

= Northern Area Command ( RAAF ) =

Northern Area Command was one of several geographically based commands raised by the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) during World War II . It was formed in May 1941 , and covered the whole of northern Australia and Papua . Headquartered at Townsville , Queensland , Northern Area Command was primarily responsible for air defence , aerial reconnaissance and protection of the sea lanes within its boundaries . In January 1942 , following the outbreak of the Pacific War , it was divided into North @-@ Western and North @-@ Eastern Area Commands , to counter Japanese threats to northern Australia and Papua , respectively .

= = History = =

Prior to World War II , the Royal Australian Air Force was small enough for all its elements to be directly controlled by RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne . After war broke out , the RAAF began to decentralise its command structure , commensurate with expected increases in manpower and units . Between March 1940 and May 1941 , it divided Australia and Papua into four geographically based command @-@ and @-@ control zones : Central Area , Southern Area , Western Area , and Northern Area . The roles of these area commands were air defence , protection of adjacent sea lanes , and aerial reconnaissance . Each was led by an Air Officer Commanding ( AOC ) responsible for the administration and operations of air bases and units within his boundary .

Northern Area Command , headquartered in Townsville , Queensland , was formed on 8 May 1941 under the leadership of Air Commodore Frank Lukis . The command controlled units in northern New South Wales , Queensland , the Northern Territory , and Papua . Lukis was thus responsible for air defence along the entire north coast of Australia . The main air base in the Northern Territory , RAAF Station Darwin , was augmented by eight satellite bases in the region . Between June and November 1941 , Northern Area took the lead in tracking Japanese pearl luggers , whose increased presence off north @-@ western Australia was regarded as " significant " by intelligence services . Central Area was disbanded in August and its responsibilities divided between Northern Area , Southern Area , and the newly formed No. 2 ( Training ) Group .

By December 1941 , Lukis ' frontline strength in the Northern Territory consisted of No. 2 Squadron ( flying Lockheed Hudsons ) , No. 12 Squadron ( CAC Wirraways ) , and No. 13 Squadron ( Hudsons ) , based at RAAF Station Darwin . When the Pacific War broke out , Nos. 2 and 13 Squadrons deployed forces to advanced operational bases at Koepang , Laha and Namlea in the Dutch East Indies . Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons ( flying PBY Catalinas ) were based at Port Moresby in Papua , and No. 24 Squadron ( Hudsons and Wirraways ) at Rabaul in New Britain . Northern Area Command was instructed to " strike at Japanese bases or shipping wherever possible " ; " obtain such warning as is possible of any attempted southward movements by the Japanese " ; " keep open the shipping routes through the Coral , Arafura and Timor Seas " ; and " deny enemy access to Rabaul and to the Territories of New Guinea , Papua and the Mainland of Australia " . Nos. 2 , 11 , 13 , 20 and 24 Squadrons engaged in reconnaissance , maritime patrol and sporadic bombing missions against Japanese targets in the Dutch East Indies and Torres Strait . Short of modern fighters and sufficient numbers of bombers , however , the RAAF units were , in the words of the official history of Australia in the war , " virtually powerless " to either attack or defend against Japanese forces building up in the region .

On 15 January 1942 , Northern Area was split into North @-@ Western Area and North @-@ Eastern Area , to counter distinct Japanese threats to Ambon and Darwin in the former case , and Rabaul and Port Moresby in the latter . Lukis remained at Townsville as AOC of the new North @-@ Eastern Area Command . North @-@ Western Area Command was headquartered at Darwin , Northern Territory ; its inaugural AOC was Air Commodore Douglas Wilson .

= = Aftermath = =

Following the end of the war , the Chief of the Air Staff , Air Vice Marshal George Jones , proposed

reducing the five extant mainland area commands ( North @-@ Western , North @-@ Eastern , Eastern , Southern , and Western Areas ) to three . One of these would have been Northern Area , covering Queensland and the Northern Territory . The Australian Government rejected the plan and the wartime area command boundaries essentially remained in place until supplanted in 1953 ? 54 by a functional command @-@ and @-@ control system made up of Home ( operational ) , Training , and Maintenance Commands .