HD874

DESIGNED BY SUPERMARINE C/N

BUILT BY LINE NO.

DESIGN NO.

NAME WALRUS MARK BUILT

PREVIOUS IDENT.

POWER

SOURCE	DATE	DETAIL
	20/21.12.47	HEARD ISLAND: WRECKED IN STORM.
	80	POINT COOK: D/D FOR EVENTUAL RESTORATION
C 397/13-14	3.10.91	POINT COOK: F/L ONLY – CORRODED N/M O/A
C 563/15	12.2.91	POINT COOK: DURING RESTORATION.
C 579/32-34	23.5.91	POINT COOK: AS ABOVE

FLYPAST
DEC. 88

HD874

THE LAST FLIGHT OF...

The Walrus

Morning after the night before . . . . HD874 lies wrecked. (via Author)

TUCKED AWAY away in a hangar at Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Point Cook, Victoria, is an old Walrus seaplane awaiting extensive restoration work. The aircraft has had an extremely unusual and interesting service history, including having a beach on a remote Antartic island named after it.

Walrus HD874 was a veteran of the Second World War, having served a distinguished career as a spotter and air-sea rescue platform. Following the end of the war, HD874 was placed in storage awaiting possible disposal at the hands of scrap merchants. For the old seaplane, life seemed to be coming to a rapid, unglorified, demise until she was called on to serve once more in a completely different and diverse role.

Following the War, extensive exploration of the Antarctic Territory was commenced as an investigation into minerals and natural resources within the desolate frontier. The Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) was formed to undertake survey and scientific tasks within the vast icelands, and regions such as Heard Island were targeted for particular attention.

The necessity for aerial survey capabilities led to the formation of the RAAF Antarctic Flight, a support unit for ANARE activities in Antarctica during the immediate post-war era. The RAAF was tasked with providing aircraft capable of operating in the harsh environmental and meteorological conditions of the unpredictable Antarctica. Seaplanes were considered to be the logical choice for inclusion in the special unit.

Walrus HD874 was brought out of storage in 1947 and transported to Rathmines, New South Wales, for conversion to enable it to operate in ANARE expeditions. The aircraft was given a bright yellow finish to allow it to be easily seen should it be forced down on ice, and modifications completed on the mechanical and electrical systems to enable efficient and safe, operation over Antarctica.

On November 17, 1947, the Walrus and a Vought Kingfisher seaplane were loaded on a Royal Australian Navy Landing Ship Tank (LST) for a voyage to isolated Heard Island. The LST berthed in Freemantle to allow final flight testing of the aircraft and then ploughed south through heavy seas, arriving off Heard on December 11.

Two days later it carried out the first survey mapping sortie of its tour. The aircraft performed invaluable work including the first aerial photographs of Heard Island, and operated out of Atlas Cove, a small rock inlet. On completion of the assigned tasks, HD874 was beached and prepared for expected adverse weather conditions building-up in the area.

On December 20/21 extremely strong gales swept the remote island and the research team sheltered on board the LST, leaving the Walrus to weather out the violent storms. The old seaplane didn't fair very well during the blow. When the work party ventured onto the beach they discovered a tangled mess that was once a Walrus.

Beyond salvage, it was left on the beach when the expedition returned to Australia. The stony little stretch of water was subsequently named Walrus Beach in honour of the little amphibian wrecked beyond repair.

In 1980, a Department of Transport work party, from the ship MV *Cape Pillar*, recovered the wreck of the Walrus and shipped it back to Freemantle. The wreckage was transferred to Point Cook and placed in the Air Force museum's restoration hangar. It underwent extensive work to bring the hull up to a displayable standard for viewing by the general public. It is presently in store.

The RAAF operated a total of 37 Walrus amphibians but only HD874 remains in existence today. It stands as a proud historical monument to a little known facet of RAAF history, and any visitor to the desolate Heard Island could be mistaken for thinking that Walrus Beach is named after the swimming variety, and not a flying type that made its last take-off from the rocky shoreline of Atlas Cove.

Wayne Wanstall

At work, HD874 moored at Atlas Cove.