



*PBY search sectors flown from the USS *Tangier* in Noumea in May 1942. As can be seen, these sectors fell just short of the Solomon Islands. Following the intention to invade Guadalcanal, this search activity was moved further north to Espiritu Santo which allowed surveillance of the waters adjoining the Solomons.*

Meanwhile, USN PBY flying boats from VP-14 had begun operating from Noumea harbour in February 1942, supported by the seaplane tender USS *Curtiss* (soon replaced by the USS *Tangier*). This detachment also utilised some existing RAAF shore facilities on Ile Nou within the harbour. These PBYs began flying patrols ranging some 700 miles to the north, almost as far as the Solomons. Soon

increased from six to twelve flying boats, the detachment provided important reconnaissance cover during the Battle of the Coral Sea in May.

In June the USS *Curtiss* (with its own OS2U-1 floatplane) returned to Noumea and relieved the *Tangier*. By this time as many as eighteen PBYs were forward-based at Noumea, with elements drawn from various Pearl Harbor headquartered patrol squadrons.¹ There were also five OS2U-1 floatplanes based in the harbour, at least one or two of which belonged to tenders such as the *Curtiss*. Together with their patrol duties, the Noumea-based PBYs were also heavily utilised for regional transport tasks.

In March 1942 a division-sized US Army contingent of 20,000 men landed in New Caledonia, cementing the territory as the primary American base in the region for the rest of the year. Included in the force was the 67th Fighter Squadron equipped with P-400 Airacobras, the British variant of the P-39. The Airacobras were trucked in crates from Noumea's wharves to Tontouta where they were assembled in primitive conditions. The first was test flown on 28 March.

¹ In mid-July these PBYs were drawn from VP-11, VP-14, VP-23 and VP-71. Other squadrons which contributed to this mixed pool operating from the *Curtiss* in August and September were VP-51, VP-72 and VP-91.