

= Western Area Command (RAAF) =

Western 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 January 1941 , and controlled RAAF units located in Western Australia . Headquartered at Perth , Western Area Command was primarily responsible for air defence , aerial reconnaissance and protection of the sea lanes within its boundaries . Its aircraft conducted anti @-@ submarine operations throughout the war , and attacked targets in the Dutch East Indies during the Borneo campaign in 1945 . Western Area Command continued to operate following the end of the war , before its responsibilities were subsumed in 1954 by the RAAF 's new functional command @-@ and @-@ control system ; the headquarters was disbanded two years later .

= = 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 . After war broke out in September 1939 , the Air Force began to decentralise its command structure , commensurate with expected increases in manpower and units . Between March 1940 and May 1941 , the RAAF divided Australia and New Guinea 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 all air bases and units within his boundary .

Western Area Command , headquartered in Perth , was formed on 9 January 1941 to control all RAAF units in Western Australia . These included No. 14 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron , No. 25 (General Purpose) Squadron and No. 5 Initial Training School at RAAF Station Pearce ; No. 9 Elementary Flying Training School at Cunderdin ; and the soon @-@ to @-@ be @-@ raised No. 4 Service Flying Training School at Geraldton . RAAF Headquarters had maintained control of Western Australian units pending the area 's formation . Western Area 's inaugural AOC was Group Captain (acting Air Commodore) Hippolyte " Kanga " De La Rue . His senior air staff officer was Group Captain Alan Charlesworth . Headquarters staff numbered forty @-@ one , including fifteen officers . No. 14 Squadron , operating Lockheed Hudsons , and No. 25 Squadron , flying CAC Wirraways , were responsible for convoy escort and anti @-@ submarine patrol . Shortly after taking command , De La Rue lobbied RAAF Headquarters for a force of long @-@ range Catalina flying boats to augment No. 14 Squadron 's Hudsons , but none were made available .

By mid @-@ 1941 , RAAF Headquarters had determined to form training units in the southern and eastern states into semi @-@ geographical , semi @-@ functional groups separate to the area commands . This led to the establishment in August of No. 1 (Training) Group in Melbourne , covering Victoria , Tasmania and South Australia , and No. 2 (Training) Group in Sydney , covering New South Wales and Queensland ; at the same time , Central Area was dissolved and its responsibilities divided between Southern and Northern Areas , and No. 2 (Training) Group . Western Area , uniquely among the area commands , retained responsibility for training , as well as operations and maintenance , within its boundaries . In November 1941 , all available aircraft from Nos. 14 and 25 Squadrons , as well as eight Avro Ansons from No. 4 Service Flying Training School , took part in the search for HMAS Sydney after it was sunk by the German raider Kormoran ; a Hudson and an Anson each located lifeboats bearing Kormoran 's crew . Following the outbreak of the Pacific War , Northern Area was split in January 1942 into North @-@ Western and North @-@ Eastern Areas , to counter separate Japanese threats to Northern Australia and New Guinea , respectively . In May , a new area command , Eastern Area , was raised to control units within New South Wales and southern Queensland . The same month , the Air Board proposed raising No. 3 (

Training) Group and No. 8 (Maintenance) Group to control training and maintenance units in Western Australia but , though approved by the Federal government , this did not take place . As of 31 May 1942 , Western Area headquarters staff numbered 247 , including seventy @-@ two officers .

No. 35 (Transport) Squadron , operating de Havilland Fox Moth and DH.84 Dragon aircraft , was raised under Western Area 's control at Pearce on 4 March 1942 . No. 77 Squadron , equipped with P @-@ 40 Kittyhawks , was formed at Pearce on 16 March ; it was at this time the only fighter squadron available to defend Perth and Fremantle , and De La Rue worked assiduously to prepare it for operations . No. 6 Fighter Sector Headquarters , Perth , became operational on 2 May . As of 20 April , operational authority over all RAAF combat infrastructure , including area commands , was invested in the newly established Allied Air Forces (AAF) Headquarters under South West Pacific Area Command (SWPA) . Some finetuning of Western Area 's boundaries occurred in August : as well as the Northern Territory , North @-@ Western Area was given responsibility for the portion of Western Australia north of a line drawn south @-@ east from Yampi Sound to the Northern Territory border . September 1942 saw the formation of RAAF Command , led by Air Vice Marshal Bill Bostock , to oversee the majority of Australian flying units in the SWPA . Bostock exercised control of air operations through the area commands , although RAAF Headquarters continued to hold overarching administrative authority over all Australian units . In November , construction began on an airfield under Western Area 's control at Corunna Downs , near Port Hedland . Australia 's closest air base to Surabaya , it would serve as a staging post for Allied bombers bound for targets in the Dutch East Indies , allowing them to avoid Japanese fighter stations between Darwin and Java . De la Rue handed Western Area over to Air Commodore Raymond Brownell in December 1942 ; by the end of the month , headquarters staff numbered 488 , including ninety @-@ five officers .

By April 1943 , Western Area controlled four combat units : No. 14 Squadron , flying Bristol Beaufort reconnaissance @-@ bombers out of Pearce ; No. 25 Squadron , tasked with dive @-@ bombing missions in Wirraways based at Pearce ; No. 76 Squadron , flying P @-@ 40 Kittyhawks out of Potshot (Exmouth Gulf) ; and No. 85 Squadron , operating CAC Boomerang fighters from Pearce . The area command was also able to call on US Navy Catalinas of Patrol Wing 10 , based at Crawley , for reconnaissance and anti @-@ submarine missions . The Beauforts and Catalinas flew several hundred maritime patrols during 1943 . In March 1944 , Western Area went on high alert in response to concerns that a Japanese naval force would raid Western Australia . Perth was reinforced with Nos. 452 and 457 Squadrons , and Exmouth Gulf with Nos. 18 , 31 , and 120 Squadrons , but no attack ensued and the units were directed to return to their home bases . The US Navy withdrew Patrol Wing 10 mid @-@ year , curtailing Western Area 's ability to conduct long @-@ range maritime reconnaissance ; No. 14 Squadron 's fifteen serviceable Beauforts had to fly patrols of up to twenty @-@ two hours in duration to search for German submarines reported in the area . As of 31 May 1944 , Western Area headquarters staff numbered 686 , including 118 officers .

Having converted to Vultee Vengeance dive bombers in August 1943 , No. 25 Squadron moved from Pearce to Cunderdin in January 1945 and re @-@ equipped with B @-@ 24 Liberator heavy bombers . The Liberators were employed on anti @-@ submarine patrol off Cape Leeuwin later that month , owing to No. 14 Squadron 's Beauforts being fully committed to other tasks . Between April and July , No. 25 Squadron provided Western Area 's contribution to the Borneo campaign , supporting the Allied invasions of Tarakan , Labuan ? Brunei and Balikpapan . Staging through Corunna Downs , the Liberators bombed Japanese airfields in the Dutch East Indies that were within range of Tarakan , up until the day of the landings on 1 May . They attacked Malang near Surabaya at night prior to the landings at Labuan , and conducted daylight raids against Java in the lead @-@ up to the Balikpapan operation that commenced on 1 July . No. 14 Squadron had ceased its regular anti @-@ submarine patrols on 23 May following the end of hostilities in Europe , but remained on standby in case any U @-@ boats were found to be still active . In July 1945 , Brownell was appointed to command the newly formed No. 11 Group on Morotai ; he handed Western Area over to his senior air staff officer , Group Captain Colin Hannah , who held temporary command for the remainder of the war .

= = = Post @-@ war activity and disbandment = = =

Following the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 , SWPA was dissolved and RAAF Headquarters again assumed full control of all its operational formations , including the area commands . Hannah handed over command of Western Area to Group Captain Douglas Wilson in October . The RAAF shrank dramatically with demobilisation ; wartime units were scheduled for dissolution in several stages , including reconnaissance @-@ bomber squadrons by the end of 1945 , and other bomber units by September 1946 . No. 14 Squadron was disbanded at Pearce in December 1945 . No. 25 Squadron 's Liberators repatriated former prisoners of war from the Dutch East Indies to Australia until January 1946 ; the unit was disbanded in July that year . Wilson was placed on the retired list in February 1946 , and Hannah again assumed temporary command of Western Area until posted to Britain that October . Group Captain Bill Garing took over as Officer Commanding Western Area the following month , by which time headquarters staff numbered 117 , including thirty @-@ one officers .

In September 1946 , 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 : 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 Australian Government rejected the plan and the wartime area command boundaries essentially remained in place . No. 25 Squadron re @-@ formed as a Citizen Air Force unit at Pearce in April 1948 , operating P @-@ 51 Mustangs and , later , de Havilland Vampire fighters . As well as training reservists , the squadron was responsible for Western Australia 's air defence . Garing handed over command in November 1948 ; by the end of the month , Western Area headquarters staff numbered fourteen , including seven officers .

Group Captain (later Air Commodore) Bill Hely took command of Western Area in October 1951 . During Operation Hurricane , the British atomic test in the Montebello Islands in October 1952 , Hely coordinated air support including supply and observation flights by Dakotas of No. 86 (Transport) Wing . He completed his term as AOC Western Area in September 1953 , by which time headquarters staff numbered thirty @-@ one , including fifteen officers . Commencing the next month , the RAAF was reorganised from a geographically based command @-@ and @-@ control system into one based on function . In February 1954 , the newly constituted functional organisations ? Home , Training , and Maintenance Commands ? assumed control of all operations , training and maintenance from Western Area Command . Western Area remained in existence , but only as one of Home Command 's " remote control points " . The headquarters was finally disbanded on 30 November 1956 .

= = Order of battle = =

As at 30 April 1942 , Western Area 's order of battle comprised :

RAAF Station Pearce

No. 14 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron

No. 25 (General Purpose) Squadron

No. 35 (Transport) Squadron

No. 77 (Fighter) Squadron

No. 6 Fighter Sector Headquarters , Perth