

The three aircraft had established a recorded non-stop flight from Ismalia (Egypt) to Darwin, a distance of 7,162 miles. After departing Pearce for Darwin, Wing Commander Gayford's aircraft was forced down 100 miles north of Derby and badly damaged. The surviving Wellesley returned to Pearce Station where it was dismantled and shipped back to Egypt.

Pearce Station Headquarters Opened

On the 6th February 1939 with a rise in promotion for Group Captain R.J .Brownell, as Station Commander, the Headquarters was officially opened.

Creation of Two Squadrons January 1939

The Squadron was renamed No.25 City of Perth Squadron and Flight Lieutenant Brian (“Black Jack”) Walker as Commanding Officer but still with the Hawker Demons. Simultaneously No 14 Squadron was formed with Flight Lieutenant C W Pearce appointed as Commanding Officer and equipped with the Avro Ansons.

C.O.’s Residence Completed

Finally Group Captain Brownell and his family had their own residence. His first guest was the Air Member for Personnel, AIRCDRE J Russell, on exchange duty from the Royal Air Force. As the Officers Mess was not yet ready for occupation he was invited to stay the night in the Station Commander’s residence. On retiring the Air Commodore placed his shoes outside his bedroom door for a servant to clean. This gave Brownell quite a shock, as his man did not report for duty until 9.00 am and shoe cleaning was not included in his duties. The Station Commander did the “decent” thing and cleaned the shoes each morning for nearly a week.

Opening of the Officers’ Mess

This also coincided with a serious threat of War in early September 1939. All the officers were delighted with the new and magnificent Mess and at last having a home of their own. The Sergeants also were delighted as their Mess had been taken over by the Officers so now they also had their own. Two years had slipped by during this period of establishing the Pearce Station.



Pilot Officer A.D.Garrison (later Air commodore) about to touch down after a flight of nearly 2000 miles on 10 March 1938.



Shortly after touchdown of this historic formation flight from RAAF Laverton, (L to R) FLGOFF T S Ingledeew, **FLTLT W Kyle (RAF)**, FLGOFF J Daniels, FLGOFF J Daniels, FLGOFF W S Mann, PLTOFF A D Garrison (photograph) and FLGOFF L Law.

No. 23 Squadron

“Demons Fly West”

The following details have been taken from two letters sent home by Pilot Officer A.D.Garrison (later Air commodore), who joined the Squadron in December 1937 direct from a Cadet Course at RAAF Point Cook.

Intensive training for the newly posted Pilots was under the guidance of FLTLT Wallace Kyle (RAF Exchange Officer) who was the Acting Commanding Officer. Six Hawker Demons and six Avro Ansons had to be eventually ferried to Pearce and it was only accomplished because of the leadership, planning and training that FLTLT Kyle instigated.

The following details extracts from two letters sent home by Pilot Officer A. D. Garrison (later AIRCDRE) who joined the Squadron in December 1937 direct from Cadet Course at Point Cook:

Dear Mother

I feel certain that our flight has confounded the critics of Demon aircraft. Apart from a squadron of nine Wapitis in 1929, this formation of seven is the largest number of aircraft ever to cross Australia together.

We never even had so much as a puncture or a scratch of paint on the whole trip.

We left Laverton at 1 o'clock and ran into some heavy weather on our way to Nhill, but just as we reached the mountains, we ran out of it. A few minutes later we landed at Nhill, refuelled and set off to Adelaide. The Anson, of course, flew straight on to Adelaide without stopping at Nhill.

After the planes were refuelled and away in the hangars, we all went into Adelaide and stayed at the Hotel Richmond.

We had dinner and sat and yarned till about nine, then off to bed. We were called at 5.30 am then after breakfast, out to the aerodrome (about 14 miles). We set off at 8 o'clock and had two stretches of over 40 miles each to do over the water. Although we were over 8,000 feet - plenty of height to glide to the shore in the event of engine failure - I was jolly glad to be over land again.

We made such good time that we did not have to land at Kyancutta, but went straight onto Ceduna. We had a bite to eat at the A.N.A. rest house and hopped off straight across the desert to Cook. When we were over Cook, we had sufficient fuel to take us onto Forrest, but the Flight Commander (W. Kyle) would not take the risk, so we landed there and just filled one of our tanks.

We arrived at Forrest about 4 pm, and the heat was simply terrific. We had to hand-pump the petrol and although it was done in the shade of the hangar, it was hot work. Whichever way the food. Rising at 4.15 am on Thursday we had breakfast and sat down to wait for the first glimmer of light. We took off for Rawlinna then on to Kalgoorlie, where practically the whole town turned out to welcome us. Next morning after takeoff, we dived in salute over the town,

and on to Tammin - only 87 miles from Perth. We had a rest, and took on a little fuel, as we were to do a formation flight over Perth.

We were due over Perth at 2 pm, and at exactly 2 pm we passed dead over the City in perfect formation after 2,000 miles crossing Australia.

We flew around the suburbs and the City for half an hour, and then dived in formation in salute over Pearce, broke formation and landed, after one of the most successful flights ever made by the RAAF.

As we stepped from our machines, Wing Commander Brownell congratulated us individually in only the manner he can.”

So ended the letter to PLTOFF Arthur Garrison’s Mother written three days after flight arrived (10 March 1938).

‘The success of our epic crossing of the continent was, undoubtedly, due to our “A” Flight Commander, FLTLT W Kyle, whose professional approach to his duties and his already very highly developed qualities of leadership’. (Arthur Garrison’s comment).

Kyle as we now know, emerged at the end of his career in the RAF as Air Chief Marshall Sir Wallace Kyle, KCB, CB, KCVO, CBE, SSO, DFC, and later as Governor of WA.

Sir Wallace Kyle was born in Kalgoorlie, the goldfields of Western Australia in 1910 and completed his education at Guildford Grammar School (WA). At aged 17 years he presented himself to Government House in Perth to be interviewed by Sir William Campion, for selection for one of the few Scholarships to Cranwell Royal Air Force College. He was successful and arrived at Cranwell in January 1928 where he excelled in a wide variety of sports. After being awarded his Wings he became an Instructor at Cranwell and years later was appointed Deputy Commandant. He served for a time in the Fleet Air Arm, which was then part of the RAF. As CO of No 139 Squadron in WW2 he was a fearless and inspired leader. As a Staff Officer he held many important positions. In the post war period as C-in-C of Bomber Command he was responsible for the “V” Bomber Force then later the “Strike Command” up until retirement. In the RAF he was affectionately known as “Digger.”



Hawker Demon Squadrons

RAAF Station Pearce, with No 23 Squadron equipped with Demons, had a sister Squadron at RAF Station Biggin Hill, (U.K.). That SQD was the only Royal Air Force Unit equipped with the Hawker Demons and gave sensational synchronised aerobatics at the famous Hendon Air Pageant.

First C.A.F. Pilots Graduate at RAAF Pearce



FLTLT Don Mc Lean (later GPCAPT) Commanding Officer of No 25 Squadron

Group Captain Brownell presented them with their Wings on 5 October 1939.

L/R M. Lockwood , R.A.Little, C.N. Anderson, J.G.Manford, E.T Weston
and L.W. Manning.



Hawker Demons and Avro Ansons were both used to train the C.A.F Cadets after the Avro Cadet Trainer stage.

War Declared

3 September 1939

At a conference with the G.O.C. and D.N.O. (the Commanders of Army & Navy) a Combined Operations Headquarters was formed and frequent conferences were held.

First Wing Parade at Pearce

The strength of pilots was increased when the Citizen Air Force Cadets, who had been trained at Pearce, graduated and received their Wings from Group Captain Brownell on the 5th October 1939.

They were: Manford, Manning, Little, Weston, Lockwood and Anderson. Their white hatbands were removed and they were elevated to the rank of Flight Sergeant, but shortly afterwards Brownell was successful in having them promoted to Pilot Officers.

Manning, Manford and Little all rose to be Wing Commandeers and each winning the D.F.C. Charles Anderson crashed into the sea and was killed. Manning became a Senior Captain in T.A.A. with over 15,000 hours. Max Lockwood had a good service record. The only batch of Pilots to complete their training at Pearce.

Citizen Air Force 1938 Pilot Training

An RAAF Selection Committee consisting of WGCdr Scherger and SQNLDR Hefferman selected eight Cadets to commence the first C.A.F. course in September 1938. The course consisted of one month full time training at Pearce then one full weekend a month for one year. Two of the

During the following month the Cadet Officers selected for the Citizen Force began intensive training. They were J.G. Manford, D.H. Dobson, L.S. Henshilwood, L.W. Manning, E T Weston, C.V. Anderson, M.T. Lockwood and R.A. Little.

. Training proceeded and night flying was practised in Ansons over the Darling Ranges in an area bounded by Bullsbrook, Perth, Beverley and York.

Although Cadets Manford, Little and Manning had done some flying with the WA Aero Club, they still had to complete the full RAAF syllabus on Avro Trainers each logging some fifty hours. In April 1939 all the Cadets converted onto Hawker Demons and their Chief Instructor was Brian "Blackjack" Walker whose exploits during WW2 would fill a book. On Sunday afternoons people from Perth would go for a drive to Pearce and many would stop off to watch the planes and the Cadets practising. Brian Walker would take over the flying at the end of the instructing session with, "Right, I've got it." As quick as a flash the Cadet would do up his safety straps really tight and then hang on!

With war imminent in Europe they were called up for service on 1st September 1939, and each reported for duty that afternoon two days before war was declared.

September 1939 was supposed to be a full month of training and to complete all examinations prior to Graduation. The process was speeded up somewhat. As they had had no instruction regarding Air Force Law and Administration the Station Adjutant gave a lecture, before lunch, part of which was the duties of Orderly Officer and how to put a man "on charge." After lunch FLGOFF Garrison, who was in charge of Cadets, came in and said:

"Now we will do the examination on Air Force Law and Administration." (Guess what the two questions were?)

Details above were supplied by Wing Commander (Retired) L. W. Manning, who, after a period of instructing at S.F.T.S. completed a GR Course then converted to Hudsons and operated with No 32 SQN in New Guinea. After a tour on Hudsons he was posted as an O.T.U. Instructor on Hudsons at Bairnsdale and Sale. This was followed by a tour on Liberators then posted as a Chief Instructor on Liberators at an O.T.U. With 3100 hours in his Log Book he retired from the RAAF in December 1945 and joined A.N.A. in 1946. After another distinguished flying career he retired in 1977 with 20,000 hours, thus terminating the flying career of Cadet Manning.

Additional Pilots

Civilian pilots, who flew with the Maylands Aero Club, were also on the RAAF Reserve and in that role took part in Army exercises on Rottneest Island by dropping flour bombs.

At the outbreak of WW2 these pilots were called up as Sergeant Pilots and joined No. 25 Squadron as second pilots. One of these pilots was Gordon Ayres, who after a year with No. 14 Squadron completed an Instructor's Course at the Central Flying School, Point Cook. After instructing at various RAAF bases he was posted in 1943 to the United Kingdom to attend the Central Flying School for a special course. On return to Australia became the Chief Flying Instructor. In 1945 Gordon Ayres was posted to Beaufighters in the Pacific.

Five other pilots from the Maylands Aero Club were asked if they would join the RAAF if war should break out. They willingly signed "the form."

On the 19 January 1940, each of the 5 pilots received a letter directing them to report to Maylands Aero Club and **to take the minimum of personal belongings!** When they duly reported no one knew about the letters nor did RAAF Pearce so the five new recruits were told to report next day. The day following a signal from Melbourne confirmed that they were to be taken on strength in the RAAF.

As no accommodation was available our intrepid pilots rented a house nearby. It was necessary for them to have their own personal flying gear as none was provided. For meals they had to buy them from the Aero Club. They were to receive 10 shillings per day from the Air Force. When a cheque arrived the Aero Club demanded the total amount to pay for the meals supplied. When the five refused a certain Wing Commander landed at the airfield and threatened them with mutiny for withholding the cheque. Within a short time rail warrants were issued and five were sent to Melbourne to complete an RAAF Cadet Pilot Course No. 28.

Harold Roy Croker was the informant of the previous episode and he went on to complete an International Navigation School Course and was posted to Cootamundra Air Observer School as Chief Instructor. Later he would spend the next four years on operations with Beauforts and Liberators.

1937 Radio Mechanic / Air Crew

One such person was AC1 Eric Main, who entered the RAAF in 1935 and trained as Fitter / Aero. He then entered No. 1 Wireless Course and graduated as a Wireless Mechanic. He was posted to No. 23 Squadron at RAAF Laverton. His duties also included all the electrical work on Demons and Ansons as well as being a Radio Operator on the Base and in the air. On Anson flights across Australia contact with Laverton was using the 1082 and 1083 Transmitter / Receiver.

Flights with WGCDR Brownell to towns in Western Australia the Radio Operator flew with the ground staff rank and received 25 cents per day flying pay, but only on the days they flew. Soon after war with Japan commenced Eric Main was promoted to Warrant Officer and posted to New Guinea flying Hudsons. Later he was attached to Milne Bay Staff Office. In 1942 Eric Main was commissioned and with No 1 Support Unit, was involved in the invasion of Borneo. At the end of WW2 he was posted to New Guinea to salvage all the radio equipment. After a period on Hollywood Hospital, Eric Main set up the National Meteorological Radio Station in Canberra. He returned to Pearce in 1954/55, retired as Wing Commander in 1964 and has maintained close contact with the Pearce Officers' Mess to the present day.

Re-deployment for Group Captain R. J. Brownell MC, MM

Air Chief Marshall Sir Charles Burnett of the Royal Air Force was appointed Chief of the Air Staff, RAAF in February 1940. GPCAPT Brownell was summoned to RAAF headquarters in Melbourne and informed by him that he had been chosen to take charge of an RAAF group headquarters to be formed in Malaya.

So ended a two and a half year period establishing the RAAF base at Pearce where Brownell found time to do a lot of flying. Being some 2,000 miles away from the Air Board he was able to use his initiative to a much larger degree than occurred in Commands closer to RAAF headquarters in Melbourne.

Two New Squadrons Created



On the 6 February 1939 No. 25 Squadron, City of Perth, came into being Under the Command of FLTLT Brian (Black Jack) Walker, but still with Demons.



Also on the same day No.14 Squadron was created with FLTLT C.W.Pearce as Commanding Officer.

The Anson was then the RAAF's front line aircraft being the **first monoplane aircraft, the first with retractable undercarriage, and first with a turret.**

No.14 Squadron Established

as a

General Reconnaissance and bomber Squadron

On 6 February 1939, No. 14 Squadron was formed at Pearce using the Avro Ansons already on the Base with FLTLT C.W. Pearce being appointed as Commanding Officer.

The outbreak of World War 2 on 9 September 1939 suddenly changed the peacetime Squadron into wondering what was in store for their future involvement. Seaward reconnaissance patrols soon commenced.

13 January 1940

No. 14 Squadron, with their Ansons, established a camp (tents) at Albany for reconnaissance duties in connection with the arrival and departure of 2nd A.I.F. convoy on their way to the Middle East. The Ansons closely patrolled the A.I.F. convoy as they steamed up the West Coast until they anchored in Gage Roads off Fremantle Harbour. The Squadron returned to Pearce on 19 January 1940.

Reconnaissance flights became routine checking incoming shipping as well as accompanying outward-bound ships.

26.10.40 FLGOFF C.C.Learmonth was posted into the Squadron

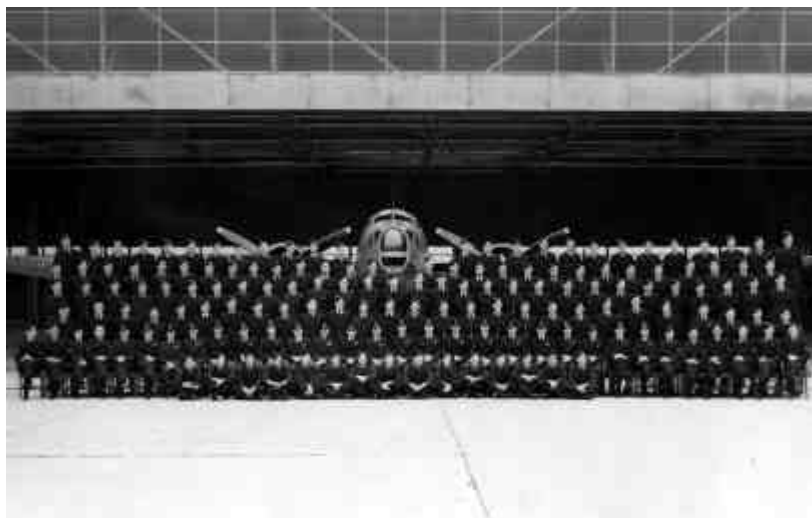
Search for H.M.A.S. Sydney

No 14 Squadron was to fly some 60 sorties while assisting in the search for the missing Australian Cruiser, which had been sunk by the German Armed Merchant ship "The Cormorant". The German ship itself was sunk in the engagement and the surviving German Crew landed in the vicinity of Carnarvon, but there were NO Australian survivors.

Conversion to Hudsons

During May 1940 Squadron Pilots flew their Ansons to NSW where they completed a conversion course on Lockheed Hudsons then flew them back to Pearce. Further training commenced before resuming sea patrols. Pigeons were taken on sea patrols during July 1940 and released at different heights and distances from Pearce yet they all returned although some were released 150 miles out to sea. Submarine patrols formed the major task for the Squadron.

During March 1942 a Hudson was ordered to attack a submerged submarine though fortunately without success, for later it proved to be the United States submarine "Sargo."



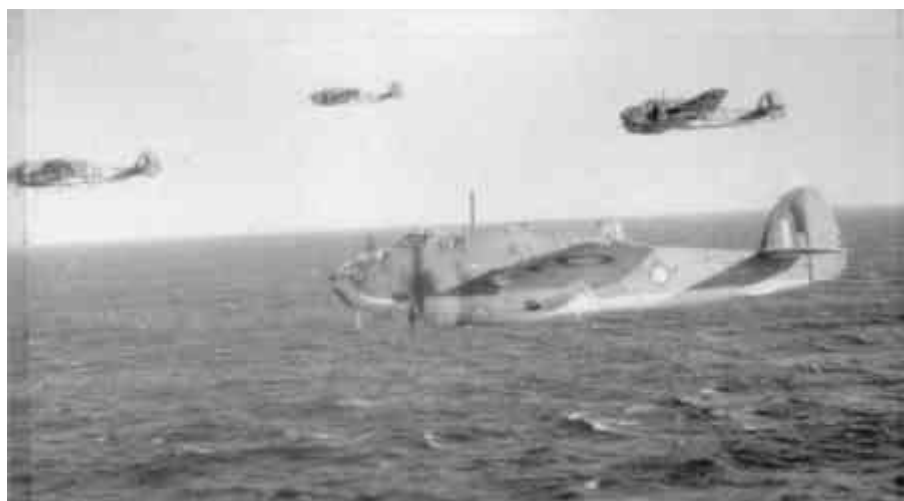
No.14 Squadron personnel in 1940 with their new Lockheed Hudson aircraft with the Commanding officer W.G. Lightfoot. With 12 aircraft the Crews were formed into three flights (A,B,C.) for coastal patrols.



1939. A Warrant Officer introducing these FLGOFF to the newly issued gas masks. Left to Right: C.C. Learmonth (behind Corporal), Ron Fletcher (end of table), Geoff Newstead, WOFF M Findlayson (glasses), Leslie Ingram (own photograph)



WGCDR C.C. Learmonth posted to Pearce in Dec 1943 as Commanding Officer of No 14 SQN then equipped with Australian built Bristol Beauforts. He had just completed 154 operational sorties in New Guinea with No 22 SQN Bostons. He won his DFC as Flight Commander and a Bar as Commanding Officer



On 6 January 1944, WGCDR Charles C. Learmonth was leading a flight of Beauforts near Rottneest Island when his aircraft became uncontrollable when the elevator trim tabs locked. By radio he explained to the other pilots the problem while crashing to his death. The riddle of the unexplained disappearances of so many Beaufort Air crews was partly solved.

During December 1943 the Squadron set about converting to the Australian made Beaufort aircraft and then resumed further training under the leadership of WGCDR C.C. Learmonth DFC and Bar, who had only just arrived from No 20 Squadron (Bostons) in New Guinea.

WGCDR Charles C Learmonth - DFC & Bar

On the 26 October 1940 FLGOFF C.C. Learmonth joined No. 14 Squadron, based at RAAF Base Pearce, who were equipped with Avro Ansons and later converted to Hudsons. A year later, soon after the Japanese attack on the American Fleet at Pearl Harbour, FLTLT Learmonth was posted to No. 2AD RAAF Richmond and in April 1942 joined No 22 Squadron flying Bostons. By November 1942 the SQN was at Ward Strip, Port Moresby, New Guinea followed by the SQN moving to Goodenough Island in August 1943.

In the year he spent flying with No 22 SQN in New Guinea he flew some 136 sorties in “She’s Apples,” against the Japanese and rose from the rank of FLTLT to Wing Commander winning a D.F.C. for his outstanding leadership and bravery. Before he left New Guinea he was awarded a Bar to his DFC.

Wing Commander Learmonth was posted to No 14 Squadron for the second time, but this time as the Commanding Officer, arriving in December 1943.

During a flight with two other Beauforts on 6 January 1944, Wing Commander Learmonth was killed in a crash off Rottneest Island. While plunging to his death he described by radio, what was occurring in the elevators and the uncontrollable vibrations, which was also observed by FLTLT Hewitt DFM flying in close formation, who could see the elevator trim tabs in the jammed full up position. FLTLT Keith Kelly was the other Pilot in the formation.

Wing Commander C.C. Learmonth provided the vital information that pinpointed the reason for the mysterious Beaufort crashes that claimed the lives of an incredible number of Air Crews in the Australian built Beaufort Bombers.

He was then twenty-six years of age.

Note:

Two months previously, **WGCDR B.I. “Black Jack” Walker** experienced the same problem with the trim tab, but because of the Co-Pilot control column, was also hauled back by the Observer and being at 5000’, allowed a belly landing to be made at Bankstown. No one was injured.



No. 14 SQN would remain at Pearce throughout WW2 using a variety of aircraft: Anson, Hudson and Beaufort



The Lockheed Hudson was a 5 seat medium bomber that entered the RAAF in 1940 and remained on strength until 1949. Some 247 were ordered and were used on reconnaissance, communications and training. They were the first RAAF aircraft to retaliate against the Japanese landings in Malaya. 13 RAAF Squadrons flew Hudsons including No 459 in the Middle East.



The "Fighting Fourteen" in 1944 with Commanding Officer WGCDR I.L. Campbell A.D.C.



Beauforts had only just replaced the aging Hudsons when WGCDR C.C. Learmonth was appointed as Commanding Officer on 7 December 1943.

His Royal Highness, the Duke of Gloucester, visited Pearce and No.14 Squadron on 7 April 1944.

Early in July 1944 the Squadron moved a detachment of Beauforts a detachment of Beauforts to an air strip at Pinjarra, 51 miles south of Perth and remained there until returning to Pearce on the 18 September.

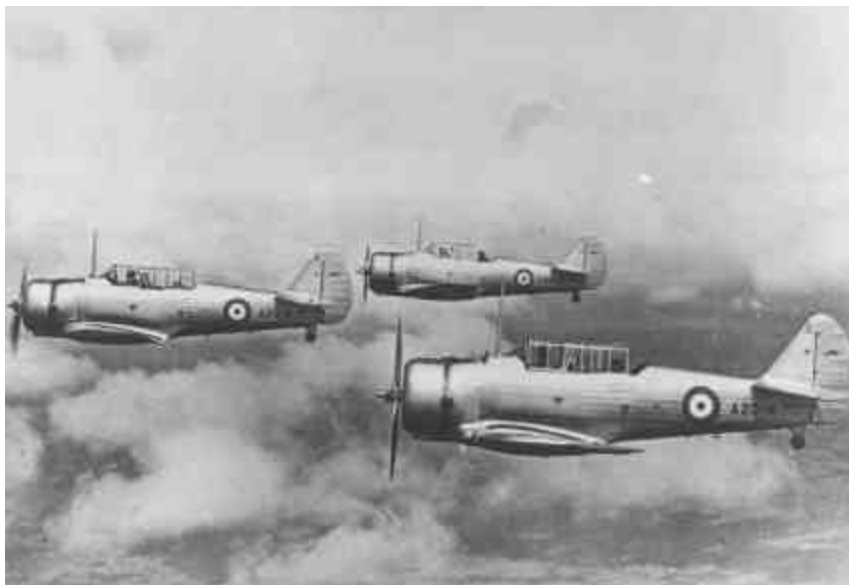
No 14 Squadron would, through the continuous flow of patrols over the war years, provide the Air Crews with the essential operational training necessary to prepare them of when they moved on to a Unit in the war zone. Their presence at Pearce provided for the defence of Western Australia. It appears that no official Squadron Crest was ever designed, that would today acknowledge the existence of this important Squadron that was created and disbanded at Pearce.

Anti-submarine patrols in the Fremantle area were discontinued from May 1945 as it was considered the war was essentially over in this region. No 14 Squadron operated from Pearce throughout WW2 and was finally disbanded on the 10 December 1945.

No 14 Squadron Commanding Officers

06	February	1939	FLTLT	C.W.	Pearce CBE DFC
17	April	1939	SQNLDR	L.V.	Lachal
31	July	1939	WGCDR	R.F.M.	Dalton
09	January	1941	WDCDR	J.E.	Graham
12	September	1942	WGCDR	G.D.	Nicholl DFC
11	February	1943	SQNLDR	J.G.	Morton DFC
07	April	1943	WGCDR	T.	MacBride Price
07	December	1943	WGCDR	C.C.	LearmonthDFC & Bar
03	March	1944	WGCDR	I.L.	CampbellADC
26	October	1944	WGCDR	R.H.	Thompson
13	September	1945	SQNLDR	H.C.	PlentyDFC & Bar
19	October	1945	FLTLT	G.F.J.	Brogue
10December	1945 No 14 Squadron disbanded.				

No.25 Squadron, City of Perth



Australian built Wirraways replaced the Demons for coastal patrols then nine Buffaloes were added to the Squadron.



No 25 SQN became a dive-bomber SQN with the arrival of the U.S.A. built Vultee Vengeance. Some 24 aircraft were based at Pearce in 1943. The Pilot, FLTLT Alan Place, with Navigator PLTOFF Bill Barnes (his photograph) flew with No 25 SQN, but this was taken during drogue towing for Liberator Gunnery exercises in Victoria.

No. 25 Squadron (City of Perth)



On 6 February 1939 the Squadron was re-numbered from No 23 SQN with FLTLT Brian (Black Jack) Walker as Commanding Officer.

The outbreak of WW2 saw No 25 Squadron brought up to full operational status with Wirraway aircraft. It was initially engaged in anti-submarine duties off Rottnest Island and providing protection to convoys such as the one transporting the 2nd A.I.F. to the Middle East. The Squadron was also involved in the grim search for survivors from H.M.A.S. Sydney after the battle with the German raider, “Kormoran.”

With the entry of Japan into the war and the subsequent threat of invasion of Australia, No 25 Squadron’s role changed to that of air defence. Initially the squadron was equipped with nine (9) Brewster Buffalo aircraft in 1942, while the Wirraways still continued to operate along the WA coast to as far away as Onslow until August 1943. The Wirraways departed to No 7 S.F.T.S. and No 5 S.F.T.S.

No 25 SQN then became an Army cooperation squadron equipped with Vultee Vengeance dive bombers.

No 25 Squadron Crest

On 1 August 1943, with approval by King George VI, the Squadron was granted the use of their new No 25 Squadron Crest.

Vultee Vengeances

Squadron Pilots set about converting themselves to the Vengeances with a set of Pilot Notes, as was the practice in single engine aircraft.

After completing an O.T.U. at RAAF Williamtown (NSW) new crews were posted into Pearce during August 1943 to begin Squadron training. Squadron Pilots set about converting themselves to the Vengeances with a set of Pilot Notes, as was the practice in single engine aircraft. Finally there were 24 aircraft in two flights with SQNLDR J.B. Hooper as the Commanding Officer. An American Army Pilot gave tactical lectures to the Pilots and observers.

Cross-country exercises, formation flying were followed by extensive dive bombing sorties. The Pearce bombing range was used, as well as Lancelin Island and Cockburn Sound low level “skip bombing’ was perfected at Lancelin Island as the target, using an approach from the seaward side of the island. The Vengeance carried 250-pound bombs in internal bomb bays but many of the bomb drops used the small practice varieties.

During March 1944 Pearce was inundated with a variety of aircraft from the Eastern States, when an alarm went up that a Japanese fleet might be heading down the west coast. A similar alarm also put S.F.T.S Geraldton on alert and trainee Pilots were sent on sea patrols armed with 112 pound bombs looking for the Japanese fleet.



No 25 SQD B24 Liberators operated from RAAF Cunderdin and staged through the secret Base at Corunna Downs (near Marble Bar). The Black Swan emblem is still used by the current SQD. Australia had 254 “Libs” and some Aussie crews flew with the American 380th Group in New Guinea in 1943.

In 1944 the first of the “Libs” entered the RAAF SQDS



Vengeance crews relaxing after a training, high-level formation dive-bombing sortie

By the end of 1944 the Vengeances left RAAF Pearce and were stored at Kalgoorlie when No. 25 Squadron was about to become a four engine bombing Squadron

Vultee Vengeances:

A two seat general purpose dive bomber that entered the RAAF in May 1942 and remained until 1951. Some 342 were ordered from America. They carried four 0.50 Calibre machine guns in the wings and a twin 0.50 in the rear cockpit as well as 2000lbs of bombs. Australian Squadrons (12, 21, 23 and 24) were used against the Japanese in New Guinea.

No.25 a Heavy Bomber Squadron

By 1945 the threat of invasion had diminished resulting in the Squadron being re-equipped as a heavy bomber unit with **Consolidated B24 Liberator aircraft.**

Crews came together at RAAF Tocumwal in NSW during October 1944 to begin their Operational Training. In January 1945 No 25 Squadron commenced operations from RAAF Cunderdin airfield and staging through the secret airfield at Corunna Downs near Marble Bar, the hottest town in Australia.

Bombing raids against targets in the then Netherlands East Indies were successfully carried out. On some occasions the Liberators would also carry the Ground Staff to set up tents and catering arrangements when consecutive bombing raids would be carried out. Corunna Downs was very remote with a harsh environment and devoid of any amenities.

Some 85 missions against enemy targets resulting in a signal of congratulations from General MacArthur, Supreme Commander, Allied Forces South Pacific, for the support the Squadron had done in the Allied Landings at Brunei Bay.

The SQN was awarded the Battle Honour: “Eastern Waters 1941 - 45.”

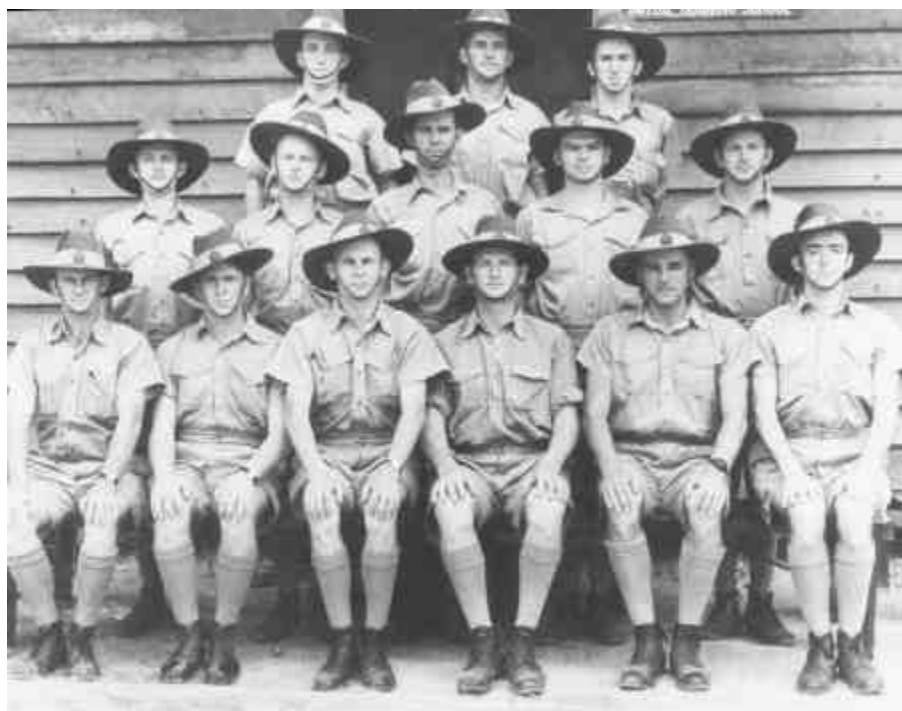
From September 1945 to January 1946 the Squadron was involved in the repatriation of Australian prisoners of war and civilian internees from Borneo and Morotai back to Australia.

No 25 Squadron disbanded on 9 July 1946.





Led by the RAAF Base Pearce Band, the Air Crew Trainees of No 5 Initial Training School Pearce marched through the City of Perth in 1941. Trainees entered the Service with the lowest rank (AC2) in the Air Force and wore the distinctive white flash in their cap.



Some of the Instructors at No 5 I.T.S. Pearce

No 5 Initial Training School

for

Air Crew Recruits

This Unit was formed on 21 October 1940 with a nucleus of 3 Officers and 18 Airmen under the Command of Squadron Leader N. Brearly, DSO, MC, AFC. On 22 November the first intake of 92 Air Crew Trainees arrived. The lack of equipment and the gradual increase of Trainees caused many problems.

First E.A.T.S. Course

The first course to enter Pearce under the **Empire Air Training Scheme** was No 8 Course on the 11 November 1940 and John Lovegrove one of the first trainees confirmed this. John was one of those who escaped from Java in a lifeboat (April 1942) and spent 47 days at sea before reaching Western Australia.

14 September 1941 saw the largest intake in the history of the Unit when 161 recruits from Adelaide and Perth arrived.

4 November the following postings were recorded:

52 Pilots to No 9 E.F.T.S. Cunderdin

12 Observers to Air Observers School, Mt Gambia

40 Gunners to No 1 Wireless & Gunnery School, Ballarat

22 December 1941 at a Training Conference attended by the Commanding Officer Squadron Leader A.R. Brown, it was decided due to the present sphere of hostilities and the adjacent Operational Squadrons that the **I.T.S. Unit would move to Clontarf orphanage on 1 March 1942.**

During those 16 months there must have been nearly 2000 Trainees who passed through their first stage in training before becoming a Member of an Air Crew.

Pearce "Mine Fields"

Early in 1942 with the threat of a Japanese invasion into Australia, a decision to lay mines around Pearce Base was implemented. Staff Sergeant George Joseph Galvin of No 13 Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, set about laying the mines, and at the same time recording their location. He was then posted to Darwin. It appears that eventually the mines had to be removed, but their location map had been lost. At some considerable cost SGR Calvin had to be brought back to WA to remove the mines. Somewhere in official documents there surely must be some details regarding this matter, but they were not available to my inquiry. (Author)

(Details were supplied by SQNLDR Dr Mike Galvin).

1941 Trainee Pilots “Painters” and “Diggers”

An enthusiastic group of young Air Crew Trainees entered Initial Training School (I.T.S.), RAAF Base Pearce, in August 1941 as No 19 Course. At the conclusion of the newly extended I.T.S. segment those selected as Observers and Wireless Air Gunners were posted to the Eastern States to continue their training while the potential Pilots were invited to “volunteer” to go to South Africa to commence flying training. Some 23 would be pilots stepped forward and told to pack their kitbags and were transported off to Perth to the Embarkation Depot (5 E.D.)

Excitement was rife but as days aimlessly drifted by waiting for a ship to arrive when it was suddenly announced that our intrepid airmen were to assemble at 8 am the following morning, not with their gear for posting!

After boarding the RAAF bus they were informed they were going to Pearce. Rumours were quickly generated and more excitement. What a complete disillusionment greeted the group when each was handed a paintbrush and tin of paint and marched to the first aircraft hangar and ordered to paint the complete building. No formal complaints about being troubled by dizziness due heights were formally tendered.

This never ending grind of slapping paint on every building was to continue until No 20 Course, Africa bound “volunteers” joined the daily bus ride to and from No 5 E.D. Now with 43 disgruntled, would be Pilots commenced all sorts of rorts and schemes. Having adopted the collective name of the “40 Club” they planned their revenge by painting an enormous 40 on the roof of an aircraft hangar. Much to the amusement of all the “erks” orders were issued remove the offending number forty, however, the rebels had used full strength paint ensuring its lasting permanence. Several of the original 20 Course state that their handy work was still evident in the 1960’s. This painting prank was not executed without some degree of danger, as two would be pilots fell off the hangar roof. One of the perpetrators received a broken leg and while the other a broken arm.

Not only as painters and sign writers were our future Pilots assigned but they were each handed a shovel and allocated a patch of ground and ordered to produce a slit trench (airman for the use of!) as well as filling a countless number of sand bags.

One tragic accident occurred when two 19-year-old Pilot trainees were told to place in position a sign on the Bombing Range. It appears that no armourers were with these two young men as they dragged the steel frame across the ground until a bomb was unearthed and exploded completely blinding one of the trainees who had recently been married.