



# Spotlight

## Supermarine Walrus

**FlyPast**

Scrutinizes the  
history of...



# The Supermarine Walrus

**Above**  
When returning to  
a launch ship, the  
Walrus would land  
on water and be  
lifted aboard by a  
crane. BOTH KEY

**A**lthough originally designed to fulfil a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) requirement, the Walrus went on to serve both the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm and the RAF throughout World War Two. Compared with Supermarine's most famous design, it was an inelegant and rudimentary looking creation, but it was undoubtedly fit for purpose and proved to be of great value in more than one role.

Its roots can be traced back to 1929 when the RAAF stated a need for an aircraft capable of being catapult-launched from cruisers. R J Mitchell – who would of course go on to draw up the Spitfire – designed a distinctive single-engined biplane that was initially called the Seagull V. Although it resembled the manufacturer's earlier Seagull III, it was essentially a completely new aircraft.

Construction was delayed until 1933 due to other commitments, but the prototype made a successful first flight on June 21 of that year. Supermarine test pilot Joseph

'Mutt' Summers was at the controls. Just five days later he flew it at the Society of British Aerospace Companies show at Hendon, and surprised spectators – and Mitchell – by successfully looping the aircraft. The machine had certainly not been designed with such manoeuvres in mind, but the feat proved the strength of its aluminium alloy construction. The amphibian was intended to serve in tropical climates, and was therefore made largely of metal rather than wood (the latter tended to deteriorate in such conditions).

Powered by a Bristol Pegasus radial engine, the Walrus (as it became known in British hands) was of 'pusher' configuration, meaning that the propeller faced the rear. This was to protect crew members as they climbed on top of the cockpit to pick up mooring lines, and it kept both the propeller and most of the engine clear from spray when alighting on water. The engine nacelle also housed electrical equipment and an oil tank – the air intake acted as an oil cooler. The

wings were designed to be folded up on deck, meaning that an aircraft with a normal wingspan of 45ft 10in (14m) could be effectively reduced to 17ft 6in for stowage.

The Walrus was usually flown by just one pilot, though it could be configured for two, with additional work stations for a radio operator and navigator. The type's detachable control column was a particularly unusual feature. It could be fitted in either of two positions, and – remarkably – could be unplugged and passed from one position to the other (for example, when the pilot was handing control over to the co-pilot).

### Going to sea

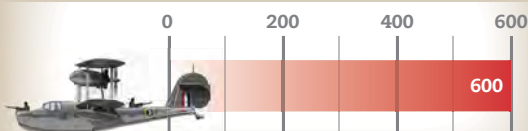
Following Summers' memorable demonstration of the new type at Hendon, further trials were carried out by the Felixstowe-based Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment. Shipboard testing took place from HMS *Repulse* and *Valiant*, and at Farnborough it became the first aircraft to undergo a catapult launch while carrying a full military load. Flt

**SPOT FACT** The type was produced from 1936 until 1944

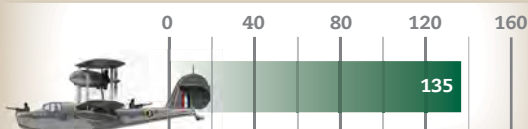
## Origin & history

### Supermarine Walrus

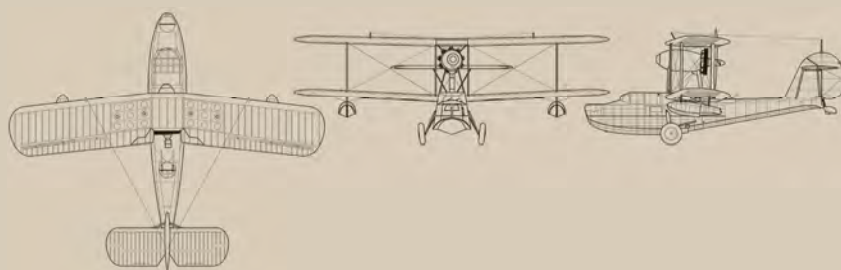
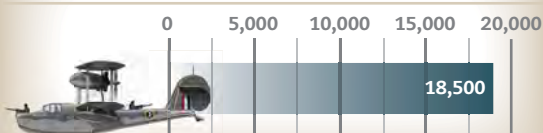
#### AT A GLANCE: RANGE (miles)



#### AT A GLANCE: SPEED (mph)



#### AT A GLANCE: CEILING (feet)



- Construction:** A total of 740 were built.
- First Flight:** The prototype flew on June 21, 1933, in the hands of Joseph 'Mutt' Summers.
- Powerplant:** One 680hp (510kW) Bristol Pegasus VI radial engine driving a four-bladed propeller.
- Dimension:** Span 45ft 10in (14m). Length 37ft 7in. Height 15ft 3in. Wing area 610sq ft (56.7 sq m).
- Weight:** Empty 4,900lb (2,220kg). Loaded 7,200lb.
- Performance:** Max speed 135mph (215km/h) at 4,750ft (1,450m). Service ceiling 18,500ft. Rate of climb 1,050ft per min. Max range 600 miles (965km).
- Armament:** Two or three 0.303in Vickers K machine guns, six 100lb (45kg) bombs or two 250lb bombs or two 250lb depth charges.
- Crew:** Three or four - pilot (sometimes with co-pilot) plus navigator and radio operator.

**Note:** performance and weights varied according to role and configuration.

Lt Sydney Richard Ubee, later an Air Vice-Marshal, was at the controls for this challenging first 'mission'.

The RAAF placed an initial order for 24 Seagull Vs, with aircraft entering service from 1935. The RAF's first order was for 12 examples – the first of its aircraft, K5772, made its debut flight on March 16, 1936. There were a few aerodynamic modifications made to the production fleet, the main one being the addition of Handley Page slats on the upper wings.

Three versions were produced, the Seagull V for Australia, and the Walrus I and II for British forces. The Mk.II was built by Saunders-Roe and was mostly made of wood, as the preferred light alloy was in great demand elsewhere.

Supermarine also created a similar but more powerful

version of the Walrus called the Sea Otter. Nearly 300 were made, but they never entirely replaced the older amphibian, instead serving alongside them, usually in the air-sea rescue role.

The Walrus was well established in British service by the time World War Two broke out. Its main task in the early years of the conflict was to search for enemy submarines and other vessels, and by March 1941 aircraft were fitted with new Air to Surface Vessel radar systems. A few of the biplanes were used for bombing and strafing in both the Norwegian campaign and in East Africa. A Royal Australian Navy Walrus

successfully struck Italian headquarters at Zeila, Somalia in August 1940.

From 1943, catapult-launched aircraft were being withdrawn, as increasingly advanced radar rendered them obsolete. Walruses were instead

used to rescue downed crews from the sea, often operating from carriers.

A handful remained in Argentine Navy service into the late 1950s, with a few flying in civilian hands elsewhere.

Today only four survive, including one Seagull V, but none are currently airworthy. ●

**Below**  
Supermarine Walrus I G-AHFN was flown by test pilot and air racer John Grierson to win the Folkestone Trophy in 1946.



**2** were used at Lee-on-Solent for trials of Air to Surface Vessel radar





# Spotlight

## Supermarine Walrus

**Graham Pitchfork** relates the exploits of two brave and determined life-savers

# The Sea Sha



**E**ffervescent, outspoken and sometimes rebellious, Tom Fletcher did not see eye-to-eye with his commanding officer. Training completed, the sergeant pilot had joined 43 Squadron to fly Spitfires; but the CO took the opportunity to transfer Tom to another Spitfire unit, 91 Squadron.

Tasked with coastal patrols, 91 supported and escorted aircraft engaged on air-sea rescue (ASR) operations. Attracted to the role, Fletcher soon joined 277 Squadron at Hawkinge, Kent, to fly the Westland Lysander and the amphibious Supermarine Walrus.

The Lysanders had been pressed





# Il Not Have Them

into service for ASR duties. During the summer of 1942, while flying the former army co-operation type, Tom located a number of aircrew in the sea and directed RAF high-speed launches (HSLs) to the scene. Within three months he had been responsible for saving nine airmen.

## Snatched from capture

On October 2, 1942 a Spitfire pilot, forced to bale out over the English

Channel, landed in the sea four miles off the French coast on the edge of a minefield. [This was very likely Sgt M H F Cooper of 616 Squadron and Mk.VI BR159 – ED.] His leader orbited the dinghy and transmitted an emergency call.

Naval authorities at Dover considered it impossible to get a launch through the minefield and too dangerous for a Walrus to have a go. Despite this advice, Tom immediately volunteered to try and make a rescue attempt and took off, with a Spitfire squadron providing an escort.

He arrived on the scene as another Spitfire squadron engaged enemy fighters trying to interfere with the rescue. He located the dinghy, alighted 150 yards (137m) away and taxied towards the survivor who failed to grasp the boathook on the first pass, and in doing so fell out of his dinghy.

In the strong wind and choppy sea, Tom tried once again, and this time the pilot was hauled aboard. He taxied clear of the minefield and took off, just clearing a floating mine. Throughout the rescue, the Walrus had come under heavy fire from shore batteries.

The Air Officer Commanding 11 Group strongly recommended Tom for the award of the Victoria Cross, writing: "Sergeant Fletcher was fully aware of the risks involved when he

volunteered for the task. He carried out the rescue with conspicuous gallantry... he ignored all dangers and through coolness, considered judgement and skill, succeeded in picking up the fighter pilot."

In the event, Tom was awarded an immediate DFM, the next-highest gallantry award available for a senior non-commissioned officer at that time.

## Friend or foe

Late in the afternoon of December 14, six men were found adrift on a raft 10 miles (16km) east of Dover. Tom located them in the rough sea and immediately landed, even though he could see that it would be impossible to take off again. In failing light he made three passes to pick up individuals but others had been swept from the raft.

Continuing to manoeuvre his Walrus, which had started to fill with water, he managed to recover another man after struggling for 30 minutes to turn into wind. By now it was completely dark and Tom reluctantly abandoned the search and started to taxi towards Dover.

The Walrus continued to ship water and he had great difficulty controlling it, finally making the harbour after almost two hours of coaxing

**Far left**  
*Aircrew of the Hawkinge ASR Flight with Tom Fletcher second from left.*

**Below left**  
*A 277 Squadron Walrus at Warmwell in January 1944.*

**Below**  
*With crewmen in the bow and rear hatches, a Walrus prepares to pick up a survivor.*





**SPOT FACT** *It was among the first aircraft to be fitted with an undercarriage position indicator on the panel*

**Right**  
*Aircrew of 277 Squadron around a Walrus at Martlesham Heath.*

**Below right**  
*Tom Fletcher after receiving his DFC.*

the wallowing amphibian through mounting waves and swell. The harbourmaster reprimanded the crew for not getting permission to bring their sinking aircraft into his harbour. The survivors were German sailors.

Fletcher was awarded an immediate bar to his DFM, one of only 60 presented during World War Two. The citation noted his “conspicuous



**Right**  
*A former Royal Navy Walrus transferred to the RAF at Mersah Matruh, Egypt.*

**Below right**  
*Arnold Divers (left) with Sergeant Keeble.*

coolness and skill under extremely difficult weather conditions”.

During the summer of 1943, he picked up seven more ditched aircrew including a USAAF fighter pilot, a Belgian Spitfire pilot and crew members of RAF and USAAF bombers.

### Top-scoring rescuer

On October 3, Tom took off to find a Typhoon pilot reported in the sea too near the French coast for a launch to be able to reach him. He found three dinghies, landed and rescued the occupants, which turned out to be survivors from an RAF bomber.

After returning to base, he immediately took off again and finally located the Typhoon pilot, picking him up. But the sea was too rough for a take-off so he started the long taxi back to England. A Royal Navy launch arrived to assist and soon afterwards the Walrus lost a float. An attempt to tow the aircraft failed and it started to sink – Tom, his crew and the survivor having to transfer to the launch. By this time he was a flying officer and was awarded an immediate DFC.

During the spring of 1944, he took off to rescue a Canadian fighter pilot in a dinghy floating so close to the



“The harbour master, who reprimanded them for not getting permission to bring their sinking aircraft into his harbour, met the crew. The survivors were German sailors”



French coast that he had to fly the Walrus over enemy-held territory to approach it and be able to make an immediate take-off towards England.

The biplane’s crew came under heavy anti-aircraft fire throughout the rescue bid, wounding one of them, but they snatched the Canadian from the sea and Tom took off.

In the next few months, he rescued an American bomber crew from the Somme Estuary and, on his last rescue, picked up a Spitfire pilot on April 30.

Tom was the most successful, and most decorated, ASR pilot, many also considering him the bravest. Very much his own man, he tolerated no nonsense from contemporaries or superiors and his determination, dedication and gallantry in saving his fellow airmen was universally admired.





Fletcher remained in the RAF after the war. In July 1945 he was attached to the Tangmere-based High Speed Flight as the search and rescue pilot when, on September 7, Gp Capt E M Donaldson broke the world speed record off the Sussex coast in Meteor IV EE549. The jet is preserved at the Tangmere Military Aviation Museum.

In 1948 Tom was badly burned when his Mosquito crashed during a training sortie at the Central Flying School. [Very likely T.3 TW116 which suffered a structural failure on landing at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucs, on August 4 – ED.]

He trained as a fighter controller but returned to flying in 1956 before continuing his career at ground control centres in Fighter Command, and retired from the RAF in 1964. Flt Lt Tom Fletcher died in March 2010 aged 95.

## 283 Squadron

Allied air activity around Italy increased significantly following Operation 'Husky', the invasion of

Sicily. This involved establishing additional ASR units, including Walrus squadrons.

On July 3, 1943 a crew of 47 Squadron needed the services of 283 Squadron. Their Beaufighter had been hit by flak during a shipping strike and was forced to ditch.

New Zealander Sgt Arnold Divers and his crew took off in a Walrus from Maison Blanche in northern Algeria and after landing to refuel at Bone 600 miles away in the northeast of the country, they found the missing crew after a brief search 15 miles south of Sardinia. They were unable to take off and for the next nine hours taxied back in a very rough sea before the Walrus ran out of fuel.

The next afternoon, an RAF HSL arrived and took off the survivors and two of the Walrus crew who were suffering badly with seasickness. Arnold remained at the controls of the amphibian and another HSL arrived to tow him back to Bone harbour.

Throughout the summer, Divers was regularly in action. He picked up a German pilot on August 10 and nine

days later he landed on a calm sea and taxied up the beach near Palermo to pick up a wounded US soldier.

## Balancing act

On November 3 the crew of a USAAF B-25 Mitchell returning to Gerbini in central Sicily sent a distress message that they were baling out over the sea after an engine failure. At 15:45 hours Divers and his gunner, Sgt E F Keeble, were scrambled from their base at Palermo to search for a reported five dinghies 30 miles to the south. Twenty minutes later they were airborne and heading for the area.

The bomber crew were wearing life jackets but were adrift in the sea. During his parachute descent, one of the crew spotted the aircraft's five-man dinghy, which had released and inflated as the doomed Mitchell hit the sea. Despite the rough sea, he located the B-25 and was able to cut the dinghy free of the sinking wreck.

Over the next two hours the other crewmen were located and pulled into the dinghy. A B-25 from their formation had noted their position ➡

**Below**  
Aircrew of 277 Squadron;  
Tom Fletcher is second  
left.





**SPOT FACT** When returning to a ship (other than carriers) it would land on water and be lifted aboard by a crane



**Above**  
Saunders-Roe-built Walrus X9498 of the ASR Flight at Cassibile, Sicily. Hurricane IIc KW980 of the Mediterranean Air Command Communications Unit based at Maison Blanche, Algeria, is parked in front of the medieval tower which served as the airfield control tower.

**Below**  
A Walrus, apparently painted with 'Invasion stripes', under tow.

and alerted the ASR organisation.

At 17:35 Divers and Keeble saw a red flare six miles away. The light was fading fast and there was a moderate swell. Divers alighted and with the aid of the aircraft's searchlight, he saw the dinghy and taxied over.

In ten minutes he had all five men on board and then attempted a take-off. The Walrus porpoised violently and the take-off was abandoned due to the swell, darkness and excessive weight. Divers decided to stay on the water overnight, so the drogues were thrown out and the bilge pumps were manned every hour.

The swell and wind increased and the aircraft began to roll badly. Divers started the engine to keep it into wind but he soon noticed a list to port, which quickly became more pronounced. The port float was leaking, causing the mainplane to bend under the weight, and there was a danger that the Walrus would break up.

Just before midnight, Keeble moved out on to the starboard wing to

counteract the list, but this was only partially successful. After an hour, Divers relieved him.

For the next two hours the two men alternated for shorter periods because of the cold. But then, the seas began to break over the Walrus.

A light was sighted on the horizon so a two-star green-red flare was fired and the Aldis lamp was used to signal for help. After 30 minutes a ship trained a light on the Walrus before drawing alongside. The five survivors of the B-25 were taken on board.

Divers and Keeble were determined to stay with the Walrus in the hope that they could salvage it. The aircraft was almost heeling over and the captain of the ship ordered the Walrus crew to abandon it. The two men were thrown ropes and were dragged on board the US Navy hospital ship *Seminole*, which took the seven men to Naples. After two nights recovering, the RAF crew returned to Palermo.

Neither was injured, but it is worth recording that Divers had only been

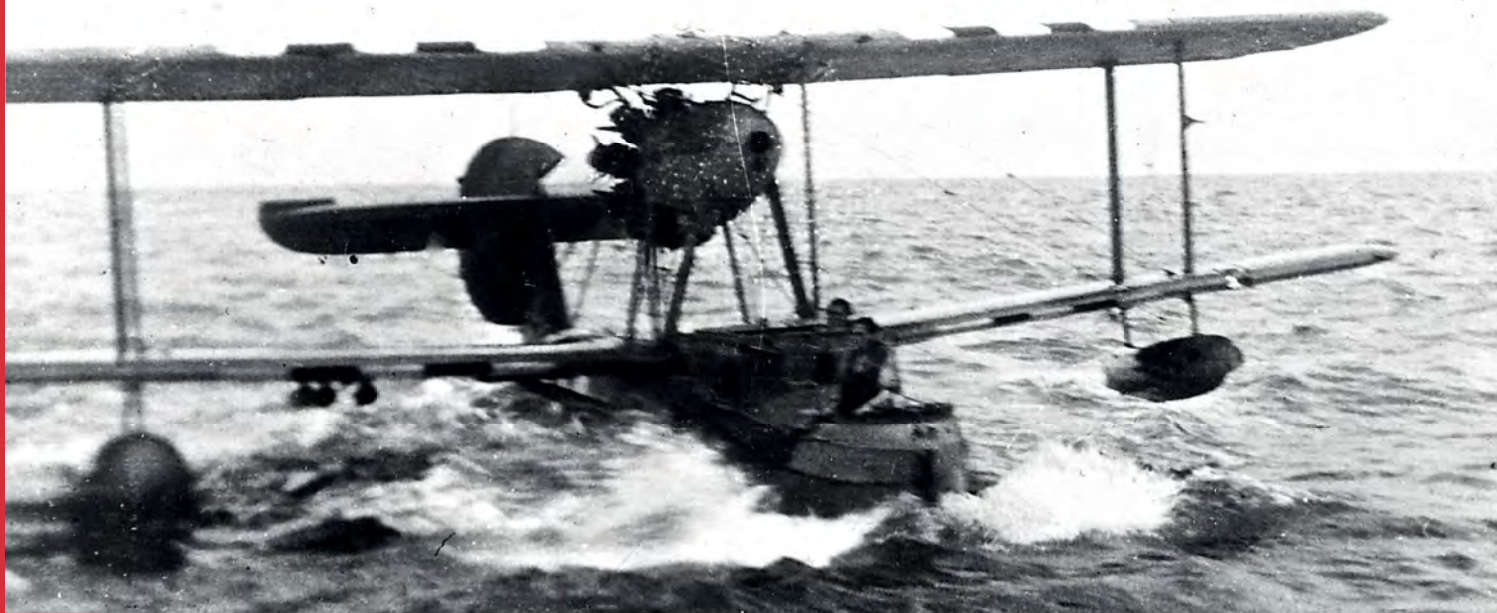
released from hospital the day they were scrambled for the rescue after recovering from malaria. He was unfit for flying, but all the other pilots were unavailable and, without reference to any senior officer, Divers immediately took off despite his weakened state. For his outstanding devotion to duty, Divers was awarded the DFM.

## Walrus down

On March 8, 1944, Divers saw more action. A Spitfire pilot of 253 Squadron was forced to bale out after attacking enemy shipping. His dinghy failed to inflate and he was left floating in his 'Mae West' five miles off the north coast of Elba.

A Walrus of 293 Squadron, piloted by the now W/O Arnold Divers DFM, with W/O P Graham as his crew, was directed to the area. A large oil patch and fluorescein dye, used to help locate a downed aircraft, was spotted and soon the fighter pilot was located.

After dropping a smoke float to assess the wind, Divers landed on the rough sea and taxied up to the





exhausted man. As Graham started to drag him on board, shore batteries opened fire with salvos of shells.

Divers attempted to take off, but shrapnel hit the engine and the propeller was mauled. Despite taking evasive action, the amphibian was again hit and badly damaged. An SOS was sent and Divers decided to abandon the Walrus.

After destroying the equipment and maps on board, Graham inflated the M-type dinghy into which he dragged the injured Spitfire pilot. Divers inflated a K-type dinghy and loaded it with rations, flare pistol and cartridges. Graham then attended to the injured

the rescuing aircraft had been hit and was unable to take off so he continued to the scene at 30 knots.

As the launch approached the north side of the island he spotted shells falling ahead and a smoke signal from the survivors. Rogers directed the HSL towards the dinghies at full speed.

The shore batteries opened fire on the launch at 11:05 and for the next 20 minutes gave their undivided attention to it. The coxswain, Corporal Eric Parham, took evasive action and despite the intense bombardment, the three men were taken on board.

Before setting course, Rogers asked

Channel.

After this particularly hazardous and gallant rescue, Rogers was awarded the DSC. His coxswain, Parham, received the DSM and the rest of the crew received commendations.

For Arnold Divers, it was the third time he had been in such straits. He had been towed to safety in July 1943 and forced to abandon another Walrus in November.

Arnold Divers made his final rescue on March 18 when he picked up a USAAF fighter pilot off the coast of Italy. He spent 45 minutes looking for calmer water before he was able to take off and head for Corsica.



**“The exploits of these two pilots in very different theatres of war graphically illustrate the skill and courage of those who flew the very basic, but sturdy, Walrus”**

pilot as they drifted away from the Walrus.

## Rescuing the rescuers

At Bastia on Corsica, Fg Off Jack Rogers, the master of the Miami class launch HSL 2543, was alerted at 09:35 that a Spitfire pilot was in the sea. He and his very experienced crew were holding at a waiting position midway between Corsica and the Italian coast and immediately headed for Elba.

Shortly afterwards, a Walrus flew overhead en route to the scene. This was Divers who came up on the VHF radio with the message: “We will leave the dinghy for you [to pick up] chum,” a typically friendly remark from airborne rescuers when passing an HSL. In the event, the Walrus crew spoke too soon.

Rogers was told that the Walrus had picked up the Spitfire pilot. Just as he turned for base, he was informed that

Divers if he should take the Walrus under tow. As this would have meant remaining stationary as the tow lines were made fast, he was ordered to abandon the amphibian and leave the area.

Rogers escaped at high speed under the protection of RAF and USAAF fighters that escorted him out of the area. The shelling continued until the launch was ten miles north of Elba.

On return to Bastia, the launch was refuelled. The crew returned to immediate readiness to be available to respond within three minutes should another call come for their assistance.

To prevent the Walrus falling into enemy hands, it was destroyed by 37mm shells fired by one of the escorting P-39 Airacobras of the USAAF's 345th Fighter Squadron.

This rescue says a great deal about the courage and determination of the air and sea rescue men, both airborne and at sea. Rogers had previously given valuable service in the English

A few days later he returned to the UK. After converting to the Mosquito, he flew night intruder sorties with 487 (New Zealand) Squadron. His last operational sortie was on May 2, 1945.

The exploits of these two pilots in very different theatres of war graphically illustrate the skill and courage of those who flew the very basic, but sturdy, Walrus. They faced conditions and difficulties not experienced by any other airmen but the weather, the sea or the enemy did not deter them if a fellow crew was in danger and needed rescuing.

*The title for this feature comes from the 1953 novel of the same name by John Harris, a story of bravery by HSL and Walrus crews. Lewis Gilbert directed the film version, released the following year, with an impressive cast, including: Michael Redgrave, Dirk Bogarde, Nigel Patrick, Bonar Colleano and Jack Watling.* ●



**Above left**  
A Walrus of 278 Squadron. The grab rails that were placed around the fuselage to help rescued airman get on board can be seen.

**Above**  
Divers and Keeble with the USAAF B-25 survivors.  
ALL VIA AUTHOR





# Spotlight

## Supermarine Walrus

# Eyes of the Navy

Andy Hay artwork of a Walrus that flew in the Battle of Cape Matapan

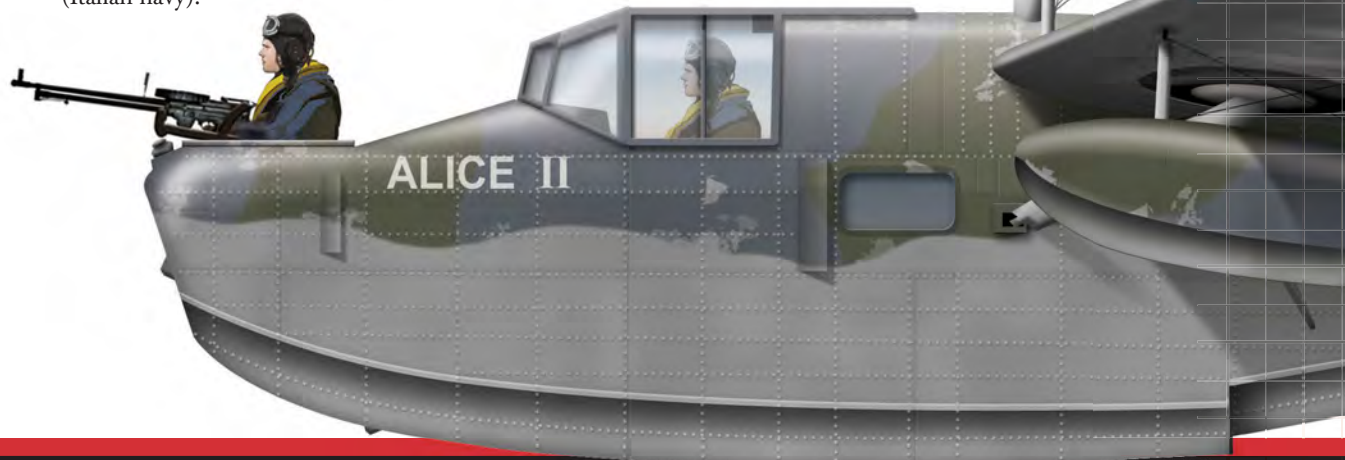
**Artwork**  
Supermarine Walrus Mk.I P5668 'Alice II' of HMS 'Gloucester' during the Battle of Cape Matapan on March 28, 1941.  
ANDY HAY-2017

**A**lthough the Supermarine Walrus fulfilled several roles during World War Two, it was designed to be a spotter for the Royal Navy. In the early years of the war, the amphibians were launched from cruisers and battleships, usually tasked with identifying enemy positions at sea.

Our subject performed this important role on March 28, 1941, during the Battle of Cape Matapan, off the southwest coast of the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece. After coded Italian messages were intercepted and deciphered by personnel at Bletchley Park's Government Code and Cypher School, British and Australian warships could intercept vessels belonging to the Regia Marina (Italian navy).

Supermarine Walrus Mk.I P5668 was launched from HMS *Gloucester* to assess Italian strength and positions. The aircraft was named *Alice II* in the tradition of her predecessor, L2299 *Alice*, after the Duchess of Gloucester.

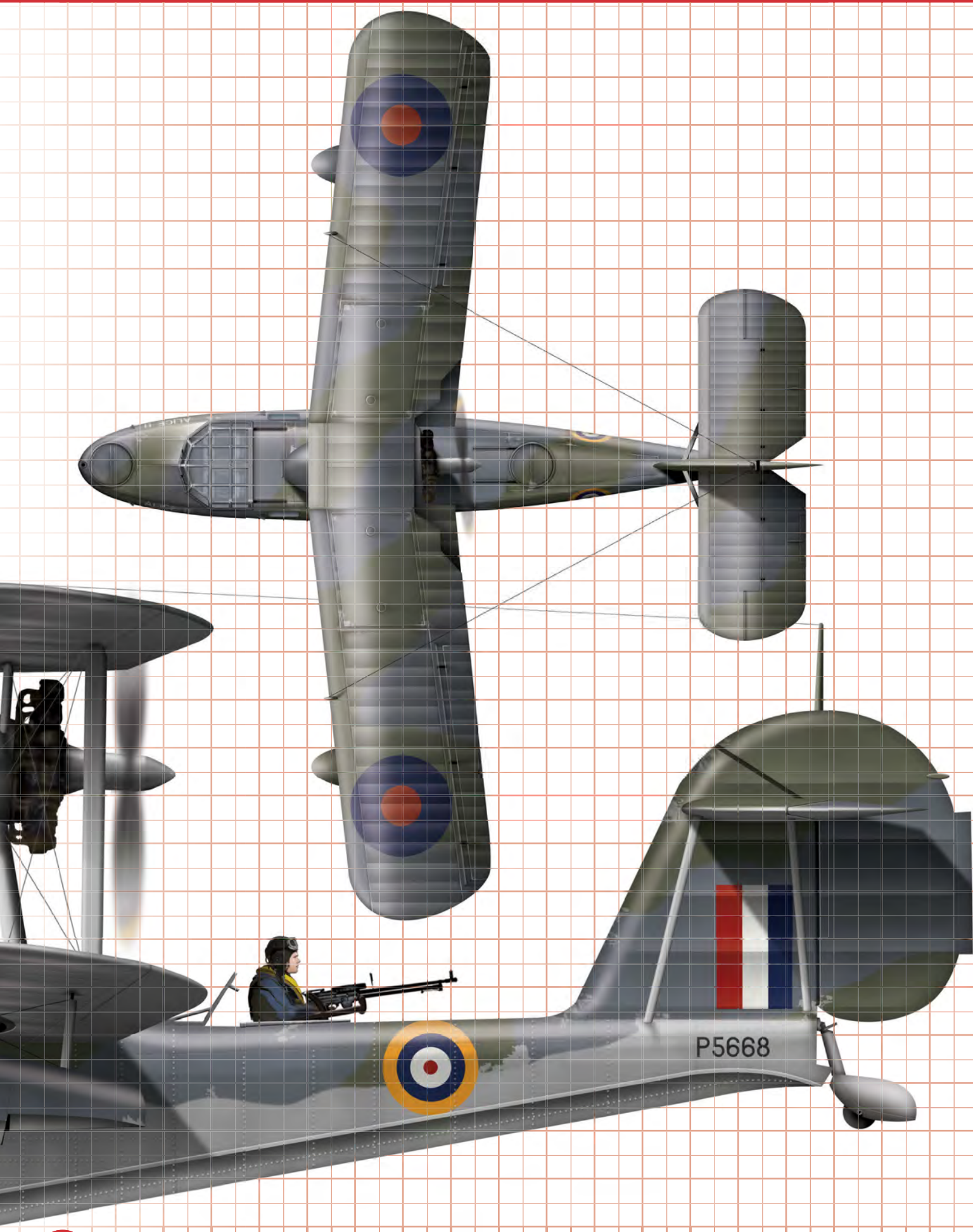
As a result of the information gained, along with other intelligence, the enemy ships were attacked by Fairey Albacore and Swordfish torpedo bombers, and were later bombarded at close range by the British battleships *Barham*, *Valiant*, and *Warspite*. The Italians lost five vessels, and sustained damage to others. Some 2,300 of their sailors were killed, with more than 1,000 taken prisoner in a conclusive naval victory for the Allies. ●





**SPOT FACT** The Pegasus engine was offset by three degrees to starboard to counter yawing

**Walrus in profile**



**8**

aircraft served with the Argentine Navy after World War Two

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## Spotlight

### Supermarine Walrus



# Walrus at

All Royal Navy units at sea received an Admiralty flash signal that read: 'Total Germany, Total Germany'. The message had been expected for a long time and nobody was surprised; the fleet had been mobilised. It was September 3, 1939 and operations to protect British shipping and hunt for German surface raiders began immediately.

The pocket battleship *Graf Spee* was known to be in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean and several hunting groups were formed to search for her. HMS *Sussex* was part of 'Force-H' engaged in the pursuit but on October

31 during a patrol its Walrus, L2261, was lost over the South Atlantic with its crew of Lt Stanley Bird, Lt Cecil Osmaston and Leading Airman Bill Brown.

By early December *Graf Spee* had sunk a dozen ships and the Walruses embarked in the Royal Navy cruisers greatly increased the areas that could be scoured. The enemy ship was finally caught east of the River Plate estuary, off the coasts of Argentina and Uruguay, early on the 13th. It was badly damaged and eventually scuttled (deliberately sunk).

As action was joined, HMS *Exeter's* aircraft, K8341 and K8343, were prepared to be catapult launched.





# War

When war broke out, Supermarine's amphibian may have looked like a throwback to a different time, but as **Andrew Thomas** explains, it proved its worth in combat on the high seas

Both were hit by shells from the German warship and had to be jettisoned.

In February 1940 HMS *Dorsetshire's* Walrus sighted the German merchantman SS *Waikama* off Rio de Janeiro, and the vessel was promptly scuttled.

## Terror of Trondheim

The invasion of Norway began on April 9, 1940. The following day Walrus P5655 flown by Sub Lt Groves with Lt Cdr Fleming as observer attacked a submerged U-boat 10 miles east of Orkney and noted oil and bubbles rising afterwards.

Later, Groves was catapulted off HMS *Sheffield* in P5670 on a recce off Trondheim where several Heinkel He 115 floatplanes at anchor were spotted. The intruding amphibian was engaged by Luftwaffe fighters. Groves managed to evade them by extreme low flying: after this P5670 was named 'The Terror of Trondheim'.

Further south, Operation 'Duck' began before dawn on the 9th when HMS *Suffolk* shelled Sola airfield at Stavanger. Lt H H Bracken and crew in L2281 catapulted off to spot for the guns, followed soon after by Lt MacWhirter in L2284. The bombardment was largely inaccurate

and destroyed only four aircraft.

After an hour both flew to Scotland. After sunrise *Suffolk* was attacked by the Luftwaffe and heavily damaged.

## Narvik expedition

After withdrawing from central Norway, the Allies concentrated to the north and an expedition was sent to Narvik. On May 18 the carrier HMS *Glorious* sent off six Walrus of 701 Squadron to Harstad. Known as 'Bishop Force', the biplanes were very vulnerable as the Luftwaffe enjoyed almost total air superiority.

This was brutally shown when, on its third sortie of the day, HMS ➔

### Far left

The DSC awarded to Midshipman David Corkhill during the Norwegian campaign was the first gallantry award to Walrus aircrew. VIA B CULL

### Below

The first ship's flight to re-equip with the Walrus was from HMS 'Achilles': K5783 was allocated to it in 1937. SUPERMARINE





**SPOT FACT** It was the first British aircraft in squadron service to feature a fully retractable main undercarriage



**Above**  
With depth charges under wing, a Walrus of 700 (Med) Squadron at Dekheila, Egypt, in early 1942. M HODGSON

**Right**  
A Walrus of 712 Squadron being manoeuvred on the deck of a carrier, 1939. VIA J D OUGHTON

**Below**  
Walrus Is K8343 and K8341 on the catapults on HMS 'Exeter' during a visit to Vancouver, in 1937. J CROOKALL VIA L MILLBERRY

Devonshire's P5647 was attacked by a Heinkel He 111. Lt Pat Benson-Dare put the Walrus into a dive, pulling up at 100ft over the water. By making tight turns, he managed to prevent the much faster German aircraft hitting P5647, even though all its guns were firing.

Midshipman David Corkhill the observer and Leading Airman D W Hill pluckily returned fire from the nose and rear positions. After 15 minutes, the fuel tank and engine were hit and with the pilot wounded the Walrus fell into Malangsfjord.

Corkhill managed to swim through the shattered hull, spotted the injured Hill and began pulling him to the shore. They were picked up by a Norwegian fishing boat.

Benson-Dare died in the aircraft and Hill succumbed to his injuries.

The 18-year-old Corkhill later received the DSC: "for his coolness in action against heavy odds." It is believed this was the first decoration awarded to a Walrus crewman.

Over the next week several of 701 Squadron's aircraft were destroyed on the ground at Harstad and by the end of May Narvik had been captured by the Germans. Walrus patrols over Narvik, Skaanland, Lødingen and Harstad continued.



"By tight turns, he managed to prevent the much faster German aircraft hitting P5647, even though all of its guns were firing"





On June 6 one of the most bizarre bombing raids of the war took place. Escorted by two Hurricanes of 46 Squadron in improving weather five Walrus of 701 attacked the quay at Røsvik on the southern shore of Sørfolda Fjord northeast of Bodø, fortunately without loss. The following day the five were flown aboard HMS *Ark Royal* as the Allies evacuated Norway.

## Submarine kill

Towards the end of June 1940, HMS *Argus* delivered a Walrus of 701 Squadron to Reykjavik, Iceland, for anti-submarine work. On the 21st P5666 from HMS *Manchester* found the *Scharnhorst*, though the out-gunned cruiser did not engage the German warship.

In Britain with the threat of invasion looming, L2271 was experimentally fitted with a 20mm cannon for surface strafing. It was tested at Boscombe



Loading HD874 on to HMAS 'Labuan' in Sydney Harbour, December 1947. KEY COLLECTION

## Return of the 'Snow Goose'

Built by Saunders-Roe at Cowes on the Isle of Wight, Walrus Mk.II HD874 was shipped to Australia and arrived at Rose Bay, Sydney, on September 14, 1943. It was issued to 9 Squadron RAAF at Bowen, Queensland, on December 17. It was placed into store in April 1945 but one more task awaited it.

Given the name *Snow Goose*, and an overall yellow colour scheme, HD874 was prepared for the RAAF's Antarctic Flight. In October 1947 it was loaded on board the converted tank landing ship, HMS *Labuan*, and the vessel departed Sydney to take part in the National Antarctica Research Expedition to Heard Island, mid-way between Australia and Antarctica itself. The *Labuan* arrived in December and HD874 was readied for flight; it was to operate from the beach alongside the Australian base camp. Crew for the *Snow Goose* was pilot Flt Lt M D Smith, photographer W/O P C Swan and wireless operator W/O G Dunlop.

The Walrus's last flight - perhaps its only one from Heard Island - was on December 13 when photographs were taken of the 11,000ft dormant volcano Big Ben. On December 21, a 120mph gale ripped through the camp and HD874 was wrecked.

The fuselage lingered and was salvaged by the RAAF Museum on March 27, 1980, being transported to Australia on the MV *Cape Pillar*. Following an extensive restoration, HD874 was rolled out at Point Cook, Victoria, in its Antarctic colours on April 4, 2002.

Down, but the project did not proceed.

Towards the end of June, a Walrus from HMS *Albatross* flown by Petty Off Hoffman, later relieved by another from Dorsetshire, spotted and shadowed the Vichy French battleship *Richelieu* off the West African port of Dakar and it returned to harbour once it had been spotted.

Patrols off Norway continued and in August HMAS *Australia*'s Seagull V A2-24 attempted to dive bomb Tromsø but was thwarted by bad weather. (Australia was the first to order the Walrus, when it was still designated the Seagull V.)

*Australia* had moved to participate in Operation Menace - the bombardment of Dakar on September 25. The guns were spotted by L2247 on loan to the RAAF and embarked on *Australia*.

Vichy Curtiss Hawk 75 fighters intervened and Cdt Fanneau de la Horie of GC I/4 shot down the Walrus, killing 33-year-old Flt Lt George Clarke, Lt Cdr Frank Fogarty and Petty Off Burnett.

During the Anglo-French operation off Gabon on November 7, *Devonshire*'s L2268, flown by Petty Off Peter Parsons, was catapulted off in search of the Vichy submarine *Poncelet*. Observer Sub Lt David Corkhill spotted the submarine, just as it submerged. Parsons dived and straddled the *Poncelet* with 100lb anti-submarine bombs. The submarine burst to the surface surrounded by bubbles of air. The crew abandoned ➡

## Above

The observer of a Walrus climbing out onto the centre section of the upper wing, prior to having the aircraft hoisted aboard the host ship during an exercise off Malta in April 1939.

KEY COLLECTION





**Above**  
A Walrus being catapulted from HMS 'Bermuda' in 1943.  
VIA R C STURTVANT

**Right**  
The Walrus was also extensively used for air-sea rescue duties in the Mediterranean. Mk.II W2757 of 293 Squadron at Pomigliano, Italy, 1944. VIA A PRICE

it but the captain, Bertrand de Saussine, decided to go down with his boat.

Off Freetown, Sierra Leone, SS *Eumaeus* was sunk by an Italian submarine on January 14, 1941 but most of the passengers and crew got away in lifeboats, or clung to wreckage. Walrus P5667 from 710 Squadron on HMS *Albatross* flown by Lt Vernon Cheesman searched for the submarine and found some survivors.

He alighted to render aid and tow drifting lifeboats back to the main group, but in doing so the Walrus was damaged and unable to take off. Eventually, two anti-submarine trawlers arrived to pick up survivors and tow P5667 to Freetown.

By the time they got ashore the crew had been on board P5667 for 22 hours. Cheesman was awarded an MBE, and CPO Dale a BEM.

### Arctic convoys

While shadowing *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* in the Denmark Strait on May 23, 1941 HMS *Norfolk* was shelled. Sitting on its catapult, *Norfolk's* Walrus L2184 was damaged and took no part in the action that sank the *Bismarck*.

However, Walruses did take part in the peripheral action. Lt MacWhirter piloting L2288 from HMS *Kenya* found the enemy supply ship *Aase Maersk* between Greenland and Iceland.

It was sunk by the *Kenya*. Several of the tankers positioned around the *Bismarck* were also found and sunk.

MacWhirter was in action again on October 3. West of Gibraltar, W2700 was catapulted from HMS *London* under very low cloud and he found the *Kota Pinang* refuelling a U-boat.



**"Hobart's Walrus bombed the Italian fighter base at Zeila in Italian Somaliland in August and later provided recce support to troops withdrawing from British Somaliland"**

Duly alerted, the cruiser raced to the spot and its fire caused the tanker to explode spectacularly.

From the start of 1942, the numbers of Walrus embarked on warships began to decline but the amphibian continued to make its presence felt, particularly on Arctic convoys.

During the ill-fated PQ 17 convoy (it suffered severe losses to enemy forces) to Russia on July 4, the Walrus from HMS *Norfolk* was flown off on an ice patrol by Sub Lts Wignall and Riley and Leading Airman Gibbons.

It was eventually towed to Novaya Zemlya and then taken as deck cargo on the SS *Ocean Freedom* to Archangel where it was loaned to the Russians and presumably used for local anti-submarine patrols. By mid-1944 catapult training had ended and 700 Squadron disbanded.

### Red Sea and the 'Med'

Italy entered the war on June 10, 1940 and on the 19th HMAS *Hobart's* Walrus L2321, flown by Flt Lt Davies, dive-bombed targets near the Italian port of Massawa



on the Red Sea coast of Eritrea. On the 26th HMNZS *Leander's* L2330 attacked a beached Italian submarine in the Red Sea.

*Hobart's* Walrus struck the Italian fighter base at Zeila in Italian Somaliland in August and later provided recce support to troops withdrawing from British Somaliland. This was followed in November by *Dorsetshire's* Walrus spotting for raids on the East African town of Dante after which it dive-bombed oil tanks.

Walruses in the Mediterranean Fleet were also out spotting for guns; over Bardia in Libya on June 21 and Scarpanto in the Dodecanese on September 4. During the successful bombardment of the Italian port of Genoa by 'Force-H' on February 9,

moved to Aboukir and expanded to a dozen aircraft.

It then went to Beirut under RAF control, becoming 700 (Levant) Squadron. On July 4, W2709 flown by Lt Dinsdale spotted a submarine but was unable to attack. Five days later in the same aircraft Lt Chorley sighted another sub and signalled an escort that engaged the vessel and captured it.

On the 11th Sub Lt Jordan, piloting W2709, sank the Italian submarine *Ondina* along with surface vessels east of Cyprus. During a patrol on August 8, Chorley and Cook in W2789 were supporting destroyers when they attacked and sank a large submarine.

Following the Allied landings in Algeria in November, a detachment

cruiser was lost with all hands, including her RAAF Walrus detachment. The German ship was also eventually sunk.

Britain declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941 and two days later Petty Off Crozier and crew in R6587 catapulted off HMS *Repulse* to search for reported invasion barges. They watched helplessly as Japanese aircraft sank *Repulse* and HMS *Prince of Wales*.

During the Battle of the Java Sea on March 1, 1942, HMS *Exeter* and HMAS *Perth* were sunk. Perth took with it Walrus L2319 and five of the air party, although Fg Off Donaghue and Naval Airman Wallace became prisoners of war.

On Easter Sunday, April 5, the cruisers *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*



1941, HMS *Renown* took the lead and her Walrus provided valuable support for the big guns.

At the end of the year, after HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* had been damaged in Alexandria, their Walruses were disembarked to Dekheila for shore-based patrols along the Egyptian coast. As 700 (Mediterranean) Squadron, the unit

of six Walruses of 700 Squadron was established at Arzeu. Under the control of 328 Wing, these were used for anti-submarine patrols until April 1943.

## Far East

German surface raiders were also active against shipping 'East of Suez' and Royal Navy cruisers scoured the seas for them. On February 21, 1941, HMS *Glasgow's* Walrus located the *Admiral Scheer* off East Africa but had to withdraw due to a shortage of fuel and the pocket battleship evaded the pursuers.

On May 8, HMS *Cornwall's* Walrus spotted a suspicious vessel in the Bay of Bengal. As the warship closed to investigate, the Kriegsmarine auxiliary cruiser *Pinguin* opened fire and the British vessel was sunk in a one-sided action.

Then, when the German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran* was found by HMAS *Sydney* off Western Australia on November 19 the Australian

were steaming from Colombo to Addu Atoll in the Maldives, and were attacked and sunk by Japanese carrier-based bombers. Over a thousand men survived, among them Vernon Cheesman, who was *Cornwall's* Walrus pilot. He had played a crucial role in the Freetown rescue of January 1941.

Japanese aircraft caught and sank HMS *Shropshire* on the 10th off Ceylon's east coast. Going down with it was Walrus L2777, although pilot Lt McConnell survived. The Japanese navy also thrust into the southwest Pacific and in a night action off Guadalcanal on August 8 HMAS *Canberra* was lost, along with five of the 9 Squadron RAAF detachment and P5715.

Obsolete when it entered the war, the Walrus nevertheless played a vital role in two oceans and in European waters. As well as its primary task as the 'eyes for the fleet', the adaptable amphibian also proved its ability in the offensive role. ●



**Above left**  
The final operational role for the Walrus was mine spotting in the Adriatic: 624 Squadron at Grottaglie, Italy, early 1945. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

**Above**  
Flown by Lt Lawrence, a Walrus of 1700 Squadron on the deck of HMS 'Ameer', July 1945. VIA R C STURTVANT

**Left**  
RAF mechanics servicing a Walrus belonging to an air-sea rescue unit in Corsica. Left to right: LACs Cook, Gordon and Bowell. KEY COLLECTION