

WGCDR Liam Colreavy, Commanding Officer No. 10 Squadron, RAAF. 30 Mar 2026. ©

We meet here today at Torrens Parade Ground - a place long connected to service, duty, and the remembrance of those who served before us. Yet the story we honour today was written far from here. It occurred over cold oceans, in distant skies, and in a campaign that shaped the course of the Second World War.

Today, with the dedication of this memorial, we recognise Australians who served in RAF Coastal Command. It may be a modest memorial, but it represents a long-overlooked chapter of Australia's wartime story - a chapter defined by endurance, vigilance, and sacrifice.

Coastal Command's work was rarely celebrated in its time. Owing to the Air Ministry's focus on Fighter Command and Bomber Command, Coastal Command was often referred to as the "Cinderella Service". Their successes were often measured not in dramatic moments, but in the simple fact that a convoy reached its destination. However their task was constant and unforgiving: to watch the seas, to hunt the U-boats, and to protect allied shipping.

Winston Churchill later wrote that the only thing that truly frightened him during the war was the U-boat peril, and Coastal Command was the force standing between those submarines and the collapse of Allied supply. This was the longest continuous campaign of the war. Its victories were cumulative, and often unseen. But they mattered significantly.

More than 5,000 Australians served in Coastal Command, and 751 lost their lives, including 31 women of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. A number served in the three RAAF-designated squadrons attached to Coastal Command: No 10 Squadron, 455 Squadron and 461 Squadron.

But the greater number, more than two-thirds of all Australian fatalities, served within RAF squadrons, embedded throughout the Command. They flew and worked in at least 75 RAF operational squadrons, along with 29 support, conversion, and training units, across the United Kingdom, Iceland, West Africa, and the Mediterranean.

Their service has been largely absent from memorials in Australia. This memorial helps to close that gap, not just for squadrons with RAAF designations, but for every Australian who served in RAF Coastal Command. And it is fitting that this recognition stands here in South Australia, where the names of at least 74 South Australians appear in the Coastal Command honour rolls.

For the squadron that I command, No. 10 Squadron, this history is deeply personal. In October 1939, before Australia had formally declared war, 10 Squadron deployed to the United Kingdom, becoming the first Dominion squadron to join the fight. They remained there for the duration of the war, flying Sunderlands in long-range maritime patrols, escorting convoys, hunting U-boats, and carrying out rescue operations.

461 Squadron later joined them, also flying the Sunderland, and was involved in some of Coastal Command's most demanding operations. This included the famous 1943 battle in which a Sunderland, heavily outnumbered by enemy fighters over the Bay of Biscay, fought off its attackers and limped home. It became known as the "Flying Porcupine," a story of teamwork, skill, and refusal to give up.

455 Squadron, though initially under Bomber Command re-rolled as a torpedo-bomber squadron and transferred to RAF Coastal Command on 26 April 1942, forming part of the "ANZAC Strike Wing" with number 489SQN of the RNZAF.

However just as importantly, this memorial reminds us that the story of Australians in Coastal Command extends far beyond these three squadrons. It encompasses the many RAAF personnel who served, sometimes alone within RAF units, wearing Australian uniforms while sharing with British, Canadian, and other Allied crew. This memorial belongs to all of them.

For the men and women of the modern Air Force, especially those of 10 Squadron of which we have a number here today, this ceremony has meaning beyond history. Our aircraft have changed, and the technology has advanced far beyond anything the RAAF aviators of the Second World War could have imagined. However some things still remain very much the same.

We still operate at long range, spending most of our time flying over the ocean. And we still carry out missions that may never make headlines, but which matter immensely to the security of our nation and our region.

The ethos of Coastal Command: persistence, patience, vigilance, and quiet professionalism, still guides us today. Their story is not a relic of the past; it is part of the tradition we uphold every time we fly, maintain and support our aircraft operations. So this memorial reminds us that the work we do now stands on the shoulders of those who came before.

More than eighty years have passed since the end of the Second World War. Almost all of those who served in it are no longer with us. In fact, to my knowledge, there is now only one surviving RAAF Sunderland veteran - Mr James Coulter, a former pilot of 10 Squadron, now 104 years old and living in Victoria. I had the privilege of speaking with James on the phone late last year. He remains humble, sharp, and deeply proud of the Sunderland crews he flew with. But he is the last of his kind that I am aware of. His remarkable longevity reminds us of something important: that the generation who carried this burden is almost gone. If we are to ensure their stories are not forgotten, then now is the moment to commit them to our national memory. And this memorial does exactly that.

This memorial also stands here today because one person refused to let this story remain forgotten. Mr Bob Goldney has been the driving force, and the heart behind this project. His connection to Coastal Command is deeply personal. Bob's father served with the Royal Air Force and was lost over the Bay of Biscay in 1944. Like so many families, Bob carries a story of service, sacrifice, and absence. But he has ensured that it is also a story of remembrance. Bob identified the fact that RAAF personnel who served in Coastal Command has not been appropriately acknowledged in memorials around Australia. He has since worked closely with the RSL, the City of Adelaide, Veterans SA, and the Air Force Association navigating challenges to get this memorial to where it is today. Bob, on behalf of the Royal Australian Air Force, and all who stand here today: thank you. Your dedication ensures that those who served, including your father, are remembered not only in the United Kingdom, but here, in your home state of South Australia.

So today, as we unveil this memorial, we honour those RAAF personnel who served in Coastal Command including those who served with: 10 Squadron, 455 Squadron, 461 Squadron, and the many Australians who served throughout RAF Coastal Command squadrons and units.

We honour their endurance, their professionalism, and their sacrifice. We honour their steadfast watch over the sea lanes that kept nations alive. They served far from home, but they are remembered here.

Lest we forget.