

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

LESLIE REDFORD CLISBY DFC 1914-1940

A South Australian wartime airman remembered



*Leslie Redford Clisby
(Courtesy Mary Eckert)*

This year will be the 73rd year since Leslie Redford Clisby was killed over France on May 14th 1940.

Les was born at McLaren Vale, South Australia, on the 29th June 1914. Having an aptitude for mechanical engineering he joined the RAAF as a ground crew member in 1935. He was at Point Cook, Victoria, when he applied for an officer cadet course (Course A) in 1936.

He crashed a Gypsy Moth (A7 45) on April 26th 1936, escaping by parachute. Apparently, he was only the second man in Australia to escape using an Irvine parachute which entitled him to become a member of the Irvine Parachute Caterpillar Club.

He was in the same intake as **Robert Wilton Bungey**. It was probably at this time they became great friends and remained so till Les's death in action in 1940. He graduated from Point Cook on the 29th June 1937. After graduation he left for England, applying for a short service commission in the RAF. He was posted to No1 FTS (Flying Training School) at Leuchars in Scotland, after which he was posted to the leading fighter squadron of the day, (No1 Squadron RAF) flying Hawker Hurricane aircraft. When World War 2 was declared No1 Squadron was posted to France, landing at Le Havre on the 8th September 1939.

During the phoney war period the squadron flew many patrols and was moving from airfield to airfield. The winter of 1939/40 was a particularly bad one. Little action with the Luftwaffe occurred in January and February, but in March 1940 things started to warm up. April 1st he claimed a Me 110 damaged, April 2nd he hit and severely damaged **Major Werner Molders'** Me 109.

By the middle of April the squadron was based at Vassincourt, and it was at this base that Les and No 1 Squadron were heavily engaged in battle. May 1940 was the time when the Luftwaffe came in force in support of their ground attack. On the May 12th, Les was credited with shooting down six enemy aircraft (in that one day) and was awarded the DFC. The following days saw intense enemy aircraft attacks as bad,

if not worse, than what occurred in the peak of the Battle of Britain. On May 14th 1940 at 0800 hrs he was engaged in combat with a Messerschmitt Bf 110 formation from I/ZG26, both he and a close friend of his, Flying Officer R L Lorimer, failed to return. Les was lost in a Hurricane s/n P2546.

There is a reference to the death of Les Clisby in the **Twelve Days of May** by Cull Lander and Weiss:

The Australian was hit by a cannon shell, and went into a dive with smoke and flames coming from his cockpit. No one actually saw him crash.

It was thought that Les's victory tally was 19 aircraft destroyed (confirmed), of which 14 had been destroyed in the 3 days before his death. The CO of No 1 squadron, Squadron Leader Halahan considered Les's total number of enemy aircraft shot down to be over 20.

Post war investigation found that the French had discovered Les's body in the burnt out remains of his aircraft and buried him in a temporary grave. Later the War Graves Commission re-buried him in the Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery at Chuloy, near Nancy, France.

Leslie Clisby is remembered on the War Memorial in Adelaide; the Memorial Books in the RAF Church, St Clement Danes, London; and on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

References

Mary Eckert (Leslie Clisby sister)

Cull B ,Lander B and Weiss H. 1995. **Twelve Days in May** . Grub Street. London.

McAulay L.1991. **Six Aces**. Banner Books Melbourne, 3056.

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March 2013