

VPB-33

Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron THIRTY THREE (VP-33) on 1 April 1942.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron THIRTY THREE (VPB-33) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 7 April 1945.

Squadron Insignia and Nickname

The first squadron insignia was a design originally approved for use by VP-5S. It consisted of a conventional pair of Naval Aviation wings superimposed on a silhouette of the Western Hemisphere and symmetrically contained in a compass rose. Colors: geographical areas, dark blue; wings, conventional gold; compass rose, red with blue inner ring and black line outer circle. The insignia was frequently referred to as "Wings Over Panama," in deference to the squadron's home base in the Panama Canal Zone during the first period of its existence. This design was not officially approved for VP-33 because it was still in use by the former VP-5S that had gone through numerous redesignations since 1931 and was known as VP-32 and VPB-32 during World War II. It is one of the few instances known where the same design was in use by two active squadrons at the same time.



The squadron's Black Cat insignia.

VP-33 was destined to become one of ten well-known Black Cat squadrons operating in the South Pacific during WWII. After reaching the combat zone and being assigned its unique mission, the squadron

submitted a new design to CNO. This insignia was approved on 17 April 1944. The black cat, the central character of the design, was shown armed with a telescope and depth charge and superimposed on an enlarged cat's eye. Colors: background, black; eye, orange and lemon yellow; cat, black with yellow outlines; eyeball, yellow; pupil, green; telescope, blue and white; depth charge, light blue with black markings. This insignia was used by the squadron until its disestablishment in 1945.

Nickname: Black Cats, 1943–1945.

Chronology of Significant Events

1 Apr–Jul 1942: VP-33 was established at NAS Norfolk, Va., under the operational control of FAW-5, as a seaplane squadron flying the PBY-5A Catalina. Squadron training was conducted at NAS Quonset Point, R.I., until mid-July.

9 Jul 1942: Patrol Squadron 52 was withdrawn from NAS Coco Solo, C.Z., and replaced by VP-33. During this period the squadron came under the operational control of FAW-3 and was assigned duties of patrolling convoy routes, ASW patrols and ferrying supplies to advanced bases in the Caribbean.

10 Jul 1943: VP-33 was relieved at NAS Coco Solo for return to NAS Corpus Christi, Texas, and 15 days home leave with orders to report to NAS San Diego, Calif.

15 Aug 1943: After a brief two-week period of refit with new aircraft and equipment, the squadron departed NAS San Diego, Calif., for transpac to NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii. Upon arrival the squadron came under the operational control of FAW-2 and quickly deployed to Canton Island. VP-33 conducted day searches toward the Gilberts covering the occupation of Baker Island.

26 Sep 1943: VP-33 was relocated to Funafuti, conducting day searches toward Tarawa.

26 Oct 1943: VP-33 moved to Perth, Australia, under the operational control of FAW-10. The squadron conducted day searches and night bombing missions to Koepang and Amboina, officially becoming a member of the Black Cat club.

15 Feb 1944: VP-33 was relocated to Samarai, New Guinea, under the operational control of FAW-17. The squadron was assigned night search patrols and attack missions against enemy shipping in the Bismarck Sea.

25 Mar 1944: VP-33 was relocated to Manus, in the Admiralty Island chain. There it conducted daylight searches toward Turk and Woleai; bombing missions against Woleai and Wakde; air-sea rescue missions around Truk, Woleai and Yap; and coverage for the invasion of Hollandia.

19 May 1944: After the occupation of Hollandia, the squadron moved aboard *Heron* (AVP 2) in Humboldt Bay. With VP-52, the squadron conducted



A PBY takes off from its base at Samarai Island, New Guinea, 80-G-K-1361.

air-sea rescue for Army strikes on Wewak, Wakde, Biak, Noemfoor, Manokwari, Babo, Jefman and Sagan.

17 Jul 1944: VP-33 was relocated to Manus to conduct daylight searches and air-sea rescue missions for downed aircrews.

1 Sep 1944: VP-33 moved to Middleburg Island to conduct night search and attack missions against enemy shipping in the Netherlands East Indies and southern Philippine islands area.

19 Sep 1944: The squadron was relocated to Morotai with no change in its assigned missions.

26 Sep 1944: Lieutenant James F. Merritt, Jr., led his Catalina in an attack against two enemy transports and their five armed escorts. The attack was conducted off the southwest coast of Mindanao, Philippines, in hazardous night conditions of bright moonlight and heavy concentrations of anti-aircraft fire from the armed escort ships. During his mast head bombing attack his bombs failed to release. He returned, despite the heavy AA fire, and made a successful attack resulting in probable damage to one large transport and the destruction of the other transport. For his actions he was awarded the Navy Cross.

3 Oct 1944: While patrolling the Toli Toli Bay, Northern Celebes, on a Black Cat mission the night of 3 October, Lieutenant (jg) William B. Sumpter led his PBY Catalina in an attack against a 6,000-ton *Katori*-class light cruiser. His attack was made during the hazardous conditions of bright moonlight and against constant and intense anti-aircraft fire from the cruiser. He scored eight bomb hits resulting in explosions and the burning of the cruiser and its sinking. For his actions he was awarded the Navy Cross.

23 Oct 1944: VPB-33 was relocated to Leyte to conduct daylight searches for the enemy in the Philippine Sea. The squadron at this time came under the operational control of FAW-10.

1 Dec 1944: A detachment of four aircraft remained under FAW-10 at Woendi Lagoon. The remainder of

the squadron relocated to Los Negros under FAW-17. This group with seven aircraft operated from Emirau and the Green and Treasury islands to conduct ASW patrols and air-sea rescue missions.

20 Dec 1944: The Woendi detachment returned to Leyte aboard the tender *San Carlos* (AVP 51). There they were reunited with the rest of the squadron on 10 January 1945, with additional support from *Tangier* (AV 8). Antishipping patrols and Dumbo missions were the order of the day.

4 Feb–Mar 1945: VPB-33 was relieved for return to the U.S. The squadron flew to Los Negros Island and boarded HMS *Tracker* on 27 February for return to San Diego, Calif. Upon arrival on 19 March the squadron was assigned temporary quarters and given leave on the 24th.

10 Apr 1945: VPB-33 was disestablished.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS Quonset Point, R.I.	1 Apr 1942
NAS Coco Solo, C.Z.	9 Jul 1942
NAS San Diego, Calif.	Jul 1943
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	15 Aug 1943
NAS San Diego, Calif.	19 Mar 1945

Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
LCDR H. D. Hale	1 Apr 1942
LCDR R. C. Bengston	22 Dec 1942
LCDR F. P. Anderson	15 Aug 1943

Aircraft Assignment

<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
PBY-5A	1 Apr 1942

Major Overseas Deployments

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
9 Jul 1942	10 Jul 1943	FAW-3	Coco Solo	PBY-5A	Carib
15 Aug 1943	*	FAW-2	Kaneohe	PBY-5A	WestPac
26 Sep 1943	*	FAW-2	Funafuti	PBY-5A	SoPac
26 Oct 1943	*	FAW-10	Perth	PBY-5A	SoPac
15 Feb 1944	*	FAW-17	Samarai	PBY-5A	SoPac
25 Mar 1944	*	FAW-17	Manus	PBY-5A	SoPac
19 May 1944	*	FAW-17	Humboldt Bay <i>Heron</i> (AVP 2)	PBY-5A	SoPac



A PBY-5 in flight off the coast of New Guinea.

Major Overseas Deployments—Continued

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
17 Jul 1944	*	FAW-17	Manus	PBY-5A	SoPac
1 Sep 1944	*	FAW-17	Middleburg Is.	PBY-5A	SoPac
19 Sep 1944	*	FAW-17	Morotai	PBY-5A	SoPac
23 Oct 1944	*	FAW-10	Leyte	PBY-5A	SoPac
1 Dec 1944	*	FAW-10	Woendi	PBY-5A	SoPac
1 Dec 1944	*	FAW-17	Los Negros	PBY-5A	SoPac
20 Dec 1944	19 Mar 1945	FAW-10	Leyte <i>San Carlos</i> (AVP 51) <i>Tangier</i> (AV 8)	PBY-5A	SoPac

* Continued combat deployment in the Pacific, moving from base to base.

Wing Assignments

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
PatWing-5		1 Apr 1942
PatWing-3/FAW-3*		9 Jul 1942
FAW-14		Jul 1943
FAW-2		15 Aug 1943
FAW-10		26 Oct 1943
FAW-17		15 Feb 1944
FAW-10		23 Oct 1944
FAW-17/10†		1 Dec 1944
FAW-14		27 Feb 1945

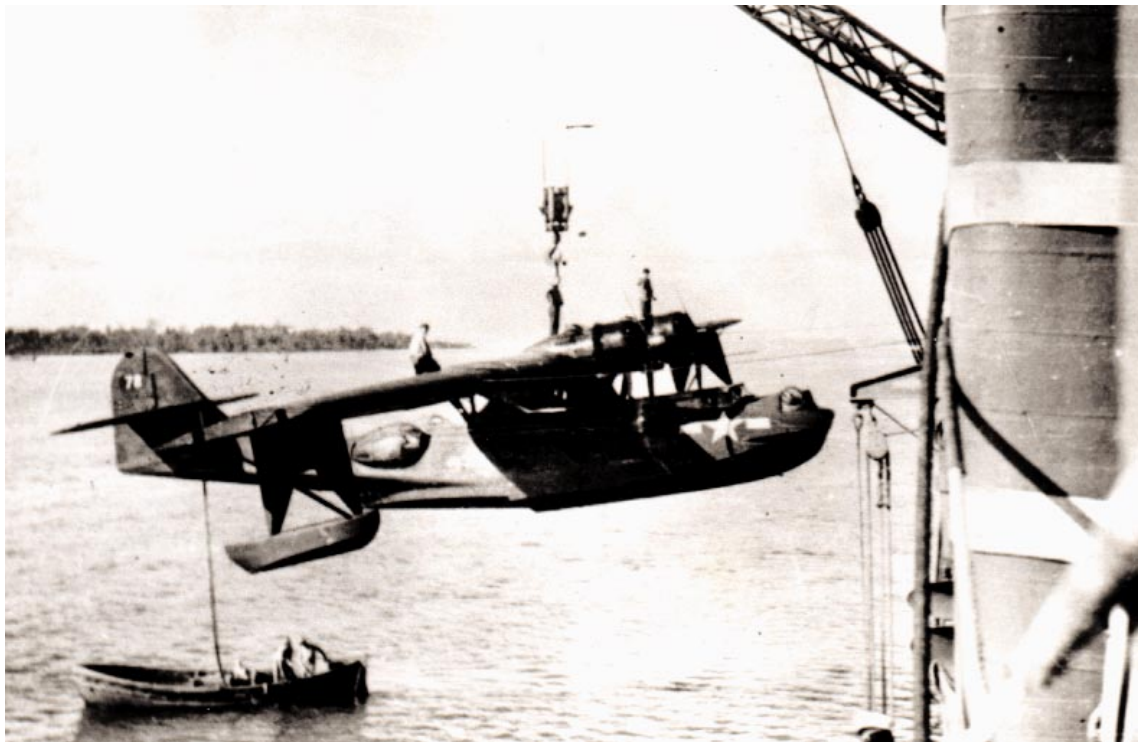
Wing Assignments—Continued

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
		* PatWing-3 was redesignated Fleet Air Wing-3 (FAW-3) on 1 November 1942.
		† A squadron detachment remained under FAW-10s operational control while the remainder of the squadron was assigned to FAW-17 on 1 December 1944. The detachment returned to the main squadron in late December 1944 and then came under FAW-17's control.

Unit Awards Received

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>	
PUC	1 Sep 1944	4 Oct 1944

A squadron PBY being hoisted aboard a tender (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection).



VPB-34

Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron THIRTY-FOUR (VP-34) on 16 April 1942.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron THIRTY-FOUR (VPB-34) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 7 April 1945.

Squadron Insignia and Nickname

The squadron's only insignia came into being during its first tour of duty in the South Pacific in early 1944. VP-34 was one of ten Navy patrol squadrons to be designated Black Cats during the war. The nickname came from the flat black paint applied to the

Catalinas and the nighttime strike missions assigned to these squadrons.

The VP-34 squadron insignia featured a cat's face with its jaws champing down on an enemy cargo vessel. On top of the cat's head was a set of radio headphones and a ball cap. Across the top of the insignia was the legend Black Cats,



The squadron's Black Cat insignia.

and at the bottom VPB-34, and Southwest Pacific. Colors: unknown, but believed to be in black and white.

Nickname: Black Cats, 1944–1945.

Chronology of Significant Events

16 Apr 1942: VP-34 was established at NAS Norfolk, Va., under the operational control of FAW-5, as a seaplane squadron flying the PBY-5 Catalina. A shortage of aircraft prevented the squadron from receiving its full complement of Catalinas until early June 1942. In the interim VP-81 loaned the squadron one PBY-5 with which to practice. Several aircrews were sent to Banana River, Fla., and Key West, Fla., for flight instruction with other squadrons.

25 Jul 1942: VP-34 was by this time fully equipped and manned. Orders were received for duty at NAS Coco Solo, C.Z., with detachments at Kingston, Jamaica, and Trujillo, Honduras. During this period the squadron conducted ASW training, and provided convoy coverage patrols under the operational control of FAW-3.

10 Oct 1942: The squadron was transferred to NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, under the operational control of FAW-11. Detachments were maintained at Great Exhuma Island, San Juan, Antigua, Trinidad, and Essequibo. Coverage for convoys and ASW patrols in the Caribbean were provided around the clock.

7 Jun 1943: VP-34 was relieved of duties in the Caribbean and relocated to NAS San Diego, Calif., under the operational control of FAW-14. Personnel were given home leave prior to the pending departure to the South Pacific. Upon return from leave, all hands began preparation for the transpac to NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii.

8–10 Jul 1943: VP-34 arrived at NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, and came under the operational control of FAW-2. Squadron personnel were given a brief period of combat training in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands.

24 Jul 1943: The squadron was split into detachments with six aircraft at Midway Island, five at Canton Island, and one at Johnston Island. Search patrols in the vicinity of the islands were conducted during the daylight hours. The squadron detachments returned to Kaneohe on 11 August 1943.

18 Aug 1943: A detachment of six aircraft was sent to Funafuti Island.

23 Aug 1943: A detachment of three aircraft returned to Johnston Island, remaining until 12 September 1943, when they returned to NAS Kaneohe. Two days later this same detachment was sent to Canton Island to conduct daytime long range searches for enemy vessels.

21 Sep 1943: The Canton and Funafuti detachments were relocated to Perth, Australia, arriving on 29 September 1943. Training and long-range search patrols were conducted by the squadron through mid-December under the operational control of FAW-10.

18 Dec 1943: VP-34 was relocated to Palm Island, Queensland, Australia, under the operational control of FAW-17. By 26 December 1943, the squadron was located at Samarai, Papua New Guinea, where it began its first offensive combat operations against the enemy as a Black Cat squadron.

31 Dec 1943–22 Jan 1944: Lieutenant Commander Thomas A. Christopher, the squadron commanding officer, set the pace for VP-34 operations in the Bismarck Sea area of operations. On 31 December 1944 he attacked and damaged one enemy vessel during a night patrol. On 22 January 1944 he again attacked and damaged an enemy vessel at night, receiving damage from heavy AA fire resulting in injury to one crewmember. For his leadership in seeking out the enemy and pressing home the attack under heavy fire Lieutenant Commander Christopher was awarded the Navy Cross. On 15 January 1944 Christopher led a five-aircraft attack on a strongly escorted enemy convoy attempting to cross the straits. He made a mast-

Squadron personnel, Lt. E. J. Fisher, Ens. J. M. Habilas, Ens. L. D. Herman and Ens. J. D. Moore, standing on a squadron PBY, March 1944, 80-G-240048.



head attack at extremely close range and personally accounted for one 6,800-ton merchantman, while the remainder of the flight destroyed two more. For this action Lieutenant Commander Christopher was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Navy Cross.

31 Dec 1943–15 Feb 1944: Lieutenant Ellis J. Fisher led his PBY-5 Catalina in numerous attacks on Japanese shipping in the Bismarck Sea. On the nights of 31 December 1943, 4 and 15 January 1944, and 15 February 1944 he participated in attacks on heavily escorted enemy convoys, sinking a large merchant ship, heavily damaging another and aiding in the destruction of a large tanker. On 18 January and 2 February 1944 he damaged a large merchant vessel and sank a medium sized tanker. On 13 February 1944 he successfully strafed and destroyed an armed enemy vessel, sank five motor launches and probably damaged a midget submarine. For his actions between 31 December 1943 and 15 February 1944 he was awarded the Navy Cross.

Jan–Feb 1944: During the nights of 16 and 22 January and 15 February, Lieutenant Harold L. Dennison led his PBY Catalina against enemy ships in the Bismarck Sea and within the vicinity of strong enemy bases. He bombed an enemy destroyer under intense anti-aircraft fire which caused severe damage to his aircraft. However, with his damaged aircraft, he returned to make repeated strafing attacks. Under hazardous weather conditions he carried out an attack

against a large merchant vessel in a strongly defended convoy. Receiving heavy and constant enemy fire, he caused heavy damage to the merchant vessel. In another action he forced an enemy tanker to run aground. For his actions in these engagements he was awarded the Navy Cross.

12 Feb 1944: Several VP-34 crews were relocated to Port Moresby, with the remaining crews and ground personnel remaining at Samarai, Papua New Guinea, to conduct maintenance, overhauls and a brief period of relief from combat operations. The detachment sent to Moresby boarded *Half Moon* (AVP 26) and *San Pablo* (AVP 30) for passage to Langemak Bay. On 19 February 1943, air-sea rescue and evacuation missions were conducted in support of TG 73.1.

15 Feb 1944: Lieutenant (jg) Nathan G. Gordon and his crew of the Samarai detachment were assigned to provide air-sea rescue support to the Army for an air attack on the enemy-held Kavieng Harbor, New Ireland. Lieutenant (jg) Gordon made four full stall landings in the rough waters of the harbor to collect survivors, coming under intense enemy fire. He and his crew located and picked up 15 Army fliers shot down during the attack. After rescuing the last man, Lieutenant (jg) Gordon was running out of fuel and was forced to land at Wewak, New Guinea. There he unloaded the Army fliers on the recently arrived tender *San Pablo* (AVP 30) before refueling and returning to Samarai. Lieutenant (jg) Gordon was later awarded

the Medal of Honor for his conduct, and each member of his crew received the Silver Star.

17 Feb 1944: Lieutenant Orazio Simonelli was awarded the Navy Cross for his action in rescuing five airmen who had been forced down by enemy gunfire on 15 February during the air attack against Kavieng Harbor, New Ireland. Although his PBY Catalina lost its fighter escort before reaching the downed airmen, Lieutenant Simonelli continued on to his object and the successful rescue, which included several severely injured men.

17 May 1944: The Langemak Bay detachment was relocated to Hollandia aboard *Half Moon* (AVP 26), where it continued air-sea rescue and evacuation missions through mid-July.

18 May 1944: The Samarai detachment was relocated to Manus Island supported by the tender *Tangier* (AV 8). Daytime scouting missions and long range scouting patrols were conducted through mid-July.

16 Jul 1944: VP-34 was relocated to Mios Woendi and Middleburg islands for a continuation of Black Cat operations.

31 Jul 1944: On the night of 31 July 1944 Lieutenant Norman L. Paxton led his PBY-5 Catalina in an attack against a large enemy freighter-transport protected by two escorts at anchor in a small harbor. He attacked in bright moonlight and against an intense barrage of antiaircraft fire. His low altitude attack succeeded in destroying the freighter-transport. He safely brought his plane and crew back to their home base despite the AA damage it had sustained during the attack. For his actions Lieutenant Paxton was awarded the Navy Cross.

1 Sep 1944: Operational control of the squadron was shifted from FAW-17 to FAW-10. A detachment was returned to Manus Island, leaving five aircraft at Mios Woendi to conduct day and night antishipping patrols.

7 Oct 1944: Five additional crews flew to supplement the detachment at Mios Woendi for patrol duties.

23 Oct 1944: VPB-34 was relocated to San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, with tender support provided by *San Carlos* (AVP 51), *San Pablo* (AVP 30), *Orca* (AVP 49) and *Currituck* (AV 7). By 6 November 1944, the squadron once again commenced its hallmark Black Cat operations, alternating with daytime air-sea rescue and evacuation missions.

3 Dec 1944: At 0013 hours, *Cooper* (DD 695) was struck by a torpedo while engaging Japanese surface

craft and barges in the waters of Ormoc Bay, Leyte, Philippines. The ship broke in two and sank in less than a minute, resulting in the loss of 191 crew members and 168 survivors left struggling in the water. At 1400 Lieutenant Frederick J. Ball and his crew were returning from a long-range reconnaissance mission and spotted the survivors floating in the bay. Ball landed his Catalina in the bay and proceeded over the next hour to pick up survivors within range of enemy shore fire. He rescued 56 sailors from the bay, and when the aircraft could hold no more Lieutenant Ball began a takeoff run that took three miles before liftoff could be achieved. He safely returned to his base with his passengers, many of them wounded. The remaining 112 survivors were collected by another VPB-34 Catalina which taxied to safety outside the bay where they were offloaded onto another ship. For his bravery under fire Lieutenant Ball received the Navy Cross.

23 Dec 1944–16 Jan 1945: VPB-34 was relieved of combat operations and relocated to Manus Island in preparation for return to the U.S. Squadron personnel boarded *Hollandia* (CVE 97) at Kaneohe, Hawaii, on 10 January 1945, arriving at San Diego, Calif., on the 16th. Upon arrival all hands were given home leave and the squadron was reduced to caretaker status.

7 Apr 1945: VPB-34 was disestablished.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS Norfolk, Va.	16 Apr 1942
NAS Coco Solo, C.Z.	25 Jul 1942
NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba	10 Oct 1942
NAS San Diego, Calif.	7 Jun 1943
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	8 Jul 1943
NAS San Diego, Calif.	16 Jan 1945

Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
LCDR Renwick S. Calderhead	16 Apr 1942
LCDR James G. Craig, Jr.	21 Aug 1942
LCDR Thomas A. Christopher	2 Nov 1943
LCDR Vadym V. Utgoff	12 May 1944

Aircraft Assignment

<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
PBY-5	Jun 1942

Major Overseas Deployments

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
25 Jul 1942	10 Oct 1942	FAW-3	Coco Solo	PBY-5	Carib
10 Oct 1942	7 Jun 1943	FAW-11	Guantanamo	PBY-5	Carib
8 Jul 1943	10 Jan 1945	FAW-2	Kaneohe	PBY-5	WestPac

Major Overseas Deployments—Continued

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
24 Jul 1943†	*	FAW-2	Midway	PBY-5	WestPac
24 Jul 1943†	*	FAW-2	Canton	PBY-5	WestPac
24 Jul 1943†	*	FAW-2	Johnston Is.	PBY-5	WestPac
18 Aug 1943†	*	FAW-2	Funafuti	PBY-5	SoPac
21 Sep 1943	*	FAW-10	Perth	PBY-5	SoPac
18 Dec 1943	*	FAW-17	Palm Island	PBY-5	SoPac
26 Dec 1943	*	FAW-17	Samarai	PBY-5	SoPac
12 Feb 1943	*	FAW-10	Port Moresby	PBY-5	SoPac
			<i>Half Moon</i> (AVP 26)		
			<i>San Pablo</i> (AVP 30)		
17 May 1944	*	FAW-17	Langemak	PBY-5	SoPac
			<i>Half Moon</i> (AVP 26)		
18 May 1944	*	FAW-17	Manus Isl.	PBY-5	SoPac
			<i>Tangier</i> (AV 8)		
16 Jul 1944	*	FAW-17	Mios Woendi	PBY-5	SoPac
1 Sep 1944	*	FAW-10	Manus Isl.	PBY-5	SoPac
23 Oct 1944	23 Dec 1944	FAW-10	San Pedro Bay	PBY-5	SoPac
			<i>San Carlos</i> (AVP 51)		
			<i>San Pablo</i> (AVP 30)		
			<i>Orca</i> (AVP 49)		
			<i>Currituck</i> (AV 7)		

* Continued combat deployment in the Pacific, moving from base to base.

† This deployment only involved a squadron detachment. The main body of the squadron remained at NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii.

Black Cat PBYS on a landing strip in the South Pacific.



Wing Assignments

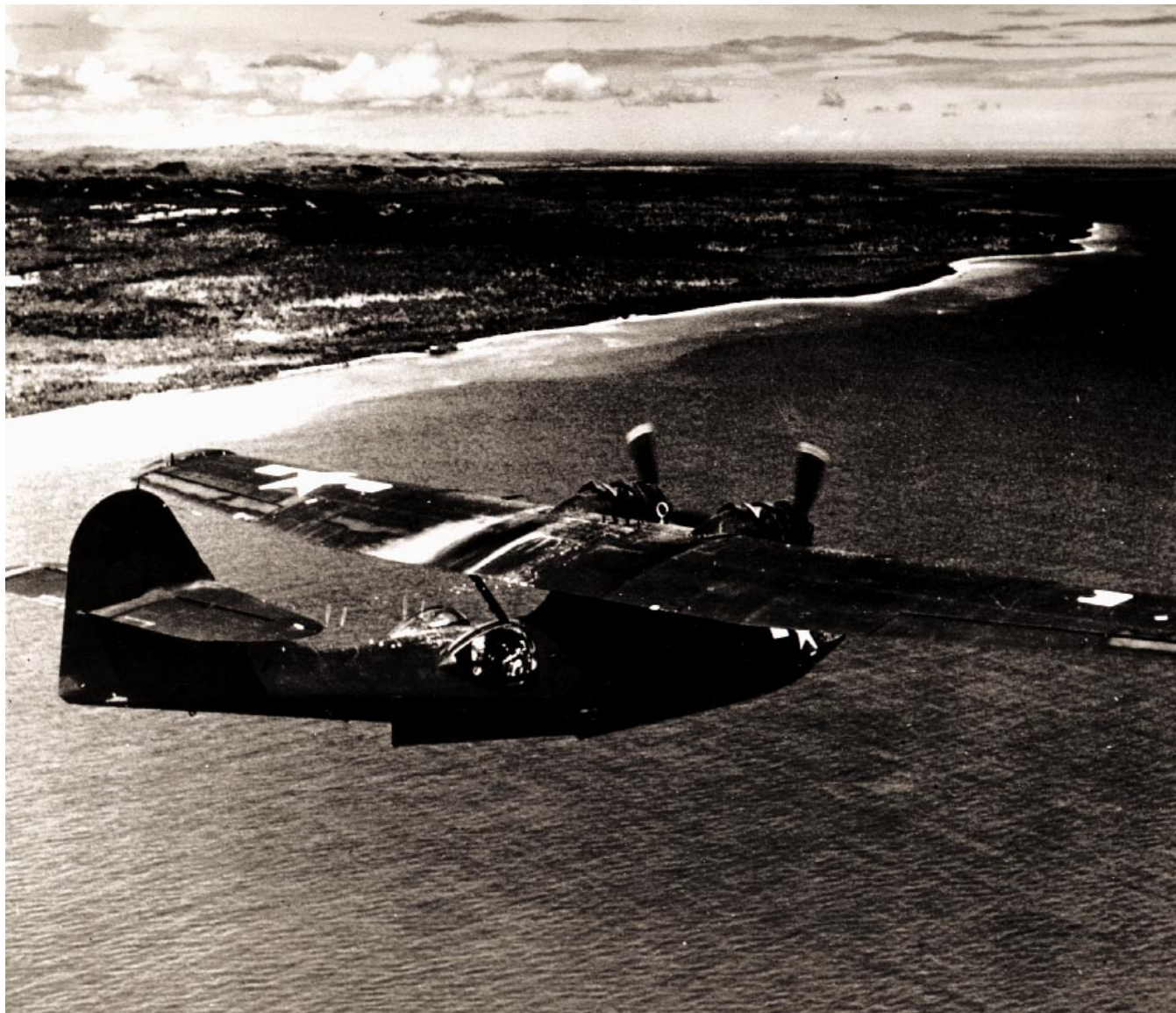
<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-5		16 Apr 1942
FAW-3		25 Jul 1942
FAW-11		10 Oct 1942
FAW-14		7 Jun 1943
FAW-2		10 Jul 1943
FAW-10		21 Sep 1943
FAW-17		18 Dec 1943
FAW-10		1 Sep 1944

Wing Assignments—Continued

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-2		23 Dec 1944
FAW-14		16 Jan 1945

Unit Awards Received

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
PUC	15 Sep 1943 1 Feb 1944



Black Cat PB4Y in flight, (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection).

VPB-43

Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron FORTY-THREE (VP-43) on 21 July 1941.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron FORTY-THREE (VPB-43) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 15 September 1945.

Squadron Insignia and Nickname

None on record.

Chronology of Significant Events

21 Jul 1941: VP-43 was established at NAS San Diego, Calif., under the operational control of PatWing-1, as a seaplane squadron flying the PBY-5 Catalina. The squadron spent the next several months awaiting the delivery of new aircraft and training crews in the waters off southern California.

1 Apr 1942: A detachment of six aircraft departed San Diego, Calif., for duty with PatWing-4 and the 4th Bomber Command of the 4th Air Force at Kodiak, Alaska. VP-43 joined VP-41, on duty in the area since the outbreak of hostilities, and VP-42, which had arrived in February 1942. This detachment returned to San Diego in late May 1942.

3 Jun 1942: Admiral Kakuta led an Imperial Japanese Navy strike force with carriers *Ryujō* and *Junyo* toward Dutch Harbor, decimating the defenses with repeated air attacks as a prelude to landings on Kiska and Attu on 7 June 1942. VP-41 was the only patrol squadron at NAF Dutch Harbor, having arrived there on 27 May 1942 (VP-42 had been sent to NAAF Cold Bay at the same time). To avoid the destruction of aircraft ashore, as had happened at Pearl Harbor, the squadrons dispersed to fjords where tenders provided the necessary servicing of aircraft. VP-41 lost two of its aircraft in combat while tracking the enemy fleet, with the crews captured and surviving the war in POW camps.

6 Jun 1942: Urgent requests for assistance led Admiral Nimitz to order VP-43 and a detachment of VP-51 to proceed to the Aleutian Islands immediately. By 4 June four Catalinas had been shot down and six were unserviceable, leaving 14 available. Departing in groups of three aircraft each, all 18 aircraft arrived safely on 10 June 1942 at Chernofsky Harbor, a small port on the northern side of Unalaska, coming under the operational control of PatWing-4.

10–14 Jun 1942: Lieutenant (jg) Milton Dahl of VP-43 was selected to conduct the first reconnaissance of the Japanese forces occupying Kiska and Attu. He verified the presence of the enemy and obtained an

accurate count of vessels in both harbors. On 11 June 1942, Commander Patrol Wing 4 received a message from Commander in Chief Pacific which said, “bomb the enemy out of Kiska.” Following unsuccessful missions by USAAF B24s and B-17s, aircraft available from VPs 41, 42, 43 and 51 commenced continuous bombing missions against targets in Kiska harbor from 11 to 13 June. These missions became known as the “Kiska Blitz.” During these bombing strikes the aircraft were serviced by *Gillis* (AVD 12) at Nazan Bay, Atka Island. Efforts to use the PBYs as horizontal bombers dropping their bombs from above the clouds proved futile. Pilots began attacking singly, approaching from a direction that provided the best cloud cover. When they were over the harbor the Catalinas were put into a dive and bombs released at the appropriate time. The flak was intense. A pullout was initiated at between 500 and 1,500 feet, and the plane immediately again sought cover in the clouds. Two VP-43 aircraft were badly damaged during the raids and several crewmen killed. All of the crews were frustrated by the lack of adequate forward firepower (one 30-caliber machine gun) available for strafing. Lieutenant Commander Carroll B. Jones, commanding officer of VP-43, led his squadron on all the bombing and strafing attacks on shipping in Kiska Harbor. His aircraft was one of those damaged by the heavy AA fire during the attacks. For his courageous leadership and coolness under fire Lieutenant Commander Jones was subsequently awarded the Navy Cross. Ensign William T. Sorensen was also awarded the Navy Cross for his actions in the Kiska Harbor campaign. He flew his plane in repeated attacks on enemy ships in the harbor under extremely hazardous weather conditions and in the face of heavy antiaircraft fire from enemy ships and shore installations. On one of his dive bombing attacks he strafed enemy four-engine patrol planes on the water, destroying three of them. His aircraft returned from this attack riddled with over 100 bullet holes.

11 Jun 1942: Machinist Leland L. Davis, an enlisted pilot of a VP-43 Catalina, had made repeated bombing attacks on enemy ships in Kiska Harbor in the face of heavy antiaircraft fire from ships and shore batteries prior to 11 June. On 11 June, prior to his planned attack on Kiska Harbor, he spotted and reported sinking a Japanese submarine caught on the surface. Postwar examination of enemy records did not indicate any submarine losses on this date. However, for all his actions in the campaign against Kiska Harbor he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. Naval Aviation Pilot Davis and his crew failed to return from their final attack against Kiska Harbor on 14 June.

14 Jun 1942: Machinist Davis, while conducting a raid on Kiska, was shot down with the loss of all hands. During attacks on enemy ships in Kiska Harbor, Japanese reconnaissance aircraft spotted the tenders at Nazan Bay. Since both *Casco* and *Gillis* had

largely expended their stocks of ammunition, bombs and aviation fuel, the decision was made to withdraw them. VP-41 and 42 were flown to Dutch Harbor and Cold Harbor, respectively, to prepare for return to the U.S. VP-43 flew to Kodiak for refit in preparation for further operations.

Jul 1942: VP-43 returned to Nazan Bay, Atka Island, and continued bombing missions against Kiska and Attu whenever weather permitted. *Gillis* (AVD 12) and *Hulbert* (AVP 19) provided tender support.

20 Jul 1942: Lieutenant Green crashed into the side of a mountain on Atka Island with the loss of all hands.

23 Aug 1942: Lieutenant Raithel and crew were missing and presumed lost on a flight from Cold Bay.

30 Aug 1942: A task force commanded by Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald occupied Adak Island. Tender *Casco* (AVP 12) was struck by a torpedo and beached at Nazan Bay. She was refloated and back in service on 12 September 1942.

20 Sep 1942: VP-43 was relieved for return to the U.S., arriving at NAS Alameda, Calif., on the 22nd, with all hands given home leave. The squadron returned to Dutch Harbor on 17 October 1942.

Jan 1943: VP-43 was relocated to Adak, Alaska, to provide reconnaissance on Japanese forces at Kiska and Attu during the landings on Amchitka. On 12 January 1943, a task force led by Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid occupied Amchitka Island.

1 Feb 1943: On 1 February the squadron returned to Dutch Harbor.

1 Jun 1943: VP-43 was relieved for return to NAS Seattle, Wash., leaving a two aircraft detachment at NAF Dutch Harbor, based aboard *Casco* (AVP 12). Personnel were given home leave and orders for reforming at NAS Tongue Point, Oregon.

1 Jul 1943: VP-43 was reformed with many new personnel and factory-fresh equipment at NAS Tongue Point, Oregon, under the operational control of FAW-6. The squadron's PBY-5 aircraft had been replaced by Land Cats, the amphibious PBY-5A. Training of personnel continued at Tongue Point and Whidbey Island, Wash., through the end of September.

15-16 Aug 1943: Kiska was occupied without opposition by U.S. forces. The Japanese had already abandoned the island a few days previously, taking advantage of bad weather to withdraw their troops without being observed by reconnaissance aircraft of VP-41, VP-42 or the two VP-43 detachment Catalinas.

31 Aug 1943: *RO-61*, Lieutenant Commander Toshisada Tokutomi commanding, entered the waters of Dutch Harbor on 30 August intent on sinking *Casco* (AVP 12), anchored in the bay guarded by *Reid* (DD 369). At mid-day on 31 August *Reid* was detached to transport a group of engineers to Adak Island leaving *Casco* unprotected. Lieutenant Commander Tokutomi made his attack on *Casco*, damaging the tender and

forcing it to beach to avoid sinking. Lieutenant S. Coleman of VP-42 spotted *RO-61* through the fog in the lee of Atka volcano. He attacked with machine guns and two depth charges, heavily damaging the submarine. Lieutenant Carl Amme of the VP-43 detachment next spotted the submarine and made a depth bomb attack. *RO-61* was further damaged by the attack, but managed to submerge leaving a large oil slick. Lieutenant Amme directed *Reid* to the site and marked the slick with smoke floats. *Reid* then dropped a pattern of depth charges that brought the submarine to the surface where it was sunk by gunfire. Five enlisted Japanese survivors were captured by *Reid*. Lieutenant Amme later found that *RO-61* had put one of its torpedoes directly through the space where his bunk was located aboard *Casco*.

4 Oct-12 Nov 1943: VP-43 departed the warmth of NAS Tongue Point, Oregon, for the frigid climes of Alaska. The weather during the flight north was so terrible that two of the squadron's new PBY-5As crashed en route. One was damaged during an attempted takeoff after a water landing with no injuries to personnel. The second aircraft struck a mountain near Pysht, Wash., leaving only two survivors. The remaining aircraft arrived safely at Kodiak, Alaska, coming under the operational control of FAW-4. By 11 October 1943, the squadron had arrived for duty at Attu, which had been occupied by U.S. forces on 11 May 1943. Upon arrival, VP-43 relieved VPs 45 and 61. Only two days after arrival, the squadron was forced to move due to air attacks by Japanese aircraft. Shemya Island (occupied on 30 May 1943) remained the temporary base for VP-43 until 12 November 1943, when it was judged safe to return to Attu.

20 Dec 1943: VP-43 remained based at Attu. On this date night bombing and reconnaissance missions were extended to the Northern Kuriles, the northernmost islands of the Japanese homelands. These were the first Navy photo reconnaissance and bombing missions over the Kuriles. On 5 February 1944, VB-139 took over these duties, as they were equipped with the faster PV-1 Ventura bomber.

23 Apr 1944: VP-43 was relieved by VP-61 for return to NAS Seattle, Wash. All hands were given home leave and orders for new squadrons on 18 May 1944.

6 Jun 1944: VP-43 was reformed at NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., under the operational control of FAW-6. Training of personnel and refit with new equipment and aircraft continued through the end of September.

6 Oct 1944: VPB-43 departed NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., for NAS Attu, Alaska, under the operational control of FAW-4, relieving VPB-61. The squadron was split into several detachments with the headquarters staff at Adak; Detachment 2, Amchitka; Detachment 3, Dutch Harbor; and Detachment 6, Kodiak. Routine duties involved escorting shipping in the North Pacific and convoy coverage in the Alaskan Sea Frontier.



A PB4Y coming in for a landing in the Aleutians, March 1944.



A PB4Y coming in for a landing in the Aleutians, March 1944.

21 Jul 1945: VPB-43 was relieved by VPB-62, returning to NAS Seattle, Wash. The last aircraft had arrived by 18 August 1945, and orders were received to disestablish the squadron.

15 Sep 1945: VPB-43 was disestablished at NAS Seattle, Wash.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS San Diego, Calif.	21 Jul 1941
NAS Alameda, Calif.	22 Sep 1942
NAS Tongue Point, Ore.	1 Jul 1943
NAS Seattle, Wash.	23 Apr 1944
NAS Whidbey Island, Wash.	6 Jun 1944
NAS Seattle, Wash.	18 Jul 1945

Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
LCDR Carroll B. Jones	1 Jul 1941
LCDR H. L. Ray	Apr 1942
LCDR Gerald E. Pierson	May 1943
LCDR John A. Horton	29 Aug 1943
LCDR Marshall C. Freerks	20 Feb 1944
LCDR Shelby O. Cole	6 Jun 1944
LCDR Robert E. Huddleston	Aug 1945

Aircraft Assignment

<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
PBY-5	Jul 1941
PBY-5A	Jul 1943

Major Overseas Deployments

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
1 Apr 1942	May 1942	PatWing-4	Kodiak	PBY-5	NorPac
6 Jun 1942	20 Sep 1942	PatWing-4	Nazan Bay <i>Gillis</i> (AVD 12) <i>Casco</i> (AVP 12) <i>Hulbert</i> (AVP 19)	PBY-5	NorPac
17 Oct 1942	1 Feb 1943	PatWing-4	Adak	PBY-5	NorPac
1 Feb 1943	1 Jun 1943	FAW-4	Dutch Harbor	PBY-5	NorPac
4 Oct 1943	12 Nov 1943	FAW-4	Shemya Isl.	PBY-5A	NorPac
12 Nov 1943	23 Apr 1943	FAW-4	Attu	PBY-5	NorPac
6 Oct 1944	21 Jul 1945	FAW-4	Adak	PBY-5A	NorPac

Wing Assignments

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
PatWing-1		21 Jul 1941
PatWing-4		6 Jun 1942
FAW-14		20 Sep 1942
PatWing-4/FAW-4*		17 Oct 1942
FAW-6		1 Jul 1943
FAW-4		11 Oct 1943
FAW-6		23 Apr 1944
FAW-4		6 Oct 1944

Wing Assignments—Continued

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-6		21 Jul 1945

* Patrol Wing 4 (PatWing-4) was redesignated Fleet Air Wing 4 (FAW-4) on 1 November 1942.

Unit Awards Received

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
NUC	8 Jun 1942 – 1 Aug 1942

VPB-44

Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron FORTY FOUR (VP-44) on 3 June 1941.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron FORTY FOUR (VPB-44) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 20 June 1945.

Squadron Insignia and Nickname

VP-44 was one of the later Black Cat squadrons in WWII. The nickname came from the black paint scheme applied to the Catalinas for night operations.



The squadron's Black Cat insignia.

The Black Cat in the squadron's insignia depicted its stealth in the dark as well as surprise and viciousness in its attack. The outline of the yellow moon emphasized the night operations, suggesting that cats operate best when the moon is full. Colors: moon, yellow; cat, black and white; background, black.

Nickname: Black Cats, 1942–1945.

Chronology of Significant Events

3 Jun 1941: VP-44 was established at NAS San Diego, Calif., under the operational control of PatWing-1, as a seaplane squadron flying the PBY-5A Catalina. Ground and flight training was conducted at San Diego.

Dec 1941–Mar 1942: VP-44 received advanced operational training at NAS Alameda, Calif., from 14

December 1941 until the squadron began preparations for transpac to Hawaii at the end of March 1942. While at Alameda, the squadron came under the operational control of PatWing-6.

26 Mar 1942: VP-44 flew its transpac to NAS Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, coming under the operational control of PatWing-2. Operational and combat training was conducted in conjunction with patrols over the waters off Oahu.

22 May–Jun 1942: VP-44 transferred to Midway Island to provide combat patrols, joining Catalinas from VPs 14, 23, 24, 51, 72, 91 and 44. There were 32 PBY-5 and 5A aircraft at Midway awaiting the arrival of the Japanese due to decoded intercepts detailing their plans to attack Midway Island. The aircraft were split into two groups—one operating with 22 aircraft from Sand Island, the other with 10 aircraft operating from Eastern Island. Sector searches were flown out to 700 miles from Midway commencing at 0415 each morning. The squadrons were handicapped at this stage of the war by the lack of radar on the aircraft. All sightings had to be done by the "Mark I eyeball." On 3 June, Ensign Jewell H. Reid and his crew were the first to spot the Japanese task force approaching Midway. On the night of 3–4 June, four squadron aircraft conducted an attack with obsolete Mark XIII torpedoes on a portion of the Japanese task force, causing damage to the Japanese tanker *Akebono Maru*. On 6 June, Lieutenant (jg) R. S. Whitman and his crew were attacked by three Japanese floatplanes and forced down. Whitman and ACRM C. Adams were killed in the attack. The aircraft was successfully ditched by the copilot, Ensign L. H. Camp, who then died of his wounds. AMM1c Virgil R. Marsh remained in the burning Catalina while his crew exited the sinking aircraft, holding off the attacking Japanese aircraft. The survivors were picked up later that day. The squadron returned to Pearl Harbor on 9 June. The other squadrons remained at Midway through the 25th conducting SAR missions for dive-bomber aircrews shot down during the Battle for Midway.

9 Jun–Sep 1942: VP-44 continued its patrols from NAS Pearl Harbor over the waters of Oahu, with a detachment at Johnston Island. On 26 September, the Pearl Harbor section of the squadron, including the headquarters staff, relocated to the recently completed NAS Kaneohe Bay facility. Two VP-44 aircraft were transferred to other squadrons reducing the complement to 10 aircraft.

21 Dec 1942: VP-44 turned in its 10 PBY-5A aircraft in return for 12 PBY-5 Catalinas. These aircraft were then equipped with twin 30-caliber guns and Mark IX gunsights.

22 Dec 1942–May 1943: The squadron received orders to deploy to the combat zone at Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides, under the operational control of FAW-1. A detachment of two aircraft was sent to

Halavo Beach, Florida Islands, for Dumbo searches only. Many of the missions flown from Halavo went deep into enemy territory. For those flights fighter escorts often accompanied the Catalinas. While based at Espiritu Santo during the months of February and March 1943 the squadron carried numerous Dumbo missions and transported equipment and personnel during the Solomons campaign. In May 1943, the squadron received two aircraft from VP-72, increasing the complement of Catalinas to 14 PBY-5s. Attacks on the Catalinas during this period were frequent. No less than 12 attacks by Mavis flying boats and Nell bombers were recorded on squadron aircraft, but with no losses.

26 Jun 1943: VP-44 was relieved for return to NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, and then on to the U.S. By 20 July 1943 VP-44 had arrived at NAS San Diego, Calif., coming under the operational control of FAW-14. All hands were given orders and home leave.

29 Sep 1943–Feb 1944: VP-44 was reformed at NAS San Diego, Calif., and conducted training in preparation for its second tour in the combat zone. It is interesting to note that, unlike the other Black Cat squadrons in the South Pacific, VP-44 was designated as such from the start. Its aircraft came from the factory with a flat-black finish instead of Navy blue, as

was the normal practice. Training was completed in January 1944 and the squadron conducted its transpac to NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii. It was discovered that the new amphibious PBY-5A with wheels did not have the range of its predecessor the PBY-5, and could not fly all the way to Hawaii with its wheels attached. The squadron found some PV-1 drop tanks at San Diego that they were able to fit to the wings of the Catalinas that gave them the range needed to make it to Hawaii. This then became standard procedure for the squadrons that followed. From 18 January to 13 February, the squadron departed NAS San Diego in pairs bound for Kaneohe.

1 Feb 1944: The squadron remained at Kaneohe, under the operational control of FAW-2, for five weeks of intensive training with emphasis on ASW techniques.

11 Mar 1944: VP-44 was deployed to Luganville Airfield on Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, under the operational control of FAW-1. A detachment of aircraft was maintained for convoy coverage at Nausori. ASW training resumed at Luganville Airfield, with the addition of two new technical aids: the sonobuoy and a searchlight with 80 million candlepower. Antishipping searches, ASW patrols and rescue missions were the primary missions at both locations.



Personnel checking a PBY-5A before it leaves the airstrip on Majuro Island, March 1944.

15 Jun 1944: VP-44 moved to Green Island, halfway between Bougainville and Rabaul, only 150 miles from the enemy stronghold. A PATSU was available for maintenance of squadron aircraft and the berthing and feeding of unit personnel. Patrol missions involved flying daily search sectors extending in a northerly direction to within 200 miles of Truk. ASW operations were discontinued. Patrol missions ceased after 18 August when the primary mission of the squadron was changed to keeping 17 nearby enemy airfields neutralized and to prevent shipping at night from getting to the bypassed Japanese garrisons. Nightly Black Cat raids were conducted and the squadron maintained standby aircraft for ASW and Dumbo missions during the day. Nightly hunts were usually coordinated with one of the PT boat squadrons stationed on Green Island. The Cats would spot the target at night with their radar, then illuminate the scene for the PT boats. Both would then join in on the kill. Attacks were usually made with 4 500-pound ANM-64 bombs and 40 20-pound fragmentation bombs. On one nighttime mission over Rabaul, an enemy floatplane fighter attacked Lieutenant Lloyd Garrison and his crew. In the ensuing combat they managed to shoot down the fighter. Upon return, the jubilant crew was informed that confirmation was needed before credit could be authorized. Undaunted, the crew returned early the next morning and took pictures in broad daylight of the smoking wreckage still floating in the bay at Rabaul. They were duly given credit for the deed.

4 Sep–Dec 1944: VP-44 operational control was changed from FAW-1 to FAW-2. By this stage of the war, Japanese resistance had been broken and Rabaul neutralized. It was the squadron's job to see that 17 enemy airfields were regularly bombed to prevent their use and to intercept resupply ships and barges attempting to reinforce Japanese troops on Bougainville and New Ireland. A detachment of three aircraft was maintained for a few months at Torokina airstrip on Bougainville for Dumbo work with Marine air units. This group was nearly overrun during a

Banzai attack by the last remaining Japanese troops on Bougainville in December 1944.

1 Dec 1944: VPB-44 operational control was shifted from FAW-2 to Commander Air Seventh Fleet (ComAir7thFlt). Six squadron aircraft were utilized for passenger and mail runs between Hollandia, New Guinea and Leyte, Philippines. The squadron also conducted resupply for the Australian coastwatchers, flying to such remote islands as Pinipel, Feni, Nuguria, Lehir and Ontong Java.

Jan–Feb 1945: The squadron remained based primarily on Green Island, with one aircraft at Hollandia and two at the Seaplane Base Repair Base #1 on Manus Island. Black Cat missions were officially terminated on 10 February with the complete neutralization of Rabaul and the primary mission of the squadron shifted to Dumbo work.

Mar 1945: A three-aircraft detachment was located at Manus and a two-aircraft detachment at Emirau Island for Dumbo work. The squadron at Green Island was primarily assigned air freight, ASW standby and Dumbo missions.

11 Apr 1945: VPB-44 was relieved by VPB-53 for return to the United States. The squadron arrived at NAS Kaneohe on 21 April and boarded *Cape Esperance* (CVE 88) for return to San Diego, Calif. Upon arrival on 1 May, the squadron was given orders reassigning all personnel.

20 Jun 1945: VPB-44 was disestablished at NAS San Diego, Calif.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS San Diego, Calif.	3 Jun 1941
NAS Alameda, Calif.	14 Dec 1941
NAS Pearl Harbor, Hawaii	26 Mar 1942
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	26 Sep 1942
NAS San Diego, Calif.	Jul 1943
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	18 Jan 1944
NAS San Diego, Calif.	1 May 1945

Squadron PBV-5A Black Cats on Fiji Islands (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection).



Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
LCDR W. C. Holt	3 Jun 1941	PBY-5A	Jun 1941
LCDR R. C. Brixner	Oct 1941	PBY-5	Dec 1942
LCDR R. A. Rosasco	Dec 1942	PBY-5	Sep 1943
LCDR G. S. Bogart	29 Sep 1943	PBY-5A	

Aircraft Assignment**Major Overseas Deployments**

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
26 Mar 1942	22 May 1942	PatWing-2	Pearl Harbor	PBY-5A	WestPac
22 May 1942	22 Dec 1942	PatWing-2	Midway	PBY-5A	WestPac
22 Dec 1942	20 Jul 1943	FAW-1	Espiritu Santo	PBY-5	SoPac
18 Jan 1944	*	FAW-2	Kaneohe	PBY-5A	WestPac
11 Mar 1944	*	FAW-1	Espiritu Santo	PBY-5A	SoPac
15 Jun 1944	1 May 1945	FAW-1/2	Green Island	PBY-5A	SoPac

* Continued combat deployment in the Pacific, moving from base to base.



A squadron PBY delivering supplies to a coast watcher on Lihir Island (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection).

Wing Assignments

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
PatWing-1		3 Jun 1941
PatWing-6		14 Dec 1941
PatWing-2/FAW-2 [†]		26 Mar 1942
FAW-1		22 Dec 1942
FAW-14		Jul 1943
FAW-2		18 Jan 1944
FAW-1		11 Mar 1944
FAW-2		4 Sep 1944
ComAir7thFlt		1 Dec 1944

Wing Assignments—Continued

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-14		1 May 1945

[†] Patrol Wing 2 (PatWing-2) was redesignated Fleet Air Wing 2 (FAW-2) on 1 November 1942.

Unit Awards Received

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
None on record.	

Squadron personnel at a morning muster (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection).



VPB-45

Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron FORTY FIVE (VP-45) on 10 March 1943.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron FORTY FIVE (VPB-45) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 5 June 1945.

Squadron Insignia and Nickname

None on record.

Chronology of Significant Events

10 Mar–Apr 1943: VP-45 was established at NAS Seattle, Wash., as a seaplane squadron flying the PBY-5 Catalina. The actual training of the squadron took place at NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., through mid-April 1943. During this period VP-45 came under the operational control of FAW-6.

22 Apr–Jun 1943: With training completed, six of the squadron's aircraft were relocated to Alaska, arriving at Kodiak on 27 April and Adak on 1 May 1943. The squadron officially deployed to Kodiak, Alaska, in May and came under the operational control of FAW-4. The squadron arrived just in time for the occupation of Attu, in the Aleutian chain. Japanese forces had occupied this small island on 7 June 1942. On 28 May 1943, General Yamaziki of the Imperial Japanese Army received a surrender invitation via air drop by a VP-43 Catalina. He refused and the U.S. Army took Attu on 29 June. While the campaign for Attu was going on, tender *Casco* (AVP 12) provided support for VP-45 operations which consisted of antishipping strikes in the vicinity of Attu, Amchitka and Kiska.

4 May 1943: The first regular patrols by VP-45 began from NAF Amchitka and beyond Attu towards the Kuriles.

30 Jun 1943: With the capture of Attu, larger facilities for coping with the requirements of a seaplane squadron became available. The remaining six aircraft of the squadron, which had been waiting impatiently at Seattle, deployed to augment the *Casco* group. Until shore facilities were built, the squadron continued open sea operations from the tender *Casco* (AVP 12) at Attu.

10–19 Jul 1943: VP-45 made its first bombing run on Paramushiro, Kurile Islands. The bombs were released by radar at night in overcast with unknown results. This performance was repeated on 19 July 1943.

10 Aug–9 Oct 1943: VP-45 personnel were able to move ashore at Attu. Duties consisted primarily of sector searches for enemy activity, which by this time had

been largely eliminated. Casco Cove at Attu was too small to provide adequate protection for the entire squadron and facilities for use of beaching gear for the nonamphibious PBY-5s was nonexistent. On 9 October 1943, the squadron was relieved by VP-43 for return to Seattle, where the squadron could be refitted with new PBY-5A amphibious aircraft.

14 Jan 1944: VP-45 was reformed at Seattle, Wash., with amphibious PBY-5A aircraft and new personnel. Operational control was exercised by FAW-6. Training took place at NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., but instead of returning north upon completion of refitting and training, the squadron received orders in early March to proceed southeast to Norfolk, Va.

15 Mar 1944: VP-45 departed NAS Whidbey Island for NAS Norfolk, where it came under the operational control of FAW-5. Shortly after arrival the squadron was relocated to Boca Chica, Fla., where it was given training, as well as conducting operational ASW patrols.

29 Apr 1944: VP-45 deployed to NAF Belem, Brazil, with detachments maintained at NAF Amapa and NAF Sao Luiz, Brazil. Duties consisted of sweeps and anti-submarine patrols. Operational control over the squadron was exercised by FAW-16.

7 Jun 1944: A detachment was sent to NAF Fernando de Neronha Island to conduct daily sector sweeps and antisubmarine patrols. Facilities at this tiny base located 210 miles off the eastern coast of Brazil were cramped and primitive. VP-45 shared the base with PV-1 Ventura landplane detachments from VBs 125, 134 and 145 based out of NAF Pici Field, Forteleza, Brazil.

1 Oct 1944: VP-45 was redesignated VPB-45. During this period the squadron conducted routine patrols and was additionally tasked with training Brazilian aircrews at NAF Galeao Field, Rio de Janeiro.

Jan 1945: One aircraft was reported overdue from a patrol and presumed lost. Although weather may have been a factor, enemy action was more probable as German U-boats were increasingly heavily armed. In the previous year several Navy patrol aircraft had been shot down or damaged while attempting to complete a bombing run on surfaced submarines.

Feb 1945: Six of the squadron's aircraft were detached to Ascension Island for antisubmarine patrols and convoy coverage.

15 Mar–22 May 1945: VP-45 was relocated to NAF Ipitanga, Bahia, Brazil. Routine patrols were resumed until orders were received on 22 May 1945 for return to the continental United States.

27 May 1945: VP-45 reported aboard NAS Norfolk, Va., under the operational control of FAW-5.

5 Jun 1945: VP-45 was disestablished at NAS Norfolk.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS Seattle, Wash.	10 Mar 1943
NAS Norfolk, Va.	15 Mar 1944

Commanding Officers—Continued

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
LCDR C. Atkinson	14 Jan 1944
LCDR H. B. Scott	8 Jun 1944
LCDR L. E. Binion	7 May 1945

Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
LT Guy Howard (actg)	10 Mar 1943
LT Carl H. Amme	1 May 1943

Aircraft Assignment

<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
PBY-5	Mar 1943
PBY-5A	Jan 1944

Major Overseas Deployments

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
22 Apr 1943	*	FAW-4	Kodiak <i>Casco</i> (AVP 12)	PBY-5	NorPac
30 Jun 1943	9 Oct 1943	FAW-4	Attu <i>Casco</i> (AVP 12)	PBY-5	NorPac
29 Apr 1944	†	FAW-16	Belem	PBY-5A	SoLant
15 Mar 1945	27 May 1945	FAW-16	Ipitanga	PBY-5A	SoLant

* Continued combat deployment in the Aleutians, moving from base to base.

† Continued combat deployment in South America, moving from base to base.

Air Wing Assignments

<i>Air Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-6		10 Mar 1943
FAW-4		22 Apr 1943
FAW-6		Oct 1943
FAW-5		15 Mar 1944
FAW-16		29 Apr 1944

Air Wing Assignments—Continued

<i>Air Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-5		27 May 1945

Unit Awards Received

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
None on record.	

VPB-52

Lineage

Established as Torpedo Squadron THREE D FIFTEEN (VT-3D15) on 12 July 1928.

Redesignated Patrol Squadron THREE-S (VP-3S) on 21 January 1931.

Redesignated Patrol Squadron THREE Base Force (VP-3F) on 17 July 1933.

Redesignated Patrol Squadron THREE (VP-3) on 1 October 1937.

Redesignated Patrol Squadron THIRTY TWO (VP-32) on 1 July 1939.

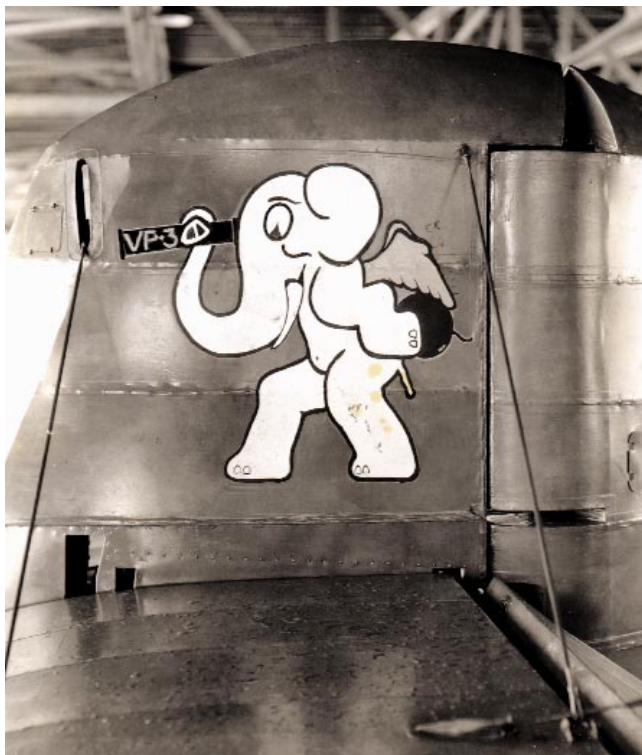
Redesignated Patrol Squadron FIFTY TWO (VP-52) on 1 July 1941.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron FIFTY TWO (VPB-52) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 7 April 1945.

Squadron Insignia

The squadron's first insignia was created by VT-3D15 and approved by the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics on 11 July 1929. The somewhat amateurish appearance of the original design showed a gray elephant holding a black bomb behind his back, with a telescope held to his eye by his trunk. A set of wings adorned the back. Wings and telescope were



The squadron's first insignia as displayed on the tail of its aircraft.



The squadron's insignia approved by the Bureau of Aeronautics.

highlighted in yellow. Size of the insignia on the squadron aircraft was 21 inches overall. The significance of the design is unknown.

With the redesignation of VT-3D15 to VP-3S on 21 January 1931, the same insignia continued in use. On 1 April 1937, the squadron submitted a modified design for bureau approval. The appearance of the elephant was somewhat less cartoonish, and the entire design was centered on a red background. All other colors remained the same. BuAer approved the modified design on 20 April 1937, which continued in use through numerous redesignations from 1937 until the squadron's disestablishment in 1945.

Nickname: No nickname is on record for the squadron, although it has been suggested that the original design in 1929 contained a pink elephant that was soon changed to official Navy gray, lest a nickname be attached that would not reflect favorably on the Navy!

Chronology of Significant Events

12 Jul 1928: VT-3D15 established at NAS Coco Solo, C.Z., as a torpedo bomber squadron flying the T3M-2 twin floatplane. The squadron's primary mission was observation and protection of Coco Solo zone against hostile forces.

21 Jan 1931: VT-3D15 was redesignated Patrol Squadron 3 (VP-3S), Scouting Force, at NAS Coco Solo, C.Z., with 18 PM-1 aircraft. Training and patrol operations were the order of the day.

1 Jul 1931: NAS Coco Solo, home port for the squadron, was redesignated Fleet Air Base (FAB) Coco

Solo. The redesignation of both the squadron and its home port indicated a change in mission from coastal defense to fleet aircraft. VP-3S participated in operations with the fleet in concert with VP-8S, off the coast of Cuba, in a portion of Fleet Problem XII. *Wright* (AV 1) provided tender support. VP-3S returned to FAB Coco Solo on 30 July 1931.

17 Jul 1933: The squadron came under the control of the fleet Base Force Command and was redesignated Patrol Squadron Three Base Force (VP-3F) with

12 PM-1s supported by *Swan* (AM 34) and *Lapwing* (AM 1).

21 Apr 1934: VP-3F conducted massed flights in exercises with VPs 2F, 3F, 5F, 7F and 9F during Fleet Problem XV held off the coast of Panama. The squadron's participation in the problem lasted through 28 May 1934.

1 Jan 1935: VPs 3F and 5F conducted exercises with tenders *Wright* (AV 1), *Lapwing* (AM 1), *Teal* (AM 23) and *Gannet* (AM 41) to test the ability of sur-



A squadron P2D-1 in flight.

face vessels to support flying boat operations at remote locations.

21–22 Jun 1937: Twelve PBY-1 Catalinas of VP-3F under the command of Lieutenant Robert W. Morse flew nonstop from NAS San Diego, Calif., to FAB Coco Solo, C.Z., completing the 3,292-mile flight in 27 hours and 58 minutes.

1 Oct 1937: The squadron was redesignated Patrol Squadron Three (VP-3) and became part of the new patrol wing organization under PatWing-3.

20 Feb 1939: VPs 3, 5 and 2 participated in Fleet Problem XX conducted in the Caribbean and coastal waters of South America. PatWing-3 aircraft were part of Black Force, taking part in bombing attacks against White Force vessels. The exercises clearly demonstrated the extreme vulnerability of the slow-moving patrol flying boats against organized antiaircraft fire of support vessels. An attack on a flying boat base also demonstrated the vulnerability of the aircraft when on the ground or in the water, as compared to dispersion with tenders at remote sites.

14 Apr 1939: Aircraft of VPs 3, 2 and 5 mapped 1,076 miles of South American coastline from Nicaragua to the Colombian border. The achievement was significant given the prevailing state of the weather during this period and the poor conditions for aerial photography.

Feb 1940: VP-32 relieved VP-33 of Neutrality Patrol duty, flying out of Guantanamo, Cuba. The Neutrality Patrol was created in response to the German invasion of Poland in August 1939. This invasion set the stage for global conflict with the potential for Axis surface merchant raiders and submarines to prey on British vessels in U.S. territorial waters. President Roosevelt issued his first proclamation of neutrality on 5 September 1939, declaring waters within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S. off-limits to military operations of belligerent powers. The Neutrality Patrol would extend east of Boston and south of Trinidad in the Caribbean. VPs 51, 52, 53, 54 and 33 were the first squadrons to be assigned to the Neutrality Patrol, supported by four tenders.



A formation of squadron PB5Ys.

29 Jun 1940: VP-32 was relieved by VP-33 on Neutrality Patrol duty.

1 Jun 1941: After VP-32 was relocated to its home port at NAS Norfolk, Va., the squadron turned in its well-used PB5Y-2 and PB5Y-3 aircraft, obtaining six new PB5Y-5s at NAS San Diego, Calif. Six more aircraft were flown to NAS Norfolk on 7 July 1941.

17 Jul 1941: VP-52 personnel and material were loaded aboard *Curtiss* (AV 4) for transport to Guantanamo, Cuba, to relieve VP-81. Using Guantanamo as a base of operations, the squadron conducted an aerial survey of Bermuda, Cuba and Great Exuma Island. During these operations tender support was provided by *Albemarle* (AV 5) and *George E. Badger* (AVP 16). VP-52 returned to NAS Norfolk in August 1941 to prepare the squadron for redeployment to South America.

23 Aug 1941: A six-aircraft detachment was sent to San Juan, P.R., for Neutrality Patrol duties.

5 Nov 1941--Mar 1942: All of VP-52's well-worn PB5Y-5s were turned over to VP-51 in exchange for its new PB5Y-5 patrol planes. Commencing immediately after the exchange, the squadron deployed to Natal, Brazil. After five months of operations from Natal, VP-83 relieved VP-52 of patrol duties at Natal and returned to NAS Norfolk, Va. in March 1942.

23 Apr 1942: The VP-52 administrative staff remained at NAS Norfolk, while the aircrews and support staff deployed to Bermuda. Once on station, the squadron conducted convoy protection and ASW patrols in the central Atlantic.

May 1943: VP-52 turned over six crews and six PB5Y-5 aircraft to VP-31, NAS Pensacola, Fla., and the remaining members of the squadron were sent to NAS San Diego, Calif. Upon arrival, the crews and support personnel upon arrival at San Diego began preparations for a transpac, while the crews with VP-31 at Pensacola participated in ASW duties in Caribbean waters.



A squadron PB5Y undergoing a wash down.

31 May 1943: With the squadron reunited, the support staff, ground crews and material departed aboard *Long Island* (CVE 1) for NAS Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Two days later the aircrews began the transpac from San Diego to Pearl Harbor.

9 Jun 1943: Five aircraft and six crews were deployed to Canton Island for training and patrol duty, with a three-aircraft detachment sent to Johnston Island.

2 Jul 1943: Seven aircraft and seven crews were deployed to Midway for training and patrol duty.

30 Jul 1943: The squadron was reunited at NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, to prepare for deployment to Perth, Australia.

7 Aug 1943: VP-52 arrived at Perth, Australia, and commenced reconnaissance patrols and operations from advanced bases in the southwest Pacific. Detachments were located at Exmouth Gulf, Geraldton and Perth.

16 Oct 1943: VP-52 commenced Black Cat operations from Palm Island and New Guinea.

22 Nov 1943: The squadron was transferred to Namoai Bay, New Guinea, where it conducted Black Cat night antishipping patrols at masthead levels.

25 Nov–23 Dec 1943: Lieutenant Alex N. McInnis, Jr., led his PBY Catalina on night missions against enemy combatants and convoys in the Bismarck Archipelago during extremely adverse and hazardous weather conditions. During this period of operation

from 25 November to 23 December 1943 he successfully carried out a low-altitude attack on a large merchant vessel. He experienced heavy antiaircraft fire from enemy combatants but was able to drop his thousand pound bomb on the merchant ship, leaving it in flames and still burning three hours after the attack. For his actions during the attacks between 25 November and 23 December 1943 he was awarded the Navy Cross.

26 Nov 1943: Lieutenant William J. Lahodney and his crew conducted a night attack on an enemy task force consisting of a cruiser and three destroyers in the waters off Rabaul. Lahodney's bombs heavily damaged the enemy cruiser, but his own aircraft sustained severe damage with over 100 holes in the wings and fuselage from the intense AA fire. Lahodney managed to fly the perforated Catalina over mountainous terrain and stormy seas for four hours to arrive safely at his home base. For his heroic actions and skillful flying he was awarded the Navy Cross.

10 Dec 1943: Lieutenant (jg) Rudolph Lloyd and his crew made an attack at night on a large enemy freighter in the Bismarck Archipelago under extremely adverse weather conditions. After dropping their bomb on the target, Lieutenant Lloyd returned and made strafing attacks on the ship until it sank.

14 Dec 1943: Lieutenant (jg) Lloyd and his crew conducted a night attack on ships in Kavieng



Squadron personnel on one of its PBY-5s nicknamed Pugnacious Puss, October 1943.

Harbor during adverse weather conditions. A bombing run was made on what appeared to be a small enemy cruiser or large destroyer and two hits were observed. Lloyd returned to make a strafing pass, but was forced to retreat by intense AA fire and the arrival of enemy fighter aircraft. For his courageous actions on the nights of 10 and 14 December, Lieutenant Lloyd was awarded the Navy Cross.

13 May 1944: VP-52 conducted missions from Humboldt Bay, Hollandia, in the area of New Guinea, New Britain and in the Bismarck Sea.

15 Jul 1944: The squadron was transferred to Woendi Lagoon where it conducted antisubmarine patrols and Dumbo air-sea rescue missions for downed flyers in support of the bombing of Woleai, Truk and Yap islands.

18 Sep 1944: VP-52 operated from NAF Manus Island, with rotation of detachments to Treasury, Green and Emirau islands.

9 Dec 1944: VPB-52 was reunited for transfer to the United States via NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, arriving at NAS San Diego, Calif., aboard the *Breton* (CVE 23) on 31 December.

7 Apr 1945: VPB-52 was disestablished.



A squadron Black Cat in flight, February 1944.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS Coco Solo, C.Z.	12 Jul 1928
FAB Coco Solo, C.Z.	1 Jul 1931
NAS Coco Solo, C.Z.	30 Sep 1939
San Juan, P.R.	27 Mar 1941
NAS Norfolk, Va.	1 Jun 1941
NAS San Diego, Calif.	11 Feb 1943
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	2 Jun 1943
NAS San Diego, Calif.	9 Dec 1944

Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
Unknown	1928–1932
LCDR George L. Compo	14 Apr 1933
LCDR Fred C. Dickey	26 Jun 1935
LT Rorbert W. Morse	29 Mar 1937



A squadron PBY-5A taxiing, February 1944.

Commanding Officers—Continued

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
LCDR William H. Hamilton	2 May 1939	PM-1	Jul 1928
LCDR Thomas A. Turner, Jr.	May 1940	P2D-1	1933
CDR F. M. Hammit	May 1942	PBY-1	Aug 1937
CDR Frank M. Nichols	Apr 1943	PBY-2	Feb 1940
CDR Harold A. Sommer	Sep 1943	PBY-2	Feb 1940
CDR Rennix N. Isner, Jr.	Aug 1944	PBY-5	Jun 1941

Aircraft Assignment

A squadron P2D-1 on the launching ramp.

Major Overseas Deployments

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
1 Feb 1940	29 Jun 1940	PatWing-5	Guantanamo	PBY-2	Carib
17 Jul 1941	18 Aug 1941	PatWing-5	Guantanamo	PBY-5	Carib
			<i>Albemarle (AV 5)</i>		
			<i>George E. Badger (AVP 16)</i>		
23 Aug 1941	Nov 1941	PatWing-5	San Juan	PBY-5	Carib
5 Nov 1941	27 Mar 1942	FAW-3	Natal	PBY-5	SoLant
23 Apr 1942	11 Feb 1943	FAW-5	Bermuda	PBY-5	Lant
2 Jun 1943	9 Jun 1943	FAW-2	Kaneohe	PBY-5	WestPac
9 Jun 1943	30 Jul 1943	FAW-2	Canton & Johnson Is.	PBY-5	SoPac
2 Jul 1943	30 Jul 1943	FAW-2	Midway Is.	PBY-5	WestPac
7 Aug 1943	*	FAW-10	Perth	PBY-5	SoPac
22 Nov 1943	*	FAW-17	Namoai Bay	PBY-5	SoPac
23 Dec 1943	*	FAW-17	Port Moresby	PBY-5	SoPac
12 Feb 1944	*	FAW-17	Palm Is.	PBY-5	SoPac
26 Mar 1944	*	FAW-17	<i>Tangier (AV 8)</i>	PBY-5	SoPac
			<i>San Pablo (AVP 30)</i>		
13 May 1944	*	FAW-17	Humboldt Bay	PBY-5	SoPac
15 Jul 1944	*	FAW-17	Woendi	PBY-5	SoPac



A formation of squadron PBX-5As, December 1943.

Major Overseas Deployments—Continued

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
18 Sep 1944	*	FAW-17	Manus	PBX-5	SoPac
9 Oct 1944	9 Dec 1944	FAW-17	Hollandia Woendi	PBX-5	SoPac

* Continued combat deployment in the Pacific, moving from base to base.

Wing Assignments

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
Naval District 15		12 Jul 1928
Scouting Force		21 Jan 1931
Base Force		17 Jul 1933
PatWing-3		1 Oct 1933
PatWing-5		Feb 1940
FAW-3		5 Nov 1941
FAW-5		Mar 1942
FAW-2		2 Jun 1943
FAW-10		31 Jul 1943
FAW-17		16 Oct 1943
FAW-14		31 Dec 1944

Unit Awards

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
PUC	15 Sep 1943 – 1 Feb 1944



Squadron personnel on one of its PBX-5s nicknamed Alley Cat, October 1943, 80-G-223051.



A formation of squadron Black Cats, December 1943.

VPB-54

Lineage

Established as Patrol Squadron FIFTY FOUR (VP-54) on 15 November 1942.

Redesignated Patrol Bombing Squadron FIFTY FOUR (VPB-54) on 1 October 1944.

Disestablished on 7 April 1945.

Squadron Insignia and Nickname

Although there is no record of any official insignia on file, a February 1943 photograph of the squadron commanding officer standing next to a VP-54 Catalina shows an insignia of a snarling black cat crouched on top of a bomb. Members of the squadron state that a full moon served as a background for the design. Colors: moon background, orange; cat and bomb, black with white outlining; cat's tongue, red; teeth and whiskers, white.

Nickname: Black Cats, 1942–1945.

Chronology of Significant Events

15 Nov 1942–12 Feb 1943: VP-54 was established at NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, as a seaplane squadron flying the PBV-5A Catalina under the operational control of FAW-2. Formation and training of the squadron



The squadron's Black Cat insignia.

continued through 11 February 1943. Although 12 aircraft was the normal complement for a squadron, 18 aircraft were on board by the end of the year. On 12 February 1943, VP-54 was ordered to convert to a night flying unit with two weeks training time prior to transfer to the combat zone.

1 Mar 1943: The first element of aircraft departed NAS Kaneohe for NOB Espiritu Santo, with the last aircraft arriving in early April. During this period of operations the squadron came under the operational control of FAW-1. While en route, four aircraft were caught at NAF Canton Island in a surprise night raid by Japanese Mitsubishi G4M1 Navy Type 1 (Betty) attack bombers. All four Catalinas were destroyed.

11 Mar 1943: VP-54 began sending its aircraft to Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, relieving VP-12. Its duties were to conduct antishipping patrols in the Solomons area in support of the forces occupying the island and Dumbo missions in support of downed air-

crews. The initial landings on Guadalcanal had been made on 7 August 1942, encountering strong Japanese resistance. The island was not declared secure until 9 February 1943. Patrol tracks included Russell Island, the southwest coast of Santa Isobel and the northern tip of Malaita and Savo Island.

5 Aug 1943: During the Rendova and Munda Island campaigns in the Solomons, the Japanese attempted to remove as many of their ground forces as possible from isolated garrisons. VP-54 conducted numerous antishipping attacks on transports during this period.

7 Sep 1943: VP-54 was based at NAB Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, with seven aircraft, NOB Espiritu Santo with one aircraft and Noumea with three aircraft.

7 Oct 1943: VP-54 provided support for the forces attacking Vella Lavella, Solomons.

1 Nov 1943: VP-54 was tasked with providing anti-submarine coverage, search missions and air coverage at the beginning of the Bougainville campaign. By the end of the campaign the squadron's tour of duty drew to a close. Since arriving in the combat theater the squadron had recovered 52 personnel from the water, including downed pilots and survivors of ship sinkings.

20 Nov 1943: VP-54 was relieved and flew its aircraft to Sidney, Australia. The aircraft remained at Sidney while the squadron personnel were returned to the U.S. aboard ship. After a period of home leave, a cadre of personnel were given orders to report to NAS San Diego, Calif., for reforming the squadron.

6 Feb 1944: VP-54 was reformed at NAS San Diego, Calif., under the operational control of FAW-14, with new PBV-5A aircraft to replace the ones left in Australia. By May the squadron had fully integrated its new personnel and equipment and was ready for re-deployment.

20 May 1944: VP-54 departed NAS San Diego in elements of three aircraft, with the last arriving at NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii, on 21 May 1944. The remainder of the squadron and its assets were sent to Hawaii aboard *Breton* (CVE 10). Upon arrival at NAS Kaneohe the squadron came under the operational control of FAW-2.

28 May 1944: A detachment of six aircraft and nine crews was deployed to Midway Island until 2 July 1944, conducting routine operational patrols. The remaining squadron assets at NAS Kaneohe continued to perform routine patrols in Hawaiian waters.

8 Jul 1944: VP-54 deployed to Guadalcanal in three-plane sections, leaving NAS Kaneohe every other day. The first section arrived at Espiritu Santo on 12 July, continuing on to Carney Field, Guadalcanal, to relieve VP-81. During this period the squadron came under the operational control of FAW-1.

31 Jul 1944: VP-54 was relocated to Luganville Airfield, Espiritu Santo, relieving VP-12. A detachment



A formation of Black Cats, 80-G-301450.

of four PBY-5As was maintained at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, for duty with the 2nd Marine Air Wing through 10 September 1944. The squadron aircraft at Luganville conducted routine ASW patrols and Dumbo searches.

13 Sep 1944: VP-54 deployed 13 aircraft and 15 crews to Emirau. Two aircraft were sent to Funafuti. Both detachments returned to Espiritu Santo on 21 September 1944.

22 Sep 1944: Long-range navigation over large areas of the ocean was difficult for large aircraft with a full time navigator and extremely difficult for single-seat fighters. The Navy was frequently called upon by the Army Air Forces to provide seaplane escorts for fighter groups making long transits between island bases. The presence of amphibious Navy aircraft also ensured a quick rescue in the event of ditching. VP-54 conducted such a mission on 22 September, escorting the Western Caroline Air Force from Emirau to Peleliu Island, staging through Hollandia and Owi.

24 Sep 1944: A three-aircraft element was sent on a night search for enemy shipping in the passage north of Peleliu.

1 Oct 1944: VP-54 was redesignated VPB-54. On this date, the squadron provided an escort for Marine squadrons being transferred from Emirau to Palau.

4 Nov 1944: A detachment of six aircraft and crews remained at Peleliu Island, Palau, for Dumbo missions. The other seven squadron aircraft remained at Espiritu Santo.

10 Nov 1944: VPB-54 was relieved by RNZAF Squadron No. 5, but lacking further orders remained at Espiritu Santo until mid-December.

12–23 Dec 1944: The seven aircraft of the Espiritu Santo detachment of VPB-54 were relocated to the island of Los Negros. On 23 December 1944, the detachment relieved VPB-34 for air-sea rescue and evac-

uation work. Tender support at Leyte Gulf was provided by *Orca* (AVP 49) under the operational control of FAW-10.

27 Dec 1944–10 Jan 1945: VPB-23 relieved the squadron's Peleliu detachment, but its aircraft were too worn out to be able to rejoin the squadron at Leyte Gulf. The six aircraft were first flown to Woendi for overhaul on 1 January 1945. The work was completed a week later and the detachment flew into Leyte on 10 January 1945. Upon arrival the detachment was put aboard *Tangier* (AV 8), while the remaining five aircraft and eight crews of the former Leyte detachment departed aboard *Orca* (AVP 49) for duty in Lingayen Gulf.

22 Jan 1945: The six aircraft and crews aboard *Tangier* (AV 8) were relocated to *San Carlos* (AVP 51) and continued operations in the Leyte Gulf.

14 Feb 1945: The Lingayen Gulf detachment was relieved by VPB-17 and then returned to Leyte Gulf to rejoin the rest of the squadron. *Currituck* (AV 7) provided this group tender support.

17 Feb 1945: VPB-54's tour of duty formally concluded with its relief at Leyte Gulf by VPB-17. Three of the squadron aircraft were flown to Manus Island for transportation to the U.S. The remaining crews departed from Samar Island via NATS, returning to the continental U.S. The support staff and ground crews boarded *Wharton* (AP 7) for return to the States.

24 Feb–13 Mar 1945: The commanding officer and aircrew personnel reported to COMFAIRALAMEDA and FAW-8 at NAS Alameda, Calif.. On 13 March 1945, prior to the arrival of the ground crews and support staff, all personnel were given reassignment orders sending them to other squadrons.

7 Apr 1945: VPB-54 was disestablished at NAS Alameda, Calif.

Home Port Assignments

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date of Assignment</i>
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	15 Nov 1942
NAS San Diego, Calif.	Dec 1943
NAS Kaneohe, Hawaii	21 May 1944
NAS Alameda, Calif.	24 Feb 1945

Commanding Officers

	<i>Date Assumed Command</i>
LT Carl W. Schoenweiss	15 Nov 1942
LCDR Kenneth J. Sanger	6 Feb 1944

Aircraft Assignment

<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Date Type First Received</i>
PBY-5A	15 Nov 1942



The squadron's commanding officer, Lcdr. Schoenweiss (right) gets a briefing from one of his pilots, note the squadron insignia in the background (Courtesy Richard C. Knott Collection).

Major Overseas Deployments

<i>Date of Departure</i>	<i>Date of Return</i>	<i>Wing</i>	<i>Base of Operations</i>	<i>Type of Aircraft</i>	<i>Area of Operations</i>
1 Mar 1943	*	FAW-1	Espiritu Santo	PBY-5A	SoPac
11 Mar 1943	*	FAW-1	Guadalcanal	PBY-5A	SoPac
20 Nov 1943	Dec 1943	FAW-1	Sidney	PBY-5A	SoPac
20 May 1944	*	FAW-2	Kaneohe	PBY-5A	SoPac
28 May 1944	*	FAW-2	Midway	PBY-5A	SoPac
12 Jul 1944	*	FAW-1	Guadalcanal	PBY-5A	SoPac
31 Jul 1944	*	FAW-1	Espiritu Santo	PBY-5A	SoPac
13 Sep 1944	*	FAW-2	Emirau	PBY-5A	SoPac
4 Nov 1944	*	FAW-2	Peleliu	PBY-5A	SoPac
12 Dec 1944	*	FAW-10	Los Negros <i>Orca</i> (AVP 49)	PBY-5A	SoPac
10 Jan 1945	*	FAW-10	Leyte <i>Tangier</i> (AV 8) <i>San Carlos</i> (AVP 51)	PBY-5A	SoPac
10 Jan 1945	*	FAW-10	Lingayen <i>Orca</i> (AVP 49)	PBY-5A	SoPac
14 Feb 1945	17 Feb 1945	FAW-10	Leyte <i>Currituck</i> (AV 7)	PBY-5A	SoPac

* Continued combat deployment in the Pacific, moving from base to base.

Wing Assignments

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-2		15 Nov 1942
FAW-1		1 Mar 1943
FAW-14		Dec 1943
FAW-2		20 May 1944
FAW-1		8 Jul 1944
FAW-2		4 Sep 1944
FAW-10		12 Dec 1944

Wing Assignments—Continued

<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail Code</i>	<i>Assignment Date</i>
FAW-8		24 Feb 1945

Unit Awards Received

<i>Unit Award</i>	<i>Inclusive Date Covering Unit Award</i>
None on record.	



A squadron PBY-5A being prepared for beaching (Courtesy Fred C. Dickey, Jr., Collection).



A squadron PBY-5A coming up the launching ramp (Courtesy Fred C. Dickey, Jr. Collection).