



# 10 Squadron RAAF

## *The Sunderland Years*

**The new four-engined Short Sunderland flying boat was the undoubtedly the 'Queen Of The Skies' for RAF Coastal Command in 1939. By 3 September, the first day of the war, 40 were in service with four RAF squadrons and Australian personnel were waiting to receive the first of nine ordered for the RAAF.**

*Above: Four of 10 Squadron's original pilots at Pembroke Dock in Wales. From left: Flt Off Ivan Podger, Flt Lt Bill 'Bull' Garing, Flt Lt Charles Pearce, and Flt Lt Bill Gibson. Tom Scott*

10 SQUADRON RAAF, a new general reconnaissance unit, was formed under the command of Sqd Ldr Leon Lachal on 1 July 1939 at Point Cook, Victoria. Pending the delivery of Sunderlands from Britain, it was temporarily equipped with Supermarine Seagull V (Walrus) amphibians, a Supermarine Southampton flying boat and a de Havilland Moth floatplane.

Pilots and ground staff left Australia for Britain that month to accept and train on the new aircraft before ferrying them back to Australia.

After training, the Australians assembled at Pembroke Dock in Wales and were there when war was declared. They accepted their first Sunderland, N9048/A, at Short's Rochester factory on 11 September. The second (N9049/B) followed eight days later.

Preparations were made for the flights to Australia in groups of three, provisionally planned to start early in October. But on 7 October the Australian flying boat detachment (temporarily a lodger unit with 210 Squadron RAF) was notified that it was to remain on active service in Europe. Thus 10 Squadron RAAF became the first Dominion air unit to achieve active service in WWII. The RAF allocated the code letters 'RB'.

On 3 January 1940 the squadron became part of 15 Group RAF Coastal Command with the responsibility of covering the vital Western Approaches into Britain. It was declared operational on 1 February and immediately began convoy escort missions, anti-submarine patrols, air-sea-rescue work and ferrying equipment and personnel on long range transport flights.

### INTO ACTION

On 1 April 1940, 10 Squadron moved to Mount Batten near Plymouth, and on 14 May, Flt Lt Hugh Birch's crew in Sunderland P9605/K sighted the squadron's first U-boat. The first attack on a U-boat occurred on 17 June when Flt Lt Charles Pearce's crew (in N9604/J) claimed superficial damage. Pearce was awarded the DFC, the first to a member of the RAAF since its formation in 1921.

The next day saw 10 Squadron's first casualties during a 'special flight' to deliver a British Intelligence officer to France to arrange the evacuation of General de Gaulle's family before German occupation.

Walrus L2312 was borrowed from the RAF for the mission but it crashed in flames in France killing all on board for reason unknown. Lost were Flt Lt John



'Dinger' Bell, Sgt Charles Harris and two passengers. These were the first RAAF fatalities on active service since its formation.

On 1 July, Flt Lt W 'Hoot' Gibson's crew (in P9603/H) had the distinction of destroying the squadron's first submarine when they sank the U-26. Credit was shared with the Royal Navy corvette HMS *Gladiolus* which also took part in the action. This was the second sinking achieved by Coastal Command aircraft since hostilities began.

13 July saw Gibson and his crew clash with a Messerschmitt Bf 110 west of Ushant Island, the fighter departing with an engine trailing smoke. Twenty-five bullets struck the Sunderland, piercing both port fuel tanks but there was no fire. For this action and his attack on the U-26, Gibson received a DFC. Elsewhere, Flt Lt Dick Cohen and his crew chased a Heinkel He 111 from a convoy under their protection.

Two days later, south of the Scilly Isles, Flt Lt Hugh Birch and crew in P9603 single-handedly drove away five He 111s attacking the SS *City of Limerick*, damaging one. The Germans were beginning to respect these 'flying porcupines'.

On 28 July and 80 miles from Valencia, Ireland,

Hugh Birch and crew (P9601/RB-F) located four lifeboats from the torpedoed *Auckland Star*. Deciding the sea was calm enough, Birch landed next to the lifeboats to take off anyone requiring urgent medical attention.

As a trawler had been sighted approaching and nobody needed immediate help, Birch left the rescue to the trawler. This was the first successful open ocean landing made by an RAAF flying boat.

Next day, Bull Garing and crew (P9601/RB-F) escorting the armed merchant cruiser HMAS *Mooltan*, fought off attacks by Ju 88s for four-and-a-half hours. The ship's captain highly commended the Sunderland crew for their effective air cover and Garing later received the DFC.

After the Admiralty had to re-route ocean convoys north of Ireland, a detachment from 10 Squadron operated from Oban on the Firth of Lorn, Scotland, to provide air cover. Oban was hazardous, frequently blanketed by fog and low cloud at night and rough sea during winter. Because of drifted landing flares, Sunderland P9602/RB-G, struck the shore and sank within five minutes on 2-3 September but the crew evacuated safely. >>>

**Above: Sunderland N9048/RB-A, 10 Squadron's first aircraft accepted at Short's Rochester factory on 11 September 1939.**

*Tom Scott*

**This was the first successful open ocean landing made by an RAAF flying boat.**





**Above & below: U-boats were hard to kill. A strafing run over the U-71 west of Bordeaux by Flt Lt Sam Wood and crew on 5 June 1942. This photo was published in the English press. Although heavily damaged, the U-71 managed to reach La Pallice. The German press seems to have been keen to let its public know (and the British) that it had escaped and reused the photo complete with enhanced explosions!** Tom Scott

25 September was eventful. Flt Lt Ivan Podger and crew (P9603/RB-H) on convoy escort with an RAF Sunderland drove off a Focke-Wulf Condor. Another Sunderland (N9050/RB-D) piloted by Bull Garing found a lifeboat full of survivors from the SS *City of Benares* which had been sunk on 17 September. Forty-five people including six children were recovered by an escort destroyer.

On 17 October, Podger landed Sunderland P9600/RB-E on the sea and successfully picked up 21 survivors in a lifeboat from the SS *Stangrant* which had been sunk four days earlier. In the Bay of Biscay, Charles Pearce and crew (N9050/RB-D) bombed a crash-diving U-boat without obvious results.

Towards the end of October 1940 weather over the UK deteriorated badly. In November gales frequently lashed the west and south coasts of Britain causing the loss of three RAF flying boats at their moorings. At such times it was normal to put a skeleton crew aboard 10 Squadron's Sunderlands to run the engines and keep the strain off the mooring cables if necessary.

During a gale at Mount Batten one Sunderland broke its moorings and Cpl Harold Martin – despite having had no instruction in taxiing these huge machines – started the engines and moved it to a safer anchorage, saving the aircraft and others nearby from serious damage. He was Mentioned in Despatches.

On the night of 27-28 November, Plymouth was subjected to a six-hour air raid. Two Sunderlands, N9048/RB-A (10 Squadron's first) and P9601/RB-E, were destroyed and several others damaged.

**Above: 1 July 1940: Flt Lt Bill 'Hoot' Gibson's Sunderland P9603/RB-H attacking the U-26. Credit was shared with HMS *Gladiolus*. This was the second sinking achieved by Coastal Command aircraft since the war began, and 10 Squadron's first conclusive submarine victory.** Tom Scott

On the night of 20-21 March 1941 the Luftwaffe attacked Plymouth. Two Sunderlands, P9604/RB-J and T9047/RB-L, were damaged. Over 20,000 incendiaries were dropped on shops and residential areas. Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, who was visiting Britain, was in the city in time to experience its heaviest raid of the war so far.

By late 1940/early 1941, the die had been cast. These duties and experiences would be those of the squadron for the rest of the war. A summary of some of the highlights follow...

## ANTI-SUBMARINE

A summary of 10 Squadron's U-boat sinkings appears in the table accompanying this article. Apart from these victories, there were naturally numerous other encounters:

18 March 1942: In the Bay of Biscay, Flt Lt 'Buck' Judell and crew (W3999/RB-Y) depth charge a submerged U-boat without success.

5 June 1942: Flt Lt Sam Wood and crew (W3986/RB-U) heavily damaged the U-71 west of Bordeaux and then had a running 75-minute battle with an Fw 200. The U-boat managed to reach La Pallice.

During mid-1942 there was a rash of sightings resulting in several attacks in which submarines were damaged. These included the U-71 on 5 June; the Italian submarine *Luigi Torelli* on 7 June; U-105 on 11 June; and Italy's *Reginaldo Giuliani* on 1 September.





16 July 1943: Flt Lt R Humble of 10 Squadron found two outward-bound U-boats in the Bay of Biscay. They responded with accurate AA fire. His attack blew several men overboard before the U-boats crash-dived, apparently undamaged.

1 August 1943: In the Bay of Biscay, Sunderland W4020/B captained by Flt Lt Bob Fry was crippled by AA fire while attacking the U-454. Just after the ruptured German submarine sank, the Sunderland crashed while force-landing in heavy swell. Six of Fry's crew survived, rescued by HMS *Wren*.

### ANTI-SHIPING

30 September 1941: Over the Bay of Biscay, Flt Lt Geoff Havyatt and crew (W3979/RB-Q) bombed and strafed two enemy tramp steamers.

20 March 1942: Flg Off Graham Pockley and crew (W3983/RB-R) attacked a German motor launch leaving it sinking in the Bay of Biscay.

1 January 1943: Flg Off Kerv Beeton and crew (W4004/RB-Z) found the inward-bound German blockade runner *Rhakotis* (6,753 tons). He then located cruiser HMS *Scylla*, which was also searching for this ship. By laying a line of smoke floats, he guided *Scylla* to within 12 miles of *Rhakotis*, which was sunk by the cruiser's guns.

### AERIAL COMBAT

21 June 1942: Sunderland W3999/RB-Y captained by Flt Lt 'Buck' Judell failed to return from an air-sea rescue mission. It was a Mk.III featuring a dorsal turret, an improved hull and Mk.II ASV radar. Shortly after arriving in the search area, it was attacked by an Arado Ar 196 and forced to alight with an engine smoking. As it stopped it blew up killing the entire crew.

30 July 1942: Sunderland W3994/RB-X was shot down during an anti-shipping patrol along the Spanish coast just outside territorial waters. Missing, believed killed, were Flt Lt Eric Martin and crew.

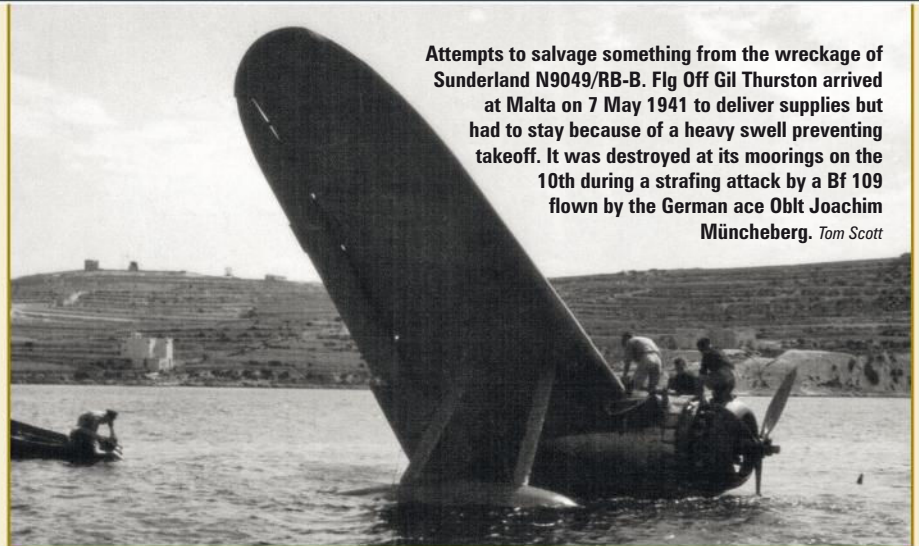
To try to counter the effectiveness of the enemy fighters, 10 Squadron developed a number of armament modifications. One was the fitting of four Browning 0.303in machine guns in the aircraft's bow.

These were also useful against submarine anti-aircraft gun crews and aided in lining up for making depth charge attacks. Another was the introduction of galley hatch-mounted machine guns originally developed by 461 Squadron RAAF for its Sunderlands.

17 May 1943: Flt Lt Malcolm McKenzie's Sunderland (W4004/Z) failed to return from a patrol and was presumed shot down by fighters. According to German sources, 15/KG 40's Hptm Hans Morr shot down a Sunderland on this day but also lost a Ju 88C-6, probably by return fire from McKenzie's Sunderland.

5 July 1943: Despite four attending Ju 88s, Flg Off R Gray's Sunderland attacked three U-boats in the Bay of Biscay but they escaped by diving quickly.

9 July 1943: Flg Off Dick Grey and crew (W4030/H) found three U-boats sailing together on the surface for stronger anti-aircraft defence, and there was also an air escort of four Ju 88s. Grey attacked regardless but was unsuccessful against such a well-defended target.



Attempts to salvage something from the wreckage of Sunderland N9049/RB-B. Flg Off Gil Thurston arrived at Malta on 7 May 1941 to deliver supplies but had to stay because of a heavy swell preventing takeoff. It was destroyed at its moorings on the 10th during a strafing attack by a Bf 109 flown by the German ace Oblt Joachim Müncheberg. *Tom Scott*

3 August 1943: Sunderland DD852/J captained by Flg Off Basil Williams battled seven Ju 88s for an hour over the Bay of Biscay, probably destroying one. Front gunner Flt Sgt Hugh Bird was killed and four other crewmembers wounded before escaping.

11 August 1943: Flt Lt Norm Gerrard and crew (DP177/F) failed to return from the Bay of Biscay. Just three days earlier, on a similar patrol in the same aircraft, they had escaped from six Ju 88s.

30 November 1943: Six Ju 88s attacked Flt Lt T Clarke's Sunderland (DD865/L). Three crewmembers were wounded and the flying boat so severely damaged it had to glide in for a landing after its fuel tanks were punctured. The 'flying porcupine' left one Ju 88 with both engines burning and another with an engine on fire. Tail gunner Flt Sgt Frank Callander was awarded a DFM and Clarke a DFC.

15 February 1944: Sixteen Ju 88s attacked Flt Lt McCulloch's Sunderland (EK574/Q). After damaging some of its opponents, the flying boat escaped into cloud, but not before tail gunner Flt Sgt Gordon Mills had been killed.

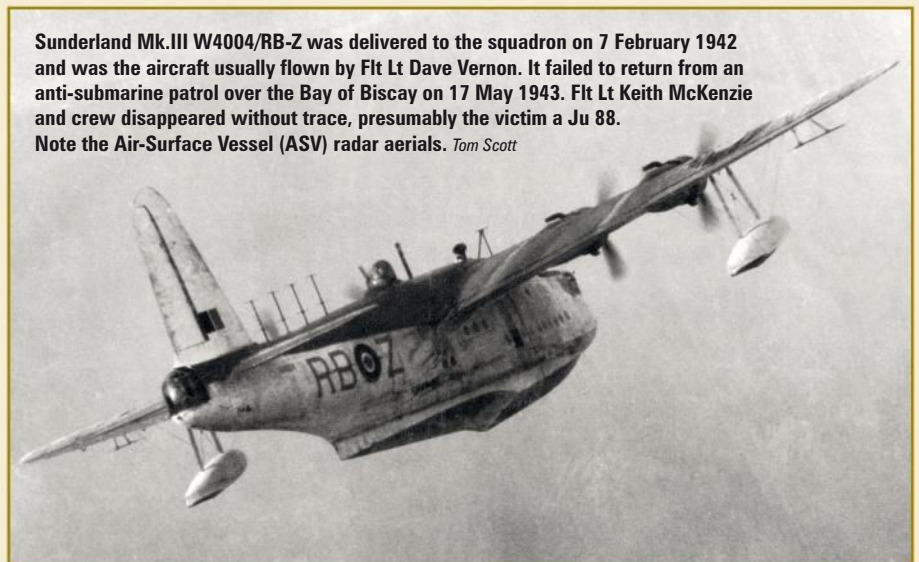
### OTHER ACTIVITIES

11 June 1941: At Mount Batten, 10 Squadron took delivery of three ex-BOAC Short S.26 G-class flying boats to be used for special long range sorties to the Middle East. >>>



Above: 22 October 1941: six survivors of a Whitley crew that was picked up from a dinghy floating in the Bay of Biscay by Flt Lt Reg Burrage and crew. *Tom Scott*

Sunderland Mk.III W4004/RB-Z was delivered to the squadron on 7 February 1942 and was the aircraft usually flown by Flt Lt Dave Vernon. It failed to return from an anti-submarine patrol over the Bay of Biscay on 17 May 1943. Flt Lt Keith McKenzie and crew disappeared without trace, presumably the victim a Ju 88. Note the Air-Surface Vessel (ASV) radar aerials. *Tom Scott*





Above: The grateful personnel of 10 Squadron RAAF presented this plaque to the city of Plymouth. Author's collection

20 June 1941: Sqn Ldr Ivan Podger in Sunderland P9063/RB-H conducted a search for G-class flying boat X8274 *Golden Fleece*, lost on a flight from Mount Batten to Gibraltar. Although using newly-fitted radar, the search was unsuccessful. Most of the aircraft's passengers and crew perished but five survivors were eventually rescued by a German seaplane. One was Cpl Len Corcoran who became 10 Squadron's only POW of the war.

24 October 1941: Flying in early morning darkness, Flt Lt Attie Wearne and crew in P9605/RB-K on their way to an anti-submarine patrol were suddenly fired on from below.

Wearne took evasive action. With daylight it was realised that the port outer wing tank had been holed and was streaming oil. Fitters Cpl Ted King and LAC D Hunter patched the holes and cut another in the top of the tank to refill it from a spare drum.

With King keeping check on the gauges, Hunter stayed in the cramped wing for the next two hours until reaching Pembroke Dock, keeping the engine running smoothly by collecting oil draining into the nacelle in a jug and pouring it back into the tank.

It was later learned that they had unintentionally flown over a trigger-happy 'friendly' convoy!

3 November 1941: Although BOAC aircraft flew between England and Cairo, 10 Squadron Sunderlands still made lengthy Middle East detachments. In a typical scenario, Sqn Ldr Reg Burrage and crew in W3986/RB-U flew to Malta carrying 14 fighter pilots, returned to Gibraltar on the 8th and two days later carried more fighter pilots to Cairo.

After two sorties to Aboukir, Burrage returned to Gibraltar on the 19th with eleven passengers. Returning to England early on the 22nd, he had to turn back to Gibraltar because of a gale warning. On his way again that evening, he finally reached Pembroke Dock after a brief clash with an He 111.

25 April 1942: 461 Squadron RAAF formed at Mount Batten from a nucleus provided by 10 Squadron. Initially commanded by Sqn Ldr R Burrage, it was planned as a Catalina unit but instead received Sunderlands.

A modification that was widely accepted by the RAF was a redesign of the Sunderland's engine mounts and wing internal layout enabling the aircraft's unreliable Bristol Pegasus engines to be replaced by Pratt and Whitney R-1830 Twin Wasps. Plans drawn by 10 Squadron's staff were accepted by Shorts and led to the production of Pratt and Whitney-powered Sunderlands which entered service in mid-1944.

In February 1944, 10 Squadron created a new Coastal Command monthly record by flying 1,143 hours. With the invasion of France on 6 June 1944, the squadron participated in patrols to cover Allied shipping as well as conducting its usual anti-submarine patrols.

Throughout the latter half of 1944, these patrols continued but with the new 'schnorkel' equipment now fitted to German submarines, the Allies had no effective countermeasure. There were very few sightings made for the rest of the war.

As the Allies spread out deeper into France, the Germans were obliged to abandon the airfields from which they had launched such heavy counterattacks on Coastal Command aircraft. Consequently, the frequency of combat declined and by late 1944 they were almost non-existent.

### THE END OF AN ERA

10 Squadron flew its last wartime mission on 7 May 1945, an anti-submarine patrol by Flt Lt A Dustan and crew in Sunderland NJ256/F.

Between 15-19 June, the squadron ferried its Mk.III Sunderlands to Wig Bay in Scotland for disposal. In return, newer Mk.Vs previously operated by 461 Squadron were taken on charge. Official notification then came that 12 Sunderlands were to be dispatched to the Pacific zone. They were to depart on 3 July in four flights of three.

Meanwhile, a second 10 Squadron RAAF came into existence temporarily at Driffield on 20 June 1945 when 466 (Halifax) Squadron ceased to be part of RAF Bomber Command and was renumbered as 10 Squadron. This particular unit had spent May and early June disposing of its surplus bombs by jettisoning them into the sea and commencing specialised training for long-distance transport duties which did not eventuate.

10 (Sunderland) Squadron ceased operations with RAF Coastal Command that same day, 20 June 1945. The 'Sunderland boys' had set an enviable record during their six years with Coastal Command including being credited with accounting for at least six enemy submarines. It was the only RAAF squadron to see continuous active service for the entire duration of hostilities in Europe.

10 Squadron was disbanded officially on 26 October 1945. A new 10 squadron would come into existence on 1 March 1949 at Garbutt in Queensland, but that is another story..



### 10 SQUADRON RAAF - U-BOAT CLAIMS

DATE	U-BOAT	LOCALITY	AIRCRAFT	COMMANDER
1 July 1940	U-26 Type IA	SW Bishop's Rock	P9603*	Flt Lt W Gibson
7 May 1943	U-465 Type VIIC	240mils NW Cape Ortegal	W3993	Flt Lt G G Rossiter
31 May 1943	U-563 Type VIIC	SW of Brest	DV969**	Flt Lt M S Mainprize
1 August 1943	U-454 Type VIIC	N of Cape Finisterre	W4020	Flt Lt K G Fry
8 January 1944	U-426 Type VIIC	W of Nantes	EK586	Flg Off J P Roberts
8 July 1944	U-243 Type VIIC	130 miles SW Brest	W4030	Flg Off W B Tilley

\* Shared with HMS *Gladiolus*

\*\* Shared with 58 and 228 Squadrons RAF