Eastern Area Command (RAAF)

Eastern 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 1942 , and controlled units based in New South Wales and southern Queensland . Headquartered in Sydney , Eastern Area Command was primarily responsible for air defence , aerial reconnaissance and protection of the sea lanes within its boundaries . The area continued to function following the end of the war , transferring its headquarters to Glenbrook , in the Blue Mountains , in 1949 . By this time most of the RAAF 's operational units were based within Eastern Area 's boundaries . It was re @-@ formed in October 1953 as Home Command (renamed Operational Command in 1959 , and Air Command in 1987) under the RAAF 's new functional command @-@ and @-@ control system .

History

World War II

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 . When 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 , Australia and Papua were divided into four geographically based command @-@ and @-@ control zones : Central Area , Southern Area , Western Area , and Northern Area . The roles of the area commands were air defence , protection of adjacent sea lanes , and aerial reconnaissance . Each was led by an Air Officer Commanding (AOC) who controlled the administration and operations of all air bases and units within his boundary .
Central Area was disbanded in August 1941 and its responsibilities divided between Southern Area , Northern Area , and the newly formed No. 2 (Training) Group . The outbreak of the Pacific War resulted in Northern Area being split in January 1942 into North @-@ Western and North @-@ Eastern Areas , to counter separate Japanese threats to Northern Australia and New Guinea . Southern Area was also considered appropriate for division owing to its size , so the Air Board proposed assigning responsibility for operational and maintenance units within New South Wales to a new area command , Eastern Area , which would also assume control of units in southern Queensland from North @-@ Eastern Area .
Headquartered in the Sydney suburb of Edgecliff , Eastern Area Command was formed on 15 May 1942 under the leadership of Air Vice Marshal Bill Anderson . Staff numbered 114 , including forty @-@ five officers . Training units in New South Wales remained part of No. 2 (Training) Group . No. 5 (Maintenance) Group was formed in Sydney on 1 June , and took responsibility for all maintenance units initially controlled by Eastern Area Command . In September , the Allied Air Forces commander in the South West Pacific Area , Major General George Kenney , formed the majority of his US flying units into the Fifth Air Force , and most of their Australian counterparts into RAAF Command , led by Air Vice Marshal Bill Bostock . Bostock exercised control of Australian air operations through the area commands , although RAAF Headquarters continued to hold overarching administrative authority , meaning that Bostock and his area commanders were ultimately dependent on the Chief of the Air Staff , Air Vice Marshal George Jones , for supplies and equipment .
Of necessity , the RAAF 's two northerly area commands were primarily responsible for bombing and air defence , while the other commands focussed on maritime patrol and anti @-@ submarine warfare . Aircraft from Eastern Area flew over 400 patrol , anti @-@ submarine , and convoy escort missions in January 1943 . By April , the command was operating seven combat units : No. 5 Squadron , flying army cooperation missions with CAC Wirraways out of Kingaroy , Queensland ; No. 23 Squadron , flying dive @-@ bombing missions with Wirraways from Lowood , Queensland ; No. 24 Squadron , flying dive @-@ bombing missions with Wirraways from Bankstown , New South Wales ; No. 32 Squadron , flying reconnaissance and bombing missions with Lockheed Hudsons

from Camden , New South Wales ; No. 71 Squadron , flying maritime reconnaissance and anti @-@ submarine missions with Avro Ansons from Lowood ; No. 73 Squadron , flying maritime reconnaissance and anti @-@ submarine missions with Ansons from Nowra , New South Wales ; and No. 83 Squadron , flying fighter missions with Wirraways from Strathpine , Queensland . Area headquarters staff numbered 626 , including ninety @-@ nine officers . Bristol Beauforts of No. 32 Squadron were credited with damaging a Japanese submarine on 19 June , but neither the RAAF nor the Royal Australian Navy was able to destroy any enemy submarines in coastal waters during 1943 .

Anderson handed over command of Eastern Area to Air Commodore John Summers in July 1943 . Group Captain Alister Murdoch became senior air staff officer (SASO) . On 22 October , Avro Lancaster Q @-@ for @-@ Queenie , piloted by Flight Lieutenant Peter Isaacson , " buzzed " the Eastern Area headquarters building in Edgecliff before flying under the Sydney Harbour Bridge , flouting regulations and becoming the largest aircraft to pull such a stunt . The same month , the Air Board proposed carving a new area command out of Eastern Area , which by then was considered too large to be controlled by one headquarters and therefore ripe for division . The new command , to be known as Central Area , would have been responsible for training and operational units in southern Queensland ; the War Cabinet deferred its decision on the proposal . The concept was raised again in August 1944 , and this time Central Area Command was to control maintenance units , as well as training and operations , in southern Queensland ; once again , nothing came of the proposal .

Air Commodore Alan Charlesworth was appointed AOC Eastern Area in December 1943 . Japanese submarine activity had decreased in the months prior to Charlesworth taking command , and he was concerned that Allied ships were becoming complacent . He observed " a general slackening off in procedure ; ships are seldom where they should be , and a minority of merchant ships identify themselves to aircraft " . The RAAF 's patrols had also settled into a predictable pattern that an observant submarine captain could easily avoid . Charlesworth relinquished command in September 1944 to take over North @-@ Western Area . In December , aircraft from Eastern Area took part in the search for the German submarine U @-@ 862 , but could not prevent it sinking the Liberty ship Robert J. Walker on Christmas ; a Beaufort of No. 15 Squadron , based at Camden , located the wreck . No. 32 Squadron lost a Beaufort with its crew shortly after takeoff from Lowood during the search for U @-@ 862 , which was called off in January 1945 . That month , Air Commodore Leon Lachal became AOC Eastern Area , and held command for the duration of the Pacific War .

=== Post @-@ war activity and reorganisation ===

Following the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 , South West Pacific Area was dissolved and RAAF Headquarters again assumed full control of all its operational elements , including the area commands . According to the official history of the post @-@ war Air Force , the AOC Eastern Area was considered " Australia 's senior operational airman " and delegated by the Chief of the Air Staff with day @-@ to @-@ day responsibility for the nation 's air defence . Most of the RAAF 's bases and aircraft employed in operations were situated within Eastern Area 's sphere of control in New South Wales and southern Queensland . Air Commodore Frank Lukis succeeded Lachal as AOC in December 1945 . By the end of the month , headquarters staff numbered 1 @,@ 122 , including 104 officers . No. 82 (Bomber) Wing came under the control of Eastern Area Command in April 1946 , when it moved to RAAF Station Amberley , Queensland ; initially operating B @-@ 24 Liberators , the wing re @-@ equipped with Avro Lincolns soon after . By this time Eastern Area headquarters occupied seven mansions in Point Piper , Sydney ; it subsequently relocated to Bradfield Park . Lukis retired from the Air Force in May , and Charlesworth took over command .

In July ? August 1946 , Eastern Area Command oversaw the establishment of No. 86 (Transport) Wing , operating C @-@ 47 Dakotas , at RAAF Station Schofields , New South Wales , displacing No. 78 (Fighter) Wing , which moved to RAAF Station Williamtown , and began operating P @-@ 51 Mustangs . The following month , Air Vice Marshal Jones proposed reducing the five mainland

area commands (North @-@ Western , North @-@ Eastern , Eastern , Southern , and Western Areas) to three : Northern Area , covering Queensland and the Northern Territory ; Eastern Area , covering New South Wales ; and Southern Area , covering Western Australia , South Australia , Victoria and Tasmania . The proposal was part of a much larger plan to restructure the post @-@ war RAAF ; the Federal government rejected the plan and the wartime area command boundaries largely remained in place . Lachal succeeded Charlesworth as AOC Eastern Area in October , and held command until his retirement from the Air Force in July 1947 .

Lachal 's successor as AOC Eastern Area , Air Vice Marshal Frank Bladin , was responsible for preparing the transfer of its headquarters from Bradfield Park to the former Lapstone Hotel at Glenbrook in the Lower Blue Mountains , a process that was completed in 1949 . As well as commanding a view of the surrounding countryside , the property was within five kilometres (three miles) of the City of Penrith and thirty kilometres (twenty miles) of RAAF Station Richmond , and incorporated a disused railway tunnel that offered , according to government correspondence , " complete protection from Atom Bomb attack " . An adjoining property , " Briarcliffe " , was purchased soon afterwards to augment the new headquarters ' accommodation facilities . Bladin completed his term as AOC Eastern Area in October 1948 . Air Vice Marshal John McCauley was appointed AOC in March the following year . McCauley commanded Eastern Area during the early years of the Malayan Emergency , and oversaw the deployment of No. 90 (Composite) Wing to administer RAAF units stationed there ? a Lincoln squadron detached from No. 82 Wing and a Dakota squadron from No. 86 Wing . Having re @-@ equipped with de Havilland Vampire jets , No. 78 Wing departed Williamtown for garrison duties with the RAF on Malta in July 1952 . In May 1953 , Eastern Area 's SASO , Group Captain Frank Headlam , announced that the Air Force was planning to re @-@ equip No. 82 Wing with English Electric Canberra jet bombers , and also procure CAC Sabre swept @-@ wing jet fighters .

The Federal government retired Air Marshal Jones in 1952 and replaced him with Air Marshal Donald Hardman , RAF , who proceeded to re @-@ organise the RAAF command @-@ and @-@ control system along functional lines , establishing Home (operational) , Training , and Maintenance Commands in October 1953 . The first was re @-@ formed from Eastern Area Command as it was considered the RAAF 's de facto operational organisation . The second was re @-@ formed from Southern Area Command , as it was the hub of training services , controlling those in New South Wales and Queensland as well as Victoria and South Australia . The third and last functional command was formed from the extant Maintenance Group headquarters in Melbourne . The transition to a functional system was completed in February 1954 , when the three new commands assumed control of operations , training and maintenance from Western , North @-@ Western , and North @-@ Eastern Areas .

= = Aftermath = =

The functional commands established in 1953 ? 54 were revised in 1959 . Home Command was renamed Operational Command , and Training and Maintenance Commands merged to become Support Command . Operational Command was renamed Air Command in 1987 , and three years later Support Command split into Logistics Command and Training Command . Throughout the evolution from Home to Operational to Air Command , the headquarters remained at Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains . In 1997 , logistics management became the responsibility of Support Command (Air Force) , the RAAF component of the Defence @-@ wide Support Command Australia (later subsumed by the Defence Materiel Organisation) . Training Command was re @-@ formed as Air Force Training Group , a force element group under Air Command , in 2006 . Air Command thus became the sole command @-@ level organisation in the RAAF .

= = Order of battle = =

As at May 1944 , Eastern Area controlled the following squadrons :
No. 11 Squadron , equipped with Consolidated PBY Catalinas , based in Rathmines

No. 21 Squadron , equipped with Vultee Vengeances , based at Camden
No. 32 Squadron , equipped with Bristol Beauforts , based at Lowood
No. 107 Squadron , equipped with Vought Kingfishers , based at St. George 's Basin