

## 39612 Flight Lieutenant Frank Jonathan Howell, DFC and Bar

Born at Golders Green in London on 25th January 1912, Frank Howell took a short service commission in the Royal Air Force. He trained at AST Antsy 1st March - 30th April 1937, moving on to No 3 FTS at Grantham from 1st May - 7th August. On 3rd May he was made Acting Pilot Officer. Training was completed at South Cerney from 24th August - 26th November, whereupon he was posted to No 25 (F) Squadron at Hawkinge, flying Hawker Demon aircraft on 3rd December. He became a Pilot Officer on 1st March 1938. His next posting was to No 80 Sqdn flying Gloster Gladiators at Ismailia from 27th March 1938, during which time he was attached to No 4 FTS at Abu Sueir from 13th June - 25th September. No 80 Sqdn moved to Amiriya on 24th September 1938, returning to Ismailia on 9th October. On 16th January 1939, they again moved to Helwan, where they remained until Frank was posted back to the UK on 28th August 1939. He was stationed at the Uxbridge depot from the 29th until being posted to 609 (West Riding) Squadron at Drem on 14th November 1939. On 1st September his promotion to Flying Officer had taken place, and it was with this rank that he joined the squadron. From Drem, Frank followed the movements of the squadron, going to Kinloss from 5th December 1939 - 12th January 1940, whereupon they returned to Drem until 19th May. From Drem, the Squadron moved south to Northolt, where they stayed until moving to Middle Wallop in Hampshire on the 4th July, finally heading to Warmwell in Dorset on 29th November.

Frank Howell force landed Spitfire N3203 on 30th May at Martlesham (with no damage) due to foul weather. His first combat came the next day, 31st May, while flying an offensive patrol at 15,000ft over Dunkirk in Spitfire N3024. He attacked a Junkers Ju88 with Joe Dawson, which is believed to have crashed, and, in conjunction with John Dundas, attacked a Heinkel He111, setting fire to the starboard engine. Both were claimed as 'Damaged Probable'. The following day, again over Dunkirk, he attacked another He111, seeing no result, before attacking 3 more and setting the starboard engine alight on one of them - claiming one 'Damaged' and one 'Damaged Probable'. This was also the day he became 'A' Flight Commander. He was amongst the party that escorted Winston Churchill to France and back on 11th and 13th June. On 12<sup>th</sup> July, Red Section, consisting of Flt-Lt Frank Howell in R6691, Fg-Off Paul Edge in R6636 and Plt-Off Johnny Curchin R6634 shot down a Heinkel 111 (later only credited with a 'Probable'). On 18th July, whilst flying Spitfire R6634, he shared in the destruction of a Junkers Ju88 of 1/KG54, engaging it 5 miles off Swanage. His aircraft was hit in the glycol tank by return fire and baled out uninjured, landing 4 miles south of Poole at 15.15 hours and being picked up by the Royal Navy. Paul Edge was also shot down, and the aircraft was finally shot down by Alan Feary. He was scrambled on 13th August in R6691 and flying at 18,000ft saw "50 plus Ju87's with Escort". He promptly shot down 2 of them. On August 15th, in his own words: "Middle Wallop attacked again by 12 Ju88's. Took off as a salvo hit hangar and chased a Ju88 to Warmwell, and shot it down in flames". On the 25th, flying X4104 he damaged two Messerschmitt 110's in head on attacks. He was credited on this day with 1 Bf110 'Destroyed' in X4234. On the 3rd September he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant. On 7th September, whilst patrolling Northolt - Brooklands at 20,000ft in R6691, he encountered a large formation of Messerschmitt 110's. Having shot one down, he then spotted a large formation of Ju88's and attacked one, setting its engine on fire, before attacking another, on which he observed no result - although the cine-gun film shows a fire starting. He was also shot at by another Spitfire during this

engagement. He was credited with one Bf110 Destroyed, and 2 Ju88's Probably Destroyed. Patrolling Brooklands at 20,000ft in R6691 on 15th September, he took 2 snap shots at a formation of Dornier Do17's with escort, with no visible result. During his second patrol that day, over Hastings, he shot down 1 Dornier Do17 out of a formation of 18. On 7th October, he force landed Spitfire X4472 at Shaftesbury after combat with Messerschmitt Bf 109's over Yeovil. He had been hit in the oil tank, but had shot down a Bf110. On 21st October, in conjunction with Sydney Hill, he shared in the destruction of a Ju88 which had been machine-gunning Old Sarum. This was 609 Squadrons 100th Kill. 4 Days later, on the 25th October, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

From 609, Frank was posted to Filton on 23rd February 1941 to form and command 118 Squadron on Spitfires. Whilst with 118, Howell claimed the squadron's first victory, a Heinkel He111 on the night of July 7th. He also claimed a 'Probable' Bf109 and shared another on October 13th. 118 subsequently moved to Colerne, Warmwell and Ibsley, from where Frank was posted on 23rd October 1941, joining HMS Prince of Wales and heading out to the Far East theatre of war. His promotion to Squadron Leader came through on 1st December. Joining 243 Sqdn on 6th December, which was reforming at Kallang with Brewster Buffalos, he was almost immediately posted a few days later to Headquarters Fighter Command in Singapore. He was on the Prince of Wales when it was sunk on 10th December, and was taken prisoner by Japanese forces on 16th February 1942 whilst trying to reach Sumatra - being held at Muntok, Palembang, Singapore, Changi, until 15th August 1945. Frank returned to the UK, arriving back at Cosford on 24th October.

From 18th March - 9th April 1946, Frank Howell was posted to No. 110 Refresher Unit at Wittering, before moving on to No 17 SFTS at Coleby Grange until 24th May. On 17th August he was sent to HQ Fighter Command until 30th June 1947, becoming Squadron Leader again on 15th November, before a posting to No 1 Squadron at Tangmere on IF Course 5th -23rd January 1948. He was subsequently posted to take over as Commanding Officer of No 54 Squadron at Odiham on 12th January, which was equipped with DeHavilland Vampire's.

On 9th May 1948, Frank Howell was making a cine film of his squadron's aircraft, when the wingtip of one of them struck him, severing his jugular vein. Squadron Leader Frank Howell, DFC, bled to death before he could be treated.

Married on 22nd November 1946, Frank Howell had a son born on 1st September 1947, and a daughter who followed on 2nd October 1948. The first husband of his wife (she began with nursing, before becoming a FANY in SOE, decoding in Italy and marrying Miles in Cairo Cathedral), 80044 Wing Commander Miles Andrew Johnson DFC, a pilot of 25 (S.A.A.F.) Sqdn, died on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1944 when, as a passenger in a ditched aircraft, he tried to save a padre. After joining 237 (Rhodesia) Sqdn, he took command of 208 Sqdn in North Africa 1942-43. In August 1944 he became W/C Operations of 254 Wing in Italy

HOWELL, Frank Jonathan, from Golders Green, London, was serving in 609 Squadron as a Flying Officer early in 1940. He became a flight commander in June, and first claimed during the Battle of Britain. On 13th August he shot down two

Ju87's and on the 15th got a Ju88. He destroyed Bf110's on 25th August and 7th September, and on the latter day, also probably destroyed a Ju88. On the 13th he got a Ju87, and a Do17 on the 15th, and on 7th October claimed a Bf110. He was then awarded the DFC. During this period he also shared one victory, and on 21st October shared a Ju88, the squadron's hundredth victory. In February 1941 he was posted to command 118 Squadron, having a score of 9, and on 8th July got the unit's first victory, a He111, which he destroyed at night. He was awarded a Bar to his DFC in October 1941, and on the 13th shared a Bf109 and probably destroyed a second. He was then promoted to Wing Commander and posted to the Far East, where he was killed soon after.

F/Lt. F.J.Howell Baled out from Spitfire R6634 south of Poole after combat with a Ju88 off Swanage at 15.15 and was rescued by the Navy.