

HISTORY IN FOCUS





COASTAL COMMAND

The Royal Air Force's (RAF) Coastal Command was founded in 1936. When the Second World War began, a group of Australians were in England to take delivery of new flying boats. They were kept there to form No. 10 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and were attached to Coastal Command. Two more predominantly Australian squadrons, Nos 455 and 461, joined the command later in the war. Australians, like men of many nationalities, were also to be found throughout its operational squadrons.

Coastal Command is best remembered for its part in defeating the German U-boat threat in the Atlantic, but its aircraft were also engaged in escorting Allied ships, conducting anti-shipping patrols, transporting important passengers, performing air-sea rescue, and mine laying, photographic reconnaissance and meteorological monitoring. Because they needed to fly long distances over vast oceans, Coastal Command's aircraft flew from bases in the United Kingdom, Iceland, Gibraltar, the Soviet Union and west and north Africa.

Atlantic patrols could be monotonous and exhausting, lasting up to 16 hours. One Australian recalled that logbooks typically recorded uneventful patrols.

Encounters with the enemy were relatively infrequent but the possibility of combat meant they needed to concentrate and maintain constant vigilance.

The weather could make operations stressful. Anti-submarine patrols were conducted between 1200 and 5000 feet above sea level where aircraft might, as one Australian said, be 'tossed like a toy ... one didn't hunt for U-boats at a height of ten thousand feet above the weather, one hunted for U-boats ... in the weather'.

During the Second World War, Coastal Command was credited with having destroyed 366 German ships and 165 U-boats. It operated from the war's first day until its last, and more than 5500 of its members were killed.

During the Cold War, Coastal Command carried out anti-submarine duties before it became part of the newly formed Strike Command.

IMAGE: Ground crew of No. 10 Squadron RAAF, Coastal Command, haul a Sunderland aircraft ashore for repairs, Plymouth, England, May 1945. (AWM SUK14702)