

37869 Flying Officer Ian Bedford Nesbitt 'Hack' Russell was born in 1912 in South Yarra, Victoria, near Melbourne, Australia. **Following an education in the United States of America**, Ian joined the pre-war Royal Air Force. In November 1939 he was posted to No. 609 (West Riding) Squadron with the rank of Pilot Officer, flying Supermarine Spitfire Mk.1 aircraft from RAF Drem in Scotland. Promotion to Flying Officer followed, and on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1940 he was posted to No. 245 Squadron at RAF Leconfield flying Hawker Hurricane Mk.1's – 245 moving to Drem on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Subsequently posted to No. 607 Squadron at RAF Croydon, 'Hack', as he was known amongst his colleagues, flew Hurricanes in combat against the Luftwaffe. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940, whilst flying Hurricane P2619 AF-D, Hack crash landed after being wounded whilst flying on a patrol which came into contact with German Heinkel He111 bombers. His aircraft is believed to have been abandoned at approximately 16.30 hours. He returned to 609 Squadron on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1940, now stationed at RAF Northolt, 'on orders from the Air Ministry'. F/O Russell was only back with the squadron for only ten days before he was posted as 'missing, presumed killed', having disappeared over Dunkirk in Spitfire L1058 whilst on a patrol covering the evacuation of troops from the beaches of Northern France, during which he had got involved in a combat with German Messerschmitt Bf110 'Zerstörer' aircraft. Ian Russell is credited as having shot down a total of 11 enemy aircraft confirmed destroyed, with a further six probably destroyed. On one particular occasion he got two confirmed victories, after which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. As one of the missing aircrew with no known grave, Ian's name is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial

#### RAF Form 540, Operations Record Book

Drem 29.11.39. Flying Officer I.B.N. Russell reported for flying duties.

Kinloss. 7.1.40. Yellow Section on general flying practice. Yellow 1 out of R/T touch and only one wheel lowered. Pilot - Flying Officer Russell abandoned aircraft and landed safely by parachute. The aircraft - Spitfire L.1064 crashed at Crook of Alves and burnt out on impact.

Drem. 25.1.40

07.39. Yellow Section on Dawn Patrol - May Island.

08.47. Yellow Section landed.

15.10. Red Section patrolled Crail at 10,000 feet. No interception.

The second instance occurred of sticking of one of the undercarriage legs. Flying Officer A.R. Edge had great difficulty in operating his port leg. He eventually got the leg down and landed safely. The aircraft was immediately put U/S and is now being very carefully examined.

Flying Officer I.B.N. Russell damaged his Airscrew and Flaps on landing and running into a slight drift of snow and mud which caused the tail to lift. Aircraft repaired same day.

Drem. 8.5.40. Flying Officer I.B.N. Russell posted to No. 245 Squadron Leconfield. Information was received today from Headquarters No. 13 Group to the effect that the Heinkel 111 attacked by Red Section at 09.45 hours on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1940 and lost in the clouds had been riddled by bullets but had been able to regain its base. The aircraft was later shot down at Wick and the pilot volunteered this information.

Northolt. 22.5.40. Flying Officer I.B.N. Russell returned to Squadron from No. 607 Squadron on instructions given to him by Air Ministry.

Northolt. 30.5.40. A really fine achievement on the part of these men led by Flight Sergeant Evans who worked unceasingly through day and night to get our Aircraft armoured. By 12.00 hours today 13 aircraft were finished.

The order to stand by for action over the French Coast has been received from Group Captain Vincent during the previous night and at 12.00 hours the following 12 pilots took off for the first rendezvous at Biggin Hill to form up with the other squadrons and prepare the plan of action.

<u>Red Section</u>	<u>Green Section</u>	<u>Yellow Section</u>	<u>Blue Section</u>
F/Lt D. Persse-Joynt	F/O I.B.N. Russell	F/O Howell.	F/Lt P.H. Barran
F/O G.D. Ayre	P/O C.N. Overton	F/O J. Dawson	F/O S.G. Beaumont
F/O A.R. Edge	S/Ldr M.T. Avent	F/O J.C. Dunda	F/O J.C. Gilbert

It is felt to be an honour to the Squadron to be chosen for such an important task as this one of covering the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk. The attached Intelligence Report covers the days operations from which it will be seen that Flying Officer G.D. Ayre was killed. He apparently ran out of petrol and must have spun in on his approach to force land in the grounds of an explosive works at Oakley near Harwich. Flying Officer J.C. Dundas force landed at Frinton and damaged a mainplane. Flying Officer F.J. Howell also force landed nearby but refuelled and returned undamaged to Northolt. (Appendix "D".)

Northolt. 31.5.40. Squadron received orders to rendezvous at North Weald at 12.30 hours and stand by at 30 minutes availability. The attached Intelligence Report covers both patrols, the first at 14.00 hours when the squadron took the top patrol at 20,000 feet, the second at 19.00 hours when the squadron were on patrol with a squadron of Defiant's at 10,000 feet with an above guard from No. 111 Squadron. Flight Lieutenant D. Persse-Joynt is missing from the first patrol, and Flying Officer J.C. Gilbert from the second. Sergeant Bennett is thought to have come down in the sea near Dover and be picked up by a boat which was directed to him by Flying Officer I.B.N. Russell.

The squadron can claim quite definitely the following:-

3 Heinkel 111.

2 Me.109's.

1 Do.17.

In addition the following are probable but not confirmed:-

1 or 2 Heinkels 111.

1 Ju.88.

Sergeant Bennett's report is not yet in.

Sections:-

First Patrol:

<u>Red Section:-</u>	<u>Yellow Section:-</u>	<u>Blue Section:-</u>	<u>Green Section:-</u>
F/Lt D. Persse-Joynt.	F/O F.J. Howell.	F/O. J.C. Gilbert.	F/O P. Drummond-Hay.
F/O I.B.N. Russell.	F/O J. Dawson.	Sgt. Bennett.	F/O A.J. Blayney.
P/O C.N. Overton.	F/O J.C. Dundas.	P/O J.R. Buchanan.	

Second Patrol:-

Red Section:-

Blue Section:-

Yellow Section:-

F/O I.B.N. Russell. F/O P. Drummond-Hay. F/O F.J. Howell.  
P/O C.N. Overton. F/O J.C. Gilbert. F/O J. Dawson.  
Sgt. Bennett. F/O J.R. Buchanan. F/O J.C. Dundas.

NOTE:- F/Lt. P.H. Barran could not take off and F/O A.J. Blayney had to return with engine trouble. Neither took part in the days operations. (Appendix "E".)

Northolt. 1/6/40. The Squadron was again called upon to help in protecting the B.E.F. evacuation. Two patrols were made but very little enemy activity was encountered. The attached combat report cover the engagements of Red Section (first patrol) and Yellow Section (second patrol). Flying Officer Russell and Flying Officer Dawson are missing. The Squadron can claim one Me.110 definite and severe damage to two Heinkels. The Sections were composed as follows:-

1st Patrol "Red"

Flying Officer Russell  
Flying Officer Edge.  
Flying Officer Dundas.

2nd Patrol "Yellow"

Flying Officer Howell.  
Flying Officer Dawson.

Flying Officer Russell has been recommended by Group Captain Vincent for the D.F.C. Since May 13th he has shot down 11 E/A confirmed and 6 more unconfirmed, and further effected the rescue of a pilot from the sea. (Appendix "A".)

‘Ye Booke’, the diary of Flight Sergeant ‘Tich’ Cloves

7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1940 found us still in occupation and also provided an exhibition of how a Spitfire can fly without a pilot. Fg Off Russell in L1064 prepared to land but only one wheel decided to come out. He circled round and tried everything. The wheel that was down wouldn't go up; neither would the one that was up go down. The emergency lowering gear had no effect; there was only one thing to do, ‘Bale out’. Having throttled back and set the kite on a nice even keel heading seawards, Fg Off Russell duly baled out and made a successful landing. The Spitfire continued flying on its own, but inevitably and eventually, it crashed, burst into flames, and was burned out. Plt Off Dundas, who was in the air at the time, did a spot of formation flying alongside and gave a good running commentary over the R/T.

On 13<sup>th</sup> Mar Fg Off Russell in L1058 force landed at Beal after being caught in a snowstorm while on patrol. A wire fence damaged the starboard elevator and trimming tab. A party from Acklington fractured the trimming tab in endeavouring to straighten it. They went away for another but didn't come back; after waiting patiently practically all the next day, Fg Off Russell stowed the trimming tab, which had been removed, in the cockpit, and took off. He returned to base in good order, which was a good show.

25<sup>th</sup> May. Fg Off Russell taxied out in L1068 in a big hurry and collided forcibly with a brand new Command Reserve Aircraft P9427, which was dispersed on the edge of the taxiway. Both aircraft beyond unit capacity to repair.

31<sup>st</sup> May. Twelve aircraft taxied out to patrol Dunkirk, but only eleven took off. Flt Lt Barran in L1083 struck a contractors wagon on the taxiway and wrote off his starboard wingtip. Early in the afternoon, Plt Off Blayney returned in N3223, which

he said was b----- awful. The remaining ten went into action, with the following results:

Fg Off Drummond-Hay in L1095 met a Dornier flying along on one engine. He put a burst into the other engine and put that out of action. Crew baled out and Dornier disappeared. Fg Off Russell in L1058 shot down 2 Heinkels and a Messerschmitt 109. One of the Heinkels was well on its way down when Plt Off Overton in L1082 gave it another short burst. He found a good spot, the Heinkel just blew up. Plt Off Overton also accounted for a Messerschmitt 109. Plt Off Buchanan in N3023 shot down a Me109 and a ME110. Fg Off Dundas in L1096 shot down a Heinkel. Fg Off Howell in N3024, with the help of Fg Off Dawson in L1065 seriously damaged a Heinkel III and put it out of control. He also attacked a Junkers 88 with Fg Off Dundas and put it out of action. Fg Off Gilbert in L1081 shot down a ME109 and a ME110. After that he disappeared and no news as to his fate was available. Flt Lt Persse-Joynt in N3202 led Red Section down in a dive over Dunkirk and finding they were over AA batteries, gave the order to climb. This was the last that was heard of him.

Sgt Bennett in L1087 shot down a Heinkel. His aircraft was badly shot up, but he attempted to return to base, accompanied by Fg Off Russell in L1058. About 2 miles from Dover he suddenly nose-dived into the Channel. He was seen to get out of the aircraft by Fg Off Russell, who apparently signalled a tug at Dover, which put out and picked up Sgt Bennett.

News of the missing pilots was anxiously awaited, but no confirmation either way was received. They were posted as missing. The squadron had given the enemy something to think about, but our own losses were a sad blow. We now realised what we were up against and what the future held.

1<sup>st</sup> June. Squadron again ordered to patrol Dunkirk. Only eleven aircraft remained serviceable and these took off for the job in hand. The five 'B' Flight aircraft returned intact, not having made any contact in their sector. 'A' Flight fared differently.

Fg Off Russell in L1058 and Fg Off Edge in N3222 dived on a formation and were just pulling out on ascertaining they were friendly when a ME110 appeared and got in a burst on Fg Off Russell. He was seen to go down but appeared to get the aircraft under control when low over the water. He might have been able to make the beach; we hoped so. Fg Off Edge turned his attention to the ME110 and shot it down. Fg Off Dundas in L1096 gave a Heinkel all he'd got and seriously damaged it. The crew smartly jettisoned their bombs and beat it. Fg Off Howell in N3024 also attacked a Heinkel, setting one engine on fire. This crew also smartly jettisoned their bombs, as did three others in the vicinity. Fg Off Dawson swapped aircraft with Fg Off Edge as his own hadn't been re-armed and took N3222 to complete Yellow Section. He was last seen attempting to finish off the Heinkel set on fire by Fg Off Howell. Information came through that he had force-landed but this was not confirmed.

In three days, the squadron had lost six pilots, five from 'A' Flight and one from 'B' Flight. They lost their lives assisting in the protection of the BEF on their withdrawal from Dunkirk. Lost in a very good cause; that of saving many who were destined to fight again.

Citation for the Distinguished Flying Cross. London Gazette 14<sup>th</sup> June 1940 : 3622

Russell. Ian Bedford Nesbitt. FO. (37869). RAF. 609SQN.

By shooting down two enemy aircraft one day in May, 1940, this officer has a total of ten enemy aircraft to his credit and possibly a further six have been destroyed by him. After this combat he was instrumental in saving the life of another British pilot by guiding a trawler to an aircraft which had alighted on the sea.

#### Miscellaneous Information

Ian's father, Francis Arthur Russell, was the grandson of Reverend Garrett John Russell, who came to Australia from Ireland in 1856 with his mother, his wife and 7 of their 8 children. At the time of their arrival Frank's father, Robert Frederick Russell, was 3 years old. He was later to have a successful career in Education, and was a journalist, writer and general entrepreneur. He married twice, Frank being the third child from his first marriage to Harriet Crook, who died of typhoid shortly after the birth of their sixth child. He later remarried, his second wife being Lucy Coles Gammon.

Frank was born during 1882 in Sandhurst, Victoria, Australia, He married Phyllis May Nesbitt in 1909 in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia Phyllis was the daughter of Charles Connolly Nesbitt and Mary McCulloch Russell. She was born during 1888 in Kyneton, Victoria, Australia, and died in 1930 in East Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, as the result of a road accident. Frank was a journalist and writer who won a literary prize for his romantic novel 'The Ashes of Achievement'. He also became a barrister later in life, articulated to his older brother. He travelled extensively, finally dying (probably of pneumonia) in London, England, in 1945.

**Franks sister was horrified to read that her nephew Ian had once flown his plane under the Sydney Harbour Bridge!**

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