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BELL, COLIN DOUGLAS

403317

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AUSTRALIANS ON WHIRLWINDS

Account by : AUS403326 Sergeant Peter Alexander Ewing and

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Bell and Ewing sailed on the "AWATEA" for Vancouver on 13th June 1941. There were 1,000 airmen altogether including the ground staff for No. 452 Squadron.

Ewing and Bell trained as pilots at Uplands, Canada, during which, as members of No. 33 Course, they were filmed by Warner Bros. in the full length picture featuring Air Marshal Bishop, V.C., James Cagney in full cast in the picture "Captains of the Clouds".

They left Halifax in mid October in the "ANDES", a vessel which had been completed shortly after the outbreak of war for the South American trade. Her first maiden voyage was as a troopship between Australia and the Middle East. Other vessels in the convoy were the Capetown Castle, Warwick Castle, Empress of Bermuda, Tio del Pacifico and the Aorangi. It is believed that the Aorangi was taken to Scotland for breaking up.

Ewing and Bell after landing at Liverpool were three weeks at Bourne-mouth and then were posted to 61 O.T.U., Heston, and were trained for two months on Spitfires. There were 5 Australian Pilot Officers and 6 Sergeants on the same course. The R.A.F. ace, Wing Commander Malan, lectured them in fighting tactics. The Australians were very impressed with his sound commonsense.

Ewing had 26½ hours flying and Bell 30 hours before they were posted on 20th January 1942 to 263 Squadron located at Charmey Downs, which is a satellite of Colern, Wiltshire.

263 Squadron is equipped with Whirlwinds. It is customary for new arrivals to have an hour or so on Oxfords before getting on to the Whirlwind. Bad weather held up Ewing and Bell's Oxford training and up to the time of the interview they had no opportunity of flying Whirlwinds.

A signal came through calling for applications to the Middle East. Although the Australians volunteered the Commanding Officer did not submit their names stating that they would have many opportunities later. Five days ago, the Australians renewed their applications after hearing that quite a number were going east. The Commanding Officer and their Flight Commander took immediate action and went themselves to No. 10 Group Headquarters and it is believed arranged for their posting to the Middle East.

Ewing and Bell were the only Australians on the Station. They stated that there were only two Whirlwind squadrons in the United Kingdom. The Whirlwinds were originally built for bomber interception. They are twin engine single seater fighters armed with four cannons. Powered by Rolls Royce Peregrine Mark I, the aircraft have been operational for about twelve months. They have already gone out of production - it is believed they have proved too expensive. They cost as much as five Spitfires.

Cruising speed 240 miles per hour and 315 miles at full boost at their rated altitude. Their endurance in the air is about one hour. They carry about 67 gallons of petrol for each engine. Guns have enough ammunition for six seconds full firing. The Whirlwinds are being used latterly for "rhubarbs". Pilots really accomplish their operations full of praise of them as a type but less experienced men are usually reticent in their remarks. They are tricky to land as the approach is about 135 miles per hour. They have a wonderful rate of climb, climbing to 3,500 feet in a minute. They are fully aerobatic and possess good visibility, nose being small compared to the 12' 6" projection of the Spitfire. They are manufactured by Westlands.

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AUS. 403317 Sergeant C.B. Bell

(INTERVIEW FILED UNDER AUS. 403326 Sergeant Peter Alexander Ewing)