
Chapter 3 Catalinas: Double Sunrise Service

The Catalinas

Large numbers of Consolidated Catalinas were being supplied to Great Britain from the United States under the terms of the wartime Lend-Lease Act. A small number had been released from the RAF to BOAC to maintain civilian services mainly to Africa. When Qantas received British Air Ministry approval to operate the Indian Ocean service, it was agreed that four Catalinas would be supplied by Britain to maintain a weekly service, allowing for airframe and engine maintenance. They would be flying boat models without the weight of the retractable land undercarriage of amphibian model Catalinas. Later, in May 1944, a fifth RAF Catalina would be transferred to BOAC for handover to Qantas to increase capacity on the Indian Ocean service.

The first two BOAC Catalinas for the Indian Ocean service, G-AGFL and G-AGFM, had been sent to Ceylon in March 1943 for the planned RAF Ceylon-Perth survey flights. The next two for the Indian Ocean service were recently delivered PBY-5 flying boats allocated to BOAC, to be passed on to Qantas. They were ferried to BOAC's Hythe flying boat base on the English south coast in July 1943 for civil conversion and installation of six additional fuel tanks near the flight engineer's station. After British civil certification as G-AGID and G-AGIE, both set off during August for the long ferry flight by BOAC crews to Ceylon. G-AGID reached Ceylon on 26 August where it was handed over to Qantas at Koggala Lake. Three days later its delivery to Perth continued under the command of Captain Ambrose as a special flight making a brief enroute stop at the Cocos Islands to drop off two essential meteorological observers, as described later. This Catalina's first scheduled service was 2Q8, departing Perth for Koggala on 8 September 1943 under the



Raising the bow anchor of a Catalina at Nedlands prior to departure for another Indian Ocean crossing. This image of G-AGFM Altair Star shows the name with the "star" symbol and "QANTAS EMPIRE AIRWAYS LTD" as painted in black on the forward section of the Catalinas. (Qantas)



G-AGFM "on the step" taking off at Lake Koggala, Ceylon, showing its camouflage and fuselage roundels. (Imperial War Museum)

command of Captain OFY Thomas. Qantas flight numbers are explained at the end of this section.

G-AGIE departed Hythe on 17 August 1943 but was forced to return from Lisbon due to low oil pressure in one engine. After repairs by BOAC at Hythe it was diverted again due to a combination of autopilot failure and an elevator control problem, having these rectified at the BOAC flying boat base at Foynes, Ireland. Finally departing Foynes