





RISING SUN TO **SWASTIKA**

ANDREW THOMAS' CHRONICLES TWO AUSTRALIAN HUDSON SQUADRONS' OPERATIONS IN WIDELY SEPARATE THEATRES



In 1938 the Royal Australian Air Force became the second customer, after the RAF, for the Lockheed Hudson, placing an initial order for 50 Twin Wasp-powered aircraft. The first, A16-1, arrived at 2 Aircraft Depot on February 9, 1940, and the type entered frontline squadron service on April 1 that year.

A total of 247 Hudsons from direct purchase or Lend Lease followed – the first of them arriving in Australia on May 20, 1942. A further 83 served with 459

Squadron from RAF stocks in the Mediterranean.

The Hudsons quickly replaced Avro Ansons in existing units and became the original equipment of newly formed squadrons. Most still lacked their characteristic Boulton Paul gun turret, however, so a rather unsatisfactory cupola was fitted temporarily.

Once fully equipped in August 1940, 1 and 8 Squadrons moved forward to Malaya to counter burgeoning Japanese expansionism. But on the 13th of the month the RAAF suffered a tragedy when Hudson A16-97 of 2 Squadron, flown by Flt Lt Bob Hitchcock, crashed on approach to Canberra, killing all on board.

The passengers included the minister for the army Brigadier Geoffrey Street, air minister James Fairbairn, chief of the general staff Sir Cyril Brudenell Bingham White and minister for external affairs Sir Henry Gullett – the core members of Australia's government involved in the war effort, apart from Prime Minister Robert Menzies himself.

SHIP HUNTING

On the eve of war in the Far East the RAAF had 24 Hudsons in Malaya – at Kota Bharu and Kuantan (with 1 and 8 Squadrons respectively). Another 53 equipped 2 Squadron at Koepang on Timor and at Darwin; 6 Squadron at Richmond and Laverton; 13

Top left
Until the Hudsons' characteristic Boulton Paul gun turrets were fitted, aircraft such as these from 6 Squadron had a rather unsatisfactory cupola installed. RAAF

Below
Even Hudson Mk.IIs – such as 8 Squadron's A16-76 NN-F – forward-deployed in Malaya initially lacked turrets. RAAF





Squadron at Ambon in the Banda Sea and Darwin; and 14 Squadron at Pearce, Western Australia.

The force was completed by the trio of 23 Squadron's Hudsons at Archerfield and four aircraft that were part of the forward-based 24 Squadron at Rabaul, in New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

Soon after midday on Saturday, December 6, 1941, Flt Lt John Ramshaw, a 27-year-old from Victoria, and his crew in A16-19 were flying towards the airfield at Kota Bharu 185 miles away (which was also 1 Squadron's base) when they spotted a fleet of Japanese ships with an escort that included a battleship. They, and the crew of another Hudson that had arrived, radioed the sighting to Singapore and shadowed the vessels.

A Catalina flying boat sent out the next day to relocate the convoy was shot down and more Hudson sorties were ordered, with Flt Lt Lockwood's A16-21 being fired on by the destroyer *Uranami*. The landings went ahead that night, and shortly after 02:00 on December 8 Lockwood led the seven available Hudsons for low-level attacks on the shipping offshore.

His bombs struck the Japanese transport *Awazisan Maru*, but heavy fire from the cruiser *Sendai* brought down A16-94, killing 22-year-old Flt Lt John Leighton-Jones and his crew – the first Australian Hudson lost in action. The incident took place just an hour before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Further south, 13 Squadron's Hudsons from Ambon in the Dutch East Indies were soon out on patrol, though heavy losses would force their withdrawal to Darwin in late January 1942. The aircraft on Rabaul were also used as an advanced strike force before being overwhelmed by a Japanese attack on January 21, the crews evacuating in surviving aircraft before the island fell.

HIGHEST TRADITIONS

When World War Two began, 2 Squadron RAAF, commanded by Sqn Ldr Alan Charlesworth, began mounting convoy escorts with its Ansons off the Australian east coast, which continued after re-equipment with Hudsons in mid-1940.

By mid-1941 Wg Cdr Frank Headlam was in command and in December the unit began moving north, with Flt Lt Rob Cuming leading 'A' Flight to Koepang and the CO taking the remainder to Darwin where news of war with Japan broke.



As RAAF Hudsons engaged the Japanese in Malaya, early on December 8 (still the 7th in Hawaii, which lay east of the International Date Line) Fg Off Bob Law-Smith of 'A' Flight attacked and set fire to the 300-ton (270 tonnes) Japanese ship *Nanyo Maru* and forced it aground on the coast of Timor – the first action in this theatre.

Patrols of the nearby sea lanes continued and at the end of December four aircraft moved to Ambon, as the southward surge of the Japanese continued.

On January 11, 2 Squadron mounted its first offensive sorties of the war when Ambon-based Hudsons attacked an enemy invasion force northeast of the Celebes (now Sulawesi), hitting a cruiser and shooting down two floatplanes. But by the next day the Japanese had fighter cover, and Mitsubishi Zeros claimed Hudsons A16-46 and A16-12, with just one member of Flt Lt Parker Hodge's and Fg Off Peter Gorrie's crews surviving. Two Hudsons of 13 Squadron were also lost in this brutal introduction to the war.

The position in Ambon rapidly became untenable and by late January the two squadrons had lost

Hudson left for Darwin shortly before Dutch Timor fell.

There was little respite as the first enemy air raid on Darwin destroyed four more Hudsons (A16-6, A16-57, A16-78 and A16-135) on the ground, so the aircraft were evacuated to other airfields around the area.

Action soon resumed when six enemy aircraft bombed the base at Koepang on March 18, marking the start of a sustained period of RAAF operations from northern Australia over the Banda Sea.

During an attack on the 23rd, Flt Lt Jack McAllister in A16-109 bombed a flying boat in Koepang before being targeted by a Zero,

to handle when another burst from the Zeros [destroyed] my port engine. An instant later it burst into flames."

In late April, Sqn Ldr 'Tich' McFarlane became CO and, promoted to wing commander, he led the squadron back to Darwin despite continued air attacks. Operations in the Zero-infested skies of Timor and Ambon continued, with McFarlane conducting a daring daylight recce resulting in a subsequent attack by nine Hudsons on shipping in Ambon harbour.

A move to the new airfield at Batchelor, south of Darwin, came in mid-August, from where Hudsons

Top left
No.2 Squadron RAAF's Colours, showing its battle honours for the Pacific and Darwin plus the US Presidential citation for the Banda Sea action. RAAF



flew operations into the northwest area. Steady losses to fighters continued, though there were occasional successes, such as when Fg Off Arthur Sharp's aircraft was attacked: as the Zero pulled away, gunner Sgt Ernie Keith fired into its exposed belly and it went down in flames.

Once additional guns had been fitted to the Hudsons, Japanese fighters were less inclined to close on a formation, due to the greater firepower. When separated from his formation over Timor, Fg Off Neil Badger was pursued at low level through the jungle-clad valleys by a Zero, but just over the sea it closed to 50 yards on the beam – when, raked by the Hudson's gunfire, it crashed.

Among those recognised for courage during the fighting over the Banda Sea was wireless op/air gunner Flt Sgt Bill Oldfield, awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal. Uniquely, 2 Squadron won a US Presidential Unit Citation for its actions over the Banda Sea, which were in the highest traditions of the RAAF: the streamer is born on its colours.

Above
An early Lockheed Hudson fitted with the dorsal turret, Mk.I A16-29 joined 14 Squadron on April 4, 1940. RAAF

Left
Hudson Mk.I A16-33 of 13 Squadron RAAF became bogged down on February 7, 1941 while landing at Bathurst Island, reflecting the conditions on forward airstrips when war came. GP CAPT C EATON VIA F SMITH

Bottom left
Hudson Mk.I A16-97/B of 2 Squadron crashed at Canberra on August 13, 1940, killing the crew and a number of VIP passengers. JOHN BATCHELOR VIA MALCOLM V LOWE



17 aircraft between them, including four to strafing by Zeros on the 26th, Australia Day.

These effective attacks continued, as did 2 Squadron's reconnaissance sorties until the evacuation, though some, including Fg Off Bill White who was later awarded 2 Squadron's first Distinguished Flying Cross, were captured and executed soon afterwards by the enemy.

Attacks on Timor increased too and soon Koepang could only be used by night, and early on Thursday, February 19, the last

which was eventually shot down by the Hudson gunners. The crippled bomber crashed into the sea and only its pilot survived to enter captivity. He was one of two 2 Squadron aircrew to eventually emerge from imprisonment. Most were executed.

These raids continued almost daily with some success but were vulnerable to enemy fighters, as one 2 Squadron pilot described: "He used his cannon well and one burst put the turret guns out of action. The aircraft became more difficult



Above
Hudson Mk.IIIA A16-172 joined 2 Squadron RAAF on September 11, 1942 but was shot down during an attack on a Japanese ship just three days later with the loss of crew. VIA J W BENNETT



Above right
A 459 Squadron Hudson Mk.III, V8998/GK-O, awaits its next anti-shipping sortie. It was destroyed in a crash on September 6, 1942. SON LDR F K MURRAY



Above right
Awaiting bomb loading at Batchelor in October 1942 is Hudson Mk.IIIA A16-242, which crash-landed after an anti-submarine patrol early on March 14, 1943 and was written off. RAAF

On Christmas Eve 1942 the unit attacked a destroyer escorting transports in the Wetar Strait, north of eastern Timor, but managed only near misses on the manoeuvring ships. Three days later, new CO Wg Cdr Ralph Moran led a formation back to the same area where they had an intense fight with three Zeros. Although one was claimed shot down, the Aussie aircrews watched in horror as Fg Off Merv John's Hudson, A16-210, "burst into flames from half way under the fuselage and shot up in the air out of control and finally spiralled into the sea". The remaining five aircraft returned, all but one damaged.

NEW GUINEA

One of the squadron's first missions of 1943 was an armed recce of the Kai Islands (otherwise known as the Spice Islands) on January 6 when an Otori-Class torpedo boat was spotted. Diving from 6,000ft, the Hudsons scored direct hits with their bombs and stopped the vessel, which belched black smoke before it exploded. Attacks on Timor continued through February, but after the Japanese defeat in the Bismarck Sea off New Britain, the Darwin-based units' focus switched to targets further east off southwest New Guinea in the Arafura Sea. To achieve the required range, sorties were often staged via

Milingimbi on the coast of Arnhem Land, some 300 miles east of Darwin. Six Hudsons led by Sqn Ldr Malcolm Burns took off there to attack Timoeka airfield in southwest New Guinea on April 6, but just after dropping his bombs, Burns' aircraft was hit by ground fire and crashed. Several other Hudsons were damaged, and again when the strike was repeated several days later. Wg Cdr Jock Whyte became the latest CO of the squadron, which then moved to Hughes, an airfield just outside Darwin. Japanese airpower was waning but fighters were still seen occasionally. During an armed recce on April 24, Plt Off Aloysius Kilgaroff's crew spotted seaplanes at anchor and then evaded an attack by an E8N 'Dave' biplane. The next day, Fg Off 'Bunny' Austin was attacked by a much more dangerous A6M2-N 'Rufe' floatplane which was driven off, damaged. 'Rufes' continued to be encountered on sorties to the New Guinea coast. Two of the float-equipped fighters pounced on a formation of five Hudsons attacking the seaplane anchorage at Maikoor on May 7. One of them, A16-171, flown by WO Viv Jackman, straggled behind the formation before falling victim to a 'Rufe' and going down in flames. The fighters also damaged Fg Off Ray Hornby's A16-211, named *The*

Tojo Busters, which he managed to fly back to Milingimbi where it was written off. It's commemorated today by the paint scheme worn by the world's sole airworthy Hudson, Mk.IV VH-KOY. Cutting enemy shipping routes between the offshore islands to New Guinea, and targeting traffic around the coast, remained 2 Squadron's priorities. Timor was still attacked too – Sqn Ldr Cyril Williams, on the first trip of his tour, leading a four-aircraft assault on Penfoei airfield during bad weather on July 9. Although the others turned back, nothing was seen of Williams' aircraft again.



Wg Cdr Keith Hennock arrived as CO soon afterwards and the focus continued to be the New Guinea coast, as Allied landings in the north of the island went ahead. By late 1943 the squadron's Hudsons were obsolete for the role, and it had flown them for longer than any RAAF unit. In November a handful of B-34 Venturas arrived but were deemed unsuitable, and so began a protracted conversion to the Australian-built Bristol Beaufort. The first flight had converted by the end of the year. Operations nevertheless continued with the faithful Hudson into 1944, though increasingly more were flown by Beauforts until, on





April 8, Fg Off Roger Kuring's crew flew A16-199 on 2 Squadron's final operation with the Lockheed type, closing a hard-fought but distinguished period.

MEDITERRANEAN ACTION

Soon after Australian Hudsons entered combat in the Far East, the RAAF established another unit with the type in the Mediterranean: led by Sqn Ldr Philip Howson, 459 Squadron formed at Burg el Arab near the port of Alexandria, Egypt, on February 10, 1942. Its missions would focus on maritime reconnaissance and anti-shipping, under control of 201 Group.



It flew its first patrol four days later, but not until late May would 459 reach full strength, by which time Wg Cdr Keith Hennock was in charge.

During May, the squadron moved to airfield LG 40, flying 52 maritime recce patrols during the month and covering a vital convoy to Malta.

While overhead the ships on June 15, Hudson Mk.IV V9022 was shot down by Bf 109s with the loss of 21-year-old Queenslander Fg Off William Blackstock and his crew.

Just before dusk that day came another air attack from Ju 88s of I./LG 1 and I./KG 54. Flying Hudson V9052/GK-D at 400ft, Plt Off Jim Cowan-Hunt attacked one as another came in from behind, Sgt H A Jackson returning fire from the turret and hitting its starboard engine. The first Ju 88 then turned to attack, forcing Cowan-Hunt to evade at almost waveltop height. He opened fire with the Hudson's front guns, setting ablaze one of the engines, and the German aircraft limped away, losing height.

Cowan-Hunt was lost with his crew in Hudson V9187/GK-C on an anti-submarine patrol on June 30.

In the desert war, Axis forces were dependent on their supply lines across the Mediterranean and along the North African coast. To interdict these routes, from July 20 the squadron was tasked with attacking

large landing barges (F-boats) moving between Tobruk, Libya and Mersa Matruh in Egypt, for which it moved to Edku in the northwestern Nile delta. But during the third sortie off Tobruk on the 24th, the Hudsons ran into Messerschmitt Bf 110s of III./ZG 26, and Uffz Helmut Neitzke – flying '4U+EK' – shot one down, although he was hit by return fire.

On the 27th, the 200-ton Italian barge *MFP 348* was sunk west of Sidi Barrani, and the following day four Hudsons attacked two F-boats near Mersa Matruh. Diving to deck level, the crews released their bombs and hit one that was beached – though Hudson FH292 was struck by flak and ditched and a second was damaged.

Just after dawn on August 2, Flt Lt I F D'A Rose made a surprise dive attack on an F-boat, which sank after being hit by three bombs. Three days later Hudson FH302 disappeared on a night shipping attack along with Flt Sgt Walter Staines' and his crew.

Another F-boat was sunk on the 13th, the attacking Hudson crew reporting a terrific explosion midships – though another fell victim to flak on a strike later in the day, off Ras Azzaz.

By mid-August, 459 Squadron had flown 85 sorties against F-boats (for the loss of four Hudsons): 15 were sunk and three damaged, forcing the Germans to abandon their use.

The squadron then took on convoy and anti-submarine searches. At dawn on September 4, during an attack on an escort destroyer, bombs from Plt Off Beaton's Hudson, FH242/GK-K, set the vessel on fire from stem to stern. Four days later Fg Off Allan Proctor's crew hit a large supply ship. ➔



Left
During July and August 1942, 459 Squadron Hudsons conducted intensive attacks on enemy F-boats along the Libyan coast. Some of the crews decorated their aircraft with nose art. SON LDR F K MURRAY

Below left
A formation of 459 Squadron Hudson Mk.IIIa sets out on September 6, 1942, flying over the Nile delta for a convoy escort off the approaches to the port of Alexandria. SON LDR F K MURRAY

Below
A formation of 2 Squadron Hudson Mk.IIIa variants over northern Australia circa April 1943. The nearest aircraft is A16-233/N, which was shot down while attacking a Japanese ship on September 9. Three of the crew were killed and the two survivors captured, interrogated and executed. VIA J W BENNETT



Right

Having temporarily converted to the bombing role, 459 Squadron Hudson Mk.IIIa FH428/R over choppy Mediterranean waters approaches the Crete coast in September 1943.

VIA J W BENNETT



Below

In 1943, 459 Squadron concentrated on anti-submarine work with the Hudson Mk.IIIa - exemplified by FH250/L flown by Flt Sgt Barnard and his crew on June 19, three days after their successful attack on a U-boat. D J DILWORTH

A detachment of ASV radar-equipped Hudsons was then sent to Aden to cover the Red Sea approaches from possible Japanese submarines, and six more went to Palestine after a surge in submarine activity in the eastern Mediterranean.

Later in September, Philip Howson took command of 459 as operations against enemy convoys increased in importance up to and after the great offensive at El Alamein, Egypt, which opened on October 23.

By early November, desperately short of fuel supplies, the enemy began to withdraw from El Alamein and the Hudsons were ordered forward to airfield LG 39. From there on the 16th they covered Operation Stoneage, the successful run of a convoy from Egypt to Malta.

Searches for Axis shipping continued, and by the end of the month 459 Squadron had been concentrated together once more at Gianacelis in Alexandria. In mid-

December came a further move to Gambut in the desert, southeast of the Libyan port of Tobruk.

The unit then flew 71 sorties over the central and eastern Mediterranean, continuing into 1943 - although with the Axis moving west there was little activity on 459's 'patch'.

U-BOAT SINKING

Throughout June, three Hudsons were regularly detached to extend patrol coverage from St Jean and Lydda, Palestine (today known as Lod), while from Gambut on June 12, Sqn Ldr Alsopp in FH308/U attacked a submerging U-boat and may have damaged it.

Four days later Flt Sgt D T Barnard found Kptlt Hans-Georg Trox's U-97 surfaced, with some of its crew sunbathing on deck. Barnard's Hudson attacked immediately. One depth charge exploded on the boat's decking, with two more alongside, and U-97

went down by the stern within minutes, leaving 21 survivors. The explosions had, however, badly damaged the Hudson and only by skilful flying was Barnard able to recover to Haifa.

Patrols continued to protect convoy and fleet movements from the Nile delta with little of note, but increasingly the focus was switching to the Aegean area.

In September, 459 was temporarily retasked in the light bomber role and began operations in support of the Aegean campaign - including round-the-clock attacks on ports and airfields in Greece and on Crete - to cover the British landings on the islands of Kos and Leros in the Dodecanese.

In a major effort on the night of September 20/21, 13 Hudsons bombed Kalamaki airfield south of Athens while five more attacked Heraklion on Crete. But a vigorous German counterattack retook the islands after bitter fighting.

In October, Wg Cdr A D Henderson took command of 459 Squadron, which continued its Aegean operations, mainly focusing on inter-island shipping. Airfields continued to be hit too, Heraklion being the target on October 18 and the 28th. More than 100 sorties were recorded, with attacks on ports and other maritime targets continuing until the unit came off operations in December to re-equip with the Hudson's lineal successor, the Lockheed Ventura Mk.V.

Its final Hudson sortie, flown by FK397/Y on March 4, 1944, closed an intense and tactically important period for the type. ●

