

CHAPTER 1

1942

Early 1942 saw Australia under the threat of Japanese invasion, and various plans were being made for the defence of the continent. With RAAF seaplane operations centred at Rathmines on the New South Wales coast, the Air Board was intent on the establishment of a new seaplane maintenance depot and safe haven for its RAAF flying boats. The existence of Lake Boga as a potential site for flying boat activity had been known to the government as early as 1938. At that time various approaches, including that of the Lake Boga Progress Association, were made in support of a flying boat training base and/or air mail terminal. "Representations have already been made to the local Parliamentary Members, and to the Prime Minister and Sir Earle Page, and they have all offered their support," advised a July 1938 article in the *Swan Hill Guardian*.

In early March 1942 a Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) inspection party arrived in Swan Hill where they met with State Rivers and Water Supply Commission District Officer Jack D Wallis. They made an inspection of both Lake Boga and Kangaroo Lake, with a preference for Lake Boga. Originally natural lakes, both bodies of water were now fed from the Murray River through the Torrumbarry irrigation system.

Lake Boga possessed adequate vacant land along the lake's foreshore, an adjacent rail head and highway, electric power from the Swan Hill power station, and a large body of obstacle free water surrounded by flat countryside, all the ingredients necessary for the safe alighting and service of flying boats.

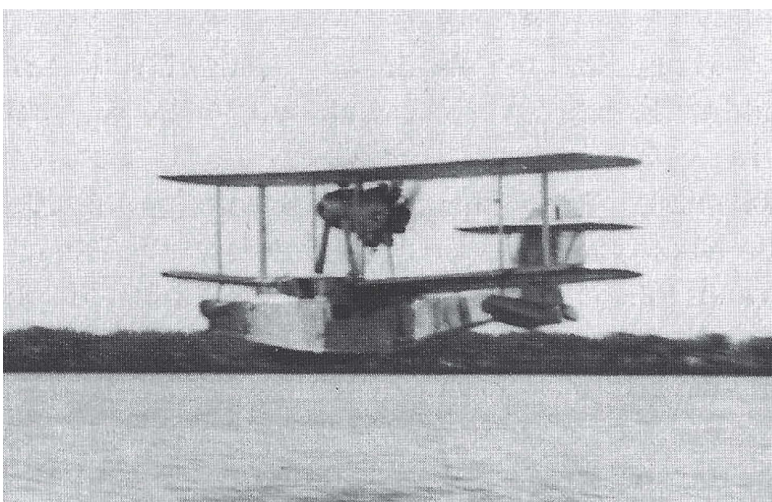
While examining an alternate body of water in the Waranga Basin, a member of the DCA party wrote to Wallis from Tatura 9 March, concluding his letter:

In case of sudden emergency (which might arrive at any time) I should be obliged if you could get one of the Commission's staff to go over the lake and remove any stakes that may have been put in by fishermen or the sailing people. It may be necessary to land one of the big flying boats on the lake, even within a day or two.

On 13 March, Wallis received a telegram from Sydney asking him to arrange for the arrival at Lake Boga of an amphibian aircraft carrying Qantas personnel.

With the assistance of Messrs Fred Petzke and Roy Irvine, the lake was cleared of obstructions including fishing net stakes and the Lake Boga Yacht Club's pile mounted judging box. Petzke was a successful Swan Hill plumber and tank maker, Irvine the local Ford agent who promoted business by nailing old T model Ford doors to roadside trees throughout the region, inscribed, "FORD - Phone Swan Hill 123".

The following Sunday afternoon a strange biplane flying boat, with a large back to front motor (an RAAF Walrus), circled, then alighted upon Lake Boga, taxiing towards the recreational reserve. A crowd had gathered by the time Flight Lieutenant John McMahan cut the spluttering motor and anchored the Supermarine Walrus amphibian



On 15 March 1942, Hudson Fysh and Lester Brain from Qantas alighted on Lake Boga in a Walrus amphibian. A later photo. (Gordon Myers)