# SUPERMARINE WALRUS

WORDS: PETE LONDON

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### **From Seagull to Walrus P90** Fleet Air Arm workhorse **P96** Wartime RAF rescuers Racer, whale-hunter, explorer... P104

MAIN IMAGE: A No 276 Squadron Walrus performing a simulated air-sea rescue in what is obviously shallow water, given that the undercarriage is extended. AEROPLANE



# From Seagull to Walrus



**ABOVE:** Seagull Vs A2-2/076 and A2-12 in formation. Both are un-armed, though A2-2 is fitted with light series carriers. A jaunty airman braces against the slipstream to ride in the prow of A2-12. VIA PETE LONDON



ate in 1929 the Royal Australian Air Force issued an outline specification for a new

amphibian flying boat. Circulated within Britain's aviation industry, the requirements were felt particularly challenging. Perhaps because of that, the aeroplane that resulted was remarkable. It became the foremost fleet gunnery-spotting and observation aircraft of the Royal Navy and Commonwealth navies, and undertook a host of other duties. Later it was flown with great distinction in the vital role of air-sea rescue. Originally known as the Supermarine Seagull V, it grew famous under its subsequent name: Walrus.

From its formation in 1916, the Supermarine Aviation Works at Woolston, Southampton, had designed and built numerous waterborne aircraft types. In 1920 it embarked on its Seal military amphibian. From that emerged the more powerful Seagull; 23 MkIIs were acquired by the RAF, and in MkIII form it was sold to Australia.

With the Seagull III giving good service, the Australian Air Staff contemplated acquiring a future amphibian which could take advantage of new developments in shipboard launching. Sturdiness would be key – at that time, aircraft catapults were being installed on numerous warships, but the Seagull III was not strong enough to withstand the forces created during such launches.

For Australia it was essential that a successor type be capable of catapulting with full military load, but also be stowable within HMAS *Albatross*. The emerging requirement specified endurance of four hours, provision for three crew, and equipment allowing various reconnaissance and survey duties. In addition, the ability to operate on open seas in waves of up to 6ft was called for.

DATABASE

At Supermarine, meanwhile, Reginald Mitchell had been chief designer since 1919. His Seagull programme had included a variant with a pusher engine; by February 1930, with possible Royal Navy use in mind, his new Type 181 design contemplated a single-engined amphibian featuring a pusher option.

That came to nothing, but early in 1932 the Type 223 was drawn up, again a single-engined pusher. Details were passed to the Royal Australian Air Force, which expressed interest. This time Supermarine went ahead with a prototype, initially as a private venture. By early 1933 its hull structure was complete, though initially the catapult spools were omitted. Work had dragged somewhat due to more pressing activities, including the Schneider Trophy floatplane racers.

Initially intended to employ a water-cooled Rolls-Royce Kestrel, finally the air-cooled Bristol Pegasus was selected. Along with other less significant changes, the design became known as the Seagull V. The prototype first flew on 21 June 1933 from Southampton Water, in the hands of chief test pilot Joseph 'Mutt' Summers. By then it had acquired the identity N-1.

Summers' assessment of the new aircraft was generally enthusiastic, though he criticised its on-ground steering and the rigidity of its undercarriage. Five days later he flew N-1 at the SBAC show, delighting the Hendon crowds by looping the aircraft (without Mitchell's prior knowledge), a manoeuvre almost unheard-of with a flying boat.

Its undercarriage modified, in July 1933 the Seagull V passed to the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment (MAEE) at Felixstowe for assessment, with the amended identity N-2; it had emerged that N-1 had previously been allotted to a Supermarine Southampton. By then, Australian attention was firmly focused on the type, and trials were carried out which included the RAAF's particular requirements.

At that time though, Britain's Air Ministry had expressed no commitment to the Seagull V. In June 1933, when the amphibian was seen by the Ministry's Director of Technical Development, he commented: "Very interesting; but of course we have no requirement for anything like this". Later the Ministry wrote to Supermarine: "While we wish to be kept informed of [the Seagull V's] progress and will watch its development [...] we would inform



ABOVE: HMAS Australia and her Seagull V, A2-1. After a long life, in January 1945 the aircraft was reduced to produce. VIA PETE LONDON



ABOVE: The first prototype Seagull V in its initial guise as N-1 at the 1933 SBAC show, where it was looped. *AEROPLANE* 

you that we do not envisage any role for an aircraft of this type with HM forces."

MAEE trials with N-2 included altitude tests at around 17,000ft, climbing, pitching and stalling assessments, water handling, and behaviour on land, for which the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment (A&AEE) at Martlesham Heath was used. It was found that the engine sometimes cut out at around 10,000ft, cured by installation of a petrol pump and careful lagging of the carburettor. Water handling was generally good, though when taxiing in choppy seas the aircraft tended to labour, and it was felt that lateral stability could be improved by modifying the wing floats.

In November 1933 the Chief of the Australian Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, visited Woolston. Two months later, as catapult trials with N-2 were being undertaken by the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, subject to successful completion of testing the Australian government approved the purchase of Seagull Vs.

Following its MAEE trials, over the spring of 1934 fleet evaluation of N-2 took place at Gibraltar, the Royal Navy managing its assessment for the Australians. The Seagull V's crewmen for these tests were Lt Cdrs Caspar John and Walter Couchman, both of whom would rise to the rank of Admiral. Impressed by its performance and durability, the two men became great supporters of the aircraft. Like other naval aviators, they saw its potential in the roles of fleet gunnery spotting and reconnaissance. Ensuing visits to the battleship HMS Valiant off the Kyles of Bute challenged N-2 in waves of up to 6ft combined with

30kt winds, but no significant new problems were reported. Later, Vice Admiral Sir Arthur Pedder wrote of the aircraft: "It was the complete answer to our prayers, but we gathered the powers-thatbe didn't think much of it."

On returning to Woolston N-2 received wing floats with improved buoyancy and revised planing bottoms. Other modifications included changes in the cabin layout, reinforcement of the catapult spools and a slight re-shaping of the nose profile. The cabin windows were enlarged and received splash deflectors, while the centre diagonal strut supporting the tailplane was removed.

After final discussions between Supermarine and the Australian Air Staff, in August 1934 the company received an order for 24 Seagull Vs as catapult spotterreconnaissance aircraft for the Royal Australian Navy's cruiser force. Production was contracted against Specification 6/34, drawn up by Britain's Air Ministry.

The first Seagull V, serialled A2-1, flew on 25 June 1935 from Woolston, piloted by George Pickering. It was a short flight, the elevator trim tab controls having been crossed, but the following day a 30-minute assessment was made. Acceptance trials done, on 9 September Pickering delivered the aircraft direct to HMAS *Australia* at Spithead.

Further examples were shipped to Australia, serving with No 1 Seaplane Training Flight at Point Cook and No 101 Flight at



Richmond, New South Wales, joining warships as required. Eventually, *Seagull* Vs were embarked in HMAS Sydney, HMAS Hobart, HMAS Perth, HMAS Australia, HMAS Canberra, HMAS Manoora, HMAS Warrego and HMAS Westralia.

Finally, the type was ordered for the Royal Navy. British interest in the Seagull II had been qualified, its hydrodynamic properties in rough waters criticised. But the Seagull V's strength and seaworthiness were much improved, and confirmed its utility as a catapult-launched spotter.

Naval pressure for acquisition of the aircraft had been applied. Even so, the Air Ministry was initially still cautious. In May 1935 an order was placed against Specification 2/35 for just 12 examples, serialled K5772 to K5783. The first was flown on 18 March 1936 by George Pickering, the aircraft being named the Walrus I. Differences between the Seagull V and Walrus I were few, the most visually obvious being the Handley Page-Lachmann slats fitted at the Australians' request but not adopted by the Walrus. Jury struts to support the wings when folded were usually kept in position by the Walrus when flown, but not by the Seagull V. In both cases, though, there were exceptions.

Meanwhile, following more sea trials including catapult launches from HMS *Ark Royal*, in January 1935 N-2 passed to the Royal Navy as K4797. On 4 October, while ferrying Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse from Hendon to HMS *Nelson*, moored off Portland, the aircraft turned turtle after inadvertently alighting with its undercarriage lowered.

Fortunately, all aboard survived. K4797 returned to Woolston for repairs, and the addition of an undercarriage position indicator. Transported to Gibraltar for yet another round of trials, in January 1936 it collided with an antisubmarine boom while taking off. Again the crew was rescued but sadly the aircraft sank. Upon recovery, it was deemed beyond repair and struck off.

Following the Air Ministry's first small order for Walruses, two further contracts were awarded for eight and 28 examples. Finally, on 10 July 1936, Supermarine received an order for 168 Walruses to Specification 37/36, which more than vindicated the company's private-venture investment. But with Spitfire production ramping up at Woolston, Walrus manufacturing came under great pressure.

In February 1939, just up the River Itchen from the main works, an additional factory began building Walrus hulls. Total Supermarine production reached 285 examples. However, the extra capacity still wasn't sufficient and manufacturing was transferred to Saunders-Roe at Cowes on the Isle of Wight. With wide experience of waterborne aircraft but only limited production work of its own at the time, Saunders-Roe made 461 Walruses, of which 191 were Mklls with wooden hulls. Teams of boat-builders skilled in wood-working were available on the island, and the wooden hull avoided large-scale use of precious light alloys. Featuring a slightly revised upper bow profile, it was heavier than the metal type but easier to repair.

The first prototype woodenhulled Walrus, X1045, built by Saunders-Roe, made its maiden flight on 2 May 1940 in the hands of George Pickering and Saro's pilot Leslie Ash. Pickering found the wooden hull smoother and quieter on the water. While Supermarine retained design authority for the Walrus, Saro also replaced its original metal tailwheel with a pneumatic type. Though suitable for grass airfields, when moving on hard surfaces the metal wheel made a hideous racket.

BELOW: Walrus Is of the School of Naval Co-operation. Control of this unit passed from the RAF to the Admiralty in May 1939. AEROPLANE



DATAPOINT Legendary Vickers-Supermarine test pilot Alex Henshaw conducted a good deal of production flight-testing on Walruses.



# **Supermarine Walrus**

# Anatomy of the Walrus

A utilitarian airframe, but strong, durable and easy to maintain



he Walrus I was of mixed construction. Its metal hull was of single-step

arrangement, a first for Supermarine, the monocoque structure built up on girdersection Alclad frames interconnected by a keel and stringers, and covered by a riveted Alclad skin. For much of its length the cross-section formed a shallow tumblehome profile, while to simplify maintenance the skinning avoided double curvature as far as possible.

Reginald Mitchell adopted a flat-sided hard chine hull configuration reminiscent of Vickers' Viking series, a form found to cut through small waves rather than riding over them. In late 1928 Supermarine had been acquired by Vickers, so Mitchell would have had access to the parent company's technology. He may also have been influenced by Maj H. J. Payn, a pilot, ex-RAF engineer and former Vickers man, who had joined his team.

The hull formed one continuous compartment, built along an H-sectioned Alclad keelson, a semi-bulkhead at frame 5 separating the cockpit from the cabin. The aft hull terminated at an Alclad box-form stern post. A walkway of corrugated Alclad panels connected cockpit and cabin with the open dorsal position. To allow catapulting, stainless steel spools were fitted, the leading pair at the intersection of the hull step with the chine, the other amidships at frame 16. Six bilge drain plugs and a camera aperture were fitted in the hull bottom.

At the extreme nose were two mooring and towing bollards, and a defensive position doubling as a mooring station. Though it became customary to fly the aircraft with three crewmen (pilot, co-pilot and telegraphist/ air gunner), the seating



ABOVE: A good view of a Walrus with folded wings is provided by MkI K8341. VIA PETE LONDON

accommodation was for four: first and second pilots' positions, and, aft within the cabin, the wireless operator's and navigator's seats. The navigator had a small window through which to make observations, while a Type F24 camera was stowed alongside the wireless.

The enclosed cockpit was glazed with a combination of Celestoid and safety glass, while the windscreen was fitted with wipers, and a sliding roof. The pilot's position featured an Alclad one-piece instrument panel and a wheel control column of light alloy tube. Dual control could be provided, movements of the second pilot's control wheel being transmitted to the first pilot's controls by direct coupling. When not in use the second

pilot's seat and rudder pedals could be stowed away. Water rudder controls were locked to those of the air rudder.

Both defensive positions were fitted with pivoting machine gun jockey mountings on circular rings, each able to mount a single .303in Lewis gun or a Vickers K gun. Spare ammunition drums were kept on stowage pegs below the stations. When not required, the guns could be stowed; covers were provided for both positions. The forward position could also be used for bomb-aiming. A bomb sight would be temporarily attached to the outside of the hull, the bomb-aimer being obliged to lean far out over the prow in the full force of the slipstream, secured only by a safety belt and wire strop.

A Type C dinghy was kept by the aft station, and an anchor, two sea anchors, a boat hook, distress signals and a muffin bell were carried, along with a hand-pump for pumping the bilges. Provision was made to take towed target equipment.

The 45ft 10in equal-span un-staggered wings comprised a top centre section, and top and bottom outer sections hinged at the rear spar to fold back through an angle of 78°, minimising storage space at sea. The upper wings featured dihedral of 1°, and the lower ones 3°, the outer portions of both being swept at 7° 30'. Frise ailerons, mass-balanced, were adopted on all four outer wings, while folding flaps were fitted to the inner portions of the lower trailing edges.

**285** The number of Walruses built by Supermarine.

### **Supermarine Walrus**

The top centre-section was a ply-covered structure; the two spars and box ribs were of stainless steel, with tubular flanges and corrugated webs, and ribs of wood. The centre-section was designed to support a crew member when hooking the aircraft on to a ship's loading crane. Slinging points were included on the front and rear spars, with lifting gear stowage just aft of the front spar.

On alighting at sea, the aircraft would come alongside the host vessel and a crewman would climb up to the centre-section. Securing himself with a line using an eye-bolt in the leading-edge, he passed hooks lowered from the ship's crane through the amphibian's slinging-points. The aircraft would then be hoisted aboard its vessel. The operation was reasonably straightforward in calm waters, but could be extremely tricky in rougher seas.

The top wing spars continued out through the mostly fabriccovered outer planes, which contained fuel tanks at their inboard ends, each of 75-gallon capacity. Duralumin jury struts were provided to help keep the complete outer plane structures rigid when folded. The lower wings were of equal span and chord to the top outer, also built round two spars and again, fabric-covered.

Underwing recesses accommodated the main

RIGHT: At Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne, the crewman on the upper wing of Walrus I K5783 – which served with 720 Catapult Flight (later 720 Squadron), New Zealand Division – is engaged with the aircraft's hoisting cables. STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

undercarriage when retracted, while wire-braced wing floats, each with four watertight bulkheads, were fitted. Two bomb mountings could be found under each bottom plane, able to carry a variety of loads, while a light series carrier could be added between each pair.

Between the wings was the engine, aft of a barrelled Alclad nacelle. The first Seagull V was powered by a Bristol Pegasus II L2P nine-cylinder air-cooled radial. Production Seagull Vs and early Walruses employed a Pegasus II M2, but most Walruses used the Pegasus VI, which gave an additional 125hp. Adopting a pusher layout meant the propeller was relatively shielded from spray, and the risk reduced of an accident to the crewman charged with hooking-on during the recovery process at sea.

The four-bladed, two-piece propeller was rather near the tail, but the threat of yaw induced by the un-equal force on the fin of the corkscrew effect from the slipstream was contained by offsetting the nacelle 3° to port.

### WALRUS I SPECIFICATIONS

#### POWERPLANT

SPAN (upper and lower wings) LENGTH HEIGHT (to tip of propeller, WING AREA (top) WING AREA (bottom) EMPTY WEIGHT LOADED WEIGHT MAXIMUM SPEED CRUISING SPEED RANGE SERVICE CEILING ARMAMENT

K5783 0

A REAL PROPERTY.

One 625hp Bristol Pegasus II M2 or 750hp Pegasus VI air-cooled radial 45ft 10in 38ft 0in 16ft 10.5in to propeller tip (gear down) 315 square feet 287 square feet 4.900lb 7,200lb 135mph at 4,750ft 95mph 600 miles at 95mph 18.500ft Two .303in Lewis or Vickers K machine guns; universal and light series carriers allowing combinations (not exceeding a total of 760lb) of MkVIII depth charges; 250lb bombs; 100lb bombs; 40lb bombs; 20lb hombs

The Walrus was the first British military aircraft to feature a retractable main undercarriage. The units each employed an oleo-pneumatic leg and radius rod, hydraulically recessed using a hand pump worked by the first pilot. The cable-operated brakes were supplied by either Dunlop or Palmer. The tailwheel was wholly of metal (later replaced by a pneumatic-tyred type) and protruded from the stainless steel water rudder at the base of the stern post.

An instrument panel indicator showed the main undercarriage position, while a horn sounded in the cockpit when the engine throttle lever was closed, to remind the pilot to look at his indicator. Crews sometimes found the horn irritating, and it would quietly be disconnected.

The tail unit consisted of a large single fin and rudder, together with a high-mounted tailplane. The tailplane's position placed it well within the propeller airstream, maximising elevator authority, and lessening exposure to spray on the water. Integral with the hull, the fin was mostly of Alclad, though its upper portion was a fabriccovered wooden structure. At its trailing edge the rudder employed a servo-rudder. The tailplane was of mixed construction, the elevators featuring trim flaps inset into their trailing edges.

**DATAPOINT** RAAF Seagull Vs conducted a varied range of work, not least assisting in the study of the migratory habits of fish.



# Supermarine Walrus



# 461

Walrus production by Saunders-Roe totalled 461 units, of which 191 were wooden-hulled MkIIs.

> BELOW: 764 Squadron Walruses in formation. A Seaplane Training Squadron, during the time it flew the Walrus the unit was based chiefly at Lawrenny Ferry, Pembrokeshire. VIA PETE LONDON

# In the Navy

# The Walrus proved a great workhorse for the Fleet Air Arm

he operational career of the Walrus with the Royal Navy began in the spring of 1936, as

the initial production batch was allocated to various vessels. Catapult Flights received the type, each allotted a shore base and their aircraft embarked in warships as required. The Navy's County-class cruisers were modified to take Walruses and a new class, the Towns, made ready to receive them.

The first vessels to host the amphibians were the battleship HMS Nelson, cruisers Shropshire, Norfolk, Cumberland and the light cruiser Achilles, followed by cruisers Sussex, Exeter, York and Devonshire. By the outbreak of war, the type was also embarked in the monitor Terror and in HMS Albatross, acquired by the Royal Navy as part-exchange for the Royal Australian Navy's Leanderclass cruisers. Perhaps inspired by its unusual appearance, as the aircraft entered service it acquired various nicknames including 'Shagbat' and 'Steam Pigeon', the 'steam' being caused on the water if spray hit the hot, un-cowled engine.

From September 1939, Walruses were used widely in support of shipping protection, joining the never-ending search for enemy commerce raiders. In the South Atlantic patrols began over vast expanses of sea, navigated in radio silence by dead reckoning, through unpredictable weather and visibility. Chances of finding German vessels were slender. While patrolling from HMS Sussex on 31 October 1939, Walrus L2261 of 711 Squadron was shot down by three enemy aircraft, all three aboard being killed.

That December the Walrus was present at the Battle of the River Plate, off the estuary dividing Uruguay and Argentina. Three cruisers, *Exeter, Ajax* and *Achilles*, fought the pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee. Exeter was severely damaged and the German vessel eventually scuttled. For the amphibians it was a disappointing episode. Exeter's K8341 of 718 Flight, damaged by shell splinters, had to be jettisoned after the ship was set afire, its fuel threatening the vessel's safety. Achilles' Walrus missed the battle altogether,

having been left ashore for maintenance.

The new year saw a reorganisation of Walrus units when 700 Squadron was formed on 21 January by amalgamating the 700 series of Catapult Flights. It was based at Hatston, on the island of Mainland, Orkney, and initially had no fewer than 42 Walruses on strength, as well as 11 examples of the Seafox and 12 Swordfish. During February, HMS Dorsetshire's aircraft spotted the German merchantman Waikama out of Rio, which was scuttled when intercepted.

As it turned out, of the major naval engagements against the Axis powers the Walrus was only launched during the battles of Cape Spartivento (from Renown and Manchester, on 27 November 1940) and Cape Matapan (from Gloucester, on 28 March 1941). The type nonetheless played a vital role, not only in searching for enemy surface raiders and their supply ships but also flying ceaseless anti-submarine patrols to help protect the fleets. Together with armed trawlers, Walrus P5655 attacked a U-boat 10 miles east of the Orkneys on 10 April 1940, and a kill was confirmed.

A further use for the aircraft turned out to be support of amphibious operations, first drawn on during the Norwegian campaign where shore-based airfields were few but sheltered waters abundant. A new squadron, 701, formed at Donibristle, embarked in the carrier HMS *Glorious* and travelled to Harstad in northern Norway. Its Walruses were supplemented by those from *Glasgow, Southampton* and *Effingham.* 

During May and June 1940 the Norway-based amphibians carried out reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrols, as well as ferrying personnel, but not without loss. On 18 May *Devonshire's* aircraft P5647 was shot down by a Heinkel He 111 near the Malangsfjorden; Lt R. W. Benson Dare was killed, Midshipman A. D. Corkhill was wounded but rescued, and LA W. H. Hill died of his wounds.

During 6 June three amphibians from 701 Squadron, accompanied by examples from *Effingham* and *Southampton*, **DATAPOINT** One of the more unusual Walrus rescues of the war was that of an RAF Cierva C30A autogyro pilot who had ditched off Worthing pier in April 1943.

Operation 'Menace', the

attempt to wrest Dakar from

Vichy control, was launched on

23 September. During the port's

County-class cruisers and HMAS

Australia carried out spotting and

bombardment, Walruses from

the battleship Barham, three

anti-submarine patrols. On 25

September Australia's Walrus

L2247 was shot down by Vichy

while bombardment-spotting.

French Curtiss Hawk 75A fighters

Two of the three crew apparently

baled out astern of Barham, but

all died.

That day too, the battleship HMS Resolution was torpedoed by BEM.

L2268, crewed by Petty Officer Peter Henry Parsons, Sub Lt A. D. Corkhill and Naval Airman Evans, bombed the Vichy submarine Poncelet in the Gulf of Guinea; British sloop HMS Milford also attacked. Poncelet surrendered and was later scuttled. For his

the Vichy submarine Bévéziers. Walruses joined the counterattack, but, despite reports at the time that it had been destroyed, the submarine escaped. On 7 November Devonshire's aircraft

ABOVE: Walrus I L2217 leaves its catapult in 1942, when it was serving with 700 Squadron in HMS Sheffield. VIA PETE LONDON



DATABASE

actions. Parsons received the

In the Mediterranean theatre, two separate Royal Navy commands came into being. To the east the Mediterranean Fleet flew a total of 14 Walruses on anti-submarine patrols as well as bombardment-spotting, particularly of Bardia in eastern Libya during September 1940, before moving to Crete when the Italians invaded Greece in October. There they patrolled around Souda Bay, and Glasgow's Walrus fended off a Fiat CR42 fighter with the help of antiaircraft fire from a trawler. However, the Italians' poor progress led to intervention by German forces. During 1941 the Mediterranean Fleet suffered cruel losses and by December its Walruses were much reduced.

Meanwhile, in the western Mediterranean Force H had developed, smaller than its eastern counterpart and often consisting chiefly of one aircraft carrier, a capital ship, and two cruisers. In February 1941 Genoa was bombarded and Sheffield's Walruses were used to spot, while that November Walruses were present for the North African invasion, spotting around Oran and Algiers, and undertaking anti-submarine patrols and communications work.

Prior to December 1941 the Royal Australian Navy participated in Atlantic and Mediterranean operations, but to help provide some protection around the East Indies and South West Pacific two armed merchantmen were each allocated a Seagull V. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the RAN vessels returned with their aircraft to Australasia. Perth was

ABOVE: Carrier operations by FAA Walruses continued until the end of the war in South-east Asia. AEROPLANE

strafed the enemy-held Norwegian village of Solfolla. Escorted by No 46 Squadron Hurricanes, they returned without loss. Shortly after 01.00hrs on 8 June, as the Norwegian campaign came to an end and the Allies evacuated under Operation 'Alphabet', a 701 Squadron Walrus landed aboard Glorious, carrying various communications. Its mission accomplished, at 02.07 it left for Ark Royal – by the end of that day Glorious had been sunk, with terrible loss of life.

As the situation in France then crumbled, on 14 June German troops entered Paris. Four days later, at 02.00hrs a lone Walrus took off from RAF Mount Batten in Devon on a clandestine task. The aircraft, L2312, was flown by No 10 Squadron, RAAF personnel Flt Lt John Napier Bell and Flt Sgt Charles Harris, together with Cpl Bernard Nowell, RAF, accompanied by French-speaking Maj Norman Hope of the Secret Intelligence Service. Their mission was to rescue the wife and children of Free French leader Gen Charles de Gaulle before German forces arrived. Mme de Gaulle was staying at Carantec, on Brittany's north coast. But in bad weather the Walrus disappeared. Much later it emerged that, while attempting to land near Ploudaniel, the amphibian had crashed into an embankment and all aboard were killed. In the event, Mme de Gaulle and her children escaped from France by ship to Falmouth in Cornwall.

By that summer, Hobart, Leander and Dorsetshire were escorting convoys passing between Port Suez and Aden. In Somaliland their Walruses acted against the Italians as light bombers, and to the armoury of the small 20lb and 100lb bombs often carried were added more substantial 250lb bombs, dropped on targets at Zeila. The damage meted out to the Italians was not severe. but in such an isolated theatre the raids provided a real morale-booster.

Of wider significance was the role played by Walruses off the French West African port of Dakar, held by Vichy French forces, over the summer and autumn of 1940. On 25 June the Vichy-controlled battleship Richelieu suddenly left port but, stalked by amphibians from Dorsetshire and Albatross, it turned for home, just prior to an attack on Dakar by Fleet Air Arm Swordfish. A subsequent 'Stringbag' raid succeeded in damaging the vessel.



**BELOW:** Walrus I W3026 **711 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm** CHRIS SANDHAM-BAILEY

sunk during February 1942 at the Battle of the Java Sea, while *Canberra* was lost at the Battle of Savo Island. Australia and Hobart participated in the Battle of the Coral Sea, but by the middle of 1943 only *Australia* retained her flight. As Seagulls were lost, replacement Walruses were brought in, and the survivors continued in training and rescue activities.

Upon Germany's invasion of Russia the Navy's amphibians began the escort and protection of North Russian convoys including the disastrous PQ17 in June and July 1942. Returning from patrol on 4 July, *Norfolk's* P5706 was unable to find her vessel at the expected rendezvous. The convoy had scattered and Norfolk had withdrawn from the area. Aboard, Lt R. Wignall, Sub-Lt G. Riley and LA Gibbons eventually alighted by the steamer Palomares and the amphibian was taken in tow. Palomares survived repeated Luftwaffe attacks, and the Walrus crew later transferred to a small minesweeper while their aircraft was lashed to the deck of SS Ocean Freedom. Eventually it arrived more or less intact at Archangel, only to become a victim of the severe climate there. P5706 wasn't the only Walrus to land on Soviet soil - at least two flew briefly from Murmansk while their ship, SS Trinidad, was undergoing repairs.

The Navy also operated the Walrus from shore bases. By April 1940, 700 Squadron was carrying out anti-submarine patrols around the Orkneys, while on its return from Norway 701 travelled to lceland for similar duties aboard the carrier *Argus* until relieved by No 98 Squadron, RAF. Subsequently 701 flew from Hatston, Donibristle and Stornoway, undertaking convoy escorts and anti-submarine work until disbandment in June 1941. Overseas, numerous aircraft found their way to Aboukir-based 201 (Naval Co-operation) Group, patrolling off Alexandria and providing escort cover, a response to heavy losses inflicted on Mediterranean fleet ships. Several covert flights were made to evacuate casualties from Tobruk.

A further Walrus unit was 700 (Levant) Squadron, six amphibians operating from various harbours around the Turkish and Egyptian borders until the summer of 1943, again on anti-submarine and escort duties. 700 (Levant) participated in the claimed destruction or capture of several Italian submarines - two involved Walrus W2709. On 9 July 1942 its crew spied an underwater track and alerted a nearby corvette to the spot, which brought the enemy to the surface where it was captured. Just two days later the same aircraft, flying east of Cyprus in the hands of Sqn Ldr P. A. Jordan, attacked and sank the Italian

submarine *Ondina* assisted by two surface vessels. For the action Jordan was mentioned in despatches.

50N

W3026

Meanwhile, 700 (Algiers) Squadron was formed in November 1942 at the former Vichy base at Arzeu, Algeria, and claimed several submarine strikes. It provided escort protection until some of its Walruses passed to the RAF for air-sea rescue work between February and August 1943 - others went to the Free French Navy unit Flottille 40. Aircraft from Royal Naval Air Station Piarco on Trinidad, where they performed observer training, carried out anti-submarine patrols and provided a detachment to watch over the Vichy French fleet laid up at Martinique.

By 1943, further advances in radar technology had made the Walrus outdated for spotting at sea, while improving anti-aircraft defences rendered spotting of shore-based targets a task for faster aircraft. Amphibious-boat reconnaissance training ceased that April. The surviving shipbased Walruses were generally phased out, the last catapultborne aircraft to go being those embarked in the battleships *Duke* of York and *Rodney*, and the cruiser *Belfast*.

A handful remained at sea aboard carriers, notably Fencer and Victorious, where they were used mostly for air-sea rescue and general communications work. The Walrus had no arrestor hook; the method developed for a carrier approach was to ease down to around 50kt, in a steep descent. If the carrier was moving at, say, 10kt, and taking into account a headwind, the relative speed of the aircraft would have been very slow. The type continued its limited carrierborne duties after the war, the light fleet carriers Glory and Venerable flying their aircraft, mostly in South-east Asia, A until the end of 1945.



**ABOVE:** Delivered new to the Fleet Air Arm in May 1939, Walrus I L2323 taxies with a crewman perched on the upper wing. *AEROPLANE* 

**DATAPOINT** Wg Cdr Wilfred Duncan Smith, father of Conservative politician Iain, was rescued by an RAF Walrus off Crotone, Italy after his Spitfire suffered fuel starvation in 1943.

# DATABASE

### **Supermarine Walrus**



# RAF Rescuers

# Sterling work was done around the coasts of the UK – and further afield – by the Walrus units of the RAF

s its work at sea reduced, the Walrus took up the task of shore-based air-sea rescue. The need to recover downed airmen from the water had emerged during 1940, with British aircraft constantly flying over the Channel and North Sea. By the following year the RAF was stepping up missions into enemy territory, which always involved two sea crossings. For flyers who ended up in the water, 'Mae West' life preservers provided buoyancy while dinghies, issued to Bomber and Coastal Command crews, were eventually introduced for fighter pilots too. But though the occasional downed man might be spotted by a passing vessel, and at times ad hoc search flights were made, the chance of being rescued was uncomfortably slim. In July 1940, as losses – many of them taking place over the sea – mounted, a modest Channel rescue service was formed to spot for airmen in the water, using light naval craft and RAF high-speed launches. Some borrowed Lysanders also arrived, and employing aircraft to search as part of a combined effort immediately improved chances of success. To coordinate work the RAF's Directorate of Air-Sea Rescue was created in February 1941.

Landplanes could scour the waters and direct surface vessels to pick up crews, but it was clear that, to hasten their recovery, an amphibious type would be enormously useful. The Walrus was the ideal aircraft to alight on the sea, retrieve men and return them to safety. As the air-sea rescue service expanded, several RAF ASR squadrons formed,

ABOVE: Walrus W3026 of No 276 Squadron during an ASR exercise on 29 May 1942. Practice pick-ups from the water took place regularly, in various sea states. PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

# **598** The number of rescues recorded as having been carried out by No 277 Squadron alone.



**ABOVE:** No 293 Squadron's Flt Sgt E. J. Holmes and WO J. R. Berry with No 450 Squadron, RAAF P-40 pilot Flt Sgt Harry Eaves (centre) after his rescue off the port of Ortona in eastern Italy on 3 April 1944. The Walrus is Z1813; on 20 April, with a different crew, it retrieved Eaves for a second time. VIA PETE LONDON

flying a mixture of aircraft including the Walrus.

The amphibian crews braved enemy fighters, anti-aircraft fire and even sea mines in carrying out their rescues. To maximise the number of men they could pick up, ASR Walruses often flew with only two crew, though sometimes it was difficult for one person to lift a man, perhaps injured, from the water.

ASR Walruses were un-armed, while many featured grab-rails around the forward hull just above the waterline. Inside, additional loads were taken: stretchers, used as beds for the injured; blankets, sometimes electrically-heated, in which to wrap those rescued; chocolate and biscuits; and at times an ingeniously-designed can with a central fuse which, when lit, fizzed briefly to provide hot soup.

The first dedicated ASR squadrons were created during the autumn of 1941. In October No 275 Squadron formed at RAF Valley, Anglesey. At first equipped with Lysanders, by the year's end Walruses had arrived for patrols over the Irish Sea, operating with Spitfires, Defiants and Ansons. The landplanes spotted downed crews, dropping dinghies and supplies, before Walruses flew out and plucked the airmen from the water. 275 subsequently flew from Warmwell, Dorset and later Exeter, Devon.

The same month saw No 276 Squadron being formed at Harrowbeer, Devon, to patrol the western end of the English Channel and the Bristol Channel. To help provide wider coverage the squadron soon split into three flights – A Flight moved to Warmwell and was later detached to Roborough, Devon, while B Flight remained at Harrowbeer and C Flight flew from Perranporth in Cornwall. The squadron was also equipped with Spitfires and Defiants.

No 277 Squadron was established at Stapleford Tawney, Essex, in December 1941, with flights at Hawkinge near Folkestone, Martlesham Heath in Suffolk and Shoreham near Brighton. At first the unit received eight Lysanders and four Walruses. 277 covered the critical area of water between the south-east of England and northern France.

The East Anglian coast was dealt with by No 278 Squadron, formed at Matlaske in Norfolk during October 1941, initially with six Lysanders and three Walruses. Over its life 278 covered an ever-wider area, and several detachments eventually formed: at Acklington, Northumberland; Ayr, South Ayrshire; Drem, East Lothian; Hutton Cranswick, Yorkshire; North Coates, Lincolnshire; Peterhead, Aberdeenshire; and Woolsington, Newcastle.

No 281 Squadron, set up with Defiants at Ouston south of Newcastle in March 1942, received Walruses the following February, and by June had replaced its Defiants with Ansons. In November 1943 it was absorbed by No 282 Squadron, which had formed on 1 January 1943 at Castletown, Caithness for patrols off the north coast of Scotland. At first 282 flew only Walruses, but in March 1943 these were supplemented by Ansons.

In terms of rescues No 277 Squadron led the way, unsurprising considering its 'beat'. On 5 September 1942, Shoreham-based Walrus W3076, flown by Flt Sgt J. L. Barber and Sgt L. R. Healey, rescued a No 64 Squadron Spitfire pilot from the Hornchurch Wing. The squadron had been flying a diversionary mission while B-17s bombed the railway at Rouen, and were attacked by Fw 190s, Flt Sgt G. Mason coming down off Dieppe.

Having spotted the yellow dinghy, the amphibian alighted in heavy seas. By then Mason had drifted into a minefield. Just after landing Barber narrowly avoided one mine, and another as he searched for Mason among the steep troughs. To add to the problems Barber been spied from the shore, and German guns opened up.

As the Walrus taxied between two rows of mines Healey saw Mason, pulling him aboard. The aircraft began its take-off, only for Barber to realise that the lines of mines curved in front of him towards the end of his intended run. He managed to hop the aircraft over them, and after that fraught episode the flight back to Shoreham was thankfully without incident. For his bravery during the rescue Flt Sgt Barber received the Distinguished Flying Medal.

Other ASR squadrons, too, made many rescues. On 18 June 1942 Walrus W3026 of No 276 Squadron, piloted by Sgt R. C. Yeates, saved the crew of No 58 Squadron Whitley Z9161. Returning from a convoy patrol, the Whitley had diverted to RAF Chivenor in Devon and was forced down to 100ft due to bad weather; suffering fuel starvation, it alighted in the sea south-west of Bude in Cornwall. With his five new passengers retrieved from their dinghy Yeates found it impossible to take off, so taxied across the sea and onto Bude's beach. In fact, many times the ASR Walruses would taxi home overloaded with rescued men, simply unable to leave the water.

No 278 Squadron, by then based at Coltishall near Norwich, recovered the crew of a B-17 off Norfolk on 26 July 1943, but it took two Walruses to do it. The bomber, from the 322nd Bomb Squadron, 91st Bomb Group, had been part of an 8th Air Force raid on Hamburg. Arriving at the scene during the early evening, Walruses L2307, piloted by WO G. B. Reeder, and K8549, by Fg Off W. A. Land, put down and between them safely picked up the 10 American crewmen. But the added weight prevented the amphibians from leaving the water, and growing waves began to damage them.

In worsening seas, both Walruses taxied slowly toward the coastline. They became separated, but finally L2307 was spotted by a high-speed rescue launch and its B-17 crew members transferred. After a long run Reeder managed to leave the water and flew home. Land's aircraft plodded on, encountering a second launch many hours later. The Americans from K8549 joined the naval craft while the amphibian was



taken in tow to Gorleston naval base, sustaining more damage during the journey.

With the war's movement toward Germany, work for the rescuers gradually dried up. No 275 Squadron disbanded at Harrowbeer in February 1945. 276 had moved to Cherbourg, subsequently serving in Belgium and Norway before disbanding at Dunsfold in November 1945. 277 flew Walruses until February 1945 when it followed suit at Hawkinge.

278's amphibians served until October 1945, operating latterly over the Channel from Thorney Island in Sussex. With a short break, 282 was equipped with Walruses until July 1945, by which time it was flying from Cornwall's Davidstow Moor, and also employed Warwicks. Today it's not possible to say exactly how many airmen were saved by Walrus ASR flights around Britain, but the number was in excess of 1,000

Warfare in the Mediterranean theatre had meanwhile led to an urgent need for ASR cover. Again Walruses were used, and dedicated RAF squadrons created. The Middle East Air-Sea Rescue Flight went operational in August 1941, based at Kibrit, Egypt. In the following year, within that unit a Walrus Flight was created. its base at

Benghazi, Libya, using Fleet Air Arm aircraft accompanied by FAA personnel. The Middle Éast ASR Flight became No 294 Squadron, RAF in September 1943, initially at Berka, Libya. The Walruses flew mainly over the eastern Mediterranean, before the squadron disbanded at Basra, Iraq in April 1946.

No 283 Squadron formed during February 1943 at Algiers, using the former French seaplane station. It flew six Walruses off the North African coast before an August move to Sicily. As the war progressed, detachments were sent to Italy and Sardinia and the squadron headquarters eventually moved to Corsica, from where it could cover the waters off southern France and northern Italy. During April 1944, 283's Walruses were transferred to No 293 Squadron, established with Warwicks in June 1943. Until its March 1946 disbandment, 293's amphibians helped provide ASR off the Italian coasts, and rescued more than 100 men.

The seas around Malta were covered by No 284 Squadron, which formed at Gravesend in May 1943 before moving to Hal Far during July and August 1943. Its Walrus detachments subsequently spread far and wide, flying from locations including Sardinia, Sicily and mainland Italy. Warwicks began

to arrive in March 1944 and by the following September the Walruses had been transferred. also passing to No 293 Squadron. By that time 284 had saved over 70 airmen.

As with home waters, trade was frequent. A typical, if eventful, day's work for No 283 Squadron came on 3 July 1943 after a Beaufighter X of No 47 Squadron came down south of Sardinia following a shipping strike. Walrus Z1780 (crewed by Sgt W. S. Lambert, Sgt A. Divers, RNZAF and Sgt Cromie) was despatched and managed to pick up the Beaufighter's two crewmen, but then found it impossible to take off. After taxiing across the water for hours the amphibian's fuel ran out, but eventually a launch arrived to take it in tow. The Walrus, beached at Bône harbour (now Annaba, Algeria), was refuelled and returned to its unit.

It wasn't always Allied airmen who were rescued. On 10 August 1943 a Walrus from No 283 Squadron picked up a Dornier Do 217 pilot, shot down by a Beaufighter during a raid on the Sicilian port of Augusta. The German flyer, Leutnant Hans-Joachim Zantopp of III./KG 100, was hauled into the Walrus and searched. His captors discovered an interesting range of personal defence items: the arsenal

included a knife, a Mauser pistol, a Luger pistol and, it's said, a Beretta pistol strapped to his leg!

A further Walrus squadron also flew in the Mediterranean. During December 1944, No 624 Squadron re-formed at Grottaglie, southern Italy. The unit wasn't concerned with ASR, but used Walruses for minespotting duties around the Italian coast and in Greek waters. It disbanded in November 1945.

No 269 Squadron returned from duty in Iceland to Davidstow Moor in January 1944, taking on a mixture of Hudsons, Martinets, Spitfires and Walruses. A move followed to RAF Lagens in the Azores - there it flew ASR, meteorological and target-towing missions prior to disbanding in March 1946.

In the Far East, on 1 February 1944 No 292 Squadron formed at Jessore, Bangladesh, flying Walruses for ASR work over the Bay of Bengal. By March it was operating from Ratmalana, Sri Lanka, and later Warwicks arrived to help out, replaced by Liberators. In February 1945 it moved to Agartala, India, to be closer to the operational areas as the front line in Burma moved east. There 292 disbanded on 14 June 1945, the amphibians serving right up to that time, though rescues were A infrequent.



ABOVE: On 28 June 1942, Saro-built Walrus I W2706 of the ASR Flight Middle East participated in the rescue of aircrew from downed Wellington W5732. Here, it's seen two years later at Mersa Matruh, Egypt. VIA PETE LONDON

IN SERVICE

Walruses around the world

Foreign sales of the type proved quite numerous

umerous Walruses were purchased by foreign governments, both before and after the Second World War. During 1938 six examples, allotted Supermarine B Conditions identities N-9 to N-14, were earmarked for Turkey. The first flew on 4 February 1938; five had arrived by April, but it's not certain N-14 was delivered. Five more, L2263 to L2267, served in Portugal with the serials 97 to 101.

Argentina also acquired the type. Serials M-0-1, M-0-2, M-0-3 and M-0-4 are known to have been worn by early Argentine Walruses. In January 1939, B-marked N-15 and N-16 were delivered aboard the Vickers-Armstrong-built light cruiser ARA *La Argentina* at Barrow in Furness; these served as M-0-9 and M-0-10.

The Republic of Ireland bought three Walruses, originally serialled L2301, L2302 and L2303, but prior to export given B markings N-18, N-19 and N-20. The first nearly didn't arrive. On 3 March 1939, encountering bad weather over the Irish Sea during its delivery flight from Eastleigh to Baldonnel, N-18 made a forced landing with engine trouble near Ballytrent, off the County Wexford coast. Its upper wing damaged, the crew of Lt Quinlan and Lt Higgins taxied into Wexford harbour and completed their journey by road, as did the amphibian.

In service, for some time the Irish Air Corps Walruses retained their B identities. Later their overall silver finishes were replaced by camouflage schemes,



**ABOVE:** Argentine Navy Walrus M-0-4 mounted on its ship-borne catapult. VIA PETE LONDON



**ABOVE:** Post-war, the French Aéronavale flew Walruses until 1951. Here is 52.S-27 of Flottille 52.S. VIAPETE LONDON

and they became known by just their numbers, the 'N' being dropped. They flew mostly with No 1 Coastal Patrol Squadron at Rineanna, County Clare, on the River Shannon, regular patrols being made along the Atlantic coast and the Irish Sea. Missions typically lasted three hours, sometimes in very poor weather. Duties included spotting for damaged or suspicious vessels, searching for survivors of sinkings, and investigating sightings of straying foreign aircraft.

By the autumn of 1939 only two Irish Walruses were serviceable. Serial 18 was eventually repaired, and by 1941 it was flying with the wings of 19, which had crash-landed at Baldonnel on 18 September 1940. Serial 20 crashed on 3 September 1942 and was written off, but the first example soldiered on. In 1944 it was transferred to the Air Corps' General Purpose Flight, and finally struck off during August 1945.

The number of times the same Walrus, Z1813, rescued RAAF

P-40 pilot Harry Eaves.

Canada received eight Walruses, while the Royal New Zealand Air Force purchased 10 examples, and the Royal Australian Air Force acquired 37.

Post-war, despite the retirement of the Walrus from its British service career, some examples continued to fly with overseas forces. W3016 passed to the Egyptian Navy as N3016. The French Aéronavale acquired Walruses for use by Flottille 53.S in training flying boat pilots at Hourtin in south-west France, these operating until 1951. Walruses were employed for training by Flottille 50.S, and Flottille 52.S which flew with the École Navale at Lanvéoc-Poulmic in Brittany.

In 1947 eight further Walruses (N-33 to N-40) travelled to Argentina, becoming 2-0-23 to 2-0-30. At least two, serials M-0-4 and 2-0-24, were used by the Argentinean Antarctic expedition that surveyed Deception Island and Discovery Bay between 1946 and 1948. The Argentinean Walruses went on to be the longest in-service examples, and two were still aboard *La Argentina* until at least 1958.

# **IRISH DEFECTORS**



ABOVE: Camouflaged Irish Air Corps Walruses at a snowy Baldonnel near Dublin; the nearest is serial 18. VIA PETE LONDON

The start of 1942 was enlivened at Cornwall's RAF St Eval. Unexpectedly an Irish Air Corps Walrus arrived – the four servicemen aboard, restless with their country's neutrality, had decided life would be more exciting with the Luftwaffe and resolved to fly to Cherbourg and volunteer. The Walrus, serial N-18, was duly pressed into use and headed south, evading an IAC Lysander sent to search for it.

Eventually, though, the adventurers became lost. Intercepted by RAF Spitfires, the Walrus was compelled to land at St Eval. The station's intelligence officer initially believed that the aircraft, wearing unfamiliar green and orange national markings, was Dutch, but a wireless signal soon put everyone in the picture. The Irishmen were detained and subsequently returned home under guard. N-18 was collected by Air Corps personnel, flying to the service's main Baldonnel airfield. By then it sported a new Lewis gun, donated by the kindly St Eval armourers to replace the rusted example with which it had arrived. **DATAPOINT** Post-war, Tom Fletcher was attached to the RAF High-Speed Flight as its search and rescue pilot during its Meteor world air speed record attempts.



**Supermarine Walrus** 

# Tom Fletcher: rescue hero

The most decorated RAF air-sea rescue pilot



n 2 October 1942, after a dogfight with Luftwaffe Focke-Wulf Fw 190s over the

Channel, RAF Spitfire pilot Flt Sgt Michael Cooper of No 616 Squadron was forced to bail out. He landed in the sea four miles north of Calais, on the edge of a minefield. His leader transmitted an emergency call, but at Dover the naval authorities felt it too dangerous to attempt a rescue through the minefield by launch. Nonetheless, No 277 Squadron's Walrus L2315 left Hawkinge for the scene, piloted by Sgt Tom Fletcher.

Fletcher arrived over Cooper's dinghy while, far above, Spitfires engaged enemy fighters trying to prevent the rescue. Alighting in strong winds and a choppy sea he taxied towards the survivor, who missed the boat hook offered up on the Walrus's first pass. Shore batteries opened up on the amphibian, but Fletcher tried again and Cooper was hauled aboard. The Walrus taxied away from the minefield and took off, just clearing a mine. For his bravery Sgt Fletcher was immediately awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal.

Born at Leigh in Lancashire, Tom Fletcher had volunteered as a pilot, joining up in June 1940. Following his training he was posted to No 43 Squadron on Spitfires. Candid and sometimes unruly, he was transferred to No 91 Squadron at Hawkinge; there he encountered the ASR Walruses of No 277 Squadron, which he later joined.

On 14 December 1942, several men were reported adrift on a raft seven miles off Dover. Fletcher flew Walrus X9521 to the scene, touching down in rough seas and dwindling light. Three of the men were saved; the others, weakened by their ordeal, were swept away. With its extra load the Walrus had to taxi back to Dover, a gruelling two-hour journey undertaken in the dark. The men Fletcher had been so determined to save were German sailors. He received a Bar to his DFM, one of fewer than 60 bestowed during the Second World War. The London Gazette citation confirming the award tells us that it was his seventh successful rescue.



ABOVE: Lancashire-born Tom Fletcher flew Walruses with No 277 Squadron, and became the RAF's most decorated ASR pilot. VIA PETE LONDON

During 1943 Fletcher retrieved several more ditched aircrew. On 31 August he picked up a No 29 Operational Training Unit Wellington pilot, using wooden-hulled Walrus II HD908, and on 3 September three members of a B-17 Flying Fortress crew, again with HD908, part of a wider mission involving a trio of amphibians.

On 3 October, he took Walrus W3097 in search of a No 486 Squadron Typhoon pilot reported to have come down off the French coast. But instead of finding just one dinghy he came across three, containing the crew of No 88 Squadron Boston BZ316, which had ditched off Barfleur following a raid on Distré in the Loire area of France.

Alighting, Fletcher took on the three crewmen and headed for home. By the time he'd dropped his charges it was too late to return to look for the downed Typhoon pilot, but next day at first light, the Walrus was off again. By then the pilot had drifted very near the French shoreline and the seas were heavy. Fletcher located the dinghy; the pilot was taken aboard, but during the amphibian's take-off the waves smashed its starboard float.

Taxiing gingerly away, with two men clinging far out on the port wing to try to counterbalance the aircraft, finally everyone was picked up by a British motor antisubmarine boat. An attempt was made to tow the Walrus, but eventually it was abandoned and sunk by gunfire from the rescuer.

Tom Fletcher made his final rescue on 30 April 1944, recovering a Spitfire pilot, during which he flew a Sea Otter. By then he had saved more men than any other ASR pilot. In May 1944, promoted to Pilot Officer, he was awarded the DFC.