

# NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL FREDERICK J. BELL, U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

Frederick Jackson Bell was born in Norfolk, Virginia, on September 5, 1903, son of John Frank and Margaret Estelle (Jackson) Bell. He attended St. George's School and Maury High School in Norfolk, and entered the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment from the Second District of Virginia in 1920. As a Midshipman he was Athletic Editor of the "Lucky Bag," was Manager of the Baseball Team (2), and participated in Class boxing and track. Graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Science and commissioned Ensign in the U. S. Navy on June 5, 1924, he subsequently progressed to the rank of Captain to date from June 1, 1943. He was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy on February 1, 1948, and was advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral on the basis of combat citations.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1924, he served as Assistant Plotting Room Officer in the USS TEXAS for a year, and when detached from that battleship had instruction at the Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, Rhode Island. From January 1926 until March 1928 he served as Gunnery Officer and First Lieutenant of the USS JOHN D. EDWARDS, which operated for three months in Nicaraguan and Honduran waters as a unit of the Scouting Force, and later spent eleven months in European waters. During the three years to follow he had successive duty in the USS PRESTON, USS PATOKA and USS CONCORD.

He returned to Annapolis in June 1931, and during the next two years was a student in General Line and Applied Communications at the Naval Post-graduate School. He served for a year as Personnel and Athletic Officer on the Staff of Vice Admiral W. R. Sexton, Commander Battleships, Battle Force, and from June 1934 until August 1935 had similar duty on the Staff of Vice Admiral T. T. Craven, Commander Battleships, Battle Force, acting as Aide and Flag Officer and as Operations Officer during the last seven months of that period.

Remaining at sea, he next served as Watch and Division Officer, and Main Battery Assistant on board the USS WEST VIRGINIA. When detached he reported to the Navy Department, Washington, D. C., for a tour of duty in the Training Division, Bureau of Navigation, and in June 1938 returned to sea as Aide and Flag Lieutenant on the Staff of the Commander Scouting Force, attached to the USS INDIANAPOLIS, flagship. In March 1941 he joined the USS BOISE, a cruiser operating with the Asiatic Fleet, and served as her Damage Control Officer and First Lieutenant prior to and following the outbreak of World War II in December 1941. Arriving at Manila just four days before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the BOISE patrolled the Malay Barrier and made one short trip to Australia before his detachment in May 1942, after she had struck an uncharted pinnacle rock and was placed in drydock for repairs.

On May 30, 1942, he assumed command of the USS GRAYSON, which during the period of his command sank an enemy submarine and demolished numerous enemy planes. "For extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer of the USS GRAYSON during the Battle of Ontong Java against enemy Japanese forces on

August 24, 1942..." he was awarded the Navy Cross. The citation continues, in part: "When his ship was subjected to repeated bombing and strafing attacks by enemy dive bombers at very close range, Commander Bell coned his vessel and directed the fire of his battery with outstanding efficiency, destroying at least two Japanese dive bombers and damaging others. Immediately following the engagement and during the night he conducted a search for lost planes, taking his ship into enemy waters and away from the protection of friendly forces...established the identity of aircraft and, by flashing messages, directed our planes safely to the carriers, which had been forced to retire from the battle area, thereby saving a number of our aircraft from destruction..."

He was also awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" and citation as follows: "For meritorious service as Commanding Officer of the USS GRAYSON during an attack on enemy Japanese aircraft in the Solomon Islands Area on the night of February 17, 1943. As part of a Task Unit convoying troops, supplies and equipment to Guadalcanal, Captain Bell promptly engaged a group of Japanese torpedo planes threatening the security of the convoy and assisted in repelling the formation and destroying at least five of the hostile craft. His outstanding leadership and the courageous devotion to duty of the officers and men under his command enabled the GRAYSON to render valuable service in fulfilling a vital mission and come through the action undamaged."

In May 1943 he reported for duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, and in November of the same year was transferred to the Bureau of Naval Personnel (formerly Bureau of Navigation). There he served first as Assistant Director, Officer Distribution Division, and on December 7, 1944, he became Director of that Division. He later served until October 27, 1947 as Director of the Enlisted Performance Division, Bureau Naval Personnel, then was relieved of all active duty pending his retirement on February 1, 1948.

In addition to the Navy Cross and Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," Rear Admiral Bell has the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received in action. He also has the Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal; the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; American Campaign Medal; and World War II Victory Medal.

He is a member of the New York Yacht Club and the Army and Navy Country Club, Arlington, Virginia. He is the author of "Room to Swing a Cat," which deals with the early history of the U. S. Navy, and "Condition Red," which describes destroyer action in the South Pacific in World War II.

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