



CATALINA FLYING MEMORIAL LTD

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Catalina Flying Boat returns to Rathmines

In World War II at the beginning of the Pacific War in 1941 at Rathmines on Lake Macquarie NSW one of the largest Flying Boat base in the world was developed to accommodate a growing fleet of Catalina Flying Boats.

The Catalina proved to be extremely important in the Pacific Theatre doing in some respects for Australia what the Spitfire did for Britain. The “Cats” were slow, long-range aircraft which could stay in the air for well over 20 hours and were used to operate behind enemy lines as bombers, mine laying, depth-charging, air-sea rescue, long-range reconnaissance.

Rathmines was developed to accommodate the growing fleet of Cats 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 Rathmines national heritage listed. This could, after listing, lead to Government funding to assist in the construction of one of the WWII hangars to be utilised.

The Catalina PBY, built by Consolidated Aircraft in the USA is a very distinctive aircraft with its two engines mounted high on its high-wing, with its flying-boat shaped hull, and gun-turrets. Some were amphibian, with wheels for land operations as well as water, and some were straight seaplanes without wheels.

Although it is a very old design (1932) it served a unique and distinctive role throughout WWII and there was no other aircraft that could what the old Cats could do. The Cats were painted black or dull grey to be invisible as they penetrated low and slow on their missions behind enemy lines. They were no match for the fast, manoeuvrable Japanese Zero fighters and their firepower, so the Cats had to be difficult to spot.

Philip Dulhunty OAM, member of the Catalina Association and Chairman of the Seaplane Pilots Association, located a wartime Catalina in Portugal and with the help of Neville and Gaby Kennard raised funds for its purchase and refurbishment for ferry-flight to Australia.

The main feature of the Catalina and why it is so different from all other war birds, is its operation on and off the water. The Catalina was designed and built solely for waterborne operations and its take off and landing on the water is spectacular. In service it could use any waterway at all and often landed and took off in the open sea. Its water operations distinguish it from every other aircraft.

It is envisaged that it will become the centrepiece of the Rathmines Museum, and will operate off the waters of Lake Macquarie, as its sisters did 65 years ago.

Some generous supporters have already contributed a good sum to acquire the aircraft. Several volunteers have offered their services to service and fly the aircraft. Now more money is needed to make the aircraft ready and to ferry it home to Lake Macquarie. The fuel bill alone could be \$75,000.

To make the “Rathmines Catalina” a reality generous financial contributions are needed; 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 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.

Donations are tax deductible. Catalina lovers and supporters should send their contributions to:
The Catalina Flying Memorial Ltd
Building 2, 35 – 41 Waterloo Road
Macquarie Park 2113

Sponsorships will be appreciated, and contributions in kind – airfares to Europe, accommodation, fuel, equipment, safety-gear, uniforms, products, expertise, time. We ask people to put up their hands, join us and be part of this exciting venture.

Philip Dulhunty OAM 10/6/07



Catalina taking off from 3 OTU Rathmines NSW



3 OTU Rathmines NSW showing 'CATS' on the line