

**THIS WAS AUSTRALIA**



**FLIGHT** Lieutenant E. V. "Beau" Beaumont, RAAF, steadied the Walrus amphibian at 7,000 feet and turned into the dawn of April 28, 1941.

Through the compass of his flying goggles the eastern sky looked like a freshly cut watermelon.

Low on the still purple horizon the rugged profile of the Island of Anti Kyrethia rose from the sea like a prehistoric animal.

To the south the snow topped peaks of Crete floated like strawberry ice creams.

Food, however, was far from the pilot's mind. His eyes were probing the sky for enemy aircraft. Over Anti Kyrethia the sun momentarily reflected on a plexiglass dome.

The roar of the engine mounted on the wing above his head made voice communication impossible. He wagged the aircraft wings and alerted the observer, Sub-Lieutenant G. F. Brian, RN and the airgunner, Petty Officer Telegraphist D. Bowden, RAN.

Two German Dorniers flashed by overhead. Their shadows caused the airgunner to look up. Barely a hundred feet above him he saw the pale blue underbelly of the enemy bomber. The Maltese Crosses stood out black and menacing on the wings.

The Walrus was 100 miles per hour slower than the Dorniers. She carried

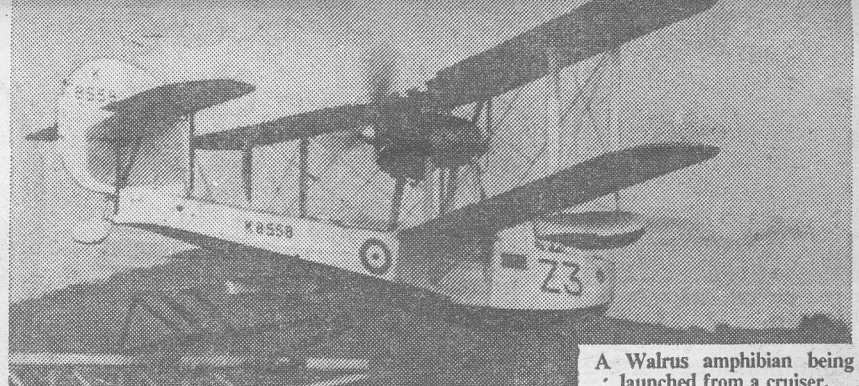
By L. J. LIND

# Walrus lost the savage dog-fight

only two Lewis guns, one forward and aft, against her adversaries two cannon and four machine guns. On the credit side the Walrus was more manoeuvrable and could turn on the proverbial three-penny bit.

Beaumont was a cool professional. The crew had been together for over a year and had carefully rehearsed tactics for an attack by two aircraft. The observer up front and the airgunner at the rear signalled the enemy's every move.

A rising banshee scream high above them heralded the first attack. Bowden crouched low in his cock-



A Walrus amphibian being launched from a cruiser.

pit and aimed the Lewis gun at maximum elevation. The Dornier was a silver thunderbolt spitting fire from its wings.

Beaumont kicked hard the port pedal and the Walrus side-slipped. Bowden raised his sights and squirted a quick burst at the target. He ducked his head as cannon shell exploded on the top wing.

Brian, up forward, met the second bomber with a raking burst. The silver shadow flashed by a hundred yards to starboard.

The Dorniers pulled out of their dives and screamed high for altitude. This time they came in from both sides.

Pieces of metal flew off the tail and a neat hem-stitch of cannon holes appeared along the amphibian's hull.

Beaumont dived the Walrus low to the slightly ruffled sea. He brought the nose up and gave her full throttle. Anti Kyrethia rose up in front of them and the pilot aimed the aircraft for the ravines that carved the island in slices.

The sheer grey cliffs closed around them and for two minutes they were safe from their attackers. The Dorniers did not follow but turned sharply and positioned themselves over the exit to the ravine.

A hail of fire met them as they catapulted out over the sea. The Walrus was shaking like a rabbit in a dog's mouth.

Time was running out for the Walrus. Bowden's gun was out of action with a stoppage. He looked up as he was clearing it and not fifty yards away was one of the Dorniers flying in formation with them.

The next attack was decisive. A long burst of incendiary bullets hit the starboard fuel tank. The Walrus was burning like a torch.

the battle began the bullet-riddled Pusser's Bus splashed down.

The Germans dived low over the wreckage and wagged their wings. They vanished to the north.

Bowden was wounded in the hand, knee and the back of the head. The other two, apart from bruises, were unscathed.

The liferaft was inflated and they scrambled aboard. Water was pouring into the perforated hull. Suddenly, the engine mounted high on the top wing, crashed into the cockpit. Two minutes later the aircraft was sucked down and a frothing ring of bubbles marked her last resting place.

Anti Kyrethia looked tantalising close but was in fact two miles distant. A

strong current spun the raft in circles but as the hours passed they realised they were being carried to sea.

About 2 pm their spirits rose when a Sunderland passed over at 5,000 feet. They fired two Verey flares but the big flying boat flew on.

They were shivering with cold when darkness blotted out the sea and sky. For hours they huddled together in the rocking raft then suddenly, Brian sat bolt upright and shouted, "Look there's a destroyer over there."

Beaumont fired the two last flares. They heard the destroyer's engines and there she was, dark and towering and lovely. Minutes later they were sipping hot cocoa in the Wardroom of HMAS Havock.

The Walrus and her crew belonged to the Australian cruiser, HMAS Perth.

Perth's Walrus was a small price to pay for the service rendered by the Naval Reconnaissance Squadron. During the evacuation of Greece not one ship was lost by enemy surface action.

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