



Castle Archdale, Lough Erne Flying Boat Base

Castle Archdale was the headquarters of the RAF (in Fermanagh) and from there flying boats were launched to provide more effective air cover for shipments transporting vital supplies across the Atlantic from the US to Britain. By the summer of 1942, one allied ship was being sunk every four hours in the Atlantic, while German U-boat losses remained very low.



Flying boats moored at Castle Archdale
Photograph courtesy of the Hailstone Trust

Construction work began around the Castle Archdale estate in January 1941 and the base was opened by Coastal Command on 7 February 1941. Lough Erne flying boats would provide an extra 100 miles of air cover into the Atlantic.

A flying boat is a seaplane that is equipped to take off from and land on water. This means that such planes do not require a conventional runway. The two flying boats most widely used in Fermanagh were the Sunderland and the Catalina. Flying Boats would take off from Lough Erne in daylight and would fly patrols over the Atlantic Ocean. If a flying boat was returning from the Atlantic Ocean when it was dark they would have to land at Loch Ryan near Stranraer in Scotland because it was too dangerous to attempt a landing on Lough Erne at night. There were too many obstacles such as islands and rocks which they might crash into.

The base had a flying boat dock where Sunderlands and Catalinas could be serviced without removing them from the water. This dock is still at Castle Archdale today and is the only surviving flying boat dock in the world.



Sunderlands flying over the Erne near Belleek
Photograph courtesy of the Hailstone Trust



A view of a convoy patrol from a Sunderland flying boat
Photograph courtesy of Breege McCusker

