

RAAF 38 Squadron - The First 50 Years.

by Mark Royle

On the 15th September 1943 at RAAF Station, Richmond, New South Wales, Number 38 Transport Squadron R.A.A.F was formed. The Squadron's first aircraft were the Lockheed Hudson MK IV. Its duties were that of general cargo, passengers and V.I.P flights. Number 38 Squadron's first official sortie was a freight run from Richmond to Gorrie in the Northern Territory on the 17th December 1943. The aircraft made stops at Dubbo, Charleville, Cloncurry and Tennant Creek on the forward and return trips. Number 38 Squadron's very first aircraft was a Hudson (serial number A16-134) ferried from Tocumal on 07 Nov 1943 by the then Commanding Officer SQNLDR C.C. Forman (RAF) (290487).

May 1944 the Squadron was re-equipped with the Dakota and the ever trusty Hudson was retired. On the 22nd of May the Squadron and operational role came under the control of the Directorate of Air Transport, Allied Air Forces. On the 15th October 1944 control of the Squadron changed hands to the R.A.A.F Directorate of Air Transport.

During 1944 the Squadron operated on internal routes throughout Australia and co-operated with the United States Airforce on routes to Hollandia, Biak and Noemfoer flying whatever was needed to keep the war effort going. In October 1944 parachute training was added to the Squadron's ever growing list of duties.

December 1944 the Squadron started moving its troops and equipment to Archerfield, Queensland, and ceased operations at Richmond on the 27th December 1944. During this move to Queensland the Squadron continued to operate into the battle grounds of the South West Pacific area. Casualty evacuation operations were stepped up and supply dropping operations commenced in New Guinea and Borneo in 1945.

On the cessation of hostilities in August 1945, Number 38 Squadron was the first to fly into Singapore after the surrender of Japan. It was then employed on the evacuation of Prisoners of War from Bangkok, Singapore and Borneo. To these activities was added Operation "PIG BRISTLE" in 1946 when large quantities of pig bristles were flown from Chunking to Hong Kong for shipment to Australia.

On the 15th August 1946 the Squadron moved to Schofields in New South Wales and became a component of Number 86 Wing(Transport).

After arrival at a Schofields, the Squadron commenced operations in conjunction with Numbers 36 and 37 Squadron, the other two flying units of Number 86 Wing. The main task of the Wing at this time was the Japan Courier, a tri-weekly service inaugurated for the provision of supplies, replacements and mail to the Australian Component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces. This Courier became the longest scheduled air route flown by a twin engined aircraft in the world, a round trip of over 13,000 miles. Besides the Japan Courier, the wing carried out shorter Couriers which involved routes of internal Australia, and the South Pacific.

For the efficiency with which it carried out its operational duties in the year 1946-1947 the Squadron was awarded the "Gloucester Cup" donated by His Royal Highness, the Duke of Gloucester, as an annual award to the most efficient R.A.A.F Squadron of the year. To date Number 38 Squadron has won the "Gloucester Cup" a total of five times (1946-1947, 1953-1954, 1973-74, 1974-1975 and 1986-1987).

After the Japan Courier was handed over to QANTAS on the 26th December 1947, Number 38 Squadron was engaged on many and varied missions including Search and Rescue (SAR), VIP, and General Transport duties.

In August 1948, five crews were sent from the Squadron to the United Kingdom for duties on the Berlin Air Lift. Together with five crews from 36 Squadron they formed an Australian Squadron which flew R.A.F Dakotas for 12 months in and out off Berlin.

On the 1st July 1949, Number 38 Squadron moved to Richmond, NSW, where it originally formed. This was to be the permanent base of the Squadron in peacetime. However, the Squadron was again on the move 12 months later, when it moved to R.A.F Changi, Singapore at the end of June 1950. It was placed under the control of Air Officer Commanding (A.O.C) Malaya and took part in all transport activities in the Far East.

Number 38 Squadron operated throughout the South West Pacific, Western Pacific and East Indian Ocean areas and during the entire period of operations only suffered one fatal accident. This being a Dakota which disappeared near Penau Lakes in Dutch New Guinea, during 1945 en-route from Biak to Merauke. This aircraft was carrying a spare crew and all personnel were reported missing. The aircraft was recovered some 20 years later.

On the 20 November 1950 advice was received from Number 90 Wing to the effect that four Dakota aircraft of Number 38 (T) Squadron together with crews and maintenance personnel were to move to Iwakuni to provide logistical support for Number 77 Squadron and the United Kingdom brigade in Korea.

Number 38 Squadron moved from Changi back to Richmond on the 08 December 1952 flying home via Surabaya, Darwin, Cloncurry and Amberley.

Once again the Squadron was on the move, this time to Canberra. Number 86(T) Wing moved to Canberra on 23 April 1954, as the powers to be said all Transport Aircraft should be stationed in the Nation's capital. However in 1958 when they were convinced this was not a good location for search and rescue aircraft and Number 86(T) Wing was re-established at Richmond on 03 September 1958.

From September 1958 Number 38 Squadron operated from Richmond until the Squadron moved to RAAF Amberley on 08 December 1962. During this time from 1960 - 64, the Squadron had a Communications Flight attached to it flying aircraft such as the MK7 & MK8 Meteor, BAC Canberra and Winjeel. The Squadron had such a diverse range of aircraft that it was now wondering whether it was a Transport Squadron or a Fighter/Bomber Squadron. Also during this period pilots from Canberra and Williamtown came to the Squadron to get some valuable flying time. April 1962 saw the Squadron take over full time SAR duties with the departure of Number 11(Maritime Reconnaissance) Squadron from Richmond.

The first of the new Caribou Aircraft arrived at the Squadron on 22nd April 1964. A few months later in July 1964, the Squadron lost its first Caribou on a STOL (Short Takeoff and Landing) approach into Naval Air Station Nowra.

1964 also saw Number 38 Squadron off to war once again - this time to the jungles of Vietnam. The Detachment was soon to become R.A.A.F Transport Flight Vietnam and then later reformed Number 35 Squadron. On the 1st April 1971 the Squadron was presented with its colours by His Royal Highness, Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh. On the 12th June 1971 the last of the Caribous, A4-299 arrived at Richmond. On the 28th August 1972 the Squadron suffered its first fatal Caribou accident when A4-233 was reported

missing between Wau and Mt Yule. To date this has been the Caribous only fatal accident for both Numbers 38 and 35 Squadron. September 1973 saw the last Dakota leave the Squadron ending a 30 year association between the Squadron and the Dakota.

On the 21st December 1975 after 11 years and 26,000 flying hrs DET "A" PNG (Papua New Guinea) was disbanded . 1975 also saw the Squadron departing on its longest deployment yet to the mountains of India and Pakistan. Five years later with 2000 accident free flying hrs, the deployment returned home to Richmond.

On the 7th November 1981 the Squadron was granted the Freedom of the City of Parramatta, a honour very seldom granted to an individual Squadron.

The years between 1981 and 1992 were relatively quiet for the Squadron as one with such a colourful past deserves a rest now and then. However during this period the Squadron was involved in the Nation's 200th Anniversary in 1988, it was also called upon to perform many civil aid tasks including flood relief and SAR duties and of course it continued to conduct normal tasking to a high standard.

On 18th December 1992 the Squadron moved once again, this time to Amberley in Queensland where we currently operate from. In 1993 three members served for the United Nations in Somalia.

On 15th September 1993 the Squadron celebrated its 50 years of continuous service, with a reunion of all current members and ex-members attending various celebrations.

In the nineties the Squadron has taken on new roles and technology in Night Vision Goggles (NGV), Electronic Warfare Self Protection system (EWSP) and Global Positioning System (GPS). As the Caribou Replacement progresses towards 2000, 38 Squadron continues to perform an operational role which will be transferred to the new aircraft, and the Squadron will go on to bigger and better achievements.

Number 38 Squadron and the United Nations

The following is an extract of the Squadron records involving the trip of A4-199 and her crew from RAAF Richmond to Rawalpindi in Pakistan, to aid the United Nations (UNMOGIP) 1975-1978.

Richmond 04 Mar 75 FLTLT P. Cleary, FLGOFF R. Folvig, FLTLT K. Stone SGT K. O'Brien and CPL W. Little departed Richmond at 0230Z for Alice Springs in A4-199 on first leg of ferry flight to Rawalpindi in Pakistan. This brought into being Number 38 Squadron Detachment "B". Travelling with the aircraft were SGT B Warring and CPL R Jones. The first landing point was COBAR to refuel and then on to ALICE SPRINGS. The only problem on the first day was that the drift sight had been left behind at Richmond.

This was rectified by obtaining a phone patch with the Commanding Officer of the Squadron and having it sent to Alice Springs on the first civil flight from Sydney on the following day.

Alice Springs 05 Mar 75 After receiving the drift sight from the Ansett flight it was subsequently fitted to the aircraft and the "SNOW GOOSE" (so named because of the white colour scheme for UN) took off for Broome. The flight to Broome was uneventful. However the turbulence made it unpleasant from the passengers' point of view. On this leg there were many messages passed over the radios relating to Diplomatic Clearances and accommodation in Indonesia.

Broome 06 Mar 75. Everybody rose early as there was much to do in preparation for the first overseas leg of the trip. The aircraft departed at 0230Z for Bali. This sector was very interesting as it was the crew's first attempt at communicating with Indonesians, which was at times both difficult and humorous. Bali was a welcome sight when it finally appeared on the horizon after the four and a half hours across the ocean. The following day was a rest day at Bali and was a pleasant change from riding in the "SNOW GOOSE".

Bali 08 Mar 75. The flight from Bali to Jakarta proceeded via Cape Djangkar, Surabaya, Semarang and Cirebon to Halim. This was very difficult as Pertamina does not have AVGAS 100/130 (Aviation fuel) at Halim. In the end the aircraft had to be refuelled the following morning by courtesy of the Indonesian Air Force.

Jakarta 09 Mar 75. The morning began with a minor incident in one of the taxis whilst travelling to the airport. The taxi was speeding down the main highway in the usual South East Asian manner, horn blaring when it had a tyre blow out. The driver immediately applied harsh braking, lost directional control and continued sideways along the central medium strip. When the car came to a halt, before the passengers could evacuate, the driver selected first gear and drove across the two lanes of traffic to the verge and then commenced to change the wheel. At that moment the Australian Air Attache drove up. He picked up the passengers and conveyed them to the airport. The flight on to Butterworth was uneventful except for the occasional thunderstorm to be circumnavigated between Singapore and Malacca. On arrival at Butterworth the aircraft was met by a number of previous 38 Squadron members who were currently serving with Transport Services Flight. The next day was a rest day and most spent it shopping in Penang.

Butterworth 12 Mar 75. Originally the crew were to have one rest day in Butterworth but as a Diplomatic Clearance for India had not been received it was decided to remain at Butterworth until all clearances could be obtained. The clearances were finally received and the "SNOW GOOSE" departed Butterworth for Rangoon. At Rangoon the customs, immigration, health and security required a total of 21 copies of the manifest, 15 to get into the country and 6 to get out.

Rangoon 13 Mar 75. The flight continued without any problems to Calcutta. At Calcutta the aircraft was met by British Airways and it was a pleasure to have them handle the arrival. It was the first place apart from Butterworth at which assistance for the crew and passengers was ready and waiting for the aircraft to arrive. British Airways refuelled and cleaned the aircraft, arranged inflight rations for the following day, assisted in clearing everybody through health, immigration and customs and then drove them to the hotel.

Calcutta 14 Mar 75. The trip through to Delhi was uneventful. However, there was a 20 knot head wind which made it very long. It was the first head wind of the trip to be experienced. At Delhi the "SNOW GOOSE" was met by SQNLDR B.J. McKenny (Det Cdr) and CAPT K. Birch (C.A.F) who had travelled down from Rawalpindi to Delhi, a few days earlier, to help navigate the border crossing between India and

Pakistan.

Delhi 15 Mar 75. The sector from Delhi to Rawalpindi was flown with the help of CAPT K. BIRCH (C.A.F) as he had flown the route on several previous occasions and gave helpful advice. On arrival at Rawalpindi the remainder of the Canadian Detachment were at the airport to meet the Caribou with cans of cold Tiger beer. After completing the usual entry paper work the crew and other personnel were driven to the Intercontinental Hotel where they organised their living quarters.

During the Caribou's stay in India and Pakistan the aircraft was employed doing 'milk runs' and border patrols. Flying around the mountains in that part of the world required every thing the Caribou's engines and crew could deliver, as flying around at 21,000 feet was not uncommon. Problems with the crossing of the border also caused some tense moments. And operating in the dust bowls of Rawalpindi in the morning then in the snow and wet of Srinagar a day later kept everyone on their toes.

38 SQUADRON FLOOD RELIEF 1990

38 Squadron flood relief commenced on the 14th of April 1990 when a single Caribou flew to the NSW town of Walgett with the intention to drop hay to stranded sheep within the area. That first flight signalled the beginning of a massive relief effort by Number 38 Squadron that was destined to continue for more than a month.

The incessant rains that fell over Eastern Australia in the first half of April caused the Bogan, Barwon, Macquarie and Darling River systems to burst their banks resulting in widespread flooding to most of North West NSW and South West Queensland. Inland Australia became an inland sea with huge losses to livestock and extensive damage to property. Sheep and cattle clung to the peaks of high ground and quickly ran out of food whilst farmers and townspeople alike clamoured onto any high point available to escape the ever rising waters. When the Government authorised the use of the military to aid the civil community, Number 38 Squadron was one of the first to respond. Through flying conditions described as atrocious, the staunch Caribous and their crews arrived and commenced operations.

Initially the tasks were for shuttles between Dubbo and the smaller outlying communities of Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar and Wanoaring. Through low cloud, heavy rain, wind and with very little of the ground below them not under water, the Caribous flew in food, medical supplies, sandbags and personnel to the beleaguered towns. These sorties not only provided essential supplies and services but more importantly, let isolated and desperate people know that they were not alone and that help was on its way.

After several exhausting days for both aircrew and groundcrew, the rains abated and the job of cleaning up and damage assessment began. Most apparent was the enormous loss of livestock with large numbers still stranded on pockets of high ground around the area. So began the second phase of Caribou relief operations, fodder dropping. The affected farmers would contact the civil relief authorities with requests for hay. The civilian authorities would then prioritise the task before handing it over to the Squadron. It was here that the sturdy old Caribous excelled over all others involved in the relief effort. The amazing flexibility of the Caribou and the professionalism of the crews that flew them really came to the fore.

Crawling along at a gentle 85 knots, the hay was dropped onto very small drop zones such as dam walls, narrow roads and any tiny high spot of land in the huge expanse of water. It was a high pressure atmosphere for both the pilots and the hard working dispatchers down the back. A miss on the drop zone cost time and money for the farmers, but the Squadron was not found wanting.

The operations continued until mid May. However by then the numbers had dwindled form nine aircraft operating at the height of the disaster to just two. On the 18th of May the final Caribou was called home

Despite isolated reports within the media that were critical of certain government aspects of the whole relief operation, the overwhelming opinion was one of complete gratitude that the Caribous and the personnel of Number 38 Squadron had done so well. It was an enormous effort by the entire Squadron under very trying conditions and one for which we can be very proud. It also won the respect and admiration of all who were connected with the relief operations.

THE FOLLOWING 38 SQUADRON AIRCRAFT SERVED ON FLOOD RELIEF

Aircraft	Dates Operated
A4-140	24 APR 90- 01 MAY 90
A4-179	23 APR 90- 08 MAY 90
A4-204	21 APR 90- 16 MAY 90
A4-208	14 MAY 90- 18 MAY 90
A4-210	03 MAY 90- 08 MAY 90
A4-231	20 APR 90- 11 MAY 90
A4-235	14 APR 90- 18 APR 90
	23 APR 90- 27 APR 90
A4-236	22 APR 90- 04 MAY 90
A4-275	17 APR 90- 22 APR 90
	30 APR 90- 06 MAY 90
A4-299	23 APR 90- 04 MAY 90

FLOOD RELIEF DETAILS

BASE AIRFIELDS: Walgett Dubbo, Narrromine, Nyngan

SORTIES COMMENCED: 14 APR 90

SORTIES CEASED: 18 MAY 90

DIRECT MANPOWER COST: Aircrew 455 man days, Groundcrew 260 man days.

FODDER: Sorties flown 300

Bales dropped 25000

FOOD SUPPLY: Sorties flown 37

Food carried 167000 lbs approx

HOURS FLOWN: All aircraft 705.1

FOOTNOTE: The first fodder drop was carried out by WGCDR P Hooper, FLGOFF M Keaney and WOFF D Gill doors close at 0900 time on target 1400 and A4-235 dropped 100 bales of hay.