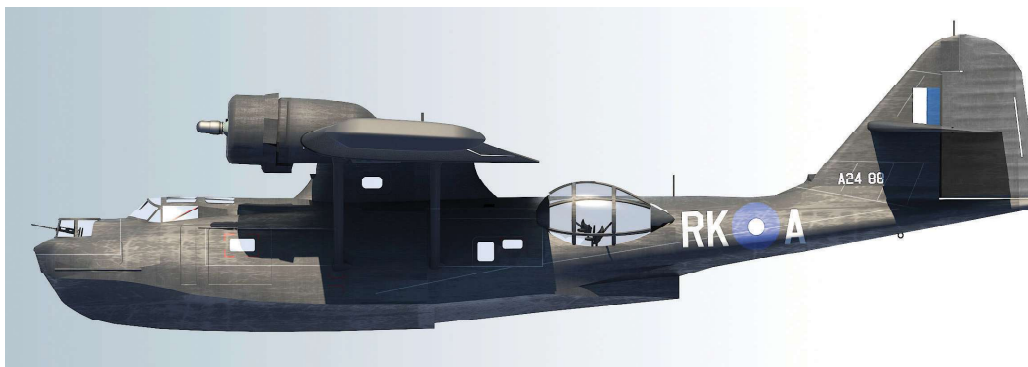


MAY 1943 – AUGUST 1945: VICTORY AND VINDICATION



An example of a Catalina in the Night Black scheme introduced in May 1944. This is PB5Y-5A(M) A24-88 (RK-A) as serving with No. 42 Squadron in late 1944.

was a logical use of the RAAF's limited resources, and meant the Japanese had to undertake constant minesweeping to keep their ports and shipping lanes open.

By this time the RAAF was sure that the minelaying campaign was achieving significant results. As well as closing harbours while mines were swept, 25 ships had been claimed as sunk or damaged in the Netherlands East Indies by September 1944. On 11 August 1944, RAAF Command issued Operational Instruction No. 99/1944, which ordered that:

The primary employment of all flying boat squadrons within North Western Area is to be that of sea mining from the air.³

This order was reinforced by moving existing units to bases closer to the Netherlands East Indies, the addition of a new squadron to the minelaying force and the establishment of a dedicated command structure to coordinate minelaying. No. 43 Squadron transferred from Karumba to Darwin in April 1944 and No. 20 Squadron relocated from Cairns to Darwin in September 1944. A new Catalina unit, No. 42 Squadron, was formed at Darwin in June 1944. It moved to a new flying boat base at Melville Bay, Northern Territory, in July and commenced minelaying in September.

From September 1944, the operations of Nos. 20, 42 and 43 Squadrons were directed by the Darwin-based No. 76 Wing, which had the task of planning and coordinating the minelaying campaign.⁴

The RAAF estimated that this clear focus on minelaying and the influx of additional aircraft could achieve up to a five-fold increase in the previous modest tally of about 20 mining sorties per month.

This increasing capability was reinforced by the ability of the Catalinas to reach increasingly distant targets by late 1944. The previous transient bases in northwest Western Australia were replaced by well-developed, secure facilities at Yampi Sound and finally West Bay. These

³ North Western Area included the Northern Territory and the north-western extremity of Western Australia. The Catalina mining force was based in the Northern Territory by September 1944.

⁴ No. 11 Squadron transferred to Rathmines in July 1944. It continued anti-submarine and maritime reconnaissance patrols from this base, while providing a reserve of trained crews and occasional detachments to support the mining campaign.