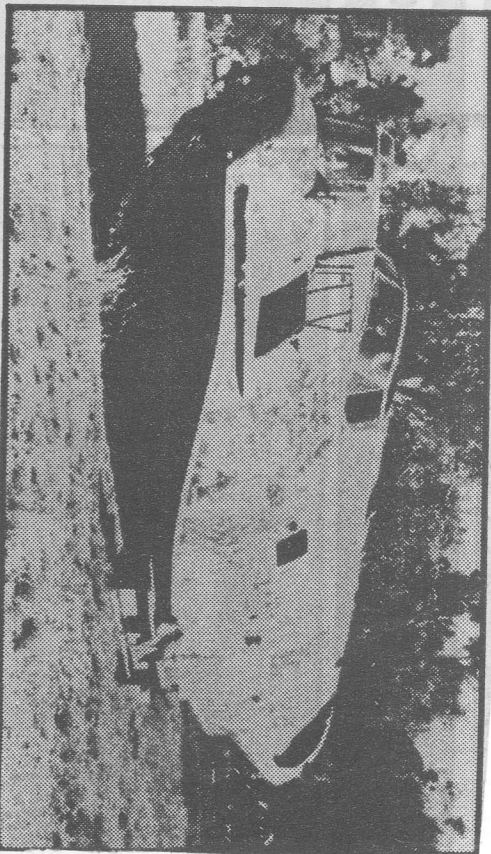


In the air ... the A24-79 on a war-time reconnaissance flight.



On the land ... Wings clipped, A24-79 waits for her new-look.

Retirement is plain sailing for war veteran

By TRENT BOUTS

A plane which carried hundreds of kilograms of explosives on a secret mission during World War 2 is enjoying a leisurely retirement on the Murray River.

The 1943 American-made Catalina has had its wings clipped and now bears a cargo of Eskies and bronzed bottles as a houseboat.

A syndicate of six Victorians use the remodelled craft as a holiday home for annual cruises on the Murray. But in December, 1944, Catalina A24-79 was one of six which left Darwin with 1520 kg of

explosives to mine strategic Manila Bay against the Japanese.

The mission was the RAAF's largest and longest single mine-laying operation and was part of a highly successful campaign to hamper enemy activity by disrupting supplies and communications.

A report by flight captain Ross King said crews flew into the Philippines expecting a 50 per cent casualty rate, but A24-79 returned unscathed to coastal reconnaissance

and shipping escort work in Australia.

The RAAF received 168 Catalinas in World War 2 and survivors were sold from No. 1 Flying Boat Repair Depot at Lake Boga, nearly 300 km north of Melbourne.

Some buyers tried to revamp the aircraft for use as barges but with limited success. Many were broken down for scrap.

Several years ago historians traced three Catalinas surviving as aircraft. Only one retained something like original form.

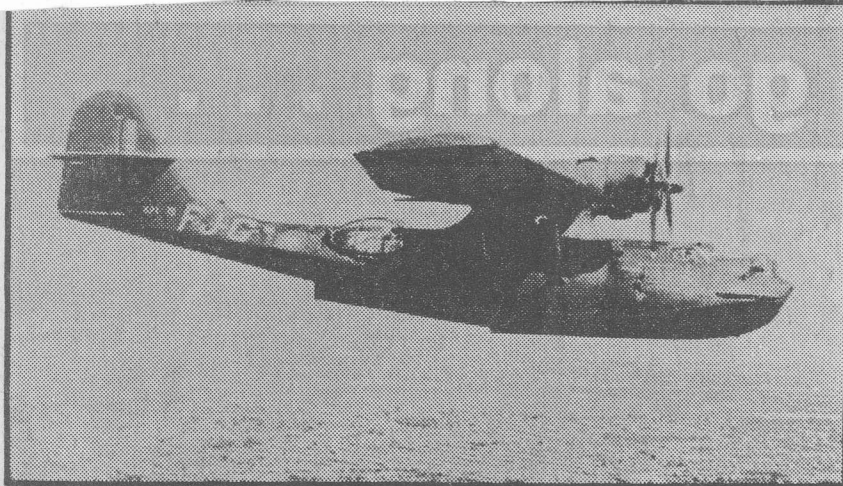
A painter, Vic Perrow, bought

A24-79 from Lake Boga and began a major conversion to include all the comforts of home. The result reached the water as a houseboat about 30 years later.

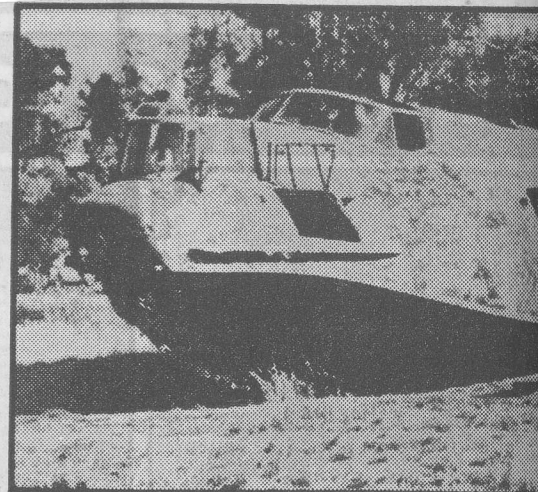
Part-owner Wayne Gundry, of Richmond said "The Cat" was expecting familiar company on the Murray soon. Friends are building a similar craft from one of A24-79's old flying mates, A24-88.

The two planes were completed four days apart by Consolidated Aircraft Corporation, San Diego, in 1943.

Heard? 8?



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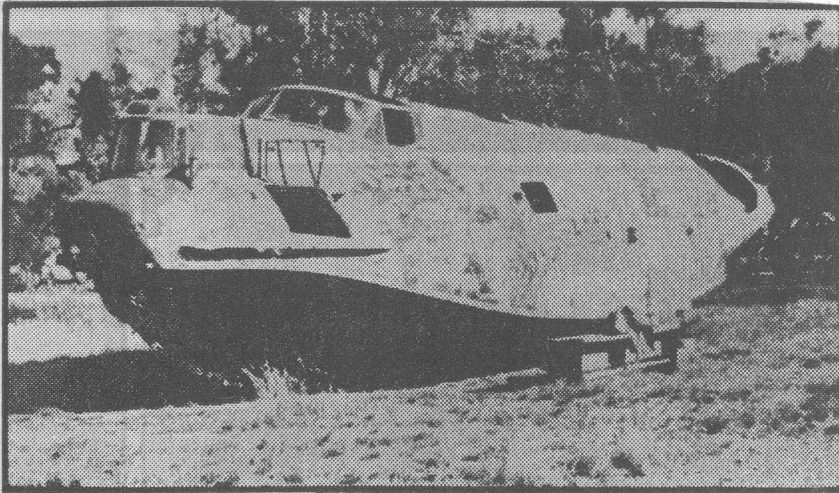
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HERALD? 8?



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