Although he flew sixteen different aircraft during his time in the squadron, most missions and flying hours were spent in PBY-5 Serial number A24-55. At the end of his tour, he flew some familiarisation and check flights in two different Catalina models the PB2B-2 and the PB2B-2R He was Assessed by Officer Commanding 43 (GR/FB) Squadron Monkton at completion of his tour in May 1945, as an “above average” Catalina Captain.



Crew of the Catalina PBY-5 Serial Number A24-55, 43 Squadron, Darwin, April 1945.

Back row L to R F/SGT. Joe Hudson (2nd Engineer), F/SGT. Norm Farrar (1st Engineer), W/O Sgt. Gibson (2nd WAG), SGT. Vern Dinbeh (Rigger), Sgt. Ron Pringle (Rigger)

Front Row: W/O Jack Legge (1st WAG), F/Lt Norm Simpson (Navigator); F/Lt Ian Smith (Captain); F/O Don Kean (2nd Pilot)

Final posting

With his tour with 43 Squadron completed, F/Lt Smith, took leave in June 1945 and married his longtime sweetheart Margaret Miller Cunningham in Hobart, Tasmania. After a short honeymoon he was back with 3 OTU at Rathmines for the third and final time.

Flight Lieutenant Smith, clocked up 125 hours 20 mins over the next three months flying from Rathmines, to either Lake Boga, Rose Bay, Cairns or Darwin (via Cairns). He flew ten different aircraft, including the newer PB2B-2 versions of the Catalina,

but mostly PBY-5 models Serial Numbers A24-80 or A24 -84. Following the cessation of hostilities, his final operation in a Catalina, took him around Australia in PBY-5 No A24-84 between September 22 and October 3, 1945. The flight commenced at Rathmines and proceeded via– Cairns – Darwin – Morotai – Darwin– Geraldton – Perth – Adelaide – Rose Bay and back to Rathmines.

On tying up A24-84 at the mooring at Rathmines on the 3 October 1945, for the last time, F/Lt Smith, had completed 54 operations in Catalinas with a grand total of 2000 hours and fifty minutes flying time. He was demobbed from the RAAF on the 12 October, 1945.