

INTRODUCTION

When the Royal Air Force ordered 200 Lockheed Hudsons in 1938 it would have been difficult to imagine the far-reaching affects that the order would bring. For the RAF it provided the chance to fill a gap in their land-based reconnaissance squadrons, whilst for Lockheeds there was a chance to extend production of their Lockheed 14 airliner, albeit in militarised form. For Australia, the British move away from British aircraft constructors signalled the green light for their own follow-on order for the same type, although, initially, for only fifty in number. More important, however, "was the stimulating effect of [this] early British interest in American aircraft and orders on the military side of the American aviation industry", noted British historian John Terraine points out in his treatise dealing with the wartime RAF, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945* (London, 1985, p. 39). It was in Terraine's words, "the small opening which later unleashed a vast flood."

The design was to serve both Britain and Australia well. The RAF used some 2,000 of the type altogether whilst 247 were received in Australia. Other Hudsons were used operationally by the Royal Canadian Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force, South African Air Force, United States Army Air Corps, United States Navy, Brazilian Air Force, Chinese Air Force and, post-war, one was even used by the Israeli Air Force (this aircraft previously served with the RAAF!). Production reached the figure of 2,940 aircraft altogether.

In general terms of claims to fame, the Hudson was the first American-built aircraft to see operational service with the RAF in the Second World War, the first RAF aircraft operating from the United Kingdom to shoot down an enemy aircraft in that conflict, involved in the first capture of an enemy submarine by air, the first land-based aircraft type to be delivered regularly by air across the Atlantic, first RAF aircraft type to use air-to-surface radar operationally. It was also Hudsons which sunk the first enemy submarines claimed by the US Army Air Corps and United States Navy following America's entry into the war in 1941.

As far as Australian service is concerned, the Hudson was of even greater importance, but it claims to fame were even more impressive. It was only the second American-designed aircraft chosen for Royal Australian Air Force usage but was the first all-metal offensive aircraft type that the RAAF used, it was the only land-based aircraft capable of carrying a bombload of significance in service at the start of the Pacific war, the first aircraft of any nationality in action against the Japanese in that conflict, the first RAAF aircraft to be fitted with air-to-surface radar and the only aircraft type in the RAAF's inventory to ever carry an airborne lifeboat. Such was the attrition rate of the first RAAF Hudsons in action that by the end of the Second World War only ten Mk I's remained in service. Ninety had been struck off charge, the majority due to enemy action in the first three months of the war against Japan. No other aircraft type in RAAF service can match those statistics.

Many of the aspects mentioned above are dealt with in this volume about this often overlooked aircraft. The rest of *The RAAF Hudson Story* will be told in Book Two.

Some readers may wonder why two volumes were necessary to cover the subject. The answer is that from the outset I had decided to leave no stone unturned in my Hudson research. Couple that with the fact that twelve RAAF squadrons were equipped with this type of aircraft and it quickly becomes apparent that to cover the subject fully the resultant work could only be expected to be of mammoth proportions and, without doubt, an unwieldy and expensive volume. It was therefore decided to split the history into two books, each with an operational and non-operational mix, the expectation being that most people would have a specific interest in one or the other volume but not both. Some attempt has been made to keep relevant chapters together, but size dictated that each volume could only handle two or three long chapters. For this reason, the operational history of Hudsons in North Western and North Eastern Areas cannot be included in this volume, but will be found in Book Two.

The compilation of this work has relied heavily on official records, recollections and wartime diaries and correspondence provided by those involved. A wide search for Hudson-related literature found a mountain of material, a full bibliography of which will appear in Book Two. Using the official history volumes dealing with the