

= Northern Command (RAAF) =

Northern Command was one of several geographically based commands raised by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) during World War II . Established in April 1944 , it evolved from No. 9 Operational Group , which had been the RAAF 's primary mobile formation in the South West Pacific theatre since September 1942 , but had lately become a garrison force in New Guinea . Northern Command was headquartered initially at Milne Bay and then , from August 1944 , in Madang . It conducted operations in New Guinea , New Britain , and Bougainville until the end of the war . Re @-@ designated Northern Area in December 1945 , it was headquartered in Port Moresby from March 1946 and disbanded in February 1947 .

= = 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 . 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 air bases and units within his boundary . By mid @-@ 1942 , Central Area had been dissolved , Northern Area had been split into North @-@ Eastern Area and North @-@ Western Area , and Eastern Area was created , making a total of five commands .

The static area command system was well suited to defence , but less so for an offensive posture . In September 1942 , therefore , the Air Force created a large mobile formation known as No. 9 Operational Group , to act as a self @-@ contained tactical air force that would be able to keep pace with Allied advances through the South West Pacific theatre . By September 1943 , however , No. 9 Group had become a static garrison force in New Guinea , similar to the area commands on mainland Australia , and a new mobile group was required to support the advance north towards the Philippines and Japan . This was formed in November 1943 as No. 10 Operational Group (later the Australian First Tactical Air Force) , which initially came under No. 9 Group 's control . To better reflect No. 9 Group 's new status , the head of RAAF Command , Air Vice Marshal William Bostock , recommended renaming it Northern Area . RAAF Headquarters did not agree to this at first , but on 11 April 1944 settled on calling it Northern Command , under the same AOC who commanded No. 9 Group , Air Commodore Frank Lukis . On its formation the command was headquartered at Milne Bay .

By July 1944 , No. 10 Group 's position in western New Guinea was complicating Northern Command 's efforts to supply it , and the group was made independent of the command . The next month , Northern Command headquarters transferred to Madang . In September , No. 71 Wing was detached from No. 10 Group to Northern Command , which had been given the task of supporting the Australian 6th Division in the Aitape ? Wewak campaign . Headquartered at Tadi in northern New Guinea , No. 71 Wing comprised Nos. 7 , 8 and 100 Bristol Beaufort Squadrons , augmented by a flight of CAC Boomerangs from No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron . No. 74 (Composite) Wing , which had been formed in August 1943 and was headquartered at Port Moresby , also came under the aegis of Northern Command . The command 's other major operational formation was No. 84 (Army Cooperation) Wing , which began moving from Australia to Torokina on Bougainville in October 1944 . By this time , Northern Command controlled six squadrons in the New Guinea area . No. 79 Wing , equipped with B @-@ 25 Mitchells , was earmarked for transfer from North @-@ Western Area to Northern Command , to undertake operations in New Britain , but its proposed airfield was not ready and it was instead transferred to the First Tactical Air Force at Labuan the following year .

Air Commodore Allan Walters took over Northern Command from Lukis in February 1945 . Walters directed operations in New Guinea , New Britain and Bougainville until the end of hostilities . Group

Captain Val Hancock assumed command of No. 71 Wing in April . To maximize support to Australian ground troops in the lead @-@ up to the final assault on Wewak , the wing 's three extant Beaufort squadrons were joined by two more , Nos. 6 and 15 . Approximately sixty Beauforts and Boomerangs struck Japanese positions behind Dove Bay prior to amphibious landings on 11 May to cut off retreating enemy troops . Over the entire month , the wing dropped more than 1 @,@ 200 tons of bombs and flew in excess of 1 @,@ 400 sorties . The wing suffered fuel and ordnance shortages ; at one stage its squadrons had to load their Beauforts with captured Japanese bombs . No. 84 Wing , commanded by Group Captain Bill Hely and comprising No. 5 (Tactical Reconnaissance) Squadron , flying mainly Boomerangs , and two reconnaissance and transport units , also suffered shortages of equipment , as well as pilots . Augmented by a detachment of No. 36 Squadron , flying C @-@ 47 Dakotas , its aircraft flew slightly over 4 @,@ 000 sorties during the Bougainville campaign up to the end of June 1945 . That month , Northern Command was tasked with acting in reserve for Operation Oboe Six , the invasion of Labuan . In July , No. 11 Group was formed as a " static command " headquartered on Morotai in the Dutch East Indies , using elements of Northern Command and the First Tactical Air Force ; this freed the latter from garrison duties while its combat units advanced towards Borneo .

No. 71 Wing continued operations until the last day of the Pacific War , flying its final mission involving thirty Beauforts only hours before news arrived of the Allied victory on 15 August 1945 . No. 74 Wing was disbanded in Port Moresby the same day . No. 71 Wing squadrons subsequently dropped leaflets to remaining pockets of Japanese resistance , making them aware of the surrender ; the wing was disbanded at Tadjia in January 1946 . No. 84 Wing suffered morale problems following the end of the war owing to inactivity and the uncertainties of demobilisation ; as a result , the wing 's commanding officer sent Northern Command headquarters a frank report , its tone earning a rebuke from Walters . No. 84 Wing left Bougainville in February 1946 and disbanded in Melbourne the next month .

Northern Command was redesignated Northern Area on 1 December 1945 , and its headquarters transferred to Port Moresby in March the following year . Walters handed over command in June 1946 . The area headquarters was disbanded at Port Moresby on 27 February 1947 .