

Rathmines and the Catalina.

During July 1938, No 5 Squadron (renamed No 9 Squadron on the 1 Jan, 1939), which was based at RAAF Base Point Cook, was sent to investigate landing areas and sites around the Lake Macquarie area (near Newcastle in NSW) for the establishment a Base and the eventual move of the squadron. In September 1939, camp was set up, and arrangements were made to rent local cottages as living quarters. The Base, with Wing Commander J.E. Hewitt in command, became operational when 9 Squadron transferred from Point Cook to Rathmines, with Seagull flying boats (right). Catalina flying boats arrived at the Base in February 1941, and by September 1943 the Base was comprised of 14 Catalina's, two Seagulls, a Dornier and a Dolphin. During training, many personnel brought their families to live in the towns and villages near the Rathmines Base which influenced the establishment of other services such a school and post office.



The RAAF Base at Rathmines, on [Lake Macquarie](#) became the largest RAAF flying boat base in the southern hemisphere. Lake Macquarie was an ideal site as it is Australia's largest saltwater lake and is four times the size of Sydney Harbour, with 175km of shoreline.

At various stages during World War II, Rathmines housed Nos. 9 ([Walrus](#)), 11, 20 and 43 ([Catalina](#)), 40 ([Sunderland](#) and [Martins](#)), 41 ([Dorniers](#), [Martins](#) and [Empires](#)) and 107 ([Kingfisher](#)) Squadrons. The

Rathmines RAAF seaplane base played a pivotal role in the defence of Australia in World War II and its flying boats were involved with the mining of Manila Harbour and played an important part in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

The base reached its peak strength of almost 3,000 RAAF personnel in 1944-45. It comprised 230 buildings and marine facilities and there were forty aircraft in service.



As well as being was a vital repair centre, it was also a centre for training, housing the Operational Training Unit

for Catalina crews and in all provided training to over 200 crews during the war. New flying boats, made in the USA, were flown to Rathmines and were then converted for operational duties. Between 1941 and 1952, the RAAF operated a total of 168 Catalinas, with the prefix A24, and these were flown by four front line squadrons, two communications units and three air-sea rescue flights. The Catalina flying boats were the only aircraft to see service with the RAAF for the total wartime operations against Japan. In January 1952, after the war, the Catalina was declared surplus to requirements.



Part of the old north-east aircraft maintenance workshop facilities are now used by the [Christadelphian Society](#) as their bible school.

An elderly couple was attending church services, about halfway through she leans over and says to her husband, "I just let out a silent fart, what do you think I should do?"

He replies ' Put a new battery in your hearing aid.'



The aircraft workshop facilities. The 4 “huts” in front were the old Airmen’s sleeping quarters, and have been moved here from other parts of the base by the Christadelphian Society, for their use.

Part of the old concrete slipway, where the aircraft were dragged from the water for servicing, can be seen in the forefront of the photo.
It’s now the biggest boat ramp in NSW.



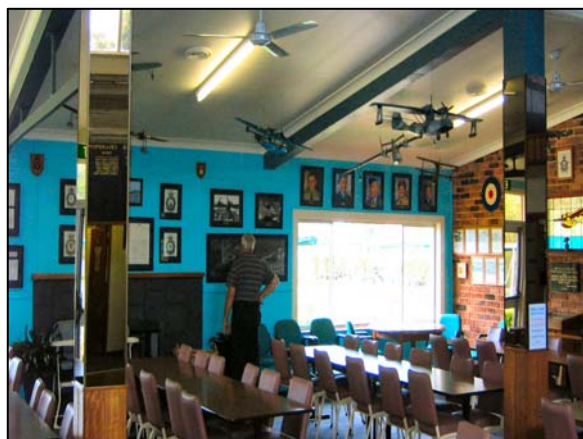
The old Sergeants’ Mess, now the Westlakes Music Centre.



The old Officers' Mess, now the Rathmines Memorial Bowling Club.

A man and his wife are awakened at 3 o'clock in the morning by a loud pounding on the door..... The man gets up and goes to the door where a drunken stranger, standing in the pouring rain, is asking for a push. "Not a chance," says the husband, "It is three o'clock in the morning." He slams the door and returns to bed. "Who was that?" asked his wife. "Just some drunk guy asking for a push," he answers. "Did you help him?" she asks. "No. I did not. It is three o'clock in the morning and it is pouring rain outside!!"

His wife said, "Don't you remember about three months ago when we broke down and those two guys helped us? I think you should help him, and you should be ashamed of yourself!" The man does as he is told (of course!), gets dressed and goes out into the pouring rain. He calls out into the dark, "Hello! Are you still there?" "Yes," comes back the answer." "Do you still need a push?" calls out the husband. "Yes! Please!" comes the reply from the darkness. "Where are you?" asks the husband. "Over here on the swing!!" replies the drunk.



Top two photos above show the Officers' Mess (Bowls Club) as it is today, while the photo as left is how it was during the war.

Following World War II, Rathmines was used as a ground training base, and the Officers' Training School was formed there along with training facilities for senior non-commissioned officers, physical training instructors and national servicemen. In 1962, the Base was sold to the Lake Macquarie Council. Many buildings were privately purchased and removed from the site or used by Lake Macquarie Council as community halls. A large hangar, complete with electrically-operated doors, which was used for servicing seaplanes, was pulled down and was shipped to [RAAF Base Richmond](#) to house the RAAF's then-new [C-130A Hercules](#) aircraft.

He who laughs last, thinks slowest.

The original Rathmines base has now been heritage listed by the NSW State Government and an application for similar recognition has been made to the Federal Government so that funds may be raised for the erection of a hangar type Museum.

The Base has continuing social significance to WWII service personnel and to the community of Lake Macquarie, who recognise the site's history and continue to use the site, creating an evolving landscape which retains significant elements of the RAAF Base.



The old Airmans' recreation centre (above), which used to be the Base's picture theatre and gymnasium, is now used as the Rathmines Community Hall. Below, one of the old Airmans' sleeping huts, which is now used by the Christadelphian society.



The Catalina



The PBY Catalina was one of the most successful flying boats produced. First flown in March 1935, they were in production for over ten years and were designed and built by the American aircraft manufacturer, Consolidated Aircraft of San Diego, California. (PB stands for Patrol Bomber, with Y being Consolidated Aircraft's manufacturer identification). It

could be equipped with depth charges, mines, bombs, torpedoes and .50 calibre machine guns and was one of the most widely used multi-role aircraft of World War II. It was also one of the most durable and effective aircraft of the War, due to its endurance and good load carrying capacity. It had a maximum speed of 170 knots and an endurance of 23 hours which could be extended to a fantastic 32 hours with auxiliary tanks. Consequently, Catalina's were used by almost all the Allied services including the RAF and RAAF. Although it was one of the slowest combat aircraft of World War II, it was preferred over all the newer, faster and better-equipped replacements from other manufacturers. During WWII, it was a Catalina, flown by USN pilot Ensign Smith, that on Monday morning, 26th May 1941, found the Bismarck and allowed the British to sink her.

On the other hand, you have, like, different fingers.

Flying boats, such as the Catalina, placed a special demand on training air crews who not only learnt to fly the aircraft but needed to learn manoeuvres in sea conditions which were usually associated with naval operations. The famous Black Cats (right) were used on covert night operations in just about every enemy port in the South West Pacific Area, operations extending as far as the Chinese coast. During these operations 322 aircrew were lost. The Black Cats were painted matt black and roamed the western Pacific from December 1942, laying mines in enemy harbours, finding Japanese ships by radar at night and picking up Allied survivors from ships and aircraft who were afloat in boats and dinghies.



The Catalina is a twin-engine high winged amphibious monoplane with retractable wing tip floats. It features an almost cantilevered wing mounted above a shallow but broad hull on a central pylon. The wing has a rectangular centre section and tapered outer panels, all of stressed-skin all-metal construction, though the ailerons and trailing edges are fabric-skinned.

A unique feature is the wing-tip floats, which are mounted on pivoted frames,



which can be retracted electrically so that in flight the floats form the wingtips. The hull is also all-metal, with a broad semicircular upper surface.

It was also one of the first US aircraft to carry radar. At first this was a metric wave radar with arrays of dipole antennas on the wings, and later a

centimetric radar in a fairing on top of the cockpit. A Leigh light was installed under the wing.

The bow has a mooring compartment and transparent sighting window with a roller blind giving seawater protection. A turret all-round window was fitted in the upper bow. The two pilots sat side-by-side in a wide cockpit with large windows all round. Left and right gunner stations comprised blister windows on the waist of the hull behind the wing. The tail was of a tall design with the horizontal tail mounted well up the single fin. Power was supplied from a pair of two-row Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp engines neatly cowled on the centre section with cooling gills and driving Hamilton variable-pitch propellers.

About 3,300 Catalinas were produced and many are still flying today as water bombers, flying geological surveys, carrying people, supplies and equipment to inaccessible areas and even flying sportsmen into remote areas for hunting and fishing.

An exasperated caller to a Computer Tech Support said she couldn't get her new Computer to turn on. After ensuring the computer was plugged in, the technician asked her what happened when she pushed the power button. Her response, "I pushed and pushed on the foot pedal and nothing happened." The 'foot pedal' turned out to be the mouse.