

GROUP CAPTAIN CLIVE (“*Killer*”) CALDWELL.

DSO. DFC and Bar POLISH CROSS OF VALOUR.

RAAF”s no. 1 FIGHTER PILOT.

Clive Caldwell was the RAAF Top Fighter Pilot in WW2. 1939-45.

He was a hero and role model to the thousands of young men who enlisted in the RAAF in WW2. Many of these were aged 18-20 and they would learn to fly aeroplanes at speeds of 350 mph before they had qualified for their car drivers licence.

Their casualty list was very high at 34%.

This is one man’s story.

Your head is throbbing from too many beers the night before and your first attempt to get your foot onto the wing, fails. Better have a pee against the wheel of your *Tomahawk* as it’s good luck and you don’t want to have a little accident at 20,000 feet.

The stick is cold to the touch and you pull it back into your stomach. God, it’s cold. You drag on your smelly rubber oxygen mask and turn on your oxygen. A few deep breaths and your head begins to clear. That’s it, pure oxygen. Just the thing for a hangover.

Now then, Cockpit checks. Set altimeter. Pull the big handle on the floor to open the radiator shutter. Work the piston pump to pressurize the hydraulic lines. Switch on. Fuel on. Adjust rudder trim. Throttle mix to run idle-rich. Check magnetos. Flick the primer switch.

Put your head out and shout, *Clear Prop.*

The engine fires. Black smoke from the exhausts on each side.

One by one, the *Tomahawks* throw up a sandstorm from their props. Can't see a bloody thing. Wave to the *erks*. Clear for take-off.

Your head is clear but there is a lead weight in your stomach.

Is this the day that you don't return?

On the 5<sup>th</sup>. December 1941. Twelve *Tomahawks* from 250 Squadron led by Clive Caldwell came across forty *Stuka* Dive Bombers escorted by fifty *ME 109* fighters, on their way to bomb British Troops in North Africa. Clive wrote;

At 300 yards I opened fire and hit two *Stukas* and they burst into flames and went down. I then attacked another from behind and it also crashed. I pulled up under two more and fired a long burst. They both caught fire and went down.

In an amazing feat Clive Caldwell had shot down five enemy aircraft in a few minutes. To become a *Fighter Ace*, you had to destroy five enemy aircraft. Clive was an instant *Ace*.

That night, Clive wrote in his log:

*To kill a man is a worry. At first you think about it but you soon get over it. It's their life or yours. It is war and you do what you do and then get over it.*

He also thought about the four of his mates who had not returned that day.

A few more than 1,000 Allied pilots became *Aces* in WW2 and one third of them would be killed in the War.

Clive Caldwell was tenth in a list of Allied pilots who became *Aces*. Ahead of him were two South Africans, four Englishmen, a Frenchman, An Irish man and a Canadian.

Clives score was 28 and one half *Kills*, 6 *Probables* and 28 *Badly Damaged*.

20 of Clive's score were in Africa when he flew a *Tomahawk* and 8 and a half were in Darwin, where he flew a *Spitfire*.

The life of a trainee Bank Clerk is not considered to be very exciting but Clive had little say in his career path. His father decided it for him.

The Bank of NSW was Clive's first job when he left school. He wore a dark suit and had a starched collar. His day was controlled by the big clock on the wall and the calendar next to it.

At 10am each work day the Bank opened its doors. Not a minute before and not a minute after. It was the same at 3 pm each day. It was Clive's job to wind the clock, change the date and to open and close the doors and to ignore the wails of the suffering members of the public who were one minute late. The Manager would preside over this form of torture by producing his watch from his pocket and counting down the final seconds, before announcing ; *Caldwell you will please open/close the doors*.

The Bank had a shooting gallery in the basement and it was here that the poor staff had to learn how to fire a pistol so that they could defend the Bank against any armed robbers. This weapon was kept in a drawer under the counter and most of the staff would have been too scared to use it anyway.

Clive loved the idea and would try to get in some practice as often as he was allowed. He became a very accurate shot.

On one very dreary day, Clive took the pistol and fired two shots which hit the clock and caused it to fall to the ground. The girls in the Bank screamed and ran for cover. The manager was not impressed.

Clive had made his first *kill* and his Banking career was over.

Clive Robertson Caldwell was born at Rozelle in Sydney in 1910 when aeroplanes hardly existed but they would play an important role in his life from 1941 to 1946.

His father was a Bank Manager at the ES&A Bank at Rozelle . His mother died in 1915.

After his Banking Career was ended he worked at several jobs and in 1938 he joined the Royal Aero Club at Mascot and learned to fly. He had over 12 hours flying *Tiger Moths*. He was also good with his fists and would earn some cash fighting at Sydney Stadium.

In 1939 he met and married Jean Main who was a trainee Nurse and she had parents who had a property at Illabo in Southern NSW.

In 1939 the maximum age for a Pilot in the RAAF was 29 so Clive altered his birth Certificate to 26 and enlisted in Sydney.

He was called up in 1940 and entered the RAAF as an AC 2 Trainee in No. 1 Course of the Empire Training Scheme. At Narrandera he trained on *Tiger Moths* and then at Wagga Wagga he flew *Wirraway* advanced trainers.

He was often sent on solo flights to test his skill at navigation but he would fly to Illabo, land in a paddock and spend some time with his wife. He would remove some petrol and then fly back to Wagga Wagga

His final report was ;

***Caldwell needs practice at leading but he will prove to be a very good pilot.***

He was given the rank of Pilot Officer and was posted to Africa in February 1941. He joined 250 Squadron and would fly a **P40 Tomahawk** fighter. He wrote;

*The Tomahawk is a lovely plane to fly. It does not have the climb of the Spitfire but it is good on the rough landing fields in Africa. It will take a lot of punishment and will often come back with bits missing. It can have bullet holes all over it but will still fly.*

250 Squadron was based near Alexandria and Clive was to make his first kills. He shot down a **ME109** and a **Cant** Bomber.

The ME 109 had no idea that Clive was behind him . Clive closed in to 200 yard before firing his guns. The 19 year old German Pilot never knew what hit him. He never saw the man who killed him as he crashed into the desert.

That night Clive wrote to his wife;

*It is bitterly cold in the desert and I think of home and the fire and the dogs. I am dirty and unshaven and I cannot sleep. Made my first kill today and I am not pleased. Should I be?*

In Australia, Jean was also sitting before a fire. It took six weeks to get a letter from Clive and six weeks for him to get a reply. She turned off her light as Clive turned off his kero lamp. Both tried to think about tomorrow. If there was to be another tomorrow.

On the 29 August Clive was taking a new pilot for a test run when they were attacked from behind by a ME109 piloted by Werner Schrouer. The first bullets hit the **Tomahawk** and shattered the windscreen and the instrument panel. Clive was hit on the head and shoulder. The cabin was filled with smoke and blood. The **Tomahawk** dived towards the desert

and the German decided that he had shot it down so he headed back to his base.

Clive was now in a badly damaged plane with blood everywhere and a fire in one of his wings. He was heading back home at only 500 feet when he ran into two ME109's and he was feeling very annoyed when they came after him to finish him off. He shot down one of them and damaged the other before once again setting off for home.

He managed to get back to his base and his plane had 108 bullet holes and 15 cannon shell holes in the fuselage and wings.

Clive was operated on by two Navy Doctors who took 4 hours to remove the shrapnel and the Perspex from his head and shoulder. There was only a bottle of rum to stop the pain.

Werner Schroer survived the War claiming 81 Allied Aircraft shot down. We can only wonder if they were all as successful as his victory over Clive.

Clive was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross DFC . The Citation was;

***For courage, determination and devotion to duty. This Officer has performed consistent and brilliant work in operations in various theatres of War in the Middle East. He has at all times shown dogged determination, great courage and a high devotion to duty which has proved an inspiration to his fellow Pilots.***

Clive's score was rising rapidly and he now had 14 Black Crosses and 2 Italian insignia on his fuselage. He was to receive a Bar to his DFC but further decorations were not about to come to him. His C.O. had recommended him for a DSO but back in Australia, The Chief of the RAAF, Air Marshall George Jones had written;

***This Officer is an Empire Air Trainee and as such is considered to be already sufficiently well decorated and is to receive no more regardless of further service.***

However, Clive was promoted to Squadron Leader and given Command of the RAF 112 Squadron flying the new ***Kittyhawk*** fighters. He was now the first Empire Air Trainee to command a Fighter Squadron.

AM Jones was not pleased.

On the 21 February 1942 Lieutenant Hans Arnold Stahischmidt was a German Ace with over 30 kills to his credit. Before taking off he allowed someone to take his photo and this was a bad luck move,

He led his group of 30 ME109 fighters on patrol and he saw, below him, 12 ***Kittyhawks***.

Before he could dive, one of the ***Kittyhawks*** began to climb vertically with its guns blazing. His plane was hit and caught fire. Hans Arnold bailed out and watched his 109 crash into the desert. He was rescued by a German Tank patrol. The other ***Kittyhawks*** , inspired by their Leader, attacked the German force and shot down 4 . The rest scattered and fled the battle scene. No ***Kittyhawk*** was lost.

Clive was awarded the Polish Cross of Valour for his service to the many Polish Pilots who served under him.

On the 14 March 1942 Clive shot down a ***ME109*** and a ***Machi*** Fighter. These were to be his last kills in the Middle East. He had shot down 20 and 6 probables. He had flown 550 hours of operations.

This is Part 1 of my story, and in part 2 I will tell you about Clive's story in Australia.

*(John Imrie, 13/10/2021)*