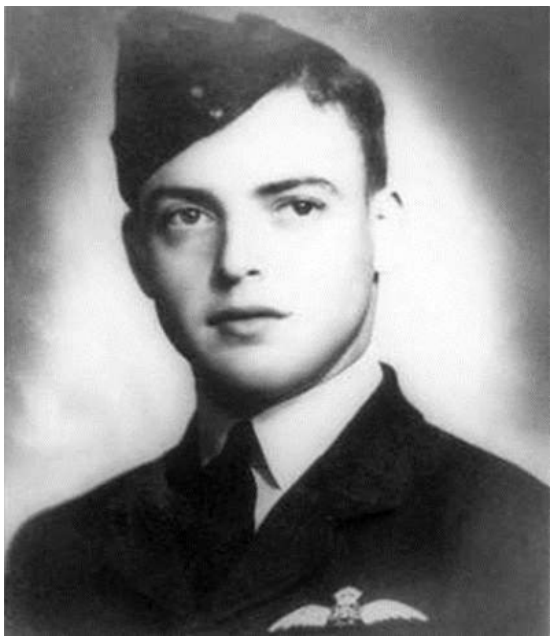
PO Maxwell Herron Bell DFC 405995 RAAF



Maxwell, known as Max to his family and "Dinger" to his squadron, was born on 19 February 1923 in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, the son of John George Kingsborrough Bell and Evelyn Mary Bell nee Herron.

Educated at Bowenville State School and Brisbane Boys' High, Maxwell was employed as a tractor driver when, in February 1941 he volunteered for aircrew duties with the RAAF.

Called up in July 1941, Maxwell completed his flying training in Australia in March 1942 with the award of his Wings. Maxwell arrived in the UK in August 1942 and, following training at 5(P) AFU at RAF Ternhill, Shropshire and 53 OTU at RAF Llandow, Wales for Spitfire conversion, in December 1942 Maxwell was posted to 19 Sqn.

When the squadron commenced conversion to the Mustang, Maxwell commenced a series of attachments away from the Squadron; however, in June 1943 he was admitted to RAFH Locking, Somerset where, after significant surgery, at one stage he was listed as 'very seriously ill'. Following his recovery and qualification on the Mustang, in March 1944 Maxwell was posted back onto 19 Sqn at RAF Ford, Sussex.

In June 1944 19 Sqn, as part of 122 Wing, 2nd Tactical Air Force, moved to Normandy in support of the advancing forces and in August 1944 Maxwell was granted a commission. On 2 September 19 Sqn moved to the recently captured airfield at Evreux, near Rouen, and then on to Beauvais, North of Paris. On 8 September the squadron moved to (Base 60) Grimbergen, Belgium.

On 9 September 1944, twelve 19 Sqn pilots were tasked with an armed reconnaissance patrol of the areas of Arnhem - Zwolle - Lingen. At 12:45 Maxwell departed (Base 60) Grimbergen as No.3 in White Section in Mustang III FX887 (QV).

At 13:38 Maxwell's aircraft was hit by light flak during a strafing run on a train South of Apeldorn. Successfully baling out, Maxwell was taken POW. A German Flak report stated *"The pilot parachuted from a height of about 200 metres, was captured by Uffz. Schütze, 4.Kp./Baupionier-Btl.801 and handed over to 4.Kp./SS.Pz.Gr.Rgt.19".*

Sometime between 9 September and 19 September 1944 Maxwell was murdered by members of the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen". On 19 September 1944 Maxwell was buried in Klarenbeek Churchyard, Gelderland, Netherlands as "an unknown Canadian Soldier", and officially remembered on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey. In September 1945 Maxwell, still incorrectly identified, was transferred to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, Gelderland, Netherlands. Following a war crimes trial, and further investigation, in August 1998 the CWGC accepted Maxwell's identification and his grave is now correctly marked.

In November 1944 Maxwell was posthumously awarded the DFC. His citation read:

" WO Bell is an efficient and most reliable pilot. He has taken part in many harassing attacks on the enemy and has invariably displayed a high degree of gallantry. He has destroyed 4 enemy aircraft"

Maxwell is commemorated on Wall Panel - Not Yet Erected

Photo Source: vwma.org.au