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BELL, P. R.A.F

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES
ACCESS STATUS

OPEN

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

SURNAME **BELL** NUMBER
CHRISTIAN NAMES **P**
AIR FORCE RANK AND MUSTERING **F/S** **AG**
DEGREES ETC.
DATE OF BIRTH PLACE
EDUCATED
DATE OF ENTERING SERVICE
PREVIOUS SERVICE EXPERIENCE
PLACES OF TRAINING
CIVILIAN CAREER AND ACTIVITIES
.....
SPORT (TEAMS REPRESENTED) CLUBS ETC.
.....
FATHER
WIFE
HOME ADDRESS

SIGNATURE

DATE

DATE OF EMBARKATION

HEADQUARTERS USE ONLY - DO NOT FILL IN

AWARDS

CATEGORY INTERVIEWS

SECRET

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AUS403718 SERGEANT BOMBARDIER C.O.CHAPMAN, D.F.M., OF SYDNEY

5/10/42

He was on No. 12 Course at Lindfield, N.S.W. He left Australia in April, 1941, on the Awatea for Canada where he trained at Winnipeg and MacDonald. He arrived in England in the Warwick Castle in November, 1941, and was posted to No. 23 O.T.U., Pershore.

While at Pershore, Chapman did his first two operations, the 1000-bomber raids on Cologne and Essen. He flew on both occasions with a screen crew. At 25 O.T.U., Chapman crewed up with an American pilot, AUS Flight Sergeant A.V.Ritchie, of Sydney, observer; AUS Sergeant D.W. Beattie, of Hobart, Tasmania, wireless operator/air gunner; and AUS Flight Sergeant P.Bell, of Western Australia, rear gunner. They were posted on June 24 to No. 150 Wellington Squadron at Snaith.

Sergeant Chapman did 13 operations with this crew. On the Flight 13th./Sergeant Bell was killed and Sergeant Beattie injured. This was in August in a raid on Mainz. The Wellington was hit on the outward flight by flak, which damaged the electrical system making the bomb release u/s. Unaware of this, the pilot pressed on and ran in over the target. The crew were under the impression that the bombs were dropped. On the way back, 50 miles in from the Dutch coast an enemy fighter came up from underneath and opened fire.

"He blew us to pieces, tore holes right down the fuselage", said Sergeant Chapman. "He killed the rear gunner instantly and riddled Beattie with lead. The observer was dodging in and out between the bullets and cannon."

Sergeant Chapman and Flight Sergeant Ritchie lifted Sergeant Beattie from the astro dome where he had been standing and took him back to his seat. "He never complained once" Sergeant Chapman said. "His arms and hands were riddled with bullets, his skull was full of shrapnel and he had a bullet near his brain, but he stuck it out fully conscious all the way home".

Sergeant Chapman took over the wireless and began sending out S.O.S. to the A.S.R. "I thought I had forgotten all my wireless" he said "but I found the S.O.S. all right."

The fire from the enemy aircraft had put the starboard engine out of action and they were flying on one motor. Forty miles from the

coast the petrol guages began to show nil. They were right out of fuel as they reached the coast and crash landed at Coltishall.

"We didn't know till they lifted the kite up next day that we had landed on cans of explosive incendiaries" Chapman said. "The fuselage was hanging in ribbons. The Wellingtons take an awful beating."

The pilot was awarded the D.F.C. and Sergeant Chapman's part in the action was later mentioned in the citation for his D.F.M.

An R.A.F. rear gunner and wireless operator/air gunner then joined the crew and they did 14 more operations together. On a later raid, on ~~Dusseldorf~~ ^{Kassel}, they shot down two JU88's in four minutes. This action won Sergeant Chapman his immediate award. *7/11/43 Sept 17/42*

The Wellington was on the way to the target about five miles inside the Dutch coast. The first JU88 came in on the starboard beam. Sergeant Chapman saw the fighter coming in and opened fire at 200 yards.

"I gave him 300 rounds" he said. "He didn't open fire. He didn't have a chance. He burst into flames and as he went down, the rear gunner put a burst in. We saw him hit the ground and break in two."

From 14,000 feet the Wellington's crew could see the enemy fighter aerodrome beneath them lit up, and the JU's taking off. Four minutes later the second came in on the starboard beam. "I only got in a short burst but the rear gunner gave him 600 rounds," Sergeant Chapman said. The JU broke away without firing and they watched it hit the ground and explode. The Wellington went on and bombed the target.

"There are fighters and flak all the time. You get simply peppered" Chapman said. Four trips after they shot down the JU's the crew damaged an ME110. They were attacked over Occupied France on the way back from Essen. "The ME came up from underneath and fired a burst which blew three canon holes in the fuselage. We broke away and it ^{peeled} ~~peeled~~ up over the front of us and I got in a fairly long burst" Chapman said.

The enemy aircraft dropped away suddenly into cloud. The Wellington's crew were unhurt. "As soon as we saw the cannon fire go streaking past we banked away to port and missed the worst of it," he said. "What we got just went up through the bomb doors and out through the top. It didn't stop."

Sergeant Chapman finished his 27 operations on September 30, 1942

1942. His tour includes raids on Bremen, Essen, Cologne, Dusseldorf (four times), Duisburg (five times), Hamburg, Wilhelmshaven, Emden, Mainz, Frankfurt, Kassel, Osnabruck, and five minelaying trips.

On the second last mine-laying trip Flight Sergeant Ritchie, the observer, was hit by flak from a flak ship. "We were right down on the water" ~~Flight~~ sergeant Chapman said. "We flew right over two of them, a cannon shell hit the side of the kite and blew the batteries to pieces. A piece of shrapnel hit the observer."

There are about 30 Australians in No. 150 Squadron.

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